BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE ★ FEBRUARY, 1947 ★ 25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES—II
Pennsylvania—*Painted by*
HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

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THE THIEF OF THEBES
A complete novel
by DAVID CHENEY

THE NORSO MISSION
An O.S.S. story
by RICHARD M. KELLY

Eleven short stories and many Special Features

THESE UNITED STATES . . . II—PENNSYLVANIA

VALLEY FORGE

SOME say he was noble, sympathetic, full of prayers. Nonsense! He could swear as well as preach; and better still, he could command. Let me paint you the man, tell you what he gave us during this hard winter of our hopes, this sunless bitter time!

Nobility is a shabby word too often borrowed by rascals to cover failure; his was not. He was full aware of our weaknesses, and deplored our sufferings, which he shared. He could help us little in material ways. He devoted much time to us, and gave what he had in such bounteous measure and we so sadly lacked—a firm determination, a faith in ultimate material success, and a disregard of reality hard to explain. He never lied to us with false hopes. He lavished his great fund of faith upon our impoverished minds. Our disputes had all but wrecked our cause; he turned them to better reason, giving us a clear picture of what might be gained if we forgot our very real troubles and visioned his unreal dreams. I say this not in criticism; to us they were quite unreal.

In brief, he saw a nation in prospect; we could only see each other barefoot and in rags. Oh, he gave his own spare boots to the needy; he stinted nothing to share what he had—someone sent him a pair of woolen breeches as a gift, and he gave them to Tiny George Waxing, the gangling six-foot Pennsylvania Dutch drummer-boy. His great gift to us all was this power to rise above reality. No mealy-mouthed talk, mind—we were no preaching prattlers.

Some saw it not and departed for home, cursing him. Others trusted him blindly. Others had a glimmering of his dreams and came to share them; in these chill days men must freely expend the faith they had from him but scarce credited. His greatness lay in his firm surety, a strangely positive belief that this country of ours would become a nation—not of chance, but of long-since planned destinies.

He imparted this feeling to us without putting it into so many words. Still, we divined a somehow intuitional thing difficult to express—as though we were mere agents entrusted with higher purposes, machines set to carry out commands from above. Our endurance, our fortitude, must embody a determination to fight it through. Such was the magnificent vision he somehow put into us; how he did it I know not. Such palaver was no talk to give hungry, freezing men whose unbooted feet left bloody marks in the snow; and he gave us no such talk. He was a practical man whose teeth tormented him at times. None the less, from him we did have this conviction of a higher destiny. The man had in him something firm and sure and splendid, and we tried to understand it; and he tried to make us feel and share it. He had his bad moments, as we all did; he was human—he liked his tot of grog; but it was not grog that held us together during those bitter months. Hold firm, said he, and he would find us boots. So he did when we went over to Trenton and looted the Hessians. . . . But we had to hold firm through the dark days.

Such is my memory of him. A man sharing our bad grub, our campfires, our depression, a man like us all, with aching teeth and frozen toes, and in him a vast unrealized dream that he dared not put into frail words, yet could share with us gladly. And this was his greatest gift to us, this intangible vision, this gift of determination and firm faith.

H. Bedford-Jones

Readers' Comment*

Two Suggestions

BLUE BOOK *is valued by me and many of my friends as a wholesome, all-around means of recreation. I have two suggestions which I'd like to make:*

1. *Keep the illustrations as artistic and real as possible, yet with a ruggedness appealing to both men and women. I like your realism.*
2. *Maybe we can have continued both the "historical" as well as the futuristic stories (such "The Cup of Wrath," which I believe is thought-provoking as well as entertaining), but the feeling I have is that the large majority should be of contemporary nature.*

I too dislike serials; this is no criticism, but a matter of individual taste. In my opinion, each issue should be complete in itself.

Congratulations on the excellent authors you have always presented, with so few exceptions. This "Blue Book" magazine sells itself because it is good reading!

I do miss short features to arouse one's curiosity, but don't sacrifice to include them.

J. C. D.

Moot Questions

I WISH to disagree with the letter which was entitled, "Serials—But No Fact Stories."

In the first place I, as a veteran of the first World War, am sure I voice the opinion of at least a majority my fellow-veterans that it is thrilling to read such swell articles as "Operation Dormouse" and "The Trigger Fights Her War." And I have an idea that this applies to a big majority of the stay-at-homes in the Second World War—and a very considerable bloc of that war's veterans also.

As for the opinion that it would be better editorial policy to switch to serials, that is a very moot question. I, personally, detest serials, and never read them as they are published—preferring to save the issues until they are finished; sometimes, however, this isn't feasible.

Carl L. Gibson

*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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McCALL CORPORATION, Publishers, The Blue Book Magazine

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Published monthly at McCall St., Dayton 1, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton 1, Ohio. Editorial and Executive offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, February, 1947, LXXXIV, No. 4.

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Subscription Prices: one year $2.50, two years $4.00, in U. S., Canada and Pan-American countries. Extra in other foreign countries $1.00 per year. For change of address give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new. Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in the Blue Book Magazine will be received only on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts and art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

Printed in U.S.A.

Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1897

Abe *and the* Golden

A TRAIN of immigrants came through the Coloma Valley where some settlers, most of them Mormons, were hewing lumber. Abraham Crump, whipsawing a log with a Cosumne Indian, watched without special interest, for he had seen many such trains straggling into California. They came as usual, ragged and half starved, their covered wagons abandoned on a trail now marked by the bones of cattle or kin.

But something caught Abraham's eye so that he dropped his end of the whipsaw and walked, almost ran, down to the clearing. It was a young girl still in her teens, dressed in a tight-fitting bodice and billowy linsey dress, eyes shining in the shade of her poke bonnet, dimpled chin held high.

Her eyes shone perhaps because she saw him the moment that he saw her. They were total strangers to each other except for what was written in the stars. They had both come from Missouri, she following the Oregon and California trail, he crossing the Southwest with Kearny and Kit Carson and the Mormon Battalion. And now as the stars had ordained, they met in the Coloma Valley, and each knew the other was the reason for coming all this long way.

She was on foot, leading a mule with a little brown-eyed man in the saddle. His eyes were the same as hers except that they were lugubrious and hers bright. He had two children, one in front of the saddlehorn, a smaller one in his arms The children, Abraham learned, had belonged to a young couple who were the last to straggle into the clearing. But the girl with the tanned face and dimpled chin was his daughter.

While the Mormons fed the hungry and cared for the sick, the girl helped Mrs. Wimmer, the camp cook. Abraham hovered around the log cookhouse so that he could listen to her and look at her. To his consternation, he heard her say the whole train was moving on into the Sacramento Valley, for three huts and a half-completed sawmill could not shelter them even for one night.

"That is not what is written in the stars," he said to himself, then to her when she came out to fetch some water: "I'll carry the pail. A woman must not carry water—not in California."

She looked at his lank figure, his floppy hat and hunting-shirt, pantaloons and moccasins. "But a frontier woman must work—harder than the menfolk, I have heard."

"No. The Cosumne Indians do it all. Unless it's spinning and weaving, and the Moquelumne Indians do that." He took the pail from her.

"And what do *you* do?"

"I'm helping build this mill—for wages. But I have enough to buy a ranch. I'll hire some Indians to plow for wheat and peas this month. Next month we'll plow for corn and shear the sheep, and in May we'll start the spinning and carding and weaving. It'll be a nice ranch to live on!" He filled the water-pail and they started back.

"A woman should do the spinning," she said, "not a man—not even Indians."

"No, a woman on my ranch will just be there to make a home. She'll be my wife."

"How many wives have you already?"

"A few of us building this mill are not Mormons. When I choose a wife, I will choose one and cleave to her only."

He saw her eyes drop and her tanned face turn pink. "I'll take the pail now. Thanks for helping me."

"But wait now. I have a way of helping you that's not known to the rest of your train. You'll need my help. You were leading a mule, and a man was riding. He must've been very sick, else he wouldn't let you walk while he sat his saddle."

"It was my father. He was snowed in up yonder." She nodded to the white-capped Sierras. "His toes were frozen, so he had to ride."

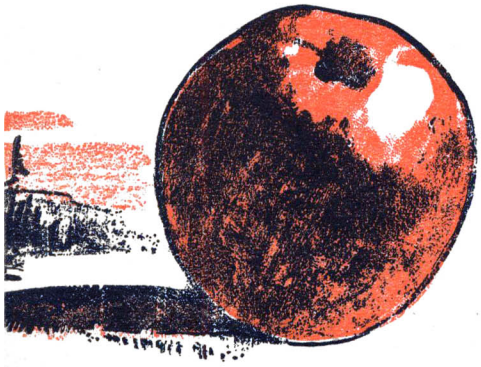
"Then you must stay here till he's well," Abe said eagerly. "He can get rich here—and without plowing for corn or making clearings or building log cabins." He took a fawnskin bag from his belt and poured some yellow dust and flakes into his palm. "Some of us have been panning for this after our work-hours. I'll tell your father where he can find it. It's gold."

"It doesn't look like gold to me," she said. "It's not reddish like the coins I've seen. It's too pale."

"That's what everyone says. It looks more like brass than gold. They say it might be iron pyrites, but it isn't. And the Mormons say, anyway it's not worth leaving regular work for the hazards of gold-hunting."

When enemies pursue too closely, a Forty-niner recalls a classic stratagem.

by KENNETH PERKINS



Apples

"They may be right," she said. "A log cabin and a home and corn are worth more than gold."

"But your father can't work like the others. You tell him about this: all he needs is a pan or a cradle rocker, or a long tom for sluicing."

She was about to answer when she realized that they were being watched by a long-necked man with a small tapering head who was peering from behind the corner of one of the log huts.

Abe saw her blanch under her windburn, then say as she turned into the cook-shack: "Tell my father what you've told me. He'll know if it is fool's-gold or not."

Abraham turned to see the long-necked man step to the rack where the saddles were slung. Taking two pistols from a saddlebag, the man belted them on and came to the cook-shack. "I didn't figure it'd be polite to wear these batteries in such a hospitable camp," he said as he passed Abe.

"May come in handy," Abe said, his eyes glinting.

A pale glare flickered in the man's eyes too, his neck-cords knotting as he said: "Yes, they'll come in handy amongst strangers—in the future—if one of 'em gets to sweet-talking my wife."

Abraham gulped. She could not be his wife! She was hardly grown up—seventeen at the most, and this fellow was middle-aged or older. He had said "in the future," which meant perhaps that she was not his wife as yet. That might have explained the anxious and murderous look as he turned and followed her into the cook-shack.

Abraham Crump went into the bunk cabin to get his derringer. He took a good swig from his brandy jug, and this reminded him that the Mormons had been serving nothing but hot possets of ginger and molasses to the pilgrims. A real drink, he reflected, might serve as a good introduction to the girl's father.

IN the double log-house he found little Tim Hornuff, the father, telling a group of Mormons about something that happened up there in the Sierras. Abe listened until he got the general drift of the tale: Tim Hornuff had lost his bearings up there while tracking a mule deer. Because of a sudden snowstorm, he could not get back to the immigrant train.

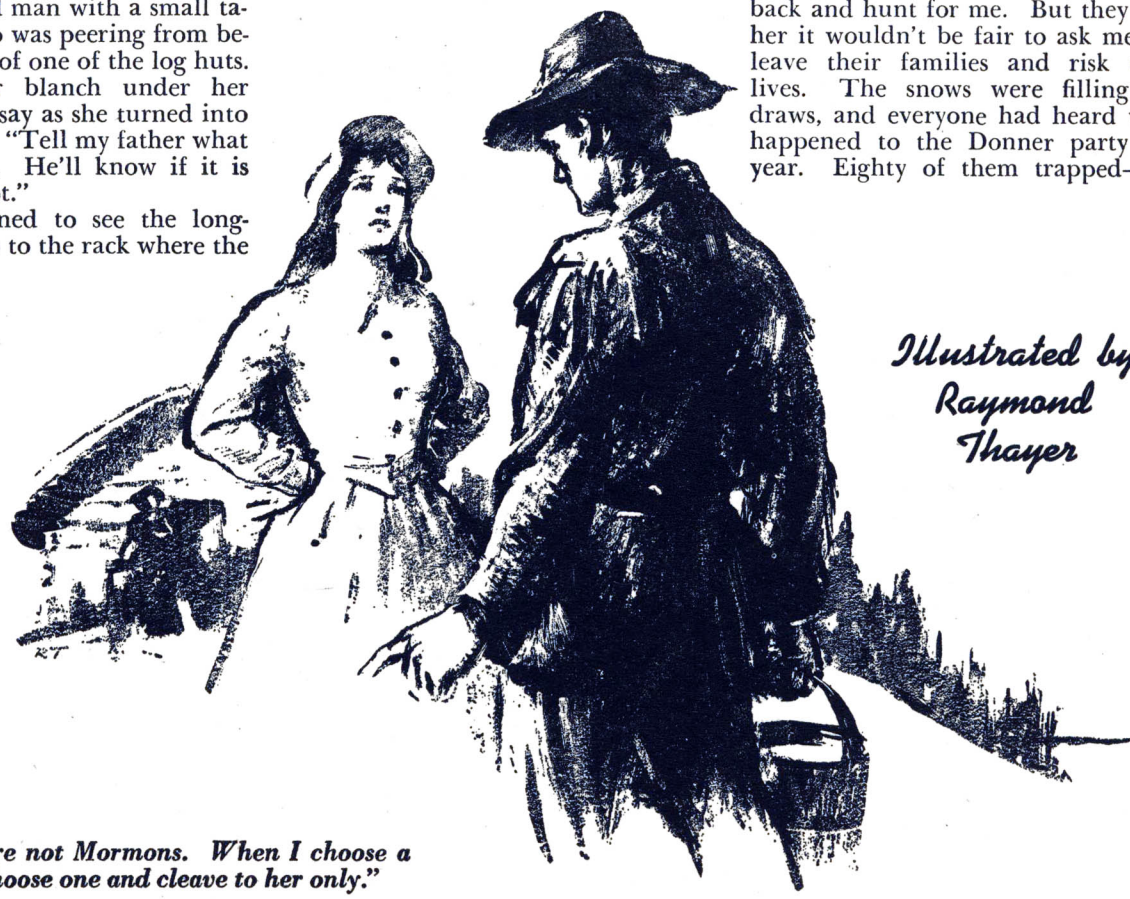
"But you got out safe," one of the Mormons said.

"A rescue party of three men came back and found me," Hornuff admitted. "They were paid to do it—paid in dollars—by Mutton John Blake."

Abraham shoved in between two of the listeners sitting at the redwood table. He reached for the empty posset cup and filled it from his jug. Since the Mormons did not drink, he lifted the jug to his own lips, saying: "To your salvation, sir!"

Hornuff burst out in a sudden frenzy: "I shouldn't have been saved! I'd rather have starved to health—if I'd known the truth!"

They all waited, the silence broken only by the gurgle of the brandy as Abraham drank. Then Tim Hornuff burst out again: "Do you know why I was saved? My daughter begged them to put up a rescue party and go back and hunt for me. But they told her it wouldn't be fair to ask men to leave their families and risk their lives. The snows were filling the draws, and everyone had heard what happened to the Donner party last year. Eighty of them trapped—and



Illustrated by Raymond Thayer

"A few of us are not Mormons. When I choose a wife, I will choose one and cleave to her only."

half of them starved to death, including babes! The horror of it was in every mind—and Samanthy knew that was what would happen to me. She was beside herself. She was half crazed. That's why she signed the contract of marriage."

"She signed what?" Abraham asked.

"Mutton John Blake proposed to her many times, crossing the plains, and she refused him. He said since no one would volunteer, he would pay three men out of his own pocket. He would give them provisions out of his own stock, enough to last awhile in case they got snowed in. He was the only one in the train who had flour and jerky to spare. And he'd supply his last horses for the relief party. All this he promised if she'd accept him."

"And he kept his promise, it appears," one of the Mormons said.

"He kept his part of the bargain," the father admitted. "And Samanthy says she will keep hers. She's afraid of him. He considers her his wife."

Abraham Crump filled the cup again and took another drink himself, his neck-muscles cracking. It was a hard swallow.

"But now that we're no longer in the wilderness," Tim Hornuff went on, "now that there are men to help us—" He hesitated, looking at the ring of sober faces. "I've come to you men to ask your advice. She is not legally married except by signing her name to a piece of paper. Don't tell me that's enough for a marriage on this frontier—or is it?"

He waited anxiously, saw a nod or two, then cried: "But how can this man she hates hold her to such a contract? Why can't she tell him straight out: 'You didn't save my father! You hired men to do it! It was your money, yes; but you cannot buy a wife like a slave, no matter what bargain is made! You can't keep me by force!' "

The listeners stroked their beards. One of them, a Mormon from Virginia, gave his judgment first. "But you say she has decided to keep the covenant she made. That settles it."

Another Mormon gave his judgment. "As I have heard, this man Blake lost two of his horses because of the snowdrifts, and the provisions they cached were lost to the coyotes and Digger Indians. He hired three men. How are these expenses to be written off?"

Bigler, the one from Virginia, said: "Furthermore, he fulfilled his part of the bargain, and had you brought back from the Sierra snows. It's the law of grubstaking, unbreakable in this country; but instead of getting a third of the strike, he gets a wife."

TIM HORNUFF had come to the wrong court to try his case. The Latter Day Saints had already shown the West and the world that a contract cannot be entered into lightly. "A contract," one said, "smacks of holy writ, of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon and the Bible itself. You have asked us for advice. We say, let your daughter do the right thing before God."

Samanthy stood at the door, white-faced. In the dead silence every man expected a tongue-whipping, but instead she merely said to her father: "Mrs. Wimmer wants you to come and get your dinner."

"Not now. I can eat nothing." Hornuff looked at the group of Mormons. "You have given your verdict, so there is nothing more for us to talk about."

The jury understood that the distracted little man wanted to talk to his daughter alone. Those who were seated got up; all drifted to the door. Abraham waited until the last man had left; then he turned and faced the girl.

"I am not a Mormon, but I marched with them for many months

They were strangers, but each knew the other was the reason for coming all this long way.

—all the way from Council Bluffs to California till we were mustered out last July. It was a long enough march to find that their precepts are mostly good precepts. But I do not agree that this bargain has anything to do with God. Blake forced it on you when you had no choice. With the snows coming, you could think only of the horror of the Donner party eating each other's livers and lights to keep from starving. You were too sick to think. You were dazed. You were forced. You were cheated."

"Cheated?" she asked, her eyes flaming. "I heard what those men said: Blake saved my father's life. I owe a debt—"

"I'll pay the debt." Abraham took his gold-poke from his pocket.

Hornuff stared, not knowing what was in the bag. The girl stared likewise, her face flushed with anger. "So you think you can buy a man's wife from him with a gold-poke? I would be in debt to you instead of to Blake." She stopped to get her breath; then: "I've had enough of this haranguing and bartering! I'm going to Blake right now and tell him I'm ready to ride. I'll go wherever he wants me to go. I'm his betrothed—more than that, I became his wife when I made that bargain with him."

"You aren't going anywhere with him." Her father blocked the way. From the side of his stiffened lips he said to Abe: "Get me two saddle-horses. I'm taking her down to Tuleburg, where we have kin-folk. I'll send the horses back."

Abe relayed this order to an Indian wrangler, then turned back into the cabin. Hornuff was trying to hold the girl's arms, but she freed herself.

Abraham Crump took her arm as her father had taken it. She looked down at his hands in utter astonishment as he said: "Your father can't take you down to Tuleburg against your will, but I can take you."

His arm clamped her waist like a bear-trap sprung shut. He used only one arm, but she felt that his whole body was the trap imprisoning her life. With his other hand he held the gold-poke out to Hornuff. "Give this to Mutton John Blake. If he thinks I've euchred him out of the pot, let him think it and fight."

Little Tim Hornuff limped into the cook-shack and down the line of men seated at the plank table. Slowly he trudged toward Mutton John's place at the end. There was no hurry. On the contrary, if he hurried, he might invite disaster. What if Blake refused to accept the gold in payment for his bride? What if he flew into a rage and set out to trail her and bring her back? Hornuff decided to wait until after the meal before delivering his message.

It was the wrong decision. Two of the Cosumnes and a squaw came to the door. One of them announced without excitement that Abraham Crump had fled with the white woman. He had taken her by force, the Indian said; for although they had two horses, Crump had packed the girl off, holding her in front of him, riding one horse.

"Wait a minute, Mutton John! I can explain everything!" Tim Hornuff shouted as Blake jumped to his feet. "You're going to be paid! I got the payment right here—"

But Blake had already run out to the brush corral, shouting over his shoulder: "Pile on your horses, whoever wants to help me! I'll pay you well!"

Half a dozen men—two of them his kinsmen, the others willing enough to be his hired gun-hands, ran out to the corral.

ABRAHAM rode behind the cantle holding his prisoner in the saddle with one arm. With his left he held the reins of his pinto, also the reins of the riderless buckskin loping at his side. It was an awkward way to untrack, so awkward that they had scarcely reached the sawmill four hundred yards from the log cabins when Blake and his men started saddling up.

Abruptly the girl stopped struggling. "What are you going to do when those men catch you?" she asked.

"I'm going to fight."

"Is it madness or brandy that makes you think you're bigger than you are?"

"Neither. It's the stars."

She had turned halfway around so that her cheek bumped into his, both burning hot at the contact. "If you look back," she said, "you'll see seven men—if you can count."

"There won't be seven counted at the shoot-out."

Abe had followed the dry channel which led from the frame of the unfinished sawmill. At the end—a distance of fifty rods—some Indians were digging near the wing dam which diverted the river water into the channel at night. Abe called to them: "They're chasing me to kill me—those men back yonder! Tell them what we found in the tail-race!"

The Cosumnes just stood shaking their bobbed hair in dumb amazement. It was an abduction—that was all they could understand when they saw the man and woman on one horse, the posse of men saddling up, mounting and swinging out of the brush corral. Abe yelled at them again, then raked his horse into a run, the buckskin tailing on.

"What chance do you think you have with two of us on one horse?" the girl asked tauntingly.

"None except that I threw them a golden apple."

Whether or not Samanthy had ever heard of the apples of Hippomenes, she could see the ancient legend reenacted right now. Glancing back over her shoulder, she saw the Indians climbing out of the ditch and standing in the way of the riders. Blake and his men kept on, almost running the Indians down, but several drew rein. The last three, after passing the wing dam, wheeled their ponies and to the girl's astonishment turned back!

But Mutton John Blake kept coming, well in the lead of the remaining pursuers. Before another furlong in the race he was within range. Samanthy heard the shot, and it sent a spasm of anger through her body—a spasm that seemed to be a part of the sudden jerk of her captor, whose chest was pressed against her back. So her bridegroom was the kind to shoot a man who had a girl in his arms! That was her first rage, but the next was more selfless. "You're hit!" she said, understanding the heavy slump of Abe's body against hers, the forward tilt of his head, his chin digging into her shoulder.

"No matter—I'm going to fight!" he mumbled.

"Don't you come any closer, Mr. Blake!" Samanthy warned as she lifted the derringer.

"You can't, you can't!" she gasped wildly. She lifted her hand to support his lolling head, and found his cheek bathed in sweat, but cold. "I'll ride the other horse. I won't jump free. I promise!"

"And you're the kind who'll keep a promise," he thought, as he turned into a clump of manzanita and madrone. When he checked the horses and they wheeled side and side, the girl slid over to the buckskin. But Abe still clung to the reins and swung out across the next clearing.

Although they gained on the four riders, Abe's horse pounded the red earth, thrown off its gait by the shifting of the rider clinging to the saddle-horn. The hammering hoofs sent successive jolts through horse and rider, stabbing Abe's shoulder and the cracked bone. He knew he could not ride far.

Beyond a stand of balsam and oak he swung into a *barranca* where a man was panning in the creek bed. This was Peter Wimmer, a wheelwright who had helped build the tail-race of the mill. Wimmer had heard the shot, but thought nothing of it until the echoes merged into the rapid drum-beat of hoofs. When he climbed up to look, he saw Abraham Crump riding stirrup to stirrup with a girl. And he saw that the girl's arm cradled him as he swayed backward, her other hand clutching a fistful of his shirt at the chest as if to balance him in the saddle. It did not look like an abduction this time. It looked plainly enough like an elopement—but one that had failed.

Abraham held the reins of both horses, snubbing them so close that the nuzzle of one horse rubbed the mane of the other. He checked them to a walk partly by the unconscious backward shift of his weight, partly on purpose: He must have a moment's relief from that intolerable jolting of his bones. "Tell them about the gold in the *barranca*," he gasped.

"But it's a secret—" Wimmer began.

"That Mormon elder down at the Fort told everyone in his store. You tell those riders, Pete!"

With an oath the German wheelwright exclaimed: "Then all California will know—"

The girl cut him off: "Can't you see this man's badly hurt?"

"All right, slope!" Wimmer shouted. "I'll tell them!"

Before Abe put the horses into a trot, Samanthy called over her shoulder, to the wheelwright: "Have you got any brandy?"

Wimmer took a flask from his pocket. He had to run before he could put it into the girl's outstretched hand.

THEY topped the divide as Samanthy looked back. Three more men had dropped out of the race and were shoving their horses toward Peter Wimmer, who held up his pan. A low sunbeam struck the few yellow grains in the residue of sand, magnifying the light and giving the illusion that the pan was full of gold-dust. It

was the second apple of Hippomenes thrown in the race.

Mutton John Blake might not have dared to continue this man-hunt alone, except that he saw Abe swing his horse between two boulders, slip slowly from the saddle, then to his hands and knees. It looked like an easy finish to Blake. He held his horse to a walk and circled the boulders at a good distance like a coyote sizing up a hencoop.

Samanthy had dropped to Abe's side and was helping him off with his hunting-jacket. His black shirt shone with blood when the jacket came off; and his hand, stiff in a deathlike grip

on his derringer, was streaming red. Samanthy pillowed his head against her chest and held the brandy-flask to his mouth. "You can't fight now," she whispered.

"How many are coming?" he said between clenched teeth.

"Just Blake."

"That makes the odds even; and they're just the odds that I want. They're sweet!"

"Don't talk nonsense! You'll be killed. Do you want to give your life just for—"

"Just to free you."

"When you never saw me before!"

"I saw you every night when we were marching down to Texas and across the desert, and at San Pasqual, where I was wounded, and at the San Gabriel River. Kearny and Kit Carson brought me to California to find you—"

She clutched him hard. "Blake's coming! He's dropped from his horse, and he's walking through the pines straight to us! Give me that gun!" She wrenched it from his hand and stood up. The blunt little derringer was hidden in the folds of her billowy skirt as she said coolly: "And now what do you want, Mr. Blake?"

"I want to finish him. That's what I want. Get out of the way!"

"You've already shot him in the back. It'll be murder."

"Who'll call it murder, when every man in camp knows I'm in the right? He took you by force, rustled you from under my very nose—you, my wife!"

The girl said, still cool: "He didn't force me. I came of my own choice."

"You were riding double!" Blake snorted, walking toward her.

"Don't you come any closer, Mr. Blake!" She lifted the derringer.

A LITTLE man riding bareback crashed through the chaparral. "Pretty smoky looking set-up, seems like." The girl's father had followed the chase, undistracted by the golden apples thrown on the trail. He jumped from his horse and ran between Blake and his betrothed. "Listen, Mutton John, you don't want to marry a girl who promised to wed you, then fixes to kill you first whack."

"The little hellcat—she lied!" Blake choked. "Telling me he didn't force her!"

"It was you that forced her into that bargain, Mutton John," the father shot back. "She got into debt to you to save my life, and the debt's going to be paid with this." He took out Abraham's gold-poke. "Want to heft it?" He thrust it into Blake's hand, then snatched it back. "It's yours when you give me that contract Samanthy signed."

Blake said half to himself: "Those Indians were yapping something about gold. Let's see that poke." When Hornuff handed it to him, he weighed it roughly, then loosening the thongs, took a pinch of dust with his fingers. "Where did this come from?"

"Ask him—" Hornuff nodded to Abraham Crump, sitting behind the boulder.

Abe called out: "What's it matter to you where it came from? I got a claim to the gully where I panned it."

"I think you're lying. The Indians said there was gold in the tail-race. You got a claim to the whole mill?"

"The tail-race was only where we found the first *pepitas*. A fortnight ago Jim, the boss, found some after the night-sluicing when he closed the headgate and shut off the water."

"It's fool's-gold—" Blake said uncertainly, then weighed it again, pondering. "Not fool's-gold; it's too hefty."

"Mrs. Wimmer boiled one of the *pepitas* in her wash kettle, and Jim hammered it and tested it."

For the third time Blake weighed it and rubbed the bright dust with his thumb. "It's not enough to cancel the contract unless I know where it came from."

Abraham tried to sit up as he called weakly: "You mean you want to jump my claim?"

"Not jump it; I want the deed to it."

"Here's the location-notice," Abraham said readily. "I'll sign it over to you."

"You'll do no such a thing!" Samanthy cried.

Abraham whispered to her: "He can find gold in every gulch on the American River if he wants to look for it. Mine was only a pocket I've cleaned out. Give him this paper."

Mutton John Blake read it half aloud:

"Notice is hereby given that the undersigned citizen of the United States has located a claim to the following described placer mining ground, viz—" He hurried over the description of the gully, which was like countless others on the South Fork—with patches of greasewood clinging to the rocky slopes, of chamisal blanketing the red earth, of balsam and pine bordering the golden wash of the bed.

At the bottom of the notice Abe had scribbled: *"I hereby transfer my claim to this ground to Mutton John Blake. Signed, Abraham Crump."*

Blake took out his contract of marriage, tore it in half and threw the pieces over the boulder. The third golden apple had worked its magic.

Abraham held up his flask as little Tim Hornuff came behind the boulder. "To your salvation, sir!"

"The salvation of all three of us," the father said, swigging.

"Dad, you put that down! It's for him—he needs all of it. He had seven men after him with me in the middle, and he figured the right way out!" Samanthy started to rip her petticoat for bandages. "Now build a fire and help me doctor him."

As she worked, she said: "I've just thought it out—what you meant by a golden apple. Our schoolteacher once told us the story, but I was only ten and I can't remember the end of it."

"A Greek won a race by dropping an apple every time the race was too close. He did it so he could win the woman he loved. And he won her."

When Samanthy finished dressing the wound, she said: "Help me lift him to a horse, Dad. There's a Dr. Bates at Sutter's Fort the immigrants told about. We'll have to get him down there." Then she added, looking at Abraham's gray face: "He was a pretty smart Greek, wasn't he?"

In the Twelfth Century an intrigue at the court of the great Sultan Saladin brings forth the Sphinx Emerald to play its strange magic rôle.

Swordsmen

LIKE old Whoosis, the Roman poet, I sing of swords and rascals. With certain few exceptions, all men are rascals. I am, naturally, one of the exceptions. Yet my career has given me no cause of pride, unless it be the affection in which I hold my master Saladin, as he is usually called—a contraction for Sala'h-ud-Din, which means "Honoring the Faith." His given name is Yusuf or Joseph. In the Kurdish country where he came from, they use Biblical names.

Greek-born in Alexandria, I was educated as a scribe. My drunken father sold me to the Arabs as a slave, and I was named El Bahi, "The Elegant," because of my good looks. I was taken to Cairo, rapidly made my way and became secretary to Saladin

# of Saladin by H. BEDFORD-JONES

when he came to Cairo, a green Kurdish country boy, with his uncle the governor. This was in the Year of the Hegira 564, or as Christians reckon it 1168, if you must have history.

Myself, I have no love for history; it is dull work. I have set out to tell the truth here, and it deals with some chancy intrigue, an honest eunuch, and a bit of hot swordplay—also with that accursed and beautiful jewel the Sphinx Emerald. This may also be history, but it is generally unknown and deserves to be told. So, with one hand upon my alleged heart, I bow gracefully; El Bahi is at your service with the truth. Salutations!

Let me skip the preludes of intrigue, treachery and struggle. Five years after coming to Cairo, Saladin's uncle was dead, and he was governor of

It was an imposing procession that arrived at the house behind the Mosque of El Azhar. Safir, decked with a jeweled Persian caftan, made a magnificent figure.

Egypt for the Sultan Nureddin, chief ruler of the Moslem world. As his secretary, I was doing very well for myself. His vizier, the eunuch Karakush, ruled the city and country, with all its emirs and captains, Mameluke slaves and soldiers, workmen and Egyptians. Let me paint these three men for you, since our world revolved about them:

I was rather small, stoutish, of great elegance in dress and manners, and well accustomed to finesse—in a word, a diplomat. I came only to the shoulder of my good friend the tall and scrawny Karakush. He was given to violence and savage passions, but was actually secretive and highly careful. We lived in the old palace with Saladin and his soldiers, but both of us were too wise to cut any figure among the swaggering emirs and great lords. Jealousy and treachery were everywhere, and throats were swiftly cut.

Karakush had one talent; he was a gifted builder, and over a cup of wine could dream great dreams in stone, which later took shape. He was spending Saladin's wealth, and held our master in great love. So did I, and why not? Everyone loved Saladin.

He was then thirty-five, handsome and generous, brave as a lion, so clever with arms that no warrior could stand against him. Yet he could dissimulate, worm his way amid conflicting interests, and suddenly seize an unsuspected point. We had served him well when he became governor. Perhaps Karakush suspected his ambition; I knew it, for Saladin confessed it to me one afternoon after dictating letters.

"El Bahi, the wind is stirring the trees," he said. "Sultan Nureddin—may Allah prolong his years!—is a suspicious old man. Luckily, the Crusaders in Jerusalem are keeping him too busy to molest me. What would happen if I took arms against him?"

"Things unpleasant to you," I said. I noted that he was playing with a great green stone set in a ring, but at the moment thought nothing of it. He had startled me. "Nureddin is the Commander of the Faithful, head of our religion; also, he has armies. Your emirs and captains swore fealty to him; they obey you because you govern in his name. He can depose you. He can slay you. That is, if he can reach you."

Saladin grunted. "I had a pigeon this morning. Nureddin orders me to join him with my best troops to lay siege to the Christian city of Karak, their Arabian outpost. This means he wants me under his thumb. I must either obey him or defy him."

HERE was evil news. Nureddin had established a very efficient pigeon-post linking all quarters of the empire. Saladin himself handled the letters that came by pigeon—one day from Damascus, two days from Bagdad. It was like magic! . . . . His reflective eyes dwelt upon the jewel in his hand, then rose to meet mine.

"This is highly secret news," he went on. "Give me your advice, El Bahi. Egypt is rich and powerful. Karakush is now building a citadel on the hill above the city. I am tempted. Emir El Ghazy is confident that I could defy the Sultan with impunity."

Here was worse tidings. "El Ghazy is a rogue. He'd love to ruin you. He's a good soldier but a bad guide."

"He gave me this emerald," Saladin said. "An ancient stone found in the palace treasury—one of magic power."

I CLUCKED my tongue at him and laughed. This angered him.

"Stop evading!" he snapped. "I want advice, not grins."

"Opinions are prompt, but advice comes best after sleep," I said. "In the morning, I'll give what you ask. Let me sleep upon it."

He nodded, his gaze returning to the emerald, which seemed to fascinate him.

"Very well. A splendid fellow, El Ghazy. He gives jewels like a sultan—jewels that hold angels or devils, I'm not sure which."

He seemed dreamy and uncertain, and this worried me.

The reason? I got a hint of it that evening when I unburdened myself to Karakush, giving him the whole story. We were accustomed to such confidences; we worked together for mutual protection, highly necessary in a palace crammed with intrigue and treachery. He liked me, and I had great respect for his brains. More than once we had managed affairs behind the curtains and effected great issues.

Chewing at his eternal sweetmeats, which never put any fat on his belly, the gaunt eunuch eyed me sardonically but said nothing till I had finished.

"Our heads are very loose on our shoulders, El Bahi," he grunted abruptly. "Emir El Ghazy, may Allah blast him, is a clever fellow, a spy for Sultan Nureddin. Unless we can get our master Saladin out of this tight pinch, we'll be in a tighter one ourselves."

"No argument," I commented.

He snarled between his thin lips. "You placid cat! If I didn't know your sharp claws and keen wits, I'd throw a cushion at you! Look at the game we play! Nureddin makes the overt move to catch the eye, but he's far away. Emir El Ghazy holds the sword, unsuspected. He's the danger-point, the one to watch. Somehow he has over-reached us. . . . Ha! An emerald, you say! Did you examine it closely?"

"I paid it no attention."

"I've heard tales of such a stone; it bewitches men, casts a charm upon them. Hm! You have a cat's nimble jump. How would you handle the Sultan's demands on Saladin?"

I told him, and he nodded slowly.

"Well enough; but the peril is here with El Ghazy. Ten to one, there's a woman in it, too. You pry into that angle. Saladin's no prude; question him. And remember, he has terrific pride and self-esteem! I'll go after the larger game. I can reach the length of the great road, into the hell-pit of the Pyramids, and to the craggy heights above."

The sardonic demon loved to boast, but this was the simple truth. Having Saladin's entire confidence, he was pushing forward vast constructions. First in Cairo, where the citadel was building and the city walls being extended to take in the older towns of El Fostat and Babylon. Then a great army road was being built, north into Lower Egypt and south to the Cataracts, following the Nile. Canals, bridges, cisterns were being constructed with the stones of several small pyramids. Having thousands of slaves and free workmen at his own orders, Karakush was almost unlimited in power.

However, I had some abilities myself. Before midnight I had set a dozen skillful men at work, and had written a letter to the Sultan. Then I turned in to sleep. There would be trouble with El Ghazy, of course, but I was fairly sure of Saladin. He never drank, being fanatical on the subject; he had a repressed love of horseplay; his vanity and pride were solid qualities, well founded; and while he paid no heed to slaves and common girls, he did have an eagle eye for an exceptional woman. So I knew just about where to lay hold of him. And if I knew nothing about weapons and made no swaggering show, as Saladin's secretary I had an almost unlimited expense account, which was useful. Saladin had issued glass money, as a novelty, but I had a fat chest of golden dinars on which to draw; and a gold coin is worth a dozen blustering swordsmen.

NEXT morning Saladin came to my room after the sunrise prayer—he kept unearthly hours—and cursed me for a lazy dog on finding me still asleep. I gave him the letter I had written, and he read it with astonishment.

"So I'm an obedient slave of the Sultan, am I? Obeying his commands with devout speed . . . the troops being gathered . . . arranging to meet him at Karak. . . . In Allah's name, what means this nonsense?"

"Not nonsense; good sense," I said sleepily. "Gather the troops. It'll keep 'em busy. Seal and send the letter. It'll make Nureddin happy. He'll go to meet you at Karak, and the Christians will trounce him soundly when you don't show up."

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

"Let discussion wait until later."

He folded the rice-paper thin. I saw he was pleased.

"So! El Bahi, add ten dinars a month to your salary. I'm going for a swim in the Nile. . . . Here—you can play with this till I come back. Guard it carefully."

He threw the ring with the green stone at me, and departed.

Wide awake now, I seized the emerald and inspected it. Bewitched? Obviously. In the stone was a tiny figure, the exact shape of the Sphinx; this was a marvel, surely. Apparently it was quite natural. The emerald was a poor one, but I found it fascinating.

Two of my own slaves appeared. I was trimmed and bathed; then my breakfast came in; and all the while I kept the ring on my finger, admiring that emerald. The masseurs came, and had just finished rubbing me, when in walked El Ghazy. We had no privacy in this old palace—that was why Saladin was building a new one with the citadel. I sent away the rubbers, saluted the Emir humbly, and he smiled at me. He had a keen face, bearded and trimmed, and his eyes were like a sword.

"My good El Bahi," he said, "I know quite well you're a damned deceitful rogue, and you love money. Eh?"

"Not glass money, my lord," I replied.

He chuckled at this. "I have a hundred golden dinars here," he said. "Do they make your nose itch?"

"By Allah, they do!" I told him. He nodded at me. He was a lordly man, well made, magnificently attired; his arms and jewels were of the finest. But I had turned the emerald inside my hand and closed my fingers over it, so he did not observe it.

"Our master Saladin, upon whom be peace, has received certain orders from the Sultan, beloved of Allah," he said. "Can you tell me what answer he returns?"

"Certainly," I said. "He honors the commands of the Sultan, and is sending troops to aid him, and will himself follow as soon as he recovers from a fever that has smitten him sorely."

"Oh!" The Emir grinned, swallowed this lie, and pulled a purse from his girdle, tossing it to me. "Good man. I see we understand one another. Salaam!"

I wished him peace also, and he departed happy. I returned to contemplation of the emerald, which was fascinating indeed, and was at this when a slave announced Karakush. He was hot and sweaty, having been overseeing the work since sunrise.

"Oh, damned luxurious cat, may you roast in hell!" said he.

"That being likely, I prefer to be comfortable here," I retorted. "This is the emerald. Look at it."

While he did so, I told him of my late visitor and what had passed.

"You see," I finished, "El Ghazy now believes that Saladin is trying to evade the Sultan's orders, thus will press his own affair."

"By tomorrow night we should have some news. Let us meet, then, luxurious prince of deviltry," he said. "This emerald is the same of which I heard. Does Saladin know that it has bewitched him?"

"No, but he suspects something," I said. "I think he'll ask me soon."

He went away. I selected a robe of thin white silk, with a peach-blush girdle, and when dressed went to attend Saladin. He was holding morning court. When it was over, he retired with me to the secretariat.

"The letter you wrote has gone," he said. "Now take some orders regarding the troops and the gathering of supplies for the Karak expedition."

When they were done, he asked for the emerald, and I gave it to him.

"It is bewitched," I said. "Any man who wears it is bewitched. Like you."

"Me?" He snorted angrily. "Bewitched?"

"Certainly. You asked my advice; that shows. Usually you give orders, and have no need of any advice. The stone has one of those ancient Egyptian gods inside it, and it addles the wits of any person who wears it. That's why El Ghazy gave it to you."

This angered him. "The Emir is an honorable man, utterly devoted to me."

"I had a hundred dinars from him an hour ago, to get your answer to the Sultan. He knew all about that order you received."

HE was staggered. "Eh? He bribed you? And you betrayed me?"

"No, him. I lied to him. The hundred dinars is good money for a lie."

His lips twitched. "My elegant El Bahi, it will grieve me to see your head hung above the gate of my new citadel! I fear it will come to that."

"If Allah desires it, yes," I asserted. "After El Ghazy is governor of Egypt."

He patted the emerald. "When you have proof of the magic and witch-

craft you assign to this emerald, come to me with it freely. Until then, use no more loose talk about it." He spoke sternly. "Punishment for loose talk, rewards for proof, by Allah!"

"Then remember it is an oath by Allah's name," I said. This startled him, for he was a devout man, but he could not eat his own words, so the matter ended thus.

THE orders went out to the troops; I knew El Ghazy would find my words to him thus confirmed, so all was well. The day passed in routine business. That afternoon Saladin embarked on a boat for an inspection trip up the Nile; he would not return for a couple of days, and I breathed more easily. Luckily he had not taken me with him.

I had bad luck toward evening, just the same. Karakush sent me a jar of wine, and in sampling it I spilled some on my handsome girdle. It was Cyprian wine, and the stain would not come out; the girdle was spoiled. Strictly speaking, wine is not drunk by the Moslem; but neither Karakush nor I cared particularly about religious tenets, and we did like wine.

It was the following day before I began to hear from the men I had set to work. Reports came in fast that afternoon. I got them tabulated, and things began to look exciting. When the time came to get together with Karakush, that evening, I really had something, too.

He had not been wasting his time, either. In his sardonic way he urged me to speak first, and set out cups and a whole beaker of his Cyprian wine. So I gave him my story, and then launched into the reports I had.

"You were right in suspecting a woman at work. A woman occupies a house in the street just behind the Mosque of El Azhar—a very beautiful woman, but rarely seen. Her servants are Persians. Gossip says she is a Persian princess. Emir El Ghazy has twice been seen to visit this house by night, in company with Saladin. A huge amount of hazy detail boils down to these facts. I am having the house watched. Carrier pigeons have been seen to arrive there; whence they come, none can say. The apparent master of the house is the Persian rug-merchant Selim whose shop is in the rug-bazaar, but this is obviously a blind; he never goes there, though his servants often do. The house is registered in his name with the police. That empties my pack, worthy Karakush."

He grinned in his tigerish way. "The woman is named Leila; she is sister to Melek, the vizier of Sultan Nureddin," he said, relishing my astonishment. "That house is a trap set to snare a lion. How do I know? Because, for the past twelve hours a man has been lying in the prison at the construction camp across the river. He happens to be one of El Ghazy's secretaries."

Chilling information, this!

"You've had him tortured?" I said.

"No. He's been kept full of hashish, and all his words recorded." Karakush smiled. "In conjunction with your reports, his babblings make everything clear. He has, however, spoken of a certain date which means nothing to me. Monday, the seventh day of the month Safar. Eh?"

I shook my head. It was the following Monday; it had no meaning to me. There was a sample of our excellent working. Without my information, Karakush would have seen nothing in the babblings of his prisoner; the two were complementary, perfectly fitting, opening the entire plot to our understanding.

"Further," went on Karakush, "the personal troops of El Ghazy are being assembled at his house in Boulak, the island near the city. They have orders to gather there the end of the week. Those of several other captains are under orders also. They are friends of El Ghazy, but he is the most prominent. Do you think something is expected to happen next Monday?"

"Probably. Let me speak with Saladin about it, and I can tell better," I said. We refilled our cups. The wine was strong, and had its usual effect on Karakush—that is, it melted his outward seeming, and drew out his real self. He sighed, rubbed his big hook of a nose, and nodded at me.

"I have an ambition," he said. "We need not be godly men to give of godly stuff. I would like to carve a great eagle upon that citadel. I have picked out the very spot, on the west façade of the wall, so that all men would see it until the end of time. But to represent any living creature is abhorrent to the true religion. Saladin would never permit it."

I regarded him curiously. "An eagle? Why?"

"My friend, I will never have children," he said, after gulping down his wine. "You do not know why I am called Karakush; it means black bird, or eagle. Once, as a child, I was named Ardzrouni, meaning eagle-bearer—the name of a royal Armenian family. I would like to put the Armenian eagle on the wall of Saladin's citadel, you see?"

"It would put your head over the gate," I told him truly. "Well, shall we warn our master or not?"

He shrugged. "Useless. He would not accept warnings; he trusts El Ghazy, probably is in love with this woman. Let us wait." He stretched out his arm, smooth as silk yet muscle-hard as iron. "I could use a sword, once. I still can, better than most men. When Saladin returns, feel him out carefully, and we shall see."

I left him, presently. So he was Armenian, of high birth! Probably taken in war and made a slave—an interesting sidelight upon his character. . . .

Two days later Saladin returned to Cairo, full of praise for the construction work, and heaping honors upon Karakush, who heeded them not. A queer fellow, that eunuch.

I took occasion to talk with Saladin, casually. He still had the emerald, still watched and studied it by the hour; he gave me curt replies while he looked into it. On the Monday evening, said he, there was to be an entertainment by some dancing girls, to which Emir El Ghazy was going with him. A private affair.

Although it was a hot morning, I went out into the city and climbed to the construction on the hill-flank, and found Karakush at work.

"It's only too clear," I told him. "Saladin is to be killed there on Monday night."

"Naturally. Of course that's the scheme," he said, and chuckled. "Can you write Persian?"

"That's my business, isn't it?" I retorted. "Persian, Turki, Armenian or what have you. Even Bokhari. Tomorrow's Friday. What are we to do?"

"Pray to Allah," he said. "I sha'n't tell even you, my friend. Trust me. On Monday morning you shall write the letters. I'll deliver them later. There's just one thing to give you hope. Our master loves a good joke and a good sword; we'll give him both."

More he would not say. I thought the heat had addled his brain, and going home got into a tepid bath and cooled off. The nights were chill, but the days were foretastes of hell if one got into the white sunlight. How Karakush stood his architectural work I could not see.

DURING those next days Saladin, in high humor, lost no chance to rail at me about the emerald. It was the very father of inspiration, said he, the fount of all good luck and virtue; a royal jewel, fit for a sultan.

"Once you depended on yourself," I told him impudently. "Then you were a Kurdish prince, the greatest of warriors. Now you seek luck from a heathen stone."

He went into a roar of laughter, but all the same it pricked him hard. I saw him watching me, after this, with thoughtful eyes.

Saladin was nobody's fool, however. He knew those troops were concentrating about the city, so he ordered El Ghazy and the other captains to get them started on the desert road toward Karak, and sent others of his own troops along, and they had to obey him. He had me write Sultan Nureddin that the troops were moving and

he would follow at once. I tried to warn him, and he shut me up with peremptory voice.

On Monday morning, Karakush looked me up at the secretariat and showed me a letter to be written out in florid Persian. I read it and choked.

"You've gone stark mad!" I said. "A letter to Leila—the noble Persian Safir, sent by the Sultan himself to consult with her—"

"Peace! Write it," he growled. "Safir arrives toward sunset, goes tonight to her house with this letter. Leave the rest to me. Get it written, and bring it to my quarters tonight after supper. And for the love of Allah, stay sober or I'll have you flayed alive!"

I wrote the letter myself, with much beard-scratching, and did a good job.

THAT evening I took the letter to the apartment of Karakush. I was innocent, unsuspecting, fearing nothing. A slave bowed me in, and I saw no sign of the Armenian. Then a very demon of a man appeared—a tall fellow with a curled beard, a black patch over one eye, a magnificent Persian costume, jewels on his hands. Two slaves were with him. At his command they seized me roughly, tearing off my delicate green robe of Medina weft.

"Persian dogs, Allah upon you!" I cried angrily. "You'll be flogged at the gates for this outrage—Karakush will rip the skin from your backs!"

"Strip him," said the tall Persian, and the two slaves stripped me. "Now shave his head and beard. Those curled whiskers are not necessary."

They committed this outrage while he stood looking on, gripping a cruel curved sword and laughing amusedly at my threats. When they had shaved off my beard, which required an hour's dressing and curling each day, they rubbed into my skin some brown stain which darkened me, clothed me in a hideous harsh, ill-cut robe of camel's hair, and about my neck set a huge rosary of beads for the ninety-nine sacred names of Allah.

The tall fellow picked up the folded letter, which had fallen in my struggles.

"Certainly no one will now recognize you, sleek cat," said he, laughing at me. "You're my honored companion, the holy man El Kahin, so don't forget to finger your beads and mutter prayers. I have numerous slaves waiting to escort us fittingly. What, the noble Safir does not please you?"

It was Karakush himself, and he was well tricked out. His garments and belongings carried the two polo-mallets called *chugan*, heraldic arms much used in Persia, where polo is a highly popular game. The Chugandar, as he is known, is an important court official there.

I cursed him bitterly, but curses and protests were alike vain.

"Drink your wine and save your breath," he said, sipping the Cyprian they brought us. "I need you, and I need luck as well. My problem is to carry off things so that Emir El Ghazy will not call in the armed men he doubtless has ready. We must confuse him so he will be uncertain. Allah alone knows what the event will be! However, we must hope for the best, and then it may happen."

He called his slaves and set forth, dragging me along until I yielded to force and went along of myself. The slaves bore lights; some were armed; and it was an imposing procession that arrived at the house which was behind the Mosque of El Azhar. Safir, decked with a jeweled Persian caftan, made a magnificent figure.

Word was taken to the lady of the house, and we were admitted. Leaving our slaves outside, we were conducted to the presence of the lady Leila, as Safir demanded. This was in the large central chamber, open to the sky above, where fountains played, and a thousand lamps made brightness in the alcoves. She was there, sitting upon rich cushions; and there also was Saladin, and the Emir El Ghazy, both of them looking rather aghast at this intrusion. The lady herself was veiled, icy in manner, very decorous, clad in gem-spangled robes. A small monkey on a golden chain sat by her.

At this moment came musicians and dancing-girls; our byplay was ended.

Safir, ignoring the other two, saluted her with the greatest courtesy, using her real name.

"Peace to you, sister of the most noble Melek!" said he, presenting his letter. "I arrived in this dog-ridden hovel they call a city barely an hour ago, and have made all haste to present myself before you and deliver this epistle from your brother, vizier to the Sultan—may Allah be kind to him!"

At this disclosure of her actual name and rank, Saladin betrayed no surprise; he was regarding us keenly.

She took the letter and spoke in an angry voice.

"I do not seem to recall your face."

Safir preened himself, and laughed.

"Lady, I am Safir el Amidi, Chugandar of the court. And this,"—he waved a hand at me—"is the holy man El Kahin, a magician, as his name implies, dweller in the desert and master of incantations and charms."

All this while Emir El Ghazy, apparently alarmed by our arrival, was in a mood of gathering black anger.

Leila glanced over the letter, then addressed Safir.

"Let discussion wait until later. Sit down, be at ease. These guests of mine are here to witness some dancing—"

She presented Emir El Ghazy, but Saladin made her a gesture of caution.

"I am Yusuf, of the Emir's suite," he said, to keep his rank from being known. He stood up and came toward us. "Peace to you," he said politely, and saluted me. "If it be true that you are a holy man, El Kahin, I ask you for your blessing."

He suspected nothing, evidently. It was perilous to jest with Saladin on religious matters, but I could not lose the opportunity.

"Take my blessing in the Prophet's name," I responded. "The more so, since you seem to need it badly. I see you are not yourself, but a man bewitched."

He started slightly, and his dark eyes flashed.

"Bewitched?" he repeated. "I?"

"Precisely." I fingered my beads. "It is proof that you are bewitched, because you are here and not in a safer place, use a name you do not generally use, and appear to trust those whom you should suspect."

AN outburst threatened, but Safir checked it by a roar of laughter.

"That's the way with him, always stirring up trouble!" said he. "Pardon him, I beseech you. El Kahin is very holy, but a bit soft in the head—you understand."

He gave me a warning kick as he spoke. It was all very bewildering to the lady and also to El Ghazy; our arrival had entirely upset their scheme of things. However, Saladin seated himself again. Slaves brought in trays of sweetmeats and the rarest sherbets.

Leila was examining the letter, and she seemed more puzzled than ever. This did not surprise me, since it bore neither signature nor seal. Emir El Ghazy paid me scant notice but fixed his attention upon Safir, and I saw trouble brooding.

Since I knew very well that Saladin was here because Leila was no ordinary person, I thought best to put trouble aside and please my master. I asked:

"Noble lady, would it please you, while awaiting entertainment, to permit me to divert your mind?"

"How would your holiness attempt such a task?" she said, none too politely.

"Oh, nothing could be simpler," I replied in the same tone. "I pray you, let me be given a brush and ink and paper, and I'll write an incantation which will astonish you. And you yourself shall be the judge."

My voice gave me away to Saladin, for I saw a twinkle come into his eye. But the lady beckoned a slave and told him to give me what I wanted. A bit of paper and writing-materials were given me.

"In the name of Allah!" I said, and began to write, making a play upon the names of El Ghazy, *"The Victorious,"* and Saladin, *"Honoring the Faith."* It took only a moment. *"Victory,"* I wrote, *"can bring sorrow; to honor the Faith is ever wise."* I let the words dry, then handed her the paper.

"A true enchantment," I said, "that will cure all trouble in the heart."

She read it; then her hand clenched the paper into a crumpled ball.

"You are a sage," she declared, with a little silvery laugh. At this moment came musicians, and three dancing girls; drum and fifes began to play; figures began to move about the fountain before us, and our byplay was ended. But I liked her laugh. She knew now where we stood.

Safir made a noble show, blustering like a true Persian, admiring the dancers, making an ass of himself generally. On purpose, of course! His intent was to keep El Ghazy bewildered and confused, unable to strike a decisive course. Saladin, though discussing the finer points of the dancing with his hostess, kept an eye on Safir—an enjoying eye, it seemed to me. He had never suspected his tall eunuch of such histrionic art.

Saladin had been given a magnificent sherbet in a huge golden cup. He had set it down beside his cushion to speak with Leila, when Safir began to boast about some famed dancer at Erzeroum—a man who danced with his sword and did marvelous things. As he spoke, he hitched around his saber and gestured with it, and the tip of the sheath struck against the golden cup and knocked it over.

Saladin said nothing. El Ghazy flew into a passion, but Safir put on a show that struck me dumb. He apologized most humbly to Saladin, cursing his own clumsiness, asking pardon, finally taking up his own untouched cup of sherbet and asking Saladin to accept it in place of that spilled. He did this just as a slave was bringing another golden cup. Saladin took it and gave it to Safir.

"Take this, my friend," he said, "and I'll accept yours with pleasure. In Kurdistan, where I was born, a sword can do no wrong while it is sheathed."

EL GHAZY cast an angry look at Leila, and I knew that Safir had acted with intention. The cup which Saladin had given him, he kept untouched. El Ghazy, however, fingered his own jeweled hilt and scowled at Safir.

"A child should not play with the toys of men," he said significantly.

"True, beloved of Allah," said Safir. "Also, jewels become women, not warriors. Your sword-hilt is pretty; the dancing girls would like it. Mine is unadorned, but does not slip in the hand with blood and sweat of battle. A sword that slips is perilous to a man."

"Not if his hand be firm," snarled El Ghazy, quick to accept the challenge. All our attention was now centered upon the two. Leila made a gesture, and the dancing girls left the floor, and the musicians retired. El Ghazy went on speaking, with gathering anger.

"The hand is what matters. If the hand be firm, the sword bites."

"The hand cannot be firm unless it be true," said Safir with a ghastly grin. "And if hand and heart be false, victorious one, how can it be firm? The hand that betrays its master must slip, in the justice of Allah. The ambitious heart that aspires to murder its master and take his place—"

"You Persian dog!" burst forth El Ghazy, the veins swelling on his temples. "You prate fine words and dare not back them up with actions!"

Safir fingered his false beard complacently. "I have no permission," he said gently. "It is discourteous to bare sword in the house of another. If this gracious lady would give her consent, I should be most happy—"

"Oh, by all means!" spoke out Leila, clapping her hands. "Both of you are bold braggarts. Back up your loud words if you can, and let Allah favor the truest heart!"

As a serpent glides yet cannot be seen to move, Safir left his cushions. His tall shape moved out across the tiled floor, and the sword was bare in his hand. A plain sword, but the edge of the steel glittered, and I knew it must be exceeding sharp. El Ghazy rose, slipped off his embroidered coat, and the blade came naked in his grip.

He stepped forth, a magnificent picture of a warrior, perfectly coördinated, his dark gaze fastened upon the tall, ornately clad Persian.

I glanced at Saladin. He was leaning forward, watching intently, excitement in his face, all else forgotten.

"Allah!" he ejaculated, his own fingers twitching for a sword-grip. "Allah! The winner shall have a purse of a thousand dinars!"

"The loser," said El Ghazy, "will have no need for it."

He laughed, as he advanced toward the tall Persian. At this moment occurred a slight interruption, although it passed almost unnoticed. A slave came hurriedly in and crossed to Leila, sank on his knee and extended something. It was a tiny pellet of paper, I observed, such as might have come from the leg of a pigeon. She took and tucked it away, and the slave departed.

Then the steel clashed.

Exciting? Not in the least. Neither man was mailed; each had a sword, to serve as weapon and shield alike. For all his proud hauteur, El Ghazy was deliberate and very careful. He crossed blades with Safir. The two men began to strike, in a methodic way; each was feeling out the other and risking nothing. Saladin, obviously, thought it was no more than a fencing game—or did he? To read that dark intent face was impossible. Leila's features were lost behind her veil, which revealed only the eyes.

I watched the fighters, thinking how cleverly Safir had gained all his objectives, drawing the Emir into this match without rousing any hidden men. He was clever now, too, his tall figure stiff and unbending before El Ghazy's attack, his footwork crude and uncertain, his pose awkward; his sword scarcely moved, but was like a wall in the air, clinging to the other blade and holding it. This was not the sinewy, willowy figure I knew so well. He was dissembling.

SUDDENLY El Ghazy broke into movement too swift for the eye to follow. He delivered three slashing blows, ferocity whistling on his blade. Safir received each on his sword, drawing the steel slightly away as he did so; he was a little slow for the third, which caught his embroidered caftan and shore most of it away from his head; yet he avoided the keen edge. El Ghazy laughed.

"Not bad, Persian! Next time the head goes as well as the hat."

"I'll take your chain to pay for the caftan," said Safir. His long arm and long saber and long body shot forward like a steel spring. A backward leap saved El Ghazy, but the steel point caught the links of a great gold chain he wore about his neck, and the gold went clattering on the tiles. Saladin cried out admiringly.

The two men paused, breathing hard, each eying the other. El Ghazy made up his mind and moved forward craftily, apparently slashing high, for the head. The steel whistled as it came in—aimed for the long legs, a deadly stroke.

Yet before our very eyes Safir changed stance and body, it seemed. He was no longer tall and erect. He was leaning far forward, his legs well back and safe, his blade pecking threateningly for the throat. Almost in panic, El Ghazy slashed and slashed; his edge was parried each time; he fell back a step and another step; he tried to beat aside the blade before his eyes, and the haft slipped in his hand so he almost lost his sword.

At this, amazingly, Safir halted.

"What did I tell you?" he cried out. "If the hand be false, it cannot be firm!"

The bearded features of El Ghazy darkened under a rush of furious blood. He must have seen that the tall man was playing with him. The rest of us knew that we were looking on swordsmanship little less than magical. Still Safir laughed.

"The great El Ghazy, no longer simple emir, but now Governor of Egypt!" he went on tauntingly. "Hapless Saladin, bewitched by the emerald and dead of poison, El Ghazy ruler in his stead—"

His jeering almost killed him. El Ghazy came in slashing like a madman, reckless and terrible, with such furious address that Safir backed and backed and needed every last bit of skill to avoid the blows, leaping sideways, handling his blade with frantic strength, all energy intent upon defense alone. It was a marvel of attack, a marvel of defense, two masters hard at work, but Safir did not strike a blow in return. He had no chance, so incredibly swift was El Ghazy. Back almost to the fountain went Safir, then fell into that curious crouch. El Ghazy took warning and checked himself.

Saladin was in a blaze. "With two such captains, I could drive the Christians from Jerusalem!" he yelled excitedly. "Allah give me such men—"

He came to his feet and shouted incoherently—for now Safir was attacking, the first time he had really extended himself. I saw his object. He was making no brilliant assault, just a steady, close, savage attack that El Ghazy had to meet with his whole effort. He tried no tricks. His blade swung like a living streak of fire in the air, and El Ghazy had to watch like a hawk. Remembering that lissom, sinewy sword-arm of tireless steel muscle, I knew this was a deliberate attempt to sap and weary El Ghazy; but the latter was no weakling.

Thus far neither man was touched—an eloquent tribute to the matchless mastery at work on either side. Both were streaming and streaked with sweat, the magnificent garments disarrayed, their breath a panting whistle, and the false beard of Safir hung in grotesque patches about his chin; but I saw that the eyes of El Ghazy were staring and distended, and his smile had become a grotesque grimace.

Out of his deadly crouch Safir flew as from a released spring, sword a part of arm and body. The other man, with a terrific effort, parried the reaching blade, swept it aside, and cut forward. A line of scarlet leaped out along Safir's forehead—the point had barely scratched him in passing. With his left hand he whipped the blood from his eyes—and suddenly swept forward again, uncoiling that incredible length of arm.

El Ghazy parried, and as before found an opening and cut in for it, desperately. This was what Sifar wanted. He came suddenly to his full height, parried the cut neatly, and slashed. The other could not recover to ward the blow. I could have sworn that it reached him; yet nothing happened. Safir lost balance a little with the force of his own stroke, and staggered away a pace.

THEN—Allah forgive all sin! The truth is past belief—the head of El Ghazy toppled, and rolled almost to the feet of Saladin. The body was relaxed, and fell backward into the fountain, with a frightful rush of blood. The saber clattered on the tiles. We had seen an impossible thing, the thing discussed in every gathering of swordsmen and affirmed or denied blankly—we had witnessed it, and the fact stupefied us all. Even Safir, leaning on his blade and gasping for breath, merely stared and gulped and could say nothing.

"Us," did I say? Not all of us—not the veiled woman, at least. Upon the dreadful choked silence I caught a tiny rustle of paper. Unwitting that she had just now beheld the miracle possible only to a perfect sword and swordsman, she was unfolding the tiny paper message and reading its brief content. A queer strangled sound came from her—a laugh that was not a laugh. She thrust her arm toward Saladin, extending the tiny paper.

"Saladin—read, read!" Her voice was a gasp. "It came from Damascus—by pigeon. Read it!"

He snatched the paper and glanced at its message.

"By Allah—and Allah!" Amazement broke upon his lips. "Sultan Nureddin died in his sleep last night! If this be true—"

His speech failed, but the words had burned into us all.

"If this be true," I spoke up, "then he who moves quickest has the prize. That is, unless he sits mooning over an emerald while the world turns up-

side down—or holds his belly like a monkey who has tasted poison meant for his betters."

This made them all look quickly. Leila's little monkey lay with beady eyes winking around. He had quietly slipped to the sherbet spilled from Saladin's cup, and had been gobbling it greedily. A short laugh escaped Leila.

"You are fools, all of you," she said. "There was no poison in the cup. El Ghazy thought there was, but I replaced the poison with a narcotic drug. No harm is done."

Saladin's fierce, eager laugh broke upon the room. He gestured at me.

"I am not the fool you thought me, anyway! But there was sense in the proof you offered about the emerald. Perhaps I was bewitched; at all events, I am myself again now. El Ghazy? I was not that man's tool. Take his head, El Bahi, and have it hung over the city gates. Karakush! To me, swordsman!"

Safir moved, very wearily, and came to Saladin, who took his hand and spoke.

"Egypt is a pleasant land; this woman is true. She came to beguile me, an enemy, and Allah turned her into a friend. Take care of her, take care of Egypt, for me. I am going—now, tonight, and I shall return as Sultan. Whatever request you ask of me shall then be granted on the spot."

"Careful!" A faint laugh escaped Safir. "Careful of promises, Master!"

"I mean it. I swear by Allah that any request you make of me, even if it be to the half of my power, shall be freely granted. As for the emerald, I shall keep it—to bewitch and ruin some other man, one of these days."

THERE, my friends, you have the story I promised. How Saladin swooped upon Damascus and in time returned home as Sultan, the greatest ever known to the world, is in the history books.

If you will some day come to Cairo, you shall see for yourselves what was the wish later made by Karakush and granted by Sultan Saladin. Look toward the west façade of the noble citadel that overhangs the town. You may see it carven there as a witness unto future ages—the royal eagle of the Armenian kings, symbol of the eunuch who, but for the will of Allah, might have worn a crown.

You ask about the veiled lady? Well, I am merely El Bahi, chief of the Sultan's secretariat, so what should I know of the harem of my master? Still, I have heard laughter at times behind the carven screens, and it was the laughter of the veiled lady Leila—may Allah bestow many sons upon her!

But as for the Sphinx Emerald—I never saw it again, for it was kept by Saladin unto his own purposes.

My Most Amusing Experience

With His Majesty's Compliments

WHILE our ship was anchored at Subic Bay, in the Philippines, the captain of a newly arrived English destroyer invited the skipper and several of us aboard. After he'd proudly shown us around, he took us to the wardroom.

More than a dozen unopened bottles of bonded liquor were lined up on a shelf. The captain saw us eying them.

"Most English ships have a whisky mess," he explained. "What will be your pleasure, gentlemen?"

After one drink around, the captain opened a second bottle and poured another. Then for the third and fourth drinks, he opened bottles three and four, carefully replacing numbers one and two on the shelf.

Our skipper was curious. "Why do you open a new bottle for each drink?" he asked. "Is it an old English sea custom?"

"Righto," the Britisher grinned. "You see, His Majesty provides all the liquor for our guests. Of course, if a spot or two is left in a bottle, we don't bother returning it to the King *until it's empty.*" *A. F. N.*

Bear Scare

BROTHER ED and I half-dozed in the hot June sun, lazily watching our lines bobbing over the side of the small fishing-skiff on the blue expanse of Lake St. Francis.

Anchored less than a quarter-mile off the big South Lancaster wharf, well-dotted with sun-bathers and swimmers, we could feel the sunny peace which blanketed the Ontario agricultural district—a staid, early-to-bed community famous only for its fishing.

A sudden rocking of the boat snapped me out of my doze. Ed was half-turned, shading his eyes and looking across the five-mile expanse of water. A black something was heading toward the Ontario shore, making good progress.

Eddie broke the silence: "Looks like black bear—what do you think?" I nodded—and we stared at each other. We'd spent ten summers fishing the big lake, and this was the first bruin we'd seen in the water.

The aquatic marvel steamed past our boat as though he hadn't just completed a five-mile splash. As Bruin swept in beside the wharf, some of the kids spotted him. The cry went up, and practically everyone there swarmed over to take a look.

Mr. Bruin, sedately and as though he were miles from any humans, swam in behind the wharf, out of sight. We figured he was heading for a little bay over to the right—not knowing his plans.

Presently shrill shrieks made us aware that something was happening. Then we spotted Mr. Bruin, calmly walking through the big arched entrance to the wharf. From that moment it was pure pandemonium.

For the next two or three minutes the wharf disgorged diving human forms like a slot-machine. The non-swimmers scurried around in frantic panic, looking for a way out that didn't spell wetness. The only escape was over the side—and over they went, to sputter and splash, or be held up by those who could swim.

After a dignified circle of the wharf, during which inspection he obviously had a sharp eye for food left by the departed sun-bathers, Mr. Bruin left the way he came in, a black bundle of nerve.

Alton Cleland.

The Sergeant Speaks

PRIOR to Pearl Harbor, I was called to active duty as a Reserve Officer and assigned to one of the two regular Army regiments of colored troops. The regiment to which I was assigned had a fine record, and among its noncommissioned officers were many old soldiers who were doing their utmost to whip the recruits into shape.

I had noticed that the company was slow in assembling at reveille. I called the First Sergeant over and explained that something would have to be done to assure promptness at the reveille formation.

"Yes suh!" answered the First Sergeant, who had been an old cavalryman. He saluted, returned to the company, called them to attention and explained in no uncertain terms, "Men, you-all see this here whistle?" There was a chorus of affirmation. "Well, tomorrow morning when I blows this whistle, I wants to see a cloud of dust an' a row of statues!"

Henry C. J. Evans.

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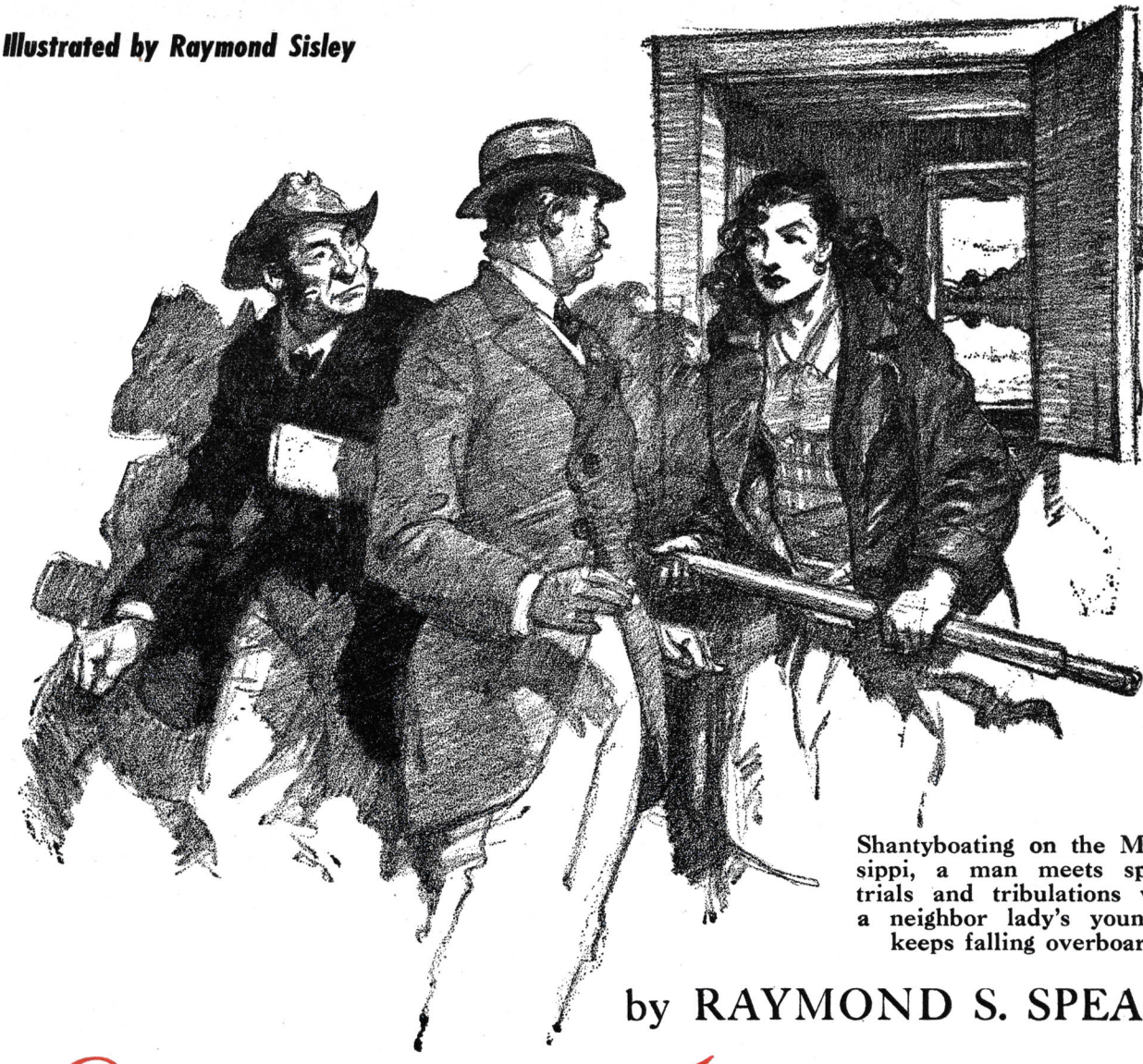
Illustrated by Raymond Sisley



Shantyboating on the Mississippi, a man meets special trials and tribulations when a neighbor lady's youngster keeps falling overboard.

by RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Soft-paw Ignorance

THIS woman we heard about started down the Ohio. She was one of those intellectual town women, a real up-the-bank soft-paw, and plumb ignorant as regards shantyboating. She was just sick of being courted and talked about. In a moment of disgust and determination she went down to the shantyboat eddy above Marietta and found Mrs. Haney, who had an extra boat for sale for one hundred dollars. Though new, it wasn't furnished good, but that woman brought down plenty of outfit and gimcracks, and a small chap about five or six years old. She throwed off both lines, hauled in the gangplank and blew a contemptuous good-by kiss at the whole land area on both sides the Ohio.

She got going late in the evening. Course, old-timers like to float all night, if they don't care what happens, if anything. But this woman just didn't know any better. The first word that came down ahead was that she turned the boat loose, night and day, for come close to a week. Then all she landed in for was to go up the bank and get supplies she and her young-un had run short of. The place she landed at was a ferry settlement on the Kentucky side. She bought a lot of fruit, vegetables, meat and kerosene to run her freezer, and a few odds and ends. She had money, according to the hear-tell, but with her looks it wasn't necessary.

Up at Cincinnati she was headed for a bridge pier, but a fellow in an outboard skiff pulled her clear of that predicament. She thanked him, then kinda missed another pier, steering by her sweeps, but she pulled over right in front of a steamboat; while the pilot squawked his whistle, he had to full speed astern and swing over almost clear around, so as not to hit her boat. If she hadn't been a lady in skirts, he'd never taken all that pains. Pilots always remember it if they run down a woman.

When she got to Louisville, she was right out in the middle of the river, heading for the Falls. She hadn't been run down by steamboats nor sucked under a big tow or hit by transporters running dark at night. Well, the life-saving crew the Government maintains at the Falls spotted her and ran out and towed her over to the north side canal chute, and she thanked them real cordial. . . . Strangers, soft-paws afloat, just don't seem to know nothing at all about what's liable to happen, tripping.

By the time she come opposite Cairo, a lot of us river folks had heard tell of her, and I recognized her boat by the white cabin with blue-trimmed windows and door-jambs, and black-trimmed red hull. It was a thirty-foot scow hull and a twenty-foot cabin. I don't know how come Mrs. Haney took only a hundred dollars for it, unless it was getting late in the fall and winter liable to set in, freezing up before one could trip into clear.

BY the time she reached the Ohio Forks, we knowed this lady was a widow, her name Mrs. Juno Creset. The word was she was real pretty, but just plumb disgusted with folks. One story was that her man got killed up on account of another lady. Anyhow, she was soft-paw ignorant on the river, about her only boating having been sport fishing in a skiff, and doing some mourning over in Michigan in a summer resort, retired and lone. Folks do talk!

But anyhow, she floated by Cairo with her snoot in the air, and a jab in the current took her over the jumping-off place into the Mississippi, swirling past me where I was eddied in a reverse back-set of current. She came pitching down, caught in the whirlpools where the Big Muddy sawed along the slow-going Ohio. I wasn't more'n a hundred yards or so astern, but outside the circlings.

She had had a carpenter build a collapsible fence around her stern and bow decks so as to keep that boy of hers from falling overboard. She had also picked up a pup somewhere too, to keep the youngster company. I don't know why on earth a woman wants to go shantyboating down the river with a small boy—and a dog to boot!

The way things happen down Old Mississip' is a caution. I was getting roast pork, sage dressing, mashed potatoes and so on, real busy, kind of a noonday dinner, when I heard a yell. It was just about the most melodious whoop I ever heard outside of some good singing across Old Muddy Gut, so I stuck my head out to see what she was bellyaching about. It was her, all right. That brat of hers had pulled and yanked and managed to unhook her protection fence across the bow bumper, and the section just swung down on its hooks and eyes. The boy went over, head over heels in a big splash.

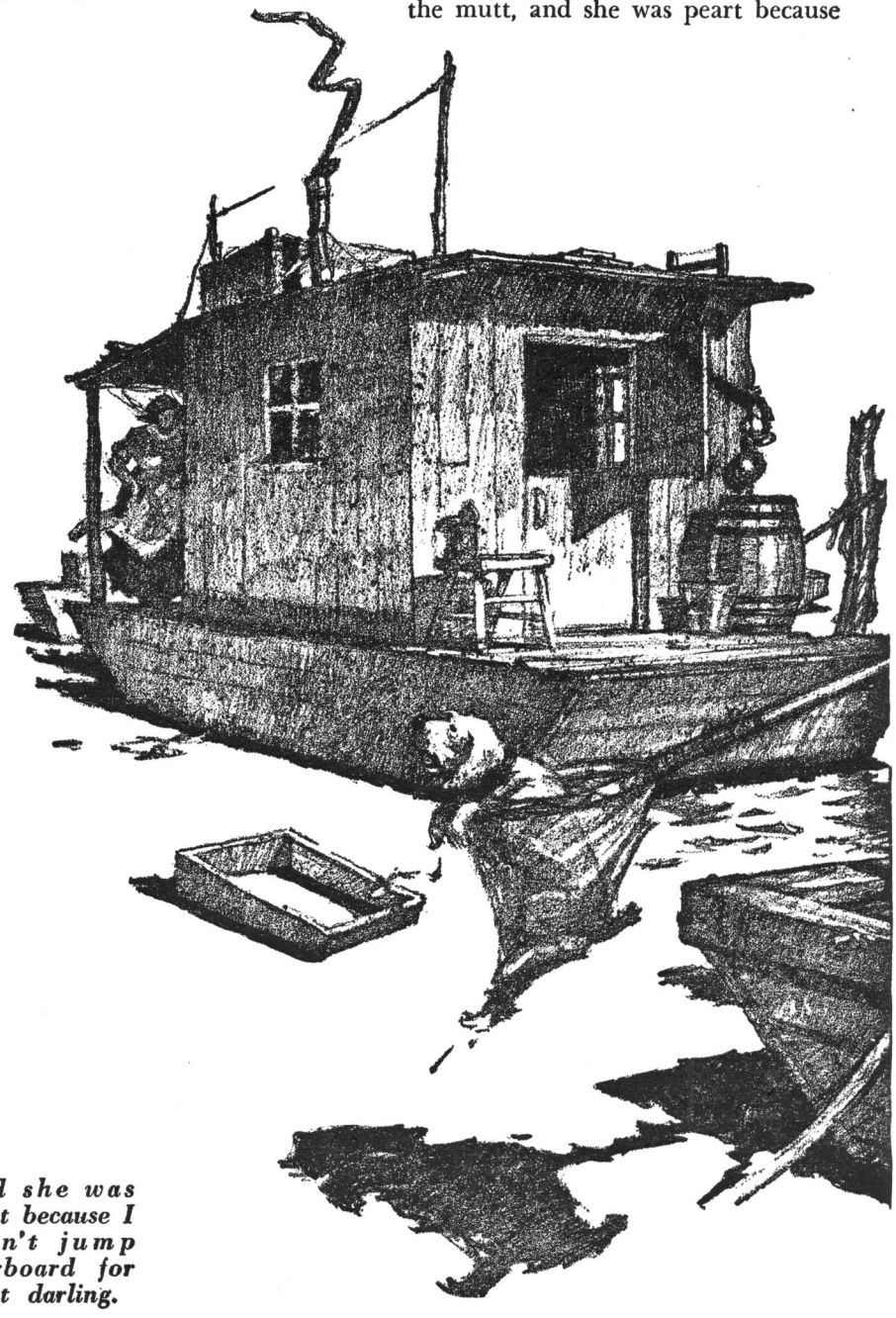
Our boats had floated along, seesawing; and the way boats do, we were drifting close together. Of course, I was disgusted. I could see what was the matter; and about twenty feet from her bow, I saw something flopping and pitching around like a big fish, or a beaver in a trap. Of course, I had to do something, so I shoved over and got my boathook tangled into that kid's rompers or overalls, whatever they call those one-piece things. And I squeezed the water out of him, gave him a small drink of wild-grape brandy off a jug I happened to have; by then she came banging and slamming into my boat, hard as she could row.

That youngster was sputtering and gasping and drizzling, getting along all right, the way I'd first-aided him. And of all the looks any woman ever gave me, she sure was primed and explosive. She took the kid and cried and talked, while I went out and pulled over and lassoed her boat, which had bounded off and was going by its lonesome.

Generally I stop over at Putney Bend eddy, to kind of catch my breath after making the Jump-off at the Forks. But by the time I caught her boat and got it bow to bow, snug to mine, and she had that nuisance of hern stripped and wiped off and dried on my bedspread, the first thing to be grabbed, we were down past the eddy and around the bend.

She looked at me. Her eyes snapped, and her teeth came together like an otter-trap jaws. She couldn't see why I hadn't told her that brat was unhooking the deck-pen fence, in the first place, before he fell over. And then we heard a yip-yip, and when I looked out around, there was that mutt she'd picked up for company and as an alarm. He was standing almost straight up and down in the water, trying to climb out on top the water, and yelping his head off. I had to laugh, for he was an up-the-bank dog, and shore looked an awful long ways off for him, and the swirling eddies down the crossing was turning him around and around in circles; and no matter if he started to swim to us or ashore, the circling water headed him somewhere else—and was he scairt!

That woman ordered me to rescue the mutt, and she was peart because



And she was peart because I didn't jump overboard for that darling.

I didn't jump overboard for that darling. I had a minnow dip-net I catch bait with, and got near enough to the purp to dip him on board. I landed him on her bow deck, and he ran into the cabin, crawling back under her bed. She wrapped her brat in my bedspread and went aboard her boat. I wadded up the wet jumpers or what-you-call-'ems and pitched them after her. She come out, and tried to untie my shipshape knots, but I had to do it. Then we shoved each other apart, and I saw smoke in her galley-kitchen.

"You're burning something!" I told her, and went back to 'tend to my own hot-bread and pot-roast and browned gravy.

Of course, Juno Creset was just another softpaw tripping the rivers. She was nervous and fidgety and ignorant. She'd been afloat about a month, and she was getting more and more panicky. She even spanked that brat for unhooking his fence protection; two days later he had experimented with the stern fence and got it all loose and hanging by only one hook and eye. And there Cupey—she called him—was overboard again, threshing around and gurgling and blowing like a whale. This was in a big towboat mooring-eddy, with hardly any current.

I was dragging driftwood off the sandbar to my boat when I heard the yelling, and I had to swim out and drag the little cuss ashore. He wasn't in the water more than two or three minutes; when he got his breath and stopped choking, I began to holler too. "I did do! I did do!" he said, and if he'd been my brat, I'd sure spanked him.

"Sometime he'll go over and I won't be around!" I told her, and I showed her how to wire the hooks to the staples so he couldn't work any of them loose, and open up the corral fence.

Another thing, I told her how the Chinese river-trippers tie a block of wood on the back of their brats so if they fall overboard, the wood floats them till somebody has time to hook them aboard. I didn't just tell her. I had a piece of balsa wood about two foot long and off a six-by-two-inch plank.

Then I rigged a pack-harness on this, through some holes, and I tied it onto Cupey's shoulders.

"Now I'll throw him overboard, and you'll see how it works!" I told her, and I don't remember ever seeing a woman look less friendly and grateful. But I went off to my boat and emptied my wet pockets, wrung the water out of my money and pocket belt, and put on some dry clothes. There we was, twice in succession, happenstancing together.

Of all the Lower Mississippi nuisances, I don't know nothing that equals a soft-paw, especially a woman with a brat and a dog. And the way that old Muddy Gut is, if a man gets stuck with a soft-paw, seems as though that confounded river just keeps loading a man with responsibilities. Not just me alone, but ask any old-timer, and he'll say the same thing. The minute you do an ignorant soft-paw a favor or lend a hand or anything, and there you are, stuck!

Of course, I knowed what to expect, but I resented it. I waited till the eddy was all dark, quiet, and nothing but owls hooting on guard. Then I poled all clear and slid away in the night into the main current and off down the river. Personally, I don't favor night tripping. Too much can come a-happening in practically no time at all. However, I got down the crossing and around the next two or three bends. I floated about four hours, and landing into a bluff reef sandbar, I didn't know where I was. It was about twenty-five miles below and across the river from the widow

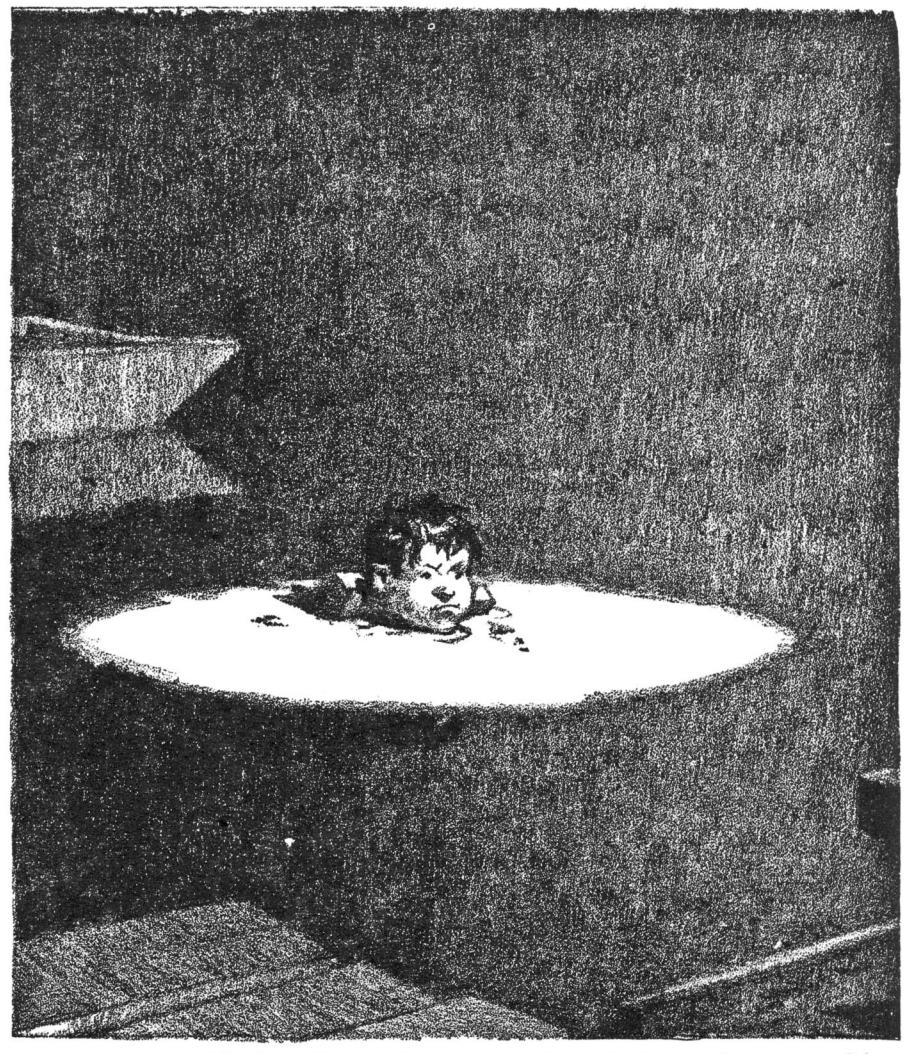
and her brat and mutt. Of course, I was sleepy, nervous and fidgety, small things upsetting more than big ones.

After two-three days I felt I was shut of that incumbrance. I dropped into a short eddy opposite Columbus hickories, which are full of long air-holes and luckily aint any good for wheel-spokes or lumbering. I gathered about ten bushels of nuts, the size of hen's-eggs, killed some big red squirrels, and scurried off downstream. The sky had thickened up; the wind had quietened down; and it was sure a weather-breeder. Sure 'nough, come a swirling wind and cold weather, with a norther swinjering down the line. It brought the ducks, and I killed five canvasbacks and two young Canadian geese. I was sure sitting pretty, and just for luck I put out some traps. I caught two big otter, a buck and a doe, and that was fifty dollars cash.

A MAN never knows what kind of winter he's going to have till he has a few weeks' samplings. If he gets along smooth, casual and plumb comfy, he'd better look out. Old Mississip' soft-palavers a man, maybe half the winter, or clear over to the Spring Tide, and then, *kerslam!* he gets everything that can happen all at once. I got through Memphis without having anything more disagreeable happen than that widow; and down below President Island, the sun was shining and the south wind breezing balmy. And so I landed along by the Walnut Bend disturbances, tying into a nice eddy. I got some wild meat along there, and two razorbacks, about one hundred and fifty pounds of pure pork, which I smoked for bacon and hams, and the lean jowls and surplusage for sage sausage. I was sure busy for a few days, between preserving pork chops, roast pork, dressing and so on. I fairly gorged. And just when I'd settled down for peace, security and enjoyment, I heard a funny whimpering noise outside, about ten o'clock at night.

I blew my light out, and grabbed my 'lectric lantern spot to look and see. Well, I saw, sure enough! There was a human face all screwed up into shrunken and chilling misery. So I reached over with that minnow net of mine and I dipped the floater on board. Of course, the way things were, I couldn't just ignore somebody floating down into my eddy.

But there it was, that piece of balsa-wood plank, and there was that darned widow's brat, teeth chattering, chillin', whimperin'. The water was too cold for swimming, unless it was necessary, and if you want to call it good luck, that kid was roly-poly fat. Course, blubber is real good protection for anybody in cold water. You take a fat woman who falls overboard, and she floats lots longer and survives where a lean man or woman get chilled through and get sunk in hardly no time at all.



I grabbed my 'lectric lantern spot for a look-see. Sure enough!

So I had a fat kid on my hands. Well suh, I had the darndest time trying to find something small enough to dress that brat! I sure did. But I had some sugar-bags and cornmeal sacking, and pieces of odds and ends, and two raccoon hides, and I did manage to patch him up. He sure looked comical, though, with two striped coon-tails dangling from his neck, because I sewed the skins upside down. It took some figuring, too, having upstairs and down garments, so's the lower part could be put on or taken off, or lowered, but I kind of did it, good enough, I guess.

It was ten o'clock, about, when I landed him. That was nearly five hours after daytime. He could talk enough so I knew he'd fallen over before dark. If he'd floated down the current all the time, that meant he'd come twenty-five or up to thirty-five miles, the current running six miles or so an hour. He said his mother was tied to the bank, but that's about all I could get out of him.

I thought probably being a widow and lonesome, she was worried, even if that brat was buoyed up by balsa wood. I'd painted the piece of plank three or four coats, so the water wouldn't soak in. I even daubed inside the bored holes for the harness. Now wouldn't a man think that kid would have gone on down and been picked up somewhere the next day? The river was rising, and so the middle was higher than the sides, and that throwed that brat right into the shoreline—and there he come for me to pick him up, to warm him up, dry him off, and feed him, and look after him. Sometimes I don't know; if shanty-boating wasn't such easy and cheap living, I'd never put up with no darned Mississippi River! I'd get up the Tennessee, or Cumberland, or back on some of those small streams like the Wabash, or Arkansas, or Yazoo. But then, of course, a man's shut in and limited, working those small backwaters.

I asked Whisky Williams, when he come down, if he'd seen that widow, but somehow he'd missed her. Some sports dropped in hunting the Dark

There was a human face screwed up into chilling misery.

Corner along by Walnut, but they hadn't noticed her. Course, they were up-the-bankers—soft-paws, practically, and they never notice much. I waited awhile, but she didn't show up. Of course, I advertised to anyone coming along, that I'd fished the kid out, and she could have him back any time, and the sooner the better.

Personally, I'd never gone in none for livestock aboard a boat. I'd come down the river first off, on a marrying trip. I had a real nice wife, tall and about one hundred and forty pounds, and a real good shape, able to cook cakes and pies, as well as plain victuals, and she'd been just about perfect, except she was jealous and didn't like the river; one night when I was visiting a game of poker, when I came home she'd gone up the bank. Then I tried two cats and a dog, but they were a nuisance and ate about as much as I did.

I 'VORCED Maud, and took up with a river lady, but she had her idees and I had mine, so we parted agreeably, for one boat wasn't big enough for the two of us, even when it was a sacred-concert boat ninety-foot long which we salvaged and got awarded eight hundred dollars when we turned it in. She claimed half the salvage, which was pretty liberal. She had a small but active pup—and we tried having two boats moored bow to bow, visiting back and forth, but even that twin-beds proposition didn't work. She cut loose when I kicked her dog overboard, and she caught him ten-fifteen miles down the river. Anyhow, the dog was a good riddance. Then he got fleas and sick and his hips was paralyzed and she drowned him herself. Then she come back, trying to make up for preferring a dog to me, and we visited back and forth, some, but I never cared much, one way or another. She sickened down around Plaquemine, and it cost me a good three hundred dollars, doctoring and burying her.

I figured I'd done my duty, charitying and tolerating, but that darned Old Mississip' apparently had other ideas. Anyhow, there I was, stuck with that brat. I didn't want him. I dried his clothes out, and he sure had coveralls, and some insiders, red and yeller flannels and leggings and tied-on shoes. However, he needed plenty, so I divided up what he floated in with, and made two shifts. Then I reorganized my two skins and the sugar- and meal-bags, so I had two ornery shifts, and the two coon-hides for cold weather when I turned him out on a sandbar to let him run, exercise and wear down.

I never saw anything like that darned kid, stirring around. I tried tying him up in a corner. He yelled his head off; partly he cried and partly he was just plain mad. I tried spanking him; I tried stuffing him with eats; and if I turned him loose, he just pull-hauled everything in reach. And so I tried running him loose on the sandbar. Of course, the balsa-board float was my idea, so I kept it on him; but I hung some sand on him in a bag so he'd get tired quicker. It was sure a sight, seeing him running all over two-three square miles of sand, collecting dead birds, bottles, odds and ends from the jetsam left by higher water on the bar.

He sure was the most active pet I ever had. He fairly had all the energy of dogs, cats and the up-the-bank woman I came down the river with. The river woman, while she had her health, was quite a lot like that boy, always stirring around, cooking, house-cleaning, mopping the decks, and changing things around. If she saw me sitting, reading, or thinking, she had me out steering the boat, if we was floating; or cutting stovewood if we was moored to a bar or bank. A quiet, logy, kind of settled-down woman takes a lot more waiting on and helping around. She aint so interesting and satisfactory as one of those active ones. Personally, I'd rather have one doing too much and repeating than one that loafs most of the time. Course, that's a matter of taste. But I bet I lost ten pounds, myself, lookin' after that brat that floated in.

I couldn't remember his name, though I'd heard the widow call him by it, so I called him Cupey, same as his mother, Juno Creset, did. He'd yell his head off, romping and running; but when he talked, he was real soft-voiced and gentlemanly. When he wasn't exercising, but just merely behaving, he acted real perfect and mannerly. That reminded me about how the widow, even when she sure despised and intolerated me, talked along, calm and quiet. You see, if a mother yells her head off, her brats are sure to do the same. But if she acts polite and sticks verbal butcher-knives into her man, or anybody, she sure emphasizes by what she says instead of the noise she makes.

Of course, me being a fur-trapper winters, I always make a practice of studying animals, whether to catch them for their skins or shoot them for

According to her tell, I'd undisciplined and ruinated that offspring of hers.

their meats. Thataway it was kind of natural to make kind of a popular study of that boy. Excepting one time I had a half-breed Chesapeake Bay spaniel, I'd always found any dog more of a nuisance than he was worth. Any hunting-dog has to be took care of a whole year, just in order to have him for sporting, shooting rabbits or retrieving quail, or swimming out for ducks or geese shot down.

I was shooting feathers the winter I picked up that spaniel. I began to shoot the first flight down on the Missouri, and I sold fifty pillows down to K.C., and then I was taking the tail of the flight through St. Louis clear down to Louisiana. This was the year before they rounded up the hunters at Memphis, which practically ruinated feather- and market-hunting for ducks and geese unlimited. But what I was going to say: I used that Chesapeake Bay dog only ninety-two days out of that year, and I had to support and manage even that dog 273 days to get the use of him for ninety-two days. And look what it would have cost me, if I'd been a sport, instead of a practical wild-crafter!

That darned brat I'd fished out the river wasn't any earthly use at all, that I could figure. But of course, he was an amusing little cuss. In one way, he was the most bothersome live animal I'd ever had to do with, including women. As for dogs and cats, he was lots more amusing and interesting. He swaggered and promenaded back and forth, stretching his legs and wagging his arms, looking for what else to do. He'd rattle and bang the buoy plank on his back, and two or three times I saw him run hell-bent the length of the boat and jump overboard, just to make a big splash and have me come get him, paddling my canoe or rowing my skiff. Now he knowed well enough, that water was cold, but his blubber protected him—and when I spanked him, he yelled his head off, but one time he said;

"I feel got warm again!"

I had to laugh, and he laughed, and there was my discipline all gone to hell! He was half provoking and half funny, usually depending on how I happened to be feeling at the moment. Sometimes when he did something, I'd be mad as a wet cat. And then again, when he'd do the self-same thing, it'd be funny!

Word went up and down Old Mississip' that I'd caught the widow's brat down by Walnut Bend cut-off. And then word went up and down the river that the widow was sick and sore, having lost her darling baby boy. She wasn't one of those women it's any gift to comfort in their miseries. I heard that three or four detached fellows, and a couple of temporarily foot-loose sports she hailed, asking about her baby boy, tried to take her mind off her bereavement. She was terribly active and resentful, and even if she was up-the-bank, she run those fellows off her boat; and no matter if they actually tried to stay with her, she knocked three overboard, that was known about. One couldn't swim, and he'd drowned, sure as damnation, if old

Anderson hadn't thrown him a rope and caught him in the noose. And even after a month or so, that widow was hind-sighting, mourning and wailing that brat. Even the dog and a cat she had wa'n't no consolation, and she got shut of them, because they reminded her so much.

NOW aint that like Old Mississip'! There I was wanting to get rid of that nuisance, and there she was, moaning and agroaning, because she didn't have him! Now wouldn't you think that people having what they don't want could kind of equalize with those who haven't got what they do want—the same thing? But that ain't the way down Old Mississip'. Of course, there's some equalizing, like that old story that every river-tripper has been told about:

Two fellers was married to two women. And to the wrong women, at that. I mean neither one of them got along with the woman he had, for a whoop. They had two nice shantyboats, though, and they made their livings, ten or twelve different ways, according to the seasons, fur-trapping in the winter, drifting the high tides, fishing when the fish come up, and berrying, frogging, turtling summers, and hunting autumns, and so on. They were real practical, all four of them; two had come down from back in Pittsburgh or Down East, somewheres; and the other two was from up around St. Paul, or anyhow Iowa or Illinois, the Middle West.

Then the way those things happen down Old Mississippi, both those boats landed in below Tower, along by Kaskaskia, or perhaps St. Genevieve. And like all along down, they got to jawing and fighting, two and two. And they heard each other and got to looking across from boat to boat. Nice, sensible people, except as regards each other, they held a session of mutual insulting, indignating and considering.

The two men were about alike, ornery, and about equally insignificant, but still pretty shrewd at that, and inclined to be fair-minded. So they calmed down and talked things over. Of course, there it was, plain as day; they weren't adapted to each other, in both couples. One of the women was about one hundred and sixty pounds and the other woman was about one hundred and forty pounds. Otherwise they were equalized, one female opposite the other, temper to temper, blue eyes to blue eyes, both pretty good cooks, and competent, river-broke and just unable to stand their husbands. So, the way it actually was, the only inequality was about twenty pounds' difference between the women. And so the feller that took the one-hundred-and-sixty-pound woman off the other husband's hands gave twenty pounds of Arkansaw turkey—you know, sowbelly bacon —to make up the discrepancy.

So they traded, and both the parties of the first and second parts were satisfied, and when they met up down below, getting $17.50 divorces and marrying in due course, they were just as peaceable, happy and contented as could be. But there was Old Mississip' taking a hand. Now wouldn't you think those women would have got the right husbands in the firstest place? But no! They had to have fighting, war and discontent—and if they hadn't had, such is human nature, the chances are the husbands they got to appreciate afterward would have been the very ones to be got rid of.

Of course, dropping down, I kinda managed to keep track of that widow. Sometimes she was away astern of me; sometimes she heard I was away down below, and she scurried along, passing me, and getting away ahead. Then she heard I didn't have her brat, but just somebody else's. Even so, she kept hoping, and so did I. But we never contacted each other till we dropped into Arkansaw Old Mouth for the Christmas-New-Year's holidays. I anchored up White River, where the Arkansaw New Mouth comes in. She was down in Old Mouth. It was a week or so before we got straightened out, and connected. Then it was in Montgomery Chute.

"My, my ba-aby!" the widow yipped, and grabbed him, coonskin coat and all. "You-u darling!"

A good riddance! It'd taken better than two months to get those two connected again, and I don't suppose Old Mississipp' ever heaved a bigger sigh of relief into anybody than he did to me. There I was rid of that brat, and for two-three days I was sure having a vacation from responsibility and kid-herding. But—I don't know. Somehow or other, my shantyboat seemed emptier and emptier. I'd wake up in the night and there wasn't any hammock swinging, and Cupey in it, wriggling or trying to sit up. And all day long I'd come to and look around, jump to look out onto the current to see if that balsa board was in sight, with a head floating up from it. I'd catch my breath, cuss a little, and turn back whatever I had been doing, recollecting I was shut of him.

This wasn't like when I lost that Chesapeake Bay dog, for fifty dollars, or either of my previous women, or the cats. Somehow, it was dif'rent. I got so I sat there cussing. I missed having to watch that darned brat, and washing his clothes, and exercising him on the sandbars, and so on. I was sitting there two days after Christmas. I'd helped the widow fix up a Christmas tree for her brat, and hung on it some odds and ends he needed to play with, and keep him busy. I felt useless, no 'count and river-ratty. Somehow, I had kind of a spell, wondering what's the use! I didn't even feel like going to the New Year's party aboard the sacred-concert boat. That's one way a man knows he's played out, not wanting to mingle with folks.

Then that widow came. She had her brat by one hand, yanking him along. She was sure thin-lipped and strutty, fire in her eyes. According to her tell, I'd completely undisciplined and ruinated that offspring of hers, and what was I going to do about it?

I pearted right up. I told her to give him to me, for a pet. The look she gave me! I'd kept him two-three months instead of getting him right back to her, instanter. And hadn't I kidnaped him, anyhow? Well, I never knowed a man yet, that could talk to a woman, when her dander is really up. I sat and took it. She kinda run down, presently, and began to blink and sniffle. If she'd knowed what Old Mississip' was really like, she'd never in God's world started down in the first place, but she loved shantyboating —it was so snug, cozy and economical. And she just knew she couldn't ever stand it up-the-bank—never again!

And while I was consoling her, somebody yelled, "Baby overboard!" and we ran out for a look-see, and sure enough there was that brat paddling around in the red Arkansaw and green White River water, grinning and chuckling. He didn't have that balsawood float on either, but it didn't make no dif'rence, because he was swimming dog-strokes, and now and then overhand strokes.

"Will you look at the darling!" that widow cried to me. "Why, he can swim! Why, River Man, you've taught him to swim!"

AND she turned the most soulful and flabbergasting glances of her eyes and looked at me. And her lips twitched, and her arms lifted out the most expressive in the world. And the next two-three minutes I was lost in oblivion and surprise. All there was to it, Juno said it was perfectly obvious, that amphibious tike of hern needed a man to help bring him up.

So there I was, and that widow grateful, admiring and just beautiful. I'd never even dreamed of her being good-natured, friendly and generous; but there she was; all we needed was a marriage certificate, which we got off the missionary boat that had come in for the Arkansaw Mouth Christmas-New-Year's holidays.

One funny thing, I have to laugh at: ev'y once in a while she takes that piece of balsa wood off the wall-hook where it thumps-thumps when the shantyboat rocks, drumming in the night. She hugs it, but she looks at me. "Oh, you *darling!*" she says. Now ain't that comical? I never did get that figured out.

The roll petered out. She came back to starboard. "Knocking off for coffee?" Mr. Clyde asked, thin-voiced.

Seebad *and*

IF it hadn't been for a little bunch of men on deck, Mark Clyde, the mate, would have beaten his own yell across to the port rail. As it was, he went over one man, knocked two more spinning and still got there before the Porto Rican stevedore came out of his sweet dream. Clyde had just time to snatch the line out of the steevie's relaxing hand.

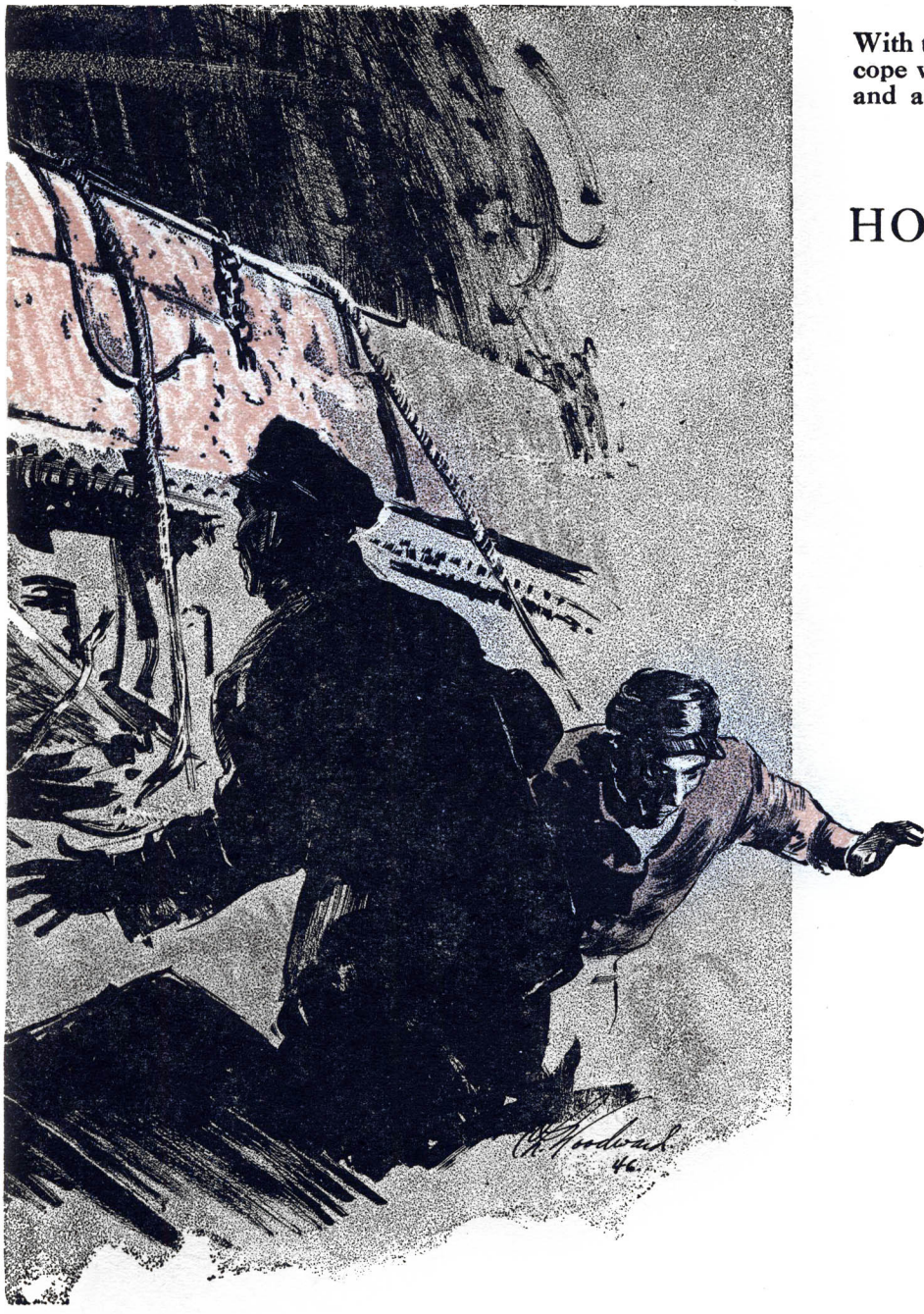
He handled it with loving care. Already the rope had started snaking out through his fingers with flickering speed. While still letting it run with one hand, he threw a couple of turns on a bitt, the nearest solid thing.

As gradually as an Aberdeen Scot reaching for his pocketbook, he put a slight strain on the line. His face was knotted up tight, but his fingers were tender.

Gently he increased the pressure, snubbing the rope. Slow, steady but fast enough! Next instant, he had it belayed.

Up in the air, dangling from the top of the ship's heaviest boom, a massive box of steel, with caterpillar tread on it, had begun swooping through the air. Then it had slowed, slowed and stopped, with a deep groan from the strained wires suspending it. As Mr. Clyde's guy purchase took hold, it brought up without even a dangerous swing.

The ship's starboard deck and the pier below, the places that solid hunk of cargo might have passed through on its way down to bedrock, were empty. But for a hundred feet around, steevies, seamen and loafers were just beginning to slow down.



With the war over, a mate shouldn't have to cope with a tank on the loose in the hold—and a hurricane threatening the ship too.

by RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

the Sailor

Mark Clyde stood there in a pool of his own sweat. He felt as if he was still holding that heavy thing up with his eyes.

The man Clyde had run over, a small, chunky little fellow with a big broad nose and long arms, jammed on a white hat that threw a shade of green from the underside of it down on his eyeglasses. He got up off the deck and grinned at Clyde—an appealing grin, in a way.

"That's moving, Mr. Mate," he said. "But aren't you crowding your luck, using that ten-ton boom for a lift of that weight? Sheer-legs—"

Mark Clyde didn't answer. Cold-eyed, he spoke soothingly to the jittery boss steevie and the winchmen. The job went on, with nobody throwing a convulsion. Handsomely they lowered the thing—it was on the manifest as a "submarine tank"—down into the Number Two 'tween-decks.

It was then that Mark Clyde walked over to the six men by the alleyway entrance. His red hair and hazel eyes were all aglint. He spoke softly to the chunky, spectacled man in the white hat:

"Crowding my luck, am I? Yes! But there's always a hope a heavy lift will drop on some son standing under where cargo's being worked."

He drew a breath.

"Luck, hey? Are ye a shipmaster or a ship's officer, by any strange chance?"

Eyeglasses batted his eyes behind his lenses. His big nose and mouth both drooped. "No, I—"

"A seaman, then?"

"No; I've never—"

"Well, what in Tophet are ye, then, shoving your mouth into my business?" bawled Mark Clyde.

Eyeglasses looked unhappy. "My friends and I are yachtsmen—"

"Yachtsmen!" Clyde roared. "Yachtsmen, by Peter! Well, Mr.—"

He grabbed Eyeglasses' arm. "No, let me guess who ye are," he said, and his sarcasm was acid enough to take the galvanizing off a shackle. "You're Sindbad the Sailor himself—or maybe it's Seebad the Sailor. My apologies—"

Eyeglasses broke in. "My name's Tolliver," he said. "Captain Bell, realizing how long we could be stranded here, has kindly agreed to sign us on as workaways—"

Mark Clyde clamped his hands over his sun-helmet to keep his brains from breaking through.

"I've heard of ye!" he said. "Six men who sailed their own ship under in an ocean pleasure race—if ye can call a gaff-rigged teacup a ship! And now you're in my lap! That'll top this run."

He hammered his helmet with a fist like a bitt. "Yeah, that'll really put a cuff on it!" he said.

He jumped toward the hatchway as if he were ending all, and grabbed the rungs of the iron ladder. He went skittering down into the 'tween-decks to secure the huge armored tank that had been wished on him by the blessed ship's agent an hour before sailing time. The shore gent thought it would make up for a shipment of cased pineapple that hadn't arrived.

At the foot of the ladder he stopped dead. He was dog-tired. He jerked

off his sun-helmet and glowered into it angrily.

There was Mark Clyde again. Blowing his top like a lady hysteric at a nylon sale!

Though his outside life was harassed and chaotic, Clyde wanted always to live easy with himself. And how could he do that, going up in the air like a balloon over an idiot like this Seebad?

Mr. Clyde knew well enough he was crowding his luck in using that boom, just as Seebad had said. But in this business you usually had to pick what looked like the safer of two tough alternatives, after which you started crowding your luck.

"Arrh!" he growled, turning a hard face to the steel tank.

The Old Man took one hand off the bridge-rail—instantly he was catapulted, sprawling.

He had had either to risk that boom or hold the ship in port half a day, maybe longer, rigging sheer-legs or howling for a floating crane to handle the lift. And meanwhile that hurricane spinning leisurely on its destructive and erratic way up from the Doldrums gained half a day on the ship.

Maybe the big wind would decide to haul more to the westward and twirl far over to Florida. And maybe, though it wasn't likely, it would head almost due north and overtake the *Dwight*. Maybe it would do all kinds of things, like recurving on her, five hundred miles to northward.

But the honest judgment of the Old Man and himself was to make knots out of there, giving the hurricane all the berth possible. So he risked the boom, rigging what preventers he could. Not safe, maybe, but safer than waiting.

And now, with all hands a little on edge about that blow, Mr. Clyde was landed with six passengers in a freight ship. Six! Six of them jammed into the officers' quarters, getting in the way, asking questions, disturbing the waking and the sleeping hours of watch officers who needed their rest. Workaways! He knew that breed. Men well enough to travel but too sick to work.

Nevertheless Mr. Clyde shouldn't have thrown that catfit.

"I ought to apologize to that little squip," Mark Clyde warned himself. How else could he live easy with himself?

Mr. Ogren, the second mate, came down the ladder.

"You ought to apologize to Seebad, Mister," he said, grinning first and shaking his head.

"With the hard of my fist!"

"How d'you know his wife's sister or aunt ain't the chief stockholder of the line?"

"Keep away from those movie theaters," Mr. Clyde rasped.

CAPTAIN BELL stuck his genteel torpedo-shaped beard over the edge of the hatchway.

"Mr. Clyde, may I see you a moment?" he asked affably.

"Make sure these steevies secure this chunk of bad luck, and the word is *secure,*" Mark Clyde said hastily, and told Ogren how. "I'll be back."

He clattered up the ladder. All the Old Man wanted was to introduce him to Seebad Tolliver, and his ex-crew, Rainey, Taylor, Sands, Nilsen and Boyd. Who was who gave the seething Mr. Clyde no qualms. Wooden-faced, he shook hands all round. His hand was no friendlier than the sole of a seaboot. Of course he should apologize, but wasn't he human? He needed a bit of time.

"Mr. Tolliver," said Captain Bell, using his sociable shoregoing voice, "was instrumental in getting our ship some business—that submarine tank."

He strolled away.

So! Mark Clyde's jaw stiffened to case-hardened steel.

Seebad split his face again in his ugly broad grin.

"Friend of mine bought it from an amateur salvage outfit to try out off the Delaware capes," he said, ignoring Mr. Clyde's eyes, which were boring a hot hole in him. "He wants to go treasure-hunting."

Mr. Clyde choked down a burning wish that Seebad and buddies would run north in that bottom buggy without benefit of oxygen. He got a stranglehold on his temper. He pried open his mouth, the way you'd open the jaws of a rusted monkey wrench. By Peter, he would apologize to Seebad if he killed the lubber next minute. Just then he caught sight of the Old Man, under the bridge, batting him out a blinker message. He grunted, snapped his mouth shut and hustled away.

The Old Man led him around the corner of the bridgehouse. He tugged at his torpedo beard, as if to assure himself it was real. After nearly a year of watching the Old Man do that, Mr. Clyde had the itch to give it a bit of a jerk himself.

"Ah—Mr. Clyde, our agent tells me that Mr. Tolliver is a brother-in-law of our marine superintendent," Captain Bell said.

Brother-in-law of old Murgatroyd, hey! So the movies had something, after all! And Murgatroyd loved Mark Clyde as a shark loves a barracuda.

"That iron-headed dock walloper *would* have kin like Seebad!" Mr. Clyde exploded.

He hardly heard Captain Bell add:

"Ah—I'd like to get her away smartly, with no further delay."

On his way back to Number Two hatch, Mark Clyde nearly walked through Seebad. Apologize to him? He'd see that bollard-nosed, near-eyed, mouth-shooting brother-in-law further than Fiddler's Green!

He got the hatches on, and the *Dwight T. Brush* shoved down the harbor, down the Catano range, and put Morro Castle astern.

Coming aft from his station on the forecastle head, he saw Seebad and the five other workaways standing on the lower bridge. They were looking at native sailing craft through the Old Man's own sacred binoculars, and criticizing their rigs.

He went hustling around on deck seeing to the securing of the cargo booms with a vigilant eye and a pushful voice.

Captain Bell himself came down from the bridge. He joined the group, tugged his beard and talked genially to Seebad.

Mr. Clyde snorted and caressed his red hair. Captain Bell should be skippering a North Atlantic passenger liner with a staff captain to do the work. According to the book, you had to be a mate before you could be captain. Try as he would, Mark Clyde couldn't picture Bell as a hard-handed mate. Bell, tangling with boss stevedores, sweating in a hold, tank-crawling, juggling papers, working a washdown or paint-gang, running a ship? It was impossible.

"They must ha' seen he was a captain when he was wearing three-cornered pants," Mark Clyde told a winch confidentially. "'Here's a captain,' they'd say, 'and no sense trying to make anything useful out o' him. Take away that rattle, make out his ticket an' hand him a ship with a good lively mate to keep her going for him.'"

The man was a wonder to Mr. Clyde....

That evening the young radio operator came into the messroom looking important. That told weary Mark Clyde the hurricane hadn't shifted course enough to put them clear of the edge of it. On the other hand, Sparks wasn't greenish yet, so they still had a fair chance of missing it by a good margin. In his head Mr. Clyde placed the center. When he had time to pop into the chartroom, he found his guess at a fix was only twenty miles south of where Mr. Ogren had located the twister from the latest radio reports. The blow was a bit nearer than he had expected, but it was heading about north of west toward Mona Passage. Going away!

For once the chief engineer was giving the bridge plenty of revolutions without any back-chat about blood out of a stone.

Walking past the Old Man's office on his way to his bunk, Clyde heard loud snatches of conversation within. Apparently the six workaways were in there explaining the theory of cyclonic storms to each other or to the Old Man.

"Yachtsmen!" muttered Mr. Clyde through his teeth. He strode into his room and brought up sharply. Mr. Ogren, no pleasing figure in a pair of green shorts, was preparing to bed down on Mr. Clyde's settee. The fat second mate didn't look any happier about it than Clyde.

"The third and junior third have got my cuddy, and a swell mess they'll make of it," he grumbled. "Whole blasted deck is playing 'Going to Jerusalem.' Yachtsmen! Why the blinking blazes can't they sail their boats in the bathtub and leave the ocean for guys who have business on it?"

He got philosophical. "'Anybody who'd go to sea for pleasure would go to hell for a pastime,'" he quoted. "Who said that?"

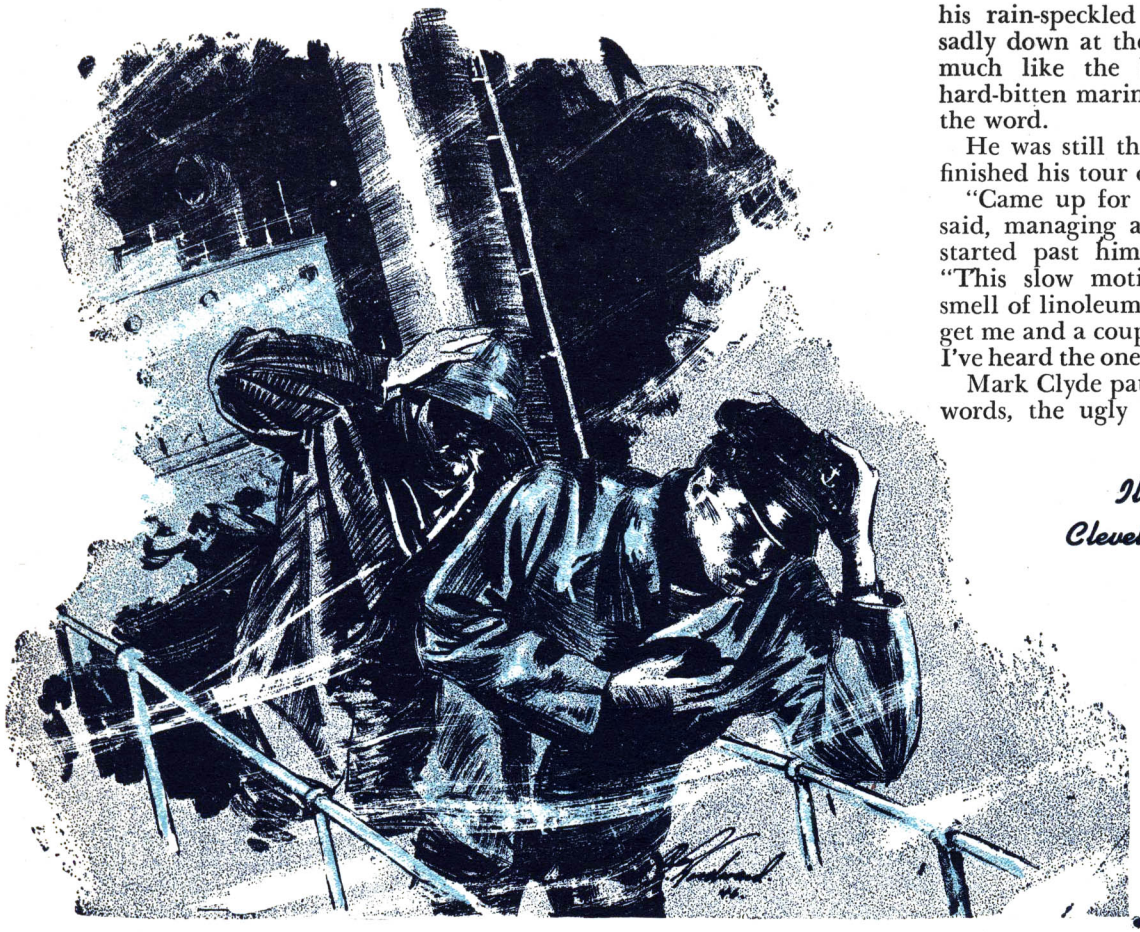
"Noah—fourth day out," Mark Clyde replied moodily. "Do ye talk in your sleep too?"

Ogren combined scowl and yawn.

MARK CLYDE crawled into his sack. Above the creak and rumble and hum in the old wagon as she batted out her thirteen through a moderate beam sea, he could hear an occasional voice from the Old Man's office around the corner. Probably Seebad was still being very sea-high wise. Yachtsmen—neither fish, flesh nor good red herring. It was a whale of a big ocean. And down here in the low latitudes where a hurricane was most venomous, it was also smallest in diameter.

He listened to wind and sea hitting her on the starboard beam. Maybe a point forward of the beam. They called them the northeast trades, but mostly they blew out of the east.

"Keep blowing!" he muttered, and calked off. He woke up once. No sound from the settee; it was after four, then, for it was not likely Ogren would stop snoring. He gauged the sea. More of a swell, and hitting her a little abaft the beam now. The ship was rolling slowly. That submarine tractor, practically alone in the 'tween-decks, was keeping her weight up more than he liked. There was a touch of south in the east wind, and



Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

"It couldn't be anything else—unless something's gone adrift down in the engine-room," Ogren said.

it was piping up strongly. But the center would be a good way to the westward. A few dishes and mugs clashed and rolled, deceptively loud, on the floor of the pantry next the messroom. Then he twisted over and dropped off.

When he turned out a couple of hours later, the rain was coming down with tropic gusto, and the ship was rolling heavily in an easterly swell. The rain whipped a whitish mist off the surface of the sullen, deep blue sea.

He had a look at the chart. The latest position showed the hurricane was setting a more northerly course than he had expected. This blow probably wouldn't lift hats on Miami Beach, some eight hundred miles to the westward. Too much north in it. The twister would give the *Dwight* a whisk.

Raindrops pattered on him like buckshot as he had a sharp look around on deck. Booms snug in their cradles. Hatch battens, wedges, tarps in shape to stand loose water, and maybe some green ones as well.

Joe Gannon, the boatswain, intercepted Clyde beside Number Two hatch.

"These guys that go to sea for fun!" he said gloomily, leaning into the wind. "Looks like the sea is going to have the fun, sir—and the boys say we got to take it on the chin on account of them. Wind's piping up."

"Wait'll you're hurt," said Mr. Clyde. He jerked a hand. "Open the manhole. I want to see how my bottom buggy's riding."

"An' that's got the boys hotted up too," Gannon said. "What kind of landsman's monkeyshine is that—a submarine tank? Cripes, what a thing to be carrying—and us right over the Nares Deep, ain't we? Askin' for trouble! A submarine tank in the 'tween-decks, a hurricane blowing up, six Jonahs on board, and forty-six hundred fathom under her—"

"The Captain isn't thinking of anchoring," Mr. Clyde said coldly. "And if you're thinking of drowning, bose, anything over one fathom is just trimmings. Let's go."

DOWN in the gloomy vault of the 'tween-decks of Number Two the submarine tank groaned in its chocks, wires and chains like mighty Samson in captivity. Soberly they watched it.

When the ship rolled, the armor-weighted steel box seemed to bunch itself against its fastenings and strain like a live thing fighting for freedom. But it was secure. They took up on the turnbuckles. The weight of it had won a little play in the steel lashings.

Back on deck again, the boatswain flung a thumb toward the lower bridge. "There's one of 'em puttin' the eye on you now."

Seebad, with his elbows planted on the rail and his eyes blinking behind his rain-speckled glasses, was gazing sadly down at them. He didn't look much like the brother-in-law of a hard-bitten marine super. Pallid was the word.

He was still there when Mr. Clyde finished his tour of the holds.

"Came up for a little air," Seebad said, managing a smile, as the mate started past him for the messroom. "This slow motion—or perhaps the smell of linoleum or hot oil—seems to get me and a couple of my crew. And I've heard the one about cold pork fat."

Mark Clyde paused. In spite of his words, the ugly little man was still cocky, as if this getting glassy-eyed was an accident that might happen to any sailor. Murgatroyd, waiting on the Brooklyn pier, would be pumping this brother-in-law about Mr. Clyde. A civil answer now— But would Mark Clyde be kissing any man's foot to get a good word said for him? That would make himself less easy to live with than ever.

"It's your neck, not your stomach, you'll be worrying about by evening," he said crisply. "Wind's working around across the sea."

He went on to the messroom. Only three workaways sitting at the six-man table against the after bulkhead where the steward had parked them. Even with the tablecloths wetted down and the fiddles up, a man could keep in front of him just what grub he could hold in his hands. It was quite a roll, but a smooth, long roll, nothing to kick about. . . .

The passing hours proved Mark Clyde a prophet. The wind kept edging around to southward. First it was on her quarter and then on her stern. Rather a rapid shift, with the velocity mounting from a fresh gale to a strong gale.

On the bridge Captain Bell ignored radio reports and watched the barometer and the wind shift. About this much was what they had to take. The center was off to the westward. There was little likelihood in this latitude of the blow recurving on them.

The Old Man tugged inquiringly at his beard and held his course. Uncomfortable, of course, but seamen are not paid to be comfortable.

"Ah—hardly of full hurricane intensity, I'd say, Mr. Clyde," he piped up. "We're not a great many miles from the center, judging by the speed of the shift, and yet—where's the wind?"

"No more than forty-five or so," Clyde agreed, with a hand clamped on the rail. "Not even a whole gale. But with the wind going around against a swell like this, it's a queer jumpy sea we'll have."

The skipper was still acting more like a spectator than a participant, and no action was required. Would the Old Man ever get into a jam requiring him to do some stuff?

As the afternoon wore away, life on the *Dwight* got tougher. The smooth long swell was breaking up; a lumpy sea was forming up across it, and the *Dwight* began bucking and reeling more and more like a restive porpoise. Her screw kicked out at odd times, as when she was heaved up by converging seas. She treated the ship's company to vibrations you'd have to pay for ashore.

Surprisingly, Seebad and all the other workaways revived as the motion became more erratic. Seebad's grin stretched broader and uglier than ever.

"It was the slow roll that got me," he told the mate cheerily. "We're used to little ships that swing your gizzard around your head. Lively craft."

It was close to the last straw for Joe Gannon and some of the others. These wind sailors would come to life when real seamen got wonky, and had to use their hands as much as their feet to get around above and below decks.

JUMP? At times she nearly took off. No man could figure which way she was going to throw herself. As two seas met close by the ship, their tops, swooping together, would spurt high, like a shell-burst, and water would roar down on deck like a cascade. Or it would lop over. Green! Chaotic was the word. Like what you'd get in the windless center of a hurricane, only this wasn't it.

"If we had a whole gale hitting, it would be better," Clyde said. "We'd get direction with the seas, not this—"

The Old Man took one hand off the bridge-rail to grip his torpedo beard. The *Dwight* bucked under him, with a twitch to starboard. Instantly he was catapulted, sprawling, toward the bulwark.

One arm curled ahead of him, but he had neither the time nor strength to fend off. His head hit. A nasty sound, that. He went limp.

Mark Clyde let go all holds to scramble after him. He pinned down the Old Man so he couldn't slide. The man was out cold. It had been quite a crack.

Mr. Ogren looked at Mark Clyde. It was Ogren's watch, but now it was Mr. Clyde's ship.

"Blankets and a pillow," Clyde ordered, still kneeling astride the unconscious skipper.

The steward hustled up. They eased the Old Man over onto a blanket, and with the pillow under his head dragged him slowly along the deck to the chartroom settee.

"Build up something against that bunk," Mr. Clyde told the steward. "Pack him in with pillows so the sea can't shift him. Keep him warm. Stick an ice-bag on that head."

"Cracked skull?" Ogren asked.

"That or concussion," Mark Clyde said. "All we can do now is keep him quiet. It wasn't a man-killing wallop."

He was on his knees beside the settee, holding Bell on it as the ship jerked over. The whole deck under him shook violently.

"What the—" Ogren gasped.

Clyde stiffened up, listening, with a palm on the floor. She flung herself over the other way. Nothing. . . . Then—*crash!*

Ogren looked at him. Mark Clyde looked back. "Yes," he said. With his finger he brought a kibitzing messman into the room.

"Hold the Captain on there," he said, and walked out to the bridge with Ogren at his heels. They stood close together at the rail.

"It couldn't be anything else—unless something's gone adrift down in the engine-room," Ogren said.

Mark Clyde pointed toward the engine-room telephone. It did not ring.

He beckoned to Knight, the stringy young third mate who had come from nowhere.

"Drop her to thirty revs."

"Thirty," said Knight, and jumped to the telephone.

A lumpy collision of seas surged up under her starboard bow. The ship reeled.

Mr. Clyde turned toward the ladder. Ogren shoved an arm across the rails to stop him. "The whole ship's in your lap, man!" he protested. "This waltz with the bottom-buggy is mine."

"No!" said Clyde. The sweat was steaming hot on his forehead as he shook his head. "I'll not have a ship if that tank batters through her plates close above the line."

Slowing, the *Dwight* went thrusting evenly through smoother water. In such a wind-storm oil would do nothing but take the white crests off a sea of that chaotic mass. He lifted his eyes off the mountainous changing ridges, and jerked a hand toward the wheel.

"Head her into the old swell to see if she'll ride easier. I doubt it."

Halfway down the ladder, he stopped and called back:

"If she's no better, swing her beam on to the wind."

He stabbed the stiff fingers of his left hand at right angles to his outstretched right arm.

"Try to get her beam to the gale in a smooth, after the tank has rolled over to the other side. There's a slim chance the heel will hold the thing there long enough for us to throw some lashings on it."

OGREN was open-mouthed. "You want me to maneuver her while you're down in the 'tween-decks with that tank loose to—"

"Hell, yes!" said Mark Clyde with bleak realism. "There's no rhyme nor reason to this sea. That thing can do anything, any time."

"How about pumping the tanks—"

"Too slow! Too risky. A heel the wrong way might throw the tank through her plating."

He hit the lower bridge. Seebad, who had been down there listening with his ears rigged out, got in his way.

"Mr. Clyde, I—"

"Are ye volunteering to join the gang in the 'tween-decks?" Clyde cut in crisply.

"No. My glasses would fog up But—"

"Then give me gangway!" Clyde shoved him aside. "This is no place for a yachtsman, or even a marine super's brother-in-law."

Joe Gannon's glum red face was rising up from the shelter deck. With a gesture Clyde headed him down. Bending to the skirling wind, they hurried forward toward the access manhole to Number Two. Clyde talked men, then called off sizes of chains, steel cables, heavy lines, turnbuckles and wire clamps.

There was no time to get the hatch off, even if it were safe. He must depend on what dunnage and heavier timbers were already in the 'tween-decks, and what gear could be got down the manhole.

Switching on the 'tween-deck lights, he began clambering down the steel rungs.

This little while the ship had been laboring in the sea, but with neither pitch nor roll acute enough to stir the thing below. Now his body swung abruptly sidewise and the weight borne by his arms on the rungs doubled suddenly. He heard below him the rumble and crackle of the tank as it plowed solidly through loose dunnage on the floor. There thundered in his ears a mighty, reverberating crash in the 'tween-decks. He was inside a mammoth drum that had been dealt a tremendous blow.

He got to the 'tween-decks floor, yellow in the light. The tank, still

on its treads, lay hard against the port side, aft of the hatchway trunk. One blunted steel corner on that insensate thing had snapped the wooden battens and was jammed in against her shell plating.

Mr. Clyde drew a breath. A glimpse of dull gray daylight showed through the splintered two-by-six battens above the tank. That last blow between two main frames had split the strong, riveted steel wall that was the side of the ship.

Not too bad by itself, but another blow like that—

Now the ponderous, evil tank lay still, but plainly waiting for the sea to renew its tremendous momentum.

THE ship jumped under Clyde's feet, and he with it. The tank groaned, swayed, moved a few inches. No chance to time or anticipate the movements of that malign thing. Mostly it would be lying in wait.

He made his way quickly across the floor, littered with displaced dunnage on which was to have rested his cased pineapples. Among the shredded and broken wires that had secured that massive chunk of cargo, he saw a turnbuckle broken across the thread. That failure, metal fatigue, they'd call it, could have started the thing on its destructive course. One break would give it the play that made it possible to break other lashings.

He heard the shock of a sea strike. The ship slanted sharply over to starboard. Clyde ran. The tank, with gathering power, lumbered across the steel floor. He grabbed at a stanchion and stopped, clear of the thundering thing, but with knees ashake. No frame, no plating would stand!

The ship, like a live thing, saved herself. She began lifting her starboard side. The sliding tank lost speed. She hit the wall of battens with no more than a solid thump.

Mr. Clyde turned; Joe Gannon was leading toward him a silent, burdened group of seamen. Five men, none of them happy.

"Pass the word along to Mr. Ogren," Clyde shouted. "Put her port side to the weather. Port side! Get her round fast! Come on, men! We've got it cornered."

Somebody laughed sourly. But they listened to what he told them about chocking her and securing the strongest of chains and wires to integral parts of the ship. With Clyde ahead, they charged at it furiously as if aware of what they would do if they stopped to think. The ship shuddered and swayed; the tank clanked. They dropped what they held and fled recklessly across strewn timber. The floor leaped under them; the charging juggernaut remained in its corner as if satisfied by their panic. Two-by-six battens splintered and crumbled as the armored steel box ceased to stir.

The thing still stood against the starboard side. The ship was turning; Clyde could sense that. A moment later, through the split in the port-side plating, seawater blew in in spurts and trickles. The men stared with popping eyes.

"Mr. Ogren's got her broadside to the gale!" Clyde shouted at them. "That'll hold it! Come on!"

Again he led the way. As the ship plowed slowly through a smooth, he felt her heeling slightly under the pressure of the wind. His heart sank. Not enough! The slant down to starboard was only a matter of a few degrees.

It was better than nothing; that was all you could say. Looking back, he caught sight of another man by the ladder, poised to clamber upward. One of the workaways, that fellow was, Rainey, Taylor, Sands, Nilsen or Boyd, not Seebad. Clyde opened his mouth to blast the man out of there; then shut his jaws with resolute control. He had no breath for anything but this job. Besides, the man was already on his way up.

Behind Clyde chains clinked, wires rasped and timbers dragged as the men followed him warily toward the waiting tank. Grimly Mr. Clyde stood in the path the tank would take, and told them where they could work safest.

The men went at the job with heads cocked, eyes shifting queerly, hands fumbling, as they strove to chock the treads and pass steel lashings. In Clyde dwelt the same tension, the same division. He was no more than half a man on that job; the other half crouched deep inside him, struggling to leap away.

Joe Gannon swore in unending course as he fought with a stiff wire. "Damn' thing's alive!" he rasped.

The sea and the tank, joining together to destroy that ship, developed a power too mighty for men to hope to control. Blood pudding was all that would come of their most valiant efforts.

"It's nothing if ye leave any slack!" he warned. "Put your backs into it."

The ship dropped. Men scrambled away, flattened against the after bulkhead of the hold, their work undone. Mr. Clyde, with muscles twitching and teeth gritting, held his ground. The ship lifted, heeling, and he felt the tank looming up over him, stirring, ready to slide. For seconds more he held his place.

The roll petered out. She came back to starboard.

"Knocking off for coffee?" he asked them, thin-voiced. Slowly, not shamefaced but reluctant, they picked up tools, timbers and chains. They started the job again.

Time was going. And time, as sure as it ticked, would raise a lump of sea to catapult that thing across against the broken side, derisively trailing half-secured chains and wires after it. Any second—any second!

And he there, close against it, passing a wire that looked thin as a thread, but was as resistant to his fingers as a spring. Any second now.

And once again he felt the ship rising swiftly, balancing crazily on the top of a monstrous and erratic sea. She had not yet started to roll, but this must be it. This time—

For all his will, his fingers went weak. The coward that was half of him bunched strong muscles inside his body to flee. If he ran, he'd never live easy with himself. But if he stayed—

Somebody took place beside him, there in the path of the thing, shoulder to his shoulder. The feel of that shoulder gave him strength to stay. If somebody else could stand there, so too could Mark Clyde.

"Steady!" he said, though his nerves screamed high terror of the coming roll. "We're getting there!"

"She won't go far this time!" piped up a mild, unhurried voice beside him. "We've a heel on her she can't roll much against."

It was Seebad. *Seebad!* Seebad in his drenched shirt and trousers, with his glasses all awash with water.

All Mr. Clyde's hot nature clamored wrathfully to turn and hurl this play-acting or half-witted lubber clear of the killing thing he derided. What right had he there, standing with open hands beside seamen risking their necks to do a job? In the same instant that impulse rose, he fought it down, trampled it down, and kept his hands on the job. There could be help even from Seebad.

"Ye heard him!" he sang out. "Stand to it!"

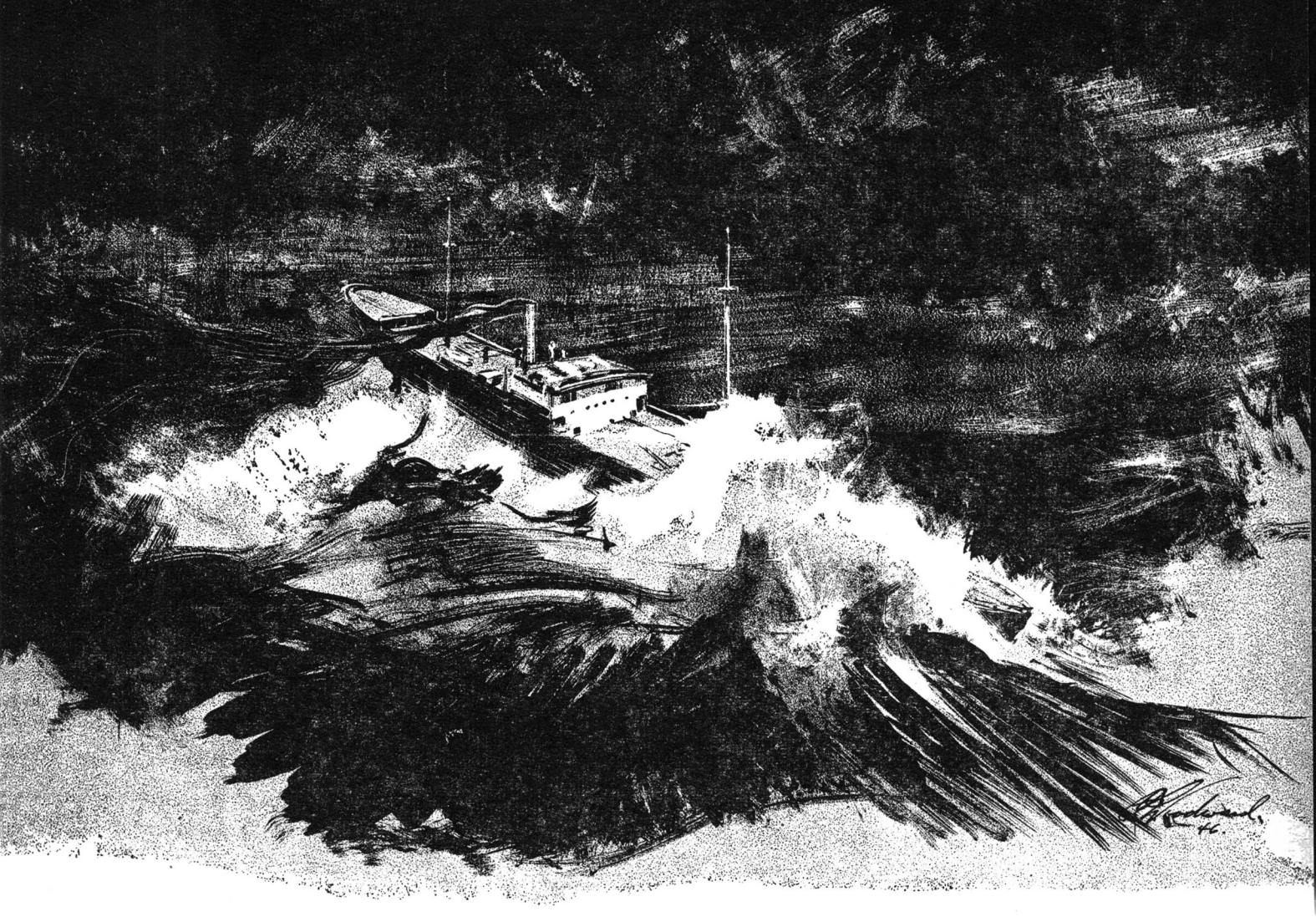
The ship, risen high, unstable in the sea, was lurching over to port. Timber crackled under the tank's touch.

BUT the ship did not fall over and release destruction. The sea drove her over, but some other force was fighting to shove her back to starboard. That would keep this side where they worked low, low enough to hold the tank cornered.

"The wind's roaring up, boys!" Clyde cried. "She can't roll against it! Tighten 'em! Take up on the turnbuckles!"

Seebad, still beside him, chuckled like a loon.

They bound the thing all round with heavy chain, a weight that had to be handled by many hands together. They got it taut, finished the job with a rush, and with a rush scrambled away from the thing. But that was mere nerves; they stopped at



once and stood still around it, panting and proud.

"That's there—if she rolls onto her beam ends," Clyde said. "Knock off."

He took Seebad by the shoulder. "Out o' this," he said, and propelled Seebad toward the ladder. She was still heeled over; the deck was well aslant; yet he'd swear his cargo of sugar and coffee could not shift.

"The Captain's coming to," the yachtsman said.

"He would—now," Clyde said absently. That man was a marvel; leave it at that.

His thoughts were occupied completely with Seebad. It had taken courage to stand by like that.

"Your luck is bigger than your brain," he told the man. "Only the wind tuning up—"

"Tuning up nothing!" Seebad broke in. "The wind hasn't risen. It's gone to work."

Climbing up through the manhole, Mark Clyde passed over this ignorance. His mind leaped to the patching of the split side-plating. It could be done; there was no danger to the ship. They emerged on the slanting deck.

Seebad lifted a short, triumphant arm. Mr. Clyde looked aloft, his jaw sagging. No, the wind had not risen.

High on the foremast and kingposts of the ship were stretched taut a motley collection of tarpaulins, boat-covers, spare canvas, windsails.

The stiff wind tore at them, and they strained and bellied. They had been bent on anyhow, lashed to whatever fitting aloft would take a strain, and sheeted in strange ways to the cargo booms in their cradles.

Even as Mark Clyde stared, a line broke with a snap. A tarp thundered and flogged itself to rags and went flying down to leeward.

AND the *Dwight's* miraculous heel was explained. That canvas had put her over on her side like a sailing-ship. Simple—but he hadn't thought of it himself.

Five workaways wet with salt spray and salt sweat grinned proudly at Mark Clyde—Rainey, Taylor, Sands, Nilsen and Boyd; and among them seamen, messmen and blackgang men.

"We're windjamming men," Seebad said. "Not much use on a steamer, but we know how to make the wind work. Mr. Ogren saw the point, and turned out all hands to help."

"Ye did well," Mark Clyde said slowly. Now was the time to apologize. This little man had saved their bacon. But apology stuck in his throat.

"Take in your washing while it still stands!" he shouted to the men on deck. "She's secure below!"

They moved, those workaways, and the crew with them. Clyde faced Seebad.

"If ye weren't brother-in-law to that marine super of ours that thinks—"

"Brother-in-law? *Me?* My sister divorced that old crab!"

In sudden ecstasy Mark Clyde clapped his arm across the small yachtsman's shoulder. "Seebad, I fair love ye!" he burst out. "Ye've a mind that rises above that mug o' yours, and I'm dead sorry I bawled ye out. It's plain truth I should ha' rigged sheer-legs—"

"Stow it!" said Seebad happily. "I was just trying to get on a seamanly basis with you, and I don't rate it."

He took off his salt- and sweat-smeared glasses and glowered at them with a strained gaze. "If it wasn't for my eyes—" He hooked on the spectacles with half a smile. "I would have been a seaman myself," he said. "As it is, all I can do is design ships in a naval architect's office and sail toy yachts."

He shook his head. "If it wasn't for my eyes—" he muttered.

"If it wasn't for your head, I wouldn't be a seaman myself—a live one," Mark Clyde said. "Come up on the bridge and relieve Mr. Ogren while he patches her up. I'll be your lookout myself, an' live easier for the privilege."

The amazing story of the only uniformed Allied unit operating in Norway after the Narvak disaster until the Nazi surrender—how OSS Major William Colby parachuted into Norway and led his twenty Norse ski-troops in attacks against the vital railroad, in the face of terrifying terrain, severe casualties and thousands of German soldiers.

By Lt. Comdr. RICHARD M. KELLY

The

BILL COLBY just didn't look the part.

Twenty-five years of age, medium short and a wiry 132 pounds, his eyeglasses and serious face marked him a scholarly law student—his principal occupation before he helped Uncle Sam win the war.

Of the twenty-two thousand Americans who served in Major General William J. Donovan's office of Strategic Services, few looked less like a daring behind-the-lines parachutist.

Yet this Princeton-graduated son of a Regular Army Colonel not only parachuted into France, where he distinguished himself by his escapes and achievements with the underground, but he followed it up with a jump into previously impenetrable northern Norway, where he and his men accomplished one of the toughest missions ever undertaken by an OSS team.

Before we tell that story with all its grim details, let us consider this amazing Colby. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, he lived the typical life of an Army youngster at posts all over the United States and in China. His lack of enthusiasm for this latter country was to lead him years later to one of the most fateful decisions of his life. He was graduated from Princeton in 1940—where he received an ROTC commission; and he had just completed his first year at Columbia Law when he was called to active duty as a second lieutenant in the Field Artillery. Assigned to Fort Sill as an instructor, the post routine soon palled on him, and he volunteered to join the paratroops.

The Army thought he was fooling. But he wasn't. In spite of a very tight squeeze on the eye-examination, he managed to make the grade. This bit of luck didn't last long, however, for he broke an ankle while taking jump training at Fort Benning. Finally he became a full-fledged paratrooper; and when the OSS recruiters, more interested in brains than brawn, came around, Colby volunteered and was accepted for the usual "hazardous missions behind enemy lines."

In England he found himself a member of the famous Jedburghs; and his mission into France which won him the Bronze Star and the Croix de Guerre was typical of that highly successful OSS operation, save in the way in which it started.

Colby and his two French partners were dropped smack in the middle of a German-occupied city! The pilot of their plane told them he had spotted the signal fires and then circled to check on the identification signals. Apparently satisfied, he gave the orders to jump, and the three OSS men found themselves floating down over the city. The fires they'd seen proved to be a burning train. Narrowly missing death in the drop, Colby just managed to keep himself clear of a house and landed in a garden. The falling supplies woke up the whole town, Germans included; and the three parachutists were compelled to flee for their lives. After two days of dodging German patrols in the outlying fields, they managed to make contact with an underground radio and continue with their mission—an eventual great success. But that experience hardly endeared the Air Corps to Colby, and apparently set a hard-luck precedent for his subsequent operations in Norway.

Colby's flight back to England in the fall of 1944 was his happiest memory of his French experience. It was broad daylight, and the country looked beautiful below him. In dramatic contrast, he recalled the ominous darkness that had marked his first plane trip into France some months before. He felt that his dangerous work had helped to break the pall of Nazi gloom over the country and rekindle the light of freedom.

Following a brief rest in England, these noble reveries were cut short with talk of his next assignment. Most of the Jeds were going to China. Major Colby could either go with them, or if he preferred, he could take command of the Norso group which had been trained for operations in Norway. He promptly chose the latter.

The Norso group was a strapping group of Norwegian birth or extraction who had been gathered by the Army into the 99th Infantry Battalion and given special mountain training at Camp Hale near Denver, Colorado. Taken to England by OSS, they had received further training in northern Scotland; but when no feasible operations developed for them in Norway, most of them undertook operational missions into France. . . .

When Colby took them over in the fall of 1944, he carefully screened the unit, keeping sixty-five men, whom he took to Scotland for additional training. Most of the men were experienced skiers—and all were several sizes larger than their scrappy little C.O. Colby himself had gone to high school in Vermont, where he had done some skiing, but he practically had to start from scratch in the mountains of northern Scotland. Concurrent with the training, Colby and his officers were gathering intelligence for their projected operations. The picture that was unfolded to them was anything but encouraging.

The Germans had approximately four hundred thousand troops in Norway. Of these one hundred fifty thousand were veteran mountain troops concentrated in the Narvik-Tromso area of northern Norway—troops which had been driven out of Finland by the Russians; and the Nazi high command was making frantic efforts to transport them southward to Germany, where their services were critically needed. Because of the heavy winter snows, all roads were impassable. The British Navy's dominance of the North Sea made transportation by water almost impossible,

NORSO MISSION

and the only route open to the Germans was the Nordland railroad. This was a single-track line running south to Trondheim. It was chosen as the objective of "Rype" Mission.

The choice of the code name for Colby's mission was a logical one. The *rype* is a Norwegian bird which changes colors with the seasons—being white in winter and brown in summer. The Norsos were similarly equipped for disguise with their reversible white snow-parkas.

Another factor which made the projected mission more difficult was the Allied directives with regard to the Norwegian underground. For four bitter years the Norwegian people had suffered under the Nazis. It would take very little to stir them up to open action, which would lead to heavy loss of life, for the Germans had a throttling grip on the country, and the Allies could not afford to divert troops to come to their assistance. Accordingly Colby's orders were to avoid all possible contact with civilians; and further to insure that widespread underground resistance would not flare up, the American party was to drop into the sparsely populated northern areas near the Swedish border.

Greatest hazard of all facing the OSS party was the problem of flying. Never before had the Air Corps attempted such a northerly flight. It was twelve hundred miles from the bases in Southern England, and eight hundred miles from the staging points in northern Scotland. The winter flying-weather in the target area, only 150 miles south of the Arctic Circle, was among the world's worst, a fact which was radically to alter the operation and cost heavily in lives. First change dictated by the Air Force was that available aircraft could take only thirty-five of the fifty men in the Norsos on the first drop.

By the end of January, Colby's advance party, consisting of his second in command, Captain Tom Sather, Second Lieutenant Borge Langeland and Staff Sergeant Arne Listeid, were standing by to drop in and prepare the way for the main party. Bad weather made flights impossible during that moon period, and after a month's waiting, the trip was attempted again on March second. This time, with great difficulty, the plane reached the target area, but the conditions at the pinpoint made ground observation impossible. Sather's plane barely made it back to Scotland; after jettisoning all equipment, they landed with only fifty gallons of gas in the tanks.

Because of these delays, it was then decided that the whole party would jump in together without an advance reconnaissance. While waiting for this opportunity, secret intelligence from underground sources changed

the location and target of the whole operation. From the evidence it was obvious that the Germans had discovered the plans of Mission Rype. First came an underground message through Sweden that a German patrol had located itself in the area chosen for the drop. Next a Free Norwegian newspaper published in England carried an ominous item: The Germans had suddenly put forty to fifty extra guards at all tunnels and bridges along the very strip of the Nordland railroad that Colby and his men had planned to attack. Somehow, somewhere, either in Sweden, in Norway or even in England, German spies had penetrated the secret. It was a most disturbing development omen for the waiting parachutists.

Immediately the dropping place was changed to an isolated spot on Jaevsjo Lake, near the Swedish border. This new location made the original rail targets impractical, and so new plans were quickly made for attacks on the Grana Bridge and other vulnerable points nearer to their new dropping zone.

One encouraging event among all these disappointments was the recruiting of Norwegian Lieutenant Hoel for Mission Rype.

Hoel had been active in the underground in Norway, but the Nazis spotted him, and he was forced to flee to Sweden, whence he made his way to England. Sneaked back in by OSS, he had organized a small group of five men, who were to receive Rype. Hoel had then had trouble with Swedish authorities for violating their neutrality, and once again had come back to England. Fortunately, he was very familiar with the Jaevsjo Lake area, and lacking the benefit of an advance party, Colby considered him a tremendous asset.

On March 24th, 1945, the mission was finally mounted in eight Liberators. They departed from Harrington airdrome in warm southern England at three in the afternoon. First stop was at Kindloss Air Base in northern Scotland near Inverness; then they were off on the long cold flight across the North Sea and the Norwegian mountains to their ice-shrouded destination. Thirty-five Americans and one Norwegian were aboard—the first uniformed Allied troops to enter Norway since the disastrous British defeat at Narvik in 1940.

THE story of that flight and the surprising adventures that followed it are best told in the words of Major Colby himself:

"It was a four-and-a-half-hour flight to our pinpoint; and in spite of our heavy winter clothing, we were all very cold and miserable. Most of the trip was across the black forbidding North Sea, and it gave us all a tremendous lift when we crossed the coast and saw below us in the moonlight the snow-covered mountains of Norway. There was very little time to speculate on the breath-taking beauty of the scene, because we were soon at our pinpoint area. Our plane picked up the radio signal from our reception party. I looked down and saw the fire on the snow-covered lake below. Then I spotted a swath cut through the trees which I recognized to be the Swedish border. This was the right place.

"WE circled again, and then I was floating down through the cold clear air. I landed easily on the hardened snow on top of the lake. It was deathly quiet, and I was completely alone. Because of the leak in our original plans, I was naturally nervous about our reception committee. I took out my pistol and headed toward the bonfire. As I neared it, I saw a white-clad figure coming toward me. 'Is the fishing good here?' I called in Norwegian while covering him with my .45. 'Yes, especially in the winter,' he replied. It was the proper password, and we shook hands. After two months of delay and disappointment, I had at last arrived safely in Norway! It gave me a real thrill.

"My first concern was for my men, and it was soon evident that the jump had not gone well. Because there had never been a parachute in this area, we felt that our eight planes would arouse the Germans to investigate, and we were desperately anxious to get all our supplies under cover before a German plane came over the next morning. Our five-man Norwegian reception committee heightened our fears with the news that a small German ski patrol had been in the area just twelve hours before our arrival.

"The three men who had jumped with me were soon around the fire, and we were joined within an hour by another group of four. That left twenty-eight still unaccounted for, and I began to get worried. By four A.M. two other parties of four joined up with us. They had been dropped four to five miles away, and their supply-chutes were scattered widely on the lake. Our strength was now sixteen, but we were almost defenseless, for our skis, food and rifles were all in the containers. Fortunately, all but one of the sixteen had jumped safely. This man had a sprained knee.

"We immediately went to work gathering up such supplies as we could find. A Norwegian who had a farm at the lakeside aided us with his horse, which to my tremendous surprise appeared wearing small circular snowshoes on each foot. Tom Sather, who had lived most of his life in Northern Norway, had told me that we would find horses with snowshoes, but I had refused to believe it. I was very glad to find that I was wrong, for the horse helped us a lot; but when morning came, the major part of our equipment was still dispersed on the lake. There was still no sign of the other four plane-loads of men and equipment. And no one had seen the other planes drop, for a fog had set in immediately after the parachuting had started.

"We worked all the next day without rest, always apprehensive that a German spotting plane would discover us, but luckily none came. By nightfall we had hidden in the farmhouse all the containers we could find. Many were lost in the very deep snow. It was now thirty hours since we had boarded our plane in southern England, and all of us were thoroughly exhausted. After radioing base that four plane-loads had arrived safe, we turned in—too tired to worry further over our predicament.

"The next day base advised us that three of the planes had failed to drop their personnel, but that one other plane had dropped five men and all their equipment. They promised that the rest of the men and additional supplies would be dropped in to us at the first opportunity. There was nothing I could do about the five missing men. It was useless to search, for they could have been in any direction. When a week went by with no news, we had pretty much decided that they had either been killed in a crash or picked up by the Germans. Then someone brought a Swedish newspaper to our farm. It told of five American paratroops being picked up in Sweden fifty miles east of our pinpoint. That meant that unless our contacts in Sweden could secure their release, they would be interned for the duration. It was a tough blow, and we cursed the Air Corps for such a blunder, but at least we were relieved to know that they were alive and in good hands.

"We spent the first few days at the lakeside farm, which consisted of five small buildings. Here we were fairly comfortable, but the Easter holidays were at hand; and as it was customary for Norwegians to go into the mountains for skiing at this time, we decided to move into the nearby woods. Here we set up parachute tents and slept in our sleeping-bags on the snow. It went below zero every night, and during the day seldom went above freezing. We kept fires going at night, but during the day this was impossible because the smoke could be seen for miles and would attract the attention of the ever-prowling German patrols.

"While awaiting our reinforcements, we organized an Intelligence network for the area. So wild and mountainous was our location that it was almost uninhabited. Except for the Norwegian family at our farm, the

only people we ever saw were Lap hunters who tended reindeer herds in the neighboring valleys. Hans Liermo, the most famous Norwegian hunter thereabout, became our chief scout, and proved invaluable in planning operations. The snow everywhere was from three to nine feet deep. Movement without skis was impossible.

"Daily we sent weather reports and awaited for the planes. Our luck was terrible. One night we heard three planes in the vicinity, but the weather was so bad they were not able to drop. Later I heard from base that one of the planes had crashed in the Orkney Islands north of Scotland, killing seven Air Corps men and six of our men. This news was a tremendous blow to our morale, for our Norso group had been together for nearly three years, and all the men were close friends. Weather continued bad—and then one night we heard planes again. One of our lookouts stationed on a nearby mountain peak thought he heard a crash, but could not be sure. The next day we learned from headquarters that three planes had again attempted to drop to us. Two had returned unsuccessful; and the third, with four of our Norsos aboard, was missing.

"AS matters stood by the first week in April, sixteen sorties had been attempted to launch Rype Mission. Only four of these had been successful. Of our original thirty-five men, a bare minimum for our projected operations, thirteen men and three officers including, Norwegian Lt. Hoel, were with me in Norway. Five men were in Sweden. Six of our men and seven Air Corps had been killed in the Orkneys, and four more Norsos and eight Air Corps were missing and presumed dead. It was a terrible disappointment, but not surprising to us when base advised that no more drops would be attempted. We were to proceed on operations with what we had.

"Our total strength including Norwegians was only twenty. Against us the Germans had four hundred thousand troops in Norway. In our immediate area, they had one thousand at Snaasa, twenty-five miles away; seven hundred at Namsos; one hundred and fifty at Grong; and small detachments at Ekker, Formo, Formofos, Nordli and Agle, and another five hundred at Krogsgard. The railroad which was to be our target was heavily guarded over its entire length, and in addition to night and day patrols, there were special garrisons guarding all bridges and tunnels.

"In spite of these difficulties, we had made plans to go ahead with our original objective—to blow the Grana Bridge. Hans Liermo had made a reconnaissance for us. He reported such formidable defenses, that with only sixteen men we were forced to

"Hour after hour we toiled up that icy slope, peril driving us."

Illustrated by John McDermott

"At the last second I reached Andersen and forced him down as the charge exploded."

make a radically new plan. Liermo told us that the approaches to the bridge were protected by barbed-wire, and that there were twenty Germans guarding it at all times. These Germans were located in guardhouses at each end of the bridge, and there were another one thousand Germans located only a half a mile down the track.

"Our plan was to stop an empty train well south of the bridge at an unguarded point, seize the train and ride it to the bridge, stopping at each guardhouse to surround and eliminate the German guards. With luck, and counting on surprise, we felt we could accomplish this. Then we planned to blow the bridge and ride the train back south to an unguarded area, where we would make our escape after sending the train back up the track to crash into the fjord at the blasted bridge. The presence of Andreas Andersen, a former engineer on the railroad, who had joined our little group, was an added factor that seemed to make the whole fantastic project sound feasible.

"Our attacking unit, about twenty strong, including the Norwegians, moved out from Jaevsjo farm on Monday, April ninth. We started out on skis in a driving wind- and rainstorm which made the going extremely difficult. Each man carried a forty-pound pack and his rifle. In addition, every third man hauled a *pulk,* which is a small toboggan with a pole attached. These *pulks* carried sixty pounds of explosives, and additional gear for our estimated six-day journey.

"The first day we made a short march to the summer hut of a Nazi sympathizer. Here we dried out, and with the help of some liquor discovered in a cache had an enjoyable night. The next two days were also spent in this hut, for a raging snowstorm came up, and our Norwegian guides advised that we could never cross the mountains under such conditions. We waited until Thursday, and although the storm was still heavy, we pushed on. The going was unbelievably tough. There were many streams to be crossed; and after each crossing, we had to stop and dry our skis, for movement was impossible when they were wet. On many occasions we would have to take off our skis and climb up and down ice-covered rocks.

"WE climbed one mountain that day, and circled around another to avoid a German observation post. That night we spent in another tiny hut. The next day Lt. Hoel, myself and three of the men separated from the main party to make a personal reconnaissance of Grana Bridge. We found it heavily guarded, and confirmed the suspected location of a machine-gun on the south side. We watched a train go by which seemed to be mainly freight. Our plan to seize a train to do the job looked much more difficult than I had imagined. That night we camped in a cleft in the rocks on the south side of a mountain.

"Saturday morning two reconnaissance parties set out to check the German positions at Valoy Station and Tangen Bridge, which were alternate targets. They were also to secure additional information on the trains. The Tangen Bridge party found the terrain too difficult to reach the target and report back to the main unit, which had moved to a central location at Oyingen Lake, about five miles from the Nordland railroad. The party scouting Valoy Station took up a position on a hill about three hundred yards from the German position. Here they were startled to discover the Germans in a state of full alert. The soldiers were seen running to their positions and preparing to fight, so they concluded that the enemy had spotted them or one of our other reconnaissance parties.

"These Intelligence reports convinced me that because of the alert at Valoy Station and the formidable defenses at the Jorstad Bridge, we had better attack only the Tangen Bridge south of Valoy Station. This bridge was said to be unguarded, except for frequent patrols. Reluctantly we realized that our train-stealing project was beyond our capabilities, particularly when the movement of trains could not be ascertained with any regularity.

"Accordingly we moved out behind an advance party of scouts at nine that night. It took us seven and a half hours of back-breaking toil to go the ten miles through the mountains to our objective. Frequently we had to take off our skis to climb up and down sheer cliffs and boulder-studded slopes. Finally at 0430 Sunday morning we hit the down-slope to the railroad. There was a crust on the snow, and we had to close in on the bridge very slowly, for the slightest sounds carried in the still morning air. Skis were removed about five hundred yards from the bridge, and I went forward with one man to make a final reconnaissance before calling up the main party to set the charges.

"We spotted a small house on a hill overlooking the bridge and headed toward it. There were no tracks outside, so we figured it was unoccupied; but when we came closer, we heard movement inside. Fearing that it might be a German patrol, we forced an entry with weapons in hand. The occupants proved to be a refugee Finnish family who told us that the bridge was unguarded, but that there were very frequent German patrols. Leaving my sergeant to keep an eye on them, I ran down the hill to take a look at the bridge. It turned out to be a thirty-six-foot structure made of steel 'I' beams. We had more than enough explosive to destroy it.

"Everything looked secure, so I went back for the main party to do the job. Small covering parties were deployed at each end of the bridge to guard against German patrols. As soon as they were in position, our demolition party, under Lt. Farnsworth, who had prepared the charges, moved onto the bridge and started working. In a few minutes everything was set, and we took up positions along a height overlooking the bridge. Our idea was to blow it when a train came by, and then shoot up the train. We waited until 0630, and when no train came, we blew the bridge, wrecking it completely. It was nearly dawn when we started back. Before leaving, I ran down to the railroad and fastened our calling card, a small American flag, to a rail. With this we hoped to ward off reprisals against the local Norwegians.

"After recovering our skis, we headed back into the mountains toward Oyingen, where it was necessary to stop for a few hours for food and rest, as all of us were extremely exhausted. I had planned a roundabout retreat to deceive any pursuing Germans as to the location of our camp. This route led straight to the Swedish border, and then cut back along it to Jaevsjo Lake. As it turned out, this strategy saved our lives, for three German ski patrols immediately took up the chase.

"During the late afternoon we heard a German spotting plane which we surmised was looking for us. Whether they saw us or not, we never knew; but we certainly were not hard to follow, for our tracks were very easily discernible in the snow. That was one of the many bad features about operating under these conditions. We soon caught sight of a ten-man German ski patrol which was racing after us from the direction of the railroad. We were in no condition for a fight, and I knew that the delay might very well prove fatal, as the Germans had thousands of troops they could send after us. Our only hope was to try and keep ahead of them.

"To slow up our pursuers, we rigged a trip-wire booby trap with a couple of pounds of plastic explosive, and buried it in our ski trail on the down-slope of a steep hill. When the German patrol leader raced down the hill hot on our trail, he hit our little surprise and was badly wounded. This made them a lot more cautious in their pursuit; and when another of their men broke a leg in crossing a particularly rough bit of terrain, this party became discouraged and broke off the chase.

"It was late Monday afternoon when we finally shook off that first German patrol. By now all of us were in terrible shape. For a week we had been on the go through the worst country I had ever seen; and for the last three days and nights we had been moving constantly with nothing but two-hour breaks. This and the added strain of the chase had left us almost at the point of complete exhaustion. I told the men that we would stop for the night and the next day at a mountain hut a few miles ahead where I had planned to meet Lt. Hoel. This news bucked them all up for a final effort, and we dragged ourselves into this hut about ten Monday night.

"I fastened our calling card."

"I immediately got in contact with Lt. Hoel while the rest of the men flopped down—many of them too tired even to eat. Hoel had shocking information. On receipt of it, I was forced to make one of the toughest decisions I ever faced. He told me that a heavily armed force of twenty-five Germans and Norwegian Nazis (which meant that they were expert skiers) had been searching this area all day and were now located in a hut just a few thousand yards away from us. They had evidently come up by road and got ahead of us to cut off our escape. I knew very well that we were in no condition to take on such a strong force, which was not only fresh but outnumbered us, and had almost unlimited reinforcements to call up. Should we delay we would almost certainly be detected and have to fight an uneven battle. We had one chance. In spite of our condition, we must circle around the enemy contingent and try to get over the next mountain before daylight.

"IT was a tough order to give, but I explained to the men that we had no choice. Cold, tired, hungry and weak, they showed amazing spirit; and after a few hours' rest we cautiously started out again. We still faced the worst part of our journey. Looming ahead was Sugarloaf Mountain — a snow- and ice-covered peak rising steep and forbidding for several miles at an angle of forty-five degrees. Under the most ideal conditions, crossing it would have been a severe ordeal for skilled mountain men. For us in our condition it was murder. The Norsos were all for attempting to go around the mountain, but I felt the quickest way would be to go straight up, and that's what we did.

"Starting out, I took a benzedrine tablet. The rest of the party didn't think much of this idea, but before long everyone was taking them. I know that without that extra artificial lift I would never have made it. We had to get over the mountain by dawn, because we were completely exposed while scaling it, and sitting ducks for a German attack. Hour after hour we toiled up that icy slope, the peril of our position giving us extra stimulus. More than once it looked as if we wouldn't make it; but by daybreak we reached the summit and started down the other side. Beautiful Sweden was only ten miles away; and at the border was a Norwegian underground camp of a few men where I knew we could hole up for a few days. Happy at having made it, we skied down Benzedrine Mountain to the Norwegian hide-out, where good food, warmth and rest

awaited us. As I learned later, we had just made it in time. The German patrols followed our trail up the mountain next morning, but thinking that we had escaped to Sweden, they gave up the chase and turned back.

"I rested at this camp for sixteen hours, and then pushed on to our headquarters at Jaevsjo Lake to get back to the radio. The rest of the unit rested for a few more days and then rejoined me there. On my arrival, I was delighted to find the five men who had been dropped into Sweden some weeks before. They had been interned by the Swedes, but through the connivance of the Swedish underground and our agents in Stockholm, they had been spirited out of the camp and sent to us. Their welcome presence brought our American strength up to twenty, a very heartening addition, now that we knew the Germans were aroused and hunting for us. A few days later we received a shipment of supplies, mostly explosives, by courier from our sources in Sweden; and we immediately planned a new operation against the railroad.

"For our next job we decided to hit the railroad in the valley north of Snaasa, about thirty miles north of our original attack at the Tangen Bridge. Here the Germans were thicker than fleas all along the track, with heavy concentration at all bridges and tunnels. Because of this we decided to destroy the tracks for a two-mile stretch, hoping to avoid the fixed garrisons and frequent patrols by stealth, and relying principally on the boldness and surprise of our plan for its success.

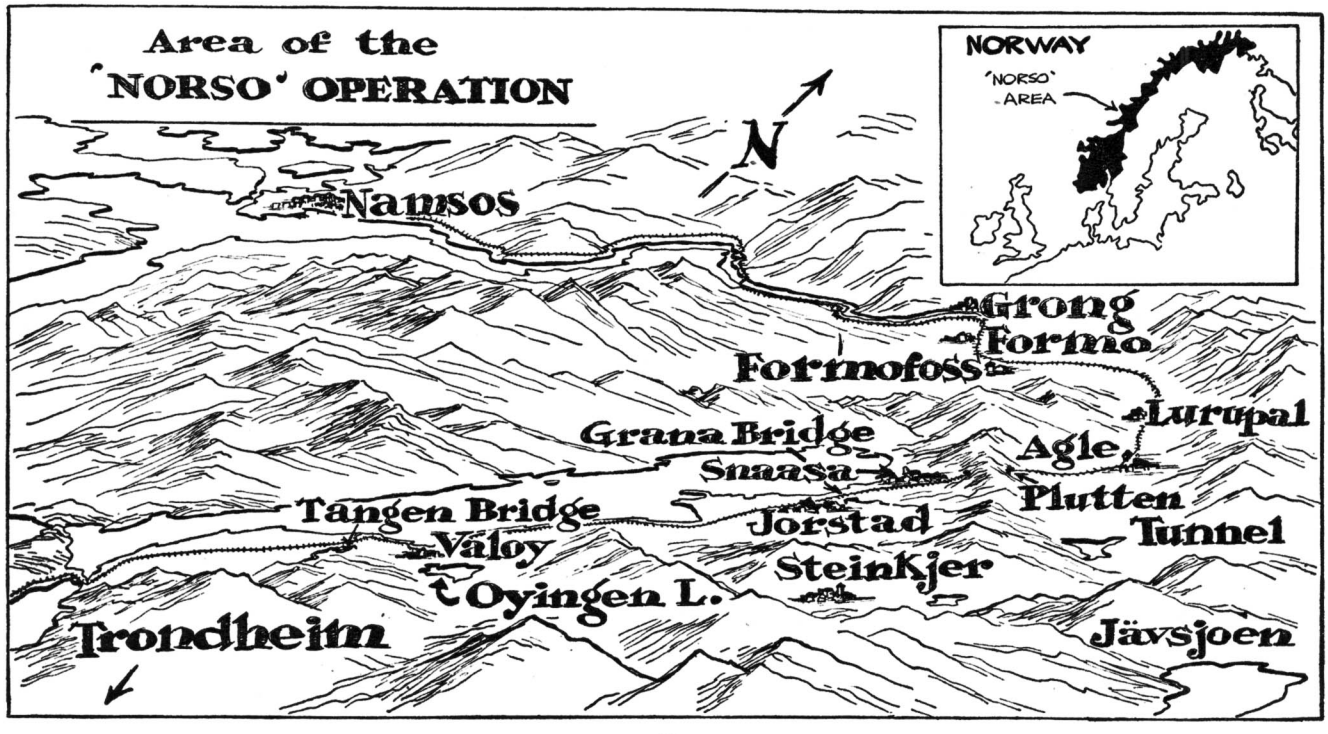
"The heaviest enemy concentration along this part of the railroad was at Snaasa, which was garrisoned by one thousand Germans. Their positions were just five miles south of our projected demolition. At Luradal, a half a mile to the north, were forty Germans. There were eight more at a post about midway on the stretch, and another group of undetermined size guarding the Plutten Tunnel, which was also without our target area. We planned to avoid these guards and blow on both sides of the tunnel. To the south of our selected target were two more garrisons—one of twelve men just eight hundred yards down the track and a concentration of forty more a half-mile beyond them. Allowing for twenty guards at the Plutten Tunnel, that meant there would be 120 of the enemy stationed in our operational area, with another one thousand ten minutes away. We also knew that because of our first operation, these guards would have been alerted for additional attacks.

"On Monday April twenty-third we started out from Jaevsjo farm twenty-five strong, pulling our specially prepared railroad charges on *pulks* behind us. As before, we followed a circuitous route so as to deceive any hostile patrols as to our destination. Two days of heavy trekking took us to our rendezvous point at a mountain hut five miles from the railroad. Next morning Hans Liermo, our wonderful scout, Sergeant Langeland and I took off to reconnoiter the target. Taking full advantage of our white parkas and using all available cover, we slipped in close to the railroad and checked the points of attack. We saw no Germans, but heard them on several occasions chopping wood and working around their positions.

"After thoroughly familiarizing ourselves with the situation, we returned to our hut, where I briefed each demolition team on its objective. I had split the group into eight teams of three men apiece, each armed with thirty rail charges—sufficient for approximately two hundred yards of track. The departure of the teams was staggered so that all would arrive at the railroad simultaneously. Charges were to be detonated at quarter to twelve when I fired a green Very signal. If for any reason the signal was not given, they were to explode the charges five minutes later anyway.

"I KNEW because of the presence of so many enemy troops this operation was a good deal more risky than our first effort. The men knew it too, but every one of them was tremendously eager. To break the tension just before we moved out, I told our cook to put a fresh pot of coffee on the stove so that it would be all ready when we retreated. My stolid Norsemen thought this was a great joke, and we shoved off in high spirits.

"Once again the surface of the snow was a hard crust, and as we neared the railroad, we had to proceed with extreme caution, for the slightest sound would have alerted the German guards. My own assignment was a stretch of track at one of the tunnel exits. With me was Corporal Windh, an excellent and experienced soldier, and a Norwegian scout, Andersen. We reached the railroad without incident, but were hampered in laying the charges by the presence of a German position only thirty yards from the northern limit of our demolition. Working very quietly, we managed to get all the charges into position, but I was not able to finish in time to give the signal at 11:45.



"Five minutes later the first explosions started down the track, and immediately afterward a deafening crescendo broke out as the boys went to work on all sides. Each pair of charges had to be individually fired; and as the first series of explosions blasted the quiet of the night, the Germans shot flares into the air for miles around. I was concerned about our own position so close to the enemy guardhouse, and I sent Corporal Windh across the track to set up his BAR to give us protection while the Norwegian and I set to work firing our charges.

"This took only a couple of minutes, and I was thinking we had made it as I pulled the last detonator and started back, when to my horror I saw Andersen standing right next to the last rail which was about to be blasted. I yelled to him, but he didn't seem to understand, and I thought he would be killed. At just the last second I reached him and forced him down as the charge exploded, sending fragments of steel over our heads.

"My shouting and this close explosion drew the attention of the German guards, who opened up on us. Most of their shots went wild, but one kicked up dirt on my face, and I hopped up and ran for it. This time Andersen understood my instructions perfectly. We rejoined Corporal Windh, and after waiting a few minutes for signs of the German guards, whom we could not see, I gave the word to withdraw and we raced back to our assembly point.

"Here I found all of our teams intact. The surprise had been complete, and the job had been 100 per cent successful. Over two miles of track had been completely destroyed. Only Captain Sather, who heard machine-gun fire, and myself had been bothered by enemy reaction, and no one had been wounded. We had a quick cup of the coffee which was ready, and then hearing sounds of pursuit coming up our trail, we moved out with all possible speed. It was thirty-five miles to Jaevsjo, and we made it by four o'clock the next afternoon. I was very proud of the men. The attack required perfect discipline and coördination. One slip would very likely have imperiled all of us, outnumbered as we were, and exposed along the track without our skis.

"Back at the camp we posted extra guards and waited for the German reaction. So swift had been our retreat that we saw no sign of a pursuit after leaving our rendezvous point. But I knew the enemy would not take such an assault on their critically important rail-line without drastic retaliation. . . . It wasn't long in coming. First news we received was from a friendly Norwegian agent. He reported that a German had told him that the men who did this job were 'a very brave and resourceful group.' This was very flattering to all of us, but we expected something more than compliments. Again our return journey had been made by a roundabout route to deceive the Germans, and again our strategy worked. We heard that a thirty-five-man patrol was searching the area to our west. Fortunately they did not visit our camp, where we were busy with a grim task.

"When the German patrol leader raced down the hill hot on our trail, he hit our surprise."

"On our return to Jaevsjo, a Lap hunter reported that he had found the wreck of an airplane on a mountain-top fifteen miles to the north. There was no sign of life—and twelve bodies. We knew that it must be the missing plane with four of our companions. Severe storms held us up for the next two days, so I had the men prepare graves to bury the bodies after we recovered them. A few days later we were to use these same graves for quite another purpose.

"When the storm let up, I took half the contingent to the wreck. It was pretty terrible. The plane had evidently hit the top of the mountain and bounced down the slope. Pieces of it were scattered over a wide area, and from the position and condition of the bodies, we surmised that everyone had been killed instantly. Several of the men who had been dropped by mistake into Sweden recognized the Air Corps crew. It was the same plane that had erred so badly in dropping them; and they had obviously gone to their deaths determined to make a good drop with this plane-load to redeem themselves in our eyes. We had all damned these men heartily before, and we felt pretty bad when we realized they had given their lives for us.

"It was impossible to take the bodies back to our camp for burial or to dig graves on that rocky ice-covered mountain. We wrapped each man in his parachute and laid the bodies reverently in a rock cave which we erected,

"At any event as soon as Berre's pistol dropped, the German sergeant fired at him."

and I marked the spot with a small American flag. Then I conducted a brief military ceremony. We fired three volleys over the grave, and took pictures to send to the men's families.

"The day after this funeral a five-man German ski patrol burst into our camp without warning. We later found out that they had stopped just behind the crest of the hill overlooking our farm. Seeing only three or four people outside the huts, they had rapidly slid down the hill, and before anyone knew what was happening they were upon us. All of them were armed—four with machine-pistols and the fifth with a rifle. Three of our men, all unarmed, and a Norwegian named Berre who had a pistol, were standing outside at the time. Four of the Germans leveled their weapons at Staff Sergeant Myrland; and then a fifth, who was a sergeant-major and the patrol leader, covered Berre.

"Sgt. Myrland coolly informed the Germans that they could shoot him, but that there were enough of us to get all of them. By this time several of our men had come out of the surrounding buildings with their Thompson submachine-guns cocked, and began to gather round the little group. On hearing Myrland's threat, one of the Germans said that they would surrender, and Berre lowered his pistol, which had been pointing at the leader.

"Berre hated the Germans, and either something that he said excited the German or he became panicky when he saw our people closing in on him. At any event, as soon as Berre's pistol dropped, the German sergeant fired at him, putting a bullet through

his chest. Then his machine-pistol jammed. That was the last shot fired by any of those Germans. Enraged by the German's action, our men opened up on all of them with Tommy-guns, and in a few seconds the five of them were all very dead.

"We buried the Germans in the graves we had prepared previously for the plane crew. Sergeant Fred Johansen, our medic, treated Berre with penicillin. Then we put him on a toboggan and several of the men put on civilian clothes and hauled him forty miles to the nearest settlement in Sweden, where he was given good care by the sympathetic Swedish authorities.

"Our only regret at the elimination of this German patrol was the fear of a much stronger follow-up patrol. A week before most of our Norwegian underground helpers had been shifted to another area on orders from London. Should the Germans come after us in any force, we would be heavily outnumbered. Fortunately, two days later a party of Norwegians from Snaasa came to join us. They reported intense German activity to track us down.

"This was confirmed shortly afterward when a second group arrived fleeing from a Gestapo round-up in a nearby village. Evidently our activities had stirred things up. These extra men gave us an added feeling of security in the event of a German attack, but they were a very serious drain on our very slender food supplies. By this time all of our original food was gone and most of what we had been able to secure from Swedish sources. We were down to eating *grut,* a thoroughly unappetizing Norwegian concoction of flour and water which we took from the farm. It was terrible, but was all we had.

"Such was our situation in the first week of May. Elsewhere the collapse of Germany seemed to be a matter of hours. The big question which concerned us and our London headquarters was the vital rôle we would play should the very considerable German forces make a last-ditch stand in Norway. Hitler and other Nazi leaders had threatened such a development, and should it take place, our unit would become the focal point of wide-scale Allied actions to crush this last enemy stronghold. Already we had made plans for receiving additional men and supplies when the summer weather again permitted dropping.

"ALL this speculation and planning came to an end with the surrender. For a few days we were wary as to whether the German troops in Norway would play along. Meanwhile we kept to the mountains until the situation should clarify itself. Finally I received orders to move into the town of Steinkjer. I took a German-speaking Norso with me and paid a call on the local German commander at Snaasa, a captain. I wanted to be sure that no action would be taken against my men when we entered the town. He seemed pretty excited, but willing to take orders, so our men dressed up and skied into the town with colors flying. We were received with a tremendous ovation.

"From Snaasa we went by truck to Steinkjer, where another gala welcome ceremony took place. Next we were ordered to Trondheim, where we participated in a tumultuous celebration of a national holiday on May 17. On the way we visited several other towns and inspected the railroad, since repaired by Russian prisoners of the Germans. Everywhere the people gave us a wild reception, and one enthusiast presented me with a beautiful large American flag, behind which we proudly marched in all celebrations. The Norwegians knew all about us, and their newspapers carried the most glowing accounts of our operations, playing up strongly the fact that we were the first Allied fighting unit to operate in the country since 1940. It was all very satisfying, and we felt it helped to create good feeling between our two countries.

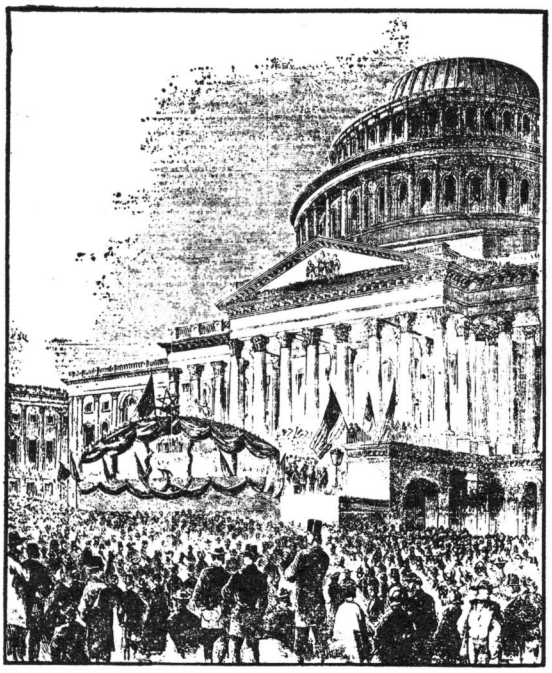
"After Trondheim we were ordered to Namsos, where there were ten thousand Germans and a large German naval force in the harbor. Our rather strange assignment here was to supervise the activities of these ten thousand Germans, all of whom were armed, and some of whom, particularly the naval personnel, were in an ugly mood. The twenty-five of us couldn't have done a thing, but I decided on a bold front, and when I heard that certain ships in the harbor were sailing around giving Nazi salutes to each other, I ordered an inspection of all craft. Next day I, who didn't know one end of a ship from another, inspected all the German vessels. This show of bravado on the part of an American officer seemed to impress on the Germans that they really had lost the war, and things quieted down.

"On June tenth our unit participated in the parade in honor of Crown Prince Olaf when he visited Trondheim. Afterward I gave all the men furloughs to visit their families in Norway. Everywhere they were received as heroes. One of the men discovered that his younger brother had joined the Nazi SS and his family was in disgrace, but his appearance in an American uniform as a member of 'the fabulous Norsos' more than made up for the defection of his brother. . . .

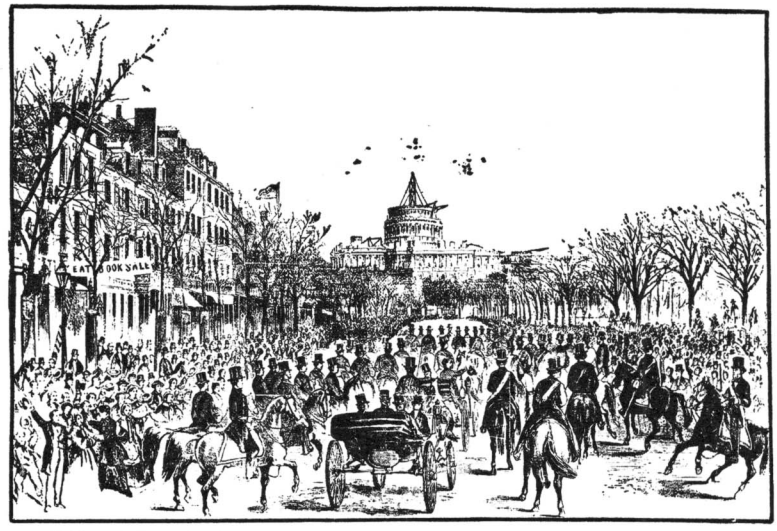
"Late in June our unit flew back to England. The flight back was beautiful. Once again I was impressed by the contrast with our arrival in the dead of night. Now everything was so bright and peaceful. Eleven of our men and fifteen Air Corps men had paid with their lives for our mission. We all hoped that our efforts had made these sacrifices worth while and helped to end the war by even a few minutes."

The War Department evidently felt that Colby and his men accomplished something. Colby and Sather received Silver Stars, and several of the men Bronze Stars.

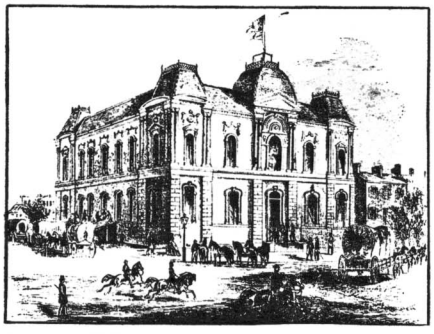
Lincoln's



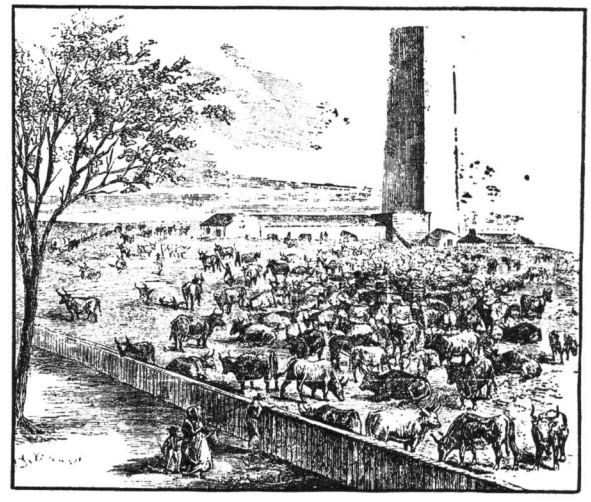
The Capitol with its unfinished cupola; great War meeting on August 6, 1862.



When Lincoln drove up Pennsylvania Avenue on his way to the inauguration this was his first impression of the Capitol.



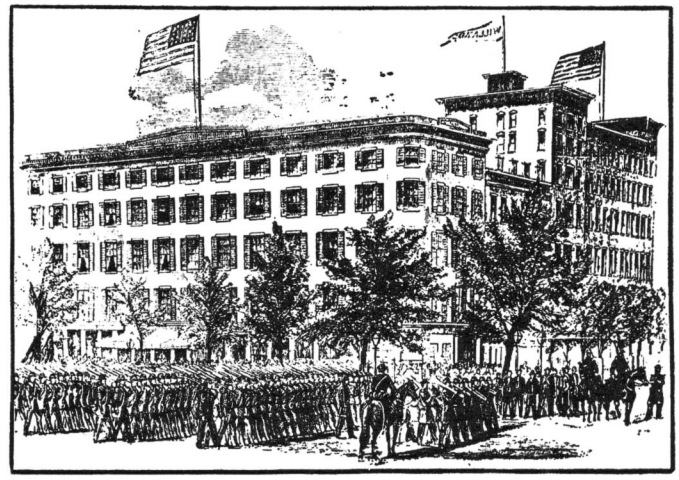
Corcoran Gallery of Art: The building, on Pennsylvania Avenue, donated by the noted banker, was just finished when the Civil War broke out. The Government at once rented it as a depot for military clothing.



Beef cattle to supply the troops were kept in the meadow adjacent to the unfinished Washington Monument. (Theft of a stone contributed by the Pope led to a situation which in 1854 stopped work when the monument was only 153 ft. high. Construction was resumed in 1876.)

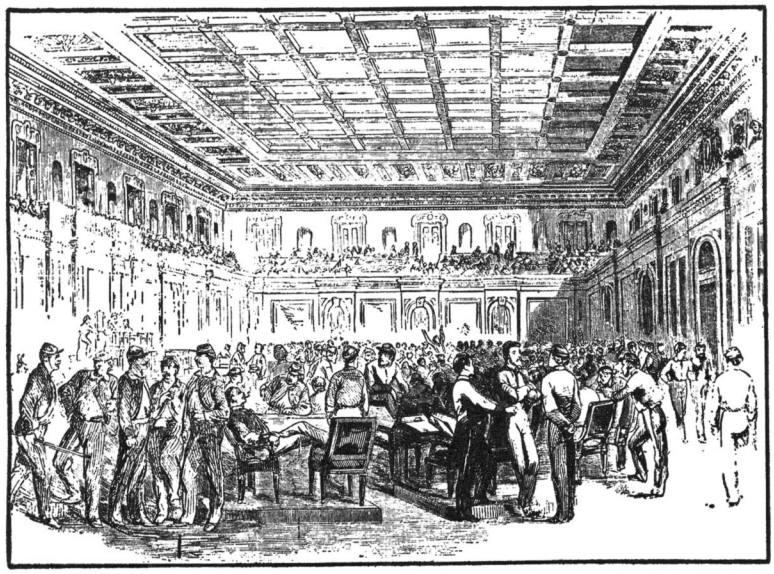
The grand horse-depot of the War Department was on the grounds of the Capitol.

Office-seekers waiting outside the room in the White House where President Lincoln held his Cabinet meetings.

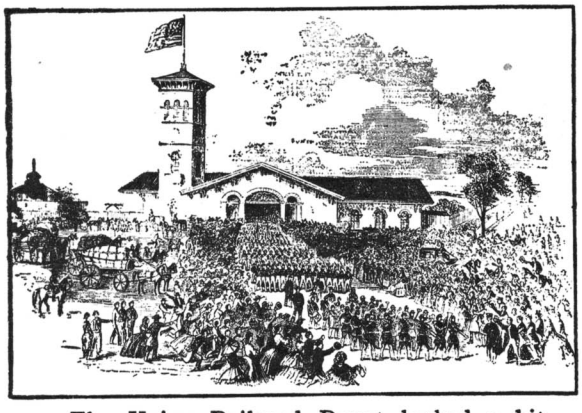


Willard's Hotel was then as now one of the busiest places in Washington.

Washington



The New York Fire Zouaves Regiment was for some time in 1861 quartered in the Hall of Representatives in the Capitol.



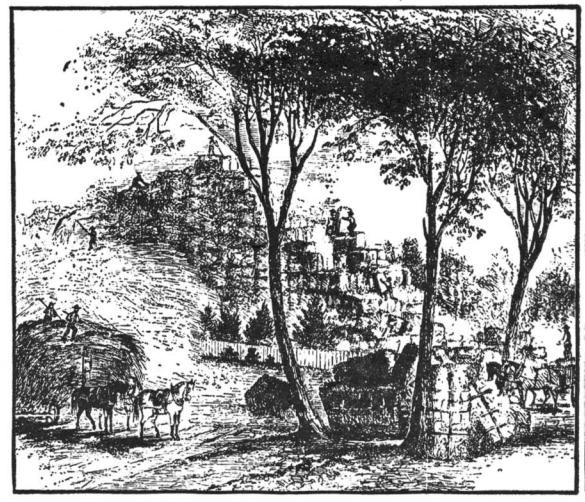
The Union Railroad Depot looked a bit different from today's stately building. Arrival of the New York 71 Regiment.

Old prints from Three Lions, Schoenfeld Collection.

Treasury Department—"lady clerks" leaving the Treasury Building after office hours.

President Lincoln with General Hooker and his staff on the way to review the Army of the Potomac, April, 1863.

Living quarters for the Eighth Massachusetts Regiment in 1861 were found in the unfinished rotunda of the Capitol Building.



This mammoth collection of fodder at the corner of F and 18th Streets would look very conspicuous in today's Washington.

Twice a vengeful Hindu prince has carried out his threat to murder each of four men he thought had wronged him. Now this Rajah from Hell warns his third intended victim.

by GORDON KEYNE

The Devil's

DRIVING with Parr, I got up to Santa Barbara from Los Angeles at an early-morning hour. We stopped at a filling-station downtown to gas up, and I sought the telephone. After some difficulty I got the residence of the Honorable Fitzjames Balfour—and a very English butler.

"This is Dr. Hugh Clements," I said, "an old friend of Mr. Balfour just from India. Is he up and around?"

"Yes indeed, sir," came the reply. "He's always about early. Just now he's somewhere downtown getting an important letter in the post."

"The devil! Is Miss Trent there at his house?"

She was, and presently I had her on the phone, much surprised to hear my voice.

"Yes, I'm here, Virginia," I said. "Parr is with me—Colonel Magruder's man. Magruder was murdered last night."

Her voice broke like a violin-string at hearing this. First her father, then Magruder!

"Balfour's next," I said. "Tell me what luck you had with him?"

"Oh, the very best!" she reported. "We were driving down today to meet with you and Colonel Magruder. He'll do anything you want, will coöperate in any way you think wise. He's downtown now, mailing a special-delivery letter to you."

I queried her about the situation. She said to come at once to the house, and told where it was. Plenty of room, she said. Balfour would be delighted to have us.

"Be there in twenty minutes," I said, and rang off before I could succumb to temptation and send her a kiss over the wire. She might not have liked that.

Balfour's place was no large estate. He had retired from his prosecutor's position in the Indian service just before the war's end, and instead of going home to England, came to California. He got in on the ground floor, just before the real-estate boom, and took over a nice but not showy place in the new Santa Barbara development north of town. We gained it without trouble—a pleasant hillside house with a few big trees around, small grounds, and the walls of big estates on either side. There was a roomy garage with servants' quarters above.

Virginia Trent welcomed us and took us in to breakfast; Balfour was not back yet. The house was thick with his pompous style—two English servants and so forth; a buffet breakfast, and that sort of thing. Having an unpleasantly fresh and stiff wound in my thigh, I was not very brisk, but said nothing of it. Parr disappeared, and I was thankful for a few moments alone with Virginia.

"Better save the Magruder story till Balfour gets back," I said. "Your report is the main thing, my dear. If Balfour really means business—"

"Oh, but he does!" she exclaimed eagerly. "He knows where Chaffee lives, and has already written him. He has sent to San Francisco for guards. He'll do anything you think best. Mrs. Balfour is visiting friends in Beverly Hills and won't be back for a week, so there's no interference." She looked out of the window. "He's back now."

Fire

"The ring turned red as fire, sir!" Parr cried, staring at me. "You have just heard the voice of the Rajah," I said.

Balfour walked in and wrung my hand delightedly. He was ruddy, very fit, gray-topped, inclined to pomposity, quite a human fellow on the whole. I spared him the news about Magruder until he had breakfasted; when he found Parr was with me, he guessed the truth, and it shook him frightfully.

We gathered on his screened veranda with Parr and Virginia Trent.

"This meeting is your idea, Clements," he said. "So take charge. Bad news?"

"Very. Let me begin at the beginning. Last week I landed here after seven years at my Lacpore hospital—"

I told how I had been thrown into contact with the Rajah from Hell (he was by right, and called himself, Rajah of Sirvath, but I knew no other name for him) and how he proved to be a man whom I had saved from death in Lacpore. Now he was wealthy, handsome, most capable; then, he had been destitute, a poor devil of whom I knew nothing.

"He holds me in real gratitude," I went on, "but he's imbued with venomous hatred for four men now in California. You, Balfour; Howard Chaffee, whom I don't know; Sir James Trent and Colonel Magruder—and these last two he has already murdered."

"But why?" puffed Balfour. "Why, in God's name?"

"Because you people picked him up as a notorious dacoit or bandit, and sentenced him to life imprisonment. He believes you framed him; he thinks you were unjust—"

"Look here, that's all poppycock," Balfour broke in. "Mere eyewash, Clements! I recall the case perfectly. Government was very grateful to us. You can't accuse us."

"I'm not; I'm telling you his warped beliefs. He was in Russia for a time and no doubt absorbed an anti-English bias. He escaped, you see, during the time of turmoil when the Japs were invading Bengal. He thinks himself a victim of injustice."

I went on to describe the murders of Colonel Magruder and Sir James Trent; it was tough on Virginia and Parr, but necessary. We had no evidence on which to convict the Rajah of the murders. Last night his chauffeur had fired on us, wounding me slightly, and Parr had killed him. I held out my hand.

"There's the proof. Parr found that silver ring beside the man's body."

I TOOK off the ring; everyone examined it. Plain silver, set with a black stone in whose heart burned a red flame—a stone unknown to any of us. I put it on my hand again.

"The Rajah wears a similar stone; therefore I fancy this ring has some connection with him and may serve us," I said. "Now, Balfour, you have all the facts. My idea is that we should combine against this terror. If Magruder had listened to me and had come here yesterday, he'd still be alive. What d'ye think, Balfour?"

"I think you're right," he said. "I've written this Chaffee—he lives in San Francisco. We'll hear from him. He was the one who identified our friend as the dacoit, by the way."

"And you were the King's Counsel who prosecuted him," I said. "Trent was the judge who sentenced him, and so forth. He believes that you fellows framed him unjustly in India—and now he's being tough on you. He murdered Trent, who was my friend, and I'm in the business to prove it and get him his just deserts. He knows it, and mind you, won't hurt me; but his men will, quick enough. It's an ironic situation."

We discussed things. My idea was that Balfour would get a warning—the Rajah always gave warning before striking—before long; and that we

should get in touch with Chaffee and make every effort to find the Rajah and put him behind the bars. So far, we did not even know what name he used, or where he was.

"Right," said Balfour. "Chaffee should get my letter today. I told him to telephone me instantly he got it; we'll hear from him. How about pulling in the police, what?"

THIS was argued and negatived, until we had some actual evidence. During the discussion I got out a cigarette and reached for an electric lighter that stood on the table. As I lit the cigarette, I was aware of a sensation, not painful, but annoying, in my finger. I looked at it. An exclamation escaped me.

The formerly black stone in the silver ring was now flaming red, as though afire! Yet it was not hot, barely warm enough to be felt.

I stared at it, still holding the lighter. So did the others. Virginia started to speak, then was silenced by another voice, faint but distinct.

"—nothing more at present," it said. And it was not speaking English, but Hindustani! *"Look for orders at noon and at midnight. Ghopal Singh or I will speak each time. I shall be in Santa Barbara only a few days. I want everyone to be alert and ready. That is all."*

The voice ceased. Also, the fiery glow died out of the stone in my ring, which again became black and glittering, with just a spark in its depths. When I put down the lighter and cord, the spark lessened.

Everyone, even Virginia, recognized the Hindustani if not the words. All were staring blankly around in search of the speaker. Except for us, the veranda was empty. I was the only one to recognize those tones; it shocked me stiff.

"What a singular vibrant voice!" exclaimed Virginia. "Who was speaking?"

"Dash it, that's what I'd like to know!" broke out Balfour. "Hindustani! Some trick of yours, Clements?"

I tried to speak and could not.

"The ring turned red as fire, sir!" Parr cried, staring at me.

I stirred, came alive, found words.

"You have just heard the voice of the man we were discussing," I said slowly, "the Rajah from Hell. Look —it's just past ten o'clock! I picked up this lighter, touching the wire. The ring turned red. It didn't burn, just turned red, blazing red. Touching that wire caused the contact, caused the supersonic waves to take hold, caused us to hear the speaker—some sort of electronics, you see! This ring belonged to the Rajah's man who was killed last night—"

They all began to talk at once. Balfour pooh-poohed the notion, then became silent as I translated the words we had heard. He got a shock, also; evidently the Rajah was here in Santa Barbara. Presently I roused myself and spoke.

"Let's accept what we all heard. Electronics—why not? We know the human body is an antenna, a radio aërial. We don't know the half of what electronic developments arose from the war, here or in Russia. Our man was a refugee in that country, for a time. It's far easier to believe than to disbelieve; that he's an electronic wizard is a fact."

"By your theory," Balfour said, "that stone is a sort of speaker by which he's in touch with his bally agents."

"That's my notion." I handed him the ring. "Test it at noon, twelve o'clock. Touch a wire somewhere, get his broadcast. If it's true, then we, as well as his own men, will be in touch with him."

An electrifying thought; it brought us all up in sharp surmise. Ghopal Singh—as Parr exclaimed, that was not a Hindu name. Sounded like a Sikh. There might be a clue!

Balfour started up.

"I know the police chief here, slightly. I'll run downtown now and get him after information on this Ghopal Singh—won't need to lay any charge. The fellow may have a record, y'know. I'll be back by noon to test the ring. Care to go, Clements?"

I did not. My wound, slight as it was, bothered me when in a car, so Balfour took Parr with him, for company, and Virginia remained with me.

This affair of the ring, while it might afford us a slight lead, rather hit us all under the belt. It indicated the diabolic craft and ingenuity of the enemy. It showed that he was in command of weapons far beyond our knowledge. To be blunt, it terrified us—it did me, at least. The fire in that stone which was not fire at all was frightening.

I bathed quickly, shaved, and rejoined Virginia, feeling much more myself. We went into Balfour's library, where his telephone was located, with the possible call from Chaffee in mind. He had a remarkable lot of Anglo-Indian directories of all sorts, and I examined these with quick interest that kindled when I came upon a volume devoted to the Indian peerage and royal houses.

Seizing on this, we examined it together, found the royal Rajput house of Sirvath listed in great detail, and in breathless excitement conned the entries. The present ruler was a brother of the previous rajah, whose only heir had been a son, a young man now dead. He had died during the war, and his name had been Lajpat Rai.

"That's the man," said Virginia. "No one else answers, Hugh."

"So what?" I said. "Our man claims to be the rightful Rajah of Sirvath. Now we have his name—Lajpat Rai. He may not use it, but that's his name, and we have it. Beyond doubt he has papers to prove some other identity, by which he entered the country. Now we put the Immigration people on him, and spike his guns!"

"Grand!" she said. "How are you going to find him to do it?"

This was a facer—it was quite impossible, so far as I could see. However, I felt we had made a step forward, a definite step. His prison conviction under the identity of another man, a bandit, had ruined our man's pretensions to the throne of Sirvath; this was one reason for his actuating hatred of Balfour and the others. Lajpat Rai was dead—but our Rajah from Hell had been Lajpat Rai.

We were still discussing this discovery when Balfour came back with Parr, and we found it was getting close to noon. Our host was radiant.

"Jolly good work!" exclaimed Balfour, upon hearing our report. "I've done very well, too—excellently, in fact! It was an inspiration to go to the police. They have complete data on this Ghopal Singh. He's a Sikh, right enough; was a worker in the hot district south of Stockton, and is badly wanted for robbery and attempted murder up there last year. If he's in town, they'll dig him out, be sure of that—and his master with him. This Ghopal was a Communist, as well."

"That's no crime," I said. "Andrei Gromyko is one too, and lives in a grand estate on Long Island and is popular in Washington."

Balfour winked. "All right, my lad. Wait and see. Getting just on to noon —so we'll try this ring of yours, what?" He reached out and took hold of a lamp-cord. "Any wire will do, I suppose. One minute before twelve, by my time."

He stood there, his puffy red face looking rather foolish, but his eyes were intent and combative, his mouth had an ugly set; he could be a nasty customer, I thought, especially when browbeating some poor devil of an Indian radical—a "filthy native," in his estimation.

"LOOK at it!" broke from Parr. "The ring! The devil's fire!"

Balfour held up his hand; the black stone of the ring was fiery crimson.

"Twelve o'clock," said none of us. *"No further orders today, my friends."* The Rajah's voice, speaking in Hindustani. Then he switched instantly to English.

"Good day, Dr. Clements. Good day, Mr. Balfour. I trust you are making use of that ring you obtained last night? Make the most of it, I admonish you. A message is on the way to you now. That is all."

The words died out; the ring became black again. I saw Parr looking at me and nodding. Balfour had purpled with anger. Virginia sat tense and white.

"He gives us credit for more ingenuity than we possess," I observed lightly. "He's not certain we've found the secret of the ring; apparently he has sent you some warning, Balfour. You can still clear out of here."

"Be damned if I'll run from him!" snapped Balfour. "Those watchmen haven't come? No word from Chaffee? Huh! I'll stay right here, and if he tries any tricks I'll give him what for! Upon my word—the insufferable impudence of him!"

HE reverted to the practical. The police had been trying out a new radio trick—electronic plates fastened to the walls of a room, and radio reception audible between the plates, nowhere else. Something like that might explain the black stone, on whose properties we had accidentally stumbled. I shrugged; anything was possible.

The butler announced luncheon. Almost at the same moment Balfour was called to the telephone; he rejoined us with a sparkle in his eye.

"That was Howard Chaffee," he announced. "He's driving down from San Francisco. Said he'd get here sometime this evening. He has important information on our man. Said he saw in the papers about Sir James Trent's death, and had been at work on the case. Expects a Government man named Aguilar to meet him here tonight. Looks definite, what?"

"Pleasantly so," I assented cheerfully. "I knew if we got our heads together we'd get results. *Aguilar* sounds Spanish."

"Half this town is Spanish, or Mexican, or pretends to be," sniffed Balfour. "They capitalize it for tourists. Ha! Now I feel better. We can fight back. Chaffee sounded as though he meant business."

I did not mention that, from the little I knew of him, Chaffee seemed to be an arrant scoundrel. I was by no means particular.

We all relaxed under this cheerful intimation, and the meal became almost merry. The coffee had just arrived when a car drove in, and there were Balfour's three guards. We interviewed them—hard-eyed, capable men who obviously knew their business. Balfour told them his life had been threatened, and they, with Parr, were to guard the place.

"I sha'n't stir from it," he said. "I'll remain here."

"Okay," said one of the three. "That's the ticket, sir. Now let's see the servants and look over the place. We'll answer for your safety if you don't leave the premises. If any vis-

Illustrated by James Ernst

I stood transfixed as he said swiftly: "I want you to pull out of this Balfour thing. . . . It would grieve me if accidents happened."

"If you're on a spot," said the guard, "there's no sense in wasting time."

itors are expected, we want to know about 'em."

They went off with Parr, and Balfour beamed at us, and returned the silver ring to me.

"I fancy we have that devil blocked now, eh? What are you two going to do for the afternoon? You said you wanted to see the town, Virginia."

She assented. "I've always heard about it and have never seen it. But—"

"Then we'll do it," I broke in "Everything's safe here. We'll see the place, do any errands for our host, maybe take in a movie, and get back for dinner and a big evening with Howard Chaffee."

So, half an hour later, Virginia and I got away for town. . . .

Looking back now at those happenings in Balfour's house, it is easy to realize what childish fools we all were, and I make no exception of myself. At the moment we seemed pretty smart, covering every avenue of possible danger and of approach by the Rajah from Hell, as we thought. Yet we were the veriest bungling amateurs, neglecting the most simple precautions. Aware of his deadly rapidity of action, we were hypnotized by it, and absolutely forgot the possibility that he might have made slow and careful preparation toward gaining his ends. I had previously guessed that I was watched in all I did by his agents, and paid small importance to it; I was as much to blame as anyone.

For an hour or so I drove about with Virginia, even taking a look at the vast estates in the southern suburb of Montecito. Then we came back into town, parked the car, and she did some shopping on Main Street. Fascinated by the luxury shops, she vetoed any movie, and we wandered rather expensively about the place, until I was loaded with her packages.

We were in a drugstore buying toiletries when she suddenly turned to me.

"Hugh, will you telephone Mr. Balfour? He said to get some Kleenex if I saw any, because he had run out and did not know where to find it. They have a big stock here. Ask if he wants the white or colored, and how much to get."

There was a phone-booth in sight, so I went to it and called Balfour's house. The butler responded; I gave my name, and Balfour came to the phone. I put Virginia's question to him.

"Oh, get three or four packages, any color," he replied. "And—Clements!"

"Yes?"

"I had a telegram half an hour ago, sent from Los Angeles." His voice was quite steady. "It was unsigned, but said something would occur within two days."

"Oh! Sirvath?"

"Obviously. I'm trying to get it traced. Won't do much good, I fear."

I hung up thoughtfully. So he had received his warning. The time-limit meant nothing. Lajpat Rai, to give him his true name, might strike at any time. Better not say anything to Virginia about this, I thought, as I pushed open the booth door.

"Ah, Clements! I'd like a word with you—just a word."

I stood immobile, transfixed. There was Virginia, across the store—and here, within a foot, smiling at me coolly, stood the Rajah from Hell! Hat pulled over his darkly luminous eyes, he wore natty flannels and looked quite at his ease.

"Glad you found Miss Trent unhurt and well," he said swiftly, as though we were old friends. "I want to emphasize my kindly feelings toward you, Dr. Clements, by asking you to pull out of this Balfour thing—you and her both. It would grieve me if accidents happened."

"Grieve you?" I repeated. "You and your cheap tricks—see here, you'll get badly bitten if you keep up this deviltry of yours!"

"As though you or your friends could harm me, or even find me!" he said. "Sorry you're stubborn about it, but I must admit the reason is charming. Well, I warn you: clear out before evening comes—for her sake. I can't be answerable otherwise."

With a nod he turned away; Virginia was coming toward us. My childish outburst had been weak, pitiful. There was nothing I could do—no use in making a scene.

"Lajpat Rai!" I exclaimed. He looked back at me, pausing. "What stone is in that silver ring?"

His white teeth showed in a faint grin.

"An uranium compound, of course! So long."

I WATCHED him out the side door, helpless, unable to think or move. Virginia came to me, smiling.

"Who's your handsome friend—oh, what's the matter?"

"Everything," I said. "That was the Rajah from Hell—and he answered to the name of Lajpat Rai—here, come along to the soda fountain; we can talk there."

We got a little table, sat down, gave our order; and I told Virginia what Balfour had said, too—no use trying to hold anything back. The drinks came. Virginia was as white as a sheet, but otherwise never turned a hair.

"There was nothing you could do," she said quietly. "Nothing I could have done either, except to lose my head. Glad I didn't know who he was. I'll know him next time."

"His warnings are to be respected, and this one was well meant. Think you'd better respect it, and leave?"

"No," she replied. "I can do no good, I know, but I intend to exert every effort to bring him to justice for Father's murder, Hugh. I think we're getting somewhere, too. If one of his men can be caught and made to talk, we'll have him. Balfour has the police after this Ghopal Singh, and Chaffee will give us something important when he comes. . . . No, I want to wait for developments. Do you blame me?"

I did not, of course. She was the vitally interested party; she was the one to prosecute if Lajpat Rai could be linked with the murder of Sir James Trent. Some attempt on Balfour's life would be made within two days. It seemed safe enough for her to stick around until morning, anyhow. We might even get our hands on the chief devil himself.

So there was no further argument.

Getting to the car, we drove out to Balfour's house, getting there about four o'clock, and called Parr and Balfour into consultation. They heard my report of the meeting, and Balfour urged Virginia to accept the warning and leave. She refused flatly.

"Wait till morning, anyhow," she concluded. "I must hear what Chaffee has to tell us, you know."

"All right, then." Balfour shrugged and assented. "So he says the black stone is uranium? Bosh! . . . Where's the bally thing now, Clements?"

"Lying on my dresser. Want to give Chaffee a demonstration at midnight?"

"We might," he said. "Hello—what's this, now?"

"This" proved to be one of the three guards, asking for a hearing.

"We've been doing a little checking up, Mr. Balfour," he said. "Your phone wires come to the garage first, then to the house. Why?"

The only heir had been a son, Lajpat Rai. "That's the man," said Virginia. "No one else answers, Hugh."

"There he goes!" yelled one of the guards, and the gun in his hand spat three rapid shots.

"Eh? How the devil would I know?" said Balfour. "Ask the telephone people."

"Well, it'd be a cinch for anyone living in those upstairs garage rooms to tap your wires. All that's needed is a magneto, or a magnet wrapped magneto style. Who stays up there? The two menservants and the cook, I understand."

"Correct," said Balfour. "Both men have been with me for ten years or more. The cook, Mrs. Brown, was employed by my wife three months ago. Local woman. Steady, reliable and a good cook. There's a phone in the garage, by the way."

The guard grinned. "That answers my first question, then. Suppose Mrs. Brown was a spy and reporting all that was said on your phone here?"

We looked at one another. "Well, we'd be in the soup," said Balfour. "I say! I can telephone Mrs. Balfour in Beverly Hills and get this woman's references, and you can look her up in the morning, eh?"

"I'd say do it now," replied the guard, "and one of us can look her up tonight. If you're on a spot, there's no sense in wasting time. We don't want her to listen in and get wise, though; she's in her room now. I'll go chin with her while you're on the wire."

This was good advice; it would have been better a few hours earlier. Thought of what any such spy might have reported to Lajpat Rai *via* the garage phone was disturbing. Balfour called Long Distance; before he got his wife, the guard came back hotfoot. Mrs. Brown had gone, disappeared—gone for a walk half an hour ago, another guard said. It had not been considered worth while reporting. She had carried only a leather arm-bag.

"With the magneto and wire in it," said the guard, and went off to search the woman's room. The search revealed nothing suspicious, but Mrs. Brown did not come back; and this looked bad, but not necessarily suspicious.

There was plenty of food in the house, and Balfour's two menservants threw a meal together without trouble. Just as we were about to sit down, the telephone summoned our host. He rejoined us, rubbing his hands and chuckling.

"I knew it! I knew the blighter would overstep!" Balfour exclaimed. "They've got Ghopal Singh—found him driving a car that's registered in his own name, and he's behind the bars now. The chief said I'd better come down this evening when he's questioned. I'll go in an hour or so. . . . Risk? Poppycock! No risk at all."

Knowing the infernal craft of Lajpat Rai, I was not so sure; however, it was great news, and put us all into an excited dither. At last we had one of the enemy's men in limbo! A start had been made; the Rajah from Hell was not impervious. It put heart into us all. It has often occurred to me, however, that this lucky stroke of ours may have forced Lajpat Rai to change his plans and get into faster motion. . . .

At any rate, we made a merry meal, seasoned with facile predictions on what the morrow would bring forth. The coffee was being served when again Balfour was summoned to the phone by a long-distance call. Once more he returned joyously, and picked a fat cheroot from the open box on the table before he explained.

"That was Chaffee on the line. He's at Santa Maria, a town just north of here. Had some tire trouble and was delayed. Hopes to be along here in a couple of hours. He says not to open any fight on our man until we've talked with Aguilar—dashed important By the way, we've heard nothing from the fellow, eh?"

"Did he say what branch of Government service this Aguilar was in?" I demanded.

"Eh? Oh, yes—Immigration Service."

"Then we may have our man nailed. He probably, almost certainly, entered the country under a false name, and with false papers, and Aguilar is laying for him. Lucky thing Chaffee got into this with us."

"Still, we must catch the wolf," said Virginia Trent, "before we can skin him."

Balfour chuckled over his cheroot, but there was an unhappy truth in her words. Laying hands on the Rajah from Hell would not be easy.

Our host, with activity at hand, became a careful general. He meant to be back from police headquarters before Chaffee arrived. He sent Parr to get out his car and to drive him downtown, and called in the three guards.

"No trouble likely tonight," he said, "and I'll have a radio car sent to prowl on this road; but keep a sharp eye out just the same. Admit nobody except a man named Aguilar, and another named Chaffee; each will be driving. As soon as I return from downtown, Parr will join you, and you'd best form watches to break up the night. That's all."

"What if anyone else shows up?" asked one. "Strangers?"

"Detain them," Balfour directed. "That's what you're here for."

The forces scattered; the car honked; Balfour bade us a cheery farewell and departed with Parr at the wheel. The evening was pitch dark.

I took a look at things outside, and did not envy the guards their job, though they were armed and had flashlights. Balfour had one floodlight that would illumine the garage front; he should have had a dozen to cover the whole house and its approaches. Still, two men should be able to guard the place.

HALF an hour passed. Virginia, at the piano, was playing softly. I finished a cigar and went upstairs. The slight flesh-wound in my thigh was burning a bit, and I decided to put on a fresh dressing. I switched on the lights in my bedroom, and while getting the gauze and adhesive tape, noticed the silver ring with the black stone lying on my dresser. Better take it downstairs when I went, was my thought; Chaffee would want to have a look at it. We might even test it out at midnight.

My room was at the corner of the house overlooking the drive and the approach to the garage. It was warm weather and the windows were open. I mention all these details, not because of their importance, but to counter the allegations that have been made regarding the luck of Lajpat Rai. I do not believe it was luck. I am not so sure there is any such thing as luck, even. I do know that the man went to amazing care, and was swift to take advantage of conditions as they were—and this, for some people, means luck.

I could hear the piano faintly. To change the dressing on my hurt was no great job. I removed my trousers, took off the bandage Parr had applied, and went to the window. I had heard a car drive up, saw a flashlight beam stabbing about down below, and heard voices.

"Who is it?" I demanded. "Is that Mr. Balfour back?"

"It's a Mr. Aguilar looking for him." replied one of the guards. Aguilar! So the Government man was here!

"Good," I rejoined. "I'll be down in five minutes. Bring him in."

They never had a chance to bring him in.

I went into the adjoining bathroom to get some iodine, found mercurochrome instead, and carefully dabbed it on the torn flesh; to use that stuff requires attention, because it spills and stains. On top of it I put the cotton, gauze and strips of tape, well fastening the dressing. The whole thing had not taken more than three minutes, if that. I looked approvingly at the result, caught a slight sound, and looked up.

Across the bedroom, the top of my dresser was gushing flame.

I was spellbound by the incredible sight. Flames were rolling and breaking in a wave; and the wave came from that silver ring. It was like a blowtorch, only a hundred times worse. The window curtains had already caught, and fire was bursting up the old-fashioned wooden Venetian blinds. I heard a yell of alarm from outside.

Then I was darting for my trousers. I yanked them on, got bath-towels and went to the flames. It was like fighting blazing gasoline; the towels whipped the flames all over the place and started a dozen more fires—and the damned ring gushed forth fire until the towel knocked it aside and knocked it under the bed. Then the flames really took hold of things.

Chemical of some sort, naturally; we never learned whether some form of radiant energy started the thing, or whether it was spontaneous. The room was a blazing furnace when at length I gave up the useless effort and staggered out into the hall, slamming the door behind me. Virginia was calling frantically at the foot of the stairs; men were shouting outside.

"Get out of the place!" I called to her. "Phone for the fire department!"

Panic had seized me, I admit. Still, I got downstairs and to the phone, and sent the alarm before she could do so. Balfour's two servants and the guards were already at my room, and opening it up merely spread the blaze. I got Virginia outside, and got my rented car out of the garage. It was the only thing saved.

Naturally, everything else had been crowded out of my head—Aguilar's arrival and the rest. I was taking the car down the road a bit when Balfour's car roared up past me on its return. The whole corner of the house was ablaze now, and the ruddy glare showed me the faces of Parr and Balfour very clearly.

I STOPPED the car as quickly as possible and hastened back to the fire. Little time had passed, rapidly as the blaze had gained. Balfour was out of his car, running to Virginia and the guards, who stood out in the road, well away from the heat. The two menservants had rigged a hose and were dousing the garage roof, to which the flames were nearly reaching. Everything at this side of the house was in a full glare of light. As I approached, I caught sight of another car standing just past the house—that in which Aguilar had arrived. Parr joined me, shouting questions above the roar and crackle of the flames, and we hurried on to the group.

I caught one of the guards by the arm. "Where's that man Aguilar?"

"Gosh, I dunno!" he said, staring around. "He was here a minute ago—back out of the heat somewhere, I guess."

A distant siren, just then, told of coming help. Balfour strode out from us, shouting something at his two servants. I was watching the flames gush out through the house-wall, and thinking how fantastic and improbable must be my story of the fire's origin. We had all forgotten any thought of danger to Balfour.

Then it happened. From the road-edge I saw a tiny spurt of reddish flame; the crack of a shot pierced through the flame-crackle. Balfour threw out his arms and pitched forward in the glare of light.

"There he goes!" yelled one of the guards. I saw a running figure in light gray go darting toward the car up the road. The guard had seen it first, and the gun in his hand spat three rapid shots. The figure fell, rolled over, then was up and in the car. Another guard beside me yelled.

"That's him! That's Aguilar! *Get* him!"

But nobody could get him. A driver must have been waiting with the engine going; the car slipped away and leaped into the darkness and was gone. Aguilar—Lajpat Rai had come giving Aguilar's name, had done his work, had been hit—and was gone. But he had been hit! One of those pursuing bullets had reached him!

Not that this did any good. Just as the fire chief arrived with siren scream-

ing, we dragged Balfour out of the heat, and found him dead, shot through the head.

Firemen arrived, police arrived; water streams blasted into the house and saved half of it, and the garage, from the flames; but Balfour was dead, murdered. Our efforts had accomplished nothing—except, perhaps, to drive Lajpat Rai into this desperately clumsy murder which could not be disguised as being anything else. He must have planned something far more refined and clever. Certainly his get-away was perfect.

Hundreds of cars and a tumultuous crowd poured on the scene. Parr came through it to where Virginia and I were talking with the police chief. He led another man—a slight, inconspicuous little man.

"Here's Aguilar, Dr. Clements," he said. "The real one."

A quiet, small man, saying almost nothing. But he went down to police headquarters with us and sat in on the investigation. Chaffee showed up later, upon his arrival. He was not so old as the others, being in his early fifties; a spry, leathery-faced, hard-eyed man, also with the ability to keep silent, and a bad egg in spite of his money. He was in time to hear everything and put into dry blunt words what the police chief would not say.

"It's a bust, Dr. Clements," he murmured to me. "The beggar's made a bloody fool of us again, and we're damned well bilked."

AND that was precisely the case. The single fact on record was that Balfour had been shot; by whom, none could say. Nobody had identified the murderer. In fact, the coroner next morning got a verdict from his jury of person or persons unknown. The hunt went out for the person we described as Lajpat Rai—and that was the end of it, practically.

"Not quite, of course," Aguilar said that afternoon. He, Parr, Chaffee, Virginia and I were in consultation. "He entered the country with false papers, under a false name. That much remains fact, and it sells me chips to sit into the game. That's a crime. We can't pin Balfour's death on him, maybe. We can't pin Colonel Magruder's death on him, maybe. But he's an accessory to the murder of Sir James Trent; do you want to make that charge, Miss Trent?"

"I certainly do," replied Virginia.

I nodded to her.

Howard Chaffee, who had done very little talking to now, spoke up.

"I haven't had much chance to gam with you folks, but by all accounts I'm next on the list of this Rajah from Hell, so I'd better take the ball and run with it. I've got a place up at Frisco, no family, lots of room, and I aim to give this guy one hell of a fight when he comes along to monkey with me."

"You'll probably have a respite," I said, "since it's pretty sure he drew a bullet last night and may be laid up temporarily."

Chaffee nodded. He was a cool, level-headed sort, and while disliking him heartily, I felt he was the right man for us.

"Okay, then, if you folks want to join in, come along," he offered. "I can use help, yes. Parr wants to get him because of the killing of his master, Colonel Magruder. Miss Trent has her father's murder in mind. Aguilar has a Government job to handle. You, Dr. Clements, have no direct interest—"

"But I have," I said, and met Virginia's eyes for an instant. "Sir James was my friend, and I'm assisting his daughter. Also, I'm the only one of you all who knows the man and can identify him, so that lets me in. Further, I didn't tell the police the truth about how the fire started last night. The truth would be incredible."

Then and there, I gave it to them. Told them about the ring, the black stone, what Lajpat Rai had said concerning it, and what I had seen as the fire's origin.

"Nothing mystical or occult about it," I concluded. "Nothing fuzzy about my brains either. What I saw, I saw, and I can't explain it. Take it for what it's worth."

There was a silence while they eyed me. Then Aguilar spoke in his soft, quiet way, almost apologetically.

"Electronics happens to be a hobby of mine," he said. "During the war I was working with the navy on radar, and the many other electronic devices that were invented. What you've just said, Dr. Clements, is quite credible. I'd say it's clear that this man we're after is an electronics and possibly a radium expert, and therefore dangerous and most interesting in Government eyes. He learned of my expected arrival from the wire-tapping servant and came in my name—impersonating me. I fully intend to wire Washington regarding the issue of a special warrant for his arrest. And for the near future I expect to be located in San Francisco. Do I make myself clear?"

He did, at least to me, for his sidelong glance at Howard Chaffee gave me a hint. He did not entirely like the company he was keeping; nor did I blame him.

"Okay, folks!" Chaffee rose blithely. "I'll get back up to Frisco. You have my address, so show up as soon as you're done with the formalities here. We'll set a trap for Lajpat Rai that will settle him for keeps!"

He little dreamed who would be the victim of his trap—nor did we.

THE MINSTREL RAPSCALLION FRANCOIS VILLON IS HERE CAUGHT UP IN A DESPERATE BUSINESS OF LOVE AND THEFT AND MURDER.

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

Illustrated by John Fulton

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THUNDER shuddered over Paris, and silver lightning penciled glowing streaks of brilliance in the inky sky. Close at hand the chant of the Watch cried out the lateness of the hour; and farther away, the bells of the Sorbonne tongued the sound of curfew at the honest citizens of the city.

François Villon listened, while he watched at the window of the warm room; and when the flare of crackling lightning touched his face, his hawk nose was even bolder than usual above the cynical mockery of his lips. He cradled a fragile glass of ruby wine in lean fingers, conscious of the woman who rested so quietly on the couch, and studied her reflection in the polished window glass.

Rogue and His Lady

"You speak in riddles, Marie," he said at last. "The King is my friend, and once again I am welcome at court. How can there be trouble which concerns me?"

She laughed, and the sound was a soft caress which drew him about, touching his senses with the same magic which had bent him to her will so many years before.

"Pierre," she said, "Pierre de Montvain. It is said he looks for the men who stripped his Paris house while he was at Blois."

François Villon lifted the glass and inspected the wine critically, a thin thread of laughter running through his mind. Well he knew who had stripped the house, for even now his purse was heavy with the gold which had been his share of the loot. But that Marie d' Ormond should know was a bit shocking, even to his iron nerves.

Marie d' Ormond watched, seeking a play of expression in the rogue-poet's dark face; and when she saw none, her slender hand touched the silk cushions at her side.

"Come—beside me," she said. "It has been long since last we were together—until now."

He felt the quickening of his pulse then, and cursed silently beneath his breath. She could do this to him, even as she had always done, and it was maddening in its way, for he knew her for what she was.

Not always had she been like this; once she had run the streets, a wild thing, stealing, spying, beaten by a father whose last cries had been sealed within him by boiling oil for counterfeiting the King's money.

Villon had known her then, as she had known many men; and even then she had been rapacious, eager for things which her life could not give her. He had seen her rise, man by man, *coup* by *coup,* until now she stood at the threshold of a title.

She was dangerous, that he knew; and as unscrupulous and vicious as the wolves which prowled Paris streets in the dark of night. And yet, seeing her on the couch, he felt his blood race, and a heady eagerness took him to her side at her soft words.

He sat and finished the drink and then laid the glass aside. He could

feel her warmness at his side, and the scent of her perfume ran into his senses and befuddled them more than the liquors he had drunk.

He slid an arm about her waist, and his fingers touched smooth skin. Her mouth was cherry red, and he bent his head. For a second she held back, and then she was close to him, warm and pliant and strangely eager.

She broke free at last, and there was no laughter in her eyes, only a strange light of panic which he did not see.

"La!" she said then. "You have not changed."

François Villon laughed. "Could anyone change about you?" he asked.

Marie d' Ormond smiled, drawing the silken robe closer to her body. She was composed now, eyes calculating again; and as though sensing the change, Villon reached for the wine, tilting it into the twin glasses.

"All right," he said at last, after both had sipped, "what is it that you want?"

Thunder boomed outside, its vibration touching the swinging chandelier. Tiny flames licked at charred wood in the fireplace. Portraits stared with blind eyes from the walls, and the room was close with the richness of its fittings. The rogue-poet ran his gaze about the room, conscious that Marie watched him covertly.

"Well?" he said at last, impatiently.

"I need your help, François," she said finally. "I want you to steal a jewel for me."

"A jewel—steal!" François Villon turned his head, incredulity lighting in his dark eyes. "You jest."

"No, I do not jest," the woman said, and her blue eyes were serious and suddenly cold as ice. "Carot has it; he wears it in a small velvet sack about his throat. I want it, must have it; and you are the one who must steal it for me."

"But why?" Villon swung his right hand in an encircling gesture. "What can one more jewel mean to you, when you have this, and when you are rumored to be Comte Du Chal's wife within the month?"

HE saw then that changed she had not. Her breasts were soft and fully rounded, and she had the face of a woman, intensely beautiful, her hair like a smooth golden cap, but she had not changed. He saw past the beauty and touched her mind, and she was a gutter *gamine,* brutal and selfish in her way, heedless of all others.

"One more jewel!" she answered. "François, it means the difference between life and death to me." She looked about, and then laid a slim hand over his. "I shall marry Du Chal, as the rumors say, within the month; but to do that I must have a dowry. I have this only because the moneylenders have been generous. I

have a month's grace to repay what I have borrowed; then I shall be stripped of everything."

Her voice strengthened, and her hand closed tightly over his. Her mouth worked with the tightness of her ambition, but her eyes were as cold and calculating as those of a cat.

"I sha'n't go back," she said. "I've worked too hard to rise this high. You've got to help—because of what we once meant to each other."

François Villon almost laughed. That after so many years she should appeal to him on such a basis was almost comic. They had been youthful then, fired with youthful passion and desire; the years had quenched such flames almost completely.

"No!" he said. "I cannot risk a gibbet noose."

Marie d' Ormond drew away, and all softness drained from her as though it had never been. He saw the change, and his back stiffened, for he sensed the words she was about to say.

"I want that ruby, Villon," she said thinly, "and I intend to have it. You know it, know it well; the 'Star of Allah,' it is called, and any moneylender in the *Coquille* will pay a fortune for it."

Villon nodded. He knew the jewel, and knew further that even a rascally moneylender would give five thousand pieces of gold for it. It had disappeared years before, after a robbery of the King's palace, and rumor had been that it had been cut into smaller gems for easier disposal. How Carot had obtained it was of no matter at the moment. Fabulously wealthy, like many collectors, he probably had many stolen valuables, hoarding and fingering them in the privacy of his room.

A thought crossed Villon's mind then, a memory, and his eyes clouded.

"You're lying, Marie," he said. "You cannot be penniless, for I know your late husband left you money."

"All right!" Her voice was as harsh as his. "I lied. The truth is, someone has found out about me and threatens to tell Du Chal of my true beginning, unless I steal the jewel for him."

"Who?"

"It does not matter."

Villon shrugged. The court was studded with men and women as unscrupulous as any in the Thieves' Guild, the difference being only in their dress and education and station in life.

"No!" he said again, weighing everything and rejecting the request.

"François," Marie bent forward. "I mean this: you will steal that ruby and bring it to me. If you do not, then information will go to de Montvain as to who robbed his house."

"I will impoverish myself; but for you I am willing to shave profits to nothing."

"Like that?"

"Like that!" The woman's voice softened. "Don't be a fool, François; this will not be your first theft; Carot means nothing to you. And to make it worth your while, I shall pay five hundred gold-pieces to you on the day you deliver the jewel."

Villon considered. He knew the depths of the slim woman at his side, and he had no illusions as to her ability to carry through her threat to inform the authorities of the robbery of de Montvain's house.

She would turn on him as fast as she had turned on others. She had come up through life the hard way; it was even whispered that two husbands' lives had been snuffed out because they had carelessly eaten soup which she had prepared with her own hands. She was dangerous, doubly so because she was a woman, without principle and without love.

"All right," he agreed, "I'll steal the jewel. But mind, do not play me for a cat's-paw." He rose to his feet. "When do you want it?"

Marie was smiling now, the soft contented smile of a woman who has won her way. "Within the week," she said. She laughed aloud. "We still work well together, eh, François?"

"Well enough," he agreed, and reached for his cloak. "I'll take your carriage."

She came from the couch, pressing close to him, and despite the muted throb of anger in his heart, he held her closely for a moment, tasting the warmness of her lips.

"A week," he said, and left the room.

VILLON stood a moment on the outer steps of the house, watching the rain slant into the muddy road, hearing the thunder cracking across the sky. The freshness of the air was clearing the wine-fumes from his mind now; and anger and regret was growing.

He had thought the evening to be nothing more than a romantic interlude, a secret rendezvous, and had found it a trap from which there was no escape. Marie had been clever, damnably so, and thus he must do her will or find himself again a hunted man, banished from the heart of Paris, which was the only life he loved.

He cursed softly and dashed toward the waiting carriage. Two men rode the box, but as was the custom at such clandestine meetings, they did not turn their heads, rousing only when they felt the weight of his step in the carriage.

"Rue St. James, driver," Villon called, and reached to shut the door.

A hand twisted it from his clutch; and a slim figure, wet and muddy, darted into the carriage, to sink with a chilled gasp at Villon's side.

Villon caught at his dagger, sliding it free with the deftness of long skill, and lifting it, touched the point to the intruder's side.

"Move, and you die!" he said coldly.

He had seen such things before. Crimps and footpads worked this way, darting into carriages, knowing the occupants could afford no outcry at the moment, and then robbing them at a blade's threat.

"François!" the intruder said, and Villon's dagger dropped in surprise.

"Velvet!" he said. "What fool's errand are you on now?"

The carriage lurched into movement, the driver and coachman unaware of what had transpired inside. Wheels slammed echoes from the rutted roads, and mud slashed high in the rain.

Villon reached and turned up the lantern-wick, until the interior was bright with light. Curtains hid the night, and he was alone with the slim visitor.

She was shivering, despite the cloak about her shoulder, and he saw then that she was drenched. He drew her cloak away and fastened his own about her shoulders. She thanked him with her eyes, and then huddled close, shivering, stopping only when moments had passed.

And when at last he saw that some of the chill was gone, Villon took his arm from about her shoulders and twisted her to face him.

"Now explain," he ordered. "What were you doing back there?"

"Listening," the girl said defiantly. "You fool, you blind fool, that blonde doxie netted you as nicely as any carp from the Seine!"

The rogue-poet flushed. "And what business is that of yours?" he said as coldly as he could.

"I love you, François," she said simply.

A sense of guilt came to him then, for he knew she spoke the truth. They were alike, he and she, thieves and rascals, born of a time such as the world had never seen; and within them

was the dark laughter and brooding resentment of Satan himself. She was gypsy, dark and daring, with the slim hips and full breasts of the Romanies. Blue sheened the blackness of her hair, and the blueness of her eyes was so dark as to be almost ebony; even now, dressed as she was like a boy, cape huddled about her shoulders, she was feminine and dangerous to his peace of mind.

"I know," he said, "and I you."

Velvet reared like a frightened angry cat. "Then how dare you kiss and touch that woman! Oh, don't think I didn't see, don't think I was on the roof, looking through a window, for the fun of feeling rain about my body." She touched his face, and her mood changed with a mercurial speed. "You blind fool, can't you see she plays with you?"

Villon shrugged. "She has me at sword's-point; I have no choice."

"Ha!" Velvet laughed scornfully. "Denounce her, tell her story. She cannot fight if she is thrown back into the gutter from where she came."

The rogue-poet scowled. "Montvain would listen to her words; he'll have my life, if he finds out I helped to rob his house." He shook his head. "I have no choice but to steal the ruby, no choice at all."

Velvet fell silent for the moment, and Villon thought she had fallen asleep, for her eyes were closed. The carriage lurched, and rain slashed at the curtains. The world outside was a wet hell, but inside the carriage there was warmth and light. He lifted an edge of the curtain, and saw that the carriage was in the Rue St. James.

"HOW?" Velvet said suddenly; and Villon, understanding, spread his hands in an almost helpless gesture.

"I am not certain," he said. "The King's Ball is Friday; that should be the time."

"Very well," Velvet said, and reached so suddenly for the door that he could not stop her. One glimpse he had of her smile, and then she was gone, slipping into the night, rain whipping into the door opening before the panel closed.

He shrugged, and turned the lantern down, until the flame was but a feeble glow. Minutes slid slowly past as he sat and pondered the problem. He went over every phase, seeking a way out, and always did he run against a blank wall he could not pierce or scale. He was trapped as surely as any man could be; and knowing Marie d' Ormond, he knew that his freedom hung on her whim, even if he succeeded in stealing the ruby.

"Women!" he said in deep disgust; and then he smiled, remembering the hour which had passed before Marie's demand. There had been compensations. . . .

And then a flush ran upward from his collar, deepening until he felt his face afire, for he was just then fully realizing that Velvet had been watching through a window crack.

"Damn!" he said, and wondered if ever another man had been so plagued.

He felt the carriage stop at last, and opening the door, he stepped into the street. Mud squirted about his boots and the rain had not slacked.

"All right," he called, and the carriage slid into the night.

He darted into the dubious shelter of a house-front, huddling against the wall, conscious that he carried Velvet's cloak, for she had taken his with her. It was no protection now, but he flung it about his shoulder and ran his gaze along the street.

The Pomme de Pin threw yellow shards of lights through cracked shutters, and he could hear the riotous sounds of merriment from the late drinkers. Bagot would be there, big and burly, banging his tankard of ale and eating. King of the *Coquille,* the Thieves' Guild, he was a dull-witted merchant by day and a thieving genius at night. Jehan would be there, too, dressed like a court dandy, ogling the doxies and playing *glic,* full grown, and yet no larger than a boy. And of course Saul the Jew would be there, huddling in one corner, sucking at pendulous lips, dirty hands ready to change good hard coins for anything stolen which could be resold.

François Villon chuckled, the first glimmerings of a plan coming to his mind. He paced swiftly down the street, bent against the rain, and pushed through the tavern's door. Light and warmth and the odors of cooking thrust at him, and he smiled at the merriment for a moment unnoticed.

This was the Paris he knew and loved, hard and glittering and brutal, yet soft beneath for those who needed her help. A lutist played before the fire, tankard at his side, pausing only to quaff liquor continually replaced. The keeper and two barmaids hustled about, carrying wine and ale and crusty food to the tables, perspiring but laughing, while the half a hundred customers talked and banged for service, and sang and generally raised a din that would bring the Watch with quieting words half a dozen times during the night.

"Villon!" a voice bellowed; and then he was in the crowd, being forced to a table, refreshment shoved to hand.

He laughed, looking about, and playfully pinched the soft curve of the nearest doxie. She squealed in mock anger, but the invitation in her eyes was clear and bold.

"A poem," a drinker shouted, and the crowd echoed the words, until at last the rogue-poet held his hand for silence.

"A tip," he called, "to all cross coves."

He reached and gestured, and the lutist handed the instrument to him. He plucked the strings idly, words forming in his mind, memory calling hidden rhymes. Laughter rang in the room, and then men and women settled back, quiet coming. And when at last he was ready, Villon plucked a single string.

"Suppose you screeve? or go cheap-jack?
Or fake the broads? or fig a nag?
Or thimble rig? or knap a yack?
Or pitch a snide? or smash a rag?
Suppose you duff? or nose and lag?
Or get the straight and land your pot?
How do you melt the multy swag?
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

Fiddle or fence, or mace, or mack,
Or moskeneer, or flash the drag;
Dead lurk a crib, or do a crack,
Pad with a slang, or chuck a fag;
Bonnet, or tout, or mump or gag;
Rattle the tats, or mark the spot:
You cannot bag a single stag—
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

Suppose you try a different tack,
And on the square you flash your flag?
At penny-a-lining make your whack,
Or with the mummers mump and gag?
For nix, for nix the dibs you bag!
At any graft, no matter what,
Your merry goblins soon stravag—
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

It's up the spout and Charley Wag
With wipes and tickers and what not;
Until the squeezer nips your scrag,
Booze and the blowens cop the lot." (*)

He finished, and laughter ran the huge room. This was the jargon of the thieves, and smiles touched dark faces. He rang a last note on the lute, and then handed it back to the player. Tilting a tankard, he drained it, and then swung through the laughing drinking crowd toward Saul the Jew, who sat in a far corner, faint amusement in his greasy eyes.

"It is good, Villon," Saul said quietly, and gestured an invitation to the rogue-poet to sit down across from him.

François Villon shrugged. "It is a poem," he said, "but the thought will not be heeded."

The Jew spread fat hands. "Men must make their own lives," he said philosophically. Then his eyes hooded a bit. "What is on your mind?"

"My mind?" Villon dissembled.

"Yes!" Saul smiled. "You do not seek me out except for business." His hands rubbed unconsciously. "What have you to sell?"

Villon shrugged. "I come to buy," he said. "I want a stone which looks exactly like the 'Star of Allah.'"

**William Ernest Henley's translation*

There was a calculated abandon in her dancing, all of the passion which smoldered in her Romany heart.

Saul sucked in his breath, and for once his hands were still. His gaze flicked about, and his head drew tighter to his shoulders.

"You know where the ruby is?" he asked eagerly. "You intend to steal it?"

François Villon laughed. "I want a copy of the stone," he admitted.

Saul ran a dirty hand over his lips. "We are old friends, no?" he said. "Then listen. I have a stone; I will give it to you—for a small price. And then you will sell the ruby to me—for a great price."

The rogue-poet shrugged. "I want only to buy a duplicate ruby," he said. "Beyond that, I know nothing."

Saul nodded. "But you do not forget that we are friends—later?"

"I forget nothing," Villon agreed. "Now, when can I have the ruby?"

"Tomorrow." Saul pushed the wine toward Villon. "Three, four, yes—five thousand pieces of honest gold I give you. It is a fortune; I will impoverish myself; but for you, I am willing to shave any profits to nothing."

François Villon drank from the jug and wiped his mouth. "You're a greasy thief, Saul," he said affectionately. "If you'll pay that, then you'll sell for five times that."

Saul smiled. "I do not lose money," he admitted.

"Tomorrow, then," Villon said, and came from the table. "And don't forget, the stone must be a perfect imitation."

The Jew spread fat hands. "I know my business," he said in injured pride.

"Good!" Villon turned away, going toward friends at the far side of the room. He felt good and reckless, and with a driving urge in him then. Events were shaping to his liking.

And then the roaring life of the Pomme de Pin caught him up, and he gave no more thought to the future, content with the present which lay so invitingly at hand.

THIS was the King's Ball, the greatest event of the season. Men and women came for countless leagues to show their silks and satins and to make a leg or shy curtsy. Royalty was here, and those who would become royalty, and those who fawned on those of the bluest blood. Here intrigues grew, and love became reality and scandal was a casual thing which flourished behind locked doors and in hidden spots.

Here it was that François Villon stood on a Friday night, as he had stood before, when the King's favor had enfolded him. He was a rogue and a thief, and by some accounts a murderer; but tonight he walked in peace, for banishment had been lifted, and he was a free man.

He was an Oriental pirate this night, yellow-faced, slant-eyed mask covering his piratical face, and his eyes glittered through the mask-holes, searching, seeking, never still.

He could feel the weight of the huge ruby in the sash at his slim waist, and he touched it now and again, feeling the excitement of the moment in his blood. He had made his plans; now all was in the laps of the gods.

The throng was great, laughter mingling and spreading warmly in the great ballroom. Tapestries glowed red and yellow and blue and green in the tapers' light; gilded chairs were ranged about, and the punch-table was crowded with those whose thirst was tantalized by the ruby and amber wines and liquors which spread in bottled glory.

Villon smiled behind his mask, walking about, even dancing when scented arms lifted at his request. The orchestra played, and couples spun and whirled, dipping and bending, until the scene was a riot of moving color that even he, a poet, would have been hard-pressed to describe in all its flowing beauty.

He saw Marie d' Ormond, and a thread of anger came to his mind. She carried a gilt mask on a short wand,

"You scum," she finished, "once you could have had me; but no, you preferred a gypsy girl!"

but it could not hide her identity, for her beauty was a cold reckless thing that hovered men about her like moths at flame.

She saw Villon, but his mask gave no clue to his identity, and except for a sudden momentary interest in his lithe bearing, she gave no heed. He bowed slightly, in passing, and then went toward the punch-table, retrieving a slim glass of ruby wine, and sliding his mask a bit so he could drink.

"You lucky dog!" a voice said almost at his back, and turning, he saw Comte Du Chal, unmasked, talking with a group of friends.

He liked the man, as he liked few at court, for the Comte was young and carefree and yet with a sense of responsibility which augured well for his future. They had met many times in the past, and it was Du Chal whose aid had helped to secure the King's grace for Villon.

And now Du Chal stood and listened to his friends talk, his eyes ever on Marie d' Ormond across the room. He was in love, had been for days; and it angered Villon then that the man could not see through the pretences of the woman and know her true nature. She was not for him, for she was cruel and calculating; she would despoil his wealth and wreck his soul. And yet nothing could be said, particularly by Villon, for Du Chal would use a blade to any man who talked.

FRANCOIS VILLON shrugged. The world was a vicious place at best; each man had to fight his way, forge his own destiny. And if Du Chal was destined to marry Marie d' Ormond, then that was the way it had to be.

A staff sounded at the door, and the King came through, men and women bowing and making curtsies, as he walked the length of the ballroom to his place at the head. He handed the Queen into her chair, and then was seated. He nodded, and the entertainment began.

A man ate fire; he ate it and spat it, and played with it as though it were a harmless gas. Smoke spurted from his flaring nostrils, and women stared wide-eyed, while men forgot their wining and their wenching for a time. This was one of a traveling troupe, brought here for the evening, and when the King applauded; the revelers slapped their palms in riotous glee.

Next was a vagabond lutist, gay in his red and yellow costume, and singing bawdies which brought blushes to the ladies' faces and soft laughter from the men. The minstrel was clever, and his songs wove names into the impromptu ballads, seeking out person after person, treading close, but never slipping past the line between mockery's laughter and sudden hot anger.

François Villon watched, liking what he saw. He heard the laughter, and he hummed with the lutist. He was pressed back against the wall now, unnoticed by the throng, and he slipped farther back, edging toward the man he had identified as Carot.

Carot was at the end of the liquor table, dressed in the flamboyant costume of an Indian Prince, feathered turban on his round head, his corpulent body swathed in flowing shirt and trousers and robe of weighted blue and yellow silk. His face was hidden behind a brown-tinted mask, but his laughter rang with complacent amusement, as much a giveaway as though he were unmasked.

Villon felt the tension coming to him again. This would have to be swift, executed within flashing seconds. This robbery would have to move with a precision so delicate one mistake in timing would ruin everything. The crowd was great, and many would turn to help; Villon had to be first, his lean fingers slipping with delicate ease to accomplish their task.

He leaned against the table end, indolent of posture, but his senses preternaturally sharp. He heard the applause for the lutist, but he gave no heed, running his eyes about the immediate vicinity.

None watched him; all were intent upon the entertainment. Carefully, his right hand moving with a studied slowness, he reached out and dropped a small white tablet into the glass at Carot's hand, and in the same movement, his fingers went past and gripped a full glass. The movement was so natural it was undetectable; a moment later, Villon stepped away, the first step of his plan accomplished.

Cymbals clanged, and fingers tapped a curious rhythm on twin hip drums. Then music spurted, spreading, and a slim gypsy dancer slid onto the polished floor. Villon caught his breath.

The dancer was Velvet, black hair aswirl, soft breasts cupped in a lacy spangled halter. Her crimson skirt flared about her slim tanned thighs, weighted with silver coins, so that as she whirled, it petaled in a wheeling circle. Her feet were bare, and she danced with a tigerish grace which stilled all sound but the music.

There was calculated abandon in her dancing, all of the primitive passion which smoldered deep in her Romany heart. She moved, and there was melody in each movement. She laughed, and men caught their breaths with sudden urge. She laughed, white teeth even whiter against dark skin, and ladies of the court shrank within their finery with instinctive hate.

"The fool, the little fool!" François Villon whispered to himself then, for he knew why she was here.

She had bribed her way into the traveling troupe which was the entertainment. She was dancing as only a gypsy could, ready at any instant to come to his aid, should danger threaten his plans. She did not know what he had in mind, but she was ready to help; and because he knew her keen mind, he did not discount the aid that she could give.

But he had no time for thinking of her then. Carot was fumbling for the glass of wine at his back, eyes still on Velvet. Villon could feel the hot perspiration sliding down his face and throat. Now was the moment; the next three minutes would decide all.

The drug was powerful; he had used it before. It would not kill, nor would the victim suspect he had been drugged. It worked with brutal swiftness, bringing sudden faintness, almost unconsciousness, which would last but a few short moments. Then the drinker would recover as though nothing had happened.

And in those fleeting minutes, Villon would have his chance.

CAROT'S plump fingers found the glass, almost toppled it, then caught it up. He tilted his mask with his free hand and drank, slowly, but steadily, and then set the glass aside.

Villon swallowed heavily, fingers coming up to touch the false ruby in the sash at his waist. His masked face swung about, keen eyes studying those close at hand. Music came faster; and now Velvet was like a flickering flame, flashing over the floor, coming ever closer to Villon, as though she had singled him out of the entire crowd.

Carot swayed. He caught his balance, and his right hand pawed suddenly, blindly, at his mask. Villon moved a step toward him, ready.

Carot fell—he fell suddenly and without warning, a deep sigh welling from his chest. And even as he crumpled, François Villon stepped forward and caught his weight. And others whirled, faint cries of alarm sounding, but for the brief second he needed, Villon was alone with the man, bending over him, apparently pulled down by the gross weight.

And in that second he acted. He used his right hand with the blinding speed of a pickpocket, fingers sliding down the back of Carot's neck, until his fingers caught a slim chain. Twisting it about thumb and finger, he broke it. Then in the same movement, he drew it free, cupping the small silk bag in his fingers. So swift had been the action, he had the jewel before Carot settled to the floor.

Then men moved in to help. Velvet still danced, music swirling in the gay ecstatic pattern only gypsy melodies possess. The court watched her slim figure pirouetting, and only a few knew that Carot was down.

Villon backed, letting others take his place. His lean fingers tugged at the drawstrings of the silk bag, fumbling strangely for the moment. He did it instinctively, watching, making certain his action went unnoticed. He saw then that Velvet had seen and understood the small drama at the table. She whirled toward him, spinning, dark eyes alive.

The bag came open, and Villon slid the ruby into the hollow of his cupped hand. Then he reached for the false stone at his waist. Panic bit at him, blinding panic. The ruby was gone!

He swore, hand rushing at the cloth about his waist, searching for the telltale lump. He found nothing—and even then, he saw the first signs of returning consciousness in Carot.

His gaze went to the floor, hoping to see the stone where it had fallen. He saw nothing but polished wood. People crowded around in fantastic costumes, milling about. He knew then that he had lost the gamble; the real stone must be replaced in the bag, for when Carot missed it, he would raise a hue and cry that would bring Palace guards like flies.

He felt the lump at his ankle. He felt it, and bent, hand sliding along his leg. The false stone was there, caught within the cloth, and because of the banded bottom, he could not get it free.

He felt the shock of a body striking his own. Perfumed flesh touched his, and he almost went backward. A slim hand caught his, and then Velvet had regained her balance, having apparently tripped. She was gone, whirling back up the length of the room, finishing her dance.

And in her hand, clutched tightly, was the real ruby, deftly plucked from Villon's fingers.

Carot was conscious now, mask stripped away, coming heavily to his feet. He shook his head, driving away the blackness in his mind, and his hand went automatically to his throat. Surprise came to his eyes.

Villon slashed his trouser-leg. He drew his dagger and slashed the cloth with a slight tearing movement. Velvet had forced him back against the table, and the action went unnoticed, as though he but brushed himself. His fingers slid in and caught the false stone and drew it forth. An instant later, it was in the silk bag, strings caught tight.

"M'sieur," Villon said, and pressed to Carot's side, "I think you must have dropped this when you fainted."

He didn't hear the thanks; he gave them no heed. He was unrecognized because of the mask and costume; and later, when Carot found his stolen ruby had been restolen, there would be no connection with Villon.

François breathed easily for the first time in minutes. An age had passed in those flying action-filled seconds. He pressed through the throng and

left the ballroom, conscious that Velvet's dance was over.

He went along the hall and down the stairs and through the outer door. His hand mockingly saluted the iron-rigid guards, and then he was at the carriage which had drawn up.

"In," Velvet said sharply and urgently.

He clambered in, drawing the mask from his face and breathing in a deep sighing sound.

"Close," he said. "That was close!"

Velvet laughed. She wore a cloak over her dancing costume, and her eyes were dark and esoteric. She opened her clenched hand, and the huge ruby, large as a pigeon egg, flashed and glinted bloodily in the light of the carriage lamp.

"There, François," she said.

"You little devil!" François Villon said fondly, and drew her close.

MARIE D' ORMOND was eager. Her fingers twisted, and the glitter in her eyes was no less bright than that of the great ruby in Villon's fist. They were outside the silk shop near the Thieves' market, and they fingered the display, apparently talking as idle persons will who meet casually on the street.

"Where is it, François?" she asked. "I know you took it, for I heard the story of Carot's fainting at the Ball."

He unfolded his hand, barely giving her a glimpse of it.

She caught her breath in sudden avarice, and almost did she snatch at his hand. Then control came, and she smiled at the rogue-poet.

"You always were clever, François," she said. "I knew that, if anybody could bring the ruby to me, that person would be you."

"You still want it?" he asked. "There is no other way?"

"Of course not." The first faint flush of anger came to her cheeks. "Now, may I have it?"

François Villon felt a stubbornness drawing at his nerves. "And you still plan to marry Du Chal?"

"Of course. Within three weeks; and then if anybody talks, there will be nothing he can do." Her hand stretched out imperiously. "Come, we made a bargain."

Reluctantly, he slipped the fabulous ruby into her hand and watched it disappear into the throat of her dress. For the first time in years he felt no pleasure in a theft.

"The money?" he said. "It is a bad bargain, but it is done."

Marie d' Ormond laughed then, softly, fully, and it was as though the years had never passed and she was but a street gamin, greedy, unprincipled and thoroughly evil.

"Don't be a fool, François," she said. "You stole for memory's sake." She stiffened at his involuntary movement. "Do nothing," she warned, "or I shall swear you tried to sell me the stolen ruby; you'll hang for that."

François Villon was still then, the white-hot pulse of anger at his throat. He had been played for a ninny, a cat's paw, and the knowledge was galling. His wide mouth thinned, but he knew that he was whipped, for one outcry from her would seal his doom just as she predicted.

"And maybe I could tell a story also," he said, knowing the futility of his words.

Marie d' Ormond smiled. "Your story would reach no ears of importance," she declared. "Comte Du Chal would see to that." She swung about to leave, and then turned again, and he saw the blazing hate swirling in her eyes. "You scum, you gutter scum," she finished, "once you could have had me for your own; but no, you preferred a gypsy girl! Well, take her, Master poet, for once I am Comte Du Chal's wife, you'll never step again into court."

She was gone then, going toward her carriage; and in the moment that passed, Villon almost followed. Then a hand touched his shoulder, and turning, he saw that Pierre de Montvain stood at his side.

The man was huge, face blocky with repressed anger, and his hand was a vise on Villon's shoulder.

"Word has come to me, Master Villon," Montvain said, "that you know something of the robbery of my house. I make no threats, but I make a promise. Unless the property is returned, or the value, two thousand pieces of gold, the gibbet of Montfauçon will have a new occupant. You have until the end of the week."

He shouldered past, waiting for no word from the rogue-poet. His walk was heavy and his shoulders squared. He paused only when Marie d' Ormond's carriage passed, touching his hat; and then the carriage was rolling by, white fingers waving mockingly at Villon.

François Villon shook his head. This last was a final slap in the face from Marie. Not content with robbing him of five hundred pieces of gold as his price for stealing the "Star of Allah," she had flung this last at him, knowing he could never pay so princely a sum.

"I warned you, François," a soft voice said at his side, and the poet turned brooding eyes at Velvet.

He smiled reluctantly, struck by the humor of her "I told you so"—but laughter clogged in his throat.

"You heard?" he asked.

"I heard," Velvet admitted. "I was just within the doorway."

François Villon spread his hands helplessly. "There is nothing to do but leave Paris," he said. "The money from the robbery is long since spent by Bagot and Jehan and the others."

"Saul?" Velvet asked.

"The Jew!" François Villon did laugh. "When money slips out of one hand, ten times the amount must come into the other."

Velvet fingered a length of purple silk. She was utterly feminine, breasts pouting against the cloth of her dress, her hair a loose swirl about her face.

"You've learned your lesson?" she asked. "You know at last that playing with women other than myself is a stupid thing?"

Villon chuckled. "Have your fun," he said ruefully. "It appears that soon I shall not be around to chide."

Velvet opened her hand then, and it was as though a flame glowed within her tiny palm.

"Look!" she said simply, and laid the ruby in Villon's fingers.

"But—" François Villon could find no words. His gaze went to where Marie d' Ormond's carriage was even then disappearing down the street.

Velvet laughed softly. "Where women are concerned, Master poet," she said, "you are a child. I knew her for what she was and what she would do. And so, when Saul told me you had bought a false stone from him, I knew you planned to substitute it for the real. I too played your game; and I too substituted for the 'Star of Allah.' The ruby you gave Marie d' Ormond was the second false stone bought from Saul."

"Then Marie—" François Villon began to laugh.

He laughed, and the mirth swirled into the morning air, drew faces about in quick smiles, and wove a cocoon of gayety about him and Velvet. This was the irony of life which tickled his ribald senses. Marie had been too clever; now her blackmailer would talk, and she would return to the place where she had started her ambitious climb.

Even if she talked about Villon, that would not matter, for most was common knowledge, and he was under the protection of Charles VII now.

And Monsieur Pierre de Montvain!

The ruby would take care of him, and leave thousands besides.

AND so François Villon laughed. "Velvet," he said, "I am a rogue, a rascal, not worthy of your faintest touch. But believe me, when I say I love you!"

And she knew he spoke the truth, because she had some of the devil in her that smoldered in him. "Come," she said, "we must see Saul."

Arm in arm they went down the street. Paris smiled maternally at her favorite son. The air was warm, and children laughed happily in the streets. And because they were in love, because they were a rogue and his lady, they would have had the world no other way.

The Gray-faced Buck

He was a canny old codger, and he fought valiantly for his own.

by JIM CHAPMAN

Illustrated by John Costigan, N.A.

THE November sun had risen, casting long shadows from the scattered spruces, when Curly Evans crawled to the rim of Porcupine Valley. He set his rifle carefully aside, adjusted his binoculars, and began to scan the country. A skiff of snow had fallen during the night, and it sparkled. He squinted, and crowfoot lines appeared around his eyes, somehow matching the faded red shirt, old mackinaw trousers and soft felt hat that he wore. These were weathered, and seemed a

part of the scene, like the creatures he hunted.

Curly Evans was a big-game guide; and a deer-hunt such as this was an old story—all in a day's work to him, for the sport had long ago become commonplace. But now, as his binoculars paused, and he turned to signal his younger companion, there was jubilation in his eyes, and he even felt excitement. His wits were to be matched against the cunning of a remarkable animal, and his spirit leaped to meet the challenge.

AS Matt Paulister crawled up the slope, Curly looked thoughtfully at him. He noted that the man's red hunting-cap and shirt were new—the wrinkles scarcely out of them. Obviously they were fresh out of some city sport-shop. The same went for the model '99 Savage repeater which fairly glistened with newness. Curly had almost decided that he had a greenhorn on his hands, when he noticed the way the man was crawling. Matt Paulister held his rifle clear of the ground and crept forward as though familiar with the task. His expression was eager.

"Do you see one?" he asked.

Curly nodded. "You must have a lucky star. Look over this root, and line up that big pine halfway down the slope. He's lying in the buck-brush down there in the bottom, and his face looks sort of white, like a weathered stump. There! Did you see his antlers shine? That's old Gray-face, with a head that more than one millionaire sportsman has dreamed of hanging in his den. He's the most famous buck in this country!"

Matt Paulister whistled softly, and his eyes began to sparkle while he fumbled with numb fingers at the adjustment on his binoculars. Curly watched him curiously. There was something different about this fellow.

Matt Paulister drew a sharp breath. "Brother!" he exclaimed in awe. "That's really a *buck!* Do you think we can get close to him?"

Curly chuckled. "We can try," he said; "but as I said before, that's old Gray-face!" He paused long enough to bite off the corner of a new plug of tobacco expertly. "See that long swale with the willows growing along the edge?" he asked. "Well, it looks from here as though the old master made the mistake of lying too close to it. That's low ground, and there's a game-trail behind the willows. It's the best chance I've had at the old buck this year. Even the wind's right! Let's hope no one else sees him and gets there first."

Gray-face was chewing his cud as he lay in the buck-brush, body hidden, but head and horns towering up. The wind was at his back, while his eyes and ears swept the country before him. With each passing season he had been hunted with increasing persistence, and it had developed in him an unusual caution.

Now, with the hunt in full swing, he was constantly alert and aware of every sound around him. A mouse rustled through the grass-roots; a flock of chickadees fed in a nearby birch, and a magpie chattered to herself in a willow clump twenty yards away. They were all peaceful sounds, and Gray-face regurgitated another cud and proceeded to chew it contentedly.

The buck's attention turned to the magpie, and his mild eyes noted every movement. She was a friend; one of those strange comradeships which are sometimes formed in the wild. He saw her hop around the willow clump, cock her head sidewise, and look at him quizzically. Then, unable to see anything unusually interesting about him, she began to preen her feathers, still muttering to herself in nasal tones, punctuated by an occasional loud *"Squaaaw!"* He knew that it was magpie small-talk, a means of entertaining herself.

He swallowed the cud, let the flavor drift from his nostrils, then raised his nose to test the freshening breeze. There was the tang of willow, the faint odor of spruce, and lastly the scent of the does. Gray-face turned his head, and there was a jealous possessiveness in the way he gazed toward where the three of them were lying a hundred yards away.

His eyes flashed as his gaze moved about on the farther side of the does, searching for a sign of his hated rival, the pale buck. A dozen times Gray-face had attempted to fight the intruder and drive him from Porcupine Valley, but each time the pale one evaded his wrath, vanishing into the thickets—and twice had taken a doe with him. This left Gray-face only three, and the theft made him furious. Had he not been so occupied with the task of avoiding other enemies, he would have long since forced a decisive encounter.

Satisfied that his rival was nowhere about, the old buck settled himself more comfortably and returned to his sharp scrutiny of the surrounding bushes and the spruce-dotted slopes of Porcupine Valley.

CURLY EVANS made a long detour so as to get around to the far side of the buck; and on the way, Matt Paulister spoke in low tones.

"You know," he said, "I've never hunted mule-deer before. When I was a kid, a little spike-horn buck used to come into our back yard, and he got so tame that I could feed him carrots. He even used to play a bit, and I got to feeling that he was almost human. Then the deer season opened, and a hunter shot him. He staggered

The pale buck, oblivious of

into the yard and died at my feet. When the man came and carried him away, it almost broke my heart. I hated that man!"

"Yeh," admitted Curly. "I know how you must have felt."

"Of course, this is different," Matt went on. "These deer are really wild, and they're smart. Take this old Gray-face, for example: he's got brains enough to take care of himself. You're on even terms."

"Sure," said Curly without enthusiasm. He was thinking about field-glasses, high-velocity rifles, telescopic sights, and the army of hunters. Somehow he couldn't feel that they were on very even terms.

"It's strange what life does to a guy," continued Matt. "I was overseas; and Down Under, we used to hunt some queer little deer to help out our rations. We used jeeps, and it wasn't much sport. Then I got to thinking how swell it would be to go on a real hunt and get a big mule-deer head to hang over the living-room door when I got back; and pretty soon it was all I thought about. It kept me going

all else but the battle, charged, sharp prongs aimed for the tender underparts.

when things looked the blackest. So this trip is sort of a dream come true, especially if I get this gray-faced buck."

This cleared up several matters which had been puzzling Curly, but at that moment they began to work down a wooded gully which led back into the valley, and the conversation ended.

The buck was still on his bed, and Curly had a feeling in his bones. He got it every time there was going to be action. It was a kind of sixth sense of his, and he wondered if fortune had at last forsaken old Gray-face. Oddly, he didn't relish the thought. The battle of wits between him and the old buck was in its fifth year, and he would miss the old veteran if he no longer roamed the slopes of Porcupine Valley. Something would be gone from Curly's life, a certain spice.

But sooner or later the buck would have to go. Some hunter would get him, Curly reminded himself. Gray-face was getting older every year, and perhaps it would be just as well for him to die now, in the glory of his prime, before he met defeat by some younger and stronger buck. If any man deserved old Gray-face, it was Matt Paulister, Curly concluded; but he hated to think about it. He couldn't forget the terrified look on the old buck's face when he had led another hunter into range the year before. There had been a pathetic fear of death in those big eyes. Only the hunter's wild shooting had allowed Gray-face to escape.

Curly shrugged off the feeling that had been growing within him. It was his business, this job of guiding hunters, he remembered. He owed it to Matt Paulister to take him into range of the old buck, and he would do it if he could.

NEAR the base of the slope, in a pocket of spruce, Curly Evans stopped. They were less than half a mile from the buck, and he spoke in a whisper.

"If we get close, it will still be a difficult running shot," he said. "That old devil never stops for a second look, and we'll have to lift him so that you can get a body shot. We don't want to damage that head."

"I used to hit Japs," Matt stated simply.

Curly knew that he need say no more. This man's quiet confidence was reassuring. He had the coolness of a much older man, and the guide was sure that this time there'd be no wild shooting.

They continued their cautious approach, keeping thickets between themselves and the buck until they reached the swale. Then they crept along the game-trail. From above, Curly had already marked out a lone pine that rose where the willows were thin. He had decided to spy on the buck from there, and plan the last yards of the stalk.

He moved gingerly, expecting to wince at any moment to the loud crack of a broken branch or twig. Long ago he had resigned himself to these with every hunter. They had become an accepted hazard. But the crack never came. Matt crept along the trail like a cat, his whole attention centered on the job of moving noiselessly. Curly was surprised, and before long found himself marveling at the man's skill.

They reached the pine, and while Matt squatted on his heels, listening to the chatter of a magpie, Curly Evans crawled through the willows, flat on his stomach. He parted the brush, peered through the opening, and froze. The big gray-faced buck, his antlers looking huge even at three hundred yards, was staring straight at him!

Curly Evans lay motionless, his mind racing. Plainly the old buck was suspicious, or had actually seen him. It seemed impossible and yet there could be no other explanation for the animal's actions. Cautiously he signaled his companion, taking great care not to move any part of his body which might be in sight.

"He's either seen or heard us," he whispered, scarcely forming the words. "Sooner or later he'll make a break, and you'd better be ready."

At his elbow Matt Paulister checked the indicator on the magazine of his rifle to make sure that it was full of shells. Then he crouched down to wait. "What a head!" he whispered.

GRAY-FACE knew instinctively that the swale was dangerous and must be watched. He happened to see the bushes move and froze instantly, trying to pierce the shadows under the willows with his eyes. It might be a porcupine, or perhaps a stalking cougar or coyote, but somehow Gray-face was reminded of men. Yet he saw no shiny face or glistening gun-barrel. So he stayed where he was, ready for instant flight.

From the corner of his eyes he could see the magpie. Hopeful of a meal, she was listening to the rustle of a mouse in the buck-brush below her, and was not yet aware of his tenseness. When she flashed to a higher limb of the willow and looked about, her excited danger-cry struck his sensitive ears like a blow. The sounds died out of the woods as two chickadees became restrained, the mouse ceased its rustling. At last utter silence fell.

Far away he heard a woodpecker drum, pause, then drum again. The magpie spread her wings and sailed gracefully to another clump of willows closer to the swale. She squalled questioningly, then once more fell silent. Soon the bird flew nearer to the suspected spot and squalled again. Before long she was only fifty yards from where he had seen the bushes move.

Suddenly she leaped into the air, cried out at the top of her voice, and flew back over the brush toward him, still swearing at what she had seen. He quivered with excitement.

At that moment the blast of a rifle shattered the valley stillness. It didn't come from the willows, but from up the slope of Porcupine Mountain, fully a mile away. Two more shots sounded, but Gray-face didn't hear them, because everything was drowned in the crash of his hoofs in the buck-brush. His first bound carried him halfway to the willow where the magpie had been perched, and the next one placed him behind it. Cunningly he bounded straight away, then flashed sidewise into the undergrowth.

The does ran too, the crash of their bounds blending with those of the buck. Protectively he swung in behind them, then stopped to listen, glaring back in the direction of the willows. No enemy threatened, so he snorted in defiance, wheeled, and bounded after the does. Half a mile away, the four of them stopped on a height of land to look back. The valley seemed harmless and empty.

Gray-face was still suspicious of what might have been in the willows, and he proceeded to leave it a safe distance behind. Finally he led the way into the first of three sheltered basins which lay end to end along the floor of Porcupine Valley. Halfway through the first one, the old buck suddenly stopped and threw up his head. The breeze had brought him the musky scent of the pale buck!

A strange opalescence came into the old buck's eyes, and his brain turned red with fury. He took a few steps forward, then abruptly leaped around a bramble bush. But instead of the buck, he found his rival's recent bed. It was still warm, almost steaming.

Protectively Gray-face

Old Gray-face stamped his feet savagely; then to vent his disappointment he threshed his antlers in the bramble-bush until it was a smashed and broken heap of branches.

At last he paused, as though he had suddenly remembered the movement in the willows. Caution returned to his brain, and with a last defiant shake of his antlers, the old buck went back to the does. He led the way through the basin and into the next one several hundred yards away. It was here, a few minutes later, that a disdainful cough made old Gray-face whirl. The pale buck stood less than ten yards away, the madness of the love moon blazing in his eyes. It was evident that he had but one intention—to whip the old buck and steal his remaining does.

Rage returned to every fiber of old Gray-face's being, and he lowered his antlers and shook them angrily. Then he pawed the leafy mold, and flung it high, so that it fell on his back and spattered on the leaves. His hated rival had chosen to fight, and Gray-face welcomed the battle. No thought of defeat entered his brain, for in all his years he had never been beaten. He scarcely noticed that this buck stood taller than himself by fully an inch, and that he was heavily boned.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

I ACCEPT the Honorary Chairmanship of American Brotherhood Week, 1947, with the firm conviction that brotherhood is essential to the establishment and maintenance of peace. Our supreme need is brotherhood as a pattern for peace, here and across the globe.

Our own land can make no greater contribution to this troubled world than to establish brotherhood as the rule of life among all our citizens of every religion, race or national origin. Brotherhood—live it, believe it, support it—must be the resolve that governs our relations to one another. We cannot hope to commend brotherhood abroad unless we practice it at home.

Democracy rests upon brotherhood. Justice, amity, understanding and cooperation among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews throughout our nation are cornerstones of democracy, even as they are the requirements of brotherhood. With them we can maintain our national unity and keep up the teamwork needed in peace as in war . . .

Very sincerely yours,

Harry Truman

swung in behind his three does, then stopped to listen—glaring back—snorting defiance.

The pale buck tipped his own formidable rack into fighting position, and stepped closer, his eyes rolling. His antlers spread wider than the old buck's, but carried less prongs and were not so heavily beamed. Now he snorted and charged.

Their antlers crashed together with a clatter which could have been heard for a mile. Gray-face felt his hoofs tear up the black earth, and he snuffed with surprise when it took all his strength to keep from being driven backward. . . .

Back in the willows, the two men had remained motionless until they heard Gray-face's defiant snort and the sound of his fading bounds. Then Curly Evans spat.

"Damn!" he exclaimed feelingly. "How d'you like that? Spooked so fast when he heard those shots that a guy couldn't even shoot from a place like this!"

"He didn't give me much chance," admitted Matt, checking his safety and relaxing against a willow trunk. "Now what?"

"We'll follow him," replied Curly without hesitation. "That skiff of snow is heavy enough so we can track him. Right now we'll make a pot of coffee and wait for him to settle down."

It was scarcely an hour later when the two men found where Gray-face had smashed up the bramble-bush in the first sheltered basin. Curly chuckled quietly and pointed to the havoc the buck had wrought.

"He found another buck's bed, and he didn't like the smell," he explained in a whisper. "This is the man moon—as we call it—when the bucks fight for the does."

"I guess they have some real battles, huh?" whispered Matt.

"Yep," replied Curly, "but this old Gray-face is getting pretty old. One of these day's he'll meet his match, and that'll be the finish. The old fellows never last long once they've been licked. It breaks their spirit."

They moved on, silent as shadows, and soon came to where the tracks led into the second basin.

"Just as I thought," whispered Curly. "If I don't miss my guess, we'll be catching up with him pretty soon."

THE battle had not gone well for Gray-face. From the first he'd been forced to fight defensively, and it made him furious. This rival exerted such relentless pressure that his neck began to ache before the battle was well under way. Nor was he able to turn the other's head aside with a skillful twist of his antlers. The pale buck gave the impression of unbreakable strength, and it worried Gray-face and caused a feeling close to panic.

The two stolen does had appeared as soon as the first crash of antlers announced that a battle was in progress. Now the five of them stood a little apart, watching curiously. He knew they would follow the victor without question, casting only contempt upon the loser, and this knowledge goaded him to fury. He attacked savagely, striving with all his wild strength to drive the pale buck into retreat.

From the beginning of the battle old Gray-face had been conscious of the magpie. She hopped about, squalling in mock alarm when the struggle moved too close to her perch. Every few seconds she flew to the top of a willow clump to look over the country. Somehow she made him nervous, reminding him of other dangers.

He kept rolling his eyes so that he could see back in the direction from which they had come. In pauses when they stood panting, heads low and antlers touching, he tried to listen.

It was during one of these pauses that the magpie abruptly launched

herself into the air, squalled her danger-cry, and was gone.

Instantly old Gray-face backed up, disengaging his antlers and breaking away. The pale buck, oblivious of all else but the battle, took it for a sign that the old buck was beaten. He charged, sharp prongs aimed for the tender underparts. Unwilling to flee and admit defeat, the old buck was forced to meet him, and once more their antlers crashed together.

Every nerve in Gray-face's cunning nature warned him that he must end the struggle. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw a grouse come whirring overhead. It flew from the direction of the first sheltered basin! A flock of cedar waxwings followed. Some creature was coming! Gray-face was certain now. At this moment he should be leading the does to safety, or stealing a look from some dense thicket to see what manner of enemy came. In desperation he launched a fear-maddened charge. Into it he put more strength than he knew he possessed....

Matt Paulister placed a restraining hand on Curly's arm. "Listen!" he whispered. Curly stopped, and he saw that Matt's eyes were blazing with excitement. Then he heard a rattle of antlers, the snorting of fighting bucks.

"Follow me!" he whispered, and moved forward swiftly, keeping behind the willow clumps. A short distance farther on he stopped behind a juneberry bush. From here they were able to peer through the branches and watch the struggle taking place scarcely fifty yards away.

THE battle was at its peak—the old gray-faced buck recklessly pouring out his strength in one final burst of fury. Curly had never before watched such a titanic struggle. The fight surged back and forth as first one, then the other, drove his rival across the clearing. Beneath them the ground was a mixture of black earth, leaves, sticks and trampled brush. Not for a second did it diminish in fury, but rather grew in fierceness and savagery.

Slowly it became evident that old Gray-face was weakening. His mouth gaped open, and he fought for air. His rushes became shorter, and several times he stumbled. Curly knew that the last moments had come, and that it was best for the struggle to be ended now, before the old gray-faced monarch suffered the agony of defeat.

He nudged Matt Paulister in the ribs. "Take him!" he whispered. Matt jumped, apparently having forgotten that the guide was also watching. Then slowly he raised his rifle.

Curly looked away. He couldn't bear to watch. Never before had he felt like this. He remembered how the buck only that day had guarded the rear of the herd when they left the willows, risking his own safety. He remembered the picture the old buck had made, fighting his last gallant and glorious fight.

Then Matt Paulister's rifle roared, and Curly Evans heard the hollow thud of the bullet striking its mark. He heard the surviving buck snort with fear, then crash away. A strange flood of emotions poured through him: sadness, self-reproach, and even anger at himself and Matt Paulister. Suddenly he hated hunting and everything connected with it.

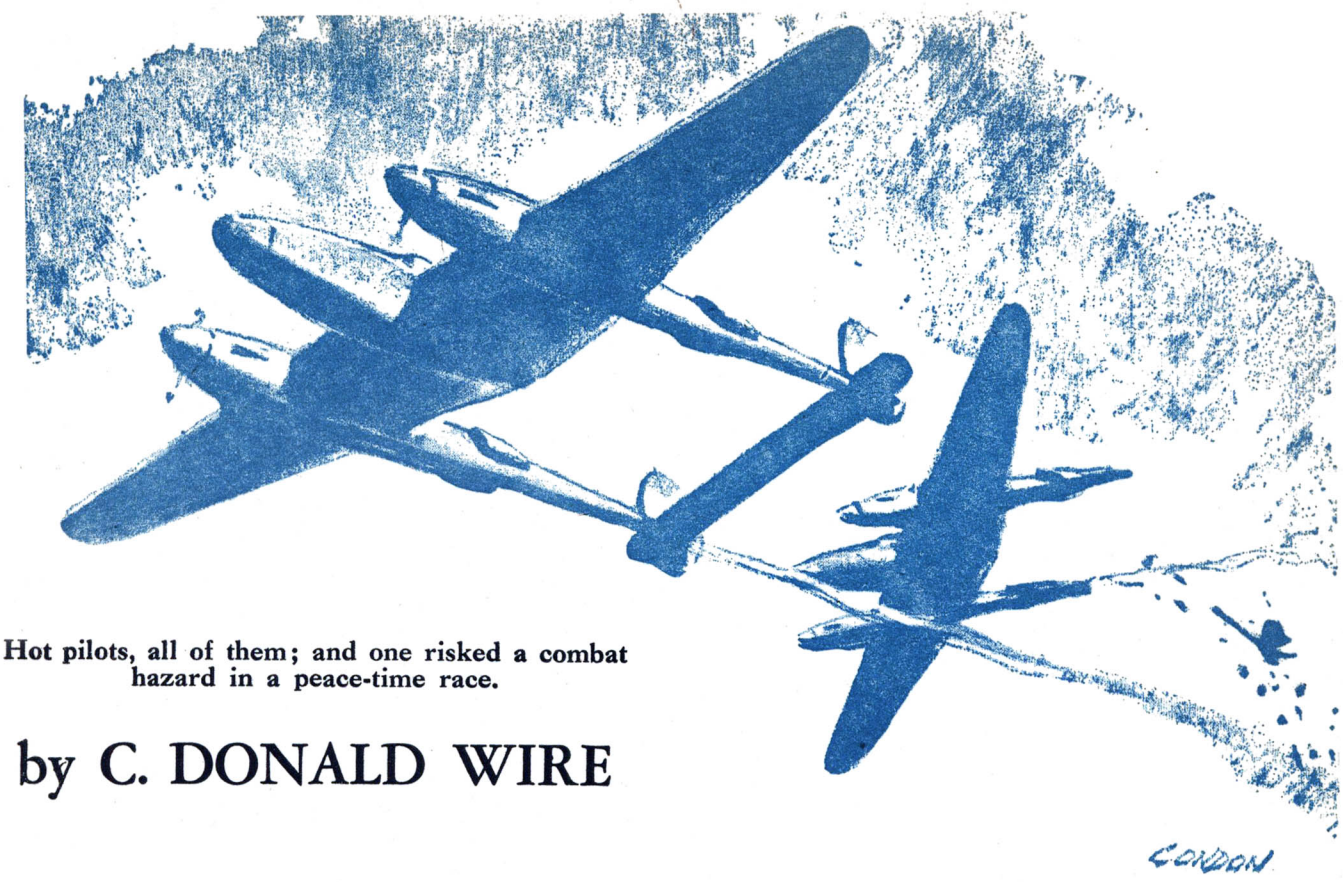
"I got him!" yelled Matt, half leaping over the juneberry bush and running toward his prize.

Curly Evans looked up. His jaw sagged, and he stared unbelievingly. Bounding away behind the does was a dark buck with a gray face! He could see one cheek plainly.... It did not make sense.

"Matt! You got the wrong buck!" he shouted, still unable to believe what he saw.

Matt stopped. "Like hell I did!" he replied. "Whatever made you think I'd shoot that magnificent old codger?" Then, as though to justify himself he added: "This pale one's got nearly as good a head!"

Curly Evans didn't know. He sat down suddenly, and he didn't know exactly why he did that either.



Hot pilots, all of them; and one risked a combat hazard in a peace-time race.

by C. DONALD WIRE

Never Hug a Pylon

THE line-up was impressive—and it could be dangerous. Include Chabot and Studevant, both out of the 12th Air Force. Then Milton Granowski, with a tour in the South Pacific and Europe under his belt. Baldy Lansing, the kid Corbett, and big Charley Prescott—big, slow-moving Charley Prescott, who had liquidated twenty-seven Hitler facsimiles while parading around blue German skies. You didn't look quizzical when somebody mentioned the name. You nodded your head and said: "Yeah, I've read about him. Quite a boy in an airplane."

They were civilians now, up to their necks, and loving it. But they didn't swing their arms; they flapped them. Flying was all they knew, and they didn't intend learning anything else.

Larry Dickson dropped the list of six names on his desk. His flat, pleasantly ugly face wrapped itself up in a worried look.

How that Prescott could fly! But he was like a charge of dynamite. Clean in the straightaway, dangerous on the turns. He'd been pushing stuff around pylons before the war. He'd earned a reputation then for making vertical turns on a prop spinner. With those old castor-oil burners you could do it. But coming in off the straightaway with a barrel-housing Mustang, you either swung wide and took your pylon in a circle, or you skidded halfway out to Redondo Beach—a guaranteed method of scattering a flight in assorted up and down and lateral directions.

Shaking his big close-cropped head, Prescott would say sadly: "I see that pylon, and I feel as if I've got to get in and flick it with a wing-tip. I guess it's the way I fly."

And then there was Granowski, the quiet, unassuming boy-faced man, who wouldn't budge out of a position if you chawed his tail off up to the canopy. He'd chisel himself a groove in the sky, and let the rest of the hellions mill around like cows trying to get inside on the turns. He'd always say there wasn't as much room up there as you'd like to believe, and a man who couldn't find a spot for himself should damn' well be on the ground.

Maybe Granowski had the right idea. At least you knew where he was. You couldn't say that for a guy like Prescott. That boy took up a lot of sky, and if he and Granowski ever met at the same place at the same time, it wasn't likely Granowski would move. And Prescott, in a vertical and skidding, wouldn't likely see Granowski—

The door to the Operations shack banged open. Dickson looked up and saw a good deal of arms and legs clad in officer's pinks and a leather flying-jacket.

"Glad you came in, Skipper," Dickson said, dropping back in his swivel chair and easing a leg over the desk. "Pull up a 'chute-pack and sit down."

Colonel "Skipper" Talbot, youthful commander of the 403rd jet-fighter squadron at March Field, California, delivered his six feet plus into a chair.

"You'll retract that statement," he said quietly. "I have nothing but sour apples, foraged from the wastelands of Riverside. Want me to leave?"

Dickson dropped his leg and sat up stiffly.

"What's the matter with that brass?" he sniffed defiantly. "They goin' to retire the Air Force to oblivion? Maybe they think a come-on poster in front of the post office is enough to

let the public know we've got one. Or maybe they just don't think. You tell me a better way to keep the country airplane-conscious than to sponsor jet-races? And we aren't amateurs, you know—"

"Who says so, Larry?" Talbot shifted his lean frame. "The Army knows your record. You were with 'em long enough. Nobody's doubting the ability of you or your gang. It's just the practicability of pushing jets around a course small enough to be seen by a grandstand mob. Sure, we can put a pylon here at L.A. Airport, one down at San Diego, and another in San Berdue, and have a hell of a whopping time—for the pilots. But no thrill-dizzy John Jones is going to pay two six bits a seat to watch a flight of airplanes come over once every fifteen or twenty minutes. See my point? And the Army's."

"I see it, and I'm ignoring it," Dickson replied. "We have no intentions of running a cross-country rat-race. Leave that to the Bendix boys. We'll use the same course we're flying here Sunday—a three-pylon circuit. Start and finish will be here, the first turn at Douglas in Santa Monica, the second turn at Howard Hughes' place on the flats. We'll have grandstands at each field, and a warm-up thrill show by the local talent. Each grandstand will have an unobstructed view of two complete legs. Now what more can they ask?"

"Nothing, Larry, providing it's reasonably safe. You can prang every ship you've got, and the mob will love it. But with the Army furnishing the jets, they won't. They're still funny that way—"

Dickson pulled himself to his feet. "Granted. They make with the airplanes; I supply the pilots. We don't want to mess up ourselves or their property. Bring 'em out here Sunday, and we'll show 'em that what we can do with these surplus windmill jobs we can do with jets."

Dickson didn't say anything about Prescott. It wasn't necessary. Both Granowski and the big boy had been in Talbot's Mustang outfit overseas. Talbot knew Prescott down to the color of his socks. He knew him, and he was just waiting, like the rest.

They left Operations, which was just a partitioned enclosure in a vacant corner of their rental hangar, and strode out onto the mile-long concrete apron. In five minutes six ships were going up for a thirty-minute practice heat. Dickson was staying on the ground to observe performance.

OUT on the line Dickson saw Number 48, Prescott's Mustang, ticking over in an engine warm-up. Three ships down, the twin Allisons on Granowski's Lightning were spinning counter revolutions and drumming out their healthy roar of power.

A lot of money tied up in two airplanes like that, surplus or otherwise. A lot of money tied up in this whole deal, Dickson thought. Maintenance crews, 100-octane and oil, hangar space, advertising, not to mention keeping the body nourished. And aside from the cash each boy had put out on his airplane, it was all on the cuff. It was all stacked high in a nauseating pile of I.O.U.'s.

It had taken much talk to convince the moneylenders. Promises were so much whistle up a drain-spout to them. They wanted collateral that had shape and substance. So that put their airplanes in hock. "All or nothing at all" wasn't just the name of a song.

In return for a percentage of the gate, the Los Angeles *Examiner* sponsored a twenty-five-thousand-dollar first prize and gave them a nice spread of advertising. Grandstand seats were going better than expected, and Dickson figured on sufficient general admission at the gate to take a large slice out of the overhead.

Sunday was three days off. A high-pressure area was holding fast, and the weather man looked cheerful. Clouds were all right, as long as they were high. Good visibility was important. It meant the difference between a sharp race and a case of eye-strain.

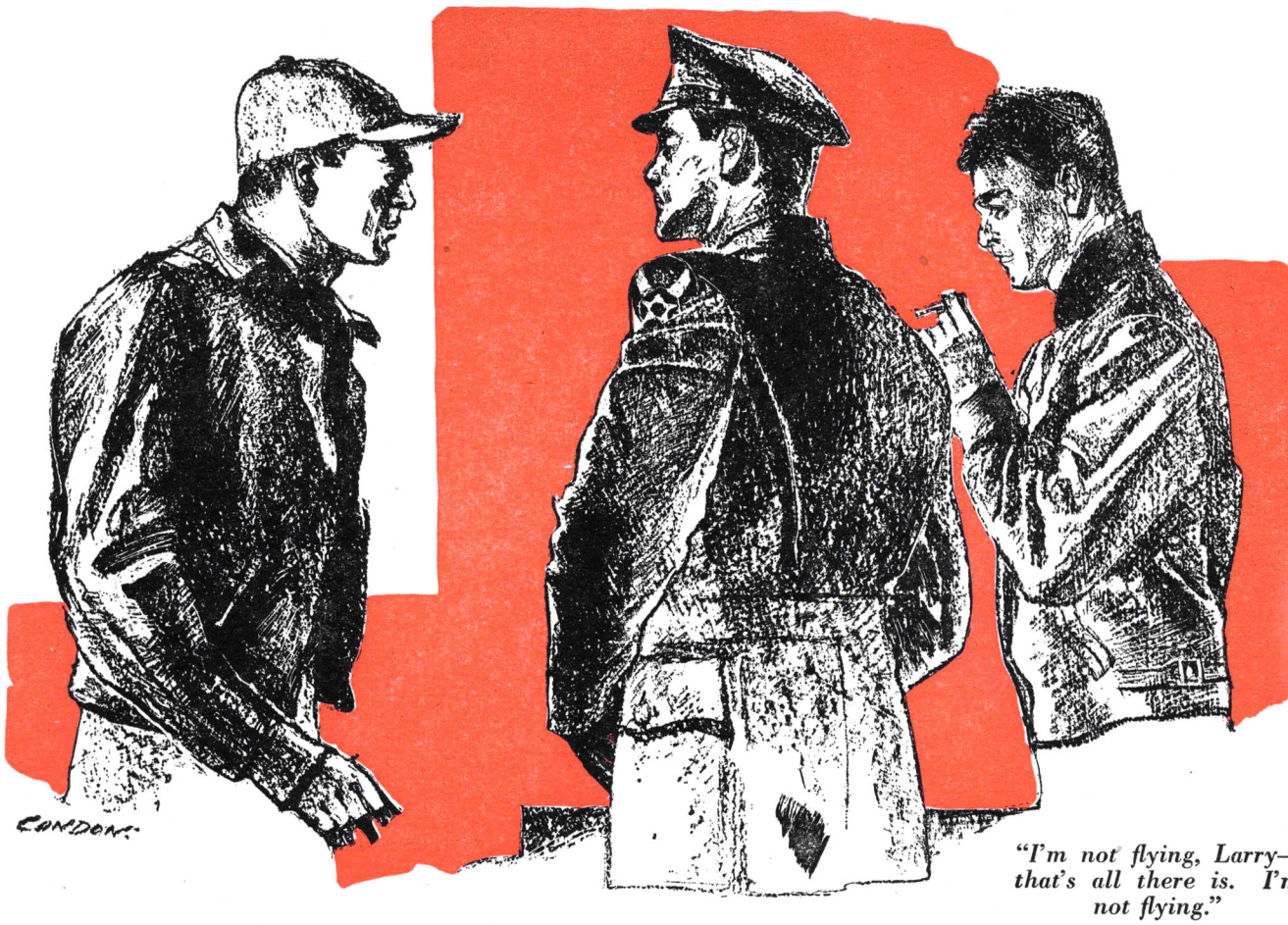
The boys were keyed up and noisy about the whole thing. If only Prescott would watch himself—

Granowski's Lightning waddled out of the line, started for the end of the runway. Dickson could see the boy-faced man hunched under his canopy, checking oil-pressure and cylinder-head temperatures. Behind him came Chabot in his Mustang, then Studevant in a P-47. Prescott, twirling on a braked right wheel, gunned his Number 48 into fourth position. Then from across the apron, highballing like a couple of fast taxi artists, came Baldy Lansing and the kid Corbett, both in Lightnings.

They lined up on the runway, two abreast, with the kid an odd man churning air a foot from Lansing's booms. A green flare arced from the control tower.

Granowski, brakes released, leaped ahead, pouring in mercury and turning up to three thousand revolutions.

Get her in, Milt. She's staggering. Watch that wing, don't let her stall-



"I'm not flying, Larry—that's all there is. I'm not flying."

Chabot snapped away from his standstill. One by one the others turned rubber into the runway, and like shrieking monsters eager to get into their element, lifted clear and followed Granowski's low-level lead.

He took them at a hundred feet across the sand dunes, and then in a wide, sweeping turn to the left pulled up to three hundred. Dickson watched them bunch up as they came inland from Hermosa.

"Riding easy," he said to Talbot. "I always like to watch them come into the starter pylon. They're just like a flock of scraggly blackbirds now, and you can't even guess who's going to take the lead. But once they get that green flare, they flatten out and you can almost feel the air burn."

Talbot nodded. "I'd like to be doing a little of that myself, Larry," he said quietly. Then he smiled. "Well, hell, even if the Army won't let me, I can champion the cause. And they look good. I have a hunch everything's going to be O.K. Yes, sir, O.K."

They hit the starter pylon, and a second green flare curved away from the control tower.

Dickson was conscious of his breath held in him. He could feel the involuntary tensing of all his muscles.

Granowski dropped two hundred feet as if he'd hit a sudden downdraft. He seemed almost to flatten into the ground. Like a snarling animal snapping a leash, he sprang away from the pylon. Prescott fanned to the left and Chabot grabbed onto his right wing like a leech. Studevant and Lansing and the kid fanned right and rode high, evidently intent on flying a match with each other.

Like hell-birds on a spree, they streaked for the Douglas pylon. Dickson watched them until they were specks revolving in a lazy turn against a wide stretch of blue to the north. He lost them as they dropped down on Howard Hughes field, then picked them up as they lifted over the Del Rey hills.

Granowski, still at his hundred-foot level, was holding a good lead. Prescott, two hundred yards inside, was coming up fast. The other four, holding to the outside for a wide sweep at the pylon, were capable of gaining any position on the next turn.

Then it was Prescott, bearing in, barrel-housing in a straight unswerving line for the starter pylon. Dickson breathed unspoken words as Number 48, a thing of flashing silver and whining speed, brushed by, scant feet from the pylon, and snapped over in a vertical left bank. Prescott skidded out, ate up sky and distance as he ruddered to line up on course. He shot out beyond the circle the others were coming in on. But when he righted, he had a good lead on Chabot, who had got inside Granowski and aced him out.

Then again they were highballing for Douglas, Prescott with a lead he would hold at least until the next turn, Chabot churning second, and Granowski, stodgy and unrelenting in his hundred-foot position, driving a close third.

Larry Dickson turned to Talbot. "Prescott," he said. "See what he does? The brass won't like it. I know damn' well they won't like it. He knows he does it. He can't seem to help it." Eagerly he grasped Talbot's arm. "Look, Skipper, he was in your outfit overseas. Maybe you can do something—"

Talbot shook his head. "I know how he flies. It isn't Prescott and an airplane—it's just one. He loses himself in that damn' cockpit. The only way to keep him off a pylon is to have somebody inside him. And no fly-boy out to win a race is going to play stooge for his greatest threat."

"Yeah, that adds up," Dickson grunted. "Twenty-five thousand bucks is a lot of money—"

FOR fifteen minutes they wheeled through the sky, exchanging the lead in fast, tricky maneuvers when rounding pylons. Granowski stayed at one hundred feet and was always among the first three. Prescott constantly hugged the inside, and once split the flight wide open as he skidded through them.

It was then Dickson became alert. He thought he must be breathing a short prayer. The apprehension he felt was startling, and unhealthy speculation. Talbot had spoken to him once or twice, and he hadn't answered. He hadn't heard. He was watching, and knew he was waiting.

THEY came in off the straightaway from the Howard Hughes pylon. Prescott held a scant fifty yards, and the rest were crowding him in a scattered right echelon. Granowski was below and wide. Prescott stayed close as they peeled off and swung out to circle the starter pylon. Then Number 48, with a wing-tip brushing the upright, rolled into a vertical and began that inevitable centrifugal skid.

The kid Corbett, almost half snapping out of a trailing position, cut the field for an inside position. He firewalled his throttles, moved up fast to snatch at Number One when they came out of the turn.

Dickson wondered if Corbett could see that flat belly rushing at him. He wondered if the kid was wasting a precious second in frozen panic, trying to activate muscles that were receiving impressions from a dozen chaotic thoughts.

Number 48 had blotted him out, and Dickson wanted to close his eyes. He wanted to shut out the sight of crashing metal and spraying, torching gasoline. But that deep-seated human instinct to observe disaster claimed him. He looked into the sky. Involuntarily he braced himself, as if expecting a wave of concussion. They were one now, individual outline lost, only the barest air space between—

And in that split second before contact, Corbett dropped, nose boring toward the ground and engines wide open and whining. Prescott flashed through and into the clear.

Corbett had plenty of speed, and he was eating up altitude. He flattened. He mushed the last fifty feet. He tore into Granowski's Lightning, ripped off half the tail assembly and mashed the canopy into the nacelle. His own right engine belched smoke, and he wobbled away like a stunned bird.

Dickson felt pain in his right arm. He suddenly became conscious of Talbot's hand gripping him. Sickness crept into his stomach, and he watched the mortally wounded boy-faced man maneuver his fluttering craft around in a half-circle.

There was the scream of sirens as crash-wagons and ambulances roared across the apron. Red flares plummeted from the control tower to signify an emergency condition on the field.

Granowski got his ship across the fence. . . . Dickson prayed him over, hanging onto that slim thread of hope that would have to be a miracle. The little guy must be half out, fighting rudder controls that weren't there. Slugged, groggy, not knowing what hit him, only dimly aware of a narrow ribbon of concrete that meant safety—

Get her in, Milt. She's staggering. Watch that wing, don't let her stall—

The left wing dropped out, and he took a lazy, single-turn spin into the ground.

The explosion came across the field and struck Dickson like a fist. He recoiled, felt the strength drain out of his legs and the rubber creep into his knees. He saw the flame and smoke boil out, coil into the sky and dirty the blue. The twin booms, sticking up out of the earth as if marking a funeral pyre, collapsed and left just the awful roar of fire.

The kid Corbett, his right prop feathered and the engine wrapped in a veil of smoke, came in on a short, fast approach, well under control. He rolled the full length of the runway, a crash-wagon keeping pace. Before he had come to a full stop, CO_2 was pouring into the Allison.

Dickson was aware then of stunning silence. He looked at Talbot. The lean colonel was standing mute and immobile, tall figure bent forward as if he were listening for the sound of a voice. *What have you got to say, Dave? What are you thinking? A fine way to impress the Army, huh? To hell with the Army! A lousy way to wash out a man like Granowski—*

Dickson turned and walked slowly back across the apron.

In the operations shack he rang up engineering.

"Hello, Jake," he said dryly. "Get a twenty-four-hour shift on Corbett's plane. See if you can have it ready for Sunday." Then as an afterthought: "Scratch Granowski."

DICKSON found Prescott in the pilots' lounge. He'd let the afternoon slip by, not wanting to bother the big boy. It didn't seem right to heckle a man when he had things on his mind. You'd think he'd go out and tie one on, get it out of his system. But there's where a guy like Prescott just didn't fall in line.

He was sitting in a half-circle booth, idly stirring a cup of coffee and looking at nothing in particular. It would have been much better if he'd been sitting there with a half-empty bottle, talking to himself.

So Dickson walked up to him and asked: "Have a strong drink?"

Prescott shook his cropped head. "No thanks, Larry. Sit down. You look tired, the way I feel."

Dickson eased in on the opposite side of the linoleum-covered table.

"I think you've stirred that coffee enough," he said to Prescott. "Now drink it."

A trim waitress moved in from out of nowhere.

"The same." Dickson indicated Prescott's cup. "Put in one spoonful of sugar and stir it yourself. I don't want to get in a rut like him."

Prescott took his spoon from the cup and placed it on the table instead of in the saucer. A little pool of coffee formed under it. He studied it.

"Interesting, isn't it?" he offered. "Sort of like the mush of smoke over a target after you've put in a thousand pound H.E.—"

"You're a civilian now," Dickson interrupted. "Whales and elephants and steel safes are the only things that weigh a thousand pounds—"

"A lot of things weigh a thousand pounds—or better. Funny how you get to thinking about little things that were only the smallest incident. Things you forgot about the next day—"

"Well, like the time Granowski and I went on that ammo-dump strike. I hit it square. He got a little off the beam and unloaded into a patch of woods—"

"So you gave him the big raspberry—"

"No, he gave it to me. The dump I hit was a camouflaged dummy. The woods he hit was the McCoy. The smoke spread out just like that coffee—"

Prescott's eyes left the table and fastened on Dickson. There was a look in them that wasn't the right kind of look. It wasn't the right kind of look for a man like Prescott.

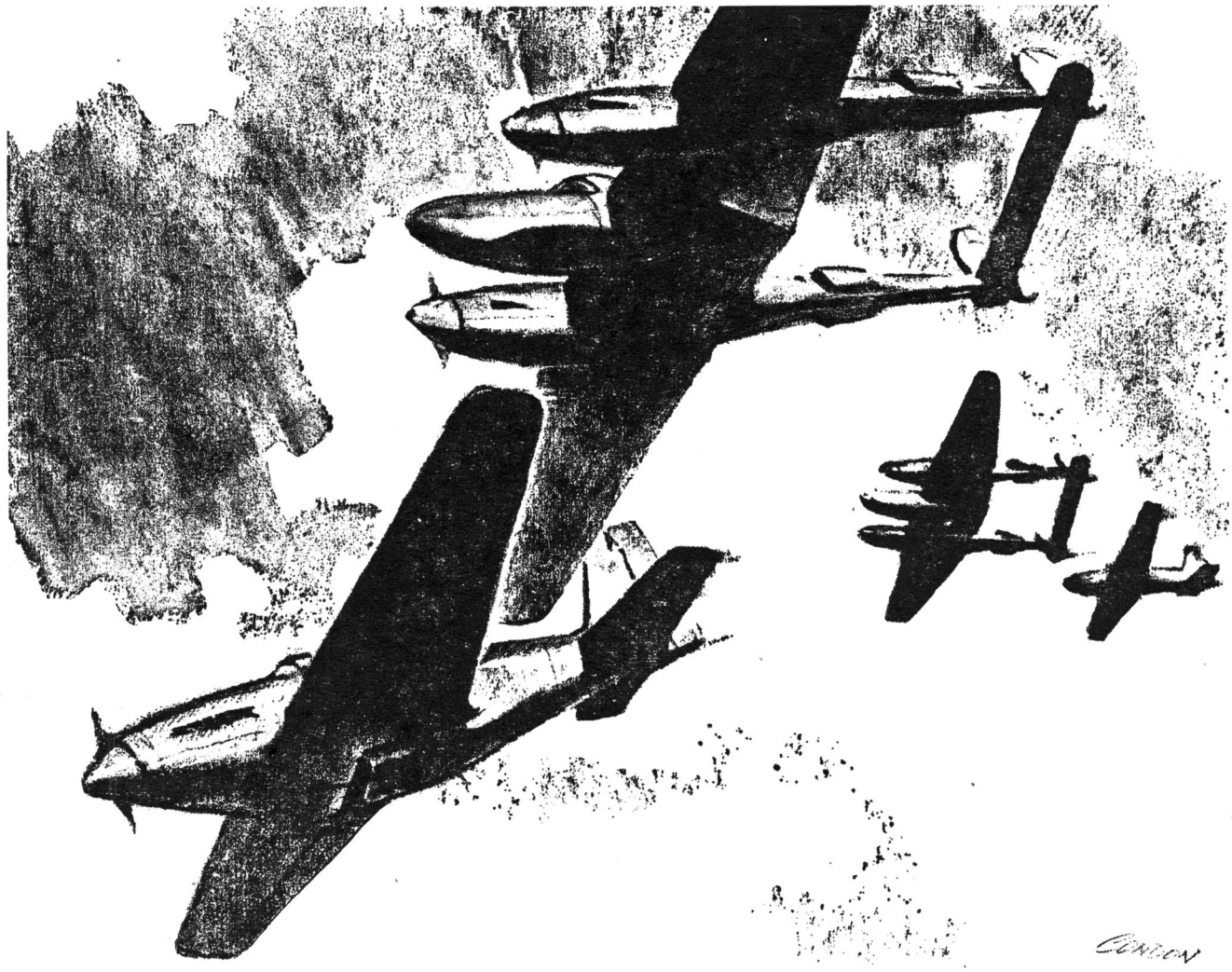
He said quietly: "Granowski would be here if I didn't fly like a damn' fool—"

"Wait a minute," Dickson put in. "Let's stack this up right. We're in a hot spot, Charley. We're flying for the public and we're flying for the Army, and they've both got different ideas. We've got to put on a show, and we've got to prove we can eventually push jets around this close course. Every guy up there is going to be flying for that twenty-five grand. Don't think I won't be. But you're in the toughest spot. You've got to do more than just fly to win. You're the drawing-card. You're the character they hound for autographs. You're the fair-haired son the generals cluck about and say: 'Yep, that's my boy.' Get it?"

"Yeah, and so did Granowski—"

"Break it off, Charley." Dickson got to his feet. "I have things should need be doing. Drink my coffee when it comes. It won't need stirring. See you later." . . .

The grandstands filled early, and general admission milled around the parked airplanes in quiet confusion. Howard Hughes and Douglas reported capacity crowds with the take still going heavy at the gate. Representa-



Dickson firewalled, pulled up on the flight and stuck his right wing-tip in Prescott's cockpit.

tives of half a dozen engineering concerns and a couple of oil companies were hanging around, pleasant words and pleasant smile on their lips. They radiated unbounded enthusiasm over the entire project. They were only too eager to exchange the I.O.U.'s they had in their pockets for a nice chunk of the gate-receipts.

Larry Dickson waited in Operations for Talbot to dodge his retinue of visiting brass and bring in a cross-section of opinion.

He sat there with too many thoughts, tapping out a rhythmless staccato on the desk with a pencil. It was all out and all the way today. That keen pitch of excitement among the boys had quieted after Granowski went in. But they'd fly a good show, once they had their hands on the throttles.

And you had to consider Prescott, the big drawing-card. There's plenty in a name, Dickson realized. The crowd would put their shekels on him. Why shouldn't they? Twenty-seven kills is a good score. Twenty-eight kills—

Dickson ground his teeth as if to grind the thought out of his mind. There wasn't a better throttle-jockey in North American air. He'd give them a thrill show they'd never forget. He just had to be careful and realize that Army stuff from March Field was sitting by with the big sharp knife.

Talbot came in, hot and worried.

"Did you deposit your brass on the fur-lined seats?" Dickson asked.

"They'd have to be totally blind not to see everything," Talbot confided. "I've got 'em right down front, where they can stick out a finger and dust off a wing-tip as the boys taxi by."

"What's the mood? Enthusiastic, indifferent, or reminiscent of a hang-over?"

Talbot dropped into a chair. He studied his slim hands.

"This is the situation, Larry," he finally said. "They're interested, and can be shown; but skeptical as all hell. General Rickovan and old Bilious Barnard are out there. They've got more hours flying upside down than we've got right side up. This whole jet business is highly unconventional to them. They've got propellers in their brains, and it'll take a good blast of hot air to blow 'em out."

"Something like the Old Guard against the New Order, huh?"

"That's about it. And that—incident—a couple days ago didn't help. We filed a newspaper account—details unknown. But the Army has an underground that makes Associated Wire Service look like a courtesy circulation rag. They'll be watching Prescott."

"And so will a couple hundred thousand others. I'm flying, sure, and so are the other boys. But we're just the gang. A lot of admission will be paid to see Prescott perform—"

The door to Operations swung open, and Prescott held it against the wall with one big hand.

"I don't think he'll be performing, Larry," he said flatly. "I think he'll just stand on the ground and watch—"

Dickson pushed out of his swivel chair. "Kind of hard to tell what's on your mind, Charley," he returned quietly. "Whatever it is, spill it, and then let's go out and fly airplanes."

PRESCOTT took one more step into the room. He left the door open. His big, square shoulders were hunched and a frown creased his forehead.

"I'm not flying, Larry," he went on. "That's all there is, I'm not flying—"

"I told you once to break it off, didn't I?" Dickson's voice was sandy with irritation. "So you've filled yourself up with a lot of rot, and turned in a conviction, is that it? You've been

in this game long enough to know things happen. They just happen, and there's nobody to blame. Last Thursday it could have been anyone else on that turn. Lansing, Chabot, Studevant, any one of them might have swung wide—"

"Now *you* break it off, Larry. Would they do it consistently, boot the law of averages around the way I do? Hell, no! Let's square away on it, Larry. Let's forget past performances. Damn it, the closer I came to a Heinie, the more chance I had getting him! That doesn't work now. I know what's going on. I know the Army's out here, standing by with a blue seal of approval—or a fat red check-mark. And brother, I'm just the man to louse it up—"

"You stupe!"—defiantly from Dickson. "You're the one man who can put it over! All you got to do is go out there and fly a good race with a little show. Next time the mob'll break their legs to watch you in a jet. Just stay off the pylons—"

Dickson bit off the rest. Hopeless little prayers, and the caustic, unpalatable taste of defeat. Keep a fish out of water, or the eternal day with no night.

Prescott said: "Larry, if I knew I'd do that, I'd race. But I won't—"

Then Dickson turned and walked back to his chair. He let silence hang for a few long seconds.

He spoke carefully, wanting to hear each word himself so he would feel fully committed.

"If you were coming into a pylon, and someone was crowding you on the *inside,* what would you do?"

Prescott was hesitant. He seemed to be weighing the words Dickson had spoken.

"I'd clear out. But hell, who ever gets inside me?"

"We're not playing charades, Charley. Don't start guessing. Now hit the apron. It's about time for warming up."

THE frown vanished from Prescott's face. He seemed to tug at a confused thought. He turned to the open door. Twisting his head around, he said: "I guess I'm just a dumb pilot. I talk myself out of it, and then you talk me right back into it. I'm going easy, though. And Larry, it's your basket I'm laying the egg in."

He walked out into the hangar.

Talbot looked at the ceiling. Almost in a whisper, as if he were speaking to himself, he said: "Twenty-five thousand bucks is sure a lot of money."

Dickson started his rhythmless staccato with the pencil.

"Yeah, it sure is, Skipper. A lot of money. But it just goes to show how a casual statement can be completely and disastrously disproved."

"Meaning?"

"Quote. No fly-boy out to win a race is going to play stooge to his greatest threat. Unquote. Skipper, you've just had the pleasure of seeing a certain character heave a caldron of jack out the window for the sake of a demanding populace and a skeptical Army. There's a good chance we'll satisfy both the Army and the populace. There's a good chance I'll get a couple of burnt-out engines, too. Let's hit the apron."

DICKSON sat off Studevant's left wing, feeling the pleasant vibration of his Allisons as they spun in counter-harmony. To his right and slightly behind, Number 48 quivered against locked brakes, her four blades churning and ready to grab air. Dickson made a circle to Prescott with thumb and index finger. The big man nodded.

Then behind were Chabot and Lansing, and kid Corbett. A nice flight! One shy, maybe, but there wouldn't be too much time to think about that.

Give the crowd a show, boys. Send that goggle-eyed mob into a frenzy of excitement. Send 'em away jabbering and making with the hands like airplanes. And for Gawd's sake, don't forget the Army—

The green flare lifted from the control tower and curved over the field.

Studevant's Thunderbolt was rolling. Dickson held fast at fifty inches of mercury, released his brakes, and then eased on up to seventy. The runway snaked out and away, and the stands flew past to the rear.

His nose lifted, and he began working in back pressure on the wheel. Studevant cleared and flattened out to pick up speed. Dickson felt his wheels break from the concrete, and he held himself off. He wound up to a close left-wing position on Studevant, then came back to twenty-four hundred revs and forty-five inches.

The Del Rey sand dunes drifted under, and then the endless stretch of startling blue that was the Pacific Ocean filled the curved hollow of the bay.

They did a lazy left turn and followed the coastline south to Hermosa. Studevant circled them over Hermosa, and they dropped into a groove that was a straight line to the starter pylon.

Dickson felt that peculiar little pulse beat in his neck and the tingle in his fingers. It was getting in his blood now. It was churning inside him, and he was tightening just like a spring. It seemed a nice day just to tour around and look over the country. Maybe go south down the coast and come back inland. Go up through Cajon Pass into Palm Dale—

Highway 101 wound beneath them. The tall trees bordering the road, the scattered oil-wells, Imperial Highway on the south border of the field, the west hangars—

They hit the starter pylon, and green cascaded from the control tower.

They fanned and maneuvered fast for positions.

Dickson lifted up and dropped back down on the extreme inside. He toyed with his power, waiting to see who would set the pace. He had an hour up here—an hour in which he'd do plenty of firewalling, driving up on Prescott to keep him wide.

It was Prescott, all out and in a heat with his Mustang, who flattened at three hundred feet and shoved his nose in the lead for Douglas. Chabot and Lansing pressed him, Mustang and Lightning greasing along with no more than six feet between wing-tips. The kid Corbett and Studevant fanned wide, willing to keep pace until they found their opening.

Dickson let Prescott have his lead. He drove steady, hands on the twin throttles, revving at a well-synchronized twenty-three hundred.

The plowed squares of flat land fell away behind. They hit the foothills, and Chabot took a lead wide preparing for the Douglas pylon. The others swung with him. But Prescott held true as a bullet.

"He's molded right into that kite," Dickson thought. "He's barrel-housing straight for that pylon, and nothing short of a joker like me on his inside is going to stop him."

Dickson firewalled, pulled up on the flight and stuck his right wing-tip in Prescott's cockpit. The big man's cropped head swiveled on his shoulders. Dickson wondered just how startled he was. Prescott ruddered right, and Dickson went with him. He swung wider, almost reluctantly, and hit the turn with plenty of good air between him and the pylon. He settled back into third position.

Dickson eased off. He'd have to nurse along as best he could between heat-treatments. You might take a driving finish wide open, but shoving them up every couple of minutes wasn't the best thing for a pair of thoroughly used Allisons.

Prescott sidled back into the inside, and Dickson had to drive hard to swing him at the Howard Hughes pylon. On the leg to the starter pylon he seemed a little uncertain and erratic, wanting to override Dickson, but apparently mindful of the ever-present wing-tip jabbing at his canopy. He came around in fourth position, but immediately flattened and went all out for the lead.

In thirty minutes the sweat was dripping off Dickson's face. His hands were knots, and his feet burned like hot lead. He had his mixture-controls up in full emergency rich, and the cylinder-head temperature needles were wavering just below the red line.

Prescott was wearing him down. He let the big boy alone on the straight-away to Douglas, and watched him bear in for the pylon as if he were out to snatch a candy stick off a Christmas tree. Then it was all out, everything forward in an air-burning drive to swing him out at the last second.

It was rooted in him like the instinct of self-preservation. Dickson wondered if there wasn't oil flowing in his veins instead of blood. You didn't call a thing like that habit. Or did you?

But the big boy moved ahead and captured a fair lead. How long he held it depended on how long he stayed off the pylons. Once he skinned an upright and the realization drove home, he'd be washed out.

Dickson grimaced every time he bent his throttles over the quadrant and roared up on the inside. It became a nerve-racking monotony that filled his arm with an ache up to the shoulder. Little gods of wayward flyers, please keep that boy out—

His wing-tip was brushing Number 48's canopy again. Dickson looked across at Prescott. The face was relaxed, eyes ahead, a strange softness and ease in the slump of his wide shoulders.

Then he saw Dickson, and he smiled. He made the circle with thumb and index finger. Dickson dropped back, and with a pounding in his head that was rushing blood and quiet fear, he watched Prescott lead away from the Howard Hughes pylon and do a beautiful coördinated turn.

The aches drained out of Dickson's body.

SO Dickson figured he could let his charge off the leash and get in the race himself; he figured he might still stand a chance at that twenty-five thousand bucks, even if the pace was continually getting hotter.

He stopped his figuring and feathered his right prop when the engine went out with a grind of burnt metal and a spray of oil tossed into the breeze.

He went up quick with the left throttle and prop-pitch, rode hard left rudder and then turned in some trim to take off the pressure. Automatically he hit ignition switches and gasoline valves, opened the Prestones and checked the good engine mixture for emergency rich.

Just a cruise, a hot, fast cruise. And now a single engine landing that at least would give the crowd a thrill. But as Dickson swung out of the circuit, he felt a calming, unexplainable feeling of satisfaction. You had to admit it was worth the green currency to get that big boy out of his spin and back in the groove. He was flying a beautiful race now, and the Army would smile approvingly and say: "Yes, he flies the Army way, you know. The Army way."

At least Dickson hoped his imagination was on the right track.

He came into the approach at L.A. airport. Sweet Sue, how gorgeous these Lightnings flew on one engine! Seemed almost a shame to run both of 'em at the same time.

He set down easy in the first third of the runway, rolled without brake and turned off on the taxi-strip. He waved the crash-truck away, looked up through the canopy. They were wheeling through the sky, Prescott with a long, easy lead. They came into the turn, and the big boy took them around in a graceful arc that was strictly needle and ball.

Dickson watched them until the yellow flare went up, until Prescott, highballing on the last lap with a quarter-mile of free air behind him, screamed across the grandstand at a good fifty feet and unscrewed two slow rolls.

Yeah, the mob's going nuts now. They're up on their feet, shouting for more—

A Chevy coupé screeched up to Dickson's Lightning. Skipper Talbot scrambled out. He hauled himself up the step onto the center section.

"If you grin any wider, you'll split your face," Dickson thought. But he was grinning himself.

"Good show," Talbot said warmly. "Old Bilious is drawing up plans for every flyable week-end for the next five years. And there's a jet in every one. There's a jet and you and your gang in every one, Larry."

Horses Race a Train

By Frederick S. Randall

AS the last spike was driven into the last rail, and the wood-burning engine snorted jerkily up to the new station in Pontiac, Nelson Paine Stewart let his dour Scotch visage relax into a rare smile. Another of his pioneer dreams had become a pioneer fact—the Detroit & Pontiac Railroad* was in operation! Already his nimble mind was beginning to figure ways and means of outwitting the English bondholders who had made possible Michigan's first railroad. But that is another story.

Upstate the news finally reached that famous Michigan character "Salt" Williams, another pioneer who was gaining wealth from various new business developments in the Wolverine State. Legend has it that Stewart and Williams had clashed in the past, and with results not always to the advantage of Williams.

Be that as it may, Salt Williams came down to Detroit to view the steam carriages, ride on them, and mayhap wish he had thought of the idea first. For after looking over the entire system, he condemned it with numerous derogatory remarks, concluding with the challenge that he could lick the train any day with a good team of horses.

This insult got Stewart more steamed up than his engines, and he lost his usual canniness. One word led to another, until the day and hour were named for a race between horse-drawn and engine-drawn carriages. Williams was to race a carriage against Stewart's train from Pontiac to Detroit (about twenty-five miles). The winner was to be waiting in the old Griswold House with dinner ordered; the loser was to pay for the dinner—and to hand over five thousand dollars to the winner.

This was not hay, as the saying goes, in those days of 1858, and people shook their heads. Old Salt must be slipping, they announced to one another sagely. He couldn't lick those steam buggies. That road between Detroit and Pontiac was bad, full of sand and ruts, axle-deep in mud if it rained. He'd lose for sure this time. Odds were way out in favor of Stewart, and there were few takers. Salt had bitten off too much. But the genial Mr. Williams smiled benignly and kept his counsel.

Came the great day. The word "Go!" was given, and with a taunting whistle from the locomotive and a bellowing "Giddap" from Salt Williams, the race began amid cheers and banter. A capacity crowd rode on the train, planning to see the chagrin on Williams' face when he found his rival waiting at the Griswold House.

But many hours later it was a tired and furious railroad president, and a begrimed and weary group of passengers who arrived in Detroit to find Salt Williams ensconced cheerfully in the lobby of the hotel. They were greeted with: "Dinner is ready, Nelson!"

Stewart, his train-crew and his passengers had had to man saws and axes every few miles of the entire distance to cut wood! For the night before the race, Williams and a crew of men had removed all the cordwood stacked neatly at strategic points along the right-of-way—the wood which was to serve as fuel for the locomotive!

**Later the first unit of the present Grand Trunk & Western.*

"That's the man! That's him! He done it!" . . . . The Sheriff said: "Take it easy, Minnie."

Murder by

JEFF COLE had a sudden uneasy feeling when he saw the Sheriff's car turn off the highway onto the lane road and approach his house.

It didn't look like a day for trouble. The old plantation had stirred to life with the coming of spring. Mockingbirds had found their voices, and from the south field, there drifted the "Gee" and "Haw" of a Negro plowhand fighting his mule. Uncle Absalom, down on the sunlit sandbar, was trying to herd a flock of geese away from the bayou.

Aunt Cindy opened the front door and shuffled across the wide gallery.

"Sheriff comin', Mistuh Jeff."

"So I see."

"Wonder whut we done now."

"Maybe it's a social call."

"Aint nothin' social 'bout that Sheriff." She turned back into the house. "I got coffee when you ready, suh."

Jeff nodded, rose lankily from the bamboo rocker and stood waiting.

It wasn't a social call. The Sheriff parked his car on the circular shell driveway in front of the house. He and a deputy got out. He wasted no time on preliminaries.

"I've come to pick up one of your hands, Jeff."

"Who?"

"Absalom Smith."

"What for?"

"Murder."

Jeff laughed shortly. "The only thing Uncle Ab ever killed is time."

"He killed Ben Moak, one of those squatters on the back of your place. I've got evidence."

"What evidence?"

"A witness who saw him—also his shotgun. . . . Where is he?"

Jeff pointed down the long hill toward the sandbar.

The Sheriff said: "Get him, Bud." The deputy long-legged it away.

Jeff motioned to a chair, dropped into his rocker and asked Aunt Cindy for coffee. The Sheriff sat, took off his hat and wiped the sweatband with a soiled handkerchief.

"Never more surprised in my life," he said. "I've known Absalom since I was a kid. But—well, in this business, you can't ever tell." He sighed and changed the subject. "Been out of the Marines about a month, haven't you, Jeff?"

"A little over."

"What kind of duty did you have?"

Give a man an idea, and an urgent reason to act, and he'll play your way—as in this story by

JAMES HOWARD LEVEQUE

Night

"Intelligence."

"That's right. I remember now. You and Bud were in the same outfit. Sort of detective work, wasn't it?"

"Sort of."

Aunt Cindy appeared with the coffee, steaming Louisiana French drip, black and heady. She placed it on a table and went back inside.

The Sheriff drank appreciatively.

Jeff wondered how the Sheriff would handle the investigation—whether he had some pet system like Colonel Romunder. "Give a man an idea," the old Marine would say, "and an urgent reason to act, and he'll play your way every time." It always worked.

UNCLE ABSALOM wasn't frightened when the deputy brought him up. He looked from Jeff to the Sheriff with an expression saying plainly that he could enjoy a joke as well as anyone.

The Sheriff's face and voice were hard. "Absalom, what made you kill that white man?"

Uncle Absalom grinned. "Sheriff," he said, "you quit funnin' this po' ol' colored man."

"Ben Moak's dead. You two had a fight yesterday."

Uncle Absalom's grin vanished. "Wasn't no fight, Sheriff. I jus' saw him takin' some of Mistuh Jeff's fence-posts an' tol' him Mistuh Jeff gonna be awful mad."

"Then what happened?"

"He picked up a stick an' run me off!"

"Where's your shotgun?"

"Funny thing 'bout that gun, Sheriff: It was hangin' over the fireplace in mah house yestiddy, but I didn't see it this mawnin'. I reckon somebody borried it to kill a hog or a hawk or somethin'."

"I'll tell you where it is! It's in my car. I picked it up where you dropped it after you shot Ben Moak!"

For the first time, the full import of the situation hit Uncle Absalom. The Sheriff wasn't funning. His eyes were too hard, his tone too harsh. The old Negro began to tremble. His voice quavered.

"I didn't kill nobody!" he said. "I didn't kill no white man—God's mah judge, Sheriff!"

The Sheriff looked at Uncle Absalom steadily a long time. Then he said gruffly: "Come along, Absalom."

"Whar—whar at you takin' me, Sheriff?"

"Out to Ben Moak's shanty-boat. Then to jail. Come along."

The old Negro began blubbering. He appealed to Jeff. "Fo' seventy-seven years, I been livin' on this place with yo' father an' grandfather, Mistuh Jeff. I aint never been in no trouble. You aint gonna let 'em take ol' Absalom away, is you, Mistuh Jeff?"

Anger glinted deep in Jeff's gray eyes. But his face and voice were calm enough. He said: "The Sheriff's within his rights, Uncle Ab. You go along." He turned to the Sheriff. "Mind if I go too?"

The Sheriff did mind, but he didn't want to say so. "All right. But keep out of the way."

Jeff turned back into the house to get his hat. Aunt Cindy met him at the door, his hat in hand. He took it silently, put it on his head, turned and strode out to the car. He climbed in the front seat beside the Sheriff, beside Uncle Ab's old single-barreled shotgun.

They rode in almost complete silence across the mile-wide back field, then followed the tortuous dirt road through a hardwood forest. This was "overflow land" that dipped lower and lower as it neared Ouachita River. Presently the Moak shanty-boat appeared through the trees. Near it were a coupé and a hearse.

The Sheriff grunted with satisfaction. "Coroner and the undertaker got here fast enough!" he said.

IT was a typical shanty-boater's camp. There was the boat itself, unpainted—the hull a small barge, the superstructure made of frame siding, the roof covered with tar; there were two windows on each side, a door at each end opening onto narrow decks. A minnow seine was draped across the shoreward windows; a sooty washtub hung from a nail at one end. There were cane fishing-poles on the roof; buckets and one hide-bottomed chair cluttered the decks. A shaky two-by-twelve served as a gangplank. Ashore there was the usual pen of chickens, the usual barking dog tied to his stake, the usual refuse-heap. The forest rose all around.

As the Sheriff's car stopped, a woman began screaming: "That's the man! That's him! He done it!" She ran up to the car and pointed a trembling finger through the open window at Uncle Absalom.

The Sheriff said: "Take it easy, Minnie."

Jeff looked her over. He had seen Mrs. Moak before. Under thirty, slim, not bad looking. Cleaned up and dressed in store clothes, there would be a certain wild beauty about her. Now her eyes were red from crying, her bare feet streaked with dirt.

He followed the Sheriff to the deck of the boat, where the coroner was kneeling beside the body.

The coroner rose, extended his hand to Jeff. "He got a double load of squirrel shot in the chest," he told the Sheriff. "The pattern's small; must have been from fairly close up. Death instantaneous."

Mrs. Moak had come down the gangplank. "It sure was close up!" she said. "He was standing at the top end of this gangplank when he shot Ben! It sounded like thunder!" She looked down at the body of her dead husband, and began crying again.

Jeff knew Ben Moak: a taciturn man, over fifty, thin as a whip. He'd

had a short temper and little character. But his wife's tears were real.

The Sheriff said: "Minnie, if you can stand a little more of this investigation—"

She interrupted vehemently: "Investigate all you damn' please! But you got your man—you ought to take him out and hang him!"

The Sheriff called, "Bring Absalom here!" and the deputy herded the old Negro down the gangplank.

UNCLE ABSALOM'S eyes looked at Jeff and drew courage from them. He wasn't alone.

The Sheriff pointed to the dead shanty-boater. "There he is, Absalom, just where he fell when you shot him!"

Uncle Absalom's ancient voice said: "I never."

"Bring him inside!" They all entered the cabin and distributed themselves on chairs, boxes and beds. Only Uncle Absalom stood.

"What did you and Ben Moak fight about, Absalom?"

"Wasn't no fight, Sher—"

"That's a lie! I saw them with my own eyes!" Minnie leveled a finger at Uncle Absalom. "You had a gun!"

"That wasn't nothin' but mah ol' hickory walkin'-stick."

"I know a gun when I see one!"

Jeff asked her: "What were you doing out by my lumber lot?"

"If it's any of your business, I was looking for Ben to tell him our dog got away—but she was with Ben."

"Minnie, what time was Ben shot?" the Sheriff asked.

"I don't know. It was late. Ten or eleven, I guess."

"Absalom, where were you last night?"

"After I lef' Mr. Ben, I went home an' et. Then I dressed an' went to lodge-meetin' down to the church."

"What time did the meeting break up?"

"I don't rightly know. Near as I can figure, it was 'bout nine o'clock."

Minnie pointed out: "He had plenty of time to come out here and shoot Ben!"

"You said you heard the prowler first, Minnie."

"That's right, Sheriff. Ben was sleeping. But I was awake, and I heard somebody walking along the shore, quiet-like. So I woke Ben up, and he heard it too. He got his automatic shotgun and went out on deck—"

"Is that the gun?"

"That's it. Ben didn't never use the flashlight when he went out like that. Scared it would give him away. But I got it and held it ready at the window.

"I heard a step at the top of the gangplank and all of a sudden they both blasted away. Ben must have missed. I got the light on in time to see this old burr-head turn and stumble and drop his gun. It slid down into the water, and he was scared to take time to fish it out, so he run away, leaving it there."

"You couldn't have made a mistake, identifying Absalom?"

"Not in a million years! He was sore at Ben, and he killed him!"

"Then what?"

"I don't know. I began hollerin', I guess. Because pretty soon, here come Mr. Lasker, who lives in his houseboat a quarter-mile down the river. He said—"

"We'll let him tell it," interrupted the Sheriff. "Get Luke Lasker, Bud." The deputy went to the door and called.

Luke Lasker was tall and rangy, about thirty-five years old, and went to hair. There was a black shock of it on his head; his eyebrows were bushy, his face covered with heavy stubble, and a thick tuft of it protruded from the open neck of his jacket. As he looked down at the Sheriff, he had the sardonic expression of a squatter surveying the law.

"Well, what's your story, Luke?"

"It's short. He was dead when I got here, and I don't want to get mixed up in this. I just went to get you, that's all."

"You didn't like Ben Moak, did you?"

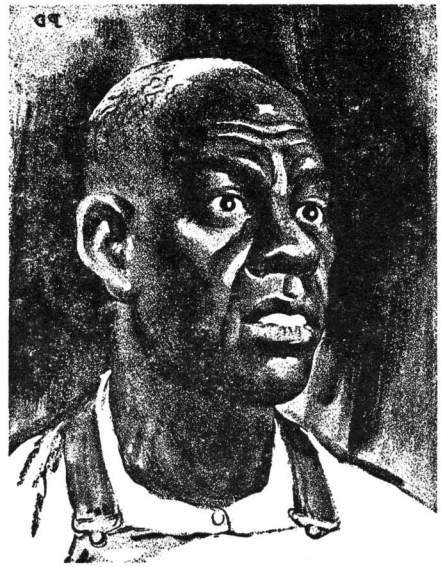
"What's that got to do with it?"

"You tell me."

"Nothing. I didn't get along with him—who did?—but I didn't kill him. I just heard Mrs. Moak yelling after those shots, and come over to see what was wrong."

"What *was* wrong?"

Lasker stared at the Sheriff as though he hadn't understood him. "Why, Moak was dead, that's all. Shot in the chest. Mrs. Moak was talking about seeing this man Absalom. I didn't know what to think until I saw his gun. That clinched it. It'll clinch it for a jury, too. So I told Mrs. Moak to let everything stay the way it was—I know the law—and walked to town to get you, Sheriff. That's as much as I know."



"I didn't do it, Mistuh Jeff."

Minnie nodded agreement. "That's the way it was," she said. Luke looked over at her, and Jeff watched their glances meet.

The coroner rose and said: "I'll be moving the body now, unless you have some further use—"

"No," the Sheriff said. "No." He turned to Jeff and shrugged. "Take Absalom to my car, Bud."

Minnie began crying again, and Uncle Absalom gave her a long, searching look. Then he said to Jeff: "I didn't do it, Mistuh Jeff."

Jeff nodded. "Don't worry, Uncle Ab."

"About funeral arrangements, Minnie—"

"I'll go to town tomorrow, Sheriff," she said.

"Don't leave the parish. We'll need you for the inquest and trial. You too, Luke. . . . Coming, Jeff?"

"No, think I'll stay awhile, Sheriff." Thanks." He met Bud's studied gaze without expression, then watched from the forward deck until the last of the three vehicles had disappeared into the lengthening shadows of the forest.

LUKE and Minnie came out on deck. Jeff turned and faced them.

"Got a family, Luke?" he asked pleasantly.

"What's it to you?"

"If you have a family, doesn't it seem strange that you should leave them unprotected with someone shooting in the neighborhood and come running over here?"

"I wanted to help."

"You're the first river-man I ever saw who would leave his family and run out to mix in a shooting ruckus on the boat of a man he didn't like."

"What are you getting at?"

"I don't believe you're married."

"All right. So I live alone. So what?"

Jeff smiled disarmingly. "How long has your boat been tied up to my property?"

"Your property! Mrs. Moak, is this guy—"

She nodded. "This is Mr. Cole. He owns this land."

Lasker was defiant. "All right! If you don't like it, I'll cast off first thing tomorrow!"

"Maybe you will; maybe you won't."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You know, what interests me is why you should have tied up just where you did. River people frequently form houseboat colonies for companionship. But you and Ben didn't get along at all, Luke. Yet you must have had some strong personal reason."

He made a deprecating gesture. "And don't call me Mr. Cole. Just call me Jeff." His smile was bland. "Why don't you two call each other Luke and Minnie?"

"Say! Just what are you getting at?"

Jeff motioned to the dog on the bank. "Nice watchdog you have there, Minnie."

The glitter of fright was born in her eyes. "Oh, he's not much good."

"Oh, yes, he is. River people always keep watchdogs, and they're always the best. They've got to be. They're the only warning of danger at night a river-man has. It's sometimes a matter of life or death. And that's why Ben Moak died. His dog didn't bark."

Minnie cried: "He did, too! He barked his fool head off!"

"Oh! Then how could you hear Uncle Absalom creeping up in the dark if the dog was yelping? How could you hear his stealthy step on the gangplank?"

"I don't care! I heard him, I tell you!"

"And why didn't Ben wake up?"

"He was a heavy sleeper."

"That's odd, isn't it? After a lifetime on the river, his ear should have been keenly attuned to the voice of his dog, especially to those peculiar variations in tone and intensity that warn of danger. He must have been a heavy sleeper, indeed—with the dog scarcely twelve feet from his ear and the window wide open!"

Lasker started to say something, then clamped his jaws shut.

Jeff shook his head. "The dog didn't bark, Minnie. Ben's dog didn't bark at all."

Jeff produced a package of cigarettes, offered them around. The other two refused. He lighted up.

"And consider the coroner," he continued. "There was another bad blunder. The coroner said Ben had died from a double load of squirrel-shot in his chest. But Uncle Ab's gun was single-barreled."

Minnie countered: "He could reload, couldn't he?"

JEFF looked surprised. "But Minnie, I thought you said the shots came all at once."

"Maybe I was excited, maybe—"

"No. You heard them right. They came all at once. But they didn't come from Uncle Ab's gun. Picture him standing there, in complete blackness, at the upper end of a wobbly, narrow gangplank. The man he came to kill is standing at the other end of the gangplank. They fire simultaneously at point-blank range. One misses completely, if that's possible. But there's more to it than that. As Ben is falling, Uncle Ab, on his unsteady perch, must reload and put a second hole, right beside the first, in Ben's chest—a target he can't even see.

"What's your story, Luke?" Luke said: "He was dead when I got here; I just went to get you, that's all."

"That's asking a lot, even for a young man, isn't it? Uncle Ab is seventy-seven years old."

Lasker growled. "What's this all mean—what's it prove?"

"Why, it proves that you and Minnie know each other a lot better than you've let on. It proves Ben was killed by somebody the dog knew well. It proves Ben was shot before the killer ever saw Uncle Ab's gun—otherwise there wouldn't have been two holes in Ben's chest. It proves there were two people involved instead of one, Luke. It proves Uncle Ab's gun was planted after Ben was shot."

Jeff knocked ashes off into the river. His sigh sounded loud in the dead silence. "There were several other mistakes, equally bad; but so far, it looks as if I'm the only one who has caught them, doesn't it? Apparently the Sheriff hasn't, and maybe he won't. And as long as you're here to testify against Uncle Ab, Minnie, the case against him is almost conclusive—unless somebody jams the works for you."

The latent fright in her eyes had risen to the surface now, and she made no effort to hide it. Luke's face was a hairy mask of doubt, of indecision.

Jeff smiled at them.

"But *I* might jam the works, Minnie. I've been thinking it might be a good idea if I went to town tomorrow and talked this over with the Sheriff. He might be interested." He turned toward the gangplank, then stopped and faced them again. "Remember," he said, "don't go away. The Sheriff would consider it very suspicious indeed—and you couldn't go far."

He walked up the gangplank and into the woods without looking back.

When he reached home, he took a shower and went down to supper. Aunt Cindy hovered near by, watching him anxiously.

"You aint hongry, Mistuh Jeff. You is worried 'bout Absalom. What's the Sheriff think?"

"I don't know. But he's not watching those two houseboats. Nobody's watching them—and they've got to be watched if Absalom is to be helped!"

"You got an idea who done it?"

"I absolutely know who did it. But we've got to have proof—which, with the kind of concrete evidence the Sheriff has against Uncle Ab, means not logic but a confession."

He jabbed at a chicken leg. "I'm expecting a visit from somebody out there tonight," he said, avoiding her eyes. "Somebody who will be coming well armed, with the intention of killing me. At least, I hope so."

"Mistuh Jeff! Whut you done? Made yo'self bait in a trap fo' Absalom?"

"Only if I've convinced them they can't afford to let me live. And they really can't." He finished a glass of wine and rose. "The bait must stay in the trap, Aunt Cindy. Yet I wish there was some way of knowing what's going on out at the river."

It was dusk now, and through the north window he could see intermittent flashes of lightning.

"Storm coming up," he said briskly. "Rain, if it isn't too heavy, will mean footprints."

Aunt Cindy shivered.

AN hour after nightfall, the storm hit with sudden violence. Gusts of wind rattled shutters against the house; rain skirled across the windowpanes.

Simultaneously Aunt Cindy came into the library and reported: "They's quarrelin' now, Mistuh Jeff."

"Dope from your Ouija board?"

Aunt Cindy shook her head and explained a little proudly: "I went down an' saw the Grand Potentate, an' tol' him it's time Absalom's lodge done somethin' useful. They had a quorum present, so I organized 'em. We got runners all over them woods, Mistuh Jeff!"

Illustrated by Pat Denman

The explosion from the rifle rocketed around the room. . . . Jeff shifted his position and dived low.

"What are they quarreling about?"

"I dunno, suh. We couldn't get too close, count o' that dog."

Black eyes in black faces peering through the rain-swept night at a shanty-boat that held a killer—Jeff stirred nervously from his chair and said: "Good work, Aunt Cindy. Keep me posted." She left.

The rumble of thunder was closer now, the flashes of lightning more vivid. Rain whipped down in drenching torrents.

With the Sheriff's arrival, the whole atmosphere of the plantation had undergone a subtle change. Murder, Jeff told himself, does that. For the living as for the dead, nothing is ever the same. Yet this queer unreal feeling of suspended action, of waiting—

A door crashed open somewhere at the rear of the house; he heard Aunt Cindy's muffled footsteps as she ran to shut it. The hallway portières stirred.

He turned on the radio, and the room crackled with static; he turned it off.

Aunt Cindy was at the door again. Her usually placid face had taken on an odd, tense look.

"Somethin' wrong out there, Mistuh Jeff," she said.

"Wrong? What?"

"There was a shot."

Very carefully, Jeff took a cigarette from a package and put it between his lips. His eyes never left Aunt Cindy's face.

"Who was shooting?"

"I dunno. There was this shot, then somebody screamed."

"A man or a woman?"

"I dunno. Wash didn't know. It was just a high-pitched scream that done got lost in the wind."

"Was that all?"

"Yassuh—'cept the lamp went out."

"In the shanty-boat?"

She nodded. "I dunno whether it blowed out or was turned out."

White glare filled the room, the house shook with the concussion of thunder. The crystal chandelier swayed slightly. Aunt Cindy, watching it, waited until the sound had diminished. "I's havin' troubles with the lodge," she continued. "They's wet, and they's scared. Maybe we won't hear nothin' else."

"Well, you've all done fine, Aunt Cindy, and I appreciate it. If your work here is finished, you'd better go now."

She asked, "You sure you'll be all right, Mistuh Jeff?" but the relief in her tone was unmistakable.

"I'll be O.K. Need a raincoat?"

"Nossuh. I borried yours."

Jeff went with her to the back door. She threw the raincoat over her head and ran out into the night. Lightning flashed, and Jeff saw her waddling swiftly down the two-hundred-yard-long walk that led to the house where she and the "Grand Potentate" lived. Jeff slammed the door and bolted it.

He went from room to room through the cavernous old house, turning on lights, fastening windows, turning off lights. He reached the library finally.

There were two wide windows opening toward the front gallery; these he latched, drawing the damask draperies tight. The French doors facing the side shell driveway he left unlocked.

He swung a lounge chair beside a floor-lamp so that its back was to the doors. He placed a bowl on the seat, filled it with wadded cotton and lighted it, watched it flame briefly before smoldering. A thin tendril of smoke continued to rise from the bowl.

Fists pounded on the back door. The sound had an urgent, desperate quality. Jeff moved rapidly through the darkened house to the kitchen, turned on the light and opened the door.

It was Joshua, black face wet and gleaming, eyes bulging, out of breath.

"He's a-comin', Mistuh Jeff! He's a-comin' in the storm!"

"The man?"

Joshua nodded. "Leastways, he had on pants an' a slicker. He went to that other houseboat first, then come away fast, hurryin' down the river road." He gasped for breath. "We left off watchin' that houseboat, an' I cut across the woods an' field, fast as I could come. I didn't beat him by much."

"Did he have a gun?"

"Maybe, but I didn't see none."

"Thank you, Joshua. Better stay out of the way."

Joshua vanished. Jeff closed the door behind him, bolted it, and turned out the light. As he hurried toward the library he could picture that wild race through the stormy night, with the black man finally winning.

By how much? The shanty-boater should be in the yard now and approaching the house. He'd look it over carefully, spot the lone light in the library. Would he suspect trouble? Jeff didn't know. He took his service automatic from the drawer of the library table, slid a shell into the chamber, and switched off the chandelier.

Shadows leaped from the corners of the room and huddled around the floor-lamp. Jeff stepped behind an antique love-seat with meshwork back, crouched and waited. He could see both the French doors to his left, the portières to his right; the chair with the smoking cotton was under the floor-lamp, directly ahead across the darkened room. The acrid odor of burnt fiber was everywhere.

JEFF was not sure when he first was aware of the faint oval in the night beyond the French doors; its outlines were too indistinct to identify. Then it moved nearer and became a face. But not one he could recognize. Rain running down the glass distorted the features; light was too uncertain.

Abruptly it disappeared. Had the man spotted a trap, perhaps seen that the smoke rising from the lounging chair was not cigarette smoke? It didn't matter. If the man had come to kill, finding a trap would not stop him; rather, it would prove that murder was vital to his own safety.

Presently there were noises at the back of the house—or seemed to be. With the sound of the storm, Jeff couldn't be sure. Once, the tinkle of falling glass seemed mixed with the rumble of thunder overhead. But it was easy to imagine you heard strange sounds or to interpret the creaking of a board as the result of an unwary footfall. The portières stirred.

The face looked in at the French doors again. The knob began to turn slowly. Once it squeaked, the sound surprisingly loud, and the turning stopped.

Something glittered under the portières. Light from the floor-lamp had caught the surface of a narrow finger of water that was snaking its way along the floor. Someone—who had been out in the rain—was standing there.

The door inched open; the muzzle of a rifle appeared. Behind it, Minnie Moak crouched forward. With quick, furtive glances about the room, she moved toward the chair under the floor-lamp. Two steps away, she realized that the chair was empty.

The portières opened, and Luke Lasker stepped through. Minnie jerked the gun around—but recognized him in time.

"Luke! What are you doing here?"

He strode toward her, his wet bare feet silent on the floor. He made no answer.

"You fool! I told you I'd handle this!"

"You're wearing my boots, Minnie." The tone of his voice was flat, repressed. "And my overalls."

"Shut up, Luke! He's hiding somewhere—he'll hear us!"

"You took my rifle."

He was towering over her now. In a tight voice he said: "If nobody saw you here, the footprints would be mine. The slug in Cole's head would be from my rifle." Neither his meaning nor his intention was immediately clear to her. "But if they should find you here—dead with Cole, you double-crossing little—"

She was too late. She brought the rifle up, but not in time. Luke's right hand whipped out from the shadow behind his back. Jeff tried to stop the blow. He called out and rose abruptly, sending the love-seat crashing across the room. But the knife plunged deep into Minnie's side.

She gasped, half turned, and as she fell against the floor-lamp Jeff recognized the knife as one from his own kitchen. The lamp crashed to the floor and went out.

Jeff held his breath and listened, hoping for another flash of lightning, but none came. Had Luke escaped through the portières or was he silently closing in?

Luke had said: "If they find you here—dead with Cole—" The shanty-boater could not afford to leave. Jeff edged toward the wall-switch; a board groaned under him, and he froze. If Luke had picked up the rifle—

Some small metallic object hit Jeff's shoulder, caromed off against a bookcase and fell to the floor. Jeff thought: "Cagey!" But he didn't fire. Luke had the rifle, all right, but no target.

FROM the left a husky voice said sharply: "Break it up, Minnie!"

The explosion from Luke's rifle rocketed around the room. He had fired blindly at the voice. Jeff spotted Luke's position and, afraid to miss a shot in the dark, dived low.

The rifle exploded again as they hit the floor, bounced out of Luke's hands and clattered across the room. Jeff brought the flat side of his automatic against Luke's head. The shanty-boater groaned, kicked out wildly, tried to crawl from Jeff's grasp. Jeff hit him again. He lay still.

The husky voice was saying: "Where's the light? Dammit, where's the light-switch?"

The chandelier blazed. Jeff rose.

Bud, the deputy, gazed slowly around the room. "Rough party, Jeff." He walked over to Minnie.

"Where'd you come from, Bud?"

"The shanty-boat. I'd been watching it since dark; and when Minnie left, I followed her as well as I could."

Jeff picked up the river-man's rifle and handed it to Bud. "Who did that shooting out there tonight?"

"Luke—at me. I was trying to get closer when the dog began barking. Luke came out on the after-deck, and as I ducked back behind a tree, he fired. One of your cows was near by, and when the shot frightened her, she ran away and Luke thought that's what it was. I think he got the dog, though. Poor little devil screamed like a human."

Luke stirred, groaned, sat up. One side of his head was badly bruised. He looked around dumbly.

Jeff asked: "Luke, whose idea was it to kill Ben?"

"Hers," the shanty-boater said dully. "An' she killed him. All I did was get the burr-head's gun to plant while he was away. But—but when I figured she was going to frame me for killin' you, I went crazy!"

Jeff nodded and told Bud: "You showed up just in time."

The deputy smiled a little grimly. "When you stayed behind, Jeff, I knew exactly what was in your mind. So I got out of the Sheriff's car and walked back. You see I worked for a colonel once too, who said: 'Give a man an idea, and an urgent reason to act—'"

A strange phase of the war's last days was the stubborn German attempt to march their prisoners of war to the "redoubt" beyond the Danube—even though the civilians knew the war was lost and were eager to curry favor by trading food for soap and cigarettes from the prisoners' Red Cross parcels.

ESCAPE

AT the time that this story covers, the Americans had already cracked the Siegfried Line and were pushing spear-thrusts all over German territory. Our latest report while at Nürnberg was that the Americans were on top of Aschaffenberg and headed our way. We had already been given our orders by the American officers in charge of our camps as to what to do if any tanks came nearby, and those orders were to hit the dirt and stay there.

It was on April 22, 1944, that I became a prisoner. The Calais Area, about fifty miles south of St. Omer, was our scheduled destination on this particular day, with one of the numerous German V-1 sites our specific target. We'd been assigned to take a devastating bomb-run that left us bracketed by flak from all points of the compass, and no way of doing anything about it but sweat it out!

Flying deputy lead in the second box of our Group's thirty-six ships, we were relegated to the Number Four slot. Coming up on the target, we could see that we were in for a bad time. The first box of our 322nd Bomb Group had been furnished the "window" to toss out that would throw the radar plotting apparatus off on the flak guns below. We were to come in close behind and make use of their protection. However, in negotiating the turn onto the bomb-run, our box had dropped back about ten miles behind the eighteen ships ahead of us. We would not be covered by "window" protection. Our ships would be flying a straight course on the bomb-run, and sitting ten thousand feet up in the air like so many clay pigeons for Jerry to play with.

All during the bomb-run, the flak gravel was playing a steady tattoo through the metal skin of our B-26 Marauder. Tension was high! Our bomb load of six five-hundred-pounders was of a newly developed type that exploded instantly upon contact, even without the benefit of the nose- and tail-detonating fuses.

Seconds seemed like hours! All the while, Jerry poured a hail of flak up at us that beat a ceaseless shattering through the sides of our ship. We were taking a three-minute bomb-run, and flying a painfully accurate straight course.

"Bombs away!" And we all gulped for fresh air.

Then, within a matter of a few seconds, there was a terrific explosion, and the whole ship bounced upward! We'd had a direct hit—but where?

Kneeling between the pilot and co-pilot, with my maps resting on my knee, I looked out to the right, and down below I could see the formation going on. We seemed to be going straight up as though flying in an elevator.

Captain Red Jordan, the pilot, and co-pilot Bates were both pushing on their sticks in a determined effort to get the nose down. Then I knew without a doubt that our tail-controls were badly shot up.

Just as the ship righted itself, Lt. Bates looked out of his window, gasped, tapped Captain Jordan on the shoulder, and both reached for the right-engine feathering switch. That engine was on fire. Jordan immediately called through the interphone: "Prepare to bail out!"

This was my cue! With five men to go out the bomb-bay, there was no time for loitering. Disconnecting my ear-phones, I discarded my flak suit, took my chest 'chute from the radio operator, hooked it onto my harness and waited.

A voice yelled in my ear, and I headed for the bomb-bay. That was covered with slippery, greasy, bloody-red hydraulic fluid. The right door was closed tight, and the left door was open just far enough to squeeze through. Knowing that the tail controls were badly shot up, the right engine was gone and the hydraulic system haywire, there was no hesitation upon my part. I bailed out!

To make a long story short, twelve riflemen were waiting for me as I landed on the edge of a small town. Their officer's first comment was: "For you der War is ofer!" My fifty-second mission had evidently stretched the percentage basis too far, and it had caught up with me.

Sixteen days were spent in solitary at Dulag Luft at Frankfurt, then eight months at Stalag Luft III at Sagan. We had been marched out of Sagan (between Berlin and Breslau) when the Russians headed our way in their mad dash upon Berlin. This had been on January 27, 1945. We had been given an hour's notice at midnight, and were on the road soon thereafter. It was freezing cold; a wind-blown snowstorm was raging, and we walked all the way to a place called Muscau. With most of us having worn-out shoes and little in the way of adequate clothing, we had been marched about seventy-two kilometers in twenty-four hours. There had been a five-hour stop in one village, where we were left to shift for ourselves out in the snow with only two blankets for shelter.

During the last part of the trip the exhausted men were dropping out like flies, and the guards with them. Cold, lack of clothing and improper diet were taking their toll. Most of the officers, happily, had been left in haylofts and village churches, and eventually made it to Muscau. Those of us that kept on finally staggered into Muscau in the wee hours of the morning, only to find there was no shelter readily available. We had to wait until they found a place to put us. Over twelve thousand men had started on that march. Out of my barracks, commanded by Lt. Col. R. C. Sears, there were only about eighty men left of the 144 that had started. Only four German guards were still on their feet, and they had thrown away their rifles and packs.

Illustration by Robert Greenhalgh

by CAPTAIN KENNETH F. HARNIMAN

DIARY

Upon arriving at Nürnberg, we were greeted with some of the dirtiest and foulest barracks that one could possibly imagine. Aside from that, sanitation was something that one could dimly remember but not presently available.

Air raids had been carried on against the marshaling yard with the Americans coming over at about 10:30 A.M. and continuing through until about 15:00 (3 P.M.). At night the British would start in at about 18:30 P.M. and continue until about 02:30 A.M. in the morning. This lasted for a period of about two weeks. All the while our interpreters were listening to German broadcasts, translating them to English, and coming around to the barracks and reading the latest news. We, in turn, had maps on the walls that were kept up to date with the latest German broadcasts. The British BBC broadcasts were read off to us, but any news from this secret source was not bandied about or ever kept on the maps. We listened and remembered.

The German guards were in just about the same straits as we were in regard to food, and with Nürnberg being bombed daily, we were lucky to get any food at all.

When we finally did march, it must be remembered that most of the guards had been following our maps, they'd been on short rations also, most of them were well aware that Germany had lost the war, and in general their morale was at a low ebb. During our stay at Nürnberg a lot of our former guards had been taken and sent to the Western Front; and so, when we did march, we had about four guards to 150 American Air Corps officers.

Most of us were pretty low in weight. My weight when shot down had been around 180. At Sagan I tipped the kilograms for a 152-pound translation, while at Nürnberg my weight must have been around 120. All of us were skin and bone. When we walked a few hundred yards we would get weak and our legs would start to buckle. Only the merciful coming of a few Red Cross parcels about two weeks before the march was responsible for our being in any sort of shape at all.

Black market in Germany was flourishing heavily at this time. On the march, the guards told us that German money wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. Barter was the main source of securing what you wanted. Cigarettes were worth a mint, and so was soap. All Red Cross parcels contained cigarettes, including the French and the Belgian parcels that occasionally came through. This was where our source of trading supplies came from. For myself, I didn't smoke, and was always hoarding my share in preparation for the time when we would march.

NÜRNBERG, STALAG III

APRIL 4TH: RECEIVED NOTICE at 09:00 to be ready to leave at 11:00. Big rush to get what last-minute packing needed to be done and a hot meal down before the march. Lt's. Cotterell, Stapleton, Captain Hyde and myself were to go together if possible, and attempt an escape if any opportunity arrived. We decided to take our large pan made out of tin cans, two fast Kriege type Bunsen burners and two regular Kriege burners, plus a few wood shavings to enable us to start our burners quickly.

Moved out of barracks around 10:30. Lots of fun with the fellows taking what bowls and cups were available and smashing them up against the end of the building, breaking up of the stools and tables available, and generally smashing everything in sight. A good time was had by all.

Taking off out of the barbed-wire compound, the Germans gave us an excellent indication of their equipment as the guards with their rifles and machine-guns stood at ease while we passed, and a certain number of guards dropped alongside of each unit to be with us for the duration. Things did not look so good! There seemed to be more than an adequate supply of police dogs also.

Marching was slow at first, and unwieldy, as the long line kept kinking and unkinking while getting slowly into its stride. Few opportunities were available for trading. One chance at trading for some bread resulted in several other Krieges horning in, the price of barter (cigarettes and soap) being doubled, tripled and quadrupled so that in the end none of us made out. It was during this period that we finally decided to toss away the pack with the burners, pan and wood. Eddie Stapleton was not doing so well with his bum leg, and his stomach was beginning to bother him.

Scheduled plan of marching was fifty minutes out of every hour. There was to be thirty paces between blocks, and one hundred paces between sections. Two MP's, one at the end and one at the front of each block were to act as coördinators between blocks. The medical section was placed at the rear of each compound. In case of strafing, the column of threes were to disperse as follows: The 1st column to the left of the road and into the ditch, the third column to the right out further than the ditch, and the middle column to the ditch at the right. In case of a pitched battle or an emergency of that sort, the orders were to surrender. A runner was assigned to each block.

Arrived in the village of Polling at 21:00 in the dark, where we were assigned a barn for about 250 or more men to sleep in. One small electric-light bulb was available, which had to be used either downstairs or up in the loft. It was on a long wire. Most of our bedding down was done in the dark, due to the fact that the bulb was so dim. Men bedding down were tripping and fall-

ing all over each other in the dark trying to find vacant spaces to place their two blankets. I had a large blister on my foot about the size of a quarter.

April 5th: Got up at 07:00 to prepare breakfast and nose around to check on trading possibilities. Got in on a hot-water deal with the farmer, who was heating hot water for the fellows to make soluble coffee with. At least, his wife was. Also traded three cigarettes for about ten potatoes, another three or four cigarettes for onions and some barley grain, unhusked. Cotterell was also up; and between the two of us we got breakfast ready with a big pot of stew made out of the bargained potatoes, onions, some garlic we'd saved from a French Red Cross parcel and a British bread stew from the remains of a British Red Cross parcel. Kriege burners were used to heat the stew.

At 09:00 the Germans moved us out and on the road again.

Proceeding on to Neuemarket, we arrived on the outskirts of the town at 15:00, where we were halted due to the fact that we were to be fed soup and bread, and they could only feed one group at a time. Just about this time an air-raid alarm sounded, and we prepared for a siege. However, their object was not Neuemarket, and with a very lazy sunny day, we sat down and silently cheered the B-17's and B-24's that went overhead with their object evidently Nürnberg. Sky trails revealed the course of the planes, and in time we saw the slowly mounting column of large black smoke from the direction of Nürnberg. The dropping of each group's markers was very plain. During this air raid most of we Krieges were down by the stream idly watching the planes and washing our feet, or getting Kriege burners going and cooking a bit of a snack from what food was available.

In time we moved up to our ration point and received one ladle of soup (about five tablespoonfuls or less), with so many men in line (twenty-eight thousand or so) and everyone needing bread—the price of it went sky high again with the thrifty Germans slicing their loaves into small pieces and allotting them to the highest bidder. Captain Hyde and I did succeed in securing some.

Just before we reached our next stopping spot, some of the German people started offering bottles of milk, beer and wine for three cigarettes. They went like wildfire, and some of the Krieges broke ranks and chased after the people going back to their home for more. This resulted in several warnings by the guards, and then they started shooting over their heads with machine-guns. Order was immediately restored!

APRIL 5TH: AT 16:30 WE AGAIN STOPPED, this time in a large woods, where each compound's territory was marked off for them to settle down in. With lots of twigs on the ground and fires a seeming necessity for the evening dampness, there was an immediate rush for what little brush that could be found on the ground. Violating the boundary rules, we soon had the guards in a furore, and once more they lifted their rifles at the more daring of us. Unhappily, I seemed to be the farthest one back of the woods—but saw the light, put my hands over my head and returned with my tongue in my cheek—grabbing as much wood on the way as possible, with both eyes on the guard and a sickly looking grin on my face. It worked!

Within little time we had a few saplings torn down (when the guards weren't looking) and had them set up in preparation for a leanto. Rumor had it that we were to stay here for the night, and a good wind was already blowing up with rain in the offing. As it got colder, we started up a fire, putting some of our bartered potatoes underneath it in a pit, and setting it up on top of gravel taken from alongside the railroad track. A drop-stick with one end in the ground and a wire suspended from the part over the fire heated our water. We opened a can of concentrated British Red Cross oatmeal to use for supper between four of us.

About this time a Fräulein went by on a bicycle with two loaves of bread and a dozen or so small rolls. About ten of us went out to bargain with her, and a free-for-all started in which I ended up with three small rolls—and a punch in the stomach from the butt of the guard's rifle as well, with it finally being aimed at my head; one very scared Fräulein and several disgruntled Krieges. Capt. Hyde and Lt. Cotterell were expecting me to get the business at any minute, and were agreeably surprised when I came back with the rolls.

During the whole day Lt. Stapleton had been sick and complained of his stomach. In the evening he couldn't eat at all and had cramps continuously which he could not seem to get rid of. We were very much worried about him.

MOVING OUT at approximately 20:30, we were given the works. It started to pour rain and came down in buckets. Most of us took a blanket and made a rain-cape out of it. However, with the very poor shoes we had, our feet were getting soaked with absolutely no chance of doing anything about it but slosh forward. As it got darker, more and more dark shadows started to take off from the line of march hoping to escape. Major Orris was one of these, and put me in charge of the block before leaving. Lt. Stapleton was getting worse; Lt. Cotterell's leg injury was causing him all sorts of trouble; Capt. Hyde's back injury was raising the devil, and my blister was not conducive to a very happy mood. And still the rains came.

Lt. Stapleton kept getting worse, and at 22:00, with him practically out cold for the last half hour, there was no sense in trying to continue marching. He needed attention, and badly. We fell out of line, putting Capt. Morgan in charge. Our block medical officer dropped back to see what was wrong, but his medical kit was so meager that there was nothing he could do.

What looked like a farmhouse was nearby, and we headed for that in the rain. One guard attempted to stop us, but by explaining to him that we had a man who was very ill and needed carrying, he let us go. Looking around, we discovered a big barn and a rather large house. We headed for the house and fell in luck. Camp Three was stationed in this vicinity, and a German medical orderly was located in the farmhouse. The medical orderly gave Stapleton pills—which seemed to have no effect whatsoever.

About this time Capt. Frost (2½-yr. Kriege) came wandering in looking for shelter. He was tired of walking, and demanded to see the commandant. The commandant turned out to be a Feldwebel who had been rather decent to fellows when at Sagan, and had just about saved most of our lives by securing us shelter at his own health's expense on our bitter cold march from Sagan to Muscau in January. He put us out in the slaughterhouse, where there was a fire going and a huge vat of hot water. When the guards, who were sleeping overhead, pulled out at three A.M. in the morning, we were to sleep there. It was about twelve P.M. then.

April 6: Still in the slaughterhouse, we made Klim cans of soluble coffee. As the early hours progressed, the room became more and more filled with broken-down Krieges who couldn't make the march. The head medical officer from our camp at Nürnberg, Capt. Patterson, or a name similar to that, also dropped in with bad feet. Camp Two stopped outside for a rest, and their officers dropped in for a little warmth, and to leave Lt. Col. Clark with us. He had been hit in the eye with a chip of gravel from a red-hot fire he was throwing water on to put out in the true camper's fashion.

A bit of humor to enlighten the evening was when one of the German guards came in pretty well barreled with beer. He was very high, and went to great lengths to explain to us about the party going on, and that it was a shame we couldn't join them. Then with a grin on his face he slyly suggested that for three cigarettes each he would secure us each a bottle of beer. The medical officer (he was also American) protested, but most of us got up the cigarettes and awaited the developments. True to his word, he came running out with his arms full of beer-bottles and we were given an excellent treat in one of the most unexpected of places. Lt. Stapleton at this time was sleeping, but still groaning in his sleep.

Talk centered upon what would be done for us, and the medical officer stated that we would be picked up by the Red Cross truck and taken on to Mooseberg, our eventual destination. However, we would have to sign a parole, and even if we were picked up and cut off by American troops, we would have to go through the lines on to Mooseberg due to the parole. This set-up did not quite suit my taste, and the more I thought about it the healthier I felt. Capt. Hyde was also of the same opinion, as was Capt. Frost. We decided to take off together and take our chances. After filling up our tin-can canteens, we left our ideal shelter. There had been an air-raid alert on, and it was still in effect when we left. The rain was still coming down in buckets.

Sloshing steadily along with our blankets thrown over our heads and shoulders for rain-capes, we surprisingly made good time. We knew Lts. Stapleton and Cotterell were in good hands and would receive medical treatment as soon as it could be made available. My blister seemed to have broken and did not bother me at all. Flashes of lightning presented a sinister appearance, as did fires deep in the woods that threw weird glares in dancing red glows. We assumed that the fires were made by Krieges also worn out and attempting to keep warm.

Coming into a small village, we ran into two Volkssturm guards and figured our goose was cooked as far as moving on any further. However, once again my jittery German stood by us, and I found that they were friendly, or so it appeared. One offered to go down and get us five slices of bread for five cigarettes, and we soon struck a bargain. However, after he disappeared we began to think that maybe he had gone after reinforcements. But our luck still held, and he came back grinning and bearing the five slices of bread. Capt. Hyde then attempted to bargain with him for his knife in exchange for more cigarettes but the price he wanted was too high.

We marched on until we saw many fires ahead in the woods and assumed some of the camps had stopped there for the night. We didn't feel like sitting in the rain and were wondering about moving on. As expected, the guards were posted out in the road. Asking them what blocks were there, we found they weren't ours, and after greeting them "Good morning," we blithely moved on, expecting to hear a sharp cry of "Halt!" at any minute. However, none came, and we passed three camps in the same fashion. With the rain pouring down and the lightning flashes from time to time the whole set-up was very weird, and more like a spook movie than actual life.

About 05:00 we were coming up on a bridge when two more Volkssturm popped up in front of us. We were still by ourselves with no guard. Once again our German language came to the fore, and Capt. Frost and I gave them a hearty "Good Morning" as though it was the most natural thing in the world for us to be tramping down the highway all by ourselves. These two old men were also nice fellows and never even questioned us about our status. They knew we were Krieges and asked us how long we thought the war would last. They were tired of it all and wished that it would soon end so they could live in peace again. Capt. Hyde was still hot after a knife, so went to dickering again. He finally arrived at a price of ten cigarettes for the knife, and everyone was happy. We moved along. . . .

Beilingries is the one town that I remember as a really beautiful town. (General Patton later selected it as his headquarters during his rush down to the Danube and toward Munich.) All the buildings were of different shades of brown and green with colorful trim, and styled in such a way as to remind you of a quaint Swiss village like those shown in the movies. There was a beautifully decorated Catholic church in the center of the town. War seemed far removed from this town with its peaceful atmosphere, and we Krieges seemed to add a jarring note to the general atmosphere.

We noticed Frau after Frau passing us by with bread in her market basket, and "Hungry" Harniman put on that doleful look again and made some attempts at trading. To our surprise, the market was wonderful, and each one of us soon had as much bread as we could carry with about three cigarettes getting us a good-sized slice off those large round loaves.

Noticing a few German boys hanging around watching us we kidded with them, and they informed us that they would like a cigarette. Food was still important, and upon questioning, we learned that they were willing to secure us potatoes in exchange for the cigarettes, so we immediately struck a bargain and the kids went scurrying off for the potatoes.

Just after the two youths left there was a great commotion with the Town Crier going past and proclaiming that the *Bürgermeister* forbade any of the populace to trade or talk with the POW's in any way whatsoever. Also that the German guards were rounding up all the POW's and marching them out of town.

Heading down the street, the two German youths came running back loaded down with potatoes. But as they went to give them to us, a German Frau leaned out of her window, and what she said to those kids wasn't funny. She really tore into them and scared them to death. However, I did manage to get a good batch of the potatoes, and I went scurrying down the street with my arms full of them. It must have been quite a ludicrous sight!

Our efforts to avoid the Luftwaffe guards, however, proved futile. They were all over the town, and weren't fooling. They'd been given orders to round all the Krieges up and to shoot if necessary. We noticed the steadfastness of their purpose immediately, as the guard that challenged us came running up with the rifle-barrel pointed right at us. Discretion seemed the better part of valor, and we were herded down the street to the square with several other Krieges. From there, we were herded in a body to outside of town into a hospital area where we were expected to sleep. Only, there wasn't any room to stand up in the buildings, let alone sleep there.

A Lt. Col. Edner and Capt. Frost went to the guard and demanded to see the German Hauptmann. The guard hit the ceiling; and Capt. Frost, who could also speak German, hit the ceiling with him by becoming just as voluble, until finally the guard let them go down the street looking for the Hauptmann. The main point in their argument that finally won was the fact that Lt. Col. Edner's rank was explained; and to a guard, rank means trouble. At any rate, the two of them finally managed to collar the Hauptmann, who could speak English. They soon put up their argument to him that they were officers and entitled to sleep in decent quarters, until finally the Hauptmann gave them permission to move on up the road to the next camp. This was a camp of American Air Corps officers.

They came back for their packs, and Capt. Hyde and me, and once again we had to cuss out the German guard and assume a superior air to get by him. When all else failed, we brought in the German Hauptmann's name and order, and it was amazing as to the effect it had. All sputterings ceased and the guard let us by with little trouble and no written pass, no pretense of the Hauptmann or anything.

Walking on down the road all by ourselves and no guard we soon came upon the area where the other camp was. They were way off the road to the left and camped in a large field around a cluster of farmhouses. Deciding that the atmosphere didn't quite suit our discriminative tastes we moved on down the road. Then came the hill!

This hill must have been about two miles long; and for tired Krieges it was a heartbreaker. Riding a truck on my way back to Nürnberg after escaping to the American lines a few weeks later, I was told by the driver that the Nazis had placed 88's all over that steep grade as well as tank-barriers, and that the Americans had considerable trouble in finally taking it over.

Going up the hill we noticed a guard marching ahead of us with a batch of Krieges and also two Fräuleins pushing bikes. The guard seemed more interested in the Fräuleins than the Krieges, and the pace was slow and easy. We decided that everything was okay and continued catching up to them. The Krieges turned out to be old comrades, and we had a gay old time comparing notes and checking up on whom they'd seen last. The guard was also talkative; and as the girls increased their pace, he did too and left his original Krieges behind by themselves. We soon found out that he was loaded with Schnapps and disgusted with everything in general. The Fräuleins were first-aid workers or nurses' aids. They dropped out for a rest, and we staggered on. . . .

Just at the top of the hill and around the bend was a small village, and we found that Camp Five was staying for the evening. These were American enlisted men with Colonel Jack Jenkins in charge. It turned out that Colonel Jenkins was sleeping in a barn and cooking in this German family's kitchen. There was room in the loft of the barn, and although it was late, about 08:30 or 09:00 he thought we might be able to use the kitchen to make a snack. We immediately took him up on the idea and heated some coffee, toasted some of our black bread and opened up two cans of sardines. Finishing this, we went out to the barn, climbed into the loft (Capt. Frost had a German flashlight he'd pilfered) and made our beds. We'd had a busy day, and that long hill had just about finished us. . . .

MARCHING TO WITHIN two kilometers of the Danube (a couple of days later), we came into a small town where we noticed several of the Red Cross parcel-issuance crew. We stopped and asked them what the score was, and learned that this was the village where the Red Cross parcels would be issued to the Camps as they came through instead of at the town of Neustadt on the other side of the Danube. We sat down at the crossroads and pulled off our packs. Lt. Col. Edner headed back to talk to the Red Cross crew, and Harniman went wandering off to see whether he could find a place to sleep and a kitchen to cook in. Both Capt. Gould and Capt. Hyde were pretty well tuckered and since they had nothing to do, just sat and confabbed.

My mission turned out successful, for just down the road I found a small house where the Frau was willing to let us sleep in her barn, let us use the kitchen to cook in and also sell us a few potatoes. There only seemed to be this woman, her mother and a daughter around. I went back to tell the fellows we were all set. Lt. Col. Edner had found out all the latest on the Red Cross parcel-issuance and it looked as though this was the place to stay for the night without worrying about the Jerries kicking us around. We all went over to the house and made ourselves at home up in the hayloft of the barn.

Capt. Gould and myself gathered up all our extra cigarettes and soap and headed down the road to trade. We managed to get about eight eggs and some bread in the vicinity, which we brought back, and then we decided to try the next village. This proved our undoing, for it was directly opposite from the way we should have been going. Anyway, with our pockets loaded with cigarettes, we decided to try and get a few more eggs, some bread and possibly some milk if we could work a deal. It was still a beautiful sunshiny day, and we had the whole afternoon ahead of us. Just about that time a German automobile came rolling along the dusty road and we got way over to the side to let it by. But, it fooled us and did not roll on by.

At the window was an officer who appeared to be a German captain. He immediately asked me in German as to just where I thought we were going. Well, with both of us dressed in the American Red Cross "G.I." outfits, there didn't seem to be much sense in reeling out a long story. Besides, there was no doubt as to the brusqueness of his manner and to the fact that he wasn't going to be trifled with. This fellow was that sharp-eyed austere Prussian type. So I admitted that we were prisoners-of-war, that we were hungry and that we were just walking down to the next village to trade for some food. All this time I kept calling him "Hauptmann" (Captain). He demanded to know what camp we were from, where we were formerly stationed, etc.! All this while Capt. Gould was nudging me and grinning for all he was worth. He was getting a big kick out of it.

FINALLY THIS OFFICER turned his car around, demanded we get in the back of it, and away we went. This time I was really worried. Getting into the car I noticed a private in the back and asked him who the officer was. To my amazement, and also to increase the dilemma we were in I was informed that he was a German full colonel. And here I'd been making him madder and madder by calling him Captain. I told Capt. Gould about it, and he grinned even more. Anyway, we went right on by the house where all our food and our two marching comrades were, and on down the road to where another Camp was marching through. Here the Colonel had the car stop, and he called two Luftwaffe guards over. He then proceeded to give them a thorough bawling-out for letting prisoners-of-war wander around, told them to keep a good eye on us for the duration of the march, and to shoot us if necessary if we tried any shenanigans. Meanwhile, we were both let out of the car and put in charge of one of the guards.

For just about one half-hour that Colonel lectured the two guards, telling them what dangerous men we were and what would happen to the guards if we were caught wandering around again. And these two kept repeating, *"Ja, mein Herr! Nein, mein Herr!"*

As soon as the Colonel turned his car around and left, the two guards wanted to know what it was all about. I immediately offered them each a cigarette and told them our story. They told me that he did not belong to the Camps that were marching through, but was stationed nearby. They seemed like good Joes, so I offered them each five cigarettes and asked them what the chances were of them turning the other way while we walked back to where we were staying. They replied that they couldn't do that because that German Colonel might catch us, but they would escort us back to the house themselves—which they did!

One can well imagine the surprise of Lt. Col. Edner and Capt. Hyde as we came rolling into the yard under German Luftwaffe guard. They thought the jig was up, and we weren't too sure as to just exactly what the score was.

But the funny part was that here Edner and Hyde were all stretched out on a blanket, stripped to the waist and getting a bit of suntan as unconcernedly as if they were vacationing at Palm Beach instead of POW'ing in Germany. We gave the guards three more cigarettes apiece; and they, with large grins on their faces and a knowing wink, went on their way. What a relief!

Two German Wehrmacht soldiers convalescing from wounds were staying at the house. Both were just about back to normal and we found out later that one of them was to report to Neustadt the next morning prior to being sent to the West Front. Anyway, the other fellow came out and wheeled away on a bike. Then a few minutes later he came back with a full loaf of bread. We offered to trade, and got the loaf for three cigarettes....

Leaning over the fence was a pretty German Fräulein and she called me over to ask if we were Americans. I said yes, and she asked me about America. Seemed as though she had an uncle in Chicago. Just about that time the air-raid warning sounded, and looking up, we saw what looked like the whole Eighth Air Force on parade going overhead. However, we were not worried, as we knew that this was a small town and hardly worth the trouble of such a big bombing force. Besides, there were many much more worth-while targets in the vicinity.

Walking into the house that evening to cook our meal, we were a bit nonplused to find the other German Wehrmacht soldier there. He was eating his supper, and upon talking with him and the Frau I learned that he was her husband and was due to report to the West Front on the morrow. While we were cooking, the Frau asked me what would happen to her husband if he surrendered. Would he be immediately shot, taken prisoner back to America or what would happen to him? I again explained that the Americans were good people and that we were not barbarians. I told them that he would probably be kept a prisoner in France, somewhere. Then they wanted to know how long, and my own answer was that I thought maybe two or three years, because the Americans were not a hard nation when it came to dealing with conquered countries.

This pleased them both and we had little difficulty in securing plenty of potatoes and the use of the pans we needed to cook with. We had opened another can of British stew meat to mix with the potatoes, and Hyde had found some carrots out in the barn. Lt. Col. Edner had already found use for what chocolate we had left and was busily making a pudding with that and the eggs. This pudding was popping the eyes out of the daughter, and later we gave her a good-sized taste of it.

LATER WE GOT OUR ISSUANCE of Red Cross parcels in the form of one French and one Belgian parcel between the four of us. These parcels had mostly sweets and crackers in them with a few cans of meat and some canned vegetable or other. We felt that life was now smiling down on us in a big way!

That evening was ideal, and all of us sat out in front of the house on a long bench. The Frau's husband had gone down the street to say good-by to some of his friends while the grandmother, the Frau, her sister and her daughter were out on the bench with us getting a breath of air. I was asked what America was like, and if New York was as big as they were told and were the buildings so large. They also wanted to know how bad the buildings were damaged from the German air raids they had been told about. Of course I immediately told them that those air raids were propaganda, and they more or less indicated by their attitude that they hadn't believed this story either. Then talk got around to whether I was married or not, and if I had any children, and what was my wife like and did she work, etc.

Grandmother was having a great old time listening, and to be truthful it was a very peaceful scene with war again seeming a far way off. Finally the grandmother said that she thought I spoke pretty good German and that it was a shame for such a nice fellow to have to be a prisoner and go on to prison camp. . . .

APRIL 10TH: After an excellent breakfast of coffee, eggs and fried potatoes, we got started down the road at about nine o'clock. It was another beautiful day, and the sun had come up like a great big ball of fire. No guards were around as we sneaked out of the village and started on our way. Being unaware as to how close we were to the Danube we were very much surprised suddenly to come up on a small river about one hundred feet across. On the bridge was a sign stating that it was the DONAU RIVER. When I told the other fellows that I thought this was the Danube, they laughed at me. The Danube was supposed to be a large river not just a small stream. Besides, this stream was a dirty green and not blue.

On our side of the bridge was a German Wehrmacht guard who came out of his small shack with a big grin on his face. He wanted to know if we were prisoners-of-war, were we going to cross the bridge and did we have a guard. I replied to all these questions, and he told us to take it easy and not to walk too fast, because we were only going to be put behind barbed wire when we reached our destination. Well, I grinned, offered him a cigarette, and we started across the bridge. Halfway across were two bombs lying on the center of it. Both were defused, and the plowed-up part of the bridge indicated that they had been dropped there. One looked like a British bomb and the other like an American. Offhand, we agreed that they were about five-hundred-pounders. We immediately started wondering what the score on those bombs was, and whether or not the Germans had them wired so as to blow the bridge up when the Americans came. We could already see the Germans throwing up breastworks on the south side of the river and several 88's and other guns being installed. We continued on across. . . .

(The march continued for some days in the same way, the Americans using cigarettes and soap from their Red Cross parcels to bargain for food and shelter with the people along the way—and keeping a sharp lookout for a chance to drop out and escape.)

April 13th, Friday: Everybody was scheduled to march at 09:00 A.M. on this day, and although we had intended to shove off early, our hayloft was evidently too much for us and we got caught napping. However, we had a good breakfast from some barley flour Lt. Col. Edner had snitched from an old Frau and made into pancakes, four eggs apiece and coffee and bread. The coffee was of the soluble type and came from the American Red Cross parcels.

A guard came looking for us the next morning just about the time we had figured the Camp had left. The old boy wasn't fooling either, and we were soon down in line with the rest of the Krieges. However, Hyde and Edner had bargained with the old crone the day before, and we now had a baby carriage along with us to put our packs in. Each of us took turns pushing it. While going out of town the German townsfolk sent many a gibe our way teasing us about the "Kinderwagen" we were pushing along.

Rolling along we dropped back until we were soon at the rear of the line. Our main interest was to develop sore feet again and drop out. However, this Camp set-up was a little different and had German guards to the rear with bicycles and machine-guns. And we soon found out that they weren't fooling. However, it was much easier walking and we took our time.

Farther up the road we went by a small encampment of Krieges with a guard, and one of them yelled at Lt.

Col. Edner. Then the first thing we knew Lt. Col. Edner and this fellow rejoined us and we were introduced to Lt. Tommy Watts of the RCAF. Both Edner and Watts had been in the same British compound a few years back. Tommy was an American from Kansas who had joined the Royal Canadian Air Force way back when, and had been on his 12th mission with a "Wimpy" Wellington when shot down. He'd been a prisoner-of-war for over two years. He also told us in a low voice that he had just escaped from Mooseberg (the camp we were marching to) and was heading for the Danube, where he had a contact on the other side. He'd had a narrow escape near Landshut, and had almost been pulverized by a P-51 that was strafing after the bombers had just left. Tommy was busy escaping when the P-51 saw him running and drove him into a headlong dive at a bomb-crater. Questioning him about Mooseberg, we found that it was a dump, the food poor, they were on half Red Cross parcel rations, the fellows were sleeping in tents and wallowing in mud.

WE MARCHED ON and finally stopped on the outskirts of a town called Pfefferhausen. Here we filled up our canteens with water and during the waiting interval were told that Red Cross parcels were being issued out at the head of the line, and that we would get ours when we passed by. The ration was one parcel for four men.

Getting our parcel, we continued on and found out that we would be bivouacked in an open field for the night. This didn't suit our ideas at all so Lt. Col. Edner went over to the guard and demanded to be taken to the Hauptmann. Upon being taken to the Hauptmann, Edner complained about everything in general and asked to be given a guard and allowed to look up the road for a better place to sleep. Surprisingly, the Hauptmann agreed, and with Lt. Col. Edner calling out to any of the misfit Krieges that we happened to know, we soon had about twenty Air Corps men to go with us, *and* Rudy, our guard—a typical army misfit if there ever was one.

Our first attempt for shelter was at a farmhouse on a hill, but that old Nazi billygoat wouldn't be bothered with us and told us to get scooting, that he was housing the Luftwaffe guards for the night. Farther up the road and to the right was a series of farmhouses up on the hill. This looked like the place, and while the Krieges waited on the road, Rudy, Lt. Col. Edner and I went up the hill to the different houses and made arrangements. Only women were home, so we told them that the Hauptmann had ordered that we were to sleep in their barns for the night. Up on the top of the hill and at the last farmhouse (far removed from the road), Lt. Col. Edner and myself made the deal for our little group, and then told Rudy that he was to take the other fellows and sleep in the farmhouse down the road. We kept ten fellows up at our farmhouse. Rudy listened very patiently and agreed to the whole set-up. (We grinned quietly to ourselves, because this was the spot we intended to make our break from.) Our hosts consisted of the mother, one blonde nice-looking Fräulein about seventeen, one boy of about twelve and another boy of about six.

Persistent rumors were also flying around on this day to the effect that Roosevelt had died. This was very disconcerting and we were anxious to get our hands on a radio so that we could tune in on BBC and check up. We resolved to look around the neighborhood the next day and see if we couldn't find some house that had a radio. We also had to find the whereabouts of General Patton's outfit if we could, because Tommy wanted to head back for the Danube. But if the Americans were too close to the Danube, the chance would be too risky, for the woods and fields would undoubtedly be full of German soldiers alerted to defend the crossing of this natural barrier. We had to know!

Word came up from the group down at the other farmhouse that there was a radio down there but it was a battery set. Also, it was in the living-room, and that was where Rudy and the family hung out. Lt. Col. Edner and Tommy Watt (Tommy's Canadian lieutenant rank was the equivalent to our Captain's rank) went down to see what could be done about tuning in. They had it fixed up between them to see Rudy on unimportant business, check on the radio and perhaps tune in on BBC.

The main set-up for tuning in on BBC was for Tommy, who could speak German, to start up a conversation with Rudy and the family, while Edner fooled around with the radio. When it was time for BBC, Tommy was to talk a little louder and go into some form of a long discourse to keep the family's and Rudy's mind off what was being tuned in on the radio. It worked pretty well, except for the fact that by the time Lt. Col. Edner got it tuned in right, the program of newscasting was just about at an end. However, they did get some information that seemed to indicate that President Roosevelt was actually dead.

The next day Tommy and I went out with cigarettes and soap to see if we couldn't pick up some eggs, milk and potatoes. We got along famously that day, with both Tommy and I able to carry on a fairly good conversation. We got more than enough food, and way up on another hill we got a lead on what eventually decided us to "hole out" in this section. Up on this hill was a large farm with about six or eight refugees working there. Of the main family was the grandmother (called *Mutter*), the daughter, her child and two sons. Mutter was quite talkative, and seemingly very fond of Americans. She got out her map, showed us where we were and then pointed out to us where the Americans were. In fact, every day thereafter she had the latest report as to how the Americans were doing, and would show us their advances. And yet we could never find out by radio! The grapevine system among the German peasants seemed well informed. We kept coming back and checking.

Deer was plentiful in this section. Everywhere you looked there were small patches of woods, and out grazing on the grass nearby would be two or three deer. But whenever you tried to get near them, they took off in a hurry. They were a picture to look at as they nonchalantly grazed on the grass off on a distant hillside, and it brought the hunting urge into one's veins.

That Saturday afternoon, April 14th, some more of the family came home. There were two more daughters: One worked in Munich and pedaled home by bike, while another daughter worked in Landshut and also pedaled from there by bike. Then there was an aunt who came from somewhere else and was a most excellent cook. During her brief few days there she treated us to some excellent German dishes. Pancakes, biscuits, apple tarts, jelly rolls, some sort of potato flapjack and whatnot was our fare, with all five of us gratefully grinning our approval. Most of the food used was what we traded for around the neighborhood, although from time to time certain items were tossed in that belonged to the family's ration. We reciprocated in kind by treating them to tea, coffee, chocolate puddings, honey cake. . . . We got there on Friday the 13th and stayed until the morning of April 19th.

DURING OUR RECONNAISSANCES in bargaining for food and looking over the lay of the land, Tommy and I discovered a neat patch of woods north of the farmhouse we were staying in and decided to build a leanto. The next day we sneaked off with an ax in our bag and soon had the framework of a good sized leanto started in a deep patch of the pine trees. However, that afternoon on our visit up to the top of the hill and to this other farm we were talking with the family, and they suggested we hide out around there. They would be willing to feed us and if it rained we could hide in one of their barns by way of an unnoticed rear door. We remained noncommittal. Coming back along the path, we talked it over and decided that up on the hill would be a better place.

Next day we took off on a trading expedition again and at first headed northward. Once in the woods, we doubled back for about three miles and headed into the forest behind the farm upon which we had decided to use for our escape hide-out. We built an excellent pine-tree leanto there, or so I thought. All the framework was made secure, and the pine tree boughs were interlaced and latticed until a good solid matting was made, and then we piled our boughs on until the roof was about a foot thick before we went to work on the sides. No tree was stripped too much, and we got all our boughs from distant points dragging them in to where we had our leanto. Security was our main keyword throughout the whole procedure. Even the German family didn't know for sure whether we were going to attempt to hide out! . . .

Each night two of us would go to Rudy's farmhouse and pull the same old gag of trying to tune in on BBC. However, BBC wasn't putting any information out on General Patton's whereabouts, and the only news we were getting was from the farmhouse up on the hill. Every time we tuned in on the radio (it was by the front window) the rest of the Krieges would be listening outside in the dark to what was going on.

THE FEW DAYS that we were "relaxing" at this restful spot the air raids seemed to be stepped up, and the larger towns all around us were hit. The younger daughter of our German hosts was working in Landshut when that town was hit, and hit hard. Both Tommy and I were up on the hill trading with Mutter when we heard the bombers overhead. All the workers stopped, and about ten of us were on the highest spot of ground watching the formations go over. Both Tommy and I predicted it was Landshut; and sure enough, we soon saw the flares drop, heard the distant booms and then saw the slowly rising column of smoke ascend above the pine-tree horizon. One of our group was a German woman who had formerly lived in Landshut but had been bombed out. She had the jitters so she looked about ready to fall apart. Her husband had been killed in a former Landshut raid, from what we understood, and she had been sent to the farm by her German doctor.

Coming back to the farm, we immediately noticed the whole family had the jitters. The father had gone to work at Regensberg, but the other daughter was getting dressed up and soon pedaled off on her bike to check up on her younger sister. That evening about ten o'clock they both came back and told us about the air raid. The younger daughter insisted that our fighter pilots had come down the center of the street and strafed it after the raid; and no matter how hard we tried to argue with her, she insisted she'd seen them. She herself had pedaled out of the immediate vicinity of the town during the air raid, and hadn't been hurt. Things took a turn for the better when she came back that evening—for us at least, because we figured if she'd been killed we'd have had rough sledding.

The next day, Regensberg was raided, and that evening the father came pedaling home. He'd been bombed out. When the older daughter, who'd been staying home for a couple of days, stated that she was going back to Munich, we all tried to dissuade her, but she insisted that she had to go; otherwise she'd be turned over to the Gestapo. She went to work the next morning, and was still in Munich when we left to escape.

However, time had just about run out, and on the afternoon of the 18th Rudy came up to tell Lt. Col. Edner that Camp Six had come and was moving out the next morning. He had got orders that we were to be ready at nine o'clock and move out with the crippled section. Well, this was it, and we knew it. All of our food was checked and divided equally among the five of us, while Tommy and I were supposedly up on the hill just trading. Actually, we were making last-minute arrangements up on the hill and getting set to take off.

Mutter said that she would feed us, and Vater had also indicated he wanted us to hide out. Both of their sons (one was 41 and the other 45) also knew we were going to attempt to "sweat out" the coming of the Americans. Mutter's last report had the Americans about twenty kilometers from the Danube. Also, Kriege rumor from passing Camps had given us the impression that they were not going to stop at Mooseberg, but that Rosenheim was their next stop. Checking the map, we could see that Rosenheim was on the way to Berchtesgaden and we started thinking. By checking fact and rumor, we decided that the Air Corps were going to be used for hostages to save Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels and the SS troopers' necks. As far as we were both concerned, we were damned if we were going to be used to save their worthless hides.

Next morning we got up early and had an excellent breakfast. About 07:30 we said our good-bys and took off—heading in the opposite direction from where we expected to stay in our leanto and then cutting back once we got deep into the woods. Capt. Hyde had my wife's address and was to write to her if he got through all right. If I was okay, she would already have heard from me, and if not Capt. Hyde would be able to give her the information as to where and when I'd last been seen. Besides, it was April 19th; my third anniversary was coming up on May 16th and I hadn't been with my wife for even one since we'd been married. My first anniversary was spent in England, my second in prison camp at Sagan, and I had hopes of getting through in time to spend the third with her. (I didn't quite make it! I was in Le Havre.)

Our leanto looked good to us and after getting there we lay down on the pine boughs and took a good snooze. After our snooze we had a small cold snack of crackers and some other Red Cross food. We knew that a fire was out of the question because it would immediately give our position away. The smoke would rise above the treetops and if any German soldiers were in the vicinity they would immediately investigate.

Just before dark we headed down toward the edge of the woods and watched the house for a good hour or so while remaining hidden behind the foliage. However, everything seemed in order, and we decided to go up to the house at 21:00. Maria was there and had a meal all ready for us. But first she told us to wash up, and even provided hot water for the purpose. She asked if we had shaving kits, and upon confirmation we were told to bring them the next night and we could shave. Carl, one of the brothers, came in a little later (after finishing his milking) and he talked us into sleeping in the haymow, saying he would wake us up at 05:30. We agreed.

BUT IN THE NIGHT a detachment of infantry, on the retreat, moved in on the farm and demanded a place to bed down. They were put into the barn also and slept just on the other side of the partition from us. We could hear them talking just as if they were sleeping right alongside of us. To say that we were both jittery, would be putting it mildly. We knew that one word from the German family and—"We'd had it!" (Retreating soldiers can't be bothered with prisoners.) However, we soon got used to such episodes and had quite a few close calls before the Americans finally came through. Needless to say, when Carl came to awake us at 05:15, we were already awake and more than glad to slip out in the pre-dawn back to our leanto. In little time we were sound asleep there and catching up on the sleep we didn't get the night before.

That noon Maria was scheduled to bring us a food-basket out to the woods, and we were wondering just how she would work it. It didn't seem likely that Maria would put her neck out to risk bringing us food. However, we underestimated Maria by far.

Around 13:30 we saw Maria and her daughter (I think the daughter's name was Christine) come walking along the path toward the woods with a basket in her hand.

They were laughing and joking exactly as though they were going on a picnic all by themselves. Tommy doubled back to meet them back along the woods path, while I stayed at the woods edge for almost a half-hour. But no German soldiers had followed, and feeling secure about the whole deal, I went back to join Tommy.

The food was excellent. A large bowl of beef broth with bread dumplings was the main dish, with a special dessert of some sort of hollow sugar-coated bun filled with apple sauce. They were delicious and hit the spot. Little Christine had her eyes dancing with excitement as she watched us eat. She evidently knew just exactly what would happen if we were caught, and she was highly thrilled at being a participant. I believe she was about nine years of age. Both she and Maria wanted to see our leanto but I said no, and explained that maybe next time they could. We were told to come on up to the house that night but to be careful.

THAT NIGHT TOMMY AND I were extra cautious and took thirty minutes to cover an approximate distance of two hundred yards while coming up the hill from out of the hollows. This was a roundabout way, but we always used it to assure that our leanto direction would not be indicated. Coming up to the outhouse, we sneaked around that after a few cautious moments and continued to the barn. Vater could be seen in the moonlight while he was standing by the edge of the house. Just about then we heard a walking and scraping noise up in the loft of the one barn and ducked back quickly in the shadows, but not before Vater had seen us. Soon there came a clumping down the steps, and a German Wehrmacht officer headed across the courtyard toward the other barns. Vater came over to us and told us to move quick to the milk-shed when he waved us on.

While Vater stood out in the courtyard and looked around, Tommy and I stood waiting in the shadows. Both of us were pretty well keyed up, and for my part, I was wondering what the devil I was doing there in the first place. It would have been much more safe and sensible to go back down the path and around through the woods to our leanto.

Soon Vater gave us the come-on signal with a wave of his hand. But just as we stepped out into the moonlight, about six German soldiers came marching around the corner of a building about one hundred feet away from us. There was no time to run, and to hesitate would also have brought disaster to us. Instead, both of us walked nonchalantly on toward the milk-shed and went inside. Possibly just dumb luck, but we got away with it, and not one came to investigate. It's even possible that they thought we were work-prisoners doing our evening chores. But both Tommy and I breathed a sigh of relief once we got inside the milk-shed.

Carl was in the shadows milking the cows and told us to sit down until he got the signal from the house. He apparently seemed unconcerned and went on milking and feeding the cows for the next ten minutes or so. Soon a light flashed on in a bedroom, and Carl told us to go on into the house. And so, with our hearts literally booming, we stepped out into the moonlight, strolled across the courtyard and into the house. Maria was waiting there and gave us hot water to shave with. Then we sat down to the evening meal. Carl came in about fifteen minutes later and ate with us. Our own tea served for the beverage. We stayed there until eleven o'clock, then crawled up in the hayloft to sleep until 05:15 again.

Next morning Carl evidently overslept himself, because it was already dawn when we awoke and headed back to the woods. We wasted no time scooting across the open field, but even at that, we found out later that we had been spotted. Only, luckily, it was a Polish worker named Stanislaus who saw us. Stan was sure we were Americans too, and every night thereafter the German family told us that Stan had been poking and nosing around all day trying to find out where we were hiding.

On the next day, Saturday, April 21st, we were greeted with a general blowing up of the wind and a chilly pervading atmosphere. Rain was in the offing, and I was anxious to see how our leanto would take it. Just to be safe, we cut more pine boughs and added to the depth of the roof. Also we made a tighter lattice-work of the sides and made better beds for ourselves.

Maria came with Christine that noon and told us the Germans were still around. We felt that since the family had risked their necks the night before in feeding us under the very noses of the soldiers, we could at least display our confidence in reciprocating by showing Maria our leanto. This was Tommy's idea, and since our future was now in their hands anyway, it seemed only reasonable that we agree.

Christine was all excited, and when we finally brought her up to the leanto, she uttered all sorts of excited comments. Neither she nor Maria could quite get over the compactness of our little home. They both kept clucking their tongues, walking around it, looking inside, asking us questions. We invited them inside out of the cold wind while we ate our lunch. Having a few pieces of chocolate and some crackers of French Red Cross parcel vintage, we treated them to some, and a good time was had by all. However, four persons made it rather a tight squeeze.

That afternoon it started to get squally, but Tommy and I were lazily content, sleeping on our pine boughs in the leanto. Comfortably and lazily we listened to the rain commencing to fall and wondered if it would keep us from getting to the farmhouse that night. It dropped gently at first, and I can remember how secure and dry we felt. Then the fury of the storm mounted, and we really got pelted with rain. It came down in buckets as if the whole heavens had opened up. But still we were comfortable and unworried. Then, from out of nowhere, a drop of water landed on my face. Then Tommy mentioned he'd felt a drop. Soon we were subjected to regular drippings and then in time there wasn't any dry spot in our leanto. Quickly we gathered all the pine boughs on the floor and propped them up on the roof, but even that didn't help. Our food we tied to the roof in Red Cross boxes so that wouldn't be on the wet floor.

Soon there was no doubt but that it would be impossible for us to stay in the leanto. Finally Tommy talked me into going back to the hut, which was swimming in water. Everything was soaked, including our blankets. We felt like a couple of drowned rats, and I guess we more than looked it. Talking over the situation, we decided to try the farm regardless of the Germans and attempt to sneak in the hayloft.

Although practically exhausted and low in spirits, we still had sense enough to be careful and look around before heading for the milk-stall. We figured we might as well head for the milk-stall because it was almost 21:00, the appointed time for us to arrive for our supper.

CARL WAS IN THE MILK-STALL and clucked in consternation as we came in soaked to the skin. We told him that our leanto had leaked and that was how we'd got so wet. Carl soon had a roaring fire going in the milk-shed. We had brought our own blankets and threw them around us while the rest of our clothes were being dried on the heater. This heater was a peculiar contraption in that the fire-box was underneath, while on top of it was a built-in sort of water-tub that was kept filled. It was on the cover of this tub that we had our clothes drying.

Two pails were given to us, and while sitting on stools we had our feet soaking in the hot water. Maria brought us out steaming bowls of soup and large slices of German bread. They also told us there were only four soldiers around and nothing to worry about. We were to sleep in

the milk-shed that night and go to the hayloft just before dawn when our clothes were dry. Carl said he would awaken us. That night we dropped gently off to sleep on a pile of hay just in front of the cow-stocks. Tommy woke up once when the cow in back of him had reached over and was slowly chewing on the hay and pulling it out from underneath Tommy's head.

About 02:00 A.M. there was an awful racket out in the yard and I thought a whole division had marched in on the farm. To say I was scared stiff would be putting it mildly. And all the time there was a shouting of German gutturals going on that were too far away to be understood. I determined to get a look-see, but it was still raining and with no light it was almost impossible to see anything. Then all of a sudden there was a new rattle and clatter, and whatever was out there headed back down the road. In the morning Carl told me that it had been a panzer tank, that they had got lost and had stopped at the farmhouse to ask directions.

WE STAYED IN THE HAYLOFT all that day and for the balance of our stay until we were finally rescued. There was nothing to do, no books to read and time hung heavy on our hands. All we could do was to burrow down in the hay in our blankets and snooze away. I studied my German book from time to time and also we had quite a few bull sessions. The days were very long and we were more than glad to have evening come so that we could sneak around in back of the buildings, into the milk-shed, and then wait for the "all-clear" signal.

On Monday, April 23rd, it rained all day and we slept all day. The next morning about seven A.M. I was interrupted in my pleasant snoozing by the tugging of something at my feet. It turned out to be Stanislaus. He had been searching for us all this time and had finally located our hide-out. I couldn't imagine how he had crept in the door and got to us without making any noise until subsequent mornings proved to us that this fellow was flawless in his technique and could move about at will without hardly making a sound. He would have made an excellent second-story man.

Anyway, when I finally shook the sleep out of my eyes and recognized him as one of the workers we had seen before going into hiding I breathed a sigh of relief. Stan, in the meanwhile, had grasped my hand in his mighty paw and was urgently whispering "Comrade!" Every other word was comrade and we were talking for about five minutes before Tommy heard us whispering and woke up. In the meantime we had offered him a cigarette and Stan was calmly smoking it in the hay and carelessly dropping his ashes all over the place.

We learned that he had a wife and four children in Poland. Before the Russians came through, he had received a letter once in a while from them. Now he didn't know. He was worried and hoped the war would soon end so he could get back to his family.

When we asked about the family that was hiding us out, and for whom Stan was working, he immediately got excited and said that they were no good. He told us that a couple of years ago he and the other workers were treated like dogs, but now that the war was almost over all of the workers were being better fed and given less working hours. He also told us that they had special Catholic services about once a month for the Polish workers in that section. Upon our asking him about the family at the bottom of the hill, he replied that they were good German people. He said that in rough times these people had also fed him when he was hungry. As a clincher he told us: "Listen, my friends, now that times are hard and Germany is losing the war, these people here on this farm will do anything to save their necks, but two years back you'd have been beaten and turned over to the Gestapo without a tear! I am not joking, my friends, I speak the truth, believe me!"

Tommy and I readily agreed that the father and the one son would be tough customers if they were against you instead of for you.

All that day, Tuesday, April 24th, there was bombing. The Air Force seemed to be out in strength and bombing in all directions. At one time we heard a batch of planes flying low and upon looking out through a crack in the door we noticed a formation of B-26's scooting by over the treetopped horizon. This was my first look at a B-26 in over a year and I got that old homesick feeling. My knockdown date had been April 22nd, 1944, just before the invasion. It was good to get a look at B-26's again and I wondered if, perhaps, they might have been from my own group.

On the day of Wednesday, April 25th, our farm seemed to be loaded with soldiers. About every hour we could hear more clomping on the other side of the partition, the spreading of blankets and the snores of worn-out soldiers. Carl, coming to us at noon with our food sneaked in a milk pail, told us that they were sleeping all over the place. They were infantry and had not had any sleep for three days. He said they'd been retreating and retreating and were worn out. Then Maria came to talk with us and then Stan came in for awhile in the afternoon. Then Vater came to have a look at us. All in all, it was just like "Open House" and with all the talking going on both Tommy and I expected to have a German soldier or two walk in on us at any minute. But, it didn't happen and we survived the day—*only,* that day was pretty rough on the nervous system.

That night, upon coming into the kitchen, Mutter had another story to tell us. It seemed that at Regensberg, the German soldiers retreated out of the town at two A.M. and at 02:05 the Americans came in. According to Mutter the German soldiers never even got a chance to blow up the bridge and by four o'clock the entire town had surrendered, and the bridge was still standing although the Germans had tried their best to blow it up. Mutter seemed tickled about this and kept commenting that the Americans were pretty good soldiers. We, of course, agreed! . . .

ALL DAY ON THURSDAY, April 26th, we heard cannon booming in the not too far distance. Carl came at noon to tell us that the Americans were now shelling Neustadt, Abendsburg, and Augsburg. It had rained all day in a half-hearted sort of way and with such dismal weather we had little trouble in snoozing from time to time.

That evening when we came into the house there was little to say at first, and we noticed both Carl and his brother were just a little bit perturbed. Both were in the Volkssturm, and the night before Peter had been on duty at Pfefferhausen. This night was Carl's night to be on duty, and Carl wanted no part of it. He was damned if he was going to go. When Pete told him that he'd have to go, Carl would get excited and say: "Fanaticism—that's what it is! Just a lot of darn foolishness. What good would I be with a gun against American tanks?" And Pete, with a twinkle in his eye, would needle him some more. After a while, Carl went grumbling off to bed with the parting admonition that he wasn't going and that's all there was to it.

When we asked Pete about the Volkssturm and what he'd done the night before, Pete gave a hearty chuckle. During the conversation and while Tommy was talking to Maria's brother-in-law, Pete asked me: *"Verstehe Diesel öl?"* Well, of course that wasn't too hard to understand because our word is practically the same thing. Anyway, Pete told me there wouldn't be any battle through this section and chuckled all the while. When I told him I wasn't too sure of that, he told me to listen that night for trucks and tanks going down the road. Upon my asking him what was up, he again asked me: *"Verstehe Diesel öl?"*

Upon my nodding in assent he told me that all the Diesel oil for the front-line trucks and tanks had been stored at Pfefferhausen and that the Volkssturm the night before had opened the petcocks to the tanks and emptied the oil all over the ground. I was so dumfounded I couldn't believe it, and asked him to repeat what he said. He chuckled again, repeated the same information and said that if I didn't believe him, to listen to the tanks and trucks going down the road in retreat that night. And, they did go rolling and clanking by all night long.

On Friday the 27th at noon we learned the Americans were only fourteen kilometers from where we were. (So near and yet so far!) Carl was grinning widely when he told us the news. We of course were kidding him about not going on duty, and he just grinned and replied that wouldn't he be feeling silly on guard right now with all those tanks and cannon tearing the town apart. He certainly looked relieved and vindicated in his stand against Pete in not going. Besides, the weather that day was perfect, and just as sunny as could be. About all we could think of was, "Come on, Yanks!" Every cannon-boom gave pleasure to our listening ears, and when there was a lull in the firing we felt disappointed.

LITTLE WAS SAID THAT EVENING in the house, but we did get the best feed we'd had yet. We had asked Maria the night before if we could have pancakes, and sure enough we got them that night and with a special jam sauce to put on them. Marie also had a few of Mutter's special sugar buns filled with applesauce for us. We were doing all right.

About 15:00 (3 o'clock) on Saturday we were subjected to one of the worst scares we'd had to date. While lying around in the hayloft we suddenly heard a whole batch of trucks and cars coming down the drive. At first we thought they might be Americans, but the German gutturals soon told us differently. We counted about thirteen trucks and cars all told, and they spread out all over the farm. Immediately we began to worry: "Supposing our P-47's or P-51's come along now and spot these babies all around the farm? We'll be blasted to pieces!" We really started to sweat!

Carl came sneaking around to us and told us that a whole batch of young SS troopers had moved in on the farm and taken over. He was frankly worried but no more than we, when Carl informed us that they'd just been strafed by P-47's along the road, and had a dead SS trooper sitting out in one of the cars. Whewwwwwwww-wwwww, we really started to sweat then. Both of us had visions of what our fate would be when under the present circumstances they caught us attempting escape and found out we were Air Corps prisoners of war besides!

Vater came sneaking in that afternoon to get a look at us, and he had a worried frown also. As things stood, there was only one entrance and exit to our shelter. If anyone came in, we had no way of sneaking out. And the SS troopers were snooping around all over the farm. Vater knew this, and going over into one corner, he started heaving bales of hay around. I went over to see what was up when he had finally worked himself downward into a corner out of sight. To my amazement, I saw that he was uncovering a door that was at the rear of the barn, and more or less sheltered from any prying eyes unless someone happened to be in the immediate vicinity. After we got all the hay-bales out of the way, Vater told me that Maria would feed us through that door that night, and to be ready for her at dark.

Around seven o'clock that evening there was a lot of commotion. A sedan had come scurrying into the yard; a lot of orders were issued, and then the trucks and cars started moving out. We could tell that much from the motors and the shouting going on. However, two trucks wouldn't start, and according to my calculations there was still one sedan type left in the yard.

In time the two trucks got started and took off, and through a crack in the door we saw them head out the driveway. They were large trucks with machine-guns mounted on the roof of the cab. They were also loaded down with pine bough camouflage. The occupants themselves had on the German rubberized camouflage capes. We were glad to see them go and hoped that somewhere along the line our P-51's would catch up with them and give them a deserved rest from their brutal atrocities. We wanted no part of them. Tommy immediately relaxed and thought they were all gone, but somehow I wasn't convinced and was sure there was still one more car hanging around somewhere.

When darkness came, Maria came sneaking in the back way and had a big bowlful of meat stew. In fact, it was all meat. Both Tommy and I looked at each other and wondered what was up. We had never been given any meat before, and thought the war must surely be close to the end to have such a stroke of good luck. We ate and ate and still couldn't finish it all. It was the first decent meat I had seen in over a year.

Maria upon leaving, almost got us into another jam. Just as she headed out the door, an SS trooper came out the back door of the barn partitioned off from us, and it was only by a hair that she missed being seen as she stepped back into our loft. When she finally did take off, she slipped in some mud and fell flat on her sitdown. We could hear a muttered cussword as she picked herself up and took off. She had informed us that four SS troopers were staying.

Later Stan came in through the regular entrance. He was all keyed up about the SS troopers staying that night. Without any ceremony, he informed us that he was going to walk the woods that night. Upon further questioning, he told us that several of his Polish comrades were also going to do the same thing. They were all waiting for him and his good American friends. At this time it was pouring rain again, and all Stan had for protection was a raggedy-patched suit with a sweater underneath. When we asked him what he was worrying about, Stan immediately replied, *"SS nicht gut!"* (SS no good.) He then made motions to tell us that they would cut off his fingers, his ears and any other convenient article. He said the SS had no use for the Polish!

Tommy and I talked it over hurriedly and decided we'd remain and sweat it out in our hayloft. We tried to talk Stan into bringing his friends there too, but he was determined to get as far away from the SS as possible. His general attitude of fright made us even more jittery, but we determined to stay where we were.

NEXT MORNING MARIA CAME IN to tell us that the SS troopers were gone. When she asked for the empty stew bowl, I asked her if she had made it. She replied no. Then I wanted to know if Mutter had made it. Again she replied no. When I asked her who had made it, she replied: "SS!" I'll bet both Tommy and I had our hair standing straight up. Marie laughed and told us that the SS troopers had taken over the kitchen and cooked up the whole batch of meat stew out of the meat they had brought themselves. She had sneaked in and got us a bowlful when they had left in the trucks, and while the four who had stayed were out fiddling in the barn with their blankets.

Stan came in that morning looking worn out. He had walked all night long out in the rain and looked it. He said there were plenty of Wehrmacht soldiers in the woods also. This surprised us, but Stan seemed to indicate that the soldiers were hiding from the Germans and wanted to give themselves up. He said neither he nor his companions had been seen, however. During this time we could hear shells ripping through the woods and thudding in the distance. We knew that our rescue wasn't very far off.

Carl came about a half hour later and told us the Americans were all around and why didn't we go meet them. However, he admitted none had come past the farm yet. My main worry was left-over snipers, and although Tommy wanted to take off, I refused to budge an inch, until sure.

About noontime, all was quiet. There was no more firing and we wondered what was up. Tommy wanted to get out of the hayloft and take a look around, but I still couldn't see where it would be worth the risk.

WHILE WE WERE TALKING IT OVER, our young Russian friend suddenly appeared; he was all excited and talking a mile a minute about the Americans. He said they were in an encampment on the other side of the woods, and wanted us to go with him immediately. He produced a note which read:

To American Soldiers:

This is a note to let you know that bearer has told us about two American soldiers. We have occupied this place, and if you let this guide bring you down to us, we will see that you are taken care of. We are an American outfit and will take care of you.

1st/Sgt. David Ziel

Tommy was all set then and wanted to take off immediately. But it struck me as strange that the Americans hadn't sent a soldier with the Russian, and also that there was no serial number on the note. It appeared to me that it might be a typical German trick as there was no indication that such a note couldn't be written by a German as well as an American. But Tommy was insistent, and we finally agreed that he would put on his French outfit, keep the Russian in front of him, and if anything happened, to try his best to escape. In the meantime, if I didn't hear from him in a reasonable length of time, I was to sneak off and hide out in the woods at our hut. Tommy was to meet me there if he could.

After Tommy had gone, I had nothing to do but wait and didn't enjoy the situation one bit. Things were getting close to the end, and the mental pressure was terrifically high.

Then from the newly made doorway I heard Vater calling me: "Heinrich!" (I had used the name *Heinrich* because the whole family had had difficulty in calling me *Kenneth.)* Well, I didn't know whether to bolt or not. Maybe Vater had something to say, and maybe he didn't. Finally I walked over near the opening and peeked around a bale of hay. The first thing I saw was a GI steel helmet on top of a laughing face and the fellow had a GI light rifle in his hand. I just stared open-mouthed. And then I let out one sharp yell: "Yank!" He grinned and said: "Yeah, been waiting a long time for us?"

It took me better than three-quarters of an hour to gather my wits together and finally get everything (a few useless odds and ends) together to take off with my rescuers. In fact, my thoughts were so jumbled and jambled that I never did find out their names. Also, Vater, Mutter, Maria, Christine, Carl, Peter and the Munich pair were clapping me on the shoulder and laughing and making a big fuss. But all the while Harniman was walking around in a fog, wondering where Tommy was. You see, these two fellows hadn't seen hide nor hair of Tommy. The time was about 14:45 and they said they'd come through and taken the territory around noon.

While I was still laughing and grinning and scowling and praying, my Russian friend came up. We were just getting into the jeep the two soldiers had. They were from the 501st Armored Field battalion. Anyway, the Russian had a note from Tommy to follow the Russian, and he would bring me to where Tommy was. So I told the Russian to hop on the jeep, and we'd take him with us. He grinned in delight but couldn't quite believe that he was going to be allowed to ride too.

Ours was a typical jeep-ride with all corners done *via* the hairpin-turn method, and finally bouncing across an open field to a tank unit set up in the field. Here the two GI's introduced me, and I in turn spoke to them in English, explaining that the Russian boy had helped us to escape, and that when I introduced him to shake his hand and pat him on the back. Well, the gang caught on quick, and my Russian friend was given a rousing welcome.

Within a space of minutes I was offered cigarettes, candy, coffee, eggs, stew, etc.! But my main interest was in finding Tommy. It seems that he was about a quarter of a mile away and doing all right too. The GI's had just butchered a pig and wanted us to stay to help eat it. Tommy was already loaded with wine and champagne. And here we were with two dinner invitations and happier than all blue blazes to realize that we were again in American hands. It seemed too good to be true.

I finally got Tommy to come with me and we headed back toward the C. O. In the interim they had received word *via* radio that Mooseberg had been taken after a brief skirmish with SS troopers. So our escape stunt hadn't helped us a bit except that we could probably get out quicker than they to the Coast, and on our way home just that much more quickly. We immediately started asking about trucks back. There was one scheduled to go back for mail and supplies the first thing in the morning. No time was wasted in deciding that we wanted to go with it. . . .

Then came the business of eating. There was stew, fried eggs, coffee and some of the first American white bread that I had seen in over a year. And butter! We ate and ate, and when we were full the fellows prevailed upon us to eat some more, and soon the food must have been pouring out of our ears. I consumed twelve fried eggs that evening, and got that peculiar poisoned-stomach feeling that comes to prisoners-of-war when they try to consume more than their shriveled stomachs can hold.

In the meantime, the whole outfit had been ordered to move on up, and within ten minutes were on their way. The only ones remaining were the supply crews. Tommy and I buttonholed them for a jeep, and were soon on our way *via* jeep, to the little farmhouse at the foot of the hill where the German mother and father had been so kind to Capt. Hyde and Capt. Gould.

IT WAS JUST ABOUT DUSK, and our driver, a lieutenant warned us about snipers along the roadside and told us we'd have to be watching the sides of the road every minute. But *now* we had guns!

Anyway, upon coming up into the farmyard, we were surprised and delighted to see no blackouts and a brilliant light shining through the window. Upon going into the house, we were amazed to find two German Wehrmacht soldiers there, unarmed. One was fifteen and the other seventeen. We immediately covered them with our rifles, and Father came over to explain that they wanted to give themselves up, and had been waiting all day for the Americans to come to the farm. However, the lieutenant informed us that this was the infantry job, and that mopping-up operations would be conducted by them when they came through in the next day or so. There was no doubt as to the relief in Mother's face when she realized it was Tommy and I who had come in the door and not American strangers. The whole family had evidently been sweating out the two youths' surrender. We searched them immediately, told them to get their belongings and sit in the jeep. In the meantime we'd given the children chocolate bars, cigarettes to Father, and coffee and things to Mother. The three daughters were there, but their main interests were centered around the two youthful soldiers. Father, in the meanwhile, got an ancient pistol out and also the cartridges for it and turned it over to me. I have it home now as a souvenir of my experiences in defeated Germany.

MAN of the NORTH

A fortune in furs in his canoe, and a buxom widow awaiting his return; and then—Fate and his enemies and his own wild heart changed the beautiful plan.

by DAN CUSHMAN

BATEESE CHAMPLAIN had been *voyageur* and trapper for sixteen of his thirty-two years, but never had he seen such a season's trade of furs as these.

He interrupted the swing of the paddle that drove his birch canoe along the timbered southern shore of Great Slave Lake, and stroked a bit of fur which projected from one of the bales just ahead of his knees.

That bit of fur was marten—honey-brown, glossy, soft as Chinese velvet. In other bales, wrapped with sailcloth and buckskin, were pelts of beaver, mink, ermine and black fox worth a *grand seigneur's* ransom at the auction marts of Montreal.

After stroking the bit of marten fur, Bateese closed his eyes, and for a few seconds pondered the infinite goodness of St. Anne, patron of *voyageurs,* who had this year interceded with God in his behalf to fill his canoe with such a magnificent trade of furs. This year, when he had resolved to say farewell to the rivers of the North forever! Surely it was the wish of heaven that he should return a *bourgeois* to the tiny village of Winnipeg, and marry Marie Douval, red-cheeked widow of that worthless Pierre who had drowned in the Grand Rapids two years ago.

"Come on, ol' woman," he said, addressing his birch canoe. "Today, you take me up river for las' time. My Marie, she will not say no to Bateese Champlain—not when she see his purse heavy with gold coin."

He plunged his paddle deep, sending the canoe like a Cree arrow, while his voice rose in the old *voyageur's* song:

"Mon père a fait batir maison"

He sang until the sun slanted over the evergreens, and the clustering buildings of a Nor'wester's post came in sight along Slave Point.

A dozen lodges of Chipewayan Indians were camped nearby, and the trader was inside his stockade with the gate closed. Bateese tied up at the mooring-logs, and followed the pathway leading to the gate.

"Radeau!" he shouted. "Open up! See, it is your ol' friend Bateese Champlain, with the finest load of furs in whole North Woods!"

Radeau, a large-beaked Assiniboin halfbreed, shuffled from his gloomy traders' shanty and peered out suspiciously through a crack in the gate. Radeau was a Company man, a Nor'wester; and as such he was forever expecting trouble with independent traders such as this Bateese. Men like Bateese were sharp. One could not get them in the right humor with whisky, as he could the Crees and Yellowknives. No, they would drink your strongwater by the jugful, and still make you pay valuable flintlocks, and knives, and even gold itself for their pelts. To Radeau's way of thinking, such traders as Bateese Champlain should be given an ounce of rifle-ball for their bales of furs, and good riddance!

"Ah, Bateese!" Radeau said, opening the gate and rubbing his smoky hands together as though in all the North there was no man he loved so much. "My friend Bateese! So you have taken a good trade of furs from these Yellowknives of yours!"

"In all my twenty years as *coureur de bois,* no trade of furs have I seen like this, Radeau."

"Ha!" Radeau did not believe this story of a fine trade. He thought it was merely preparation for the haggling to follow. He sighed, and shook his head. "But you are so late. The brigade, it is already gone. Now I

Roche swung the ax high. The voyageurs *standing near Bateese scattered.*

must hold your furs through the long year. That is not good for the price, Bateese. You should have been here three days ago."

"It is no difference." And Bateese shrugged.

"No?" Radeau stooped, and led the way through the low door of the trading house. Only a faint light came through the window of oiled deerskin. By habit he walked around the counter of whipsawed planks, and set out a jug and two bronze cups. He poured liquor, and the two men drank.

Radeau said: "Yes, Bateese, you come late. Now the Company will have to store your furs through the whole year, while the mice, the rats, the mildew—"

"But I am not trading you my furs, Radeau."

Radeau put down his cup. "Not trading me your furs! But I tell you the brigade, she's been gone these three days. You think perhaps you can catch it at Chipewayan and make the trade there, but—"

"This year I do not trade my furs to the Company at all. This year I will not have my blood sucked by you weasels of Montreal. No, monsieur! This year I, Bateese Champlain, will take my furs to the traders of Winnipeg. There I will sell them to Nor'wester, or Hudson's Bay, or to the traders from New York, whoever will pay the most. This year, Radeau, you see me for the las' time. After this year, these wild woods of the North will know Bateese Champlain no more."

Bateese held out his cup for more liquor, and Radeau grudgingly poured a few drops.

"No more the strong cold, Radeau. No more the long portage. No more the big fool to work all time and trade furs for nothing. This year it is I who make the big fortune, and with it I will buy the acres of good black soil, to plow and plant cabbages. This year I will take Marie Douval before the priest, and marry her, and we will raise one big fine family."

Radeau glowered: "You are a fool."

"Oh-ho!"

"Yes, you are a fool. You think you can make the long voyage alone—you are a fool. The Crees will have both your hair and your furs before you reach Cumberland House."

"I will catch the brigade at Chipewayan."

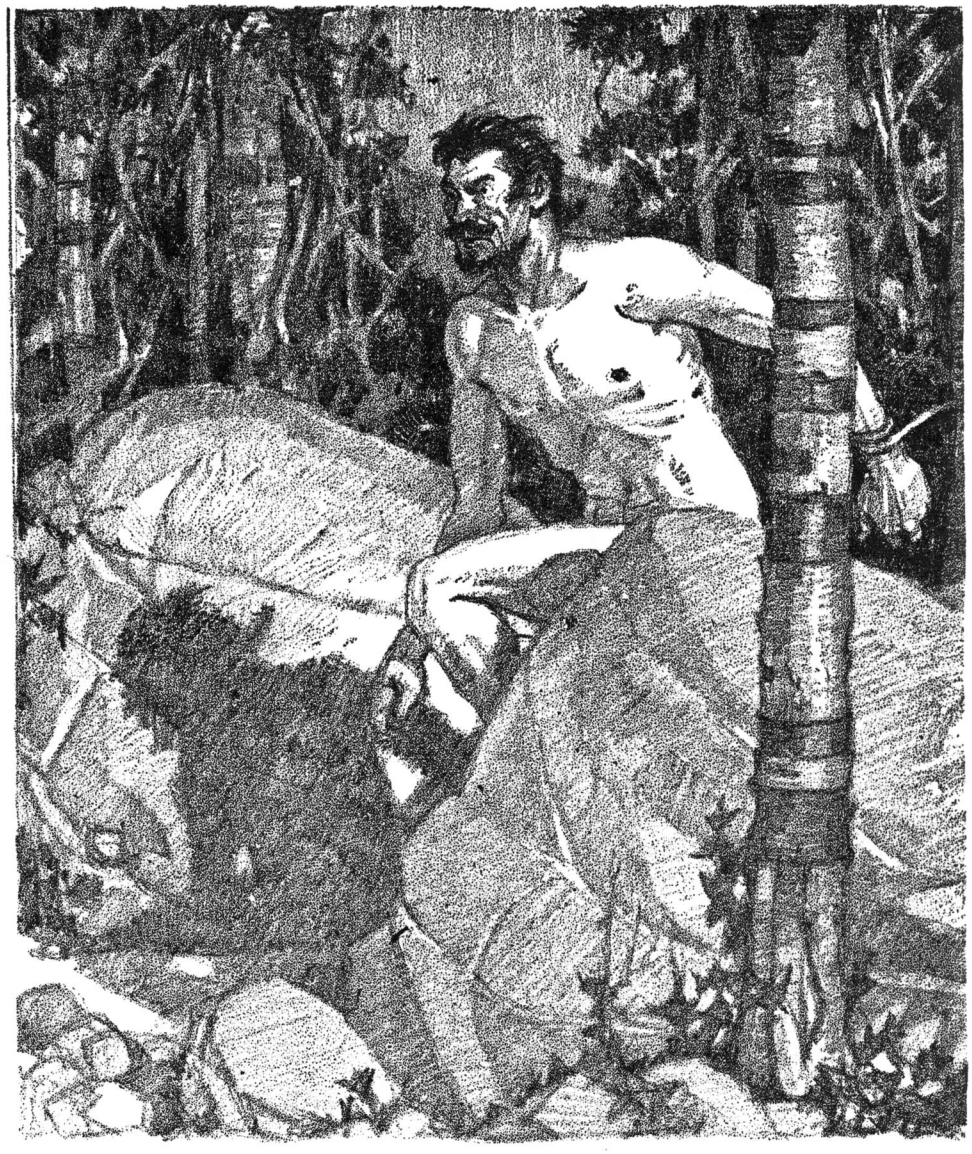
"You know who is *partisan* of the brigade? Roche! He will strangle you with his hands, when he finds you have traded in Company territory, yet would cheat them of their furs."

"*My* furs, monsieur!"

"He will strangle you, and take Marie Douval for himself."

Bateese roared with laughter at such a thought. He stamped dust

With a swing of his knife, Big Plume cut the thong. Bateese, free, ran.



from the floor with his moccasins, and beat the legs of his buckskin pants with his big hands. Then, abruptly, his laughter stopped, and he said:

"With the brigade, or without it, I will reach the village of Winnipeg. I will trade my furs, not for your strongwater and bullet lead, not for bits of trade-beads, but for gold. And with this gold I will become a man of property. A *bourgeois!* I will have Marie for wife, and four sons named Pierre, François, Louis and Bateese. I will sit on my own front porch, and look across my own fields, and I will smoke my pipe there in ease, while you fools of the Nor'west Company freeze in winter, and become hunchbacked over canoe paddle and portage load in summer. This I, Bateese Champlain, will do. And now, Radeau, you may fill the cup once more, that we can say farewell in peace."

Radeau filled the cups, drank silently. He watched from the opened gate of the stockade as Bateese left at his tall stride. After a while Radeau's Cree squaw shuffled from the dinky cabin and stood beside him.

"Watche!" said Radeau, speaking to her in the Cree tongue. "Behold him, the fool. He should be content with a squaw like you. Or two squaws, if he wishes. But no, he must have his white woman. Marie Douval! Pouf! Every *voyageur* north of Michilimackinac knows that this Marie will have no one except a rich *partisan* like Roche."

BATEESE CHAMPLAIN shoved away, lifting high his glistening paddle in a signal of farewell. He headed north until he cleared the point, then southwest toward the spot where the Slave River entered the lake.

Stars came out. He anchored in shallow water, and slept among his precious bales of fur for the three hours of northern night.

Slave River entered with a buoyant current, swelled by melted snows of the south. It was a mighty stream, broad and straight through solid walls of evergreen. He went steadily on until the sun was directly in the south. Noon. He laid his birch paddle across the canoe and cut pemmican in chunks as thick as his fist.

It was good pemmican, made of caribou back fat, and loin, and berries, all pounded together by the patient hands of his Cree squaw—his wife of the woods, whom this year he was leaving for Marie Douval. And after the pemmican was pounded, this squaw of his had hung it in the smoke of the tepee fire through all the blue moons of winter until its flavor was strong and good. She had been a good wife, this Cree, and he would take her again if it ever became the will of God that he return North.

He cut a dozen chunks of the greasy pemmican, peeled them of their dried intestine casing, and laid them in a row across the paddle-blades. Then he ate rapidly, stabbing each chunk with the keen point of his hunting knife to carry it to his mouth. In less time than it takes to propel a canoe one mile, he was finished. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and once more pushed into the current of the Slave. . . .

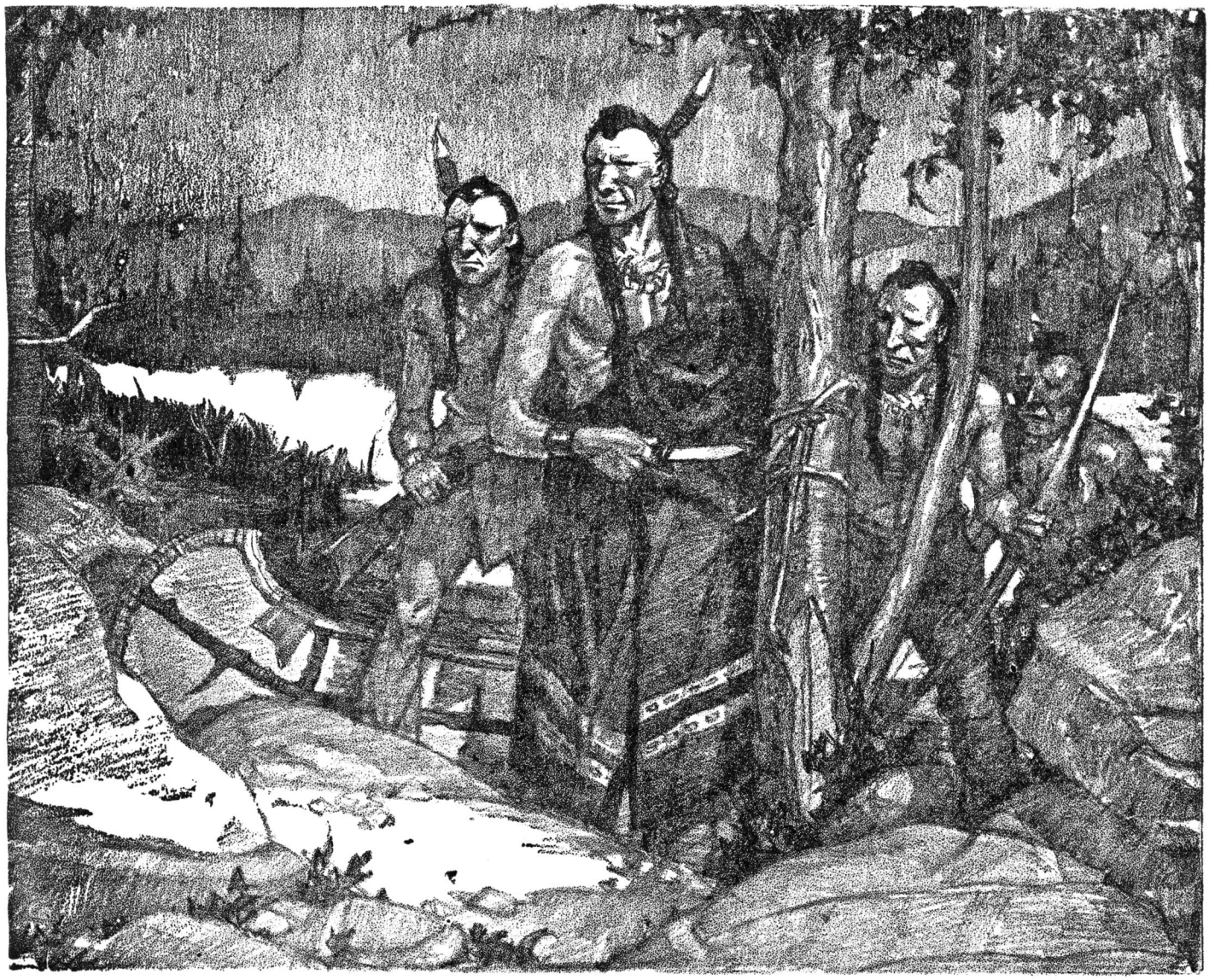
On the seventh day he reached the fort at Chipewayan. The brigade was gone. He went inside the stockade carrying a single beaver pelt, and dickered with the clerk, a red-cheeked lad his first year away from Montreal, for enough rough-cut tobacco to fill his pouch of tanned deer bladder. He learned that the brigade was only one day ahead of him, and so without resting he pushed on up the Athabasca River.

On the third day he caught sight of the brigade, its fifty canoes spread out along many miles of river.

These canoes, like his own, were birch-ribbed, and birch-bark-covered, smeared with resin, and sewed with watap fibers from the roots of pine trees; but they were far larger, some of them forty feet in length, and propelled by the paddles of many *voyageurs*.

Bateese fell in at the rear of the line, holding the *voyageur's* monotonous rhythm until the gloom of the great forest became purplish with evening, and the slim-pointed spruce-tops made long shadows across the water. Now smoke commenced rising from around a bend. His shout mingled with the shouts of *voyageurs* in the big canoes ahead, and like them he bent with extra strength on the paddle, for the smoke was made by the supper fire.

He rounded the bend and saw a shore already covered by upended canoes. At least a hundred men were there, and more going ashore. A fire burned on the stones not far from the water's edge. Huge iron pots on prop-poles surrounded it. Already the air was good with the odor of dried-pea, onion and jerked-meat stew.



Bateese Champlain sent his canoe to shore between two larger craft, leaped to his knees in the icy water, and lightened load by carrying his precious furs to shore. Then, with an easy roll, he upended his craft, and carried it to a place on the bank where the warm springtime air would dry it, and make its seams ready for melted pitch before morning.

"Oh-ho!" he shouted, striding up the bank with moccasins streaming water. "It is I, Bateese Champlain, you eaters of the pork's belly! It is I, the *homme du Nord* who go beyond even Lac Slave to bring back furs softer as the *grand dame's* breast. Hear me, you *mangeurs du lard* who sleep out the cold moons in your fine Athabasca stockade!"

Bateese neared the fire, stopped, legs spread, and beat his chest thrice with fist and forearm. Then he laughed so that the voices of all the camp were stilled, and the great silent forest spoke back to him,

"Watche! It is I, Bateese Champlain, who make this year his last voyage from the rivers of the North! It is I, Champlain, who go back with the *grand seigneur's* ransom in black fox skins to marry Marie Douval, and buy one great estate and raise many sons and fine cabbages!"

His words brought a cheer, for his friends were many in the brigade, and following the cheer there was a hush. Roche, *partisan* of the brigade, had stopped his inspection of the canoe bottoms, and was coming toward him.

ROCHE was a broad, bowlegged man, with something both handsome and arrogant about his reddish-bronze tanned face. He paused a stride or two from Bateese, smiling but not extending his hand.

"Bateese! We thought you were dead of lice in the lodge of your squaw's people, that you did not come this spring to trade your rat-chewed catch of furs."

Bateese laughed. He laughed loudly, spreading the muscles of his chest, showing teeth as white as quartz pebbles washed by the Athabasca's cold current.

"You joke, Roche. You have already heard it told that I have this year traded for the fines' bateau-load of furs that the Slave country has ever seen—furs that the blessed Louis himself would proudly wear when he is crowned king of France."

"Pah!" Roche spat on the ground. "I never yet saw furs caught by the Yellowknives that weren't cut half in two by the snare."

"Listen, monsieur! These furs of mine, they are so thick you would pluck handfuls of hair to find the skin, and so soft as the velvet of a Company partner's cloak."

"We will see. I feel sorry for you, Bateese, and so I will take off nothing for the snare-marks."

"You feel sorry for *me?*"

"Yes, because it is I, Louis Roche, who will marry Marie Douval."

The *voyageurs* were now in a tight group around them, and the words of their *partisan* brought a cheer. They looked expectantly at Bateese. Perhaps there would be a challenge, a contest of fists and *savate.*

"You will not marry Marie Douval," said Bateese. "And I am not trading you my furs."

Roche shrugged. "Take them then to MacTavish at Fort Bœuf. You

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"I will gae ye a set o' buckskins for your nakedness and a knife to kill yoursel'."

will not get enough to buy red cock's feathers for your hat from that Scotsman."

"Hear me! This year I do not trade with you leeches of the Nor'west Company. This year I take my furs to Winnipeg, where the Nor'west, or Hudson's Bay, or the American traders from the south will get them, whoever bids me the most."

Roche's face went dark. He expanded his chest with rage until he looked almost as large as Bateese himself. He opened and closed his hands as though he longed for the throat of this rebellious *coureur de bois* in front of him. Finally he spoke, controlling his voice,

"You joke, Bateese. You would not trade for furs in Nor'wester's country, and then sell them to Hudson's Bay."

"Ho! Beyond the Great Slave she belongs only to the devil, the timber wolf, and Bateese Champlain."

Roche spat. "Open your bales, that we may get to the trading."

"I do not open my bales until I get to the village of Winnipeg, *monsieur le partisan!*"

Roche turned abruptly and strode to Bateese's upended canoe. He stood, broad, bowlegged, looking at the bales of furs stacked beside it. He lifted one bale with the toe of his moccasin and looked at a projecting bit of the marten fur—fur of magnificent gloss, heavy, well stretched and dried. The quality of that bit of fur seemed to add to his anger. He let the bale fall and turned sharply. Fighting to control his fury, he strode toward the cook-fire. As he came near, the flames fell on the polished head of an ax. He seized it, spun around, swung it high. The *voyageurs* standing near Bateese scattered, but Roche did not hurl it at him. Instead he aimed it at the canoe. Its head flashed twice as it revolved, then plunged from sight, handle and all, leaving a ragged hole through both the birchbark sides.

Bateese came thundering toward Roche, hands outstretched. Roche faced him. He called sharply, bringing half a dozen men on the run. Bateese stopped. Although many of the *voyageurs* favored Bateese, Roche was their *partisan,* and they would obey. Bateese could not fight them all. He exhaled, then turned, walked down to look at the damage to his canoe.

One of the birch ribs had been splintered, and tears followed the grain of the birchbark for long distances around the holes.

Bateese spoke no word. He lifted the canoe, carried it through a cranberry thicket to a little sheltered area among spruce trees. He went back with the camp silently watching, and three at a time carried his bales of fur.

He squatted on the lee side of his wounded canoe, hacking pemmican and eating it in savage mouthfuls, cursing Roche and all the breed of Nor'westers. He primed his flintlock, stabbed his hunting-knife in the earth near his head, rolled in his blanket capote and slept.

At dawn, with the Nor'wester's camp astir, and the breeze carrying the odor of more stew to his nostrils, Bateese struck sparks with flint and steel, catching a smolder of fire in shredded cottonwood bark, fanning it to blaze with his deerskin hat. He waited until the brigade was gone upriver; then he climbed a rock hillside where jackpine grew.

From the pine trunks he scraped hardened pitch, and from their roots he secured the watap fibers for sewing patches. While the pitch was melting near the fire, he hunted a yellow birch tree so he would have its bark for patches, and its wood to replace the rib shattered by the ax.

It took him a day, working with ax and hunting-knife, to carve the rib, another day to lash it into place, another to apply the patches, and pitch up old seams. On the fourth day he

once more pushed south against the current of the Athabasca.

Eighteen hours of each day he spent at the paddle. The pemmican ran out. He was hungry, but he did not take time to go ashore and stalk moose or bear. One day he caught a fish on a line strung behind his canoe. The next day he caught none. At a Beaver Indian village he traded a hatchet for two willow loops of sun-dried fish that had been speared the fall before. He ate them in one day after the prodigal manner of the *voyageurs,* and spent the next two days with nothing. Near the mouth of MacKay River he shot a beaver, feasted first on raw liver and then on the tail broiled over coals. He reached the Clearwater and turned east. The current was more rapid than the Athabasca. There were riffles too fast for the paddles. He made headway standing, and pushing with a long pike pole. When the riffles became faster, he waded waist deep in the frigid water, pulling his canoe by the babiche rope.

HE reached Portage la Loche. The grass there was just starting new growth after being trampled by the many feet of the brigade.

He slung his bales of fur from branches where packrats and wolves could not reach them, padded his head with a small pack of mink skins, and started across, carrying the canoe. It was a load for two men, but Bateese Champlain carried it alone. He returned for the furs, shouldering three bales at a time. There were foodless days, and days when he feasted on rabbit, but no day that the long portage did not ring to his song:

"Mon père a fait batir maison" . . .

Sometimes he would sit, and rest his pack against a windfall, and take out his redstone pipe from the land of the Dakotas, and fill it with tobacco rubbed with red willow bark after the manner of the Crees. Then he would puff the good bitter smoke, and think of the price he would demand for his princely furs, and of the land he would buy facing the Assiniboin River, just west of the village of Winnipeg. And he would think of his house of sturdy logs, its windows made of glass rather than oiled deer-skin, his chair with the plush seat overlooking his acres of cabbages, and his feather bed warmed by his own good wife Marie Douval, who would be Douval no longer.

"Oh-ho!" he would laugh, lifting his pipestem high in the air, and forgetting the ache between his shoulders, and the holes in his moccasins crusted and blackish from the blood of his feet where they had been cut by the sharp stones of the portage. "Oh-ho! That will be good, no?"

At last the brutal portage was over. Bateese had been three days with only a packrat for supper, but he went on.

That day he caught one fish—the next day, none. The wind stopped, but not his paddle. . . . As days and weeks passed, some *voyageur's* instinct guided him through an intricate pattern of lakes, one like the other, planless as so many ink-spots on a Company clerk's blotter.

He reached the Churchill River flowing east to the domains of the Hudson's Bay Company, then turned south at the Portage la Truite. He wrapped his feet in beaver-skins, padded the top of his head with the packet of mink, and carried the canoe across the low divide where waters ran to the Saskatchewan.

"Downstream, ol' woman!" he cried to his canoe as he struggled with it across La Truite. "Downstream we will go like one *bourgeois* now, all way to Lac Winnipeg."

He returned for his first load of furs—and found four Indians seated near the ashes of his fire. By their height, and the cast of their faces, he knew them to be Crees.

He lifted his palm in the signal of friendship, and spoke the Cree tongue,

"Friend! My wife of the North, she's Cree woman. Mistook tribe."

The leader of the Crees stood up, tall and hawk-faced, drawing his quill-worked trade blanket around his stringy shoulders. He carried a bow of chokecherry wood on his arm; at his waist was a quiver of scraped and painted deer-back hide from which a dozen arrows projected, points first, to protect their feathered tails from thorns.

"Me chief Big Plume. I know no Mistook tribe."

"Friend," repeated Bateese, holding his palm up, fingers together.

"You kill Cree at Lake Kississing!" barked a young brave with a flintlock musket in the crook of his arm.

"No. I'm trapper at the Great Slave. For ten years I have not been at Lac Kississing."

"You kill Cree. White man from brigade say—"

"Roche, he's one liar." Bateese turned to Chief Big Plume. *"Watche!* Hear me, wise one. I have never killed one man. In all my years I have never killed Indian nor white."

The Crees talked together. One with pewter earrings kept shaking his head violently, asking for Bateese's scalp. Big Plume listened as he rubbed his palm back and forth across his painted quiver. The young brave unexpectedly tossed his musket to his shoulder, and walked forward aiming at Bateese's breast.

"You kill!"

"No!"

Big Plume spoke sharply in command. The other two braves grabbed Bateese, pulling him toward a cottonwood sapling. He protested innocence in the name of God and twenty saints, but they bound his wrists to the sapling so firmly that a man of twice his strength would have been helpless.

He told them of his love for all Crees, of his hatred for their enemies, those snake-eating Sioux. The Crees seemed to have gone deaf. With Big Plume directing, the thongs were cut, allowing the bales of fur to fall from the branches.

BIG PLUME walked from one bale to the next, cutting them open with his Hudson's Bay knife. The three warriors scrambled among the pelts, pulling them inside out, stroking the soft fur. As each bale was opened, their elation mounted. Never in the Kissising country had they seen such furs as these. They would be worth a fortune in strongwater at Fort Bœuf, post of the Nor'westers to the south.

Thought of the strongwater put Big Plume in good humor. He ordered the bales tied again and advanced on Bateese, holding his knife before him.

"We would kill you," he said, "but the Crees do not kill those who come with gifts. I, Big Plume, will be

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merciful as the Black-robes have taught me. I will not kill you, white man. But one more gift must I take —a gift of buckskin!"

He cackled with laughter, and the warriors stamped moccasined feet on the earth in appreciation of Big Plume's joke. With a quick, deft thrust of the knife, Big Plume cut Bateese's buckskin shirt down the front. He swung the knife twice more, slicing the sleeves. He cut the buckskin trousers and leggings, tore the hat from Bateese's head, kicked it all toward the water, leaving him naked. With a final swing of the knife, he cut the babiche thong.

Bateese was free. The Crees were at the water's edge, gathering stones. He ran, with thorns tearing his naked skin. A rock glanced from his skull. At the distance of a hundred paces he heard the whip of a rifle-ball past his cheek, the rattle as the report echoed through the forest.

Trees hid him. He kept on, leaping windfalls, wading slimy muskeg. At last he circled back to the portage trail, muddy, tired and bleeding.

There was a night chill in the air. The trail was harsh beneath his feet. Swarms of mosquitoes sang after him.

He ran, making a breeze that kept the mosquitoes in a cloud a little way behind his shoulders. A storm came up, covering the moon, and a gray mistiness settled to the spruce-tops. Rain fell intermittently with cold spatters. A wind came from the east, swaying the spruce branches. He was thankful, for it drove the mosquitoes to cover in the tall grass. He slowed to a walk. Rain slanted in, cold and fine, beating his naked shoulders. . . .

Dawn was gray. Late spring, but the wind had a taste of winter. Bateese, who had not flinched at the strong cold of the Slave, felt this wet chill inside his bones. There was also a pain where his tooth had broken on a caribou bone two seasons before.

He found his canoe upended, its bottom glistening in the rain. He carried it to the water, shoved off.

The rain lasted all day. He spent the night, naked, beneath the canoe on a tiny, brush-covered island. Hunger clawed at his stomach, and his tooth throbbed with pain. It was still raining at dawn. He hunted the water's edge for a sharp fragment of stone to pry the aching tooth loose, but there was none.

He went on, a trifle light-headed from pain and hunger, working his paddle as though his body were some automatic mechanism.

He might have gone on after dark had not his canoe grounded on a bar near the outlet of a small lake. He splashed ashore. At the water's edge there crawled a small turtle.

He fell on the turtle, seized it in both hands, and hammered it to pieces between two rocks. He ate it, spitting out only the larger pieces of shell.

Morning. The rain had diminished. The turtle meat had given him a little strength, though his tooth ached with a sharper throb. He looked at his surroundings. He was not far up the river from Fort Bœuf, where MacTavish, the Nor'wester, held sway.

It was still morning when he sighted Fort Bœuf, a huddle of rain-soaked buildings inside a sagging stockade. There was a flagpole with no flag, a blockhouse with little black loopholes, a four-pound cannon sticking its ugly bronze nose through an opening at one side of the gate.

Bateese tied his canoe and ran up the muddy pathway.

"MacTavish!" he called, slapping his wet hands against the gate. "Let me in, you Scotsman, MacTavish. Let in your ol' friend Bateese Champlain, robbed by worthless Crees."

MacTavish was there, but he took his time. A cabin door opened, and Bateese could smell frying bear-steaks. The odor made him forget his tooth and dance barefoot, laughing and weeping from hunger.

"MacTavish!" he cried, slapping at the gate timbers with both hands. "MacTavish!"

MacTavish spoke from inside: "Stop shouting like a drunken savage, mon. What do ye want, naked and wi' no furs to trade?"

"Meat!" Bateese wept. "Give meat to your ol' friend Bateese Champlain."

"Why dinna ye gae to the factors o' the Hudson's Bay Company, mon? Is na' their food as good as their prices?"

"I do not trade with Hudson's Bay. The Crees, they rob—"

"But ye dinna like the Nor'west. Roche told me ye dinna like us. Ye called us thieves and bloodsuckers."

"Give me meat, MacTavish. Behold! Listen who is hungry. This is your old friend Bateese Champlain, who love you."

"Ah, mon. I would na' hae ye break bread wi' bloodsuckers."

"I make the big joke. Ha-ha! I only tell Roche this story so I can bring you my furs to trade. Open the gate that I may kiss your cheek. Behold your friend, cold and naked, with one aching tooth, and for five days only the mud-turtle for food."

MacTavish swung open the gate on its creaking wooden hinges. Bateese clasped his hand for a second in gratitude, and ran toward the hut, whence came the odor of bear-steaks. He seized two sizzling chops from the griddle and tore meat off in huge mouthfuls. MacTavish, a gray, hunch-shouldered man, watched from the doorway with pale blue eyes. After Bateese had devoured four chops and a quantity of cold bannock, he said:

"And noo that ye ha' tasted the charity o' the Company, I'll ask ye to leave the same way ye came."

His belly full, Bateese again noticed the fury of his aching tooth.

"MacTavish, you would not turn out a naked man with an aching tooth."

"I run na rest-house for forest vagabonds."

"But I, your friend Bateese Champlain, who come to trade."

"What ha' ye to trade?"

"One canoe, the fines' in the Great Slave."

"I want na canoe."

Bateese remembered the little pack of mink-skins that had padded his head during the portage. Still naked, he ran to get them, broke the buckskin thong, spread them across the table. Eighteen furs. Fine, silky, dark, each with its perfect stripe.

Bateese stroked the fur. "Behold! It is like silk. See? Not one scar of the ice, for they were caught in October. You will give me much trade for these royal furs, MacTavish!"

"I will gae ye a suit o' buckskins for your nakedness, a drink o' strongwater for your tooth, and a knife to kill yoursel'."

"Ho! You make joke. You will give me one flintlock, and two gallons of strongwater with the pain-killer mixed in, and one knife, and food."

They haggled. At last Bateese obtained a knife, some worn buckskin pants, a strip of sailcloth for his shoulders, and a jug of trade whisky with a bottle of laudanum added to kill the pain of his tooth.

There was still a drizzle of rain when Bateese walked down to his canoe. He sat crosslegged in the bottom, and drank from the jug, rolling mouthfuls of trade whisky and laudanum over his tooth to deaden the pain. In a short time he could feel pain no longer. He wedged the point of the hunting-knife against the tooth, twisted sharply. There was a crack, and he spat out the tooth.

Never, for many days, had Bateese been so happy. By habit he paddled up the stream, bellowing his wild *voyageur's* song:

"Mon père a fait batir maison.
Ha! ha! ha! Frit a l'huile"

He had no memory of lying down to sleep, but when he awoke, he was full length in the bottom of the canoe with the night sky above him.

He sat up, head and jaw aching. The canoe was upstream and across the river from the fort, resting on a mudbank.

He waded ashore and sat down with his back against a fallen trunk, wondering what he should do. At Slave Point and at Chipewayan he had

talked very big, and now the memory of that big talk came back to jeer at him.

Morning arrived, with a yellow sun cutting through mists left by rain. A canoe swung in sight from upriver, with four men aboard. Bateese stirred himself. He watched as it came closer. It was a Cree canoe, and the man who sat at the bow was Big Plume.

Bateese ran to the water's edge, shouting in the Cree tongue,

"Kut-at-issichik! You fools!"

The insult instantly brought their paddles to a stop. They rode with the current, staring at him. Bateese laughed, and splashed his feet in shallow water,

"See? Madame Champlain will dress like one queen."

"Watche! You take my fur but not my strongwater. I laugh at you fools —oh-ho!"

They were suspicious of a trap. The young brave with pewter earrings leveled his musket, while the others paddled to shore.

"Where is this strongwater of yours?" asked Big Plume.

"Ho! You think I would tell? I have many jugs of strongwater, but they are in one safe place. Give me first a bale of furs, and I will let you have big drink from jug."

Big Plume came ashore. He sniffed the jug, tasted it. He drank.

"Meyo!" he said, calling it good.

He passed it on. The others drank, keeping the jug up for a long time while Bateese pretended to fear that they would take too much.

"Now give me the bale of furs!" he said.

"Ha-ya!" laughed the Crees, stamping their moccasins. Bateese wept for fair play, but they elbowed him aside. They passed the jug, and danced, singing their wild songs of battle. And then they slept!

Bateese looked in their canoe. He saw his own furs, along with many mink and beaver pelts from the Kississing. He transferred them all to his own canoe. He cut armholes in the quill-decorated blanket of Big Plume

and put it on. He took the beaded moccasins of the youngest brave, the leggings of another, and fastened in his ears the pewter earrings of the third. He cut the rest of their clothes in strips, even shaving their braided hair, so they would return in disgrace to the lodges of their people. Every fragment he heaped in their canoe, which he set adrift.

"This Bateese Champlain, he's smart one, no?" he shouted as the craft rode high on the current.

Bateese paddled back to the fort. He tied two rare black fox skins together by their tails, tossed them around his shoulders like a royal collar, and strode to the gate, shouting:

"Behold me now, you bloodsucker of the Company! See who is outside your gate—Bateese Champlain, king of the forest!"

MacTavish came out, blinking.

"See me, you unbaptized carcajou! See Bateese Champlain, whose canoe is loaded with one fortune in furs which he will trade to the bidder with most gold in Winnipeg."

With a final gesture of high drama, Bateese drew from beneath his quill-decorated trade blanket the tattered piece of sailcloth which MacTavish had given him to wear for a shirt.

"Here, monsieur, take the rag you would give your friend who came poor and hungry to your gate!"

He turned and strode away with MacTavish trotting behind.

"Coom back, mon!" he pleaded. "Coom back and have a wee drappie of the bottle for ould times' sake."

But Bateese did not stop. He strode royally to his canoe, with the black fox skins swinging. . . .

It was fine going from Fort Bœuf to the broad Saskatchewan, and east to Winnipeg Lake. There was little wind, so he avoided the crooked shore and struck boldly south across the great water, found the river flowing from the south, and at last reached the settlement of Winnipeg.

Never had a canoeload of furs made such excitement as these from north of the Slave. Bateese refused a dozen bids, finally selling to a representative of John Jacob Astor, the American.

With one piece of gold he bought a velvet cloak and a scarlet cock's feather for his hat. With a second piece of gold he bought a red dress of a size that would fit Marie Douval.

Twilight of the first day was coming when he walked to her log house, the dress rolled under his arm. A candle was burning in the front room. He looked through the window. Marie, dark-haired and buxom, sat talking to Louis Roche.

Bateese strode inside.

"Behold, Marie!" he shouted. "Behold your Bateese, who has come with the fortune to marry you and raise one fine family."

Marie Douval stared at Bateese, and at the dress he was holding out.

"See? Madame Champlain she will dress like one queen. She will not scrub the floor and peel the potato like the squaw of a Nor'wester *partisan.*"

Roche accepted the challenge, but Bateese felled him with a single blow of his open hand. He reached down, seized Roche between the shoulders, and flung him through the door.

"Come, Marie!" he said, spreading his arms. And she came to him.

BY next spring, Bateese had a farm facing the Assiniboin. There was a log house with a fine front porch. He had a bed of mallard's feathers, and a chair with a seat of plush. Cabbages grew well in the fertile soil, and on the twenty-first day of June, Marie bore Bateese a strong red-faced son named Pierre.

The summer months passed. Bateese sat on his porch, smoking a pipe packed with tobacco and red willow bark. The tobacco was poor this season, he noticed. It did not have the flavor of tobacco he had smoked in the north.

He knocked out the pipe on the palm of his hand and walked among his cabbages. They were just forming heads, with the green outer leaves lying on the ground beside them. A breeze came from the north, carrying the odor of autumn-dry forest.

The forest odor clung to his nostrils. It made him remember long ago when he was a lad of sixteen years on his first brigade from Fort William on Lac Superior.

He wandered along the Assiniboin, past its forks with the Red. He walked a long time, remembering the men on that first brigade. He noticed that he was keeping step with a distant rhythm. Men were singing from up the river. The voices became louder, and at length he made out the accompanying splash of canoe paddles.

It was a brigade. A group of independent *coureurs de bois,* headed north for the winter's trade.

He walked, keeping time, watching over his shoulder. A single canoe with eight men aboard rounded a bend. It drew nearer. He speeded his step, trying to keep abreast. The current was with the canoe, and the paddles of the *voyageurs* swung rapidly. He was going at a trot, but still the canoe left him behind.

Ahead of him was a bend with a path making a short cut across it. There was still time. He ran with long strides.

He reached the water's edge, waded to the waist. The singing voices were coming from around the bend. He waved, shouted. Flandin, the leader, swung the canoe toward him and stretched his arm. Bateese seized it and pulled himself over the gunwale.

The *voyageur* Geroux handed him a lighted pipe, loaded with tobacco and red willow bark. Bateese puffed it. The smoke was good, and he wondered where Geroux had secured this old-time tobacco.

"Mon père a fait batir maison,"

sang the voyageurs. Bateese Champlain seized a paddle and pulled hard, facing the north, while his voice joined in the chorus:

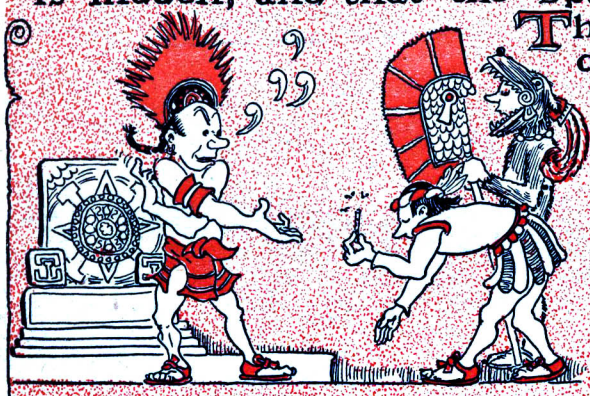
"Ha! ha! ha! frit a l'huile!"

A Relation of the Commodities of Nova Hispana

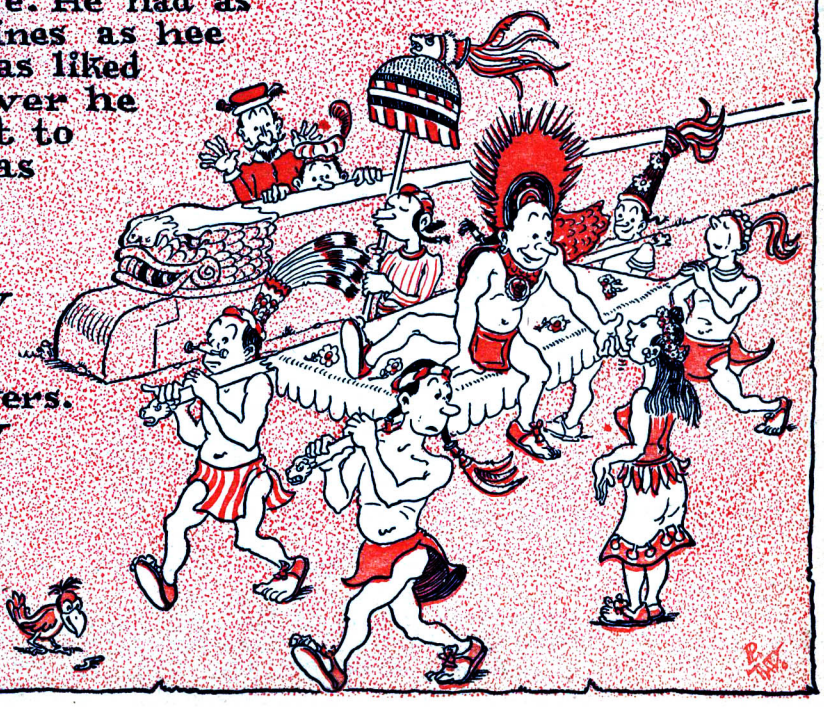
and the maners of the inhabitants, written by Henry Hawks merchant, which lived five yeeres in the sayde countrey, and drew the same at the request of M. Richard Hakluyt Esquire of Eiton, 1572

From Richard Hakluyt's "Principall Navigations of the English Nation," illuminated by Peter Wells, who also pays taxes and *bathes*.

Mutezuma which was the last king of this country, was one of the richest princes which have been seene in our time, or long before. He had all kinde of beasts which were then in the countrey, and all maner of birds, and fishes, and all maner of wormes, which creepe upon the earth, and all trees, and flowers, and herbes, all fashioned in silver and gold, which was the greatest part of al his treasure, and in these things had he great joy, as the old Indians report. And unto this day they say that the treasure of Mutezuma is hidden, and that the Spaniards have it not.



This king would give none of his people freedome, nor forgive any of them that should pay him tribute, though he were never so poore. For if it had bene told him that one of his tributaries was poore, & that he was not able to pay his tribute according to the custome, then he would have him bound to bring at such times as tributes should be payd, a quill full of Lice, saying, hee would have none free, but himselfe. He had as many wives or concubines as hee would have, and such as liked him. Alwayes whensoever he went out of his Court to passe the time, he was borne upon 4. of his noble mens shoulders set upon a table, some say, of golde, and very richly dressed with feathers of divers and many colours and flowers. He washed *all* his body every day, were it never so cold. And unto this day so do all the Indians, and especially the women.



THE CHAMP PULLS ONE

Home from war, and not as young as a boxer should be, Willie Boulder meets a hard problem and takes on a tough customer.

by Joel Reeve

WILLY BOULDER said: "Not politics. Not that lousy racket. Fight business is clean compared to politics, especially in Midburgh."

Pat Hafey was wearing creases between his eyes these days. He said deprecatingly: "People have asked me to run for Mayor. Even Mayor Peters, who is going to run for Congress. George Miner, Lou Farese and the crooks in town want Peters out, and they want their own man to be mayor."

Willy said: "I turn my back on you for a minute to fight a war, and you go into politics!"

Pat's grin was not as wide as it might have been. He said: "Well, the country needs saving. Look at the way things are. The war is over, but what have we got? No new taxicabs for you—scarcely any food for my kids."

Willy said: "I've got to fight this monster, this Neanderthal man, this phenom, Augie Meyer. You run for mayor. Is that sensible?"

"Okay," said Pat, breaking down and really grinning. "You win. I've been a fighter, a fight manager. When they came to me and asked me to run, I was so proud I could bust. It wasn't the political machine, looking for cheap votes. It was the good people. If we could only get George Carraway, the banker, to line up with us, I think we would be in. But since we had that trouble with son John, I'm afraid Mr. Carraway won't play. And then, we're friendly with Bo Martini, and you know Bo runs a game up over his roadhouse. If we could get Bo to close up, maybe—"

Willy said: "No, you don't. I'm not asking Bo to close his games. The rascal has always been my pal. I believe in leaving people alone. You be the politician. I've got to fight this Augie Meyer that Farese dug up—and I'm thirty years old, bub, remember? Thirty!"

It did not seem possible. He left the office of the gymnasium which Pat Hafey ran on the side and which was Midburgh's headquarters for sportsmen of all kinds, and watched Patsy "Kayo" Dollar spar with Kid Atkins, the veteran colored star. Atkins was teaching the young welter all he knew, which was considerable. Kayo had gained his nickname from the *Moon Mullins* strip in the newspaper, but he was fast showing evidence that he would make it stick by his ring work. He was Willy's protégé from the war, and a coming champ.

Willy slid out unnoticed and went down the stairs. Kayo was a comer, all right, and he was twenty. He weighed one-forty-five, and was growing; and in a year he would be a middleweight. Willy Boulder was the champion of the world at that weight. The future was confused. . . .

He turned the corner of Dey and Strickland Streets, and where a dog wagon had once stood was a large, airy, well-built garage with a sign over it, "CHAMPION CAB CO." He went into the office at the rear of the building; and his partner, Happy Carson, came out and spoke briefly in his slangy, breezy manner, then passed on out into the garage where the cabs were stored. Willy entered the private office.

Mary Carson pushed a hand through her auburn hair and sat back, looking at him. She had the same clear, direct look, as youthfully innocent as he always remembered. But she was no longer a child, and she said: "Hello, Willy. Business is good, but we can't get new cabs, nor tires, nor anything we need. What do *you* know?"

He put his hands on the desk and leaned toward her. "I love you."

"Yes," she said. "I know. On your lunch hour, aren't you?"

He said; "I'm not kidding around, Mary. I want us to get married."

She said: "Pat goes into politics; you want suddenly to get married."

He said: "You know I've loved you for ten years. Things have been against us. Maybe it was all my fault. I want to try to do different."

She was direct as always, speaking slowly, choosing her words. "You are a champion. You've lived under pressure for years—then you fought an exciting war. Now you want to settle down—but maybe I'd like some excitement. I've been caring for your business here. Maybe I couldn't just be part of the general let-down."

"You don't really want the excitement," he said. "You wouldn't like it."

"How do I know that?" she asked reasonably. There was a shadow across her lovely features. "I've had so little—you've had so much."

He pushed himself away from the desk, straightening his back. He sighed. "I see this is no day for me. I see you're thinking again. That's our trouble, maybe. We always think. Maybe if we just acted—"

She said: "Go about your business. Help Pat get elected Mayor. Train for Augie Meyer. You're a veteran now. Meyer is very tough, they say."

He left her in the office she managed so well. She was the brains; Happy handled the men; Willy provided capital when needed; and the Champion Cab Co. was successful. On Dey Street he saw George Miner's fat pink face through the window of Ace High Cab's headquarters. Miner was the smoothie, the big contact man, member of the best clubs, but the go-between for such low characters as Lou Farese and the marijuana and black-market crowd in Midburgh. Willy frowned, thinking about Farese's sister Idabelle, and a sleek article named Howard Jones, and the young, high-strung, edgy fighter Patsy Kayo Dollar. There were always problems as a man grew older and took on responsibilities. Patsy Kayo Dollar was an orphan, and Willy had brought him home from the Army.

MINER was promoting the Augie Meyer fight, because no one else in town knew how to handle a bout in the ball park. Farese had a piece of the new middle contender, of course, through Miner and political pull. Midburgh had the champ, Meyer wanted the fight, and the Midstate boys had learned their lesson from the Jacobs Beach mob. Lou Farese was declared Meyer's Midstate manager. Willy was a hapless and helpless party to the hold-up, and it griped him to the soul. One thing all agreed upon. Meyer was tough. They said he could not be

hurt, which made Willy grin, because they could all be hurt if you hit them where they lived; but he knew Meyer was tough enough, because he had licked everyone. Willy had been plenty tough too, in his day. By the grace of God and Pat Hafey, he had managed not to get *too* tough; his head did not buzz with the punches of other days, like that of poor Boo Dorengo, who now drove a cab for Champion when he felt well enough. Willy had survived, to learn the easier way, the deft handling of foot and fist, the pace and timing to decision the tough boys.

THERE'D been some talk of sidetracking Meyer until Kayo Dollar was big enough to handle him—or to foist him off on Charley Hose, Hafey's clever light heavy. But Willy had never used a "cop," and it seemed a sorry thing to start. When Kayo grew up, he could succeed Willy—maybe. But meantime Willy would take care of challengers, saving the title for his protégé.

He almost ran into the lean, neat figure of Bo Martini. The white teeth of his old friend gleamed; the mustache was clipped as close as ever, and only a few gray strands showed in the ex-bootlegger's hair. Bo said: "Hey, pal, whatcha know? I got all my seven brothers here at last. They all workin' at my joint. When you comin' out an' see me?"

Willy said: "I hear you don't need me. I hear you are making a million with those tables upstairs."

Bo said: "You know it, pal. But I got good meals too, for these times. I got my brother, he makes *pasta fagiole,* you should taste it. Your own cabs they make plenny bringin' people to eat my chicken *cacciatore*. . . . Willy, I hear things, too. I hear you are a boob to fight this killer, this Meyer. I hear your pal Pat, he is in politics. This is strictly from nonsense, pal. What good does this do you, huh?"

Willy said: "I dunno, Bo." He looked past Bo and saw the face of John Carraway through the window of the bank. Carraway was very conscious of his Ivy League education and his social standing; once he had tried to take Mary away from Willy, and because of ignoble failure hated them both. The hard face disappeared, and Willy said: "I guess a fighter just has to fight. And they asked Pat to get into the political thing."

Bo said: "Pal, you oughta get married, raise a family. But not seven brothers. Such trouble! I will see you, pal. One of my brothers got a ticket." He winked and went into City Hall. He was a great character, and his roadhouse was a success and his gambling-tables were on the level, people said. . . .

Willy went back to the gym, and Kayo Dollar was dressed and ready to leave. Willy said to the kid: "Stay out of the Club Splendide, will you, Kayo? It's a crummy dive."

Kayo had the nervous system of a Kentucky Derby entry and the general lines of a running greyhound. He said: "Aw—they can't hurt me, Champ. Those kids are all right. Just a little jitterbuggin'. It's good for my legs. Jumpin' and jivin'." He pranced, hands clasped, his feet doing an intricate pattern, his face beatific.

Willy said: "Looks like monkey antics. But that's okay. Only the Splendide is run by this Jones, who works with Farese." He had to be very careful about the juvenile but evil Idabelle Farese. He thought he saw symptoms of Kayo being smitten by that volatile and no-good beauty. "They're enemies of mine, kid. And they'd do anything to get Pat Hafey out of politics."

Kayo said carelessly: "Anything you say, Champ." There was too much

Illustrated by John McDermott

Pat said only: "You're all right?" "Yeah. He win the first," said Willy dryly.

easy agreement in him. He went out, and Willy thought he was wearing trousers cut too high under his arms and a jacket too long in the tail. But the boy was only twenty, and he too had fought a tough war. He was a Dempsey type, nervous, shifty, quicker than any welter ever seen, a devastating hooker, bobbing and weaving in the ring—a potential champion if his nervous system could stand it.

Willy sighed and changed clothing. He warmed up with calisthenics, taking it easy. He had the old routine by heart, and it wasn't even hard work, though the sweat poured off him. He liked training in town. It was not as boresome as the summer camps. It was early spring, and Meyer was working in the country; but Willy was happy using Hafey's gym.

He took off his sweat-shirt and went at the light bag, and there were little brown spots where the bullets had gone in, but he was all right. He had been very lucky in the war, he thought, to come through Africa, Italy and Germany without getting killed.

And then he wondered how lucky—or unlucky—his life had really been. He was thirty; his youth was gone. He was a world's champion, but his girl wouldn't marry him. He was fighting a Joe Grimm battler next week for a purse which would largely be eaten by Government tax, and his face might get altered some more in the bargain. His youth had somehow got lost over the years of hard work.

He grinned, and Charley Hose came in and boxed with him. Charley was light-heavy champion, and Willy was fortunate to have him in the same stable, and get to box with him: that was one lucky thing he knew about.

IT was two days before the fight. Kid Atkins finished sparring two rounds with Willy and buried his black face in a towel. He mumbled: "You gittin' too fancy in there, Willy. You gittin' to be real Fancy Dan."

Willy said: "You think I'm sharp?" It was the last boxing he meant to do. He felt pretty good for a thirty-year-old champion.

Atkins said: "You fancy enough." He scowled. "I see dis Meyer boy in Chi two months ago. He awful tough, Willy. He tougher'n anybody we ever know."

"They're all tough," said Willy. "I've seen pictures of him."

"Them pitchers old. He throws his right diff'rent in them pitchers," said Kid Atkins.

"I'll be watching for it," Willy promised half idly. He knew Meyer would be tough, but he had arrived at that stage of training where one more work day would have driven him stale. He felt apathetic.

Kid Atkins hesitated. Then he went on: "I reckon you be all right, Willy. I wanted to say somep'n 'bout that Kayo. He been foolin' with a bad crowd. I hear he been messin' around Idabelle Farese an' that Club Splendide."

Willy said: "I asked him to stop."

Kid Atkins said: "They got some kind of a scheme—I dunno what. But you know dem people. I heah 'bout it through a waiter I know. Dey is lots of money bein' bet on Meyer. And they is mo' money bein' bet 'at Pat Hafey gits out o' politics."

The impatience broke through for a moment with this faithful friend from the old days in New York. Willy snapped: "I've got a bellyful of politics already. The hell with politics."

Kid Atkins rolled his eyes. "Does Pat git to be Mayor, I'm openin' me a li'l' ol' place uptown. Fried chicken in a pan, wifout knife or fohk, hot biscuits fo' them as likes 'em buttered in the kitchen—when we gits butter, me an' Lulu May."

Willy said: "You can do that without Pat being Mayor."

"Naw," said the Kid. "Cain't git no license. They got escuses fo' any place I tries. Y'see, I'm a friend of yours an' Pat's!"

Willy said: "Oh. I see." His impatience died. He had tried for years to get Kid Atkins to save the considerable amount of money the colored star had earned, and with little success. He said: "Well, maybe we ought to work harder for Pat. After the fight."

"Sho 'nuff," said the Kid. "Afteh the fight." He did not say, as he always had: "After us beats Meyer."

Willy said: "I hope you haven't bet your wad on this one."

"Nope," said Atkins virtuously. "Me and Lulu May aint bet a dime."

Something inside of Willy curdled. It was the first time he had ever been matched that the inveterate gambler Kid Atkins had not bet a bunch of money on him, usually to win by a knockout. He finished dressing and went out of the gym. He went over to the Champion Cab Co., and Happy came out of the garage and greeted him.

"Hey, you look sharp.... You see the invoices with the new prices? What little we kin get costs too much. The mechanics gotta have a raise, and the drivers couldn't eat if business wasn't so good because cabs are so scarce. I tell you, we need a change of politics," said Happy.

Willy said: "I guess you're right. You bet on the fight, Hap?"

"Hell, no," said Happy. "I haven't got a dime to spare. Business is gamble enough these days. That guy in Washington—"

"You're smart," said Willy dryly. He went into the office, and his face was grim as he surveyed Mary Carson.

She said: "You look unhappy. Don't tell me you're overtrained."

He said. "I'm all right. Have you heard anything new about Kayo?"

She said: "I had the boys check on him. Cab-drivers know everything.... Dopey Ben Egan says Kayo is enamored of Idabelle Farese. This Harold Jones is Idabelle's steady date, but she plays along with Kayo. They do the jitterbug dances together. Club Splendide—what a name for that old barn that used to be the Elks Hall in the old days!—is the hangout for the young post-war baddies of Midburgh. Miner and Farese keep the police out. It is a very ugly situation."

"POLITICS again," muttered Willy. "I never see my manager any more; my kid fighter gets himself all scrambled up, and it's politics."

"They run a bad place," said Mary flatly. "The Carraways, of the bank, own that building. Farese leases it. Miner protects it. I don't believe George Carraway knows what goes on—John handles the leases. I can't imagine John turning out as he has."

Willy said: "Because he went to college?" Then he decided not to quarrel with Mary Carson, ever again, if he could help it. He said: "I'll have to do something about Kayo. But what? I can hardly remember when I was twenty. It's so long ago."

She shook her head, unsmiling. "That was 1935, Willy. I was sixteen .... You grew into a middleweight, and came home to Midburgh to fight Chig Dolan—he's in an asylum now. We were organizing the cab company, and Farese tried to strong-arm us. You first noticed me, then."

"You were wonderful," he said, remembering. "You helped me break up Miner's mob. Farese took an awful beating. That gave Mr. Peters his chance to run for Mayor and partly cleaned up the town."

"You see? Politics," she said.

He thought about that. When he was a kid, Midburgh had been as corrupt as an American city can be, which is very corrupt indeed. Pat Hafey had almost been run into a crooked deal on his first visit....

Mary said in her calm, steady voice: "There is a shindig at the Club Splendide tonight. It is quite a gala affair. Kayo will be there. Maybe we should attend."

"We?" He shook his head. "That's no place for you, baby. I'll go down and check."

She said: "I want to go, Willy. I want to see what's happening. I'm a part of Midburgh too. And—it may be an adventure."

"Adventure?" he echoed. "That nasty joint? You stay away from there."

"You remember what I told you?" She smiled, but he well knew the strength beneath her calm. "You've always had the excitement. There is

something special brewing tonight, Dopey Ben told me. I want to be there."

He could not deny her. He felt that he was gaining ground with her lately, because he had been bringing his problems to her, tentatively, laying them where she could examine them without actually asking advice. He said: "Okay, baby. . . . And maybe we can find out why no one is betting that I'll win against Meyer. Not even Kid Atkins."

She eyed him obliquely, picking up a fountain pen, one of the new ones which will write under water but not so well on a desk-top. She said: "Maybe because you are thirty and not really interested in boxing except as routine—and because he is twenty-two and hungry."

Willy said: "Have I slipped that far?"

"I don't know," she said. "You fought once after the war, abroad. Were you good?"

He said: "I knocked out the Frenchman in a round. How do I know if I was really good?"

"They don't think you can knock out Meyer in a round," she said softly. "They want to do other things with their money."

He said doggedly: "I wish they'd bet on me, anyway. I wonder if Bo Martini did?"

THEY went out to Bo Martini's place for dinner. Mary ate veal *Scalapogni* and pronounced it wonderful, but Willy confined his eating to steak, no trimmings, bread and milk. He had no trouble with his waistline yet, but neither was he courting that problem.

Bo came in and sat with them a moment. He said: "You gonna beat off this bum's ears, huh, Willy?"

"I hope you didn't bet too much on that," said Willy stiffly, afraid to hear Bo's answer. Mary hid a smile behind a napkin.

"Naw. I got a joint now. I take bets, I don't make 'em," said Bo. "I got seven brothers—they are strictly a nuisance. You dunno the troubles I got with them boys."

Willy said: "I can imagine." He shut up and gloomily allowed Mary to make conversation with Martini. There was a wonderful hot band, and he listened to the trumpet, which was out of the world. He liked jazz, and it stirred him and made him feel better.

At ten he paid the check, and there was a cab waiting. Dopey Ben Egan, a hulking man, drove them to the Club Splendide, a large barn in the factory district of Midburgh. A neon sign lit the entrance, but the stairs were dark. The dance-hall was on the second story. The band was loud, with a screechy clarinet. Willy bought two

The spotlight landed on them. Willy ducked, holding Kayo up.

tickets of admission, and a lout with a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth stared, then departed into the gloominess of the hall. The lights were turned so low as to be negligible.

On the floor couples moved so slowly as to appear part of a nightmare of turgid motion. The lights went even lower, and a spot stabbed the floor, picking out a drowsy-looking face here and there as the dance-time of the band slowed to waltz rhythm.

MARY said: "You were so right, Willy. I don't like this at all."

"How am I going to pick out Kayo in this foul dungeon?" Willy fretted. He steered Mary through the crowd. Pausing, he allowed his eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. He muttered: "This place seems foreshortened, or something—smaller than when I was a kid." The band was playing in front of a black drape which covered their end of the hall.

"It's always that way when you grow up. Things are never as large as young eyes make them," Mary said. "Willy—this place smells bad."

They had reached the black hangings. Willy frowned as the lights went on and the music stopped. In the center of the floor a young man with marceled hair was talking in the ear of a beautiful but somehow sinister young girl.

Mary said: "That's Jones and Idabelle Farese. Kayo should be somewhere near that girl."

There was no sign of Kayo. Willy drew Mary into the drapes so that they would not be recognized by the crowd. Jones began making an announcement about another "Shadow Dance" and the crowd, comprising young people in strange outfits, girls without make-up save brush-painted lips, boys in zoot-suits or the equivalent, applauded vigorously. Then Jones grabbed the girl's arm and led her straight for the place where Willy hid.

The lights, fortunately, went out again. Idabelle Farese and the handsome young man came closer. The band played a gooey ballad, sung by a dolorous thin girl in a green dress and under a green spotlight. The voice of Idabelle was a bit strident.

"I slipped him the Finnola, okay. You got the photog?"

Jones said: "Your brother's handlin' that. You go in an' slip your shoulder outa that dress, see?"

She said: "I don't get the wrinkle."

"We're gonna get Boulder too," said Jones. He seemed a bit nervous. "He come in, with his broad. I just got the dope. We're gonna get a shot of 'em, throw it in wit' the shot of you and Kayo, that punk, see? And don't get so chummy with 'at Kayo, neither—get me, babe? I don't like it."

She said: "Don't be a square, gate." There was a potent silence and the two dim figures clung together.

Willy put his hand behind him. He moved along the wall, searching. He knew now why the hall seemed smaller. There was a back room, and the black drapes covered a partition. His hand encountered a knob. He turned it, and there was a slit in the curtain and the door was open. He pulled Mary through, into a Stygian blackness. Mary's breath came quickly, but her hand in his did not tremble, and he remembered that she feared nothing. He shut the door behind them and said to her: "If the girl comes in—and the photographer, we'll have to break the camera. This is for politics. It would hurt Pat—ruin him with certain people he needs."

She said: "Maybe we should get out. You're not in politics."

"Nuts," he said. "This is no time for jokes."

He could not find a light-switch. He flicked a cigarette lighter he carried to light Mary's smokes. He saw a huddled body on a couch. It was a large room, and there was a juke-box in the corner. It was evidently a place for private parties.

He made his way to the couch in darkness, flipped the lighter again. Kayo's thin face was pale and covered with a film of perspiration. He breathed too loudly, lying in a strained position.

Mary said: "I've found a back door."

There were voices from somewhere outside the room: "Git the pint of booze ready an' toss it on the bum. Boulder and his babe gotta drink somep'n in that sweat-box. Slip them a Mickey too, an' git a pitcher." It was Farese, Willy knew, and his fists doubled. But it was not a time for slugging without scheming, and he bent, raising the unconscious Kayo to his shoulders.

He staggered toward Mary, handing her the lighter, whispering: "Where is Farese? Back door, or in the dance-hall?"

She said: "I couldn't tell. His voice just echoed around in here."

"I can get Kayo out, but I can't fight off the toughs," muttered Willy.

She said: "Let's go through on the dance-floor."

He saw what she meant without an explanation. He said: "Okay, darling. Get us through that door."

She used the lighter sparingly. They had to hurry, because now there were loud sounds on the back stairs as the photographer came with his camera. They came to the door, and she opened it carefully, parting the drapes to peer through. The back door opened, and Farese's voice became loud.

"Let's go, characters. Get a light on in here and git goin'."

Mary closed the door behind them. Willy let Kayo slide down until his feet touched the floor. Mary closed in, and they slid out from behind the curtain. Time had sped so swiftly that the Shadow Dance was still on. The finger of the spotlight sought them inexorably as they moved together across the floor.

It landed on them. Willy ducked down, holding Kayo up from behind. Mary put both sturdy arms around the unconscious youth and bore him through a couple of slow, agonizing steps, looking up into his face with simulated adoration.

The spotlight moved on. The music was slow enough: Through the hot, panting crowd they moved the young fighter. They came to the gate leading from the floor. Willy picked Kayo off his feet and carried him, erect, through the turnstile.

A rough voice said: "Hey, what's a idea?" From the far end of the hall a voice was pounding, and the shrill accents of Idabelle answered.

Willy said: "A pass-out. I'm takin' him out o' the joint."

"Okay, go ahead before he gets sick," said the door-tender. Mary whisked ahead, but recoiled at the head of the stairs. The man with the drooping cigarette had a blackjack in his hand.

Willy propped Kayo against the wall, in a corner. He was seething with the strain of suspense, and his muscles ached for action. He took the wrist of the hand holding the blackjack and twisted, spinning his man. His hand cut knifelike, a trick learned in the war, cutting off outcry by slicing at the thug's throat. Then he chucked the man bodily back through the door, into the Club Splendide, so that he crashed on the floor and lay still, choking.

Even as he picked up Kayo and started down the stairs, he realized that experience had again counted. He had been careful not to hurt his fists on the hoodlum.

DOPEY BEN EGAN was coming through the door, and behind him a couple of other Champion Cab men, including Boo Dorengo, former middleweight champ. They took Kayo up among them and promised succor for him. They knew all about Mickey Finns and the effect of the lethal dose. Kayo would be all right in a couple of hours, Egan said consolingly; and did they want the joint upstairs took apart now or later?

Later, Willy told him, and with Mary he was driven home. In front of the Carson house, Willy lingered. He said: "You like the excitement?"

"Now I do," she said. "Not so much when it was happening."

He said: "I won't ask you again to marry me. After the fight, though—" He walked away, holding himself in,

knowing all this was bad for him, so near to ring-time. But a dirty scheme had failed; and maybe Pat Hafey would get to be mayor at that, if they feared him that much.

A thought occurred to Willy, and he hastened his pace, intent upon acting, even though the hour was late.

AT ringside, excitement mounted. Augie Meyer's hair grew down to his eyebrows, went around back and spread all over his torso. He resembled, Willy thought, a hair mattress with muscles. He looked twice as tough as in pictures.

Lou Farese glared from the corner like an animal. George Miner was at ringside, pink and affable, but with a bit of terror beneath the glossy exterior, Willy thought. The underworld of Midburgh was grouped around Miner at ringside, a thing the big promoter had never allowed before.

Bo Martini waved a slim hand. Sue Hafey, handsome as ever and looking half her age, sat with Mary Carson; and Happy was with that party. This was home, and his dear ones and his enemies were present to watch the veteran Willy Boulder defend his middleweight title.

Pat Hafey said in the corner: "I wish I never had got into this political mess, now that we're here. I've been neglecting you."

Pat always worried at ringside. Kid Atkins handled the pail; and Kayo Dollar, still slightly pallid but quite subdued, swung a towel. Willy said: "If I can't handle myself after all these years, I'm no good. Don't fret. This boy is tough—so what?"

Willy's hands were taped, and Pat drew the loose sleeves of the robe away and fitted the new gloves. He was getting very bald, this man who had fought the lightweights of a great era, from Leonard to Canzoneri—and never lost to a champion. Willy went on: "I even bet a little on this. About all the cash I could raise, in fact."

Pat said: "But you almost never bet on yourself, and—"

"I thought someone ought to," said Willy calmly. "It makes a fellow feel better if there are bets on him. It gives him confidence."

Pat said: "Willy, you've maybe made a mis—" He broke off, biting at his lip. He saw the derision on his fighter's face, and silently led him to ring center as the referee beckoned.

Augie Meyer's eyes were set far back in his head, behind ample bony structure. They were animal eyes, alert and intelligent, just like a pig's eyes. Meyer had thick lips, and he sneered at everyone and everything. He sure looked very tough.

". . . . Shake hands now and come out fighting. . . And may the better man win," intoned the referee.

Now that Mary had finally consented, Willy wondered if he could be good enough to her.

Meyer refused to touch gloves. Willy grinned and went to the corner. He stretched at the ropes and looked down at Kayo and Kid Atkins and Pat. They were all worried. They knew how good Meyer was.

Pat Hafey wheeled and picked out a well-known bookie at ringside. He said in an audible voice: "Will you take my marker for five thousand?"

The bookie stared an instant. The bell rang. Pat insisted: "On Boulder to win."

There was a sudden roar. The bookie said: "Hell, yes!" He looked like a man who had just received a nice present—say, five thousand dollars. Pat whirled about.

Willy lay on the floor in his own corner, facing Pat. He had one knee under him, and he got up on it, but his eyes were glazed, and Pat felt real panic as he picked up the count. It was *"Four,"* and he showed Willy four fingers, then five, then six.

Kid Atkins was moaning: "Suckered Willy wiff a right. Showed 'im the left, and any sensible Joe would espect a left—but this un throws a right."

Kayo nodded. "A sucker punch. Unorthodox."

At *"Seven"* Willy's eyes cleared. At *"Eight"* he nodded. At *"Nine"* he came to his feet in one rippling motion, and the referee stepped between to wipe resin from his gloves.

In another instant the challenger, like a wild beast from some primordial ooze, was slamming, smashing, tearing at Willy as though to murder him then and there. The left hand which Willy pumped automatically into his face had little effect. Augie Meyer was a killer in every lineament, and in that first round he showed it. Never had Willy been hit so many times in one canto by one fighter.

And yet, when the bell rang, Willy walked to his corner on steady legs. He sat down without flinching, and there were no cuts to patch, only a bruise on his jaw where that first paralyzing right had landed. He leaned back against the ropes, and Pat Hafey drenched him with water, then wiped him carefully. Pat said only: "You're all right?"

"Yeah. He win the first," said Willy dryly.

The second-round gong clamored. Willy got off the stool as Pat whisked it from under him. Across the ring sprang the panther who was Augie Meyer.

It seemed as though Willy were snowed under this avalanche of blows. Flesh and blood could not endure such an attack. Snorting and plunging, Meyer threw both hands in a never-ending torrent of leather. Willy's feet carried him a bit to one side. Then they carried him a bit back to the other side.

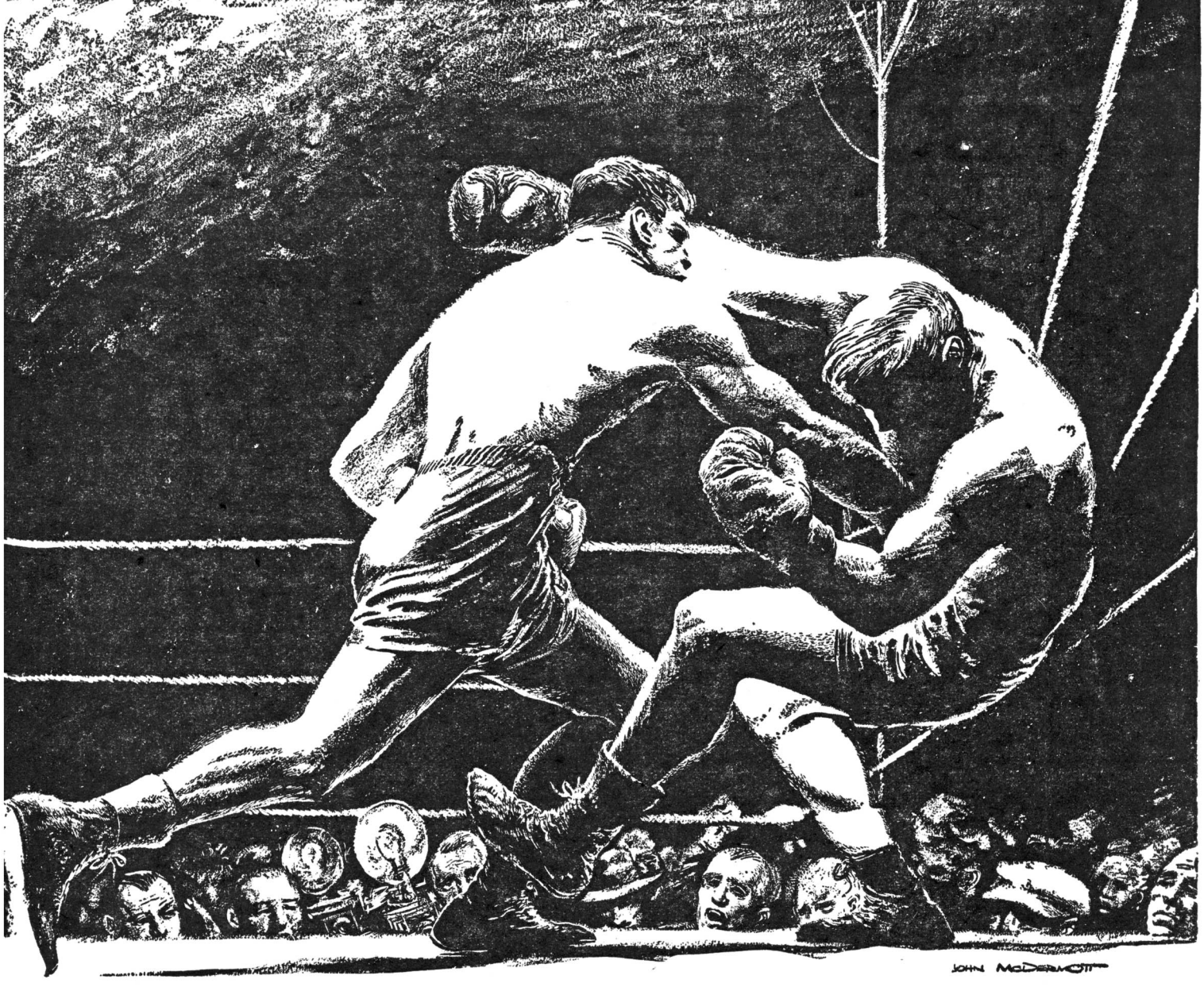
Somehow Willy was still there. Augie Meyer retreated, taking breath for a new attack, for no man ever lived who could sustain such chucking of punches for a full three minutes. As he did, Willy was gliding in, stabbing a left. The hard-bunched glove banged home, again and again. It was not a left jab, either. It was a straight left, the champ's shoulder behind it. . . .

The second round ended. Willy muttered; "I win that one."

"Even," said Pat. "He was aggressive."

"Oh, yeah," said Willy. "That's what I used to be."

The third round began the same way. Meyer came in, rushing. Willy turned sidewise and let him get part way past, then stabbed him with a left. Meyer wheeled and tried his unorthodox right, a really good overhand wallop, the one which had laid Willy low. The champion weaved away, came inside the punch and tripped two strong lefts to the mark. Meyer did



Eight straight rights went into Meyer's body—he was ready to be had.

not come close to going down, but he spun around, arms wide. For a moment he was helpless. Willy deftly set him up with a short left. Meyer recovered and fell into a clinch.

Willy said behind his mouthpiece: "Nice goin', son." He shoved Meyer away with both hands and boxed, tincanning away, then coming back in a beautifully timed attack, the left cutting, cutting. He made Meyer move, and when he did, it seemed as though he were taking the offensive, although he was really feinting Meyer into short leads and beating him to the punch.

After the fourth, Willy said to Pat: "This boy's toughest I ever fought."

"Yep," said Pat. "You're no more than even with him right now."

Willy said: "This boy is stronger than when we started."

"Right," said Pat Hafey. Down at ringside Sue Hafey and Mary Carson were holding hands, dying a thousand deaths. Miner was leaning forward, aware of the closeness of the bout, but confident. Farese was all gesticulating confidence.

Bo Martini and his seven brothers had entered as the bout began. The roadhouse was closed during the time of the bout. Bo never missed one of Willy's performances, although this was the first the seven younger brothers had ever seen. They were unhappy, the brothers. Bo lit a cigarette with steady hand.

The fifth was a good round for Meyer. He kept coming in and feinting and chucking that overhand right. It landed on the shoulder where Willy wore his little brown scars, his wounded shoulder, and after a while it began to droop quite noticeably. Mary whimpered a little, suffering with the champion.

THEY went into the seventh. It was still Meyer's fight, on aggressiveness, although Meyer now was observed to have only one eye. The other was hiding behind a blue and black mouse.

The challenger came in and tried to butt Willy in the chin as he dumped a big right to the champ's body. Meyer was getting anxious to kill off the worn old veteran he had been promised as a gift. He roughed it in the clinch. Willy spun him with hands which were skilled beyond Meyer's knowledge. Meyer went into the ropes, looked baffled, tried to see past the shanty over his eye.

Willy stepped back. The overhand right came again. Willy let it drop, lowered his shoulder.

Meyer shifted, his single good orb gleaming. He lowered his left, ready to pitch it from the hip in a terrible uppercut. It was a move designed to end the fight, to capture a title. It was a canny move by a great animalistic fighter, an instinctively good boxer.

Willy turned his hip to the uppercut. His own right hand flashed. For the first time in the bout, his heels went to solid floor, and his toes gripped through the light shoes, seeking the canvas. His body pivoted, and from behind the perfect shell of his defense came the shots from the big guns.

Meyer's eyebrow split, and blood ran down his cheek. His nose crum-

pled under the left hook which swept his head over upon his shoulder. His mouthpiece flew away, bouncing and rolling on the ring floor.

Willy broke ground again, on light feet, ducking, feinting. Augie tried to fight back, swinging his head like a wounded bull. Willy hit him in the body.

Eight straight rights went into Meyer's body. At the end of the round he was on the ropes in his own corner, all doubled over, his knees shaking. His body was pink with the spots the gloves had left, the skin raw.

Willy removed his own mouth-protector and said to Farese: "That was for playing along with your cute little camera tricks. Come up and get your fighter, you dirty rat. He's about ready to be had."

He sauntered to his corner, nodding at Sue and Mary, waving at the crowd. He was a champion, and this was an old, old story; a young, stalwart ruffian trying to bull him out of his title. He knew now why Maxie Baer had yawned when he was a young heavy and things were so easy. . . .

The bell rang for the next round. Willy got up smiling.

Farese pushed his fighter off the stool. Augie Meyer tried to make his legs work. They refused. He fell on his face, essayed still to rise. His animal eyes had nothing in them but red lights.

Amid a hush, the referee counted ten. Meyer never made it to his feet.

George Miner arose and walked heavily from the ball-park. On his heels followed his minions from the underworld.

MARY said: "I don't quite understand it. One moment he seemed to be winning the fight. Then you were beating him to death."

"I just fought the way you have to fight that kind," Willy said carelessly. "What I want to know is: Do we get married next week?"

She said: "What did you do about Miner and Farese? You did something yesterday that changed things."

He said: "You said you didn't want to be part of the let-down. So I went to George Carraway. I told him about the Club Splendide. Bo Martini was in there. He is a big depositor, you know. The old man called in his son—it was not very nice. John Carraway is leaving town. George Carraway is backing Pat for Mayor. Bo promised to close up his games."

"Bo did what?"

"Bo is making enough downstairs. Ever since Prohibition days, when he made his first stake, Bo has been trying to find something like that. He never meant to be crooked—he is not crooked, really. Mostly the law was just wrong for Bo's talents." And Willy grinned.

She said: "Mr. Carraway—Bo's closing clinched it. He's a churchgoer, Mr. Carraway. That means Pat's got the church people."

A HOT trumpeter was playing "China Boy" like a madman. It was a victory party, and everyone was very gay. One of Bo's brothers was cooking, another serving. Bo was making eyes at Sue Hafey, an old habit which to this day annoyed Pat. to Sue's delight.

Kayo Dollar made a somewhat timid entrance. Clinging to his arm was a young, dark beauty of the first water.

Mary said: "For goodness sake! Another girl!"

"Oh, that's all right," said Willy indulgently. "Bo Martini, it seems, also has a sister. Aint she cute? Are you going to marry me next week, or am I going to try to take her away from Kayo?"

Mary said honestly: "I am going to marry you next week."

Willy looked at her. Now that she had finally consented, his stomach was suddenly empty and fearful. He wondered if he could be good enough to her, to this gray-eyed, red-haired, lovely creature he had known all his life, yet did not know at all.

Yet even as he pressed her hand, he looked at Kayo Dollar, wondering if the kid was all right—and wondering if when he grew into a middleweight, Kayo would be good enough to take the aging champion of the world—Willy Boulder.

Do You Know Baseball?

A Quiz by Ben Gould

HOW much do you know about baseball plays and players? Grade your score according to these ratings: 50 to 60—fair; 60 to 70—good; 70 to 80—excellent; over 80—expert.

1. What big-league manager once captained football, baseball and basketball at Fordham University?
2. Whose wild pitch with the bases full lost a World Series?
3. Guess, within two years, the date of the first night game in the big leagues.
4. Who originated the All-Star baseball game?
5. Name two big-league managers who directed their teams to four straight championships.
6. What player was nicknamed "Stonewall?"
7. What big-league manager is better known as "The Deacon?"
8. What big-league executive was once married to Zasu Pitts?
9. Who is called "The Brain of Baseball?"
10. What player was often mistaken for Babe Ruth because of similar facial and physical resemblance?
11. What is the distance from the pitcher's mound to the home plate?
12. What big-league president started out as a sports-writer?
13. Who holds the World Series strikeout record and how many batters did he fan?
14. Who is the dean of all big-league umpires?
15. Who holds the best batting average (lifetime) for World Series play?
16. Who is known as baseball's "Unknown Man?"
17. What old-time pitcher was known as "Old Hoss?"
18. What slugger was affectionately called "The Boob?"
19. Who is considered the most learned of all big-leaguers?
20. What player-manager was a soccer star before turning to baseball?

Answers

1. Frank Frisch, known as the Fordham Flash.
2. John Miljus of the Pittsburgh Pirates.
3. May 24, 1935.
4. Arch Ward, Chicago sports editor.
5. John McGraw, Joe McCarthy and Charley Comiskey.
6. Travis Jackson, Giants' shortstop.
7. Bill McKechnie of the Cincinnati Reds.
8. Tom Gallery, vice-president of the New York Yankees.
9. Branch Rickey, Dodgers.
10. Freddy Heimach, who pitched for the Yankees.
11. Sixty feet, six inches.
12. Ford Frick of the National League.
13. Howard Ehmke, of the Philadelphia A's who fanned 13 Cubs on Oct. 8, 1929.
14. Bill Klem.
15. Lou Gehrig, who batted .361 in 34 games of seven series.
16. The mythical pitcher in the poem "Casey at the Bat."
17. Charlie Radbourne.
18. Floyd Caves Herman of the Dodgers.
19. Moe Berg, of the Red Sox, is a lawyer, economist and speaks seven foreign languages.
20. Jimmy Wilson, who managed Philadelphia and Chicago.

The Thief of Thebes

ORESTOS, LORD OF LABYRINTH,
by grace of Minos and the
Immortal Gods,
new returned from Nippur and the sacred
rivers bearing a treaty with Babylon,
inscribes these disks in memory of Burna-
Buriash the King, by
command of the Minos:

To the Unknown God,
the One God, Glory!

THE EGYPT OF THE PHARAOH HAREMHEB is a land of glitter and of gold, wherein he who loves silks and wine may glory in his ease; wherein he who loves adventure, hunting or good blows may fight his fill: for in Egypt a man may find either—there is ever luxury there and ever war. And I, Orestos, Lord of Labyrinth upon Crete, was loath to leave the land.

Minos-Eye, mightiest galley of the Cretan fleet, would sail at dawn for home; and I with her, for the charge was mine—and the duty mine—to return to Minos, King of Kings and Lord of the wide Mid Sea. But in the Garden of Tiy, near the Royal Palace at Thebes. I had looked into a woman's eyes—and was lost. For she was Anksen, widow of the Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Ammon, and a queen—and I, only Lord of Labyrinth.

And I had rather have died in Egypt than to look into Anksen's face no more. But *Minos-Eye* would sail at dawn; for in that hour, when I stood by the mainmast of the galley, talking with my captain Thersites, I thought the One God I worship had turned from me His face.

There rose a burst of voices upon the after-deck and there came the rush of feet. Three burly soldiers of the

The stirring saga of the Cretan noble Orestos (renamed by the Babylonians after their legendary hero Gilgames), who fell in love with Tut-ankh-Ammon's widow, fought the army of Babylon's rival city Nippur, and stormed the high towers of the citadel to rescue the captive queen. . . . The author will be remembered for "Son of Minos," "Bow Strings," "The Bronze Warrior" and other well-liked novels.

by DAVID CHENEY

guard came, dragging with them a tall wretch who struggled to be free. And the guards cast that ragged fellow upon the deck before me.

He rose to his knees and swayed a little and grinned.

"Sing ho, the sweet wine!" he cried to me. "Sing ho, the free faring!"

I turned from my talk with Thersites to stare down at him. I saw only his dirt and his rags: a beggar upon the golden galley, kneeling in the light of the moon. Yet this fellow was to put off my faring home to Crete—and change my destiny. He was to lead me to far places across wilderness, across desert. He was to fight by my side in war-chariot silver and black upon the wide plain of Sumir. Like a god, he was to fight with me in mad battle upon a tower of Nippur. He was to save me at last from death in a Babylonian furnace. He was to lead me to her whom I love, bound in golden chains in a shrine of Bel Marduk. He was not what he seemed; and in that hour of night upon the galley, I saw only his dirt and his rags. That he brought to me black news of Queen Anksen, how could I know?

He wore a yellow turban upon his great black head, and a long beard, matted and unkempt. He looked up at me shrewdly. His eyes were strangely blue and bright for so mean a scamp.

"Who's this?" I demanded sternly. "What does this beggar upon the Minos-ship?"

One of the Labyrinth men stood forth, his quilted mail bright with shining bronze.

"I had sent three of the crew below to store away goods in the belly of the ship," said he. "Are we not to sail at dawn? And in the deeps of her, they stumbled on this spy hiding behind a cask. He had found my lord's wine."

Thersites steppcd forward and seized the fellow by his shoulder. "Speak, wretch!" he bade. "What do you, spying on this ship?"

"Men call me Anpu-kha—that is to say, in Egyptian, 'Jackal-spirit,'" said he. There was a burr to his tones that was not Egyptian. "But I am no jackal. If a man has wits, shall he not live by them? Sing ho, the sweet wine! Sing ho, the free faring!"

"You are no Egyptian," said I, staring at his lean face and matted black beard. "Where howls your pack?"

"For a silver ring in the palm," said he impudently, "I will read your glory or your doom, or interpret the foul dream you had in the night. I know the houses of the

stars, the lines of the hand, the foretelling by straws, and by blood, and by giblets of fowls."

"He is of Babylon," said I to Thersites. "He patters glibly, like a Chaldee. He's too wise for a beggar, too sharp for a thief. He's a spy."

"A man of the Red Lands hides himself away in Cretan galley," said the kneeling wretch. "He is then a beggar, a thief or a spy. There is no other chance—"

"Why say you the fellow is of Babylon?" Thersites asked sharply.

"They who dwell in the shadow of ziggurats or towers of the gods," said I, "are readers of omens, interpreters of dreams. The land is black with magic. Who but a Chaldee could speak so? Look at his face: he's no Egyptian. Fellow, speak up! Come you from Nippur?"

"The shadow on your mind is from the lion's wing," said the kneeling man, and rose suddenly. "You shall have no peace till you behold the golden couch of Bel Marduk. Ha! You shine in the moonlight like the *kimmu,* the very spirit of Gilgames the Hunter!"

He leaned forward and stared searchingly into my face.

"Up, Cretan!" he cried in loud voice, raising high a long, powerful right arm. *"Because of the Queen's face in your heart, Babylon awaits you!"*

I started and felt the blood in my cheeks.

"The face of what queen—" I began hoarsely.

"The ziggurat shall ring to your mailed feet! Your sword shall be red upon E-Gingu, the holy temple, and old Nippur loud with its clashing. Aye, there shall be woe in Nippur till the Lord of Crete stands before the King with the crown of the double asps!"

"This is gibberish—" began Thersites.

"Come, fellow, speak!" I bade him sternly. "What do you on Minos-ship?"

"I bear news of import to the Lord of Labyrinth," said he calmly. "Has not a princess of Egypt married a king of Crete? Behold, once that princess saved this house of flesh, and I would do in return a favor to the house of stone. You shall hear what I have to tell; and in exchange, I will fare safely with you. There be those who raven for my life. I go with the Lord Orestos to Babylon."

"I go not to Babylon," I said. "We sail at dawn for Labyrinth."

Anpu-kha laughed. "Man plans his journey, but Bel lays out the road. You stay in Thebes tonight; you journey tomorrow to the two rivers of the old gods."

"I am for Crete!" I exclaimed again.

"I HAVE A CHARM," said Anpu-kha, as if to turn my thoughts from Crete. "It is verily the agate heart of Dungi, King of Elam. It is yours for one golden chain."

"What do I want with Dungi's toy?" I demanded.

"The fear of the father of the gods is upon this agate heart," said the strange fellow earnestly. "No devotee of Bel's will dare harm him who wears Dungi's heart. Restore the heart to Bel, and he shall prosper you; Bel shall enrich you; Bel shall send you thence with a god's bride, a princess—aye, a one-time queen."

"Why should your god Bel do this thing for me?"

"Behold, the charm is one of the seven tablets of destiny! It was stolen neatly from Bel and brought to Thebes. It is here, in my palm: the heart of Dungi, King of Elam, blessed of gods. A chain of gold, one little chain of gold: the price of greatness and your heart's desire!"

"We waste time—" I began.

"I will guide you to the sacred rivers; I will be your interpreter among the Babylonians. I will show you the well of sweet water in the sandy waste. Let the god have his agate again! Restore unto Bel that which is Bel's!"

"If you stole from the god, and the fear of Nergal is upon you," I told him, "surely by your own hand the charm should be restored."

"I cannot restore the agate," declared Anpu-kha. "They would cast me into the furnace. But the charm must go back. Promise me you will take me with you unto Nippur, and I will give you Dungi's heart!"

But he showed me no charm. "Let me see this charm of Dungi's," I said curiously.

"LET THE RODS OPEN HIS MOUTH," urged Thersites. "Let these men take him away and beat confession out of his black body."

"You will restore the charm unto Bel," insisted the fellow.

I laughed. "Chaldean," I said, "you are mad to think a man of Crete on his way home to Labyrinth would turn back, cross the hot wilderness and the lands of the Amorites beyond, and fare even to Babylonia; enter the mighty temple of Bel Marduk in thrice-ancient Nippur; and at peril of torture and death, restore to the altar of your bloody god this charm thieved away by a scurvy wretch!"

Anpu-kha grinned cheerfully. He stroked the black mat upon his chin. He stared at me as in deep thought. And with swift motion he thrust his right hand into the folds of his robe, and placed in my hand the talisman.

"Behold Dungi's luck!" he cried. "Betray not the ancient gods!"

"I worship the One," said I. Yet the agate lay hot in my palm, and my heart beat fast.

"Let the guards take him away!" Thersites urged. "He's flushed with wine. Lord Orestos, decree now his punishment!"

"How, think you, will you punish the Thief of Thebes?" demanded the tall wretch, his sharp eyes upon my face.

"With at least twenty strokes of the rod," answered Thersites roughly. "If the Lord Orestos does not decree at least twenty, I will make up to you the count, honest Thief of Thebes."

"The rod of Egypt was laid upon my back in the Double House," declared Anpu-kha, the Thief of Thebes. "And there were forty strokes or the weals lied to the torn flesh. I am calloused on the back: I could bear your twenty. But let me speak: a barter! A barter! A tale that shall save three!"

"One," said I.

"Three," said the Thief of Thebes.

"You speak priestly-wise," said I, "which is to say, in riddles. Does the Thief of Thebes count as three?"

"Open your ears, O Cretans!" cried Anpu-kha. "Follow the count: *one,* the thief. You agree that I might tell that which would save the thief?"

"I grant you the one," said I.

"*Two,* the Pharaoh Haremheb," said he.

"There are secrets blabbed in gutters that palaces know not," said I. "I grant you the two."

"You grant me *three,* then," said the Thief of Thebes, "for verily, I will tell a tale that shall save also the life of a queen."

"Again, a queen!" I cried, starting forward. "How, a queen? *Name you this queen."*

"I will trade her name with you for my life," said the Thief, raising both arms in salute. "A secret I know in barter for my life—and the right to travel with you to the land of Babylon!"

"If the fellow can verily tell a tale that is true," said I to Thersites, "his tale may yet save two; and if it will save two, I see not, friend Thersites, why we should not stretch that tall story for the sake of saving three—and so deliver the wretch to me. Aye, Thersites, I would be made rich by that barter: I would have a champion who has already saved a queen and a thief and a King of Kings!"

We were laughing at him in the moonlight; but he stood proudly, as if sure of what he knew.

"I think there be more to this Thief of Thebes than we have known," I said. "Anpu-kha, you look to be no jackal. You stand tall and straight. You do not look, in this magic light, to be even a thief, O Thief of Thebes!"

"I thank the Lord Orestos for that," he said.

"If your tale will save the Pharaoh and a queen, you shall go with me—wherever I fare," I said.

Anpu-kha looked anxiously into my face.

"I will be true man to you," he declared. "I will show you the safe path. I will guard you with my life. Verily, I will be with you: and if I be with you, Bel Marduk shall lead you to your heart's desire, and that blessing you have thought impossible in this life shall drop into your hands as did the agate heart that even now pulses in your palm like a coal of fire. Bel Marduk wills it!"

"What is this!" I exclaimed, feeling the blood in my face. "How know you what lies in my heart?"

"You have already explained it," said Anpu-kha. "I am of Babylon. All things are open to me. Take me, Lord, and your life with me from Bel Marduk's heaven-high tower!"

"Who is this queen whom you would save?" I cried.

"He will take me!" cried Anpu-kha, turning joyfully to Thersites. "The blood is in his face. Open your ears, you Cretans! *By this hour tomorrow night, Tut-ankh-Ammons Queen shall be prisoner of men of Nippur!*"

I sprang forward. I seized Anpu-kha by the two arms and shook him as he were a thin reed.

"You lie!" I shouted. "The Queen Anksen abides safe in the Double House!"

"She is for Nippur," insisted the fellow. "She is for the golden shrine, the god's bride, the priest's knife. *Go you back, Orestos, to Labyrinth. What is the Queen Anksen to you?*"

I turned to Thersites. "The fellow is a prophet," I said, drawing my bronze blade half out of its jeweled case and dropping it back with a clash. *"I am for Nippur."*

Chapter Two

THUS IT CAME ABOUT THAT I CRIED OUT upon *Minos-Eye,* we were bound—not for home, not for Crete, as all had thought, but for Nippur and distant Babylonia. Yet my Captain Thersites, starting up at the word, was moved not by this news, but by my secret thus shouted forth to all.

"How now, Orestos!" he cried, his mouth open, his eyes staring. "Anksen! The dead Pharaoh's queen! Dare you—"

Thersites gulped and stopped: he could not say the words.

"I am Lord of Labyrinth," I told him proudly. "My blood is noble. The Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Ammon is dead. I shame not to love the queen his widow. My duty was to Minos—and I would have gone back to Crete, hiding my secret in my heart, had I not heard this black news from Anpu-kha. *The fellow knew I am for Nippur!*"

"We have yet to hear this story that shall save three," said Thersites. "Those who run in streets are glib of tongue. Do you put faith in a thief?"

I looked into the face of the yellow-turbaned Thief of Thebes. His eyes, so bright and blue, met mine with strange strength and steadiness.

"I believe the Thief of Thebes," said I somberly. "The gods know, I would he lied! Come, fellow! How know you of this peril to the Queen?"

"Wise is that leader of men who knows when—and whom—to trust," answered the Thief of Thebes. "Does the Captain think I would gain ought, with my very life in the balance, by fogging your brains with lies?"

"He has said he believes you," Thersites told him. "I have not said you lied. I judge the man by his story."

"After the funeral of the Pharaoh," Anpu-kha began, "I engaged one Impara to visit the House of Death in the Valley of the Dead Kings, he being skilled in tunneling through cut stones—"

"Neither Pharaoh nor any mortal man could claim the Queen's soul; it is in the keeping of the gods!"

"He being a robber of the dead," said Thersites scornfully. "You keep good company, honest Thief of Thebes!"

"What has this Impara to do with pharaoh or queen?" I demanded.

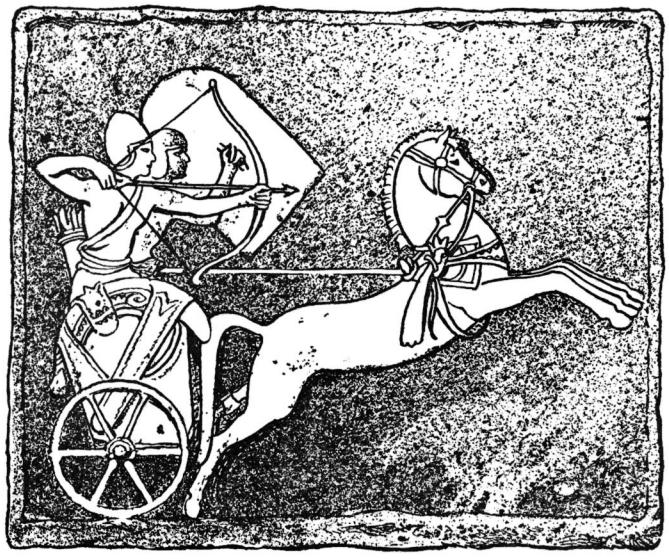
"HEAR ME THROUGH," answered Anpu-kha. "I had in mind to take back with me to Babylon a certain golden crown that once graced the head of the Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Ammon."

"So you are a thief—" I began.

"I wanted no crown for a thief," he told me coolly. "Shall a thief wear a crown? This crown was given by Narbutali, brother of King Burna-Buriash of Babylon, to Egypt—and it was not Narbutali's to give. The crown is the ancient tiara of Babylon's anointed ones and belongs to Babylon."

"So—you would journey to Babylon to sell there this precious crown?" I asked. "Would you have a Lord of Crete escort a thief of crowns to Babylon?"

"Nay. I would carry the crown to Bel Marduk in Nippur," said Anpu-kha. "If I restore the crown to Bel, may not the god of Destiny overlook my theft of the agate heart—the heart of Dungi in the hand of the Cretan lord? Truly, this talisman of destiny burned in my thoughts: for the long arm of Bel reaches even into Egypt. What god would not forgive one of his priests



for the loss of an agate talisman, if that priest fetched to the god the tiara of a King of Kings in its stead?"

"Hold, Anpu-kha!" I cried. "What say you? *A priest of Bel—you?*"

"A man shall not be judged by his words till the thought be finished," said the Thief of Thebes calmly. "I was about to add: and if, for a priest, a tiara outweigh an agate talisman, why not then for a poor thief of Thebes?"

But there was mockery and challenge in his grin.

"Let it be," said I. "The story, Anpu-kha!"

"So I met this knave Impara by night on the Way of the Sphinxes, and went up with him to the Cave of Tut-ankh-Ammon. But when we came to that grim place, we found company there before us. Impara slid up among the rocks and mingled with them. And he came down to tell a startling thing."

"To the kernel, man!" I cried. "If there be any meat in the nut!"

"Impara said these were fellows of Mennufer,* followers of the Prince Eye, governor of the city. They had broken into the House of Death and painted upon the wall a cartouche that says it be the very sign of Eye, beloved of Ammon, son of Ra, Pharaoh of all Egypt."

"Eye is but a governor!" I exclaimed. "How dared the Prince Eye—"

"He is strong, this Eye," said Anpu-kha, "and he painted upon the wall what shall soon be truth, if Haremheb be not warned in time. Prince Eye marches upon Thebes with a great army. And it is at this moment that the Queen Anksen fares forth on a lion-hunt. She hunts with the javelin, so I am told, as cleverly as the Princess Hathane hunted with her bow. Aye, the Queen fares forth—to fall into the hands of the men of Nippur—and Nippur will strike for Eye, to enthrone him in the Double House, if Eye strike for Narbutali, Partesi of Nippur."

"I will strike out this Eye!" I cried, my sword in my hand. "Let Haremheb marshal his men! I will take a hundred warriors, Thersites—and leave you as many, and in command of the galley. I will take a hundred. . . . Nay, but let Haremheb strike out Eye: I will take the Cretan heroes and march to spoil the plot of Burna-Buriash."

"The plot of Narbutali, Partesi of Nippur," corrected the Thief of Thebes, "and not the plot of Burna-Buriash. Did I speak the name of Burna-Buriash?"

"If you go on this long journey," averred Thersites, "I fare with you, Orestos. You will need two hundred Cretans for this journey—and Thersites by your side."

*Ancient Memphis.

I turned and stared into the black-bearded face of the Thief of Thebes.

"Dare you go with me to the Pharaoh with your tale?" I asked.

"Not in these garments," answered the Thief, holding out his torn and dirty skirts sidewise from his body. "Will the Pharaoh listen to a thief clad in stinking rags?"

I laughed. "Take him, Thersites," said I, "and see that he is stripped of the rags and bathes in scented water. And clothe him then in good bronze gear. Aye, gird his side with the best blade you can find upon the galley. If a thief speak with a king, for his own sake he had well be clad in shining mail!"

And Thersites took the fellow away, to see that this was done.

But I paced the deck of *Minos-Eye,* frantic to think of the plot to seize Anksen the Queen.

Chapter Three

When Anpu-kha the Thief of Thebes had donned the armor, we stood astonished to behold the change. Assuredly, the man in rags becomes an altered being when dressed in gleaming mail! He strutted among us like a lord; and I knew in my heart, whatever this man might be, he was no mere thief of Thebes. And I began to be troubled over him.

As we marched up the paved way, past the Garden of Tiy, at this hour sleeping in the soft light of the moon, we came upon a captain and his guard, who had hurried forth to see what meant the blaze of armor on the royal way. I tramped ahead, Anpu-kha closely attending me, and went boldly up to him.

"Lord Orestos!" cried the Captain. "But you were dropping downriver at dawn on the long way to Crete! What do you now in Thebes—and with such a company? By the horns of Ptah, these men are harnessed as for battle!"

"Ra-Rising brighten your path!" I said to the Captain. "I must see the Pharaoh Haremheb without delay."

"The Pharaoh sleeps," began the Captain, astonished. "Bring your band to the house of the guards, and we will breakfast together. The King will go forth at the seventh hour to bathe in the river—"

"My errand with the Pharaoh will not await his pleasure," I told him. "I bring tidings to Haremheb that threaten both his throne and his life."

"I know you Cretans to be loyal friends of the One," grumbled the Captain, "and therefore I will do for you that which I would not do for a prince of Egypt. But I hope you have made sure of this threat, ere you break the King's rest! I will rouse the One. Follow me."

And we went to the Double House. Then did the Captain vanish within. Presently the Lord of the Palace came forth and bade me enter—aye, and my two hundred Cretans too. And we tramped down the shining hall.

Halfway down, I halted. "It were not wise to anger the One, this morning," I said to the Lord of the Palace. "I forgot that we must remove our boots."

The Lord of the Palace looked at me. "Tut-ankh-Ammon sleeps in his house of death," he said. "Haremheb is the greater king. A man is a man, to Haremheb, and not to be abased in the presence of his pharaoh. Keep on your boots. The son of Ra awaits you in the throne-room."

We entered the Hall of State. And Haremheb sat in his royal robes, the double crown upon his head, the beard of royalty upon his face, and the scepter in his hand.

He gave me a grim look as I approached, my arms raised in salute.

"Lord Orestos," said he, "why have you roused me from my sleep?"

"Sokar the god of death is abroad," said I, "and I have come with two hundred heroes of Crete to offer our swords and our bodies in defense of the Pharaoh of Egypt."

"I have commanded armies and brought victories to Egypt," said Haremheb, "and I fear not Sokar. But a little time ago, I went forth from my own house in the country to serve Egypt. Therefore I know well what must have stirred in your heart, Lord Orestos, when the great galley *Minos-Eye* was about to turn downstream homeward. And I know, too, how to value that loyalty which draws you back to Thebes. Some evil thing betides us. What lies in your mind?"

"A man of Egypt brought us word on the galley that Prince Eye, the governor of Mennufer, has declared himself Pharaoh and moves against you with a strong army."

Haremheb was not looking at me. He leaned forward in his throne-seat and stared at the Thief of Thebes. He rubbed his chin above the great artificial beard of royalty.

"We know how to deal with the Prince Eye," he said.... "I have seen the tall warrior beside you before."

"I think not, Son of Ra," said Anpu-kha.

"A year ago, I was on embassy to Babylonia," said Haremheb. "In the city of Nippur, I was told that King Burna-Buriash was not there—but I laid a gift at the feet of Bel Marduk. In the holy court of the god, I saw your face."

"I have traveled much," said Anpu-kha, unmoved. "I have been to many places. Aye, I have been in Nippur. But if the Pharaoh saw my face in the court of the god, my double-self must have been faring forth to adore Bel Marduk."

"A man has three selves," said the Pharaoh softly, "or so we are taught by the wise. And one of your three selves surely adores Bel Marduk—and that one wore the robes of a high priest of E-Sagil.* The face I have once seen, I never forget."

"Sin** the Illuminator hear me!" exclaimed the Thief of Thebes. "I have driven chariots for the furies of Istar. I have been in Nippur—aye, to the inmost shrine. But the Khertummin or magicians of Babylon have bewitched you, if you think you saw Anpu-kha of Thebes dressed as a high priest! Man is bound to the wheel of life; the wheel turns, and now is man up; and the wheel turns, and now is man down."

"I saw you in Nippur," the Pharaoh repeated grimly.

"Think twice before you whisper of Anpu-kha in E-Sagil, O glory over me, or where men of Nippur can hear," said the Thief of Thebes. "My life would not be worth a straw in a furnace, if an officer of Nippur looked twice into this lean face. Mayhap Kadash the High Priest might favor the Thief of Thebes; but I dare not think—"

"What do you with the Lord Orestos?" demanded the Pharaoh.

"Look well upon the Cretan, O Ra-Rising!" cried Anpu-kha. "Behold you Gilgames in the flesh again. I am for Gilgames. I ride with the hounds of Nimrod. If I err not, we shall now strike against Nippur, a stiff-necked and rebellious people. I am for Gilgames, and I will sell his life dearly if any foe strike at his lofty plume!"

"Are you, then, a man of war?" asked the Pharaoh.

"If you think Anpu-kha cannot wield the bronze, ride forth and watch me in a fray! The dream-god Makhir roils truth in man's head with fantasies. Hearken to me, O Pharaoh, swear by Botar the moon-goddess, by Nergal grim god of death, by Allat his bride, to live and to die for Gilgames! May Uttuk the wind-gusts sweep me into the ranks of the never-dead; may Gibil smite me with the sting of heaven even as Jehovah smote Ammon in Karnak, if I be not true to Gilgames and good friend to the Pharaoh Haremheb!"

"The sting of heaven?" asked the Pharaoh.

*The precincts of the temple of Bel.

**The Moon-god of Ur, from whose name came *Sinai*.

"The lightning," explained the Thief.

"Babylon is a land of lies," said the Pharaoh somberly.

"Babylon is a land of traffic," retorted the strange Thief of Thebes. "The cry of the Chaldeans is in their ships and camel-trains.* I am a man of—"

"Know you a man who will not lie?" demanded the Pharaoh. "Name me that man, and I will move over on this High Seat of Horus to make room for him."

"Know *you* a man who will not lie?" echoed the Thief of Thebes. "O King of Kings, surely there comes to the most honest man the moment when he must lie or see his life-plans blown about by the wind-gusts of the unburied. You are a man, though of the mighty of earth. I confess to you, in the shadow of your greatness, I tell you but half: I hold back much—but it is for the sake of Gilgames that I hold back, and of his success in Babylon. Not till the hour is ripe, will I make known myself to Gilgames."

"I am beset with foes at home," said Haremheb. "I have no mind to test the power of Burna-Buriash."

"I spake of Nippur, not of Burna-Buriash," said the Thief of Thebes. "Burna-Buriash is beset by perils too: for his brother Narbutali has quarreled with him. He would be wise to set up his court in the ancient city of gold—in treble-walled Babylon. You will send swords against Nippur, O Son of the Sun!"

"I battle Eye," said the Pharaoh. "Why should I battle Nippur?"

"Did not the Queen Anksen go forth into the wilderness on a lion-hunt last night?" demanded Anpu-kha.

The Pharaoh started, and leaned forward in his seat of ebony and ivory.

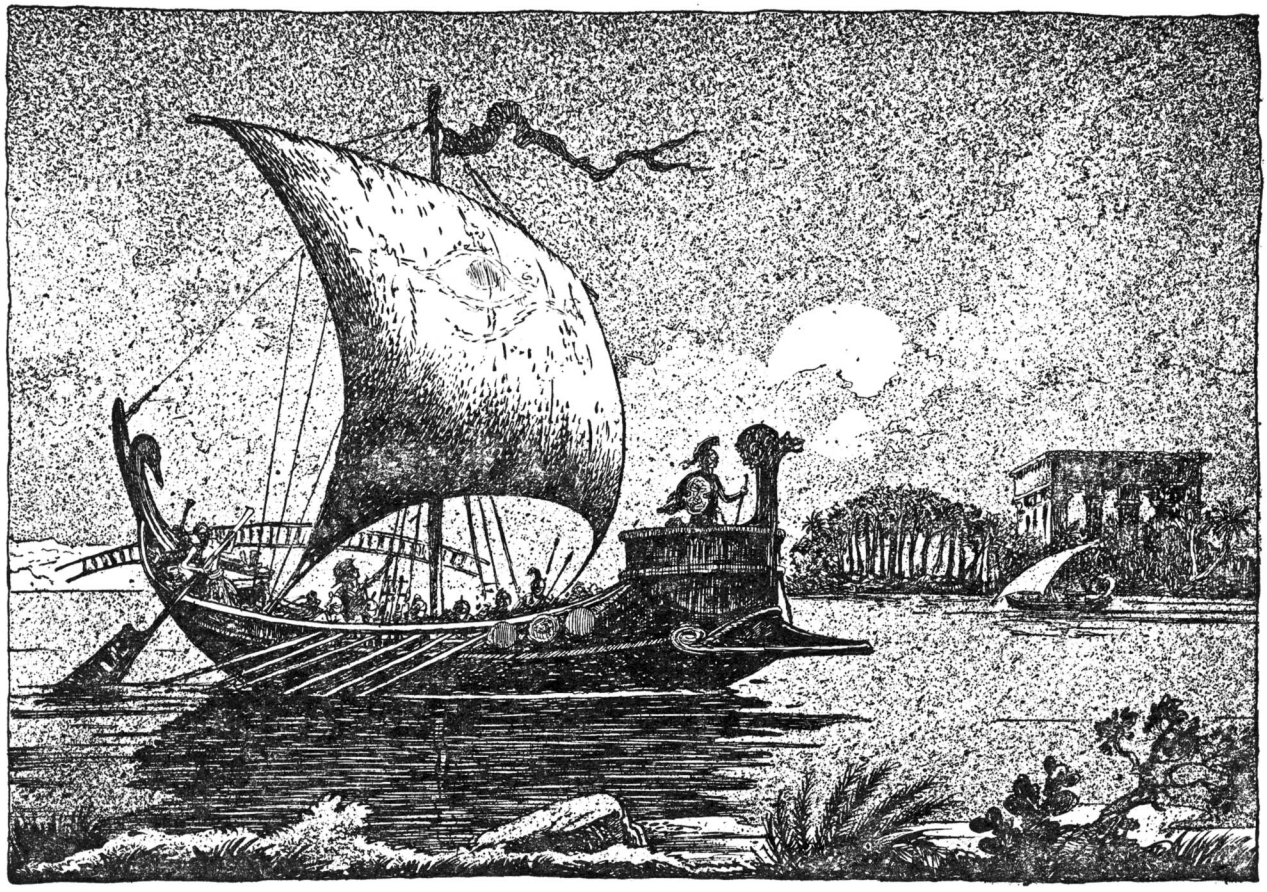
"What has the Queen to do with the champion of Gilgames?" he asked, frowning and staring at the Thief of Thebes.

"With me, nothing; with my purpose, much. At this hour, the beautiful Queen is borne away bound, by the soldiers of Nippur," said the Thief of Thebes. "If Haremheb lets this insult to Egypt pass, those men have lied who have said Haremheb was once a general mighty in battle! Haremheb is wise. He will strike down Eye; but he will also send Gilgames and his hounds a-hunting after the Queen—aye, even to Nippur's sacred heap!"

I seized his arm. "Upon the ship," I cried, "you averred the Queen would be taken on this day! Do you now say Anksen *is* taken by the men of Nippur—already taken?"

The despair in my voice startled Haremheb. His wise eyes turned upon me. He stroked his chin above the royal beard.

*Doubtless a common saying in the time of Haremheb: the adage is to be found, also, in the book of *Isaiah*.



Minos-Eye, *mightiest galley of the Cretan fleet, would sail at dawn for home; and I with her.*

"The Pharaoh was so dear to Orestos that Orestos gave up Knossos for Thebes," he said softly.

"Anksen is Egypt, to Orestos of Crete," I said. "For you, O just Pharaoh, the blood of my veins; for the Queen, the blood of my heart."

"By Maat, you look high!" exclaimed the Pharaoh.

"By Zeus, I stand high!" I answered him. "I am a lord of Labyrinth. But answer me, O great King: can a man govern his love as he would the horses to his chariot?"

"I think that man who would govern love is like a charioteer who seeks to drive two chariots at one time in a race," said the Pharaoh Haremheb.

"The One, the Unknown God puts this heat into a man's heart," I said. "A man loves not by his own will. Turned I not homeward, when my trading was done? But I am come again unto the Royal House; and if I risk the lives of two hundred heroes of Labyrinth in this mad plunge into Babylon's heart, I will claim as my right the Queen when I bring her to Thebes again. I am a lord of Labyrinth."

"You speak loftily, Lord Orestos," said Haremheb. "If you ride for Nippur with your two hundred, you will fare at your own risks. Nor have I the mind to break with the counselors of Egypt, or to turn from me the minds of the princes of our court, by promising Tut-ankh-Ammon's queen to an outlander and a mere lord, be he of Labyrinth or the courts of Ra!"

"Bel Marduk has willed it!" cried the Thief of Thebes. "That which Marduk wills, man must accept with humble mein. Even pharaohs are ruled by fiats of the gods."

"How know you the will of Marduk?" asked the grim Pharaoh. "But I am of Egypt. I worship Ammon and Osiris and Ptah. Why should *I* heed the mandate of Marduk?"

"This is Marduk's business," said the other. "Marduk has surely caused Anksen to be taken; Marduk will yield Anksen only to the one of Marduk's choice. Behold, I say, who am a seer of seers, I know Marduk's mind: and he will give the Queen unto the mighty Gilgames. And Haremheb the Pharaoh will be pleased."

Then, for the first time, upon the grim face of the Pharaoh appeared the shadow of a smile.

"Among common men," he said dryly, "like the Pharaoh of Lower and Upper Egypt, and this proud lord of Labyrinth, you stand, stranger, like the tower of Bel over Nippur. Verily, you front me like a king!"

"I am known in Thebes as Anpu-kha, the jackal-soul, the thief of the inner streets," said the man beside me. "The Pharaoh is pleased to mock."

"I am not at this hour ruler of the destinies of all Egypt," exclaimed the Pharaoh, "if Anpu-kha the Thief of Thebes, as he is pleased to name himself, is what he seems. How long have you been in Thebes?"

"Too little time to know all the evil within its walls," replied the other. "Long enough to know the Pharaoh's heart. Have you, O King of Kings, a second lotus-bud for the hand of Orestos, Lord of Labyrinth?"

Again the strange grim Pharaoh almost smiled.

"Let Orestos, who has a high spirit, look to himself," he said. "He is without fear; aye, like the Bronze Warrior. And you speak boldly, Anpu-kha. I like bold men. We march before noon against the Prince Eye, we of Thebes. But do you take your Gilgames and the heroes you are pleased to call his hounds, and ride after the Queen. If you bring not Anksen back to the Double House, venture not to stand before the High Seat of Horus again. But—Orestos, when you are gone, tell this fellow, whoever he may be, the Pharaoh likes bold men."

He fell silent. And then rising, with a gesture of dismissal, he said,

"You may draw upon my army for full supplies for your mad journey. I will furnish chariots and horses, and as many Egyptian warriors as Orestos has Cretans, and a hundred servants who may also serve as light infantry in need. With such an army, surely, Gilgames can sack the city Babylon itself!"

And he laughed and left us. And I knew, as I watched him move toward the Royal House, the Pharaoh Haremheb had no hope either for the success of our journey or of seeing the Queen Anksen again.

Chapter Four

As I went forth from the presence of the Pharaoh Haremheb, I felt heavy upon me the unbelief of the ruler of Egypt. He believed that I and my little band went forth to certain death. True, he had doubled my strength; but how weak was that aid thus carelessly given by the world's greatest power! And my companion, my guide, was the Thief of Thebes, a Babylonian, whom I had every reason to mistrust, perhaps even to fear.

The Babylonian stalked at my side, his eyes fixed ahead, not looking at me. There was a curious change in the fellow, since he had talked so boldly on the galley. Anpu-kha bore himself straight and proudly. His head was held high; his strong, firm chin lifted. There was sleeping power in the man—but whether for good or evil, I could not know.

"Anpu-kha," said I, "the Pharaoh likes bold men."

"He is a man of war," said Anpu-kha, as if that explained all.

I clapped my right hand upon his shoulder, and his body shook, for I am a tall man and my arm is heavy.

"Thief of Thebes," said I fiercely, "you make poor straw for my staff in this faring! You come to me, condemned of your own mouth as a thief. You have chattered in dark places with evil men. I go with naked sword into Babylonia, where I must assume every man to be my foe till he prove otherwise. The power of Nippur stands between me and my love. And you, the unknown, with your tricks and your wiles choose, for some curious purpose I know not, to attach yourself to me like barnacles to a ship's bottom. I like bold men; but I like bold men better when they fight on my side. What say you of a man so bold that he fights beside him whom he secretly plans to destroy?"

"At my back is Thebes," said Anpu-kha, not flinching. "Before my face a weary way lies Nippur. Know you Chaldean, or the tongue of Nippur? Know you the paths across the wilderness, across burning deserts? Know you where men of eld sank wells? Know you the customs of the land? Or where the guards lurk? Or how to fare safely from Egypt into the heart of a hostile land?"

"I am a babe in a womb, to this world of Babylon," said I.

"Yonder lies Babylonia," said Anpu-kha, "a powerful land, a land of warriors, a rich land, and mighty; and you enter that land with drawn sword, with—say, five hundred at your back. Five hundred against ten thousand! Gilgames: my back to Nippur, my face to Thebes: seek you this, O man of little faith?"

"By Zeus, I need counsel, I need a guide, I need a friend!" I cried. "But you run around my words—you touch them not. Saw Haremheb your face in E-Gingu?"

"Think you I lack wit, to say Haremheb looked into these eyes in the presence of Bel Marduk? Beheld them indeed housed in a high priest's skull? Now, who are the high priests in Babylon?"

I started. "Even as the Pharaoh is a high priest of Ammon and of Ptah in Egypt, Burna-Buriash is a high priest before the altars of Babylonia!"

"The mitered lord of Karnak is no Pharaoh," said Anpu-kha.

"Men of royal blood are high priests: princes and sons of the mighty in the land," said I. "A high priest has power in Nippur—to take, to torture, and to slay."

"And this one with the huge body I have named Gilgames!" cried the Thief of Thebes. "I am the Thief of Thebes—and I am to be Ea-banni to this Gilgames, leal companion, as a brother of his blood. Does a brother betray?" But he gave a bitter laugh as he asked the question; there was mockery in his blue eyes.

"You have lived in Egypt." And I echoed his bitter laugh. "How many pharaohs have died from the cup a brother tinctured!"

"A bold man has his sword," said the Thief of Thebes. "A bold man needs no poison. Poison in the cup, I say unto you, is weapon of weaklings and of fools."

"You are no mere thief," said I. "You confessed to Haremheb. You forgot to abase yourself before the High Seat of Horus. A common man would have spread himself upon the painted tiles. A common man's nose, burrowing into the green reeds among the water-fowl on the tiles, would drown him in painted marsh. But you stood before Pharaoh eye to eye—at your ease!"

"Is it a crime to stand in the presence of Haremheb?" demanded Anpu-kha. "Think you the old general likes grovelers and kissers of hands?"

"It is no crime to prostrate oneself before a king of kings," I answered, "when you are of the people. You are a bauble, a frail reed, before Pharaoh. A breath from the high seat, and you are a dead man. A prudent man lives to see tomorrow's sun."

"Good. Then I am no prudent man." Anpu-kha gave a strange laugh. "I stood before a king. Good. You are a lord of Labyrinth, but not a king; yet to the world's mightiest king of kings, you said you would marry a pharaoh's widow—and that lady as great as the Pharaoh himself. Did not Anksen's father rule all Egypt? In the city of the Sun's Disk! And is she not a near kinswoman to Haremheb? And you would wed her! Pah! *Hope you to see tomorrow's sun?*"

"The sun shines upon the Thief of Thebes—or upon Orestos of Labyrinth—as well as upon the Pharaoh in the Double House. Who is so great he can claim the sun?"

"We speak of your love for a queen," said Anpu-kha.

"As you say—we speak of love. I might say that thief seeks death who speaks of private, sacred things to a lord of Labyrinth. But let us speak of love. Is not love the sun of the lover? Radiant and rising, the sun is his warmth and life. If a man be not a pharaoh, is it forbidden that he love? Or can even your dread god Bel Marduk in E-Gingu control the heart of a man? The sun of my love is as dear to me as his kingdom is to Haremheb. Does a king forsake his kingdom of his own will? Then I will hold fast to my love while life in me burns!"

"Let us see now who is the better man," cried Anpu-kha, for some reason breathing fast. "Stand still! I will lend you a buffet—and after that, if you are still able, do you give me interest for my loan. Are you ready, Gilgames?"

I laughed scornfully. "You burn with wrath!" I cried. "What has angered you? Loved you once, and was your love denied you? So be it. Tickle me with your coney-foot. Strike!"

Thereat the Thief of Thebes drew back and struck me upon the cheek a fearful blow. For an instant the world went black; I shook, but I kept my feet.

Then carelessly I whipped my right fist into the face of Anpu-kha. His legs shot out from under him and his bronze mail rang upon the rocky path. And Anpu-kha lay still.

I ran to a little fountain not far off in the Garden of Tiy, and brought back water in my helmet, and dashed it into the face of the Thief of Thebes.

He shook himself, groaned and sat up.

"Bel Marduk gave me wisdom when I named you Gilgames!" he gasped. "Look toward the King's house. Do the gleaming walls still stand?"

"They will stand another five hundred years," said I.

"It was no earthquake, then," said the Thief of Thebes, "and verily, I have chosen a proper man for my little task in Babylon. A tap of your fist, and the light went out! Ha! Is not my head twisted a bit on the backbone? Am I crossed in the eyes? Is my nose in place?"

"You'll do well enough," I told him. "You lost a fang."

"A tooth," said the Thief. "My fangs, like a cat's claws, lie deep hid. My fangs are safe."

"You are sore within as well as without. Have you fangs for Gilgames?"

The Thief rose to his feet with a surprising spring. He shook his head hard, and laughed merrily.

"You twist my sense," cried the Thief. "Has Ea-banni fangs for Gilgames? I will show my fangs only to the foes of Gilgames! Ha! A proper man: the gods made but two of them, and have since rested."

"Two?" I cried. "How two?"

"The first Gilgames, the mighty hunter Nimrod, was created by Ea; Sin beamed him wisdom; Istar put terror into his glance. The second Gilgames was fathered, I think, by Zeus: a new Hercules. The gods made the twain: they have rested since. When I beheld you upon Minos-ship, I knew you for him whom I had long sought: there was but one other—there will be no more."

"Why, I had thought *I* was the one who needed you, O Thief," I said. "How then, tell me, does the Thief need Gilgames? Shall you teach me to snatch amber chains from other thieves?"

"With this brave sword you have put into my fist, and with this goodly jacket of mail upon my back and breast, and with the two hundred chosen heroes of Labyrinth at our backs, you and I will hew our way through the myriads of Nippur, Zeus-son! Aye, to the feet of Bel Marduk! I say, Egypt knew you not—but I know you, Gilgames!"

"The man raves," I said. "He's soft-shelled, like a crab. My tap has cracked his skull."

"We will be a terror in Nippur!" cried Anpu-kha. "We will show the city a thing! We will right this wrong!"

"What wrong?" I asked.

"You win the match," said Anpu-kha. "And I pay interest for the loan: behold the precious links!"

From under his jacket of mail he drew forth a long chain of fine red gold.

I took it into my hands and stared at the perfect links.

"It is ancient," said I.

"It was wrought in Ur," said the Thief. "Now look upon the heart of Dungi: the boring in the agate was made for this chain. It is the work of Tubal, king of smiths. String now the heart of Dungi upon its red-gold links, and wear it always!"

"Why should I trot around like a woman with a bauble on my breast?"

"Tuck it under your mail, then," said Anpu-kha. "But if a man of Babylonia threaten you, draw it forth and hold it up. It is a talisman of destiny. Verily the lion's wing of Babylon and the tower of Bel cast shadow eternally over the wearer thereof. You are in the god's favor. Bel Marduk shields you."

And with that, the Thief of Thebes fell silent.

We returned to the ship. And Thersites, captain of my band, approached to learn my will.

"Anpu-kha," said I, "we can use your wisdom now. How think you the men of Nippur entered this land, to steal away the Queen?"

"There are two roads by which they might come in," said the Thief of Thebes. "They might come by the westward route, perhaps through Palestinia, or they might come by way of the great desert and the Red Sea. I think they crossed the sea."

"Where would they get them boats, to cross the sea?" asked Thersites.

"In Babylonia," said the Thief of Thebes, "we make two kinds of boats fitted to carry in caravans. The one kind, we make of wickerwork and hides daubed with pitch. These are round, like giant bowls, and difficult to paddle. The other kind are rafts—huge platforms upon sheep-skins blown fat with wind. The round-boats or coracles we use for carrying men; the rafts serve well to carry horses, chariots, and the baggage of the train. Assuredly, the men of Nippur brought with them wickerwork and timbers, tar, and sheep-skins and hides, for the crossing of the Red Sea."

I looked with unseeing eyes out upon the green Nile shore—unseeing, that is, save for the green, green banks and the blue, blue sky: all else in that scene I saw nothing of. Now why, I thought, did this fellow always say "men of Nippur?" Had Nippur, in truth, rebelled against Babylon? Yet this man had spoken of Nippur as if that were his city. Was the thief a spy for Burna-Buriash the King? If Nippur warred upon the King, and Nippur took Queen Anksen, and if the Thief were the King's man—would that not explain why he sought to aid me to rescue Anksen? Babylon, with Nippur in arms against her, would not care to offend Egypt!

These matters, I told myself, I would consider in another hour. Who but Thersites could counsel me? As for the boats—

HERE, THE THIEF OF THEBES spoke—aye, as if he had read my thoughts.

"The King is not at Nippur," he declared, "for Nippur has drawn sword for the Nin Nippur*, the King's brother Narbutali. Nippur has risen against Babylon, and Nippur has taken your Queen, O Gilgames. As for the boats, surely the men who crossed the Red Sea to seize Anksen will have many boats. Let us beat the raiders to the sea, and borrow boats of them for the crossing. The men of Nippur will circle about for a time for forage and for plunder—they will seek mightily to rouse Egypt against Babylon. But during the heat of the day, they rest and sleep."

"If we cross the Red Sea before the men of Nippur, we shall be in advance of the Queen," I mused. "Would that be a good thing or not? To cut off her captors from the homeward way—"

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* *Nin* is Babylonian for *lord*—"the Lord of Nippur."

"We must fare well armed," broke in Thersites. "The Pharaoh promised help. We must have chariots and horses from the Pharaoh; we must take goodly store of lances, of shields, of arrows and of bows, and good bronze heads, and spare swords; and water and food, and fodder for the horses. It will be night ere we can fare forth."

"Let your foe carry your fodder. Let your foe bear your food and your arms and your munitions of war!" Anpu-kha spoke urgently, turning about and facing the captain of my band.

"How—" began Thersites.

"March lightly against Nippur; take your gear and your arms from the foe," insisted the Thief. "As for chariots and horses, are they not ready in the King's stables? Will it spoil an hour to bring forth those we need?"

"The battle is for the ready," insisted Thersites. "We should fare well-equipped for the long way."

"The battle is for the swift," said the Thief. "*'I am weak today; I will bide more strength till the morrow'* will cost a general lives of good men if not the war. *Victory* is but another word for *surprise*. Strike first, strike fast, and strike where your foe is least alert. *'I am too weak'* has killed many a brave soldier before now. We cannot risk a life by dallying."

"But only till night—" began Thersites again.

"Nay, friend," exclaimed the Thief. "It is a race—and time is with Nippur. Bel Marduk will not stop the sun in his course, though doubtless the Unknown God of Gilgames who split the Red Sea for Moses might in ten winks of an eye turn back the sun for a thousand years. But will Gilgames call upon his god to stop the sun? Will his god do that for him which he can do for himself? If you would gain an hour, will you seek to change the time of the sun? Or will you rise an hour earlier to your labor, and let time be as the gods have regulated it? Good, then: let us gain time so: the time is with Nippur. Let us ride forth in the heat of the day, while the men of Nippur sleep, and dash for the Red Sea."

"This is a wise thief," declared Thersites, staring at the man.

"I will not dally by the Nile—with the Queen in a Nippur tent," said I. "I will grant you two hours to be ready. We will ride forth in two hours' time. Thersites, do you see the Captain of the King's guard in all haste and fetch us down chariots and horses. We have abundant store of gear upon the ship: we will take what we have, and fill our needs in the tents and from the backs of Nippur's men. Anpu-kha, you learned not this wisdom thieving in the streets of Thebes!"

"Think you all wisdom is stored in palaces and temples?" cried the Thief of Thebes. "I can garner more wisdom in an hour in the place of the wine-sellers than you can reap in a year upon the silver sands of Karnak."

"You grubbed not your wisdom from the dirt of Thebes," said I. "But there is truth on your lips in this: the schools of the wise are the hearts of their brothers; and he who has learned of life is wiser than the student of moldy papyrus. But you have surely leavened the lore you garnered in the place of the wine-sellers with a wisdom that is the frankincense and the cedar of the Chaldees!"

"I have seen Ur, ancient of the gods, and I have seen golden Babylon," admitted the Thief of Thebes. "I have spoken with a man upon a throne and have drunken with the rabble of Thebes."

"Aye, Thersites," said I to the Captain, "a well-rounded man, is our Thief of Thebes!"

"Behold, I am become a perfect round, the eternal circle," declared the Thief. "For here is my right hand—it is verily the son of Ra; and here is my left hand—it is the Thief of Thebes. And I have two sides to my mouth that accord like two sweet harmonies with this my right hand and this my left: and the right side of my mouth shall speak to you of high places and of kings; and the left side of my mouth shall speak of lousy beggars and the mud-caked makers of dried bricks. Look to it, Gilgames; I will work magic in Nippur for you with these two hands and these two sides of the Jackal's mouth! The gates that will be shut to you shall open by that magic! Aye, 'twill snatch you from the lion's maw and the fiery furnace! Who knows the real man in Anpu-kha? But one could speak; and he is a high god and hewn of rock. Bel Marduk is silent."

"Is the thief in Babylon a philosopher also?" cried Thersites. "My brain swims in Chaldean fog. But I know an incense that shall clear my brains. I am for the royal stables. The smell of a horse in my nostrils is like a trumpet-blast in the ears of a warrior. When I smell horse, I drive forth chariot; and we are on our road to the Red Sea by that magic. Zeus guard you, my Lord Orestos! Send this fellow with me, and save your strength for battle!"

"Go with him, Ea-banni," said I. "You have said the day's lesson. Your words sound heavy. I will weigh them; I will test them with acid. If there be true gold in this Chaldean fog, I will store it in some corner of my brain's treasury. The One God knows, I go forth on desperate errand, and the emergency will surely front me when I need the gold of Anpu-kha."

The Thief gave me a long look.

"Keep fast the heart of Dungi," said he, "and nourish the faith that sprouts in your deeps for the Thief of Thebes!"

They went from me, and I descended to the little cabin and drank red wine alone.

Chapter Five

THE CHARIOTS AND HORSES OF EGYPT came down to the Nile. With a flashing of silver and of gold, with a fine tossing of crimson plumes, with radiance of jeweled harness, with rumble of strong wheels, they came. And the noble horses pranced, and the beautiful harness shone. Thersites rode at their head, and Anpu-kha with him. They shouted to me from the shore, as I stood by the rail of our galley to see them come.

Haremheb had sent with them captains of chariots, attendants and grooms. And he had sent a hundred horsemen mounted as they ride in Babylonia; and he had sent servants and carriers of baggage.

Then Anpu-kha came up to me, and said:

"You are in fever to be off, O Gilgames. But I have tarried for some months in Thebes, and there is an errand I should do, ere I go hence."

I looked at the fellow thoughtfully. "An errand?" I asked myself. "What errand should a thief of the streets have in the city of Thebes? Has he not his fortune on his back—or in his head? What else can Anpu-kha require?"

Aloud, I said unto him: "I am in sore haste. How long will this errand require?"

"An hour—no more," answered Anpu-kha.

"I will go with you to Thebes," said I. "I will buy certain supplies for our far journey while you do your duty, whatever that may be, in old Thebes. Is there not a little boat by the wharf? Let us make haste."

We went over into Thebes. And Anpu-kha bowed unto me like a courtier and turned off a side way into a narrow lane.

Then did I, keeping close to the walls, follow after him. He went swiftly, not looking back, and came at length to the end of the City and the grim House of Heht the Taskmaster. And here he stopped and looked around him.

Anpu-kha then gave three loud whistles, birdlike and clear; and lo! from within the House of Heht there came an answering call—and Anpu-kha entered the square mud-house of Heht.

And I crept close after him and found he was met with three ragged beggars in the room of the small window high up near the roof. Now, the light was dim—and I hid around the corner of the door that they should see me not.

The beggars cast themselves groveling upon the ground before Anpu-kha. And he, with impatient gesture of his right arm, roughly bade them stand.

"We are in Egypt," he said, "and I am a thief of Thebes. Speak fast what you know: for the Lord Orestos suspects me—of what he knows not. I must not keep him waiting at the little boat. What of the army of Nippur?"

"There are no more than a thousand warriors, chariots and horsemen," said one of the beggars, a black-bearded fellow in pied coat. "They crossed the Red Sea in coracles and upon sheep-skin rafts, and have left them upon the shore under a small guard of fifty men."

"Where is the Queen, Anksen?" demanded the Thief of Thebes.

I trembled so outside the door, I feared I would jar that house of mud and be discovered unto him.

"She is not by the Sea," spoke up a second beggar. "Nor have they taken her yet across. Some say she is kept by two hundred men near the ford of the Israelites, while the rest of them wander off to pillage and to loot and to seize cattle for food for the journey home. I have listened by their fires. I think they will not cross the Sea for days."

"Is Narbutali with them?" demanded Anpu-kha.

"We saw not the Partesi," answered the first beggar, "nor was he named at the campfires."

Now for the first time the third beggar spoke. "Narbutali tarries on the other side of the Red Sea," he asserted, "and with him a strong force. He will wait in the hills till the foraging army returns with the Queen."

Anpu-kha stood silent a moment, looking at the three.

"I ride with the Cretan hounds," he said at last, in a voice of authority. "We will fall upon the guards of the boats in the night and cross in their craft. Do you follow closely and see where we camp. Keep sharp eye upon Narbutali's men, lest they discover us; and do you report to me by night when you see two small fires glowing a little apart from the camp of the Lord Orestos."

"I have the jeweled tiara from the House of Death," said the third beggar, speaking for the second time. "Will you take it now? My life is a small thing, Lo— Anpu-kha; but I am troubled by this treasure. I fear lest it be taken from me, and I be haled before you to my doom."

And he thrust a lean arm under his tattered robes, and brought forth a crown. It was formed of two golden asps, with heads entwined at the fore and bearing a great flaming ball that seemed to glance red fire; and all about its rings the double circlet was set with splendid pearls.

I recalled the story of the Thief of Thebes upon *Minos-Eye*. Indeed I could well believe this kingly circlet belonged to the rulers of Babylon! The day would come when sight of that tiara upon a king's head would save me from fiery death.

"YOU WILL HOLD THE TIARA," commanded Anpu-kha sternly. "It will be required of you in Nippur. Kings of old wore the headpiece; kings of Babylon shall wear it yet again. It was Narbutali who, in despite of the King, gave it unto Tut-ankh-Ammon. Guard it. In Nippur, if you have it not, you die."

"If I die, I die," answered the beggar. "But if in Nippur you cut me off, promise that my body shall be buried with pure water and with food, lest I wander among the undead in the terrible Winds."

"You will give me the crown in Nippur. You will not die," said Anpu-kha. "But if Bel Marduk should cut you off, I will see that your body is laid in a strong case of baked clay, and that pure water is given you, and barley."

"If you receive not the crown in Nippur, I will be already dead," said the beggar. "But I like not this venture. It is against old custom, and mad. And time is passing—"

At the beggar's words, I turned and slipped swiftly out of that evil House of Heht and returned to the city.

When Anpu-kha came down to the shore, I was aboard the little boat, puzzling over the strange meeting. Now who was Anpu-kha?

Whatever the fellow was, nothing had transpired to me out of the House of Heht that was unfriendly to my purpose, that was not loyal to my cause. The information he had of the three beggars was useful. He had spies working for him—why should I complain? If the spies worked for the Thief of Thebes, assuredly they worked also for Orestos of Labyrinth!

Upon our return to the royal wharf, I mounted a chariot of the Pharaoh's, and we rode off in a fine dust in the heat of the day. My chariot was of shining gold; but the Thief of Thebes chose to ride in a chariot lacquered silver and black. Silver, said he, for Sin the Moon, and black for Night. . . .

It was by clear moonlight, on another night, that we came to a height looking down upon the Red Sea. And behold, at our feet there was a gleam of campfires, and beyond, upon the shore, I could see the black splotches that I knew were rafts and bowl-like boats.

"As I promised, O Gilgames," said Anpu-kha, pointing to them, "the boats of Nippur upon the shore."

"Thersites!" I called.

He came up and stood stiffly before me, his armor flashing in the moonlight.

"We will go down to them softly," I told him, "to take them unaware. Let the Egyptians stand by the chariots and the horses—we will leave them here till we finish this business on the beach. Draw together the heroes, and follow me to the shore."

WE FLOWED DOWN THE LONG HILL like shadows. The camp slept. Then with a rush we were upon them.

Aye, that night the men of Nippur were gorged with the bronze of Crete! There was a fierce flashing by the fires; there was outcry and brief battle—and the night was still again, sleeping under stars. Thersites sounded his ram's-horn, and the Egyptians brought down the chariots and the horses.

It is no easy thing to load men upon the round-boats of Nippur, for they do bob and tip and spin. But Anpu-kha revealed to us gangplanks of cedar-wood. We laid a bridge so against the side of each one of those great round boats, and twenty men would wade into the sea and stand upon the farther side. And our troops would go into her. But the rafts were waiting, ready, the sheep-skins blown high—and we had but to lay the planks against them, to load on the horses. There was a wild snorting and whinnying and beating of hoofs—then the horses were upon the rafts, the chariots lashed in place for the open sea. It was all done far more swiftly than I had thought possible, under the direction of Anpu-kha. Soon we were moving slowly out into the heart of the Red Sea.

The moonlight fell brightly upon that great flotilla of black boats and huge rafts. The Red Sea was rolling gently. We advanced with a little lapping sound. There was a pleasant smell of tar, and the steady dip of the paddles was music in the night.

And we came safely to the farther shore, and landed our gear. Thence we marched up into the hills for two hours and encamped well-hidden in the narrow vale of a dry stream.

When we were encamped and the tented ground became silent, after a meal under the stars, I retired to my tent, and Thersites with me.

"I think," said I, "that our friend the Thief of Thebes will have visitors ere long."

Thersites started. "Do you expect treachery of the fellow?" he exclaimed. "He is strange—I do not understand him. But I will stake my life, he is true!"

"Nay," said I, "I look for no treachery. I think he has spies working in the night—and these ragged beggars shall serve us also while they are serving him. It looks as if his purposes and mine are one. But do you keep watch. When you behold, a little apart from the cluster of our tents, two small fires burning, send me word at once."

"I will do so, Lord Orestos," he answered me. "But if you are bent upon doing a bit of spying for yourself, should I not watch from a distance, lest you need my sword?"

"I will not need your sword," said I, "but do you watch. I ever keep a guard at my rear when I can. Yet beware lest Anpu-kha see you stirring in the night. I would not have him know that I suspect him!"

SOMETIME LATER HIPPOPHILES came to say two small fires were burning under the stars. Then I went forth and slipped secretly through the night. I took my stand near the two fires, by the dry trunk of a dead fig-tree.

The fires of Anpu-kha burned brightly. The Thief sat a little back from the flames, and fed the fire with small twigs—dead thorn, I thought. Presently, one after another, three figures drifted in like shadows out of the night.

Anpu-kha made an impatient gesture. I could hear his voice distinctly from my concealment by the dead fig-tree.

"I am Anpu-kha, the Thief of Thebes," he said. "Forget not to treat me always as you should a thief of Thebes. Put bridles to your mouths, lest a tongue slip: I am Anpu-kha."

The three dark figures bowed low. At a motion from their master, they seated themselves by the twin fires. After a little, I heard the voice of the Thief of Thebes again.

"The night listens," he said, his voice low but clear. "Do you feel the night listen, O men of Babylon? The silence is heavy. No hyena cries; no lion roars. The wind sleeps."

"The way is open," said another voice. "We have taken thought about the Thief of Thebes. His doings are grievous in our eyes and in the eyes of those who love him. The way is open—to Babylon."

"A thief thanks a beggar," said the voice. "The choice is made. East is here. Let East give tidings from the Red Sea's farther shore."

"I am abased," said the one called East. "I have discovered my error—but error it was, and I am abased."

"You bring bad news," said Anpu-kha. "Has any man ever charged that Anpu-kha is rash, hasty or unjust? What fear you then, O East?"

"Nay," said East hastily. "Anpu-kha is as just as Ea. I have been misled in the camp of the men of Nippur."

"How misled?" cried the Thief of Thebes sharply.

"The Queen Anksen is not in the camp of the men of Nippur," answered East. He moved as if to cast himself face-down upon the sand—and straightened suddenly.

"Where then is the Queen?" cried Anpu-kha.

"She was borne across the Red Sea a full two hours before he whom you call Gilgames entered his coracle." The man hesitated, as if groping for words. "I know only that she is now held prisoner ahead of us, that the looters of Egypt are now on this side of the Sea, and that they know where we are camped."

"Will they attack?" demanded Anpu-kha.

"Not yet," said East. "They are at a loss to understand the crossing of Gilgames, or why he is hostile to them. They know him for a Cretan—and does not Babylonia trade with Crete? He attacked them; he seized their boats; but he sought not the Queen on the Egyptian side

of the Sea. They will follow, to see what Gilgames will do."

"And then?" demanded the Thief.

"When the moment comes that they are certain the Cretan seeks the Queen, they will have him between the forward force and the force from Egypt. Already they know he commands but a small force. They fear nothing from Gilgames."

"Know you if Narbutali himself leads the forward host?" asked the Thief.

"I have been on the farther side of the Sea," said the one called East. "Ask West."

"Let West speak," said Anpu-kha.

"I have searched out the forward host," reported a new voice. "Now, verily, Narbutali is in the midst, in his tent of cloth of gold."

"How many with him?" demanded Anpu-kha.

"There marched from Nippur ten thousand men," said the one called West. "One thousand, as you know, O—Thief of Thebes, he sent across to seize upon the beautiful Queen, hoping to stir Egypt against Babylon. One need but take one thousand from ten, to know the force that Narbutali commands."

The gleaming figure of the Thief of Thebes, by his twin fires, stirred uneasily.

"Narbutali is a fox," he said. "He sent a thousand men across the Red Sea into Egypt?"

"A thousand men" said West.

"Good. What a commander has done in one place, he may do in five, seven, nine places! How many men are encamped around that golden tent?"

"The night was dark," said West uneasily. "It is a mighty camp."

"Fool!" cried Anpu-kha. "Narbutali surely knows by now that the Cretans have crossed the Red Sea. We lie between his two forces. We have two hundred Cretans, and as many Egyptian men of war, and perhaps a hundred servants of the little army, bearing light arms. But the servants would count little in a fray: four hundred, say, against—ten thousand."

"Bel Marduk save you!" exclaimed the voice of East. "There is still time. Come with us. We have horses across these low southward-lying hills. Slip away into the night with us to Babylon. For I tell you—"

"The Cretans are doomed," said West. "Perish not with this Gilgames. Come—come swiftly!"

THE THIRD SHADOW, who had not yet spoken, was still silent.

"Is North voiceless?" exclaimed the Thief of Thebes. "He is the greatest and the wisest of you all. He has said no word tonight. North, is there no news from Babylon?"

"No news," began the third voice," save that—"

"What would North have this Thief of Thebes do?" cried the master by the fires. "What is your counsel? Am I to abandon him who spared my life, who has trusted

Illustrated by JOHN RICHARD FLANAGAN

me? Am I to leave these brave warriors from the Sea of the Setting Sun*, to be slaughtered by Narbutali—and slink away like a jackal indeed, to save my own skin?"

East sprang up. "Think of Babylon!" he cried. "Consider well who you are!"

"And who am I?" cried the Thief of Thebes, rising in his turn. "A beggar in rags, am I! Anpu-kha the Thief of Thebes. The jackal-soul."

North, the third shadow, rose abruptly and faced the first. His voice shook with scorn.

"Go back to your spying!" he cried. "Aye, you East, and you West. You are fit only to slink about brave men's fires in the night! Are not the old gods with Anpu-kha? When before have you beheld such warriors as attend the mighty Gilgames? Ha! I would pit that two hundred, led by Gilgames, with Anpu-kha at his side, against Nippur's ten thousand! Surely, it were better to die gloriously with such godlike men than to perish ingloriously upon a golden couch in Babylon! When did the Thief of Thebes turn coward? Has he spared his lean body? Has he flinched from poverty and rags and stench and evil men, in his quest for wisdom and for knowledge of humble men? Has pride kept his feet upon a rug of silk, his lips in the precious wine? There is honor in Labyrinth and honor in Thebes; for have not the homeward bound warriors turned back, to draw bronze in desperate errantry against the whole kingdom of Babylonia? And all for the beautiful Queen?"

"Nay, North, nay!" exclaimed Anpu-kha.

"Narbutali broke his vows to his brother the King," North swept on passionately. "He has shamed all Babylonia. If the city of Nippur follows his emblem, think you Nippur too has lost all honor? The god Bel Marduk rules in Nippur. Who but Burna-Buriash restored his high place? And if Nippur has her ten thousand, Babylon has her myriad host! Fools! Let East and West blow back to their dark caves—*the army of Babylon is marching!*"

Anpu-kha bounded to his feet. He seized North by the two arms. "Hail to North!" he cried. "Let these other two slink away to safety. You, North, shall carry me a message to the commander of Babylon's host."

"And you, O Thief of Thebes?" cried North.

"My place is here, with the Cretans," he answered. "I fear nothing. Here: take this parchment and deliver it to the King's captain. The army of Babylon is on the march! The army of Babylon!"

And Anpu-kha turned from them and stalked away into the night.

I RUBBED MY HAND WEARILY over my forehead and returned to my tent. Now, the small tent of the Thief of Thebes stood at the end of the camp. And presently the flap lifted and I stood therein. And the Thief sat upon a stool by a small brazier of charcoal, staring into the flame.

He turned and saw me in that dim light.

"Bow not to me," he said mechanically. "I am the Thief of Thebes."

"I care not who you are," said I. "I am faring this night before the dawn into the camp of Narbutali. Will you risk your bones with me?"

"I can speak as to the weight of your fist," said Anpu-kha. "Like a god, you smote once—and the light of the sun went out. You have brought me out of Egypt. You have clad me in goodly armor and placed in my hands a bronze blade any king would be glad to wield. Where you go, I go; where you fight, I fight by your side. If you take me deathward, we die. But this is the land of the old gods—of Elam and of Ur: and it were better that these bones mingled with the mud on Euphrates bank, this night, than that the Thief of Thebes lose the adventure with Gilgames!"

"Neither horse nor chariot will serve us, this night," I warned him. "We fare not to battle, as I hope—but to slink into Narbutali's camp, to find the tent of Anksen."

"You asked me yesterday in Egypt whence I got this wisdom," said the Thief of Thebes. "Until this hour, you have watched me cunningly, slantwise, with suspicion to sour the light of the moon. Now you would fare forth alone with me into the wilderness—and into Nippur's mighty camp: and I, a Chaldee. Why put your trust now in the Thief of Thebes?"

"Have I not trusted you?" I asked. "My life is precious to me, for I am young. More precious than life is this new love that burns in my heart like fire. But I deliver into your keeping my hopes of life and love, for I have learned wisdom, at last, from the Thief of Thebes."

"Go to the fig-tree by the dry bed of the stream," said Anpu-kha. "I will join you there shortly."

"The—the fig-tree?" I gasped.

"The fig is dead," said Anpu-kha, leaning forward and stirring his charcoal fire with a brazen dagger. "Yet I say unto you, Lord Orestos, you learned wisdom this night from the dead fig-tree!"

I stared at him for a moment, and turned, and went out into the night.

Of this one thing I am sure: Anpu-kha neither saw nor heard me as I watched and listened—by the dead fig-tree.

CHAPTER SIX

NOW, ANPU-KHA AND I CROSSED THE RAGGED hills of the wilderness. For a long time we followed the dry bed of the stream. Once I heard, far to the north of us, the roar of a lion; and more than once we were brought up standing by the sudden rush of feet from our path, or by the wild laughter of the hyena. We came in an hour's time to a small rise. Below us, in the light of the new-risen moon, there lay the camp of Narbutali.

Verily the tents of Narbutali seemed to reach a long league across the night. Golden in the midst rose the splendor of the lord of Nippur's pavilion. To the right of it by a score of spaces stood a scarlet pyramidal tent. There was a campfire just beyond, in the main way of the camp, and we could see by it the figures of men. The moon glittered upon their javelins.

"A tent like a pyramid—a scarlet tent," I whispered to Anpu-kha.

"She would be there," assented the Thief of Thebes. "But look you, Lord Orestos: this is a mighty camp, and the sentinels are alert. It would be heavy price to pay for one last glimpse into a queen's face, were your *kha* to be loosed this night!"

*The Babylonian name for the Mediterranean.

"I must see her face—I must know she is safe," I answered him.

"I am Babylonian," said Anpu-kha. "Let me fare for you, Gilgames. I will speak with her; I will bring you true word of how she fares and how she looks. Bide here in the shelter of the rock, and I will enter Narbutali's camp."

"Nay—I must see Anksen," said I.

And I moved swiftly down the long slope toward Nippur's tents.

But Anpu-kha like a swift gazelle flashed by me. He bore down a guard standing in shadow, that I had not seen, and sheathed his dagger in the watcher's back. His left hand was clapped over the fellow's mouth, and not a sigh escaped to warn the sleeping camp.

WE GLIDED INTO NIPPUR'S CAMP. There were sounds of men snoring, and a stirring here and there, and the pawing of horses' hoofs. We reached the back of the scarlet tent.

I drew my bronze blade, for there rose by the tent a shadow black against the bright cloth. But Anpu-kha turned swiftly and caught my wrist.

"North watches by Egypt's couch for Gilgames," he whispered. "Slip the bronze gently back into the sheath. Behold how the cloth of the tent is raised a little above the ground for air. Do you creep under. We will wait here. Be swift. Let your words be few, and say them softly."

Yellow light poured from under the scarlet cloth. I crouched down and crawled under. The floor of the tent was covered with soft lion-skins.

The light was yellow, dim, flickering. The shadows writhed in the yellow light. There was an incense upon the air, heavy and strange to my nostrils—and anon I saw the great alabaster brazier upon a golden lion from which came the light, and the perforated sphere that fumed forth the sweet and heavy scent. There was a couch of ivory and ebony on my left by the farther wall, an Egyptian couch upon the backs of spotted beasts; and seated on that couch, the small, slender figure of a woman in a robe of purple silk. She was dreamlike and unreal in that dim yellow light.

And I began to tremble—only the deep softness of the pelts upon which I lay saved me from ringing with bronze plates my presence to all Nippur.

Yet something about the interior of the tent impressed me as wrong.

The Queen Anksen was a prisoner. There should be attendants in the tent; I would expect to see golden chains—for are not queens imprisoned with golden chains? —upon her slim arms, upon her slender ankles. But the woman on the couch was alone and unchained. The incense was passing sweet.

I rose to my knees; I stood. Softly, lest I draw the guards, I said:

"Anksen!"

The woman sprang up and whirled around. One hand went to her mouth, the other to her heart. She stared white-faced, with wonder in her eyes.

"Who are you? What do you here?" she whispered.

Alas, it was not Anksen! This woman was of the Queen's build, but a stranger!

"Where is Anksen?" I cried, springing across the little space between us.

"Speak softly!" she warned. "Would you draw the guards? You are not Egyptian!"

I shook my head.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You must needs be that reckless lord who leads a handful of Cretans against the might of Nippur! *Are you mad?"*

"Where is Anksen?" I repeated, struggling to keep my voice from rising. A great fear was in my heart. Had they slain the Queen?

She laughed. I thought it strange she showed no fear. Her laugh was like a little silvern bell. She was lovely and dark; but her eyes slanted in the Eastern fashion, and I thought of the snake-goddess of Crete: a snake-goddess, she, with the eyes of a cat!

"The lovely Queen of Egypt," she said, "whom you cross Babylon to seek, is safe in E-Sagil. Bel Marduk has her."

"In Nippur!" I stared into her strange eyes. "And who are you?"

"I am the Princess Sarai," she said. "I am Narbutali's only wife; and if Burna-Buriash be dead, as men say, verily right soon I am Queen of Babylon!"

"The gods give you other pleasant dreams," said I, turning from her. "I am then for Nippur."

"Wait, stranger," she said softly. "You are brave to enter the camp of Narbutali—alone! Anksen is fortunate among women!"

"She is prisoner of this Narbutali, who usurps his brother's throne," I said.

"Such love I have not seen—no, not in Babylon. You have reached into this tent, in the camp of Narbutali. But Nippur is girt by treble and lofty walls. Few men living, even men of Babylonia, may enter the holy place of the gods where Anksen is held in golden chains. How hope you to pass the walls of Nippur and the inner walls of E-Gingu to behold your Queen again?"

I thought of the charm of Dungi under my plated jacket; and moved by strange impulse, I drew forth the agate talisman and showed it to her.

She cried out. She leaned forward and touched the agate heart.

"I will restore Dungi's heart to Bel Marduk," said I. "This talisman of destiny will admit me to the holy place."

"How came you by Dungi's heart?" she asked in wonder.

"I was given it by a thief of Thebes."

"That cannot be," said she. "How could an Egyptian thief enter the inner temple of Bel?"

"There are thieves in Egypt," I said. "Are there no thieves in Babylonia?"

SHE SMILED. "BUT TWO MEN may enter the shrine upon E-Gingu," she said: "Narbutali, King's brother and high priest, may enter—and the King, Burna-Buriash. But this charm belonged to Kurigalzu, the father of these brothers; and Kurigalzu gave it unto Burna-Buriash. He, when he became king, laid it at the feet of the god. The talisman would be his, perhaps, still to take away if he wished; but did he not dedicate it for his own blessing to Bel Marduk? The god would be angered, if the jewel were taken away. Then how came your thief by this agate heart?"

"Narbutali has betrayed his brother the king," said I. "If he has been false in one thing, he might well be false in another—"

"If Narbutali took the charm, how came it then in Thebes? Narbutali has not been in Egypt."

I stared at her. "He gave away a crown that was not his," I said, remembering the aspen circlet that North held for the Thief of Thebes, "aye—to the Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Ammon. Narbutali may have sold the talisman into Egypt, and this thief—"

"It is true that Narbutali quarreled with Burna-Buriash his brother," she said. "Narbutali is a harsh and cruel man, though he is my husband—and though I love him. Yet Narbutali did not move against Burna-Buriash till the king had been long missing—till all men believed him dead."

"Who believed him dead?" I asked.

"For nearly the space of one year," she said, "no lord of Nippur has beheld the face of Burna-Buriash the King. He was a man of curious whims, rash beyond all other men, with a passion for adventure. Aye, Burna-Buriash was a restless ruler: he was not content with his kingship:

he must needs wander about. When he was not leading his armies in the field, he was out of his palace, seeking adventures. He has his harem in Babylon; and he sued the Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Ammon for the hand of the Princess Hathane—to set her, because of her beauty, first among all his wives. Some say that he went even to Egypt, to demand her in person of the Pharaoh."

"He did not come—" I began.

"Babylon has been kingless overlong," she said. "The city of Babylon may choose to bide his return; but Nippur will place Narbutali upon the throne. If Burna-Buriash be dead, surely it is right and lawful that Narbutali his brother shall be king. If Burna-Buriash lives, then still I say Narbutali should be king."

"Why?" I asked.

"The king who leaves his throne shall lose his kingdom," said the woman.

"So reasons the heart and not the head," said I. "A lawful king is still king, though he be at home or abroad. If the King return, would Narbutali yield?"

"Who save Narbutali knows?" she answered me. "Yet he is true priest of Bel Marduk. If the anointed one lives, Narbutali may count it the judgment of the god, and yield to his brother. But Narbutali is an obstinate man. He is proud and ambitious. He will, I think, harden his heart. I think he will not yield."

She touched the agate talisman again. "Were you in Nippur," she said, "the talisman would admit you even to the holy place of the god. Who can touch you, with the god's mark above your heart? Have you verily come for Egypt's widow only—for no other purpose? Should you reach E-Gingu, would you bear Anksen thence?"

"I will rescue the Queen," I assured her, "or die."

The woman sighed. "I am Sarai, which in my language means *light*. Look into my face, stranger! Why should Narbutali turn from me to Anksen? Am I not beautiful too? A light for my lord the Partesi of Nippur? I will not yield my place to the Egyptian! By the gods, if you would save Anksen, you needs must act swiftly: for Narbutali returns unto Nippur with all speed, and I with him. And I vow unto Istar I will see Egypt's queen thrown to the lions ere I see her reign as Narbutali's queen! Go to Nippur and snatch her from the keeping of the gods—if you can!"

"I will see you in Nippur," said I, and turned to depart as I had entered.

SOMETHING CAUSED ME TO HALT and look back over my shoulder. It may have been the rustle of garments, or that nameless awareness of a presence for which there is no explaining: for such things come to the heart from the gods.

The flaps of the entrance had been drawn back; within the tent, against a background of crowding warriors and the bright light of the campfire beyond, stood a bearded man.

He was regal in his bearing. His beard was long and black and curled, and his hair fell in plaits of curls to his shoulders. He bore a purple velvet cap upon his head topped by a crest, a golden lotus-bud. His robe was of fine linen, ornamented with heavy fringe of Tyrian purple and with fine lines blue and white. A wide belt of enameled leather engirt his waist, ornamented with small golden lions and with flashing stones. From this baldric hung a short sword, with handle of gold and ivory. His sandals were of red gold, with a golden lion on each side of the foot harnessed in silver with loops of wire at the back of the beast's neck, from which small golden snakes reached left to right, forming a buckle over the mound of the foot.

In his left hand this man bore a javelin that rose higher than his head, and the shaft was ebony entwined with golden wire. He was staring at me out of narrow eyes, jet-black and sly.

The warriors behind the tall man moved in past him, and stood in a ring of bronze around the pyramidal tent. Sarai sat motionless upon her couch. The golden censer poured forth fragrant fumes.

"The blessing of Bel Marduk upon the Partesi Narbutali," said I, turning to face him and folding my arms.

"It is death, to enter the tent of Sarai, wife of Narbutali, Nin Nippur," he said, in excellent Egyptian, his voice rich and strong. "I grant you a choice, O Stranger: death in the fiery furnace, or death in the lions' den."

"He came not to visit Sarai, queen-to-be of Babylon," said the woman on the couch, in a lazy, emotionless voice. "He came expecting to see—another woman."

"It is death, whatever his reason, to—" the man began again.

"He has not touched me," said Sarai. "He thought to speak with Queen Anksen."

THE LORD OF NIPPUR took two steps forward and halted again. He leaned then upon his javelin, and studied my face.

"You are bold, to enter the camp of Nippur's army," he said musingly. "You are taller, I think, than I, and broader at the shoulders. You are not Egyptian. Hah! Cretan, you are that Nin from Labyrinth who seized my boats by the Red Sea!"

"I am Orestos," said I, "and a lord of Labyrinth."

"Babylonia trades with Crete," said Narbutali. "We are not foes."

"Crete has peace with you," said I. "This war is mine alone."

"You come up against Nippur's ten thousand with two hundred Cretans," said Narbutali scornfully, "aided by an Egyptian rabble. For what purpose do you come?"

"You have borne away out of Egypt by force Tut-ankh-Ammon's queen," said I. "Release unto me Anksen, and I will pledge friendship with Nippur and return to the Nile."

Narbutali laughed. "You are prisoner of him who is soon to be crowned king of all Babylonia," he said. "And would you talk terms with me? The taking of Anksen is Temple business. I meddle not in business of the gods."

"She was taken by your soldiers," said I, "and imprisoned in your camp."

"What is the dead Pharaoh's queen to the Nin of Labyrinth?" demanded Narbutali. "Has Egypt no pride? Cannot Egypt come to Nippur to claim her own?"

"What is the beautiful Sarai to the Partesi of Nippur?" I asked.

But at that moment the eyes of Narbutali fell upon the agate heart of Dungi hanging bright upon my chest.

He started and moved forward. He took his javelin in his left hand, and pointed a trembling finger at Dungi's charm.

"The talisman of destiny!" he cried. "How came you by Dungi's heart?"

"The heart of Dungi was a gift, made to me upon the Nile," said I. "I travel to E-Gingu, to restore it to Bel Marduk."

"Is Burna-Buriash living, then?" Narbutali cried, greatly moved. "Why should Burna-Buriash give to the Nin of Labyrinth the jewel dedicated to the father of the gods?"

"The talisman was given me by a thief of Thebes," said I, "upon condition that I bring it to Nippur, that I restore it to the god."

"Then Burna-Buriash is dead and I am King!" cried Narbutali.

"Be not hasty in judgment," said Sarai softly. "It was given the Nin Orestos by a thief. The talisman, then, was stolen."

"Would an Egyptian thief steal from Marduk's holy place?" exclaimed the Partesi. "Would a thief seek to restore the stolen jewel to the god? Do you, Orestos, pur-

pose then to enter Nippur? You possess the treasure. Would you yield it verily unto Bel Marduk?"

"I worship the Unknown God, like the Bronze Warrior my King," said I. "But there be other gods, whether of power or of dead stone I know not. Yet I would render unto any god that which belongs to the god. I will restore the jewel to Bel Marduk."

The tall man leaned with both hands upon his javelin

"I worship Bel Marduk," said he. "You wear the god's emblem. I cannot touch you. Your person is sacred."

"I may go, then?" I cried, astonished.

"Go—as you came," said Narbutali, and laughed. "What have I to fear from Orestos of Labyrinth? Come up against me with your two hundred! Sack the city of Nippur!"

I looked at him. "You and I meet face to face for the first time in this life," said I. "Yet your face is strangely familiar. I will know you again, Narbutali, when we meet in Nippur."

"If ever you pass the treble walls," promised Narbutali, "and restore the agate heart of Dungi, as you promise, to the god, my doom still hangs over you, Nin Labyrinth. If you restore in truth the talisman of destiny to the blessed shrine and come away, I will feast you in the royal palace. But if you seek to seize the beautiful Anksen, by Nergal the death-god, I will feed you to the lions for Nippur's sport!"

"These hands shall lay the agate heart upon Bel Marduk's shrine," I promised. "I will bear Anksen safely thence. But look to it that you touch not Egypt's queen: if you harm one hair of her small head, I will hew you down though you take refuge upon the top of the highest ziggurat of Bel!"

"Go swiftly!" exclaimed Narbutali. "I fear Marduk—but my javelin may cleave to other gods! Out, lest I forget the gods and spit you upon my javelin!"

I laughed, and bowed low to the Princess Sarai.

"Narbutali," said I, "I thank your god for this freedom. Be not too hasty to seize Burna-Buriash's throne. He may yet demand it of you—and I think you are too great a man to trade your life for a dream."

And I stooped down and slid under the raised tent-bottom out into the moonlight. There was no sign of the man of Anpu-kha nor of the Thief. And I walked away slowly toward the low hilltop from which the Thief of Thebes and I had first spied out the Nippur camp.

Chapter Seven

On the hill there was no one. I fared on through the moonlight among ragged and twisted rocks broken and split and tossed about as if earth had burst and strewn her bones upon the tormented land. A sweet odor came on the light wind as from Eden in Babylon. I felt weary, for I had not slept that night, and was well-nigh sick with foreboding.

The beautiful Anksen had been carried on—farther from me, into the heart of the land of dark magic, the evil and sensuous land of omens and of dreams and of prophecies and of savage cruelties. The noble Narbutali, I knew, was evil; the lovely Sarai, a serpent woman who was friendly only because jealous of the Queen. Never in this life had I struggled, till that hour, with a mood so black.

Narbutali had shown singular respect for the agate heart of Dungi: but it had surely served his pleasure to set me free. From ought he knew, what had he to fear? He had measured well the bounds of my rashness. Death, he knew, was to me a light thing compared with that which I hid in my heart for Egypt's queen.

This ruler rejoiced to see men writhe in the fiery furnace of the god, to watch the vain struggles of men cast

into the lions' den, to bury men living in coffins of clay. He saved Orestos for a spectacle. He felt sure that I would do some wildly daring thing, to die splendidly rather than to go back to Egypt without the Queen. I had read these things glittering in his eyes.

And surely the Thief of Thebes must have known the Queen was not in the royal tent! He and his shadow had lured me there and left me to perish. I had been mad to put faith in a Chaldee!

Whatever the man was, a thief of Thebes he was not. What sly scheme slithered in his strange mind? I felt, that night, in the madness of my unreason, that he had played even with Narbutali a demon-game: I was an ivory piece upon a giant game-board. Narbutali and Anpu-kha stooped like Titans over the squares, grinning to see me slip and slide and skip to make them play.

Narbutali, I had read aright: but I was unjust to the Thief of Thebes.

I came to our camp at dawn, staggering and well-nigh spent. As I neared the fires, I heard the sounds of warriors arraying themselves for the field. There was a neighing of horses, the creak of chariot-wheels, the ring of brave bronze. The tents were folded away.

Even as I halted, staring, my little army moved forward. The black and silver chariot of Anpu-kha was in the lead; the scarlet-wheeled chariot of Thersites rumbled behind him.

The Thief of Thebes leaped from his chariot; Thersites was afoot and running toward me. One on either side, they grabbed my arms. My Cretans ringed me around, laughing with joy in the moonlight.

"What befell in the Nippur tent?" cried Anpu-kha, clapping me upon the shoulder—a thing he had never dared do before. "I was listening upon the ground, where you left me. And you were so long that I peered under the skirt of the tent—and I beheld Narbutali! And you, his prisoner!"

"Anpu-kha came shouting into camp," Thersites broke in. "'A rescue!' he shouted. 'A rescue! Orestos is in Narbutali's grip! After him! After him! Strike tents! Strike tents!"

"How came the Princess Sarai there?" demanded Anpu-kha. "Where is Anksen?"

"They have sent the Queen on into Nippur," said I. "They are to move on at once—I think they move at dawn."

"But how escaped you from Narbutali's grip?" insisted Anpu-kha. "It is not like the Partesi to lose a chance to see a man die terribly."

"The heart of Dungi on my breast," said I.

"So the agate moved him," mused the Thief of Thebes. "A strange, bold man is Narbutali. He has no fear, save of the gods. And of all the gods of Babylon—and they are many—the father of the gods is his god. The talisman which you wear Narbutali deems the very jewel of Marduk."

"When the tiger hungers not," I answered, "the tiger will play with the helpless gazelle. I am mouse to that cat. Doubtless Narbutali fears Bel Marduk; but he would see me dash out my brains against the walls of Nippur."

Anpu-kha gave me a long look. "The agate on your heart," he said, "is one of the *duppi-simati*, the tablets of destiny. It gives control over gods and men. *Zu* stole the tablets; but they were restored to Marduk, son of the Avenger—*Tir-gimili*, the restorer of peace."

"Three things you can do—" began Thersites.

"Aye, Captain, three," said I. "I would know your minds. We stand between the thousand coming up from Egypt and the nine thousand between us and Nippur—between the millstones. Now, we can slip from the trap and fare southward, and return again to Egypt to sue Haremheb for an army. Doubtless he will have crushed the Prince Eye ere we reach him. Or we can strike swiftly the thousand at our backs. Some of us will win through—and we can still seek help in Thebes. Or—"

"Are you mad, Lord Orestos?" cried Thersites. "You would not dash this little band against the might of Nippur?"

"What can a scant four hundred do against ten thousand?" asked Anpu-kha, but there was a curious smile upon his black-bearded face.

"We have two hundred Cretans," said I. "Are they not veterans of the Mid Sea? Poets shall sing their deeds in days to come. By Zeus, to me my Cretans are ten thousand! I have a plan. But what would you advise, Thersites?"

"Let us slip away southward," said Thersites. "Let us live, to save Anksen! Let us fetch a host out of Egypt to beleaguer the city of Nippur!"

"Let us strike through the thousand men behind us," said Anpu-kha—and he winked at me. "We will be a sword, to cut them like butter!"

I laughed. "When have I beheld fear in the eyes of the Thief of Thebes?" I asked. "Know you ought of the army of Babylon?"

"What army of Babylon? Thersites, the Lord Orestos is mad—or did Narbutali pour him drugged wine in the scarlet tent of the Princess Sarai? Babylon lies beyond Nippur!"

"Where is the army of Babylon?" I demanded again of Anpu-kha, looking at him steadily.

The man straightened and laughed. "The augury of the dead fig-tree!" he cried. "Babylon throws a host against Nippur. But I fear it cannot reach this wilderness ere the millstones crush."

"Bind swords to the chariot wheels," I ordered. "We will roll like a pyramid upon its side against the heart of Narbutali's host. At the point shall roll my chariot. You, Anpu-kha, and you, Thersites, shall ride close after me, and the others follow. If my horses fall, if my chariot smashes, let one of you take me up."

"They are ten thousand," said Thersites, frowning.

"We will smite them with such fury and such speed," I promised, "we will slash through their thin long-drawn line ere they can overwhelm us—and we will drive straight for Nippur's walls!"

"The gods fight on our side!" cried Anpu-kha. "But how will you pass through the treble walls of Nippur?"

"When we behold the ziggurats of Nippur, we shall know what to do," said I. "The One God will open the gates."

"The youth is in love," said the Thief of Thebes to Thersites. "He would storm the gates of the Happy Fields, to win his love. Anksen is in Nippur. True love is unconquerable. Can Nippur hold against true love?"

"Wise men say the sound of trumpets may shatter walls of mud," said Thersites. "And is not this man's love more potent than trumpets? Lead on!"

"We will shatter Nippur's army with the pyramid of Gilgames!" cried the Thief of Thebes to my Cretans crowding around us. "When we reach Nippur's gates, they will swing wide for us. We will pass through."

"Who will open the gates of Nippur to me?" I asked, astonished at his sudden certainty.

"I have the shibboleth," said the Thief of Thebes, giving a strange glance.

With a ring and a clashing, the swords leaped forth: the Cretans clashed sword against sword and shouted. And we turned and moved through the dawn.

"We will lurk in the hills ever a little back of Nippur's main army," I directed them. "Charge not till I command. We will smite them when we behold the tower of Bel."

"A Captain of Babylon should hear this thing," said Anpu-kha in my ear. "The army should behold this charge! It will be for the children of tomorrow a mighty tale!"

"If a man of us live to reach the city gates!" grumbled Thersites.

"Fear not, Thersites," I said to him. "Can Nippur stand against the One God's stroke?"

"You are a seer," said the Thief of Thebes. "The hour shall strike when Nippur is a heap and the glory of Bel Marduk riven and puddled by rain. I fear the god Bel; but before your God, I stand beyond fear. Where is the army of Thebes that went forth against the Israelites? I saw it march forth—a flame with power to devour kingdoms! Drowned in the Red Sea, that flame! Let Narbutali call upon Bel, but Bel will be deaf upon the ziggurat; for soon One mightier than Bel numbers the men of Nippur. They have sinned. They shall die."

"If I spoke like a seer," said I, "you speak like a king!"

"How should a king speak?" asked Anpu-kha, looking at me in his strange way. "And how a thief of Thebes? In your wisdom, instruct me. You are silent. Words are wind in men's throat: once out, they are gone, even as if they had never been. Can words in a king's mouth be more? Can words of a thief be less?"

And Anpu-kha laughed, and went back to his black and silver chariot.

Chapter Eight

NIPPUR IN BABYLONIA, WHITHER WE WERE journeying by chariot and by horse, lies a far way from the Red Sea. By what Anpu-kha called *musi-u-urri,* night and day, we fared for several weeks through that wilderness. And we passed through vast fields of wheat: for the land is one of the world's richest granaries. We passed over hills and through great forests.

And ever to our rear clung the thousand, and ever before us marched Narbutali's host. And northwestward lay Babylon; and northeastward, Nippur.

At night, when we needed supplies, I chose me picked men; and with Anpu-kha we crept upon Narbutali's camps—and we took what we needed of gear and of supplies from the host of the foe, even as the Thief of Thebes had counseled in Egypt. Yet all those weeks the men of Nippur behind us and the men of Narbutali in advance offered no battle. And our men began to grumble: their swords, they said, were athirst.

At last, in more than a moon's journey, we reached a level plain; and Thersites said:

"Shall we attack now?"

And I said, "Nay—it is too far from Nippur. March on!"

Again we approached a plain, and Thersites cried:

"Now surely is the hour, and this the plain for our attack!"

And I answered him: "Nay—not yet. I would charge upon them from a hill. I would sweep down upon their center like a thunderbolt. And it must be near Nippur. March on!"

Then I called Anpu-kha to me, and said:

"This is your land. Is there a plain before Nippur and a steep, high place from which we can charge down upon Narbutali?"

"The plain of Sumir," answered the Thief of Thebes, "that lies beyond the Euphrates. Behold, Nippur is beyond, and the old Tigris. I will guide you to hills that drop to the plain of Sumir."

AND WE PASSED THROUGH great fields of standing grain. We passed across marshes. We passed through forests again, and crossed other hills. And we crossed many canals. And ever the host of Narbutali withdrew slowly before us, and ever the thousand out of Egypt hung upon our rear.

Then came Anpu-kha to say he had received word that the army of Babylon was near the city of Kis. Now, Kis lies beyond Nippur, and is the next city to it upon the Tigris River.

And I called to me Thersites, captain of my band, and Anpu-kha the guide, and I said to them:

"Behold, the army of Nippur marches in close order. Now do you, Thersites, send a trumpeter one league to the northward, and with him twenty men in bronze; and let him in an hour's time stand forth upon the hilltop where the lowering sun will flash upon the armor, and let the trumpeter sound his ram's-horn as if for attack. And behold, Narbutali will believe he is being assailed upon the north, and he will lengthen his line a league to the north."

"But surely, Lord Orestos, you will not attack from the north?" cried Thersites.

And Anpu-kha laughed. "Thersites is strong in battle," he said, "but battles are won by cunning and by strategy as much as by brave blows."

"The odds are too heavy against us," grumbled Thersites. "We charge down to our deaths. Surely the nine thousand will swallow us up!"

Then I said to Thersites, "And do you straightway send a trumpeter with twenty men in bright bronze one league to the southward. And when a quarter-hour has elapsed after the sounding of the ram's-horn in the north, let the trumpeter to the south sound lustily upon his horn. And let his twenty warriors stand where the lowering sun shall glance upon their shining mail."

"But surely," objected Thersites, "you will not attack from the south?"

"Now let Zamama god of war wonder!" cried the Thief of Thebes. "For Babylon has not beheld such a brain since Ea separated the waters from the dry land! Look you, Thersites, your Nin from the Sea of the Setting Sun is a conqueror! He will win this battle—aye, and with great slaughter! Mullil our Bel has furnished the temple of his mind with *mete-ursag,* the adornment of warriors. The Partesi will be broken. Nin Nippur shall know terrible defeat!"

"We should abide the coming of the army of Babylon," insisted Thersites. "We are too weak for them. Let us wait for Babylon."

"You have heard Thersites," said I, to the Thief of Thebes. "What says the wise Anpu-kha?"

"Three lessons have I learned from the god Zamama," said the Thief of Thebes. "First, if you are outnumbered in the field, lose not precious time awaiting a possible strength on the morrow. For while you wait, will not your enemy also wax the stronger?"

"It is a wise law," said I. "And the second law of Zamama?"

"The second law requires that the wise commander of the weaker force shall not strike where he is expected," said the Thief of Thebes. "For where he is expected to strike, there shall his enemy be strong to repel and to destroy. And verily, the element of surprise is more powerful than javelin and sword. If there be a weak spot, seek it out and there strike!"

"And the third law?" I asked.

"The trumpeters are sent forth in obedience to that law," said Anpu-kha. "Narbutali knows how few we are. And he shall hear the trumpet on the north sound, and behold, armor flashing on the hills; and he shall hear the trumpet on the south sound, and behold armor shining on the hills of the south. And if I mistake not the purpose of Nin Labyrinth, he will straightway sound trumpets in the center and reveal to the startled Nippur host armor gleaming on the central hill."

"But what then shall befall?" demanded Thersites, his face red.

"Look down, Thersites, upon the field," said I. "The trumpeter sounds on the north—and Narbutali throws out his line northward a league; the trumpeter sounds upon the south, and Narbutali throws out his left wing a league to the south. Can you not see what I will do then?"

Thersites spoke no word. He only shook his head.

"Great is Gilgames!" cried Anpu-kha. "Behold, below us march Narbutali's nine thousand men in close array. What shall four hundred do against nine thousand soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder? But when the trumpets sound, Narbutali's nine thousand stand in a long thin line reaching two leagues across the plain. And because they expect attack, they will stand facing us."

"YOU HAVE THINNED THE LINE," said Thersites. "What then?"

"Then the men to the north will make a feint of charging; then the men of the south also will make a feint of charging; and then will they ride swiftly back behind the hills. Behold, Narbutali is now at a loss to know from which of three places to expect the main attack—or whether with reinforcements we shall strike at all three points at once. And Gilgames will form his flying pyramid, and he will strike like a thunderbolt upon the center of Narbutali's line."

"And I say to you, Thersites, we shall carve them as a hot knife new butter. They shall not stand before us, for our Lord the Unknown God is with us this day."

"Let men go out into the thickets," said Anpu-kha, "and bring in branches of date and branches of tamarisk. Lo, Nin Gilgames! I have had those who serve the Thief of Thebes bring me up shirts of the hair of goats and of kids; they have brought me down holy water from E-Sagil that was removed thence long since and hidden away for the hour of my need. For the devils of the plain fight with Narbutali; and what demon shall stand before the magic of date and of tamarisk, of goat-hair and of the hair of the kid, and of the holy water of the god? These Cretans are *zabam bikhram* of Gilgames, the chosen soldiers. Let them bear torches!"

"Torches!" exclaimed Thersites. "Behold, it is still day—"

"The demons fear pure light," explained Anpu-kha. "We will sprinkle our men with holy water; we will adorn the chariots and the horses with the power of date and of tamarisk; and we three shall wear the magic shirts of hair."

THEN THE EGYPTIAN SERVANTS were sent forth; and they returned with branches of date and of tamarisk. And we who were to lead drew on the magic shirts. The Thief of Thebes stood forth with ewers of holy water. And he cried:

"The god Sin arm you with power, O Gilgames!
Let Ninip give you a sword!
The Star shall give you victory,
And Samar and Rimmon guard you well."

And he sprinkled us with the holy water of E-Sagil. And then, turning, he faced the host in the valley and cried:

"By Ura and the Seven Gods, bring havoc upon this host, Bel Marduk!
The dagger of pestilence bury in their heart!
Nippur has come forth with the bodies of beasts of the caves and of ravens.
But Gilgames is like unto a god: he is a shepherd, who seeketh pasture for his men, who leadeth them to food.
Let Adad the storm-god ride above them!
Let Naba the wind smite them!
Let the dragon coil about them!
Let Usum-gal the serpent-dragon crush them!
For Apsu the primeval deep shall overflow them,
And Tiemat the chaos shall swallow them up!
For behold the lightning of Bel Marduk bearing upon his breast
One of the duppi simati, *the tablets of destiny!*
Let the bow drop, the quiver break, the mace lose its head!
By Ura and the Seven Gods, bring havoc upon Narbutali!"

And from the north sounded the first trumpet, and armor flashed upon the hill.

And from the south sounded the second trumpet, and armor flashed upon the hill.

Then near us, in the center, the ram's-horn sounded, and we moved forward till we were glancing in the blaze of the sun. And we waited until those upon the north and upon the south should drop back behind the hills to join us.

Before us lay the long thin line of Narbutali's host. The sun gleamed upon its armor, upon the chariots of copper and the chariots of silver and the chariots of gold. And the armor flamed; the heads of the javelins were as fire upon torches. And they stood motionless, facing the hills.

Now we had fastened swords to our chariot-wheels. And the heads of our horses and the chariots were adorned with the branches of date and of tamarisk.

And the Thief of Thebes began to chant—a wild and ancient song:

"I sing of Marduk son of Ansar,
Tir-gimili, god of heaven,
Restorer of peace!
Hearken, O warriors, give ear!
The she-ass is fast to the chariot.
The quiver is full; the bow is strung;
The mace swings free; the sword is bright:
Hearken, O warriors, give ear!"

And he suddenly gave a great roar, shouting above the rumble of our chariot wheels as we rolled down the steep slope:

"Buru Ikdu the mighty bull is not dead! Buru Ikdu the mighty bull gores his foes! Strike, Gilgames, strike! For the glory of Babylon!"

And we smote that thin line. The chariot-wheels armed with the knives flashed and became red in their ranks. Their horses reared; they reared and turned aside. Their warriors wavered; they fled from before us.

And we passed into the heart of them. There was a tumult and a shouting. My chariot fouled the wheels of Nin Narbutali's; but he turned from me; he sprang down and sprang upon a riderless horse, and the beast took the bit in his teeth and bolted out of the mêlée.

Then I leaped to the ground, and I leaped into the nearest chariot, beside the Thief of Thebes. And our swords ran blood, and the knives upon the chariot were sated. We smote them like a thunderbolt, and passed through them like gods.

All too late, the thousand men of Nippur who followed us, charged upon our rear. We had moved on so fast that they fell upon their own forces; and for a time men of Nippur fought men of Nippur foolishly upon the plain. The whole line of Narbutali was thrown into confusion. And we mowed among the living till the field was heaped with the slain.

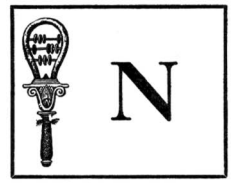
Even as the army of Narbutali milled about upon the plain, a shouting rose upon the north. Lo, the army of Babylon was come! And it fell with mace and with javelin and with sword upon the confused and broken army of Nippur. But I led our little band free of the battle —and we rode forth, shouting, toward the gates of the city.

And now did the Thief of Thebes chant a hymn of victory. The words fell like flame upon my ears: but I can portray them but poorly in Minoan:

"They are the bitter poison of the gods!
They are the owls hooting over a city!
They are the demons with bodies of dogs,
Whose claws are the claws of birds,
Whose heads are the heads of lions,
Whose wings are four-fold!
But they have met with na'id ina gable,
The horse glorious in war;
They have met with tamarisk and with date boughs,
With water of the gods and with torches of fire:
Shattered is the chariot, slain the she-ass that drew it,
The horses of Nippur have galloped away!
And even as Gilgames the mighty hunter
Overthrew Khumbaba the Elamite king,
So Nin Labyrinth has ridden forth
From the Sea of the Setting Sun
And overthrown Narbutali, Partesi of Nippur!"

So the Thief rode beside me, chanting. And his head was high, his face flushed. He lashed the two horses of his chariot; and we rumbled toward the city gates.

CHAPTER NINE



NIPPUR ROSE OVER US, BRIGHT IN THE dying sun. I beheld, above black and lofty walls, the stage-towers rising heavenward, their great sides enameled with winged lions and with godlike men, gleaming in gold and ivory and silver and scarlet and blue. A bright and beautiful city was Nippur upon its mounds, far-spread over the plain.

"Turn the chariot northward!" I cried to Anpu-kha. "Let us join the army of Babylon! The triple gates are fast shut. How shall we enter this city through the mighty walls of brick? Turn northward!"

"I will show you a thing this day," said the Thief of Thebes. "Behold, Bel Marduk will open the gates to us, and we shall ride in as gently as a man comes into his house out of the vineyards at the close of the day. You have had faith in the Thief of Thebes to this hour. I have promised you Anksen. We will ride in!"

We moved on. "If we are to enter Nippur," said I, "let us remove the knives from the chariot wheels. For this is a great city and populous; and if we ride in with the knives upon our wheels, we shall slash the legs of the throng, and the host will turn upon us; and from housetop and from wall they will hurl bricks upon us, and they will rend us in the narrow ways. For we are few, and they a myriad."

So we halted by the roadside and removed the swords from the wheels of the chariots. And Anpu-kha said:

"Let us approach the gates, for Narbutali may drive in after us, if he is sore pressed by Babylon."

"Forward!" I cried. "Let every man fare sword in hand —for who knows what evil may face us at the treble gates?"

And those remaining of my little army galloped hard after us to the outer gates of Nippur.

AND NOW ANPU-KHA raised his voice and shouted:

"Hearken, Lord of the Gates! Give ear, O Keepers of the City!"

A tall man appeared upon one of the twin towers by the gates. He wore a double-peaked blue hat upon his head, and bore a short javelin in his right hand. There was a charm pendant upon his breast that flashed in the setting sun.

"Who calls the Lord of the Gates?" he cried down to us.

And Anpu-kha answered:

"By the Temple of the Great Light, I bid you to open the gates! For Bel has cursed Narbutali with the mighty curses; he whose command changes not has cursed Nin Nippur; and the one greater than Nin Nippur or Partesi is at hand, seeking entrance with soldiers from the Sea of the Setting Sun."

"The gates of Nippur open not to any voice that calls," cried the man in the blue headpiece. "Have you a shibboleth that will open the gates?"

"By Samas the judge; by Belit the great mother and Bel Nin of destiny; by Ea the all-wise and Istar lady of battle, the gates shall open!" cried Anpu-kha. "The priests of Marduk will hear me: behold, it is written, *'the God of man is a shepherd.'*"

And lo when the Lord of the Gates heard these words, he shouted back:

"Alkat! Alkat! Glory to Alkat!"

And Anpu-kha answered and said, as repeating a ritual:

"Glory to Alkat: he has destroyed the roar of Tiamat; he has destroyed the power of Apsu; the march of the Sun he has directed, his rising each day has Alkat made a law."

"Ea lives on truth!" cried the Lord of the Gates. "Let the strangers enter Nippur!"

Slowly the great gates swung inward. And the sun had now set: behold, it was night. Then did we ride into the city of Bel Marduk, and the Thief of Thebes with us. And I beheld many men thronging around us with torches that flared and smoked. And on either side, against the walls of the portal, through the shifting light and shadow I beheld giant sculptures of winged lions and of fish-headed gods. And now the first gates were swung shut with a great thunder behind us.

The second gates groaned and swung inward. And we passed through the second gates. And behold, beyond the second gates, the mighty winged lions stood moveless as rocks upon hills, in the torchilght.

The second gates thundered shut behind us, and the third gates opened before us. And we passed through the third gates; and these also with a great noise closed behind us. We were within the great city of Nippur!

The people of the city streamed around us. They bore innumerable torches, and the flares made light the hard-trodden way. The houses fronted the path blackly, in great blocks two and three stories high, each raised upon a mound a little above the way. And there were huge stone lions winged and awesome to behold beside us. And the women and the children crowded into our path and stopped our progress.

Anpu-kha said: "I would speak with the Lord of the Gates. Do you abide here."

Then I looked and saw, just ahead, great numbers of soldiers with shields and short javelins. And with these, the man in the blue headpiece who had hailed us from the top of the tower by the gates.

The Thief of Thebes sprang down from his black and silver chariot, and went forward to the Lord of the Gates; and they talked for a long time together. The press of the throng surged between us, and I saw Anpu-kha no more that night.

After a long time, I said to Thersites:

"Lo, Anpu-kha has vanished away. The moon has risen, and the night grows late. Our men are weary, and many sore wounded. Yonder by the winged lion stands a tall man in priestly garments. Wait here. I will speak with that man."

And Thersites answered: "What can a priest do for us?"

And I said: "There is room in the temples."

Thersites laughed. "We are outland folk, and worship other gods. I think the priests will not shelter you within the sacred walls of E-Sagil."

"We will sleep this night in E-Sagil," said I.

I descended from the black and silver chariot, and went up to the priest. Now with him were two torch-bearers, one on either side. His face was long and his forehead high, and his beard fell to his chest as white as snow on Ararat.

I spoke to the priest in Egyptian.

"You are a priest of Bel Marduk?" I asked.

"I am Kadash, High Priest of Bel Marduk," said he, in the tongue of Haremheb. "There has been fighting upon the plain, and you have been in battle. But you are not of Nippur."

"We fought against Nippur," said I boldly.

"But you were then on the farther side of Narbutali's army!" exclaimed Kadash the High Priest. "And you are but a handful! How came you between Narbutali and the city?"

"We cut through Narbutali's army," said I. "We smote his line in the center, and threw it into confusion, so that we moved like reapers among his warriors and mowed the living as they were stalks of wheat."

"Istar, goddess glorious in battle, hear!" cried Kadash. "You must have fought like gods! And how came you through the treble gates?"

"WITH ME THERE WAS ONE who calls himself the Thief of Thebes," said I. "And he had the shibboleth."

"Now by the law of Alkat!" cried the High Priest. "How came an Egyptian thief to know the password of Nippur? It is a ritual, and known to few; and they, the lords of princes! You have cut through Narbutali's host, and that is a miracle. You have gained the city through a thief's wisdom—and that cries out with the secrets of the council chamber of the god!"

"I am Orestos, a lord of Labyrinth," said I, "and worshiper of the Unknown God. The way opens before me."

"We have heard, in Babylonia, of wonders in Egypt," said the High Priest. "What would you of Kadash?"

"My men are weary," said I, "and many suffer from sore wounds. Lead us into E-Sagil and admit us to chambers where we may bathe and eat and sleep. For if the Partesi Narbutali return and find us in the open streets, he may cast us into dungeons: for how shall we fight amid the throng of the city? Open the gates to E-Sagil."

"It may be the Partesi will be King of Babylon," said Kadash. "Why should the priests of Bel incur the wrath of the King, to comfort this night the enemies of Narbutali?"

Then I drew from under my jacket the heart of Dungi.

The Tower of Bel rose in seven mighty stages. . . . Shouting defiance to the champions of the god, we went up the steep circling way.

And Kadash beheld the agate talisman in the torchlight. He raised both arms straight out from his body and bowed low before Dungi's heart.

"Blessed be he who comes to E-Sagil with the favor of Marduk!" he cried. "Gather close your warriors and follow me. Be swift, lest Narbutali return and cut you off."

And I spoke to Thersites, and swiftly our men closed up and followed after us, Kadash the High Priest stalking ahead with a dozen acolytes bearing torches to light the way. And the way ascended and passed beyond the dark masses of the houses. It rose to a low hill, upon which the rising moon gleamed on a mighty inner wall, whose wide portal was defended by two great towers, one on either side. And above us rose the buildings of the temples, huge and splendid, brilliant with gold; and soaring into the sky toward the stars, the lofty ziggurats or towers of the gods.

"If the priests of Marduk took Anksen the Queen," I whispered to Thersites, as Kadash went ahead to attend to the opening of the temple gates, "she will be imprisoned in E-Gingu. And even now we are going into E-Gingu."

"It were not wise for us that Kadash know we seek the Queen," suggested Thersites with unwonted wisdom; for he is a brave man and a true, yet little given to thinking things out for himself.

"We will not reveal our purpose unto Kadash," I assured him hastily.

WE ASCENDED TO THE GATES of the sacred precinct of the gods. Now these gates were sheathed in brass and hung in sockets of stone; and stone is a precious thing in the land of Bel, for there is no stone there; and these skillfully wrought sockets are brought into the land at a cost only kings can bear. But the inner doors of the holy place are sheathed in solid gold.

Kadash the High Priest went before us, and the torchbearers with him. The gates were opened to us and we passed in, the feet of the warriors scraping upon the beaten way, the chariot wheels rumbling, the hoofs of the horses sounding a martial *clop-clop* as we fared. And Kadash led us past the shops of the venders of images, of the venders of incense, and of the venders of sacred wines, and through an inner and goodly gate painted with the fish-headed god and the deeds of that Gilgames for whom the Thief of Thebes had named me. But I did not then know his image.

And Kadash the High Priest stared into my face and said: "Behold, in ancient days Babylon had warriors as mighty as you, O Stranger! You look upon the hunting of Gilgames."

Thersites stared and laughed. "By Samas' light!" he cried. "It is meet the gates of Gilgames should swing wide to Gilgames!"

And Kadash passed a nervous hand over his white beard and said:

"Gilgames is with the gods—"

"Nay," said Thersites, "you have admitted Gilgames to E-Sagil! For there came one out of Babylon who looked into the face of the Lord Orestos and knew him; and thenceforward, he has not failed to call him by his proper name. He who slashed through the might of Nin Nippur is verily Gilgames to the life."

"Who was this man out of Babylon?" demanded Kadash the High Priest.

"He calls himself Anpu-kha, the Thief of Thebes," said Thersites. "But if he be thief or common man, I am the god Ra incarnate!"

Kadash looked at the talisman of Dungi. "Answer me, Gilgames," he said, with a curious smile. "This Thief of Thebes: it was his hand that hung the heart of Dungi upon your heart?"

"It was his hand," said I.

And Kadash the High Priest said a curious thing. There was a light in his eyes, and his voice shook.

"'Ea lives on truth,'" he quoted from the sacred hymn. "'Ea feeds on truth even as Ra!' The tablet of destiny is on your breast, Nin Gilgames. You are welcome in the holy place. Ay, you shall sleep this night in *E-temen an-ki*, the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth, which some call the Palace of Gilgames, in a chamber of palmwood and of ivory."

"We thank Kadash the High Priest," said I.

"The houses of Bel Marduk are yours. We will feed you upon the god's viands—the roasted meats and the precious wines. For there is no favor I would not do for him who has traveled with this Thief of Thebes; and thrice honored in E-Sagil is he who comes wearing the talisman of King Dungi! Keep your arms, and rest this night. The slaves of the temple shall feed you ere you sleep."

"Who, then, is this Thief of Thebes?" I cried.

Kadash the High Priest stared.

"Who am I, to instruct Gilgames?" he said. "You have looked into his face. You wear the gift of Bel Marduk. I am silent, because it is forbidden that I speak: but surely Gilgames knows. Who am I, to speak aloud the secrets of the gods? A high priest of Marduk? Lord of E-Sagil? Yet over me is a greater one. Surely that lord can stand in the very presence of the gods with open eyes. There is glory upon his own forehead, the light of his fathers who were gods!"

"The Thief of Thebes may well be a Nin of Babylon," said I, "and of the blood of the gods. He has served me well across that far country between Thebes and Nippur. His counsels are wise. And in the battle with Narbutali beyond the walls, he proved a mighty warrior. Yet after all, he is a Chaldee—and he has failed me in my hour of need."

"He is not with you," said Kadash soberly. "Know you whither he went, or why? You have your own purposes. Your heart's desire seems to you the world. Think you this Thief of Thebes has no business of his own? It well may be he has duties to the gods. *Or that his danger is even greater than yours.*"

"*Danger?*" cried Thersites, whipping out his good bronze blade. "Danger to my Lord Orestos? What danger, priest?"

"We are in sanctuary," I said sternly to Kadash. "We are shielded by Bel Marduk."

"The danger of which I speak lies without the walls of E-Sagil," said Kadash smoothly. "You are guests of the god. If you prove false to the divine talisman, if you move against the hierarchy of the gods, we have our own army, we have our own strength. You have a purpose in your mad venture. You did not risk torture and death for the mere thrill of the faring! In this hour the priests of Bel watch alertly—we know not how the gods will command us to move. We also in this hour are foes of Narbutali—but to Narbutali, Partesi of Nippur. Should Narbutali become king, we must make friends with him—at least, seeming friendship. He is of Istar's blood!"

"We are in sanctuary," I repeated.

KADASH LOOKED AT ME, stroking his great white beard. "So long as Narbutali is Partesi and Nin Nippur only, you are in sanctuary. We bide the issue. There is still fighting beyond the city walls. Babylon has smitten the army that you had already confused. That was good strategy. Yet how came you to fight for Babylon?"

"I know not Babylon's plans," said I. "I have heard that Burna-Buriash is absent; who leads his host, I know not. I have no quarrel with Nippur the city, the priests of Bel, the city Babylon. I have an errand here that in due season I will reveal unto you. But are you threatening me, Nin Sagil? Would you dare try to hold us prisoners in E-Sagil?"

"You entered the holy place of your own will," said Kadash. "You besought me in Marduk's name to let you in. You are in. If you would go forth into the city again, I will open the gates—"

"Nay," I said. "Later, I will go forth. For the hour, I too will bide the destiny of Narbutali, within E-Sagil. Crete has swords. If E-Sagil keeps the pledge of the god Bel and shields us in the holy place, our swords shall sleep. But if E-Sagil sets ward over Crete, our swords shall quicken and flame. I have my god: I worship the Unknown God. I will respect your ancient gods only if they keep faith. If there be treachery, Crete shall move. Aye, I will set torch to the temples, if the hierarchy seek to hem me in."

"You would draw swords in E-Sagil?" cried Kadash.

"I will strike at the first whisper of danger," said I. "That leader is rash who learns he is threatened and who puts off till tomorrow what is better done in the hour. *I will not feign friendship with the cobra. I will not seek to appease the asp. For if the serpent moves to strike, strike he will; and the issue lies only with the sword.*"

"You are weary and spent with the battle," said Kadash gently. "You are a little band in a great city. You are in the shadow of Bel. Surely that leader is wise, who finds himself weak before his enemy and bides the morrow—when his strength may increase or the odds change in his favor?"

"Crete may wax stronger by tomorrow or tomorrow or tomorrow," said I. "But may not the army of Marduk, or of Narbutali, or of whatever foe Crete may have, also wax stronger with the hours? Narbutali may yet win the field—and tomorrow find the foes of Crete stronger yet. Nay! The sick man had best take his medicine. Delay will not avail to avoid the evil. I tell you, Kadash, I strike at the first whisper of peril. I will be friend to Kadash as long as Kadash is open and friendly with me. But a ward over my Cretan band I will not brook."

"You shall rest in the Palace of Gilgames by the Court of *E-temen an-ki*," replied Kadash. "Keep your bronze in the sheaths and keep your men in the House of Gilgames."

"Do I take orders from Kadash now?" I cried. "If you know where the Thief of Thebes has gone, send him word to come to me if he be true friend of Gilgames—and that without delay. This is his city, and I like not his absence in this hour."

"You are a bold man," said Kadash. "Surely, you are of the blood of the gods. Follow me."

And Kadash the High Priest led us to the House of Gilgames, built square round a court of double columns, with scenes painted upon the inner walls of mighty hunting with lions. The floor was of lacquered bricks painted with grass and with flowers, with butterflies and with birds like the floor of the great hall of the Double House at Thebes.

On the four sides of that House there were chambers richly furnished, with hangings of velvet and furniture of ebony and of ivory and of palm-wood and of gold. We drew up our chariots in the court, and attendants of the temples came and led our horses away.

Chapter Ten

THE LEADERS OF MY BAND SLEPT THAT NIGHT IN THE chambers; our men slept upon the pavement of the court. But first Kadash caused to be brought small tables and silvern chairs, and set before us bread and baked meat and wines. And there were fruits of many kinds, and sweetmeats strange and subtle on the tongue.

I lay down upon the couch of ebony and gold in full array, my hilt in my fist. I was sick from weariness, yet sore from buffets of battle and from sundry cuts of the fray and slept ill. I tossed about, and turned my face to the painted wall.

Little flames burned upon a bronze brazier raised on golden lion-legs, and shed shifting light and shadow upon the hunting on the wall. Near me there was a winged lion erect like a man. And the lion seemed to move.

I WATCHED THAT RAMPANT BEAST in the haze of my weariness, and the lion moved toward me. Without a sound, a section of the wall turned upon a pivot; and through the opening thus formed there glided North, one of the followers of Anpu-kha.

"Kadash has set a guard upon your portal," he whispered hoarsely. "He is of two minds what to do with you, for he dreads the power of Nin Nippur. Tomorrow, I think, he will strip you of arms and war-gear and cast you into the dungeons of E-Sagil."

"But he is friendly to the Thief of Thebes," I said.

"Whether Narbutali will win, or the armies of Babylon, who knows in Nippur?" North looked at me. "Kadash is High Priest. He must be ready to be thought leal to Nin Nippur, should Nin Nippur hold the city, or leal to Babylon, should Babylon take it. What is Gilgames? A puppet in the play of gods!"

"But I wear Dungi's heart," I said.

"Therefore Kadash will not harm you," said North. "And should he be forced to deliver you unto Narbutali, verily he will scheme to free you again: this man has two faces—he would please the Partesi and he would please Bel Marduk."

"Kadash has befriended me," I answered, astonished. "He has admitted me to this sacred place. He has housed me in a goodly palace. He has fed me and all my followers upon bread and honey, baked meats and wine. And before this heart of Dungi on my breast—"

"I tell you Kadash is friend to Gilgames," said North. "But is he not keeper of the sacred places? Narbutali has withdrawn into Nippur before the conquering Babylon host. Even now Babylon beleaguers the city. And when Narbutali heard that you were come in and sheltered in E-Sagil, he sent word in wrath to Kadash the High Priest and said:

"'Why hold you in the sanctuary of Bel Marduk the enemies of Nin Nippur? Lo, they have come against Nippur with blades flowing with our blood; they have slashed through the might of Nippur by their tricks; they have shamed the glory of the city!

"'Now I, Nin Nippur and Partesi of the holy city, proclaim myself King of Babylonia in the absence of Burna-Buriash my brother. Do you therefore set guards upon the Cretans while they sleep. And at dawn, seize them and cast them into the dungeons of E-Sagil. For I will have sport of them for the nobles of Nippur. Aye, they shall be cast into fire; they shall be thrown to the lions for our sport: some into fire and some into the pit, for the pleasure of Nippur.'

"Now, who is Kadash the High Priest, to affront the King of Babylon? Kadash will not harm you, from respect for Dungi's heart. Yet he will seize you at dawn and he will deliver you unto Narbutali the self-proclaimed king."

"Where now is Anpu-kha?" I whispered. "Is this his friendship for Gilgames? In the hour of my need, to abandon me to Marduk?"

"The Thief of Thebes has business in the city," said North. "And surely you can reason that his business may well bear upon your quest. The beautiful queen out of Egypt is not in the dungeons nor in the palaces of the gods. Where will the stranger look for Anksen? How shall he find her among a hundred thousand—in E-Sagil, whose priests suspect him, or in the outer city, whose Nin is his enemy? Look well to your own safety and leave the Thief of Thebes to his business. When the hour is ripe, you shall see him again."

"How knew you where I was housed? How knew you of this secret way through the wall?"

"Who am I, to know these things? Behold, Kadash sent word privily unto Anpu-kha and said: 'If you are who I think you are, you should be informed that at dawn Narbutali who proclaims himself king commands that I cast the Cretans into the dungeons of E-Sagil. But when the stranger asked shelter and I learned that you have called him *Gilgames,* I said to myself, 'If the Thief of Thebes is he who I think he is, he will wish this Gilgames to sleep this night in the Palace of Gilgames.' For if the Thief of Thebes is who I think he is, he will know the secret way, and will send him word that at dawn I must cast him into the dungeons of E-Sagil. Do what you must do for the kingdom of Babylon; but spare the temples of the holy place and the priests of Bel Marduk. Fear Bel!' "

"Where leads this secret way?" I asked. "If you came in by it without knowledge of the ward, I and these with me can go forth by it."

"Kadash sleeps," said North. "He will say that he believed you too spent by the battle to stir forth this night. His wards droop over the shafts of their long javelins. E-Sagil sleeps."

"I am not for the dungeons of E-Sagil," said I. "I will wake them with bronze and in blood!"

"See to it that you harm not Kadash the High Priest," North told me sternly. "But do what you must do, and that swiftly. There is a spring in this wall that releases the latch: press here upon the lion's paw, and push—so! Rouse your men. I will wait just beyond the secret gate."

The wall was whole again, nor could eye detect the seams of that secret portal.

Straightway I roused up Thersites and all my men and pressed the lion's paw. The portal swung wide, and we passed through into a narrow passage between the thick walls of the Palace of Gilgames, where North awaited us. He led us by a long way, that passed in part deep underground; and the walls reeked with dampness, and rivulets ran upon the floor. And we came forth from the secret way into one of the huge round towers that guard the gates of E-Sagil.

WE FELL UPON THE GUARDS of the gates of E-Sagil and slew them. Fifty picked warriors I left to guard the gates, and went up through the ways of the holy precincts of Bel, and seized upon Kadash the High Priest and upon all the hierarchy of Bel Marduk and the other gods. And E-Sagil was wholly ours, from the twin-towered portal to the ziggurats of Bel. With Kadash I dealt gently, nor harmed his holy priests. Yet because the fear of Narbutali was black upon them, I shut them fast in the dungeons of the temples.

Then I hunted through all the ways of E-Sagil for Anksen the Queen, but found her not. And I sent forth Thersites and hailed Kadash the High Priest before me.

"I have sought the Queen of Egypt," I said unto Kadash, "throughout all the palace of the gods; and behold, she is not here. Now the only place remaining where I have not sought is upon the lofty tower, the ziggurat of Bel Marduk. I wear the talisman of the god. I will ascend the tower of Bel with nine picked warriors of Crete, and look for Anksen the Queen in the holy of holies, the shrine of the god on the top of the tower."

And Kadash the High Priest answered in wrath: "Bel Marduk destroy you, if you set foot upon the top of the Tower of Bel! For surely in the golden chamber of Bel only the King of Babylon and the Nin Nippur his brother may set foot and live!"

And I said unto Kadash: "I have come out of Egypt to fetch back Anksen Tut-ankh-Ammon's queen to the Double House of the Pharaoh Haremheb. And I have followed Anksen across the wilderness a march of more than thirty days from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River.

"And I have beheld the might of Nippur drawn up on the plain of Sumir. Behold, Nin Nippur's host reached in shining brass two leagues across the plain of Sumir, with the left wing and the right wing touching great canals.

"And with my four hundred I smote the center of Nippur's line. By the power of the living God, of the Unknown God, I cut through the host of Narbutali, and came even unto the gates of Nippur.

"And these gates were lofty; these gates were threefold barriers in my way. And the threefold gates, the mighty gates of shining brass, swung wide for my victorious band. And I followed Anksen the Queen even into the holy city of Bel, and I followed her into the thrice-sacred walls of E-Sagil."

KADASH THE HIGH PRIEST looked at me sourly. "How know you that the beautiful Egyptian is within the walls of E-Sagil?" he asked.

"She was taken by the men of Nin Nippur for the priests of Bel," said I. "Is there not a custom in this land, each year to choose for the god the most beautiful woman in Babylonia to be his bride?"

"Anksen is of Thebes," replied Kadash, "and Egyptian."

"Did not Burna-Buriash sue the Pharaoh Tut-ankh-Ammon for the hand of the Princess Hathane? And Hathane was given unto Myenides the Bronze Warrior. After that, from the King of Babylon there came no word nor protest."

"He was too great," declared Kadash the High Priest, "to show resentment because the Princess was given to a King of Crete rather than to Babylon. A woman is but a woman—and what woman in all the world would not wed the King of Babylon?"

"But now, lo, the Nin Nippur, Partesi of the ancient city, brother of Burna-Buriash, has seized the throne of Babylon," I said. "And surely Narbutali is a man of wiles. He stirred up the Prince Eye to seize the throne of Egypt; and he stirred up the priests of Bel Marduk, to choose for the first time in all history a woman of Egypt to be the bride of the god. And is not Narbutali a man of one wife only? And will he fail, now that he has proclaimed himself king, to choose the bride of the god to be his bride? He will command of the priesthood a decree of Marduk, giving unto him the beautiful queen. Doubtless Kadash the High Priest has already received his command."

"The Nin Labyrinth is all-wise," said Kadash the High Priest. "He knows Marduk's will. Let the Nin answer his own questions."

"The order has gone forth," said I. "I will rescue the Queen from the priests of Bel Marduk."

"The gates of E-Sagil shall be opened to Narbutali the King," warned Kadash. "Surely you know that this man as King is lord over me? Aye, and over the holy places of Nippur? And the very mouthpiece of Bel? I am leal to Burna-Buriash if he lives; for if he lives, he is the anointed of the gods. But I will be leal to Narbutali as long as he sits upon the throne in Nippur. The gates must be opened to the King!"

"Who has made Narbutali the King of Babylon?" said I. "Is there a testimony in the temples of Bel that Burna-Buriash is dead? The army of Babylon beleaguers the city. For what king, then, do the warriors of Babylon

Upon the third stage, the champion well-nigh split my ox-hide shield.

fight? And if Babylon fights Nippur, how then shall Narbutali be King of Babylon?"

I paused, and Kadash answered not.

"Surely the army of Babylon knows that Narbutali stands next in succession to Burna-Buriash his brother! But they have moved eastward; they have smitten the army of Narbutali; even now they storm the gates of the city. The Nin Nippur is like a lion at bay before the hunters. Yet Narbutali makes himself king."

"The walls are not broached," said Kadash the High Priest. "Nin Nippur is King within them. I will open to Narbutali the gates of E-Sagil."

I laughed. "Picked men of Crete hold the gates," said I. "Narbutali may hold Nippur, but I possess all the temples of the god. And I will not go forth from this place until I have taken Anksen out of the hands of Bel. Surely, the temple of Bel has a heart, and the heart is upon the high tower. I will ascend to the Queen!"

"There are seven stages to the Tower of Bel," retorted Kadash. "And upon each stage are priests of Bel and chosen champions of the god. And these champions are giants of the Amalekites: mighty men of valor. The way to the chamber of Bel circles the lofty tower. Behold, you can see it from the windows, a spiral circling the outer tower. And this way is of a width for two men only."

"And so—" I said.

"You are a mighty man; but the champions of Bel are giants, and hold the seven stages above you. You will be open to their attack all the way from the shrine at the foot to the chamber of Bel at the top."

"I have a sword," said I, "and the Lord my God is the One, the Unknown God. I fear neither the champions of Bel nor Marduk himself. By my sword I will cut down the Amalekites. By my sword and the might of the Living God, I will scale the tower and save the Queen."

And I commanded the guards to take Kadash the High Priest back to his cell and to keep guard over him, lest he send forth word out of that place to Narbutali the self-proclaimed king.

Yet despite all that, Kadash spoke to Narbutali, Nin Nippur; and Narbutali, while I was ascending the tower, moved to destroy me.

But all this I then knew not. And I assembled of my Cretans my captain Thersites; and Doxites, Artaxes, and Zirgon; and Melchonides, Aspides, Hierates the Hairy; and Polymedes and Hippophiles, who ever went with Thersites, for they were from his palace in Haggia. And Tyson I left in command of the temples of Bel. With these nine chosen warriors I approached the high Tower of Bel.

Chapter Eleven

BEHOLD, THE TOWER OF BEL IS HIGHER THAN all other towers of earth. When it was first building, it is said in Babylon that men thought to rear it to the very courts of the gods. But the gods in wrath smote it with earthquake and with fire, and the top thereof fell even with the thunder of a mountain falling. The rain poured out of heaven like the river Euphrates, and the bricks of mud became liquid streams and flowed down the precipitous sides, and roiled the waters of the Tigris.

And the gods smote the brains of the builders of the Tower of Bel with curious madness: for ere that defiance of the gods, they spake one tongue; but when the gods smote them, there arose among them confusion and fear. The host was broken into groups, and each group thereafter spake its own tongue, and these groups could not speak the one with the others. And the Tower of Bel stood for centuries unfinished and ruined.

Yet later kings finished the Tower of Bel. And Kurigalzu the father of Burna-Buriash added two stages to its height; so that now, as I stood staring up at it, it rose in seven mighty stages, its golden top reaching even unto the clouds.

The sides of the Tower of Bel were enameled with scenes of kings and of gods; with pictures of kings hunting gazelles and lions, of kings victorious over their foes and their feet upon the necks of the conquered; of kings in battle and of kings worshiping; of gods terrible to behold —the fish-headed Dagon, winged gods with bodies of lions, Ea and Istar, Anu and Samas and Bel. The colors dazzled in the light: blue, gold, purple and blood-red. And upon the top, the shrine of Bel Marduk was a flame of gold—for the sun smote upon it, and the gold seemed to radiate fire.

I bade Thersites to bring unto me the chosen eight, bearing goodly shields and swords of hard bronze, javelins, and long bows and quivers of arrows. Upon my left arm I bore my great shield: the double-circle shield of the ships I carried, that many a strong warrior cannot lift. And from a cord around my neck, I carried a white ram's-horn. All armored in shining brass, we mounted the steep way.

GUARDS OF THE FIRST STAGE, the champions of Marduk, the giants of the Amalekites, shot down long arrows and hurled down stones. But we clung to the sides of the wall, and the arrows splintered harmlessly upon the bricks; and the stones smote the steep stairway and shot off into space, and touched us not. Then we, shouting defiance to the champions of the god, went up the circling way and came to the first stage.

And Doxites the Haggian darted by us as we reached that level. An Amalekite giant seized him by an arm and a leg and hurled him spinning into space. But Thersites and I had gained the terrace, and I thrust the giant through and through while yet his mighty arms were raised. And Thersites engaged with his brave sword a second Amalekite that rushed upon us. Thersites danced lightly around him, but the giant moved slowly. So, swiftly and terribly, Thersites reached under his guard and smote him in the midribs. By this time the remaining seven Cretans had attained that terrace. And the priests that came against us with javelins and with short swords were soon cut down. And we began the climb to the second stage.

We went up boldly, hugging the wall, through flights of arrows and falling rocks that overshot us, until we stood just under the edge of the second terrace. With my back to the wall, I lifted my white ram's-horn that hung from a baldric at my side and blew a great blast upon it. And one of the god's champions, hearing the sound so near his feet, threw himself prone to see, and thrust his great head out over the edge.

Then I sprang upward and grasped the Amalekite round the neck and gave a great heave. The huge body, turned violently upon the fulcrum of the terrace edge, spun heels over head out over the stairs of the way. My men sprang aside; and the giant's body bounded down that long way, round curve and curve, to the first stage, where it struck with great force upon the bricks of the terrace and rebounded into emptiness. And the Amalekite fell like a meteor through the roof of the House of the Image-makers by that square known to the priesthood as the Place of the Gods.

Nine of us reached the terrace and smote the champions hip and thigh. They could not stand before us, and we slew them before an image of Marduk that stood within a gilded shrine. Upon the second terrace, Artaxes and Zirgon were slain; and the seven of us remaining rested, and bound up our wounds.

And the steps of the first flight of stairs numbered sixty, and those of the second flight, sixty. And between the second and the third stage, Polymedes of Labyrinth was smitten by a great stone and swept off the steep and winding way. So it was that six of us, only, reached the third stage.

Yet the three champions upon the third stage, hearing the sounds of battle below, lay upon their faces and looked down over the edge of the terrace. And Melchonides and Aspides bent their great bows, and spitted the heads of two giants with broad arrows. And the third champion retreated from the approach and stood with his back to the wall of the shrine. Behold, there we came upon him; and I slew him after a flurry of blows. But he well-nigh split my ox-hide shield. In this fight, we lost no man.

And the stairs of the third flight numbered fifty steps. And the stairs of each of the next three flights numbered forty, and of the seventh and last, thirty. So that from the base to the summit, the Ziggurat of Bel was approached by three hundred and twenty steps; and each step was nearly the length of a tall man's foot.

Upon the fourth terrace we lost Hierates the Hairy, a man of great strength who had been with me from childhood. Here also the champions held back from the edge, waiting for us by a shrine of Dagon the fish-headed god. At the fifth terrace, once again, we lost no man. But when we came to the sixth, we found our ascent opposed by three Amalekites, and the fight was long and hard. Aspides of Nesbia was here cut down, a mighty man with the bow; Hippophiles was slain; and Melchonides was sore wounded in the groin, of which wound later he died. Now, Melchonides was second only to Aspides the Nesbian in his skill with the bow, and curiously enough in our land of Crete had been a carver of wood without peer.

Now were the two of us left of the original ten: Thersites and I. And we were sore wearied by that long steep ascent, and the six battles we had had. I was wounded slightly in the shield-arm, and Thersites in the right shoulder; we were muscle-weary and sore bruised. So we stretched out close to the wall and rested.

"We have lost eight good men on our way up," said Thersites, "and we have yet to gain the tower-top. There stands the shrine of Bel Marduk, the bridal chamber, and doubtless it will be strongly held. Now, by Zeus, how can the two of us, weary and wounded, storm the seventh terrace against the champions of the gods?"

"We will take the seventh terrace," said I. "We will rescue the Queen!"

"You fight for a hope," said Thersites. "You do not know that Anksen is there."

"She is there," I insisted. "I know of a certainty that she is there."

"I would fight to the death for my favorite horse," declared my Captain. "I would ascend the seven stages of seven towers for a comrade's sake. But what woman is worth eight brave men! Let Babylon have her! Should she cost the life of Orestos, I would sheathe this blade in her white breast. Give her to Nin Nippur!"

"She is worth all Babylon; she is worth all Egypt!" I exclaimed in wrath. "Yet these warriors died not for a woman, but for an ideal."

THEN FROM THE SHRINE OF THE GOD a familiar voice joined in our chatter:

"The wisdom of Gilgames," it said, "is like unto the wisdom of Ea, who made the laws of land and sea and stars. We pursue love and beauty even to the gates of death. He who takes love and beauty from us, takes more than life: for without these gifts of the gods, how differs man from the lump of sod or the cold stone by the path? Lo, I am here—though the beauty I sought was not for me, though the love I followed was not my love. Am I not Ea-banni to this Gilgames?"

And from the shrine, forth came Anpu-kha the Thief of Thebes. His black beard was matted with blood; his brave bronze armor was dented by many blows; his great arms were bound behind his back by thick cords.

I sprang up and clutched him by his shoulders. "You—a prisoner!" I cried. "How came you upon the Tower of Bel?"

"I climbed in the night," answered Anpu-kha, "and I reached even to this the sixth stage unseen. But here one of these mighty men of war had left his javelin lying in the way; and I, coming up over the stairs unseeing, caught a boot-toe on the shaft and fell crashing.

"Lo, they were upon me before I could strike! I thought they would slay me, but they knew not who I am, and feared. So they bound my arms, and placed me in the holy place. And I waited there; for with the new day, I knew that Gilgames would come. I have been sleeping. You have fought a great fight—for your beauty and your love."

"The One God gives us another sword," said I joyously to Thersites. "We will take the seventh terrace; we will rescue the Queen. The Thief of Thebes has no peer among the warriors of Babylon. The victory is ours."

"Up!" cried Anpu-kha, when I had slit his cords and freed him. "To the seventh stage!"

And we ascended then swiftly to the top of the tower.

In my hot haste I led the twain and came upon the terrace to behold only two aged priests of Bel in white and crimson robes. We had fought our last fight! The Tower of Bel was ours!

Now I was at the golden gates of the shrine of Bel, the sacred chamber of the god's bride. And I thrust against the gates, but the gates were fast locked. And I beat upon the golden panels with my fists.

FROM WITHIN THERE CAME A GRATING, and the gates opened. An ancient priestess of the god, low bent over an ivory staff, stared out and mumbled with toothless jaws. She raised the staff as if to strike, as I advanced; but I laughed and shoved her aside and entered the holy place.

The air was dim in the chamber of the bride, and sweet with incense. For a moment I could see nothing but a stand encrusted with gems, and a chair beside it, and a golden couch. And then—against the farther wall, two small hands upon her heart, bound hand and foot in chains of gold—slender and dark and lovely beyond all words of poets known, Anksen the Queen.

"No, no!" she cried in her clear sweet voice. "I am under the ægis of Bel! I demand protection of the god! I am the Queen, Anksen of Egypt!"

I moved forward and knelt at her feet.

"I am here at last," I said hoarsely, "and you are free."

"Free?" she echoed. "Free? But—but who—"

She leaned closer, and then cried out sharply and flushed and paled.

"Lord Orestos! Lord Orestos! But you left us for Crete! You—how came you here, upon the high tower of Bel?"

"When Anpu-kha here brought us word on our galley at Thebes that you were taken by the men of Nippur," I said, "I fared with all haste to the Royal House. And the Pharaoh Haremheb gave me chariots and horses and men; and with the Thief of Thebes and Thersites of Labyrinth, my captain, and two hundred Cretans, I crossed the wide wilderness."

"All this, for me?" cried Anksen amazedly. "Oh, my dear Lord!"

"Upon the plain of Sumir, I smote the army of Narbutali. Even the might of Nippur I pierced, and came to the gates of the city. By the wisdom of this Anpu-kha, the Thief of Thebes, the gates were opened unto us. We found haven in the courts of the gods. But Narbutali has declared himself King of Babylon, and Kadash the High Priest stands with him. Therefore am I here upon the top of the Tower of Bel, to take you hence from the evils of Babylon."

"But—this is the chamber of the Bride of Bel Marduk!" gasped the Queen. "I was held here for the god. Only Nin Nippur and the King could enter this place, save for the aged priestess of Bel who serves the bride. And there are seven stages—and hundreds of steep steps—and the giant champions of the gods at every stage! And you are but three!"

"At the foot of the tower, we were ten," said I. "At the sixth stage, we were two. But there we found the Thief of Thebes bound—"

"A thief—" began Queen Anksen, and looked at him. She gave a little start and stared. "Did you say a *thief*, my lord?"

"So he calls himself," said I, laughing. "Anpu-kha, the Thief of Thebes."

And then Anksen laughed also. Like little silver bells, her laughter rang forth.

"Hail, Thief!" she cried. "What booty sought this thief upon the Tower's top?"

"The world's chief treasure," replied Anpu-kha, bowing half to earth. "But not for me—for Gilgames."

"And who," demanded the Queen, "is Gilgames?"

But her eyes turned suddenly upon me. And there was a light in them sweeter than dawn upon the Lake of Tiy.

"He who has braved all Babylon for love," said the Thief. "He who has dared even Marduk's wrath to rescue Anksen."

"This warrior calls himself the Thief of Thebes," said I. "He is wise in the wisdom of the streets and of common men's hearts. I have learned of him."

"Would Orestos Lord of Labyrinth turn thief?" cried the Queen.

"I have defied Marduk to snatch you hence," said I. "I would take you back to Crete, to grace the courts of Labyrinth."

"Why, Lord Gilgames?"

"When we talked in the Garden of Tiy, you first stole from me. If a Queen of Egypt steal, may not a Lord of Labyrinth come a-thieving too, to Marduk's tower?"

"I stole not," said the Queen. "Whatever of yours, O mad Lord, I carried thence, you gave me freely. I have been the wife of a Pharaoh; but that marriage was arranged for reasons of state. Neither he nor any mortal man could claim the Queen's soul; it is in the keeping of the gods!"

"The Queen Anksen is of divine blood," said I. "Has she not the keeping of her own soul? I am not a king; I am Lord of Labyrinth, and a man. I sue not the gods of Babylon nor the animal-headed gods of Egypt for that which the Queen herself has held steadfast all her life—for me. Yet upon the Nile, this Thief of Thebes boasted he knew Marduk's will. In Marduk's Chamber of the Bride, speak, O Thief of Thebes! What is the mandate of Bel Marduk?"

"*Bel Marduk the great Nin Nippur will give Anksen the Queen unto Gilgames when he restores to the inner shrine the talisman of King Dungi,*" declared Anpu-kha in a deep and sounding voice.

"Marduk is a god of Babylon," said the Queen, smiling. "I am not his to bestow. I was his prisoner. Gilgames has taken the Tower of Bel. The Bride of the God is the booty of Gilgames. I yield to the rights of war."

"The rights of war concern you not," said I. "From the moment I set foot within this shrine, you were queen of your own destiny. From Marduk's shrine, I now can see, I take no booty."

"I am no longer a queen," said Anksen. "I am only a woman; and I have nothing to give to Gilgames that was not already his before he set forth out of Thebes. O Lord of the Green Isles, surely you ascended this tower through blood and death to claim that which was already yours, awaiting you upon the tower-top!"

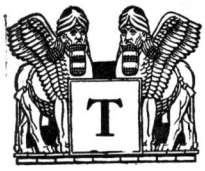
I SPRANG FORWARD. But Anpu-kha held me by the right arm.

"The Queen is yours, O Gilgames," he said; "but not until you have restored to Bel Marduk the heart of Dungi, may you take her. We have still to get her safely out of Babylon."

"I know you, Thief of Thebes," said Anksen. "Your true name is your own secret—I will not tattle. Though I know neither your purpose, nor why you play this game, I will place in your keeping the happiness of Gilgames and of Anksen. Could you not trust even Gilgames with your true name?"

"When the time is right, Gilgames shall know it," answered he. "The secret is not mine: it belongs to Babylon. Till that hour, I am Anpu-kha. But let us descend to the Temples. The hour of my own destiny is near."

Chapter Twelve



THE GOING-DOWN FROM THAT LOFTY PLACE, the top of the ziggurat of Bel, was more difficult, save for the bloody battles of the stages, than the going-up. The hierodules of Bel were dead; but there were three hundred and twenty steep steps to descend, and we wound round and round that tower, till earth and sky seemed swimming together. But the slender form of Anksen was beside me!

I looked down into her small dark face, as we went slowly down and down. "I have won that for which I came into Babylon," I said. "Surely the One God is with me!"

Anksen looked up at me. "You have won the Queen," she said.

But Anpu-kha said dryly: "Aye, you have won the Queen. You hold the temple of the god. But outside the sacred walls lies Nippur. And Narbutali is there, and his strength with him."

"A man of guile," said Anksen, as we went down and down. "I remember Tut-ankh-Ammon once said that if Babylon was an omen fulfilling through ages, Narbutali the King's brother was an evil omen fulfilled."

"Kadash the High Priest seems friendly, though fearful of Nin Nippur," said Thersites.

"Kadash!" The Thief of Thebes laughed. "If Narbutali is an evil omen, what shall we say of Kadash? He looks two ways: if Narbutali triumphs, Kadash would have Narbutali consider him a friend; if the army of Babylon wins, Kadash would have Babylon think he stood with Babylon. If Burna-Buriash is dead, Kadash will grovel before Narbutali. Should Burna-Buriash be living, Kadash the High Priest will prostrate himself before the King."

I looked uneasily into the dark eyes of Anksen.

"My arm is strong and my sword heavy," said I. "I have rescued the Queen. Surely the Queen is safe."

"Who is safe in E-Sagil?" cried Anpu-kha. "Who but Kadash knows all its secret ways? In what chamber within the walls of the gods will you cloister your queen, to keep her safe? Narbutali has proclaimed himself king. How long, think you, will he wait, to enter the courts of Bel? You have fought the giant hierodules upon the tower, and all Nippur saw. Now, Narbutali as king is lord even of the courts of the gods. And you have shed the blood of the hierodules, the temple slaves, and of priests upon the holy tower of Bel. Kadash will hide his face from you. And who among the hierarchy can you trust?"

"Beyond the walls," said I, "we fought Narbutali, and so we fought for Babylon. Babylon rages beyond the treble walls. Should I open the gates to Babylon—"

"*You* open the gates?" Anpu-kha laughed. "The gates are guarded by a thousand men."

"We have slashed through ten thousand," I said.

"Upon the plain of Sumir," said Anpu-kha. "You could maneuver upon the plain. But the ways to the gates of Nippur are narrow; your chariots are useless; your horses you cannot ride into towers of the wall. Upon foot you must fight—and the guard of Narbutali by the gates are heavy-armed—and a thousand warriors."

"Tonight, I will creep upon them. I will open the gates," I insisted.

"Let be," said the Thief of Thebes. "When the time is right, the gates shall open. What the Lord Orestos needs now is rest and sleep."

"Let Lord Orestos sleep in the hall of the Palace of Gilgames," said Thersites, "and the Queen in the inner chamber—without fear. I will stand guard."

"Who shall then watch over Thersites?" asked Anpu-kha. "Are his bones and muscles of the metal of his jacket, that he needs no rest?"

"If Gilgames is to sleep," said I, "then Thersites sleeps also. You were by my side all up the lofty tower. You and I only, lived to reach the top. Tomorrow we must go forth from Nippur. The Thief as ever counsels like a god."

We came at last to the foot of the Tower. Then we went to the Palace of Gilgames, and in an inner chamber I placed the Queen. There was a golden couch in that chamber, and a tall brazier with charcoal burning against the chill of the night.

"I am afraid," said the Queen. "The air broods. There is treachery in E-Sagil. Orestos, I am afraid."

"Thersites sleeps by me in the outer chamber, and the men of Crete close by."

"Sent I not a Hermes to you, *through these walls?*" asked Anpu-kha, leaning against the lintel of the door. "I chanced to know that way. But what secret ways these other walls may hold, only Kadash and his priesthood know. I am unwearied by battle; I will keep ward by the portal of the house, that the Queen may rest."

"When we reach the Nile," said I, "you shall voyage with me to the Green Isles. I will make you great in Labyrinth!"

Anpu-kha laughed. "I am minded to bide in Babylon," he said. "The laws of Ea are immutable. I will not turn my back upon Bel Marduk a second time. In Thebes, you knew me for a thief. How will you make a thief great in Crete? But I have been known in Babylon in other guise; and the wheel turns—immutable as the laws of Ea, the wheel turns. Have I been a thief? Have I broken bread with beggars? In the streets of Thebes are only dust and sweat. But in Babylon, I may find silk for my body, wine for my lips. I bide in Babylon."

"There is blood in Babylon—" I began.

"WISE MEN SAY THE DELUGE purged the earth," said the Thief of Thebes. "Babylon grows old. In her youth, she bathed in the flood; in her age, she bathes in blood. Of this bath shall Babylon purge herself again of war. I am minded to see Babylon at peace."

"Not with Narbutali king," said I.

"Is Narbutali king?" Anpu-kha had a little smile upon his lips. "The child plays with puppets and with toys. Does the man in truth put off childish things? Nay: a king is an older child that plays on with his puppets and his toys. Yesterday, to a king, is dead; tomorrow, to a king, will never come. Today and today and today, he will play.

"But the gods know that there will be other kings. There were kings, yesterday; there will be kings tomorrow and tomorrow through ageless time, till kings are no more. A life is the blink of a god's eye: then what, to the gods, is one day?

"Yesterday, Narbutali said, 'I am King!' Tomorrow, of which he has no thought, there shall be a King in Babylon; but his name will not be Narbutali. I think men of the age unborn shall look in vain for the name of this King Narbutali upon dried brick or boastful stone! He will not stamp his name upon one brick of Babylon in one day. The gods palsy the hands of the workers in stone; the sculptor's fingers are still; the chisel slips from them; and for Narbutali in this stoneless land there is no stone for image or for wall. But Burna-Buriash will return to his throne. Aye, and his name is stamped upon the burned bricks and written upon the palace and the temple walls as a testimony through ages unborn, to the end of time: *in this land and at this time was Burna-Buriash King of Babylon, and servant of the most high Bel Marduk, lord of destiny.*"

His voice glowed. Not one of us moved or spake.

"Go to your couches," he commanded, "you who have been Queen of Egypt, and you who count ageless Labyrinth as home. I have beheld Time shimmering upon a leaf of the Tree of Life like a drop of dew. In this jewel,

for this moment, we live. Behold, Burna-Buriash has taken the jewel from the leaf of the tree eternal. He holds the dewdrop in his palm.

"Today, Narbutali plays at kingdoms and crowns; tomorrow, Burna-Buriash will take up the play where a year gone by he left it. All this time, this brief hour, that Narbutali has been at play, his gilded dream has flashed by him in the dewdrop in Burna-Buriash's palm! If the fist close, where is the drop of dew? Tomorrow, by Bel Marduk's word, the fist shall close."

"When I clad the Thief of Thebes in garments sewn with bronze," said I, "verily I wrought a tower of brass!"

"The Thief of Thebes has spoken—perhaps for the last time," said Anpu-kha. "Lie down to pleasant dreams. I go to my watch by the portal of the house."

"There is wine in the goatskins," said Thersites. "I am dry as the dust of Thebes."

"Who has watched the wine while we were upon the tower?" demanded Anpu-kha. "He who drinks wine in the place of his foes is wise to guard the wineskins."

"We have warded the door while you were gone," said a Cretan soldier. "No man passed through."

"I drink no wine that has stood where I could not see it, in the house of my enemy," said the Thief, and went out, through the door.

But the rest of us were athirst, and we all drank deeply of the wine.

I went then boldly to the Queen and took her by her two arms and looked down into her dark eyes. "Rest and sleep without fear," I said. "Gilgames has climbed the god's tower; he has become like unto a god. He will wed a queen of Egypt, and breed sons for Labyrinth."

"The gods watch over you, my lord," whispered Anksen. "First, I wed by choice of state; I will wed Orestos by choice of my own heart."

And for the first time, no eye watching, we kissed—and so parted.

There was tempest brewing in the windy caves in that hour: we felt the coming of the storm, but were too weary to heed.

Chapter Thirteen

Nevertheless, the wine in the goatskins had been drugged. We slept all through that night and through all the next day, and awoke in the dungeons of Narbutali. But the Queen was not there, nor was the Thief of Thebes, who had refused the wine. For the priests moved through their secret ways in the walls and drugged all the wine of our camp; and E-Sagil was taken by the men of Narbutali. And we of Crete were brought bound before the self-styled king.

Here was a great court set with pillars of dried bricks, and with mighty lions carved in rock. And the floor was paved with enameled tiles and covered with rugs soft and deep and bright with many colors. At the farther end Narbutali sat upon a lofty throne carved in Egypt all of shittim-wood inlaid with ivory and with gold; and there were seven steps of ebony that led to the high throne of Nippur. And Narbutali wore the great crown, and a javelin was in his hand. His robes were heavy; his garments were of purple silk. Beside him sat the Princess Sarai, proud in the robes and crown of a queen.

And many lords and ladies of Nippur sat in the seats of the mighty. And all through that great court sounded strange flutes, stringed instruments and throbbing drums. Over all, smoke drifted; there was bitter odor of burning wood. And the bitterness of smoke was curiously mingled with the stench of wild beasts.

I looked around me. Lo, upon my left hand I saw a great furnace of brickwork. The mouth thereof was wide, and the door thereof a latticework of brazen bars. The flames in the furnace roared, and poured forth fumes that hung upon the still, hot air of the great pillared court.

And upon my right hand I beheld a great pit, walled with stone, the bottom covered with straw and littered with dry bones. As I stared, there rumbled upward out of the pit the hoarse threat of lions' roar.

I looked eagerly about me. The Thief of Thebes was not there. I saw not Anksen the Queen.

And I stood before Narbutali, Nin Nippur. My wrists were lashed together behind my back; but I stood straight before Narbutali and I bent not the knee. My belt and good Cretan blade were gone. But the armor was upon me, the plates of strong bronze, the shining coat of mail. And the heart of Dungi still hung over my heart, bright in the gloom of the court.

Upon my right the crowd stirred, parted. Soldiers of Narbutali with long javelins brought forth Anksen the Queen. She stood straight also, before the Partesi, and gave no sign. Her face was pale, but her lips were firm. Even as I, I knew, the Queen had seen the fiery furnace and the lion-pit. This was the hour. This was death.

In that hour I had but one hope: the Thief of Thebes was not there. He had promised the gates of Nippur should be open to the army of Babylon. If Anpu-kha were still free—and he had not touched the wine in E-Sagil—he would open the gates. But the flaming furnace and the yawning pit of the beasts were ready for us. Our time was brief.

The Queen and I were led into the clear space before Narbutali and Sarai, at the foot of the seven ebony steps. The Nin Nippur sat stiffly in his kingly robes and state. He stroked his black beard. Sarai, now queen, looked long at me and at the Egyptian Queen. I could see the greenish lights in her slanting eyes; cat-eyed, she watched us, and she too looked pleased.

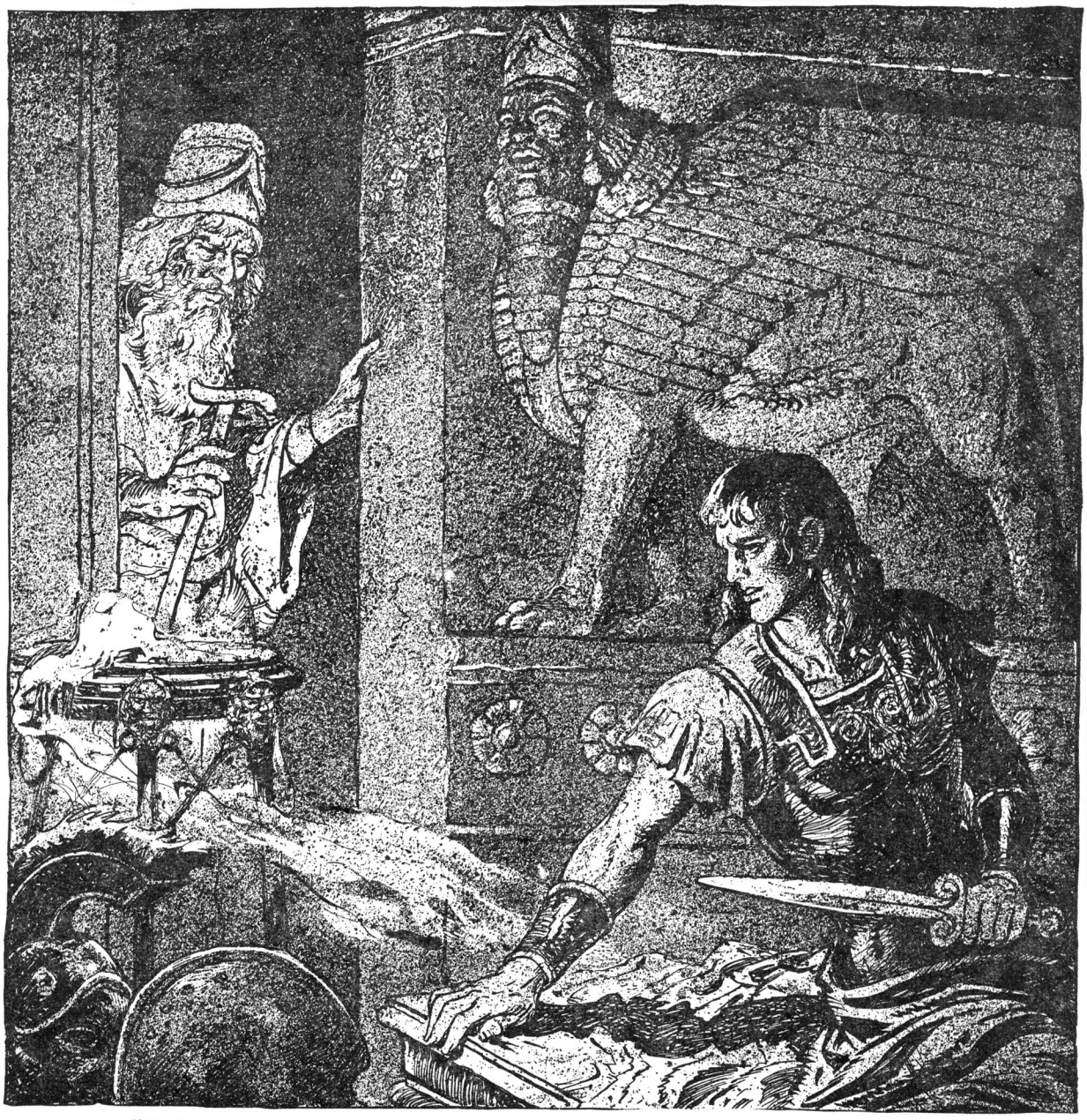
"The Lord Orestos has come into Nippur like Istar's fury," said Narbutali musingly. "I spared his life in the camp in the wilderness, for the sake of Dungi's charm upon his neck. But he smote the army of Nippur upon the Plain of Sumir. And he came into the city—by what magic we know not—and was admitted into the sacred places of the gods, even to the presence of Bel Marduk in E-Sagil. The Lord Orestos boasted that he rode hither with a thief of Thebes."

"The Thief of Thebes is an honorable man," I answered calmly, "and a warrior without peer among the followers of Narbutali. But he who has usurped his brother's seat, that man sent his troops into Egypt and stole a queen. Mayhap the Thief of Thebes has stolen baubles, though the fact has never been proved against him; but the Nin Nippur has stolen a queen and set her fettered in golden chains upon the Tower of Bel."

"The Lord Orestos has shed blood at the feet of Bel Marduk," said Narbutali, as if I had not spoken. "He has slain the slaves of the temple, the mighty Amalekite guards. He has scaled the height of the holy tower, and snatched thence the bride of the god from the golden shrine. And he seized upon E-Sagil; he held the gates and the temples and the high places. And when Narbutali proclaimed himself king, Orestos opened not the gates to the King."

"Babylon and not Nippur rules Babylonia," said I. "What does the army of Babylon at the gates of Nippur? The princes of the kingdom know not any King Narbutali. Burna-Buriash is still King of Babylon."

"The woman is fair above women," said Narbutali. "She has been removed by violence from the holy shrine. The King of Babylon has but one wife. Assuredly it would add to his prestige among nations, if he were to take to wife a one-time queen of Egypt."



"Kadash has set a guard upon you. . . . He is of two minds what to do with you."

"Would you ally yourself by violence with Egypt?" demanded Sarai. "Think well, Narbutali! It would mean war—and are we not already shut within these gates by the army of Babylon? And what of your first plan: that Egypt should blame Babylon the city for the theft of her Queen? Behold, the lions are hungry and ready; the furnace flames. Are we to chatter away the afternoon? I thought we were to have sport with the mighty Gilgames!"

Narbutali looked at his wife and then at me. Now, the agate charm of Dungi hung outside my jacket. The lights from the flaming furnace flashed upon the polished stone. But I think he had not yet noted that the talisman was still above my heart.

Narbutali said: "By the ancient laws of the land, the Lord Orestos must die. But we give him a choice: behold, upon our left, the pit of lions; upon our right, the furnace. The Nin Labyrinth is a brave man. Let him choose the lions or the flames, and show Babylon how a Minoan lord can die!"

"Nay!" cried Sarai. "You cannot touch the Nin Orestos! By the laws of the gods, which are above all laws of man, you cannot touch him."

"Why cannot I touch him?" cried Narbutali, starting up from his throne seat and glaring angrily at his queen. "Take care lest you try me too far, Sarai. Do you speak in his defense?"

"My lord the King errs," said Sarai softly. "I but remind him that the Nin Labyrinth wears the talisman of Dungi, which is one of the seven tablets of destiny, and is blessed unto Bel. Narbutali fears the gods! He cannot touch him who is shielded by the charm of Dungi."

Narbutali sank back upon the throne-seat. "You speak truth," he exclaimed. "I had not seen. . . . Yet you spoke of the sport. How shall we destroy this man who has profaned the courts and towers of the god whose charm now protects him?"

"It is simple," said his queen. "Let his sword be buckled again to his side. Let his bound hands be freed. Then cast the Egyptian woman into the lions' den. Surely, when Anksen is in the pit, with the great Gilgames free, we shall have sport! And behold—if he die, he dies by his own act. You have not profaned the fateful charm!"

"Free my hands, and I will remove the charm!" I cried. "Narbutali and Nippur war not on women! Let the

Queen of Egypt be set free and sent back to Thebes with honor! Promise me that upon your kingly word, and I will gladly die in the pit, to make sport for Nippur."

Narbutali laughed. "Let the arms of the Nin Labyrinth be freed," he ordered. "Let his sword be brought and strapped again to his side. But hold fast his arms! And when you have done this, cast the Egyptian into the lions' den—and at that moment, release the Nin Orestos!"

"Give me the sword, Narbutali!" cried Anksen. "The Lord Orestos wears the charm of the god—and this trick of the Queen of Nippur is but a subterfuge. For I say, if you follow her plan, you will bring upon you the wrath of Bel Marduk! Behold! I can wield a sword. I will make you rare sport in the lions' den—if you will free the Lord Orestos."

But the warriors of the king brought me my sword and baldric, and strapped the blade to my body again. And they cut the cords that bound me. But two men on each side held my arms, so that I was held fast in my place. But Anksen they cast into the lions' den.

And the warriors of the king released me.

Chapter Fourteen

Now the lions' pit of Nippur was shaped like half a cup with the diameter toward us. And upon the arc of the cup were three openings to the lairs of the beasts, each with rounding top and closed by a sliding gate with heavy bars of bronze. And the depth of the pit was, as I believe, about nine Egyptian cubits*. The walls were of the great Babylonian bricks, sun-dried; the floor thereof was covered with straw. And because Nippur stands upon marshy land, and the place abounds with springs, the pit was moist, and water dripped down the mossy sides.

For one instant I stood staring into the pit. The barred gates had not been rolled away; the lions were still in their lairs.

A hot little breeze stirred in the court. Behind me, I could hear the crackle of flames in the furnace. The rank odor of the beasts stung my nostrils. Near me, in a row, stood three stout warriors bearing javelins with long heavy shafts.

My sword against three Nubian lions! My sword between Anksen and death! And she, so fair, so slight, so delicate! I knew then what I should do.

With a hoarse cry, I whipped out my sword, and smote the nearest warrior to the ground with the flat of the blade, and seized his javelin. The second warrior stepped back, as if to let me by him. He was staring at the shining heart upon my breast. In my rage, I smote him with the Cretan blade through and through, and leaped upon the third one. He too dared not strike—but seeing my will, calmly reversed his javelin and handed me the shaft. The other one I snatched up from where it had fallen beside the dead soldier.

I sprang to the brink and leaped into the arena. The litter of straw broke the force of the fall. I went to my knees, but sprang up, and took my stand in front of Egypt's queen. She stood, head up and face calm, facing the beasts.

"O Orestos!" she cried. "Must you needs die too? Above, there is chance for you. My own hour is come. Do you not see that I now must behold him I love torn by the beasts before I die? There is time! Get back to the court! Get back! They dare not touch you, for the blessing of Marduk upon your breast! And Anpu-kha will come. He is a power in the land, and he will come! In Ra's name, save yourself!"

I laughed. "This is neither your hour nor mine, Queen of the world!" I said. "You shall not see me die in the pit; nor shall your soft flesh be torn by the beasts. Keep back against the wall, and watch!"

And I cast two of my three javelins upon the litter at her feet.

I heard a cry from the watching court. The gates groaned and slid open.

One huge beast bounded forth. He stood just outside his den, head raised, snuffing the air. He lifted high his muzzle and roared deeply and terribly. The other two lions still slunk within their caves.

Now the Nubian moved against me. He gave two great bounds, and crouched, his long tail quivering like a cat's. He dug his claws into the litter and braced.

I moved two paces toward him, and set the butt of the javelin hard against the ground. The head, I tipped forward. I crouched by it, taut, my eyes intent upon the beast.

And now the lion leaped. He came hurtling through the rancid air. I moved the javelin-head to meet his breast. Down upon the bronze point he dropped—and the shaft sank into his body; the weight of him impaled the huge body upon my shaft. And I, with one swift motion, slid away sidewise—and clear.

Above, the Nippur crowd was cheering. I turned and saluted with my sword.

The Nubian lay dying upon the shaft, growling and biting and tearing at the tough wood with his teeth.

A second Nubian bounded forth. Anksen cried out to me. I turned swiftly, caught up a second javelin, and finding no time in which to repeat the trick, I hurled the shaft as the beast sailed toward me in a long and terrible leap.

In my haste, I missed the shot: the point but slit his tawny hide upon the flank. I sprang aside, and the beast, landing lightly for his weight, was upon me.

He struck out with one huge paw and raked the bronze plates from my left arm—already hurt in the fight upon the tower. I will bear to my death the scars of that terrible slashing. And I went down and rolled upon the litter.

Yet, ere the beast could touch me again, I was up. Behold, his flank was toward me. I smote with my sword—the blade entered just over the left shoulder and cleft his heart.

But in his death agony the beast tore the hilt from my hand, and the third lion was upon me. Even as the creature came, Anksen flashed by me. The last javelin was in her hand. All her years of training at the lion-hunt was in her steady eyes and her sure arm.

Anksen smote the third beast in the ribs with the javelin. He turned to bite at the raging wound. At that moment I succeeded in freeing my sword, and sprang upon him. I thrust the blade to the hilt in his heaving side.

Anksen was coming toward me. There came to my dazed ears the hoarse shouting of the Nippur lords and ladies. I sheathed my blade.

"Who in a lion-hunt is like unto Anksen?" I cried to her. "You have saved me from the Nubian maw. One life-span will be time too brief to repay what in this hour I owe the Queen!"

"You are hurt," she cried. "You bleed!"

And she tore the skirt of her robe and bound up my stricken arm.

We turned, now, to the wall. And they let down a ladder of hempen cords, and Anksen mounted and I after her.

Once more we stood before the throne seats of Narbutali and Sarai. But the shouting crowds enraged the self-styled king.

"I will tear the talisman from the barbarian boaster!" he shouted. "The two shall die! I will plunge them into the fiery furnace!"

*An ancient Egyptian cubit was 20.64 inches.

He moved suddenly down the long steps, his sword shining in his hand.

I drew my bloody blade. But a hand closed upon my wrist. The voice of Kadash the High Priest whispered in my ear:

"Fear not. The man upon the throne is king by his own word only. Nippur is loyal to the true King. Sheathe your bronze."

"But he threatens us with the fire—" I began, astonished at the man's seeming friendliness.

"You are not for the furnace," he said, "for I have spoken with him whom you call the Thief of Thebes. I have warned him of your peril—and he comes with force, with power."

"What can Anpu-kha do?" I began hotly. "We are in the power of Narbutali!"

"Think you I gave you into Nin Nippur's hand to see you die?" demanded Kadash. "How long, think you, would I have lived, had I not yielded you up to the Partesi? I yielded you up only because I knew help was near. I am sorry we were not in time to save you from the pit—but you have come forth gloriously victor of that fight. I say, be calm; sheathe the bronze. You wear Dungi's heart. You have purged the holy place of this sin of stealing a barbarian woman and setting her upon the Tower as bride of the god. The Amalekites were no slaves of Bel: they were minions of Narbutali, betrayer of Nippur. Lo, the portal opens! The true king comes!"

"Burna-Buriash?" I exclaimed.

"The King of Babylon," Kadash the High Priest said.

AT THIS VERY MOMENT a trumpet rang outside the portals. The gates swung wide; and in rode proud horsemen to the merry sound of lutes.

And the rabble of Nippur poured in with them, dancing and shouting:

"The King! The King!"

Three tall riders in bronze came first, mounted upon black horses, bearing lances and great shields; and after them, riding alone, a tall gaunt figure, a man in golden mail.

From where I stood by Anksen and Kadash, I could not see the rider's face. But upon his head he wore that which made me start to see, and cry out. And Anksen too gave a little cry, and clutched my good right arm.

The tiara upon the gaunt man's head was formed of two golden asps—I had seen those asps! Two asps with heads entwined at the fore, and bearing a great flashing red stone; and all about the double circlet were set splendid pearls. I could see it, again, flashing in the hands of North, in the dim House of Heht!

"Look at the crown!" she cried to me. "I know that crown! I know it—and yet it can't be!"

"Why can't it be?" I asked her.

"The crown came from Babylon, in truth," she said, "but it is sealed in the tomb of my husband Tut-ankh-Ammon!"

"It was in the House of Death," said I, "but a thief in the pay of him who calls himself Thief of Thebes tunneled through the rock and took it thence. The last I knew, a camp-follower of Anpu-kha's had it in his keeping. Ah!" I broke off sharply. "Anpu-kha told the fellow to deliver it into his hands in Nippur, at peril of his life."

"And Anpu-kha has it again," cried Anksen. "Do you not know the rider now?"

I looked again. The man had halted his horse just opposite to where we stood. He turned his face. Seeing me staring up at him with open mouth, he laughed and waved his hand.

"Gilgames," he called, clearly, above the champ of hoofs and the lilt of flutes, "I opened the gates to Babylon!"

He whom I knew in the wilderness as North, rode forward a little way and couched his lance.

Narbutali had reached the floor-level, and stood as one turned to stone. Sarai sat motionless upon her throne

Then North spoke.

"Samas the Judge," he cried, "has beheld the deeds of Narbutali, the brother of the King. Behold, the King is not dead. He but visited in Egypt, and taking upon himself the rags of the meanest, sought wisdom in the streets and byways of Thebes. Samas shall judge the deeds of Narbutali—and of Burna-Buriash the King!

"Nippur! In your courts I cry the coming of the King, the return of him whom Istar has favored, whom Belit the great mother and Bel the god of destiny have returned to his own: *Burna-Buriash, King of Babylon!*"

And the trumpets blared, the lutes sang again.

Chanting voices sounded near:

"May Bel bless Burna-Buriash the King with mighty blessings! May Bel whose command changes not bless Burna-Buriash and make long and prosperous his reign!"

And the three horsemen pivoted their steeds, so that they faced outward from the side of the court, toward the King and toward us. And Burna-Buriash rode forward and stared at his brother.

"A little hasty, O brother," said Burna-Buriash the King. "If the beginning of your reign reveals what the years would bring to Babylon, I have saved Babylon this day from pestilence and the sword!"

Then Sarai swept down from her high place; and she and Narbutali, Nin Nippur, cast themselves face down upon the tiles and cried: "Mercy! Mercy!"

"I will give you mercy," said Burna-Buriash. "Lo, I abandoned my throne to jackals and to kites. The rod of Egypt was laid heavily upon my back. The sin is upon me, the King. The laws of the land are immutable, men say; and by these laws, you would be doomed. Yet I am King of Babylon, and Narbutali is my brother.

"Therefore will my brother and Sarai his wife travel to the city of Ur and dwell there in my palace for the period of three years. If, at the end of that time, I find that they have been loyal to the King and lived at peace under the might of Bel, I will restore Narbutali my brother to be Partesi of Nippur again, Nin Nippur. Let the two be taken hence and escorted to the city of Ur."

And he turned his horse and faced the crowd that had poured in through the gates. In a loud voice, he proclaimed:

"I am Burna-Buriash, who to his people is as the father who bore them.
I have caused the words of Marduk to be revered.
I have established peace in the land."

He sprang down from his horse and came up to me. He took me by the two arms, and cried, for all to hear:

"Orestos, whom I have named Gilgames, I will name you King of Nippur and Anksen your Queen, if you will but tarry in Babylon and help me with your wisdom to rule."

I turned and looked into the eyes of Anksen.

"What say you, Queen of Egypt?" I asked her gently.

She lifted her small head proudly.

"I have been a queen overlong," she said. "I weary of being a queen. Methinks of all the joys this earth can give, none can be so deep and lasting as to be the wife of a Lord of Labyrinth and dwell by the great Green Sea."

"Thief of Thebes," I said, "I have come to love you like a brother. Tomorrow I will gather those Cretan warriors who still live. Tomorrow I will visit with them the shrine of E-Sagil and restore the luck of Dungi according to my word. I must then with this lady who is to be my wife, and Thersites and my men, ride back to Thebes and Haremheb.

"I think the Green Isle of Crete is of all lands the fairest; and I would set Egypt's fairest gem in that bezel—for the world to see. Let a lord of Babylon rule in

Nippur. But let Burna-Buriash give unto Minos a treaty of perpetual friendship, even such a treaty as Haremheb Pharaoh of Egypt has given unto Myenides the Bronze Warrior and my King."

"I have already given you the highest title that Babylon can give," said the Thief of Thebes. "Behold, you are Gilgames!"

"What," I asked, "has the Thief of Thebes stolen in Egypt?"

"Wisdom, the King hopes," he said. "Wisdom to rule over Babylon!"

"You are wise, then, without my counsel," I answered him. "What think you, philosopher, of my wisdom that spurns a crown to behold Crete again?"

"What says the Queen?" asked Burna-Buriash.

"If you speak to me, friend," said she, "you err in the name. Behold, you who have worn rags should know wisdom when it is revealed in Nippur. My Orestos will remain a Lord of Labyrinth—on his own Green Isle. And I, who have been Queen of Egypt, say that by that choice he has proved wise beyond the sons of man. I am made great by his love. If the King of Babylon knows wisdom greater than that of Gilgames' choice, let him speak."

"I would doff my crown and go beyond the pillars of the Mid Sea, for such a woman," declared the King. "Gilgames, your wisdom is deeper than mine. The Thief of Thebes has surrendered his freedom for a cold crown and a hard throne. But you have fought to the tower's height and taken from the very hand of Bel the love of the queen of women. Aye, by Marduk's might, you shall know love—in Labyrinth!"

"In Labyrinth," I said.

"It is your Jan Eden," said the one-time Thief of Thebes, "the Garden of your Delight."

Chapter Fifteen

OW, IN THE COURSE OF TIME, I TOOK ANKSEN and the remnant of my warriors and went down out of Babylon into Egypt. And he that had been the Thief of Thebes, Burna-Buriash, King of Babylon, went with me, and the glory of his might, chariots and horsemen. And we wept unashamed by the Red Sea, when he turned back.

Anksen the Queen and I went over into Egypt, to the city of Thebes. Then the Pharaoh Haremheb frowned upon us, because I had turned my heart to Anksen the Queen; and the Queen, he set among the women of the Double House; and me, he held close prisoner in a chamber thereof. And he set his guards at the door.

My heart smote me. And I cried out in the night—had I gone over into Babylon for this? Smitten the host of Narbutali? Fought bloodily up the Tower of Bel to bring my beloved thence? Fought for her in the lions' pit in Nippur? To be stopped in Thebes; to be torn from her after winning her—in the city of the Pharaoh!

Now, the galley *Minos-Eye* had returned to Crete. Yet in this period, the galleys of war promised in the new Treaty to Crete, sailed forth. Ten of them by that pact were sailing for Knossos—and one by one they sailed. The hour came when a slave told me the last of the ten galleys of war would drop down the Nile at dawn.

And the slave said:

"You have been kind to this humble one. Now therefore, at midnight, go to the door of your chamber and open softly—for they will be unlocked; and the guards shall be sleeping, drugged by my hand, by the portal. Do you then fare softly to the Garden in the courtyard and the summerhouse there. Behold, she will be waiting, for whom you eat out your heart, my Lord! And you two may then flee forth into the night. For the ship of the Pharaoh is at the dock, and sails at dawn for Crete."

I gave to the slave ten golden rings. And at midnight I tried the door, and lo, it was unlocked. I stole forth by the sleeping guards to the Garden of the Lotus-pool. And near the summerhouse, Anksen stood, lovely in the light of the moon; and I took my lady in my arms.

But a voice I knew spake to us out of the dark summerhouse:

"What think you to do, Orestos of Crete?"

And I answered and said: "The time was, I thought the Pharaoh Haremheb was kind of heart."

THE PHARAOH ANSWERED: "You know me for a grim ruler of men, whose heart is hard. I have crushed the Prince Eye and destroyed his plotters of evil with a heavy hand. Now, behold, you, a Lord of Labyrinth, went forth into Nippur. And you scaled the lofty tower of Marduk and brought thence Tut-ankh-Ammon's queen. And falling into the hands of Narbutali, you beheld the queen cast into the lions' den. And you sprang into the pit and slew the Nubian beasts—"

"The Queen with her own hands smote down one of them," I said. "She is little, but she wielded the javelin like a Nimrod."

"*And now you would wed a Queen of Egypt!*" said the voice of Haremheb. "Are you mad, to think the Pharaoh could agree? Behold, the princes of Egypt would turn upon me, were I to give you the Queen, and rend me limb from limb. And the last ship of war that sails for Crete waits at the Royal Pier. I have heard that my disloyal slaves have put aboard her all your men, Thersites your brave captain, and the treasures of Anksen. These same disloyal slaves have spirited you forth out of the chamber where you were imprisoned—"

"It was a gentle prisonment," said I, "save for the fear that tore me, the fear of losing Anksen."

"Now I know not how I will restrain my wrath, should you and Egypt's queen steal away out of the Double House and past the hieracosphinxes down to the river and the pier! Should you dare do this thing, when your ship has sailed, I will pursue you in the royal galley and with the fleet of Egypt even to the mouth of the Nile!

"Happily for you, the royal galley, I fear, will never reach you; but I will show the terror of my wrath by the showers of arrows I will cause to be poured forth against your fleeing ship: aye, verily, the arrows of my wrath shall speed terribly into the waters of the Nile!

"And I fear I will have to report to my council that you have escaped out of Egypt, though I did what I could. Aye, I will tell them with grief that Anksen the Queen, *though I did what I could,* has fled away with the Lord Orestos to Crete!"

I began to cry out incoherent words, seeking to thank the grim-faced Pharaoh. But he said:

"I shall now doze in the summerhouse, breathing fragrance of lotus from the pool. I fear, when I awake, Orestos, whom I have loved like a son, will be gone—and with him my lovely kinswoman Anksen! Were we face to face, I would say: *Farewell, farewell—and Ra's blessing on your children!*

"As we are not face to face, and some late-roving noble may come by at any moment, I simply say: *Get out, get out before I set my dogs a-hunting you!*"

And thereat, followed by the sound of the Pharaoh Haremheb's unwonted laughter, she and I fled away out of the Garden of the Lotus-pool and forth from the Double House. Hand in hand, we raced down the paved way past the hieracosphinxes, to the pier. There, they upon the ship took us aboard. And we dropped away swiftly down the long Nile toward Crete, toward Labyrinth.

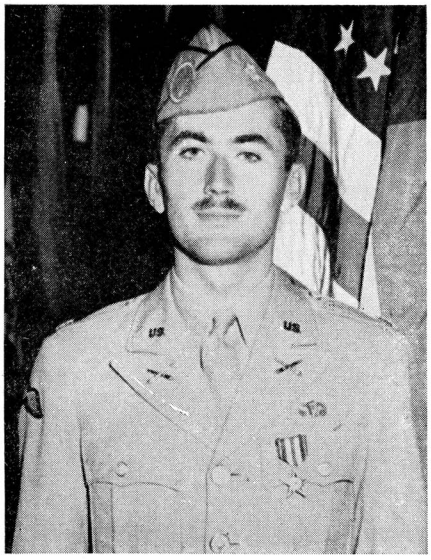
And Thersites came to us, standing in the bow.

"Behold, the royal galley pursues us!" he cried, "and shoots great flights of arrows into the stream!"

And we two lovers laughed.

And the Nile was silver in the moon.

Who's Who *in this* Issue



Major William E. Colby

BORN in St. Paul, Minn., the son of a Regular Army Colonel, William Colby grew up at various Army posts in the States and in China. He was graduated from Princeton in 1940, received his R.O.T.C. commission there, and had just finished his first year at Columbia Law School when he was called into active service. The story of his amazing O.S.S. job in Norway begins on page 34. His citation for the Silver Star follows:

"By direction of the President . . . the Silver Star is awarded to:

Major *William E. Colby* (Army Serial No. 0403761), Field Artillery, United States Army, for gallantry in action, while commanding a special unit of United States forces in Norway, from 25 March 1945 to 8 May 1945. Commanding the only troop of United States forces in Norway prior to the capitulation of the German High Command, Major *Colby* accomplished a most difficult mission with signal success. Beset with extreme weather conditions and treacherous terrain to traverse, he took many exhausting trips in grave personal danger through enemy patrols. The successful completion of his operation aided materially in the coordination of Allied actions and in the furtherance of good relations between the government of the United States and the Norwegian peoples. Major *Colby's* actions reflect great credit upon himself and the United States armed forces. Entered military service from New York."

Dan Cushman

HE began his writing career at the age of sixteen, when he became correspondent for a Great Falls daily in his home town of Big Sandy, at the edge of the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana. He took the job seriously, writing all the news with such candor that the local Lions Club took to passing resolutions against him.

Later he attended the University of Montana, and on graduation, during the dog-days of the depression, turned his hand to prospecting. This was pleasant, though not particularly remunerative. One reason for his lack of success may be learned from this story he likes to tell about himself:

"Once, when camped near French Creek down in the southwestern corner of Montana," he says, "it was my habit to climb a ridge and circle a certain outcropping while on my way to what I considered a territory with redhot geological possibilities. Now and then, winded after the long climb, I would pause and scratch a match on that outcropping, and lean against it while smoking my corncob. One morning I climbed the ridge and discovered that somebody had been up there and staked the ground along that summit; and after snooping around for the reason, I noticed the outcropping had gold sticking out all over it. A month later the fellow who located it was turning down offers from seventy-five thousand on up."

Later on Cushman turned a hand at assaying, was a geologist's assistant, announced for a couple of "peanut whistle" radio stations, became a newspaper man and writer.

Today, at thirty-five, he has a couple of small children, and keeps talking about a plan in which his typewriter, a log cabin, and one of the West's finest rainbow-trout streams all seem to play a part.

Captain Kenneth Harriman

IN 1932 I graduated from high school at the age of sixteen in the midst of that discouraging period, the Depression. Took the bull by the horns in 1938, and went West to attend Western State Teachers College, located at Macomb, Illinois. Majoring in Business Administration and minoring in Journalism and Phys. Ed., I paid my freight by doing sports publicity for Ray Hanson, Athletic Director. Beat the draft to the punch and joined the Air Corps, November 5, 1941, becoming a navigator. Went overseas in April 1943, was appointed Squadron Navigator, and checked out as a member of a lead crew for the 9th Air Force in the 322nd Bomb Group, 451st Bomb Squadron. Flew long enough to obtain the DFC with cluster, Air Medal with eight clusters, Purple Heart, Presidential unit citation and one lone battle star. It was my 52nd mission that proved disastrous. Currently live in Pearl River, New York, am happily married and have a daughter, Patricia Anne.

Dan Cushman with a chicken-hawk caught in the act.

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE for FEBRUARY, 1947

A ROGUE AND HIS LADY
by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

NEVER HUG A PYLON
by C. DONALD WIRE

SWORDSMEN OF SALADIN
by H. BEDFORD-JONES

THE DEVIL'S FIRE
by GORDON KEYNE

SEEBAD AND THE SAILOR
by RICHARD H. WATKINS