BLUE BOOK

Magazine of Adventure for MEN, by MEN ★ SEPTEMBER ★ 25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES...IX—Florida
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by RICHARD M. KELLY

Twelve short stories and many special features

THESE UNITED STATES . . . . IX — FLORIDA

"*The* Fairest, Fruitfullest *and* Pleasantest"

IT was the hurricane season in Florida, nearly four hundred years ago, as Francis Parkman tells the story. Ponce de Leon had sought his Fountain of Youth in 1513, and in 1521 had died of wounds inflicted by the Indians. Panfilo de Narvaez had landed with six hundred men near Pensacola in 1528, but after six months the Indian attacks and hunger drove them to put to sea again; and he had been drowned in a shipwreck, and only Cabeza de Vaca and three other of his men survived, after eight years, to reach the Spanish settlements in Mexico. Ferdinando de Soto had led an expedition to Florida in 1540; and in 1559 Tristan de Luna had tried to found a colony but had given it up. In 1562, the French under Jean Ribaut had landed near St. Augustine; and in 1564, another Huguenot colony had been established at the mouth of the St. Johns.

Now, in September of 1565, a Spanish expedition under Pedro Menéndez de Aviles marched overland during a hurricane, and attacked the French Huguenot settlement near St. Augustine, and executed nearly the entire garrison of Fort Caroline. For the Spaniards had suffered relatively little from the storm; whereas the French ships under Jean Ribaut, coming to the aid of Fort Caroline, were wrecked; and when the castaway crews surrendered, Menéndez had them executed also. He killed them, "not as-Frenchmen but as Lutherans," the Encyclopedia Britannica reports him to have declared—and adds the sequel:

Ribaut's friend Dominique de Gourgues, himself a Catholic, organized a punitive expedition, and with the aid of the Indians captured Fort San Mateo in 1568; and on the spot where the garrison of Fort Caroline had been executed, he hanged the Spanish prisoners, inscribing on a tablet the statement: "I do this not as unto Spaniards, but as to traitors, robbers and murderers."

So the war-torn history of early Florida went on. In 1568 St. Augustine was ravaged by Sir Francis Drake, and in 1665 attacked by Captain John Davis. The constant friction with the English colonies in the Carolinas and Georgia continued, until, by the Treaty of Paris, Florida was ceded to England by the Spanish in return for Havana. Under British rule, immigration to Florida got under way; in 1769 a party of fifteen hundred Minorcans was brought to Florida to work indigo plantations at New Smyrna; and other groups were attracted by the riches of this new land. During the war for American independence, the people of Florida were, for the most part, loyal to Great Britain; and in 1778 an expedition from Florida joined with British forces in the siege of Savannah. In 1779, however, Spain declared war against Great Britain, and a Spanish expedition from New Orleans captured Pensacola.

By the Treaty of Paris of 1783, Florida reverted to Spain; and the troubled story continues, with British troops landing at Pensacola during the War of 1812. Not until the Treaty of 1819, ratified in 1821, were the United States at last to take possession of this region first described by poor Jean Ribaut as "the fairest, fruitfullest and pleasantest of all the world."

Readers' Comment*

About War Stories

IN regard to the letter about World War II stories, I have a suggestion to make: that the writer should read and scrutinize the front page of BLUE BOOK better. *"Magazine of Adventure for men, by men."*

I don't know where he was nor how long he was in the service that he had rather forget the war; but I served three years in the Pacific in submarine duty, kinda hazardous; and I am proud of what I did and also of what others did, and want to remember; and I believe that the majority of the guys feel just as I do. I like reading of the exploits of other submariners, sailors, infantrymen and especially the OSS stories by Commander Kelly.

I lost plenty of my buddies in different services, and had some narrow ones myself; but to say that we should forget the guys that died and the experiences we went through would be egotistical and full of self-pity.

Here's hoping you will have more and just as good stories in the future. How about slipping in more stories of submarines? I'd like to know what happened to some of my buddies.

Gerald N. Merwin.

From an Eye Specialist

I WANT to compliment you upon having intelligence enough not to print the good stories of the BLUE BOOK on the highly glazed, irritating, blinding paper used by most so-called high-class magazines. The paper you use is soft, restful, and soothing to the organ of vision. When reading the BLUE BOOK one can enjoy its contents fully without having his attention diverted to his eyes.

Probably if one evaluates his literature by the amount of glare given off by the paper—well, for him that is as good a way as any.

J. J. Horton, M.D.

From a Western Clergyman

A FEW nights ago, a young man rooming in the parsonage presented me with my first issue of BLUE BOOK. I believe it to be the finest magazine of its class I have had the pleasure of reading.

I am sure that I would never have bothered to read the magazine had not my eye caught your special feature—"These United States." It was a fine piece of work and well handled.

It is my belief that the continued use of such material will not only give BLUE BOOK a fine balance but will assure it of a type of reader of which it can justly be proud.

Louis B. Gerhardt.

BLUE BOOK

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

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Return to the Valley

"DO you see it?" Joe asked me softly.

I opened my mouth, but there wasn't any sound. I swallowed hard and nodded.

I guess I was trying to convince myself that this was still the Twentieth Century, and I wasn't more than five miles from the house where I had been born, and the thing I was looking at was just a trick of some sort.

But it wasn't a trick. The long dugout canoe came straight down the center of the river; and from our vantage point on the mound at the edge of the bluff, we could look down and see three men in it. Dusk was coming on, with a faint haze, but I could see them clearly. They were dark and straight, and the two at bow and stern, who were handling the paddles, wore only loin-cloths and colored headbands. The one in the middle sat motionless, staring straight ahead. He was wearing a headdress with antlers of some sort on it, and something that looked like a bead-trimmed tunic.

They went on down the river; and then, as we watched, they seemed to disappear into the haze. I guess I just kept staring down that way until Joe's voice brought me out of it.

"I told you they'd come," he said, "but I wasn't sure you'd be able to see them."

I turned and looked at him, at this big guy, Joe Hopewell, with his straight black hair and high cheekbones and slightly slanting eyes.

"They looked like Indians," I said, thinking, as I spoke, that it was a rather stupid pronouncement.

"You're off a few thousand years, Bill," he said. "They're Mound Builders—the people who built this mound right here."

I turned back toward the river, and he went on, with his voice very low, almost pleading. "They're my people," he said. "I'm one of them, just as I've been telling you. Do you believe me now?"

I thought that over for a while, or paused so it would look as if I were thinking. I hated to admit I believed something so absolutely implausible.

"Yeah," I said finally. "I believe you—at least until I can figure out some other explanation for this."

It was almost dark. Across the valley, lights were beginning to twinkle on the distant bluffs. Down below, the river reflected the fading light, and everything seemed to blend into a calm, beautiful picture. But then a little breeze came, for just an instant, and we smelled the sickening stench that had become a part of the river in recent months—a combination of chemical refuse, rotting dead fish and decaying vegetation.

"I wonder what your friends think of the chemical plant, and what it's done to the river?" I asked Joe.

"I was wondering the same thing," he said quietly.

We stood up, brushing wisps of dried grass from our trousers, and walked down the dim little path that skirted the edge of the bluff. A big moon was rising, shining through the lacework of the trees. Somewhere, far in the distance, an owl hooted mournfully. We came to a little tar-paper shack, and Joe unlocked the door.

"Have some supper with me?" he asked.

"No, thanks," I said. "I have work to do in town."

I paused for a moment, and then I asked the question that had been troubling me ever since we left the mound.

"What are you going to do, now that you've seen these people of yours?" I said.

Joe stood there in the dark doorway. He laughed very softly. "I'm going to meet them," he said, "and you're going with me.

I almost said: "Oh, no, I'm not!" That was what I wanted to say. But then I remembered a promise I had made one night in a foxhole in Normandy after I had stopped three slugs and the Heinies seemed to want to finish the job. Joe had stood like a rock between me and Death; and I had told him, after it was over, that if ever I could help him, he had only to ask.

So I didn't protest now. I have the old-fashioned idea that a promise is a promise.

A DARING STORY THAT BRIDGES THE AEON OF TIME BETWEEN THE MOUND BUILDERS AND THE MEN OF TODAY.

by RICHARD L. GORDON

"Okay," I said, turning away from the shack. "Good night."

I did plenty of thinking as I walked along the path toward Gray's Landing. I was thinking that this was a fine situation for me to be in. I was supposed to be a solid citizen of the community. You see, I'm editor of the Gray's Landing *Times*. It's just a little country weekly newspaper, but it's pretty good, if I do say so myself. I wondered what my readers would think if they knew I was convinced that some Mound Builders had come back for a visit—and that Joe Hopewell really was a Mound Builder himself.

I went to the office and tried to write an editorial about the need for a new municipal building, but I couldn't seem to concentrate. I kept thinking about the Mound Builders and Joe. I told myself that I was too old to believe such stuff. But now that I had seen those guys in the canoe, there was no longer any question in my mind about his story.

JOE and I had met in the Army, and we went through a lot of war together. He impressed me as an unusual character right from the start. He looked almost like an Indian, and he was very quiet. He never talked about himself. Even when I got to know him well enough to ask direct questions, he gave evasive answers. Finally I decided he was trying to forget something, and I stopped being nosy.

In combat, he fought like a demon. He seemed to glory in battle, and he had no concern at all for his personal safety. He collected plenty of medals along the way, but he didn't like to wear them; nor did he like to be praised for what he did.

When the fighting was over and we were headed for the States, and discharge, I had a feeling of being lost. I guess a lot of guys felt the same way. I had been a newspaper reporter in New York before the war, but I didn't want to go back there. I didn't know what I wanted to do. One day Joe asked me where I was going after I got my discharge, and out of the blue I got an idea. I told him I was going to Gray's Landing. That was where I had been born, and I had gone through high school there, but now all my folks were either dead or had moved away. I really didn't know why I said I was going there, except

that I remembered it as a peaceful, friendly place.

We got to talking about Gray's Landing, and the river, and suddenly Joe said: "Would you mind if I went there with you?"

"No," I said. "That would be fine, but why—"

"I don't have a home," he said, "and that sounds like the place for me."

So we came to Gray's Landing. I'll never forget the day we arrived. The town was just as I had remembered it, with the comfortable white houses, and the quiet elm-shaded courthouse square, and the stone marker on the spot where Abe Lincoln once made a speech. We walked down to the edge of the bluff and looked at the river and the valley, and I thought of something Thomas Wolfe, I think, once wrote, about each man having a part of America that is all his, and as familiar to him as his mother's face.

"I guess we're home," I said to Joe.

"Yes," he said. "We're home."

The old boy who ran the *Times* was pushing seventy and pretty tired, so I made a down payment and took over. Joe built himself a shack on the edge of the bluff north of town, and made enough to live on by fishing until the chemical plant spoiled the river. Then he picked up odd jobs around town.

AT first the people of Gray's Landing seemed a bit suspicious of Joe. He went around in an undershirt and dirty khaki pants, and he never wore shoes in the summer. He was a big fellow, and when he needed a haircut—which was most of the time—he really looked fierce. But after I had dropped a few casual remarks around town about the things he had done in the war, people started to warm up to him; and after a few months everybody realized he was a pretty nice guy.

Things went along very well, and then one night during the winter, while we were sitting by the fire in his shack, drinking coffee, he told the strangest story I had ever heard.

"Bill," he said, "I want to tell you something. I don't expect you to believe it, at least right at first, but I can't carry it around by myself any longer."

I looked at him and nodded. "Fire away," I said. "I figured you'd tell me sooner or later."

"All right," he said, lighting his pipe. "I had a reason for coming to Gray's Landing with you. This country around here used to be my home too."

"When was that?" I asked.

He grinned. "You wouldn't remember," he said. "It was thousands of years ago."

I guess my thoughts showed on my face, for he hurried on. "You see," he said, "I'm a Mound Builder. I was here long before the Indians."

Naturally, I thought he was crazy, but I decided it best to humor him.

"What are you doing here now?" I asked, trying to sound serious. "Why didn't you die like all the rest?"

"A good question," he said, grinning. "The truth is, I got into a jam, and the chiefs decided I wasn't fit to go to Ma-kee-tah. That's the name my people had for heaven."

Illustrated by Frederick Chapman

"I told you they'd come," Joe said, "but I wasn't sure you'd be able to see them."

"What sort of jam did you get into?"

He sighed. "There was a girl," he said. "She was from another clan, and—well, you might say we eloped. It would have been all right if we'd gone according to regulations, but we thought that was a lot of bunk. So we just took off. One thing led to another, and finally our clans got into a war, although both of them usually were very peaceful. They almost killed each other off; and afterward those who were left got to thinking how foolish the whole thing had been. They also got to thinking that if it hadn't been for me, it never would have happened. So they decided I should never be admitted to heaven."

"What happened to the girl?" I asked, thinking all the time that this was pretty silly, and I'd better get Joe to a doctor.

His face clouded, and he was silent for a moment. "They killed her—as a sacrifice," he said. "That was part of the penalty. They sent her to Ma-kee-tah, and then fixed it so I could never be with her."

Loony as a cuckoo, I decided, feeling awfully sorry for him.

"What have you been doing since the Mound Builders died off?" I asked, trying to sound very casual and conversational.

"Wandering around," he said. "I've been all over the world. It's been a long time."

"Yes, I imagine it has," I said dryly.

"I've been trying to do things that would get me into Ma-kee-tah, but it's never worked," he said. "I thought that time in Normandy I'd get there, but evidently it didn't satisfy the old boys. At least I didn't die. You see, I have the idea that if I can die in some really worth-while cause, they'll forgive me."

"I see," I said, though I didn't see at all. "But what good do you think coming back here will do?"

"I don't know for sure," he said, "but I thought maybe my people might return here once in a while to look things over. If they do, I'll try to talk to them and get an idea of what they want me to do."

"Oh," I said. I couldn't think of anything else.

After that conversation, I almost tried to have Joe put in a veterans' hospital. But I thought it over and decided not to. Somehow it seemed that would be a dirty trick; and as long as he didn't harm anybody, there was no real need to do anything. But I didn't humor him any more about the story. Instead, I told him flatly I didn't believe it, and tried to argue him out of it. He never backed down, though; he insisted it was true.

AFTER a while we didn't talk any more about it. There were other things to do. Spring was coming on, and we went fishing a lot—that is, until the new chemical plant up the river started operating. It dumped a lot of waste into the river, and the fish died almost overnight.

I wrote editorials about the plant, and the fishermen of the town had a mass meeting, but it seemed nothing could be done about it. L. B. Hendricks, the fellow who owned the plant, had powerful connections in the State capital, and though he was really violating the stream-pollution law, nobody did anything to stop him.

One day, after I let loose a good front-page blast against him, Hendricks strode into the office with mayhem in his eye. Joe happened to be there at the time; we had been griping to each other about what had happened to our favorite fishing-holes.

Hendricks was a pompous sort of character, with a pot belly and a round, florid face. He started right out by demanding that I retract everything I had said about him and his plant.

"Why?" I asked. "It was the truth."

"As an editor, you should be interested in getting new industries here," he countered. "You're simply biting the hand that feeds you."

"That doesn't ring true," I said. "Ninety per cent of the men working at your plant were brought in from outside because the local fellows wouldn't work for what you pay. These people you've brought in have caused nothing but trouble. We've had more brawls and cutting scrapes since the plant opened than we ever had before."

His face became even redder.

"You're nothing but scum!" he shouted. "Just a dirty river-rat—that's what you are. When I'm through with you, you'll wish you'd never been born!"

I was on my feet and headed for him, but Joe got there first.

Joe got his big hands around Hendricks' throat and took him down to the floor. Then he looked up at me.

"Do you want me to kill him?"

Joe spoke very calmly, as if he were asking me if I'd like to go out for a beer.

"No!" I yelled. "Are you nuts?"

Joe looked disappointed, but he released Hendricks and stood up. Hendricks didn't waste any time getting out of the office. He ran as if something—Joe, for instance—were chasing him. He didn't bother me any more after that, either, but his plant kept on dumping waste into the river.

Summer arrived, and the river stench grew worse. And then came the afternoon in July when Joe insisted that I go up to the mound with him.

"I saw them—my people," he said. "Maybe they'll come again at dusk tonight."

And sure enough, they did, just as I have told you. . . .

I didn't have much peace of mind after that, because I kept thinking that sometime soon Joe was going to call on me to go with him and meet these guys from thousands of years ago. I didn't like the idea at all.

Then, after several weeks, just as I was beginning to concentrate on my work again, something happened to make me think about Mound Builders all the more. Some professors came to Gray's Landing from the State University and announced they were going to open up the mound to see what was in it. At first I was tempted to blast them in the *Times* for messing up the landscape, but then I decided it was all in the interest of science, and anyhow, maybe they wouldn't find anything in the mound.

I was wrong there. They found plenty. One bright morning I went out to the diggings to get a story for the paper. There was a little bespectacled guy named Dr. Blankenship in charge, and he was all excited.

"It's wonderful!" he said. "Human remains, household utensils, religious

"Do you want me to kill him?"

articles. This is an important burial mound."

I looked down into the hole, where men were carefully scooping dirt away from human skeletons.

"How many people buried here?" I asked.

"Fifteen," he said. "Notice how they are arranged in a circle, with the heads all toward the center. That thing in the middle evidently was a sacrificial altar."

I wondered what he would say if I told him about Joe. Probably he'd think I was the local half-wit.

"Are they Indians or Mound Builders?" I asked, hoping he'd say Indians.

"Oh, they're undoubtedly Mound Builders," he said. "The Indians of this section didn't build mounds. This

Have you ever tried to sock a ghost? It's a very peculiar feeling. . . . Joe was laughing as if the whole thing were terrifically funny.

is a perfect example of the Hopewell culture."

"Hopewell?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"That's the archeological name for the culture of this particular period and group," he explained.

"I see," I said, pretending to take notes.

After that, I went to see Joe.

"How'd you get that name, Hopewell?" I asked.

Joe grinned. "You've been talking to those professors," he said. "Well, I took the name Hopewell a few years ago when I found out that was the name the scientists had tagged onto my people. It's a nice name, isn't it?"

"Nuts," I said.

JULY was done, and August too. The glare of the bright, hot days mellowed, and there was a promise of autumn in the air. The nights became a little chilly, and it was easy to tell that winter was somewhere to the north. But there was still Indian summer, with the haze at dusk, and the smell of wood-smoke in the air. I was glad I was at Gray's Landing, and not in a city somewhere.

Then one afternoon Joe came to the *Times* office.

"You going to be busy tonight?" he asked casually.

I knew what was coming, and tried to think of some reason why I would be busy. But there was that promise I had given.

"No, I'm not going to be busy," I said. "Why?"

"I think we can visit my people tonight," he said.

"Why do you want me along?"

"For moral support, old buddy," he said, grinning. "They may not be too glad to see me."

"A lot of help I'll be," I said. "Where are we going to meet these guys?"

"We'll take my boat and go up the river," he said. "I think we'll find 'em. I feel it in my bones."

"Please don't mention bones," I said. "It makes me think of those skeletons in the mound."

I didn't feel like working any more, so I went on up to the shack with Joe. We loafed around for the rest of the afternoon and built a fire outside the shack as the sun went out of sight behind the western bluffs. As we were sitting beside the fire eating supper, old Pop Walters came up the path. He was night watchman at the chemical plant.

"Hi, Pop," I said. "How are things up at the plant?"

He spat, and gave me a melancholy look.

"Things're all right," he said.

"You don't sound very happy."

He pointed down toward the river.

"Ever' time I think what that damn' plant's done to the river, it makes me sick to my stummick," he said. "I get a day off, and I can't even go fishin' any more."

"Well, why do you work for Hendricks?" I asked.

"Because I got to eat," he said, starting up the path again.

After he left, Joe and I sat there smoking our pipes in silence. I was a little nervous, and after a while I asked Joe when we were going up the river.

"We'll wait till it's good and dark," he said. "I think they'd like it better that way."

I looked at the fire and tried to convince myself that this was all a dream, and I'd wake up pretty soon. But of course that didn't do a bit of good.

"Look," I said, "why do you want to go back with these Mound Builders? Don't you like things as they are nowadays?"

He didn't answer for a while, but finally he said:

"Things were pretty good back in my own time. There were no poor guys like Pop, for instance, who were forced to do a job they hated just to make a living. And people knew what honor meant then, too. There wasn't as much stabbing in the back as there is now. I know I'd feel better, being with my own people."

I didn't argue with him, because I knew how he felt. He was lonely, and loneliness can be a terrible thing.

WELL, we went upriver after dark —and I mean *dark*. Joe rowed, and I sat in the stern of the skiff, holding my nose in an effort to keep from smelling the chemicals and dead fish in

the river. I strained my eyes to see something in the darkness—hoping all the time that there would be nothing to see. I'm not ashamed to admit that I was scared. After a while we knew we were below the mound because, high up, there was the light at the diggings. The professors kept a guard there all the time so nobody would molest the bones and pottery and other stuff they were studying.

Suddenly Joe stopped rowing and seemed to be listening. I listened too, and shivers chased one another up and down my spine when I heard a slow, measured *splash—splash—splash,* like somebody paddling a canoe.

Then it came out of the gloom, straight toward us. It was the long dugout canoe we had seen before—or at least it looked the same. The night was cool, but I was sweating as if it were the Fourth of July. My mouth seemed to be filled with cotton, and I kept pinching my knee to make sure I was awake.

Then Joe shipped the oars and stood up. He turned to face the ghostly canoe and said something I couldn't understand, and the guys in the canoe stopped paddling. They drifted close to us, and the one in the middle stood up. I kept hoping he'd lose his balance and fall into the river. I didn't think I could stand much more of this.

Joe said something else, and the fellow in the canoe said something, and then the canoe turned and headed back up the river, and we followed.

"What's up?" I whispered.

"So far, so good," Joe panted, straining at the oars. "That fellow in the canoe is Ke-la. He said to follow them. The council has a camp up the river."

"Oh, brother!" I breathed. "Why did I ever get into this?"

After a while we followed the canoe in under the willows and stepped ashore. We followed the three Mound Builders along a little path through the woods, and pretty soon we could see a light through the trees.

Then we stepped out into a clearing, and the guy from the canoe motioned us to stop. Some other Mound Builders were sitting around a fire, but they didn't pay any attention to us. The one from the canoe stepped forward and walked toward them. I almost yelled out loud when he walked right through a small tree. Joe must have heard me gasp, for he whispered:

"That's the advantage of being a ghost. No detours."

"I'd rather detour," I said.

There was a mutter of conversation at the fire, and the men there all stood up and faced us. Then the one who had brought us motioned for us and the other two from the canoe to come forward.

One man in the group at the fire stood out from all the rest. He was taller than the others, and on his head was an elaborate shell-trimmed headdress. A tan woven garment, with flecks of mica on it, covered him from neck to knees, and on his chest, supported by a thong around his neck, was a gleaming copper plate. It was easy to see he was a big-shot.

Then something happened that I could hardly believe—even though I thought I had reached the point where I would believe anything. Joe walked up to this chief and dropped to his knees. Then he put his forehead right down on the ground, at the feet of the chief.

The chief said something, and Joe stood up and backed away to stand beside me.

"A fine thing," I whispered. "What is that guy, a first sergeant?"

"He's the chief of my clan," Joe whispered. "He's also my uncle."

We all sat down, and I took a good look around. There were fifteen of the Mound Builders, including those from the canoe. The boys had their weapons along—flint-tipped spears, and stone axes, and also some mean-looking copper axes. They were looking at us now, and I wished I was in a nice safe foxhole.

THEN the palaver started, and it seemed they were all questioning Joe, and he was answering them. One fellow, a wiry, tough-looking guy, seemed to do a lot of talking.

"That's Ko-log," Joe explained to me. "He doesn't like me."

After a while there was a pause in the discussion, and I whispered to Joe:

"How about finding out why I can see these fellows if they're ghosts. Am I a Mound Builder too?"

He spoke to the chief, and the chief looked at me for a long time. Then the chief spoke, and after he finished, Joe turned to me.

"He says you can see them because you came back to the valley where you were born. He says you love the valley and the river as much as they do, and that makes you a brother."

I thought that over and decided it made sense, in a crazy sort of way. I do love that valley. I'll never leave it again.

The men around the fire were talking among themselves now, and those near the chief were leaning toward him and telling something.

"Most of them are in favor of giving me a chance to get into Ma-kee-tah," Joe said in a low voice. "But Ko-log is arguing against it. He isn't the forgiving type."

Just then Ko-log jumped to his feet. He yelled a lot of stuff that I couldn't understand, and pointed an accusing finger at Joe—like the prosecuting attorney in a Class B movie.

And then, just when I was getting to enjoy the scene, he grabbed a stone ax and lunged toward Joe. He took everybody by surprise, but for once in my life I moved fast. I jumped up and aimed a haymaker at his jaw, expecting to feel the ax splitting my cranium the next instant.

Have you ever tried to sock a ghost? It's a very peculiar feeling. I almost threw myself into the next county with that swing, because there wasn't anything to stop my fist once it got started. I hit Ko-log's chin all right, but there wasn't any chin there. He hit me with the ax, too, but there was no substance to the ax, and I didn't even get a scratch.

I landed on my hands and knees almost in the fire, and Ko-log made another lunge toward Joe, who was laughing as if the whole thing were terrifically funny. Ko-log took a swipe with the ax, and I yelled as it seemed to pass through Joe's neck, but Joe just laughed all the louder.

"He can't hurt us," Joe said. "He's strictly a lightweight. In fact, he's no weight at all."

The Mound Builders seemed a bit dazed by all this, but I saw a little grin orming on the face of the chief. Then he became very stern and started talking to Ko-log, and it was plain to see that Ko-log was getting a bawling-out for disrupting the proceedings.

So Ko-log sat down, looking rather sheepish, and the chief stood up. The chief pointed at Joe, and at the ground, and at the sky. He made a long speech, and he ended by taking off the copper breastplate he wore and putting the thong over Joe's head, so that the plate covered Joe's chest.

Then everybody stood up, and the party was over.

"Let's go," Joe said.

We didn't talk until we were in the boat, and then I asked Joe what had happened.

"Well," he said, "they decided to give me a fighting chance. Ko-log was against it, but that ax trick he tried to pull worked to my advantage. The chief said that if I had a friend like you, who'd risk his life for me, then I must amount to something."

I guess I blushed in the darkness. I'm no special hero.

"What's the copper breastplate for?" I asked.

"For good luck," Joe said. "I think the chief is on my side."

We landed below Joe's shack and climbed the bluff. Inside the shack, he lighted a lamp, and as he turned toward me, I gasped.

"Where's that plate?" I asked. "Did you take it off?"

"I still have it on," he said, "only it's sort of a ghost breastplate. You can see it only when conditions are right."

I lighted my pipe. "Okay," I said, "I believe anything, now. But a lot of luck it'll bring you, if it's invisible.

Now just what is your plan to get into the Happy Hunting-ground?"

"Well," he said, "the council isn't exactly satisfied with the conditions around here. They think the white man has loused up the deal something terrific. In fact, they implied that they wouldn't frown at all on a little polite revenge. At any rate, I have to do something really worth-while. If it meets with their approval, then I get a one-way ticket to Ma-kee-tah."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," he said thoughtfully. "It's quite a problem."

"Well, I'm glad it isn't up to me," I said. "I'm going home and have a nightmare."

EARLY the next Sunday morning I was sleeping soundly after a Saturday evening of tavern-inspection with Joe when the landlady pounded on my door.

"Bill," she yelled. "Telephone for you!"

I crawled out of bed with a bad taste in my mouth, and finally got to the telephone in the hall downstairs.

It was Jim Browning, the town marshal.

"Good morning!" he said. "You want an item for the paper?"

"No!" I said. "Not on Sunday morning."

"Not even if the chemical plant's on fire?"

"Chemical plant?"

"Yep. Fire department just went out. Probably won't do no good, though—no city water out there."

I jumped into my clothes and then into my 1938 coupé, and I was in sight of the plant within ten minutes. As I rattled up the road, watching the flames and smoke billowing out of the plant, the whole thing seemed to come apart at the seams and spread out over the landscape. The firemen and spectators scattered back, shielding their faces against the heat, and I stopped the car and ran the rest of the way.

It was a good thing it was Sunday. Nobody had been working in the plant. Pop Walters was sitting on the running-board of the fire-truck. His eyebrows were singed and his face was sooty. He seemed dazed.

"What happened, Pop?" I asked, sitting down beside him.

His watery old eyes became more watery, and he leaned close to me. "Your friend, that Joe fellow," he said, "I reckon he set 'er off."

"Joe!" I said. "Did he get out?"

Pop patted my sleeve. "I reckon not," he said. "Last I seen him, he was running right into the worst of it, hollerin' and whoopin' like a wild man."

I looked at the plant. It looked like a rubbish fire. I guess I cried a little, though I didn't know why, because I figured Joe had known what he was doing. Still, he had been my good friend for a long time.

"Are you sure he started it?" I asked Pop in a low voice.

He nodded. "He told me so hisself. I was back in the laboratory when I smelled smoke. It looked like I was trapped, and I started yellin', though I didn't know anybody was around. Just then Joe busts in and grabs me. 'I didn't know you was here when I started it,' he says. Then he tells me to hold my breath, and drags me through the smoke and flames and out into the open. As soon as I'm outside, he goes back in." Pop sighed. "He was a queer fellow, that Joe."

Just then a car slammed to a stop, and Hendricks jumped out. He ran up to Pop and started accusing him of letting the place burn down on purpose.

"I'm ruined!" he yelled. "I—I ought to kill you!"

He never gave Pop a chance to talk. He cursed him and called him vile names, and finally I jumped up and grabbed Hendricks by the shoulders. Then I shoved, and he landed sitting down in the dust.

"You're not talking to Pop like that any more," I said. "You aren't his boss any longer. And you can take your out-of-town riffraff back where they came from. We don't want you and your kind around Gray's Landing, and if you try to rebuild this plant, you'll find out what I mean."

Then I turned to Pop. "I need a janitor at the *Times*," I lied. "It won't pay much, but there'll be plenty of time off for fishing, if you want it."

Pop grinned. "I'll take that job," he said. "Looks like there might be some fish in the river again."

On the way back to town I stopped at Joe's shack. The door was unlocked, and on the table was a note. *"Dear Bill,"* it said. *"This place is yours, and so is my boat. Thanks for everything."*

A FEW days later I heard that the men from the University were about finished with research at the mound, so I went up again to see if I could get a story. I talked to Dr. Blankenship for awhile, and then I looked down into the pit.

"Say," I said to him, "how many skeletons did you say were here?"

"Fifteen," he said. "Why?"

"Count again," I said. "There are sixteen. Maybe you overlooked that one over there with the copper breastplate on it."

"'I didn't know you was here when I started it,' he says."

THE RACKETS WERE FORMING UP AGAIN IN THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD; AND AN UGLY MURDER TESTS LITTLE GOONEY'S ABILITY AS A REAL NEWSPAPER MAN.

Two Hundred

SINCE young Arthur Traudt had proved such a success as a reporter on the *Clarion,* almost no one called him by his old nickname Little Gooney any more. But the affectionate diminutive clung to him; and in people's minds he was still the industrious, earnest little biscuit-face who had lifted himself by his bootstraps into an important part of the life of the Old Neighborhood. They did not call him Little Gooney, but they thought of him that way; and they liked him and, what is more, trusted him.

John Lamont, who ran the big package store after Repeal, was a retired gentleman of the rackets and a great friend of Gooney. John was a white-haired man of late middle age, a great raconteur and a very generous soul. He told wondrous tales of the bad old days, and sometimes Gooney got a feature squib from them. Even Officer Murphy, the neighborhood cop, liked John, and often dropped in to tell of the other side of the Prohibition picture.

John lived upstairs over the liquor store, in an apartment he had made over from a railroad flat, and with him lived his brother Pack and his ward Arden Moresco, a pretty blonde girl. Pack was much younger than John, and had always been a sort of shadow to his vigorous brother; Arden was the daughter of the late Bo Moresco, a veritable king of racketeers. "Benny the Leg" Moran, a lame character, was the errand boy; they all lived pretty comfortably, although Benny was not a member of the household, and not a sweet, loving lad, anyway.

In fact, there were those who said that Benny the Leg had been a very bad guy in the old days, and had packed a big rod, with which he eliminated enemies of John Lamont. But looking at the ruddy, smiling, easy-going John, it was hard for Gooney to believe those tales.

Gretchen Humperknickel, who was waiting only to buy the house on Taylor Street and acquire some furniture before marrying Gooney, sometimes sniffed at Gooney's habit of dropping into Lamont's shop. She said one night: "Honest, Arthur, that Arden is all right, but she *is* dumb. And there is something about it—her father was notorious. I hope you are not the kind who flirts, Arthur; but that girl—"

Gooney laughed. "Who'd flirt with me? Everyone knows about you and me, Gretchen dear. Why don't we buy that furniture on the installment plan and get married? Then I won't have time to hang around any place!"

"No weekly payments," she said firmly. They were cleaning up the delicatessen owned by her father Herman, who was arthritic. "You run along now, and stay out of trouble."

Gooney said: "I don't have any troubles except with you!" He kissed her and went down the street, and there was a light in Lamont's, so of course he went in.

John said: "Hiya, Arthur? I was just tellin' Murphy about the time I was stuck with a bagful of cash. I can't mention no names, but it was a big bundle; the law was after us, and there I was, stuck with the green stuff. It was not mine, you see, and—"

Jingle came into the store, and he broke off. Jingle was Murphy's hair shirt, a no guy, a wrong tomato who never would learn about the neighborhood, and indeed would never try. He was all cop, and in our neighborhood that was a fearful and awful thing.

Murphy, a lean man with a sharp nose and shoulders like a wrestler, said: "Well, guess we better quit. Thanks for the Scotch, John. I'll be seein' you." His eyes went to Arden Moresco; and Gooney, who never missed anything, checked the glance. He had noticed that before. Arden was a girl of curves and color. Murphy, a confirmed bachelor, had never looked at another girl, but with Arden he seemed at ease. He smiled at her and said: "How about a picture tomorrow afternoon, honey?"

"Well—I don't think I can," said Arden. But she smiled. She had teeth like a tooth-paste ad. Her eyes were gray and deep-set. Her mother had been German and Bo Moresco was

Grand

"A strange thing, lad. In the chest and in the groin. The hard way to kill oneself, sonny."

by JOEL REEVE

Spanish, and the result was interesting, Gooney thought—but not to Gooney.

Murphy colored and said: "Oh—that's all right. Good night." Jingle was grinning, and Murphy's back was very stiff as he left.

Pack Lamont came downstairs and said: "How about closin', John?" Pack was thin and dark, very unlike his brother. He said: "I'll handle it. You go ahead upstairs and take it easy."

John said: "Tryin' to spoil me in my old age, Pack?" He laughed and said to Gooney: "I'll tell you about the swag some day. But my tongue runs off, and mebbe I shouldn't of started that story. Might hurt someone." He winked and went through a door behind the counter, and up the stairs.

Pack nodded at Gooney. "John ain't feelin' too well. Ticker, I guess. He always had that trouble."

"He looks fine to me," said Gooney in surprise.

Arden turned out the front lights. She said: "He isn't exactly sick, you know. Just—well, strange, maybe. I'm worried over him. He's so sweet."

Gooney said: "Oh, John's okay. He's healthier than I am." He waved good night and went out the door and home to his boarding-house. He had a nice big room, with breakfast and any other meal he wanted; but he mostly ate at the delicatessen and wished he was eating in his own home. But right now, those were dreams. . . .

He was dreaming when the phone he had installed at his bedside jangled him to wakefulness. It was Fletcher, the editor, who seemed never to sleep. The *Clarion* was a morning sheet, but Fletcher was always there. He snapped: "Gooney, get down to Lamont's store. John just shot himself."

Shock dazed Gooney into dead silence, and Fletcher's voice insisted: "Come on, snap into it, kid. You know the people. You can do something—and I'll want a rehash of his career. The gangs are forming again. John was old-time gangs. We'll tie it up."

Gooney said, "Okay. . . . Okay. . . . It's just—well, I liked John."

"You like everybody," gibed Fletcher. "I want a story, never mind whether you like it or not. Get that?"

"Okay," mumbled Gooney. He was young enough to be saddened, drawing on his clothing. The shock lingered. . . . He looked at his watch. He had seen John about midnight, it was only two o'clock now. Sudden death was a thing to which a reporter should grow accustomed, he thought wearily.

MURPHY was there, his lips compressed, his face bleak. Jingle was poking around, suspicious of everything and everybody, with or without cause. Arden was weeping in her room on the third floor. Pack was white, and seemed sick. They had brought in Benny the Leg, a short, saturnine man with an apelike face and one thick shoe, and his limping step was a requiem to the kindly dead man.

Pack said: "I didn't know he was that sick. We were just talkin' about it, weren't we, Gooney?"

Gooney nodded, and went up to view the body. Murphy stood over the fallen, stout form. John's hair was disarranged, and Gooney felt an impulse to comb it back. John's face looked as though he had suffered.

Murphy said: "A strange thing, lad. In the chest and in the groin. The hard way to kill oneself, sonny."

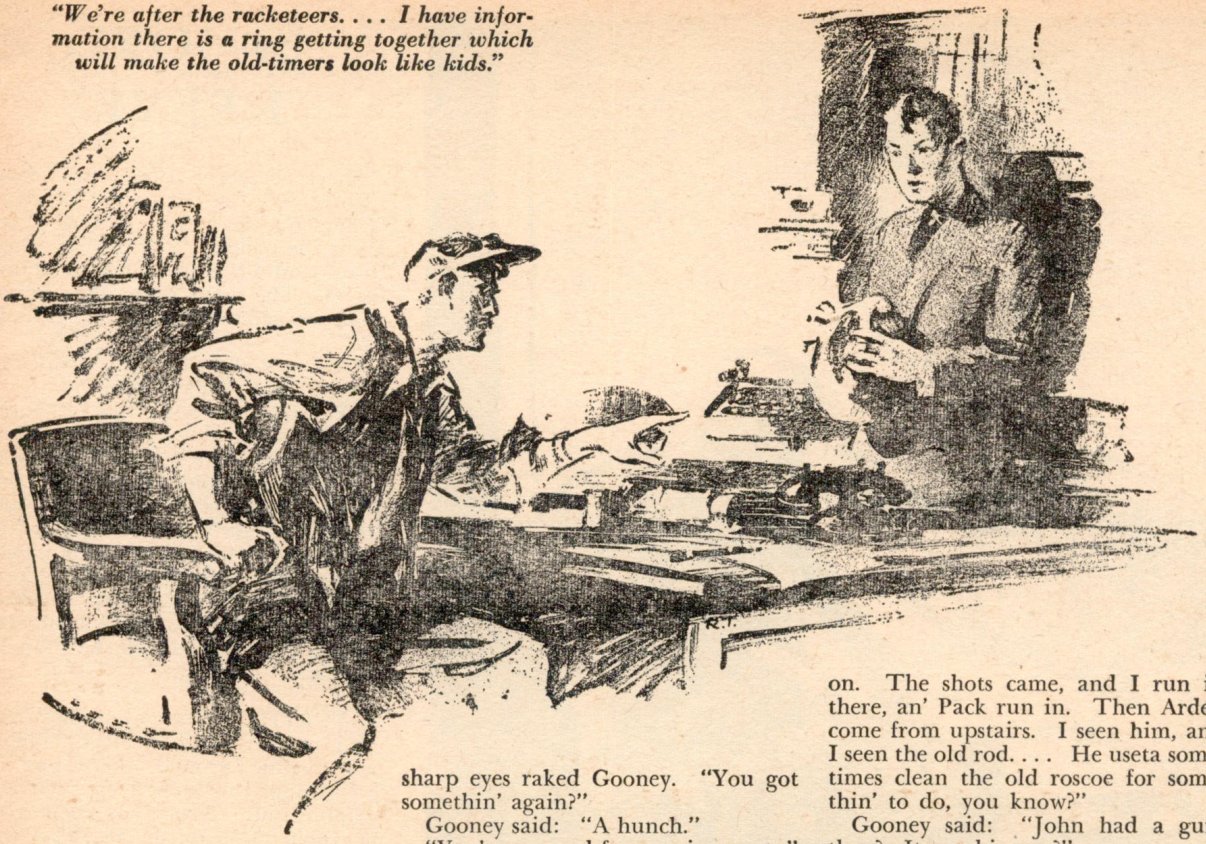
Gooney said: "You gave him the paraffin test?" His face was tight, angry, now that he had seen his dead friend.

"They been here—Homicide, the M.E.'s man. There's powder stains on John's hands, all right. The groin shot must've been a reflex—after he tried to pump one into his heart. I know what you're thinkin', Gooney. John didn't seem the type. But you never know, son—you never know."

Gooney said: "Murphy, he wouldn't have done it. . . . I got a reason. It's screwy, but somehow I just don't believe it."

"A reason?" Murphy's eyes were sharp. He said: "No, no, Gooney. It won't do. It was like this: Arden and Pack were on the third floor,

"We're after the racketeers. . . . I have information there is a ring getting together which will make the old-timers look like kids."



playin' some new records on the phonograph. Benny the Leg was in the kitchen, makin' some coffee and readin' the paper. They heard the shots, and they all ran. I checked it—nobody could have got into the flat through the kitchen on account of Benny—or up the stairs, because the store was padlocked tight."

Gooney said: "Just Benny, Pack—and Arden."

"It's no good, I tell you," said Murphy. "John killed himself."

There was no use talking. Gooney did what he had to do. He got a picture; he remembered John's stories. He wrote a couple of them. He sat at the typewriter in the *Clarion* office and worked hard until four. He ended the story: "And just before John Lamont died, he laughingly told this reporter that there was one other gargantuan tale, involving a suitcase full of greenbacks, a chase with the cops, and a great pay-off at the end. But John Lamont never got to finish this yarn. He died."

Fletcher read swiftly, blue pencil poised. For once he did not slash paragraphs to the floor. When he had finished, he peered gnomelike through his green visor and said: "You never once mentioned that John killed himself."

"You wrote the news story," said Gooney. "You said it."

"Dammit, don't quibble with me!" Fletcher tilted the shade back, and his sharp eyes raked Gooney. "You got somethin' again?"

Gooney said: "A hunch."

"You're excused from assignments," said Fletcher abruptly. "Go ahead. We're after the racketeers who are forming up. I have information that there is a ring getting together which will make the old-timers look like kids. Get on this and stay on it. Keep it quiet and report here as you go. Okay?"

"Yeah," said Little Gooney. His round face was solemn, his brown eyes reflective. "I like it. Thank you, Fletcher." He went home and slept.

THE next day the store was closed, but Gooney tapped on the door, and Benny the Leg let him in. Benny had peculiar eyes—they slanted off over Gooney's shoulder and never seemed to be looking at him. There was a bottle opened on the counter, good bourbon, and Benny was drinking out of a paper cup.

Gooney said: "He was your friend too, Benny. You want to tell me about it—off the record?"

Benny said: "Off the record?" He seemed about to get angry. Then he shifted his eyes to the floor. He mumbled: "You was his pal, all right. You was one of his pals. . . . Yeah. . . . Well, I was inna kitchen, see? John always looked at his books—he kept books." It seemed a thing to contemplate, as though John were not quite right in the head. "At night he looked at the books. An' listened to the late newscast, you know, that Wheeler wheel. He hadda program on. The shots came, and I run in there, an' Pack run in. Then Arden come from upstairs. I seen him, and I seen the old rod. . . . He useta sometimes clean the old roscoe for somethin' to do, you know?"

Gooney said: "John had a gun, then? It was his gun?"

"Nacher'ly it was his gun," said Benny the Leg.

Gooney said: "He didn't leave a note, then? Or say anything?"

"He had this look on his face," said Benny the Leg. "It was awful. I seen guys look like that inna old days. But John—I didn't like it."

Gooney said: "You were reading the paper, the radio was on. You wouldn't have heard if anyone came into the room where John was?"

Benny said: "John was my pal, see? I been through a lot with John."

The door behind the counter opened. Pack came in and looked at Benny, then at the bottle. He said mildly: "What's this, a wake? A wake without a corpse, huh? They're cuttin' poor John up for the autopsy."

"Cops!" said Benny the Leg. "Damn coppers!"

Pack poured himself a small drink. He said: "He was a good brother to me. Without him, I'd be nobody, a bum."

Benny said: "And what about me? What about my job?"

"You'll be all right," said Pack. "I'm not makin' any changes. You're a part of the joint, Benny."

"Me and my bum gam," said Benny. "What'll I do?"

Pack shrugged, and smiled at Gooney, cocking an eye at the half-empty pint. He seemed sad and weary. He said: "Well, John was sick. He was taking stuff, you know, from

Zack's Drugstore. Kept it quiet—that was John. But Zack can tell you."

"Heart trouble?" asked Gooney sympathetically.

"I wouldn't know. John didn't talk," said Pack simply. "He was that kind. He never told about his troubles."

Gooney said: "Who was his doctor?"

"He didn't say. He was like that," repeated Pack. "Did you know, Benny?"

Benny said: "John was never one to talk."

The door opened again. Arden came slowly in. She was wearing a black dress. It was a party dress, pretty low cut, Gooney noted, but it was black. She said: "Oh, Arthur, isn't it terrible? Poor, poor Uncle John."

"I wanted to extend my sympathy," said Gooney formally, in the manner of the neighborhood folk. "And ask if there is anything I could do."

"Oh, thank you very much. There is nothing, thank you," she replied in kind. "We just wish to be alone. . . . That is, we don't want any fuss."

Gooney said: "No, thanks, Pack, I do not drink whisky, only beer. I will be around if you need me." He took his solemn departure.

He went over to Zack's Drugstore. He found Zack in the rear, putting up some medicine for Herman Humperknickel and volunteered to carry it to the delicatessen. He asked about John Lamont's medicine.

Perkins said: "It was just a mild sedative. Wouldn't harm a flea."

"John come in for it regular?" asked Gooney.

"Not John. He sent Pack over, or the girl. Or I dropped it by when I was going home."

"What doctor did he have?"

"That was funny," said Zack. "It was some new doc, over on Grand Street. A Dr. Lansing. I don't even know him."

Gooney said: "Dr. Lansing, huh?" He took the medicine over, and Gretchen was voluble about ex-racketeers and their families, and positive that no good would come of such people. He helped her with the noon rush, serving *pastrami* sandwiches and glasses of hot tea and liverwurst salads with a practiced hand. He did not reply to Gretchen's comments. He was thinking.

He took a street-car over to Grand Street, which was out of the Old Neighborhood. The building which housed Dr. Lansing's office was dingy and dilapidated. He rang the bell and waited. Then he rang again, but he knew that the place was deserted.

He went around to the rear. The alley was littered. The rear door sagged. It was latched, but there was a fundamental weakness to the whole structure, and pressure of Gooney's sturdy shoulder gave him immediate entry.

The house had not been cleaned lately, and even the Doctor's office was littered and unclean. Gooney's heart beat fast—he was trespassing, and such things always made him uneasy. There were empty whisky bottles aplenty.

This did not add up. John Lamont had been above all a neat, cleanly man. Gooney looked gingerly into a filing-case, but there were no records. That John should come a far distance to a man like this for medical assistance did not make sense.

There seemed no books or notes of any kind. Aware that certain professional men found it inconvenient to keep cash accounts, due to high income taxes, Gooney did not pursue this search. He suddenly wanted out of this place. It was—sinister. The absent Dr. Lansing was not, he was certain, a good man.

He retreated through the back rooms to the door. The back yard was a grassless waste bounded by a high fence, the boards of which were broken in many places. Gooney closed the door as best he could, his hands shaking. He was beginning to be very sure of something. He was almost positive now that his friend John Lamont had not committed suicide.

He began to hurry toward the alley. He was very quick on his feet—he had learned to run away from bigger boys at school. He broke into a quick sprint. A bee buzzed past him, and flattened itself in the splintery wood of the house.

He almost stopped to look; then he realized it had been no bee—he had been shot at before. He remembered the broken boards in the fence, and ran into the alley like a rabbit into its hole.

He ran all the way to the car line, and just managed to board a trolley as it pulled away from the safety aisle.

Gooney suddenly wanted out of this place. It was—sinister.

He stayed on the platform, breathing hard, staring back. No one came in view.

Now he knew. He knew that John had not killed himself, that someone had been watching the Doctor's house, that he had put himself in danger by breaking in there. But he also knew that the killer was panicky, because it was silly to take that shot at Gooney. He had not yet learned anything.

He put it together, riding back to the Old Neighborhood. A mild sedative, administered by a strange doctor, would not have been a matter to drive any man to suicide. In fact, it proved John was not ill, and therefore had no reason to kill himself. That was simple.

But someone had wanted John dead, and was now trying to keep the police from finding that he had not committed the deed himself. In fact, some frightened killer did not want anyone to learn this fact. Gooney knew enough about crime to be afraid of a frightened killer.

He got off the car and called Murphy. He said: "Look, Murphy, there is a Dr. Lansing, 1504 Grand. Put him on the ticker, huh? He issued the prescription for John. It was only a mild sedative."

Murphy said: "Sonny, the M.E. says it was suicide. Ballistics says John's gun fired both bullets. It's in the records."

Gooney said: "Murphy—someone took a shot at me. I didn't hear any report, but there was a shot—a silencer, maybe."

There was silence on the other end of the line. Then Murphy said quietly: "All right, Arthur. Will do."

IT was evening when Gooney got back to the liquor store. They had John's body over at Cracow's now, and only Benny was there, with another bottle. Benny was pretty drunk, but he seemed more lucid than when sober.

They talked about John. Gooney led the conversation as unobtrusively as possible. They talked about John's tall tales of Prohibition days.

Gooney said: "He started to tell a pip about a satchelful of dough. He really told some whoppers."

"Yeah," said Benny. "Only, that wasn't no lie." He took a drink straight from the bottle.

Gooney waited. A clock ticked somewhere. Benny the Leg said in his careful, drunken voice: "That was Bo Moresco's dough. There was two hunnerd grand in that bag. An ord'nary black satchel. Two hunnerd gees, pal!"

"He was stuck with it, he said." Gooney held his breath. "But wasn't Bo bumped off about then?"

"Yeah, Bo was knocked off, an' John had the dough. The gang was bustin'

There were no lights. . . . It was empty, of that he was sure.

up. There wasn't nothin' left. The Feds got in an' rapped every joker they didn't gun. Them Boy Scouts!" said Benny the Leg.

"I wonder what became of all that money?" Gooney ventured.

Benny the Leg corked the bottle. "Yeah. I wonder," he said dully.

Gooney said softly: "Well, John was on the level. We all know that. He may have been in the rackets, but it was an unpopular law, and people didn't think anything of bootlegging. These new mobsters, they're bad, Benny. From Lucky Luciano on, they were murder. They still are."

Benny said: "Lucky was a stiff. Owney Madden would eat Lucky for breakfast. John wouldn't 'a' let him inna house."

"Sure," said Gooney. "You're right, Benny." He hung around, but Benny didn't say any more. His old sullenness returned. Gooney went quietly out.

He took a street-car downtown. He was known at Headquarters, and they let him look at the pictures of John's body, very gruesome and sad. He examined the reports, too. Murphy had left word that he could do so, off the record. This was no good for the *Clarion,* but he thoroughly conned everything the police had on the case. He also hung around and talked to some of the old desk-men, asking about Bo Moresco and an alleged large sum of cash money in a satchel. He learned nothing about that—not a thing.

He detoured back to the house on Grand Street. He hung around, watching. There were no lights. He had no intention of entering that place again. It was empty, of that he was sure.

He went back to Humperknickel's, and talked to Gretchen about the house on Taylor Street. They were closing the deal—they had that much money. Gretchen thought they ought to rent it until they bought the furniture. There was not much use arguing with Gretchen—she resembled a little china Dresden doll, but her chin was firm and round. She loved Little Gooney better than anything, but her father was ill, she had a horror of debt and she was strong on duty.

He was almost angry with her when he left. This upset him, for he was the best-natured of young men. He walked several blocks aimlessly, trying to throw it off. He thought about John Lamont, and that made him sadder. He kept trying to imagine who had killed John.

He had an idea of the motive, now, of course. If he only knew where that large hunk of money had gone—if John had only finished his story. . . . And that brought him around in a complete circle to the beginning, which of course had been the story which John had begun and not finished.

And that brought him to a lane down which he ventured with trepidation, his mind faltering. At first he was frightened. Then anger began to surge within him, deep anger, the sort that demands action.

BENNY was very drunk. He could not talk. Gooney got into the room, and Benny lay across the bed, snoring, and Gooney could not wake him. There was some caffeine in the medicine chest, and Gooney held Benny's nose and poured water after the tablets. Then he ran the tub full of cold water, and picked up the small figure with the short leg and slid it into the tub. When Benny was lucid,

he gave up the key, but he was still sagging, head in hands, mumbling about John Lamont, when Gooney left.

Gooney went down to the liquor store and watched. There were no lights in the house. It was midnight. He walked past the mortuary twice, then went back, gaining strength each time he passed, carrying the strength to the liquor-store door, in which he fitted the key Benny had surrendered.

He went through the front and into the back room, where the cases were stacked. John always had kept a good stock of whiskies and wines. His foot hit something, making a small noise.

He ran across the floor, dragging one leg. He ran back again, the same way. Then he ducked down behind a stack of cases and waited.

It was very frightening, that period of time. It could not have been many moments, but it was very dark in the back room, and Gooney's heart would not beat softly and quietly, but insisted upon pounding. He was sure anyone coming into the room could hear it.

He knew that he had no right in here. He should have called Fletcher. He should have called Murphy. He should have done anything but this. Yet the anger and the hurt in him burned so brightly that he was not sorry he had come. He was merely scared about what was going to happen.

He had left the door open. He kept his eyes glued upon it, crouching down behind the cases. It was gray in the blackness. He looked at it so hard his gaze went blank for a moment, and he could see nothing.

That is, he thought his eyes blurred. In another moment he knew that this was not true. The door had gone a different color, all right. But it was because someone had come through.

THERE was someone else in the room. His heart stopped for a moment, and he held his breath. His knees and elbows tingled; his hands went numb. There was something particularly deadly about a gun with a silencer, speeding its bullet without sound. . . .

He did not move from his hiding place; yet he sensed where the intruder was moving. He was keyed to a point where he could almost smell out the direction of the other. He knew that if he were shot in here, in the dark, he would be considered fair game, because he had no right here. He managed to get his stout little legs under him, crouching.

A voice said: "Benny! I've got you covered, Benny. Damn you, I knew you were in on it! Where is it, Benny? Tell me, or I'll—"

Gooney knocked over one of the cases. As he did so, he leaped sidewise. There was the bee sound again. Then Gooney was in the air, leaping, like a terrier after the nose of a raging bull.

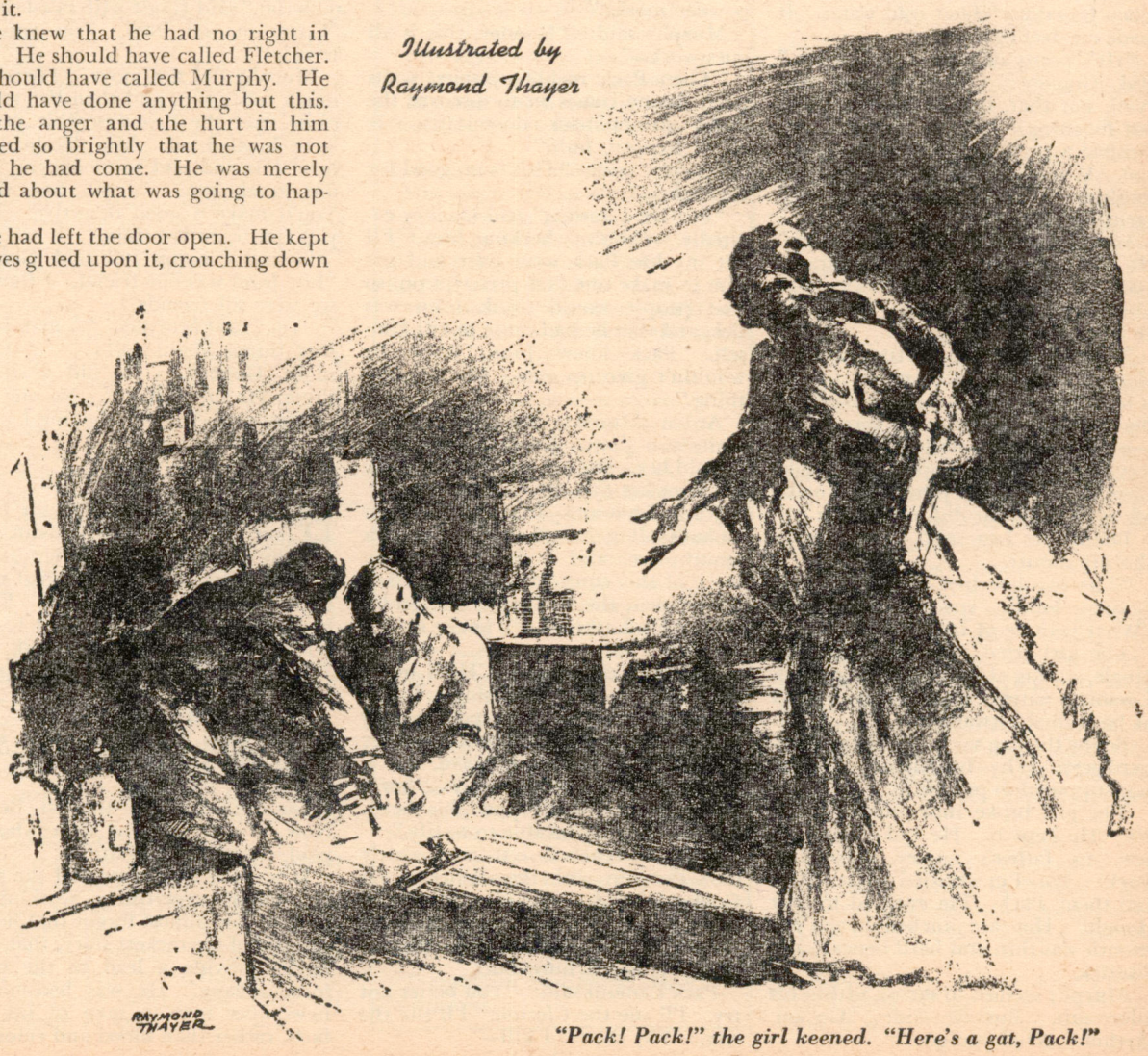
His hands grasped ears. His hard, round little head butted upward. His skull smashed into a face, and then his hands were snatching, frantic, wet with the fear.

He got hold of the gun. The figure was falling away from him. There was a scream, very loud; and Gooney was bathed in light. He blinked, blinded, as Arden Moresco, her hand on the switch, stood in the light and threw a revolver across the room.

"Pack! *Pack!*" the girl keened. "Here's a gat, Pack!"

Gooney tried to reach the gun, but could not. He had the other thing,

Illustrated by Raymond Thayer



"Pack! Pack!" the girl keened. "Here's a gat, Pack!"

with its unwieldy barrel and the ugly snout fastened to it. He held it gingerly, aiming it at nothing in particular and said: "You'd better not. You just better not. I'll—I'll shoot."

A strong hand reached out and shoved Arden Moresco aside. Pack Lamont was getting off the floor, but he did not reach for the gun Arden had tossed to him. His face was bloody, and Officer Murphy was standing in the doorway. Murphy's face was gaunt and lined. Behind him Jingle was holding Arden by the arm, a vague stare in his eyes.

Murphy said: "What is it, Arthur? How do you see it?"

THE outer door opened. A foot scraped. Benny the Leg limped in. He looked terrible, but he could walk. He stared at Pack's bloody nose, at the girl. Arden wore a negligee over a filmy nightgown. She was as beautiful as a poster in front of a burlesque house.

Gooney said: "Benny! Benny!"

"Ha?" Benny stared at Gooney. Then he said: "That cold water. It made me deef again."

"He's pretty deaf when he's sober," said Gooney. "That started me. Well, not that, maybe. It was John not finishing his story. John always finished a yarn, the next time he saw you. Would he kill himself without finishing? A man who loved to tell yarns like John?"

Murphy said: "Make sense, Arthur." He was stern and without kindliness, and Gooney remembered things. Murphy did not look at Arden. He looked at Gooney, and at Pack.

"The gangs are starting again." Gooney shook himself, trying to put it together, as if he were writing it for the *Clarion*. He said: "There was a bag with two hundred thousand dollars. Bo Moresco slipped it to John; then Bo got killed. John had to make off with it. What did he do with it?"

Benny the Leg said: "Hey—what's this all about?"

"The two hundred thousand," said Gooney loudly, spacing the words. "What became of it?"

The girl tried to pull away from Jingle, staring at Benny the Leg. Pack Lamont's narrow shoulders convulsed as he leaned forward.

Benny the Leg said: "The two hunnerd gees? Why—he paid off. Like he was supposed to pay off."

The girl broke into sound. "You lie! He kept it. He hid it out. It was my father's money, wasn't it, Pack? We—I'm entitled to it. You tell them, Pack. I'm entitled to that dough!" Her face pinched in, and her mouth was thin and hard beneath the lipstick.

Murphy seemed to shrink within his blue suit. But he said: "Go on, Arthur. What you got?"

"They wanted this money. That's the motive. This two hundred thousand. I guess Pack is tied in with the new gangs. It seems that way. . . . John goes upstairs into that little front room. They know he turns on the radio. They know Benny is deaf—when he's sober. He tries not to show it, but he is. I could tell yesterday. He half hears things, and when his attention is on something—like the newspaper—he's deaf. They went upstairs to play these records—but Pack came down. He asked John about the money. John laughed at him. Maybe John gave him hell—you know how John was. But Pack is serious; the mob has told him to get it, for a start. He has John's gun. He tells John what he is going to do. John is very brave; and after all, it is his no-good brother. He wouldn't be scared of Pack. He grabs for the gun. It goes off, shooting him in the groin. He goes down. *Then* Pack takes the gun, puts it in John's hand, pulls the trigger. There are powder marks, for the test. But no one tested Pack for powder marks!"

Murphy said: "Gooney, this is all guesswork—"

"Then Pack rushes upstairs, waits until Benny comes in to discover the body, rushes back downstairs. It could happen, huh?"

Murphy said: "This is no good for the police."

"But Dr. Lansing," said Gooney excitedly. "You're checking him. I'll bet my life Pack went over and got him to make out that prescription, so that people would think John was sick, and that he had cause to kill himself. Pack knew John, knew he wouldn't give up easy. I'll bet anything."

Arden Moresco was white now, white as a ghost. Jingle did not have to hold her. She couldn't have moved. She kept her eyes on Pack Lamont.

John Lamont's brother asserted: "That's all a lot of hay. I want a mouthpiece, and I don't want any more of this con. Why should I kill my brother, the best pal I ever had?"

"Get Dr. Lansing. I'll bet he identifies Pack."

Murphy said coldly: "He'll never do that. We found Lansing. That's why I'm here. We found Lansing buried in his own back yard. Under some trash, in a shallow grave."

Gooney said: "Murdered. . . . Sure! Of course." He dropped his head. "Then he won't be able to testify."

Murphy reached out and gently took the gun with the silencer from Gooney's hand. He said: "We could never prove that story you just told, Arthur. It is a good one, but we couldn't take it into court."

Pack Lamont said: "You better not try. I'll sue the *Clarion*. I'll sue the city. Why should I kill—"

Murphy said crisply: "You're right, Pack. We couldn't get you. But you're a novice, Pack. You never would make good in a tough mob. The bullet that came out of Lansing was marked. The sign of havin' gone through a silencer ain't to be mistaken. You should've ditched this gun, used that one." He jerked his head toward the one on the floor, the one Arden had tried to throw to Pack. "We won't even try you for killin' John. You'll fry for the murder of Lansing!"

The girl broke. "Pack! Oh, no, Pack. You said you wouldn't! You said you'd stay outa the bad trouble. Oh, Pack!" She sobbed. The negligee slipped off the marble of her lovely shoulders. She shook with grief.

Jingle said: "Should I 'cuff her, Murphy?"

"I've no charge against her," said Murphy dully. "None at all. Unless Pack involves her, there ain't a thing but material witness to hang on the girl."

"I'll take her down and book her material," said Jingle with satisfaction. "Come on, you, Pack. You—you fratercide!"

Murphy did not move. There was much confusion, and then the wagon came, and the two miserable people were hustled off. Murphy held his head low and said to Gooney: "You did good, son. It was fine work. You'd make a good detective. Now you can write yer story."

"I won't enjoy it," said Gooney. "But John was our friend. I thought we were all friends."

"Yes," said Murphy. "A man imagines things about folks. . . . Good night, Gooney." He did a strange thing: He shook hands. No one ever remembered Murphy shaking hands—he was not that kind.

Then he went out.

BENNY THE LEG was drinking bourbon. Gooney stared about, and the store was suddenly unfamiliar, a strange place, as though he had never been in it. Benny muttered: "Killed his brother that was so good to 'im! For a lousy two hunnerd grand, what John gave to Harrigan an' the coppers, damn 'em."

Gooney said: "What?"

"To keep John and nine other hoods outa the can. Includin' me," said Benny morosely.

Gooney said: "Is that so, Benny? Now who were these men who got paid—besides Harrigan?"

It was the biggest part of the story. He forgot everything, working on Benny. He almost forgot that he had the end-of-the-rackets story, that Pack might provide a lead to the newly formed gang. He was becoming a newspaper man, a man of ink and facts, rather than blood and emotions.

Young Wings Unfurling

by THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

SAP is the blood of a tree. Blood is the sap of a man. A man is not a tree, thank God! A tree cannot pull up its roots, but a man can lift his feet.

It was early morning of a day in spring. Hawthorns were in bloom, and fiddle-heads of fern uncurled and sloughed thin brown skins. A butterfly split its cocoon, and unfurled and spread its crumpled wings of mulberry and azure, to dry in the sun. A lark went singing up and up and out of sight. A vixen barked among the dew-wet rocks.

Good Brother Ambrose lay on his back and snored. . . . It was now more than fifteen years since he had fled the World and the Flesh and the Devil. But I suspected that he had had his fun, and called many a tune and paid many a piper, before retreating to this mountainy wilderness.

"But what about me?" I asked.

The new-hatched butterfly raised and lowered its drying wings of mulberry and azure; and receiving not other answer, I turned and stepped out and off, leaving Brother Ambrose flat on his back and snoring.

I was a man. I had lived a score of years, almost—a score lacking but twenty-four months, to be exact. My head was stuffed with churchly Latin, but my nose was full of smells of mayblossom and leaf-bud and greening moss and uncurling fern. My eyes were full of new sunshine, of painted wings, and of blue and flashing distances crowded with receding tors and crags and hanging woods. My heart was full of skylark song. I had a silver penny, a sharp knife of thrice-forged and thrice-tempered iron, and a staff of seasoned holly shod with iron. I had a wallet of doeskin, and therein four barley scones of my good friend's baking. I had a feather from a golden eagle's wing in my cap, fastened with a golden brooch. I had a mountainy man's strength and health.

I saw a wolf, glimpsed and gone like the shadow of a sky-raking falcon. I saw a cock bustard running, a hare crouched in her form, and a raven on a thunder-blasted snag of oak. I saw a white forest cow in a dell, with horns as long and sharp as bear-spears, and a white calf suckling. She snorted and tossed her horns and chopped the sod; and I went up and around that dell by sheep-paths among rocks.

I halted six hours later, at high noon, and drank from a bubbling spring and ate a scone. After a little rest, I traveled again. I wondered if good Brother Ambrose had by now spied out the tracks of my flight on moss and sward. I saw a dog otter on a rock in the burn, mustached like old King Uther Pendragon. I saw where a wild bull, or maybe a unicorn, had polished a horn on the rind of a young oak. I heard a snort and crash, and ran half a mile. . . .

I caught a scent of smoke, and the sound of a flute. I beheld four people about a fire. One was a woman.

A PREVIEW

Once in a long while there comes to an editor's desk a contribution of such distinction that it seems destined to live as a classic in our literature. This short novel by Theodore Goodridge Roberts, illustrated by John Richard Flanagan, will appear complete in our October issue. And because it has given us such pleasure, we are printing a few paragraphs herewith, in order that you may savor its quality and be reminded not to overlook it next month.

A STORY OF THAT GREAT POET AND ARRANT KNAVE WHO EVEN STOLE THE BISHOP'S TABLE SERVICE—AND IN CONSEQUENCE FOUND HIMSELF IN DIRE PERIL.

The Devil's

MONSIEUR FRANCOIS VILLON, lately of Paris, wiped the froth of stout ale from his mustache, and his laughter rang clearly through the tavern.

"—and so they hanged him," he finished his tale. "His legs kicking and his face as red-bloated as that of the Bishop of Orléans."

Approval roared. Men pounded the table in riotous laughter, while doxies gave little cries of horror, yet did not take their eyes from the swarthy hook-nosed features of the poet-rogue.

Michel, the tavern-master, refilled the ale mug, perspiration draining down his face and neck and soaking his shirt.

"A good tale, François," he said. "God knows we hear little enough of Paris here; it is good to have you visit for a time."

"It is good," Villon admitted, and his right eyelid dropped in a knowing wink. "Who knows but what the gibbet might still have hungered for a fresh neck."

"You'll not hang, not you," the girl beside Villon said, laughingly. "The Devil protects his own."

He kissed her roughly, savoring the warmth of her mouth, while the blood ran hot in his veins. This was not Paris; this was not the life he would have chosen for his own. But it would do—it would have to do, for to return before good news arrived, was to dare the wrath of Thibault d'Aussigny, the Bishop of Orléans.

He grinned at the thought. His purse was heavy, and the Bishop's dining-table was without its gold and silver service. Even now the Bishop's men must be scouring the towns and countryside, searching for the miscreant who had entered a secret place in the dark of night and stolen the Bishop's most prized possessions.

His grin froze at memory of the Bishop. Great gross body and wine-veined face, pudgy hands and keen rapacious mind, those belonged to the Monsieur Thibault d' Aussigny. He fattened on the Church's power, ignoring the trust which was his, filling his purse and his belly with callous disregard for the rights of others.

Once before had their paths crossed, and then it was that Master François Villon had defintely come off second best. A funnel and a barrel of water had swelled Villon with monstrous

The bullies took him across the courtyard. Villon walked with

Disciple

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

Illustrated by John Fulton

full assurance. Later, he would make his declaration of innocence.

agony. A vermin-stinking cell had been his guest-room, and the Bishop had been most relentless in his interrogation. Only luck had saved Villon then, only luck and the unconscious intervention of Charles VII.

The second and last time, they had not met face to face. The Bishop had slept in his velvet-trimmed bed, while Villon, stalking on cat-soft feet, had passed him by and stolen the silver and gold from its hiding-place.

The thought brought laughter bubbling to Villon's mind. The Archbishop would be most ill-pleased at the Bishop's loss. Pope Nicholas V had been the donor of the services to the Archbishop, who in turn had given one of the twin sets to the Bishop of Orléans. When the Bishop admitted his loss, without a doubt, his trouble would be such that only a man of the cloth could bear it and survive.

"What is so funny, François?" the doxie by his side asked, her soft red lips pouting. "Is it me, because I am not like those you know in Paris?"

He chuckled, turning her about with strong hands, slyly pinching a smooth curve in answer.

"City or country," he said with mock gallantry, "never have I seen the like of you."

And then, because he was the center of all eyes, and because he reveled in being the hub about which life whirled, he put the girl from his lap and caught the lute which lay so close at hand. A dozen people watched, their eyes warm and friendly, even a bit awed, for here was a man whose poetry rang throughout the country, a mosker who walked at times with royalty, and better yet, a man who Bagot, King of the Thieves Guild, the *Coquille,* had called the finest thief in all France.

He sang. His tone was true, and the words came forth with the mockery of his dark mind. His mobile mouth shaped the lyrics, and his nose was bold and curved, his eyes dark and mocking for the moment.

Pour ce, amez tant que vouldez,
Suyvez assemblees et festes,
En la fin ja mieulx n'en vauldrez
Et si n'y romprez que vos testes;
Folles amours font les gens bestes:
Salmon en ydolatria,
Samson en perdit ses lunetes.
Bien est eureux qui riens n'y a!

And so he sang the song he named the "Double Ballade." The lute sang softly too, a duet to his voice and words. And when the ballade grew bitter, it held the group in thrall, and when it jeered and grew sardonic, men laughed and shouted and pounded tables in approval. For this was something new to them, a poet singing the thoughts of his mind, a poet-rogue with mocking bitter laughter in his voice and soul.

"Laugh—but I shall laugh last," said the Frog.

He watched their faces, and a smile curved his lips. These were truands, men wanted by the law, hiding out in the country tavern where the ale was stout and the doxies slender and butter-soft, where cares were put aside for a time, where plunder was divided and new crimes planned. These were his friends, and this was part of his life, and he liked both, for his conscience was gnarled and withered like a wind-sere apple; there was little that he had not done of moskeneering since the University days, when Father Guillaume Villon had been his confessor and protector.

He could see the gigantic figure of Bagot at the side of the room, mutton joint in heavy fingers, a great bottle of Rheims wine before him on the table. At his left, Estienne Bezon slept against the wall, broad face slack in slumber, hands instinctively close to purse and knife. They had shared the plunder of the Bishop's treasures; they had been with him when Saul the Jew had bought the silver and gold at a niggardly price. They too would stay hidden with him for a time, until safety for their necks was assured by a messenger from Paris.

Bagot winked. Among men, he was like a horse among colts, great shoulders and titanic strength, his shaven poll shadowed by stubble until it was like a spotted melon. But despite his size, he moved with a cat-like speed, and a sword was a fearsome weapon in his fingers. Estienne was new to Bagot and Villon, a master-thief, lately come from Burgundy. He it was who had scouted the Bishop's home; he it was who had been at Villon's side when the robbery was consummated. In appearance he was stupid, but behind his low forehead a keen mind lay in wait for any moment when crooked rascality should come to flower.

And then, watching Bagot, François felt the premonition of disaster touch his heart. He heard no sound above his voice; yet candles flickered from a breeze. He saw Bagot's fingers move in a danger signal; and when he turned, he saw the shining razor-edged blades of three swords not six feet away from his chest.

"Don't move, Villon," the first bully said. "Don't move, or we spit you like a fowl."

There was silence; for a time laughter and music had rung in the smoky tavern, but now there was nothing but the spitting hiss of grease dripping into the fireplace flames, and the nervous scrape of a shoe on solid floor.

THE door hung open; its greased hinges had given no warning. The three stood within the room, and outside, a fourth waited, sword and dagger in capable hands.

Villon grinned. He grinned with a slow-witted stupidity which ignored the deadly swords. The lute lowered in his hands, and he held it before his stomach.

"I know no Villon," he said. "I am a foot-weary peddler; see, there is my pack beside the door."

The first man shook his head. "You are under arrest, Villon, on the charge of robbing the Bishop of Orléans." His gaze swiveled about the low-beamed room. "We are on the Bishop's business; let no man interfere."

"But I tell you," François Villon insisted, "that I am but a poor peddler of salves and beads and threads and—"

From the corner of his eye, he caught he slow movement of Bagot. Estienne was awake now; and from the rigidity of his arm, Villon knew a dagger was free, ready for instant flinging.

He hesitated. Blood would flow if he resisted; yet to go meekly, was to invite his own death. These men were hard, harder even than he, for they were professional bullies, a price on their sword-talents.

"But there must be some mistake," he said. "These good people will swear that I have been here for days."

The first bully, resplendent in the Bishop's livery of orange and black, looked about and then spat with cold insolence.

"If one so much as opens his mouth, I'll close it with a hand of cold steel." He gestured with his sword. "Come with us, and try not my patience."

"This is a mistake you will rue," Villon persisted.

A sword licked out, point touching his chest. So keen was it, he did not feel the touch for a second, and then

a worm of warmness crept down his belly, a flow of blood seeping from his skin.

François Villon caught his breath. Death lay but inches away. If he moved, other than at an order, he would meet the Bishop of Orléans again, but only the Bishop would see and talk.

"I—" he began. And then Estienne broke the deadlock.

The dagger came, turning lazily over and over, yet streaking with incredible speed. There was the *thwock* of steel on flesh; then the first guard was clawing at his throat, bubbles of crimson breaking on his mouth.

Bagot charged, hurling a great table aside as though it weighed nothing. One guard whirled, and Bagot reached out, clamping huge hands about the sword-arm. A bone broke with a popping sound, and then the bully was whirling overhead, smashing against the wall in a grotesque bundle of flopping legs and arms.

Villon bent and caught the first bully's fallen sword. It came alive in his hand, a winking sliver of silver flame. His teeth gleamed whitely, and laughter was on his face. "Guard yourself," he shouted, and drove in.

He lunged, and the blade slid in and caught, thrown aside by a twisting parry. The bully's face was white, for Villon's prowess as a swordsman was famed throughout all France. He swore and backed, and when his shoulder struck the wall, he came lunging forward, hoping to beat the poet-rogue down by sheer savagery.

VILLON whirled, engaging the bully *en tierce,* then withdrawing and lunging. The bully barely escaped, a tatter of cloth whipping from his sleeve. His free hand caught a dagger from his waist, and he flung it with a quick underhanded snap. Only a slipping side-twist saved Villon.

Then François Villon gave a half-lunge, drawing up the bully's guard. And in the same movement, dropping almost to one knee, he sent the flickering point of the sword up and forward. Coming in, the bully raced straight onto the point. Bone grated on steel, and then the blade was through, sliding easily; and stepping back, Villon let the body slide to the floor.

He spun, making for the fourth man outside. But Bagot had reached the man first. A hurled stool had thrown the bully aside, and now he was unconscious, blood smearing his face where the great thief's fist had wiped away all expression.

"Hot work, eh, François!" Bagot said, grinning.

There was bedlam for a moment. Men were shouting and doxies screaming; but slowly order came, order and a modicum of quiet.

A Double Ballade of Good Counsel

by

François Villon

NOW take your fill of love and glee,
And after balls and banquets hie;
In the end ye'll get no good for fee,
But just heads broken by and by;
Light loves make beasts of men that sigh;
They changed the faith of Solomon,
And left not Samson lights to spy;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

Sweet Orpheus, lord of minstrelsy,
For this with flute and pipe came nigh
The danger of the dog's heads three
That ravening at hell's door doth lie;
Fain was Narcissus, fair and shy,
For love's love lightly lost and won,
In a deep well to drown and die;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

Sardana, flower of chivalry,
Who conquered Crete with horn and cry,
For this was fain a maid to be
And learn with girls the thread to ply;
King David, wise in prophecy,
Forgot the fear of God for one
Seen washing either shapely thigh;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

For this did Amnon, craftily
Feigning to eat of cakes of rye,
Deflower his sister fair to see,
Which was foul incest; and hereby
Was Herod moved, it is no lie,
To lop the head of Baptist John
For dance and jig and psaltery;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

Next of myself I tell, poor me,
How thrashed like clothes at wash was I
Stark naked, I must needs agree;
Who made me eat so sour a pie
But Katherine of Vaucelles? thereby
Noé took third part of that fun;
Such wedding-gloves are ill to buy;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

But for that young man fair and free
To pass those young maids lightly by,
Nay, would you burn him quick, not he;
Like broom-horsed witches though he fry,
They are sweet as civet in his eye;
But trust them, and you're fooled anon;
For white or brown, and low or high,
Good luck has he that deals with none!

—Translation by Charles Algernon Swinburne.

"Now what?" Estienne asked, retrieving his knife and wiping it callously on a dead man's cloak.

"Michel!" Bagot's voice lifted. "Get rid of these bodies. We'll go our way."

"Aye!" Michel said, and deftly caught the bag of heavy gold-pieces tossed him by the giant thief. "They'll not be found; and"—he grinned—"none of us will remember that you or they have been here."

"And him?" Estienne asked, pointing to the fourth bully. "Shall I cut his throat?"

François Villon shivered at the thought. Death in duel or combat was a natural thing, but murder in cold blood was beyond his thinking or capabilities. He shook his head, knowing that on his answer lay a man's life.

"We'll take him along and lose him somewhere," he said. "I think Bagot can persuade him not to talk in the future."

"A simple thing," Bagot agreed, and flexed heavy muscles, a knowing grin on his face.

"They must have ridden horses," Estienne said. "I'll find and bring them here."

"Hurry!" Villon ordered. "They may not have ridden alone; others may be about."

He sighed, watching Estienne leave. So much had happened in seconds; death had walked into the tavern, uninvited and unannounced. And because he knew it was his fault, he felt the first incongruous twinges of remorse.

Bagot sensed the tenor of his thoughts, and his voice cut deep into Villon's consciousness.

"Take no blame, Villon," he said harshly. "They would have brought you back to death for money."

Villon nodded. Life these days was hard, mercenaries still prowling the land, their swords for hire to the highest bidder. To tell the truth, he had been most fortunate they had not struck him down at once.

He heard the whistle outside; Estienne had found the horses. With a wave of his hand, not speaking, he went through the door. Bagot bent and lifted the unconscious bully with consummate ease, flinging him across the saddle of the fourth horse. Then mounting, the trio swung their horses into the night. Behind, voices called farewells; then a closing door cut away all light and sound of the tavern.

AN hour later, horses lathered with foamy sweat, they dismounted by a stream, stretching in fatigue. The bully was conscious now, blood crusted on his face, his sullenness a tangible thing.

"What now?" Estienne asked, whetting a knife on his palm. "I do not think it wise to let him go free."

The bully cringed in the early moonlight, his gaze swinging wildly toward the poet-rogue.

"I was but paid to do a task," he cried. "You cannot kill me in cold blood."

"No!" Bagot said softly from where he squatted at the water's edge.

François Villon wiped water away from his mouth. Many thoughts had been his during the hour's ride. His face was grim and cold, his knife close to hand, as he turned and strode to where the prisoner sat.

"How did you find me?" he asked. "Don't lie."

The prisoner shrugged. "A man named Gaudet told us where you would be."

"Gaudet!" Villon answered.

"The Frog!" Bagot said. "Villon, I told you he should have been throttled months ago."

Villon felt the snakish twisting of rage in his mind. Gaudet he knew: Gaudet the sly, Gaudet the vicious. Once they had fought, and now the man who was nicknamed the Frog wore Villon's knife-work across his cheek. He had sworn revenge, revenge for the thing Villon had done, but the poet-rogue, sure of his own strength, had laughed the threat away.

And now this moment had been brought about by Gaudet's giving information to the Bishop.

"What else do you know?" Villon asked the surly bully.

"That Gaudet talked—and that you have no choice but to return. A message was sent to you by the Bishop, for he knew you would fight." The prisoner spat. "I warned the others to give the message at once."

"And the message?"

"Just that Father Guillaume de Villon is being held hostage for your return. If you refuse, then the Bishop will unfrock the priest."

CHILL came to the heart of Villon. He shivered as with the plague, and his hand was white about the knife-hilt at his waist. The Bishop of Orléans had found the poet-rogue's Achilles heel, his one spot of weakness, for to Father Villon he owed more debts than he could ever repay.

"You lie!" he cried, and caught at the bully with savage hands. He shook the man brutally, then flung him away.

"He does not lie, François," Bagot said grimly. "He dare not lie, not and expect to live."

"But you can't go back," Estienne snapped. "You'll dance on air."

"We'll go back and rescue the priest," Bagot said harshly. "Saint Michael, but I would enjoy sliding a knife into the Bishop's fat belly."

"No!" Villon turned away, walking toward the water. It laughed at him and his folly, murmuring half-understood sound, sparkling in the silver moonlight.

This was the ugly end to an adventure. Three men had already died, and now a gentle old priest was being held as hostage in a stinking dungeon. Father Villon, white-haired and soft-hearted beyond belief, was being held to account for the deviltry which was Villon's way of life.

"I'm going back," François said at last. "I'll give myself up."

"Don't be a fool," Bagot growled. "The Bishop is all wind; he will not dare harm the priest. You'll boil in oil when you cannot produce the stolen service."

"I'll take that chance."

"We'll hold you here until your senses clear."

"Will you now?" Villon asked.

There was tension, and then the men relaxed, ashamed of what they had said. To save Villon, the others would have fought him, and the irony of the situation struck sparks of laughter in Villon's heart.

"Maybe we can get the silver back," he said. "Saul may not have sold or melted it down."

"Maybe not," Bagot agreed. "But if he has, then what? And I know for a fact that he is in the south of France, not due back for another month."

"A vault is only a vault," Estienne remarked idly. "What we have done before, we can do again."

A thought whirled in Villon's mind, dark laughter spinning into light. He swung his head, staring at the shadow which was Estienne. White teeth showed in a sudden grin.

"Get back to your master," he said to the prisoner, and calculated swiftly in his mind. "Get back, and say that I will surrender on the seventh day from now."

"No!" Bagot snarled. "You don't take the blame for what we all have done."

"Let him go," Villon snapped. "Let him go."

The prisoner scrambled to his feet, his face white in the moonlight. He did not look back, running for the nearest horse and swinging into the saddle.

"Remember, the seventh day," Villon cried, and the bully looked around.

"And why not now?" he called back.

François Villon laughed, standing tall and straight in the moonlight. His arrogance was his mantle and he wore it well.

"Tell the Bishop," he yelled, "that first I must commit another robbery."

His laughter rang toward the stars, as the bully kneed the horse into flight. Then he gestured for Bagot and Estienne to come closer.

"This," he explained, "is what I have in mind."

He talked, outlining the thought which had come to him. And when he was through, Bagot slapped a huge thigh in rascally delight, while Estienne whistled in amusement.

Then swinging into saddles, the trio rode toward the north.

THERE are men whom the Devil has marked for his own. Villon was one. Born to poverty in a land ravaged by the Hundred Years' War, saved from starvation by the gentle open-handedness of a priest, he had run the dirty streets of Paris, fighting in a world where battle was a common thing.

He had asked no quarter, had given none. His keen mind had fastened upon the teachings at the University where he had been sent by Father Guillaume de Villon, and from it had come a sense of man's minuteness in all of space. There was a dark sublimity in his mind that placed him apart from other men. Poetry grew in his heart, and he placed it on paper with ink and quill. The world was shocked, for he wrote of ugliness and decay and of the innermost recesses of a man's soul, instead of the vapid prattlings with which poets won renown.

He was a thief, a good thief, and some said a murderer. He had learned early that a man with a slow blade was the first to die. A protégé of Charles of Orléans, he had sung at Court. And at other times, his name in disgrace, he had been a hunted creature, hiding with the *Coquille*, his only fortune lying within his ability to rob a house in the dark of night.

Now, riding down the Orléans road, he wondered why the Devil had so marked him from other men. Others grew rich and fat on less talent than he, others were respectable, families tight-knit about them, while, in truth, he was but a homeless wanderer upon the face of the land he loved so greatly.

Ahead, the spires of the Church of Orléans rose in pointed majesty, and a frown touched his mouth. The Bishop was there, and Father Villon and Gaudet the Frog.

He hated Gaudet at the moment as he could never remember hating any man. A sneak, an informer, he would profit by this adventure. Gold would be in his purse, and he would laugh while Villon hung, if that he did.

Villon had given little thought to the man since the time, two years before, when he and Gaudet had fought over Jeanne Chizmont. The fight had been most brief, and ended with the Frog's mouth slitted an inch wider, and Villon hurrying away with the girl.

Not that his interest in Jeanne had gone further than wanting to help her. Gaudet, in the manner of the times, had taken her in payment of a debt owed by her father, a man who had died quite agonizedly for daring to counterfeit the King's coinage.

"City or country," Villon said with mock gallantry, "never have I seen the like of you."

Gaudet had used her shamefully, making her help in his profession of truand, forcing her to lure unwary men into dark alleys, where his own knife forced their purses from them, with or without bloodshed.

Villon had discovered the girl weeping one night; and when his words had drawn forth answers, his anger had been as great as though he were the most righteous man in all Paris. With almost his last coin, he had paid Gaudet the girl's debt and bought her freedom; but because she was pretty, because he had spent a year in training her, the Frog had decided she was not to go free. Then it was that Villon had fought. And when the fight was over, Jeanne was in the care of Father Villon, who later obtained a position for her in the house of the Bishop of Orléans. Gaudet had sworn revenge, and now his revenge was taking place. Now François Villon rode to keep an appointment with his own death. . . .

He spurred the horse with his heels. The road was dusty and deserted; but far ahead, he saw a flutter of movement at the church's gates. Then two horses came into the road, the riders in orange and black—bullies of the Bishop.

He rode ahead, and when the bullies came to his side, he said nothing at the threat of swords. He rode along, humming softly to himself, wondering what the Bishop would have to say.

But at the main gate, when the bullies forced him past, toward a postern gate, he turned his head in surprise.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

The nearest man grinned through yellow broken teeth, his French a sorry thing.

"The dungeon, Master Poet," he said. "We've a special cell we've saved for you."

"But I want to see the Bishop; he expects me."

"Does he now, Master Poet? Well, he says that you are to await him down below. At the present, he and the Archbishop are busy."

"Arch—" Villon grinned.

This was better than he had expected. The Bishop of Orléans was in the first stages of his trouble, the Archbishop evidently making a special trip because of the loss of his gift to Monseigneur Thibault d' Aussigny.

"You will not smile quite so broadly, shortly," the second bully said grimly. "It so happens that oil is being heated

Father Villon spoke. "François has told me this is a great mistake. No matter what he is or has been,

in the torture-room. With roasted buttocks, you will find the world not so funny."

"How right you are!" Villon said, and shivered in cold horror at the thought.

The bullies took him through the gate and across the courtyard. Servants were at washtubs in the rear; they looked up incuriously, then fell to chatting again, wooden pestles making flat slapping sounds against wet garments.

François Villon walked with full assurance. Even now, Bagot and Estienne should be meeting at the Sleeping Cock, their saddlebags taut with the Bishop of Orléans' gold and silver service. They should be laughing together over mugs of dark ale, plotting the movements they would make early in the night. When shadows were bottomless pits, when the house of the Bishop slept, then they would ply their robber's craft and replace the stolen service in one of the numerous hiding-places they had discovered upon their first entrance. Later, Villon would make his declaration of innocence, and after a bit of byplay and counter-challenges, a search would disclose the service, safe and serene.

THE idea was clever, and laughter tickled Villon's throat. The Bishop would be livid with rage; Father Villon would receive apologies; and he, Villon, would depart as free as the idle breeze. Later, of course, the Bishop's silver would disappear again, this time without a clue to its vanishing.

"In here," the first bully said, and the poet-rogue went ahead and down a flight of damp ill-smelling steps. Ahead lay the dungeons and torture-room. Ahead lay death for many in the years to come, while phantoms of other victims watched from the ugly shadows.

A key grated in a lock; a bar lifted and fell with a muffled thud. Then Villon was thrust roughly into a corridor, lighted dimly by two flickering lamps. Fetid air made the flames smoky, and a great rat glared its hate from red eyes before darting to safety.

François Villon felt nerves grow taut in his shoulders. Once before, he had been a prisoner here; once before he had felt the tortures of the big room farther down the corridor. He liked none of it, not at all.

"In there," the first bully said, opening a door.

Villon went reeling forward from the thrust of a brutal hand. He ran into a wall, hearing the grated door slam shut behind. Then the Bishop's

never has he lied to me."

men were gone, the scuffle of their feet dying away.

"François!" a voice said from the stone bunk to one side. "François, my son!"

"Father—Father Villon!" the poet-rogue said gently, and bent to aid the old man to a sitting position.

"Why did you do such a terrible thing, son?" the old priest said.

François Villon studied the man who had reared him. Shorter than himself, clear eyes tolerant despite the misery the younger man had brought, there was no condemnation in the priest's face, only a struggle to understand.

"It is a mistake, Father," François Villon said. "Everything will be all right soon. Believe me."

He felt shame touch him at the words. He felt no allegiance to the world, yet he felt shame before this holy man. Father Villon had given his life to helping others; to him the poet-rogue owed more than he could ever repay. And despite the things which Villon had done, the old priest still believed good lay in him.

"You swear that?" Father Villon asked. "You swear that you did not steal the service, that it was all a great mistake?"

"It was a mistake," Villon answered ambiguously. "When I talk to the Bishop, he will understand."

"I'm glad," the priest said. "I've prayed for your salvation, François, not because of myself, but because there is greatness in you, a greatness which your poetry declares."

François Villon turned away, shaken despite himself. Few men could bring the darkness of his soul so clearly to his mind's eyes; and when he saw himself as he could be, through this gentle priest's eyes, he wondered that any man could be other than good.

FATHER VILLON said no more, sitting on the cold bunk, fingers telling his beads. François walked to the cell door, holding the rusted bars in tight hands, wishing now he had never heard of the Bishop and his precious church service. Anything would be better than this. The priest was making no reproaches, no demands, despite the fact that his life could be shattered, should he be unfrocked as had been threatened because of his adopted son's black thievery.

Villon wished now he had waited for Bagot and Estienne. They had traveled fast together the first three days, riding to Paris to gather the Bishop's stolen dining-service. Some Villon had found; the rest was with Saul, the buyer of stolen goods, and Bagot and Estienne had ridden to retrieve it. At the Sleeping Cock the three pieces found by Villon was waiting for the others, and within a couple of hours, all would be returned.

He smiled at the thought. By morning, everything would be settled, the silver and gold service returned, Father Villon freed, and the Bishop satisfied. Even the Archbishop would have to be content.

Only one thing galled Villon, and that was that Gaudet should go free after his treachery. Still, and Villon touched the scabbard emptied by the Bishop's bully, there would be other times in which to settle the score.

He heard the squeak of rusty hinges, and pressing tight to the bars, he saw the slight figure of a woman slip into the corridor. A cloak was about her shoulders, no darker than her hair, and she came forward quickly, stopping before the cell.

"Jeanne!" François Villon said in surprise. Almost had he forgotten that she worked for the Bishop.

"I brought some food, François," the girl whispered. "The Bishop has ordered no food for you, thinking to make you talk the easier."

François Villon drew the cloth package into the cell, holding it in his right hand. His keen eyes studied the girl's face, a premonition touching his heart.

"What else?" he asked. "What else, Jeanne?"

He could see the slow tears in her eyes, slow tears of pity for himself.

"A man named Estienne sent a message," she answered.

"Yes, yes!" Impatience and exultation caught at Villon's mind.

"It is that Saul has melted down the booty."

"What is it, François?" Father Villon asked from the bunk.

François Villon could not answer. He leaned against the door, caught by cold horror. This then was the end to his scheming, this was the final answer to his escapade. This was the Devil's final ironic jest to his chosen favorite.

"François?" the girl said.

"I'm all right," he said, and straightened. "You're sure that was the message?"

"Quite sure." Anger blazed in Jeanne's smooth features. "Saint Michael, but I wish I could free you long enough to reach Gaudet!"

"Jeanne!" Father Villon said gently. "Jeanne, such talk is not Christian."

François Villon turned away, droping onto the bunk, absently touching the bundle of food. Futility lay in his mind, his mouth twisted in bitter humor. He had laid his plans so carefully, and now they lay in crumbled ruin.

He heard the soft voices of the girl and the priest, but gave no heed.

He felt no amusement now that the Bishop would be in trouble with the Archbishop. Amusement grew from a sense of safety, and at the moment, he knew his life hung by a thread like Damocles' sword. And to make it worse, of course, was the fact that Father Villon would be an innocent victim.

He swore softly to himself, shoulders pressed back against the wall.

AND then because he was a thief, and his existence depended upon clear unshadowed thinking, he cast away the brooding thoughts and tried to rationalize. Jeanne talked softly with the priest, and he watched them unseeingly. The seconds passed, grew into minutes, and gradually a new thought intruded into his mind.

He cast the idea into mold, studying its planes, and found them good. Slowly tension went from his shoulders, and hell's mockery began to swirl in his eyes. He drew his thoughts together and coalesced them into a whole. And at last he stood

and returned to the door, the priest going back to the bunk.

"Jeanne," François Villon said softly, "take this message to Estienne. Tell him that there must be no delay. Tell him that this must be done."

His voice sank to a muttered whisper, and slowly interest grew in the girl's eyes. Then, his message finished, he leaned against the door and watched the girl slip from the corridor. There was nothing to do now but wait, wait and hope.

"François," Father Villon asked, "is everything all right?"

And because there was implicit trust in the old man, because he should not be hurt, François Villon nodded his head.

"Everything is fine, Father," he said. "Everything is fine."

And he wondered if he lied.

IT was morning. There was no light in the dungeon other than the lamps, yet there was a time sense within François Villon which told him a new day had arrived.

He lay on his bunk, chilled and damp. The hours had passed with dreadful slowness, peopled with terrors of his imaginings, and he had not slept. Father Villon had slept calmly, as he did everything, and now watching the old man, Villon felt a sense of pity. Far better it would have been for the old man if François had never been born.

He searched his heart for an answer to himself, and found nothing. He was an atavist, a throwback, and yet he knew that deep in him was a shadow of good. Poetry sang in his heart, and poetry did not come from evil.

And so he lay and wondered at life. And in the midst of a thought, he heard the clatter of a flung bolt and then the tread of heavy feet. A lantern spewed yellow light into the cell, waking the priest and bringing Villon to his feet.

"Up!" the Bishop's man ordered harshly.

They went, two bullies in front and two behind. The Bishop was taking no chances. They climbed from the dungeon to a side room, and from there to a second floor. A servant opened a door and stood aside, and the guards herded the two prisoners into the room.

The Bishop was not alone. Beside him, clad in his stately robes, the Archbishop sat at ease in a great chair. His hair was white, his face solemn now, firm lips compressed, keen eyes taking in every point of Villon's appearance.

"This is the miscreant," the Bishop said, and rage suffused his bloated face with blood.

"I have done nothing," François Villon said loudly. "And by what right is my adopted father held to account for the charges made against me?"

He saw Gaudet then, standing to one side, and hatred flooded his being so completely he saw no other. He took a slow step toward the man, and a guard's sword licked out and drove him back into position.

"Is this the man?" the Bishop asked, and Gaudet nodded.

"That's Villon," he said; "that's the man who talked of robbing you. I heard him talk and I saw the service."

He grinned at Villon, his slashed face warped in a leering smile of triumph. He was squat and ugly, bowed legs and bald head and short arms and squat body disclosing where his nickname had originated. And in his eyes, his hatred was a violent thing, brought of many causes.

"The man lies," the poet said calmly. "We fought a long time ago, and this is his revenge, a tissue of lies built of nothing."

The Bishop leaned forward, robe rustling stiffly. "I do not think he lies," he said flatly, porcine eyes glittering. He looked at Gaudet. "Your horse is waiting, my secretary will pay you as promised. Now be off."

"I would prefer to stay, if it pleases you," Gaudet said softly.

The Bishop shrugged, and looked again at Villon. The Archbishop said nothing, only watching, yet Villon could see the lines of strain in his face. The Archbishop had a stake here, too, for if Nicholas V ever discovered a gift of his had been stolen because of carelessness, then the plagues of Egypt would be as nothing compared to the trouble which would come to the Archbishop.

"One chance I shall give you," the Bishop said to François Villon. "One chance, and one answer. If the answer does not please me, then my men shall loosen your tongue in ways of which you already know."

Villon's stomach drew into a knot. He knew the water torture and had felt his joints start in creaking torment on a rack. He wanted nothing of either. He could feel cold perspiration sliding down his spine.

"I am an innocent man," he declared.

Father Villon spoke then for the first time. "François has told me this is a great mistake. No matter what he is or has been, never has he lied to me."

Villon felt a surge of pride in the old priest. He had lied to the man by devious wording of his replies, but because the priest looked only for good in others he accepted the obvious meaning of everything said.

The Bishop clasped fat hands. "Where is the church service?" he asked, and great bubbles of perspiration beaded his face.

"I do not know." Villon said calmly.

"Take him down," the Bishop ordered. "Warm him up and make him talk."

The bullies stepped forward, two grasping the poet's arms, two standing back, weapons in the clear, gleaming weirdly.

"Wait!" the Archbishop said, and looked at Villon. "Master Poet," he went on, "I do not like violence. Return the service, and I swear you shall go free."

François Villon shrugged heavy hands away. A vein throbbed at his temple, and he could feel the tremor of his legs. Everything depended upon Bagot and Estienne now; without their aid, unless they had done his bidding, his life was forfeit.

"I tell you that I know nothing of the theft," he cried. "The Bishop has made a grave mistake. After all, he is mortal, like the rest of us, and so his memory must be mortal too. Perhaps he has hidden the service in a place he has not recalled."

"The man lies, I tell you!" Gaudet snapped from where he stood. "I heard him talk, and I saw what he had stolen."

The Archbishop pursed his mouth, his gaze drifting from man to man and stopping at the Bishop's face.

"That could be," he admitted.

The Bishop wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "I placed the service in a special place," he said. "There are other hiding-places, but they are empty."

François Villon permitted outrage to creep into his voice. "You can't condemn me on this truand's word," he said. "Search the other places; give me a chance to prove my innocence of these charges."

THE Bishop glared, but because his superior watched, he gave in as gracefully as possible.

"All right," he said. "There are but three other places in which the service could have been hidden. I do not remember hiding anything in those places; but because I am a just man, I shall search them myself."

He stood, waddling toward the door. His hatred of Villon was a tangible thing, and in his little eyes there was a promise of disaster yet to come.

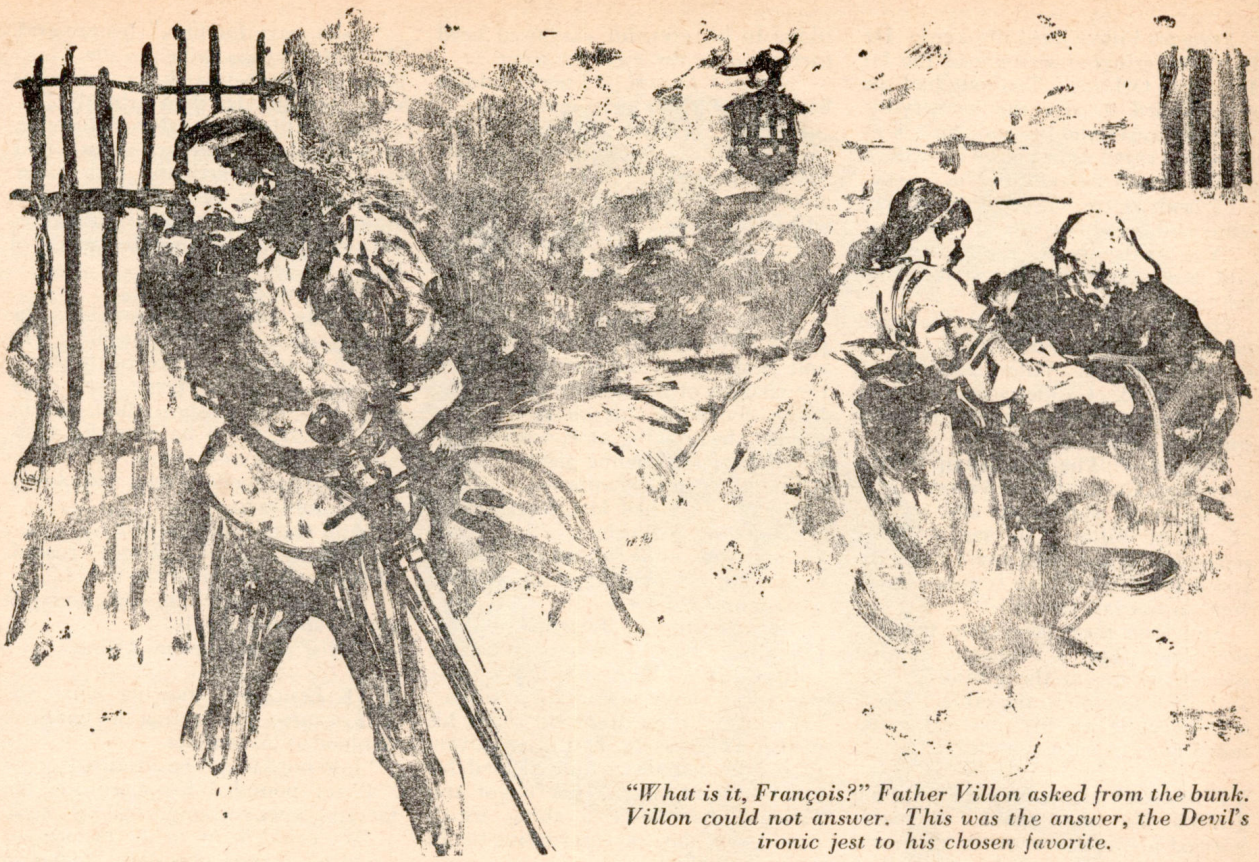
"I shall go, too," the Archbishop said, and joined the Bishop at the door.

Then they were gone, and Villon felt tension leaving his body. He touched Father Villon gently on the arm, and the priest smiled in sympathetic comfort.

"Villon," Gaudet said from where he stood.

"What is it, Frog?" the poet answered, and laughed at the instant flush which came to the man.

"Don't call me that!"



"What is it, François?" Father Villon asked from the bunk. Villon could not answer. This was the answer, the Devil's ironic jest to his chosen favorite.

"And why not?" Villon grinned. "Since I opened your mouth wider, the name fits you better."

"All right, laugh—but I shall laugh last, Master Poet," Gaudet said. "I'll be on the road to Paris while you bathe in boiling oil." He smiled at the instant fading of Villon's smile. "You're not quite so brave now, not quite so gallant, are you? Pig, I've waited long for this moment."

François Villon shrugged and looked away. He could feel the pounding of his heart. The minutes dragged by, and almost could he have cried out in vexation. What was happening, what had been discovered?

And then the door opened again; and coming through, their arms loaded with the Bishop's gold and silver dining-service, were the Bishop and his superior.

"I told you I was innocent," Villon cried.

"It's a trick," Gaudet said. "That is not your service."

"You fool, of course it's my service," the Bishop said.

"Oh, my son," Father Villon said, and his hand touched Villon's sleeve. "I'm proud of you in your innocence."

They laid the silver on a table and then resumed their seats, the Bishop, calm now, the Archbishop stern and very straight.

"Father," the Archbishop said, "in my name and in the name of the Church, I wish to apologize for what has happened."

"It is nothing but a mistake," Father Villon said. "I am happy that François has proved himself against the tongues of those who apparently wish him ill."

A fist pounded upon the door, and then a man came through, carrying saddlebags, his face alight with shock.

"What is this?" the Bishop asked, angered at the unceremonious entrance.

"My bags!" Gaudet cried. "Those are my saddlebags."

"Look," the newcomer said, and tilted the bags over the table. Money and jewelry poured out in glittering array. "I found them there, after a servant discovered a room had been robbed."

ABRUPTLY the Archbishop was out of his chair, his hands reaching for the gold-pieces and bits of jewelry. A terrible anger was in his face, and he turned, hands lifting.

"No!" François Villon forced away the incredulous shock which had come at the interruption. This he had not expected; this was luck beyond his wildest imaginings. Even here, while denouncing Villon, Gaudet had reverted to himself, stealing.

"Arrest me that man," the Bishop bellowed, and two bullies lunged forward.

Gaudet tried to fight, tried to make a plunging run for the door. François Villon waited until the last moment, then leaned forward, carrying the entire weight of his shoulder in one smashing blow. Gaudet grunted, then fell slackly to the floor.

"You see now the kind of man who would have sworn away my life," Villon cried. "His trickery is obvious now. He moved the service from hiding-place to hiding-place and then denounced me. And even while he would have me die, he stole from the house itself."

"Take him below," the Bishop said.

"I have heard enough," the Archbishop said coldly, and stuffed his returned valuables into his pockets. "François Villon, you are free to go. Father Villon, I would like very much to have your company at my home for a time."

"I thank you, Sire," Villon said, and watched the light of contentment come to the old priest's eyes.

"And as for you," the Archbishop said flatly to the Bishop. "It is obvious that you are a man whose judgment is not too great. You forget where you have hidden things, you permit thieves to roam your house. I tell you this, and I mean it on my oath—if ever I hear of trouble here, if anything, particularly the church service, disappears, I shall see that Orléans has a new Bishop. Is that understood?"

François Villon liked the scene. He liked the cringing attitude of the fat Bishop of Orléans. Too long had the man lorded it over the countryside with his power and his position. Now he would crawl a bit before he walked again. It was a good thought.

"I understand," the Bishop of Orléans said humbly.

"You are dismissed," the Archbishop said, and the Bishop almost ran from the room.

Outside, the door closed, his voice raged in short staccato orders. Then there was silence. Villon listened and then grinned. Gaudet would find the entrance to the next world a hot and stubborn gate.

"Father—" The Archbishop turned gravely to Guillaume de Villon.

The priest looked up and smiled. "Good-by, Villon," he said. "Now remember that I shall say a Mass for you every day. There is greatness in you; do not fail yourself."

And then they were gone through the door. For a moment, Villon waited, staring at the gleaming gold and silver service on the table. Then, a faint smile on his piratical hook-nosed face, he turned and left.

IT was dusk again, and the Sleeping Cock was wide awake. Alemaids hurried about the low-raftered room, plump arms extended, heavy mugs of foam-topped liquid in steady fingers. Capons roasted on spits at the fireplace, and a suckling pig shrank on a carving-table before the slashings of a knife in the tavern-keeper's hand.

Bagot beat booming rhythm from his table with a copper mug, his bull voice roaring a tavern song with little regard for melody. Estienne sat near the wall, at the side of Bagot, opening his eyes sleepily from time to time, finishing ale after ale, and then dropping back into slumber with an ease no other could match.

Bullies from the Bishop's house sat at a long table at the rear, bright in their orange and black, food heaped with reckless abundance before them by the ever-moving maids. Tables were crowded, talk a bedlam.

François Villon sucked hungrily at the mouth of a bottle of pale gold wine. Meat and bread and crusty pie lay close at hand, and he ate more slowly now, the first bite of his hunger dulled and blunted.

A doxie caught his eye, and he admired the smooth swell of her breasts, the soft curved lines of her body. There was frank invitation in her bold eyes, and he grinned in negation, laughing aloud at the pouting swing of her head as she turned away.

"It's almost time," he said to Bagot.

The great thief poured fresh ale from a brimming pitcher, washing down a huge mouthful of steaming ham. He grinned at the slighter man, liking in his eyes, his shadowed head turning as he surveyed the scene.

"Not yet," he said. "There's a doxie here who needs to feel a man's kiss."

Estienne opened his eyes lazily. "You've yet to tell what happened, Villon," he said. "Best talk fast, for after that ride last night, I could sleep without trouble."

François Villon smiled at his friend. "You could sleep anywhere, at any time, Estienne," he said.

He told them of all that had happened, and laughter lay in his voice and heart when his words described the chagrin of the Bishop of Orléans. Bagot choked in his merriment and washed the choking away with a pint of bitter ale. Estienne grinned sleepily, nodding in slow approval.

"I thought I had lost, for a time," the poet-rogue finished. "I did not know if you could ride so far and yet return before morning, not and do what must be done."

"It was simple," Estienne replied, yawning. "Bagot tore bars away, and I slipped in. The Archbishop's house was asleep; none saw us come or go."

François Villon drank deeply of his wine. This was the end to an adventure, and it amused him, tickled his fancy beyond belief. For Bagot and Estienne had done a thing which would some day come to roaring life in a ringing ballade.

They had ridden like fleet phantoms through the night to the house of the Archbishop of Orléans, and there they had robbed his vault of the twin set of dining-services given him by Nicholas V. Then, driving their mounts almost to death, they had retraced their way, bringing the service back to the house where Villon and the aged priest were imprisoned. In the last hour of darkness, Estienne had sneaked through a pried window and replaced the twin service in one of the hiding-places discovered when the Bishop's house had first been robbed.

Later, when Villon had claimed innocence, the Archbishop's set had been discovered. And since it was identical to the Bishop's, it was accepted as the one originally stolen. The Bishop had been most embarrassed, Father Guillaume de Villon's innate faith in men had not been trampled, and François Villon had escaped unscathed.

It was a great jest, worthy of the Devil himself, and thinking of it, the trio of rogues roared their mirth and lifted bottle and cups in fine rascally approval.

A SOFT hand touched Villon's cheek, and he turned to see that Jeanne stood at his side. She bent and kissed him gently, and her eyes were lighted with her liking.

"What news?" Bagot asked. "What news of the Frog, the man whose mouth opened wide once too often?"

"I was sorry for him," Jeanne said. "He betrayed my father to the King's men, and he betrayed me, yet I felt sorry for him. He died painfully."

Because life was hard in France, because death was always so close, they laughed—Bagot, Estienne, and Villon. And Jeanne sat beside them, a wine glass in her hand, and for the first time, François Villon realized the beauty of her.

"What now?" she asked.

"Within the hour," Villon said, "the Bishop shall be robbed again. His service must be returned to the Archbishop, and"—his keen eyes were sparkling—"the Bishop shall not be able to talk, for if he does the Archbishop will be most wroth. It will do the fat toad good to stew with worry in the months to come."

"And then—" Jeanne said.

"Back to Paris," Bagot roared. "Back to the center of the world."

"Hurrah!" Estienne said, and fell asleep, snoring gently.

"Paris?" Jeanne asked Villon.

HE hesitated, knowing what she wanted, and feeling the hot flush of blood at his temples.

"I do not know," he admitted.

Bagot pounded for more ale, the tavern-keeper running to fill his needs.

"We could drink to the memory of Gaudet," Jeanne persisted. "That is, if you returned."

"Gaudet?" Villon said.

"Yes. I was the one who discovered the Archbishop's quarters had been robbed."

"You!" François Villon said in astonishment.

And then knowledge came to his eyes, knowledge and grim approval.

"Yes, me."

"And you were the thief, you it was who slipped the stolen things into Gaudet's saddlebags and then spread the alarm to the guards?"

"It's time to go," Bagot broke in.

"Was it you?" Villon persisted.

And then he was standing, looking down at a slim dark-haired girl whose sense of ironic revenge so matched his own. They were of a kind, in many ways, and the thoughts of what might yet be filled his heart with laughter.

"I'll be back," he said. "Wait for me tomorrow night."

He bent and kissed her soft smooth mouth, liking it, feeling its warm promise. Then, not looking back, he strode on toward the door. He had thought the adventure over, except for one minor detail.

But feeling her kiss lingering on his mouth, he knew that much still lay ahead. He was whistling softly as he mounted his horse and swung its head toward the Church of Orléans. He was whistling and anxiously figuring out the number of hours until he could return.

A NOTICE: to all Bold-Hearted Gentlemen .... Such as are desirous of acquiring Honour, Sport, Education and a few tonnes of incidental Golde...

An advertisement inserted by Sir Walter Ralegh, Knight, into his "Discovery of the...Empire of Guiana" {From Richard Hakluyt's "Principall Discoveries of the English Nation"}... illustrated here by Peter Wells, an avid seeker after *golde*, & the possessor of two itching feet {

For the rest, which my selfe have seene, I will promise these things that follow, which I know to be true. Those that are desirous to discover and to see many nations, may be satisfied within this river, which bringeth foorth so many armes and branches leading to severall countries and provinces, above 2000 miles East and West, and 800 miles South and North, and of these, the most eyther rich in golde, or in other marchandizes. The common souldier shall here fight for golde, and pay himselfe in steede of pence, with plates of halfe a foote broad, whereas he breaketh his bones in other warres for provant and penury. Those commanders and chieftaines that shoot at honour and abundance, shall finde there more rich and beautifull cities, more temples adorned with golden images, more sepulchres filled with treasure, then either Cortez found in Mexico, or Pizarro in Peru; and the shining glory of this conquest will eclipse all those so farre extended beames of the Spanish nation. There is no countrey which yeeldeth more pleasure to the inhabitants, either for those common delights of hunting, hawking, fishing, fowling or the reste, then Guiana doth. It hath so many plaines, cleere rivers, abundance of Phesants, Partriges, Quailes, Railes, Cranes, Herons, and all other fowle: Deere of all sortes, Porkes, Hares, Lions, Tygers, Leopards and divers other sortes of beasts, either for chase, or food... To speake of the severall sorts of every kind, I fear would be troublesome to the Reader, and therefore I will omit them, and conclude that both for health, good ayre, pleasure, and riches, I am resolved it cannot be equalled by any region ...

Serving the Only God He

THE scout dog—typical of many another in the army of Marine war-dog platoons—understood almost everything that was happening. You could take the word of his proud handler for that and find it easy to believe, noting the alert intelligence in the animal's dark eyes and his ready response to commands. Training completed, he and his handler became members of a newly organized platoon, for now they were a group of men and dogs set apart—standing formations, and going on maneuvers as a unit. *Esprit de corps,* that feeling of belonging to a team, and determination not to let anybody on that team down, began to animate the outfit. Perhaps the scout dog sensed even that, since it was no more than a development of the bond of service and loyalty between him and his master.

He could not have understood that he was going off to war, although he would recognize it when he encountered it, being familiar with the sound and the fury of it: the weariness of long marches, combat training with artillery crashing, machine-gun bullets pinging viciously close over him, and land-mines exploding near enough to shower him with clouds of earth. But though he could not comprehend where he was going and why, who can deny that the dog caught the excitement when the platoon got its orders, drew overseas equipment, and entrained for the port of embarkation?

He did not like the train trip, the long hours cramped in his shipping-crate in the stuffy baggage-car. He was lonely and uncomfortable and he whined a little. How glad he was to see his handler pushing through the narrow aisle between the crates to water, feed, and speak to him! And how grateful he was when once the train stopped long enough for him to be taken out for a little exercise.

A tang of salt sea air was in his nostrils when he detrained. He must have felt many curious eyes on him as the lieutenant in command of the platoon led it across the dock and up the transport's gangplank. For indeed this was a stirring and novel sight, these American war dogs and their handlers. The fine animals, strong and fit—mostly Doberman pinschers and German shepherds—walked aboard confidently, each scout dog at his handler's heel, each messenger dog on leash with one of his two masters. Hawsers were cast off, and the ship warped away from the dock.

A handler stood at the rail, staring at the receding shoreline. His dog rose on his hind feet, put his fore-

Stories of our war-dogs and the battles they fought in the Pacific campaigns

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Knows

On wanton wing the war planes drone
To blaze, with livid airlane beams,
A trail of terror, hatred sown,
Too mad for truth, too real for dreams.
Yet clear, above hot hymns of hate,
Brave bells of Yuletide dare again
To sing the song they consecrate
To "Peace on Earth, good will to men;"
While free men, faithful to their trust,
Stand 'neath the stars of Christmas night
To fight and fall, if fall they must,
For God and Country and the right;
And "man's best friend," keen, eager-eyed,
Alert to face his master's foes,
Stands steadfast at his sentry's side,
Serving the only God he knows.

William Cary Duncan:
"Comrades in Arms."

paws up on the rail and gravely watched too. An affectionate arm went around the furry shoulders. "Take a good look at the good old U. S. A., old fellow! May be a long time before we see it again." . . .

The voyage was long, and hard on the dogs. As the ship sailed southward through tropical seas, the dogs' crates on the fantail of the ship, though not as stifling as quarters below, grew terribly hot under the blazing sun. Panting dogs were bivouacked on deck under a shading tarpaulin. It was too crowded for much exercise, but the scout-dog's handler gave him all he could; it helped toward preventing his pads growing soft and vulnerable to the sharp coral rock of the islands where they were bound.

The dogs were trained to use what the sailors called a K-9 "head"—a sandbox with a post set up in the middle of it. One dog's handler and a sailor were nearly in a fight once, when the sailor tried to pet the dog; it was tough convincing him that petting by anybody and everybody would turn a highly trained war dog into a mascot. The dog and his master kept aloof and let the Navy's cracks about the Army and its snooty ways pass unheeded.

A strange shoreline—stretches of sandy beach and palm trees. The platoon debarked, made camp, and went through the days of hardening and refresher training that the long voyage had made necessary. If the Army ever had enough planes, the lieutenant said it would be worth-while to fly a war-dog platoon straight from training-camp to action at the front.

One day the platoon marched back to the beach. This time the men and dogs walked straight into an iron ship, its bow opening to them. The voyage in company with a great flotilla was happily short. Inside the iron ship, the scout dog heard a bombardment begin, far more tremendous than any at the training-camp. Things clanged against the side of the ship like a hammer on an anvil. The scout-dog's handler, carbine slung over his right shoulder, crouched tensely beside him, the dog's leash in his left hand. The shelling and shooting was louder now, and the dog coughed from the acrid smoke enveloping the craft. Somebody shouted a command. The doors of the bow swung wide, and the dog and his handler joined the outward rush. They hit the beach.

Such was the prelude to battle, for the Marine and Army war-dog platoons which took part in the invasions of the Pacific islands held by the Japanese.

BUT it was not in the shell-racked chaos of amphibious assaults that the K-9 Corps found its best opportunity to serve. On the beaches the dogs proved chiefly that they could stand fire, although they were of value in warning of Jap night counterattacks. When the beachhead was secured, and the columns began to push inland, then our war dogs came into their own.

Before the invaders lay the green menace of the tropical jungle, dark with somber shadows beneath its thick canopy of foliage, even at high noon.

Trails, mere tunnels through the dense, vegetation, were the only entrances, unless new paths were slowly and laboriously hacked. Deep within the jungle, along those trails, were laid Japanese ambushes. For the first American patrols thrusting in, that inscription which Dante pictured over the gates of Hell might almost have rung true: *"All hope abandon, ye who enter here."* Nevertheless they drove in. Brave men died when the ambushes were sprung, but the Japs were finally outflanked; patrols pushed on.

WHEN a scout dog and his handler were at the point of the patrol, then it was different. A keen canine nose caught the Jap scent from seventy-five yards to several hundred yards away. The dog froze into rigidity, an almost inaudible rumble in his throat. The patrol halted while scouts wriggled through the jungle to the flanks and dealt with the enemy machine-gun covering the trail, or the patrol leader sent for a mortar section, perhaps by messenger dog, to blast out the ambush. Sometimes a K-9 muzzle would point up at a tree. The Jap sniper, hidden in its branches, had made himself almost invisible to human eyes by painting his body green. But canine eyes, which are color-blind, had not been deceived by the green paint, and his ears were sharp enough to catch a slight rustling overhead. So Yank submachine-guns sprayed with lead, and the sniper's body hurtled to the ground or hung limp from the belt that had bound him to the trunk.

Now and again the dogs failed. But this sentence keeps recurring in reports on war-dog platoons by the divisions to which they were attached:

"No patrols led by dogs were fired on first, or suffered casualties."

There were eight war dogs in the first K-9 tactical unit to take part in operations in the Southwest Pacific—not enough for a platoon, only a detachment. Six were scouts, two messengers—all German and Belgian shep-

herds. Their names were Sandy, Lady, Dick, Duke, Rocky, Husky, Teddy, Ranger. Not one of them returned. Five died on duty and three, just before they were to be sent home, were found to be infected with typhus and had to be destroyed.

Much depended upon the service of this detachment. Whether war dogs would be used further in the Pacific theater virtually rested on the performance of these dogs. How the eight discharged their duty might furnish a theme for a K-9 odyssey worthy of chronicling by Homer, who wrote so movingly of Argus, the old hound of Ulysses'. Even a bare account of the detachment's campaigns, first with the Australians on New Guinea and later with the Marines on New Britain, has an epic flavor.

TRAINED at Beltsville, Maryland, the unit was put under command of Second Lieutenant Robert Johnson. Handlers were Technicians Fourth Class Herman H. Boude, William M. Jorgensen, Guy C. Sheldon, and Arthur N. Tyler. Landed at Port Moresby, New Guinea, and hardened again after the long sea voyage, the outfit was flown to the front in August, 1943, and attached to an Australian battalion of the force which was then driving the Japs back through the Markham and Ramu valleys. For forty-eight out of fifty-three days the K-9s spearheaded the reconnaissance patrols pushing through the jungles. The scout dogs repeatedly spotted Japs or groups of natives not known to be in the vicinity; and the messenger dogs, plunging through streams or shouldering a path through tall Kunai grass, kept contact with troops following the advance.

"Duke could scent a Jap three-quarters of a mile away in an open field, when the wind was right," declared his handler, Sergeant Tyler. "In the jungle he would always warn us when the enemy was two or three hundred yards away. While we were with the Australian Army, Duke was responsible for tipping us off on something like fifty Japs."

A report on the drive reads as did others which followed: "Patrols led by the dogs were never ambushed and suffered no casualties." It keeps recurring. The dogs' service could have no greater tribute.

By the time the detachment was reassigned to the Marine Raider Regiment of the Sixth Army for the New Britain campaign, the dogs had made such a reputation that they were given air transportation in a plane with a group of staff officers. All went well until a rough landing jounced one dog into another's private niche, and on top of its occupant. Ensued a dog-fight of such far-ranging fury that the "brass" had to make a hasty exit from the plane by the escape hatch.

In the Cape Gloucester attack, the dogs went ashore with the first wave. While the Marines held on and consolidated the beachheads, the dogs stood guard at night, giving warning of Jap attempts to infiltrate. The canine detachment led the advance up the coast from the cape. The dog Dick constantly alerted to Japs in the path of the advance, ranging from spotting single stragglers to full platoons. Once, as the patrol approached a group of five camouflaged huts, Dick insisted on pointing only one of them. Marines, trusting him, ignored the four huts and concentrated their fire on the fifth. Investigation gave the dog a perfect score: four of the huts were empty. In the fifth, four Japs had been waiting in ambush until Marine bullets riddled its walls.

Duke again distinguished himself. The two-year-old, sixty-pound German shepherd now won a reputation as a bring-'em-back-alive expert. Although prisoners were especially desired by Intelligence officers for questioning, the rank and file of Marines kept forgetting this whenever they met Japs—until it was too late. So also did the K-9 handlers at first. "Duke led me up to a hut one day," related Sergeant Tyler, Duke's handler. "I found a Jap outside and stabbed him. Duke stayed on the alert. I found a second Jap hiding inside and knifed him too."

But after two days of killing Japs, the Americans remembered that prisoners were needed. Duke led a patrol around a little hill in an approach so stealthy that three Japs were captured at their noon meal with their mouths still full of rice. That same afternoon the dog took other prisoner-hunters undetected to within fifteen yards of a Jap captain and two men; the fugitives jumped into the sea, but were fished out. Three more Nips were tallied for the dog before the day was over. Duke's total for the campaign was: fifty Japs flushed, with twenty-two of them captured and the rest killed.

Meanwhile the redoubtable Duke continued saving American lives. Working with a patrol on the mission of locating the point on the coast where the Japanese were evacuating their troops, the dog sniffed and alerted. The patrol, noting the spot, started to slip away. But the presence of the Americans had been discovered by the enemy. Jap counter-patrols began to close in, determined that news of the embarkation-place would never get out, and it was Duke's keen nose that guided the Marines from between the pincers. On a dozen other occasions he prevented scouts from running into ambushes. . . .

Sandy was one of the two messenger dogs with the detachment. He had iron nerves, and shelling never seemed to bother him. All through the campaign this black shepherd—a big fellow weighing a good sixty pounds—was to be found with one of his handlers bringing up the rear of patrols, led by one of the scout dogs. Swiftly and surely, he carried messages back to his second master, following the main body. The damp of the jungle had forced the designing of a new moisture-proof container which, fastened to Sandy's collar, held the dispatches he delivered.

Now as torrential tropical rains poured down, the walkie-talkie radio sets began to blank out—and just at a critical moment when communication was most needed. The Marines, advancing on a strategic Jap air-strip, had run into strong defenses near Turzi Point. Direct infantry assault of the Jap pillboxes would cost many lives and might take more time than could be spared; artillery-fire was needed to blast the way clear.

Radio was modern and using dogs was primitive—but radio was out, and it was up to Sandy. Runners might have made it in time, but the going was tough, and there was a Jap barrage to get through. The officer commanding scribbled the coördinates of the pillboxes, with an urgent request for artillery-fire on them and handed the slip to Sergeant Brown. The handler put it in Sandy's pouch, gave him an affectionate pat on the rump and ordered, "Report!"

Mortar-shells and tank-shells burst around the dog as he sped off. For much of his run he was under heavy fire. He plowed through tall thick sharp-edged Kunai grass, plunged into and swam a river. For twenty-four hours he had not seen Sergeant Sheldon. Furthermore, his second handler had moved to an entirely different place from the one where Brown and the dog had left him to go forward with the advance. Yet an unerring instinct was guiding the dog.

IN the position occupied by the main Marine force, Sheldon was one of many men crouched in foxholes behind barbed-wire entanglements. But Sandy was looking for him and him alone. The sergeant glanced up to see sixty pounds of black dog hurtling over the wire barrier, to land right on top of him. Sandy, panting and dripping but with tail joyously wagging over the reunion, and over Sheldon's praise, had delivered his message.

They sent the strong dog straight back with an acknowledgment. Soon an artillery concentration crashed on the pillboxes, pounding them and their garrison to pieces. The advance surged forward over the rubble.

Scout dogs saved lives in jungle warfare; that had been brilliantly demonstrated by the Army K-9 detachment, small as it was.

It took a bold dog to plunge into the dark entrance of a cave where fanatical Japs were lurking.

Meanwhile the Marine Corps had been training its own war dogs and organizing them and the personnel handling them into platoons, to be regularly attached to battalions or regiments in combat.

To command the first Marine dog platoon the Corps picked Clyde Henderson, a young chemistry teacher, a fancier of Doberman pinschers, and a specialist in obedience training. Commissioned a lieutenant in the Corps, he was ordered to Camp Lejeune. In the spring of 1943, his outfit was ready: Twenty-four dogs, all Dobermans except for three German shepherds, and fifty-five men. A special train took them to the Pacific coast and they shipped in May.

Marine officers in the field were not easy to convince, but Henderson persuaded them to give his dogs a trial. Their performance in one week of maneuvers overcame skepticism; however, some time was spent in staging-areas before orders into action arrived. The platoon was attached to the Second Marine Raider Battalion and on November 1, 1943, they sailed for Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Aboard a landing-craft under heavy fire, the platoon headed for the beach.

There were a couple of thousand Japs on the island toward which they were speeding, and most of the Japs seemed to be shooting at this particular landing-craft, with artillery and small arms. Lt. Henderson watched the dogs milling about nervously. He and the handlers were equally edgy—it was the first time any of them had been under hostile fire. The men had their arms around the dogs, trying to quiet them, and reassuring themselves.

A grinding, neck-jerking jolt—the barge had grounded on a sand bar about ten yards offshore. Henderson and his men jumped overboard and started wading for the shore, water up to their waists, the dogs swimming after them. Dripping, they emerged on the bullet-spattered beach. Across that strip of sand they dashed at top speed for the shelter of the jungle. The lieutenant shouted orders to the handlers with their dogs to join the Raider companies where they had already been assigned. Two dogs detailed to M Company happened to draw the most crucial task that day. Their names were Andy and Caesar.

Andy was a Doberman whose proud stride had won him the nickname of "Gentleman Jim." He was an affectionate dog with his friends, but the Marines had trained him "to be a mean *hombre* with strangers." He and his handler were sent straight out to the point of one of M Company's patrols boring into the jungle.

Andy, differing from the average scout dog, liked to work off leash. When the order came to advance, he trotted casually up the trail about ten yards ahead of his handler. To the racket of battle off on the flanks, he paid no attention whatever—here was his job! About four hundred yards up the trail he halted. His handler watched him for a moment, then passed the word back through the column that it probably was only a wild boar in the brush. But about one hundred and fifty yards farther, the dog froze in his tracks. His pointed ears pricked up even more sharply and his hackles rose. A soft growl rumbled in his throat and his head pointed slightly to the right. His handler, Pfc. Robert Lansley whispered back: "Well, this is it. There's a Jap sniper back in there, probably about seventy-five yards."

The scout leader was a bit skeptical, never having worked with dogs before, but a couple of automatic riflemen were sent ahead to investigate—just in case. A few minutes later there was a rattle of fire. A rifleman came back and said with a grin: "We figured the Jap must be hiding in a mangrove tree just off the trail, so I gave it a good spraying. Sure enough, a Jap tumbled out." Everybody looked at Andy with new respect and reliance. Twice more before they reached a trail junction and established a road block, Andy alerted to the presence of snipers. That day Company M advanced farther than any other company, and occupied the only major position captured by the Americans.

Caesar had his chance as the Japs' resistance stiffened. Henderson knew Caesar as a big, bashful, German shepherd, given through Dogs for Defense the day after his owners, three brothers, had all entered the service. As a messenger dog, he was in sudden demand when the walkie-talkie radios failed to carry through the dense jungle. He made runs back and forth between his two handlers with Jap

When a seventeen-man patrol was surrounded, Buster made runs under heavy Jap fire for reinforcements.

snipers taking potshots at him en route. But the light was poor and Caesar was fast; he got through.

In his secondary rôle as a sentry dog, Caesar showed both bravery and perfect obedience. Henderson tells the story: "It's a harrowing thing to try to relax and sleep in a foxhole, when you are wondering if a Jap may creep in and knife you as you sleep. The Japs had been devils at infiltrating our outposts at night. So we placed dogs to supplement the human sentries.

"We had our first casualty at dawn of the third day. It was Caesar, the German shepherd, already the darling of the raiders. The Japs had launched a dawn attack. Caesar, on hearing the Japs coming, jumped out of the foxhole and ran toward them. Handler Mayo called him back. Just as Caesar halted grudgingly to turn back, a Jap pumped bullets into him.

"During the confusion of battle, Caesar disappeared. Mayo was frantic. He called me to learn whether I had seen him. He was half shouting and half crying. But I hadn't seen Caesar. Soon we found a trail of blood through the jungle. As I suspected, the dog had returned to the battalion command post and had taken refuge in the bushes near Johnny Kleeman, his other handler. Kleeman hadn't heard him come in.

"There was Caesar on the ground barely conscious. Mayo ran to him, lay down beside him and hugged him gently. Three raiders were busy improvising a special stretcher. They had chopped down two long poles and lashed them to two short cross-poles. To this frame they fastened a blanket so it made a deep hammock.

"When the trip started to the regimental first-aid station, a dozen raiders, including Mayo and Kleeman, trailed along. They waited outside the hospital tent. After twenty minutes the regimental surgeon came out and announced that the bullet in Caesar's shoulder was too near the heart to operate, but that he might pull through.

"He did. While he was convalescing, the raiders insisted on getting daily bulletins on his condition and tried to pamper him by sneaking him food, choice morsels of 'C' rations! Caesar was able to return to active duty about three weeks later. He still carries the Jap slug in his shoulder."

DAILY, as the Marines drove deeper into the island, the war-dog platoon added to its record. Jack, a Doberman, spotted a Jap sniper in a tree, pointing him like a bird dog. The sniper, shot out of his perch, proved to have had a heavy machine-gun trained on the company command post. Another Jack, a German shepherd, was shot in the back as he was carrying back a vital message from a road-block being attacked by the Japs—the telephone line had been shot out. The dog gallantly ran on and delivered his dispatch which brought reinforcements and stretcher-bearers for the dog's wounded handler, among others. The Doberman Otto was at least one hundred yards distant when he alerted to an enemy machine-gun; before it opened fire, the Marine patrol had time to take cover. The Doberman Rex warned of a Jap surprise attack at dawn and it was blasted to bits.

Although six of the dogs, along with the bitches, had to be washed out by Lt. Henderson for front-line duty, the rest of them carried through the campaign or fell in action as Kuno did: Kuno, a Doberman, was severely wounded in the head and stomach by the explosion of a Japanese grenade, and had to be put out of his pain. The platoon buried him with honor.

The dogs were going strong on the fourteenth day of the fight. It was then that Andy performed what Lt. Henderson considered the most extraordinary feat of the Bougainville operation.

The advance had been held up for some hours by machine-gun fire. Andy's handlers, Pfc. Lansley and Pfc. John Mahoney, went forward into the jungle; presently Andy froze, then pointed to the left and to the right. Peering through the foliage, Lansley saw two banyan trees and decided the Japs had set up machine-gun nests beneath the roots of those trees. With Mahoney covering him, Lansley traversed both trees' bases with machine-gun fire, then ran forward and threw grenades into the dugout. The destruction of those two machine-gun nests enabled the Americans to move forward, and the next day Colonel Shapley sent a report to Washington that the dog platoon was a success.

The Commanding General of the First Marine Amphibious Corps officially reported that: "The dogs have proven themselves as message-carriers, scouts, and vital night security; and were constantly employed during the operation of securing and extending the beachhead. They were remarkable, and more are needed." Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, the Marine Corps Commandant, wrote personal letters to the donors of the six cited dogs.

Tributes from the "brass" are of considerable account. But to Lieutenant—later promoted to Captain—Henderson and the personnel of the First Marine War Dog Platoon, certain actions of comrades-in-arms spoke more loudly than words. When handlers and their dogs joined a Marine outfit in action, foxholes would be voluntarily dug for them.

"If a man will dig a foxhole in the front line for another guy," ran a Leatherneck saying, "he wants that guy around."

ON the island of Guam is a small plot of ground, a spot deeply affecting to all who are fond of dogs. Should you visit the Asan Military Cemetery, walk on to a small adjoining enclosure. Palm trees and flowering plants surround it. There are ranked a score or so of small white slabs marking the graves of American dogs of war. They bear the letters U.S.M.C.—these dogs served with the United States Marine Corps—and beneath is a silhouette of a dog's head and the dog's name and platoon. No troops who served with dogs would deny such honorable interment there, or in a second war-dog cemetery on Okinawa, to their comrades in battle.

War dogs served with the Marines and the Army through all the bloody business of island-hopping across the Pacific. Guadalcanal, New Guinea, New Britain, Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, the Philippines—names that ring with valor—stand on the records of one or another of the platoons. Eight Army units and seven Marine units, saw action against the Japanese. This history singles out certain units only because the circumstances of their assignment afforded them greater opportunities and more strenuous and stirring service.

Campaigning that was ideal for the K-9 Corps was encountered by the Army's 26th War Dog Platoon on Morotai in the Dutch East Indies. There the enemy had made little resistance to the American landing, but had retired into the mountainous jungles, whence they sallied forth frequently to raid and harass. Our troops, in order to root the Jap out, had to uncover and destroy his camps, supply-dumps, and communications, defended by ambushes and trail blocks.

Helping our patrols to penetrate those Japanese barriers with as few casualties as possible was the mission of the dogs and their handlers of the 26th War Dog Platoon—the mission for which they had been trained.

Scout dogs of the 26th, from September 17 to November 10, 1944, led more than one hundred patrols, ranging from a five-man scouting-party to a rifle company of two hundred or more. On these patrols—in the field from one to three days—the dogs never failed to alert at seventy-five yards or farther. Not a single casualty was suffered when a dog was along. With a dog in the lead, scouts moved ahead more rapidly, confident they would not be ambushed.

Infantrymen on the patrols did not stint their praise either of the dogs or of the handlers. As one infantry lieutenant in a report on the 26th's activities stated: "I have worked with these dogs on a number of patrols. Time and again they have saved our patrols from being ambushed. Not only do the dogs deserve credit, but the men who handle them. Theirs is a tricky and dangerous job with no credit other than the praise of all the men who work with them. I think they should be made eligible for the Combat Infantry Badge and also plenty of rank to compensate for the extreme hardships of their nerve-racking job."

"The dogs and men are without doubt one of our most valuable adjuncts in jungle fighting," another report ran. And a third added: "The men who handle the dogs have my outstanding admiration, as they are the Number One man, and up ahead of the scouts. Their action has always been outstanding. Personally I always feel better on patrol when I have a good dog and trainer with me."

Messenger dogs, too, had their chance on Morotai when radio failed. Sets often went dead after patrols had advanced a mile or so into the jungle, and dogs were the only communication except runners. Notable was the feat of Buster, a collie messenger. When a seventeen-man patrol was surrounded and hard-pressed, the dog made runs under heavy Jap machine-gun and knee-mortar fire. Reinforcements sent up were strong enough not only to extricate the patrol but to destroy the entire enemy force.

THE K-9 Corps made such a reputation for itself in the Pacific Theater that the staff found it necessary to protect it against overestimates of its abilities. As always, the Corps had to be saved from its friends: soldiers who tried to pet and feed the dogs. Orders were issued in the form of a training circular sent out through divisions at the front.

"No individual," it directed, "will attempt to touch or feed a scout dog, nor will he speak, whistle, lunge at, or in any manner, either by voice or gesture, attempt to attract the dog's attention.

"Dogs give silent warning in the following manner: by lunging on their leash, pointing in the manner of a bird dog, or by raising the hair on their back and neck. They do not bark and seldom growl.

"The handler is the sole judge of what the dog can do. He will not be ordered to work a dog if he says that the dog cannot work.

"One factor, such as the wrong direction of the wind, will cause a dog to be useless on a mission.

"Dogs work best for from 4 to 8 hours. If a mission requires a night vigil all night, it must have two dogs.

"The use of scout dogs is a matter of common sense, mixed with a fair understanding of animals.

"These dogs are not super-weapons nor will they work miracles. They have been trained for special work which they can do with the help and understanding of all concerned, and will more than prove their worth by giving timely warning of the approach of the enemy."

It was briefing badly needed, designed to forestall such a bitter experience as the Army's 25th War Dog Platoon had undergone when an infantry patrol leader overruled two handlers on their dogs.

Two of the 25th's dogs and their handlers were on duty with a patrol moving through a jungle trail. Suddenly the dog at the point made a pickup and alerted. He and his handler stood fast. But the patrol leader motioned them forward. Reluctantly they advanced. Rifle-fire cracked, and the dog was instantly killed, though his master was not hit. But the patrol leader was not satisfied with the amount of fire drawn. He ordered the second scout-dog's handler to put him on a long leash and send him out toward the Japanese position.

From the report, formal but explicit, it is easy to picture what happened in the jungle gloom that day:

The handler, crouching beside his dog and whispering earnestly that it wouldn't be any use to get his dog knocked off that way. . . . The leader obstinately insisting. . . . The handler, eying the dead dog up the trail, and pleading on. . . . Finally a curtly given direct order. . . . The handler's gesture of helplessness as he shifted leashes and sent his dog forward. . . . And the dog, giving unquestioning obedience, advancing down the trail.

When the dog reached the spot where the body of his K-9 comrade lay, hidden rifles opened fire again. A bullet smashed low into the scout dog's left shoulder, nearly severing his left front leg. Since he could not recover from so grave a wound, he was mercifully put to death.

Two fine dogs had been needlessly sacrificed. Giving the first alert to the presence of the enemy was what they had been trained to do and that had saved the patrol from walking into an ambush and being shot to pieces. More could not fairly be asked.

ON that dearly-bought coral atoll, Peleliu, the commanding officer of a heavy weapons company, Captain Carl Lockard, U.S.M.C.R., saw his war dogs in the field when dogs and handlers were detailed for sentry duty with his 37-mm. cannon, set up to cover trails. Lockard, keenly interested, watched the dogs in action and admired their steadiness under fire; they never flinched when the Marines opened up. But they were not immune to shock when a Japanese shell burst close to them; Lockard noticed that for some time afterward they went about as if in a trance, dulled and drooping. He pitied, too, their suffering from the sharp coral cutting cruelly into their feet. For a while a dog would wear the shoes his handler tied on him, but soon the distracted animal would chew them off. It was not to be wondered that canine pads were injured by rock formations so jagged that the special rubber-fibre-soled shoes of the men were worn through in four or five days. On several occasions, Lockard saw handlers carrying their heavy dogs in their arms over bad stretches of coral.

He would not forget the spectacle of a dog whose handlers had become casualties. (The Marines were then using two handlers to a dog.) The dog would follow along with the rest of the platoon like a lost soul until he was sent to the rear to be retrained with new handlers. Usually after a few weeks he would have given his loyalty and obedience to his new masters.

Too often it went unconsidered that dogs are as susceptible to fatigue as men. When worn out, their keen noses could not always be depended on. Captain Lockard remembers one black night on Peleliu when a handler and his dog, along with another Marine, went to sleep in an M-7 gun emplacement. The three were exhausted from an all-day patrol. The dog slept as soundly as the two Marines when a Jap sneaked up and took a rifle from right out of the arms of the handler and under the dog's nose. Other Marines heard the Jap slipping away and shot him. That taught the outfit to replace a dog, exhausted from patrolling, with a fresh sentry dog to stand guard at night.

Outstanding service on Peleliu and on Okinawa as well was performed by a scout dog named Boy. Twice he saved Marine patrols from stumbling into an ambush. On a third occasion the dog was about to alert, but the Marines had then approached the Jap strong-point so closely that they were taken under fire. As if to make amends for not having given his warning sooner, Boy broke loose from his handler and raced into the thick underbrush in a savage charge on the enemy gun. A bullet split a muscle in his left fore-shoulder. But the diversion caused by his charge had given the Leathernecks a chance to storm the gun. Its crew fled, leaving two dead behind. Marines tenderly placed the dog on a stretcher, loaded him on an ambulance, and took him back to an emergency first-aid station. Four men of the company stood by as a Navy surgeon prepared to treat Boy's wound. "Take good care of him, Doc," they begged, "and make sure that when he's evacuated he has no duty-slip. He's earned a rest."

There are failures, as well as achievements, in records of war dogs in the Pacific. At times they alerted and no trace of the enemy could be found, or they alerted for animals. Adverse reports stated that they made too much noise in thick vegetation; that they tired too quickly; that they slowed up advances; that too many washed out under the stress of bombardments.

The answer is that a dog, like a human being, is an individual. Some war dogs were up to it, others were not. As a Marine handler put it: "Nobody likes dogs better than I do, but you can't rate them over a human being that way—just like humans, some of them are eager beavers and some of them are dope-offs."

For the most part the dogs not only superbly performed the duties for which they had been trained but took on others. They guarded supply dumps and prisoners. Stationed around restricted areas, they helped save souvenir-hunters from their own folly; it never seemed to occur to a rash G.I. or gyrene that a Samurai sword might bait a booby trap, or a sniper have his sights lined in on the Yank who stooped to pick up an abandoned Jap flag. The dogs helped burial details find our own dead. Also they checked Nips who might be shamming dead. "A live Jap can't lie still while a dog stalks him," one handler declared.

PERHAPS the most unusual extra service was the contribution of Bebe, a Doberman pinscher. Although deafened by shellfire on Bougainville, she stayed on duty and was transferred to Guam. During the fighting to recapture that lost American base, Bebe acted as a walking blood-bank for wounded dogs of the 2nd and 3rd Marine War Dog Platoons. Nor do the transfusions she gave appear to have depleted her. During an interlude in the campaign, she took up with a doughty Doberman scout, the result being a litter of six male pups. The sire was shortly after killed in action and is one of those buried in the island's war-dog cemetery.

Cave-checking was another K-9 extra, by reason of which not a few veterans are living today—and grateful.

It took a bold dog, as it took a brave man, to plunge into the dark forbidding entrance of a cave where fanatical Japs were lurking. Some dogs were reluctant or refused; others, with the hunting instinct strong in them, rushed in. But most K-9s would alert a cave containing Japs, and it would be dealt with in one way or another. Otherwise, small but dangerous groups of the enemy, left behind our lines, would have been able to slip out at night and cause considerable trouble. On Guam, Saipan and Iwo Jima, dogs were invaluable aids in cave cleanups.

On Iwo, Rick, a German shepherd, alerted a cave for two Marines with whom he was scouting. They jumped inside and killed a Jap near the entrance, but the dog kept right on alerting. An idea that they had taken enough chances for the time being dawned on the Leathernecks. They withdrew, fetched an interpreter and pushed fifty yards farther into the interior before Rick alerted again. The interpreter then began spouting Japanese. It took him an hour, but he succeeded in talking nine Nips into surrendering.

The Japs had a trick of camouflaging the entrance of a cave stronghold to make it look as if it had been closed. If it were a careful job, it might fool an American patrol, but not a dog.

"We were about to pass a cave that gave all outward appearances of being closed," relates Handler Robert F. Greene of a scouting patrol on Iwo which he led with his dog Bibi. "Actually, the cave just had large rocks rolled up in front of it. Bibi, ranging out in front of the patrol, alerted this cave; he trotted right up to it and stuck his nose between the rocks. We knew then that the apparently sealed cave was strictly a phony.

"We rolled the rocks back, killed one Jap near the mouth of it, and demolition men blew it closed to take care of any other stragglers in there. If Bibi hadn't caught that one for us, those Nips could have still been hanging around there, waiting to strike, long after Iwo had been secured."

Another good cave-checker was Dutchess of the 39th, an Army platoon. Leading a mop-up party over a cave-pitted area in the Philippines, an area which the enemy was believed to have evacuated entirely, the dog spotted the one cave in which Japs still were concealed. The thirty-three of the enemy inside were finished off by hand grenades. . . .

"More than 200 combat patrols during the period from 9 March to 23 May 1945. . . . More than 200 known enemy killed by patrols after advancing into areas alerted by dogs. . . . Any number of times parties were saved from ambush by the alertness of the dogs and their handlers."

Thus runs the citation of the 39th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon, made by the 33rd Division, one of the four divisions with which that platoon served in the Philippines.

Two deaths in action, one of a handler and one of a dog, also stand on the 39th's roll of honor.

When an assault patrol was given the mission of locating and destroying an enemy machine-gun nest, Sergeant Knisely and his German shepherd Danny took the point of the patrol. Twice the dog alerted, and scouts went forward but were unable to spot the well-hidden nest. Then the handler volunteered to lead the patrol as close as possible. Slowly and cautiously they moved up. Danny alerted very strongly, and the sergeant pointed out the gun's exact position. But in the fight that eliminated it and its crew, Knisely was killed. He was awarded the Silver Star posthumously.

Wolf, another shepherd, was leading an infantry patrol through the Corabello Mountains toward the strategic Balete Pass when he scented a Jap party entrenched on a hill about one hundred and fifty yards distant. The patrol launched a surprise attack. In the hot engagement that followed, Wolf was wounded by shell fragments. Since he did not whimper or show any sign of pain, the men around him failed to notice that he had been hit. As the firing increased in intensity, the Americans realized they were heavily outnumbered and were being encircled. Again the dog and his handler took post at the point. Three times Wolf's alerts enabled the patrol to avoid Jap columns closing in on it. Severely wounded though he was, he finally guided the American troops out of the trap and back to their command post. When the gallant animal's wounds were discovered, an emergency operation was performed but could not save him.

Illustrated by John Costigan, N.A.

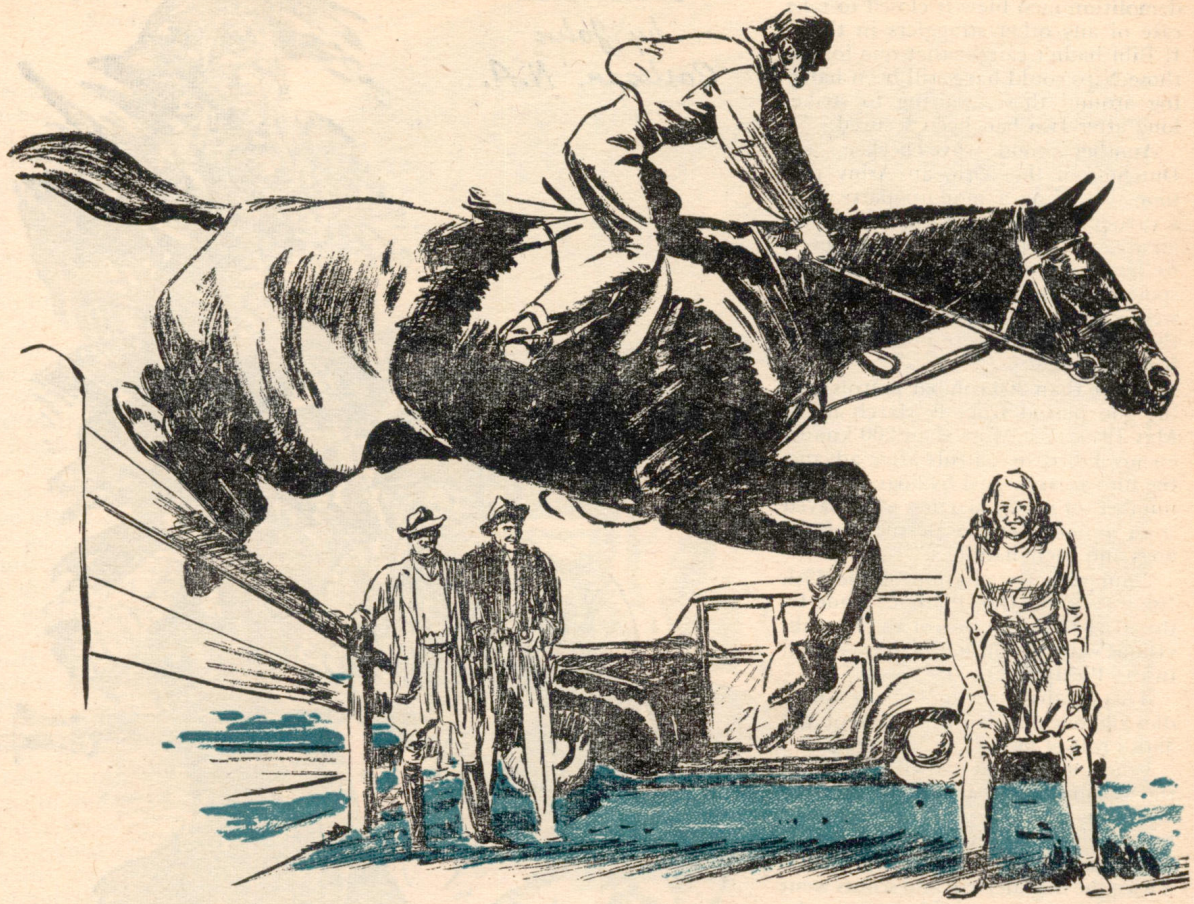
Twice the dog alerted, but scouts were unable to spot the well-hidden nest.

Another K-9 hero was Bruce. During a screaming Jap banzai attack on E Company, 27th Infantry, this German shepherd sighted three Japs with fixed bayonets bearing down on a foxhole in which lay two wounded American soldiers. Bruce rushed out in a fierce charge that routed the Japs and saved the wounded men.

First-hand judgment on American war dogs in the Pacific ranges from Divisional commendations in military language to a Marine sergeant's blunt accolade: "They really paid off."

Words were backed by deeds: Those handlers lugging dogs whose pads had been cut by coral. . . . Wounded K-9s carried back on stretchers and given transfusions and careful surgical treatment. . . . Dogs, killed in action, given honorable burial. And Dogs for Defense headquarters in New York was receiving from handlers at the front an increasing number of letters with the request they be forwarded to their dog's owner. Typical was the one a Marine wrote about his Doberman: "During the past months Judy and I have been through a lot together and I have become very fond of her. I would like to have her after the war. So if you can possibly see your way clear to part with her, I would be forever grateful to you—and although I am not a person of any wealth I would be only too happy to pay any amount I could afford if I could have her."

Then and almost invariably the owner's answer was yes.



WHEN A RACEHORSE WILL COME OVER A FENCE IN ANSWER TO A GIRL'S WHISTLE, THERE IS AN EXTRA HAZARD IN BETTING ON HIM.

THE gray colt turned through the gate and halted in front of the freshly painted white stable. Bart Mulcane slid to the ground and handed the reins to the waiting groom.

"Give him an extra carrot, Tim. He fled every jump on the course, and never laid a shoe on a stick. He's a good boy."

Tim grinned, and jerked his head at a long shining car parked across the cobbled yard.

"There's a bad boy waiting for you in the tack-room, boss. Mr. Parnell Heath, the big shot from the big town." The groom lowered his voice. "I hear he's fresh out of jail."

Bart stared at the long car.

"That's right. Heath got a year and a day for income-tax evasion last spring. I wonder what he wants."

Tim shrugged. "I didn't ask him. But I checked the saddles and bridles, and locked the steel case before I left him alone in there."

Bart laughed, walked through the archway into the stable and halted at the tack-room door. A stocky man in a pearl-gray hat and smoothly tailored tweeds arose from a chair and came forward, his thick lips curved in a smile, his hand extended.

"How are you, son," he said, his voice smooth. "I hear you're getting a good string of jumpers together this year."

Bart gripped the soft, pudgy hand briefly.

"I've got a few likely youngsters. Are you buying?"

"Not exactly." The stocky man hesitated, then went on: "I dropped in at Luther Funderwhite's farm this morning. Luther tells me he sold you a colt about four months ago—a big black, over sixteen hands, coming five years, with a white sock on his right foreleg."

"That's right," Bart told him. "I had a customer who wanted a quiet hack for his daughter."

"For his daughter?" Parnell Heath chuckled, then sobered. "That colt belongs to me, son. That dumb Dutchman had no right to sell him."

Bart stared at the stocky man thoughtfully. There was something wrong with this—something that didn't make sense.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Heath," he said quietly. "You must have your horses mixed. This black I bought from Luther is just a panfooted plug. Luther had him in a plow. I gave a hundred for him, trimmed him up and sold him for four hundred. He isn't your kind of horse. You wouldn't be bothered with his sort."

"There's no mix-up," Parnell Heath said. "I left that colt with Luther last spring, gave him four months' board in advance. Then I had that little disagreement with the Internal Revenue boys, and they tucked me away for a year. I guess Luther thought I was in for life. He put the colt to work and then sold him to you." The stocky man shrugged, then added: "It's just one of those tough breaks. But I want that colt."

Bart Mulcane shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't help you," he said slowly. "You'll have to work it out with Luther. He gave me a bill-of-sale, and I sold the colt in good faith. The deal's closed."

Parnell Heath's black eyes narrowed. He asked curtly:

"Who bought him?"

Double Redouble

by RICHARD DERMODY

The whistle shrilled again. Parnell Heath leaped back as the powerful body drove into the air and over the fence, landing a scant yard away.

"A retired business man named Selwyn Lake," Bart said. "He has a farm about five miles down the road."

Heath flipped a card on the table. "Here's my phone-number in New York. You get that colt back from Lake, and I'll put a couple of hundred extra dollars in your pants pocket. Offer Lake up to a thousand. I want that colt."

Bart picked up the card. "All right. I'll try to get him."

"Good." The stocky man slapped him on the shoulder. "Call me any time. I'll have a van and a check here in a few hours." He walked to the door and turned, his thick lips smiling, the black eyes above them hard, cold. "Don't get any fancy ideas, son," he said softly. "It might not be healthy."

Bart Mulcane stood quietly in the tack-room for a long time after the whine of the big car had faded down the road. There had been menace, a definite threat, in Parnell Heath's smooth voice. He frowned. Luther Funderwhite was just an ordinary farmer, not a horseman. Why would a man like Heath, owner of one of the top racing stables on Long Island, board a horse with Luther?

A foot scraped in the doorway. The groom, Tim, was edging into the room.

"You figure on schooling the bay mare this morning?"

Bart nodded. "I'll ride her over to the Lake place. It'll make a good ten miles on the road for her."

Tim grinned. "I was listening outside the door," he said. "Ten will get you twenty, old man Lake won't sell that black colt. I've seen the girl riding him a few times, and she gets along good with him. She's a swell dish—a blonde," he added.

"I never happened to run into the girl, but I'm afraid you're right," Bart said. He looked at the groom. "What do you think about this? Why is Heath in such a sweat about that colt?"

Tim grinned. "Heath's a slick operator. Maybe he wants to do a little plowing."

Bart shook his head. "I doubt it. The only plowing Parnell Heath ever did in his life was in someone else's pocketbook."

"That's the kind of plowing I meant," the groom told him.

BART'S bay mare turned into the graveled drive of the Lake farm, lifted her head and whinnied. A shrill answer rippled from the stable behind the rambling stone house. Bart Mulcane grinned. The black colt was in residence. He lifted a hand to the tall gray-haired man on the lawn.

Selwyn Lake walked to the driveway and smiled up at the dark-faced young man in the saddle.

"Glad you came along, Mulcane," he said heartily. "Cynthia is quite taken with that horse you sold me. He has turned out to be quite a lad."

Bart slid to the ground, pulled the reins over the mare's head and walked beside the taller man. They turned the corner into the stableyard. Bart halted, stared.

A tall blonde girl in mud-spattered jodhpurs and a white roll-neck sweater was briskly applying a dandy-brush to a black horse tied to a ring in the stable wall. She turned and smiled, her teeth white and even. Bart looked past her at the horse.

The black colt stood quiet, his slender ears alerted at the bay mare. Bart walked forward slowly, his eyes tracing the proud set of the ebony head, the long muscles rippling in arm and shoulder, the clean outline of gaskin and stifle, the slope of the broad, powerful quarters from hip to croup. He knew now why Parnell Heath wanted this colt.

"It was that damned plow that fooled me," he said under his breath.

The colt who had dragged a plow alongside Luther's draft-horses four

months ago had been rough-coated, coarse, his feet flat and broad from barefoot months in pasture, his flanks and belly distended with Luther's meadow hay. Hard grain, a warm stable and regular work under a saddle had shaped and finished him. Bart glanced at Selwyn Lake.

"I wouldn't recognize him."

The tall man chuckled, turned to the girl.

"Cynthia, this is Bart Mulcane, the man responsible for bringing you two soul-mates together."

The girl laid an affectionate hand on the black colt's shoulder and came forward, her blue eyes smiling, her handshake warm and firm.

"I'm so grateful to you, Mr. Mulcane," she said. "I thought I'd hate it, being buried up here in the country, but now—" She laughed and glanced back at the colt. "I call him Dark Dream. I suppose you think that's a silly name."

Bart grinned, gestured at the bay mare.

"Allow me to present Chocolate Claire. I christened her."

Cynthia laughed again.

"I feel much better now." She hesitated, then went on: "I hoped you would drop in to see us. You see, we are not absolute strangers, Mr. Mulcane. I saw you win two steeplechase races at Saratoga, last August." There was a faint pink flush in her cheeks. "I think you're a beautiful rider."

"Thanks." Bart looked at the girl. Tim was right. Selwyn Lake's daughter was a swell dish. About twenty-two or -three, he judged. Good type, well legged up, with an easy way of going. She wore riding kit as though she belonged in it. He turned his eyes to the colt, reluctantly.

"Have you ever tried him over a fence?"

Cynthia shook her head.

"I don't ride well enough for that, but he can jump." She pointed at the white-barred gate leading to the paddock beyond the stable yard, a gate nearly five feet high. "He came over that one morning when I whistled to him."

"When you whistled to him?"

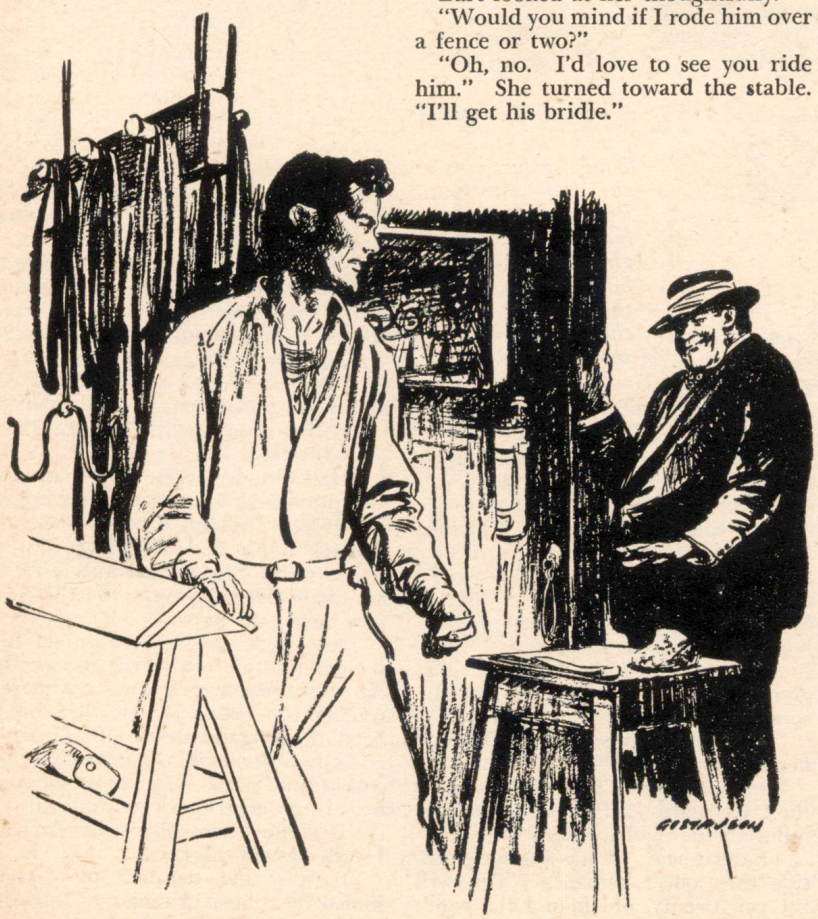
Cynthia laughed, put her fingers to her lips and produced a shrill note.

"I was a yell-leader at school. I trained Dream to come to the gate by rattling a bucket of oats and whistling at the same time. One morning I whistled too soon. Before I could get the gate open, he came over it like a bird."

Bart looked at her thoughtfully.

"Would you mind if I rode him over a fence or two?"

"Oh, no. I'd love to see you ride him." She turned toward the stable. "I'll get his bridle."



"Don't get any fancy ideas, son," he said softly. "It might not be healthy."

Bart pulled the saddle from the bay mare, and walking over to the colt, laid it gently on the short-coupled back. The girl came from the stable carrying a big-ringed hunting snaffle. He watched approvingly as she unbuckled the halter, slid the reins over the colt's ears and slipped the jointed bit between the ebony lips. This girl had the right touch with a horse. He buckled the girth into the billet ends, picked up the reins, turned the iron and swung into the saddle.

The black colt felt right, strong and collected. Bart thrust his feet home in the irons, tapped the dark flanks and moved the colt into a trot. The second time around the yard he halted the colt and smiled down at the girl.

"You've got good hands. His mouth is as light as a feather."

The color rose in her cheeks.

"Thank you, kind sir," she said demurely.

Bart turned the colt, walked him to the far end of the yard.

"Here we go," he said sharply, and drove his heels into the black flanks.

The colt whirled on his haunch, broke to a long, reaching gallop. As he neared the gate, Bart shifted his weight forward, took a light pull at the reins. He grinned as the black's hocks came under him, and dropped his hands.

They landed lightly on the deep turf beyond the gate, the colt swinging to his long, easy gallop again. Bart settled in the saddle, looked thoughtfully at the slender, alert ears.

"You've had plenty of this, baby," he said softly.

He swung the colt in a wide circle back to the gate, the soft drum of hoofs on turf steady, relaxed. The black swept over the gate again, then trotted to the girl and halted.

"That was wonderful. I've never seen anything so perfect." She looked up at the tall man beside her. "I've just got to learn to take him over jumps. Please, Dad!"

Selwyn Lake looked at the rider.

"Do you think she could handle him? Would you be willing to teach her?" he asked.

BART looked at the girl, his smile fading. The cold black eyes and hard face of Parnell Heath rose in front of him. There was no mystery about this black colt now. He knew the story, or at least enough of it. Not a pretty story! Not a story to tell these two decent people, if it could be avoided. He swung to the ground, smiled at the girl again.

"I'll be glad to teach you," he said slowly. "Bring your horse over to my place any time." He loosened the girth and pulled the saddle. "Your Dark Dream is a better horse than you realize," he went on. "I don't suppose you'd sell him."

"Sell him?" Cynthia laughed and glanced at her father. "I'd rather sell Dad."

Selwyn Lake chuckled.

"I doubt if you'd get a fair offer." He turned to the rider. "Could you stay to lunch? We'd like to have you."

Bart shook his head, his face sobering.

"I'll have to get back. I've got an important call to make." He shifted the saddle on his arm and walked to the bay mare's side, his dark face troubled. Parnell Heath was not going to be pleased.

PARNELL HEATH was not pleased. His smooth voice roughened and rasped in the receiver:

"All right, Mulcane, so you flopped. I'll take it myself from here in. But be sure you keep your nose out of it." The receiver clicked, and the phone went dead.

Bart Mulcane stared at the black instrument and shrugged. There wasn't anything Parnell Heath could do—except haul old Luther Funderwhite into court. And if he went to court—

That night the rain began, the soft, insistent rain of early spring. It rained for two days and two nights. On the morning of the third day the tack-room telephone shrilled. Bart picked up the receiver. As he listened, a dull weight slid low into the pit of his stomach.

Selwyn Lake's quiet, cultured voice was trembling.

"Something serious has happened to Cynthia's horse. I wish you'd come over here. I'd appreciate it."

Bart's fingers tightened on the telephone.

"What's wrong? Is he sick?"

"I don't think so," Selwyn Lake said. "But he is acting strangely. To be honest, Cynthia is frightened."

"I'll be there in ten minutes." Bart put the receiver on the hook and walked quickly out of the room, a dark certainty clouding his mind. He should have foreseen this, should have warned those two decent people. He broke to a run as he crossed the yard to the garage, then slowed. Speed was not important now. All he needed was one look at that black colt. . . .

The black colt stood in the far corner of the box stall, his eyes showing white half-moons, his nostrils wide and red. As the door slid open, he raised a foot and struck the bright straw angrily, a rolling snort spreading his nostrils wider, his ears flat against his skull. Bart Mulcane halted inside the door and studied the colt in silence. Finally he turned to the two in the doorway.

"I think we'd better go into the house. I have a story to tell you, a long story."

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Bart grinned. "Allow me to present Chocolate Claire. I christened her."

The living-room of the Lake farmhouse was long, low-ceilinged, with big comfortable chairs, a fire crackling briskly in the wide stone fireplace. Bart dropped into a chair, sat for a moment looking out the broad window at the hills, checkered with the green and brown of early spring. They were peaceful hills. He turned to the blonde girl sitting wide-eyed and attentive in a chair beside the hearth.

"Have you ever heard of Sergeant Murphy?"

Cynthia Lake's blue eyes were puzzled.

"Sergeant Murphy? Was he a war hero?"

"He was a steeplechaser," Bart said quietly. "A great horse with a curious history. At the age of five, Sergeant Murphy was bought out of a plow in Ireland for twenty-five pounds. At the age of thirteen he ran second in the Grand National; at the age of fourteen he won it. His owner refused fifty thousand American dollars for him after the race."

Selwyn Lake leaned forward, a trace of impatience in his quiet voice.

"This is most interesting. But what bearing does it have on Cynthia's horse?"

"I'm getting to that," Bart said. "You've got a shock coming. I'm trying to soften it a little." He hesitated, then went on: "I bought the black colt out of a plow, from a farmer named Luther Funderwhite." He turned to the girl. "Your Dark Dream's career has been just the reverse of Sergeant Murphy's."

Cynthia's eyes widened.

"Do you mean—"

Bart nodded. This wasn't easy. He felt slow anger rising. This blonde girl was important to him, he realized suddenly.

"Yes," he said. "Your Dark Dream was a steeplechaser. No horse could handle fences the way he does without plenty of hard schooling behind him." Bart smiled briefly, bitterly. "Perhaps I'd better tell you about a conversation I had with a man named Parnell Heath."

He spoke slowly, carefully, choosing his words. At the end Selwyn Lake nodded.

"I am beginning to understand. I know of Parnell Heath. He has a most unsavory reputation."

The girl shook her head, her hands gripped together in her lap.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mulcane, but I don't understand. Why did Dark Dream kick at me when I went into his stall this morning?"

Bart looked at her, his face sober.

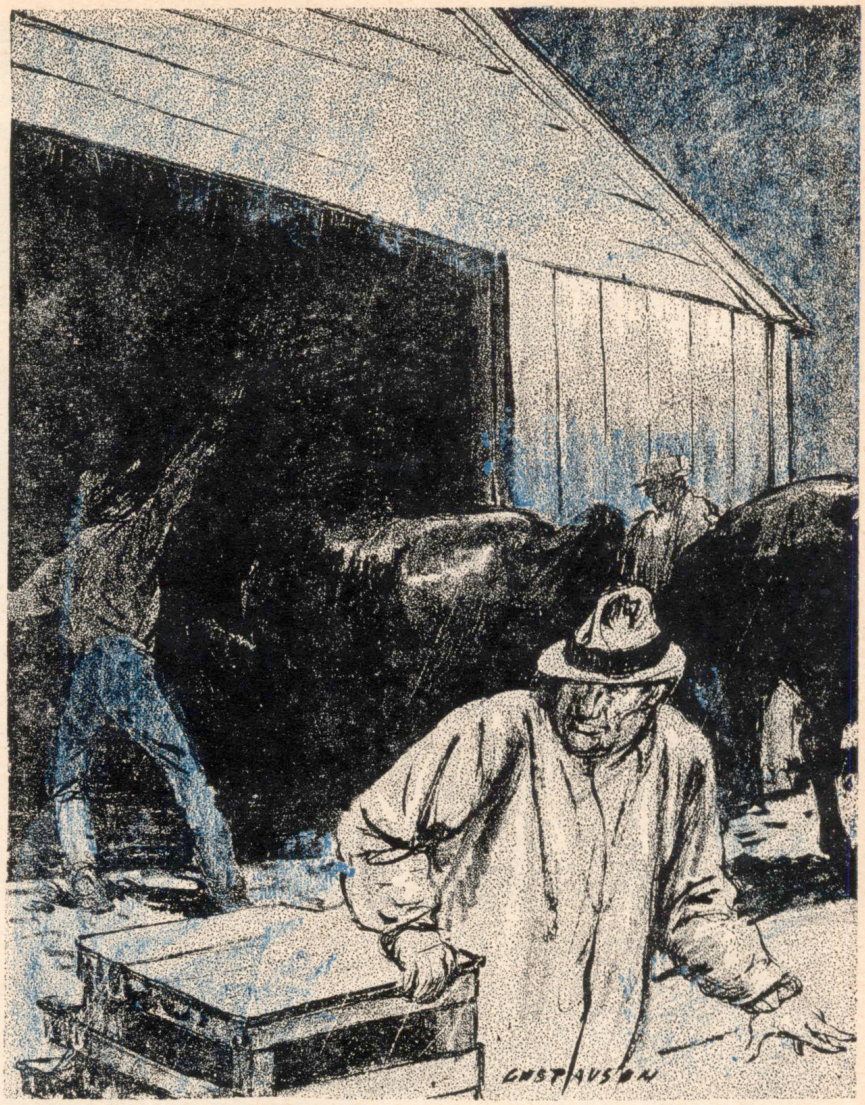
"Dark Dream didn't kick at you. You couldn't make that colt kick anyone."

Cynthia gasped, slow comprehension dawning in her blue eyes.

"Then the horse out there isn't Dark Dream?"

"That's correct," Bart said quietly. "Dark Dream was taken away in a van last night. I saw the tire-tracks

"Dark Dream was taken away in a van last night. . . . And he is now in Parnell Heath's stable."



in the road outside the gate. And he is now in Parnell Heath's stable on Long Island." He stared at the floor. "It's my fault. I should have realized —should have warned you."

The girl's lips tightened.

"It's not your fault," she said. She turned to her father. "Can't we have this man Heath, this thief, arrested?"

Selwyn Lake glanced at the rider.

"What do you think?"

Bart shook his head.

"Your Dark Dream's real name is Moonraker. I suspected it, but I wasn't certain until I saw that other colt in your stable. Moonraker won his first three starts last spring. He was a four-year-old, and a sensation. All of a sudden he came apart, began to unload jockeys, run out at his jumps and act up in the stable. He started four times last summer. His last out, his odds were over a hundred to one."

"I see," the girl said slowly. "Moonraker was taken off the track and hidden away on Mr. Funderwhite's farm. Then this horse out in our stable was raced in his place."

"Exactly," Bart said. "The colt in your stable was put in as a ringer for Moonraker."

"A ringer?"

Bart smiled briefly.

"That's the racetrack term for a horse racing under a false name. Usually a good horse is substituted for a poor one. Heath simply reversed the process."

The girl frowned.

"But why? Why would he race a horse that couldn't win?"

"To build up the odds," Bart said. "You see, Heath intended to bring Moonraker back to the track in a month or so, but the Internal Revenue men put him in jail for income-tax evasion before he got Moonraker back into his stable. His idea was to put Moonraker in again as soon as the odds were high enough. He'd make a real killing. In fact, he will when the races start again."

Selwyn Lake spoke quietly.

"I'm afraid we're helpless in this situation, Cynthia," he said. "Parnell Heath is the legal owner of Moonraker. The horse is registered in his name. He would simply laugh at us if we took him to court. We can't prove ownership of the horse, and he can. Isn't that right, Mulcane?"

Bart nodded.

"I'm afraid so. There's nothing we can do."

The girl stared into the fire.

"He's such a lovely horse," she said. "I hate to think of that awful man owning him." Her lips quivered suddenly. "He even jumped the gate when I whistled to him."

Bart Mulcane was on his feet, staring at her.

"He jumped the gate when you whistled," he repeated softly. He turned to the gray-haired man. "I'll get Moonraker for you, but you'll have to buy him, at a fair price."

The girl was out of the chair, kneeling at her father's side.

"You must, Dad. Say that you'll buy him!"

Selwyn Lake looked at her thoughtfully, laid a hand on her bright head.

"You're all the family I've got, Cynthia," he said quietly. He turned to the dark-faced young man standing before the bright fire. "I'm not a wealthy man; that's why we are living here on the farm. What would you consider a fair price?"

Bart grinned at him.

"I'm a business man, Mr. Lake," he said slowly. "I'll make you a business proposition. My business is training, racing and selling horses. If you will buy Moonraker from Heath for ten thousand dollars, I'll train him, ride him on the tracks, and I'll guarantee we will divide at least fifty thousand at the end of this year." He glanced at the girl. "Your daughter can exercise him every day, give him his road work."

"Will Heath sell him for ten thousand?"

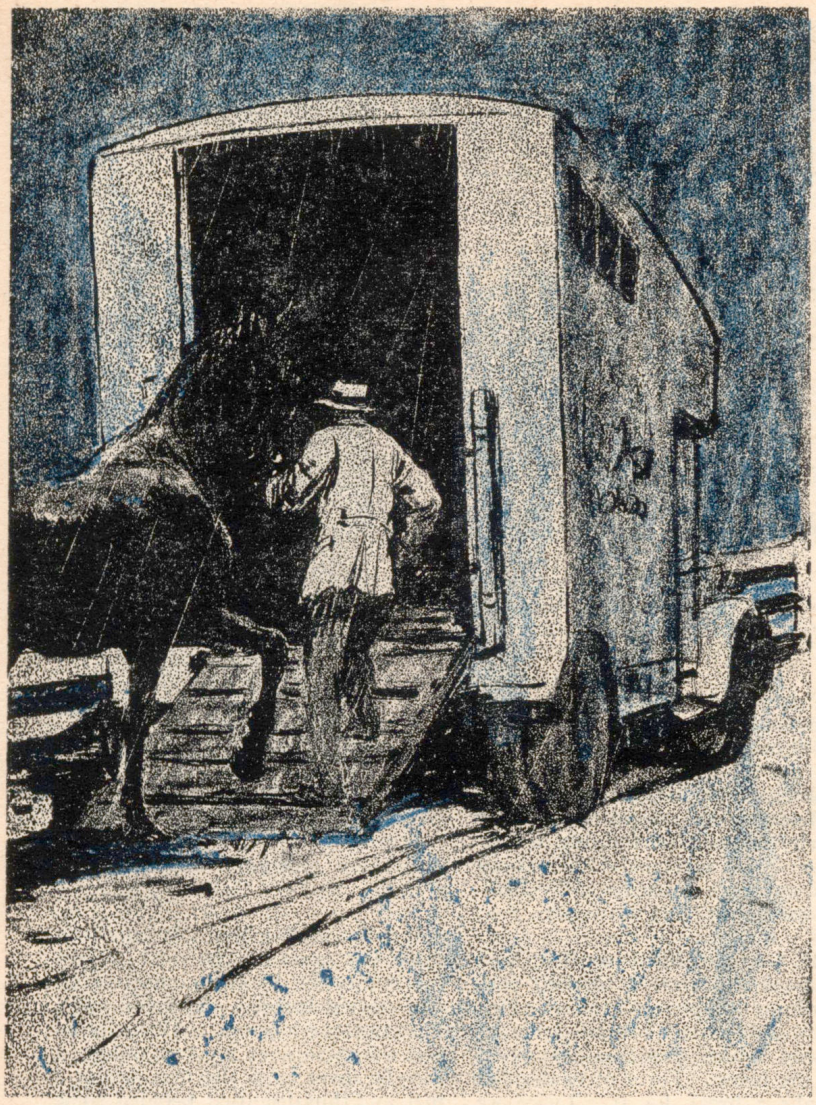
Bart's grin widened.

"Moonraker is worth a lot more than ten thousand to Heath, but if you are willing to go for a little genteel blackmail, I think I can persuade him to sell at that price."

Cynthia set her jaw firmly.

"Blackmail or murder," she said quietly. "And it doesn't have to be too genteel."

PARNELL HEATH leaned on the top rail and leveled his field-glasses at a black horse galloping through the back-stretch of his private track. He turned at a step behind him, stared, and his thick lips parted in a smile.



"Hello, son! And what brings you here?"

Bart Mulcane returned the smile, indicated the two people beside him.

"I'd like to introduce Miss Cynthia Lake and her father," he said. "Mr. Lake is interested in your horse Moonraker. In fact, he has a check for ten thousand in his pocket made out to you. I think that's a fair price, considering the circumstances," he added.

Parnell Heath laughed harshly.

"Circumstances, hey?" He pointed with the field-glasses. "I was just watching Moonraker work. He's coming along fine. In fact, I'd say he's a different horse now! I might add that he's not for sale, at any price."

Bart moved closer, met the stocky man's hard eyes.

"You'll sell him," he said quietly. "I brought my van along. I'll leave here with Moonraker aboard that van." He turned and looked down the track. The black horse was turning into the stretch, coming fast, the jockey hunched low on his neck.

"Hang onto your hat, Mr. Parnell Heath," Bart said softly. "You're going to get the surprise of your life."

Parnell Heath's voice snarled.

"Damn you, I told you to keep your nose out of—" He turned as a shrill whistle split the air behind him. "What's that? What the—"

The black horse was swerving now, bearing away from the rail, the jockey sawing desperately at the reins.

The whistle shrilled again.

The black horse shook his head, his stride lengthened, the drumming of his hoofs louder every second. He was coming straight at the fence.

Parnell Heath leaped back as the powerful body drove into the air and over the fence, landing a scant yard away. Moonraker trotted to the blonde girl and lowered his head.

BART MULCANE slowed the car, the heavy, loaded van rumbling behind, and turned into the driveway of the Lake farm. The moon was rising, the shadowy house and stable streaked with soft gold. He smiled at the girl beside him, her shoulder warm against him.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said. "You're not going to ride with the van when we go to the races. I refuse to stop every five miles to make sure your horse hasn't fallen out or jumped the tail-gate."

CYNTHIA sighed, a contented sigh. "My horse," she said very softly. "Doesn't that sound lovely?" She turned to the gray-haired man in the rear seat. "Will you ever forget the look on Mr. Parnell Heath's face when Dark Dream—I mean Moonraker—jumped that fence almost into his lap?"

Selwyn Lake chuckled.

"That was a pretty sight." He leaned forward. "You've handled this cleverly, Bart Mulcane," he said. "Heath realized instantly what would happen if Cynthia ever whistled to the horse during a race."

Cynthia stretched her arms happily.

"Blackmail," she said. "It's wonderful."

The car rolled to a halt. Bart turned, smiled at the girl.

"It was blackmail, with a big helping of pure bluff," he said. He lowered his voice. "This is a professional secret, but there is a way Heath could have protected Moonraker from those alluring pipes of yours."

"How?"

"By stuffing cotton in the horse's ears," Bart said. "If Heath was a smart horseman, he would have known that trick."

The girl laughed, got out of the car. The two men followed and they stood in a half-circle in the moonlight, smiling at each other, enjoying the feeling of victory, of mutual accomplishment. Cynthia spoke thoughtfully, looking at her father.

"Mr. Heath missed a trick. You know, Dad, I've been thinking that this has been like one of those hectic bridge hands: Doubled and redoubled."

Selwyn Lake chuckled.

"I see what you mean. Heath put a double for Moonraker on the track. At the same time Moonraker was doubling for a plowhorse. Then Heath tried a redouble when he purloined Moonraker from our stable and left that other horse in his place. By the way, what—"

He was interrupted by a long, shrill whinny from the van behind the car.

An answer rippled from the stable.

Cynthia gasped, stared at the men.

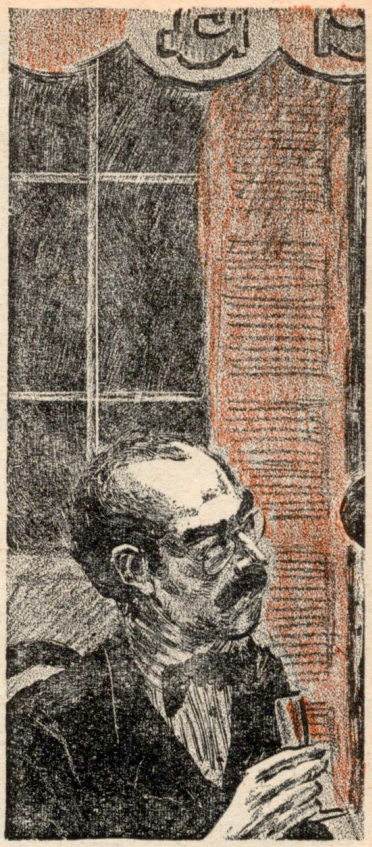
"That other horse! I'd forgotten about him. What are we going to do with him?"

"Your father bought two horses," Bart Mulcane told her. He grinned. "We'll just count that gent in the stable as an overtrick."

Secret Agent *in* Brussels

The amazing adventures of a famous Allied spy in World War II.... As told to —

LT. COMDR. RICHARD M. KELLY, USNR



What I saw made my

THE young man whose story is told exclusively in this article is in the United States today. He has recently arrived from Belgium to marry the American WAC he met while serving as a secret agent for the Office of Strategic Services. Should you see his stocky well-dressed figure and eager smiling face, or listen to him tell you why he has applied for American citizenship, you would never imagine the life of violence, intrigue, murder and incredible steel-nerved adventure that lies behind him.

For security reasons even today his real name cannot be told. But had the reader been present in the office of a four-star American general one afternoon this spring, he would have heard a glowing citation which accompanied the presentation of the Silver Star to our agent. Thus did the United States follow the British and Belgian Governments in recognizing the daring achievements recorded in this story.

Our future secret agent, whom we will know only as "Jan," one of his many aliases, was born in Belgium, the youngest of six children, in 1919. The scars of one German invasion were painfully evident during his boyhood. In January, 1939, at the age of twenty, his studies to become a teacher were interrupted by the grim call to military service. As an officer cadet, his career in the infantry was uneventful until Hitler treacherously attacked his little country on May 10, 1940. The superlatively equipped Nazi hordes quickly crushed the heroic Belgian resistance; and on May 27, Jan was made prisoner with tens of thousands of other Allied troops. From the first minute of his captivity, the same spirit that was to carry him through to success as a secret agent manifested itself—a burning determination to get back into the fight against the Nazis.

The story he tells of his escape from the Germans, his recapture and long captivity in Spain, his training in England and his spectacular life as an Allied spy begins that hot May afternoon on a dusty Belgian road:

THE Germans lined us all up and started to march us to their prisoner-of-war camps in Germany. Our route was down the Brussels-Antwerp highway, which passed a few miles from my home. Three of us decided to make a break for it. Twice we darted into the crowds of weeping people who lined the road. Each time armed German guards spotted us; and each time we were lucky to get off with kicks and rifle-clubbings.

By four in the afternoon the exhausted prisoners were slowing down, making it more difficult for the guards to watch us. We were approaching a familiar place where the highway was elevated to cross a railroad line, just the spot for the one chance I had in mind. I whispered quickly to my friends as we marched along—then just before we came to the bridge itself, I gave a signal. The three of us dived off the road and rolled down the forty-foot embankment. We crashed into the underbrush, where we lay still, holding our breaths, waiting for the bullets to start coming at us. A minute passed, then two—and we knew we had made it. Evidently in the disorganized line, the guards had missed that quick dive. Now all we had to do was lie there waiting for the column to pass above us.

It took about an hour. When everything was quiet on the road, we got up cautiously, brushed ourselves off and started through the fields. If I were to make it home, civilian clothes and a bicycle were my first needs. I bought them from the first farmer I met, and thus disguised, pedaled home through the dusk. . . .

My family was safe, and after two quiet weeks, I knew I was safe too—safe enough to start fighting again, this time in a different way. The underground we organized was the first resistance activity in our area, and we limited ourselves to minor sabotage of German transport. We used to cut tires, put sugar in gasoline tanks to ruin the engine, slip sand into bearings and write threatening letters to Belgian collaborators. After three months of this, I realized the area was getting too hot for me. The Germans were making strenuous efforts to round up all escaped POW's. Being very well known, I was in real danger of being denounced by someone who sought to curry favor with the Nazis. And finally the proclamation of a forced-labor draft in Germany for all young men between twenty and thirty made the need for escape immediate.

Fortunately I had just met Louis, a Belgian officer who had recently come

blood run cold. Had I been a minute earlier, I should have been captured with them.

from France, where the Belgian underground organization was already established. I volunteered to return with him to the unoccupied part of France to work for the organization, and if possible to make my way through Spain to England, where our Belgian Government was directing its fight against the Nazis.

Early one morning Louis and I took the train for France; and we had no difficulty with the Germans until we neared the border of Free France. No one was permitted within forty miles of the demarcation line without special papers. By luck we reached Besançon, fifteen miles from the border, where we were to meet a guide from the organization. But the man never appeared.

It was a tough situation—we knew no one in the town; and the Germans were on the alert, patrolling the countryside with big dogs. Since it was just a few minutes before the curfew, we sought refuge at a Catholic hospital. The nuns were wonderful. They asked no questions, fed us well and put us in a ward as very sick people. There we passed the night in perfect safety.

The next morning we set off across country, attempting to follow the instructions of an old priest. Four times we narrowly escaped capture by mounted German patrols; the fifth brush with the enemy was our closest. We almost walked into them—but fortunately we saw them first and managed to duck into a house that was under construction. The French workmen looked at us silently as the patrol rode by. It was only after the echo of their horses had died away that the foreman spoke: "You are trying to cross the border?"

Louis and I glanced at each other—this could be a trap. After a second's hesitation, Louis chanced it. "Yes."

The foreman motioned us to follow him, and we discovered he was taking us to his home. Within a half-hour an old man appeared, looked at us steadily for a moment and then said: "Let's go!"

We hiked through the hills for hours. By dark we were in heavily wooded mountains; and at ten o'clock our guide told us we were only a few hundred yards from the line. The boundary ran through a very dense forest. A wide swath had been cut through the trees, and was regularly patrolled by the Germans with their huge police dogs. At a signal from our guide, we spread out and made a dash across the clearing. The Germans saw us; they opened rapid fire, and immediately a pack of dogs gave chase. A few hundred yards inside Free France one of their dogs caught up with us. Louis, who was nearest, turned to meet his charge, and as the animal sprang at him, drove his knife through the brute's throat, killing him instantly. The Germans gave up the chase, and after two hours we were safe in a small village. Here, in the midst of gay lights—in contrast to the deep blackout in the German zone—we celebrated our escape with a couple of bottles of wine.

Next day we headed for Toulouse by train. We were successful in avoiding the French gendarmes, but were nearly arrested by some French secret police searching for two men who had murdered a German officer in Paris. They refused to believe our story, and were about to take us in when luckily I remembered two recent Brussels theater stubs I had in my pocket. This convinced them; and they let us proceed to Toulouse.

The Belgian escape organization which we joined was very well planned. In a short time eight of my countrymen and I were on a train bound for the Spanish border. We traveled separately, with false papers to authorize our movements in the restricted zone.

The escape plan worked smoothly at first. The train stopped at an isolated station near the Pyrenées, and

as we had been instructed, the nine of us jumped out on the opposite side of the station and hid in a ditch. Forty minutes later, we were picked up by two guides. Our route now lay across the rugged Pyrenées. It was mid-February, and the going was terrific. After climbing steadily for a day and a half, we reached the snow and ice. It was bitter cold; none of us had proper clothing or food; and our only water was the snow. Because all the passes were guarded by Franco's police, we were forced to cross over the mountain peaks. We climbed in single file, hanging onto a rope, with the blizzard making it impossible at times to see the man ahead. Occasionally we rested for a few hours in some shepherd's hut, but even with this, one of our party couldn't take it. He was left behind—never to be heard of again.

FINALLY, after five nights in the mountains, the storms abated, temperature rose and green hillsides came into view. We were in Spain! It was a dirty, ragged and exhausted group that arrived two days later at the rendezvous—a little railroad station near Figueras. Here we were to be picked up by a Barcelona police captain hired by the organization to take us to a safe house in Barcelona. From there the organization was to arrange further shipment to England.

The policeman was not there; and as the hours went by, our guides, growing apprehensive, deserted us. It was just before traintime that the Spaniard appeared. Once aboard the train, he queried us in great detail as to who we were, where we had been and where we were going. Briefed for this, we assured him we were all French-Canadians.

As the train pulled into Barcelona four hours later, our guide disappeared. We jerked into the station—and there on the platform, rapidly surrounding our coach, was a large detachment of Spanish police. It was complete betrayal. Handcuffed, we were taken to the secret police headquarters, stripped of all our valuables and kept standing without food or water for six hours. Then, herded into vans with twenty prostitutes, we were taken to a jail and packed into tiny cells with thirty-five common criminals. These cells were so small there wasn't even room to sit down. It was our first experience with Franco's prison system, and our opinion of it grew progressively worse. After four miserable days here, lightened only by food we received from the British embassy, we were taken out one by one for further interrogation. For four hours a nasty harelipped Spaniard tried to break down my story, but I stuck to it in spite of repeated beatings over the head with a rubber hose. I was not to forget this character; I hope that some day I will meet him again!

At the huge prison, Carcel Modello, to which we were finally transferred, one of our group died nameless. Our treatment here was very severe, but it was nothing to the torture and shootings which were nightly meted out to the wretched Spanish Republican prisoners here. After two bitter months we were moved to the infamous concentration camp Miranda d'Ebero. Here, with two thousand other refugees of all nationalities, I spent twelve and a half months of indescribable misery. The food was of the poorest; in protest we finally staged a hunger strike—for 159 hours, we took only a few sips of water. For the last two days I was so weak that I just lay motionless on the ground. This demonstration caused a slight improvement in the food and sanitary arrangements, but during my fifteen months as a prisoner, I never had a bath and was always ridden with lice.

My biggest heartbreak during all these months was the last-minute failure of a three-month escape project in which I participated. Working mostly at night, we dug a tunnel 180 feet from one of the barracks to outside the barbed wire. And just ten minutes before the first man was to start through the tunnel a Spanish guard stepped on the outside exit and discovered the whole plot!

Just a month and a half after this, I was freed and turned over to an Allied embassy. These wonderful people took us to Madrid, where I had my first bath and decent food in what seemed like years. Only someone who has been a "guest" of Franco for so long can appreciate my feelings at being liberated.

From Madrid we went to Gibraltar, and from there by American ship to England, where we arrived July 6, 1942. It was almost twenty-five months to the day since I had first escaped from the German army. Throughout the long bitter months I had been sustained by an intense desire to get back into the fight. At last it seemed as if that chance might come soon, and I was very, very happy.

MY trip through British security added to my already high opinion of the British in intelligence matters. When I first left Toulouse, my background had been forwarded to England. To double-check my identity, a board of British officers asked me to describe in detail an afternoon's outing I had had in Toulouse twenty months before. I had forgotten the incident completely, but after they gave me the name of one member of the organization who had been present, I was able to recall the details. This security screening was extremely detailed and unbelievably thorough. It had to be, because the Germans were constantly trying to penetrate England and the Allied underground organization, with agents who posed as refugees. Several of these were detected in the group that came up from Gibraltar with me. During my stay in England I heard of others who were deliberately passed through and allowed to go free. However, they were kept under close surveillance until all their contacts were discovered. Then the whole ring would be simultaneously arrested. The Germans frequently used the same technique—as I was to discover later.

AFTER being cleared by the British security, I reported to the Belgian Government in exile, where I was again checked very closely and finally given my old rank as cadet officer in the Belgian Army. After a week's leave, my first vacation since the start of 1939, I volunteered for work as a secret agent. Weeks of the most severe tests followed. The majority of the candidates failed, but to my great happiness I was finally accepted as being mentally, morally and psychologically fitted for the difficult work.

For most of the following year I was given the most intensive and rugged training imaginable. Languages were no particular problem, as I already spoke Flemish, French, German, English and Spanish. At first we were given exhaustive physical tests at a secret training area in Scotland. Next we learned psychological warfare, guerrilla warfare, sabotage and military intelligence. We were required to pass rigid examinations and demonstrations in parachuting, weapons, explosives, silent killing, photographic work, radio communication and codes. We became expert at attacking trucks, armored cars, trains, planes, jails and barracks.

The most fascinating courses were those given by real agents. From them we learned how to lead a double life, and what we could expect from the Gestapo and other Nazi counter-intelligence forces. After that course, none of us had any illusions as to what would happen to us should the enemy catch us. Many of the fellows planned to use the death capsules with which all agents were supplied should they ever be captured. I made no such plan, but worked on the principle that while there's life there's hope.

Had any of us lacked for a profession after the war, and been so disposed, we would have made perfect gangsters. Some of the things in which we had to be proficient were lock-picking, bank-robbing, burglary, bribery, blackmail, poisoning, forgery, knife-fighting, and instinctive pistol-shooting.

Finally my training was completed. Many times in the days ahead I was to

owe my life to its thoroughness. I felt completely confident and red-hot for action. My mission was soon ready: a psychological warfare assignment in the Flemish part of Belgium. My job was to assist in the organization and distribution of an existent underground newspaper; to instruct the underground for their part in the coming invasion; to blackmail high German officers and collaborators; and finally to work on lowering the morale of German troops. It was a big assignment, and much to my liking.

In addition to my own mission, I was given some secret microfilm instructions to deliver to one of the top leaders of the resistance movement. I had two means of contacting this man. One was a password which I was to use at a certain address in Brussels; the other was through an agent, a very clever lawyer, who was to jump in with me.

Our final briefing and equipment check were most thorough. The slightest misstep at this stage might well cost our own lives and those of many others. I had to memorize the names, addresses and passwords for an entire escape route which would take me through France and Spain, should I be ordered back to England or be forced to flee.

Accompanying me as my wireless operator was another Belgian, a dentist. He had a most ingenious radio set worked into his dental equipment, as well as several of the ordinary type suitcase radio sets. Each of us carried a pistol, a fighting-knife, a grenade, our codes, spare clothes and plenty of money. In addition we had gold secreted in our shoes, and diamonds in our hairbrushes. The plans called for us to be dropped blindly about forty-five miles south of Brussels on the farm of the lawyer's grandfather, who was to be our first safe contact with the resistance.

THE final hours in England were most memorable. We were given an elaborate dinner, then driven out to the airfield. The first sight of the big four-engined Halifaxes all painted black and lined up on the field for their nightly missions to the underground was one of the most impressive of my life. No agent who has ever seen it will ever forget it.

A good-by kiss from a beautiful girl, a last drink and smoke, a final check of the photographs of our dropping-place, a quick briefing with the British plane crew, and we were off. It was a moment of high excitement and tremendous elation. In a few hours we would be back in Belgium, pitting our wits and training against the brilliant and ruthless German intelligence.

We had scant time to speculate as to our own particular fate, for as we began crossing the European coast,

Just before curfew, as he came out of his girl's house, the traitor was shot down by Tommy-guns in the best gangster style.

the big plane was buffeted around by German anti-aircraft shells. We had been warned to expect this, but the violent maneuvers of the plane and the shrapnel pinging off the fuselage was far worse than I expected. Our Halifax was traveling all alone, and the greatest danger until we hit the ground was from the German night fighters. Should one of them catch us, particularly during the drop, we would all be dead ducks.

The five-hour trip to the target was purposely roundabout, to confuse the enemy radar trackers. As we neared the dropping-place, the big plane lost altitude rapidly. We put on our parachute helmets, shook hands all around and prepared to go out. The dispatcher opened the hole, and I, who was to be the first to jump, looked down on Belgium. I could see the roads and houses very clearly in the moonlight. It was the greatest moment of my life. Lower and lower went the big plane, its speed slowing down to only 120 miles an hour. At five hundred feet the pilot leveled off, the red light for "running in" flashed on, and I braced myself for the jump. Seconds later the green light blinked, and I was diving through the air.

My chute opened almost immediately; and looking up, I could see the plane and five other chutes silhouetted against the full moon. I came down very quickly. As I hit the ground, I immediately unbuckled and collapsed my chute, ripped off my jump helmet and whipped out my .38. All was quiet. I slipped off my heavy jump-suit and jump-boots in the darkness, taking special care not to drop anything that would later give away our landing-place. All this took just a few seconds. Then, with my gear in my arms, I crouched low and gave our recognition whistle. The lawyer, who had jumped right after me, answered from about seventy-five yards, and I went forward to meet him. We had landed in a newly plowed field, and as we came together each of us picked up a handful of soil and kissed it, saying, "That's Belgium!" In spite of our tense situation, we were filled with emotion.

Our immediate problem was to locate my radioman and the packages which contained our radios, money and other essential material. Leaving my jump equipment with the lawyer, who began to dig a hole to bury it, I started out to find the missing chutes. After twenty-five minutes I came across my radioman. He was frightened to death and nearly shot me. I helped to get him organized and found the first two packages near him. The third and most important, which contained sixty thousand dollars and his disguised radio, could not be found. Together we rejoined the lawyer, and continued to bury the extra jump gear while the lawyer made a short reconnaissance. He had just returned with the great news that we were less than two miles from his family's village, when he heard a German patrol coming down the road.

They were talking loudly and carrying chest flashlights. We crouched in the field by the side of the road, guns trained on the three Germans, ready to let them have it at the first hostile move. They passed less than three yards from us. We couldn't see then how they missed seeing us, but later we were to learn they had spotted us instantly. Wisely, they had made no move, as we certainly would have killed them.

As soon as the Germans had disappeared, we hurriedly finished disguising the parachute cache and took off over the countryside to the lawyer's farm. We reached it without incident

I was awakened by a German voice shouting, "Open up for the police!"

at four-thirty A. M. After a brief rest in the barn we walked in on the lawyer's astonished family at six A. M. Through them, the lawyer promptly contacted the local resistance organization, which sent some men to search for our missing package. They found it by nine o'clock—on top of a barn—arriving there just ten minutes before a squad of Germans who were searching the countryside for us. That same morning the lawyer left for Brussels, while the dentist and I stayed under cover in the house.

Two days later two young and very pretty girls came down from Brussels to guide us to the city. My escort was "Betty," the sister of a sabotage leader. Each pair traveled separate from the other and had no difficulty, although I was stopped and checked by the Gestapo several times en route. I had perfect confidence in my false papers and supporting cover story of being on my way to the city for a better job. Both the papers and the story—one I had rehearsed many times in England—satisfied the Germans; we arrived safely at an apartment in Brussels. For the first few days I did nothing but wander around the town to get reacclimated. It had been thirty-eight months since I last visited Brussels on my escape to Free France, so it was most important for me to learn the new German regulations on rationing, curfew, civilian movements, security checks and other activities before I started on my mission.

My first move was to find separate quarters for myself and set up a system of cut-outs or safe couriers to keep contact with my radio operator, who moved to a separate apartment. Purposely I arranged it so the dentist would not know where I lived. He received his messages from me at regularly scheduled rendezvous where he would meet my cut-out in some public place. This routine precaution was to save my life just a few days later. To guard radios, particularly when transmitting, the underground organization had a special protection squad. These men kept track of all the DF cars the Germans used to trap illegal sets. In addition, whenever the radio was in operation, several of these gunmen would loiter around outside to deal with any unforeseen enemy interruption.

As soon as I was established in my own apartment, I made contact with "Hector," the underground chief for whom London had given me the microfilm instructions. I went to his address and gave the passsword. They had been expecting me, and I was ushered in immediately to a forty-one-year-old Belgian. He was the coördinating leader of five different resistance groups, none of whom knew of the existence of the others. I found him to be most helpful. Right away

Illustrated by John McDermott

The door swung open; the man was snatched in, and the car roared away.

he arranged for me to meet the leaders of one of his groups, the Movement National Belgium, known as the MNB, the psychological warfare organization with which I was to work.

The next evening at seven, Hector brought me to the headquarters of the MNB. There I met the leader and his principal assistants. They requested my security password, which checked against their list; and once I was cleared, we discussed my mission in detail. Then they set up a rendezvous for me with the active workers of their organization, with whom I was to operate very closely. Fortunately for me, they did not inquire as to where I was living; nor did they make any further arrangements for me to meet with them at that time.

As I came away from this conference with the top men of MNB, I could not help but feel that the first five days of my mission had gone very well. Already I was established in a safe apartment; I had delivered my secret microfilms, and was in contact with the proper group to accomplish my mission.

This good feeling was to last but a few hours. Early the next morning I received a frantic call from Betty; her news was disastrous. The Germans had just arrested all the leaders of the MNB, and most of the organization all over Belgium. The men whom I had met the evening before, and all those I was to contact the next day were either in custody or had fled. This called for quick action. Within a few hours I was in a new apartment, trying to figure out my next step. My only hope of reëstablishing contact with the resistance was through Hector. It was Betty who found him and brought back to me the name of an MNB member who was still at large. However, Hector could give me only the man's name and address—I had no password or cut-out to vouch for me. It seemed like the best chance, so I decided to try and contact the man myself.

Three times on the same day I went to the address and rang the bell. Each time no one answered. There were a few men loitering around outside, and I suspected that the house was not only occupied but guarded. On the other hand, these men could well be Gestapo. Because of the wave of arrests, any newcomer would be extremely suspect; it was only common sense to keep away from that house.

Once again I got in touch with Betty. She offered a number-two chance —her brother Jean, regional leader of a very active sabotage group known as Group G. Jean was a splendid fellow. He assured me that he had some leads on local cells of the MNB, with whom he could put me in contact in two weeks, by which time the current series of arrests would probably have quieted down. Two weeks was too long a time to sit doing nothing, so I volunteered to work with Group G.

This new arrangement had barely started operating when disaster struck again. The cut-out who delivered my message to the radio operator reported that the dentist had failed to keep his last two rendezvous. In our business, that usually meant only one thing—he had been taken by the Germans. Confirmation was not long in coming. Several of his protection squad were arrested. It was obvious that the dentist was not only in Gestapo hands, but that he had talked. Fortunately, he did not know where I lived or with whom I was in contact. But he did know something about my mission, and of course had my description and false name. From now on I could expect that the Gestapo would have me listed and be looking for me.

It was now only ten days since I had landed in Belgium. The whole group I had come to work with had been wiped out; the Germans were on the hunt for me; and my radioman had been captured, thus cutting me off from all contact with my London base. Things were definitely not looking very good.

I continued to work with Sabotage Group G, and through its leader Jean I met two other agents from England. One of these, "Francis," was a radio operator for the top echelon of the Brussels resistance, and the other a

truly fabulous English agent whom I can refer to only as "Fred." I became very friendly with both these men.

Francis offered to transmit a few messages for me, which put me back in touch with London. As for Fred—he was the most amazing man I ever knew. He occupied a very high and important position in the underground, traveling twice a month between Brussels and Paris to maintain contact between the Belgian and French resistance. One of his many activities in Brussels was to manage the protection squads and assorted assassins who acted as the gunmen for the underground. I was shortly to see several demonstrations of the effectiveness of Fred's private army. He had many aliases, and in a very short time seemed to be able to change his appearance completely. His principal pose—one by which he was well known to both the elite of Brussels and many Germans—was head of the black market, an identity which he covered by widespread manipulations in scarce items. It was typical of him that on occasions when he needed to carry a gun, he had papers to prove that he was a private detective with a pistol permit. He got away with it, too.

I was still scheming as to how I could do something about my original mission. My first opportunity came when I received a tip on another survivor of the MNB. I immediately visited this man, but lacking the password, I was unable to convince him that I was an agent from London. Knowing the torture and killings which the Gestapo had visited upon so many of his friends and associates in recent weeks, I could hardly blame him. I was getting suspicious of everyone myself, and with good reason.

TO establish my identity, I asked this man for a message which I promised to have broadcast over the BBC the next night. Everyone in the underground listened to these broadcasts from London. The message he gave me was, *"The hare is not yet running."* I rushed this to Francis, who flashed it to London with top priority. The next night—a tense one for me—the message came through as requested, and the MNB man agreed to work with me. I financed him to reorganize the underground newspaper which had been suspended by the recent arrests. He lined up a printshop, paper and printers outside the city; and we were all set to go when American bombers blasted the establishment, killing several of his men and destroying all the equipment! This was the final blow to my original mission. I did manage to organize and instruct a number of local cells to carry on minor work, but from that time on, my major activity was with Sabotage Group G and Fred.

Jean was still trying very hard to help. One day he offered to go down to Ghent, where he believed he could dig up some surviving MNB contacts. Together with three members of his sabotage group, whose names I happened to discover, he started out in a car for Ghent. On the way they were all arrested by the Gestapo. That very same day we received news that Hector, the resistance chief, and all the other leaders of Group G had been taken. It was now March, 1944, the blackest month of the Belgian Resistance. All over the country brave men were being picked up, tortured and either shot or sent to concentration camps. Most of those who survived the Gestapo torture were sent to Buchenwald, where Hector and several other top men were hanged.

This frightful wave of arrests had disrupted the whole underground organization: No one knew whether or not it was safe to keep a scheduled rendezvous. The danger signs were up at all our letter drops where we usually picked up messages. It was now very obvious that we had traitors in our midst, and the strain was terrific, as every hour brought news of fresh arrests. We all wondered who would be next to go, and when our own turns would come. Worse of all, we didn't know who the traitors were. News had come in that the mop-up of MNB had been traced to a woman in Antwerp who had brought Gestapo agents into the organization. These agents had worked with MNB for months, and then had given the word for simultaneous arrests all over Belgium.

Several days after Jean and the other leaders of Group G had been arrested, we received an important clue—one of the three men who had left for Ghent with Jean had been released by the Germans. We checked on who that man knew. Almost all his contacts in the organization had been arrested. He alone had been freed. This, then, was certainly a traitor. Fred ordered several of his gunmen to take care of him. And that night, just before curfew as he came out of his girl's house, the traitor was shot down by tommy-guns in the best gangster style. The assassins reported back to Fred that the fellow was dead. But they were wrong. In spite of the twenty slugs in his body, the man stayed alive long enough to betray another half-dozen resistance men, all of whom were picked up and shot by the Germans.

ALONG about this time I had my closest escape: I knew of only one survivor of Sabotage Group G. After a talk together he agreed to set up a meeting with another man, so that I could start rebuilding the group. Our rendezvous was set for two P.M in a big Brussels café. Our practice in a situation like this was for the two men who knew each other to meet a few minutes early, and then go to a table so that when the third man arrived (in this case myself) he could inconspicuously go to the table and greet them both as old friends. This technique eliminated excessive moving around from one table to another, which would have been likely to draw unwanted attention to our meeting.

An earlier date that same afternoon had taken longer than I had anticipated, so it was a few minutes after two when I hurried through the side door of the café. Quickly I looked around the room, and what I saw made my blood run cold. At that very second two Gestapo men were escorting my friend and another man out the front door in handcuffs. Had I been a minute earlier, I should have been captured with them.

WHENEVER anyone was arrested, we of the resistance had to assume that all he knew would be discovered by the Germans. This was not a reflection on the ability of the men to stand up to Gestapo tortures. We knew that they frequently used drugs and other methods to make people talk in spite of themselves. Because this man knew where I lived, I never went back to my apartment. Fred, the top British agent, took me in to live with him. Significantly, I was the only member of the underground organization who knew where Fred lived. I was to learn that rigid adherence to precautions like this accounted for his charmed life.

Shortly after I moved in with Fred, we received an alarming phone tip from an informer. Several men who knew the location of our last surviving depot for arms and radios had just been captured. Our organization had been badly shattered by the recent wave of arrests. Should this depot be seized, we might be cut off from all contact with England. Although it was terribly risky, Fred decided we would have to take the chance and move these vital supplies ourselves—there was no time to round up what was left of his protection squad to do the job. Together we rushed out in his car to the depot. We found it intact, loaded the radios, guns and ammo into the car and raced back to our apartment. Later we learned that our haste was well justified: the Gestapo arrived five minutes after we left.

Our next problem was what to do with the stuff. As it was late at night, we had to hide it temporarily at our place. Ordinarily we always avoided having anything incriminating in our possession. Our house had three apartments. I lived on the ground floor, Fred on the second and a dancer whom we hardly knew on the third.

We put the material in Fred's room, and turned in, exhausted.

Early next morning I was awakened by a pounding on the outside door. A heavy German voice was shouting: "Open up for the police!" Grabbing the .45 I always kept under my pillow, I quickly cocked it and jumped out of bed. My shuttered front window looked out on the street. There was a police car at the curb. Obviously we were trapped. One chance, as I saw it, would be to beat it out the back window of my apartment and slip into the hospital which adjoined our building. The other and less attractive alternative would be to shoot our way into the street. At any event, my first concern was to warn Fred.

Quietly I opened my apartment door and tiptoed into the hall. The street door, which was still resounding under the fists of the police, had an opaque glass top protected by metal grillwork. I could see the outline of three figures. There was a noise on the stairs above, and I looked up to see Fred coming down, clad only in his pajama pants, a Sten gun in his hand, and two clips of extra cartridges stuck in his waist.

"There's somebody knocking, Jan," he remarked, as casually as if he expected it to be his mother. The fact that we were two of the few surviving agents in Brussels, and that our quarters were packed with radios, guns and ammo, seemed to cause him no concern at all. At the time, I didn't think his British calm was very funny. Suddenly the pounding ceased, and a few moments later we heard the German car drive away. I was pretty excited; I figured our one chance was to get the hell out of the place in a hurry.

I TOLD Fred so. "Impossible," he replied. "I haven't even bathed or shaved yet." Furthermore, he was sure the police wouldn't be back—just a false alarm. Nothing I said could persuade him. He went back upstairs to get his bathrobe and shaving gear. The only bath for the house was in the cellar. When Fred came down, I noticed that in spite of his seeming unconcern, he was carrying his pistol.

While he was downstairs, I crammed my things into bags and then dressed. I had just started for the cellar to hurry Fred along, when I heard the sound of a key turning in the front door. I grabbed my gun and stationed myself at my door so that I could cover the entrance and hold them in the hall until Fred could get upstairs.

The door swung open. Fortunately, some instinct made me hold my fire. The first man in was the owner of the house, whom we knew very well. He made a scarcely perceptible sign to me with his eyes and then, half-turning to conceal me, addressed the police:

As soon as they saw me, they began firing questions. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"The dancer you want is on the top floor, gentlemen."

I had just enough time to whip my pistol behind my back before two Germans and two Belgian policemen followed the proprietor into the hall. This was my first inkling that they hadn't come specifically for us. However, as soon as they spotted me, they began firing questions. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" I was backed up against the wall with the pistol right behind me but somehow I managed to answer in a normal tone that I was a railway inspector who had rented this apartment. The proprietor nodded his head in confirmation. In the midst of another barrage of questions, I caught a glimpse of Fred, gun in hand, peeking around the entrance to the cellar stairs. Since the police were facing me, they could not see him, but neither could I make any sign to warn him. I glanced at the proprietor—only one look at his blanched face, and I knew that he had seen Fred too.

A false move on Fred's part at this stage might finish us, but he didn't let us down. Quickly he slipped his gun into his bathrobe pocket and came forward—his whole attitude one of bewildered innocence. He was the slightly indignant citizen when he asked the police what all the trouble was about. As they turned to question him, I was able to duck back into my room and slide my .45 under the pillow. What a relief!

Fred's unruffled answers reassured the police; they started up the stairs to the dancer's apartment on the third floor. From their conversation, we had discovered that the dancer's girl was suspected of murdering a German officer, and that they wanted to question the fellow as to her whereabouts. While they were upstairs, Fred and I hid our incriminating material as best we could under his bed. Then, to my horror, Fred invited the police into his room for a couple of drinks. The Germans checked our papers, sat right on top of the radios and had a few glasses with us. After an hour's visit, which didn't help my nerves at all, they left, the best of friends with Fred!

Later that day we moved the weapons and radios to a less compromising place. Fred thought the whole episode very amusing—a sentiment I certainly did not share.

FRED had arranged a meeting to introduce me to a fellow who knew all about the Flanders area. The rendezvous was set for ten A.M. the next day in a secondhand bookshop on a busy square. At ten minutes to ten, Fred and I entered a sidewalk café just across the street from the meeting-place, and ordered a drink. Fred kept his eye on the bookshop, where a most peculiar situation began speedily to develop. First a couple of young fellows came along and casually stationed themselves on either side of the shop. Then a car with three Germans parked about twenty yards to the right. Finally at ten o'clock Fred's man arrived, followed very closely by a German couple.

Fred understood this at once. Clearly, his agent was coöperating with the Gestapo to trap us. At once he went to the café telephone and called the bookshop. To the clerk who answered, he gave this message: He had a date to meet a friend and was unable to keep it; would the clerk have the man (whom he then described in detail) called to the phone. When the man came to the phone (I am sure with the Germans holding a gun to his back) Fred explained that he couldn't keep the date at the bookshop, but told him to leave the place and walk two blocks to the right. Then he was to turn and slowly walk three more blocks to the left, which would bring him to a corner in the heart of downtown Brussels. He was to wait for us there.

He rang off, then immediately alerted his protection group. That call completed, he asked me, since I was not known to the suspected agent, to trail him to see that he followed instructions. A few minutes later Fred's gunmen arrived in a car, picked him up and headed directly for the intersection where the man was due to arrive at approximately ten-fifteen.

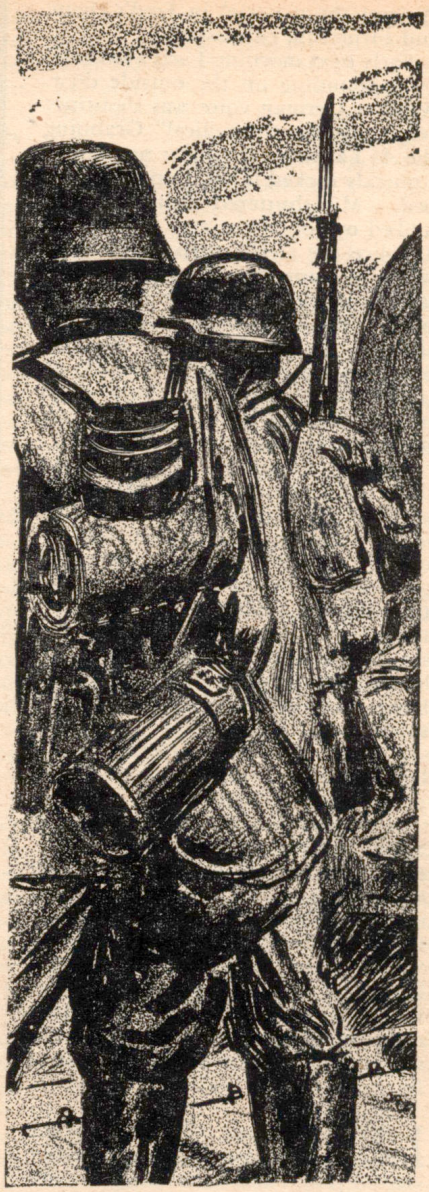
I BEGAN to shadow the man and his German entourage. After his talk with Fred, the traitor had held a quick conference with the Gestapo and then started out with the couple and two other Germans following closely behind. The car with three more Germans trailed along, while I kept them all under observation twenty-five yards back on the opposite side of the street.

Just as the man reached the appointed intersection, the door of Fred's car, which was already at the spot, swung open; the man was snatched into the back, and the car roared away in traffic. I saw the whole thing happen in a flash. The Germans were stunned. One of them fired a couple of shots at the fleeing car, but it quickly disappeared.

When I met Fred an hour later he told me everything had been "taken care of." The next day the man's body was found in the canal. Not only had Fred eluded the elaborate trap, but he had snatched the informer himself from the Germans in fifteen minutes' time.

From that time on, I worked exclusively for Fred. One job that he had me do was the wrecking of a train. He had planned the simultaneous blowing of three railroads to paralyze all German rail traffic in the Brussels area. My assignment was a single-track railroad twenty miles outside the city. With one other man I went down to meet two local guides. We had planned our operation to get a German troop-train which was due to pass that night. The most difficult part of the mission was our approach to the tracks, which were very heavily guarded and constantly patrolled. Luckily our guides knew every inch of the way, and cautiously they maneuvered us through the guards to a beautiful position near a curve on a hillside. There we lay quietly, just three yards from the tracks, to await the train.

We couldn't lay the charges in advance, because the Germans checked



She asked if he would help her with

the heavy bag. . . . He gallantly carried the explosives to her hotel. Later that plastic killed a lot of Germans.

the roadbed just before every train passed. Ten minutes before the troop-train was due, a five-man inspection patrol passed just a few feet away. They didn't see us. Soon afterward the railroad signals changed —very thoughtful of the Germans to warn us that our target was approaching. We waited until we could hear the hum of the train on the rails. Then it took but a few seconds to slap our magnetized charges with their pressure detonators against the rails. One minute later the train roared around the bend. We were only twenty-five yards away when the engine hit the explosive. What followed was most gratifying. The engine and four of the seven troop-packed coaches telescoped like an accordion and crashed down the hill. The cries of the wounded added to the confusion. It was a perfect job. We naturally didn't stick around to check on the casualties, but we knew that they were very heavy. . . .

My daily routine in Brussels was frequently exciting. By now my papers had been checked hundreds of times, and I was quite used to it. The only time that it really bothered me was when for business reasons I happened to be carrying a gun or other compromising material. Several times I missed detection by the slimmest of margins.

The trolley cars were favorite places for the Germans to stop and check everyone's papers and packages. On one such occasion, I was carrying a revolver. As the Gestapo men came aboard, we were all required to lift our hands over our heads while they went through our pockets. I was carrying a newspaper. Just before they came to me, I pulled out my pistol, wrapped it in my newspaper and raised it up in the air. No less than six people saw me do this, but no one betrayed me. I was inwardly sweating blood when the Germans searched me, but they never thought to look inside the newspaper.

Another close one was the time I was carrying a package containing three hundred thousand francs, which I was taking to change into smaller bills. No individual was permitted to have over ten thousand francs in his possession without a very special permit, which I didn't have. As the trolley came to a stop, I was really worried. Every package would have

to be opened, and when they came to me, I would have had it. The Germans ordered everyone to march off the car for the inspection.

As I passed the motorman, I noticed that he had his lunch and thermos bottle on the shelf right by his controls. Catching his eye for a second, I placed my package on top of his lunch and stepped off the train.

The Germans never thought to investigate my bundle, although they went through all the rest with their customary thoroughness. After we got back on board, I retrieved my precious package. There was not one word from the motorman during the whole episode, but as I left his car, I gratefully slipped him a large bill.

Betty, the courier, had a close call on another occasion. She had gone out to the country to bring back some plastic explosive for sabotage operations. When she arrived in Brussels with her heavy suitcase, she was shocked to see that all civilians were being stopped at a separate gate for baggage inspection. She also noticed that German military were using a separate exit, and were not checked. Thinking quickly, she smiled prettily at a young German officer and asked if he would help her with the heavy bag. He was charmed at being able to assist such a pretty girl, and gallantly carried the explosives to her hotel. Later that plastic killed a lot of Germans.

ONE night when things looked blackest, Fred, Francis, another agent and myself were sitting in a bar, talking of going back to England for a fresh start, when a Gestapo patrol entered and demanded all our papers. Had the Germans only realized it, at that moment they had within their power most of what was left of the Belgian underground agent network in Brussels. Fred didn't bat an eye. After our papers were checked, he invited the Germans to join us. They agreed readily, and for over an hour the very men who were trying to hunt us down enjoyed our drinks and swapped stories with us. This type of thing used to give Fred a great lift.

In April orders came through from London for me to return to report on developments and prepare for a new mission. I had been in Belgium nearly four months. The early German mop-up of all the people with whom I was to work had largely doomed my psychological warfare mission from the beginning. Principal accomplishment in this line was my formation of new cells, which were later built up into a new organization to take the place of the liquidated MNB. On the other hand, my sabotage and protection work with Fred had been quite successful.

For the trip back, Fred procured papers for me as an engineer for a German firm. Betty was the fiancée of the lawyer who had jumped in with me. He had completed his mission, and was already back in England. Before leaving, he had made me promise to take her back with me if possible. Even without that promise, I would have wanted to help her out—I owed my life to her. Fred made all arrangements for our trip to Paris, with Betty scheduled as my private secretary. Everything worked perfectly until we reached a point just south of the capital, where I discovered that several links in my escape route to Spain had been wiped out. Unable to proceed, I returned to Paris, where Fred used his black-market connections to get me reorganized. I started out again, building my escape route as I went. Realizing that the trip through the Pyrenées was too rugged for Betty, I made arrangements for her to reach Spain by boat—a longer but far safer route.

At Estajelle, a small French town near the Spanish border, I was nearly captured by the Germans. They came to raid the house where I was spending the night. Actually they were looking for a communist, but I did not know it. The woman of the house did a wonderful job. She stalled the Germans for a minute until her son could put up a ladder to my room. I escaped over the roofs.

My second trip through the Pyrenées with three guides was a cinch compared to my last journey in the winter of 1941. In Barcelona my exit permit was stamped by the same harelipped official who had supervised my brutal interrogation two years before. He did not recognize the South African "Jack Williams" as the "French-Canadian" who had been a former client. I was then flown back to England. The whole trip from Paris took only sixteen days.

After a wonderful two-week holiday, I was briefed for another mission in Belgium. This was to be a sabotage operation to destroy Gestapo files. Our infiltration was again to be by parachute, but this time we were to be met by a reception committee. Four times we flew the mission without success. Twice we were nearly killed in the attempt. On the third effort we were attacked by a German night fighter. Our plane was badly shot up and we were very lucky to get back to the southern coast of England, where we crash-landed. All of us were badly shaken up, but the next night we tried again in another plane. Again we were unsuccessful.

THIS fourth failure washed out further attempts during that moon period. Before we could get off again, the Americans had taken Brussels. I landed there the first day of the liberation. The population, and particularly my old friends of the resistance, were deliriously happy. But there was plenty of sorrow too, for the thousands of underground workers who had paved the way with their lives.

For three weeks I worked with the Belgian Government tracking down Gestapo agents and the hated collaborators. This work seemed dull after the thrill of being an agent, so I volunteered for and was accepted by the American Office of Strategic Services for another mission as an agent in Germany.

My first assignment with OSS was to interrogate Germans who had been overrun by the American First Army. Through them and other contacts made by passing through the American lines, I helped line up a network of safe houses and reliable anti-Nazis inside Germany.

Then, in December, 1944, I was flown back to London to prepare for a mission to Munich. Francis, my old friend from Brussels, came along as my radio operator. It was while going through training with OSS that I met the American WAC who was later to become my wife.

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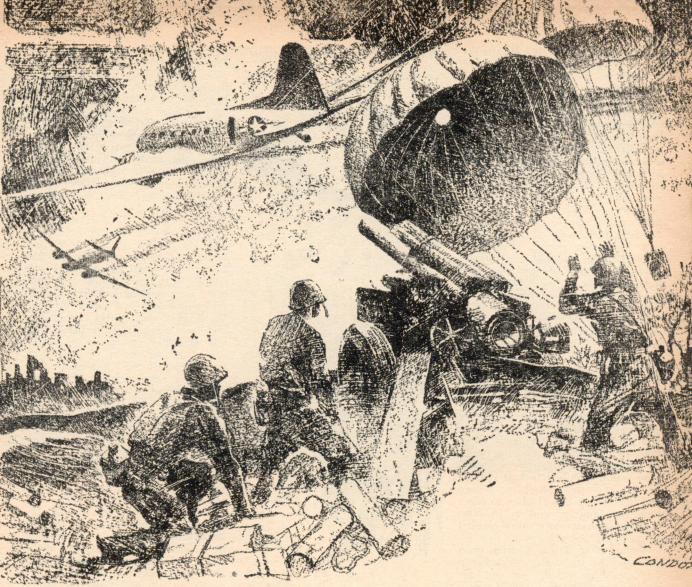


The Lost Battalion *of* Mortain

WHEN THE TROOP CARRIER COMMAND FLEW AN HEROIC RESCUE MISSION.

By C. DONALD WIRE

THE haze was thick, almost impenetrable, a combination of raging battle-smoke and muggy weather. Out of it roared twelve aircraft, type Douglas C-47, the same huge unarmed transports that in weeks previous had dropped the 101st Airborne Division into Normandy.

The twelve C-47s came in over target, a small hill just outside the French village of Mortain. It was 16:25 hours, August 9, 1944. Daylight streamed through the haze, brought out each ship in clear, startling relief. German ground batteries, tracking and computing range and altitude since the ships crossed into enemy territory, threw flak into the air with deadly accuracy. Only four hundred feet straight up separated them from those flat, parapack-studded bellies.

Without a break in formation, and at a crawling 125 miles an hour, the twelve aircraft absorbed the punishment and made their drop. Seventy-two vari-colored parachutes blossomed in the air. With critically needed bundles of ammunition and food drifting toward the ground, the flight of C-47s plunged into the deck, throttles fire-walled and engines reverberating with a roar of power that made the racket of cannon below sound like that of popguns.

They weaved and turned at tree-top level, fought their way back out of Mortain. Twelve aircraft went in on the drop, and despite wings and cargo compartments torn by flak gravel, and ruptured tanks spouting gasoline, twelve aircraft came out.

That action, the relief of the "Lost Battalion" in Mortain, was perhaps the most precisely executed and at the same time the least-planned operation ever flown by the Ninth Troop Carrier Command. It followed Troop Carrier's primary function of the transportation of airborne troops and supplies, and the towing of gliders into enemy territory; but here the similarity stopped.

The airborne invasion of Normandy, only a month old, had proved

to the world that assault from the sky was truly the new weapon of the war. In this case the entire operation of Neptune-Bigot, from its conception by Allied Command to its final execution, had been on a grand, overwhelming scale. Over one thousand troop-carriers, the Douglas C-47s, had participated. This involved all units of the command stationed in the British Isles. The invasion area had been thoroughly saturated by bombardment, and thousands of fighters flew cover for the formation of skytrains. Photo maps, complete weather data, extensive intelligence and flak briefings had been given. Pathfinder teams went in to mark the targets; naval boats had flashed on-course lights across the channel. Months had gone into planning and pre-invasion maneuvers.

But global warfare isn't fought by any set timetable. Mortain wasn't anticipated. It was just another little French village, another clutter of débris on the long march to victory. It wasn't a Falaise Gap, or a Carentan or St. Lô, until that day in early August.

With a foothold secured on the Cherbourg Peninsula, and the First and Third Armies striving to break through and spill out onto the plains of France, it was obvious a second blow would soon be struck at Hitler's *Festung Europa*. Southern France was chosen as a logical place to effect a second landing; and as in Normandy, airborne troops would be used to spearhead the maneuver.

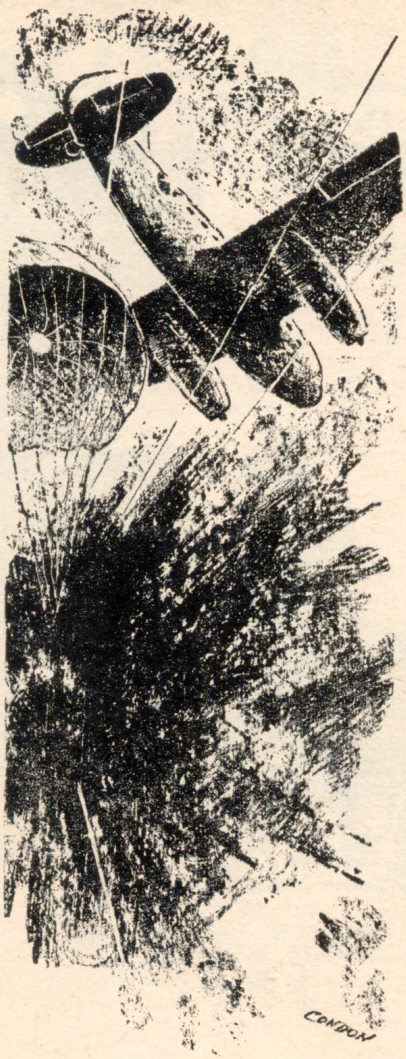
To augment Troop Carrier units stationed in Italy, the 50th Troop Carrier Wing, made up of four groups, was dispatched from the British Isles in mass flight to bases on the Italian Peninsula. Each group left a quarter of its strength to carry on operational re-supply missions out of Britain. They would also engage in any airborne operations that were deemed necessary by Supreme Headquarters.

At the Devonshire base of Exeter, on the south coast of Britain, the 98th Squadron of the 440th Troop Carrier Group had drawn the low card. As a result of administrative adjustments, the 98th was now the 440th Provisional Troop Carrier Group, commanded by Lt. Colonel Bascome Neal.

Colonel Neal was a short, stocky pilot, good-natured and of the type wingmen will follow until their airplanes stop flying. You couldn't miss him for the cigar stuck in his mouth, and his fast, springy step. He rightfully had that cocky attitude, so it was no wonder he named his ship "Cock o' the Walk."

With his complement of thirty-two airplanes, Neal had the job of carrying on with the constant freight hauls to the far shore and air evacuations in

Illustrated by Grattan Condon



The last bundle caught a direct hit and exploded, throwing Cock o' the Walk *over.*

return. He also had a few disheartened pilots on his hands, since the 98th was doomed to sit on the sidelines and watch the airborne invasion of Southern France. Most of the boys had the idea it would be a good show, and they felt left out in the cold. It was with relief that a teletyped message was received from Command on August 6, ordering the 98th to Station 464, at Ramsbury in the Midlands.

When the complement arrived at Ramsbury, they found the base buzzing with activity. Paratroopers from the British, French, Polish and American armies were there in force. Rumors were thick; it looked like another drop, or perhaps, as had happened in the past, just another "dry run."

Missions had been planned daily by Headquarters, and just as rapidly scrubbed. The ground situation in France was constantly changing. Drop zones were overrun while pilots were in their airplanes ready to take off. Briefings were called, and minutes later canceled as news of fresh ground advances came through.

Here at Ramsbury the 440th Provisional Troop Carrier officially became a part of the 1st Allied Airborne Army. This Army was to embrace the entire Troop Carrier Command, and all Allied airborne units in the European Theater.

The first two days at Ramsbury were a welter of speculation. Everybody had heard something from somebody, who got it from someone who knew. The usual freight hauls were run on a twenty-four-hour schedule. C-47s were arriving and departing all through the day and night. An endless chain of aircraft kept ammunition and food going into the battle-lines, and wounded returning.

On the afternoon of August 9, twelve aircraft and crews of the 98th Squadron were alerted. In exactly thirty minutes the twelve C-47s greased down the runway and lifted into a formation of four V's, three ships in each V. Colonel Neal in *Cock o' the Walk* led the formation southeast across Britain.

Later most of the pilots admitted they had no idea what it was all about until they returned to the base and talked the thing over.

This hastily planned, daring daylight mission that was to save the Lost Battalion of Mortain was the outcome of a decision by the German Wehrmacht to hold on and attempt to push the Allies back into the sea. In the north, British and Canadian troops were striking at the Nazi flank. In the south, Patton's hard-smashing armored spearheads were threatening to burst eastward and outflank the enemy.

Pressing back in a ferocious major counter-attack, the German armies developed a wedge which became known as the Battle of Falaise Gap. This tactical maneuver was intended to split the First Army at Avranches, separating it from the Third Army on the German left flank. Thus General Patton's narrow supply-lines would be severed.

In a tiny Royal Air Force theater at Ramsbury, Colonel Neal and his men sat through a few minutes of briefing. Little information was available. Time was precious, a factor that prevented gathering the usual extensive data. Information on weather was what you yourself could see outside—low clouds, thick haze that restricted visibility and would make check-points difficult to find. Plenty of opposition was anticipated, but the positions of flak batteries were not known.

Mortain itself was a little French village lying in the path of the enemy attack. A dozen times it had been taken, lost, and retaken by the Allies. At present the city was in the hands of the Nazis, but a small hill just outside was occupied by a battalion of American artillery. This battalion had been ordered to hold at all costs, since the position they occupied commanded the roads through which enemy armor was moving. They were entirely surrounded, had been for days; and American forces, engaged in a bitter struggle, would not be expected to reach them for some time. Food and water were low; ammunition and medical supplies virtually exhausted. The tiny Lost Battalion, with casualties mounting hourly, was doomed to annihilation unless vital supplies reached them immediately.

There was only one road open to Mortain—through the air. It was a job neatly cut to specifications of Troop Carrier.

NOW was the pay-off. The 440th had come through with a brilliant performance in the airborne invasion of Normandy. Here the long hours in the air, the endless training flights both in the States and in Britain, had marked the difference between a perfectly executed maneuver and a slipshod, amateurish attempt.

Could twelve unarmed, unarmored transports, in full daylight, perform on a smaller scale the same tactical operation that was Mission Memphis of June 7? Memphis was given the cover of the entire Eighth and Ninth Airforce Fighter commands. In spite of perfect timing and coördination, losses throughout Troop Carrier were quite heavy, and damage to aircraft was extensive.

It remained to be seen if the 98th, under the stress of emergency, could fulfill their obligation to the 440th Group as a whole.

Each C-47 of the twelve participating in the mission had six parapacks slung under its belly: Food, ammunition, medical supplies, all packed in straw to lessen the impact of striking the ground. The assignment of the pilots was to get in, make a precision drop that would put every bundle right on that hill, and get out—if possible.

Colonel Neal assembled his formation under tattered cloud cover. From Ramsbury the flight went southeast to Greenham Commons. Without changing course, they proceeded across the Channel. Altitude here varied, sometimes above the overcast, at other times below it. There were uneasy moments when successive cloud-layers enveloped the flight, and wingmen pulled in tight to maintain contact with their element leaders.

Landfall at France was at airstrip A-22, near Colleville on the Cherbourg Peninsula. Up from A-22 came a flight of planes that made Neal sit a little easier in his cockpit. A cover of sixteen P-47 Thunderbolts swarmed around the Skytrain formation. This cover was a little more than expected, and was undoubtedly partly responsible for the return of all ships.

With his formation at three thousand feet, Colonel Neal banked right and put them on course for Isigny. Beyond Isigny, heading southwest now, they passed the ruins of St. Lô and the gutted hamlets that had been pounded into dust. The haze thickened as battle-smoke wafted from the lines. Navigational check-points, in many cases, had been blasted out of existence.

The small town of Marigny moved beneath the formation, and finally Colonel Neal spotted the railroad crossing outside of Folligny. From here the run-in to Mortain would be made, straight and unswerving, with all ships gradually letting down to four hundred feet over target. Course was southeast again.

Throttles were eased off and the formation tightened. Radio operators took positions in the astrodomes, ready for the green light that would blink from Colonel Neal's lead ship. Crew chiefs stood tense at the switch panels that would salvo the parapacks.

The Thunderbolt cover peeled off and screamed into the German hot-spots that were opening up. Tracer and small arms sliced the air. Twenty- and forty-millimeter barked out from concealed gun-positions, and that hideous sound of flak gravel tearing through airplane skin was heard by the pilots.

WINGS level and with no slightest deviation from course, the twelve C-47s dropped lower. Air speeds fell from 150 to 140, down to a limping 125 that made the ground stand still beneath them. The haze deepened to a dirty brown that was stifling.

Colonel Neal and his navigator, Captain Henderson, squinted into the glare of a low-hanging sun for the church steeple that would mark their target. This final check-point, given as a means to identify a hill that was part of thousands of hills, was in itself comical. If France has anything, it has church steeples.

Colonel Neal knew the drop had to be perfect. There was no Norden or Sperry bombsight to rely on. Only judgment, and a sixth sense that had been developed through the previous months. Anything less than one hundred per cent accuracy would be failure. Every bundle must go right into the target. There would be no follow-up missions, since the fate of the Lost Battalion was now or never.

The cluttered streets of Mortain rushed beneath, and withering fire lifted into the air. It was seconds to the target, endless seconds stooging along at 125 miles an hour, with only four hundred feet of smoke-filled air below.

At exactly 16:25 hours, Colonel Neal spotted his church—minus the steeple.

The ground beneath had risen sharply. They were over the hill, over the dug-in, unconquerable Lost Battalion. Neal gave the drop signal, and his crew chief tripped the parapack salvo. Elements caught the green wink of a biscuit gun from *Cock o' the Walk's* astrodome and hit their salvo switches.

Seventy-two parachutes, done in gay colors to identify the packs, swung down through the air. The last bundle to leave Neal's ship caught a direct hit from an ack-ack battery. It exploded into dust, throwing *Cock o' the Walk* over as if she had plunged into a sudden up-draft.

German gun batteries now had accurate range, and Neal knew it was get out or get licked. He took the formation into the deck, into the scattered forests and green fields that were littered with shell-holes. Heavy machine-gun fire and small arms harassed them as they turned and twisted out of the target area. Any maneuver that would keep them flying was the right one, regardless of those who said you couldn't do it with a C-47. Gone was the neat formation, the straight and level flying. A pilot running into a hot spot would heel over 90 degrees and make a turn that would be sharp for a Piper Cub.

They came out, all twelve of them, shot up and dripping 100 octane on the fields of Normandy. But they were still flying.

THE LOST BATTALION recovered every bundle dropped. They continued to hold out against an attack that was steadily mounting in fury. A few days later contact was made by ground forces. Mortain was cleared of the enemy; Allied might poured through to stem the German assault.

There was nothing glamorous or sensational about the relief of Mortain by the 440th Provisional Troop Carrier Group. There were no official commendations, and the mission was soon forgotten in the heat of more spectacular operations, such as the airborne invasions of Southern France and Holland. Mortain was just another battle that had been turned, another milestone along a road that was rough and getting rougher.

But Colonel Neal, with a cigar in his mouth and an affectionate look at *Cock o' the Walk,* knew it was another Troop Carrier job well done. That was sufficient.

BE HER MASTER

A ship's officer learns to rule the men and mechanisms for which he is responsible.

by RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

ROCK BURNSIDE woke up abruptly. Under him the *Agnes Galante's* old engine had quit rumbling. He slid into his pants, and on bare feet padded swiftly up the narrow steps to the bridge.

The ship was rolling in the choppy sea kicked up by the northeast trade. At least Force 6, that wind, and it might well pick up with the coming of the sun. A puffy cloud went charging across the face of the gibbous moon now close to setting. The gray-white light in the shabby little wheelhouse died away. No dawn yet.

Tim Lloyd, the chief mate, was headed across the house to the engine-room speaking-tube. Silently he got out of Rock Burnside's way. When Rock reached the tube, the chief engineer was already talking on the other end.

"The shaft has cracked, Captain," Harrison said. His voice sounded sharp. "I wouldn't turn it another rev. She'd kick her propeller into the sea."

Rock Burnside stared at the tube as the moon sliced through the cloud. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of the helmsman, a black Virgin Islander, parting his lips at him in a soundless snarl. The man's hands fiddled uncertainly with the spokes of the useless wheel. At the lee door of the wheelhouse the mate, a rigid, unfriendly figure, waited.

"Do you hear me, Captain?" asked the chief engineer's penetrant voice. "Ye've no power."

"I hear you, Mr. Harrison," Rock said. He paused, with hot agony searing his brain. He looked at the tube again and then walked away from it. He headed toward the mate at the door and stepped past him to go to the wing of the bridge. He stared hard down the black water to port.

Tim Lloyd pointed. "Cape San Juan light a point forward of the beam, sir," he said. The deference in his tone was tinged with derision. "Four miles."

Rock's fingers doubled up at the mockery in Lloyd's voice. With an effort he opened his hand again.

The peaks of Puerto Rico, on the port bow, were a distant darkness.

"A nest of reefs and rocks dead to leeward," he muttered to himself. "All the blasted Cordilleras Reefs." And he turned to face the mate.

"Sighted any ships during your watch?" he asked.

"The *Brimstone Hill* passed three quarters of an hour ago, on schedule, sir," Lloyd replied. In the moonlight his suspicious eyes were digging hard into Rock's face.

"The tail-shaft has cracked, Mr. Lloyd," Rock said. "We're on our own."

"Tough," said Tim Lloyd. "Your first command, too."

Rock jerked his eyes off San Juan light. Lloyd's voice had lost its formality, but it was still edged with a quality that should not be there. Derision? Distrust? Irony? His voice wasn't right.

Rock moved to a box under the bridge rail, groped in it and took out the night-glasses. Then he looked aft, straight to eastward, carefully searching the dim horizon for a white light.

EVEN a glimpse of the *Brimstone Hill's* stern light would be heartening. As mate, Rock had found her a happy ship, not a floating psychopathic ward like his new command. From the deck below his ears picked up the angry muttering of a couple of the crew. There was one A.B., a copper-faced fellow with few teeth and yellow eyeballs, whom he particularly distrusted. From the way the seaman watched Rock the feeling was probably mutual.

Already the *Agnes Galante* had fallen off her course and lay sluggishly in the trough of the short seas. Her roll was quick and undignified. Wind and sea were combining to butt the little freighter along down to leeward.

Tim Lloyd closed up alongside him, watching him narrowly instead of joining him in the search of the empty horizon.

Vividly Rock Burnside remembered the counsel of the *Brimstone's* skipper, Nels Ranstead, as seagoing a shipmaster as they came:

"You'll make mistakes, son, when you get a ship. *But be her master* and you'll avoid the biggest mistake of all."

"Rather a coincidence, sir, your old ship so close at hand," Tim Lloyd said probingly. "Captain Ranstead has piled up quite a reputation for rescuing seamen out of luck."

Rock Burnside grunted. "It could be a coincidence, Mr. Lloyd," he said distantly. "However, steamship lines aren't sentimental when it comes to salvage claims. Get up two red lights."

"Aye, sir," said Tim Lloyd briskly. "Any radio message?"

"Two red lights." Rock's voice was harsh. He was trying to think. The coincidence was too blasted strange to be convincing. He was well aware of the vastness of the sea.

Rock's eyes shifted to a figure down at the port rail of the well deck. He waited for the moon to come through and light up this motionless man.

It was fat Ford Galvin. He was dressed. A pair of binoculars hung against his barrel chest.

Galvin looked around and upward. He saw Rock Burnside bending forward over the bridge rail. He shook his head mournfully.

Rock responded with a brief jerk of the wrist and went back to studying the movement of his ship. She was in ballast only and her light draft lifted her sides that much higher to this strong wind. The rocks were waiting. He could not delay. He turned and beckoned and instantly the radio operator, still in pajamas, was beside him, bending his long neck in urgent expectancy.

"Try to raise the *Brimstone Hill*," Rock said. "I've a message for her."

THE radio operator hustled toward the shack behind the chartroom.

Shadows were showing down on deck, now, shadows that became small bunches of men when the moon rode clear. The news had run through the sleeping ship. And now they were yammering among themselves. Although he did not listen, Rock caught snatches of voices purposely upraised.

"You'd think that the underwriters would wise up," one man growled.

"It gets me down to have some guy stick out my neck for me," another said, even louder. Was that Copper Face?

"Where do I come in on this dirty deal?"

Ominously the voices dropped and went on talking.

Tim Lloyd came back, head cocked alertly. He pointed aloft at two glowing lights that proclaimed the *Agnes Galante's* shame to the world. He stood in front of Rock, waiting.

Rock nodded toward the rail below. "Has our passenger been on deck the whole of your watch?" he asked, lowering his voice.

Lloyd peered down at the plump round figure on the well deck. "Galvin, huh?" he said. "He hasn't been up on the bridge. Haven't even seen him till now."

"Tell the second mate to take a gang up on the fo'c's'le head," Rock said. "He's to bring the starboard anchor inboard, secure it and unshackle it from the anchor chain. We have no wire hawser strong enough to tow with; I want the anchor-cable ready for instant use."

"Aye, sir," said Lloyd briskly.

"Return to the bridge when you've got Mr. Topolo started on the job."

The mate hurried off.

Rock went up on the bridge top and took a couple of hurried bearings. He noticed that the dubious gray light of dawn was coming. In the chartroom he looked up the pilot book. In Vieques Sound, on the other side of that chain of rocks to leeward, the flood tide set to southward and the ebb to northward. The tide table told him this was the middle of the ebb. Some slight current in this location should be opposing the effect of wind and sea. But he knew it wasn't. She was going down on the reefs. And the turn of the tide would speed her drift.

No doubt about it—without help she'd be on the rocks in three hours.

Turning from the bridge rail to look aft for the radio operator, Rock found somebody close behind, watching him.

Surprised, Rock made this out to be Harrison, the chief engineer. Harri-

On the forecastle head a man of Topolo's gang lay on the deck and Mr. Lloyd was nursing bloody knuckles.

son, a slouching figure, thin from years of drink and pallid from engine-room air, just stood there, without explanation of this appearance on deck.

"What does your examination of that crack show, Chief?" Rock asked. "Can you give us enough turns to get steerage-way on her?"

"You heard me the first time," Harrison said waspishly. "You'd better grab a ride before the *Brimstone Hill* gets too far to save us."

"I'm keeping out of your way, Captain," Ford Galvin said.

He turned quickly and went down the bridge ladder. At the bottom he stopped. "I can't whittle a main shaft out of matchsticks, can I?" he shouted in his thin, high voice. He brushed past Ford Galvin and disappeared.

Galvin started after the chief engineer; then shrugged his shoulders and came a few steps up the ladder.

"I'm keeping out of your way, Captain," he said.

Rock looked down at him, bothered by this advertised unobtrusiveness. Nominally, of course, Galvin was only an ordinary seaman, signed on so that he might make the run through the Virgin Passage to San Juan. But though Rock hadn't known Galvin in person for more than a week he suspected that this man, a figure of some consequence in West Indian shipping circles, had gotten him his ship. Certainly somebody had bespoken this sudden and unexpected command for him. And it was Galvin who had introduced him to the desiccated old marine super of the three-ship Galante line, the man who had offered him the job.

"You won't be in the way on the bridge, Mr. Galvin," Rock said. "I'm busy, of course."

"I'd rather keep off it," Galvin said. "Glad that ship's handy."

He retreated down the treads. Rock ignored hostile eyes upturned on deck close to the ladder. He paced the bridge, a hand cupped around his jaw. "I feel like a crook at a detectives' ball," he muttered.

His duty was plain. Though he resented the pressure from all the suspicious ship's company, including even Ford Galvin, to get help from the *Brimstone Hill* was the only thing to do. Maybe those men down on deck would believe their mounting belligerence had forced him to abandon some sinister plot to wreck the *Agnes* for insurance money. But what they might think of him could have no bearing on what he must do.

Sparks came hurrying from the radio shack.

"I raised him at last," he said. "That's a three-operator ship."

He shoved a pencil and a sheet of paper at Rock.

Rock wrote:

MAIN SHAFT CRACKED. REQUIRE IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE.

He signed it *"Rockwell Burnside, Master."*

Over in the wing of the bridge, Rock planted his hands on the rail and looked at the light of Cape San Juan, fading slowly in the growing light.

Tim Lloyd returned from the forecastle head.

"Topolo's handling it O.K.," he reported.

The yammering on deck died down. All hands knew Sparks was talking to the *Brimstone Hill*. But men were still watching the bridge distrustfully.

Captain Ranstead was on the job. He flashed back an immediate offer to tow.

Rock gave his position, specified arbitration on salvage charges.

Ranstead accepted. On the lightening eastern horizon his running-lights showed. The *Brimstone Hill* came down on the *Agnes Galante* with confident speed. The gang on the forecastle head had to work fast to get the cable ready.

Rock knew well what ill-suppressed satisfaction Nels Ranstead got out of rendering assistance at sea and of maneuvering his ship under exacting conditions. A man like Ranstead got tired of routine command of a floating freighthouse.

Ranstead wasted no time being fancy about the *Agnes Galante*. The Cordilleras were closer. He passed the drifting ship to leeward, swept around her stern and came up close to windward of her.

His square-handed boatswain—Rock knew that man well—put a heaving line across the *Agnes'* well-deck on the first cast. Ranstead's crew paid out line and wire hawser with steady, unhurrying skill.

Rock paced the bridge, head pivoting forward at every turn, hands locked behind his back, while Tim Lloyd and the second, up on the head, shackled the *Agnes Galante's* anchor chain to the hawser for towing. Lloyd and Topolo knew their stuff and were doing it. There was light enough now to see that.

Ranstead gave the *Agnes* plenty of scope and put a strain on the towline with skillful caution. But once he had the *Agnes* under way and headed back toward the Virgin Passage he gradually increased his speed.

In spite of the wind and sea on the port bow Ranstead was driving his ship. Though considerably smaller, the *Agnes Galante* had a fine crust of barnacles, with liberal garnishings of weed, on her bottom and she did not follow with easy grace. Rock Burnside stood still on the bridge with his two hands planted on the rail and watched that straining wire and cable with great unease. Of course, the heavy anchor chain, acting as a spring, dampened the violence of sudden stresses. But in spite of that he was puzzled. It wasn't at all like old Ranstead to crowd a hawser to the breaking-point. The chain, dropping deep under the sea and then rising up straight, taut and dripping, told the story.

LLOYD came aft, disappeared in the house a few moments and then came up on the bridge nursing a mug of coffee in his hands. He looked over the side to estimate the speed the *Agnes* was making through the water and shook his head dubiously.

"Near enough to jerk the anchor windlass off the deck," he said. He hesitated and then went on:

"Sparks was just telling me, sir, that Captain Ranstead's been radioing his agents at St. Thomas to try to get a tug to relieve him of this towing job," he said.

Rock's face went suddenly white.

"That should have been reported to me at once, Mr. Lloyd," he said. "By you, if Sparks was so witless as to consider it merely a matter of gossip."

He turned away from the silent mate and went pacing across the thrumming bridge planking. This news and the reckless strain of the towing meant that Captain Ranstead,

pulling his ear over there on the bridge of the *Brimstone Hill,* was under some strong compulsion for speed. Rock came back to the mate.

"Step into the chartroom, Mr. Lloyd," he said through tightened lips, and led the way.

In the narrow, shabby little room he faced the mate with intent eyes. Lloyd's face was taut but he did not avoid Rock's gaze.

"You're second in command of this ship, Mr. Lloyd," Rock said curtly. "Is there a sea lawyer on board attempting to stir up the crew?"

"Not that I know, sir," said Tim Lloyd steadily. His expression was unreadable.

"This yellow-faced man in your watch? Or Galvin?"

"Nobody's happy, but I don't know anybody's actually making trouble."

"That isn't satisfactory, Mr. Lloyd," Rock snapped. "I may be new to this line but I can spot a crew that's on the boil with rumors, dissatisfaction, threats of mutiny."

"It's not my fault, sir," Lloyd said.

"But you do not deny the condition exists. I have also observed you indulging in furtive talk with Topolo that looks to me like more of the same."

He paused for Lloyd to deny this but the mate was silent.

"That sort of thing can lead to panic, the loss of the ship in an emergency," Rock said. "I don't like it. I suggest you come out in the open."

Tim Lloyd lifted his head. "Right!" he said. "I'll let you have it straight. All hands think something queer is up. There's you coming out of nowhere, or other waters, anyhow, to get the job of old man. The ship, after standing by for weeks, suddenly pushes off to San Juan without a ton of cargo in her. Then a shipping man like Galvin signs on for the run when he could hop a plane or a passenger ship. And Harrison, down below, picks up new men off the beach and starts chucking his weight around like a prima donna. What's it all add up to?"

Lloyd did not add: "An insurance job?" But it was plain that was what he thought.

ROCK took his jaw in his hand. Tim Lloyd was standing up to him. It was Rock's turn now to meet the accusing glare in the mate's eyes.

"Anything else?" Rock asked.

"No, sir," said Lloyd. "But it seems to be quite a bit."

"Surely there's been some gossip ashore that wouldn't come to the ears of a newcomer like me?"

Lloyd, braced for an outburst, was surprised by that calm question.

"Nothing that fits in," he said. He was scowling; he seemed almost to be talking to himself. "Of course there's an almighty scuffle for West Indian trade, but you could sink all three of these little old Galante ships and the line with 'em and never cause a ripple. It's a fight between two big ones."

He looked at Rock Burnside again. "This new bunch, that you come from, the West Indian Hill line, with the *Brimstone Hill* and the other modern ships, are bucking the big Carib International, that has a grip on the islands. But I don't see—"

"The Carib International," Rock repeated. "I know the operators of the *Brimstone Hill* are straight. But how about their rivals, the Carib International? Crooks?"

Lloyd shook his head. "They might cut a corner, but they wouldn't risk too much."

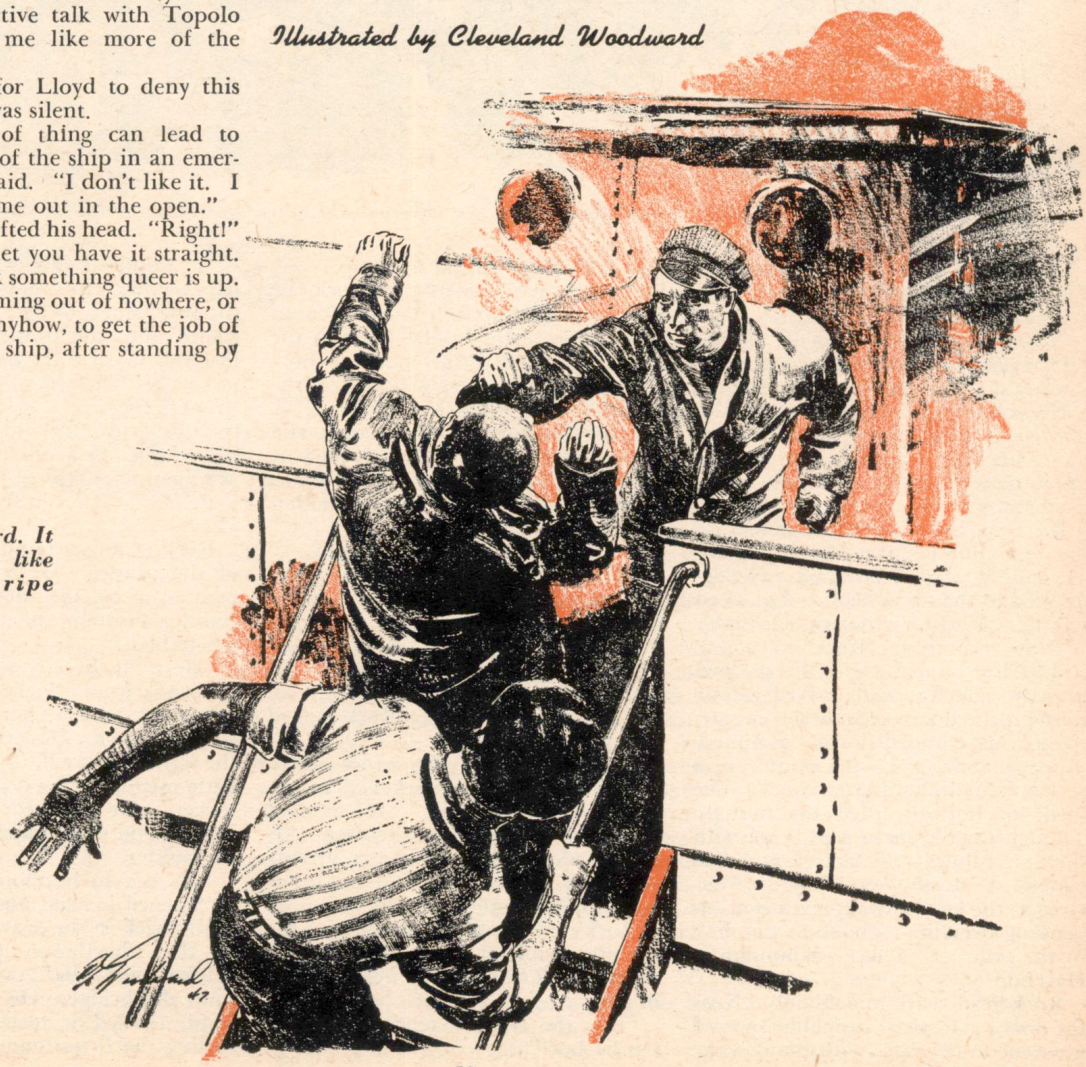
He stopped, with suspicion returning. "What's all this got to do—"

"You were in line for the master's job in this one?" Rock asked.

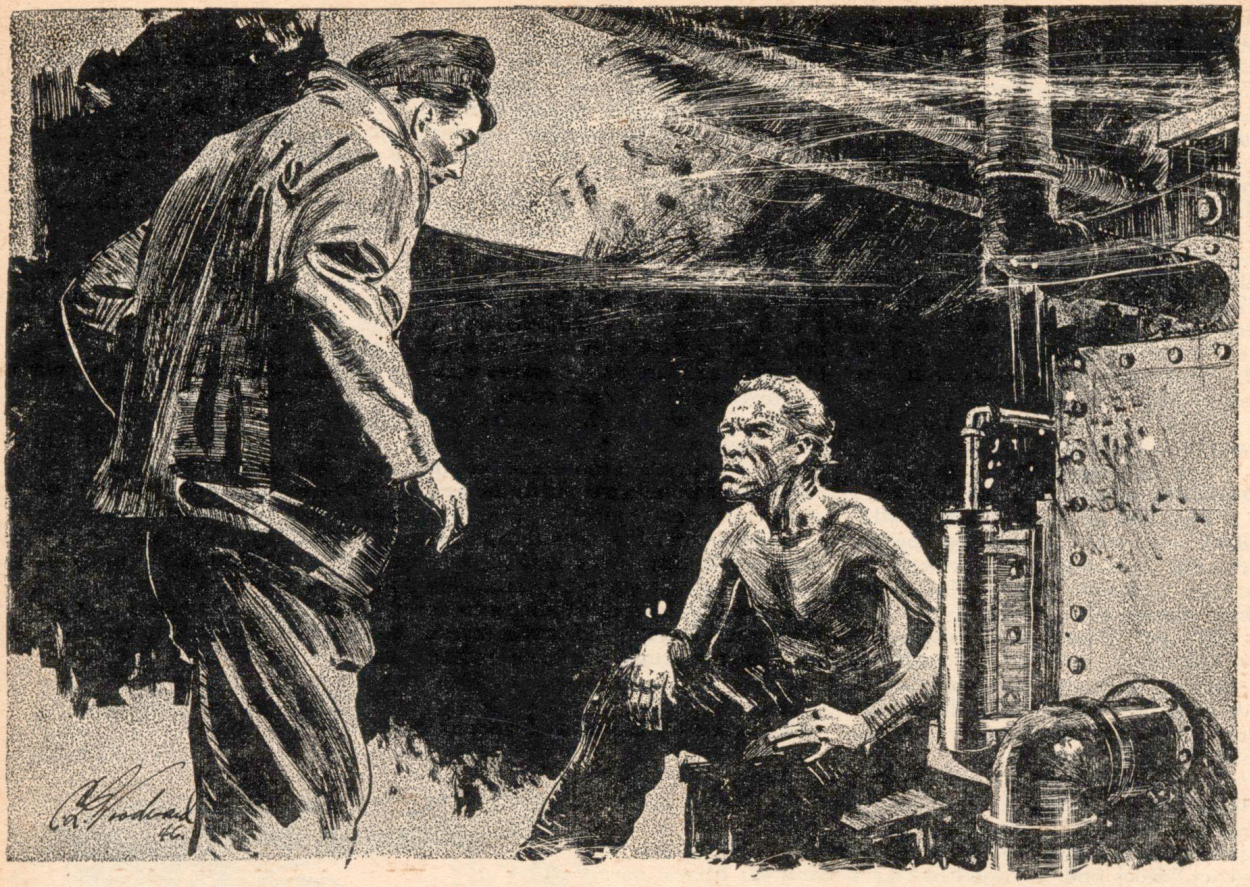
"That's right," Tom Lloyd replied crisply. "It had been as good as promised to me."

"But if you thought I was acting square to the ship you wouldn't lay down on your own job?"

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward



Rock hit hard. It was rather like hitting a ripe melon.



Near the door to the shaft tunnel Rock spotted a wizened old wiper in hiding behind a pump.

"I haven't and I wouldn't—sir." The "sir" was an afterthought but the mate's eyes were still steady.

"Fair enough, Mr. Lloyd! Seems I'll have to take over the engine-room," Rock said. "You take over the bridge."

He followed the mate out of the chartroom after thirty seconds and noted his rigid stance in the wing of the bridge. Lloyd's gaze was again fixed suspiciously on the taut towline.

Rock moved toward the ladder at the set, unhurried pace of a ship's master, but he wasted no time. He descended to the main deck and glanced around. Ford Galvin wasn't in sight.

"Low visibility," Rock muttered. Unmindful of many eyes, he stepped into the alleyway and walked calmly through the doorway into the engine-room. He climbed down the filmed, slippery ladders with the caution of a deck man in unfamiliar territory. The smell of hot oil filled his nostrils. Though the old main engine was still there was hum and clatter and hiss enough from the auxiliaries. MacGregor, the first assistant engineer, was bending over the logbook at the desk by the controls. There was no sign of Harrison.

Rock headed aft immediately. Near the door to the shaft tunnel he spotted a wizened old wiper with monkeylike face in hiding behind a pump. Following the man's intent gaze Rock saw Harrison and Galvin in inconspicuous conversation over by the lathe in the ship's cramped little machine-shop. Harrison was pressing a bottle on the shipping man. He was insistent, almost threatening. Galvin took it and drank briefly; then pushed it back at Harrison. The chief, his face sardonic, snarled something at him. Neither man was drunk.

ROCK tapped the wiper's shoulder, motioned imperatively toward the shaft tunnel. Stooping, Rock led him into the ill-lit, narrow tunnel where the shining main shaft lay still and massive, like a fallen column, in the grip of its bearings. Rock looked at it intently.

"You the mate?" the wiper asked. He pointed with a blackened finger. "Well, it's still cracked." He scowled at this young man from the deck. "It ain't healed any since we got up our anchor at St. Thomas. Did you sailor boys think running it would fix it up?"

Rock's eyes stabbed suddenly at the wiper's wrinkled face. He paused, thinking. *The shaft had been cracked in port.*

"Has the crack extended since we left harbor?"

"I wouldn't know, buddy," the wiper said. "But if it has that jaw-slinging chief discovered it not by comin' into the tunnel here, but by listenin' to that fat deck man." He jerked his black hand toward Galvin. "Yeah," he said. "What's the racket, buddy? Insurance money for some an' an open boat for us?"

"Thanks, old-timer," Rock said.

Be her master, old Ranstead had advised.

Rock swung around and crept out of the tunnel. He ignored the two men over by the lathe and walked rapidly through the engine-room to the ladders.

He went directly to his own quarters, took from a locked drawer a holster heavy with a Colt automatic and strapped it on. His eye was caught by the sight of himself, thus armed, in the little mirror on the door of his clothes locker. He stopped, faced himself soberly and then, quickly, unstrapped the holster.

"It's got to be more than a gun," he warned himself and put the automatic back in the drawer. He ran up to the wheelhouse, picked up the blinker signal-light and walked out onto the bridge. He plugged in the light, leveled it forward and began calling the *Brimstone Hill.*

Down on the *Agnes'* forecastle head, Topolo, the second mate, pointed his head at the hawser but his eyes slued toward the flashing blinker. On the other side of the bridge Tim Lloyd watched the blinker with unconcealed attention.

The *Brimstone Hill* answered.

Rock Burnside blinked out:

RANSTEAD MASTER
AM NOW ABLE TO PROCEED SO WILL CAST OFF YOUR LINE. THANKS.
BURNSIDE MASTER.

Topolo's jaw was hanging loose. He faced aft, his dark eyes pivoting uncertainly from Rock to Tim Lloyd.

Rock called Lloyd.

"As soon as Ranstead slows down, heave in our chain on the windlass and unshackle the *Brimstone's* wire, Mr. Lloyd," he said.

THE mate's eyes leaped down to leeward, to the rocks of the Cordilleras reefs. His face hardened. He didn't move.

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Lloyd," Rock said tersely to the motionless mate. He was dropping overboard the divine right of shipmasters to do as they chose without question. He must have the mate on his side or there would be red mutiny in this ship.

"Here's a question for you," Rock said. "If the *Brimstone Hill* kicked her schedule in the face to go off sniping for salvage money would it help the Carib International?"

"It could," said the mate slowly. "It would give the new line a black eye with the shippers. Maybe there's a contract that would be violated or some agreement broken—unless the saving of human life was involved."

He lifted a hand, pointing to the rocks and his eyes blazed suddenly. "There *is* human life involved—the life of every man in this ship," he said.

"No," said Rock. Already the *Brimstone Hill's* propeller had ceased to thresh the sea. The anchor cable was disappearing, link by link, into the blue water ahead. "I think not. Right now the *Agnes Galante* is able to make port under her own steam. She would have to be able to get in alone, however slowly. Otherwise the *Brimstone Hill* would be absolved of contract breaking."

"I don't get it. You want us to cast off—"

"Ford Galvin framed a phony breakdown to delay the *Brimstone Hill* for the Carib International—or more likely he framed it on his own for their benefit. Yes; that's more like it. A free-lancing rascal who intends to cash in later. The windlass, Mr. Lloyd! I'm calling Galvin's bluff and Harrison's bluff."

Still the mate did not move. "But—the rocks!" he protested. "If you're wrong you'll lose your ship!"

"There are more ways of losing a ship than ramming her on the rocks," Rock said tartly. "D'you think the Galante line wouldn't lose her if a stiff salvage award was slapped on them?"

Down below, sensing trouble on the bridge, watching men were edging together in tight little bunches.

"How about the rocks?" Tim Lloyd persisted doggedly. He was conscious of that threatening movement on deck.

"If I don't get power I shall take her through the reefs without it," Rock said. "I'll rig tarpaulins on the booms as sails and our motor lifeboats overside will give her a nudge in a pinch. In the shelter behind those reefs we'll anchor and radio for a tug."

The beginnings of unwilling admiration showed on Tim Lloyd's face. Rock took a quick step toward him. "I've given you scope because I think you're honest and this black game is complicated. Now I repeat an order: Get in our cable and cast off that towing wire, Mr. Lloyd."

The mate squared his cap on his head. "Let go the towing wire, sir," he said obediently. A grin flickered briefly on his face. "And I hope we come through the next five minutes."

He clattered down the ladder and started forward. The hawser, slackened, was curving deep into the sea. Topolo's gang on the forecastle head watched the mate coming toward them with black faces. Copper Face lingered on the well deck.

Lloyd got to Topolo. The windlass began clattering. Copper Face took a step forward.

Rock walked to the engine-room speaking-tube.

"Put on Mr. Harrison," he said when a man below answered.

"Mr. Harrison? I have cast off our tow line. Your game's up. Give me twenty revs or you'll take the consequences."

He heard a howl from Mr. Harrison and then his voice, fainter, spitting out the news to somebody beside him.

Rock did not wait. The windlass was still clattering. He walked out of the wheelhouse and across to the ladder leading down to deck.

On the forecastle head a man of Topolo's gang lay on the deck and Mr. Lloyd was nursing bloody knuckles on his right hand. Other men, and the second mate with them, were sullenly standing by as the last of the chain came in and the *Brimstone Hill's* slackened wire lifted in through the hawsepipe.

Copper Face went darting around among the men down on the well deck. He was urging them forward.

Ford Galvin came bursting out on deck. His voice rose in an angry squall as he saw what was going on forward. After him ran the chief engineer and a couple of the black gang.

"He's casting off! We're headed for the rocks! Come on! Make him—"

He waved his hand and went pounding up the bridge ladder.

Rock had all the time in the world. He hit hard. It was rather like hitting a ripe melon. Galvin, two steps below the head of the ladder, went over backward. He crashed against Mr. Harrison and then slid with him, half riding the ladder railing, down to the deck; they made an untidy mess there.

Copper Face came leaping up from the well deck, stumbled over Galvin but recovered as quickly as a cat. He looked up the ladder, gripped at the rail and glanced down at Galvin again.

Standing squarely at the head of the ladder, Rock pointed an arm at Copper Face.

"You, there, pick up that man!" he commanded with cool confidence that he would be obeyed. "A couple of you take him to the hospital and lock him in."

He flicked his eyes forward. The wire hawser, unshackled now, was twisting over the bow of the *Agnes* into the sea. Done!

"Mr. Harrison, go to your room and stay there," Rock ordered.

Harrison raised his lean, stooped body off the deck. He stuck his toe, with malignant force, into Galvin's ribs. Copper Face stared at him; then bent slowly, thrust powerful hands under Galvin and heaved him up.

"You'll bear in mind that it was me that chased him when he rushed the bridge," Harrison said with venomous insistence. "You ought to give me a chance to get her to port for you. A man can be mistaken, can't he?"

Mistaken! Rock's heart leaped in his flurried chest. It was a confession. Mistaken!

"He can," Rock said. "You have been. . . . I'll trust Mr. MacGregor to nurse along that shaft. You heard my order."

AGAIN Rock walked to the engine-room tube. MacGregor was on the other end. He received the order for slow speed ahead and repeated it with complete calm. In the blue sea to eastward the *Brimstone Hill* was surging ahead toward the rising sun, only a little behind her schedule and with no great claims piled up against the *Agnes*. Ranstead would see to that.

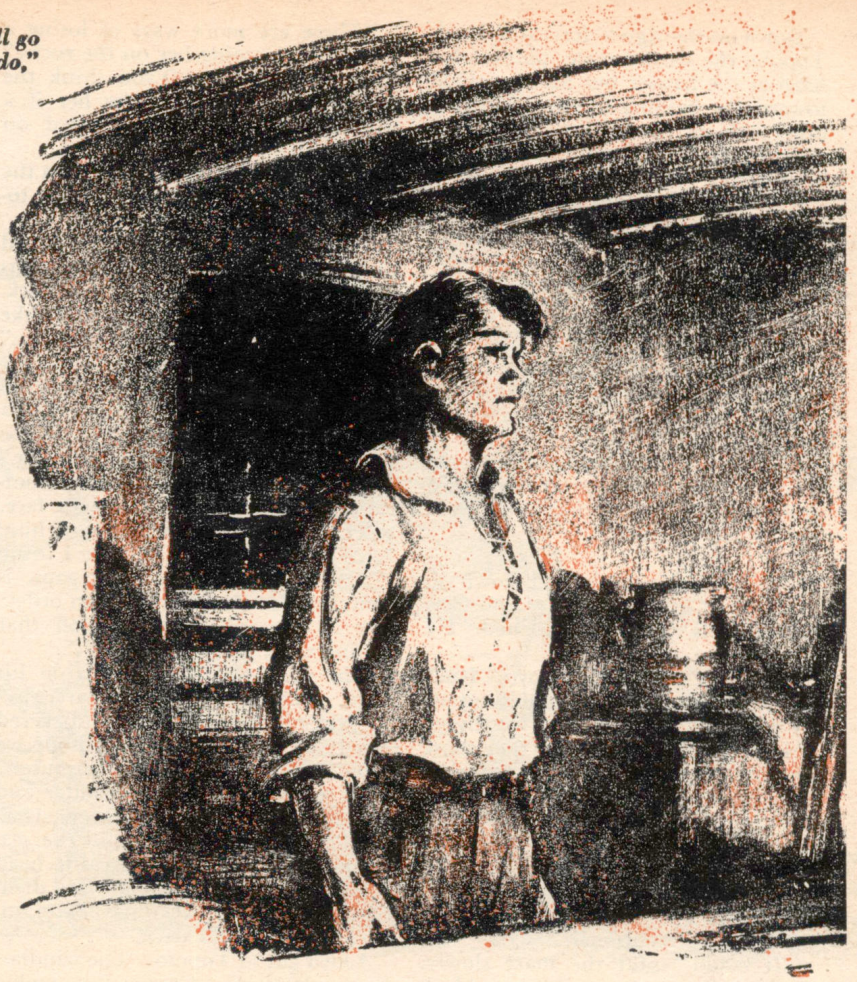
Tim Lloyd came back to the bridge. The deck below was clear of men. The engine was shaking the planking under his feet. He grinned at Rock and looked to leeward at the seas creaming on the rocks of the Cordilleras reefs.

"You know, I'd bet five bucks, sir, that you could have taken her through 'em," he said.

This time the "sir" was not sarcastically emphasized. Neither was it an afterthought.

Be her master!

"You won't need the crutch. I'll go ashore if you'll tell me what to do," Shadow said.



The Way

ALL afternoon long the Fort Benton-bound packet *Aurora* had snorted and fretted as it lay piled high and dry upon a sandbar, stubbornly resisting the efforts at warping, that process by which a line was made fast to a tree on the timbered bank and the other end slowly drawn in by a capstan in an attempt to lift the boat by its own bootstraps. All afternoon the crew had worked; and Shadow Landis, the youngest and most inept of the lot, had worked with them until Jim Alvord, the first mate, had spied the cut cottonwood floating downstream and assigned Shadow to a yawl and told him to recover as much of the drifting fuel as he could.

At first the job had been something of a lark until Shadow had seen the grimness in the face of Yellowstone Jones, that gray-bearded mountain man who was northward bound, and sensed, vaguely, the shape of disaster. Fear came easily to Shadow, for fear, shadowing the boy all of his days, had given him his name.

"What is it?" he'd ventured to ask when he'd tied up to the main deck the third time to unload his dripping cargo of salvaged firewood.

Yellowstone leaned against the rail, favoring his left leg, a fine figure in clay-yellowed buckskin. "Sioux country yonder," he said cryptically and swept an arm to the northwest.

That was always the way it was, Shadow turning to Yellowstone when there was a question to be asked. It was Yellowstone, down to St. Louis to sell his furs and spend his money riotously, who'd found Shadow in a waterfront saloon, doing a slave's work and taking the abuse of the bartender in return for a floor to sleep upon. It was Yellowstone who'd taken him out of that place and got a knife cut in the leg when the bartender had resented losing his flunky—a cut that had kept the trapper limping the *Aurora's* decks all the miles of the Lower Missouri. It was Yellowstone who'd spoken to Captain Amos Lynch and arranged for Shadow to become a deck sweep aboard this boat. And it was Yellowstone who now answered Shadow's question, though the answer made little sense to the boy.

Sioux country? They had *been* in Sioux country since they'd passed the mouth of the Niobrara to follow the Big Muddy's tortuous, ever-changing channel across Dakota. Shadow had heard the talk of the crew and knew now why the pilot-house, far above, was sheathed in boiler iron and why Jim Alvord posted armed guards on the main deck at night when the boat was tied up to the bank. The whipping General Sully had given the Indians at Whitestone Hill in '62 still rankled in their minds these six years later, and even Red Cloud's treaty with the Indian Commission failed to keep all the Ogallala Sioux at peace. Then, too, there were renegade whites, the debris of two disbanded armies, that were not above scamping a steamer for the cargo it carried. Yet how had Yellowstone smelled danger in this peaceful, sunlit summer's day?

"That wood," the mountain man explained. "It were cut by woodhawks and stacked for selling to steamboats. Did it jump into the river by itself? Git at yore work, lad! Amos Lynch may be burning butter and sides of bacon for fuel before we sight a settlement."

And so Shadow had taken the yawl into the current again, not quite understanding the significance of that floating fuel, and growing the more fearful because the danger was so vague. Then the night came and the packet was still stranded, the effort to extricate it given up until daylight; and Yellowstone had come seeking out Shadow on the main deck where the purse-poor passengers, those who provided their own bedding and food, congregated. "Come along, lad," the mountain man said, and Shadow silently followed him.

Yellowstone could make out fairly well with a cane, and he'd sworn a lurid oath that he'd be healed when he set foot upon the Fort Benton wharf in distant Montana, but Shadow now had to give him a hand up

STEAMBOATING UP THE MISSOURI WHEN THE SIOUX WERE ON THE WARPATH WAS A HAZARDOUS BUSINESS. . . . HOWEVER, A BRAVE MAN DIES BUT ONCE.

by NORMAN FOX

of the Valiant

the companionways. Thus they ascended to the saloon deck and the hurricane deck and then to the texas, the officers' quarters surmounted by the cupola-like pilothouse. Around them now was the darkness and the turgid, sighing river; and beyond was the wilderness, and from these heights Shadow looked out upon the night and shuddered, remembering St. Louis with a greater enthusiasm than he'd ever before known.

Yellowstone said, "In here, lad," and a door gave into the Captain's cabin.

Five men sat about the Captain's table beneath the overhanging brass-bound lamp, and one of them was Amos Lynch himself, a solid figure in blue and brass buttons, his mutton-chop whiskers awry as though he'd fingered them too often tonight. Jasper Garvey, the pilot, sat next to him, a man grave with responsibility; and Whistle Joe Haynes, the dour engineer, looked dourer than ever. The two mates, Jim Alvord and Isaac Bent, were tracing aimless patterns upon the table top with their finger-tips; but each looked up as Yellowstone framed himself in the doorway and pushed Shadow ahead of him. And Yellowstone said then: "Here's the man for the job."

Now, Shadow had the makings of a big man when the years put some meat on him, but he was only sixteen; and in this moment he was conscious of his scrawniness and his pinched face and his unkempt brown hair; and he was conscious, too, that he was the lowliest person aboard, a deck sweep who did the fetching and carrying for anyone who called him. And so he stood now before the boat's aristocracy like a peasant in the gilded palace of the texas until he remembered that all of them here, save one, were his friends. Amos Lynch had taught him river lore and half-promised another berth when this run was finished. Jasper Garvey had on occasion allowed him within the sacred precincts of the pilothouse. Whistle Joe had regaled him below decks with fat lies of other runs. Jim Alvord had turned a smiling face to a landsman's naïveté; only Isaac Bent, the second mate, dark and saturnine and heavily-mustached, had shown him scorn and threatened abuse. And, remembering all this, Shadow drew himself taller and stood waiting.

Captain Lynch said: "We're in trouble, Shadow."

"The sandbar, sir?"

Lynch shook his head. "Warping has failed, but come daylight, we'll try grasshoppering off it; and Garvey thinks it will turn the trick. Our problem is fuel. It takes a good thirty cords for a day's running, and we're just about out. If bad comes to worst, we can rip up planking or try to depend on rack-heaps of driftwood. Do you understand now why you were sent to salvage what you could from the river?"

Shadow nodded, and Lynch said: "Around the next bend is the Brulé Point wood-yard, a large place with a stockade and a palisade. The wood-hawks who run it have supplied us for years. But we think the Sioux have struck and massacred the outfit."

NOW Shadow truly understood why Yellowstone had turned grim at sight of that floating wood, and fear was suddenly a knotted fist in the lad's stomach.

"It's an old Sioux trick," Lynch went on, "to kill off the wood-hawks, toss the wood into the river, then lie in wait, knowing a steamboat will have to put its crew ashore to chop more fuel. There's the makings of a second massacre if we're guessing right but still fall into the trap they've set. There's a chance that the Indians killed and fled and the wood-yard is deserted. There's a chance that the floating wood came from some camp farther up and Brulé Point is safe. In any case we've got to have fuel. And that's why we've got to know if it's safe to

put in at Brulé Point once we're off this sandbar. A man could go ashore tonight, scout out that wood-yard from behind, and discover if an ambush awaits us. Yellowstone Jones thinks you're the man."

Shadow swallowed hard. *"Me,* sir?"

Captain Lynch nodded.

Illustrated by Raymond Thayer

If there was a guard posted tonight, the man was not in the vicinity when Shadow slipped silently from the deck into the water.

"I can't send any of my officers. I've two hundred passengers aboard, city folks, most of them, on their way to try to get rich quick in the Montana diggings. I'll need my officers to organize them for fighting, if it comes to that. We might even be attacked tonight. Yellowstone would go, but he can't walk far. I could call the crew together and ask for a volunteer, but I'd risk spreading panic if the word got out. Will you take the job?"

Take the job? It made a lot for Shadow to think about. It meant a great deal to him to be aboard this boat; it meant opportunity and a new way of life. And to volunteer now would mean that he, the lowliest one aboard, would be the most exalted, the one who'd risked his skin for the others. It would mean an assured future with this packet line, for Amos Lynch would remember, always. But it would mean, too, braving the darkness and the unknown, leaving the solid safety of the packet to go out yonder where death lurked. But the choice didn't seem to be his, not really. With all his soul he wanted to grasp at this opportunity; he wanted to draw himself even taller and tell them that he would make the try; but his flesh was a-tremble and his skin was crawling, his body betraying him and making his voice quaver; and the sound that came out of him was inarticulate and meaningless.

He saw their faces fall. He saw the hope go out of them, sagging their shoulders. All except Isaac Bent, who let his contempt show in his eyes. But it was Yellowstone Jones who was the hardest to look at—Yellowstone, who'd delivered him from bondage in St. Louis and placed confidence in him tonight. Yellowstone's grizzled face, turned leathery by the weather of the Rockies, was now blank and fathomless, only the tight-drawnness of his bearded lips showing his disappointment.

Captain Lynch said softly: "We understand, Shadow. Actually, we had no right to ask. I told Yellowstone it would be senseless to send a boy to do a man's work, but he thought a youngster might wriggle through where a man would fail. I'm sorry, Shadow, sorrier than you know. A man named Shakespeare once said: 'Cowards die many times before their deaths, the valiant never taste of death but once.'"

That was the only reprimand; but Shadow would have found it easier if they'd all reviled him, laying their tongues to harsh words and laying their hands upon him. Blows he could bear; he'd felt many of them. He stumbled from the cabin and down the companionways to the main deck; and here, just above the waterline, he found his tangled blankets and crept into them, trying to still the wild beating of his heart, trying to shake from his mind the awfulness of that moment of decision in the cabin.

Sleep evaded him. He heard the lapping of the river against the boat, the chorusing of frogs on the far banks; and the minutes had forged themselves into an hour when he kicked aside the blankets, knowing what he must do if he were to find a measure of peace. Silently he ascended to the saloon deck, directly above. He had to see Yellowstone, who had quarters here; he had to tell the mountain man he was sorry he'd failed him. Yet he wasn't sure that Yellowstone would listen. Whatever bond there'd once been between the two of them was now broken. But there could be no rest until he'd made the try.

AND so he came to tap timidly upon the door of Yellowstone's cabin and was bade to enter, and thus he found the ancient mountain man not in his bunk but seated fully clad by a lamp-lighted table, busily working with his long-bladed Green River skinning-knife. Yellowstone had got a cottonwood limb from the packet's scanty supply of fuel, a forked limb; and he was hewing at the wood with studied intentness.

"What you whittling?" Shadow ventured.

"A crutch, when I get it fashioned, lad."

"A crutch?"

"Waugh! To keep my leg under me when I strike through the timber."

"You're going ashore?"

Yellowstone looked up, his face still blank and fathomless. "Somebody's got to do it. If it ain't me, it'll be Cap'n Lynch hisself, and he's needed here."

The trapper's long, breech-loading Army model Springfield rifle stood in a shadowy corner. On the table before him was a new Colt's .45. These weapons were usually stowed beneath Yellowstone's bunk; and, seeing them and the crutch that shaped as the blade winked in the lamplight, Shadow understood, and, understanding, remembered that wild night in St. Louis when he'd been delivered from bondage and Yellowstone had come by his useless leg. And Shadow said then, "You won't need the crutch. I came here to tell you I'd go ashore if you'll tell me what to do."

Yellowstone placed the knife on the table, and there was no change in him except that the blankness had gone out

of his eyes. "We're beached in mid-river, lad," he said. "It's not much of swim to the left bank, and that will put you into timber. Brulé Point will be north of you as the crow flies. We could have seen the wood-yard this afternoon, except for the timber. Circle around and come up behind the palisade, and snoop out what you can find. Remember that you can smell an Injun a mile off. If the varmints are about, get back here with the word as fast as you can skedaddle. But if they've moved on and it's safe, you might as well stay at the wood-yard till sunup."

He extended the revolver. "Take Young Betsy, here. Show yourself at sunup and fire once if it's safe for us to put in. That was Cap'n Lynch's idea of a proper signal when they laid plans in his cabin. We'll have our ears perked for it."

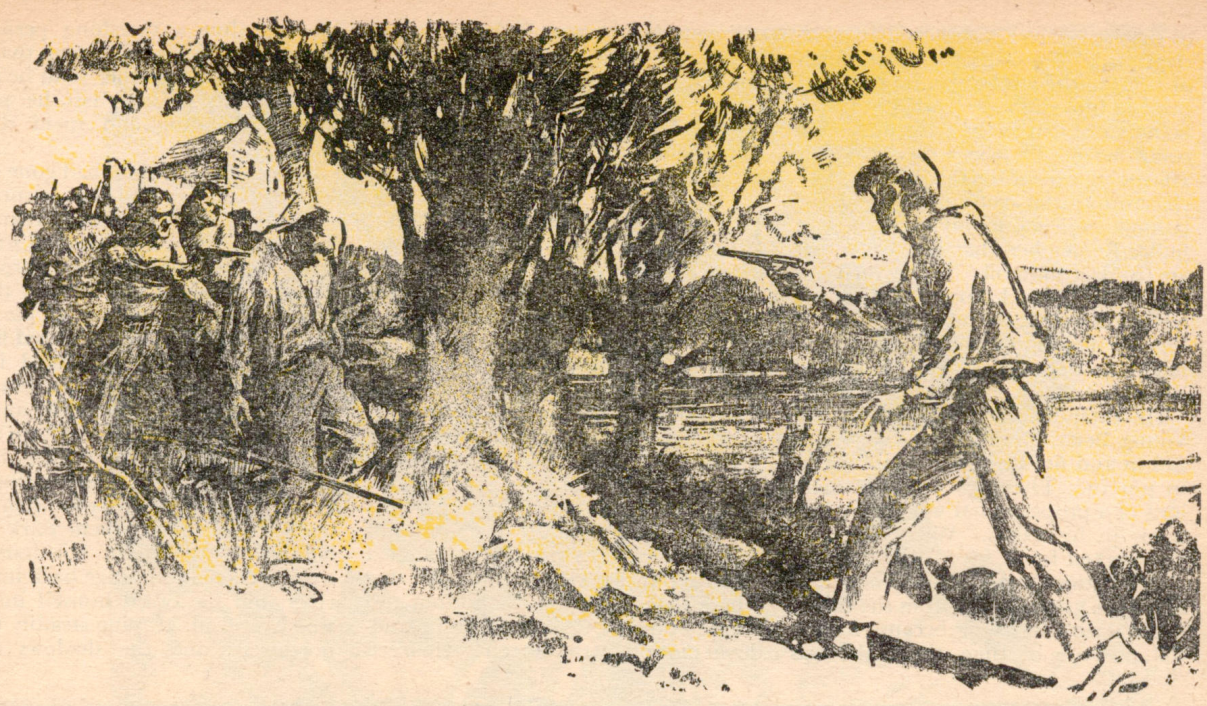
"I'd better hurry," Shadow said, and lifted the gun and fled from the cabin.

He wasn't hurrying because he felt the pressure of time—the night was still new—but because he knew that to linger would be to succumb to that knotted fist of fear that had again formed in his stomach as he'd listened to Yellowstone just now. He didn't want to have to unsay the words that had committed him to this effort.

IF there was a guard posted tonight, the man was not in the vicinity when Shadow got to the main deck and slipped silently into the water and struck out for the far shore. He was glad to be pitting himself against the river, glad to have something for his arms and legs to do and his mind to busy itself with so there'd be no time now for thinking of anything but reaching that far bank. The current caught at him and gave him a fight; he was buffeted by the drifting débris brought down from the far mountains by the June rise. Once his feet tangled in a sleeping sawyer, a submerged tree whose roots rested on the bottom and whose branches were given an up-and-down motion by the current. He freed himself after a threshing period of panic, and it seemed then that the shore was much farther than he'd calculated, but at long last he pulled himself dripping and spent to the bank.

The chorusing frogs had gone silent with his coming, and that silence was suddenly more clamorous than any noise could be. The fringing willows built a solid wall along the stream, a world of shadows and fancied things. He got the revolver out of his shirt-front where he'd stowed it, and he felt reassured until he wondered if the water had fouled its mechanism. He put the gun away and turned and had a look out upon the placid face of the river to where the packet lay, a stranded giant, the decks rising tier upon tier, the twin stacks with their scrollwork between them stark sentinels against the night. His desire was to turn then and plunge back into the river; but he forced himself into the woods instead, keeping steadily to the northwest; and the shadows closed

Men were preparing to grasshopper the packet off the sandbar; and Shadow watched in horrified silence.



around him, and he knew such an aloneness as he'd never known before.

One hand clutching at Young Betsy, he worked hard at keeping his mind busy, knowing that the moment he ceased to command his own thinking his imagination would begin its insidious work, peopling these woods with a thousand dangers. He reminded himself that it would be easy to get lost; and he lifted his eyes to the stars, trying to remember all that Yellowstone had taught him about the heavens on kinder nights on the lower river. He mentally measured the distance he'd walked and the problematical distance that might yet remain; and he tried then to make his footsteps more cautious, knowing that he must be near the wood-yard.

The timber thinned to an expanse of gaunt stumps, and beyond this the pointed palisade loomed. He paused at the edge of the open space, finding it more fearful than the woods had been, and crossed the stretch hurriedly, hugging to the shadow of the high fence when he reached it. He searched for a gate and found one and put his hand to it and pressed gently.

The gate made an awesome sound in the night; and he paused, ready to bolt; but no other sound came to his ears. He wondered about dogs—surely the wood-hawks would have dogs about—and the absence of dogs suddenly became so significant as to bring the hair rising at the nape of his neck. He had the gate opened to the space of his body, and he squeezed into the stockade and made out what appeared to be two log cabins, one big and one small, with what probably was a horse stable between them. Sliding one foot ahead of the other, he made a silent advance and almost stumbled over something stretched upon the ground. There was starlight enough to show him that it was a man, a white man, naked and newly dead, the top of his head a raw and hideous wound.

Shadow stood rooted to the spot, not able to run, not able to cry out, but wanting to do both. And that was when the wave of men beat at him out of the darkness, bearing him down and smothering him with the combined weight of many bodies.

He fought, lashing out with fist and foot and trying hard to get his hand to Young Betsy; but it was only the instinctive struggling of desperation, foredoomed to failure from the first. His arms were roughly pinioned and buckskin bit at his wrists, and he was hauled to his feet and sent stumbling toward the larger of the log cabins. A door opened, briefly revealing a rectangle of lamplight; Shadow was pushed inside and the door closed again; and he saw that at least fifty men were in the huge single room and that most of them were Indians.

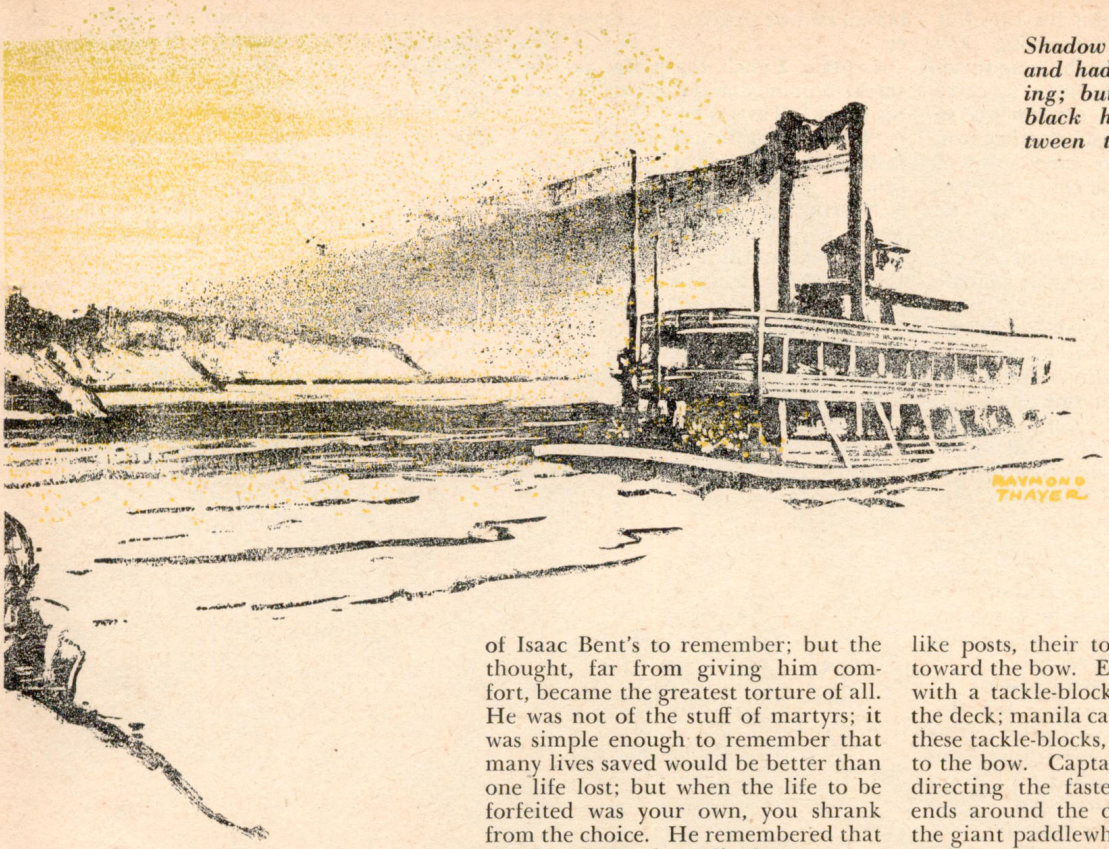
THEY had a smell to them, a rancid odor that came from unwashed bodies and animal grease; he knew now what Yellowstone had meant when he'd said you could smell an Indian a mile off—but he'd learned too late. He'd expected feathers and paint; but these were agency Indians clad in nondescript issue clothes, a banty-legged, pot-bellied lot, led to deviltry by their gnawing frustrations and the scheming of renegade whites. There were five white men in the room, a bearded, unregenerate crew, one of them wearing a faded Confederate campaign hat; another, big and pockmarked, with a Union Army blouse thrown cloak-fashion over his shoulders, the sleeves dangling. But the one who chained Shadow's eyes was Isaac Bent, erstwhile second mate of the packet *Aurora*.

Shadow's first thought was that Bent had come here as he himself had come, to scout out the truth as to whether this wood-yard was an ambush; and it was odd to feel even for a single moment a sudden kinship with the man. Then he saw that Bent was unbound and sat in careless camaraderie with the others. Bent's saturnine face widened with a grin, and he said: "So a boy came to do a man's work after all. You muddle-footed fool, we heard you a half-mile off!"

Shadow said: "You're a friend of these people!"—still not quite believing it.

"Friend?" Bent said and seemed to take a perverse pleasure from Shadow's dismay. "More than that. A spy, if you like, who is here to tell these men that the *Aurora* carries cargo worth laying a hand upon. Minted money. A cold swim, wasn't it? I might have volunteered to scout for Captain Lynch, but that would have meant either returning to the packet or arousing his suspicion. It's better this way—no chance of being missed until morning. I'd rather be ashore than aboard the packet when the sun comes up."

A young Sioux had taken the Colt's revolver from Shadow. Now the gun was laid on a slab table in the center of the room. The oldest Indian, a man whose face was a tracery of wrin-



Shadow spun on his heel, and had no time for aiming; but when he shot, a black hole appeared between the eyes of Isaac Bent.

kles, said something in a guttural tongue; and the pockmarked white man made an undertone translation to Isaac Bent. The mate reached for the gun, broke it open, and had a look at the loads.

"Yes," Bent said. "It's for the signal I told you about."

A sudden thought showed fleetingly in his eyes, and his face turned crafty. He hefted the gun in his hand and said: "You'll fire this thing off come morning, eh, Shadow?" He dropped the shells into the palm of his hand and loaded only one chamber and snapped the gun shut again. He smiled. "You see, boy, you mean nothing to us one way or another. There's no reason for you to die. That puts it up to you."

Shadow said: "No!"

"A night for thinking will change your mind," Bent said, and made a flat, impatient gesture with his hand. Fingers closed upon Shadow's pinioned arms; and he was half-dragged, half-carried, to the stable and dumped into a stall. Now his ankles were lashed, and he was left here in the darkness; he could hear the soft padding of moccasined feet, and knew that someone looked in upon him from time to time.

That alone was enough to keep the terror alive in him. He was resigned now to dying; the agony was in speculating on how he would die and when. There was that suggested choice of Isaac Bent's to remember; but the thought, far from giving him comfort, became the greatest torture of all. He was not of the stuff of martyrs; it was simple enough to remember that many lives saved would be better than one life lost; but when the life to be forfeited was your own, you shrank from the choice. He remembered that wood-hawk by the palisade gate, very naked and very dead; and he could picture himself like that, mutilated and left for the coyotes; and the memory stood between him and sleep.

YET he did sleep—bodily weariness made him doze fitfully, jerking back to wakefulness each time; and it was the longest night of his life. The sun came up after an eternity, the light finding its way into this stable; and men came to haul him to his feet and drag him outside. His ankles and wrists were unlashed, but he found it hard to stand, and he had to do a lot of rubbing to ease the tingling torture out of his cramped limbs. Isaac Bent came from the big log cabin, the pockmarked white man and the old, wrinkled Indian with him. Bent made that flat gesture with his hand, and Shadow was thrust beyond the palisade gate and through the screening timber until he could look from its concealment and see the river with the *Aurora* yonderly, still beached upon the sandbar.

They were up and about, the men of the *Aurora*. They were preparing to grasshopper the packet off the sandbar; and Shadow, who'd witnessed that incredible process many times on this run, watched in fascinated, horrified silence. Already the spars, those long, heavy timbers resembling telegraph poles which were carried on the sides of the boat near the bow, had been raised and set in the river bottom like posts, their tops leaning slightly toward the bow. Each spar was rigged with a tackle-block above the line of the deck; manila cables passed through these tackle-blocks, their ends fastened to the bow. Captain Lynch would be directing the fastening of the other ends around the capstan. And now the giant paddlewheels were churning as the capstan turned, thus lifting the boat and pushing it forward. While Shadow watched, this whole process was repeated with the spars re-set farther ahead, the packet gradually lifting itself over the bar.

Then Isaac Bent, standing beside Shadow, was sucking in a long, hard breath; for the *Aurora* was free now and turning its nose upstream, cutting diagonally across the current toward the promontory known as Brulé Point. Bent thrust the gun with its single bullet into Shadow's hand and said: "All you've got to do is show yourself and fire that shot. Don't be a fool, boy."

He shoved at Shadow, sending him stumbling forward out of the willows' concealment; and Shadow stood upon the bank, watching the *Aurora* come closer. Now he could make out every movement on the decks and every face lining the rails, and he glanced behind him and saw other faces too, dark, coppery faces and bearded, crafty faces. The whole renegade force had come silently into the willows; white hands and red ones tightened upon rifles, and Shadow saw here the perfect trap into which the *Aurora's* people might unwittingly walk. And the gun in his hand became so heavy that he could hardly hold it.

He had been hoping desperately, had Shadow, that the grasshoppering wouldn't work. He'd been hoping the *Aurora* would stay stranded, for the packet's release meant his own finish. He could see that now. Isaac

Bent had promised him his life, but he wouldn't keep that promise. For Bent would want to be the lone survivor of the *Aurora,* the man to carry a twisted tale to the settlements so that on another boat and another run, Bent could once more carry word of valuable cargo to these cohorts of his. No, Shadow was doomed whether he fired or not; but if he fired, the *Aurora's* people would be doomed as well.

If Bent had left more than a single shell in the gun, it might be different. *One* shot was the signal for safety; more than one would carry a warning to Amos Lynch or Yellowstone Jones. But one bullet meant one shot, and there was no choice. Nor was there any choice between living and dying, not really. And realizing this, the last of the fear went out of Shadow Landis, because a man has to have the hope of living if there is to be meaning to his fear. And thus, oddly, the shadow of death banished the last shadow from his life; and now, because he was going to die, he knew how he would die, and that made all the difference.

"Shoot, you fool!" Bent hissed.

At this moment Shadow felt disembodied; there was no reality to this situation—it was like something from one of those paper-backed Ned Buntline books he had often read. Then he shot. He raised the gun and spun about on his heel, and had no time for aiming; but when he shot, a black hole appeared between the eyes of Isaac Bent, and the man went down dead.

It took a full, stricken second for the rest of them to realize what had happened; and then the pockmarked man, cursing, lifted his own gun; with the roar of it in his ears, Shadow felt the shock of the bullet, and his left leg crumpled under him and would not support his weight. Another of the whites fired, the bullet scorching Shadow's cheek as he went down; another gun banged and something struck him again, but the thought was strong in him that the packet had been warned, and with that thought, the boy knew the blessed oblivion of unconsciousness.

A MAN'S arms cradled him as he opened his eyes; he identified the buckskin sleeve before he raised his eyes to Yellowstone's face. He was still here by the river bank; and by moving his head, he could see the *Aurora* close by, its landing stage reaching to the bank; and all around him a fight swirled, the guns and shouts and confusion a steady beat against his ears.

Yellowstone smiled and said: "You did fine, lad. We came ashore anyway, knowing you were in trouble when we saw you fall, but the difference between being sure they were here waiting and not being sure gave us the edge. We've got them outnumbered, and we're givin' 'em Green River."

Captain Lynch came up, powder-smoke-begrimed and carrying a gun in his hand. "How is he?"

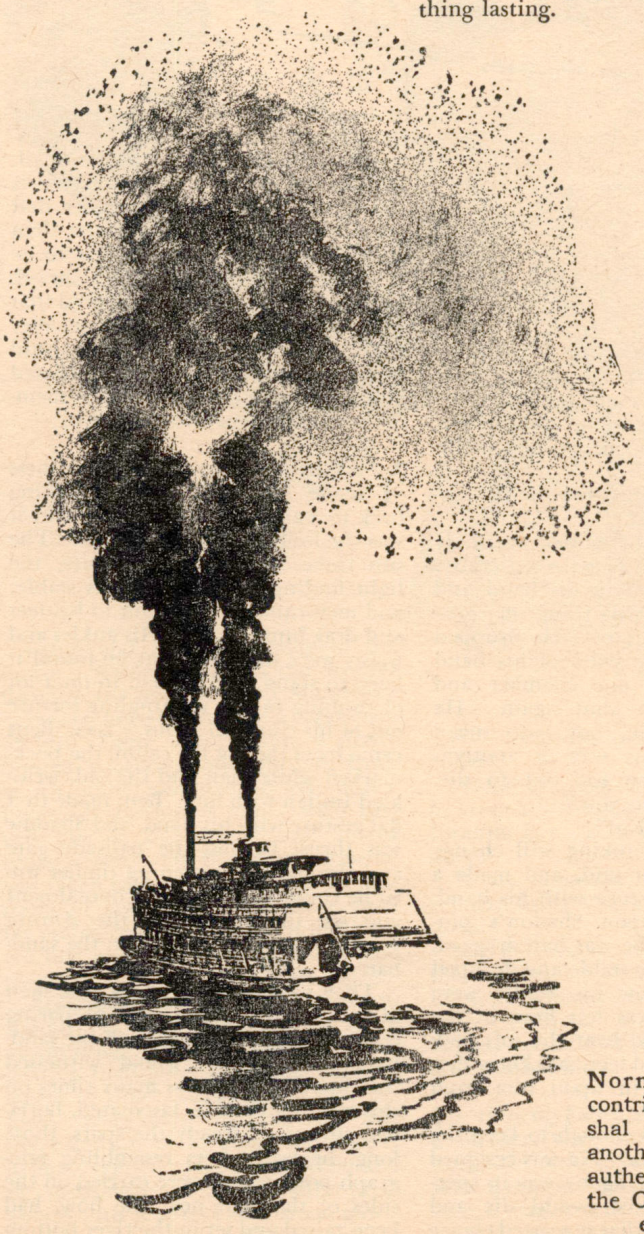
"Fit enough to use that crutch I fashioned last night," Yellowstone said.

Nearby an Indian lay dying, silently and with dignity, that Indian so seamed of face. He said something in his guttural tongue, and Yellowstone listened. Curiosity was strong in Amos Lynch's face, and the mountain man said: "He tells me how this lad turned the trick. He shot Bent, and the whites might have cut him down then, but this old buck shouted an order to his Injuns not to fire at Shadow. He says that the Sioux are brothers to the brave."

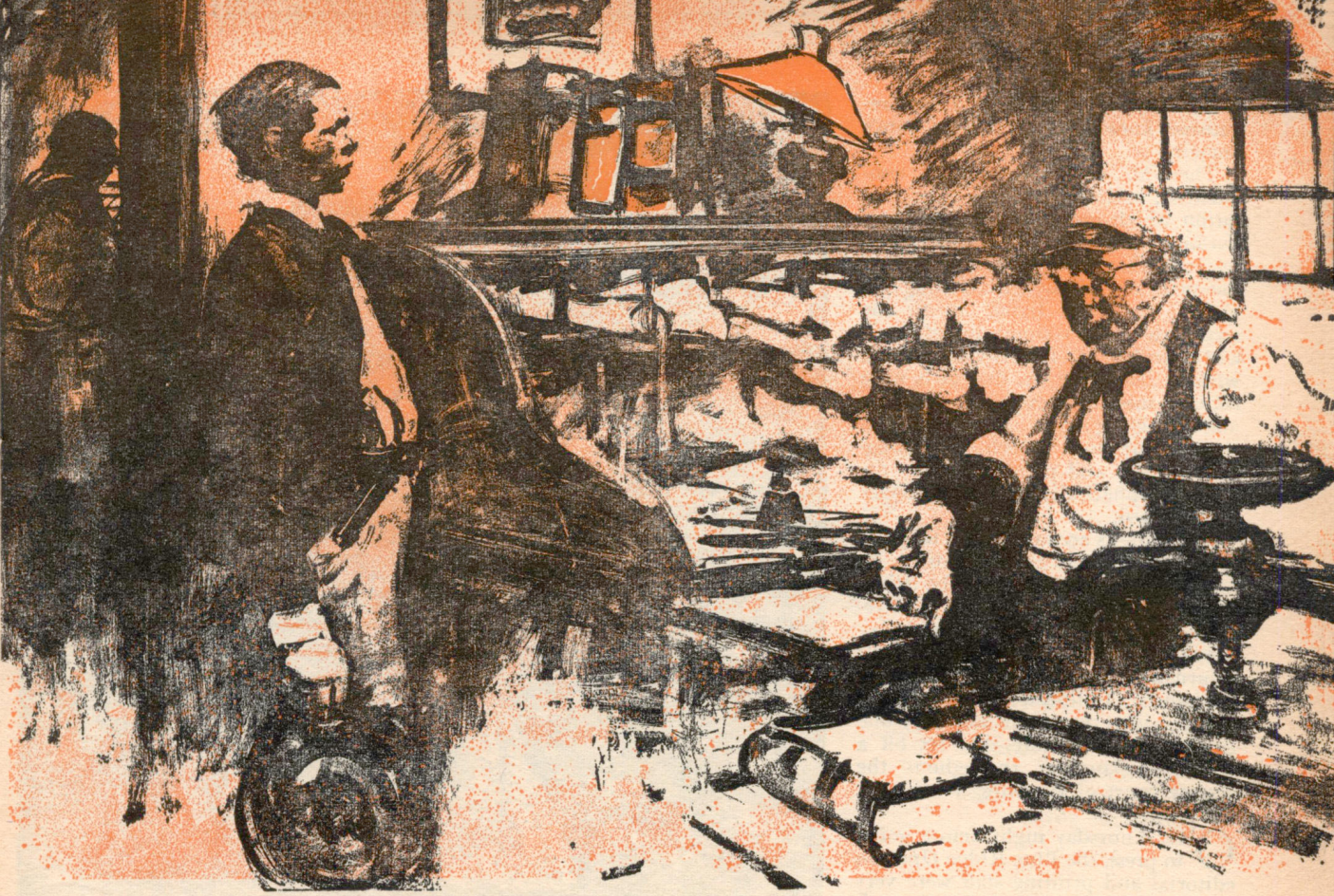
So that was why he hadn't been riddled with bullets after Isaac Bent had died! A queer thing, Shadow reflected, that he'd been spared because an ancient Sioux had read courage in his act. There was worth, then, even to the courage of desperation. It made a fine thought to hang on to; it made a little clearer what that Shakespeare fellow had meant about a coward dying many deaths, the valiant only one. He wondered if he could cling to the way of the valiant now that he'd found it, and he felt that it could be so.

Amos Lynch was beckoning to a couple of the deck-hands. "The fight's nearly done," Lynch said. "Carry this boy to the boat, and carry him gently. He's to be bedded in my own bed."

Shadow felt himself lifted; and there was something symbolic in it, something lasting.



Norman Fox will contribute "The Marshal of Trailtown," another stirring and authentic drama of the Old West, to an early issue.



Printer *with* a Gun

Your old-time printer had to shoot his share when readers disagreed with the editor

by RAYMOND S. SPEARS

WHEN Jim Franson was twelve years old, he became a printer's devil in the Blue Ridge *Opinion* office and shop. Mr. Bidley, the publisher-editor, had turned down several boys, but Jim's bright blue eyes and tight-lipped grin, as well as his straight answers, pleased him. Another thing, sticking muzzle-back in Jim's belt—homemade from a mule trace—was a brass-mounted single-shot cartridge pistol. Mr. Bidley didn't ask any impolite questions. He just turned around in his swivel chair and indicated several rifles and shotguns in the two corners of the editorial sanctum.

"Now, Jim," the editor said, "in case we have rough visitors, that carbine .44 is yours!"

That was Jim Franson's first instruction as printer's devil and in the newspaper business, profession and trade. During the next seven years, Mr. Bidley trained and taught Jim about everything from type lice to typesetting with an eye to attractive jobs and pages balanced for advertisements, "Rube-Page" correspondents, front-page exposition and restraint, single-stick and double-width sets—news, poetry, editorials, and so on. By the time Jim was fifteen years of age, he had begun to set paragraphs of news items that he'd heard around town. This pleased Mr. Bidley mightily. He encouraged the apprentice printer to gather news and set it up, while restraining a tendency to prolixity and stressing the essential fact that the fewer words to express an idea or subject, the better.

In due course, after seven years, Jim Franson was a tall slender quiet-behaving journeyman printer, who could report a dog-fight, a county political convention, a circus, a killing, a story of woods afire, or of an unfortunate difficulty over the ownership of a razorback hog that developed into a sorry and deadly feud. No one knew more about printing than did Jim.

As long as Mr. Bidley lived, Jim Franson was a faithful, honorable and grateful employee. It never occurred to Jim that he'd ever work anywhere else. His wages were all according; he had a girl friend; he boarded with a nice cheerful widow; Government documents coming in from the district Congressman kept Jim informed on raising bees, internal revenue, the open range and homesteading, navigation of the rivers, promotion of harbor facilities, pack-rats, mussel-shells, seeds to use for gardens, fertilizers, orchard production, and census statistics; in fact, Jim Franson, unknown

to himself, was building up a comprehensive knowledge of Uncle Sam's domain.

Then Mr. Bidley reported a confidential, exclusive and active organization which met down on the river bottoms, where it "whereased" and resolved that certain scamps among the men and kindly girls among the women were not living up to the standards of the community, as made and provided. In fact, it was declared without fear or favor, that girls were actually meeting men here and there, and inveigling them. This condition, the organization (which wore long-skirt devices and painted masks) declared emphatically, could no longer be tolerated.

Mr. Bidley's account didn't take the so-called "night-riders" seriously. In fact he dealt playfully with the Prime Mogul Bullhead's leadership, and remarked that no doubt a Due and Proportionate Cow awaited Bullhead's return in a mood to be soothed. As it chanced, Bullhead was a widower and the idea that there was only one cow struck a keynote that set off a ripple of laughter throughout the county court of Rippling Waters.

ONE Thursday night before going to press, the Blue Ridge *Opinion* editorial and printing staff were very busy. Suddenly there burst through the three entrances a shrill and vociferous gang of night-riders, and forthwith the newspaper staff leaped to their respective firearms.

Jim Franson, as printer's devil, had to keep the office arms clean. He had killed deer, bear and three panthers with the carbine allotted to his particular service. He had killed many a wild turkey gobbler, shooting heads and necks with accuracy. As boy and youth he had reflected that in case of a raid on the Blue Ridge *Opinion,* he would do his duty. He leaped now to the editorial sanctum, dropped the lever of the carbine, pumping a shell into the chamber, and opened up on the invaders.

Yelps, shots and scuffling ensued. The blue smoke of black-powder shots filled the atmosphere, mingling with the odor of printer's ink. In what seemed to be but time to turn around and get out, the night-riders turned tail—some jumped through windows, some leaped out through doorways; they were gone, all but four who remained prostrate. One of the four was the Prime Mogul Bullhead, who wept and wailed, dying in surprise at death.

Also, Mr. Bidley was dead. Someone had shot him with a .38-caliber revolver. The bullet went in above the right ear and out through the left temple. The shop foreman had simply vanished. Jim Franson took over.

Jim had killed deer, bear and panthers with the

The Blue Ridge *Opinion* was only two hours late in coming from the press on Friday, and it contained an account of the raid on the newspaper office. If it hadn't been for the Prime Mogul Bullhead's death, public sympathy might have let the staff go on issuing the Blue Ridge *Opinion.* Of course, Jim Franson had to leave. He had the name not only of killing Bullhead, himself, but two and perhaps three others, as well as severely wounding several others. The idea of killing four and wounding so many others when only one of the newspaper faction was killed—it just simply didn't stand to reason.

Jim got away. Stating that Jim was wanted as a material witness, Sheriff Durk Jackniff offered two hundred and fifty dollars reward for Jim's capture, but he got into the current of the Crippled Bear river, paddling down in a board "cunner"—and thus he became a tramp printer. He called himself Bidley Jason, and both times he was arrested on suspicion, he passed himself off as one of the Jason family, with whose private and public affairs he had become familiar.

Jim crossed the danger zones of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, with only two pick-ups. He crossed the Mississippi at St. Louis, and worked there for a stake. He went to Kansas City, presently, and later angled back and forth out of Kansas, up into Nebraska, and into the Dakotas, moving his hat here and there to a new nail.

More and more, Jim Franson kept moving. If he didn't like the water, the grub, the boarding-house lady, his new boss, or the looks of the town he would move on—after a day or a week.

carbine . . . now he opened up on the invaders.

Any editor, just looking at Jim coming in, recognized that here was a tramp printer.

Jim took back his own name when he learned that Sheriff Durk Jackniff hadn't circularized him any farther than the Mississippi river. Durk was a good fellow—though relatives of the deceased and wounded night-riders were anxious to get Jim back where they could handle him. But all the cash-money reward they put up was seven hundred and fifty dollars.

ANYHOW, Jim Franson got into the cow, mine-camp and railroad-town country, across the big pasture, through the Rockies and into the big central basin. Jim, a contented, hometown, industrious boy, had been uprooted and urged forth and the unfairness of his exile for a long time made his heart ache. Modest, kindly, but outraged, he hated the crime of self-defense that had been thrust upon him.

Thus he arrived in Fallen Trees. This was half cow- and half mine-town; it was the county seat of the New Allotment. Placer gold in the hills, timber galore, vast acreages of strong sod and bunch grass, and a railroad with city and out-yonder shipping-pens, made Fallen Trees just naturally an invincible bet.

Just to show how unpredictable, irresponsible and haphazardly things happened in those old days—and do yet, for that matter—Jim Franson came to town with a commercial traveler who was doing the cross-roads and off-trail circuit, selling hats and shoes. Jim was driving a spanking team of big Montana harness-broke horses hitched to a twelve-foot buckboard that sagged down, then sprang up, sometimes lifting all four wheels off the ground, the way those horses traveled and Jim drove. Fatty Cueman, the commercial traveler, had persuaded Jim to handle the ribbons for two-fifty a day and expenses.

That's how close Jim came to turning hired hand, cowboy, stable-man—just ornery. Jim unloaded the samples at the hotel and put the horses and buckboard up at the corral livery. He strolled along the street, and suddenly he whiffed benzine, ink, paper, perhaps sweat—those things that exude from a print shop—whether in the wet swamps of Louisiana, the murk of city streets, or the keen dry air of deserts.

The print shop was reached through an alley between a saloon and a dance-hall—no matter if sour beer, sweet moonshine, perfumery and soap were also in the breeze, they couldn't fool that man who had been a tramp printer for almost a decade. Jim went right through that four-foot alley into the back lot facing the next street over, to the four-square two-story pyramidal-roofed building whose front elevation carried the sign:

FALLEN TREES STANDARDS
DANA GRANT, *Editor*

Jim Franson stood looking at that sign. He looked at his hands, with which he had rubbed neatsfoot oil into the leathers harnessing that spanking big horse-team. A tramp printer was in one hell of a profession—he would never amount to a damn in God's world! There was no fool in the world equal to a man who, once getting an outside job, went back into the stinking benzine-ink-and-sweat atmosphere of a print shop! And so Jim cast a farewell look in the direction of the livery—and walked into the hot, fascinating office of the Fallen Trees *Standards.*

Jim hung up the yellow oilskin that he used for a duster. He pulled a stick from his hip pocket. Then, stepping along eagerly, he headed back to where he found the cases and a hook with copy on it, and began to set type—feeling the type to see if it was so new it'd cut a fellow's fingers to pieces, or whether it had a nice comfortable well-conditioned feel. Jim had to try out an office before he'd make up his mind to work for it. He was picking and sticking type when a voice said at his shoulder:

"Howdy, Jim! Where the hell'd you come from?"

"Why, damn it, it's you, Blake!" Jim blinked and beamed. *"Shu-u-u!"*

Blake, it was—the foreman, and glad to have a printer come in! He'd come out from Kansas City, stopped a while at Wichita and then at Denver—and this fellow Grant needed somebody competent! Hadn't anything

A stream of candidates and friends of candidates—bosses, heels and sincere citizens—came to see Dana Grant.

but cowboys and gamblers, till Jim came along.

"You got a gun, Jim?" Blake asked.

"Mine was stolen off me—where was it, now? I forget."

"Well, come here!" And Blake led him into the corner office. There was a pigeonhole desk, a swivel chair, a beer barrel with the head knocked out for waste paper, some Government documents, an old dictionary, a copy of Macaulay's Essays, some buffalo-horns, spearheads, a skull and scalps and other Indian relics. And in two corners were long-barreled weapons, rifles and .45-.90s, and three double-barreled shotguns. "We got the ammunition locked up," Blake said. "Here's where we hide the key. Understand, they don't steal—just borrow the shells—but we might need 'em."

"Something doing?" Jim asked.

"Well—uh-uh—not yet." Blake shook his head. "The editor's real notional and independent. Those holes in the wall—the splintered ones—were poked through a while back. Might have been playful—still, they might have been serious; fair warning, you know."

"Just what's the trouble?" Jim asked.

"Government lands, homesteaders coming in, two-three outfits feuding up—a lot of damned personal things too." Blake shrugged and sighed. "Dana Grant's just able to be up and around. Some damned scoundrel took a pot-shot at him a week ago—bushwhackers."

"I suppose he's lined up with somebody?" Jim suggested.

"No, that's the hell of it!" Blake shook his head. "He ain't tied up with nobody. One of those fool sentimental press-freedom fellers! He says if anything happens he'll print it, because it's news! You know that kind—"

"Yeah, I know." Jim shrugged. "I learned my case back in the Blue Ridge—with Bidley of the Blue Ridge *Opinion!*"

"Say, I never knew that, Jim! Hell, shake! One of Bidley's boys, eh?" Blake's features lighted up. "Dog-gone! I've heard tell of him—night-riders killed him up. Well, he stuck to his opinions, all right! Course, he mout've lived longer if he hadn't."

"His time'd come," Jim intoned.

"You know, after you left back East in K. C. I got to wonderin' if you was that Jim Franson they told about?" Blake suggested curiously.

"Mister Man! Let's mind our own business—you yourn and me mine," Jim growled.

"No 'fense, Jim! Cripes! I tell you, Jim, this .45-.90 with the pearl frontsight an' that fancy dingus backsight—it's a Star Gauge," Blake said. "It's the best damned, most accurate, fastest-shooting rifle in this whole damned country, and it's yourn, Jim! Anybody that worked with Bidley of the Blue Ridge *Opinion* has fustest whack at the guns—just in case anything should happen: difficulty, posse duty, any of those emergencies!"

So Jim Franson set that bit of copy, started a galley, and kept on working. He went out to eat lunch with Blake, who introduced him to the prettiest waitress in town, and then after eating they circulated around and met the best bartenders, gamblers, and some general-store, hardware and barber-shop proprietors. And when they

Some came in a friendly mood.

got back to the office they had to shake their heads violently in order to see clearly what they were doing. Jim nearly always had to go around, being introduced that way—and one circuit was enough. After that, he took something soft, no matter who was inviting. Not that he had any prejudices or ideas about other people's habits; he just claimed the privilege of having his own notions. Being practical, experienced and having his nerve, he upheld his rights. And that is to say, at whatever cost. If he wanted a drink, he took it—even in Kansas. And then again if he didn't want to drink, in Wyoming, or the Dakotas, or Montana, he didn't.

"It's a free country!" Jim said, when the occasion arose. He didn't brag it, nor proclaim it, nor worry about it; but when necessary he just talked up and backed up his statements, in full measure, and be damned to who argued differently! And come to find out, he was a man after Dana Grant's own heart.

Riding into town, leaping with the buckboard's spring, Jim Franson had expected no welcome at all. He just brought in a drummer, a commercial traveler carrying a line of hats and shoes—Jim's job being but little better than that of a hostler rubbing down horses and figuring when to give them drink, grain and hay. All his rich background of Government documents, typesetting, reporting local news—set in the stick!—and experiences along the roads for ten thousand miles had come to this Fallen Trees, to the eager, relieved welcome of Blake, a man he'd known back in Kansas City. Here too was Dana Grant, another such man as Mr. Bidley, a promulgator of facts, news, truth—regardless of all except its interest, value and timeliness.

SO Jim Franson, snatching type to stick, setting a quarter-page for Utility Merchants; or making down a batch of Rube-Page items from Paint Horse or Stolen Cows; or telling in the stick an editorial on cheating tinhorns—Jim was in an element he had long sought. When he had driven off the night-riders and left that first job after seven years, always he had sought an office where the first thing an apprentice devil was told was which gun was his. How many offices had he tarried in? How could he remember? Only, of course, he never forgot—never stopped anywhere that he didn't learn something new, different, good—if no more than that it was not fitting for a man to work for a liar, a toady or a cheat; much less could a tramp printer stay by an office where the editor-publisher's ideals stank, if any.

Imagine smelling a print shop upwind, finding the type a handsome style—worn just right—and going to work, all according, after seeing the .45-.90s and other models, and the editor-proprietor just getting around again, having been bushwhacked for being on the level! No matter if the land was wild and dusty; no matter if the sheriff was a thief and the mayor a scoundrel and the city boss a crooked gambler, a sodden drunk and a wholesale pimp—the editor-publisher, Dana Grant was brave, honest and true, an honor to his business, his profession and his ambition! A Mr. Bidley all over again, publishing the truth and shaming the Devil!

Tall and gaunt and pale, Dana Grant came to the office, limping, walking on the crook of a club of a cane, his eyes the beautiful blue of a man with a serene soul. What if the damnable authorities had sidestepped around, careful not to find the bushwhacker who left a .38-.55 empty shell where he lay in wait—and there was only one .38-.55 rifle in all that county, basin or region? Hanging from Grant's belt—too large around, now—was a fast-draw holster with muzzle tied down, holding a .44-six with a seven-and-one-half-inch barrel. The owner of the .38-.55 had been drinking around, bold and confident, until he saw the man who had been bushwhacked looking into saloons, barber shops, lunchrooms, hotel offices—sore wounded and with one foot dragging, gaunted; something in the bearing of Dana Grant affected every observer, and especially that proud gun-owner. He slid back from the bat-wing doorway whence he looked out to see. Then he hastily said he reckoned he'd go elk-hunting. Hastily, through a back door into an alley, on the run, he went to get his horse and galloped away.

That was news. That noonday Jim Franson heard that Hud Wranger had left town. The first thing after eating his dinner, Jim set up a paragraph in his stick:

> Hud Wranger, owner of the only .38-.55 repeater hereabouts, leaned his left eye out to watch Dana Grant —on his way to the office of the Fallen Trees *Standards* for the first time, since a .38-.55 bullet hit him from ambush. Mr. Wranger had two choices. He left town rapidly.

Blake, making up, found the paragraph in a galley of local items. He read it, blinked, squinted thoughtfully, and removed it to the form without pulling a proof. The next night Mr. Grant read that item in its due place down the column of locals. During all his suffering and weakness and meditation about that attempted assassination, he had gone from anger to anguish: he had despised the authorities; he had been gratified to have here and there a friend who came in to shake his hand; but now, sitting in that big rocking-chair before the fireplace where a big pitch-pine stump burned, he sat trying to overcome the emotion he felt, reading that brief account of a coward running for tall timber when he saw his victim coming, ready for business, limping and sore though he was.

"That must 'a' been that new tramp printer!" mused Mr. Grant. "Blake, nor anybody else, wouldn't 'a' thought to notice that left-eye business!"

JIM FRANSON thought of Fallen Trees as just another halting-place on his second ten thousand miles of tramp printing. But day after day he stayed on. He practised with that star-gauge Winchester. He hung up antelope, elk, deer and bear at his favorite restaurants, and took haunches home to the boarding-house kept by the widow where he stayed. She was a nice friendly generous woman, looking younger than her age. Of course, tramp printers are dubious propositions. A man can be a hunter, a good shot, facing up to a grizzly bear, and

still not quite measure up to the standards and ideas of a widow in a frontier town. It was that way with Stella Benbows. Mr. Grant had sent tramp printers over to board with her before. She'd seen them come and watched them go; Mr. Grant made up what they owed, if anything, jumping their debts.

NOW this fellow, Jim Franson—quiet, playful, appreciative—just naturally met all of her requirements, and some extras. He wasn't any kid, nor did he act foolish, or too backward. If anyone else was around, Jim was just another boarder. But if he rented a buckboard and took Mrs. Benbows out to get eggs, or pick up venison, or eat a Sunday picnic in some clump of timber or at a running spring, his behavior wasn't a disappointment. Somehow—Stella sometimes wondered *how*—Jim had learned even the finicky ways of boarding-house widows.

" 'Tisn't minding my own business, Jim," she told him confidentially, "but Mr. Grant has serious enemies. You'd be surprised! You see, the trouble is, printing right out in the *Standards* that only tinhorns use marked cards, loaded dice and fixed wheels against all comers, friends, associates, strangers—that hurts feelings. Besides, it makes customers suspicious. I'm afraid Mr. Grant better tone down, or just pull his freight. Leaving would be safest. You noticed, probably, that the *Standards* has lost most of its profitable advertising."

"I'd noticed," Jim admitted. "I was wondering just what the trouble was. Anybody in partic'lar to keep an eye on, Stella?"

"Well, it's just about ev'ybody!" She shook her head. "I mean the games, dance-halls, politicians, and all those businesses that play along with the hounds a-runnin', as we used to say."

"They don't use trailin' hounds out here," Jim remarked.

"I know—I come from back in the timber!" she said. "Blue Ridge country."

"I just knowed it!" he assured her. "I was a hillbilly, myse'f!"

"So-o!" she cried out. "Why, Jim—Jim Franson! So yo're one of them Cove boys—up along—Jim *Franson!* Why—ho-law! I remember now! The Blue Ridge *Opinion!* Mr. Bidley got killed up—by them night-riders! Why, Jim, I'm proud of you! Ev'ybody was, presently! Ain't it quare, us meetin' 'way out here? Sho-o! Hit takes time for reputations to catch up with men!"

"It was my lucky day, Stella!" he said. "Yo' know, yo' give a man serious idees—"

"Oh, shucks!" she shrugged. "Temp'rary ones, same as I got. Next I know, yo'll be traipsin' away—just a tramp printer!"

"We're sick an' tired of this maligning the integrity of our community!"

"Well, course, I reckon likely!" He sighed. "A man neveh knows, Stella. Back home I figured I was set for life. Then—"

"You left between days, taking the killings' blame with you," she filled in. "That was honorable, Jim; ev'ybody said so. That-a-way they all settled down, peaceable, friendly, even speaking when they met—the troublesomes. So you kept dodging, back and forth—rewarded, totin' yo'r burden, stoppin' ev'ywhere—but neveh stoppin' long!"

"I'd like to stop here permanent," Jim assured her. "If yo'd marry me—"

"No, indeedy! Not me!" Stella shook her head. "Too many tramp printers come proposing—and gone on afoot, horseback, or buckboard, stage, train—all those dif'rent ways! Course we c'n be friendly, Jim, as long as necessary, liking each other—sweethearts till you cain't stand me, or all of us, no more! But *marrying* a tramp printer—no, suh!"

Jim kissed her, kind of sadly. She mocked his seriousness. She was the first widow—and he'd met a lot of them—that he felt inclined to argue with. She understood only too well: Shiftless, no 'count, vagabonding, never staying put—tramp printer!

"I'm no good—sorry!" he shook his head.

"No, suh, Jim!" she declared. "A good, friendly, useful man—but just occasional. Nobody forgets you, Jim—if'n you take the notion. I'll never forget, Jim! I promise you that! I just wish you'd remember me too."

"Stella—Stella!" He held her close. "I jus' don't know what ails me! Arriving here, driving a buckboard

Cussack declared. "Why, a killing ain't necessarily a detriment to a place!"

team and a commercial traveler, I thought I was through—I wanted to be a cowboy, or a hostler, or somebody's hired man. Then I smelled that printer's ink and benzine—and the shop was dif'rent. I knew the foreman, Blake, from K.C. I couldn't stay away. There was that old boy, Dana Grant—and here are you, Stella! Of course, I'm lacking—I ain't got something I need. I thought I had it, back home on the Blue Ridge *Opinion*—but I lost it when I left there between days. I been lookin' for it, Stella, honest, I have. Here in Fallen Trees, seems like I got ev'ything but it. But without it, I jus' ain't worth a damn!"

"I hear tell Dana Grant says plenty dif'rent!" The widow shook her head. "Those pieces that you pick up around—dog-fights, pack-rat swaps, poking fun at important citizens—looks like it mout be nerve, Jim. You know how sensitive folks can be, from back home. It's taking chances here, Jim. You know how politicians, sports, business-men, dance-hall proprietors and so on, are. They're saying even Dana Grant never stuck the knife in and twisted it, like the things you say. Why, actually, they're buying better liquor and ain't cutting it near as much—since the way you told about the so-called intoxicating hard drinks!"

"I didn't suppose anybody'd paid any attention to those—those squibs." Jim shook his head. "It's funny, Stella; a man can write a thousand items; then he says something that comes back on him, and nobody forgets—and to save his life a man can't figure how-come. It was like that on the Blue Ridge *Opinion:* You could call those night-riders anything under God's heaven and down into Satan's hell, and they'd strut and be proud as all-get-out. But if you made fun of them, they come a-raiding!"

"So the comicals are really serious?" Stella asked.

"Why—you reckon so, Stella?" Jim held her tight, but leaned back to get perspective. "You know, gal, I bet you've said something!"

"I'd kind of like to think so, Jim." Stella nodded. "Somehow, you—you're dif'rent. You got variety; you give more'n you take—not but what you take enough, at that! You stimulate. You're somebody to live up to, Jim!"

"Lawsy, Stella!" he sighed. "As if you ain't, too!"

When Jim Franson went to work as usual the next day, he was conscious that he lacked a vital something. Apparently it wasn't anything to do with sticking type, courting a widow, prodding the community consciences, or doing whatever needed to be done there in the print shop of the Fallen Trees *Standards.* Mr. Grant called him in and had him write something special—editorial paragraphs, or a certain news item—or go get copy for an advertisement that needed Jim to handle and make up. The *Standards* circulation perked up. Papers came in more and more for exchanging. People gathered early to pick copies up on publication day—and men stood along the main street in small groups, nodding or shaking their heads, discussing who was catching hell this time.

It was the stingers people remembered, mostly. The *Standards* could praise the singing, dancing, figure, eyes and charm of one of the girls fifty-one weeks of the year—but let in one adjective with a bit of mosquito poison in it, and she'd glare and hate, never forgetting. Only the widow didn't have a painful sense along with her tickling. Even when he spoke of everybody loving a certain gracious personality, but that he liked her as well as loved her, she told him how a thing like that sounded, come to analyze it. She remembered, but didn't hold it against him—and that was a most gracious fact about her.

THEN election of city, county and district officials came on. A steady stream of candidates and friends of candidates—bosses, heels and sincere citizens—came through to see Dana Grant. Some came in a friendly mood, some in a dubious neutrality, and some came to find out whether or not—and if not, why? Ranchers from out yonder, important citizens of scattered communities and the local bailiwick, and the politicians—the men who knew the laws, practices, conditions, who was who, what and why. The politicians, maligned, suspected and hated, were in fact the only vis-

"Now you're going to stay," Stella said, "I might reconsider your proffer."

itors at the editor's office who knew what it was all about. They ran ninety-nine per cent useful, honorable, loving to serve the public. But that crooked, sneaking, bull-dozing one per cent—Mr. Grant called Jim Franson in and ordered:

"Jim, let's have an editorial about all the damned fools who don't know anything, despising the politicians who know public affairs. If you know any that are one hundred per cent honorable and happy to serve the public—seeing the right to do it, even to their own hurt, let's set them up and shoot the works in their favor!"

Jim shook his head.

"Mr. Grant," he said, "you know as well as I do it'd ruin a man if it got around that he was honest, sincere, and competent?"

"Sure I know it! Wouldn't that be one way to ruin a crook? I mean by having bad judgment, believing in the wrong one? It's a gamble, Jim. Go to it!"

Jim wrote the piece. It was about three people, and no more. Every one who was left out of that editorial fantasy of praise was madder than a gray wolf in a trap. And two of the three, who were really on the level, felt sick and miserable—being meek, modest and reliable. The other fellow, knowing what he did about himself, thought that whoever wrote that piece was sarcastic, ironical and intentional. He came down to the Fallen Trees *Standards* office with both his guns buckled on, looking for trouble for those insults. Jim, knowing what to expect—he'd never known selective praise to fail!—headed off the indignant recipient of praise, and got him before he got to Mr. Grant.

The killing made quite a sensation.

Jim took Stella Benbows' advice and went out around the Basin, collecting for subscriptions, doing some business in letterheads, envelopes and other papers, and Mr. Grant sent out copies of the dodgers offering a two-hundred-fifty-dollar reward for information about Jim, who was wanted for homicide. The widow brought the sheriff's office notices; she tried to have Jim leave the country, the talk sounding grim and dangerous.

"No," Jim refused; "I just hide out till after election."

The election came and the old crowd was thrown out. The new crowd was friendly to the *Standards*, at least on the surface, and the grand jury justified the killing as self-defense and upholding the freedom of the press. Of course, tacking on that "freedom of the press" was going a long ways. Why, any damned editor, printer's devil, or tramp compositor might do meanness and justify his murdering as upholding the United States Constitution! That turned popular attention to the new officials, the jury system, and what the world was coming to, and Jim Franson quietly returned to town and showed up in the print shop and editorial-room. Hardly any one noticed him but Stella, who welcomed him with open arms.

"You old tramp printer!" She shook her head. "I thought I'd lost you, darned if I didn't!"

IT was like coming home from a long absence. Jim had seldom felt a place was *home*. His job, the smell of the shop, the feel of the type and his very thoughts and ideas, all made him rejoice. His feeling of vagabonding worthlessness gave way to the certainty that his good shooting, at least, was a valuable newspaper asset. But what gave him a realization of triumph was finding in the boiler-plate fillers that came in, a whole column of paragraphs he had written and printed in the Fallen Trees *Standards*. The discovery was startling; it was an attack on his unfairness to himself.

But the assassin's bullet had hurt Dana Grant; he was unable fully to overcome what it had done to his spirit as well as to his body. Where he previously had leaped to an affray, upholding the ideals of the *Standards*, now he summoned Jim Franson to have him set in type in his own way the things that ought to be told. Yet, reading Jim's way of telling, Grant cringed a bit because Jim used fighting talk. The public blame fell on the editor and publisher, even though the items were recognized as Jim's way of saying things.

From accounts in the Fallen Trees *Standards* the court town came to suffer from its reputation. Out around in the region were court seats which had a lot worse conditions—more killings, more personal difficulties, worse dance-halls, gamblers and resorts than Fallen Trees ever tolerated—at least after Dana Grant took over the newspaper and began telling the truth, regardless. But Fallen Trees had the name; Easterners came to Fallen Trees looking for the wild times the West supplied to the bored and jaded appetites. Fallen Trees respectables tried to convince visitors and Jim Franson and Dana Grant that the old days of fifteen or twenty months before, when Grant had been shot, were dead and gone forever. Hadn't the coward who bushwhacked the editor been run out of town by

Grant and popular sentiment? Moreover, the citizens would stand just so much—and no more, if it came right down to it. The public didn't have to stand for everything.

Even when two men met up, had a difficulty, and the break was perfectly even, the *Standards* spread it all over the front page and called it murder, just as if it had been bushwhacking, or somebody killing a drunk to establish or increase a reputation. And so a committee of the most consequential, self-assured and offended members of the community stalked into the editorial office and shook their forefingers in the face of Dana Grant.

"We're sick an' tired of this maligning the fair and honorable integrity of our community!" the Honorable Tom Cussack declared. "Why, damn it, a killing ain't necessarily a detriment to a place like mine! You know yo'se'f, Dana Grant, I never had no meanness-killing in the Every Man's Wish; your telling what happened when that fool cowboy got killed up is just another intolerable insult!"

Dana Grant's soft answer turned away no wrath. The arguments went back and forth; then all of a sudden Jim Franson heard guns being cocked —and shooting developed in the office. Jim caught up a mallet off the imposing-stone and leaped into the scene. The editor had got Tom Cussack, but had only wounded one of the two others. Dana Grant lay fallen forward on his desk—dead, this time.

Jim swung his mallet at a face coming into the office through the doorway, and it was a fair swat; it flattened the nose, both cheekbones and burst both eyes—killing Hank Kippy dead. The other fellow, Cussack's chief manager, was wounded—till Jim hit him, and then he was dead.

Jim took over the proceedings. He took his star-gauge .45-.90 and went over to the courthouse. He rounded up the coroner, three friendly deputy sheriffs and the county prosecutor, and herded them over to the scene of the difficulty. Then he had the prosecutor write out exactly what he saw—where the bodies were, and the guns —and he got the statement signed, witnessed and affidavited.

MRS. GRANT never had liked Fallen Trees. She was from the East. When the killing of Dana Grant had been duly deplored and the killing of the three committeemen had been legalized and justified, Mrs. Grant begged to have somebody buy the Fallen Trees *Standards,* good will, assets and all. If it wasn't bought right away, she'd close the shop and take East whatever she could find that wasn't nailed down.

Nobody in Fallen Trees had ever thought they might lose their newspaper and printing-office conveniences. They had grumbled, kicked and shook their heads at some things Dana Grant had printed, bleating the facts right out, as if he didn't care a damn whose feelings he hurt. He'd been shot easy once; and now he'd been done in, sure 'nough. And since Jim Franson began to be more of a reporter and editorial-writer than he was a printer, nobody knew what to expect to read, from week to week. Now something had to be done, and quick.

"Course, I don't reckon I'm a good insurance risk—" Jim said.

Talk rippled and echoed back and forth along the street. The board of trade met, and the amusement proprietors had special meetings, figuring what could be done to salvage the newspaper. It would be a calamity if it should cease publication, just because one of those Down East women was prejudiced. However, nobody did anything, actually, except that boarding-house widow, Stella Benbows. She went around and talked to Mrs. Grant, who was terribly prejudiced against all things in Fallen Trees, just because her husband had got killed up for being too unpopular, independent and self-defending. Stella had a long stocking, practically full up with her savings.

The next anybody knew, Mrs. Grant had gone back home to God's country, and Stella Benbows owned the Fallen Trees *Standards,* the papers all in order, legitimated, and filed in the county clerk's office. That was a comical proceeding. When the men talking themselves red-faced along the streets and around the courthouse square heard Stella had taken over, they just lost about three inches in height, collapsing.

Jim Franson was just making up the paper, with probably the most impudent and independent exposure of a battle in an editorial sanctum ever printed, when Stella came across and through the alley to the office, bringing her receipts and documents. She walked into the sanctum and saw that the blood had been cleaned off the floor, along with a lot of papers and accumulations, and the desk had been polished off. She sat down in the swivel chair, drew a piece of copy paper to her, convenient, and wrote:

> Mrs. Stella Benbows has purchased the holdings of Mrs. Lucy Grant, relict of the late Dana Grant. Mrs. Benbows has taken immediate possession of the premises, assets and good will of the Fallen Trees *Standards.* Mr. Jim Franson will assume the duties of editor and business manager, under the general direction of the publisher.

Having written this in a precise and flowing hand, the widow went out to the composing-room and handed it to Jim Franson, who gave her an impatient glance, being busy. However, he read the copy, blinked and read it again.

"Put it up at the top of the editorial page," the widow said.

JIM stood a moment, nonplused, then stepped over to a case of lower-case type and set the copy to the beginning of the sentence saying Mr. Jim Franson was sticking. There he hesitated, while Stella leaned back against the paper-cutter, a small smile on her lips. Jim looked out the window. He could see the road leading away yonder over the rolling prairie ground, past buttes and toward a notch in the mountains. He sighed. He shook his head.

He wasn't a tramp printer any more. Instead he was editor and business manager. He set that sentence Stella Benbows had written, telling for him. He put the stickful of type in a turn-rule box that'd print black, a border around. He pulled down the editorial in which he excoriated killers and a community that tolerated potential scoundrels. He set the box in the open space, and twisted the quoins, locking the form. Then he became aware of somebody at his side.

"Now that you're going to stay," Stella said, "I might reconsider your proffer of a life partnership."

"I haven't changed my mind," Jim said slowly. "Of course, I don't reckon I'm a good insurance risk. But—"

"We should worry!" She smiled. "Fallen Trees is under new management."

The Right Must

THE city fathers had never bothered to light up Front Street, believing the faint glow from kerosene lights in fifty saloons was sufficient for men just off the log drive; and between Front Street and the town proper was a vacant block, also dark. Black River Ben Black and three friends strode through this empty stretch, four abreast, their voices roaring in song:

"Oh, I went up the Eau Claire to drive,
I thought they'd never begin;
The wind was blowing dead ahead
And Kelly was drunk again."

More verses followed, none so mild, and the four bellowed happily, their calked shoes keeping time by ripping splinters from the plank sidewalk.

In mid-block a man stepped from behind a tree. A metal badge glinted on his coat.

"Stop that noise!" he commanded. "You're under arrest."

Black River Ben's friends were silent. Black River could talk so much better.

"Arrest!" he said in a voice that squeaked. "Why?"

"Law against making a racket after nine."

"But look, Mister!" Black River seemed to be pleading. "We just hit town. How'd we know?"

Fear in his voice had the desired effect. The policeman's austerity was no longer forced.

"Makes no difference," he said. "You river pigs get going."

Dark as it was, Black River could make out the bulk of the fellow, and that the bulk was in the wrong places beneath narrow shoulders. Black River didn't want to go to jail and didn't intend to, and this would be a simple matter for four men hardened by logging-camp and drive.

Still, Black River hesitated. He got much joy from using his fists, and he could use them beautifully; but long ago he'd found far greater satisfaction in using his head. His friends, ready battlers, didn't object. He could take an affair that normally would be ended in a few minutes, and string it through a night of fun.

"Have a heart, Mister!" Black River stepped closer. "We didn't mean—"

He had no doubt but that the others would also move forward. Flambeau Smith came in on one side, Gin-pole Jim Simpson on the other, and little Sandy McLean slipped to the rear.

They moved on, steadily and swiftly, just as if the policeman were not struggling. Gin-pole held an elbow and lifted half the man's weight, and he could not use night-stick or revolver. They swept into Front Street.

"Jerry," Black River said to an astonished bartender, "our friend here's had a real tough night chasin' river pigs into their pens. No glass for him. Set out a tumbler."

Jerry hesitated. He didn't like this. The policeman pushed back and started to speak. Black River and Flambeau Smith pounded the bar and laughed loudly. Gin-pole Jim and Sandy McLean crowded their unwilling guest against the rail.

"He's wore out," Black River said. "Dragged nine river pigs up the hill already tonight."

The policeman had a helpless look. The light showed his face to be as flabby as his body, and his eyes lighted and his nostrils twitched when whisky was set before him.

"Here's to them noble lads, the Falls policemen!" Black River Ben shouted, and when the half-tumbler was quickly downed: "Fill 'em up, Jerry!"

The policeman relaxed and grasped the second glass. Black River knew he had little to worry about now, but the fellow still had his night-stick and gun, and might get ideas in drink.

"You picked the right bunch," Black River said. "We're all from Joe Blount's Camp Three."

This created the impression Black River expected. "The crew that won a bet for Blount from Todd Kane on which camp'd bank the most logs?" the policeman asked.

"Sure, and Camp Three's won that bet for Joe, four years running. Fill 'em up, Jerry. We get a kick out o' beating Kane. He's only a boiled-shirt lad. Never worked in the woods like Joe has."

AS he spoke, Black River looked at his friends and saw they were alert. It was great, he thought, to have such camp mates, but he wasn't unaware of his own showmanship.

"Another round, Jerry," he said. "That's a fine club you've got, Mister."

Proudly the policeman handed it over. Varnished, without a dent, it was obviously new, as was the man's uniform.

"Best second-growth oak," he said. "Hit hard's you want, you can't break it on a head."

"Wah!" Black River exclaimed admiringly. "Like a spoke out of a tote-wagon wheel! Look, Gin-pole!"

Gin-pole examined the stick curiously. He was not a huge man, but he gave an impression of physical power as no giant could. Now, as if in experiment, he grasped the stick at both ends and brought it down lightly across the edge of the bar. The club might have been a match. Gin-pole tossed the pieces across the room and turned back to Sandy McLean.

"The big ox hit only one man in his life," Black River whispered. "Broke his neck. Now he's afraid he'll kill somebody again. Besides, he's got a bad tooth. Makes him fretful."

WARILY the policeman edged away from Gin-pole.

"Here's how," Black River said. "We call him Gin-pole 'cause he's always figurin' to use one for deckin' and loadin', though the moose could pick up a log and set it on top of a sleigh. Queer, ain't it, how queer men get. Hey, Gin-pole! Look around."

Gin-pole turned. The right side of his face was swollen.

"That's getting worse," Black River Ben said, and he explained. "Swelled so we couldn't get at it with blacksmith's tongs. Got a tooth doctor in the Falls?"

"Best in the State," the policeman said. "Over the bank at Main and Blount streets. . . . Now I'm buyin'."

"No," Black River said. "Jerry!"

Jerry frowned but filled the glasses. A fight started at the rear of the room, but Camp Three men were above watching ordinary brawls. Yells came from the street. A thousand river pigs were warming up for the night. The policeman started for the door, but Black River spun him back.

"Just boys," Black River said. "If you went out there, they might step on you, and they all wear calks."

The policeman settled against the friendly bar. "Fool idea, anyway—no noise after nine o'clock," he said.

Black River grinned approval, and went to the bottom of lumberjack psychology. "Nine months, no liquor, no women, nothing but hard work—ain't they earned a good time?"

The policeman nodded sage agreement, so sage he did not know his

Triumph

IT ALL BEGAN IN FUN, BUT FOR A TIME THE SITUATION LOOKED A BIT SERIOUS.

by ROBERT PINKERTON

They moved on steadily and swiftly, just as if the policeman were not struggling.

revolver was slipped from its holster. Black River walked to the rear door, tossed it out and heard it splash in the river.

"S-s-s-t!" Jerry whispered. He had come to the end of the bar and was leaning across it. "What you bring him in here for?"

"'Cause he arrested us."

"And now when he tells whose place he was in, the damn' police will close me up."

"We'll get him so full he can't remember where he was. Now if the house was to buy a few—"

"But look who he is! Clyde Caskey, and—"

"Not kin to Luke!"

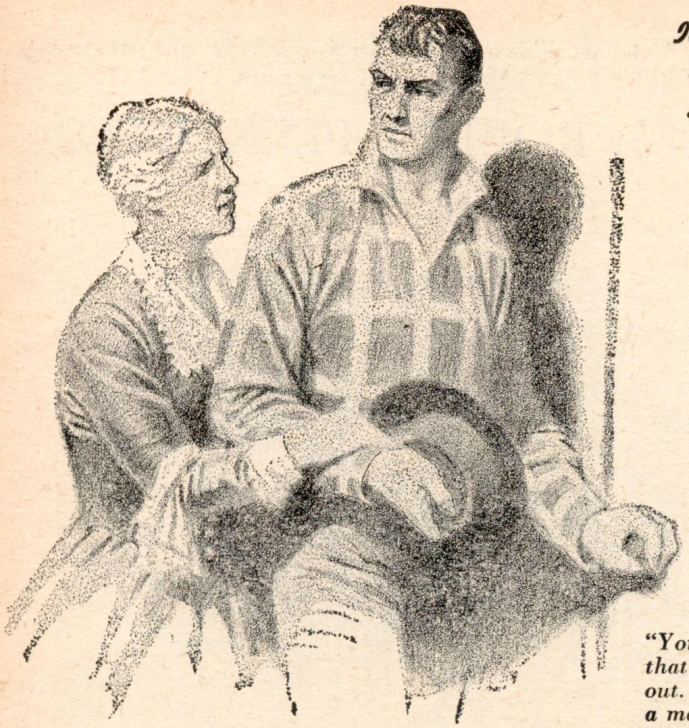
"Brother. Get him out o' here."

Black River smiled, and he felt the smile warm him clear through. All his life he'd rarely held a grudge. He'd figured a grudge was a sign of defeat, and a year ago Chief of Police Luke Caskey had tossed Black River into jail for no real reason at all, kept him there until the river pigs were broke and gone.

"Luke's brother!" he said. "Ain't the Lord good to me?"

"Clyde's just a bum," Jerry said. "Luke couldn't get him to work, so last week he put him on the force."

Black River glanced down the bar. His friends were tending out on the policeman.



Illustrated by Dan Sweeney

"You can't say that and walk out. Joe's as good a man as he ever was."

"Worst of it is," Jerry said, "Luke's getting pushed hard. New preacher's been raising hell about Front Street."

"That's all preachers ever do, raise hell," Black River said. "They don't know nothing about human nature."

"This one does. He's got Joe Blount's wife to back him, and she's pulled Joe in on it."

Black River beat the bar. "Not Bessie!" he said.

IT was no easier to believe Bessie Blount had turned reformer than Joe himself. For years she had run a boarding and lodging-house; no one understood lumberjacks better. She knew the whyfor of the drinking, fighting and women, and never preached when a man came to her broke or sick. She'd fed and nursed them, and even buried a few; and if a stranger made a crack about Bessie, he had a hundred fights on his hands.

The lumberjacks had missed her when she married Joe Blount, wealthiest lumberman in town, but they had celebrated appropriately, glad she'd been yanked away from that hot range and given a bit of ease. Now Black River was mystified. Maybe he just didn't know anything about women.

"But Joe!" he said. "He's only an overgrown river pig. A boiled shirt can't make him different, or living in that big house."

"Bessie's built a bigger house," Jerry said. "On the bluff right above the end of the street. She built a house for the preacher across from hers, and that's why they made these new laws. Bessie and her divine don't like the noise down here, and of course Joe, owning the town, owns Luke Caskey."

Black River grinned. His active brain had often conceived plots that would produce excitement and a good time, but he'd never had a situation like this. And how his grudge hooked in!

"So this bird is Luke's brother!" he said. "To hell with the preacher! No accountin' for Bessie; but Joe—he needs hardenin' up. And Luke Caskey! Quit frettin', Jerry. All we got to do is have a few on the house, and we'll clean up your rear and get your logs down-river."

It wasn't difficult. After more drinks, all on Jerry, Policeman Clyde Caskey was led from bar to bar until he could scarcely walk. A few river pigs were violently attracted by the blue uniform, but between Black River's quick tongue and the fists of the other three, Clyde was protected. When walking was too difficult for him, he was carried into town and made comfortable on the preacher's front porch. Black River and his friends returned to a joyous and noisy night. . . .

They did not waken until afternoon. Gin-pole Jim complained for the first time about his face.

" 'Tain't the hurtin'," he said, "but I can't see past it."

The swelling was enormous. A few drinks "slid right on by without stoppin' to help." Black River recalled the tooth doctor. "We won't go 'long with you," he said. "Luke Caskey'll be layin' for us, but nobody'd know you, the way you look."

The afternoon passed, and Gin-pole did not return. After supper Black River hired a boy to scout the town.

"He's in jail," was the report an hour later.

"Let's start," Sandy McLean said, and he headed for the bluffs on which the town stood.

Black River jerked him back. "The jail's brick and it's got iron bars," he said. "We got to figure this."

Sandy and Flambeau Smith had perfect faith in Black River's figuring, but they got restless before he gave the word at ten o'clock, when the boy reported that Clyde Caskey was again on duty.

What Sandy and Flambeau did not know was that Black River was worried. His idea of having a little fun with the Caskeys had put Gin-pole in a bad hole, but now Black River believed he had an effective scheme that held enough risk to make it exciting. He took the others to the vacant block and hid until they heard hesitant footsteps.

This time they did not treat Clyde gently, but pulled him down like a wolf pack, bound and gagged him and tossed him into the brush. Black River took his gun and keys.

THE town was dark when they entered it, and they walked in the dirt street for silence. Black River led them around a corner and into the police station. When the desk sergeant lowered his newspaper, his eyes were wide, and a little frightened

"What you jacks want?" he asked.

Black River laid Clyde Caskey's revolver on the desk.

"Found this," he said. "Thought one of you dropped it."

The sergeant's relief was so great he was swept into warm friendliness. "Now, that's white of you boys," he said. "Never knew of a lumberjack who'd do this."

'What's the matter with lumberjacks?" Black River demanded.

"Don't get huffy. They're all right. Give us trouble sometimes but—wish there was more like you."

"We're no different. We're river pigs and ain't ashamed of it."

"Sure! Sure! Funny, but—" He was examining the weapon. "Clyde Caskey's! The clumsy bum lost one last night, and I issued this to him only a couple of hours ago. Won't Luke boil? But you boys—any trouble—just ask for me."

Black River wasn't mollified. "We don't want no favors," he said. "We can take care of ourselves."

He turned, then came back smiling, and he had no misconceptions as to the warmth and friendliness of his smile.

"I'm too touchy," he said. "I got a favor. A jack in our camp, name of Simpson—you got him skidded here?"

"Simpson!" the sergeant said. "Wah! Luke says he's bound for State's prison, sure's hell."

"That's bad. He does get rough. We never cared about him much. But a camp mate—if we could say good-by."

"That feller needs a friend. Go right in. The door that's shut. Last cell on the right. Only don't stay long. The chief drops in around midnight."

The three went through the door, which Black River was careful to close after them, and on to the last cell. Gin-pole looked up from his bunk without surprise.

"Been a long time getting here," he said. "Bring a key?"

"Maybe," Black River said, and he tried the keys he'd taken from Clyde Caskey. The third opened the cell, but when Gin-pole started out, Black River pushed him back.

"It ain't that easy," he said. "See if I can work this."

He reached through the bars from the inside and inserted the key in the lock. "Yep," he said. "Get in."

They entered without question, and he locked the door. For years they had never questioned Black River. "It's like going to a show," Flambeau Smith had said. "You don't know how it's coming out, and you think the gal's sure going through the sluiceway tied to a log. But everything gets set right in the end."

The four sat on the bunk. The prisoner's face was not badly swollen. "I thought the doc'd have to rig a gin-pole to drag that tooth out," he said, "but she came on the third yank. I could use a drink."

"You'll get one," Black River said. "What'd Luke say?"

"I ain't killed anybody, but that's all I missed."

They talked for ten minutes. Gin-pole suggested they were damned fools to lock themselves in jail when they could have walked out, but the others knew he merely wanted a drink.

"Besides," Black River said, "a brain can lift more'n a gin-pole. Here comes the shanty boss."

The sergeant stopped outside, his astonishment complete.

"How'n hell you jacks get in there?" he demanded.

"The door wasn't locked," Black River said, "so we—"

"Wasn't locked! I locked it myself."

"Then how'd we get in?"

The sergeant couldn't answer that. His hands trembled with his keys. "Don't tell this," he said. "I'd lose my job."

He swung open the door, and all four started out.

"Not you," he said, and pushed Gin-pole back.

They closed in as if at a signal. They were not rough, merely firm. They took the sergeant's gun and keys and locked him in the cell. Black River laid the gun and the sergeant's and Clyde's keys on the front-room desk.

"Ain't Chief Luke goin' to wonder?" he said. . . .

They celebrated well that night; and having so late a start, they did not quit until daylight and then slept most of the day. Before supper they went to Jerry's place for an eye-opener.

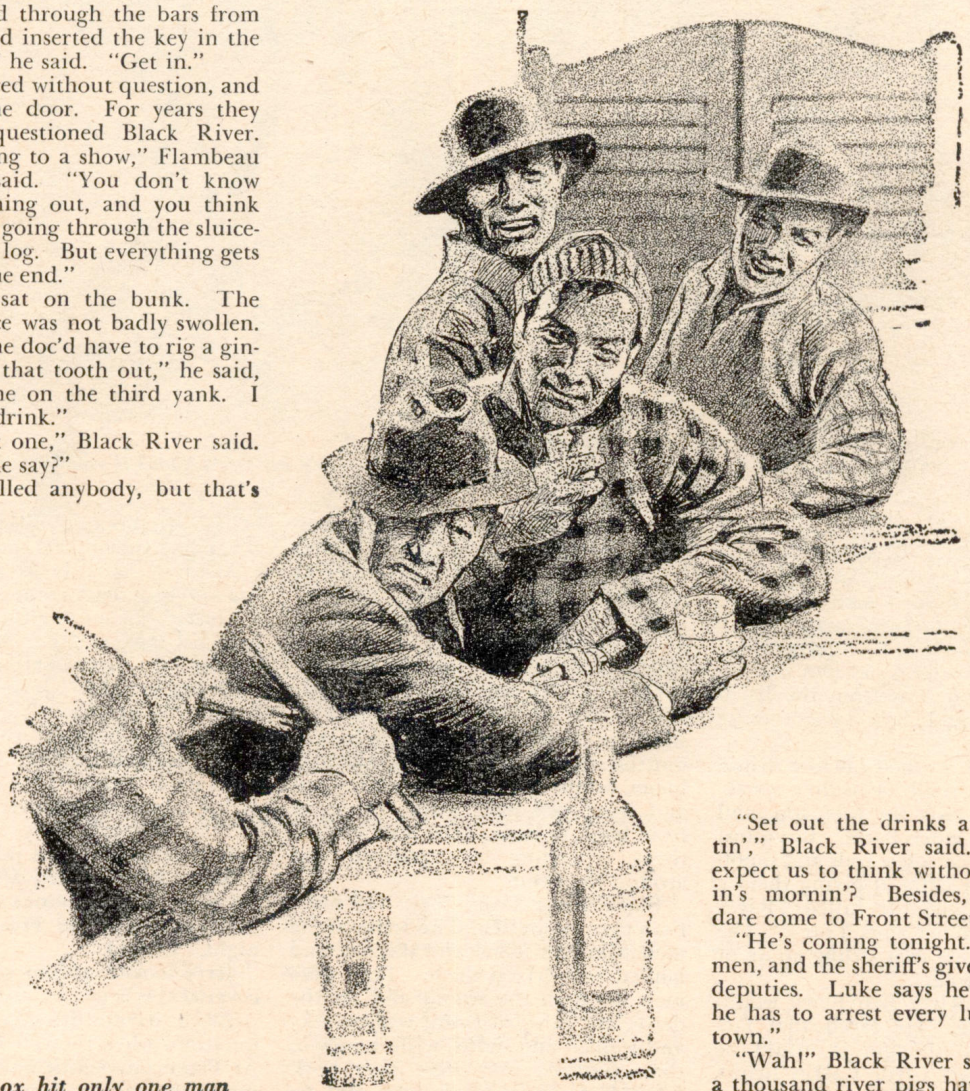
"Get out!" Jerry shouted.

They lined up at the bar and ordered drinks.

"Tying up cops and locking 'em in a cell—Luke says he'll hang the lot of you," Jerry stormed.

Black River smiled. He hadn't been so happy in a long while.

"Luke's even talking of closing all Front Street. Wrecking our business is what you've done."



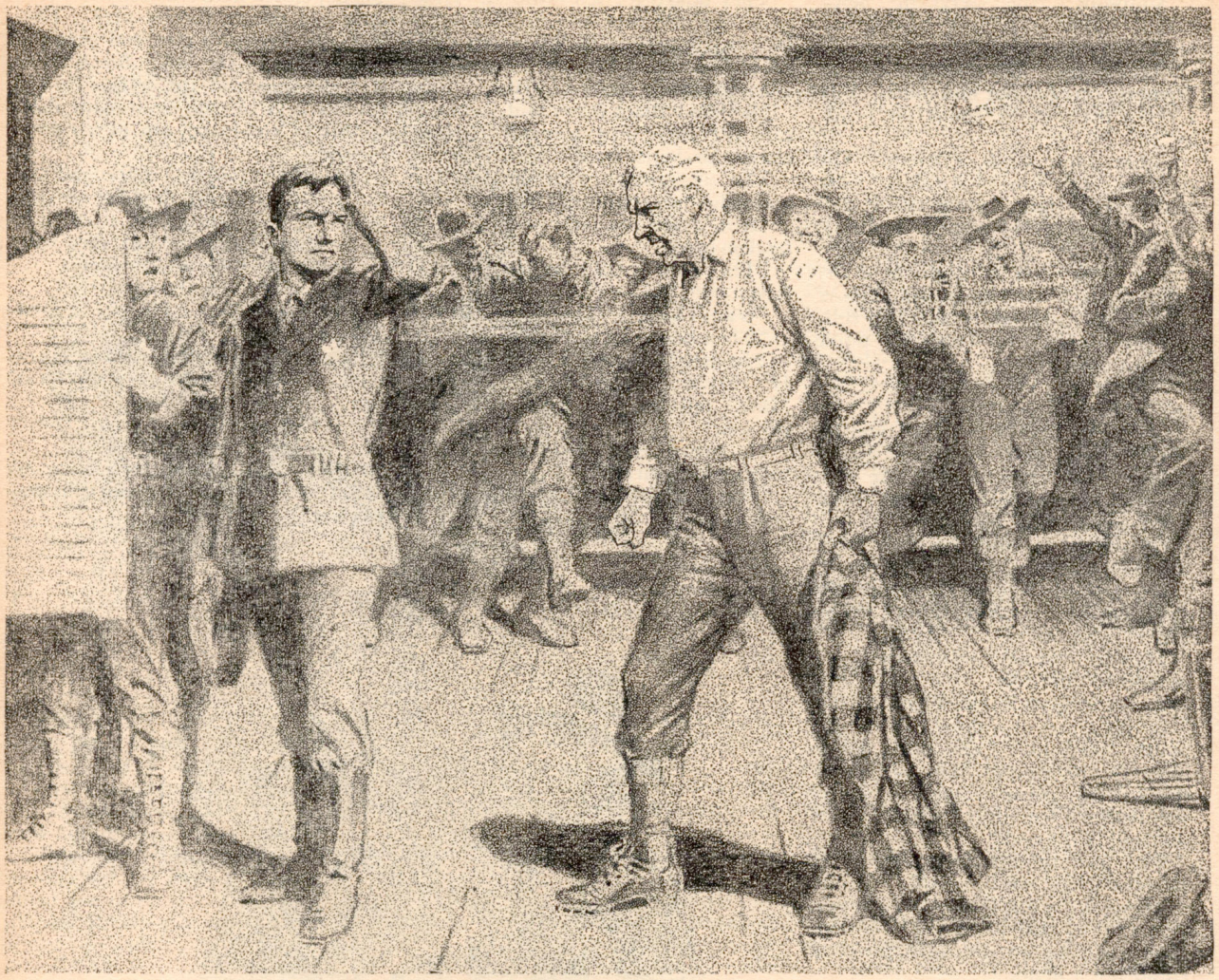
"The big ox hit only one man in his life," Black River whispered. "Broke his neck."

"Set out the drinks and quit blattin'," Black River said. "How you expect us to think without our mornin's mornin'? Besides, Luke don't dare come to Front Street."

"He's coming tonight. Got twelve men, and the sheriff's given him fifteen deputies. Luke says he'll get you if he has to arrest every lumberjack in town."

"Wah!" Black River said. "Won't a thousand river pigs have themselves a time?"

Jerry set out drinks, disgustedly.



"You crazy, Luke?" he demanded. "Every man jack here's my friend, and if you lay a hand on one,

"We can lead 'em onto the logs and birl 'em off," Black River said. "We can duck out back doors and tag along behind while they're searchin'. We can keep it up all night."

"You damned fool," Jerry said. "Luke's got all the deer rifles and revolvers and shotguns from the hardware stores, and he's ravin', crazy mad."

Black River downed his first drink, and a second, and he didn't speak. Fun is fun. Fists are fists, too, and they never do much harm. But guns! Men standing off a few rods and shooting other men without giving them a chance. And who'd be killed? River pigs. Men from Camp Three. The finest bunch that ever swung an ax or threw a pick-pole.

And Black River Ben Black would be responsible. He faced that fact readily. He'd thought it would be more fun to get Clyde Caskey drunk than hit him a couple of times, and when that little trick had put Ginpole Jim Simpson in jail, Black River had enjoyed the risk of getting him out. He'd been cute, all right; but his cuteness had brought this. Tricks wouldn't stop Luke Caskey.

"Jerry," Black River said, "give me a bottle and a glass. You birds enjoy yourself. I got some thinkin' to do."

He retired to a table in a far corner and poured a drink, but for a long while he didn't touch it. He looked out the window at the logs in the mill boom, bright brown in the setting sun and lying still now, filling the river from bank to bank, acres and acres of them, stretching far upstream and around the bend.

Black River loved logs, but more than that, he loved and understood the men who had felled and skidded and hauled and driven them. They were men when in the woods and on the drive, but now, in town, with whisky and women and lights, with money in their pockets, they were only boys. They'd spit in a lion's face, and tonight they'd spit in Luke Caskey's face and get a chunk of lead in the belly. All because Black River Ben Black had thought he was smart.

After an hour, he returned to the bar and ordered a round.

"Jerry," he said, "Luke won't be here till late, will he? Figure to let the boys get sort o' helpless first."

"You guessed it," Jerry said. "I got a cousin on the force."

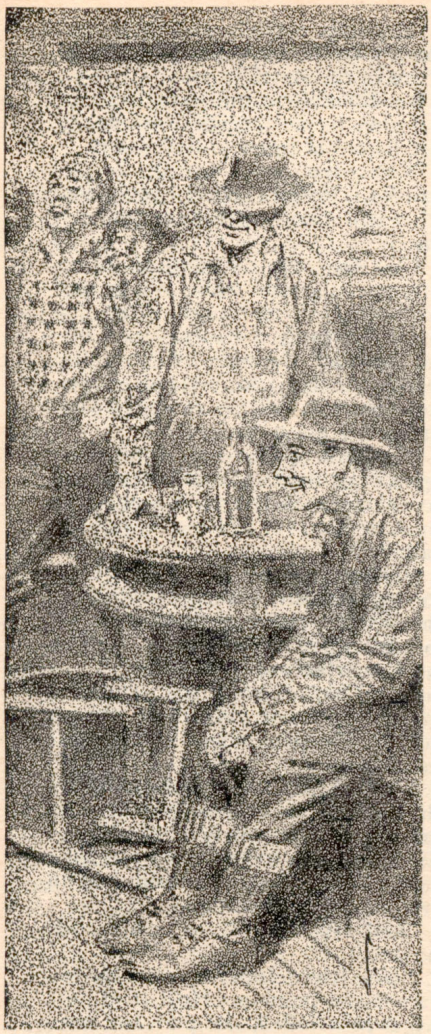
"Dig up a bottle o' the best rye in town. I'll call for it at the back door 'bout dark. Now we got to eat supper or breakfast, or whatever it is."

"Eat hearty," Jerry said. "Luke don't feed good in his jail."

Black River peeled fifty dollars off his roll. "Even money Luke doesn't arrest anybody in Front Street tonight," he said.

Jerry looked at him with pity, and covered the bet.

Black River's friends did not ask questions when they ate, or afterward. As Flambeau Smith had said, it was more fun waiting to see what popped out of this agile brain, but tonight they weren't so sure.



I'll run you out of the Falls."

At dusk Black River signaled to Jerry from his rear door, stuffed a bottle into a hip pocket and went on along the river-bank. It was dark when he climbed the bluff beyond Front Street and crossed a wide lawn before a huge house. He sat on the steps, removed his calked shoes and knocked at the door.

When it was opened by a woman in a black dress and tiny white apron, Black River took advantage of her fright and pushed past into the hall. Light shone through a wide door on the right, and he went through it.

Black River stopped. It wasn't that this was grandeur such as he had never dreamed of, plush and satin, towering and heavily laden whatnots, marble-top tables, rich, smothering drapes at tall windows and a huge chandelier with its score of candles. He saw only the woman at the far end of the room.

Bessie Blount sat in a huge chair, her feet on a stool, and her skirts billowed out like water flowing over a logging dam. She held a hoop in which a white cloth was stretched, and was poking a needle and colored thread through it. Her glance was as cold as a February morning.

"What in— What you doing here?" she demanded.

Black River smiled, and his stocking feet took him quickly across the room.

"Evening, ma'am," he said, mixing deference and the old familiarity in what he hoped were the right amounts. "You're looking better 'n' younger'n when I saw you last. Not a river pig in town ain't glad you got a chance to take it easy after all you did for 'em. We was talking about it last night, and one of 'em said he owed you two weeks' board and he never paid it because you ducked out on him. So when I said I was comin' to see Joe, he gave me ten dollars to hand you."

Black River peeled two bills off his roll without neglecting to study Bessie Blount's face. She'd been angry, and then confused, and now she was angry again.

"I don't want it," she said.

"Now, ma'am! This jack figured you didn't need it, but that's no reason to make him feel bad. He ain't ever stopped talking 'bout how you took care of him when he got too drunk once, and—"

"I don't want his money," Bessie said.

"But family men get killed in sawmills, and there's churches. He said you'd find a place where it'd do good."

"Churches! I know you, Black River. Always scheming, making jokes. You can't come here and snicker about my working with the Reverend to clean hell-holes out of The Falls."

Black River was properly shocked. "I never heard a word about it," he said. "Knowing you from the old days, and remembering how good you were to the lads when they'd been playing a little too hard, and understandin' how it was—a whole winter in the woods and a tough time on the drive— Why, Bessie, there's two hundred river pigs in town right now that would go spit in a grizzly bear's face if you asked 'em to."

"Soft soap!" she said, jabbing needle through cloth. "You always could spread it, Black River. Now you're only trying to get out of this jam you're in with Luke Caskey."

He stretched his six-feet-one a bit, and looked down at her.

"I'm sorry I came," he said. "It was better thinking about you like you was. I'd be going, only I got to see Joe."

"You can't see him," she said. "He's sick in bed."

"Sick! In bed! Joe Blount's too tough to be sick. Unless he's getting weak from living soft. What you done to him?"

Black River was impassioned. He'd failed with Bessie, and everything had depended on his winning. He'd felt sure she would remember the old days and would understand.

"Get out!" she cried. "You can't talk that way to me. Joe's only being what he should. Ain't he the leading man in the Falls? Didn't he build the town? Don't that give him responsibilities? I showed him what he's got to be, and he's being it."

"Being what? A boiled-shirt sawmill man with farmers in his camps. He won't bank the logs, and he'll have hung drives. Then who'll own the town?" He walked to the door.

"You're not scaring me," Bessie Blount said.

"I wasn't trying to. I come to tell Joe what Camp Three thinks of him. If he's too damned sick to see me, tell him he's won his last bet from Todd Kane. We'd rather work for Kane than for a man who lets a woman and a preacher run him."

HE went out. He'd lost, and he couldn't waste time; he must get down to Front Street and try something else before Luke Caskey started shooting. Black River was opening the door when Bessie caught his arm.

"You can't say all that about Joe and walk out," she said. "Joe's as good a man as he ever was."

"Good! How'd we know it? He ever come to Front Street any more and celebrate winning his bet? No! He's lyin' in bed."

She didn't answer that, and she was no longer angry.

"Please, Black River!" she said.

"Soft soap! Only you never used to spread it."

She ignored that. "But Camp Three! He's always boasting about it. He's more proud of it than his big sawmill and all his timber. Now, if his crew works for Kane—you wouldn't sell Joe out."

"Joe ain't bought himself in, the last couple of years. He had a hold on us once, but he ain't any more."

Black River wasn't acting now. He meant it. Camp Three lads raised the most hell on Front Street because they'd won for Joe, and now Joe's police chief planned to shoot them. He had to get down there, but she held his arm.

"Losing Camp Three! If I've done that to Joe—" She broke off, drew herself up and pointed to the parlor.

"I'll get Joe in there if I have to drag him," she said.

Black River went back. He had never felt so uncomfortable. This had started as a bit of fun, and now he found himself tangled not only in sudden death for his friends, but in an emotional upheaval he could not fathom. He watched a gold clock on the mantel.

Bessie Blount burst into the room, pushing Joe. He wore an undershirt and a pair of pants, and was completely bewildered till he saw Black River.

"What in hell you doin' here?" he demanded.

"What Bessie asked me!" Black River said. "Must be a happy family when a man and his wife think alike."

Joe snorted. "What's happy about stayin' abed daytimes? She's kept me in all week, and—"

He stopped when Black River tugged the bottle from his hip pocket.

Joe glanced at his wife.

"Go ahead," she said. "May be what you need."

Joe stared at her in astonishment. "What you done to her, Black River?" he demanded, and took a long drag.

"Have another," Bessie said: "you'll need it. Camp Three's quit you. Going to work for Todd Kane."

Joe stopped short in his second drink and glared furiously at Black River, but the river pig beat him to it.

"How much you win from Kane this year?" he demanded.

Joe was startled. "Same as last year," he said. "Five thousand. Next year we're betting ten."

Black River leaped onto that log with every calk biting into the bark.

"Five thousand!" he said in sudden anger. "And who won it for you? Did you buy one of the lads in Camp Three even a glass of beer? How long since you've helped 'em celebrate on Front Street? What in hell's got into you since you been reformed? You was a good lumberjack once, but now you're only a boiled-shirt buzzard like Todd Kane. I talked to him today, and all Camp Three'll move over come fall. We'll be no worse off."

Joe Blount was still a lumberjack, and sick or not, he started swinging. Black River pinned his arms and slammed him into a chair so hard Joe stayed there.

"I didn't figure it," Joe said. "I'll split the bet with—"

Black River broke in, and he was really angry. "You been mixin' with the wrong kind o' people so long you've forgot what a lumberjack's like. The lads never figured on the money. It was just being proud of Camp Three. Being the best damned crew in the State. Knowing they worked for a real river pig."

He turned to the door.

"This is your doings!" Joe shouted at his wife. "You and that preacher."

"Sure," she said. "'Cause I didn't have anything else to do. Only I couldn't 'a' twisted a real man around my finger."

Both Joe and Black River blinked.

"You told the crew yet about seeing Kane?" she demanded.

"I'm tellin' 'em now," Black River said. "They'll be in Jerry's." He glanced at the gold clock. Time was short.

"Wait here!" Bessie said, and ran from the room.

THE bottle had been passed twice before she returned with a wool shirt and a pair of calked shoes. Joe took them and started to the door.

"Put 'em on here," Bessie said. "What I been missing around this place is calk-holes in the floor."

Black River and Joe Blount found Jerry's saloon packed with Camp Three men. Joe pushed through to the bar.

"If I see you takin' in a nickel tonight, I'll have you closed up," he said to Jerry. "Now set 'em out."

Noise lifted far into the town. Men beat Joe Blount on the back and told what they'd do to Todd Kane's crew next winter. Everyone, Joe most of all, had a fine time. . . .

At midnight Chief Luke Caskey stormed in, armed policemen and deputies behind him.

"Stop this racket!" Luke shouted. "And you"—he'd spotted Black River—"are under arrest."

Joe Blount turned from the bar, and when he saw the rifles, his lumberjack hatred of weapons boiled out.

"You gone crazy, Luke?" he demanded. "What's them guns for? What you doin' on Front Street, anyhow?"

That was only a flexing of throat-muscles, a pause while anger and words built up pressure. When Joe really cut loose, metaphors and similes shredded the hide off the police chief. Lumberjacks listened in awe, and teamsters laid away choice bits. At last Joe got down to cases.

"Git back to town and don't come again," he said. "Every man jack here's my friend, and if you lay a hand on one, I'll run you out of the Falls."

He drove the police into the street, cursing steadily amid a bedlam of cheers. All Front Street turned out to learn what was going on. A thousand men yelped and whistled and sang. They didn't know what had happened, but it was fun to make a noise. The pine woods were so still in winter.

Black River Ben Black stood on the sidewalk, silent and subdued. He knew he had overreached himself, that dead river pigs might have been lying in the mud. Flambeau Smith laid an arm across his shoulders.

"Lad, lad, did you fool 'em again!" he said.

Black River didn't speak. He felt even more humble. He'd tried, and when he'd failed, the play had been taken away from him.

"And Jerry's got a hundred of your money," Flambeau said.

Black River smiled. At least he'd felt sure enough to back himself.

"We'll leave it right on the bar," he said. "Till it's all gone."

Who's on Top Today?

A Quiz

by Ed Dembitz

CAN you name the record-holders whose accomplishments are listed below? Eight correct is an average score for all-round sports fans.

What champion—

(1) Hit safely in fifty-six consecutive major-league baseball games?

(2) Ran the mile in 4:01.4 on July 17, 1945 at Stockholm?

(3) Won the 1946 U. S. Open Golf tournament?

(4) Set the existing pole-vault mark at fifteen feet, seven and three-quarter inches?

(5) Drove the motorboat *Blue Bird II* 141.74 m.p.h. in 1939?

(6) Undefeated from 1935-'43, and holds most of the backstroke swim records?

(7) Horse won $561,161 on American racetracks?

(8) Horse set the mile trotting record at 1:55¼?

(9) Ran the hundred-yard dash in 9.4 seconds?

(10) Holds the three-quarter-mile, one-mile and one-and-one-half-mile outdoor ice-skating world records?

(11) Drove an automobile 369.7 m.p.h. at Bonneville in 1939?

(12) Playing for Detroit, won the league batting title twelve times?

Answers:

1. Joe DiMaggio, in 1941
2. Gundar Haegg
3. Lloyd Mangrum
4. Cornelius Warmerdam
5. Sir Malcolm Campbell
6. Adolph Kiefer
7. Whirlaway
8. Greyhound
9. Jesse Owens, Frank Wykoff, Clyde Jeffrey
10. Clas Thunberg
11. John R. Cobb
12. Ty Cobb

The Bookshop Mystery

A fifty-dollar bill slipped into an old book disappeared . . . . And thereby hangs a strange tale of murder.

by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

BUSINESS was brisk at Zorn's bookshop this morning. Adolph Zorn himself had to emerge from his cubbyhole at the rear and help David Murray, his efficient young clerk, who usually was able to carry on alone. The shop was deep and narrow, squeezed in between a curio store and a delicatessen in the upper Fifties of West Side New York. David Murray knew the stock much better than Zorn did. Zorn was a merchant; David was a book-lover. To Zorn, books were chattels; to David they were friends. His warmth toward them, as well as his fresh, eager personality, drew customers just as Zorn's coldly acquisitive outlook sometimes drove them away.

It was the way David had been brought up. Infantile paralysis had kept him in a wheel-chair till he was fifteen. At the age when other boys were playing Scrub Nine on corner lots, David had sat in his grandfather's bookshop in Boston. Some day he wanted to own a book-store himself. His older sister Celia had something to do with this, too; she was a big-name book reviewer, and ran the book page on one of the New York papers. All through his crippled childhood she'd mothered David, had valiantly consoled him, taught him that all the thrills weren't on the corner lots. Often she'd bucked him up with those stirring lines by Emily Dickinson: "There is no frigate like a book, to bear us worlds away, or any charger like a page, of prancing poetry."

That was what made David the spark-plug here in Zorn's bookshop. An operation had given him legs again, but his heart wasn't changed.

This morning one of his favorite customers came in. He was a slight, oldish man, a retired psychology professor named Sloan. "Good morning, David," he said. "Has the book I ordered come in yet?"

"Not yet, Professor Sloan," David said. "Byways in Psychology," he remembered, was the title ordered. "Sorry. Soon as it comes in, I'll let you know."

The old man took off his spectacles, wiped them, put them on again. His eyes swept avidly over shelves along either wall. "Mind if I browse a little, David?"

"Help yourself," David invited. Browsers of a sincere sort, like Professor Sloan, were always welcome.

He went back toward a non-fiction section, and David turned to another customer.

Ten minutes later Professor Sloan appeared again at David's elbow. He held in hand a heavy volume of at least a thousand pages. "I'll take this one," he said.

As he paid for it, the title surprised David. "Famous Unsolved Crimes," by Wendell Fish. He stared curiously as Professor Sloan went out with it. Now what on earth, he wondered, would Sloan want with that?

THREE o'clock that same day found David alone in the shop. It was the mid-afternoon lull, and Adolph Zorn had retired to his office at the rear. The shop was so quiet that David could even hear the tinkle of a cash register in the delicatessen next door. The walls were thin—in fact, the delicatessen, the bookshop and the curio store had been partitioned from what had once been a single room.

An express boy came in with a package. Unwrapping it, David found it to be the book that Professor Sloan had ordered. Immediately David called him on the phone.

"Professor Sloan? This is David Murray at the bookshop."

"Yes, David."

"Your copy of 'Byways in Psychology' just came in."

"It did? Splendid! Would you mind sending it out? I'll be glad to pay the messenger fee."

"I'll send it right out, Professor." Sloan's apartment was only a few blocks away.

"And while you're about it," the Professor said, "please send along another book I noticed while browsing your shelves this morning."

"Certainly. What's the title?"

"The title," Sloan said, "is 'Man from Montreal.' It's by I. Hadley."

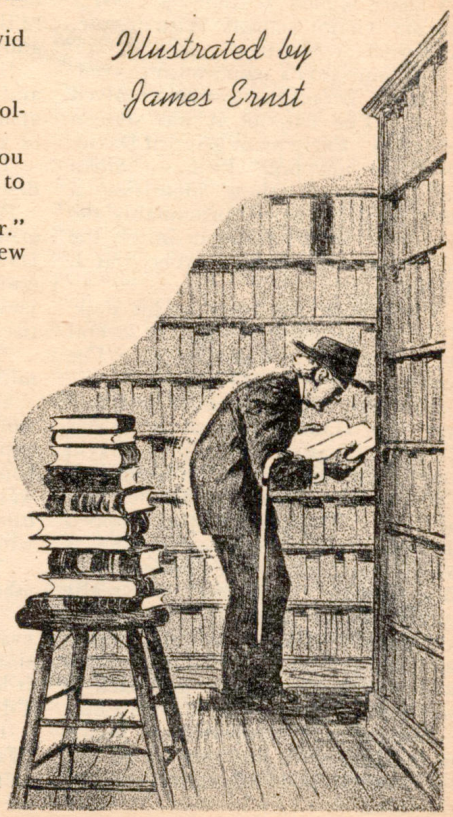
David's brow puckered. "I don't seem to remember that one. Are you sure you saw it here?"

"This very morning." Sloan's voice struck David as peculiarly distinct and urgent. "It's put out by the Wittenhouse Publishing Company."

When he hung up, David looked through his catalogue of titles. There was no such title as "Man From Montreal." Neither did his list of authors show any name like I. Hadley. Last he looked at his roster of publishers. Wittenhouse wasn't among them.

It mystified David. Why should Professor Sloan mention a book, an author and a publisher not on his lists? He could be confused on one name, but hardly on three. He had spoken the names precisely, even stressing them a little. David recalled his

Illustrated by James Ernst



moment of puzzlement, this morning, when the Professor had purchased "Famous Unsolved Crimes." The title didn't fit the man's academic background.

Could there be any connection between his out-of-character purchase this morning and his strange request this afternoon?

David went back to the non-fiction section where the old man had browsed. On the seventh shelf, four books from the left end, he saw an empty space about two inches wide. By it was another copy of "Famous Unsolved Crimes." The shop had carried two copies in stock, and naturally they'd been shelved side by side.

David couldn't quite reach the seventh shelf. He drew a stool and stood on it. It was barely possible, he thought, that Sloan had confused a chapter title with a main title. David took down the remaining copy of "Famous Unsolved Crimes" and turned to its table of contents.

It was headed "101 Unsolved Murders," and listed them as Cases 1 to 101. David ran his finger down the page—Case No. 1, New York; Case No. 2, London; Case No. 3, New Orleans—

Well down the table he came to: Case No. 77, Montreal.

He turned to its record in the book. The victim's name, he saw with a start, had been Wittenhouse.

SO there was a connection! No publisher named Wittenhouse, but a murder victim named Wittenhouse. A murder at Montreal!

The murderer's name wasn't given, naturally, because it was an unsolved crime. The date of it was sixteen years ago. Excitement gripped David. Over the telephone Professor Sloan had mentioned three identities: a *Man from Montreal,* presumably the murderer; *Wittenhouse,* definitely the victim; and *I. Hadley.* Who was I. Hadley?

David took the book to his desk. There he skimmed through the several pages devoted to Case No. 77. The name I. Hadley didn't appear.

The only Hadley known to David was Jim Hadley, one of his sister Celia's many persistent suitors. David knew them all, because he lived with Celia, and he liked Jim Hadley best of the lot. Occasionally Jim dropped in here on a pretense of looking at books, but David wasn't fooled by it. Big, friendly Jim Hadley was really coming in to chum up with Celia's kid brother. David was Celia's weakness, and Jim knew it. Making friends with David was a smart approach, if you wanted to make time with Celia.

But she could never marry a policeman, Celia said, not even if he was the smartest, best-looking inspector on the force.

Thought of his rank alerted David. *Inspector* Hadley. I. Hadley!

Was that it? Had Professor Sloan spoken to him in code? Was it a guarded request for David to send Inspector Hadley in connection with the Wittenhouse murder in Montreal? Why would he need to be cryptic? If he wanted the police, why couldn't he call them himself?

Had there been another man present in the room? A man who would object and intervene if Sloan, openly, summoned the police?

David dialed a number. "Precinct headquarters? This is David Murray at Zorn's bookshop. Could you ask Inspector Hadley to come over here right away?"

Jim Hadley came promptly. Big and solid and thirty, he sat down and listened to David's story.

"Thing to do," he decided at once, "is to deliver this book." He picked up "Byways in Psychology," which David had promised to send by messenger. "I'll be the messenger. Want to come along, Dave?"

"I wouldn't miss it," David said eagerly. He took the extra copy of "Famous Unsolved Crimes" back to its proper place on the shelf. Then he looked in at Adolph Zorn's office. "I'm leaving a little early, Mr. Zorn. Do you mind?"

Zorn's round, beetle-browed face took a frown. Definitely he minded. But he couldn't afford to say no. The entire good-will asset of his busines was wrapped up in David Murray. "I'll take over," he agreed grumpily, and came forward into the store.

Jim Hadley took David to his car, and they drove to Professor Sloan's apartment. It was on the first floor of a modest three-story walk-up.

The outer hall was quiet and deserted.

Professor Sloan admitted them, grimacing sheepishly when he saw David. "I suppose you thought I was crazy, young man." In his smoking-jacket and slippers, he appeared entirely placid and at ease.

"It didn't make sense," David admitted.

Sloan waved them to chairs. "The words I spoke over the phone," he explained, "weren't meant to impress you, David, but to impress a guest who was with me. They failed to impress him, so I know now my suspicion was wrong."

"What suspicion?" Jim Hadley asked bluntly.

"It's not important," the Professor evaded. "I simply took a little excursion down a psychological byway, and it led nowhere. So if you don't mind, I'd rather drop it."

Hadley's eyes flicked to a copy of "Famous Unsolved Crimes" on the table. "If it has to do with a crime," he persisted, "we can't drop it."

The Professor gave a resigned sigh. "I suppose if I don't tell you, you'll begin to suspect *me* of something."

David laughed. "Maybe we will, Professor."

"A few days ago," Sloan said, "I was in your bookshop, David. Only one other customer was there. He didn't see me, because I was kneeling behind a rack, examining titles on a low shelf. You were arranging a display up front."

"Who," David asked, "was the other customer?"

THE Professor smiled cryptically. "In fairness to him, we won't mention his name. He's an acquaintance of mine, a reputable citizen whom I respect. Let's call him X. I saw X do a strange thing. He took a book down from a high shelf, put something in it, restored the book to its place and left the shop. Curious, I went to the book to see what he'd put in it. It was a fifty-dollar bill. The book was one of two copies of 'Famous Unsolved Crimes.' The page where he put the bill was one entitled Case No. 77."

Hadley's eyes narrowed. David's opened wider. "But why," he gasped, "would he put money in a book?"

Sloan shrugged. "The money wasn't mine, of course, so I left it in the book. The only solution I could think of was petty blackmail. Later a blackmailer could take the bill from the book. Yet I couldn't conceive of X as a criminal. If he were making surreptitious payments, it could only be to quiet some minor scandal. The comparatively small sum of fifty dollars, as well as X's reputable character, convinced me it couldn't be anything worse."

"Why," Hadley questioned, "didn't you report it to the store?"

"Because X is a man I respect and I don't want to embarrass him. If he has indulged in some indiscreet romance, for instance, I'd rather not be the one to tell tales. However, the thing preyed on me as I left the shop. I turned into the delicatessen next door for a purchase or two. All the while the idea of petty blackmail kept churning in my mind. Its psychological angles intrigued me, so when I left the delicatessen I went back for another look at the book. The fifty-dollar bill was gone."

"Gone?" David echoed. "Who took it?"

"The blackmailer, I suppose," the Professor said. "Let's call him Y. But I was still sure that X's guilt is petty—something scandalous and embarrassing rather than criminal. Which is why I kept it to myself. Until this morning! This morning I went back and bought the extra copy of the book. At home with it, I made a study of Case No. 77. It concerns

a murder sixteen years ago at Montreal. The murder weapon was a midiron golf-club, found broken by the body. At that point I began to wonder. Could X himself have committed that murder? He lives in New York, and always has. But he travels occasionally, takes vacations. He's a competent golfer. He could have been in Montreal on a certain day sixteen years ago. Was it to tighten pressure on him, to keep him frightened and harassed, that Y ordered him to put money at a certain page in a certain book?"

After a moment of tension, Jim Hadley said: "Go on, Professor. What did you do then?"

"I decided to expose X, if the matter had anything to do with the crime at Montreal. If it did not, I would mind my own business."

"But how," David wondered, "could you decide whether it did or didn't?"

"By a simple psychological test," Sloan answered confidently. "So I made the test. I invited X here at three this afternoon. I seated him by a table on which I'd placed the broken halves of a midiron golf-club. Also on the table was the book, open at Case 77. As his eyes fell on these exhibits, I observed X closely. There was no reaction whatever. So I concluded that the nature of the book had nothing to do with it. Y could merely have told him to put the money at random in the fourth book from the left end of a particular shelf."

Hadley stoked his pipe, nodding absorbedly. "If X is guilty in Case 77," he agreed, "it should have got a rise out of him."

"It definitely didn't," repeated Sloan. "And just then my phone rang. It was David, here. So I used the opportunity to clinch my test. I spoke the terms: *Man from Montreal; Wittenhouse;* and the name of a well-known local police officer. The face of X remained passive. My shot in the dark had missed."

Hadley said: "And you decline to identify X?"

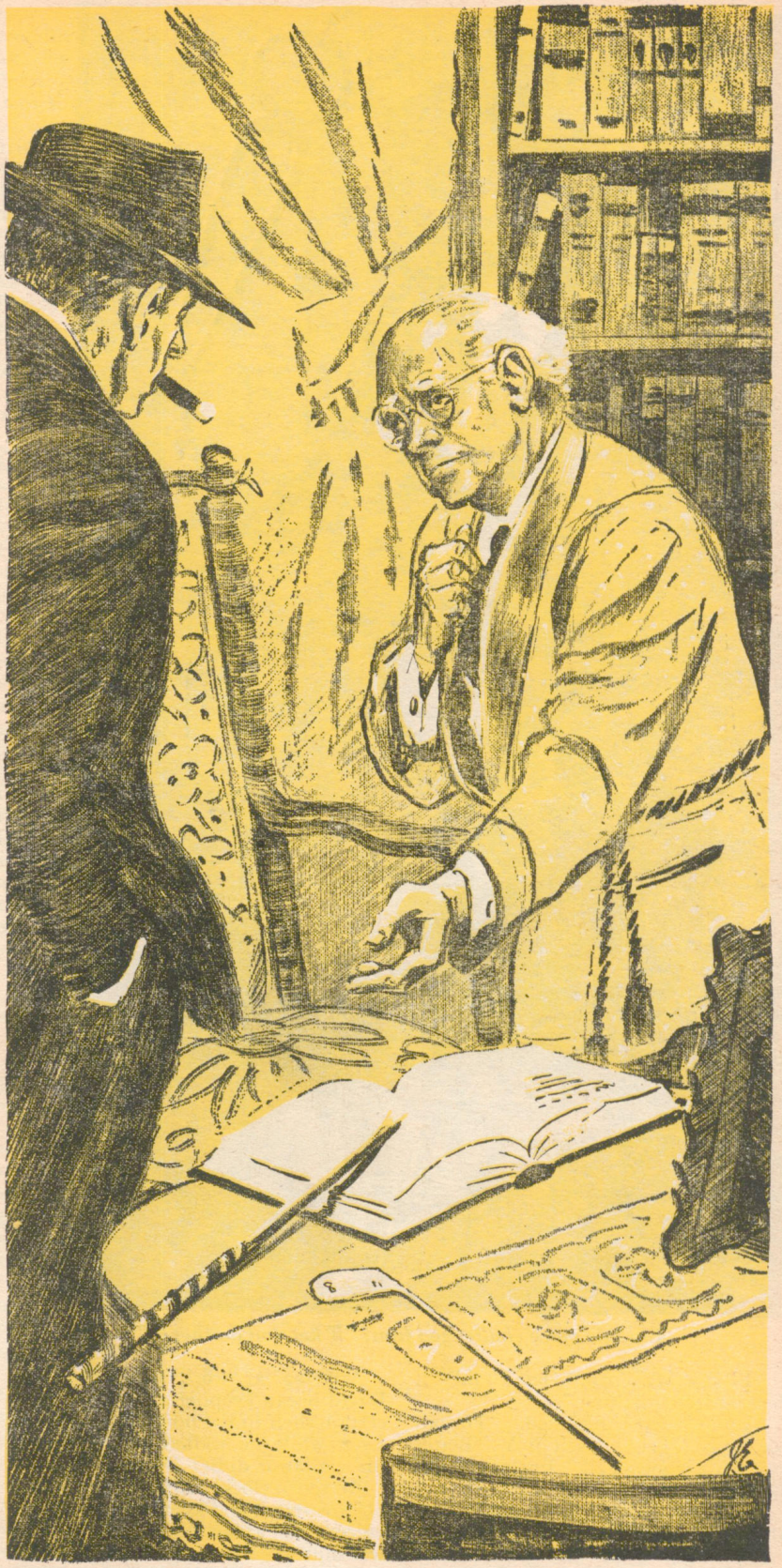
"I do."

"Okay, Professor. There's another way to find out. Come on, David."

JIM HADLEY drove David home. As David got out of the car, the Inspector said: "Watch the book. If it happened once, it'll happen again."

"You mean one of my customers is making another customer pay by the week, or month?"

"Or maybe fifty bucks every payday," Jim guessed. "X could be a man of small income. So Y can't stick him for more than fifty at a time. If you'll play cat-and-mouse, maybe you'll see X put money in the book and Y take it out."



"As his eyes fell on these exhibits, I observed X closely. There was no reaction whatever."

A brittle voice challenged him: "What you do there?"

"I'll ask Mr. Zorn," David said, "if he's noticed anything."

"Don't," Jim cautioned. "For all we know, Zorn himself is Y. Better not tip anyone at all. Just watch the book."

The Inspector looked wistfully at the door. David grinned, and said: "Sis is out of town. She's on a lecture tour."

"Oh!" Jim said, disappointed. "Well, so long, pal. And keep your eye on that book." . . .

Arriving at work next morning, David began keeping a wary eye on a certain shelf in the non-fiction section. Even while he waited on customers, his vigilance didn't slacken.

At ten o'clock his telephone rang. He answered, and heard Jim Hadley's voice: "I'm at Sloan's apartment. He was murdered last night. Strangled."

His words, as their impact shocked David, rushed on: "Don't say a thing to anyone. You don't know anything except what you read in the papers. *But keep watching that book!* Understand?"

"I can't," David said, "when I go out to lunch."

"When will that be?"

"Twelve-thirty till one."

"Leave that to me. I'll be there at twelve-thirty."

When Hadley appeared at twelve-thirty, a thin man in a baggy suit followed him in. The thin man began browsing along the bookshelves. "One of my men," Jim whispered to David. "He doesn't know what he wants, and won't make up his mind till you come back at one. Here. Put this back where it came from."

He gave David a package. In it he found the copy of "Famous Unsolved Crimes" Professor Sloan had purchased yesterday. David put it back on the seventh shelf of a certain section, beside its mate there. Zorn strolled out of his office to take charge while David was off to lunch.

"I could eat a bite myself, pal," Jim said to David. "Let's go."

IT was the biggest excitement that had ever touched David's life. He went out walking on air. Wait till Celia heard about it! In a restaurant booth, Jim Hadley said to him: "I've got a hunch."

"About who X is?" David asked breathlessly.

"No. My hunch is that X's contacts with Y are blind. I mean X doesn't know who Y is. Blackmail is risky, so Y didn't announce his identity to X. But by phone or typed letter, he convinced X that he knows and can prove an old guilt in Montreal. *'Put $50 in a certain spot,'* Y instructed X, *'at certain regular intervals, and I won't tell.'*"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because it fits. It wraps up a motive for X to kill Sloan. When Sloan made that test yesterday, X jumped to the conclusion that Sloan himself was Y. 'Here,' X thought, 'is the rat who's been bleeding me. But I can't handle him now, because it's daytime and maybe someone saw me come in. Safer if I come back tonight, when it's dark."

"But that means," David said, "that X won't put any more payments in the book."

"That's right," Jim agreed. "X thinks Y is dead, so he won't put any more payments in the book. *But the real Y doesn't know that.* Y will read in tonight's paper that a Professor Sloan was found murdered in his apartment. There'll be no reason for Y to connect it with his own deal with X. So when the next payment comes due, Y will look in the book for it. Clear? So you keep on watching the book."

"But it isn't Y we really want. It's X."

"If we catch Y, we can charge him with blackmail and high-pressure X's name out of him. For my money, Y can be that tightwad boss of yours, Zorn."

"But Mr. Zorn," David objected, "has a key to the shop. He could come back at night to look in the book."

"You've a key yourself, haven't you? Let me borrow it."

David passed over his store key. "I'll have duplicates made," Hadley said. . . .

David's life, during the next several days, settled into a routine of watching. Sometimes the shop was filled with customers, with Zorn helping him. Sometimes he was alone there. Always he managed to keep an eye on anyone who went near that particular shelf.

On the third day a publisher's salesman called, and David ushered him back to Zorn's office. Zorn was hunched over his desk, absorbed in the morning paper. On the front page was a follow-up on the Sloan murder. David had read it himself. He knew it didn't mention the X-Y mystery angle, or anything about a book called "Famous Unsolved Crimes."

"This Prof was a customer of ours, wasn't he?" Zorn asked as David appeared.

"One of our best, Mr. Zorn." David introduced the salesman and went back to his work. . . .

It was a morning later when a woman looked at the book. She was a tall, angular woman, so tall she was able to take "Famous Unsolved Crimes" down without using the stool. David's eye was on her. But he saw that the woman only looked at the title. She didn't open the book. After putting it back, she took down another one several feet to the right. This one she opened at the middle, and thumbed a few pages before restoring it to the shelf.

David closed in soon enough to see that it was "Annals of Scotland Yard." "May I interest you in something, Mrs. Wilson?" David asked. Jim Hadley had coached him how to find out a stranger's name.

"I think not," the customer said curtly. "And my name's not Wilson. It's Cooper." She left the shop.

AT noon David reported it to Jim Hadley.

"Yeh," Jim admitted thoughtfully, "Y could be a woman. Don't think she's that one, though." He returned David's store key. "I had a duplicate made for the man who's staking out in the shop every night. Just in case Y is Zorn. If he's not, he's probably one of your regular browsers. Just keep watching that book, pal."

David was getting a big thrill out of these man-to-man confidences. It was great to be called "pal" by a man like Jim Hadley.

He watched all afternoon, but no one went near the book. It was the same all the next morning.

"What stumps me," Inspector Hadley fretted when he met David at noon, "is that we've checked up on all Sloan's friends, and none of them seems to fit X."

"Professor Sloan," David reminded him, "didn't say X was a friend. He said, 'X is an acquaintance whom I respect.' "

"But if he wasn't a close friend," Hadley argued, "how could Sloan get him over to his apartment so readily that afternoon? You can call up a friend and say, 'Come on over, Bill,' and he'll probably come. But you can't do that with just any casual acquaintance."

DAVID went back to the bookshop. During the mid-afternoon lull he found himself alone. Then Zorn came catfooting forward, and was at his side before David noticed him. David glanced quickly past him at the book. It was in place, all right. "Better advertise this," Zorn said. He handed David a memo, and went back to his cubbyhole.

The memo merely said that a well-known author would be in the shop on a day next week to autograph copies of his current best-seller. During the minute it took David to read it, his eyes were not on the critical shelf.

When he looked, all breath was shocked from him.

The book was gone!

One copy was there, but the other wasn't. The space four books from the left end of the seventh shelf was blank.

David hurried there for a close look. Yes, the book had disappeared within the last minute. And only Zorn had passed by it.

Quickly David stepped to the phone and called Hadley. "Inspector Hadley," he said excitedly, "please come right over. The book's gone. Mr. Zorn took it back to his office."

"I'm on my way," Jim said, and hung up with a snap.

David's eyes shifted back to the blank space on the shelf.

But it wasn't blank any more. The book was again in place.

And not a soul was in sight!

As the truth flashed over David, he dashed from the shop. Ten steps down the walk, he turned in at a store door. The sign over it said: "Pierre LeBlanc, Curios and Antiques."

The name could be French-Canadian. Pierre LeBlanc, sixteen years ago, could have witnessed a crime in Montreal.

The store was deserted. David hurried back through it, over thick carpeting which gave no sound, to a rear office. As he approached the office, he heard someone within dial a telephone.

Then came a sharply complaining voice, LeBlanc's: "You didn't come across this week. I just looked. Don't try to hold out on me, Doc."

David backed fearfully away. So X was a doctor! That was why Professor Sloan could call him to his apartment so surely. When you ask your doctor to come, he usually comes.

Against a blank wall to his left David saw a low stool. It seemed to serve no purpose there. David mounted it, and his hand groped over the polished pine wall about seven feet above the floor. Then he saw a rectangular crack—an inconspicuous panel about four inches wide by twelve tall. LeBlanc, he realized, must have cut it with a keyhole saw at this carefully selected spot.

David got a fingernail in the crack and pulled open a four-by-twelve-inch hinged door. His hand darted through and touched a book—a book on his own shop shelf. He drew it to him, stood there on the stool staring at its title—"Famous Unsolved Crimes."

A brittle voice challenged him: "What you do there?" It was Pierre LeBlanc, charging toward David with a pair of antique fire-tongs in hand.

David wasn't a scrapper. Physical combat had been completely out of his life. His only advantages now were that he stood on a stool, and that he too had something hard and heavy in his hands.

Frantically he crashed it down on LeBlanc's head. Just as he did it, the fire-tongs hit his own head. Dizziness claimed David, and he toppled from the stool.

THE next he knew was the feel of a strong comforting arm; Jim Hadley was kneeling by him. Two uniformed policemen, near by, were pinioning LeBlanc.

Hadley asked gently: "You all right, pal?"

"Sure," David said.

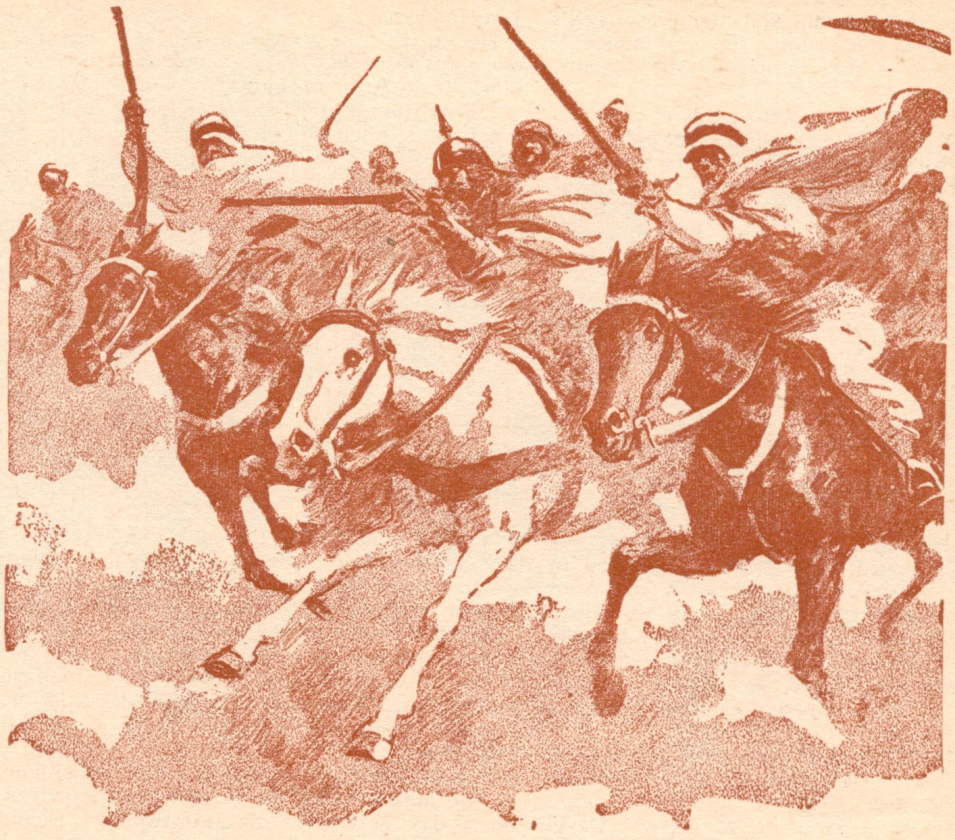
"Is that X?" Hadley asked, thumbing toward LeBlanc.

"No," David said, getting to his feet. "That's Y. X is a Doctor Moore. A Doctor Moore came in to look at books sometimes. If you'll look him up, I think you'll find he was Professor Sloan's doctor."

Hadley looked at a heavy book on the floor. Then his gaze shifted to a small open panel in the wall. "I get it," he muttered.

Then he looked at David's pale face, and worry appeared on his own. "She's not gonna like it, Dave—me getting you into this!"

David grinned. "You mean Sis? Don't give it a thought, pal. The way I'll tell her, you saved my life."



They were coming at the gallop, with shrill cries of "Allah!" Two of the foremost riders wore the Mameluke panoply.

Lady in Chain Mail

FABRE twisted the ring from his finger and held it aloft, laughing, so that the sunset rays struck a green spark from the stone in it.

"The emerald of Ibrahim Kachef Bey, comrades!" he exclaimed lightly. "Look well at it! Today the Corsican himself offered me ten thousand francs for it. I refused."

The other two men received his careless words with grave concern. Duroc the geologist, a rocky-faced cynic of forty, spoke out in his blunt way:

"A mistake, Pierre. You might have built your fortune on that ring. Bonaparte is an Italian; he cherishes a grudge or a rebuff. And the General-in-chief of the Army of Egypt can be a bad enemy to a mere member of the Commission of Arts and Sciences."

"That's true," assented Bonnard, the historian. He was an elderly man, sad-eyed, burned-out, suffering with a liver complaint; a kindly fellow. "The ring cost you nothing. You took it from that dead Mameluke Bey at the Pyramids battle. Sell it. What good is it to you?"

"None, perhaps, but I'm fond of it." Fabre regarded them with a glint of mockery in his stubborn dark eyes. "Yes, I'm in love with the emerald. And that woman sent again to me this morning, wanting to buy it back, asking for an interview. The dead Mameluke was her father, Ibrahim Kachef Bey. I'd like to see her. Who knows? Anything's possible here, where our Corsican has become a sultan preaching the creed of Islam! She may be young and beautiful, eh?"

His words drew laughter and nods of comprehension.

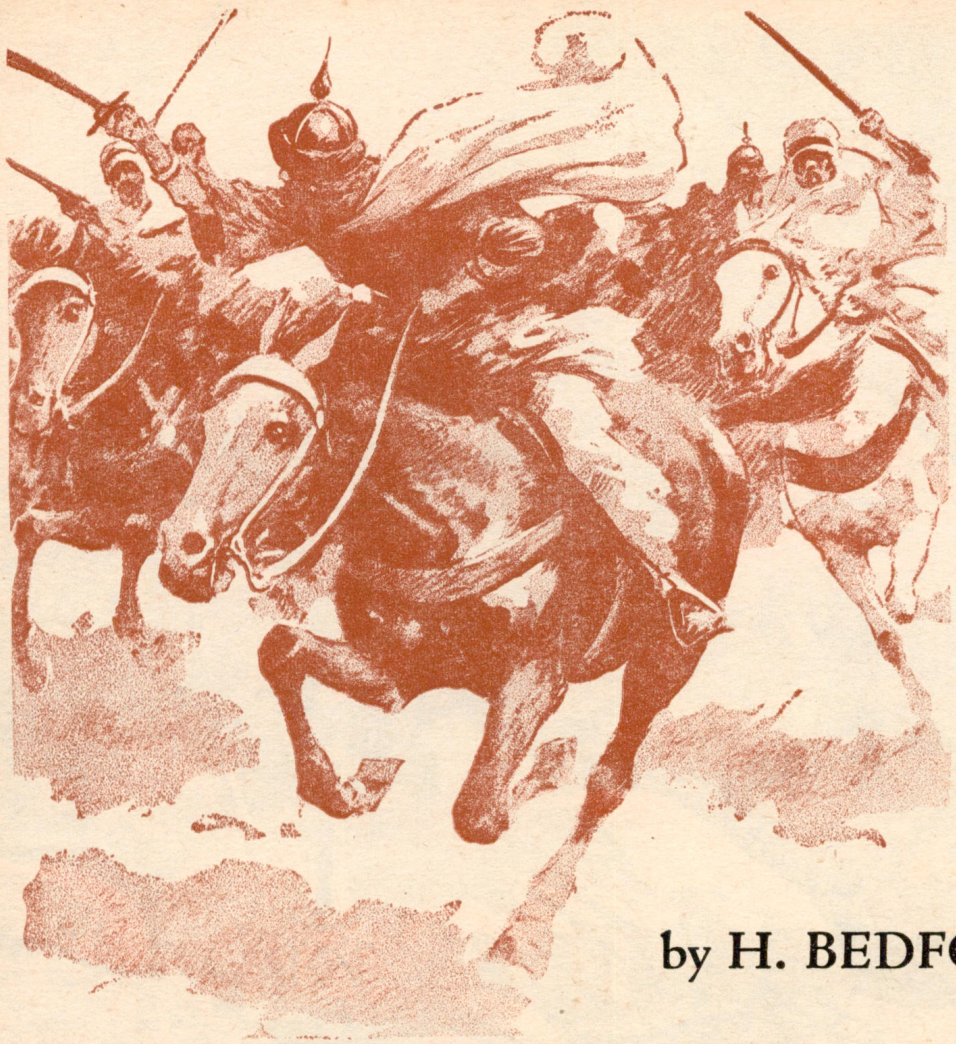
"I don't blame you," Bonnard said. "It's a young man's war, so make the most of your chances, by all means."

"You're a lucky devil, and I envy you," put in Duroc, giving his ferocious mustaches a twist. He was really the tenderest of men, and the mustaches pleased him by lending him an entirely false air of bloodthirsty aggression. "The stone is marvelous, absolutely unique. And historic as well. Let me see it once more, will you?"

The three were sitting in the coolness of sunset, in the garden of their small requisitioned house just off the Ezbekiya, where the palaces of the Mameluke Beys were now occupied by Bonaparte and his various headquarters staffs. This was a pleasant little house and garden, redolent with orange trees; and these three men, who wore no uniforms, were in luxury—the luxury of conquerors. They were not, most distinctly not, fighting men.

They were members of the Commission of Arts and Sciences, a hundred and seventy in number, summoned by Bonaparte from all the savants of France to accompany the Egyptian expedition. Pierre Marie Fabre was a minor member in the department of native manufacturers. In the fighting before Cairo was taken, when savants shouldered muskets like common soldiers, and everyone was looting the gorgeously arrayed Mamelukes, he had obtained the emerald ring from one of the dead cavaliers—no less a person than Ibrahim Kachef Bey, as he had since learned.

That had been in July. Now it was October, and easy conquest and



FROM THE HAND OF A DEAD MAMELUKE AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE PYRAMIDS, A CIVILIAN SCIENTIST WITH NAPOLEON'S ARMY TOOK THE SPHINX EMERALD. . . . AND THOUGH THE MAMELUKE'S MILITANT DAUGHTER OFFERED TO BUY BACK THE GEM AT A PRICE HIGH INDEED, SWIFT TRAGEDY FOLLOWED.

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

loot had shattered the morale of the expedition. General Menou, father of the Tricolor, had turned Mohammedan and had established himself at Alexandria with a choice harem; Bonaparte purred to his native title of Sultan el Kebir. Cairo was plundered of Mameluke weapons and curios and treasures. But the emerald ring obtained by Fabre was the prize of all. The emerald was not large and was of poor color, but it was unique.

Duroc and others who knew precious stones had established that it was the Sphinx Emerald, a stone famed from ancient times, figuring in history and romance. Now, in the red sunset, the geologist took the ring, held a lens over the stone, and stared into its heart. He was openly fascinated by what he saw. His features changed and softened; his hard eyes warmed; he spoke almost dreamily.

"Richelieu, the great Cardinal, once owned this stone," he said. "He willed it to his niece, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon—and then it vanished. That was its last appearance; what became of it has never been established."

"I've read of it," said Bonnard, taking the ring and examining it with great attention. "Look! Here inside the circlet is engraving, nearly effaced!"

"I know. It's Arabic. Marcel translated it for me," Fabre put in. "It reads: *'Hasan el-Maghrebi made me'*. Some goldsmith in Morocco, evidently. The work is very crude. It's a hundred and fifty years since Richelieu died, so the stone must have gone from France to Morocco, thence here to Egypt. Pity it can't speak and tell its story."

"It does speak, though not in words," said Duroc. "A man could lose his head over the emerald. Any woman would, assuredly. No one seems to perceive the same things in the stone, either. Wonderful!"

"Not at all," said Bonnard. "I can explain it quite simply."

HE puffed at his pipe for a moment. Then he began to speak, telling that the unique feature of this stone, which must have come in ancient times from the emerald mines in Upper Egypt, was the flaw that it contained. A flawless emerald seldom or never exists. In this stone the flaws were many; when examined under a glass, or even to the naked eye, they took on the aspect of the Sphinx in profile. It was no mere fancy but an exact duplication—startlingly exact, one of Nature's curious quirks.

"The riddle of the Sphinx is no secret," the historian related. "It represents the Mind—that unknown, wonderful, inexplicable thing we call the Mind. Here in this bit of green beryl we behold a Sphinx amid green fields and hills and landscapes. To some, it is amazing and fascinating beyond belief. Others find it repellent and repulsive. Others find in it a beauty so poignant, so exquisite, that it moves them to tears. Why is this? Because, like the Mind itself, it conveys a sense of the beautiful, the evil, the slippery and evasive—such is its appeal to the human imagination. Each one beholds in it some quality of his own mind. It speaks differently to each."

"The General," said Fabre, "declared that it spelled fame and glory."

Duroc uttered his raucous laugh. "To the Corsican, the greatest thing in the world, the only thing worth while, is glory—his own, of course. The Mameluke woman who pursues you, Pierre—why does she want it?"

"Her messenger said it was a talisman, a good-luck charm, which her father had received from his ancestors."

"Precisely! Any woman would go insane over the stone. Beware of her, I warn you! The Arabs believe an emerald renders all magic powerless. But beryl does have some curious properties—electric, for instance. The sixfold character of the crystal has an extraordinary effect on the refraction and light dispersion—"

The discussion was interrupted by the arrival of an aide from headquarters with orders for Fabre. He opened the sealed sheet, headed with the vignette of the Commission. He was ordered to leave Cairo in the morning with an escort of six men of the 12th Light Foot, and to proceed to the village of El Bakri, some miles to the east and south, there to make an exhaustive report on the manufacture of qulla jars, for which the place was renowned.

There was nothing unusual in this order. The Commission was composed of writers, sculptors, mathematicians, chemists, men of all the arts and sciences; its purpose was to prepare for the colonization of Egypt and the utilization of all its resources. Already the members were being scattered over the whole country on various missions; powder factories were being started, and commercial objectives of all sorts were under way.

"Well, I'll be glad to get away for a while," commented Fabre. "But what in the devil's name are qulla jars?"

Bonnard chuckled. They're the porous water-jars used everywhere in Egypt, made by a secret process. I believe their amazing porosity is gained by mixing certain ashes with the clay. It's an enormous traffic. The people of that village have a monopoly on the manufacture—the jars aren't made there in mass, but the villagers go out and take charge of the various factories, as experts. You're lucky to get away; things are shaping up for trouble, here in the city."

Duroc's laugh cackled, agreeing. "Didn't I say the Corsican was a bad enemy? He knows well enough a revolt is coming, and hopes for it, to

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

"Since we cannot speak as friends," she said abruptly, "let us talk as enemies under truce."

establish his own authority in blood! It'll suit his purposes. What's it to him if all the Frenchmen not in barracks here get their throats cut? This is your reward for refusing him the emerald, Pierre."

"Absurd! He's too great a man to be so petty—"

"Great? Bah! You're a young idealist, full of wind and fine theories," Duroc said acidly. "The Corsican is out for himself, first, last and foremost. At Toulon, a soldier beside him was struck by a cannon-ball, drenching him with blood. It gave him the itch, and he's had it ever since. That's why he always sticks a hand inside his coat, so he can scratch his chest. It gave him an itch for glory, too, at anyone's expense—"

In a burst of laughter, the three broke off their discussion and went in to dinner. Nobody in the expedition had any illusions about their leader.

True, Pierre Marie Fabre was young, barely twenty-three, but this was an era of youth. In the six-year-old Republic, all the young men had come to the top. Darkly eager, impetuous, thin-nostriled, Fabre had plunged into the Egyptian adventure like the rest of them, careless of consequences, enthralled by the glamour of it.

His family, a wealthy manufacturing one of Lyons, had been swept away in the Revolution. At the general amnesty he had returned, alone, to build up his career anew. A friend had got him this place, as an expert in manufacturing, and he was building his hopes on the issue of the expedition, which promised fame and fortune to all concerned. But youth was

a perilous thing in this army of conquest, just the same.

He had been far from frank with his two comrades. Not only had he been in touch with Amina, the daughter of Ibrahim Kachef Bey, but he had an appointment to visit her this very evening, on the business of the emerald ring. A slave was to pick him up here and conduct him to her house. Where it was, he had no idea; not far, since it was one of the lesser Mameluke palaces, and these were all grouped nearby.

Risky, of course, and therefore all the more attractive. Hatred for the French was mounting to fever heat in Cairo, fanned white-hot by Turkish agents; tension was increasing, and Bedouins by the thousand were said to be quietly flooding into the city to augment trouble. Any revolt must be a bloody affair, since most of the army was off on detached missions or quartered in barracks outside the city.

THE situation was not helped by the avidity of everyone, from the headquarters staff down, for wine and women. Blondes were no rarity here. The Mameluke ranks had for generations been recruited from Circassian, Georgian and other slaves of white skin, while the Arabs themselves were white as anyone. So the army was hugely enjoying itself, careless of any future reckoning. Yet, as Fabre well judged, a reckoning was imminent.

When, at the appointed time that evening, Fabre stepped out into the street, he was shaved and spruced up hopefully, hat pulled over eyes, and long green riding-coat buttoned to the chin, a small pistol in his pocket and a stout silver-headed cane in hand. A dark figure awaited him—the Kachef slave, a pleasant brown fellow who spoke French. They set off at once, the slave leading the way. Fabre had no fears whatever. The unknown lady had sent an oath upon the Koran that he would have safe-conduct, and he believed her.

Dimly lighted, tortuous narrow streets, strange speech and shapes on all sides, carven cedar balconies overhead echoing with voices, drunken soldiers singing, Nubian flutes and drums making unearthly noises, intent crowds around story-tellers and magicians, lighted mosque-entrances hinting at mystery; tiny open-fronted bazaars thronged with buyers—all very glamorous, no doubt, but Fabre could sense the burning hatred in Turk and Arab eyes as he passed. It troubled him little. These were the conquered; he was of the conquerors, whose artillery yawned from the towering citadel above. These people needed a hard, sharp, bitter lesson of blood that would properly cow them, and they would get it if they gave the Corsican the least excuse.

Fabre and his guide came to the house. Stables occupied the ground floor—to the now vanished Mameluke cavaliers, horses had been a large part of life. Fabre was led into a dimly lighted courtyard and garden, from which stairs mounted to the upper floors of the house, stairs with carven marble balustrades and inlaid cedar screens. On the second floor he was taken into a corridor, and on to a room of some size. The slave took his riding-coat and hat, then left him. No one else had appeared about the place.

Accustomed as he had become to Eastern luxury, Fabre found the room astonishing. Painted beams, cedar lattices, tiled floor and walls, hanging lamps of silver, Persian rugs and pillows, ivory-inlaid tabourettes the shape and size of the huge French army drums, golden dishes of cakes and of sweetmeats, Turkish water-pipes ablaze with jewels—Fabre stood gawking around until, at a slight sound, he turned to see his hostess entering. He bowed.

"Good evening, monsieur," she said in French. "I am Amina, daughter of Ibrahim Bey. Be seated; I am glad to see you."

"I am honored, Lella Amina," he replied, using the Arabic form of address.

She half sat, half reclined, among the pillows. Fabre made a pile of them for himself and sat cross-legged, native fashion. She smiled faintly, helped herself to a sweetmeat, relaxed and studied him.

IN return, Fabre studied her; both of them were frankly curious. He noted her reddish hair and very white skin; a thin gauze veil half covered her face; a magnificent Kashmir shawl was looped about her shoulders; and be-

"So? The city is alive with spies. Stores of arms and powder have been collected. And you imagine all this is news to me?"

neath this he glimpsed, to his amazement, the links of a steel shirt that fell to her hips. Noting his glance, she touched the links.

"The daughter of Ibrahim Kachef was trained to bear arms," she said. "I was as a son to him. My great sorrow is that I was not at his side when he fell. You Franks will yet find that I can use my weapons."

"They would overcome us at the first encounter," Fabre said gallantly. "I think the name Amina means *radiance*? It was well bestowed, lady. Such eyes would put our cannon to silence."

The flattery seemed to please her. Indeed, Fabre half meant his words, for her features were surprising. Her eyes were blue, intensely sharp and bright. While not beautiful, her face, like her voice, was eloquent of strength and character; there was no Oriental languor about her. He could well believe that she could bear arms like any cavalier.

"Since we cannot speak as friends," she said abruptly, "let us talk as enemies under truce, each trusting in the honor of the other, without lies or pretense."

"As you wish, Lella Amina," assented Fabre. "You know my name. I am here as your guest. Must we indeed be enemies?"

"That is for you to choose," she rejoined coolly. "Whether you depart as you came, or stay to make this house your home, is for you to say. You know why I brought you here; it was not for yourself—though you are certainly a pleasing sort of man—but for the ring on your hand. You are here to discuss business."

Fabre blinked slightly. He had anticipated Oriental parley and evasions. He was by no means averse to a romantic adventure, and had rather taken this for granted; but her direct speech and blunt overture, her lack of any preliminaries or small-talk, quite took him aback and left him disconcerted. Duroc, he thought, would have sourly enjoyed this interview.

He put out his hand, and from his finger twisted the ring—a massive, even clumsy circlet of gold, holding the single stone—and held it up.

"Is this so important a thing, lady?" he demanded.

"To me, yes," came her blunt reply. "You have worn it; have lived with it—come, be honest! Do you consider it important, or would you part with it lightly?"

He nodded thoughtfully. "I understand. Yes, I am not anxious to part with it, though many, even our General, have tried to obtain it from me. It's mine, and I keep it."

Her lips curled scornfully.

"Yours? Others have thought the same—my father thought it his. The Moor who stole it from the Sultan of Morocco and brought it to Egypt, thought it his. I say it is mine—whether in my possession or not, it belongs to me!" She checked herself.

"It is really a famous emerald, monsieur," she went on, less excitedly. "Some call it the jewel of desire. It is said that the Prophet Mohammed—on whom be blessings!—captured the shadow of the Sphinx and confined it in the stone. One beholds things in it. The Sphinx is plainly there, other things less plainly. It is a ring of great magic power. It is worth a high price, which I am prepared to pay. I would not lower myself by cheapening it like a bazaar merchant. I must have it at any cost—and shall."

"Oh!" said Fabre. He resented the pride, the dominance of her; the force and directness of her words nettled him. She was not asking, but commanding, as though any bargaining or pleading were beneath her. An extraordinary woman, a most disturbing woman.

"Your father died under French bullets; its magic power did not save him," he said quietly. "I do not believe in magic, Lella Amina. I do like this emerald, and no one can take it from me."

"That too has been said by others," she replied significantly. "You took it as loot, and as loot it may be taken from you in turn. But let us not come to angry words. My purpose is to purchase the ring from you. I presume you're willing to sell, at a price?"

"Frankly, I'm not sure," he made slow response. "It fascinates me. I have refused large sums for it. I like it. Therefore I can understand what it means to you and why you want it." He paused. "Still, I might part with it—to you. Who knows? I don't know yet what you offer, lady."

SHE sat looking at him in silence for a long moment; a delicate scent of perfume drifted upon the room from her. Fabre perceived that she was earnest, intent, deadly serious. Somehow the fact impressed him with singular force, made him realize that this interview was no light matter, but grave indeed, at least in her eyes.

"All you Franks, from your General down to your camp cooks, are interested in only two things," she said. "Plunder and—shall I say love? Well, here is wealth." She swept her hand around at the room. "There is more. Ask what you will, and it is yours. Here am I; ask what you will. If I do not please you, there are other women in plenty who can be provided. Your price will be paid. What more is necessary? Give me the ring. You shall have what you will."

Fabre was actually shocked in every nerve as he listened to this starkly realistic offer. Here was no spiced ad-

venture, no glamour, no romance. This girl—for he guessed her to be young—calmly offered her wealth, herself, whatever he desired, in exchange for the ring. It was mere ugly barter; his compliance, his devotion to the grossest material things, was taken for granted.

He flushed angrily. His youthful ideals of romance, his French sense of gallantry, were offended; and in consequence he recoiled where an older man would have considered. His dark eyes sparkled angrily as he made reply.

"You have much to learn about us Franks, Lady Amina. This emerald arouses desire, emotion, makes appeal to the soul; the Sphinx crouching within its heart speaks to the mind and spirit. Can such a marvel be bought like a quarter of beef? Hardly. Beautiful as you may be, desirable as you admittedly are, tempting as might be your wealth, the exchange you propose is a shabby one."

She straightened up, staring with incredulous eyes.

"You cannot refuse! I've offered everything a man could desire!"

"Not at all," he said coldly, perceiving her utter lack of comprehension. "You offer too much, and not enough. You cannot buy things of the spirit with things material. You offer possession, but it is only love that makes possession worth while."

"You are absurd!" She flung back her veil impatiently; her blue eyes flamed. "What you say is nonsense!"

"It is what this jewel says, not I." He tapped the emerald as he spoke. "Nonsense? From your viewpoint, perhaps; not from mine, lady."

She tensed; her muscles gathered; angry passion suffused her face; and for one instant Fabre thought she was about to spring at him. Then, abruptly, she struck the cushions with her fist and relaxed, and even nodded calmly at him.

"Very well, monsieur; you speak like a fool, but I think you are an honest fool," she said, her voice restrained and quiet. "I have still another offer

Fabre lifted the pistol calmly. He would make sure of this fellow, anyhow!

to make. I offer you something even greater, added to the price I have already set before you—the greatest thing of all."

"Yes?" he responded, as she paused. "And what is that?"

"Your life."

He surveyed her, puzzled. "I do not understand, lady."

"We are enemies, monsieur." She lowered her voice. "I want that ring. I must have it! Well, I might threaten you. I might say that I shall regain that ring from your dead hand, as you took it from my father's hand. Instead, I offer you your life. Under my protection it is safe. Accept, and you have nothing to fear."

Fabre smiled. "But my dear lady, as it is I have nothing to fear—"

"Oh, you imbecile!" she exploded almost frantically. "Within three days every Christian in Cairo will be dead! You Franks, all the other Christians here—not one of you remains alive! Is it nothing to you, that I offer you safety?"

He understood, and a chill went through him.

"Nothing." He rose, slipped the ring on his finger, and bowed to her. "Our interview, I think, is ended. I shall not part with the ring. I do not agree with you, Lella Amina, that we are enemies. No Frenchman can accept a woman as an enemy—much less so young and beautiful and gifted a woman. Perhaps we can meet again as friends, and I shall look forward to that happy day."

The finality of his decision was obvious. She made no response, except to clap her hands.

The slave who had conducted Fabre hither came into the room, bringing his hat and riding-coat. Amina curtly ordered him to take the Frank safely home. Fabre departed, bowing to her again from the doorway; she ignored him.

He followed his guide back to the little house he called home, fed the slave and dismissed him. Fabre found that his two comrades had gone to at-

tend a meeting of the Institute of Egypt, Bonaparte's pet society formed from the savants and leaders of the Commission of Arts and Sciences. Both Duroc and Bonnard were members. Fabre was not.

FIVE minutes later Fabre was hurrying across the open square of the Ezbekiya to the palace of Elfi Bey, now occupied by Bonaparte. The corporal of the guard sent in his name, and he was conducted to the terrace above the garden. The General and a few of his chiefs were gathered here—General Dupuy, in command of the city, Murat, Dumas, Marmont, Reynier, Cafarelli and others.

"You seek me, citizen?" Bonaparte came up to him. The Republican form of address, soon to be cast aside with the Republic, was still in vogue.

"Yes, Citizen General," Fabre replied. "I learned something tonight of such urgent importance that—"

"Well, then, speak it out!" broke in the scrawny, untidy, sallow little man in his impatient way. "What is this urgent news?"

"It is that within three days the natives expect revolt. Also, a general massacre of all Christians in the city. This comes from a sure source, Citizen General."

The others had gathered around—Dumas, dark mulatto features alive with interest; Reynier, fisting the huge jeweled Mameluke saber he affected; Cafarelli and Dupuy serious and gravely intent. Bonaparte eyed his visitor frowningly.

"So? The city is alive with Turkish agents and English spies. Desert Bedouins are filtering in by the thousand. Stores of arms and powder have been collected. And you imagine all this is news to me?"

"It comes within three days—"

"How do you know this—whence comes this certain information?"

"From the daughter of Ibrahim Kachef Bey."

"She vouchsafed it for love of you, perhaps?" sneered the General.

Fabre flushed. "No, Citizen General. She let slip the words in anger. She was trying to make me part with the ring I had taken from the dead Ibrahim Bey."

"Yes, I remember you and your ring—the magic emerald, eh?" Bonaparte's scrawny features darkened with anger. "You think she let slip the words? Bah! It was done deliberately. These rascals would like nothing better than to learn my plans, my dispositions. Within three weeks, perhaps, will come the revolt—not within three days. I thank you for the information, citizen, but we shall not detain you."

With this cool dismissal, Bonaparte turned his back.

Fabre bowed and departed, stung to bitter anger, but wordless. Let the cursed Corsican think what he liked! Duty was done.

"Obviously, Bonaparte detests me," thought Fabre, hastening home. "He's not forgotten my refusal to let him have the ring. Duroc was right to warn me; I've made an enemy, and a bad one. Well, devil take him!"

Pierre Marie Fabre shared the opinion of many in the army about the Corsican, whose ambition had aroused the fear and hatred of the old revolutionary soldiers of '93. However, upon reaching home he dismissed the whole thing from his mind. Lighting the lamp in the living-room the three friends shared in common, he placed on the table the battered microscope Duroc had brought with him to Egypt.

Even for this day of budding science it was not much of a microscope, being of feeble power, but at least it would enlarge objects appreciably, and this was all Fabre desired at the moment. He placed it beside the light, settled down comfortably to it, took the ring from his finger and placed the emerald beneath the lens-tube.

He focused; now as always, the vision of splendor that opened to his eye made him catch his breath. This fleck of green beryl, cut *en cabochon*, became a landscape of marvel, shot athwart by the shadowy cleavage of its flaws. Those flaws rose, in the center, into the perfect image of the Sphinx seen in profile—a chance formation, of course, yet exact, even to the forepaws—a vivid green shape in a world of green mirage touched with dazzling pinnacles and points of light.

An uneven landscape it was, with clustering hills and precipices, darker depths, strange shimmering, glowing colors caused by the natural dichroism of the crystal. The minute jagged flaws and singularly angular bubbles characteristic of true emerald became monstrous shapes of dispersed radiance. With every shift of light, one beheld new vistas and glories that plucked at the imagination and swept it afar.

What Fabre saw in the stone, beyond that one stately looming figure of the Sphinx, he himself could not say precisely. Like the splendors seen in dream, these were gone as they came, and left only a sense of intense fascination and gripping illusion. To tear himself away from the spectacle he found difficult, when Bonnard and Duroc returned.

"Hello! At it again, eh?" Duroc exclaimed. "I don't blame you. That damned stone holds a terrific fascination."

"Would you like to have it?" Fabre asked, smiling.

"Name of a black dog! Of course. Who wouldn't? But I've never tried to pry you loose from it."

"You're the only person who hasn't—except Bonnard, there."

"Bah! I wouldn't have the accursed thing; there's evil in it," said the historian, laughing. "What you people find in it, I can't see. But Duroc may cut your throat for it, some night. Well, what news?"

"None that's good. I was warned that the natives expect a revolt within three days, and took the information to headquarters. The Corsican sniffed and turned his back on me."

"Naturally," Duroc snarled. "A revolt is what he wants, to put him firmly in the saddle. He'd turn his artillery on the town, and it'd be something to remember. He'll make himself king here, as he'd be king in France if he got the chance."

"There's always the guillotine for kings, *mes amis*," put in Bonnard.

"The Corsican is too smart for any guillotine. You'll see! Are you off in the morning, Pierre?"

Fabre nodded. He liked the hard, honest, cynical geologist.

"Look, Duroc," he said impulsively. "This emerald—see? Well, if anything happens to me, you shall have it. I'll bequeath it to you, comrade. Understood?"

"Devil take you, I don't want it at that price! Anyhow, you'll outlive me."

Fabre smiled. "I expect to live a long time, but one never knows. Anyhow, remember it—if the unexpected should happen, the ring goes to you."

The three, with jests and laughter, split a bottle of wine and turned in.

THAT night Fabre dreamed of Lella Amina; at least, she figured in his dreams, but with morning he could not remember them. Her gauze-veiled features lingered in his mind; her voice, her striking eyes, her vest of steel links, combined to make her memory a vivid thing. He wakened to thoughts of her. Perhaps, he reflected, he had really been a fool to reject what she had offered! It was a chance that would never come again.

The party arrived with a spare horse for him—a sergeant and five men, a guide, an interpreter, supplies packed on lead horses, muskets and ammunition and water. Fabre swung up into the high peaked saddle, and with a gay wave of his hand to Bonnard and Duroc, rode away. It was the 29th Vendémiaire, Year VII of the Republican calendar—October 20, 1798.

Unhurried, the party followed the guide to the Bab en-Nasr gate, and out of the city past the Tombs of the Caliphs, taking the road for the Forest of Stone, as the petrified forests among the hills were called. Skirting the Mokattam plateau, they rode to the east and south, making for the hills. Here was open desert, and the sand made slow going.

Gradually they worked in among the hills, whose flanks closed from sight

the dome and twin minarets of Saladin's Citadel and mosque. The soldiers, who were unused to horses, groused at everything as usual; the sun waxed high; the heat became terrific. The sense of being lost in the desert hills brought panic; but they were not lost, so the grinning native guide reassured them. Another hour, two hours, would see them at the village of El Bakri, where there was a well of abundant water.

EVENTUALLY they did reach the village. It was a small one with a copious well, over which leaned a few date-palms. A ruinous mud wall surrounded the place. Aside from a few naked brats, several hostile-eyed women and two old men, no one was here. Fabre put the interpreter to work and learned that most of the villagers had gone to Cairo for some celebration. Apparently the old men were entirely willing to talk, so the completion of his mission seemed assured. Not today, however. The remainder of the afternoon was given to clearing out several of the mud shacks and cleaning them for occupancy.

The place was eloquent of its livelihood. Beside every house were vats of mud or clay, with stacks of water-jars, lamps and other household articles, fired and ready for sale. Runways of water led from the well to the village street, handy for the mixing of the clay. The women and children sedulously avoided the visitors, and Fabre warned his men against molesting any of them. That evening he got out his writing-materials, ready for work. A day, or at most two, he reckoned, would see his survey completed. The two old men would be the only sources of information in the wretched place, about which sand-hills rose on every side. The loads were unpacked and stored; the sergeant arranged for a night guard over the horses; and Fabre retired to fight fleas during the night hours. He had no dreams and little sleep this night.

He was up with the sunrise, like everyone else: The lovely pure calm sunrise of the Nile valley, touched with soft lights and glowing electric air—that sunrise to which the ancient race dedicated the worship of Horus. All was secure; there had been no alarms; the grumbling of the men had subsided, and they were trying to make friends with the naked children—but unavailingly.

Breakfast over, Fabre went to work. He settled down with his writing-materials under a sunshade of dry palm-leaves; the interpreter brought the two old men, and the inquiry began. Determined to make it a thorough one, Fabre neglected no details about the mixing and baking of the clay, and information poured from the two elders. Meantime, the horses were watered and taken up the wadi to graze upon the clumps of *terfa,* the desert shrub used for fodder.

The sun rose high. Fabre wrote steadily, sending the interpreter to select jars from the village stacks, with which to illustrate the various mixtures of ashes and clay described to him. Absorbed in his work, he glanced up in surprise when the sergeant, an old veteran of the Rhine fighting, came and knocked out his pipe.

"Citizen Fabre, will you ask that interpreter what these miscalled females are up to, with their brats?"

"Eh?" Fabre glanced around. He saw that the children were being assembled near the well, at the other end of the village, by their mothers. At this moment the two old men rose, gathered up their voluminous rags, and strode hastily away toward the others. Fabre called the interpreter, who was off getting jars—but next moment everything broke into fluid motion. Women, naked children, and the two old men all went flowing over the ruinous wall like so many rats, and away up the wadi fast as they could pelt. The soldiers and the interpreter shouted after them in vain—they only scurried the faster.

"What the devil are they up to?" muttered the sergeant, staring after them. "Ah, plague take the lot of 'em. Look there! Hi, you fellows! Fire over their heads, quickly!"

Too late! What happened now was swift and unexpected. From the sand-ridges beside the wadi spurted rolling tufts of smoke; even before the sound of the shots reached him, Fabre saw the two men guarding the horses pitch to the sand. The covey of women and children scattered like quail and vanished; so did the horses. Far beyond musket-shot, horsemen appeared rounding up the scattered beasts.

The four soldiers left in the village, seeing their comrades thus shot down and themselves set afoot, burst into torrential oaths and shouts of fury. The sergeant calmed them with cool, swift orders; he seized a musket and passed it to Fabre, then took charge. The guide and interpreter hid themselves in the houses.

"Six of us here, guns for all. . . . Steady, you bastards, save your breath! Two of you to the wall with me. The other three stay back, hold your fire, be ready to reload fast. They'll be on us in a minute—hold your fire, damn you, till I give the word!"

Everything passed with incredible rapidity. Fabre, fumbling to load his musket, scarcely had the ball rammed down when a dozen or more horsemen appeared up the wadi; others came to join them from one side, and swept down toward the village. Thanks to the cool old sergeant, the men had recovered from their panic and fury, and stood ready. The veteran spoke again.

"Careful, now; don't waste a ball. Aim for the horses, then reload. Pay 'em for our two comrades, there!"

They were coming at the gallop, with shrill yells of *"Allah!"* Two of the foremost riders wore the Mameluke panoply—steel helmets and shirts; the others were desert Arabs. They flourished long guns and opened a furious but totally ineffective fire as they came charging. Fabre, who had brought a brace of pistols from town, hurried to get them loaded. The sergeant and his two men, at the mud wall, were aiming carefully.

Over twenty of the horsemen, and more trailing from the sandhills to join them. They came in a wild rush, sabers out, guns waving, voices screaming, evidently thinking to take the village at the first sweep. Suddenly the sergeant's long musket banged. One of the two Mameluke leaders plunged down. The other two muskets spoke, and two more horses fell. The sergeant, hastily reloading, waved a hand to Fabre.

"Come along, all of you! Don't waste a shot."

With his companions, Fabre ran to the wall. Several of the Arabs, afoot, were hurling themselves through the gaps; the sergeant and his two men met them with bayonets fixed. The three fresh muskets poured their fire into the huddle of figures. Fabre seized his two pistols, aimed and fired deliberately, and this broke the attack. Leaving half a dozen wounded or dead, and several horses pitching and screaming, the Arabs fled for cover. Among the dead was one of the mail-clad Mamelukes. Fabre left the shelter of the wall, darted to the glittering figure, and catching up helmet and sabre, brought them in as trophies. Two wild shots whistled overhead.

"Well, that did it," observed the sergeant. "Now things will get tough. They'll come in from all sides. Everybody scatter out along the wall, take plenty of powder and ball, and don't waste ammunition. If we're rushed, gather around the well."

Two hurt Arabs, dragging themselves away, were shot. From the *terfa* brush and sand gullies a dropping fire was opened on the village, without damage. Posts were taken, and the day that had opened to excitement of battle settled into monotony of sniping warfare, with only an occasional shot returned.

INSUFFERABLY the sun blazed down. Noon came, passed. Fabre dragged the guide and interpreter from hiding, and put them to work as cooks. Unexpectedly, in the full afternoon heat, figures on foot burst from shelter on two sides of the village and came in with a desperate charge. Several of them were dropped, three or four gained a gap in the wall, and saber

clanged on bayonet until they broke and fled again. But two of the soldiers had been wounded badly.

After this, nothing happened. The battle had settled into a siege. The attackers worked close, and their fire began to be accurate and deadly.

Fabre consulted with the sergeant, as the afternoon wore along. With the horses gone, their chance of escape was gone also; to leave the shelter of the village, with its copious well, would be madness. To judge by the figures visible beyond range, the number of the enemy was increasing; more than once, Fabre had glimpsed the glittering shape of the remaining Mameluke afar, evidently disposing his men. A messenger to bring help? Neither the guide nor the interpreter was willing to venture it; no other could regain the city.

The shadows were lengthening, and the sun was low, when everyone came to the alert at the sound of shots. They came closer. Presently Fabre discerned a horseman coming up the wadi at a gallop, while Arab guns banged at him from either side. He headed for the village at a desperate burst of speed, hanging low in the saddle, and his uniform was recognized as that of the Guides, commanded by Sulkowski.

Muskets blazed to cover his approach. His horse, streaming blood from a dozen wounds, went down thirty yards from the wall. Two men dashed out to bring him in, and he came staggering between them. Two balls had gone through his body; he was done for.

"Orders—to return!" he gasped out. "Citizen Duroc sent me—no use—all is lost! Revolt everywhere. Sulkowski is dead—Dupuy was cut to pieces—all Christians massacred—the sick and wounded killed—Arabs have the city—"

His head lolled over, in midsentence, and he died.

At this terrible information the little group looked one at another, knowing the worst. Revolt had caught the French by surprise. No help would come now; their fate was sealed. The sergeant broke in upon their frightful silence with an oath.

"Get to your places, everyone—to the walls! We're not dead yet. *Mort de Dieu,* look alive, you scoundrels! I'll arrange later for sentries to watch the night. Gather everything you can find and build fires! Quick about it, now—all the wood you can discover in this accursed village!"

They broke into action. Every scrap of wood in and about the houses was collected. With darkness, fires were lighted, sentries posted, and those off duty got some repose. No attack came; none the less, that was a frightful night. Toward dawn, one of the wounded men died.

Morning came; the sun mounted; and more natives arrived to swell the attacking ranks. A hundred or more were in full sight, sitting like vultures on the heights, while others kept up a steady fire on the village. Clouds, rarely seen here, drifted over the sky. It was mid-morning when the rumble of thunder sounded—a phenomenon almost unknown in Egypt. A peal ripped across the sky. Then a shout broke from the sergeant.

"Listen! The guns!"

Guns indeed—artillery on the distant citadel, hurling death into the Arab city, blending with and prolonging the thunder. The Corsican was at work; but what help here? None, except a furtive word that the sergeant brought to Fabre.

"Sorry, citizen. The powder's running low. Save it."

TOWARD noon, came the attack. There must have been two hundred, pressing forward at a wild run under cover of a heavy fire. One of the soldiers was killed. The muskets smashed into them; a grenade, brought along by one of the men, exploded in the massed ranks. Again they broke and ran, while bullets hailed in from the sandy heights around.

The sergeant came to Fabre.

"Well, citizen, this looks like it. We haven't a dozen charges left."

"We've done our best," said Fabre simply.

Duroc had sent to save him—good old Duroc! He looked down at his hand. Who would get the emerald now? That Mameluke girl had spoken truly; it would be taken from him as he had taken it. The end was coming. Curiously enough, Fabre knew this, yet he could not realize it clearly; one never does.

His eye fell on one of the clay-vats nearby, and a laugh came to his lips. He took some of the clay and mixed it with water, making a firm mud. Of this he fashioned a miniature pyramid. From the ring he pried out the emerald, and thrust the green stone firmly into the heart of the little mud-pyramid, smoothing over the mud above it. When the thing was finished to his liking, he took his knife and with the point began to scratch letters in the soft mud.

"For Hector Duroc, Membre de l'Institut," he scratched, then his initials and the date. On another of the pyramid's sides he scratched the word *"morituri,"* but there was no room for the entire quotation. *"We who are about to die"*—well, that was enough! Some one would find this, and Duroc would get it eventually, a legacy from the dead. Duroc would understand. He would look inside the pyramid for the Sphinx.

Viewing his work with satisfaction, Fabre laid it aside in the sun to dry and harden, amid a pile of the village wares. The afternoon was lengthening. Shouts and yells sounded; more Arabs had come riding up; bullets were pouring in upon the fated village; and powder-smoke drifted over the wadi. The sergeant appeared.

"Come along to the well, citizen. Only two more of us now—Lemaire just got his. Looks like a rush coming."

They ran from house to house, sheltering against the whistling balls, and reached the well. Two more men stood there; the muskets of the dead had been gathered and loaded with the last charges. The Arabs were assembling.

"Well, everybody, here's luck on the other side!" the sergeant sang out. A burst of yells drowned his voice, and the rush came—wild faces, guns and sabers waving, the name of Allah echoing to heaven.

None of the defenders uttered a word. They were too busy firing the muskets and fixing bayonets. In the forefront of the oncoming rush, Fabre discerned the mailed figure of the Mameluke, long curved saber in hand.

They were almost to the wall—they were over it, surging in at the gaps. The sergeant fired his last shot, clubbed the musket and swung into the sabers and wild faces. He was down. Fabre had his one pistol left. He saw the Mameluke coming for him and lifted the pistol, calmly. He would make sure of this fellow, anyhow!

Recognition stabbed into him; his finger slid from the trigger! That face! Those eyes! It was she, Amina herself! A smile touched his lips, and he lowered the pistol. It was his last act. . . .

He was still smiling, faintly, when Duroc, Bonnard and their detachment of Guides found him next day. The village was deserted, save for the dead. The cursing Frenchmen collected the bodies of their own for burial. Bonnard and the geologist stood apart.

"He was no fighting man. Why did it have to come to him here?" burst out Duroc, with a volley of furious oaths. He was white and strained, almost beside himself.

"I went through his clothes," Bonnard said. "There was nothing. He left no word. Did you see the empty ring on his hand? The stone's gone—probably smashed."

"Be damned to it," said Duroc roughly. "I wasn't thinking about that. I'd give a dozen emeralds for him—to have him back. Damn it, the boy was my friend!"

"The best we can do is to see him buried decently," said Bonnard.

They did it, and rode away again, and no one noticed the little sun-baked pyramid of dried clay, shoved amid the stock of village pots.

The Shootin' Fool

It takes quite a man to drive a truck load of nitroglycerin up to a blazing oil-well.

by WESSEL SMITTER

HE parked his red shooting truck angle-wise in the sloping street; then he got out, stretched, and rested his lean muscular frame against the hitching-rail in front of Mrs. Moore's eating-place. It was still early, and except for three dogs renewing yesterday's acquaintance with stiff-legged diffidence and suspicion, the dusty street was deserted; but there was the smell of wood-smoke and the sound of rattling stove-lids in the small lean-to that was both kitchen and sleeping-quarters for the woman who ran the small restaurant.

Eastward the long slope fell away from the hills, and the road lay like a thin scratch across the desert. In the distance a long freight left a motionless plume of white smoke hanging against purple shadows and sent hollow echoes rumbling back from the Sierra range on the opposite side of the valley. Its movement was scarcely perceptible. No breath of air stirred, but a small whirlwind funneled the sand into a yellow cone and danced crazily across the floor of the desert.

On the rising slope to the east the oil-well derricks pinnacled into a cloudless sky. A couple of buzzards drifted in lazy circles over the town garbage-dump in a small cañon, and the heat shimmered in dancing waves

above the metal tops of the oil storage tanks perched on the terraced slopes along the hillside. It promised to be a hot Fourth of July in Squaw Hollow.

Hutch Anderson was his name, but the oil-field workers called him "The Shootin' Fool." Lettering on the metal sides of the truck read, "OIL-WELL SHOOTING," but Hutch Anderson, like his father, who had died three years ago, was an expert on any job that called for the use of nitroglycerin or dynamite or giant powder.

Mrs. Moore unlocked the front door. Hutch threw away his half-smoked cigar and went in.

"Morning, Hutch," said the woman.

"Morning, Mrs. Moore. Looks like you're kinda late up this morning."

"Well, it's the Fourth, you know, though I guess it's just another day for some. You working?"

"A couple of hours. Got a well to shoot up on the hill."

Hutch took a stool at the counter.

"Ham and," he said. "You better make it three orders. Hank and Tiny will be here any minute. I'll have a cup of Java if you've got it made. What's new?"

MRS. Moore rested her work-reddened hands on the counter. "Well, I guess you heard Eula Mae Turner is back from college."

"No!"

"Got in yesterday and brought a man with her. Same college, they went to. He's an engineer, and he's agoing to run things for Mrs. Turner. Mrs. Turner kinda hinted yesterday that he and Eula Mae was just about the same as engaged."

"Looks like Mrs. Turner's got plans."

"It sure does," said Mrs. Moore with a flourish of her apron. And then, giving Hutch a confidential jab with her thumb: "I guess you'd be the one to know, wouldn't you, Hutch?"

"Maybe."

"What'd Mrs. Turner tell you that night you took Eula Mae home from the commencement exercises in high school?"

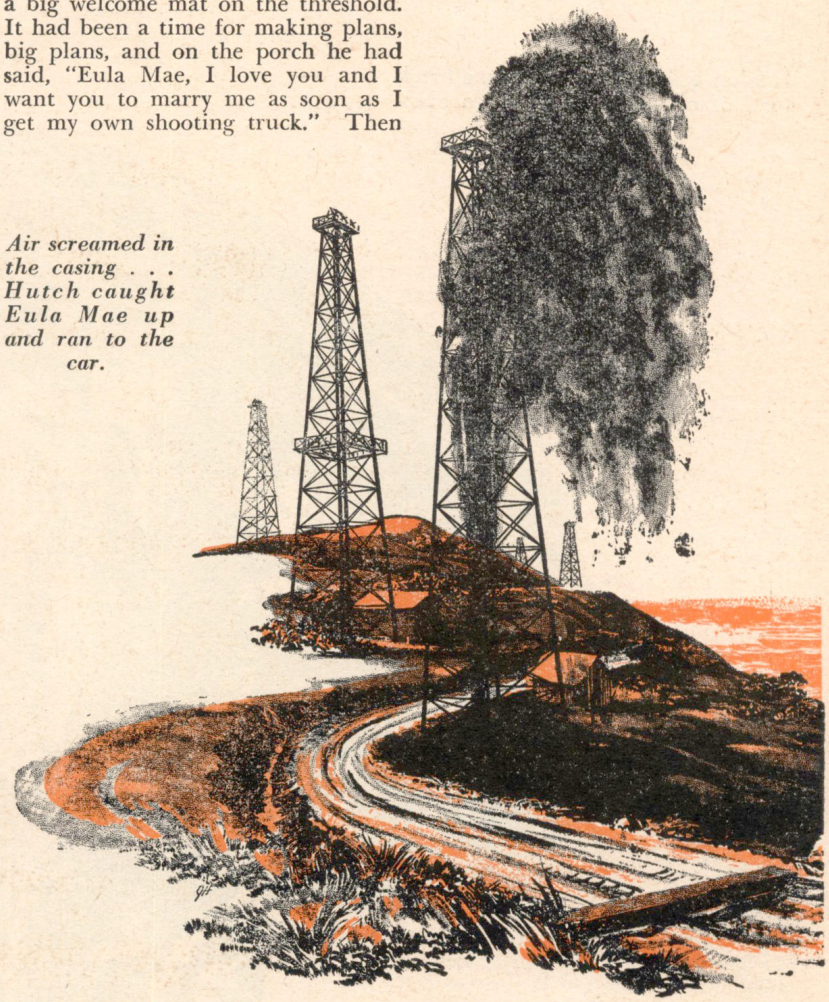
"That's four years ago—four years and one month to the day."

"Oh, but I'll bet you ain't forgot, Hutch. You never took no interest in other girls, and I'll bet if it wasn't for those highfalutin' ideas of her mother's, this town and the people in it would be plenty good enough for her daughter."

"Bring me that Java."

"Okay."

Through the open door he could see the tops of the cottonwoods that grew about the big yellow house in the draw. He remembered that June night, the white dress that Eula Mae had worn, the glint of the moon on her blue-black hair. That afternoon he had shot his first well alone. All through high school they had been in the same class, and that night life had seemed like an open door with a big welcome mat on the threshold. It had been a time for making plans, big plans, and on the porch he had said, "Eula Mae, I love you and I want you to marry me as soon as I get my own shooting truck." Then



Air screamed in the casing . . . Hutch caught Eula Mae up and ran to the car.

the door had opened and Mrs. Turner had said, "Come in, both of you. I've got something to say."

He had given Eula Mae a toilet set and her mother had returned it.

"I'm going to ask you to take this back," she had said. "It's much too expensive for you to give to Eula Mae. I like you, Hutch, but I think you ought to know now that my daughter is not going to marry an oil-field worker. She's going to college. For the next few years, at least, her plans are made."

All the time Eula Mae had stood there tense and silent, her face like chalk. He had been sorry for her, sorry for himself, and had finally blurted out: "I'll ask you again, Eula Mae—in four years."

Stricken to tears, Eula Mae had cried, "Oh, Mother—" and then she had run out of the room, crying hysterically.

That summer Eula Mae and her mother had gone East. He had written twice, but there had been no reply. In the fall Mrs. Turner had come back, but Eula Mae had remained away at college, and she had traveled and had been a stranger to Squaw Hill for four years. And now at last she was back, and he wondered if she was still as beautiful as ever, and whether her beauty still mattered. . . .

Mrs. Moore returned with the coffee.

"I heard last night that Eula Mae is agoing to lead the parade today. Her mother went and bought her a palomino, and a saddle that cost four hundred dollars."

"Looks like Mrs. Turner figures that new well she's bringing in might be a gusher."

"Well, they do say—some of her men that eats here—it looks awful good. Last week they was a rumor that the Universal Petroleum people offered her two hundred thousand

if she'd pull her tools and turn over the lease. She just laughed at 'em. And when her man died, they were as poor as a horned toad."

"Not exactly," said Hutch. "They had a couple of wells then. And he left her a hatful of advice."

"What was that?"

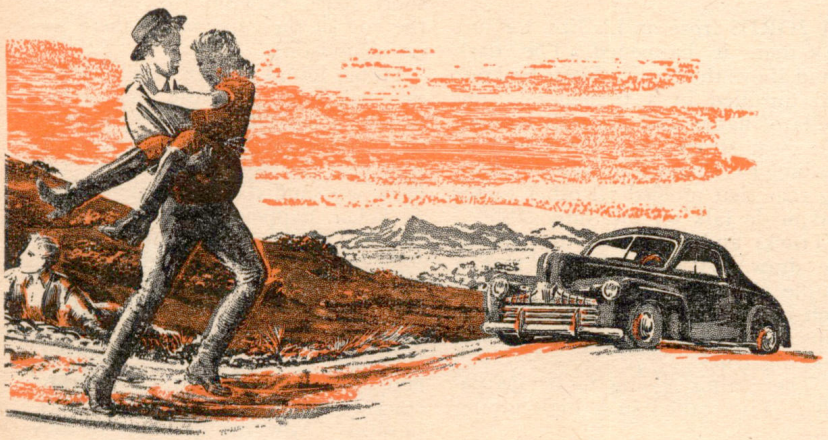
" 'Fools,' he used to tell her, 'drill wells. Smart people buy 'em.' "

"But if they offered her all that money for one she's drilled—"

"She should have taken it, and bought herself a few bargains. Mr. Turner made what money he had buying up old wells and reconditioning them. Dad helped him. Bringing in a new well is risky business, and hers is in a new sand, nine thousand feet. Nobody knows what's down there."

Hank and Tiny came in and sat down beside Hutch. Hank was rawboned, angular, with sandy hair and a red face. Tiny was short-legged, paunchy and badly in need of a shave. The men ate, and got into the truck, and then drove to the powder magazine built into the side

Illustrated by Gould K. Hulse, Jr.



of a hill a mile outside of town. They loaded forty quarts of nitroglycerin and an empty brass shell shaped like a torpedo and about as long as the bed of the truck; then drove back to town and followed a dirt road over a series of switchbacks and terraces.

HALFWAY up the hill on the second terrace, they came to Mrs. Turner's new well. Spud Haines, Mrs. Turner's head driller, was there, and the men were swabbing out. Momentarily the well was expected to come in, and night and day for the last week Spud had kept a skeleton crew on the job.

Tiny wrinkled his nose as they passed. "Every time I go by that rig lately," he squeaked in a high falsetto voice, "I smell gas."

Universal No. 24, near the top of the hill, was ready to shoot. The job was a production shot, the purpose of which was to open up the rock fissures in the hopes of accelerating the flow. It was not a difficult shot, but there were a couple of conditions to be considered: the hole was filled with a mixture of oil and water, and the log showed a bottom temperature that was almost as high as the critical point of the explosive.

THE men filled the nitroglycerin shell, got the truck in place and began lowering the torpedo into the well casing. The truck sat above the well a hundred yards up the road, and as the line spooled off the drum, Tiny kept his hand on the brake and one eye on the depth-indicator. Hank connected the electrical wires attached to the detonator and took his position by the shooting box. As a matter of safety, Hutch pulled a timber across the road to block any car or truck that might come up the hill.

The torpedo had been lowered five thousand feet, and there was still four hundred to go, when the men heard the sound of a motor.

Tiny shouted: "Hold that car, Hutch! I can't stop 'er now. We're close to the bottom!"

Hutch saw the car, a blue coupé. He signaled to the driver. Even before the car pulled to a stop near the barrier, he knew that it was Eula Mae and the new engineer. They were both dressed in Eastern riding-togs. She was at the wheel. Pale and exquisite, and wearing clothes that were both smart and exotic, she was even more beautiful than Hutch's old dreams of her.

He approached the car on her side.

"Hello, stranger!" he said.

"Hello, Hutch." She gave him a serious look, and her eyes fell.

"You'll have to wait a minute," he said. "We're shooting a well."

"My good fellow," said the young man at her side, "suppose *you* wait. We're rather in a hurry, you know."

"We can't stop at this stage. We've got to go through with the job."

"Oh, poppycock! You know I've been around oil-fields. This is a public road, you know. Suppose you remove that timber?"

"That timber stays there."

"Max—please! We'll wait," Eula Mae pleaded, putting her hand on the man's sleeve.

"We'll not wait. I'm about to show this fellow what happens when an irresistible force meets a movable object."

He got out of the car and picked up one end of the timber. Hutch made a flying leap and came down on the timber with both feet. The timber fell and pinched the man's toes. Mad with pain and frustration, he came at Hutch.

Hutch was ready, parried the first blow and let drive for the jaw. It was a glancing blow, and the engineer came back. He was fast on his feet and a big man, but Hutch was almost as big and faster. Hutch drove another blow for the face. It landed square. His opponent staggered for a moment, leaped in close and got in two powerful jabs in the stomach. Hutch doubled up and while he still scratched for wind, the man came in again with two jabs to the kidneys. Hutch dropped to his knee, planned a bit of strategy.

The man swung his foot, aiming his boot for the face. But Hutch was too quick. He pitched himself forward and upward, drove his shoulder into the pit of his opponent's stomach. They had been fighting near the edge of the road. The force of the lunge pitched the man over the edge and down the loose-shale embankment.

The girl had got out of the car. She came forward. Tiny shouted: "Fire in the hole!"

Hutch called back: "Let 'er go!"

"Max, are you hurt?" cried the girl, coming forward.

"Get back in that car!" Hutch ordered.

"I will not!" she blazed.

There was a dull thump far underground. The air screamed in the casing, and a black column geysered up from the hole. Hutch caught Eula Mae up in his arms, ran back to the car, and deposited her kicking form on the cushions. A rain of black mud, oil and water enveloped the derrick. Only the young engineer was caught in the deluge.

The girl turned the car about and waited a moment for Max.

"I sure hated to do it," Hutch said to the girl, "but you see how it was. That's a high-temperature hole, and I'd rather ruin that suit of his than that well."

She gave him a look that was cold as an iceberg. Max climbed into the car without a word, and they drove back down the hill.

TWO o'clock was the time set for the parade. The men ate in Mrs. Moore's place; because it was a holiday, Hutch paid. They sauntered outside, and Tiny said: "Well, I guess we'd better clean up the truck a little if we're to ride in the parade."

Hutch said: "Go ahead. You and Hank worry about it. I'm going to be a spectator."

Hank and Tiny shuffled off across the street, picking their teeth. The truck sat in front of a small rusty sheet-metal building that was both a garage and a shop where Hutch kept his tools and miscellaneous shooting equipment.

There were a lot of people in town, mostly oil-field workers and miners, but also a few riders and cowhands, in from the neighboring ranches. Cars splattered with mud and covered with alkali dust were parked nose-down in the dusty gutters along the sides of the streets. Women and small children, in wilted holiday attire, walked back and forth along the irregular sidewalks, eating ice-cream from dripping cones; and small boys kept up an incessant popping with firecrackers.

In the lower end of the draw, below the cottonwood trees, in what had once been a corral, the parade was forming. It would be the same thing again, except, of course, there would be Eula Mae. There would be the band, and then more men and women on horses, followed by the Volunteer Engine Company, the men with helmets and slickers riding the red pumper. Usually Ben Meyers, who owned the Bar-L ranch, contributed a flat-bed truck carrying one of his prize Hereford bulls with a big sign that read: "Service with a Smile."

And there would be the county highway equipment, the yellow trucks, graders and tractors making up a considerable section of the caravan. Most popular of all with the kids would be the American Legion's exhibit, a flat-bed truck with a group of Legionnaires, and a meat-grinder with a small dog in the hopper, with one of the men turning the crank while the others threw wieners to the crowd lining the streets.

A yellow tank truck with a sprinkler attached passed by and settled the dust. Hank and Tiny left with the shooting truck. Down below, in the corral, a police whistle trilled a shrill note. Mrs. Moore, wearing a straw hat and new summer dress, came out of the eating-place and locked the front door.

"By gum," she grumbled to herself, "if anybody wants to eat, they'll just have to wait."

Hutch said: "You going to watch the parade, Mrs. Moore?"

"Yes sir. And I don't know but what right here's as good a place as any to stand, if you don't mind my company."

"Proud of it," said Hutch.

Hutch lit a cigarette and flicked the match out into the street. He was exhaling the first draw when there was a sudden roar, and a dark column of what looked like smoke shot up from a well on the lower terrace and rose five hundred feet into the air.

"My glory to be!" exclaimed Mrs. Moore. "It's Mrs. Turner's new well! It's a strike, if I ever see one!"

"It's a gasser," said Hutch. "She's high, wide and wild, and by golly, she's out of control."

Every man, woman and child on the street stopped spellbound, or ran to get a better view of the spectacle. The well was throwing rocks and stones from its casing, and even from this distance of half a mile these could be heard striking the heavy timbers in the derrick.

"If that crown block's still up there," said Hutch to himself, "or if she strikes a spark from the casing—"

WORDS froze on his lips, for just then it happened. The dark cloud above the derrick blossomed out and unrolled in a tremendous umbrella of flame, and the well ignited. The heat struck, and the sound of escaping gas changed to an ear-thumping roar that muffled all other noises and made talk all but impossible.

Trucks and cars raced up out of the draw. A siren wailed; and a couple of small kids, separated from their mother, ran crying up the street. Tiny and Hank came up in the shooting truck.

"There ain't agoing to be no parade," Tiny called in a high piping voice.

"Oh, the oil tanks," Mrs. Moore wailed. "If they catch on fire, all the houses will go."

From the seat of the truck Hank shouted: "Let's get over there, Hutch! Let's go!"

Hutch got into the truck. Hank drove. They had gone two blocks and had reached a small rise that gave them a good view of the fire, when Hutch said: "Pull off to the side. We're going to look this thing over. Do a little figuring."

In awed silence the men looked. The wooden derrick, a hundred and thirty feet high, had already been consumed by the flames. The big storage tanks sat five hundred yards below the flaming well. Already crews of men, some in asbestos suits, were starting bulldozers. Others, working behind metal shields, were playing streams of water against the sides of the tanks. If the oil caught, the tanks would collapse, and a flaming flood would sweep into the lower part of the town.

Tiny said: "I wouldn't give more than about five bucks for the whole town."

"Gentlemen," said Hutch, "I think we're going to put out that fire. And we don't have much time."

"You mean that, serious?" said Tiny.

"You mean the three of us?" Hank asked.

"That's right. Turn around and drive to the shop."

In the shop there was a gas hot-plate the men sometimes used to make coffee. On the way back to the shop Hutch had bought some firecrackers from a small kid. He laid these on the bench, disconnected the hose from the hot-plate and attached it to a short piece of pipe.

Tiny picked up the firecrackers. "Firecrackers!" he said with an air of great wonderment. "He's agoing to put out that well with firecrackers!"

Hutch fixed the pipe upright in the bench vise, turned on the gas, and held a match to it. The flame was about a foot high, but there was a short space between the flame and the end of the pipe where there was no combustion.

Hutch found a piece of wire about two feet long. To the end of this he tied a firecracker. Then, lighting the firecracker, he held it over the pipe near the base of the flame. The flame was snuffed out in the explosion.

"What happened," he explained, "is that the explosion cut the flame right half in two. It knocked the gas down into the pipe, at the same time it sent the fire upward. The trick is to explode the charge where the gas and flame meet, separate 'em. This here's a miniature gasser, and the firecracker is a miniature charge of explosives. Now the question is—how much dynamite will it take to put out the fire?"

"Holy smokes!" said Tiny.

"Jumpin' Moses!" said Hank.

"It's going to take a terrific jolt to smack that gas down in the hole," Hutch continued. "I figure about four hundred pounds."

Hutch grabbed a piece of board and a pencil.

"HERE'S how we'll do it," he said, making a sketch. "We've got plenty of derricks to work from out there. We string a steel line six or seven hundred feet long between a couple of derricks. Let it sag down in the center, so's the dip in the line comes in over the fire. Maybe have to swing it a little when we get ready to shoot. Wrap the dynamite in wet burlap—plenty of it. Attach a shooting-wire, and let 'er ride in on a trolley. You guys take the truck, line

up the stuff. I've got to find Mrs. Turner."

Mrs. Turner was not at the house. Members of the American Legion were warning people who lived in the draw to vacate their homes. One of the men told Hutch that Mrs. Turner was up in her office above the bank. He hurried back uptown, climbed the wooden stairs, and heard voices. There was some sort of conference. He had seen the cars down below, the blue coupé and a station wagon belonging to the Universal Petroleum Company. The door into the hallway stood open.

A MAN said: "We don't want your well, Mrs. Turner—under any considerations. You may have a valuable well, but right now it's a very hot potato." That was Mr. Johnson, Universal's field engineer.

"But you've got the equipment," said Mrs. Turner, with a hopeless sound in her voice. "I haven't."

"We'll do all we can to help. What do you want in the way of equipment?"

Max answered: "We'll need ten boilers, steam lines and three or four mud pumps."

"Any idea how long it'll take to make an installation of that kind?" It was Mr. Johnson again.

"Three or four days. But it's our only chance."

"Then it's just too bad," said the other. "The temperature of that oil is going up fast, and when it reaches the flash point— Well, it'll be just too bad."

Hutch walked into the room. Eula Mae was there. The men were seated on pieces of furniture. Mrs. Turner, distraught and tense, stood near a big window; from there she was able to see the fire. The glass in the window rattled and shook with the reverberations thrown off by the well.

"Mrs. Turner," said Hutch, "I think I can put out that fire. I'd like to try it."

"Do you mind leaving?" said Max. "We're in the midst of a rather important discussion right now."

"I'm addressing Mrs. Turner."

"And I'm handling Mrs. Turner's affairs."

"Please, Max—" said Mrs. Turner. "Maybe he's got an idea."

"How would you go about putting out that fire?" asked Max.

"I'd shoot it out."

"Just how?"

"That little detail is a trade secret."

Max looked at the others, and curled his lip in a laugh.

"He'd shoot it! That's how he'd do it!"

There was the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Spud Haines, covered with mud and perspiration, jabbed his head through the door opening.

"We're not going to be able to hold 'er much longer," he announced, out of breath. "The water's getting low in the reservoir."

Mrs. Turner moaned: "Oh, oh! Why did this have to happen to me? What are we going to do? The whole town will go up in smoke."

Eula Mae rose to comfort her mother, but Max took the woman's arm and led her off into a corner. They held a whispered conversation for a moment or two, then rejoined the group.

"Can't take a chance on your scheme," said Max. "We've no guarantee you wouldn't blow the casing. Then we'd lose the well. If you're so sure of yourself, why don't you make us an offer? Buy the well, and do as you please? We've a contract made out. Sign it right now and it's yours."

"How much?"

"Five thousand dollars, as is."

"I'll take it," said Hutch. "Make out the papers."

Mr. Johnson got to his feet. Max said: "He'll need a witness, Mr. Johnson. Do you mind signing?"

"I'd rather not," he said stiffly, and walked out.

There were a few changes to be made in the contract. While Max took care of that, Hutch went down to find one of his men to sign as a witness. At the bottom of the stairs he heard Eula Mae call from the top. He waited.

"Hutch," she said, talking fast, "do you know what you're doing? You'll lose everything. Nothing can save the town. They know it. I ought not to tell you this—she's my mother; but the minute you sign those papers, you'll be responsible."

"I'll take a chance. Somebody's got to put out that fire. Unless I buy the well, I can't even try."

"You can't do it. There isn't time. They're making the families move out of the houses. You'll have a hundred lawsuits, including Mother's."

"Not if I save her house?"

"Nobody expects you to do it."

"Not even you?"

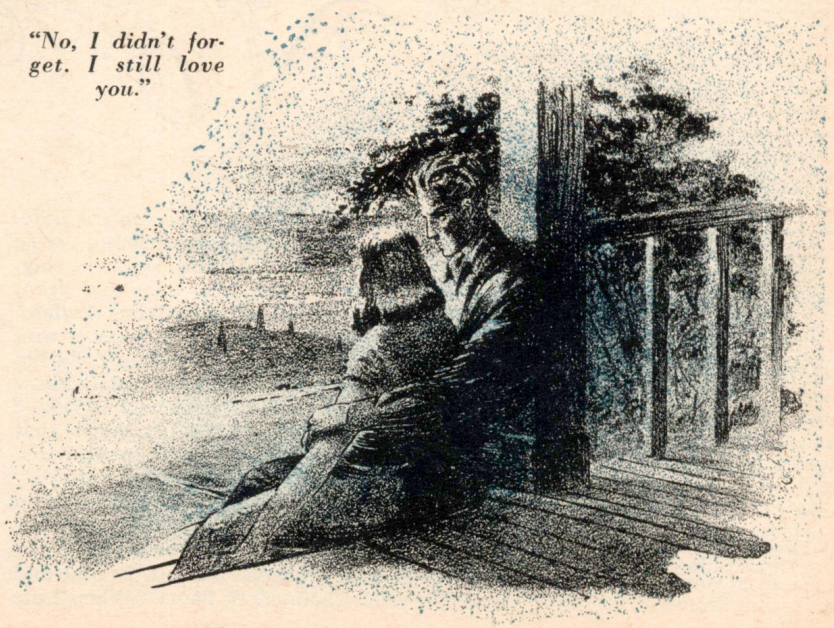
"Oh, Hutch, I think you're wonderful. But it's a job for the gods."

"Okay," he said. "This time I'm going to play God."

He found the truck and the men. They had already loaded the shooting gear and the dynamite. Hutch took Hank and returned to the office, gave Mrs. Turner his check, and signed the contract, which not only carried the date, but also the hour in which the title to the blazing well was transfered. As the two men left the office, Eula Mae said: "I'll be watching you. Hutch, from the window. And please —be careful. If you get hurt, we'll all feel like criminals."

NEWS was spread around almost at once that the Shooting Fool was going to subdue the well. Men, women and children gathered about on the upper terrace, wondering if, by some miracle, their homes were going to be saved.

Hutch and his men donned asbestos suits, helmets, shoes and mittens. In the blistering heat they climbed the derricks, one on each side of the blazing well, and fastened the steel line, letting it sag so that it came ten or twelve feet above the top of the casing. They attached the trolley, and with a block and tackle hoisted the dynamite, with the shooting wire attached, up to the trolley. When everything was ready, Hutch took his place at the shooting box and gave the signal. Tiny released the trolley; the charge of dynamite coasted down, and when it reached the well, Hutch hit the



"No, I didn't forget. I still love you."

plunger. There was a terrific blast, and the flames folded up and disappeared in a gigantic cloud of black smoke.

Hutch and his two helpers quickly approached the well. They found the heavy control head, fastened it to the anchors, and turned down the valve.

For a moment there was a strange silence. Then the men on the terrace above threw their hats up into the air and yelled.

Afterward, there was still time for the parade—a parade that was totally unlike the one that had been planned. In it there was only the band and the red shooting truck with Hutch and his two men in the seat. Twice they were made to drive back and forth over the short route, while the townspeople lined both sides of the street and cheered. Then it was evening, and Hank and Tiny went home. Hutch also went home, cleaned up, and had supper in Mrs. Moore's restaurant. After eating, he walked outside, leaned against the rail, and rolled a leisurely cigarette.

AFTER an exciting day the streets of the town were almost deserted. Across the valley the blue-blackness lay against the slopes of the far mountains, but there was still a splash of lavender and rose on the high peaks. A coyote yammered a lone cry in the hills to the east, and the lights from one or two cars twinkled like stars where the long road lay over the desert.

A girl came diagonally across the street. It was Eula Mae, and she came up and touched his arm with her fingers and said simply: "Walk home with me, Hutch."

He threw away his half-smoked cigarette and walked along at her side. She said, "You were magnificent," and then neither spoke until they reached the house.

The leaves in the cottonwood trees made a slight rustling noise, like the sound of silk. The yellow moon, about to climb up from behind the curtain of black hills, threw an orange glow into the skies.

"I started to ask you something—" he said, and came to a stop.

She turned her face expectantly, and in the soft darkness her beauty was a thing beyond compare.

"And you forgot," she said.

"No. No—I didn't forget, even though it was four years and one month ago. It was in June. It's July now. I said I loved you, and I asked you to marry me, and then we were interrupted. I still love you and I still want you more than ever. I said I'd ask you again."

He paused and took both her hands.

"I'm asking you now."

"I loved you then, Hutch; I love you now—and forever."

No Time

AROUND every fire on the hide-wagon camp-ground were hunters and skinners, big, hairy-faced men and lean, leather-thong men, talking buffalo. They speculated on the coming winter, calculated how far south the big herds would move, and wondered how long a haul they'd have back to Dodge City market. They reckoned that some hide-buyer might start up down at Denison afore long.

Lute Sawyer sat by his outfit's wagon fire, his long legs ramming his knobby knees up under his chin, and watched how busily it was flapping its blue and yellow banners of flame. When Lute liked something especially, he'd get a kind of private grin in his horizon-gray eyes; and the longer it stayed there, the more it would pull up on his mouth. It was doing that right now, because he was thinking how tonight he was living the best part of his life he had yet lived.

When the Kiowas killed his Paw and Maw and burned their cabin, down in Texas, it hadn't seemed like anything good would ever come to Lute again. But then he was alone on the plains, a kid of sixteen, hungry and scared. Now he was going on eighteen, owned a Sharps, and on one wagon were thirty hides all his own.

A daughter of the frontier inspires a young buffalo-hunter to undertake a strange quest.

by ZACHARY BALL

to Waste

Yes, this here around him, bounded by raw campfire flames and brittle, biting air, was the best of his life—and then the girl walked straight into it. Lute hadn't ever seen many girls, so he certainly didn't know they ever got so pretty it would cut a man's wind off just to look at one of them.

There was a man with the girl; and when he spoke to the men around the fire there, he said she was his daughter, and they took off their hats. Lute just sat, his long arms holding his knees together, and looked at her.

She was all gold and white. Her skin and her coat and bonnet were the soft white of clouds; her hair was pale gold; and her eyes were the color of a bluebird's wing.

Out of the talk now, certain facts emerged. The girl's Paw was a hide-buyer, and he had come down to look the loads over. Lute got that much; and then the girl saw him and smiled at him, and after that he didn't know what happened until they were leaving, and her Paw called her Genevieve.

NO other name in the world would have been pretty enough for her. Every time Lute said it in his head before he went to sleep, it got prettier. And when he saw her at the hide shed next morning, doing figure-writing for her Paw, she herself was even prettier than last night.

She kept on looking prettier every time he'd see her. In one week's time Lute knew he was going to make himself some real money, enough money to buy whatever it took for a man to have a woman like her for all his life.

He told her his plan to go back to the hunt with his same outfit and save himself enough to buy wagons and hire skinners of his own. Well, she thought that was fine. Then he figured out a way to make a lot more money, and to make it quicker, too. He told her about that.

"You see," he said, "in a big herd there's usually one or two blue-hide buffalo."

"Only, they're really black," she said. "Daddy's bought a few of them. They bring lots of money."

Lute said excitedly: "More'n ary a other hide, except the white ones. Everybody hears about them, and nobody ever sees one. I aim to get me a good horse and a pack-mare and get down into the far country ahead of all the big hide outfits. Horseback, and alone, I can go fast. I'll make all the big herds and take out the blues. Why, I might get three, four thousand dollars' worth!"

"You will be rich, Lute, some day!"

She was excited too, and her smile was bright in that deep blue of her eyes. As Lute left, he wondered if maybe he hadn't seen a laugh in them too, a laugh at his ambitions.

Others laughed at this notion of his, all right. The oldtimers he told it to, they laughed. Then they quit laughing, and tried hard to talk him out of it. "Injun fodder, that's what you'll be makin' o' yourself," they warned.

Lute listened to them respectfully, with his grin in his eyes.

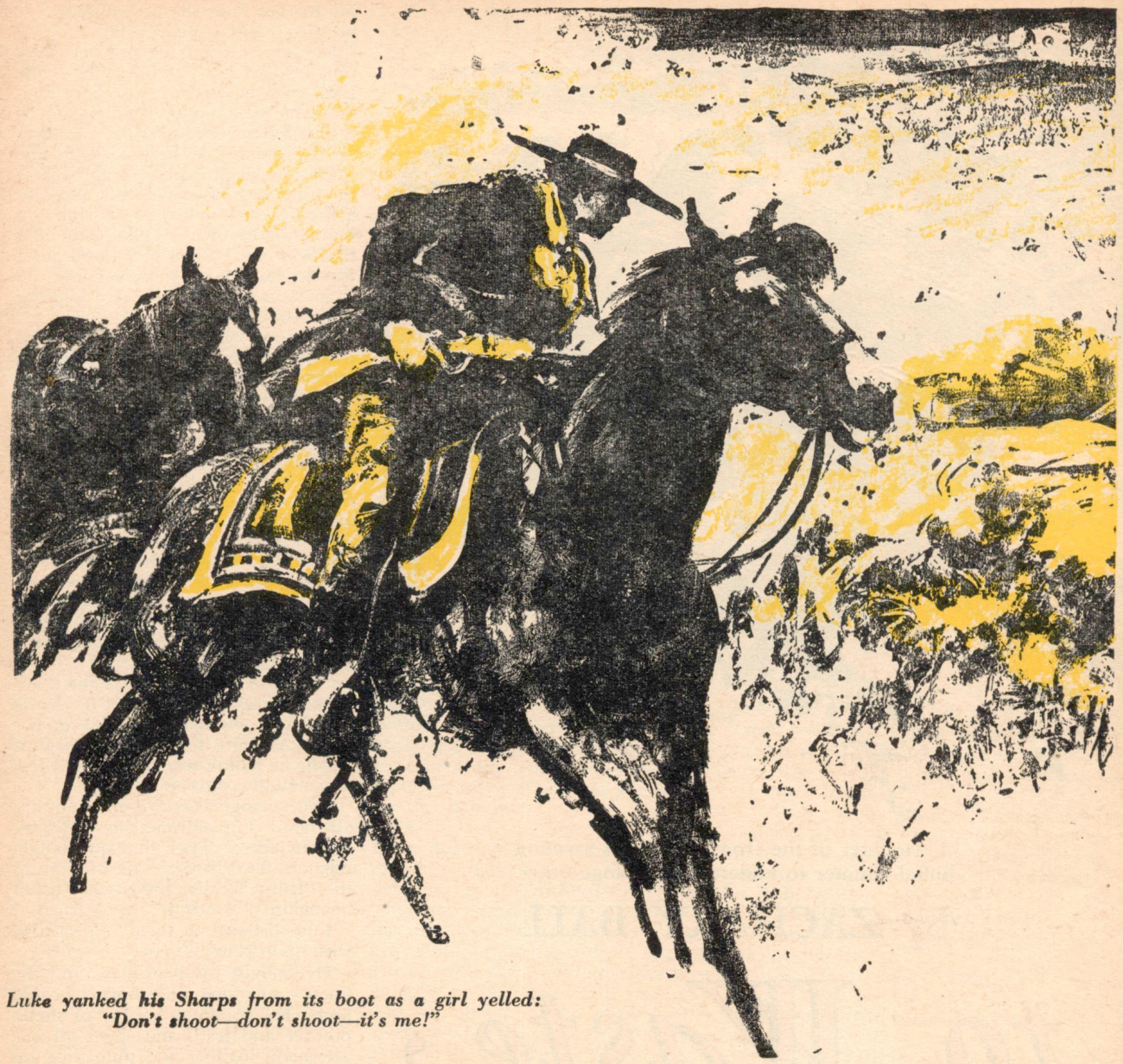
He bought his pack-mare and the finest young long-range horse he could find. He bought a supply of shells, powder and lead, and spent all one afternoon loading and unloading his bullet-mold. . . .

When he rode his snow-white gelding out for Genevieve to see, she said he was the loveliest horse she'd ever seen; she named him Frosty. Lute looked at her around Frosty's nose, and asked her if she could see that gold kind of sheen to the horse's mane. She could see it. Lute wanted to tell her how gold and white and pretty she'd looked to him that first night, but he had to give it up on account of the hardness in his throat.

"You be careful on this trip, Lute," Genevieve said. "And you make a lot of money, and don't dare forget about me."

He tried to tell her how impossible that would be, but couldn't, and that made her laugh at him.

He didn't get to see her again, because she went off visiting. So he rode



Luke yanked his Sharps from its boot as a girl yelled: "Don't shoot—don't shoot—it's me!"

out of Dodge in a soft, thick snowfall at daybreak, taking everything he owned but his heart. Frosty was happy as a big white pup, but the brown pack-mare none too anxious to hit the Texas trail.

AT the end of nine days he was deep in the Southwest; he hadn't seen a sod shanty in two days. He'd passed a couple of small herds of mealy-noses, but there wasn't a blue-hide among them. He hadn't really expected to sight any blues until he got into the black-noses over in the west runs.

He rode up onto a rise. Winter was crackling the air as evening came on. To the southwest, across a great swale, the sun had just gone, leaving the sky and the earth bloody and cold. Way off yonder was a thin little smoke-bank. He instantly noticed how it lay in the stillness, as if it had been there the better part of the day.

Ain't no Injun camp, he thought. *Wouldn't be that much smoke. Don't hardly seem likely ary settler would live way out here, either.*

On the chance it was maybe Comanches on the move, he decided to drift east and make cold camp in that slash of rough. He did, and rode south next morning, keeping to the slash. Once, just ahead of high-sun, he stood on an upthrust, but he couldn't see another sign of yesterday's smoke.

Right after that was when the hunk of brush between two granite slabs moved and sent Frosty into a series of snorting, sidewise jumps. Lute yanked his Sharps from its boot as a girl young-un crawled out of the brush, half scared to death, yelling: "Don't shoot—don't shoot—it's me!"

Lute said right plumb out: "The hell it is!"

She just stood there, looking like she wanted to cry, but too scared to do even that. He got down and walked over to her. She beat anything he'd ever seen. She was little and scrawny and ugly. Her hair was brownish and tangled, and she was brush-scratched and miserable-looking. Her scared eyes were set so far apart that they put the final touch to making her look to Lute exactly like a scraggly brown chicken.

"What you a-doin' here?" he asked her.

Her eyes roamed his face awhile; then she said: "I'm a-scared."

He sat her down on a slab and stood above her while she told how the Comanches came and killed off her family and burned everything.

"How'd they miss you?" Lute asked.

"I don't know. I just ran, that's all. I been hiding in here."

"Seems you'd of froze in the night."

"I got terrible cold." She pointed to a smooth place along by the slabs. "I'd get out and run there till I'd get just awful tired; then I'd hide in the brush again."

WHAT she was telling him was so much like what happened to him and his folks that he didn't like to listen to it. She was just a little girl young-un; and when she finished talking, her brown, speckled eyes came up to his, and what he saw in them made him look away.

She said, as if she couldn't believe it herself: "I aint got no Paw nor no Maw."

Way she said that, made Lute walk off and test the packs on his mare. When he came back, he said: "Come on—we'll go see."

He mounted and looked down at her, no bigger than a dusty brown minute. He gave her a hand and an empty stirrup, and she got up behind him.

Lute approached the place with no particular caution. Once Comanches finished, they left for good. The pole corral was all that was left standing. Not far from it were two round black spots that had been haystacks. Gray-black piles of ashes showed where buildings had been. Where the house had been, a stub of rock chimney stood as marker at the grave of ashes.

Lute let the young-un down. She stood for a moment, then walked right at that stub of chimney. The wind blew against her, showing how thin-legged she was. It pulled a whirl of ashes up out of the house-heap, and Lute saw human bones there.

The girl walked right past them.

She must of seen 'em, Lute thought. *The bones of her own folks. God-a'mighty, and her walkin' over there brave as ary man. She's got somethin' in her backbone, that un!*

She knelt by the chimney, put her fists against it, and bowed her shoulders so her forehead rested on her knuckles. She stayed like that for a long time, the prairie wind blowing against her, picking at her stringy hair, pulling up little ashy cyclones of what had been her life.

She didn't cry. Her little bird-wing shoulders were steady. Just an honest, ragged prayer; that was what must be coming out of her heart, a pitiful something that was a part of her. Lute got down and stood with his back to her, and rubbed Frosty's nose and waited.

Finally she came back.

Lute said: "Know ary place I can take you to?"

"No."

He thought things over; then they headed out together again, still toward the southwest. They rode all afternoon, him saying little and her almost nothing. She was just there behind him, holding onto the cantle; and once, coming up out of a steep cut, she had to hold to him. Twice he handed back strips of jerky to her, and his canteen.

He'd hoped to sight a shanty where he could leave her, but they didn't. They camped at sundown beside a trickle of water that had tired willows and a few scrub cottonwoods growing along its banks.

While he tended the horses, the girl gathered buffalo-chips, got her fire going and unroped the packs. When he came back from a ridge where he went for a look at the valley to the west, she was making meal-cakes and coffee, and was heating strips of jerky in the fry-pan.

You'd think she'd never done ary thing in her life that pleasured her as much as fixing that grub. While they were eating it, he told her about his hunting-trip and all about Genevieve. Blowing across his tin cup of coffee, he said: "You know, Chicken, I figure to buy right into her Paw's hide business. Or start up buyin' on my own."

She said: "My name's Martha."

But he kept calling her Chicken. He drained the tin cup, filled it again, and handed it to her. She took it solemnly.

He said, dreamily: "Yep—Genevieve, she's the kind of girl a man gets out and works for."

Chicken said nothing.

He got up and began to untie the bed-roll. "You can roll up yonder," he told her. "We can't bait no Comanches by keepin' the fire."

She said: "No."

He tossed her a blanket. "Reckon if we don't find some settler family you can stay with, I'll have to take you along with me till we get to Denison. I can't lose time takin' you all the way back to Dodge."

She said, "No," in a very small voice.

They rolled up in their blankets and their weariness, and into the stillness of the vast, flat country came stealing deep night, just as it had done millions of times before. It found the two young ones, new to the old rawness of the country, and settled gently over them.

LUTE woke to the smell of coffee and the feel of heat on his face. Chicken was settling the fry-pan into the side of the fire. She had done something to her hair that had improved it a good deal, and she was wearing that old pair of pants he'd been aiming to throw away to save pack weight. She'd done some cutting on them, and fixed up something for her head. From this angle her mouth had a curve to it he hadn't noticed before. He watched the way she was carrying on about breakfast in real woman-style.

Suddenly he said: "How old are you?"

She didn't look up from her fry-pan. "A month from sixteen."

He got up and went down to the little creek. Then he went up on the rise again to look for herds. The blue saucer of morning sky was brightening from the pink that was running around the east rim. What was left of the night had hid under bunches of growth and behind upthrusts. There was no herd in sight. He went back.

After breakfast he saddled Frosty and went to look for the mare. He finally found her. She had stepped in a gopher-hole, and the bone of her leg was sticking out through the flesh. After he shot her, he put the rifle back in its boot and went and sat on a boulder and watched how the sun was

spreading out over the plains. He heard Chicken come scrabbling up, but he didn't look at her.

She saw the mare and said: "Oh." Then she walked over to where he was, and he said: "We're a hell of a long ways from anywhere."

She just stood there, quiet.

After a long time he stood up suddenly and faced her. "Hear what I said? Why did it have to be me as found you, anyhow? I got to travel fast, you hear? I got to! I got to get my hides and get 'em back to Dodge! I could travel light and plenty fast without the mare if I was by myself! Hear me?" He shouted that last at her, and his words stayed right there in the silence so ugly that finally they made him turn away from her.

She went back down to camp.

THEY had walked five hundred miles, with Frosty carrying the packs, which had got plumb light, but with the load increased by three blue hides; they had seen hundreds of thousands of buffalo, lived like two men, worked hard and talked little.

Now they were camped in a shallow cave in rough country, with big herds moving down past them on all sides. They would ride out for a day or two of hunting, then back to rest and get more grub and clean up any new hides, then go out in another direction. Now they had eight blue hides cached in the cave.

They hadn't seen a blue for several days that morning the gunshot woke Lute. He scrambled to his knees, and saw that Chicken wasn't in the cave. He reached for his Sharps, and it was gone. He heard Chicken screaming then, and he crawled out. Her voice came flying up to him. She was clawing her way up the talus slope, dragging his rifle.

He ran down to her, and she clung to him, talking fast. "Lute—I saw a herd moving over that hump—and there was a young bull, Lute—Lute—a *white* one!"

"Go on!" In his excitement he began shaking her as if he thought he could shake more words out of her.

"Big one—" she gasped. "I got the gun—"

"Did you get him—Chicken?"

"Yes—Lute. Oh, yes!"

He let go of her and ran. From the top of the ridge he saw the scared small herd still running out onto the flat land. Then he saw the albino, and plunged down the slope toward it. . . .

Chicken said, in a foolish-sounding voice: "I really shot him!"

Lute said reverently: "Two thousand dollars, three thousand—God A'mighty, three thousand!

"I can go back, Chicken—you know that? This is all I need! I can go back to Dodge now! You know that, Chicken?"

She didn't cry. Just an honest, ragged prayer: that was what must be coming out of her heart.

Finally: "Yes. I know that." . . .

They staked the white hide out, and spent the whole day on it. Lute said it had to be as clean as a ram's-horn. The weather was almost like summer, and in the afternoon he pulled off his shirt and worked barebacked. Chicken said she'd never seen such fine weather in winter. Lute told her Texas wasn't always like this in winter.

She was gone for a little after that, and he didn't know until evening chill came that she had taken his shirt and washed it. She had been a nuisance and a worry to him for a long time, keeping her safe and getting her grub to put meat on her bones; and now, when she brought him his shirt, crinkled and clean-smelling, it irritated him so that he wanted to slap her.

He wished she'd do or say something that would give him real honest cause to be angry with her. She did that night, sitting by their dying cookfire. He had his back against one of the rocks that cluttered the cave entrance, holding onto his knees and dreaming out loud about what a fine thing it would be if he could sell his blue hides for enough that he could afford to get the white one made into a robe for Genevieve. He told Chicken it was a caution how Genevieve fit to anything that was pure white.

"Salt is white." Chicken said that; then, looking straight at him, she kept on talking fast: "She aint worth hers. She aint worth her salt. Oh, you think so. But she aint. Maybe I aint much woman, like her, but you mind this—a woman that's got ary thing in her craw don't send a man trailin' out into Comanche country for her. She wants him where she can look straight at him, not peek at him from behind his stack of dollars."

She was on her feet when she finished, looking down at him in the dim firelight. She wheeled, stooped and went into the cave. He sat there for quite a spell, wanting to go in and yank her off of her pallet and toss her downslope.

WITH her behind him, Lute topped the last hump before heading down to the flats. In the early sun he spotted the hunt train. He stopped Frosty, and pointed it out to Chicken. "We're about through around here," he said. "We'll have to move a good piece to keep away from an outfit as big as that and get the blues I want."

They headed northwest. By the time they found one big herd and looked it over, not finding a single blue, the day was plenty warm. They ran across a watering-place late in the day, and dismounted for a breather.

Chicken said if they'd brought blankets and more grub, they could have stayed here all night and tried again tomorrow.

"That outfit we saw this morning'll be gettin' out in here," he said. "Besides, I've decided to get you to Denison, and hit back to Dodge myself."

She didn't say anything. She finished her jerky and got a drink of water, and walked up out of the sink and beyond a bunch of hackberry scrub. When she came back, he was ready to go, and she said she could see dust off to the northwest.

He looked at her sharply and said: "Let's get goin'." He saw the dust too, and said it was a norther coming. "Liable to get plenty cold," he said. "Got to hit for camp, fast as we can."

An hour later all the north of the sky looked like blue night moving down, and there was some dust coming; and when it hit them, it was a wall of cold wind.

"Hold onto me!" Lute yelled at Chicken. "Goin' to get bad!"

They went at a lope, with the wind pushing them. The only protection they had was Lute's deerskin jacket tied behind the saddle. He waited until he could feel Chicken's arms shaking, holding to him; then he told her to untie it and put in on. She wanted him to put it on, and he had to yell at her to make her do what he wanted.

The top of night clamped down from the north, and they kept going through the darkness. Lute was hurting with the cold, and he was forced to let the big horse take it easier.

The storm came all of a sudden; and the pellets hit so hard Lute wasn't sure, in the dark, that it wasn't sand until he caught one in his mouth and it melted. He stopped and got the blanket from under the saddle and fastened it around his shoulders. He could feel every minute how tired Frosty was getting. Finally he stopped again, unsaddled, left the saddle, and they went on bareback, Lute carrying his rifle over his arm.

LATER, when Chicken said she was awfully cold, he put her in front of him, and he took the weight of the storm. He held her close against him, and she didn't shiver so much now. It kept getting colder, and the black fierceness howled down over them and beat at them. He rubbed first one of her legs, then the other, hard. She said how cold her feet were.

They went on for a long time, but at last had to get down and walk. Lute led Frosty and carried his rifle, and he told Chicken she'd have to hold to his blanket or she'd get lost. He did that so she would have something to keep her mind on.

They kept getting colder. Lute began to feel for clumps of ice-covered bunch-grass as he walked. His feet were so numb he nearly missed the grass when he did find it.

With dead hands he cleared several bunches of thin ice, and cut them off at the ground with his skinning-knife. Chicken hunkered close against him, and in this way they shielded the little pile of grass while he clumsily lit matches. He bet all of them but two, and the storm won them all and howled at him for his folly. He put the metal case back in his pocket with the two in it, in case they found a sheltered place.

"Come on," he shouted at Chicken, and they trudged on. Every once in a while he'd say something to her so she'd have to answer. Her voice wasn't very strong now, and twice he felt her lose the blanket, and he reached out and pulled her back. Once they stopped, and he fired his rifle three times, and he listened into the storm and made her listen too. No answer came, and they went on.

It seemed quite a spell after that when she let go of the blanket. He reached for her, and couldn't find her. Then he turned back, and stumbled over her. He knelt and rubbed her legs, then straddled her and rubbed her arms and hands. Her old cap thing was loose, and he pulled it down tight on her head by feel, then slapped her face, one side and then the other, till she yelled at him to stop.

It was a crazy thing, but while he was slapping her, he got to thinking about how many times he'd wanted to do just this and hadn't. He got to laughing about that. He laughed so loud that he could hear his laughter over the storm.

He pulled her to her feet, and she was awake now, all right.

The next time she went down, there were some more icy patches of grass, and after he got her awake, he crawled around on his hands and knees and collected some of it. This time he dug a little hole and pulled bullets with his teeth and poured powder into the hole, and packed the grass over it. The first match blazed, but the storm took it. He grabbed his big hat off, and had Chicken hold it down there for a shield. He struck the last match and jammed it into the powder. It flared up in a big blaze, and the grass caught. He stumbled for more grass, but before he found even one bunch, he saw his fire blowing away, and the blackness take the little flurry of sparks. He groped back through the dark to Chicken and Frosty.

They clumped on through the dark, cold eternity of the storm, and now her laughing had stopped. When she went down the next time, he knew this was it. For hours he had been thinking about it, and the thinking had made him colder than the storm. He knelt and worked her over again, but he couldn't get her to talk.

This was it. She couldn't go on. There was nothing else to do.

He fired his Sharps four times again, and put her hands on the barrel and held them there to warm them. The barrel cooled, and he got up and ran his hands along the reins to Frosty's head. He led the big horse a couple of steps away, put the rifle against his head and pulled the trigger.

Frosty fell just right, with his back to the wind. Lute ripped his belly all the way, and his hands were warm by the time he got the entrails out. But when he went to get Chicken, ice formed on his hands before he got her back.

He stuffed her into the cavity of the horse, and she was so little there was still room for him to back partly in against her. He pulled the big saddle blanket so it covered the front of him and helped to hold the warmth in the cavity. Chicken was asleep. . . . She wouldn't freeze now, not before daylight, but he knew he mustn't go to sleep.

He didn't know whether he had or not, but suddenly there was light all around, early sunlight, and the wind was still shouting. Then he knew it wasn't the wind, but men's voices, and the men were prying the carcass open and getting him and Chicken out. They were hunters from that outfit he'd seen yesterday.

LUTE was sure a lucky fellow; he kept telling Chicken that. Lucky the hunters found them; lucky the outfit had a couple of loads of hides ready to make the haul into Denison. "My luck's sure runnin' to find that Genevieve's Paw has set up hide-buyin' in Denison, and Genevieve herself is right here in town with him. Lordy, but it's enough to make a man lose his head," he told Chicken.

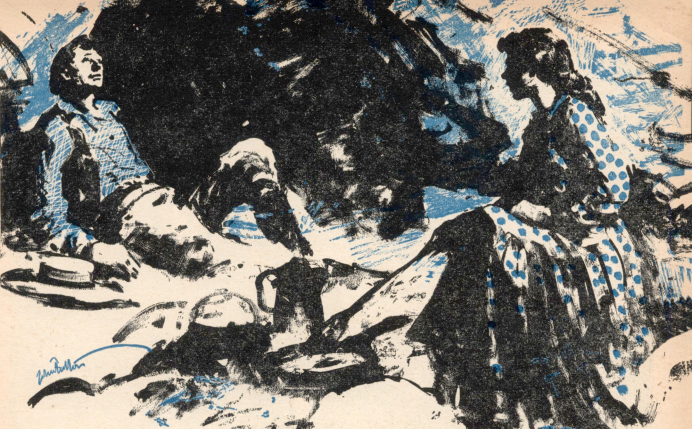
"Which you will, if this knife slips," she said, and that was her first reply to his talk. She finished trimming his hair and handed his skinning-knife back to him.

She stood holding his old shirt in her hands and watched him put on the new one. He stuffed it into his britches, tossed his jacket into the hide-wagon, set his leather hat on his combed-down hair, and asked her how he looked.

She approved with a little nod.

He set out for the hide shed. He would certain sure give Genevieve a surprise. He saw her Paw at a wagon inspecting the load, so he went right on into the office.

Genevieve was there, all right, but she didn't see Lute until that fellow quit kissing her. Then he saw Lute. He was a young fellow with a good smile. "If a man don't kiss his wife once in a while," he said, "some other fellow's liable to, eh? What can I do for you, stranger?"



His grin grew. "Martha, tell me what a fool I've been. So's I'll never forget."

Genevieve got all excited, and she said: "Why, Lute! Well—well, Lute!"

Her husband said: "My name's Armstrong."

"He's Father's new partner in the hide business," Genevieve told Lute happily. "Darling, Lute went out from Dodge to get some blue hides and make a lot of money."

Through all the different feelings that were filling Lute, he couldn't help noticing how foolish that sounded when Genevieve told it to her husband. She had said something more that Lute hadn't understood, and seemed to be waiting for him to answer, so he said: "What?"

"Did you get them—the blue hides?" she asked.

He said: "Yes. Yes, I got 'em."

"Well," Armstrong said brightly, "bring them around. We're shipping to Leavenworth tomorrow, and we'll give you top price for them. Glad to."

Lute said, "Yes," and walked out of there. He walked out of the hide yard, and out of the settlement, and for a long time he did nothing but just walk and think. Funny part was, not much of his thinking was about Genevieve. By the time he got back to the wagons, he didn't rightly know what he had been thinking about.

The wagons were empty. All of his hides were gone. He looked around, but Chicken was gone too. He squatted with his back against a wheel, and began to dig at the ground with his knife.

He was still doing that when Chicken came around the end of the wagon and stopped there by him. At first he didn't know her, not in the full, soft skirts that now covered her toes, and with her hair all combed and piled up thataway on her head. That hair got him. Even after he stood up, he kept looking down at it until at last he put his hand on it to see if it was as soft as it looked.

It was.

THEN he noticed her mouth—the woman stillness on it. Seemed like every last thing about her was changed. Well, not the wide-apart eyes. They were the same. Well, no, not quite.

He said: "Where's my hides?"

Of a sudden he was very mad at her because she looked so different.

"Your blues are at the shed. I done sold my white one."

That set him to studying her for sure. He studied especially how calm and soft brown and gold-speckled her eyes were. Then that mouth of hers, and how she had it fixed that woman way.

He said: "Say that again."

She said: "I done sold my white one."

Yep! Damned if her voice hadn't grown up, too! He began to grin.

He said: "What's your name?"

"Martha."

"Yep—that's right. I remember." His grin grew. "Martha, will you do somethin' for me?"

"What?"

"Tell me what a fool I've been. So's I'll never forget."

She began to smile. "A man generally remembers best what he finds out for himself."

"What did they give you for the white hide?"

"Seventeen hundred dollars. The man—" She looked down at the hole he'd dug with his knife.

His grin went away, and he frowned. "Go on. Say it."

"I don't want to."

"Say it."

She looked up and said: "Mr. Armstrong, he bought it special for a robe for—"

"Seventeen hundred, huh?"

She said: "With what you get from the blue hides, it'll be a plenty to set you up in hide-buyin'—like you said."

When he put his hands on her shoulders, she smiled brightly.

He said: "I wonder if there's a preacher here?"

"Yes, I already asked."

After he kissed her, he said: "My luck's sure runnin' lately."

A book-length novel by

Francis Wallace

GRIDIRON

THE girl who sat before the long mirror of the dressing-table looked about seventeen—which could be doubted, as might also the quality of young innocence which wide, well-spaced blue eyes gave to her fair round face; but there could be no question about the texture of her skin, the slimness of her figure or her rich auburn shoulder-length hair.

The door to the room opened very slowly, and a man of about thirty-five, a very dressed-up little man, moved stealthily toward her; but there was no menace in him, and his narrow face had an anticipatory smile. The girl continued to hum a throaty tune, to dab at her face, gave no sign that she knew he was there until his hands had almost reached her shoulders; then she observed, in a metallic, contemptuous voice: "So the creep is playing games again!"

The man froze momentarily; the smile left his face and his eyes seemed hurt as those of a child whose playful game had been misunderstood. Her voice slapped him again: "What did I tell you about knocking?"

"Something eating you tonight, baby?" His voice was too big and tough for the rest of him.

"I might as well be in a hospital with a lot of nosy internes."

"You mean you've got a scar some place, baby?" His laugh was deliberately grating, and his eyes went significantly to her brief costume—a fragment of dark blue lace, embellished with opaque silk designs and suggestive red arrows. She said nothing; now there was no innocence but biting contempt in her face as she wrapped a robe about her, gave each movement a deliberate rasp designed to cut his ego. His face darkened in resentment; and now his hands moved to her shoulders and his fingers dug into the flesh beneath the robe.

She turned, broke his grip, leveled icy eyes upon him. "Ziggy, you've got a good thing here at the Blue Lily, haven't you?"

"You're telling I."

"If you want to keep it, stop creeping in—and keep your hands off me."

Ziggy thought he was a good actor, which explained a lot about him. Now he pretended to be amused.

"Something must be eating you tonight, baby."

HOT SPOT

THE STORY OF THREE BROTHERS WHO PLAYED FOOTBALL ON TWO RIVAL TEAMS; OF THE NIGHT-CLUB SINGER KNOWN AS THE BLUE LILY; AND OF THE GAMBLERS WHO TRIED AN ALL TOO CLEVER SCHEME.

"I'm not your baby." She returned to the mirror, began to brush her hair. "Now that you're in—what do you want?"

He was still smiling. "There's somebody at my table wants to meet you. He's got some special reason."

"Then you've got a special reason for wanting me to meet him."

"Angles—always angles."

"With you, yes. You never had a thought that didn't angle its way through your corkscrew brain. Who's the goon?"

"Walt Stone is no goon." Ziggy seemed honestly incensed that she should say such a thing. "He's going to be one of the star backs at Capitol this season."

"That don't mean a thing to me."

"It does to me."

"That's what I thought. Close the door when you go out—and next time, knock."

"Lil—you're getting pretty fresh for somebody nobody ever heard of until I took you over."

She turned, blazed her eyes at his. "Whoever heard of you until you latched onto me? And while we're on that subject, let's go further. How about that bonus you owe me?"

"You'll get yours when I get off the nut. I'm still paying painters." He went to the door. "Are you coming out to meet Walt or not?"

"What's the angle?"

Ziggy decided to be amused again. "If you ever get to heaven, you'll probably stop to argue with St. Pete about angles."

"Stop stalling. What's the deal?"

Ziggy shrugged, explained the deal: Walt Stone was a brother of Pete Stone, the Capitol fullback. He was just back from Japan, was supposed to go to Capitol also. If he did, the team would be a cinch not to lose a game. But there was a guy out there talking to Walt now, trying to get him to go to Chanford, which was Capitol's big rival. All he was asking her to do was to come out and break it up. She should have enough civic pride to want to keep Walt at the home school.

"Civic pride!" Lily laughed derisively. "You mean so you can win all your bets."

He smiled. "Okay—suppose there was something in it for you?" The deal, Ziggy said, could be something like this. Number One—she should come out and break up this huddle.

Number Two—she should keep Walt in line, sell him on civic pride, for a couple weeks, until he signed up with Capitol.

"Is he good-looking?"

Ziggy frowned. "Never mind about that—this is strictly business."

"That's what I thought. I'll think it over."

"Well, hustle up. This guy Dexter might put him in the bag while you're wasting time."

"And don't forget to knock next time."

ZIGGY slammed the door. . . . Lily smiled. He thought he was so tough and so clever, but he was so easily handled. She removed the robe, admired her figure in the mirror. It was her best friend. They had come a long way together and had a long way to go. This was just a roadside stop, and she could feel a change coming on. She needed a change of pace; this college boy might just be good for what ailed her. She selected a dress from her wardrobe. . . .

The two men at the table were quickly on their feet as Lily approached. Ziggy, of course, didn't bother to get up. The college boy was big and blond, had a cute face with crinkly eyes, was a laughing boy model. Mr. Dexter was much older, but not too old, the type Lily called the jackpot, because he promised so much but so seldom paid off. But he had all the makings—clothes, manners, distinguished looks, plenty of hair with just the right amount of gray at the edges, even the waxy mustache.

They forgot whatever they had been talking about, which was what gentlemen usually did when the Blue Lily petaled in. Almost immediately, and undoubtedly by Ziggy's arrangement, the orchestra began to play, and the music acted as a detonator on Walt Stone, who had Lily on her feet and away before the gentlemanly Mr. Dexter could get out of his seat.

The college boy could dance; and Lily took time out to be her age, to be young again, to smile and be gay. But after a while the tempo slowed and she looked up at Walt. "Who," she asked, "is Mr. Dexter?"

"He's my man." Walt grinned, glanced quickly toward the table as if he had forgotten Mr. Dexter and wanted to make sure he was still there. Mr. Dexter, he explained, was a big-shot lawyer who also had a very interesting hobby: He liked to help deserving students go to college—if the students were six feet tall, weighed around two hundred pounds, could run the hundred-yard dash in eleven seconds in a football suit, and wanted to go to Mr. Dexter's college.

Lily inspected Walt. "You would seem to be a deserving student—but I thought you were going to Capitol."

His eyes crinkled, and he looked down at her, chuckled: "Angles, Freshface. You wouldn't understand. . . . How long since you had a good home-cooked meal?"

"You don't mean—you can cook too?"

He explained. They were going to have a birthday dinner at his house Thursday night, and everybody was supposed to bring his best girl. He didn't have any best girl because he had been away. Also, the competition would be very keen, because his brother Pete's wife was a regular babe, and his kid brother Davey's girl was a high-school dumpling. "I bet them," he said, "that I'd still turn up with the leading lady. Then I saw you. Do you like ham and cabbage?"

Lily smiled up at him. "That does it, son." And then Walt thanked her very nicely, gathered her in and they danced again.

Lily sang quite well that night. Angles always stimulated her. Ziggy had an angle; Walt had an angle; Mr. Dexter would have more angles than a geometry book—and then there was Lily, who had been weaned on angles.

CHAPTER TWO

LILY had faced audiences for so long, on stage and street corner, that she always felt more or less on parade and moved easily into any rôle. Now, when they drew up before the big comfortable-looking house, and Walt went into a Sir Walter Raleigh routine, she took his arm and gave her interpretation of Queen Bess. He had briefed her about the family; so that when applause came from an upper balcony, she bowed to the two up there, knew that the younger one was Davey, the birthday boy, and that the big one, who carried a baby under his arm like a football, was Pete, the married brother and the star fullback of the Capitol team.

Lily played it well, knew she had it—but also knew she needed it, for Walt had not exaggerated about this being an all-star female cast. The mother still had the beauty of bone and line that hadn't been rubbed on and didn't rub off, even at her age and after an afternoon over a hot stove. The other two were jet brunettes in dark dresses, and they made a very nice frame for Lily's red hair and lime linen.

During the dinner, which was also as advertised, and very gay, except for the mother, who seemed content just to sit and enjoy them, Lily continued her inspection: Little Nancy Dark-eyes was the type that didn't talk much, just looked, and might be very bright or just plain dumb. She would marry Davey early and grow hippy and busty; right now she was all dimples and curves. But Martha was the babe. She had come from an office, looked after the baby, helped with the dinner—and still was cool, calm and slightly sensational. She had the same type of face as Mom's, a tall showgirl's figure, a violin voice and the manner you didn't just put on with a mink.

LILY found herself thinking of all this in an office every day with a smooth-tail; for the plot had thickened when Walt had said that Martha was Mr. Dexter's secretary, had been for years, and intended to stay on the job until Pete got his degree at the end of the year. That was because of the house. The father had died suddenly during the war, leaving a mortgage on the place, and the boys had made an agreement not to strike out for themselves until the house was free of debt. Martha was going along on that; she seemed to be a stand-up guy; but Mr. Dexter would have a pocketful of routines, and you could never quite tell about these stately still-water dolls.

Pete was probably the answer to that. He was raw man with things down deep in his eyes he wouldn't always be talking about. Just how much of what Walt was, Lily hadn't had a chance to find out, because he had never got off the laugh-wheel. Davey was just a happy kid, still young enough to cry inside about things; but if he did, nobody would ever know, because he was no part of a softy. They didn't particularly resemble each other, but were all good-looking in different ways, and all built from the same pattern—wide shoulders, narrow waist, flat hips and strong legs.

Davey opened his presents after dinner. The kid had a cute sense of humor, and a gag for everything—as when he tried his sweater on and looked at Nancy, who was definitely the type. They all laughed but kept it clean; and there was none of the business of who-gave-what. Davey thanked them all, including Lily, who said that if she were going to be thanked, she would have to give him something, so she got up and kissed him. That started something. Martha and Nancy also kissed Davey, and Little Dark-eyes was not just fooling. Then Davey went to his mother and kissed her, very sweetly.

His mother began to cry and to say how sorry she was that Davey couldn't have what he really wanted most, what they had always planned for him. It came out that Davey wasn't going to college because he wasn't quite big enough to get a football scholarship at Capitol with his older brothers; and because of the house-payments, they could not afford to send him. The boy was swell about it, Lily thought, acted as if it didn't mean a thing to him, said he would keep on working and help with the payments.

Then Walt moved in, said he was sorry to upset Davey's plans—but the

kid was going to have to go to college. The others thought it was another of his gags, and their faces told him this was nothing to kid about. Walt said he wasn't kidding, but that there were a couple of things they might not like so well. The first was that Davey was going to Chanford.

Lily began to get it. This was Walt's angle with Mr. Dexter. She thought it was swell—but there were no cheers from the others. Davey was embarrassed. "Gee, that's great, Walt—but I'd have to play against you and Pete in the big game."

Walt grinned, said that wasn't quite right, because Walt was also going to Chanford. That was the atom bomb, and the looks swept around the table while Walt waited, as if he had expected all this.

"I won't let you do it," Davey said. "They're only taking me to get you."

Walt assured him that wasn't the case at all. Chanford had been interested in Davey as soon as they found out Capitol was not. As for himself, Walt grinned, he was just being selfish. At Capitol he could just be Pete's brother; at Chanford he would be on his own. Pete wanted to know what the arrangement was, who was taking care of them. Walt smiled blandly, said Pete should know they didn't do such things at Chanford, that he and Davey would have to work—although they probably wouldn't have to break their backs at it.

Pete turned to Martha. "Were you in on this too?"

"Me? How?"

"Your boss is a Chanford talent scout."

She shrugged. "He did mention the other day how interesting it would be when you three brothers played on the same team. I said it looked as if Capitol was not going to take Davey. That's all. You're for this, aren't you?"

Sure, Pete was for it. It wouldn't be what they had wanted, or what their father had always wanted; but it was the next-best thing. Chanford was a fine school, a very fine school, and they should all be very happy it had turned out this way, that Walt had been able to swing it.

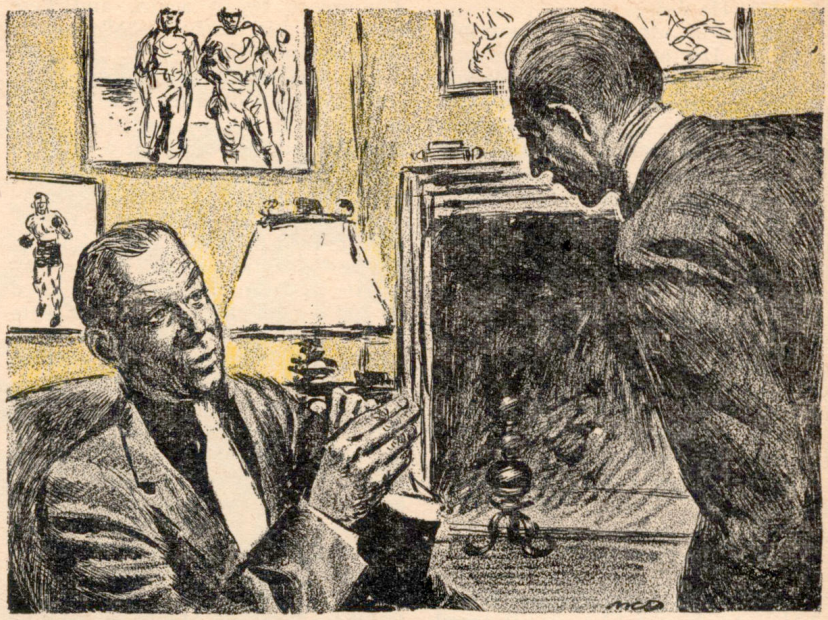
"But dirty old Chanford!" Mom protested.

"Hey, Mom—smile when you say that," Walt cried.

Mom smiled. She would get used to it, and it was wonderful. Only, who would she root for? Nancy said Mom could do like the President at the Army-Navy game; but Mom said that was one game she would not go see.

Pete grinned. "Nothing to worry about, Mom—I'll take it easy with the kids." Walt and Davey roared at that, but Lily got a thrill out of the way the three brothers looked at each other—no fancy talk, but just a nice look which said it would take more than college rivalry to break the solidarity of the Stone family.

Illustrated by John McDermott



Jingle hacked it out. "I'm taking over. Now shuddup, siddown an' listen."

They seemed to wake up then, decided that what Walt had arranged was so much better than no college at all for Davey that it called for a continued celebration. Walt had the answer to that, too—they would all go to the new hot spot of the town to see the sensational Blue Lily do her stuff.

"Have you seen her?" Martha asked Lily.

"Not in person," Lily said, smiling at Walt.

The question came up of who was to look after the baby. Mom wanted to do that, said she was too old to go to night-clubs; but there was a sparkle in her eyes, and Nancy came up with the answer. She and Davey were too young to go to night-clubs; they would stay home, look after the baby, do the dishes and clean up. Lily decided Little Dark-eyes definitely was not dumb.

Chapter Three

WALT was dancing with his mother, who looked very pretty under the blue lights, with her silver hair and smooth skin, highly colored by the excitement of doing something which was for her both unusual and daring. She still had a young figure, a young voice and a young mind, and Walt was looking down at her as though she were the million-dollar baby. Walt was a good kid.

Martha, dancing with Pete, gazed up at him with jack-o'-lantern eyes. She was enjoying the dancing and was envied by every woman who watched her, for all that she had—including the big and vital man who looked at her with adoring eyes.

Lily was alone, listening to the music, having strange uneasy thoughts. She had always thought her showcase had been very flossy and splendiferous; but now, sitting on the sucker's side of the stage, she saw how cheap and hokey it really was, and what an accurate reflection of Ziggy's personality. His idea of illusion had been to let the painters paint like mad, slapping blue lilies on everything in sight, including intimate items in the powder-room, and probably in the men's room.

Lily was beginning to feel like the ancient king who had such a golden touch that he had starved to death, or more likely, she thought, had finally gone nuts and knocked himself off.

She was feeling like a Cinderella with two left feet. Tonight she had enjoyed herself in a different sort of way, with honest laughs. She had been part of a family, complete with baby. Walt was getting a terrific belt out of fooling his family, and Lily had gone along with him; but soon she was going to have to leave the party, get up before them in her blue costume, do her suggestive dance and sing her naughty little songs, all according to the gospel of Ziggy. After that, she would be nothing to Walt's family but a night out. The slipper wouldn't fit.

Mr. Dexter was coming to the table, with new and more staccato messages in his telegraphic eyes, flattery in his easy, cushioned voice. "Miss Carewe

—how effective you are in a dress! May I?" He did.

"I'm not so sure that is a compliment, Mr. Dexter."

He even had a Pullman laugh. "Please be assured I am in no sense insensible to the charms of the Blue Lily, but"—his smile was so shedding she could almost feel its warmth—"there are some women who—"

"Like her, for instance," Lily pointed to Martha, whose back was to them, and she saw that Mr. Dexter's reaction was electric, that he was in no sense insensible to the charms of Martha Stone. "Stick around," Lily continued, "and you can meet her; she's at this table. But"—and now she laughed lightly—"better not make any passes; the big guy is her husband—Walt Stone's brother."

Dexter was smiling at Lily, appraising her. "Yes, I know. Martha is my secretary."

"Well—how coincidental!"

WHEN the others returned to the table, it was like a well-staged scene, Lily thought, in which each hit his cue right on the nose. Martha pretended not to see Mr. Dexter until she reached the table, was properly surprised. Pete and Mr. Dexter shook hands, looked each other straight in the eye, said this was long overdue. Walt grinned at everybody, and Mom continued to study Mr. Dexter carefully from back of her smile.

Now Ziggy was coming, with his professional smile: but Lily knew other things would be working in his devious mind, that he was not going to like this, would be apt to uncoil an ugly crack with a barb at the end, spoil Walt's surprise. So after the introductions she decided to forestall him.

"Zygwald, have you heard the good news—about Walt's going to Chanford?"

But he smiled in good humor, said to Mr. Dexter: "So you put it over?" Mr. Dexter was carefully lighting a cigarette, did not answer. Ziggy put his arm about Pete's shoulder. "Okay—we'll still take Chanford, eh, pal?"

"We'll do our best, Ziggy."

"I never went wrong betting on Pete yet." Ziggy signaled the waiter, gave the circular motion with his hand that indicated he was buying a drink all around. "Just to show everybody there's no hard feelings—Walt, Mr. Dexter—this party is on the house."

Pete looked steadily at Ziggy, did not smile. "Thanks, Ziggy—but it's a family party. We'll take care of it."

"Forget it, Pete," Ziggy chuckled. "I'll get it back when you beat these Chanford guys."

"It's our party, Ziggy." Something in Pete's voice made them all look at him.

Ziggy shrugged. "Okay—if that's the way you want it, Pete."

"That's the way we want it, Ziggy." The music began again, and Pete turned to his mother. "Mom—how about a dance?"

Pete danced with his mother. Ziggy sent a sharp look after him, glanced at Lily as if this were all her fault, then walked away without a word to any of the others. The little man had been hurt again.

Walt took Lily's hand, began to rise, but she held his hand, glanced at her watch. It would soon be time for Cinderella to scram, but now she wanted to see played the scene which Pete had set up. Pete had set Ziggy down solidly, for whatever reason; and he had invited Mr. Dexter to show his hand by leaving Martha unguarded. But if Mr. Dexter had a hand, he did not play it. He behaved as if he really had joined the party quite by accident, as if he had just come over to say hello to Lily. Now he said good-night to her, and to Martha, politely, as any boss would who had happened to meet his secretary socially. He was very happy to have met Mrs. Stone, and he wished Walt luck at Chanford as if he had had no part at all in Walt's going there.

Lily excused herself, left as though she were going to the powder-room, hurriedly, before Martha or Mom might try to join her. She fully expected to find Ziggy waiting in her room, decided that if he did, she would set him down harder than Pete had done, for Lily had another jolt in store for the little man.

She'd dance in her revealing costume, float her feathered petals in the dim blue light that was made more nebulous by the tobacco smoke; but when she came back to sing in the glaring spotlight, she would wear a dress, blue and not much of a dress, but still a dress—and she would sing the least naughty of her songs with the innocent air of a kid who wasn't really aware of what she was saying. She was going to try to make the slipper fit.

CHAPTER FOUR

PETE helped his mother and wife into the back seat of the new five-passenger coupé, stood outside a few moments, admiring it, then got in beside his brother. "Is this car part of the deal?"

Walt snapped his fingers. "Doggone! Why didn't I think of that?" He started the car. "Well—did all you nice people have a nice time?"

Martha laughed softly. "All right, Walt—you put it over very smoothly—although I thought she did look somewhat familiar—the newspaper ads, I suppose. How long have you known her?"

"Two nights."

"This is her car, isn't it?"

"Sure."

"Mom—your boys work fast."

"They take that after their father."

"Slow down, Walt," Pete said.

Walt dropped the speed. "That's what comes when a guy has responsibilities."

"Yeh—and you're still one of them, don't forget. Look, Walt—I know you're not supposed to talk—but I'm just curious how they do it at Chanford—and for how much?"

Walt drove quietly for a while. "Well, it's no bonanza, if that's what you're worrying about—but I'll be able to help as much on the house as I would have at Capitol—maybe more."

"Wish I could say the same."

MOM picked it up from the back seat. "You just get your degree this year, Pete, and everybody will be happy."

Pete turned to her. "Mom—you've never really shown us any figures. Are you sure you're doing all right with the house?"

"You just let me worry about that."

"That still doesn't answer my question. How much would it take to burn the mortgage?"

Mom thought awhile. "About five thousand."

"That's still a lot of dough—the rate we've been paying it off; but after this year, we'll pay it off a lot faster. I'll get out of school, play pro ball, pick up that five gees like that—" Pete snapped his fingers.

"Only your share, Pete," his mother said. "After all, you're married and have your own future. As soon as you can afford it, you should move to a little house of your own—"

"Trying to get rid of us, Mom?"

Mom laughed. "Yes—you and Martha and Mike."

Walt said to Pete: "What I can't get through my head is why, if we're so hard up, you insisted on paying that check?"

"We couldn't afford not to pay it."

"I still don't get it."

"I'll spell it out for you sometime." Pete inclined his head toward the back seat.

Mom had seen the gesture. "I'd like to know too, Pete."

"It's just as Walt said—maybe I'm getting cautious from having responsibilities; but I'm not going back to Ziggy's again." The car was quiet for a minute; then Pete said: "And I don't think you should hang around the place, either Walt."

"Why?"

"I don't like the tie-up."

"Has this any connection with Lily?"

"In a way."

"She just works there." There was a challenging note in Walt's voice.

"Pete doesn't mean that," Martha said quickly. "You'd better tell him, Pete."

"If he thinks I'm old enough to know."

"Walt," his mother said, "don't talk like that. Whatever Pete has in mind is for your good."

It was, Pete said soberly, the gambling angle. Ziggy had always bet on football games; had helped them when they were in high school; had even helped Pete in college, a few bucks here and there. But Ziggy had been a small-timer then. Now he was getting into the big leagues; his place was becoming a hangout for the heavy gamblers. There had been scandals in pro football. Pete and Walt were in big-time college ball. They were all skating on thin ice as it was, trying to get the house paid for. Any smear might ruin them. They just couldn't take a chance on getting involved with a man like Ziggy.

When Walt did not answer immediately, his mother said: "I think Pete's right, Walt."

Walt shrugged. "I still don't think Ziggy would ask us to do anything wrong."

"Maybe not," Pete said. "But he still talks too much. You heard him popping off tonight about how he was going to bet on the Capitol-Chanford game. You and I might just have the deciding of that game, Walt. We can't take favors from him."

Walt's good nature was back. "Okay—give yourself the pep talk. Davey and I won't be here, remember."

LATER, they were in their room with the baby, who was getting his late feeding; Pete said disturbedly: "Maybe I am too cautious, Marty—maybe I was too rough with him."

"I think you had every right to say what you did. You're the head of the family now."

"Would you like the Blue Lily in the family?"

"I'd have to know more about her."

"She's got fingerprints all over her."

"A girl can't always avoid fingerprints."

"The dope around is that she's Ziggy's girl."

"You can't always go on gossip, either. Your mother likes her."

"Mom's a pushover for girls—because she just had boys."

The baby made a wonderful burp, and Martha laughed. "Mike says you should stop worrying—anyhow, you know how Walt is with girls."

"That's just it—I know how he is with everything. He's like Dad." This was as near as Pete had ever come to criticizing his dead father, and he seemed to realize it. "What I mean is he's got a good heart, but he doesn't always stop to think."

"This is a fine thing he's doing, Pete."

"Don't I know it? He doesn't want to go to Chanford—we've been talking about plays we could work together—he's doing this to take care of Davey. Just the same, maybe it's a good thing he's not going to be here, close to that girl. She might be all right herself, but she's tied in with the wrong people. They could use her as the link."

Martha smiled. "Aren't you dramatizing now? You know how Walt is with girls."

"I suppose you're right."

"That's all, Mike, back to your beddy-by." Leaning over the crib, Martha said: "Well, you finally met my boss."

"Yeh."

"What did you think of him?"

"About what I'd figured."

"What had you figured?"

"Look, Martha, do we have to talk about it?"

She faced him with a little smile. "No—but—"

"Okay. I know he's been swell to you, and held your job while you had the baby; and Mom couldn't have kept up the house payments without your money, and still couldn't—"

"Pete—please—"

"Let me finish. Now he's sending Davey to school when I couldn't swing it, and he's paying Walt so he can help more with the house. He's just too wonderful, but I'm your husband and I'm jealous and there's not a thing I can do about it until I can get my degree—so—"

Martha took his big face between her hands, looked at him fondly. "All right—but you could still trust me a little."

"I do—all the way. But I don't trust any guy who has to be around you all day." Pete was smiling again.

"That sounds like a compliment—but then you're just my husband."

"I wouldn't even trust your husband around you."

"Now, there you have something." She kissed him softly, moved away. "With that man around, I wouldn't trust your wife." She dropped to the floor, peered under the double bed.

"Lose something?" Pete asked.

"No— Just looking for gamblers."

"I see one."

"Where— Ouch! You brute—picking on a girl when she's down!"

CHAPTER FIVE

ONCE the football season began, the Blue Lily Café became the place to go for the latest odds, the scarcest tickets and hot eggs of information just off the coaching nests. The sporting fraternity was assimilated in the well-dressed supper crowds; but their sharp faces and clipped dialogue were prominent in the early morning hours after the honest working-people had gone home to bed. Ziggy was flattered, as any little man with a big ego would be, who suddenly found himself the center of a group which had previously only tolerated him. Their attitude was still somewhat condescending; but he bustled about with such pigeon-breasted importance that whenever a wine-cork exploded, somebody at the press table would observe that Zygwald had just popped another button from his weskit.

NOTHING was too good for the press, at Ziggy's. His office typewriter was always available, and a ringside booth was reserved regardless of how many important people had to wait behind the velvet rope. Lily spent a lot of time with the newsboys between shows, found them somewhat balmy Indians, none of whom, however, belonged to the paw-knee tribe. She didn't know much about football, and proved it with un-bright remarks which they laughed at and finally began to print. Not unaware of the publicity value, she thought up other quotable fruitcake; and they pinned gags of their own coinage on her until she gradually became known as a character, and had to read the sports pages and Harry Walker's night-life column every day to see how dumb-like-a-fox she was.

From their talk at the table and her reading and listening to the games on the radio, she had a general idea of how the football season was progressing. Pete Stone had had a knee injured in one of the early games, and Capitol was being hard-pressed in battles which would have been breezes with him in the line-up. The fact that Walt was going like a hot-hinge at Chanford was a double abrasion on sensitive Capitol hides; for he was not only unavailable to carry on for Capitol in his brother's absence but was building Chanford into a definite menace in the approaching annual Big Game between the two schools.

The situation was particularly painful to Ziggy, who, like most professional gamblers, preferred not to gamble at all, but to give odds on a sure thing. When he had had a difficult afternoon sweating out a close one, he would scornfully ignore Lily or glare at her as the cause of it all, for her failure to keep Walt in line; but there had been no scenes between them since she had defied him by replacing the brief costume with a frock. The public had welcomed the change; Lily was a bigger attraction than ever; Harry Walker now referred to her as an "artist of song." Ziggy was too much of a business man to quarrel with success; but it was an uneasy truce, for he made it very obvious that she was an enemy inside his walls. . . .

Walt never mentioned football in the daily letters Lily found in her fan-mail box at the Café; but he was put-

ting other things down in black and white which would have been very valuable if he were the usual type of college boy, with father and lawyer, and if Lily were that kind of girl. He had even mentioned marriage; but had said that she would have to be true to him until he could pick up five thousand bucks somewhere to pay the mortgage on the old homestead. He added that he would also love her in December as he did in May. Walt could laugh even in print.

THE best Lily could do in return was to scribble out a page a day which, she told him, looked like a lot of grunts from one wooden Indian to another; but, she explained, she had never gone to college, or to high school either, because her pops had forgotten to come home one day when she was a tree growing in Brooklyn, and she had to start hoofing early for the tough but honest buck. She underscored *honest*. She told him about how Harry Walker and her other newsboys bodyguarded her against some of the forms of so-called human life which were washed up these nights on the Blue Lily Beach. She particularly mentioned a Dick Tracy character called Jingle, who was always jingling coins in his pocket but who also looked as if his back teeth were always aching, and who was nothing she would ever want to meet at midnight when the wind was howling blue.

She did not tell him that the chief problem in the adult delinquent department was his man, Mr. Dexter. From the butt that was scuttled about the press table, she knew that Walt and Davey were supposed to have their expenses paid by Mr. Dexter, and she didn't want to cause any trouble because of the family finances. Anyhow, Mr. Smooth-tail was not being difficult; all he did was send her flowers every now and then, with perfume or some other harmless item like black lingerie; and he would sit and smile at her. Every so often she would sing a chorus to him because she really admired a smooth operator; but she never sat at his table, and he was not welcome at the press table because he had hijacked Walt from Capitol. He was not too popular with Ziggy, either; but he was a steady spender, and with Ziggy a buck was a buck, particularly since Walt was gone. She understood that Mr. Dexter had denied paying Walt, but the newsboys said that was the old malarkey, because if Mr. Dexter admitted it he would get his college into a jam and get Walt tossed out.

After a while Lily did write Walt that she suspected what she was falling into with him might also be love; at least it was something very different and very nice, and seemed to check pretty well with symptoms she had heard other touched dolls describe. And she told him that every night now, when she sang, she picked out somebody in the audience to sing to. This was a new part of the act which had gone over very well, because she and the spotlight man had worked up quite a routine of jumping from person to person before she made up her mind; but what she was actually doing, she wrote, was trying to find a man who would remind her of Walt; and when she sang, it was really to him. So he was always in her thoughts, and it helped put over the songs, too.

On the night of the Midwest game, in which Walt had scored three touchdowns, everybody at the café seemed to be talking about him, and he was so much in her mind that she actually thought she saw his crinkly eyes, curly hair and cute face at the press table. Then her heart did a kangaroo leap as she realized that it was Laughing Boy in person.

As she walked toward him, he came to meet her, took her hands, and walked along with her, saying sweet and funny things as she sang. When it was over and she took her bows, he bowed too, to the crowd, and then they bowed to each other as if it were part of the act. When the band hit her encore, she did not sing again but gave him her arms and they danced, really danced. Then she took him away with her, and the ringing in her heart drowned out the applause of the crowd. She was still in his arms in her dressing-room when the door opened.

Ziggy stood there. His face was ugly—then sad.

Lily cried: "How many times have I told you to knock?"

"Yes, Ziggy—what's the idea?" Now Laughing Boy was not laughing.

Ziggy made another of his quick changes. He was grinning widely. "Idea? The idea is they're tearing down the joint. Come on out—you too, Walt. You're terrific."

"You go out, Ziggy." Walt was grinning again. "You take the bows." Walt closed the door.

Ziggy did not go out to take the bows. He went to his office to brood. He was beginning to get fed up with doing things for people and getting thanked with a kick in the teeth. All he ever got from his friends and old pals these days was the cold shoulder of beef. Walt could take a powder and have the guts to come back, muscle into the show and shut doors in people's faces who owned the joint! But Ziggy couldn't open her door without knocking, or lay a finger on her. Jingle was making cracks about people wasting his time. Pete Stone wouldn't come near the place, wouldn't even let somebody buy him a drink.

And that Bingo Krock. There was a pal!

Ziggy could understand, because of a few scandals here and there, how a coach had to be a little choosy about the characters he was seen around with; like Jingle, for instance. But that didn't mean Bingo had to stay out of the joint entirely, or never call up like he used to, or never even be home when his private number was called; and the last thanks Ziggy had ever expected from a pal was to be barred from the Capitol bench and secret practice. For what? In all the years Ziggy had been around, had he ever asked anybody to do anything wrong? After all the things he had done for Bingo, what had he ever got out of it except maybe a little inside information about injuries and such other things as were helpful in making bets—and passing along the info' where it would do the most good.

Ziggy had earned a reputation with the right people for being on the ball, as far as Capitol was concerned. That was why Jingle had come. The Big Boys were interested in the Big Game, would move in if they could get a certain particular piece of information. Nothing underhanded, just a plain little bit of information that wouldn't hurt anybody. But the Big Boys had to be sure, had to have it from the boy or the coach or somebody in the family. And it couldn't go wrong. Jingle had made that very plain. It couldn't go wrong, he said, sucking his teeth and picking his spot on your vest. That's why Jingle was there, to set it up so it couldn't go wrong. If somebody told them for sure, and it didn't turn out to be for sure— Jingle was making that very plain.

AS a small-time operator, Ziggy had had an idea of how the Big Boys worked; but Jingle had given him the lodge secrets. The Big Boys weren't interested in the C-games, where one team was a big favorite; or in the B-games, which were toss-ups. These were okay for the sucker spot sheets. The Big Boys were interested only in the A-games, where there was a certain particular bit of inside info' running for them and them alone. That's why they had sent Jingle to look into the possibilities of the Capitol-Chanford thing. With Pete Stone out, it would rate a toss-up. But if Pete's knee would be okay, Capitol would be a two-touchdown favorite.

The way it looked now, Pete would not be able to go against Chanford; but if this turned out to be one of Bingo's tricks, and Pete would turn up at game-time with a miraculous recovery—and the Big Boys knew that *for sure*—then they would have an A-game and really chuck it in.

There was another type of game, referred to as Insurance, where someone was put in the bag; but Jingle

said the Big Boys weren't taking any chances on things of such a perilous nature now, had nothing such in mind around here. All they saw in Chanford-Capitol was a chance for an A-game. All they had to know was about Pete's knee. But they had to be sure.

So there it was. Ziggy had a chance to get in on the ground floor. All he had to do was supply that certain particular piece of information which wouldn't hurt anybody. That was what embarrassed him, why it hurt him so deeply that Bingo and Pete, who could give it to him like that, were playing so coy with him. It hurt Ziggy to be treated like that. It really hurt every time Jingle made one of his cracks about small-time operators wasting his time. Jingle was getting disgusted.

So was Ziggy.

But in the morning he felt better—very much better.

Spread all over the front page of the big Sunday edition of the *Register*, Harry Walker's paper, were two pictures. The first showed Walt Stone carrying the Midwest safety man over the goal for his third touchdown. It was titled: SATURDAY AFTERNOON. The second picture showed Walt Stone with his arms about the Blue Lily, current café sensation. This one was captioned: EARLY SUNDAY MORNING.

For publicity like that, people could bawl Ziggy out in his own joint, shut his own doors in his face. They could make funny cracks about him popping buttons from his vest or walking around like a pigeon, write anything they wanted to in their columns. For that kind of stuff—

Ziggy had the electric shock of a new idea, a very cute idea. He got up and began to pace again. This time Ziggy was not brooding, but thinking.

It had come to him how he could get that certain particular bit of information—and get even with a lot of people who had been kicking his teeth out. He would show that Jingle whether he was a small-time operator or not!

Ziggy prepared his script, rehearsed it; and when Lily came in that night, he put on his most charming smile, was even careful to knock on the door.

She was sitting before her mirror again; but now she was not admiring herself as she usually was; she was looking at the two newspaper pictures of Walt Stone pasted on the mirror.

She was moony-eyed. This would be a pushover.

CHAPTER SIX

LATER that night, when Harry Walker sat down at his little word-piano, he wrote that at long last Lily Carewe was divorcing herself from the Blue Lily Café at the end of the current week. He predicted that one of the smart showmen who had been scouting her act for some time would quickly plant her in a more spiritual atmosphere, where she would reincarnate as an Easter Lily. In preparation for this, and after much urging from Harry Walker himself, but over the violent objection of Ziggy the Pouter, she had, at her Sunday night show, discarded the vulgar honky-tonk dance, and substituted two honest torchy songs obviously beamed at a certain well-known football star from a nearby university.

If Pete's knee would be okay, Capitol would be a favorite.

Harry Walker was vaguely aware he was displaying the chaste affection of an artistic father. Lily was his baby and would continue to be. The kid had quit in a huff, over something she hadn't mentioned and Harry hadn't asked about. She might be in a tough spot. The reference to talent-scouts had been a polite fiction which might, however, give some of them an idea. It would also needle Zygwald, who was inclined to overestimate the obligations due his hospitality.

That was all the paragraph meant to Harry Walker, who, like most writers, was almost totally unaware and equally unconcerned about the width or effect of the ripples caused by the pebbles he tossed into people's professional ponds. They were characters, he the dramatist, and inclined to regard his reactions as infallible.

This pebble rippled in many directions:

It violently disturbed the morning coffee of Pete Stone, who was already morosely disturbed about his injury and irritated by the persistent efforts of newspaper men, gamblers, students and other football fanatics to discover its exact nature. Following coaching orders, Pete had been doing certain things which he thought rather silly on the part of a father and a veteran of grim war episodes. He had already lost his chance for the All-American selection he had privately cherished and desperately wanted for its cash-in value in professional football.

But what bothered him most was the fact that Walt had ignored his warning about going to the Blue Lily. The picture of him making public love to a night-club singer connected with gamblers had been bad enough in itself; but now Harry Walker was keeping the thing alive. Everything Walt did for the rest of the season would be used in the same way to glamorize a romance which might not even exist. Against that background, a rattle-brain like Walt might be maneuvered into a really dangerous spot. Pete had the feeling which had haunted him since the night they had all first gone to Ziggy's—that the entire family might be caught in a whirlpool over which they would have no control. He sat down and wrote Walt a letter about it, added a postscript—the next time he came to town it might be nice if he dropped in on the family, too—or at least gave his mother a phone call.

RIPPLES reached Chanford at last. Tom Dawn, the coach, tried to be understanding about the picture. He could see, he had told Walt, how a boy might think he could slip off a train at midnight, visit his girl for a couple hours, then fly back, mingle with the arriving squad and pretend he had been in his berth all night. That was smart—and Tom Dawn liked smart players. But to go to the hottest night-spot and be photographed in a love-scene with the café sensation of the town—that was not smart. Further reminders, like this column of Harry Walker's, might revive embarrassing questions by faculty people who were already sensitive to newspaper gibes about the manner in which the two "Rolling Stones" had rolled from Capitol to the simon-pure Chanford school.

Walt, who played the Foolish Sinner rôle very well, from long practice, was relieved that Coach Dawn seemed to know nothing about the gambling angle. He made a vow hereafter to think before he acted—at least until after the Big Game; but almost immediately he began to relax, to assure himself that nothing could happen now, because Lily was leaving Ziggy's. In his mind he began to canvass the places in Chanford where she might work; but he decided that would not be so good, either. If he were so close to Lily, he would want to marry her. It was going to be rough, waiting until the house was paid for; but that was how it had to be.

When Pete's letter came, he answered it immediately, told his brother

to relax, explained why he had not come home. He had intended to—but certain characters he met had quizzed him so much about Pete's knee that he had decided it would look funny for a Chanford man to come snooping around. Chanford was very much interested in that knee, too. He knew they would not think he was spying or that he would spill anything he found out; but what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him; he wouldn't be apt to drop anything by a hint or even a facial gesture. He hoped the knee would be okay—and he wasn't just thinking about the game. As for the other stuff, his coach had had him on the carpet, too. He definitely wouldn't stick his chin out any more. Okay now?

The ripples reached Ziggy, crashed his sensitive ego, became breakers of wrath that produced a violent undertow. He described in detail the scene with Lily. He had gone in very gentlemanly to find out what she knew about Pete's knee, figuring Walt knew or that she had gone to the house with him. She had told him Walt hadn't gone home because of the questions Ziggy had asked him about Pete's knee, that she wasn't interested in it. Then he had made her an honest proposition, suggested she visit the mother or Pete's wife, and find out what she could, that there would be something in it for her.

So what did she do? Right away she got tough, told him she wasn't go-to be any stool for him, to get his own information. He had taken that, tried to calm her down, had even offered to marry the broad. So what? She laughed at him. So he had blown up, as any man would do, tossed the book at her; told her she was getting too tight for her pants, she wouldn't get anywhere with that Dexter, because he was nuts about his secretary; that Harry Walker and the newspaper guys were kidding her around and she was falling for it; that that Walt Stone was just playing her around—and the Stones were going to lose their house anyhow if the old lady didn't get caught up with her payments pretty soon. Then he had told her she would wake up with a bang some day if she kept on pushing him around; that he had picked her out of a chorus line, and she would go right back there if she should suddenly stop being the Blue Lily. Then she had hit the roof, started talking about a bonus again—and was going to walk out that night until he reminded her about the week's notice.

Okay—so she could get out. He would take steps to keep her from using the Blue Lily name. He would get himself another Blue Lily, and when he did he would keep her away away from newspaper guys. He would bar that Harry Walker from the joint—drinking his liquor and putting ideas into Lily's head and writing phony stuff about talent scouts going to pick her up! And he would bar that Dexter, too, spoiling her with flowers and coming into his joint to steal Walt right out from under his nose. And he would take care of that Bingo Krock too, while he was about it. He would let slip to the press some of the little things he used to do for Bingo Krock and Pete Stone, things the school guys weren't supposed to know about—and now the gratitude he was getting. He would get even with all of them—

During all this Jingle sat listening, watching, jingling his coins, thinking: "What a dope this is that's been wastin' my time. A tailor-made set-up, the kind we work on months to build up; but does this dope see it? His little feelin's has been hurt; he can't make the moll; so he's going to get rid o' all the star actors. This is what wants to be a Big Boy!"

As Ziggy continued to recite the litany of his faithless friends, Jingle also got up and began to walk about. Now and then he interrupted to ask a question; and as the little tumblers clicked into place, his teeth stopped aching and the jingle of his coins, an orchestration for Ziggy's oration, grew faint. Finally the last angle dropped, the door flew open, revealed—a cinch A, maybe even *Insurance*—

"Shuddup." Jingle's voice was a heavy chain dragged over cement.

"Hey—" The dope's little feelin's was bein' hurt again. "Nobody's talking to me that way in my own joint. Who do you think you're talking to that way?"

"A dope—a time-wastin' jerk." Jingle hacked it out. "I got it. I'm takin' over. Now shuddup, siddown an' listen."

Ziggy shut up, sat down, listened, marveled. It was so simple, so cute, so safe—and also so legal.

Chapter Seven

Jason Carter Dexter—it said on the office door, on the top floor of the highest building in Capitol City—the one that served as a beacon. Lily opened the door, was greeted by a pretty girl who piloted her through two more offices beautifully furnished with beautiful girls who were also beautifully furnished. Finally she arrived at the office of the private secretary who was most beautiful of all.

"Greetings, Easter Lily," Martha said.

"So you read my friend Harry?"

"Doesn't everybody? Well, congratulations and best wishes."

"Thanks. I'll need them."

Martha led the way into the private office of Jason Carter Dexter himself. It had a big desk, a couch, comfortable chairs and many windows. It also had a kitchenette and shower.

"All the comforts of home," Lily said, "but I'd be afraid of planes."

"The boss isn't coming in today—so I thought you might like to eat here—salad, lamb chop, tea or coffee—all right?"

"Wonderful," Lily thrilled. "I'll help."

"It's ready. You can help me carry it to the table." The table was already set in a bay window that overlooked the town.

"I suppose they read Harry out at the house too?" As Martha nibbled and nodded, Lily went on: "Are they mad at me?"

"For what?"

"Because Walt didn't come home?"

"Oh—so you knew that?" Martha frowned. "I could shake that Walt myself, big as he is! Pete was furious because of that—and the picture."

"Why—doesn't he think I'm good enough for his brother?"

Martha had led a sheltered life, had always vaguely assumed certain things about burlesque girls, which was, she realized, how she had catalogued Lily. But now, looking into the frank innocent face opposite, she felt sure that the story of Lily's life was in her honest eyes, that she had walked through mud without being spattered. "You're okay with me, Lily; and Mom's been in your corner from the beginning. Pete liked you too—it's—you may as well know—it's the gambling set-up at your club he's been afraid of."

Martha explained why, as she knew it, from the time Pete had insisted on paying the check; told of Ziggy's gambling connections, the scandals in football, the chance Walt took of having himself smeared by hanging around there; the danger in the picture. She said that Pete had originally acted from instinct; but that since he had hurt his knee, the gamblers had been trying their best to find out all about it. The strangest people had even come to Martha, quizzing her, so that she had to make a rule of discussing it with nobody, not even the girls at the office or her boss. "He would like to know, too, because he's from Chanford."

"I'm as dumb about football as Harry and the boys say I am, Martha. I thought it was just something they played on the field. But that's the reason Walt didn't go home. He intended to—but he said everybody had been quizzing him about Pete's knee and what he didn't know wouldn't get him into trouble."

Martha smiled. "They'll be glad to know that."

"You tell them he didn't even know about the picture. I didn't either—until I saw it in the paper. It was nothing, really—we were just clowning around. How's Mom?"

"Well enough—but she works too hard."

"Maybe she worries about those house payments." Martha looked up sharply and Lily continued: "Walt told me about the deal."

"She seems to do all right—but we have to take her word for it at that."

"Well, if anything should come up, Martha—don't let her worry. Give me a buzz—I might find something in the kick."

"Are you trying to tell me something, Lily?"

Lily smiled. "Yes—one more thing: That bunch of beauty-contest candidates back there sure gave me a good going-over. I figure one of them pays the bills for flowers. Some people figure that just because a girl's in show business she has no place to keep her copy of the Ten Commandments."

Touché, Martha thought; but she smiled. "Some people think that of a girl in any kind of business—particularly if her boss is an obvious wolf."

"WHICH Mr. Smooth-tail Dexter obviously is," Lily chuckled. "At least with you there should be some safety in numbers."

"Do you mean you have little troubles of your own, Lily?"

"I did at first; but you have to learn how to handle each one. Ziggy has octopus hands, but I make him feel like a jellyfish."

"Very good—and how do you handle Mr. Smooth-tail?"

"He seems harmless enough."

"Persistent, though, don't you think? Sometimes I think he looks on beautiful girls as so many goldfish in a tank."

Lily laughed. "I'm a bluefish—or was. Gosh, Martha, you can't imagine how good that makes me feel—to say *was.* To be out of the bluefish bowl!"

Martha dallied over her sparse dessert. "I was just wondering about our metaphors. I make him a fisherman, but you call him Mr. Smooth-tail—and that's a fish."

"He is a fish," Lily declared. "Any guy that keeps on sending a girl presents after she's told him no dice—but definitely—is the biggest kind of a fish."

But that was the way some fishermen liked to fish, Martha thought, after Lily had left. Lily had been giving the master quite a run, was probably a rough-and-ready battler; but that wasn't Mr. Smooth-tail's line. Now Martha was having a peculiar thought: She knew exactly how good it made Lily feel to be out of the fish-bowl. That was the way Martha would feel when Pete got his degree and she could get out of the Dexter orbit. Even though he never said a false word, it was never out of his voice—or his eyes.

That evening Martha reported on her surprise luncheon. Mom said that Lily had a good heart; but when they were alone Pete quizzed Martha about all the details of the conversation. He was suspicious of this visit, said Lily's announced intention of leaving Ziggy had a phony ring to it.

"Oh, Pete—be reasonable! The girl is all right—she even offered to help with the payments on the house if we got stuck—"

"How did she happen to bring that up?"

"I don't know. Let's forget all this cloak-and-dagger stuff." There was an edge in Martha's voice. She was getting tired of football with its silly mystifications. It was supposed to be just a game—but all it had brought to her life was conflict. Her own father had never seen her baby because he had some silly notion that all football players were low-grade gladiators. Pete was becoming very difficult since he had hurt his knee. She would be glad when the season was over, when he could get his mind back on his studies instead of one football game. Martha was getting bored with that, too.

No sporting event could possibly be worth all the excitement and hysteria this one was causing. It was taking up half her time at the office—tickets, parties, reservations for the Chanford team, all that sort of thing because her boss was still a sophomore at Chanford in his mind. She couldn't ride a bus or talk to a client, even her own employer or a girl like Lily, without having to guard her tongue and be quizzed about it afterward. She was getting sick of hearing and reading about Pete's knee; and of listening to Pete's obsession about the gamblers. He really seemed to think the family was being caught in something disastrous, that they were already meshed in a gambler's web being spun by a blue spider.

She would be glad when Pete could get out on the field and start getting rid of his energy there. At home he was slowly but steadily getting on her nerves. They had never had a serious quarrel and she hoped they never would. They were both calm people. Pete would be hard to quarrel with because he was sheathed in layers of self-control; but underneath was something dynamic she didn't want to rouse; she was afraid of what might happen should he ever explode.

So she told him nothing of her conversation with Lily about Mr. Dexter. That was the last thing she wanted Pete to explode about. Martha looked at her sleeping boy, hoped he would never handle a football!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THERE were white lilies in the dressing-room that night and a typed note: *"Sorry I was not in. Next time please let me know."* It was initialed *J.C.D.* Attached was a card from Martha in a very neat hand: *"The office grapevine tipped him. He really believes you came to see him—or did you? Anyhow, thanks."* There was a P.S.: *"During the war we gave nylons and soap-powder."*

So Martha had been sending the flowers and junk all the time. There was probably little the beauty gang didn't know about the affairs of Mr. Smooth-tail—or perhaps he was the type who wanted them to know, who liked to strut through his private pond. Martha seemed to have his number and Lily was glad of that. Martha was a good guy. They would have lots of fun together. Little Dark-eyes would be okay, too.

All this and Laughing Boy, too!

There was a timid knock at the door; but this time it was Timmy the busboy who brought word that the boss would like to see her in his private office. Lily went at once, adjusting her boxing gloves, just in case he had already gotten himself another Blue Lily and was going to try to bounce her. She wouldn't let him get away with that. If she had to work a notice, she was going to work it.

The office was empty when she got there and Lily took a good look around, a farewell tour of the pinup girls and boys, the latter mostly football players and fighters. It had seemed impressive before, but now she was comparing it with Mr. Dexter's suite. There was that much difference between the two men.

ZIGGY came in, very full of himself. "Sit down, Miss Carewe."

Lily sat down, smiled. "Getting very formal, aren't we?"

"From now on it's strictly business."

"It's too bad we didn't start that earlier."

His eyes, on hers, were unhappy. He fidgeted with a ruler, looked very small and a bit pathetic behind the big desk. "Okay—I hate to admit it but I made mistakes with you, figured you wrong."

"Are you ill, Ziggy?"

"Never mind with the funny business. You made arrangements any other place yet?"

She made him wait. "Well, I haven't exactly signed anything—"

"Okay. I've a proposition: There's a guy wants to buy into the joint, to do things on a really big scale. I got to kick in heavy, too. But I'm working on another proposition that figures to pay off in a couple weeks; my cash is tied up until then. But we can make our agreement now."

"Can we?"

He reached into his wallet, grandiloquently counted five bills, tossed them on the desk. "There's five hundred bucks—a bonus for staying till after Big Game Week. I'm all sold out for then, and can't make any

changes. When this new deal begins, with the new partner, your pay is doubled—but you'll sign a contract. You're not going to get me over a barrel this way again."

Lily shrugged. "It will take some thinking."

"What is there to think about? If I ain't Santa Claus on this, there ain't no Santa Claus."

"Before I signed a contract, I'd have to see a lawyer—"

"Okay—see your friend that sends white lilies."

"You don't miss anything that goes around here, do you Ziggy?"

"Not a thing—you can go on that."

"Neither do I," Lily smiled. "You've probably told this prospective partner you've already got me under contract; maybe he'll give me a better deal without you being involved?"

"More gratitude."

"Just business, Ziggy dear!"

"I build you up and you hold me up—want to freeze me out."

"Let's get straight, Zygwald! You gave me a chance, yes—but you weren't doing me any favor; if I hadn't come through, your shoestring would have broken long ago. So let's get over hurting about Santa Claus." She got up, started for the door.

"Hey there—come back here!" He whipped out the wallet again, briskly counted five more bills, dramatically tossed them on the others. "There's a grand—is that cheap?"

"What am I supposed to give for that—my right arm?"

He smiled bitterly. "Why I ever picked a burglar like you out of a line, I don't know. The second five hundred is to bind an option on a contract to be negotiated whenever my partner and I get ready to talk business—contract to be two years at two hundred a week—on condition you don't get married during the life of the contract."

SHE looked at him sharply, picked up the ten one-hundred dollar bills, smelled them, weighed them. "Pretty stuff, isn't it?"

"More than you ever saw, baby—okay, it's a deal."

She let the money float back to the desk. "Sorry, my great benefactor—not quite!"

"Now what—you Jesse James?"

She smiled: "Something like this: Contract six months, mutual options, to be negotiated within one week from today, salary to be decided on, minimum two-fifty a week. I own the act, have the final word on any changes. This thousand bucks, a bonus already due me, to serve as first payment on a total bonus, to be paid on signing of contract, of five thousand—"

"Hey!" Ziggy leaped as if he'd been stung.

Lily shrugged. "Oh, save it, Ziggy. Your partner would be glad to pay me the bonus. A week will give me time to entertain other offers—and when and whom I marry is strictly my business."

"You female Judas!" Ziggy was groaning as she left.

Jingle came out of the lavatory. He was not smiling but his teeth did not seem to be aching, either.

"Well—how did I do, partner?"

Ziggy was waiting like a school kid for a pat on the head.

"Fair," Jingle conceded grudgingly. "That's a sharp tomato."

"But how about the way I angled till she made the proposition herself?"

"Quite an actor." Jingle made it sound derogatory. This was the kind of a ham actor that couldn't be built up; the kind who'd be taking bows when there was still work to be done. There was plenty work to be done; and this was just the ham to pull it—with the right direction. Jingle always thought he would probably do all right in Hollywood. His favorite diversion was going to movies and second-guessing the writers, directors and producers. In his racket he was a combination of the three.

Now he began to block out the next moves: The first scene was easy—this ham would love it—dash into her dressing-room, groan some more, throw the grand down and say okay, it was a deal. But the big scene, the clincher, would take a little working on; how it was played would depend on how certain people did certain things with that five gees in mind.

Jingle wrote all this in his careful report to the Big Boys that night, after the grand had been duly accepted by the tomato.

The tomato herself also wrote her usual letter to Walt that night, in her usual direct and frivolous manner. He had made a bad mistake some time previous, she said, by putting down on paper that he would marry her—when, as and if, he picked up the dough to pay off the mortgage on the old family homestead. It was always dangerous, she said, for a college boy to put things down like that in letters to showgirls, which she would now prove.

He might have thought he was playing safe, hiding behind those five thousand bucks that weren't there; but that never bothered an old cowgirl like Annie Oakley when she really was out to get her man. So now Lily had in hand exactly one thousand pretty green shamrocks; and in another week, would have four thousand more. These she had practically picked out of the air, due to her great ability as a business executive, which she had picked up from watching Martha exec at the offices of Jason Carter Dexter. (Here she digressed to state that after they were married and Walt became an estate lawyer like his man Dexter, his dear wife, Lily, was going to personally hire all the female help. He should see the load of talent his man Dexter had to draw from and some of them could even type, ha ha!)

BUT to get back to the filthy dough department: she wasn't kidding. She gave him an account of the new deal with Ziggy as she had made it so far, asked him to check it as a lawyer and advise her what to do to protect herself, because she was dealing with a Professor of Angles. She also said that she wasn't kidding about Marriage, Inc., either. This wheelbarrow of rocks happened to be just the amount the family needed to clear the house, which was no accident, because that was what had put the figure in her mind, never really dreaming Ziggy would go that high. So, casting all maidenly modesty aside, since everybody was doing it these days, meaning the grand old institution, why not? The family could figure the five G's as an investment on her part; they could pay her instead of the bank; and if Mrs. Walter Stone tried to put any pressure on, Walt could beat her (if he thought he could get away with that against the toughest kid on Ocean Avenue).

Seriously and on the level, there were two other angles: Martha could now quit her job any time she wanted to; and Mom wouldn't have to be worried so much about meeting those payments. The pressure would be off all around. So, she concluded, his bluff was called; and this would teach him to be careful, hereafter, what he wrote on paper. All kidding aside, if he hadn't been kidding, neither was she, so how about action, Bub?

Lily got action. First a wire which said he wasn't kidding—zowie! Then a letter which was very businesslike: It was swell of her to make the offer, etc., but there really was no need for it. Mom seemed to be doing all right. He hadn't been kidding, he really was hurting for her—but it wouldn't seem right, using her money. It wouldn't be a good way to start; but she had been swell—

Lily answered: so he was crawling out of it, no guts, a fine thing for a big tough football guy who was being mentioned in the same breath as All-America! She had never gone to college but it all seemed like simple arithmetic to her. If Martha could work and pitch in, what was wrong with Lily doing the same thing? If Pete had intended using his pro football bonus money, which it looked like he wasn't going to get now, to pay the debt and be credited with that much ownership—what was wrong with Lily doing it? Mrs. Walt Stone wasn't going to be any *in-law*. Didn't she have any rights? The idea, as she saw it, was they

wanted to get married but a hurdle was in the way; so through a combination of events over which none of them had control, good old Ziggy had given them a golden pole to vault across; but just because it had Lily's name on it, Walt didn't want to use it. Nero fiddled while Rome burned and over the Alps lay Italy. Did he or didn't he? And (P. S.) what about the advice he was to give her on the contract?

On the contract, he answered, special delivery, she had done very well, was a better lawyer than he would ever be. After Ziggy presented it she should take it to Martha to have the fine print read. On the other matter, she was a better lawyer than he was, too; they would talk it over on the night of the Big Game—meanwhile he was saving his love for her—and how!

Lily received this letter, figured she had him reeling and sent a telegram:

STOP STALLING STOP YES OR NO STOP
ANNIE OAKLEY

Late that afternoon Ziggy was in his office arranging the table seating for the Big Game week-end when a Western Union boy came to the door. "You got anybody named Annie Oakley working here, sir?"

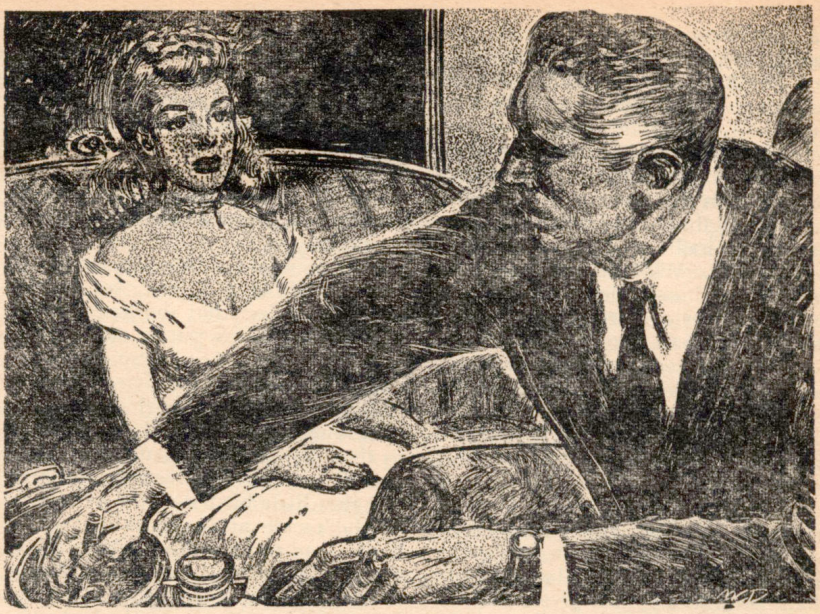
Ziggy grinned. "No—but I got quite a few customers with that name. Probably a gag." He looked at the address, tossed the boy a quarter. "It's okay." He closed the door, carefully opened the envelope, read the wire, made a copy of it on his typewriter, resealed the envelope, put it on the table in Lily's dressing-room. Then he called Jingle, and read the message:

ANNIE OAKLEY
% LILY CAREWE
BLUE LILY CAFE
CAPITOL CITY
OKAY STOP YOU WIN STOP ARRANGE DETAILS LOVE LOVE LOVE
W. HICKOCK

"What's it mean?" Ziggy asked.
"It means we pull the string."

Chapter Nine

WALT waited three days before he got an answer to his wire. He had many theories to account for the delay: It had not been delivered because of the goofy Annie Oakley address; in these days people were so careless. Or she had just been testing him out, figured he couldn't be much of a guy to take money from a girl that way. Or she had decided not to take a chance on ruining her career by marrying a penniless guy this early, when she had men like Dexter on the leash and could have many more. After all, Lily was young and beautiful and had personality, talent and brains. There was no place she had to stop—Broadway, Hollywood.



"Well,"—he smiled faintly,—"everybody seems to assume they are gamblers; but just what are they up to?"

Why should she saddle herself with a football player who would have his little fling in the news and then fade out after graduation? Or maybe she had just been kidding him, and it had all been a gag that he had swallowed.

When the letter came, the reason was none of the things he had thought. She hadn't written, she said, because she didn't know just what to say. She wasn't sure yet, but she knew she had to write something. So this was it—and she would try not to be funny. The first and important thing was that she might not get that extra four thousand dollars. The second and perhaps more important thing was, she didn't know whether she should take it or not. So she would put it up to him, because it might affect him.

First, she wanted him to know that everything she had written up to now had been in good faith. She did love him till it made her hurt; she wanted to be part of his family because she thought they were all swell, and she had never had a real family, as she had told him. She would have been so happy to have been able to help them out. That was why she had talked to Martha.

When Ziggy had asked her to stay, had given her a thousand-dollar bonus, that was reasonable too. She had drawn them in; he was sold out for the Big Game week-end. If he did have a partner who wanted to build a big show around her, the four thousand bonus was not too unusual. People like Harry Walker and the other newsboys thought she was a good bet.

Now, when she had received his wire, she had been very happy; and since the week was up anyhow, she had gone to Ziggy to get action on the contract. He had stalled, said he wasn't ready, reminded her that he had told her his money was tied up in a big deal which he expected to close in ten days. He even gave her the date—November 16. That date stuck in her mind, as it would in Walt's—it was the date of the Big Game. There seemed to be some connection—and finally she made him admit that the big deal his money was tied up in was the Big Game. He had bet everything he owned, even mortgaged the Café, on the game.

She went on:

"He said that if he happened to lose, everything was off and he couldn't pay me a dime; I might not even have a job. But he expected to win—was sure he was going to win. He said the game figured to be even money with Pete out; but the information he had was that Pete was playing possum, that this was one of Bingo Krock's cute tricks; that Pete was practicing secretly, was in good shape; that Capitol would win by two touchdowns, no matter how good you were—and that's why he was sure he was going to make a big killing.

"But he also said it was just as well I had found out how things were, in case I had been making any big plans or spending the bonus before I had it, or maybe even *planning to get married.* I asked him how he knew that, and he laughed, said he didn't, but that it wouldn't surprise anybody, the way you and I had been giving ourselves away ever since we met, daily letters, even telegrams, picture in the paper, all that.

"I got mad and told him that maybe I didn't know much about football, which I don't; but I knew enough to

see that I was now in the fine spot of having to tell you that if your team won the Big Game it would cost me four thousand dollars—that's the way I told him, did not mention the house, even though it was he who first hinted that your mother was behind in the payments on the house. I told him I knew enough about him to know that he always had an angle, no matter what he did. Well, he didn't get mad at that; he almost cried. He said nobody had ever accused him before of asking a football player to do wrong. He said that your name had never been mentioned in all this; that the bonus had been my idea, not his, that I would never have known he was betting on the game if I hadn't forced it out of him.

"I HAD to admit all that was true. Still, I didn't trust him, was going to quit right off. He said I couldn't do that, because he had given me the thousand dollars to stay till after the Big Game business. I said I'd give him back his money—or half of it, because I figured he owed me the other half for bonuses he had promised; then he appealed to my fairness and said what a spot he would be in if the Blue Lily weren't there when he was charging people fifteen bucks a plate to hear her. He even said *hear*.

"Then he said there was a sure way to settle it. Since you seemed to be the one I was worrying about, I should write to you, tell you exactly what happened and put it up to you on its merits. He said he would bet me anything that you would say it was an honest business deal all the way, and that the only reason I suspected anything wrong was because I had always suspected him of having an angle on anything he did. That, at least I should do this before tossing four thousand bucks away—to say nothing of that two-fifty-a-week contract.

"I didn't say that I would write you, because I don't want you mixed up in this at all if there's the slightest chance of anything being wrong, which there always is, with Ziggy. And that Jingle is around here more than ever. And it's not only you but your family. So you give it a good think, honey, and let me know. And take care of yourself, because I love you so much, and would rather have anything happen to me than the littlest thing to you."

Walt reread the letter, read it again.

He walked out by the lake and took a pencil and worked it out as if it were an enemy formation and he was preparing defenses. He got three possible answers:

1. It was as it appeared to be on the surface, just a business deal with a few coincidences.

2. Or it was a very clever scheme, too subtle for Ziggy ever to work out, to offer a bribe to him through Lily, without any evidence that a bribe had ever been offered. It offered perfect safety for everyone. In the set-up Walt himself was figured as a dope, a crook, or just a cutie who was invited to think, since Pete would be back, Capitol would be a cinch to win—and there would be no real harm done if Walt fumbled or threw a pass that missed by inches.

3. If it was a subtle scheme, then Lily was either a dupe or an accomplice. The fact that she had written to tip him off, to put it up to him, could have been the consummate subtlety. They would be giving his conscience an out; figuring that whatever he said now, it would jell and ferment so that he might even unconsciously fumble or miss his receiver, or give just that little bit less to the key block or the tackle at the goal-line. Lily hadn't *had* to write him. After all, if she hadn't written him, he would never have known—but then he read the letter again, realized why she had written, why she had to write: She didn't want him to make a lot of plans keyed on that four thousand dollars which might not be there.

Walt was sure it was a bribe offer. If Pete would be as good as new, Capitol did figure to win—but not without an argument; but the surest way for Capitol to win, regardless of what shape Pete was in, would be to tie up Walt—the key man of Chanford on offense and defense. That wasn't just an accident—and if that was not an accident, none of the rest was. It was like looking at the last page of a mystery story and then going back to see how perfectly and cleverly every little part, every little angle, every innocent circumstance was so guiltily pat.

Walt went back. All the little angles clicked. It could all have been planned, all the way back to the time when he had first met Lily—at Ziggy's suggestion. He had said he was looking for a girl to take home to a party—and Ziggy had brought out Lily. Ziggy hadn't really been sore about Walt's going to Chanford. Had he been working on this even then?

Ziggy had given them a golden pole to vault across.

Walt always came back to Lily, forced himself to come back to her. After all, who was Lily—or what was she? What he saw in his mind, felt in his heart—or just what Pete had implied she was, *Ziggy's girl*, the key in a gambling coup that had to be big because it was so clever?

But to think *that* of Lily was as if somebody, even a doctor, should suddenly tell Walt that he, who thought himself so normal, was really insane. And if Lily was no good, who was any good? Who could he ever believe in, outside his mother, of course—what reason would there ever be for believing in anybody? If he had really been so easily taken for this sleigh-ride—if such it was—maybe he'd been wrong about a lot of things; maybe he had some thinking to do; maybe he was just a sap. The one person he knew was all right, the one person he would follow, would take care of, was his mother. The first thing to do was find out just what the truth was about those payments. . . .

It took three days to get the information from the bank; and now it was Lily whose imagination provided explanations for the daily letter that wasn't there when she arrived at the café. It meant that Walt thought the situation as serious as she had thought it. It might mean that she had angered him by putting him on the spot, forcing him to make such a decision. Perhaps he was convinced that Pete had been right from the beginning, that Lily was tabasco in the pie because of her tie-up with Ziggy. Or maybe she had just been too fresh, too bold, had scared him away by putting pressure on him to marry her. He may have met some college girl, a girl like Martha, or one with a nice family of her own, and not a drifter trying to latch on to a family. Martha had warned Lily that Walt had always been fickle; maybe Walt had been just kidding her around, as Ziggy said.

She got down the shoe-box where she kept all of his letters, read them over, every word, searching for clues of falseness. She went over every minute of the few hours they had been together. She spent so much time thinking, staring, even when she was with the newsboys, that they complained about her not paying proper attention to their words of wit and wisdom. The mood persisted in her songs, which she sang with such a languid air that Harry Walker did fresh nip-ups, said this was a new style which compared with Helen Morgan at her best.

Harry of course had announced the news about her new contract, exaggerated the figures, taken full credit and asked, of nobody in particular, if that wasn't a Hollywood *emigré* at the café last night? Harry used many words like *emigré* that Lily didn't understand; but she knew they meant well for her.

FLOWERS from J.C.D. came with regularity now, and were usually accompanied by some pleasant little note from Martha, such as congratulations on the new contract. Lily had called the next day and said she would want Martha to look over the contract; and Martha's next note suggested Lily bring it to lunch. So Lily was embarrassed about that, since there was no contract.

She was having strange inside fears. She had always laughed at the delicate creatures who talked about their

nerves; but now she was getting jumpy, and her stomach began to get elevators and escalators. One way or another it all seemed tied up with the Stones—and the Big Game. Everybody was talking about the Big Game now. She was sick of hearing about Pete's knee, wanted to yell out that Ziggy knew it was okay or he wouldn't have mortgaged his club to bet. But she knew she shouldn't say a word about that knee; she knew she had to be careful; that if she made any mistake now, it might get her and the Stones into a lot of trouble. And she knew why she was thinking that. Something was in the works. The newsboys were watching the gamblers, trying to get in on what was going on. Jingle was like a corn-stick with molasses, the way the gambler flies buzzed around him. And friend Ziggy was busting out all over.

Lily was glad now that she had put it up to Walt. She would be worried sick trying to decide for herself. Walt was giving it a good think, as she had asked him; when he wrote, he would tell her what to do, what the score was. She was quite sure what that would be—she was so sure, that she hadn't spent any of the thousand-buck bonus, even though she thought that much, at least, really belonged to her. If Walt told her to give it back too, to have no part of the whole business, she would do it.

HIS letter was there one night among the fan mail. She was afraid to open it. It looked thin, and that stabbed her, because Walt always wrote such thick ones, ran on and on just as he talked. She held it in her hand, weighed it. The back flap was mussed up a little, as if maybe he had changed his mind after it had been sealed. Finally she opened it.

He hadn't answered, he wrote, for several reasons. The team was working on a lot of new stuff; then he had a bad ankle which she wasn't to mention to anybody, but it took a lot of time for treatments. About the other matter, she had been smart in letting him know what she thought; he could see, under the circumstances, why she should feel as she did; but he couldn't see any reason why she should penalize herself. It was strictly a business deal between her and her boss, and she certainly had earned a bonus. He didn't see that it could make any difference in the game.

Everybody at Chanford also figured Pete would be in there, that this was why Bingo had held him out, so he would be ready for Chanford. Capitol really hadn't needed Pete the last two games, or he probably would have been in there. This was a typical Bingo Krock set-up. Chanford was going to fight its heart out, and Walt would be in there, and Davey too, for the kid was improving—and if anybody bet that Capitol would win by more than ten points, his head should be examined. But she should keep that under her bonnet, too; the only reason he was telling her was he didn't want to see her lose any of her hard-earned dough through loyalty to him. Loyalty was okay, but you had to be sensible too.

Everything else was as before. If he didn't seem enthusiastic—well, he was tired—and his ankle was bothering him more than he wanted anybody to know. If he didn't play much Saturday, she shouldn't be surprised; they didn't figure to need him, and he might be held out to save his ankle and give Davey some experience. If he didn't write her often between now and the Big Game, it would be because he had his mind on other things. But that was no reason why she should stop writing him.

The letter left Lily with a vacant feeling, as if she had been walking along a familiar path—and all of a sudden there just wasn't anything there. She put it in the shoe-box with the other envelopes and telegrams. And when she sang that night, she had no zip, nor poignance or any of the other things Harry Walker always said she had. But he claimed to like it, called it the hypnotic technique, a change of pace which really held them. One of the newsboys said the love-bug really must have bitten her; and she said, without thinking, that love was okay, but it could also have two left feet. They liked that, said it was the first good quote she had given them for some time. She was thinking of the quotes she could give them if she would merely let them see a certain letter which mentioned ten points.

Ziggy asked, that night, rather carelessly, if she had ever heard anything from Walt about what they had talked about. She said no, she hadn't written him about it; she had thought it over and decided maybe she was just seeing angles on a grapefruit. She would stay for the Big Game week-end; but after that, he'd better have the contract and bonus ready or she would move to parts unknown. He told her, gleefully, there was absolutely nothing to worry about, it was in the bag—but she shouldn't go spreading that around. He looked at her, sort of funny, put his hand on her for the first time in a long time, but in a nice kind of way, told her to *take it easy*, in a nice kind of a voice. Or maybe, Lily thought, it only *seemed* that way—for a reason. Maybe she just didn't care any longer.

She watched Jingle, Ziggy and the flies that buzzed around, in and out of the private office, which now seemed more Jingle's than Ziggy's. Something new had been added, without a doubt. The newsboys noticed it, talked about it, waved their big ears like antennæ. They were even asking leading questions of Lily. Now she was glad she had played dumb. She wished very much she still were dumb.

Chapter Ten

THE excitement of Big Game Week began to build, once the contests of the preceding Saturday had been decided and the track was cleared for the head-on, all-out collision of two undefeated gridiron juggernauts. The delightful delirium had been increased, Harry Walker wrote, by two sharp plot angles affecting the stars of the production. Pete, the Static Stone, had appeared in uniform for the first time in a month, though he still ran with a definite limp and did not get into the game. Walt, the Rolling Stone, had retired after the first period, had shown none of his spectacular punt returns.

But Harry Walker warned his clients against entering the running-broad-jump-at-conclusions event. By letting it be known that Pete was a probable starter, wily Bingo Krock might have deliberately added to the confusion because nobody had been in the least enlightened on the subject of how much strain the injured knee would stand. Though the subtle Tom Dawn had apparently given substance to local rumors about Walt having an injured ankle, he might also have withdrawn his star to avoid possible injury before the major game, and to give experience to his replacements, Husky Parsons and Davey (the Pebble) Stone.

The common estimation was that, if Pete Stone *were* in shape to drive, punt and pass with his normal vigor and resolve, Capitol should be a two-touchdown favorite; but Harry Walker pointed out that the odds-makers, who were not confused by sentimental loyalties, had significantly made it an even game in their opening Monday morning line—which indicated that the smart money was satisfied that Pete Stone, though he might start, would not be at top form; and that Walt Stone would be sufficiently brilliant to stand off the definitely superior Capitol line, and the triple-threat Chuck Linn, who had done a surprisingly good job at taking over for Capitol since Pete Stone had been hurt.

Harry Walker suggested that his clients closely follow the betting odds, in view of the rumors that were being buzzed about dirty work at the crossroads, or in this case, the fifty-yard line. Such things, he admitted, were part of every important sports event; but he was not writing them off entirely in a game where the gamblers had so obviously moved in. He promised his clients that he would be a bird-dog all week long. (And, Harry said to himself, I'm not just kidding.)

Weather prospects for the week-end were favorable—and the ticket and hotel situations had ceased to be problems in midsummer, when all available had been exhausted. Room would be found in the usual vest pockets for the literaries and radio stars who followed the trail of the Big Game, who never knew for sure until one Saturday night where they would be the next. It was just possible, Harry Walker continued, that the games could be played without these characters; but they would add the final *chi-chi* to a very *soigné* occasion. (Harry liked to throw in such words picked up from the dramatic critics; and if he wasn't always sure of their exact meaning, he was reasonably sure that nobody else would be, least not the readers of his column—which was mainly about the night life of a city which had been described by a major leaguer as "the town where everybody goes home and to bed at night.")

HARRY WALKER was a kindly man who wrote kindly about people. Some of the big leaguers said Harry could also be a big-leaguer. He didn't particularly want to be; but when he had them all before him, as he would have this week, he was not above wanting to impress the big by-lines. And he thought that he might just have the story to do it with; he might just have his teeth into journalistic red meat. So he wasn't just kidding when he advised his clients, in a self-depreciating manner, to watch this space every day for the latest clues and rhubarbs nosed out by Old Bird-dog Harry. Even a minor league bird-dog could smell some things; and Harry had smelled this one early in the season, which was the big reason he had hung around the Blue Lily Café while using the Lily herself for diversionary purposes.

As Harry Walker wrote, so, in their various styles, did the others, including many national writers who set up shop early in the gridiron hot-spot of the nation. They wrote upside-down and backward about all the angles—national, sectional, dramatic—of what gradually came to be called the Brother Act; but only one man was definite in his opinion, and his opinion was written only for the few in the zero circle of the Big Boys. Jingle recommended anything up to ten points on Capitol as guaranteed by insurance from Chanford. He said that all important players had begun the week in good physical condition; and that rumors of injuries from either camp should be overlooked unless supported by inside information.

Jingle gave no reasons; but the zero circle went for the shot, spreading their money around so that the odds should be disturbed as faintly as possible. When they were down, they passed the info to Circle 1, which also got down; and then moved on to Circle 2. By Wednesday, Capitol was such a solid three-point favorite that the mysterious melting itself became news, and the word went out from Zero Circle to put the damper on—which was done by a rumor that Chuck Linn had sprained the wrist of his passing arm.

On Thursday, Harry Walker pointed with modest pride to his prediction about the mercurial movement of the odds. He also admitted that by now the Old Bird-dog was as confused as everybody else, but he promised to keep his watery blue eyes going backward and forward, like the crowd that watched a tennis match in the newsreels. But he did not publicly tie-in the Blue Lily Café, because he wanted to keep his franchise at this obvious center of operations, where a new group of hard-faced operatives—to whom even Jingle deferred and before whom Ziggy swept the path—had moved in and taken over.

But Ziggy's was the hot-spot, the center of night life, the place where visiting celebrities ganged up, in increasing numbers, as red corpuscles hurry to the focus of infection. Lily took them all in stride, as if she did not care, which was the way to take the big-leaguers. She sang in all of her moods; and between shows, particularly after the second show, there were now two rows in the Blue Lily press section. Visiting wolves made their moves, tried out their most cherished routines, successful in assorted cities; but Lily still walked home with her local bodyguards—until that Thursday night, when she went away in the impressive car of Jason Carter Dexter.

Harry Walker wondered why.

And so, later on, did Jason Carter Dexter, after he had also made his moves and tried his routines with the polished proficiency of an experienced practitioner on his home grounds.

"Why, Lily?" he asked pleasantly and without rancor.

"I don't know, really."

There was inviting space beside her on the yielding divan in the sybaritic den. She was also inviting and dressed for the rôle. But she had not been yielding. Dexter had been there beside her, had had his arms about her, prospected her roseate lips, discovered marble. He had long ago stopped working overtime as Pygmalion. When the Galateas did not react to reasonable ministrations, he had learned that the sensible thing to do was what he had now done—ease over to his own comfortable chair, light the perfumed mixture in his non-resistant meerschaum, and settle down for the cozy chat which was all the sleeping beauties ever seemed to be in the mood for. This beauty at least, with her penchant for strange manifestations, might be diverting—and might also, if properly plumbed, be the source of interesting and useful information.

"Maybe,"—she was dreamily musing to the ceiling—"I just got tired of watching you watching me; maybe I was like the bird in the tree, and your black eyes charmed me."

Yes, maybe—Dexter thought; but he smilingly acknowledged this frank tribute to an ancient if not always honorable avocation.

"Maybe I just got tired of looking at all those awful people around the café this week."

"What people—there are all kinds of new ones?"

"Those razor-faces."

He nodded. "They are quite noxious. Just who are they?"

"Are you kidding, Mr. Dexter?"

"Well,"—he smiled faintly—"everybody seems to assume they are gamblers; but just who are they—and what are they up to?" He gestured gracefully.

"I wouldn't know. I got it across to Ziggy long ago that I wanted no part of his characters. I just work at the place."

"If you'll forgive the suggestion," he said, "I was rather relieved when Harry Walker wrote that you were going to resign."

"Why?"

"Innocent people sometimes get smeared."

"Then you think Ziggy is really up to something?"

"Your friend Harry Walker seems to think so." She did not respond to that, and he continued: "My secretary mentioned a new contract you wanted me to look over."

"That's not settled yet. In fact, I may not sign it—I'm just staying till after the Big Game business."

"Big Game business?"

LILY'S smile was artless. "Ziggy's nicking the suckers fifteen bucks a plate—have *you* been nicked?"

He chuckled. "I wouldn't think of missing it—even at such prices—if the Blue Lily is the attraction."

"Thank you." She looked around the room, the shiny black room that matched Mr. Dexter's eyes. There was a floor-length mirror, big enough for a store window, with a white fluffy rug before it—polar bear. Lily murmured: "Maybe I just wanted to see what it was like here."

He was pleased. "Then you had heard about it?"

"No—but I knew there would be one—just as I knew what type your secretary would be." There was a slight pause but no station identification, and Lily continued: "I was really not prepared for all your secretaries—nor for this wonderful playhouse. I feel sort of—what's that word—impotent?"

He laughed at her guileless expression, also pondered artful implica-

tions. "Let's just consider you a horrible waste. My diagnosis is that you've been insulated by, let us say, a handsome tail-back?"

She smiled. "Maybe that's what I really wanted to find out."

"He is a very lucky young man. How's his ankle?"

"I haven't heard from him for a week."

"Is anything wrong between you two?"

"Oh, no." She smiled brightly. "He told me he would have other things on his mind." She leaned forward, with schoolgirl zeal. "Who do you think will win, Mr. Dexter?"

"Everybody seems to think that depends on the famous Pete Stone knee." His eyes dropped to her knees. "Personally, I think it has been overemphasized—but do you hear anything about it?"

SHE gurgled. "Is that a nice question to ask a single girl? I should think that would be a question for your secretary."

"We don't discuss football or family at the office."

"I'll bet you don't. Well, nobody tells me anything about anything—and I'm glad they don't. Secrets burn my insides. I like to come right out with things. When something's bothering me, I like to get it settled." He waited, and she leaned forward again: "Mr. Dexter—should a girl marry for love or money?"

He shrugged. "Should a girl marry?"

"Okay—then should a man?"

"I would say—that would depend on the man."

"All right—now, should a man or woman be governed by principles—or by what they can get away with?"

"As for instance?"

She gave him a long, inquisitive look. Then: "Well, should a man—or a woman—have a different attitude about a married person than a single person?"

Now he searched her eyes, blew a puff of blue smoke, watched it. "I should say that a man would be guided by the wishes of the woman—married or single."

Lily wrinkled her nose, squinted her eyes, as if she were thinking hard, trying to get something through to her mind. "But how about what's right—and what's wrong?"

He smiled: "What *is* right? Or wrong?"

"What you think is right or wrong."

"Exactly."

"But, Mr. Dexter, suppose other people think it's wrong—even against the law?"

"I would never advise breaking a law."

"But you think a person—boy or girl—should look after his own interests—

"How about the way I angled till she made the proposition?"

as long as he can convince himself there's nothing wrong with it?"

"Something like that, perhaps."

She sat back. "But suppose a woman tried to let a man know every way she could that she wasn't interested?"

Dexter was beginning to be bored. He had thought this one would certainly have a hard sophistication. "Lily, are you trying to tell me you are just a nice girl at heart?"

"I don't know—but I want to straighten out something. Suppose this girl was married, and had made it plain she didn't want to play—why should the man keep after her—I mean—a gentleman?"

Boredom was becoming annoyance. "My dear Lily—you seem obsessed with the idea that a man might want only one thing from a woman."

"Well, doesn't he, usually?"

"Usually, perhaps." Dexter's round black liquid eyes were shining now. "But every so often a woman represents something rare to a man, becomes the saint in his life, an idol to adore."

"Mr. Dexter—are you kidding?" It was obvious she was not.

"I don't suppose you've ever read the *Vita Nuova?*" She had not, of course; so he told her the story of Dante's exquisite love for Beatrice, always at a respectful distance; he explained that Beatrice was a married woman, and their love was classic.

When he ended, Lily asked:

"You mean, Mr. Dexter, that he never even spoke to the doll?"

"Probably not."

"You mean the only kick he got out of it was not having her?"

"Approximately. A form of masochistic ecstasy, if you will." He had to explain what *masochism* meant. She said that he used more big words than Harry Walker. She also said that Dante sounded stupid.

"Really?"

"Sure. And I'll bet Beatrice thought so too."

"You interest me, Lily. Why should she think so?"

"Because he would never get any place. A girl likes a man to make his move, even if he isn't going to get anywhere—and besides, you never can tell."

Dexter's eyes had lost their shine, his voice its unction. "My dear girl—do you know who Dante was?"

"Some kind of a poet?"

"'Some kind of a poet'! He was a genius." Mr. Dexter was emphatic.

"Not with women, he wasn't."

"His works are immortal."

"Maybe so, Mr. Dexter. But he still sounds like a dope to me."

He sent her home in a taxi.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MARTHA and Pete usually rode to town together on the eight-forty bus every morning; but Bingo Krock liked his players to sleep in on Friday—in case they were nervous and didn't get too much rest the night before the battle—which would also be just as well, because Bingo liked his men to go into a game mean and bad-tempered. Martha was sure, from the way Pete had been acting lately, that he would be in the proper mood. Not having to wait for him this morning, she caught an earlier bus, expecting to be first at the office. She was there ahead of the other girls; but on her own desk she saw a big vase of yellow chrysanthemums.

Mr. Smooth-tail, she thought, had probably had a dull evening, gone to bed bored, got up full of vim and tricks. She picked up the vase, carried it to his office, placed them on his desk without salutation. He seemed quite concerned until she explained: "Chanford's headquarters are in here. Capitol's colors are green and white, remember?"

"Oh." He chuckled, returned her vibrant smile. "Good gag—too bad I hadn't thought of it. I remembered I hadn't brought you flowers for quite a while."

"Well, thanks, boss. I'll order some white ones for my office." She started away, turned, caught an unusual look on his face, a quite personal look. "I don't suppose you'll be in long?"

"No. I'm leaving at noon to see the team. They're staying at the country club. Officially I won't be here at all."

"And what about the several thousand people who've been calling for tickets?"

"Just tell them whatever you've been telling them."

"Week-end arrangements? Flowers for a lady, perhaps?"

"No more flowers for a lady"—his voice, very firm, changed—"unless you would like to join me at the Blue Lily tonight?"

She saw that he meant it, so pretended he was joking. "Thank you, but I will be very busy tonight—family reunion begins. I assume you've taken care of your reservations at the Blue Lily?"

"Yes."

"I'll check—I understand the demand is terrific." She started for her office, knew his eyes were on her, heard his voice, with its new disturbing, caressing note. He was saying that he would talk to Ziggy himself—but she might take it down. So she listened on the connection in her office, made notes, got a shock or two; then, when the buzzer sounded, came back to him, sat in her usual chair, felt his eyes on her, felt her color rising, hoped none of this got into her voice as she read back the call.

"YOU checked on the reservations which Ziggy said were okay for both nights—usual table for two. You laughed, said you just wanted to check on whether he would still be open after reading Harry Walker's column this morning. He said Walker had done nothing but drink his liquor and put ideas in his star's head and try to wreck his joint in general; but now he was barred from the joint. You asked how he felt about the game; he said Capitol was a cinch. You asked about Pete; he said Pete would be all right; you asked how he knew; he laughed but wouldn't say. He asked about Walt's leg; you said you didn't know. He said he thought maybe Lily had told you last night. You said you hadn't talked football with Lily; he said 'I'll bet!' He congratulated you on finally making her; you said he could have her; he said he had other things on his mind just now.

"Then he offered to bet you on the game, make your table check double or nothing, even give you three points. You said you were not betting on this game; there was too much talk about something being wrong. He said if you meant him, he had never asked anybody to do anything wrong in his life—and when did you start being a reformer? You said you didn't think anything was wrong, that nobody could get to any of the players on either team. He said that was right; he was just backing his judgment, like always, and what was wrong with that? You said it was too bad about all the talk, that if any of the boys fumbled or made any kind of a mistake, people would be suspicious. He said you should talk to Harry Walker about that; he was the one who was dishing all that around." She looked up, met his eyes intimately upon her again.

"Martha—do you read Harry Walker?"

"Usually."

"Have you read him this morning?"

She smiled. "I usually do that after I get to the office—while I'm having my second cup of coffee with the girls."

"Will you have your second cup with me this morning?"

She went to the kitchenette, prepared the coffee, and while it was heating, sat on the arm of a chair where she could watch it. One of her legs dangled so that the skirt was above her knee. She knew he was looking at her leg; so she got up and returned to the stove, arranged the cups, cream and sugar, returned to the chair, sat down properly. There was a charged feeling in the room she had never felt there before, a feeling that he might be going to be unpleasant. It was the first time she had ever really thought, what Lily had put into words, that there might be safety in numbers. The girls would be in the outer office by now; they would have seen her coat, the closed office door, would be wondering how come Mr. Smooth-tail, as they all called him now, had fallen out of bed so early today, would be expressing their girlish guesses.

But he talked football. "Aren't you at all worried by what Walker has been hinting?"

"Should I be?"

"I think all of us should be. Your school and mine—your husband and brother-in-law—my protégé."

"Just what does that mean, Mr. Dexter?" Her voice was cool.

"Your coffee is boiling."

Martha was also boiling; but she poured the coffee, listened: "This morning Harry Walker identifies the Blue Lily Café as headquarters for a group of big-shot out-of-town gamblers whom he practically accuses of tampering with this game."

"Cream and sugar, isn't it?"

"Cream, no sugar. I'm thinking of that picture of Walt and Lily."

She brought his coffee, sat down with her own, frowned. "That was unfortunate—the sort of thing Pete warned him about—"

"Pete warned him? Why?"

"He didn't like the set-up with Ziggy."

"When did he warn him?"

She looked up, caught by his intensity. "There was nothing special—this was before the season began, the night we were all there after Davey's birthday dinner. Pete just said he wasn't going back any more after Ziggy started to talk about betting on the games. He advised Walt not to. And Walt hasn't been there except that one night." She smiled. "He's such a crazy nut, he walked right into that picture."

"I'm wondering—if he did just walk into it—or whether that particular picture could have been framed."

"Look, Mr. Dexter—you don't believe—"

"Walt? Of course not. But those others—that's all true about them. It's the main reason I've spent so much time there myself. That's why I'm going again tonight—are you sure you couldn't make it, Martha? We might just stumble on something important—women are sharp."

"Is that an assignment?" She met his eyes.

"Of course not."

"Then you'll have to excuse me. I am Pete's wife—remember? Harry Walker didn't mention the picture, did he?"

"If he did, I'd have a suit slapped on him right now. Then, of course, he wouldn't implicate his *pet.*" He said the word as if he were referring to something poisonous—and Martha wondered just what Lily had done to the man to change him so quickly.

"Are *you* implicating her, Mr. Dexter?"

He smiled. "Sounds melodramatic when you put it into words, doesn't it? No, I couldn't say I'm even suspecting her. It's just that—she could be the link—in fact, the obvious one. That's why I've been cultivating her, why I sounded her out last night."

(Liar, Martha thought. *I'll bet you sounded her out all right, and got told off and that's why you're building your scenarios. But why all this sudden devotion to me?)* "And what did you find out?"

"She thinks Dante is a dope."

WRONG approach for Lily, Martha thought, even as she said: "I wouldn't have thought of Lily as a Dante student."

"She thought he was some kind of poet." The edge was in his voice again, a catty edge she had never heard there before. Mr. Smooth-tail had definitely been bruised. "The subject just happened to come up. She hadn't heard of the *Vita Nuova,* of course, so I told her of Dante's exquisite love of Beatrice. So her reaction was that Dante was not only a dope but that Beatrice also thought he was a dope."

He was staring straight in Martha's eyes now, awaiting an answer. She began to get it, but was not sure, so she compromised with: "He *was* a bit out of this world, wasn't he?" She moved away, back to her own office, thinking that Dante must also have become a bore and an irritating nuisance—as her estimable boss was giving every sign of becoming.

But now there were more important things to think of. Pete had not been bruised by Lily's rebuffs—yet he had also said that she could be the link. Pete still had an even sharper hunch about her—and how all this talk of the game being fixed was part of the cloud that had been hanging over them ever since Walt had first met Lily. That was why Lily had not been invited to their dinner tonight, because Pete had made such a stormy protest.

DEXTER again summoned Martha, and asked her to get Tom Dawn, the Chanford coach. The Dexter name was magic in Chanford athletic circles; soon Dawn was on the phone, and it was "Tom" and "Dex." Martha had not been asked to transcribe this call; but neither had Dexter switched her off the line, which he usually did on calls of a private nature—for instance, ladies. So she took notes.

Dexter wanted to know about Walt's ankle. Dawn, with a chuckle in his voice, assured him there was nothing to worry about. Yes, they were aware of the rumors—but there was nothing to worry about there, either. Yes, the kids would be protected from mysterious strangers, would never be away from camp except for two or three who lived in town and were making quiet trips home that evening for dinner. Yes, the Stones—but everything was all right. The game? Well, what did Dexter hear about Pete Stone? Yes? Well, that was what they were expecting. They would be in there trying. Would Dex be out? Okay. Tom would be seeing Dex. . . . Take it easy.

Now Dexter asked Martha to try to get Bingo Krock. This call was harder to complete. The name of Dexter was anathema at Capitol, and the feeling was in Bingo's voice when he finally roared his "Yeh?" into the phone. Dexter very diplomatically eased into the situation of the rumors; hoped that, for the good of both schools, Capitol was taking the same precautions as Chanford—but Bingo interrupted him there, said that Capitol would take care of itself; but that, if what he heard around was true, Chanford would have plenty to do to keep its own nose clean.

Bingo didn't even say good-by.

Martha didn't get it. When a moral cynic suddenly turned guardian of public morals, he could be suspected of being up to something. Martha couldn't imagine what—but she did know that, regardless of how they had felt before, the two coaches would now be watching their stars with careful eye—and the stars would be Walt and Pete. It was no wonder that the strain of this Big Game seemed to be bearing down harder on Mom than on anybody else. She seemed to have the same instinctive sense of impending catastrophe that Pete had felt.

As the day went on, and the radio blared and the afternoon editions came out with fresh headlines—as the odds continued to swing steadily toward Capitol, until they were now favored by seven points—Martha began to get the same feeling. The word seemed to be well around that Pete would be in top shape. But nobody knew that—not even Martha, perhaps not even Pete. He wanted to get in this game so much that he might even be fooling himself. His several layers of icicle control protected him by day; but during his sleep last night he had ground the cap from a tooth, just as he had the night before going overseas, leaving her when she was pregnant.

Martha had feared a clash at dinner because Lily had not been invited; but Walt gave no indication that he noticed the omission. He and Pete had met with a good handshake and a good laugh as each said, "Hi, cripple—how's the leg?" and then each had put on an exaggerated limp. Pete was so happy to see Davey that he put his arms around him, hugged him in a way that embarrassed them both. Davey had grown and was older, was even more quiet than before; but he was still the baby brother to Pete. They ate heartily, didn't mention the game, talked about old times, talked about anything but football.

Mom had always pretended to like football, because the boys did, and their father had; but she was living for the day when the last one of them would play his final game. She had sort of secretly hoped, though she felt like a traitor doing it, that Davey might not make the Chanford squad, because he was so small compared to the other two. But he would be in the game tomorrow, and he and Pete on opposite sides. She couldn't imagine Pete throwing Davey down as he did the others, for Pete was supposed to be a holy terror, the way they talked on the radio and wrote in the papers. Mom was going to have to go to the game tomorrow, but she would give anything for a good excuse not to. It might be fun for all those other people, fighting for tickets at such outrageous prices, but for her it would be pure torture.

Then there was the talk about something being wrong with the game—gamblers. That was why Lily wasn't here—she worked for gamblers. Mom knew none of her boys would ever think of doing a wrong thing like that. Pete didn't suspect Walt; he was afraid the gamblers might work through Lily to get Walt in some kind of a trap, like that picture. Somebody on the radio had mentioned the picture without naming names—

Football couldn't be so important that it should get boys into such danger that one of them even had to stay away from home so he wouldn't be a spy on his own brother's leg; or so that these boys had to be nervous underneath, as they all now were, waiting for the game, and so strained with each other, when they had always been so close. Now they were all looking at her. Everybody had suddenly stopped talking.

"Mom"—Walt's voice was very kind, his smile very sweet—"why did you fool us about the house?"

They had a pact in the family, never to tell a direct lie, even for the best of reasons. Mom would not lie. She spoke in a strong voice: "I want you all to finish college—and you're going to."

"Then you did fool us?" It was Pete.

"Yes."

"Have you been keeping up the payments?"

It was an odd feeling to face the gently accusing eyes of her own family. She wished Dan were here—but if Dan were here, there would have been no need to fool them. "I caught up last summer when Davey worked. I'm a little behind now."

Davey said: "I'll drop out of school."

"No, you won't," Pete said. "It's my responsibility. I'll quit after tomorrow's game."

"You will not." Mom was firm. "You'll finish, Pete—and Davey, if we're really in danger in January, you can drop out the second semester. Pete will be out by summer, and then you can go back again. We'll do all right."

Martha said: "I know somebody who wants to help if you get a little short, Mom."

PETE was staring at her. "Not Dexter—no more from him."

"Not Dexter."

"Who?" They were all looking at her.

"Lily."

"Bless her!" Mom said.

"How could she know?" Pete asked, sharply.

Martha realized now what she might have brought on. Walt was staring at her with a bitter smile. She didn't know what Lily might have told him. She made her voice calm, hoped to calm the others. "I don't know that she did know anything about it. She heard us talking when she was here, knew we ran close on the payments. She happened to ask how Mom was the day we had lunch—I told you about it then, Pete. I said Mom looked tired—and she said she might be worried about the payments—to tell her if we needed help—" Martha was pleading to Pete's eyes. "She just did it out of the goodness of her heart."

"Maybe." Pete turned to Walt. "Did she tell you?"

Walt looked steadily at Pete. "I wrote the bank. Calm down. Nobody's going to quit school. I'll get the money."

"How?"

They were all waiting for Walt. His eyes circled them, and as they did, his face slowly changed. The old good humor was back. "A Chanford angel has promised me a hundred bucks a touchdown." Now he grinned. "I figure I'll get four."

The tension was broken, and Pete gave a grudging smile. "You're not getting any touchdowns, son."

"Who's going to stop me—Chuck Linn?"

"I'm not talking."

They all laughed, glad to be on this safer ground again. Walt looked at his watch, at Davey. "Well, kid—time to kiss the girls good-by—we're due at the slave station in an hour."

Pete walked toward the sidewalk with the two, walked between them, a hand on each of their elbows, as if he hated to break the last fraternal contact. Then he gave them a friendly shove on their way. "Be seeing you, kids."

"Take care of yourself, Pete," Walt said.

"Same to you, Walt. . . . Hey, Davey," Pete called as they walked toward the bus stop, "see that he doesn't stop to have his picture taken."

Walt turned, quickly—then broke into a wide grin: "Next time I have my picture taken, my number will be toward the press box."

Pete came back to the women, put his arm around his mother, who was waving a limp hand, looking through obscured vision. "Take it easy, Mom, it's only a football game."

A little later, Pete was saying it again, to his mother, then his wife, as he also left to spend the night in seclusion with his teammates. And Martha was saying to Mom, after he had gone from sight: "Pete will look after them."

"Who will look after Pete?"

"Pete?" Martha laughed at the idea of anybody hurting Pete.

Mom was saying a little prayer.

The phone rang. It was Lily.

Chapter Twelve

LILY wanted to know if Walt was there. Martha said she was sorry, he had just left. Lily said, "Oh," and there was such an embarrassing pause that Martha began to make light and cheerful conversation. "What did you do to a certain Mr. Smooth-tail last night?"

"Why?"

"He seemed hurt."

"He was giving me a lot of malarkey about Dante and Beatrice. I figured he was talking about himself, and somebody we know—married, get it?"

"Oh—yes, I think so."

"I think he figured he was Dante—so I told him he was a dope. I guess he got it. Why—did he make any move today?"

"Well—"

"That's good. What I figured. Bring it to a head. The guy's a little outside in an upstairs corner. Didn't Walt mention me?"

"Well—"

"I thought he'd call me—or maybe I'd be asked to dinner. I wanted to talk to him. Did he say anything about the house? Payments or anything?"

A thin shock hit Martha, tightened her voice: "I'd like to see you, Lily."

"I'd like to see you, too. This thing has got me almost nuts—I've got to talk to somebody. I'm at the café—we're doing an extra show tonight."

"You couldn't get out?"

"No—I'm in a spot. That's what I want to—"

"All right. I'll be down."

"Come to my dressing-room—if I'm not there, wait. Only, better not let anybody see you—you know who I mean."

"How do I got to your room?"

"That part's easy. Go right past the ladyjohn—second door."

The phone was on the table in the downstairs hall at the foot of the steps. Mom had been with the baby, getting him to sleep. She came down the stairs, spoke casually. "He's asleep. What did Lily want?"

"Walt. She wanted to wish him luck before the game."

"Too bad she just missed him."

"Yes. I think she's a good kid." Martha hesitated. "I'm getting nervous. I thought of riding downtown and watching the crowds for a while."

"That's a good idea. Brighten you up, Martha. We'll all be better off when this game is over."

"I'll be back in an hour."

"Have a good time, Martha—and if you meet any of your friends, don't hurry."

Martha walked to the corner; but when minutes passed and there was no sign of a bus, she convinced herself this was an emergency, and took the first cab that slowed down. It might just be an emergency; but that she would know soon enough, and she was glad it was a talkative driver. The crowds, he said, were already nuts, with excitement and alcohol. He was picking Capitol, said the forecast was rain, which would help Capitol—and the word was around that Pete Stone was okay. The word was also around that it wouldn't make much difference how Pete was—because it was in the bag for Capitol. But there was always talk like that. Martha had given him the street-corner address nearest the café; but now, as they drove into the noisy crowds along High Street, a light rain had already begun to fall—and she saw things which convinced her the sidewalk would be no place for an unescorted girl. So she told him to take her to the Blue Lily.

He gave her another look. "The hot-spot. Meeting somebody there?"

"Yes."

"Good thing. You can't get close to the door without a reservation."

IT was like a première crowd. Ziggy had added a canopy which was jammed on both sides by curious celebrity-hunters. Martha got out of the cab and walked through the path of police. There were a few whistles, even though she was not dressed for a night out. She felt socially nude without a man. The policeman at the door thought so too.

"Reservation, lady?"

"I want to see Miss Carewe."

"Everybody does—that's why you have to have a reservation."

"Get word to her, please—I have an appointment."

"Sorry, lady." The policeman smiled as if she had made a good try. "You'll have to move aside."

Martha moved aside but not away. Other people were coming; dressed-up people, with reservations, were being photographed. It was a spot Martha had never been in before. Doors had always opened automatically for her—her father's influence, her own personality, her boy-friends' money, her husband's publicity. She could get in here easily enough by telling this man who she was, showing a card—but that she didn't want to do. The policeman was beginning to be annoyed.

"Look, lady—you tried, and it didn't work."

"I do have a reservation, Officer. Will you see if Mr. Carter Dexter has arrived yet? I'm to be his guest."

He was skeptical; but the name of Carter Dexter and her confident smile swung him. He opened the door, spoke to somebody inside. Martha waited, wondered what to do next. It was going to be embarrassing if Dexter were or were not there. It might be better to retreat and telephone Lily—but that would attract attention. She waited. Dexter came; he was delighted. And diplomatic.

"So you got here, after all." He moved past the officer, took her arm, and—impulsively, she hoped—put his other hand at her waist. Other people were coming, the camera popped nearby, and Martha gave the shrugging cop a triumphant smile as she entered what was, for the night, the social mecca of Capitol City. Dexter had dropped his arm, but the joy of achievement, of conquest, or something—even he was not yet certain, refracted from the black liquid pools of his eyes.

"You are just in time for the first show."

"Where is your table?"

"Ringside."

"Why don't you go on? I'm really not ready for this—I'd like to freshen up."

He had had a few drinks.

"That's not very flattering to our Lily."

"All right, then." The lights were down, and they made their way to the table, brushing and squeezing through what was left of the aisles.

"Ziggy is getting fifteen dollars a square foot tonight," Dexter chuckled. He took her arm again, guided her to the table for two at the foot of the stage.

The spotlight came on; the place grew remarkably quiet. Lily came out, to riotous applause; she looked around, started slightly as she saw Martha, gave a slight nod. Dexter moved significantly closer to Martha, put his arm about her, was chuckling, glowing at Lily. The camera flashed nearby again as Lily began to sing.

Her performance was almost a shock to Martha, so much had it improved since the last time. This was an emotional song that hit a full crescendo, and Lily was there with all of it; she had these people, held them; they couldn't get enough of her; but on the second encore, when Dexter turned to the waiter, Martha slipped away.

This time Lily got her head in, was talking to somebody—

SHE was in the dressing-room when Lily came in, flushed, breathless. "I see Dante made his move."

"I had to use him to get in—no reservation. And the man at the door wouldn't take a message to you—he thought I was a crasher. This is not a good place for me to be seen, Lily, so—"

"It won't take long—but you won't like it."

Lily told the story in its barest details: Walt had said, mostly kidding, that he needed five thousand dollars to pay off the house debt so they could get married. After she had quit, Ziggy had wanted her to stay so badly that she had demanded five thousand dollars' bonus. He finally agreed to pay it, and she had told Walt he could use the money on the house so they could get married and Martha could quit her job if she wanted to. Walt had objected, but she had pressured him into it. Then Ziggy had said he had all his money bet, could pay the bonus only if Capitol won.

That put Lily in the position of having to tell Walt the bonus money and the marriage was off—unless his team lost to Capitol. She had accused Ziggy of the frame, but he had pointed out he had not even mentioned Walt—all of which was true. He had challenged her to tell Walt the whole business, was sure that Walt would think it was okay. She had to tell Walt something, just in case the bonus money would not be there, so she had told him the truth. And he had written her it was okay—and that he thought Capitol would win by ten points.

"How would that sound to you, Martha?"

"Bad. But I don't think Walt—" She hesitated. There was what had happened at the dinner table. Walt had said he would get the money. "Maybe it's all coincidence, Lily—"

"That's what I was hoping until today. I went to read Walt's letters again—and they were gone from where I kept them." She showed Martha the shoe-box. "There was that letter about the ten points—and a wire, which was kidding and about something else, which would look awfully bad."

"Maybe you misplaced them—"

"No. I accused Ziggy, and he admitted stealing them. He said he had me where he wanted me now—that they had planned it all and I had fallen for it. They had been reading my mail. They think Walt really meant to send them those messages through me: that he thinks I knew what I was doing all the time—that it was all a clever deal where no bribe was actually offered. Ziggy bragged about that. He said he and his partners are in the clear; the only evidence is against me and Walt. If I don't do what they say from now on, they will have Walt exposed, tossed out of football and put in jail—and me too. Nice, huh?"

Martha's stomach was being rolled up like a spool of cold steel thread. This was what Pete had feared, what Mom had felt, what Dexter had talked about and Harry Walker had written about. This was disaster for Walt, for the family.

"MARTHA—you believe me, don't you?"

"I don't know, Lily—I don't know what to think. This is horrible. What else do they want you to do?"

"I'm supposed to get word to Walt that they are all betting that Capitol will win by three points; but they have some money up to ten points. They will give me—but really, Walt—an extra thousand-dollar bonus for every point over three Capitol makes—but nothing at all if Capitol wins by less than three points—or loses."

"Was that why you tried to call Walt tonight?"

"Yes—no—I mean I wanted to tell him how it was, so he would know—and I wanted to tell him not to do anything wrong, that I wasn't in on it. You've got to believe that. That's why I'm telling you. You've got to get word to him somehow not to do it."

"I should report this whole horrible mess to the police—right now." Martha got up.

Lily was frantic. "But you can't do that. Ziggy would deny all he said to me. If he showed that letter and wire, it would ruin Walt—and me. You've got to believe me. What would I have to gain by telling you all this—if I were in on it?"

Martha studied her. "I don't know. There were some pictures taken around me tonight—I might be in them. Those might not be any more accidental than that one of you and Walt." Her eyes narrowed. "That would look wonderful in tomorrow's paper—Pete Stone's wife at the gamblers' headquarters the night before the big game. With all this other talk, what would that do to Pete? Maybe that's the idea—to get Pete in too."

"No, Martha—please—"

"And you've also messed things so with my boss that I may have to quit my job. I was handling him all right until you moved into that too." Martha opened the door. "You've certainly fixed us up beautifully—the family you cared so much about! Congratulations, Lily!"

Dexter was waiting when she came out of the powder room. "Ah, there you are, goddess. There's still room for a postage stamp on Ziggy's dance-floor."

"Sorry, Mr. Dexter, but here I also go." She smiled her prettiest. "Thanks so much for the first aid."

His eyes narrowed. "But you can't do that."

"But I have to. I had to see Lily—it was an emergency." Martha laughed lightly, moved him toward the door. "You might not believe this—but in all the confusion, nobody had thought to invite the famous Blue Lily to the game. She called me tonight. I happened to have an extra ticket and was coming downtown, so I told her I'd drop in with it."

"Very thoughtful—indeed." He had recovered, bowed. "Always glad to be of service."

"Thank you, so much. Good night."

"Good night."

Martha also said good night to the policeman on the outer door. He blinked, shrugged, then smiled. This cute trick had got away with her cute trick, whatever it was.

But in the morning the policeman was not so sure that it had been such a cute trick when he saw the newspaper picture of the cute trick herself outside the door, and the caption:

> Mrs. Peter Stone, wife of the Capitol star, at the entrance of the Blue Lily Café, hot-spot of the merrymakers and odds-makers the night before the Big Game—smiling at Jason Carter Dexter, her employer, and the Chanford alumnus generally reported to be the sponsor of the Rolling Stones. Odds on today's Big Game continued to swing to Capitol as wet weather was forecast.

Chapter Thirteen

MARTHA had had very little real trouble in her life, no great worries. Little Mike had come easily; she had always had a sublime sort of confidence that Pete would come through the war; even her father's opposition to her marriage and refusal to give it his blessing had been an intellectual rather than emotional experience. He did all the nice things on birthdays and holidays, was just a father and grandfather *in absentia;* some day, she was sure, he would find some way to rationalize it in his academic mind, and they would all fit in very nicely and go on from there. Her father was dean of English at Capitol, had long been an implacable foe of commercialized football at the institution, regarded Pete as a subsidized gladiator, which he no doubt was. Her father had taken the position that his only daughter had betrayed him, by going over to the football Philistines.

Which she had, she had always admitted, but had never thought it a serious transgression until this night before the Big Game when her mind had been overrun with the subject. She had always thought it very much of an academic matter, with much to be said on the players' side; but as she woke this morning of the Big Game, she also woke with the dull weight that had been dragged through her head all night long, that still pressed as a physical weight. She had that awful feeling that this was an awakening worse than the nightmare.

It was cloudy with the promise of rain. That would have seemed important, ordinarily—Capitol wanted a heavy field to cut down the efficiency of Walt's speed and passing. But who won this game now had no importance whatever to Martha. She would trade the game for the assurance that no harm would come to the family during the short span of this day.

The strong smell of coffee came from below. Mom was already there, was at a table, having her morning cup and looking over the paper when Martha came down.

"Looks as if they'll have a good enough day for it, Mom."

"Uh-uh." Mom smiled, handed her the paper. "I'd have thought anybody that was out night-clubbing would want to sleep this morning."

Martha amazed at her sure calm, studied the picture. Page One! Lovely! This would be a nice good-morning for Pete. "Bad picture of me, don't you think, Mom?"

"Doesn't do you justice."

"You can say that again." She wondered how much Mom knew about the reference to the odds-makers. "I happened to think that Lily might not have a ticket to the game. Thought I'd drop in and ask her. But they wouldn't let me in without a reservation, wouldn't call her—so I remembered my boss would be there. They were taking pictures of everybody."

"How was Lily?"

"Marvelous. She was starting a show as I got there, so I watched it. She doesn't dance any more—just sings—and swell."

"Lily's all right."

"Nice picture of Walt and Pete too—regular Stone edition."

"They should have had Davey too."

"Maybe they will—tomorrow." Tomorrow! Martha shuddered inwardly. "Mom—how far would you trust Lily on something important?"

"As much as I'd trust you—or Pete—or Walt—or Davey. That girl has a good heart." Martha looked up, to find Mom staring at her. "I know you didn't go there just to deliver a ticket. I know there's some talk. You needn't bother to explain it to me unless you think there's a way I can help."

"Thanks, Mom. You've already told me what I really wanted to know. About Lily: Some people have been trying to use her to put Walt on the spot. She told me about it. I just wondered whether I could believe her or not. I can handle it, I think—Pete is to call me at ten o'clock. He can take care of everything. Will you be ready at noon? I'll try to bring a cab with me and you have Nancy here too. Or maybe Lily will drive us. Take it easy, Mom."

Martha kissed her mother-in-law, something she had seldom done.

NOBODY was at the office ahead of her this morning, and no flowers. The mail was unimportant, and the girls in the outer office had been excused from coming in—they would all have had a big night, have their minds on getting to the game and another big night. There was no second cup of coffee, because she wanted her contacts with her boss this morning to be hit-and-run.

At nine-thirty her phone rang. She stiffened, prepared for Pete or Dexter—or almost anybody but her father.

"Daddy—how nice!"

But Daddy was not nice. He had called to ask her what that picture meant in the newspaper. Did she not realize the position in which it put her? And if she must do such a thing, was it being considerate of her husband to do it on this morning of all mornings, when the boy would have enough on his mind—

"Daddy—are you sure you're thinking of Pete or the Capitol football team?" She smiled, enjoyed the dissertation she knew would follow, interrupted at the first polite interval: "Well, what can you expect of a girl who gets no guidance from her father?"

He was astonished at her flippant attitude; whereupon she became serious, said she had done nothing he wouldn't have sanctioned, that she was sorry, she couldn't explain to him over the phone just what it was; but she would like his advice on a major question: There was something Pete ought to know, something that might seriously affect the family; and it might just be too late after the game. He was going to call her shortly. How much should she tell him—or should she not worry him until after the game?

Her father answered immediately that this was a foolish question. The man should know—hold nothing from him. She thanked him, invited him again, as always, to drop in, as if he were in the habit of dropping in; and as always, she told him of the latest cute thing his little grandson had done. And after her father had said good-by, she called Lily Carewe at her hotel, told the operator she was sure Miss Carewe would not mind being called before her regular call because this was about tickets for today's game.

Lily said she hadn't been able to sleep all night, but sounded like a person who had slept the sleep of youth; when she finally realized who was calling, she said she was miserable, was surprised that Martha would call her

after that picture. Martha laughed, said she thought it was a bad picture; that Lily should forget anything Martha had said last night, and did she have a ticket for the game, and would she like to sit with the family? Lily didn't answer right away; then she said she was in a spot. She had to go with you-know-who, but after she got in, she would slip away and join the family, if Martha would tell her the location. Lily marked it down and checked it. Nothing else had happened, she said. Martha told her to take it easy, that everything was going to be all right. "So long, Lily."

"Lily again?" Dexter had come into the room. He had no flowers, and he was not his amiable self. He had had a big night. Something was eating him, definitely.

"What did you think of that picture, Martha?"

"Very unfortunate."

"It's libelous."

"Really?"

"Definitely."

The phone rang. It was Pete. Martha asked him to wait, said to Dexter: "I'm about to hear what my husband thinks of it."

"Should be interesting." He did not move.

She had to say to him: "Do you mind?" His "Sorry" was tinctured with mild acid as he left the room.

"Getting rid of the boss," Martha said into the phone. "Well, I suppose you're wondering what kind of wife—"

"Can that; I talked to Mom. What's up?"

"Thanks, honey. It's bad—those people you've been afraid of all along. We've got to do something—"

"Is Walt in the clear?"

"Yes—but we've got to get a message to him."

"From whom?"

"From somebody you don't trust." She heard him grunt. "I can't tell you all about it here, but this is the message: There's been a clever scheme to get at him through her. She found out about it last night. She wants no part of it, wants him to know that. That's why I was down there; that's the only reason I was with—"

"I know all that. Look, Martha—you satisfied about her?"

"YES, Pete. She's tried her best. These are smart people—not just the ones you've been afraid of—outsiders and very clever—"

"Okay. Any idea how they're betting?"

"Yes. They seem to have most of their money on Capitol to win by from three points to ten."

"How do you know that?"

"That was a message she was supposed to deliver to—somebody we know—but she told me."

"Why?"

"So we could know what was going on."

"Maybe so we could deliver the message."

"I know—I thought all that too. But if you think that, then you have to think something else—we can't believe—"

"Okay. Is that all?"

"Except I love you."

"Okay—here too."

"Take care of yourself."

Not until she hung up, did she wonder how Pete was going to get the message to Walt. They were in opposite camps, protected by guards. Pete had arranged to phone her, because no calls would be put through to the players even from their families.

A few minutes later Dexter asked Martha to get a call through to Tom Dawn, the Chanford coach. She was not optimistic, and did get quite a run-around; but the Dexter name was magical even on the morning of the Big Game. She signaled him to get on the line, listened until she was sure the contact had been made, heard his first sentence: "Listen, Tom—I just heard something very important."

Dexter could have just heard nothing except her conversation with Pete. She continued to listen.

Without disclosing the source, Dexter repeated an exaggerated version: There was a definite plot by the gamblers. Contact had evidently been made with a very important Chanford player, and a final message was going to be delivered to him that morning by a very important Capitol player. Again Tom Dawn seemed remarkably unperturbed, said he was sure there was nothing to worry about. But now Dexter would not be so easily put off. He said that since his picture had appeared on the first page of this morning's paper in such an embarrassing circumstance, and with such obvious innuendo, that his personal integrity was at stake. He insisted that Tom Dawn keep a very close watch on the actions, not only of his own top star, but of his opposite number. There were things Dexter could not say over the phone, but Dawn could use his judgment, after seeing that picture.

Dexter had hardly cradled the receiver when Martha was in the room—a Martha he had never seen.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that you were embarrassed by that picture."

"You listened?"

"Didn't you?"

"I'm involved."

"*You're* involved—what about the rest of us—now that you've done your best to—"

"I can't be dragged into a scandal—"

"Who dragged Walt to Chanford? Whose money is taking care of him?"

"Can you prove that?"

"More than you can prove what you just said to his coach. I can prove you made the arrangements—if you're going to tempt these boys with money—"

"Martha—you don't seem to realize that we may be sitting on a situation that will blow football sky-high—"

"Oh, don't I?"

"We must do something to stop it."

"That's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to keep innocent people's lives from being ruined, too. All you're concerned about is yourself—as always. I'm leaving you, Mr. Dexter—and if anything comes of this, you'll have your share of it, believe me."

She cleaned out her desk swiftly, banged the office door after her.

Dexter came out after she had left, locked the door, sat down at her desk and put in a call for Bingo Krock. He would not leave his name, but he did leave a message. One of the important Capitol players, he said, would deliver a message to one of the important Chanford players. It would be direct from the Blue Lily gamblers, and would say that there would be no pay-off unless Capitol won by at least three points.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HARRY WALKER sat in the front row of the highest football press box in the world, and surveyed the scene with high-powered glasses borrowed from a Naval Reserve officer for this occasion. He had come out very early, to avoid the congested traffic; but eighty thousand-odd other people had had the same idea. It was still an hour before game time; the great stadium seemed almost filled; yet as he looked out through the open end of the horseshoe, people were still streaming from the parking-lots spread over the acres of ground that were part of the Capitol campus.

Sports-writers were already at work in the narrow cramped benches of the glass-enclosed press box, checking their line-ups, writing their leads, distilling the surmisings of the week. Both Pete and Walt Stone would start. It was thought that Walt would be in top shape; but the question of Pete's condition was yet to be answered. Despite this, the mysterious melting of the odds had continued until Capitol was now a ten-point favorite. Reports over the nation confirmed this to be one of the biggest gambling games in the history of college football. Rumors of "something wrong" were prevalent, based on the open presence of known big-time gamblers from major sectors.

The weather promised to favor Capitol. Rain was imminent; a wet field and wet ball would handicap the Chanford attack, built around Walt Stone's passing and running from the single wing, more than it figured to bother the power which Bingo Krock's version of the T developed from his

stout line and hard-running backs piloted by the versatile Chuck Linn. If Pete Stone were able to add his customary running, rushing, pass-catching and defensive ability, there was nothing so much out of line in the behavior of the odds. The heavy money was obviously betting that Pete Stone would be right.

Harry Walker's column would not be written until after the game. He had been given the credit and responsibility for starting the gambling rumors which had spread over the country. It was up to him to come up with the story of what was wrong, if anything was wrong, or be known thereafter as the writer who had cast a cloud over two fine schools and groups of boys, just to call attention to himself. That was gents'-room journalism, and Harry did not consider himself that kind of journalist. He was sure that Ziggy and his affiliates had something riding here. So Harry was sitting sky-high, with camera glasses that made the entire stadium his stage.

He located the Stone family group—Pete's wife, the mother, another pretty girl—on the Capitol side, upper deck, not too far below the press box. Carter Dexter was on the fifty, halfway up the lower stands, in the Chanford alumni group, not too far from the bench—he was the type of alumnus who would have to get to the dressing-room after the game.

There was a front-row field box, as yet significantly vacant, on the Chanford side—an unusual place for an old Capitol rooter; but Ziggy had made quite a point of saying that, while he was betting on Capitol, he would be rooting for Chanford, because of the dirty deal he had received all year from Bingo Krock and the Capitol coaches and players. The spectacle of Ziggy the sportsman rooting against Ziggy the gambler had provided much amusement throughout the week—and the sinister comment that Ziggy the business man might have business on the Chanford side.

Harry had given Lily one of his precious tickets for the overflow press section just below the box. The motivation had not been entirely altruistic. He wanted her to be where he could talk to her after the game. The seat was, as yet, vacant. Harry's glasses idly searched the incoming arrivals for her, a needle-in-the-haystack job—

But he found her, chuckled at where he found her. This was the supreme Lilyism of all—Lily was trying to crash the Chanford dressing-room a half-hour before game-time—

THEN Harry stopped chuckling. His glasses had picked out Ziggy and the character Jingle, in the shifting crowd near the dressing-room entrance. They were watching Lily.

She was talking to the guard at the door. The door opened, and she seemed to be talking to somebody inside. The door closed, and Lily chatted with the guard. Her gorgeous red head bobbed vivaciously. She was wearing what looked like a new mink coat. The door opened again, and this time Lily got her head in, was talking to somebody, leaned forward as if she might be kissing somebody. Then the door closed.

She was picked up by Ziggy and Jingle, walked with them to the front field box. The box quickly filled. The others were all men. Harry Walker put his glasses down, gazed vacantly out at nothing. Just what was *this?*

What Harry could not know was that his leading lady had just appeared in a command performance. Since Walt Stone had not got in touch with her, Jingle had insisted that she get word to him about the three-point minimum. She had assured them she had arranged for that, but would not say how it had been done. It had been her idea, somewhat surprising to them, that she further assure them by talking to Walt himself. They had told her no dame could ever get word inside a dressing-room at this hour. They had seen her do it.

Lily had delivered a message—but not the message the gamblers wanted delivered. . . .

There was a roar from the Chanford stands as the squad ran out for its warm-up, glistening in gold pants, light blue jerseys, gold headgear. The yellow chrysanthemums bobbed in the movement of the Chanford stands; the pennants waved; the cheer-leaders did their acrobatics; the band on the sideline pumped the Fight Song. Three teams and a few stragglers ran the length of the field in signal formation, then broke into groups, began to pass, kick, run back punts—all routine stuff designed to get the feel of the ball.

There was a mightier roar as the Capitol players ran out, six full teams, since they were at home. These went through the same routine of going through signals, after which half of them ran to the bench, where they would remain as spectators. The thirty-three who might get into the game also broke into passing and kicking groups. Capitol and Chanford occupied separate parts of the field; there was some mingling as the balls got mixed up—but no communication or admission that the other team was there. This had all the formality of the preliminaries of a duel.

Harry Walker played his glasses over the grim, unsmiling faces of boys about to play a game that would be to them serious as war. He appreciated anew Bingo Krock's clever use of his school colors in the uniforms—dark green pants to match the color of the sod—and white jerseys for passers to aim at. He also knew that if it came up rain, it would also come up mud, for the Capitol turf never drained well, perhaps because Capitol teams went to power rather than speed; and mud on the smooth material of those green pants would make greased pigs of Pete Stone and the other Capitol runners.

Harry's power glasses caught Pete Stone, with his Number 12, his height and his big shoulders and legs. Pete looked all right—no limp in his gait now as he went into the air for a pass, deep and near the blue-shirted Chanford players. But he loafed back, very close to the Number 5 of his brother Walt. Whether he spoke or not Harry Walker could not say; but a few minutes later, when the Chanford squad began to leave the field, Chanford 5 was lingering, and Capitol 12 was moving along near him.

SUDDENLY Chanford 5 stopped; they seemed to be arguing—until another player, a smaller one, Chanford 32, ran up to them.

The three Stone brothers were out there together for a moment—then they broke to the opposite sides of the field, to catch the vanguard of their squads returning to the dressing-rooms for the final charges from their coaches.

This had happened in plain view of eighty thousand people but very few had noted it; most of these had been watching for it, and gave it their various interpretations.

Ziggy gleefully asked Lily if this was what she had arranged. She gave him her wide stare, asked, "What do you think?" and he gleefully passed the word that everything was copasetic, that the boys had given it the final check, that this was even better than they had thought. Harry Walker remembered that the brothers had not shaken hands, was not too sure that Davey hadn't broken up an argument between the other two. Martha knew that resourceful Pete had found the way—hoped that neither Coach Tom Dawn nor Dexter had seen it.

But Tom Dawn had seen it; and Bingo Krock, because the coaches always follow their squads on and off the field, and because each had been unconsciously watching for something like this; but each turned from the unthinkable thought that this meeting had seemingly confirmed the direct warning Dawn had received that morning from Dexter—and Krock had received from an anonymous tipster; and each coach put all the more fervor into the pep talk he had already prepared.

Bingo Krock, who was a sledgehammer orator as well as a hard-hitting coach, bellowed to his boys to go out

and win this one for old Pete, the boy who had remained loyal to his school, who had patiently followed orders, shaken off all bad breaks and was set for the game of his life today. Win for Pete—

Coach Tom Dawn, a more sensitive man, had a very different speech. He told his squad, seriously and somberly, that the unsavory things rumored about this game had some element of truth. The gamblers had tried, by a very clever scheme, an indirect approach to one of the boys now in this room. The boy had done what any Chanford man would have done—come to his coach with his suspicions. A trap had been set for the gamblers. All Chanford had to do to spring the trap was to win this game. They were playing today, not just for themselves or for Chanford—but to vindicate the entire game of college football—to talk to crooked gamblers in the only language they would understand—to prove that the one sure way for them to lose their bank-rolls was to try to tempt a college player.

The other boys were stealing looks at Walt Stone. Davey, close to his brother, was seeking his eyes. He could understand now, what had been eating Walt lately, what might have caused the peculiar scene with Pete on the field; but he still couldn't understand Pete's angle.

Coach Tom Dawn was also watching Walt—and fighting back the thought that had been gnawing at the edge of his mind ever since Dexter had called—and since the night-club girl had come to the door with her queer message.

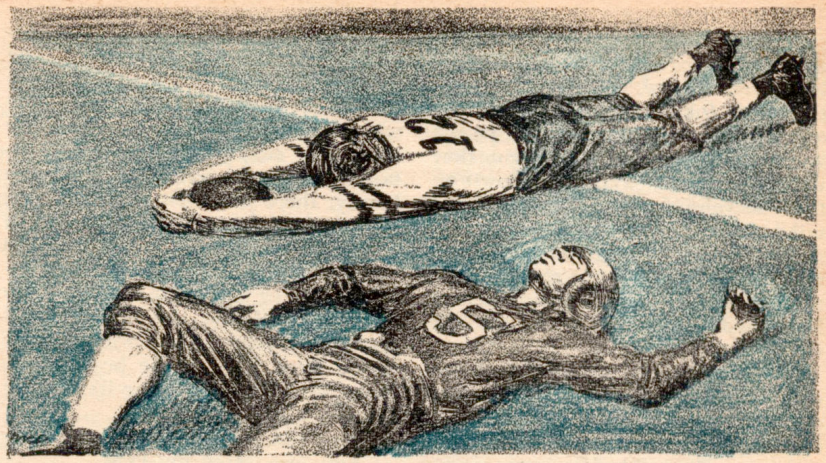
Chapter Fifteen

PEOPLE go to big football games because it is a safe and sure way of getting sharp thrills. But they see various things—from a confused blur, to a complete motion picture with elements of strategy, psychology, tradition and human interest.

The question mark of the Big Game had been answered for most by the manner in which Pete Stone had galloped during the pre-game warm-up; but Harry Walker, a student of the outdoor theater, waited for further proof. Pete Stone had always been the kickoff man for Capitol; his long, high boots gave his teammates, often himself, plenty of time to get down and nail the receiver deep in his own territory.

But Pete was not lining up to kickoff. Chuck Linn was going to boot the ball. To Harry Walker, that meant that Pete's leg was not yet strong enough to kick—and that could decide the ball game.

It was a line-drive kickoff, deep enough, but so fast that when Walt



The great zooming noise of the stadium hushed as neither brother got up.

Stone gathered it in on his two-yard line, he had plenty of field to get under way before the oncoming herd could get to him; he loped in customary fashion, swerved to the right, to the left, turned on a sharp burst of speed, drove toward an opening which might have sprung him clear—but was savagely hit by a hurtling body flung into the hole. A murmur swung round the stadium as spectators shook off the vicarious force of that tackle.

The loud-speaker droned: "Walt Stone—tackled by Pete Stone."

The crowd mumbled again—waited. The brothers were slow getting up—then Pete was on his feet, dancing about while the Capitol stands roared.

In the front row box on the Chanford side, Ziggy turned with a big smile to the men in the back rows.

But the razor-faces were pointed to the field. Walt was still on the ground. If he did not get up—this one was in!

Walt got up slowly, rubbing his neck.

Chanford had been kept well in its own backyard by Pete's tackle; now it would have to work its way out by guile or force. Walt, calling the signals, chose the prosaic method, tried three punches by his heavy backs, routine probes, at the line; but they totaled only five yards. The strong Capitol forwards, backed up by Pete Stone and Jumbo Perunko, the giant center, had won its first series of bouts—and that was important, because the line is the infantry of football, the factor of decision over the long route.

Walt dropped back; his blockers held well; his punt was forty yards from scrimmage, and so high that his ends were down to nail Chuck Linn almost as he caught the ball. Capitol had first down on its 37-yard line, which was almost but not quite the zone of attack.

Chuck Linn was spilled for a two-yard loss when somebody missed a block—and Harry Walker's glasses told him it might have been Pete Stone. Wassman, the other back, picked up five off tackle, as the Capitol strong play functioned. On third down Chuck Linn faded back from the protective T, circled about, danced, shook off two tacklers and let fly straight down the middle—

Pete Stone was down there, in the clear, five yards ahead of his brother Walt, the safety man. The ball was leading him—if he caught it, a sure touchdown. He got his fingers on it, juggled it, dropped it—

The crowd was howling in anguish and relief.

The ball was near the sidelines, and Pete was back in punt formation. Walt, most dangerous at returning punts, was now about fifteen yards in from the sidelines, with the rest of the field in which to operate. Pete did the smart thing—tried to kick out of bounds or keep Walt penned in; but a howl and a yell arose as the crowd saw where the ball was unbelievably going—out of bounds and only ten yards from the line of scrimmage. The ball had slid off the side of Pete's shoe.

Typewriters, telegraph keys and radio-announcers' voices were calling this the first big break of the ball game—and perhaps something more. Pete Stone hadn't kicked off—had fluffed his first punt. Without his kicking, he wasn't quite Pete. The psychological edge was all Chanford's now, and its crowd was imploring the boys to take advantage of this gift from the gridiron gods. . . .

Walt was back, fading from his wing position—down the field, his favorite pass-catching end Jim Kuchinka was loose and running—reaching; but the ball was a foot beyond his fingertips.

Two minutes gone and two touchdowns missed—by inches and a foot. Walt faked another pass; the secondary dashed back—and then he moved

eight yards through the prepared hole at guard from which the line-backers had been sucked away. Walt continued to follow this pattern, stayed one jump ahead of the defense, passed when they were in, ran when they were spread out. With first down on the twelve-yard line, Kuchinka, the tall pass-catching end, was alone in the end zone flat; but again Walt's pass was a foot wide—and the crowd added a second groan when it saw that Pete Stone had almost intercepted the ball with a clear field ahead.

On the next play Kuchinka crossed over behind the line from his position at right end, drawing Pete with him, swinging the entire secondary toward the left. Walt faked a jump pass—then pivoted and threw a long lateral to Bert McGrew, who had been in motion to the right, and who just kept sprinting diagonally into the end zone for a touchdown. While the crowd was still dancing, Davey Stone, star of Capitol High the year before, was on the field, in the big time now, for a big moment. He made the most of it, kicked the point that gave Chanford a seven-point lead.

Harry Walker shrugged, smiled, played his glasses like a camera again over an eighty-thousand segment of humanity temporarily off its nut. It looked very much as if he would have to start on a diet of crow in the morning. He was thinking of the most painless way to do it, kidding of course, perhaps with a line drawing of the Old Bird-dog eating crow. Having done this, he could then repeat that the gamblers had tried to put the game in the bag, but had learned once again that college loyalty was not for sale.

Harry's glasses sought the gamblers now, brought them in so close that they seemed to be just before him. Ziggy was staring at the field, his shoulders hunched up as though to fend the gimlet rays probing his back. Lily was standing beside him, waving at the Chanford bench, laughing at Ziggy, then at the razor-faces behind her. Some of the Chanford men in the box next to her were cheering her on. Jingle reached one of his long arms and sat her down. Two men in the Chanford box got up and there was a general movement toward the spot. It ended when Lily was lifted over the railing to the next box, showing a nice expanse of nylon. Room was made for her; and if they were all a bit crowded, nobody seemed to mind, not even the Chanford women with the Chanford men.

Why not? Harry Walker thought.

He walked to the rear of the press box, talked to his managing editor, suggested that a reporter and photographer be detailed to the gamblers' box. Harry loved to give suggestions to his managing editor.

Back in his seat, he turned his camera on the Stone women. The mother was sitting as if it was much too much for her, which it probably was. Harry thought of giving the managing editor another order—detailing a woman writer to the Stone family; there was even an empty seat there. But immediately he had a much better idea—he might want to use that seat himself.

The young dark one had come to life, was probably Davey's girl, and probably kidding Pete's wife. Harry would have liked to be hearing the dialogue, which was going like this at the moment:

"How did you like my Davey?"

"You just watch my Pete."

Martha had told herself that morning she would not care who won the ball game, if only nothing would happen to the family. It looked as if her prayer was being answered; it would be hard on Pete to lose; but she thought that, deep below all his layers, Pete would also rather lose than have anything happen to Walt.

PETE wasn't doing so well at the moment—nor was his team. Neither was Chanford; but first blood had done things to the Chanford line, which was fighting its bigger opponents yard for yard. There had been two exchanges of punts without any appreciable gain. . . .

The stands were rocketing; Martha was up, holding in as yet—

Pete had broken loose on one of his old runs, was at the sidelines, running clear, with only Walt coming across the field to head him off; they would meet at about the ten-yard line, where Walt would try to knock him out of bounds—

Martha let go—but her voice was as nothing in the roar; Pete had pulled his old trick, pivoted, given the safety man the slip, made a monkey out of Walt. But even as she hugged Nancy, yelled "That's my boy!" turned to squeeze Mom's shoulder, Martha had a feeling that something was wrong, that it had been too easy. Linn kicked the point, and the score was seven and seven as the first period ended.

Harry Walker leveled his glass on the gamblers' box once more. Ziggy was confident again, talking; but there was still no expression on the razor-faces. Jingle's teeth were still hurting. Harry had heard various tales of how the money had been laid; but he guessed that the Big Boys were not yet in the clear, that they had given points on Capitol. They had been sure about Pete's leg—which, despite the run he had just made, was not at par; he could not kick and did not seem to have his old drive at the line—was not bowling them over today. The gamblers also may have thought they had some insurance from Chanford—the rumor factory had worked overtime just before game time, had even mentioned Walt Stone.

Harry shrugged. His story could go two ways now—the way he wanted it to go, and the way he was afraid it might go.

Coach Tom Dawn had also been keeping tab on his star. Walt had led that touchdown march; but he had also let his brother get clear in the first minute for a possible t.d., had missed him by yards on the actual t.d., had missed Kuchinka on an easy pass for another t.d. That added up to a bad day, what might be expected of a nervous kid like his brother Davey. Walt might have been shaken on that first kickoff tackle by his brother Pete; but there was no real evidence of that. He had called his plays beautifully, even the end-zone pass; but again on that one he had made Tom Dawn's heart come to his collar—it depended for its success on its daring, which meant that it had to be protected; but Walt had not gone over to protect it; another foot, and Brother Pete might have been gone for a one-hundred-yard touchdown dash down the sidelines.

After all, the boy had been approached: there had been the call from Dexter that morning; and the girl who was the go-between had tried to deliver what might have been a code message at the dressing-room door just before the game. The manager had come to Tom, who had talked to the girl himself. She wanted him to tell Walt that he should play his best and get all the points he could. A very innocent message from a girl with innocent eyes. But that could be *part of it.*

What better way to protect yourself than to tip off your coach, apparently follow his orders—and then go *through with it?* Walt was the logical man to do such a thing—the signal-caller, passer and safety man. He had called signals well but had *just missed* a touchdown pass, and failed twice as safety man. He was definitely not playing his game.

Even if he were perfectly honest, which he probably was, something was bothering him, something was on his mind. Yet Tom Dawn hesitated to take him out. His first substitute, Husky Parsons, really did have a bad ankle; and his second sub, brother Davey, was a kid who ordinarily did not figure to get in a game like this, apart from his kicking, until it was in the bag or in desperation. And if Walt could not be trusted, what about Davey? Coach Dawn instantly apologized for that. If Davey had any guile in him, Tom Dawn didn't know boys.

Dexter's call had implied it might be a family matter. If so, there was no clue on Pete. He was playing a terrific game, considering the handicap he must be under, perhaps even

pain. His knee was probably coked up, which could mean he would be taking a chance of permanent injury. But if the gamblers were on Capitol to win by three points, Pete *should* be playing his ball game. He was certainly tying in to his brother at every opportunity. Walt was not hitting back, which was just as well.

Of course, there was the *other* possibility, that all this could be part of the scenario, that they might be building up to a situation where Pete would "get" Walt, who would sustain some "injury" which would convincingly remove him from action for the day.

DAWN told himself he had a foul evil mind. After all, Walt had a tie game, which was, at the moment, a moral victory; he had made mistakes; but everybody made mistakes; and he was under terrific pressure, on offense and defense. Since Pete had made the tying score, it had been very rugged out there, and Walt was doing his share, not brilliantly, but satisfactorily. If he were in with the gamblers, he must be giving them heart failure. In fairness to the boy, his coach should give him the benefit of the doubt; it would be a fine thing, after all, to yank his star on some cockeyed suspicion—and have his substitute passed over for another score!

Walt had a certain value just by being in there. He had the poise of a veteran, and his teammates had confidence in him. He was smart on ordinary defense—and always a dangerous man to punt or pass against, because he might run one back at any time. This was what had caused Pete to get off that one bad punt which had led to the Chanford score; the team was holding off Capitol now because Chuck Linn consistently kicked out of bounds to keep the ball away from Walt. And there was nothing wrong with his tackling. Walt was still a good routine player; but he was not sharp; he lacked spark—

Dawn was on his feet as the Capitol stands surged! Pete had gone down for the long pass again; he had a step on Walt, jumped for the ball, caught it. Walt barely got him in time to prevent another score. Capitol had decided to take a chance on Walt running back passes, to take advantage of his slow reactions. That had been a 46-yard pass to the Chanford 42.

Pete Stone and Linn were moving again; the Capitol line was beating Chanford to the charge; there was a marked psychological change in the two teams: that one pass had done it. Mechanically, Chanford was inferior; but it was a team capable of spiritual uplift. They had to be kept sharp; that was where Walt ordinarily was exceptional; but today it was where he was failing. And nobody on the bench to put in but Davey, the kid.

First down on the 10. Tom Dawn prayed for a miracle. Then he swore, kicked at the dirt—Pete had taken a lateral and scampered wide around end for a touchdown. Walt had missed him by a step again.

Walt always seemed to be *just missing.*

Tom Dawn looked tentatively at Davey—then something in the sound of the cheering made him turn to the field. The referee was stepping off a penalty. Pete's score didn't count.

Again the psychological change. Capitol lost its charge—or Chanford regained its lift. It stopped three plays at the line, and knocked down a fourth-down pass which was hurried and wild.

First down on the 7. Kick it out of there, Tom was saying; Walt was in punt formation—but he ran with the ball, made five, seven—

Fumble. A white-jerseyed Capitol man recovered.

Tom Dawn signaled for Davey to warm up.

But the yell reversed itself in midstream again. It was *Chanford's* ball, second down, two to go. The ball had been blown dead before the fumble, before Pete Stone had tackled Walt Stone.

Tom Dawn, thankful for such miracles, knew they could not continue. The stadium was being swept by a tremendous, sustained "boo-o-o!" Not all of it was coming from the Capitol stands, and directed at the officials; some of it was coming from behind the Chanford bench; some of it might be for Walt Stone. One voice, barely heard in the din, was calling: "Get the bum out of there! Which team you playing on, you bum?"

Tom Dawn could not take Walt out of there. To remove a boy under pressure could kill a boy's pride, break his heart, ruin his spirit. Tom could not take Walt out until he looked good.

Walt kicked, one of his better boots, high and far down the field, beyond midfield. One crowd cried out with a giant *whoosh*—was on its feet, sensing a change in the game—

Pete caught the ball like an outfielder; Linn was just ahead of him, and the blocking was forming. This was a rehearsed play, and it became one of those rare gridiron spectacles where every man does his job, where ten blockers take care of ten tacklers, one way or another, leaving the runner to avoid the safety man.

Walt was coming as fast as Pete; they seemed hypnotized, as neither made an attempt to avoid the head-on clash. They met and went down, rolling over together, in a churning of arms and legs.

The great zooming noise of the stadium hushed as neither brother got up. Trainers ran out from both benches; then, after permission, the coaches.

Harry Walker focused his glasses on the Stone family. Stone was a good name. The mother sat there like an image. Pete's wife was equally motionless. The little dark girl was biting her nails.

Pete, first up, was being led from the field. His leg seemed all right; a trainer was rubbing his neck.

Martha thought Pete looked up at her, at his mother. She thought she knew what he was trying to say: To her—that he had found a way to stop it.

To his mother—that he was sorry it had to be this way, that she had had to be there to see it; but that it had to be done this way, cleverly, so that nobody might suspect; that he had been satisfied in his own mind what was happening, that he had warned Walt, had tried every other way. . . .

Walt was up; he was walking, trying to break away from the coach, who was leading him toward the bench. His mates took over the task, kept him going toward the bench, toward the tunnel that led to the dressing-room.

Harry Walker's glasses told him that Walt Stone was either a great actor or he had been knocked goofy. Lily was calling to him, but he did not see her. He had a silly look on his face which could mean concussion. If it were, that would be all for Walt Stone this day.

Which might be just as well, Harry thought ruefully, while resenting his thought. But others were thinking the same thing.

Ziggy was very happy. The razorfaces had begun to relax.

Bingo Krock was not too happy about it. "What's the idea?" he growled to Pete Stone on the sidelines. "You could have ducked him. You might have ruined yourself. He wasn't so hot today—I wanted him in there. Now we'll get Parsons—he's not fast but he's tough—"

Pete Stone was looking sharply at the field, frowning.

The crowd was buzzing, beginning to applaud.

Bingo was not getting Parsons.

He was getting Little Davey.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IT was a tough spot for little Davey, playing safety man in the shadow of his goal-posts. He was inexperienced and not too tall—a natural mark for a passing attack, with a tall receiver sent down to outjump the little man. Had Pete been in there, Chuck Linn would surely have sent him down; or perhaps Chuck was waiting for Pete to return—or he may have tried the off-tackle play because Chanford was obviously expecting a

pass, and the backers-up were edging back to help Davey protect against a pass.

Wassman was through and wheeling—but Big Eggers crossed over, took a terrific whack at him from the side. Capitol could also fumble; the ball rolled toward the sidelines. Davey, coming up, dived for it with two Capitol men; he was sandwiched between them, so stiffly packaged that Tom Dawn closed his eyes, took a deep breath. When he opened them, Chanford was lining up behind the ball on its 38-yard line. Davey had touched the ball before it had gone out of bounds. He had bounced up like a rubber ball from the collision.

Tom Dawn slowly let the air out. Davey was small but well-cushioned; he knew how to fall, how to relax. He looked relaxed out there now, calling his signals, like an old pro. He was calling himself up the middle—a good play, Tom Dawn thought: they would not expect Davey to run.

HE did—head down, squirming, pivoting, bulling. He got eight yards, and bounced up again before the tackler; was running back, clapping his hands, calling his men to the huddle. His next play, a fake pass and McGrew into the line, was spilled by Perunko, who had been bowled out on the previous play; but Davey was bouncing again, clapping his hands, as though it had gone for a long gain. His shrill voice piped out over the stadium. Again he faked the pass, and again Perunko broke through, waving his arms as though he would spread-eagle the annoying sprite. But Davey calmly ducked away, moved to the right—and by that time, Kuchinka was in the flat all alone, and he took the arching pass near his knees, stumbled, righted himself and had a total gain of thirty-five yards before he was knocked out of bounds.

The stadium was now in an uproar. Gone were the two elder Stones. Here was a new Stone, a firecracker, hot as a pistol, bouncing up and down, clapping his hands, piping his signals. Chanford, a few minutes before watching the clock, hoping only to hold until the end of the half, until Walt could get back in there—Chanford was now watching the clock, hoping there would be time for Davey to score.

Three fast plays, and it was fourth and two on the twelve-yard line but with five seconds to go.

Tom Dawn sent a man in to take time out. It cost five yards, but it was worth the gamble. The man had instructions for Davey to try a field goal. Tom Dawn had feared the kid might be too modest—

Davey kicked it. The half ended. Chanford 10; Capitol 7.

Three points difference, but Chanford had the three points! Little Davey was the hero as the players hurried toward the dressing-room tunnel. Davey kept his eyes away from the people, the cheering people. One voice was familiar—a girl; and he looked up and winked at Lily. A man was yelling at him; that voice also sounded familiar; but Davey was trying hard to be modest and did not look up. Mr. Dexter, however, accepted congratulations from Chanford alumni just the same. Davey was his boy too.

In the dressing-room Davey went at once to the trainer's table. Walt was lying there, with ice-packs all around his head. The doctor said it was probably a mild concussion; that Walt was sleeping; there was nothing to do but let him sleep—and see how he came out of it. He might be good as ever—or he might have to go to a hospital. But he would play no more football today.

Davey was looking at Walt's jaw, at the bruise there. He waited until the doctor was alone and asked him how his brother had got that bruise. "I'm not sure," the doctor said, "and I wouldn't say this to any of the others—but I believe your brother was knocked out—with a punch."

"Pete wouldn't do that to Walt."

"I said I wasn't sure."

Why, Davey asked himself. What had been going on that they couldn't tell him about? Pete wasn't a dirty player—he took care of himself, yes; but he never hurt anybody without a reason—on or off the field. Why? The doctor was probably right. Davey had heard some of the other players closest to the play when it happened, charge that Pete had put everything he had into that stiff-arm, had even switched the ball so he could use his right hand—had made no effort to avoid the collision or try his sideline pivot.

THERE was only one reason Pete would do that—to get Walt out of the game. But Pete wouldn't do that just to get rid of a star on the other team; anyhow, Walt hadn't even been playing such good football today. . . .

Somebody in the crowd had been asking which team Walt was playing on. Maybe the word was around; maybe the gamblers had let it leak that Walt was supposed to be taking a bribe; maybe that was what Pete had heard—maybe that was why he had taken the only way he knew to get Walt out of the game—because he couldn't know, naturally, that Walt was acting under orders from the coach. Maybe the gamblers had purposely got word to Pete, knowing that he might do something like this.

That was it. That was what they had been arguing about before the game started, when Davey had broken it up. That was why Pete had been rough on Walt all afternoon.

The gamblers wanted Walt out—and they didn't mind putting Pete on the spot to get him out. They probably knew about Parsons' bad ankle; they figured they would have nothing to worry about, with that kid Davey in there.

Well, Davey had given them something to worry about. And he wasn't such a kid as everybody thought. He knew he had grown up some since this game had started. For the first time in his life Davey felt that the family was depending on him; he felt that his father might be talking to him now, might be saying: "Well, Davey boy, they got Walt in a spot, and they fooled Pete; you're the only one can straighten this out. The one way to be sure is to win this ball game."

DAWN was saying the same thing in a different way. The boys, in their way, were saying it to Davey. There was a queer feeling around the room, like electricity, running through the nerves, making the boys nervous, making them want to get out there again. The coach was telling them this was one of those times, this was one of those teams, this was one of those days. The coach was saying he had no doubt whatever about this game, that he knew, no matter what happened, no matter what the situation was, this team would be equal to it, would keep trying, keep thinking, keep hitting—hit them harder than they hit you on every play. That's the way to take care of big guys—use your leverage—the biggest thing about a man is his heart, his brain—you've got them, boys—you're going out there now and win-win-win-WIN-WIN-WIN—

In the press box and in the radio booths between halves, the talk had come to this kid Davey Stone, who had been overlooked in the pre-game dope. The story of how he had gone to Chanford as Iagniappe was rehashed; and the family story of how their father had wanted to see them all on the same team. The news that their mother was in the stands—Pete's wife—all of these things went out over the air. Pete was given due credit, but Walt was forgotten, except as the prelude to Davey. Few words were wasted on the fact that Walt would not play in the second half; nobody really was interested in Walt any longer. They wanted more of Davey.

They saw more—plenty more.

Pete Stone was back for Capitol, but Chanford spirit was roaring, and they climbed on Pete after a short return of the kickoff, forced a third-down punt. Davey took charge then, moved his team for five straight first downs with a clever mixture of passes and runs. In those fifty yards he became a celebrity, a football character, with nicknames. He was Little David smacking Goliath; he was the Little

Pebble that became the Big Boulder. He was—

Then somebody missed a signal, the ball went rambling and Perunko had recovered for Capitol on its twenty-three-yard line. And now it was up to Pete Stone. Everybody knew that as well as if the script had been written in the program. It Pete didn't come to life, his kid brother would steal the ball game. And that was what all of America that listened in was now rooting for.

Davey was everybody's kid brother. Come on, Davey!

Pete failed on first down—the old drive was definitely not there. But on the next play he was down the middle, jumping with Davey, outjumping the kid. They came down together, and Davey said: "Why did you slug Walt?"

"I had to. How is he?"

"Asleep. You were wrong, Pete. He told the coach about the offer."

They were on their feet, and Pete was slapping the kid on the back. The crowd roared approval.

Pete was hot now. It was Pete on every play—either running, or passing to Linn or Wilson. They seemed to have him stopped with fourth and five on the Chanford twenty-seven; but he slipped out to the flat, made a remarkable catch of a short-button hook—and when they measured, he had made first down by inches. After that he just boomed along behind the giant line. Capitol was clicking on high—and no team in America might have held them. Pete went the last eight yards by himself—carried Little Davey on his back as he lumbered along, refused to go down.

"Sorry it had to be you, kid."

"We'll be back," Davey promised.

Eggers blocked the kick, and it was Capitol 13, Chanford 10—close enough still, for a field goal to tie.

The crowd waited to see if Little David could light another fire; but the Capitol line was too good, the backfield too alert, to be trapped again by the draw-them-in—draw-them-out formula. With the crucial third-down-and-four-to-go situation calling for a pass, Davey tried to fool Perunko by running himself again, up through the middle, on the delayed sneak. But this time the big center hit Davey like a truck hitting a bicycle.

PETE was nearby when Perunko made the tackle, and thought it tougher than necessary. But he put his head down and walked away. Who was he to squawk—who had deliberately put his brother out with a right to the jaw, a sneak punch at that? Walt hadn't played great ball, had made mistakes; but he hadn't done so badly either, considering the pressure. If Davey was right, Walt had been fighting the gamblers; and big brother Pete had got Walt out of there.

Pete was really working for the gamblers. That last touchdown had got Ziggy and his friends the three points they needed.

It wasn't just that he had put Walt out of the game; he might have hurt him—maybe they weren't telling Davey the truth; maybe Walt wasn't just sleeping; they didn't let a player like Walt just sleep, on the afternoon of a big game—

That wasn't all. The word had been around, would get around; somebody would add up all the different words—some people would never give Walt the benefit of a doubt. They would say: "Why do you suppose his own brother got him out of the game—before he gave himself away entirely?" He would never have a chance now to prove they—and Pete—were wrong.

Capitol's ball again. Capitol began to move with the same regularity as on the previous march. The line was too good, the backfield too powerful and fast. Chanford was fighting stubbornly; there were no long gains—but each third down was a first down.

WELL, Harry Walker was thinking, it was a nice little dream while it lasted; but LITTLE DAVEY SLAYS GOLIATH was now just a headline laid away for another day.

Harry's camera panned the crowd again. It was like a human flower garden, now that he had time to give a thought to beauty instead of violence.

And speaking of beauty—where was Lily? She was not in either field box. Her seat in the overflow press was now filled, but not by Lily. The seat next to the Stone family now had a man in it.

The tension was gone. The crowd was beginning to shift about. The beginning of the end was in sight, and the thought in the mass mind was quite apparent: Chanford had put up a game fight, but the fire had gone out; Capitol speed, power and poise would weight the scales from here on. Little Davey was still tough and spirited, but his battery was running down. There was nobody else who might lift Chanford. From now on—just a question of the score.

Even Pete was thinking along these lines. One more touchdown would put them out in front where no accident could disturb them—no recovered fumble or lucky pass. He was thinking this as he heard his signal—off right tackle; the hole was there—the secondary was mopped up. He was cutting for the sidelines—Davey was coming across—they would meet—the old sideline special. . . . Sorry, kid, Pete was grinning, but we need this touchdown—now we pivot—

Pete was hit. He was down. He fumbled. There was a mighty roar. Chanford's ball on its own thirty-two.

"Sorry, kid." Davey was grinning, helping his big brother to his feet. "Remember the first rule of a halfback?"

Davey was scampering back now to his huddle, jumping up and down, clapping his hands.

Pete trotted to his defensive position. The first rule of a halfback, he had always told Walt and Davey, was to hang on to the ball. He was puzzled—either the kid had an extra step of speed, or Pete had lost a step. He had been hit in the middle of his pivot—and he hadn't been hit by a kid.

Pete looked at the Chanford bench—Walt wasn't there yet. Pete began to have a feeling in his stomach—

"Pete—pass—pass—"

Pete started back, but Kuchinka had a step on him. Pete came down with Kuchinka, but Kuchinka came down with the ball. Seven yards. Sound asleep—two straight bloomers! When Walt had done those things, Pete had thought he was lying down. For such mistakes he had slugged Walt. He knew Walt's trouble now—thinking of too many other things—including how his own brother thought he was a crook.

Pete told himself he'd have to get his mind back on the ball game and keep it strictly there. The kid brother was making a monkey out of him. Davey had thrown that pass deliberately, figuring that Pete would be brooding. . . . Look out—there comes the pass again! Pete dropped back—but the play was off-tackle, good for four and another first down. Davey grinned, yelled across the line: "Get your mind on the game, big brother."

The Chanford guys laughed. Pete didn't like being laughed at. Nobody knew that better than Davey. Now the kid was trying to get him mad, make him blow up. His mates knew that, were telling him to take it easy—and while attention was thus drawn to the right side of the line, Davey got six more yards with a flat pass to the left.

The crowd was warming up again. Chanford wasn't through.

ANOTHER first down, and Harry Walker dragged out his headline. Little Davey was slinging his way through the Philistines again. They were rushing him, belting him around; but he was like a bouncing bug, if there could be such an insect. But he used his slingshot once too often—fired another pass at Pete, who made a leaping catch and came down with it on his thirty-seven. This time Pete had been giving no thought to how Walt was doing. The third period had ended, and Capitol had only that thirteen to ten lead. Big enough for the gamblers, but not big enough for Pete. The kid brother couldn't be trusted. . . .

Walt knew he was having a nightmare, but he couldn't quite wake up. He was dreaming the Big Game was on, and he was asleep in the dressing-room. A fine time to oversleep, but evidently they hadn't missed him. He could even hear the noises; he wondered who was winning. Well, if they didn't bother to wake him they must not need him. So he would sleep.

His head hurt. He had a headache. He never had a headache, so he knew it was a nightmare. Now Pete was coming at him, full speed ahead—Pete would try that sideline pivot again. Walt wasn't going to be fooled again—he would go straight, knock Pete out of bounds. But Pete didn't go for the sidelines—Pete was shifting the ball—there was the stiff-arm—get under it—but the stiff-arm was an uppercut—against the rules. Pete wouldn't do that in a game. Pete wasn't dirty. Walt would fight any guy said his brother was dirty. This was just a nightmare. . . .

Pete again. A message from the gamblers. Three points. What was Pete bringing messages from Ziggy for? Had they been after Pete too? Had they found out Walt was setting a trap for them with coach—and made a play for Pete? Was Pete trying to get the money for the house? No. Pete wouldn't do that. Pete was honest. Walt would punch anybody who said—

Pete was saying Walt was crooked. Pete believed Walt was going to throw the game. Pete was saying if your dumb coach hasn't got sense enough to get you out of here, I'll do it myself—

The noise was louder. It was almost daylight. Time to get up. Time to get up, Big Game today. Mom wasn't calling him. Lily was calling him. Lily was a crook. Go way, you crook. You played me for a sucker. I loved you—go way, angel eyes—go way, fresh face. You let me down. Quit dropping hot water—what you crying for, you crook—angel-eyes crook—stop shaking me—if anybody's going to wake me up my Mom will. Gonna be tough on you today, Mom. . . . Stop shaking me—stop yelling at me—my head hurts. How could it be the fourth quarter—Davey's not in the game—Davey's a kid—you're a crook, angel eyes. You kiss nice—my eyes are open—go way. . . . I've got another hour to sleep before it's time to get up—head aches—

DAWN was looking at the clock. Eleven minutes to go. The kids were great. Each kid that came out was full of fight, wanted to get back, said they could win. Tom Dawn was hoping, but what really surprised him was what was holding these kids up. Davey—what a boy he had! But he needed help. If he had only followed his hunch, started Walt and Davey in the same backfield on the stuff they had worked—

Davey had them fired, ready to go—if only—if only—but what's the use hoping for a miracle?

Tom Dawn heard the rising thunder behind him. He turned. There was his miracle.

Chapter Seventeen

THE mass thought of the stadium had probably been: *If Walt Stone would only show up now!* That must have been the thought, for the crowd knew what the unusual commotion at the Chanford bench was all about before any announcement was made. The crowd made its own announcements—a rushing exclamation from thousands of throats.

Tom Dawn's first reaction was to look for the trainer or doctor—they should have been following Walt, if they had given him permission; then the coach remembered that both officials had been on the bench all the time. Walt had been left alone—even the guard on the door had been on the bench!

The boys on the field had taken time out, were running toward the sidelines like grade-school kids. Dr. Morton was already making a quick check. Walt looked all right, kept saying he was all right, kept straining to get on the field. The physician gave him the okay, and Tom Dawn whispered something to Walt, sent him in with a slap on his rump.

The stands rocketed. The Capitol players waited—all but Pete Stone, who met his brother, slapped his back. Then Pete rushed back to his own side of the scrimmage-line to join the defensive huddle which had quickly formed to discuss this development. "Go back to original defense," Chuck Linn was saying. "Don't kick to him. Heads up now—they'll be all hipped up. Keep Kuchinka covered—nobody else will be dangerous." He grinned at Pete: "As for me—I'd rather have Walt in there than your baby brother, any day."

But when Chanford lined up, they were both in there—and Davey was still calling signals. Chanford was deep in its own territory but a vocal windstorm swept the horseshoe. The crowd was sure something *had* to happen after such a buildup.

Something did happen—Walt fumbled the first pass from center, but recovered. In the press box they said that's what came from playing a man out of position. Walt seemed so confused that Davey had to move him over a step; and when the ball was passed again, he started in the wrong direction, or everybody thought he did, until Davey spun, lateraled—and Walt was off like a gazelle for thirteen yards and first down on the thirty. Davey threw a short pass down the middle of the diamond defense, but nobody was there. The teams lined up fast; Walt started around left end behind a wave of interference and the Capitol defenders broke for that sector—but Kuchinka came deep and wide on an end-around, got to midfield before Pete caught him from behind.

Now Davey returned to the quick-breaking offense, the draw-them-in—draw-them-out. Capitol was uncertain—Chanford was running the plays without giving the defense time to rest or confer. Seven yards to Walt down the middle—eight to Kuchinka crossing over—six to McGrew—

First down on the Capitol thirty.

Capitol took time out.

The crowd remained on its feet, but its shrill yell tapered to a buzzing.

And during the time out, Lily joined the Stone family.

"Lily," Martha cried, "where have you been?"

"Around. Hi, Mom—having a good time?"

"I'm about crazy."

"Hi, Nancy."

"Hello, Lily—how do you like my Davey?"

Lily hugged the young girl. "How do you like my Walt? Where's my seat?" Lily was looking at the tall dignified man in the gray suit.

"Oh—" Martha laughed. "Lily, this is my dad—he saw the empty seat and joined us."

"Hi, Dad," Lily smiled. "Stay where you are. I'll squeeze in. How do you like the game?"

"They are playing very splendidly—particularly Peter."

"All the Stone boys," Mom added.

"You should incorporate, Mom—well, here we go again. Come on, Chanford!"

LILY was answered with friendly booing. "You're in enemy territory," Martha smiled.

"Where do you think I've been all afternoon?"

"Where?"

"With Ziggy and his mob. I was afraid to go back after they found out I had gone to the dressing-room to get Walt."

"You did *what?*"

Lily smiled. "Sure. It was easy. I saw the guard had come out on the field, so I slipped back. There was Walt asleep—so I gave him the old pep talk—come on, Walt."

The whistle had blown; the crowd was on its feet again, making that skyrocket noise football crowds create in moments of high excitement.

The time-out had served its purpose. Capitol had recovered its poise; Chanford had lost some of its whir. Two running plays were stopped; a

pass was almost intercepted. It was fourth down on the twenty-five, with six minutes left. This would have to be a pass, and it would have to go, or Chanford was cooked. Capitol dropped men back to cover every defender, a prearranged plan; but Capitol had not suspected that this time it would be Walt Stone who would fade back to pass. He was moving to the right, looking for receivers—

There was a wide open space before him, and he started to go, was under full speed when Pete came across; but now Walt worked his own version of the sideline pivot, reversed his field, caught the Capitol defenders flat-footed, headed in the other direction. He slipped them, whirled them, faked them—and at the ten-yard line changed direction once more. At the five-yard line, two men were coming at him; but by now he had developed such speed, timing and deception that every pair of experienced football eyes in the stadium knew he had to go all the way, that nothing could stop him.

In the end zone, Walt slapped his brother on the back: "Thanks for the rest, Pete—couldn't have done it otherwise. Where were you? You look a little tired."

"I'll be seeing you, Walt."

Pete lined up under the posts. Bingo Krock, a little too late, was sending in fresh men. But Bingo dared not replace Pete Stone or Chuck Linn. Bingo was three points behind. . . .

Four points. Davey had just converted.

Chanford seventeen; Capitol thirteen—with five minutes to go.

Martha was watching Pete, knew what would be seething in him. She hoped there would be no more trouble among the boys. "Lily—what was wrong with Walt?"

"Headache. I guess he got clipped." She looked at Mom, lowered her voice. "She doesn't know anything?"

"I don't know. Were you really afraid of Ziggy?"

"Not that punk; but that Jingle gave me a look when he saw me come out with Walt. I'm not going back to that café tonight. And I wouldn't be in Ziggy's shoes for a million."

"Mom—Lily is coming home with us."

"I should think so. Your father's coming too, isn't he?"

"How about it, Dad?"

Lily felt Martha's arm quiver, saw something in her eyes, sensed something, perhaps remembered something. "Fine—he can be my boy friend—until Walt comes." Lily turned to the field: "Hold 'em, Chanford. Hold 'em, Walt."

"Come on, Pete," Martha yelled. She glanced self-consciously toward her father. He might not think that ladylike. But he smiled at her, applauded in unison with the others in the stands who were trying to pump up a Capitol rally.

The teams were lined up for the kickoff when a Chanford player ran out, and Little Davey trotted off. Both stands rose *en masse* to cheer the surprise hero—then forgot him, had something else on their minds, something urgent—

Pete Stone was loose and rambling—almost the same play again at midfield, with Walt coming up fast as before. This time Pete avoided the head-on collision, tried for the sideline pivot; but Walt's tackle was sure.

First down; Capitol on its own forty-five.

On first down Linn ran back from the T, fought off Kuchinka and Eggers, cut to the right, gestured as if to throw to Pete—then spun, threw to Wassman just inside the boundary on the Chanford twenty-four.

The crowd's voice was thundering again.

This time it was Pete going back after taking a direct pass; but the blocker then missed Kuchinka, who dropped Pete for an eight-yard loss before he could turn.

PETE faded again on the next play, but he did not have the ball; Linn had it—but Eggers had Linn for another three-yard loss. It was third, and twenty-two on the forty, and the Chanford stands were buzzing: Four minutes to go. Hold 'em for two more plays—then hang on to the ball. It had been reduced to such a simple prescription now.

The crowd was oddly silent. Even the cheer-leaders were watching the game.

This time Capitol did not line up in the T. Pete was at tailback in the single wing formation. He took the ball, faked a run to the right, faded back, faked a pass, held it—

Everybody was covered—two men were on Pete; he was going down—

He was loose from one man, held the other off with his left arm, leaped into the air, let fly—

The ball was heading into the end zone near the sideline.

When it seemed that Pete had been tackled, the second-string back who had been covering Linn relaxed, could not untrack himself, stood and watched, not too much worried, for Linn seemed too far from the ball—but he made a diving catch in the extreme corner of the end zone. The official down there took three more steps to where his eye had marked the spot. Linn had rolled outside.

The official's arms went up for a touchdown.

The radio announcers were calling it an impossible play, a one hundred to one shot on each end; but there it was, and there was the score: Capitol nineteen, Chanford seventeen—

Linn converted.

Capitol twenty; Chanford seventeen.

Two minutes to go.

Harry Walker was a Capitol rooter, but he began to have the surprising feeling that he would not really have felt too badly if Chanford had held that lead. Somebody was always spoiling a wonderful story. But there was another story that hadn't been spoiled—as yet. Harry had had the cockeyed idea, when he had first turned his glasses on Walt Stone coming out on the field, that a girl, a redhead in a mink coat, had come out of the tunnel with him, had even taken a few steps on the field until the cops detoured her.

Impossible—but what was impossible for unpredictable Lily?

Then, shortly after, his roving glass had picked her up among the Stones. So Harry was going down to talk to his friend and protégé. He was at the back of the press box, checking with the managing editor on the Ziggy story across the way, when he heard the yell—

Walt had returned the kickoff to his thirty-eight-yard line—

And Little Davey was running back on the field.

Harry kept walking toward the Stones, with his eye on the field; it was a difficult walk, because people were jumping up and down, praying and imploring and swearing.

Chanford was moving faster down the field than Harry Walker was moving down the stadium steps. And this was the most doggoned kind of football that even Harry Walker had ever seen.

Six straight passes Davey had completed—six straight first-down passes, none of them disguised, none of them for long distances, none of them really fooling Capitol defenders too much. Bullet passes—the receiver was there; the ball was there; the defender was there to get the man—mass acrobatics, a sensational tumbling act with twenty-two men taking part, with Walt Stone as the star, making unbelievable catches, taking terrific falls—with nary a fumble.

On every play they rushed Little Davey, knocked him down—but on every play he had shot that ball true to the mark—

Two minutes, twenty-two yards—and another pass. Kuchinka was in flight, hands up; and if he caught it, he would go all the way, because Pete Stone, making a daring try for interception, had let Kuchinka get by him.

One of Pete's big hands went up and the ball stuck there.

Ohhh! Both sides, both stands—relief and despair.

Capitol's ball on its twelve. Less than two minutes now. Linn tried to freeze the ball, take no chances. But he lost five yards in two plays as the en-

raged Chanford line stormed through, forced a Linn fumble which Pete recovered in a wild scramble. Bingo Krock sent in a substitute to tell them to kick that ball out of there.

Harry Walker stopped to watch. Great possibilities here. If the punt were blocked—safety or touchdown; if Linn did get it off, Walt might run it back all the way. Davey was back there, too—

Linn took plenty of time—placing his blockers. This was it—*it.*

On the bench, Bingo Krock had a quick thought.

He shouted to a sub, started to push him in—

But then the ball was passed. And Bingo swore as the line stormed in.

Linn got the ball away, toward the sideline, taking no chances on Walt Stone running this one back.

Chanford's ball on the Capitol forty-seven. Less than a minute to go. Walt, back in kick formation, took the ball, faked a pass; but if he had any ideas of duplicating his touchdown this time, he discarded them, for Capitol was playing Walt differently this time, rushing him—

He passed to Davey in the left flat. Nobody was within five yards as the kid caught the ball, set sail, slipped and whirled—until Pete came from far over on the other side to nail him with a terrific belt. Davey did not bounce this time. There was pain in his young eyes; but he winked sturdily at Pete.

Pete got up and walked away. He did not even smile. Davey had made twenty-two yards. Thirty seconds to go—twenty-nine.

WALT was back again, fading, faking, running, twisting, finding a hole down through the middle—until he met up with Pete—on the five-yard line.

Fourteen—thirteen—twelve. They were lining up to run the last play.

"Time out!" Davey yelled.

The official stepped off five-yards. Now the ball was on the ten-yard line.

"Field goal," Davey said grimly.

"That will only give us a tie," Walt protested. "That's like kissing your sister when your sweetheart's around."

Davey looked at Walt. "How many points was it they were supposed to be giving?"

"Three."

"If we miss the touchdown, they'll still have their three. Which do we want most—to beat Capitol and win for the gamblers—or a tie—and lose for the gamblers?"

"Think you can kick it?" Eggers asked.

"If the line holds."

"Okay—" Walt said. "Let's go."

Harry Walker had reached the Stone group. "Hello, everybody. Something going on?"

"Harry!" Lily gurgled. "Watch Davey kick it."

"Oh, Davey, Davey, Davey—I'll never love you if you don't—" Nancy was wailing.

"As a Capitol rooter, I hope he makes it," Harry said.

So do I, Martha thought, *so do I.*

Davey made it.

Chanford twenty; Capitol twenty.

It started to rain.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MOM had baked a ham and a cake that morning, and everything else was ready for the buffet supper. They kept her out of the kitchen, made her sit in the living-room with Martha's father and the baby, while the girls fixed the food, and kept the boys busy getting the table ready, filling water glasses, things like that. Then they all lined up, filled their plates and sat down at the dining-room table, with Little Mike between his father and grandfather. And when the meal was over, Lily put aprons on the boys and made them do the dishes and pans while the girls put the things away.

Then people dropped in—Bingo Krock and Tom Dawn, friends of the boys from the two teams, and some of their girls; and finally, Harry Walker and a few other newspaper men whom Lily introduced as her bodyguards. There were little conferences here and there. Mom finally told them to stop whispering, that she had a good idea of everything that had gone on; that she was proud of all of them, her boys and her girls. Harry Walker said, that being so, there was one question he wanted to ask:

"Who were you rooting for, Mrs. Stone?"

"I was rooting for it to get over." Mom laughed, and they all joined in, and everybody seemed satisfied that it had ended as it did, in a tie. Then they began to play the game over again, to ask questions of each other—what had happened at such and such a time? Just when had they suspected this and decided that? How had they happened to make this move and that one? But the big laugh they all got was about Lily going into the dressing-room and getting away with it. She made quite a funny story out of the trouble she had waking Walt up and Mom said that was nothing unusual, that she had had that kind of trouble with Walt all her life.

Harry Walker said there was one thing that puzzled him: Ziggy had lost his head and yelled at Walt, as he had left the field, accused him of double-crossing, and yelled that he, Ziggy, would get even. That was when the police had moved in and arrested the lot of them. They had been in the clear before that—but now it looked as if they could be prosecuted.

Lily said maybe Ziggy was scared to death—was afraid of what might happen to him after he left the stadium. Maybe he felt safer with the cops, had deliberately popped off to get himself arrested. It was, she said, just like Ziggy, who always managed to outcute himself, one way or another.

But they were young and happy, and that was all the serious stuff they had time for. They turned on the radio and pushed back the furniture in the big living-room and danced. When they had enough of that, Harry Walker suggested that Lily sing, which she did, with Martha playing. Then Walt and Lily put on the act they had done at the Blue Lily the night the famous picture had been taken. Davey and Nancy did a jitterbug; and Perunko, the big Capitol center, and some of the other boys from the team, called on Pete to do his imitation.

Pete tried to get out of it, but they insisted, and finally Mom joined them, because Pete had been quiet all evening, as if he felt he was the one person in the room who wasn't too proud of what he had done that day. Walt did a very nice thing, put his arm around Pete, grinned and pulled him out to the center of the floor.

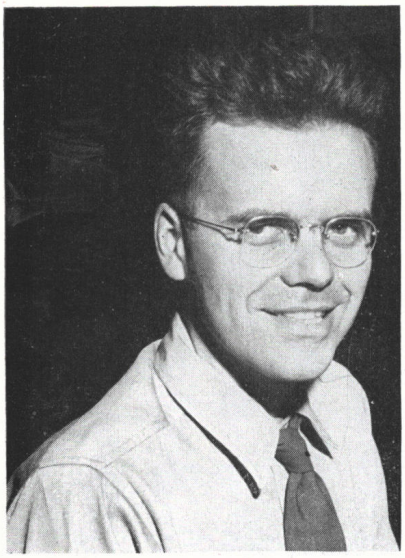
Pete's imitation was one of Bingo Krock making one of his famous dressing-room speeches. Mom had no idea that Pete was such a clown; he was really funny, and the boys got a big kick out of it, and so did Bingo Krock, who said he had never realized he was that funny. Then the boys called for Bingo to give his imitation of the English prof at the faculty athletic board meeting. Bingo looked at Martha's father and said not here; but Martha's father insisted Bingo go ahead. And Bingo did, and it was very funny, and Martha's father laughed and said he hadn't realized he was that funny either.

THEY all did their specialties, with Lily acting as master of ceremonies, introducing all the acts, and imitating different masters of ceremonies she had worked with. It was a wonderful evening, and everybody was having so much fun that Lily came to Mom, gave her a squeeze and said: "Mom, you should put on a cover charge—you'd be rich."

"I am rich, Lily," Mom said. "All of us are."

The house payments were still due; Martha had lost her job; and so had Lily. But Martha had her father; the baby and the grandfather had each other; all Mom's boys—and the three daughters she had always wanted—had done the right thing. They were young, very wonderful and in love. . . . Mom had everybody around her she loved tonight, even Dan.

Who's Who *in this* Issue



Richard L. Gordon

I'M a stock character—the newspaper reporter who wants to be a novelist. Unlike most such characters, however, I've actually written a novel (while in the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa). Now I'm looking for a gullible publisher.

Aspirations change a great deal. When I was growing up, in a little town called Havana on the bank of the Illinois river, I wanted to be a steamboat pilot. But I started writing for a weekly newspaper, and I've been pounding a typewriter ever since.

My life has followed a pretty conventional pattern. I was born thirty years ago, had the usual childhood diseases, played trumpet in the school band and left guard on the football team, and went to the University of Illinois, graduating in 1939.

Then came a series of newspaper and wire service jobs—Peoria, Des Moines, Omaha, Buffalo, Spokane—and finally Cincinnati, where I'm doing general assignment reporting for The Post. I've handled most news-room jobs and have done enough city editing to yell "City desk!" over the phone almost as well as they do in the movies. Meanwhile, I've been writing fiction and collecting rejection slips in my spare time for about ten years.

For three years I served without any particular distinction as an enlisted man in AAF intelligence and public relations. I'm married to a girl I met in college, and we hope some day to have a cabin in the hills, 'way out where the air has never been defiled by singing commercials.

Zachary Ball

I WAS born in Missouri in a log cabin in a grove of blackjack. However, I am of the younger log-cabin Missourians, and the setting in my case was synthetic. My grandfather, finding himself confronted by an acute housing shortage on the home place when three of his boys showed up with brides at the same time, frantically bought additional acreage. My father and his young wife were assigned to a brand-new log cabin which was later to become their smokehouse. So it was that I can claim a log cabin as my birthplace.

There came a day when I wandered out of the hills. I spent twenty-five years doing a number of things, ranging from a riprap job on the Missouri River to Midwest tent repertory shows and dramatic stock companies.

For those twenty-five years the writing bug was always in my hair. Five years ago, I surrendered and turned wholly to magazine fiction, collaborating with Saliee O'Brien.

Wessel Smitter

I WAS born in an Irish neighborhood, of Dutch parents under the officiating care of a doctor who spoke only German. It was all very confusing.

The early hopes of my parents were that I select the ministry as my life's calling, and they sent me to a theological school in Grand Rapids. . . . I was soon running a line of muskrat traps along the banks of the Grand River.

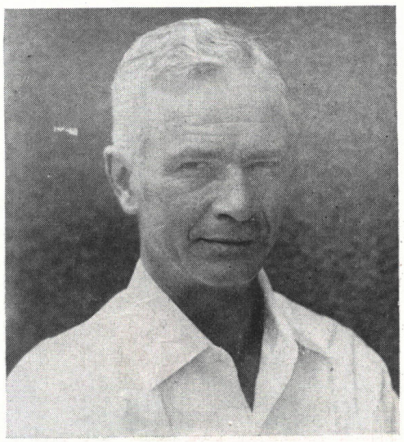
I next attended the State university, where I earned my way by giving blood transfusions to patients in the local hospital. At the end of four years I took only a slight interest in the baccalaureate address, which was concerned as I recall, with red-blooded Americans.

WESSEL SMITTER

While still in my 'teens I was run over by a Ford. In later life this gave me feelings of frustration and inferiority, and friends suggested I be psychoanalyzed. On consulting a blonde psychologist, I was advised to write about Mr. Ford. So I wrote "F.O.B. Detroit," my first book. A second ("Another Morning") dealt with pioneers the U. S. Government sent into Alaska to farm.

I live in the mountains a short distance from Pasadena. My hobby is untaming wild animals. By getting up at four A.M. and barking like a dog, I have succeeded in making the deer leave the sweet-potato patch. Now I am untaming a skunk so it'll no longer come to the kitchen door for tidbits.

P.S. I married the psychologist.



Richard Dermody

BORN in Connecticut forty-three years ago and spent some twenty years polishing saddles with the seat of my britches and making life a burden for assorted steeplechasers, hunters and polo ponies in various countries, including Ireland, Australia and the Argentine.

Took a quick run at an education at Penn State, but came in a poor second. Labored briefly under the delusion that I was a tough guy. Seventeen fights as a pro, and four KO's in a row, took care of that attitude.

Operated at odd times as a seaman, salesman, cavalryman (11th U. S.), sports-writer and press-agent. Finally broke loose from the horses when I loaned money to an editor about ten years ago. He bought my first fiction try, and since then I've cashed enough copy of one kind and another to keep my typewriter in new ribbons.

Handled radio and press for the OPA in California during the war, and still walk sideways when I smell a bureaucrat.

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE for SEPTEMBER, 1947

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TWO HUNDRED GRAND
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