BLUE BOOK

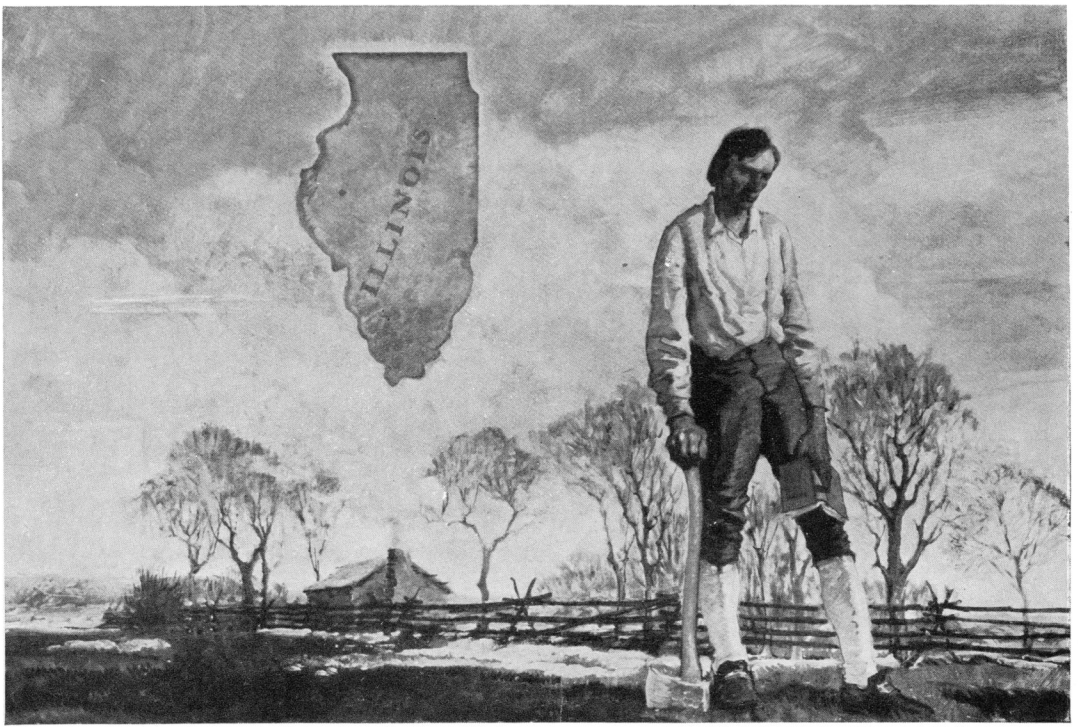
MAGAZINE
FEBRUARY, 1948
25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES...XIV
Illinois—"THE PRAIRIE YEARS"
Painted by
HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

A complete book-length novel
THIS LAND IS OURS
by OSCAR SCHISGALL

A novelette
THE MASK OF NOH

Sixteen short stories, articles and features



THESE UNITED STATES . . . . XIV—ILLINOIS

The RAIL-SPLITTER

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Often I've seen him turn from splitting rails
To con some passage in a little book,
And drawl: "Folks say do one thing at a time;
But if you aim to fix a thing in mind,
You'll help it stick there if you're raising blisters!"
A simple thing, thought of a simple man,
Rough-clad, rough-shod, unschooled, nothing to boast
From the drear past, nor anything to vision
From the unglinting future. Can you see him
As I so often have? Then, friends, remember
Those words of later years! "Either a thing is right,
Or else it's wrong," he said, and acted on it.
Why, that is a hard reality to face,
And few are given the greatness to admit it
Or act upon it; yet it came thus simply
Into his thought and utterance, because
His entire life had dealt with simple things.
Not his the art of weaving deft false words
To snare his fellow man, or chanting high
Some noble anthem flattering his God;
His but the simple word, straight to the mark,
The simple thought, direct and unadorned
And unafraid. Too often, men are afraid
Of their own thought, afraid to speak aloud
Because "It may offend." Good God! Such men
Do not deserve the name—and would not get it
There on the Western prairie where the sky
Sweeps down, immense and desolate, to meet
The far horizon. All is simplicity
Under that reach of sky. "Either a thing
Is right, or else it's wrong," the man declares,
And ends all argument. There lies the sword-edge
Of the horizon! Simple words and thoughts
Just as God gave them, echoed from a heart
Direct and plain! You see the type of man
That built this nation's greatness on itself?

Readers' Comment

First Class, or What Is?

AS a continuous reader of your magazine, I add appreciation not only of the selection but the printing so easy on the eyes. As a veteran myself, of World Wars I and II, I hope you will include stories of both in all future issues, and if possible, of the exploits of those who partook of such experiences.

I notice yours and National Geographic are rated as second-class matter: I submit they are first class, or what is? I trust further that the prospect of World War III, which God forbid, will not prevent the export of such first-class matter.

O. H. Acton (*South Africa*).

Unique Among Nations

I AM a new reader of BLUE BOOK and find that its splendid art work immediately attracts other new readers.

It is refreshing to find a magazine which devotes itself to the spread of idealism—that idealism of character which made the United States unique among nations in producing pioneers in colonization, business and research. So many stories of sophisticated living, of war, and of murder, have produced many delinquents among our young and many neurotics among our old. If the spirit of our forefathers is to be kept alive, it must be fanned into flame.

Congratulations on your fine American covers, your wholesome character-building stories, and your many and interesting illustrations.

S. R. Cunningham.

It Shouldn't Happen . . .

SACRILEGE! Heresy! Burn the parvenu in doubly-heated oil who wanted you to turn "slick"—with all that implies!

We who have turned to you gratefully, happily and "Thank God"-ly for decades don't want, and won't take a feminized, glittering creampuff collection of "fancy" pictures, perfumed settings, Hollywoodian "dolls and gigolos."

You have provided us this far with robust men and their plausible consorts—living, loving, hating, operating in "real-life" exciting surroundings all over the globe. Their lives and deaths and adventures have moved visually before us by masculine, "roast beef" dry-point and pen-and-ink sketches which satisfied us as did the words themselves.

Don't go "slick." It would be like serving pork-chops on rose petals or christening a bulldog "Pitty Sing."

It shouldn't happen to a dog!

E. St. George.

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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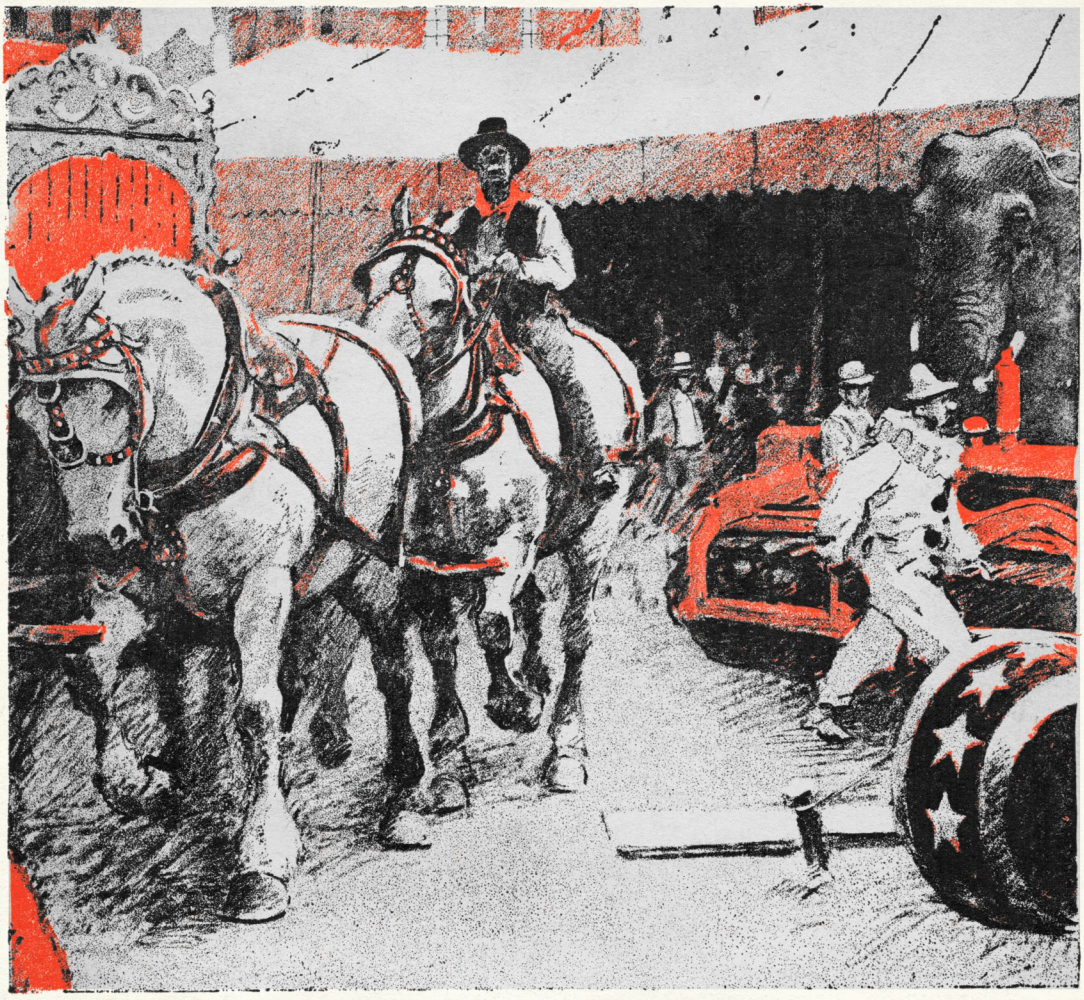
The BIG HITCH

THE sky was brightening as old Pop Mears dragged himself wearily down the runway of the stock car with his poles and double-trees. A rising sun was brightening the spaces between the railroad cars as he began to lay out the great thirty-foot pattern of them, three huge capital T's end to end, of wood and metal, along the cinders beside the railroad tracks. Birds were chirping far off; the air was clear; it was going to be a fine day. But Pop was old and tired, and he had no eyes for the morning.

Inside the car, the horses were already stamping and jingling bits in expectation. Having got his capital T's arranged to suit him (leisurely, for there was no one to hurry him, no one even to watch what he was doing), the old man clumped back up the little wooden incline, talking soothing horse-talk in a low voice. Soon he reappeared, leading Eagle and Comet, his two team leaders, by their bridles.

Comet stood back to let his teammate pound down the incline first, just as he'd been doing every morning for twelve years. Then he lowered his own ton weight more sedately, sniffing the dawn with whiffling pinky nostrils, the myriad brass studs on his harness twinkling like tiny mirrors. Once on the cinders, both Percherons walked sedately abreast up to the head of the wooden framework, and halted at the precise spot where their traces would be hitched onto it. They stood



CATERPILLAR TRACTORS WERE DOING THE HAULING FOR THIS MODERN CIRCUS, BUT A TIME ARRIVED WHEN THE EIGHT-HORSE "HITCH" OF PERCHERONS CAME BACK TO THEIR OWN.

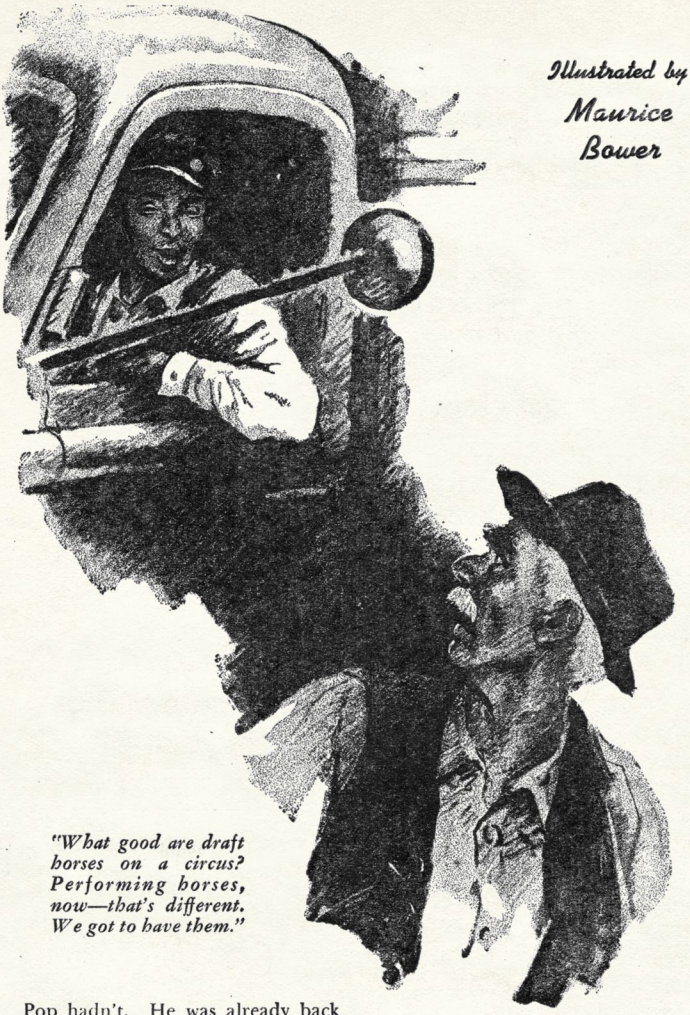
by ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON

there, patiently waiting. The rosy light hiding their age and their bony ribs, turning them into white statues a sculptor would have admired.

Pop gave them not another glance. He was already back inside the car, untying Susie and Bess, the two mares, and leading them to the door. They ambled down the runway in turn; two plumper, better-rounded beasts (mares age more gracefully than do geldings) that clumped up precisely behind the first two and halted inside the first "T." As perfect a performance as any "Liberty act" in the circus, had there been anyone to witness it.

Then Pop untied Whitey and sent him out, and followed wearily, leading Baldy by his bridle. Baldy had been "a mean hoss" in his younger days, stubborn and obstreperous; he'd never go into his place peacefully. And the two of them still kept up the pretense in Baldy's old age—Pop hauling him down the run, yanking and cussing at him; the big white tossing his long bony head and baring his too-long yellow teeth, pretending to be vicious. He even did a stiff-legged little buck as he hit the cinders, and squealed. Pop hauled him to his place, shoved him viciously into it, and walked away, Baldy aiming a feigned kick after him. Then, seeing that Pop had left him a little out of line, he sidled up carefully to where he belonged; then hastily glared around to see if Pop Mears had perchance noticed this lapse from character.

Illustrated by
Maurice Bower



"What good are draft horses on a circus? Performing horses, now—that's different. We got to have them."

Pop hadn't. He was already back in the stock car, untying the two great pole horses, Beauty and Big Joe. He unsnapped the leather straps that hung from the car's roof, supporting their harness so it wouldn't be uncomfortable during the long night train-journeys, and led them out, past the shadowy camel and zebra and "led-stock" shapes that filled the rest of the car. The polers were so huge they hardly needed the runway to descend, leaping earthward in one stiff bound. Towering ton-and-a-quarter beasts, that still had bone and muscle aplenty despite their years. Pop led them up behind the other six, then stood back to survey the team as a whole.

Perhaps it was because dawn is a time of phantoms. But Pop somehow wasn't seeing just the one team, that morning! His rheumy old eyes seemed to behold other shapes behind and beyond them, filling the whole railroad yard with massing horseflesh, as it had been in the good old days: dozens of six- and eight-horse hitches, bays and sorrels and dapple-grays, blacks and whites, clattering out of a whole file of double-length horse-cars, and lining up for blocks; the musical quickstep of a thousand heavy hoofs on cinders, jangling of chains and doubletrees, bawling of drivers' voices as they hitched up; the crack of the boss hostler's blacksnake whip as he swung onto his old gray mare and gave the signal to move. And then the whole magnificent, thrilling line of them marching proudly up to the "runs," hooking up to the big red circus wagons, and rumbling away through the dawn to the lot. In the days when a circus was still a circus!

But that was long ago, of course; it wasn't like that nowadays. Mechanization had finally come to tent shows, as to everywhere else. The horse teams were gone now, their very memory preserved only by a few old-timers. This one team was all that was left of them on the Dawson Brothers United Circus. And it wasn't a team, really. It didn't do any work; it was just a spectacle flash, a vestigial hangover, like old Pop himself.

Horses? Who cared anything about draft horses on a big modern show? Tractors unloaded the railroad trains; big Diesel tow-trucks dragged the wagons to the lot in queues of three and four and five at a time, at racing speed. And great caterpillar-bulldozers, "cats" in circus terminology, hauled them about the grounds and spotted them, even in deep mud, with a strength and precision that no horse team could hope to equal. Even working elephants, with their log-chain harnesses and colossal power could hardly compete with the "cats."

The Boss Hostler himself, that lordly monarch of old-time circus lots, was gone, replaced by a young whipper-snapper who called himself "Superintendent of Transportation," who didn't know one end of a horse from another, and thought exclusively in terms of motors and gears and gasoline—who wasn't picturesque and colorful, but only practical and grease-covered and efficient.

It was all wrong, from Pop Mears' point of view! But it was the way things were; and there wasn't anything that he, one lone man, could do against modern times. Sadly he bent to the task of coupling up the great team. Uncoiling the long fifty-foot reins and threading them through rings, fastening twenty-four sets of chains and traces, adjusting nearly half a hundred straps and buckles. He was at it when one of the big red tow-trucks came rumbling along, splattering cinders, and halted beside him. Its driver stuck his head out of the cab, and waved to Pop, gayly. One of the newfangled circus workers, neat and shaven and nattily overalled, in contrast to old Pop's ragged dishevelment. Educated, too—knew how to read and write, like as not. Pop hated him, hopelessly.

"Morning, old-timer!" he called cheerfully. "Hooking up, eh? Why in thunder you go to all that trouble every morning, I don't see. You ain't going to pull nothing with those plugs, after you get 'em hitched. Why'n't you just throw the harness on them any old way?"

SUCH heresy appalled Pop. He pushed back his battered black hat with a wrist, and glared. "'Cause that ain't the way to do it, you ignorant punk! A team like this has gotta be hitched up jest right. It's an art, it is! Takes a long time to learn."

"Well, what's the use of it, anyway?" the motorist wanted to know. "What good are draft horses on a circus? We

don't need 'em any more, an' I don't see why we bother to haul 'em around. Performing horses, now – that's different. We got to have them. But what have Percherons got to do with a circus? I ask you."

Pop almost had apoplexy. "What have they got to do with a circus? Why, Percherons have been part of circuses ever since there was any. They used to pull the whole show from town to town, 'fore they went on rails. And then they pulled the wagons to and from the lot, and out of the mud. An' in street parades – why, they've always been the most important part of a circus! I thought even punks knowed that!"

The young man yawned. "Oh, sure," he conceded. "Back in the Gay Nineties, maybe –"

POP waved his arms. "Was 1938 the Gay Nineties, Ignorance?" he squawked. "There must have been at least a thousand draft hosses on American circuses, that year! This one show had nigh on two hundred head – sixes, and eight-hoss hitches; an' near fifty drivers! We had a hull hoss-drawn street parade, miles long; band-wagons and cages an' tableaux. And this here team" – he gestured proudly toward the eight aged beasts – "was the lead band-wagon team! They pulled the big gold wagon at the head o' the hull line!"

The youngster looked slightly impressed. "You don't say?" he murmured. "But what became of all the horses, if that's the case? Where'd they go?"

The fire went out of old Pop. His shoulders slumped, his white head dropped. "God knows, son!" he said sadly. "I ain't rightly figgered it out, myself. They just disappeared. First the parades went; automobiles drove 'em off the highways. Lordy – Lordy, it don't seem possible that all the little kids growin' up now will never see a circus parade! But it's so. And then the trucks come, an' the caterpillars. Wasn't nothin' for the teams to do, seems like. They'd jest stand around the lot, while the machines done all the work. Then they started sellin' 'em off, firin' the drivers an' helpers. Now I'm the only one left on this show, and jest this one team. And all we do is jest pull one little float in the Grand Entry. It don't seem right, somehow." Old Pop scratched his head sorrowfully.

The truck driver lit a cigarette. "Oh, well," he consoled, "you got no kick coming, at that; you're lucky. You're probably the last eight-horse driver left in all show business. You ought to be thankful.... Well, got to get going, Pop, and do my work. Do it a darned sight easier than your horse teams ever did. So long! I'll probably pass you half-a-dozen times, hauling wagons, while you're walking your string out to the lot. It's a long haul today."

He roared away cheerfully in a cloud of exhaust fumes and gasoline reek. Coughing, Pop scowled after him. Then he climbed wearily onto Big John's back, gathered up his reins, and clucked softly. The team moved off, with a clatter of hoofs and scraping of tugs, following in the wake of the truck. They moved slowly down the long line of parked circus cars, stocks, pullmans and "flats," and across in front of the runs where the wagons were being unloaded.

Neither the razorbacks of the train crew, nor the crowd of townspeople "watching the circus come to town" paid much attention to old Pop and his team as they ambled past and headed uptown. A few children stared wonderingly at the big white horses all hitched together, but soon turned back to more exciting and understandable sights. And Pop was equally indifferent to them. Sitting like a hunched old spider amid his web of shimmering reins, he threaded the hitch expertly up the street amid the automobile traffic, following the white arrows chalked on telephone poles to mark the route to the show lot.

They soon left the train behind, and ambled through side-streets of the town. Pop paid little attention to his surroundings, for he had the outdoor showman's indifference to towns; to him, one was like another. River town, this one, he noted vaguely; there were levees and steamboat stacks visible far off to the right. And a fairly large one; ought to give good houses to the show. People on the sidewalks stared blankly as the team went by, and Pop made no effort to put on a show for them. He drove along with his hat on the back of his head, and a cigarette dangling beneath his yellowed mustache. No use trying to impress these towners; not with a team not hitched to anything.

If only they'd let him pull a wagon! Then it'd be a different story. Eight horses, drawing a circus wagon, would really be an attraction in these motorized days. People would crowd the sidewalks to watch them. It'd be wonderful advertising for the show. You'd think the management would see that. But no, they only laughed at Pop when he came to them asking for a wagon – any wagon, even the monkey cage. All they could see was that a truck could pull it to the lot in a third the time he could. That was all they thought about nowadays – time and speed and efficiency. Dang them all!

But Pop wouldn't give up. He'd kept on arguing and pleading. Only yesterday he'd taken his request right up to the Big Boss himself, to "Mr. Dan" Dawson, the owner of the show. (There weren't any Brothers, of course; that was just a circus convention. There was only "Mr. Dan," who ran everything) and miraculously, the Boss hadn't laughed, at all. He'd listened seriously to old Pop's impassioned arguments about what an attraction a working-horse team would be – listened, and nodded, and said he'd speak to the Transport Superintendent about it....

So this morning Pop wasn't as gloomy as usual. He sneered openly at the great red trucks roaring past with strings of pole and seat and canvas wagons, floats and cages, as if his team had been standing still. "Jest wait," he muttered after them. "Mebbe soon *we'll* have a wagon too! Then we'll see who gits the attention, you derned rackety souped-up gas-buggies!"

It took the horses almost half an hour to reach the lot, and most of the show was already on when they arrived. The lot was a huge one, down by the edge of the levee on the town's outskirts. Tents were rising against the background of the river – which was pretty high, Pop noted with his trained showman's eye, almost level with its banks; must be floods somewhere! Wagons were being unloaded, stakes driven by mechanical stake-drivers, poles hoisted on screeching pulleys by gangs of men. Tractors were dragging heavy vans about, with clattering of caterpillar treads, assisted by elephants wearing log-chain harnesses, and pushing-pads on their great foreheads.

IT was a fascinating sight to the towners standing about, but not to Pop Mears; to him it was all wrong, for he saw it in terms of the old days, when hundreds of beautiful big Percherons did all the work, moving the wagons about with hook-roped thirty- and forty-horse hitches, hoisting the tents, turning the whole lot into a vast animated replica of Rosa Bonheur's "The Horse Fair." This modern version was dull and drab by comparison, not worth looking at.

He drove on to the horse top, which was up by now, and unhitched his team. He led them into the tent, to the space reserved for them. The other circus steeds, sleek Liberty thoroughbreds, bareback horses, Wild West broncos, Shetland ponies and the clown's donkey – equines whose position in the show world was secure for a hundred years yet – regarded these humble hangovers from the past with contempt and hostility. And their grooms, mostly young punks ignorant of tradition, ignored old Pop and, he had no doubt, laughed at him behind his back.

But he ignored them all, and set to work, unharnessing his horses and hanging up the heavy harness on quarter-poles, watering and feeding his beasts, and bedding them down

with straw, so that they could rest after standing all night in the cars. Only when they were completely comfortable did he go to seek his own breakfast in the cookhouse.

After eating, he set out eagerly in search of "Mr. Dan" Dawson, to learn his fate. He located the circus owner down by the river's edge, in earnest conversation with half a dozen official-looking towners, a couple of them wearing Army uniforms. Pop hung about fidgeting from foot to foot, wondering what it was all about, while they talked and made gestures toward the water. At last they walked away, and Mr. Dan turned to him with a worried look on his usually smiling face.

"Not so good, Pop," he greeted him. "River's coming up, they tell me. Rains upstate swelling it. It's liable to come over its banks any time. We may have to clear off this lot fast, before the day's over. We've got to give at least one show – we need the money!" Then: "What was it you wanted to see me about, Pop? No use bothering you with my troubles!"

"Didja speak to Murphy about me and my team?" Pop blurted, with his one-track mind.

THE owner nodded, slowly. "Oh, yes, I spoke to him. I told you I would."

Pop's heart leaped. "Then it's all right? We kin have a wagon?"

Mr. Dan looked down at the ground, poked it with his cane. "Well, not exactly, Pop," he said. "Murphy's against it; he put up quite an argument. He doesn't want a horse team working with his trucks. Says it'd throw out his whole schedule, and make trouble with his drivers. He seems awfully set, Pop. I'm sorry."

Pop stared, his whole world crashing. "But – but you're the boss," he stammered. "You kin tell him; he's gotta do what you say!"

The owner frowned. "Oh, yes," he admitted, "I could order him, I suppose. But I don't like to. I never interfere with my department heads; it's a policy of this show, and what's made it what it is. Murphy's a crack man – oh, he's a little prejudiced, maybe. But he's the best transport man in the business. Ringling and Cole have been trying to hire him off me for years. If I force him in this, he might get sore, and take one of their offers, and then where'd we be, in mid-season? No, Pop, I can't take the chance; it's not worth it.

"And besides, there's another thing." he went on, before the old man could speak. "The Equestrian Director's complaining about your team in 'Spec.' Says you bang into properties and ring curbs as you swing around the track. Oh, no reflection on your driving, Pop; it's just that a team that size isn't practical inside a tent. He wants you to cut it down to – well, say a four. It'll look just as good to the customers, and be easier to handle. Oh, there'll be no loss in salary," he went on hurriedly, seeing the look on Pop's face. "Matter of fact, we might raise it a little, seeing as you were disappointed in the other thing. Five dollars more a week – what say?"

But Pop didn't say anything. He just turned and stumbled away, across the lot. Debacle! Utter and complete debacle! This was the end of all his hopes and dreams. A four-horse-driver again, after all these years! Why, he'd been a four-horse driver when he started in show business, half a century ago. Anyone could handle four. But a big hitch was an art that he'd given his whole life to learning. Better to quit, to drop out altogether, than to endure such humiliation. And yet he knew he couldn't quit. What would become of his horses, with him gone?

Like a man in a trance, he stumbled back into the horse top to his only friends, and slumped beside them on a water-bucket, head in hands. "No use, hosses!" he told them sadly. "We've lived too long, I guess, you an' me. Thar's no place for us in this modern world, no more. We'd ought to of died, long ago."

But, despite his misery, Pop was a trouper still, and he was ready when the performance bugle blew a couple of hours later. His eight, groomed and shining, their harness oiled and polished; and hitched to the little gilded float they drew in the pageant – a frail, absurd affair of papier maché and wood that hardly tightened their great traces to pull. Pop was wearing a brocaded robe and plumed helmet. And he drove majestically into the Big Top when the band struck up, following the "knights" on robed horses, the ballet girls, the caparisoned elephants and camels and led animals in the Grand Opening Parade of Splendor." His leaders trod on a ring curb as they made the final turn of the track, and he felt the equestrian director glaring at him; but he was past caring. The harm was already done in that direction, anyhow.

He swung the team out again, through the exit, and headed back for his tent. But before he could climb down to unhitch, a hurrying Ring Stock Boss checked him.

"Don't unhook them nags!" he ordered. "Drive 'em on out to the street. We're movin' all the stock out, fast's we can. Got to pull the Top!"

"They're really scared. If we force 'em, they're liable to stampede and tear half the town down!"

"We moved, Pop!" Dawson shouted in surprise, from the wagon-top. "We moved—at least a couple of feet!"

"Hey? What's wrong?" Pop came out of his daze to gape.

"The river! Over its banks, coming up like a house afire! We got to get out of here, quick!"

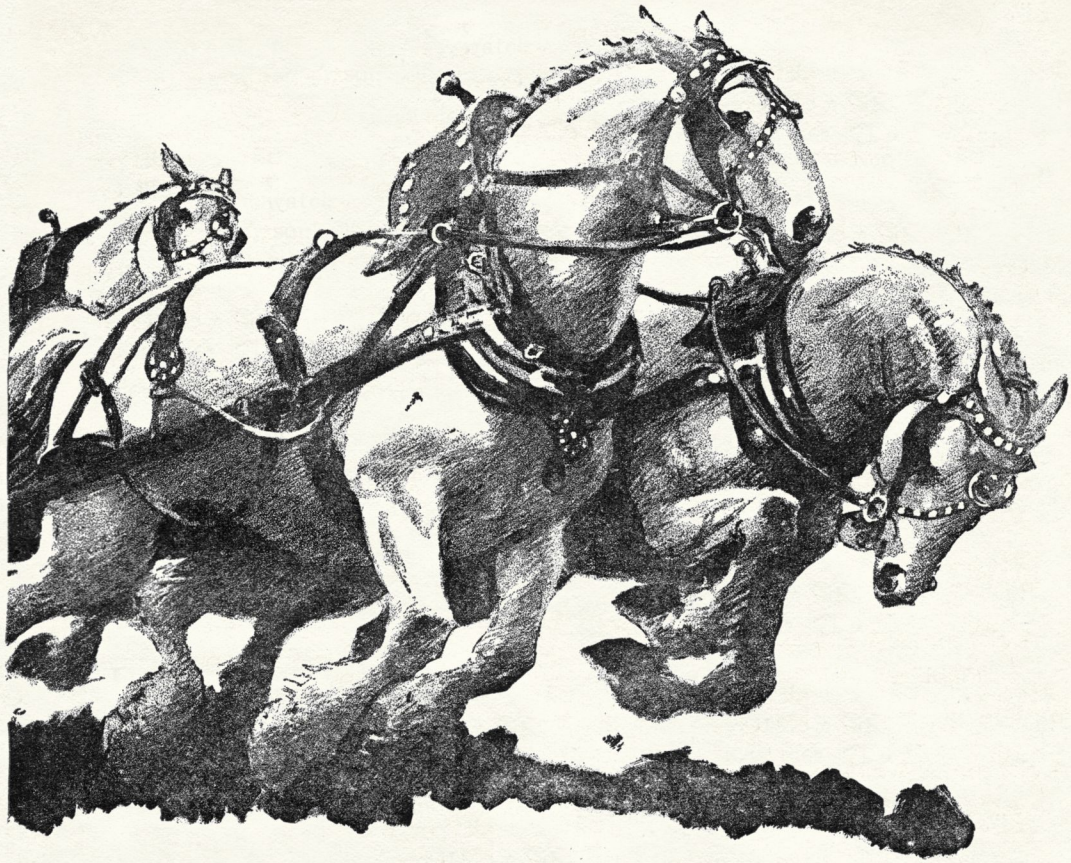
Pop stood up on his box, and looked beyond the tent. Then he whistled. It had happened! Where the lower end of the lot had been was now only a sheet of brown, rising water. The cookhouse crew were splashing about ankle-deep as they hastily struck and loaded their tent and cooking-gear. Roaring tractors, churning wakes like motorboats, were hauling the vans out as fast as they were filled.

Hastily Pop slapped his reins and drove across the lot to the street. There he surrendered his gilded float to a tow-truck, which hauled it away trainward without even bothering to affix its canvas cover. Then he left the team to graze at the lot's edge, and hurried back down to offer his feeble services in loading the rest of the show. For it was "All hands on deck!"—there was no doubt of that. The whole troupe, workmen, performers, bosses and even freaks would have to pitch in and load everything, while a hurried-up performance went on inside the Big Top and a heedless crowd, unaware of danger, applauded tumblers and clowns and animal acts. No use telling those towners about the flood; they'd only panic and make things a thousand times worse. The Big Top, strategically placed, was on the highest ground of all. And the water was rising slowly; there should be time to finish the show before it was endangered. But everything else must be loaded immediately.

Ensued then an hour and a quarter of feverish activity. Water was lapping about the lower side-wall of the Big Top when the performance finished, minus hippodrome races and finale. A vaguely dissatisfied crowd straggled out of the tent, and gaped to find the whole circus gone! Then they took a look at the solid lake of flood water that stretched where it had been, and hastily headed for home! Their town, built high, was safe enough; let the circus people handle their own problems! Within ten minutes the lot was clear of them.

Then began the long, grim struggle to load the Big Top. In the effort to finish the performance, they had waited almost too long. Men were wading nearly to their knees before the last of the thousands of seats and properties were in the wagons; and when the canvas at last was lowered on its poles, it floated like strange seaweed. But at last the task was done. A half-dozen big red vans, hub-deep in brown muck, were all that remained. The roustabouts straggled out to the street, dripping and gasping. "Okay, boys!" Boss Murphy was yelling to his "cat" drivers. "Pick up them last few wagons, and you're all through!"

THE tractors lumbered like prehistoric monsters, flailing water with their great treads. But before they reached the first wagon, something happened. They began to nose downward, below the water-line. Motors coughed and spluttered dangerously; men yanked desperately at levers and cursed. One by one, the "cats" turned round and lumbered back to high ground. It was obvious to all what the trouble was: the rising water had so undermined the lot that it would



no longer bear the gigantic weight of a bulldozer. Amphibious tractors, such as the Army uses, might have managed; but circus tractors are not amphibious.

"No use!" a driver bawled. "We can't operate out there; it's like quicksand. The bulls'll have to get them wagons out; we can't."

"Right!" The Transport Boss signaled his reserves; the great elephant line, rocking and clanking chains at the lot's edge. Keepers sank their hooks, and a dozen great gray shapes splashed out into the flood. But elephants, despite their size, are unpredictable. Something about that rising water seemed to frighten them. Only a few steps out, and they halted, squawking loudly and flinging up their trunks. In vain their drivers pleaded and goaded; they would not advance farther.

"They're spooked!" the Boss Elephant Man reported to "Mr. Dan" Dawson at length, mopping his forehead. "They're really scared. If we force 'em, they're liable to stampede and tear half the town down! I don't dare risk it."

"All right. Bring 'em in!" the owner ordered. Then he turned to Murphy, striking his fist into his palm. "But damn it, we've got to get those wagons out. There must be some way!"

"We could gilly 'em—carry everything out by hand—"

Then suddenly his jaw dropped, and he gasped. The crowd had parted, and through them a great white horse team came plodding through. At their head marched old Pop Mears proudly, leading Eagle and Comet by their bridles.

"Looks like it's up to us, Boss," he announced. "We'll git them wagons out fer you."

ALL stared at him, as at a ghost. Murphy actually wet his lips.

"Horses!" he gasped. "You're going to try to move those vans with *horses!*"

"And why not?" Pop glared at him, gnarled hands on hips. "We was movin' 'em thataway a hundred years afore your durned machines come along, you Johnny-come-lately! I reckon we kin do it again, ef we hafta!"

"But, Pop!" It was Mr. Dan protesting. "Even in the old days it would take thirty or forty head of stock to pull one of those wagons. You know that!"

Pop glared at him too. "Yeah. But we ain't got no thirty or forty head o' hosses!" he rapped. "You sold 'em all off—remember? All we got now is jest eight. I ain't sayin' fer sure they kin move 'em; I dunno ef they kin or not. But they're willin' to try, ef you say the word."

"Murphy?" Dawson shot the question. The reply was a shrug. "Hell, why not? We're licked, that's sure. Anything's worth trying. Go ahead, driver! See what you can do!"

A dozen hands boosted old Pop onto Big John's withers, handed up the reins to him. He sorted them out, then looked down anxiously. "I oughta have a helper!" he fretted. "A workin' teamster's gotta have a helper. I can't be climbin' on and off to hitch. I gotta drive—"

"O.K. I'll get you a helper." Murphy cupped his hands, and shouted to the crowd of showfolk about them. "Anybody know how to work on a

horse team?" But only blank stares answered him. New-generation circus people, for the most part, they hardly knew what he was talking about. The old lore had almost entirely died out.

"Don't nobody know how?" Pop pleaded. "*Somebody* musta worked on hosses once! I gotta have some help—"

Then he got a shock. They all did. The great Mr. Dawson, owner of the show, solemnly took off his coat, handed his cane to an attendant and climbed nimbly up beside Pop, on Beauty's back. "I'll help you, Pop," he said quietly. "I got my start in show business working on a big hitch. Twenty years ago, when I was a kid of twelve. But I guess I haven't forgotten all I knew. I'll be your helper, if you'll have me!"

THEY splashed out into the water, without hesitation. Circus draft horses aren't like elephants; they appear to have no nerves.

"It's easy!" Pop coached his new assistant anxiously, as he drove. "All you gotta do is fasten the hook-rope chains to the wagon-tongue, an' then climb up on top an' tell me where I'm goin'. I ain't got time to climb up an' drive right, I gotta work from the hosses' backs. We'll take this one fust!" They halted at the nearest van and swung around, a great fifty-foot arc of moving horseflesh. Mr. Dan slid off Beauty, and did things to chains and couplings, while Pop directed as best he could. Then: "Aw-right, let's go," he snapped. "Hup, thar, team! Hup! *Hup!*"

Languidly the eight horses started to amble forward. Encountering unexpected resistance, they halted and looked back puzzled. It had been years since they'd pulled anything save the little float; they did not know what to make of this. Old Eagle looked back and snorted, pawing the water. Then, with a curiously exultant movement, he surged into his collar and really pulled. The others followed his lead; traces creaked; poles tautened.

"We moved, Pop!" Dawson shouted in surprise, from the wagon-top. "We moved—at least a couple of feet!"

"'Course we moved!" Pop growled back. "They ain't really workin' yet; they've durn' near forgot how! An' I've most forgot how to drive. Let's see, now—"

He called on all his craft, flogged his tired old mind to action. He swung the team right and left, to break out the front wheels; then brought them around sharply with a jerk. Then suddenly he slacked the reins, and slapped them. "Hyah! *Hyah!*" The wild Comanche yell of an old-time circus teammaster rang out over the startled lot. "Let's go, thar! Hyah! *Hup!*"

And, unbelievably, the great wagon started forward. Firs- in little jerks; then as the team gained momentum, in a long, steady roll. Great white bodies leaped and surged and plunged; the leaders broke into a clumsy trot, hoofs splashing with piston motion. Old Eagle flung up his head and neighed as he went, an exultant sound.

"Beginnin' to git the idee, boy?" Pop called to him. "This is what you been waitin' fer, all these years. Now show 'em what you kin do! Show 'em all! *Hyah!*"

Suddenly the high ground was looming up ahead; the crowd along the bank was cheering. Tractors and elephants lurched out to surround the wagon and hook on, and the Boss was uncoupling the team and pounding him on the back, all at once.

"You made it, Pop!" he gasped. "You made it! Wonderful!"

But Pop only frowned worriedly, as he swung the hitch around. "Sure we made it!" he grunted. "But that was only the nearest wagon—an' the lightest. That's why we picked it fust. It's them others I'm worried about. The canvas wagons, an' the big Pole Wagon—they're awful heavy. An' the team'll tire fast; they ain't got the strength they had once. Nor me neither—we'll take this 'un next!"

It was a stringer wagon, half the length of the team, and a solid mass of wet planks. It was sunk almost to its hubs, and looked hopeless to Pop as they hitched onto it. But at least his horses were really working now. Old memories were reviving; they were beginning to pull together as a unit, to blend strength and skill together to one end. They had become a real "big hitch" now, the mightiest live-power unit ever developed by man, which gave the deathless word "horsepower" to the world as a measure for all time. The two leaders were really leading now, guiding the rest almost as much as Pop did, taking advantage of every inch of terrain, and avoiding every obstacle. Behind them the two body teams supplied power, surging along blindly with heads down and every ounce of weight in their creaking collars. And the mighty polers both pulled and steered the vehicle, guiding its twisting progress with veteran precision. Old Baldy, the bad horse, was kicking and squealing as he pulled, ears back; but moving in precision with the rest, for all that. At least, Pop thought, he had a *team!*

And slowly, with awful struggling, they dragged the long wagon out of the water. Horses floundered and slipped and skidded, fell down in their harnesses and got up to struggle on again. No whip, no goad to urge them on; circus horses do not need such things. They work for love of the game, for courage and strength bred into them over generations. Almost two centuries of circus tradition was in their labor, a record of innumerable lots conquered, of continents spanned, of the very elements put to rout by dappled horseflesh down the years, since George Washington admired the steeds of John Bill Ricketts' first American circus, and Bonheur painted the draft horses of Buffalo Bill! What were mere machines to such a tradition, such history? This was their hour, and they knew it, their hour of strength and pride. Nothing could stop them. They pulled on, and on. . . .

And one, two, three, four and then five wagons joined the others on the higher ground. Each took its brutal toll of the old team, drained strength and courage out of them, then yielded at last to something higher than mere strength and courage. The eight were plastered with mud and filth now; Pop's lovingly polished harness was a mass of dirt. The veins on white legs stood out like ropes; sprung knees wabbled, and spent old lungs breathed in great sobbing gasps. Whitey had cut his ankle on a lead chain, and blood stained the water with every step he took. Every so often Pop had to let them stop and rest, with hanging heads. Yet he dared not wait long at a time; the water was coming up too fast. The leaders were almost swimming now, at each trip; the wagons were all but floating. A little more, and they'd be swept downriver and lost forever. He had to keep going!

Numbly he swung them around again, for the sixth time, telegraphing his sheer will through the long reins. He himself could hardly sit erect now, on Big John's back; his hands clenched on leather had long lost all feeling. His head felt light; he wondered if he were going to have a stroke! But, wet and weary, he fought on doggedly, with all the gallantry of his old teamster's heart.

ONLY the great pole wagon now remained—a monstrous forty-foot mass of timbers, sunk almost out of sight in rushing water, a sheer weight of many tons. "Don't try it, Pop!" Mr. Dan admonished, beside him, as they headed out. "You've done enough now! A hundred horses couldn't budge that wagon; it's no use. It's sheer cruelty to make them try any more—"

But Pop only shook his head. "I ain't a-makin' 'em!" he grunted. He held up his hands, to show the reins were limp. "I couldn't stop 'em now, ef I wanted to. They're headin' fer that last wagon by themselves! They know their job, an' they're a-gonna do it—er bust tryin'! This here's the last time a big hitch'll ever work on a circus lot; the last time the old

Percherons'll ever have a chance, I reckon. We might as well make it a clean sweep!"

All but the polers were swimming before they reached the great vehicle; the water was up to their backs. Mr. Dan had to hold onto Beauty's hames, to keep from being drowned; he made his couplings under water, by touch. And even when he climbed on the wagon's ladder to guide, his feet were still submerged. Yet, supernaturally, it seemed, the wagon moved easily, with the first splashing surge of the team, and started shoreward.

"See?" Pop cackled wildly. "You're right; a hundred horses couldn't move that wagon in mud! But hit's loose from the mud now; hit's floatin' like a boat! We figgered on thet; thet's why we left it till last. But the further we go toward land, the heavier it'll git; I dunno's we'll make it all the way. Hyah! *Hyah!* Fast's you kin, team, so's to git momentum 'fore the mud grabs us. *Hyah! Hup!*"

The team heard him; they responded, with a last surge of feeble energy, breaking into a lunging canter as their feet touched ground, splashing and straining in one titanic rush. Then, as the shallowing water let the wagon's weight down, let the heavy wheels dig in and the awful weight of giant tent-poles come full-force, that rush began to slow. Soon it was a walk, then a crawl; with floundering bodies scrabbling on their bellies in the muck, fighting with their last ounce of strength, their last flicker of courage. Foot by foot, and then inch by inch. Groaning, gasping, fighting to a halt. . . .

And then suddenly, elephants were alongside. Tractors were wallowing out to meet them, flailing their treads; and men were swarming all about them, yelling and shouting and throwing their hats in the air.

"You've done it, Pop!" Mr. Dan shouted, from the wagon top. "This is near enough. They'll take over from here. You can stop; take your team out."

But Pop Mears didn't seem to hear him. He kept right on driving, stiff as a stuffed figure on his horse's back, numbed hands holding the reins. And the horses kept on going too. They didn't even seem to know that the awful weight of the wagon was no longer on them, that enough mechanical and animal power to move a mountain was pulling along with them. They plodded on, still going through the motions of pulling, out of the water and onto high ground. Only when they had almost reached the street did they finally halt and stand limply, with drooping heads. Pop slid down and dropped his reins and stood, a blank look on his face.

A hundred hands were reaching out to shake his, a hundred voices raised in praise and congratulations. But he brushed them all aside impatiently, turning toward his beloved team, with anxious solicitude. They were already lying down in their harness, utterly exhausted, pulled out. All but old Eagle, far up at the end of the line. He remained on his feet, legs spread wide. He raised his proud old head and glared around, with the look in his eyes that had given him his name; and neighed once more, loudly. Then suddenly he fell sidewise, like a tall tree crashing to earth.

"He's dead." Pop said vacantly, numbly. "I knowed hit, through the reins. He busted his heart, on thet last pull."

There was much emotion then, in the crowd of circus folk. Women cried, and men unashamedly dashed hands over their eyes. But old Pop only stared at them, stony-faced.

"'Tain't nuthin' to grieve over!" he told them stoutly. "He died the way he wanted to. Like a circus hoss—the last of 'em, I reckon. It's for us to be proud—not shame him by sorrow!"

It was some hours later, when the show was safely loaded on its cars and ready to pull out, that Mr. Dan Dawson, immaculate once more, clambered into the car where Pop Mears was still working over the rest of his team, by flickering lamplight.

"Yeah, they'll be all right; the others," Pop replied to his anxious query. "They'll pull through. They ain't gonna be much good, o' course; they was too old for a strain like that. But they'll live.

"I was wonderin' " he went on hesitantly, "If I could mebbe buy 'em, sir. They ain't no more good as a team, without a leader. An' anyway, hosses are through on the circus, I realize that now. It ain't no use to try to buck the machines; they're here to stay. It's best we give way, an' bow out. I got a little money saved up, an' my nephew in the East has a farm. Ef you'd sell 'em to me, we could all retire together—"

Mr. Dan stared. Then he laughed, but softly. "Sell them?" he echoed. "Why, Pop, there isn't money enough in the world to buy that team, after what they did today! They belong on this show, from now on. They've made a place for themselves, a place we won't forget. We'll get you another leader; I've already telegraphed my horse buyers. And replacements for the others, as they have to be pensioned off. But there'll always be a big hitch on this circus, as long as I'm running it!

"Oh, not because we need them, you understand," he went on. "What happened today wouldn't happen again in a hundred years—a combination in which horses could beat the tractors! They'll go right on doing our heavy work, Pop; and it's only right they should. We've got no right to ask fine animals to kill themselves working for us, now they don't have to.

"But that doesn't mean we don't need the horses too. Far from it! There's plenty for them to do, besides heavy work. Know what we're going to use your eight for, Pop, from now on? We're having the old steam calliope fixed up, back in winter quarters, and renovated. And we're going to send it downtown every day, with an eight-horse team pulling it, to play through the streets. We can't give the kids a parade any more, but we'll bring 'em a touch of the old days, eh?"

"Gosh!" Pop stared, awed by this vision of grandeur. Plumed horses, calliope tooting on circus day. "Gosh! And I kin drive 'em?"

"We-e-ll—" The owner hesitated "You can drive 'em if you want to, of course. But I don't think you'll want to, often. You'll be too busy with other duties. Because, you see, there's going to be other draft horses on the show too, a lot of them. Everywhere we can squeeze a hitch in, we'll do it. A four-horse team on the stake-driver, train teams for unloading, and a couple of big dapple-gray sixes that—well, if we can't find anything else for them to do, we'll just let 'em stand around on the lot and let people look at them! We'll dig up some of the old drivers; there must be a few of 'em left. And we'll put 'em all out on the midway in a special tent of your own, where you can sit around and yarn—a real Horse Fair! I'll bet you'll outdraw the menagerie. You see, Pop, you've made a lot of us realize that something has been missing from modern circus lots, for a long time. And so far as this show is concerned, it's coming back—to stay!"

"Glory be!" Pop murmured. Then: "But what about Murphy? How's he gonna take it? He's so set against hosses—"

Mr. Dan chuckled. "Oh, I don't think you'll have to worry about him. Matter of fact, it was partly his idea! I think he feels safer having a few horses around, after today—just in case!

"But if he makes any trouble, you can talk to him, Pop—as an equal. Because, you see, we're bringing something else back to this circus; that's been gone too long. That's why you won't have time to drive that team much, because you'll be cracking a bullwhip, and riding a Western saddle. You're Boss Hostler of this show, Pop, from now on! Boss Hostler! How does it sound?"

But Pop didn't answer; he couldn't. For the first time in his tough old life, he was crying. . . . Crying, into old Comet's mane.

Raging, he braced himself to a sitting position and took stock.

THE BROAD-BRIMMED HAT

THE brakeman had all the best of it, being older and quite some heavier. In the end, Nevis was pitched from the stock-car, and the string of empties rattled on westward without him toward the growing division point at Toledo.

Raging, he braced himself to a sitting position and took stock. The rim of his new straw boater, which the trainman had shamefully pulled down over his eyes before laying hands on him, now hung around his thin neck like a horse collar. Two of the big pearl buttons on his checked waistcoat were broken, and there was a split in the box toe of one yellow shoe. The state of his peg-topped trousers was a caution.

Hunched among the buttercups and burdock, Nevis flexed his mechanic's hands glumly. The brakie had kept his tool-box, and any chance of landing a good job in Chicago was gone for good, since a millwright needed more tools than most. With the panic of '93 still holding, his chances out West were now no better than the opportunities back home in Bridgeport. The world had turned its back on brains and ambition, Nevis told himself darkly. The new land, the mines, the forests were closed to late-comers; and the newspapers, even, were putting it out that scientists had exhausted invention. The century was ending; openings for young men, it was plain, were ending with it.

Dust from the country road that paralleled the right-of-way added to his gloom. Nevis heard a masculine hail, and a gale of giggles above the stomp and creak and jingle of a slowing team, and straightened his wiry body with belligerence. His scowl for the wagon driver bore a townsman's disrespect and ignored the two young ladies, though the one who seemed most amused by his plight was pretty. The smaller darker one he scarcely noticed at all, blinded as he was by chagrin over the poor figure he must be cutting.

A jobless millwright goes West, young man — and suffers vicissitudes until a lady's curling iron points the path to fortune.

by CHARLES ELLSWORTH

There was, however, no ridicule in the moon-shaped face of the man who peered down at him from the high wagon seat. Nevis studied the big farmer guardedly, taking notice that his squared golden beard framed a generous mouth, and that the little blue eyes were alert in the shadow of the man's broad-brimmed hat. His hair, cropped full at a level with his collar, was all but the color of the baled straw with which his dray was loaded, and his opened corduroy vest fell away from a giant's torso. Seeing that the driver's broad beam put a slant in the wagon seat which the combined weight of the two girls could not overcome, Nevis judged him to be a Dutchman or a Swiss. There were a sight of both Dutch and Swiss along the Bay of Sandusky, so he had been told.

"Ho! Like my company at Shiloh, you vas," the big teamster approved, pointing his beard after the vanishing train. "A goot fight you made, very goot. Railroaders, pah! You vas not hurted? Then a lift ve gif you, yah?"

"Yah," agreed Nevis, his pride somewhat mollified, but his vanity still in short supply. He was, he knew, too lame to walk far, and he set foot on hub and rim with relief, and pulled himself up stiffly to a place behind the driver. Removing what was left of his nifty boater from around his neck, he fumbled the shreds for an agonizing moment while the girls stared at him. Finally he edged behind a bale and thrust the remains of his hat into the other straw, but reluctantly, for it had been a jim-dandy. Having adjusted his celluloid collar, he then quickly produced a comb and undertook to part his sandy hair in the latest Eastern mode, far to the left, with a roach at the end of the wave, and no cowlick.

Emerging, he had a feeling that the result was not all he had hoped for. The pretty blonde got off a smothered gurgle before the other girl could hush her, and the driver took in his toilet with a sidelong glance that was both amiable and appraising.

"Nup, no hat," Nevis begrudged them stonily, wanting to get the worst over with. "No tools, neither," he added, scowling at the distant caboose. "Nevis Daight's the name, Yankee bred, and a good millwright by trade. In search of work," he concluded flatly, and heard the start of another giggle. Keeping his eyes on the driver, he sensed rather than saw the dark girl's quick motion to quiet her companion, and flushed uncomfortably. After a stolid moment, however, the driver let his little blue eyes well-nigh disappear into his full cheeks in a smile of his own.

"Herr Heinz, farmer," the big man said gravely. "These my daughters are: Ermintrude, who is vitout manners, and Metta, who is shy. And vork I haf for you, Herr Daight. Maybe."

Nevis said, "How do!" to the girls and breathed out sharply through his thin nose—which he privately thought was a mite too long for real good looks—at the idea of working around a farm. He saw at once that Ermintrude was her father's daughter, with the Dutchman's gilt curls and direct blue eyes. Tall and fair and porcelain complected, she was a lallapalooza, right enough. Her plain sister's hair, by contrast, was in coiled dark braids under a sensible bonnet. She had a small round face with high cheek-bones, but Nevis could not see the color of her eyes. He returned his attention to their father.

"I ain't a hired hand," he rebuked stiffly.

Once more Herr Heinz' little blue orbs retreated into their pillows of plumpness. "A plain man I like," he rumbled, "if too fast he does not go. A millwright, you said. But a mill I have for the making of straw paper, und vit this load ve go there now."

He had sold much straw to the local pulp factory, he confided as the wagon wheels churned the dust, and when the panic came, he was its largest creditor. Now he did not know what to do with the place. The machinery was old and did not work well, and costs were high in spite of his skilled immigrant papermaker. He had need of a good journeyman mechanic who could do overhauling, Herr Heinz thought.

Nevis harkened without interest to this talk of back-country manufacture, concerned over the poor impression he was making on the girls. From the sound of the job, he told himself defensively, it was no fit task for a man of his talents; but Ermintrude did not seem to recognize this. She had turned her back on him, and was chattering to her sister about a sewing machine which, it seemed, she was bound that her father should buy for her. Nevis brightened gratefully when the plainer of the two girls turned to him with evident resolution.

"Where are you from, Mr. Daight?" she asked politely, and then spoiled it all by blushing scarlet and turning her head away, further adding to his discomfort. He swallowed painfully and told her, rather more loudly than he had planned, but there was no response. It was disheartening.

Everything was too still, Nevis decided. Sun sparkled on Lake Erie water, distant fields away, and the air was heavy with Midwestern heat and the thick scent of clover. The tall bushes along the roadside, unfamiliar

"Ermintrude, who is vitout manners."

to him, wore their tiny berries like thick clusters of garnet jewelry. Something rapped against his shoulder and dug wiry feet into the cloth of his sleeve; it was a grasshopper that turned its nightmare face to him, spat, and hurtled past his ear with the spang and whir of a released spring. Nevis shuddered. Give him the city, any old time! The prettiest sister gurgled, and he realized that she had been watching him all the time. It made him mad, but at the same time he began to feel more confident.

"But no sons I got," Herr Heinz chose this moment to say plaintively. "Two motherless daughters I haf, und not even a son-in-law already."

Nevis examined this statement with respect, wondering how broad a hint it might be. Drifting mechanics were forever telling of the fortunes they could have married had they been willing to settle down. Young fellows of ability were always at a premium in these farming communities, and Herr Heinz was evidently well-to-do and a man of property. Many a successful man had begun by choosing his father-in-law with care, Nevis reminded himself with a brash look at the fair Ermintrude. He snugged his tie against his collar button and concluded that he could do worse. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, he added for his own reassurance. He then adjusted his sleeve garters, shot his cuffs, and addressed Herr Heinz.

"Sir," he began solemnly, "if you lack a millwright, I'm your man. I have references from my foreman and the pastor of my church. As to experience —"

"Mein vater said always, 'A young man needs only a broad-brimmed hat,' " the big farmer chuckled, studying Nevis with some secret merriment. " 'The few steps ahead he sees only, then, not the land's end.' The sun shines too hot on you, maybe? Here then, take this. I can do without."

With gingerly care Nevis lifted the flat-crowned felt thus abruptly thrust upon him, and turned it over in his hands. It was dark, heavy and of fine quality, and its brim was perfectly made to block off all views of far fields. He glanced at Herr Heinz and hesitated for a moment, unsure of himself. Then, with another look a pretty Ermintrude, he settled the hat over his eyes; it fitted perfectly.

The plain sister gave him one wide-eyed glance and was quiet, but the other rewarded him with a silvery peal, and her father's bellow of laughter made the horses' ears twitch. "Ho! A landsman of ours you could be, from the look!" Herr Heinz roared with vast satisfaction. "Next we see about the work, Herr Daight."

As Nevis saw matters, it was beholden on him to stick to business now. The mill, when they came to it, was a tumbledown old brick building set in a weed-grown yard. The pond behind it was scummed over; the race that brought water to the beater vats was leaking; and the pulped straw within seemed to combine the worst odors of cattle pen and tannery. The immigrant papermaker, Bogertz, was no more savory than his mill; he shook hands grudgingly and turned upon Nevis a look of instant dislike.

"A mechanic wit'out tools?" the papermaker growled, his heavy face darkening. "I need no one like this. No one!"

NEVIS kept still; he thought he recognized the type: Old World craftsmen were a suspicious lot who guarded their trade secrets like pearls, for fear someone would wrest them away. As for the man's disfavor, he would not let that daunt him in front of Ermintrude.

"To me you came without a *Pfennig* already," Herr Heinz told Bogertz mildly. "Tools Herr Daight will find, and the machine he will fix. It is my vish."

There was a moment while the papermaker tested the weight of this. "*Ja wohl,*" he mumbled suddenly, and jerked an acid-stained thumb toward the factory. "There is a bunk in the boiler-room, Herr Daight."

"Goot!" And Herr Heinz nodded. "Tomorrow a selling trip I must begin. Your report I expect in three days, Herr Daight. And you vill wear the broad-brimmed hat as a present from me, yah?"

"Yah," grinned Nevis, for the pleasure of watching Bogertz' expression. The papermaker, he was mortally certain, would turn his coat again the moment the owner was out of sight. When the empty wagon had clattered out of the yard, he braced himself with some misgiving, though the man's teeth were bared in a smile that failed to reach his eyes.

"A word with you, Herr Daight," Bogertz commanded, before thinking to lower his voice to a confidential murmur. "You are young, and I have had much experience. This I learned in the old country: If we make paper quickly, the price falls and there is no market. Trade is bad now. The machine should not be made to go faster. I wanted no help, but now that you are here — well, you can see past the end of your nose, *nicht?*"

"Tools Herr Daight will find, and the machine he will fix. It is my vish."

Nevis blinked at him. "You want me to shirk my job?"

"Do little, and that badly." The papermaker shrugged. "The foolish Herr Heinz believes in you. He will take his losses all the longer, and we may ourselves rescue the business when he gives up. That will be time enough for your mechanic's skill to show itself. Do we understand one another?"

One lid dropped in a sly wink, and Nevis stopped breathing while the man waited. Here was another way to gain a foothold on the ladder; sharp practice had won many an advantage, Nevis knew, and it would be a great thing to be an owner. But to neglect a machine! That was worse than abusing a book! Moreover, his gorge rose at an affront to the Yankee dream of more and ever more output, of cheaper manufacture and bigger markets.

"Nup. If the machine turns out more paper," he explained carefully, as to a backward child, "the product will cost less, and Herr Heinz can sell all we make at a profit. I got to set you right on that, leastways. As for t'other matter, the least said, the soonest mended. I hired out to make this mill hum, and that's what I aim to do, seems as if," he concluded firmly.

Bogertz' face clouded with the choler of some Teutonic fury, and his eyebrows worked balefully, though for the moment he seemed beyond speech. Nevis stepped back watchfully while the man sought words; and was relieved that their tone, when they came, was not in keeping with his manner.

"So? It was a chance," the papermaker said, and made it sound affable. "Now I show you the mill—and the storeroom."

THE one-cylinder machine, the boilers, the sluices and beater-room were about what Nevis expected. Only the storeroom promised much in the way of interest. There the wide brown rolls, each wound to a diameter waist-high to a man, were piled to the cobwebbed beams in stacks extending toward him from the brick end wall of the plant. Their tons of dead weight were held in leash by wedges under the front foundation rolls only, he noted with disapproval as he tore off a loose end of the harsh brown stuff.

The paper was coarse and unlovely, good for naught but crate linings or wadding. A by-product of wheat farming, it was cheap and easily come by, but something in its stubborn brittleness appealed to Nevis. The straw fibers of which it was made, done with lifting the heavy heads of grain, had survived the paper and the vats with strength to spare. Their matted vigor reminded him of spunky oldsters he knew back in Connecticut, homely but durable, and deserved a fate with more dignity to it, he figured. He stood folding and pleating an edge of his sample, his head full of speculation, until he heard the footfall behind him.

He had forgotten Bogertz, forgotten the proposal that could only have been made in desperation, forgotten even the evil look of the man. Therefore the blow with a billet of wood caught him off balance, half turning as he was, and slammed him up against the strong partition cutting off the storeroom from the mill proper. He sagged there, shocked by the suddenness of the attack, and tried to understand the words that came to him out of the dimness.

"It will seem an accident," Bogertz rasped in his hoarse voice. "This wedge is loose. I saw today—"

The sound of heavy breathing, his own, stopped, and there came to Nevis instead the scrape of a kick, and the chock of leather against wood, and the groan of a great weight shifting. He fought blindly to straighten his knees, and heard the scuffle of a body leaping aside. His vision cleared in time to see the nearest stack shudder ponderously as the leading roll turned free. There was no time to get out of the way. Instantly, as the weight of its fellows bore down upon it, the heavy cylinder charged at him.

Those above followed, thundering down upon him like stones down a mountain. Nevis dropped beside the partition and sought the angle between floor and wall. He hoped, dazedly, that the timbers would hold. That the girth of the rolls would save him. He heard shouts, and a shrill scream. For some reason Herr Heinz and his daughters had returned, he thought. Then concussion battered the boards against which he huddled, and a crushing pressure on his ribs told him that the wall had given way.

Illustrated by John Fulton

"It will seem an accident," Bogertz rasped in his hoarse voice.

NEVIS opened his eyes to the glint of a handsome brass bed. He lay quiet, taking in the flowered wallpaper and the marble-topped commode, and listened to the kitchen sounds from the room beyond. After a while the door opened, and an aproned girl peeped in at him.

"You're Metta," he remembered, catching sight of the braids.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I'll go call — no, I forgot. Trudy can't come down; she hasn't got her curls pinned up for her trip to town. Oh, dear! Well, then, you must be very quiet; you've had inflammation of the lungs. The partition tore loose at the bottom and let you through, or you'd have been—"

He interrupted hastily: "How did your father come to return?"

Metta did not answer. Instead she opened a drawer in the commode and pulled out a piece of straw paper. "You had this in your hand when we —when he found you. Would you like to keep it for luck?"

He laid the paper aside without interest, asking, "What's that in your other hand? A newfangled curling iron?"

"I was helping Trudy — oh!" she squeaked, hiding it.

"I won't let on you told," he promised. "My sister used one. Let me see how it is made, won't you?"

She gave it to him reluctantly, and he squeezed the handles together against the pressure of the spring, admiring the action of the tongs. For want of anything better, he tried them idly on his piece of straw paper. Nothing happened.

"The iron must be heated," Metta ventured timidly, and rose.

"I know!" He withered her with a look, but the paper still interested him. It would need softening with moisture or steam, of course. While he stared at it reflectively, the doorknob rattled, and he no more than had time to hide the curling iron under the bedclothes before Ermintrude swept into the room. Even in a braided jacket, her figure was what the barbershop periodicals called Junoesque. She was a dazzler, Nevis admitted cautiously to himself.

"How good to see you taking an interest again!" she cooed. "We had a time with you, Mr. Daight, I do declare."

"I'm obliged for your trouble," he felt called upon to say. To seem more gracious, he asked: "Did you get your sewing machine?"

"You remember that?" she pouted, "Father hadn't made up his mind when Metta—when we heard of a room for you in town. We went back to tell you, and Father was horribly upset by your being hurt, and now there's no saying when things at the mill will get better. And I want the sewing machine so badly!"

"It's plain," Nevis said carefully, "that the mill can do better. How much better, there's no telling yet."

"Then this stupid waiting for better times would be over?" The girl brightened, and looked upon him with warmer gaze. "You are a dear." In a moment she was putting herself out to please him, and Nevis was again the superior male. The sewing machine, he was given to understand, was a paragon of ingenuity. It was ridiculous of her father to think that it would encourage vanity or extravagance in dress, Ermintrude declared. Have it she must and would; and with good, clever Mr. Daight to fix whatever was wrong at the factory, she was sure it would be hers before long. In fact, she told him winningly from the doorway, she was on her way to town that very minute for one more look at her heart's desire. He must hurry up and get well, she added. For her sake!

Nevis blew out his cheeks and wondered what he had let himself in for, but he liked the sensation. He slid down into the pillows, then winked at Metta and pulled out the curling iron. "I didn't tattle," he grinned. "Now bring me a steaming teakettle, there's a good girl! And your scissors. And would you heat this iron for me?"

Metta was happier with work than with talking, he observed. The sheet of straw paper, made pliable by vapor, easily took the pinch of the tongs, and when crimped by the dry heat of the iron, it held its new shape. By reversing his grip, Nevis found that he could make a series of hills and valleys in the

brown stuff. The ridges had wonderful strength and resilience.

He set his mind to finding a use for them without result, though his experiments passed the hours while he was bedfast. In this, Metta was a willing helper. She carried water and heated the iron while he made rows of corrugations, and encouraged him to make more. He cut and scored the results, flexed them, stretched them and fumed. Handsome is as handsome does, he reminded her crossly one afternoon, and threw his latest strip to the floor in disgust. She picked it up patiently, and stood it on edge against the lamp on his bedside table, where he could look at it.

Nevis stopped sulking and jerked himself upright to reach for the lamp chimney. "I've got it!" he yelped. "The glass makers in Toledo ship thousands of these things every month! If I can reduce their breakage even a little— Metta, stir up a paste of flour and water. Hurry, girl!"

In a few moments he had made a sleeve to fit over the fragile glass. His corrugations expanded to take care of the bulge near the base of the chimney, and the ribs fitted snugly. He held the result over the edge of the bed and let it drop. Metta gave a housewifely squeak, but there was no tinkle of glass. The straw paper absorbed the shock, and the chimney remained unbroken. They tried it again and again before Nevis was ready to call in Herr Heinz.

"With a machine you can make these?" the big Dutchman asked with slow emphasis. "Twenty-five thousand a week, maybe?"

"No glue will set at that speed," Nevis objected, shaking his head. "I could design the machine; but how would we make the wrappers stick?"

Herr Heinz wrinkled his brow in perplexity, but Metta was out of the room in a flash. She returned with a crock of clear colorless liquid. "Here is something which sticks better than any glue," she offered hopefully. "I know. I have used it."

Nevis took the crock with some misgiving. He bonded two pieces of straw paper with a crystal smear of the syrupy stuff and tried to pull them apart again. The bond held. He dipped a finger in the crock and rubbed the coating to grit against his thumb.

"Waterglass," he marveled. "Plain silicate of soda!"

"For putting down the winter's eggs," Metta agreed shyly; "they keep very well, but the waterglass must not be spilled on anything. That is how I learned that it sticks quickly."

Her father hugged her. "Ho! Now you vill put on the broad-brimmed hat, Herr Daight! You vill lif in that hat. You vill eat and sleep in it. And you vill build me a machine, yah?"

"Herr Heinz, farmer."

"Nevis Daight's the name."

"Yah," grinned Nevis happily, and hunched over a list of the tools he would need. When Metta had followed her father off to bed, Ermintrude slipped in to smooth the pillows behind his head. She drew up a carpeted hassock and plumped herself down at his elbow.

"If your machine is a success," she inquired softly, "what will it mean to you?"

"That I can repay your care," Nevis said offhandedly, not averse to putting himself in a better light. "That your father will have a market for all the paper he can make. That the mill will be busy when others are idle. That I will have a patent, and royalties, and hard cash of my own. That likely I can afford—"

"My sewing machine!" Ermintrude finished unexpectedly. "Oh, Mr.—Mr. Daight—Nevis, you are the cleverest man in the whole world! I might have known you would remember how badly I want it. Wasn't that smart of you? Oh, you are a darling!"

"Metta Heinz, who is shy."

She transferred herself from the hassock to his arms with fluid grace, and he found his hands full of lace and ruching. He had time for only one glimpse of her blissful expression as her face neared his, and then he was kissing her or being kissed, he was not sure which. It was confusing but agreeable. Ermintrude was warm and soft, and his nostrils were full of the scent of lilac sachet, and Nevis guessed he was as good as bespoke. Not that he minded, but it did seem kind of sudden. He kissed her again, putting more heart into it, and threw Yankee caution to the winds

"You'll get your sewing machine, I expect," he said, and shocked himself out of his giddiness, for that was the same as a promise.

THEREAFTER, what with having the new lamp-wrapper rig on his mind and needing a room nearer to the mill, he saw little enough of Ermintrude. He was too busy to mind, though he was hard put to get along without Metta's help. It had been fall, and then it was winter, and then spring came and his equipment was finished. It ribbed and pasted lamp wrappers in tiptop fashion, better than he had dared hope, and faster. The first shipment went off to the glass factories, and the first bank draft came back promptly. Nevis bought the sewing machine, but he had it delivered to the mill.

He felt older now, and surer of himself, and he was deep in another notion. His work obsessed him, and beneath the broad-brimmed hat his

mind worried and tugged at a new idea which his hands patiently shaped into reality. Ermintrude had waited for her sewing machine; she could wait a while longer with profit. This new idea was to be a surprise for her.

First, however, he had to return the sewing machine to the agent. By now it was snugly packed in a crate the likes of which no one had ever seen before. Its panels, as Nevis explained to the startled representative, were built up with three sheets of straw paper, using his corrugated sheet as a filler. The result was a paper "board" of new strength and lightness, cheap and easily available.

"Tell your people," he advised the agent, "that a time will come when every machine they make will leave the factory in a crate like this, or maybe in a paperboard box. Tell them the timber will not last forever, even in this big country, and that some day lumber will be dear, and carpenters too. Tell them they will need the farmer then, and can come to our mill for their boxes. And we will be ready to make them. Tell them that! Deliver this crate to Miss Ermintrude and see for yourself!"

If this was to be an honest test he should, he knew, leave the agent's delivery to handle the crate in its own way. Nevis turned toward the farm, anxious to be on hand when his surprise got there. It had been raining, and it was still raining, but he pulled the broad-brimmed hat over his eyes and plodded on; it meant a sight to him to see how Ermintrude took his new invention. Likely she would be as pleased as he was!

Arrived at the Heinz farm, he waited on the porch to summon her as soon as the delivery wagon turned into the lane. "Oh, Nevis," she gurgled when at last she stood shivering in the doorway, "is it my new sewing machine? It is! I know it is! But where's the box it was supposed to come in?" she shrieked as the dray drew abreast of the stoop. "And what's that nasty brown blanket doing on top of it? Nevis Daight, is this your idea of a joke? If you've spoiled my precious sewing machine, I'll never speak to you again! Never!"

RUEFULLY Nevis stared down at the wagon-bed, not hearing the guffaws of the driver. The rain, the puddles of the loading-dock had played hob with his paperboard container; nothing was left of it but mush. He took off the broad-brimmed hat and rubbed his head, already busy with the remedy. Ermintrude he put out of his mind, after the first moment of dismay, knowing that her wants would always come ahead of his dreams.

"Your beautiful box," mourned a small voice at his shoulder. "Your wonderful paperboard box! I am so sorry this happened."

The words made Nevis feel some better, not that he had to depend on anyone. This was his problem, and man's work, but it beat all how much the girl understood of it. He tucked the broad-brimmed hat under his arm and slipped the other arm around her slight shoulders in brotherly fashion.

"Don't feel bad," he whispered. "I can waterproof the next one somehow. It's a little thing, but a poor one to overlook." He gave her a squeeze and a pat, and of a sudden the closeness of her ran up his sleeve like an electric shock and struck him all of a heap. He knew he had been blind, and there was nothing for it but to own up, so he went on: "Like your thinking of a room for me that first day. And your having your pa drive by to tell me about it. And your care of me when I was ailing, and humoring me in my foolishness with the curling iron—"

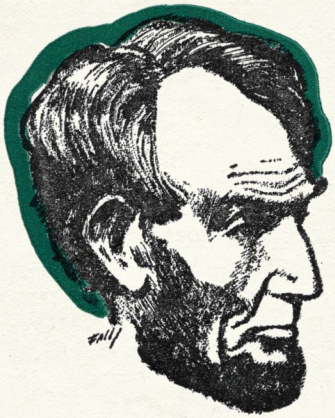
"It wasn't foolishness," she protested, her voice muffled in his new cravat. "I only did what I could to keep you happy, not having Ermintrude's way with beaus."

"You'd make two of Ermintrude," he assured her solemnly, and drew a deep breath. "I aim to make it up to you for all you've done, not saying when I'll be able. A machine to make the new paperboard will cost some, and the cooperage firms ain't going to like such goings on, nor the wood-box trust. I'll have to put on your pa's broad-brimmed hat again and—"

It was a caution, Nevis told himself a moment later, how much kissing a fellow let himself in for unless he looked out real sharp. However, it was a thing that seemed to improve with practice and, once settled on what to do with his long Yankee nose, he got along real well. Looking down into the little round face under its crown of braids, he saw that he had got the prettiest of Herr Heinz' two daughters after all, though she was shaking her head at him contrarily.

"No," she sputtered, tugging at the felt, "You will leave off the broad-brimmed hat after this. You can safely look ahead now, Mr. Daight!"

He let her take it from him while he pondered the sense of her words. One thing, he concluded with satisfaction; the loss of the hat left him with both arms free.



THE MOST IMPORTANT CRIME EVER COMMITTED IN AMERICA WAS THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN—NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT COST THE LIFE OF A GREAT MAN, BUT BECAUSE THE BITTERNESS IT ENGENDERED DID MUCH TO DELAY RECONSTRUCTION. YET, WHILE THE ACTUAL ASSASSIN WAS KNOWN AND ACCOUNTED FOR, THE FULL STORY OF THE CONSPIRACY HAS NEVER BEEN REVEALED; AND PRESUMABLY NOT ALL THE CONSPIRATORS WERE IDENTIFIED. FOR THIS REASON THE STORY HERE TOLD OF BOOTH'S CAREER AS AN OIL OPERATOR, AND OF HIS MYSTERIOUS TRIP TO CANADA, HAS A VERY SPECIAL INTEREST. . . .

New Evidence

by CORNELL GREENING and RICHARD MATCH

At ten-fifteen on the night of April 14, 1865, a man with no known personal motive entered a theater box and fired a bullet into President Lincoln's brain. The man was John Wilkes Booth, actor, matinée idol, and prosperous oil man. Though few Americans know of Booth's oil-field career, it may well hold the key to America's greatest incompletely solved murder mystery.

Twelve days after the martyrdom of Lincoln, the assassin was himself dead, shot down by his pursuers in a Virginia barn. With him died the secret of Lincoln's murder. Booth pulled the trigger of the murder gun, but he almost certainly had accomplices in high places in Washington – and perhaps in other capitals as well. No man today knows who they were: the hidden murderers of Abraham Lincoln.

In over eighty-two years since the crime at Ford's Theater, however, historical detectives have neglected one most obvious lead. Modern homicide squads always investigate the murder suspect's favorite haunts and closest friends. But Nineteenth Century criminologists knew less about unraveling the story behind a murder – even the murder of a President.

None of them, apparently, journeyed to the community where John Wilkes Booth lived during most of the year before he shot Lincoln. None heard the strange testimony of the man who was Booth's trusted friend and business associate throughout that fateful year. The town was Franklin, Pennsylvania, in the booming oil country; and the man was Joseph H. Simonds, partner of John Wilkes Booth in a profitable venture called the Dramatic Oil Company.

Fifty-four years ago, in the Pennsylvania oil-fields, Joseph Simonds told one of the writers of this article his story of that year when the murder of Abraham Lincoln took shape in the mind of John Wilkes Booth.

Simonds was a precise man, neat in speech and dress, with a reputation among oil men as a person of impeccable honesty. Nearly three decades after the assassination, he was still reluctant to discuss his friend's part in it. But Simonds remembered, and that day he talked about the unexplained incidents in the life of John Wilkes Booth, oil man. They cast a strange light on the subsequent actions of John Wilkes Booth, assassin.

In 1864 Joseph Simonds had been a dealer in real estate and oil leases in Franklin, Pennsylvania. Five years earlier, at nearby Titusville, Colonel Drake had drilled the world's first oil well. Liquid wealth gushed from the earth, and Americans flocked to western Pennsylvania as they once had to California's gold-fields. One of them was a brilliant, handsome young actor with jet black hair, whose name was John Wilkes Booth.

One day in 1864, Booth appeared in Franklin, Pennsylvania, and took a room at Mrs. Webber's boarding-house on Buffalo Street. Shortly afterward he came to Joseph Simonds with a letter of introduction from a man well and favorably known to the real-estate dealer. He wanted to invest in oil land.

Simonds arranged the purchase, for Booth, of sixty acres of the Fuller farm in neighboring Cranberry Township, fronting on the Allegheny River. Since this tract was larger than Booth wanted, Simonds went into partnership with him. They formed the Dramatic Oil Company, and put down three oil wells, which brought in twenty barrels each per day. With oil selling at $9.87 a barrel, the partners together grossed nearly six hundred dollars a day.

BOOTH was accustomed to living well—though only twenty-six years old, he had made as much as twenty thousand dollars a year on the stage, owned valuable bonds, and planned on expanding his oil holdings. The partners looked over several likely tracts, one near the new oil center of Bradford. Though moody at times, and not talkative, Booth could be extremely charming, and he became a favorite around town, universally admired by the ladies for the courtesy

THE NEW YC

WHOLE NO. 10,456. NEW YORK, SATURI

IMPORTANT.

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

The President Shot at the Theatre Last Evening.

SECRETARY SEWARD DAGGERED IN HIS BED,

At the close of the third act a person entered the box occupied by the President, and shot Mr. Lincoln in the head. The shot entered the back of his head, and came out above the temple.

The assassin then jumped from the box upon the stage and ran across to the other side, exhibiting a dagger in his hand, flourishing it in a tragical manner, shouting the same words repeated by the desperado at Mr. Seward's house, adding to it, "The South is avenged," and then escaped from the back entrance to the stage, but in his passage dropped his pistol and his hat.

Mr. Lincoln fell forward from his seat, and Mrs. Lincoln fainted.

The moment the astonished audience could realize what had happened, the President was taken and carried to Mr. Peterson's house in Tenth street, opposite to the theatre. Medical aid was immediately sent for, and the wound was at first supposed to be fatal, and it was announced that he could not live; but at half-past twelve he is still alive, though in a precarious condition.

As the assassin ran across the stage, Colonel J. B. Stewart, of this city, who was occupying one of the front seats in the orchestra, on the same side of the house as the box occupied by Mr. Lincoln, sprang to the stage and followed him; but he was obstructed in his passage across the stage by the fright of the actors, and reached the back door about three seconds after the assassin had passed out. Colonel Stewart got to the street just in time to see him mount his horse and ride away.

This operation shows that the whole thing was a preconcerted plan. The pistol was

THE PRESS DESPATCHES.

WASHINGTON, April 15—12:30 A. M.

The President was shot in a theatre to-night, and is perhaps mortally wounded.

SECOND DESPATCH.

WASHINGTON, April 15—1 A. M.

The President is not expected to live through the night. He was shot at a theatre.

Secretary Seward was also assassinated. No arteries were cut.

Additional Details of the Assassination.

WASHINGTON, April 15—1:30 A. M.

President Lincoln and wife, with other friends, this evening visited Ford's theatre, for the purpose of witnessing the performance of the American Cousin.

It was announced that General Grant would also be present; but that gentleman took the late train of cars for New Jersey.

The theatre was densely crowded, and all seemed delighted with the scene before them. During the third act, and while there was a temporary pause for one of the actors to enter, a sharp report of a pistol was heard, which merely attracted attention, but suggested nothing serious, until a man rushed to the front of the President's box, waving a large dagger in his right hand, and exclaiming "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" and immediately leaped from the box, which was

and refinement of his manners. Men were impressed by his ability to handle his fists. Once, on the main street of Franklin, he thrashed a brawny teamster for mistreating a horse.

Occasionally, at social gatherings, Booth could be persuaded to give dramatic recitations from Shakespeare or the Bible. He did so reluctantly, however, and he was even more reluctant to join discussions of the Civil War. Politics seemed to bore him. In the year of their association in Franklin, Simonds could not recall ever hearing Booth mention the name of Abraham Lincoln.

Booth had friends in Canada with whom he corresponded regularly, much to his partner's annoyance. Bogus Canadian oil promotions were notorious in the Pennsylvania oil country, and Simonds feared that his young partner might be swindled in some questionable transaction. Deaf to all warnings, Booth continued his unexplained Canadian correspondence. He gave the stamps from his Canadian letters to a boy next door who collected them. No one in Franklin, Simonds least of all, suspected that the friendly, courteous young actor might be arranging not some Canadian oil deal, but the murder of the President of the United States.

Suddenly one day Booth told Simonds that he had to go to Canada on business. Again his friend tried to dissuade him, but Booth insisted that he could take care of himself. He seemed so annoyed that Simonds dropped the subject.

Booth came back from Canada worried and depressed. He talked of going to California, and said that his associates in Canada wanted him to go into something that he absolutely would have no part in. The project was senseless, he told Simonds but he refused to say anything more. He was touchy and ill-humored, and that night he drank heavily

NEXT day – a morning early in April, 1865—Booth told Simonds he was going to Washington to put a stop to the senseless scheme his associates had proposed. He was still disturbed and irrational, and admitted that he had been unable to sleep all night. Simonds tried to persuade him to wait until he was in a calmer mood, but he packed a small satchel and said he would sleep *en route*. He left most of his clothing and belongings in his room at Mrs. Webber's, told her he'd be back in a few days, and stepped aboard the Washington train to keep his tragic appointment with history.

The next news Simonds had of John Wilkes Booth was the paralyzing report of the murder of Lincoln. For nearly two weeks afterward, black headlines told the rest of the story. Booth was hunted through Maryland, trapped in Farmer Garrett's tobacco barn near Bowling Green, Virginia, and fatally wounded by Federal troops. In the dying man's pocket, the avengers found a bill of exchange drawn on a Canadian bank.

Whom did Booth meet in Canada? His trip across the border must have been connected with the Lincoln plot. But what unknown pressure changed the apparently reluctant conspirator of Franklin, Pennsylvania, into the trigger man of Ford's Theater?

Several possibilities appear: Perhaps Booth went to Canada to consult the commissioners of Jefferson Davis' so-called "Canadian Cabinet." A number of Confederate agents, headed by Jacob Thompson, former Governor of Mississippi, had been stationed in Montreal throughout the Civil War, fomenting sabotage and raids into Union territory. They were the obvious persons for an assas-

)RK HERALD.

)AY, APRIL 15, 1865. PRICE, TEN CENTS.

LATEST

EXTRA!

8:10 A. M.

New York. Saturday, April 15, 1865.

DEATH OF THE PRESIDENT

Further

sin to make contact with. But after the war, the United States Government made every effort to convict Southern leaders of complicity in the death of Lincoln. Try as they did, Federal prosecutors could produce no convincing evidence to implicate Jefferson Davis or his agents.

Certain Government officers north of the Mason-Dixon line likewise had scant love for Lincoln. For the North's Radical Republicans, Lincoln's conciliatory post-war policy loomed as a threat to their continued party power. In 1867 one powerful Radical Republican, Lincoln's own Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, was publicly accused on the floor of Congress of having a part in his chief's murder. The charge was never proved—or disproved; but it is known that at least once during the war Stanton sent his former law partner to Canada on a secret personal mission. Did Stanton's emissary meet Booth in Montreal to arrange the murder of Lincoln?

JOSEPH SIMONDS himself was privately convinced of a third alternative. He thought the plot to kill Lincoln had been initiated by British hotheads in Canada, who obtained Booth's pledge of support before revealing their murderous intent. Throughout the Civil War, some members of the British aristocracy had backed the Confederacy with everything from propaganda to armed privateers. John Wilkes Booth—like his noted father, tragedian Junius Brutus Booth—was strongly pro-British. Once, in a conversation at Franklin, young Booth had volunteered one of his rare comments on the war. It was a strange remark, and Simonds remembered it. A British fleet, Booth said enigmatically, might appear off Virginia and trap Grant's army, just as a French fleet had once come in at the same spot to pin down Cornwallis and end the Revolutionary War.

Simond's theory is only a theory, no easier to prove than any other. But his recollections of his ill-starred young partner were factual, and from them certain probabilities emerge. These do not tally with the commonly accepted version of Booth's part in the Lincoln assassination. From Simonds' testimony, it would appear, first, that the death of Lincoln may have been planned in Canada, by a person or persons unknown. Second, Booth was not the guiding spirit of the plot, and possibly not even a willing accomplice. Third, the young oil man who left Franklin for Washington that morning in 1865 did not have murder in his heart.

Simonds reasoned that the gang in Washington, not necessarily the small fry later arrested and tried, had so committed themselves that they insisted on going through with the killing in spite of Booth's protests. Quite possibly lots were drawn, Booth got the fatal slip, and considered that, as a man of honor, he had to go through with it. Simonds could imagine no other explanation for the unwilling Booth's dramatic about-face.

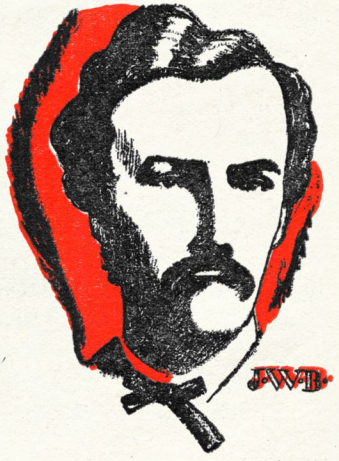
A man going to Washington to shoot the President of the United States would obviously take with him as much get-away money as he could beg or borrow. Booth did not. He had money in the bank at Franklin. He made no attempt to withdraw it, or to sell or borrow on his oil holdings, which were prime security. (The wells remained in the hands of his heirs until 1869.) He did not even ask his partner for money. Instead, Booth left town with his assets untouched, his business flourishing, and several new oil deals on the fire. He asked Simonds particularly not to lend anyone a book which he was reading with an eye to its stage possibilities. As Simonds remembered it, the book was Eugene Sue's "The Wandering Jew."

THERE was every indication that Booth intended to return to Franklin in a few days and to take up again the life of a prosperous oil producer and a popular young man-about-town. As he said good-by to Simonds, he expressed disappointment at not finding in the morning mail a letter from the local belle he had been seeing.

A boy brought the letter shortly after Booth left. It was later opened by Simonds, who hoped it might contain some clue to the events which had made his young partner the criminal of the century. Simonds was still shamefaced, nearly thirty years after, when he admitted opening his friend's mail.

Had that letter arrived an hour earlier, Simonds believed, John Wilkes Booth might never have gone to Washington that morning in April, 1865. It was signed affectionately by the prettiest girl in town, and she asked Booth to come to her without delay. Booth climbed aboard the train to Washington never knowing that the lady of his heart had summoned him elsewhere.

The fate of a nation's best-loved President may have ridden that morning with a small boy delivering a young lady's love-letter. It came too late.



King

"Sell the derby winner!" Slocumb snorted. "You must be nuts."

"WHAT is it?" demanded Stu Slocumb. "I'm askin' you—what the hell is it?" I looked at the prancing pups behind the chicken-wire enclosure. Even at three months, most of them bore the indubitable markings of racing greyhounds of good breed—bright, fiery eyes; small ears falling gracefully in half-folds; beam-like, slightly arched backs; straight legs, wide apart and muscular; large round feet, toes well sprung; fine, close coats.

But Slocumb had singled out an exception—a notable exception, now making himself conspicuous with a tongue-licking, tail-waving display of affection for the master whose stumpy forefinger pointed at him through the wire opening.

"He looks like a staghound," I said.

"Bag o' bone," Slocumb snorted. "An' look at that sheepdog coat, would you? An' those spaniel eyes?" He pushed the pup's nuzzling muzzle away with a sharp movement of his hand. "I can't figure what Black Stell was up to. Nine or ten would be enough for any respectable bitch, but she has to whelp thirteen, includin' this kiyi. I'm just unlucky."

The pup was sitting on his haunches, looking up at us quizzically. It was true, I thought. If he was a greyhound, he was the strangest one I'd seen in four years of covering dog tracks for the Miami *Post*.

He was a good two inches taller than his brothers and sisters, and he was mostly bones—bones protruding under the thick coal-black coat at his shoulders and haunches; bones ridged along his arched back; bones sticking out from his elbows and giving him a slightly bowed appearance: bones making his hocks seem too long and his almost square feet appear even larger than they were. His ears, too, were much too big for his long bony head: one stood erect in a broad triangle; the other flopped comically.

While Slocumb continued to excoriate Black Stell for mothering this queer offspring, the offspring himself regarded Slocumb affectionately out of soft brown eyes.

"I'm gonna sell Black Stell to Judge Simpson," Slocumb said, chewing angrily on the stogie between his uneven yellow teeth. "She ain't worth a tinker's dam. Three litters, an' not a winner yet. . . . The Judge's been sweet on Stell ever since she won the derby five years ago. And brother, do I need the dough!"

A fine-looking brindle pup, small but perfectly formed, pranced up to the fence. Slocumb reached a thick hand through the wire and patted her receptive muzzle.

"Pick of the litter," he said, his mood changing. "Spittin' image of Black Stell. Named her Lady Stell. Bet the Judge 'll pay high for her, just because she looks like the dam."

"Are you going to sell her too?" I asked.

"Sure," Slocumb answered shortly, and scratched his pug nose, which looked like a cork stopper in his round, leathery face. "I got a theory, you know, 'bout Black Stell. I been readin' up on this hereditary business." He stuck his thumbs in his vest pockets, and his small green eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Ever' now and then, this hereditary crosses you up. I mean you get you a good dog an' a good bitch, but the pups are no 'count. Maybe you have two, three generations—all no 'count. Then something happens: out of a no-'count bitch and a no-'count dog you get a winner. A freak, you might say. Take Black Stell. Her great-grandsire was All Alone, the Aussie champeen; but in between there wasn't nothin' worth mentionin'. Why, I picked her up for peanuts. Just liked her looks. An' if I do say it myself, I know dogs. I can look at 'em, an' I can tell."

It was probably true, I thought: Stu Slocumb did know dogs. Fifteen of his forty years had been spent around the tracks. At his little shack near the Seminole settlement he had bred racing greyhounds for ten of those years—bred them, raced them and sold them, and had managed to stay solvent. And that was something—for dog-racing is not an easy livelihood for the small owner.

"Like I say," Slocumb went on, "Black Stell popped up out of nowhere. Now, she was a good bitch. I ain't takin' away from Stell. But this hereditary book was pointin' out that there's one thing that almost always works out 'bout these freaks. They're throw-backs to the good blood in their great-grandpappies or their great-granddams, an' they got nothin' left to give the next generation.

"GET it? There ain't more'n a chance in a thousand that one of Stell's pups can run like she could. But I'm countin' on the Judge not knowin' 'bout them in-between dogs. He's just an amatoor." He spat the word contemptuously, and puffed up his small cock-of-the-walk frame. "I'll talk about Black Stell an' I'll talk about All Alone, an' I'll take him. You'll see."

Languidly, Lady Stell licked at his extended forefinger. The bony pup rose from his haunches and moved hopefully toward the wire fence. Then he stuck his muzzle next to Lady

Bones

He wasn't a specially attractive pup, but he had lots of character, and he made history on the dog track.

by

BILL GOODE

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

Stell's and began to lick the finger too. Slocumb pushed him away, and Lady Stell, as if sharing his contempt, nipped sharply at the bony one's flopping ear. The black pup offered no resistance, but turned resignedly and settled back on his haunches, an unprovocative distance from Lady Stell.

"Rags!" Slocumb put his short, stubby hands to his mouth and yelled again. "Rags!"

A tall, slightly bent Negro stepped from the door of the doghouse at the back of the enclosure.

"Yessuh."

"Get that clown out of here!" Slocumb pointed at the bony pup. "The Judge is due here any minute, an' I don't want that kiyi around."

Rags walked up to the bony pup, carefully wiped his gnarled hands on his soiled overalls, and touched the pup's head gently.

"This 'un?" he asked.

"I ain't talkin' about Lucky Sir," Slocumb snorted.

"Nossuh," said Rags, "nossuh. . . . C'mere, Bones. C'mere, honey." The pup lifted loving eyes to the dark wrinkled face, and rose and licked his fingers.

"What'll I do with him?" Rags asked Slocumb.

"Hide him. Drown him. I don't give a damn."

"You oughtn't to talk that way in front of Bones," Rags said in his soft, drawling voice.

Slocumb laughed. "That boy thinks that dog can understand things just like you an' me." He waited until Rags, the bony pup trailing at his heels, was out of hearing. "But he's a good dog man."

As Rags reached the door to the hut, he turned.

"Mistuh Slocumb," he called, speaking slowly as if he had been turning his boss' order over in his mind, "I can't drown Bones. Nossuh,"—he bent over and petted the pup—"I ain't gonna do that to you, Bones."

Bones responded with an un-doglike chirp and an enthusiastic wag of his long furry tail.

"Oh, hell," Slocumb said. "You don't have to drown him. Just keep him out of sight."

"Mistuh Slocumb,"—Rags was still standing at the door,—"can I—can I have this pup? Jus' for my own?"

Slocumb grunted disgustedly. "You can have him; you can drown him; you can give him away! I don't care. Just don't let nobody know that he's out of Black Stell."

"Yessuh. I sho' won't." Rags took Bones in his arms and carried him into the shack, the pup making a low whinnying sound—like a horse when you've given him an extra lump of sugar. . . .

Judge Simpson bought Black Stell, and Lady Stell too. He must have paid a good price. For out of the proceeds Slocumb purchased a juvenile, Chattahoochee Queen, who proved to be one of the half-dozen best pups at the Miami tracks that winter.

When I saw him just before the end of the season, he was filled with new confidence. "I'm on my way to the big dough at last," he told me. "Up to now, it's been hand-to-mouth. I never had the stake to breed my dogs proper. But the Queen is gonna be my ticket to prosperity."

He had got rid of all of Black Stell's litter along with the disappointing dam, he said, "—all except that bastard Bones. You know, that Rags, he claims Bones can talk. Says he's knowed dogs before that could listen, but Bones is the only one he ever knowed that can talk too." He guffawed. "I couldn't sell that mutt like the others. And I couldn't give him away. So I just let Rags keep him. Why, Rags even sleeps with Bones!"

DURING the summer months when the dogs are North, I spend my time covering the baseball news, but occasionally I write a color piece on the greyhounds. It keeps me in trim, and it pleases the inveterate dog fans among the natives.

One day late in August, when the baseball game had been rained out, I decided to do a feature on the "conversational" greyhound. I drove out to Stu Slocumb's place to see Rags.

He and the bony black pup met me at the door. Bones, a year old now, was much bigger, of course, but still as bony as ever. He wagged his tail furiously when he saw me, and let out a few pleasant yelps.

"He's tellin' you how-de-do," Rags said. "Take the genulman's hat, honey, and put it on the table."

Bones took my old Panama lightly between his teeth and carried it, with as much dignity as his long bowlegs permitted, to the big living-room table.

Then he came back and sat expectantly at Rags' feet.

We must have talked for an hour. Rags carried on a conversation with both of us. And before the interview was over, I found that I too was speaking to Bones as if he could understand.

"That's the smartest, nicest dog I ever seen," Rags said. "He's jus' too nice fo' his own good. But he ain't yellah. Nossuh, he's got heart."

And he told me about Big Busher Boy — one of Slocumb's old racers, long since retired, who had been noted more for his meanness than for his speed.

"Busher Boy kep' pickin' an' pickin' at Bones. He'd nip him heah and nip him theah. One day he tore a big place in Bones' ear." Rags reached down and picked up the big flopping ear and showed me the tear. "Well, Bones talked to him first. He told him good an' plenty to leave him alone. But Busher Boy kep' at him, an' finally Bones jus' turn on him an' beat the Ol' Nick outa him!"

"Bones beat Big Busher Boy?" I looked at the soft spaniel-like eyes and couldn't believe it.

"He did that!" Rags said proudly. "Then, you know what he done? Ol' Busher was bleedin' an' lyin' theah on the groun' pantin' hard, an' Bones —well, he mumbled to himself a little, an' then he goes up an' tells Busher Boy he's sorry, an' starts lickin' his cuts real sympathetic-like."

THE rain had stopped, and I asked Rags to take me to the kennels. There were only a few dogs in the shack: Big Busher Boy, in a cage to himself, and a half-dozen juveniles. Rags shook his head disconsolately and sat down on the cot which, when Slocumb was home, was his bed.

"Bad luck—that's what it is," he said. "Bad luck. They ain't one of these pups can run. He shouldn't of let Judge Simpson have Lady Stell.

"You know what the Judge tol' me? He was by heah last week. He claim those people in Oklahoma tell him Lady Stell gonna be another Black Stell."

Judge Simpson, I knew, like other prosperous Florida dog-owners, sent his pups to Oklahoma for special training when they were six or seven months old. There, in a climate which is generally regarded as healthier for growing dogs, they went through coursing school. In it they learned to start from the box, chased

Lady Stell was quoted at 4 to 1 on the odds board.

giant jackrabbits to give them the excitement of the lure and increase their speed, and finally trained on a regulation track and pursued the artificial rabbit, as in a real race.

But Stu Slocumb, like many small owners, did his own training—with Rags' invaluable help.

I asked Rags how Chattahoochee Queen was making out on the Northern tracks. What few reports I had read indicated she was doing well.

"Oh, she doin' fine," Rags said. "But it's Mistuh Slocumb who ain't doin' so good." He turned his wrinkled brown face toward me and spoke sadly. "Mistuh Slocumb—he been good to me, an' I oughtn't to say it—but he loves money too much. I tell you, it ain't a good thing fo' a man to love money mo' than his dogs."

He looked thoughtfully at Bones, and the pup made a low throaty sound as if in sorrowful agreement.

"You see, Chattahoochee Queen been winnin' right regular till they start puttin' her in the hot boxes. She's a good dog, but she ain't no Black Stell. An' so she get beat. An' Mistuh Slocumb bet heavy on her, an' lose. An' then he get mad at Chattahoochee, an' say she's a no-'count dog.

"The Judge say Mistuh Slocumb wired him fo' a hundred bucks, week befo' last."

Rags shook his head again. "I'm 'fraid Mistuh Slocumb ain't never gonna learn."

Before I left I asked him, jokingly, if Bones was ever going to race.

He looked at me soberly.

"Nossuh," he said, putting a friendly hand on the dog's muzzle. "He's too much a genulman. You know what I did." He chuckled—a throaty, reminiscent chuckle. "I train Bones to do everything like the other pups. I put the meat in front of the box, an' teach 'em to start quick-like. Only, I don't have to do that for Bones. I jus' tell him, an' he do it. But then I put him in the yard theah" —he waved toward the fenced-in area— "with a live rabbit.

"An' you know what he done? He chase that rabbit all over, an' then he catch him. He take him real gentle-like in his big mouth, an' he set him down an' talk to him. An' the rabbit look at him, an' I swear he almost smile, an' befo' I know it, Bones an' that rabbit is playin' together like ol' friends."

Bones emitted a couple of soft bark-like notes, and Rags said: "Yes, honey, that's jus' what you done."

"So then," Rags went on, "I put him on the track with that stuffed bunny." He pointed to the small home-made oval at the back of the shack. "I run the bunny around like I does fo' all the other pups, but Bones jus' look at me an' then he look at the bunny, and don't do nothin.' I say: 'Chase it, Bones, chase it!' An' he look at me again, an' then, jus' like he decided to humor me, like, he start off half-hearted runnin' after that stuffed bunny. But all the time he knowed it wasn't real.

"Nossuh. I'm 'fraid Bones ain't never gonna be no racin' dog. He jus' too smart an' too much a genulman."

I wrote the story and slugged it "RAGS AND BONES." I didn't quite believe it all, but I wrote it as if it were true—just as Rags, in the warmth of his affection for the queer-looking greyhound, had related it. I recall now that, as I turned in my copy that evening, I thought it was the last I'd write about Bones. A story like that might be good once; but that was all.

But I wasn't through with Bones—or Rags, either.

DECEMBER 1 is the big day for Florida dog fans. Biscayne usually starts running November 15; the others hold their inaugurals two weeks later. I was writing a pre-opening story on the big new Everglades track when I noticed among the entries in the first race: *"No. 7—Bones Wt. 73 Black D."*

And sure enough, the owner and trainer was listed as *S. Ragsworth.*

Still a little dubious because of what Rags had said about Bones' racing potentialities, I put in a phone-call to Stu Slocumb.

He laughed. "Hell, yes, it's Rags' Bones. It's no joke, though it'll probably turn out to be one on them dumb suckers who bet on him. I wouldn't've let him do it, but with all the other tracks openin' tomorrow, they're short on dogs at Everglades and asked me to help 'em fill the card."

"But Rags said he couldn't run," I protested.

"He can't. You should see him. You were right—he's a staghound. He ain't no greyhound. Awkward as all get-out."

I knew that no dog could run on the Florida tracks until he'd been schooled at least twice, so I asked him how Bones had performed in the schooling races.

He guffawed. "That's what got Rags all excited. I'd been kiddin'

him about his dog, an' he kept tellin' me Bones was too much of a gentleman to race. I kept after him, an' he got kinda sore, an' one night last week he took Rags over to Everglades an' put him in a schoolin' race. Didn't tell me nothin' about it beforehand.

"Then he comes back that night all worked up, an' tells me Rags won. I checked up. You know how them schoolin' races are. These trainers ain't anxious to win, because they want their dogs handicapped down in company they can beat when the real races come along.

"There was just five dogs in the race, an' I figure all of 'em but Rags had a nice big hamburger before they run, 'cause Rags wins that schoolin' race in the slowest time I ever heard of for the futurity. Guess what it was —33 seconds flat! Would you believe it!" He laughed again.

I knew there was some truth in what Slocumb said. Dog racing, of course, is one of the straightest sports in the book. There are no jockeys to fix, and if you try to stimulate a dog, you'll either kill him or make him so sick he can't run at all. And compared to some of the "amateur" sports, it's purer than new-fallen snow. In the early days, when it wasn't so closely supervised, there were occasional instances of dogs being substituted, and of them being fed or watered just before a race to slow them down. There were even reports of trainers slipping rubber bands around the feet or placing chewing gum between the toes to slow up a favorite. But now the dogs are kept in the custody of officials of the State racing commission for several hours before every race, and checked and re-checked, weighed and re-weighed; and no trainer or owner is allowed to handle them until the race is run.

But this safety measure is often ignored for schooling races, and some trainers take it for granted that other dogs are being slowed down and take steps to see that their own are similarly handled. After all, no one bets on the schoolings. Its purpose is primarily to see that the dogs have been properly trained in racing technique.

I STUCK in a couple of paragraphs on the début of Bones, the "conversational" pup. And something—perhaps a hunch, perhaps sentiment—made me leave the press box early the next evening and put a fin on Bones to win. It's something I rarely do, because I've been around the tracks long enough to know that gambling on the greyhounds is a shortcut to the poorhouse.

I wandered to the rail and watched the opening ceremonies. It's a pretty sight, and one that always gives me a thrill. In the stands a band struck up the "Star Spangled Banner." The

Bones: 8 to 1. I borrowed what I could; put it on Bones.

early arrivals, bright and colorful in their warm-weather clothing, stood at lazy attention.

The dogs pranced onto the track—each muzzled, blanketed in his distinctive colors, and led by a red-uniformed groom. The chief groom headed the procession, doing a fancy cakewalk to the music of the band. I glanced at the odds board. They were all young pups except one—an oldster with little speed named Rocky Roister. The odds were fairly even. Rocky Roister was at 6 to 1. Bones at 10 to 1.

I looked back at the dogs. There is a trick most of them learn quickly—a beautiful, graceful prance in time with the music. They had it now, as they passed the judges' stand—all except Number 7. Bones was ambling along in time with nothing but his own awkward whims. His groom kept tugging sharply at his leash. Occasionally Bones would look up at him and wag his tail.

They paraded twice in front of the judges' stand. There was the final inspection, and they all passed. I thought the judge took a longer time with Bones than with the others, and to my surprise, I felt a growing excitement as the lanky, awkward pup was approved. For Rags' sake, for the sake of that fin, I wanted Bones to win.

The procession moved down the track toward the starting-box. The voice booming over the public-address system announced that two minutes remained to post bets.

It was, as usual, a long two minutes. And the odds on the electric board flashed two complete changes. Bones was at 16 to 1. Then 25 to 1. I wasn't surprised. Many bettors wait until they've seen the dogs before risking their money. And Bones' appearance wasn't calculated to inspire confidence.

I was watching the tote board when suddenly a big laugh went up from the crowd. I looked toward the starting-box. Seven of the dogs were standing in an attitude of tense alertness, straining at their leashes, waiting to be placed in their stalls. But No. 7 wasn't. No. 7 was lying flat on the ground, his long, hairy black tail waving gently in the warm breeze, his eyes turned happily toward the crowd. At least, I consoled myself, Bones appeared to be enjoying himself.

The buzzer sounded, closing the betting windows. The grooms started putting the dogs in their stalls in the starting-box. The closing odds went up. Bones was at 40 to 1.

I looked back toward the box. No. 7 was taking his time entering the stall. His disgusted groom was tugging and pushing impatiently. Bones' head was turned toward him, and I could imagine the hurt expression in those soft ungreyhound-like eyes.

The grooms trotted in military formation down the track and off into the green infield. The lights on the far side of the oval flashed up. The band mounted a loud crescendo. The buzz of the mechanical rabbit, moving swiftly along the inner rail of the track, set the dogs barking wildly in the starting-box.

WHEN the rabbit was forty feet beyond the box, the mechanical doors sprang open.

The veteran, Rocky Roister, got the jump from the No. 2 stall and went immediately to the rail. The young pups, running wide, were in full chase.

I was opposite the judges' stand. When the pack passed me, Rocky Roister was a good two lengths in front and moving smoothly and wisely. No. 1 and No. 8 were neck and neck in second place, but they were running wide, almost in the middle of the track. I looked for Bones.

He was seventh, a half-length in front of No. 4, who had been jammed at the start, and a good five lengths back of Rocky Roister. But one thing I noted: Bones was hugging the rail and running easily in great, loping strides.

Rags was right about one thing, at least, I mused: Bones had sense.

I lost Bones at the first turn. Going down the backstretch I caught sight of No. 8, a large white pup named Lass Lucy. She was moving up fast on the outside, neck and neck with Rocky Roister, who was beginning to fade but still clinging to the rail. Three lengths back, the pack was grouped except for two dogs.

No. 4 was far back, having given up. But two lengths behind the pack and still loping easily along the rail, was Bones.

At the far turn I heard a cry—faint but clear above the noise of the crowd which was now cheering Lass Lucy's move to the front.

"Pick up them legs, Bones, and *run!*" And then a loud, confident: "C'mon theah, honey!"

I may have imagined it, because the dogs were a good two hundred feet

away, but I am almost willing to swear that No. 7's head jerked up, that he seemed to listen for just a split second, and that then, in great leaping strides, he began to move up. There was a scramble at the turn, and I caught a glimpse of a black dog cutting through the center of the pack.

At the near turn leading into the homestretch, Lass Lucy swung wide. I heard a shrill, excited cry from the crowd, and suddenly, blazing through close to the rail, the big bowlegged black pup, both ears erect now, cut into second place not a length behind the white bitch.

Lass Lucy is a sturdy performer, as the records show, and she put on a strong finish. But Bones' huge strides ate up the distance between them. He passed Lass Lucy twenty feet from the finish, and with a final burst of speed, crossed the wire a length in front.

From somewhere along the rail I heard a happy shout: "That's my honey!"

Bones' tail began to wag furiously, and he pulled up short of the blanket, which is used to halt the dogs, turned around, and galloped happily back past the judges' stand.

I glanced at the electric timer. Bones had run the futurity—1485 feet—in 31.1 seconds. It was slow time.

Three nights later Bones ran again. Once again he ambled awkwardly down the track; once again he lay prone on the dirt and waved his tail at the crowd when the pups reached the starting-box. And once again the fans, apparently convinced that the initial victory of this queer-looking animal had been a fluke, let the odds go long against him. He was 15 to 1 at post time.

The race was almost a duplicate of the first one. Bones was jammed at the start and fell eight lengths behind. In the backstretch, running easy and relaxed and hugging the rail, he narrowed the gap to five lengths.

AT the far turn he made his move through the pack, and at the near turn, he cut through to the rail and was only a length behind. He took the homestretch like a pocket edition of Whirlaway, and won going away by a length and a half.

I thought I had never seen a juvenile race with as much savvy before.

That night I left the track early and stopped by Stu Slocumb's place on my way to the *Post*. The house was dark, but there were lights in the shack. I heard talking as I walked up to the door.

Bones, his black coat shining from the vigorous massage that all racing dogs get after they've run, was resting on Rags' cot, one paw in the elderly Negro's hand. Rags was giving the dog's nails a careful manicure.

"Jus' one minute, honey, an' I'll get yo' suppeh," Rags was murmuring. And Bones made a sound that might have meant: "I could use some grub."

I broke in on the colloquy, and congratulated Rags on the triumphs of his protégé.

He showed his white teeth in a proud smile, but it passed quickly.

"He ain't exactly my proteejay no more," he sighed. "Mistuh Slocumb done made me sign the papeh tonight. He give 'im to me, an' then he took 'im away." He paused and then went on softly: "I guess it's right. Like he said, no co't would reco'nize Bones was my dog. Said I didn't give nothin' fo' him, so it wasn't legal. I don't rightly care – 'cept fo' one thing: Mistuh Slocumb don't understan' Bones. Mos' dogs, he know fine. Mos' dogs jus' like mos' folks. Give 'em a place to live an' food, an' reward 'em when they does good an' spank 'em when they does bad, an' everything go along fine.

"But Bones ain't mos' dogs. Bones is diff'runt. Bones need love. Yessuh, give Bones love, an' he beat Lucky Sir."

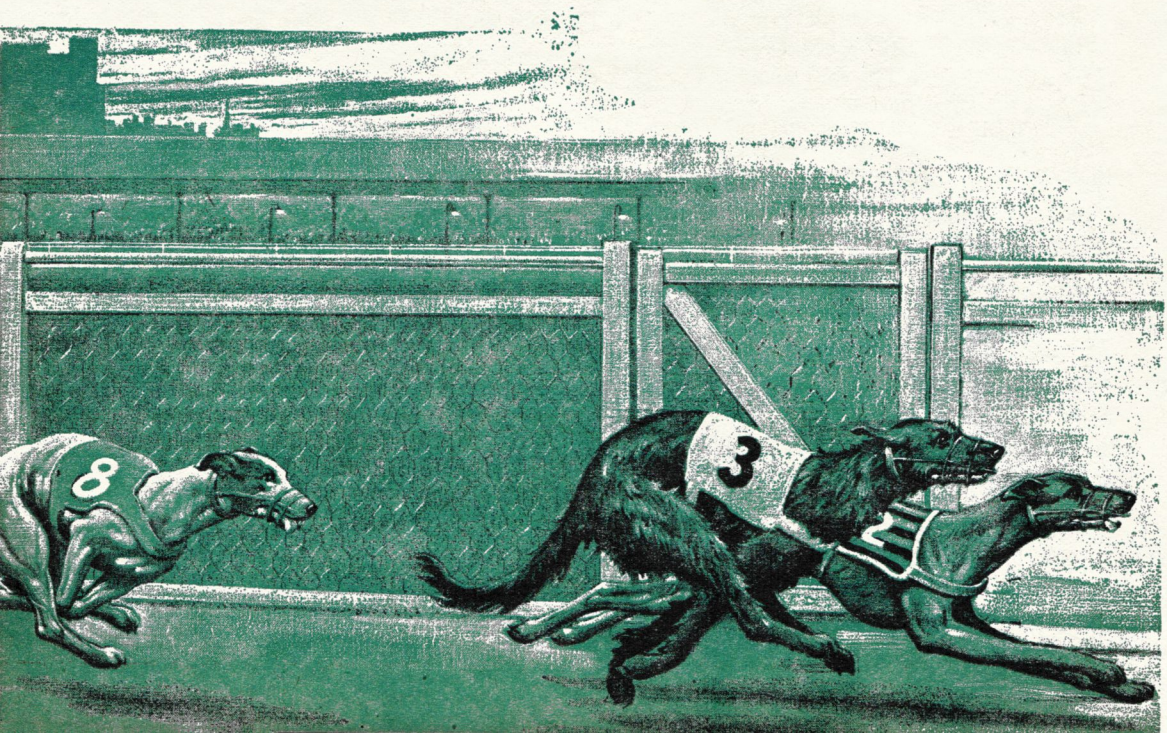
I started to protest, but something in Rags' manner deterred me. He really believed that!

"Nossuh," he went on, as if he had read my thoughts, "I know Bones' time ain't so good. But jus' you wait. He'll win, an' then he'll win again, an' every time he'll beat a l'il' bit better dog, an' by-an'-by won't be nobody can beat him!"

He got up and went to the table and prepared Bones' supper dish.

"Mistuh Slocumb laugh at me, but he don't understan' Bones. I didn't, fo' a long time. I thought 'cause Bones wouldn't hurt that live bunny an' wouldn't chase that ol' stuffed rabbit,

Bones ran those last one hundred feet as he had never run before . . . Now he was second.



he couldn't race. An' he looked so funny"—he lowered his voice so that Bones, who was now busily feasting on ground steak, onions, bran and carrots, wouldn't hear—"I jus' figgered he wasn't no racin' dog. But I was wrong." He raised his voice, and Bones looked up from the plate and mumbled contentedly. "I was wrong, wasn't I, honey? All Bones need was competition. He don't chase no fool rabbit full of stuffin's; but give him another dog to race, an' he beat any of 'em! Yessuh, he got the heart of a champeen!". . . .

Two nights later Bones ran again. He had been moved up to the second race because of his earlier victories, and his competition was a little tougher. But once again he cut through the pack on the far turn, sliced through to the rail at the near one, and closed fast in the stretch to win by a length. His time was a respectable 30.3.

Musing that Rags might possibly—just possibly—be right, that Bones ran only hard enough to beat his toughest competitor, and that he was capable of much greater speed, I wandered down to the cooling-lot where Bones and seven other dogs were walking off the sweat of their exertions.

Stu Slocumb was there, a quizzical expression on his small round face. Leaning against the fence, his green eyes were fixed on the lanky black pup.

"It'd sure be funny," he said to me, "if that staghound turned out to be a champ. I didn't believe it was possible. I ain't won a cent on that dog—believe it or not—'cause I figured them first two wins was flukes.

"Well, he'll be up against Chattahoochee Queen next time out, if I can arrange it. I want to see how much he's got."

"Kind of pushing Bones, huh?"

"Hell, I want to *know!* I don't want to build my hopes up like I done on Chattahoochee and get let down. . . . Yessir, I was just standin' here thinkin' how nice it'd be if Rags was right and that stupid-lookin' animal turned out to be a real meal ticket."

BONES went to the post at 10 to 1 against Chattahoochee Queen, who was odds-on favorite. It was his first race at five-sixteenths of a mile, but recalling how well he had finished before, I was confident that at the longer distance he'd be at his best. I put another five-spot on his nose.

When they reached the near turn into the homestretch, I was sure I had made a mistake. Either Bones was out of his class, or he had underestimated the Queen's speed. He was still three lengths back after he'd cut in at the rail; and worse, Chattahoochee Queen was on the inside.

I heard that high, confident cry above the crowd's clatter:

"Win for ol' Rags, honey, an' you'll be mine!"

"You can do it, honey!"

Bones tore down the stretch and crossed the finish line a half-length in front of Chattahoochee Queen. The electric timer showed 32.1 for the five-sixteenths. It was good time. . . .

Bones' conquest of Chattahoochee Queen was really the beginning of his extraordinary popularity.

As he trotted, in that long bow-legged stride, back past the starting line, someone started to applaud. Surprisingly, a good portion of the crowd took it up. Bones stopped abruptly, turned, faced the stands, and wagged his long furry tail happily.

It was so obviously an act of acknowledgment and appreciation—as deliberate as that of a baseball player who doffs his cap to the crowd after a home run—that it won the spectators completely. They cheered and stamped their approval.

It was then that someone shouted the name that was to follow the black dog the rest of his days: "Good old King Bones!"

It was a little premature, of course, but it stuck. And when Bones, moving up into the hot boxes, won his next eight starts and twice tied the track record for the five-sixteenths, I began to wonder if the name might not, after all, be appropriate.

Stu Slocumb backed Bones heavily and enjoyed the flush of unaccustomed prosperity. He appeared in a new green convertible; he painted his house; he bought several promising young juveniles.

"Sure, I'm spendin' it," he told me one day in January. "But as long as I got Bones, I ain't worryin'. I never seen such a dog!"

There was, I gathered, only one fly in the ointment. Lady Stell, far from proving Judge Simpson a sucker, had turned out a winner. Her record was almost as impressive as Bones'. She had won seven of eight starts at Miami Beach.

"The Judge is movin' her over to Everglades next week," Slocumb said. "He claims Lady Stell can beat Bones. That's one mistake that's gonna cost him plenty."

Toward the end of that week I got a call from Rags. He was worried, he said, because Bones had been running too often, and had a sore foot.

"I keep tellin' Mistuh Slocumb, but he won't listen," Rags complained. "All he think about is winnin' mo' money."

He asked me to speak to Slocumb, and reluctantly—because I couldn't see how it was my concern—I told Rags I would.

That very night I forgot my promise, because Bones blazed home a length in front of last year's juvenile champion in the feature race. It did not seem an appropriate time to tell Slocumb that his speedster couldn't run because he had a sore foot.

Bones, by this time, had become the most publicized dog in Florida. His bony frame, like Babe Ruth's spindly ankles, had once seemed a limitation. Now it had become a distinctive trademark, setting him apart from less able but more orthodox-looking competitors.

COLUMNS were written comparing Bones favorably with the great dogs of racing history: with Mission Boy, who won thirty-eight of forty starts over a three-year period and established five world records at the first American track at Emoryville, California, twenty-five years ago; with Rural Rube, the great champion and sire of the late thirties, who was once guest of honor at a banquet at Boston's Ritz Carlton Hotel; with Mick the Miller, the great British champion, who, at death, was stuffed at the expense of His Majesty's Government so that his fame might be perpetuated; with Never Roll, who in one summer at Boston set four world records and tied another; and with the more recent greats: Flashy Sir, Bit of Buzz, Lucky Sir. . . .

A distinguished scientist was quoted in explanation of the hereditary puzzle. The strain of All Alone had persisted, he said, through two disappointing generations to reappear, first in the bitch Black Stell, and then, in full flower, in King Bones. And research brought out the hitherto neglected fact that All Alone had also been an ungainly-looking greyhound; that when he first appeared at the Queensland track, in 1927, dog men derided the too-big animal with the long floppy ears, the furry tail, and the hind feet that seemed to have been patterned after flatboats.

I did a little research, too, and discovered a great champion of a score of years ago who, spiritually at least, was akin to Bones. It was the bitch Sunny

Concern, who steadfastly refused to run against the mechanical bunny alone, who considered live rabbits ideal playmates, and who did her best only when the competition was keen.

Bones went to the box against Lady Stell a prohibitive favorite. The electric board flashed 1 to 2 opposite his name. Lady Stell, despite her fine record, closed at 8 to 1.

Around the press box it was common knowledge that Stu Slocumb had not only backed Bones heavily at the betting windows, but had put up five thousand dollars against three of Judge Simpson's that Bones would beat his speedy sister to the wire.

THE first thing I noticed about Bones that night was that his tail was between his legs as he ambled down the track; and second, when the dogs waited at the starting-box while last-minute bets were made Bones did not recline in the familiar prone position, but stood quiet and tense.

Bones had the No. 1 stall, generally regarded as the most favorable. I thought that perhaps accounted for the curious race he ran. For this time he did not wait for the far turn to make his break. He took the lead at the start, and passed the stands the first time two lengths in front. Lady Stell had started slowly from the three position, and was fifth.

As they moved down the backstretch, Bones was still two lengths in front, but Lady Stell had pushed into second place and was moving fast. Bones, hugging the rail, seemed to falter at the far turn. The graceful brindle pup, running around him, appeared at one point to pass him, but Bones had the shorter route, and as they rounded the turn into the homestretch, the two pups were neck and neck. No other dog was near them.

"C'mon theah, honey! Lift them legs, honey!" The familiar voice sounded strained, nervous, above the clamor of the fans. And suddenly that clamor mounted into a surprised, excited roar. For Bones, whose victories had been gained in his great stretch drives, began to fade as they neared the finish. Lady Stell stuck her brindle head in front; then, suddenly, there was light between the two pups, and Lady Stell flashed past the wire going away, the winner by two lengths.

Another shout went up from the crowd when the timer flashed: 31.2. The little brindle bitch had tied the track record.

As Bones stopped short of the blanket, turned, and ambled slowly back past the stands, a disappointed bettor yelled: "Go on home, Bag o' Bones!" And another shouted disgustedly: "King Bones, hell!"

Bones' shoulders seem to sag and his tail went lower between his legs. He moved down the track toward the kennel yard with the air of an egg-sucking hound.

All good dogs lose occasionally, of course; and perhaps if Stu Slocumb had recognized that fact, the saga of King Bones might have run a happier course.

But Slocumb was angry and stubborn, and—at—that time—he still believed Bones was one of the great dogs of racing history. Moreover, he had lost heavily and wanted to recoup. Instead of giving Bones a rest—a sorely needed rest, as Rags informed me plaintively—he kept him running every second or third night.

Five times Bones went to the starting-box in the next twelve days, and five times he was beaten. His erstwhile admirers turned bitter. Many of them lost heavily on him. And now when they called him King Bones, it was in mockery.

Perhaps they regarded him merely as a dumb canine. Certainly they never dreamed that their attitude might hurt Bones as much as any temperamental athlete who fell, without warning, into a jeer-provoking slump.

Bones couldn't take it. He cringed under their derision. Tail between his legs, both ears, now, flat against his skull, he slunk to the starting-box and slunk back from his defeats. And the defeats came, worse and worse.

The night he finished seventh, in a slow field of old has-beens, Stu Slocumb beat him.

RAGS, tears in his voice, phoned me at the *Post*.

"You got to do somethin'. Mistuh Slocumb is like a crazy man. He won't listen to me. I tell him it's Bones' feet. They's in bad shape. He gonna ruin po' Bones if he don't let him rest. Please, suh, do somethin'."

I went out to see Stu Slocumb. His losses, his disappointment, had made him bitter. When I urged him to let Bones rest, he turned on me angrily.

"I know dogs," he said, "an' I know this bastard. Rags was right, all right. Bones is smart—he's too damn' smart for his own good. He don't want to run! That's all. He's lazy. But no mutt is gonna make a fool of Stu Slocumb, by God!"

I stared at him, wondering what could possibly make a good dog man talk so wildly.

But then he said: "I've lost my shirt on that damn' staghound, an' I'm gonna get it back. You'll see!"

That night Bones had the No. 8 box. He broke slowly, passed the stands well back of the pacemakers, and then, without warning, came to a dead halt, looked disconsolately toward the hindquarters of the swift-moving racers, and limped back toward the kennel yard. A groom rushed back onto the track, lifted him up, and carried him to the infield.

It happened so quickly the crowd could only gasp at first. And then some of them began to jeer—the loud, derisive jeers of disappointed losers.

It might have ended there, but for a racing judge who insisted that the track veterinarian give Bones a thorough physical examination immediately. It didn't take long to discover the trouble. There were fresh cracks in the pads of the pup's hind feet—those pads upon which a greyhound chiefly depends for the great leaps that cover as much as five yards at a single stride.

Slocumb narrowly escaped suspension. And Bones, at last, was given a rest.

IN the month that intervened before the derby, I almost forgot Bones. He was no longer news. He was just another greyhound who had flashed early speed and then disappointed. There have been hundreds before; there no doubt will be hundreds more.

Slocumb, too, virtually disappeared. A few of his dogs, including Chattahoochee Queen, continued to race, but with poor results, and I saw nothing of the bitter, leathery-faced little dog man. There were reports, which proved to be only partially true, that he had given up racing and teamed with Snow Creedon, a small-time gambler, in a numbers racket.

He had not given up racing, as I learned later. He was merely biding his time. But he had formed a partnership with Creedon.

The derby, of course, is the climax of Florida's dog season. The eight best juveniles of the winter season are matched for a two-thousand-dollar purse.

Lady Stell, having won sixteen of nineteen starts and tied two track records, was the first dog nominated for the derby. Six others were named, all of them good juveniles with fine records, but none quite in Lady Stell's class. And then Bones was chosen.

His early performances, Everglades officials announced, were too good to warrant his exclusion. And he was, they reported, now in satisfactory condition.

The night before the derby I called Stu Slocumb's place. Slocumb was out, so I talked with Rags.

"Yessuh," he said, his drawl quickening with excitement, "Bones is gonna make folks call him King an' mean it! You shoulda seen him beat Chattahoochee Queen this evenin'. He done five-sixteenths in 31.2! Yessuh, that's what he done!"

I asked him how Slocumb was.

His voice sounded troubled. "I don't rightly understan' Mistuh Slo-

cumb. He turned the trainin' over to me a month ago. He say he gonna give up these fool dogs when the season ends. Gonna sell 'em all and go in a business he can clean up in. That's what he say."

I started to hang up then, but Rags, speaking hesitantly, asked if I could do him a favor.

"I wants a l'il' loan, suh," he said apologetically. "I got somethin' on my mind."

"Yes?" I said.

"Well, I got a l'il' money saved up. An' I won some mo' when Bones was doin' good back theah. An' if you can let me have a li'l' bit, I'm gonna put it all on Bones to win the derby. An' then I figger I have enough to buy him from Mistuh Slocumb when the season end."

I did two foolish things. I told Rags I'd lend him my last hundred bucks, and then I picked Bones to win the derby.

The press box was packed on derby night, and so was the rest of Everglades Dog Course.

By derby-time spectators were standing forty or fifty deep at the rails, and the stands were full. I had taken a lot of kidding over my selection of Bones. I wanted too much to see him win. I was glad to leave the press coop and wander down to the kennel yard.

The derby entrants were being exercised. The lanky black pup looked good. He seemed the Bones of old, ambling relaxedly behind his groom, his large friendly eyes on the crowd, his tail wagging constantly.

Rags was leaning against the fence, watching Bones' every move.

His wrinkled brown face broke into a big smile when he saw me. "He's right," he whispered. "Bones is gonna show 'em tonight. That ol' Lady Stell ain't gonna be in it!"

I looked at Lady Stell. The small brindle bitch stepped gracefully, confidently, around the grass enclosure. She looked very fit.

"Where's Slocumb?"

Rags turned his eyes away. "He's around," he said.

"I suppose he's mortgaged the homestead for Bones."

He shook his head sadly. "Nossuh. Mistuh Slocumb ain't bettin' on Bones. He say Little Stell's a sure thing. He an' that Snow Creedon put all they got on Lady Stell three days ago. They claim they got a good price—"

"Is he crazy?" I said. "Doesn't he realize Bones is back in shape?"

"Yessuh, he know now. He seen him run yestiddy evenin' 'gainst Chattahoochee Queen. He see that 31.2, all right, an' he don't like it a-tall. He try to withdraw Bones today, but the commission send a doctah out, an' the doctah say Bones in fine shape. Mistuh Slocumb got awful mad. . . . I don't like it, suh. I don't like it a-tall."

Lady Stell was quoted at 4 to 1 on the odds board; Bones at 8 to 1. I went back to the press box, borrowed what I could, and put it all on Bones to win. . . .

When I got back to the kennel yard the paddock judge was giving the pups their final inspection. When he finished, they stood in the little banistered stalls waiting to be led out on the track.

It was then that I saw Stu Slocumb and Snow Creedon. Slocumb was smoking the inevitable black stogie, his little green eyes watching the dogs speculatively. I noticed something else: he was chewing gum. It didn't strike me as strange, until later, that a man would chew gum and smoke a cigar at the same time.

He got his hand on Bones' right foreleg just as I reached him.

Snow Creedon, so named because of the shock of tow-colored hair that decorated the top of his thin frame, appeared to be drunk. When the bugle sounded and the grooms prepared to lead the pups down the narrow, fenced-in runway to the track, I saw Creedon lurch toward the runway. Slocumb strolled behind him. Then both of them leaned against the top rail, a few feet apart.

As Lady Stell, who carried the blue colors of the No. 2 dog, passed down the runway, Creedon leaned over as if to pet her. The groom spoke to him sharply; and when Creedon, lurching drunkenly, tried to climb the rail, he and the groom behind him dropped their leashes and tried to push Creedon back.

And while most of the amused spectators were watching the diversion which Creedon had stirred up, I saw Stu Slocumb lean over and apparently pat Bones, who was the No. 3 dog, on the foreleg. It happened so quickly I wouldn't have noticed it at all if I hadn't had a curious presentiment, and kept my eyes on Stu Slocumb.

In a moment the grooms had pushed Creedon back from the fence, picked up their leashes, and marched the juveniles onto the track.

Curious, wondering if my suspicions could possibly be correct, I followed Slocumb and Creedon back under the stands. They were hurrying, almost running, and I lost them in the swarm of bettors. When, finally, I located them again, Creedon had stopped lurching. He was no more drunk, I reflected, than I was. And I had been bone dry all evening.

I noticed another thing: Slocumb was no longer chewing gum.

"The damn' fool," I said, "the stupid damn' fool!" And yet, was he? There was only one dog in that race, as far as I could figure, who stood a good chance, on form, of beating Lady Stell. And that was Bones. If Lady Stell won, both Slocumb and Creedon would make a killing.

I started running, beating my way through the milling crowd, toward the track. I would inform the judges, and they would see that Bones was carefully inspected again—particularly that right forefoot—before the race.

I WAS too late. Just as I reached the fence, opposite the judges' stand, I saw the lights on the other side of the oval flash up, and I heard the announcer's shrill cry above the whir of the mechanical rabbit: "Here comes Rusty!"

Standing on tiptoe, I could just see the pups as they broke from the starting-box.

Winning Wanda, a gray bitch who had been nicknamed Waning Wanda because of her habit of losing early leads, jumped to the front from the No. 1 stall. Lady Stell broke cleanly and was only a lead behind. Then my heart almost stopped. Bones had gone down on one foreleg as he leaped from the box! The fans howled, and I heard the old derisive cry: "There goes King Bones!"

But the black pup bounded from that crouched position like an angry jaguar, and when they passed the judges' stand, less than a length separated him from the two leaders, Winning Wanda and Lady Stell, who were running head and head.

Above the shouts of the crowd I could hear a drawling, painfully clear

"As long as I got Bones, I ain't worryin'."

cry: "Come on theah, Bones! Lift them legs, honey!" And this time it was repeated over and over as the dogs rounded the first turn and moved toward the far rail. And as if he heard the faithful, pleading refrain and understood it fully, Bones cut in at the second turn, took the rail position from Winning Wanda, spurted into a two-length lead over Lady Stell as they entered the backstretch.

I thought: *I must have misjudged Slocumb and Creedon. No dog could run like that with chewing-gum between his toes. . . .*

And then, it was over. Midway down the backstretch, Bones' right foreleg collapsed beneath him, and his muzzle dug into the dirt track, stirring up a cone of powdery dust. Gazelle-like, Lady Stell flew past him, and then Winning Wanda, three lengths behind the brindle bitch, and then the pack—all of them.

I heard the tears in Rags' mournful cry: "That's all right, honey. Jus' don't worry none."

But once again Bones leaped from the dirt like an angry cat and spurted, with heartbreaking effort, toward the far turn. I knew it was too late, now. He was eight or nine lengths behind. If he were lucky, he might beat Wanda, but there was little hope of his beating anyone else.

But now he was seventh, and moving into the far turn, he catapulted into the pack and was fifth, and at the near turn he broke through to the rail like the Bones of old and came onto the homestretch third. And still he was four lengths behind the flying Lady Stell.

The fickle crowd suddenly began to cheer the black pup's spirited effort and once again the shout went up: "Come on, King Bones!" But it was all too apparent that his frantic spurt had come too late.

A hundred feet from the finish he was still third, a neck behind the No. 8 dog, and three lengths from Lady Stell.

The fans had set up a deafening clatter and the valiant high cry that I recognized so poignantly was barely distinct: "Win for ol' Rags, honey, an' you'll be mine. All mine!"

Rags had always insisted that Bones could understand, and now I was willing to believe him. For Bones ran those last hundred feet as he had never run before. And still, I knew, it was too late.

Now he was second and there was a length between him and the flowing tail of the fleet Lady Stell. And then the space between them narrowed and closed—until they looked like one very long dog, the front half brindle, the hind half black.

I turned away and fixed my eyes on the pole directly opposite me that bisected the judges' stand. It was going to be very close, and one of them was going to win by a head. But I knew—I knew too well from a thousand races and a thousand finishes—that that head was going to be the brindle bitch's.

In less time than it takes to think it, and in much less time than it takes to write it, they were both at the pole and past it. . . . And the first head across that finish line was long and bony and black.

King Bones had won the derby.

Bones turned quickly and was coming back down the track. And he was limping.

I vaulted the fence and was on the track. A groom tried to intercept me, but I brushed past him.

I ran toward Bones, but I was almost too late. Stu Slocumb, having climbed the fence above the finish line, reached Bones first. But the lanky black pup scurried away from him and limped toward me. Cursing furiously, Slocumb turned, grabbed for him. The stumpy little man was breathing very fast, and his face was a sweaty, pasty white. He got his hand on Bones' right foreleg just as I reached him.

Bones growled and nipped at the hand. Slocum drew his arm back as if to slap at the dog, but I grabbed him.

"You fool," I said, "the whole crowd's watching you!"

I picked up Bones' right foreleg and looked at the toes. There was a small clot of blood between the first and second joints. I dug down and pulled out a dirty wad of gum.

"You bastard!" I said.

"For God's sake!" Slocumb whispered. "For God's sake!"

"What's the trouble here?" It was the presiding judge. A groom was with him.

I looked at Slocumb. He was trembling.

"Nothing," he said hurriedly. "For Chrissakes, it's nothing!"

The judge hesitated. "You'll have to get off the track," he said, "until the presentation." Then he turned away.

I followed Slocumb to the infield, back of the judges' stand.

"Mistuh Slocumb, somethin's wrong with Bones' foot!" Rags, who had come through the runway with the other trainers, joined us. He was carrying Bones in his arms, and there were tears in his eyes.

"YOU showed 'em, Bones," he whispered. "You showed 'em, honey." A long, rosy tongue licked happily at his brown cheeks.

"How much money did you win, Rags?" I asked.

"Fo' thousan' dollahs," he said softly. "Po' Bones, it's his right foot—"

"Okay," I said. "You can give Slocumb four grand for Bones."

"Sell the derby winner!" Slocumb snorted. "You must be nuts."

"Maybe you'd rather go to jail," I said, and started toward the judges' stand.

"It's blackmail!" Slocumb cried out. "You can't do this to me!"

I kept walking.

"Wait! For Chrissakes, wait!" He grabbed my arm and shook it, his voice coming in angry gasps.

"Okay. Okay," he snarled. "He can have the bastard."

"Put it in writing," I said.

And there, back of the judges' stand, while the crowd waited for the lanky black juvenile to be crowned derby champ, ownership of Bones passed from Stu Slocumb to Rags.

It was Rags who received the big silver cup, emblematic of the title. And it was Rags who leaned over the ungainly flop-eared, bowlegged greyhound who looked like a staghound, and planted a kiss on his moist black muzzle.

"You really King Bones now," he whispered. "An' you the han'somest king I ever seen, honey."

And Bones raised that muzzle and looked with gentle eyes at the proud brown face and made a curious undoglike sound that expressed far better than words the love he felt.

Men *in* Search *of* Danger

THE HAZARDOUS JOB OF DESTROYING STRAYED MINES IS STILL GOING ON

by LT. (jg) J. E. JENKINS, USN

THE fisherman stumbled around a solid dark object and continued backing away from the surf, giving his heavy surf-fishing rod long, even pulls as he went. Finally the fight went out of the fish, and the man began reeling in as he walked back to the edge of the water. It was then that he noticed the big barnacled object he had stumbled into in the fading dusk. He set his reel, put the pole in a frame, and walked over to investigate.

The thing was about one-third buried in the fine sand, and in the dim light appeared to be a channel buoy. He started to sit on it when he noticed part of a brass name-plate showing under the barnacles. With his big scaling-knife he hacked away until it was mostly uncovered. He struck a match and brushed the chips away. The inscription read: *U. S. Navy* BUREAU OF ORDNANCE... *Mark 11 Mod V...2/31/43.*

They disposed of 1900 rounds of live ammunition.

That is one way mines are discovered, and will continue to be found more and more frequently, according to Navy Ordnance Disposal Officers. Most of them are found by air patrols and Coast Guard Patrols, or as in this case, by accident. But no matter who finds them, the Navy's Ordnance Disposal men race to the scene and explode the mine or cart it away for further study.

Unfortunately not all mines, explosive souvenirs and booby traps left all over the world by war, end up on the beaches or in accessible spots. Often the obstacles placed by nature in the paths of the disposal-men are more dangerous than the explosives themselves. Lt. W. R. Brooks, USN, Officer in Charge of the Ordnance Disposal Unit, has a favorite story to illustrate this point. He and Electrician's Mate Paul Drady had hauled their boat up on the beach near the mouth of the Pedraneles River, Venezuela, and were cutting their way through the steaming jungle. Their mission was to find and dispose of a mine reportedly snagged in a nearby swamp. Suddenly Drady, who was following, stopped.

"Mr. Brooks," said Drady in an unnatural voice, "don't move!"

Brooks took another step to a dryer spot and turned to see Drady crouched in a springing position, nervously fingering his two-foot machete. The strange, unfocused look in Drady's eyes made Brooks' heart jerk. But before he could speak, Drady began talking in a rhythmic, monotonous undertone. Brooks stood stock-still, his mind running over all the stories he had heard about men who had "gone Asiatic." He tried to concentrate on what Drady was saying:

The LAMP of EXPERIENCE

PATRICK HENRY said two things that we hope our readers will recall as they look at our cover paintings of These United States: "I am not a Virginian, but an American," he announced in 1765. So these cover paintings are designed first to recall our proud heritage as Americans, and secondly to commemorate an event of special significance to the individual State.

And again: "I know of no way of judging the future but by the past." Now again we face a difficult and disturbing future. And if we turn back to the events of early days in America, it is not to shrink from looking forward, but to draw inspiration from our forefathers who won over the wilderness, stood steadfast for their rights as free men and walked the earth with dignity. . . .

This month our cover painting for Illinois passed over many colorful and dramatic events. For the simple fact that Abraham Lincoln was nurtured and grew to manhood there, was far more significant than any scene of battle or frontier exploration. (Kentucky also has a claim, of course, for Lincoln was born and spent his early childhood there.) For Lincoln is sign and symbol of our national spirit—the spirit which will, we devoutly believe, triumph over the troubles which loom so large for us and all mankind.

In this backward look for inspiration a splendid help has been made available for us this winter: the Freedom Train, which is touring the country,—this month in the Southwest—carrying for all to see, the famous documents that record our history.

It will be an unfeeling visitor indeed who can stand before the rough draft of the Constitution, or the original copy of the Bill of Rights, or the manuscript of the Gettysburg Address, without emotion. The words written there are part of his heritage. They have helped to create the environment in which he lives. His life would be a different matter without them.

The words of some of these documents may be known by heart. The sentiments of others may seem commonplace today. Yet they can scarcely fail to take on new meaning for the visitor as he looks at a piece of paper, now yellowed with age but once white and empty, where a man first put pen to translate thought to message and aspiration to action, and thus helped shape the course of history.

Each document represents, to a greater or lesser degree, an act of resolution. Each is a testimony of faith in which its author dared opposition to advance the concept of man's dignity and liberty a step closer to reality.

"Just promise me, Lieutenant, that no matter what happens, you won't move or say anything until I tell you to." The sweat running down Brooks' back met and accentuated the prickle that ran up his spine. Drady's eyes began to move back and forth, and Brooks was just getting ready to turn and run for the boat, when Drady began to speak again. His words froze the Lieutenant's blood.

"There is a boa constrictor on the branch over you. He has lowered his head to about a foot behind you and is swinging back and forth. A minute ago, he lifted his head up to the branch. When he does it again, I'll tell you. Then you jump."

Brooks began to wish fervently that Drady really had gone Asiatic, but he didn't dare move. His heart ticked off a series of eternities, and he thought he could hear a hollow, pipelike breathing first behind his right ear, then behind his left. Drady's eyes abruptly stopped moving. Brooks held his breath and tensed.

"Jump!" Drady screamed, and Lt. Brooks swears to this day he set a new standing broad-jump record then and there.

The only gun they had was a Very pistol used to shoot flares into the air as a signal to the ship lying off shore. With this, they began popping away at the slithering, threshing snake. Some of the gayly burning red, white and green flares ricocheted into the air and were seen by the watchful tendership just off the beach. An emergency squad was put ashore immediately, and reached Brooks and Drady in time to help kill and skin the reptile. Later, the twelve-foot hide was made into shoes, with purses to match, for the womenfolk. The wayward mine was found and disposed of.

That was during the war. Man has now ceased fighting man, but the explosive weapons they scattered over the earth are still full of the hate and fury that went into their construction.

"Delayed-action" bombs are lying around with their timing devices jammed, awaiting a particular vibration or jarring that will set them ticking again. Magnetic-influence mines are so deadly that the man who works on one (they only allow one man to a mine) must take off most of his clothes, all of his jewelry, and work with special copper-alloy tools.

ONE of the Naval Districts is notified when a mine is discovered on a beach, or someone has reason to believe his souvenir is as deadly as it looks. The Naval District then sends its own disposal expert, or wires the Chief of Naval Operations, who dispatches a team from the headquarters of the Ordnance Disposal Unit at the Naval Powder Factory, Indian Head, Maryland.

For these men, the end of the shooting war is not even in sight. According to the Navy, not only are more and more cases being reported, but time and weather are making the explosives more dangerous to handle. For instance, most mines have an automatic disarming device which renders the mine "safe" if the cable is broken or the mine loses its anchor. This disarming device sometimes becomes inoperative from corrosion or tangled marine growth such as seaweed or barnacles. It is the fact that it *might* be "live" that makes it dangerous.

Teams have been sent from Indian Head to all parts of the world. They usually carry their own equipment, and have become accustomed to flying, even though they often carry with them a considerable number of demolition charges in a box labeled *"Special Tools."*

Once, when getting ready to fly back to Washington after disposing of two mines on the beach at Nantucket, the men loading the plane gave the *"Special Tools"* box a little rough treatment. Lieutenant Brooks chided the pilot about it without telling him what was in the box, but he was summarily told that the men knew their job and could load the plane without any outside help.

NOTHING further was said until the plane landed, a little belatedly, at its destination. As Brooks climbed out of the plane, the pilot came over to him and smiled nervously.

"That was a pretty risky business," he said with exaggerated lightness.

"Yes," Brooks answered, "but how did you know what was in that box?"

The pilot looked puzzled and said: "What do you mean?"

Brooks decided to rub it in a little, so he gave a hearty laugh and said nonchalantly: "Oh, what's a couple of hundred pounds of demolition charge and caps?" The color left the pilot's face, and his mouth began to work. Brooks was enjoying himself when the pilot finally regained his speech.

"*I* didn't know there were any explosives aboard," he stuttered. "But *you* didn't know we had to circle the field several times before I could get the landing-gear down. We almost had to make a crash landing!" It was Brooks' turn to blanch.

Ordnance-disposal personnel training at the OD headquarters are being fully indoctrinated in the identifying, handling and disposing of all types of foreign weapons and all United States weapons. Their field of study covers guided missiles, rockets, torpedoes, booby traps, depth charges, land and sea mines, projectiles and demolition charges.

These men are equally at home in the air searching for mines, burrowing under the ground for a "dud" bomb,

hip-deep in treacherous swamps, or on the ocean floor in full diving regalia. In April of 1946, shortly after the disastrous explosion of the U.S.S. *Solar* at a New Jersey ammunition pier, an OD team was assigned to collect and dispose of the ammunition scattered by the blast.

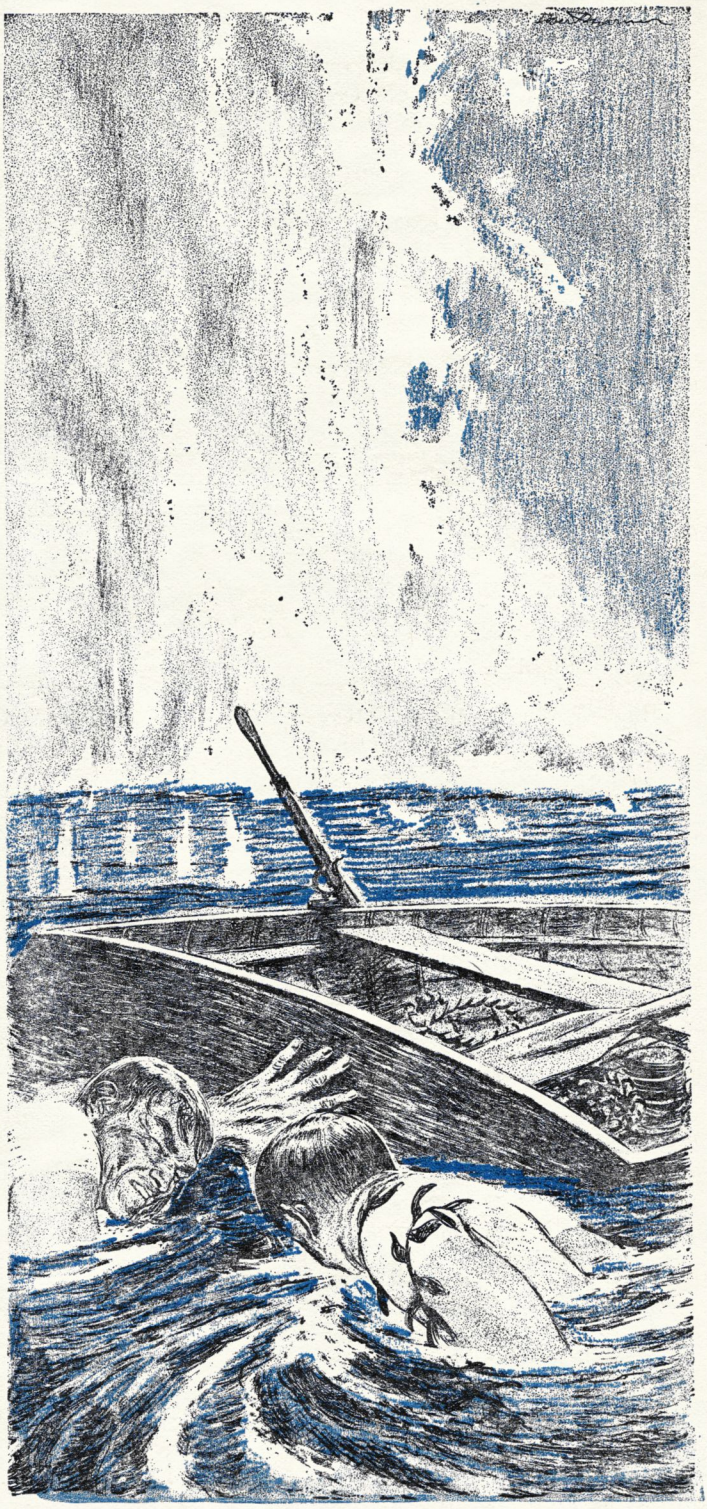
Picking up the dangerously jarred ammunition was ticklish enough. But when they began gathering the harvest of explosives from the floor of the surrounding bay, the disposal men showed what they could really do. After two weeks of almost constant diving and bringing up explosives, the weary team had disposed of over 1900 rounds of live ammunition, checked with magnetic detectors, and declared the area safe for the waiting repairmen.

Although only a few of the infamous "booby traps" are left to be disposed of, that particular job remains the most intriguing and yet the most dangerous of all the "interesting" jobs assigned to the disposal men. Most booby traps used by the enemy during the war were of a small, simple design, but with so many variations in application that their complexity was limited only by the imagination of the men setting the trap. The Navy's OD men take this as a direct challenge to their imagination and tackle booby-trap disposal with a keen sense of competition. It is not uncommon to find a booby trap on a booby trap on a booby trap – in which case the disposer must progress carefully from one ingenious trigger mechanism to the next. Climax of the game comes when he must decide that he has found them all. If he hasn't, there will be an explosion. If he has, his training and skill have won him another match in the deadliest sport of all.

OD men have two precepts that they never allow themselves to forget: First: These explosives have not heard that the war is over – they are all capable of murder until exploded or dismantled. Second: You are only allowed one strike – it's the same as having to hit a home run every time at bat.

Although their normal day's work consists of constant tinkering with complicated deadly explosives, these men shudder at newspaper accounts of children and grown-ups playing with hand grenades and souvenir mortar shells. No accurate figures are available, but the officers at Indian Head estimate that there may be up to fifty casualties per day in the U. S. caused by mishandling of live souvenirs of all types. Secretary of the Treasury John W. Snyder said:

They hastily swam around to the other side of the boat and huddled there, awaiting the blast.



"Thousands of our finest citizens are killed each year by the careless handling of war trophies. I believe we owe a duty to our veterans, to their families, and to the general public to help prevent these tragedies."

Most of these are minor burns, but people are not only likely to hurt themselves by their lack of knowledge of explosives, but they may inadvertently cause considerable property damage by not being informed as to the exact status of the souvenir they give away or sell as junk.

LAST February a Pennsylvania steel company reported two muffled explosions from one of their open-hearth furnaces. The explosions occurred after the addition of a new batch of scrap steel. They asked the Navy for help, and Lieutenant (jg) R. E. Swisher was dispatched from Indian Head to investigate. Arriving at the steel plant, he began going through several gondola cars loaded with scrap. He went through every car, and at the end of the day, had found fifty bomb fuses and sixty bomb-burster charges – a total of over four hundred pounds of high explosives. Efforts to trace the origin of the charges proved that they at one time were mere souvenirs in the possession of private individuals. The explosives were all carefully transported to the U.S. Naval Magazine, Fort Mifflin, Pa.

When mines are tossed into swampy areas by tides or by storms, they are extremely difficult to locate from the sea because of the difficulty in getting close enough to distinguish the growth-covered mine from surrounding vegetation. Late in 1944, the situation around the east coast of the U.S. and the Gulf of Paria, Venezuela, became such that the Navy decided to use its little anti-submarine blimps in helping the disposal teams locate and identify the mines. The idea proved successful from the outset, and is still in use. The blimps take a mine-disposal expert along with them on their routine flights, and carefully plot the positions of all stray mines. Going back aboard his tender-ship, the expert and his team rendezvous with the blimp, which then circles while the tender puts a small twenty-four-foot boat into the water. As soon as the blimp re-locates the mine, it leads the small boat to it by dropping colored smoke flares in a line toward the mine. When the men in the boat spot the mine, or are sure they are close to it, they usually put a two- or three-men disposal team into a small rubber life raft, so that they can make their way safely through the shallow water without risking the quicksand that is common around the Gulf.

One of the first of these coördinated airborne, seaborne operations very nearly cost the lives of two disposal men. The blimp had located a mine off Irapa, Venezuela, and led the tender to a point just offshore from it. Two men decided to row to the mine in a small wooden dinghy. About halfway in, they encountered a heavy patch of seaweed growing right up to the surface of the water, making rowing extremely difficult. The officer jumped over the side in an effort to push the boat the rest of the way, but sank to his hips in quicksand and seaweed. He heaved himself back into the boat, and they managed to work the boat in next to the mine. Working hip-deep in the slime and seaweed, with their elbows hooked over the gunwales of the boat, the men disarmed the mine and planted a demolition charge inside. They struggled back into the boat, lit the fuse, and began working their way out to a safe distance.

They soon noticed that the fuse was burning faster than normal, and that the wind and tide had begun to work against them. The harder they rowed to get away from the three-hundred-pound, steel-encased explosive, the more entangled their oars became. With time running out and with a considerable distance to go to safety, the men both splashed out of the boat and began trying to swim, pushing the boat ahead of them – anything to get away from that mine! The time was up before they could even get close to the safety zone, so they hastily swam around to the other side of the boat and huddled there, awaiting the blast that came a second later.

Luckily, they were just far enough away to survive the shock, with only a dazed numbness and a few black-and-blue spots on the softer parts of their bodies. But as they dragged themselves into the dinghy, they saw mute evidence of what their fate would have been had they tried to stay in the boat. It was riddled with shrapnel holes.

During the war, most mines were washed up on beaches from known mine-fields and their course of drift could be predicted. But the postwar antics of mines are very uncertain. All known mine-fields have been swept and the mines disposed of. The mines coming ashore now have been adrift for some time, and it cannot be accurately determined where they will wash up next. However predictions based on ocean currents indicate that the most likely spot for you to find a mine in your back yard will be on the coast of Florida, Washington or New England. In the past year six Japanese mines have been found on the coast of Washington alone.

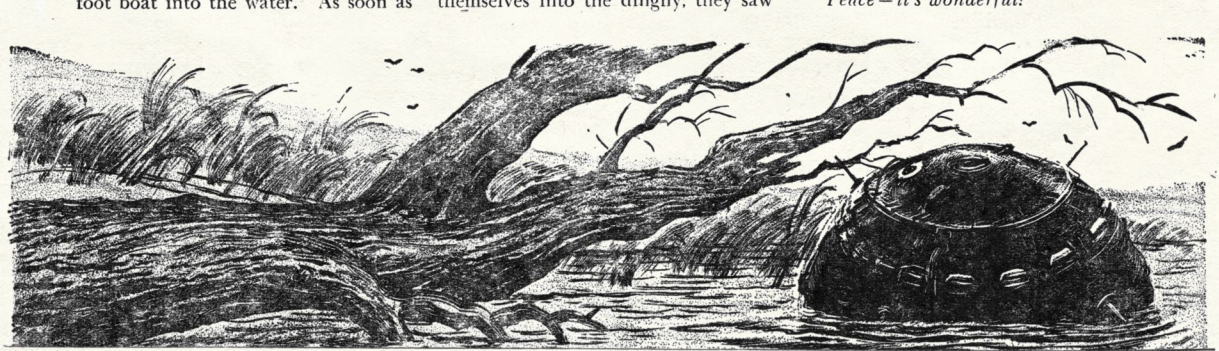
Commending the Ordnance Disposal men last month, Vice Admiral George F. Hussey, Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, said:

"The vital and courageous work done by the Naval Mine Disposal and Bomb Disposal personnel during World War II saved many lives and ships, and facilitated military operations. These men, carefully selected for their physical endurance and thoroughly trained for this hazardous operation, deactivated thousands of mines, bombs and explosives in the European and Pacific Theaters.

"Even in peacetime, their dangerous work is not finished. They render service at proving-grounds in the recovery of unexploded test munitions, saving time and money in the development of new weapons. They must be ready to rush instantly to any part of the world to render safe or destroy these dangerous explosives."

DURING the war about thirteen hundred men were assigned to ordnance disposal work. Of these, twenty-six lost their lives and over two hundred were wounded. There are now about ninety men assigned to the task. And not until the last mine has been disposed of, the last bomb dumped into the ocean, and the last souvenir rendered harmless, will these men be able to stop risking their lives, lay down their tools, and breathe the dream of all servicemen:

"Peace – it's wonderful!"



We're Coming Through!

FIGHTING HIS WAY THROUGH A STORM-SWEPT SKY, A PILOT STRANGELY FINDS HIS DESTINY.

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

Illustrated by Wilson Thomson

FLIGHT 206 had cleared from Denver at 9:06 that morning. Thirty-five minutes later Bart Holland ignored his cold dread and took up his weary search again. That was when he first heard Greg's voice over the headphones. Except for that, everything was in order: They were on time, engines functioning normally. The take-off had been smooth, and the weather promised no more treachery than usual. They were due in Omaha at 1:01.

Captain Bart Holland did not *look* haunted. Furtive at times, perhaps. He stood a good six feet two and carried his one hundred ninety pounds neatly distributed. A generous mouth and a square jaw absorbed some of the delicacy of his nose. There was just a hint of a scar over his right eyebrow. His blue-gray eyes, keen and energetic, at times reflected a guarded austerity.

The search and the cold dread had been going on for years now, and Greg's voice came as a shock. It wasn't that Bart had forgotten Greg or Allison Mayne. His mind was seldom free of them. When he remembered Greg, he automatically thought of the girl. He was always pulling up sharp and looking foolish whenever he saw someone who looked as though her name *could* be Allison Mayne.

But there it was: clear, anxious and wholly distinct—Greg's voice over the headphones.

"She's aboard, Bart." The words were clear and spoken slowly, just as Greg used to talk in the old days. None of that control-tower gibberish. *"She's aboard—Allison Mayne."* The name was pronounced in a confidential whisper . . . *"Allison Mayne."*

Bart blew his nose to ease the pressure in his ears. It could be pressure, coming out of Denver. But it didn't tune out Greg. The voice persisted:

"I'm telling you, Bart. She's aboard –Allison Mayne."

First, the cold dread that always went aboard with him, and now this haunting whisper of information. It was eerie and disturbing. Bart Holland sat studying the expression of Jeff Condon, his First Officer. There would be fine twitchings at Jeff's mouth if this was a rib. But Jeff was intent on jotting figures on their flight log.

"Okay," Bart snapped across the cockpit. "What is this gag?"

Jeff squeezed his eyebrows together questioningly. He shook his head. Jeff had been engrossed with his own problem. This one had chestnut hair, deep brown eyes, creamy skin and was nearly nineteen. She'd be waiting for him at the Fontenelle Hotel in Omaha, and Jeff was figuring that when he had logged another two hundred hours on these babies, he'd have an extra ring of braid on his sleeve, and a cozy proposition to put to his problem. Then he could jettison this overcautious Holland character.

"You hear what I hear?" Bart demanded. All Jeff was getting was their beam signal, clear and distinct. "I heard someone," Bart started to say, and then fluffed it off. "Forget it! I guess I was–just thinking."

"I'm telling you, Bart," Greg's voice broke in again. *"She's aboard . . . Allison Mayne."*

Bart was perspiring. The cockpit seemed crowded, as though another pilot were trying to make himself comfortable in it. Bart jerked his thumb toward Jeff and said: "Take over." Jeff nodded, gave the flight log a final glance, and fondled the big wheel.

Holland sat limply, staring ahead. Once he glanced up at the radio panel. The switch was on *"Receiving,"* which was as it should be. But why the voice of Greg Drayton?

Greg had been dead for more than two years!

GREG had stopped a piece of ack-ack shell over a buna factory at Hüls. Their Liberator had taken a terrific pasting on the run-in, but Greg had maintained his approach. Greg always finished anything he started. The target had been plastered, and they had roared up through the smoke and streaks of rocket fire that spat from the flak ring. Greg was grinning. Bart remembered that clearly. Then there was a metallic thud, and suddenly Greg had gasped: "Take over! I've had it. . . . Take over, Bart."

Now Greg was saying: *'I'm telling you, Bart. She's aboard . . . Allison Mayne."*

There was little they could do for Greg after that hunk of steel nailed him. He tried to crawl away so that Bart could take the left-hand seat, but he never made it. They dragged him into the radio compartment, and he never spoke again.

From that day on, Bart Holland was a first pilot. That harrowing trip back to the field outside King's Lynn gave him a little of what he never had before. For the first time he felt he was actually flying the big Lib, that he was top man. But there were many regrets that he had to climb over Greg's limp body to make good. Bart knew that too, and it stayed with him.

"If anything happens to me," Greg had said once or twice, "I want you to look up Allison. You'll like her. She's a right guy. Just tell her straight what happened. Then she'll know, and never have any regrets."

"If anything happens to you," Bart had argued apprehensively, "it will happen to me too. If we get into a jam and *you* can't get us home, who can? . . . Me? I'm just a passenger eating a good pilot's combat chow."

Greg had always brought them home. Greg had taken them through Ploesti and both Schweinfurt raids, and once brought them back on two engines. She was shot to bits and dragged a shattered flipper. He'd given the kids a chance to take to the silk over the field when they found the nose-wheel fouled, but they had all said: "Take her in, Skipper! We'll ride with you."

Greg knew how to knit people together.

"I'm telling you, Bart: she's aboard."

BART went cold at the memory of all that, took off the headphones and pushed up from the pilot's chair. He shouldered the compartment door open and made his way down the passenger aisle. Below spread the farmed squares and bordering roads of southwestern Nebraska. The River Platte wriggled on ahead. Few passengers looked up or noticed him. They were busy pondering on the details of the scenic swath below. Bart wasn't the type to command idolatrous attention. He wasn't Greg Drayton.

The hostess was sitting with a young woman who was feeding a baby. He wondered if she would know. He looked the passengers over from side to side as he moved aft. There were half a dozen who *could* be Allison Mayne.

There was a baby-faced girl with an orchid pinned to the lapel of her woolen coat. A blonde in a shepherd's check suit that fitted perfectly; she

There was little they could do for Greg after that hunk of steel nailed him.

was writing a letter and didn't look up. A chubby lass in a scarlet coat who looked lonely and uncomfortable. The typical department-store buyer who was flying because she had to and didn't enjoy it a bit. Two seats on, was a school-teacher type poring over the airline folder and trying to find where they were. A bespectacled girl with prominent teeth, devouring the articles in a digest magazine. A red-headed beauty traveling with a Big Spender who looked as if he knew how to cut coupons.

Greg had described Allison, time and time again. He had a framed photograph of her — one of those glamorized jobs with a special hair-do and party-dress frills. No one could be that beautiful. Greg had it on a small table near his bed, and Bart always felt embarrassed when he undressed in the same cubicle.

Bart had tried to write and tell Allison what had happened, but how well he had performed his task, he never knew. There were no answers to his letters. He sent her a photo of Greg's grave, but the letter and picture came back unopened a week before he had started back home. There were times when Bart entertained a theory that Greg had invented Allison Mayne. He'd read of such things—something about a defense mechanism. Greg had never shown interest in any other girl; he didn't seem normal that way.

According to Greg, Allison had an apartment in New York, a rather swank place looking over the East River. Her job was in a large building on Forty-second Street—secretary to a professional man of some sort. Greg had never fully explained these things.

"You'd like Allison," he said one night as they wandered down to the village through the mellow English twilight. Overhead, squadrons of the R.A.F. were droning east for their nightly raids on *Festung Europa*. "I know Allison would like you too. Maybe we can all get together back home sometime."

There were moments when Bart resented the way Greg was always including him in any plans involving Allison. A man had a right to live his own life and select his own friends. Once Bart tried to strike up a friendship with a young English girl who often cycled down to the White Hart Inn from the farm she was supervising for her father, who was somewhere on the Atlantic with the Merchant Marine. It could have been an interesting association, but Greg steered him off and Allison Mayne took over again.

"A smart guy would go home," observed Jeff, beginning to waver now.

CAPTAIN HOLLAND moved along the aisle to where the hostess was packing a week-end bag for the young mother. He didn't remember her name, but recalled she had been with him for several trips now. Jeff had said she was new, but she was most efficient and gave no trouble of any kind. He noticed for the first time that she was smart, neat and attractive, and began to wonder again.

"Could I see your manifest?" he asked.

She looked up at him, startled, and became flustered when he repeated his question. "Yes, at once, Captain," she said, and hurried aft to her galley. She returned with the sheet neatly clamped to a laminated board, and protected with a transparent cover.

"Everything correct?" she asked. He was running his finger down the passenger list.

"Fine! Everything's fine, Miss." He noted her name at the top of the sheet was Mellissa Arnold. His eyes ran down the list again. There was no name even resembling Allison Mayne. He rammed his shoulders against the galley wall and steadied himself against the swing of the DC-3 as she hammered into a layer of turbulence.

"Looking for someone?" The hostess was trying to draw him out with a smile.

He looked up wondering why the girl was being so pleasant. "Well, yes, in a way. I heard—that is, I got a line she'd be aboard."

"A lady?" the girl inquired. "What does she look like?"

He heard himself answering: "I don't know. I never saw her." He managed a smile, at that.

Miss Arnold did not puzzle over it. Airline personnel are always being advised to watch out for someone. To comply, is part of the schedule of service.

"We had no cancellations." She peered over his shoulder at the sheet. "Was she young?"

"Quite young, and from all accounts very pretty." Holland was trying to twist the names on the manifest into something he could work on.

"Sorry," Mellissa Arnold smiled. "Wish I could help you out."

"Wish you could too," he said, turning to notice the even curve of her eyebrows and the wide spacing of her eyes. She looked him full in the face. Her hair was the color of glossy hand-boned riding-boots — her smile, faintly wistful; but Bart put that down to the appeal of indeterminate age.

"Perhaps she's married," the girl said with a twinkle in her eye. "If so, she'd be listed under another name."

Bart felt the constriction of the fine nerves over his cheek-bones. He tried to dispose of the suggestion. "But Greg—the fellow who asked me to look her up, would have known. He said her name was Allison Mayne."

The girl evaded his eyes and said, "Sorry.... Time to serve lunch." She hurried into the galley.

"No!" he said to himself with cold decision. "She wouldn't have married. You can only love once."

The thought was disturbing, and didn't jibe with his anxiety. He twisted around and went to the galley and poked the manifest board into its rack.

"Forget it," he said to Miss Arnold, who was dishing potato salad into paper containers. "I'm just killing time, I guess."

But Greg's influence pursued him up the aisle. He stopped at the seat of the Big Spender. He was a florid man with small eyes. "Excuse me," Bart said pleasantly. "The young lady with you. Her name isn't Allison Mayne, by any chance?"

The redhead laughed raucously. "I'm in the clear, Mister. Never heard of her."

"Not this week, anyhow," the Big Spender boomed.

It wasn't very satisfactory, but it had to do. Bart smiled, flicked her a salute, went into the control compartment and took his seat again.

"What's it like?" he asked Jeff. The co-pilot had been flying on the autopilot while he made checks on his flight log.

"They're reporting a bad front coming in fast from between Fargo and Minneapolis," said Jeff, watching the effect on Bart. "There was a hint of it when I checked with Met. Coming in faster than they figured."

Bart drew in his breath and made three quick calculations. It would be a race into Omaha, at that. His first thought was to get permission to change his course and head for Kansas City. They still had more than ninety minutes to go.

The tower at Municipal Airport confirmed the condition but suggested he stay on-course for another thirty minutes. After that, they'd advise him of any changes. Bart didn't like it, and Jeff knew it. Both knew they could meet up with anything over Nebraska.

"Guess we should stay with them," Bart said uncertainly as he took over the controls.

ADJUSTING his headphones for comfort, Bart gave the panel of dancing dials a careful inspection. He took them in groups just as Greg had taught him. "Take the temperature gauges together," Greg had specified. "Then your various speeds, and from that move over to pressures. See the whole pattern of effect at once. No use jumping from a tachometer to a manifold pressure gauge. Keep things orderly in your mind."

That was Greg, all over. Had everything and everyone arranged neat and orderly. He had Bart in his place—Allison Mayne. He never mentioned the possibility of going home after the war and marrying Allison. You'd think they *were* married, the way Greg acted. It was as though Greg with all his pride in the girl, her beauty, character and affection, felt it was only right to share some of it; and since Bart was his friend and co-pilot, there could be no other arrangement.

Bart had tried his best to carry out Greg's plans; but when he got home, Allison was nowhere to be found. She had moved from the apartment on the East Side. He'd checked with the Post Office for a forwarding address, but the clerk had just laughed and said: "No soap, Mister. You can't trust 'em any more. They grab the first guys home before they can get their breath."

At her office the receptionist said there had been a secretary there by that name, but she had left some time ago and no one knew where.

Each effort to trace the girl only intensified his interest in the quest, but he had to concede it in no way promoted any emotional longings. He realized now that he had sought her as he would any relative of Greg's—performing a comradely duty. It warmed no consuming passion within him. A chance at an airline job provided a good living, and eventually presented the opportunity of searching directories and telephone books in many cities, but it also renewed the old dread of disaster.

Her picture—Greg's framed photograph—hung on his apartment wall, taunting him with its dull matted detail. It could have been the picture of anyone. He'd studied the features of hundreds of girls who could have posed for the picture. It was as unreal as a society page photograph.

The big wheel jerked as a new turbulence rocked the transport. Bart and Jeff exchanged brief glances and checked the instruments again.

"Gonner be nice," taunted Jeff, waiting for Bart to start his chicken act. He started to sing, off-key: *"Everything's Up-to-Date in Kansas City!"*

The DC-3 bucked, and the framework creaked as they hit the uneven cross-currents. The countenance of the sky was changing. A wispy scarf of cirrus drew a filter across the golden gleam of sun, turning the light to an ominous glow that made Bart lick his lips. Below now were deckled strips of stratus, and above, the warning outriders of the threatening front. Bulging cumulus clouds burdened with moisture swayed with the weaving airstreams that ran berserk before the pressure area.

There was crackling static in the phones now, snarling atmospheric threats breaking up the cadence of the beam signals, all the wicked banners and pennons of a line squall. The ship bucked and trembled as it thundered through the advance line of aërial attack.

"Omaha Radio," Bart said into his microphone. *"This is Continental Flight 206. Over."*

"Continental 206 . . . This is Omaha. Over."

"We are at Cozad, nine thousand feet," Bart reported. *"What's the prospects now?"*

"Roger, Continental 206," came the ragged reply through the barrage of static. *"For your information a squall line is forming at estimated nineteen miles west of Omaha. Suggest change of route. Over."*

Bart and Jeff exchanged glances again. Bart pressed his transmitter button and said: *"Roger, Omaha. We will advise any change of flight plan. Continental 206, Out!"*

"Might be able to get through," suggested Jeff, who was thinking of the chestnut-haired girl waiting for him at the hotel.

"I'll give it a few minutes," Bart said reluctantly as he fought the big control column. He was trying to decide whether to call the hostess and have her prepare the passengers for a possible change of route. Instead he snapped the switch that illuminated the *Fasten Safety Belts* sign in the cabin. Might as well let them know just what they were in for.

NOW the door creaked open, and Miss Arnold stood swaying in the aperture. The two pilots turned and stared at her with that "Well, what now?" look in their eyes.

"How long?" she asked anxiously. She turned and looked back down the aisle. When she set her eyes on Bart again, she was pale. There was a wisp of tawny hair dropping in a curve over her eyes, and a glisten of perspiration on her lip.

"We're on time so far," Bart said. "What's the trouble?"

"I've got a heart back there," she said, and blinked at the glare of a lightning-streak that flashed before them. "Can't hold him long."

"A heart? Who?" snapped Bart.

"That Mr. Carruthers in Seat 4. The one with the redheaded girl. He's pretty bad."

"Boozed up?" inquired Jeff.

"No!" Bart broke in, fighting the wheel again. "He was okay when I spoke to him." He turned back to the girl. "How long can you hold him?"

"Not long. He doesn't react well to the hypo. We can only hope to get him down quick," she said anxiously. "Can we speed it up?"

Bart nodded ahead. "We may have to change route and head for Kansas City. We got a line squall ahead."

"Kansas City?" The hostess paled again. "But that means—"

"Maybe forty-five minutes more," Bart conceded, "even if they're not stacked up, and we don't have to wait to get in."

"All east and west runs will be heading for K. C.," Jeff pointed out. "Can be stacked up."

She steadied herself against the doorframe as the plane bumped and shouldered its way through the thudding opposition. She flicked the wisp of hair away and said: "We've *got* to get into Omaha. He's all that girl has, I guess."

"Her father?" asked Bart.

"Well, no. Not exactly her father. I guess he just takes care of her."

"Nothing like being broad-minded," grinned Jeff. "Nice going, sister."

The hostess flared up, and it heightened the tones of her beauty. "That man's dying," she snapped at Jeff. "I don't care what he is to her. He's on my list, and I'm supposed to bring him in. What about Omaha, Captain?"

She was clutching the doorframe now as the ship bucked in the rough air. Thunder grumbled somewhere outside, and mist particles smudged the windscreen. Amazed at the suggestion, Bart turned and stared at the girl. She was appealing with her wide honest eyes. He suddenly caught a new expression, and he was certain he had seen her somewhere else before. Not as a hostess or an employee of an airline. He wondered if she could be Allison Mayne.

"You ever been through one of these?" he asked coldly, and she nodded. "Well, you ought to know better. I'll risk it as long as I dare, but I'm not piling up a ship for a fat, overstuffed lug with a bum ticker."

"Afraid?" she asked sternly.

"Darn' right! Aren't you?"

"No! I've been through worse than this."

"Your skipper must have been nuts!"

"I was the skipper," she said with emphasis. "I used to deliver AT-7s and AT-10s out of Wichita for the Army. Maybe two-engined trainers weren't that important, but I liked to think so."

"You flew—"

"I was in the Wasps," she said, and hurried away.

"She must have been nuts," Jeff said; "but I'll bet she did it."

"Nice kid," agreed Bart, still believing he had seen her somewhere.

THEY punched through the white-hot blaze of vertical lightning designs, the motors fighting the blasts of turbulence while the needles flickered, danced and oscillated in their frantic attempts to register the wild fluctuations of the outside elements. An indeterminate distance ahead, a palisade of cloudbanks shielded the rim of the earth. The advance legions in black armor formed a flying wedge, thundering their drums and roaring their war-cries. There were myriad banners bearing cirrus designs, chevrons of dirty cotton, odd blobs of blue resembling quartered arms, and all of it ripsawed by strips of hissing flame.

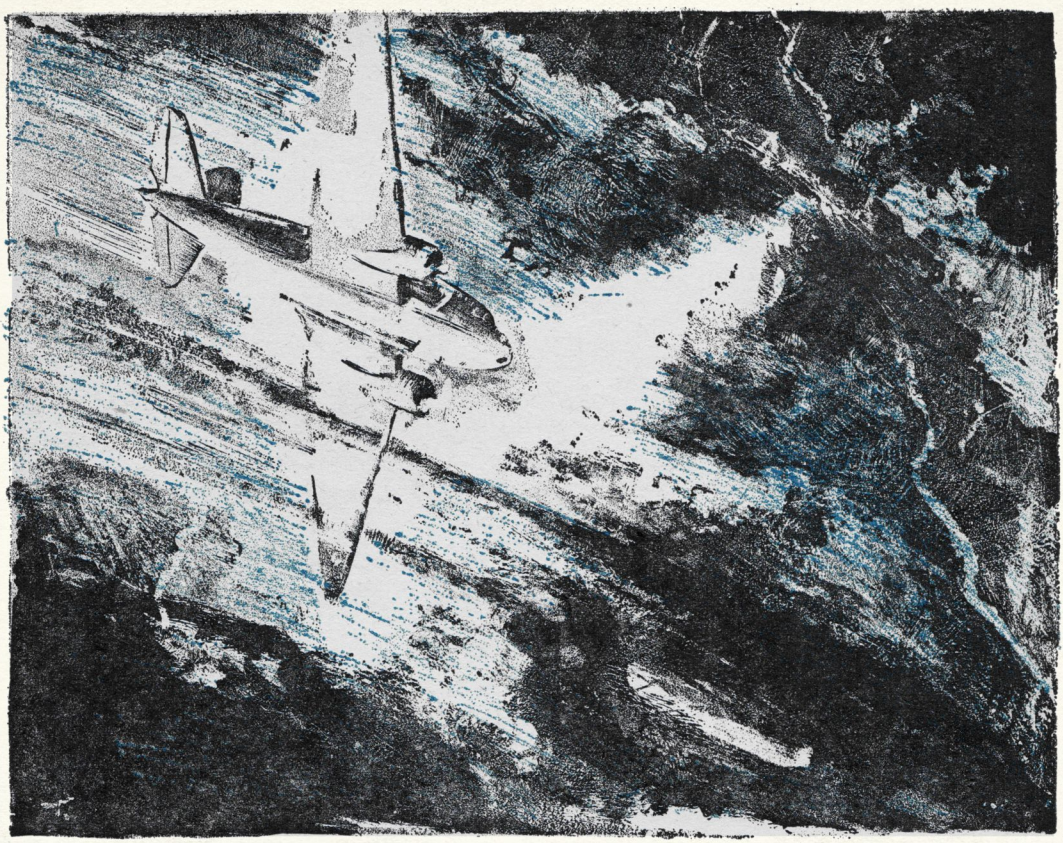
"A smart guy would go home," observed Jeff, beginning to waver now.

"Take over and stay on course," said Bart, slipping out of his seat and forcing his way through the compartment doorway.

He stood at the head of the aisle, bracing himself as wide-legged as space would permit. The passengers were huddled in their chairs. Some were curled up as if trying to sleep through a nightmare. A wide-eyed man, his hair brushed erect by fear-tortured hands, sat stiff against his belt, making inaudible sounds. Beside him a small woman squirmed, her hand clutching the padding of his shoulder. The chit in the checked suit was ill, burying her head in her arms. The baby cried, and its mother lay with her head back on the pillow, her thin hair in limp fronds across her damp forehead.

Miss Arnold had the big man tilted back in the reclining chair. His mouth was open and his dentures removed, showing a vast cavern of gums. His face was patched with blue and green tones as he snuffled and breathed in short futile gasps. The redhead

"Look," she said savagely. "Make up your mind! We either go through or—"



They punched through the white-hot blaze of vertical lightning designs, the motors fighting the blasts of turbulence.

sat glaring at him, her throat constricted, embittered with the threatened crash of her tawdry hopes.

Miss Arnold kept a continual check on the man's condition. The loose buckle of his belt jangled, and his necktie lay in a mottled heap on the floor.

"How is he?" Bart asked.

"I'll take care of him," she said without looking up. "You get us into Omaha, fast. Have a doctor on hand."

"What about the rest of them?" he asked.

"What about them?"

"You got a bus-load of trouble as it is."

"I've told them. They're willing to go through."

"You told them?" he said, stunned. "They know how bad it *can* be?"

"I told them as much as was necessary," Mellissa Arnold explained. The ship whipped into a wicked lurch, and they gripped the backs of seats to stay on their feet. "They just think they're air-sick. That's all."...

They were churning violent air again. In spells they floundered through downdrafts. Then came the frenzied struggle of the props to take a substantial bite, and the ship pounded and kettledrummed with excessive vibration.

BART took another look at the pallor of the prostrate man, and then around at the rest. In an overwhelming flood all their dread and fear rallied within him. This was Ploesti and Schweinfurt all over again; and Greg wasn't here to bring him through.

"I can't risk all these people for one man," he began again, touching her sleeve. "It's not right." His words were furry, and came from a mouth that was parched with the same old fear. The same old dread.

"We're all taking a risk, but we're giving him a chance to live. He's entitled to that," the girl snapped. "I can hold him long enough to get into Omaha."

"But they don't know what they're risking," he started again.

"They don't need to know. It's enough that you know—and can take us through."

"I don't know whether—" He fumbled for a new angle.

"Perhaps you'd like *me* to take it through," she said with a brazen sneer. "Don't think I wouldn't, either. It's your decision, remember."

"Okay. So I report I'm coming through a line squall because I have a sick man aboard. Sometime after that, we crack up and spray everything. That will sure read good in the papers."

"Depends on who writes it," she said, examining the man's fingernails. "Who knows? You might be a hero!"

"Who wants to be that sort of a hero?"

"Look!" she said savagely. "Make up your mind! We either go through—but fast—or you crawl out and head for K. C. That will read good too."

He recognized fear in her eyes—the dread she wouldn't convince him he could make it. Her anxiety cupped a warm beam on his timidity. It was melting away, and the tightness was loosening from the corners of his mouth. His hands itched to take hold—not to clutch. His shoulder muscles rippled, and he felt fit. He wanted to whistle "Pedro the Fisherman," the old tune Greg always trilled through the London blackout.

He watched her lips as she pleaded: "If you won't do it for him and for

your own conscience, do it for her. She needs him—just the way someone will need you some day. Don't ask whether it makes sense. Don't attempt to justify every move you make. It can be the finest thing you ever did!"

"She's aboard—Allison Mayne!" the misty voice was adding. Bart felt for his headphones. There were no clamps over his ears; and then he knew. All this was something inside him.

Allison Mayne? . . . Greg Drayton? . . . Could there have been any such people? The only one who mattered now was Mellissa Arnold. She was the *real* Allison Mayne, and his search was ended. This is what Greg meant all the time. Allison Mayne was the woman every man is destined to love. *His* Allison Mayne *was* aboard, only her name was Mellissa Arnold, and she had glossy hair and blue eyes; and when she smiled, the storm clouds parted and the sun came through. Right now the DC-3 was bucking and quivering in the worrying grip of the storm, but if the needles on the panel were dropping, the points of Mellissa's smile were turning up.

Her eyes sparkled when she realized that Bart would take them through. An electric impulse linked them, and it tapped out her message: *"What's a line squall? Never as bad as they say. You only hear of the ones chicken pilots crack up in. Never mind the others. They'll grab a chunk of your glory when we get in and tell it to the papers. Won't they just!"*

"Okay! Keep him ticking," he said, gripping her shoulder warmly. "How long have I got?"

"It's still Omaha," she smiled. "I'll see you when we get in."

"You sure will, sweetheart," Bart said as he strode up the aisle.

HE slipped into his seat again and snapped his belt. "Okay," he said gruffly to Jeff. "I'll take her."

"What are we doing?" Jeff asked, rubbing sweat from the backs of his hands.

"Call Omaha and tell them we're coming through."

Jeff pointed ahead and croaked: "You're going through *that?"*

"Tell them we want a doctor when we get in."

"You'll need an undertaker."

"I'm not going into Kansas City with a dead guy aboard," said Bart. "That could be bad luck."

Jeff pressed the transmitter button and began to call Omaha. While he went through the radio routine, he tried to puzzle it out. This wasn't Bart Holland—not the Bart Holland who just went down the cabin. That Bart Holland would have gone miles off his course to avoid a Scotch mist.

The Bart Holland that Jeff Condon knew would have been gripping the wheel until his knuckles were strained white.

This character was sitting easy, his fingertips on the cross-bar, and the wheel was easing gently back and forth. His fingers seemed to be tapping out a tune. Jeff watched closely, and thought he recognized it.

This Bart Holland wasn't staring ahead, eyes charged with fearsome intensity. He was taking it all in with calm meditation. He eyed the detail of the scalloped edges of the cumulonimbus clouds. He considered the intensity of the lightning burning jagged neon designs against the blackening sky panels. The cabin and wing-root structure creaked and strained, but Bart kept his fingers caressing the wheel and let her take it herself.

"Well, that's that," said Jeff, completing his contact with Omaha. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Ask them what the marriage-license laws are in Nebraska," said Bart.

JEFF blinked and switched off: "I can tell you that. You can get a license and get hitched right away. Same way in Missouri," he added.

"They'll be stacked up at Kansas City," said Bart.

Turbulence took over again, and the air-liner began to sink and plunge. A bluish sheen glowed and danced along the leading edge and splintered off the wing-tips. The storm cell produced atmospherics pleasantly reminiscent of intense flak areas, and Bart shed two musty years of bitter uncertainty. This was why pilots were born. Real pilots! . . .

A slashing rain hosed them, and slapped a translucent film across the windshield the wiper was unable to erase.

"You're gonner beat your brains out against that," Jeff predicted, squinting at the altimeter.

"What's a line squall?" grinned Bart. "Never as bad as they say."

"You picked a beaut to prove it."

Jeff was right. The storm cell was expanding with its monstrous spasms, producing violent downdraft punishment. They tightened their belts as the DC-3 gasped and plunged against the raw edge of an updraft. The instruments swung, fluctuated and trembled, attempting to register the convulsive turbulences. The altimeter needle oscillated as the plane rolled, jerked and clawed its way through the static-barbed opposition. Bart reached up, made a new adjustment on a dial; and through it all, faint and uncertain, came a whimper of the Omaha beam.

They were still heading in, not on-course, but well inside the welcoming quadrant. Bart winked at Jeff.

"You know what you're doing?" the co-pilot demanded.

"Never been so sure in my life," Bart answered.

"I only hope she stays with you," Jeff said, peering out at the wing-tips as they vibrated in the vortex.

"She will," said Bart resolutely. "She needs me."

Jeff looked perplexed and gave up.

The clock idled torturously, the lazy hands stacking the minutes together, slowly bundling up half an hour. The gas needle hurried the other way, frantic in its effort to win another race against time. Could be, they'd find it grinning from a shattered dial when the wreckage was inspected by those ordained to decide what had happened.

"Twelve-fifty," reported Jeff. "See anything?"

"Not yet. Give me ten minutes. Something will come up."

With a glance at the dancing altimeter, Bart drew back the throttles and began to let down. If he was coming out of the dissipating side of the storm cell, the turbulence would be downdrafts registering between sixteen and twenty feet per second. That wouldn't be too bad. The ship whipped and swirled through the jagged vortices. Bart reached up again and tapped the radio dial, and the whimper of beam signal roused up to a determined pattern of sound. It came in with an authoritative cadence.

Satisfied, he snapped on his transmitter again and began calling. *"Omaha Radio . . . Continental Flight 206. What are conditions at the field?"*

There was no answer, and Jeff swallowed hard. "We're down to twelve hundred," he reported. "You're running it close, Bart."

Bart tried again: *"Omaha Radio . . . Continental Flight 206. Do you hear us?"*

The Voice responded within him: *"She's aboard, Bart. Take her in. You can't go wrong now. Take her in!"*

"Wheels down!" Bart said, and drew back the throttles.

"How do you know?" quaked Jeff, poking uncertainly at the switch.

"It's a long story," Bart said, listening to the rumble of the undercarriage gear. He looked out his window and said: "I got a wheel."

Jeff turned slowly and peered out his side. "I got a wheel," he reported.

THEY came out, and a shaft of sunlight glared down and touched them lightly A sovereign's sword striking an accolade! The drenched runway lay ahead, and Bart let her sink in and touch lightly.

"You are on time," the tower man reported, *"1:01."*

"Brother!" gasped Jeff.

"Run her in," ordered Bart. "I got business back here," he said, hurrying through the compartment door.

The LADIES

Major Petschkov, who wrote, "The Bugle Sounds," characterized the Foreign Legion as "men who have been wounded in their souls." Here follows the story of such a man, an Englishman.

by GEORGES SURDEZ

You know how those things go; we exchanged glances . . . and we accidentally met one evening on a country lane.

"WHAT'S the story about me?" Sergeant James asked.

"The story about you?" I wondered.

"Yes. I know there must be one, you know. They make them up, and sometimes they're quite amusing." He smiled, and his lean hands moved slightly on the table—a gesture which corresponded to a shrug in an ordinarily organized man. "I am English—there is no use my trying to conceal that; and they know that I served in the British Army. I'd be curious, really, to know what they have made of those bare facts." He considered me with calm amusement: "Look here, I'll reverse rôles and pay for the whisky, while you talk. Then I may even tell you why I came out here. Tempting, isn't it?"

"Very, very," I admitted.

There were some forty-odd men crowded in the bar of the Hotel des Dunes, in a Saharan outpost. Anyone can identify it when I mention that the favorite drink was the *tomato,* consisting of a good portion of anisette a dash of grenadine and a lot of water chilled by being poured into the glass through a tin funnel filled with ice. That ice came from the north by train every two days, and was too precious to be wasted in individual allotment. It was ten-thirty in the evening, and the temperature cannot have been much worse than one hundred and twenty.

Sergeant Reginald James served in the Foreign Legion Cavalry, in a motorized section. In those days, the work was still relatively dangerous. Not many months before, native raiders or patriots had offered themselves the luxury of bagging a brigadier general and sundry aides; a month previously, a mounted platoon of Legion had been practically wiped out in a pass of the hills.

"I have an odd chap in my section," his commanding officer had told me. "Queer rumors floating about him. But he may not want to talk. He won't even speak English with me—answers my questions in French. I'll get him in touch with you; that's easily arranged. I'll tell him you need the technical terms for military vehicles and their maneuvers in English. After that, you're on your own. However, the man's very intelligent, will guess my intention at once; and if he tells you to mind your business or go to the devil, there's nothing to be done about it. He can be rather offish and rude."

It turned out that James was neither offish nor rude. In fact, he was a very pleasant companion, made not the least mystery of his former connection with the British Army, and gave me a comparison between the methods of the French in Morocco and those of the British on the Northern Frontier that turned out to be much too learned for my prompt understanding.

He was thirty-two or -three, and a good-looking man, a lean, long-legged, muscular specimen almost six feet tall. His face was long too, with rather too much nose and chin, and he had a lot of light brown silky hair, cut short in back and left rather too long for strict regulation in front. His eyes were very light blue, in contrast with a brick-red skin; his teeth protruded slightly. At a range of ten feet, he was the personification of the romantic Legionnaire, a hero out of Ouida or even *Beau Geste* in tailor-fitted khaki. Across the table, his face was typically British, slightly vacuous, and he might have been a bank clerk or a Cabinet Minister's secretary as easily as an ex-cavalry subaltern—which he was imagined to be.

"What's the story about me?" he repeated. He was not drunk, although

he had drunk a good deal of whisky, Canadian whisky. I had been told that he could drink all night and never feel it. But one heard that about so many people. "The Lieutenant probably told you. What am I supposed to be in the Legion for? Stealing funds, a hopeless passion, shooting my colonel in a duel? I've lost curiosity about most things, you understand, but that I would like to know."

He smiled: "Then I'd know how to behave to deepen the mystery."

"I've heard nothing much about you, Sergeant," I said, "—only vague gossip."

He took another sip of whisky.

"Very well," he said, quite seriously; "then I shall remain very vague myself. In any case, old man, you could not use my biography in your literary products. It doesn't make much sense except to me. By the way, have you ever been in England?"

"A very short time, two or three days."

"Then you might not understand at all."

"I've read books on English life," I protested, "and never found them hard to understand, so far as psychology went. You are not so different from lesser human beings, you know. You

wish to know what is said about you? You asked for it, remember, and I didn't hear it here, so there'd be no use in trying to trace it to anyone in particular—"

"Oh, go ahead," he said. "I'll bear it."

"You're supposed to have murdered your wife."

"Oh, that?" Sergeant James yielded to a grin. "Are you sure you aren't confusing me with another Britisher? It's the story about the man whose picture was on a police circular, whom everyone knew and whom no one denounced to the coppers? Heard all of it myself about another chap who was English, whose name doesn't matter. No, I did not kill my wife. To be fair, I felt like it on one occasion. Perhaps I should have, but I didn't."

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

The girl was called in, questioned, and told that nothing would be said if she left immediately.

"So it was that with you also?" I pressed.

"If you mean infidelity, no. I suppose now that you've told me what I wished to know, I have to settle. I warn you that it isn't very interesting, and remind you there's no story in it—just a little private mess, grimy and sordid enough, but unimportant."

"I'm not Tolstoi," I informed him, "and I take my problems to scale. Go ahead."

You have read English novels (Sergeant James started his story, and from then on he spoke sometimes in English, again in French, with sundry Arabic expressions impossible to reproduce), so you can set the scene for yourself. I lived, or rather my family home was in a quiet little village, ten miles from a goodish-sized town. My people are not rich according to American standards, but gentry, Army and Navy people mostly. My grandfather was killed as a major on the Frontier; my father retired as a brigadier after the War. Yes, you're quite right, public school, cavalry regiment—all that; solid people; my mother's father was a colonel, her grandfather a bishop.

I was just able to be in at the finish of the Boche in '18, and after that I fell in love. She was a lady's maid; her father was a stonemason, I think—something connected with building, in any case. I don't know why I fell in love; I understand few people do. She was a tiny girl, not more than five feet, all round and brown and laughing. Possibly the laughing did it. My mother was a stately woman, you see, handsome, good bones and good carriage; and my fiancée—I had a fiancée—was tall, fair and rather serious. I was a bit at loose ends, the way many chaps were, and I thought tennis, charity fairs and hunting were dull.

The girl worked for my fiancée's people. You know how those things go; we exchanged glances; I said thank you and she smiled; and we accidentally met one evening on a country lane. Now, if this had occurred in France, the story would have been simple. Being a Frenchman, I would have seduced her.... Yes, quite, seductions have occurred in England; but I happened to be deeply in love, respect and all that; I am, after all, of English stock.

I confided in my mother. You see, my engagement was an old understanding which seemed very proper and sensible before I fell in love. I felt that my fiancée would not weep much, but it would be embarrassing to tell her. To my astonishment, my mother was sympathetic, if not approving.

She said she understood, but that nothing must be rushed. My father,

She showed surprising spirit for a servant. They gave her a day to make up her mind before summoning the police.

then very much alive, would undoubtedly toss me out for a while. He owed it to his position in life. I could not remain in the Army, of course. She admitted the standards were foolish, but there they were. I would have to be on my own for three years, possibly five, until my father cooled. I promised her to say nothing and to look for a job.... I'll spare you my failures, the impossibility to explain to a prospective employer just why I wished to leave the Army. I went to Paris, thinking I might work for an English firm there, and live there with my girl after marriage. I made a connection, small salary but said to be sufficient for modest living for two, and returned home with the good news.

Something rather ghastly had occurred. The girl I loved had been arrested for theft. There was no doubt about it; she was guilty. She had stolen several pieces of jewelry from my fiancée's mother, and sold them to buy expensive clothes. Then I recalled having noticed subconsciously that she wore excellent clothing when we met in town. I suggested my paying up,—it was a matter of a little more than one hundred pounds,—but it was too late; she was held for trial.

You will think that I was a bit lukewarm in my passion, for I did not force my way into prison to see the girl. But remember that it was a small place, that I had a family, and that my mother pointed out that I would do her more harm than good, bring doubt upon her morality. She had admitted the theft. I wrote her three times, and received no answer. I saw a brief account in the newspapers. She got off very lightly, it was claimed; I believe three months in prison.

I married my fiancée the following year. And then we went to India. Saw service here and there, in Assam, then almost three years on the Northern Frontier. I seldom thought of the girl, and then only to consider how foolish one could be when young, what a narrow escape I had had. I was a bit ashamed of myself when I thought of all the sentimental, bookish stuff I'd mooned about.... We had two children, two boys. I was perfectly happy with my wife. She was a good companion and—forgive me; there's no other word for it—a lady.

It was about seven years before we reached England for a long stay. We stopped in London, of course, to attend to a few details. My wife took some things out of a vault in a bank. I looked over them curiously—hadn't ever seen them. I was holding a beautiful, peculiar ring with a fairly large ruby when a slight accident happened which changed the course of my life. My knee struck the leg of the table. Very painful, for an instant, you know, and I winced. My wife looked up and saw me holding the ring, and looking at it with an odd expression. It was pain which she mistook for anger.

"I promised your mother," she said hurriedly; "I know it! But I lacked the courage; it came from my great-grandmother, and—"

"Why would my mother wish you to part with a ring?"

"Oh—" She looked at me a moment, smiled with relief. "It's supposed to bring bad luck."

I knew that was not the explanation. And I remembered a description of the missing rings. It was then that I had an idea of the truth. My wife and I had rather a tense scene. She ended by losing her temper and talking.

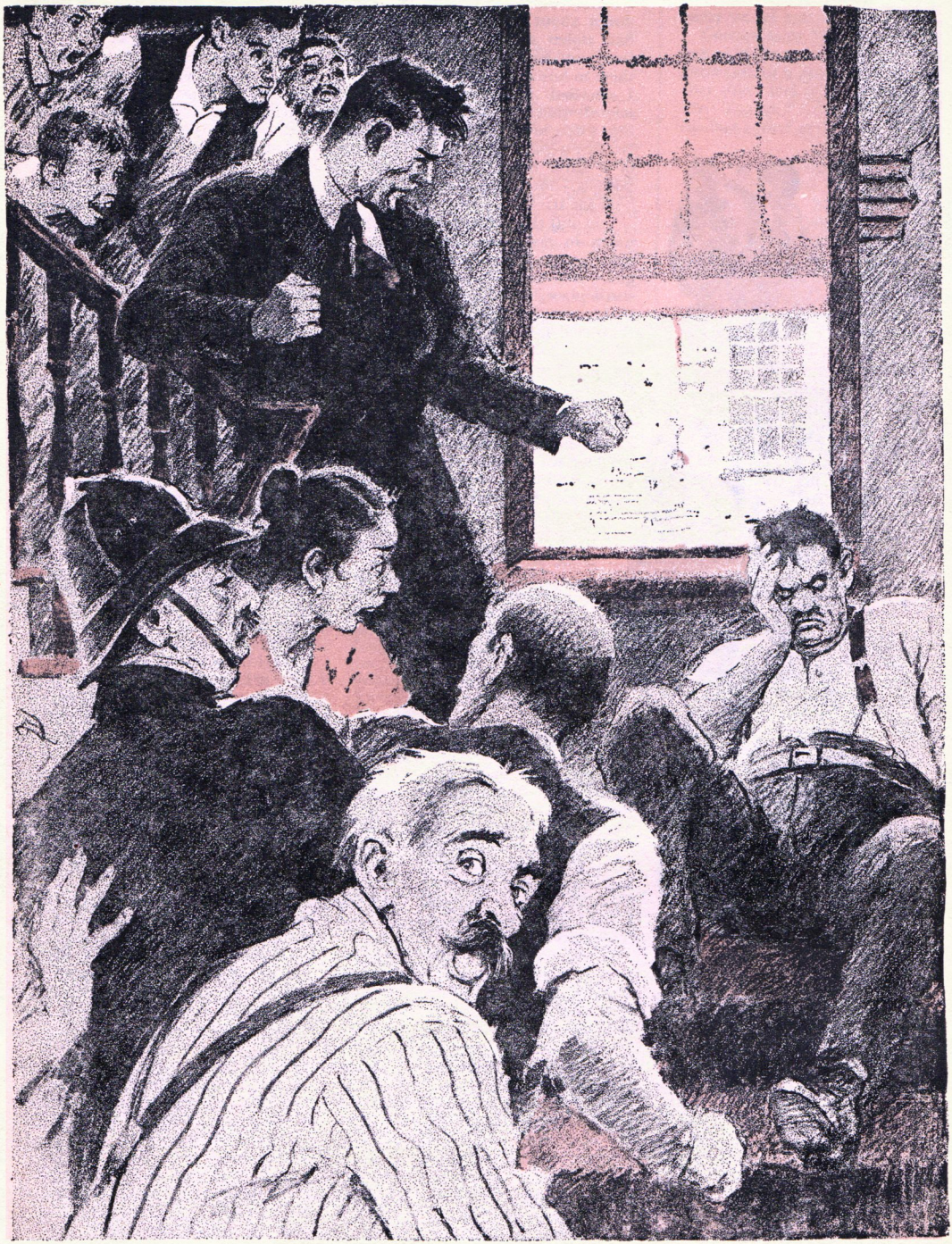
She had known about my infatuation for one of her maids. Why, everyone had guessed it. My mother and her mother had kept her from breaking with me, assured her that all young men went through that same experience—my father, her father, everyone. The right course was not to oppose it positively, but to compel the girl to leave.

Women seem to plot along straight lines. They decided that it would be useless to bribe the girl—she might be in love, and anyway knew I had excellent prospects of money. They had to *save me*. If I got married to that girl, two families would suffer; I would wreck my life for a passing fancy. Why, when I realized what she had done to me, I might kill her; one read of such things in the newspapers. So they decided on a trick, to scare off the girl, just as mothers threaten children with ogres and witches. Three rings were hidden.

The girl was called in, questioned, and told that nothing would be said if she left immediately. She understood their motive, knew what they were doing, and rebelled. She showed surprising spirit for a servant. They gave her a day to make up her mind before summoning the police. You understand: they were three ladies fighting for their families, for me. I was assured that they intended to compensate the girl generously later. Her stubbornness caused all the later trouble.

She made such a fuss, wept so loudly, that my fiancée's father, who was fond of her, noticed her grief and questioned her. She told him she was accused of theft, and he laughed and said it was nonsense, that the rings had been mislaid, and he sent for the constable to investigate.

THERE was no turning back for the three ladies after that, as you understand. Could they admit conspiring together, pretending? The girl stated that the money she had spent on clothes had been given her by my mother, and that she knew nothing about the missing rings. Why should my mother have given her money? Well, because she was secretly engaged to her son, me. A police official called on my mother as a matter of routine with apologies, stating that he knew well that the girl was using an



I am proud to say that by the time a policeman pushed his way up the stairs, boxing training had prevailed, and the other chap was seated in a corner, rather messed up.

trick, trying to stop prosecution by threatening a scandal. What could my mother say? She shook her head, and later the girl's lawyer himself persuaded her to abandon that line of defense, warning her that she was merely leaving herself open to much more serious charges. . . .

I wanted to know why she had not written me, had not answered my letters. Frightened and almost hysterical as my wife was, she laughed in my face, and I understood how easy it had been for my mother, with a casual word to the servants, to intercept mail from both sides. It was a trifle irregular, of course; but then, she had to save the family from scandal.

MY wife made it clear that the three ladies had done nothing wrong. They had not accused the girl of theft; they had told her the rings were missing from their usual place, which was the truth. She had known very well what they wanted, but she had chosen to argue and fight. The whole business had drifted far beyond their intentions; it was not their fault.

I was somewhat bewildered. Unwilling to see my mother until I had had time to think matters over a bit, I sent my wife and the children on to our home, and remained in London. I did not even know what penalties were foreseen for what those three ladies had done so piously, devotedly. After hours of brooding, I came upon a noble thought: I would find the girl, explain the whole business, compensate her handsomely and leave it to her to decide what should be done. I no longer loved her, but I was ready to do anything she asked. A private agency traced her for me in a couple of days. She lived in London.

I called on her within two hours of obtaining her address. Shabby little flat, a house swarming with people. She answered my knock, and I knew her at once. She was still pert and pretty, a bit more plump about body and hips, but giggling as of old, until I was in the center of the room and she identified me. There were two children there, a little girl and a baby boy – handsome children. From the change in name I should have guessed she was married. But because I was a romantic at the time, I had expected her to be destitute, hungry, thin. It is laughable, but I was a bit shocked that the conviction for theft had by no means blighted her life.

Instead of weeping or smiling sadly, she used the most horrible language. I tried to explain my errand, put the envelope with the notes on the table. She informed me that she would not be tricked twice, that she did not want my dirty money for any possible purpose. I do believe that she thought I had found her because of a lingering, infamous passion.

"If my husband was here, you'd catch it, you—"

She called me very inaccurate words. Do you know that I got angry myself? My intentions had been the best. It was quite ridiculous, but I could not bring myself to go. I shouted over her shouting; her children wept and screamed. And little thoughts kept coming to my mind: my mother and the others had been right, she was a stupid, coarse little woman. Life with her would have been quite impossible.

Then the hall door opened, and a very large chap came in—evidently a neighbor, for he wore slippers, trousers and a dingy undershirt. He asked if his services were needed. She told him that I had offered her money, and he turned to me very quietly: "Now, then—the lady says no, you'd better go." And he took the notes and slipped them into my pocket, jerked a thumb toward the door.

I knew he misunderstood the situation, but I answered him haughtily. I told him he was meddling. He lifted his brows and consulted the woman with a glance. She nodded, and suggested he throw me out. He indicated the door again and said: "Now, one, two, three—well, then—" leaped upon me, grasped me by the shoulder and waistband and shoved me out on the platform near the stairs. Every door was open and crowded with excited spectators. It was humiliating.

"Now, then—on your way!"

"Very well, I shall leave," I said stiffly, "but I'd advise you to take your hands off me—"

You can imagine what that led to. We exchanged four or five more words; then he fetched me a rattling good smash over the left eye. He was a big, beefy fellow, built like a coal-heaver, but rather slow. I smashed *his* eye; and for a minute or two, we had it out with fine spirit. I am proud to say that by the time a policeman pushed his way up the stairs, boxing training had prevailed, and the other chap was seated in a corner, rather messed up. But he was a perfect gentleman; he explained that it was a private misunderstanding, refused to put me in charge. He took me into his flat to wash and arrange my clothes, spoke kindly of the erratic ways of women, and escorted me out to a pub, where we had a couple of drinks . . .

I was pretty depressed. For one thing, I had a fine black eye, lacerated lips, and I could not go back to my hotel, where I would meet friends. Nothing like a battered face to give one a sense of inferiority in conventional existence! I did not want to go home as I was, either.

Furthermore, I suffered from embarrassment. I did not wish to see my mother. I loved her and respected her, but I now knew something she had done which— You understand? I had to admit that she had been right in fearing my future with the girl; she had saved me from something rather ugly. But I remembered she had been cruel to a poor girl, heartless, that she had lied. There were no other words for it. Even if we never mentioned the matter, it would be there, always.

And the victim, the innocent woman, evidently did not care for compensation or vengeance. She was interested in her children, her husband. She was right. I had to think of my own, too – my children, who had a right to a belief in their mother, a right to be brought up as—well, as I had been.

I was afraid of running into people I knew with my bruised face, and crossed over to Paris to think things over. There, I did some very steady drinking, for a fortnight – until the money I had on me was gone. After that, I felt reluctant to go to a bank for more, or to write. My mind was spinning in circles. That mental condition may be unknown to you, old boy; but ask any of my comrades in the Legion; they know it very well. I was fed up. As a gentleman I could not tolerate lies and injustice; I would have felt singularly out of place in my regimental mess, thinking of what made my presence there possible.

I dodged the issue I could not face. I came here.

"WHAT will you do when your enlistment is finished?" I asked Sergeant James after he concluded his story.

"I really don't know." He drank more whisky. "The real problem is still there, you see. Knowing what I know, I can't imagine seeing my mother, my wife. It would be too embarrassing for all of us, wouldn't it? Even they understand that. They found out where I was, and I get letters. They don't ask me to come back. I've become enough of a Legionnaire not to scorn a money-order, no matter whence."

"Peculiar situation," I offered.

"Isn't it?" he said with a rising inflection. "I told you it wasn't a story you could use, didn't I? Sorry that you are disappointed."

"Oh, not at all," I protested.

"What will I do? I suppose I'll take on for another five years in this service. You don't have to think here; that's the main attraction. You don't have to think; and if you do think, there's not a thing you can do about anything. Can you suggest anything?"

"No."

"And there you are." Sergeant James' voice was crisp; again came the slow smile. "By the way, if anyone asks you what I told you, tell them it's true, that I murdered my wife. It'll give me a certain prestige—and they'll like that much better."

Starlet *in* Jeopardy

A COLORFUL STORY OF CRIME AND DETECTIVE WORK IN THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD.

by JOEL REEVE

THE Old Neighborhood lay sprawling over a powerful ward in the City; the *Clarion*, its favorite newspaper, was a power in the town. Arthur Traudt was working the city desk under Ace Fletcher, last of the old-time editors, when Maye Maze came back to the scene of her childhood.

Every neighborhood has one, and ours has two or three: the girls who are good-looking, or talented or just plain lucky, who go out into the big world of make-believe and become famed. Maye Maze was our only motion-picture star, however; and she was truly beautiful even off the screen. Her father had been a fireman; and her mother was a smart lady who had Maye saying pieces at every church cantata, amateur performance and chowder outing in the vicinity before the kid was ten. At eighteen Maye won her tenth beauty-contest and A.C.M. gave her a test. To no one's amazement, Maye caught on. She was smart; she was clever; she could act a little. Her beauty did the rest.

Arthur Traudt did not see her come in. There was a little, flashy man with her, and they went into Fletcher's seldom-used back office. Sam Beasely, the theater critic, sighed: "She's a lovely, lovely broad. You'd never think she came from the Old Neighborhood."

Arthur Traudt said: "Izzat so? I'll have you know there are no better-looking girls anywhere than—"

"Your Gretchen Humperknickel is a lovely creature," said Beasely. "I am nuts about her. There are others—but Maye Maze is a lovely, lovely broad. You knew her in the old days?"

"It was only four years ago," said Arthur Traudt with dignity. "I knew her well. She is quite a nice-looking girl."

Ace Fletcher's bull voice roared: "Traudt! Back here!"

Arthur jumped from behind the desk. It was Fletcher's "mad" voice. Arthur wondered what he had done now. He was a little fellow, scarcely bigger than a fire hydrant, with a biscuit face and round eyes which were not so innocent as when he had gone to work for the *Clarion* as a copy boy. He trotted back to the sanctum sanctorum, went inside and closed the door behind him.

Maye Maze was sitting in the direct rays of the light from the window. He looked at her, gulped and stared. Hollywood had gilded the lily.

She had been fair—now she was a dazzling blonde. She used make-up in the old days—now it was only lipstick and her creamy, smooth skin. Her eyes, always blue, were now deep-shadowed, seeming mysterious. She smiled and her teeth were twin rows of white pearls. She cried: "Little Gooney! *Darling!*"

COMING to her feet, she swooped upon him. She was a tall girl and he felt smothered. He almost tried to escape, but at his ear her lips whispered: "I want to talk to you. I'll stall and you play along."

He stammered: "He—hello, Maye. Uh—nice to see you."

She was prattling in a cultured new voice about the old days, and how Little Gooney had been her friend. The little man's name was Abel Cochell, and he was from A.C.M., in charge of Maye's trip to the Old Neighborhood. Cochell was pumping at Gooney's limp hand, beaming past a cigar too large for his meager face. He wore clothing gaudier than anything Gooney had ever seen.

FLETCHER said sourly: "All right, you can cut the katzenjammer. I called Traudt in here to give him the lowdown."

"It cannot positively miss," said Cochell. He was the most aggressive, dogmatic little man Arthur had ever met. "Maye, she needs something, you see? A small boost. This is positively it. Kidnaping! That is big stuff, kidnaping. The *Clarion*, because it is the Old Neighborhood paper, it gets the inside. I got a couple of smart boys—then there is Dailey. That is our big gimmick—Dailey, the old beau. It is a love kidnaping! Who hates lovers? The *Clarion* exposes Dailey; there is a big laugh; Maye gets the publicity. . . . Nothing to it. Positively!"

Fletcher drew a deep breath. He said: "Traudt, this is an example of what can happen in a newspaper office. Miss Maze is very lovely. I understand she knows you. Take her out, Traudt—quietly."

"It's no use talking it over private," said Cochell, puffing his cigar and blowing smoke in Fletcher's face. "Maye's a smart kid. We're all pals."

"Take her out," roared Fletcher, and again Gooney jumped. "I don't want her to hear what I've got to say to this pusillanimous, double-barreled low comedian with the schnozzola and the stinking cigar."

Fletcher was running out of quotable adjectives. Gooney seized Maye by the arm, but the girl was ahead of him through the door. They were down the stairs before the echo of the door's banging had died, but not before Fletcher's vocabulary made itself known to the welkin.

On the sidewalk Maye Maze said: "He talks like a director I know. . . . Wasn't Abel silly to think the *Clarion* would go for that hanky-panky?" Her voice was more like the old days, and her smile was genuine, Gooney thought. She hailed a cruising taxi and got in, and he had to follow her. Things were slow on the city side, and he was due to quit in a half-hour anyway. She smelled very nice in the close confines of the cab.

She said: "Harry Hoople's saloon."

The driver headed for the nearby Old Neighborhood. Maye kept looking out the window, exclaiming that everything was the same, as astounded as though she had been away fifty years instead of four. In front of Hoople's they got out. It was almost time for Gooney to help Gretchen wait on the tables at her father's delicatessen-restaurant, but still he lingered.

"Uh—Phil Dailey isn't on until eight."

Maye Maze said: "I know it. I asked. I want to talk to you." She had him in the back room before he could get away. Harry Hoople came in, stared at her, hugged her. Harry's was a very respectable saloon, where all the Neighborhood ladies felt free to come and go through the family entrance. Harry was a swell guy.

He said: "Not here. The little room." He showed them into the tiny cubicle which held only one table and four chairs, where pinochle and poker sessions were held by the élite of the neighborhood. He brought flagons of beer, and Maye Maze got foam on her nose and laughed.

Harry had to go attend to the trade, and Maye sobered. She said: "Phil's a drunk, huh, Gooney?"

"We—ell—" Gooney could not meet her eyes. She had been engaged to handsome, laughing, tall Phil Dailey. But Phil had never got started at anything remunerative, and Mrs. Maze had always disliked him. Now Phil was tending bar for Harry Hoople. "He's not a real whisky-head, Maye. Nobody ever saw Phil act as if he was drunk. He's always so neat and clean—"

"He drinks a quart of liquor every day," she said. There was no censure in her. "He never goes with girls—nice girls, I mean. He spends every dime he makes on whisky and books. He reads and drinks and works. He is twenty-six years old, and his life is the life of an old man."

"You talk awfully grown-up for twenty-two," retorted Gooney. He was recovering from his awe of her beauty. It was real beauty, he saw now, not Hollywood. She had always been a girl to whom he could talk. He had always felt a little sorry for her, the way her mother made her work at singing and dancing and learning pieces. "Phil's all right. He's a good friend of mine. Phil is not beefing. Maybe he doesn't want a girl."

She said: "I checked on him. . . . Abel thought he would take money to phony up a kidnaping deal. . . . Phil wouldn't do it."

"It is a very silly idea," said Gooney seriously. "Kidnaping can get you killed, you know. Cops get to shooting first at kidnapers, and not all cops shoot straight enough to be sure they will miss innocent parties."

She said: "Abel is ridiculous. He is about to lose his job. This is his

The face of the man seemed to have shrunken smaller in death.

A tough lot indeed. They would break your arm for a fiver.

last chance. If his cousin was not a producer—but never mind that. The scheme will go through, you know. The studios okayed it. Abel simply will go ahead without the newspapers. But Phil won't do it. I know he won't. They'll have to think up another angle."

Gooney sat very still for a moment. Then he said: "You are not sure whether Phil will do it. You want to know. You will hold still for this dangerous, childish scheme, to find out about Phil Dailey. You still love him!"

She said passionately: "I do not. I am engaged to a nice boy in Hollywood. It is simply that I wonder—everyone wonders—about old friends. I learned about Phil's drinking—I'm worried about him. That's all—just worried! He was a nice boy." Her blue eyes flashed. Gretchen had blue eyes too, and they often flashed, but this girl was lovely. . . .

He said: "Well, I must go help Gretchen. If you are kidnaped, I will not be alarmed, then. I warn you, the *Clarion* will expose it."

"What do I care? It's a laugh—and anyway, Phil will not do it." She sat stubbornly behind the big beer, staring at him.

He got to the door. He said softly: "Maybe Phil will do it—just to be near you again. Then what will you do, Maye Maze?" He closed the door behind him, but not before he had seen the quick light in her face.

Did she want to get Phil involved with her again, just to see if the old love still endured? Was she genuinely worried about an old pal? He wondered about her, and how much Hollywood had changed her inside. He wondered a lot about people. Sometimes he thought he was getting to be an ordinary run-of-mine reporter, a thing responsive only to the roar of the presses and the odor of paper and printer's ink, but he dimly knew that so long as he had this intense interest in and love for people, he was not yet lost.

EVIDENTLY Abel Cochell had not gone to the rival paper, because the *Star* carried a banner head on the disappearance of Maye Maze. SCREEN STAR MISSING; FOUL PLAY FEARED; POLICE DRAGNET OUT! The *Star* had a field day, all right.

Fletcher had the paper spread on his desk, a cynical grin adorning his features. He said: "Traudt, this can be a diller. Meant to come right out with it. Meant to print how they approached us. And I was *not* even going to use their names in the story. But that girl—well, she is lovely, Traudt."

Gooney started. Blasphemy of the wildest order would not have amazed him more, coming from Fletcher. The editor immediately disillusioned him.

"Readers wouldn't stand for it if we socked her and something went wrong. So I want you to go on the thing. Get with it, stay with it. And just *before* they spring the gimmick—you break the story. It's an important assignment, Traudt. We can beat the brains out of the *Star*, if you pull it out."

Little Gooney said slowly: "You want me to find them. That's a big order, Fletcher. They're sure to be well hidden."

"Dailey's your friend," said Ace Fletcher. "You can do it before the cops. It means a nice boost for you, Traudt. I've been layin' for the *Star* since last election."

"Dailey didn't ever have a close friend," said Gooney. "He reads a lot. He got me reading something. A man named Thomas Wolfe . . . and Phil Wylie, and—"

"A bartender at Hoople's? Reading those birds?" Ace Fletcher stared. "There might be a story after all. A literary barkeep—a picture star—a phony kidnaping-elopement. Yes, it's tabloid stuff, but played up right, it could be dynamite. Tear out their guts. Get on it, Traudt. Break it!"

LITTLE GOONEY found himself on the street. He had no more idea which way to turn than the man in the moon, he thought unhappily. It was too early to go to Hoople's and ask that wise man's advice.

He decided to run over to Dailey's room. The *Star* had said nothing about the bartender. Cochell was saving that angle for his bombshell. The police would be searching the town; the *Star's* leg-men would be running in circles; Cochell would be giving interviews like crazy. Gooney remembered Maye Maze's prophecy that Dailey would not be a party to the scheme.

As he mounted the steps of the boarding-house, he began to doubt that Dailey would go along with Cochell's silly stunt. The girl had been very positive. Phil Dailey was a quiet, serious man despite his heavy drinking. He was still handsome; he had dignity beyond his calling—although Gooney had met many dignified bartenders, when he stopped to think of that.

He knocked on the door of Dailey's room. The portal swung open at his touch. He went in, and the bed was unmade, but Phil was gone. Gooney recognized the fact with a slight shock.

THE girl had sold him, all right. He had expected to find Phil asleep, and to have an uncomfortable interview with him. He stood in the center of the room. A book lay on the floor. It was a new copy of "Nineteen Nineteen," and it was open, face down. Gooney picked it up and smoothed the jacket. The binding was sprung.

He put it down again quickly, as though it were hot. He stepped back and took another look at the room. There were three neckties strewn across the dresser. There was a small pile of change loosely scattered. The chair alongside the dresser was turned sidewise and tilted against the wall. The bathroom was open—Phil had a private bath.

Gooney went gingerly into the bath room. He picked up the shaving brush, a fine badger hair of which Phil was quite proud. It was dry. It had obviously not been used that morning.

Gooney's pulse began to quicken at that moment. Phil Dailey was the neatest man in the Old Neighborhood. His room was never mussed. He was almost fanatically meticulous about three things: his books, of which he took the greatest care; his loose change, which he piled in separate stacks according to denomination; his neckties, which he hung evenly upon a special rack, each in its individual niche.

Phil Dailey never left an unmade bed. Mrs. Dee, his landlady, was so fond of him and his neat ways that she had installed that private bath for him, claiming that she saved the money by not hiring an extra maid to take care of the place. Phil Dailey was immaculate in his personal habits and dress, and would as soon appear naked as unshaven.

Gooney went out and down the stairs. Mrs. Dee, a fluttery lady with loose-jointed wrists, knew nothing, had not heard any unusual sounds. If Phil had gone out, it was just like always, he never disturbed a soul. It was his way, bless him, as nice a boy as ever lived, and if he took a drop of whisky now and then, she saw no reason why people should talk. . . .

Gooney went out into the street. Phil Dailey had left his room, but not of his own volition. The pertinency of this deduction drummed into his mind. He saw a taxicab, and recklessly called it, hoping the auditor would allow the expense on his account. He gave the address of the Golconda Hotel, downtown.

He asked at the desk for Mr. Abel Cochell. The clerk said: "Cochell went out about a half-hour ago. There were two men with him. A dozen calls have come in for him since. If you see him, please have him get in touch with this desk. Goodness, A.C.M. in Hollywood is raving mad."

Gooney said: "Thanks, I'll tell him. Did you recognize the two men who were with him?"

The clerk ran a hand over marceled hair and sniffed. "Very common, indeed. Cochell dropped in my estimation, immediately I saw him with them."

Gooney said breathlessly: "Did he walk between them? Maybe just a step ahead of them?"

The clerk said: "Why—I wouldn't —why, how did you know? That is the way it was. Exactly! My goodness, who are you, sir?"

BUT Gooney was hurtling toward a phone-booth. He dialed and got Fletcher at once. He said hoarsely: "Hold that story. . . . Kill everything you've got on it, and hold it for me. You'd better get the others out and start looking. The kidnaping is on the level!"

"Are you drunk, Traudt?" demanded the editor. "They *told* us they were going to pull it."

"Two men just walked Cochell out of the Golconda. Was *he* supposed to be kidnaped too? A.C.M. doesn't know it. The studio is calling him, and mad 'cause he ain't here. Phil Dailey never left his place willingly Fletcher—did that fool Cochell tell you the name of the smart boys he had picked for this job?"

"Why, no," said Fletcher. "I didn't ask. Traudt, we skipped the story in the early edition. If it's on the level, the *Star's* got us beat!"

"Get busy," said Gooney. He forgot he was talking to the great Ace Fletcher, the toughest man behind a city desk in the country. "Send the boys out looking. I'll stay on it from here. Our only chance is to turn them up. I'll call you."

He dashed out of the hotel. The newsstand on the corner was piled with copies of the *Star* so freshly printed that the ink smudged on his fingers. The big headline screamed: A.C.M. GETS KIDNAP NOTE; MAYE MAZE SNATCHED; CITY AROUSED AS MAN HUNT IS ON.

He read the story, his hands shaking so that the newspaper rattled. He got to the line: "Morton Tobnik, local A.C.M. distributor, refuses to dis-

PEANUTS, CHILDREN — AND YOU

by LELAND STOWE

Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of "They Shall Not Sleep"

I PRAY that I'll never have to do it again. Can there be anything much worse than to put only a peanut between a child and death? I hope you'll never have to do it, and live with the memory of it afterward. If you had heard their voices and seen their eyes, on that January day in the bomb-scarred workers' district of Athens....

Yet all I had left was a half-pound can of peanuts. As I struggled to open it, dozens of ragged kids held me in a vise of frantically clawing bodies. Scores of mothers, with babes in their arms, pushed and fought to get within arm's reach. They held their babies out toward me. Tiny hands of skin and bone stretched convulsively.

I tried to make every peanut count. In their frenzy they nearly swept me off my feet. Nothing but hundreds of hands: begging hands, clutching hands, despairing hands; all of them pitifully little hands. One salted peanut here, and one peanut there. Six peanuts knocked from my fingers, and a savage scramble of emaciated bodies at my feet. Another peanut here, and another peanut there. Hundreds of hands, reaching and pleading; hundreds of eyes with the light of hope flickering out. I stood there helpless, an empty blue can in my hand....Yes, I hope it will never happen to you.

Who would say that a child's life is worth less than a movie a week, or a lipstick, or a few packs of cigarettes? Yet, in today's world, there are at least 230,000,000 children who must depend upon the aid of private agencies and individuals. From Amiens to Athens, from Cairo to Calcutta and Chungking, millions upon millions of the waifs of war still hold death barely at arm's-length. Their only hope rests in the private relief agencies which, in turn, depend entirely upon you and me—upon how much we care and what we give.

A world-wide campaign exists as a demonstration that the peoples of the United Nations do care. Our own branch of UNAC is American Overseas Aid—United Nations Appeal for Children, with headquarters at 39 Broadway, New York City. In February, American Overseas Aid makes its appeal to raise $60,000,000 from Americans. That's something to put peanuts forever in their place. Something big enough for every American to want to be in on. Every penny contributed to American Overseas Aid will help bring food, medical care and new life to millions of child war victims.

If we could hear their voices and see their eyes, countless millions of children, now hungry and diseased or soon to die, would run and play and laugh once more. It only depends on how many of us hear and how many see. Look at their reaching, outspread fingers—and send your contribution to American Overseas Aid, 39 Broadway, New York.

cuss the kidnap note demanding ransom, other than to say that the studio would protect its star. The police questioned Tobnik for an hour, but he refused to talk."

Little Gooney relaxed. It was not Cochell, then, who was being quoted. No mention of Cochell was in the story. Tobnik evidently was keeping the disappearance of the publicity man under cover. For one moment Gooney had been afraid he was wrong, that Cochell was unfolding the plot from some hide-out.

He got to the A.C.M. offices as quickly as possible. He was received coldly by a secretary, until he said that he was a friend of Maye's and of Phil Dailey's. Then he was ushered into a back office, and a lean man with intelligent eyes admitted he was Tobnik.

Gooney said: "Cochell was snatched. Dailey was snatched. Cochell picked a couple of wrong ones for his dumb scheme, and they backfired. The question is, who did he pick?"

Tobnik said: "Whoever he picked is asking fifty thousand dollars, and promising us an ear off our lovely Maye if we don't deliver. Each day an ear or a finger or some gruesome souvenir." His forehead was sweating. "There's been an Officer Murphy, a plain-clothes man, grilling me as though I was behind the whole scheme. Cochell is fired, needless to say. This is the most stupid thing! . . . Have you anything definite on your friends?"

Gooney said: "The *Clarion* will find them. The staff will be out, and no hoodlum in town can hide from our bunch."

Tobnik's face froze. "You're from a newspaper? Why, dammit—"

"I'm also a friend," said Gooney quickly. "I won't crack anything you tell me in confidence, Mr. Tobnik. I just wanted to be sure this was a real kidnaping. And to learn who was in on it, if I could."

"I can't help you," said Tobnik. "If I'd known you were from the *Clarion*, I wouldn't have talked to you."

Gooney said: "Okay. Pay the ransom, if you want. But I have a feeling they won't stop at fifty thousand."

"The girl isn't worth more, frankly," said Tobnik. "Not to us. But there's the public interest. The publicity we are getting now is valuable."

Gooney said: "I suppose it is. But not to Maye, nor to Phil, nor that poor little slob of a press agent. I imagine they don't feel it is worth the candle, Mr. Tobnik." And he walked out, his face round and hard.

AT the doorway he paused, swung around and went back into the office. Tobnik was staring dismally at a piece of paper. Gooney said: "Where was that note mailed? If you'd let me see it, I might help."

Tobnik said: "Maybe I was too tough. . . . Here, you might as well take a look. If you keep this off the record, maybe we can help each other."

The envelope was from the dime store or its equivalent, he saw at a glance. It was smudged; the address was printed in pencil. The postmark was *Main Avenue Station*—in the Old Neighborhood. The note read:

> *"Bring fifty thousand in small bills UNMARKED to Kay and Main. At nine a car will drive by, blinking lights three times, stop, three times, stop. Walk up Kay Street. In front of Humperknickel's Delicatessen, drop package and walk away. Turn back into Main Avenue and go to your office. Maye will follow. Tell the cops, and get an ear off your lovely broad."*

There was a scrawled pair of lines below: *"Please pay them. They have got us and mean business — Cochell."* The other went: *"It is a real kidnaping, Tobnik — Maye."*

"The handwriting checks?" asked Gooney.

"Yes," nodded Tobnik. "Cochell put us in a jackpot, all right."

Gooney said: "It's a Neighborhood job on the Neighborhood movie star. That helps. Thanks again. I'll call you."

Tobnik said: "I'm going to give them the money. I've got to."

"Okay," said Gooney.

"I'm not telling the cops," said Tobnik.

"Okay," said Gooney. "I like you better than I did before." He left, quietly this time, head down, thinking hard. A deep suspicion had entered his mind. Maye had asserted that Cochell was due to lose his job. Now Tobnik said that "of course" Cochell was fired.

Had the loud little man seen the handwriting on the wall? Had he decided to feather his nest by pulling a real snatch?

The theory would be tenable if he could work Dailey into it. But he could not do so. Phil had never left that room willingly. Gooney was gambling his job, his paper's reputation—a precious thing—everything, on

the knowledge of his friend's habits. The note could be a fake; anything else in the cockeyed deal could be a trick; but people do not change their habits overnight.

He took another chance and did not tip Fletcher that he had seen the kidnap note. He should have done so, reserving the right to print it under his promise of remaining off the record. But he knew Fletcher, and he knew the repeated beats the *Star* was scoring on the case would have the city editor fit for a straitjacket. . . .

He went back to the Neighborhood, to Main Avenue and Kay Street, where the kidnapers' car was to make its run. The snatch was a Neighborhood job on at least two definite counts. One was that only Neighborhood people would know that Phil Dailey figured in it. The other was the note mailed at the post-office station across from where Gooney was standing. Officer Murphy went by in a prowl car with Jingle, his uniformed assistant, driving. Gooney dodged behind a lamppost. Murphy was the Neighborhood cop, but this was not a time to consult him, nor be questioned by him.

HE began running through his mind all the tough guys he knew who hung out at Patsy Geoghan's dive, the opposite number to Harry Hoople's place in the Old Neighborhood. There was Gitzy and Oily Joe and Jack the Bat, and Jamesy Cole, and Freygang the Chisel and dozens of others. If Cochell had worked Geoghan's and got his men from there, anything could happen. He walked around the corner and went in.

Geoghan was bland and talkative, but said nothing. Nearly all the boys were hanging around and smirking. They were a very tough lot indeed, and any of them could be in on it. For fifty grand, Gooney thought—they would all get in on it, and call it a fair split. They would break your arm for a fiver, and drop you in the adjacent river for a hundred, with rocks tied to your feet and your head in a bag. He thought of the lovely girl in their hands, and it made him a little sick; and suddenly they all looked exactly alike, a smug, grinning, evil crew of thugs. He got out before he started on them. He was a tiny young man, but his temper was proverbial. Like most essentially gentle and sweet people, he could turn into a fighting fury when aroused by the troubles of others.

Disconsolately he went back to Mrs. Dee's. She let him into Phil's room without question—for he often borrowed books in Phil's absence. He took up the copy of "Nineteen Nineteen" again, thinking how Phil loved to read this particular author.

The book binding was broken, all right. It fell open to the pages Phil must have been reading when he was interrupted. . . . Gooney stared at the printed pages.

For there were faint pencil-marks. To Phil, marking a book was a desecration. The mark underlined certain words. The chapter was one of the many headed DAUGHTER. . . . Gooney read: "One of them, a tall man with a hawk nose, was looking at her. Their eyes met, and she couldn't help grinning. Those boys looked as if they were having a fine time. A party of Americans dressed up like plush horses crossed the floor between her and the Frenchmen. It was Dick and the pale woman and J. Ward Morehouse and a big middle-aged woman." The words underlined were *"tall man with a hawk nose . . . J. Ward Morehouse . . . big, middle-aged woman."*

Gooney put down the book with a feeling of awe. Phil Dailey was a cool, brave man. *"Tall man with a hawk nose."* That was, for sure, Jamesy Cole, who had a beak like a poll parrot. "J. Ward Morehouse" in the book had silver-colored hair. Phil had known Gooney would come looking for him. . . . Gitzy Breen had prematurely gray hair on his egg-shaped head. And "big, middle-aged woman"—why, that was Jack the Bat, who was fat and hippy and looked like an old woman from the rear, and like an ugly mask in a devil's pageant from in front.

He reverently replaced the book and went downstairs. He ought to call in Officer Murphy now, but the *Star* would be covering Murphy from a safe distance, counting heavily on the Neighborhood cop to solve a Neighborhood case. He went doggedly past Patsy Geoghan's. None of the three described in the book were present, he saw through a window.

He searched until it became a nightmare. He spent the afternoon hours prowling the entire Neighborhood. His feet ached; his head was sore. He asked a thousand children questions on every side-street, in every alley near the docks. At times he thought he was being watched, but he had to keep going. Phil Dailey had given him the key, with his hasty, clever pencil, even as he was being kidnaped. The least Gooney could do was search.

At last he had to call Fletcher. The *Clarion* was out with a kidnap story, cleverly filled with vague allusions to things which they could not at present divulge, but which they expected imminently to relay to an expectant public. The *Star* was blatantly shouting conjectures, promising an exclusive story when the authorities closed in on the miscreants.

Fletcher bawled: "I've had every man on the damned paper combing the city. They've been everywhere but the damned Neighborhood, for which you are responsible. If you can't crack this, Traudt, you are no good to me. That Neighborhood is your territory, and this is your case and the *Star* is making a monkey of me personally."

Gooney resisted the obvious retort to that, and held the receiver farther from his ear while the editor raved. It was no use pointing out that none of this was his fault. Fletcher had

His hands shaking, he read: "Tobnik refuses to discuss kidnap note demanding ransom."

to have his whipping-boys. After a while the editor ran down, and Gooney said quietly: "I'm going to help Gretchen now. I'll be on it again, all night."

"If you sleep one hour before this is cleared up, you're fired!"

Gooney hung up. Even Fletcher did not try to stop him from helping Gretchen through the early supper rush. He went over to the delicatessen, limping, and grimly carried lentil soup and glasses of hot tea, and pumpernickel and frankfurters and kraut to the trade. Gretchen's eyes were blue and contented, watching him perform his labor of love. But she was angry when he had to go away at seven-thirty, for she wanted to see the new picture at the Bijou. She accused him of having fallen for Maye Maze. She accused him of having already married the *Clarion*, and claimed she could not see why he wanted to marry her. It took him a few moments to settle that. Gretchen was a tiny girl, shorter than Gooney, but she was a satisfying, plump armful.... He tore himself loose and went out on his hopeless search, moving closer and closer to Kay and Main as he went. At nine, he had an awful feeling that it would be too late.

He could not see how the kidnapers could afford to turn loose Phil Dailey and Maye, who surely knew them. They were of the Neighborhood; they could not have disguised themselves enough to make certain they would be free when the victims were turned back. Gooney knew what kidnapers did to keep from being turned up after the event. They got rid of their victims. The river flowed swiftly, dank and dark.

THE sun went down; the dark alleys of the Neighborhood became caves of whispering dangers. Gooney had been circling the warehouse district, which was a warren of junk-filled buildings. He went through a narrow street he had previously traversed a couple of times, heading back desperately for Phil's room. He might find further inspiration, he thought despairingly, in Phil's books.

He tripped and fell across the body. He thought it was a skid-row drunk at first, but his hands slipped on the pavement; and when he got to his knees, he was careful to wipe them on a handkerchief which turned brown and gave off a heavy odor he recognized at once.

He lit a match. The face of the small man seemed to have shrunken even smaller in death. It seemed scarcely bigger than a head-hunter's trophy Gooney had examined in the museum one Sunday.

He blew out the match at once. He crouched like a small terrier, looking this way and that. He worked his way to the head of the alley with his mind working like a busy machine shop doing manifold useful things. How far would they carry the body? They did not dare take too much chance, with Officer Murphy on the prowl.

"The jig's up, anyhow. The damn' cub musta called cops. I'll kill him, an' them too!"

He clung to the deep shadow of a ramshackle building. He stayed there five minutes without moving, trying to assure himself he was not being watched. . . .

Then he had it. The thing seemed impossible, but it had to be that way. Every haunt of the wicked had been covered that day. There was no hiding-place a rat could have used which Officer Murphy and Gooney had not covered.

He stared at the towering pile of brick, steel and stone ahead of him. He had worked around until he was on the edge of the Old Neighborhood. That was the Golconda Hotel, on the next street. This was the back alley that led to its service entrance.

He went into the alley like a frightened hare. He found a fire-door, and it opened without trouble. He paused inside, trembling a little. Cole, Breen and Jack the Bat were not men one should seek in a dark spot.

He could remember the number of Cochell's room, because he had a trained newspaper man's memory. It was 907. The boys had been very clever. Two of them had taken Cochell out, leaving his key at the desk, and tied him up some place. Of course they must have been moving him around all day. That was why at least two of them were in Geoghan's, watching the search waiting for some searcher to get warm, when they would move Cochell again. But one had remained with Phil Dailey and the girl, in the hotel room, Cochell's room, the last place anyone would look!

IT was a desperate chance, but the boys were tough characters. . . . If they could keep Cochell covered up until nine, they were all right. He must have almost got away—and it was nearing nine. So they killed him—poor little noisy man, he would make a great outcry if he were loose.

The service elevator was open, inviting. It was a time now to call the police, but there was Fletcher. Arthur slipped into the labyrinth of the hotel basement and found a telephone on the wall. He got an outside wire by blarneying the operator, and called the paper. He said rapidly: "I'm going up to Room 907 in the Golconda, and I expect to find them there. It will be Jamesy Cole, Gitzy Breen and Jack the Bat. Cochell is dead in Port Alley. If I'm right, you can be set up to break the story. I'll call back." He hung up in the rewrite man's ear, and added: "—If I live."

Thoughts of the girl and the gallant Phil Dailey ground into his brain. He worked the mechanism gingerly, and the elevator went up. The black numbers succeeded one another at each floor with maddening deliberation. At "9" he slid back the door and eased into the hall.

Illustrated by Raymond Thayer

Room 907 was two doors from the elevator. Gooney stood helplessly outside. He knew no way to get in. Fletcher would have *Clarion* men down there in a few moments. He supposed he had only to wait.

He cleared his throat, made his voice a treble and called, "Room service," rapping on the door. He simply could not resist the act.

The door opened a crack. A hoarse voice said: "Did we ast yuh for anyt'ing, yuh dope?"

That was Gitzy, not a very stalwart man physically, but quick with a gun or a knife. Gooney shoved at the door and lowered his head. He charged like a billy goat. He butted Gitzy Breen sharply between the eyes.

The door flew wide. Jack the Bat was swinging the blackjack which had given him his nickname. Gooney went under it, being so small, and came up with his hard, round head again. He caught the fat man under the chin.

Jamesy Cole said sharply: "Out o' the way! It's on'y the Goon."

JACK sat down on the floor. Gooney hurtled right on over him. He wound up on one of the double beds. He looked straight into the wide blue eyes of Maye Maze, felt the soft contours of her body beneath him.

He rolled over. Jamesy Cole fired a revolver. The sound was loud; the bullet chipped good Golconda furniture. Gooney had a Barlow jackknife in his hand. He pressed a spring, and it opened, and he reached the other bed. Kneeling, he cut loose the hands of tall Phil Dailey. Then he went back under the bed. Jack the Bat was panting: "Not the gat, yuh fool! The shiv!"

Jamesy said: "Th jig's up, anyhow. The damn' cub musta called cops. I'll kill him, an' them too!" Jamesy's trouble was cocaine, which he consumed in wholesale doses.

Something crashed. It sounded like a table lamp. Gooney decided to come up between the beds. He came in a ball, all rolled up. The gag had smeared Maye Maze's lipstick, and her mouth was crushed and hurt. He flew across the room like a small fury, arms and legs windmilling.

Jamesy had lost his gun, and he was momentarily holding his wrist where Phil Dailey had caught him with the lamp. Gooney hit the drug addict and bounced off. He lit near Jack the Bat and took a full-armed swing at him as he was trying to get up. Gooney swung again and again, and Jack's face grew uglier and uglier as blood spurted.

There were dull, thudding sounds. Phil was ducking a knife in Jamesy's hand, and countering with a right that sent Cole's head against the wall in a series of bumps that would have discouraged anyone save a junky, Gooney thought admiringly as he cut loose the bruising gag from Maye Maze.

There were loud noises in the hall. Gooney went under the bed again. This time he took the phone with him. Fletcher answered. He lay there dictating a mile a minute. The *Clarion* men arrived with Officer Murphy and Jingle. He heard Murphy say: "Knew they were here when we found Cochell. That Gooney'd make a fine cop if he was four sizes bigger."

Gooney went on dictating happily: " 'Arthur Traudt, *Clarion* reporter, anticipated the police by a half-hour and was able to loosen Phil Dailey's bonds. The handsome boy from the Old Neighborhood proceeded to give the thugs a thorough going-over. It will be remembered that Dailey was an amateur boxing champion in his youth, when he was engaged to Maye Maze, his companion throughout this terrible ordeal.' "

He stuck his head out from under the couch. He squinted at Murphy, at the handcuffed kidnapers. He rolled his eyes at Maye Maze and Phil Dailey. He ducked back under the couch and rattled off: " 'Upon being freed, the lovely Maye Maze rushed into the arms of her former sweetheart, and at this writing is still there, and it looks serious.' Okay, Fletcher, you said you wanted to tear out their hearts.... I'm telling you, they're engaged again.... Okay, he's Hoople's bartender. They're – you ought to see them."

There was a scuffle, and warm lips were at his ear. He smelled the perfume he remembered from their last meeting. Then Maye Maze whispered: "Phil's been writing a book, about the Old Neighborhood. I predict it will be a huge success, and a motion picture. Because, Gooney, this story will make me a sensation. . . . And I will have the power to film it. I'll bet it's good, anyway."

GOONEY said into the telephone: " 'Phil was working as a bartender to gather material for his book, a masterpiece of modern fiction. The story will be produced on the screen by A.C.M.'... All right, Fletcher, I'll tell you about the murder and all that. I'm tearing out your heart!"

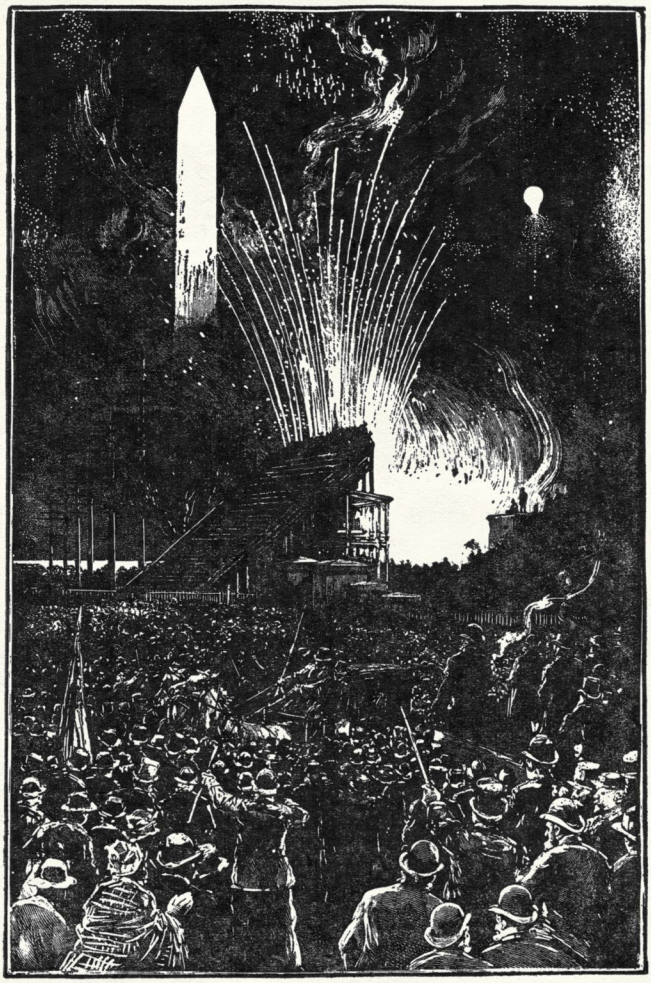
He held the phone away from his ear, smiling, his round face happy, beaming on the lovely girl.

She said: "He still sounds like that director I know." She leaned forward and kissed Gooney on the lips. She tasted fine. She said: "I'll always love you. Come to Hollywood, and I'll get you a job writing. You are clever and you know people. You told me I still loved him, and I do. You rescued us. . . . I'll always be your friend, Little Gooney."

He wiped the lipstick from his mouth and said without losing his grin: "Gretchen wouldn't like Hollywood, and anyway her papa has sore feet and cannot wait upon tables. But thank you anyway, and I think you are a very lovely broad!"

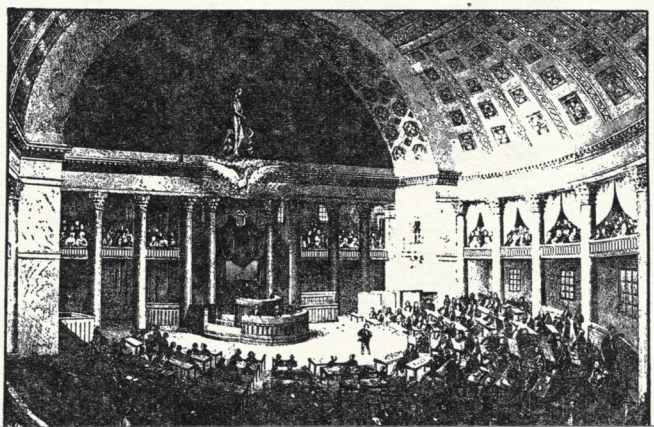
Fletcher was still yapping. . . . It was fine.

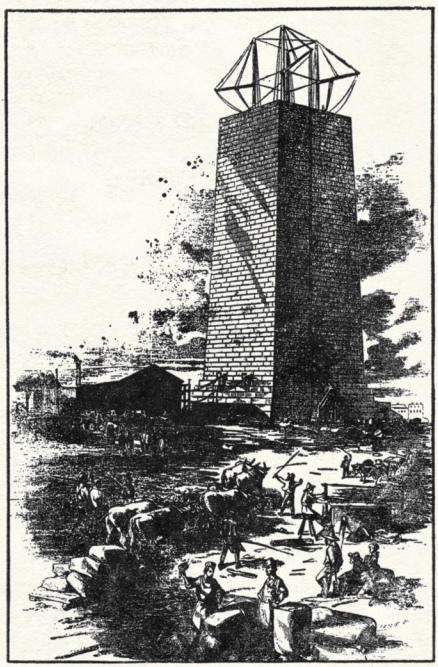
Centenary *of the*



Above: First illumination of the Washington National Monument on March 4, 1885, at the inauguration of President Cleveland.

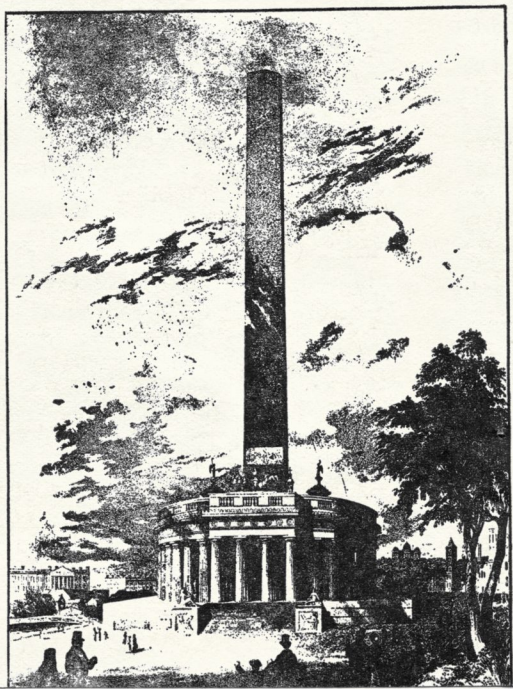
Below: On January 31, 1848, Congress authorized the erection of a monument to the memory of George Washington. The President and the Managers of the Washington National Monument Society were to select a site.



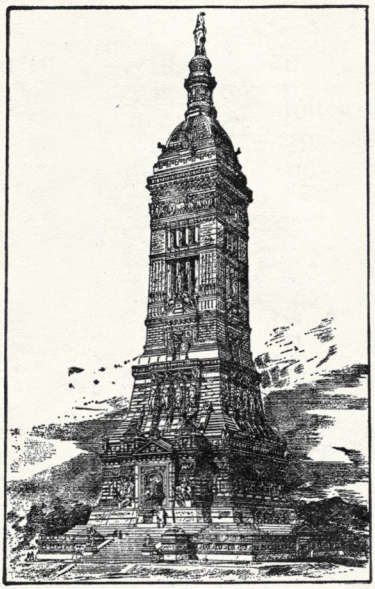


The drawing above was made in 1852. Work was stopped in 1856 for twenty years.

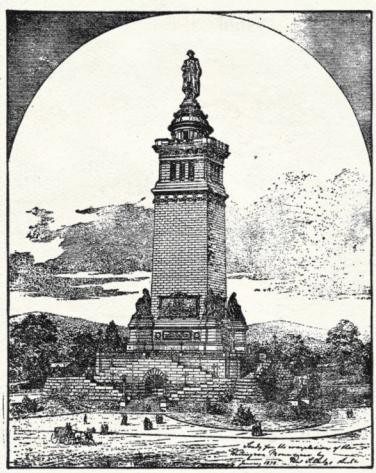
Below: American architects were invited, in 1836, to submit designs for a monument to cost about $1,000,000. Robert Mills won the competition with this design.

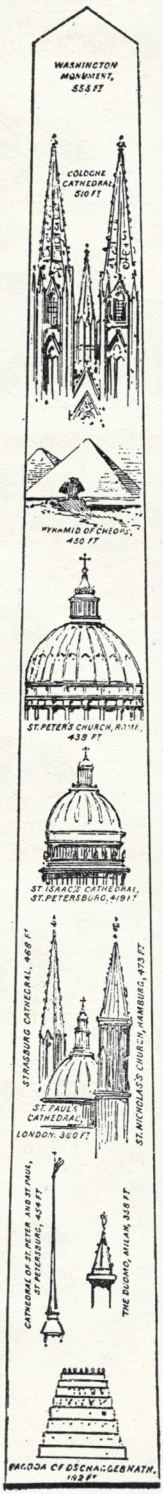


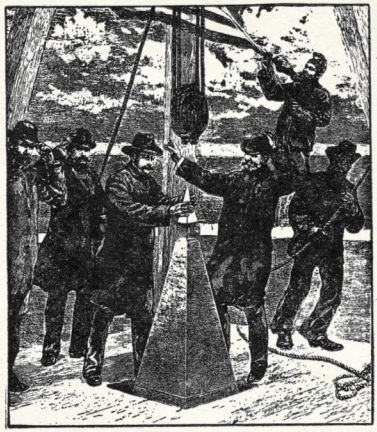
Washington Monument



Two of the many designs presented in 1876 when construction of the monument was renewed. Most of them used the existing stump as a base for architectural development.

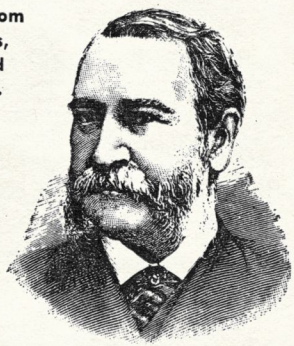




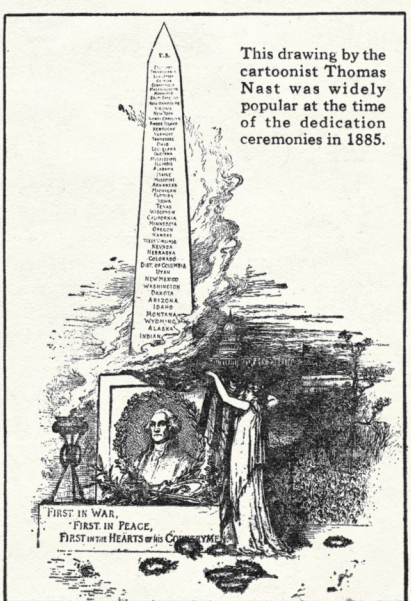


Atop the tallest building in the world in 1884: The cap-stone, weighing 3,300 pounds, was crowned by a small pyramid of pure aluminum, at that time the largest piece of aluminum ever cast.

Old prints from Three Lions, Schoenfeld Collection.



Col. Thomas L. Casey, later Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, directed the final construction of the monument when the Government took over in 1876.



This drawing by the cartoonist Thomas Nast was widely popular at the time of the dedication ceremonies in 1885.

Outward bound from Newburyport to China, the good ship Martha *has rounded the Horn, taken on a cargo of hides in California, and now in Chinese waters picks up castaways — and a dangerous problem.*

The

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

MR. BRINDLE, the hard-boiled mate, came up to the quarterdeck where Cooper stood, looked at the dim blue line of land, and rubbed his hands briskly.

"The China coast, eh? Nice work, sir, very nice! With due allowance for delays, we'll drop the hook at the Ling Ting anchorage in less than one hundred and twenty days out of Newburyport. No record, but a fast passage. We're in March, and the tea season is over. Things will be dull here."

"Not to me," said Cooper. A smile lit his serious, bony features. "All my life I've dreamed of seeing China, and now I shall. My only regret, Mr. Brindle, is that I'm now acting captain, instead of chief officer."

The same thought was in both their minds. They had left home as first and second mates; now Ezra Cooper was captain and Mr. Brindle was chief mate, and not at all glad of the step-up in rank. Three days ago Cap'n Howe had been buried; stricken by apoplexy, he had finally passed away, and all hands were bitterly sorry.

The *Martha* was a "family ship," owned in Newburyport, and most of the crew hailed from the same place. Cap'n Howe had been like a father to them all, fond of the adage that "with age comes knowledge; with knowledge comes wisdom; with wisdom comes a sense of knowing that all men are in some way correct." He liked to argue it, liked to define knowledge, not as learning from books, but as a co-relation of ordinary experiences; it was a deep saying. Now the old skipper was gone, and wisdom with him; and he was sadly missed.

Cooper was in his early twenties, and here lay China. A good sailor, well liked, he was far from knowing the ropes of the Canton trade, which was a most intricate thing in all its branches. This was his first Orient voyage. Luckily, however, he was fully aware of his deficiency.

"The deck's yours, Mister," he said to Brindle. "I'll have to go down and work out the noon sights."

With his quadrant, he passed down to the main cabin. He lighted his pipe and settled down to his figuring, little dreaming what glorious favors and unkind whips of destiny even now lay waiting upon the rippled sea-bosom ahead.

To Cooper, it had been a voyage of wonders from the very start—from the day he got the first mate's berth with Cap'n Howe, and acquired the little square cup from that man who came by it in China—a little square golden cup. . . . He finished his figuring and got the cup out of his locker and sat looking at it, as he loved to do. It was of bronze, very heavily plated with gold; tiny, square, with a bar across the top; and the outside was covered with Chinese characters incised in the metal. About the cup he really knew nothing positive, except that the seal in the bottom was an imperial seal; but he loved it. The artistry of it, the simple beauty, cried out to him.

Death, too, seemed to hover about the cup, but he did not blame it for this. Things had happened, as when they touched on the California coast for hides. The cup did seem to attract violence, rapine and blood; yet it was exquisite and beautiful in its way. Cooper loved it passionately. His seaman's life had been starved for beauty; this was his own, and appealed vitally to him. Some day he would find out what it was. He kept it ever in the locker or in his pocket, and fancied it was a lucky talisman. If so, he had need of it, for China was a queer place, and he was ignorant of it. In this year of 1834 the only port open to foreigners was Canton, with the accent on the first syllable, and they were strictly controlled by the despotic viceroy and mandarins. . . .

Mr. Brindle's heavy step sounded on the ladder. The mate came in and glanced at the chart on which Cooper had pricked off the course.

"Wind is falling," he said. "Looks like a calm, sir. And we've sighted wreckage and a boat, a couple points off the sta'board bow. People in it, looks like."

"I'll get the glass and come up." Cooper thrust the cup into his pocket and rose. "Hm! Pipe's out—got any matches?"

Brindle gave him a box of the new sulphur matches. He lit one and held it to his pipe.

"If you don't mind my saying so, Cap'n," spoke out the mate, "might be well to clear the guns and get the magazine open and ready. These China coast seas are chancy; no end o' pirates and such. They have sweeps and can operate in a calm, too. Might be some trick about this wreckage."

Cooper nodded. "Very well. Call Mr. Tucker and let him see to it. We'll have to pick up these people, of course. Be ready to back a tops'l, unless the wind falls."

He got the big spyglass from its neat mahogany box, and ran it open as he mounted to the deck. The *Martha* was a clipper; she carried two twelve-pounders, for they might be needed in these little-known seas. While Mr. Brindle's advice was good, Cooper had no fear of any trickery; wreckage was not a bait, with land so far away.

He was surprised to find the wind nearly gone, with only faint cat's-paws ruffling the water; the ship was moving slowly. Mr. Tucker, now second mate, was seeing to the guns and gear. Mr. Brindle got the yards trimmed, to get what advantage was possible from the falling wind; Cooper, who in the solitary dignity of a ship's master held aloof from all hands as much as pos-

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

Cup Comes Home

sible, focused the spyglass on the object ahead.

About China he knew almost nothing, except that it ran contrary to everything known in New England. Cap'n Howe had been in a furious rush to get back here, because the British East India Company was being dissolved, and England was taking over its huge China trade; with Yankee shrewdness, the skipper had meant to get in while his rivals were in confusion. Now he was dead, and Cooper had to do the job, of which he knew not a thing. However, there would be a United States consul to advise him, although the haughty Chinese acknowledged no consuls or embassies from "foreign devil" nations.

The ship was rolling; a flat calm that might last an hour or a week, was coming on, with a heavy groundswell. Focusing was difficult, but Cooper picked up the mass of wreckage, and then passed the glass to Mr. Brindle.

"Looks to me like a couple of spars with a boat lashed between," he stated. "A man in the boat waving to us; others there too."

BRINDLE, studying the wreckage, grunted assent.

"Aye, sir. We'll never reach 'em—the canvas is flapping now."

"Suppose you get out the quarter-boat, then. No doubt that boat is stove in or barely afloat—that's why she's lashed to the spars, eh?"

Mr. Brindle handed back the glass and departed about his business. The second mate, Mr. Tucker of the melancholy visage—who had a voice like brass—approached with word that the two guns were cleared, gun-crews ready and the magazine open.

"The glass ain't falling—just a plain calm, I guess," he said. "Looks to me like three or four people in that boat yonder."

Cooper nodded. "Better get in the canvas."

While the useless sail came in, Brindle's boat got off and went racing toward the wreckage. Cooper watched closely. The calm was an advantage rather than otherwise. With the voyage practically ended, there was much to be done—cargo manifests to make ready, and the formalities regarding the skipper's death to be cleared. Canton lay a bit up the Pearl River; and merely reaching the city would be an involved task.

White with anger, Cooper lunged for the man . . . and something hit him.

One man – two men – getting into Mr. Brindle's boat. But there was something else. Cooper squinted; his bony, serious features tensed. A woman? He could not be sure. Two women, perhaps; one stepped, one was lifted over. Bright robes was the most he could tell. Chinese women? His pulse quickened at the thought. He had never seen a Chinese woman—and never would, at Canton. Men had lived at the factories for years without sight of any women. The laws were rigorous about it, everyone said. Then how came these, in some wreckage with white men?

Sure enough – one was sitting up; one was reclining; he could see them clearly as the boat came back.

Cooper lifted his voice.

"Mr. Tucker! Looks like women coming: they can't use that Jacob's ladder. One seems hurt. Rig a tackle, and put out a bosun's chair for them."

A sling was made ready. The boat came in and made fast. Mr. Brindle came up the Jacob's ladder and jumped for Cooper, leaving Mr. Tucker to bring aboard the refugees. The mate was excited.

"Two women, sir—Chinks. Got to give 'em a cabin. And two men. From aboard a country ship, a Calcutta trader. The men are all right; the women ain't. There'll be hell to pay when we anchor. Account o' them females—"

"Calm down, Mr. Brindle," said Cooper, a twinkle unleashing the humorous devil in his eyes. "Give 'em the spare after cabin. Keep all hands away from those two men till we've questioned them. Better fetch 'em below. A country ship, you say – sunk?"

"Aye, sir—a typhoon two days ago. She had just come out of the river."

Cooper went below. He laid out medicines and rum, ordered some food brought, found the little gold cup in his pocket and set it on his desk, and lighted his pipe. This was a grave business, he knew. That Chinese women had been aboard a Calcutta ship was no less than a crime; it might mean their beheading at Canton. The utmost discretion might now be necessary The two men would probably be able to talk.

THEY came in with Mr. Brindle, saluted Cooper, and were given food and a tot of rum. They were odd ones, clad in singlets and trousers. One was named Clark; he had strong features and a pleasant smile, but said almost nothing. The other, Howson, had red hair, and his arms and chest were covered with tattooing; he was brawny and voluble, and had a strong Cockney accent. He spoke a bit of Chinese, and launched volubly into their story.

It was simple. Their Calcutta ship, caught aback in the typhoon, had gone down like a stone, not a boat getting clear. The four, in a partly smashed boat lashed to the spars, were the only survivors. But about the two women —the men exchanged glances and fell awkwardly silent.

"Out with it, Howson," said Cooper. "Take another tot of grog—oil your tongue."

Howson put down his rum. "Bli'me, sir, it's a rum go. There was a toff aboard, a Sir Somebody, as 'ad smuggled them two out o' Canton, and 'e was a-tyking them to Lunnon for to see the King—"

The story came out. A Chinese lady and her maid, leaving China—strictly against the law – to be presented to King William. Probably true, struck in Mr. Brindle; a few years back, the East India Company had got two Chinese women out for the same purpose. There was more to it, said Howson uneasily; he did not know just what. In the boat, the women had refused to talk. One was the daughter of a high official. Sick? Hurt? No, she was well enough. Seemed to be a real lady, put in Clark diffidently.

"Then she'll talk now, and you'll interpret." Cooper rose, then stopped short, glimpsing Howson's attitude. The tattooed man had frozen, staring at the little gold cup. "Hello! You know what this thing is?"

"Not me, no sir," replied Howson, and relaxed. "Chinese, ain't it?"

"Might be." Cooper pocketed it. "Perhaps the lady will know. What's her name?"

"According to 'er maid, sir, it's T'ai Ho– *'eavenly 'armony,*" said the Cockney, who seemed untroubled by the Chinese aspirate.

"Heavenly Harmony, eh? Quite a name. Come along. . . . Mr. Brindle! Better get Clark's statement down in the rough log; omit mention of the women."

The two had been put in the empty mate's cabin. The maid was an older, wrinkled woman; the other lay on the bunk, eyes closed, the maid rearranging her hair, which was perfectly and intricately coifed. She opened her eyes. Neither spoke. Neither made any reply to Howson's address. Cooper got the feeling that they shrank from the man.

He himself stood wordless, transfixed by the look of the woman on the bunk. She was young, faintly saffron-hued, unpainted, her hands hidden in her embroidered robes; yet her face was delicate beyond belief, exquisite in every line, as though chiseled from some rare substance. Jade pins held her hair in place.

"They won't talk, sir," Howson said with a smothered oath.

Cooper smiled down at the wordless young woman. He took the tiny square cup from his pocket and held it out to her. Her lips parted to show pearly teeth; a gasp escaped her. Like water struck by a stone, her face rippled with emotion. Amazement leaped in her eyes. She put up a hand, took the little cup, stared at it, uttered swift words.

"Magic, she says," muttered Howson. "Says it belonged to 'er old man – a werry precious thing—"

He licked his lips; his eyes were glued to the cup again. But the girl looked up at Cooper, a delicate flush in her face; her gaze held human feeling, emotion, gladness. She spoke again; her voice was low music.

"She's a-thankin' you, sir," Howson translated. "Thinks it's a gift, she do. Says 'er old man thought it the most wallyble of all 'is things."

Cooper blinked, but rose to the occasion nobly.

"In that case, tell her it's a gift," he said, with an inward wince. "Ask her what it is."

Howson complied. The maid struck in suddenly; her voice was shrill with warning and hostility. Instantly, the girl lost all expression. Her features became composed, vacant. She lay silent, unresponsive. But she kept hold of the cup.

"No use, sir," Howson said. "When they retire into themselves, as they put it, the game's up."

Cooper smiled, leaned forward, and patted her hand.

"All right. See the cook, Howson, and bring her tea and whatever they eat in China, if we have it. We'll tackle her again, later on."

COOPER went back to the main cabin, where Mr. Brindle still sat. A glance at the window told him that a flat calm had fallen outside.

"Not much luck with them, Mister," he said, picking up his pipe. "Am I right in thinking that we're in a fix, with those females aboard?"

"A hell of a fix," said the hard-jawed mate. "We get examined before we come to the Whampoa anchorage. O' course, bribery can effect anything; but I'd hate to chance it. Ship confiscated and us carved up—yes sir. We're stuck, sure enough."

"Hm! We can talk to 'em through that rascal Howson. Why not give 'em men's clothes and have 'em keep to the cabin by day, anyhow?"

"Might do," replied Mr. Brindle doubtfully. "There are thin clothes in the slop-chest—the stuff we used under the Line. Might do, yes, if they'll coöperate. We can't hardly put 'em back in the ocean, poor critters."

They smoked, gloomily, in silence.

"Rascal, aye – that Howson," said Mr. Brindle. "Clark's a good sort; got education. Warned me, he did, against Howson. I think Clark savvies the lingo too, but he ain't a talker."

Neither was Cooper, who grunted. He felt badly about losing the gold cup; it meant a good deal to him. It had a hint of the sensuous delicacy and fragility of the girl's face. Her father? He did not doubt the truth of her words; yet they amazed him. The recollection of Howson's entranced gaze worried him too; sight of the cup had taken avid hold of the man—a valuable, precious possession? Queer, very queer, he thought. There were odd depths about that cup somehow. He had felt as much from the first. He regretted his impulsive action in giving it to her.

He went on deck. Everything was shipshape; not a puff ruffled the water; the *Martha* rolled ungraciously. In the waist, a group of the men were around Clark, asking eagerly about China—though mostly about its women. Cooper listened to the voices and grinned. No scrap of canvas broke the horizon. Mr. Brindle appeared, in worried talk with Mr. Tucker. Cooper abruptly aroused.

"Call all hands, Mr. Brindle—both watches."

Pad-pad of bare feet. They came running, gathering in the waist, staring up at Cooper, who stood at the break of the poop—every man aboard, even Howson and Clark. Cooper looked down at them, then spoke.

"I've known most of you since we were boys. I have complete faith and trust in you. Now, we've taken aboard four people, two of them Chinese women. We lost two of the men on the way here; these two newcomers will fill the places. I can't do that with the women. I'll issue them clothes from the slop-chest, and they'll have to keep th: after cabin of days, as I see it now. If another soul gets wind of it, we're lost, the ship will be confiscated; we'll be imprisoned or killed. I'll take that risk, because I know you're to be trusted. Does anyone object?"

He paused. In the dead silence he met the glittering eyes of Howson, and their look was like a stab, filled with strange things.

"Very well; no objection. You all understand; not a word to a single person, mind! Dismissed."

The men uttered three cheers, the bo'sun leading them; hearty cheers.

Mr. Tucker came close and spoke, low-voiced.

"Howson took 'em a tray aft. Said it was your orders."

"Right. Hello, what's this?" And Cooper turned, seeing Clark mounting the ladder to the poop. The man touched his forehead.

"May I have a word with you, sir? In private?"

Cooper nooded. "Aye. Step down to the cabin. Anything wrong, Mr. Tucker?"

"No sir. Only, I don't like this here affair."

"Neither do I, so do the best we can, and never mind calamity howls." With the curt reply, Cooper went to the companionway and passed down. He found Clark awaiting him.

"Now, Clark, let's have it. You're no A.B., I take it."

Clark nodded. "Correct, Captain. I —I couldn't speak out before. I'm no sailor. I was interpreter in the East India service; you know, the company is dissolved, and the British Government has taken over its factory here."

Cooper took a chair and filled his pipe. More to come, evidently. He liked this man. Cooper could appreciate restraint.

"Sit down, be comfortable. What's on your mind?"

"The risk you're taking—it's too big."

"Nonsense. I know my men."

"But you don't understand! This girl, T'ai Ho—her father was a big man in China, a high official. Her father was disgraced and executed six or eight months ago. Her life isn't worth a farthing in China. That's one thing. Then, there's Howson. He's a bad one. The women were both in mortal terror of him, until you showed up; they had reason. He pretends to be a simple Cockney; he's not. He's been in the opium trade for years. He was part owner of our ship that sank. He's able and unscrupulous."

"And you?" said Cooper.

The other flushed. "I'm sorry for them—those women. There'll be trouble, reaching anchorage. Do you know the system?"

"No. This is my first voyage here."

"God help you, then! A pilot takes you in to the outer anchorage. A Hong merchant at Canton—a go-between who handles all business—becomes surety for you. At the forts in the Bogue channel a mandarin inspects the ship and cargo and crew; that's a mere formality, of course. Then the ship goes to anchorage at Whampoa and stays. You can go on to Canton alone, to the factories. Those women have a long wait at Whampoa while the ship is unladen and loaded, you see? With Howson aboard—" Clark finished with a hopeless gesture.

"I see." Cooper smoked a moment. "Mr. Clark! You're appointed supercargo of this ship – assistant to the Cap'n. You'll help me, interpret, see to things. Yes?"

CLARK flushed again, this time with delight.

"I'll need you," Cooper went on. "See Mr. Brindle about quarters—the fo'castle is about the only place now, though. The ship has an agent and a Hong merchant at Canton, I understand. Our captain died on the voyage out."

"I'll want his name, then. Ships go here not by their names, but by that of the captain."

Cooper left him to study the manifests and papers, went on deck and acquainted Mr. Brindle with his action. The mate nodded.

"May be a valuable man, sir. Who's going to take them females in hand?"

"I'll do it after a bit. We'll try out Clark as interpreter."...

There was no break in the flat calm. It gave the men a chance to clean up

the ship and go over their own possessions, overhaul gear, swab and holystone decks and make all shipshape.

the afternoon passed, Cooper liked the prospect less and less; a week's delay at Lintin, the outer anchorage, until permission was granted to go on to Whampoa, meant continual risks; further, the warning about Howson worried him. The man was not what he seemed, eh? And in the opium trade. Mr. Howson began to look like a shady character.

Two bells – five o'clock. Cooper summoned Clark, and they went to the cabin occupied by the women. The door was locked. Clark knocked and spoke repeatedly, then gave Cooper a puzzled sidelong stare.

"That's queer! They won't open up; they say you're a bad man and a liar—"

"Tell 'em to open up or I'll have the door broken in," snapped Cooper. The other spoke at some length. A bolt was shot; the door swung open.

INSIDE, the two women sat on the edge of the bunk, stiffly silent, coldly masked with formality. Clark addressed them. The maid gave shrill, staccato response. At one side, untouched, was a tray. T'ai Ho flashed a look at Cooper, who read in it scorn and defiance. Clark quickly explained this attitude.

"They're not afraid of me, Captain; it's you. They think you may poison them. Howson brought the tray and made some joke. They took it ill. Then he grabbed something that the younger one had—a cup you gave her. He said you wanted it back."

Cooper's temper flared

"Did he? By the Lord, I'll have a word with that fellow! Keep talking till I come back, Clark. Butter up the women a bit.'

He swung around and started for the deck. Before reaching the passage, he heard voices in the main cabin and glanced in. Here was Howson, smoking a cheroot and discoursing with a greatly worried Mr. Tucker. Cooper walked in.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, but Howson laughed.

"Hello, Cap'n. I'm getting a berth aft. I'm not bunking for'ard, you know—"

"No? You'll do as you're told, my man."

Howson grinned at him. "So says you. On the contrary, I'm living aft, and messing on cabin stores. I'm takin' my bloody ease, and until we get to Whampoa, I'll be a little tin god aboard here, with nothing too good for me."

"Gone loony, have you?" Cooper took a step toward him, then stopped dead. Howson rose, took the little gold cup from his pocket, and held it up admiringly.

"And I'm keeping this, thanks," he added. "Too bad to hand it back to the natives, eh? Too bad to tell them about your passengers. Aye! But that's what I'll do if I'm pushed, Cap'n Cooper—just that. I advise you—"

His bony features white with anger, Cooper lunged for the man. Howson changed position slightly. Cooper snapped in a swift, almost careless blow—and something hit him. Amid a galaxy of stars, his head was driven back, and he collapsed.

Howson rubbed a hand over his red-stubbled features, and turned to Mr. Tucker, who was looking on with incredulous horror. Abruptly Howson abandoned all pretense and accent; he spoke with sharp, cool confidence.

"Better take care of him. Maybe you want a touch of the same? A man who knows his business—like me—can put in a tap to the point of the jaw and get 'em every time." At this instant Mr. Brindle came into the cabin. Howson swung around, and into his hand slid the twin large-caliber barrels of a tiny derringer. "Mr. Mate, eh? Watch your step, now—I've got a ball here for each of you if you force me. I advise you to go slow."

Mr. Brindle had a terrific temper, but neither he nor Mr. Tucker were fools. And the sight of the skipper laid out cold was a very sobering thing.

When Cooper regained his senses he was in a chair, and Mr. Brindle was sopping his face with a wet rag. He started to his feet, saw the cabin was empty, and sank back.

"What hit me?" he asked dazedly. "Who did it?"

"I dunno," answered Mr. Brindle. "Tucker says it was that beggar Howson; it ain't likely. But he's got a pocket pistol, two barrels, and he ain't a Limey neither, and he threatens to tell the Chinks about the two women aboard us."

"To hell with him!" flamed Cooper. "I'll take that insolent dog apart—"

"Well, you ain't done it so far," said the mate dryly. "Hold still, now. I ain't giving the Cap'n orders, but you'd better think twice. We'd be in an awful box if the Chinks found out about them women. Here's Mr. Clark; he knows."

Clark came in, talking with Mr. Tucker, and approved sharply.

"I should have told you more," he said. "Howson used to be a gentleman; he's studied sparring, and he carries two of those derringers; they're deadly. The laws are strict against foreigners even seeing Chinese women. The ship would be confiscated; we all might be executed."

Cooper rapidly cooled; as usual, he said nothing, but he was unflinching in his own mind. He listened to the talk. From one view, the cup mattered not; here was something infinitely bigger—the ship and cargo for which he was directly responsible, the fate of T'ai Ho, possibly the lives of all aboard. He was helpless, held in a vise. But from his own view, all this was folly. He alone was master here—even if it might be wiser to accept Howson's dictum for the moment.

"All of you clear out," he said. "Mr. Brindle, arrange to give our guest a berth aft. I'll see to this business myself. Funny thing if I can't manage it."

Brindle was pugnacious but afraid; they were all afraid. They melted away, and presently Howson came swaggering into the cabin. He looked at Cooper and laughed.

"Woke up, have you? Now, Cap'n, you'll have to accept my terms. I do owe you thanks for picking us up, aye. No doubt you'd like to drop me overboard again, but I'll risk that. I'm asking no great thing. You'll be sensible about it?"

"Looks as if I've no choice," Cooper replied slowly.

Howson nodded. "Right. As it stands, I'm supposedly dead. My debts are wiped out, and that's to my taste. Let's have it clear-cut. From the outer anchorage at Ling Ting I'll take a boat to Macao, and catch a Portygee bark outbound; no doubt you can put a few Spanish dollars in my pocket. The gold cup is mine. That's understood?"

COOPER said nothing, looking steadily at the man, let him talk on.

"You've some thirty men aboard, and I'm alone, but I'm not helpless." Howson showed in his hand the gaping muzzles of the derringer. "See? I owe you no ill will, but I must act for my own interest. I'll stay away from the hands for'ard. I'll cause no trouble. But—I'm giving the orders."

"So it seems," agreed Cooper.

"*The gold cup is mine.*" That hurt. It began to matter enormously. He rather sympathized with Howson for his stand: alone, unaided, he was daring them all, facing them single-handed. Even in a scoundrel, Cooper could admire courage—but he did not intend to accept this dictation meekly.

"Do you know what the cup is?" he asked.

"No. Do you?"

"No."

"It's gold, and that's enough," Howson said. "Her father's most precious possession, said the girl; that means a lot. I'll take my chance o' fortune, Cap'n."

Cooper said nothing; he felt the singular appeal of the cup, sensing its worth beyond words, its artistry, but silently reached for his pipe, stuffed it, and lighted it. Howson went on:

"I'm meeting you fair and square, putting all cards down. I'm no angel; a man must do what he can, in these seas. That woman, Heavenly Har-

mony, don't like me. I'll stay clear of her. I only want to play my own hand."

"You're playing it," Cooper said curtly. Conscious of the weapon covering him, he rose and walked out. To the cabin of the women was only a few steps; he found Clark there, talking with them.

"No luck, Captain. They're resentful."

"Tell 'em what's happened with Howson," said Cooper. "Tell the girl she's safe, and I'll get the cup back for her. Ask her what the cup is."

Clark conferred with the two women. They had lost their cold hostility, but were curt, and he shook his head at Cooper.

"It's no go. They don't trust us and won't talk."

"Very well. I'll send them clothes and another tray later, by you. Try to put some sense into them if you can."

He strode out and sought the deck, angrily; but anger was futile, and he fought it down. The sun was sinking behind the blue line of China; the sea was oily and mirror-smooth, unbroken. Mr. Tucker and Mr. Brindle came up to him.

"New messmate aft, have we?" said the latter. "Impertinent devil—still, sir, it ain't so bad. We can bear with him if we must, I calculate. Mr. Tucker says he ain't stopping long with us."

"No, he'll get off to Macao as soon as possible."

"Then we can bear with his airs," put in Mr. Tucker. "Just goes to show it don't pay to help a man, I say. It's awful how a person will take advantage of you!"

Cooper reflected grimly that they knew nothing about it; the cup was not theirs. Presently Clark appeared, with a nod to Cooper; the two women had accepted his arrangements....

Mess that evening was more pleasant forward than aft. Howson, beyond demanding a tot of rum, made no trouble and seemed to want none. He was wary and on the defensive, rather than blustering, as though not wishing to push his luck too far. Clark proved more and more to Cooper's liking, said little of himself, and it seemed that he might prove a valuable man indeed. That he was of good birth was obvious; he was pleasant enough, but not forceful. That evening he took the Chinese women their supper and the clothes Cooper provided.

With morning the calm was flatter than ever, but the glass was not falling; no typhoon danger. The ship rocked to the slow ground-swell. Nothing broke the horizon. Cooper spent the morning going over the manifests of Cap'n Howe's hodgepodge of cargo with Clark—quicksilver, three hundred thousand Spanish dollars in kegs, lead and scrap iron, hides from California, and so on. Cooper learned much about the niceties of Cantonese procedures, but his mind was not on the subject. He was thinking, as he had thought most of the night, about the little square cup, but he saw no way out of his difficulty.

"Anything is possible with that cup; it is sacred."

EARLY in the afternoon, Cooper was enjoying a pipe on deck when Clark came to him, beaming. The Chinese women were agreeable to the plans for them; they were cutting each other's hair, had agreed to wear the clothes that were provided.

"And," added Clark, "I got a word about that cup. It's a sacred thing, used by the Emperor himself in the annual sacrifice, and given by him to the scholar who comes out top man in the yearly examinations at Peking for official rank. That means it's about the biggest thing that happens in China."

Cooper nodded, with no comment. "Who's in the cabin? Thought I heard voices as I passed the skylight."

"Yes. Howson's down there, drinking. He wants to see the women, and your mate was trying to talk him out of it when I came up."

The mate? That meant Mr. Brindle, for Tucker had all hands forward working with the sailmaker on repairs to the canvas. So, thought Cooper grimly, the time had come. What to do, he did not yet know, but he meant to be master aboard his own ship. He knocked out his pipe and stepped to the companion ladder. While on the treads, he heard an oath and a crash from the main cabin – then all was silent.

In the doorway he came to a startled halt. There, a yard distant, stood Howson, covering him with the deadly derringer, whose hammers were cocked.

"Come in, Cap'n, come in," said Howson mockingly. "Heard you coming. You got the notion of giving me a lesson too?"

"I aim to," said Cooper. "No rush about it; so don't get careless with your weapon. I was looking for the mate."

"Oh! Look across the cabin, then."

There, opposite him, Cooper saw Mr. Brindle lying crumpled up and senseless on the deck. The red-haired man grinned at his expression.

"He ain't hurt—I just tapped him, like I did you. The blighter forgot who he was talking to and allowed

he'd teach me a thing or two." Howson mimicked the mate's New England drawl. "He fancied himself, but he made a mistake; I've stood up to the best pugs in England. There's rum on the table; have a drink and compose yourself."

Cooper drew up a chair and sat down, pouring himself a drink of rum and sipping it slowly. Mr. Brindle must have lost his temper. Yes, Clark had said something about Howson having been a gentleman pugilist, a rare thing at the time outside of England.

Cooper reflected. The derringer was cocked and ready; a sharp warning. A call to the men—that would mean murder done. This was the Captain's job, and his alone. The mate had bungled things. Through the open skylight drifted a voice from forward — Mr. Tucker's brazen voice calling to the men.

"Look alive there. Sails! Looks like a puff coming; it may mean wind!"

The tension of crisis gripped Cooper; it was now or never. He looked at Howson.

"I've never known Mr. Brindle to be knocked out before. He's a bucko."

Howson relaxed slightly. "Ah! He's never met a man who knew how to use his hands. I'll have a dram o' that rum myself—here, put it in this. Not handy for drinking, maybe, but it suits me."

With his free hand he produced the tiny gold cup and put it on the table. It had obviously been used before. Sight of it was maddening to Cooper; he silently nodded and reached for the rum, wondering if he dared brave that deadly little weapon. Reason told him it would be folly.

"Since you're in amiable mind, Cap'n," went on Howson, "we might settle now about the dollars. I'll need about a hundred. All ships bring 'em to Canton, so you'll have plenty aboard."

Cooper nodded. "Aye. We've a few kegs."

He poured rum into the tiny cup, then filled his own glass to the brim. Howson, watching him sharply, went on speaking.

"Spanish dollars have a premium of thirty percent in Canton; having no currency of their own, the natives value them mightily. A good profit on importing the coins, eh?" Howson lifted the gold cup and sipped the rum—the cocked weapon, all the while, held steadily on Cooper. "Ah! Tastes good; sorry I'll be leaving you so soon. You're not, though."

"Not at all." Cooper picked up his glass; his fingers were perfectly steady. It shot through his mind in a flash—all he must do. He saw it clearly and accepted the risk. Sight of the cup, with Howson drinking from it like a profanation, seemed to clear his brain.

Cooper took a sip from his own glass. Howson was close to him. The derringer gaped at him; he could see the priming powder on the pans, the brown finger on the double trigger. If he bungled it, he was a dead man, and knew it.

He lifted his glass again, then paused and spoke.

"Tell me something: This tattooing of yours—was it done at Canton?"

"Lor, no!" Howson laughed. "I got that—"

Cooper's hand moved. The rum in his glass shot out, squarely at the pistol, and doused the priming exactly. The finger tightened; the flints came down, and nothing happened. Howson snarled an oath and dropped the weapon. Then, as Cooper came out of his chair, Howson hit him and knocked him flat.

HE struck the deck, went rolling. The terrific force of that blow frightened him; he knew nothing of boxing. Fighting he knew, yes. So had Mr. Brindle. This was in his mind as he scrambled to his feet.

Before he was set, Howson smashed him. He went down again, jarred and dazed. The gold cup clattered on the deck. As he slowly came up, Howson rushed him, face alight with fury, driving in blow upon blow. Cooper tried to dodge them, but their force knocked him off his feet. For the third time he went sprawling. Howson reached him with a kick in the ribs, but luckily wore no boots.

Lips and cheek bleeding, bells ringing in his ears, Cooper got to one knee as the other came at him. He lunged forward and his fist hammered home, just above the belt. He came erect, shaking his head. Howson was staggering, off balance, and brought up against the bulkhead; he came back instantly, but Cooper was ready for him. That one crack had been a beauty.

Feet wide apart to counter the ship's roll, they stood almost toe to toe and slugged it out. Cooper took punishment here, more than he wanted, but time and again he landed blows to the same spot, just above the belt. And they told; more than his weight was in them, for he fought in sailor-fashion, sending in a crack only when he had the roll of the ship with it. He landed a few, but at a cost.

Howson's trained fists were doing sore work; they were red now, and so was Cooper's face — red and swollen, skin cut and gashed, one eye closed, blood bubbling from lips and nostrils. Howson was unmarked, but each time Cooper landed amidships, he shrank and bent a little, and the force was knocked out of him for a breath or two.

Neither man could keep up this fearful savagery without cessation for very long. Cooper took a shower of blows, bored in, and landed a right that sank into Howson's midriff. The shock knocked them apart. Howson staggered back against the bulkhead and stood as though nailed to it, panting. Cooper clung to the table-edge, sick and dizzy. They glared at each other, sucked in breath, and then Howson slid forward, wiped fists on trousers with a hasty lick, struck against the supine figure of Brindle, and waited to get his balance. A crooked grin twisted Cooper's lips; he knew what those repeated cracks to the belt would do. His fight was won now—almost.

"Losing your feet?" he gasped.

Howson came at him in a fury. Cooper's head whipped back under a stiff left, and he barely blocked the following right for his chin. The roll of the deck was against him, but it had to roll back, and he was ready for that sharp kick-back as the ship dropped with the swell—ready, poised, letting himself go. Howson's fist landed but slipped with the blood and failed to stop him. Cooper felt his right sink solidly in for the second time, weight and roll of deck with it.

Intervention came unseen, unexpected.

With the forward roll, the little square cup slid across the deck. Howson put out a foot to brace himself for the backward roll; his foot fell upon the cup, and the blow caught him unpoised, off balance. He lost his footing, was knocked backward, and flinging out his arms wildly, went hurtling headlong. He slammed into the bulkhead and fell, an inert mass, head twisted so that his face was almost against that of Mr. Brindle, who was trying to rise.

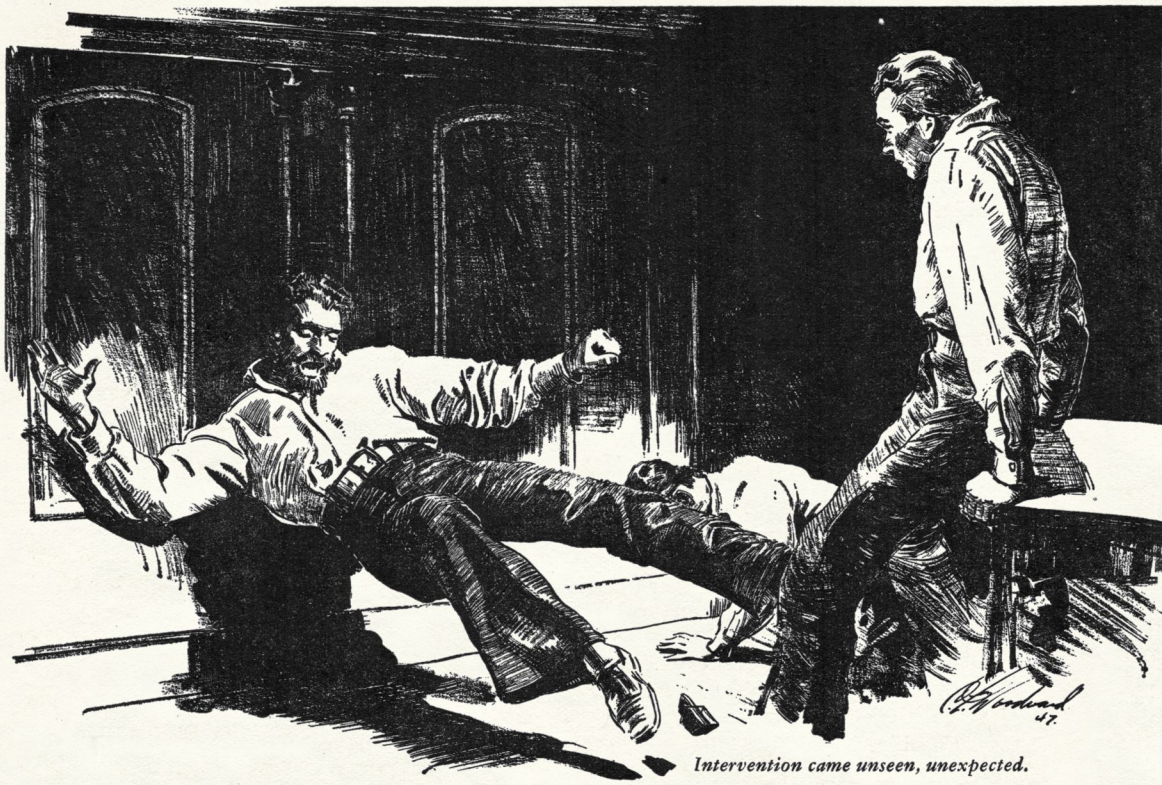
The ship rolled, masts and cordage rattling, timbers creaking. The little cup struck against the fallen derringer with a tinkle, like a cry of delight at its own strategy. Cooper clung to the table-edge again, breath whistling in harsh gasps. He saw Mr. Brindle get to his knees, stare into Howson's face, and jump backward with startled recognition. He tried to laugh, but the sound was only a croak.

BRINDLE came erect, looked at Cooper, and stood petrified.

"Good God! What's happened?" he exclaimed.

With an effort, Cooper reached for the rum bottle and took a swig. The fiery stuff burned him, cleared his head, and he dropped into a chair, unable to speak. Mr. Brindle stooped, fingered the lump on his jaw, turned Howson a bit, and examined him with interest. What had happened became quite obvious.

Cooper sat in utter dejection, one eye closed and swelling, the other seeing only a bleak future as the reaction took hold of him. He had knocked Howson out, yes, but that was nothing. The evil was done now. The man



Intervention came unseen, unexpected.

would do his worst, and no bonds or chains could keep him from it. The ship was lost, the two Chinese women were lost, and all because of his own lack of restraint. With a slatting of lines up above, the ship rolled again. Something struck his foot. With an effort, he leaned over and looked.

The little gold cup! He leaned forward and picked it up.

"That blighter's fist had the kick of a mule, Mr. Cooper," said Mr. Brindle. "But you done it, and I'd ha' give a good deal to've seen it. He knocked hell out of you first, though. I'll get the arnicy and some water."

He started away. Cooper woke up and croaked husky words.

"Wait.... Manacles.... May not be much use, but we'll have to do our best to keep him quiet, keep him confined—"

Mr. Brindle's jaw fell.

"Who, him?" He looked at Howson. A hard laugh came to his lips. "Lor' bless you, sir, he don't need 'em! He's done for, and a good riddance. Must have broke his neck when he rammed into the bulkhead—"

Cooper blinked. Understanding gradually reached his brain. He put the little cup on his knee and looked at it; a rush of feeling came into his heart.

"I didn't aim to kill him," he muttered. "I didn't do it. You did it—you! Dead—and to think of it! No talk now, everything safe—and you did it! Knew you were coming home, did you?"

Sun came in at the window and touched the cup. It winked at him. He reached for it and thrust it into his pocket, almost with fear. He was growing superstitious about the thing, and he disliked this. Yet he loved it for its artistry, its beauty.

"I'll have to find out the meaning of that Chinese writing graven in it," he thought; then he found Brindle back, bathing and anointing his battered features and daubing on arnica with liberal hand.

"Are you sure about – him?" he asked.

Mr. Brindle grunted. "Hold still—there we are. Yep, certain sure, sir. What's that on the deck—oh, his little pocket-gun, eh? Didn't he use it?"

"Did his best. Lucky he didn't use it on you."

"Aye, sir. Feels like I got a couple teeth broke, though; hope I can find somebody ashore to pull 'em."

"Thanks for the dressing. If you can find Clark, send him to me." Cooper glanced at the sprawled figure. "You might see that he's sewn up and taken care of, too."

"I can't think of anything I'd rather be about," said Mr. Brindle, and went out.

Cooper, left alone, took another swig of rum; he needed it. Presently the mate returned with Sails and a strip of old canvas in which to sew the body for burial. Howson was dead, no doubt about that. Clark showed up and saw the situation; Cooper motioned to him, and went out with him to the cabin of the two women.

"Tell 'em there's no more to fear," he said, as he knocked.

"What happened, Captain? Who did it?"

"The little gold cup did it – but I don't suppose you'd credit that."

"I'll tell T'ai Ho, and we'll see what she thinks about it."

Voices from within; the door was unlocked, and Cooper stepped inside, to stare. The two women were in the clothes supplied them. They giggled self-consciously until Clark addressed them at some length. Then T'ai Ho, Heavenly Harmony, stood up straight, her eyes flashing, and her voice struck out like steel; she saw the cup in Cooper's hand.

"She says anything is possible with that cup; it is sacred," Clark translated. "And she's very grateful about being picked up and so forth. Says you'll be repaid."

Cooper managed a twisted smile and put the little object in her hand. Then he heard Mr. Tucker calling from on deck:

"Mr. Cooper! Wind coming up, sir!"

A wind for China! The cup had done its work.

COMBAT TEAM

WHILE the 3rd Battalion was holding Manhay, we received orders to prepare to attack as part of the 82nd Airborne Division. The 1st Battalion had now returned from the 3rd Armored Division, and were bivouacked in Ferrières. They had lost about one hundred and fifty men, but were now fairly well rested and only slightly under Table of Organization strength. The 2nd Battalion had moved farther down into the 7th Armored sector to reinforce them, but as yet had not been committed.

The 82nd was to attack southward with its left on the Salm River and its right near Manhay, with the mission of driving the northern shoulder of the Bulge inward about five miles. The 517th sector was to be on the extreme left toward the Salm River, an area now held by the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. It was estimated that the enemy was holding the line of hills in front of the 82nd in considerable strength by Volks-sturm and Volks-Grenadier units that had been moved in behind the main attack to keep open the shoulders of the Bulge. In order to relieve the units of the 505th, who had to displace to the west and themselves prepare to attack, we moved the 1st Battalion from Ferrières. As the 2nd was now our freshest battalion they were to be used as the left assault units. The 551st Parachute Infantry, a separate battalion, had also been attached to us, and they were to be used as the right assault unit. The 3rd Battalion, which was still dug in at Manhay, was to be relieved by a battalion of the 75th Division, which was taking over the 7th Armored Division area, and rejoin the regiment near Basse-Bodeux and remain initially in reserve. The attack was scheduled to jump off at 8 A.M. on January 3rd. Three regiments of the 82nd were to start the attack, including the 517th, the 505th, and the 325th. The 504th was initially in Division Reserve.

We moved the regimental C. P. on the night of January 2nd to a house in the town of Basse-Bodeux, then on the front line. From here we would be able to see the troops moving forward to the attack the next morning, and to get good communications. In the house there lived an old man who stayed for the most part in the kitchen. Everybody else had left the town and moved back out of the combat area, but he had stayed behind to take care of the cattle and to make sure there was something left to come back to when the fighting was over. The old man was not very communicative, and we had other things to occupy our attention at the time anyway, so he just sat there unconcernedly as things moved around him.

That night, the Germans shelled the town generally about every half-hour all night. From upstairs we could hear the shells landing out in the yard or against the building, and sleep was possible only during the intervals. As one shell had broken one of the windows of the operations office, the next morning we moved most of the installations into the basement, at least temporarily. At daylight we could see the troops moving to the attack, and shortly afterward a lot of automatic-weapons fire and mortar fire from the next range of hills beyond the narrow valley. The 551st was a little slow in getting started, which worried us, but after they got started seemed to be making good progress through the wooded slopes of their first objective.

The 2nd Battalion on the left had succeeded in taking the town of Trois Ponts at the extreme left on the Salm River, but had run into heavy resistance in trying to take Fosse, located on the side of an open hill. Since artillery ammunition was limited, the expected concentration was very light and they were now pinned down about halfway up the side of the snow-covered hill, and taking a lot of casualties. General Gavin had come up on a visit. Together we had walked along the road in back of the advance elements of the 2nd Battalion.

"They have only gone a couple hundred yards beyond the line of departure," remarked the General as we sought shelter in a ditch from a rain of mortar shells then coming in. "I want this town tonight," the General remarked, pointing on the map to the town of St. Jacques. With this, he departed, leaving us to figure how to get moving and extricate the 2nd Battalion from its unhappy position.

We tried bringing up some tank-destroyers to assist Col. Seitz with direct fire on the town of Fosse. However, they were limited to the roads due to the heavy snow, and after running over several mines, they too had to be extricated without doing much good. After much mental anguish, we finally decided to move the 1st Battalion through the area cleared by the

Illustrated by John McDermott

WITH THE SAVAGE BATTLE OF THE BULGE, THE COMBAT STORY OF THE 517TH AIRBORNE REGIMENT COMES TO ITS CONCLUSION. "THERE WERE NO BETTER MEN ANYWHERE," SAYS THEIR COMMANDER. "THEY HAD YOUTH AND THE SPIRIT THAT GOES WITH IT.... THE CONFIDENCE TO WISH TO CLOSE WITH THE ENEMY AND DESTROY HIM."

by COLONEL RUPERT D. GRAVES

551st, to strike St. Jacques from the flank. A company from the 2nd Battalion was also sent by the same route to move in and seize the objective behind the town of Fosse. This scheme as executed by the 1st Battalion and Company F of the 2nd saved the situation, and prevented at least myself and perhaps General Gavin from having a nervous breakdown.

UNDER the leadership of Colonel Boyle, the 1st Battalion worked its way behind the 551st, then cut over to the town of St. Jacques, reaching there about eleven o'clock at night. After an artillery preparation they moved into the town under cover of darkness. They encountered German machine-gun positions on the outskirts of town, but in the darkness the fire was not well directed, and by the number of dead Germans lying around St. Jacques next morning they had done plenty of damage after getting into the town. After mopping up St. Jacques, the 1st Battalion moved on and repeated the treatment to Bergeval about a mile farther on. Company F also had succeeded in reaching its objective, and by the next morning we were all quite elated at the success of these night operations, but we still had quite a way to go. The General wanted us to keep on until we could dabble our feet in the waters of the Salm River, as he expressed it.

The 1st Battalion was pretty tired and had taken time out in Bergeval to get rations up to the men and get them rested slightly before moving on. It was dark before they started from Bergeval.

During the afternoon we could see groups of Germans to the front and placed artillery fire on them. As the main defense line had been broken, we didn't expect to run into too much trouble now. The Germans, however, had different ideas on the subject. As the 1st Battalion moved south from town, they must have wandered right past quite a few Germans in the heavy woods and darkness, for when they stopped to dig in, they found themselves practically surrounded. Colonel Boyle while moving up to a company C. P. was shot at by a German burp gunner, and wounded badly in both arms. The Krauts then shelled the 1st Battalion position heavily, and quite a few men were hit. The Germans moved in through the woods and placed heavy automatic fire on them. It was a bad night for the 1st Battalion. The 3rd, which now had been moved forward, was sent to their assistance, and they succeeded in combing the woods and clearing out the Germans who had been behind the position and also some to the front.

With the coming of daylight it looked a little more encouraging, and Major McMahon, who had been sent to take Colonel Boyle's place, also steadied things down. Most of the Germans who had been cut off in the town of Fosse had also been rounded up. It had happened that Major Kinzer, the artillery liaison officer, after a visit to the 551st the day before, had decided to return *via* Fosse instead of coming with me. As he entered the town, he saw several Germans run into a building. He went after them, and was surprised when about fifteen of them marched out with a white flag. Lieutenant Neiler, the Regimental S-2, joined Kinzer, and they then rounded up about sixty more who, knowing they had been cut off, were ready to turn in. It was quite a sight to see Kinzer and Neiler marching about a hundred Germans into the PW enclosure at Basse-Bodeux.

The 551st by now had reorganized in their sector, and by the morning of the third day started moving toward Petit Halleaux along the Salm River. They also were trying to dabble their feet in the Salm. This area toward the river was very heavily wooded, and movement of course greatly restricted by the deep snow. I had sent Lieutenant Neiler the day before to reconnoiter the crossings of the Salm in the 551st area, as it had been rumored that the Germans were still using an old bridge near Petit Halleaux for troop movements and for vehicles.

NEILER, accompanied by Lieut. Farren of the 551st, had only progressed a few hundred yards when they suddenly ran into a group of Germans coming up the trail. Farren, who was in front, didn't have much chance, as a German about fifteen feet away had him covered, and he therefore threw up his hands; but Neiler, who was armed only with a pistol, started to fire and took off back up the trail. A German about fifteen or twenty feet away fired at him several times, and one bullet entered his helmet and lifted both the helmet and knit cap underneath from his head. Neiler succeeded in escaping unharmed, but slightly shaky after his experience.

After this he always carried a Tommy-gun instead of a pistol. Lieutenant Farren's grave was found the next day, very neatly marked by a cross with his name on it.

This should have been a warning to the 551st, but when they started the attack next day, one company got pretty badly shot up by approaching Petit Halleaux in broad daylight along a road with steep banks on both sides. A machine-gun had been placed to cover this road and had waited until they were about ten feet away before it opened fire. The snow that fell during the night had served the purpose of camouflaging this enemy position almost perfectly, and there was no indication whatever that a German was within miles. In spite of this, the 551st pushed on and captured Petit Halleaux.

Colonel Juareg, the C. O. of the 551st, was killed that day by mortar fire while directing the attack, and his loss was deeply felt. He was a courageous leader, and had worked tirelessly during the past several days under extremely adverse conditions to make the attack a success. Major Holm, the battalion executive, then assumed command. The German regimental commander was found a suicide in Petit Halleaux. In his pocket was found a message to the division commander stating the hopelessness of his position and asking for further instructions, apparently hoping for orders to withdraw. However, the answer from the division commander was to hold until the end, and this he had done.

It was important to the enemy to hold this northern flank of the Bulge against the attacks that were now being directed by the Americans to cut off the Bulge and offset the effect of the deep penetration that had been made by the forces of Von Rundstedt. It was believed, now that the German advance had been stopped, that this offensive by the enemy would serve to end the war sooner than they had formerly expected. The optimism of ending the war early had been replaced now, due to the fanaticism of the German resistance, to the opposite trend and toward a more realistic view; and many thought now that it would last at least a couple more years. With the defenses of the Siegfried Line still to look forward to, many of us didn't think that this estimate was so far wrong.

AS the 504th had now been committed and had taken over the right of our sector, we were given orders to move over behind the 505th, who were still attacking, and prepare to relieve them. The 3rd Battalion was to remain with the 504th as we moved the men by foot to the vicinity of Arbrefontaine. Still more snow had fallen, and it was now almost waist deep as the 1st and 2nd Battalions moved into a bivouac area in the woods, and the weather had become extremely cold. When we arrived in the 505th area, we contacted Colonel Eckman, who was busy at the time at his O. P. trying to direct fire onto a German Mark VI tank that was giving them trouble.

After checking the troops into their assembly areas, we set up the regimental C. P. at a small house just outside of Arbrefontaine. The Division C. P. and at least two other C. P.s were in this town, so we decided not to crowd in with them. This building was not very big, but it served well for the two days we stayed in that area. There were only two rooms, so one was set up as the S-3, or operations office, and the other as the S-2 office. I know that I stayed in the S-3 office most of the time, and sometimes wondered why everybody came in here to find out what was going on.

The solution to this was discovered a little later when I happened to go down the hall to the S-2 office. Captain Dearing had hung several signs outside such as *"No admittance except on business," "Beware the Mad Dog," "Off Limits"* and *"Achtung—Minen."* On looking into the S-2 room, there was Captain Dearing with his assistant very peaceably sitting beside a cozy fire in solitary splendor, reading very sedately the latest Intelligence information. On returning to the S-3 room, there also was posted a large sign as follows: *"S-3 office—come in and get warm."* Inside, where you could hardly wedge yourself in, was a bedlam. Not only the regular S-3 personnel but all liaison officers, their drivers, orderlies, odds and ends from the Headquarters Company, communications personnel and many others.

After a visit to the Division Headquarters, where we received orders to move the 2nd Battalion that night over to another position, we hadn't much to do. However, the move had to be made at night in a blinding snowstorm after they had just got themselves settled, and was not as easy as it looked on the map. As soon as they got moved, we found that the 82nd was to be relieved by the 75th Division, and that we had the honor of moving to another sector for an attack that was to take place on the 13th of January.

Taking with me the S-3, S-2 and the battalion commanders, we departed to the new area to find out what we were to do with the 106th Division, to whom we were now attached. At Francorchamps, where we arrived half-frozen, we found Gus Nelson, the C. O. of the 112th Infantry Regiment. When the Germans had started the Bulge attack, he had got separated from the rest of the Division who had withdrawn and were now on the south flank of the Bulge. He had been attached to the remnants of the 106th Division, who were supposed to attack on the 13th. Now, however, he had just received orders to withdraw and reform his division.

We, the 517th, were therefore to take his place in the attack. His regiment was now occupying a defensive position in the vicinity of Stavelot on the Ambleve River. The 424th, which was the only regiment remaining from the 106th Division, was to attack on the right from the vicinity of Trois Ponts. We continued on to Stavelot and set up the C. P. in a large windowless building on the square. The 1st Battalion took over the sector of the 112th so we would have one battalion with which to start the attack. The 2nd Battalion had been detached to join the 7th Armored, who were scheduled to attack shortly with the mission of recapturing St. Vith, from which they had been driven a week before.

THE situation was the same as on the previous attack. The Germans held the high ground across an open valley over which we had to pass to reach their positions. In addition to this, we had to cross the Ambleve River. Although the time of attack was set at eight o'clock the next morning, we determined not to get caught out in the open as we had a week before. So during the night of the 12th and 13th we sent a company of the 1st Battalion across the river to secure that part of Stavelot to the south of the stream. They encountered no resistance but had captured a German patrol who came into the town that night.

Sergeant Vardy was standing near a building when a Kraut suddenly pushed a burp gun into his ribs. Vardy, without thinking and perhaps being a little ticklish, turned and grabbed the gun. He threw the Kraut on the ground and took him prisoner. When we got him, he turned out to be a German technical sergeant about six feet two inches tall who looked like a professional wrestler. Vardy, who is a slender little chap, really must have worked fast. Finally the tech sergeant, after some persuasion, disclosed the location of the enemy troops on the hills overlooking Stavelot.

While all this was going on, the 3rd Battalion, which was making the assault, was moving over by truck from the 82nd Airborne Division area. While they were attached to the 504th, they had gone across the Salm and secured a bridgehead at the town of Grand Halleaux, they had run into some trouble and had cleared some Germans from the town. As soon as they were relieved, they started for Stavelot and arrived on the night of the 12th. At first we had been reluctant to move trucks over the open

ground under possible artillery observation into Stavelot. However, time was getting short, so Paxton moved right into town and got away with it all right.

Before dawn next morning we had a company moving across the broken-down bridge across the Ambleve, and through the ruins, the smashed half-tracks, disabled German tanks and scattered German and American bodies left over from the German advance of just before Christmas. As soon as this company got across, we sent over another one and hoped they would get well up into the woods and not get caught in the open when daylight came about seven o'clock. Some shells landed in the town as they crossed the river, but not much damage was done, and they were well on their way by daylight.

Soon a great deal of firing was heard, however, and we knew they had run into the enemy main positions on the rolling hills beyond the town of Stavelot. They called on their artillery, and succeeded in breaking through; and by dark that night were well entrenched on the first objective. It was not done without some casualties, however, for on a visit that afternoon many men could be seen lying in the snow who would never see their home or their loved ones again. There was one soldier who was lying down apparently resting with his elbow on the ground and his head resting in his hand. I said something to him but received no answer, and on closer inspection saw that he had been dead for some time.

IT is always painful to see American dead, as they are ones you have seen and possibly talked with a few hours before, and have been the ones who have done the actual work of knocking the Germans out of their positions that higher-ups as well as you have planned so easily in orders on the previous day. About the German dead I know that for myself little pity was wasted. They were complete strangers, and although at times they were numerous, it was more with curiosity that we looked at them. We wanted to see whether they were young or old, what kind of troops they were; and the more dead there were, the more we knew that our fire, our plans, and our men had worked effectively. Besides, the more German dead we saw the quicker the war would be completed victoriously, for of course we had to keep going until the Germans realized that they were beaten.

On this attack, as on others, Colonel Paxton had many narrow escapes. On one occasion he was leading his C. P. group forward through the woods when Lieutenant Morgan, his S-2, told a man to go ahead in front of the Colonel. This man had hardly

Some of them asked if the Boche were coming back.

passed Paxton when he was shot through the head by a sniper. On another occasion it was not known whether or not the Krauts had the trail covered. Paxton told his group to wait a minute and he would see, and started forward. A machine-gun opened up; and Paxton, coming back with several holes in his trouser-leg, said: "Yes, I guess they are still there."

The 424th on the right had not advanced very far and the town of Henumont in their sector was still in German hands. That night I was called back to General Perrin's headquarters beyond Francorchamps. As it was still very cold, and I had been having a rather heavy siege of the GIs, and the paregoric I had taken had only served to make me sick to my stomach, this trip to inform me that we were to take Henumont the next morning was not particularly pleasant. While at the C. P., it was learned that another regiment had had over five hundred casualties that day, mostly from trench foot; that we had between thirty-five and forty from mortar and machine-gun fire, but none from trench foot.

In my mind there dawned the clear picture that the paratroopers, in spite of any faults, were the ones to have in combat. They had already been in two attacks and were beginning their third within two weeks, and nobody was falling out because of trench foot. If they had trench foot, and a lot of them undoubtedly had by now, they were not turning in to the aid station until they got back to the rear area. As Colonel Howze of the 3rd Armored Division remarked while the 1st Battalion was fighting for him around Soy and Hotton: "If all our troops were like these, we would have been in Berlin a year ago."

We arranged to give the attackers our artillery for support.

DURING the early morning of the 14th of January, the 1st Battalion left positions they had been holding in Stavelot, marched through the snow to a position east of Henumont and attacked the town after a short artillery preparation. The Germans had vacated the town, and all that was left besides a lot of homeless cattle wandering loose in the middle of the street was the remains of an American patrol who had been ambushed as they entered the town. The Germans had kept out of sight and let them come in to extreme short range before firing. The officer was a blond-haired youngster, and as we saw from his papers strewn around on the ground, from St. Paul, Minnesota.

There wasn't much to be done for the patrol; but Major Bowlby, who had been brought up in the cavalry, climbed up into a hayloft and threw down a lot of hay for the starving cattle. The people of the town had joined the miserable-looking throng that we had seen moving back before the hated and dreaded Boche, carrying and pushing in wheelbarrows what few belongings they could. Some of them had asked us if the Boche were coming back again and we had told them they were not. Nevertheless, when the Germans retreated, they had left word that they would return within a week, and the helpless people were too scared to pay much attention to our assurances. However, the cattle seemed even more pitiful than the humans, as the latter could do something about it, but all the cattle could do was to stay to starve to death in their stalls, or if turned loose to wander in a vain search for forage in the deep snow.

The enemy had holed up in Logbierme and Coulée, the next town south of Henumont. They had a couple of tanks which caused the 1st Battalion some trouble as they slowly drove the Krauts from the buildings. The 3rd Battalion by now had reached the town of Houvegnes, where they found at one house the table all set to serve dinner, and a meal cooking on the stove. I suspect also that some of the 3rd Battalion had supplemented this meal with steaks from a cow that had been killed by artillery fire.

During the night a blizzard came up and another heavy snow fell. The 3rd Battalion moved southward to Poteaux, and the 1st Battalion pushed forward to a forest-covered ridge on their right and put out a road block on the east and west road to their front. A German water-cart with two men on it came driving up the road, and the road block ambushed them. The 106th Division had reached the limit of their advance, and we were now attached to the 30th Division, who had been attacking on our left, to continue the attack. A patrol from the 3rd Battalion surprised a German artillery observation group by finding a wire line and following it until they came to a group of twelve Krauts on a hill directing fire from an assault gun into Poteaux. This group was either killed or captured, and the heavy accurate fire into the town came to a stop. We pushed on to the south about another mile, when we reached the 30th Division final objective, and we held fast.

The engineers had a hard time keeping the trails open after the heavy snow, as the mines could not be seen. Although one or two jeeps were blown up from the mines, the heavy snowplow was not bothered too much by the explosion of a Teller mine. One bit of humor indulged in by the engineers was a big sign painted on the back of an antiquated French road-sweeper that they had impressed into service. This sign sarcastically read: *"C'est la guerre."* This old French vehicle must have been at least the vintage of 1890, for it had the old-fashioned carriage-type wheels, and a buggy seat perched well up in the air. It was ludicrous just to look at, but with a G.I. planted imperiously on the buggy seat and the apparition almost incredibly moving down the street impelled by its eight-horsepower engine, it gave everybody that passed a good laugh. It thus served a purpose, whether it did any useful work or not.

THE newly arrived 75th Division now was supposed to attack across our front toward the east, while we remained in position until they passed our front. We watched them one morning from the road block, and they were having a hard time getting started. One battalion was trying to cross an open field under heavy German machine-gun and mortar fire in plain daylight. Major Bowlby and I happened to be visiting the 1st Battalion road block when this occurred, and a company of the 75th was trying to move up the road by crawling. Nebelwerfer fire started coming in, which while the shells were in flight sounded something like an old rusty ice-cream freezer in action, except louder. We took refuge in the building the road block was using for a C. P., and the company started back down the road. We arranged to give the attackers our artillery for support as they did not have communications with theirs. The Germans were finally driven out of their positions, and

after another day we were ordered back to Stavelot for a brief rest.

While at Stavelot, the men were put in buildings, and entertainments were arranged. Company messes were now operated for a little change in diet. While in combat, the men had existed on ten-in-one rations, which was a good ration and which they could cook up themselves. I know some of them liked it so well that objections were heard when the kitchens were set up. The 2nd Battalion was still fighting with the 7th Armored Division for St. Vith, but rejoined us after a few days. They had run into pretty strong resistance, for the Germans there were doing everything they could to hold the Bulge open until they escaped with the bulk of their forces. They were up against the fanatic S.S. Division that had killed the American prisoners at Malmédy. But they had plenty of tank support, and after a few days rejoined the regiment in Stavelot.

WE had each battalion commander give a critique on his experiences during the past weeks for the officers and men so they could learn what had been going on, and also to improve our technique from the past experiences. Beaver Thompson, the celebrated newspaper correspondent, came down for a visit from 1st Army headquarters at Spa. At our command post, a big barn of a building on the square, the windows were covered to keep out the cold winter winds, and G.I. stoves were sprinkled around. The average French stove or fireplace never seemed to heat a place adequately, since they were built with the purpose of economy of fuel. The G.I. stove, however, was round and ample, and when it came to red glow was far superior to any French stove. It finally got so that when we moved, we would try to get the stoves from the last bivouac up early, and many loaded them on the jeeps following the main attack. Here at the C. P. was an old Belgian taken care of by his daughter. The old man was apparently very sick, as he kept to his bed in the rooms they occupied and did not bother us, and we did not bother them. We found that he was a doctor, and at one time before his illness had been considered the leading surgeon in that part of Belgium.

Most of the people in this part of Belgium were not overly friendly, as it had belonged to Germany before the last war and they certainly never put themselves out to welcome the Americans. Perhaps this area had been fought over so much, and armies of both sides had passed through there with such devastating effect, that they were now apathetic and felt the hopelessness of their position—also that if they befriended one side, it might happen that the opposing side would return the next week and punish them for being so friendly. In spite of this everybody enjoyed the few days we spent in Stavelot, as all too quickly we were ordered to rejoin the 82nd Airborne Division, which had just jumped off from St. Vith, after its capture, and were attacking in the vicinity of Honsfeld toward the Siegfried Line.

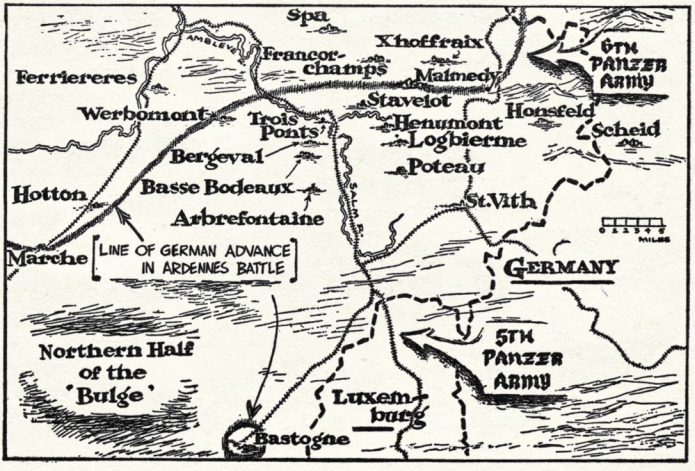
The area the 82nd was operating in was very rugged. That is, it consisted of wide expanses of heavy woods, with lanes or trails cut through them. Due to the heavy traffic and melting snow, these dirt trails were now very rough, and in many places almost impassable. I had left about three o'clock in the afternoon to come forward, leaving Zais to get the battalions started forward the next morning. It took me until three o'clock the next morning to reach 82nd headquarters, where General Gavin was still up and busy. He said that the 325th was attacking toward the town of Scheid early that morning, and that we were to protect the flanks, particularly against attack from the northeast. He liked to have everything buttoned up as he called it, and it was the normal thing in the 82nd after any attack to button up so that no large enemy groups could filter through without encountering resistance.

The 325th jumped off that morning all right, and as they moved forward, we saw many of them carrying the German Panzerfaust. This was only good for one shot, but carried a lot more power than did our bazooka or rocket weapon, and was one of the few things that could stop the Mark VI tank. The attack that morning was not an easy one, and soon litter men were busy bringing wounded back up the narrow forest trail from the direction of Scheid. Many more followed them that day, until the town was finally captured in the late afternoon. Our 1st Battalion was put in position to button up the north flank of the 325th and that night when I returned to the Division C. P., I found that our regiment was ordered to another front to participate in an attack to be made by the V Corps.

As usual, I went ahead with some of the regimental staff and the battalion commanders, in order to get the plan and make a reconnaissance before the arrival of the troops under Colonel Zais. We stopped off at the headquarters of the V Corps at Eupen to get information on where we were going. Here we found General Huebner, whom I had known a few years before when he was executive of the 19th Infantry in Hawaii. He was very cordial but full of business as usual, and anxious, as he expressed it, to get the damn' war over with. He had a very tough assignment for us, however, and certainly didn't permit friendship to interfere with duty, as we soon found.

Colonel John Hill, a classmate, took us up to the 78th Division, to which unit we were going to be attached for this operation. At their headquarters near Simmerath, we met General Parker, the division commander, and General Rice, the assistant division commander. The plan was for the 78th to attack from their present position and take the town of Schmidt, and then push on to prevent the Germans from blowing up the dam and thereby flooding the Roer River Valley. While they were doing this, we were to attack in an adjacent sector held by the 8th Division. Our objective was outlined as the high ground east of the Roer River, and we were to jump off from the little town of Bergstein, Germany.

We immediately had to get word to the column to move to the vicinity of Bergstein instead of coming into the 78th sector. After getting all the information we could we started out again to Bergstein to get a look at our



That night was a nightmare as the troops were stopped by mine-fields covered by machine-gun and mortar fire.

area and make plans for the attack which was to be the following night, the 2nd-3rd of February. The roads were now in poor shape as they had thawed slightly and then been frozen, again covering everything with a thin coating of ice. However the troops got up there all right the next morning after riding all night in trucks, although as Major Armstrong remarked later, his eyes stood out like a bullfrog's for a week after, from leaning out of the cab trying to watch the road. The towns in this area such as Hurtgen, Kleinhau, Brandenburg and Bergstein were beaten to a pulp, and were much worse than any area we had seen. During the next few days the roads thawed out and all except the main paved roads became hub-deep in mud. The whole scene was one of war at its worst, and the combination of mud and demolished towns gave everything the aspect of desolation and despair.

However, we visited Bergstein that afternoon, which was under artillery fire and the battalion that occupied it kept well hidden in the basements and cellars. In fact, they did not appreciate us moving around in the town, as they said it drew fire; and the commanding general of the 8th Division added his protest to theirs and let us understand that we were severely reprimanded. At the 13th Infantry C. P. we found Colonel Nelson, whom I had known before in the 10th Armored Division. This C. P. was located in Brandenburg, but as all the buildings were in ruins, they had dug into the side of a hill and braced the ceilings and walls with heavy timber. The vicinity of the C. P. was extremely muddy, and even then the ceiling was beginning to drip from the melting snow. As he was moving back to Kleinhau, he let us use the C. P., and we were grateful as there was no other place to go except out in the mud. When the troops arrived, we put them in a patch of woods which had some small dugouts and where they could stay until the time for attack that same night.

As the time for attack drew near, we moved the forward echelon of the C. P. to the already overcrowded Bergstein. Here we found one room of a mostly demolished building that was not occupied, and set up our telephones, radios and an O. P. on the upper floor. That night was pretty much of a nightmare, for the troops almost immediately were stopped by heavy mine-fields covered by machine-gun and mortar fire, and illuminated by brilliant flares. As it was impossible to remove the mines at night, we waited for daylight to send in groups to remove the mines and tape gaps to guide troops through them.

This they succeeded in doing; and the next night Captain Birder took our company through first. He had a rough time, as he was almost immediately surrounded by German paratroopers, and in the dark it became quite a mix-up. Captain Birder, who was a fine young company commander barely twenty-one years of age and a recent graduate of Notre Dame, was killed, and the Germans closed up the gaps in the mine-field before others could follow. The night before we had lost Captain Juichi, the commander of F Company, and Captain Woodall, the artillery liaison officer with the 3rd Battalion, by mortar fire.

WE seemed to be getting nowhere fast, but we tried again on the third night with about the same success. The companies that had started the attack with from thirty to forty men were now down to twenty, and with some of the best leaders gone. Two companies of the 1st Battalion were also sent to clean off the hill on the left, from which heavy fire was coming. This was done, but it still seemed to be to no avail. The 6th German parachute regiment, which was holding this sector, was not going to budge, apparently, until they wanted to.

In the meantime the attack on Schmidt by the 78th was not progressing too well, and night after night the artillery would lay into the town, firing all night long with 155s and 240s until the place must have been a shambles. The Germans also were starting to put big stuff into Bergstein, and when a whole building or what remained of a building would crumple up from a blast, we figured it must be from at least a small buzz-bomb that they were using. However the nightmare finally came to an end. The Germans suddenly withdrew, we were relieved by the 508th Parachute Infantry and were ordered to move to Laon, France, later to join up with the 13th Airborne Division, which was now *en route* to France from the U. S.

It was a pretty tired, dejected bunch that moved back toward Brandenburg. They had been almost continuously on the move since the 19th of December. Casualties had not been terribly high, except possibly on this last venture, but the weather had been severely cold, feet were getting in bad

condition, and the many long moves in open trucks had caused many respiratory ailments. Trucks were scarce on the move back to entrain at Aachen, but the men were satisfied to load about thirty-five men on the 2½s to make sure they got out of that area. I know myself—though not having to take a lot of the hardships that the men did—that I felt as though I had taken a physical beating. What we all needed was a chance to relax, to get cleaned up and rested up. Nevertheless, as the men loaded on the forty-and-eights again at Aachen their spirits were high, and apparently the youngsters could recover quickly, particularly after a good night's sleep and knowing that they were now headed for a rest area.

Aachen, a city that had been heavily bombed, and about which one had heard and read, was about three-fourths demolished. According to the reports, we thought that the whole city was flat. However, the railyard had been put back into shape very quickly, and there were whole rows of houses that had not been hit by bombs at all.

We visited the M. P. headquarters while we were there, and the hotel was in almost perfect condition with electricity and hot water. About forty thousand Germans still lived in the city, out of about an original one hundred thousand.

At Laon we stayed at an old French barracks for about a week before moving farther south to join up with the 13th Airborne.

THE town of Joigny, nestling in the valley of the Yonne River about a hundred fifty kilometers south of Paris, was quiet and secluded. Although some German troops had been billeted there in the days of the occupation, it had missed most of the destruction and bitterness of war. It would have been an ideal spot to enjoy living in France but we were rapidly getting entwined again in the final drive to complete victory over Germany. First of all we were now assigned to a division that had just come overseas. In personnel, equipment, and administrative matters they were as near perfection as could be obtained, whereas we had now been almost continually in combat or preparing for combat for a year. Many of the old faces had now gone; and although we had received some replacements we needed about eight hundred men to put us up to full strength. So many changes had occurred, and so rapidly that our service records as well as others now needed months of work before they would be anywhere near perfect. Under the expediency of combat we had picked up a lot of extra equipment which now was considered as over age, and most of the other equipment was generally in a rather beaten-up condition. At the same time both men and officers were entitled to visit Paris and other places as a reward for their long and faithful service. Time was needed to accomplish these things, but now the 7th Army advancing toward the Rhine in the vicinity of Mannheim had requested an airborne division to help them to secure a bridgehead across the river.

The 17th Airborne Division already had been set up to cross the Rhine and land near the town of Wesel. We followed them to the airfields around the 4th of April. Although the division was well spread out at these airfields in northern France, as we were to use the new C-46, carrying about thirty men, the whole regiment was at one field located a few miles from Bapaume. Here we had tents set up by a colored engineer service battalion to wait and prepare for the coming attack. The C-46 group at the nearby

airfield had lost twenty-four ships the day before on the Wesel jump, and were certainly not over-enthusiastic about this coming affair.

Preparations were made, however; but the day before the operation was scheduled to occur, everything was canceled. What had happened was that General Patton's Third Army had simply walked across the Rhine in that area and had found little opposition. Plans were then made to jump farther into the interior of Germany near the town of Heckingen. A group of mysterious German scientists were supposed to have set up in this area whom we were supposed to capture together with their records and apparatus. However Heckingen as well as most other German towns was also quickly overrun by the now rapidly advancing ground forces, and we were forced again to postpone our plans at the last minute. In another week the war ended as of the 9th of May, although reports had got out several days before that everything was *kaput* for Germany.

OUR stay now at the field was an anti-climax. The weather for several weeks had been bitter; although this was April, a driving sleet swept across the open fields, apparently coming right off the North Sea and the tents had little effect in keeping out the wintry blasts. The ground around the tents was a sea of mud, and the walk from the tents to the mess tent was a precarious and slippery journey. The Red Cross girls who had accompanied the regiment to the area, however, slogged around with the rest of us, and lent cheer to the bedraggled inmates of the camp. Most of us got a chance to see some of the surrounding cities such as Arras, Lens and Lille, and also to visit Brussels. At Lille one day they were bringing some of the displaced persons whom the Germans had requisitioned from France for labor. Hundreds of them were now coming in by train daily, and hundreds of people lined the streets to catch the first glimpse of someone who had been torn from his family four or five years before. On one occasion while returning from Lille we picked up in the car a middle-aged Frenchman in an old and torn French soldier's overcoat. He apparently had no one to meet him, and was starting to walk off with his belongings wrapped up in a piece of blanket. He was not very communicative, but we did gather that he had been captured by the Germans when they took Verdun in 1940. As we approached his home town and his house, he grew very quiet, and soon the tears were streaming down his cheeks. He was seeing the familiar scenes that he had not looked at for six years, and he would soon see the brothers and sisters, the mother and wife and children he had not seen for those years. We kept quiet also, knowing what he was thinking about, and let him off at the house he pointed out. We waited until the old mother and all the rest of the family came out joyfully to welcome him, and then drove back to the airfield.

During the next few weeks there was a constant shuffling and reshuffling within the regiment. All the men who had a campaign star for Italy were given the privilege of transferring to the 82nd Division, who were designated as occupation troops. As this included all the older men in the regiment, our losses were heavy, and the administration work to get the service records, etc., up to date and reorganizing with replacements now sent in was very heavy. As none of the other units in the Division were effected by this shift we were thus generally far behind the others in completeness of records, and the cause of most of the worries of the Division staff. Very soon after the Italian men left, we had to transfer all the men over seventy-five points to the 17th ALB Division which was being inactivated. What we had left was a new regiment composed about ninety per cent of men and officers who had been assigned during the past few months. When we completed this last change-over, we were now prepared as far as personnel was concerned for redeployment to the Pacific for the battle of Japan.

The atmosphere of Joigny was generally pastoral with its small farms on the hillsides outside the town, its small flocks of goats in the hills, the smooth-flowing Yonne with its occasional fishermen and slow-moving barges and its peaceful inhabitants in the narrow, walled streets. However now and then through the U.S.O. program an occasional celebrity from the outer-world came for a visit and these we usually put up for the night at the regimental officers' quarters. Georges Carpentier, the famous French prize-fighter, who as a boy had worked in the coal mines of Lens, was one of these. Although the gorgeous Georges was then well over the fifty-year mark, he was still trim, exceptionally well dressed and still his dapper, confident self. He refereed one of our boxing matches held in the Place de Marche, and although I don't believe most of our youngsters remembered too much about his fight with Jack Dempsey many years before, the French people of the town were highly enthusiastic.

The stay at the assembly area, Camp Pittsburgh, was rather hectic. We turned in the equipment we didn't need, boxed up what we were to take back, made reams of rosters, and stencils covering all the reception stations where the men would go on their thirty-day furlough after arrival in the states. To add to the general confusion we were assigned about a thousand low-point men from the 17th Airborne Division eligible to go to Japan, and these men also had to be processed physically, clothes and equipment turned in or issued as necessary and new ship loading lists prepared. As we were only due to stay at Pittsburgh a few days before starting for the port of Le Havre everybody had to work, and particularly the personnel section, with a feverish haste not conducive to the best and most accurate results.

On arrival at Camp Phillip Morris at Le Havre, we found the troops had already left and were in the process of loading on the *Madawaska Victory* preparatory to sailing at twelve noon. As it was now almost ten A.M. and we had been traveling since about midnight, we started for the boat in all haste, finally locating it after a harried search of the waterfront and with a half-hour to spare. We then settled back for the crossing of the Atlantic, with the ship heavily loaded. The men had to sleep in shifts; all passageways were constantly jammed with reclining figures. The voyage was rough, but at last we were on our way back, to see that Statue of Liberty we had so missed, the past year and a half. . . .

I cannot finish my story without paying a final tribute to those officers and men who followed and fought through these pages. There were no better men to have been had anywhere than the group that left Camp Mackall, N. C., for overseas. The average age of the enlisted men was nineteen, that of the officers only slightly higher. They had youth and the spirit that goes with it. They also had the confidence in themselves to wish to close with the enemy and destroy him. I can remember the story of the lead scout in the forest near Hotton, Belgium, who went ahead of the platoon knocking out enemy machine-gun nests as he went along by himself. He had forgotten that he was simply to cover the advance of the platoon, and his job ended when he located the enemy. One or two of these men could do a lot of damage, and many are the instances where they did. For feats of physical stamina and endurance they were unsurpassed.

WHILE thinking back on these days, I can now see that another one of the outstanding qualities of a paratrooper was his willingness to take a chance. While sometimes this attribute caused some casualties, on the other hand it finished up the job more quickly. Casualties are a necessary evil in war and I can remember sweating them out almost continuously, for if excessive casualties were incurred, there was in most cases something wrong with the plans. It seemed to me that there must always be a way of arranging an attack so that a minimum of casualties would be suffered.

Drawn by
John C. Wonsetler

"To carry on a certain correspondence with persons within the enemy lines . . . $3,276." This and other entries suggest an O.S.S. in the Revolution. Moreover, the Commander's accounts balanced to within one dollar.

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Washington Lives *in* His Ledgers

THE average account book is dull reading, but not George Washington's—for his sheds bright sidelights on his character and career.

Entries reveal Washington's deep love for his stepchildren and other children. He spared no outlay during the illness of "Patsy" Custis, who died in 1773. Despite cost of the schooling of "Jacky" Custis, he helped give opportunity to less fortunate children by contributing generously to educational institutions in the Colonies.

Humanly, he loved entertainment and recreation, and did not forgo them. But it is clear on his records how frequently he paid far more than his share at a party, taking pleasure in his friends' pleasure.

As master of Mount Vernon, the welfare of a village-size community was dependent upon him, and he was well aware of the hardships imposed on all in every walk of life by unjust British commercial restrictions. His sympathy for the average man, for the small tradesman and artisan, was a potent reason for his espousal of the Revolution.

His painstaking accounts extend through his French and Indian War campaigns. Then, and in the Revolution, are noted more than occasional entries: *"To Secret Services."* They indicate how firmly he believed that money was well spent which might save soldiers' lives. When circumstances justified it, he would launch his troops in furious attacks; but no commander was ever more considerate, so far as it was possible, of the men he led. When his men went payless, their families destitute, he came to their assistance with money out of his own pocket.

Through the most hopeless years of the Revolution, Washington's faith in the cause persisted, and he loaned every spare dollar of his private funds to the Government. Uncomplainingly he accepted depreciated currency in payment of pre-war debts, because he was not willing to be accused of repudiating his country's money.

The post-war period was desperate in Washington's time. His own finances were in miserable condition. Neglected Mount Vernon was no longer even covering the cost of its upkeep. Still Washington continued his unobtrusive charities. His ledgers prove that hardly a week passed without his aiding people in distress—veterans, widows, children. Closed entries record that not a few men not pressed for payment, died in his debt.

He borrowed to pay his own local debts before going to New York to be inaugurated as our first President. Entries in the General's neat, legible script read:

"To cash paid for cleaning the house which was provided for my quarters and had been occupied by the Marblehead Regiment . . . £2.10.9." (This proves that soldiers were no different in '76; if non-coms and officers aren't on the job, quarters and camp sites always will be left in an unholy mess.)

"To the relief of the distressed wives and children of the soldiers from Marblehead . . . £15." (The Marbleheaders had rushed to enlist and were away from home at war much longer than expected. Washington was rightly grateful to that fine soldier-marine outfit, even though one of their "Charge of Quarters" had slipped up.)

"To carry on a certain correspondence with persons within the enemy lines . . . $3,276." (Washington drew heavily on the Paymaster General for Secret Service expenses. Accounts approved and paid were destroyed to protect the identity of American spies. Without a doubt the Revolutionary O.S.S. was worth the money. In 1782, one of our spies stole the official record of the strength of the British Army in America—right out of its New York headquarters!)

The historian, John C. Fitzpatrick, notes that when an amazed and delighted Treasury Department audited the accounts, kept by George Washington through eight stormy years, *they tallied to within one dollar.* And that discrepancy was in favor of the Treasury.

GEORGE WASHINGTON was the original dollar-a-year man. He refused any salary as President, as he had as Commander-in-Chief. When Congress nevertheless voted him a $25,000 salary, he accepted it only for expenses incurred in office. He spent more than that sum, all carefully accounted for, yet asked no reimbursement. All through his two terms, his energies were bent on securing financial stability for the nation. On retirement he devoted the last years of his life to wise management of his Mount Vernon farm lands, where among other economical measures, he developed a system of rotation of crops.

The Pastel

A HARD-BOILED YOUNG PRODUCTION EXPERT FINDS HIMSELF SADDLED WITH A MAN OF VISION FROM WASHINGTON—AND SPARKS FLY FAST.

THEY say it is twenty steps, more or less, that they make you walk when they have the intention of giving you a haircut with a guillotine. My notice of execution was delivered to me in the form of a wire, as I was timing operations in the forge room at Donner Industries in Sheboygan. It said:

BE IN MY OFFICE AT TEN A.M. SEPTEMBER ELEVENTH.

J. ARTHUR MURCH.

That needs a little explanation. When the term "efficiency expert" began to smell too loud, they renamed guys like me "Industrial Engineer." I slave for the firm of Bellows and Murch, Industrial Engineers. My name is Sam Ladder. They pay me fifty-five hundred a year plus fifteen hundred expenses, and call me an "intermediate consultant." They sell the services of people like me to client firms at a rate of fifteen hundred bucks per month per man. My job is usually switching production lines around to give cheaper operation, better quality and more speed. Thus I am unpopular with labor, management, the firm and myself. My qualifications are a degree in mechanical engineering, eight years of experience, a knowledge of metallurgy, a face to frighten children, and grease under my fingernails.

I know that the terms of employment are a good deal for Bellows and Murch, and I keep telling myself that I like the work. That rosy glow on the horizon over there is a standing offer. Bellows and Murch will pay any employee ten per cent of the take from any contract he is instrumental in placing. The only trouble is that they keep you so busy earning that fifteen hundred a month for the firm, that you've got no time to cut yourself in on the rosy glow.

The word among us slaves is that the only reason J. Arthur Murch ever wants to see you is to give you the heave-ho. That accounts for the slow dirge music in the back of my head as I tried to sleep on the sleeper. But there was counterpoint music in a lighter vein. Seeing J. Arthur would also include seeing J. Arthur's secretary, one Ginny Davo, with whom I have had numerous conversations in which she has done most of the talking, saying things like: "You're no better than a nomad, Sam, and I want a house in one spot, with some permanent friends, and I look forward with no pleasure to any life which consists of eight months in West Overshoe, Idaho, followed by six months in Sandy Blast, Texas. I hate packing and unpacking; and though you are a sweet guy, Sam, I'm a gal with roots like an elm tree."

So maybe it was a combination of dirges: An opportunity to be fired by J. Arthur, and another large "No" from the chestnut-topped morsel.

At quarter to ten, with a pronounced sag, I rode up in the elevator to the thirty-fourth floor of the Willet Building, clutching in a sweaty palm my brief case full of notes, and feeling slightly dizzy. I kept telling myself that it was a fine plan to get fired, but I had sales resistance.

Mabel on the front desk looked at me and said, "Oh," which is her normal greeting, though somewhat disconcerting at any time. I plodded down the soundproof corridor and turned into J. Arthur's outer office, where Ginny sits enthroned behind a three-hundred-dollar desk and a typewriter with everything but a reverse gear.

I dropped hat and brief case on one of the torture chairs, grabbed her firmly by the chin and kissed her with authority.

She backed away from it and said: "Sam, you've got the finesse of an air-hammer. Save your strength for J. Arthur."

"What happens to me, Ginny? Is it bad?"

"I don't know."

"Then what are you doing in here? Don't you work for the guy?"

"I'm an employee, and not a confidante," she said primly.

I sat down. "Honey, if he fires me, I can get a nice quiet job in one spot and then you can marry me, hey?"

"Come back and ask me again after you've spent a year in this nice quiet job you might find. I want proof that you're going to stay put."

Before I could think of a new way to ask her, a languid citizen walked in and handed her a card. He was about thirty, tall, slim, tweedy and superior. I resented her handing out her best smile. "I'll tell him you're here, Dr. Hawes."

She clicked on the box and said: "Dr. Hawes has arrived."

J. Arthur's voice blared metallically: "Is Ladder there?"

"He just arrived also, sir."

"Send them both in."

When I opened the door, Dr. Hawes strolled by me. J. Arthur Murch has all the lean grace of a socket wrench. He wears gray suits, gray ties, a gray face and gray hair. He is without passion. He looks as though the sharp angles of his cheeks and jaw would scratch a carborundum block. The only thing he keeps on the top of his desk is a pair of dice he made himself out of tool steel. I've heard that they're loaded.

I WAS surprised to see him bounce up, come out from behind his period desk and shake hands with the blond and languid Dr. Hawes. "It's indeed a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Hawes. . . . Hello, Ladder."

Before we sat down, he said: "Dr. Walter S. Hawes; this is Sam Ladder." We shook hands. The Doc let go quickly. I had expected his hand to feel like fresh putty, but it was surprisingly warm and firm.

We sat on the other side of the desk from J. Arthur, squinting into the light from the big windows behind him. J. Arthur put his elbows on the desk and made a little cathedral with his fingers. He peered through it at us and said: "Dr. Hawes, Ladder here is one of our practical young men. He's been with us for eight years, ex-

Production Line

by JOHN D. MACDONALD

cept for the war period, of course. I think he'll meet your requirements."

"For what?" I asked.

"Don't interrupt, and you'll find out sooner, Ladder," Murch said. "Dr. Hawes is an economist. You've probably heard of him. He's been very active in Washington for several years as a consultant to various Government bureaus. Dr. Hawes came to me several weeks ago with a suggestion. He felt that the broad view of economics could be applied to some of our problems, and suggested that he be given an opportunity to work with us when our next problem of plant utilization came up. We now have that problem."

Dr. Hawes stared at me calmly. "Yes, Ladder. It has been arranged that we work together. You will, of course, work out the practical aspects of my plans."

"Dr. Hawes will not technically be an employee, Ladder," Murch said smoothly. "We are hiring him at a sizable daily retainer, and he will be in charge of the job."

"Things slowing up in Washington?" I asked.

Hawes said distantly: "Not at all, old boy. In fact, I might say that several important persons are quite interested in this experiment. It has a bearing on the entire problem of how much Government can contribute to industry."

"I thought it was vice versa," I said.

"Your attitude is disappointing," J. Arthur said.

I said quickly: "It should be very interesting." A gesture of appeasement. I was baffled. I have known of J. Arthur Murch speaking softly about the Government, using words that would send mule-skinners screaming for the hills, and not repeating himself for minutes on end. His attitude could only be described as incredible.

J. Arthur reached over and grabbed a thick pile of blueprints and lists of equipment off a table by the windows. He passed them to Hawes, saying: "The plant in question is the Poughkeepsie plant of the Wilkinson Company. It has been idle for well over two years. In fact, it has never been used. It was built to manufacture some sort of flame-throwing apparatus, and the war ended just when they were ready to go into production. The Wilkinson Company is owned by Contract Electric, who have been one of our biggest clients for years. Mr. Judd of Contract Electric has asked us to survey the plant and make recommendations regarding utilization. Here is all the data on the plant. There's a watchman there at all hours. Gentlemen, you may begin. I'll expect a preliminary report inside of two weeks' time."

WE walked out, Dr. Hawes stuffing the data into his brief case. I closed the door behind us. He turned to me. "Uh—Ladder, suppose you be at the Hotel Pennsylvania at two with your suitcase. We'll go up in my car. I'll arrange for reservations at the Lord Nelson in Poughkeepsie. Do you need any tools or anything?"

"I keep all my tack-hammers in the pockets of my overalls."

"Ladder, we'll get along beautifully if you'll just coördinate."

"That a Washington word?"

"You might call it that."

"Doc, I'll coördinate like crazy. I'm a bureaucrat at heart."

"You may call me Hawes."

"Thank you, Doc."

He sniffed and walked out. I pulled a chair over and sat beside Ginny. "Honey, he didn't fire me. He just told me to work for a little while with that man of vision."

"I think he's sweet," she said.

"As a matter of fact, so do I; but that isn't what I was getting around to. I was thinking that—"

"I know. Mr. Murch didn't fire you, so you think we ought to celebrate by getting married. The answer is still the same. Stick around, and I'll have it mimeographed."

"But I've had an idea. You want a house you can stay in. The other day I saw the most beautiful all-aluminum trailer with everything that—"

"No!"

"And maybe you could even grow vines on the outside of it. Kids playing around it. You washing the dishes, and me reading the—"

"No!"

"And we go everywhere in the car with our little home rolling along behind—"

"No! No! *No!*"

"How about lunch today?"

"And maybe you could even grow vines on the outside of it."

"No!"

"What! Don't you even want to have lunch with me?"

"Oh, Sam—I'm sorry! I didn't realize you'd changed the subject. Sure, I'll lunch with you."

I DROPPED her back at the office, checked out of my hotel and raced over to the Pennsylvania with a ringing in my ears. The ringing kept saying, *"No!"*

I expected a conservative little business coupé and both hands tight on the wheel; but the garage people brought around a convertible low enough to step over, and he tooled it through the Manhattan welter with the ease of a hack driver. We climbed up onto the Parkway, and he leveled it out at cruising speed. I began to feel a little like the day when I was ten years old and I was invited over to the right side of the tracks to a birthday party. I remembered that the party had ended in a free-for-all, with some of the happy guests running screaming home. I hoped that my joint venture with the Doc wouldn't end the same way—but even as I thought it, I recognized in myself a growing urge to punch him in the head. Not a politic move, considering the way J. Arthur had kowtowed to him.

The top was down, and he said, over the rush of the wind: "How'd you get into this line of business, Ladder?"

"Oh, I've just always liked tools and machinery, and I—"

"Never had any urge in that direction myself. More interested in the overall picture. Tools and machinery are just one of the minor aspects of the broad picture of production. They are the elements whereby labor can give a greater value-added to the raw materials with which they deal. Much like a man using stilts to step over a high fence. Not over a week ago I was talking to a Senate committee about how we, in the Government, must stop looking at the production picture through a peashooter. Yes, that's what I said, a peashooter. We must begin, I said, to deëmphasize the strictly management-labor aspects of industrial progress and look to a broader coördination of all the aspects of production: Tools and machinery and labor and management and capital and consumer demand. Yes, consumer demand. That is the key to the picture, Ladder. I do have your name right? Because a plant which is manufacturing at peak efficiency an item which, in the marketplace is a drug—yes, a drug on the marketplace, ha-ha—that plant will be unprofitable. Hmmm. Just what do you do, Ladder?"

"Well, I mess around with production lines to see how they can be rearranged for more speed, and change speeds and feeds on tools to eliminate bottlenecks, and—"

"You know, Ladder, I envy you. You are a happy man. You work with your hands. Back in the days of the guilds, before the Industrial Revolution, this was a happy world, and man's hope is to get back to that individual pride in workmanship. We, in the top layer of Government, are discontented. We work with the broad aspects of the problem, and yet we never get a chance really to see the result of our handiwork. I sometimes think that I should take a job in a plant, running a dirty machine."

"You can eat off most modern equipment."

"What? As I was saying, we are a hard-pressed, neurotic group, we who labor in the labyrinths of Washington to provide you and your kind with more satisfactory conditions under which to work—"

On and on and on and on—all the way to Poughkeepsie. I found out after twenty miles that if I nodded my head once in a while, he'd keep on yammering. That gave me time and leisure to remember the exact way the soft curls grow on the nape of my Ginny's neck. . . .

It was close to five when we pulled into Poughkeepsie. He had acquired for us two adjoining rooms with a bath between. He stood in my room and smiled at me as though he was doing me a great favor. "Now, Ladder," he said, "we'll drive on out to the plant tomorrow, so you're on your own for the rest of the evening."

"Thanks, Doc."

He frowned a little at that. "I have friends near here. State Department. Be ready at nine sharp in the morning."

"Yes sir." I saluted him. He smiled calmly and went on into his own room. I had a therapeutic nip at the bar, a fair dinner, and afterward, I snitched the blueprints out of his briefcase. By the time I turned in at eleven, I could have found my way around the plant blindfolded. It was pretty obvious that the only way I'd get Junior off my hands was to get the job done as quickly as possible. The thing that really r'iled me was the thought that part of my income taxes were going to maintain that broad-view kid in the style to which he had grown accustomed.

J. Arthur Murch had all the lean grace of a socket wrench.

THE September sun was shining on the long white building when we drove into the deserted parking-lot eight miles north of Poughkeepsie. The plant had been set up by Al Johannes, who really knows his business.

We presented our letter to the watchman, and he let us in. As I had learned from the blueprints, the plant production space was in one huge high-ceilinged room. It was designed for straight-line flow of production. At one end were the stockrooms, with outside unloading platforms and spur tracks. At the other end was a huge room for inspection and packaging, with a loading platform and more tracks. The offices were in a double layer along one side of the main room. The upstairs offices were separated from the production area by sheets of glass. All the walls and machines were in pastel shades of green and blue. Moving parts on the tools were in bright red. The place was spotless. There was even a setup to pipe music in.

Hawes stood on the floor and looked around, wonder in his eyes. He gasped, "It's—so pretty! The colors! So clean! Was this an experimental plant?"

"No. All the new ones are like this, for the last eight or ten years."

"I had no idea. Where are the belts and things to drive the machinery?"

"Belts! Modern tools all have a self-contained drive."

We wandered around. He pointed at a tool. "What's that?"

"Cutter grinder."

"What does it do?"

"Grinds cutters."

"Oh."

I pointed out milling machines and turret lathes and automatic screw machines and planers and whatall.

The power was on. At his request I cut on one of the turret lathes and showed him how the turret turned automatically, bringing new tools to bear on the piece held in the jaws. He was intrigued.

"Amazing, isn't it?"

"Huh?"

"Amazing, I said."

"It's a turret lathe. It's called that because it has a turret. It keeps the guy on the lathe from changing setups all the time. What's amazing about that?"

"Ladder, you have a restricted viewpoint. You are so close to these wonders of American mechanical genius that you can't appreciate them. I am astounded."

He saved the real kicker until we had walked up to the offices. Then he stood, chest inflated, thumbs in his vest pockets, and looked down at the silent and empty shop. It always grieves me to see machines idle.

He said, loudly: "Down there, Ladder, you see virgin fields awaiting our touch. We will transform that into a beehive. And down there will labor men—each intent on some minor operation, unconscious of the overall picture, working through the dull hours, unthinking, like beasts of the field. Somehow, it saddens me."

"Don't low-rate those guys, Doc. Some of them can read too, you know."

"You don't understand what I'm talking about, Ladder. But that's okay. Don't fret about it. Let's get to work."

"And just how do you propose to do that?"

HE considered the problem without turning. Then he said: "Go over that gibberish that Mr. Murch gave you, and make me out a list of all the things that could be made in this plant."

"What!"

"Surely that's the way to approach the problem, old boy. With such a list, we can begin to plan. We have to use this plant for the greatest good for the greatest number."

"Sure, but there's just one or two little things maybe you ought to think about."

"Glad to listen to suggestions, Ladder."

"This isn't a suggestion, Doc. It would take me about a year to make such a list. Down there you've got metal-working equipment. With that, skilled guys could make any gimmick that's made out of metal. Our problem is to consider those things they can make down there that will use the maximum amount of the standing equipment. When you use the maximum amount, you get the lowest unit cost. I have a few ideas about the sort of thing we'll have to investigate. Then, after we pick a couple of items, I make a report of what it'll cost to start turning each of them out, and Murch picks one of his boys to make a market survey on each one. We combine the two reports and have our answer, provided patent rights don't screw us up."

After sixteen pages, I still didn't believe it. It was too utterly fantastic.

But Doctor Walter S. Hawes, Economist, had stopped listening at the point where I said that the shop could make anything. He stood there in a dream, looking down at the pastel production line. I don't know what he saw. I saw that the equipment was probably moored on solid concrete and steel, and would be one stinking job to shift around—which would probably have to be done.

I spread the blueprints out on a drafting-table in the next office, and then called: "Hey, Doc! Come on in here while I show you something."

He walked to the doorway, looked through me and murmured: "You do whatever you're used to doing, Ladder. I think I'll wander around for a bit. I'm beginning to get an idea. Something you said—" He floated off.

After I had stood by the windows for a time, orienting the actuality with the blueprints, I did some wandering too. A few times I saw Hawes in the distance, looking as well suited to his environment as a harpsichord in a caboose. Drifting and dreaming.

On the way back to town for lunch, I told him what I was working on. "Some kind of portable spray deal, Doc. Like paint-sprayers, or bug-dusting gimmicks—or maybe even portable metal-spraying outfits. That's pretty close to what the place was designed for, and it's always good to stick pretty close to original intent."

"Sure. Sure," he mumbled.

After lunch I phoned Sol in New York, and told him to dig me up some blueprints of several kinds of spray apparatus, and send them up as quick as he could make it. That would give me something I could go on. I could list the operations as shown by the prints, and see how they fitted the layout. It had begun to look as though I would have very little trouble with Hawes. How wrong a man can be!

I got my prints the next day, which was a Wednesday, and by Saturday I had a sweet plan. It involved a slight redesigning of a portable spray gun to fit it to the production layout, but it would mean the minimum shifting of the production line, and a utilization of the existing tools that was almost perfect. It would leave me with three surplus milling machines and one surplus drill press, over and above the normal standby equipment. Those four could be sold to acquire the two additional gang drills that would be needed. Sometimes a job works that way; you happen to select the right trial balloon the first time, and your troubles are diminished a hundred times. Hawes stayed out of my hair. He found a typewriter and kept up a continuous rattling in one corner of one of the offices. Also he drew pictures.

We knocked off at five on Saturday afternoon, and I steered him down

into the bar of the hotel. After the second Martini, I said: "Doc, our troubles are over. I've got a gimmick that'll fit the production line like a glove, and a little bird told me this noon over the phone that the market picture is good and that we can probably get a lease of patent rights."

He frowned at me. "Gimmick? Don't tell me that you think you have a report to make?"

"What do you think I've been doing out there, Doc? Sharpening my Boy Scout knife? While you've been mooning around and writing a thesis, I've done the work."

"Ha!" he said flatly. "What you say merely proves to me that you are stuck tight in your narrow little rut, too limited in mental caliber to see over your shoestrings."

"And maybe you'll keep those pretty teeth longer, Doc, if you make your remarks a little less personal."

"I'm being completely impersonal. My report is ready to turn in. It has a breadth of vision that will undoubtedly alarm you. Here's one of my carbons of it. Take a look." He passed it across the table.

After I read the first few paragraphs, I gulped the rest of my drink and ordered a double. When it arrived, I groped for it and lifted it to my lips with shaking hand.

After I had climbed through all sixteen pages, I still didn't believe it. It was too utterly fantastic—and somehow it was extraordinarily typical.

IN brief, he proposed that the Poughkeepsie plant be made the sole production source for an experimental community, and that land be acquired adjoining the plant grounds for the erection of a village to be composed solely of the workers in the plant. Temporary barracks would be supplied, and lots of lumber and pipe and stuff. Then, the workers would build their own houses, using the plant to manufacture the necessary hinges and window catches and heating units and so on—all the hardware that goes into a house. During this period, they would be paid by Contract Electric, who would be the cost-plus-fixed-fee contractor on a Government contract which would be written to provide for the establishment of this experimental community. Phase One would be the building and the equipping of the houses, and he anticipated in his report that it would be easy to recruit skilled workers who were dissatisfied with their living arrangements in nearby cities.

Phase Two would be the stepping out of the picture of Government advisors and the taking over of the management function by the workers. A community council would determine what the plant should make, and requisitions would be placed on Contract Electric by the community for the necessary raw materials. These items manufactured over and above the community needs would be sold in the open market, and the proceeds put into two separate funds. One would be to pay back Contract Electric for the wages during the nonproductive period and the raw materials. The other would be a purchase fund, eventually to increase to the size where the plant could be purchased in the name of the community.

Phase Three would occur after the plant was paid for. That was the dilly. Then, men from this community would be put on the Government payroll to go around the country and help establish similar communities all over the U. S.

It was beautifully written—and almost convincing. It talked, in the end, about "unification of the tools of production" and "community pride in workmanship" and "a return to the days of the guilds, when men worked harmoniously for a common end."

I ordered another drink and looked at him. He was beaming proudly at me. "What do you think?"

"I think it is the world's prize example of backward reasoning, Doc. Other than that, it's beautiful."

He turned grim. "Permit me to hear your objections."

"Sure. Take hinges for the front doors: A firm makes them for a few cents each. So, instead of buying them, they make them in a shop that isn't suited for it. They hand-make them—cost maybe three or four or ten bucks a pair. Wasted effort."

"Ah, but you forget the psychological aspects of having the plant supply all the needs of the community. What you said about the plant being able to make anything that is made out of metal is what started me off on this line of thinking."

"Okay! So what about the second phase when they decide what they're going to make? Maybe they pick something they can't make efficiently. Then they can't compete in the market without cutting their prices down below cost. They lose money."

"Money? So they lose money. The Government will willingly support this venture through the trial stages."

"But it's backward. Why not set the plant up to make a good product at a good price, and then later let the employees buy in? If it's profitable enough, the company can build their houses for them. Eventually they can own it."

"Nonsense, Ladder! That's paternalism. The employees would always feel as if a bone had been thrown to them. This way, it's their plant from the beginning."

"And a bottomless well to toss money into. It would mean a deal where a man couldn't get himself fired unless he committed actual murder. Every time I've seen a setup like that, I've seen sloppy production."

"You want to use a big whip?"

"Nuts! I want guys on their toes. I work twice as hard because I'm always wondering when Murch is going to think of a good excuse to bounce me out."

"You're a traditionalist, Ladder."

"And you're a metaphysical nincompoop, Doc."

"Obviously we can't agree, Ladder. My report will be the one turned in."

"Along with mine."

"Remember now, you're working for me."

"For a little while. And you remember, my professorial friend, that the job of Bellows and Murch is to show Contract Electric how they can make dough. If it's a profitable operation, the employees will get fat wages—and I have yet to see a guy that'll trade in a fat pay envelope for a social experiment."

"The Government will pay them well."

"Did I hear you talk about paternalism with a sneer, Doc?"

He stood up, snatched his paper and walked off. I sipped what was left of my drink, and what, with the slight buzz, I called Ginny up. She said no again, told me that I had been drinking, and hung up.

Dr. Walter S. Hawes and I did very little talking on the way down. It was raining, and the tires made a slick noise on the concrete of the Parkway. He dropped me off at my hotel and said: "Nine o'clock sharp in Mr. Murch's office, Ladder—and you will co-sign my report before you go in."

"Just like next year I'll pitch for the Dodgers."

"You may be looking for that sort of job," he said, and drove away.

WHEN I walked in, Ginny Davo looked like a May morning, and her eyes had a sparkle like silver dollars. Doc hadn't arrived.

I said: "Why couldn't I get hold of you last night, honey?"

"Why Doctor Hawes took me out, Sam. Didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't. To a lecture, I presume."

"To a very fine little club in the Village, Sam."

"Had a good time, I presume."

"Why, of course, Sam. There's no need for you to get so nasty. And I was sorry to hear Walter say that you had been no help to him at all up in Poughkeepsie."

I got as far as, "Why, that—" when he walked in, practically arm in arm with J. Arthur Murch.

Doc said, "Good morning, Virginia." And Murch—the old traitor—beamed at both of them.

We went on into the office, and my own report was burning a hole in my pocket. It was only two pages, and most of it was a list of operations, with a code symbol to indicate whether or not the operation could be done on existing equipment.

We sat as before, and Murch constructed his little cathedral to peer through. He said: "Well?"

Hawes cleared his throat. "Before I begin, Mr. Murch, I want to point out that not only did Mr. Ladder give me no help whatsoever, but he has a closed mind and refuses to consider my conclusions."

J. Arthur glared at me. "What's the reason for your attitude, Ladder?"

"The guy's a crackpot, Mr. Murch."

"Shut up! Proceed, Dr. Hawes."

HAWES whipped out his report and began to read it in a clear voice, vibrant with feeling and social consequence. I studied Murch's face while all this was going on, trying to guess what must be going on inside his cold gray head. The report certainly violated all the traditions that he had drummed into the thick heads of his slaves. The minutes kept by, and the clear voice emoted on. Murch stared at his fingers, his mouth thin and straight.

At last the resounding final paragraph was over. J. Arthur coughed. He twiddled his fingers. He smiled at Hawes. "That—uh—that certainly is interesting, Dr. Hawes. Very interesting. But as to the practical aspects of the case—" My heart gave a great bound, and I reached for my report. Murch continued: "Can you be certain that the appropriation would go through?" I nearly fell on the floor.

Hawes beamed. "With my knowledge of Washington procedure, Mr. Murch, I can practically guarantee it."

"Hmm. We'd better see Mr. Judd at the earliest possible opportunity. I'll phone him right away, and we can take the report over."

There was a squeak in my voice as I said: "But, Mr. Murch! That layout is a natural for a portable metal-spraying gimmick, and I've got my report—"

Hawes said, coolly: "Old boy, can't you see that Mr. Murch isn't the least bit interested in your trivial little report?"

That did it! That tore it right in half. I bounded out of the chair and went after him. Something was making a growling noise, and I realized dimly that it was me. He got up quick, and I tried to ram my right fist right down his throat. I wanted to hear those teeth come off.

His mouth wasn't where it should have been. It was like missing a golf ball. An empty feeling. Something exploded sharply on my chin. I came up off my knees to see Hawes dancing

That did it! I bounded out of the chair and went after him.

in front of me in a gray mist. Somehow he looked as though he knew what he was doing. On my third swing I connected. I found him by Braille, straddled him and was trying to bust his face down through the floor—when the lights went out. . . .

I was dead and in heaven, and an angel was ministering to me. When I woke up a little more, I saw that the angel was Ginny. She was pale, and she had been crying. I struggled up and held my head and said: "Whoo! What happened?"

"J. Arthur tagged you with the desk lamp."

"Where is he?"

"He and Walter went to see Mr. Judd. They were going to stop at a drugstore first to get Walter patched up."

Everything was dandy. I said: "And what now?"

"Mr. Murch told me to call up every Management Engineering firm in town and tell them that you have been fired for emotional instability. The firm will mail you a check bringing you up to date. He said he'll write to the out-of-town firms. He dictated a letter of reference for you."

"Read it to me."

"It says: 'To the best of my knowledge and belief, Samuel Ladder classifies himself as an Industrial Engineer. He endeavored to convert this firm to his belief for an eight-year period ending suddenly on the morning of September eighteenth. Signed, J. Arthur Murch.' "

"Now that I'm down and out, will you marry me, Ginny?"

"Of course, darling. Any time you say."

I guess my Ginny is just that sort of girl. She has to be needed, and she certainly knew that she was wanted.

She phoned me at the hotel that she could get a week off, starting in four days. She told me that Murch had begun to use my name as a new cuss-word. She said that Dr. Hawes was a fatuous prig, and that she hated everybody that didn't like me.

GINNY and I stayed in a little guest-house in the woods near a hotel in Southern Pines, and everything was just right. All my problems faded away—until I started to wonder how I was going to earn a living. It would have to be a case of making a tour around to the client firms that I hadn't been too rough with, and see if they needed a guy with two hands and a big mouth.

She hadn't told me that she had let the office know where they could get

in touch with her. They thought she was off by herself. The wire came on the fifth day of the honeymoon:

WHERE IS LADDER? IMPERATIVE HE VISIT THIS OFFICE THIRTIETH NOVEMBER MORNING. J. ARTHUR MURCH.

She counted the words and said: "Eleven, darling. He must really be in a sweat. Let's go."

"The hell with it! This is a honeymoon, and I like it here, and he just wants me for target practice or something. I'm not going."

She smiled at me sweetly. She looked wonderful in the blazing white terry-cloth robe with that chestnut hair piled high on her head. "Pack!" she said. . . .

I left her in the coffee-shop in the lobby of the building, and went on up to the offices of Bellows and Murch. My insides had turned to slush, and I tried to whistle with dry lips. On a hunch, I had brought along the Poughkeepsie report.

A new girl was at Ginny's desk—a fill-in. She looked at me coolly, and said: "You look dopey enough to be Sam Ladder." I nodded. "Go on in, Sam. They await you."

They did: J. Arthur, who looked at me like a dog looking at a tree surgeon, and a stranger. The stranger was in his late fifties, and large in every dimension. A lock of white hair fell down over his tanned forehead.

Murch said: "I sent out wires to everyone I thought might know about you. Which one did you answer?"

"The one you sent to my wife."

"Wife?"

"The ex-Miss Davo. You can keep that harpy out there in your outer office. Ginny is through."

Murch sighed, and flapped a hand in a helpless gesture. "This is—"

The stranger interrupted. "Charley Hawes is my name, Sam. Glad to know you."

"Any relation to—" I said weakly.

"His father, Sam. Walter flew out to the coast the other day all puffed up about this big deal he's swinging here, and told me about you. I got a few little businesses on the West Coast—ah—Hawes Mining Equipment, Hawes Construction, Hawes Motors, Hawes Shipbuilding. Few more—prefabs, gliders. Forget the rest now and then. Son, did you really nail him?"

I could see the suit coming. "Yes sir," I said faintly.

He chuckled. "Good boy. Walter is a damned college professor. Ethereal. Calls me a reactionary and a robber baron. Murch, how come you paid any attention to that—report that Walter wrote up? How come you tried to sell it to Judd? I've known Ben Judd for years. He wouldn't fall for that sort of gunk."

MURCH bleated a little. He said: "Well, I didn't. I told Ben on the side to play along with me, and let Dr. Hawes think that he had a ripe idea. You see—"

"Sure, I see it. You wanted to play along with Walter in hopes that I'd be grateful enough to become a client of yours. Goodness knows, you've had those two men out there in L. A. pestering me long enough. And then because Ladder, here, almost crossed up the deal by swinging on Walter, you fired him. Now, that's a hell of a way to do business, Murch. Man your age ought to have more sense."

"But I—"

"Don't give me any but's, Murch. Sam, did you make a report on the Poughkeepsie plant that Walter is yammering about?"

I handed it to him, and my hand was shaking so badly that he had to make two grabs for it. He scanned it quickly. "Hmmm. I like 'em short. Right smack on the nose. Murch, I've got a proposition for you. Walter told me some of the things that Sam, here, said to him. Walter thought they were silly, but they made sense to me. Didn't know you had roughnecks like Sam working for you. I'll make a contract with you that'll call for about five of your men working with me out there for a two-year period. But I want Sam Ladder in charge. And I know how you people operate. Ladder, here, is responsible for this contract, not those two cream-puffs you've had working on me. Understand?"

Murch flashed me a look of pure hatred and said: "Yes sir."

He said: "Furthermore, you'll hire Ladder back with a small bonus. The bonus is for punching that phony son of mine in the teeth." He turned to me. I was busy with arithmetic. Ten per cent of five times fifteen hundred a month is nine thousand a year. A nice addition to the Ladder purse.

He said: "I'll expect you in L. A. with your crew one week from today, Sam. And you'll have one more responsibility: I'm assigning Walter to you."

I stammered: "But he—Washington—the broad picture—"

"Son, the broad picture gives me a pain. Walter, for all his big talk, has a nice knowledge of double-entry bookkeeping. I told him flat that either he was going to stick around home and get his hands dirty, or I was disinheriting him."

On my way down to tell Ginny, I didn't use the elevator. I just floated down the shaft.

SPORT SPURTS

by Harold Helfer

TRYING to convert a spare on the last frame, Connie Constance, of Seattle, Wash., bumped his leg as he delivered the ball; matches in his pocket ignited and he dropped the ball—missing the spare, a 200-game, a 600-series and causing his team to lose by a single pin.

* * *

Joe Louis has defended his heavyweight title more times than did the five champions before him collectively.

* * *

When a crowd of soccer enthusiasts at Lima, Peru, became peeved at a referee because he refused to count a spectacular goal try, they not only chased him out of the stadium but set fire to the stands.

Alabama's governor, James E. Folsom, put up a "juicy Alabama steak" and Ellis Arnall, former governor of Georgia, put up a "crate of Georgia peaches" as a wager on the outcome of the Alabama-Georgia game.

* * *

President Harding liked to wager a fin when he went out to see the Washington Senators play.

* * *

Skis for the Norwegian Winter Olympics sports team are made at Montgomery, Ala., a town which doesn't know what snow is.

Basketball is so popular in Manila that sometimes 15,000 people jam into a gymnasium which has a seating capacity for 2000.

* * *

Wes Farrell's nine homers constitute the most round-trippers a pitcher has ever made in a single season.

* * *

Although he lived in one of the most impoverished countries in the world, the late Manolete was so popular as a bullfighter that at the age of thirty he had accumulated $4,000,000.

* * *

Popular actor Robert Sterling starred in football, baseball and track at the University of Pittsburgh, and is the son of a former Chicago Cubs catcher.

Illustrated by Manning de V. Lee

The Shipmate Spirit

by FREDERICK and P. G. BELL

THE usual morning fog lay heavily on the bay, presently to be pushed to sea by the usual late morning sun of southern California. Reaching through the mist and disappearing in the haze at the edge of midchannel the mass of World War I destroyers rested in the same tranquility and immobility that had marked their existence for twenty years.

They were tended after a fashion and in accordance with the demands of rigid economy. Their engines were turned over and packed with grease, their bottoms scraped, and every now and then more red lead was slapped on their flanks. Here they drowsed, year on year, stretching side by side in a long line across the back waters of the bay—ugly and powerless—dirty canvas covering their four stacks and the holes in decks where guns had once been.

Then the world again turned upside down, and it was decided to bring the ships to life. In consequence the American Navy was faced with the discomforting alternative of weakening the already depleted crews of ships in commission. or recalling to active duty men who long ago had marched inland with their discharge papers in their pocket and an oar on their shoulder, ready to settle down when they had journeyed far enough from the sea for the oar to elicit an inquiry as to its purpose.

It was because of this rebirth of the destroyers that Timothy O'Bannon, Chief Boatswain's Mate, retired, came back to the fleet in which he had lived for thirty years.

There are officers near the top of the Navy List who remember Tim O'Bannon as stroke of a whaleboat crew that never met defeat; as the mainstay of a football team that won the championship of the Atlantic Fleet so regularly that envious captains sought to disperse its members to points as far east and as far west as the Mediterranean Squadron and the China Station. There are some who remember O'Bannon as a hairy-chested, two-fisted, hard-hitting Irishman who could climb into a coal lighter where men were sinking exhausted on their shovels, and in ten minutes have them in a race that filled the canvas bags faster than the whips could swing them onto the ship's deck.

There are others to whom the name of O'Bannon brings flash-backs to a night in Shanghai when a slight barroom altercation involving the navies of four nations threatened to become an international incident.

Among today's officers, possibly no more than a dozen have heard of Tim O'Bannon; and this on occasion when an admiral, honoring the wardroom with his presence at dinner, uses an O'Bannon story to point up a vista of the Old Navy.

It is certain that the name of their new chief boatswain's mate held no meaning for the Captain or the Executive of the *Dixon* who, on this misty morning, struggled to relieve a torpedo tube of the ailments and affections that had plagued it during two decades of disuse.

Lieutenant Commander Jerry Randall slid from beneath the tube, pulled a cigarette from the rumpled pack in the pocket of his dungaree shirt and offered one to his Executive.

"Try her now, Bill," he said hopefully.

Lieutenant William Tatem, second in command of the *Dixon,* grasped

the brass training wheel and threw his weight against it. The gears protested like an angry cat, then gave way reluctantly, allowing the tube to point its three barrels at the adjacent destroyer.

Bill Tatem straightened in the harvester seat. "She's better," he admitted cautiously, "The shims seem to have done the trick."

The Captain ran nervous fingers through his damp hair. "Okay," he said. "Have the torpedo gang treat the others the same way. And be sure they slap plenty of grease in the gears."

"Aye-aye, sir," Bill Tatem acknowledged automatically. He clambered from the mount, paused on the step and let his gaze sweep over the scarred and flaking paintwork, the tangled mass of rigging, the mountainous pile of miscellaneous equipment that encumbered the decks, where a handful of new seamen were struggling in aimless fashion.

"Hell, Skipper," he asked, "do you think we'll ever have her ready for sea?"

Captain Randall smiled wearily. "Maybe some angel in the Bureau will send us a real boatswain's mate."

"Yeah, maybe," Tatem replied. He nodded toward the destroyer alongside. "If we could only get someone like that young fellow Leech, next door! He's the new Navy; keen, alert, on his toes.

"But we won't get that kind," he went on savagely. "We'll draw some old duffer who was paid off before I was born. A metal man," he added, derisively.

Jerry Randall laughed. "I know, silver in the hair, gold in the teeth and lead in the pants." "Like that one," he added, pointing.

"Shades of Paul Jones and the sainted sea pig!" murmured Tatem. "Call me a soldier if I ever saw the like."

Across the wooden brows between the moored ships there marched a relic of an earlier and less hectic Navy. He was a stalwart figure of abundant tonnage, ample beam and generous overall length. His face bore the mellow, weathered tint that is taken on by old leather, old mahogany and old mariners. He wore the uniform of a chief petty officer, *circa* 1920, with round-brimmed cap and dinky black bow tie. His freshly pressed serge uniform had the look of clothing long stowed in moth-balls. Service stripes reached from wrist almost to elbow, and across his barrel chest ran a splash of ribbons topped with the light blue and white stars of the medal of honor. Punctiliously he saluted as he stepped on board the *Dixon*. He let his eyes sweep fore and aft; and it was obvious that what he saw did not please him.

"Timothy O'Bannon, sonny," he announced to the awed petty officer on watch. "Timothy O'Bannon reporting for duty." He strode forward toward the C.P.O. quarters in determined fashion.

Lieutenant Tatem shook his head mournfully. "Well, that's the pay-off. With that old barnacle around our neck, we'll be in this back channel for life."

Someone clucked his tongue sympathetically and Tatem turned to see young boatswain's mate Leech standing at the side of the adjacent ship. "It's too bad, sir," said Leech with an ingratiating smile. "He's probably so full of lumbago that he'll be in sick-bay most of the time."

"It might be a good thing, at that," Lieutenant Tatem muttered glumly.

FROM Pryzanski, the coxswain, O'Bannon heard details of excessive pessimism.

"We ain't got no men," Ski confided. "There's your deck force—and look at 'em! Six boots straight from the Training Station, when we rate twenty seamen.

"And that ain't all," he continued, happy to have a funnel for his troubles and flattered at the attention of the older man. "There ain't no paint, no gear, no brushes, no wash-deck hose, no spanners, no—"

"Why?" demanded O'Bannon.

" 'Cause there's forty cans fighting to get what the Yard has, and Lieutenant Tatem, he believes in doing like the book calls for. He turns in requisitions all nice and proper, but by the time the papers percolate down to the guy in the issuing office, there ain't nothing left to issue."

O'Bannon agreed that such a procedure was senseless in the extreme. "Back in the old *Maryland* I had a Division Officer, Ensign Rocky Ford, who used to say to me: 'Tim, direct actions get direct results.' Ski, you and me'll have to do a little foragin'."

For several days the Captain and Lieutenant Tatem saw little of O'Bannon, though they heard him with increasing frequency as he went about his task of guiding the deck force by a voice that rattled the rigging and jolted the spleen at extreme range.

From the forecastle of the adjacent destroyer young boatswain's mate Leech also watched and listened, and was amused. "Get wise to yourself!" he mocked. "This is the new Navy. You don't have to yell at your men. I guess it's pretty tough, at that," he continued in a tone of bogus sympathy, "with the bums you've got for a crew."

O'Bannon dropped the wire he had been splicing, booted a seaman out of his path and shook a monstrous fist across the life-lines. "One more crack about my boys," he bellowed, "and I'll eat your heart out with my bare hands."

Pryzanski spoke up from under O'Bannon's lee. "Yeah," he agreed. "They may be bums, but they're our bums."

"They're our shipmates," corrected O'Bannon, "And no fancy-pants sofa-pillow sailor is going to throw his hooks into 'em."

"Shipmates!" jeered Leech, from a safe tactical distance. "All the shipmates went down with the *Maine*. Nowadays it's every man for himself, and I've got ten bucks that says we'll get to sea before that tub of yours ever shakes itself loose from the bottom. Any time you want to take me up just come on over, *shipmate*."

Ski watched Leech's retreating figure, and there was concern in his gaze. "Somebody's going to wind that guy's clock for him one of these days, and the only thing they'll half-mast will be the meal pennant. . . . All the same," he added, "maybe he's got something. We'll never get this crate to sea the way we're goin' now."

O'Bannon nodded in agreement. "You know," he said, "it's about time we drew some midnight small stores. Let's check in with the Exec, then get one look around."

Lieutenant Tatem, wrestling earnestly with the complexities of *Form 8967, Paint, Requisition for* (original and five copies required), gave a scant nod to O'Bannon's request for permission to visit the Navy Yard. "Not that I think it will do any good," he said grudgingly, "but here are the requisitions we have been trying to fill." O'Bannon took the papers that were pushed over the desk and made his departure, but not before he heard Lieutenant Tatem mumble: "What we need more than anything else is a fast young boatswain's mate."

"A fast young boatswain's mate, is it?" O'Bannon asked himself. "He still wants young Mister Fancy Pants Leech from next door."

O'BANNON and Ski paused at dockside to look across the bay at an aircraft carrier that was rounding the inner harbor buoys. Her huge island towered high above the sandy shoreline. On her flight-deck fifty planes lay quiet under the canvas hoods that covered their engines. Under the flare of her bow a brace of tugs darted importantly into position.

Ski motioned with a jerk of his head. "Look at her! All fresh paint, and engines that move, and two thousand men to keep her scrubbed up pretty, while we— Tim, it ain't fair."

"Maybe we ought to go aboard her and come back with what we need," said O'Bannon musingly.

"Not a chance," said Ski. "Them ships is guarded like a queen's jools. There's guys with Tommy-guns at

every frame, and they all got itchy fingers."

"Maybe so," said O'Bannon, "but there's ways and means.

TURNED loose in the Navy Yard, O'Bannon and Ski went about their business with an ease born of long experience as pilferers. Prudently O'Bannon had provided himself with an adequate number of shipping tags, an inconspicuous pot of white paint and a lettering-brush.

Their way took them by the anchor park. O'Bannon's pace slackened, and he cast an eye speculatively over the field.

"What's the idea, stopping here?" Ski demanded. "They sure ain't gonna send us to sea without no anchor."

"There's ground taykle and there's ground taykle," explained O'Bannon. He gravitated unerringly toward a likely-looking anchor that appeared sound in stock and fluke; removed a tag that hung from its ring, scaled off a scarcely discernible name on the shank, and in its place painted *U.S.S. DIXON, INV. 13764-41.*

"Now, that wouldn't fool a paymaster," said O'Bannon. "But most any new clerk or truck-driver will believe them names mean something." On the anchor-ring he lashed a tag marked, *Deliver at Once — Req. No. 277.*

In the gathering darkness they were drawn to a long, low building by the fine, healthy smell of tar and hemp. Within its pungent, dimly lit interior they discovered a sailor's treasure-house: bins filled with steel shackles; coils of phosphor-bronze wire for lifelines; row on row of wooden and galvanized blocks, some of them veritable collector's items.

Ski went up and over the craggy array like a mountain goat, cramming small articles of loose gear in the front of his dungaree shirt as he climbed. "What we need is a truck," he averred.

Below, O'Bannon tagged the heavier items with the name of the *Dixon,* checking each one carefully against the pages of the requisition he had received from Lieutenant Tatem.

He had progressed deep into the murky cavern of the passage when he heard furtive footsteps ahead and saw the gleam of a hooded flashlight. He eased back into the shadows, cocked his right fist and waited.

At the same moment, high under the rafters, Ski discovered the stowage bin for galley equipment. It was made known to him with startling suddenness and a New Year's Eve crescendo as he rode to the deck on a strong surfing wave of *Pots—iron, bean;* and *Pans—broiling, aluminum.* There was a second of silence; then guards closed in from each end of the building.

"Timothy O'Bannon reporting for duty."

Ski struggled to his feet, but the hardware with which he had filled his jumper rendered rapid retreat impossible. "Scram, Tim!" he implored. "We been blitzed."

"And leave a shipmate!" Tim demanded angrily. "Nothing doing. Not even a dumb guy who falls over his feet. Pull up your socks," he ordered, "and let's see if we can talk our way out of this."

He turned to the guards. "Thanks for looking in, boys," he began silkily. "But we won't need you. Me and Ski were just checking over a few items on this requisition."

"Yeah, that's what the guy said you'd be doing."

"What guy?" demanded Tim and Ski together.

"The guy that gave us the tip-off. He said to tell you that all the shipmates went down with the *Maine.*"

"Leech! Oh, that dirty, double-crossing—"

THE Admiral was holding his weekly hurricane session. His hair stood on end like strands of tarred hemp. His outstretched finger projected as solidly as a steel marlinspike, and his voice rasped in the grating sound of holystones on a sanded deck. He held a letter before him, and pounded upon it with the vehemence of a coxswain beating out the stroke for a twelve-man cutter crew.

He looked out over the heads of the destroyer captains who crowded his office, and his face took on the crimson shade of a port sidelight.

"Two to one he has apoplexy before he gets it out," whispered Matthews, of the *Stratford.*

"Make it a sporting proposition," answered Jack Parker, of the *Andrews.* "I'll lay you twenty fathoms of three-inch manila to ten gallons of war-color that the first sentence will be: *'Gentlemen, I don't propose—'* "

"Gentlemen," began the Admiral, and his tone implied that he was carrying naval courtesy to its tensile limit, "Gentlemen, I don't propose to put up with it any longer."

Parker grinned maliciously at Lieutenant Commander Andrews. "You owe me ten gallons of gray paint," he murmured.

"This letter from the Navy Department," continued the Admiral, waving the paper like a semaphored SOS, "this letter tells me that the East Coast yards are about to put six destroyers in commission, while we haven't one single ship that is ready. *Why?*" he demanded, in an answer-me-if-you-dare manner.

Little Billy Carson, never one to disregard a challenge, spoke up manfully, but with none of the diplomacy for which his Service is noted. "It seems, sir," he began, "that the yard is unable to deliver the material to fill our requisitions."

"Really," replied the Admiral, in a tone that implied: *Damn your eyes, I'll court-martial you before breakfast.*

"Yes, sir," continued Billy, not a whit abashed, but keeping his eyes from the Admiral's frozen gaze. "And what is worse, whenever I do manage to get something for my ship, it doesn't last long unless it's nailed down."

"And why is that, sir?" demanded the Admiral.

"Because someone steals it," replied Billy simply.

The other destroyer skippers all grinned, and the Admiral hrumph-ed to batten down the awakening of a reminiscent smile.

"It appears to me, young man," he growled, "that you would take proper steps to safeguard your ship and its property. I cannot condone 'stealing,' as you so forcibly put it. In fact," he continued, warming to his subject, "I do not propose to put up with it."

The door from the outer office opened quietly, and an aide, resplendent in the gilded loops of his aiguillettes, tiptoed across the room and bent his head deferentially to whisper in the Old Man's ear.

"Heh?" snorted the Admiral. The aide nodded. The air was pregnant with a new tension.

"Which of you," asked the Admiral in his quarterdeck voice, "is the commanding officer of the *Dixon?*"

Jerry Randall stood up. "I am, sir."

The Admiral smiled benignly. "Oh, you are," he said pleasantly—too pleasantly.

"Stand by for the kiss of death," whispered Jenkins, of the *Ruffing.*

"Then let me tell you, sir," bellowed the Admiral, "let me tell you

that two of your men are in the brig, charged with stealing Government property from the Navy Yard."

"Their names are," he consulted a memorandum that the aide held out in a solicitous manner – "their names are Pryz – Prz – some damned foreign business, and T. O'Bannon," he repeated, half aloud. "It couldn't be the same one. At any rate, your men will be brought to trial in due course.

"And gentlemen," he added, smiling sweetly, "I trust that this will be a lesson to you all." He looked at Billy Carson. "Young man, you were right. There is too much stealing around here, and I don't propose to put up with it for a moment. That is all, gentlemen, excepting—*get your ships ready for sea.*"

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER RANDALL, hands shoved deep in the pockets of his uniform jacket, teeth clenched about the well-chewed bit of a briar pipe that was known to the crew as boiler No. 5, paced back and forth across the bare steel deck of the wardroom.

"It's not that I care especially about this O'Bannon," he was explaining. "The old coot should have had more sense than to be nabbed snitching things from the Yard. But now the Admiral's determined to make an example of the *Dixon,* and mark my words, we'll be the last ship out of here."

Ensign Wattles, fresh from a ninety-day training course as Reserve Midshipman, spoke up from the depths of his ripe naval experience. "It appears to me, sir," he said, "that the Admiral was unduly hasty, and that on second thought he will realize that he has no legal right to impose a penalty on our ship merely because members of our crew were found guilty of pilfering."

Lieutenant Tatem strangled on the coffee that he was drinking, but spoke up before Jerry Randall could recover from his astonishment.

"Mr. Wattles," said Tatem, in the resigned voice that he used for ensigns and small children, "what was your occupation before you honored our Service with your presence?"

"I was a lawyer, sir," replied Mr. Wattles.

"And how long had you practiced law before entering the Navy?"

Ensign Wattles appeared slightly confused. "As a matter of fact, sir," he said. "I received my degree only last June, so I have not yet taken an active part in the profession."

Lieutenant Tatem snorted. "You will learn, Mr. Wattles, never to discuss senior officers and legal rights in the same voice. A few weeks ago," he continued, "a chaplain decided not to hold up his service for the Admiral. He had got as far as, *'The Lord is in*

His holy temple –' when the Admiral stuck his head over the hatch and bellowed, 'Not until I'm there, He isn't, young man.' "

"I think I see what you mean, sir," said Mr. Wattles.

THE next seven days were as many years in the lives of Lieutenant Commander Randall and the officers and men of the *Dixon.* The backing turbines developed a squeal; the main condensers refused to divulge the hiding-places of their leaks; the lube-oil pumps resisted all efforts to alter their character after twenty years of idleness; and above all, supplies that were "Urgently needed in order to equip the ship properly for sea" were caught up somewhere in the vast bottleneck of defense materials.

It began to look as though the *Dixon* were doomed to remain indefinitely in an immobilized state. The black-gang worked until they dropped exhausted on the floor-plates, and on deck the gunner's mates and torpedomen swore at the obstinacy of training racks, elevating pinions and gunsight mechanisms. Their task was made no easier by the continued absence of the chief boatswain's mate and coxswain.

Then, on Saturday morning, the work was finished – the turbines buttoned up, the guns working properly in their trunnions and slides, the steering and anchor engines ready for use, once you became accustomed to odd squeaks, whistles and groans from their moving parts. The ammunition was aboard and stowed in the magazines. The torpedoes, their sinister, evil-looking bodies coated with heavy grease, were slid into the dark protectiveness of the tubes. On the fan-tail the depth charges, deceptively innocent in appearance, lay cheek by jowl in the tracks, ready to loose the TNT that crammed their bellies.

In short, the ship was ready to move and ready to shoot, but she was

"One more crack about my boys," he bellowed, "and I'll eat your heart out with my bare hands."

little nearer to sea than she had been at any time during her twenty years of retirement. The proper color for a warship is gray, of one shade or another, with glittering brass, shining decks and snowy uniforms. The *Dixon* was red—deep, dull, dirty red, from stem to stern, from truck to waterline. Her crimson sides were begrimed with soot and streaked with huge yellow-green splotches from the smoke-pipe gases. Her brasswork was enveloped in a rich patina that would have graced a bit of garden statuary, but which is looked upon with disfavor in naval circles.

She was, Jerry Randall admitted sadly, a blot on the face of the ocean. "I could understand it if we couldn't get steel plate, or aluminum sheathing or ordnance parts—but paint, canvas, cordage—the country must be full of it. I'll stop in the Yard to make a final check. Maybe a shipment arrived this morning.... Damn that O'Bannon," he added, as an afterthought. "You sure were right, Bill. He's been a handicap, so far, and not a help."

RELEASED from the brig, free men again, Chief Boatswain's Mate O'Bannon and Coxswain Pryzanski walked slowly across the parade ground. The late afternoon sun spread a warm light on the green turf, over which, as far as eye could reach, white-clad sailors in squads, platoons and companies clutched unfamiliar rifles and struggled to convert the rasping growls of drill-masters into understandable commands. It was a pleasing and inspiring picture but it awakened no sympathetic response in the two men.

"Grass," said Ski. "For six days I been cutting grass, with a Marine guard ten foot behind to watch that I don't run away. Let's get off of this and find us some good hard cee-ment."

Tim was silent, meditative, filled with inner contemplation. All week the galling memory of his outwitting at the hands of Leech had badgered him, and the knowledge that now he was returning empty-handed to face Lieutenant Tatem increased his bitterness and sense of defeat. Frustration was a new experience to Timothy O'Bannon and it sat heavily on his mind.

"Don't look now," Ski said. "But we'd better go to collision quarters."

O'Bannon gazed up to find a company of recruits in line, close aboard on his starboard hand. He had a choice of running forward or to the rear, or turning off to the left in advance of the line of march. He solved the matter simply.

"Company, ha-alt!" he roared. The company halted. A bandy-legged little chief petty officer who looked fourteen years older than Noah came charging around the end, waving his cutlass and shouting.

"Who said halt? I'll ram this cheese knife—" His eyes lit on O'Bannon, and a welcoming grin came to his wizened face. "Call me yeoman, if it ain't young Tim O'Bannon! I heard you was back, but they said you was putting one of them cans in commission..... Mark time," he shouted to his company. "Double time," he added, over his shoulder.

O'Bannon chortled. "Ski, meet Windy Kleckner. He was an old-timer when I was an apprentice boy. Windy, this is Ski. Him and me are shipmates."

"Proud to meet any shipmate of Tim O'Bannon's," said Windy. "Timothy, my boy, you're just in time. We're having a get-together tonight—the Big Sixteeners—over at Hawsehole Olsen's spot. 'Member Hawsehole? Us and him was shipmates together on the old *Massachusetts*. He's got the only draft beer in town that's fit to pour down a scupper. There's more'n a dozen of us back on active duty. Slice-bar Reilly's got him a tug, and there's—"

"Can't make it, Windy," said O'Bannon. "Fact is, we've hit a spot of trouble, and I'm heading back for the ship. I'll be seeing you around. Tell Slice-bar I'll look him up."

"You'd ought to drop in for a little while," persisted Windy. "Slice-bar's got to leave early. He's lighterin' stores aboard the *Santee* for the fleet in Hawaii."

"What kind of stores?" demanded Tim.

"Just—stores," said Windy. "Rope and paint and such. Enough for half the fleet. Slice-bar says the hangar deck of the *Santee* looks like a supply depot already."

"Windy," said Tim, "do you suppose I could sort of borrow about fifty

In thirty minutes she was loaded, and on her way to the destroyer.

of them handsome, modern sailors that're bouncing up and down behind you?"

"Why sure, Tim," said Windy, puzzled. "Of course, fifty swab-handles would do just as good. Now if it's men that you want, I can pass up the meeting tonight and give you a hand."

"I've changed my mind," said Tim. "I'm coming to the meeting with you. Ski, you go on back to the ship and stand by for word from me. Try to get Mr. Tatem out of the way. Break out all the stages you can find and range 'em along the side. Rig plenty of cargo lights. And if that guy Leech starts sticking his nose in, wrap a stanchion around his neck.

"Come on, Windy," he added. "Send these kids of yours back to barracks before you wear 'em out. They've got work to do tonight."

THE Big Sixteeners is an organization that soon will be as extinct as the dodo or the woohoo bird. It is comprised of men who made the cruise around the world in the "Big Sixteen" battleships that were the pride of the Navy back in 1907, when Fighting Bob Evans' boys were "Ready for a fight or a frolic."

The members who gathered in Hawsehole Olsen's bar on the evening in question were relics of an era when it was said that the prime requisite for a sailor was a strong back and a weak mind. That is what they said among themselves, but let the stranger beware.

Slice-bar Reilly, Chief Watertender, retired, one-time coal-passer aboard the *Oregon* on her cruise around the Horn, squared a pair of shoulders that had put the fear of the Lord into two generations of firemen. "Bear a hand, Hawsehole. Me and Tim's got to get moving."

Their host, who had gained his name, and a medal, when he dived through a hawsehole in a North Atlantic gale to rescue a shipmate, set sail to a squadron of brimming schooners and grinned happily at the other old-timers who crowded the small room. "One more round, boys – on the house. Then we get under way to give a hand to our old shipmate Timothy O'Bannon, of the Armored Cruiser O'Bannons."

"Everything's set," said Tim. "I just had a phone call from Ski. Your gang got there all right, Windy. The only officer aboard is a new ninety-day wonder who don't know which end is up. We'll feed the gear to you until this requisition is checked off. If you want anything else, holler. Fill up the storerooms as fast as you can, and remember, we want everything painted – hull, stacks, decks, bulkheads – and a good, neat job."

"Who you think you're talking to," growled Windy, "a bunch of boots? You and Slice-bar start the gear moving. We'll fix that tin can of yours so's you won't know her."

An hour later, and on the other side of the harbor, Slice-bar Reilly swung his tug and lighter alongside the high steel walls of the *Santee,* newest of our aircraft carriers. Her hangar deck, empty of planes for this passage to Hawaii, resembled one of the mammoth warehouses that line the docks at Panama. Under the gleam of floodlights hundreds of sailors went about the business of moving stores and provisions from lighters and dock and securing them on the vast surface of the deck. Officers chugged to and fro on scooters, while the shrill voices of boatswains' pipes echoed against the steel beams, and rose sharply over the hum of winches and cargo cranes.

O'Bannon gazed upon the scene with satisfaction. Here were stores sufficient for fifty destroyers. Certainly, he thought to himself, the few odds and ends he needed would never be missed – at least, not right away.

He waited until the *Santee's* storekeepers had checked the contents of the lighter against their invoices. Then he drew Lieutenant Tatem's well-worn requisitions from his pocket and motioned to the tug crew. Slice-bar Reilly's boys swung into action. Drums of paint followed coils of manila line, bolts of canvas and rolls of red linoleum onto the broad flat stern of the tug. In thirty minutes she was loaded and on her way to the destroyer.

Aboard the *Dixon* Messrs. Kleckner and Reilly took immediate and complete charge. As Ensign Wattles explained later to the Captain: "It was most disconcerting, sir. I was sitting quietly in my room, studying the chapter in the Watch Officers Guide where they list certain situations and tell you what action to take. Suddenly these two elderly chief petty officers burst in, and the little one told me that he and a few men were going to do some work, and for me just to take it easy. He was quite respectful, but somehow he gave the impression that I'd better let him have his way.

I must say, sir, if this sort of thing is common in the Navy, it certainly should be covered in the Watch Officers Guide."

By midnight the ship's sides and stacks were painted, and Windy shifted his belowdecks to lay new linoleum in the officers' country and crew's quarters. "This ought not to take long," he said to Ski, as they stood in the wardroom. "We'll finish her on the mid watch."

A recruit came down the ladder on the run. "Sir," he said, "Mr. Hawsehole Olsen told me to report that there's some guy aft who's trying to make trouble."

"Is the guy a nawficer?" demanded Windy.

"No, sir, he's a—"

"Then wrap a wrench around his neck," ordered Windy sternly. "Tell Hawsehole to throw him in the peak tank and not to bother me no more."

"Yes sir," replied the recruit. "Throw him in the peak tank."

"Gee, you guys are sure doin' a lot for Tim," said Ski.

"Nuts!" said Windy. "Us and him was shipmates."

"So I heard," replied Ski. "I'm beginning to get a new slant on that part of it."

IT was nine o'clock on Sunday morning when Lieutenant Commander Randall returned aboard. He brought up at the gangway and stared at his ship in wonder and disbelief. From stem to stern, from truck to waterline, she was a fresh and beautiful war color. Her brasswork and spotless bronze lifelines glistened in the sunlight. New manila lines were coiled down ready for use. The gangway and booms had been sanded and re-varnished. The decks were a handsome shade of deep gray. He felt of the paint. It was dry enough. He stepped aside to make room for a squad of men who were finishing the job of snaking the lifelines, and his eyes fell on his Chief Boatswain's Mate.

O'Bannon advanced eagerly. "Sir," he said, "do you suppose we can get out of here soon?"

Randall regarded him intently and with a sudden glimmer of understanding. "Do you expect trouble if we stay?"

"No troubles, sir, that can't be cured by a loose foretopsail," replied Tim. "But if we stay much longer, we might find the tide against us, in a manner of speaking, sir."

Lieutenant Tatem came aft on the double. "I just got aboard, sir," he panted. "Never saw anything like it. They must have stolen every bit of it. Why, even the chairs in the wardroom have *Santee* marked on the bottom. There'll be hell to pay."

"Mr. Tatem," replied Randall solemnly, "I find that I can't hear very well this morning—but my eyes are functioning perfectly, and it is obvious that the *Dixon* is ready for sea. I shall report that fact to the Admiral at once. Please get up steam."...

The Admiral dubbed a six-inch putt, lifted his head heavenward and moved his lips in silent exhortation. Jerry Randall, standing at the edge of the green, cleared his throat loudly.

The Admiral turned and clenched his putter in both hands. "Well," he snarled, "isn't it enough that my game is hopelessly ruined? Must you pursue me when I am trying to find a few hours' peace?"

Randall waited a moment to savor the full effect of his reply.

"Sir," he said, "I report that the *Dixon* is ready for sea. I request permission to get under way immediately."

"What!" demanded the Admiral. He'd seen the ships only yesterday, and the *Dixon* was as moth-eaten as the rest of them. He inspected Randall carefully. Maybe he *had* been too rough on these young fellows. They were commencing to crack up.

Randall indicated a bench near the next tee. "If you will step up here, sir, you will see what I mean."

The Admiral stepped. He saw the *Dixon*—shiny, glistening, new—her long slim lines beautiful under her light coating of gray, her bow numbers sharply outlined in white. There was something funny about this—something damned funny. But it would wait. The important thing was that he had beaten the East Coast yards.

"Remarkable!" he said, slowly. He turned, took a driver from his caddie, teed up his ball and smacked a stinger down the center of the fairway. "Go ahead, Randall," he said. "Go ahead. You'll get your orders on the way to Panama." He strode off across the green slope, and Randall heard him commence to sing "The High Barbaree" in rolling, off-key tones....

The *Dixon* was in mid-channel when O'Bannon, standing by the anchors on the forecastle, saw the *Santee's* gig standing toward the carrier. "Ten minutes to get alongside," he muttered to himself, "then another ten—maybe fifteen, before he finds out—" He looked anxiously to sea, where a fine California fog was rolling up rapidly. "Give her the gun, Jerry Randall! They can't recall us by searchlight once we're in the mist, and they won't let 'em use radio—"

The *Dixon* cleared the channel entrance buoys and turned her nose southward into the fog. A megaphone appeared at the bridge window, and Lieutenant Tatem shouted: "Secure the anchors for sea." O'Bannon raised his hand in acknowledgment. He put on extra stoppers, lashed the chains together and set up on the capstan brakes. "Secure the sea details," the bridge ordered.

Tim entered the chief petty officers' quarters, sat down on the top of his low locker, pulled off his shoes and cocked his feet on the table. He was tired, very tired, and the thought annoyed him. Ten years ago, when he was a young man of fifty—well, not so much more than fifty—it hadn't bothered him to work all night. Maybe he was getting old. Maybe Mr. Tatem was right, and this new Navy had passed him by, this Navy where every seaman had a college education. Still, there was more than one way to cat an anchor. "Different ships, different long splices," as the saying went. And certainly you have to prove yourself all over again in every ship you serve in. Well, the *Dixon* was the first destroyer to get to sea, wasn't she?

Tim looked around, sniffed the paint-laden air and examined the new linoleum that covered the deck. The ship was all right. Tomorrow she would be too far south to be recalled for any little matter like rifled storerooms aboard the *Santee*. And the Big Sixteeners could be depended on to look after things in the proper shipmate manner.

SKI stood in the doorway, holding a cigarette and balancing himself against the ship's motion. He grinned at O'Bannon. "I guess we filled Mr. Tatem's requisition for him, huh?"

"Not quite," said Tim. "We didn't get him a fast young boatswain's mate."

"We got him a good imitation of one," Ski replied. "Who do you guess it was that got in Hawsehole Olsen's way last night, and that just woke up in the after peak tank?"

Tim dropped his feet to the deck. "You don't mean—"

"I sure do," said Ski. "He don't look so young and alert right now, but it's Leech, all right, and is the Old Man swabbing up the decks with him!"

"Well, now, isn't that too bad!" rejoined Tim.

"Yeah," said Ski, "but the pay-off came when the jimmylegs was yanking Leech to the bridge, and Leech wanted to know if that was any way to treat a shipmate."

O'Bannon gave a slow smile. "He said that, did he? Well, he doesn't know the meaning of *shipmate* yet, but he will, Ski, he will."

Leaning back against the friendly edge of his bunk, Tim crammed a fistful of sailor's shag into the sloping bowl of his short-stemmed clay pipe, lighted it and blew a cloud of lethal smoke. The *Dixon* swung up on a long roll and lifted her prow skyward. A handkerchief of fog swirled down the hatch and into the compartment. Tim wiggled his toes and sighed contentedly. This was the life.

Calling All Cars!

"No imagination," Joe Barca complained. "That's your trouble, Charley. In this easy-money business you got to have it, or else you're sunk. Got to imagine everything that *can* happen, then imagine your way out if it does."

Charley drove silently through the early spring night. By the dashboard light of the stolen car, Joe studied his face. It was a dumb face, and the way Charley was chewing gum made it look even dumber. Joe was sort of sorry for him. Charley was just a young punk off the farm. Hadn't been around. But did know about cars. How to cross the ignition with a hairpin, for instance, so you didn't need a key. Could do it quick, in the dark, without raising the hood. That's why Joe Barca took him on.

"Listen," Charley protested again. "I don't aim to back into that pole and bust the tail-light. I just don't happen to notice the pole's there."

Joe tried patience.

"That's the point, Charley," he said. "You don't notice and don't have imagination enough to wonder if something's behind you. So when I run out of the filling station with the money, you throw this buggy in reverse and bust the tail-light."

Charley chewed harder and took his turn at studying Joe. Joe was smart, all right, even if he didn't look it. He just looked like some fat old guy, trying to get along. And always fussing.

Charley said: "We don't need no tail-light."

"There you go again!" Joe's voice pitched up in exasperation. "Don't you see that gas monkey give the tail-light the eye as we're leaving, so's he can call the State cops? They'll be out in ten minutes, hunting a car without a tail-light. Hunting us!"

The black sedan purred steadily through sparse after-midnight traffic on Telegraph Road southwest of Detroit. At Northline Road, Joe planned that they would turn right, then south again on a gravel road he'd already picked. By three o'clock they'd be in Ohio; they'd ditch this Michigan car and pick up one with Ohio plates. After that they'd not need to worry. Provided, of course, the State cops didn't spot this tail-light.

"What'd we get?" Charley asked.

"Small change, from the feel of it," Joe said. "I don't take time to count it. Not enough to retire on, that's sure."

Charley cackled as if that were a good joke, and slowed for the lights of a little town. He went through the village at an easy, unsuspicious rate, and picked up speed where the concrete narrowed again.

"Somebody overhauling us," Joe Barca said, looking back. Charley tramped the accelerator. But the car behind hurried, too. "Better slow down," Joe warned. "Drive reasonable; if it's the law, I'll do the talking. You ain't got enough imagination."

Car 922, Michigan State Police, was returning to Flatrock post after a routine family-trouble call. As usual, the wife had got mad when she saw the police and ordered them away.

"Don't you lay a hand on my Herman!" she had warned.

"They're all like tha ," Trooper Murphy was explaining out of twenty years' bitter experience. "Guy can be murderin' his woman and her yellin' for help—but leave so much as a constable show up, an' the pair of 'em joins forces ag'in' the law."

Probationary Trooper Hansen sat straight behind the wheel; he hadn't learned yet how to take it easy while driving. He held Car 922 to a steady fifty-five miles an hour, kept his eyes on the road and listened while Murphy put out good advice by the bushel.

"One thing you got to have in the police business," he was saying, "an' that's imagination. Might as well go out on a complaint without your pants as without imagination an' a good sharp pencil."

They were rolling southward. The radio had been silent since they left the wife-beater's shack. Road traffic came in dribbles and they had just slid through a village without reducing speed when Murphy noticed the car ahead with no tail-light.

"Might as well give 'em a warning," he said. "Me, personally, I don't like busted tail-lights. Too dangerous."

The other car put on speed, so Trooper Hansen stepped on his accelerator. The other slowed, then, and Number 922 slid alongside it, and Murphy looked it over. It was a black 1941 sedan with two men in the front seat. That busted tail-light was recent.

"I'll talk, and you listen good and learn how," Murphy said. He pressed a button on the dash, and a big red headlight at an angle on the right fender glowed suddenly—on its lens the words: "STOP! STATE POLICE."

A DRAMA OF THE MICHIGAN STATE POLICE BY THE GIFTED AUTHOR OF "CAR 99" AND "THE MARKED MAN."

by KARL DETZER

The black sedan pulled over and bumped to a startled halt; and Hansen, remembering what he had been taught in recruit school, cut in ahead to keep it from making a quick get-away. Trooper Murphy got out and left the door open, so Hansen could hear how he handled this.

"GOOD evenin'," Murphy said, being neither too stern nor too cordial. "You've got no tail-light."

The fat man beside the driver admitted politely: "That's right, Officer. Busted it a bit ago, backing into a tree."

"Um," Murphy made a small grunting noise, half sympathy, half disbelief. "May I see your operator's license?"

"Of course, Officer. Here's mine. Show him your driver's license, Charley."

Murphy studied the two cards by the headlight, flipped open his book, made a note, then asked: "Certificate of registration, please?"

"Afraid you'd ask for that, Officer," Joe Barca said. "It's my car, sir. Left the registration in my other pants."

"Um," Murphy murmured again. He glanced again at the license. "You live in Rockwood. Well, it's just a step out of my way. We'll stop and take a look. You ride in the police car with my partner. I'll drive yours."

They shifted quickly, Murphy getting behind the wheel of the black se-

"What you think you're doing?" Captain James yelled. "Remember, this hoodlum's got a radio too. He's listening!"

dan, Barca transferring cheerfully to the police car. As he closed the door, he glanced at the number painted on it.

"Car Nine-two-two, eh?" he remarked. Hansen said, "Yes sir," and wondered: Murphy's badge sure was hanging heavy on him tonight. According to the rule-book you didn't make all this fuss over a broken tail-light.

"I'll lead the way," Murphy said. "Follow close, Hansen."

He expertly backed the sedan and cut around in front, but before Hansen could get the police car into gear, a big ten-wheel truck thundered past, blocking his view of the disappearing, dead tail-light.

"Nice evening," Hansen said, remembering that a trooper always is polite, even when making an arrest.

"Yeh," Joe Barca agreed affably. "Nice large evening, Officer. Little cool, but nice." His hand was in his pocket. "Nice evening for you to snap off the headlights and be quick! Quick, I say!" He jabbed something hard into Hansen's side. "That's good. Now, see this crossroad coming up? We turn into it. *Turn,* I say!"

Illustrated by James Ernst

Hansen hesitated and his prisoner jabbed him again. Hansen obeyed slowly. He had a sudden memory of Murphy talking about imagination. The radio stuttered into action.

"Station Two-five to Car Nine-two-two."

"That's us," Barca said. "Answer it." When Hansen fumbled, Barca repeated: "Answer it, I say! And if you mention me, I'll leave you have it. Now, answer!"

"Nine-two-two to Station Two-five," Hansen said hesitantly.

"Be on the lookout for a black sedan with broken tail-light. Occupied by two men. Description to follow. They stuck up a filling station at Taylor Center within past ten minutes. Details later."

Again the gun jammed Hansen's ribs.

"Okay, Station Two-five," he managed to say.

The car was bumping slowly along the side road in the dark. Hansen's passenger laughed.

"That's right. Look out for us. That's a joke, son!"

It occurred to Hansen that Trooper Murphy, riding toward Rockwood in the civilian car, had no radio, might suspect nothing till he got there and 922 didn't show up. Thinking of Murphy, Hansen remembered about imagination. He'd have to imagine his way out of this, not just ride along doing whatever this punk told him to. So he gave the wheel a twist, turning the car toward the ditch.

"What you think you're doing?" Barca yelled. "Smart, eh?"

His gun, pressed against Hansen's side, exploded.

The car wobbled, nosed slowly into the shallow ditch and stopped. Hansen sprawled across the wheel. Joe Barca got out, walked around in front, whistling under his breath, and opened the left-hand door. He pulled Hansen by his shoulder-strap, and the probationary trooper tumbled like a half-empty sack of oats, and lay twisted in the dry grass.

Barca pushed him with his foot. Hansen didn't move. He was dead, all right. Joe Barca had to laugh, it had been so easy. The young squirt was just like Charley. No imagination! Barca took the police revolver from the

Hansen didn't move. He was dead, all right. Joe Barca had to laugh, it had been so easy.

dead man's holster, laid it back in the car seat, got in and closed the door. He put Car 922 into gear, climbed to the blacktop and put on speed. He didn't look back, didn't see the light flash on in the farmhouse behind the orchard.

"Station Two-five to Car Nine-two-two," the radio urged. *"What's the matter, Nine-two-two? Can't you read me?"*

Joe Barca drove faster.

THE night had been uneventful in the radio room at Headquarters of the Michigan State Police at East Lansing. Now that the State had put in two-way equipment, with a small transmitter in each post, the big five-thousand-watt job at East Lansing served only as a mother station, keeping order among the others, issuing Statewide dispatches; only in event of a major crime did it assume command. Tonight, Dispatcher Fred Alexander, a lanky man with a mop of graying hair, sat with his elbows on the radio desk, checking his log.

This was the quiet midnight hour. The early evening grist of stolen cars was past and the two-o'clock flurry of accidents that follow the closing of roadside taverns hadn't begun. Alexander was alone in the room; his partner, Pete Ganzer, had gone downstairs for his supper.

"Station Two-five to dispatch," the voice of Flatrock post came over the amplifier.

"Go ahead, Two-five," Alexander picked up his pencil.

"Two men stuck up a filling station in Taylor Center within past ten minutes. . . ."

Alexander wrote down the sketchy description: Black sedan with broken tail-light, Michigan license, one fat man, one thin. . . . He repeated the alarm for all cars and stations. Then he glanced up quickly at the big wall map and the electric panel board beside it. Lighted blocks on the board showed which cars were patrolling. Not many out at this time of night. Alexander counted nine in the whole lower Detroit area—three of them from Second District Headquarters at Seven Mile and Grand River, one from Flatrock, two from Ypsilanti, one each from Clinton, Erie and Blissfield. Nine cars to cover fifteen hundred square miles.

The posts around the rest of the State were repeating the alarm now. Alexander grunted and looked again at the map. Needle in a haystack. Why did filling stations have to keep so much money on hand that hoodlums were forever knocking them off? He wondered what the cook had left in the icebox for supper.

Flatrock post once more was trying to get in touch with Car 922. That car wasn't listed on the board; must have been sent out from the post on some minor complaint. Well, that gave him ten cars to use instead of nine—if 922 would only answer its call number. Its crew probably had gone in for a hamburger somewhere. Alexander yawned and returned to his log. Just another filling-station stick-up.

JOE BARCA was feeling good. This was a pretty nice car. He'd been lucky to get it. And with the radio turned on this way, let the State cops put out all the road blocks they had a mind to! He could hear whatever they said, could dodge around any bridges or crossroads where they might decide to set up a blockade. All he had to do was listen close and use his imagination. The law wouldn't get too excited about the stick-up, and it might be a couple of hours before they found the body of that dumb cop. Joe had nothing to worry about. He had driven five minutes and was thinking of taking the next crossroad south when the radio suddenly hummed into action.

"All cars and stations!" an excited voice was shouting. *"Get this, dispatch! Body of a trooper just been found on County Road Three-six-oh one-quarter mile east of U. S. 24. Citizen who discovered body heard shot and investigated. Trooper's gun is missing. Car Nine-two-two—come in. Do you hear me, Nine-two-two?"*

Joe Barca chuckled. He could hear, all right. And a lot of good it would do the cops. Three more minutes, and he would turn south at the crossroad. . . .

"Station Two-five to dispatch!" the radio shouted. *"Trooper Murphy reports he left Trooper Hansen in Car Nine-two-two with suspect in robbery-armed of that filling station. Last saw Hansen near County Road Three-six-oh and Telegraph. Wait a second, dispatch. It's him, all right. Party that found body got badge number. It's Hansen's badge, so this killer must be driving Car Nine-two-two."*

Barca hurried. Time to be getting out of here. Too bad that nosey farmer found the body so soon. Why didn't people mind their own business?

IN East Lansing headquarters, Dispatcher Alexander thrust out his long jaw, ran his hand quickly through his hair and swore to himself. Holding up a filling station was one thing, murder another. And murder of a trooper—he swiftly pressed a button on his desk, setting off a general alarm. He heard the bells ringing in the barracks across the courtyard, where forty troopers in for a two-weeks' refresher course were bunked. Forty troopers. Quite a few. But it was ninety miles down to that crossroad where young Hansen's body lay in the ditch. Ninety miles, ninety minutes. A long, long time. He punched the bell again.

Assistant Dispatcher Pete Ganzer ran in from the mess hall with his mouth full and a half-eaten sandwich in his hand. Lights were flashing on and men were yelling in the barracks across the way.

"Listen," Alexander told Ganzer, and pressing the button on his microphone began to speak into it rapidly: *"A trooper has been murdered. Everybody stand by for a Signal Seven."*

"Gosh!" Ganzer whispered. "Who?" He sat down suddenly at the telephone switchboard. He fumbled, putting on the headphones, fumbled again, plugging in for a call to Second District Headquarters at Detroit.

"All cars and stations!" Alexander was saying. *"Start all available men and cars toward location of this crime . . . County Road Three-six-oh and Telegraph Road. All stations report to dispatch by land wire numbers of cars going on blockade. Get 'em rolling!"*

"Hello, Second District," Ganzer shouted into the telephone. "Got that message? What cars you sending?" He scribbled the numbers. "Okay. They'll hear from us. Notify city police and Wayne County sheriff. Phone all posts in your district in case they missed the radio."

He handed the list of car numbers to Alexander, who began to broadcast at once.

"Car 182, to U. S. 24 and County Road 17. Report on arrival. Car 462 establish road block at Allendale. Car 152 get to bridge over Mud Creek.... Halt all traffic."

In half a minute nine cars were rolling. And immediately the post at Erie was notifying Flatrock that it already was blocking the bridges over Otter Creek at Lasalle and south of Strasburg.

The door burst open, and First Sergeant Roviak stuck in his lean gray head.

"Handle map!" Alexander yelled at him. Roviak grabbed the notes off the dispatch desk, stepped to the wall map and began to poke pins into crossroads, each pin with its car number on it.

"That's all now," Alexander finally said.

"All?" Roviak scowled at the map. "Not much of a blockade, yet. Me, I could drive a beer truck through it."

"It's all the cars we got," Alexander answered sharply. "Show me how to have one car cover twenty locations, and I'll dispatch 'em!"

"Bet there's fifty coming from up north on your Signal Seven. We'll have plenty in an hour."

"That's too late. Need 'em now!"

They could hear Flint and Bay City posts talking to their cars, urging speed, and the captain of District Seven reporting that he was on his way.

"Hansen was a good boy," Roviak said. "They don't come any better."

"Yeh," Alexander agreed. He was counting the pins on the map. "Sixteen cars. Maybe a dozen more next half hour. Not enough."

The door opened fast, and Captain James, department communications officer, strode in. His white hair was rumpled, and his eyes were full of sleep; he wore a sweat shirt, wrong side out, dungarees and red bedroom slippers. He eyed the map.

"Got to put out more cars quick!" he said.

"You find 'em, and I'll send 'em," Alexander retorted.

Motors roared out in the courtyard as troopers from the refresher school took off. Someone was yelling for another shotgun, and someone else was demanding that Whitey bring his flashlight. Ganzer turned quickly from the telephone switchboard to say that Detroit city police were blocking all main highways at the city limits. Alexander opened his microphone and spread that news, too, to all cars and stations.

"What the hell you think you're doing?" Captain James yelled. "Remember, this hoodlum's got a radio too. He's listening!"

"That's right," Alexander agreed. He started to say something else, caught himself and sat staring at the microphone.

"Tell him Detroit's blocked off," the Captain complained, "and he goes the other way. No chance to catch him at the city limits."

"That's right," Alexander repeated. He was staring at the map. "That's right, sir!" He laughed out loud. Roviak twisted around and looked at him, and the Captain paused, his slippered feet apart, his face blank with astonishment. Still laughing, Alexander opened his microphone and began to give rapid orders.

"Car 14, go to New Boston. Block crossroad. Car 191, take intersection at town of Waltz. Car 517 to Huron River bridge at French Landing. Car 846, railroad crossing at D & I junction. Car 799, Swan Creek Ditch bridge on 350—that's county-line road...."

Captain James was screaming so Alexander closed his microphone.

"You're crazy!" James was yelling. "What you think you're doing? Aren't any cars with those numbers! You know that!"

"I sure do," Alexander agreed. "So do the troops out on the road. But this hoodlum don't know it. I'm talking to him right now."

He opened his microphone.

"Dispatch to Car 735, hold down intersection at Martinsville. Car 884 take crossroad 401 west of Willow—"

THE Captain scowled and scratched his head as Alexander ordered fictitious cars by the dozen to crossroads in the manhunt area. Forty cars, fifty, sixty! Sweat ran down his nose, and his voice cracked twice. He shut the microphone at last; and Roviak, who had been sticking pins into the map, turned swiftly.

"County road junction 381 and 383 wide open," he warned.

"Detective car 8, take junction of 381 and 383," Alexander broadcast. "All other cars arriving in blockade area start to patrol roads. Even-numbered cars, north-and-south roads, odd numbers east and west. You're pretty close to this killer right now. Take no chances. He's killed one trooper tonight. Don't let him kill another."

JOE BARCA was rushing south on Road 56 when the radio sent a car to New Boston, just three miles ahead. He turned and started back. He'd use French Landing bridge, instead. These dumb cops couldn't outsmart him. He knew these roads.

"Car 517 take bridge at French Landing," the radio ordered. Barca stopped. Funny how hot the night was getting. It made him sweat. Better begin to use his imagination.

Barca swung east at the next corner. He didn't know this road. The sign said it was Number 364. Lucky to have the radio. Between it and his imagination, he'd play hell with the cops, no matter how many cars they had. The law sure was moving fast, though—first cutting off Detroit, then blocking all those roads south and west. He'd slip around Flatrock, get to Ohio that way.

"Car 71," the radio said, *"cover Road 364 in Eureka."*

Barca slammed on the brakes. He could see a number of scattered lights a mile ahead.

He tried to lie flat.... If he could hold his breath—

Could be Eureka. Could be—most likely was. Sure it was. Car 71 was on its way there. Probably there now. All of a sudden he felt very tired.

The radio came on again. A lot more cars. Thicker than flies. Every crossroad. How many jalopies did the State cops have, anyhow? Why'd they need 'em all? Wasting the taxpayers' money in joyriding around! That radio fellow sure sounded mad. You'd hate to have a run-in with a guy like that.

Car lights shone suddenly a mile ahead. Barca doused his own, backed swiftly, started west again. A gravel road turned south; he swung into it. He didn't know its number. He turned on his lights and drove faster, then switched them off. Couldn't take a chance with so much law around.

The radio was sending a car to Road 392. Maybe that was this road. Maybe the car was up ahead, rushing toward him. Barca slowed. Cops carried machine-guns and shotguns. Young cops had a reputation for being trigger-happy. If he met a police car—

A light flashed, far ahead. Barca stepped on his brake. He could hear that fellow telling all even-numbered cars to take north-and-south roads. Well, this one was north-and-south, wasn't it? That light up there might be an even-numbered car.

The light disappeared. Maybe the cops had turned it off and were slipping up in the dark. The radio was warning all cars to take no chances. That made Joe Barca mad. The light shone again, nearer this time. Was that another light, coming up behind?

"*Take no chances!*" the radio was yelling.

Barca scrambled out into the road, forgetting the police pistol on the seat. Didn't think of it till he had crossed the ditch and climbed through the barbed-wire fence. Too late now. He started to run. He was headed west. Or was it east? He didn't know.

Who ever heard of so many cars? Cars posted everywhere! Cars coming down all the roads! Cars with shotguns and machine-guns. The field was rough. He fell, got up, fell again. Those were woods ahead. What if the cops were waiting there too? A darker shadow seemed to be moving, there among the trees. Barca got down and began to crawl forward. Somewhere out on the road behind him a siren began to scream. He crawled faster, into the darkness.

TROOPER MURPHY and the Sergeant from Flatrock post raced north on the narrow gravel road.

"Alexander's sure usin' his head!" Murphy was repeating admiringly. "That's imagination, Sarge, puttin' out phony car numbers. Me, was I this hoodlum, I wouldn't know what to do."

"How'd you happen to spot the sedan?" the Sergeant asked.

"Didn't, till the fat guy starts talkin' so free an' easy. Honest citizens act scared when you pull 'em off the road."

"Lights ahead!" the Sergeant interrupted and put on speed.

They found Car 922, its radiator so hot it must have been abandoned within five minutes. Murphy grabbed the microphone.

"Car 922 recovered!" he reported, and gave the location. The Sergeant already had picked up Barca's trail and was poking his flashlight through the fence. "Suspect afoot!" Murphy yelled.

Alexander directed all cars to cancel previous orders and converge on the spot, and the Flatrock sergeant to assume command in the field. The Sergeant swore and ran back to the car. As commander, he'd have to stand by the microphone, couldn't be in on the catch. Murphy set off alone across the ditch.

"Where you going?" the Sergeant yelled. "Have plenty help in a minute."

"Me, I'm not waitin'," Murphy called over his shoulder. "I'm goin' to get this party, myself, personal."...

Joe Barca got across the field somehow. The next fence was tougher—but he managed to crawl through it. Beyond it were woods. He stopped, listening. A car was racing, somewhere. Now it stopped. Barca began to run, bumped into a tree, staggered and sat down. He got up, but could not be sure which way he had been going. He turned, ran a few steps, turned again.

It was so dark he didn't see the little creek. A root caught his toe, and he sprawled forward, into the black water. His pistol was in his hand as he fell; the chill water caused his fingers to open suddenly, and he dropped the gun and heard it splash. He clawed around in the mud, faster and faster, deeper and deeper....

Then he heard someone, coming through the brush. It sounded like lots of people, running hard. Lots of cops. They had a light. It flashed toward him, away, toward him again. Do no good to run now. He tried to lie down flat in the muddy water. It was very cold. The light came closer. He ducked his head under the surface. If he could hold his breath long enough, they might go on past. He held—held—it was safe here, under water—safe—safe....

MURPHY swung the drowned man's body to his shoulder and started back across the field. Headlights were converging on the road; voices were shouting. Murphy swung his flashlight in a circle. The Sergeant reached him first.

"Got him?"

"Yeh," Murphy's voice was sour with disgust. "Only, he's dead. Lay down in the crick and drowns himself! Maybe thought we couldn't see him there. That's what I say about these punks, Sarge. Can't figure things out ahead. Got no imagination."

THIS LAND IS OURS

A complete book-length novel of the West today: a great country and a fine people—though they differ about our National Parks.

by OSCAR SCHISGALL

THE HEAVY THRASH OF RAIN WAS THE ONLY sound Jud Morgan heard before the shot. It was a hard-driven, stinging downpour. It lashed his bony face as he sent the mare down a slope, around scattered clumps of brush and snakeweed.

Underfoot, water an inch deep streamed past the horse's hoofs to pour into arroyos. He sat hunched in the saddle, looking down at it, not liking what he saw. He might as well be splashing through a sluice. This could mean flash floods for the country below.

Two pack-horses trailed him. They sloshed along at a weary gait, heads low, tails drawn in, their legs and bellies still dripping mud from a bog they'd had to cross a few minutes ago. Jud didn't glance back at them. He had learned that if he turned, the cold rain got in under the collar of his slicker and dribbled down his neck. So he faced the storm and kept his shoulders bent against it. And though the slicker was buttoned up to his chin, it didn't cover his long legs. The sodden levis were pasted to his thighs, as drenched as if he'd walked hip-deep in a river.

In moments like this Jud Morgan sometimes wondered, with a deep and derisive bitterness, why he stayed in the job. What did it get a man? Wealth? No. Distinction? No. Just hard work; endless bickering and heartache and argument, to say nothing of days and months in the foulest weather God saw fit to visit on man. Why, then, did he stick with it?

He didn't try to find an answer.

After a while he lifted his eyes to squint through the cascade that dripped from the brim of his hat. In the gray twilight the rain blurred everything. Beyond a hundred yards he couldn't see at all. There were few trees up here—just scrub oaks, and an occasional piñon, as far as he could make out; nothing that offered a promise of shelter.

Nevertheless, with darkness due in a half-hour or so, he'd have to make camp pretty soon. As he looked around, the prospect wasn't reassuring, but he had no choice. According to his calculations, the town of Twin Rivers must be all of twenty miles away. He didn't intend to grope for it through a blind night, with tired horses. And God knew if there was any ranch at which he could find a dry bed up here on the high slopes of the Sangre de Cristos. To Jud Morgan, this part of New Mexico was strange country.

He began to search for a ridge. It wouldn't be the first night he'd rolled into a poncho and gone to sleep among rocks, with the rattle of rain in his ears. A few years ago, back at Arizona U, cynical, raspy-voiced Professor Korth had warned him: "You won't really begin to learn anything about this business, Morgan, till you get out into the weather. And then, God help you, you'll learn a heap all at once." A bit grimly Jud smiled at the recollection.

That was when he heard the shot.

It made him draw rein, and the mare pricked up her ears. He sat looking toward his right. The sound had come from the other side of a barren rise; it couldn't be more than fifty or sixty yards away.

Jud's heels came in, and he rode up the slippery slope quickly. The pack-horses followed with sudden alacrity. When he reached the rim, he stopped again.

Below, in a gully, a figure with a rifle stood beside a fallen horse. The horse lay so still that Jud could guess what had happened and why it had been shot. One of its forelegs was crazily out of shape, broken a few inches above the fetlock.

The figure with the rifle hadn't turned; probably hadn't heard anything in the downpour. Jud saw the dejected shoulders, booted legs spread wide in mud, with water splashing around them. That other rider seemed even more thoroughly soaked than Jud himself; no slicker covered the checkered shirt and muddy jeans.

He put a hand to his mouth and shouted: "Hey!"

The figure spun around, and Jud saw that this was a woman. She stared up at him, more surprised than he. She pushed wet hair away from her face, as though to see him more clearly.

He swung out of the saddle in a hurry, dropping the reins over the mare's head, and slithered down the slope. Halfway to the bottom he almost lost his balance—a fall that might have brought him sliding to her feet on his face; but he managed to catch some brush, and presently he had his six feet two inches of lean body upright in front of her.

She looked at him with unbelieving eyes, as if the rain had produced something unearthly. Her two-handed grip on the rifle was tight, and she held the gun against her chest.

"I'm no ghost," he said. "No need to look so scared, ma'am."

She was young; twenty-two or so. Not very pretty, judging by what he could see—unless there was beauty under the streak of mud that ran from her forehead down across a cheek, daubing the nose on its way. Her body, though, was all right. Tall in the mud-spattered clothes, it was, he decided, very much all right.

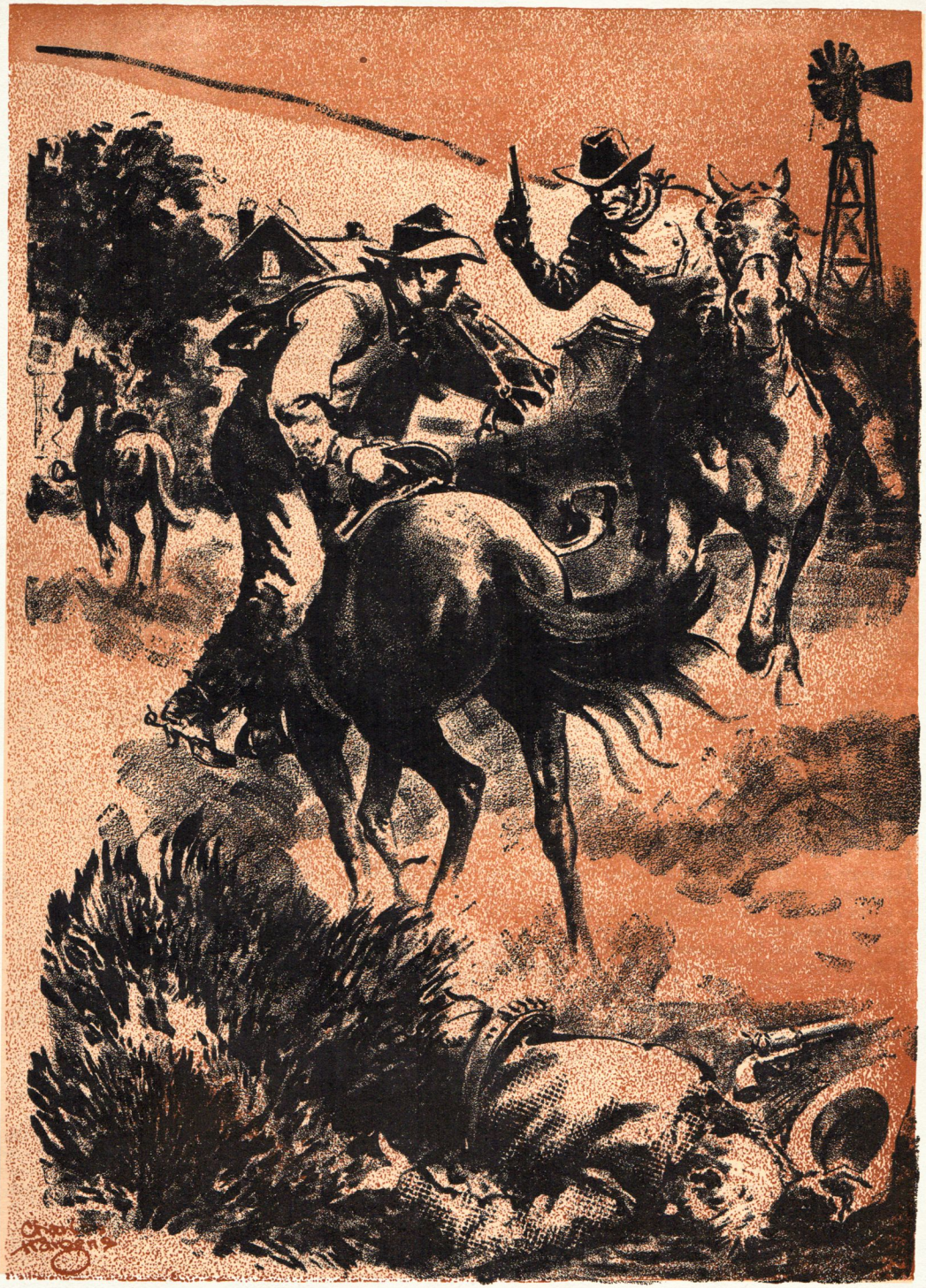
"How'd it happen?" he asked.

"I—I was up on the bluff. It caved in, and we came down." Because she had to talk above the noise of the rain, her voice was loud, strained.

Jud asked: "Hurt?"

"No. No, I'm all right. Landed in mud."

"Lucky."



Jud acted on impulse, flinging himself off his horse to dive for Tudbury's gun. "Don't touch it!" Valentine yelled.

He saw that she had shot her horse through the forehead. His glance slid to the flank, where rain had washed the brand clear: a diamond enclosing a *G*.

"I'll get the saddle," he said, squatting to loosen the cinch. He had to bunch up the slicker so that it wouldn't lie in the mud. "Got anybody around?"

"No. I'm riding alone."

She watched him with a frown as he worked to free the saddle. Her hands still gripped the rifle hard.

He looked up through the rain. "Name's Jud Morgan," he said.

She nodded. "Mine's Griscom—Laura Griscom." Then she hesitated. "Which way you heading?"

"Twin Rivers."

"That's a long way."

"I know. Figured I'd camp somewhere and make it tomorrow." He had a sudden hope. "You got a ranch hereabouts?"

She shook her head. "My place is down near Twin Rivers, too."

Hope collapsed, and he went back to the task of pulling the saddle from the dead horse. When he had it free, he rose and slung it over his shoulder. "Let's go."

It was almost dark as he started away, looking for a place where he could climb the slippery bank. Instead of following him at once, Laura Griscom went to stoop over the dead horse, and he paused to watch her. She ran a hand through the dripping mane, just behind the ears; held tight for a few seconds while she bit her lip. Then she dropped a last pat on the wet neck and got up, her head lowered as she walked after Jud Morgan.

"Been—been riding that horse every day for five years," she said.

He had no answer to that. Ankle-deep in mud, he had to slosh some fifty yards along the gully, with the rain hammering at his back, before he found a spot it would be feasible to climb. Carrying the saddle, he couldn't offer the girl much help. But she didn't need it. She tucked the rifle under her arm and scrambled up the bank as quickly as he. When they were on the rim and walking toward the horses, he couldn't help feeling sorry for her. She must be cold and miserable, wet to the skin.

"Were *you* aiming to make Twin Rivers tonight?" he asked.

"Not in this rain." After a few steps she added: "There's a shack—an old fire-lookout—a mile or so ahead. They don't use it any more, but it's dry."

JUD FELT A SENSE OF RELIEF. It would be good to be under a roof tonight. At the same time he became uneasy about the girl. How would she feel about sharing the shelter with a man?

She kept her head bent against the rain. By the time he'd thrown her saddle over one of the pack-horses and tied it down, he could take no more of the silence.

"I'm trying to figure what you're doing up here," he said.

He thought she hadn't heard; the answer was so long delayed. Then she said: "I came hunting strays."

"Kind of far from home for strays."

"Maybe."

"And high up."

"They climb."

Jud turned away from her, and his mouth tightened as he undid a saddle-roll. Did she take him for a fool? He knew she was lying. It wasn't even a good lie. At this time of year, early in the month of May, enough good grass hadn't yet grown here, high in the mountains, to lure cattle up from the lowlands. Why would they stray from rich valley forage to these barren heights? Here and there, of course, there might be a mountain valley with fair grass, but to reach such pastures, cows would have to show the instincts of migratory birds.

Jud pulled a poncho out of the roll. He snapped it open, gave it to her.

"Here. Wrap it around you."

"What's the use?" she said. "I'm soaked."

"It'll be warmer. And ride my horse. If the shack's only a mile, there's no sense shifting packs. I'll walk."

While she drew the poncho around her shoulders, she glanced over the withers of the big chestnut mare. "That horse looks as if she could carry double."

"Not when she's tuckered out."

The girl raised her foot to the stirrup, then gave him a puzzled look. The abrupt curt quality of his voice, the anger he couldn't hide, seemed to trouble her. But she said nothing as she mounted. He adjusted the stirrup-length for her. With the poncho around her shoulders, she looked like a blanket-draped Navajo squaw.

"All right, let's go," Jud said.

He put a hand on the saddle for support. Walking beside her while she rode, he had to watch his footing. More than once he slipped, almost fell, but his grip on the saddle steadied him. They didn't talk now. Laura Griscom kept the rifle under the poncho.

DARKNESS CAME LONG BEFORE they reached the shack—the kind of darkness that could press against your eyeballs, opaque and blinding, so that you couldn't see a lifted hand. But Jud had taken a flashlight out of a saddle-bag and he kept its yellow beam fixed on the ground ahead. The rain flashed and sparkled where it slanted through the light. And the mare, watching it, kept her ears up, stiff and alert.

Jud noticed that Laura Griscom seemed to know her way in the night like a wildcat on the prowl. She never hesitated in the course she picked.

The last quarter-mile was an uphill trudge over gravel and stones; difficult footing, but solid. Here the clatter of hoofs was loud. After some five minutes of the climb the girl pulled back on the reins.

"Raise that light, will you?" she said.

Jud did, and saw the lookout only a few yards away. It was a sizable cabin. The exploring yellow ray revealed a cupola on its roof, and a low shed close to its rear.

"Keep away from the other side," Laura Griscom said, dismounting. "There's a twelve-hundred-foot drop."

He sent the flashlight's beam toward the cliff and saw the sharp, sudden edge beyond which there was nothing. He grunted. Walking in this sort of darkness, a man might step off that edge before he knew it was there.

He brought the light back to the cabin. "How come they abandon a fire-lookout in this country?"

"They built a better one higher up," she said. "Last year."

She helped him lead his string of mounts into the shed. As far as he could discover with the yellow ray, the place contained nothing but a stack of short logs, cut for firewood. Still, it was a haven for the weary horses. They tossed their heads, whipped their tails, snorted in relief.

"Let's go have a look in the house," Jud said. "Then I'll unsaddle."

The door of the lookout stuck, maybe because of the rain. He had to throw his weight against it before it yielded. Stepping in with the girl beside him, he sent the beam searching.

All the windows were boarded up, so that the walls were solid. In a corner the circle of light played on a crude table and a bench; there were no other furnishings. But there was a stone fireplace with a few logs near it, an old soap-box half full of kindling, and a couple of empty tin cans beside the box. Traveling on, the light paused on another door, open, and Jud realized the cabin had two rooms. That was good. It solved the problem of how he and the girl would spend the night.

She stood so close to him that he could feel her against his arm, could hear her breathing. He shot the ray back

at the tin cans. "Seems like other folks have camped here."

"Sheep-herders," she said. "Maybe some dudes last summer."

"You too, I reckon."

"Me? No."

"You knew the way pretty well."

She was quiet a few seconds. Then she said: "During the war, when they were short of men, I used to come up here to help with fire-watching. Often."

Jud made no comment. Opening a button of his slicker, he groped in a shirt pocket. He brought out a lighter—a windproof thing he had bought a couple of years ago in an Army PX—and gave it to her.

"How about getting a fire going while I unsaddle?" he asked.

"Sure."

In the shed it took him some ten minutes to make the horses comfortable. He wished he could feed them, but there was nothing to do about that tonight. And while he worked, he couldn't help thinking about the girl.

Apart from the fact that she had lied to him, what he disliked was her hardness. She talked and behaved like a man: taciturn, yielding nothing, asking no favors. It annoyed him. He didn't like grimness in men; liked it much less in women. So far—except for the moment when she had bent over the dead horse—he had seen no sign of anything gentle or feminine in her. Probably, he decided, she belonged to that breed of tough, hard-working range women who sacrifice softness to the demands of their job. That kind always left him awed—and cold.

When he went back to the cabin, he carried a couple of saddlebags, a canteen, a pot and a pan.

By this time a crackling fire danced in the fireplace. Laura Griscom stood in its red glow, combing fingers through wet hair, shaking it back. Her booted legs were parted, water still dripping from the jeans. The warmth of the blaze must have brightened her mood, for she gave Jud a smile over her shoulder.

"Feels wonderful," she said. "Come and get some."

He stood still, staring in surprise. Her hair was reddish, maybe blonde; and now that she wore no hat, there seemed to be a great deal of it. With the firelight shining through its thickness, it looked mighty pretty, the way it hung to her shoulders. She had wiped the mud from her face. Even in the flickering light he realized that he'd been wrong about her looks. Dead wrong. She *was* pretty, all over.... Or was it just the way the fire-glow softened her face?

He shut the door with a shove of his foot. He put the bags down, tossed his streaming hat to the bench.

"You sure look different," he said.

"Nothing like a good fire."

Jud pushed back damp brown hair. "Won't folks be worrying over you?"

"I—guess so. Can't help that. Used to be a telephone line to this place, but it's down."

"How far to that other lookout station?"

"Six-seven miles. It's tough climbing, even in daylight. Couldn't make it now."

She crouched in front of the fire, holding out her hands. It was clear the girl was satisfied to accept the situation as it was. Jud looked at her bright hair. Then he bent to open one of the bags. He pulled out a pair of blue jeans, a couple of woolen shirts, socks, and some underclothes, all sized to his own lanky figure.

"Get into these," he said. "You can use one of the shirts for a towel. I don't carry towels."

"What about yourself?"

"All I need is dry jeans. I've got another extra pair."

She glanced at the bag. "You certainly travel heavy," she commented.

"That's because I carry 'most everything I own." He picked up the sack by its cord. "I'll go change in the other room. Yell when you're ready. Then we'll fix some grub."

She smiled again. "Meeting up with you is like finding a general store."

The second room, he saw as he flashed the light around, was bare. Here too the windows were boarded. Still, it was dry, and more than he had dared hope for an hour ago.

He took off the slicker and the boots, and slipped out of the drenched levis. With a spare undershirt he dried his long legs—hard legs with flat, smooth muscles running through them. He rubbed until the skin glowed. When he was comfortable in the fresh jeans, he sat down on the floor to wait, the flashlight held between his knees.

Suddenly her voice came through the closed door. It was startled, questioning. "Say! Is this a *Ranger's* shirt you gave me?"

"That's right," Jud called. "U. S. Forest Service."

"Meaning you're a Ranger?"

"Yep. On my way to take over at Twin Rivers."

There was silence.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. Just surprised. . . . I'll be ready in a minute."

When at last she called him in, he couldn't restrain a smile. In the firelight Laura Griscom stood with his jeans rolled halfway to her knees, and his big forest-green shirt bulging around her shoulders. Funny that wearing a man's clothes should make a girl seem so much more feminine. She had got the hair to stay back from her face, and he saw that she had wide cheek-bones, wide-set eyes, and a very good chin.

"Thanks for all this," she said.

He nodded, and dragged the second saddle-bag close to the fire. As he squatted beside it, working at the cord, Laura watched him with searching directness.

"So you're our new Ranger!" she said at last. "You—you didn't believe what I told you about hunting strays, did you?"

"Not a word of it. Strays don't come up this far in May."

"They do—if somebody *drives* 'em!"

Jud raised his head, startled. "Oh," he said slowly, "that's a different story.... Cattle-thieves?"

"All I know is, I've been losing stock."

"Much?"

"Maybe thirty-forty head."

He studied her face for a time, then resumed opening the bag, taking things from it. "What do you do," he asked, "—run your own outfit?"

"With my brother," she said. "The Diamond G. You didn't happen to spot any cows where you traveled today, did you?"

"No."

"This is the only way rustled cattle could be driven. Through the mountains. For a while, when we met back there, I thought maybe *you*—"

Jud shook his head. "You caught yourself the wrong man. I don't generally steal cows."

He opened a can of beans, spilled them into the pan, and held it over the fire. He still didn't believe the girl. A woman who wanted to hunt rustlers, it seemed to him, would hardly go out alone to face a gang, even with a Winchester. She'd take men along. Or she'd *send* men. This wasn't the year 1847; it was 1947, and you could call upon the law of New Mexico to chase thieves. What kind of nonsense was she asking him to accept?

Laura Griscom had found the coffee. She poured water from his canteen into the pot and worked beside him. They knelt together in front of the flames, their long shadows quivering on the floor behind them.

When the beans were ready, he gave her his fork, and he used a spoon. They ate together out of the pan. She sat on the floor, cross-legged, very close to him, so that he had a good chance to consider her face. It disturbed him, and his strange resentment continued. It was a determined face, with a self-reliant set about the lips. And yet, in the trembling glow of the fire, it seemed too young and soft to be so resolute. Either the firelight was fooling him, or she was. Damn it, the girl was *beautiful*....

Her eyes came up to meet his. She said: "You're in for a tough time at Twin Rivers."

"So I've been warned."

"Our people don't hold with the Forest Service."

"You mean *some* of your people."

"I mean those that count."

Jud carefully put down the empty pan. "The way I learned it back at school, everybody counts: cattle-men, sheep-men, timber people, Indians, cowpokes — everybody." He smiled at her without much humor. "Those are the people that count with the Forest Service—the people we call everybody."

TO THAT, LAURA had nothing to say. She got up on her knees and bent to reach for the coffeepot—and somehow she lost her balance. With a half-uttered little cry she toppled awkwardly sidewise, almost across Jud's lap. He caught her as she fell. Before he quite realized what was happening, he found her weight in his arms, warm and firm, her body held tight against his own. For an instant, as he held her like that, looking down into her face, his breath stopped. His very thoughts stopped.

She lay back, as startled as he, her eyes bewildered, yet ready to laugh. He could feel her breath on his face, her hand clutching his shoulder. He had an overpowering impulse to keep her like that, to hold her harder against himself. His arms tightened.

Then her laugh came—a low, self-deprecating laugh, full of mockery for her awkwardness—and she straightened. His arms dropped stiffly away from her... She was back on her knees, brushing hair away from her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said.

There were a hundred casual things Jud might have answered, but he didn't speak at all. He was shaken. And that irritated him. A slight thing happened, unimportant, even silly; a perfectly normal sort of accident—and yet he was shaken. While she poured the coffee, he had to keep his eyes away from her, staring at the fire.

If Laura was aware of it, she didn't show it. At least she pretended not to notice it. She settled back with a cup of coffee.

"You were talking about people who count," Jud said.

She replied: "I mean the ranchers who run the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association. Maybe you've heard about us. We've talked up loud enough to be heard clear across the country, in Washington."

"Yes, I've heard about you."

It was good to force his mind back to things like that. They were part of his job; they steadied him. He had not only heard about the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association, but he had read its petition to the Government. He knew it was fighting the Forest Service with all the vigor and determination it could muster: demanding increased grazing rights on the public lands; demanding, too, that those lands be turned over to the sovereign State of New Mexico.

He said: "I also heard you gave the last Ranger in Twin Rivers, Marty Sharrock, a pretty rough time."

"He brought it on himself."

Jud watched while she drank from the tin cup. And he felt steady again. "I used to work with Sharrock before he came to New Mexico," he said quietly. "Spent eight months as his assistant up in the Shoshone country —Wyoming. That was before the war."

He drew a deep breath.

"Best education I ever got," he said. "He was quite a man. One in a million, Marty Sharrock. I'd hate to think anybody around Twin Rivers—killed him."

Laura put down the cup so abruptly that coffee splashed over her hand. "Why—why should you think he was killed?"

"What do *you* think happened to him?"

"I—don't know. People sometimes do ride off, disappear."

"Just like that?"

"Why not?"

"Say so-long to a wife and kid, and blow away like a wisp of smoke? No."

"If he'd been killed—" A note of anxiety came into her voice, and she leaned forward. "It just doesn't make sense! Marty Sharrock rode out on a palomino, with a sorrel pack-horse trailing him. He was going to make a routine trip around his district. If he'd been killed—even if his body had been hidden—somebody would have found those two ponies sooner or later. Posses hunted everywhere. At least a dozen of them covered every square foot of the district. What became of the horses?"

"Yes," Jud Morgan admitted, "that's kind of hard to understand, two horses disappearing with him."

"He *must* have ridden away with them!"

"Ridden where? Why?"

"God knows!"

Jud could talk now without thinking of how this girl had felt in his arms—or almost without thinking about it. "Descriptions of him and his horses," he pointed out, "went to every State in the Southwest. It's more than a month since Marty disappeared. If he'd been traveling, he'd have been spotted *somewhere* by this time. You can't help recognizing a man like Marty Sharrock—a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound giant with that wild red hair of his."

This the girl didn't attempt to deny; there was unease in the way she stirred.

"No, I don't think he just rode off," Jud repeated. "Why should he? He had a job he liked, a family he loved, a sense of responsibility to his work that was like a religion. Only thing that worried him here was the scrap he was having with Twin Rivers cattle-men. And I've got a hunch maybe one of them knows what became of Marty Sharrock."

The cabin was still. After a time Laura gulped down the last of her coffee like a shot of raw whisky. She even shuddered as she gave Jud the cup. When his hand touched hers, he found it shaky.

You hold a girl in your arms for just a second, he thought, and all your perceptions become sharpened; you're aware of every little motion she makes, of every shadow in her expression. Or was he just imagining things?

He filled the cup for himself. Behind him he heard a creak, and a gust of wet wind struck his back. Thinking the door must have blown open, he turned and started to rise. Then he checked the movement.

A man stood in the doorway.

Chapter Two

JUD FELT HIS WHOLE BODY GO STIFF; THE MAN was bulky about the shoulders — a solidly built figure with thick, wide-spread legs. In the firelight water dripped from his sombrero, from his windbreaker, from his hands. He held a flashlight, its beam extinguished. And as he stood in the open door, his eyes, though obscured by the hat-brim, glinted with a reflection of the fire. They swept from Laura to Jud Morgan—and stayed there, steady.

Jud caught the girl's faint gasp. She rose, not in alarm but in amazement. *"Ed!"* she said.

The man slowly shut the door. He pushed the flashlight into a pocket as if he were holstering a gun, saying nothing, his manner deliberate.

Jud didn't like his stillness. As he got up, he didn't like the way the man looked at him, either. He didn't like the accusation in those eyes. Most keenly of all, however, he had a feeling of angry rebellion—illogical, maybe, but nevertheless sharp—because someone else had come into the cabin. This shattered something that had belonged to him and the girl.

FINALLY THE MAN SPOKE in a voice that was low and tight. He said to Laura, without looking at her: "So this is why you been comin' into the hills."

"Ed!"

"Huntin' strays, you called it.... Strays!... Well, it ain't goin' to happen any more."

He came toward Jud. He came with a heavy, determined step, hands clenching into fists.

It was clear he didn't intend to ask questions. He was going to swing, and there was no way of stopping him. Jud could see the fight coming. He was confused, not knowing who this man might be. But talk would have to wait. With the man only two paces away, he picked a target on the fellow's jaw and set his feet.

The girl leaped in front of him. She pushed at the bulky man's chest with a violence that threw his whole body off balance. She had the sudden strength of fury, and it was magnificent. As he stumbled back, caught off guard, she followed. She stayed very close to him, threatening, her voice deep and harsh. "What's got into you, Ed? *Stop it!"*

"I won't stand for—"

"Cut it out! I ought to slap you across the mouth for what you're saying!"

She forced him back against the wall. And because her bitterness overwhelmed his own, more shaking and more passionate than his, he began to look disconcerted, to waver. Laura seemed in that moment as strong as he, and far more angry.

Watching the girl, Jud himself was amazed. As her eyes blazed upon the man, he could almost believe she was the kind who'd go out single-handed to track cattle thieves. There was a masculine, reckless quality in her rage. It was wild and intolerant.

"How can you be such a fool?" she demanded.

The man said: "Now, hold on—"

"What do I have to do — spell things out for you? This man found me in the hills — stranded. I'd had to shoot my horse. We're here because we couldn't go any farther."

"Wait a minute, Laura. I—"

"I never saw him before tonight. *And we weren't going to sleep together!* What more do you want to know?"

The man stared at her. She flung the hair back from her face with an angry sweep of her hand.

"His name's Jud Morgan," she said, "and he's the new Ranger!"

Over her shoulder the man called Ed looked quickly at Jud. He was surprised; uncertain now. The impulse to fight appeared to have drained out of him.

Laura turned away. In a flat, hard voice she said to Jud: "This is Ed Valentine—from down Twin Rivers." Then she went to the fireplace, rubbing a stiff hand up and down her left arm as if it had been bruised. With her anger subsiding, she looked ashamed of it.

Jud, not moving, faced the man at the wall... Ed Valentine—*Edwin C. Valentine.* He remembered that name. He had seen it signed to petitions that had gone to Washington, to Santa Fe. Valentine was a leader in the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association; its secretary or treasurer — something like that. He looked young, no more than thirty, with a dark and powerful face, flat-lipped, decisive. This was one of the men Jud would have to swing around to the Government's way of seeing things. At first glance, he put it down as hopeless.

Valentine's eyes went about the cabin. They took in the saddlebags on the floor, the wet clothes Laura had hung on the edge of the table, the garments she wore. Finally he pushed back his hat.

"Looka here, Laura," he said. "If I been readin' sign wrong, I'm sorry. But—"

"You ought to read twice before you blow up!"

"Well, look! I figured I'd find you where there was shelter in this rain, but I never expected to find you with —*company.* It kind of—threw me."

She didn't reply.

Valentine turned to Jud. "Reckon, Ranger, maybe I owe you an apology too."

"Let it go," Jud said.

Laura spoke without turning from the fire. "You better sit down and get straightened out."

Valentine took a step toward her, but stopped. "I—I'll put my horse in the shed first."

When he was gone, the cabin seemed almost too still. Jud fixed curious eyes on the girl. Her sudden show of spitfire strength had astonished him. Whether he admired it or was shocked by it, he hardly knew. In any case, he felt as if he'd seen something she hadn't intended to reveal; something fiery and unbridled, beyond all control. It was hard to realize that, even for a second, she had lain in his arms, confused and laughing and warmly feminine. This was another person.

He crossed the cabin to put the coffeepot back on the logs. Squatting in front of it, he said: "Pretty hot-headed *hombre,* your friend Valentine."

To his surprise, Laura came to the rancher's defense. "You can't blame him for what he thought. It must have looked mighty queer, you and I sitting here alone, in the middle of nowhere. And my clothes—well, it does look funny."

"That wasn't what you said to *him."*

"Oh, I—lost my temper. Besides, I didn't want to see a fight."

Jud placed another log on the fire, watching the sparks rise. She certainly was a creature of contradictions.

"How-come he's chasing after you up here?" he asked. "If he were your brother, now, or your husband, I could understand—"

"He's *going* to be my husband."

That hit Jud Morgan—hard. He started to speak, but the words stuck, and he had a sense of consternation. Yet he realized at once that there was no reason for this feeling of protest. It was pointless. He turned back to the fire, and seeing the forgotten coffee, drank it down; licked the flavor from his lips without really tasting it.

The girl said: "I guess you got the wrong idea about Ed. The way he walked in—"

But Valentine came back then, and they dropped the discussion. Jud was glad to end it. He made room for the man in front of the fireplace.

Sitting down, the rancher combed thick fingers through disheveled dark hair. "Morgan," he said, "I won't blame you if you hold that business against me. Reckon I acted like a fool."

"It's over with," Jud said. "Let's forget it."

VALENTINE SMILED, showing good teeth. When he smiled, his dark face was attractive. "You sound like you mean it, too." He held out his hand. "Thanks."

Jud took the handclasp with a nod. If this man owed further apologies to anyone at all, he was thinking, it was to Laura. But they didn't come.

For Valentine had noticed the rifle propped against the wall, in the shadows. He looked at it with puzzled

That was when he heard the shot.

interest. His glance seemed to slide down its barrel to its stock, where it remained, intent.

Laura said in a quiet voice: "I found that, Ed. This morning."

"Found a rifle? Where?"

"In a little arroyo near Lost Cañon."

Valentine got up and went to examine the gun. He turned it over and over in his hands, frowning. Meanwhile Jud had to make some quick and startled mental readjustments. What the girl was saying was that she'd gone out to hunt cattle-thieves *without* a rifle!

"Found it loaded," she added.

Valentine put the gun back against the wall. The girl watched him as he came to the fire; there was no change in his expression.

She asked: "Did Marty Sharrock carry a rifle?"

"How would I know?"

"Thought I'd turn it over to the Marshal tomorrow—ask him to check."

"That's an idea." Valentine sat down near Jud. He seemed thoughtful. From his shirt pocket he took tobacco and paper and rolled a cigarette. By the time he'd lit it, he appeared to have made up his mind about something.

"Rain's easin' up," he told Laura briskly. "In half an hour or so we ought to be able to ride."

"I have no horse."

"I've got Firebug out tonight. He'll carry double."

She hesitated. "Isn't he pretty tired?"

"That's all right. He'll rest tomorrow."

"And the going will be slippery – especially on the cliff trail."

"We'll take it easy." As if the thing were settled, Valentine turned to Jud. "How about you?"

"Guess I'll stay the night," Jud said, stretching his legs. "My horses are worn out."

"You take on your new job tomorrow?"

"Soon as I hit Twin Rivers."

Valentine considered his cigarette. "I sure hope you turn out to be more reasonable than the gent before you," he said.

"Couldn't hope to be a better Ranger than Marty Sharrock."

"Well, I don't know. Trouble with Sharrock, he was too stubborn." Valentine frowned. "Damn it, some of us cattle-men were in this country before Sharrock was born. Seems to me *we* ought to know something about cows an' grass, an' how many head to raise."

Having started, he talked with increasing vehemence, arguing that local cattle-men had no chance to make a decent living with Government control as stringent as it was. Jud only half-listened. Lying on his elbow, he was developing a queer sense of unease. He couldn't quite define it. It concerned Laura, and he watched her from the corners of his eyes, wondering why Valentine was so eager to get her away from here tonight. It didn't seem altogether logical that the rancher should want to ride double at night, on slippery trails, with a tired horse. . . . Why?

Laura finally opened the door and told Valentine the rain had stopped. From where he sat, Jud could look out and see moonlight breaking through rifts in black clouds. He didn't rise while Valentine took his hat and flashlight and went out to the shed for his horse.

Then he got up slowly. Laura gathered her clothes from the table, rolled them into a bundle. When she had taken the rifle from the wall, she faced him. The firelight gleamed in her hair. He had a curious sense of regret at her going. He had something else too—a feeling that it would be good to have her in his arms once more, warm and close, with her startled eyes near his. But under all this lay that queer sting of anxiety, of uncertainty. He was troubled about something he couldn't understand.

"Thanks," she said. "For everything."

"Nothing to thank me for."

"Plenty, I think. . . . I'll bring your clothes over to the Ranger station tomorrow and pick up my saddle."

Five minutes later Jud stood outdoors, watching them ride off double on Valentine's big horse. Laura held the flashlight, and they went down the rocky slope with its beam searching out their path.

The night was cool and windy after the storm. Fast black clouds scudded overhead. With the wind in his hair, Jud glanced around. Whenever moonlight found its way between clouds, he could look over the edge of the cliff, off into infinite blackness. He saw that its rim made a wide, descending semicircle several miles long, sloping down steeply in some spots, easily in others. After a moment he brought his gaze back to the distant flashlight that was in Laura Griscom's hand.

He kept looking at it, sometimes hidden, then reappearing, until it was a tiny speck almost a mile away. Clearly, they were taking what she had called the cliff trail, for the light followed the ragged, descending edge of the drop.

Jud's worry became sharper with passing minutes. It began to torment him. He drew a hand across his mouth —and had an impulse to saddle his horses and follow. Just why he should distrust Ed Valentine he found it hard to understand. It simply wasn't *natural* for the man to insist on riding such a trail at night, after rain. The urge to go after them became stronger. He could still see the distant speck of light, small as a firefly now—a spark in the darkness.

As HE WATCHED IT, knowing it was in Laura's hand, it fell. . . . It went down and down, a tiny meteor dropping hundreds of feet through the blackness, down along the face of the cliff, down until it struck bottom and there was no light at all. . . .

Jud Morgan came out of a spell. He released the breath he'd held back, and he felt suddenly sick. When

he turned, his legs seemed too heavy to be moved. But he managed to run to the shed where the horses were. As he dragged his saddle out of a corner, he said: "Come on, fellers, we got to ride!"

Chapter Three

JUD MORGAN TOOK A FEW MOMENTS IN THE cabin to gather his saddlebags and put out the fire. When he mounted the chestnut mare, he jerked on the lead-rope, and the two pack-horses followed, tossing their heads, splashing mud. Because a gust of wind almost carried his hat away, he pulled its brim low over his eyes. Then he focused the flashlight's beam on the ground.

The moon was finding frequent rifts in the clouds, and that helped. But he couldn't press the horses. The downslope was still too wet and slippery.

He was a fool to worry. Laura must be all right. Why shouldn't she be all right? Why let his imagination run to terrors?

The trail wasn't dangerous. Except where boulders lay, it was as wide as a highway. And though it followed the curve of the cliff, he seldom had to ride close to the brink. Wherever the yellow beam of the flashlight revealed the tracks of Valentine's horse, he saw that the rancher had also kept away from the cliff's edge.

For all that, the going was slow and uncertain. The horses had to pick their footing. Deep arroyos crossed the trail to spill waterfalls of rain down the face of the cliff. Dipping into the gullies, the ponies had to struggle up slithery banks. You couldn't speed up a ride like this.

Within ten minutes there was a full break in the clouds. The moonlight poured through, so bright and clear that he could put the flashlight away. This was the kind of moonlight they boasted of in New Mexico, a brilliant, electric shower of silver. Looking back, he saw the cabin with its cupola perched on the edge of the cliff half a mile above him.

When he was sure he had traveled at least a mile, Morgan's anxiety grew sharper. He leaned over the saddle-horn. This must be approximately the place where he'd seen the light make its long plunge. At his right there was a drop of several hundred feet. A few boulders obstructed the trail here, and he had to ride close to the edge.

What he needed now, for the sake of his nerves, was a glimpse of Ed Valentine's horse — with Laura on it. His eyes followed the long semicircular descent of the rim. He could see nobody. Willow trees and rocks darkened the trail below.

On impulse he pulled out the flashlight. He snapped it on and off repeatedly, waving it from side to side. Maybe, if they glanced back, they'd see it. They'd wait.

He rode another mile, passing a hollow in which a few aspens bent before the wind. In the moonlight their trembling leaves shimmered like spangles. And it was here that he heard a voice float up to him. It was a man's voice, faint in the distance, shouting; "Hi, up there! *Hi-i-i!*"

Sudden excitement stirred Jud. The flashlight must have been seen. He waved it again. Then he put a hand to his mouth and yelled: "Hi, there! Coming!"

For some three hundred yards he rode at greater speed, the pans in the saddlebags clanking as the pack-horses broke into a trot. He bent forward, searching.

In a clear spot near some willows he finally saw them — Laura and the bulky figure of Ed Valentine, standing at the head of their horse. . . .

The rancher called in bewilderment: "Hey, what in hell *you* doin' here? Thought you figured to stay up yonder."

Jud's relief was so great that his whole body went limp. When he drew rein, he pushed back his hat and wiped a sleeve across his forehead. It was wet.

"Changed my mind," he said.

Laura slowly came toward him. The big forest-green shirt was bunched about her shoulders; she was hitching up the belt of the jeans.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

"Saw your flash go over the cliff. Thought you might be in trouble."

"O-oh —"

"Just a little accident," Valentine said. "No trouble." The girl explained: "Ed was holding the rifle across his lap, and it slid off when we were near the edge. I saw it go and tried to grab it — and lost the light too. They both went over."

Jud didn't answer. He swung out of the creaking saddle, and keeping a hand on the horn, leaned his six-feet-two against the horse. Valentine, he saw, had begun to grin.

"What'd *you* think?" the rancher asked. "That one of us went *with* the light?"

"Could be."

The heavy man chuckled. "Well, anyhow, damn' nice o' you to come hightailin' after us. Now that your worries are over, suppose we all ride."

Jud turned to the lead pack-horse. "Wait till I shift saddlebags," he said, and added to Laura: "You can use this feller."

Still grinning, Valentine helped redistribute the packs. A few minutes later they were traveling down the slope again, in single file. The rancher went first, with Laura behind him on a long-legged sorrel. Jud trailed with the second pack-horse, following them into lower country, where they passed wide regions of sage, sweet-scented after the rain.

More than once the girl glanced back at him, her eyes perplexed, but Jud kept his head lowered. Presently he noticed that she was allowing the distance between her and the rancher to widen. It was some fifteen feet—then thirty, forty.

THERE CAME A TIME when Valentine disappeared around boulders sixty feet ahead. Laura slowed her horse until Jud was beside her. She searched his face in the moonlight.

"What's the matter?" she whispered.

His mouth hardened. "That rifle. What made you think it might have been Marty Sharrock's?"

"Oh, that —" She held her breath. "Well, I know he owned a Winchester. Saw him with it. But then, of course, a lot of people own Winchesters."

"But not many people throw loaded Winchesters into arroyos and leave 'em there — is that it? Sounds like something only a *dead* man would do."

Laura looked ahead, saying nothing.

He didn't know to what extent she'd be willing to discuss the man she was going to marry, but he took a chance. "You sure that rifle *slipped* from Valentine's lap?"

"Of course it slipped!"

"It wasn't — helped along any?"

From beyond the boulders Ed Valentine called: "Hey! What's holdin' you?"

"Coming!" Laura answered. "Cinch needs tightening!" She gave Jud a last quick look. "It slipped!" she said fiercely. *"It just slipped!"* Then she prodded the sorrel into a trot; and after that, he had no opportunity to talk to her alone.

Riding in the rear again, he let a bitter expression come to his lips. The glibness with which she'd called, "Cinch needs tightening!" reminded him that earlier in the night, she had lied to him too. He was sure of it now. She wouldn't have left home alone, without a rifle, to hunt cattle-thieves. This girl was beautiful, yes; and the mem-

"All I'm askin' is a fair break!" Valentine said.

ory of holding her in his arms could still stir him. But how much of what she said could a man ever believe?

He straightened in the saddle, drew a long breath. After all, he had an approximate idea of where the rifle had gone over the cliff. About a mile below the lookout cabin. Unless it had landed on a high ledge, maybe it could be found again.

AT TEN O'CLOCK THE NEXT MORNING a mud-spattered 1937 Ford rolled up to the Twin Rivers station of the United States Forest Service, some four miles outside the town. A fat, grizzled man in his sixties eased himself out from behind the wheel, grunting with the effort. He wore a faded blue shirt, old overalls tucked into high-heeled riding-boots, and a dusty gray sombrero with an enormous brim.

For a moment he stood beside the car, hat in hand, squinting at the Ranger station out of puffy little eyes. It was a neat clapboard building, painted gray, as simple in architecture as Army barracks. But he surveyed it as if it were a spavined horse somebody had urged him to buy. Behind it there was a barn; beyond that ran the fence of a small corral; and as final background, several miles away, rolled the towering blue heights of the Sangre de Cristos.

The man's glance went to the top of a fifty-foot pole. Up there the flag, flapping against sunny blue skies, looked mighty pretty this morning, and he grunted again with a kind of grudging appreciation as he walked up the grassy rise to the door. Tangled gray hair lay thick on his head, and heavy puffs showed under his eyes.

He pushed open the door, stepping into a small office that had two desks facing each other. On the wall above them hung a map of the Ranger district—some two hundred thousand acres of the country that lay around Twin Rivers.

Young Mike Leslie, the assistant Ranger, sat at one of the desks, filling out a report. Straw-colored hair dangled over his forehead. Though he was twenty-five, Mike had the face of a boy of eighteen – snub-nosed, blue-eyed, with the disarming stare of a child. He looked up in surprise.

"Why, howdy, Cy."

"Howdy." The old man's voice seemed to rattle over gravel. "Heard we got ourselves a new Ranger."

"That's right. Rode in last night."

"Ed Valentine told me. Figured I'd drop by an' get acquainted—if he's around."

Mike Leslie got up—small, spry, quick. "Have a seat, Cy. I'll get him."

He hurried up the stairs to a bedroom where Jud Morgan, with empty saddlebags strewn around him, had just hung his belongings on hooks. Mike shut the door, then spoke in a low voice.

"It's started, Jud. Cy Baldrick's here."

IN A TWO-HOUR TALK after breakfast, Mike had told Jud Morgan almost everything he knew about local problems. And he had talked a good deal about Cy Baldrick, president of the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association. So Jud's brows rose as he took a stubby briar pipe from his mouth.

"Sure didn't lose any time," he said.

"When you talk to him – well, he's the one *hombre* you've got to handle with gloves. If he's against you, you're licked. Carries more influence in Twin Rivers than anybody else."

Jud put the pipe back between his teeth and reached for the door.

"Wait!" Mike sounded uneasy. "Couple things you better remember. Baldrick's the son-of-a-gun who fought so hard to get Marty Sharrock transferred out of here. Kept sending wires about Marty's incompetence to the Regional Forester, and to Washington, and even to the Senators and Congressmen from New Mexico, asking them to put on the pressure. He'll probably fight you the same way if you don't knuckle under to him."

"Knuckle under – how?"

"Consult him, take his advice, ask him to ride with you on inspection trips –"

"In other words, invite him to run my office?"

"Just about."

Jud nodded. "Thanks for the warning." He opened the door. "Let's go."

In their long discussion of local problems Jud had found his assistant Ranger earnest, well-informed, eager to do a good job; and he was prepared now to accept Mike's estimate of Cy Baldrick.

Yet the gravel-voiced rancher turned out to be neither hostile nor overbearing in this first encounter. On the other hand, he gave no indication of friendship, either. Baldrick seemed to have had but one purpose in coming – to make a dispassionate appraisal of the new Ranger. Time after time, while they talked, his puffy eyes traveled over Jud's lean figure. He remained as poker-faced as a judge reserving decision.

For the most part his conversation concerned the local range, both inside and outside the National Forest; and he asked Jud questions about his experience with cows. Whether or not the answers satisfied him, he didn't say. He stayed half an hour, and when he finally rose to go, slapping his sombrero against his leg, he said:

"Like to have you come to the stockmen's meetin' Wednesday night. Say a few words to the boys."

"Glad to."

"You know how folks feel about a new Ranger – want to find out everything about him Where's he from? What're his ideas?"

"Sure," Jud said. "I understand."

"Can't promise you a friendly audience, though. Reckon you know how our people feel about the Forest Service."

"I've heard."

"All the same, they'll give you a fair hearin'. Only, for gosh sakes —" Baldrick suddenly scowled. "Don't come around with colored movies to show us what happens to rangeland when it's over-stocked! Damn it, we've had a bellyful o' pictures! Lectures, too. All we want to know is who the hell are *you*, an' by what right, outside that green shirt, d'you set yourself up to decide our range problems."

Jud grinned.

"Our reg'lar meetin'-house burned down last winter," Baldrick added. "We meet at the movie theater in town. Wednesday night, eight o'clock."

"I'll be there."

When the grizzled rancher had left, Jud sat down at his desk, relit the pipe and smiled at Mike Leslie. "Crotchety old buzzard," he said. "But I guess you always know where he stands. Sounds two-fisted and outspoken."

"Trouble is," Mike said gloomily, "he always stands against us."

"Who's *for* us around here? Anybody?"

Mike shrugged. "Lots of small cattle-men—those who'd have no grass at all without their Federal permits to protect 'em. And the dude ranchers who count on us to preserve their rights to recreation in the forests. They add up to quite a few but they don't stack up against the big operators."

The telephone rang. Mike took it – a routine report from a fire-lookout station. Meanwhile Jud puffed at his pipe and gazed out of the window, and his mind wandered over the mountains as far as his eyes He waited until the telephone conversation ended.

"Mike," he said, "did you see Marty Sharrock when he rode away?"

"Sure Helped him pack."

"And he was carrying a rifle —"

"Yeah. Winchester .22. Don't ask me why."

"How'd he get along with Ed Valentine?"

That made Mike Leslie shake his head. He had already heard about Jud's mountain meeting with the rancher. "Not too hot," he said. "Valentine's got a hell of a temper. At stockmen's meetings he wouldn't hesitate to yell his head off at Marty. They clashed plenty.... And by the way," he added with a wry grin. "just to show you how we Rangers rate around here – the Sharrocks and I were about the only ones in all of Twin Rivers who didn't get invites to Valentine's wedding."

Jud turned startled eyes from the window "Wedding? *When's* the wedding?"

"It was supposed to happen three weeks ago. Only, the bride postponed it to September."

"How come?"

"Search me. I'm a guy Laura Griscom doesn't open up to with her secrets."

Jud carefully tamped the tobacco down in his bowl. Laura, he was thinking, probably didn't open up with secrets to anybody. He got up, walked the length of the office while smoke streamed over his shoulder. For a time he looked out of the window; then he came back. There was much he ought to do – paper work, read reports, meet people, come to grips with his job. But it would keep.

"Mike," he said, "could I borrow one of your horses? Mine need rest."

"Why not take the car? Kind of a weatherbeaten jalopy, but she'll travel."

"I want to mosey up into the hills. Look for that rifle."

Though Mike Leslie gave him an odd glance, he nodded and went out. From a window Jud watched his quick, light figure go up a grassy slope to a pasture where the horses grazed. There were five ponies somewhere up there now – Jud's three, and two that belonged to Mike.

An Indian woman came into the office. Jud turned to watch her. She emptied the waste-paper baskets into a bag. Mike had arranged with Rosie Dawn to walk in from her pueblo every morning – a matter of three miles – to keep house at the station. She was big and stolid and powerful, probably in her fifties Her heavy wide skirts looked as if they encompassed a dozen petticoats. Rosie Dawn came to work as she'd have come to a fiesta, in her most colorful clothes, wearing half a dozen silver bracelets on each arm, a collection of huge rings, a broad silver belt, and two turquoise Zuñi pendants hung on silver necklaces. Though Mike insisted she could talk, so far, Jud hadn't heard her utter a sound. Wherever she moved, however, she tinkled. You could follow her progress around the house by listening to the clatter of her jewels.

"Rosie," Jud said, "could you fix me some noon grub to take along? Anything at all."

She nodded, and went out with the refuse bag under her arm.

Jud turned to the wall map. With an exploring finger he located the site of the old lookout station, the great semicircular cliff on which it stood, the spot near which Ed Valentine had let the rifle slip. . . . He studied the country, seeking the best way to reach it from the red circle which indicated the Ranger station.

Outside he heard a car stop, but he continued to look at the map. Then the door opened and a girl's voice said: " 'Morning."

Jud turned with a start. For a second Laura Griscom's smile dazzled him.

"Came for my saddle," she said.

He stared. It was hard to believe this was the girl he'd found drenched by rain, spattered with mud. She wore a white blouse and a short, crisp blue skirt. Her hair, dry and fluffed now, was definitely blonde—a wonderful ash blonde. He could see all of it because her sombrero, caught around her neck with a thin strap, hung on her back.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said.

"Why?"

"Do you always look so fresh and pretty after a storm?"

Laura gave him an amused look. "You know, Jud," she said, "if it depended on talk, you'd make out right well in Twin Rivers.... How about my saddle?"

"Come along," he said.

AS THEY WALKED to the barn, Laura told him: "You'll have to wait a day or two for your clothes. I'm having them washed."

"Didn't have to bother."

"I always wash clothes I borrow from strange Rangers"

He got her saddle and carried it to the convertible in which she'd come. When he'd thrown it in, he saw that she was looking toward the corral, where Mike Leslie now saddled a bony black gelding with rangy legs. At the same time Rosie Dawn came out of the house with a small canvas bag; she waved to Jud to indicate it was his grub.

"Thanks, Rosie," he said "Put it down."

Laura gave him a curious glance. "Riding again?"

"Yep."

"I – kind of thought you might."

"That so?"

"Even thought of riding along with you. . . . I know just about where it went over the cliff."

Jud looked into her eyes. They were hazel, he saw. In daylight they were clear and calm and self-assured. Something queer stirred in him. Apart from the fact that she might help locate the rifle, the idea of spending a few hours alone with Laura Griscom had a fascination he couldn't escape.

"How soon can you be ready?" he asked.

"Give me an hour." From under her hand she peered up the long rise toward the Sangre de Cristos, then pointed

to a spot a couple of miles away. "See the red bluff? Meet you in front of it. From there we can follow a trail."

"But why should *you* want to go?"

She thought that over before answering. Then she said slowly: "Marty Sharrock's disappearing has given the whole Stockmen's Association a bad name. Lots of folks know we were trying to get rid of him – but we tried legal ways only, like having him transferred.... All the same, it looks bad for us. As a member of the Association, I'd sort of like to–get to the bottom of it."

"No other reason?"

She frowned. "What other reason could there be?"

"I'm just wondering."

"You wonder too much!"

She stepped into the car, slammed the door, and Jud watched her drive away. Over the back of the open seat he could see the blonde hair flying in the sunshine. He kept his eyes on it until Mike Leslie came down the slope with the saddled black horse.

"Fraternizing with the enemy?" Mike said, grinning.

"Just reconnoitering for information."

Mike chuckled and patted the black's neck. "Meet Methuselah," he said. "He'll jar your spine a bit, but he'll get you around mighty fast."

When he'd picked up his bag of food and tied it to the back of the saddle, Jud mounted. "I'd like to say hello to Mrs. Sharrock before I go," he said. "Where'll I find her?"

Mike pointed along the road, in the direction of the mountains. "A mile up that way there's a fork; take the right turn about half a mile farther. You'll hit a dude ranch – the C Bar C, run by Mrs. Ruth Crain. That's where she's living, with her kid." Mike looked concerned. "I tried to get her to stay on here. When she heard you'd got Marty's job, though, she insisted on clearing out, to leave the place to you. Of course, she won't go away from Twin Rivers – not till she knows about Marty."

Jud felt uncomfortable. "Hate to think I drove her out –"

"That's the way she wants it.' Then Mike brightened. "Say, you'll get a kick out of Ruth Crain. For my money, he's the best looker in seven States. Brains, too. And on *our* side."

Jud said grimly, "About time I met somebody on our side. How does her husband stand?"

"She – has no husband. Killed in Italy. First bunch to hit the beachhead at Anzio."

"Oh?"

"Clyde W. Crain–used to write books about the West. Pretty near all he left her was the ranch. It's empty now; but come summer, she draws quite a crowd of dudes."

Jud picked up the reins. "Well thanks, Mike. See you about sundown."

He rode fifty yards along the road, and then Mike called after him: "Get Ruth Crain to come to the meeting Wednesday night! That gal can be counted on to get up and speak her mind!"

Chapter Four

NEAR THE CORRAL OF THE DUDE RANCH, A BOY of six was making desperate efforts to lasso a kitten. He chased her furiously. As if enjoying the game, the kitten darted from the corral fence to the base of a cottonwood tree, waiting there, back hunched, for the boy to try another throw.

But the youngster stopped when Jud dismounted. He came forward curiously, the miniature lariat trailing him.

Jud pushed back his hat. There was no mistaking that shock of wild red hair above the freckled face. "I'll bet," he said, "your name is Johnny Sharrock."

The boy looked puzzled. "That's right. And what's yours?"

"Jud Morgan."

Brown eyes went wide in amazement. "Jud Morgan? You? Gee!"

"What's the matter?"

"My daddy told me about you–my mummy too! You fly airplanes over the Japs!"

Jud grinned. "Well, I did once or twice," he admitted, "but that was a long time ago." He sent a solemn look at the kitten. "Pretty wild critter you're trying to rope there."

"I – I make out like it's a buffalo."

"Looks more like a wildcat to me. Takes a lot of guts to lasso wildcats."

"Gee! Does it?"

"Yep. Your mother around, Johnny?"

"Sure–I'll get her!"

Johnny ran off with all the speed he could manage. The porch door banged behind him.

A moment later, when Jud turned from tossing the reins over a corral post, the boy came out with his mother. As he took off his hat, Jud had a sense of dismay. Ann Sharrock looked worn and anxious – a tall, dark-haired woman who seemed much older than her thirty-two years. The past month must have done that to her.

"Jud!" She came toward him quickly. She held out both hands, and as he took them, her voice caught. She couldn't talk. She turned her head, and he knew she was fighting tears. He waited, trying to press reassurance into her fingers. When at last she lifted her face again, she bit her lip and did her best to smile. "Sorry, Jud. I – I didn't mean to let go like that. It's just –"

"I understand."

To his surprise, she kissed him. It was an impulsive kiss, meant for an old friend. Then she took his arm and led him into the house.

He found himself in a high, raftered room that made him stare. This, obviously, was the lounge for ranch guests. A wagon-wheel, suspended from the ceiling, served as a chandelier, with half a dozen lights. The walls were lined with book-filled shelves, and a few Navajo rugs lent color to the floor. In a corner there was a piano with a bowl of spring wildflowers on it. The chairs were rustic, yet deep and comfortable. This, he decided, was the kind of home a wise man would build for himself–with a wise woman to share it.

He had a pretty solemn talk with Ann Sharrock. Though he hadn't wanted to speak too much about Marty, there was no avoiding it. Ann could think of nothing else. She was completely baffled by her husband's disappearance – and scared.

Finally he said: "Look, Ann. The Ranger station is your home. I wish you'd stay there."

"Oh, no. There's no room."

"Mike and I could double up."

"I wouldn't hear of it. It's your job now, and your house. But I – I'd be glad to come over any time and help out. I used to do all Marty's typewriting, you know. And I'd take all fire-lookout reports, too. I'd like to go on doing it for you, Jud, if you'll let me."

"Why, sure –"

"I *need* something to do." She sounded a little desperate. "After you've tried everything, hunted everywhere – when there's nothing left but waiting – waiting day in and day out –"

"You come over and get to work tomorrow," Jud said.

The porch door opened, and a girl with chestnut-colored hair came into the room. A deerskin jacket hung open over her blouse; a broad belt of silver-inlaid cowhide topped off her skirt. She tossed her hat and a pair of gauntlets to a chair, and sent a hand through her hair.

Jud, getting up, heard Ann introduce him to Ruth Crain. He was thinking, in wonder that Mike Leslie

hadn't exaggerated at all. This woman, though not very tall, was a looker, all right. She had lively, gracious beauty, and her handclasp was as warm as her smile.

"Ann's told me a lot about you," she said.

"Mike Leslie's told me quite a few nice things about you, too," Jud answered. "Too bad you couldn't hear him."

Ruth Crain laughed. "Oh, I bribe Mike with Sunday dinners... You tell him if he wants any more, he'll have to bring you along. You men *need* home-cooked meals now and then. And if you plan to be my friend, Jud Morgan, you'll come often. Sunday dinner's at one. Weekdays, it's at six."

HER BROWN EYES were warm, sparkling. Her whole attitude, in fact, was so cordial and easy and winning that Jud surrendered at once. He liked Ruth Crain. She made you feel like settling back in one of her easy-chairs, stretching out your legs, telling yourself this was home. He judged her to be in her mid-twenties. That meant she'd been pretty young when her husband died at Anzio; pretty young to undertake the running of a dude ranch on her own, anyhow. Even while they talked, Jud knew he was going to enjoy coming here.

Presently Ruth Crain started for a far door. But he stopped her by mentioning the invitation he'd got from Cy Baldrick to attend the Wednesday meeting.

"Hope *you'll* be there," he said.

A faint frown came to her face. "Well... I was planning to stay away from stockmen's meetings for a while. They make me see red. I—I get into too many fights."

Jud was silent while she rubbed an uncertain hand over the top of a chair.

She said: "My husband wrote half a dozen books to plead for the future of the West – for conservation, for sensible use of what we have here. In a way those books are my Bible. I know what he lived for, what he believed in, and I try to fight for those things because I believe in them too. That's why it makes me furious when some of our people – especially some of our women, whom men are too gallant to answer – get up and cry out against the Forest Service and intelligent management. Last meeting I came so close to a hair-pulling match that it made me ashamed."

Ann Sharrock said gently: "It wasn't your fault, Ruth. It was the way Laura Griscom spoke."

"Maybe. I keep telling myself that people like Laura Griscom believe in their ideas just as honestly as I believe in mine – and no doubt she does. But I get angry, just the same. Still,"—Ruth suddenly smiled at Jud—"since this is your welcome, I'll come. And I'll try to behave – even with Laura Griscom."

She left them then. Jud roused himself. It was time to start. There was, however, one thing more he had to learn from Ann Sharrock. Yet he didn't want to terrify her with the query, or build futile hopes with an explanation of what had happened. He thought a moment.

"Look, Ann, before I go... Marty had a Winchester .22. It's the only thing I never saw described in the notices. Guess they just took it for granted that a rifle is a rifle. But would there be any special way of identifying Marty's gun?"

"Oh, yes," she said quickly. "The Marshal asked me that, too, and I told him. Marty bought it in Wyoming from a man named Sanders. And Sanders had scratched his initials in the stock. Marty rubbed and polished for all he was worth, and you could hardly make out the initials at all when he finished. But if you knew just where to look in good light, you could still see them—*B.S.*"

"Thanks," Jud said. He ran a hand through the rumpled red hair of Johnny Sharrock, who'd come to stand beside him. "Well, I've got to get on."

At the corral fence, where he went for his horse, he found Ruth Crain unsaddling her pony. She hung the saddle over a post, then turned to face him, leaning back against the fence with her elbows propped on a bar. Her eyes appraised his lank figure, and she smiled.

"Quite a job they handed you," she said.

"It should keep me busy," he agreed.

She became grave. "I'd say it's one of the biggest jobs in the Forest Service. I guess you know our Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association was among the first to petition Congress to put the Service out of business."

He nodded.

"And they've made more noise about it than any other association in the Southwest," she said. "As a result, other associations have been turning to Twin Rivers for leadership. They've copied that first petition almost word for word. What Twin Rivers does, the others back."

"I've noticed."

"So if, by the grace of heaven or magic or what-have-you, a man could figure out some way to swing the Twin Rivers crowd over to *our* side – to the Government's side – why, he'd be knocking the keystone right out of the whole arch, you might say. If Twin Rivers were to change its mind, a lot of others would weaken too. They might even trail along with Twin Rivers."

Jud smiled. "You sure do make it sound like a man-size responsibility. Kind of scares me to hear it put that way." Yet he liked her straightforward thinking, and he knew she was seeing his problem clearly. He swung into the saddle. "Got any ideas how a man might go about doing the job?"

"No-o." Her glance went over him again in that appraising way; then her brown eyes rose to meet his. She said quietly: "But I've got a hunch *you* have."

WHEN JUD REACHED the foot of the red bluff half an hour later, Laura was waiting on an impatient pinto. She had changed back to jeans and a red shirt, and her hat dangled on her back, so that the bright hair shone in the sun. He noticed a bag on the saddle; she must have brought food too.

As they rode up through the foothills, he wondered why being close to this girl tautened his nerves. Again and again he looked over her figure; and when she turned her head he studied the firm face with its high cheekbones and wide-set hazel eyes. Yes, it was a beautiful face, an independent sort of face, and there was a shine about it that quickened everything in him. With Laura, he realized, it was as if he were constantly facing a challenge.

While they rode, she kept their talk impersonal. She pointed out things which she seemed to feel he ought to see – stretches of rich blue gramma, small bunches of cows grazing here and there. On his own account Jud considered other things: the quality of the soil the horses trod, stands of piñon on the hills, scattered clumps of cottonwoods, aspen and willows. He looked around in silence, like a man making computations.

But always his thoughts came back to the girl slightly ahead of him. It was ridiculous, he knew, to let himself be stirred like this. In range matters she represented every idea to which he was opposed. She belonged to an alien tribe – the direct opposite to someone like Ruth Crain, for example, with whom he could feel at ease.... And yet there was something compelling about Laura that made him want to wrench their differences out of his mind.

By one o'clock they were riding along the base of the cliff. In daylight its face was shot through with streaks of red and chrome-yellow; and far ahead, where it rose in a copper-colored wall to a height of twelve hundred feet, he could see, on its rim, the tiny black speck which must be the lookout. They rode a few miles; and suddenly Jud leaned forward, squinting.

"Is that smoke?"

Laura had to search before she spied it—a faint gray spiral. It was half a mile away, rising out of a hollow.

They prodded the horses into a brisk run. A few minutes later they saw it in the bottom of the saucer – the embers of a small campfire, with no one around.

"Looks as if your people still need plenty of education," Jud said harshly. "Leaving fires like that in a country covered with brush!"

"Must be dudes," Laura said

Whatever the explanation might be, Jud felt a Ranger's anger when he dismounted. He went close to the embers, intending to scatter them and stamp them out. But as soon as he thrust his boot into the ashes, he kicked something hard, metallic. In surprise he gave it a harder kick—and there was the barrel of a rifle.... The stock was burned away.

Chapter Five

WITH ANOTHER KICK JUD MORGAN SENT THE rifle-barrel flying five feet from the fire. A few pieces of glowing ash still clung where the stock had been. The metal was too hot to touch.

Laura sat in the saddle. She hadn't spoken; but Jud, squinting up against the sun, was aware of the shock in her face.

He said with more harshness than he intended: "Looks as if maybe your friend Valentine got here ahead of us."

"No!" She swung quickly down to the ground. "It – it couldn't have been Ed!"

"Nobody else knew where to go hunt for the rifle."

"But Ed.... No! He came to our place this morning. He was right there, talking to my brother Joe, when I left!"

"Did you tell him where you were heading?"

"Of course not!"

Her defense of Ed Valentine was a natural thing, yet it irritated Jud. He said: "All the same, riding hard, he could have left after you, and got here before us."

"We'd have seen him! It's wide open country."

Her attitude seemed to rule out argument, and it added to his resentment. Turning away, he scattered the embers with deliberate movements of his boot. He stamped them out. When he finished, he walked away, glancing over the ground.

A few yards from the fire the tracks of a horse were clear. The horse had been staked long enough to churn up the soil in one spot, and then it had gone toward the cliff. The marks led down among boulders in a deep gully.

Jud followed them for a couple of hundred yards. They went in the general direction of Twin Rivers. One thing caught his interest. Whereas three of the prints were always sharp and clear, the fourth tended to be smudged. It was as if the horse had dragged its right foreleg a little, scuffing the ground an inch or two before lifting its hoof....

When he came back to the girl, she seemed too absorbed in thought to notice him. He put a hand on her arm.

He said: "Look, Laura. I'm sorry if I seemed to accuse Ed. It's just that this business of Marty Sharrock – well, it's got me down."

She lowered her head. Jud found himself looking into her blonde hair, so close to it that the breeze blew a few strands against his face; and he had again that impulse to pull her closer, to forget Ed Valentine and rifles and limping horses....

Laura looked up into his eyes. "I know," she said. "I can't – blame you much."

That was all. He went to squat beside the rifle. Yet he felt better. He was no longer resentful. That instant of intimacy, of understanding, was tonic. He could even speak now of the rifle he had found, without letting his voice sound tight.

"That's one he put over on us," Jud muttered. "Maybe

"When it's cool enough to be handled," he said, "we'll take it to the Marshal." He gave her a glance. "Did you notice any marks on the stock when you found it yesterday?"

"No-o. I didn't look. It was raining too hard."

She too sounded more at ease, and that was good. He asked: "Think you can find the place you picked it up?"

"I – don't know. There are a lot of arroyos up there. It's wild country."

"You could come pretty close to it?"

"I suppose so."

He pressed her no further. He just squatted and watched the rifle as it cooled.

After a time it occurred to him that since they had to wait, they might as well eat. He went to untie his food-bag from the saddle. He was busy with it when she cried out.

He followed the direction of her hand.

Several miles away, topping a ridge, he saw a rider. All he could make out was a dark speck and a trail of dust. The figure was galloping hell-bent for town. It crossed the ridge and disappeared.

Jud grasped the saddle-horn and started to lift a foot.

"No use," Laura said. "He's too far."

She was right, he saw. At the speed the rider was making, he couldn't be overtaken. Jud let go of the saddle. Shading his eyes, he watched the distant ridge till the dust settled.

"That's one he put over on us," he muttered. "Know *anybody* besides Ed Valentine who might be looking for this rifle?"

She flung back: "Who said Ed might?"

"I'm just asking."

"I wouldn't know."

we can pick up that hombre's *tracks—see where they lead."*

"Well." Jud studied the distant ridge, seeking landmarks. "Maybe we can pick up that *hombre's* tracks on the way home, see where they lead."

They ate in silence, seated cross-legged in the sun. For company they had a hawk overhead, its shadow drawing circles around them. Jud found it hard to take his eyes off the girl. Even in that old red shirt and faded blue jeans, she was something to see. She had a really fine body, strong and tall; and he began to notice details like the length and slimness of her hands, the white gleam of her teeth, the way her blonde hair stirred when there was a breeze.

He was giving her too much attention. It made him uncomfortable. He drew his eyes off to other things.

While he munched Rosie Dawn's food, he dug a heel into the hard-caked gray soil. It reminded him of the Mojave Desert, or of the Dakota Badlands. Under an inch of crust there was dust – it looked like sawdust. Few things would grow here. Cactus, maybe, or a bit of mesquite. Whether this was part of the National Forest he was to administer, he didn't know. He'd have to study the map more carefully. But in or out of the Forest, this region was waste land. Where its soil wasn't dying, it seemed already dead. Yet grass had grown here; he looked around at scattered clumps of brush and an occasional shoot of snakeweed.

Laura seemed to follow his thoughts. She said: "You won't find anything so bad in your Ranger district. Sheep did this – years ago. The land below, *our* land, is good."

"Then it's got to be *kept* good," he said. "This kind of soil" – he jabbed it again with his heel – "makes a man feel sick."

She was quiet.

"It's like finding the carcass of something that could've been kept alive."

"Trouble with you Rangers," Laura said, "is you think you're the *only* ones fit to keep the land alive. You seem to think cattle-men can't be trusted to take care of it."

"Some can; some can't."

"Look!" she argued. "Grass is all we've got to count on. Our *living* depends on it. Why wouldn't we look after it if it was in our hands? You think a stockman needs a Ranger to tell him how important grass is?"

"No," Jud said. "But where there's just enough grass to feed, say, a thousand cows, somebody's got to see it that a few strong guys with money and plenty of hired hands don't grab it all off for their own cattle, freezing out the little fellows. Somebody's got to see to it that *everybody* in the community gets a fair chance at that grass. And if there's just enough for a thousand cows, somebody's got to make sure a few overambitious guys don't drive *three* thousand head onto it, thereby raising stringy, half-starved, worthless beef for everybody concerned."

"And why would any intelligent cattle-men do such things – cut their own throats the way you say?"

"You tell *me*. Probably the sheep-men who ruined *this* basin figured they were intelligent too."

"Maybe. But – "

"Intelligent stockmen have done it again and again," Jud said. "That's why Congress had to pass regulations to stop it. That's one reason there's a Forest Service."

He got up and went to test the rifle-barrel. It was cool enough to handle now. He picked it up, and the last bits of ash fell away from the metal.

"Let's get going," he said.

ON THE WAY HOME Morgan had no trouble finding the tracks of the man who had galloped away. He began where the marks came out of the gully at the foot of the cliff. From there he could follow them toward the distant ridge. They twisted in a zigzag way, always keeping to lowlands.

As his rangy black horse loped beside Laura's pinto, he knew what must have happened. Maybe the rider had intended to put out the fire and bury the barrel instead of leaving it to be found; but when he had seen two horses coming – at a time when he couldn't yet touch the hot rifle – he had probably covered it up with ashes as best he could, and then he'd hurried away through the gully. If signs meant anything at all, they showed he had done his best to keep out of sight for a few miles, in hollows and arroyos, until finally, at a safe distance, he'd ridden wildly for Twin Rivers.

But such theories didn't help identify him.

Jud looked at the girl. She rode easily, her back straight, her eyes on the tracks. He had a growing and insistent curiosity about her. It came to a head when they lost the tracks on a stretch of gravel.

To his surprise, Laura picked them up again before he himself could see anything at all. She pointed out the way, and within a few minutes he found the marks clear along the rim of a bluff.

"You're as good as an Indian," he said.

"I *am* an Indian."

He stared at her. "You're *what?*"

Laura smiled. "A Navajo. The Navajos made me a member of the tribe last year."

"How's that?"

"I helped them a little during the war." Seeing his wide-eyed look, she explained: "The Navajos ran into plenty of war trouble. A lot of their men have several wives – and children with all of them. But when the braves went into the Army, the Government recognized only the *first* wives. The rest were illegal, and their kids didn't count. So a Navajo soldier could send home allotments to cover only the children of his Number One wife. That left a lot of Number Two squaws and their young

sters without money, without men, without anything. They had a rough time."

"What did *you* do about it?"

"Ran a sort of canteen in an old barn near Twin Rivers – a combination school and eating-place for Indian kids. Plenty of people helped out. I collected funds and food from 'most everybody around town. Got quite a few women to help, too. It worked out pretty well till the fathers came back... So one night last year they had a big powwow, built a fire, and made me a Navajo."

Jud's eyes were lively. "Keep going."

"That's the whole story."

"I don't mean about the Navajos. I mean about yourself."

She gave him a curious, half-amused look. "Why?"

"I'm sort of trying to put you together in my mind. Been trying to figure you out since we met."

The smile came again. "Makes me sound like a jigsaw puzzle.... What piece you want to start with?"

"Let's say the time you were born."

"Right here in Twin Rivers, on the Diamond G. Twenty-three years ago Next piece?"

"Pick up the one when you had freckles and pigtails."

"That would be a year or two after my mother died.... Well, Pa reared me just about the same way he did my brother Joe. Figured I ought to know a bit about everything. When I wasn't at school, I fed chickens, rode herd, helped brand calves, put out salt on the hills – even learned to break broncos One day I was trying to break a particularly ornery cayuse, and the crazy horse bucked me plumb over the corral fence just as the parson's wife drove by. She came running in to Pa and told him he ought to be ashamed. Letting a girl carry on like that, all flying legs and arms, especially with a lot of cowhands standing around and laughing their fool heads off. By the time Pa got out, I was in the midst of a terrific kicking fight with one of the hands, because I hadn't liked the way he laughed."

LAURA LOOKED OFF toward the mountains, smiling. "I guess Pa got scared. Maybe it seemed I was turning out to be more man than woman. I even looked like a boy – tall and skinny. Anyhow, he packed me off to a girls' school in Santa Fe, with orders that they turn me into a lady. After a while I began to learn a little about behaving the way a young lady should, so I guess Pa felt better. Summer vacations, though, I'd come right home, get into a pair of old levis, and do a man's job again."

She became grave.

"Finally I had a year at Southern Cal. And then Pa died. That was three years ago, in the midst of the war. He left the Diamond G to Joe and me, but Joe was in the Pacific. So I quit Cal and came home to run the place. Ran it alone for quite a spell—till Joe came back. Now, of course, we run it together. Joe's married, by the way. He's got a nice wife and two youngsters."

"Sure sounds as if you had twenty-three mighty crowded years." Jud squinted at the sun. "When do we get to the part about Ed Valentine?"

"Well – you already know that."

"Not much."

"The Valentine spread runs next to ours. I've known Ed all my life."

"Meaning you made up your mind to become Mrs. Valentine when you were about four?"

"No-o. It wasn't till this past winter – when I got back from Washington." Her tone changed. "Stockmen's Association sent me to Washington as a sort of delegate – to talk to Congressmen and Senators, about getting the Forest Service off our necks."

"Uh-huh," Jud said dryly. "Mike Leslie told me about that." Mike had also told him that, after her trip to Washington, Marty Sharrock had spent weeks in writing long letters. He'd had to answer Congressional demands for explanations to various charges Laura had made. "Of course," Mike had said, "once the Congressmen knew the facts, they were satisfied and dropped the thing. But for a while Marty had plenty of headaches. He was pretty sore at Laura Griscom."

BECAUSE JUD DIDN'T want to resume the Forest Service argument, he asked nothing else. Laura hadn't mentioned the recent postponement of her wedding, but he let it go. It wasn't his business. Now that he knew a few things about the girl, he felt better. She seemed warmer, more understandable. And yet, he realized, she had told him only superficial facts about herself – the kind of facts he might have learned from other people. Nothing she'd said had any connection with her actions in the mountains yesterday. And if he pressed her about those, he guessed, she'd drag out the old story about hunting cattle-thieves....

He kept his eyes on the tracks they were following; they led now across a rolling, gray-green region of sagebrush. An hour later, however, where the hoof-marks joined scores of others on a dirt road leading to Twin Rivers, they became hopelessly confused: Looking for them was like trying to find the spoor of one sheep where hundreds had trampled.

Laura said: "Kind of expected it might wind up like this."

Half a mile farther, the road forked, and Laura stopped her pinto. She nodded toward the right fork. "I go this way."

"How about coming to the Marshal with me?"

Her eyes fell to the rifle-barrel he held. "*You* can tell him just about everything we know."

"Most likely he'll want to talk to you too."

"He knows where to find me."

Suddenly her manner changed. She held out her hand and gave him a smile that was bright and friendly.

"Nice riding with you, Jud," she said. "Times I can almost forget you're a Ranger."

A slow grin came to his face. "Times I can almost forget you're a headache to the Forest Service."

She laughed, and he watched her ride away. From the rim of a little slope she waved to him before she disappeared.

He loped on toward the Ranger station; from there he intended to drive the car down to the Marshal in town. On both sides of the dirt road cattle grazed, and Jud's eyes roamed over the grass. Blue gramma, much of it. Side-oats and timothy, maybe eight inches high, in good shape. The way it ought to look in May when intelligently managed. That was the mark of Marty Sharrock, of all the Rangers before him.

At last, rounding a bend, Jud came in sight of the Ranger station; and what he saw made him draw rein and stare.

Cows – some two hundred milling Herefords – were herded in front of the building. Five mounted men kept them bunched. They covered the grass around the station, the road in front of it, the space between the house and the barn; and they stirred up a great cloud of dust. Out of the middle of the mass the flagpole rose, the flag hanging listless in the afternoon heat.

Bewildered, Jud kicked the black's ribs. He went on quickly, and his ears were full of the cattle's bawling. He had to ride around them to get the horse to the corral. When he dismounted, he looked at the brands of the nearest cows. The marks resembled an anchor.

He called to one of the riders: "Hey, what's up?"

"Tryin' to find out where in hell to *run* these critters!" the man answered. "Far as I'm concerned, just as soon leave 'em right here!"

"Whose are they?"

"Been bought by Ed Valentine!"

"Valentine? What in – "

"No sense askin' *me* Mister Valentine's inside there. Go talk to him."

Jud looked at the remnant of the rifle in his hand. He went to the barn and put the thing into the back of the car. This was something he didn't want to discuss with Valentine now. As he walked to the station, he had to pick his way around the cows. Their dust choked him, and their bawling deafened him. When he approached the door, he could hear angry voices above the din: Ed Valentine's and Mike Leslie's.

He went in to find Mike, flushed, eyes very bright, facing not only Valentine but another man – a lanky, dust-covered figure with a week's growth of graying beard. Mike seemed very much relieved to see Jud Morgan step into the office.

He cried above the noise of the cows: "Valentine, here, wants a permit to run two hundred additional head onto Forest range!"

"All I'm askin' is a fair break!" Valentine said. His heavy face was as flushed as Mike's, and wet with sweat, streaked with dust. His eyes were almost as angry as they'd been when he had come into the mountain lookout. "Seems like a fair break, though, is just too much to expect o' the Forest Service!"

Throwing his hat aside, Jud pushed back his brown hair. "What's it all about?"

"He went and bought these cows," Mike began. "An'—"

"I can talk for myself!" Valentine shouted. He pointed to the dusty man beside him. "This here is Wade Crosby, from over to Lincoln Forks! Wade's goin' out o' business. Couple months ago I made a deal to buy his stock. Didn't figure they'd get here till June, but Wade didn't understand it that way – "

"Thought he was ready to take delivery any time," Crosby cut in, his voice hoarse.

"Well, I ain't!" Valentine said. "My grass – my own grass – is feeding all the cows it can take right now! You Rangers won't let me use more grass in the forest, so I got to go find private pasture I can rent! And that'll take time. Maybe two-three weeks! All I'm askin' is the right to run these cows onto Forest grass for three weeks! I'll *pay* whatever it's worth. Is that askin' too much o' the Government o' the United States – a chance to feed some cows till I can find a place for 'em? Damn it, I got to put 'em *somewhere!*"

Jud looked out of the window. That mass of cattle had traveled sixty-odd miles from Lincoln Forks, and the cows were gray with the dust of the trip.

He turned back to Valentine. "You asking for a three-weeks' special grazing permit? Is that it?"

"Yes!"

"You got it."

Valentine stared. His mouth opened, then closed again. He drew a hand across his lips. "You mean I –"

"Drive the cows onto forest grass," Jud said. "Come around tomorrow, and I'll have the permit for you."

It came so easily that Valentine didn't seem prepared for the concession. He'd been ready to shout and argue. Now there was no need for that. He looked at Mike Leslie, as though to seek confirmation of what he'd heard; Mike seemed as surprised as the rancher himself.

"Go on," Jud said. "Get 'em out of here."

Chapter Six

WHEN THE CATTLE WERE SEVERAL HUNDRED yards up the slope, on their way to forage, Mike said with bitterness he couldn't hide: "Well, I sure hope you know what you're doing."

"Government's got to be reasonable," Jud answered. He was at the window, loading his pipe and watching Valentine help the other men in the drive.

"The Government, though, has a right to expect ranchers to be reasonable too!" Mike said. "Where does he come off to buy cattle before he knows where he's going to feed 'em?"

"He was wrong. But it wouldn't have helped to say no to a temporary permit. There he was, loaded down with two hundred head. What could he do – pick 'em up by the tails and throw 'em into the sky? If we'd ignored his trouble, we'd have got the Stockmen's Association down on our heads worse than ever."

"Maybe. But –"

Jud said: "I'd bet dollars to peanuts he staged this thing. He's too old a hand at the cattle business to let himself get caught short the way he did."

Mike looked puzzled.

"He probably figured that if he had the cows right here, on our doorstep, with no place to put 'em, it would be like throwing them into our lap. Give us plenty of embarrassment, and put public sympathy on his side. Nobody wants to see cows starve. Also, he'd set a precedent for extra permits, if he won his point."

"Well, he did win, and you know what's going to happen now?" Mike said. "Trouble! *Plenty* trouble! When other folks see Valentine drive those cows onto Forest range, *they'll* come around demanding extra permits."

Jud smiled. "I'm counting on that."

"Huh?"

"We'll have to turn them down, of course. They may be sore, but they'll be sore at Valentine too. Folks always turn against people who kind of steal a march, the smart-alecks who get themselves extra benefits. Things like that, Mike, can start a rift even in a Stockmen's Association."

Mike Leslie blinked. Then he sat on his desk and thoughtfully plucked at his lower lip. "Say," he said, after a long silence, "maybe you got something there."

HALF AN HOUR LATER, having told Mike about the burned rifle, Jud washed up, backed the old Chevvy out of the barn, and drove to town to see the Marshal.

In the late sunshine Twin Rivers looked as drab as most cow towns he had known. He crossed the rattling wooden bridge where two creeks met, then drove up the main street. This was his first daylight view of the town. He looked around with interest. There were the usual saloons, the post office, the Cattlemen's Bank. There was a big general store called the Trading Post, its windows filled with Indian blankets, moccasins and jewelry. He noticed quite a few Indians on the street. They seemed to gather near the State movie theater – "Open Fridays and Saturdays" – where he was to have his first official encounter with the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association.

Next door to Willebrant's Drug Store he saw the Marshal's office, and he parked the car.

Marshal Sam Tudbury was short, thin, tight-lipped – a white-haired man with a small white mustache. His tanned face, however, didn't seem as old as the hair hinted; fifty or so, Jud guessed. He saw that part of the Marshal's left ear was missing, and he recalled something Mike had told him about a gun-fight years ago, up in the mountains.

They shook hands solemnly. Sam Tudbury appeared pleased to meet the new Ranger. When they sat down, he offered a cigar. Jud declined, and the Marshal lit one himself. He had been sending curious glances at the rifle-barrel in Jud's hands. Now as he listened to its story, he lifted his brows.

"Mighty interestin'," he said, examining the barrel. "Yes sir, that's mighty interestin'.... Near Lost Cañon, you say?"

"So Laura Griscom told me."

"That's maybe fifteen-twenty miles out o' Sharrock's district. Wonder what he might've been doin' up there."

"Did posses hunt up that way?"

"Not as I remember. Couldn't figure any reason to ride up into lost country like that." Tudbury put the cigar into a tray. He turned the barrel over and over in his hands. "Reckon I'll drift up there, though, for a look. Want to mosey along?"

"Can't," Jud said. "Got too much on my hands. Got to get this job going."

Tudbury nodded. "Maybe I could get Laura Griscom to come show me where she found it."

"I'm sure you could."

"Good man, Sharrock."

Jud was silent.

"Well," Tudbury said "you leave this thing with me. I'll see where it leads." He leaned back, picked up the cigar and gave Jud a narrow-eyed appraisal through a cloud of smoke. "You figuring to carry on Marty Sharrock's policies?"

"Why not? They're the Service policies."

"The way they're observed, though, sort of depends a lot on the Ranger, don't it? On whether he's lenient or tough, smart or dumb?"

"Same as the peace of a town depends on how lenient or tough, smart or dumb the Marshal is, you might say. Yes, that's true. I figure to do the job the best way I know."

Tudbury smiled. He got up with Jud, and held his hand out across the desk. "Any time *I* can help," he said, "just yell. Seein' we both work for the same boss."

AT EIGHT-THIRTY NEXT MORNING, when Jud stepped out of the house to light an after-breakfast pipe, he saw a car come down the road. It stopped near the station, while a long cloud of dust settled behind it. Ruth Crain was at the wheel. Beside her sat Johnny and Ann Sharrock.

Remembering that Ann was to start work today, Jud went down the little slope to welcome her. "Typewriter's waiting," he said.

Ann smiled as she stepped out of the car. It seemed to him that her face, under the dull dark hair, didn't look quite so worn this morning.

"You don't know how much this means to me, Jud," she said.

"It'll mean a lot more to Mike and me. He's even slower on a typewriter than I am."

He felt Johnny tugging at his levis. He grinned down at the freckled face, rumpled the fiery Sharrock hair. "Hi, there, big feller."

"Can I stay too?" Johnny asked. "Just play around?"

"You bet."

"Daddy used to let me help pull the flag up mornings. Down again nights, too."

"Well, it's a funny thing," Jud said. "Mike and I were just wondering where we'd find a man to help with the flag. From now on, it's your job."

Johnny whooped and ran off to the familiar barn. When Jud glanced at the boy's mother, he saw tears in her eyes; but she was smiling as she hurried up to the door of the house.

Ruth Crain said quietly: "You're all right, Ranger."

He looked at her -- calm beautiful with her wealth of chestnut hair, relaxed at the car's wheel. Instead of speaking, he puffed at his pipe a couple of times. You didn't have to speak much with Ruth Crain, he knew intuitively. Your mind could meet hers in silence.

She peered up the long green slope that led to the mountains. After a while she said: "I drove into town last night. Heard about Ed Valentine's two hundred cows A few men were -- laughing over it."

"That so?"

"Seems Valentine told them he figured the smartest thing to do was take his cows right to the Ranger station. If he didn't get a permit, he'd ride off with his men and leave the cattle right there. Let *you* figure out what to do with them. Well, since you didn't want to be left with two hundred Herefords bawling all over the place, you gave him his permit."

Jud looked at his pipe. "That's one way of putting it."

"I suppose you had – your own reason?"

He nodded.

"Kind of thought so." She waited a moment, giving him a chance to speak. When he didn't, she threw gears into reverse. "Well, I've got to go Dinner Sunday?"

"You bet."

She swung the car around; and at that moment Jud saw a man on a piebald cayuse loping down the road. He was still a hundred yards away – a stocky man with a floppy sombrero.

"Happen to know who that is?" Jud asked.

"Ed Valentine's top hand," Ruth said. "Buck Stevens."

Ruth drove away. Smoking his pipe, Jud watched the rider. Probably coming for the permit. And then he saw something that made him take the pipe from his mouth. Buck Stevens had a cayuse that limped slightly. Nothing much. Nothing you'd worry about. It was just that its right foreleg always seemed to drag a little before it was lifted.

Buck Stevens introduced himself. "Ed Valentine asked me to ride by for that permit," he said.

"Sure," Jud answered. "Come in."

He puffed at his pipe while the cowpuncher led his horse to a corral fence-post. Stevens was short; he had a torso so heavy that the burden of carrying it seemed too much for his stubby legs. They were bowed.

Jud's eyes traveled over the tracks the cayuse left – duplicates of the tracks he had seen near the cliff, the mark of the right foreleg always smudged. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe as Buck Stevens came back.

"Horse gone sort of lame, hasn't he?"

"Naw," Stevens said. "Born that way."

"Queer."

"He's all right. It don't slow him up any."

Jud led Ed Valentine's top hand into the station, where he dictated a three-week special grazing permit to Ann Sharrock. She typed it without comment. Mike Leslie was telephoning a weather report to the office of the District Supervisor. Beyond a casual nod, he gave Buck no attention. The room, taking the scent from the cowpuncher's clothes, seemed slowly to fill with the smell of cattle and sweat.

As Jud sat down to sign the permit, he said: "Got a feeling I saw you yesterday, Stevens."

"Me? Naw."

"Your horse, too. Up in the hills."

BUCK'S FACE WAS IMPASSIVE. "Not me. Never got off our spread yestiddy."

"Funny. I could've sworn —"

"Ain't been up in the hills in weeks."

"Well, I could be wrong." Jud gave him the paper. "Has Valentine started to hunt that grass?"

"He'll be goin' today or tomorrow."

"Might be quite a job. Where can a man rent grass around here, anyhow?"

Buck said bitterly: "No place. He'll have to travel maybe forty-fifty miles."

"Too bad he didn't figure that before he bought the cows."

Buck Stevens folded the paper and put it into a pocket. When he picked up the floppy sombrero he had dropped on a chair, he looked at it, brows drawn.

"Supposin' Ed *don't* find grass right away," he said. "What happens if he's got no place to take his cows in three weeks?"

"Did Ed tell you to ask me that?"

"Naw. I'm talkin' for myself."

"He's liable to be socked with heavy penalties."

"Fines?"

"A fine, and maybe suspension of his regular grazing permit."

"Hell!" Buck said. "Wonder if he knows that."

"No doubt he does. Anyhow, you can tell him."

"I sure will.... Meantime, any restrictions on where we can graze?"

"No. Just stay inside drift fences."

The bowlegged man left. From the door Jud watched him mount, ride up the road; on a horse, he no longer looked short. When he was out of sight, Jud went to sit on a corner of his desk. He picked up the telephone and asked the operator to get him Marshal Tudbury's office.

Ann Sharrock stopped cleaning the typewriter to stare. Mike, who had begun to finger a stack of pink papers, lifted his eyes too.

JUD SAID: "HELLO, MARSHAL.... Morgan."

"Howdy."

"Remember my telling you about those tracks we followed?"

"Sure."

"I've just seen 'em again. Under Buck Stevens' horse."

There was a moment of silence. Mike Leslie let a few papers slip out of his hands. The Marshal repeated in a wondering tone; "Buck Stevens?"

"He claims he wasn't off his spread yesterday."

"Whereas you claim he *was?*"

"I can only go by the tracks. Unless there are two horses around with the same kind of foreleg limp."

"Ain't hardly likely, is it?"

"That's why I'm calling."

After a pause Tudbury said: "Well, now, that's *somethin'*.... I suppose there'd be folks on Valentine's spread who'd back up Buck's story?"

"Guess maybe he could find some," Jud agreed. "A man can always fix himself up with witnesses – if he's got the right kind of friends."

"Could be you got something," the Marshal said slowly. "Some things do fit in, like Valentine maybe telling his top hand just where he'd dropped that rifle over the cliff –" He stopped. "Let me think this over, Morgan. I'll be talkin' to you again."

When Jud put down the telephone, he found Ann Sharrock watching him with harassed eyes. "Jud!" Her voice was tense. "Is this about – Marty?"

He nodded. Refilling his pipe, he had to tell her the whole story. When he finished he asked: "Did Marty ever have any trouble with Stevens?"

"Why, no." Ann seemed confused. "Don't think I ever heard him even mention Buck. . . Did you, Mike?"

Mike Leslie shook a puzzled head. "His business was all with Ed Valentine."

"Did Marty happen to speak of Valentine that last day?"

"No," Ann said, trying to remember details. "He didn't speak about anybody in particular. He was just going off on a routine inspection trip, same as he always did before spring round-up."

Jud sighed and sat down in his chair. No use trying to guess. He pulled a stack of papers close to him and went to work. There was a great deal to do, and for a couple of hours he seemed to forget both Marty and Buck Stevens. Outside, little Johnny Sharrock had transformed the corral to a stockade. Using a stick as a gun, he was shooting scores of Comanches, and his shouts of "Bang! *Bang!*" came through the morning stillness.

Jud dictated half a dozen letters – wondering how soon Marshal Tudbury would call back with a completely formulated plan; or *if* he would call at all.... While Ann worked on the letters, he studied the list of Twin Rivers permittees, and the number of cattle each was entitled to graze on the public lands. Practically every rancher he saw by the records, was running the maximum of his allowance. There was a second list of names: people with timber rights in the mountains. But this, he found, was an inactive list at the moment, with only a couple of sawmills working. A third list, over which he went carefully, was a roster of men available for emergency duty in case of forest fires.

Rage seized Jud; he went after Valentine crazily.

Chapter Seven

THE RANGER STATION WAS QUIET NOW, SAVE for the sounds of Ann's typewriting and, upstairs, the occasional clatter and tinkle of Rosie Dawn's Indian jewelry as she went about her task of cleaning house. It remained quiet until Laura Griscom's car stopped outside.

Laura brought a tall, blond man in with her – a man who put Jud's laundered clothes down on a chair. He had the same wide-spread eyes as Laura, the same high cheek-bones; but in his case the features seemed somehow too prominent, giving him an almost Slavic look.

"'Morning," Laura said cheerfully. "Thought it was high time you met my brother Joe."

Joe Griscom had a nice smile. Jud liked his handshake too. He was under thirty, with a fine athlete's body. The upper buttons of his shirt were open, showing a powerful chest.

Jud's eyes roamed to Laura. She wore a short skirt and a light yellow sweater that was almost the same color as the hair which hung to her shoulders. It seemed to him that he noticed new attractions every time he glanced at Laura Griscom.

She had greeted both Ann Sharrock and Mike, and now she brought her attention back to Jud.

"Long as I had to deliver your clothes," she said, "Joe took this chance to come along and talk business."

"It's about Wade Crosby over in Lincoln Forks," Joe told him when they were seated. "Reckon you met him yesterday – the man who sold Ed Valentine those cows."

Jud nodded. He was still considering Laura and smiling a little. Her personality seemed to change with her clothes. Today – well, this was how she must have looked when she was a co-ed at Southern Cal. Completely feminine. And mighty soothing to the eye. There were some things for which a man might envy Ed Valentine. . .

Joe Griscom's brisk voice brought him back from the contemplation. Joe was saying: "All told, Wade Crosby owns about twelve hundred head. He's selling out at a low price, to get rid of 'em quick. I'd like to buy a hundred or so myself."

Jud fixed alert eyes on the man.

"At the price Crosby is asking," Joe went on, "Laura and I could clear maybe fifteen hundred dollars by the time we drive to market. All we need is a place to graze 'em."

"Meaning you too figure to rent private pasture?"

"Soon as we can find grass at a price that'll leave us some profit, yes. Trouble is, Wade Crosby wants a quick decision. I'd have to take the cows off his hands within a couple of days. That's all right with me – provided you'll give us a permit to run them onto Forest range till I can find private grass."

Laura said: "Same kind of permit you gave Ed."

THE TELEPHONE RANG. While Mike Leslie answered, Jud stared at his hands. He'd been expecting requests like this, but he wished the first hadn't come from Laura. It was bound to lead to an argument. . . .

Mike put a hand over the transmitter. "Cy Baldrick," he said. "Wants to talk to you."

Jud picked up the telephone. The raspy voice of the president of the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association was so crackling and clear that he had to hold the instrument away from his ear.

"Hi," Baldrick said. "I hear you just gave Ed Valentine a special permit for two hundred head. Very nice! Yes sir, that's very nice indeed."

"Glad you're pleased."

"Best thing the Service has done around here in years. Most reasonable, anyway. How about issuin' one of those permits to *me?*"

"Oh –"

"You know the situation, don't you?"

"What situation?"

"Well," Baldrick said, "lots of us cattlemen knew Wade Crosby was sellin' out. In fact, all of us knew it. Only reason we didn't buy was we couldn't figure where to graze extra stock. Now if you hand out extra permits– of which I'm a hundred per cent in favor, you understand – it'll change the picture. Me, I could take two-three hundred head off Crosby's spread tomorrow. I wouldn't want more than you gave Ed Valentine, but I sure feel I'm entitled to as much."

Jud glanced at Laura and Joe Griscom. They must have heard Cy Baldrick's words. In the stillness of the office, his voice had been distinct.

He said: "I've got other folks in here right now, asking the same thing."

"Naturally. Knew you would."

Jud said: "Look, Baldrick: Valentine had me squeezed. Caught me when I couldn't help myself. You folks are all in a different position. *You* haven't bought any stock. You don't have hungry cattle on your hands. So I'm turning down all requests for further permits."

"Now, hold on! That range can take more cows – "

"I'm starting my inspection trip Thursday," Jud said. "Once I've had a chance to see the grass for myself, maybe I'll change my mind. Right now I've got to play the cards the way they were dealt to me – which means no more permits."

Baldrick's voice changed. "Why should Ed Valentine have an advantage over the rest of us?" he demanded. "Hell, no reason *I* can't pull the same stunt he did! What would you do if *I* showed up at the Ranger station with two hundred cows? Just because a man plays it straight – "

"In your case, and in the case of everybody else," Jud answered, "I've had a chance to issue a warning in advance, as I'm issuing it now. If you bring any cows around, it'll be at your own risk; I won't have any sense of responsibility about them."

"You sound mighty final."

"Got to."

"Folks around here ain't going to like it, Morgan."

"That can't be helped. They'll have to understand my position."

A new note, almost of warning, crept into Cy Baldrick's tones: "If I was you, I don't know as I'd start a new job by lettin' myself be accused o' playin' favorites – especially with Government property."

"I wouldn't call it playing favorites. It's just that Valentine outsmarted me."

Mike Leslie, who was listening on the other extension, said: "I don't want to butt in, Cy, but it looks to me like Valentine outsmarted the rest of you, too."

"What d'you mean by that, Mike?"

"Didn't he know some of you others might be interested in buying Crosby's stock? You and Joe Griscom, for instance?"

"Well, yeah, but – "

"Then why didn't he tell you what he had in mind? Instead of grabbing off two hundred head for himself, why couldn't he get maybe six-seven hundred here, to be split among you? We'd have had to issue a permit for six hundred, same as we did for two hundred."

Baldrick didn't answer that.

Glancing at Laura, Jud saw her eyes become troubled; her brother looked down at the floor.

"If you ask me," Mike was saying, "Ed Valentine kind of stole a march on *everybody!*"

Jud said: "Anyhow, that's the way it stands, Baldrick. Sorry. Be seeing you at the meeting." He put down the telephone and turned to Laura and Joe Griscom. "That answer your question too?"

Joe was silent, but Laura's eyes flashed in anger. "It isn't fair!" she said.

"What isn't?"

"Ed's having an advantage over everybody else! It's no good for him; it's no good for you; it's no good for anybody. It'll just cause trouble."

"He wanted it that way."

Joe said thoughtfully, still looking at the floor: "Funny that Ed never thought of letting the rest of us in on it."

Laura flashed at him: "Does he have to think for every rancher in Twin Rivers?"

"No-o, but – "

"Don't blame *him* because the rest of us were slow!"

"All the same, he might've mentioned something. It wouldn't have cost him anything."

Jud looked across the two desks at Mike Leslie, whose straw-colored hair hung over his forehead. Here it was – an indication of how other ranchers would soon feel. By this time Cy Baldrick, too, must be wondering with a twinge of resentment why the president of the Stockmen's Association hadn't been given an opportunity to share Ed Valentine's luck.

AS LAURA ROSE TO LEAVE, she looked angry. Jud guessed this wasn't quick spitfire anger which would pass like a squall; it was deep, smoldering, persistent. She turned to the door; but her brother wanted an accounting of what he owed in grazing fees, and he waited while Mike got his records out of a file. So Laura went out alone.

Jud followed. He walked with her to the open-topped roadster. While they waited for Joe, he leaned one arm on the car's door.

Suddenly Laura surprised him with a flash of insight. "What are you trying to do to us," she asked, "—divide and conquer?"

"I don't want to conquer," he said. "I just want folks to see what happens on the range when every man is out for himself."

"People are always out for themselves! Ed's no different than anybody else!"

He considered her face, with its worried brows, and a faint smile came to his lips. "When you're sore, Laura," he said, "you're a mighty good-looking gal. Matter of fact, you're a mighty good-looking gal even when you aren't sore."

This, Jud knew, was hardly the answer she had expected. While she stared, a queer impulse stirred him. He lifted a hand to her chin, as though he could see her face better by tilting it back like that. His eyes took in every feature carefully, and the seconds passed. At last he said:

"I wish you were on my side."

And then, because her face was so close and because the impulse had been unreasoning from the start, Jud let it have its way. He bent forward and kissed her. He knew, as he did it, that this wasn't a whim of the moment. He'd been wanting to kiss her for a long time. There was something inevitable in it.

He didn't hurry. And when he straightened, Laura looked at him with bewildered eyes, her face white and confused. Behind them the door creaked as Joe came out of the station. Jud released her chin, reluctantly.

She didn't speak at all. She seemed too stunned.

LONG AFTER JOE GRISCOM had driven Laura away, the moment left Jud with a glow that would not fade. Laura *could* have turned her face from him; she *could* have pushed him away. She hadn't. When it was over, she might even have become furious. She hadn't done that, either.

The day passed, and Jud clung pleasantly to the memory of the kiss. Yet there were plenty of things to distract his thoughts. A group of Navajos came around to ask the right to chop firewood in the Forest. Each man wanted a cord for his own use. Jud granted the plea. Also he received five more requests for extra grazing rights from local cattlemen. To refuse them all wasn't easy; still, he had to be firm about it.

By the next morning, which was Wednesday, he decided to make a preliminary survey of the forage within a few miles of the Ranger station. Too many of the petitioners he had turned down had said: "Why don't you go *look* at the grass? You'll see how much we got!" His refusal of permits would be more effective, he knew, if it were based on personal observation. With Ann Sharrock in the office to answer telephone calls and see visitors, he asked Mike to ride along with him.

They followed a drift fence across rolling range. Plenty of cows grazed here, lifting white faces as the men passed. In a way, Jud felt pleased with what he saw. The grass was in good condition; the cattle looked well fed. And he liked other things, too—for example, the way the distant Sangre de Cristos loomed against the sky, all green and brown, with deep blue shadows in their valleys. It was inspiring country to work in; perhaps not as spectacular as the Grand Teton region he had known in Wyoming, with its jagged snow-covered peaks, but in its own quiet way this New Mexican range was beautiful.

He began to think of what he'd said to Laura—how much better the job could be if she believed in what he had to do. He frowned a little. Maybe he was letting thoughts of Laura Griscom become too much involved in his task....

On the other side of the drift fence there were no cows at all. The grass there was some six inches high—side-oats and timothy, for the most part, bent before a morning breeze.

Mike Leslie said: "Marty figured to open that country about the middle of June. Four thousand acres. By that time this grass here will be pretty well chewed down."

Jud nodded.

"Last year," Mike added, "the Stockmen's Association wanted it opened by the end of May. They kicked up quite a fuss, but Marty refused. He almost had a fist fight with Ed Valentine over it."

"Sounds like Valentine is always mighty free with his fists."

"Yep." Mike gave him an appraising glance. "You try to slap penalties on him when his three-week permit is up, and I'll bet *you* get into a fight with him too."

Jud looked away at the mountains. He hoped Valentine wouldn't attempt to dispute matters that way. He didn't want to fight Ed—or anybody else. Up in the timber country of the north, where he had been stationed for a few months when first he'd joined the Forest Service, Jud Morgan had got his fill of fist-fighting. Loggers were tough, the toughest crowd he'd ever worked with. When they got a little drunk and came at you, there was no choice; you either fought and won your fight, or you got your face permanently damaged. Like everyone else, Jud had been drawn into several fights that winter. It had been a normal part of the life. You couldn't mingle with people and avoid it. And he'd learned a great deal about fighting, from the loggers. Principally, he'd learned how to dodge a fast swing and how to put the weight of his whole body behind a punch. But it was knowledge he didn't care to use here, when nothing could be gained by using it.

He turned his mind to other things. Strange, that Marshal Tudbury hadn't called back about the matter of Buck Stevens. Maybe he'd call today. This was, Jud reminded himself, the day of the Twin Rivers stockmen's meeting. Tonight he'd encounter them all in a group. He wondered if he ought to be preparing some sort of speech....

He and Mike had been following the drift fence for some two miles when they heard the thud of hoofs far behind them. Looking back, they saw two riders. The men were galloping hard in their direction. Jud drew rein, turned his horse.

"Now what?" Mike said. "Nothing good ever comes that fast."

They waited. Presently Jud recognized the men—Ed Valentine and Buck Stevens—and tightened his hold on the reins. In fact, his whole lean body tightened. Ed was riding a few yards ahead of his top hand. The brim of his sombrero was bent up by the wind.

"I don't like it," Mike muttered. "Something's wrong."

WHEN THEY ARRIVED, Valentine was out of his saddle before his horse had fully stopped. His heavy face was flushed. He jammed his sombrero over his saddle-horn, as if to be rid of it. He hitched up his belt, and his eyes blazed.

"The Sharrock kid told me I'd find you up this-a-way!" he said. "Get off that horse, Morgan!"

Jud looked at the thick-shouldered man with puzzled eyes. He didn't move. "What's up?"

"You know damn' well what's up! Get off that horse!"

"I don't know what you're talking—"

"Do I have to *drag* you off?"

The way he came forward, Valentine looked as if he fully intended to do it, too. He was furious. Here, Jud realized, was the same unreasoning fury he had faced that night in the lookout cabin—the wild temper of a man ready to hit first and talk later. And this time there was no Laura to intervene.

Illustrated by Charles Hargens

"Nothing good ever comes that fast."

Buck Stevens stopped his horse beside Mike's. Jud sent him a brief glance, then looked back at Valentine.

"If I've got to fight," he said. "I generally like to know why."

"For turnin' this whole damn' town against me, that's why!"

"Me? I never—"

"You're a liar! And if you ain't got the guts to get off that horse, you're yeller, too!"

Jud's lips drew in tight. Some things you couldn't let pass. He dismounted.

"Ed, you've got it wrong," he said. "I didn't—"

He couldn't finish, because Valentine rushed at him. The mare skittered off against the fence. Valentine's fist whizzed straight at his face. Jud jerked his head aside, and the blow missed his cheek by half an inch. But before he could straighten, Valentine's other fist crashed against his temple.

It was a stinging blow. It staggered him, sent him reeling, and he blinked in surprise. By the time he found his footing, Valentine was coming at him again, head lowered, heavy shoulders hunched. Jud turned a little, pulled back a fist.

He saw Valentine's bunched knuckles fly at his face, but now he saw them in time. He sidestepped, and the blow grazed his ear. Ed was still coming forward with the momentum of his swing. Jud drove a fist into his stomach, stopping the charge.

It was a dull and solid thud. It landed just under the ribs. It must have hurt, because Valentine caught his breath, bent over. Both hands dropped to protect the spot, to hold it for an instant, and in that moment his face was unguarded.

Jud struck twice—a left and a right—choppy blows, slashing at the jaws, traveling no more than six inches. Both landed; there was nothing to stop them.

The rancher's head jerked right, then left. His arms reached out to grasp at Jud's—and Jud drove a blow between them, straight at the chin. Suddenly Ed Valentine was on his knees, his head dangling as if he'd been clubbed.

Jud stood over him, rubbing his knuckles. There was a numb feeling in his temple, but it was clearing now. Without fully glancing up, he knew that both Mike and Buck Stevens were standing in their stirrups, wide-eyed at the sight of Ed Valentine on his knees.

When he lifted his face, Ed had to bring his eyes into focus. They were surprised and a little dazed. He looked at Jud's fists, then up at his head.

And he lunged. It was an upward leap that flung him against Jud before a punch could stop him. His left arm hooked around Jud's back, pulling him in close, hard. For a few seconds he had Jud's hands pinioned between their bodies. And Ed's right arm was free.

He drove quick blows into Jud's ribs—short, jolting jabs, always at the same spot. Pounding like a piston, bruising, weakening, while his left arm pulled Jud against himself.

Jud winced, fought to tear his arms free. He knew this kind of infighting. Loggers knew it too. Those punches hurt. They could drop a man in a few seconds. And now Ed's blows climbed a little higher, banging away at the heart....

With a violent wrench Jud twisted his body sidewise. At the very instant he turned, he felt Valentine's knee come up. It was a terrific heave intended for the groin; but because Jud had managed to spin, he caught it on the side of his thigh. He could feel it rake upward.

Rage seized him. He smashed his shoulder against Valentine as if he were flinging himself against a jammed door. Catching the rancher on one foot, with the other still raised, he sent the man stumbling back, off balance. And Jud went after him. He went after him crazily.

He smashed a fist into Ed's face. As the dark head snapped back, he drove another blow to Valentine's ear, a third straight to the chin. His fists kept pounding in a wild, furious rhythm, finding jaws, head, chest, face. They drove Ed back against the fence, holding him there.

Ed's eyes bulged. Agony came into them, and even terror. He tried to block the storm of blows, to fight back, but now his arms seemed stiff and slow, and he couldn't coördinate their movements. Blood began running from his nose over his mouth, streaming down his chin.

Suddenly he bent low under the blows, lifting his elbows to protect his head. And as he went down, Jud's fist swept up almost from the grass, in a terrific uppercut that caught Valentine on the jaw.

The man pitched forward. He dropped face down beside the fence, arms outstretched. His whole body went stiff; there was not even a twitch of motion....

After a few moments of staring, Buck Stevens got out of his saddle. He moved in a daze. Sinking to his knees beside Valentine, he rolled the man over on his back. Blood still covered the mouth and Ed's breathing was labored, his brows drawn in pain. Whether or not he was unconscious, Jud couldn't tell; but Ed was clearly through with the fight.

THERE WAS PAIN in Jud's side too, where Valentine's punches had hammered. There was still a numbness in his head, too. But he gave no attention to these. He walked a few yards to get his horse. When he came back, leading the mare, his breathing was steadier.

He said to Buck Stevens, "What made him blow his top?" and his voice was harsh.

Buck looked around at him, uneasily. "Talk he had with Cy Baldrick."

"Well, get him home. And tell him next time to ask questions before he starts throwing fists!"

Jud climbed into the saddle. With a jerk of his head he beckoned to Mike Leslie, sent a final glance at Ed Valentine, still motionless in the grass, then continued riding

along the line of the drift fence. His face was pale now, the bones gaunt under the drawn skin.

After a while Mike said: "Man, I didn't know you could slug like that!"

Jud Morgan was thinking about Valentine's knee—the knee that had been driven up to crash into his groin. The memory of it filled him with a deep and blazing contempt for the man. He could understand and respect a fist fight—clean, hard, pitiless. But a kick at the groin was like drawing a knife, and he despised Valentine for it. It sickened him, suddenly, to remember that Laura Griscom planned to marry this man.

Chapter Eight

ANGER PREYED ON HIM THROUGHOUT THE DAY. Though its eruptive quality had subsided by the time he came home, it persisted as a black mood that colored everything he said and did. Talking to Mike, he was needlessly curt, and he hated himself for it. When he shaved for the meeting with the Stockmen's Association, he nicked his jaw and stood cursing in front of the mirror while the blood dried.

He and Mike had planned to eat at the Fiesta Café in Twin Rivers before going to the meeting. But when Mike came back after driving Ann Sharrock and Johnny home, he said: "Say, Jud, I sort of made a date. Ruth Crain said if we'd come by to her place for pot-luck about six-thirty, why, she'd drive on to the meeting with us. Okay?"

Though he tried to hide it by being casual, there was no mistaking the hope in Mike's blue eyes. Jud gave him a quick glance. He had been noticing the way Mike talked about Ruth, the way his face glowed when he saw her, with a kind of admiration that wasn't far short of worship.... Jud kept his own voice diffident.

"Sure," he said. "Glad to."

Mike at once went off to his room, whistling "Anniversary Song." And Jud did some thinking while he knotted his tie. Nice kid, Mike. Good as they came. Couldn't ask for a better assistant. He'd learned that Mike hailed from Iowa; his father practiced law in Des Moines—represented some insurance companies and had a good chance of becoming a judge. Mike himself had taken a degree from the Iowa State College of Agriculture just before the Signal Corps had got him in '42. Coming out of the war as a first lieutenant, he'd joined the Forest Service almost immediately. This was his first station; and, Jud had gathered, he considered himself mighty lucky to have had a year and a half of service with Marty Sharrock.

Yes, a nice kid, dedicated to his job. You could count on him every minute. With a sense of satisfaction Jud finished knotting the tie—and suddenly thought of something that alarmed him. He turned to the door.

"Hey, Mike!" he called. "Did you mention the fight to Ruth?"

"No-o—"

"To Ann?"

"No. Wasn't sure you'd *want* me to talk about it to anybody."

"Good. Let's forget about it."

Jud hoped earnestly that Valentine would stay out of sight till his bruises vanished, not spreading the news of the fight. He hoped Buck Stevens could be kept silent too. It never helped a Ranger to acquire the reputation of settling issues by force instead of by reason. A Ranger was supposed to be on good terms with stockmen—their friend, their adviser. Where differences arose, logic had to prevail, and the public welfare. To let it become known that Jud had begun his administration of the Twin Rivers district with a fist-fight could benefit nobody. It would probably stir resentment. It might even bring sneers at the high-handed methods of the Forest Service.

Mike must have realized all this when he decided to say nothing about the fight; and Jud was grateful for his silence.

Half an hour later they sat down to an evening meal in the C Bar C's raftered living-room under the hanging wagon-wheel that was a chandelier. Ruth Crain had set tall Mexican candles on the table. Their light drew glints from her chestnut-colored hair, and flashed in the depths of her dark eyes. She sat opposite Jud, so that he had ample opportunity to observe the play of candlelight and shadow over her expressive face. He watched it in fascination.

Her manner was easy, friendly. When his eyes met hers, she smiled in a way that seemed to tell him how glad she was he had come. She gave him chicken with a savory Mexican sauce, and enchiladas that were marvelously light. Long before the meal was over, he realized, in surprise, that the black mood of the day had completely passed. He felt fine, sitting here across the table from Ruth Crain; felt, somehow, as if he'd been coming here for years. Once the dude guests began to arrive for the summer, he supposed, this kind of privacy would no longer be possible. But while it lasted, it was wonderful.

Over coffee he looked around at the well-filled bookshelves. And his eyes went to the piano. It could be mighty pleasant, he thought a bit wistfully, to sit in this room of an evening, smoking a pipe, listening to Ruth Crain play....

Mike said: "We'd better get started."

Jud smiled at Ruth. "Kind of hate to break up anything as nice as this."

"Call it a temporary break," she said, rising. "You come back any time you like, and we'll continue."

He nodded at the piano. "Next time will you throw in a bit of Chopin or Gershwin?"

She laughed. "You and Mike—except that he calls for 'Don't Fence Me In' and 'Home on the Range.'... All right," she said. "Next time it's music."

Ann Sharrock didn't drive to town with them. Jud guessed she didn't want to go through the ordeal of talking to a hundred curious strangers about Marty.

In the car, as they rolled toward town, Ruth said thoughtfully: "What are you going to talk about, Jud?"

"Myself."

For a while she was silent, watching the road. "You'll never get a better chance to put in a few licks for the Service. If you had something exciting to throw into that meeting—something to pull a lot of people over to your side—"

"Yes," Jud said dryly. "I've been looking for something like that. It isn't easy to find."

Mike said: "Trouble is, the Service doesn't deal in bombshells."

"Still—" Ruth hesitated. "I—I'd sort of like to see you make the most of this opportunity, Jud."

He glanced at her, his eyes searching.

"Got any ideas?"

"No. I—I just feel there ought to be *some* way—"

IT WAS DARK WHEN THEY drove into Twin Rivers. The front of the movie theater was lit as on a Saturday night, and quite a few people were going into the place. Jud parked the car. As he stepped out of it, somebody spoke to him, and he turned to face the slight, white-mustached figure of Marshal Sam Tudbury.

"Tried to phone you awhile back," Tudbury said, "but no answer. Got a second before you go in?"

"You bet."

The Marshal took him aside. "Thought you might like to know. Had a talk with Laura Griscom. She told me just about where she found that rifle."

Jud gave him a sharp, questioning look.

"So I sent a couple of men to poke around Lost Cañon," Tudbury said. "They're there now."

"Good."

"Seein' it's more than a month since Sharrock went up there – *if* he did – don't know just what my boys may find. But they'll hunt, anyway. . . . Now you better get inside, an' give folks their chance to tear the new Ranger apart. Luck to you!"

When Jud went into the theater, he found at least a hundred and fifty men and women in the seats. Baldrick met him at the door. Fat, cleanly shaved, his thick gray hair brushed back in a way that was startlingly handsome, Baldrick led him to the stage. Two chairs had been set on it. They sat down.

Jud looked over the audience. Ruth and Mike had found seats in the fourth row, on the side. She gave him an encouraging smile, and he answered with a nod. He felt nervous. It wasn't because he had to face an audience, but rather because he knew Ruth was right. He ought to have some way of enlisting the good will of this crowd. But how?

He could see neither Valentine nor Laura. The fact that Ed wasn't there could perhaps be explained by his bruised face; but the absence of Laura was something he couldn't understand.

Then he saw her. She walked in with her brother Joe, and a dark slim girl who, Jud guessed, must be Joe's wife. They sat down some ten rows from the platform. Laura's eyes met Jud's squarely. He tried to see in them whether she knew anything about his fight with Ed, but they revealed nothing. When she smiled, it seemed to him there was something forced and strained in it. Well, he felt a little strained himself after that kiss. . . . She shook back her blonde hair, exchanged a word with the girl beside her.

Then Cy Baldrick got up, lifting a hand for silence. He cleared his throat, adjusted his black string of a necktie, and said:

"Folks, we got ourselves a new Ranger, an', frankly, I don't know much more about him than any o' you others know. So I asked Jud Morgan to come here tonight an' tell us about himself. He don't have to tell us about the Service – we already know about that, an plenty."

A few people laughed. Baldrick put up his hand and cleared his throat again.

"What we want to know is what kind o' man the Government has sent our way, an' does he know the difference between a heifer an' a goat. Where's he from, an' how much work has he done around cows? With that in mind, friends, I'm mighty glad now to interduce Ranger Jud Morgan."

There was some dutiful applause as Cy Baldrick sat down. Then Jud rose to his lanky six feet two. He drew a deep breath as he stepped to the front of the stage.

BUT BEFORE HE SPOKE a word, a mocking voice called from the rear: " 'Fore you start that speech, Ranger, how about givin' a man an extra permit – same as Valentine got?"

There was a little laughter. And from the other side of the theater a second voice, slightly more bitter, cried: "Yeah! How about playin' *fair*?"

Then it began to snowball. As the spirit of challenge caught the audience, the cries broke from right and left, growing louder, more insistent, more jeering. A clatter of applause lent them impetus. Man after man took up the calls. The noise rose to overwhelm any effort Jud might have made to speak.

His face went gray. There was no mistaking the mocking hostility in the uproar. He saw plenty of people trying to hush their neighbors, but those who were making the clamor were in an unassailable majority. They didn't want a speech. They wanted action – permits; and one man threw it all into a single succinct phrase when he yelled:

"Put up or shut up, Ranger!"

Jud looked around at Cy Baldrick. The old man had risen, but he seemed bewildered, not sure of whether to quell the noise or let it have its moment.

Anger flared in Jud. He lifted his hands for silence. But the onslaught of noise grew louder, more strident, more jeering. It was like a game in which everybody had decided to join.

"Do we get permits or don t we?"

"Do we rate as good as Valentine or don't we?"

And finally, above all the other cries, there was a shrill and sneering: *"How much did Valentine pay you, Ranger?"*

Mike Leslie jumped up, his fists clenched. He started for the man who'd said that. But two ranchers rose to stop him. And other men got up. It looked like the beginning of a riot.

Chapter Nine

THE LAST INSINUATING CRY STUNG JUD LIKE A whip. He wanted to jump into the audience and find the man who had spoken; slap the words down his throat. Mike Leslie hadn't reached the fellow as yet, because half a dozen people had risen in the aisle to block him.

By this time Cy Baldrick's arms were waving high. "Quiet!" he roared. "Damn it, everybody, *quiet!*"

Despite him, the noise grew louder and more challenging, an upheaval of sound that overwhelmed all his cries. His fat face began to sweat. He pushed a harassed hand through his hair, leaving it disheveled. His anger changed to pleading, but that went unheard too.

Jud said in disgust: "The hell with it!"

He turned back to his chair. No use trying to outshout this storm. No use letting his temper go. These people, he realized, weren't incensed merely because he had issued an extra permit to Ed Valentine. They were taking this means of revealing their general antagonism to the Forest Service, of letting him know exactly how they felt about Government controls. Any pretext at all would have started them.

When he sat down, everybody in the theater seemed to be adding to the din. A dozen private arguments were under way. He saw men shaking fingers at one another. And he saw, too, in surprise, that Ed Valentine had just come in. There was tape on his upper lip. His arrival caused many people to stop talking and glower at him. But Valentine, after a startled glance at the confusion of the meeting, sat down in the last row.

Suddenly Laura was pushing her way into the aisle, her face white with fury. She walked quickly toward the stage. There was an empty seat in the first row, and she climbed upon it. She didn't attempt to speak against the uproar. She just stood there, one hand raised.

After a moment there were calls of "Sh! . . . . Sh!" Maybe she won attention because everybody knew how opposed she was to the Forest Service; probably they expected her to summarize and crystallize their own complaints, or add to them. Whatever the reason, they were willing to listen to Laura Griscom. Silence came quickly. The men who had risen sat down again.

When Laura spoke, her voice had a harsh quality. "*I* want an extra permit as much as any of you!" she said. "But I came here tonight to hear what Ranger Morgan has to say." Her tones became bitter. "My father helped organize the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association. He was proud of it, and I've always been proud of it too; but right now – right now I'm *ashamed* of it!"

As her angry eyes flicked over the startled crowd, she could have whispered, and they'd have heard her.

"I never before knew this Association to invite a guest," she said, "just to slap him down. If there's no decency left in us, if we're just a mob that wants a riot, let's break it up and go home. . . . Ranger Morgan didn't force himself on us. Our president asked him to come. So if there *is* some decency among us, let's shut up. Let's give our guest the attention he has the right to expect. Anybody who doesn't agree – this would be a good time to get up and leave."

NOBODY GOT UP. Nobody spoke. Here and there a few people exchanged uneasy glances, but that was all. The theater was quiet now.

Over her shoulder Laura glanced at Jud as if to invite him to go on. She stepped down into the aisle, tossed back her hair, and went to her own seat.

Jud got up, waiting until she was settled. Then he went to the front of the stage and nodded to her.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

He was proud of Laura. The pride welled through him, making him forget his moment of anger. When he looked over the audience and began to speak, that sense of pride steadied his voice, so that he talked without rancor, without excitement, as though there had been no incident at all to disturb him:

"I know how you folks feel," he said. "A stranger drifts in among you – a man who, by virtue of his green shirt, exercises a certain amount of control over your earnings – and naturally you bristle at the sight of him. Can't blame you. Maybe, in your place, I'd be sore too. I know my *father* used to be dead-set against the U.S. Forest Service when he thought the Government was infringing on his rights. He made plenty of bitter speeches about it across the dinner-table.

"In fact," Jud went on, "in those days my father would have had seven fits if he thought his own son would ever go into the Service. He expected me to be a cattle-man. To keep running the Rafter M – which was our family brand – the way he and my grandfather had run it before me. I was reared to know cows and to hate anybody and anything that interfered with the right of any American to raise as much beef as he damn' well pleased. My father wasn't a big cattle-man—never ran more than six hundred head. But if he stayed small, he wanted it to be his own choice, and not because the Government forced it on him."

This, obviously, was not the kind of talk the ranchers had expected. He could feel a new quality come into the audience. He could see it in the surprised faces. They were curious now; puzzled.

When he glanced at Laura, he saw the perplexity in her face too. It occurred to him that he'd never told her much about himself. Well, she'd get it now. . .

"We never overgrazed our land," Jud said. "My father was too wise a cattle-man to do that. And our grass was good. But suddenly, almost without any kind of warning, something began to happen to it. *Dust* drifted in. Brown and gray, it came on every wind. It came even without wind. It got thicker and thicker, and our grass was stifled under it, and the land began to look dead. . . . We lived at Bat Hollow, Oklahoma. I guess you remember what happened to Oklahoma in the days of the Dust Bowl. We were right in the middle of it.

"My father died at a time when a lot of our cows were dying too – dying for want of grass. My mother had gone a few years before – and there I was, the sole owner of a lot of dust. I looked around at it, and I sort of wanted to cry. I wished I could have.

"I couldn't understand why this curse had come on the land. *We'd* done nothing to bring it. We'd treated the land the best we knew how. And now there was nothing to show for it – except a stretch of brown desert. I got rid of what cows I had left. Couldn't feed 'em any more. All I owned was dust.

"The thing got under my skin. I *had* to find out why it had happened. It seemed so damned unfair – not only to me, but to all our neighbors, to everybody for hundreds and hundreds of miles. So I went around asking questions. And I found out something I've never forgotten: It isn't just what *you* do that affects your land; it's what *everybody else* does, too. You can be the victims of the foolishness, the blindness, the selfishness of men hundreds of miles away.

"I found out how people I'd never even seen had let their land go to dust by overgrazing, and not bothering to plant new grass right, not bothering about such things as trees and water and proper irrigation. And because they'd let *their* land go to dust, without anybody's protesting, the dust had blown and covered our land, and everybody had lost out.

"Then I learned how the big aim of the Forest Service is to prevent that kind of calamity from happening again, anywhere. The Forest Service wasn't concerned only with cows and sheep, and the grass they ate. It was concerned with timber, too, and with watersheds – with everything that goes into the making of a prosperous land—the kind of things I'd never thought much about. Sure, they told me, sometimes folks got restraints put on them. But that was for the benefit of all – just as we restrain a man from running hog-wild with a gun.

"Well, after what I'd seen happen in Oklahoma, I was all for any organization that was out to save the land. I couldn't think of any fight to which I'd rather devote the rest of my life. I worked my way through college so's I'd be eligible for the Service, and I got into it as soon as they'd take me. . . . I guess that's about all the personal background I can give you folks." He paused. "I've been with the Service ever since I left college – counting out the war years. I've worked among timber people and with cattle-men; and the longer I'm in it, the more convinced I become that it's the finest safeguard there is to the future of the land. Because there's got to be *some* over-all control against greed and short-sightedness."

WHEN HE FINISHED, there was silence. He looked around, meeting Ruth Crain's eyes, and Mike's. Both were as absorbed as if he'd put a spell on them. Then Ruth's face began to light up and shine at him with approval.

"If you've got any questions," Jud said, "why – I'll try to answer."

A black-bearded man rose in the rear.

"Duke's my name. I feel kind o' better, havin' heard you, Ranger," he said in a deep voice. "Leastwise, seems you're one of us – a cow-man, an' not some doggone Eastern know-nothin' with a lot o' crazy Washington ideas. But I'm askin' this: Do you realize the Federal Government, in its forest lands, owns eighty percent o' this State o' New Mexico?"

"Yes, I know," Jud said.

"You realize how much taxes the State is losin' because that land ain't privately owned?"

"Matter of fact," Jud said, "it isn't losing anything, to speak of. I just saw the figures of our sister State, Arizona, which has the same problem to face as New Mexico. Arizona's figures show that the *rent* cattle-men pay to use public lands – three cents an acre – is ten times what the State could collect in taxes. And what does the State get? Roads built and maintained; Ranger service to oversee the country; fire-lookouts – all those things which could cost the State money."

Ruth Crain quickly rose, her hand up. When Jud

"There ain't enough grass for that many!"

nodded to her, she said: "We've been over the figures again and again at these meetings. I think it's been pretty well established that the taxpayers – the people of New Mexico – gain a lot more than they lose when eighty percent of their land is administered by Federal funds. It means the Federal Government is pouring money *into* New Mexico."

She sat down, and Jud nodded his thanks for her support.

The questions came for an hour. To his surprise, they weren't bitter now; nor were they uttered in anger. It was as if the resentment of the crowd had spent itself in that first outbreak, and the meeting went calmly earnestly. The queries were familiar – the same problems of policy he had heard everywhere else; his replies were sober. And what had started as a threatened riot ended quietly at half-past ten.

The truth of the situation didn't hit Jud until he was shaking hands with Cy Baldrick before leaving the stage.

"Well," Baldrick said, "we're sure glad we got a Ranger that knows somethin' about cows. But I can tell you this – you ain't changed my mind one whit about the Forest Service. I still want to get it out o' this country – an' by the Lord, I give you fair warnin' I aim to *get* it out!"

ON THE CROWDED SIDEWALK outside, Joe Griscom introduced Jud to his wife, Susan. Jud shook her hand, but his gaze wandered to Laura. He tried to thank her again for the way she had ended the confusion. Ed Valentine, however, took her arm before she could reply and urged her away.

"Let's get out of here," he said brusquely. "I've had my fill o' the Service."

Laura looked, for an instant, as if she would protest in anger; as if Ed's manner shocked her. But something in his face must have changed her mind, for she nodded to Jud, and went off with the man.

"If you get around near our place, Morgan," Joe Griscom was saying, "stop by. We're right proud of the Diamond G. Like you to see it."

"Sure will," Jud promised.

He found Ruth and Mike waiting for him, and they went to their car. This time Mike got in behind the wheel. As they drove off, Jud was startled to find Ruth's arm snugly within his own. She was smiling, and her eyes were bright. She squeezed his arm companionably as she said:

"I was proud of you, Jud. It was fine."

"Didn't get very far," he said.

"What you said was just enough."

JUD SHOOK HIS HEAD. "Words won't change their feelings."

Mike said: "Nothing will."

Jud peered at the dark road, and his face tightened. "Except, maybe, if they can ever see what overgrazing does to their *own* range. The way I once did."

"Yeah," Mike agreed. "But that's not supposed to happen while we're here. If it does, we ought to be fired."

Jud was silent.

As the car sped out of Twin Rivers, Ruth Crain watched him, not interrupting his thoughts. Something seemed to excite him. But finally, when he drew a long breath and blinked out of reverie, she said: "Want to tell us about it?"

"About what?"

"This idea you just got."

He grinned. His eyes went to hers. "It isn't ripe," he said. "Wait till I get back from my inspection trip."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Figure about a week."

She watched the road as the night wind whipped back her dark hair. After a long time she said in a speculative way: "Laura Griscom was wonderful, I thought."

Ten minutes later, when they dropped Ruth at her ranch, she turned to Jud, smiling, and held out her hand.

"Have a good trip," she said. "And come tell me about it when you get back."

She waved to Mike, said, "'Night!" and hurried to the house. The two men sat in the car, looking after her until she went inside. Then they drove on, neither speaking.

They had gone only as far as the fork in the road when Jud sat upright, and Mike gasped. Both stared ahead with sudden shock. In the darkness a mile away there was a quivering yellow glow. It grew brighter, touched with red. It expanded. Finally above the tree-tops, flames began to rise.

Mike jammed his foot down on the accelerator. The car leaped like a roweled horse. There was only one building over there, where the flames showed.

"That's our place!" Mike said hoarsely. "That's *us!*"

They raced the mile at breakneck speed. The car bounded over bumps like a thing alive. Clinging to the door, Jud watched the fire rise higher and higher, filling the sky with its glow. And within him another fire rose too, consuming him with dismay and bewilderment and a touch of horror.

By the time they reached the station, the flames were leaping thirty feet up from its roof. The night was noisy with its roar, acrid with the smell of smoke. Jud jumped out of the car. His face was drawn as he ran forward but a wall of terrific heat stopped him. You couldn't push into it. You couldn't get within a hundred feet of the station. That heat scorched your skin, brought tears from your eyes.

"She's gone!" Mike yelled in an agonized voice. "She's done for!"

The whole place became a mass of crackling, snarling flame that flung itself high into the darkness. Vast clouds of smoke twisted up from it, red in the glare.

Jud looked desperately at the barn. That too had caught fire. One wall and the roof were already in flame. But there was still a chance of getting inside, of saving some of the tools. It wasn't much to salvage, but it was better than standing here like this, helpless, doing nothing.

"Come on!" he shouted, and ran in a circle toward the barn.

It was so hot in there that they hunched and kept their arms around their heads for protection. They got a few axes and saddles and threw them out to safety. They picked up whatever else was movable, flung it out. But then the heat became too intense. There was no way of staying in the place. No way of saving it, either. They stumbled out, half blinded by heat and smoke.

Cars and horses were arriving now. Everybody who had seen the blaze must have started for it. Cattle-men on their way homeward from the meeting had swung around and came racing down to the station. The road was full of headlights, and everywhere people were running toward the fire.

But there wasn't anything they could do now – nothing beyond yelling and milling and watching the house go.

Mike, his face streaked with sweat and dirt, came to Jud's side. His voice was hoarse. "That couldn't have started by itself!"

Just as grimy, Jud pulled a forearm across his face, to wipe it. He shook his head.

When he glanced toward the road, he saw that more than a hundred people were already here. A crowd of Navajos had come too, in a truck. Some had brought axes, and others carried buckets; but they were too late to be of help.

"Jud!"

He turned at the call, saw Laura running toward him. Her eyes were desperate. Her hair streamed behind her.

"How'd it start?" she cried.

"Don't know." His voice was thick.

"Was anybody here?"

"No."

"Rosie Dawn?"

"She left at five this afternoon."

Then he saw Marshal Tudbury. The white-haired little man, having left his car on the road, hurried over with the same questions Laura had uttered. Joe Griscom was behind him. and Cy Baldrick, even Ed Valentine – all the people Jud had seen at the meeting.

And Jud could answer nothing.

Tudbury snapped: "Did you leave a supper-fire in the kitchen?"

Mike heard that, and flung back: "Hell, no! We didn't even cook tonight!"

"Could've been a short circuit!" Baldrick said.

"Sure," Mike answered scornfully "Or a meteor. Or a bolt of lightning."

BALDRICK GLARED AT HIM. "You think it was started *deliberate*?"

"You bet I do!"

"By who?"

"*You* guess! I don't know!"

"Why in hell should anybody want to burn down the station?"

Jud swung away from them all and their argument. He felt heartsick and bitter. He was in no mood to share in the guessing. Near the corral fence he picked up one of the axes he had rescued from the barn. Carrying it, he started a round of the house, to see if trees had caught the sparks. Fortunately there was a wide clearance around the site of the station; the fire wasn't likely to spread to timber. Still, to guard against it was better than to stand arguing.

People asked him a hundred questions as he pushed among them. He had no replies. The roar of the fire was vicious in his ears, and the smell of it stung his nostrils. Time after time he coughed because of the smoke in his lungs.

He passed Ruth Crain. She had come with Ann Sharrock. Both looked wild-eyed Ruth said something, but he didn't catch it.

Within an hour what had been the Ranger station was a heap of flaming embers. The roof had collapsed, and the walls had crumpled. Each time something crashed an explosion of sparks flew skyward through the smoke.

By one o'clock there was just a mass of embers. People were going home – silent people now, grave and tight-lipped. Ruth Crain found Jud near the crowd of Navajos, ax in hand. She looked exhausted, but her eyes were flashing as she glanced at his – his face streaked, his whole long body limp with discouragement.

"Jud," she said, "you and Mike come to my place. I told Mike you can put up there."

"Thanks, Ruth." He was husky.

"You got any notion of who could have done it?"

He looked at her, but he didn't answer. His eyes went back to the embers.

"Can't think of *many* people around here mean enough to do a thing like this!" she said.

"All it takes is one," he replied.

Chapter Ten

AT NOON THE NEXT DAY JUD MORGAN, INSTEAD of leaving for his proposed inspection trip, got into the Chevvy, backed it away from Ruth Crain's house, and started along the road for the Diamond G ranch. On the seat beside him there was a five-gallon can, its screw-on top missing. Seven letters were stenciled in black on the container: G-R-I-S-C-O-M.

His face was tired and gray. The corners of the lips were drawn down in a way that was bitter. He drove without haste, his eyes steady, unswerving, as if they were fixed on things far beyond the road.

It was his first visit to the Diamond G. As he approached it in the bright May sunshine, he couldn't help being impressed by its neatness. The adobe house was big and very white, as if it had recently been washed clean. A windmill creaked behind it. The barns looked well kept, too. A couple of men he didn't know worked by the corral fence, pausing to look at him as he brought the car to a stop.

The house door opened, and Laura came out. She wore levis and a sweater, and she seemed at once glad and puzzled to see him. She hurried down a path as Jud got out of the car.

"Hi," he said. He reached to the seat and brought out the five-gallon can. "This yours?"

Her eyes widened. "Why, ye-es . . Where'd you get it?"

"It was found alongside our road, just up a way from where the station stood. In brush."

Laura's face lost color.

"Hired some Navajos to clear the ashes away," Jud said. "One of them found the can. Still smells of gasoline."

She jerked alarmed eyes up to his. "Jud! You don't think – "

"Where'd you generally keep it?"

"In the barn! We've got two like it." She explained in a rush, "Joe likes to keep an extra supply on hand. Sundays you can't get gas in Twin Rivers."

The two cowhands were shuffling over from the corral now, curious. Susan Griscom, Joe's slim wife, had come out of the house, and she also hurried to the car.

"Somebody who knew about the cans might've helped himself," Jud said. "After dark."

"Nobody was here last night that I know of!" Laura turned to the cowhands. "You see anybody?"

Both men shook puzzled heads. They'd been in the bunkhouse most of the evening, they assured her, and they hadn't seen or heard anyone go into the barn.

"Gasoline would explain why our place went up so fast," Jud said, and he couldn't help talking grimly. He looked down at the can. "I'll turn this over to the Marshal. Something *he* ought to dig into." Then he added: "The other can still in the barn?"

They all went to see. The second can was there, all right, standing alone on a shelf near the door.

"Joe around?" Jud asked.

Susan Griscom said quickly, "No. But I'm sure he doesn't know any more than we do. We were all together last night, at the meeting."

"Just wondered if he noticed a can was missing."

"I don't think so. He didn't say anything."

Jud's mind went back to last night's meeting. He remembered Ed Valentine coming in late, slipping into a rear-row seat. But that had been hours before the start of the fire. . . .

When Jud went back to the car, Laura walked beside him. She kept troubled eyes fixed on the ground. She and Jud were alone now, the others still talking near the barn.

"What *good* would it do anybody to burn down your place?" she said. "I don't get it."

Jud didn't immediately reply. He was thinking as they walked that Valentine had probably been in the Diamond G barn often enough to know about the gasoline cans. He wouldn't have had to do this thing himself. He could have sent someone – say Buck Stevens, just as he might have sent Buck Stevens to destroy Marty Sharrock's rifle. Why do such a thing? Being the kind of man he was, Valentine might have found considerable satisfaction in such a triumph. Not only because it would impede the local work of the Forest Service, destroying all its files and records, but because it would in a measure compensate his spirit for the punches he had taken.

With a hand on the door of the car, Jud glanced at Laura. "Ed tell you about our run-in?" he asked.

She flushed. "Yes. . . . I was sorry to hear it. That temper of Ed's – "

"Figure he's carrying a grudge?"

For an instant her eyes flashed. She lifted her head, and Jud thought she was going to say something fiercely loyal to the man she intended to marry. But the words didn't come. Instead, the fire in her eyes faded, and she looked away. Even her voice faltered, sounding discouraged as she replied:

"I wouldn't know."

HE LIFTED THE CAN back into the car and climbed in behind the wheel. As he pulled the door shut, Laura's manner changed.

"What about your trip?" she asked. "Putting it off?"

"Couple of weeks, yes. The Regional Forester is sending out a crew to build a new station. I'll hang around till they get started."

"You fixed for a place to stay? We could put you up – "

He looked at her face, at her hair shining in the sun. When he thought of being in the same house, day and night, with this girl whom he wanted to take into his arms even now, he knew it wouldn't be any good. Nothing but self-torment.

"Thanks," he said. "Mike and I are set at the C Bar C. Ruth Crain has plenty of room."

He drove off then, and twenty minutes later Marshal Tudbury was examining the can. He listened in grave silence to everything Jud had to say; and Jud told not only what he knew but also what he suspected.

"Buck Stevens?" Tudbury said.

"What do *you* think?"

"Could be."

"Worth looking into, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Reckon."

"If you'd rather *I* went after it – "

"No, it's my job." Tudbury put the can aside. "You leave it with me, Morgan. I got a couple notions about Stevens an' Valentine. Be gettin' in touch with you." His eyes narrowed as he glanced over Jud's lean figure. "What about all the records that was burned? Got copies?"

"Some are on file with the District Supervisor, yes," Jud said, rising. "But not of purely local stuff."

"Local stuff a dead loss?"

"Yep." Jud turned to the door. His mouth was grim. "You can score one for the other side."

TWO GUESTS – A COUPLE named Watkins from San Francisco who said that they wanted an early vacation – came to the C Bar C that week; but they kept pretty much to themselves, riding during the day and going to their room early after supper. So the privacy of the ranch wasn't badly disturbed. Jud found that all the anticipation he'd had of evenings in the big raftered room had been justified. It was a comforting, a heart-warming place to be.

He and Mike converted one room to a temporary office. Because even their typewriter had been destroyed, they had to borrow a portable from Ruth to carry on necessary correspondence. Jud insisted on paying for rent and board; and though Ruth at first laughed at this arrangement, she finally yielded. "If it'll make you feel easier that way, all right," she said.

During those few days Jud and Mike alternated in supervising the work of the Navajos at the ruins of the Ranger station. All the débris had to be hauled away. Oddly enough, the only thing which had survived was the flagpole, though its paint had been badly blistered and had peeled.

On two evenings in that first week Jud tried to see Laura. But on both occasions, when he telephoned the Diamond G, he was brought up short by the fact that she was seeing Ed Valentine that night.

And why not? he thought harshly. It was reasonable for Laura and Ed to be together. Once he saw them in Twin Rivers, when they were coming out of the drugstore. Ed had his arm under Laura's, and he was grinning as he talked to her. They didn't see Jud at all; they seemed too deeply engrossed in each other.

So he spent the evenings at Ruth's – which was compensation enough for any man, he decided. Sometimes Ruth played the piano. It was good to sit smoking his pipe, with a forgotten book in his lap, while music filled the raftered room. Ann Sharrock usually sewed for Johnny while she listened. Mike would hang over the piano, watching Ruth's hands on the keys, sometimes talking to her in a low voice. . .

In the midst of such an evening somebody rapped at the door. Johnny Sharrock ran to open it. Ruth stopped playing halfway through a Mozart minuet.

Ed Valentine stepped through the doorway.

He came in only a pace or two, sombrero in hand. He looked around the room, while Jud slowly rose, surprised. Ed's eyes, having taken in everything else, came to Jud's.

"Just stopped by," he said, his voice heavy, "to tell you I'm pullin' my two hundred extra cows off your range tomorrow mornin'."

Jud couldn't help blinking. "Find pasture?"

"Yeah."

"Where?"

"Eighteen miles from here. Ozzie Weymark's land. Figured you ought to know."

Ed Valentine nodded to Ruth and left.

Staring across the room at Mike Leslie, Jud was dumfounded.

"Well, what d'you know?" he said at last. "I'd have bet dollars to peanuts we were heading for trouble with Valentine when his three weeks were up!"

"Me too," Mike said, confused. "I figured he'd stall and ask for an extension of a few weeks. This – why damn it, this just doesn't *sound* like Valentine!"

Ruth Crain said quietly: "Yes, it does. I'm not surprised."

They looked at her. She still sat at the piano, her face half in shadows, one hand on the keys.

"I've been around town enough to know how people feel about Valentine now," she said. "It's not *your* grass his two hundred cows are eating It's *their* grass. The longer he keeps his cows on that public grass, the less of it other folks have. So they've been watching him, saying he ought to hurry up and get his stock to private pasture." She thought a moment. "Valentine doesn't want enemies among the stockmen. He's treasurer of the Association now, and some day he'd like to be its president, I imagine. Anyhow, he's got to go on living around Twin Rivers, and he doesn't want to live among neighbors who bear him a grudge. That's why he's taking those cows away."

It made sense. Jud sat down to think about it. Presently Ruth was playing again – something that flowed through his thoughts without disturbing them. He puffed at his pipe and leaned far back in his chair, preoccupied eyes fixed on the ceiling. Maybe this was a victory over Valentine, but it didn't feel like one. He thought for a half hour. He nodded vaguely when Ann Sharrock said good night and went off to bed.

SUDDENLY A STRANGE LIGHT came into his eyes. He got up, paced the room. Ruth and Mike watched him, but he was unaware of them. For the time he was as isolated as if he were walking on a mountaintop.

At last he stopped. "Mike," he said, "I'm going to do something that'll knock folks off their feet."

Mike frowned, waiting.

"Those four thousand acres we figured to open to limited grazing in the middle of June. . . . Mike, I'm going to throw 'em all open to free and unrestricted grazing for everybody, starting tomorrow!"

Mike stared. "You nuts?"

"Maybe."

"What in thunder for?"

Jud sat down again. He leaned forward, his hands clasped between his knees, eyes narrow and bright as they fastened themselves on a Navajo rug.

"The only thing that'll sway these stockmen, I think, is – experience!"

"But how in hell – "

"Before I came here," Jud said, "I was told to do my level best to swing the Twin Rivers Stockmen's Association over to our side. I don't think it can be done with words. But actions – that's different. Actions bring results. Look how *one* act – just issuing a permit – put a split between Valentine and the others."

"But what've you got in mind with those four thousand acres?" Mike demanded.

"If I throw 'em open to free and unrestricted grazing, everybody who wants to graze extra cows will rush in. Unless I'm all cockeyed, there won't be enough grass on that stretch to feed all the cows. The ranchers will start bickering and arguing among themselves – arguing that this man or that one is taking more than his fair share. The big fellows will shoulder the little ones out of the way – "

Ruth had risen, eyes bright with inspiration. She took two quick steps away from the piano.

"You're right, Jud!" she said. "It – it could be a sort of illustration of what happens to the *whole* range when controls are removed! That's something they'll *all* understand – they'll see it happen on their own land!"

Mike protested: "But, Jud, it'll ruin those four thousand acres."

"For this season, maybe. It's worth it if we can make enough cattle-men realize what can happen without controls."

"Figure the Regional Forester will back such a play?"

"He said he'd back any play I thought was worth making." Jud got up again, went on pacing the room. "We'll get hold of Cy Baldrick in the morning," he said. "Ask him to call a special stockmen's meeting to make the announcement."

On reconsideration, however, he decided not to wait until morning. He called Cy Baldrick at once. And he explained to the president of the Association, "A lot of you folks have a chance to make some extra money this year, and I don't want to stand in your way. That's why I'm doing this."

Baldrick, of course, was enthusiastic with the news. Maybe it wasn't too late to get some of Wade Crosby's cattle, he said, now that there was grass for them. And he didn't have to call any special meeting. He'd get busy on the telephone right now. Folks would be glad to spread such an announcement. Within an hour everybody would know. . . . Doggone it, first time the Service had shown any real coöperation, Baldrick declared.

When Jud put down the telephone, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. This could be a dangerous thing to try. If it failed, he'd deserve all kinds of scorn. But if it succeeded –

The telephone rang.

Ruth answered it, looked around. "For you, Jud," she said. "Sounds like Marshal Tudbury."

It was the Marshal. His voice was brittle, a little harsh, as he said, "Morgan, can you get over to my office *pronto*? Bring Mike if you like. But nobody else."

"What's up?"

"Better not tell Mrs. Sharrock yet, either."

"What's up?" Jud repeated.

"The boys up at Lost Cañon found Marty Sharrock's body!"

Chapter Eleven

IT WAS TEN O'CLOCK WHEN JUD PARKED IN front of Marshal Tudbury's office. Except for the saloons, it showed the only lights on the main street.

When Jud and Mike ran in, Tudbury sat on a corner of his desk, smoking a cigar. Two men were with him—weary figures, disheveled, their clothes dirty, their jowls in need of shaves. With a wave of the cigar he introduced the others: Windy Davisson and Flick Stewart.

"They been up to Lost Cañon," Tudbury said.

"Where – where's the body?" Mike whispered.

Tudbury said, "Tell 'em, boys."

Windy Davisson, a thick-set man of perhaps fifty, pulled a hand across his mouth. He looked as if he hadn't slept in a week. There were heavy pouches under his eyes.

He said: "Like Tudbury ordered, we poked all around Lost Cañon. For days. Then Flick here noticed somethin' queer in an arroyo. Bunch o' rocks piled there. Plenty rocks in that country, but why a lot o' 'em should be piled in that one arroyo, we couldn't figure. It sure looked like somebody *put* 'em there. So Flick and me, we figured we better see what for."

Windy Davisson looked at his hands. They were gnarled and calloused.

"It was a job," he said. "We had to lift them rocks an' fling 'em aside, an' some were heavy. Pretty soon we got a smell that near scared the hides off us. We almost quit an' ran. But we worked some more – an' first thing we found was a horse."

Jud shot a quick look at Tudbury. The Marshal's frown was fixed on his cigar. His mouth was set in a hard line.

"We uncovered just part o' that there horse," Davisson said. "There was still enough hide left to show the brand. Marty Sharrock's brand." Davisson sniffed, as if the stench bothered him even now "Then we lifted other rocks – and after a while we saw a man's boot. Well, in about five minutes we had the body uncovered. I wouldn't swear it looked like anybody – but it was big, an' there was the red hair; and the same silver-inlaid belt Marty Sharrock used to wear We uncovered part of another horse too. Reckon that's the whole story."

Jud asked hushedly: "What – what did you do with the body?"

"Covered it up again. Left it there."

Mike cried: "Didn't even try to bring it in?"

"We know where it is, an' that's enough. Figured we'd take a party back with a box, see? Inside a box, it'll be all right to carry the body home."

Jud said, his face white and drawn: "Any sign *how* he was killed?"

"That's somethin' a doctor'll have to dig for," Windy answered. "We had our fill just lookin' at it the way it lay."

Tudbury said: "I'm sendin' out for it tomorrow. Ought to be here in two-three days."

"And then?" Mike sounded breathless.

"I – ain't sure yet." The Marshal contemplated his cigar. "Knowin' Marty Sharrock is dead don't tell us who murdered him. We'll have to watch our step for a spell – till we find a clear trail we can follow. Course, we already got a couple trails we can sniff at, so to speak. The matter o' Buck Stevens burnin' that rifle – if we can prove it *was* him. An' also we know Laura Griscom had some reason to go pokin' up into Lost Cañon. I got to ask her about that."

Jud asked: "When you going to see her?"

"Tonight."

"Mind if I go along?"

"She's comin' here. Be here any minute." He nodded at the telephone. "Called her a few minutes ago." Tudbury puffed at the cigar, then stared thoughtfully into the smoke. "Seein' as how you were the one who found her near the Cañon, Morgan I'd like to have you on hand when we talk."

Windy Davisson rose, sighing with weariness. "Me, what I need is a good stiff drink. Who's a-comin'?"

Flick Stewart rose with a grunt, and Jud said tightly: "I could use a drink myself."

THEY ALL COULD. They crossed the street to the Fiesta Café, from which they could watch the Marshal's office. Half a dozen men were drinking there. The smell of whisky mingled with the smell of cattle. Jud ordered a bourbon and swallowed it straight.

He looked down into the empty glass. He remembered the long months he'd worked with big red-headed Marty Sharrock up in Wyoming, riding range, palavering over campfires. And he thought, too, of Ann Sharrock, who had kept her hope alive for six weeks; who had refused to leave Twin Rivers because she stanchly believed Marty would come back. Now Ann would have to be told about this – that Marty's body was lying under some rocks in a wilderness arroyo. . . .

"There she is now," Tudbury said, nodding toward the window.

Jud turned his head. A roadster had stopped near his own car. He could see Laura's blonde hair shining in the light that poured from the Marshal's office window. She stepped out of the car, crossed the sidewalk – tall, beautifully straight.

"You fellers stay here," Tudbury said to Mike, Stewart and Windy Davisson. "No use scarin' her with a mob. . . . Come on, Morgan."

As they crossed the street, Laura saw them and waited. Perhaps she had already recognized Jud's car; she showed no surprise at the sight of him. She seemed uneasy, puzzled.

Tudbury opened the door for her. Inside, he drew green shades over the window. Then he waved her to a chair.

"Sit down," he said. "This ain't goin' to be nice."

Laura's worried eyes shifted from Jud to the Marshal. "What's it all about?"

"Sharrock," the Marshal said. "We found his body near where you picked up his rifle."

IT HIT HER LIKE A BLOW. Jud saw her face go white. Then she sat down. It was the first time he had seen Laura so shaken.

"Whoever killed him," the Marshal said, "also took the trouble to kill his horses. Wanted to wipe out every trace, looks like. Only thing he didn't bury was the rifle. Prob'ly couldn't find where Sharrock had dropped it." Tudbury settled on a corner of the desk. "What you got to tell us," he said, "is why *you* went up to Lost Cañon. An' look – don't give me any malarkey about huntin' strays or stolen stock. If any stock had been stolen, you'd have notified this office, same as everybody does."

Laura looked desperate. Once she glanced wildly at the door, as if she'd have liked to bolt out of there. When her eyes rose to Jud's, there was in them something like an appeal for help.

Jud went to her. He took her arms and raised her to her feet, and he stood looking deep into her eyes, holding her in a hard grip. There was only one kind of help he could give her now.

"Better speak up," he said. "With a body on our hands, we got to take the wraps off everything."

"But I – I don't know anything about – "

"Cut it!" Maybe it was the bourbon he'd swallowed. Maybe it was the bitterness in him. Whatever the reason, he shook her as if she were a stubborn child. But his tones weren't the tones he'd have used with a child. They were harsh and urgent and compelling. "We don't have to wonder what happened to Marty any more. We know. It's time to quit kidding each other if we're going to find out who killed him. And the way I see it, *you* wanted to find out as much as anybody. Isn't that why you went to Lost Cañon?"

"I – " Her voice caught. She was deathly white.

"Maybe I'm wrong," Jud said, "but certain things I can put together, and they fit. It's not only Marty I'm thinking about. It's *you*. For your own sake, this thing has to be cleared up, Laura. *You've* got to know where you stand. With Ed, I mean. You can't go on wondering any more than we can. One way or another, it's got to be settled. Isn't that so?"

Despite his grip, she sank back to the chair. Her harassed eyes were still fastened on the floor.

"You're right," she whispered. "I *do* have to get it cleared. . . . It's been driving me crazy."

"We can begin clearing it, maybe, if you'll tell what made you go to Lost Cañon."

"It – it started with the cows. Up to last month Ed was running more stock on Forest range than his permit

allowed." She talked in a whisper. "He had a hundred and fifty extra head on public lands. Spring round-up would have showed it. Marty Sharrock would have fined him, maybe done something about the permit."

"You mean Marty didn't know about those extra head?"

"No. Ed had run them onto the range at night."

Jud glanced at the Marshal.

"So," she said, "Ed rounded up a hundred and fifty head of his stock – he did that at night too, when there was nobody around to see – and he drove them off the Forest range. If they weren't there during the spring round-up, Marty would never know about them."

"Go on."

"The only way to drive the cows was over the mountains, through Lost Cañon. Otherwise, folks around here would have seen them. And that's what Ed did. I knew about it, but there wasn't anything I could do. Ed had made arrangements to rent grass for those hundred and fifty head the other side of the hills, at Ozzie Weymark's ranch. And the day after he started his drive, Marty Sharrock went on that inspection trip."

Her voice had become harried. Jud didn't interrupt, nor did the Marshal.

"When Marty disappeared, I – I got that awful fear," she said. "A hundred and fifty cows leave plenty of tracks. What if Marty had come across them? What if he'd followed them to see where they led and what it was all about? If he'd caught up with Ed and accused him of anything – well, I knew Ed's temper. *That's* what scared me."

She looked up, agony in her eyes.

"It was a terrible fear, Jud. It – it kept me awake nights. Drove me wild."

"Reckon it would."

"I was supposed to marry Ed then. Everything was fixed. Only – oh, I *couldn't* with that feeling hanging over me! I couldn't marry him, thinking that maybe– maybe he – "

"And that's why you put the wedding off."

"I told myself if I had time – just a little time – to clear my mind of the thing, to find out one way or another for sure. . . . Yes, I put it off to September."

"Didn't Ed want to know why?"

"I made up some excuse. He didn't like it. But I held out."

"And so you went hunting on your own. In Lost Cañon."

"There wasn't anybody I could talk to," she said. "I *had* to do it myself. What I'd find, I didn't know. But I had to go see. I had to satisfy myself. All I found was the rifle – and that didn't mean much, because I couldn't be sure it had been Marty Sharrock's."

The Marshal asked: "Ever talk to Ed himself about Sharrock?"

"If you mean did I – tell him what I was afraid of, no. No, I – couldn't. We talked about Sharrock only the way everybody else did."

"Who was with him when he drove those hundred and fifty cows over the hills?"

"Buck Stevens."

"Anybody else?"

"No. Just Ed and Buck."

"Ever talk to Buck about it?"

"I tried, but it didn't do any good. He shrugged it off as if nothing at all was wrong."

JUD DREW A HAND across his forehead. She wasn't holding anything back; he felt sure of that. What she'd said fitted together in an understandable pattern. The news that Ed Valentine had snatched a hundred and fifty illegal cows off the Forest range just before spring round-up wasn't startling. Such tricks had been played before. And Jud could agree that Marty Sharrock, finding the spoor of so many cattle running toward the mountains, might follow to see where it led. That would explain why Marty had traveled far out of his district.

Laura was asking the Marshal: "What – what are you going to *do* about Ed?"

"Nothin' yet."

She started to speak, but checked the words.

"We got no proof against him or Buck or anybody else," Tudbury said. "All we got so far is the body." He went around the desk to his chair. "Course, I'll admit what you told us gives us a doggone' good lead to work on. But we still got to find something better'n a guess – something that'll stick with a jury, an' stick beyond all reasonable doubt. That's what I got to hunt for."

Laura, however, could offer no more help. Outside, a few minutes later, Jud wanted to drive home with her. She still looked shaken and pale, and he didn't like to let her go alone.

But she insisted on driving by herself.

"I'll be all right," she said. "I – I've got to think things out, Jud."

Her hand was on the car's door, and he put his own over it. "These past weeks must've been pretty rough on you," he said quietly. "I'm sorry."

"They've been hell."

She opened the door and got into the car. Though she kept her face averted, he knew there were tears in her eyes. She said, "Good night, Jud," and drove off; and he stood watching the tail-lights of her car.

After a while he crossed the street to get Mike out of the Fiesta Café. On the way home, as he listened to what had happened, Mike shook his head in a grim way.

"Toughest job of all," he said, "will be telling Ann."

FOR ANN SHARROCK, however, the worst moment came not on hearing the news itself. Deep in her heart she must have been dreading it for weeks, and Jud's grave words were merely the confirmation of something she had secretly expected, much as she had recoiled from facing it. For Ann the worst moment occurred four days later, when she had to go to Twin Rivers to identify the body.

That was the ordeal which finally broke her down. Ruth Crain, who had driven in with her and Jud and Mike, had to take her home, put her to bed. Ann was sick. A kind of hysteria assailed her; she lay sobbing into her pillow for hours, unable to speak, unable to stop the tears.

Twin Rivers was too many years removed from its pioneer days to be callous to murder. Jud saw concern in the face of every cattle-man he met. Though they had bitterly disagreed with Marty Sharrock on his theories of Government control, most men had respected him for his integrity. The fact that he had been killed, possibly by somebody in the town, was not a pleasant thing for Twin Rivers to take.

Another thing, too, bothered the ranchers. Jud encountered it wherever he rode. This was the problem created by his opening of four thousand acres of public lands to free and untrammeled grazing. It had brought about a sudden grass rush as swift as any gold rush. And it had caused complications.

Cy Baldrick, whom Jud met in Twin Rivers the day the region was opened, stopped him to ask, "You hear who was the first *hombre* to drive his cows onto that new spread?"

Baldrick sounded truculent, and that puzzled Jud. He said: "No. Who?"

"Ed Valentine!"

Jud raised his brows.

"Canceled his lease on the land he'd rented," Baldrick said. "Hadn't signed any papers yet, so he got out of it. Why *pay* for land when he could run his two hundred cows onto free range right here?"

"You say he's done it already?"

"This mornin', yeah. He was first to open the drift fence an' drive his cattle through."

Jud's face was impassive. "Well," he said, "if the range is open, it's open to everybody. He's within his rights."

Baldrick grunted.

"How about you?" Jud asked. "Going to run cattle on it?"

The old man scowled. "Damn' right, I am! Three of us got hold o' Wade Crosby, long distance — Joe Griscom, Luke Evers, an' me Crosby's got seven hundred head left. We're buyin' 'em all to be split among us. We'll have 'em here in two-three days."

"Good," Jud said.

The next afternoon he and Mike saddled their horses and rode out to see the newly opened region. As they came in sight of it, Mike said:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

There were more cows grazing on it than either of them had dreamed of finding. As he peered up the long slope, Jud made an estimate of five hundred head; maybe more.

They met a cowpuncher Jud recognized — Dutch Waring — one of the two men he had seen near Laura's barn.

"Where'd all these cows come from?" Jud called.

Dutch grinned. "All over. Folks drove 'em in from their private land. First come, first served, they figured."

"How many Diamond G cows you got here?"

"Sixty. Joe's orders."

Half a mile farther up the slope, they met a bearded cattle-man Jud remembered seeing at the meeting, a chunky figure with a worried scowl. His name, Mike whispered, was Duke.

Duke demanded: "What's all this I hear about Baldrick an' them others fixin' to drive seven hundred head onto this grass?"

"That's right," Jud said.

"There ain't enough grass for *that* many!" He waved over the range. "Not with what we got here already!"

"Reckon not," Jud agreed.

"Well? What you gonna do?"

"Me? Nothing."

"Looka here, man," Duke protested, "what's the use givin' us four thousand free acres if you're gonna let cows without limit come onto it? The thing don't make sense! Suppose folks from ten-twenty miles away decide to run their stock over here, too?"

"Well, that's free grazing," Jud said.

"It's cockeyed!"

JUD GAVE HIM a thoughtful look. "Didn't I see your name on the petition that asked for the removal of Government controls?"

"Sure, I signed it! But — "

"Well, you got it," Jud said. "Leastwise, on a small scale."

Duke scowled again. "That's the trouble with it. Scale's *too* small!"

"Wouldn't make much difference if there were a hundred thousand free acres," Jud said. "In that case, cattle-men from other places would drive here. You'd be just as crowded. . . . How many head *you* got here, Duke?"

"Only twenty. But, hell, I want to see my twenty get enough grass! If Baldrick an' Valentine an' them other big fellers are goin' to crowd me out — "

"You better talk to them," Jud said. "It's out of my hands now. The grass is all yours."

He couldn't help smiling as he rode away with Mike.

The day after Marty Sharrock's body had been brought to town, Wade Crosby's seven hundred cows arrived. Jud sat his horse on a ridge and watched them being driven toward the free grass — a big, bawling, dust-covered drive, with a dozen cowpunchers cursing the cattle as they plodded along. Other people came to watch too. Jud saw little pleasure in their faces. This would overcrowd the free range; its grass would be gone long before the season ended. And then what?

Then, maybe, he thought, *I'll have every rancher around here hating my guts. If things don't work out, I may even be kicked out of my job for being incompetent.*

Still, it was a risk he had to run. If these cattle-men learned a lesson from this experience, he might yet achieve the thing for which he'd come to Twin Rivers.

Chapter Twelve

BUT HE HAD LITTLE TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT. Late the following afternoon, when he was washing up for supper, Jud looked out of a window to see three riders approaching Ruth Crain's house — Marshal Tudbury and two young fellows Jud didn't know.

Jud ran a towel over his wet face, then hurried out. Mike had gone to supervise the removal of a drift fence, and he hadn't yet come home. Ruth was outside, however, talking to Tudbury. The white-haired Marshal didn't dismount. He glanced up as Jud appeared.

"Figured you might want to ride along," he said in a tight voice. "Aimin' to have a talk with Buck Stevens."

Jud started. "Anything new?"

"Saddle up. I'll tell you as we go." He nodded to the two young riders behind him. "Meet Bill Gorth, my nephew. An' Doug Westlake."

Jud nodded to the men. He was aware of a curious sense of excitement about them. It was in Tudbury's voice, too. So he muttered something to Ruth about missing supper, and ran to saddle his chestnut mare.

"I hear Buck's been helpin' move your drift fence," Tudbury said when they rode off together. "We'll most likely find him by that new stretch o' free grass."

Jud asked quickly: "What've you got on him?"

Tudbury was deliberate in replying. He ran a hand over his small white mustache, then jerked his head toward the two men behind them.

"My nephew Bill an' his sidekick," he said, "work for the telephone company — linemen. They just got back after spendin' a couple weeks lookin' over the lines to fire-lookout stations. Gave me an idea."

It was almost sundown, and the Marshal squinted westward at faint streams of color that were beginning to flow across the sky. A breeze stirred the white hair under the brim of his sombrero.

"That day you found the rifle in a campfire," Tudbury said, "Bill, here, an' Doug, were headin' out on their trip. They *could've* gone by way o' the cliff trail, passing above the spot where the campfire was."

"*Did* they?"

"No-o. But then, Buck Stevens don't know that."

Jud's eyes widened in understanding. He glanced back at Bill and Doug: young fellows, lean, both of them with a determined cast to their lips.

"How high would you say the cliff was at that particular spot?" Tudbury asked.

"Four or five hundred feet."

"So if Bill an' Doug looked down at Buck Stevens, they couldn't've been mistaken about him. Not at four or five hundred feet."

Jud asked: "Why wouldn't they call out to him?"

"Too puzzled by what they saw." Tudbury said. "A man burnin' up a rifle — well, it don't look right. They

figured to shut up – an' report to me when they'd get home."

"I see."

Tudbury asked: "Think Buck'll fall for it?"

"He might. Worth trying."

"All I want to see," Tudbury said grimly, "is how much I can scare out o' the buzzard!"

As they loped on, across green range where cows watched them, Jud had a sense of rising excitement. It was increased by the fact that the Marshal wore a holstered gun at his hip. This was the first time Jud had seen the man armed.

"If you're right about the hoof-marks you spotted out there," Tudbury said, "then we know damn' well it was Buck burned the rifle. Trick is to make him *admit* it – an' tell us how come! An' how it ties up with Ed Valentine!"

It was almost dark when they saw half a dozen men riding through a hollow. Work on the drift fence must have stopped for the day; the cowpunchers were riding homeward. Among them Jud recognized the short, heavy-bodied figure of Buck Stevens, with his floppy sombrero.

Tudbury called out, and the six men drew rein, looking around in surprise.

"Come on," the Marshal said, touching heels to his horse. "Just let me handle this. I got Bill an' Doug rehearsed in case they have to talk up."

They rode at a fast lope. The six men who'd worked on the drift fence came from different ranches, the Marshal said as he peered over them. Only two were from Valentine's outfit – Buck and a cowpuncher named Gus Kester.

When they stopped, among curious stares, the Marshal said: "Been huntin' for you, Buck."

Buck Stevens glanced quickly at Bill and Doug, his eyes uneasy. Then he looked back at Tudbury.

"What for?"

"Little matter o' building yourself a fire."

Jud saw Buck start. His face was dirty, streaked with a mixture of dust and sweat; but under the grime it lost color.

"Fire? What you talkin' about?"

Tudbury dismounted. "Get down, Buck." His voice was hard, curt, flat. Jud noticed that his right hand rested on the butt of his holstered gun.

IN GROWING BEWILDERMENT Buck Stevens blinked from the Marshal to the other men around him. He found surprise in their faces; but that was all – no sign of anyone coming to his assistance.

"I said get down, Buck."

Buck Stevens slowly swung out of his saddle. On his feet he didn't look very impressive – short, bowlegged, worried.

"I don't get it, Marshal."

"It just so happens," Tudbury said, "that Bill an' Doug saw you start that fire. They were ridin' by no more'n four hundred feet from you – only you never lifted your eyes to see 'em."

Buck seemed to be holding his breath. Again he looked around at the circle of mounted men, as if seeking help. He met only frowns. His glance darted to Tudbury's hand on the gun.

"What you got to say?" the Marshal snapped.

"Why – uh – "

"It'd better be good. I'm declarin' you under arrest."

"Now, looka here – " Buck gasped.

"With two reliable eyewitnesses against you," Tudbury said, "I don't know as there's much you *can* say." He glanced at Kester, the other rider from Valentine's outfit. "Gus," he said, "you go tell your boss his top hand won't be back for quite a spell. He'll be locked up."

"Now, wait a minute!" Buck cried. "You can't lock me up for that fire! It was an *accident!*"

"Accident?"

"Yeah! I – I was lightin' a cigarette. There was nobody around, an' I was waitin' to see Morgan. The match must've been lit when I dropped it. I walked around the place, an' when I got back, the fire'd got started. I *tried* to stamp it out, but it had took hold a'ready. When that buildin' started to go – hell, I'll admit I was scared, an' I hightailed out o' there *pronto*. I – I didn't want the responsibility pinned on me. But all the same, it was an accident!"

Jud stared at the Marshal, astounded, and Tudbury stared back at him.

Buck was talking about burning down the Ranger station!

One of the cowpunchers flung out harshly: "Why in hell didn't you hop inside an' phone for help?"

"The door was blazin'!" Buck said.

THERE WAS A MOMENT of silence; Buck must have felt the hostility in it, and the disbelief. He rubbed nervous hands along his thighs. His eyes went again to Tudbury's guns.

"Now, that's mighty interestin'," the Marshal said in a low tone. "So you admit startin' that fire too."

Buck scowled. "What d'you mean, *too?*"

"It happens I wasn't talkin' about that there fire a-tall," Tudbury said slowly. "We know *that* one wasn't no accident. Gasoline was poured. Long as you admit you started it, though, it gives me another charge to hold you on."

Buck Stevens' voice became a little shrill. "What in hell you talkin' about, Marshal? You *said* the fire – "

"I'm talkin' about the campfire where you burned up the stock o' Marty Sharrock's rifle. *That's* where Bill and Doug saw you – from the top o' the cliff!"

Buck Stevens was stunned. Twice he parted his lips to speak, but no sounds came. A gray patina, lifeless as clay, spread under the grime on his face. The realization that he'd confessed something of which he hadn't even been accused seemed to be too much for him.

"All right," Tudbury said nodding at Buck's horse. "You can climb up now. I'm runnin' you in."

"For – for what?" Buck got out hoarsely. "An accident?"

"Two things. Settin' fire to the Ranger station, an' murderin' Marty Sharrock. Let's go."

"I didn't murder Marty Sharrock!"

Buck's scream left the Marshal cold. He nodded again toward the horse. "Let's go, I said."

"I tell you I *didn't* kill Sharrock! This is plumb loco! I – "

"You burned his rifle. If you didn't kill him, why would you be destroyin' important evidence like that?"

"I – it – "

Buck abruptly stopped stammering. He gulped hard, clamped his mouth shut. He scowled at the ground.

"Get goin'," Tudbury said.

And then Buck, saying nothing more, climbed into his saddle.

The whole crowd trailed along, talking in amazed whispers, while the Marshal escorted his prisoner to town. It was almost dark now. Far ahead, they saw lights in Twin Rivers.

Jud couldn't help admiring the adroitness with which Sam Tudbury had managed Valentine's top hand. This, he realized, was only the beginning. The real grilling would come when Buck had been locked behind bars. But for the present it would do; it had yielded more than Jud had dreamed possible.

The Twin Rivers jail – used no more than once or twice in the past few years – was a small adobe building just outside the town. It had an office behind which

there were two cells. A single electric bulb hung from a wire above a desk.

Bill Gorth switched on the light while the Marshal, his hand still on his gun, motioned Buck into the building.

"You fellers stay out," he said to the others. "Come along, Morgan."

So the cowpunchers stayed outside while Tudbury shut the door. The Marshal pulled one of the cell doors open.

"Inside, Buck."

"Now, looka here!" Buck was hoarse. His eyes had become wild. "You got no proof I killed Sharrock! Just because I burned his rifle don't say I plugged him, too!"

"If you didn't do it, then it was done by somebody you're tryin' to cover. I'll talk turkey, Buck. I think it was Ed Valentine did it. I think it was Ed sent you to burn that rifle, too. But one way or the other, you're just as guilty as him, an' you'll hang same as he does."

"*Hang?* Why should I hang? I never — "

"Unless you're ready to do some talkin'," Tudbury said flatly. "You want to give me a signed statement — all right. Makes you a witness for the State; you won't hang. But if you'd rather shut up an' get your neck stretched, that's up to you. *You're* the only one can decide whose neck is worth more to you — yours or Valentine's."

Buck's face was ashen under the swinging light. He looked at the Marshal with wide eyes that had filled with terror. Then they narrowed, and he put stubby hands on the desk, leaning over it, lips tight against his teeth.

"You mean there's no hangin' charge against me if I tell?" he whispered.

"You got my word for it."

"'Cause there's no reason I *should* hang. I didn't kill Sharrock. It *was* Ed."

"Figured so."

"Sharrock caught up with us near Lost Cañon. We was drivin' cows over the hills. Him an' Ed got into a fight — *I* wasn't within a hundred yards of 'em. Ed went wild. Pulled his gun an' plugged Sharrock in the belly. Sharrock was still on his horse. Rode quite a distance 'fore he fell off. Somewhere along the edge of a bluff he dropped his rifle, an' we — we never found it."

Sweat was running down Buck's face. He was breathing heavily, and his eyes looked feverish.

"That's the way it was, Marshal, so help me."

"Ed kill Marty's horses too?"

"Yeah. Wanted to wipe out all sign of him."

"An' you helped?"

Buck Stevens made a hurried gesture with his hand. He seemed to be pleading now. "Look, Marshal. I helped *bury* the carcasses — that was all. Sure, I coulda turned against Ed. I coulda streaked right home to tell you what'd happened — if Ed had let me get away without drillin' me too. Only, I — I ain't built that way. I been workin' on the Valentine spread seventeen years. I kind o' felt I *had* to stick by Ed."

"Felt you had to burn down the Ranger station, too."

BUCK DIDN'T ANSWER THAT. He looked down at the desk, still leaning on it.

After a time Tudbury said: "You willin' to write all that down an' sign it?"

"If — if it gets me off — "

"It won't get you off. Nothin' will get you off. But it'll save you from hangin'. So it's your neck or Ed Valentine's."

Buck drew an unsteady breath. He sank to the chair at the desk, and his face was ghastly. He ran a hand over it, wiping away the sweat. Then he held the hand out.

"Gimme some paper," he said.

Chapter Thirteen

WHEN JUD MORGAN FOLLOWED MARSHAL Tudbury out of the adobe jail twenty minutes later, they found quite a crowd in front of the place. Some forty men had gathered in the darkness, and they became quiet, waiting for the Marshal to tell them what had happened.

But Tudbury went to his horse. Tudbury had another arrest to make. With a hand on the saddle-horn, he looked over the crowd.

"Don't want you men trailin' along," he said. "If you hanker for excitement, stick around awhile. I aim to be back in maybe a half hour. . . . Bill!"

His nephew, whom he was leaving on guard, stepped out of the jail door. He stood silhouetted against the light inside.

"You tell these folks what happened," Tudbury said. And then: "Let's ride, Morgan."

As they mounted, Jud thought of something. Glancing back at the crowd, he called: "Gus Kester here?"

Somebody answered: "Naw. Kester hightailed home long ago."

Jud sent a sharp glance at the Marshal. "If Kester told Ed what happened," he whispered, "Ed may try for a get-away!"

"Come on!"

They kicked the horses, sent them galloping hard along the dirt road, and now they didn't talk. Tudbury had agreed to take Jud along for one reason: "I'll prob'ly need a witness for anything he says when I take him, an' I'd as soon have a Government man as my witness."

It was a good thing they rode fast. Ten minutes later, as they neared the lighted windows of Ed Valentine's ranchhouse, they saw a saddled horse near the door. They raced for it just as Ed ran out of the house. He was buckling a holster around his waist.

At the sight of the oncoming men, he stopped abruptly. They were a hundred yards away, still galloping.

Ed leaped for his horse. In the saddle, he pulled his gun. His voice was harsh:

"What you after, Marshal?"

Tudbury drew back on his reins, and Jud stopped beside him. They were now some thirty yards from Ed Valentine.

"I'm after *you*," Tudbury said. "An' I'm callin' on you to come peaceable — "

There was a flash in the darkness as Valentine fired. His horse heaved under him, and he fired again.

Tudbury had just lifted his gun to answer when the second shot caught him. Jud heard a gasp. He saw Tudbury's gun fall to the ground; the Marshal slumped over, fell out of the saddle. Jud had a glimpse of his eyes, wide and full of horror. And a trickle of blood was spilling down his forehead.

Jud acted on sheer impulse then, flinging himself off his horse and diving for Tudbury's gun.

"Don't touch it!" Valentine yelled.

But Jud had his hand on it now. Valentine fired again. Dirt and pebbles flew from under Jud's face, leaping up to sting his cheeks. He raised the gun and saw Valentine galloping toward him bent low over the saddle-horn. The man shot from ten yards away; and before he could squeeze his own trigger, Jud felt something hot slash through his ribs.

All the strength seemed suddenly to go out of him. He sank to his knees as Valentine thundered past him, almost over him. The blaze in his ribs spread through his stomach. He turned, wild-eyed, to see Valentine racing away, bent low. And a terrible sense of frustration swept over him, like rage.

Then he saw that Tudbury was sitting up, his gun retrieved. Though blood was freely running down his

forehead now, the Marshal blazed away three times, four times — and suddenly Valentine's horse was galloping without a rider. Valentine himself was a huddle in the dirt, twenty yards away, face down. . . .

Jud got up. He started toward the Marshal, swaying. Somebody cried out from the ranch-house. It was a voice he knew — a girl's voice, and she was coming toward him. But Jud didn't turn. He walked a few paces, and then his legs caved in. He went down abruptly. His stomach seemed ablaze. He folded his arms over it; and as he fell, his mind went black. . . .

What Jud Morgan saw when he opened his eyes, puzzled him. He looked around with a frown, trying to understand.

For one thing, he was in bed. Bright sunshine poured through a neatly curtained window. The window was open a little, and the curtains billowed in a light breeze. The room was unfamiliar. He studied the flowered design on the wallpaper — big sunflowers — and he knew he'd never been here before.

When he moved, he felt a sting in his ribs. That made him remember things. He recalled so much so swiftly that he jerked up his head, and he wanted to call out. But he didn't. He let his head sink back. He shut his eyes. A frown appeared on his forehead as he tried to concentrate on what had happened.

Presently he heard quiet footsteps outside the room, as if someone was approaching on tiptoe. The door creaked.

Jud opened his eyes.

Mike Leslie stood there, and Ruth Crain. Mike came forward quickly, saying, "Jud!"

"Hi —" But Jud checked himself. He couldn't recognize his voice. It sounded feeble, husky. He tried again, giving it more effort. But it still wasn't much better.

Mike sat down beside the bed. His face was tense. "How — how you feel, feller? Any pain?"

"Not much —"

"Gosh, it's good to hear you talk again!"

Jud looked around, still perplexed. He raised his eyes to Ruth.

"Where am I, anyhow?" he asked.

"The Diamond G," she said.

He stared.

"Steady. You're not supposed to talk much," Ruth warned. "It was the closest place to Valentine's. So they brought you here, and Laura's been looking after you."

Jud's eyes were wide. "What — what about Tudbury? And Ed?"

Ruth glanced at Mike, leaving the reply to him. He hesitated before he said:

"Tudbury's home. Ed's bullet creased his scalp. But he's coming along."

"And Ed?"

Mike was silent a second or two. Then he said: "He's dead."

As Jud closed his eyes again, he thought of a great many things all at once — confusing things. But principally he thought about Laura. Tudbury had killed the man she was going to marry. . . . He wondered how she must be feeling.

MIKE GOT UP. "We're not supposed to stay," he said. "I'll tell Laura you've come to."

"How — how long have I been out?" Jud whispered.

"Four days."

"Wh-at?"

"Four days. Doctor's been seeing you twice a day. You'll be all right." Mike followed Ruth to the door. He paused a moment, as if undecided, then said: "There's just one thing I'd like to tell you. . . . Can you take some news?"

"Sure."

"Those four thousand acres we opened — they've brought on fights. Regular fist-fights! Baldrick himself was in one. Little ranchers yelling the big ones are hogging more than their fair share of the grass. The old story. There's twelve hundred cows on the spread right now, and the grass won't last six weeks."

Jud couldn't help smiling. "Knew it would happen."

"Most folks are disgusted with everyone else. Laura's one of them. They had a special stockmen's meeting last night. Susan Griscom stayed with you while Laura went. She made quite a speech. Terrific."

"Tell me," Jud urged.

"She said if this is what comes with the removal of Government controls, all this fighting and grabbing, then the hell with it. She's changing her mind about a free range. She wanted to withdraw her name from the petition. Twelve others got right up and backed her. Little fellows, mostly, but there's enough of them, all told, to vote a withdrawal of the petition — and that's what's coming up at their next meeting!"

He announced the victory as simply as that.

AFTER THEY LEFT, Jud stared at the billowing curtains. He was filled with wonder at the way things had happened. The dazedness was still in his eyes when Laura stepped into the room.

She came to sit on the chair beside the bed. Jud looked first at her hair; it shone in the sunlight that flowed into the window. Then he looked at her eyes. They were misty and trying hard to match the smile on her lips.

He said: "I sure got plenty to thank you for."

"No," she answered. "Nothing. . . . Mike told me there isn't much pain now?"

"None at all. Just a kind of dull, numb feeling."

Suddenly there were tears in her eyes, and she lowered her face. Reaching over, she pressed his hand as it lay on the bed. It seemed as if whatever she wanted to say caught in her throat.

"I — I'm sorry it turned out the way it did," Jud said huskily. "With Ed, I mean."

"I guess he — brought it about himself, Jud."

"You were there when it happened, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"That's kind of tough —"

"I — I was there when Gus Kester came with the news about Buck, too. I'd come to tell Ed that things were — off."

Jud blinked, lifted his head. *"Off?"*

Laura started to rise. "I'm not supposed to talk to you long," she said. "Doctor's orders. Tomorrow —"

"You *got* to tell me this!"

"There isn't much to tell. I just knew I — I'd never be able to marry Ed. You can't marry a man you don't have blind faith in. And I just *couldn't* have blind faith any more. . . . I'd told him that just before Gus Kester came."

She turned away to the door, and Jud looked after her in silence. It was ridiculous to feel wonderful at a time like this, with a bullet-slash in your ribs. Yet Jud felt better than wonderful. His whole being glowed. She smiled at him briefly before she went out and shut the door.

He didn't mind her going now. She'd be back. Again and again. And sooner or later the brutality of the past few days would be softened by time; things would be different between them, and better. They'd be able to talk and laugh and live like normal human beings.

With the memory of Ed Valentine dimming, there would be nothing in the way of Jud's telling her how much he loved her. . . . He closed his eyes with a smile. Things were going to be all right on the range.

"What am I doing here?" he asked. . . . The girl said something that sounded like "Cha."

IT was a bare room, with paper-paned windows along one side and straw mats on the floor. A Japanese girl knelt beside him.

"I beg your pardon," Jonathan said. "I thought you were Miss Krugie."

The girl lowered her eyes and said, *"Wakari masen."*

"It beats all hell," said Jonathan. He was flat on his back on a bed of quilts on the floor, his head on a hard round pillow. He discovered that he was wearing a wide-sleeved *yukata* and a pair of yellow slippers. The *yukata* was of black silk, decorated with a design of silver chrysanthemums. Jonathan had an idea he looked pretty sharp in it, perhaps inscrutable and menacing. He gave the Jap girl an inscrutable look and she smiled shyly and blushed and lowered her eyes and covered her face with her hands. Jonathan sat up, the better to witness this phenomenon of an exotic culture. He was attacked by head-pains and nausea and lay down again at once.

He said, "What the devil is the matter with me?"

The girl peeked at him between her fingers.

"What am I doing here?" he asked. "Where is Miss Krugie?"

"Dozo, wakari masen."

"You know my friend-o? Where my friend-o?"

"Friend-o," she said in delight, nodding her head. She crawled away and crawled back with a bowl and said something that sounded like *"Cha."*

Jonathan took the bowl and beheld that it was tea. He raised his head and drank, spilling some down his chin. The girl was right on the ball with a tea paper, and cleaned him up. She was wearing a yellow and scarlet kimono and an *obi* tied in an enormous and intricate bow at her back, where it looked not unlike the butterfly wings it was indeed intended to resemble. She was colorful and quite pretty but Jonathan was more interested in getting through to her little mind with some words she might understand, than he was in her appearance. His memory was somewhere in a bale of cotton and in its possession was his paltry command of the Japanese language. He closed his eyes and strove to remember. The thought of a banjo swam across his mental vision: Banjo, *obenjo, obenjo-wa doko desu-ka:* the one phrase you learn in a foreign country before all others: "Where is the toilet?" Or, in the customary Anglican delicacy of the phrase-books, the W. C. So, substitute Miss Krugie for *obenjo*—or would she take *dokoni imasu-ka?* Either one should be close enough.

He opened his eyes and said, "Miss Krugie—*wa doko desu-ka?*"

The girl's hands fluttered like two startled birds and she chattered unintelligibly for some time.

"Miss Krugie," Jonathan said patiently, when she had finished.

The girl's hands fell hopelessly and she sighed.

The MASK of NOH

An American Intelligence officer (our old friend Jonathan, in fact) handles a matter of stolen pearls and a double reverse cross in occupied Japan. A Novelette—

by WILLIAM BRANDON

Jonathan dozed, it seemed for a minute or two. Suddenly his mind cleared, his memory returned at a gallop, and he said, "Good Lord, how long have I been asleep here?" The girl came crawling with the bowl of tea and he shook his hand at it. "Mr. Hagoromo," he said. "Hagoromo—Hagoromo-*san!*"

THE girl gave him an anxious look, rose to her feet and hurried noiselessly from the room. A little time passed, while Jonathan practiced sitting up. He felt a great deal better. His watch was gone, with the rest of his clothes, but there was darkness beyond the opaque windows (the room was lighted by a single electric bulb hung from the ceiling), and he therefore risked the assumption that night had arrived. He had fallen in the goldfish pond, at the start of this whole ridiculous business, and that had been how many hours ago?

The girl came in, bowed low, and scurried around picking up the tea utensils. She stopped at the door on the way out to fold her hands before her and bow once more, and then backed out and scurried away. An instant later the door slid open again and Miss Krugie and Mr. Hagoromo came in.

Miss Krugie began to laugh. She said, with her Australian accent, "I'm sorry, darling, but it is such a funny situation. How d'you feel now?"

"Splendid, naturally!" snarled Jonathan.

"Well, good-o," Miss Krugie said cheerfully. "But your eyes still look a bit rummy."

"I beg you to accept my most humble apologies," Mr. Hagoromo said in his excellent English. "It has been a deplorable, shall we say, comedy of errors? I trust you are fully recovered?"

"Oh, come," Miss Krugie said; "it wasn't entirely your fault. . . . Are you able to get up, Johnny?"

"I haven't any clothes," Jonathan pointed out.

"Your uniform will be here at once," Mr. Hagoromo said. He went to the door, moving in a sort of glide, and looked up and down the corridor and clapped his hands. He was tall for a Japanese, and possessed of a stately air. He wore a gray kimono and horn-rimmed spectacles.

"How long have I been asleep?" Jonathan demanded.

Miss Krugie glanced at her watch. "A couple of hours—more or less. You do look nice in that frock!"

The Japanese girl came in carrying Jonathan's clothes. They had been pressed after a slapdash fashion, but at least they were dried out. Mr. Hagoromo suggested to Miss Krugie that they withdraw, to which Miss Krugie responded, "Too right," waved to Jonathan and called, "Ta, darling!" and, with a suggestive leer in the direction of the maidservant, went out.

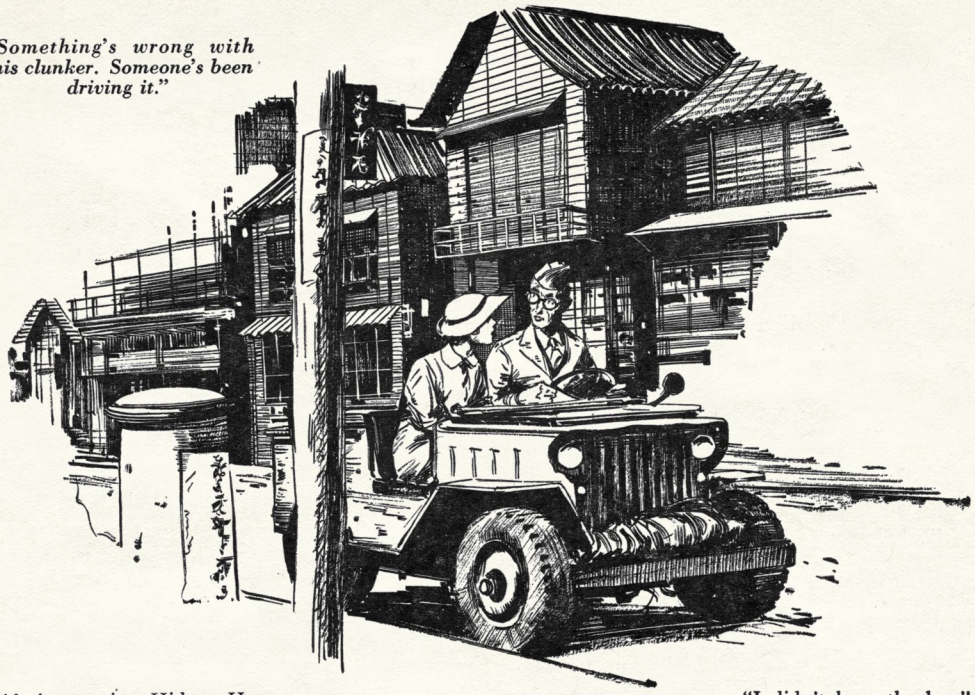
After some difficulty, Jonathan succeeded in chasing out the Jap girl also, who apparently had intended to stay and help him dress. The unnerving thought assailed him that she might have been the one who had undressed him while he was unconscious. Such reflections did not improve his bitter humor. Neither did thoughts of Miss Krugie.

Miss Krugie was of a type familiar to him, which didn't make her any easier to endure. She was young and good to look upon, with blue-black hair coiled low on her neck and a slim-hipped body she was fond of exhibiting. She had a way of being falsely demure about the eyes that would render her disturbingly appealing, Jonathan supposed, to anyone who didn't know her very well. These were physical attributes of what might be called the coed type, but Miss Krugie was rather the woman-undergraduate type. There is a difference. Whereas the coed is largely a creature of instinct evidencing an erratic behaviorism no more mysterious than that of any prairie chicken in its nuptial dance, the woman undergraduate considers herself an adult and a reasoning being. The woman undergraduate is serenely capable, supremely logical, and religiously iconoclastic. She takes nothing seriously except her Work. She reduces men to so many sniveling inferiority complexes; she does this by laughing at them when they would rather not be laughed at. She does this, perhaps, in self-defense, as the woman undergraduate is usually plain enough to clabber milk. When, however, the sharp-fanged soul of the woman undergraduate is overlaid with the inviting feminine characteristics of the harmless coed, the result is one of the most monstrous menaces to society that a menacing civilization has yet produced.

Jonathan had been sent to Japan to assist S.C.A.P. in screening a number of commission recommendations affecting the future of the Japanese educational system. He had arrived to find that he would be aided in this work by Miss Krugie, who had been introduced to him as an Australian educator. Miss Krugie had once received some attention for anthropological field-work carried out among the aborigines in the neighborhood of Alice Springs, and she was unquestionably sincere in her Work, but her experience was necessarily limited by her tender years. Jonathan had an idea she had fallen heir to a Japanese junket more because she was the daughter of Australian General Sir Hugh Krugie, known affectionately among the Diggers as Hughie the Hangman, also presently stationed in Japan, than because of any extraordinary qualifications. Whatever the contributing factors, the inescapable conclusion was that Jonathan was stuck with her, and things were rough all over.

A *NOH* dance was one thing Jonathan had wanted to see while in Japan, for he had once written a monograph on *noh* masks* in the overambitious days of his early professorship. When he had mentioned this desire to Miss Krugie she had taken him in hand like a licensed guide. She had been in Japan for some weeks before Jonathan arrived, she too had been interested in the *noh* (conditioned in her case by prewar travel in Japan), and she had succeeded, she

*"Clues to the Influence upon Western Literature of the Naturalistic Wooden Masks of *Sarugaku-no-Noh*," Jordan University Press, Lit. Tech. Series No. 7, 1939, $1.50.



"Something's wrong with this clunker. Someone's been driving it."

said, in meeting Hideyo Hagoromo, the foremost actor of the leading school. She proposed to take Jonathan out to see him; in fact, she insisted on it.

Thus on a summer Sunday afternoon they had driven in Jonathan's jeep to Mr. Hagoromo's theater, where performances were given on alternate Sundays. It developed that they had picked an off Sunday, but they found Mr. Hagoromo at home in his house adjoining the theater. He showed them over the stylized *butai* (stage) and displayed the drums and flutes of the orchestra and some of the symbolist scenery. Carried away by enthusiasm, he dug up another actor to play *ture* to his *site* and the two appeared masked on the stage to chant *utai* from several plays, Mr. Hagoromo explaining as they went along that they were doing a god play, a battle play, a play of pleasant wishes, and so on. Later, Mr. Hagoromo showed them his valuable collection of *noh* masks.

It had been an interesting afternoon. Jonathan had enjoyed himself in spite of Miss Krugie, until he fell in the goldfish pond. This misadventure had made frantic the host in Mr. Hagoromo, who got a drink of liquor, crushed a couple of aspirins in it, and forced it on Jonathan while he was still picking goldfish out of his ears. Jonathan had no more than drunk the stuff when it was discovered that Mr. Hagoromo had gotten hold of sleeping-tablets instead of the aspirin. Miss Krugie had found a rollicking amusement in this. Mr. Hagoromo had been horrified. Jonathan had gone to sleep in the act of wringing out his wallet.

Now he dressed, checked his watch and belongings—nothing was missing but a provost-marshal pass that was of no use to him, anyway—and padded out to the other rooms of the house.

IN the little indoor garden that took the place of a foyer, he found Miss Krugie. Mr. Hagoromo was pleading with them to stay and take some supper with him, that he might make amends for his unforgivable blunder with the sleeping-tablets. Miss Krugie said to think nothing of it, that it had been great fun, really, and that they absolutely had to pop off. Jonathan assured Mr. Hagoromo that he harbored no ill will and requested Mr. Hagoromo not to disembowel himself on his account. They put on their shoes, Mr. Hagoromo gave them each a wrapped present, bowed them farewell with elaborate ceremony, and they went out into the night and found their jeep. The engine roared at a touch of the starter.

"Something wrong with this clunker," Jonathan said.

"Why—because it started? Usually you have to wiggle the gear lever."

"Usually you do. When it starts like this it's hot; someone's been driving it."

"But that's absurd, darling! Unless you were walking in your sleep."

"I didn't have the key," Jonathan explained. "The key was in my clothes and I didn't have my clothes."

"You don't need a key. There's only a switch."

"It's got a padlock on it. See the little padlock? See the little chain? When I get in I unlock the little padlock and take the little chain off the little wheel. If you don't do that you can't steer it. If you can't steer it you can't drive it. Right-o? Good-o?"

"Oh, fair cow," Miss Krugie said.

Jonathan kicked the jeep in gear and drove downtown. Mr. Hagoromo's neighborhood, in a university district, was half and half—blocks desolated by bombing alternated with strips of buildings comparatively untouched. Nearer the center of town they drove through a great area that had been leveled by incendiaries—looking like nothing so much as an endless field of blackened stubble in the moonlight—and were suddenly among the almost unmarked buildings of Kozimati, where, except that the architecture was generally too modernistic, they might have been in midtown New York. Jonathan dropped Miss Krugie at the Marunouti Hotel, drove on to his quarters in the Yuraku Building, and went to bed.

His roommate, a War Crimes warrant officer, awakened him at ten in the morning and told him he was wanted on the telephone. Jonathan staggered down to the telephones at the end of the hall and answered one after another until Miss Krugie's voice came out of the third receiver.

"Henrietta here," Miss Krugie said. "Are you there?"

"Who?" Jonathan asked.

"Henrietta Krugie."

"Do you have to have a name like that at this time in the morning?"

"The whole thing's Henrietta Jondaryan Margaret Elizabeth. People used to call me Liz but I don't often allow it any more. But I'll let you, if you'd rather."

"I kiss your hands."

"That's sweet, really. Johnny darling, do you know why I called?"

"I haven't got any idea why you called."

"Good-o," Miss Krugie said, in something like relief. "Then you must run right over here. I'm at my hotel."

"Right now?"

"Instantly."

"Without my pants on?"

"You can be such a bore, Johnny! Dress is optional; but do hurry. And—oh, I say—don't drive over. Walk."

"I don't get it."

"Your jeep would give you away. I can't explain here, but it's quite important. Do believe me."

"Fair dinkum?"

"Whatever you mean, yes. Now you must hurry."

"Did you open Mr. Hagoromo's present?"

"He gave me a little Japanese tobacco pipe. I can't imagine why."

"The presents were mixed up. I've got yours—it's a *kakemono,* inscribed to H. J. M. E. Krugie, M.A., but I didn't believe that was you until I heard all your names. I thought you made your doctorate last year."

"I did. It's just a mistake. Now we must stop talking."

"I'll bring it with me."

"No, don't wait to bring anything. I'm ringing off now—do hurry over."

"All right," Jonathan said. "I'll give it a bloody go, myte."

HE shaved, dressed and walked to Miss Krugie's hotel. The morning was bright and warm and pleasant even without breakfast. Jonathan had been in Japan for a day or two during the winter and he noticed, or thought he noticed now, a change in the people on the streets: There were fewer uniforms marking the discharged Jap soldiers. There were more men in Western clothes, or scraps and remnants thereof. Summer kimonos were more vivid. The grotesque face-masks that everyone had worn during the winter were rarely seen. Many of the passers-by still carried knapsacks, indicating frequent trips to the country to buy food, but the people looked no hungrier. The tangerine sellers along the sidewalks were getting slightly cheaper prices. There seemed a little less of lethargy in the brightly dressed crowds. Like flocks of chattering sunbirds (smelling of fish) they surged across the avenues, jammed the streetcars. . . . Were these the people who had fought the ugliest of modern wars? Hard to believe!

THE Marunouti Hotel was a genteel joint catering principally, at the moment, to foreign diplomats. This made for an elevated atmosphere in which Miss Krugie seemed well at home. She was waiting on the steps and hurried Jonathan inside to what she called the lift.

She said, "You'll have to stay in my room, at least for a time."

"Look," Jonathan said, "I've told you before, there's a girl named Annabel waiting in the States for me, and she has old-fashioned ideas."

"I'm sure she thinks you're wonderful, darling, and I wouldn't disillusion her for the world, and there's nothing I'd love more than to hear about Annabel all over again, for perhaps the tenth time since I've known you; there's nothing I love so much as listening while men rave to me about their fiancées—and men love to rave about them too, even while they're making love to other girls, as doubtless you know—but not now. This isn't a proposition, Johnny—this is something quite different and much more serious. Come in, do sit down and try to make yourself comfortable; I've a spot of tucker coming up, and you're going to get a shock."

She placed Jonathan in an upholstered chair and crossed to a mirror where she tucked up strands of her crisp black hair and tugged her skirt smooth about her hips, then lit a cigarette and turned to face him. She was wearing a simple dark blue dress that went well with her eyes, and a little round white collar that made her look remarkably fresh and innocent.

"But it wasn't grand larceny, Johnny—it wouldn't have been crime."

She leaned against a small table and said, "You'd never guess what you've done."

"I've walked over here in obedience to some feminine whim in your twisted mind, and it had damned well better be good."

Miss Krugie smiled and said, "Oh, it is, quite good! You've pinched Baron Kita's Chinese chessmen."

A Japanese girl wearing the baggy trousers known as *mompei,* the most unbecoming article of apparel the world has ever known, came in with breakfast. She placed it on the small table and bowed and withdrew.

"I've stolen Baron Kita's Chinese chessmen?" Jonathan said.

"Mm-hm." Miss Krugie sat down across the table from him and poured coffee.

"And what the devil *are* the Baron Kita's Chinese chessmen?"

"A very fine set, I understand—beautifully carved ivory, and awfully old."

"So I stole them! When did I steal them?"

"It's extraordinary, really," Miss Krugie said, nibbling on a piece of toast. "You stole them yesterday afternoon about six or seven o'clock."

"I was unconscious yesterday afternoon about six or seven o'clock."

"EAT something, darling, and stop staring at me so, and I'll tell you all about it. You must take the cereal, it's good for you. This is the cream. Have you ever heard of Baron Hakuseki Kita?"

"No, I've never heard of Baron Hakuseki Kita."

"There's no point at all in an antagonistic attitude. (You may take my bacon, if you want more.) I'm sure you have heard of him, but you've forgotten. He was a director of the Ago steel works and through that he had a piece in a whole labyrinth of various corporations, and he was recently put under house arrest when it was discovered that he was an officer of a secret society formed to preserve the power of the *Zaibatsu*—the Nip industrial and financial bloc. His case has attracted a lot of attention because it is regarded as a significant test of our policies toward the *Zaibatsu,* which of course was the one Japanese organism most responsible for the war. The rumor is that S.C.A.P. is gathering evidence to try Baron Kita as a war criminal. In the meantime Baron Kita is rounding up all his resources for defense, which must be difficult, because he is strictly confined in his house and isn't able to communicate freely with his cobbers in the mob."

"So he plays chess."

"He did place all his defense in his chessmen. I suppose he reasoned that the one thing he had to be sure of was an available supply of money, so he

unstrung the Kita pearls and then he hollowed out the chessmen and put a pearl in the base of each piece. There are exactly thirty-two of the Kita pearls. In that way he could keep a fortune with him, wherever he might go, and have it in reasonable safety. And very definitely a fortune: The Kita pearls are fabulous. Then too, he was probably anxious to give the pearls his personal protection because his title to them wasn't entirely clear. The pearls were in the possession of his children—he's estranged from them—before the war. I'm not familiar with all the story, but I have the impression that Baron Kita's legal right to the pearls might conceivably be in doubt, in which case the nine points of the law of possession would be more important than ever. So it's perfectly understandable why he went to such pains to conceal them where he thought they would be both safe and handy."

"Then he told you where he'd hidden them?"

"No, he told Major Fox, of the C.I.C., after the chessmen were stolen, and Major Fox told me this morning. Major Fox didn't know where you were billeted and you haven't been here long enough to be in the Locator; but he knows me, so he rang me up to ask where you were. I told him you had gone to Kyoto. Then I called you."

"Now I've gone to Kyoto?"

"Indeed you have, and you'd best stop there for a bit."

"You mean I'd better hide out."

"Too right, darling, you had. You can stay here if necessary; I don't know of a better place."

"Because I pinched the chessmen?"

"You're staring at me again. You must discipline your emotions. Of course I'll help you and it shouldn't be too long before it's all straightened out, because it's really too fantastic to be difficult, but it does call for coolness.

"It seems that last evening, while you were under the influence of drugs at Mr. Hagoromo's, someone appeared in your uniform at Baron Kita's house and surrendered a provost-marshal's pass with your name on it to the M.P.'s on duty there, then went in the house and pinched the chessmen. Evidently he knew exactly where to go. Baron Kita was at dinner and he didn't see the thief. He didn't even learn of the robbery until this morning, when he noticed for the first time that his strongbox had been rifled and the chessmen were gone."

"I don't like the way you say 'under the influence of drugs'—that won't sound so hot at a court-martial."

"So they investigated and you were the only person who had entered the house. Not you, I mean to say, but whoever was masquerading as you. My soul, there won't be any court-martial! Surely you're not seriously alarmed?"

"Why the hell should I be?" Jonathan asked, in a louder voice than he intended. "I'm used to having the police of three continents looking for me."

"But I explained to Major Fox where you were last evening, and what happened. Obviously you were the victim of some sort of plot. C.I.C. and C.I.D. men will go out and pick up Mr. Hagoromo and his accomplices and after the truth is out and the whole thing is smoothed over, you will come back from Kyoto and that will be the end of it.

"But if you give yourself up now you'll have a rather rough go of it for a time at least, and you could expect to find yourself in a very awkward position if the affair weren't quickly solved. You see, Baron Kita quite naturally charges that the American Army deliberately robbed him. It could become an incident that would affect the ultimate value of the occupation. There's bound to be a bloody row."

"So I hide somewhere to make it appear that I'm guilty!"

"Would you rather let them get their hands on you?"

"I like the way you put things," Jonathan said. "You make it sound as though there's a mob waiting to tear me apart."

"There jolly well is, until they learn to their own satisfaction that Mr. Hagoromo is the only one to blame. You'll do much better to wait until the actual thief is caught, before you turn up. I thought you were supposed to be something of a criminologist, among other things, so you should be able to appreciate the necessity of this course. And you're not *hiding*. You caught the ten-twenty to Kyoto this morning—or rather, to Osaka. At Osaka you took the electric to Kyoto. You found the Kyoto Hotel full—it's the officers' billet, and it always is—so you looked up a little Japanese inn. You don't recall its exact address. You remember that it's near the Gion Shrine. There are ever so many little places in that quarter where one could be lost for weeks. While there, you contact a few people concerned with Kyoto University and simply wander around and look at the wistaria. As soon as the Kita case is cleared up you return to Tokyo and you are positively amazed to know Major Fox was looking for you."

"Prison will be familiar to us," Mr. Hagoromo said.

"It stinks," Jonathan said.

"I'm doing this because I feel partly responsible for the mess you're in," Miss Krugie said, "but my responsibility stops short of enduring a simpleton, and an ungracious one at that! Do, please, run and give yourself up, and play the glistening innocent. I shan't worry my head about you another minute."

"That's the best news I've had this week," Jonathan said.

"Johnny, where are you going?"

"To give myself up."

"Darling, you fool—"

There was a rap at the door.

"The girl for the breakfast things," Miss Krugie said. "—Yes?"

A voice called, "Hank?"

"Oh, fair cow," Miss Krugie whispered, "it's Major Fox!" She lifted her voice to a note of sweet surprise: "Freddy?"

"May I come in?"

"Half a minute!" She gave Jonathan a cool look and whispered, "Do you prefer to be taken here?"

Jonathan got up from his chair and looked here and there with the white-eyed attitude of a horse in a burning barn. He charged into the bathroom and closed the door.

"Darling!" he heard. "Poor Freddy, you look fagged!"

"I've been beating my brains out about this thing, Hank. Listen, everything is haywire. Are you sure you told me the truth?"

"Freddy!"

Jonathan opened the bathroom door an inch and peered through. Major Fox was a male ingénue with curly blond hair and a voice of deep and stirring timbre, a youthful, athletic figure in a beautifully tailored uniform. He had a clean-cut profile that could have come off a new dime. He was clearly the All-American boy, America's secret weapon.

"You know I believe you, Hank, but I've been out to this *noh* theater that you— Who's been breakfasting with you?"

"My father dropped over. Hear him gargling, poor lamb? He's taken

the most dreadful cold. He's in a vicious humor."

Jonathan jumped to the lavatory, ran water in a glass and gargled at the top of his voice. Then he stopped to listen.

"—But it's silly to be afraid of him!"

"Not that at all, but he's made it clear he doesn't like me, and your father isn't exactly a man to cross. I'll tell you the worst and get out—you can meet me somewhere later."

"Harrrgh!" Jonathan shouted.

MAJOR FOX'S voice, somewhat shaken went on hastily in a lower tone: "There *isn't* any Mr. Hagoromo! There was a Mr. Hagoromo who was a *noh* actor, but he died in 1919. He took his name from the title of a *noh* play, one of the best-known ones. The people who operate that theater and occupy the house next to it have been gone for a week and just returned this morning. Of course, we've pulled them all in, but they swear they know nothing of you or this fellow Jaffrey and none of them fit your description of Mr. Hagoromo."

Miss Krugie's shocked voice said, "But that's incredible!"

"I want you to come and have a look and see if you can identify any of them."

"Haarroo!" Jonathan bellowed.

"It's just Freddy Fox, Father," Miss Krugie's voice said at the bathroom door. There was a moment of excited whispering in the other room. Then a door closed.

Miss Krugie said, "You may come out now, Papa."

Jonathan came out and said, "What was that he told you?"

"I'm to meet him in an hour and I'll know more then. It's simply impossible! He says there isn't any Mr. Hagoromo."

"Of course there isn't. The guy's taken it on the duffy."

"Poor Freddy!"

Jonathan was outraged. He said, "Poor *Freddy?*"

"He's such a nice boy. It's horrid to lie to him so."

"Hank," Jonathan sneered.

"I'm shocked that I don't feel more loyalty for Freddy. I've no reason on earth to feel any loyalty for you, when you consider— Johnny, we must have stumbled onto something awfully big! It's simply impossible that there isn't any Mr. Hagoromo! I was out to see him last Wednesday, you know—I told you—and he told me to return some Sunday for a performance, so I took you out yesterday. . . . I asked at the Travel Bureau and a man told me—" She chewed her lip in thought. "What in the world do you suppose it is?"

"The beginning of my new life in Leavenworth."

"But the only thing they've really got on you is that pass the thief turned in when he entered Baron Kita's house. What sort of pass was it? What were you doing with it?"

"Would you rather let them get their hands on you?"

"I got it at the Provost-Marshal's office—a special permission to pass restricted-area lines. You told me Mr. Hagoromo's theater was off limits, like all the other theaters in Tokyo. You told me to get it."

"Oh, yes, so I did. But it didn't give specific permission to go into Baron Kita's house. The thief took a chance using it. . . . I take it you've changed your mind about giving yourself up?"

"I've got to think," Jonathan said.

"I'll run along and meet Freddy. Don't worry too much, darling. It'll all be right in a fortnight."

"Ha-ha!" Jonathan said. He sat down morosely and drank some cold coffee.

"I do have faith in Freddy."

Miss Krugie went to the mirror and put on a little white hat; she got a purse and a pair of gloves and stopped to kiss Jonathan lightly on the top of his head and went out.

Jonathan had felt that his experience with crime was well rounded and extensive. He had considered himself an authority on the psychological aspects of the subject. However, he never before had played the part of a wanted criminal and now, picturing M.P.'s combing the streets and railroad stations of Tokyo and Osaka and Kyoto, looking for him, he began to appreciate the full meaning of the trite phrase concerning every man's hand being against. He began to realize much about the psychology of crime that he had scarcely suspected heretofore—the geometric progression of panic, for example.

Miss Krugie's efforts in his behalf had only succeeded in putting him in a very bad light indeed, under the circumstances, but what was done was done. Certainly it would now be wiser to remain free somewhat longer and watch developments rather than place himself in Major Fox's hands, where he would be entirely helpless.

He gnawed some toast.

Unquestionably he was the victim of a very clever scheme; he had played the fall guy to such adroit direction that he hadn't even felt the bump. Unquestionably Mr. Hagoromo had made the astute Dr. Jaffrey out to be nine kinds of a numskull! Unquestionably he was in a hell of a situation.

There was a knocking on the door and a girl's voice called, "Disses."

JONATHAN got up and slipped into a closet. Watching, he saw the Japanese girl in *mompei* come in and pick up the breakfast dishes and go out. The closet was small and Miss Krugie, for the woman-undergraduate type, had a lot of clothes. In pawing his way back out to the open air, Jonathan cascaded a stack of hats off a shelf. One of them was a wide-brimmed Australian campaign hat—probably a keepsake that some Aussie outfit had presented to the General's daughter. Jonathan had always had a secret hankering to wear one, so he tried it on for size and squatted on his heels to look at himself in the underslung mirror. Not bad! Swashbuckling—a dash of *d'Artagnan* and a soupçon of Buffalo Bill—in fact, a very fine hat. Jonathan had an idea the excellent Aussie military reputation had been tailored of necessity to measure up to the Aussie hat. He

searched in the closet and found an Aussie battle jacket. He put it on and hung his own jacket in the closet in place of it. He was out of uniform, but if the worst came, he could beat that rap by saying he was just up from Guinea, where the Yanks customarily wore Aussie clothes or anything else they felt like wearing.

Thus disguised, he went out.

He walked over to the palace and caught a street-car, rambled with it over the north side of Tokyo for some time, and at last made the conductor understand that he wished to get in the vicinity of the Imperial University. He changed cars and presently found himself in familiar territory. He alighted and walked to Mr. Hagoromo's theater.

An M.P. was loitering on the sidewalk before Mr. Hagoromo's house. A staff car was parked at the curb.

"I sye, Sergeant," Jonathan said (the M.P. was a Pfc.), "has General Krugie arrived yet?"

"I guess not," the M.P. said. "Major Fox is in there now. You know him?"

"Oh, right-o," Jonathan said. "Then the General's daughter is with him."

"I guess so. There's some dame with 'em—I mean a woman. I don't know who she is. I don't know from nothing. You want to go in?"

"No, thynks. I'll just wyte about a bit. If that's okye."

"Sure, wait all you want to."

"Good-o! The General should be along shortly."

JONATHAN sauntered away. When he reached the corner of the block he kept going, the back of his neck damp with cold sweat. He came to an alley of sorts, and sauntered into it. On one side of the alley, homes as imposing as Mr. Hagoromo's were reasonably intact, while on the other side there began a bomb-made junkyard that extended for acres. A number of shacks, made of corrugated iron or raw lumber, had sprung up here and there in this wasteland, some of them clinging to prewar chimneys left still standing in the rubble. A few market stalls were set up in the alley, around which moved a considerable throng of Japs—a tribute to the ability of this plentiful people to create crowds at the drop of a yen, as the streets and sidewalks Jonathan had just left had been practically empty.

He approached the crowd of shoppers and walked among them, and a bullet-headed little man trotted beside him and whispered, *"Cigaretto? Cigaretto?"* Jonathan took out his pack and offered the man a cigarette. The Jap grabbed the pack, shoved a wad of yen into Jonathan's hand, and ducked away. Instantly Jonathan was surrounded by a small riot of would-be purchasers, all waving money and calling for *cigarettos, chew gum,* or *chocoretto.* The merchants left their market stalls to join the stampede. In the space of a few seconds some hundreds of the little people had gathered around him, the whole mob trotting along to keep pace with him, as if he were some Oriental Pied Piper. It was, Jonathan knew, a first-rate means of attracting attention, but there was nothing he could do about it. He walked on steadily, while another cold wave of anxiety washed up the back of his neck. When it was clear that he was peddling nothing, the crowd fell away as quickly as it had gathered, and Jonathan was walking alone in the bright sunlight among swarms of kimonoed shoppers not in the least concerned with him.

He reached the last of the market stalls and the crowds ended abruptly.

He thought he could distinguish the back of Mr. Hagoromo's house and theater not far ahead, but he wasn't sure.

On an impulse he turned back to the nearest market stall. He asked the proprietor if he spoke English and the man bowed and smiled and made his eyes sad. Jonathan said, *"Tsuyaku ga imasu ka?"* which meant, more or less, did the proprietor know of anyone who spoke English? After several tries the proprietor succeeded in understanding this request, posed for a while in thought, at last grinned brightly and bowed and said something which Jonathan gathered from his manner indicated that he didn't.

Jonathan slipped into a closet to watch the Japanese girl.

A few Japs had formed a curious group to watch the conversation, and now a youth dressed in the remnants of a Naval cadet uniform stepped forward and said, "I speak."

"You speak English?" Jonathan asked.

The young man gave a series of jerky bows. "I rivv once Honoruru. Ritteruh boy." He held out his hand to portray a small child, and suddenly broke into a startling laugh which sprang from his grave countenance and clattered up half the chromatic scale in ascending volume—*hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee!*—and left him as rigidly solemn as before. All the listeners broke into giggles.

"You know these houses?" Jonathan waved his hand. "You live around here?"

The young man bowed five or six times.

*"Kanze Noh-gaku-do-wa doko desu-ka?"** Jonathan inquired. The boy

*These written words, unfortunately, bear only an uncertain resemblance to spoken Japanese. The generally accepted Hepburn spelling is used here, which is a literal phonetic rendition of each written syllable; however, to make it sound like *Nippon-go* as *Nippon-jin* might speak it, certain vowels, particularly the assibilative *u*, must be modified for purposes of euphony. Further, occlusives rise in the throat, fricatives are largely shortened, and palatalization occurs at the teeth ridge—often the buck-teeth ridge, at that. Thus the written *z* will assume something of the sound of *m* while *j* could be as easily written *zy; f* approaches *h* and *t* becomes a sharp *ch*. Finally, for real authenticity, the speech must be delivered in a stopped-up voice, as if the speaker has a bad head cold or beans in his nostrils. *Sukiyaki,* about the only Japanese dish Westerners can eat with their eyes open, is not *sooki-yaki* but *skeeyaki*. GIs and gyrenes arrived at Yokosuka Naval Base calling it Yokosooka and left calling it (among other things) Yokoska. *Desu,* which with its interrogative suffix, *ka,* is perhaps the most commonly used word in the language, is not *desoo-ka* but *dess-ka*. Japanese is easy to learn. All you have to do is memorize the above mentioned *dess-ka*. By judicious use of this word *(Ah, so dess-ka? Nan dess-ka?)* in its various inflections you can hold your own in any Nipponese conversation. Incidentally, since the written Japanese *s* syllable must admit of a *u* termination, the English word *nice* becomes *nice-u,* an extremely popular word among pidgin-English-speaking Japanese. For parallel reasons, *friend* and *present* and *wife* transmute into *friend-o, present-o,* and *wife-u*. The language discussed here is, of course, the written-spoken language, not the written-written language, which is another thing altogether. Dr. Jaffrey is currently preparing a study of this subject, a paper to be entitled, "What You Can Do with the Japanese Language."

Illustrated by Hamilton Greene

"Just don't say anything about what I've found here, understand?"

frowned and then said, "Oh, yess!" and pointed in the direction of Mr. Hagoromo's theater.

"You'll do," Jonathan said. "Come on." He walked from the marketplace with his interpreter at his heels. A few yards down the alley he stopped and pointed to the house next door to Mr. Hagoromo's. "You know who lives there?"

The boy bowed and said, "Wass Baron Kita. Now burned inside, empty."

"Baron Kita?"

"Once Baron Kita have arruh this, gardens, pretty *suki-ya*—tea pavirion—then one house onry, then burn firebomb, arruh but warruhs burn. Now he rivv Sanban-tyo."

"Do you know who lives in the next house?"

"Hakone, *noh* actor. He rivv in house by theater."

"You ever hear of a Mr. Hagoromo?"

The boy wrinkled his face and said, "Mr. Hagoromo I don't know, I'm sorry. *Hagoromo*—it is a coat, made of birds."

"Was Mr. Hakone at home last week?"

"In Kamakura, Mr. Hakone and his house—for vacation—come back today. Now porice there." The boy bowed and ventured with some timidity, "You Yankee porice?"

"I'm Austrylian," Jonathan said briefly. "Where do you live?"

The boy gestured at the shacks in the burned land.

"Then you're around here every day. Who was in Mr. Hakone's house last week?"

The boy sucked in his breath and bowed a few times in a rather absentminded manner. He said, "Porice don't know?"

"The Tokyo police know everything," Jonathan said. "And they tell us."

"Porice don't know," the boy said, a statement this time.

Jonathan still had in his hand the money the Jap had given him for his cigarettes. He handed it to the interpreter. He got his tobacco pouch out of his pocket and let the boy see it. "I want to know," he said.

THE boy bowed deeply, his shining black eyes on the tobacco pouch. Jonathan gave it to him.

"I show you," the boy said.

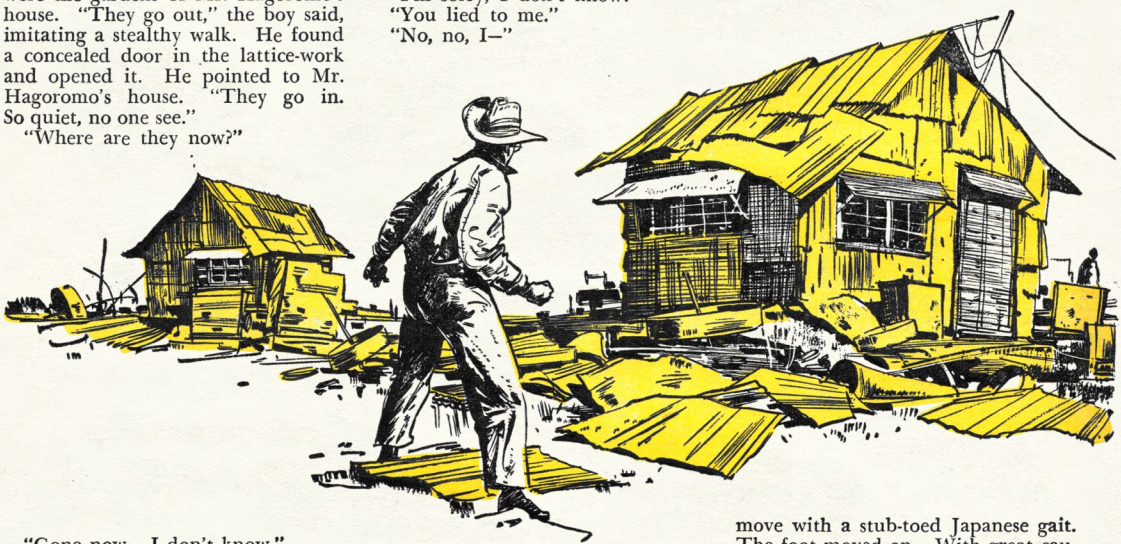
He led Jonathan from the alley into the garden of the house he had described as Baron Kita's. Some of the walls and sections of the gabled roofs of the house were undamaged. Jonathan had an idea the fire that had gutted the once luxurious dwelling had been started by sparks from the holocaust that must have raged in the bombed area nearby; the place hadn't received an incendiary of its own or it would have been leveled. Some of the walls were banks of windows, all now shuttered with thin sliding panels of wood.

The boy pulled one of these aside. The window behind had been shattered. They entered the charred interior of the house. Some of the rooms had been burned to nothing more than a carpet of ashes on the ground, but in places the fire had left the floor and a few floor mats, burned around the edges, and even some of the paper screens which had served as partitions. Sunlight shot through holes in the roof to pierce the gloom with blinding pillars, in which the dust raised by their passage swam in choking clouds.

"Here," the Jap youth said. "I think here maybe." He led the way down a corridor that ended in a pagoda enclosed on three sides by delicately carved lattice-work. He pointed to piles of mats in the corner. "Beds here. Ritteruh stove." A black

smudge on the woodwork. He kicked at some crumpled newspapers and disclosed empty food tins. The chow had been GI Ten-in-One rations and the newspaper the tins had been wrapped in was, oddly enough, a section from an old Melbourne *Times-Pictorial.* "They rivv here," the boy said. "They watch." He squatted on the floor and pointed through the latticed wall. A few yards beyond were the gardens of Mr. Hagoromo's house. "They go out," the boy said, imitating a stealthy walk. He found a concealed door in the lattice-work and opened it. He pointed to Mr. Hagoromo's house. "They go in. So quiet, no one see."

"Where are they now?"



"Gone now. I don't know."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know, I'm sorry."

"But you knew someone was staying in here."

"See rright sometimes burning."

"And the Tokyo police didn't know it?"

"Porice don't know. Porice mean. Everyone hate porice. Porice mean in war. Why you not arrest porice? War criminarruhs porice!" The boy grew agitated. "Devirruhs porice, devirruhs porice!" Jonathan told him to keep it at ease and the boy stopped talking at once and went into one of his stiff-backed bows.

"Who was in Baron Kita's household?" Jonathan demanded. "His family? Who lived with him when he lived here?"

"I don't know, I'm sorry. Don't know famirry."

"Someone came back to live here who knew this house well. Who was it?"

"I don't know, I'm sorry."

Jonathan turned his back on the boy and probed about the littered floor. Mr. Hagoromo and his assistants had made this place their base. Now it was hot, so they would be staying clear. But how clear?

It seemed reasonable that they might still be in the vicinity. The Tokyo housing shortage wouldn't permit many changes of residence. He couldn't find them, but he might be able to draw them to him. It was a long parlay, but he was playing on borrowed funds.

He said, "Ah," and stooped over and picked up a piece of wood.

The boy said, "What, sir?"

Jonathan pocketed the splinter without letting him see it. He said, "You knew what was here. You lied to me."

"I'm sorry, I don't know!"

"You lied to me."

"No, no, I—"

"But I've found it." Jonathan patted his pocket. He frowned at the boy severely. "I ought to have you arrested."

"I don't understand," the boy said. "I don't know."

"Never mind. The next time, don't lie. Can I get out to the street through here?"

"Yess, through garden. I don't rrie, I'm sorry."

"All right, then just don't say anything about what I've found here, understand?"

THE boy said unhappily, "I don't know—"

"Then keep it quiet." Jonathan turned away abruptly and ducked out into the garden and strode through it toward the street. Around the corner of the house he dropped to the ground and crawled back to the latticed pagoda. The boy was gone. Maybe he would return to the back-alley marketplace and tell what he had seen; maybe he wouldn't. Maybe Mr. Hagoromo would hear and be concerned; maybe not. Anyhow, smoke was cheap. He crawled back into the house and, deep in the corner of one of the half-burned rooms, hid himself under a section of flooring. The ground was damp and thickly inhabited with some fat black insects that kept him busily entertained during the hour or so he spent with them. As time passed in this wise he began to wonder if Leavenworth wouldn't be a better deal. . . .

The visitor came so quietly that the first Jonathan knew of his presence was a foot placed on the ground a yard from his nose. The foot was shod in a Western shoe and it didn't move with a stub-toed Japanese gait. The foot moved on. With great caution Jonathan twisted his head to see out from under the blackened edge of the flooring. He got a worm's-eye view of the room and a foreshortened look at the back of a stout man in a black suit. The man was at a corner of the room and there was that in his manner which made Jonathan think of a housewife peering into a cooking-pot. Jonathan began to work his way out from under the floor. A little farther and he would be in position for a fast jump, and it should be easy to take the guy from behind. At that moment one of the heavy stringers supporting the floor boards gave way and fell across his legs. There was a small sound of cracking wood. The fat man stepped back and looked quickly here and there, and Jonathan saw that he was not a Jap. Desperately, Jonathan tried to free his legs, but it couldn't be done without making a racket, and there was no point in crashing out like a young moose. The fat man would be gone long before he could get to his feet. He lay still and called himself names while the fat man walked out and went away.

In what seems to be the classic fate of the righteous man, Jonathan had guessed on the nose but lit on his face, uncleared for action when the moment came. He had been correct in his hunch that Mr. Hagoromo and his

confederates might have left something incriminating, something of value, something they wouldn't want found, in this ruined house that had been their headquarters and intimately concerned with their activities. He had pretended to discover something of significance, in the long-shot hope that the interpreter would tell of it in the marketplace, and that the Hagoromo people, if still in the neighborhood, would hear the story—that an important find had been made at the scene of their blind. In that case, if they had indeed left anything in the house they wouldn't want found, they might possibly come on the run to see if it was still there.

Jonathan gave her a couple of minutes, then walked to the shack.

This parlay had played out most happily in the arrival of the fat man, and at that point had collapsed, to leave Jonathan lying helpless while the fat man went freely out again. Having lost his chance to get his hands on one member of the mob, his one hope now was that the fat man might have only been assuring himself of the safety of something hidden, and might have left it—whatever it was—undisturbed.

He waited ten minutes and then struggled out from under the floor regardless of the noise and went to the corner of the room to see what had received the stout man's attention.

A niche was here set in the wall, a place called by the Japanese *tokonoma,* used for display of a *kakemono* or an arrangement of flowers. Except for a dry flower-stem sticking up through a hole in the wooden base, this *tokonoma* was empty.

He remembered the impression the fat man had given of a housewife lifting a kettle-lid, and he put out his hand and lifted the board that was the wooden base of the niche. The withered flower-stem ran into a tall, slender vase that sat in an open space below. Jonathan tentatively hefted the vase. Then he pulled up the stem to free the vase, tipped the vase over his hand and poured out thirty-two lustrous and perfectly matched pearls.

He looked at them for a time, then put them in his pocket and replaced the vase. The vase itself was bronze and appeared to be a very good piece—Meiji Restoration, he thought—but it seemed wise to leave it, in case the fat man should return again too soon. A fish can break away while you're in the act of reaching for the gaff.

DOWNTOWN, in the Marunouti district, Jonathan went to the Red Cross library in the Bankers' Club and looked up Baron Kita in back issues of English-language Tokyo newspapers. He learned that Baron Kita was technically alone in the world, having disowned a son and daughter during the war. The son, a university teacher, had been imprisoned throughout the war as a "dangerous pacifist." The daughter, whose name was Humiko, was also a university teacher and had also been imprisoned during the war as a dangerous pacifist. They had been associated with a stateless European named Dus-Chotimirski, an educator of long experience in Japan, it was stated, in the operation of a school described by the wartime government as "radical and seditious." All were now at liberty and living in Tokyo but, according to the newspaper, the son and daughter had had no contact with Baron Kita for several years. As these articles dealt with Baron Kita's house arrest and the possibility of his indictment as a war criminal, there was a great deal of material concerning the financial architecture of Baron Kita's past, which Jonathan didn't take the time to read.

He went back to Miss Krugie's hotel, found that Miss Krugie had not yet returned, and ordered up a bottle of whisky, a dish of ice, and soda. He put away the Australian hat and jacket.

He mixed a drink and sat down with it, and for a while lost himself in thought. He made another short drink and then went in the bathroom and poured out the rest of the whisky. It was Japanese Scotch anyway, and pretty rough. When he heard Miss Krugie at the door he opened his collar and pulled his hair over his eyes and sprawled back in his chair with the whisky bottle in his hand.

"Oh, fair cow," Miss Krugie said, wrinkling her nose. "Now you're stinko."

"Just having a little shot to the cops," Jonathan said. "My old buddies, the cops. Have a snort."

"No, thank you, I'll not have a snort." Miss Krugie put down her hat and went to the mirror and jerked a comb through her hair. "As if I haven't enough to contend with! You're perfectly disgusting."

"Ah, baby!" Jonathan said.

"Do you know what's happened?" She spun around to face him. "Among other things, my father has somehow gotten wind of this thing. Freddy swears that news of the theft has not been released to anyone, but the fact remains that Father must have had a man out snooping around Mr. Hagoromo's theater this morning while I was there—at least the guard said there was an Australian officer making inquiries. If Father learns I'm involved in a crime he'll merely have apoplexy, but if he learns I'm harboring the thief in my bedroom—if he finds you in here, sodden and dissipated-looking the way you are now, he'll—"

"Brr," Jonathan said.

"You'd think your precious Annabel was an angel of mercy in comparison."

"Don't tell her!" Jonathan said in alarm.

"Oh, how I wish I could show you to her—just the way you are right now! I'd do it in a minute!"

"Let's talk about us," Jonathan said.

"I should throw you out."

"Sweetheart!"

"Are you in any condition to understand what I say?"

"It depends," Jonathan said with a judicious leer, "on what you say."

"Oh, give me a drink." She snatched the bottle from him. "My soul, you've had it all."

"Siddown," Jonathan invited, patting his knee. "Le's talk."

"We certainly will talk! It so happens you're in much hotter water than we'd ever dreamed. I've been all over my trail with Major Fox and there isn't a sign that Mr. Hagoromo ever existed."

"All over your trail with Major Fox, eh?"

"I mean the trail that—that led me to Mr. Hagoromo. Or are you interested at all?"

"Your voice is a melody," Jonathan said. He closed his eyes to listen.

"WELL, I don't think I've told you how I was directed to Mr. Hagoromo in the first place. I inquired, at the Japan Travel Bureau office over in the Marunouti building, about *noh* theaters in Tokyo, and a clerk told me he would secure information on *noh* theaters if I cared to call back at a later date. There were crowds of Jap travelers in the office, you know, when I went in, and this clerk materialized

The Jap shoved a wad of yen into Jonathan's hand, and ducked away.

from nowhere to take care of me, and of course it never occurred to me that he didn't actually work there. I made an appointment to come back the next morning, and he wrote his name on a card and gave it to me; I remember it was Mr. M. Takara. Oh, yes, the clerk was wearing a morning coat too. I recall thinking he must have been a superior sort—possibly a manager, or something of the kind.

"So, as I say, I promised to come in the next morning at ten and ask for him, and I did go back, but before I could ask he was at my elbow and he explained that he was terribly sorry, that the *noh* theater state of affairs was only a shadow of its prewar self, when over a dozen stages of several of the leading schools had been active in the city. However, he told me that Hideyo Hagoromo, one of the finest *noh* actors in Japan, had reëstablished his theater in Hongo, where performances were to be seen on alternate Sundays, and Mr. Takara had obtained from a former director of the Society for International Cultural Relations a letter of introduction to Mr. Hagoromo, which Mr. Takara was pleased to present me, and he did so, with a lovely bow. He told me that should I wish I might visit Mr. Hagoromo at Moto-mati 5-tyome, Hongo-ku, where Mr. Takara was sure Mr. Hagoromo would be delighted to discuss the *noh* with anyone interested and would possibly be happy to arrange an extra performance for a party of my friends. Really, when Mr. Takara showed me out, clicking his teeth and bowing from the hips, I felt as grand as Mrs. MacArthur.

"The letter of introduction to Mr. Hagoromo was in Japanese, of course, so I don't have any idea what it said. And I've lost the card Mr. Takara gave me with his name on it. I went out Wednesday afternoon, as you know, to see Mr. Hagoromo, and gave him the letter of introduction, and spent a delightful hour or so talking to him. Naturally when you came in at the weekend and wanted to find a *noh* theater, I took you right out.

"But now Mr. Hagoromo is gone, and everyone says he never existed, and at the Travel Bureau they say they have never heard of a Mr. Takara and that they would be very unlikely to furnish anyone a letter of introduction from a former director of the Society for International Cultural Relations.

"Evidently it was an extremely well organized ring of some sort, directed by someone immensely clever. And now they have vanished into thin air."

"Into thin air," Jonathan repeated dreamily. "There to gloat in evil glee over the success of their sinister machinations."

"It's nice you are amused," said Miss Krugie. "Perhaps you can tell me what in the world we are going to do?"

Jonathan raised his hand and looked at his watch. Apparently he had difficulty focusing his eyes.

Instantly Jonathan was surrounded by a small riot of would-be purchasers.

"In approximately six hours," he said with a pontific air, "the police will descend upon a character named Dus-Chotimirski."

Miss Krugie said, "Who?"

"A stout gentleman with sagging eyes known as Dus-Chotimirski. They will find on him the pearls."

Miss Krugie said, wide-eyed, "Johnny, what *are* you talking about?"

Jonathan waggled a finger at her. "You forget that I am an Intelligence officer. Come what may, sink or swim, thick or thin, A-2 wins through. There are ways of keeping in touch, even from a hide-out."

"But I've been with Major Fox all morning and I haven't heard a thing of—of anyone named whatever you said."

Jonathan hiccuped expressively. He stretched out his legs at their full length and shut his eyes.

"Johnny!" Miss Krugie said.

"At the moment," Jonathan said, "I hit the sack."

She cried, *"Johnny!"* He didn't answer. She tugged at his shoulder. He breathed deeply in sleep.

Miss Krugie got up and put on her little white hat and went out. Jonathan jumped to his feet, and tore off his jacket, threw it down and grabbed the Aussie hat and jacket and followed her.

She left the hotel and walked rapidly the few blocks to the esplanade at the palace moat and turned north. Jonathan, a hundred yards behind her, crossed the street to the ricksha stand at the Bankers' Club and climbed into one that had the top up. He called, *"Kuru-maya-san!"* and the ricksha-man came running. *"Kita-made itte kudaṣai,"* Jonathan said, which meant, in broken Japanese, that he wished to go north. The man started out at a trot on the boulevard.

Within a block they had almost overtaken Miss Krugie. Apparently, Jonathan thought, she intended to walk all the way. The girl must have muscles! Jonathan said, *"Yukkuri aruka,"* and the ricksha-man slowed to a walk and turned to look at him. Jonathan pointed to Miss Krugie. *"Tsuite."* The ricksha-man looked at Miss Krugie. He glanced at Jonathan again, with a grin of lecherous understanding.

At the Moto-mati Jonathan paid off the ricksha and followed Miss Krugie on foot. She crossed the alley behind Mr. Hagoromo's theater, went through the little marketplace Jonathan had visited a few hours before, and disappeared in one of the corrugated iron shacks of the burned-over area beyond the alley.

Jonathan gave her a couple of minutes, then walked to the shack, slid the rickety door open and walked in.

Mr. Hagoromo was squatting on a ragged mat on the dirt floor. The Japanese maidservant was squatting on another mat beside him. Miss Krugie was standing. They all gave him a satisfactorily startled look.

"Konnichi-wa," Jonathan said politely. He swept off the Australian hat and made a rather grandiloquent bow.

"You beast!" Miss Krugie said. "Oh, you—you *thing!"*

Mr. Hagoromo and the maidservant stood up and bowed.

"I hope you will sometime be able to forgive us, Dr. Jaffrey," the maidservant said in English.

"Don't even speak to him!" snapped Miss Krugie.

"We shall visit Major Fox within an hour," said Mr. Hagoromo.

"Good-o. I'm sure they won't hold you too long. It's a nasty shame."

"Prison will be familiar to us," Mr. Hagoromo said, his spectacles glittering.

"And do tell Chotimirski how sorry I am. I really am. It's such a pity."

Mr. Hagoromo and the maidservant bowed again. Miss Krugie pushed Jonathan outside and took his arm and pulled him away. She said, "Can't you hurry? Or do you deliberately want to ruin everything for us too?"

"Listen—" Jonathan began.

"We mustn't be seen here! Hurry!"

They reached the street. Jonathan was surprised to see that the ricksha-man had followed him from the corner and was waiting. The ricksha-man, evidently an old dog with deep knowledge of the ways of the world, smirked and bowed. Jonathan handed Miss Krugie into the carriage and got in beside her. Miss Krugie gave the address of her hotel.

"They are the son and daughter of Baron Kita, I presume," Jonathan said.

"Give me a cigarette, please," Miss Krugie said. He searched his pockets but found none and Miss Krugie said acidly, "Can't you be counted on for even the simplest things?"

"Listen—" Jonathan began again.

"So you were the Australian officer! I might've known it."

"Listen," Jonathan said in a drill-field voice, "I want to know what the hell goes on!"

The ricksha-man threw a surprised and frightened look over his shoulder and broke into a trot.

"But surely you do know! You've been so clever!"

"I was clever enough to know that no Jap could have disguised himself as me, to go out and steal the Baron's chessmen. That left out Mr. Hagoromo. The only other people we'd seen in his house had been the maidservant and the *noh* actor who helped Mr. Hagoromo give us a show; and since we'd only seen the actor while masked, he was obviously our thief. He had to be a European. And after I found where the thief and his buddies had been keeping a watch on the *noh* theater—from a wing of Baron Kita's prewar home—I decided that I needed only to locate a Jap, a Jap girl, and a European, all with some reason to be familiar with Baron Kita's prewar house, and with some logical connection with Baron Kita's present household that could account for their knowing of the pearls in the chessmen—and with some connection with you."

"Connection with *me?"*

"I looked into Baron Kita's family and saw them in plain sight: Son and daughter, and a stateless European they'd been working with. Couldn't be anyone else. All of them were active in educational circles, which could easily account for a previous acquaintance with you. All I had to do to prove I was right was drop a word about Dus-Chotimirski, and you took off like a ruptured duck."

"Yes, and you frightened me out of my wits, and the whole thing's a dreadful bust, and you risked ruination for all of us! But if you connected me with Chotimirski, then surely Freddy will too, and we're lost regardless."

"I picked it up from Mr. Hagoromo's gift and the Melbourne *Times-Pictorial*—and Freddy doesn't have either one. Mr. Hagoromo credited you with a Master's degree—a good indication that he knew you better before the war than he does now. No holder of a Doctor's degree is going to let a new acquaintance get the mistaken idea that he's only got a Master's. More likely, when Mr. Hagoromo last knew you, that was as far as you'd gone—which meant you were lying when you said you'd met him only last Wednesday. Then when you sent them some food, or took them some, you wrapped it in a newspaper that happened to be a *Times-Pictorial* you'd probably brought with you on the airplane—or maybe you're a subscriber; in any event, it looked like your calling-card.

"However, it doesn't matter whether Freddy finds out or not. Naturally, I'm going to turn you in."

"Johnny, you couldn't!"

"Give me three good reasons why I should hold still for the hard time you've been giving me. Give me even one."

"RIGHT-O," Miss Krugie said grimly. "I'll jolly well give you a very handsome one—because if it's ever shown that I was collusive in the theft of those chessmen, I'll swear that you were collusive too, and no one will ever believe you weren't." She gave him a pretty smile. "So it's wink or sink for the two of us, darling. That's why it was so miserably stupid to send me out to see them and then follow me there. How would it have looked if we'd been seen visiting them? And they're to confess this afternoon—and it all came to nothing anyway?"

"Okay," Jonathan said, "then it's sink for the two of us. I'm not exactly eager, but I can't go along with grand larceny. If they nail me with you, well, that's tough."

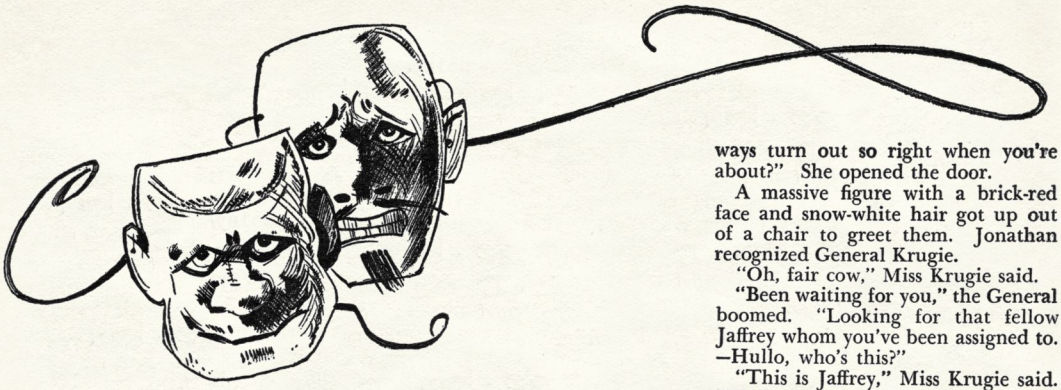
"But it wasn't grand larceny, Johnny—it wasn't anything! Even if Chotimirski had gotten the pearls it wouldn't have been crime—not really crime. But he didn't get them; they weren't in the chessmen."

"They weren't *what?"*

"Baron Kita is claiming they were stolen; but they really weren't, because when Chotimirski got the chessmen they were empty.

"You see, the pearls were Humiko's, she actually had possession of them before the war, and then when she was arrested by the Jap war government her father got hold of them and kept them. He had no real right to them, but there's the ridiculous Japanese double-standard property law, and Baron Kita was a favorite with the warlords anyway and could do whatever he pleased.

"After the war ended they—Humiko and her brother—tried to get the pearls back but Kita refused to give them up, and things were at sixes and sevens as far as the law is concerned, and they had no money or influence, and Baron Kita was still a powerful figure, so



they gave up hope of ever getting the pearls through legal process—before Baron Kita should have spent them in defense of the *Zaibatsu,* at any rate. When I came up a month ago and saw them, and they told me, I wanted to help them. I even talked to my father, but he said it wouldn't do for him to get involved in anyone's personal troubles, and I thought that any method, really, that would get the pearls back from Baron Kita would be justified.

"One of the servants with Baron Kita is loyal to Humiko and her brother, and he told Humiko the pearls were hidden in the chessmen, and we talked several times about a way to get at them, and then you came up and mentioned a *noh* drama, and there was that *noh* theater right there, and the people all gone from it for a holiday, and we thought if Chotimirski could get your uniform and some sort of pass—though I didn't realize the pass would have your name on it, so they would be led directly to you; you'd never have heard of the stolen chessmen except for that. Anyway, I tripped you and you went into the goldfish pond, and it all went off as smooth as silk—at least, until Freddy came looking for you.

"Chotimirski was going to hide out some place in the country with the pearls, and Humiko and her brother were going to confess and explain all the circumstances of the theft to the authorities and tell everything except where Chotimirski could be found with the pearls. Sooner or later their right to the pearls would be assured and then Chotimirski was to return and join them and they were going to use the pearls to finance a school here. I thought I was doing a fine and good thing in helping them. I don't feel at all guilty. Now, since Chotimirski didn't get the pearls after all, he's going to go with them to confess, and of course their confession will clear you. When you said what you did about Chotimirski being arrested, I thought there must have been a hitch and I was scared to death, or I wouldn't have taken a chance by going out to see them. But that was when they told me that Baron Kita had been too quick for them again, and Chotimirski hadn't really got the pearls. That's the only thing I'm sorry about."

"You're not only psychopathic," Jonathan said. "You're sentimental besides. On you, it's surprising. But it looks good."

"Then you won't tell? You are going to happen back from Kyoto this afternoon as we'd planned?"

Jonathan reached in his pocket and brought out a handful of pearls. He gave them to her. He said, "Here's a stray," and fished up another one.

MISS KRUGIE held them in her hands and looked at them.

"There is a popular cabalistic symbol among criminals known as the double-cross," Jonathan said. "Chotimirski was familiar with it. Its rites are simple. Remove pearls from chessmen and secrete same. Inform confederates chessmen were empty. Sadly confess abortive theft. Baron Kita insists pearls were in chessmen. Chotimirski insists they were not; word against word—stalemate. Upon release, secure pearls, remove self from scene, live happily ever after. But there is a somewhat more esoteric symbol known as the double-cross switch. Its end result is to leave Baron Kita and Dus-Chotimirski both deep in a hole, which appears to be a good place for them."

"You darling," Miss Krugie said breathlessly. She put the pearls away in her purse. "Johnny, you darling!"

"I can't help myself," Jonathan said. "I'm a sucker for a sentimental woman. Here's the hotel."

Miss Krugie put her arms around his neck and kissed him. The rickshaman was pleased and he came to lean on the wheel and sun them with a benevolent smile.

Upstairs, Miss Krugie put her key in the door and said, "I'm dying to know how you did it. Does everything always turn out so right when you're about?" She opened the door.

A massive figure with a brick-red face and snow-white hair got up out of a chair to greet them. Jonathan recognized General Krugie.

"Oh, fair cow," Miss Krugie said.

"Been waiting for you," the General boomed. "Looking for that fellow Jaffrey whom you've been assigned to. —Hullo, who's this?"

"This is Jaffrey," Miss Krugie said. "He just got back from Kyoto. Just this minute."

"Austrylian?" the General bellowed, looking on Jonathan with the little red eyes of a berserk bull elephant.

"Oh, no," Miss Krugie said, with a phony laugh. "He just—that is— I say, is there someone with you?"

"Eh? Yes, of course there's someone with me. Young lady flew in today with the gold-braid Yank inspection-party that just came out from Washington. She's a secretary. Seems this fellow Jaffrey's her young man and she wanted me to find him. Sent her to me, since he's working with you. Follow me? Here my dear, here's your young man. Got up like a Digger."

A very pretty girl with red hair and green eyes appeared from behind the General. Jonathan saw her as in a dream, dimly. She was wearing Stateside clothes. She was holding his cap and jacket. She was all that he had been remembering for something over two years.

"Well, good-o!" Miss Krugie exclaimed.

"ANNABEL!" Jonathan croaked.

"It's been only twenty-nine months and two weeks and three days," Annabel said to the General, in an angel's voice. "So naturally—"

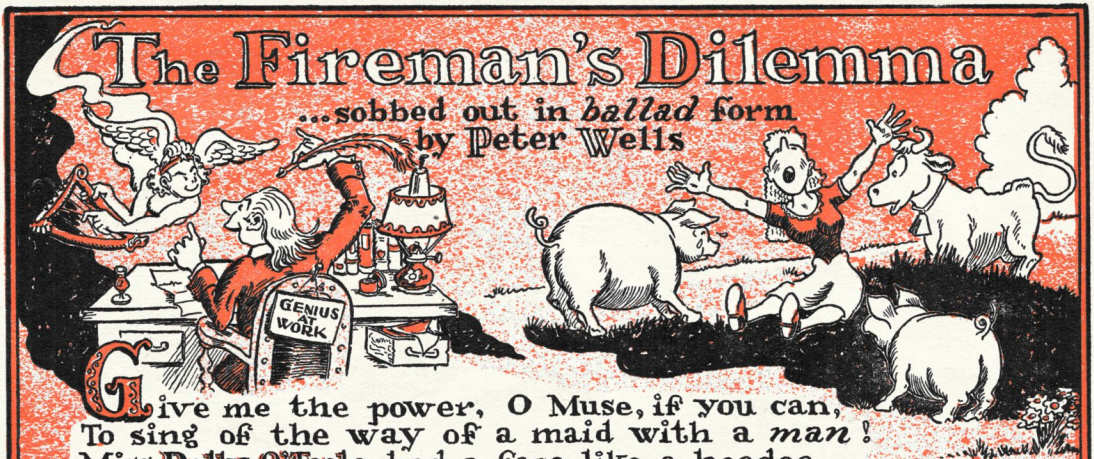
"Oh, good-o," General Krugie said. "Come and waltz, Liz; give 'em half a chance." He took his daughter out of the room. His voice echoed back from the hall. "Hope you've not got the habit of bringing young men up to your room, eh? Not good practice, you know."

Jonathan stood in the door, looking at Annabel and swallowing. He said: "You don't look real."

She came to him and took his hand and drew him inside and closed the door. She took off his wide-brimmed Australian hat and dropped it on a table. She said, "You do. You look very typical." She got out a handkerchief and wiped Miss Krugie's lipstick from his mouth. She said, *"Now,"* and drew his arms around her.

The Fireman's Dilemma

...sobbed out in *ballad* form
by Peter Wells



Give me the power, O Muse, if you can,
To sing of the way of a maid with a *man*!
Miss **Dolly O'Toole** had a face like a hoodoo,
But she yearned for *Romance* just as I, even *you* do.

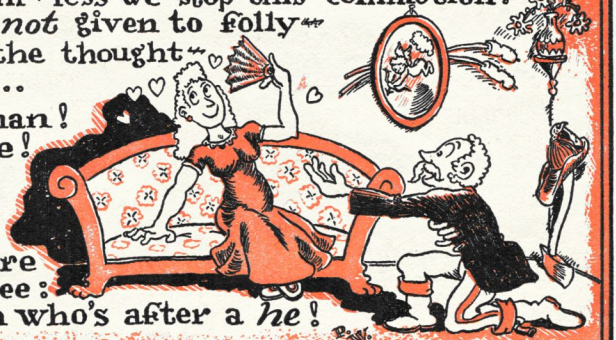
After picking and sorting, she finally chose
A promising Fireman, who squirted a hose...
Fireman McTavish! See! What a *Man*!
Guarding his bachelorhood! Woe to her plan!

Her shy small advances, her feminine wiles,
Were spurned by McTavish, who was cool to her smiles.
But Dolly kept trying, and thinking it out,
She reasoned: "Where fires are—there's *Firemen* about!"

Suiting action to words,
She bought matches and oil—
And *here* we can see
The results of her toil...
She had fires in her attic,
Her basement, her roof—
Which were quenched
by McTavish,
Who still kept aloof...

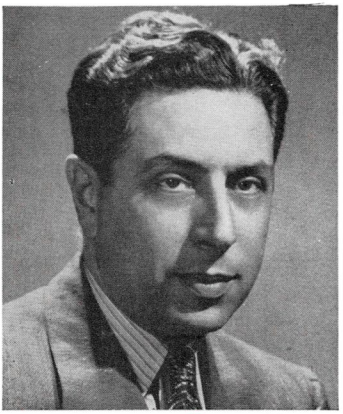
The Fire Chief was puzzled, though he liked to keep busy—
These fires at one address were making him dizzy!
Observant by nature, as Fire Chiefs must be,
He summoned McTavish to give his decree:
"McTavish," he said, "You're in line for promotion,
But your *future* looks dim—'less we stop this commotion!"
McTavish was Scotch and *not* given to folly—
Though he blanched at the thought—
He'd have to take Dolly...

Behold the brave Fireman!
He's down on his knee!
Miss O'Toole enjoys
An emotional spree...



The **MORAL** is here
For all gallants still free:
Beware Female Woman who's after a *he*!

Who's Who *in this* Issue



Oscar Schisgall

HE was born in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1901, came to New York 1907, and except for travel, has lived here ever since.

Educated in New York City—New York University, 1923. His background includes several years of residence, between 1926 and 1930, in France, Germany, England, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Switzerland, etc.

He is the author of sixteen books, the latest of which was "Swastika" (magazine serial title was "I Married a Nazi"). Concerning "This Land Is Ours," he writes:

"Last summer I traveled some eleven thousand miles through a great part of the West; and time after time I stopped for a few days to ride with friends in the U. S. Forest Service. One thing soon became clear: north or south, Rangers had the same concern. A bitter fight was developing between certain groups of ranchers who wanted free access to National Forest lands, without any kind of Government control over their activities—and on the other side of the fence, men who believed grazing controls must be continued for the welfare of the nation. Angry debates raged everywhere.

"Here, obviously, was the perfect modern background for a novel. I talked to dozens of Rangers, to dozens of cattlemen who opposed the Ranger point of view. I went to Washington and spent many days with the highest echelon of the Forest Service. The men were cordial, helpful—in fact, they all but became my collaborators.

"One last word: I'd like some day to do another novel of the Forest Service, if only for the joy of going West again to ride trail with some of the finest fellows I've ever met, the Rangers."

Robert Barbour Johnson

WAS born in Kentucky, educated in New Orleans, have lived in New York, Woodstock, San Francisco; and have traveled all over the United States, Canada and parts of Mexico, mostly with tent shows. Have been newspaper man, sightseeing barker, lecturer, sideshow barker, press agent, and trainer of horses, ponies, dogs, camels and other circus animals. In the last few years I've more or less settled down in San Francisco as writer and artist. My circus paintings have been hung in most West Coast Galleries, and have toured the country; but for some reason I haven't tackled the subject in short stories until now. My hobbies are a fifty-thousand-part miniature circus, horseback riding, arms and armor and ancient civilizations; and most of my best and closest friends have four legs!

Robert Barbour Johnson

William F. Goodykoontz

BORN in Bluefield, West Virginia, thirty-three years ago. Attended George Washington University in Washington, D. C. Worked for the Washington *News,* Washington *Post,* and I.N.S. Spent four years in the Army. Under pen-name Bill Goode, wrote a novel "The Senator's Nude," published in May, 1947, and a number of short stories and articles, most of them unpublished. Recently have spent considerable time in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where I became very much interested in dog-racing. "King Bones" was the product of numerous (and mostly unprofitable) visits to the tracks around Miami, to the West Dixie Greyhound Kennels, and to the old books on the sport which—in a less commercialized form—goes all the way back to Queen Elizabeth's time.

Next to dogs, I like people best.

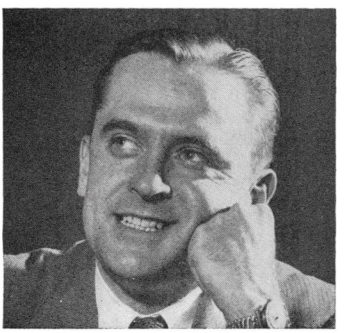
Charles Ellsworth

STARTED life in Akron, Ohio, and attended the University of Akron and the Cleveland School of Art. Artist and industrial designer for ten years. Wrote so many articles about industrial design that sales promotion, publicity and public relations got me.

Turned to fiction at forty—but to turn from publicity stories to fiction is only a quarter turn, at best! Have been free-lancing for eighteen months, with a dozen top magazine stories and many articles to show for it.

Have worked in Akron, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington and New York—and now live in Gramercy Park. Dependents—a patient wife who, luckily, used to teach English to high-school students, and a twelve-year-old daughter who writes better than I do—and is pretty besides!

Ex-hobby: flying gliders and sail planes with my wife as passenger, or vice versa. Present hobby: singing with the Manhattan Chapter chorus of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc., in veterans' hospitals around town. Watch for our Carnegie Hall concert in May *(Adv.).*



William F. Goodykoontz

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE FOR ADVENTUROUS READING
FEBRUARY, 1948

Ten short stories, including:

CALLING ALL CARS!
by KARL DETZER

STARLET IN JEOPARDY
by JOEL REEVE

THE LADIES
by GEORGES SURDEZ

WE'RE COMING THROUGH!
by ARCH WHITEHOUSE