# BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

JULY, 1949

25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES . . . XXXI—Iowa: *Painted by Benton Clark*

STAR OF DOOM *by LEWIS SOWDEN*

If the world were doomed, how would you spend your last weeks?

NORMANDY BREAK-THROUGH
*by C. DONALD WIRE & FORREST SHUGART*

THE ROLLING TONS *by WILLIAM E. BARRETT*

THESE UNITED STATES....XXXI—IOWA

# The Heart of America

BLACK HAWK had met defeat, and was confined in Jefferson Barracks, Mo., on the September morning in 1832 when General Winfield Scott and Governor Reynolds of Illinois met on the present site of Davenport, Iowa, to negotiate with the tribes Black Hawk had led during nearly a year of skirmishes with the settlers and organized militia. But there were chiefs present to plead before the white men, ably and at length, the invalidity of the cession in 1804 of fifty million acres of land in Illinois, Wisconsin and Missouri. For a quarter of a century the issue had been contended, and in 1831 had become acute when squatters preëmpted Black Hawk's village, forcing him to withdraw from the Illinois to the Iowa side of the Mississippi River. Early in 1832 he recrossed the river in defiance of orders, and the Black Hawk War was on, a war notable for no large spectacular battles, but rather for its many murderous forays. (Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis both served in the Black Hawk War but it is not of record that they ever met.)

Gradually the Indians were driven to retreat; and in the treaty, signed at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island, on September 21, among the terms enforced by General Scott was one compelling the Sauks and Foxes to cede all eastern Iowa. It marked the first cession of what was to prove to be the richest land in America.

First claimed by Joliet and Marquette in 1673, Iowa belonged to France until 1762, when Louisiana west of the Mississippi was ceded to Spain. Retroceded in 1800, at the command of Napoleon, the territory remained under the French flag until 1803. With the Louisiana Purchase, it became a part of the western domain of the United States. During the following thirty-five years the area was attached at various times to the territories of Louisiana, Missouri, Michigan and Wisconsin. On July 4, 1838, it came into its own with the creation of the Iowa Territory, which included, not only the present State of Iowa, but Minnesota and parts of North and South Dakota. In 1846 Iowa was admitted to the Union, with its present area, 56,280 square miles.

Iowa is the rich agrarian heart of the country, and it is no coincidence that four of her sons have served as Secretary of Agriculture; that the first agricultural societies were founded here in 1852; that ninety-five years ago the nation's first State Fair was held in Iowa. This month from August 25 to September 3, the annual Iowa State Fair will draw its customary enthusiastic crowds to Des Moines.

In the proportion of its area under cultivation, ninety per cent, Iowa leads the country, and the value of its crops, livestock and livestock products exceeds any other State. One tenth of all the food in the United States is produced on a quarter of the nation's grade A land—in Iowa! The State is Number One in such important farm products as eggs, poultry, prime beef, hogs and horses.

Its industry, over half of which consists of manufactured farm products, is also of economic importance. And Council Bluffs is the fifth U. S. rail center. No point in Iowa today is more than twelve miles from a railroad.

The heart of America, Iowa gives strength to America; and to Iowa America turns with pride.

# Readers' Comment

## A Lot for Two Bits

I READ with interest, to the point of regurgitation, a reader's recent plea for a new-type cover for BLUE BOOK. For two bits we have a novel, two novelettes, eight or nine short stories, five or six special features, and four stories of fact and true experience and he wants pretty pictures yet!

I take the point of view of the poker player who was forty dollars loser when some one remarked that the game was getting tight. He said, "Gents, I don't give a damn how tight you get, just don't go home." Wrap my copy in anything you choose, but be certain it reaches the newsstand the same time each month.

—JAMES L. DALTON.

## Features as Best Sellers?

BLUE BOOK, of all magazines, makes the most welcome monthly entry to our home. It goes without saying that both the good woman and myself enjoy each and every story, article and filler item; but here is my main point: Not normally hard or narrow-minded parents, we prefer our two early-teen-aged boys to steer clear of cheap comic books, but unhesitatingly give them the go sign for BLUE BOOK. I'm pleased to see them enjoy the balance of adventure, mystery, thrills and intrigue which BB provides. Your two regular features go into scrapbooks. One boy saves the Peter Wells illuminated page and the other goes for "These United States."

I think both these features would make their way to the best-seller lists if published in book form at the end of the series. I could readily place a couple dozen copies of each myself, and it's a sure bet that every school and public library in the country would give them a welcome to their shelves.

—NICK ZELL.

## A Hospital Favorite

BLUE BOOK offers a fine lot of select reading for the small price you ask for it. I have been a BLUE BOOK fan for years. Every month, I read my copy from cover to cover, then take it with me to the hospital. I read to my patients, and with every one of them, your magazine wins instant approval. They love to listen to the stories, and for a while they forget their pain and loneliness. Is that not a worthy mission for any magazine?

For this reason, I am glad that your stories are complete in each issue. Please keep it that way.

—AGATHA BRUNGARDT, R. N.


# 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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# Serenade *in*


OLD-TIMERS used to say there were only two seasons in Leadville—winter and July. It was still winter, the April morning when Mr. Oscar Wilde came to town, and a new snowfall hid the Shining Mountains.

On any map, of course, you'll find them called the Rockies, but Uncle Evie and the hard-rock men knew an older, better name. They knew how quartz and chrysolites and porphyry glittered by lamplight in the shafts of Carbonate Hill; and after a sixth drink Uncle Evie always spoke of the Shining Mountains.

This morning he was sober. But he made a point of wearing his red flannel shirt and greased boots, and that was why Kitty Walker turned her back on him. Kitty and the other members of the Ladies' Literary Society wanted Leadville to make a good first impression on Mr. Oscar Wilde. They wanted Mr. Oscar Wilde to realize that Leadville could be just as cultured as Denver.

The railroad had been finished only the year before, and a big crowd met the morning train. People could recognize our distinguished guest from his newspaper pictures as he stumbled off the coach, followed by his lecture manager and colored valet. But he wasn't wearing his famous knee pants and silk stockings. He wore a bottle-green overcoat with the fur collar pulled high, and he didn't seem interested in culture.

Uncle Evie guessed why. "He's got the light-air sickness," said Uncle Evie, grinning wickedly, "and we won't need to do anything to stop him from lecturing tonight."

Most visitors got the light-air sickness at two miles above sea level. It was the first time I'd ever seen a poet; and with the curiosity of a twelve-year-old boy, I scrambled for a closer view. He was bigger and younger than I had supposed; but his face held a sickly pallor, and he flapped one white hand helplessly.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please!" begged the manager, a fussy little personage. "Mr. Wilde requires medical attention—the introductions can come later."

Sympathetic souls helped the invalid across the cinder platform and bundled him into a barouche drawn by two white horses. The ladies of the Literary Society followed in hired rigs, but Uncle Evie and his gang piled into a buckboard behind mine mules. Kitty Walker knew that he was up to some devilment, and I never saw her looking more troubled. . . .

Even Uncle Evie's own kith and kin admitted that he had got the swelled head ever since he stayed two rounds with John L. Sullivan. Only last February he had traveled all the way to New Orleans to put up his dukes as a sparring partner. Early in the third round, just before the knockout, Uncle Evie had a Killarney mouse hung on his left peeper. With one eye swelled shut, he seemed to be mesmerized by the Boston Strong Boy's mustaches, coming at him like horns. And when he woke up, he swore at first he had been tossed by a bull.

Everybody knows what John L. did to Paddy Ryan, the Pride of Troy, in a bare-knuckled bout. Uncle Evie bet a hundred against odds that the Trojan Hero wouldn't last ten rounds, but the winnings went to buy drinks for the champ and his friends.

That Killarney mouse spoiled Uncle Evie. It had ripened into purple and green when he got back broke to Leadville, and he celebrated his twenty-first birthday by showing it off in every saloon. There wasn't a trace left in April, but he swaggered as much as ever. This morning it was just like him to pass other rigs until his mules were trotting alongside the

# Leadville

**When Mr. Oscar Wilde came lecturing to America, the good ladies of Leadville decided to show Denver that they had culture too. . . . But the menfolks were a trial.**

*by* LYNN MONTROSS

barouche. He would probably have worn a hothouse lily for sarcastic effect if the Harvard boys hadn't thought of it first.

But even Uncle Evie hadn't the heart to make a scene after another look at our distinguished guest. Mr. Oscar Wilde was gasping for air; and by this time his face had turned as yellow as the arsenic-laden smoke that poured from Leadville's smelters. Once he opened his eyes to the surroundings—the shanties climbing the slope of California Gulch; the wasteland of stumps left after whole forests had fed the furnaces; the rivers of slag hissing their way down through the ore-stained snow; the crunch of the steel molars grinding the rock, and the fierce mutter of the flames digesting it into bullion.

Once, just once, the poet opened his eyes. Then he shuddered and closed them again.

"Please!" implored the manager from the front seat of the barouche. "Won't someone drive ahead and summon a physician?"

Uncle Evie bellowed at the mules, causing the poet to shudder a second time. For this was an errand which just suited Uncle Evie, and he had a doctor waiting when the visitors were escorted into the ladies' entrance of the Clarendon Hotel. His eyes were dancing as he flipped a silver dollar into my hand.

"Trot along, squirt," he said, "and tell Kitty there won't be any lecture. Tell her that I'll be calling in my new swallowtail to take her out for dinner and dancing."

When a boy is still at the unscrubbed age, young ladies have a sweet, disturbing smell compounded of silk and fur and sachet powder. Kitty bent closer to hear my whisper, for the hotel parlor was filled with anxious clubwomen waiting for the doctor's verdict. It wouldn't have surprised me if she had flown into a fury—a girl who could put her father to bed by force when old Tom Walker came home roaring on a Saturday night. Kitty wasn't the weeping or swooning sort, and I felt embarrassed to watch her lips tremble.

"When you are older, Willie," she said at last, "you'll understand that it's better to be hurt now than to be sorry later."

Kitty couldn't have been more than nineteen herself. But perhaps I did understand, just a little, when she handed me the heart-shaped lavaliere Uncle Evie had brought her from New Orleans.

"Take this back to him," she said in a sorrowful voice. "Unless he has changed too much, he'll know what I mean."

He did know, all right, when I called him aside in the Clarendon Bar. But it wasn't Uncle Evie's way to be sensible until he had tried bravado. Without anyone noticing, he slipped the lavaliere into the pocket of his flannel shirt. Then he put on his most hearty tone, as if he had something to celebrate.

"Everybody up!" shouted Uncle Evie. "The drinks are on me."

Whenever twenty Leadville miners toed the bar in those days, you could count half as many nationalities. There were the Welsh and Scotch and Irish, and there were the Swedes from the iron diggings near the Arctic Circle. There were Negroes born in slavery, and there were dark, fierce little men from the Balkans. There were Yankees and Mexicans and Canucks; but the best hard-rock men of them all were the Cousin Jacks.

Strangers visiting Leadville had never heard of such a race. But it was the hard-rock men of Cornwall, with two thousand years of mining

*"He's got the light-air sickness," said Uncle Evie, grinning wickedly. "We won't need to do anything to stop*

skill behind them, who sank the shafts at Butte and Blackhawk and Virginia City. And when the foreman needed another good hand, a Cornishman could always say: "I'll write my Cousin Jack in the old country. Happen he might come to the States."

THE name stuck. It became a boast and a legend in the Shining Mountains, for the Cousin Jacks could sing and fight as well as swing a pick. Uncle Evie emptied his glass at a gulp, then he cleared his throat to hint that he felt like harmonizing. The Swedes and Scots and Serbs waited in gloomy silence, knowing that there is no stopping a Cousin Jack when he feels in the mood.

Uncle Evie liked his music sad. He gripped the bar, and he braced both feet. Then he threw back his head and got volume on an old favorite, "Your Letter Came, Dear, But It Came Too Late."

Soloists in Leadville had to soar above the earth-shaking rumble of the ore-crushers and stamping mills. There wasn't anybody who had the power of Uncle Evie, which made it such a pity that he was tone-deaf. Choirs of angels were softly chanting in his heart, and he never suspected that they sounded like herds of braying burros in his larynx. Any criticism he took as fighting talk, and his listeners could only wait for the final bellow, half an octave off key, which left the windows rattling. Just after that climax someone rushed into the bar to announce that Mr. Oscar Wilde had made a marvelous recovery from the light-air sickness.

Uncle Evie, red-faced and panting, was mopping his brow. He dropped his bandana when he learned that the lecture would be delivered, after all. Although the physician had insisted on diet and absolute rest, he was overruled by the Clarendon chef, who had come to Leadville straight from Delmonico's. On his own responsibility Monsieur La Pierce prescribed cold roast quail with iced champagne. These remedies restored the patient to such an extent that he declared the altitude bracing.

"Nobody could object," said Uncle Evie, summing up the situation, "if President Chester A. Arthur was lecturing. Even Reverend De Witt Talmadge we could stand. . . . But a London snob wearing knee pants and silk stockings—it's too thick!"

All the other Cousin Jacks were behind him to a man. So were the Swedes and Scots and Serbs. They conferred in whispers while I finished my strawberry pop, and a chorus of guffaws announced that some scheme had been approved. Pete, the bartender, was commissioned to write the invitation in his best Spencerian, taking pains with the curlicues and flourishes. Another silver dollar was

*Illustrated by*
JOHN FULTON


***him from lecturing tonight."***

pressed into my hand, along with the folded sheet of hotel stationery, but Uncle Evie's airs didn't fool me.

"Deliver this to the bridal suite," he said. "We thought Mr. Wilde might like us to show him down in a mine this afternoon."

ALL the way upstairs my still small voice pleaded with me. Kitty and the other ladies wanted Leadville to be cultured. They had hired the Grand Opera House. They had sold heaps of tickets. It meant a lot to them that we could afford a celebrity who had lectured in Denver and Boston and New York.

There was still time to do the right thing, even while Mr. Oscar Wilde scanned the invitation, but I lacked the moral fiber. Besides, I was curious.

"Delighted!" drawled the poet, smiling down at me. "You may report that I accept with pleasure—I've always wanted to see how the precious metals were mined." He paused for a final sip of his iced champagne. "Coal or iron, of course, would be tiresome. They are merely useful, and if I have the luxuries of life, I can do without the necessities."

Mr. Wilde had changed to a tweed suit, and after recovering from the altitude, he seemed to have a better opinion of us.

"Leadville," he murmured, glancing out the window at the wooden sidewalks of Harrison Avenue, "has the most picturesque men in America! Boots and slouch hats ought to be adopted by law as the national costume."

That was a peculiar thing about our distinguished guest—he always said the thing you least expected, and you couldn't be sure whether he meant it nice or nasty. Just then Uncle Evie began another number in the bar below. His volume was better than usual, and he experimented with a sad tremolo when he came to the chorus of "Papa, Stay Home, Don't Leave Me Tonight." Mr. Wilde listened a moment with a pained expression. "At least," he remarked, "that fellow has the courage of his discords. He has learned not to hide his blight under a bushel."

Uncle Evie looked outraged when I reported the exact words. "The gall of him!" he said, shaking his head sadly. "Some people simply haven't got any ear for music."

IN our family circle we always made allowances for my uncle's given name. His homesick mother, just arrived from the old country, had insisted on calling him Evelyn after some limey lord or duke. She never suspected that it was a fighting word which would shape the character of a boy brought up in mining camps.

The longer he thought about Mr. Wilde, the more sensitive Uncle Evie felt. "I'm going home and change clothes," he said. "I resent those smart-aleck remarks about Leadville men being picturesque."

Whenever he wanted to throw his weight around, Uncle Evie always strutted in one of his uniforms. First, he peeled off his woolen undershirt, revealing the tattooed eagle which flapped its wings as he flexed his biceps. Then he took a long while to decide between the regalia of the Hook and Ladder Company and the Light Cavalry. There was a lot to be said for each, but he finally chose the blue militia uniform with its plumed brass helmet and broad gold stripes down the legs.

Leadville's military companies never saw any action except parades, but a hard-rock man didn't signify unless he belonged. Uncle Evie threw out his chest and clanked his spurs, and he swept off his helmet with a grand flourish when Kitty Walker stopped him outside the Clarendon.

Anyone else could have seen that she was speaking for the ladies of the Literary Society, not herself. A worried group of them waited in the lobby as she swallowed her pride for the good of the cause. "I hope," said Kitty, very polite and formal, "that we're still good enough friends so I can ask a favor?"

"Name it," said Uncle Evie, hooking his thumbs in his belt as if he owned every mine on Carbonate Hill.

SHE surveyed him up and down, all the way from plume to spurs. "You big baboon!" she said. "You half-tamed gorilla!"

He grinned foolishly, for those pet names caught him by surprise. There wasn't any prettier girl in town, and there was a lot more of Kitty than the others. In a day when women wanted to be small and helpless, she stood straight and tall and proud. She had hands. She had shoulders. And she had legs instead of limbs.

"This afternoon," she explained, "the ladies planned to invite Mr. Wilde to a tea. Couldn't you postpone his visit to the mine till tomorrow?"

For a moment it seemed as if Uncle Evie's better nature would assert itself. Then his civic pride got the upper hand.

"We don't need any lecturer to bring us culture," he bragged. "We've got thirty thousand population where a few years ago there wasn't scarcely anybody. We've got the highest and the toughest town in the United States! We've got our head in the clouds and our feet in the richest silver mines on earth—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Kitty, still talking affectionately.

He pointed to Harrison Avenue, where an ore team struggled through fetlock-deep mud and snow. There followed a surrey in which several gamblers and fancy ladies were taking the air before starting their professional duties. "Leadville," said Uncle Evie complacently, "has ever been a town where the gents wore the pants. Next you women will be wanting to *vote.*"

"Maybe it would be a good idea," she flared, losing her temper. "You went down in the mines when you were twelve, and I quit the sixth grade to help my mother. But some day we're going to have a high school in Leadville! Some day we're going to have a library!" Kitty's eyes blazed a challenge. *"It'll be the women who fight for those things.* We'll have to bribe and bully you men every step of the way—then we'll bless you for it afterward."

Uncle Evie blinked. He gulped and swallowed, the way a man does

when a woman has the last word. But before he could think of the answer, Kitty left him standing alone on the sidewalk.

Now there wasn't anything except a miracle that could have saved Mr. Oscar Wilde from visiting the mine.

A person couldn't help feeling a little sorry for him, so trustful and confiding, so proud of his borrowed boots and slouch hat and corduroy breeches. He didn't seem to notice the suspicious bulges in the pockets of Uncle Evie and the other miners who called for him at the hotel. He didn't even suspect that he was being initiated when they took him into one of the smelters at the foot of California Gulch.

THE heat and noise wilted most visitors. But our distinguished guest found inspiration in the hoarse rumble of the furnaces. He exclaimed at the blinding showers of sparks and the weird tongues of blue or green flame as half-naked stokers fed the fires. He was fascinated by the bubbling white-hot pots of bullion, and the poisonous haze composed of soot and the dust of arsenic and lead oxides.

"It's beautiful as—hell!" cried Mr. Oscar Wilde in his enthusiasm, and he didn't mean it as swearing.

Next, after a jolting ride up Carbonate Hill, he was treated to a breathless descent in an ore-bucket to the bottom of the No. 3 shaft of the Matchless. There a different kind of hell awaited him in the dripping blackness of galleries faintly lit by miners' lamps. Three shifts of human moles toiled around the clock in this everlasting midnight to dig the ore—the dull black chlorides and the brown, smelly carbonates from which the silver was extracted.

Even this part of the initiation didn't faze our distinguished guest. But the final degree had never yet failed with any tenderfoot, and Uncle Evie produced a bottle from the pocket of his militia uniform. He drew the cork with his teeth and took a man-size snort. Then he showed his good manners by wiping the neck of the bottle on his sleeve before passing it around.

"It's an old Leadville custom," he announced, "to wet the stranger's whistle. . . . Some of us have knocked off work to entertain you," said Uncle Evie pointedly, "and we might be offended if you didn't drink with us."

"Work," sighed Mr. Wilde, "is the curse of the drinking classes." He choked a little, and his eyes watered after he felt the fangs of the mining-camp whisky. But it had to be admitted that he put down as much as any Cousin Jack.

The bottle scarcely lasted one round. As soon as it was killed, a full one promptly appeared from the next man's pocket.

*Uncle Evie launched into a creation of his own, dedicated to the*

Leadville took its drinking contests seriously. There was no further pretense of conviviality as the third and fourth bottles were finished in an atmosphere of grave concentration. And still Mr. Oscar Wilde showed no signs of weakening.

IT was Uncle Evie himself who cracked first. He had never supposed that hard-rock men would find any difficulty in drinking down a champagne-sipping poet. That was why he had been prematurely celebrating in State Street bars while Mr. Wilde enjoyed a refreshing nap at the hotel. Still, Uncle Evie might never have disgraced himself if he hadn't been betrayed by his sensitive nature. The final bottle was in circulation when he remembered that he had been slandered. His brooding gaze settled on Mr. Wilde, who had just tossed off an eighth drink without any noticeable effects.

There was an uneasy silence in which the overhead dripping sounded like rain. "I understand," said Uncle Evie with dignity, "that *you've* been telling people I couldn't sing."

The poet looked sad. "This should teach us all a lesson," he said virtuously. "If a person tells the truth, he is sure to be found out sooner or later!"

Uncle Evie's jaw dropped. Then he let out a yell of rage and committed the unforgivable sin.

Visitors to Leadville didn't realize that miners had their own commandments, handed down for generations. Strictest of all was the unwritten law against starting a fight underground, where the lives of others might be endangered. Hard-rock men had been known to toil peacefully side by side for days, both of them holding a grudge that would explode into violence some time when they met on the surface.

It was to the credit of our guest that he did put up his dukes man-

*Shining Mountains.... Nothing like it had ever been heard before.*

fully. But Uncle Evie had already been tackled by every miner within reach. Before he could throw a punch, he was toppled with a crash and pinioned by a dozen muscular arms. And after his struggles ended, he was grimly sat upon.

Mr. Wilde, being a tenderfoot, didn't know what to make of the shamefaced apologies muttered by these rough fellows. He couldn't comprehend why their ringleader had suddenly become an outcast. He was even more bewildered when they jerked Uncle Evie to his feet and filed sternly toward the shaft, guarding him as if he were a culprit.

It was snowing again on the surface. Large damp flakes swirled out of a somber sky to meet the sparks swirling upward from the black smelter chimneys. In this false dusk the three livery rigs wound down Carbonate Hill with the solemnity of a funeral procession. Not a word was spoken in Mr. Wilde's carriage all the way to the uproarious half-mile of State Street, where kerosene flares blazed in front of dance halls, saloons, gambling joints and variety theaters.

The poet took in the scene with fascination. Then he felt troubled by the gloomy and averted faces of his companions as they gathered about him on the wooden sidewalk. "Gentlemen," he said earnestly, "I'd like to do something to repay your hospitality! Won't you permit me to buy a last round of drinks?"

The hard-rock men stared at him, first in wonder, then in respect and salutation. For there could be no doubt either of his sincerity or capacity, and Leadville admired a genuine two-bottle man. Silently the nearest Cousin Jack wrung the poet's hand. One by one, the Swedes and Scots and Serbs paid their tribute, until only Uncle Evie was left. But Uncle Evie was on his way down the street, alone and unfriended. Uncle Evie had been sobered by his downfall, and in his mouth was the taste of crow, which is a bitter taste when a young man is twenty-one.

Most of the hard-rock men had never heard of Botticelli. They were not fascinated by the early Florentine school of art. But they flocked to the Grand Opera House that evening, and they applauded every time Mr. Oscar Wilde paused for breath.

His sudden popularity was not damaged even by the velvet knee breeches and silk stockings he wore on the stage. Pete, the bartender, summed up public opinion. "After all," said Pete, "a man has to make a living."

In our family circle it was agreed that Uncle Evie could only live down his disgrace by attending in his swallowtail. Several cups of black coffee aided in his regeneration, and I earned my third silver dollar of the day by keeping an eye on him.

Every time he dozed, I dug my elbow into him. And the lecture wasn't dull when Mr. Wilde described the beauty of his friend Lillie Langtry, the modern Helen of Troy. All the miners stamped and whistled, but at this point the ladies of the Literary Society seemed to lose interest. The ladies had been a little disappointed in Mr. Wilde ever since hearing about his performance in the mine.

After a few noisy curtain calls the hard-rock men felt that they had done right by their new hero. They drifted away to their usual haunts, and Uncle Evie was one of the few males appearing at the reception held afterward in the Clarendon ballroom.

This evening had been one of the triumphs of Mr. Wilde's lecture tour in America. He was young enough to enjoy hero-worship, but the day's activities and the high altitude had left him sleepy. Not a single aphorism had fallen from his lips in an hour, and he found it needful to stifle several yawns during the introductions.

At this moment he was approached by a lovely young Amazon with shoulders as broad as his own. Kitty had just counted the evening's receipts, and her eyes were bright with enthusiasm.

"Mr. Wilde, I don't know much about Leonardo da Vinci," she confided, stumbling over the unfamiliar name. "But I do hope we can get the men of Leadville interested in raising funds for a new high school and library—"

Our distinguished guest held up one hand. His long, intellectual face took on a look hinting that a witticism was at last forthcoming. "Women," he remarked, "inspire us with the desire to do great things—and always prevent us from carrying them out." He let a little pause elapse, then added with a thoughtful air: "My dear, the only way a woman can

ever reform a man is by boring him so completely that he loses all interest in life."

Kitty's cheeks flamed. A girl brought up in mining camps is bound to hear words which are not ladylike, and she whispered several of them as she turned her back. But Mr. Oscar Wilde did not notice. Mr. Oscar Wilde was making a mental note of his witticism for some future occasion.

The episode did not escape Uncle Evie, who had been following Kitty humbly with his eyes. All evening he had been trying to work up the courage for an apology to our distinguished guest, but now he perceived that it was no longer necessary. And when Kitty returned from the cloakroom, he was stationed near the door.

"It would give me great pleasure," entreated Uncle Evie, "to see you safely home—"

But Kitty looked straight through him as if he were transparent. "I'm sure that Willie would be glad to escort me," she said, and she waited for me to hold her coat.

By the time I hurried back to the ballroom Uncle Evie had vanished. Mr. Wilde had retired for a long slumber before taking a morning train, and the last guests were departing.

First, of course, I thought of the State Street bars. But it was an injustice to suppose that Uncle Evie had been drowning his sorrows. They were beyond the aid of such restoratives, and after a long search I found him plodding down the middle of a residence street—solitary, wretched.

"Out of my way, boy!" he muttered. "The only chance I've got left is to sing for her."

There was no arguing with Uncle Evie when he reached that stage. So I tagged along at a discreet distance.

Kitty's home crouched at the foot of the gulch. Other shanties clung to the steep sides, perching wherever they could find a shelf. All of them were darkened for the night as Uncle Evie planted himself in the road, ignoring the mud and snow. He loosened his wing collar until the tie dangled. Then he unbuttoned his vest and sounded the full-throated opening notes of "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

He was in wonderful voice. Emotion always helped Uncle Evie's volume; and tonight he put his whole soul into it. The resulting discords bounded back and forth across the gulch, multiplying themselves in thundering echoes.

When the song ended, he did not hesitate for an encore. The angels in his heart were already chanting

*"I'll do better than that!" cried Uncle Evie, and his good eye gleamed with enthusiasm. "Darling, I'll sing for you."*

the plaintive chords of "Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?" This selection just suited the burros inhabiting his larynx, and they shattered the midnight stillness with their most lusty braying.

Lights had now begun to appear in some of the shanties. But Uncle Evie did not hear the angry voices of aroused sleepers. He did not hear Kitty calling to him from her bedroom window:

"Evelyn Davis! *Will* you hush that awful bawling!"

Just at that instant the full moon broke through the clouds. It revealed Uncle Evie, pouring out his soul as he wiped away the perspiration. It also revealed the breathless spectacle of the Shining Mountains, towering over the world in all their glory.

Uncle Evie took one look at the dazzling white peaks and was lifted off his feet. In the past he had depended on the music of others, but now he knew that he was a composer. Without a pause he launched into a creation of his own, dedicated to the Shining Mountains. And since no words could have been adequate, he was able for the first time in his life to express himself without restraint.

Nothing like it had ever been heard before. The first tremendous strains set up vibrations which started several minor avalanches. Lights now gleamed in every window as missiles rained from above—bricks and stones and frozen potatoes. A few of these projectiles glanced off Uncle Evie's swallowtail, but in his absorption he did not notice.

He did not notice even when Kitty Walker appeared before him, after slipping on a kimono. Uncle Evie had just removed his coat, so fierce was the heat engendered by creation, and his eyes were closed as he addressed the moon. Kitty tried to make herself heard, but at close range the fur-bearing bass notes would have drowned out a battery of ore-crushers.

THERE was only one thing left to do, as she knew from long experience with her father on Saturday nights. Kitty's right described a sweeping arc and connected squarely. The result was a startled bellow of acknowledgment, followed by silence.

Uncle Evie blinked like a man groping his way out of a trance. Criticism had never destroyed his faith before, but after feeling his rapidly swelling left eye he was crushed by doubts.

"Didn't you like my singing?" he asked hoarsely.

She threw her arms about him with protective tenderness. "I loved it, Evie! But you were breaking my heart—it was so wonderful I couldn't stand it any longer."

The sensitive look vanished from his face. "You're wonderful too," he said, pointing to his new Killarney mouse. "John L. Sullivan himself couldn't have done any better."

Suddenly both of them realized that they were embracing in a spotlight supplied by the moon. They became aware of the large and appreciative audience hanging out of windows up and down the gulch. "Let's go into the house," said Kitty gently, "and put some beefsteak on your poor eye."

In the shadows of the front porch they paused for a last moment of privacy before facing her family in the parlor. Kitty rested her head on his shoulder, and the future seemed assured.

"Mr. Oscar Wilde means well," she said, "but he hasn't got the kind of culture we need. Evie, we can raise money for our library and high school by giving benefits—you know, home-talent plays and concerts. You could help me so much by selling tickets—"

"I'll do better than that!" cried Uncle Evie. He held her at arm's length, and his good eye gleamed with enthusiasm. "Darling," he said impressively, "I'll sing for you."

# The Tiger's Hour

**An Oriental prince undertakes to decide a rivalry in his harem by a battle of leopards. . . . And then a stronger force takes over.**

by HERBERT RAVENEL SASS

THE Raja had a feeling for beauty of movement. It was stronger even than his feeling for beauty of line. As the two women who had been dining with him rose abruptly and moved away from the table, his eyes followed them with an intense and visible pleasure. It was chiefly because they always moved superbly that these two had entranced him.

"Leopards," the Raja said to himself softly. "The most graceful—and the most sinister—animals in the world."

He remained seated at the end of the richly appointed table in the center of the vast, magnificent room. Except for his white turban with its single jewel, he was dressed in the European fashion: a slight and delicately handsome man in his perfectly fitted evening clothes, his skin no darker than olive, his mustache no more than a black line. His gaze shifted quizzically back and forth between the two women standing apart from him and from each other in a silence electric with anger. Their backs were turned to him; and he wondered again, as he had wondered in Paris, at the daring expressiveness of the extreme European styles.

Presently the Raja rose. He stood beside the table, gazing abstractedly out of a window at the jagged rampart of the Himalayas white against the sunset sky. Then he clapped his hands. Immediately through a curtained doorway at the end of the room his secretary appeared.

"Debnarain," the Raja said, "we face a dilemma: My little dinner has not been so successful as I had hoped."

The secretary's clean-shaven amber face denoted regret. The Raja continued:

"You met both these ladies on their arrival at the frontier, so that introductions are unnecessary. That one, you recall, is the blonde Mlle. Christine of Sweden, while that is the dark Señorita Felisa of Aragon, in Spain. As I told you, they helped at different times to make my stay in Paris most charming, and so it was arranged that they should come to me here in Netaan. I don't flatter myself that they were attracted to me personally, but there was something intriguing in the idea of marrying one of the world's richest rulers and becoming a queen. Alas, Debnarain, neither lady knew that the other was coming: And now that both are here with the same object in view, they reject the obvious solution of the matter. In a word, they refuse to be queens together."

He looked at Debnarain with a whimsical upturning of the corners of his mouth, and the secretary inclined his head gravely.

"They refuse to accept each other, Debnarain; and therein they seem to me illogical. Neither was ignorant of our customs here in the East, and each came prepared to accept the other ladies of my household. That, I suppose, is due to the fact that the others are natives, as these two would express it, and therefore so inferior that their existence may be ignored."

Again he paused, watching Debnarain closely. He saw the secretary's black eyes grow narrow, and the Raja nodded as though he had expected this change in the other man's expression. But he made no reference to it.

"You see," he continued, "how graceful they are. When they move, I am reminded of an exquisite phrase of the Scottish poet Thomson, 'Every flowing limb in pleasure drowns'—also of Robert Herrick's sleek stanza:

*"When as in silks my Julia goes,*
*Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows*
*That liquefaction of her clothes."*

"And, Debnarain, they remind me of something else—they remind me of leopards, most graceful of animals. The dark Señorita Felisa, I conceive, is like the black leopard of our *terai* jungles. The blonde Mlle. Christine recalls the snow leopard of our high mountains. It is this comparison that has given me an idea."

The Raja paused. Again a faint smile parted his lips. "You will have a snow leopard trapped, Debnarain," he said, "and also a black leopard. They must both be females. You will have them brought here to the palace, and placed in cages to await my pleasure."

He turned toward the two women. "Ladies," he said, "I must ask you to listen. There is an ancient custom of my country, not much talked about, but still sometimes invoked in dilemmas such as ours. When an irreconcilable conflict arises between two wives of a household, threatening that household's peace, the master declares his preference, and the other wife eliminates herself by taking poison. Since you will not consent to be queens together, it is obvious that one or the other of you—"

He laughed softly and yet his jet eyes were now blue-green with anger. "Don't you see, Debnarain," he cried, "we shall let the leopards decide it? We shall let the two leopards fight it out. If the black leopard wins, the dark Felisa will become a queen, and the blonde Christine will drink the poison. If the snow leopard wins, it will be the other way about. Ah, my dears, it will be an exciting battle, and how you will enjoy watching it, each of you praying that her champion will win!"

His voice resumed its accustomed silken smoothness, though the blue-green light still gleamed in his eyes. "It seems fantastic," he asked, "incredible? You came to get riches, power, and instead it may be a poison cup. You do not like that? Well, we do not like it, Debnarain and I, when you refuse to accept each other, but make no objection to my other women—when you slight them because they are 'natives.' You forgot Debnarain and I are 'natives' also."

The two Parisiennes were watching him closely. If they were alarmed, they hid their fright well. A swift glance passed between them as though each wished to know what the other was thinking. The tall fair-haired one shrugged her white shoulders. "I do not find your joke amusing," she said to him coldly. The Spanish woman smiled scornfully, turned her back on the Raja and his secretary, and resumed her examination of the curios in a wall cabinet. The Raja continued:

"A month from today we shall have our battle of the leopards. Meanwhile the palace and its gardens are at your disposal, though you will not be permitted to leave the grounds. Drana Ranee, the present mistress of my household, will see that you have every comfort. I hope, my dear Felisa and my equally dear Christine, that you will both find it an agreeable month."

Badour saw her coming, far down the valley road, and something turned over inside him. "So I still amuse her," he said to himself. "She is coming for more amusement. Be careful, Badour. Be very careful, my son."

But he wouldn't be careful, and he knew it—not in the mood that was on him today. Again he admitted one good thing in this Raja, this Raja who was bringing European ways over the mountain walls into sequestered Netaan. Instead of keeping his women in seclusion, the Raja let them go where they wished. But for that new custom, he, Badour, would have had no glimpse of Drana Ranee these past twelve months.

The Netaan women are most of them small, their skin like pale lucent amber, their features delicate and finely modeled, with thick dark hair and eyes of either black or brown. Drana, a brown-eyed hill girl whose beauty had made her the Raja's principal Ranee or queen, drew her horse to a halt in front of Badour, who stood beside the road with bowed head, not venturing to look at her yet.

"You may raise your eyes," she said.

The young hill man took a deep breath and stood with head flung back above his square strong shoulders, his jet eyes looking straight into hers. He kept nothing back; he let it blaze out of his eyes, his face. Not only she would see it, he said to himself; this time her two Gurkha lancers, who had halted their horses a few paces behind her, would see it also.

Well, that didn't matter. A man could stand just so much, and then the barriers broke. She spoke to him quietly, as though there were nothing unusual in his face:

"You have trapped the two leopards, Badour?"

"The black one is in a cage at my house," he replied as coolly as he could. "I have found a snow cat's sunning-ledge on the second ridge of Junnoohari. I shall take her with nets three days from now."

"Debnarain will be pleased," she said. She was speaking in a low voice; the two lancers couldn't hear her words. Her tone was casual, yet he was aware of a certain urgency.

"You are trapping those two for Debnarain," she said. "Now, Badour, you will trap a leopard for me: Not a black one nor a white one. I want a tawny leopard—the common brown kind. It must be a female, and as large and strong as the others."

"It is your right to command me," Badour answered. "This will be easy. Black leopards are more rare, and snow cats are only on the high ridges. But tawny leopards swarm in the *terai* jungles. I shall arrange a pit-trap tomorrow."

"You will take her to your house, Badour, and keep her there." Again he caught an urgency, an excitement, under the even quietness of her tone. "You will send me word when you have her. Then I shall come and tell you what to do."

He bowed, and she smiled down at him, slim and young in her tight Netaan bodice, with full trousers convenient for riding, a black-and-gold veil caught with silver brooches in her soft hair. "I shall tell Debnarain," she said in a louder voice, "that you are performing his commission." She turned her horse's head.

"Badour," she whispered, "you will do this for me, but not because I command it." He stood staring after her as she galloped back toward the city, with the two crimson-jacketed lancers side by side behind her.

"The black leopard will come first," the Raja said pleasantly. "Your champion, or shall I say your counterpart, my lovely Felisa. Let us hope that her fangs are keen."

They were seated—the Raja, Debnarain and the two ladies from Paris—in a small balcony above a rectangular court. The stone-paved space below them was the pit or arena where, in the days of the earlier Rajput

*"The black leopard will come first," said the Raja pleasantly. "Your champion, or shall I say your counterpart, my lovely Felisa."*

princes, battles between wild beasts were staged for the amusement of the ruler and his consorts. Now, after long years, the pit was again in use.

The Raja's eyes looked down and across at a brass-studded door in the wall at the other side of the pit. Beyond this door Badour waited with his caged leopards; and through this door, operated by a hidden mechanism, the leopards would come. Señorita Felisa, in black and scarlet with gold sequins, leaned tensely forward in her chair, her chin clutched in her clenched hand. At the Raja's left, Mlle. Christine, emerald earrings against her straw-colored hair, gazed down at the brass-studded door.

Both women saw the door through a haze of incredulous horror. For on a small table behind them stood a silver cup half full of a liquid green as grass.

"Ah!" the Raja said softly. "Look!"

The brass-studded door was opening. It swung slowly on its hinges, revealing a dark tunnel-like passage; and suddenly from the darkness of this passage into the bright sunlight of the open court was thrust a face.

It was a face of satanic beauty. It was coal-black, perfectly modeled yet rugged as though hewn from rock, and in the midst of it blazed a pair of great orange-yellow eyes. A moment this face remained there immobile, watchful. Then, with ears flattened and lips curled so that her long white teeth gleamed like daggers half unsheathed, the black leopard moved slowly out into the pit.

The Raja, leaning forward over the balcony's railing, uttered a low exclamation. "Felisa," he whispered to the Spanish woman at his right, "the leopard-trapper has done well by you. I have seen few finer black leopards. She is sinewy, powerful. See how her eyes flame. There is a secret brought down from the old days, a powder which we place in their food. It makes them doubly fierce, and it gives them the eyes of demons—"

He broke off. Though as yet it was not visible, they knew that in a moment another face would appear in the doorway opening into the pit. The Raja laughed softly.

"Christine, my charmer," he said to the blonde woman at his left, "now *you* are coming. Coming in beauty, as you always come—and, let us hope, in power. Coming to be a queen, or else—"

He left the sentence unfinished. Mlle. Christine had risen. Her small hands clutched at the jacket over her breast; her painted lips were like bloody gashes across her bloodless face. Her eyes stared wildly at the dark square of the doorway in the pit; and in that doorway something which until now had been only a shadow slowly took shape.

It changed from a dark shadow to a gray shadow. Then suddenly they saw it as a great silvery-white cat-face above a snow-white chest. It was broader, more massive than the black

leopard's face; and the eyes, normally blue-gray, were incandescent orbs of green. They were fixed in a savage glare upon the black leopard pacing restlessly at the base of the opposite wall. Crouching low, the snow leopard moved out of the doorway—a bulkier, heavier beast than the lithe jungle cat, with longer, thicker fur, pure white and cloudy white marked with gray rosettes over the powerful shoulders and back.

The Raja's long fingers closed softly over Mlle. Christine's trembling hand.

"Congratulations, my sweet," he whispered. "The leopard-trapper has done well by you also. A snow leopard needs weight to offset a black leopard's quickness. This is the largest female I have ever seen."

His hand, firm upon Christine's quivering wrist, pulled her down into her chair. "See," he whispered, "how they eye each other, how their tails twitch with fury. That is the effect of the powder. They will fight to the death, and already they are crouched for the spring."

He glanced smilingly from one woman to the other.

"Ah, Felisa—Christine," he said, "now it is here, the hour of decision: A queen's jewels, or a cup of poison. While life goes on as usual in the great world outside, here within our mountain walls we stage a little drama of our own—and your precious lives hang on it, my dears. When you came, beautiful as leopards, stalking me as your prey, hungry for my gold yet scorning my race, you didn't foresee that I would put you in a pit to tear each other with fang and claw—"

He stopped suddenly. Plainly a new thought had come to him. He turned to the man behind him.

"Debnarain," he said, "we planned it badly. There should have been a third leopard. The black one for Felisa, the white one for Christine, a tawny one for Drana Ranee. That would have been complete, quite perfect. Why didn't we think of a tawny leopard, Debnarain?"

For answer the secretary pointed. Through the doorway into the pit a tawny leopard was gliding—a lustrous, long-bodied, golden-amber cat, with spots and rosettes of brown.

In the same instant the black leopard and the snow leopard sprang at each other from opposite sides of the pit.

They sprang at the same moment, and with equal fury. Meeting almost in the center of the stone-paved rectangle, they reared on their hind-legs, striking with their big forepaws, ears flat against their heads, bared teeth flashing. They were like boxers sparring for an opening, and one could see how much more slender the black leopard was than the thick-furred, cloudy-white cat from the Himalayan ridges.

But this sparring lasted only a moment, and it was the black one that bored in. Thinner, longer-limbed, it was also quicker. Suddenly it was inside the snow leopard's guard, its jaws slashing at its enemy's throat.

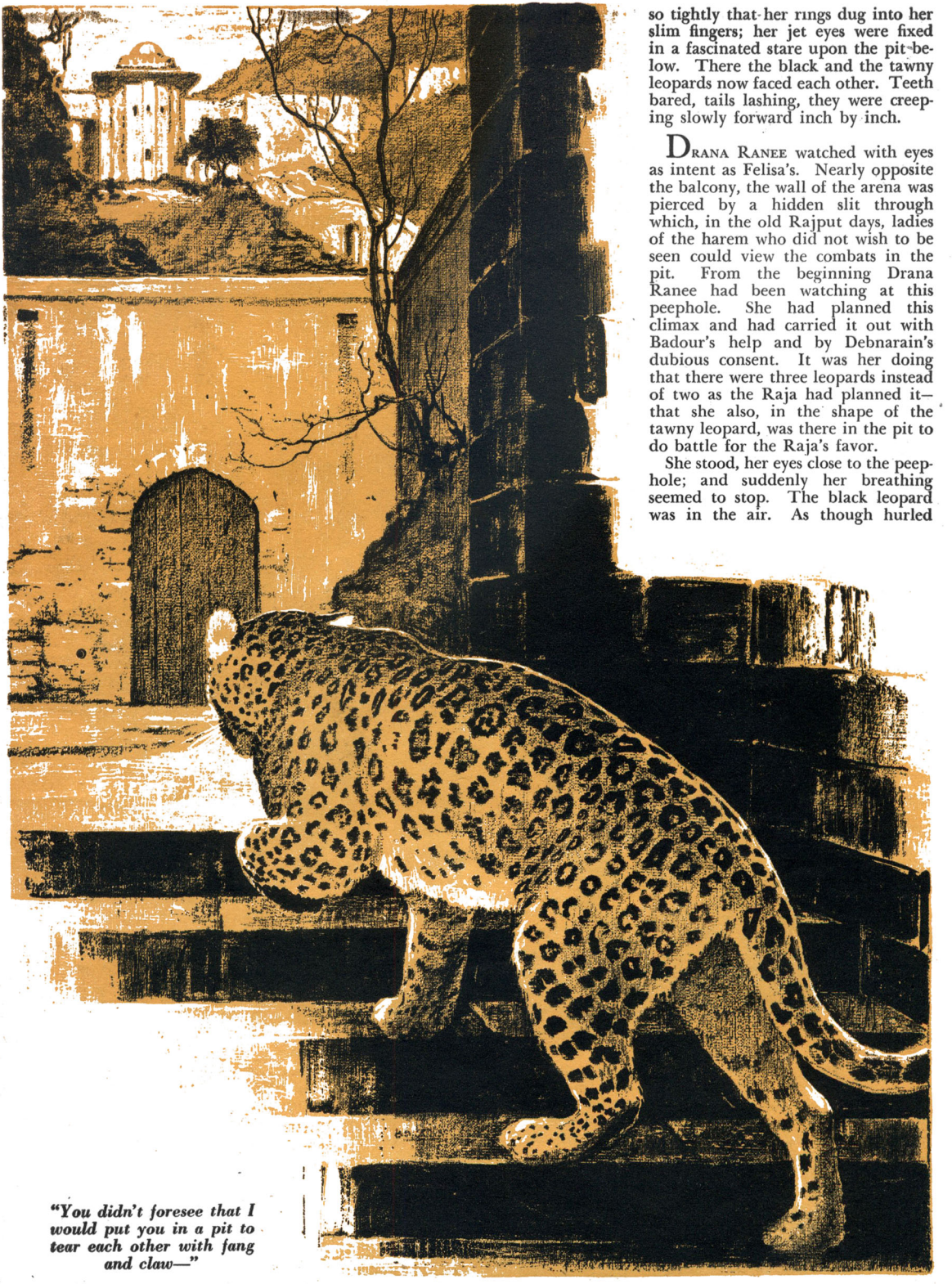
They went down together, locked in close grapple, rolling over and over, snarling, coughing horribly. They were not two but one, a writhing mass never still for an instant; for some moments it was impossible to see which had the advantage, so closely were their bodies interlocked. Then the Raja, leaning forward over the balcony rail, made a clucking noise with his tongue.

"Ah, Christine," he murmured, "Christine, I am afraid—"

He was right. Almost suddenly the fury of the struggle diminished; two minutes later the snow leopard was dead. The green light was gone from its incandescent eyes; its body lay limp on the stone floor. That first savage lunge of the black leopard in the opening moments of the battle had torn a gash in the white throat through which the snow leopard's life had drained out.

In the balcony above the pit Mlle. Christine sat slumped in her chair, her breast rising and falling with her quick, labored breathing. Her gray eyes were glassy. One hand twitched spasmodically in her lap; the other, flung behind her as she collapsed, rested inert on the small table where the cup of green liquid stood.

Felisa the Spaniard was on her feet. Her hands clutched the railing



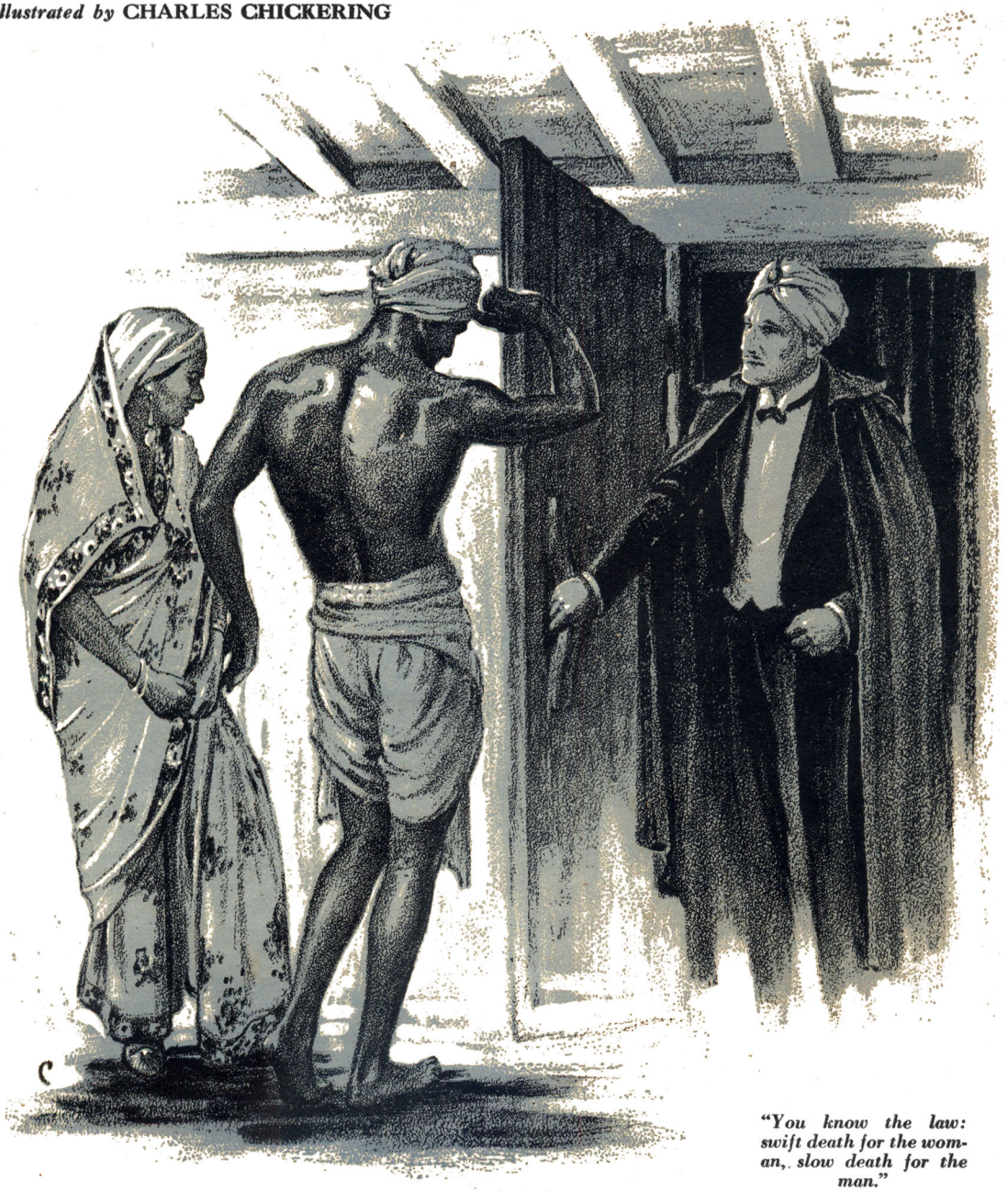
*"You didn't foresee that I would put you in a pit to tear each other with fang and claw—"*

so tightly that her rings dug into her slim fingers; her jet eyes were fixed in a fascinated stare upon the pit below. There the black and the tawny leopards now faced each other. Teeth bared, tails lashing, they were creeping slowly forward inch by inch.

DRANA RANEE watched with eyes as intent as Felisa's. Nearly opposite the balcony, the wall of the arena was pierced by a hidden slit through which, in the old Rajput days, ladies of the harem who did not wish to be seen could view the combats in the pit. From the beginning Drana Ranee had been watching at this peephole. She had planned this climax and had carried it out with Badour's help and by Debnarain's dubious consent. It was her doing that there were three leopards instead of two as the Raja had planned it—that she also, in the shape of the tawny leopard, was there in the pit to do battle for the Raja's favor.

She stood, her eyes close to the peephole; and suddenly her breathing seemed to stop. The black leopard was in the air. As though hurled

*Illustrated by* CHARLES CHICKERING



*"You know the law: swift death for the woman, slow death for the man."*

from a catapult, it was leaping. And the tawny one was motionless, seemingly unready!

Then, quick as light, the tawny one was on its back. Its four big paws, the claws unsheathed, were thrust upward. Into the bristling fortification of those claws the black leopard smashed downward with talons as terrible as its enemy's, and with long white fangs slashing, stabbing at the tawny one's throat.

Again it was impossible to see clearly what happened. The two leopards, locked together, were a great black and yellow ball in incessant erratic motion, rolling and writhing over the stone floor. There was less snarling this time. As though this fight were too deadly for sound, they fought almost silently, except for the clashing of teeth as their questing jaws encountered, the rasping of claws against the stones, and a monotonous moaning whine which rose and fell but was never loud.

Soon even this whining ceased. . . . Then suddenly, as they struggled in close embrace almost in the center of the pit, the silence was split by a piercing agonized scream.

Drana Ranee drew away from her peephole as though she could watch this no longer; then, fascinated, she pressed her face once more against

the slit in the wall. In the balcony the Raja took his cigarette from his lips. "That was the death-scream, Debnarain," he said with a trace of excitement. "One of them has received a mortal hurt. It will be over soon."

He turned, and for a moment his eyes seemed to rest on the cup with the green liquid in it.

Then he smiled at the quivering Spanish woman.

"Was it you that screamed, Felisa?" he asked softly, "or was it—the other leopard? Well, presently we shall know."

IT was near midnight, and Badour had not slept yet. Two hours ago he had returned from the city, and now he lay in his clothes on his pallet of sheepskins in his little clay-plastered house near the head of the valley. His big kukri knife, the hill men's favorite weapon, lay on the floor beside him. Two tapers against the opposite wall gave more light than his dark thoughts needed.

They were dark enough. She had won. She had kept her Raja, kept him from those others, the two European women. She had risked much, perhaps even life itself, but she had won.

Badour's compressed lips were a thin line. Oh, he knew her; no man knew her better! When she had been only a hill girl as poor as he, she had been proud, ambitious, determined to make her beauty carry her far. She had not changed. Love was nothing to her; ambition, power were everything. To have been supplanted as the Raja's principal queen would have killed her.

Badour laughed grimly. The humorous part of it was that he—he of all men—had helped her keep her Raja! He knew that four times out of five a black leopard, fiercest of all the cat kind, would defeat a tawny one. He had trapped seven tawny leopards before he had caught one which would have a chance against that black she-devil. He had *lived* in the jungle, starved, hunted day and night—and why? So that this girl could keep her Raja. So that she could retain her power and her pride, which were all she cared about. . . .

He raised his head. Riders were coming on the road; the hoofbeats were suddenly audible as they rounded the shoulder of the hill just below his house. He heard the horses halt, the riders dismount.

He rose but he didn't even glance at his kukri knife lying beside the bed. He had few enemies, and seldom troubled to bar his door. These riders would be Newar and Lachoon, cronies of his, stopping for a talk on their way home from the city. They would have some rice wine with them, or maybe something stronger. A drink or two would be good tonight.

"Enter!" he cried as he heard them outside the door. But the men who opened the door were not Newar and Lachoon. They were the two Gurkha lancers of Drana Ranee.

They opened the door and stood aside. There was a moment during which the doorway remained empty. Then Badour saw Drana Ranee standing there.

He knew everything in that moment. It was there in her eyes; it was shining out of her eyes just as it had always shone out of his whenever he looked at her. He hadn't tried to hide it from her, and now she too was hiding nothing. At last, at long last she was telling him—telling him something which somehow he had always known and yet had never known: something which was past belief and yet was true.

The two Gurkhas had stepped outside and had closed the door behind them so that Drana and Badour were alone in the room. She moved toward him, holding out her hands. He knew, and yet he could not quite believe.

"You won," he said. "Your leopard won. You have kept your Raja. Why have you come?"

"I kept him," she interrupted, "but he cannot keep me. You would have known that long ago, Badour, if you hadn't been blind. You would have seen—but we must not talk now. We must be over Junnoohari Pass before daylight. I brought a fast horse for you, faster than your pony—"

She stiffened in his arms. Outside, there was a sudden rush of feet, a smothered ejaculation, the sound of a struggle which was over almost in an instant. The door opened. The Raja stood on the threshold.

The single great jewel in his white turban glittered in the light of the tapers. He had thrown a scarlet cape over his black evening clothes. His delicately modeled face was like a face carved from ivory as his jet eyes rested upon the man and the woman standing side by side before him.

THE Raja looked at them in silence for a moment. Then he nodded, and came toward them, his lips parted in the slight smile that Drana knew well but could never read certainly. He spoke to the girl.

"Well," he said, "your leopard won. But you forgot that there is a greater one than the leopard. You know the legend that our people believe—that the first ancestor of the Netaan Rajas was a royal tiger, and in every Raja the blood of that tiger still flows. The leopards had their hour this afternoon. Now it is the tiger's hour."

His slender hand stroked his chin, then dropped again beneath the scarlet cape. He continued, speaking rapidly, his eyes on the girl:

"Debnarain was right; you love this leopard-trapper and have always loved him. Now I have caught you with your lover. You know the law: a swift death for the woman, a slow death for the man."

He paused. His eyes fell on Badour's kukri lying on the floor by the bed. He walked there, picked it up the great curved knife and felt its edge with a slim steady finger. Badour moved quickly, placing himself between the Raja and Drana. The Raja smiled.

"I have twenty men outside," he said. "There is nothing you can do. You are a trapper of leopards, my friend; but this time, you see, it is a tiger."

He pursed his thin lips, and again his hand stroked his chin. He was still looking at the girl.

"Debnarain was right," he said, "and wrong. He said that you loved this man but loved yourself more. He said that you would never go away with your leopard-trapper, because you would never give up wealth and power and live in a hut instead of a palace. But—you brought a led-horse with you tonight. You brought it for him. You were going away with him. You and he would have been over the Junnoohari Pass before morning. So it seems that Debnarain was wrong. There *is* something, someone whom you love more than yourself. After all, you are not like Felisa and Christine."

HE had been speaking calmly. Now his smile faded; his lips were drawn tight over his white teeth; his face was more than ever like an ivory mask.

"I am sending those two back to Paris where they belong—they are poor creatures, no more worthy of anger than of love. As for me, I have work to do here in Netaan. I must build forts for defense and to keep trouble out—the strife that bathes India in blood. I must build roads and start schools. I must teach the people to grow larger crops so that we shall be able to feed ourselves."

His face underwent a sudden spasm as though intolerable pain had stabbed him. This lasted only an instant; a moment later his faint smile had returned.

"So you see I shall be very busy—too busy, perhaps, to grieve over what I have lost. But I ask this favor of you: When you and your leopard-catcher are safe over Junnoohari Pass, remember that the tiger's hour came—and he did not use it."

Not till the door had closed behind the slight, erect form in the white turban and scarlet cape, did hill man and hill girl look at each other again.

FIVE YEARS AGO AMERICANS WERE SMASHING THE POWER OF GERMANY IN FRANCE IN THE DESPERATE ACTION HERE VIVIDLY DESCRIBED.

# Normandy

## *As told to* C. DONALD WIRE

THIS is the story of Task Force X of the 3rd Armored Division. Across the shambles of the Carentan Peninsula, from the beach-heads of Normandy to the Seine River, Task Force X operated as an independent unit, a roving command ordered to harass the enemy and keep him on the run.

On the morning of July 26, 1944, Combat Command A of the 3rd Armored Division was in assembly area at Le Desert, just behind the American forward line. This line ran between St. Lô and Périers, along the highway connecting these two towns. Most of the 4th, 9th and 30th Divisions had been pulled back a thousand yards from the road in preparation for launching the attack. The front was marked by a display of yellow identification panels. The curtain was ready to rise on Operation Cobra, the driving of the enemy from the Carentan Peninsula.

Overture was supplied by the Army Air Forces. Mustang groups beat the bushes and threw lead into anything that moved on the far side of the line. Wave after wave of Fortresses and Liberators swept through the sky, the roar of their combined engines a drumfire of sound that was deafening. Eighteen hundred heavies, four hundred mediums, and seven hundred fighters blasted the way for ground movement.

Task Force X moved out of assembly. Represented in the force were H Company, 36th Armored Infantry, H Company, 32nd Armored Regiment, a battery of self-propelled 105-millimeter guns, and a platoon of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. The force was under command of Colonel L. L. Doan.

Task Force X took to the road in armored half-tracks and tanks. In command of the lead platoon was Lieutenant Joseph W. Herrick, Infantry—or just plain doughfoot, as Joe would call himself. Joe had a little more experience than the others—thirteen years in the United States Army, a veteran of both the Philip-

# Break-through

## *and* FORREST SHUGART


pines and China. Stateside, he was a vehicle test officer for the Tank Destroyer School. But testing vehicles didn't measure up to his ideas of fighting a war, so he transferred into Infantry and joined the 3rd Armored in Britain in time for the invasion.

From now on it's Joe Herrick's story. He tells it the only way a good leader can tell of such things—as he saw it:

We passed through the 8th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division, scattering them off the road like a bunch of jay-walkers. Greetings were exchanged—very pointed and expressing no sympathy. As far as they were concerned, any doughfoot who would ride herd on a tank was deserting the colors.

We made contact with Jerry so fast that just the thought of it scared hell out of us. From a short distance down the road came the hysterical rattle of a German "burp" gun. It was answered immediately by the measured *bub-bub-bub* of an automatic rifle. This noisy exchange was drowned out by the sharp crack of a tank .75 and the mushy crump of mortar shells.

A cry of "Infantry! Where the hell is that damned infantry!" came down the column. We rumbled to a halt, and I hit the dirt on the run. My legs were doing all right, but I was afraid at any moment they'd cease to coöperate and tangle me up.

In the middle of the road beyond the lead tank was a shoe. In the shoe was a foot. Something shapeless was huddled in the ditch along the side of the road. I didn't look any closer.

On the crest of a small hill that forced the road in a sweeping turn to the right, I found Sergeant Johnson peering through a tangle of hedge. When I came up, he said: "A Heinie patrol, Lieutenant. Holed up down there." He pointed to a group of buildings flanking a single-track railroad that wound through the shallow valley below. I checked the position on my map. It was St. Benoît.

In a few minutes my C.O., Colonel Russell, came up from the column. We went into a huddle, and everybody agreed that the enemy patrol had hopped it after the first flurry and was now on its way to Paris. That is, everybody agreed, except Herrick. I had a hunch, and I was plenty sorry when it proved true.

I was ordered to take my platoon down to a railroad spur east of St. Benoît and blow out a culvert to allow passage of the tanks. We moved out along the hedgerows. I had my tongue in my cheek and that feeling in my stomach—that stuffed feeling, as if I'd just eaten a quarter of beef.

*They didn't stop to ask questions; they threw everything they had.*

We were almost to the railroad track—the rifle squads up front and the machine-gun and mortar squads behind—when six Krauts jumped up out of the weeds like gophers and took off toward the village.

I damned my hunch. These boys weren't headed for Paris. They were the big wheels of the Wehrmacht—fanatic S.S. troopers. Give them a town to hang onto, and they'd set up housekeeping until you blasted them out.

We sent over a burst of fire, and two dropped. The rest ducked behind the railroad embankment. A machine gun stuttered, the bullets snapping through the ever-present hedges and showering us with leaves. Sergeant Carson and I stumbled into a hole filled with water. Take any hole, it doesn't matter—it will always be filled with water.

Fire from the village ceased, and I caught a glimpse of a waving white flag. I ordered the platoon to stay down. This surrender racket was old business.

Suddenly there was a hell of a roar from our rear, and a pair of tanks clanked into the field from the road. They didn't stop to ask questions. They threw everything they had at St. Benoît—their lap guns, their .50-caliber turret guns, and then .75-millimeters. The Krauts disappeared in a cloud of smoke and dust.

But they were only down, not out. We received a reply—a searing blast of flame that withered the hedges like a forest fire. We crouched and prayed. Small arms, mortar and .88s ripped at the earth walls from which the hedges grew. In later days I gave a great deal of thanks to the ancient Gallic farmers who were responsible for those walls. They'd only laid the stones, but trees grew and died, and the walls that rose were a mass of earth and tangled root and limb. Impervious to most shells—I kept telling myself.

I thought the tanks would return fire, but they didn't like the heat of the moment. They beat it for the protection of the road, which was below the terrain level of the village. I called them a few choice words, and then glanced down the line of the crouched platoon.

Sergeant Beck must have caught my eye, for he leaped to his feet and started to run toward me—a good man coming up for orders. He reached the halfway mark when a .88 struck a tree he was passing. The tree toppled, and the sergeant's legs ran on. The upper half of his body disappeared.

My mouth was open, and I was about to shout some silly remark when my helmet was snatched from my head. It was Carson, kneeling there beside me and screaming what was left of his head off. Most of it was peeled away. He kept screaming and shouting, "Give me my hat! Damn it—my hat—my hat—"

I struggled with him for possession of the helmet. I felt foolish and I felt sick. He let go of the helmet and began walking around in tight circles. He kept screaming and clawing at his head. I tackled him; and Sergeant Lubbock, who was now Platoon Sergeant by right of inheritance, sat on him. He lapsed into unconsciousness.

The enemy fire slacked off and I sent out an order for retreat to the road. We began the long crawl. So many of the figures were still as I moved back along the platoon! I wanted to prod them and tell them to get moving. I knew it wouldn't do any good.

Sergeant Lubbock and I made six trips back into that charnel house. We got all those who were still living back on the road. Three times Jarman, the big boy of the platoon, thrust out his wrist where once had been a hand, and asked me to shake. I shook. You see, he was leaving us for good; he knew that. Little Rasmussen wandered listlessly up and down the road, his clothes charred and his skin blackened—in his hands a bazooka that had been bent into a horseshoe. A bullet had set off the ammunition pack on his back. He shouldn't have lived, but he did.

Colonel Russell made contact, and we were given fifteen minutes to reform. We went back, right into St. Benoît, and found Jerry gone. They must have added two and two and figured we'd eventually throw our armor against them. I'm glad they could add.

Nightfall found us deep within the hedgerows around the village of Marigny. Colonel Russell was giving us the old pep talk, the old "Just one more hedge, boys, and we'll call it a day." That stuff, I found out, could go on forever. Normandy was all


hedgerows—really earth embankments with trees growing on top. You didn't hurdle them or go blasting away in a frontal assault. They were the next best thing to a fortress. The procedure was something like this:

We'd send a squad up each side hedge, supported by machine guns and mortars. Jerry would hold his position until you closed in, then pull out and fight from the next hedge. The plan was simple, the execution a little more difficult.

We moved up for our "one more hedge." Lying between two supporting tanks, I was soon deaf from the muzzle blast. Our own artillery shells kept plowing into the trees overhead, and we got the fragments intended for the Krauts.

Sergeant Terhune let out a squeal as we got a tree-burst right over our heads. I got that stuffed feeling as I looked at him. The suspenders to his ammo belt were severed, and his field jacket was ripped open. A red stain spread across his shirt. We rushed him off to an aid station. An hour later he returned, a sheepish grin on his homely face, and a welt across his back that looked as if it had been raised with a whip. We never figured that one out.

One of the tanks that was threatening to split my eardrums pulled away from the hedge and dropped off onto the road. It clanked a few yards and then was stopped cold by an .88 from a Jerry Panther. Corporal Wade and I went after the Panther. We got it with a bazooka shot broadside. We kept back, waiting to see if any of the crew members were alive. One we could see on the road, quite dead. Then a second popped out from under the tank like a scared rabbit. He ran with the same vigor.

We banged away at him, but never touched him. He bore a charmed life—or Wade and I needed glasses.

At dawn of the following day we hit the road for the village of Cerisy La Salle, our next objective. By now all the doughs were hep to this riding herd on a tank. Someone must have seen a newsreel of the Russians. It's a hot seat, let me tell you. You can toast bread on those engine gratings. I still carry a checkerboard brand on my rump.

Shortly after we moved out of our bivouac area the lead tank pulled up sharp, and rifles cracked. I started those motions with my legs, hoping as always that they'd take me in the direction I wanted to go.

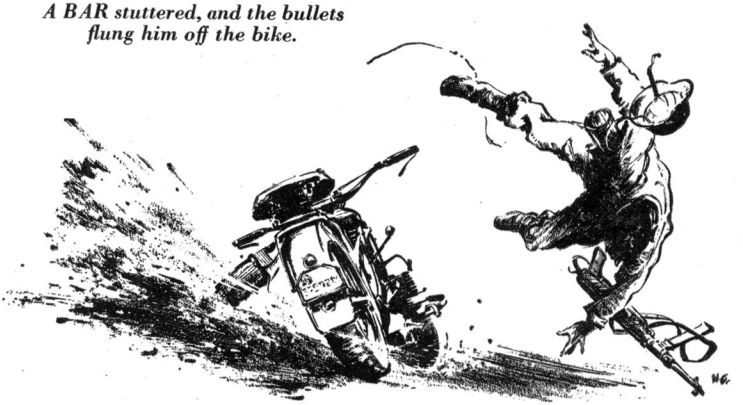
A camouflaged anti-tank gun had been spotted in a ditch. The tank boys were a little worried, and insisted on an investigation—by the infantry.

I tabbed a rifle squad and moved up through the fields flanking the road. Holing up where we could see and not be seen, we waited. The waiting game is nerve-racking. I suddenly wanted to do all kinds of things, like scratch myself or clear my throat. I began thinking about a sneeze. That was enough. I gave the order to flush the nest with fire. Before anybody could pull a trigger, three Krauts walked out with their hands up. Very obliging.

We stayed put and watched for trickery. The leader of the three strode forward confidently. His two henchmen looked as if they were ready to stop living at any moment. That they did, when they made a bad decision and turned and ran. The bullets that hit them threw them right into the ditch.

The personality boy turned out to be a tow-headed kid who was happy as all hell, and very talkative. We gathered around him and gave him a quick shake-down. We had to beat Colonel Russell to the pick of the loot, but the Colonel came out all right—he got a pocket-knife with seven blades. He really blew his top when the kid insisted on riding on the hood of a jeep. Somewhere he'd found out that we occasionally transported a prisoner that way. But the Colonel booted him off, and it was a very discomfited Nazi that started to the rear

*A BAR stuttered, and the bullets flung him off the bike.*



*Illustrated by*

on his own. His dignity, not to mention his backside, was sorely hurt.

Paralleling a ridge of high ground, we approached Cerisy La Salle. A shallow valley dropped away from the ridge. The village was on the opposite side of the valley.

I was riding the rear deck of the third tank. The tank platoon leader, hanging half out of his turret, started to shout something to me when he got a direct .88 hit. He went straight up, did a lazy slow roll, and came down running. I could see his legs pumping before he touched the road.

*I can still see him there, carrying everything except weapons.*

My tank took a hit and lurched like a drunk. I decided it was time to join that platoon leader. We went off that road like two Yale milers. The legs, I told myself, were still doing their part.

The column broke for the hedgerows and prepared to fire. Sergeant Lura was busy deploying the platoon along the slope above the road. We didn't have to wait long for a fight. Enemy infantry poked their noses out of the woods below in the valley, and we gave them what we had. That ended the battle. They melted back into the woods, leaving quite a few dead in the field.

The tank platoon leader, after counting noses, came up one man short. He figured the driver of the lead tank—the one that took the .88 hit—was still in the smoking rubble. He almost started the hostilities all over again when he asked me for a couple of doughs to go get his man. It was a job for the infantry, he kept telling me. It was his man, not mine, I kept telling him.

There was no risk placing a bet on who would go. I took two BAR men and dropped down onto the road. We found the driver under what was left of his tank, quite alive but afraid to come out because of the ammunition that was exploding over his head. We couldn't blame him. That stuff was really popping. We finally convinced him that he could not stay there forever.

Enemy artillery was beginning to register on the column. Several more tanks were hit and burning. I started back down the road looking for Colonel Russell. If he had any answers, I wanted them.

I found the Colonel herding tanks into the fields where they could find cover. He had a soft spot in his heart for that armor. As I was talking to him, a tank received a bazooka hit and blew up. The fire came from a lane that entered the road near us.

Colonel Russell shouted: "Go get it, Herrick!" I looked at him sad-eyed, and explained that all my men were down the road. He had an answer, but not the kind I wanted. He grabbed two men and shoved them at me. "Take these. Give 'em hell!" We moved off, me trying to figure out who I was supposed to give hell to—the Krauts or my two men.

We picked up machine-gun fire and hit the dirt. Bullets plucked at my clothes, and I was waiting for—well, since it only happens once, it can't be described. I counted three holes in my field jacket, but there wasn't a scratch on my body. The two boys who dropped at my heels never got up.

When the fire ceased, I crawled up the lane on my knees. I passed a bazooka lying in the road, the imprint of a man's body in the grass next to it. A little farther on was a German helmet, and tracks in the mud. I stopped. I had lost interest and had no intention of making a career of the hunt.

Back with Colonel Russell, I was informed that Cerisy La Salle was too tough a nut for one column. We

*Hamilton Greene*

***It was wholesale surrender. We dreaded it. It meant that somewhere up ahead fanatic S.S. divisions were blocking withdrawal.***

withdrew—reluctantly, of course—and the 1st Infantry Division took over.

Next objective in our little black book was Mont Pinchon, the highest hill in Normandy. It was getting late, so Colonel Russell took a notion to tuck us in early. We leaguered in an apple orchard. Fresh fruit, but stale bedding.

German planes came over all night long, dropping those hideous flares that blaze and drip like a bucket of gasoline poured into the air. They give you a feeling as if mice are crawling along your spine. Jerry dropped bombs on everything that stuck up, and I can tell you we kept down.

At dawn we moved to the foot of Mont Pinchon. It was getting a once-over-lightly with artillery time fire and strafing Mustangs. They banged the place up pretty well.

We doughs moved into our line of departure. We flushed a few Krauts and had to skirmish for it, which is not in the book. A line of departure is supposed to be a quiet, pleasant place where you sit and think—or don't think.

Across the road from me sat a gray-clad soldier, a coal-scuttle helmet on his head and a rifle on his knees. He scowled, a German scowl. I scowled back. He got the best of me, because he had three eyes against my two. The third one was a neat hole in his forehead. I got to thinking I might look like that sometime, so I went over and turned him around.

At 08:30 hours we shoved off into the dense woods of the hillside. The Krauts up above poured it on, and kept us hugging the brush. We came to the river bank and dropped into a wash of scummy water. I had the mortar squad throw out a few rounds at the chattering machine guns that were making it hot. We laid our own machine guns across the bank of the wash, and fired them like rifles.

Suddenly I felt the warm stickiness of blood, and found my hands and face covered with it. I didn't hurt, and was alarmed because I didn't. Then the man next to me, a kid named Evans, slid down into the muck. A jagged splinter of steel protruded from his neck. It was his blood that was covering me.

Sergeant Lubbock and I held him up while Jeff, our platoon medic, made a cursory examination. We all three agreed he was dead. Twelve hours later, when he was picked up by litter-bearers, he was very much alive. When Jeff heard this, he was really happy. He hated to see the boys get it. I believe that he somehow felt responsible if a man died from wounds. I can still see him shambling along at the rear of the platoon, carrying everything except weapons—bandage pouches, extra canteens—and an extra share of guts.

Jeff never fired a shot. But wherever a shot was fired, he was there. He seemed to be every place at once, patching and tending and worrying himself sick. When he finally got his, in the Ardennes salient, it happened just the way he'd have wanted it to happen—bent over a wounded man, an ampoule of morphine in his hand, a look of grave concern on his serious face.

SINCE we were bogged down, it wasn't long before Colonel Russell was blistering the air over the walkie-talkie. He wanted to know what individual or collective rights we had in holding up the war. I pleaded a delay of thirty minutes, since it would be dark by then. He refused, and told us to get the lead out of our pants.

I gave the order for a charge. Sergeant Lubbock yelled to the rear: "If anyone's damn' fool enough to follow us, get in tow!" Well, there were plenty of damn' fools in that outfit, all right.

We slipped into the river. The current was swift, and like ice. Machine-gun fire whipped it into a froth. The bullets made a funny dull *plop* as they plowed into the surface. Heads went under. Some bobbed back up; others stayed down.

The hardest thing I ever did in my life was clamber up that far bank. I

was cold to the bone, and those unpredictable legs of mine wobbled under me like two soggy cornstalks.

We went on up the hill, slipping and sliding, cursing the tangle of underbrush and the loud, incessant rattle of the machine guns. We went on and on, and it seemed the hill rose higher and higher.

Just as we reached the summit, Jerry pulled out. Like that, as if he were bored with the whole thing! We figured on taking five and getting a cigarette, when he roared right back at us. He probably had ideas about a trap, but it didn't work. Three times he came back, and three times we drove him into the woods. He quieted down then, and left us to shiver and go hungry.

I had come to the conclusion that the rest of the column had forgotten us and we were stuck here for good, when a battalion of the 1st Division came slogging up the hill. They tossed us K rations, and swept on in hot pursuit.

With our bellies full of corned pork loaf and biscuits, we marched the seven miles into Mont Pinchon. The column, re-formed under the cover of darkness, was standing by at the *kaput* German battalion and regimental headquarters.

AT dawn of the next day we saw the road running through that town packed with armor, all flowing toward Mortain. This was the first real contact we had made with the main striking force. It was a good sight.

But coming from the opposite direction, moving listlessly and without purpose, was a negative quantity that spelled defeat and utter dejection. French civilians, their faces blank and exhausted, pushing the remnants of their belongings in creaky wagons or wheelbarrows, and in some cases baby buggies. German prisoners, never searched, their hands clasped over their heads. Every field delivered another handful. They just threw down their weapons and joined the mob.

It was wholesale surrender. We dreaded it. At this stage, it meant that somewhere up ahead fanatic S.S. divisions were blocking withdrawal, leaving their own men the choice of death or surrender to the Allies.

We moved out, toward Coutances. The road was littered with the débris of the fleeing Wehrmacht. Gas masks in their round aluminum containers, coal-scuttle helmets, and the soiled letters that always began *Mein Lieber Hans* or *Herman* or *Fritz*, and invariably ended with *Heil Hitler, Mutter.*

We didn't get far before an M.E. 110 came roaring out of the blue and whipped our column in a strafing run from front to rear. He did a good job—men lay dying in the road, and a few tanks were stopped cold. If he'd had any brains, he'd have pulled out and beat it, but he came in for a second run, and at that, every gun in the column fastened on him. He whipped straight up and dropped out of his smoking plane. I saw his 'chute blossom; then his body jerked and kicked as the lines of fire converged on him. I could hear him screaming, even after his 'chute was shredded and he was in free fall like a bomb. It wasn't a pleasant sight, but it wasn't anything that would bother your conscience. You just remembered what he'd done to your column.

*Our next victim was an armored vehicle. The .57 blew it apart.*

THAT night, bedded down in our leaguer, we heard over our radios that something big was brewing at Mortain. The Krauts were getting their second wind, and a firm stand, if not a counterattack, was expected.

The search planes came over, lighting the night sky with their gruesome flares, tracing and re-tracing in an effort to rout us out. Colonel Russell received word that we were wanted at Barentan immediately, so we obliged the search planes by leaving our concealment and forming on the road. They quickly found us, and the dash to Barentan became a nightmare of shrieking anti-personnel bombs and the dripping buckets of gasoline that were poured into the air. It was a night I'll never forget. Under that artificial glow, a man's face read fear as if it were written in a heavy black headline. We scattered and then re-formed so many times I lost count.

Barentan proved to be a grandstand seat for the final battle of Mortain. I say final, because Mortain was one town that changed hands so many times its mayor didn't know whether to "heil" like a Nazi or salute like an American.

Up until now, Task Force X had been an independent unit, detailed to gnaw at the German 7th Army and give 'em hell wherever they were met. We had been a small force searching out other small forces—clearing hedgerows and hilltops, routing out last-stand defenders from villages. Here at Barentan, although still to operate as an independent unit, we were to enter into closer liaison with the main force and become part of the entire Allied drive.

American spearheads reached out and slammed into four full Panzer Divisions, three of them S.S., that had started for Avranches. This was the beginning of Falaise Gap. We were outnumbered three to one, and for the most part it was the cream of the Wehrmacht against our raw untested doughs and armor. We must have put up a good show, though. German

*I could hear him screaming, even after his 'chute was shredded.*

G2 identified divisions that were nowhere near this sector. Our strength was consistently reported as many times stronger than it actually was.

Our hilltop job at Barentan (Command seemed insistent on keeping us up in the air) was to defend a roadblock and keep all roads to our front cleared of the enemy.

We moved into position and prepared to set up the block at night. Tsoe, a Navajo Indian and the platoon comic, drew first blood by shooting a German off a bicycle. The Jerry was peddling along with an air of casualness, whistling "Clair de Lune."

We hastily threw a surface minefield across the road, manhandled a

57-millimeter anti-tank gun into position, and dug in on either side of the block. We weren't officially open for business when the first customer came along.

It was a Jerry on a motorcycle, wide open and really wheeling. He spotted the mines and went into a series of swerves that brought him through without touching a mine. That boy could ride, but it didn't help him much. A BAR stuttered, and the bullets flung him off the bike. The motorcycle was wheeled away to join our stable of mobile loot.

After an uneventful hour that gave us a chance to put on the finishing touches, a gigantic German ammunition truck came lumbering down the road. It was loaded with a choice assortment of artillery shells, demolition charges, screaming meemies, and a few dozen other varieties of hell-raisers that Jerry spent his time and money on.

I couldn't help feeling just a bit excited at the thought of the way that baby would blow.

It plowed right into the minefield. One went off and set it afire. Then a shell from our 57-millimeter blew it up in what was the greatest single explosion I ever saw.

It went high in a blinding sheet of flame, rockets and bazooka ammunition screaming and whining through the air for thousands of feet. The hedges on each side of the road were flattened for a hundred yards. Later we found pieces of the truck two hundred yards away.

After the pyrotechnics died down, we inspected the minefield and found all of them discharged. From now on we'd have to rely on our .57 and machine guns.

Our next victim—or should I say customer—was an armored vehicle that presented a dim silhouette as it clanked down the road. The .57 blew it apart just as it had the ammunition truck. We could hear German voices shouting commands, and strangest of all, a chorus of feminine screams. That had us stumped, until in the early morning light we saw a red cross painted on the defunct vehicle. Evidently the gals had been nurses or German WACs, or maybe some French mademoiselles going along for the ride. . . .

The next four days and nights followed a similar pattern. We stopped everything that came up that road. Attacks were thrown in from every side, and we soon realized the American forces were beginning to exist as a number of separate, surrounded units.

We held the road-block until they told us the German 7th Army had beaten itself to pieces against the 1st and 30th Infantry divisions over at Mortain. Then it was on to Gorron, and Mayenne and Javron and Pré-en-pail—more hedgerows, more hills, more rivers.

Our column had turned north, and we had orders to keep moving until we hit something heavy. The Falaise Gap was closing, and what was left of the German 7th was mostly fanatic S.S. divisions. At Rânes we contacted the 1st and 17th S.S. Panzers. A tough nut to crack, and to make the situation lively, a strong group of Germans that had been bypassed closed in on our rear. Task Force X was again in its usual position—surrounded.

For three days—August 14th, 15th, and 16th—there was no let-up. They plastered us with every gun they had. On the night of the fifteenth, a German patrol worked its way into our position and took five prisoners. Next day we found them huddled in a ditch—riddled with machine-gun bullets. I can't remember our taking any prisoners after that.

On the 18th the British broke through from the north. The Falaise Gap was closed—the fight was over. The rest was just slaughter, and they left that to those who specialized in mopping up.

We moved on, engaged in a pursuit that was becoming a rat-race. Suddenly you realized this was the way a war should be fought. Pretty girls waving at you, tossing flowers, tossing kisses. You threw them cigarettes and rations and yelled, *"Vive la France!"*

We saw the Eiffel Tower—Paris. We had dreamed of it and talked of it. Every man had his plans for the great city. . . . So did we go on to Paris? We did not. We went to Corbeil, fourteen miles up the Seine, and built a bridge across the river. We found some Krauts on the other side and had another fight. We won the fight and traveled on across France and across Germany. We never saw Paris until the war was over and we were coming back.

*My tank took a hit and lurched like a drunk.*

# Flags of Our Fathers

**Many of the newspaper notices of H. Bedford-Jones and his work stated that he paid no attention to literary style. This does him grave injustice. It is true that he knew that the best style for narrative was the simplest. But when the occasion was suitable he could and did write with grace, power and deep feeling. We reprint this page from our July, 1942, issue as an example.**

*by* H. BEDFORD-JONES

JIM BROWN was lost, as may easily happen during maneuvers; he was hot and exhausted and disheartened. He slumped down beside a pine tree and gazed out at the Pacific Ocean, whose sparkling flickers of white ran clear to Pearl Harbor and Australia and China. The breeze was cool; it made soft whistling sounds in the trees overhead, like distant voices singing among the pine-needles. Gradually the cadenced tones drew nearer—yes, they really were voices! Surprise thrilled him, when words began to come clear. . . .

"Listen to us, Jim Brown, private first-class! Listen to us, the voices forever marching upon these timeless waves of air. Once, like you, we pulsed to the greatness that lies in life and high emprise, in swelling achievement and the storm of armies; but now we bring you a message that we have learned through the strait door of death. If hatred and writhing fury be the ringing clarions of your universe, they are but penny trumpets here in ours, where the still small voice of brotherhood rolls and rolls in chasms evermore.

"Each of us in life had his own emblazoned flag, and honored it according to his own vision, small or great. Each of us had a different banner; yet difference lay only to the eye, and each stood for the same ideals in the end. This flag of yours but carries on our tradition.

"To each of us our banner was a bit of cloth, as yours to you; we were made of bone and flesh as you yourself. Yet within us were souls, as in you; and in our banner, too, was held a spirit that still lives on, doing homage to this your flag. What lies within this scrap of cloth, this cresset of the yeomanry of heaven?

"WE CAME WITH THE OLD RAVEN OF the pagan Vikings, emptying our blood upon your shores, claiming for our God's acre your forested hills and vinland slopes. Our ensign was the ravening bird of prey, men said; but to us it spoke of ghostly strength, of family and old friends left beyond the world's edge. Hail, Raven of Odin, bird of wisdom and of blood! Visible sign of invisible gods and forces, leading us on to stake liberty and life against the world's unknown!

"WE CAME WITH THE LILIES OF FRANCE, the golden fleur-de-lis. No mere garden flowers, but granted us by heaven upon the oriflamme, the sacred banner of our ancient rulers; given as a token of beauty ineffable, of spiritual tenderness and of unearthly values, a memory to bear upon the crown of earthly monarchs. So blew our lilies by sea and shore and mountain, by arctic wastes and western isle, in smoke of council-fire and scalp-dance —golden lilies, uplifting hearts of men across the wrack of broken battle and foundered hopes.

"WE CAME, IN THE LIGHTNINGS OF THE Castle and the Lion, proud quarterings of Leon and Castile, astride this noble hemisphere our galleons had discovered. Ours the might of regal hand beating across continents, subduing savage nations with pitiless majesty, sinking iron into the soil of valley and hill and islet—the red of iron and the red of blood together mingled to eternity. Up, Castile! Thunder, Leon! Conquer gloriously, daring all things; go down to death when ye must, but go victorious in pride and honor deathless, taking salute of the celestial legions as ye blow across the winds between the worlds, triumphant unto this last!

"WE CAME, WITH CROSS OF RED ON field of white, St. George's cross; St. George who spoke of stars and kings, our leader. Aye, Cabot's hand lay on the oaken helm, but Tudor England trod the oaken deck, and the prayer of George of Cappadocia sped us to land with the gladsome whirr of gray goose quills at the end of English yards! The red cross, bandrol of the Christ, rood of Him who died upon the crooked tree, who fought the hard fight and died unvanquished—this gentle flag we bore to mind us ever how slight a thing is death, if the heart be unafraid and foursquare to all mankind, as the cross-flag blew foursquare to every wind of God! Amen.

"We came, oppressed, enslaved, seeking afar the tolerance we neither knew nor gave, searching the freedom men denied, as we in turn denied it. Yet our hearts warned us more truly, as did the flag we bore, with the red cross of St. George fielded by the white cross of St. Andrew. We streamed it at the *Mayflower's* peak, amid doubt and stress and suffering; we planted it full sturdily into the New World earth.

"WE CAME FROM NEITHER KING NOR prince to this new western earth; our standard boasted neither crown nor cross. We hoisted the colors of freemen, beggars of heaven—we of the young republic, the United Netherlands. Our freedom was bought with tears and anguished sweat, as it must be purchased with heart's blood over and over upon this earth.

"THUS WE CAME, WE WHO HAVE spoken, and many another like us; we came, and our banners flaunted upon the forest shore and then were no more seen. We gave them, these flags of ours, to make your own. It is the heir of our inspired imaginings.

"SALUTE! Such were our banners of old; such is our flag and yours today. Salute, stripes and keen stars, keeper of the deathless verities! We, voices of the dead, salute you, grave bit of cloth that holds aloft the hope of all the world! This scrap of fabric blowing in the wind, this colored napkin trailed upon a spear-shaft, this merest trifle of your equipage—why, what a blessed little thing it is, one of those little things that thunder ceaselessly upon the vault of heaven! So small as to be cradled in your hand, yet it flutters high above the venomed bitterment of earth, blowing ever higher and farther upon the glory of the coming day. . . . To You, Old Glory—Salute!"

*"This Mosby—who'd he ever fight? I could beat 'im myself!"*


THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD was always proud of Duke Mosby. He was not quite a champion, but he was a contender; he fought often and bravely; he lived quietly with his dark lovely wife Franny, and conducted himself as a hero should. His manager, Harry Hoople, ran a nice cool bar, the most respectable gathering-place imaginable. The Duke, a slim, personable gent with a twisted nose, could be found any evening in Hoople's saloon, sipping a beer or playing cribbage, or shooting the breeze with the boys and girls.

Murphy the cop and Duke were close friends. Jingle, who was Murphy's hair shirt and not of the Neighborhood, and not even a very smart policeman, did not favor Duke with his confidence. Jingle, in fact, had been heard to pronounce Duke a stumblebum who had been favored with setups, a front runner who could not beat his own mother in a real fight.

So when Jingle came up with a fighter from his side of the city, the excitement in the neighborhood was tremendous. Everyone from Arthur "Gooney" Traudt to Alderman Harrigan talked of little else while the buildup was transpiring. . . .

It all began when Duke and Harry were sitting together in the saloon one sunny afternoon. . . . Jingle, who was off duty, walked in accompanied by two men. One was a small character with a large shiny nose and nervous hands. His name was Skin Scannell, and he was a well-known fight manager. The other was a compact lad, an inch shorter than the Duke—dark, scowling, truculent.

Jingle said loudly: "Three beers. I wancha all to meet a real fighter. This here is Buggsy Tweed and his handler."

Harry said: "Hello, Buggsy. Hello, Skin. Heard you guys went West."

"You know they went West," said Jingle. His red face was pointed at Duke Mosby. "Buggsy knocked over twenty straight out West. Real fighters!"

Harry said: "Must've made some dough, huh, Skin?"

"They made plenty dough." Jingle arranged beers before his friends with a grand gesture. "Buggsy's goin' into the Arena uptown against Joe Kopp next week. Then he's aimin' to claim the champeenship of the city."

"Without fighting for it?" Harry Hoople, a patient man, grinned.

"Who's gonna fight him?" challenged Jingle. "Who's good enough?"

"What's he weigh?" asked Harry of Skin Scannell.

Before the little man could answer Jingle said: "One hunnert an' thirty-three pounds, that's what he weighs."

Harry said: "Duke can make thirty-five. See George about it, Skin. You know what to do."

Skin Scannell said in his rusty voice: "Sure, Harry."

Buggsy Tweed sneered. He had the face for it, Murphy thought. Murphy had entered the saloon during the colloquy and was standing in the back room, taking it all in. He immediately disliked Buggsy Tweed, he realized. He had always distrusted Scannell. As for Jingle, he was a fool.

Buggsy said: "I'll moider 'im. Gimme another beer, and let's blow this crummy joint."

Scannell said: "Sure, Buggsy."

Franny Mosby came in through the door behind Murphy and stood a moment, watching. Jingle recited a few of Buggsy's Western exploits which smacked of mayhem. Franny patted Murphy's arm and said: "Duke is wonderful. He doesn't even look at them."

SHE was a soft-spoken, slight girl with a quick insight into situations, and a real interest in people and problems. She was one of Murphy's favorite people. Murphy growled: "I oughta go in there and shake 'em up a bit."

"It's just another build-up," said Franny. "Isn't that Buggsy a brutal fellow?"

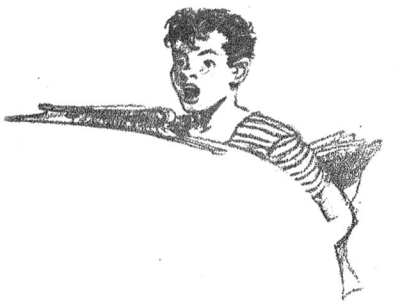
"The ugly bum!"

She said: "Now, Murph!"

He had to match her smile. Jingle had finished mouthing and was ushering his pals to the door. He paused long enough to say, with broad emphasis: "Well, Duke—*good-by!*"

Duke Mosby said: "So-long, Jingle. So-long, fellas." He picked up the cards and began to shuffle them. His eye caught sight of Franny, and he put the cards down and said: "'Scuse me, Harry."

# Frame *for the* Duke



A SPIRITED STORY OF THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD—OF ITS GUARDIAN ANGEL OFFICER MURPHY; OF ITS FAVORITE FIGHTER THE DUKE; AND OF DUKE'S BEST GIRL.

by JOEL REEVE

He came toward them, limping just a little from the old hurt to his knee. He would have been champion, Murphy thought warmly, if he had not fought in the shooting war and got that injury. He was a fine young man, but maybe not so very young any more. The Mosbys had no children, and their love and dependence on each other was to Murphy a sentimental miracle in the tough Old Neighborhood.

Murphy said: "You'll clobber him good, Duke. You'll show that loud-mouthed partner of mine who's who."

"Sure—sure," said Duke, his eyes on his pretty wife. "But Buggsy's tough and smart. And Skin is a character. Don't bet your shirt, Murph. Buggsy learned stuff in the West."

Franny said: "You're worrying, darling?" She laughed. "That I can't believe. You want to take a little ride?"

He said: "I've been waiting for you, baby."

They went out, not touching each other, but as close as two people can be, Murphy knew. Harry called from inside the bar.

They sat opposite each other, the saloonkeeper and the cop. They had gone through school together, and both had become potent forces in the sprawling, sometimes dirty, sometimes wonderful Old Neighborhood. They were curiously alike, lean men with closed, canny faces, men who had not been forced to learn tolerance, but who had been born with that graceful quality.

Harry said: "There'll be a stick in this. Skin don't talk, but he's full of gimmicks. Buggsy is tough and dirty and young. But Skin don't leave anything to luck or skill."

"I'll be watching out," said Murphy.

"It ain't cop business, strictly speakin'," Harry said.

"Naturally, it ain't," said Murphy.

"You'll have Jingle in your hair worse'n ever."

"I could get him transferred," said Murphy reflectively. "I wonder why I don't."

Harry chuckled. "He keeps you on your toes, Murph. . . . This fight will go into the ball-park. Local rivalry, very big. Skin will look for every break. Duke won't argue. He won't let me bicker. Duke is—you know how Duke is."

"I know," said Murphy.

"Okay," nodded Harry. "Have a beer, Murph."

AFTER a lot of fanfare about the fight, it was made finally, with George Mandell promoting it in the baseball stadium for July 10th. Buggsy Tweed disposed of Joe Kopp by the knock-out route in three rounds, battering poor Joe straight into the hospital. People in the Old Neighborhood began coming to Murphy with doubt in their souls. Jingle, loud in his praises of Buggsy, guffawed at them, and at his own alleged astuteness in needling Duke Mosby into making the match.

Each day Murphy had to listen to a certain amount of this talk from Jingle. He would endure it until Jingle went too far. "This Mosby, who'd he ever fight? That bum!"

"Shaddup!" Murphy's gray eyes gleamed.

"I could beat 'im myself—"

"*Shaddup.*"

"Yaaah. You're scared to hear the truth!" But Jingle would cease. He might have been willing to fight Duke Mosby, but he had no thought of tangling with Murphy. Until the next day Jingle would be quiet.

Duke was training in Mandell's Gym, in the neighborhood; Tweed worked out across town. Murphy made a daily stop to watch Mosby. Then one day when Jingle was off duty, he decided to go over and see how Buggsy was doing.

He came away very thoughtful. He went into Harry Hoople's place and called his friend into the back room. He said: "This Tweed is murder. He uses the thumb on his sparring partners. He is in the pink; and Harry, I don't think Duke is right for this one."

Harry almost whispered: "Duke *ain't* right. And I can't get him to postpone it. Scannell insisted on him namin' the referee, and Duke wouldn't lemme battle about it. They got Amish, and you know Amish. He can be had. Mandell thinks we're throwin' it. Mandell says we're nuts. But it's the Duke. Tweed got under his skin. Duke don't shoot off his mouth, y' know. Jingle and Tweed got him sore."

Murphy said: "Duke seems to be limping more."

"Shhh!" said Harry.

Franny had come in, as was her wont, very quietly. She said: "It's all right. I know about it." There were circles under her violet-hued eyes, but her mouth smiled tenderly at them. "There's nothing we can do. Duke is cold-set on going through with it."

Murphy said: "But this Tweed is tough—"

FRANNY said: "Duke is proud, Murph. If you as much as mention his wound, he tightens up and won't talk. He swore it would never handicap him, and he means to carry through that way."

Harry Hoople said: "She's right, Murph."

"I know. . . . I know." Murphy yanked at the lock of unruly hair which fell into his right eye when he was perturbed. The entire Neighborhood knew. Few were the hardy souls who were betting on their fa-

vorite son to win the bout. It was a situation entirely foreign to these people, who loved nothing so well as backing their own to the limit and beyond.

Harry said: "If you can, keep the mobsters away, Murph. Scannell is tied in with Moisha Kane's crew, y' know."

Murphy grunted: "I'll see to that."

Harry went in to wait upon a customer. Franny Mosby said: "I'm —I'm sorry about this, Murph."

"Sorry?"

"Duke should think further. He should remember that his friends deserve some consideration. Duke has a responsibility toward the Neighborhood as well as to himself—and me."

MURPHY said: "Now wait, Franny. Duke does what he does because he is a grand guy. He may be wrong in making this fight right now, in not asking for a postponement, but it ain't because Duke is thick or wrongheaded."

She said wearily: "I— Oh, Murph, this is bad. It's really bad. I'm scared, Murph. I'm scared this will finish him. He isn't quite ready to quit. He wants to have one shot at the title. He felt he was getting stronger—his leg. Now—this could ruin him, and he's too good to be ruined, Murph."

"I'll talk to him," Murphy promised, scowling. His greatest quality in the Neighborhood was his ability to mind his own business. He hated to interfere with any man, and for this he was respected even by Patsy Geoghan and the ruffians who infested Patsy's low bar. Yet he could not let Duke go blindly to certain doom.

He spoke to Duke after the training session the next day. Duke was dressing, favoring his leg. In the little cubicle set aside for privacy Murphy spoke long and earnestly. He ended: "And he's going to dirty you all the way. The head, the heel, the thumb. Put it off, Duke. Give yourself some time."

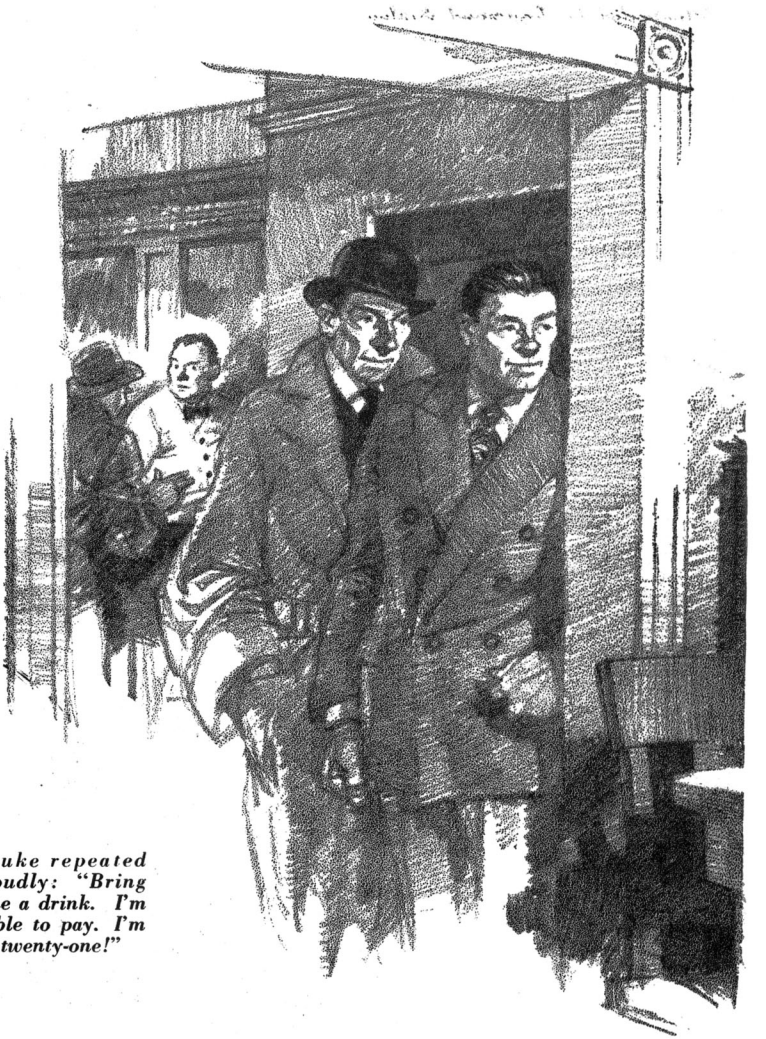
The lean little lightweight shook his head. "It would hurt Mandell. And I wouldn't give them the satisfaction. I can handle him, Murph. He's a hooker and a swinger. I'll handle him."

Murphy took a deep breath. "If you don't. . . . Say you don't. . . . He'll never give you a return match."

"I won't want one," said Duke stonily.

Murphy exhaled. "Okay, Duke. Didn't mean to butt in."

"It's all right," said Duke listlessly. He limped out of the gym. Murphy went to pick up Jingle and listen to some more bragging. Police work was routine, as though even the crooks were tensely awaiting the big fight. . . . Murphy did a lot of constructive thinking. He talked to Franny several times before the bout.



*Duke repeated loudly: "Bring me a drink. I'm able to pay. I'm twenty-one!"*

STRANGELY, they did not sell out the ball-park. Murphy looked at the empty seats and marveled. It was almost ten o'clock when he got there. Jingle had long since applied for relief that night, and Murphy had thought it wise to linger with the green cop until the last moment, lest thieves took advantage of the deserted neighborhood to commit a few depredations. Then he had learned that many of the neighborhood had refrained from attending the bout; they had no desire to see Duke Mosby whipped by an upstart from the hated district across town.

He saw Franny at ringside, and slid into a seat nearby, next to Ace Fletcher and Gooney Traudt of the *Clarion*. Gooney was pale and jittery, and Ace was cursing in his usual florid style. Behind them was Moisha Kane and a coterie of rough-looking thugs.

Kane said: "Fours, I'm layin'. Fours we win. Twos he kayoes the bum."

Jingle's excited accents came to Murphy's reddening ears: "I got two months' pay bet on us!"

Murphy got up from his seat and stood in the aisle. He said: "Jingle! Outa there!"

Moisha Kane was a thick-bodied man with shaggy eyebrows and a full, loose mouth. He said: "Siddown, copper."

"Jingle!" Murphy's voice echoed on the night air. The fighters were coming to the ring, and the crowd yelled, but Jingle did not turn to stare. He got up slowly from a seat between two of Kane's mobsters. He came past knees, his lips trembling. He was furious, but his eyes shifted, failing to meet Murphy's gaze.

*Illustrated by Raymond Sisley*

Murphy said distinctly: "Cops do not hang out with gunsels. You go sit somewhere else, Jingle!"

Kane said: "Listen, copper—this kid's off duty, see? You mind your own business, see?"

Jingle stumbled into the aisle. For one second he hesitated. Murphy reached past him and caught Kane by the collar. With one jerk he hauled him to his feet. A gangster alongside started up, and Murphy lashed out with his free hand, knocking the man back.

Kane shouted: "I'll show you, copper. You can't do this—"

Murphy struck once. His fist clipped Kane's chin. The big man reeled. Murphy spun him. Murphy's foot struck the ample rear of the lumbering figure. Kane went flying up the aisle. Before Kane could recover, Murphy was on him again, kicking him forward. All the way between the lanes of seats, with the crowd jeering and screaming, Murphy belted the gang leader.

At the gate Kane got his balance and swung. Murphy's bony fist rapped him on the button. A detective from Headquarters said: "Got yourself a handful, Murph?"

"Charge him with betting in public at a sports event," said Murphy. "I'll make the complaint."

"I'll ring in," nodded the detective. "But I hear this ain't exactly a sportin' thing. How about it?"

Murphy said: "You may be right, but this guy is wrong."

"He's awful strong uptown," drawled the detective. "You won't make this stick."

"Just so he's in for tonight," nodded Murphy. He swung back to the ring. The two fighters were going forward for instructions. He went back down to ringside and took a long stare at the hoodlums who had attended Moisha Kane. They avoided his gaze. The one he had clipped was nursing a swollen eye. Jingle was out of view.

Franny was sitting quietly, like a lady; but the circles beneath her eyes were darker and deeper. Murphy's hands shook. He squeezed back into his seat. Little Gooney was tearing up copy paper and muttering to himself. Buggsy Tweed looked hairy, hardy and happy. Duke was too pallid, too tense.

Harry Hoople took the robe from Duke's lean shoulders. He looked down at Franny, chewing the mouth-

piece. His eyes were not right, Murphy knew. He was moving as though in a dream.

The bell rang, and Buggsy Tweed came bouncing out. He was a bouncy fighter, a free swinger. He was young, and he was tough; and perhaps he did not yet mind being belted, because he seemed wide open. But Murphy remembered the young Dempsey, who also seemed to be an easy target, but who did a lot of damage while the other guy was learning that this was not strictly true.

DUKE boxed as always, moving about in a shuffle, never so quick on his feet, never any more, but clever and swift with his hands, blocking, warding off punches, slipping them. Buggsy wound in close and pummeled the body.

And Duke couldn't tie him up. Buggsy was stronger; there was no doubt of it. Until then Murphy had thought Duke was smart enough to overcome this handicap. Now he knew that tonight this was beyond the courageous Mosby.

It was murder with gloves on. Murphy sickened, watching Duke assimilate the body blows. He was afraid to look at Franny. He sat sweating, cursing. Amish, the referee, allowed Tweed to cling overlong, one hand free, belting at Duke's belly. Scannell sat in the corner like a spider, unmoved, his beady eyes calm.

Then the round ended, and Duke limped to his corner. Harry Hoople spoke to him, and Duke stared ahead, not answering. They worked on his stomach muscles. They got down, and again the bell sounded.

Duke came trotting out. He seemed to move faster than at the start of the bout. He feinted with his left and slammed a right straight at Tweed's jaw. It was a switch from his regular style, and Murphy came up with the rest, shouting.

But Tweed lowered his head and Duke's blow caromed off a hard skull. Tweed threw punches to the body, tried to get close, thumbed at Duke's eye, butted as the referee half-heartedly parted them. Duke stepped back with blood on his face, leveled a left hand, crashed again with the right.

Murphy stammered: "He knows. . . . He's goin' for the kayo. . . . It's the smartest thing. . . . He can't handle that young bull."

Tweed was trading punches now. One of Duke's rights clipped him almost on the button. He pitched sideways. Recovering, he lashed out with a desperate hook. It was a beauty, and it caught Duke coming in.

Murphy was praying. Duke had never been kayoed in his life. But he was on the floor now. He was on hands and knees, head hanging. Amish was rushing the count. . . .

Duke came up at nine. He staggered, and Tweed stalked him. Duke tried to jab. Tweed laughed, took the punch and went in. Again he hammered unmercifully at the body. Duke began to fold, like a damp piece of cardboard.

Murphy yelled: "No; oh, *no!* Take a count, Duke." Amish was allowing Tweed to rough it up in the clutch. Tweed was romping on Duke's feet, bobbing his head beneath Duke's defenseless chin.

Duke stepped far back. His left hand went out. His right came over.

Tweed was quick, all right. He went under the punch. He came up with a sucker wallop, an uppercut. It belted Duke square on the jaw. Duke went over backward.

"Stay down," Murphy whispered. "Stay down, Duke. We'll have to get him next time!"

"There won't be any next time," mourned Ace Fletcher. "That so-and-so, that Scannell, will never give him a next time."

Amish counted ten as fast as was possible. The Duke did not stir even when Harry reached tenderly to pick him up and carry him to his corner. . . . Franny was weeping, head erect, tears streaming.

"HE won't give in," Mandell told Murphy. "Tweed's getting ready to meet the champ. Scannell won't give in."

Murphy said: "I asked you if you'd put it on if it could be arranged."

"I'll put it on in the Armory," said Mandell. "Even if it costs me, and you know I like money."

Murphy said: "That's what I wanted to know."

He went to see Franny Mosby. He said: "How's he coming?"

She said: "Like you said, Murph."

"Keep at him," said Murphy. "I got to see a character."

He drove crosstown. There was a building which few cops dared enter in the stronghold of the neighborhood where Jingle had grown up. He walked past the guard at the door and up the stairs and into a luxurious club-room. Kane glared at him.

Murphy said: "So you beat the rap, huh, Moisha?"

"I'll beat any rap you put on me," said Kane.

"Sure," nodded Murphy. "You're a big kid. How about taking some of my dough, too?"

"Any time you get up some dough," scoffed the big man. His eyes glittered. "I'd like to take you, Murphy. Any old way. If you wasn't wired in uptown—"

Murphy said: "I've got ten thousand dollars says Duke Mosby can beat Buggsy Tweed. But Scannell won't let Tweed fight."

"Ten thousand? Real dough?"

Murphy took out some green bills. "I'll place it with Harrigan. You get yours up. Even money."

"We name the referee," said Kane suspiciously.

"It can be Amish," shrugged Murphy. "Tweed's a bum. I aim to prove it."

Kane said: "I never seen a cop go nuts before. What's the gimmick, Murphy?" He wagged his head from side to side, his loose mouth half-open. He surveyed the ceiling for a long moment. He said: "Scannell will be tough."

"Do what you can," said Murphy. "I'll work on him too."

"You can't work on him," sneered Kane. "You're a cop!"

"Do what you can," repeated Murphy. "Harrigan will have the dough tonight."

He walked out of the "social club." He drove back across town and met Jingle. He had been having a hard time with Jingle since the night of the bout. For reasons of his own he had suffered for the most part in silence. He listened to Jingle rave about his acumen as a judge of boxers, about Tweed's invincibility and Tweed's imminent ascendancy of the lightweight throne.

Finally Murphy said: "Tell you what: I'll take odds Tweed don't even get to fight for the title this year."

"Fifty bucks," crowed Jingle. "How about fifty?"

"Right," nodded Murphy. He slowed down the patrol car near the corner saloon of Harry Hoople. Duke Mosby came into sight. He was limping a little, and lurching a little too.

Jingle said: "There's your bum. Look at 'im. He's been lushing it up ever since he got his tail beat."

Murphy said: "It's sad. Poor Franny!"

FRANNY came down the street, took Duke's arm. She led him toward their house on Kay Street.

"Well, he never had it," said Jingle judiciously. "He was a great front. This lousy neighborhood built him up. Once he met a good man, he was finished. Through!"

Murphy said: "Oh, I don't know. I'd like to bet another fifty that if he *did* meet Tweed again, he would win."

"You got a bet!" roared Jingle. "That's a dream bet, but you got it! That would be an even easier fifty!"

"Okay," said Murphy. "Remember that."

"Remember it? Haw!" Jingle was vastly amused.

That night Murphy was in Harry Hoople's, sitting with Franny and Duke. Duke's hair was slightly dis-

*Tweed went into the ropes. The crowd roared, and Amish got in Duke's way as he tried to pursue the stumbling Tweed.*

arranged. He twisted a glass around and around on the table top. The door opened; Skin Scannell entered.

"Bring me a drink," said Duke.

Murphy said in a low voice: "Don't take another drink, Duke. Skin's in the joint."

"The hell with him," said Duke coldly. His eyes were slightly bloodshot, his face seemed puffed. "Bourbon on rocks, Harry."

Hoople shook his head. Duke repeated loudly: "Bring me a drink. I'm able to pay. I'm twenty-one!"

Franny said: "Please, dear—"

"Am I stiff? Am I doing anything wrong?" Duke stared at her in anger.

Murphy said: "Duke!"

"All right, Murph," shrugged the fighter. "But I want my drink."

Harry brought the drink, smacked it on the table and turned his back on his boxer. People carefully did not look toward the table. Skin Scannell held up two fingers, drank a rye and soda. Duke sat staring at the wall, revolving the glass in his hand.

After a while Skin Scannell walked out, but Duke remained, unmoved. Franny talked brightly to Murphy, her voice in fair control. At midnight Harry closed the place, and Murphy took Franny and Duke home in his own modest coupé.

The next day the fight was made for the Armory, and Duke disappeared from town to do his training in the country. Franny remained in the Neighborhood and kept her own counsel. Murphy went about the appointed order of things. Moisha Kane covered the ten thousand on deposit with Harrigan, and was pleasantly amazed to have the old alderman put up another five thousand of his own.

STRANGELY, the people of the Old Neighborhood turned out for the bout in the Armory, filling the large building to the rafters. Murphy had to elbow his way through the crowd. Going down to ringside he looked right and left, spotting the men he sought.

Moisha Kane had been smarter this time. The mobsters were spread around. Murphy gestured to the squad from uptown, pointing out the location of the hoodlums. Men moved quietly, unobtrusively to strategic positions, big flat-footed men in plain clothing. Murphy's lean jaw was like iron. It was going to be nip and tuck, he well knew. He worked his way down to ringside. Franny was in her accustomed place. Little Gooney was covering alone, his biscuit-like face tight with anticipation.

Amish was standing in the ring while the announcer went through his act.

Murphy stood beneath the ropes staring upward into the arc lights. He said harshly: "Amish!"

The referee started, then peered down. He had been a pugilist and he looked it. "Huh? Murphy?"

"I saw you work the last bout. I said nothing then. Now I'm tellin' you, Amish. Work this one right."

"What you talkin' about? You crazy?"

"I'm covering Kane. You work it right, or I'll see you later. That's personal, and you can call it a threat," said Murphy.

"You can't—" Amish's voice trailed off. The Police Commissioner had just entered and was staring at him with cold eyes as he took his first-row seat. Alderman Harrigan was with the official. Amish swallowed, and moved away from Murphy.

Murphy located Kane. Jingle was across the ring with another cop tonight. . . . The crowd howled, and Duke Mosby came down the aisle.

The Duke was tanned to the bone. His eyes glittered a little; and although he limped, his head was high. He waved jauntily at Franny, then at Murphy.

Skin Scannell, ushering his fighter through the ropes, stared with dropping jaw. The drunk-sodden Mosby had evaporated. The Duke had never looked better.

Buggsy, however, did not seem to notice. Tweed was in equally good shape. He looked every inch a contender for the title. He danced and shadow-boxed and laughed as Scannell whispered in his ear. He said scornfully for all to hear: "I'd take him the best day he ever seen."

Sitting next to Gooney, Murphy muttered: "Could be. He's a hell of a fighter."

Little Gooney said: "However did Duke get back in shape so fast?"

"Oh," said Murphy carelessly, "he was never out of condition. That was an act to get Scannell in the mood."

"Some act!" said the reporter. "He fooled me."

"He's a good actor," said Murphy. "But can he lick this guy?"

The ring was cleared. Amish was giving instructions. Amish did not look happy. Murphy swung and watched Kane. The racketeer was silently watching, his pendulous lips sulking. Murphy sat tight, waiting.

The fighters went to their corners. Duke pulled on the ropes. Franny Mosby lifted her two hands in the gladiator's salute. The bell clanged.

Tweed trotted out, jaw set, hands held low. He was resuming where he'd left off—going for Duke's body. He hammered home two hooks and curled an arm to hold Duke while he pummeled him about the kidneys and the back of the head. Amish moved slowly, but he went in and broke it up.

Tweed scowled at Amish. Duke jabbed three lefts to the jaw without a return, shuffling, moving carefully right, then back to the left. Tweed feinted with his right. Duke crossed over a straight left to the head. Tweed rushed.

Duke sidestepped with the smoothness of a toreador. Tweed went into the ropes. The crowd roared, and Amish got in Duke's way as he tried to pursue the stumbling Tweed.

Murphy said: "I warned him—"

Duke coolly walked around. Tweed shot a left to the head. Duke countered with a short right. Tweed broke ground, started over with another rush. Duke tied him up for a moment, and again Amish broke them.

Murphy said grimly: "Amish is playin' both ends against the middle. He breaks them, but gets in Duke's way."

Duke boxed through. With ten seconds to go, he limped a bit evading a wild scramble by Buggsy, and caught a right on the head which staggered him. Buggsy swarmed on him with body blows. One came below the belt line. The round ended, and Amish delivered a half-hearted warning but did not signal that Tweed had forfeited the round.

Moisha Kane said to a henchman: "Buggsy can't lose. He's all over this bum. It's in the bag."

Murphy sat tight, sweating it out. The second round went by with Duke boxing, Tweed trying to get close. In the third Duke caught one over the eye and bled a little, and Murphy bled with him.

It was the fourth. Tweed, strong as a bull, came with both hands. Duke limped away, stabbing with the left. Duke's thin face was expressionless, his head high. Tweed ducked and tried to butt in close. Amish moved between them.

Duke had allowed this maneuver before without protest or action. Now he suddenly galvanized into full speed. He went around Amish, mustering all the speed at his command. He came in with Tweed looking the other way for him. He started a punch, then paused. He stood, waiting for Tweed to turn around.

The fight mob stood and roared their approval. Tweed, scowling, threw a low blow, then attempted to thumb Duke's eye. Murphy ground his hands together.

Duke suddenly fell back. Tweed leaped eagerly for the kill. Duke seemed to sag. Tweed dropped his right to let go with the uppercut which had knocked Duke out in the first fight.

Duke miraculously recovered. His own right started before Tweed's. It went in a straight line from his chest, across to the hard jaw of Buggsy Tweed.

Tweed spun in a circle. Duke was closing in, measuring with his educated left. Tweed, glassy-eyed, threw out both arms. Duke crouched, stuck out the left. He propped back Tweed's head and his right hand flashed.

Tweed seemed to leave the floor. He spread-eagled under the arcs, half-turning. He landed with a thud. Amish, goggle-eyed, almost forgot to count.

Murphy howled: "Timekeeper! Timekeeper!"

Amish stared numbly at the official. The timekeeper held up four fingers. Amish said: "Uh . . . five . . . six . . . seven. . . ."

Kane's voice came in a great bellow: "Fake! Fake! He started on 'four!' Fake!"

All over the Armory the planted hoodlums started up, their mouths open to bray at the prearranged signal from Kane. People were bewildered by the sudden action in the ring, the unexpected turning of tables. A riot was imminent.

Big, bulky men moved. Huge hands clamped down. The rallying

## SPORT SPURTS .... *by Harold Helfer*

**When Daniel Carpio, the Peruvian swam the English Channel in 1947, he became the twenty-fourth person to accomplish this feat.**

* * *

**Actor George Raft won twenty-five professional fights in succession, then gave up the ring when he was knocked out in his next bout.**

* * *

**John Thompson, Paterson, N. J., pitcher, hit two home runs in one inning—each with the bases loaded.**

* * *

**After celebrating seventy-five of his birthdays on December 23rd, Connie Mack, the manager of the Philadelphia Athletics, discovered it should have been on December 22nd.**

* * *

**In a game in 1925, Cleveland led the Philadelphia Athletics 15-to-4 going into the ninth inning, but the A's scored thirteen times in the last frame to win.**

* * *

**In baseball's early days a player was out if a fielder caught his ball on the first bounce.**

* * *

**Swimmer-actress Esther Williams says: "Anybody who hasn't competed in sports, hasn't resisted the temptation to quit when pressed or beaten, is facing life the hard way."**

cry of "fake" came only from one throat—Moisha Kane's. Hoodlums gurgled in the hands of officers. Murphy came ranging around on Kane. In the ring Amish said dully: "Nine . . . and *out.*"

Murphy had Kane by the neck again. He said: "Just can't stay out of the pokey, can you? Inciting to riot! Conspiring to frame a public exhibition known as a 'prize-fight'! And the Commissioner is *very* interested in the numbers racket you are operating, my friend."

Kane said: "That's what you think, you dumb copper. You'll never collect on that bet."

"You forget that Harrigan has the money," said Murphy. "You didn't think I had ten grand of my own, did you? Why, you sucker, everyone in the Old Neighborhood contributed to that roll! And every man, woman and child knew Duke was puttin' on the drunk act you and your scumball Scannell fell for. And I've got you cold, Kane, on the numbers thing."

"You got nothin'. . . . You can't even pinch me!"

Murphy turned and said: "Officer, take him in."

Kane said: "You'll play hell—" He gaped. His chin sagged.

Jingle said grimly: "Come on, Moisha. I got the dope on the numbers, and I know you framed to beat the Duke. Murphy beat me into it, into findin' out from the boys. I didn't believe it, Moisha. I thought you was regular. Hell, Moisha, you ain't even half smart. You even forgot I was a cop!"

THEY were trying to mob Duke Mosby, and the uniformed detail was protecting him. George Mandell howled over the mike that he had something to say and got the crowd semi-quiet. Then he announced that the lightweight champion of the world had agreed to accept a bout in the near future with the winner of this night's bout.

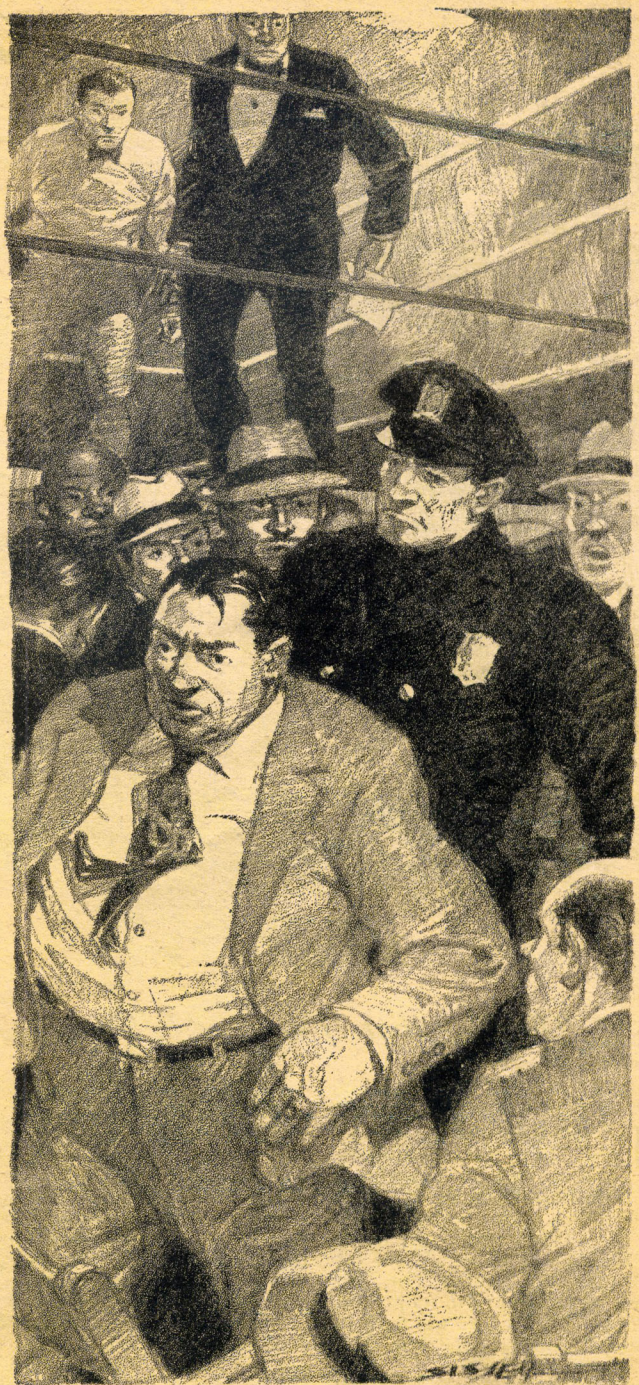
In the pandemonium Murphy got Franny through and into the dressing-room. Duke sat, scarcely breathing hard, while Harry Hoople removed his bandages.

Murphy said: "Pretty good night's work."

Duke kissed his wife. Then he stared at Murphy. He said: "I believe you'd make a stage director, an actor, a great prize-fighter—anything you wanted to be."

Franny held onto Murphy with both hands. "Duke, you just described him. Murphy—the Neighborhood cop!"

Murphy blushed pretty hard. He had only been trying to keep things straight for his pals, and shut up a loud-mouth crook from across town—from an inferior neighborhood.



*"Just can't stay out of the pokey, can you? Inciting to riot! Conspiring to frame a public exhibition!" Murphy said.*

# DOGS

**"The more I see of men, the better I love my dog!" Here follow the stories of certain famous men and the dogs that shared their fortunes.**


## ARGUS

### *The Dog that Welcomed Ulysses*

ULYSSES had bred the dog Argus. His trait of watchfulness, evident even in puppyhood, must have caused him to be named for the fabled giant who had a hundred eyes. When Ulysses left his island kingdom of Ithaca to join the Greek expedition against Troy, Argus was still too young to train. But the image of his master was fixed in the puppy's mind, and the memory of dogs is long.

In Ithaca, Argus, grown large and swift, coursed deer, wild goats, and hares with the huntsmen. He was no "table dog"—animals the Greeks kept as house pets—but of the strong, fierce breed used for the chase or to guard the herds and flocks.

After a siege of ten years Troy was taken by the stratagem of the wooden horse and Ulysses began that long voyage home which is the theme of Homer's Odyssey. It was a journey fraught with such perilous adventures that it consumed ten years more, and demanded all the hero's courage and craft before he reached Ithaca.

There most believed Ulysses dead. Few besides his faithful wife Penelope still hoped. The supposed widow was able to put off scores of importunate suitors only by promising to make her choice among them when she completed a garment; all she wove by day, she unraveled each night.

None knew Ulysses when he returned, disguised in a beggar's rags, but the still loyal swineherd Eumæus accompanied the stranger in an invasion of the palace that would end in triumph over the suitors.

Outside the gate they beheld an old dog, derelict and masterless, lying on a dung-heap for warmth, his hide twitching under the torment of ticks. Argus knew Ulysses instantly. He dropped his ears forward, and his tail thumped with joy, yet he was too feeble to drag himself to his master.

Ulysses brushed away a tear. "Eumæus," he said, "how strange such a dog lies on a dunghill! He is beautifully formed, but I am not certain whether his speed and strength match his looks, or whether he is merely one of the table dogs their masters keep for show."

"Truly," the swineherd answered, "that is a dog of one who died in a far-off country. If his form and strength were still as when Ulysses left him, departing for Troy, you would marvel at his fleetness and courage. No quarry he traced into the depths of the forest could escape him. Now he has fallen on evil days; his master has perished in a foreign land, and neglectful women give him no more care."

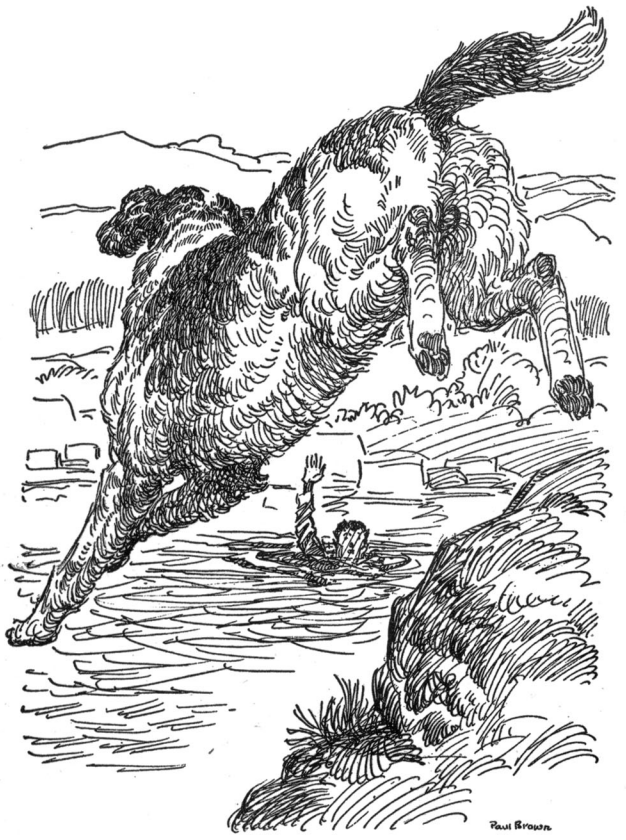
Now that the old dog had looked on the master for whom he had waited so long, his eyes closed.

"Argus the dog," Homer relates, "went down into the blackness of death, that moment he saw Ulysses after twenty years."

An epitaph, written by another Greek poet, would serve well for the faithful Argus.

*Thou who passest on this path,*
*If haply thou dost mark this monument,*
*Laugh not, I pray thee, though it is a dog's grave.*
*Tears fell for me, and the dust was heaped above me*
*By a master's hand.*

# OF DESTINY




## BOATSWAIN

### *The Newfoundland that Rescued Byron*

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Illustrated by PAUL BROWN

THE powerful black-and-white dog stared at his unpredictable master. That darkly handsome young Englishman was running toward the lake, limping a little on the twisted feet with which he was born. Fully dressed, he flung himself into the water. He floundered about, gasping choked cries for help. It was a convincing performance to anyone who did not know that the supposedly drowning man was the poet George Gordon Byron, an expert swimmer who would one day, like Leander, swim the Hellespont.

The dog did not hesitate. Boatswain was a Newfoundland, and rescuing the drowning was a duty bred in his every fiber. Plunging into the lake, he swam out, seized his master by his coat and towed him ashore. Byron was delighted. It was a dramatic spectacle, and the poet loved and lived drama, and wrote it.

He repeated the drowning trick from time to time. Boatswain, whether or not he sensed it was all acting, always played his part perfectly.

Too soon comedy gave way to tragedy. Byron was not granted even the average companionship of a decade or two which a dog's normal life span affords. Boatswain caught rabies. All through the fatal illness, the poet tenderly nursed the Newfoundland, risking his life to sponge the froth from the suffering creature's jaws. Boatswain injured neither him nor anyone else; in his fits of madness he bit only himself. To his death, he responded with grateful affection to his master's care.

In the former monastery, Newstead Abbey, which was Byron's country seat, he ordered a vault built for his dog within the ruined chapel where the altar once stood, and he gave instructions that he also was to be buried there. Upon a side of a finely-sculptured pedestal was inscribed a celebrated epitaph, written by the poet.

NEAR THIS SPOT
Are deposited the remains of one
Who possessed Beauty without Vanity
Strength without Insolence
Courage without Ferocity
And all the Virtues of Man
without his Vices
This praise, which would be
unmeaning flattery
If inscribed over human ashes,
Is but a just tribute to the Memory of
BOATSWAIN, A DOG
Who was born at Newfoundland,
May 1803,
And died at Newstead Abbey,
November 18, 1808.

Byron died of malaria in Greece, where he had gone to help that country fight for its independence from Turkey. Among his possessions was found a treasured keepsake—the collar Boatswain had worn.

*Now the dog did go home, soon to return with Paul Revere's spurs.*

# PAUL REVERE'S DOG

HIS dog followed him when he left his house on Boston's North Square that fateful night of the 18th of April, 1775. Doubtless Paul Revere told the dog to go home, since he was setting out—

*Ready to ride and spread the alarm*
*Through every Middlesex village and farm.*

Like countless other dogs on innumerable other occasions, the dog looked hurt, turned back, then trotted after his master again. It was far too risky to shout "Go home!" with sentries on patrol and British Regulars on the march to Lexington to capture John Hancock, Sam Adams, and the Americans' military stores at Lexington and Concord. Revere gave up and let his pet come along; and fortunate it was that he did.

Paul met the two men who were to row him across the Charles River, where a British frigate lay on guard. It was then he realized he had forgotten cloth to muffle the oars. One of the patriots knew a girl who lived in the neighborhood. He whistled softly beneath her window, and when she looked out, he whispered up urgently. Down fluttered a flannel petticoat, still warm. But now it came to Revere that in his haste he had forgotten another important item. He was not "ready to ride"—he had left his spurs at his house.

Scribbling a note to his wife Rachel, he bent down, tied it to his dog's collar and gave him an order. Now the dog did go home, racing off through the dark streets. Soon the trusty animal returned, carrying the spurs, and his master hastened on.

*Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride.*

At the river a farewell pat, a command to be quiet. We can imagine the dog sitting disconsolately on the shore, whimpering a little, as the boat rowed away. A landing was made; Paul Revere swung into the saddle on Mr. Larkin's swift horse and galloped off.

NEAR Charlestown two British officers approached to halt the express rider. One rode down on him, the other circled to head him off. Revere whirled his steed. Surely those spurs were useful then. Cross-country he sped—the Britishers were quickly outdistanced and one was bogged down. On Revere dashed, alarming houses along his route. Only after he had brought his warning to Lexington and was riding on to Concord did the British capture him and take his horse. By then his memorable errand had been done.

So a dog must be honored too, for that historic ride. When Paul Revere told the story of his exploit to his children, always a favorite part was how his dog had brought to him his forgotten spurs.

# POMPEY

**A pug dog saved the life of William of Orange when Spanish assassins broke into his camp.**

PICKETS around the Dutch camp were drowsy and too few, and officers of the guard careless in inspecting outposts that black night in 1572. This army, come to relieve Mons from Spanish siege, was strong, but no less formidable was the investing force under the Duke of Alva, Philip II's cruel commander who had brought fire and sword to devastate the Low Countries. By their lax watch, Dutchmen were risking the life of the leader and heart of their cause, William the Silent, Prince of Orange and Count of Nassau, whose tent was pitched in the center of the encampment.

Yet there was one sentinel that was alert: the little dog curled up on the Prince's cot. Though he was slumbering as soundly as his master, his was the keen, never-dormant instinct of the good watchdog. The silvery-coated Pompey was of the breed, probably imported from China and long favored in Holland, a breed then known as camuses, meaning crooked or snub-nosed. Today we call them pugs, and borrow back the name to describe people as having a pug nose.

Down on the unwary Dutch in the small hours marched the intrepid Colonel Julian de Romero at the head of six hundred Spanish veterans, wearing white shirts over their armor to distinguish each other in the darkness. They slipped past the sentries and had struck the camp before the alarm was given. Through carnage and chaos dashed Romero with a picked detachment—straight toward the Prince's tent. The slaughter of William of Orange would likely bring speedy collapse to Dutch resistance and deal a terrible blow to religious and civic liberty for which he stood champion.

And still the weary Prince and his guards slept profoundly. Despite the clash of arms and shrieks of the dying, all slept on but Pompey. The pug leaped up, whined and barked frantically. Yet not till he scratched his master's face could he waken him. As William burst from his tent, onrushing Spaniards cut down his two secretaries. By the barest of margins the Prince reached his horse, kept ready-saddled, flung himself on its back and made his escape. The baffled raiders, perforce content with the heavy toll they had taken in the camp, beat a retreat.

"But for my little dog I should have been killed," William of Orange acknowledged freely.

ALWAYS afterward he kept Pompey and other pugs by his side. It is said that Pompey saved his master's life on another occasion; but at last William fell victim to an assassin hired by Philip of Spain.

At the foot of statues of the Prince, both in Holland and in the United States, is sculptured a pug in grateful memory of Pompey's warning on that nearly fatal night. When the great Dutchman's great-grandson ascended the throne of England as William III, pugs became the vogue, and were adorned with orange ribbons in honor of the House of Orange.


# THE BLACK DOG OF NEWGATE PRISON

A STRAY black dog crept into the dreadful reeking gloom of London's Newgate Prison. He may have been looking for his master, or seeking food even in that unlikely spot; for a that period in the Thirteenth Century England was in the grip of a frightful famine. If turnkeys saw him enter, they paid no heed. No man ever knew his true name. Yet the gaunt creature which slunk into Newgate that evening was destined to become immortal.

Chains clanked on dank stones where prisoners fettered to the walls strove to smother misery with sleep. Here lay brutal criminals, awaiting execution for bloody deeds; and here too languished poor wretches, men and women, jailed under the merciless laws of the day for no worse than a trifling theft. Many were close

to starvation. Free of the fierce pangs of hunger were only those who had bought or begged food or been fed by relatives—they and a furtive group, clustered in a dark corner. And it was these last who saw the black dog.

Seeming huge, a veritable monster, in the shadows, the jet animal loomed over them. His eyes gleamed with a baleful light, and his jaws slavered. The prisoners cringed and cowered from him. Maybe this was *his* dog.

A short time before, a new felon had been thrust into Newgate, a man clad all in black, accused of sorcery, 'twas said. This crew of murderers and mutineers in the corner, famished and desperate, had fallen upon him in the dead of the night, slaughtered him and made a horrid feast of his flesh. Now here was his dog, his familiar spirit—did not the Devil often take the form of a black dog?—come to avenge his master. While Newgate echoed to the wild shrieks of the cannibals, the black dog vanished.

He came again and again, so men swore. Always he reappeared just before inmates were dragged off to be hanged. The doomed stared down from the cart carrying them through crowded streets to the gallows on Tyburn Hill, to perceive the black dog, a nemesis following them to their death.

A glimpse of the black dog was enough to drive prisoners in screaming panic to rush the gates, where guards cut most of them down or drove them back. Those who escaped usually were recaptured, and it was the black dog himself, they vowed, that had helped hound them.

Many released from Newgate could quote the couplet:

*Say to the world when thou art freed from hell,*
*Newgate's Black Dog thou sawest and knowest too well.*

He was a more fearsome spectacle, declared those who had beheld him, than Cerberus, the three-headed dog which is the guardian of the infernal regions. "Black he was, with curling snakes for hairs, his eyes like torches; his breath was poison and smoke came from his nostrils. His tongue was a clapper tolling poor men to ring a peal in hell . . . and he rent them with ravening paws to tear out their bowels."

For years, for centuries, the specter of the Black Dog haunted Newgate. Perhaps other strays, like the first one which began the legend, wandered into the prison from time to time, convincing witnesses that the apparition was a horrible reality.

In a sense, it was real. The Black Dog was a black conscience.

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# Songs That Have Made History

## XIII—Aj, Lúcka, Lúcka!

IT was a song that helped carry through one of the greatest marches in history. The march of the Czechoslovak Legion in the First World War has been compared to the Anabasis of Xenophon and his ten thousand Greeks, carving a path through Persian hordes to the shores of the Mediterranean. Yet odds were heavier against the modern soldiers, who sang as they fought their way out of Russia and across Siberia and journeyed on until they had completed a circuit of the world.

Nobody knows who wrote their song, *"Aj, Lúcka, Lúcka!"** as it is called from the first words of its refrain. It is one of those old folk-tunes, cherished by a people for centuries. There is little martial about its merry words, but there is a swinging lift to its music for the feet of marching men and harmonies for their voices. Most of all, it breathes the spirit of a beloved homeland. No soldier, fighting for his country, asks more of the song that takes him into battle.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Czechs and Slovaks living in exile in Russia at once began to organize battalions. Now at long last came their opportunity, serving under the banner of the Allies, to win freedom for their native land from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Sturdy recruits joined the colors. Under the leadership of Thomas Masaryk, who would become the first President of Czechoslovakia, and Benés, his successor, more fighting men to fill the ranks were passed through the underground from enemy territory, until the Legion reached a strength of 40,000. It fought gallantly on the Russian front up to the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, when repeated attempts to Russianize the Legion forced a break and began the great march.

Through the Ukraine and eastward marched the Legion—poorly armed, short of all equipment, provisions and medical supplies. But the Bolsheviks could not halt determined troops who rushed into combat with flails and clubs where they lacked rifles. Russian Asia saw the compact column: men wearing a cap badge of red and white, displaying the crowned lion of Bohemia, on his breast a shield emblazoned with a cross—men singing as they marched. Czechoslovaks from prison camps swung into line. Here was no invading army, cutting a swath of rapine and pillage, but a disciplined force that treated inhabitants with courtesy and paid for its food.

The Legion used any transport it could find, the Trans-Siberian Railway helping it over many weary miles. Crowded box-cars rang with song, and it was there an American Y.M.C.A. man, Charles Atherton, a football and baseball star from Penn State, learned *"Aj, Lúcka, Lúcka!"* while pumping away at a portable organ. He would bring it back to the States, along with other Czech melodies, to become popular and be sung in Czech by college, school and other choruses, though not many know its story and meaning. Freely translated, it runs:

Through fields wide and verdant,
Where the tall grass grows,
Down in cascade swirling,
Pure a river flows.

From his castle watching,
There its lord could see
Two most beauteous damsels,
Weeping plaintively.

"Ho!" he called his henchman.
"Saddle steeds apace.
Off we'll go a-riding
To the wars or chase."

"Master," cried the henchman
"Arms have we no more.
How shall we go hunting,
Or ride forth to war?"

Gazing toward the maidens,
Soothed the lord those fears.
"Man, we're going hunting
Eighteen-year-old dears!"

At length the mighty stretch of Siberia—5,000 miles—lay behind the Legion. Shipped over the Pacific, it reached San Francisco and was transported by rail across the United States and thence on back to Europe. The march had begun in May, 1918. Advance elements arrived in Prague, capital of the new Republic of Czechoslovakia, in June, 1920.

You know the tragic aftermath: How first the mailed fist of Hitler, then the iron heel of Stalin crushed independence, bought with blood. But freedom lives in the hearts of Czechoslovaks, lives with a song—never to die, nor forever to be denied.

*—Fairfax Downey*

* Pronounced *"Aie, Lutchka!"*

# Pie in $\frac{e}{y}$ Sky

{by the Pilgrims' own Chamber of Commerce}

From "Extracts of a Booke of Captaine John Smith, printed in 1622. called New England's Tryalls," to be found at large in "Purchas His Pilgrimes." Here all tricked out as a feast for $\frac{e}{y}$ eyes by that wistful old New Englander, Peter Wells...

Loving Cousin, at our arrivall at New Plimoth in New England, we found all our Friends and Planters in good health, though they were left sicke and weake with very small meanes, the Indians round about us peaceable and friendly, the Countrey very pleasant and temperate, yeelding naturally of it selfe great store of fruits, as Vines of divers sorts in great abundance; there is likewise Walnuts, Chestnuts, Small-nuts and Plums, with much variety of Flowers, Roots, and Hearbs, no lesse pleasant than wholsome & profitable: no place hath more Goose-berries, and Straw-berries, nor better; Timber of all sorts you have in England doth cover the land, that affords Beasts of divers sorts, and great flockes of Turkies, Quailes, Pigeons and Partridges: Many great Lakes abounding with Fish, Fowle, Beavers and Otters. The Sea affoords us as great plentie of all excellent sorts of Sea-fish, as the Rivers and Iles doth variety of wild Fowle of most useful sorts. Mines we find to our thinking, but neither the goodnesse nor qualitie wee know. Better Graine cannot be then the Indian Corne, if we will plant it upon as good ground as a man need desire. We are all Free-holders, the Rent-day doth not trouble us, and all these good blessings we have, of which and what we list in their seasons for taking. Our company are for the most part very religious honest people; The Word of God sincerely taught us every Sabbath: so that I know not any thing a contented mind can here want. I desire your friendly care to send my wife and children to mee, where I wish all the Friends I have in England, and so I rest,

*your loving Kinsman*

*William Hilton.*

# Sleuths with Sirens

SIGNS warned: QUIET—HOSPITAL ZONE. But the block was a bedlam. Giant pumpers throbbed; hose trucks clanged; police whistles shrilled. Men in black helmets and rubber boots shouted hoarsely as they laddered the five-story building.

Ambulances glared with bloodshot eyes, trying to squeeze past chemical trucks, red sedans, a big quad combination—jouncing over the white boa constrictors writhing across the sidewalks from the hydrants. Starchy internes jumped out, carrying rolled-up stretchers, vanished into the murky haze of the hospital's main entrance.

Crowds surging against hastily strung fire-lines followed the tapering shaft of a searchlight's beams up to the third-floor windows, where the quad's eighty-five-foot spring ladder swayed in toward the ledge. Hosemen churned in and out of the main door, lugging axes, electric torches, smoke exhausters, extinguishers. Policemen from the green emergency truck set up a resuscitator on the sidewalk.

It was a scene of apparent confusion—yet in reality there was none. Each man was carrying out an assignment for which he'd been especially trained, and for which he'd received specific orders. But if there was no confusion, there was more than the normal amount of concern among the blaze-beaters.

The worst fires are always those in which the most lives are endangered; and no alarm is more dreaded than the one which taps out the signal of a hospital box. *And this was the third time in twelve hours the big rigs had been rushed to this same New York hospital!*

Naturally, incendiarism was suspected. The only kind of lightning that strikes three times in the same place is the lightning-bug. And hospitals—like schools and churches—are favorite targets of the torch.

The first two "stops" had been fairly easy; a matter of extinguishing smoldering paper in supply closets. But the danger was no less acute, because the fire that's intentionally set is most likely to get out of hand; the arsonist usually does his best to give the flames a good head start.

The hospital was of "fireproof" construction, but it contained enough inflammables to cause a major disaster—mattresses, bedding, varnished woodwork, curtains, quantities of ether in the surgery. . . .

Even if actual flames could be kept under control, there was always the fear that smoke and fumes would cause fatalities among the hundreds of patients.

Two firemen emerged from the haze of smoke at the main entrance, half leading, half carrying a girl in the blue uniform of a nurse's aide. Her face was soot-smudged; she leaned weakly on the men in the rubber coats.

They led her to a sedan marked *Battalion Chief,* and reported to a weather-bitten individual wearing a tall white helmet:

"Found her lyin' at the bottom of the third-floor stairs, Chief. Had a towel gag stuck in her mouth. Her feet an' hands were tied up with these." One of the rescuers held out pieces of waxy-white clothesline.

A stocky man in a rumpled brown suit and water-spotted brown felt came up to the sedan. "Get Doc to take a look at her. She's in bad shape."

"Wouldn't wonder," exclaimed the second hoseman. "After her gettin' clunked by this guy she found sneaking around under the staircase! He tied her up an' shoved that towel in her face so she like to smothered to death, after he touched off that pile of newspapers in the second-floor linen closet."

The man in the brown suit frowned sympathetically:

"We'll have Doc fix you up right away, miss. Just tell us what this man looked like."

The girl began to babble:

Her name was Margaret McCaffrey. She was a nurse's aide; she'd been sent down to the refrigerator on the second floor to get a couple of pitchers of cracked ice for patients' ice-bags. On the way down she saw a man skulking in the shadows under the staircase.

She hadn't cried out, hoping he wouldn't realize she'd seen him. But as she ran to get the door to the second floor open, he came up behind her, hit her with something that felt like a piece of pipe.

When she fell, he tied her up, gagged her and then scuttled out. She had supposed he was the firebug, because in a few minutes she smelled smoke and tried to crawl to the first-floor stairs so she could roll down them.

"Took a little longer to get that third blaze going." The man in the brown suit nodded. "Boys had cleaned out all the waste rags and paper. How many matches did you use to set the first one?"

"Only one," she answered without thinking. Then she burst into hysterical tears.

The man in the brown suit nodded again. "Let's get down to my office, and you can tell me all about it—get it all off your chest."

"Who're you?" blubbered the McCaffrey girl. "Are you a detective?"

"I'm just the Fire Marshal," he said. "Let's go."

THAT was one of the simpler cases which the New York City Bureau of Fire Investigation has solved by its unspectacular, Johnny-on-the-spot observation of the habits and methods of incendiarists.

The BFI (which has as outstanding a record of criminal-catching as its more famous counterpart bearing the same initials differently arranged) knew that where a number of fires are started in rapid succession, it was almost invariably an inside job, done by someone familiar to the premises and having constant access to them.

They knew it wasn't a professional fire-bug job, done to collect insurance, because the hospital was a non-profit organization, and nobody would have been the gainer if the building had been gutted. So it was almost certainly an amateur arsonist, presumably one moved by resentment at some injury, real or fancied. Probably, therefore, an employee of the hospital.

Most important of all, in the office of the Chief Fire Marshal of the City of New York, high in the Municipal Building in City Hall Square, are voluminous records of cases where incendiarists claim to have been assaulted by the familiar "strange man," who thereupon proceeded to torch the property.

So Margaret McCaffrey had two strikes against her when the hosemen helped her to her feet and led her out of the building. The towel, used as

**A big-city arson squad has a specially interesting job of detection.**

# by STEWART STERLING

a gag, was the third strike. This last blaze had been set in a linen closet—but she hadn't mentioned going near the place where towels were stored. It didn't seem likely to the Marshal that the "strange man" would have gone to the storage closet to get the gag, returned and then gone back to start the fire. . . .

The New York City BFI isn't unique; every large city has one, though in some sections the work is carried on by what is known as the Arson Squad. Practically every State has a State Fire Marshal's office, to handle cases of incendiarism which occur outside big-city areas. There is a special group of arson sleuths employed by the National Board of Fire Underwriters, which operates in every one of the forty-eight States, coöperating with the city and State marshals.

But though there is nothing extraordinary about the Gotham set-up, aside from the high degree of efficiency with which it functions, there is a great deal that's unusual about New York's Chief Fire Marshal, Thomas E. Brophy.

Tom Brophy has been putting the finger on arsonists for more than forty years. He has delved into more incendiary blazes than any other man in the world, and has squashed enough deadly firebugs to fill a penitentiary.

He has no working hours, unless you call a twenty-four-hour tour of duty seven days a week, "working hours." Whenever the concerto in brass begins, with the tap of the fire-bell in his office or his home, Brophy or one of his half-hundred deputies gets on the job, fast. Part of the secret of catching the arsonist is to get to the fire with all possible speed, because if the arsonist has done his work thoroughly, much of the evidence against him is consumed by the blaze.

Frequently Marshal Brophy's red sedan—equipped with flasher lights, siren, bell and two-way short-wave radio—beats the engine companies to the fire. Last November he was racing to answer an alarm when a man rushed out into the street, halted Brophy's car, pointed to an unoccupied tenement building some distance down the street:

*Illustrated by*
*RAYMOND THAYER*

*"Found her lyin' at the bottom of the third-floor stairs. Had a gag stuck in her mouth, her feet and hands tied."*

"That's where it is, Chief! In the hallway!"

Brophy arrested Joseph E. Dyer then and there. The too-helpful firebug had failed to note that no smoke or flame was as yet visible from the street. Dyer was convicted, too.

That wasn't the first time Brophy had picked up an arsonist while the fire was still in progress. The kind of pathological pyromaniac who sets fires for excitement or revenge is almost certain to hang around the fire-lines, getting a big belt out of the fear

and commotion he has caused—and his face frequently gives him away.

On occasion, Brophy has picked up an incendiarist out of the spectators at a fire simply by his mental card-catalogue of past offenders. They took him once to see a heroic orderly who had put out a fire in the Methodist Episcopal Hospital in Brooklyn. Instead of congratulating the man, Brophy put the arm on him. He was an arsonist the Marshal had convicted and sent up, years before. . . .

The first thing Brophy—or one of his deputies—does when he reaches a blaze is to determine whether it is an accidental, spontaneous or intentional fire. Almost every arsonist tries to start his conflagration in such a way that it will *seem* accidental. And many fires which appear, at first glance, to have been set, turn out to be the result of that little-appreciated spontaneous combustion.

Churches being among the principal sufferers from the pathological pyromaniac, arson was suspected when the famous Riverside Church went up to the tune of a million dollars' damage some years ago. Careful investigation showed the linseed oil on painters' rags was the real culprit.

A lunchroom in a bad location had been losing money, so when the building caught fire one night after closing, incendiarism was the first thought. But a greasy ham-bag, tossed on a pile of fruit crates, was the actual offender.

The amateur arsonists are generally easier to catch than the professional firebugs who torch for pay. A large percentage of the first group are youngsters, fifteen to eighteen being the most dangerous ages. Sometimes the fires they set do comparatively small damage compared to the losses caused by the bug who collects his hire only if he burns up a building.

To combat this second group, Brophy and his men call upon highly specialized experience, an uncannily developed sense of smell—and a bewildering array of scientific laboratory apparatus.

EXPERIENCE with thousands of investigated fires tells Brophy how to "get to the bottom of it."—*i.e.*, find out *where* it started. That often tells a great deal, in itself.

One well-known firebug had a habit of scraping plaster away from lathing to expose the dry wood and let flames get into the hollow wall space of a tenement. Whenever a "stop" was made in time to reveal such a break in the plaster, there was a logical assumption this particular torch had been at work.

Incendiarists often start fires in hall closets or broom closets because they know it will be difficult to demonstrate to the satisfaction of a jury that the blaze might not have been a result of spontaneous combustion. One bug, a grandmother with nine grandchildren, specialized in setting her deadly bonfires in baby carriages stored under tenement stairs! These habits, once known, become trademarks of arson—much as do different types of "starters."

Once a commercial arsonist begins by using a certain "starter"—kerosene, celluloid shavings, excelsior, ether, a timed candle or a fuse cut to length—he generally sticks to that particular method. If Brophy can get to a fire before the structure collapses, he can usually discover traces of the "starter" and the method employed.

Bertha Warshavsky, one of the most notorious money torches, invented the looped string hung over a door-knob—at the end of the string a packet of matches tied to a cotton wick soaked in saltpeter and dried. Underneath this cozy little contraption she would arrange a shoe-box full of shredded paper.

By the time the slow-burning wick ignited the matches and the cord burned through, dropping the flaming mass into the shoe-box, Bertha would usually be a long distance away.

But on one occasion this diabolical device touched off a building which was such a quick burner—aided by the fact that the door burned through first and helped to build up draft—that the whole place collapsed before the charred shoe-box was entirely consumed. Pieces of the shoe-box, traced to Bertha, sent her a long distance away—even farther than usual. . . .

Whereas pyromaniacs are likely to hang around the scene of the crime to extract from it the fullest measure of excitement, the professional firebug usually goes to the opposite extreme.

In order to establish an alibi, he prefers to get as far as possible from the job he has set by the time the big red trucks are rolling out of the engine houses.

So partial are many firebugs to this fixed idea of providing themselves with a fireproof alibi, that they frequently overdo it and are trapped by their own ingenuity. One man rigged up a door-bell to connect a spark-gap in a circuit with a saucer-full of flash-light powder set in a nest of oil-soaked excelsior.

He went to a city a hundred miles from his home town, sent himself a Special Delivery letter (under a fictitious name, of course) and then continued on to another metropolis three hundred miles still farther west.

Comfortably arranging his alibi, by sitting in front of a chrome and red-leather bar, fully equipped with everything from free pretzels to free-wheeling blondes, he waited while the postman, four hundred miles to the east, jabbed the door-bell of his house. *Boom!*

But the flashlight powder did its work too well: Grains of burned magnesium were later found, imbedded by the force of the blast, in the baseboard of his living-room. The bars beside which this ingenious individual is now sitting are not equipped with blondes.

A certain firebug used nothing but pieces of blotting paper as his brand of "starter." The gimmick was, the blotters had been soaked in hydrides of phosphorus, a chemical not usually obtainable at the corner drugstore. When dry, this chemical ignites. It is, so to speak, a self-starter. The blotters kept on catching fire until finally the marshals caught up with the bug.

IF Brophy can find nothing about the point of origin of the blaze, or of the starter used, he gets to work with scientific tools. The most important thing, after finding out *where* the blaze began, is to determine *how* it began.

There are several keys. One is that each material burns at a specific temperature. Gasoline, for example, burns at 1500° F. Aluminum melts at 1204°. If, therefore, the substance used as a starter was touched off in an aluminum saucepan, it is a reasonable certainty that if the saucepan wasn't melted, the ignitor wasn't gasoline—or anything else that burns as hotly as gasoline.

Sometimes the Marshal doesn't find any copper ash-trays, or gold rings or such, around the source of the fire to give him a clue to the starting substance. Then he takes sections of burned wood cut from a spot as close to the point of origin as possible. An arson sleuth can tell as much from a section of charred and checked wood as a fingerprint expert can from the whorls and loops left by your thumb.

Burn an oak board, for example, by tossing it in the fireplace; the alligatorings—those geometrical cross-hatchings on the surface of the charred wood—take on a certain easily recognizable pattern. But if you pour alcohol on the board and then burn the soaked wood, the alligatorings will be closer together. The higher the temperature at which the igniting substance burns, the smaller and finer those tell-tale checkmarks become.

Microscopes and enlargements of micrographs are another weapon in the war against arson. A furrier whose factory suffered a catastrophic fire put in a heavy claim for destroyed silver-fox coats. The arson sleuths found a few unburned hairs clinging to the metal hangers on which the coats had been stored. Under the compound lenses, the hairs showed up as rabbit fur. The manufacturer had


*One well-known firebug had a habit of scraping plaster away from lathing to expose the dry wood.*

switched his stock, set the fire, kept the valuable silver-fox garments—and planned to collect heavily. He did—in a somewhat different sense than he had anticipated.

DURING the depression-period years Brophy could almost tell in advance where the greatest number of industrial and business fires would occur; at the end of the wholesale hat-and-cap season, for instance, when retailers had completed their purchases for the time being, there would be a great increase in claims for fire insurance from the district where caps and hats were manufactured.

At the close of the toy season, there were sure to be several disastrous fires in the toy district of Manhattan—and so on. Brophy stationed special deputies in each wholesale district at the critical "end-of-the-season" periods, and greatly reduced claims were the result.

There aren't so many seasonal conflagrations nowadays because it's usually more profitable for a manufacturer to sell what goods he has on hand—and he seldom has much trouble doing it. But if there should be a business slump, extra precautions again would be taken by the BFI.

Only a few weeks ago New York's Fire Commissioner, Frank Quayle, noted in his annual departmental report:

"Should (there be) a downward revision of prices . . . . there will undoubtedly be a gradual and pronounced increase in incendiarism by unscrupulous merchants who find themselves overstocked with goods greatly depreciated in value."

If that time does come, Tom Brophy will be ready to meet the hazard with the newest in firebug-catching techniques.

The motion-picture camera—to establish in court the point of origin of the blaze; the spectroscope—to prove the identity of the paint particles found in the cuff of a suspect's pants with the pigment on a batch of melted-down cosmetic boxes; the wire recorder—to take down what the suspect says after his arrest: all these will be brought into action when needed. But no amount of laboratory equipment can substitute for Tom Brophy's unique experience in how the mind of an arsonist works. As in the case of the cat that sent a man to prison.

It was after a fire in a Manhattan drugstore. A preliminary investigation gave no reason to suspect arson. No kerosene smell, no charred matchsticks where they shouldn't be, no tallow spot to show where a candlestub had melted down.

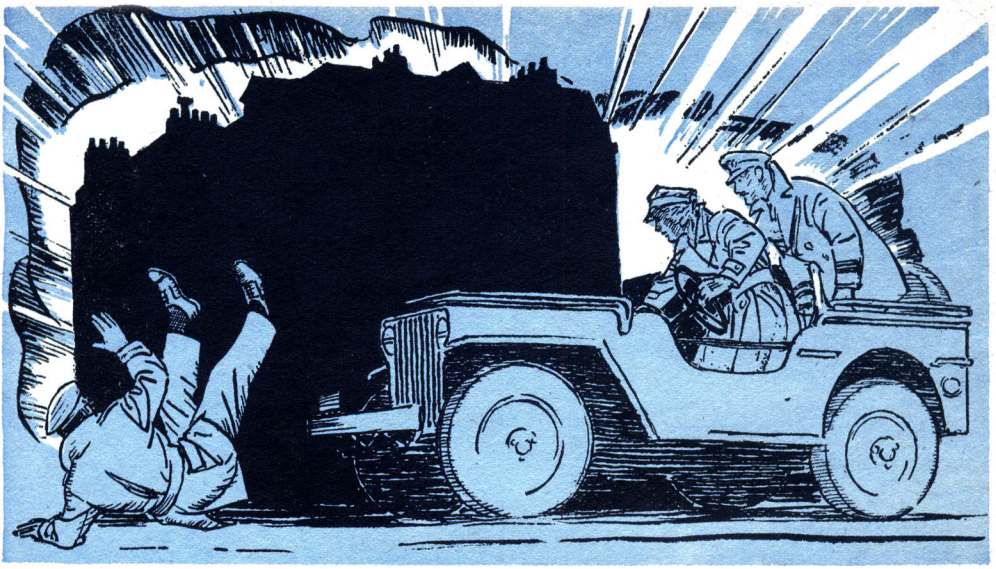
The only thing that aroused Brophy's seventh sense—that instinctive "feel" that something was wrong—was a cat's box: A cardboard box, burned to ashes—with a pillow in it, also reduced to ashes. But no cat.

On inquiry, Brophy learned the druggist had been in the habit of leaving the cat in the store every night, when locking up. But the night of the blaze, *for some reason,* the pharmacist had taken the cat home.

That was enough to begin with. Before Brophy finished, the druggist had confessed to setting the blaze in order to collect the insurance money, the cat had a new home, and so did its former owner.

A BLAZE in a corner drugstore may not seem so important. But that "insignificant" fire may have taken pumpers and ladder-trucks and badly needed smoke-eaters away from another spot where they might have saved other lives just at that time. That drugstore fire was a night patrol in a continuous battle which has cost the U. S. over a million casualties and close to a hundred thousand fatalities in the last decade.

In a war as deadly as the fight on fire, it's good to know a man like Chief Fire Marshal Brophy is still around—and on our side.



# By Appointment

**An American goes back to London to keep a tragic rendezvous.**

*by* ARTHUR GORDON

"SORRY," said the girl, "but I still find it awfully hard to dance uphill." She raised her head, and her hair brushed his face. "Don't you?"

Nicholas waited until the pressure of her arm around his neck relaxed a bit. "I don't think the rolling is so noticeable now," he said. "We're in the lee of the Irish coast. No more big waves."

The ship's orchestra ended the fox-trot on a gleeful chord. Nicholas stood still. The girl's body remained pressed against his for an instant longer than necessary; then she stepped back and joined in the polite applause. She smiled at him, this pretty girl, crinkling her nose in the funny way she had. Rosemary Addams, of Chicago, *en route* to spend a year at the Sorbonne. Sea-gray eyes, smiling mouth, cornsilk hair. Easily the prettiest girl on board. So young—nineteen. So eager. So hungry for life.

"I'm hot," she announced. "Aren't you, Nick? Let's not dance any more. Not now. Take me on deck and tell me—tell me about Ireland. About banshees and leprechauns and things. Oh, I can't believe this is our last night aboard. The time has gone so fast, hasn't it, Nick?" She tugged impatiently at his arm. "*Hasn't* it, Nick?"

"That's right," he agreed tolerantly. "It's gone very fast." They were at the door now, that led from the lounge to the promenade deck. "Wait a minute," he said, looking at her bare shoulders. "If you're so hot, you'll need some kind of wrap."

"Oh, no," she said. "It's much warmer than it was. After all, it's August, and a beautiful night. Besides, I never catch cold."

She pushed open the door and led him out on deck. She was right about the night. The air was almost mild. Off the starboard bow the moon poured a flood of quicksilver into the sea, and through it the ship moved with calm deliberation, as if it knew exactly where it was going and felt serene and contented about it. A few miles away, misty in the moonlight, the hills of Ireland were sliding past, their dark shadows pricked by flashes from the sentinel lighthouses. It was late; almost midnight.

"Let's go up on the boat-deck, please," Rosemary said.

He followed her obediently past the stacks of folded deck-chairs, past the deserted deck-tennis court, up the steep stairs. All through the voyage he had been avoiding just this situation—Rosemary and himself alone, late at night, on the boatdeck. Or anywhere else, for that matter. It had become a game, almost, with Rosemary puzzled at first, then intrigued, finally determined—that was the word for it—to bring her quarry at least momentarily to bay.

Strange, he thought, how masculine indifference affected some women. He had seen a good deal of that process lately, usually beginning with hurt pride and ending with pride abandoned. Not that Rosemary was really to blame. It was a small ship; most of the passengers were middle-aged or married. As an unattached male, he had inevitably been paired off with her. Pingpong, shuffleboard, dancing; but until now, nothing like this.

They walked slowly forward, past the lifeboats white in the moonlight, past the great funnel where steam hissed softly. They stopped near the

rail, and she turned toward him. "Tell me, Nick," she said.

"About Ireland?"

"No, about you."

"Well," he said, with an effort at lightness, "you know most of the vital statistics. That I'm a lawyer. That I'm old enough to be your grandfather—"

"Don't talk nonsense," she said sharply. "You're thirty-two."

"How do you know?"

"I looked at your passport one day when you were playing deck tennis. But Nick—" She came close to him and touched the handkerchief in his breast pocket, straightening it in a gesture that was forlornly appealing. "That's not what I mean. I just don't understand you. You're so—so *withdrawn*. I can't get through to you, and I want to so much. What *is* it, Nick? Is it me? Am I really so repulsive?"

Her mouth trembled, and her eyes had the starry look that comes just before tears. *Damnation,* he thought, *it's hell to be so young; she thinks her heart is breaking.* Aloud he said gently: "Of course not, Rosemary; you're one of the prettiest girls I ever met. And one of the nicest." He took off his coat and put it around her shoulders; her skin was cool and yielding under his fingers. "See?" he said. "You're shivering. I warned you."

She shook her head blindly. "I'm not cold, Nick, really I'm not. I'm just being silly, I guess. But tomorrow we land, and you're going to London and I'm going to Scotland, and then France, and I don't know when I'll see you again—"

She was crying now, the teardrops bright in the moonlight. "Oh, look, now," he said, torn between laughter and pity, "this won't do. We'll meet again—often. I'm sure of it." He put an arm around her shoulders in what he meant to be a comforting hug. He knew instantly that it was a mistake, but the knowledge came too late. Her arms went around his neck, the coat sliding unheeded to the deck. Her mouth was on his, warm and demanding. He held himself tense for a moment, then something stirred in him, something dormant so long that he had begun to believe it dead. His fingers tightened on the ivory shoulders. They stood locked together, one shadow against the diamond path of moonbeams. Then abruptly he let her go.

She swayed back against the rail. "I knew you cared," she whispered. "You do care, don't you, Nick?"

He said, more harshly than he intended, "No, Rosemary, I don't." Then he saw her face, and knew there was no mercy in being kind. "You were begging for a kiss," he said. "You got one."

She turned and ran down the deck, noiseless as a white moth. He picked up his coat and put it on. He took out the handkerchief she had arranged so carefully and rubbed it across his lips. The lipstick made a red smear on the white linen. The old ache just below his breastbone came back so suddenly and sharply that it was like a physical blow. He pressed his body against the rail as if pressure could help. He dropped his handkerchief over the side and watched it flutter toward the foam-laced water.

"I'm sorry, Kit," he said aloud.

THIS was something he rarely did—talk to her aloud. It was all right to think about her; it was all right, even, to send thought-messages to her. But not to talk aloud. That made it seem as if she were alive and beside him, and she was not.

For Kit was dead.

And so was the child she would have borne if poliomyelitis had not struck her—and so was her husband, really, although he was condemned for a while to go on breathing and pretending he was alive.

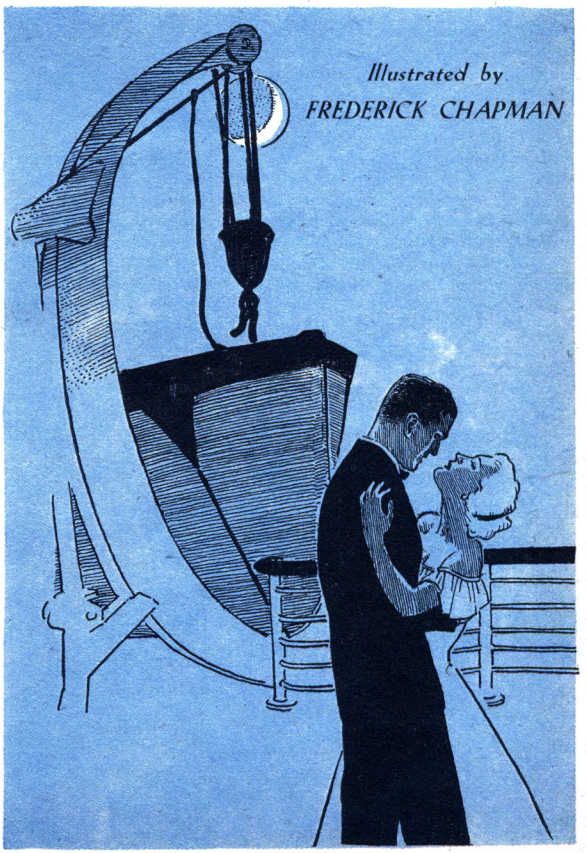
Poor Nicholas, people said, such a dreadful tragedy. She was such a sweet girl—English, you know, but awfully friendly—and so devoted to Nicholas. It's terribly hard, although being young, he'll get over it, in time. . . .

That was just the trouble: he didn't get over it. There had been time enough for the edge of pain to become dulled, at least a little. Almost two years, now. Time enough for him to have married again—that was what his sister had said, trying to be practical, not unkind—time enough for him to have regained his ambition, recovered the zest and drive that had carried him so far up the ladder of material success in so short a time.

But he hadn't.

It was like waiting for a bell to ring when the clapper was gone, waiting for a spark to glow in the ashes of a dead fire.

His sister, with infinite tact and skill, had brought up the name of a girl he had known from childhood, a nice girl, a talented girl, a girl whose background exactly matched his own. "She'd give her soul to marry you, Nick," his sister had said. "And I think she'd make you happy—in time. I know you don't love her, but anything would be better for you than going on like this."




***"You do care, don't you, Nick?" "No, Rosemary, I don't," he said, more harshly than he intended.***

"No," he had said, "it wouldn't be fair."

"Fair to her, you mean?"

"Fair to any of us."

That was the trouble; he often spoke as if Kit were alive.

Larry Kirkwood, his best friend in college and later in law-school, had never stopped trying to rouse him from the inertia into which he had fallen. Larry had become fanatically interested in city politics and planning. "It's fascinating stuff," he told Nicholas. "Drop the work you're doing, and come on in with me. I tell you, boy, we need you! We've chased some of the rats out of the barn, but they keep creeping back. You have no idea how defenseless the people are against the kind of blood-suckers you find in local government. I need help, Nick—help from somebody like you." His eyes had gleamed with enthusiasm. "We'd really be a team, Nick. One of these days you could be district attorney, and I'd be mayor. Or the other way round! How about it?"

He had hated to disappoint Larry. But what good is a terrier that doesn't want to chase rats? He kept on with his own work, doing it well enough from force of habit, not from real interest.

The vacations were the worst. Last summer he had tried visiting friends, progressing miserably from one household to another, trying to join in summer gayety, wincing away from memories of former visits when he and Kit shared the same room, sometimes, where now only one bed was turned down.

This year, groping for another solution, he had had this idea of a trip to England. Or rather, the idea had been thrust upon him in a curious way. One cold rainy night in the previous spring, after a talk with his sister, he had decided to make a real effort to pick up the threads of living. As a beginning, he went through a drawer of old photographs and letters, putting the pictures stoically into an envelope, reading the letters and then feeding them to the fire that burned in the library grate.

The letters were mostly ones that he and Kit had exchanged during the war when he was stationed at a bleak and muddy airbase near Norwich and she was in London. He read them one by one, slouched in his old leather chair with Sandy the Airedale beside him. As he read, the walls with their familiar books dissolved, the warmth of the fire faded, and he was back in the Nissen hut, writing on the plain wooden table with his feet wrapped in an old fleece flying-jacket to keep them warm, his breath steaming grayly in the chill air, and outside on the perimeter track, where the Liberators squatted in the dark, the snarl and cough of the engines as the crew-chiefs readied their ungainly charges for the mission the next day.

He could see it all as clearly as if the table were actually before him: the peanut cans that served as ash-trays, the intelligence reports, the V-mail letters from home, the blue envelopes postmarked London—those were from Kit.

Friendly, amusing letters at first, then full of a growing tenderness, an almost intuitive awareness of all that was to follow. He read them all; it was like hearing her voice again. And then, near the end of one letter, where she was talking about meeting him at the crowded station next time he came down on leave, she had written: *". . . although I suppose it wouldn't matter if we did miss each other. I would know exactly where to find you. It's wonderful, having a rendezvous like ours. No matter what happens, we can always meet there, as if by appointment."*

He had stood up slowly, the letter in his hand. Sandy had opened one eye. He had knelt and scratched behind the battle-scarred ears.

"I suppose it would be pretty silly to go back, wouldn't it, Sandy?"

The stubby tail had wagged agreement. But the next day he had ordered his tickets for England.

Now, leaning against the rail, watching the mother-of-pearl clouds slide across the moon, he knew that the decision had not been silly, not from his own point of view. Ever since he had made up his mind to go back, back to the place where he had first met Kit, some of the soreness had gone out of him. He had no clear idea of what he expected to find. Probably nothing. But somehow she might be there, in the air, just out of sight, just out of hearing, but there. By appointment. . . .

If she wasn't—well, what had he to lose? If she was—then he would know it, that was all, and something inside him would be satisfied, and perhaps at peace.

He walked slowly aft, down to the promenade deck, down the main staircase, past the purser's office where the baggage was stacked, ready for the porters in the morning. His steward was in the corridor; all during the voyage he had fussed over Nicholas like a mother hen. "Liverpool, ten o'clock, sir. Call you at 'alf-past-seven, sir?"

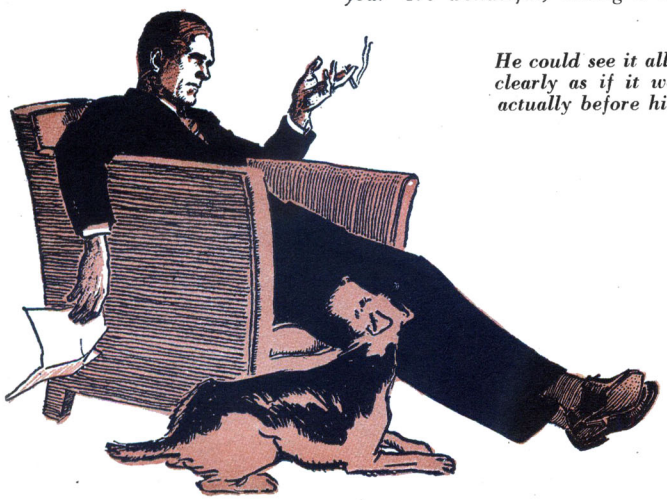
"Don't bother," Nicholas said. "I'll be up."

In the small neat cabin he undressed slowly. A book was lying on his bunk, one Rosemary had given him. Poor Rosemary, he thought; she had picked a poor partner for a shipboard romance. Well, she would get over it. He smiled a bit grimly. That was what people always said when they no longer cared to contemplate another's suffering.

He turned out the light and lay with fingers laced behind his head. Perhaps he should not have kissed the girl like that, but exactly what did one do in such a situation, what did one say? Suppose he had told her the truth, suppose he had simply said: "I'm sorry, Rosemary, but I'm going to England to meet my wife. We have a rendezvous in Grosvenor Square." And then tried to explain that Kit was dead?

She would have thought him mad.

Grosvenor Square. He seldom heard the words any more, but when he did a little electric shock always seemed to touch his spine and tingle behind his ears. Grosvenor Square. That was where he first met Kit. That was where it all began.



*He could see it all as clearly as if it were actually before him.*

He had lived that meeting over ten thousand times in retrospect. All he had to do was slip his mind off its leash and it went straight back, of its own accord, to that February night when London suffered its first sharp attack of what afterward came to be known as the "Baby Blitz."

He had been walking to his Red Cross Club from a late dinner in Bayswater when the alert sounded and the guns in Hyde Park began to slam. He plodded on through the blackout —there were no taxis, of course— thinking he could make it without ducking into a shelter. Then, as he turned from Park Lane into Upper Brook street, every gun in London seemed to cut loose—Bofors, rocket batteries, everything.

Sparks jumped from the pavement as shrapnel began falling about him with musical tinkling sounds. A stick of bombs fell somewhere down Chelsea way; he heard the successive roars and the horrible grating sound of a building collapsing. A shellcap whistled down behind him with a screech like a falling bomb, and really alarmed, he began to run for the nearest shelter he knew, the American offices at 20 Grosvenor Square.

He dashed across North Audley Street without looking, heard a screech of brakes almost in his ear, tried to dodge, and fell sprawling in front of a staff car whose hooded lights, reduced to mere slits, seemed to glare at him malevolently. And through the infernal uproar of guns and bombs a very British, very exasperated, very feminine voice called to him: "I say, *must* you go about flinging yourself under motorcars at a time like this?"

That was Kit.

SHE was a volunteer driver of staff cars. On this occasion her passenger was an Air Commodore whose destination, it seemed, was also 20 Grosvenor Square. The three of them found themselves, a moment later, inside the comforting blast wall that protected the entrance. There were mumbled apologies from Nicholas, and a cheery rejoinder from the RAF officer: "Quite all right, Captain; don't like bombs much meself." He had turned to Kit. "Why not run the Captain home when this nonsense outside quiets down a bit? I'll be here for at least two hours."

"Very good, sir," Kit had said.

An hour later, when the all-clear sounded, she had driven him back to his Red Cross Club. They had stood for a moment in Jermyn Street looking up at the sky where four searchlights, one from each corner of the unconquered city, were focused on the zenith. All was quiet. The searchlights lay like sword-blades on blue velvet. It was like being inside

*They stood a moment looking up at the sky. It was good to be alive and safe once more.*

a star sapphire. It was good to be alive and safe once more.

He had asked if he might see her again. She said she thought it could be managed. They had exchanged addresses, and he had felt compelled to say: "I'm only an intelligence officer, you know, not a flyer."

"Well," said Kit, "we can't all have wings, now, can we?"

That was the beginning of it.

After that, they met as often as the war permitted, usually in London, often outside 20 Grosvenor Square, since Kit's headquarters were not far away. Kit said she was going to have a brass marker put at the spot where she had "nearly run him over" to commemorate the happy event. Since this was not immediately possible, they let the square itself be their memorial.

It was more like a jungle than a London square, overgrown with hedges and bushes, crowded with drab Army huts, and with a fat silver barrage balloon living in the middle like a pampered elephant. It was not a pretty place, but they loved it as it was, partly because it was their rendezvous, partly because it was a little outpost of America. *Eisenhowerplatz*, the British called it with a mixture of irritation and affection, watching the endless stream of Yanks who, with their rakish caps and sloppy salutes, their arrogance and their little-boy shyness, had invaded the fortress island.

Grosvenor Square. It was all so clear in his mind: the jeeps parked in the mud under the trees, the bomb-shattered houses, the flag on the American Embassy, the M.P. who clicked his heels so explosively when he saluted, and always Kit waiting for him, or running to meet him, her face alive with gladness. Always Kit. . . .

He turned restlessly in his narrow bunk. Well, tomorrow he would be back. Tomorrow he would see it again. It was there, waiting for him. He would not think about it any more tonight. With an effort, he pulled down the shades in his mind, shutting out Grosvenor Square, shutting out the war, shutting out everything except Kit.

Finally, he slept.

In the morning there was the orderly confusion of landing, the immigra-

tion formalities, the customs routine, the hurried farewells. He saw Rosemary briefly; she was looking pale, but said good-by to him calmly enough.

Once on the London train, he put Rosemary out of his thoughts. There was too much to see; too many impressions to absorb. He sat by the window watching the drabness of Liverpool move past. It was England, all right: the fussy taxis with the railing on top, the big dray horses with their shaggy fetlocks, the wry pinched faces of the workingmen, pale under their grimy caps. The little people of England—the sight of them always touched his heart, somehow—as frail and shabby as sparrows on the outside, and inside as tough and enduring as steel. Kit's people.

The train moved into the tidy countryside where the wheat was being stacked and rooks flew cawing through the blue air. He watched it for a while, then read the personal column in the newspaper he had bought. That was one of the things he had taught Kit—to see the personal items as an American would see them, thus providing herself with an endless source of amusement. Here was a typical one:

> Small lady going East wishes to sacrifice South American skunk.

This harmless effort to sell a fur coat conjured up a mental picture that was irresistible. He took out a pencil and began a rough sketch of a small lady brandishing a knife over a despondent-looking polecat. But then he crumpled the drawing in his hand and dropped it to the floor. There was no one to show it to.

He read the other items in the column. Ancient cars were being offered at fantastic prices. Bedsheets were urgently needed for an invalid musician. Somebody wanted to exchange two evening dresses for a perambulator. Austerity, it seemed, was still with the British.

He frowned, thinking of what Larry Kirkwood had said to him the night before he left. "The trouble with us Americans, Nick, is that we've forgotten that charity begins at home. We rush around boosting other nations' living standards, when right under our noses people are hungry and illiterate and dirty and miserable. I could show you slums right in this city that would curl your hair. Hell, it isn't a question of saving the world for democracy, it's a question of saving democracy for the world. And if we're going to save it, we've got to begin right here at home."

Good old Larry! Put one man like him in every American town and the rest would be easy. But there weren't enough Larry Kirkwoods.

As the hours passed, and London grew nearer, Nick felt nervousness building up in him, a blend of anticipation and dread that was almost like stage-fright. He loved London. He and Kit had been married there shortly after V-E Day. They had spent part of their honeymoon in one of its gray old hotels. He knew there would be change, and he dreaded it.

But when the taxi drove him through the late afternoon it was not so altered as he had feared. Some rebuilding and repainting was going on, but every street still had its burned-out church or its bombed-out house. London still wore her honorable scars. The uniforms were gone from the streets, but the bobbies still directed traffic with imperturbable calm and the big red buses moved as majestically as ever through the gathering dusk. No, London had not changed.

He had written for reservations at a hotel where he and Kit had stayed. Not the same rooms: that would have been too much. He had made it plain that he wanted only a single room. The hotel was near Grosvenor Square, and it was a friendly place. Somehow he did not want to feel completely alone.

The doorman in his green livery must have known he was coming, or else his memory was uncanny.

"Good evening, Major Duncan," he said. "A pleasure to see you again, sir. And Mrs. Duncan—well, I trust?"

"Yes," Nicholas said, "she's very well, thanks. I'm sorry—I've forgotten your name."

"Robbins, sir. Thank you, sir."

Perhaps, Nicholas thought as he went through the heavy revolving door, it had been a mistake to come here. Elsewhere he would not have had to run the risk of those sudden questions, born of ignorance and kindness, that were like the sudden turning of a knife in a wound. Well, it was too late to change now.

He signed the register and was shown to his room, a small one overlooking the park. He could still see, in the fading light, sheep grazing where once the anti-aircraft guns had thrust their slim muzzles skyward.

"Will you be going out for dinner, sir?"

He turned from the window. A waiter had come in and was hovering expectantly. "No," Nicholas said. "I'd like something here in my room. Anything will do."

"Very good, sir."

The food that appeared was little better than wartime rations. When he had finished, Nicholas drew a chair up to the window and watched the lights spring up in the purple twilight. At least the discomfort of the blackout no longer had to be endured.

The room grew dark and somber. He switched on the lamps, feeling lonely and depressed. Perhaps the trip *had* been a mistake, an impulsive gesture that could only revive old memories, open old wounds. It was childish to suppose that a mere change of geography could cure his soul-sickness. Yet that was all it was: a change of geography.

He got up at last and unpacked, taking as much time as he could. He felt a queer reluctance at the thought of going out into the night, of revisiting Grosvenor Square. It was too much like being a ghost. But he knew that in the end he would go.

At ten-thirty he could stand his room no longer. He went down to the bar and ordered a whisky and soda. The bartender was a jovial soul with an eye for Americans. Nicholas was afraid that he, too, might remember him and ask about Kit, but he did not.

At eleven the bar closed. A side door led to the street. Nicholas went out into the cool night air. The moon was up, working her silver alchemy in the ruined houses, whitening the grass in Hyde Park. A few taxis and buses lumbered past. Nicholas began walking north. He felt calm and clear-headed. He had had only the one drink.

At Upper Brook Street he made the turn that led to Grosvenor Square. He walked slowly, keeping his eyes on the uneven pavement, trying to subdue the sudden pounding of his heart. He had walked this way a hundred times. He knew exactly what the square looked like. There was no point in getting so excited about it.

As he approached the corner the strange resistance grew stronger. To keep from looking at the square he resolutely fixed his eyes on the empty shell of a house across the street where a delicate iron staircase still spiraled up the naked inner wall. Then he came to the corner and had to look.

The square that he had known was gone. The high hedges, the thick mysterious bushes, the huts, the tangled mass of trees—all were gone. Instead, a flat expanse of grass, relieved only by an occasional tree or low flower-bed, stretched unbroken all the way to the American Embassy on the other side. He stared at it, sick with disappointment. This was not Grosvenor Square where he and Kit had met so often. This was not the jungle where the barrage balloon had its lair. Was it this he had come so far to see, this prim English lawn with its signs saying please keep off the grass?

Why had they done it?

He moved slowly forward across North Audley Street. A glimmer of

marble on the north side of the square caught his eye. He peered at it, and suddenly he knew, with a shock of recognition, what it was. He knew why they had changed the square. They had turned it into a memorial for the American War President. He had read about it in the papers, and had forgotten. . . .

A flicker of curiosity stirred in him. He followed one of the paths that led to the base of the statue. The President stood there, braced against his stick, his Inverness cape falling in bronze folds about him. In front of him, the moon-silvered expanse of grass. Behind him, an unbroken line of houses except where a bomb had taken one building away, like a slice from a cake.

The President was here in Grosvenor Square.

Nicholas had said harsh things about this man before the war. Others said harsh things still. But here he was in London, just the same, and it was impossible to be an American and not feel a fierce pride, and a choking sense of gratitude. Nicholas felt it, in a hot surge of feeling unlike anything he had known since Kit died.

He stood gazing up at the statue, pallid in the moonlight. The face was a remarkable likeness. Sightless and serene it gazed steadfastly south —the way the buzz-bombs had come. There was a name and a date on the pedestal, nothing more. And Nicholas knew that nothing more was needed. He remembered, once, seeing the tomb of Christopher Wren, the great architect, in St. Paul's, and the Latin inscription: *Si monumentum quæris, circumspice.* If you seek a memorial for this man, gaze around you.


***He remembered the tomb of Christopher Wren—the inscription: If you seek a memorial for this man, gaze around you.***

It was the same here; the memorial was around him. Not quite visible, perhaps; buried under a thin layer of time. But it was here. The jeeps and the mud and the Nissen huts, the fat barrage balloon in the center, the ring of American heels on the surrounding pavements, the sloppy salutes, the American faces, the American voices, the American dream. . . . Eisenhowerplatz. . . . It was still here, the real background for this monument, no matter what they did to the trees or the grass. And Kit was here, running to meet him the way she always did. And he was here, and it would never change. . . .

He began to walk around the little symmetrical terrace that enclosed the base of the statue. There were marble benches, and on either side a small fountain threw a spray of water that glittered in the moonlight. It was deserted, now, but in the daytime the little people of England would sit and eat their meager lunches, and the children would scramble where once the weapons-carriers had stood.

He saw some words cut deeply into the stone and stooped to read them. *Freedom from want.* He turned his head and saw on the opposite wall the matching words. *Freedom from fear.* The four freedoms; so they were here too. Brave words, given to the world by two brave men. Brave words, but still not a reality.

He remembered what Larry had said to him about the slums and poverty of his own city, and the dishonesty and graft, and the need for help. His throat tightened, and he felt a queer stirring inside of him, as if something long dead was coming to life again. He knew at last what he was going to do, and he wondered why it had taken him so long to see these simple things. That since he was alive, he must return to living. That life could not stand still, looking backward. That there was much too much to be done.

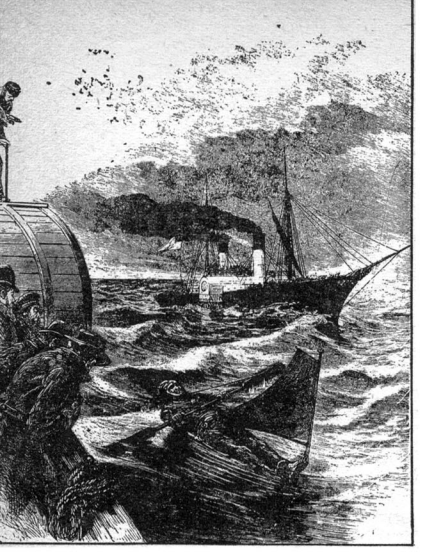
He left the memorial and began to walk back the way he had come. He crossed North Audley Street and he heard again, in his mind, the squeal of brakes and Kit's exasperated voice, "I say, *must* you go about flinging yourself under motorcars. . . ." He smiled and kept on walking. He knew, now, that Kit *was* in Grosvenor Square, that she was every place they had ever been together, that every moment they had shared was written down, just as it had happened, in the great Book of Time. Nothing could alter that, now or ever.

But some day, if another Rosemary —the right Rosemary—came along, he knew Kit would approve; would understand.

He walked faster, his footsteps loud in the quiet street. He came to the hotel, and Robbins the doorman touched his tall hat and sprang to set the revolving door in motion.

"Lovely evening, sir," said Robbins. "Will you be staying with us long?"

Nicholas shook his head. "No," he said. "No, I'll be starting back very soon. I've got to get home. There's such a lot of work to do."



*Meeting the Dover passenger-boat.*

# The Incredible

## Picturesque People—XIV

ON the night of October 21, 1874, a singularly wild and fearful night long remembered in Western Europe, a transatlantic liner, the *Queen,* hove to a dozen miles off Cape Clear, Ireland, to discharge a solitary passenger. The seas were beginning to rise, and in the judgment of many of those aboard, the passenger, a cheerful, handsome man of twenty-six, was either plainly demented or so outrageously brave that the difference was not apparent, and for his own safety ought to have been locked up below until the ship docked in Queenstown or Liverpool.

The first officer, a prudent seaman who had observed the barometer falling through the late afternoon, was himself of this conviction. Somehow he could not rid his mind of the notion that he and Captain Bragg, master of the *Queen,* not only were flying in the face of Providence by allowing the passenger to leave, but were also needlessly risking their careers with the National Line Steamship Company, owners of the vessel.

Captain Bragg felt otherwise.

Though the whole procedure appeared to be highly irregular, there were circumstances which could be described as—what was the word? Extenuating! That was it: extenuating. Besides, the passenger was anything but crazy; or in any case, no crazier than many another adventurer adrift in the wide world of the 1870's—fighting Indians of the Wild West, searching for diamonds in Africa or gold in the Rockies or riches in heaven only knew what out-of-the-way places in Asia, South America and the far Pacific islands. So the skipper had argued for ten days past, until now he had only the slightest misgivings.

Captain Bragg had taken to his passenger from the very beginning, even though he had come aboard as a stowaway. The skipper was by no means a fatalist, but there were times when he could suffer things to take their course with no interference from him. This, he knew, was just such an occasion.

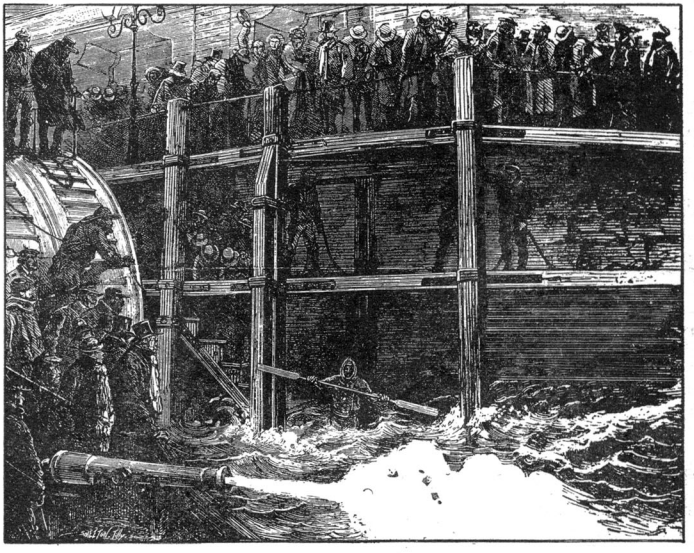
For several days before the *Queen's* departure from New York, the city had chuckled over an amusing story in the papers about one Captain Paul Boyton, a colorful gentleman of many exploits, who possessed a wonderful rubber suit which when inflated kept him afloat. This Boyton proposed to demonstrate the merits of his suit as a life-saving adjunct by going overside from a ship two hundred miles at sea and paddling his way back to land.

Skeptical and irreverent, the newspapers scoffingly related that he already had been shooed off several ships to whose captains he had trustingly disclosed his intentions. Captain Bragg, therefore, was only mildly astonished when Boyton turned up on the *Queen* the day after she sailed. Bragg was standing on the bridge that Sunday afternoon when a disturbance on the forward deck drew his attention. A small crowd of passengers had gathered near the rail, and presently two seamen emerged from their midst leading a man curiously garbed in rubber from head to toe, and carrying a double-bladed paddle and a small waterproof bag.

"Ah, Boyton!" said the Captain. "I see you are aboard of me."

Boyton impenitently acknowledged that he was; and now that Captain Bragg knew it, he ought to know also that he had not bought passage and would leave at once, especially as he wished to get started on his way home. The skipper had laughed at this, and ordered Boyton to hand over his suit and other gear to a steward. Boyton had grumblingly complied. Next the Captain had quietly offered him an unoccupied bunk in the officers' quarters. Boyton accepted. At any rate, the master was a decent fellow.

On the following day the skipper had called him in for a chat, and by judicious questioning drew Boyton into talk about himself. It sounded like an encyclopedia of adventure:



*Start from the docks at Dover, England, April 10, 1875.*

# Captain Boyton

## *by* JOHN FERRIS

Born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1848 of American parents; raised in Pittsburgh, where he had taken to the Allegheny like a fish; a year in the Union Navy in the final year of the Civil War; a mission for his father to the Caribbean to hunt marine curiosities; a fortnight's participation in a Mexican revolution; military service as a *franc-tireur* in the Franco-Prussian War; a futile quest for diamonds in South Africa; some voyaging as a hand on sailing ships; finally two summers as captain of the first life-saving service in the new resort of Atlantic City, N. J.

Captain Bragg was impressed, and he said so. Boyton had talked on. In the summers of 1873 and 1874 he had single-handedly saved seventy-one lives. These feats had brought him to the notice of a C. S. Merriman, a Pittsburgh rubber manufacturer, and inventor of the suit. Together they hoped the suit would save many lives, and they hoped it would make them a fortune as well.

The suit was made of very fine vulcanized rubber, and consisted of two sections, joined at the waist. The pantaloons ended in a band of steel over which the lower part of the tunic fitted, a strap covering all, thus making a perfectly water-tight joint. At the back of the head, on the back, on the breast, and on each thigh there were five internal compartments, each with a tube for inflating it. The face was the only part of the body exposed to the weather.

The leg compartments extended around the whole leg from hip to knee, and the suit weighed thirty-five pounds. Dressed and inflated, Boyton could float vertically, the water coming to his chest. To travel, however, he lay on his back, propelled his body feet foremost with his blade at the rate of one hundred strokes a minute.

Captain Bragg had been incredulous. Boyton had become more persuasive. Many times during the past summer, he said, he had broken through the surf at Atlantic City and paddled far out to sea. As for food and drink—well, he had that little waterproof bag, itself fitted with air chambers, and strong enough to carry, besides his provisions, a compass and a knife, and some signal lights.

Captain Bragg, in the week following, had become more and more sympathetic. He had hinted that perhaps he would let Boyton go overside in European waters—off Ireland, for instance. Ireland, the skipper explained, was a kind of breakwater for Europe, an island of towering cliffs, which bore the brunt of the North Atlantic's westering gales. Cape Clear would be a likely spot, since Boyton could paddle into the lee of the island where the light stood, and then make his way to the mainland. Boyton had bubbled over with gratitude.

THUS it was settled. But on that dark night of October 21, 1874, neither Captain Bragg nor his departing guest could foresee the world-wide fame that awaited Boyton, the aquatic adventurer, the frog-man who was to navigate thousands of miles of European and American waters on his back, earning for himself fame and fortune, and a trunkful of royal decorations and illuminated addresses. So extensive was the acclaim to be that in Italy alone, songs would be composed in his honor, cigars named for him, a lake christened with his name, and his exploits recorded on calendars.

On the heaving deck of the *Queen* that night, Boyton was living in the moment. The rubber suit, worn over his ordinary street clothes, was snug. His bag was secured to his belt. In an inner pocket he carried fifty dollars. In a cluster of anxious passengers he stood near the rail. The first officer was still remonstrating with Captain Bragg. "The man will surely lose his life," he said.

At nine P.M., a light showed far off the port bow. "That's Cape Clear," said Captain Bragg, and after a final word of caution, ordered the engines stopped. Boyton shook hands and climbed to the rail. Pausing dramatically, he said, "Good night, Captain. Good night, ladies and gentlemen," and slid quickly down a rope to the water and kicked himself free of the ship. From the deck high above him came a cheer. Boyton stood in the water and shouted reassuringly to the skipper. The propellers began turning, the ship slid away, and Boyton found himself in darkness. The light-

*Life-saving and swimming outfit.*

house beam, visible from deck, did not reach him on the surface, but he took his bearings and started paddling.

As the swells lifted him, he stared ahead in the direction of the light. He made good headway and after some time saw the welcome beam. Utterly contented, he drove his paddle vigorously into the sea and broke into song. But the wind was increasing steadily, and soon burst upon him in terrific gusts. Two hours after he had left the ship, the gale was on him in all its fury. The light vanished. Boyton lost his paddle, then recovered it. The rain nearly blinded him, and the raging seas made paddling almost useless.

Sometimes he was completely submerged, only to shoot up to the crest of the wave again, take a deep breath and slide down, down, down. He had to abandon paddling and drift. For hours the seas drove him onward. About three A.M., six hours after he had dropped into the water, he heard a booming sound. He raised his head, thinking he must be near Cape Clear. Ahead of him lay a dark mass which he thought were clouds against the morning sky. But suddenly he noticed at the base a telltale white edging—the white of surf breaking at the foot of tall black cliffs.

He dug in his paddle and worked furiously to retreat. For an hour he struggled, gradually moving outward and southward. Boyton estimated afterward that he was in the water more than seven hours, and was carried by wind, wave and his own pad-

dling about forty miles before he was suddenly swept irresistibly shoreward to a place where a small stream made a break in the cliffside. He clung to a rock to save himself from the backwash of the sea, then was lifted still higher by the next breaking wave. Within a few seconds he had scrambled to safety.

For a few minutes he knelt in prayer. Then he looked about him. He had only a sketchy idea of his whereabouts, and when one of the rocket signals from his bag went unanswered, he started walking down a road which led to a village. The gale was still blowing. Seeing a light in one of the houses, he knocked on the door. It was opened by a man who stepped back in alarm. (In the next half-dozen years Boyton delighted in popping out of streams unexpectedly and scaring the daylights out of innocent peasants in France, Germany, Italy and Spain.) Boyton followed the man inside. He had come to the life-saving station. The guard was not easily convinced by Boyton's explanation of how he had come ashore, and kept asking about the "other survivors." Part of the guard's incredulity, aside from the fact of Boyton's frightening appearance, could be attributed to the storm itself. Checking on the records later, Boyton found that fifty-six craft of various sizes had been lost that night around the British Isles.

The guard eventually tired of his own questions and allowed Boyton to remove his rubber suit and go to sleep. He was awakened when other guards came in and, given a good bracer of poteen, repeated his story. At eight A.M. villagers began crowding into the cottage, and Boyton had to answer more questions. Nobody appeared to believe him, preferring to think he had swum all the way from New York.

He had landed, he discovered, in Trefask Bight, and was not in the village of Baltimore. The nearest telegraph office was in Skibbereen, nine miles away. After a big breakfast he engaged a peasant to drive him over to the town. Carrying his rubber suit and bag and paddle, Boyton went to the office and composed telegrams to Captain Bragg at Queenstown, and to the New York *Herald's* office in Fleet Street, London. The clerk, outraged at the palpable falsehoods in the messages, refused to send them, and Boyton had to seek out the manager, who apologized and dispatched the telegrams. All Skibbereen quickly heard of Boyton's daring feat and cried him up as a hero.

In the afternoon he left by stage for Dunmanway to take train for Cork. As he left Skibbereen, the villagers cheered lustily. From the top of the stage Boyton waved his paddle, to which he had attached, with the showmanship that was to distinguish him later, a small American flag.

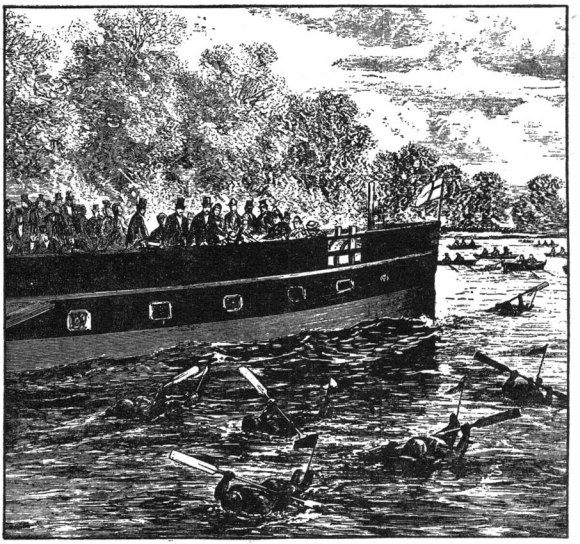
Captain Bragg had brought his ship into Queenstown harbor at noon, and when Boyton's telegram was delivered, he read it to the assembled passengers, who cheered. The first officer was greatly relieved. The *Queen* departed for Liverpool, and those passengers who debarked at Queenstown soon spread the strange story of the American in the rubber suit. When Boyton arrived in Cork, the whole city knew what he had done. Reporters interviewed him. The Cork papers ran several columns, and the story was relayed to European and New York papers.

The next several days Boyton was lionized by Cork. At the height of the excitement of attending dinners and receptions, he suddenly realized he was broke. He was sitting in his hotel room moodily wondering what to do when a man knocked on the door and introduced himself as Mr. Murphy, manager of an opera company then playing in Cork. Murphy was eager to have Boyton appear at the theater. Boyton demurred, arguing he was not a public speaker. Murphy countered with a five-pound advance, and the information that he would do the lecturing himself.

Boyton consented to appear on these terms; and Murphy, with admirable energy, had the city plastered with posters. Murphy also tricked Boyton. When Boyton walked out from the wings after the first act of "Madame Angot," the manager introduced him to the audience and walked off. Boyton was indignant, and turning to the audience outlined the terms of his appearance. "Brace up, Captain," someone shouted. "We came to hear *you*." Uneasy at first, he plunged into the story of his perilous voyage, described his Civil War experiences, his Mexican skirmishes and his *franc-tireur* days.

He spoke for an hour, and the appearance netted him thirty-two pounds, then worth about $160. Three offers came to him by telegraph from Dublin; and the Cork Steamship Company promised him ten pounds for an exhibition in Queenstown harbor.

Meanwhile, the English press was evincing a deplorable skepticism about the whole Boyton affair. Several British journals dispatched correspondents, who questioned the hero and the people of Baltimore. Satisfied that Boyton was the genuine article, they did handsomely by him. By the time their flattering stories were being published, he was in Dublin. He had a full week at the Queen's Theater, and to improve his lecture,



Old prints from Three Lions, Schoenfeld Collection.

*The Boyton fad of 1875: Race in the Boyton suit on the Thames from Putney to Hammersmith.*

*A cigar in mid-channel.*

he studied a newspaper account of his own adventures. He also introduced a tableau. At the conclusion of his talk he retired briefly, reappearing in his rubber suit with uplifted paddle and flag in front of a screen painted to represent the black cliffs of Ireland.

Before leaving Ireland, Boyton gave an exhibition in the lake at the Zoological Gardens in the Phœnix Park for which he received seventy pounds. He paddled down the Liffey past crowds he estimated at one hundred thousand; and on November 9, he paddled the ten miles from Howth Head to Dalkey. Next day the grateful Dubliners presented him with an elaborately worked American flag, a gold medal, and an illumined address, signed by many prominent citizens.

London was Cork and Dublin all over again, with parties, receptions and personal appearances. The inevitable command performance came shortly. Queen Victoria would be pleased to see Boyton on the royal yacht *Albert*. Boyton went down to Plymouth, where he was entertained by the Mayor, the American consul, and members of the Yacht club. Afterward he crossed to Modena in the Isle of Wight.

The exhibition for the Queen was highly successful. Boyton went overside, paddled, walked in the water, and in all matters comported himself expertly. Returning to the yacht, he explained the details of his suit, and was delighted to hear Her Majesty express the hope that a few of the costumes would soon be available for the yacht. In due time she sent Boyton an elegant chronometer gold watch with a motto and heavy chain, and a request for his photograph.

By this time Boyton had become a first-rate lecturer. His audiences were eager; and his bank account kept growing. But then as later, he yearned for new conquests. In February, 1875, he floated down the Thames to "show the Londoners what a real Yankee looks like," and when spring came, he began preparations for crossing the English Channel, an obvious challenge to his skill and stamina. He visited Boulogne and Calais, Folkestone and Dover, studied charts of the tides and currents, and talked with pilots and coastal folk. In France, M. l'Onguety, president of the Boulogne Humane Society, offered him the services of a good pilot. Boyton gratefully accepted.

*Captain Boyton signaling his arrival at Boulogne, May 28, 1875.*

He chartered a small steamer, the *Rambler*, for the press and a handful of guests, and started his voyage on April 10, 1875. The London correspondent of the New York *Herald* has left us a memorable description of the scene at Dover where the crossing began before dawn: "At the quay," he wrote, "a great number of people had gathered, regardless of the unseasonable hour and the chill air. There was a most horrible din and confusion, caused by the shouting and crush of the people, the whiz of rockets, the puffing of steamboats and the hoarse sound of speaking trumpets, all amid the glare of Bengal lights and burning pitch."

Despite his careful preparations, Boyton missed his goal. Fifteen hours after he left Dover, he lay off Boulogne. The waves at times had "seemed to become living things animated by a terrible hatred for the strange being battling with them," but bad reckoning had undone him. The tide was running north, and there appeared small chance that Boyton could make shore. Still, to show his resolution Boyton swam rapidly around the steamer, then allowed himself to be helped aboard.

The failure did not damage him financially. Telegrams of congratulation for a splendid try came from the Queen, the Prince of Wales and many other prominent Britons, as well as new substantial offers to appear in exhibitions. Boyton took an engagement which promised $250 a day. In these exhibitions he usually paddled around in the water for about half an hour, and, as a fillip to the demonstration, fired off a few rockets. Gradually, however, Boyton added new attractions, which he programmed as: Signals of Distress; Night Signals; Formation of a Raft from the Debris of a Wreck; Sending Dispatches (by carrier pigeons); Cooking; Shooting; Fishing (in waters otherwise inaccessible to shorebound anglers); Rescue Work, and finally the Destruction of an Enemy's Ship by Torpedoes, an act which only too accurately foretold the work of the frog-men of the recent war.

Still later Boyton was to form an aquatic troupe and a kind of Wild West show which was to take London by storm for two successive seasons.

His early shows, however primitive, found a receptive public. In Birmingham alone in three days he took in three thousand dollars. Meanwhile, his social life continued on the strenuous course it had started in Ireland. Hundreds of invitations to dinners, banquets and receptions deluged him. His brother Michael had arrived from the United States and a new attack on the Channel was planned, this time from Cape Griz Nez, France, the point from which Gertrude Ederle, without benefit of rubber suit and paddle, was to take off fifty-one years later for her great swim.

Boyton started at dawn on May 28, accompanied as he was earlier by a press boat. On this voyage he introduced an innovation—a sail. An English reporter who followed Boyton and wrote a running account of the events during the twenty-three and a half hours required for the crossing, has left this gem: "Quarter to eight: Boyton calls for his sail. The stanch little lath of a mast is fixed into the socket attached to one of his feet. The tiny sail fills, but sends him on a wrong tack, wind still blowing w.n.-w. Nothing daunted, Boyton paddles onward for another hour. He then sends the laconic message, *All right!* by the first pigeon post of the Folkestone Pigeon Club."

He ate well and smoked a cigar. But there were sharks on his mind, and an hour before he landed he had a bad scare. The "shark" was a porpoise. Boyton resumed his paddling, and came ashore at Fan Bay, about one hundred yards west of the South Foreland Light. The battery at Dover fired an eleven-gun salute, and the people of Dover tendered the hero a public dinner. Once more congratulatory messages poured in—from the Queen, the Prince of Wales, President Grant, and others. Medals, flags, jewelry and addresses followed. The Humane Society of Boulogne voted him their massive gold medal, representing the First Order of French Life-Saving.

Through the rest of the English summer Boyton appeared in numerous towns and watering-places; collecting, he estimated, about $1,750 a week. In September he accepted a two weeks' engagement at Lake Weissensee, Berlin, where he did a stupendous business and fell in love with a blue-eyed beauty, "the sweetest and loveliest girl in Berlin," he wrote later. However, it never amounted to anything, as Boyton's life at that time was stirred by a love of freedom and adventure "much stronger than any chains Cupid could weave."

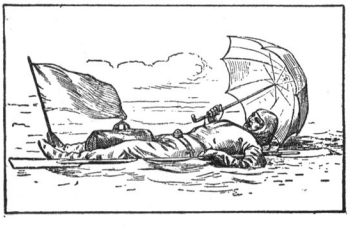
For the pleasure of the German royal family he staged an exhibition in a lake at Castle Sans Souci, and then, bored with the tameness of these exhibitions, set out to conquer the Rhine from Basle, Switzerland, to Cologne, Germany, a distance of 450 miles.

In the year 1875 Boyton's announcement of a new trip roused as much interest as the transatlantic flights of the 1920's were to awaken. French, English and German reporters promptly journeyed to Basle. As the first seventy miles of river were too rough for journalistic comfort, Boyton suggested that the correspondents join him at Strassburg.

He entered the Rhine at five o'clock on a crisp October morning, approximately a year after he had left New York. His equipment consisted only of his paddle and a bugle which he blew at intervals, chiefly, it appears, to frighten unwary peasants. At noon he reached Breisgann and lunched. Returning to the water he paddled through the Black Forest, now and then lustily tootling. It was nightfall when he landed at Kohl. In his wetly gleaming suit he knocked at the door of the first house he came to, sending its female occupant into hysterics. A policeman who came running to her aid, recognized Boyton and told him he would fetch a carriage to take him to Strassburg. As chance would have it, the one he hailed was the correspondents' carriage. The men had come over to the river to watch for Boyton.

Next day the party bought a flat-bottomed boat, forty feet long and eight feet wide, and engaged two boatmen. The Berlin representative, a Count von Sierasowsie, was a legless invalid who was carried around on his assignments and social calls in a perambulator pushed by a private soldier assigned as a servant by the Army. The perambulator was rolled into the bow. Straw and chairs were put aboard, and the baggage followed, including Boyton's three trunks.

The press found the trip exceedingly rough, especially through the long German night. At Worms which they reached the following day they were guests at a reception of townspeople who turned out in small boats. The burgomaster was rowed to Boyton's side in a boat which carried a liberal supply of *Liebfraumilch*. Boyton was presented with a chased goblet. Many toasts were drunk.



*A leisure hour: Testing his outfit.*

From Worms onward, the voyage was a continuous fête. At every town and village the voyagers were welcomed with wine of the country. At three A.M. the party arrived at Mainz and roused the sleeping inhabitants with rockets and bugle calls. The run from Kohl had taken thirty-six hours and Boyton wished to rest over the weekend. Once more the telegrams arrived. One, from Elizabeth, Princess of Schaumburg-Lippe, invited Boyton to Wiesbaden.

Refreshed, Boyton and his companions took to the river again and more receptions. At Geisenheim, the townsfolk insisted that Boyton land and take part in a parade of girls decked with flowers. The press boat was loaded with new supplies of wine and the trip downstream continued.

At nightfall they reached Bingen, where Boyton was warned of the perils of the Bingen Loch and the Lorelei. Past castles, built high on the banks, he paddled his way, occasionally blowing his bugle and watching with pleasure the waving of handkerchiefs. As he approached the famous whirlpool of the Lorelei he ignored the warning cries from the boat and let himself go. He suffered no harm and shortly rejoined the boat.

The crew quit at Coblenz, and Simnick, the Count's servant, took over the steering. He was an awkward sailor and several times the Count and his perambulator were nearly pitched into the Rhine. Five days after leaving Kohl, Boyton paddled up to the quayside in Cologne. Cannons boomed in the old city and bells were rung. And again Boyton was the hero of dinners and receptions.

From Cologne he moved on to new triumphs. He floated down the Scheldt from Antwerp to the North Sea, and gave exhibitions in various cities and towns in Germany, Belgium and Holland until cold weather set in and ice formed on the lakes. In December he crossed to England, and on the 28th, his fame secure and his pockets well-lined, he sailed for New York.

And New York, which had been skeptical, New York which had scoffed, now took off its hat and welcomed him home in the most boisterous reception of all. . . .

In the years that followed, Boyton, wearing his rubber suit, floated down most of the rivers of the United States and Europe. He grew rich and famous, was wined and dined everywhere. Ultimately he retired to quieter pursuits, but the itch to travel never forsook him. In 1925, returning from a trip to the Caribbean, he contracted pneumonia and died.

# The

# A strictly truthful

I HAD been informed that Walt Dutton was a liar, but it took a sudden and savage rain, driven by an unreasonable November gale, to make me acutely aware that there are times when local gossip and the truth are virtually inseparable.

I had been hunting grouse in Green Bottom when the rain overtook me; I was wet, cold, utterly miserable and starting to sneeze when I reached the hemlock-board shack of Walt Dutton, on the old Bugbee oil lease. He made me welcome, and the natural-gas fire in the ancient stove was welcome as steak to a starving man. Dutton is a tall, skinny individual, with a long drooping mustache and no hair on his head. He listened attentively to my sneezes, nodded briefly and knowingly. He opened a closet door in the neat but comfortable room, fetched forth a gallon jug.

"A little tonic wine, mixed with hot water and a smidgin of sugar, will stop that there cold before she gets aholt of you," he assured me. He produced a heavy pint cup, and the jug gurgled. The teakettle belched steam, and he poured hot water in the cup, together with some sugar. He stirred the mixture noisily and vigorously, handed it to me and profanely urged me to swallow the contents immediately.

I swallowed hastily after following instructions, gasped for breath. Tonic wine, indeed! This was a lethal infusion, apparently compounded of ether, barbed wire, the juice of wild crabapples, with a little turpentine added as an afterthought. When I was able to breathe freely again and inwardly warmed, I courteously asked Walt Dutton how the tonic was made. I sipped the second dose he had urged upon me, while he indulged in a cup, just to keep me company, he explained.

It was made, he told me, after some hedging, after a recipe discovered by his grandmother. She claimed it was a prime tonic and she had lived to be upward of ninety-eight before she was took off, he said. It was made, he told me in confidence, of chokeberries, sugar and grain alcohol, sassafras roots and hard cider. In secret pro-

# Passing of Effie

## story by HARRY BOTSFORD

portions, he insisted, and with plenty of time for aging. He usually made a half-dozen kegs each year on account of he suffered from bad health, and only the tonic kept him from the grave.

"My cat Effie, she used to lap up this tonic like it was cream," he confided. "That cat lived to be thutty years old, and she was hale and rugged and mean, just like my grandmother, right up to the day she died. Drunk near a quart of this here elixir a day, did Effie, and she was the most healthy cat you ever laid eyes on. Famous, was my Effie; the oilfields never seen her like. Had circumstances been different, sir, Effie would have been buried with honors."

My cold was improving by leaps and bounds. As I daintily sipped my fourth dose, the rain drummed on the tar-paper roof of the Dutton shanty and the wind tugged at the windows, and the steam arose from my drying clothes. It was very cozy. As a man of courteous instincts I was duly grateful to my host. I politely asked what had happened to the lamented Effie.

The old man slowly stuffed a blackened corncob pipe with shag, lighted it, puffed vigorously and sighed sadly. The faded blue eyes lightened and his voice was eager: "I'd like to tell you, mister, but I've told some and they mostly snicker and say the truth ain't in me. You look like a man who knows the truth when he hears it. This is the gospel truth, and here's how Effie passed away from this mortal coil."

He began: I found Effie when she was just a kitten, in the woods clost to Cash Up. Before long, I realized she was a different kind of cat. She was real strong for her age and I remember she used to go out and catch big rats before her eyes opened. That will give you some idea of her vitality.

As she started to grow, I sort of figgered she was the daughter of some renegade house-cat and a medium-sized wildcat. There was times when I thought she might even have some panther blood in her.

I was living in a little shack about this size, just outside of the little oil town of Enterprise. I did a little work in the oilfields now and then, but, my health bein' on the porely side, I just sort of sat around and rested and made me a few kegs of tonic. Now and then I'd sell a bottle to an ailin' friend, just enough to make a livin', you understand. Had to buy fresh meat for Effie, her havin' a voracious appetite.

All of a sudden, she got peckish about her food, so one day I give her a saucer of tonic and she liked it wonderful. After lapping it up, she swaggered to the door, rared back her head and howled like a panther. Then she took off into the woods. In less'n a hour she was back with a full-grown turkey gobbler slang over her shoulder, proud as could be. After that, Effie provided her own meat. She was a natural-born hunter and she raided chicken roosts for miles around, I've known her to make off with a pig that weighed as much as fifteen pounds, more than oncet; she liked pork real well.

She got her daily ration of about one quart of tonic as she growed up. She grew to be a critter that weighed upward of thutty pounds. She had a kind of nasty disposition, a sort of a woods meanness that I called plain ornery. We was pals and I thought the world of her, but I never encouraged her in wickedness. Night after night we used to set in the shack, drinking a little tonic now and then, and I'd tell her to her teeth that she was a bad, wicked cat, and unless she mended her ways, I'd warn her, she would come to a bad end. She knew what I was sayin' and she'd sort of sneer and try to tell me to mind my own business.

In thutty years Effie was knowed far and wide. When she visited Enterprise, which was often, the dogs took to the woods and the cats hid. She had a way with wimmin, did Effie, a sort of wheedlin' way. She knew just where she was welcome. She'd go to the back door, sit on the porch and start to purr. Her purr was something to hear, sort of like an elephant with the asthmy. Yet she could purr a sort of a tune, a kind of gay thing. Times at the shack when she would purr and I'd sing. It was real purty, too. Well sir, when a woman would hear that tune, she'd open the door

*Illustrated by Charles Chickering*

*There was nothing Effie liked better than conquerin' a dog.*

and fetch out some vittles for Effie, a pair of chicken legs, a hunk of rare roast beef, some little tidbit. She was also very fond of angel-food cake and Mrs. Higgins, at the boarding-house, always saved her a big piece. Effie would purr a special sort of tune for Mrs. Higgins.

She didn't always go to town with me, for she was an independent critter and she would go roaming when the spirit moved her, as it often did after she had her evening ration of tonic.

One night I discovered that Effie was dishonest, a thing that shocked me to the rim-bone. Never could abide dishonesty or lyin'. I was sittin' in front of the fire, sort of taking me a nap. I woke up sudden, and there was Effie with the jug of tonic cradled in her front paws, drinking with the ease of a man. She put down the jug, quiet-like, laid down with a smirk and went sound asleep. After that, there was no holdin' Effie. I couldn't hide the tonic where she couldn't find it. I had to double my production, a sad thing, because to make it proper, you got to be patient and age it proper. Agein's the secret. Three weeks in the keg before she's ripe and mellow like this we're sippin' this minute.

It was probably natural that Effie didn't like dogs. There was hardly a dog in Warren County that didn't bear her claw-marks. All told, she had murdered more than sixteen healthy dogs, including a German police dog that belonged to a man from Warren, who wasn't pleased about it and even threatened to have the law on me. He came up to see me, real mad and snortin' threats. I gave him a couple of cups of tonic, and before he left we was close friends and he offered me a hundred dollars for Effie.

There was nothin' Effie liked better than to meet up with a strange dog. After conquerin' a dog, she would come home, smug and very happy. She'd sit and purr gay little tunes till she sang me to sleep. Then, darn her hide, she'd guzzle her fill of tonic and go huntin'.

About this time Effie reached what you might call maturity. She was thutty years old; weighed a pound for every year. She was a sort of a yaller color, splotched with black. Her coat was always in prime condition. With all her faults, Effie was a clean cat and particular; she was downright fussy about her looks and what she ate. Oncet, the widder Shaderline, a pious old female I sorta shined up to, thinkin' some of matrimony, fed Effie some salmon that was more than a mite spoiled. Effie took one bite, sniffed, curled back her lips and bit the widder on the off leg, leavin' a wound the doctor had to sew up. After that, the widder wanted no truck with me. Only some copious applications of the tonic cured my busted and achin' heart.

One day a new dog came to town. His name was Arthur and he was the property of a driller from Red Hot, man named Bob Glenn. He was a normal-sized hound dog, inclined to be flighty and morose, with a great talent for hunting and finding skunks. Arthur was an affectionate sort of dog, liked to be close to his master. Glenn, a persnickerty sort of person, liked the dog but he hated the smell of skunks. The dog had a positive talent for tangling with skunks; findin' them was his mission in life and he was passionately devoted to it, you might say. After each encounter he smole pretty high, to put the matter mildly, which I ain't. He was real pleased when he was all smole up with essence of skunk, happy and proud, and he craved to share that delicate and soul-satisfyin' aroma with his master.

Glenn would have none of it; he would cuss the dog, give him a lusty kick and order Arthur to stay at least a hundred yards away from him. The dog would brood over the injustice of the situation and he'd slink along, thinkin' deep thoughts, his mind in a whirl, torn between enjoyment of his smell and the bitterness of not being able to share it with the one human bein' he loved. It was kind of pitiful.

One day I was in town with Effie, deliverin' a couple of bottles of tonic to Red Sutherland, a sick friend. Effie joined me in a small beaker of likker at the Golden Gusher bar and we had walked out and stood in the sunshine, at peace with the world. Effie had just started to purr when all of a sudden she stopped. Glenn was comin' down the street and Arthur was trailin' him at a safe distance. Effie kind of smiled and clumb a chestnut tree 'at overhung the sidewalk. I didn't say nothin' to Glenn when he passed, but I knew what was goin' to happen. Never did care f.r Glenn. Sort of a teetotaler, it was whispered. Effie stretched out on a limb, about fifteen feet from the sidewalk. Surprise, that was one of the forms of strategy that always worked. Her ears were laid back and there was a smile of contentment on her face. The hound slouched along moodily, his eyes anxiously measuring the distance between him and Glenn. As he passed the tree, Effie launched herself on Arthur's back with a horrible, hair-raisin' screech. Normally, what happened from then on was pure routine. She'd sink her

teeth in the dog's neck and start kickin' with her hind legs, armed with claws an inch long and sharp as thorns. The dog would howl and take off wonderful fast. Effie would ride for a spell and then dismount gracefully, sit down and laff and laff while the dog disappeared in the distance.

THIS time it was different. Effie started to sink her teeth into Arthur's neck and the rich aroma of skunk hit her sensitive nose. A fastidious cat, she was froze in horror, incapable of movement for a split second by this secret weapon.

Arthur was a dog of action. He shrugged, and Effie fell to the ground. Arthur was in a desperate mood and his temper flared. He tore into the half-numb Effie and bit off a four-inch section of her tail. Between the pain and the smell there was only one thing Effie could do. She lept high in the air and tore up a telegraph pole fast as chain lightnin'. Arthur was still displeased and he circled the pole and did some forthright bayin'. He dared Effie to come to earth and be chawed to pieces. Effie declined, but her voice wavered. The other dogs and cats in Enterprise came out of hidin' and gleefully watched the performance. Effie was humiliated in the sight of those she had maltreated in the past. Her prestige, mister, was shot to hell and gone. Arthur finally gave up and trotted down the street.

After a while, Effie, a chastened and confused cat, backed down the pole. She no sooner reached the ground when a little fat pug dog that belonged to the widow Shaderline snuck up behind Effie and barked. Effie didn't hesitate; she scuttled back up the pole like she was shot from a gun, thinkin' Arthur had returned to finish the job. The little pug waddled down the street, sort of struttin' and receivin' the congratulations of the other dogs and cats.

Effie was late gettin' home that night. She sort of snuck in, her eyes downcast. I poured her a good pint of the tonic and she lapped it up without stoppin'. I gave her another full treatment. There was a hurt and disillusioned look in her eyes. I bandaged her tail and put some liniment on it. Must of hurt her some, for she snarled and took a swipe at me and you can see the scar plain to this day.

Effie brooded as the tail healed. She seldom went out nights. Instead of bringing home a prime sucklin' pig or a fat goose, she took to fetchin' home things no bigger than a small rabbit. I bought beefsteak, fed her a lot of tonic, tryin' to help her regain her spirits and pride, to restore her native meanness.

One night she went out and didn't come back. I was worried. I took my telescope and looked high and low for her the next day. I went into town and Ed O'Brien, the bartender at the Golden Gusher, told me a strange tale as I took aboard some likker—a most unusual thing for me, for I'm a temperate man, but I was worried about Effie.

Ed said that a hostler at the Swartz livery stable had come in for his usual pint of breakfast likker and that the man's hands was shakin' and his eyes bulgin' with fright. He told Ed that when he had drunk his mornin' pint, he was through with likker for life. He had seen a thing, the man said, that made his blood run cold, a kind of an optical illusion brought on by too much drink. The man slept on a bunk in the shed where the nitro company stored its wagons. They usually loaded the wagons with gallon cans of nitro the night before so they could get an early start in the morning to shoot an oil-well.

Well, this hostler, a man named Tyndal, claimed that he thought he heard a little sound that wakened him. He said he saw a cat as big as a tiger open the back of the nitro wagon and pull a gallon can of the explosive from the felt-lined cell. The cat pulled the cork with its teeth, cradled the can in its paws and drunk more than half of it. Then the critter put the cork back, eased the can into its case, closed the lid and sort of tiptoed away into the rosy dawn. Ed sort of figgered the man was already drunk and throwed the man out.

All of a sudden I knowed what had happened. With great presence of mind, I emptied the bottle on the bar and told Ed that if he wanted to live, he'd better close the bar and git the hell out of there immediate. The fool thought I was drunk, so he throwed me out. I knew Effie was up to something a mite more than dangerous. It was my bounden duty to warn the citizens of Enterprise of disaster bein' real eminent. I tried to tell a few of them that Effie had drunk herself a half-gallon of nitro and that somethin' was going to happen and that they'd better take to the hills. They didn't believe me, the fools. Some of them accused me of bein' drunk, but most of them believed I was lyin', a habit they claimed I had. I didn't stop to argue with them, although my feelin's was deeply hurt. I clumb the hill above the town and rigged up the telescope and trained it on the town and waited.

I WAITED about an hour—then I see this Bob Glenn goin' to work. Arthur, evidently newly and heavily scented with skunk, marched along a good hundred yards behind Glenn, ears flopping, evidently in a bad temper. Suddenly I saw Effie. She appeared between two houses, walking careful like, but with a sort of a leer on her face. Her stummick was swole all out of shape by the nitro she had drunk and she could hardly walk.

She reached the middle of the sidewalk, arched her back and started to taunt Arthur. She called him indecent names, she made remarks about his parents that were ill-advised but probably true. She invited him, if he had a drop of red blood in him, to engage in battle immediate. She raised a paw to her nose and waggled her claws at him, with a nasty laugh. Then she sat down, with her back to him and started to wash her face, casual-like.

This Arthur was really a dog of spirit. He had pride. Besides, his temper was none too sunny this mornin'. He had whipped this cat before and he could do it again. He said as much, but Effie only snickered and egged him on. He rared back, yelped oncet, and tore at Effie—his mouth open and murder in his heart.

Just as he reached Effie, she turned sideways and she let out a great whoop of triumph, a screech I'll remember to my dyin' day, a great holler it was. It was over in a split second. The impact of Arthur's body exploded a half-gallon of nitro, and when the smoke cleared away, half the town of Enterprise had been knocked flat to the ground, and Effie and Arthur was only a memory.

I hustled back to the shack and filled four jugs with tonic and lit out for here real fast. I didn't want no damage suits on my hands. That's why there was no funeral services for Effie—but I still mourn her passin'.

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## Birds Are Like That

**Because their young, like our own, slobber and drop things, the mothers of young robins, hummingbirds, wrens, and canvasback ducks, place the food deep down their throats.**

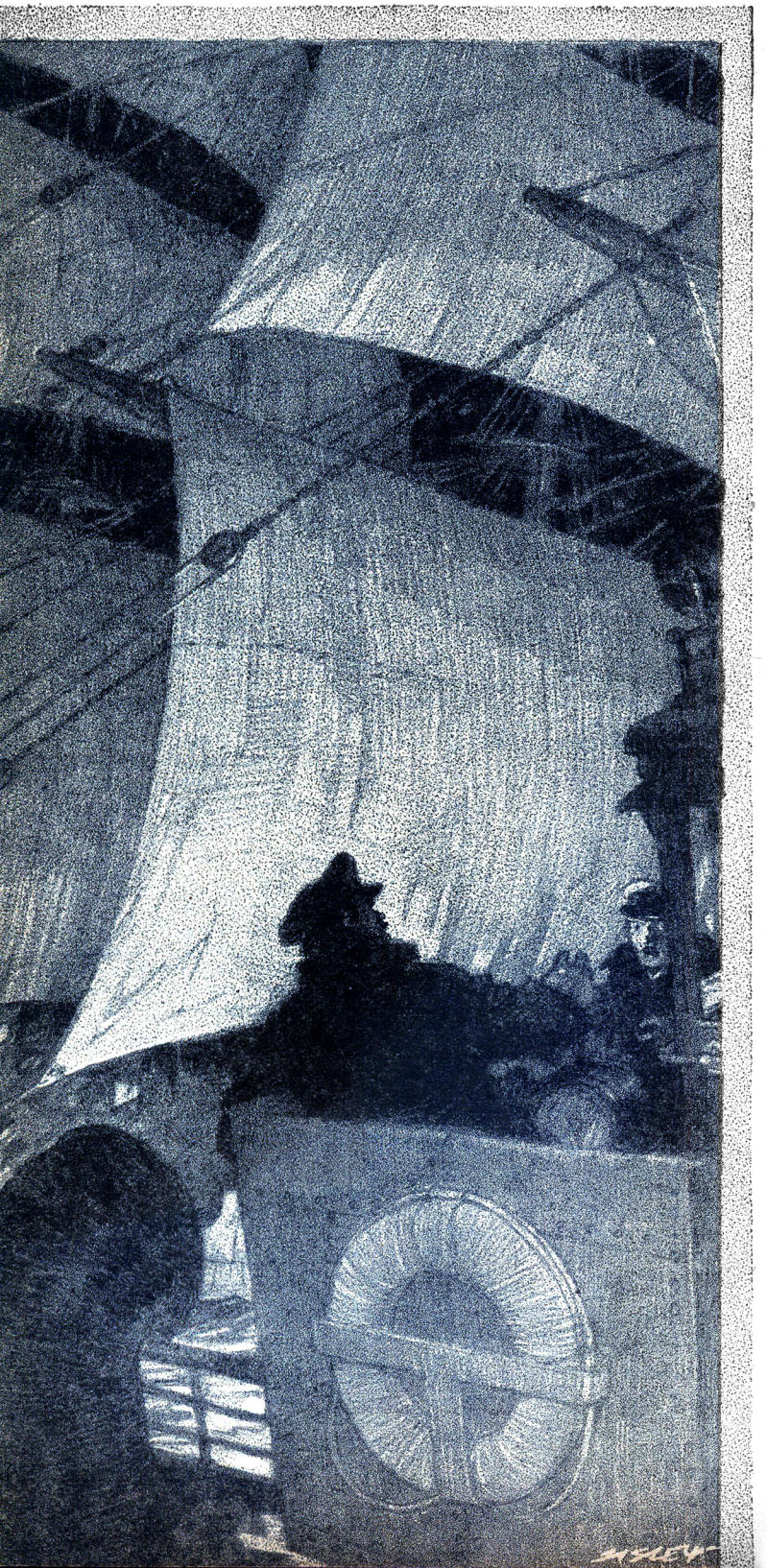
* * *

**Almost as good as the owl and perhaps superior to the cat as a mouse-catcher is the red-shouldered hawk. Contrary to common belief, they will not kill chickens if any other meat is available—even a mere scrap of bacon left in the chicken-house for them.**

* * *

**When gulls settle on an island each pair or family takes up a definite patch of ground as its private estate. It neither walks nor forages on another family's land. Young, who adventurously cross these unmarked boundaries, are severely pecked. Gull marriages are enduring. Couples have been known to stick together from ten to twenty years. Gulls may live up to fifty years.**

*—by SIMPSON M. RITTER*



# SEA

WITH radio and many modern gadgets, things on the old sea are very different today. There still are wrecks, but nothing like as many as in the hard old days when it was man alone against the elements.

I wonder how many wrecks I remember! First, when I was a kid at school, comes the *Elbe*—a big German liner bound across for New York, and sunk by a little coastwise steamer called the *Craithie*. I lay asleep, not far from where the *Elbe* went down, safe on the shore; and never heard or knew of those three hundred people drowning in the windy spray-lashed blackness of the night—till morning brought the papers. Long later, mate of a liner and on her bridge at dawn, I met the little *Craithie* sticking her once-murderous bows into the wild North Sea; and seemed to hear them screaming. I suppose a sailor should not have imagination!

I wonder there were not more wrecks in those days, when I recall my first night on a steamer's bridge; bound out of London for South and East Africa. The Old Man stayed with me for one hour, during my first night watch in charge upon the bridge. The channel was as thick with traffic as some city street, well nigh. Great ocean greyhounds sped by, westward bound. Great greyhounds met me. Steam tramps were everywhere, plugging along at their ten miles an hour, crossing my bow from starboard and from port, meeting me head-on, falling astern as I overhauled them one by one. The fishing fleets were out, after the mackerel and pilchard—smacks in their scores, all over the night-hid wintry water. A fisherman did not have to show a light until he judged a vessel coming down on him was near enough to warrant it; and left it, often, till the last moment. There were some warships out; and here and there a lofty sailing ship under top-gallant sails heading up-Channel for the downs and some North Sea, German, Dutch or Belgian port. Some sailing ships were tacking out

***I had to give her the right-of-way—and couldn't. She missed me by not over fifty feet.***

# TOLL

AN OLD-TIME SAILOR WRITES OF THE SAILING SHIPS AND MEN HE KNEW IN THE DAYS OF THE CAPE HORN VOYAGES, BEFORE THE "STEAM KETTLES" TOOK OVER THE SEA.

*by* BILL ADAMS

to sea, under short canvas—topsails, and courses. I had to give each fisherman and sailing ship the right of way, as well as many steamers. And to me, new come myself from sail, it seemed that every light upon the sea was coming straight for me.

Two bells struck—nine o'clock. The Old Man said: "Mister, I'm going below. Call me at once if you want anything."

He went, and left me there; with down below a full complement of passengers in my sole keeping. Talk about being scared! I could have called him ere he went into his cabin, and every minute afterward till came at last eight bells, when that hard watch was over. One does not do it. One takes the solitary burden of responsibility, and by God's grace, comes through. Or, if you like it better, by the grace of "the little cherub who sits up aloft and takes care of poor sailors." I still can see that darkness, and those frightening lights, and sails that loomed, from fishing smacks, close beneath my steamer's driving bow. She was a fourteen-mile-an-hour vessel. Fourteen an hour seems mighty little nowadays, when young lads fly through five degrees and more an hour, and take it quite for granted. Then it was swift enough.

Next night, traffic was less. There was no breath of wind, but from the black sou'west was a long high mountainous swell, so that the steamer pitched and lifted constantly. The Old Man did not come onto the bridge at all that night when I was there. I had a good pair of night glasses, and kept them mostly at my eyes, peering into impenetrable darkness. Now and again a light showed far away, passed by, and left me. Two bells, and four, then six struck. One more hour, and I'd be in my bunk. One hour can be a long, long time in nights like that night was. Women, and little kids, and men, soundsleeping down below. And the ship's crew, of course: deckhands, stewards, cooks, black-gang and engineers, and one's fellow-officers. One does not give a thought to any save the little kids and women. Or if one does, only a passing thought. It is the thought of what would come to kids and women that keeps a man weasel-eyed. So, suddenly, quick as a cat that springs, I sprang to the engine-room telegraph and rang the engines full astern, then grabbed the whistle-cord and gave three roaring blasts. Up came the Old Man, jumping perhaps more catlike than myself.

"*What is it, Mister?*"

"A tramp with no lights showing, sir," said I; and we could plainly make out the shape of a great blackness blacker than the blackness of the night as that damned tramp rolled by close on our port. The Old Man called her *damned.* "Saving her lamp oil, damn her clear to hell!" said he. And as he spoke, she condescended to show a feeble glim. Had I not caught the loom of her big hulk, night glasses to my eyes, I'd not be sitting here. There would have been fine feasting for the fish; and headlines in the papers telling of two steamers gone to the sea bottom, with a few hundred lives. Those seconds between the time I sighted her, and she was safe gone by, were a sailor's very special hell. They paid me well, though. When we came in, docked in the Sou'west Indie dock, the Marine Superintendent came aboard; and after talking for a while with my Old Man, came up to me and asked: "How about you going second of a larger ship next voyage?"

"Thanks, sir," said I.

AFTER that first night in the heavy traffic I was at home entirely, no matter how thick it was; how dark, or wild the sea. It's queer how soon a fellow gets the hang of it. Or is it queer? I think it is because of training under sail, which gives a man a cool and steady head, and a quick nerve to smell a peril coming. On my next voyage, as second mate, I had a time nigh worse than that first night, steaming head on into a roaring sou'west gale, homebound from Port Natal, and off the Cape. We were in ballast, with some seventy thousand cases of high explosives in the 'tween-decks hold, and steaming full ahead, just held our own against the wind and sea.

I took the bridge at midnight, and just as I took it, saw a green-and-red light coming straight for me. A sailing ship, running like a big stag through the black roaring night! I had to give her right-of-way—and couldn't. She missed me by not over fifty feet. There was no time to call the Old Man up, and had I called him, he could not have done a thing. Just one more unheard-of old sea commonplace. Two ships and crews, and a full list of passengers saved by the grace of God—or "the little cherub who sits up aloft and takes care of poor sailors," if you prefer it. . . .

After the *Elbe* I remember next the *Drummond Castle,* a fine passenger liner bound from the Cape for London. I was at school then also; a kid scarce dry behind the ears, as goes the old saying. A steamer sighted the *Drummond,* wondered at her course, and ran up a signal to ask where she was heading for. The *Drummond* made no reply, and piled up on the savage rocks off Cape Ushant, with over four hundred lives lost. A steward, a deckhand, and one passenger were saved. I think the latter's name was Marchand. And it was said that all South Africa was in mourning.

There was the *Mohegan,* one of the big, not very fast liners owned by the Atlantic Transport Company. She was seen coming at full speed head on toward the rocks of the south coast of Cornwall, in broad daylight. Why? How *could* such a thing have happened? It did happen, and that is all that ever anyone knew. Over two hundred lives lost. A few years later the old *Paris* went ashore not far from the same spot, but got off with no loss of life. Rumor had it that there was magnetism in the rocks that caused the compasses of the *Paris* to be untrue, and that the same thing may have been responsible for the *Mohegan's* loss. Even so, there could be no possible excuse for such a wreck happening in full broad daylight. The Atlantic Transport did not take green men fresh from sailing ships, as did the steamer company with which I served. The *Mohegan* remains one of the mysteries of the sea.

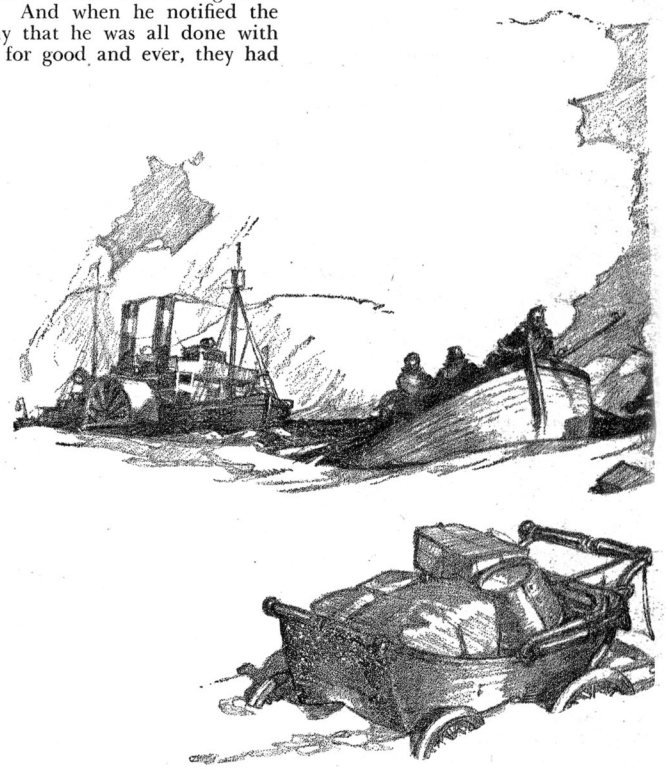
THEN there was the ship *La Burgoyne,* owned by the French Compagnie Transatlantique. I was in sail when she was lost, and in a West Coast port. My first mate was a fine fellow by the name of John Martin, who had come to my ship from being mate of the flyer *County of Roxburgh,* a four-masted barque. Before

being mate of her, he had been mate of her sister ship, *County of Linlithgow.* Often he talked to me, in long night watches at sea, speaking of those two tall sisters. "They were the smartest and fastest packets ever I was in, till I came in this ship of yours, Bill," he'd say. On the day we heard of the loss of the *La Bourgoyne,* he said solemnly: "Well, thank God I wasn't mate of the *Linlithgow!* If I had been, it would have been she and not the *Cromartyshire.*"

The *Linlithgow,* a four-masted barque like her sister, and the full-rigged ship *Cromartyshire,* were bound across the Western Ocean to New York, and there being always keen rivalry between the Scottish Shire line and County lines, both were carrying full sail and going hell for leather through thick fog—which, was, of course, contrary to Article Nine of the rule of the road for ships at sea.

It was early morning, a little past dawn, when, with her royals set, and every other last stitch of sail, the *Cromartyshire* crashed head on into the eastbound liner *La Burgoyne,* and sent her to the bottom. She went down in a very few minutes; and there were nasty rumors of the behavior of her crew. I was not there, and never met any man who was. There is an old Latin proverb, which, I think, may be applied in the case, as also in that of the *Mohegan—de mortuis nil nisi bonum*: meaning, "Of the dead (say) nothing but good."

The *Cromartyshire,* thanks to the watertight bulkhead forty feet aft of the stem, which was customary in all limejuice ships, made New York safely, with a good deal of damage to her fore top-hamper, her bows crumpled, and her jib boom carried away. I suppose her master lost his ticket, but never heard. He should have. Some three hundred people were lost.



THE Limeys were mighty strict with their merchant marine when I was in it. There was the *Suevic,* a grand new liner built for the Shaw Saville and Albion line, which ran out to New Zealand by way of Madeira and Cape Town, to Wellington and Dunedin; and returned by way of the Strait of Magellan, Montevideo and, I think, but am not sure, Lisbon.

A fellow named Kirby went to sea for Shaw Saville and Albion, as an apprentice in the days when they had sailing ships carrying passengers. After finishing his four-year apprenticeship, he went second mate, mate and master, in succession, then went into one of their new steamers as fourth mate. Of course he was soon promoted, to third, second and first; and in due time became master. He had a record completely spotless: had never so much as lost one sail or one man, never dented a plate, nor had any accident of any sort. When I was in steam, he was commodore skipper of his company, with a record still absolutely perfect in every respect. And at last came the time when he was to retire. He had bought a fine farm in the county of Norfolk, England, and planned, as did many an old sailor, to settle down and end his days in peace amongst horses, sheep, cattle, pigs and poultry, with a flower and a vegetable garden. And when he notified the company that he was all done with the sea for good and ever, they had the *Suevic* loaded, and with a full passenger list, ready to pull out for New Zealand on her maiden voyage. She was something new in the New Zealand trade; the finest, largest and much the most costly vessel ever built for it. Of all the skippers in Shaw Saville's fleet, Kirby was best known and best liked. Having spent his whole sea life in the New Zealand trade, he was known far and wide in those islands and had friends unnumbered both there and in Britain. So what happens? Naturally enough, his company begged him to make just one more voyage, to take out and bring home their magnificent new ship. And being, as was the way, and doubtless yet is, with most seafaring men, Kirby agreed, little though he wished to.

The *Suevic* made a fine passage out to New Zealand, left for home with a full passenger list, and with thousands of tons of frozen mutton and rabbits in her great holds. Kirby was fêted at every port on the way out and home. There were headlines about him and his grand command in the newspapers. And then—steaming up-Channel only a few hours run from her London dock, what does he do with her but pile her up, head on, hard and fast upon the merciless rocks of the Cornish coast, in thick fog! They dynamited her, cut her in two, in front of her boilers, and towed her stern end into Southampton. A new bow was built for her by her builders, Harland and Wolfe, of Belfast, Ireland, and the two sections were joined. The *Suevic* was again a fine vessel. For weeks the lobster fishermen were unable to catch a lobster, because of the feasting they had on the lost cargo from the *Suevic's* forehold, left on the rocks. And what of Kirby?

Kirby was tried before the Board of Trade, and had his master's ticket taken away. He broke down in the court and cried like a kid. Why not? One may presume it was Kirby's fault. By the grace of God, or of the little cherub, not a life was lost, no one was injured. Kirby has been dead these many years. The sea was ever


*A large van loaded with furniture was sighted adrift on the sea. . . . Four sailing-ship sailors having a peaceful game of euchre were found on it.*

a cruel mistress. . . . *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*

Some years ago I was talking with an artillery colonel about the wreck of one of our American merchant marine liners. "I can't understand how it happened. It was day with a smooth sea and bright sky," said I.

"Oh, it was fully excusable. She was steaming in uncharted waters," replied the colonel.

"Good night, what the devil are you talking about?" I asked, amazed. "If she was in uncharted waters, what was he doing going at full ahead? Why wasn't he going dead slow, or at least slow? What was the matter with his sounding apparatus? Why wasn't he taking soundings all the time, eh?"

The colonel remained unable to see that the skipper was to blame. Evidently the authorities were equally unable to see it; for the skipper did not have his master's license revoked. I dare say he still is at sea, in command. I'm glad I'm not his mate! . . .

There was an April night some thirty or more years ago when, utterly unable to sleep, I paced to and fro on the bedroom floor.

"What's the matter with you, dear? Why are you so restless?" asked my wife, my comrade for many a long year ashore and afloat.

"Daddy, I wish you'd lie down or be quieter. I can't go to sleep because you're so queer," said the child.

"I'm sorry," said I, and went down and walked up and down the drive between blossoming orange trees, the sky full of stars, the ridges of the high Sierras clear in the distance against an indigo sky.

"What was—what is the matter, dear?" asked my wife, at breakfast.

"I don't know. There's something awful happening somewhere," I replied. And then, in a little, came the paper with its flaring black headlines telling of the *Titanic*. . . .

I've spoken of steamers. Sailing ship wrecks were so common that they seldom were mentioned save in shipping papers and nautical magazines. The sailor was a man of whom little was thought, and that little was not good. "Like a drunken sailor" was the landsman's common expression. He was something of an outcast amongst the soft-living landfolk. . . . I recall the newspaper story of another steamer wreck, in which six passengers were lost and five of the crew.

"Six passengers lost their lives. Six poor souls have gone to meet their maker," said the newspaper. And then, after a period, "*five sailors drowned.*"

THERE was the *Stella*, owned by the London, Brighton and South Coast railway, running between Southampton (or Weymouth—I am not sure) and the Channel islands, Jersey and Guernsey, and a French port. She was a fast little packet, and expected to run on schedule and meet a train

*I had to give each ship the right of way . . . it seemed that every light upon the sea was coming straight for me.*

them—and they did not give a tinker's dam, of course.

In my first night at sea, eleven ships were lost in the Irish Sea, St. George's channel, the Bristol channel, and on the south coast of Ireland, in the "great gale of '97," which still is spoken of on those coasts. By the grace of God, or the little cherub, if you prefer, my own ship managed to run in for shelter; her foredeck stove in, a full suit of storm sails ripped to ribbons. From her deck I saw two of the wrecks—one, a four-masted barque hard and fast on the fanged rocks of Lundy Isle, her masts gone, her port bulwarks under the sea; and not a living man aboard. Lost with all hands, in the midnight's fury! The other, too far away to determine her rig because she lay on her side with her keel toward us, was a large ship with the wild tides roaring over her. Lost with all hands in the midnight's fury! I never knew

it each end if anyhow possible. The skipper piled her up on the Caskets, a group of wicked rocks near her course. She went down with 210 lives. Next day a boat with some of her passengers was picked up by an inbound liner. The newspapers carried a long story about what terrible hardships they had suffered. Doubtless they had suffered, though the sea was quite smooth and the weather not very cold. Three days later a large van loaded with furniture was sighted adrift on the sea. It had floated off the *Stella's* deck when she sank. There was a breeze. The sea was choppy. The passing steamer lowered a boat, which pulled off to the van, and was alongside it before four old sailing-ship sailors having a peaceful game of euchre on it became aware of its presence. The boat took them to the steamer. They landed a few hours later, and drifted away. The papers never said a word about the names of any of those lost ships, because I was too scared to pay any attention. I suppose I heard some names, but they went from my head.

On Christmas Eve, 1899, the fine four-mast barque *Primrose Hill* left Liverpool, bound for San Francisco. A few hours later, in a fresh gale, she went ashore on the Stack Rocks, a few miles west of the fine harbor of Holyhead. One foremast hand managed to jump to a rock, and made his way ashore. All others were lost—amongst them some little green first-voyage kids such as I had been two years or so ago. The parents of one of the kids brought suit against the owners, because the ship had left port with every man in the forecastle drunk. I never went to sea in sail without the crew coming aboard drunk, or almost every one of them; occasionally there was a sailor with some common sense when ashore. There was no question about the crew of the *Primrose Hill* having been thoroughly drunk when she pulled from Toxteth dock into the muddy Mersey; but the kid's parents might as well have saved their lawyer's fees.

ONCE in a while God, or the little cherub, did manage to fool the old sea. A week before I sailed from the Fraser River for Liverpool, the three-mast main-skysail-yard barque *Ravenscraig* sailed from Port Townsend for Callao, a voyage for which thirty days would be about right. When I came into Liverpool 155 days later, she had not arrived, and her name was on the overdue list. Days passed; daily I scanned the shipping news. At last she was posted missing, and the Lutine bell was rung for her at Lloyds'. She came into Callao shortly afterward, having been 188 days at sea, most of the time in a flat calm. She belonged in South Shields, and from that Geordie port came all her apprentices. Because all Geordies know the old sea and her wickedness, every church bell in South Shields was rung for joy, and thankfulness to God—or maybe the little cherub.

Sailing ships capsized at times—caught under too much sail off the River Plate by a roaring pampero; caught in a mad squall on the Line, for even on the Line the sea is often a she-devil; or by broaching to—coming all in an instant broadside on to a mad sea and yelling gale when the man at the wheel looked away for one second from his swinging compass, or was worn out with utter weariness. Or, as at times happened, when the skipper was new to the ship, and did not know yet that she could not safely *run*—fly with a gale at her heels. Some ships cannot, could not, run.

There was a time I left Falmouth, bound to a North Sea port after a long voyage from Oregon. Ahead of my ship pulled out the lovely French full-rigger *Chanaral*, bound also from Oregon, and now a few hours' sail from her home at Nantes. I still can hear the French sailors rousing their triumphant homeward-bound chantey. That night a heavy squall caught my ship, and we lowered and furled her royals, then let her fly, driving past steamer after steamer. I mind that it was I who furled, single-handed, her big main royal, and how I laughed at the kettle we were passing close. . . . Things happen that change a sailor's laughter to a frown. Next day our pilot came aboard, and told us how, in that hard squall, the *Chanaral*, under full sail, had capsized and gone to the bottom. Her mate was picked up, having clung to a piece of floating wreckage most

of a night and most of the next day. All others were crab food. . . .

Sailing ships took fire and burned at sea. A ship would be loading wheat at an Oregon wharf, or on the Sacramento. A shower would fall, and ere the mate, who maybe was busy elsewhere, could yell to the stevedores to lay off loading, a dozen sacks would be well wetted. They'd go down, deep into the hold. The shower blew by. The sun came out. Next day the ship towed down to the Bay, to wait till Shanghai Brown, or Jack Three-fingers, or fat Tod Costigan, brought off a crew. They'd come aboard, drunk as usual. They'd be a lot of scum, poor devils from a dozen seaport slums, the kind of men a "decent" woman, passing, would draw her skirts from quickly, lest she be soiled.

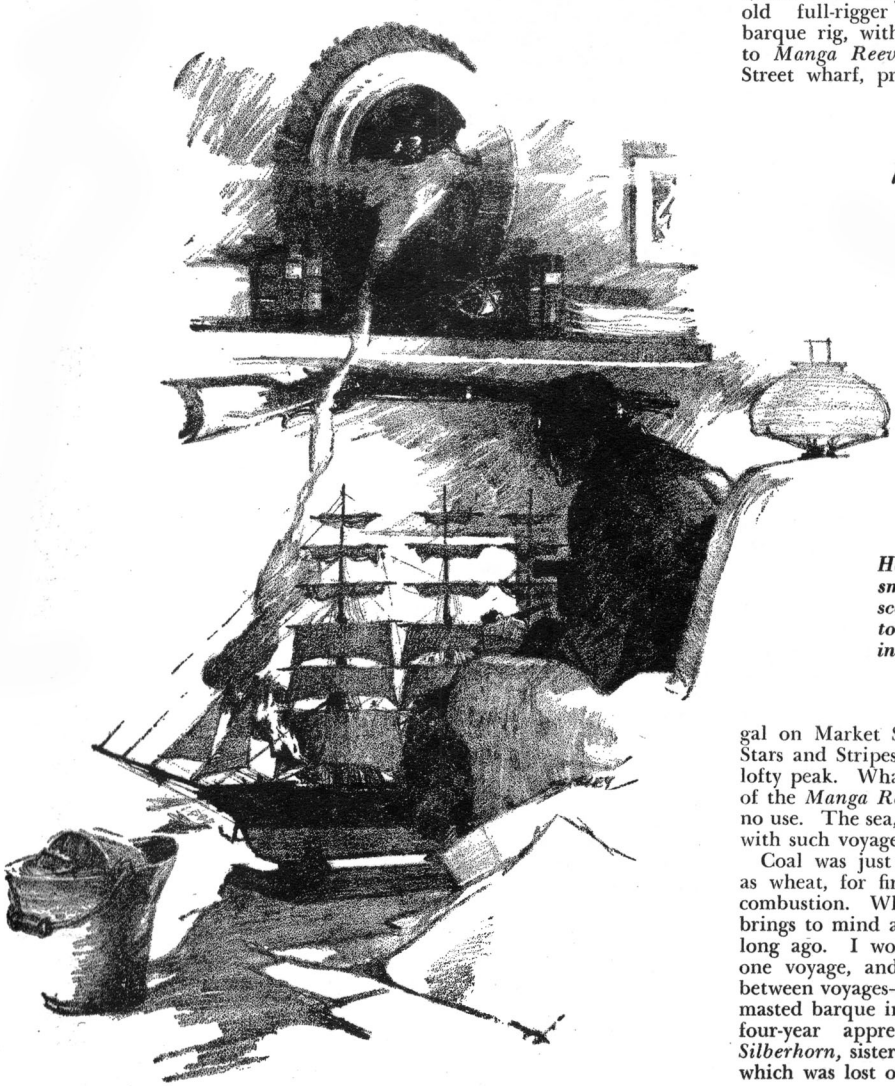
The ship pulled out, and set her snowy topsails when beyond the bar. Day passed to day, and all the look of shore fell from those sailormen. They talked and laughed and sang. Sometimes a sailor even prayed! I mind a Finn who spent his whole free time reading his Bible. They did their work, and did it right—skilled fingers clever at dainty jobs in rigging. They never shirked; or if one did, his fellows shunned and damned him. Then one day some sailor laid hand upon a hatch by chance while washing down the decks some tropic morn. . . . "Mister Mate—I teenk zee sheep, she ees burn in zee cargo."

"Mister Mate, Pitcairn's a thousand miles to the south. We'll beach her there," said the skipper; but when they came there, the natives came off and said: "If you beach her in Bounty Bay, Mister Captain, the sea is so rough she will go all to pieces."

"Men, what do you say? Are you willing to take a chance and try to sail her to Manga Reeva island?" asked her skipper; and a loud laughing cheer replied—though her long decks were smoking, her sides steaming, and to get to the storeroom for food had not been possible for days. They were living on wheat dragged up from the forehatch and made into a gruelly mess by the Chinese, or Malay, or Greek, or Limey cook.

So they sailed her 300 miles on to Manga Reeva, ran her onto the sandy beach, and left her *with her flag flying.* I saw that vessel myself a year later. A San Francisco firm had bought her hull, and put in a new deck of sorts, and had her towed home. . . . I don't know—maybe they sailed her. Anyway, there was the old full-rigger *Pyrennees,* under barque rig, with her name changed to *Manga Reeva,* lying at Howard Street wharf, pretty as the prettiest

*Illustrated by Raymond Sisley*



***Her hull began to smoke, her paint to scorch, her mainsail to smolder. I sat staring, fascinated. What did it matter?***

gal on Market Street, and with the Stars and Stripes flying proud at her lofty peak. What, I wonder, became of the *Manga Reeva?* To wonder is no use. The sea, the shores, are thick with such voyages of the day bygone.

Coal was just about as dangerous as wheat, for fire from spontaneous combustion. Which for some reason brings to mind a ship model I made long ago. I worked on her during one voyage, and then when ashore between voyages—a model of the four-masted barque in which I served my four-year apprenticeship: the old *Silberhorn,* sister to the *Goldenhorn,* which was lost on Santa Rosa island

off Santa Barbara, and of the *Matterhorn,* which capsized at sea, her company being picked up from the boats a week later; and of the same fleet as the big *Lyderhorn,* in which my old chum Bud Morris, who now is gone to his long watch below, served his four years.

My model was nothing to write home about: just a fair average piece of work. Not one of the fancy perfect models such as old Captain Pryce Mitchell used to sit making in his home at Santa Barbara, and sold for four thousand dollars. You can see Mitchell's model of the full-rigger *Dunskeig* in the library of that city today, bought by a well-to-do woman for four thousand dollars and given to the library. God rest her, for a fine lady! . . .

My model was finished, as finished as ever I was going to finish her. She had her six topsails, foresail and mainsail set, with topmast staysails. It must have been blowing a bit, in my mind. Her other sails were furled on their yards, her other staysails down. She was painted black above the waterline, with a broad white stripe; below her waterline salmon pink, just as the old ship was when I was aboard. Her name was painted on both bows, and on her stern. Her quarterboats were on their skids: a lifeboat and gig on the fore deckhouse. Well, what good was she to me? She was not good enough to present to any friend, at least so I thought then. Lordy, I wish I had her now!

I HAD my second-mate's ticket, and had quit the sea to go in steam. I was alone, sitting before a big open fire. I took her off the mantel, and set her down before the fire. I sat staring at her, thinking of the days and nights, the weeks and months, I'd served her on the rolling sea. Her hull began to smoke a little, her paint to scorch. I sat staring. A spark flew, presently, when her hull was scenting the room. It fell in the weather clew of her mainsail. The mainsail began to smolder. I sat staring. The mainsail and hull, at the same instant, began to burn. A flame ran up her mainsail spread to the lower main topsail, and on to the upper. Her rigging began to go—backstays, running rigging, shrouds. I sat staring, fascinated. What did it matter? Her mizzen mast fell, lengthwise, catching in the main rigging. A few moments, and her mainmast fell, and started the foremast blazing. She was all ablaze aloft, save her jigger mast. In a minute or two the jigger took fire from her hull. A little while, and the old ship was lying on her starboard side, smoking, a total loss. I put the fire out, laid her in the wood basket and left her there. I suppose the maid threw her remains on the fire next day. What did it matter?

Years later I was wakened by my wife, who asked: "What *is* the matter? Why are you groaning in your sleep? Are you in pain?"

"No, I'm all right, dear. Forget it," I replied, and told her to go back to sleep. She did, and I got up and went out and walked to and fro, under the stars. I had dreamed that the *Silberhorn* was lying on an island beach, burned out. Behind her were rather high somber green hills. There was no sign of any human life.

MONTHS later I was hauling rock from a lemon grove, on the same ranch, when the guy I was working with asked: "What's the name of that ship I've heard you talk of?"

"You mean the *Insizwa?*" I asked. No, that wasn't it, nor the *Illovo, Inkosi, Matabele* or the *Dabulamanizi.* "Oh, I guess you must mean the old *Silberhorn?*" said I.

"That's it. There's something about it in the paper," he said. I quit work, went to the ranchhouse, and asked the boss to let me see the paper.

The *Silberhorn* had been posted missing. She had last been seen eighty-eight miles southwest of Masa-Fuera island, in the South Pacific, afire; with dusk fast drawing in, a heavy gale blowing, and her boats gone. The crew had abandoned her. All that could be seen on her stern were the letters *ool—Liverpool.* A four-masted Liverpool barque—it could be no other than the *Silberhorn.* None of her people were ever found. Lost with all hands!

You suppose if I hadn't burned that model my old packet would not have burned? Rats! Of course she would have: but—well, it was a sort of queer coincidence, don't you think? I wonder! In any case, that I should have seen her lying burned out on an island beach, evidently at just about the time she did burn, was what one might call a trifle queer, don't you think? It goes to show how much a part of a ship a sailor can grow to be.

The old barky was bound across from Newcastle, New South Wales, to Junin, on the Chile coast, with a coal cargo. She was a hard hungry old devil, and we all hated her, and her Old Man, and her owners. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* I don't go in for cussing, and when I say, "By God, we loved her," it is simple fact. (Not that I cannot cuss; but what use is it?) . . .

The day of sail and of sailors is forever gone. Sailors grow ever scarcer. Soon they will be extinct as the dodo bird and the Great Auk. Now and then, but mighty seldom, I do, by the grace of God (or the little cherub, if you prefer it) meet up with a man who speaks my language.

One day last fall when on my way home to my mountains from the valley "down below" my bus stopped for half an hour in a little one-cylinder town a dozen miles or so down the mountain. With half an hour to kill, I wandered into the town, and dropped into the dime store. The proprietor was selling, to a little old lady with gray hair, two spools of white cotton, and a dozen clothespins. As soon as he was done with her, I said, having sized him up: "How about taking in that main royal, Mister?"

"Where did you learn *that* talk?" he cried, swinging round.

"What ship did you serve your time in?" I asked.

"The three-masted barque *Haddon Hall,* owned by De Wolfe brothers, Brunswick Street, Liverpool. They had the *Goldenhorn, Silberhorn—*"

"Yes, shipmate. I served mine in the *Silberhorn,*" I interrupted. So for a time, while various wondering females came in for various things, and a man who very evidently thought us both quite mad came and went out in a hurry, blocks groaned, ropes skirled, and white sails flapped in a dime store, while two square-rigger sailors talked of a day that never again will be.

"It was one hell of a hard life, wasn't it, shipmate?" said he.

"It sure was. Grueling work, bitter cold, blazing heat, and rotten pork, and hardtack full of weevils most of the time—just plain hell and misery, shipmate," I answered.

"No one who wasn't a damn' fool ever would have gone to sea in those days," said he, as an old lady grew impatient to be waited on because she had left a roast in her oven.

"A roast in the oven! Good Lordy, think of that shipmate! You're dead right, only a damn' fool ever would have gone to sea," said I.

"DON'T you wish you were back?" he called, as I opened the door, not wanting to spoil his business.

"You bet I do! I'd sell my soul to stand for an hour at a clipper's kicking wheel with a southerly buster blowing from dead aft," I replied.

"Me too, shipmate! God help poor sailors! Drop in when you're this way," he called as I closed his door behind me.

Ah, what good's talking?

*The rats have gone, and we the crew,*
*It's time I guess that we went too!*
*I thought I heard the Old Man say,*
*You can pack your bag and go your way.*

*Leave her, Johnny, leave her!*
*Leave her, Johnny, leave her now you can!*
*Leave her, Johnny, leave her like a man!*
*Leave her, Johnny, leave her.*

**A MAN owning a little two-bit outfit of ten square miles isn't even land-poor, in Texas. Luke wished he was back working for seventy a month on a real ranch. And then came his nephew with his fool rain-making scheme!**

*"Dang' smartaleck!" Luke grumbled. "Why don't he leave me alone?"*

*by*
ALLAN BOSWORTH

# Cloudy in the West

THE recurrent dream found Luke Bristow lying under the liveoak tree, a long and loose-strung man with drooping red mustache turning white, a man blessed with great appreciation of the simple things, such as idleness. It was September, and the mortgage was due.

In the dream, Luke was always back on the Pitchfork, working—to use the term loosely—for J. W. Hays, who owned half the county. Branding a few calves after somebody younger had cussed them into the chute; maybe greasing a couple of windmills next week, or riding leisurely down a string of bob wire with the sun feeling good on his back, and not a worry in the world. All the time dragging down seventy a month clear, even to Bull Durham. . . .

A gnat buzzed Luke's ear. He slapped it, shattering the dream. His eyes opened on harsh realities: the two-room shack on a rocky hill-point, the gray and dun flat where twisters sucked spirals of dust into the sky, a scatter of drought-gaunted cows hunting feed. *A little two-bit, pore-boy outfit,* Luke thought. *Got as much chance as a belch in that whirlwind yonder.*

He sat up reluctantly. Yesterday's thunderheads were making up again; but the windmill that wasn't paid for said the wind was still in the west. He heard the buzzing sound swell, and suddenly realized it wasn't a gnat, but the war-surplus plane owned by a much larger-winged pest—his nephew Claude, who was to blame for all this.

On the ground Claude could be defied, though it was hard not to fall for his slick talk. In the plane, he took on a sort of omnipotence; he was spying from Above. Luke shambled guiltily to a crowbar leaning in a sadly shallow posthole. "The dang' smart aleck!" he grumbled, lifting the bar a few inches. "Why don't he leave me alone?" He let the bar fall. "Bank's goin' to get this place, anyhow!"

The plane rolled to a dusty stop. Luke leaned wearily on the crowbar. He had only to think about work to get up a sweat, and he managed one now. Claude came briskly up the slope, swinging his goggles. He had the Bristow looks in a sharp way, but his energy was no kin.

"That's the same hole you were digging this morning!" he accused.

Luke's mustache bristled. "Had other things to do. Been busy."

"Oh, yeah?" Claude turned to the liveoak's shade, and felt the earth in the most likely spot. "You're a liar, Uncle Luke. The ground's still warm where you sacked out."

"That's just enough!" Luke yelled, dropping the crowbar flat. "I been aimin' to bust up this partnership. I'm bustin' it, right now!"

He started for the house, a picture of injured pride. "Now, wait," Claude called. "I talked to the bank. I've got a new idea."

"Had a whole year of your ideas!" retorted Luke. "Had a bellyful of modern methods and scientific approaches. Hellfire foolishness!"

He fell into a hide-bottomed rocker on the sagging gallery, breathing heavily. Claude, on the steps, studied him. "You've got to be patient," he said. "It takes time."

"It takes time?" Luke jeered. "I'll tell you what it takes—it takes *rain!* Look at them cows—you can hang your hat on any of 'em. Look at that flat—prairie dawgs starvin' to death there every day! And another thing: It takes land. I let you talk me into buyin' a measly ten sections. Why, hellfire, a man with ten sections ain't even land-pore, in Texas! Things are different with the Pitchfork—"

*"Trouble with you, J. W., you think you own people, body and soul. Well, you don't own me!"*

Claude was tired hearing about the big outfit whose land began yonder where the fence crossed the flat, and ran everywhere to the east of them. "The Pitchfork," he said, "is reactionary, medieval—"

"Evil? You're crazy. Seen many a time I'd swear God a'mighty Hisself was workin' for J. W. Hays! Seen it rain on the Pitchfork when all the other ranches was dry as a bone!"

"I mean J. W. would have made a fine feudal lord," Claude explained. "He takes care of his hands, but he thinks he owns them, body and soul. Tells them where to buy, where to send their kids to school—even tells them how to vote."

Luke dismissed the sacred right of the ballot with a wave of his hand. "Rains in Texas in September," he declared, "it don't make a damn who's President. But it ain't rained. No sir, I'm goin' to ask J. W. for my old job."

Claude eyed the thunderheads, and then studied Luke craftily, planning a new approach. "How do you know J. W. will take you back?" he asked. "Were you very close to him?"

"Close? Raised together! Me and J. W. have slept under the same tarp many a time. We have et out of the same skillet, and drunk out of the same cow-track."

"H'm," said Claude. "Suppose I told you I know how to make it rain, right on this pasture? Would you ask J. W. to sign your note for an extension on that five thousand? The bank's agreeable."

"Don't hooraw me, son," Luke begged. "I seen a man try to make it rain, once. He built a kind of tower on a hill, over on the old Mitchell place. I got the idea that God a'mighty's kind of jealous of His rights and prerogatives. All that come up was a big wind that blowed the rig clear over into Old Mexico."

Claude smiled a superior smile. "Read this newspaper clipping, here. There's a scientific approach to the problem of making rain. We've got a plane—all we need is dry ice. And you go see J. W. Hays."

Luke drove the old pick-up truck to town next day. It was one of the rare occasions when ambition stirred latently within his breast, clashing with his better nature. The pastures on both sides of the road were brown.

Get rain, even on ten sections, and there'd be feed for quite a few cows—if the bank would wait until the feed grew. *Sell two or three hundred head of prime beef next spring, and buy more land. Why, hellfire, we could be a big outfit some day! Keeps up this dry spell, even the Pitchfork might go broke. J. W., old-timer, you just listen to me. . . . Ain't a thing to worry about. Got a job with me long as you want it!*

He got out to open a gate, and thunder rumbled in the west, and he noted with satisfaction that the clouds were coming up again. According to Claude, modern science could milk a cloud dry just like a cow; all you had to do was catch one over your pasture. Before Luke got to town, he was singing.

He parked in front of the Lone Star Domino Parlor, and peered through the dusty window. There was J. W. Hays, sitting at the table where he usually held court, transacted cattle business, and played dominoes all at once; Tom Jessup and two other ranchers were with him. J. W. was a sawed-off man who managed to seem big, with a red face and a stomach in the advanced stages of prosperity. In between a good hat and an expensive pair of boots, he always dressed like one of his seventy-dollar hands. He wore his authority on head and foot, and exercised it in a voice that had been known to turn a stampede.

Luke shambled in, hiding a grin under his mustache, feeling a glow. He hadn't seen J. W., to speak to him, since leaving the Pitchfork.

"Howdy, J. W.," he said heartily. "Howdy, boys."

Tom Jessup played a domino, and returned the greeting. The other two men nodded pleasantly, but J. W. was lost in contemplation of the three dominoes racked face to back in front of him. The game was freezeout, played blindly off the back of the hand, calling for no skill and little concentration.

"You fellers get any rain?" Luke asked, pulling up a chair.

"It's forgot how," Jessup grunted, watching anxiously as J. W. put a domino on the high center stack without winning. "You ask me, we're due for rocky times. Maybe the country ought to have a change. Maybe we ought to've elected Dewey."

Jessup was the heretic, but J. W. shot a quick, frosty glance at Luke. "What's he ever done for us?" he trumpeted. "Who raised the price of beef?"

"Well, I reckon it was the Democrats," Jessup said. "But—"

"I go along with folks who go along with me," J. W. went on, his voice rising. "They don't have to bust their backs for me every day, just as long as I know they're on my side. With me, a man is either for me or against me, and if he straddles the fence, I ain't goin' to sympathize with his snagged britches." It was his turn to play again, and he slammed a domino down and boomed: "No, sir—I can't abide a traitor!"

Luke felt himself shriveling small. The man next to Jessup grunted, "Froze out!" and Jessup echoed, "Me too," and pushed back his chair on the next play.

Now J. W. was down to one domino, and his remaining opponent had four. Luke Bristow watched, unworried, knowing that what happened here was only a fragment of the larger pattern that made up the life and works of J. W. Hays. The other man swore as he laid the double six on a five blank. J. W.'s neck veins swelled in triumph as he topped this with a six-ace and took the pot. Three more plays ended the game.

"Lucky with anything you touch!" Luke said admiringly, shaking his head. "Uh, could I talk to you private, J. W.?"

The Pitchfork owner withered him with a look. "Run out on me, didn't you?" he demanded. "I could have told you then that you'd come crawlin' back before the weather got cold. Won't do no good!"

Luke's jaw sagged. He knew the ranchman of old: he was well aware that J. W. always had to get a certain amount of bluster out of his system. But he didn't have to blow up here and humiliate Luke in front of everybody. That spark of ambition within Luke glowed, and touched off a flame of anger.

"Wasn't askin' to come back, dang you!" he yelled, leaping out of the chair with unwonted celerity. "Wanted to talk business. Trouble with you, J. W., you think you own people, body and soul—think you can tell them where to buy their grub, where to educate their kids. Well, you don't own *me!*" He started for the door, then turned to face the startled group. "I'm goin' to make it rain! You hear me—*make it rain!* On my pasture. You wait and see!"

"Now, Luke," J. W. began in a hurt tone. "Now, wait, Luke!"

"Hell with you!" Luke snarled, slamming the door. He opened it again, and thrust his head inside. "I'll kill your vote next election. I'll vote the Republican ticket!"

In the heat of anger, Luke Bristow would have taken to the sky like a screaming eagle. But there was bidding of time, and biting of fingernails. Two batches of dry ice evaporated, and so did Luke's confidence. It was a week before Claude got the right kind of cloud—a fat, storm-dark cloud over the western hills, ripe for the knife to be drawn across its bloated belly.

At that moment, Luke, who had never been higher than a windmill platform, suddenly realized that man was not meant to fly. . . .

"Hurry up!" his nephew called. "We've got to get on top of that cloud before it moves clear over to the Pitchfork!"

Luke stopped short. "Um—never thought of that," he said, chewing his mustache ragged. "Maybe we ain't got the legal right to—"

"Get in this airplane! You made your brag, didn't you? Everybody in town knows about it. They'll laugh you off the street."

Luke climbed hesitantly to the observer's cockpit. "S'pose we get a regular fencepost-lifter and cowchip-floater? This flat'll be under water."

"Buckle your safety belt, and put on those gloves. I can land in a dozen different places."

There was no way out, so Luke did as he was told, crooking his legs around a smoking carton of dry ice pellets. The cloud was halfway over the sky, and wind came out of it to make the windmill creak and rattle its rods. Luke opened his mouth to say that no rain ever came from the west, anyhow—and just then the engine burst into a roar, and the blast from the propeller flattened his mus-

*Illustrated by Loran Wilford*

tache. He shut his eyes, and there was a violent rushing, and a lurch that felt like a saddle-horse reaching swimming depth. Luke didn't exactly pray, because he remembered that he was about to tamper with the Almighty's weather plans, but he thought, *Just get me down this time, and I won't never let him slick-talk me again!*

Then the carton pressed cold and heavy against one leg. He opened his eyes to see what caused this, and there was the sky slanted downhill, and the pasture swinging around one wingtip. Fascination seized Luke, making him forget to be scared. The hills looked mighty flat and small; the steel windmill tower was an inch-high toy. Back of it, the flat narrowed between hillpoints, and ran under the boundary wire like a jaundiced tongue.

EVERYTHING beyond that fence was the Pitchfork. The land rolled majestically to the eastern horizon, and went on from there; Luke saw one of J. W.'s windmills, with a shine of water in its dirt tank, up the widening flat; he saw the Pitchfork ranchhouse in a liveoak mott, maybe ten miles away. There didn't seem to be any end to J. W.'s power and influence and luck: they reached up into the sky itself, and a man couldn't get away from them. J. W. had a lot of grass left in that flat, though it was brown and dry.

By twisting his neck, Luke could see his own puny ten sections spread below, no bigger than an oversized horse trap. *Chicken-feed outfit,* he told himself disparagingly, and just then a swirl of gray mist struck his face, and the wingtips vanished in an eerie gloom. He yelled in alarm, but Claude didn't hear.

Claude was flying through the edge of the cloud, climbing to get on top. Wind jolted them, but the plane came out into bright sunlight again, and the cloud stretched below in a billowing sea. Claude throttled the engine to cruising speed and motioned for Luke to begin throwing out ice.

"Ain't nothin' but wind and lightnir' in this cloud!" Luke protested, but the words were torn from his teeth. He scooped up a double handful of ice pellets, and the plane lurched and skidded so violently most of them were spilled in the cockpit. He managed to throw out a gallon or so before a thermal found the ship and lifted it buoyantly a thousand feet, leaving Luke's stomach at the lower altitude.

Then the thermal went the way of thin air. They dropped so fast the pasteboard carton seemed to be floating between Luke's trembling knees. The mist swallowed them, and Luke felt the plane twisting and sunfishing like a Mexican bronc' with a cockleburr under the saddle.

Then lightning ripped and roared through the cloud. Luke raised his eyes toward what he hoped was heaven. He apologized for presuming to change the weather, blaming everything on Claude. This was a prayer, and he was not alone in making it: Claude had just learned what a line squall can do to an airplane. Now the carton dispensed its entire contents in a rush past Luke's face, and before he could marvel at a seeming defiance of the law of gravity, he discovered that his own weight was hanging from the safety belt.

They came out of the lower edge of the cloud that way—upside-down, buffeted by the wind. The ship went nose down in a spin, and only Claude knew how he fought it back into level flight. Luke groaned, and lifted his head weakly.

He saw they were over the hills to the west, while the cloud was scudding low above the ranchhouse and corrals. No rain was falling, but now a vengeful dagger slashed out of the dark swirl, and crumpled the windmill wheel. Eye-hurting brilliance streaked down the legs of the steel tower, and a tongue of flame licked out across the ground.

The plane rocked, banking so sharply that the wing hid the area of the windmill for a moment, and Luke grabbed the cockpit coaming to hold on. When he could see again, dun smoke was rolling along the flat in the direction of the boundary fence, and low, ragged flame jumped from bush to grass clump as the wind ferried blazing wisps ahead. Bright spots broke out beyond the fence, where the grass was higher.

"God a'mighty!" screamed the horrified Luke. "Look what this here smart aleck has done now—busted the windmill, and set J. W.'s grass on fire!"

THERE was only one thing to do now, and even Claude knew what it was, whether or not he was ready to admit the guilt Luke pinned on him. The fire had to be fought and conquered before it spread up through all the widening valleys that ran into the Pitchfork range. With a wind like this one, it would run through good grass as fast as a man could run.

Already a thick cloud of dun smoke was rolling up the flat, rising and thinning in the sky. They'd see that at the Pitchfork, and help would come. But every minute counted.

Claude sent the plane skimming over the runway, where a cross-wind bent the mesquites, and headed it up the flat. They saw the cloud lowering, dark with fury, and another bolt of lightning hammered the rocky hill above the ranchhouse, leaving a cedar tree split and smoking. They roared over the small blackened strip where the fire had burned over their own land before it jumped the fence; now they looked down on the moving line of the flame itself—already a quarter of a mile long, and bulging into Pitchfork territory. *This is what we get for trying to make it rain when He wasn't ready for it to rain! Like I said, He's jealous of His rights and prerogatives!*

CLAUDE left the fire behind, and swung the plane over the dirt tank and windmill Luke had seen earlier. Luke remembered the day when he had to grease that mill with a cold norther blowing. At the time, he had grumbled. *Didn't know when I was happy. Seventy dollars a month, and nothing to worry about—only after this J. W. won't never have me back. Hey, what's that smart aleck Claude trying to do?*

The plane was gliding into the wind, engine throttled, and there was a clump of mesquites directly ahead. Luke covered his eyes, but felt only a couple of bumps and heard the slither of rubber on gravel. They came to a stop in a bare, hoof-trampled area near the water trough fed by the dirt tank.

"See if you can find a feed sack!" Claude shouted, jumping out. "Wet it in the tank, and let's get to that fire!"

"Don't you try to tell me how to fight a grass fire," Luke warned. "Wouldn't be no fire if it wasn't for you and your scientific methods!"

He climbed down, thankful to be on the ground again. Claude rummaged around the windmill and came up with a piece of tarp used to cover a gasoline engine. He dipped this in the water trough and ran toward the fire, which by now was only a couple of hundred yards away. Luke made a hasty search, finding nothing. He stood on the tank dam and saw Claude vanish into the billowing smoke. The roar of flames rode loud on the wind.

Luke looked down at his blue jeans. They were almost new, and looked more lived in than worn. They had cost him five dollars.

"Nothin' else I can do!" he said regretfully, and peeled off the jeans. "Good thing I got on long-handled drawers—keep my legs from blistering!"

He dipped the jeans in the tank, and raced for the fire in a lanky, knobby-kneed run. The smoke met him like something alive, seeking out his face, bringing tears to his eyes and making him choke. A shower of sparks from a catclaw bush stung his cheeks. He clutched the jeans by the cuffs and slapped the roomy seat against a blazing prickly pear.

No telling where Claude was. Luke fell back slowly, slapping at fire that ran ankle-high under his boots. It was on both sides of him; he

couldn't move fast enough along the advancing line. He fought furiously for what seemed like hours, instead of minutes, and the pungent smoke was burning the lining out of his lungs. His cheeks were blistered, and the jeans weighed a ton.

Worst of all, they were no longer wet, and twice he had to step on them to put out smoldering fire in their seat. The tank would be about even with him now—somewhere on the left. He moved that way, groping; then he heard voices, and the sputter and hiss of water being played on the flames.

J. W. Hays loomed suddenly, incredibly large in the distortion of the smoke and heat. He was bowed under the seventy-pound weight of a knapsack-style back-tank, and he was pumping the nozzle to squirt a thin stream. Beyond him Luke dimly saw other men, some with back-tanks, some with wet brooms, or shovels.

"Now we're gettin' somewhere!" he panted, falling in beside his old benefactor. "Squirt some of that water on these here britches!"

The Pitchfork owner showed no surprise. It was natural for both of them to be here, and they worked their way to the left with the rest of the party, falling back gradually, but leaving the flames checked behind them. They came, finally, to the tank dam, and from this elevation they saw the fire burning strongly on both wings.

"Ain't any use," J. W. panted. "All hell can't stop it, with this wind. It'll just have to burn to the hills."

LUKE heard a splash, and looked to see Claude throwing a bucket of water over the wing of his plane. He pointed an accusing finger that way, and then lowered it slowly. Claude was a young man, and had to make his way; he'd be around a long time after Luke was gone.

"I done all this, J. W.," Luke said manfully. "I figured to make it rain; I got lightnin', instead. I'm mighty sorry."

J. W. put down the burdensome back-pump, and looked at him for a long minute. He said: "Luke, you better turn in them britches at the ranch commissary store tomorrow, and get yourself a new pair. Tell 'em you're back on the Pitchfork payroll."

*That's the way it is with J. W.—you string along with him, and he takes care of you. Why, hellfire, I didn't no more mean what I said about voting the Republican ticket than anything! Just talking to hear my head rattle. . .*

A drop of moisture fell on Luke's hand. His eyes were wet, but not that wet. He looked wonderingly at the sky.

Somebody yelled, "Here she comes—tadpoles and cats an' dogs!" and

*"Good thing I got on long-handled drawers—keep my legs from blistering!"*

Luke ducked as lightning ripped the bottom of the dark cloud, slicing it like a knife. The rain came instantly, with roaring, drenching violence.

"God a'mighty!" Luke shouted. "Look at it! Feel it! Man, that's *rain!*" Then he stopped short. This was the Pitchfork, wasn't it? That was J. W. Hays, standing beside him with a happy grin, letting the rain beat into his face. When Luke came to think of it, there was nothing at all surprising about rain falling on J. W.'s land.

They slapped each other joyfully on the back, and splashed to shelter under the plane's wing. Claude was dancing a jig there.

"You thought I couldn't do it, eh?" Claude demanded. "Thought scientific methods wouldn't work? Well, look at this! Why, I'm in business! I can fly all over Texas, chasing clouds, and making it rain. That is"—and he hesitated—"if you meant what you said about busting up the partnership."

Luke looked at J. W., and what he saw in the ranchman's face settled it. He sighed happily, and leaned back against a wheel of the plane, listening to the rain drumming on the wing.

"Claude," he said generously, "you just go right ahead. There ain't a thing to worry about!"


# The Rolling Tons

A SHORT NOVEL OF THE WESTERN OILFIELDS AND THE HEAVY TRUCKING JOBS ON WHICH THEY DEPEND.

## by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

THERE was a hard cold wind blowing down Cody Street, and the mountain range east of Pennant was hazed with cloud. The tall man on the loading platform of the Wazee Supply Company was dancing a jig and slapping his hands against his thighs. Stan Rawson backed the K-2 up to the ramp and slid out from under the wheel. The K-2 was a light-duty truck with a panel stake body. The lettering on the door read "Rawson —Etruria City." The man on the platform grinned his recognition.

"Look who's here!" he said. "Business must be bad across the line, Stan, when the boss handles pick-ups."

"Business is swell. It's just that I'm getting old, Pete. I like these jobs where you fellows do the loading."

There were several crates of fittings on the platform, a small electric light plant, a quarter-horsepower electric motor, a 230-pound bailer—the kind of stuff that a man handled with a small truck. Rawson walked around it and read the sign tacked to the warehouse wall. It read:

$1,000.00 REWARD

I will pay One Thousand Dollars reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person or persons engaged in sabotage against my trucks, or for the return of any stolen Ballard truck with evidence leading to the conviction of the thief. Confidential information will be treated confidentially and adequately rewarded.

Neil Ballard
The Ballard Company
Etruria City.

Rawson was medium tall, but the width of his shoulders minimized his height. He walked lightly but when he stood, he stood solidly. "Growing old" in Stan Rawson's case meant that he was approaching thirty. He frowned at the notice, read it twice and turned around.

"I saw these things around Etruria this morning," he said. "First time I've taken time to read one of them."

Pete Acker was checking the pick-up order. He moistened the point of the pencil with the tip of his tongue. "It won't do no good," he said.

"I suppose not."

Rawson jumped down from the platform and started across Cody Street. Pete would load the truck and, if the truck was in his way after it was loaded, Pete would move it out of the way. A man did not have to do all his own work when he dealt with a supply house, but a man with a truck did all the work every place else.

Cody Street was paved and it was a good wide street into which other paved streets ran. Beyond that, the town of Pennant spread far in an irregular pattern of dirt roads and cowpaths, of frame shacks and cinder block houses. Tall oil derricks commanded the skyline westward, a thin

*"There is this fellow with one truck and one stomach-ache," Francisco said. "He would have us drive for him."*

formation stretching toward the hazy horizon. A group of white buildings occupied a long block on the east side of Cody Street. A sign on the roof of the middle building identified the group: "BURK HALVERSON, GENERAL CONTRACTING." Rawson walked past the switchboard and the small bullpen in which three stenographers and a bookkeeper worked. The door to Burk Halverson's private office was open, and Halverson himself was sitting behind a flat-top desk.

The boss of Wazee County was a thin man in his early fifties. His skin was darkened by many years in the high country and there were deep lines, like calipers, around his mouth. The mouth itself was thin. He looked at Rawson as a man looks across a wide prairie, his lids drawn tight over two-thirds of his eyeballs.

"Sit down, Rawson," he said. "I asked you to drop in today because I've been looking into your business. For a man with your overhead, you're not doing so well."

Arrogance was natural to Burk Halverson. Stan Rawson shrugged his shoulders. "I'm getting by. Nobody in Etruria is doing very well—yet."

"Etruria City is a joke." Halverson moved the papers on his desk as though impatient to conclude the interview. "We pay retainers to attorneys so that they will stand by until we need them," he said. "I am prepared to offer you the same proposition."

Stan Rawson lighted a cigarette. "How much is the retainer and what do you want for it?"

Halverson brought his hands together on the desk top with the tips of his thin fingers meeting. "We will sign a contract with you for one year, and pay you approximately what you are earning now. In addition to that, you may continue to handle any business which does not conflict with ours."

STAN RAWSON smiled grimly. Burk Halverson was not an oilman; nor, save in a political sense, was he a contractor. He had been the political power of an obscure county in a Western State when Neil Ballard brought in his wildcat across the line in Mesa County, in another State, and created the Stateline oilfield. Now Burk Halverson was the instrument of the mighty Sentinel Oil Corporation. If Ballard lost the field that he discovered, Burk Halverson would be a man of destiny. Stan Rawson was not excited at the prospect of becoming a rung in the Halverson ladder.

"Nobody with any sense would sign a contract to stand still for a year during a boom," he said. "If you offered me a share of Sentinel's hauling business, I might be interested."

"Sentinel's needs are being met, and will be met. I am offering you survival in the trucking business. To use your own phrase, nobody with sense would refuse that."

Burk Halverson's voice was cold. There was no emotion in him, no sense of physical threat, and still he looked dangerous. His thin hands would never strike anyone, but he would find other hands to do the striking if he needed them. Rawson rose to his feet. He did not like people who talked down to him and he resented threats, implied or otherwise.

"A man could earn a thousand dollars," he said, "if he could answer some of the questions that Neil Ballard is asking."

Halverson looked thoughtful for a moment, his eyes fixed on some distant point across the room. "Ballard has

neither sense nor judgment," he said. "You are refusing my offer?"

"As it stands, yes."

"That is unfortunate. You will regret it."

Burk Halverson picked up the letter that he had been reading when Rawson entered and Rawson went out without saying good-by. There were trucks rolling in and out of the Halverson yards; big trucks and small, floats, trailers, gasoline and Diesels. The railroad did not come to Pennant, but the Halverson fleet brought the heavy stuff in and distributed as much of it as the Sentinel properties could use. It was a good fleet and Rawson frowned thoughtfully as he watched a gin-pole truck in the yards loading drill stem. He owned six trucks and he dreamed of his own fleet—but the six trucks ate up nearly all that they earned.

He crossed the street to the Wazee Supply Company and checked the invoice with Pete. The Mesa County wildcatter for whom the stuff was destined was drilling across the line, but he found it cheaper to buy in Pennant than to pay the truck freight over the mountains from the supply centers of his own State. That was the situation which kept Etruria City poor while Halverson's town grew wealthy.

It was growing dark now, and Rawson had thirty miles to go; twenty in this State and ten in his own. He thought about Halverson's offer as he drove. It would have meant a lot to him if it had been an honest offer, but the facts were too obvious. Someone was trying to drive the Ballard trucks off the highway and Burk Halverson was interested in Stan Rawson only to the extent of removing the Rawson trucks from Neil Ballard's reach.

The road stretched long and lonely. Off to the right, rig lights rode high and a few flares burned. The State-line field was new and there were not as many wells as there would be eventually. As it was, there were more wells in Wazee County, the newcomer, than in Mesa County where the discovery well had gone down. Sentinel Oil had unlimited resources while Neil Ballard had leased more land than he could afford to drill.

There was a short rise on the Wazee side of the State line and as Rawson topped it, he saw the lights of a parked car at the bottom of the hill. His jaw tightened. At best, a parked car along a road like this meant that someone was in trouble, and truck drivers were constantly cast in the rôle of rescuers on the road. At worst, this parked car could mean danger if he stopped. A number of trucks had been hijacked recently, several drivers had been forced to walk to the nearest town, and one driver had not only lost his truck, but the load of drill stem that he was hauling. Neil Ballard's reward notice had been written in righteous anger.

A girl stepped out into the path of the headlights and held up her hand. Stan Rawson turned his wheel and rolled to a stop. He looked warily at the parked coupé, then turned his eyes toward the girl.

She was dressed in a fawn-colored windbreaker and brown slacks, a soft felt hat that was completely feminine and a white scarf anchored at her throat with a simple bar pin. She stood with her hands on her hips, hands that were encased in gauntlet gloves. She did not look helpless; she was merely a girl who needed help.

"My jalopy quit on me," she said. "It won't run."

Rawson glanced at the car. It was not a jalopy; it was a slick, maroon-colored 1946 coupé in the middle-price range. There was not a dent in it, and it did not look like a car that was in trouble. It had Texas plates. Rawson swung down and lifted the hood on the left-hand side.

"Gas?" he said.

"Nearly a tankful."

He shrugged. "It's not reaching your carburetor. Don't ask me why. It's too cold and I don't feel like finding out. I've got a rope in the truck and I'll tow you to Etruria."

"Thanks."

The girl slapped her hands together and while Rawson was getting the towrope from the toolbox, she walked curiously around his truck. When he had the towline hooked, she started back to her own car and hesitated a moment.

"Do you work for Rawson?" she said.

"I am Rawson."

"Oh!"

She did not introduce herself and he did not encourage an introduction. He had a normal interest in women, but not on the highway. On the highway, Rawson considered them a nuisance.

"Watch your swing on the curves," he said, "especially if we've got traffic coming against us—and honk your horn if you want me to stop."

He got back under the wheel, then, and drove her to Etruria City.

## Chapter Two

Etruria City was an older town than Pennant, but it looked like a primitive copy. It had only one paved street and most of the buildings along that street were dull and dingy, monuments to the long, leisurely years when Etruria City, isolated from the rest of the State by two ranges of mountains, was a cowman's shopping center. Stan Rawson's white frame building was on the last block of paving to the south. The big garage doors slid open at the command of his horn and, by driving to the rear wall, he was able to tow the maroon coupé clear of the doors. Francisco Garra, his ace driver, was walking toward him as he alighted.

Francisco was a moon-faced man, deceptively mild in manner and deceptively soft in appearance. He wore a small mustache and, in repose, he looked fat. In action, the fat was charged with vitality and became muscle.

"There is this fellow with one truck and one stomach-ache," he said. "He would have us drive for him."

Rawson looked at the man who was sitting hunched over on a wooden bench; a husky six-footer, with the build of a wrestler. The man's nose had been broken at some time or other and his mouth was a thin flat line.

"It's maybe my appendix. I dunno," he said. "I feel terrible. But that cargo has to get through tonight. It's late now."

Rawson nodded. It could be. Men did get sick driving trucks. Garra had brought a truck home over a hundred miles of mountains once with his right arm broken. Garra would not be *simpatico* to a driver with a sore stomach.

"Let me see your papers," he said.

Garra had the papers and he handed them over. The man with the stomach-ache was identified as Leo Maxon, a driver for some obscure outfit called the Hyway Hauling Company of Capital City, beyond the mountain ranges. He was hauling a hoisting unit and engine weighing over fifteen tons to a well location east of Pennant. The papers seemed all right. Rawson looked at the driver.

"Where's your swamper?"

"I didn't have one. They've got roughnecks at the well to help unload."

"Okay. I guess you know that if we take over, we collect for the entire haul. That's the rule."

"Yeah. The boss will just have to stand for it, that's all. I gotta see a doc."

"Well, just as soon as you sign a paper for us, you can do whatever you want. And we'll have your truck back here tomorrow."

Rawson turned toward the door which connected the garage and the office. He had forgotten the girl, but she was standing only a few feet away.

"Need a stenographer?" she said.

"Thanks," he said. "Come along. I thought I was going to have to do it myself."

The office was two rooms, with a glassed-in semi-private cubicle for Rawson and a larger open space for his stenographer and bookkeeper. The staff had left for the day and the girl took over the typewriter. Rawson dictated a consignment order from the Hyway Hauling Company to his own outfit and Maxon signed three copies; one for himself, one for the Rawson files, and one for Garra to carry in the truck. It was all very simple and foolproof. Rawson walked out with Garra to the truck.

It was an impressive piece of rolling stock, thirty-odd tons of flat-bed truck, with six wheels and an amazing amount of gear and tackle. Rawson looked it over appreciatively and enviously. A man needed big equipment in a business where practically everything movable was measured in tons. His own equipment was sturdy but he needed some really big stuff. There were times when he operated under a handicap.

Garra was looking at the truck, too, his eyes gleaming. "You are giving to me this job of the stomach-ache?" he said.

Rawson grinned. "I'm *sticking* you with it! Those roughnecks may not be much good."

"The winch is good, no?"

"It looks good." Rawson frowned. "I can't picture any new development east of Pennant, though. All I know about down there is that dry hole, the Simpson-Wheeler job."

Garra shrugged. "There is a map sketch in those papers. I can find it with a map."

"Okay. But stay out of trouble."

Rawson went back to his office. The girl was sitting at the typewriter desk. She had removed the windbreaker and she was wearing a cream-colored blouse. She was medium-tall, five-six or -seven perhaps, and slender. The hair which escaped from beneath her felt hat was light hair, but not light enough to be called blonde. The scarf, loosely knotted at her throat, emphasized the contours of her face and the clean curve of her cheek. She had a firm mouth, with a soft lip line that kept severity out of it.

"I stuck around," she said. "I'm interested in the trucking business. Are you getting all the business you want?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

He looked at her sharply, and killed the casual reply that he might have given her. There was something in the terse way she asked the question that appealed to him and, for all of her pictorial quality, she did not look like a person who asked questions for the sake of making conversation. He remembered that her license tags were Texas and that she might not know the local situation.

*"My jalopy quit on me," she said. "It won't run."*

"This Stateline oilfield extends into two States," he said, "and the discovery well was brought in a few miles from here in this State. It was a wildcat and a fellow named Neil Ballard put it down. Before he spudded in he got leases on options to more than half the county, so nobody can drill over here except Ballard. A few more people are trying, but they are a long way from the proven area. They are wildcatters and don't amount to much. Across the State line, Sentinel Oil controls even more land than Ballard does here. Burk Halverson got it for them, and they are right over the oil pool. An independent trucker can't get a dime's worth of business from Ballard or Halverson."

The girl listened intently, her chin cupped in the palm of her right hand, her elbow resting on her knee. "You don't like Ballard?" she said.

Rawson shrugged. "He doesn't try to make people like him. He is his own contractor and he runs his own truck fleet. He controls more land than he can drill. He's an outsider and he tries to make all the money himself. Nobody is profiting by Ballard's presence here, so the county won't build new roads and the State won't improve connecting highways.

They are making more money across the line than we are and people have a feeling that the oil belongs over here where it was discovered."

The girl nodded solemnly. "It's a Ballard trait," she said. "The Ballards play for keeps. They have to be slapped down occasionally to keep them human." She raised her eyes and a smile played across her lips. "I am Beth Ballard."

Stan Rawson stared at her. "That was a dirty trick," he said.

"No, it wasn't. I wanted an honest opinion. I felt that you would be honest if you talked."

"I talked, enough."

"I liked it. I knew a lot about you before I met you." Beth Ballard rose and walked around the room. "My father was pretty successful in Texas oil, you know. He left me as much money as he left Neil. Neil's money is running low. He's sunk it all up here. Now, I'm coming in with mine, but I'm not giving it to Neil. I'm a Ballard, too. I want my own part of this show. Maybe I'll buy him out of operating and leave him distribution."

Stan Rawson watched her move around the room. She moved swiftly, nervously, and she smoked as she talked, flipping ashes carelessly from her cigarette. She was, he imagined, twenty-five or twenty-six. She stopped suddenly and faced him.

"Do you want to sell this business?"

He met her eyes. "No!"

"I didn't think you would. How about coming in with me if I take over the operating end of the business? I'll give you stock in exchange for your business, or cash if you prefer it, and you'll operate the Ballard truck fleet."

Stan Rawson's interest quickened. "You're offering a lot to a stranger," he said.

"I looked you up—your Army record—everything. On the transportation end, I need a man who knows this country up here. And I need men in key spots who have not learned to take orders from Neil."

"You're going to compete with your brother?"

"No. I'm going to ally myself with him and lick Sentinel Oil to death. But I've got to trim his job down to a size he can handle."

"That sounds reasonable." Rawson's eyes measured her. "But can you handle the responsibility that you take from him?"

Beth Ballard rested one slack-clad leg on the corner of a desk. "No," she said, "I'm a woman. I can't boss a job—any kind of a job. I don't want to boss anything. But I've got money. A lot of it. I didn't earn that money but I can justify possession of it if I make good use of it. I am going to pick good men and treat them fairly. If they pass the fair treatment along to the men under them—and they will, if they are good men—we will beat Sentinel Oil on every front."

It was quiet in the room save for the rumble and the beat of life that flowed in waves of muddled sound from Gunnison Street. The girl was leaning forward slightly. Her dark eyes were intent upon Rawson and there was sincerity in her, in the poise of her body, in her clenched fist. She believed what she said, and she wanted to be believed. Rawson felt a stirring in his blood, a sense of excitement; but he had a lot of himself in the business that he had built, and, within certain limits, that business made him a free man with the option of saying Yes or No to anyone. He had said "No!" this morning to Burk Halverson.

"I don't know as much about you as you know about me," he said. "I've got my own business, and I've made out all right."

The words sounded curt and ungracious, even to himself, but they came out that way while his mind was trying to phrase a thought. Beth Ballard's eyes clouded and she slid her leg off the edge of the desk. Her windbreaker was on the back of a chair and she picked it up.

"I appreciate the towing job," she said, "and your mechanic said that he'd fix my car. It should be ready, I guess."

She turned toward the door which led to the garage and she seemed more feminine in that moment, a slender girl with light hair and a soft mouth rather than a brisk, restless woman. Rawson watched her go and her hand was on the doorknob before he found his voice.

"Thanks for doing the typing," he said.

"Think nothing of it."

Beth did not turn around and after the door closed behind her, Stan Rawson sat in the chair beside the stenographer's desk and smoked a cigarette, vaguely dissatisfied with himself. . . . Beth Ballard had talked business to him. If a man had offered the same deal, he would have talked it through. Because she was a woman, some barrier had gone up in his mind and he had refused even to think about it. He did not know why he felt as he did, but he did not have any impulse to reopen the subject. The logical thing for a fleet-owner in oil country was an alliance with a contractor or a big operator; in the Stateline field, the logical thing was doubly logical—but he had refused, this day, the only two alliances worth having.

It was quiet, and he heard the whirring sound of the garage door mechanism. Beth Ballard would be driving out. He sat where he was until the door closed again, then he walked into the garage. Red Logan, the mechanic, was lighting his pipe, a pleased expression on his face. Red was middle-aged and lame. He had had a pretty hard time until Stan Rawson gave him a job.

"That's a fine girl," he said, "and a mighty pretty one."

"She must have overpaid you."

"I wanted no pay. 'Twas a plugged fuel line she had. A simple thing." Red Logan drew hard on his pipe. "She gave me five dollars," he added.

Stan Rawson laughed. "Okay, Red. I'm going across the street for some supper."

He went out to Gunnison Street and the wind was walking through the town. The neon lights of the taverns were hazed with it and there was a white haze forming on the surfaces of exposed metal. There was noise and warmth in Blackie's and Stan Rawson took a table near the wall. He knew half of the men in the place. One of them, Sam Decker of the Dollar D ranch, crossed the room to his table.

Sam was in his sixties and he could have posed for any artist who aspired to paint the Old West. He had a white walrus mustache, skin like well-tanned leather and blue pouches under his eyes. Rawson had known him before there was a boom in Mesa County, before there was a second world war, before there was a truck with the Rawson name on it. Sam had been drinking tonight and liquor made his tongue slow. His eyes, however, were clear.

"Stan," he said, "you can maybe tell me something. I got a lot of land that's right smack next to the land where Neil Ballard's getting his oil. I got oil under my land. It stands to reason I do. I don't get a dollar out of that oil till it's topside. Is that a fact or ain't it?"

"It's a fact, Sam."

"Right. And I gave Neil Ballard an option to drill my land. He's got a lease if he drills but he ain't drilled it. He's got a rig out there but it's just a rig. Not even an engine on it. And his time is running out. What would you do, Stan?"

Stan Rawson stared at the tabletop. "Ballard spread himself pretty thin," he said. "He'll drill your land all right."

The old man shook his head. "I'm not waiting. His time's running out. I signed a paper last week with Burk Halverson. He's got a big outfit. When Ballard's time runs out, Halverson is coming in. And he'll get my oil for me. A man couldn't do anything else, could he?"

"I guess not, Sam."

"Of course not." The rancher lurched to his feet. "I knew you'd agree with me, son. Ain't no other thing I could have done."

He went back across the room to the table he had left and Rawson's thoughtful eyes followed him. He understood Sam Decker and he knew that the old man was worried. He had tried too hard to justify himself. Sam Decker's breed seldom left one political party for another, or stopped trading with a favorite store. If he had not lost faith in Neil Ballard, he would not have listened to Burk Halverson, much less signed with him. Having signed, he felt a strange compulsion to tell people about it and listen to the echo of his own voice assuring him that he was right.

The other people in Blackie's, and probably people in many other places, had heard his voice, too. Sam Decker's ranch was the largest lease that Ballard had under option. The smaller landowners would be signing with Halverson, too, and if Ballard did not drill fast enough to fulfill his lease provisions, Sentinel Oil would come across the State line and take his field from him, piece by piece.

Rawson raised his eyes to the notice on the wall near the door: "ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD." That sign was another mistake. Ballard was advertising the fact that his trucks were running into trouble. It took trucks, a lot of trucks, to make an oilfield. A man had to have derricks and lumber, boilers and pumps and stem and drill collars. He had to have engines and hoists. Those things were big tons and they had to be hauled in big road-wagons by men who knew how to handle them. Neil Ballard was trying to run everything, own everything, be everything.

The voice of Sam Decker was loud in the room.

"A man can't sit around while people take the oil out from under his land. If Neil Ballard can't drill my land, there's others that can."

Stan Rawson paid his check and stepped out into the wind again. "I'd be a fool to tie up with the Ballards," he said. "A male Ballard is bad enough. A female Ballard would be worse."

If he was a little bit like Sam Decker, and trying to convince himself that he was right, the thought never occurred to him.

## CHAPTER THREE

FRANCISCO GARRA did not come back with the truck that he had driven into Wazee County.

All morning, as he checked his trucks out on the early schedules, Stan Rawson waited for a phone call and with the passing minutes a conviction

*"I got oil under my land. It stands to reason I do."*

grew. There was a smell of trouble in the air as there was a smell of snow. Francisco Garra had his frailties. He drank too much at times and he had a weakness for strange women; but he had the Latin trait of taking each thing in its proper season. Rawson trucks, so far, had rolled over the dark and lonely roads of two States without encountering trouble, but mysterious things had happened to Ballard trucks, and yesterday Stan Rawson had refused to climb aboard the Halverson bandwagon.

He paced up and down, thinking about that, and he was not surprised when the phone call came at nine thirty.

"Rawson?" the voice on the phone said. "This is Neil Ballard. I've got to see you right away. Preferably not at your place or mine. I'm going out to my Number Six. How about meeting me there?"

"Right away."

Rawson asked no questions. There had been a note of urgency in Ballard's voice, and his own rapidly developing hunch matched that note. He rolled his battered coupé out of the garage and took the county road out of town. The ruts were carved deep in that road and the little car bounced in and out of the lines that truck tires had drawn across the prairie. There were trucks coming and going, all bearing the big red "B" insignia of Ballard. Bright storage tanks gleamed in the pale sunlight on the high ground beside the discovery well. Number Six was a quarter of a mile west, and south of the road.

The engines and the pumps were silent on Number Six, but the men on the platform were busy "cementing in." Two trucks were unloading tankage beyond the mud pool and Stan Rawson looked them over critically as he parked his car. When oil operators handled their own hauling, they wasted a lot of horsepower and manpower. An oil man would have positive and unshakable convictions about the type of draw works he wanted on his platform, but he bought his trucks on the basis of rated capacity and then forgot all about the rated capacity. Maybe that was the way to do it. A fleet owner could not work that way.

Neil Ballard was a tall, lean man in his early thirties. He was standing beside a stained and battered station wagon and he wore a Stetson hat, a tweed jacket, lumberjack shirt and Army slacks. The costume was picturesque but the man himself looked both undernourished and in need of sleep. He ground a cigarette under his heel and lighted another one.

"Rawson," he said, "I had a phone call awhile ago. A driver of yours named Garra has been arrested in Pennant with one of my stolen trucks."

Rawson's jaw tightened. "We took that truck over from a driver who claimed that he was sick. The papers didn't say that it was your truck."

"Papers are easily faked. Let's get in out of the wind."

Ballard opened the rear door of the station wagon and slid in. Rawson followed him and closed the door. Beth Ballard was in the front seat and she was dressed as she had been when Rawson talked to her in his own office. She turned around in the seat and waved to him. Neil Ballard dropped ashes on his trousers and brushed them off nervously.

"Sheriff Jess Wilson, Burk Halverson's hand-picked law officer, is claiming my thousand-dollar reward," he said.

RAWSON braced his back against the door on his side, twisting his body so that he could face Ballard. "Let us get one thing straight," he said grimly: "Do you think that I've been hijacking your trucks?"

Ballard's smile was weary. "Not for a minute."

Beth Ballard spoke softly from the front seat. "You forget that I typed the papers for you when that driver turned over the truck."

Rawson had forgotten. Neil Ballard's emphatic statement was immediately stripped of all meaning. The Ballards did not have faith in him; they merely had evidence in his favor.

"It's a stupid play," he said. "Even if I have a hard time proving that I did not fake those papers myself, no court will believe that I stole one of your trucks, or that Garra did—and

*"I had a phone call awhile ago. Garra has been arrested in Pennant with one of my stolen trucks."*

that we drove it into Pennant, with reward notices posted all over the place."

"No." Ballard pushed the Stetson back from his forehead. "But look at it this way. That is one of my biggest trucks and it was hauling the engine and equipment that I need to start the Ballard-Decker Number One. I've got to get that one started, Rawson, to confirm my lease with Decker, and I can't duplicate that equipment in time. Deliveries are murderously slow and I've got to bring my stuff over the mountains from Capitol City under winter conditions. Those fellows can hold my truck and my equipment as evidence until they have some sort of trial."

"Are you sure that they can?"

"Yes. Pennant is in another State and all of the law in Wazee County is under Burk Halverson's thumb. Claiming my thousand dollars gives them a strong card. By my own terms, I pay off on a conviction. The claimant of the reward will hold my property until there is a court decision. I've already talked to my attorneys."

Stan Rawson frowned at his own clasped hands. He had considered the Ballard notice a mistake when he first saw it. He thought now about Burk Halverson, sitting coldly behind his desk and laying down his take-it-or-leave-it offers. He thought, too, of Sam Decker and his talk in Blackie's, of Sam's deal with Sentinel Oil which would split the Ballard holdings in two if Neil Ballard failed to start a well in time.

The wheels of thought went around and around. Ballard was speaking again. "I had a call from my driver this morning before the Pennant call came through," he said, "so I knew that he had lost the truck. He was held up by two men with guns yesterday evening on the mountain road west of Etruria City. He and his swamper were locked in a mountain cabin all night."

Stan Rawson heard the words but they registered only vaguely on his mind. It was easy enough for men with guns to prey on truck-drivers. A truck-driver had enough to do. He wasn't anyone's standing army.

"I could bail Garra out, I guess."

His own words fell without weight in the suddenly quiet station wagon. He was aware that both Neil and Beth were looking at him, but he was staring at his hands again; big, rough hands that were built for heavy stuff and not for light subtleties. He could bail Garra out, acknowledging the charge of stealing a Ballard truck, then beat the charge in court eventually. He could go on with "business as usual" and the Ballards could worry about their own problems.

The wheels of thought continued to revolve. There had been no big red "B" on that truck last night. The men who stole it had either painted it over or substituted another door. Trucks came in standard brands with interchangeable parts.

His eyes lifted to Ballard's face.

"How can anyone in Pennant identify that truck as yours and place charges against Garra?" he said.

"They want me to come over and identify it."

Rawson straightened. "As soon as you do, they've got you on the hook. They know, *because they stole it,* that it is your truck; but right now, legally speaking, they are holding *a* truck and *a* driver, with no evidence of theft."

Ballard shook his head slowly. "I have to identify it."

"You're busy today. Phone them and tell them that. Tell them that you'll take a look at the truck tomorrow."

"What difference will that make?"

Neil Ballard's eyes were measuring; the eyes of a man whose life is an eternal Yes or No. He was over his

nervousness and back in the driver's seat as a big oil executive. Stan Rawson decided that he had nothing that he wanted to sell to Neil Ballard and that, consequently, he had no sales talk to make.

"I'm in this mess, too," he said; "I would like to have those twenty-four hours."

"I'll do as you wish, then, of course." Neil Ballard nodded and the man himself was gone, hidden entirely behind the mask that he utilized for terminating business discussions. "I wanted to be sure that we understood each other since any move that I made would result in charges being placed against your man."

"Thanks. There will be no misunderstanding." Rawson paused a moment. "I would like to have your duplicate set of keys for that truck. Somebody in your organization will have them. I'd like them this afternoon. I've got some identifying of my own to do."

Rawson knew how to terminate an interview himself. He pressed down on the release catch of the door. Only then, as he was about to leave the station wagon did he look at Beth. Her eyes met his candidly, without retreat, and she did not look like a Ballard of Ballard Oil; she was a beautiful woman who might, conceivably, have a sense of humor.

"I had an idea for a while," she said, "that we were going to do something about the people who steal our trucks—but, anyway, we have fixed a date for identifying one of them. That's something."

Her brother turned to her impatiently. "We are doing all that we can do," he said. "It's a difficult situation."

Beth Ballard did not look at him. She was still looking at Stan Rawson. "It is a very difficult situation," she said.

RAWSON walked back to his own car. The tankage had been unloaded and one of the trucks was gone. The other, he saw, would not be going. It was settled at an angle into a small depression and it had a broken axle. Axles did not break easily on the big trucks, but a man could break any mechanism ever built if he overloaded it and overstressed it. That, of course, came back to an oil man's philosophy on trucks. There were times when an hour of time was worth more than a truck. An independent could not afford to think like that because a single truck was a good part of his overhead.

He drove back along the rutted road over land that Neil Ballard had under lease and he felt small in a country where everything was big. He did not even have the opportunity for growth because the field would grow too fast for him. He could not keep up, could not make money fast enough to afford broken axles on trucks spilled in a ditch.

It was the dark side of a picture that he had examined many times before. There was a bright side, the side that kept him in business and kept him trying, but he was not in the mood to look at that. In spite of himself, he had been drawn in from the side lines and involved in a fight between two of the giants. He had nothing to win, but he had been played for a sucker and his best driver was in jail accused of stealing a truck to which he, Stan Rawson, had assigned him. He had refused cards, but cards had been dealt to him, and he was playing the hand of Neil Ballard. If he won, the chips would be Ballard's, and if he lost, they would be his own.

THERE was snow in the air. It was no longer a threat but a reality. Big flakes were floating lazily across the road and the sky was a dull gray. He had the windshield wipers working by the time that he reached his garage and he had to wait while the K-2 pulled in ahead of him. He had dispatched it to the wildcat with the load that he had picked up in Pennant. Forty miles out and forty miles back; and it had covered the home trip empty. That was another of the many things wrong with independent trucking in an oilfield.

There was a copy of the Etruria City *Messenger* on his desk; he would have brushed it aside with his mail if the black headline on the front page had not commanded his attention. It was a banner head—*New Ballard Company Organized.* Below that, the story ran across two columns:

> A new company, to be known as the Ballard Construction Company, has been organized by Elizabeth Ballard, the sister of Neil Ballard, the president of the Ballard Company. The new company, which will operate in the Stateline field as soon as the legal formalities are completed, will engage in general contracting, and will, it is assumed, take over the drilling and construction contracts on the Ballard oil properties.
>
> Associated with Miss Ballard in the new venture are . . .

The names that followed meant nothing to Stan Rawson. Beth Ballard had assured him that her ability was the ability of selecting good men for the work that she undertook to do, so he assumed that the associates would measure up. He frowned at the black print and he remembered how casually he had brushed her proposition aside last night. It had not been a wild idea. She had already worked out her plan to spend her money under her own control and still aid her hard-pressed brother.

The phone rang, and he lifted it from its cradle indifferently. The voice of Francisco Garra came across the wire. "Boss? This is Garra. I am in this small jail of Pennant. They have permit' me one phone call to get a lawyer."

Rawson's eyes narrowed. "With people listening to you?"

*"Sí."*

"And to me?"

*"Sí."*

"What is the charge, Frisco?"

"It is a maybe charge—like a maybe stomach-ache. Maybe I steal a truck, they tell me. Maybe it belonged to Señor Neil Ballard. Maybe somebody gets a thousand dollars. It is a lonely jail. You get me a lawyer?"

Rawson spoke slowly, like a man trying to make up his mind. "It is snowing, Frisco," he said. "Those people over there are all wrong about the truck and about the thousand dollars. If you still need a lawyer tomorrow, you will have one."

Francisco Garra expelled his breath slowly.

*"Sí,* Señor Boss," he said. *"'Sta bueno."*

The receiver of the phone in Pennant clicked and Rawson had a mental picture of Francisco Garra. Garra would react to a phony charge as he reacted to a trucker who did not take the load through. His pride would resent the accusation of theft and it would resent more the payment of tribute. He had intelligence and he knew how to convey information without making a point of it. Rawson rose from his desk and his wide shoulders were swinging as he entered the garage where Red Logan was putting a patch on an inner tube.

"Go on home, Red," he said, "and catch a little sleep. I've got a job for you tonight at ten."

## CHAPTER FOUR

ANGER built up in Rawson through the day and it sparked every act of the day. Snow in the high country meant blocked roads—and men on remote projects all over Mesa County discovered suddenly that there was equipment in Etruria City that was essential to their work and to their well-being. The Rawson trucks worked and the men came in wet, sullen and profane. Stan Rawson was as tired and as wet as any of them, but the profanity was dammed up inside of him and he took it that way on the night road to Pennant.

Red Logan crouched beside him on the wide seat of the K-2. Logan was the one man, apart from Garra, whom Stan could trust. The others were merely men he hired, restless spirits,

most of them, who might be working for Ballard or for Halverson tomorrow or next week, depending upon how the winds of their opportunity blew. The headlights pushed into the heavy, slanting snow barrier and the white stuff kept coming against the K-2 relentlessly, smothering the slashing wipers, blanketing down on the hood, wiping away the shoulder lines that gave definition to the road. Red Logan wiped the mist off the rear-vision mirror.

"There's a fellow behind us. A medium-sized car. He's sort of hanging there. Not gaining any."

"I know. I've been wondering about him."

Rawson held to his steady speed. There were many legitimate reasons why a man in a car would stay behind him. A truck was a good trail-breaker on a snowy night. On the other hand, the Halverson crowd might have someone keeping tabs on him. Halverson was playing for big stakes, the Decker land and all the land that might conceivably follow Sam Decker into the Sentinel camp. In such a game trucks, and their owners, were small white chips.

It was impossible to see the marker which identified the spot where two States met, but the speedometer fixed the spot approximately. Rawson experienced again the feeling that he had once put behind him, he hoped, forever: the feeling of entering enemy territory. The forces of law and order in Mesa County might be futile, indifferent to the interests of the alien Ballard who scattered few favors and little prosperity; but the forces of law and order in Wazee County were definitely hostile to people from across the line. Men, whether they wore badges or not, in Pennant, lived on the goodwill of Burk Halverson and Sentinel Oil. Rawson had felt their enmity in the matter of Garra's arrest and he was going against them as an enemy. He watched the rear-vision mirror.

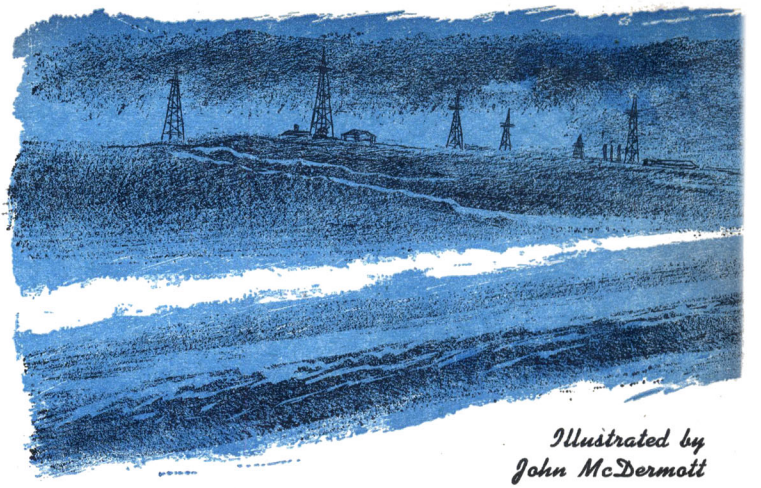
"We'll be reaching the fork in the road soon," he said. "Let's stop and see if that fellow goes by."

RAWSON pulled toward the shoulder, feeling for it, and braked cautiously to a stop. Red Logan swore.

"He stopped, too! And he turned his lights off."

"It's hard to be sure about his lights. I lost them on every curve and every time he angled a bit. This snow is pretty heavy."

Rawson studied the rear-vision mirror intently. He could hear nothing except his own idling engine and there was no flash in the mirror, no gleam of light. It was a situation on which he could guess wrong. He shrugged his shoulders and reached for the door-handle.



*Illustrated by John McDermott*

"I'm going back for a look," he said.

"I wouldn't."

"It's a flip-up, but if they are against us, they will have friends in Pennant."

"You got a gun?"

"No."

He stepped out into the darkness and the snow came almost to the tops of the combat boots that he wore. Once he walked clear of the glowing tail-lights, the night was pocket-dark. The snow spiraled as it fell and it confused his sense of direction. He plodded on doggedly and the old abandoned emotion was strong now. Night, discomfort and enemy territory! He knew that trinity well. He knew how they all added up and he felt a little of that, too—of fear.

He almost walked into the car before he saw it, and he had reached the door of the driver's side before he realized that the car was a maroon coupé. Beth Ballard rolled down the window.

"You have a lot of nerve walking back like that," she said. "You could get yourself killed."

Rawson did not admit that he had thought about that himself. Finding Beth in the car was an anticlimax and he felt foolish.

"You've got no business following me," he said.

"I've got the same right as any other citizen. You are using a State highway."

"Why should you?"

The snow was blowing into her face and she blinked. "I wouldn't follow you if you were going over to identify a truck."

He stood there thinking about that, with the snow swirling around him. "Okay," he said, "but stay out of my way."

"Right."

He turned and plodded back slowly. Beth's headlights came on and he could see where he was going. Red Logan looked at him inquiringly and he growled.

"It was a girl," he said. "She wasn't following me—she was following you. Maybe she wants to give you another five bucks."

Red Logan rubbed the unshaven gray stubble on his jaw. "Ah!" he said.

"Yeah!" Rawson put the truck in gear. "What's so 'Ah' about it?"

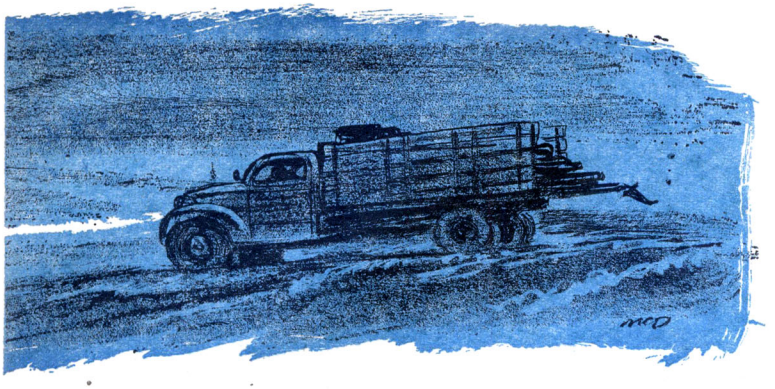
The road forked two ways and the straight road led to Cody Street and all the lights of town. They took the dirt road that curved left and the snow was so heavy that the road and prairie merged. It was hard going till they met another intersecting road. This was the route of Sentinel trucks coming in from the field and the snow was hammered down. Rawson watched the rear-vision mirror and the headlights of Beth's car kept coming along.

THERE was light now behind the screen of falling snow, and inside the town of Pennant, two blocks west of Cody Street, Rawson swung the wheel. The courthouse was a gray hulk looming out of the white night and beyond the courthouse, a block and a half from the courthouse square, was the jail; a narrow, two-story brick structure that stood isolated from its neighbors, surrounded by unkempt, vacant lots. There was a single yellow light burning behind a downstairs window and there was a huge truck parked in the lot on the north side of the jail.

"There's their evidence!"

Rawson switched off his lights and the one jail light seemed to swim in the white mist. He handed two keys to Red Logan. "Get over there and be ready to start that truck," he said. "If I get Frisco out, he'll join you—and fast."

This point was the end of his planning, but Rawson was quietly



*Red Logan crouched beside Stan on the wide front seat—one man whom he could trust.*

confident of himself now. He had no plan for getting Garra out of the jail because he did not know what obstacles he might encounter. He was in Pennant, however, for the purpose of taking Garra back with him. If he could get away with it, he was going to steal a stolen truck, too—and let the law of Pennant decide what to do about the disappearance of an unidentified truck and the escape of an unbooked prisoner.

He moved swiftly toward the jail and the snow was soundproofing the world. He paused under the lighted window, then climbed up the outside of the stone stoop which led to the door. By holding onto the railing of the stoop and swinging his body far out, he could look into the room.

It was a lonely jail, Garra said, and he meant that he was the only prisoner. The jailer's room behind the window looked lonely, too. There was one man in the room, a bullet-headed youth who dozed in a chair beside a big-bellied stove. There was a gunbelt and a holster on the table against which his tilted chair was balanced. There was a telephone on that table, too, which worried Rawson more than the gun in the holster. The door of the jail would be locked, of course, and if this guard became suspicious or alarmed, he would phone for help.

Rawson dropped to the ground and the snow cushioned him. He moved cautiously around the building and there was no other light, no sound of life anywhere. He looked at the bars on the ground-floor windows and he could imagine hooking onto them with the winch of Ballard's big truck. They would come out of there when he put the pressure on.

"I could damn' near move the jail with that baby," he muttered regretfully, "but it wouldn't do."

He completed the circle of the building and he had convinced himself of the obvious. It is not easy to break into a jail nor to aid a man in breaking out. He studied the lighted window for a moment, the black hulk of the building and the break in the smooth pattern of falling snow where the smoke poured out of the chimney on the roof.

A man who stayed in the trucking business had to know how to lick tough problems or he did not stay long. A germ of an idea grew and expanded as he stood there. He hunched his shoulders against the cold and turned back to his truck. Beth's car was parked in the shadows and she came forward as he bent over his toolbox.

"Can I help?" she said.

He shook his head. "Just stay out of it!"

He sensed the fact that he was being unnecessarily ungracious again, but he had no time for tact or diplomacy. He took the coiled tow-rope out of the toolbox and two short, flat boards out of the body of the truck. He walked away, then, and left Beth standing there.

In the dark behind the jail, he uncoiled the rope and made a cast with the hook end toward the bars of the second-story window. He made four casts before the hook caught the bars and held. His nerves were tightening up. Even on a snowy night, there might be a deputy patrolling the jail grounds occasionally or some late citizen coming home in a car with glaring lights. He tied the two boards to his belt and climbed swiftly up the rope. It was slippery on the window ledge and he gripped the bars tightly while he kicked the snow away. The overhang of the roof was dark above him and he fastened the hook to it with his first cast. He reached out from the ledge with one hand holding the bar while he tested the grip of the hook. The snow blinded him and he hesitated for a moment; then he gripped the line and swung out over space on it.

He was a pendulum swinging from the jail roof and he waited until his weight plumbed the line before he climbed. When he stood solidly on the roof, he drew a deep breath, reeled in his line and crossed the slippery, treacherous surface to the chimney. He protected his mouth and nostrils with his bent arm, but the smoke stung his eyes as he placed the boards in position over the chimney openings.

There was no time to lose once that was done, and he slid down his line without any intermediate stop at the second floor. The snow was waist-deep where he landed in the drift against the wall, but he snapped his wrist sharply and sent a spiral traveling up the line which dislodged his anchored hook. He was wading out as the rope came down and he tossed it in a loose loop on the path of the steps. He swung up again on the outside of the steps and looked in the window.

The jailer was no longer dozing in his chair. There was smoke in the room and he was on his feet, snapping the flue valve on the stovepipe back and forth. He gave that up as useless and looked toward the phone. It was the moment that Rawson dreaded, the big gamble of his plan—and the moment passed swiftly. The jailer did what ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have done under the same circumstances. Something was blocking his chimney and filling the room with smoke. Whether he could do anything about it or not, he wanted to look at the chimney. He moved toward the door and when he opened it, Rawson was waiting for him.

The tall, bullet-headed jailer had time only to look surprised. Stan Rawson drove his fist to the man's chin and came in behind the punch as the man reeled. He kicked the door closed and walked the jailer past the table with a wrestling grip that tied up the man's arms. The smoke was dense now in the room.

"I want the keys to the prisoner's cell," he demanded. "Have you got them on you?"

"Some place. I got—"

The jailer was groggy, and Rawson released his arms, walked behind him as he fumbled for his keys, and opened the inner door. There were four cells in the downstairs block and Garra was in the second cell. He grinned broadly when he saw Rawson.

"I know you come," he said, "I change places with this burro, no?"

"You do."

Rawson took the keys from the fumbling fingers of the jailer and opened


*"I want the keys to the prisoner's cell," Rawson demanded.*

the cell door. Garra stepped out with one fist cocked and he was no longer grinning. "I can hit him one time?"

Rawson pushed him back. "He's been hit," he said.

He no longer felt regret at the necessity for ruthlessness. If Garra wanted to hit this big fellow, the man had earned it somewhere along the line. Rawson snapped the cell door closed. There was no smoke in the cell corridor but the jail office was black with it. Rawson and Garra held their breaths as they raced through it. The cold air and the snow felt good in their faces as they closed the front door and stood for a second on the steps.

It was a jail-break and it had been easy, almost too easy.

A man stepped out from the shadows beside the steps. He had a gun in his hand.

"Stand right there!" he said.

Rawson was on ground level and Garra was on the second step. Pale light from the jail window flowed over them and in the splash from the pool of light, they could see the menacing figure with the gun. Some accident, perhaps, had brought him, or the failure of the jailer to phone some certain number at a certain time. Whatever it was, the man knew how to hold a pistol and he did not step close enough to invite attack.

"You on the steps, come down slowly with your hands up!"

He was in command of the situation and Garra moved cautiously, his hands held high. But another voice spoke quietly from the shadows.

"You with the gun, drop it in the snow!"

The man tensed and half turned. Beth Ballard was standing within six feet of him and she had a small automatic in her hand. She was wearing the windbreaker, the slacks and laced boots. There was nothing faltering nor feminine about her; she was someone with a gun, someone who looked capable of pulling the trigger. The man dropped his own gun in the snow and Rawson stepped forward. He could see the man's face now: the hard face with the thin lips and the broken nose, the face of the man who called himself Leo Maxon, a driver with a stomach-ache who could not drive his truck.

Rawson's jaw tightened.

"Put the gun away, Beth," he said.

He called her Beth and did not think about it. He was thinking that this man was all of Pennant, the stealer of trucks. This man was the representative of Halverson who was too frail to hit. This man was a double-crossing scoundrel in his own right. Rawson walked into him and Leo Maxon's hands came up. Rawson's left slashed out and his right was coming up after it. Maxon blocked the left but he was wide open for the right.

That right fist, with all the power of Rawson's blocky, close-coupled body behind it, crashed against Maxon's jaw. The man seemed to grow two inches in height before he started to go down and Rawson hit him twice more as he was folding. His lips were tight against his teeth and he did not see the man hit the ground.

"Let's go!" he said. "Take your car up to Cody Street and leave it, Beth. You'll ride with me. I'll pick you up. Red's in the big truck, Frisco—"

He was turning toward the shadowed street where the K-2 waited, when Garra gripped his arm. Beth was already running to her own car. Garra's voice was hoarse.

"The cargo!" he said. "The big engine! I already delivered it to a well. It was an old well. The dry hole, I think. The men were there to sign for it. I did not know then that this was a trick, a scheme."

## Chapter Five

Stan Rawson stood in the blinding snowstorm, twenty feet from the jail, and he had seconds in which to make a decision. Maxon would be raising an alarm, once he shook the knockout from his brain. They had to get away with the recaptured truck, out to the highway and over the State line with it. Neil Bal-

lard would get his truck back. He had no right to expect any more than that. No right at all!

But a truck was a white chip to an oil man. Neil Ballard did not know, probably, how many trucks he had. Neil Ballard made leases for land and he put down wells to hold his leases and to get the oil out of the ground before his rivals, tapping the same source from a different location, could drain that oil away. Somewhere in the wind-blown, snow-covered waste to the east of Pennant there was an engine and a hoist that Neil Ballard could not replace in time to save his lease on Sam Decker's Dollar D ranch. Hitting a thug like Leo Maxon was a meaningless gesture, because Burk Halverson did not care about trucks, either. By tricking Rawson and Rawson's man, Garra, into delivering Ballard's heavy equipment to an old rig, Halverson had won for himself a lease to Sam Decker's ranch. Maybe.

RAWSON swore through his teeth. "Take the big baby back to wherever you left that stuff, Frisco," he said. "I'll follow you."

He heard the snorting thunder of the big engine as he warmed up his own K-2; then Garra was wheeling the truck away, thirty tons of truck on a 254-inch wheelbase. There was snow deep on the flat bed, and snow piled over the hood and onto the front mudguards; but Red Logan had cleaned up the windshield and the mirrors. Garra was pointing his nose down Bridger Street, a street that cut across Cody. Rawson followed him, and the night was empty. A few lights gleamed feebly through the white quilt that waved in the storm, but no vehicles moved but their own. He had to slow down and watch, with his door open, when he came to Cody. Beth was standing on a corner in snow above her knees.

"Where are we going?" she said.

"To get that equipment of yours."

She looked at him curiously. A chain link had broken and was banging against his mudguard. He swore at it, and as the oath relieved some of the tension in his nerves, he swore again. Beth Ballard only yawned. "I know all of those words," she said. "Don't you know any new ones?"

Rawson straightened. "I'm sorry."

"That's all right."

The loose chain link kept banging as they left the pavement behind and plunged into the drifts of the country road. The Ballard truck up ahead was a swaying pair of tail-lights, and Rawson shifted down as his engine labored. He was a fool, he told himself, not to go home. Nobody would tackle the job of loading that heavy stuff on a night like this. Nobody! If he were in his own office and the president of a big oil company called him up personally, he would turn this job down. Yet here he was, taking it.

Beth stirred on the seat beside him. "Why did you want me to ride with you?" she said.

"Your car couldn't make it. You can pick it up tomorrow. Your brother will go over to identify a truck they haven't got."

"Oh!"

The girl's voice had disappointment in it. Rawson's rugged profile, seen in the dim light of the instrument panel, was a series of bold lines emphasized by chunks of shadow; a face that a pencil artist might do for a lumberjack study.

She drew her breath in and beat her chilled hands together.

"You are a pretty hard character," she said.

"So hard that I needed you to rescue me," he said. He frowned at the floating tail-lights ahead of him, and his voice softened: "I didn't even thank you."

"That's all right. I carry the gun because I drive around alone." She stared at the slashing windshield wipers. "I would have shot him," she said.

Rawson looked at her. He wondered about that. "You're a harder character than I am, then," he said. "I don't believe in guns."

The girl considered that statement gravely and shook her head. "I don't believe that people who use guns are hard. Mostly, I think, they are frightened. I was."

HE looked at her again, but he had no time to answer her. Garra was turning the big truck to the left. It was hard going as he felt his way into a side road. Rawson, driving in the grooves that the big tires cut, had an easier time. The headlights picked out the stark skeleton of an abandoned rig. This had been, once upon a time, a hope of fortune; but there had been no oil at the bottom of a long, laboriously drilled hole. Garra was swinging his truck around, tossing a high wake of snow as a vessel tosses spray. Rawson parked the K-2 beside the empty pipe rack.

"You'd better stay inside," he said.

Beth opened her door. "Not I! I'm seeing the whole show."

She followed him up on the drilling platform. Garra was backing the big truck. He stopped, and Red Logan helped him hook the winch to the wooden ramp in the back of the truck. Beth stood back as Rawson helped to steer the ramp into place. She was looking apprehensively at the "cargo," the precious piece of equipment that was vital to the Ballard-Decker Number One, the well that must be sunk to save the Decker lease.

It was a grim, surly-looking mountain of mechanism that took up one end of the drilling platform: an engine that looked like the front of a truck, and the huge, enclosed hoist machinery, both mounted on a long grooved base. It was over fifteen tons of dead weight—and these three men had to put it in the truck.

Rawson came up the ramp to the platform with Garra. They lashed the winch cable to the hoist and they moved swiftly, remembering one Leo Maxon, who would spread the alarm in Pennant, and wondering if Halverson's goons had enough enthusiasm for their work to organize a pursuit on a night like this. There was shelter from the storm in the shadow of the derrick. Rawson waved his hand to the north.

"I'm going over on that side with my truck," he said, "and I'll be hooked onto this big gimmick with a line. You'll handle the winch, Frisco, and Red will give me the signals."

Garra grinned at him and there was eagerness in the broad, fleshy face that dissipated some of the weariness. Garra's skin was blue and the small mustache had lost its jaunty look; it was a thin, limp line now. The job, however, was a challenge and a hazard. Garra liked such work.

"We'll do it," he asserted. "This winch, it has ten speeds. I play it like an organ."

"Right! Now about those signals."

Red Logan was holding the long beam flashlight in his hand. He looked thin and old, but his eyes were fixed gravely on Rawson's face as Rawson ran through the signals that he would need to do his part of the job. He nodded and slapped one mittened hand against his leg.

"That's all!" And Rawson turned. Beth was standing quietly to one side. She was wet and mud-spattered, but she had her chin up. He knew what would happen if he told her to stay out of this—what always happened when he told her to stay out of things.

"You're riding with me," he said.

BETH smiled, partly because he had beaten her to the punch, partly because she wanted to ride with him. She took one more look at "the big gimmick." It would have to be drawn in toward the center of the platform so that it would line up with the ramp and the winch could exert only a straight pull. Rawson, in his truck, would pull against it and his cable would form a wide open V design with the cable from the winch. Under pressure and guidance, the heavy equipment would move in on the platform, turning as it moved. That, at least, was the blueprint.

Rawson strode to his truck and she followed him. The snow was deep and this was wide-open prairie. Rawson drove carefully, taking a long

swing to avoid the drifts close to the platform. He stopped on the other side of the rig and Garra came out to him with the line. He drove straight away to take up the slack and his wheels, for all of the heavy chains, slid and spun. It was going to be tricky driving. He had to dig in like a cow pony anchoring itself when a lasso tightens on a steer, but he could not afford to dig in hard enough to stick.

He punched his gloved hand across his rear-vision mirror, and Logan's flash was waving. Garra was in the truck. Rawson moved his wheel to the right. He would have to be well east of the rig on the first pull. His eyes gleamed as excitement mounted in him. This, in a sense, was rodeo. It was fast, dangerous action and anything could happen. Beth opened her door.

"Hey!" he said. "What're you doing?"

"I'm going out to take those signals. You can't see them."

Her door window was rolled down, and she was standing out on the running-board. He looked at his outside mirror, and it was frosted over. The mirror above the windshield was fogged again. There was no time to argue with her.

His headlights cut a path across the white prairie, and he could see the jagged contour of the land in a series of snow-covered hummocks and blue hollows. He was headed downhill, and the truck skidded at the bottom. The chains bit in as he climbed out of the depression, and he was not quite level when he felt the cable tighten. Beth's voice was explosively fast.

"Left!" she shouted.

Rawson swung the wheel, and when the girl cried "Hold it!" he eased the engine weight against the cable and moved the wheel to the right again before he centered it.

"Forward, slowly. Now right!"

Her voice came to him faster than he could catch the signal from the waving flash. He could picture the scene on the drilling platform. The winch was exerting pressure on the big engine, straight pressure; but the pull of Rawson's cable was swinging it eastward and inching it toward the head of the ramp. Without Rawson's line, it would plunge off the platform to the ground as it turned; and if he missed a signal, it might still miss the ramp.

"Right! Right! Right!"

He swung, straining against the taut cable, conscious of the broken ground ahead of him and the spinning of his wheels on the frozen earth.

"Hold it!"

He had no time to think about Beth, no time to think about anything. The pictures in his mind unreeled, and he could see that big gimmick on the platform. It would be close to the top of the ramp. He could see in advance the climactic moment when those thirty-two thousand pounds tipped over and started down onto the bed of the truck. There were steel cages called headache posts now to protect the driver from that plunge, because in the past too many heavy weights had crashed through the cabs—but the big tons still broke loose and killed people.

"Left, Stan. *Left!* Position."

His heart jumped. This was it. He could work with a little slack for a few moments. The hoist was where he imagined it, lined up with the ramp, immobile, no longer pulled by the winch. The steadying truck must be behind it now, slowing it, steadying it, ready to swing right again if it yawed on the snowy platform or the slippery ramp.

The truck snorted and thundered as it bounced across the rough prairie, with the chain-clad wheels tossing the snow high. It skidded, turned half around, straightened again, and Beth screamed:

"Hold it!"

There was an icy wind blowing through the cabin. It would be appallingly cold out on the running-board where Beth clung. Rawson punched his glove once more across the clouded mirror. He could just barely see the point of light that signaled from the dark end of the drilling platform. The interpreting voice came to him:

"Straight ahead! *No!* Bear right a little!"

There was a mound about two feet high, and he hit it as the slack went out of the cable and he felt the pull of weight once more against his straining engine. He heard Beth's sharp cry above the snarl of the engine, but the wheel was jigging in his hands, and he felt as though he had been punched in the jaw.

***A man stepped out from the shadows. "Stand right there!" he said.***

*"Beth! She fell off!"* something inside of him was screaming, and some-other voice in his brain shouted: "Watch it! All of those tons are balanced on the ramp!"

He could not go to her. He could not find out if she were hurt or not. He dared not release his grip on the wheel for a second. He saw the signal light, a dull spark in the white night, swing frantically right, and his nerves protested even as he turned the wheel.

Beth had fallen off on the right side. She might be unconscious. He might run over her! He had no time to argue with himself, with his nerves, his instincts or the signal light. A terrific force was pulling against his engine, buffeting the truck, pulling him, skidding and protesting, over the snow-covered earth. He straightened the wheel and pulled against it. For a second the left side of the truck was high as the right wheels slid off the hummock. He was going over—then he slid backward a good two feet, and the truck righted itself.

The signal light was telling him frantically to hold that line, to ease back slowly. Sixteen tons of mechanism were sliding down the ramp onto the flat truck-bed, over the rollers and into the magic circle where they would ride easily. He drew a deep breath, and his muscles were trembling. Beth was out there in the darkness somewhere, and he was no longer oriented. The turning of the wheel had been a series of lefts and rights. He could not locate himself in relationship to the spot where he lost her. And the signal light was beckoning him into reverse.

He could not signal back. He was tied to a terrible, man-killing weight, and he could not let go. He let the clutch out, and the weight dragged him. . . .

The light was dancing and he knew that it was all over. Rawson drew the hand-brake tight, and then he was out of the truck on legs that trembled. His feet felt numb and the cold air slashed at him, but he moved past the nose of the truck, heading back the way he had come. Somewhere up ahead was the mound of snow where she had bounced off. Somewhere—

She came up into the glaring headlights of the truck, staggering a little, and stopped, blinded, like a rabbit on a road. Rawson plunged through the drift on his trembling legs; and as he reached her, he went down. His hands touched her as he fell, and she tumbled with him, rolling as she hit.

She was in his arms, and the white light of the K-2 flowed over them. There was a bruise on her cheekbone, and a dark, dirty line across her chin. The snow was in her face and in her eyelashes, and she was very beautiful.

"Beth," he said, "are you all right?"

His voice smothered on him, but his anxiety came through in the grip of his arms about her, the tension of his body.

"I'm fine, Stan. Swell—"

He picked her up, and she was amazingly light. If he had thought about her weight at all, he would have imagined her as heavier, more solid. The cold had soaked into her, and she was trembling.

"I loved it," she said; "I was never so excited!"

He turned toward the truck, slipping and sliding as the truck itself had done. He thought that this girl was wonderful, and that he had never been polite to her, that she took risks like a man but felt like a woman in his arms. He wanted to put all of that, or some of that, into words, but the words wouldn't come to him.

A truck horn called to them. Garra lay on it and eased up and pressed again, making music with it, triumphant music. They had the big gimmick on the truck, and all that they had to do was hammer their way home through a snowstorm that was building into a blizzard. The horn said that they could do it, and that Francisco Garra could play a winch or a truck like an organ. Stan Rawson eased Beth down, and he could say nothing at all because he was suddenly aware of the fact that as a man and a woman they stood in different worlds with a gulf between them. She was a Ballard; and still, tonight they had fought for the Ballard cause together. There was one thing that he could say.

"If you still want to have me in your outfit," he said, "I'll sign up."

"I want you."

Beth Ballard smiled, and he could not read the smile. He had remembered that she was a Ballard, but he had forgotten that the Ballards played for keeps, and that they always got what they wanted. Beth's fingers lingered a moment on his arm.

Far away, the truck horn sounded as Garra still made music.

# Position Unknown

**When a former Air Force colonel who has led a flight of B-29's is given the navigator's job on a transport plane, he's apt to be rebellious. But the Pacific is wide, and storms mean trouble.**

## by PETER DOLLAR

THE gravy run! I just can't figure it, the way some of these young pilots will talk! Now don't get me wrong. I am not beefing, understand. Oh, no! If there's a gravy run around, I'll take it every time. But look at it this way: Suppose you run into something out there—a sticky valve, a leaking oil line, something like that. It's a swell day. Not a cloud in the sky. You're sitting there fat, dumb and happy, when a couple of engines conk out. But you're on the gravy run; you haven't a thing to worry about. Except you're descending at five hundred feet a minute, with the throttles shoved into the instrument panel. And all of a sudden it isn't the gravy run any more. It's a mighty big ocean, brother, and it's all awfully wet.

Still, that's what they say. I don't know why they do it. It must make them feel good, I guess. Take Jeff Duncan, for instance. He had the same idea—until he got educated, that is.

The day Jeff came to work I was down in Personnel talking to Baldy Brogan's red-haired brat. The door opened, and in walked this tall skinny kid with the cowcatcher jaw. I thought he was homely until he grinned.

"Duncan," he said, leaning over the rail. "Jeff Duncan. What's yours?" From the glint in his eye I knew he didn't mean me.

"I beg your pardon." Kathleen was startled, but she managed to recover. She lifted that lovely Irish face and gave him the full treatment—icebox variety. The results were gratifying.

"Think nothing of it," Jeff mumbled, looking like he'd just run into a wall. "They sent me down here . . . I'm Duncan, I mean."

"So you said." Kathleen reached for the card file coldly. "Jake, this seems to be Mr. Duncan, one of our new junior pilots. Mr. Gillespie."

"An old friend of the family?" Jeff asked, pumping my hand. "An uncle, perhaps? I hope."

"Right the first time," I said. "Carry on."

"Your papers are here, Mr. Duncan," Kathleen was saying. "You're to take them and report to the navigation office for assignment."

Jeff pulled out of his spin. "Navigation? You must have the wrong Duncan. I'm a pilot!"

" 'Duncan,' " Kathleen read from the card, " 'Jefferson. Age: twenty-six. Previous experience: Lt. Colonel AAF. Flying time twenty-two-fifty. Hair: brown. Eyes'—er—right?"

"Sure," Jeff objected. "But I don't know a thing about navigation. I didn't hire on here to train as a bubble chaser."

"Every skipper flying this pond spent a year doing that," I told him. "Come along, and I'll introduce you to Baldy Brogan, the Chief Navigator. The young lady's father, by the way."

"Ugh," Jeff said. Kathleen couldn't help smiling, and his frown disappeared like a widow's insurance. "What time would you like to have lunch?" he demanded.

"I wouldn't," Kathleen said, but her voice lacked conviction.

Jeff grinned. "I'll be by about twelve—just in case you get hungry. It's been a rare pleasure, Miss Brogan."

"Likewise," mocked Kathleen, "I'm sure."

I suppose you know about women. There isn't one born who wouldn't have been curious about a good-looking young pilot—single—with grief on his mind. And Jeff had a load.

JEFF still wore the grin when he walked out of Baldy Brogan's office and bumped into the boss' daughter, who just happened to be cruising down the hall in the direction of the cafeteria. But it faded fast as the months went by. Riding the navigation stool was getting him down. No pilot likes that, especially a born airplane driver who's used to commanding a flight of B-29's. If it hadn't been for Kathleen, he probably would have taken off for China or South America or any place else he could park his pants in a cockpit.

Kathleen pondered the problem one evening in the Brogan living-room while her parents played double solitaire. The radio was tuned to a dance band, and she and Jeff were holding hands over the back of the couch when the great light dawned. Being a straightforward female, she went into action; and she hadn't talked around the subject for more than an hour before Baldy came up with a brilliant idea.

"Say!" he boomed, sneaking a red jack over the queen of hearts. "When are you kids going to get married?"

"Why, Papa!" Kathleen purred.

Mrs. Brogan's reaction was equally pleasing. "Oh," she sobbed, clasping Kathleen to her breast, "my poor dear baby."

Jeff looked pained. "I love your daughter dearly, Mrs. Brogan," he said, "but we can't get married. Not while I'm still navigating, at least."

"WHAT'S wrong with navigating?" Kathleen was put out in more ways than one.

"Let's not go into that," Jeff said. "It would take too long."

"Well!" Kathleen snapped. "My dad has been navigating for fifteen years. He seems to be doing all right."

"Your dad's not a pilot," Jeff said, "and that's not the point. I was referring to the two hundred and fifty bucks a month they pay me."

"Why didn't you say so?" Kathleen demanded. "Besides, I'm working."

"Don't change the subject," Jeff said.

"If it's money you need," the radio blared, "drop in and see Big Hearted Biff Harkins, the mad moneylender. Yes, folks, see Big Hearted Biff, and you'll say—"

"Turn that thing off!" Baldy yelled. "What's the matter, Jeff? Are you too good for the job? Or can't you cut the buck?"

"Brogan!" Mrs. Brogan ordered, "Stop shouting!"

"The gravy run," Jeff said. The cowcatcher jaw was beginning to jut.

"The gravy run!" Baldy shouted. "Listen, bub, you were wearing three-cornered pants when we pioneered this

drink, and it wasn't any gravy run then. What's more, if you don't like it, why don't you stop crying about it and quit?"

"Papa!" Kathleen wailed.

"I will," Jeff said, reaching for his hat. "In fact, I do."

DUNCAN was sweating out his thirty-day notice when I ran into him in the ready-room in Honolulu. It was a pickup crew; that was the week of the big wind last winter, and there hadn't been anything moving for days. Things had been quiet and restful until one of the bright boys at the airport had a brainstorm, and they pulled a crew out of the hotel in a hurry. "We're giving you nothing but gas," they said. "If you get through, okay; if not, turn around and come back with a weather report."

I'd checked the radio gear and was sitting around biting my fingernails over the sixteen-hour forecast, when Jeff slouched by and dropped into a chair. He didn't look happy.

"Mr. Jeff Duncan," I greeted him. "What's eating you?"

"Check ride," he mumbled, staring at a spot on the wall.

"So what?" I was fresh off a Sydney trip, and I hadn't caught up with the latest scuttlebutt. "They say when you pass your navigation check some of your boys get transferred to the coastwise run. Fifty bucks a month and promotion to the co-pilot's seat. You might even get to fly once in a while. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," Jeff said, "except I don't believe in Santa Claus."

"Let's cut out this torque-tube talk, bub," I said soothingly. "What's on your mind?"

"I was just thinking," Jeff said, "that I would have the luck to draw Baldy Brogan."

I didn't get it. "Baldy? Hell, he won't turn you down. Kathleen would slit his throat from ear to ear."

"That's what you think," Jeff said. The door opened, and Baldy Brogan walked in, looking grim.

"Hi, goldilocks," I said cheerfully. "Long time no see."

"Hello, Jake," Baldy grunted; then he saw Jeff—and he stopped in his tracks. "Oh," he said, "so it's you."

Jeff jumped out of his chair as if he'd been stabbed, and stood there stony-faced.

"Well, well," Baldy went on, "I'm flattered! Of all the armchair pilots on this airline, they give me the one who really loves his work. It's an honor to be allowed to check a man like you—Colonel."

Jeff flushed clear back to his ears. I hadn't heard anyone needle him like that since he worked out on an ex-Marine pilot two months before. But he set his jaw and kept it set.

"What's the matter, Colonel?" Baldy asked. "Aren't we speaking?"

"Now look, Baldy," I put in. "Relax. Take it easy."

"You know, Jake"—Baldy glared up at Jeff, who towered over him by a good six inches—"I think the Colonel is bored. I guess it isn't very exciting to navigate one of these crates from here to there after the things you've done, is it, Colonel? They don't hand out any medals for flying this drink."

Jeff's right fist clenched, and I started out of my chair, hoping I was big enough to stop the slaughter. But nothing happened. One corner of his mouth just twitched, as if he was trying to smile.

"That's right, Mr. Brogan," he said softly. "No excitement. No medals. This is the gravy run—haven't you heard?" And he started for the door.

*Jeff pulled out of his spin. "Navigation? You must have the wrong Duncan. I'm a pilot!"*


"Check the gear before you get on that airplane," Baldy yelled after him. "Check it good!"

The door slammed, and I let the silence settle for a minute before I opened my mouth. "Brogan," I said, "I've known you since the time you had hair on your head. Would you mind telling me what this is all about?"

The little guy looked back at me deadpan. "You wouldn't understand, Jake," he muttered. "This is between Jeff and me."

*"On instruments. Wind unknown. Severe turbulence. Lightning. Heavy rain. Postion unknown."*

HALF an hour later, when we staggered off the runway with a full load of gas, I was still in the dark. The sun went down as we leveled off, and the chain of islands faded under the starboard wing. Sheet lightning was flashing away to the north by the time we passed the Hilo Intersection, a hundred and seventy miles from Honolulu, and signed off with the tower. I dimmed the bulb above the radio table, and watched the blue light pulsing and throbbing across the sea of clouds.

The first bank we plowed into wasn't any of your soft stratified stuff. It must have been a CB blown off the

peaks of Hawaii, and I thought it would shake the rivets right out of the ship. We fastened our safety belts and hung on, bracing ourselves between jolts.

Every once in a while we'd break into the clear for a minute. The jagged edges of the big buildups that were rushing toward us were outlined against the black night. Then *boom!* We were in it again. The rain was coming down like a load of gravel on a tin roof, and the sound of the engines was only a background moan.

We climbed to nine thousand feet, trying to get out of the turbulence. The lightning was worse than ever up there. It broke off the edges of the props with a crack that would raise you right out of your seat. Our one passenger, a company employee, staggered up to the flight deck and wedged himself in behind Number Two life-raft. He said he was tired of dodging the St. Elmo's fire that was running up and down the middle aisle.

In the midst of all this there was cold war being waged over the navigation table. I don't know how he managed it—I was having trouble holding onto my fillings, myself—but Baldy had braced himself between the stool and the bulkhead, and he was giving Jeff the full treatment.

We'd hit a big bump, and he'd kind of grunt. "What's the meridian transit of Arcturus?" he'd shout in Jeff's ear.

Jeff would crimp his long legs under the table to keep from being tossed into the astrodome, and go grimly to work.

"Give me a radius of action for San Diego," Baldy would yell.

"What's the local time and date in Suva, Colonel?"

Of course, it was a waste of time. But there wasn't much else for Jeff to do, the way we were careening around in the soup. The hourly navigation report was always the same. "On instruments. Wind unknown. Severe turbulence. Lightning Heavy rain. Position unknown."

Baldy kept at it. But after a while Jeff started hitting back. He'd supply the answers all right; only, after each one he'd turn to Baldy with a serious expression.

"You mustn't worry so much, Mr. Brogan," he'd say. "After all, this *is* the gravy run."

The more he talked like that the madder Baldy got. But after an hour or two he began to realize that he couldn't win. Jeff was too sharp. Besides, that bulkhead was getting awfully hard. In disgust he pried himself loose and went aft.

SEVEN hours out, we were still plowing through the soup. It was smoother, more stratified stuff by then, but the skipper was getting impatient. We were close to the Point of No Return, and unless you're interested in taking a swim, you don't go past that without knowing your position. We had no idea of ours. There hadn't been a chance for a star fix all night.

We were on the gauges, flying at seven thousand feet, when the skipper decided to climb again. I sent in the request for change of altitude. Joe Wendell, our flight engineer, poured the power to the mills, and we started nosing up. It was a good move. At ten thousand the white stuff began to disperse. There was a high overcast, but it was thin and the stars poked through.

Baldy went into action. He'd been haunting the flight-deck for hours, reading temperatures and airspeeds, and running his findings off on a slide-rule. There was a groove in the deck where he'd wandered back and forth to the cockpit checking the clouds.

"Pull out the spare octant, Colonel," he ordered. "I'll shoot a couple of stars from the cockpit while you work the astrodome. I don't like the looks of this forecast."

Jeff laid the spare box on the table next to his own octant, and lifted the lid. From the expression on his face when he looked inside, I thought he'd uncovered a nest of snakes. The box was empty.

"Why, you stupid blankety blank!" Baldy howled, going up like a toy balloon. "I thought I told you to check the gear before we left. Of all the—"

That was as far as he got, because we chose that moment to barge into the largest cumulus cloud in that part of the ocean. The ship went up eight hundred feet in nothing flat, and came back with a gut-scrambling jar that drove my chin into my knees. At the same moment something went *bang* on the port wing, and started jumping around like a ring-tailed ape with the D.T.'s.

"Feather Number One!" the skipper yelled, pulling the fire-control valve. The ship yawed to the left, and he and Joe started pushing buttons like crazy. Charley Delucca, the co-pilot, switched the vacuum pump over to the right side. A minute later the manifold pressure and r.p.m. needles on Number One were hugging zero, and we were sitting out there on three.

The skipper rolled the rudder tabs back and called for the navigation department. It was in bad shape. Baldy was draped across Jeff's legs, still cussing, while our one octant rattled around in small pieces on the deck.

"We're turning around," the skipper said when they got untangled. "Grab a fix, and give me an ETA for Honolulu."

Jeff opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He held a piece of broken lens in his hand. "The octant—" he gulped.

"Now, wait a minute!" the skipper yelled, handing the controls to Delucca and storming out of the cockpit. "What in hell's wrong with the spare?"

"There isn't any, sir," Jeff stammered. "I forgot to check it."

"You forgot to check it!" the skipper shouted. "That's a hell of a note!"

"Don't blame the Colonel." Baldy couldn't resist it. "He didn't think this could happen on the gravy run."

THE skipper ignored him. He was studying the chart, weighing the hazards of punching that front again on three engines.

"How far to Equi-time Point, Mister?" he asked.

"Fifty-five minutes." Jeff showed him the forecast.

"We passed it an hour ago," Baldy said.

The skipper stared at him, and his face was tense. "You know what that means," he said softly. "Back it up, Mr. Brogan."

"All right," Baldy said, sketching lines on the chart. "Here's Equi-time Point, and the forecast calls for two well-defined fronts with a forty-knot wind on the nose. But we hit only one front, and we hit it too soon. So suppose the weather had moved over like this, to the northwest, as I think it has. Figure it yourself. Forty knots on the tail instead of the nose. Eighty miles in an hour. Which means we get to the Point of No Return in six hours instead of eight and a half. It means that right now we're over two hundred miles beyond it."

The skipper's expression was pained. I knew how he felt. If Baldy was right, he couldn't turn around, even on four engines. On three it was suicide. But the book said different. If you lose an engine or fail to get a fix by forecast Time of No Return, you go back, but quick. Not knowing our position, he was in a bind.

"It's against regulations, Baldy," he groaned.

Jeff was making noises like he had something to say. The skipper came out of it and turned on him grimly. "Let's have it, Mister. What's your brilliant opinion?"

"I'd take Mr. Brogan's word for it," Jeff answered red-faced, "if I were you. But if you want a fix, I think I can get one, sir."

"*If* I want a fix!" the skipper exploded. "Just how do you propose to do that?"

"I think I can make an astrolabe that will work," Jeff said, "with a protractor and a piece of string."

Baldy's jaw sagged. "Where did you get that idea?" he demanded.

"From the Chief Navigator's daughter," Jeff said without smiling. "She told me her dad dreamed it up."

"Look," the skipper said. "Let's not have a history of the contraption. Will it work?"

"Well, I'll be damned," Baldy said. "I think it might."

"Okay. You've got half an hour." The skipper looked up from the chronometer. "Make it good," he told Jeff.

Ever notice how the flight deck of an airplane smells? It has a pleasant, familiar odor you can get homesick for after a few thousand hours in the air. But right about then it began to stink. I was sweating as I watched Jeff tape a protractor to one edge of a three-foot rule and punch a hole through the middle with a pair of dividers, for I was thinking that gadget was all that stood between us and a belly-landing in the drink.

A minute later Baldy shoved a flashlight into my hands, and we went to work. The skipper and Charley Delucca flew straight and level while Jeff stood on the navigation stool with his head in the astrodome, sighting the stars. As he tipped the rule, a weighted string, hanging plumb from the hole in the center of the protractor, gave an altitude reading on the azimuth scale.

"Mark!" Jeff yelled.

I flashed on the light, and Baldy's thumb closed down on the string. "Forty-two," he said.

"Mark!"

"Forty-one."

In ten minutes we had three stars, ten shots on each. Everyone in the crew except Charley Delucca was leaning over Jeff's shoulder when he put the first line on the chart. It was way ahead of our forecast position. The second one crossed about fifty miles south of track. The third one fell in, and he had it. You could have put the head of a small spike in that fix, but it was the prettiest triangle I ever saw. And it was three hundred miles *past* the Point of No Return.

For a minute no one spoke. We were thinking what dead ducks we would have been if we'd turned around. Then Joe Wendell was pounding my back and yelling something in my ear. I grabbed Jeff's hand.

"Nice work, bub," I grinned. "My grandchildren will thank you for this."

"That's my boy, Jake!" Baldy chortled, forgetting himself. He glanced at Jeff, and his voice trailed off. "That is—nice work, huh?"

The skipper patted Jeff's arm. "Good thinking, Duncan. You too, Baldy. I won't forget it."

"Neither will I, sir," Jeff said, and his face was solemn.

THE rest? Well, there wasn't much to it. Using that contraption of Jeff's, we hit our ETA within a couple of minutes. The sun was rising over Mt. Diablo when we let down into that good San Francisco fog. It never smelled sweeter. With the dead prop hanging in the air, the skipper put the ship on the runway as if he was serving afternoon tea.

We taxied up to the gates, and Kathleen was standing in the waiting-room with her nose pressed against the glass. Jeff didn't seem to notice her. Neither did Baldy. They walked into Operations together, looking glum, and started filing their gear. Finally Jeff cleared his throat.

"Thanks for the ride, Mr. Brogan." He hesitated. "And give my regards —uh—love to Kathleen."

Baldy whirled, and a big smile spread over his Irish pan. "You'd better do it yourself," he said. "Seattle's a long way off, and that's where you're going when I turn in my report. As a co-pilot, Colonel."

"But my resignation—"

"I filed that sometime ago," the little guy chuckled. "In the wastebasket."

Jeff smiled for the first time in twelve hours. "Gee, Mr. Brogan—" He changed his mind and started for the door as Kathleen rushed in, looking slightly disheveled.

"Jeff!" she cried. "Darling—" She saw Baldy, and stopped in confusion.

"Just call me 'Colonel,'" Jeff laughed, taking a long step forward and wasting no time.

Kathleen came up for air. "Papa," she asked happily, "are you all right? They said you had trouble."

"Trouble?" Baldy grinned. "Why, baby, haven't you heard? Nothing ever happens out there. This is the gravy run."

*Illustrated by Grattan Condon*

*From Jeff's expression, I thought he'd uncovered a nest of snakes.*

**At the end of his last rodeo he had four hundred dollars and seven well-knit fractures. So he took a peaceful winter job breaking horses, to earn himself a ranch.**

# Bronc' Stomper

by FRANK BONHAM

CAL HAWKINS was thirty years old, and in a bronc'-stomper thirty years is comparable to sixty in a banker. For twelve years he had followed the shows, always paying expenses, sometimes showing a profit. At the end of his last season he showed a net balance of four hundred dollars and seven well-knit fractures. It was getting harder every year to take the jolts. It was becoming more disturbing to shake hands with crippled rodeo bums still riding the circuit for the drinks they could cadge.

After the fall shows, he took a winter job breaking horses. He had made up his mind: He would not go back. He would stay with horse-breaking until he had a stake and put it down on a ranch.

The horse-breaking job ended in February, sooner than he had thought it would, but it was like coming out of a cage to be on the move again, drifting leisurely up through New Mexico and waiting for a job to manifest itself.

When he heard of a little roping over at Matador, he drifted thirty miles out of his way to watch it. It was an amateur affair, and, being a professional, Hawkins could not compete in it. He merely stood behind the chutes, talking with a couple of cowboys he knew and trying, without being too obvious about it, to get enough of the glorious rodeo smell into his lungs to last a while.

One of the men tried to talk him into making an exhibition ride on a bronc' none of the local talent had been able to stay with. "No more outlaws for me," Cal said. "I used to get medical expenses out of riding those brutes, but I'll be danged if I'll ride for less."

But every time a rider came out on a bronc', every time a steer's hoofs thudded down the trampled earth, his hands clenched the chute bars until they ached, the way something inside him ached. He was like a drunkard having his beer, while his

*Illustrated by Charles Horgens*


throat screamed for the big drink in the little glass.

But he stuck to his decision. No more bronc's for Cal Hawkins.

After the show he had a tip that the big Spade ranch was looking for a horse-breaker. Cal tackled Roy Shelly, the manager, in a saloon. Shelly was a lean old New Mexican with dry brown skin and a face with more wrinkles than a concertina. He looked like a man who would be contemptuous of anyone who knew less about ranching than he did and hate anyone who knew as much. He had a harassed expression about the eyes and a mouth like a stubborn bronc's.

"Cal Hawkins, eh?" he said. "Do you tame them, Cal, or just put spur marks on them?"

"I give them the three-day treatment," Cal answered. "Ten dollars a head. I'll work steady, if you want. Don't think I'll be riding next season."

"Getting too rich to ride for points?"

"Getting too smart."

Shelly finished his drink. "I'll want a contract, anyway. You don't draw a dollar till you've broke twenty."

THEY walked down the windy street in the February dusk. "If you're serious about working for a living," Shelly said, "you might do yourself some good out there. Judge Taverner's talking about breaking somebody in as range foreman. Right now I haven't got a man I'd trust to pour whisky out of a boot."

Under a tree in a vacant lot, a wagon was waiting. Shelly hitched the horses while Cal tied his horse and pack-animal to the tail of the wagon. Shelly got up on the seat and filled his pipe. "Joyce ought to be along pretty soon," he said. "The Old Man's daughter. Not in the contract, by the way. Any taming you do there is out of your own pocket."

A girl hurried from the street with some parcels. She wore a riding-skirt and gabardine shirt and a short Chimayo jacket. Her hair, the color of rubbed oak, was long, with a clean shimmer. Roy Shelly introduced them. She offered her hand and a smile. She was more friendly than she had to be with a plain horse-breaker, Cal thought, and it occurred to him that this job might be less onerous than the average.

As they started out of town, crowded onto the seat, Joyce glanced at him. "I didn't see you ride today, did I?"

"I'm not riding any more," Cal told her.

Joyce smiled. "Well, you'll be able to keep your hand in, in case you ever go back—or I don't know the Duke."

Cal was aware of Roy Shelly stirring uncomfortably on the seat. "The Duke?" Cal said.

"Didn't Roy tell you about him? Dad bought him for me last year, but nobody's been able to break him. He's a Morgan-Thoroughbred cross. He'll see that you don't forget how to ride the rough ones!"

Cal glanced at Shelly, but the manager said nothing; and it would have been awkward, just now, to remind him that a horse-breaker's job was to break horses, not to make five-gaited saddlers out of them.

When he looked back at the girl, he was not sure he cared to quibble, anyway. Joyce Taverner appeared to be about all a boss' daughter was expected to be—slender, under twenty, and attractive. . . .

In the morning, Cal appraised the ranch and liked what he could see of it. The Spade comprised a cattle domain of nearly two hundred thousand acres of unfenced range. The winter grass was yellow, the many dry arroyos were piped with the olive of live oaks, and the hills and mesas were the velvet brown of a riverboat gambler's collar. If you must stay in one place, he thought, it looked like a good place to stay.

Shelly took him into one of the barns to show him a horse in a stall. It was deep slate in color, with three white stockings and a blaze on its forehead. It had a wall-eyed stare for them as they moved about.

"One of mine?" Cal asked.

*"The Old Man's daughter. . . . Any taming you do there is out of your own pocket."*

Shelly cleared his throat. "This is the horse Joyce was telling you about. That's a seven-hundred-dollar gelding, son."

Cal liked the massively-muscled thighs and forelegs and the small, alert ears. "You mean I ride him for three days and then she takes over?"

"I—uh—I thought you could sort of work at it in your spare time."

"In my spare time," Cal said, "I read magazines and play poker. For ten dollars a head I can't make ladies' saddlers out of them."

He said it mainly to let the manager know he wasn't fooled, but Shelly surprised him by saying: "I guess that's right. I tell you what: I'll put up another twenty of my own. I've got a little bet on with the Judge about that horse, Cal. He bought him for Joyce on my say-so. Couple of boys have already got pitched off, and now he's crying that the horse'll never be broke. What do you think?"

"I think the song's right: 'Never was a horse that couldn't be rode; Never was a man that couldn't be throwed.' "

"Think you're the man for this one?"

"Never know till you climb up on them."

They went outside. A screen door banged and the Judge and Joyce came from the house. Judge Taverner was a large, florid, white-haired man who wore a black string tie as a sort of badge of service. His trousers were suspendered high on a capacious stomach, and he had tufted white brows which gave his eyes a penetrative stare.

There seemed to be only one thing on people's mind out here. "What do you think of the Duke, Cal?" Taverner asked.

"Looks all right," Cal said cautiously.

Joyce wanted to know when he was going to start on him.

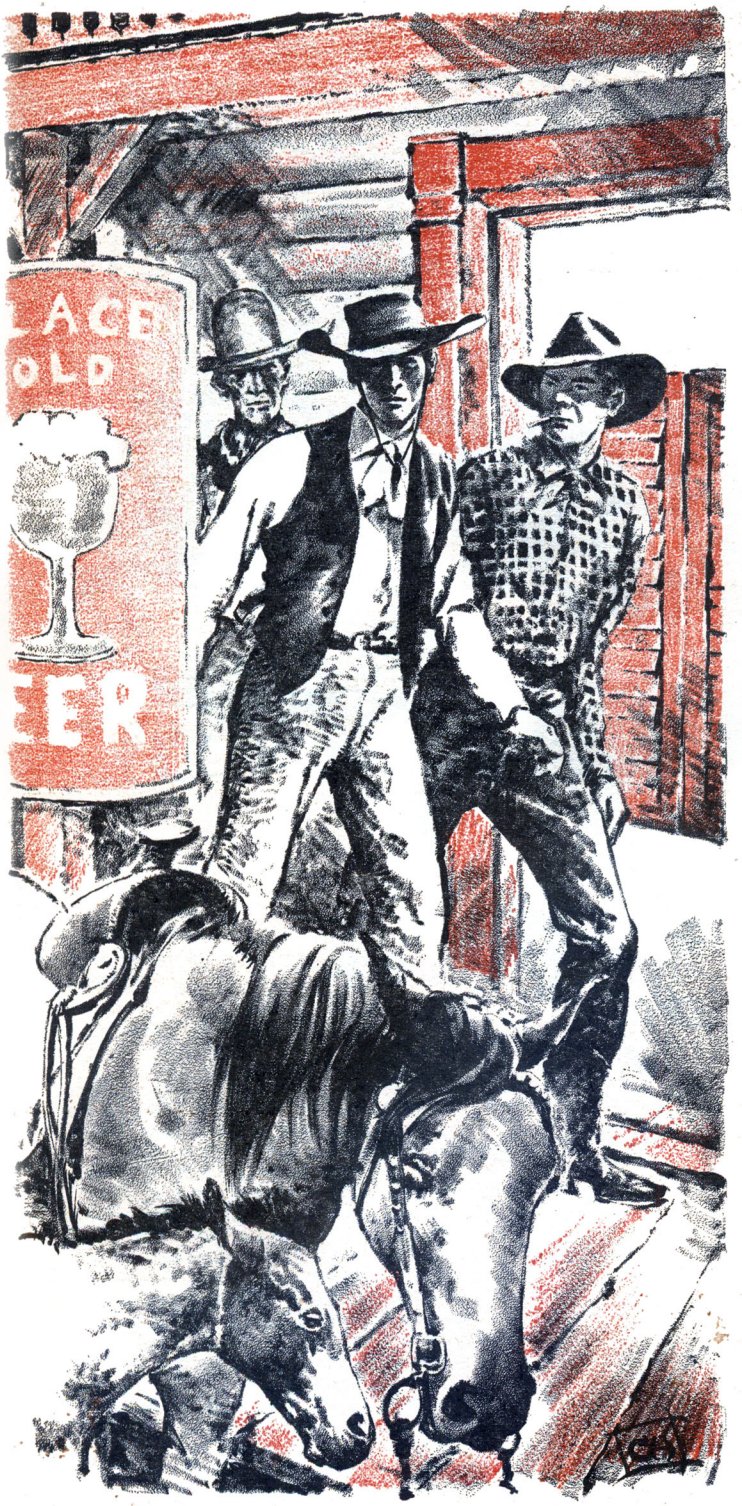
"Any time," Cal said. "I thought your father would want me to start on the range horses, first."

Taverner glanced at Shelly with those indictive eyes of his. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I'm rather anxious to see what can be done with him. I was persuaded to buy him against my better judgment. I've about decided he's not going to be trained."

Shelly started to reply, but made a hard mouth instead and looked stonily at Cal.

"I'll start him this afternoon, then," Cal said.

In the afternoon, Shelly turned Iron Duke into the corral and Cal watched him move about. Cowpunchers began to drift over and the Judge and Joyce stood outside the




*"If you're serious, Taverner's talking about breaking somebody in as range foreman. Right now I haven't got a man I'd trust."*

bars with Cal. Iron Duke was pure raw material. He wouldn't lead and he had never worn a bridle. He had a natural singlefoot which Cal did not like. He was convinced that horses with natural saddle gaits were apt to be eccentric.

Otherwise, the Duke was a sound and powerful horse, deep-bodied and sensitive. The challenge in his high-held head was his declaration of independence. *So they're trying to make a ladies' horse out of you!* Cal thought. In a way, he and the Duke had something in common. Civilization was trying to make both of them perform tricks they didn't want to.

He advanced carefully with his rope in his hands, talking encouragingly. Immediately the gelding broke and tried to get past him. Cal made his throw so that the horse stepped into the loop; he braced on his heels and the gray went down.

He went to work quickly, fixing a handkerchief blind and making a hackamore out of the rope. As the Duke lunged up again, he had already begun to sweat. Getting the saddle on him was mayhem, but finally Cal gave the latigo a flip and started the horse toward the gate. One thing he had learned was that it was easier to fall on the ground than on a corral-bar.

The Iron Duke was making queer, strangled sounds in his chest. He kicked savagely as Cal turned the stirrup. Cal went up and the gelding tossed off a couple of tentative pitches and then stood still, trembling. Cal reached forward and yanked off the blinder.

The Duke began to kick and squeal. He started off on a blind run. Suddenly he swerved and began to pitch, putting a neck-breaking snap into it. He tried to shake the saddle loose and bawled like a steer. He ascended in crazy, twisting leaps that turned his belly to the sun.

Up there in the saddle, Cal took the jolting with a frown. It was Iron Duke's privilege to pitch, but he was making a lot of work out of it. He fought as though his honor were at stake.

Cal was suddenly ashamed at being involved in it. This horse was no more meant to wear a saddle than Daniel Boone was born to wear white kid gloves. Cal wanted to get it over with. He began to spur. Under the roweling the gray went wild. He began pitching toward a tree, and Cal had to slap him on the side of the head with his Stetson to turn him. "Baby," he pleaded, "it's not *that* bad, is it?"

He reached forward to pat the animal on the neck, and at that instant the Duke went into a chain of crow-hops that slammed Cal back and

forth from cantle to swell. One of the ranch-hands yelled: Cal had lost a stirrup. It flapped wildly and Cal could be seen stabbing at it with his toe. A moment later he rose out of the saddle and the Duke went pitching off across the prairie without him. Cal landed on his side and lay there a moment, then got up stiffly.

Joyce ran up. "Are you all right, Cal?"

Cal wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "Yes; but he isn't going to do that saddle any good."

Judge Taverner had a sour grin for him when he and Roy Shelly arrived. "Well, does this prove my point?"

Shelly stared furiously at Cal. Cal didn't know what to say. It was his job to break horses, not to worry about what happened to their souls. He had let Shelly down, because he knew that, though he had not let Iron Duke shake him deliberately, he had gone soft with him for an instant—and accomplished the same thing.

"I wouldn't say that," he told the Judge. "He's a scrapper, though. He'll take some doing."

AFTERWARDS, Shelly took Cal aside. "Hawkins, I could've rode out that limber-kneed pitching myself!"

Cal told Shelly, "He puts a mean twist in his pitching. He won't catch me off-balance next time."

"If he does, you'll catch yourself hunting a new job."

"I reckon there's one to be had," Cal smiled.

Shelly simmered down. "I'm getting it from both sides, Cal. The Judge keeps throwing that seven hundred dollars at me and Joyce wants her saddle-horse. If I had the money, I'd buy the brute myself and shoot him. What do you think—is he ever going to make a saddler?"

"If you mean will he ever be any good, I don't know. I've known horses to kill themselves rather than be ridden. We'll find that out when I bring him in again."

He found the saddle five miles out, rolled and kicked to a ruin. But he didn't find the horse, and for a week he kept discovering things to do other than to bring the Duke in. A girl called Rodeo was smiling in his mind again and asking when she would see him. In a few weeks the boys would be throwing their saddles in baggage cars and traveling to wherever the bands played and the prize money was big. But Cal Hawkins would be riding alone under hot suns. He would be breaking bronc's and mending fence and flanking calves.

**There was only one thing he liked about the job—Joyce; and a small monitor in his mind even shook its head at her. It had started casually, with afternoon rides and long talks. In fact, it was all so relaxed and** casual that he let his guard down, and all at once she was dominating even the hours when he was not with her. Right there Cal halted to look the situation over.

Life with a bronc'-stomper would be a non-stop track-meet for a girl. Of course, he thought, she might like traveling. . . . But she wouldn't like holing up in two-dollar hotels while her husband tried to win enough money, with his luck running wrong, to bail them out.

CAL was working with a horse one afternoon when she rode in. It was a crisp March day, the ground still dark with recent rain, a line of sodden clouds on the mesa. She had ridden hard, for her horse was blowing and the impact of the wind had freshened her skin.

"Cal, he's over in Gallina Wash!" she told him. "If we get over there fast we can catch him."

The horse was at the head of a wide wash peppered with oaks. Just now there was a sandy trickle of water down it. Cal sent Joyce up to start the horse running, and selected a spot behind a shoulder of the cut-bank to wait for him.

In a few minutes he heard a yell, and then a soft thunder of hoofs on the sand. Iron Duke flashed past a bend and came at a reaching lope toward Cal's spot. His mane and tail, a lighter gray than his body, streamed straight back, and his lope was the smooth, coördinated run of the wild horse. A tag-end of the hackamore still dangled from his neck.

Cal stood there with the rope flung back but without the capacity to make the throw. He had broken scores of horses: What was there about this one that upset him?

Suddenly he came alive. He stepped out, swung the rope and let it stretch across the sand. Iron Duke swerved and ran past.

When Joyce arrived, Cal was simply standing there. She reined up and stared at him. "Cal, you let him get away!"

"*Let* him!" Cal said. "That horse was moving."

"He was moving last time, and you didn't miss. Cal, I think you're afraid of that horse! You don't want

*"Baby," Cal pleaded, "it's not that bad, is it?"*

to catch him because you're afraid to ride him again!"

Cal looked at her sharply and swung into the saddle. He started down the wash, but Joyce came up with him. "Well, isn't that it? You've been finding something to do every day to keep from having to catch him."

"If you want it straight," Cal said, "I *don't* want to break him. There are some horses that weren't meant to be ridden. He's one of them. He may kill himself before he'll be broken."

"But what use is a gelding if he can't be ridden? We can't just let him run wild."

"I'm not thinking about usefulness," Cal told her. It was hard to put it in words because it was merely something he felt. "I'm thinking about his spirit. He's proud. Putting a saddle on him is like putting leg-irons on a man. Why humiliate him?"

They rode in silence for a while. Then Joyce said quietly, "The moral seems to be that a horse-breaker ought to be like a doctor. He shouldn't get sentimental over his patients. I hope you get over it, Cal, because the Duke is the main reason Roy hired you. Dad thinks you'd fit into this range foreman job he's talking about. But you won't get a chance at it if Shelly fires you."

She was honestly concerned, and it was in his mind to tell her that he wouldn't take such a job because it was the leg-irons he had been talking about; but when he thought about it he knew it wouldn't make sense to anyone but a bronc'-stomper.

"I'm no cow-rancher," he said. "When I get caught up here I'll probably move along."

He saw in her face that he had hurt her, and he wished there had been an easier way to break it. She said, "I'm sorry, Cal. I thought you were something more than a bronc'-stomper. When you said you'd quit the rodeos, I thought you meant it."

"I thought I did, too," Cal admitted. "Now I'm not so sure. It's hard to break off clean when you've ridden so long. I may ride one more season."

"It's the only way to break off, isn't it?"

"I wish I knew."

They entered the ranch-yard. Cal took her horse, but she hesitated a moment. "We don't need to tell anyone we saw Iron Duke. You can go after him later, if you want. I don't want this to spoil your chance at the job, in case you change your mind about staying."

Cal was silent, not knowing what to say; whether to admit that he was afraid to stay because he was falling in love with her, or to find an excuse. Suddenly her eyes darkened.

"You don't have to look so worried, Cal Hawkins! I'm not trying to put a saddle on you. Any girl who took a good look at you would know better!"

She dismounted, threw the reins of her pony over the corral bar, and ran to the house.

Cal sat for an hour on the top pole of a corral, a spot in which he had never failed to find wisdom before, but this time he climbed down with nothing but stiff joints. Yet below the surface of his despair there was an artesian sort of elation that kept bubbling up.

THREE more bronc's took Cal's course in how to become cow-ponies, and then one day a letter was forwarded from his last address. It was from a promoter who had taken over the little Alpine City rodeo this spring and had the Association's blessing on it. Alpine was only fifty miles from the Spade ranch.

"Two thousand dollars in prize money, and championship points will hang on trees. Hope to see you there."

That day he went through the motions of teaching a horse to lead, but he was experiencing in his mind all the glorious smells and sounds and colors of a big-town rodeo. He got the shakes when he imagined the chute banging open and a bronc cannonballing through it.

At noon, Roy Shelly tramped into the mess-shack. "Take a gander out the window, boys!"

Cal didn't have to look. "Where'd you find him?"

"On the mesa. Had my trap set a week. Well, you got the guts to go up on him again?"

"You want it with a saddle or bareback?" Cal asked.

Shelly said steadily: "You can put glue on your pants if you want, but I want him broke today. Another week of the old man's belly-aching and I'm licked."

Cal went out and looked at the gray. He smoked a cigarette. The horse still wore the hackamore, like a frazzled necktie. But it hadn't put any bow in the proud arch of his neck, for he roamed the corral with those quick, tossing rushes of his that dared a man to come after him.

Someone had told the Judge. He and Joyce came out to look him over, and the Judge wanted to know what Cal thought about it; would he put up more or less fight after running wild? Cal said probably more, and Taverner went over to harass Roy Shelly.

CAL had been nervous before, but he had never felt like this. He was about to know how a fighter like the Duke looked when he had been utterly subdued, for he meant to stay on his back until he would answer the spur, and the analogy he had drawn between himself and the Duke he could not get out of his mind.

Cal pulled his saddle off the top pole of the corral. This time the Duke anticipated his strategy. It was tougher to throw him and fix the blind. It was a ten-minute campaign to get the saddle on his back. Cal hauled his head around and tried for the stirrup, but the gelding shied off, kicking, until Cal found the stirrup and went up. He threw off the blind and almost instantly the gray's back bent like a spring and he tore loose.

He planted his forelegs and the horn slammed Cal in the belt-buckle. He reached back to bite at his knee. Cal walloped him over the nose with his Stetson and spurred at the same time. Iron Duke blared and shook himself until the saddle popped. Then with his hind feet he slashed at the stirrups.

Now he reared, suddenly, pawing at the sky. Cal saw it coming and kicked free. Iron Duke lost his balance and went over backward in a struggling dog-fall. The saddlehorn cracked against the ground, but Cal had jumped clear and landed on his knees beside the horse.

He was trembling, partly with shock and partly with anger. When the horse scrambled up, Cal was there to seize the reins and vault into the saddle. Iron Duke made a short rush and suddenly realized Cal was still on his back. He went straight up in a sunfishing leap; as he came back, Cal spurred right and jerked the horse's head left. Off-balance, the gray made a futile attempt to crow-hop and Cal broke that up by reversing the trick. The Duke was baffled. He kept trying to pitch but Cal wouldn't let him.

At last he stood shuddering, trying to comprehend it, and Cal went to work on him. . .

Gradually some meaning began to come out of it. The horse was commencing to understand what the spur-

ring meant. He ran toward the trees. Cal reined in and he blundered to a stop. Cal spurred and he made a jerky start. Then Cal and the horse were moving at a long lope toward the mesa. . . .

Cal was back in an hour. Iron Duke was soaked with lather and marked up by the spur. But what the Judge and Roy Shelly noticed was that the intangible thing called pride was missing. Iron Duke was just a horse under a saddle—even a little less than that. He was a hangdog creature who had forgotten how to look dangerous. He stood with his legs planted widely as Cal dismounted. He did not respond when Cal patted him and began to loosen the cinch.

Cal started toward the bunkhouse. He paused with his saddle balanced on his hip to say: "Well, boys, I'd say it was a tie match. He's broken, all right—broken plumb in two. He'll never be any better than he is right now. But it's not because he was too tough to break. I reckon you were both right."

He walked on, hoping the Judge would turn the horse out to range. He had had enough of him. Seeing him now was like coming face to face with himself as he would have been after ten years of punching cows. The Duke had accomplished that much.

In the bunkhouse, he made a roll of his blankets and began dumping his small collection of personal belongings into a sack. In a few days he would be in Alpine City, talking behind the chutes with the boys he had contested against so long; the boys he understood and who understood him. Yet he felt no particular elation over it. He got out the letter and read it again, hoping it would be the trigger to set off the emotions he had expected to feel.

He was standing that way when the light from the door was cut off. Evening sunlight, coming from behind Joyce, made a bright glory of her hair. Her features were in shadow. "Packing?" she said.

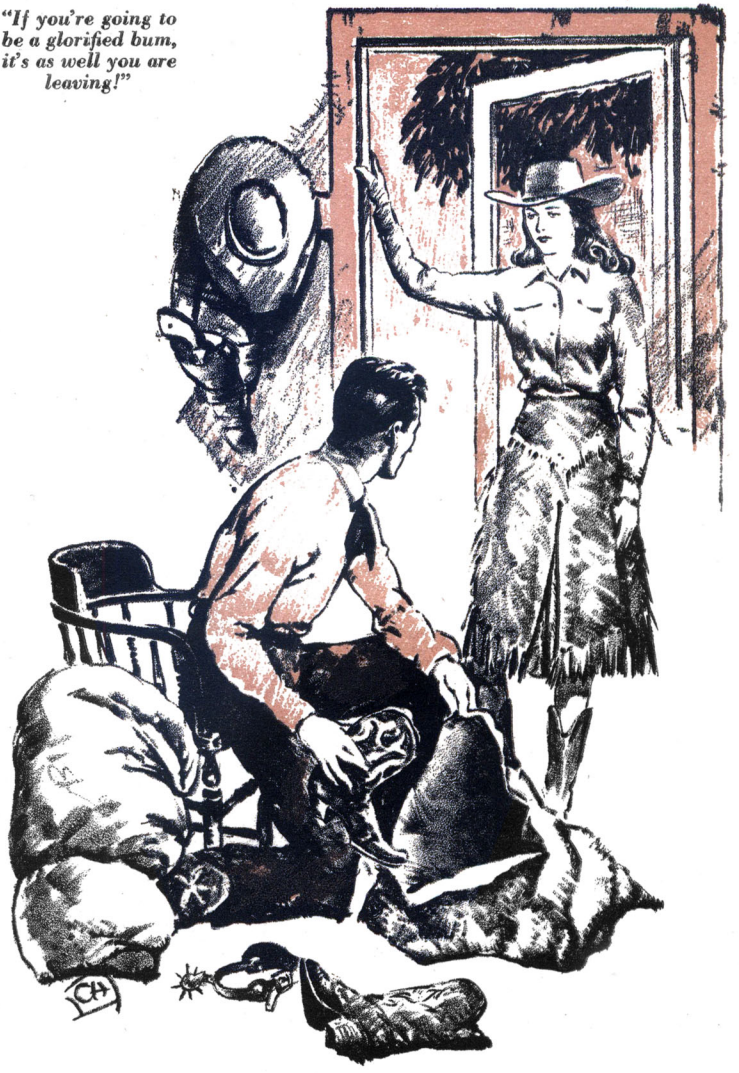
"I'm going to make the Alpine City show next week. I may be back. But this one's too good to miss."

Joyce only looked at him, and Cal went on heartily, "Well, he's all yours! You can ride him without a saddle, if you want. Sorry I had to spoil him."

She spoke levelly, as if she wanted to be sure he understood her. "You didn't spoil him, Cal. He spoiled himself. No one could have hurt him if he'd had anything besides pride. You rubbed that off, and there was nothing underneath."

Cal shook his head. "He had as much as any horse ever had. But he hated being bossed a little more than most. That's what ruined him."

*"If you're going to be a glorified bum, it's as well you are leaving!"*



Joyce walked up to him. There were tears in her eyes, but what he noticed chiefly was that she seemed angry enough to choke him. "If you don't think you're being bossed by this rodeo thing, Cal Hawkins, you haven't looked at yourself lately! You don't ride because you want to. You ride because you have to. And if you don't have any more spirit and intelligence than a horse, if you're going to keep on being a glorified bum, it's just as well you are leaving!"

The screen door slammed behind her.

Cal thought of a number of things to say, but it was too late, now, and in his bottled resentment he went to stand at the door, frowning after her as she ran into the house. After a moment his displeasure faded. In his mind there remained the impression of her words, and it was like reading clean type after straining too long over a line of blurred print.

He looked beyond the ranch-house at the big sweep of prairie suffused with sunset colors. The fluted walls of the mesa were dark, the sky was peach and blue. Across the plateau an evening breeze flowed softly. He thought again: *If you must stay in one place, it isn't a bad place to stay.*

He was conscious of the letter, still in his hand, and as he looked at it he heard for an instant the distant thunder of hoofs, the yelping of a crowd. But they grew fainter as he listened, dying as inconsequential sounds heard at a distance. Close at hand, the cook began vigorously to hammer the dinner triangle.

Cal jumped. He balled the letter and tossed it in the woodbox, and, whistling, he walked toward the washstand to clean up for dinner.

***Time held no meaning; this could be a moment later, or a day. Benvenuto Cellini leaned against the wall, wondering why he was not dead.***

ROME had fallen at last. Events had come full cycle, and now the Holy City was a corpse still torn by the butchers who were the soldiers of Charles V of Spain. Medicean intrigue had failed to avert the final reckoning, and the Spanish conquest had reached its zenith. Only the lone Castel Sant' Angelo held a feeble flame of resistance; and it was a crowded fortress where three thousand people huddled in terror and misery and waited for the final onslaught.

The Duke of Bourbon, who was the Constable of France and nobly born, had ignored a truce between Charles and the Pope, and led his men into battle, clad in the flowing white cape which was his vanity. His troops had stormed and breached the walls of Rome, advancing their lines street by street and house by house, until they stood at the bulwark of the Castel and made their final bid. Scaling ladders had lifted, and the roaring of falconets and sacros and culverins was the blasting roll of thunder in the air. And then panic had struck, for on the first day of attack, on the sixth of May, the Duke of Bourbon had died clinging to a scaling ladder, his white cape stained with crimson. Benvenuto Cellini and two companions had shot him dead with the skill of men who knew their lives depended upon their aim.

Cellini had not liked his task, for his life had been spent in a nation torn with war. It still called itself the Holy Roman Empire; but it was neither holy nor Roman nor an empire, but rather a league of provinces and countries which had banded together in common battle. True, the Church's influence was great, but still men rebelled against it. And the Roman Empire had died hundreds of years before, perhaps with Charlemagne. But misnamed or not, it lived in war, and Cellini wondered sometimes if ever there would be peace.

Spanish power had extended from the days when it had been the ally of those it now fought. Its strength had grown, fattening on intrigues and battles, until now so many treaties had been made and broken no man knew truly where he stood, other than to know he must fight for his existence. The final alliance of 1526, the year before, made among France, England, Rome, Venice and Florence against Spain, meant nothing now, for Roman barons had revolted against Pope Clement VII. This was the final phase of battle; and Rome was the last, except for Florence, of the Empire to be attacked. It had been the only hope of survival.

And now that hope was vanishing. The Duke of Bourbon was dead, but other soldiers lived. Rumor had it the Prince of Orange, Philibert de Chalons, had succeeded Bourbon as Captain-General; and if that were true, then the fighting would be doubly fierce, for the Prince of Orange hated his enemy with a deadly hatred nothing could erase.

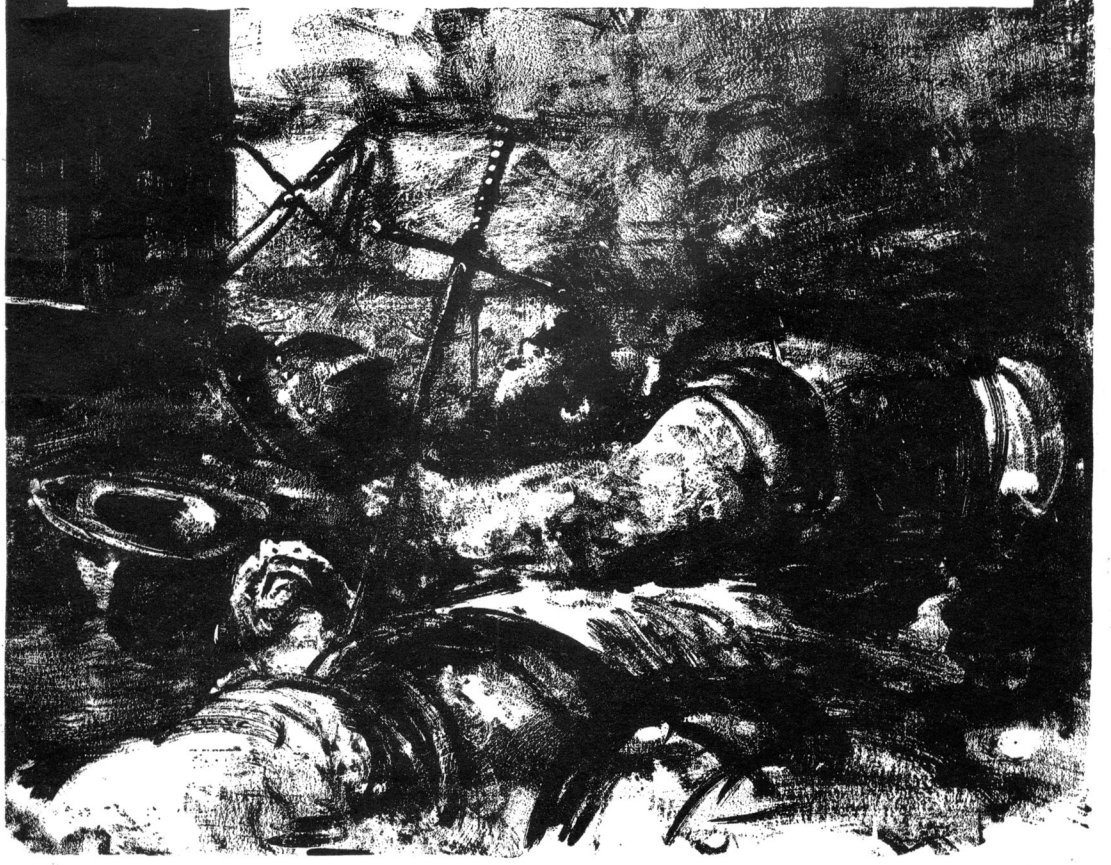
Peace had come for a time, the truce of making ready for more attacks. With Bourbon dead, the army was without a head; but it ran amuck through Rome, gutting the houses and the city buildings and even invaded the Vatican, whence the Pope, Clement VII, had fled at the last moment, his life saved when Bishop Paolo Giovio had covered his white robe with his own robe of violet, thus making Clement a less likely target.

Now the Pope was as much a prisoner in the Castel as any of the others, and the Castel held three thousand in a space which had been built for three hundred. The Castel Sant'

# The Devil's Luck

**Benvenuto Cellini tries to save the Pope's gold from the conquerors of Rome.**

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK



Angelo was a trap, for there was no egress, no way of escape, except through abject surrender or the paying of fantastic ransoms demanded by the Spanish. . . .

Benvenuto considered the situation as he leaned on the battlement high over the ground. This was the keep, or the "Angel," as it was called, because of the huge marble statue of a guardian angel atop the Castel. But now there was nothing of the angelic about the scene, for the keep was ringed with demi-cannon, falconets and sacros, all loaded and primed and needing only the touch of a slow match to explode in flame-mouthed fury.

Cellini was weary indeed. Long days of fighting had worn him out; and sometimes he envied the dead, for at least they slept. Eight guns were under his command, and powder-smoke was in his skin and clothing and nostrils.

He shook his head, as though in answer to the question, and surveyed the scene below. Thousands of refugees so crowded the courtyard there was little room for walking. Apathy weakened them, a resignation, which had come through almost a month of fighting. Unless victory or a truce came soon, those people would surrender, trusting to their luck and God to save them from the bullets and blades and tortures of the conquering army. Even the Pope and the City officials could not control them much longer.

Cellini sighed and glanced at Jacopo Salviani, a dozen feet away. The man leaned against the balustrade, sleek and fat despite the rationed food. His oily face was arrogant and heavy-

lidded, and he watched the soldiery in the streets as though he had no part in any of this.

His had been the voice which had cried for surrender in the black days of the siege. He was a Florentine, but his sympathies were Spanish to the core. He would have treated with the men of Charles V, and for his aid he expected a price. Only the hardiness of the Pope's mind and the advice of his counselors kept Salviani from attaining his ends.

Cellini grimaced and then stretched tired arms. Night was coming on, the twenty-eighth since the siege had begun, and there would be few more nights, for food was almost gone, and with starvation came defeat. He envied Jacopo Salviani then for his sleekness and his obvious ability to live comfortably where others starved.

He caught Salviani's gaze, and a flush came to his face at the insolence in the other's eyes. He disliked the man and distrusted him; he had protested against permitting him to take charge of the cannon during the night hours when an attack might come at any moment. But his expostulations had done no good, for Salviani had friends among the leaders, and within the hour he would take command

*"Master Cellini, I thank you for coming so promptly," said the Pope. "I would come across the world at your wish," Cellini replied.*

again, as he had done for a fortnight now.

"We cannot last," Jacopo Salviani said conversationally. "Surely, Master Cellini, you can recognize that fact?"

Benvenuto Cellini held his anger by sheer will. His fingers were at the hilt of the storta at his side, and for a moment the urge to slay all but mastered him. Then he spat deliberately, and his voice slashed like a whip.

"You are a dog, a treacherous dog, Salviani," he said. "Had I my way, I would hang you from the keep's wall."

Jacopo Salviani flushed, but he showed no outward offense. His gaze went about the empty roof, for the cannoneers were below, and his voice softened.

"Do you know the wealth which lies in the Castel?" he asked. "With a tenth of it we could buy security among the Spanish. And as the goldsmith attached to Clement's court, you would have access to a lot of it." He licked greasy lips. "At night, over and down the wall by ropes, we could escape with all we could carry, and buy our freedom."

"Get away from me," Cellini said slowly, a vein throbbing at his temple. "Get away, before I slit your throat."

Jacopo Salviani straightened, and menace lay in every line of his body. His eyes slitted piglike, and suddenly Cellini realized how dangerous this man might be.

"All right," Salviani said harshly, "you've had your chance. Don't whine for another."

Cellini spun on his heel and strode for the roof opening. Disgust was in his mind, and he knew that another moment might break his restraint. He stepped into the square opening, foot on the stair, and his eyes were contemptuous as he gave one last look at the fat intriguer.

"One warning," he said: "If an attack comes and those cannon do not speak at the right time, then you will be the first to feel my blade. Remember that."

He paced down the stairs, leaving Salviani on the roof. Anger swirled in him, and he passed men without speaking, his features so set the muscles ached.

"Ho, Cellini!" a voice called, and he turned reluctantly in the hall.

"What is it?" he snapped. Then he smiled, recognizing Horatio Baglione. "Oh, it's you," he finished.

The other smiled. "It's I," he admitted. "Why the scowl?"

Cellini hesitated, then shrugged. "Salviani again," he admitted.

The newcomer grunted, as though the sound were an answer. He too had met Salviani's arguments for surrender. As the man in charge of the defense of Rome, as the leader of the Bande Nere, the Black Bands he had inherited from a dying Giovannini de Medici, his problems had been many. With a scant two thousand infantry and even less cavalry, he had tried to stem the invasion of the Holy City and had lost. Now, a prisoner like the rest, he must cope with such rascals as Jacopo Salviani.

"I can do nothing," he admitted. "I proposed hanging Salviani, and His Holiness would not give me permission. Salviani's sister is married to Don Juan Achelete y Trujillo, and the Don would avenge such a hanging when the full sack of Rome is completed."

Cellini sighed. He and Horatio Baglione stood in the only clear space in the hall. Lamps smoked gustily, and the air was cool. Refugees sat along the wall, only the bravi showing

animation and they quarreling where they diced for their rations of food. He felt again the impossibility of the situation, and muted anger throbbed in his mind.

"So what do we do now?" Cellini asked. "Invaders without and traitors within; we cannot win."

No expression could be seen on Baglione's bearded face, but his eyes were bright with stifled emotions.

"We surrender," he said quietly. "We surrender on the morning of June fifth." His laughter was bitter. "On June fifth, in the Year of our Lord 1527, an empire dies, perhaps never to rise again."

"Surrender!" Cellini caught at the other with savage hands. "Are you mad! They will butcher us like cattle."

Horatio Baglione shook his head. "I do not know the details," he said. "I know only that His Holiness has sent for you, and that I heard enough to know that peace terms have been given His Holiness."

Benvenuto Cellini swore bitterly. "That we should come to this!" He clenched his hands. "Then that means only Florence will be left, and it cannot hold out as long as this Castel has done."

Baglione smiled, without warmth, lips twisting wryly. "That is the situation," he admitted. "Not a pretty one." He turned away. "Come along; His Holiness waits."

SICK at heart, Cellini followed. Memory churned and spat forth remembrances. Spanish and Germans and Romans and Epirote were the army which had attacked Rome. Murder-crazed, they had breached the walls and swept forward. *"O Madre! que hoy será vengada."* the cry had burst forth. They swarmed in, and the wounded of a hospital, first attacked, were done to death in beds where they had thought to regain life.

The scum of the earth had attacked, almost capturing the Pope at St. Peter's where he held Mass. Explosions roared, and women and children and holy men died beside brave defenders. The sack was an accomplished thing, with but eight thousand of the attackers dead. The Papal troops were gone, slain to a man on the Ponte San Sisto. Fires had sprung up, priceless paintings and furniture and books burning so that the looters might see their gold and silver and lesser things in the night.

Benvenuto Cellini remembered those scenes, and his heart was heavy. He followed Baglione down the stairs, past crowded people, and came at last to the door of the small room which the Pope had taken for his own. A guard saluted, then stood aside, and Baglione opened the door so that they might pass through.

Two men were in the room, one seated at a rude desk, the other standing near the bare wall. Clement VII was seated, and his face was haggard with strain now, a persistent flutter in his breathing, for he had caught the lung sickness in his weeks of confinement in the damp Castel. The other man was Clement's confidante and companion, Cavalierino, a Frenchman of noble blood, who now was as bedraggled as any of the prisoners, his clothing dirty and stained, only his trim beard and clean-shaven cheeks disclosing his innate neatness.

"Master Cellini, I thank you for coming so promptly," His Holiness said, and extended his hand for a kiss. His smile was tired but friendly, fondness for the goldsmith in his eyes.

"I would come across the world at your wish," Cellini replied sincerely, and waited for the other to speak.

Clement VII stirred papers upon the table with a veined finger. His eyes brooded for a moment.

"What I have to tell you," he said at last, "must be held secret. Is that understood?"

Cellini nodded, and Baglione said: "You have my word." Cavalierino tugged at his spade beard, his face grim. Clement VII sighed deeply.

"Intelligence has come from the Duke of Orange," he explained, "offering a final solution to this intolerable situation. I do not like it, and were there any other way, I would not consider it. Be that as it may, I am surrendering the Castel and all its people on the morning of June fifth." His eyes were haunted by his thoughts. "I am to pay a ransom, an indemnity, of four hundred thousand gold scudi for the safety of myself and members of the Church."

"But the others—" Cellini broke in.

Clement flushed above his beard. "They will be safe, for that will be part of the terms. Some will have to pay ransom also for their safety, but the others will not be harmed, because they are destitute." His veined hands touched a single paper. "There are the terms. The Castel will still be a semi-prison, but intercourse with the outside will be permitted. Only the most important of us will be kept here until Charles of Spain sees fit to grant complete amnesty."

Benvenuto Cellini's hands were clenched at his side. "It is a monstrous thing," he said, voice shaking. "I do not trust the enemy; this may be a trick."

Cavalierino stepped forward, shaking his head. "We have no choice now," he said. "Baglione says capitulation must be made within two weeks, or this fortress will be a charnel house. There is no food, and starvation is close at hand." His mouth was firm. "Far better to negotiate now, while still we can bargain, than to have the gate or walls breached and have that horde of monsters slaughter everyone within the Castel."

Cellini nodded, knowing the truth of the argument. Bitterness surged within him; and yet, seeing the torture which lay in the features of His Holiness, he knew that his own feelings were naught compared to those of Clement.

"I understand," he said. "Now, is there anything I can do?"

Clement smiled for the first time. "A great deal," he admitted; and bending, he drew a small chest from beneath the table, flinging back the lid. "Your task lies here."

BENVENUTO CELLINI gasped; behind, he heard the suck of breath in Baglione's throat. For the chest was heaped with glittering Papal treasure, tiaras and morses, rings and pendants, altar relics and cups, all the treasure of a Church whose authority rested in the body of this pain-racked man.

"This is your task," Clement said slowly. "Some of the work is yours; some belongs to other great artisans. But now you must unset the jewels and melt the metals into blocks." Wry humor came to his patient tone. "Even peace treaties are ignored where such treasures as these might be claimed for spoils."

"But—" Cellini began, and Cavalierino broke in.

"A part of the jewels must be kept for the ransom demanded. The rest must be so well hidden that they cannot be found by Charles' army. Later, when this horror is over, the hidden treasures will be retrieved and used to rebuild and do the work of the Church."

"But where—"

Clement VII held up a tired hand. "There is another chest, holding gold relics to the weight of a large man. All must be melted down. That gold will furnish a great deal of the ransom, and the balance will be paid with jewels. When your work is finished, you will secrete the treasure, telling of its location to Baglione and Cavalierino, but not to me."

Cavalierino bent and closed the lid of the chest. "Your work must be secret and fast," he said. "There are those among us who would betray all for even a part of that treasure."

"I know," Cellini said bitterly.

Clement VII nodded, coughing. "Be doubly vigilant these last two days," he said, when at last the coughing ended. "I am withholding my answer until the last moment, hoping that a miracle may happen, that perhaps the Duke of Urbino might change his plans and come at last to our rescue."

"Urbino!" Contempt roughened Baglione's suddenly harsh voice. "He and his army have sat for a month but

a day's slow march away. Never will he stir."

"So it is," Clement agreed. "But even so, God may work a miracle. If not, then I shall agree to the terms on the night of June fourth, and all terms should be accepted within a day or so. Until then, Master Cellini, you have a task to perform. On you, in some ways, lies the destiny of the Church."

Benvenuto Cellini knelt and kissed the Papal ring. He felt humble at the trust placed in him; and fright possessed him too, for within his grasp would be such a fortune as no individual had ever owned. And because his thoughts must have shown in his face, Clement smiled at the goldsmith.

"Master Cellini," he said, "you have served the Medici well. You are an honest man. Allay your fears about yourself." His hand touched Cellini's shoulder. "Now, to your work, whatever it must be. When you need this treasure, send for it. Until then, you have my blessing, and you are excused."

Cellini bowed his head, then rose, and Baglione was at his back as he opened the door and stepped into the hall. With the door closed, he looked at Baglione, and a wry smile touched his mouth.

"Sometimes," he said, "I wish I were not an honest man. Then I would find no such responsibility as this for a burden."

*"This is your task," Clement said. "You must unset the jewels and melt the metals into blocks."*

Horatio Baglione grinned, and his heavy hand cuffed Cellini's shoulder in a friendly gesture.

"Away with you!" he said. "We've both work to do." His eyes went along the crowded hall. "I'll send helpers; but for the love of heaven, keep your mouth shut."

Benvenuto Cellini nodded and turned away. And despite the belief of the Pope and the trust of Cavalierino and Baglione, he still felt a thread of fear in his mind. On him lay the destiny, perhaps, of the Holy Church.

He squared his shoulders and set about his task.

It was the hour five, the night of June fourth, 1527. Fog had returned, and it blew wet and dank, obscuring everything, the street fires of the Spanish army mere blobs of faint red and yellow far below the Castel's keep.

The smell of death lingered everywhere, permeating everything. The Castel's prisoners shifted uneasily, as though a voiceless rumor moved from mind to mind, wordless and yet terrifying. The Spanish had closed their cordon even more tightly, and the few basket-drawn bits of food from the outside had not arrived. Bodies lay without the walls, testimony to the aim of the attackers and the futility of trying to help the besieged.

In the room set aside for him by the Pope, Benvenuto Cellini sweated over the crude smelter he had constructed. This was the last of his task, and he wiped perspiration from his face with a blackened hand, tired beyond measure by the speed at which he had worked for unceasing hours.

The heat in the small room was great, the tiny blast furnace glowing redly. Beneath, the last of the molten gold flowed from atop glowing coals, and he tonged the pan over clay molds, emptying the gold into them to cool and harden.

The Castel was unnaturally quiet, even the carpenters' planes and hammers still. Three hundred and twelve had died within the walls during the siege, and crude burial boxes had been built for their remains. On the morrow, with peace concluded, most of them would share a common grave, blessed by the Church. The others, those of high rank, would find final resting-places apart, their burial boxes more ornate, even painted, but as final in their meaning as those of the plebeians.

*Illustrated by* JOHN FULTON

Benvenuto Cellini shook his head, remembering those who had died. Many had been his friends. He wondered at the infamy of man, then sighed and forgot all but his task for the moment.

A hiding-place had been chosen for the treasure, a sanctuary driven into cold earth behind a huge stone block in the cellar of the Castel. The work had been done secretly, and keeping the secrecy had been a task in itself, for a display of arms, or the forbidding to the prisoners of entrance to a certain section of the fortress would cause comment and perhaps return as rumor or fact to the Spanish.

But Horatio Baglione had accomplished the impossible, doing his task by divers ways, and apparently no suspicion had been aroused. The task of hiding the jewels and extra gold would take little more than an hour, cement of ground bone and ashes and clay being already placed for the mixing with water.

Cellini smiled, glad that his task was almost over. He sat at the table, and his fingers ran through the jewels heaped on the deep platter as though the stones of crimson and blue and green and clear iciness were but grains of corn. A nation's ransom lay there for the taking; few men could have resisted the temptation.

Close at hand, on the dirty floor, lay the blocks of gold. Ten they were, and altogether they weighed more than a large man. And yet so little space did they occupy that a man might be fooled into thinking he could lift them in his bare hands and walk away.

Cellini laughed and covered one palm with jewels. Never would he come so close to great wealth again. That one handful would never be missed. He closed his fingers, and a great ruby squeezed free and fell like a drop of frozen blood. He stared at his fist, and desire ran strong and deep within him.

A GLANCE at the water-clock told of the hour. Thoughtfulness came to his eyes. The envoys of the Pope had been gone four hours now, leaving a bit after sundown. They should be returning at any moment, perhaps with men of Orange's staff; and if such men arrived too soon, there would be no time for secreting the treasure in the hiding-place.

He opened his hand, and the jewels flashed tantalizingly as they dropped to the platter. He felt no sense of loss, and his hands were steady as they picked up and opened a leather bag. He sorted the jewels swiftly, retaining those needed for the ransom of His Holiness, and the rest he placed in the bag and drew the strings. The jewels made a package as big as both of his fists combined.

Laying the bag aside, he found a smaller, and placed the rest of the jewels within and drew the string. He coughed, lungs raw because of the bitter smoke in the room. Even the makeshift chimney to the outside brought little relief from the fumes.

A light knock at the door swung his head about, and he called softly.

"Who is it?" he said.

"Baglione! Hurry, open the door."

Cellini shrugged and went wearily to the door. Bolts rasped rustily as he drew them back, and he tugged on the handle. The door came open, and the fresh air was chilly.

"Baglione, I—" Cellini began.

And then he was driven backward by sheer weight as men came surging in. One horrified glance he had of bearded faces, and then the door was shut again, and he was backing before the menace of naked blades held by two bravi, while Jacopo Salviani triumphantly shot the bolts again.

"What do you want?" Benvenuto Cellini gasped, and Salviani laughed softly.

"Think you that I am a complete fool?" Salviani said. "You shut yourself away for a night and day, and from your room comes the stench of your furnace. That, after an audience with Clement, and knowing of the treasure he holds for the Church. And now you ask me what I want."

Cellini caught his breath, feeling the tension in his rangy body. He dared not move, for the glittering blades were but inches from his chest, the bravi waiting only for the word of command to thrust deep and quick.

"You would not dare!" he cried. "Those jewels belong to the Church; you could never escape."

"Who can identify a diamond?" Salviani sneered. "Now, where are they?"

Cellini's eyes betrayed him. They flicked to the leather bags upon the

*"You would not dare!" Cellini cried. "Those jewels belong to the Church; you could never escape."*

table. Salviani caught the glance, and he was smiling openly, sweat like drops of oil on his face, as he stepped forward, hand outstretched.

"I asked you to join me," he said harshly, "and you refused."

Cellini swallowed, his hands clenched into aching fists. His gaze flicked to his scabbarded sword on a wall hook, but he knew he could not reach it in time.

"You'll never escape the Castel," he said.

But Jacopo Salviani was not listening. His shaking fingers had drawn the strings free of the larger bag, and his hand dipped in and emerged, diamonds and emeralds and rubies and pearls sparkling, gleaming, in the lamplight. Salviani sucked in his breath, his tongue ran over his lips.

"Mine!" he whispered.

Cellini made his bid then. He kicked with vicious strength, and his toe caught the first bravo in the crotch, bending him over and then hurling him aside in a single fleeting second. He cried out in a strangled voice, then bucked on the floor, face purple with agony, sword clattering to the floor.

Cellini darted for the sword, and cloth ripped hissingly as the second bravo made a stroke which almost caught him on hands and knees. Then Cellini was up, and in his fury he went straight forward, ignoring conventional swordplay. His blade licked out and drove deep, and the steel locked in the bones of the bravo's chest and he died, mouth gaping and suddenly flooding crimson. He fell slackly, pulling Cellini forward. Benvenuto tried to whirl, sighting the movement of Salviani at his side. Then a boot smashed at his head, and a rocket burst in his brain, showering sparks. He went to his belly, striving vainly to raise himself by the strength of his arms.

His head turned, and one glimpse he had of Jacopo Salviani's distorted face. Then Salviani's sword whipped free and came darting in. Agony touched Cellini's back, and then the pain was icy cold, and he could feel the blade slicing into his body. He cried out, despite himself, and then he dropped slackly, blood welling from his back.

Through glazing eyes he saw Salviani stepping back, and his body quivered as the sword pulled free. His head was on one side, his cheek to the floor, and blackness was crowding his vision. He saw Salviani pause for another savage stroke; then the second bravo was dead, struck down even as he tried to rise. Jacopo Salviani was leaving no witnesses to his crime.

Cellini saw the leather bags scooped up and placed within Salviani's shirt. Then the fat man was turning, scabbarding his sword and pulling the bolts of the door. One glance the killer turned upon the room, exultation in his face. Then he opened the door and passed through, and the door closed solidly behind him.

Benvenuto Cellini called out, but his voice was a whisper. All thought vanished, and he floated in a limbo of nothingness.

TIME held no meaning; this could be a moment later, or a day. He could feel the numb pain in his back now, and he swore in sudden bitterness as he sat up. The room whirled, and the smoke tore at his eyes, and for a moment nausea rocked his stomach.

Then the room was still again, and Benvenuto Cellini leaned against the wall, wondering why he was not dead.

The bravi lay as they had fallen, blood crusting brownly now. One stared at the dirt-scabrous ceiling, and the other lay on his side, unable to fall face downward because the bone-socketed sword propped him up. The room was stiflingly hot, the furnace still smoking.

Cellini licked his lips and stretched a hand for the wine bottle beneath the table. It burned his throat, then spread warmingly, and he shook his head, clearing away the cobwebs of blankness. Pain was in his back, and he carefully reached about his chest with his right arm and explored the wound with gentle fingertips.

He chuckled grimly; there was no mystery now about his being alive. Salviani's stroke had been fair and true, but the blade had turned in heavy muscles and run along the carapace of Cellini's ribs. Pain had blotted consciousness, and Salviani thought he had delivered a death-stroke. Unless muscles had been severed, or unless the rotting-sickness set in, Cellini's back would heal within days, leaving only a stiffness as a reminder of the attack.

*"Think you that I am a complete fool?" Salviani said.*

He came slowly to his feet, moving carefully, not wanting to tear the crusted wound open again. For a second, he swayed, faintness in him. Then, his face grim, he moved to the wall and took down his extra shirt and *lucco*. Rolling the shirt into a bulky bandage, he drew it about his back and chest and knotted the sleeves tightly in front. Immediately he felt stronger, aided by the cloth's support. He drank again of the purple wine, then laid the bottle aside and lifted down his sword and belt.

With the weapon buckled at his waist, he slipped the *lucco* over his shoulders like a cloak and stood hesitantly for a moment. A glance at the water-clock told him that less than an hour had passed since the attack. But still, despite the vigilance of the guards at the walls, he knew Salviani might have had time to escape. Or again, if he felt himself safe, Salviani could have remained in the Castel, hiding the treasure and ready to disclaim any knowledge of the attack on Cellini or the murder of the two bravi.

Cellini hesitated, estimating and evaluating the situation. He must move swiftly but cautiously.

He opened the door and went through, blinking against the semi-darkness of the corridor which led into the main upper hall. His feet drew dim echoes; and ahead, the sound of snoring showed that the refugees slept on the cold floor. His hand was close to blade as he stepped from concealment, but nothing moved. To his left were the steps leading to the keep, and the corridor vanished in darkness to his right, debouching onto stairs which led to the lower floors.

He hesitated, debating plans. For Jacopo Salviani, the route of escape lay on a lower level, where a rope over the wall could be utilized as a flexible ladder. The keep held nothing but the cannon, and a view of Rome and the Prati.

Cellini swung to his right, going carefully past the sleeping refugees. Thoughts and conjectures raced in his mind, but he gave them little heed. His task now was to find and confront Salviani and expose him for the treacherous murderer that he was.

He moved past the last of the sleepers in the hall. A soldier of the Black Bands leaned against the wall, barely awake. More refugees were on the stairs, contorted in their sleep like corpses flung high by a backwash of total war.

Cressets burned in wall niches, and a few lanterns glowed dully, all barely making enough light to guide his steps. He moved down the stairs, eyes flicking from person to person. Muscles were tight in his back, and the pain of his wound was a dull burning now, stiffness coming slowly into his shoulder and left arm.

He came into a lower hall. Two soldiers, more alert, stared silently at him, then relaxed, recognition coming. He approached the first.

"I look for Ser Salviani—Jacopo Salviani," he said. "Have you seen him?"

The soldier shrugged, weariness in his eyes. "I do not know him," he admitted.

Cellini swore to himself, then turned to the second guard, but the other shook his head.

"I but arrived," the second guard explained. "I was searching for the one who tried to escape to the enemy."

"Escape!" Elation touched Cellini. "When was this—and where?"

The guard scratched his bearded chin. "A few minutes back," he admitted. "He tried to flee over the south wall, but was discovered."

Cellini bit his lips, forcing calmness into his thinking. Salviani had made one effort; in all probability he would make another. He carried a fortune in his shirt; it would take only a few of the jewels to make certain his way was clear the second time.

"Get Baglione," he snapped. "Tell him that Cellini awaits him atop the keep."

"But—" the guard began.

"Find Baglione," Cellini ordered. "That is an order from His Holiness."

"Yes sir; yes sir," the guard stammered. He ran swiftly along the hall, disappearing down a flight of stairs.

Benvenuto Cellini waited a moment, then swung about and retraced his steps to the higher floor. Impatience and a sense of futility lay in him, for he knew how great the odds were against trapping Salviani before the man could escape.

But he knew, too, that the keep would be the best place to keep a watch upon the walls, for its balustrades commanded all of them. There a single man could cry a warning at any suspicious movement.

No sleeper stirred as he went past. He felt drained of energy, and the flush of the hastily drunk wine was gone now. His back throbbed hotly, and the first hint of fever parched his

lips. He knew he needed a doctor, yet there was no time for that now.

He came to the last flight of steps to the roof and went upward. The breeze was cold on his sweaty face, and he felt a sense of relief when he emerged into the night, as though his strength had been miraculously returned by the crisp air.

The fog was lifted now, and the pale moonlight limned everything in silver cloth. Far away the fires of the conquerors glowed on the plains, and in the city other fires still sent wavering tongues of color into the night.

The cannon were dim monsters at the edge of the keep, guarding the main gate, with its heavy portcullis and drawbridge. Kegs of powder and heaps of heavy shot were racked close at hand.

He went toward the cannon, leaning against the balustrade, peering into the courtyard below. There was no movement now. Dying fires gleamed redly, and refugees slept. Close beside the gate, heaped like fantastic cords of wood, were the hundreds of burial boxes.

His gaze went along the wall automatically, even though he knew instinctively Jacopo Salviani would make no attempt at flight from there. Nothing stirred, and he turned away, going about the keep, his eyes staring intently at the Castel's walls as he circled the keep. Overhead the Angel loomed in its unearthly magnificence, and his lips twisted in a wry smile, as he wondered what must be the thoughts of such a heavenly creature at the sights of terror which lay all about.

He completed his circling of the keep and came to rest again near the cannon. Movement in the street outside the Castel caught his gaze, and he bent forward, watching.

Torches moved in a compact clot. Perhaps twenty men were there; and he squinted at the guidon carried by the first. It flipped in the light breeze, and as the group came closer to the Castel, he saw then that it was the personal flag of the Prince of Orange.

Benvenuto Cellini sighed, and the last vestige of hope disappeared from his mind. These were the men of Orange, returning with the envoys of the Pope. Peace lay close at hand, bought with death and bribery. Within moments the cause would be lost, and Charles V of Spain would be the conqueror of the Holy Empire.

He ducked suddenly, as much by instinct as warned by the sudden drawn breath at his back. He heard the clatter of a thrown knife upon the stone, and then the blade hurtled into the darkness, and he was turning to meet the rush of the bulky figure conjured out of the night itself.

"Salviani!" he cried aloud, and saw the instant growing of fear in the killer's face.

"But you're—" Salviani began, and Cellini laughed aloud.

"Not yet, traitor!" he called, and his sword whispered shrilly from its scabbard and came to guard.

Steel clattered on the stone roof, and Cellini knew then the infamy of this man. Salviani had intended to fire the cannon at the gate and wall, to breach the fortress so that the enemy might enter. Then, in the confusion, Jacopo Salviani planned to make his escape.

Cellini went forward, blade licking out. Instinct saved the murderer. He darted back, strangely light for so heavy a man, and his sword cleared leather and engaged and held Cellini's blade for the moment.

Cellini almost slipped on the flint and steel dropped by Salviani, and he kicked them away, feeling pain ripple along his back as the sword wound broke open and slimed his skin with fresh blood.

SALVIANI was backing, his voice rising in a muted cry. "Cellini," he said, "listen to reason. We will share the wealth, you and I, share it equally. Use your head, man; there's enough for both of us, more than enough!"

He gasped, and a wound opened black lips in his cheek and dribbled blood. Only instinct had saved him from a decapitating stroke.

Then fury came, the naked hatred in him coming to his face. He lunged at Cellini, weaving a pattern of death before him with his blade, and so furious was the attack that Cellini had to retreat.

Benvenuto Cellini stopped the attack near the cannon, holding Salviani now. He tested his strength against that of the other, and he knew then that the wound in his back had drained more of his strength than he had thought. In ordinary times, he could have mastered Salviani at will; but now, left arm almost useless and throwing him off balance, he realized they were almost evenly matched.

He fought with savage desperation. He made no effort to cry out, not thinking of it. His mind flicked momentarily to Horatio Baglione, and he wondered if the soldier was on his way to the keep. Then the fight was so savage there was not time for thinking.

His *lucco* fell, torn away by a sword blow, and he barely escaped the return stroke, hampered by the cannon at his back. He led and engaged and tried to lock blades, but Salviani was too clever, too strong. Their blades disengaged, and again Salviani was the aggressor.

"You have the devil's luck," Salviani panted. "Now I shall send you to your master forever."

He lunged and parried and threw his stroke, and the steel kissed Cellini's breast and slid along his ribs. Cloth and flesh parted, but the shirt-bandage was thick and turned the blade before it could strike deep.

Cellini tried to recover, but faintness weakened him, and the sword turned in his hand so that the flat of the blade struck, instead of the edge, at Salviani's throat. Salviani gagged, then darted backward a step, gasping for air.

Cellini moved in. He had seconds left, at most. He was like a scarecrow, shirt almost ripped away, the bandage fallen downward about his waist, his body black in the moonlight with blood.

But there was no faltering in his step, and his mind was clear. He measured the man and planned his attack, and then he drew on the last of his strength to attain his end.

He led and caught the parrying stroke and led again. He was drawing Salviani out of position, drawing him out of line, trying to tangle his feet and bring him off balance.

Salviani's blade hissed past his face, and he matched the blade, and sparks danced a saraband in the breeze. There was no sound but the clatter of steel on steel, the fight unheard and unnoticed by those below. Only the marble Angel watched, and its stone face was calm, uninterested, cold.

Cellini was gasping now, and a band of flame was about his chest. He missed a stroke and barely parried a counterthrust in time. He shook his head to clear his gaze.

Salviani was a lumbering dancing figure before him, deadly, strong as ever. Perspiration gleamed on his fat face, and hatred was there, and he came in strongly, leading the attack.

Cellini fell backward, as though his strength was truly gone. His blade barely kept death away. He could see the growing exultation on Salviani's face.

Then he misstroked with clumsy purpose, and his side was exposed. Salviani sucked in his breath in triumph and led his point, driving it in with all the power of his heavy body.

Cellini laughed then and took the blade—took and held it immobile between his dying left arm and his chest. For one fraction of eternity they were face to face, Salviani's sword-hilt at the skin of Cellini's body.

Cellini saw knowledge come to Salviani's face. He saw the mouth move to plead, but no pity was in him.

"For the Pope and the Empire!" Cellini cried, and his arm came back and forward twice, and each time the blade drank deep of Salviani's life.

Then Cellini stepped free, loosing Salviani's sword, and the man went down, joint by joint, his sword-hand propping him on the stone, his distended eyes staring in horror at the blood welling from his chest.

"Cell—" he whispered, and then his voice was still, and he was falling slackly, his sword grating upon the stone.

Benvenuto Cellini leaned against a *sacro*, feeling the metal cold through his clothing. He gasped for breath, and the sword dangled lifelessly in his hand. He stared at the body through dimming eyes; and strangely, irrelevantly, he thought that now another burial box would have to be constructed by the carpenters below.

He heard the sound of footsteps on the roof and came slowly about, sword lifting instinctively.

Then relief surged in his mind.

"Cellini!" Horatio Baglione cried.

"What—"

The rays of the lantern he carried shifted and swayed, lighting the macabre scene. Salviani was a slack heap on the roof, and Cellini stared at it, then glanced back at his friend.

"Here," he said, and dropped his sword and bent clumsily over the body.

His fingers jerked at cloth, tearing Salviani's shirt free. He was smiling as he lifted the leather bags into the light, laying both beside the corpse.

"The jewels?" Baglione asked incredulously.

"Yes!" Cellini licked dry lips. "I'll tell you later, after a surgeon has attended me." Momentarily strength came to his voice. "Quick, we must take these to the hiding-place and place them away."

But Horatio Baglione was shaking his head. "Too late," he said. "Men of the Prince of Orange's army have already entered the Castel. Refugees have crowded the hiding-place out of fear."

"But—" Cellini began, swinging about to peer over the balustrade.

He went sick with defeat, seeing the soldiers entering the fortress. They filed past the burial boxes, strangely orderly in their movements. The Castel was taken now.

"There's nothing to do. That is—" Baglione began, and Cellini cut him short, bending to retrieve the double bags of jewels.

"Get your men to remove this body," he said harshly. "He too will have to be buried." His gaze centered on the face of his friend. "And tell His Holiness that the jewels are safe." He smiled then, arrogance in his weary face. "Tell him that Benvenuto Cellini will fulfill his task."

Turning, he went achingly below to find a surgeon to treat his wound.

*Benvenuto Cellini was in truth a victor. He had been given a task to do, and three men had died because that duty must be done.*

THE sack of Rome was over; now Rome lay fully dead, and its conquerors no longer need worry about any attack. The citizens were cowed and beaten, fighting only over husks of bread now, cowering back from swaggering soldiers. Florence still held, but it would go before the might of Charles' army.

Soldiers watched curiously as men and women streamed from the Castel Sant' Angelo. Bedraggled, dirty, stinking with the dirt and sweat of a month's captivity, the prisoners hurried away, knowing how futile the action was, but hoping to salvage something from their shattered homes.

None carried anything of value. The victors had been thorough, and smuggled wealth had been disgorged before the prisoners had been permitted freedom.

Benvenuto Cellini had watched the search. Bled, his wounds dressed, he was weak but whole. Soon he would be on his way to Florence, but for now he watched.

The Prince of Orange and his retinue had arrived and concluded final signings of the treaty. The Pope and his staff had been formally declared prisoners of the Castel, where they would remain for many months. Certain Cardinals and others had been taken hostage by the enemy, and now the soldiery were combing the Castel, room by room, stone by stone, searching for the treasure rumored to be hidden somewhere.

Cellini had watched the search, disguised in his monk's habit, and amusement stirred within him at the bustle of activity. Not that he knew the Papal treasure was beyond the taking, but because of the improbable places which were being searched.

Ahead of him, in the people-clotted courtyard, carpenters were closing the lid of Jacopo Salviani's burial box. It was crude, like the others, but the family coat of arms had been gilded on the top, and efforts had been made to plane it smoother than most.

Don Juan Achelete y Trujillo watched the box being closed. There

was no sorrow in his firm spade-bearded face; he did this more as a courtesy to his wife than for any other reason. But he had stared into the dead face of Salviani and his hand had crossed his chest. Then he had gestured for the carpenters to close the chest, and his gaze had swung about to summon the burial group.

"All right," he called.

A Cardinal came forward, and two lesser dignitaries. Then a group of monks shifted silently into place, and Cellini stepped forward and lost himself in their midst.

"And this man—Cellini—who did this," he heard Don Achelete's voice whispering to an aide, "is he about?"

"Yes sir!" the aide answered. "He cannot pass the gate."

"Good!" The Spanish nobleman nodded grimly. "I have orders to take him, for it is thought he has the Church's treasure on his person. At least, a great quantity of freshly smelted gold was found in his room." He jerked his thumb. "Let's bury this man and then get back to work."

The procession moved toward the gate, the burial box going first, lifted on soldiers' shoulder. Then came the Cardinal and the Don and the other dignitaries. After, came the group of brown-clad monks.

Soldiers presented arms at the gate, and Cellini felt the tension mounting. Hands, soldiers' hands, were rough but courteous as they searched each man who left the fortress. Cellini held his breath, feeling fingers prod at his body. He was glad then that he had not tried to carry the gems away on his person.

Then they were free of the Castel, and the drawbridge rocked from their weight. Prisoners drifted by, barely heeding, and callous enemy soldiers made joking comments on the dead.

The sun was hot on Cellini's hooded head, and a trickle of sweat ran down his cheek. The way to the cemetery was short, and he paced steadily, head bent as though in prayer, but darting side glances about.

The group stopped at last, and the soldiers dropped the burial box into the hole dug in the earth. The ground was marked for dozens of paces about, for burial parties came and went with monotonous regularity.

The burial service was brief, but Cellini gave little heed. He had slain this man, not wickedly, but in justice, and he felt no twinge of conscience. He watched, unmoved, then swung about and followed the monks as the party returned toward the Castel.

The way led past buildings, and at the last, where a shadowed doorway invited retreat, Benvenuto Cellini darted a glance about and, seeing he was unobserved, swung into its shadows. Swiftly he removed the monk's habit, and a second later he was but another tattered refugee in a city filled with refugees.

He waited, breath held, wondering if his action had been seen. Then, his heart beating more regularly, he stepped into the sunlight and faced the Castel Sant' Angelo. He could see the men upon the keep, standing beside the spiked cannon, and he drew a strip of cloth from his waist and waved a signal.

Two men were there, Horatio Baglione and Cavalierino, and they were waiting for his message. He saw their arms come up, and he laughed aloud, conscious that passing refugees looked at him as though he had lost his senses. In a world of chaos such as this, only madmen or victors laughed. And this laughter was no victor, so he must be crazed.

But Benvenuto Cellini was in truth a victor. He had been given a task to do, and three men had died because that duty must be done. A treasure had been given to his keeping, and he had protected and hidden it so that the Church might rise again in the future when the mire and muck of war had firmed into solid ground again.

Benvenuto Cellini watched his friends turn from the keep walls, and his last glimpse of the Castel before he swung away was the marble Angel brooding over the fortress. Somehow that Angel, so untouched by earthly events, symbolized the patience of heaven.

Cellini began to walk, going toward the other side of the city, where he had been told escape might be made. He glanced sideways at the cemetery, as he passed, and a wryness came to his mouth. Jacopo Salviani had fought so desperately to gain a treasure, and now that he had it, he was dead and did not know that it was his.

For Benvenuto Cellini had spirited the treasure from the Castel Sant' Angelo. He had taken it out of the Castel with the unconscious aid and connivance of Don Juan Achelete y Trujillo, whose orders were to prevent such an occurrence.

The jewels lay hidden in Jacopo Salviani's burial box, hidden by his body. And there they would stay until the day when they were needed for the task of rebuilding the Church.

Benvenuto Cellini doubled his pace, and peace came to his face. A bird perched on the shattered fire-marked wall of a building and chirped at the sunlight. A whistle came to Cellini's lips.

Then he was away from the Castel and capture and the threat of death; and ahead of him the future was a beckoning thing which drew him onward.

"Brrreeeep!" he whistled trillingly at the bird, and laughed as it wheeled away in graceful flight toward freedom. Content for the moment, he walked ahead.

**TIME is short. But confronted as we are with Now or Never, each man chooses his desire, brings out the dearest longing of his heart, seeks to make his life as he dreamed it. For every man has a last request to make of life.**

# STAR OF

*Illustrated by John McDermott*

HOW CAN I EXPLAIN MY PURPOSE IN SETTING down this narrative? I am not sure that I know it myself; how can I explain it to others? I have no reason to believe that anyone will survive to read my story, or that there will be anyone to print it, or even that the page which carries it will outlast the telling. Yet here I find myself on a warm sultry December night sitting down to my typewriter to begin the story of—who knows what it will turn out to be? There below me, ten floors below me, glare and glimmer the lights of the city; above, the baleful star of doom shines brighter and brighter (I thank heaven that it is still outside the line of my window); and from lower down the street I hear the hum of the presses already racing for the first morning edition.

No one else in this building can hear the presses at night; but I know exactly when they have started. I know by the faint throb they send into the air, and even if I should close the window, I could not escape it. I should keep imagining it.

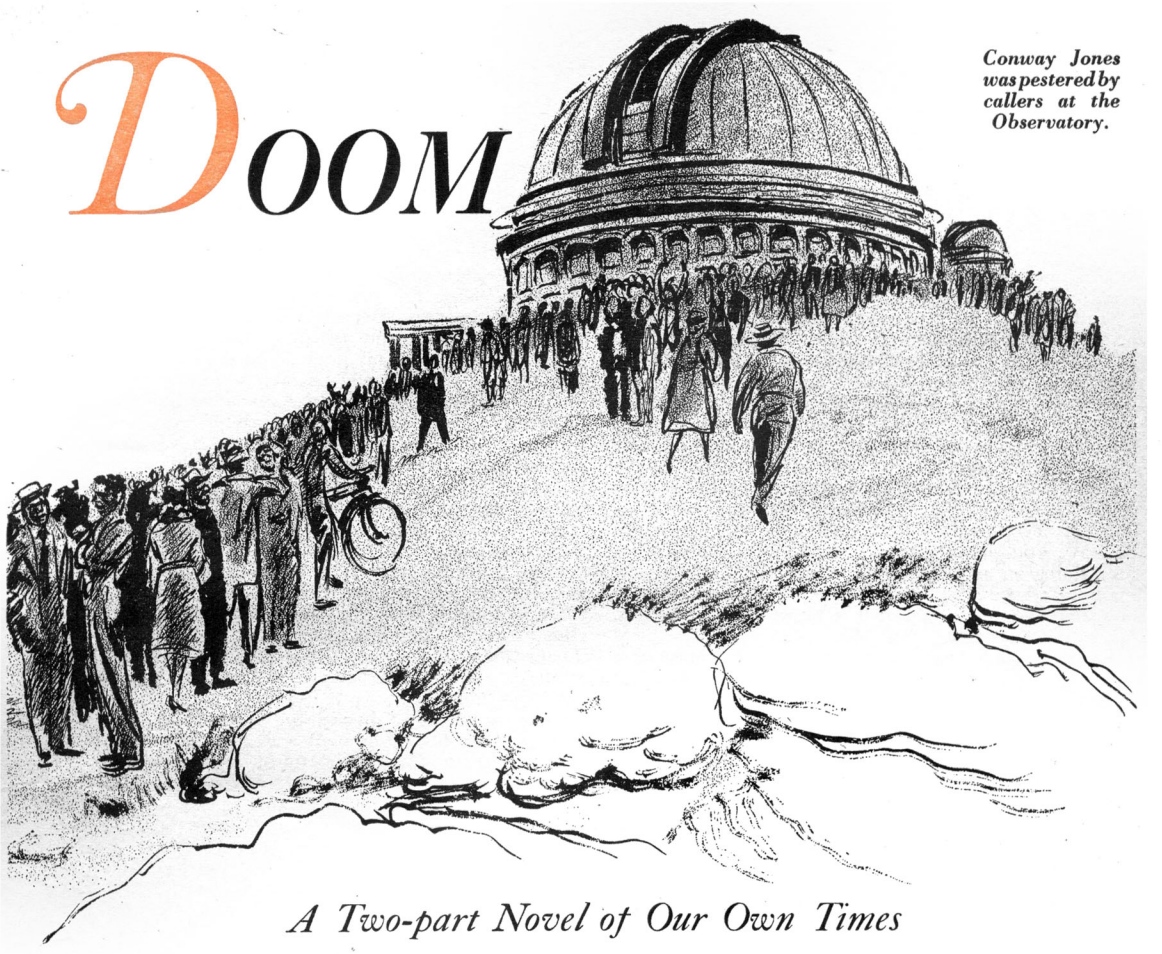
There was a time when the hum of the presses was all adventure and excitement to me, as indeed to any newspaper man really loving his work. But that was when there was a gay world to announce to a sunny morning. Now there is nothing but what is sinister and bodeful in the roll of the presses. Nothing but threat and terror come in their muffled note over the cool night air—yes, Earth's winds are still gentle and refreshing; and the patch of starry sky I see through my window is still beautiful, how beautiful!

The more I think of it, the more certain do I feel that no one will live to read this chronicle (for it is really a chronicle, not just a tale), and that the chronicle itself will be scattered almost as soon as I have tapped my last full stop. Still, I feel impelled to write it.

Can it be that somewhere in my heart of hearts there is a faint hope that chaos will not be, that somewhere we shall be able to ward it off, and that some of us will survive the great menace? I keep telling myself that such a hope is vain. My patch of sky is beautiful. But just beyond it, the Comet of Judgment, as some people call it, glows reddish. Soon it will be burning in my window too. The danger speeds nearer and nearer. But we have no means of avoiding it, no means whatever. There is no hope. There is no chance. And still here I am writing it all down as if I believed that there was!

Can it be that at a time like this every man does what he must? Time is short. But life is still bountiful, and the joys of the world are ample and manifold. Can it be that at a time like this, confronted as we are with Now or Never in its most complete form, each man

# DOOM



*Conway Jones was pestered by callers at the Observatory.*

*A Two-part Novel of Our Own Times*

by LEWIS SOWDEN

chooses his desire, brings out the dearest longing of his heart, and even though he knows it is too late, seeks to make his life as he dreamed it? Can it be that every man has a last request to make of life, but knows it only on his deathbed? Here we are in the presence of the greatest story in the history of the world, the greatest perhaps but one (I use the word *story*, of course, in the newspaper sense), the greatest story that ever a reporter was called upon to write—and I will write it. Even though I know that there will be no one to read it, I shall not be there to revise the script, and when it is done there will be no script to revise—yet I will write it. I will write it as I see it, and I will set it all down as I know it, or as much of it as the time will permit.

ACTUALLY I have been writing the story already—columns and columns of it in the paper for the past three or four days. But that is not the whole story. No story as printed in a newspaper ever is. It is never particular enough, never human enough. In a story like the one now confronting us, every detail is important. Individual behavior is of the utmost interest. I am not sure but that it is the most interesting thing of all. First comes, of course, what the astronomers have been saying. Then there is what the physicists and the mathematicians have been answering. And the politicians, too, have had a deal to say for themselves. All that, and much more has been recorded. But what about the little man? He also thinks and feels at a crisis like this. What ordinary people say and do is also significant. That is the side of the story which I specially want to write.

No doubt scores of other newspaper men are doing the same. In Britain, in America, in Russia they are bent over their typewriters as I am, hurrying to make their several chronicles of these overwhelming days. Situated as they are at the center of things, near the great council halls of the world, near the great observatories and laboratories, they are much better placed to do so than I am here at my remote perch in South Africa. But from the world's periphery I shall see things differently, and perhaps I shall see more. To the great culmination that we await, there are a thousand aspects, all of which are valid. In any event, "on the night" my seat will be as good as theirs. We shall all be on the grandstand, and there will be ample room in the press box.

So I begin my story without apologies and in no diffident mood. After all, I have a special right; for I, John Lacey, was first with the news. Yes, a newspaper man's dream come true! A world story! A world-shaker, as we say. And I had it first. The *Day* had it hours before any other newspaper in the world. True, they underplayed it. They were so scared they didn't know

what to do with it; and I have a suspicion that Henderson, the chief sub-editor, such a cautious fellow, wanted to spike it. I was furious at the time, nearly lost my temper in the presence of Mr. Madison, the editor. Looking back, I know it didn't matter. We did use the story, however unobtrusively. The *Day* was first with the news, and we did set the world agog.

Let me, therefore, get on with the story and waste no more time. I have wasted too much already. I could have started four days ago, and now there are only ten days left, at the most. Soon that star will be creeping into my patch of sky. Soon it may be impossible to work. Who knows what these ten days will be like? There is nothing for it but to press on.

Ordinarily I would never have dared to sit down to my typewriter at this time of night. People would have objected to the noise. Folk with late habits are not popular round here. Tenants of a building opposite the main office entrance in Long Street once complained of our sign *The Day—The Day—The Day* flashing in neon lights from the second floor, and we had to stop it. But now the noise of my typewriter won't matter. People are up at all hours, doing all sorts of things, things they should do and things they shouldn't do. Many are leaving. My floor is almost empty already, except for the Cosways, and they mean to go too. Mrs. Cosway has been doing an extra spring cleaning, of all things! So many folk have gone to join their families. I suppose at a time like this people want to be with their relatives. Quite understandable, but—

But this is not the way to tell the story. I must start from the beginning, from the day when the news first broke.

## Chapter Two

I REMEMBER THAT DAY AS A VERY DULL DAY at the office, and tiresome just because it was so dull. Most people, I am aware, think of a newspaper office as full of bustle and excitement, a place where the buzz of the world comes in by wire, telephone and word of mouth, and is shouted up and down the corridors. Quite false, of course. A newspaper office is a place of work, and the work is of a kind requiring calm and concentration. News when it is a matter of routine is without excitement. Front pages are not made with the tearing of hair. The most sensational-looking headlines are the result of deliberation. Everything is calculated down to the number of letters to the line. No place is so well-ordered as a well-ordered newspaper office. Not that ours is of the best, but it is typical.

Our sub-editors' room is as untidy as a bank holiday, but as quiet as a church. Our telephones are in soundproof cubicles. Our teletype machines ticking out news from the telegraph office and the agencies are in a room apart. Our radio is on the top floor. The reporters' room gets a quick reprimand shouted through the hatch if the younger fellows raise their voices too clamorously. Jupp, the galley-boy, gets a mouthful of violent expletives thrown at him if he comes up the stairs whistling. In short, a fairly quiet office; and on this early December afternoon it was quieter than usual.

Outside, the sun was hot; inside, the air was drowsy. The evening staff had not come in yet, and half the rooms were therefore empty. There was no one to swear at Jupp's whistling, because Jupp was not on duty. And there was, as we say, nothing doing. Spencer, our crime reporter, a handsome fellow, had his long legs stretched out beneath his desk and was assuring us with a sigh that there was not a murder, not a robbery, not a rape to report from anywhere, and he didn't know what the world was coming to. His favorite joke raised not a glimmer of a smile. There was nothing at the courts, said Bowles, but a few drunks and bankrupts. As far as we knew, no politician was working himself up into a state of indignation; and Clayton, our man at the City Hall, was unable to report any but the usual plots on the Council. It looked as if we were going to have a very dull paper indeed next morning.

At his desk in the corner, gray-haired old Tovey sat writing up his market report in that neat round hand of his in which you felt there was never an "i" undotted or a "t" uncrossed. Old Tovey, who would never touch so unpredictable a thing as a typewriter (and because his hand is so clear nobody wants him to) sits there every afternoon doing his markets for the Housewives' Column; and any lazy afternoon Spencer is sure to stride across to his corner and hail him with patronizing banter: "Hullo, Tovey, my boy! What's the price of cabbages today?" Or it may be carrots or turnips. This time it was cabbages, and Tovey answered him with his invariable answer: "You'd be surprised! Aye, you'd be surprised!" Whenever Tovey says this in his slightly cracked voice, he raises a grin on Spencer's blond face. I found even myself willing to smile, and smiling actually when Tovey put down his pencil and called us round him. "Look at this, boys! Come and have a look at something good."

From a drawer he took some photographs, and next moment he was passing them round. Photographs, taken by himself, of a pretty bungalow amid an orchard. "That's where I'm going to be in a month's time, boys. That's where I'll be when I've shaken the city dust from my feet. Livagen, I call the place. Not bad name, eh?"

"Bright idea, Tovey."

Tovey is due to go on pension in a month. Poor old Tovey: He's bought himself a house and a plot near the Natal coast. Been saving up for it for years.

"That's where you'll find me if you should want me, boys. And that's where I'll be able to tell you the real price of cabbages and turnips and pumpkins, the real price because I'll be growing them myself, then. But of course nobody will want to know it, not from me anyhow. You'd be surprised!"

We all agreed that we would, agreed also that Tovey was a good sort and that the office would never be the same without him. In our hearts we knew that nobody (the housewives least of all) would miss him, and we pitied him with the pity that the active journalist always keeps for the has-been.

Out of sheer boredom I put my head in at the news editor's door and suggested that I should go on a round of calls. He looked at me hard, thought a moment and then agreed that it would be better than wearing out the office chairs, provided of course that I made a proper round of it and not just a— I didn't wait for the end of his sentence, knowing that it would be something about jaunts or pub-crawls, but was off down the corridor at once.

A ROUND of calls could be a conscientious series of visits to certain chosen institutions of the town, to the secretary of this and the chairman of that, or it could just be a pleasant loaf. Perhaps when I put the suggestion to Millington, I hadn't quite made up my mind what it was going to be. Perhaps I had some thought, after making one or two perfunctory calls, of looking up Philippa at her father's office and taking her out for a spin in the country. I had done it once or twice before, and I knew that Wheeler, the office driver, could be very understanding on such occasions. Philippa and I are to be married in a couple of months—or should I say we *were* to have been married?

We would have been married weeks ago, only Philippa's mother, Mrs. Laver, is the fussy kind who insists that her elder daughter's wedding shall be arranged

with all the fashionable details, such as trousseau, wedding invitations, bridesmaids, a wedding party, a honeymoon at the coast and the rest of it. "And you must not grudge me the joy of a proper wedding," she used to tell Philippa with a sigh. "After all, dear, it may be the only wedding in our house. It's not that your sister hasn't the looks, but you see for yourself, I can't get her interested in herself, and men are afraid. . . . You know what I mean, Phil. So there, dear, do as I say. . . ." Anyhow we couldn't arrange all that at once, certainly not the three weeks at the coast, so we put the wedding off; and now. . . Well, never mind.

After what Millington said or rather mumbled (for he seldom raises his voice), I felt conscience-stricken and put Philippa out of my mind for the time being. I should be seeing her in the evening in any case, taking her to a show. Instead, therefore, of going into a cubicle and ringing her up as I might have done (these soundproof boxes are admirable for private calls), I went straight downstairs and asked Wheeler to get one of the cars out. While waiting for him, I reflected it was better this way. A dull, empty afternoon was just the time when something might break. A reporter gets like that. He smells the wind for news, and sometimes gets the scent without quite knowing it.

The car was out in a minute or so, and we were off past the traffic lights. I called first at the Chamber of Commerce, where the secretary, a bore of a fellow, began giving me a speech on the latest iniquities of the Inland Revenue Department, and hadn't half done when I bade him an abrupt good afternoon. Then we made for the Commercial Exchange, but stopping at the next traffic light, I changed my mind. These commercial folk were dullards all. I asked Wheeler to leave town and drive to the Observatory instead.

He turned his puffy eyes to me. "What, so soon?"

"Why not? I haven't had a game of billiards for a week, and Conway Jones may give us a drink."

Wheeler smiled a conspiratorial smile and took a right turn round the traffic light.

Conway Jones is the Chief Astronomer, a charming and contemplative kind of man. He rather looks down on us newspapermen and most kinds of laymen; but we don't mind that, and I get on very well with him. His study, up on the hill, with its books, and its diagrams and an instrument or two, is one of the remotest places I know. Sitting opposite him at his desk while he looks up his tables, you feel yourself to be thousands of miles from anywhere.

It's usual for us to make a call at the Observatory about once a fortnight, and get the latest news about eclipses and comets and anything else Conway Jones may have spotted. It always makes him sniff to hear it put that way. "We're not spotters," he says, and motions me to a seat.

Like so many men immersed in their own work, Conway Jones has no idea of what is and what is not news; and so the Observatory call always takes time. You have to sit down and have a chat with him, and if he has any real news, sure enough it turns up casually in the course of conversation. If Conway Jones is in the mood, he calls for tea (or something stronger if Wheeler is in luck), and then he suggests that you might have time for a few shots at billiards, and of course you always have.

Yes, I rather like this man Conway Jones, and I was looking forward to spending a pleasant half-hour with him. We left the town center behind us, and soon Wheeler was speeding up Observatory Hill—then through the iron gateway, up the drive—and here we were at the chief astronomer's office.

Removing his glasses, Conway Jones greeted me with a smile. I was glad to see that he was in conversational mood. After a few vague remarks about the weather, the brilliant sunshine and the drought, I put the usual question: "Anything in the way of—er—heavenly news today, Mr. Jones?"

"Mmm, well." And then instead of answering he said: "Let's have some tea, shall we?"

"Thanks very much." Wheeler was not in luck.

He picked up the telephone and asked for the tea. "And your driver would like some too?" he said to me.

"I'm sure he would, thanks."

"And call Mr. Lacey's driver in to have some too, will you?" Then he put the receiver down and looked at me, his thin lips parted. "News, you were asking?"

"Yes. Anything unusual cropped up?"

"Well, there is a new comet on the way. . . . Mmm—I suppose you'd call that news?"

"A comet's always worth a paragraph."

"A paragraph!"

"And," I tried to appease him, "there's usually a good picture in it."

"A good picture? I wonder."

"It's got a tail, hasn't it?"

"It has a tail, but you can't see it."

"Then how do you know it's there?"

"I said *you* can't see it. I can."

"I beg your pardon."

A native servant brought the tea in. Mr. Jones filled the cups, and as I watched him, I could not help thinking that there was something strange about him today.

We stirred our tea. He seemed to be waiting for me to speak. "This comet, has it been reported elsewhere?"

"No."

"Then you're the discoverer?"

"So I believe. Is that worth another paragraph?"

"At least two. One for the comet and one for you." And then the reporter's primal fear came upon me. "Have you told this to any other newspaper?"

"You're the first. Have your tea."

I gulped down half a cup, reflecting how lucky it was for me that I had decided to make the Observatory call.

He put down his cup before I did. "Of course, I have reported it."

I swallowed suddenly, and the hot tea burned my throat. "You have!"

"It's the usual thing to let other observatories know at once, by cable. But so far, they seem to have said nothing about it."

"Is that strange?"

"Somewhat."

I put down my cup and took up my pencil. It was time to get the details. "Is this comet visible to the naked eye?"

"It will be in a day or two, but it won't be much to look at—I mean at first. We'll see the tail only as a ring or fan, very faint to begin with."

"Why?"

"Because the tail is behind."

"I thought all comets had their tails behind."

"Don't try to be smart, young man."

"I mean I thought all comets had their tails away from the sun."

"More or less. Now, this comet reaches its perihelion, nearest point to the sun, in only eight weeks' time. It's still moving toward the sun, and we happen to be in its way—directly in its way," he added.

"What's that going to mean to us?"

"Mmm." Conway Jones smiled. He smiled one of those indulgent smiles of his. "Do you remember Halley's Comet, in 1910?" he asked suddenly.

"No."

"Of course not. Much too young. Well then, when you get back to your office, I suggest you turn up your 1910 files and read of the scare some folks had when they

thought that Halley's Comet might pass too close to the earth."

"Did it?"

"Missed us by a nice few million miles."

"Will this one come any closer?"

He seemed to be impatient at my slowness. "That's what I've been telling you. We lie directly in its path. This comet is going to hit us."

"You mean a collision between the comet and the earth?"

"We call it an appulse. Collision if you like."

"You mean a direct hit!"

"Yes."

"What a story!" I could not repress my excitement. "Mr. Jones! May I come here tonight and have a look at it through the telescope? Can I get a photograph? Or can you do a diagram for us showing the comet's orbit, I mean its ellipse or parabola or whatever it is? And you're not giving this to any other paper, are you? In any case, it's too late for them today, and we'll splash it in the morning. What a story! I think we'd better have a diagram as well as a photograph. Do you think you can have the diagram for us today? And of course I'll have to have a long interview. Is this the first comet you've discovered, and have you got a good photograph of yourself? Never mind—we can take one. Are they going to call this comet—"

He put up a hand to stop me. "What exactly do you want?"

I stopped in my course, a little ashamed. This was not the way to go about it. I had to arrange my questions properly. "You say we're directly in the comet's path. Do you mean right now?"

"I mean that we're moving toward the same point in space, the comet at about two million miles a day, the earth at about one-and-a-half million, and we're going to get there at the same time."

The way he put it made it sound a very tame affair indeed. I began to think perhaps I was exaggerating the story. But that was impossible! This was a story in a million!

"What will happen then?" I asked.

"Either we blow up or we burn up."

"You mean the comet?"

"Both of us."

For a moment I didn't know what to say. I couldn't believe I had heard right. "You mean—the comet will blow up the earth?"

"Or burn it up. Can't say which yet."

Now I could only gaze at him in silence. My face must have pictured my incredulity, for Conway Jones suddenly snapped at me. "Go and look up your 1910 files! They imagined the whole business there when Halley's Comet was coming. Fire, smoke, brimstone and all. I remember it clearly. I was a boy then. The humorists had a great time with it. But it's coming true now sure enough—if we're lucky."

"If we're lucky?"

"It'll be a quick end, you know, an end to everything. . . . But I see you don't believe me. Not the kind of stuff to tell the public, eh?"

"I'd tell them anything. I'm a reporter. But I've got to make sure of my facts. I can't afford to get this story wrong. This is tremendous! A comet in collision and blowing up—"

"In collision with us."

"I mean this is the first time anything like that—"

"No, it's not." He went to his bookshelves. I watched him take a volume and turn the pages. "In the year 1770 a comet—Lexell's—they call it, enveloped the moons of Jupiter. That was a collision of a kind."

"What happened?"

"Nothing much."

"That's what I mean. It's always been understood that comets are mostly gas, too flimsy to do any damage."

Without looking at me, he took another volume from the shelves. He seemed to have marked it at the place he wanted. "There's a cup-shaped crater in Arizona which bears a general resemblance to the craters of the moon. It is about three-quarters of a mile in diameter and several hundred feet deep. The crater is thought to have been caused by a comet which came into appulsion with the earth millions of years ago." Now he looked up. "That couldn't have been very flimsy."

"It didn't blow us up."

"There was another quite recently, in 1908. It hit us in Siberia. That also didn't blow us up, but it scorched the earth for fifty miles. Might have flattened out London quite easily."

"I thought that was only a meteor."

"Yes, part of a comet."

He replaced the book and returned to the table. "You're a reporter, you say. You must have the facts. Here they are, plain enough. We have never known what the heads of comets are made of, apart from some scattered solid stuff and gaseous matter. But we have known that the head of a comet carries an electric charge. Now, this new comet is all electric charge, an electric charge of atomic intensity. Our earth can never withstand it. The facts, you see, are quite brief. A little difficult to take in at first, maybe, but you'll get used to it. . . . Come with me."

Without other explanation, he rose abruptly and went out of the room. Taking up my copy paper and pencil, I followed him. He talked to me over his shoulder. "You're going to write about this?"

"Of course."

He must have sensed a want of conviction in my voice. "Are you sure?"

"What do you think, Mr. Jones! This is a world scoop for me, the greatest beat ever. In any case, you can't keep it quiet."

"I don't suppose you can," he drawled, "at least not for long."

This brought another question leaping to my tongue. "Do you know when the collision will take place?"

"Yes—in about a fortnight."

"A fortnight!" It was the biggest thing he'd yet told me.

I had been expecting him to take me to the dome, and had followed him without thinking. Had I not been a little dazed, I should have remembered that Conway Jones disliked having laymen about his telescope. I was reminded of that when he opened a door, and I realized we'd come to the billiard-room instead. The chief astronomer was immensely fond of the game, and had had a table installed at his own expense. I remarked that I didn't think I'd have any time for billiards today, but he insisted. He was rather vain about his skill (the only weakness I have ever seen in him), and I gathered that he wanted to show me some of his latest shots. While he was chalking the cues, I was searching my head for such scraps of knowledge about comets as I had picked up at various times in case I hit upon some useful line of inquiry. In a situation such as this ignorance was a serious disadvantage, but a reporter can't be expected to know everything. He has to be ready to pretend to know. I had an idea that all comets come back.

"When was this comet here before?"

"A few thousand years ago, I should think. I can't give the exact period for the present."

"Then we have no previous record of it?"

"No. But we can be fairly certain it didn't hit us last time. Two times running would be too much of a coincidence. Though of course," he added airily, "there's no knowing what it did to us on some earlier visit."

I BEGAN to resent his detachment. Conway Jones was always like that with newspaper men, wouldn't take them altogether seriously. There he was leaning over the side of the table now. But if this was going to be the story it seemed, I had to make dead certain of it.

"How long have you had the comet under observation?"

"Three or four days."

"And you said nothing till now."

"I wasn't sure."

"Are you sure now?"

"Absolutely."

"If it's true, why haven't the other observatories, the European or American, said anything about it?"

"Perhaps just because it is true, and like you, they're scared."

When Conway Jones said that, something like realization came upon me for the first time. I knew then that the story he was giving me was the plain truth. It was easy to imagine how unwilling most people would be to make such an announcement. There couldn't be two men as cold-blooded as Conway Jones. He was now addressing a ball. Out shot his cue, and the white ball cannoned off the red into a corner pocket. Involuntarily I must have applauded. He looked pleased. I reflected that it was not unnatural for an astronomer to be so fond of billiards. He could do almost anything with those balls, and studied them as though in compensation for the aloofness of those other spheres in celestial space.

"I'll do it again," he said, "with a wider angle this time." You would have thought we'd been talking about nothing but billiards all afternoon.

Just then Wheeler slipped into the room. Unlucky over the drink, he thought he might still find solace in a game. Conway Jones would play billiards with anyone. But this afternoon Wheeler's luck was quite out.

The astronomer pocketed the white again as neatly as before, but did not look up for approval. Instead he watched the red gliding slowly away across the cloth and asked of no one in particular: "What happens when one ball hits the other?"

I realized that the comet was not as remote from his thoughts as I had imagined. As I made no attempt to answer, he answered himself: "The two balls rebound with a report, and the force which brought them together resolves into two forces acting at certain angles which, if you're skilled enough, you can pre-determine—like this."

His cue shot out again, and again he cannoned and pocketed. "See what I mean?"

"No." I couldn't help thinking that Conway Jones was just showing off, but I had to let him tell the tale in his own way. "You don't mean that that's what's going to happen when the comet hits the earth?"

"Not really. You see, there are important differences to take into consideration: The earth and the comet are moving toward each other at a much greater speed than I could ever impart to these billiard balls, infinitely greater."

"I suppose they are."

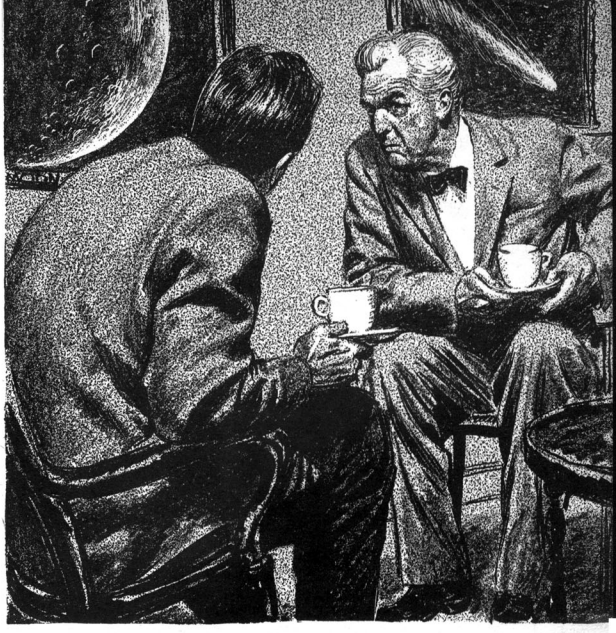
"Moreover,"—he held a ball in the palm of his hand and caressed it with his fingers—"these billiard balls are beautifully made, beautifully. They're much more stable than the earth, you know. No matter how hard I hit them, they would not disintegrate."

"And the earth will?"

"The earth is full of inequalities, unresolved strains and stresses, in fact not stable at all. Certainly in no shape to withstand anything like a major shock."

"But I thought you said the comet was not solid."

"Neither is it. But think of the electric charge it carries! A terrific kick, I assure you! In fact, had it been all solid, I think we might have stood a better chance."



*"We lie right in its path; this comet will hit us!"*

"And that's why we're going to blow up?"

"So will the comet, I fancy."

"But it's going to be the end of the world! Is that my story?"

"Oh, no. I shouldn't exaggerate. It will be the end of earth as such; but it will hardly affect the universe as a whole."

"It will mean the end of the world as far as we are concerned?"

"Oh, yes. Put subjectively, the statement is valid."

HE had dropped his cue and was chalking it again. From a corner of my eye I caught sight of Wheeler looking on with open mouth. At this moment I conceived something like horror for Conway Jones. His passionless calm and his pedantry were exasperating. Here he was virtually announcing to the world its imminent destruction, and he did it with the casual air of someone reading the news over at the breakfast-table. No doubt he had discussed the comet fully with his assistants, and worked over with them every detail of it. But now he was actually giving it to the world, the first man to do so.... It was wrong to do it this way. It was infuriating! How could he expect anyone to be convinced? And yet I knew this was his most natural manner. Conway Jones is as unemotional as a knife.

He put the chalk down. "Like to have a game?"

"No."

"Mmm . . . . You shouldn't take this comet in the wrong way, you know. It really won't make any difference to us—I mean, until it actually strikes us. Until then life can just go on. . . . Sure you won't stay for a game?"

"Mr. Jones!" At last the feelings which I felt should have possessed both of us in this situation got the better of me. "For heaven's sake, I'm not playing billiards! Are you quite sure about this comet?"

He was not a bit moved by my outburst. "The facts are just as I have given them to you."

"And earth is going to be destroyed—with all mankind?"

"That's about it."

There seemed to be nothing more to ask him. I felt baffled. Here I was in the presence of the greatest story

of all time, and I had nothing more to ask. All I could think of was, "There's no chance of error?"

"With our latest methods, the space-time angle and so on, very little indeed. We know the velocity and path of the earth. We have calculated the velocity and the elliptical curve of the comet as it approaches perihelion. Why—" And here I caught what sounded like a faint note of triumph in his voice; the man was human after all! "Why, I could even tell you which side of the earth is going to get the first impact, which countries, I mean. But that would be political, wouldn't it?" He could even joke about it.

"Will that make any difference?"

"None at all. It's purely of academic interest. But keep in touch with us. Later I shall be able to tell you more, something about the size of the nucleus of the comet, its composition and, of course, the size of the electrical charge. We shall know all these in time."

He turned a pair of gleaming eyes on me, and for the first time something like enthusiasm came into his sallow face. "Do you realize that this is going to be a unique opportunity for us? We have never before been able to observe a comet at close quarters, never. But we shall have this one under observation for days. The next fortnight is going to be of immense value to us. There's no knowing what we may learn about cometary bodies. Of course, we shall continue our observations until the last possible moment—the last one possible. . . . An opportunity in a million!"

I looked at him in silence as he talked on. But, as he spoke of this unique opportunity, not a moment of which would be wasted, the thin line of his lips, the cold concentration of his eyes, carried conviction more than anything he had said. I needed no more.

Indeed, I felt I had had enough of Conway Jones. I wanted to get away and think things over for myself. I wanted to talk about it to someone ordinary, who would be likely to have the same thoughts and feelings as myself. Moreover, with a big story on my hands, it was necessary to give the office the earliest possible warning.

I put my pencil away, realizing that I hadn't taken a single note. But it didn't matter. Every word by Conway Jones was clear in my brain. "You did say I could come again in the evening?" I asked.

"If you wish."

"What time?"

"No use coming before nine."

"You'll have the diagram for me?"

"Yes—with times, angles and velocities. Will that be enough?"

"Ample. Anything that looks impressive."

He nodded.

Then I noticed Wheeler again. He was looking at us with a ghoulish expression on his face—round eyes, sagging jaw. No thought of billiards there. "Come on!" I called to him. "Come on, Wheeler!"

As we were going out, I noticed that Conway Jones was bending over his billiard table again.

## Chapter Three

IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO DESCRIBE WITH what feelings I drove back to the office. Contrary emotions had hold of me, so that one moment I felt glad and exultant, and the next moment I was all dismay. Here I was going to write the greatest story in the world, and I could not help feeling the intoxicating triumph of it. Who, I asked myself, had ever had such a story to give to the world? Not Amerigo telling the Old World of the New World across the water. Not Balboa describing his first sight of the Pacific. Not Noah waiting for the first glimpse of land again! No! No one had ever had such a story to tell, excepting that one who first became aware of the Creation and sat down to record it. For what else could compare with the first news of the Destruction-to-be but the news of the Creation? I thought of Milton's *Satan*—yes, it was triumph with a serpent in it—Milton's *Satan* journeying through chaos and for the first time seeing the world hanging on a golden chain fast by empyreal heaven. And here I was. . . . Revulsion overtook me.

Wheeler was steering in silence. Wheeler is a fellow of few words. All he had offered in the way of comment when he got into his seat was a wry smile. We were passing a row of lawns on our way into town, and my mind turned from Satan to wonder at the beautiful green of the grass. Actually, it was a poor green. We'd had no rain for weeks, and we haven't had any yet. The blue-gums were gray with dust, the garden aloes yellowish. The lawns were being kept alive with water from the hose-pipes, and they were only a brownish green. But in those half-parched lawns I saw at that moment the lovely green of all green fields and all the beauty of the world. I saw a restless patch of water beside a meadow. I saw a stream hiding in a valley. I saw none of the big things of the world, but the little things where all the quiet lay—a fig tree in a nook of the Crocodile River, a waterfall spray on the way to Durban, a pool of the Umzimkulu. Far away I felt the air of the wine valleys—the hills where I went camping as a boy, the pale gleam of a lake. . . . And like Satan I reflected how beautiful it all was—yes, like Satan; for if he was planning the destruction of the world, I was planning to announce it, and the missions were similar. I felt overcome by the comparison I had myself raised.

"Rum chap, that astronomer!"

"What!"

"Mr. Conway Jones, he's a rum fellow."

WHEELER'S voice brought me back to reality. I was wrong to be letting my imagination and my emotions get the better of me. Conway Jones' detachment had repelled me. But he was right. He had probably spent hours observing the comet and thinking about it, and he had arrived at a state of calm contemplation. That was the only sensible thing to do, to keep calm. The world was going on as before, and would probably keep going for the next fortnight as though nothing had happened and nothing was about to happen. That was the only sensible way to take it—to keep calm.

There was no more time to think of it. The car stopped in Long Street at the editorial office of the *Day*. I took the lift to the third floor and entered the news-editor's room, trying to look as unconcerned as possible.

Millington was poring over the afternoon paper, which had just come in. My heart beat faster as I scanned the headlines upside down. "Anything in that?"

He only glanced up. "No. . . . Did you get anything?"

"Yes."

"What?"

I found that I didn't quite know how to begin.

"The end of the world," I said.

Now Millington, I should explain, is stolid even for a news editor. Nothing shakes him; nothing rouses him; nothing disturbs him. He has a good vocabulary of violent language, but never uses it violently and seldom raises his voice.

I knew that he would not show any astonishment at my news. Perhaps that was why I put it so bluntly.

He looked at me again.

"What did you say you'd got?"

"The end of the world."

"Oh, that! Keep it till Sunday night. You know we don't use any religious stuff mid-week." He turned to a heap of papers. "Now, here's something you can take off my hands, seeing that you've got nothing to do. I

want another story about the Christmas Toy Fund. We're not getting in half enough junk, and we've only about three weeks to go. Make sure you point out that we take old toys as well. We mend them here. And put a bit of sob into it. I've marked it down in the menu for half-a-column. Here's all the dope."

THE Christmas Toy Fund is one of Millington's pet features. He started it himself a couple of years ago, made a great success of it and looks after it like a mother. I'd done more than one story about it for him, but this time I refused to take the dope—I mean the papers—from him. "I've got a big job on my hands, Millington. This end-of-the-world story is going to take me at least half the evening."

"Who the blazes have you been seeing—the Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"No. The Chief Astronomer at the Observatory."

That silenced him for a moment.

"Now listen, Milly. I know what you're thinking. But I'm not drunk, and I haven't gone off my head. I know what you're going to do. Well, do it now! Send for Wheeler and check up on me. You often do it to us, don't you? But I tell you I got this story from Conway Jones. It's stone cold, and it's a world beat."

"Is it?" he grunted. "Close that door."

I did as he told me and sat down opposite him. Quickly I told him the whole story, feeling all the time that I hadn't questioned Conway Jones half enough. This was such a big story, and yet you could tell the guts of it, I mean the gist, in quite a few words. When I found I was repeating myself, I ended up bluntly with: "The big hit comes in a fortnight from today, and then—the bust-up! But we don't know yet whether it's going to burn us up or just flatten us out."

Millington seemed to be tasting something on his tongue, getting the flavor of the news, as it were. "Very well. Write the story."

The simple way he said it astonished me. I was expecting some skepticism, some remonstrance. But Millington's ways often take one by surprise. "Write the story." Just like that. His words filled me with delight.

"I'll get down to it at once. Will you warn the subs?"

He took up the menu—that is, the list of the day's assignments, and scribbled something against my name. "Quarter column," he said.

I burst out at that. "Quarter column for the end of the world!"

Suddenly he became angry. His lips tightened, and his voice dropped. "Don't stand there staring at me and gibbering about the end of the world. Write the stuff, and be damned to it! And send me someone sensible to write me a story about the Toy Fund!"

I was out of the room in a trice. It was no use arguing with Millington, and there was no need to. I had my instructions; and if I was going to be damned, I might as well be damned for two columns as for a quarter. Even while telling Millington the story, I had been assailed by doubts. Dare we print it? It was such a colossal thing! Think of the impact on the public of a great city next morning, and then the country. Could the *Day* take the risk of being in error? Was Conway Jones absolutely reliable? Remembering him as I saw him talking of his "opportunity in a million," I was certain he was. Could I get conviction into my story?

First I told Evans de Beer that Millington wanted to see him. Evans de Beer is the quietest and most conscientious reporter in the office. When there's nothing to do, he writes obituary notices of all the old men he can think of, so as not to be wasting office time. At knocking-off time he stops in the heyday of a man's career. When the old men die, the obituaries have usually to be written anew, but that doesn't worry him. So I sent him to do the Toy Fund story. Then I went down the corridor to our library to look up Halley's Comet, 1910.

Florid Mrs. Ricketts, the chief librarian, gray-haired except for some streaks of henna, was presiding as usual over her heaps and wads of clippings. And as usual, as soon as she saw someone come in, she began complaining. "Oh, these clippings! See how they pile up! They never end, and I'll never get them filed away! Those girls of mine never seem to get anything done during the day. I do declare they spend all their time talking and powdering their noses."

No one ever takes her complaints seriously or believes that she means them. She's the complaining kind.

"Mrs. Ricketts, may I get something about Halley's Comet?"

"Halley's Comet? I remember it!"

"You do! What do you remember?"

She pushed aside her clippings and took a deep breath. "Oh, Mr. Lacey, it was wonderful! I remember being made to wake up early in the morning, about four o'clock. It was June—midwinter, you know. But my mother insisted on my getting up, said I'd have something to remember all my life. Of course I didn't know anything about it. I was only four then." She stopped and giggled. "Hi-hi-hi! Now you know how old I am, Mr. Lacey."

"Never mind about that. My arithmetic's poor. I'm sure you're not more than a hundred and fifty."

"Oh, Mr. Lacey! Hi-hi-hi! Well, I saw it. And it was beautiful! There it was, stretched brilliantly across half the sky! And I've always been grateful to my mother for letting me see it, for of course I shall never see it again."

"Were you afraid it was going to swallow the earth?"

"Oh, yes, there was talk of that." (Then I knew she was at least ten at the time, and not four.)

"Have we got any clippings about it?"

"We must have. Of course I wasn't here at the time. Hi-hi-hi! But I'm sure we must have a lot."

SHE brought me a sheaf of yellowed clippings about Halley's Comet, 1910, and I took them away to my desk. They proved to be not nearly so plentiful or sensational as I had expected. Styles in journalism have changed. I myself have already written more about next week's comet in the *Day* than all our clippings combined. And these 1910 reports were so staid and wordy. There were some old photographs too. Very tame, they looked. There was nothing of the brilliance Mrs. Ricketts had recalled. Time and memory give enlargement to the view, and people always exaggerate about natural phenomena, about comets and eclipses.

True, people did seem alarmed in 1910, though the clippings did not convey that sense of terror and impending disaster I had expected to find. The comic writers certainly let themselves go. The cartoonists, grateful for something new, made great play with the personality of the comet, and there was a series of articles in the *Day* under the heading "I and the Comet." How funny they must have thought it! I can't see anything funny in it. But I forget. We're making jokes now too. Somehow it relieves the tension within you when you can laugh.

Mrs. Ricketts also brought me a volume of the encyclopedia, and I looked up the articles on Halley's Comet and on comets in general. I couldn't spend very much time on them. In any case, loading one's mind too full of book facts spoils the freshness of a story. I also got Conway Jones' file (inevitably it had an obituary written by Evans de Beer) so that I could add some personal notes on the discoverer of the comet; and as it was dusk now, I telephoned the restaurant round the corner for some food.

Then I got down to writing the story.

## Chapter Four

I wrote on and on. My typewriter covered folio after folio. . . . Apart from the rattle of my machine, there was silence in the reporters' room. I felt the lights overhead were too bright and took out my green eyeshade. Everyone had gone out for dinner. When I turned to have mine, I found that my chop was dead-cold on the plate, and the gravy had congealed into a white fat. I ate it in quick mouthfuls without tasting it while changing the paper in the typewriter. I washed the meal down with cold tea and went on typing. . . .

Presently the evening staff began to trickle back. Evans de Beer was grumbling about the Toy Fund story I had shunted onto him. He was saying something about the sob-sister stuff not being quite his line of work. "No," said someone, "why not try another obit? I hear old What's-his-name is very ill."

Fair-haired Spencer, the crime reporter, breezed in. He was cheerful now. In the course of a police round he'd picked up something about a smash-and-grab raid and had already told the sub-editors that he had a front-page story for them.

"What are you doing, Lacey?" he asked airily.

"Something from Conway Jones."

"That old drooler."

I didn't answer. *Old drooler yourself!* I reflected. *Just wait till you see what sort of a smash I've got for tomorrow morning's paper, and see the contents bill I get for this!*

When I stopped writing, I found that I had done about two-and-a-half columns. That was enough for the time being. I could add more after getting back from the Observatory. I revised my copy, corrected the mistakes, clipped the folios together and took the story in to the sub-editors' room.

The chief sub-editor, Henderson, dour as well as cautious, was copy-tasting at the time. He had a pile of copy of all kinds in front of him, some typed, some teletyped, some hand-written and some on the genteel ruled paper of the country correspondents. He was going through it to see what each story was worth, sorting out those that deserved only the floor or the spike (from which they could still be rescued if there was space to be filled) and marking the others with directions for their use.

I put my wad of copy on the table next to his hand. He barely glanced at it.

"What's all this about?"

"End of the world."

"Is that so!"

He tucked my story in at the bottom of his pile, thereby showing what he thought of it. I left it at that, and went out. Every reporter despises sub-editors as soulless creatures, and likes to see them make fools of themselves.

It was now half-past eight. There was just enough time to have a drink before going off to the Observatory. On the way out, I found that Wheeler had already chalked up our destination on the drivers' board and was waiting for me outside. He was standing on the pavement, a strange look on his face—or was it just the glow of our neon sign above him? I took him round to the Golden Springbok, where I made amends somewhat for Conway Jones' having failed him, and soon we were driving out of town to the Observatory again.

The astronomer was waiting for me in his study. The prospects for the evening, he told me at once, were not too good. There were patches of cloud in the sky, and there was no knowing when they would clear. He seemed not a bit sorry to tell me this. As I have said, Conway Jones dislikes having laymen round his instruments, and I was sure that if he could reasonably keep me away from his forty-inch refractor, he would do so. Meanwhile he showed me the prints of photographs taken the previous evening, and the diagram he had prepared for me. He was explaining these to me, indicating the comet's present position in the constellation Orion, and showing how it was moving toward the sun *"via* the earth" (he chuckled over this way of putting it), when one of his assistants came to say that the cloud had dispersed and observation was possible.

I was all keyed up to get my first view of the dreadful wanderer, the first layman to set eyes on him. But this private preview, so to speak, was far from the exciting experience I had expected it to be. It took me some time to get used to looking into the eyepiece of the big telescope, up through the long tube that seemed to reach to heaven itself; and when I did see the comet, I kept on saying that I didn't, because I hadn't thought it would look so ordinary. It seemed to me to look no different from a thousand other stars, and quite unspectacular. It was at present equal to a star of the eighth magnitude, Conway Jones explained; and when it grew to the sixth magnitude would become visible to the naked eye.

At first I could see nothing of the tail or ring, but Conway Jones, getting somewhat impatient, placed an attachment on the eyepiece, and then I discerned a faint circle of light. This was important to me. I had to have something to describe in the paper, and of course I would have to make it look rather more impressive than I had found it. This much would be expected of me. At about half-past ten I was thinking that I'd had enough of the comet for the night, when one of the astronomer's assistants came to say that there was a telephone call for me.

It turned out to be Olwen, our telephone operator, saying that I was wanted at the office. The editor was in a bit of a state (that's how she put it) and was asking for me. He was! So they'd waked up there at last, had they?

When I got back to the office, I had to wait for the lift. It came down to the accompaniment of Jupp (our fresh-faced galley-boy) whistling that tune from the new musical that burlesques the American rocket project: "Here We Come, Mr. Moon." When he saw me, he stopped his melody.

"Any proofs for me, Jupp?"

"Nope."

"Let me have them as soon as they're ready."

Before I'd got far toward the editor's office, Olwen came running after me down the corridor from the telephone room. Olwen, who is broad-faced and rather broad in the limbs too, makes something of a stir when she comes running down a corridor.

"Mr. Lacey! Mr. Lacey! There's a call for you. It's Miss Laver, and she's been trying to get you half the evening."

I stopped as though I'd run into a wall. "Miss Laver!"

"Yes, and I think she's annoyed."

Philippa! Well, I never! I had arranged to take her out to a show, and I had clean forgotten! Olwen was still standing there snickering nervously. "Get me a line at once," I said. "I'm going to the reporters' room."

When I got through to Philippa, her voice was cold.

"Is that you, Phil?"

"You've made me look a nice sort of fool this evening," she said.

"Oh, darling! I'm so sorry! I've been meaning to ring you all evening, but I haven't been able to get to a phone. I've been so upset!"

"I hope so."

"Darling! I've been on a big story and couldn't get away. I've only just got back to the office."

Then she flew into a temper. I could picture her cheeks flaming. "A story! That's all you think of.

*"News! The kind of news that'll make us look idiotic! Where did you get this stuff?"*

Stories! What do you imagine you're marrying, a linotype machine?"

"But darling! This is the biggest story ever! You'll read it in the paper. I'm sure to get a by-line with it."

"I don't care if I never see you or a newspaper for the rest of my life."

"I know it's hard on you, darling. But I'll see you in the morning and tell you all about it."

"Will you? You just try!"

Then she hung up, and I sat there calling down the line and tapping the receiver furiously. But I couldn't blame her for losing her temper, and I'd better not keep the editor waiting any longer. He's not a bad sort. I made for his office again.

Bailey was with Maddison when I entered. They had my story on the desk between them, and had obviously been discussing it. Maddison was leaning back in his chair, his shoulders square, his head straight up. He always carries himself with a certain ease and elegance. Bailey is different—mustached, careless about his clothes, always giving the impression of working hard, and inevitably nicknamed "the Old Bailey" by the reporters.

MADDISON tapped my copy with the back of his hand and looked round at me. "You've been working hard, Lacey," he drawled at me. The sarcasm warned me of trouble ahead.

"Not very hard, sir."

"What's all this you've been scribbling here?"

"I think it's a good story, sir."

"Do you expect us to print it?"

"It's news, sir."

"News! The kind of news that'll make us look damn' idiotic. Have you thought of the effect of this on the stock market? Do you want the building to be mobbed tomorrow? Where did you get this stuff from?"

"I give my authority in the story, sir. Conway Jones, the chief astronomer."

"Has he gone mad?"

"No sir."

"He was all right when I last had a drink with him." He looked across the table. Bailey smiled faintly. I couldn't make out whether he agreed or not.

"Where's Jones now?" asked Maddison.

"I've just left him at the Observatory, sir."

He picked up the telephone. "Please get me Mr. Conway Jones at the Observatory."

While waiting for the call, he took up my copy and paged it deprecatingly. I stood by, not knowing what to think. Perhaps I was all wrong to have got myself in such a state over the story. Perhaps I should really have thought of the stock market. And at the same time I told myself: *Damn the market! To hell with the building! You don't suppose there's going to be much left of it soon, do you?*

The telephone rang. Maddison put the receiver to his ear with a sweep of his arm. "Is that you, Jones? . . . Yes. Sorry to be bothering you at this time of night, old man. . . . But I say, what's all this you've been telling my reporter? . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . What's that? . . . Yes. . . . Oh. . . . Oh." Then he was silent. Conway Jones kept talking at the other end. He talked for some time. But Maddison said nothing except, "Oh. . . . Good night," and put the receiver down.

He rose from his swivel chair and took two paces toward the window. He was making a decision. That was his way. To give him his due, Maddison can make up his mind quickly when he has to. When he returned to the table, I saw that a change had come over his face. There was no sarcasm in it now. He slung the copy over to me. "We'll take a stick of that."

"A stick!"

"Not more than three inches." He addressed his assistant. "We'll keep it on the front page, but low down. And keep the headline down too. Not more than eighteen-point. Something quiet: *New Comet. Mr. Conway Jones' Discovery.* Have his name in. That'll please him." Then to me: "And you'd better speak to Mr. Bailey before you write it, Lacey. Good night. Don't bring me any more stories like that."

"Good night, sir."

I came out of Maddison's office feeling hot and cold all over, frustrated, suppressed, utterly cast down. For the life of me, I could not make it out. Could it be that my judgment was so badly at fault? But this was the greatest story in the world! I was sure of it. And I was to tell it in three inches.

When Bailey emerged from Maddison's office, I followed him to his own, next to the sub-editors' room. When I got there, he was lighting his pipe. I waited for him to sit down.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Bailey?"

He sniffed and pulled at his pipe. Then he smiled, baring the teeth on one side of his mouth, and sniffed again. It was a completely noncommittal sniff.

"Three inches for a story like that!"

"Don't take it that way, Lacey. Don't be upset. Hundred and fifty words. Think of it that way, man. What can't you say in hundred and fifty words! We'll fix it up between us. Get on with the job, and don't keep me here all night."

I'VE never liked Bailey, but at that moment I came nearer to liking him than at any other time. His way of looking at it put heart into me. I could certainly tell the greatest-ever story in a hundred and fifty words, in fifty if necessary, and perhaps there'd be some fun in doing it. The irony of it appealed to me.

Back at my desk, I boiled down my ten folios to less than one, giving merely the bald facts, and took it to Bailey. He was not satisfied, thought I might be going too far, and suggested changes. "We don't want to be alarmists, Lacey. Bear that in mind."

I rewrote the story, and then Bailey approved. He chuckled over it as he changed a word here and there, toning it down, as he said. "That's the idea, Lacey. This way we cover the story. No one can say we've missed it, and we can't be accused of scare-mongering. Whatever happens, we're in the right. It's a safe story, and we've got it first. See what I mean?"

Ruefully: "I see."

He put the headlines on himself. "Now sling it into the subs. See you tomorrow."

With a single sheet in my hand I stood hesitant outside the sub-editors' room. This was all that was left of the great story, the story that was to shake the whole of mankind. This is how the comet was to be announced to the world, the comet of comets, *the* comet, which if I bend low over my typewriter I can already see blazing in the sky.

NEW COMET SEEN

Strange Discovery Reported
by Mr. Conway Jones

A new comet has appeared in the northwestern sky. First to report it is the Chief Astronomer, Mr. Conway Jones, who has been observing it for the past four nights through the great 40-inch telescope. It is moving in the direction of the earth at great speed.

Unlike most comets, this celestial wanderer is accompanied by a ring of light instead of a tail. It is not yet visible to the naked eye, but should be seen quite easily in a day or two. A representative of the DAY viewed the comet through the telescope last night and describes it as an awesome spectacle.

"The comet is moving toward a point in the earth's path somewhat ahead of us," Mr. Jones said. "In a few days it should provide a spectacle of unique interest."

As I stood with the copy of this niggardly story in my hand, another disturbing thought occurred to me. That was all I would have next morning to show to Philippa in explanation of my lapse. What a deal of explaining I would have to do!

## CHAPTER FIVE

NEXT MORNING I SLEPT LATE AND WAS AWAKened by Tambula knocking at my door. Tambula, a six-foot Zulu with wooden rings set in the lobes of his ears, attends to all the flats on this floor. He's not supposed to do any valeting, but he'll do most things that I ask him. Tambula, who can only just about read, has a great respect for newspapers and especially for the *Day*. He has an idea that I write the whole of it, and therefore he has a prodigious respect for me.

I asked him to get me some coffee and found that he had already made it. Tambula pads around the flat in his white shoes without so much as disturbing the air.

He brought the coffee with some buttered toast, and his bronze face shone with a smile as he placed the newspaper on my knee.

There was little that could be called exciting in the paper that morning. I scarcely looked at the front page, only making sure that my own story was there, tucked away innocuously in the lower half of the page. Inside, there was a special article about the Americans' plans for sending a rocket to the moon, a feat which they hope to achieve in a month's time or so. Soon they will learn that if there is to be any interplanetary travel by man it will hardly be in accordance with his own arrangements. There was a smaller item that I found curiously interesting. It was about Professor Mortenson and the great electron microscope he has been working on for the past few years.

Mortenson, it appears, has achieved the ultimate magnification. He has isolated the fundamental particle of the atom, seen it, gazed at it. And what does he say about it? He says in an interview, that he felt he was looking at the face of God. The face of God! That struck me as strange, one of the strangest things I have ever read in a newspaper.

I remembered about Philippa. She would be expecting me to ring her, if only so as to give her an opportunity of showing me how angry she still was. I tried her father's office at Laver House, but she hadn't come in. Working as her father's secretary, she never feels obliged to keep regular hours, and often annoys him on that account. He has another secretary to do most of the work.

I telephoned her at the house. Of course she took a high and injured tone. "I thought I was going to see a big story in the paper this morning, with your name on it, too. What did they do with it, throw it back at you?"

"Darling, don't. I can explain."

"I'm waiting."

But it was no use. I couldn't do it that way. I found myself tongue-tied. "Darling, I'm coming over to see you."

"As you please, but I've got a headache."

"I'm coming over at once."

I could tell by the softened tone of her good-by that she was pleased in spite of herself.

After swallowing my toast and dressing hurriedly, I got the two-seater out and drove to Endymion, the Lavers' house in Easton. Ten minutes after leaving town I stopped in their flower-lined drive.

In spite of the headache she had pleaded, Philippa was looking beautiful. Women always look their best when they're in a temper. She has high cheek-bones with a natural color and a self-willed air which I imagine she gets from her father. Marrying a self-willed woman —is that looking for trouble? I wouldn't be the first man to be in love with danger.

Of course she still pretended to be angry. "You don't suppose it was pleasant for me to be left sitting on the sofa half the night all dressed up and—"

"Darling, I know! I swear to you I was beside myself, simply frantic all evening. But what was I to do? I couldn't just throw the story up, the story of a lifetime, I tell you."

"What was the story? I'm just dying to know."

Hopelessly I indicated the paragraphs about the comet on the front page.

"Oh, that! It didn't take you all night to write that bit."

"That's just it, Phil. They didn't use the real story."

"What was the real story?"

"The end of the world, darling."

She laughed. "No wonder they wouldn't use it."

"I mean it, Phil. The end of the world's coming."

"Oh, don't, Johnny! I don't like you a bit when you're trying to be funny. Do be serious, or I'll begin to think you were up to something dreadful last night and my headache will come back."

Just then her sister Dora entered the room. "Oh, sorry!"

"No, no, Dora. Don't go," I called. "I've just been telling Phil that I got a story about the end of the world, and she won't believe it."

Dora stopped at the door. She had a book in her hand. Her dark eyes shone in a pale face. "I believe it." And then: "I dreamed about it the other night."

That made Philippa laugh again. "She's always dreaming. What did you dream?"

"There was a great fire, and flames shot up from the ground. . . . And I was alone."

"That's not much. We all dream that when we're young. That and being buried alive. It's just fear."

"All the same I believe it. Why shouldn't it happen? Don't we deserve it?"

"It's those books she's been reading. I always say Dora reads too much. Makes her morbid. I don't want to know about the story, John, and I don't care what you were doing last night. All I care about is that you're here now. You'll stay for lunch, of course? Mum will expect it."

"I'd love to."

"And let's go out tonight instead. Yes, you must take me out tonight!"

I telephoned the office, made sure they were not expecting me till the afternoon, and gathered from my assignments that I'd be able to take the evening off in lieu of the previous evening.

"Let's have dinner out," suggested Philippa.

"And then go dancing."

"Oh, lovely, Johnny! I'm so glad you came."

LUNCH that day was a delightful lunch indeed. Mrs. Laver, who I think is rather fond of me, was charming. Dora, who grew up at a convent school, was her quiet, thoughtful self. Philippa and I lingered over coffee till it was impossible to delay any longer. Then I ran Philippa into town, dropped her at Laver House, and went on to the *Day*—hardly in any mood for work.

Fortunately it turned out to be an easy afternoon. There was someone at the airport whom I had to interview and who didn't turn up. One of our country correspondents had sent a note about an unusually large diamond found at the Aurora Mine, and I had to see the officials at the company's head office here. Millington also suggested that I keep in touch with Conway Jones in case there was anything more "in that comet story."

"But let's see what you write, for heaven's sake," he warned.

When I telephoned Conway Jones, he chuckled and asked me to come and play billiards.

As soon as the afternoon paper came in, I scanned it hurriedly. All they had about the comet was a restrained elaboration of my morning's story. There was also a note to say that the discovery had not so far been confirmed by any overseas observatory. How these editors think alike!

After leaving the office in good time, I dressed and was out at Endymion to call for Philippa at half-past six. We went to the Little Savoy, choosing it because of its intimacy. We had a good dinner, and we drank Drakenstein. I wanted to be good to Philippa, and that evening the chef was in league with me. The flavor of his fried chicken still lingers on my palate.

Then we danced. The floor was small, but the room was gay. The band was good and its rhythms excited us. I was happy and called for more wine. How we danced! There seemed nothing else in the world worth doing. The band played numbers from "The Man in the Moon," and I quite forgot how Jupp killed them daily with his whistling. As I look back on that evening, how carefree it seems, much too carefree to run its course!

ROUND about eleven, a waiter came up to me as we were leaving the floor. "You're wanted on the telephone, sir."

"Me! The telephone! But who—"

"I think it's the newspaper, sir."

Olwen was on the line. "That you, Mr. Lacey? You're wanted in the office at once."

"How on earth did you know where to find me?"

"I rang the Lavers' house."

"You would! What's it all about?"

"How should I know? I'll put you through to Mr. Millington."

He came in at once. "Will you come in, Lacey?"

"If you want me."

"Where are you?"

"At the Little Savoy."

"Sorry to spoil your evening, but you'd better come in. And make it snappy! It's getting late."

When I told Philippa, she tossed her head in annoyance. "They can't do this to us, John! Tell them to wait."

"You know I can't do that, darling."

"You had the evening off. Why can't they do without you?"

"There's a big story going." I could guess what it was, but thought it best not to tell her.

She stamped her foot. "Another story! But why must it happen on a night like this?"

"Because, darling, you've made up your mind to marry a newspaper man, and you'll have to get used to it. Get your wrap, while I pay the bill. Perhaps they won't need me for long, after all."

A few minutes later I was driving toward Long Street. When I got to the *Day* building, I left Philippa in the car outside.

Millington was waiting for me with a sheaf of cables in his hand. "There you are, Lacey! That story of yours has broken."

"You mean—"

"Yes. Broken in a big way, too. Here's all the stuff from London, miles of it. The editor wants you to handle it. And do you think you can get hold of Conway Jones?"

"I think so."

"Go to it, then."

I stood still. "I've got to have twenty minutes. I must take Philippa home first."

"Ah—pity! All right. But that stuff's got to go down to the machines by midnight, and we can't hold back the first edition, not even for the end of the world."

Too impatient to wait for the lift to come up, I ran down the three floors. When Philippa saw me, her eyes filled with delight. "So soon! Where shall we go now?"

"You're going straight home, darling."

"But what's the matter?"

"Never mind. You'll read all about it in the paper."

"I hate the paper."

"Don't fret, darling. There are only about twelve days to go, and anything may happen."

"What do you mean?"

"The world's a great place; life is thrilling; and I love you, darling. That's all."

Next moment the car was roaring up Long Street.

## Chapter Six

BACK AT THE OFFICE I SAT DOWN BEFORE THE sheaf of cables Millington had ready for me. A glance was enough to tell me that overseas astronomers confirmed Conway Jones' discovery in almost every detail. But before I had got far with them, the editor sent for me.

Maddison was alone and greeted me with a smile. "Sit down, Lacey." I took the chair usually occupied by Bailey.

"You've seen the cables? . . . Good. Well, you've got your story now."

He looked at me steadily for a moment then got up and walked to his window. I thought he was a trifle upset—something in his manner. I wondered why. He had got all he wanted out of life. When he became editor of the *Day* he told a friend (these things trickle down to the staff) that at last he was where he wanted to be, at the heart of the news, in control of a national daily. He wanted no more of life. And yet—could it be that every editor is jealous in his heart of the reporter who gets the news, the big news, the stuff that sells the paper—jealous of the excitement that goes with it? Could it be? There was no time to speculate further. Maddison was back at his desk.

"I know, Lacey, you're thinking we could have had the story this morning. But you're wrong. You've seen that even the overseas astronomers held the news up for a couple of days."

I hadn't seen that, but it was probably in the cables.

"They too," he continued, "felt they ought not to alarm the world rashly, thought they'd break the news gently. And so we were in good company, you see."

He laughed at his joke, and I had to smile.

"But now it's out. The B.B.C. gave it in their nine-o'clock news. So now we can sail into it. All the same, let's be careful. Don't forget, we place the responsibility for this on the astronomers. Here's the banner line I've written: ASTRONOMERS PREDICT END OF WORLD IN 12 DAYS. Across eight columns. See what I mean?"

"I think so, sir."

"It will be twelve days by tomorrow, won't it?"

"Just about."

"And the contents bill: *Astronomers Say End of World Is Near*. That puts the blame on them, you see, and it'll sell the paper. So now—get on with it."

As I was on my way out, Henderson, the chief sub-editor, opened the door. "That story of the Cabinet reshuffle, sir. Keep it on the front page?"

"Put it inside," said Maddison. "They're always having it."

"And the film stars' strike?"

"Front page. Let's be bright where we can."

At my own desk I was able to give my attention to the cables again and extract the main facts for my introductory story. It was as Maddison had said. Conway Jones was not the only astronomer to have seen the comet. It had been spotted probably just about the same time in South America, had been reported to California and discussed with the Astronomer Royal in England. These men had agreed to hold back the news until they were quite certain that there was no possible chance of error. But Conway Jones had let the cat out of the bag, and we had given the news to the world in our hesitant, half-hearted manner. Reuter's office here had cabled it to London the previous night.

It was astonishing that confirmation had not come from London sooner—when, of course, the *Evening* would have got it here and so deprived us of first cut at the story. (I heard afterward that they had kept their staff on late in case something turned up, but had sent them home at ten. The B.B.C. nine-o'clock news was of course eleven o'clock our time.) It seemed that the astronomers were reluctant to speak, but eventually realized that they had no option. The brief announcement from South Africa, arousing the unerring news sense of Fleet Street, had been splashed by the afternoon papers. There was no keeping it down. Messages passed between Greenwich and California, and the astronomers decided to tell the world its fate.

Their facts were substantially the same as those given me by Conway Jones. They agreed with him as to the speed of the comet and the time of appulse—the Big Hit. In one respect they were ahead of him. They were tolerably sure that the comet had a flaming nucleus, small but similar in composition to the sun. It was surrounded by an electrical atmosphere illuminated from the nucleus, so that the head of the comet, apart from the tail, appeared to be about ten times as large as the earth. The effect of impact would be to reduce our planet in a matter of minutes to a molten sphere.

I stopped when I read this. My thoughts stopped there too. For some moments I was lost in awed contemplation of this prodigious fact. . . . All life, said the Astronomer Royal, would cease at once. The end would be quick and complete. . . . The earth a molten sphere—devoid of life.

Bailey's voice at my desk awoke me to my surroundings. I hadn't seen him enter. There was a smile of cold satisfaction on the chief assistant's face. "Those two pictures you got last night, Lacey, we'll use them. I sent them up to be made an hour ago."

I could think of nothing to say.

HE went on. "And—yes—give us a story of how the *Day* was first with the news. We were, you know. That's right. How the *Day* scooped the world's press. We'll make a panel of it, in black. Look good! Are you getting that interview with Jones?"

"Yes."

"That's right. Got to make him speak again. We'll have your introduction across three columns, perhaps four. Better four, stepping down to two with your by-line on top. Will you need those cables much longer?"

"You can have them at once."

"Good. And come and see me tomorrow. We'll discuss a leader on the subject. Yes, we must give the comet a leading article." And taking the cables, he sailed out.

His interruption had steadied me. That's the way to do it, I told myself. Matter-of-fact. Cool as a chimney-pot. Be matter-of-fact about it. Get on with it!

I picked up the telephone, tapped the receiver. Line, please, . . . Line, please. . . . Damn that girl! Olwen! Get me a line. . . . At last I dialed and got through to the Observatory. Conway Jones was some time coming to the telephone.

"It's out!" I said. "Reams of it from Greenwich and California. I thought you'd like to know."

"Indeed."

"I'll read it out to you." I read him the essential portions I had summarized from the cables, and was ready to take down his comments in shorthand. As each paragraph confirmed a point he had himself made, I could hear *"Mmm"* and sometimes *"Ah"* from the other end of the line. There was little work for my pencil.

I came to the last section. "And they seem to think that the nucleus of the comet is all incandescent like the sun, and that as it strikes the earth it will reduce us to a molten mass. What do you think of that?"

"Mmm. . . . Interesting. Yes, extremely interesting."

"But is it possible?"

"Why not? It's happened before."

"Before!"

"It's only a matter of twenty million years or so since the earth was last molten. It's been molten longer than solid. In fact it's still molten at the core. We're only on the outer crust. And comparatively speaking, it won't take much at all to turn us molten once again. Not much at all."

"And then?"

"Then we start all over again."

"We?"

"Well, that is, the earth. Yes, the earth will begin to cool; life may revive somewhere in some form sometime; and God will start all over again. Yes, I think you may put it like that. God will start all over again."

My pencil scribbled fast in shorthand. *"God will start all over again. . . . God will start all over again."*

I CANNOT remember how I finished my conversation with Conway Jones. He must have rung off in his casual way while I was thinking. All I know is that when I came to transcribe my notes later, I found that my pencil had just gone on repeating, *"God will start all over again. . . . God will start all over again. . . . God will start all over again. . . ."*

By that time I had written most of my copy—my introduction, to be printed in twelve-point type across four columns; Conway Jones' first elaboration, which I simply lifted out of my previous day's story; then the story of how the *Day* had been the first newspaper in the world to give the news. I suggested a double-column headline in thirty-six-point caps: GOD MAY START AGAIN.

It was late by now. Henderson was down in the machine-room writing the last headlines, and making the last adjustments to the front page. Jupp was taking the copy from me as each sheet came off the typewriter and running away with it to have it set. At last I gave him the final paragraph, and he said he could take no more. The page was complete; the form was to be locked up and sent for casting. The first edition would still be in time to catch the early trains for the country.

With Jupp no longer steaming at my side, I went on writing in quiet and greater ease. Bailey wanted me to add a personal sketch of Conway Jones for the second edition, and give a fuller description of the comet as I had myself seen it—the first impressions of a layman. When Bailey read it, he nodded and smacked his lips. "We might even sling out the film stars' strike for this," he said and wrote a headline: "I SAW THE COMET."

It was two o'clock by now. I should have gone home. But there was to be no sleep for me yet. There was no sleep within me. I felt myself carried aloft on waves of excitement that were all around. When I left my desk, I found that people had gathered in the street below. They had heard the news over the radio and were now waiting to get the first copies of the paper. The doors had to be barred against them.

I would wait for the paper too. The presses would be starting any minute now. I made my way down to the

*"My broker has instructions to buy everything."*

machine-room, past the linotype machines, and the stones now for the most part standing unattended but still warm from the evening's work, and down to the press-room. Here the giant rotary presses were as high as a house, and the men were standing by waiting for the last plate to be fitted into place on the cylinders.

The presses rose grotesquely like huge monsters. Yes, monsters they were, with their arms, their cylinders and wheels having a sort of monstrous life of their own. Monsters that had grown in the twenty million years that had passed since the earth had begun to cool from its primeval lava and the first protoplasm had stirred on the shores of a slimy sea. And we, the protoplasm, had made all this. We had wrung the earth's secrets from fire and rock. We had built ingeniously and wondrously and covered the earth with our works. And now—back to the molten lava, to the silence that was twenty million years ago, and the silence that would be again. For the earth would go on rolling through wastes of space, and there would be a waiting and a waiting and a waiting, in case the slime of a torrid sea should stir again.

A whistle blew; there was a hoot of a horn. Slowly the presses began to roll. The broad strands of newsprint began to move over the cylinders of type. The rollers accelerated. Faster, faster. Louder, louder! Soon the newspapers, printed, cut and folded, were coming out of the hopper, flicking like the pages of a book, and then flowing on over the belt like a river of print. And as I stooped down to take my copy, my eye was caught by the double-column headline I had written. It was at the fold of the page, and so stood out at the edge. The

papers jerked out of the hopper a hundred at a time, and a hundred at a time they told me:

GOD MAY START AGAIN
GOD MAY START AGAIN
GOD MAY START AGAIN
GOD MAY START AGAIN

The roll of the mighty presses took up the refrain in my ears, GOD MAY START AGAIN. . . . GOD MAY START AGAIN. . . . For a moment it comforted me, and then it did not. For the negative is inherent in the positive, and a *may* also means a may not. And as I listened, the roar of the presses shrieked higher, and the note in their throats was changed—GOD MAY NOT START AGAIN—GOD MAY NOT START AGAIN—GOD MAY NOT START AGAIN.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KNIFE THAT CUTS CLEAN DOES NOT HURT. The point that strikes makes no pain. The pain comes later. So it was with the news that we gave to the city that morning. As newspaper men our first job that day was to record public reaction, which we expected to be sudden and overwhelming. But so ordinary did the town seem that day, so monotonously did people go about their daily business, that not only did we have to record public reaction, but we also had to go and look for it.

Although I had gone to bed in the small hours, I was up shortly after nine and calling for Tambula to make me some strong coffee. My limbs were weary but would not submit to further sleep. Feeling the need of company, I thought it best to go to the office at once.

On the way down, Biggs the liftman nodded to me lugubriously.

"Good morning, Biggs," I said.

"What's so good about it?"

"Lovely day, lovely weather."

"Yes, but where are we goin' to be this time fortnight? Can you newspaper blokes tell us that?"

"Where there won't be any lifts to work. Won't that be nice?"

He didn't seem to think so.

The first man I ran into at the office was the chief assistant editor, and I reminded him of the leading article he had suggested the previous evening.

"Ah, yes, a leading article.' The Old Bailey drew on his pipe and sniffed. "It seems the editor is not keen on a leading article on the comet. In fact, he's not keen on the comet at all. He phoned me—sniff, sniff. . . . Thinks we ought not to get too worked up about it, keep our perspective, you know. He wants a leader on the Cabinet re-shuffle, says we've got to maintain our overall view of things. I may get him to agree on a sub-leader on the comet, you know, short, light and flippant. That's what he says, be flippant with the comet. Steady people's nerves. . . . Sniff. . . . So there you are." I left him sniffing and puffing and sought out the news editor.

Millington was in a much more tractable mood. He was all for taking the comet seriously. Flippancy might be all right for the editor, but he considered he knew his duty. Yes, he tightened his lips, and he knew his duty. He had already sent someone to see the Chief of Police—"To see what arrangements they're making, you know—to handle the crowds, I mean." And he had marked down someone to see the Archbishop. "The Church ought to have something to say on this, especially now just when Christmas is coming, or rather was coming, or perhaps it'll be coming in any case—what do you think? And there's our Christmas Toy Fund. And Lacey, of course you'll keep in touch with Conway Jones, but I want you also to get the general reaction, you know, from the ordinary people, what they think about it and what they say. The holidays are coming on. What are folks' plans? You know, the housewives and shoppers, the ordinary folk."

"I know."

"Let's give them a say in this. And don't you make the stuff up yourself. Go out and get it. Let's hear them talk."

I was nothing loath to go out and get it. I like these interviews with ordinary people. They're interesting. And so I turned into the Golden Springbok, which had just opened, and prepared an approach on Tewkes the barman. It wasn't difficult to get him started, and by the time I had settled down to a glass of what he considered was good for a fat head in the morning, he was in the right gossipy mood. "And what do you think of the news this morning, Tewkes? A bit startling, eh?"

He was cleaning a glass. "I dessay it is." Tewkes is always cleaning a glass. "And I've seen startlin' things in my time. But I'll be surprised if it gets any more startlin' than that."

"What do you mean?"

"You sold a lot of papers this mornin', didn't you?"

"That's right."

"Just what I mean. Now I haven't been pushin' glasses over this counter for newspaper men for the last fi'teen year without learnin' someth'n' about newspapers. Perhaps I learned more'n you, 'cos I'm on the outside. See what I mean? It's news, Mr. Lacey, news. Gotta be sold, same as liquor. Bigger the headlines, bigger the sales."

"But Tewkes, old man, it's the astronomers who've been saying this, not just we."

"Course it's the 'stronomers. You wouldn't expect the newspapers to say it off their own bat. They let the 'stronomers talk out o' their turn. Put them up to it a bit. But tomorrow they'll find that those stargazers made a mistake. Someone did 'is sums wrong. Counted a extra nought where there weren't none. Startlin', you say? Now I remember in '45 when they dropped—"

"That's all right, Tewkes old man. Can't stay now. See you again."

OUT in the street, which was as quiet as any other Wednesday morning, I ran into Mrs. Cosway doing some shopping on early closing day. Quiet folk, the Cosways. They have the flat next to mine, and he's a bookkeeper. Naturally I walked her way, asked after her husband, the boy at college, and presently:

"What do you think of the news, Mrs. Cosway?"

"News?" She seemed a little worried. "You mean—"

"You know, the end of the world. You heard about it, I'm sure?"

"Oh, yes, couldn't help hearing about it."

"What do you—er—think of it?"

"I don't know what to think of it at all. What world are they speaking of?"

"Well, our old world, this world."

"But the world can't end, Mr. Lacey. Something's got to go on."

"True. Something in that. Still, it's bound to interfere with things a bit, don't you think?"

"I hope not," she said.

"But—the end. You know what the end means."

"I'm not sure. It didn't seem to be clear in the paper. In fact I don't think the paper knows, do you?"

"Perhaps you're right, Mrs. Cosway. Cheerio. And give my regards to your husband."

"Thank you."

Getting people's reactions didn't prove easy at all. People were dazed. The only straight answer I got was from a shopkeeper who shrugged his shoulders and said, "Business as usual," but I gathered that he said so because he was in the habit of saying so. And when he'd

said it, he thought it was very clever and repeated it. "Yes, business as usual. We mustn't let a little thing like this upset the customers. We can't do anything about it, so let's carry on and have a good time. That's right, girls, let's have a good time while we can."

The girls in the office took up his words. "Let's have a good time," and began powdering their noses.

In the afternoon the temper of the town changed. Then the winds began stirring in the forest. Then the tree-tops began shaking. I think we first sensed it when Tovey came in from the markets looking a little older and a little more weary than usual. As he sat down at his desk, someone called out (I think it was Bowles, the court reporter): "Say, Tovey, what's in good supply at the market today?"

Usually, in answer to a question like that, Tovey at once began a discourse on the iniquities of market agents who deliberately held things back in order to keep prices up. This time he answered simply: "Everything." Then he looked up at me, standing nearby drinking my tea. Singer, our black tea-boy, had just been round with his tray. "Lacey, what's the meaning of the news today? They're all asking me at the market. Thought I ought to know."

"Plain enough, Tovey. In twelve days' time or so, we all go up with a bang."

"And bang goes your vegetable farm!" sang out Bowles from the other end of the room.

Tovey turned round at him in dismay. "Bang goes my vegetable farm? But I go on pension in a month's time."

Then we realized how thoughtlessly we had spoken. Tovey's been nursing that plot of his at the coast as the only good thing that life has brought him—bought it through someone he met at the market. Now we had as good as destroyed it with a word.

Bowles hid his face behind his typewriter. But I was nearby; I had to say something. "That's all right, Tovey old man. Shouldn't worry about it if I were you." I found myself talking like Tewkes. "You know these astronomers. Sure to find it's not what they think it is. It'll all come out right."

That seemed to reassure him. Just then the hatch opened and the news editor began talking at us. I was grateful for the interruption.

"Who's doing the Judy Lane story? Clayton, is it?"

Clayton, who does the municipal round which for some odd reason includes the hospitals, called out: "Yes, Milly."

"Let's have a story about Judy Lane every day from now on. Bailey's keen on it. And listen, Clayton: Do you think you can ask the hospital if they'll do the operation sooner? After all, if there are only twelve days left—"

Ten-year-old Judy Lane has been blind from birth. Now the doctors say they can operate on her and make her see for the first time. Actually the *Evening* got that story first, but we beat them to it by announcing the Judy Lane Gift and calling for subscriptions to pay for the operation. The money came pouring in, so now the story is ours. The *Evening* became intensely annoyed.

"After all," Millington was saying, "if the kid's going to see, let's give her a good chance. May be too late soon. When have they timed the operation for?"

"Sometime next week."

"Tell them to do it this week. Why shouldn't they? Judy Lane's got to see the beauty of the world. Make that our story. Good headline, too. See what I want?"

"Sure, Milly." Clayton is a matter-of-fact sort of chap. "But I don't quite see that point about the beauty of the world."

"Don't you? Are you blind too?"

Then came a message from the Archbishop to say that he was going to preach in the Cathedral that evening; already the Church was crowded, and would we like a copy of his sermon? Of course we said we would.

Hickson, the financial editor, returned from the Stock Exchange, looking plainly upset. The market had taken a knock. All day long prices had stood firm, and people congratulated themselves; then something happened. No one quite knew what—a whisper, a rumor, some news from London. . . . People began selling, wildly, recklessly, frantically, and gold shares began to tumble toward nothing. . . . The brokers were fighting on the floor of the Exchange. "What an hour! What an hour!" exclaimed Hickson, putting his hands to his head. "Just what the editor feared, and he was right."

Spencer, our crime reporter, came in excitedly to say that there had been a mass attempt to break out of the Central Prison, and that crowds were beating at the prison gates demanding that the cells be opened. Representations were to be made to the Minister of Justice.

Conway Jones rang to tell me that he was being pestered by callers at the Observatory. The crowds were actually coming up his drive. He considered that it was sheer morbid curiosity, nothing else. Would I be sure to say in the paper next morning that he was doing no conducted tours of the Observatory; and that in any case the comet would be visible to the naked eye the following evening?

When the offices and workshops closed for the day, a mass of people gathered in City Hall Square listening to inflammatory speakers haranguing them from the steps. One of our junior reporters was sent out to see what it was all about, and returned to say that the speakers were angry and the mob was angry, but he didn't quite know what for. There was resentment, he said, just resentment. . . .

As the evening wore on, we realized that this junior of ours had given us the keynote of public feeling that day. People were resentful, feeling that they had been misled, and that they should have been warned earlier. Fourteen days was no time in which to prepare oneself for the end of the world. The cables from overseas reflected that mood precisely. People felt someone was at fault, and they didn't quite know who. They wanted to blame someone, and they could not make out where the blame lay.

Messages from London said that there were vast crowds at Marble Arch, Hyde Park, where one of the orators had been talking about the end of the world for five years, and now had an audience of thousands. A vast press of people filled Trafalgar Square from the National Gallery down into Whitehall. Our London correspondent described the scene from the windows of South Africa House. A great demonstration of protest had been held in the East End, and Whitechapel was now marching forty abreast down Ludgate Hill.

Messages from New York said that people were streaming into Times Square, led by a woman evangelist who was calling the world to, "Come to God this minute!" It was the greatest, most fervid and most spontaneous evangelical movement that New York had known for a generation. It was sweeping Manhattan, and even on Broadway people were being saved by the thousands.

Late at night the teletype machine began ticking out a summary from Reuter of the debate in the House of Commons following upon a Labor Member's raising the question of the comet on a motion of adjournment after dinner. The Member wanted to know whether the Government had been in consultation with the Astronomer Royal, whether it had had any foreknowledge of the news which South Africa had had twenty-four hours before London, and if so why it had withheld the news from the nation.

A Conservative demanded if the Minister was aware that a short distance away in Trafalgar Square people

*"I dreamed about it the other night," said Dora. "There was a great fire, and flames shot up."*

were blaming the Jews for the crisis. The retort from the other side of the House was that the Jews were blaming the Communists, and the Communists were blaming the Catholics. This raised the question of the Church's responsibility in the matter. Had the heads of the Church been in consultation with the Prime Minister, and had they advised him? If anyone could be expected to know and warn the State of a dispensation such as that now impending, it was the established Church, and if the Church did not know, it could be regarded as having signally failed in its office. The answer from the Ministerial bench was that the Church had been calling upon the people to prepare for just such a contingency as this for nigh on two thousand years, but that people had lost the habit of listening.

It was a most confused debate, though not lacking in dignity, and I forget how it ended. What I remember more distinctly is that just before midnight the B.B.C. broadcast a statement from Downing Street calling upon the nation to "maintain its accustomed calm in the great testing time that lies ahead," and assuring them that the Government "has the situation well in hand."

From the White House in Washington there came a similar utterance reminding the public that "now as never before the world is one world," that "endurance is indivisible," and that "a blow struck at human society no matter where would have its repercussions throughout the world."

Radio Paris before closing down played the "Marseillaise" three times that night.

Moscow was silent, making no reference to the comet, and studiously avoiding any comment on the news from the West.

The cables from London and Washington greatly interested the editor. He thought they struck the right note of levelheadedness, and that was the note he wanted maintained in the columns of the *Day*. He talked of putting the latest news of the comet lower down in the page, insisted that there was such a thing as overdoing it, and predicted that the public would quickly tire of "all this astronomy." Bailey and Henderson prevailed upon him, however, to give the comet the lead on the front page.

He asked me to make a list of previous prophecies of the end of the world, said he was sure there was one about the year 100 and another just before the year 1000, and he thought there was also a general impression of impending doom in the year 1500. Would I be careful to verify and dig up any other such predictions that had caused a stir in their time?

In the library Mrs. Ricketts quickly produced her envelope marked "Prophecies, End of World," and showed me the new one she was compiling which was already more bulky than anything she'd had before.

After drawing up my list of previous prophecies, I considered my work for the day done. But before leaving the office, I glanced at the late cables. They stated that astronomers now gave the speed of the comet as just about 2,060,000 miles a day, that the comet would enter the earth's atmosphere in eleven days' time precisely at 3:30 A.M. (Greenwich Time) Monday (5:30 our time), and that for all practical purposes, that could be considered the moment of impact.

## Chapter Eight

THERE IS A TIME IN THE LIFE OF EVERY NEWSpaper man when the longing comes upon him to "get away from it all," to run from the routine, from the daily search for novelty, from the nightly race with time and the early trains, and withdraw himself to some quiet country nook where once again he may learn the natural pace of life. I had never experienced that feeling. I liked my work.

On that Thursday morning, however, something very much like the tired newsman's longing came over me. I did not recognize it as such at the time, but I have had it again since, and I know it well enough. It came upon me when I opened the paper and saw the headline in big black type ELEVEN DAYS TO GO. . . . Eleven days! When we wrote that headline, did we know exactly what it meant? Did the sub-editor stop to think what he was writing? Did the compositor who set the line wonder what it signified to him? I had a suspicion that we were all doing this without quite realizing what was about to involve us. It was all news—a story such as we had never had before, and we were making the most of it.

Lower down the page was Clayton's half-column about Judy Lane. Yes, the surgeon was considering hurrying the arrangements for the operation. Couldn't yet say if it was possible. But it must be made possible, urged

the representative of the *Day*. Subscribers to the Judy Lane Gift were expecting it. He'd interviewed them. Judy Lane must be given a chance to see the beauty of the world. And that was the headline across two columns: JUDY LANE MUST SEE THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD.

I was sure that Clayton still hadn't found out what that meant when he wrote it, and I doubted whether the sub-editor understood. It was a good headline, to him. Did he stop to think what it might mean to the blind Judy Lane, who had never known the sense of sight? Did anyone stop to think?

You get like that in writing news. You think of it all as stories, as copy. . . . ELEVEN DAYS TO GO. A kind of nausea overtook me as I realized that this was not just a banner line in 72-point Grotesque. Eleven days to . . . Was I to spend them in the jaded atmosphere of a noisy office doing as I was told? Or was there such a thing as reality or quiet anywhere? Without thinking more than in a vague way, I picked up the telephone and rang up Philippa at Endymion. I guessed she would still be at home, and guessed right. I was glad to hear that her voice was cheerful.

"Darling, it's you at last! I'd begun to wonder what had happened to you."

"Philippa, may I come over?"

"But darling, I'm due at the office! I've skipped far too much time lately, and Dad will be wild with me. He says I'm setting a bad example to the staff."

"Don't talk about the office. Do as I'm doing. Forget about it. Was your father badly hit by the crash of the market yesterday?"

"I shouldn't think so. He didn't seem a bit down in the mouth last night."

"Good! Then I'll be over at once."

"Very well, impetuous one. It will be nice having you round the house again. Dora, here, is such a wet blanket."

So I drove over to Endymion and was met by Philippa smiling at the gate. She wore a gay frock that neatly showed off her figure; her hair was waved; and she was certainly good to see. Arm in arm we strolled through the gardens, Philippa talking brightly, and me thinking that come what might, the world was lovely, Philippa was lovely, and the Lavers' garden was a beautiful place to spend the morning.

Going into the house we were met by Dora, who, in contrast to her sister, cultivates an austere appearance. Her hair is parted down the middle, combed straight and gathered at the back. The lines of her face have a classic severity. She addressed me at once: "I see you've been asking people what they think of it all, John. Why didn't you ask me?"

Dora has a direct way with her that can be most disconcerting. All I could think of saying was: "Supposing I ask you now?"

I could see that she was herself put out by my blunt answer. She was hardly ready with a reply.

"Oh, what does it matter what Dora thinks?" said Philippa. "All she's been doing is reading. Look!" She took a book out of Dora's hand. "As I thought! Milton! You've been reading Milton since last week."

"Why not?"

"I could think of much more exciting stuff to keep your mind occupied."

"I've been reading Milton for a month, and I don't see why I should stop. That's just what I mean, John. Look at the mess we've made of the world! It's too late to do anything about it now. So all we can do is carry on, and hope that somehow we'll be saved, knowing all the time that we don't deserve it. We don't deserve to keep the earth."

"But—Dora!" Dora, I ought to point out, is the kind of girl whom even her own relatives never address by an abbreviation or a diminutive. "Dora, can't you think of anything more thrilling you'd like to do now?"

"No. Why should we be always looking for thrills? That's the way we've spoiled everything."

"Oh, you're a fraud!" laughed Philippa. "You're like me. You never really believe what the papers say."

Something like color came into Dora's cheeks. "This time I do!"

"Daddy doesn't believe, and I don't. If I did, I could think of a hundred wonderful things I'd want to do, and I'd go and do them. Come away, John! Leave her to her Milton. She's impossible!"

Philippa pulled at my hand. I didn't want to go. I had suddenly found Dora's point of view interesting. Something in her face and in her tone of voice now held me. I wanted to hear more—but there was no chance.

Mrs. Laver came in, cool and composed in a floral morning frock. In her middle forties, she's just about beginning to spread, and looking rather the better for it.

"There you are!" exclaimed Philippa. "Ask Mum what she thinks about it. Mum, dear, John wants to know what you're doing while waiting for the comet to come. Do tell him! He wants it for the paper."

"I'll tell him, but not for the paper."

"Do, Mum!"

"I've been hoarding—yes, John. I've begun. Don't look at me like that. I say it openly and unashamedly. I know what happens at a time like this, or at any emergency. The first thing that runs short is food. Supplies break down. And I'm not going to be caught out. Ken loves his dinner, and I'm past the age when I need deny that I like mine. So I was onto my grocers all day yesterday, and by tonight I hope to see my pantry stacked to the ceiling. What do you think of that, John?"

What could I answer? "Capital, capital, Mrs. Laver!"

"I'm glad to hear you say so. I don't think these girls appreciate what I'm doing for them. But they'll be thankful when they can sit down to a good meal in a fortnight's time. And you too, John, don't forget. There'll always be a place for you at table. I'm getting some tins of heavenly turkey in. I always say there's nothing quite so satisfying as turkey. So don't forget, John."

She would have taken me to her pantry there and then and shown me all the choice foods and delicacies she was assembling. But Philippa drew me away, and we went strolling in the garden again, among the creeping vines and to the cool rockery, where a miniature cascade kept tumbling into a gleaming pool.

We talked a lot that morning, about this and about that, but not about ourselves, and not about the thing that was uppermost in our minds—uppermost in my mind, and I felt sure uppermost in her mind too, for all her flippancy. I began to find it frustrating.

Just before lunch Kennaway Laver's big seven-seater car glided into the drive, and the big man himself stepped out.

Kennaway Laver is big in many ways. He's large and broad-shouldered, was something of an athlete in his day, and he's large in his manners, given to bullying at times. I'm sure he used to bully his wife, and even now she's a little afraid of him. You rarely see them talking to each other.

Kennaway Laver's companies—industrial, mining, ranching, but mostly industrial—are considered sound; or rather, they were. They were not spectacular. They were not in the forefront of industrial development. But they were well run; the shares never fluctuated much, and were always considered a safe investment. Kennaway Laver used to browbeat his co-directors, and at company meetings he used to browbeat the shareholders, put them into such a state of awe that they

would hardly dare to ask a question except about Kennaway Laver's health.

I've seen him at some of these meetings, which I've attended occasionally for the financial editor, and at which Philippa acts as a sort of ornamental secretary (that's how I met her); and I've admired his adroitness and command of facts. If the shareholders were a bit sat upon, they had little to complain of, for they always got their dividend. And what else could a shrimp of a shareholder expect, Kennaway Laver used to mutter into his blotting pad, except a good cigar at the annual meeting? And good cigars they got. Of course everyone at the office thought it a great stroke on my part to get engaged to Philippa. A marriage like that, they said, was far better than journalism, and they thought I'd be sure to be leaving the paper. I rather resented that outlook, but didn't discuss it. I had no intention of leaving journalism, and if Kennaway Laver had any such notion, he would also find out his mistake.

Kennaway Laver (no one ever referred to him as Laver) seldom came home for lunch. Occasionally he'd telephone in the morning and say he was bringing some friends, and that meant he had a particularly important deal in hand. Normally one had lunch and did business at the club, lingering over liqueurs (our financial editor got much of his news that way); but when Kennaway Laver brought his business associates to Endymion, it was because he could offer them a better table and better surroundings than the club, and he wanted to impress them.

On this morning, however, he had not telephoned, and he had previously given no hint that he was negotiating anything of unusual importance. Yet here he was stepping out of his seven-seater, rolling a little like a sailor as he came up the steps, his large double-breasted coat flapping about him.

Philippa ran to meet him. "Oh, Dad! We weren't expecting you for lunch. Is anything wrong at the office?"

He regarded her serenely for a moment, smiled (she was his favorite daughter, always looking sunny, as he put it), and, "If you'd been there yourself, you wouldn't have had to ask me, Philippa," he said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Dad. I was on my way. Honest, I was! And then John turned up at this time of day!"

Then he saw me coming up behind. "Hullo, John. Haven't seen you for some time. Keeping you busy at the *Day*, aren't they? What a song you people are making about the comet! Anyone would think no one had seen a comet before. Now, in 1910 I saw—"

PHILIPPA interrupted him: "But Dad, are you sure nothing is the matter in town?"

"Not as far as I can see. The office is getting on fine. . . . I'm cheerful. . . . But there's a lot of bellyaching going on at the club. Couldn't face that. So here I am."

He dropped into a large Madeira chair in the shade of the veranda and called for a drink. A native servant was there with a tray.

"Glass for you, John? Help yourself."

"Thanks. How's the market today?"

"Fine, as far as I can see."

"Took a bad bump yesterday?"

"And it'll take a few more bumps today. But I'm buying."

"Buying!"

He raised his glass to me and drank. "Yes, buying! And I'm going on buying. The bottom has dropped out of the market; stocks are going to the scrap-heap; but my broker has instructions to buy everything that drops to next to nothing, from gold shares to laundries; and as everything is dropping to next to nothing, I say the market is fine. By now I expect I own half the gold mines and two-thirds of the hotels in the country."

"But Mr. Laver—" I stopped in astonishment.

"Go on, go on! Let's hear what the press has to say."

"Don't you believe this comet is going to—well, make a mess of us all in a few days?"

He emptied his glass. "Now listen, John. There are still a few things you newspaper men can learn. I know nothing about the comet save what you tell us, but what difference does it make? Can I do anything about it? Can you? Of course not! Now if those fellows at the Stock Exchange kept their heads, they'd also know they couldn't do anything about it, and carry on as usual. That's the thing! What does the comet matter? It can only blot us out. While we are here, it makes no difference to us. And so I say, carry on as usual."

"That's what Dora's been saying," put in Philippa, not quite accurately, I thought.

"Dora? Is she still inside there reading Milton? Sensible girl! She and Milton know a thing or two." By now he had refilled his glass. "Now, what do I do at any ordinary time when I see good shares dropping? I buy them. So that's what I'm doing—laundries, hotels, fertilizer works, canning factories, gold and diamond mines. All good stuff, sound. Nothing speculative. That's my rule. Anything wrong with it?"

"But Mr. Laver, you don't think these shares are ever going to go up again?"

HE put the glass down. "Now listen again, John: You think this comet is going to do the dirty on us?"

"It looks certain enough, doesn't it?"

"I'm not contradicting. The astronomers ought to know their job. But suppose they're wrong somewhere? Supposing they've made just a tiny mistake—I'm not saying they have, mind you—but supposing they have? There's just a chance, isn't there? There's—just—a—chance. And if that chance comes off, where do I stand? Top of the world, don't I? I stand to lose nothing and to gain—the world, man, the world!"

I lacked words to express my amazement. "But do you really think the chance may come off?"

"I wouldn't waste my time thinking about it. Come to me in eleven—twelve days' time; and if you do, John, Philippa, I promise you I'll give you a whole company for yourselves, a chain of them. . . . The world! Think of it!"

"Time for lunch." Mrs. Laver cut short his speculation. He glanced up at her angrily, but said nothing. A servant was striking the gong, and he rose from his chair.

I felt lost in astonishment at the man's ruthlessly logical and practical point of view. I was amazed, but also exhilarated. It was immensely stimulating to meet a man who did not believe that all was lost, who thought just the opposite. While there was life, there was living! He was making a great adventure of it all!

The lunch was most enjoyable. I ate heartily. We all ate well. Kennaway Laver's company was stimulating. He talked a lot, told me about the stocks he'd virtually bought up that morning, and the others he was expecting to fall into his lap during the afternoon. It was good to be in the presence of his bland yet realistic optimism. Only Mrs. Laver remained untouched by it. Under its influence I was not sorry to return to town and the office.

It was late when I reported to the news editor.

"Oh, there you are! Where the heck have you been?" Nothing could rattle Millington or move him from his desk. Come to think of it, I can't remember ever seeing him away from that desk except when he went in to see the editor. He sits there leaning on an elbow or reaching for a telephone, as though he'd grown there. I can swear that's where the comet will get him. "There's something special for you," he said, "so listen."

Just then a voice came booming down the corridor. "Lacey! Where's that man Lacey? Does anyone know what's happened to Lacey?"

"Looks as if I won't have to tell you," observed Millington, as the long lanky form of Bailey burst into the room.

"Where's Lacey? Oh, there you are!" When Bailey gets excited, he loses his sniff, loses his pipe and talks at the top of his voice. "Now you've got to get hold of Kennaway Laver! You've heard what happened on the Stock Exchange? If you haven't, here's Hickson to tell you all about it. The market's gone to pieces, but Kennaway Laver has pulled it together. He seems to have bought up half the world in doing so, but he's done it! And now no one knows where he is. We can't raise him, and he won't answer the telephone. But we've got to get him, got to raise him somehow. Now, you're going to marry someone in his family, aren't you?"

"His daughter."

"Good! Wish you joy! Now, can you get hold of Kennaway Laver and get the story for us? If you can't, nobody can."

"I've seen him. Been with him all morning. I've got the story."

"You have! Well, I never!" He turned to the portly Hickson, who had come in after him. "There you are, Hickson! He's got it! Our troubles are over." He was at me again. "Hickson will give you the background. You write the story. We want a good interview with him. Make it big. Hero of the Stock Exchange and all that—colossus of commerce. Saved the market. Napoleon of industry. But be careful with him. For all I know, he may be the owner of the *Day* by now, so let him have his way. But get a good picture of him, full length. Go to it, Hickson."

When Hickson, who's a slow, stolid fellow, got down to it with me, I found there was little he could tell me. I actually knew more than he did, and knew it more accurately. But he described the scene on the floor of the Stock Exchange. "Like a Rugby scrum, I tell you, an unending scrum, with the brokers tearing their coats off each other's backs trying to get within shouting distance of Kennaway Laver's man. And there he was in the middle of it all like a pillar, buying everything that came his way—I mean, when the price had gone to hell. He wouldn't buy before then. Their tongues had to be lolling out with anxiety before he'd look at them. What a day, Lacey! What a day! I never thought I'd live to see the Stock Exchange go that way."

I got rid of Hickson and his lamentation, and picked up the telephone to ring Kennaway Laver. He'd told me a great deal that morning, but I didn't know if he was talking for publication, or how much of it he would like to see in print. In any case, some points needed checking up. It wasn't easy to get through to him. I knew a way round, however.

"Then let me speak to Miss Laver, please. She must be in." I was put through. "That you, Phil?"

"Yes. Oh, Johnny! It's you. Now what—"

"Listen, Phil! I've got to speak to your father. It's terribly important, for the newspaper. Can you get him to come to the phone?"

"Of course, darling. But don't sound so urgent. I'll be getting jealous."

Soon I was talking to the Big Man; when I told him what I was after, he reacted even in a bigger way than I had hoped for, said he had nothing to hide, and that I could print as much as I liked. I was to use my own judgment. But that wasn't all, I said. I wanted something extra, an overall statement as to why he'd done it and about his outlook.

"Tell them," he said, "that I did it because—because—I've got confidence. That's right. I've got confidence in the future, and I've got faith in the essential stability of the world. That's it, faith in the stability of human society. Will that do?"

"Thanks. The very thing!"

So I wrote the story and the interview and enjoyed doing so. Yes, I did. There's always enjoyment in writing a big story.

I wrote it, sent it in to the sub-editors, and I almost burst out laughing when I saw the headline they put onto it—"I Have Faith in World Stability, Says Kennaway Laver"—across four columns.

And I laughed again when I saw the cartoon they were sending to the engraver that night. It showed a bearded moon-faced comet coming through space and looking apprehensively at the approaching earth wearing the face of Kennaway Laver. The words they had put into the mouth of the comet were: "Do you think he's going to hit me?" It was a good cartoon, and it was something to laugh at. . . . Laugh, Earth, laugh! It doesn't matter why you laugh. There's something good in laughter itself. Laugh!

And I laughed again that night when we saw the comet for the first time with the naked eye. There it was I pointed it out to the others in the office, because I knew where to look. About twenty million miles away or so, a dullish star with a faint haze about it, not a ring—nothing menacing in it, nothing terrible, just a point of light by no means easy to distinguish from the thousands around it. And nothing in its speck of a face to promise that expanding reddish brown disk that already burns in the patch of sky seen through my window, or to bode anything so final as an all-embracing destruction. What was there to do but to laugh?

## Chapter Nine

I find it difficult to describe the events of the next two or three days exactly in the order in which they happened; and I have no intention of doing so. Although those days are immediately behind me, they are already confused in my mind, and I cannot allocate all the things that happened to their precise day, B.T.C. In the office we were already using that abbreviation—B.T.C., *Before the Comet*—and talking of the *10th Day B.T.C. 9th Day B.T.C.*, and so on. Even the outstanding event of these seventy hours or so—I cannot be sure whether we first heard of it on the tenth or ninth day, though I am quite certain that by the ninth day it was fully shaped, an established fact, the Voice of Doom and recognizable as such by everyone.

And it came unexpectedly. I mean the manner of its coming was not what anyone would have imagined. It was not loud; it was not portentous or threatening, and it got no big headlines from us to start with. The Voice of Doom came as a whisper, but everyone knew it for what it was, and those who had been skeptical of the astronomers' ability to predict the course of the comet with absolute accuracy and had been inclined to scoff at the newspapers, did not doubt the words of judgment when they read them.

As Conway Jones had explained to me, and as I had written in the paper: "The universe consists almost entirely of emptiness. The universe, for instance, is much more empty than this billiard table—much more empty."

Yes, Conway Jones was at his billiard table again. Cue in hand, he contemplated the table and smiled at me.

"If we regard these nine or ten snooker balls as the sun's planetary system, distributed somewhat in this fashion in accordance with their paths round the sun—" He arranged them with the red piece at the center. "And if we project into their midst an alien body from outside, from interstellar space—now, I don't say the comet is an alien body, but we'll assume so—it is possible so to direct the intruder that it avoids all the other balls—like this."

He took aim and shot the ball to the other side so that it missed all the other balls and evaded them even on the rebound. He looked round at me feeling he'd done pretty well. "And even without taking aim, it is possible to project this alien ball in among the others and still avoid every one. It happens in every game. Now the chances of this happening in the planetary system are infinitely fewer, infinitely. The odds against a comet hitting the earth or any other of the planets are millions of millions to one. For by comparison with interstellar space this billiard table, I may tell you, is positively crowded, like a patch of beach at the seaside on a Bank Holiday. To get a proper picture of the emptiness, the vast emptiness of the universe, you have to picture a few grains of dust floating about in the park otherwise empty, quite empty. Many millions of years will go by before any two of those specks will meet. But now it's going to happen, perhaps because"—he looked at me beatifically —"perhaps because many millions of years *have* passed."

WHEN we printed this, many people were impressed in a way that Conway Jones could hardly have approved of. They argued that if the odds against the Big Hit were so great, there ought to be a simple way of getting out of it altogether. Alter just one of factors involved, and the comet would go screaming harmlessly past us. They came in with their ideas to the office, and we put their projects into a funny column with appropriate half-column-width sketches.

One man suggested that all that was necessary was to change the earth's course slightly, ever so slightly. He argued that as the earth is a great magnet, all we had to do was to suspend another great, highly charged magnet in space, send it up by plane or rocket into the stratosphere, and poise it so as to draw the earth out of its orbit by a fraction of a degree; no more would be needed. Only, he cautioned us to arrange the deflection away from rather than toward the sun—South Africa was hot and dry enough as it is. We printed a sketch showing a great hand holding the magnet into space.

Another man thought that if we could assemble enough plants in America, Britain or Russia, or if these countries could coöperate, we could raise a terrific wind, a great blast, a tempest that would blow the comet off its course. Our drawing showed Mother Earth puffing away with bursting cheeks.

Other people considered that with all our resources and ingenuity, we lacked the means to alter the course of either the earth or the comet to any appreciable extent, and that we would do better to concentrate our efforts on minimizing the effects of the comet here when it arrived—on somehow cushioning the Big Hit. One man wrote to us from a village in the backveld, pointing out that if we could get enough clouds to surround the earth on the morning of the Hit, the clouds would absorb the heat of the comet and we should be saved. If only we could raise enough clouds for that day!

A most troublesome fellow was the one who came to us with a model and insisted on demonstrating it to us. He maintained that all we had to do was to cover the earth with shields of asbestos, and we could pass unscathed through any fire, electrical or otherwise. He took account of the fact that there might be insufficient asbestos for this purpose, but there is a good supply of asbestos in South Africa, and if we stopped exports at once, we might be able to raise enough to cover our side of the earth, at any rate. Alternatively he thought that on the night before the Big Hit we might all descend into the gold mines—four thousand, six thousand, eight or nine thousand feet, as deep as we could go. In the deep levels of the gold mines we should probably be as safe as anywhere. He appreciated, however, that there was danger even there of being roasted alive, and that some people might prefer to be roasted in the open.

Of all these crack-brained would-be inventors, I thought the most imaginative was the man who suggested a use of the icecaps. If we moved the icecaps from the poles to the equator, he was sure that we should have a shield impervious to the most corrosive fires of heaven or earth. Had we been giving a prize for anti-comet ideas, I think I'd have given it to him.

The first whisper of the Voice of Doom came during this incongruous outbreak of silly season. Among the cables passed to me for perusal during the afternoon was one about the famous physicist, Professor Mortenson. Since that day when we had published a paragraph about his magnification of the atom nucleus in his electron microscope, there had been nothing about him. He had been strangely silent. But here was a Reuter interview with him. I remember it was on the day when Tambula came to me with a group of his fellow-servants, and that was on 10 B.T.C. rather than on 9 B.T.C.

Tambula's deputation appeared on my threshold while I was having my coffee. He stood at the foot of my bed while the others, all bronze Zulus like himself, waited expectantly at the open door. Was it true, he asked me, what he had heard about the world going to be finished soon? He and his friends had heard a lot of talk about it, but they wanted to be sure. They wanted to hear me say if it was true. I nodded my head over my coffee.

"Is it true?"

"True, Tambula."

He looked round at his other companions. Then: "But the white people can stop it?"

"No, Tambula."

"Not even the big white people across the sea?"

"Not this time, Tambula."

He looked sorrowfully at me and heaved a deep sigh: *"Hau!"* Someone echoed, *"Hau!"* at the door. The Zulus trooped away.

AFTERWARD I went to the office and saw the cable about Professor Mortenson. It seemed that Mortenson had at first doubted the predictions about the comet. He had noticed some unusual details in the recorded observations of the comet's course and had been unable to explain them. When he subsequently had to admit that the comet was making for a collision with the earth, he still pointed out that its course was peculiar and considered that its eccentricity was caused by some un-

revealed factor. Mortenson had been working for days trying to ascertain this unknown quantity and had at last come to a strange conclusion. The comet, he said, had originally been traveling on a course which would have been no more perilous to the earth than that of Halley's in 1910. But at some point it had been deflected from its path. That sometimes happens to comets when they pass too near one of the planets and undergo perturbation. This comet had been exposed to no such influence; yet some perturbation there certainly was. It seemed that some disturbance had taken place in Space itself, which had produced some hitherto unexperienced affinity between the comet and the earth. As a result the earth had actually attracted the comet and now was bringing upon itself its own destruction. That was Professor Mortenson's astonishing theory.

Mortenson pointed out that when Halley's Comet came our way in 1910, men had not yet achieved nuclear fission, the breakup of the atom.

In 1945, they had. Since then they had demonstrated their newfound command—as they considered it—of the fundamental force of nature, by using it in war and displaying it in peace. Later still came those terrific tests of atomic power by the Americans in the South Pacific, by the British in Australia and by the Russians in Siberia. Most recent of all were the secret tests in the Antarctic about which so little was allowed to reach the outer world. Mortenson, who first made his name with his highly original principle of the Relativity Coëfficient, declared that something had happened on this last occasion which had confounded all calculations. Scientists were almost afraid to speak about it. It was something which brought home to them that they did not know nearly as much about the new force as they had believed.

Something had been released which was quite beyond their control or their understanding. Mortenson now asserted that these new atomic explosions, on a scale much vaster than anything attempted before—for the world powers were vying with each in the development of atomic methods of destruction—these explosions had caused some disturbance in outer space, in the shape of space itself, and arousing some affinity in the comet, had drawn it toward the earth. He believed that, given enough time, a few weeks or so, he could prove the theory mathematically.

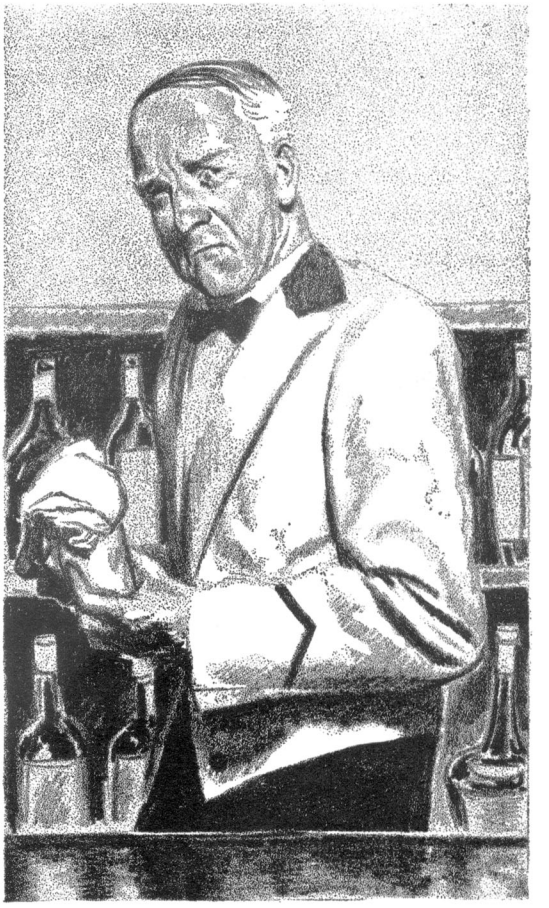
Scientists in general, were sometimes inclined to scoff at Mortenson. But the man in the street knew in his heart that Mortenson was right. Man had created the means of his own destruction. Man, groping, restless, avaricious man, had gone too far. Given a beautiful world in which to live, a green and golden world, a world which restored and renewed itself so marvelously before his very eyes, he was not content unless he was taking it apart—unless as now he was rending it to pieces.

That was what had happened. He was like a child who had been given a beautiful toy, and wanting to see how it worked, destroyed it. He had dismembered it unthinkingly, greedy for its secret but unable to consider whether he would also have the cunning of its Maker to put it together again. Man was like a child with the fire of the gods in his hands—but still a child. And so destruction was come upon him. The comet was come to erase him and all his works, and no one in his senses any longer doubted that this was so.

When I put Mortenson's theory to Conway Jones, he was upset at first. That was the only time I had ever known him to be upset. At first it seemed that Mortenson doubted the astronomical calculations; and Conway Jones, jealous of his ability and his reputation, at once pitched into his tables, graphs and charts to prove that he and the other astronomers were right.

When it became clear that Mortenson was not doubting the accuracy of the comet's course as plotted, but only the reason for the comet's behavior, his tone changed. Smiling remotely, he mused over Mortenson's Theory of the Comet. There might be something in it, he said. Yes, the more he thought of it, the more strongly he believed that there might be something in it. "Daring theory. . . . Mmm. . . . Daring thinker. Brilliant man, Mortenson, brilliant brain, and under forty, you know. Quite an audacious theory, imaginative. . . . And he says he thinks he could prove it mathematically if he had the time. I'm sure he could. . . . But of course, he won't have the time. . . . Pity—great pity."

Yes, the pity of it all! Conway Jones had his way of seeing the pity of it, and others had theirs.



*"Tomorrow they'll find those stargazers made a mistake."*

THE Cosways came to see me that evening. It seemed they had been waiting up for me, and having made sure that I had come in, they rang my bell. The Cosways have been my next-door neighbors in this building for as long as I remember, but I never saw much of them. They had a son in England studying medicine at one of the hospitals in London, and they were very proud of him. It was only later that I found that Cosway was a bookkeeper at one of the big stores, and that the quiet middle-aged couple had used up practically all their savings so as to be able to give their son a medical training.

They were diffident and repeatedly excused themselves for disturbing me at that hour. I invited them in at once, and offered them a drink. They declined; and

while Mrs. Cosway sat on the edge of a chair, her husband remained standing, not quite sure how he ought to begin. I thought I would help him.

"Heard anything from your son?"

"No, no, nothing special. . . . But Mr. Lacey, it's the news I wanted to talk to you about. It may seem strange to come worrying you at this time of night, but my wife says you talked to her about it in the street the other day, so I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Not a bit."

"Well—is it true, Mr. Lacey? I mean, I've read it, and all about it, but I thought that you being on the newspaper yourself would know more. Is it really true?"

I didn't know quite how to give him his answer, but I saw no way of avoiding it. "I'm afraid we have to accept it as true, Mr. Cosway."

"There you are. That's what I keep telling my wife. After all, it's printed. . . . You've got to believe it. It's difficult, I know. You get into the habit of thinking of the world as just going on, and you never think of it stopping. It takes time getting used to, and we're all in it together—"

Mrs. Cosway stood up. "It's not ourselves we're thinking of. It's our boy Henry. After all, we've had our life, and it hasn't been a bad life—"

"No, we don't grumble. The firm's been good to me—"

"But it doesn't seem to be fair on the young people. They don't get a chance. Henry has a future before him. Everyone says so. And he has only one year more to qualify, but now— It doesn't seem fair."

Mr. Cosway patted her hand. "For quite a long time we've only lived for him—you see I didn't quite realize that till now. Bookkeeping is not very exciting, but it was grand to plan for Henry. We've never had a doctor in my family. . . . But if as you say the news is true—of course, it's true. That's what I tell her. They wouldn't print it if it wasn't true, not a thing like that. It must seem silly of us to trouble you at this time of night."

"Not at all."

"We felt we had to talk it over with someone. Nice of you. Come, my dear."

But she still appealed to me. "What do you think we ought to do, Mr. Lacey?"

That was the most difficult question of all to answer. "We must—we mustn't give up hope, Mrs. Cosway."

"You think there is hope?"

"It helps, to hope."

"Thank you, Mr. Lacey. So good of you. I wonder what Henry is thinking. . . . Good night, Mr. Lacey."

## Chapter Ten

THE MOOD OF THE PEOPLE IN GENERAL AT THIS time—and I had better point out that I am now writing of yesterday and the day before, that is of *9 B.T.C.* and *8 B.T.C.*—their mood was resigned and fatalistic. People knew that they were for it, to put it colloquially, and there were no recriminations or complaints. They did not even blame anyone. You would have thought they would want to blame the scientists, place on them the responsibility for their fate. But they did not. They blamed themselves. They knew it was all their own fault. Not one among them but had admired the achievements of the scientists, the chemists and the physicists, and in their own way had encouraged them. The fault, if any, was everyone's. We had all sinned and were all guilty.

People stopped bringing us their ingenious plans for avoiding the comet or limiting its effects. The conviction had suddenly come upon mankind that there was no escape. Doom was on the way. There was nothing to do but prepare.

The churches were crowded day and night. Preachers arose in all parts of the city. Pulpits and shrines were set up at the roadside. Priests called the people to repentance. People confessed their sins in the streets, at the doors of churches and on the steps of the City Hall. The Stock Exchange took another crash, and I believe Kennaway Laver went on buying, but we didn't say much of it. There was too much to say. Kennaway Laver's doings seemed of minor interest. Statesmen in London, Paris, Washington and Moscow talked a great deal in their congresses and parliaments and on the radio. Moscow had by now announced the brilliant achievement of its astronomers in having discovered the comet independently. There was neither space nor time to print it all. Half of it was thrown onto the floor.

The Security Council of United Nations issued a statement. It got buried somewhere on an inside page, and I find I cannot recall what exactly it stated. There was a sudden rebirth of interest in the question of life after death. Scores of pamphlets on the subject appeared in the bookshops. Speakers developing this theme in the squares and the parks had the greatest audiences. It is quite remarkable how many people have become convinced in the matter of a few days that life after death is not only possible, but also probable, very probable.

I find that I cannot write much about the big things of the past few days—the congresses, the councils, the cabinets. In any case they are all recorded in the newspapers. Here in my own room the little things keep obtruding, things which have already etched themselves into my mind and which, if I were to live not just seven or eight days more, but a hundred years, would remain there for good.

I should remember how spontaneously people reacted to our suggestion that Judy Lane's operation should take place at once, so that the blind child should be enabled to see the world. People telephoned us. People wrote to us. They sent us money for the Judy Lane Gift. They raised the subject at ratepayers' meetings and passed resolutions urging the Hospital Board to do something. *"Let Judy Lane see the world!"* almost became a slogan. Of course what people really meant was, "Let Judy Lane see the world before it goes up in smoke," but they didn't like saying that, didn't like hearing it.

Then Clayton came in triumphantly to say that the senior surgeon at the hospital had decided he could do the operation earlier than had previously been arranged. He would in fact do it on Monday. And Clayton at once wrote a story telling how little Judy Lane would see the beauty of the world on Monday. Monday would be her great day—the day she would remember forever.

I should also remember always how Mr. and Mrs. Cosway, the folk from next door, came to say good-by to me. That was only yesterday, Sunday morning. I hadn't seen them since that night in my flat, and so I was surprised to hear that they were leaving. They had closed up the flat (after giving it a good cleaning), packed a portmanteau, and there they were.

"We're going to England," she said.

"To England!"

"To be with Henry. We thought that was best."

"Of course it is! You're right."

"There you are, Mary. What did I tell you? We're leaving at once by the noon plane. Be in London tomorrow. Won't Henry get a surprise! Of course, we've cabled him, but they say there's delay. We may even get there before the cable."

Mrs. Lacey was putting on her gloves and looking quite brisk too. "You should also go home to your people, Mr. Lacey. It's the best thing now. You have a mother?"

"Yes—" A vision came before me, a lonely old woman, a little cottage. But some men can never go home.

Mr. Cosway was talkative. "Of course, we can't really afford it. Never thought to travel this way. We simply haven't got the money. But I went to the firm, and I said—" He was quite bold about it. "I said they had to help me out. After all, I've worked for them for thirty years. They were a bit surprised, I tell you, but I always knew they were fair. We've never traveled on a plane before, you know."

"A new experience for you. You'll like it."

"Yes. The world's full of new experiences, isn't it? Never too late to fly. They say the planes take big risks these days?"

"Not more than necessary."

"That's what I was telling her. There are times when you have to take a risk. And if not now, well—"

Mrs. Cosway took my hand. "Good-by, Mr. Lacey. You've been so kind to us."

"Not at all. My regards to Henry."

Then she leaned forward and kissed me on the cheek. I was quite taken aback.

"God bless you!" she said.

"Good-by, Mrs. Cosway. Happy trip! Good-by—"

I shook hands with Mr. Cosway. "Good-by—good-by."

Such nice people, I thought. Such good kind people. And I'd never got to know them properly.

I shall remember the way Tewkes, the barman of the Golden Springbok, burst into the reporters' room that afternoon. He was drunk, plainly drunk, drunk enough vaguely to see one side of the truth in front of him and blurt it out. He beat the air wildly and shouted at us. "It's all your fault! Your fault! What business did you have telling everyone about it? Why in hell's name couldn't you leave it alone? If we hadn't known about it, it wouldn't have mattered, and we'd have been happy. It would have happened in any case, but we wouldn't have had to bother our heads about it and get all worked up. But you had to go and blow the gaff. It's your fault! You damn' newspapers! It's all your—"

Then someone took him by the scruff of the neck and pitched him out.

Things like this indicated that people were losing their grip. I had never seen Tewkes drunk before, and certainly never thought that his stomach could be so badly upset. It was symptomatic. People were losing their balance. We could feel it even inside the office. The way Jupp, the galley-boy behaved—two or three days before, it would have been inconceivable.

We noticed first that Jupp had stopped whistling. We no longer had to reprimand him, or not so frequently. It seemed he was getting serious, growing up, learning responsibility. I was in the reporters' room when I heard some strange noises down the corridor, couldn't make them out. When I put my head out at the door, there was Jupp coming along with rolls of galley proofs in his hands, but looking as quiet as a mouse. He entered, deposited the proofs and went out. Again there was that grating noise in the corridor, and again when I looked out there was nothing to be seen but Jupp, this time going in the other direction.

Then Olwen rang through to say that the editor wanted to see me. I went in and found Maddison as usual at his desk. He seemed vague and dreamy, and I couldn't quite make out what he wanted of me. There was a knock on the door; Jupp came running in with his proofs and dumped a bundle of them on the editor's blotting pad. Having done that, he stood there.

Maddison looked round. "Well, what is it?"

For a moment Jupp hesitated. Then he stuck a broad red tongue out and looking Maddison straight in the face, blew a long and resounding raspberry. A moment of ecstasy in his face—then he vanished through the doorway.

Maddison was upset, looked anxious and bewildered. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed quietly, half to himself. "I have a feeling that the boy has been wanting to do that for ever so long. Gracious!"

He didn't finish what he had begun telling me. I never found out why he had sent for me. He said it was all right—whatever it was—and he didn't need me any longer. He must have left his office soon after and gone straight home. He was not seen in the place for the rest of the day, and Bailey installed himself in his chair with satisfaction. When I heard the noise in the corridor again, I let others go and see what it was. I knew well enough. Jupp was giving raspberries for all he was worth, and to everyone up and down the building.

With preoccupations of my own on my mind, I thought no more of Jupp or Maddison. Philippa telephoned me. She had been trying to get me all afternoon, and was distressed. At first I could not understand what was worrying her. She wanted me to come over to Endymion, and yet she thought I had better not. I gathered that something strange was happening at the house, and perhaps she would rather not tell me. Then she cried out over the line: "Oh, John! Darling, let's get married! What are we waiting for?"

"Of course, Phil! We should have got married long ago."

"Let's get married at once!"

"I'll be over tomorrow, darling, and we'll arrange everything. I've been a beast, I know. I should have suggested it myself instead of waiting for you. Oh, forgive me, Phil!"

"I do, I do, darling! But come early!"

I didn't see that there was anything really to arrange, but my words calmed her.

There is I think only one more fact that I need to record from this past week, or rather only one more thing that I want to record. It is a small item, really, but I feel it is significant—Mortenson died yesterday. The message came late at night, and I was asked to write a short obituary notice. So many things had happened that this fact made little impression on my feelings. He had died too soon, I thought. He might have been spared just a few more days. And then the pity of it came upon me, a different kind of pity. I found I was sorry for Mortenson. I was sorry for every poor wight who might die now and during the next week, and so miss seeing the great, the terrible, the terrific end of it all. For undoubtedly we should see some of it, the beginning of the end, if not the end itself. I wanted to see as much of it as possible, and so I felt should every man. The great spectacle was on the way—the greatest show on Earth! And Mortenson would not see it. Poor Mortenson!

What had he died of? The cables did not say. Conway Jones had mentioned his age, less than forty. Yes, the cable said thirty-six. Why should he have died? He was robust. There had been no mention of any illness of his. I went to the library and asked Mrs. Ricketts to get his file out. Mrs. Ricketts seemed cheerful, the only cheerful person in the office, though there were heaps of unclassified clippings on her table.

"Just look at my clippings, Mr. Lacey! Clippings and clippings! You see, the girls have left me, gone off with their lights o' love, so I have no help. The clippings just pile up!"

I wanted to ask her why she stupidly went on making clippings. Hadn't she better stop? No one would want them. But she seemed to get a curious joy out of contemplating the growing heaps of clippings.

She gave me Mortenson's envelope. As I thought, there was no mention of illness. He was so famous a man, that if he'd been suffering from some ailment recently, there would have been some mention of it. How had he come to die? And then I turned up the item

*"It's all your fault! Your fault! If we hadn't known about it, it wouldn't have mattered,*

about his work with the electron microscope and about his looking into the atom nucleus.

*"It was like looking into the face of God,"* were his words on that occasion.

"And then I knew. No man could live after that. When a man saw God, he was ready to die. So Mortenson died.

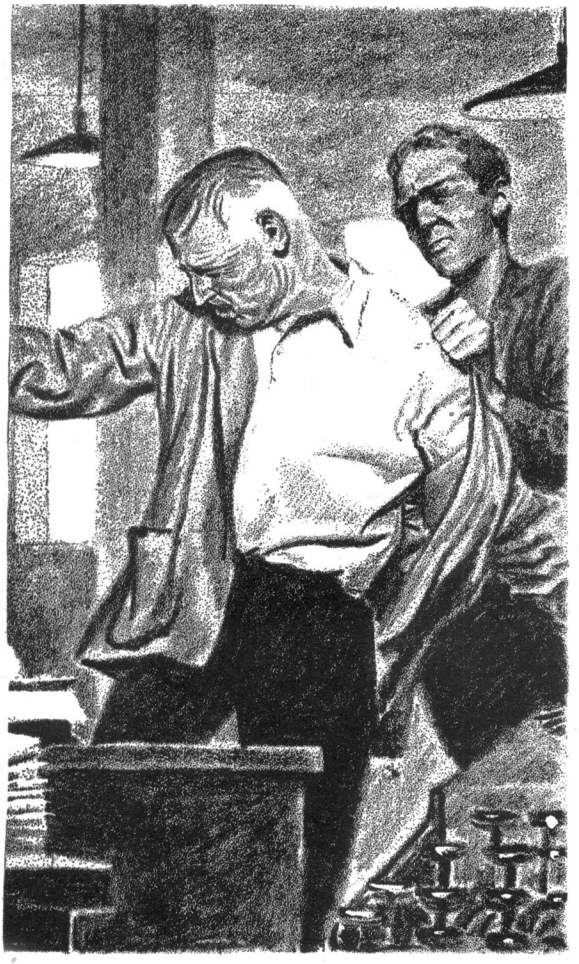
I said nothing of that in my obituary notice. There are some things you don't put into a newspaper.

## This Week: The Seventh Day

### Chapter Eleven

AT LAST I HAVE CAUGHT UP WITH MY STORY. Three nights I have sat here between midnight and dawn trying to set down in as orderly a way as I could my record of this tremendous week, the story of these converging days. Time is leaping toward annihilation, toward its explosive point, after which there will be no more days to mark or describe. Or rather, there will be days, days and more days, days and nights alternating on the sides of the earth in undisturbed progression, days and days. . . . For the sun will go on rising, and the sun will go on setting; but there will be none to hail the glory of the morning or point to the splendor of the west. The days will go on, unnumbered and uncounted, countless for countless aeons—until perhaps something will be left of the lava, something will stir in the slime, something in the waste of seasons will wait for sunrise, and the counting may start again. Something may count the beginning, just as I here am counting the end, setting down these last lapsing sunsets in the sunset of the world. Gorgeous they are, and, lest we belittle him, the sunset of man is gorgeous too, gorgeous and terrible.

We used the gifts that earth, sun and rain gave us. We followed the aspirations we brought from the mud. With the strength in which we rose from chaos, we scaled the heights of the world, our inheritance; we plumbed and spanned the oceans; we bridged the skies; we threw open the secret of matter; we sought the secret of life itself. And, who knows, that but for the sword which now stands ready to fall in our way, we might have found it. The secret of life and death might also have become ours. But the tree of life was not for us. That part of the garden is closed, and for fear that in our pride we should break down the gate, we are banished from the garden



*and we'd have been happy."*

forever. We are driven out into the wilderness of the universe, there to wander and wait unknowing till a greater man restore us and regain the blissful seat. . . .

There I go quoting Milton as if I were Dora Laver, and thinking of another Paradise Lost. What a paradise the earth seems now that we are to lose it! I have memories of snow under moonlight, the first shoots of spring, orchards in blossom. . . . But at a time like this it is important to keep one's thoughts to everyday things. It is not fancy I'm to set down here, but fact. The cables we are getting now from Europe are scrappy and do not give the feel of things. But I can give all the color of events here, and so my story can be individual, different from any other, yet as true as any. There cannot be too many ways of writing about the comet.

I am aware that I am thinking as though I really believed these pages could survive. Perhaps I do not believe that everything will vanish in one terrific blast early next Monday morning. Perhaps I cannot take it in; my mind refuses. Perhaps I cling to the hope that written words cannot be entirely destroyed; somehow they must survive. The thought is quite irrational, of course; much thinking is. Perhaps the moving finger writes, and what is written cannot be entirely erased. Time is a palimpsest; the world itself is the writer and the record; and somewhere the tale is engraved for all eternity, whether there is anyone to read it or not.

Now that I have caught up with each day's events, I have a reasonable hope of completing the story—that is, as far as it will be possible to do so. I mean to keep going at it until the last moment, or as near to it as I can get. It may seem odd that I should spend these last days slogging away at a typewriter. That's just what it has been, hours of slogging, afternoon and evening. I have been working on this story at the office too. I couldn't have got all of it down otherwise. At the office, when they see me busy, they think that I'm working on my assignments, and they like it. But why should I spend these last days tiring myself out in this fashion—and for whom? I have put this question to myself more than once, but the only answer I can get is to return to my typewriter and carry on. I can find fulfillment in nothing else. . . . It is simple enough for the older folk who have had their time and lived a reasonable span. They can sit back now and wait for the end, watch the world ebb away, see the marvel of it, and reflect that it wasn't a bad world after all. I have seen old folk wait for death like that and perhaps get more satisfaction of a kind out of their last years than out of all the rest of their lives.

But young people are different. They feel the need to crowd a lifetime into these last days; and what is living but fulfillment in one way or another? And what is fulfillment? Maybe at a time like this one knows better than at any other. How many men, looking back on their spent lives, have regretted the thing that they did not do, one thing which they knew they always wanted and yet kept putting off for another time? But now there cannot be another time. It is now or never. So Jupp spits out his raspberry at the editor, and I find that I must record it. Somewhere at the heart of things there is an abiding incongruity.

Our headline on Column 1 of the front page this morning was, in heavy black type, Seventh Day B.T.C. We shall have the corresponding headline on that column every morning from now on—just to remind people, in case they are in danger of forgetting. I cannot quite say why we do it. It's a habit newspapers have of recording the obvious. We always do something like this before Christmas: Only thirty days to Christmas. Do your shopping now. . . . Only twelve shopping days to Christmas. . . . Seventh day before the comet. What are your plans for the end of the world? How are you going to see the old world out?

Seventh Day B.T.C. . . . But some people don't seem to know about it. Look at our advertisement columns!

The City Council is still advertising for rat-catchers, who must be ready to start work by February 1. There are also vacancies in the Scavenging Department. Notices have gone out for the monthly meeting of the Council, due for next week, Tuesday night.

The Government Railways are advertising special excursion rates and extra trains for the Christmas holidays. We are under contract to print that advertisement every day for a fortnight. So we shall go on printing it every day. Contracts must be kept. Only an act of God can justify their breach, and so far there has been none. What a nicely ordered world ours is! How scrupulous we are about some things, how thorough, how pernickety! And at the same time how slap-dash we are, how confused, how chaotic! We make a chaos of our own; why should we complain of any other?

There's a petition going round the country now collecting signatures and asking the Government to convene a special session of Parliament to deal with the emergency. The petitioners contend that it is the duty of the Government to consider ways and means of keeping the country out of the path of destruction. They are quite convinced there must be a way of doing so.

All this talk of one world is deprecated; it is the talk of the big powers; it is a new form of imperialism. South Africa is six thousand miles from anywhere, and there is no reason why this country should become involved equally with others. The Prime Minister has already given his answer. He says that the Cabinet has had the matter under consideration, but that no special session of Parliament is considered necessary, and would be thought undesirable by most M.P.'s at this time of the year. In any event the Government has been exchanging notes with Downing Street and the White House; the members of the Cabinet have placed themselves at the Prime Minister's disposal, and no good purpose would be served by summoning the House. The situation is to be reconsidered in a week's time.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister calls upon the people to go about their work as usual. Workers have been scattering; absenteeism in industry is growing; and some works are in danger of running down for lack of operatives. The Prime Minister urges that there can be and there must be no running away. Transport has to be kept going; trains must be on time; the white people must set an example in steadiness and fortitude to the natives. The mines depend on the labor of the black man, and the whites cannot expect the natives to remain in the shafts if they themselves decamp into the country or to the seaside. The police force is to be strengthened. Units of the Defence Force are to be called out. These announcements have had a steadying effect on public opinion, but the petition continues to travel, and has so far gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures. It will of course have the fate of most petitions, and will probably be lost somewhere in the backveld.

The Archbishop is calling not for action but for prayer. Special services of intercession are being held. The Cathedral is open all night. Processions go through the streets calling the people to come to God, warning them that this is their last chance. I saw such a procession today coming down Observatory Hill. There were actually two processions side by side, one for white people and one for black, so that they might be called to God each according to his kind. As the leading cross-bearer came down the roadway, people threw themselves in his way crying for forgiveness and salvation. They were sprinkled with holy water, and the cross-bearer marched on.

Over the radio we have been hearing night after night why the world should be coming to an end now, and why it should not. The Brains Trust, in that detached and superior air its members affect, has been telling us that the earth is overcrowded anyhow, that at the present rate of increase among the various races there would scarcely be standing room within measurable time, and so perhaps the dissolution now imminent is just as well. Man has too literally obeyed the injunction to be fruitful and multiply. But the earth is not limitless. Ah, me, perhaps it is just as well! The next discussion of the Brains Trust will be broadcast a week from tonight, and then perhaps we shall be able to tell you more about it. Restrained chuckles fading away from the microphone. How the Brains Trust likes its little jokes!

PROGRAMS for next week remain as advertised. Programs for this week will be interrupted occasionally for special announcements, but will otherwise continue as advertised unless of course there are outside disturbances. These are considered by no means unlikely, but every attempt will be made to keep on the air. Proposals that the comet should be televised on evenings when conditions permit have been under consideration, but it was finally decided that having the comet on home television screens might prove an alarming experience for many people, and the proposal was accordingly dropped. Television programs will continue as advertised.

In America the first rapture of the "Come to God this minute!" evangelical movement having spent itself in Wall Street, people have turned themselves with typical American enthusiasm to practical methods of receiving Our Hot Visitor, as they call the comet. Fervid hot-gospelism gave way to despair, doubt and disbelief, and now to a mood of emotional resignation. A crooner has been singing: *"Let it rip, baby! We've had our day. Come, Mr. Comet, come what may. Hey, baby!"* The song is sweeping the States, and with it the "Let it rip!" spirit.

Meanwhile the Rocket-to-the-Moon project is being given great prominence in the New York papers. In fact, it seems there has been a tremendous growth of interest in this venture, and people are urging that the attempt should be made at once, this very week. Millionaires are offering fabulous sums to be taken as passengers. But the rocket experts point out that preparations cannot be accelerated; it would be impossible to make the attempt this week; and apart from the crew of two willing to risk their lives in interstellar space, the rocket will have no human occupants. Two monkeys to be carried for experimental purposes are regarded as more useful freight than millionaires. In any case the moon will prove a poor haven for refugees from the earth. The moon itself is hardly likely to escape the swoop of the comet, and will most probably be drawn into the fire to be reunited with Mother Earth, perhaps refilling that very cavity of the Pacific which was created when first it was torn from its primeval setting and the processions of the months began. No, not all the money in Wall Street will be any help to our refugees seeking a foothold in space. So—let it rip! We've had our day. Come, Mr. Comet, take it away! Hey, baby! Shake a shoulder, shake a shin! Take it coolly on the chin. Hey, baby!

IN Britain they are still playing football and doing football pools. The Government is encouraging this everything-as-usual frame of mind, this unruffled, phlegmatic, refusal-to-be-shaken state of mind. If civilization is to go under, let it do so gracefully, with dignity and without panic. Above all, let there be no panic! So on with the game! Play to the whistle! Half-time as usual, and change over! And what's wrong with civilization being caught doing its pools for the week? Or for that matter, playing football? Or doing its chores, cleaning up for the morrow? The people of Herculaneum were caught baking their bread, drinking their wine, seeking their loves. And do we think any the worse of them?

The Foreign Ministers are meeting in Paris. For months and months the Foreign Ministers of the Powers have been trying to arrange a meeting in Paris. Or were they trying to avoid a meeting in Paris? Who is to know? And who cares now whether they meet or not? The matter in hand now may be said to be beyond the province even of Foreign Ministers. But, heaven be praised, they have composed their immediate differences, or they have been able to overlook them, and they are at a round table with their scientific advisers. Repeat scientific advisers, say the cables. And well they may. Everyone is asking, why scientific advisers? Why not with their archbishops, their archimandrites and their cardinals? Nevertheless, scientific advisers mark an improvement on military advisers. At least it seems clear that they don't intend declaring war on the comet.

But what good can there be in a meeting of the Foreign Ministers now? Years ago it might have helped; months ago it might have saved us. They might have been able to avoid the atomic race. There might have been no need to build bigger and bigger bombs and try them out on the oceans and deserts. Now it is too late. But the Foreign Ministers are meeting at last! Strange how an

emergency like this brings out the innate good sense of people, the essential humanity even of a Foreign Minister. Or does it? There's something heartening in all this. Man, after all, is not all bad—not bad to the core.

## Chapter Twelve

THE COMET GROWS LARGER IN THE SKY. There it is now for all to see. It is only about thirteen million miles away now and looks about as large as a tennis ball, with a ruddy brown tint in it the color of parched earth. The haze about it is quite clear now, a swirl of light you would say, almost like a ball that's hit the line and knocked up a cloud of white chalk. A celestial tennis ball which an interstellar racket could sweep clean out of the sky, if only there was one!

A week ago I was grateful that the comet was not visible from my window, but the comet is far from the terrifying thing I thought it would be. When I can contemplate it unemotionally, I can almost find it beautiful. Poised up there in space, shining amid its spray of light, it has an awesome fascinating beauty. I often sit looking at it. Or I go out to my little balcony and reflect how I used to envy the people who had seen Halley's Comet in 1910, and wonder if I would live till its return round about 1986, or whether it would come as close again. But it won't come as close as this comet, our comet, next week's comet; and when it does come, there will be no one here to mark its progress. But we of this generation are privileged to see a sight that has never been seen before, never anywhere in the universe, and may never be seen again—yes, quite as Conway Jones says, a unique opportunity! So I gaze at the comet, while down there the presses are throbbing, telling the tale, telling the tale. . . .

When I called upon Conway Jones today he was ready to give me the distance of the comet almost down to the last minute. Wheeler takes me to the Observatory every day; says the car needs no steering any longer, knows the way itself, like the donkey he used to drive for a dairy in his young days. He says he wishes he was back on the donkey-cart; screws his eyes up and says those were the days when a man could have some peace, and sighed for a motorcar only because he didn't know what was good for him. Conway Jones is particularly pleased to be able to give me the comet's precise distance. I think that at night he must follow its minute-by-minute progress, and that he really will keep on doing so until the last minute of all.

"Our visitor is on time, absolutely on time," he keeps impressing on me, as though I were anxious lest it might not be. I think he's got Mortenson's theory at the back of his mind. No matter whether Mortenson's theory is right or wrong, the comet is behaving as the astronomers said it would. So Conway Jones tells me the distance, shows me how it corresponds with the calculations, and he is pleased, quietly pleased. Wheeler says he's like a woman baking a cake. In a week's time he'll take it out of the oven, say it's not quite as good as he meant it to be, and expect you to admire it.

In spite of my promise to Philippa, I did not go out early to Endymion after all. I slept late and was awakened by a call from the office. Bailey, it appeared, wanted to see me at once. Why Bailey should send for me so early in the day and why he should be so energetic, I could not understand. But I dressed quickly, crunched Tambula's toast, and when I saw that I'd be getting to the office in less than half an hour, I purposely lingered over my coffee. It wouldn't do to show Bailey that he could rouse me from sleep at any hour and expect me to be in attendance. Bailey could not of course know that I had been up writing till three in the morning; but I hadn't left the office till eleven P.M., so he was not entitled to expect me back before noon. I finished my coffee and went out.

Biggs, the liftman, looked at me. It was a sour look.

"How's the comet?" I inquired. It's become the fashion now to ask after the comet instead of after the weather.

"Looks much too good, if you ask me," he growled. I could swear he blamed me for it.

At the office I learned that Bailey was in Maddison's room, and there I found him sitting, rather surprisingly, in the editor's chair, filling every bit of it. He was all bustle and energy. No longer a pipe in his mouth, no hint of a sniff. His graying hair was tousled; his mustache was fierce, and his eyes were gleaming. Bailey, I realized, was happy—yes, happy as I'd never seen him before; and there was a quiet excitement about him.

"Ah, Lacey! Come in, Lacey! Sit down. . . . No, not there—here. I want to talk to you. Right! . . . Sorry I had to drag you out at this time of day. Didn't fancy getting here so early myself, don't mind telling you. But there are some special jobs to be done; and, you know, you'll be able to take time off later."

HE pushed the blotting-pad to one side, then put it back and straightened it. "Now listen, Lacey; I'm putting you in charge of the comet. I like the work you've been doing. Seems to me you've got a good hang of it, and I like your point of view. After all, you were the man who first got hold of this comet—world scoop, wasn't it? I remember, and I'm sure you'd like to do the big story. I know I would if I were in your position. So I'm putting you in charge of all the comet stuff. You know what I mean. All the copy, cables and local stuff, has got to come to you. You'll see that nothing clashes. See that we say nothing silly. Write the introduction and send the stuff in to the subs. And that's another reason why I'm putting you in charge of the comet, making you a sort of comet editor—ha-ha!" He stopped to laugh and get his breath.

"Yes, that's another reason. We have to clean the work up a bit for the subs. They're short-staffed. One of the fellows, Wilson, I think it is, has gone off to do private work. To go and walk out on us at a time like this, Lacey! I ask you! Gone away to do private work; and you know as well as I do what a newspaper man means when he says he's doing private work. Gone off to write that book he's been dreaming of all these years. I know him. Every mother's son of a journalist I ever knew, except myself—and excepting you, I hope—has always had a book at the back of his mind or in his drawer that he thought he only had to finish to become famous. And so he goes off to do private work; and before long, if he ever gets down to writing it, finds the book's no damn' good. It always turns out that way. You can't wait half a lifetime and then think you can just sit down and write a book. You find you haven't got the knack, or that somebody else has used your idea long ago. And so this fellow goes off to do private work. Ridiculous!"

I didn't know what to say to this, and felt I wasn't expected to say anything. Bailey pushed the blotter out of his way again, pushed it back and continued: "Now, I know there's none of that nonsense about you, Lacey. I've been watching you. You can keep your head. And at a time like this that's very important. So I'm putting you in charge of the comet. And apart from dressing all the copy up and so on, there are only two things in particular I'll expect from you—to keep in touch with Conway Jones, and to keep in touch with Kennaway Laver. Hickson tells me Laver's bought up half the country already. Amazing man, you know! Didn't you say you were going to marry his daughter or something like that?"

"That's right."

"Wish you joy. And that's about all, Lacey. I know I can rely on you to keep your eye on things, and of course to keep your head. Er—that's all."

But it wasn't all. I couldn't understand how Bailey had suddenly taken charge of things. He never used to talk like that, never had so much "I" about him, and when he issued instructions it was always in the name of the editor—Mr. Maddison wants this and Mr. Maddison wants that. I couldn't understand how he had suddenly become so self-confident, and I also wanted to know whether he was putting me in charge of the comet on his own responsibility, or whether Maddison had ordered it. After all, it makes a difference if you know that an order or a promotion—it was a kind of promotion—comes from the top. I couldn't ask him bluntly, so I hedged:

"By the way—where's the editor?"

"Don't you know, man? Didn't I tell you? Thought I was telling you all the time." He laughed, pushed the blotting-pad to one side (letting it stay there) and leaned back in the editor's chair. "Maddison's staying at home to write his philosophic aphorisms."

"Philosophic—"

"Yes. Incredible, isn't it? You'd think a man like Maddison had got all he wanted out of life—editor of a national daily and all that. But there you are! At the back of his mind there's an idea all the time he's some sort of Marcus Aurelius or something, and that he ought to give the world the distillations of his wisdom. You know, I never suspected it myself. Always believed Maddison when he said he'd got just where he wanted in life. Yet all the time there was this secret hankering after something else, this idea he'd been done out of the thing he really wanted, and that he's never been recognized for what he is—a philosopher! So now he goes off to prove it, and to write his philosophic meditations, the philosophy of Martin Tupper Maddison, if you please!"

He laughed over it, and mused as he repeated: *"The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Maddison."* He continued confidentially: "I'd never have known about it, but apparently he'd been working on it here last week; and when he went off yesterday, he left some pages behind. Came back for them at night. I'd been reading them, but didn't let on. High-falutin' stuff, you know. *'O Man, thou art not master of thyself. No man is master of his thoughts or feelings. An infant denied a sweetmeat may make a king avaricious.'* Utter bosh, you know! *'A falling leaf changes the center of gravity of the Earth. Falling past the eye of a minister, it may change the fate of a nation. O man, in the hour of thy twilight, think on thy beginning and wonder whether there was not thy end as well. On the first page of every book the last is also written, and the first paragraph tells the whole story.'* Upside-down piffle like that, you know.

"So when he rang this morning in that casual tone of voice of his to tell me to carry on, as he had some work to do at home, I asked no questions. I knew what it was all about. One would think at a time like this an editor would stick to his post. Testing time brings the best out of a man, or it should. But you forget all that, Lacey. You carry on. Keep in touch with Kennaway Laver; that's the big side of the story. And come and see me whenever you're in doubt. I'm always here, always ready. . . . You know me. Go along with you."

So that was it! I left the editor's office fairly in a daze. Not Maddison had astonished me, but Bailey. I had never known him so elated, so full of zest, so satisfied with himself. And I knew why. The editor had always wanted to be a philosopher, had he? But Bailey had always longed to be an editor. One of them at least now had his wish. For years Bailey had had his eye on the editorial chair. There was no more deep-frustrated man in the office when Maddison was appointed above him. For a time it seemed he would never get over it; and then, becoming in a way resigned, he found compensation in taciturnity and half-muttered criticism. But now he had it! Now when he had least expected it, he had slipped into the editorial chair, and had taken control of the paper. Now he had his wish! Now he had come into his inheritance, and he was himself again, a lordly, confident, masterful self, sure of his work and ready to give it his life. I like the Old Bailey. I decided on the spot that I like this awkward, burly man who now edits the *Day* and finds life so satisfying.

Another surprise was awaiting me when I got to the reporters' room. Standing at my desk were Mr. and Mrs. Cosway.

"Good gracious! I thought you two had gone—"

But obviously they hadn't, and they seemed to be in distress. I brought them two chairs and made them sit down.

"We shouldn't have troubled you here, Mr. Lacey," he began, "only as we missed you at the flat."

"Please don't apologize. Tell me what happened."

"Nothing much, really." He was no longer the bold Mr. Cosway who had gone to the firm and simply told them they had to see him through. "When we got to the airport yesterday, the plane was there all right, but we were told we had to give our seats up. We waited for the afternoon plane, but that again was full. It seems lots of important people have to travel just now, or so they said."

Mrs. Lacey fidgeted with her bag. "It was a great disappointment to us after we'd made up our minds. We could almost have been there by now."

"My wife suggested going to my firm, but I know they can't do anything. I thought you being on a newspaper—this seems an awful thing to say, only now we've set our hearts on it, and there isn't much time left. Do you think you could do anything to get us onto a plane, Mr. Lacey?"

I thought a moment. I realized how much it had cost these folk in heartache to decide upon the journey, to lock up their home, go away and then find themselves turned back—and what an effort it had been for them to come here and ask my help. The public relations officer at the Airways often does things for newspaper men. After all, what's he a public relations officer for? I rang up the Airways and was put through to him.

"That you, Pocock? Hullo, old man. Busy? Aren't we all? Never mind. Won't be long. . . . Listen, old chap: A couple of friends of mine were supposed to be going to England yesterday. Your people booked them on the noon plane, and when they got to the airport, they had to give up their seats to some V.I.P.'s. And they're still here. A bit hard on them, you know. . . . Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Cosway. That's right, Cosway. C-o-s-w-a-y. . . . Yes, but at a time like this everyone's a V.I.P. Do you think you can get them on today? Call them press-people if you like. Nobody will mind. . . . Tomorrow, then? . . . Well, that's something. First plane tomorrow. Yes, put as many stars as you can against their names. Thanks, old man."

When I turned to the Cosways, they were all excitement and pleasure. "Airways say they'll put you top of the list for tomorrow morning."

"So we'll get there Wednesday."

"Sorry I couldn't get you today. Quite impossible, he said."

"Tomorrow will do. Meanwhile Henry will get our cable. We don't know how to thank you, Mr. Lacey."

"Please don't try. You be there early tomorrow."

"At dawn. We sha'n't sleep tonight. . . . And in case we don't see you again, good-by—good-by."

"Good-by—good luck."

Mr. Cosway looked round before leaving. "Fancy, lived all this time, and never been in a newspaper office before. Good-by and thanks again."

They were hardly out of the room when Clayton blew in. He was talking almost before he was through the door. "Boys! It's done! It's happened! It's all over!"

"What's done?" someone asked.

"Judy Lane's had her operation!"

"She has! And—"

"Grand story, boys! Peach of a story!"

"Can she see?"

"Oh, no."

"The operation's a failure?"

"No. I mean we don't know yet. The surgeon says he can't take the bandages off all at once. Has to wait a few days."

"How long?"

"Oh—about eight days. Till next Tuesday or so."

"Next— What the hell's the good of that?"

Suddenly Clayton, who's a squarish sort of fellow—squarish jacket, squarish face, even a squarish hat—suddenly he lost his cocksureness. "After all, I mean to say, you've got to let the eyes heal first before you can open them to the light. Stands to reason."

"But Clayton, man!" I said. "The whole story is whether Judy Lane can see or not. That's all the public wants to know. And if we can't tell 'em, there's no story! By next Tuesday—"

Spencer finished the sentence for me. Spencer never had much respect for Clayton's savvy. "By next Tuesday we'll all have gone off pop, Judy Lane included."

Then Clayton went angry. "Damn it all—it's not my fault! I didn't do the operation!"

Hearing voices, Millington pushed the hatch open. "What's all the shouting about?"

WE let Clayton speak for himself. "They've done the operation on Judy Lane. But—they can't take off the bandages yet—and—well, they won't know anything until next Tuesday."

Millington coughed. "Next Tuesday, eh? That'll be fun for her, won't it?"

"I did suggest he might try and take the bandages off sooner, but the surgeon said it was out of the question."

"I dare say," said Millington, "but we're going to look damn' foolish now, aren't we? We get subscriptions from the public for the Judy Lane Gift, and what the hell's the public going to get out of it? What's Judy Lane going to get out of it? Next Tuesday! What does she say about it?"

"She doesn't know about next—"

"Then don't tell her, you blundering fool! Don't tell her!"

"Milly, it's not my fault if the world—I mean, I can't help it! That fool of a surgeon didn't say a word before. It was only this morning he talked about not being able to remove the bandages, and he couldn't have done the operation sooner in any case."

"No, but we could have dropped the whole idea."

"He says she'll see."

"Say that, then. Write the story. Make the best of it."

"And put plenty of sob in it," called out Spencer. "That's about all that's left for us now."

At this, Clayton whipped round furiously. "I don't believe the world's going to go off pop—see! I don't believe it!"

"Nice for you."

Millington gave us a sharp look, then closed the hatch. The room relapsed into silence. We all felt the touchy atmosphere, and no one knew for the moment how to dispel it, no one except Tovey. He did it unwittingly. He hadn't been in all afternoon, but no one had missed him. Now he ambled in. He had a flower in his buttonhole, and his oval face was all smiles. "Just come to say good-by to you fellows," he said.

*Thirteen million miles away—it looks like a tennis ball.*

"Tovey! What's all this about?" we asked in chorus. "What's the idea? Why the flower?"

He answered a little shyly: "Well, the firm says I can go off now, if I like. They'll waive the month. So I'm going off at once, to my little plot at the coast, Livagen. Been looking forward to this, I can tell you."

"Good old Tovey! Good for you, Tovey!"

He began shaking hands all round. "Now I'm going, I'm almost sorry. I'm going to miss you fellows."

"Not a bit! Good luck, Tovey!"

"I'm all packed, and I'll be down there tomorrow, at Livagen. And believe you me, I'm going to live again. I promise you that."

"Drop us a line sometime, Tovey."

"I will!"

"And a turkey for Christmas!"

"Might even manage that."

"Tovey, old boy," sang out Spencer, "what price cabbages now?"

"You'd be surprised!" It was the old Tovey speaking. "You'd be surprised!"

And that's how Tovey went off, amid laughter, joking and farewells. He went out with a carnation in his buttonhole.

"Poor old Tovey," said Spencer. But I was glad that by then the old man was out of hearing.

## Chapter Thirteen

AVING BEEN MADE BY BAILEY MORE OR LESS my own master, I had no need to keep reporting to the news editor, and was able to get out to Endymion in the early afternoon. Philippa met me on the veranda. Though she was glad to see me, there was something constrained about her. I could not tell what it was. She was far from her usual talkative self. We sat down on the settee in the front room, near the window looking out toward the hills. Usually we go to the library smaller and cozier. This time she called for drinks in the sitting-room.

Perhaps she was waiting for me to talk. After all, it was up to me. "Philippa, we can't get married."

"Darling, why not?"

"Well, I mean not in the usual way, not in the way your mother would want."

"Oh, my mother! Who can tell what she's going to want now?"

She hardly seemed interested, or rather not in the way I had expected her to be.

"But Phil, is there anything the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Yes, yes! Something terrible has happened, something dreadful!"

"Do tell me!"

"My father. . . . Oh, I don't know how to do it, John. At first I thought I needn't tell you. We could just go away together, and you needn't know. But you're bound to know. I expect it's all over the town by now."

"Your father hasn't crashed, has he?"

"I wish he had!"

I saw how pointless my question was even while asking it. What would it matter if Kennaway Laver did crash? What would it mean to him or to anyone?

"Then what's he done?"

She blurted it out. "My father's brought two women home, and he's installed them upstairs."

"Your father—two women! But what for?"

"Oh, John! Are you going to make me explain?"

"No, no, darling. Of course, everyone knows that Kennaway Laver has been a—bit of a lad in his time; and even now—"

"Don't tell me! Do you think we don't know? Do you think it hasn't made my mother's life a misery for years? Who do you suppose makes me go to the office? But now here! In the house! To do it like this; Two smirking, painted women upstairs. My poor Mum! She's nearly out of her mind. I don't know how she'll bear it. To do this to her! She's been wanting to run away from the house."

"Don't let her! Where can she run to—now? You see that?"

Philippa was beside herself. A native brought in some drinks. We let them stand there. She was angry with her father; she was concerned about her mother. She was not sure of herself, what to do, what to think. Impulsively she turned to me. "But John, why do you say we can't get married?"

"Of course we can. We'll arrange it."

"Then why did you say we couldn't? That was the first thing you told me."

"It was silly of me." I felt this was a time to calm her. "I mean the churches are full. The Registry Office is crowded. There's a queue all day there. One of our men's been round, writing a story about it. It looks as if the whole world wants to get married. We'll never get a look in. But don't worry, darling. I forgot. We'll get Kennaway Laver to arrange it. They'll do anything for him now."

She became furious with me. "Kennaway Laver will have nothing to do with this! I won't let him! Do you hear? Leave him out of this!"

"Very well, darling. As you wish. There's nothing to get excited about. We'll manage it somehow."

"But quickly!"

"Of course!"

"Pour me out a drink, please."

I gave her a drink and poured out one for myself. She held the glass but tasted nothing of it.

"Where is your mother now?" I asked.

"She's in her room. Dora's looking after her. She locks herself in when he's at home."

"Your father?"

"Yes. Don't ask me what he's doing. He hasn't been to the office today. He's bought up half the world, so there's nothing more for him to buy, I suppose. A lot of use it'll be to him!" She put her untouched drink down on a small table. "John! Is this all true about the comet? Is it really going to happen?"

"The scientists say so, darling, and we simply have to believe them."

"Don't answer me like that, for heaven's sake. Is it going to be the end of the world, is it really?"

I put my own glass down and took her in my arms. "Yes, darling. Yes, it is. Haven't you believed it all this time?"

"Oh, I have and I haven't. Dora says it doesn't matter whether you believe it or not. If it's true, we'll never know. We'll be unconscious before we know what's happening. All we can do is to behave as though we knew nothing about it, carry on as usual. But if it's true, I don't want to carry on as usual. I don't want to, do you hear!"

"No. Of course not." I held her in my arms. There was nothing to do but to try and calm her. "You listen altogether too much to Dora. What does she know about it?"

"Much more than I do. That comes from reading Shakespeare and the Bible. She knows much more than I ever knew."

THAT wasn't the first time I had noticed that although Dora was the younger of the two, her influence in the house was by far the stronger. Everyone listens to Dora. Even Kennaway Laver stands a little in awe of his serious-minded daughter. It was plain that she and not Philippa had taken charge of Mrs. Laver.

"You know what she told him? You should have heard her! She called him Lot! Another Lot, she said."

"What's Lot got to do with it?"

"You know, Lot and his daughters, from the Bible."

"But Phil! He hasn't—I mean your father hasn't been annoying *you?*"

"No! Nothing of that. But she calls him Lot all the same. That's her way."

Just then we heard steps in the hall, and the door opened. Dora herself entered. "Oh, hullo! I thought there were voices."

Dora has a way of entering a room that always makes one feel a little self-conscious. It carries with it a sort of comment, as though, on this occasion, she was entering not to see who was there, but because she knew well enough who was there.

Philippa ran to her. "Dora, how's Mum? Surely you've not left her alone?"

"I have. She's all right. Quiet for the time being, anyhow. I think she'll sleep. . . . Have you told him?"

"Of course."

She turned steady eyes on me. "Well, John, there's a story for you! I hope you're going to write it."

"You know very well I'm not."

"That's the trouble with your newspapers. You never write the real news. One would think that a time like this the newspapers would stop being discreet and polite, and would be willing to print the truth for a change."

"And what is the truth?"

She flashed her answer at me. "That the great Kennaway Laver has bought up half the world, and the thing's gone to his head. Isn't that news?"

"Oh, come, come, Dora. Kennaway Laver's not the first to—" But there I stopped. "I mean it's not news."

"Go on, finish it. Don't mind us. I know what you were going to say. Kennaway Laver is not the first to come home with a couple of—harlots."

Philippa was shocked. "Dora! How can you!"

"Why not? It's good English."

I MUST confess I winced, myself. Such a word from the lips of a girl, the demure Dora at that, took my breath away. But she was right about its being good English, Biblical too.

"But you're wrong," she continued. "They're not that kind." I was grateful to her for the circumlocution. "They're just two ordinary pretty girls from the office. I know. I've talked to them. He was in his bath."

"Talked to them!"

"You should hear what he's told them."

"What could he have told them?"

"The world's coming to an end."

"We've heard enough of that."

"But he's going to survive. They're sure of it. He and they. He's told them so. And they believe it. He's bought up shares by the thousands of millions. He as good as owns the country. They have to believe him. He's not going to die just like everyone else. He's got to live! He's got to be saved! He will be saved! He says so. That's what power does to a man."

"What have these girls got to do with it?"

"Don't you see? The poor things didn't know how to tell me, but it's plain enough. If he's going to be the only one to survive, he'll have to start a new generation. So he starts betimes—with them. Great Father Kennaway Laver Lot! The new father of mankind! Don't you see? They are to be the new matriarchs. Now you know!" She turned away her pale face, that seemed paler in anger. "Oh, God, if this is to be the new race—"

"What did you tell them, Dora?"

"That they're a couple of fools, and that Kennaway Laver's making bigger ones of them. But they just giggled. How were they to know, they asked. I expect he's settled a couple of gold mines on them by now, and they think it's a sort of compliment to be called Laver's Ladies. But why should I blame them? All they want is just their bit of fun while there's time for it, like everyone else." She faced her sister fiercely. "Aren't you the same? Wanting to run off to get married now! Do you think you're any better?"

"Dora!"

"What was wrong before is still wrong! The end of the world makes no difference. By the time the comet comes, we'll have turned the world into a universal brothel."

Where Dora's outburst would have led to I cannot say, for just then Kennaway Laver came downstairs. Never was I more grateful for an interruption. I was both grateful and astonished. If I had expected Kennaway Laver to appear at that moment I certainly did not picture him that way. From the talk of the girls, I had imagined him now to be big, blustering and inflated with the sense of his new importance. But I was mistaken. Big, of course, he was; he couldn't help that. If he was changed, however, it was only in his quieter manner, a strange reserve about him, his slower movements. I began to doubt if the girls understood him rightly. Then he spoke.

"Hullo, John. How are the newspapers? I expect I own them by now, the lot of them. But we'll clear that up later. Haven't much time. Come round to the office. Tell you all about it."

I felt like asking: "What's it like to be the richest man in the world?" He seemed to answer without my asking.

"Rather busy now, but always have time for the press. By the way, that tosh you're writing—quite wrong, you know. Come round to the office. I'll give you the inside story."

Then I realized that what the girls had told me must be true, perhaps truer than they knew. I had a sudden suspicion that he himself believed what he told his two girls. Of course, I dared not ask. But I was conscious of a new arrogance in him. Outwardly he looked the same normal Kennaway Laver, director of companies, and talked like him; but inside, he was master of the world and its destiny because he had bought it. Power corrupts. Power coming so suddenly and completely transforms the world for a man, and transforms him with it. This was Kennaway Laver, the new colossus.

He stood there at the open front door—the car was waiting for him in the drive—and he repeated: "I'll give you the inside story of the comet."

"Is there an inside story?" I asked rather helplessly.

"I should say there is. All a matter of finance, you know. I've cabled United Nations. Told them to do something. About time. See me at the club."

Then came the second interruption that made this whole scene at Endymion so weird an affair, so unreal-seeming that as I look back on it I have to assure myself that it actually did happen and is not just something I have imagined. . . . Mrs. Laver came down the stairs.

We were standing in a group in the hall. The color of the scene is quite clear in my mind. The parquet flooring was highly polished. A large landscape on the wall had a streak of green beneath fleecy clouds. There was a palm in the corner. All these details are clearly registered in my mind. Kennaway Laver was in a light gray suit, and the two girls were near me.

MRS. LAVER came down the stairs wearing a floral dressing-gown, her hair hanging in wisps round her ears. She stopped on the lowest step and confronting her husband, who had turned to see who was there, she raised her clenched fists over her head. "May God destroy you!" she shouted at the top of her voice. "God will destroy you and the world, the whole world, and leave not a bone of it! May God wipe out all mankind and leave not a soul to survive!" Her voice became shriller as she addressed herself to the Almighty. "God! O God! Shatter this world and trample down the men in it. Kill us! Destroy us! Rub us out like the worms. Leave none of us behind! O God, destroy us!"

Dora ran up and took hold of her by an arm. "Mother, Mother! Don't! This is blasphemy!"

Mrs. Laver kept one clenched fist in the air. "Kill him! Kill him! All my life I have wanted to kill him! Kill him, and all men like him! God Almighty, destroy the world now and let not any of us remain!"

"Mother! Mother!"

Mrs. Laver broke down and sobbed. Dora put her arms round her and drew her upstairs. Kennaway Laver stepped calmly out of the front door, and the next moment his car was gliding away.

I turned to Philippa, who had remained standing frightened near me. "Phil! You can't stay here! Come away with me!"

She answered: "Not now! How can I?"

"You must! I can't leave you here."

"How can I go? They will be all alone."

"Come and stay with me! There's nothing else to do, Phil! Come to me!"

"I can't! I can't!"

"I'll leave you my car, so that you can get away from here whenever you want to. I'll wait for you!"

"Oh, darling!"

"You'll come, Phil!"

I made my way back to town by bus.

## The Sixth Day

### Chapter Fourteen

Now I begin to discern a pattern in things. Years ago when, in an idle moment, I would speculate on the end of the world, I never imagined it like this. I suppose most of us, at different times, have thought of the possibility of the world's coming to a sudden end; and in recent years that thought has probably obtruded itself more frequently than it used to. We all had our ideas as to how people would behave on seeing the approaching end, but I don't think we ever pictured anything like this.

We imagined mankind going to pieces well before the world's disintegration. We imagined disorder and chaos —people going wild, losing all sense of right, getting a last fling out of life; society breaking down—animal passions and instincts till now kept in check by convention coming to the surface—life suddenly breaking loose into an orgy—man's last days on earth turning into a sort of Bacchanalian riot. But there has been nothing of the sort. No, nothing like that at all.

True, there have been some outbursts of what you may call instinct, passions uncontrolled rising to the top, coming out into the open, and all that. Kennaway Laver himself is an example, no longer feels any restraint or any need for it, behaves like the libertine he is, only openly now. And there are others, men and women, who yield in their various ways to the promptings of instinct and to the primal impulse to fulfill life's purpose in them. Even down to the last minute of life there is that urge to live and perform life's functions. I am sure there was that sort of impulse in me when I took hold of Philippa and pleaded with her to come away with me, to come and share my flat. She would not come, but I should have realized she would not come just then. It was probably unreasonable of me to insist.

There is not just one instinct. There are many instincts, and it may be that at a time like this certain things we are in the habit of regarding as conventions turn out to be quite as strong as instincts themselves. Are we sure that the urge toward religion, the search for God, is not an instinct? We are too much inclined to think that the instincts are all bad. But at a time like this the desire to do the right thing may be just as strong as the wish to gratify one's appetites. Of course it was that which kept Philippa back, as well as her sister's unkind taunt. Dora is the type who right to the end would regard self-denial as the supreme good. What kind of instinct is that? It is wrong to assume that only base instincts will manifest themselves. But I still think Philippa will come to me. All things considered, it is the sensible thing to do. I'm expecting her this evening.

I telephoned her this morning. From her voice I could tell she was still in great distress about her mother, that the nunnish Dora had been using more of her Biblical language on her and giving it no complimentary edge. It speaks much for Philippa's character that in these circumstances she can show so much concern for her mother, who after all has had her life and got a good deal out of it. Every person is in some measure to blame for his own ill-fortune. Philippa would not agree to my coming to fetch her. She doesn't want me to come to the house at all. I can understand her feelings, but in the discreet way one talks on the telephone in such a matter, I extracted a half-promise from her that she would, that she might come this evening. . . . And so I am waiting.

Before going to the office I sent for Tambula and got him to prepare the flat for her. Tambula gave me a demonstration of another kind of instinct, the instinct toward safety, the search for a way of escape. That is also primeval. The will to survive. Confronted by a mortal danger or foe, you turn frantically this way and that. You think of bringing the skies down as a shield, of flying up out of the reach of the threat, or digging yourself into the earth, so that the enemy may pass unseeing. If you cannot see a way of escape, you may imagine one, wish yourself one.

Tambula belongs to a race which is young in the ways of thought and culture. The ways of the white man are often inexplicable to him; science is an unimaginable mystery. The Zulus are a people of some grace and wisdom, a people of promise. But what could they make of this phenomenon in the sky? I have heard that the black people have been blaming the whites for the comet. It is the whites, they say, who have brought violence into the world and means of violence that no other people could ever have conceived. The world is being punished for the wickedness of the white man, who spread from Europe over the globe and carried cruelty and tyranny with him into every continent. It is wrong, they say, that the whole of mankind should be punished for the sins of the white man.

Now I hear that the belief is gaining ground among them that the whole of mankind may not be made to suffer, and that the colored races may be exempt from the wrath to come. It's a fantastic belief, of course. We had a story written about it today, saying that there's nothing in it—naïve, false hopes and all that. But it was Tambula who gave me the first inkling of it.

When I told him I wanted the flat to be given an extra cleaning and tidying, he looked round as if asking why, but he agreed and lingered on. There was something he wanted to ask, and it came out slowly, in his quaint, halting English.

Was it true that the big star was going to burn?

I said it was.

"But you know, Masteh, the Bantu, I mean the black people, they don't burn."

"They don't burn?"

"No, only the white peoples they burn—all over on the face and the skin. I know. I have seen."

I perceived what he meant. He was thinking of sunburn. He was right, of course. No colored man ever suffers from sunburn. The pigment in his skin is a complete protection against the rays of the sun. I have been sunburned from neck to waist after careless exposure, and have had black men, untouched by the sun that scorched me, rubbing salve into my back and pitying me —pitying the white man his infirmity, testimony written in his face that Africa is the black man's continent. I thought I saw the same kind of pity now in the eyes of the bronzed Tambula.

"Yes, that's right, Tambula. Only, it won't be that kind of burning."

"No?"

"Stronger, much stronger."

He was not convinced. He knew of no star that could burn a black man. There was still that sorrowful look on him. Tambula was sorry that I would not survive. The black man would remain to possess the world that the white man had misused, but he had no grudge against me. I told him to get on with his work.

Would he go to the grocer's for me? He nodded.

"Get me a guinea fowl, a good roast one. I want it for tonight."

"A whole fowl?"

"Yes. And some caviare, nice white rolls, paté—"

"What?"

"I'll write it all down for you." He looked at me steadily while I jotted down the items. "And wine—I'll have to get that myself. . . . And you'll make some good coffee, won't you? Get some freshly ground. And see there's plenty of cream." I wrote it all down and gave him money to pay.

He took the notes from me and folded them carefully as he put them into his pocket.

Down in the street I found the roadway blocked by a great mass of people. A procession was coming right through the center of the town, headed by priests carrying shining crosses on high, relics borne in caskets under canopies, and a richly draped image of the Virgin resting on the shoulders of six stalwart young men. One of the priests was intoning the Gloria in Latin in a high-pitched voice: *"Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. Laudamus te, benedicamus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te. . . .* We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory."

Above his voice a louder and stronger one was calling. "God is! God is! God is! Prepare for the Day of Judgment. The Day of Judgment is at hand. God is! Praise God on high! God is! God will save the world. God will save man. Prepare for the Coming of the Lord."

The crowds surged round the priests. They knelt on the curbstones as they passed. They leaned forward to kiss the hem of their robes. They prostrated themselves on the pavements and in the gutters before the image of the Virgin. The priests moved forward step by step into the crowd that pressed before them and all about them.

*"Credo, credo, credo,"* intoned the voice. *"Credo in unum Deo.* I believe in one God—"

"God is. God is. God is!" called the other. "Prepare for the Day of Judgment."

Never before had I seen such an outburst of devotional fervor anywhere in this part of the world. To get across the road I had to elbow my way through a singing, weeping and hysterical mob, and push past cassocked priests. "God is. God is. God is!" As they sang and wept, they clung onto these words ringing above them. The voice was a hope, an anchor, a foothold in chaos, a light in darkness.

Belief in God is also an instinct. The will to God, some sort of God, whether He be of wood or stone, the Sun, the Moon, or the one great solitary God of the Hebrews, is innate in man and part of his groping soul. A time like the present intensifies the instincts, not just one, but all of them; not just those we think of as bad and degrading, but the great and ennobling ones too; not just the appetites, the lusts, the longing to return to slime, but also the yearnings of the spirit, the longing to find God as well. If to desire, then to desire holiness as well; if to dance, then to dance before the Lord also. With the end almost in sight, man's instinct refuses to believe that it is the end of all. There must be a beyond. God is! God is! There is a beyond! Paradise is beyond! Rejoice! Rejoice! Next year in Jerusalem! Next week in Paradise! There is no sudden stop. There is no end. The Pearly Gates are beyond. How great the crush before the doors of heaven, but—

And so man keeps his hope in Eternity and his fear of God, and there is order in the world. Down to the last blazing hour, there will be hope and order.

It is true there is Kennaway Laver . . . And there is me. . . . "God is! Holy, holy, holy is His name. Make ready for Judgment."

I am ready for Philippa to come to me tonight. And yet neither Philippa nor I remain without restraint, without a sense of propriety, without some self-respect. These things are bred in us. They grow up with us. They cannot be cast away all at once simply because the world is coming to an end. True, there are people who do seem to have lost all sense of decency and all the dignity of man. People have been writing to the *Day* complaining of the way young couples have been behaving. Is this the way man is to go to his doom? Not with his head raised high to the stars, but with his head to the dust like the animals?

They ask this and many other things as *Pro Bono Publico* and *Citizen* are in the habit of doing. But what of it? There always have been couples misbehaving. If there are more of them today, there are also more people complaining, more people going to church, more people praying, and more people hurrying to get married, so that their unions on earth may be blessed in heaven while there still is an earth to bless them on, and while there still is earth as resting-place. The forces that are bred within us are greater than the forces about us. Man clings to life with all his instincts, and yet will go to death for the sake of honor and glory because he has been taught to fear loss of honor more than loss of life. We are not our own masters. . . . But here I go talking like Maddison writing his philosophic aphorisms. He would have done much better staying at the office and looking out of his window.

I do not pretend that all these thoughts fashioned themselves as I was pushing my way through the excited masses across the road. It did not take me as long as all that. But they were in my mind at the time, and since then they have taken shape. The procession was still moving by when I got to the *Day* and escaped from the street onto the steps of the building. The shining crosses were far ahead, but I could still hear an intoned murmur that sounded like *"In the beginning was the Word . . . the same was in the beginning with God. And all things were made by him."* And above it the other voice was still calling: "God is! God is! God calls to Judgment. Praise God!"

## Chapter Fifteen

There will be order, I have written, order down to the very last hour—but, I should add, not in the office of the *Day*. A newspaper office is a gathering of people of many sorts, a mixture of temperaments whose eccentricities are encouraged by the irregular hours they keep and the strange tasks allotted to them. People who have to give an account of a smash-and-grab raid in the morning, and then interview a woman whose child has done something wonderful or silly, cannot cultivate normal habits and do not react to things quite as other people do. The steadiest people in a newspaper office are the printers, and this is because they are only half-conscious of what they print. The linotype operators set copy which they scarcely read; the compositors make up pages with headlines which they only scan. They work to time; the machines have to be kept going, or else men are paid for standing idle; copy must be got from upstairs. So it is the printers who keep the sub-editors, the reporters and the feature-writers working, fill the pages, lock them up, send them away and get the paper out on time.

Today the composing-room was the orderly place it always is—galleys of type arrayed on the tables, rolls of damp proofs waiting to be read, forms waiting to be fastened, the stones waiting to be laden. But upstairs the reporters' room was half-empty, the desks were untidy, and we could not get any answer from the telephone board. The call was for Olwen: "Olwen! Give us a line. Olwen! Where are you? Olwen!" But there was no sign of Olwen. She was nowhere to be seen.

It was Jupp who first threw light on her disappearance. "She's gone away with that Mr. Spencer. I saw them!"

"Spencer! The crime reporter?"

"Yea. Chap with the yeller hair. I seen them, and I give 'em both a big brrrrrp."

"Brrrrp yourself, and get out of it!"

Spencer was the only reporter who could get anything like prompt service from the telephone board. Sometimes we used to get him to put through our calls when we were in a hurry. It was clear that she had a crush on him. But that he should carry her off, or she him (we never found out which it was) seemed unthinkable. And yet that is apparently what happened. Mrs. Ricketts told us all about it. There's an old communicating door between the library and the telephone-room, and listening to what goes on beyond the door is one of the compensations of Mrs. Ricketts' monotonous task.

"I heard it all," she told us. "Mr. Spencer was trying to get a line, and he couldn't. He got awfully angry, oh, dreadfully angry. I heard him shouting down the telephone. Said he had a big story on his hands. Daylight murder in the park. Oh, dear me! Then he came shouting for Olwen down the corridor. I saw him pass my door. He ran into the telephone-room, and the next I heard was kissing and hugging. I heard it all!" (One couldn't be sure she hadn't looked as well.) "Awful! She was doing all the kissing and hugging, mark you! And then Mr. Spencer came running out down the corridor, and Olwen was after him, down the steps and all. That's the last I saw of them, and I don't know what became of the murder in the park."

THAT was all we could find out about them. Poor Spencer! A good-looking chap, too. He'll never shake her off! All we could do was put someone else onto the telephone board and be glad of the chance. One of Mrs. Ricketts' girls had returned, and Mrs. Ricketts was willing enough that she should be transferred to the telephone-room; almost eager to let her go, she seemed. The new girl, who had done relief work before, at once proved herself efficient at the job, and since then there has been no shouting down the telephone lines. As the gruff-voiced Evans de Beer said: "It took the end of the world to move Olwen out of the telephone-room. Some good in everything."

At first I could not understand why Mrs. Ricketts had so readily agreed to the loss of her only remaining assistant. The heaps of clippings round her had grown enormous and quite unmanageable. Most of them were of the past week or so, and as none were classified, we had to go direct to the paper whenever we wished to refer to recent events. Bailey was getting extremely annoyed about it.

"Mrs. Ricketts!" I exclaimed. "You've got at least a month's filing-work there on that table."

"No, Mr. Lacey, three months. Three months at least."

"But Mrs. Ricketts, if you want to get them away in time, you must have someone to help you."

"I'm doing quite well, thank you, Mr. Lacey. I need no one's help. This is exactly as I want them."

She just kept on cutting bits and columns out of the papers, dating them, marking them with the name of the paper of origin, and adding them to her heaps—SOUTH AFRICAN, COMMONWEALTH, FOREIGN, PERSONAL, OBITS—occasionally taking some to the filing cabinets, tucking them neatly away in their proper places—but for the most part watching her heaps of clippings grow. She sat among them, scissors in hand, paste before her, tea at her side, looking like a large comfortable cat and as good as purring over them.

Purring over her chaos she was. And yet, I began to suspect, there was system in it, or some sort of strange occult purpose. "Three months' work, at least three months!" she kept repeating. To me it began to seem that Mrs. Ricketts was ensuring herself against a possible end of the world, or a possible end of Mrs. Ricketts, by giving herself enough work to carry her beyond the dreaded moment. By storing up plenty of work for herself, she could keep fate and the comet at bay; she need not think of the end of the world, for there was plenty of work beyond. And as long as there was work, Mrs. Ricketts would be there to do it. She had only to think of her work, and all else would follow. Her work was like a pendulum swinging into time, and swinging no matter what happened round about. It was like a large flywheel that was made to carry the engine past the dead points, and would carry Mrs. Ricketts past the stopping point in time. And as it would carry Mrs. Ricketts, it must carry the world as well, the whole world, for Mrs. Ricketts, potent as her imagination might be, could scarcely imagine herself as continuing to exist in a disembodied world. No. The world would be saved because Mrs. Ricketts would be saved.

Outside, someone was calling at the tail-end of the procession: "Pray for us! Pray for us! Mother of God, pray for us!"

But work is also a kind of prayer, and this was Mrs. Ricketts at her prayers with her scissors and paste and rubber stamps, and a firm faith in the perpetual paradox in the heart of things. So carry on, Mrs. Ricketts! There will be no one to prove you wrong. And maybe there's something in it. Maybe a falling leaf does change the center of gravity of the universe. There I go quoting Maddison again.

I remember that during the World War, pilots setting out on a flight over enemy territory would borrow a ten-shilling note from an aircraftman, or take the key of the room with them on their journey; and if they forgot to do so, the room-mate would come running with the key as the plane was taking off, and an injunction to be sure to bring it back. Absurd as it seemed to most people and even to the airmen themselves, deep down in their hearts, and the hearts of a watching nation, was the belief that no matter what happened, the pilot had perforce to come back to let his room-mate in, or to pay back that borrowed ten-shilling note. Deep down in the logical mind of men there is a lurking hope that the world is illogical. And so it is with Mrs. Ricketts. Our Mrs. Ricketts must be back next Monday to continue filing her cuttings. She has built up a barrier before which the comet of destruction must swerve. And who knows? If the world is to be saved, who knows what intangible trifle may save it? Who knows what hand may raise the admonishing finger to fate? So, good Mrs. Ricketts, carry on and save this upside-down world in your own upside-down way!

ON my own desk in the reporters' room there is another heap of things—things of a different kind: Letters from readers dealing with the comet are passed on to me. Purely from the human angle, we have to see what people think about the end of the world. It's news.

People seem to think quite a lot. They get indignant, too. They want to know what the authorities are doing about it. Are they, as usual, letting things drift till it is too late to do anything? Is there any real hope of action? Others are more moderate in their views. They accept the inevitable, and merely ask for the hospitality of our columns to suggest that people should find better ways of spending their last days on earth than they seem to have done so far. Now there's an idea. Chance here of a good human column.

I go along to see Bailey. There he is sitting squarely in the great chair as though he'd been there all his life.

"Ah, it's you, Lacey. Come in. How's the comet going or rather coming? Haw-haw!"

I don't remember ever having seen Bailey laugh before. But of course he's never been in such high spirits before.

"Is it keeping up to time?"

"According to Conway Jones, it is."

"Very interesting. I had a good look at it last night. About as big as a cup—like a cup with a saucer round it. And you know, I think there is something in what people say about there being a face in the comet, like in the moon. Man in the Comet, you know. Something in that. We ought to use it, too. There ought to be a line in it. I'll jot it down. Man in the Comet. . . . Now what have you got, Lacey? Anything new?"

"These readers' letters, Mr. Bailey. I think we could make a good special article out of them."

"How?"

"There are lots of good suggestions here, and I think we could head the story: *'What's the last thing you want to do on Earth?'* "

"Huh-huh!" He grunted and looked at me down the line of his nose. "Doesn't sound very exciting to me."

"But there's lots of human stuff, and brightly handled, it would be readable."

"Would it? Let's put it to the test at once. Tell me—what's the last thing *you* want to do before the crack of doom?"

I HADN'T expected so blunt a question. But I had to answer it as best I could. *H'mm-ing* and *well*-ing, with Bailey looking on, I stepped right into his trap. "Well—in my case—I think I'd like to see my mother, I suppose."

"Um-hm! Very creditable to you, Lacey, but it wouldn't make very exciting reading, would it?" Then he shot this at me: "Besides, you're lying! Don't tell me. I know. You're lying, just as we'd all lie if we had to answer that question. And that's the trouble. Of course, there's plenty of human interest in the idea, provided people told us what they really thought. And if they did—the story wouldn't be printable! So what's the good of it, I ask you?"

"All the same, I think it would make a bright story if—"

"All right, if your mind's set on it. Hand it over to Evans de Beer or someone. There's something else for you to do, something I want you to get busy with at once." He leaned toward me over the desk. I noticed the gray lines in his walrus mustache. Odd, the kind of things your eyes catch when you're waiting. "I think we ought to get working on a special edition. In fact, I'm certain we should."

I wasn't impressed, and I don't think I looked impressed. Special editions are a nuisance, never received with enthusiasm by the staff. "What sort of special?"

"A Big Hit Special," said Bailey.

"You mean just before the Big Hit?"

"No! No, man! What would be the good of that?" He leaned back in his chair now. "After the Big Hit! I want a special just after the Big Hit."

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't imagine that I'd got his meaning right, and I was afraid to appear stupid if I spoke. So I waited for him to say more.

"What time is the Big Hit?"

"Just about half-past five next Monday morning."

"Good! Just the right time for us. If we get enough stuff in type beforehand, we can get the special out in two hours, just in time for breakfast. It'll sell like hot cakes."

At last I had to speak. There could be no mistaking his meaning. "But Mr. Bailey! Don't you believe the world is going to end on Monday? Don't you think the stuff we've been printing in the paper is true?"

For a moment he regarded me in silence. Then he seemed to repress his impatience. "Lacey, you're a good reporter. You've got a good news sense. But you don't know everything there is to know about this news game. Do I ever ask you if the stuff you write is true?"

"No. But it is true. I make sure of it."

"That's beside the point. I never ask any of my reporters if the stuff they write is true. It would get us nowhere. All I want to know is—have they good authority for the stuff they write? That's as much as concerns me. Do you appreciate that?"

He could see by his face that I didn't quite. He went on:

"This seems to be quite the wrong time to give you a lesson in reporting, but it looks as if I have to. How do we know what's true? And how in the name of all that's holy can we know? How do we know what's happening in China now? But we've got good authority for reporting the things we do report, and we make sure to quote it every time. When the Cabinet has a meeting, or for that matter a committee of the City Council, or the Foreign Ministers, how do we know what they mean to do? We don't. But we get someone reliable to tell us, and mostly we're right. That's the only way to run a newspaper. Of course some things our men see with their own eyes. But so does everyone else. That makes the sports page the nicest part of the paper, the most peaceful, like a daily rest-cure. But those things are not the most important things, not by a long way, and about the things that are really important we simply don't know the truth. We print them on the best authority. And so it is with the comet, my boy. Get that into your head."

He paused, as though giving it a chance to sink in, but only for a moment. "We don't know that this comet is going to wipe us out. We don't know that the world is going to end next Monday morning. But we've got the best authority for saying so, and we can't have more than that. I as editor must make provision for all sorts of contingencies. We can't afford to slip up on this end-of-the-world business. The *Day* would look pretty silly if it came out next Monday morning with an ordinary edition printed at two A.M. and filled with a lot of poppycock saying the world was coming to an end at five-thirty A.M., and at eight-thirty people were ordering their Quaker Oats and English kippers as usual. So we've got to be ready to print a special edition. Only sensible thing to do. Get as much as possible written and set it up in type beforehand, and you've got to be ready to ring up Conway Jones at six A.M. and ask him for an explanation—and it had better be a darn' good explanation, too."

HAVING flung all this at me with a good deal of spirit and emphasis, he picked up the telephone. "Get me Mr. Hitchinbrooke at Reuters—yes, Reuters, at once."

He waited with the receiver to his ear. "That you, Hitch? . . . Bailey, here, the *Day*. . . . Now listen, Hitch: About that Big Hit special we're planning. . . . Yes, I did speak to your assistant about it, but couldn't make him understand. . . . Now you'll know what I mean. . . . No, no, after the Big Hit, not before. What do you take me for? . . . Yes, yes. . . . Now we shall want a full service from you, world coverage. . . . You know—how the world took it. . . . Short snappy reports from everywhere, China, Peru, Timbuctoo, Wigan, Brooklyn, Miami, Tokyo, Hollywood, and of course fuller stories from the big places. . . . Yes, that's the idea. Of course if they all turn out to be the same, we throw them on the floor, just print the important ones. . . . Yes, and I think we ought to have a message from Lapland or as near Lapland as you can get, and Moscow of course. . . . That's the idea. Short flashes will do, as soon after five-thirty as possible. . . . Good. We shall rely on you. . . . Thanks, old man."

He turned to me again. "That end is fixed up. It'll look after itself. Now we'll need a good picture of the comet, a close-up. We need not wait till half-past five for that. We can take it about half-past four. That'll be near enough, give us ample time to make the cut.

We'll want a big one, say across four columns, and we'll put it right on top of the page. See what I mean?"

"I'm trying to."

"Now what we should do for the special is to set up a few alternative headlines, so that all we'll have to do is to take the right one. For instance, we could set a banner line END-OF-THE-WORLD COMET DESTROYS ASIA and another COMET WIPES OUT AMERICA and another COMET DESTROYS AFRICA."

"That won't be much good to us. We're in Africa."

"Perhaps you're right. Anyhow you get my point. And we'll need some background material to fill up with. So let's have a list of former world catastrophes—the Flood, something good on the Flood, Atlantis, Gondwanaland, Krakatoa and anything else you can dig up. You'll do the main descriptive story of the Big Hit. I dare say you'll be able to write a good deal of it in advance. Anyhow, you can try. It'll make things easier, won't it?"

"It will."

"Get Millington to give you all the assistance you need. . . . That's all, Lacey. I'd get going on that job early, if I were you. And do be careful with those letters about the last thing people want to do on earth. Some things don't look well in print. Give us a bad name. Nothing coarse, I mean—nothing high."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHEN I LEFT BAILEY'S OFFICE MY HEAD WAS IN a daze. My new assignment had little appeal for me. It meant that I would have to write about the end of the world and the survival of the world at the same time, and the necessary adjustment of point of view from one angle to its opposite was not going to be easy. I began to wonder whether Bailey was quite in his right mind. But of course he was. He was just hard at it being editor. His chance had come to edit the *Day*, and he was determined not to be deprived of any enjoyment of power. No matter what happened or what threatened, he would go on editing the *Day* as he considered a national daily should be edited by a man who knew his job. Bailey had been waiting half a lifetime for this, and it was not going to be an empty job now if he could help it.

For my part, however, I could not share his enthusiasm over his Big Hit Special. I could not take any pleasure in a task which I was convinced would come to nothing. It would have to take its turn with my other work, and perhaps I would devote some time to it later just to please Bailey. Or I might load it off onto the conscientious Evans de Beer. If I told him Bailey wanted it, he would do it, even if it meant writing while the world blistered.

In any case I thought I'd better mention it to Millington.

"Bailey wants us to throw together a Big Hit Special. He's got a hunch we'll need it."

Millington nodded and went on nodding at every point I made. My tone, I realized, was deprecating, but he gave no hint whatever of his own opinion. I couldn't make out whether he knew all about it already or not.

"And I suppose we'd better arrange for that photograph to be taken, say at five A.M."

He made a note in his diary: 5 A.M.

I noticed that a little lower down the page he had made another entry: 5:30 A.M. *End of the world.* And then in big black letters which I could read easily upside-down, SO LONG.

He caught me looking at it, and from the expression on his immobile face I got the feeling that he was rather bored with it all.

Having completed my arrangements for the day, I telephoned Endymion. Dora answered. I asked for Philippa. Dora said she could not come to the phone.

I said I would hold the line.

Dora said that Philippa refused to come.

I repeated that I would wait for her.

There was silence. Then: "And Philippa will not come to you tonight either, John. Please understand that. It's wrong, and Mother forbids it."

It was clear that Dora had stepped between me and Philippa. The austere Dora, with her Milton and her Bible, was dominating the household. Somehow I had to get her out of the way.

"Let Philippa come to the phone. If you don't, I'll come over and fetch her myself."

I hadn't thought of saying that till that moment. Opposition always brings out the worst in one.

There was some murmuring at the other end, some fumbling with the line, then Philippa's excited voice. "Oh, John, darling! I'm coming! I'll be with you!"

"Oh, Phil! I feel such a cad!"

"No, no, darling! I'll come. Wait for me."

So Dora had not triumphed, after all! Philippa had a will of her own and would come. She would be with me tonight. It was an intoxicating thought that left me with but half a mind for my day's assignments.

TAMBULA had spared no pains to make the room look cozy and attractive—cleaned the carpet, polished everything that could take polish, pulled out a fancy cover for the bed. . . . He had worked vigorously; there was still the whiff of black man's sweat in the place. I opened the windows, arranged some flowers I had bought, put the wine to keep cool—got Tambula to warm the fowl up nicely. . . . Then I sat down to my typewriter and tried to assemble my thoughts . . .

It is eight o'clock. . . .

It is nine o'clock. . . .

The telephone rings. Philippa? No, it is the office, the gruff voice of Evans de Beer. "Mr. Bailey's asking for you. Some important cables from London. Thinks you ought to see them."

"Sorry, not tonight."

"He thinks there's something in the wind."

"Maybe. But I've had enough of the office for today."

Evans de Beer tried to coax an interest in me. "One of these cables says the Foreign Ministers have been discussing the comet."

"Have they? What's the comet got to do with them?"

"All right. I'll tell him."

He rings off.

It is ten o'clock. . . . No Philippa. . . . That girl Dora—soul of a nun—make a martyr of herself and everyone around her.

The telephone rings again. This must be Philippa! But it is Evans de Beer again, his voice slightly less gruff.

"Flash from our London office, Lacey. They're expecting something big to break. There's nothing new in yet. But the Foreign Ministers have been discussing the atom. Russia too."

"It's too late."

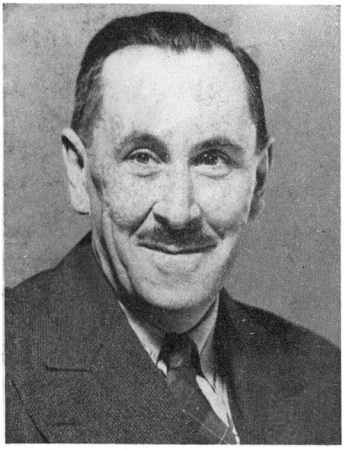
"Will you come over to the office?"

"Not tonight."

I ring off. . . . Eleven o'clock. No Philippa. . . . I can only wait. . . . Midnight. . . . The comet looks like a lamp in the sky, a ruddy, brownish, yellowish lamp flaring at us from space, a lamp to light the world. But Philippa does not come. . . . She does not come.

**The news from London, and the conference of Foreign Ministers discussing the atom, was big indeed. . . . The concluding portion of this remarkable novel will appear, of course, in our forthcoming August issue.**

# Who's Who *in this* Issue



## *Lynn Montross*

THE Battle of the Marne was raging when Lynn Montross was registered as a freshman at the University of Nebraska. Three years later he matriculated as a private in the only A.E.F. outfit to do battle on the Fourth of July.

During the next four years he was a Chicago newspaper and publicity man. Meanwhile, he published his first short stories, and after a brief New York advertising career, he concluded that free-lance writing was his line of least resistance, and he has been following this line since 1924.

The results have been two published novels, in addition to numerous magazine stories and articles. Historical research is his hobby, which led to the publication of a long book outlining warfare from Marathon down to the present day. He is now at work on a book about John Hancock and the Continental Congress, to be published by Harper.

He has lived in eight States and spent several years in France. He now lives in Denver with his wife and two children.

## *Harry Botsford*

THE author of "The Passing of Effie" writes: "I wish I knew this person well enough to write intelligently about him. He seems to be pretty complex and pleasantly confused. He loves the country, but he lives in Manhattan and likes it. Currently, he is on a diet taking off weight at the rate of a pound a day, but he is a basic and active trencherman, writes cookbooks, acts as counsel for a food account, writes about cookery for some of the magazines, and he claims to be a capable amateur chef.

"He loves to hunt and fish, ties his own flies, hasn't been in the field for ten years. He has a great affection for bird dogs, but he owns a Boston terrier who is the smartest critter on West End Avenue, according to his estimate.

"Officially, he is a public relations counsel, but spends a lot of time writing for the public prints. He has written a couple of books of no special importance, judging from sales. He has also sold his first novel for magazine publication, a performance he has no desire to repeat.

"His disposition is notably unpleasant when on a diet. Fancies himself as a bridge player. Also, he's older than he likes to admit. He is married, has two children."

HARRY BOTSFORD

## *Arthur Gordon*

BORN in Savannah thirty-six years ago; educated at St. Paul's School in New Hampshire, then four years at Yale, then two at Oxford as Rhodes Scholar. I played a lot of games violently, stroked the Balliol crew at Oxford for two years, and wrote the first short story I ever sold.

In 1936 I came home, worked briefly for *Time, Inc.,* got fired, got a job as "reader" on *Good Housekeeping;* began to write magazine stories and articles in my spare time. When the war came along, I was managing editor of *GH.*

For some mysterious reason, the Air Corps wouldn't take me until I was thirty years old, so I didn't get into uniform until Aug., 1942. But by November I was in England, assigned temporarily to the RAF, and I was overseas off and on for the next three years. I came out in 1945 a Major.

Then I free-lanced for a few months (I think it was during this period that BLUE BOOK bought "Pitchblende Quarry" a long novelette about people looking for a uranium deposit in Guatemala —a yarn written before the atom bomb was dropped, but not published till afterward.)

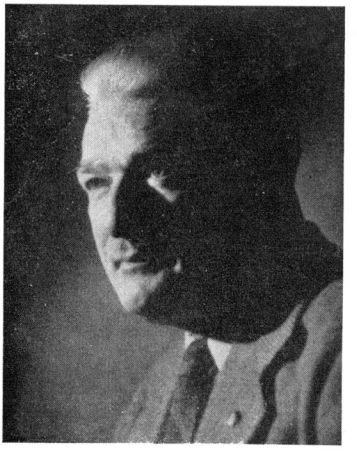
Then I was offered the editorship of *Cosmopolitan,* a job which lasted just short of three years, and was too demanding to permit any writing on the side.

This year so far has been spent working on a novel, mainly, which seems to get more involved every day—and occasional short stories or articles. The story you bought arose from a trip to England last summer, and I happen to like the story a lot—something I can't always say of my own stuff. Maybe one reason is that my wife is English, we did meet during the war, and Grosvenor Square was often the rendezvous.

I've been married twice, divorced once, and have four children, all girls. The three oldest live with my former wife. My wife, our daughter Sherry, an alley cat and an English bulldog are currently living in Savannah.

## H. Bedford-Jones

H. BEDFORD-JONES died early in May at the age of sixty-two, after a long illness. In the past thirty years he had contributed to BLUE BOOK seven serials and six book-length novels, as well as some three hundred and sixty short stories and novelettes. Especially memorable among these were the series like "Arms and Men," "Ships and Men" and "Flags of Our Fathers." As an able, versatile and accurate writer, we much regret his passing. . . . We deeply mourn, moreover, the loss of a cherished friend.



H. BEDFORD-JONES

# BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE for JULY, 1949

Nine short stories, including **THE DEVIL'S LUCK** *by Wilbur Peacock;* **BY APPOINTMENT** *by Arthur Gordon;* **SERENADE IN LEADVILLE** *by Lynn Montross;* **A FRAME FOR THE DUKE** *by Joel Reeve;* **CLOUDY IN THE WEST** *by Allan Bosworth;* **THE TIGER'S HOUR** *by Herbert Ravenel Sass . . . Many articles and special features*