BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE
JUNE, 1950
25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES . . . XLI—Nebraska
Painted by Benton Clark

TWO SHORT NOVELS

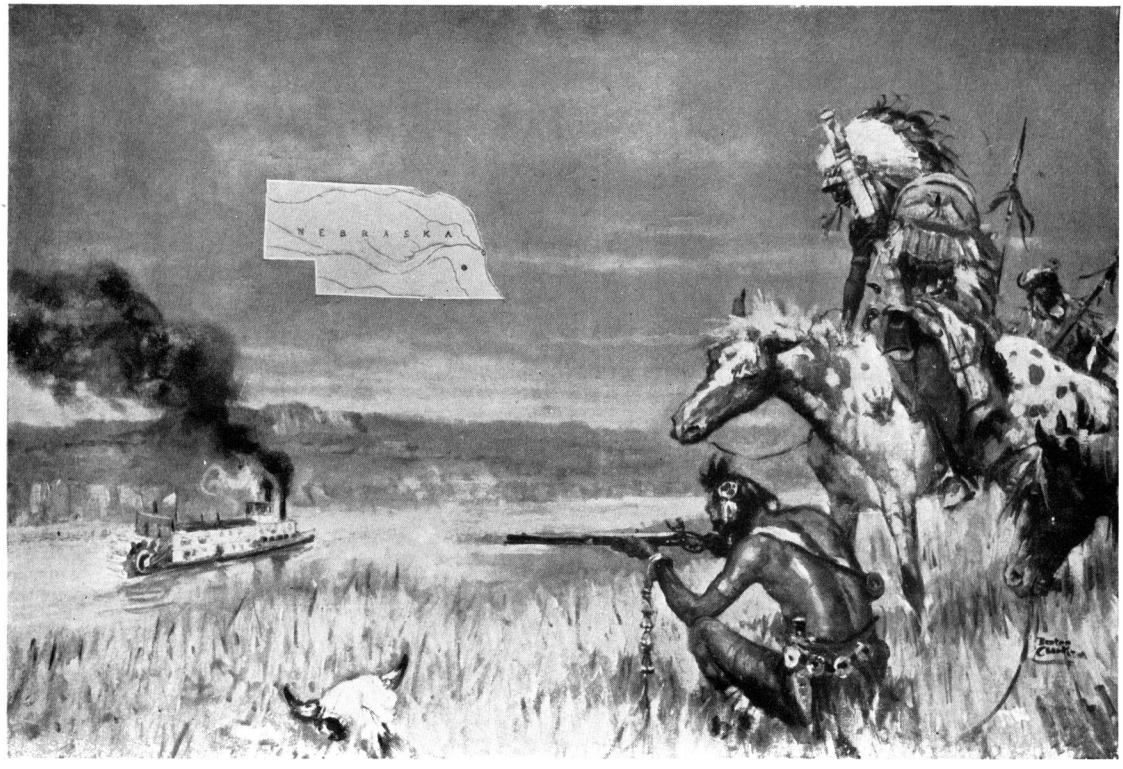
ATTACK WITH ALL WEAPONS
A story of sea war as it might be fought tomorrow
by ALEC HUDSON

and

LEFTY FARRELL *by James E. Grant*

•

THEY FELL WITHOUT PARACHUTES
—AND LIVED *by Paul Brickhill*



THESE UNITED STATES . . . . XLI—NEBRASKA

The Cornhusker State

THE name Nebraska was suggested by Lieut. John C. Frémont for the territory which one contemporary map maker described as "a great desert . . . . entirely unfit for agriculture." Nebraska, meaning "Shallow Water," was the name the Otoe Indians had for the River Platte.

From 1832—when the Oregon Trail began to attract great numbers of westbound pioneers—until the Civil War, Nebraska furnished the principal routes from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Coast. Up the Missouri, to the mouth of the Platte the settlers came. Those who followed the Oregon Trail traversed Nebraska territory along the southern bank of the Platte. The Mormon Trail, established in 1847, followed the northern bank. In one year, in the 1850's, at the peak of the westward movement, fifty thousand people, with eight thousand wagons and uncounted livestock, crossed Nebraska.

The region was acquired in the Louisiana Purchase and explored by Lewis and Clark. The first important fur-trading post, Fort Lisa, was established by the first white settler, a Spaniard, Manuel Lisa, in 1807. The most important early white settlement was Fort Atkinson, on the present site of Fort Calhoun. Bellevue, above the mouth of the Platte, established in 1823, was the first permanent settlement. Two years later the Government started action to acquire Indian lands in the territory.

From the time of Frémont's exploration in 1843, there was strong pressure in Washington for the organization of Nebraska. A provisional government was formed in 1852. Two years later the Kansas-Nebraska bill, establishing the two territories, was signed by President Pierce. This bill, providing that the new territories should be slaveholding or free, as their citizens voted, reopened fierce sectional conflict between North and South.

As a result of this conflict the Democratic Party was split, the Whig Party was destroyed, and a new party—the Republican Party—emerged. The chain of events set off by the Kansas-Nebraska bill in Congress led directly to the Civil War.

The first homestead claimed under the Free Homestead Act was in Nebraska on January 1, 1863. Civil War veterans seeking homesteads led the first main stream of settlers to Nebraska. They were followed by Germans and Scandinavians, who cared little for cities and wanted their own land. In these early days villages were so small that for some time each had only one church. Catholics and Protestants worshiped in one room, with an altar at one end, a pulpit at the other, and half the pews facing each way. In 1868 the voters of the Territory adopted a constitution; and the State, with its capital at Lincoln, was admitted to the Union.

Today Nebraska is a great granary, ranking second in rye, third in corn and wheat and fifth in barley. Omaha, the fourth greatest rail center, is one of the foremost stockyards and meatpacking centers in the United States.

Nebraska's climate is exceptionally healthful, and the scenic beauty of the State from the Niobrara River country to the Missouri River bluffs, pictured above, make this State a popular vacationland.

Who's Who *in this* Issue

Captain Wilfred J. Holmes (Alec Hudson)

WILFRED JAY HOLMES was born on April 4, 1900 in Stockport, New York, son of John Eric and Ester Moet Holmes. He attended Hudson, New York, High School before entering the U. S. Naval Academy on June 19, 1918. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 2, 1922, he was promoted to Lieutenant (jg) June 1925, and to Lieutenant, August 22, 1928.

In the summer of 1935 he assumed command of the USS *S-30,* based at Pearl Harbor. He retired the next year, for physical disability. In 1938, his first short story, "Up Periscope," was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* under the pen name of Alec Hudson. This was followed by a series of stories with Navy background.

In 1941 he was ordered back to active duty as Combat Intelligence Officer for the Fourteenth Naval District. Subsequently he was assigned duties at the Joint Intelligence Center and additional duties on the Staff of Commander in Chief, Pacific. In December 1945 he was transferred to the staff of Commander Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet, in connection with preparation of the history of submarine warfare of World War II. For "exceptionally meritorious conduct . . . as Officer in Charge of Combat Intelligence, at the Joint Intelligence Center Pacific Ocean Areas from September 7, 1943 to September 1, 1945. . . ." he was awarded the Legion of Merit.

He was later awarded the Distinguished Service Medal "For exceptionally meritorious service. . . . while attached to the Division of Naval Communications, from December 7, 1941, to April 16, 1945."

Captain Holmes was again relieved of active duty on November 6, 1946.

He resides in Honolulu with his wife Isabelle, and son, John Eric Holmes.

Paul Brickhill

PAUL BRICKHILL, aged thirty-three, is an Australian newspaper man. A Spitfire pilot during the war, he was shot down in North Africa; and among his fellow airmen in prison camp he met the people in his article, "They Fell Without Parachutes—and Lived," who actually bailed out without parachutes. He himself had a narrow escape, falling from ten thousand feet hooked to the outside of his plane by his parachute

(Continued on inside back cover)

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

June, 1950 — Vol. 91, No. 2

Two Complete Novels

Ten Short Stories

Stories of Fact and Experience

Special Features

The short stories and novels herein are fiction and intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

PHILLIPS WYMAN, *Publisher* — DONALD KENNICOTT, *Editor*

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is published each month simultaneously in the United States and Canada by McCall Corporation. Marvin Pierce, President; Lowell Shumway, Vice-President and Circulation Director; Francis Hutter, Secretary; J. D. Hartman, Treasurer. Publication and Subscription Offices: McCall Street, Dayton 1, Ohio. Executive and Editorial Offices, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, N. Y. MANUSCRIPTS and ART MATERIAL will be carefully considered but will be received only with the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury. SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION: $2.50 for one year; $4.00 for two years; $6.00 for three years in U. S. and Pan-American countries (Add $1.00 per year for other countries); $1.80 for one year; $3.60 for two years; $5.40 for three years in Canada. Send all remittances and correspondence about subscriptions to our publication office, McCall Street, Dayton 1, Ohio. IF YOU PLAN TO MOVE SOON please notify us four weeks in advance because subscription lists are addressed in advance of publication date and extra postage is charged for forwarding. When sending notice of change of address give old address as well as new, preferably clipping name and old address from last copy received. JUNE ISSUE, 1950, VOL. LXXXXI, No. 2.

Printed in U.S.A

Entered as second-class matter November 12, 1930 at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Attack *with* All

THE U.S.S. *STOCKTON* gently changed the rhythm of her roll and pitch as she headed up into the northeast trades. Astern of her, *Aldebaran*, the lone gray cargo ship of the convoy, plodded on for a few minutes before she too made the turn to the new leg of the zigzag. The two flank destroyer escorts turned with her. Lieutenant Commander Gibson, on *Stockton's* bridge, looked out over the bows at the white-capped sea beyond, but out of the corners of his eyes he watched Commander Blane, in his seat at the starboard bridge rail.

In many ways it was an advantage to carry the flag of the Escort Division Commander. It gave *Stockton* earliest information on everything that went on. In port she had the choice of berths, if there was any choice, and at sea she was bound to be the center of any action. On the other hand, the proximity of the "Commodore" just across the bridge wing made it easy for him to interfere in matters that other destroyer captains decided for themselves.

Commander Blane was not entirely unaware of what was going on in Harry Gibson's mind. He had been a destroyer escort skipper himself on his last sea cruise. Sometimes it was difficult remembering he had the entire formation to worry about, and to avoid bossing the flagship bridge. He resisted that temptation now, as he watched the convoy come around to the new course. *Dodger*, on the cargo ship's port bow, turned in a lazy circle, to lose distance, and the wisp of smoke from the stack of *Shears* indicated that she had speeded up to regain position on the starboard bow.

"Like old times, Commodore," Harry Gibson commented to the division commander.

Blane disliked the title of "Commodore." To his ears it sounded like a yacht club. But that courtesy title for the commander of a division of small ships was too firmly fixed in Navy usage for any official frowning to shake it loose. The commanding officer of a ship was "Captain" regardless of actual rank; and there had to be some way of similarly designating the division commander without too long a title.

"This weather is a lot better than the north Atlantic," he replied after an appreciable interval, "and there isn't a torpedo with my number on it coming down the range this very minute."

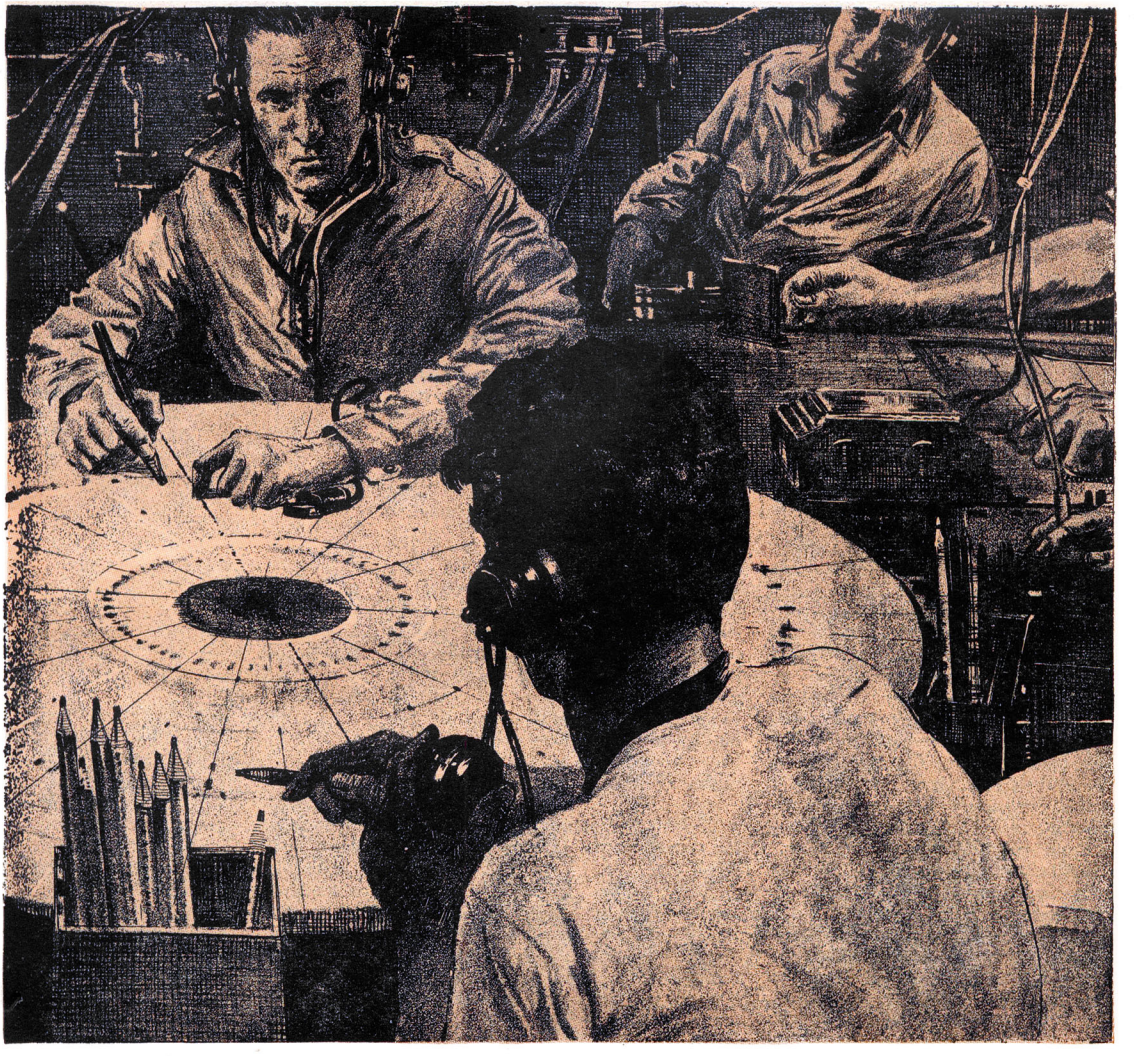
"Yea, peace, it's wonderful," the Captain agreed. "I remember one night in the north Atlantic when we had ninety ships in the convoy; and when I came up on watch at midnight, seven tankers were burning from torpedo hits, all within sight of each other. It's rather nice to have this just a drill, with only one lone chick in the convoy, and her with a belly full of nothing—and nobody going to shoot at her anyway."

Blane looked back at *Aldebaran*, as she plodded slowly along. They had escorted her out to Green Island, carrying a cargo of instruments and

Down here, surrounded by electronic instruments, it was Neal's business to

A DISTINGUISHED NAVAL OFFICER CONTRIBUTES A REMARKABLE SHORT NOVEL OF SEA WARFARE AS IT MIGHT BE FOUGHT TOMORROW.

Weapons *by* ALEC HUDSON



ascertain what the submarine was doing. Each man at his instrument concentrated on one aspect of the problem.

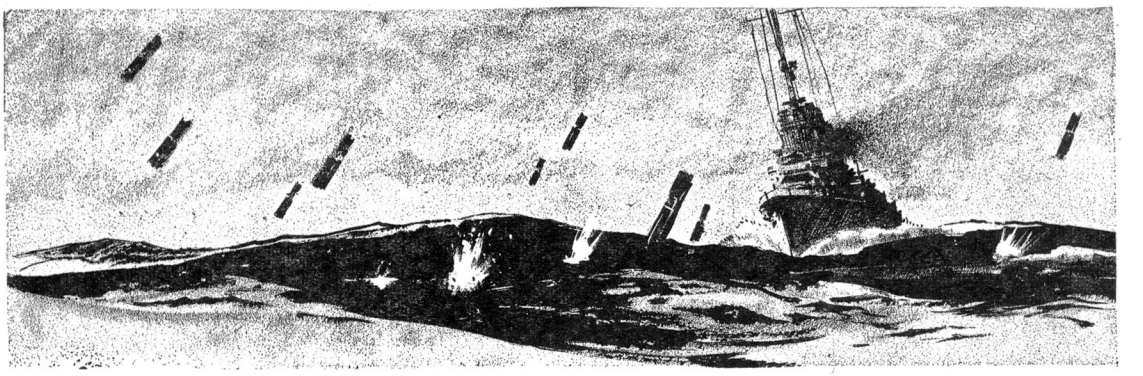
supplies, and food and beer and scientific apparatus for Task Force Fox. She was returning empty now, and even the faint excuse of guarding an important convoy had evaporated. *Aldebaran* had never been in any danger, crossing the sunny seas, with the world at peace. But it had pleased the high command to conduct an exercise with some element of realism. The three ships of the escort division had been ordered to guard her during the entire trip as though she were an important convoy in imminent danger of attack.

"I WOULD have liked to stick around awhile and seen the bomb go off," Gibson ventured. "We were right out there, and all, and there is no use laying down a snake's track with this old tub."

"I saw the one at Bikini and that was enough for me," the Commodore answered. "If this one is ten times as powerful as the Bikini one, and they say it is—I'll be glad to be a long way off when she blows."

"Maybe *Aldebaran* really carried the bomb," Harry Gibson speculated,

Illustrated by HAMILTON GREENE



"and they sent us out to guard her to make sure some foreign submarine didn't pot her on the way."

"She isn't carrying any bomb now," retorted the Commodore, "and we're still escorting her. Anyway, what good would it do anybody to sink one bomb more or less? It's the latest bomb secrets that would be worth going after, and you can't get those by sinking a ship, even if she carries them. No, my lad, relax. It's just a drill, thank God."

Harry Gibson relapsed into silence. The test of the new bomb on Green Island was the nearest thing to action that he was likely to encounter. He would have liked to be closer to it. But they were careful to clear everybody out of the area before the actual explosion, and only those who were essential were allowed to witness it. The *Stockton* wasn't essential, he supposed. She could only plod along with the slow old *Aldebaran*, day after weary day just like another. It was realistic enough in its monotony. It was very much like war in that, bobbing up and down for days on end with nothing happening.

Lieutenant Neal arrived on the bridge to take the watch. Bruce Neal was sonar officer of *Stockton*. He had spent the morning in the sound-room, drilling, always drilling, working the new sonar attack plotter into the smooth organization of the sound-room. After hours in the dark sound-room the intense light on the surface of the sea hurt his eyes, even behind the protection of his sun-glasses. He squinted painfully while Ted Smith, the gunnery officer, hurriedly rattled off the details of course and speed and formation. Lieutenant Smith was eager to be relieved and get off the bridge and down to lunch, waiting in the wardroom, his normally healthy appetite whetted by four hours in the fresh salt air.

Neal was exasperatingly slow taking over the watch. He had had his

The sharp crack of the hedgehog . . . . the projectiles hit the sea.

own lunch. He was in no hurry. For him, the time spent on watch on the bridge was just "waste time." It was time he couldn't spend in the sound-room. He had to take his turn as officer of the deck, but he did it rather resentfully. Deliberately he studied the surface of the sea, and the formation, and the papers on the chart desk before he admitted:

"Very well, sir, I relieve you."

The steward's mate came on the bridge with a lunch tray for the Captain. Commander Blane noted its arrival. He decided he would stay on the bridge a little longer, and then go down to lunch in the wardroom and put his knees under a table like a gentleman. That day was past, he congratulated himself, when he felt he had to spend every minute of the time they were in formation, day and night, on the crowded little bridge.

"How did it go this morning in the sound-room?" Gibson inquired of Neal.

"Pretty good, Captain," Neal replied. "The new attack plotter is a honey. It's a lot better than anything else we've ever tried. But it still can't hold us on when the target makes a last-minute change of course, before we start the final run."

"Don't go sticking in some last-minute jay factor of your own just before the drop," the Captain cautioned. "More attacks are spoiled that way than by the target's evasion maneuvers. I've always found that if we have a good solution, it's better to stick with it than it is to play hunches."

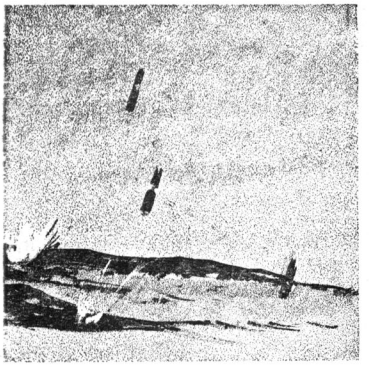
Neal didn't reply, but he thought a lot. The Captain had been a sonar officer during the war. These ex-sonar officers all thought that sonar development ended when they got out of the sound-room. Even Captain Gibson, who was a hot shot at maneuvering the ship in an attack, didn't appreciate the changes that had taken place. In the days when these old fuds had been bright young squirts, submarines made five or six knots submerged and had turning circles like battleships. You could lay down an attack course, and they couldn't possibly get out of the way. Now they made fifteen or sixteen knots, and backed and turned and twisted so you couldn't tell where they were going to be the next few seconds.

"I wish we could have a live target," Neal changed the subject. "It's getting awfully dull with nothing but simulated runs. The sonar operators haven't heard an echo bounce off a submarine in so long, I doubt they would recognize one now if they heard it."

"I'll agree with you there, Bruce," Gibson replied. "This convoy stuff may be realistic in a fashion, but you can't really try out an attack plotter on false targets. If they want realism, they should arrange to have a ping echo back from something solid, so we could see what can be done against a maneuvering target."

"It must be nice to be young," Commander Blane remarked to no one in particular. "Now, me, I've seen enough of live wild targets to last my lifetime. I wouldn't care if *Stockton's* sonar never picked up anything again except false targets, or maybe a nice tame submarine now and then—provided you're sure she's tame enough."

Almost as though he had been waiting for the Commodore's remarks as a stage cue, the messenger came on the bridge. He handed the message-board to Commander Blane for him to initial. The Commodore fumbled with his sun-glasses in leisurely anticipation of a routine message. Automatically he scribbled his initials in the proper box as he read.



"There you go, boys," he announced, handing the board to Gibson. "Your every wish is granted."

Neal interpreted the Commodore's remarks as an invitation, and read the message over his Captain's shoulder. It was a message from the Task Force Commander on Green Island.

"Search plane reports positive contact on disappearing snorkel, sail eight seven Baker, course three one zero speed six. Direct *Aldebaran* proceed independently. Escort Division Seven investigate contact."

"Signal *Aldebaran* to proceed on duty assigned," the Commodore ordered.

The signal flags snaked out of the flag bag and hung in a slack loop for a moment before they were two-blocked. There was an almost immediate show of colored bunting from *Aldebaran*. Blane reflected that communications officers probably still decoded every message with an interesting heading, as he had always done when he was a communications officer. Probably the commanding officer of each of the ships now knew as much about this affair as he did. He reached over and pressed the button of the TBS radio transmitter microphone.

"Sally One to Myrtle Six and Helen Four. Form nine zero course two three five speed two zero. Prepare for any eventuality."

The loud-speaker under the range-finder platform gurgled in its throat. "Myrtle Six to Sally One. Roger," *Dodger* replied, and in the next instant *Shears* also acknowledged the orders.

Stockton spun on her heel and headed back in the direction whence she had come. Only old *Aldebaran* plodded on alone. The escorts all reversed course and converged to form a new formation. The fireroom blowers whined in high hysteria.

"Check that course on the maneuvering-board, Neal," Blane requested.

While the sonar officer busied himself at the chart desk, Gibson walked over to the starboard side of the bridge.

"What do you think they've found, Commodore?" he inquired.

"Probably a whale," Blane answered. "These zoomies haven't seen either a periscope or a snorkel in so long they have to rely on their imaginations, just the way Neal does with his simulated sonar contacts."

"Correct course two three zero, Commodore," Neal reported. "Distance forty-two miles."

"Very well, make it so," Blane ordered.

It would be two hours before they could get down to the contact, but a lot remained to be done in those two hours.

"Could it be one of our submarines, just monkeying around for curiosity?" Neal suggested, hoping against hope that they might find a real target of some kind to work on.

"Not a chance," Blane answered. "There isn't a submarine on legitimate business within two thousand miles of here."

"Set Condition One ASW. Sound General Quarters," Gibson ordered.

"You better get down to the sound-room, Bruce," the Captain directed. "I'll take the deck until the navigator arrives.

"And look, lad," he added while Neal was slipping the binocular strap over his head, "it's nothing but another false alarm, but we're going to play it like the real thing."

After the sonar officer had retired into the sound-room, the Captain stood by the division commander and looked quietly over the sea.

"Suppose this is an enemy submarine," he speculated, "or rather a foreign one, because technically it can't be enemy when we are not at war. She has every right to be anywhere on the high seas—and this is the high seas still—and operate as she chooses, surface or submerged. Just what are we going to do about it, if we find what we are looking for, and hoping to God we won't find?"

"International law wasn't formulated to meet this situation," Blane growled. "What you say is true; but practically, we can't tolerate an enemy submarine in the vicinity of Green Island. The presumption that she just happens to be there on innocent business won't wash. Everybody in the world knows, in a general way, what's going on here."

"Oh, well," Gibson solaced, "even when we were looking for them day in and day out, nine contacts out of ten were false ones."

"Granting that this is probably only a bull whale pitching a little woo," the division commander affirmed, "whatever it is, whale or submarine or shadow, we are going to make him wish he picked a different romping-ground. Be ready to attack with all weapons. Maybe a few depth charges around his ears will change his ideas of romance."

The battle telephone had been manned, and the telephone talker stayed close beside the Captain, trailing behind himself a long length of telephone cord.

"Engineering department manned and ready," the talker reported.

"There, boys—your every wish is granted."

"Very well."

"Gunnery department manned and ready."

"Tell the gunnery officer to report to me on the bridge."

VERY shortly thereafter Lieutenant Smith arrived on the bridge in obedience to the summons. The Captain gave him terse instructions.

"Stow your drill ammunition out of the way, Ted," he directed. "Get service ammunition to all guns. Get the drill depth charges off the racks and have the ready charges armed in accordance with attack doctrine. Live ammunition on the hedgehog. I want *Stockton* in all respects ready for battle."

The gunnery officer asked no questions. He understood exactly what the Captain wanted, and he knew he had no time to lose if he was to change *Stockton* from a peace to a war status, by the time they arrived at the contact.

Dodger and *Shears* had joined up, and in accordance with orders from the division commander had formed a line abreast two miles apart, sweeping a search path with their sonar through the sea. They were running down to the contact point at twenty knots. Before they got there, they would be ready for anything that might happen.

The gun mounts slued first this way and then that, and the guns bobbed up and down in unison. Gibson watched the preparations in silence. He thought of a boxer flexing his muscles against the ring ropes, before the bell. He saw new charges being placed on the spigots of the hedgehog. The new charges had red-painted tails. Even though he himself had given the orders, he was gravely apprehensive of the significance of that bright bit of color. The gray-painted dummy charges were being replaced by lethal live ones.

The bow cleaved the gently heaving seas like a knife. Astern, the rolling wake hissed and hurried after the little ship in continuously frustrated pursuit. *Shears* and *Dodger* looked like toy ships on a painted ocean. He was to remember afterward these preparatory moments when it all seemed like a picnic, a peaceful picnic, with an exhilarating speed run over the sunny seas.

"Too much water noise at this speed, Captain," sound reported. The voice of Bruce Neal came over the voice tube as clear and recognizable as though he were standing there on the bridge.

"Tell him we'll slow down when the proper time comes," Blane snapped.

The division commander's normally fragile temper was paper-thin. He realized that he might shortly be in a very ambiguous position. If they encountered nothing after a prolonged and weary search, they would all merely feel foolish. If they actually found a submarine, the problem would be whether or not to attack immediately and without warning. He knew that he would be damned if he did and equally damned if he didn't. That was the fate of everyone in any profession, who had to make irrevocable decisions. To attempt a merely harassing maneuver might deliver the initiative into the hands of the submarine. To attack, successfully or unsuccessfully, would be certain to have the gravest consequences.

The cynicism that ten years before had been adopted to protect a sensitive nature, was rooted now so deep in the Commodore's character that he could not shake it off. It was ironic that he should be faced with this kind of decision. The emphasis these days was on atomic bombs and guided missiles. Yet if war came in the foreseeable future, the first battles to be fought would be in little ships like *Stockton*. They would have to hold the seas open against the submarines as they had done by so narrow a margin twice before. Little ships like *Stockton*, and planes as familiar with the sea as gulls, they would have to win their battle first against an enemy much more agile and powerful than the last time. Perhaps, after all, it was symbolic that the decision to start this thing should be placed in his hands.

But the moment had arrived when another decision must be made. Out on the starboard wing of the formation *Dodger* suddenly swung wide from the course.

"*Dodger* reports sonar contact," Combat Information Center reported over the battle circuit.

A MOMENT only, Blane hesitated. Almost subconsciously he had been considering some such situation since the three ships joined in search formation. The original contact was still over twenty miles away. The probability was very slight that *Dodger* had regained contact on whatever the plane had seen. It was much more probable, that with the water noises cutting down her sonar efficiency, *Dodger* had a false contact. But it wouldn't do to leave it uninvestigated. It was the freshest contact, and the value of a contact decreased rapidly with time.

For that very reason it was important to arrive as soon as possible at the plane's original position. Three anti-submarine ships were all too few to conduct an effective search on a contact that was hours old. If he divided forces, he would have two ineffective groups; and if anything happened in either group, they would be outside mutual support distance during the critical time. These pro's and con's he had carefully weighed before the situation developed. Whatever happened, he was sure it would all turn out for the worst.

He reached slowly for the TBS microphone.

"Sally One to Helen Four. Assist Myrtle Six. Sally One will proceed to original contact."

DESPITE the argument against it, he had decided to divide his forces. If *Dodger's* contact did not develop within an hour, he would order *Dodger* and *Shears* to rejoin. In the meantime *Stockton* would arrive at the earliest possible time, and could at least hold down any submarine until the others came up.

Stockton steamed on alone. After a while the plane was visible above the horizon, circling over a spot in the sea. There was, he knew, only one patrol plane at Green Island. It had been some hours now in the air, and how much longer it could remain was problematical.

"Plane reports faint propeller noises on Red Sono buoy bearing two one zero distance four miles from *Stockton*," the talker relayed from Combat Information Center.

The plane was evidently convinced she had something. It had ringed the place of the last contact with sono buoys dropped into the water. The sono buoys automatically listened for the sounds of the submerged submarine, and when and if they heard them, retransmitted them by radio to the listening plane.

"Whales don't make propeller noises," Gibson remarked.

"And not everything that listeners hear is correctly identified," Blane countered; "but we'll see soon enough."

The Commodore climbed down the ladder to the pilot-house. The helmsman was behind the wheel. The quartermaster was busy at his interminable notes. Blane continued on into Combat Information Center. For a minute he stood by the radar operator's shoulder, waiting for his eyes to become adjusted to the reduced light. He could see the bright beam sweep around and around the fluorescent screen of the P.P.I. scope. It left two spots of light, like stars, out near the rim. That was *Dodger* and *Shears*, on the horizon's edge astern. Ahead, the plane's pip appeared on the screen much closer to the center. The plotting officer bent over the board, and fiddled with the drafting machine. Blane looked over the plot, fixing in his mind the relative positions of all the elements of the problem.

"All ahead standard," said the pilothouse voice tube in Gibson's voice. They had arrived at the best estimated position of the alleged submarine, and the Captain was slowing down so that sonar would be more effective. According to the plot, the sono buoy that had made the contact was just off there to port. Blane climbed back up to the bridge again.

"Stream the foxer," he ordered.

The foxer was an automatic noisemaker to be towed astern as a defense against acoustic torpedoes. If it worked, an acoustic torpedo fired at *Stockton* would be attracted away from her screws and attack the noisier foxer, being towed at a safe distance astern.

Harry Gibson gave the necessary orders very reluctantly. "That foxer is going to spoil the sound conditions," he protested.

"This isn't just a sound problem, Captain," Blane replied stiffly, and then he added more considerately: "Back when the last war was young, we could come hurrahing down after a submerged submarine and drop depth charges all over the lot with probably nobody hurt on either side. If we weren't right on top of his conning-tower swirl when he went under, the chances of reaching him with depth charges were remote. If he had guts enough to stay up to periscope depth as we came charging down, he could fire steam torpedoes at us. We could see them coming, and if we couldn't dodge them, more times than not they ran deep under us anyway."

Gibson wasn't listening very attentively. It was impossible for him to distract his attention away from the sounds coming over the voice tube from the sound-room. As each searching ping went out from *Stockton,* it awakened reverberations in the surrounding sea. The reverberations came back to *Stockton's* transducers in a prolonged and mournful wail. It always made the Captain think of some lonesome beast crying in a desolate wilderness. Each ping retreated to the uttermost depths of the mysterious sea, and died there in attenuation as a faint whisper. At its demise, another sound wave started bravely out from *Stockton,* searching, searching again, some remote region that the previous wave had failed to reach. From force of habit Harry Gibson found himself listening attentively for an answering cry.

"Nowadays," Blane was going on, "you've got to remember that a good alert submarine can get in the first attack with an acoustic torpedo. There isn't any warning any more, no wake, no bubbles, and the damned thing homes on our screws."

"But that foxer makes a lot of noise," the Captain still argued. "It cuts down the effectiveness of our sound gear tremendously."

Once a sonar officer, always a sonar officer, Blane reflected. For them the ship exists only as a platform for the sound gear. There was no sense going on with the discussion. His mind was made up.

"You will have to get along as best you can with the foxer," he reaffirmed. "The effective range of an acoustic torpedo is probably greater than our own sonar range. Any submarine might get in the first shot before we ever bounced an echo off him; and if he hits, there might be only one shot fired. We can't run a sonar problem from a sunken destroyer escort, Captain."

Stockton turned to another leg of her search pattern. Around the best estimated position of the supposed submarine, the destroyer escort described an expanding box, tracing an evanescent design in the obliterating water, but recording her more permanent pencil track upon the chart's smooth white paper.

"*Dodger* reports contact evaluated non-submarine," Combat reported. "*Dodger* and *Shears* proceeding to rejoin *Stockton.*"

"Well," Blane thought, "it looks as though I have had my cake and can eat it too." It would take at least an hour for the other two ships to join up, but it would be unlikely that anything would happen in that time.

The plane having performed its mission of guiding *Stockton* to the sono buoy, departed for its base on Green Island. *Stockton* completed another circuit, and opened out a ways to make another box of larger compass. This might go on for days. That the whole search would prove futile was the confident expectation of everyone engaged in it.

Suddenly Harry Gibson's trained ears caught a faint, a very faint echo from a ping. Immediately sound reported: "Sonar contact."

Some strange impulse made Commander Blane look back toward the wake at just that instant, back to where the foxer trailed submerged and invisible but clamorously noisy to the sensitive underwater electronic ears of *Stockton.* As he looked, he saw the sleek body of a steel torpedo rise out of the water and shine briefly in the sun, like a great sailfish in a monstrous leap for freedom. At his shout of warning, the Captain turned, and he also saw it as it came clear out of the water and crashed down again upon the sea. Instantly a huge plume of water commenced to rise with graceful deliberation, above the wake.

The sharp wave of the detonation impinged on *Stockton's* hull a split second before the explosion burst upon them through the air.

Blane clutched the TBS microphone: "Sally One to Myrtle Six and Helen Four. We have been attacked by acoustic torpedo exploding over our foxer in the wake. Enemy submarine contact positive. Rejoin at best speed. Engage any contact decisively."

"Sonar lost contact in that explosion," Bruce Neal reported. "What was it, Captain?"

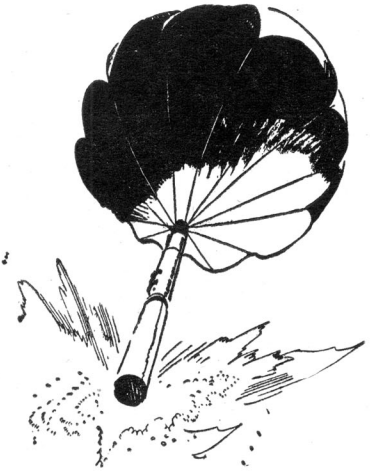
"Acoustic torpedo fired at *Stockton,*" Gibson informed the sound-room. "Exploded over the foxer. Any casualties to the sonar gear?"

"No sir, no casualties," the sonar officer replied. "Everything seems to be working all right. But it sure sounded from here as if the tail had been blown off *Stockton.*"

"Did you get a bearing on that contact?" Gibson demanded.

"Approximate bearing one six zero," Neal reported.

Making a mental computation to correct for the distance *Stockton* had run since the bearing was taken, Gibson brought the ship around toward the submarine. The enemy had made the first attack. Maybe the laws of chance would give the destroyer the next opportunity to be the aggressor.



The plane ringed the place of contact with sono buoys.

"Anyway, that removes the ambiguity," Gibson comforted, as he recovered from his shocked surprise at the sudden turn events had taken. "If the submarine attacks first, international law or no international law, we ought to be allowed the next swipe at him."

"He won't give it to us unless we take it away from him," the Commodore replied grimly, "but maybe he went down deep after that shot to escape having the torpedo home on his own screws. If he did, and we get on our toes, maybe we can get him before he comes up to periscope depth again."

It was difficult for Gibson to realize that *Stockton* was in a battle for her life. When this affair ended, he knew, either the submarine or *Stockton* might be afloat, but probably not both of them. Psychologically, it was impossible to adjust to the sudden change from a peaceful sunny morning drill to desperate battle—and despite all the speculation to the contrary, it had been only an exercise until the torpedo exploded in their wake. It was a problem he had to consider for the whole crew. How much less real must it seem to men locked in compartments below, who saw only the familiar dials and indicators and machines. Over the ship's announcing system he spoke to *Stockton's* crew.

"Now hear this: We've got a battle on our hands. The explosion you just heard was a torpedo fired at *Stockton*. It didn't hit us. If it had, some of us would now be dead and probably *Stockton* would be sinking. We've either got to get this submarine, or he'll get us. Which way it will be might depend on any one of us, any second of the time, between now and when this issue is decided. We're all in the same boat—and that's *Stockton*. She's got what it takes. Let's not let her down."

As the ship came around in the turn to the new course, the foxer slued out at an angle to the wake. The noise of it temporarily threw a blanket of sound over the whole starboard quarter, a screen of noise that the transducer could not penetrate. Gibson made no complaint. If it had not been for the efficiency of the noisemaker, *Stockton* would now be fighting for her life against the inrushing flood of water, rather than hunting for her attacker. To his ears, it seemed that the sonar beam went out more eagerly, more vindictively, as though searching for vengeance for that attack.

"Sonar contact," Gibson caught the echo as soon as the sonar operator.

"Bearing two two zero," sound reported.

"Come right to two two zero," the Captain ordered the helmsman.

"Range one two zero zero," sound reported, and the Captain knew that the attack would be over, success or failure in a very few minutes.

"Classify the contact," he demanded.

"Clear echo," came back the answer. "Submarine. Down doppler."

When the sound wave bounced off a moving target, the echo returned at a slightly different frequency than the outgoing signal. There was a doppler effect, like the change in pitch of the whistle of an approaching locomotive. It was proof that the target was moving, that it was not a stationary water disturbance.

"Stand by for hedgehog attack. Stand by for hedgehog attack."

Gibson had decided to use his ahead-thrown weapons. On *Stockton's* forecastle the hedgehog was ready to fire out ahead of her a pattern of lightweight high-explosive charges. They would sink into the sea, without warning to the enemy, unless one or more of them struck his hull as they sank silently through the water. If one of them scored a direct hit on the submarine, they would explode and inflict serious, possibly fatal damage. If they missed, they would continue silently on down to the bottom of the ocean.

The Captain had conducted countless drills, run through just like this. Despite the mounting tension, he felt perfectly at home with an old familiar problem. From the stream of reports coming over the voice-tube he could visualize exactly what was taking place in the semi-darkness of the sound-room.

"Center bearing two two three."

"Right cut two two eight."

"Left cut two one seven."

The deeply submerged submarine was running away from them, leaving behind her a disturbed wake. Over several degrees of arc, the echo reflected nearly as loudly from the wake as from the submarine itself. Until they were sure what the submarine was up to, it was necessary to take both right and left cut-ons, and cross the whole target with the sonar beam in exploration.

The wake returned a mushy echo, quite distinct from the clear return from the submarine's hull. A good operator could normally be expected to tell the difference easily, if he didn't get excited, if he didn't go to pieces under strain. The doppler effect also gave a clue to which way the submarine was headed and how fast she was going.

"Down doppler." The Captain could distinguish the change of pitch between the reverberations and the returning echo. It indicated that the submarine was still headed away from them.

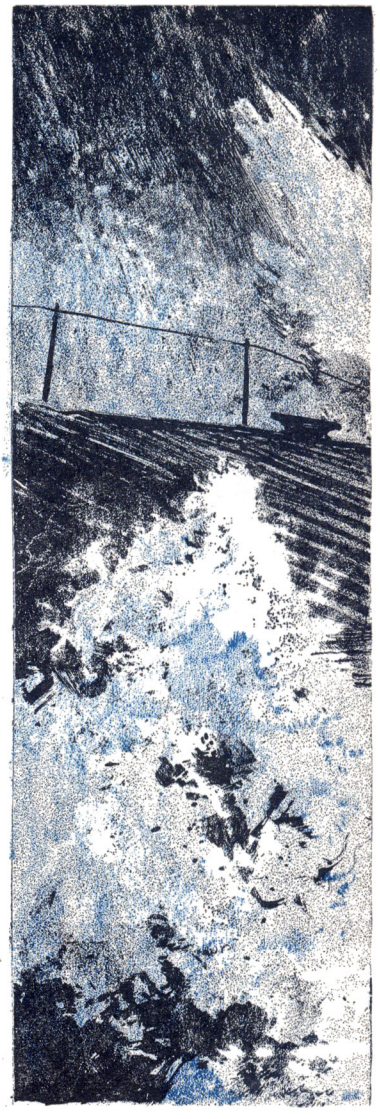
"Range rate ten knots."

"Recommend course two four five."

The attack was at its critical phase. Harry Gibson clutched the bridge rail and concentrated on the problem. It seemed to him that he projected all his resolution into his ears as he listened to the sounds coming up from the sound-room.

"Range seven hundred yards."

"Steer two four five," the Captain ordered the helmsman. They were headed across the projected track of the submarine, leading her by an



The few men visible were intent

on abandoning ship, rather than manning the gun, as the submarine's bow came up at an even sharper angle.

angle that would allow time for the hedgehog projectiles to sink to the submarine's depth, after they had been fired into her path.

"Give me a center bearing," Gibson demanded.

"Center bearing two three six," sound responded.

"Now give me right cuts only," he instructed the sound room, when he was sure the submarine was definitely moving to the right.

"Right cut two four two."

"Right cut two four three."

It was a simple problem in trigonometry to determine the angle at which the destroyer should lead the submarine. But the data was constantly changing, and there wasn't time to work problems in mathematics. The solution had to be determined almost instantly, by instinct born of experience, by rule of thumb.

"Steer two five zero," the Captain ordered.

"Bearing drawing rapidly aft," sound reported. The submarine was on the port side of the destroyer. *Stockton* was cutting just ahead of the enemy's invisible bows.

"Lost contact," came Neal's report from sound, and immediately thereafter: "Request permission to fire by recorder."

"Fire by recorder," Gibson directed, and then followed a wait, a wait of seconds that seemed like hours as everyone on the bridge in rapt attention waited for the hedgehog to fire.

The sharp crack of the hedgehog, which he had eagerly awaited for a lifetime still made Gibson's nerves leap in surprise. He watched the projectiles arch upward like a flight of birds against the sky. They reached the apex of their parabolic path, and to the Captain's watching eyes, they appeared to give a purposeful wiggle to their red-painted fin tails before they headed down again. Like cormorants, he thought, diving for fish, for a huge

steel fish—far, far below the depths that even a cormorant's eye might penetrate.

Plunging downward, the flight of projectiles met the bright blue surface of the bright blue sea. They left a transient pattern of small white splashes. *Stockton* forging onward, overtook the pattern and left it close aboard to port. For an instant the Captain thought he could catch a glimpse of the scarlet projectiles in the blue transparent water. But then there was only a spot in the sea which his eyes followed aft as *Stockton* steamed swiftly by.

He had almost forgotten that he waited for an explosion, waited for the hedgehog projectiles to hit a solid submarine and explode. In drills the projectiles sank like that, with no explosion afterward, and with results to be evaluated later from aërial photographs, and computations from a tame target submarine's report of courses and speed. In the sound-room they also listened intently for the explosion that would indicate a hit.

"There was a change of doppler at the last minute, Captain," Neal reported. "I thought the target changed course to the left. I held fire a couple of seconds after recorder time."

"Damn the doppler. Damn the doppler!" Blane cursed in exasperation, beating his fist against the bridge rail. It was just what he should have expected. That young fool of a sonar officer was too cocksure of himself.

The Captain and the division commander were in complete agreement on that score. Gibson's knuckles were white as he grasped the hand rail and leaned over the voice tube.

"Neal, there was no last-minute change of target course," he spat out through his clenched teeth. "You deliberately spoiled a perfect run by letting your imagination run wild. Now snap out of it. Next time fire by recorder when I order it, not by your private hunches—if there is a next time, if a torpedo doesn't get us first."

Down in the sound-room Bruce Neal sent a contrite "Aye, aye sir," up the voice tube to the Captain. He still felt that the submarine had evaded by a last-minute change of course. If anything, he thought, he had under-compensated the machine solution. But he didn't need to be reminded of the seriousness of the situation.

They had passed so close that the last recorded position was inside *Stockton's* turning circle. The Captain would have to steam away from the contact, and turn and come in again. It took time, precious time. The submarine might not be aware of the attack that had been made on her, and there was no swirling boiling water from exploding depth charges to spoil the sound conditions. But the crisscross wake made by *Stockton* as she turned and maneuvered would reflect the sound waves, and time alone might give the submarine a chance at a second attack.

Watching the glowing instruments shine out in the darkened room, it seemed to Neal that it was hours before the probing sound beam found an echo.

"Sonar contact, bearing three three zero."

He watched the trace on the plot. There was a peculiar note in the reflected echo. After a few observations he was certain that the contact was stationary, and only *Stockton's* rapid maneuvering was causing the shifting change of bearing.

"No doppler," he reported. "Non-submarine. We've been getting echoes off the explosion swirl of that torpedo, Captain."

They must hunt again. The room was pitch-black to anyone just entering it, but Neal's eyes were well dark-adapted, and it was easy for him to see all that was necessary. The sonar operator's face glowed with a pale green light reflected from the fluorescent screen he intensely scanned. Sharp pips of light transversed the screen, leaving tracks of fainter light behind them. The faintly illuminated range and bearing dials kept Neal oriented to the problem. The attack sonar plotter operator was attentively unbusy, waiting for data that could be analyzed, waiting for sonar to make contact. The new echo came back sharp and clear. There was no doubt that they had contacted the submarine again.

"Up doppler," he reported to the bridge. He watched the recorder confirm that the enemy had turned and was heading toward the attacking destroyer.

"Bow aspect. Range rate fifteen knots."

It was the Captain's problem to maneuver *Stockton* into attack position. Down here in the dark, surrounded by his electronic instruments, and computers and plotters, and recorders, it was Bruce Neal's business to keep contact with the enemy and ascertain what the submarine was doing, deep below the surface. Each man at his instrument concentrated on one aspect of the problem, and it was the sonar officer's job to direct and synthesize the symphony of information. It took minutes, only minutes packed with perplexing ambiguities, conflicting information, and finally certainty that this time everything was right.

"Fire by recorder," the Captain directed, and from that instant the decision was in Bruce Neal's hands. He watched the plot grow across the recorder, and assured himself that data was being automatically transmitted to the hedgehog.

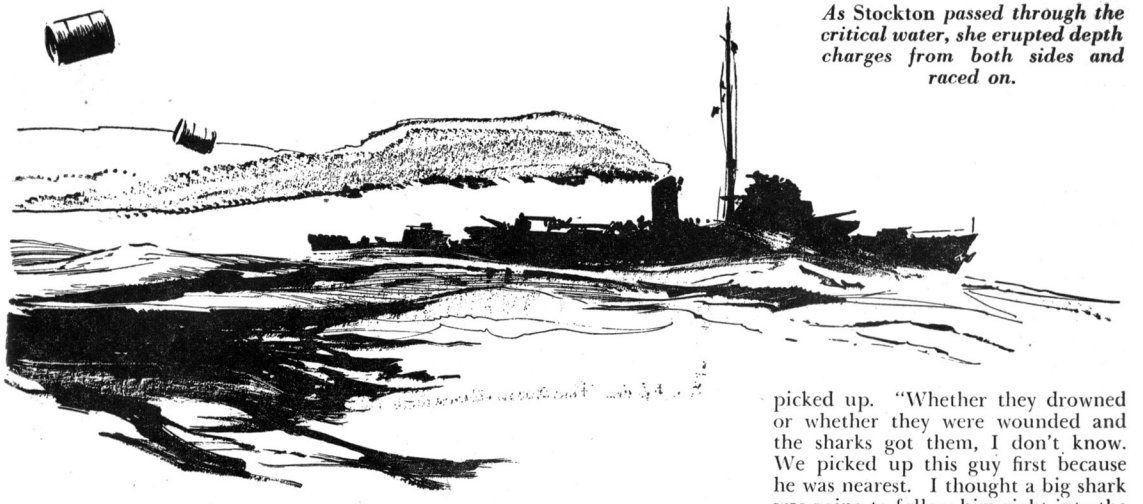
"Fire." The hedgehog sounded like a sledgehammer blow on the sound hut.

Then he waited. The battle was, to him, an affair of pips and lines and figures, but that was the stuff in which he dealt. A fluorescent screen had become more real to him than the surface of the sea.

Suddenly the sonar screen erupted in a burst of light. Then electronic ears were unnecessary to hear the thud of an exploding hedgehog projectile. The screen was violent in successive paroxysms of light waves as though it writhed in pain.

"A hit! A hit! Three sure hits. Three separate hits!" he shouted jubilantly up the voice tube.

On the bridge they'd watched the hedgehog salvo fall into the sea as the first one had done. The spot where the flight of projectiles had ended was opposite the bow, and indistinguishable from any other patch of rolling blue. Suddenly there was a violent eruption beneath the surface. A mas-



As Stockton *passed through the critical water, she erupted depth charges from both sides and raced on.*

sive boil of seething water surged upward. They heard the hit. *Stockton* had drawn first blood.

Straining to her rudder, her stern slipping sidewise in the violent white foam, *Stockton* tried desperately to turn her bows toward the disturbed patch of ocean. Gibson felt himself pushing fruitlessly against the bridge rail to hasten her around.

Back on the starboard quarter a huge black shape reared out of the water.

"Submarine on the surface! Submarine on the surface!" the lookout shouted, though every man topside of *Stockton* had seen it at the same time.

"Main battery commence firing," Gibson ordered, and almost before the telephone had transmitted the order, both forward and after guns were blazing in rapid fire.

The first salvo was short, and the next one wide to the right. With *Stockton* swinging wildly and heeling to her rudder, it was difficult to keep the guns on the target. As the splashes from the first salvo receded, Gibson saw men on the bridge of the submarine. They were climbing down on deck. The submarine's bow was at a sharp up angle, the stern still beneath the surface. If the enemy could manage to man their gun, the battle wouldn't be all one sided. The advantage still would be with *Stockton,* but any lucky hit the submarine might score on the destroyer could still change the outcome. A hit in the main engines, or on the steering engine, might disable the surface ship and let the submarine escape before *Shears* and *Dodger* could arrive.

"Ease the rudder," the Captain ordered. The submarine was now up on the beam, about a thousand yards away.

Instantly the destroyer's gun scored a hit. He saw the rose-red flash of detonating shells on the submarine's conning tower. Black débris and smoke from the explosions discolored the white-water columns of the splashes. Before the splash could die down, the center of the target was hidden from view by the impact of another salvo. In the fleeting glimpse that Gibson had of the enemy, he could see that the few men who were visible were intent on abandoning ship, rather than manning the gun. The submarine's bow came up at an even sharper angle. For a brief instant it pointed an accusing finger at the brassy sky, then slid down beneath the sea.

"All back," Gibson ordered. *Stockton* came to a restless stop about five hundred yards from the sinking enemy.

"Call away the motor whaleboat," the Captain ordered.

The boat would be able to pick up anybody in the water before *Stockton* could turn in her tight circle and approach again. As *Stockton* in her effort to turn her bows toward the place where the submarine went down, increased the distance from the spot, they could see the boat roller-coasting over the swells. It seemed tiny on the vast expanse of sea.

It was several minutes before *Stockton* could get back to the critical area. A great oil slick stretched away to leeward to mark the place. In it were a few scattered pieces of wreckage, all that was left of the enemy. There were no signs of any men in the water, but as *Stockton's* boat labored toward them, Blane and Gibson could see that it carried an extra man. Apparently there was only one survivor from the submarine.

"There were three or four men in the water at first, Captain," the boat officer reported after he had been picked up. "Whether they drowned or whether they were wounded and the sharks got them, I don't know. We picked up this guy first because he was nearest. I thought a big shark was going to follow him right into the boat. We beat it off with a boat hook, and while we were pulling this guy in, the others disappeared. Even the one we got is wounded or something. The pharmacist's mate is working on him down below."

There was nothing now for Blane to do but report his action by radio and continue to search the area with his escort division until he received further orders. There would be plenty of repercussions later. He knew that his immediate future would be filled with reports and investigations and explanations. But it would take time for the second-guessers to think up some better way in which the situation could have been handled.

THEY secured from General Quarters. The executive officer came up on the bridge.

"This prisoner we have is maybe as bad off as he thinks he is," the executive officer reported to Gibson. "The pharmacist's mate says he is in a state of severe shock—and who can blame him? He keeps trying to tell us something, only nobody can understand his language. It isn't French, and it isn't Spanish."

Commander Blane looked thoughtful. Almost he could wish that they had no prisoner. He was the only tangible evidence to take back that the incident had actually happened. It would be best all around if they never admitted that it had. On the other hand, they might be able to pick up some useful information from him.

"It might be of great importance that we find out what that bird has to say. We ought to know where this submarine came from and what they intended to do. It seems to me that if she had just intended to look around, she would have sneaked away when we arrived, rather than fire tor-

pedoes at us. Maybe this isn't the only one around. Maybe the guy speaks German."

"Maybe he does," the executive officer replied, "but none of us do, sir."

"I speak a little German, Mr. Spencer," the quartermaster modestly volunteered.

"Good," the executive officer accepted immediately. "Come on down below, Jackson, and we'll try it on him."

It was long after sunset by the time the interrogation had been completed. Blane had gone below once or twice, impatiently trying to hurry the process, but it had been apparent to him that the quartermaster and the pharmacist's mate, between them, would succeed if anyone could. The prisoner immediately became nervous and uncoöperative whenever an officer appeared, but he had sensed that the pharmacist's mate was trying to ease his pain. Sympathetic treatment helped bridge the barrier of language and had established in the patient a confidence in the uniform the pharmacist wore. The quartermaster had relayed the important information up to the bridge as soon as he had received it, and from there it had gone out to Green Island by radio to alert all the task force.

Harry Gibson no longer complained of the monotony.

"Do you really believe this story he has told you, Jackson?" Commander Blane inquired after the interrogation was complete and the quartermaster had come up on the bridge to discuss it.

"Yes sir, I do," Jackson answered positively. "He isn't consciously trying to deceive us, anyway. He's pretty sick. Maybe tomorrow he won't remember all he has told us, if he remembers anything tomorrow. But of course I can't be sure of the absolute truth of everything he told," he hedged.

"Of course," Blane agreed. "This guy wasn't in the know on everything, although he seems to have picked up plenty just by keeping his eyes and ears open."

"German isn't his native language," Jackson went on, "and I'm not very good at it, so I suppose there are a lot of errors in translation. And not being a submariner himself, he has only the vaguest idea where he has been, or why, or what happened on many days."

That had been the first thing the quartermaster found out about the prisoner. He had somehow considered it of the utmost importance for his captors to know that he was not a member of the submarine's crew. It was almost as though he feared that there was some special torture reserved for submariners.

Until two weeks before, the prisoner had never seen a submarine. He had been a member of a specially trained amphibious landing unit, but they had trained from landing boats, on sandy beaches. Then he and fifty others of his unit had been crowded into a big transport submarine and

The red glow of the burning destroyer escort gave an unearthly aspect to the sea. It was only a whim of fate that Shears *and not* Stockton *had been torpedoed.*

promptly taken to sea. There had been two other submarines, he knew, sailing on the same mission. That made one hundred and fifty men, one hundred and fifty men of a well-trained amphibious landing outfit embarked on a submarine expeditionary force.

"Do you think they actually intended to capture Green Island, Commodore?" Harry Gibson inquired.

"No doubt about it," Blane responded, "and they could do it too, with a surprise landing at dawn some morning when everybody thinks the world is quietly at peace. There wouldn't be any warning at all, with the submarines coming in to the beachhead, submerged. Just a quiet Sunday morning, and bingo—a hundred and fifty well-armed, well-trained men on your neck."

The enemy submarine had been under way for two weeks, part of it on the surface, but the past few days submerged continuously on snorkel. The prisoner hadn't known their destination. He didn't know where the other submarines were, but his own ship had been in the lead. Recently they had fueled from a big supply submarine. A "milk cow," the prisoner had called it in German. The refueling rendezvous had been made at night, by radar, Blane assumed, and the troops had been allowed topside for the first time since they sailed. The prisoner had overheard a conversation between the sailors on the submarine tanker and his own troop carrier. Theirs was the first submarine to be refueled. The other two were expected the next night, and then the "milk cow" could head for home.

"Probably the one we sank had a preliminary reconnaissance mission," Blane conjectured, "and it came on ahead. Then when we approached with our sonar searching, he had his first indication of trouble. Probably thought we were alone, and if he could knock us off with an acoustic torpedo, he would clear the way for the others. That might be why we haven't had any more contacts yet. The others haven't arrived. But it's dollars to doughnuts that tomorrow at dawn was to be D-Day on Green Island. They wouldn't send in a reconnaissance unit and risk losing the element of surprise—not a minute before they had to."

"They wouldn't have to hold the island, only for an hour or two," Gibson reasoned. "They could sweep over it and pack up all the records and the blueprints and all the instruments and equipment they wanted, and maybe even the bomb itself, and get back aboard their submarines in a few hours' time."

"If they were careful, they wouldn't leave any evidence of who made the raid," Blane added, "and even if we could surely pin it on someone, we would be faced with a *fait accompli.* All our boasted ten-year know-how advantage would be gone."

Commander Blane went below to his bunk about midnight. He was sure he would be unable to sleep, and he would have preferred to remain on the bridge. But there was room for only one mattress on the hard steel deck under the searchlight platform, and he knew that that was as far away as Gibson could be induced to leave the bridge.

He underestimated his own exhaustion. He was deep in sleep when the General Alarm sounded.

"Plane contact," Gibson told him over the voice tube. "Submarine on the surface."

Up on the bridge again, the Commodore speculated on what the new development could mean. The plane, he knew, had been refueled and sent out on search again. If the submarines remained submerged, there was little hope that the plane could make radar contact, at night, on their snorkel. But if the submarines came to the surface, then the plane could cover far more area with its radar than the destroyer escorts could hope to search. Under such circumstances, he hadn't expected the enemy to attempt to operate on the surface. But apparently he had. Apparently, also, he had instantly detected the plane's radar. The submarines had submerged again before an attack could be made.

"Probably trying desperately to make contact with the reconnaissance submarine," the Commodore guessed.

They were only about ten miles from the plane's position. Blane reasoned that the two submarines would remain together, so that there would be a minimum of rendezvous problems off the beachheads. As his eyes became readjusted to the darkness, he could see *Shears,* steaming silently along on a parallel course. Beyond her, he knew, *Dodger* held the other flank position.

"Radar contact, bearing zero five zero, distance eight thousand yards," radar reported.

It was a tiny pip, but too big to be a snorkel, and too small for a surfaced submarine.

"Sally One to Myrtle Six and Helen Four. Corpen Five. Execute," the Commodore ordered over the TBS.

The whole group changed course, bearing down on the contact. Whatever it was, out there in the darkness, it would be boxed in between *Shears* and *Stockton,* on the new course. The division came down in line, each ship a black mass against the dark sea. Occasionally a wave broke in phosphorescent foam; but up ahead where the radar had penetrated to find a pip, all was black sky and blacker sea.

"Radar contact disappeared," came the report.

"Acts like a submarine trying to find out what's going on without exposing too much," Blane remarked. "These boys know that we're hunting for them, and they suspect something unpleasant has happened to Number One. They know we mean business."

The whole escort group continued on the same course searching underwater with their sonar, and the surface of the sea and the sky with radar. Off the port bow the plane released a flare. Suspended between sea and sky by its parachute, the flare dropped slowly toward the horizon like some great setting planet. *Shears* was silhouetted in its light.

"Contact, contact, radar contact. There he is again, four thousand yards bearing zero four five." Whatever it was, they were closing in on it.

"Radar interference on the ten-centimeter band," the operator reported.

In this game of blindman's bluff both sides had electronic eyes. For all his experience, it still seemed unreal to Blane that these laboratory instruments could be transported out into the vastness of the ocean night, and used to probe the darkness like some blind wrestler's clutching fingers, searching for an advantageous hold.

"Radar contact disappeared suddenly," came the report.

They were closing to decisive range. Very soon now some ship's sonar would bounce an echo off the sub-

"Engineering department manned and ready," the telephone talker reported.

merged enemy, and it would then be only a few minutes before the crisis. But this was no impotent target cowering in the ocean depths, waiting for the depth charges to thunder down upon it. If anyone had forgotten that, the reminder came with dramatic suddenness.

The next contact was almost dead ahead, and only fifteen hundred yards away. *Stockton* headed for it, every eye on her bridge straining to catch sight of the galloping ghost that they were chasing. Behind all the guns were men with itching trigger fingers. But the submarine was coming up only to radar depth, exposing a minimum of structure, and it was impossible to pick her up with human vision.

"Sonar contact bearing zero four zero. Clear echo." Sound and radar both were on the same target.

Then when everything seemed in their favor, the tide of battle suddenly turned. Over where *Shears* was closing for the kill, there came a stab of flame, and then another. *Shears* disappeared behind two great plumes of water, and the sound of exploding torpedoes reached *Stockton. Shears* had been torpedoed. The submarine had been making a submerged radar approach on *Shears.* Her devastating attack delivered, she went deep, and disappeared from *Stockton's* radar screen.

Sonar hung on to the target. Beneath the surface the submarine was safe from radar's all-seeing eye, but not from sonar. The supersonic beam searched through the ocean depths as the radar beam searched through the air.

"Myrtle Six assist Helen Four," the division commander ordered over the voice radio. "Sally One will develop contact."

For a brief instant the red glow of the burning destroyer escort gave an unearthly aspect to the sea around them. Upon the bridge they were soberly aware that it was only a prankish whim of fate that *Shears* and not *Stockton* had been torpedoed.

"What happened to *Shears?*" Neal asked from the sound-room. Gibson ignored the question. He dreaded then to phrase the answer. He dreaded to inflict on the sound-room the sickening sense of disaster that weighed so heavily upon him. But it was an issue he couldn't dodge easily.

"She's gone, hasn't she, Captain?" Neal pressed him.

"Yes, Bruce, she's gone," he answered, for even the flaming furious fires that had been *Shears* were suddenly extinguished.

There was no time to consider the hazard of the position, no time to reason over the larger issue. In *Stockton's* sound-room the sonar problem still went on.

"Quarter aspect, down doppler," Neal reported. "Range seven hundred."

"Left cut, left cuts, give me left cuts only," Gibson demanded. The submarine was running away from them down deep, and concentrated now on avoiding the counterattack of the destroyer. But she couldn't shake off *Stockton.*

"Fire by recorder."

When the hedgehog went off, it made a flash of light in the darkness. They couldn't see the flight of these projectiles or the tiny splashes that they made in the dark water. Long after they expected it, there came a muffled deep-down explosion.

"Maybe it's a hit," Gibson commented, "but we certainly can't be sure we did him much damage or we would have more action. It's more likely that he heard our screws and released some kind of bomb to make us think we got him, while he sneaks away unharmed."

They turned back to come in on another attack, but *Stockton's* sound-room was having new difficulties. The submarine hugged close to the destroyer's wake, and in that disturbed water, sound couldn't be sure they had a true target. There were breaking-up noises and giant blurps and hisses coming from where *Shears* had gone down. It made a sound shadow for the submarine to hide behind. The enemy backed and turned and twisted, creating a complicated wake

pattern to distract the destroyer from the chase.

"I think he fishtailed away from us just before we fired," Neal reported to the Captain. "But I hung on and fired on the recorder indication," he hastily added.

"This guy knows what he's doing," Gibson agreed. "He is going to give us trouble."

Sound picked up a doubtful echo, and *Stockton* made a run on it. Harry Gibson thought it was a false target shell the submarine had released, to return an echo from a patch of bubbles and confuse pursuit. The Captain held his fire. Neal couldn't be sure it was a submarine. They crossed the line of target advance.

"Submarine depth three hundred and fifty feet by fathometer," Combat Information Center reported over the battle telephone.

Stockton had passed right over her enemy. The next time they came in, Gibson fired the hedgehog, but without any tangible results. Fathometer caught him again at three hundred and fifty feet. In this game of tag the submarine had three dimensions in which to maneuver; but as long as *Stockton* kept over him and kept him down, he would have difficulty coming up to fire another salvo of torpedoes. To lose contact for long would turn the initiative over to the submarine, and that piled a sense of desperation onto sound's efforts to keep constant contact.

"Stand by for depth-charge attack. Stand by for depth-charge attack," Gibson passed the word.

If they knew the submarine's depth, and kept her there, the tremendous power of the heavy depth charges, set to explode at that depth, could shake the submarine to pieces. It would put the fear of God in them, at any rate. On the last two passes the lead angle had been too small. The submarine was probably speeding up just before the drop. It was a game for Gibson to outguess.

Down came *Stockton*—a short run. Sound was working perfectly. "Range six hundred. Clear echo. Up doppler."

Gibson held *Stockton* on a course well ahead of the bearing, expecting the enemy to repeat his speed-up tactics.

"Bearing changing rapidly aft."

"Fire by recorder." And then: "Fire One. Fire Two. Fire center."

The K gun thundered in a deeper voice than the hedgehog battery. The huge charges hurtled through the air to port and starboard. Back aft, depth charges rolled off the racks in smooth precision as *Stockton* planted high explosives over the submarine's computed position.

The explosions lifted the destroyer and shook her as a terrier shakes a rat. Always plenty of noise and action, anyway, in a depth-charge attack, Blane reflected as the whole sea astern appeared to rise up and stand on end. He hoped the submarine was somewhere around to feel the effect. He thought he saw a big black shape appear for an instant and then disappear. It was impossible to be certain in the deceptive light. *Stockton* turned and came in again. No contact. The explosion boil bounced back a mushy echo, but still there was no contact, no clear echo. In the graying light of dawn a great blob of oil bubbled up to the surface where the depth charges had detonated. From it, with grapnel hooks, they recovered some pieces of deck planking and other wreckage.

Now there were two destroyer escorts against a single submarine, if the prisoner's count was right; but despite the fact that odds were in his favor, Blane was apprehensive. It might be that with two-thirds of their force sunk, the enemy would be bent only on withdrawal, but there was no way of knowing exactly what his plans were. The estimate of the enemy strength, for that matter, was based on tenuous evidence. There might be many submarines still in the area. The enemy might decide to go through with his plan anyway; and although Green Island possessed the most powerful offensive weapon the world had known, its defensive strength was weak. There was a great area to cover, and Blane decided that he could not divide his forces again. In obedience to orders from task force commander, the plane was covering the area on the opposite side of the island. On his side of the island, where Blane felt sure the issue would be decided, the two little destroyer escorts were both the hunters and the hunted.

The bathythermograph that morning had plotted out a thermocline at two hundred feet. Sound conditions weren't very good. The enemy might be lurking in the immediate vicinity, hiding under the thermocline and relying on its density layer to screen him from the searching sonar beam.

The sun crept higher and higher. Weariness came over *Stockton*. Commander Blane nodded half asleep on his seat by the starboard bridge rail. The probability seemed good that the remainder of this affair would be a stalemate. It would certainly have ended that way if this last submarine had stayed under the thermocline; but suddenly the enemy took the initiative. Perhaps, so Blane estimated later, her battery was low and she decided to do something drastic. Maybe she figured she still had a good chance of victory against only two destroyer escorts.

Sonar evidently failed to detect the submarine as she came up above the protective density layer. The first warning to make a somnolent bridge wake up came from the starboard lookout.

"Periscope broad on the starboard bow." Their eyes sought for the telltale feather, or the glint of the sun on the glass window.

Before they could find it, Bruce Neal shouted from the sound-room in excitement:

"Torpedo starboard bow!"

Electric torpedoes give no visible warning that they are about to strike, but the alert sonar operator had caught the whir of high-speed propellers churning the water.

"All ahead full, right rudder," Gibson ordered. His command seemed automatic, yet he knew that in that instant he had reached a delicate decision. If this was an acoustic torpedo coming down at *Stockton,* it was the wrong maneuver to turn her bow toward it. It would put her screw between the torpedo and the protecting foxer, and the torpedo would probably attack the nearer sound source. If it was an acoustic torpedo, he should turn away and unmask the foxer. There was little time to turn in any direction. Any maneuver he could make might be futile.

The submarine had been listening to *Stockton's* foxer all morning. They must know that the destroyer escort had some kind of sound device to counter an acoustic torpedo. The enemy may have decided to catch the surface vessel in a fan of straight-run high-speed torpedoes. The periscope exposure was thin evidence that he had reasoned so. If *Stockton* turned away from the submarine and frantically avoided an assumed acoustic torpedo, she lost the chance of making immediate sonar contact. She could turn toward and comb the wakes of straight-run torpedoes presenting a minimum target, and gamble at avoiding a fatal hit.

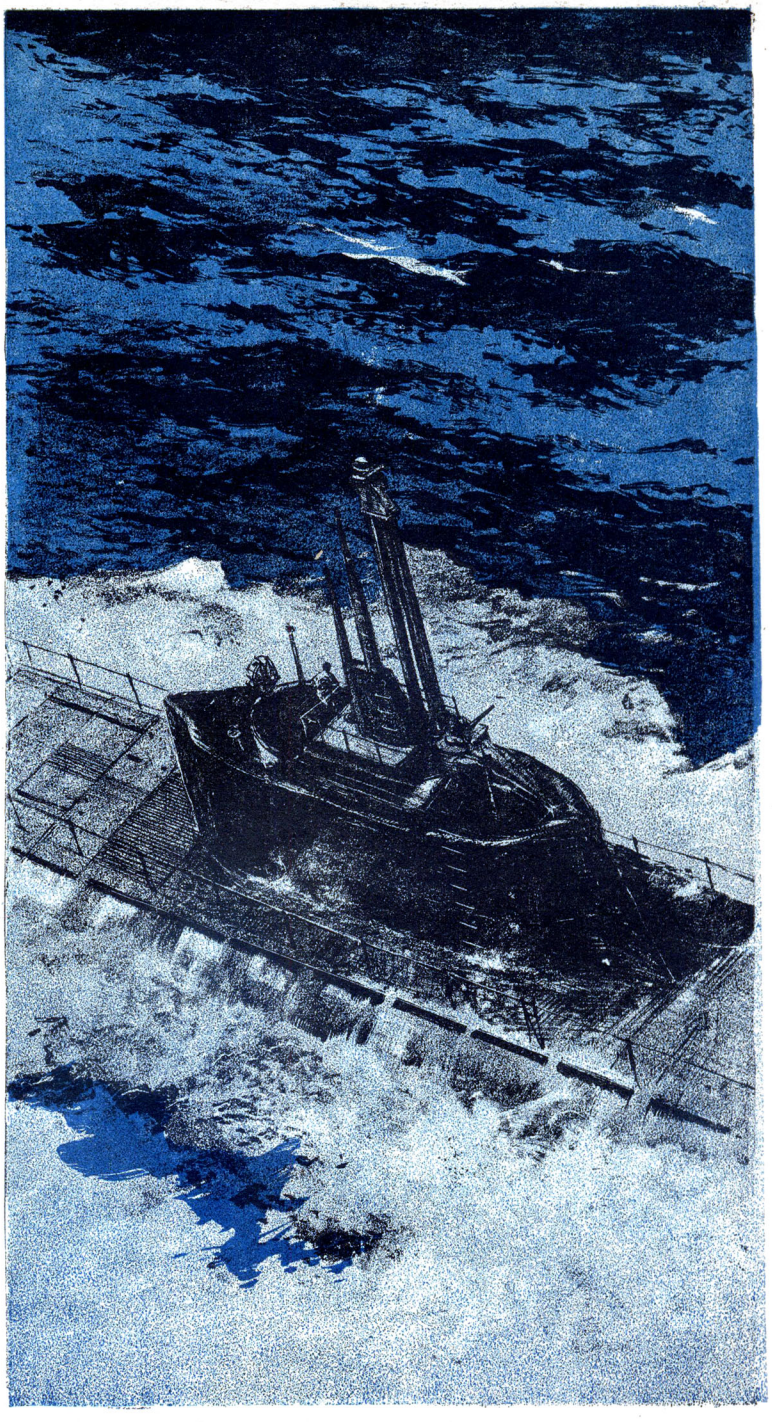
That all of this went through his mind Harry Gibson was unaware. He chose the aggressive course. He turned toward the danger.

Then all hands waited to see if he was right—waited while the seconds dragged, and *Stockton* held her breath in suspense. A full minute went by without the shattering roar that they were dreading.

"Sonar contact. Clear echo."

They had won the gambit. The torpedoes had missed. The submarine tarried too long above the protective layer. They had contact.

"Left rudder. Stand by to ram!" Gibson shouted.



Stockton turned to the attack. *Dodger* swung wide to clear the range. The attack was short. The hedgehog projectiles were in the air a short three minutes after contact, but they never found their target.

"No hits, one run, no errors," Blane recounted, and it was to go on like that for several hours. Every time the submarine broke through the thermocline, either *Dodger* or *Stockton* picked up the echo and charged in for attack. The enemy refused to play it safe. The submarine kept coming up and trying to catch an escort unawares for long enough to sink it with a salvo of torpedoes; and each time he made the attempt, *Stockton* or *Dodger* was on top of him with hedgehog or depth charges. It was like boxers swinging wildly at each other, and missing every swing, but it only needed one blow to connect to end the fight.

"They are analyzing our attack," Blane assessed, "and when they hear the pings bouncing off the hull at shorter intervals, they dunk down under that damned layer and we lose them."

"This is the time for the old deep-creep attack," Gibson suggested.

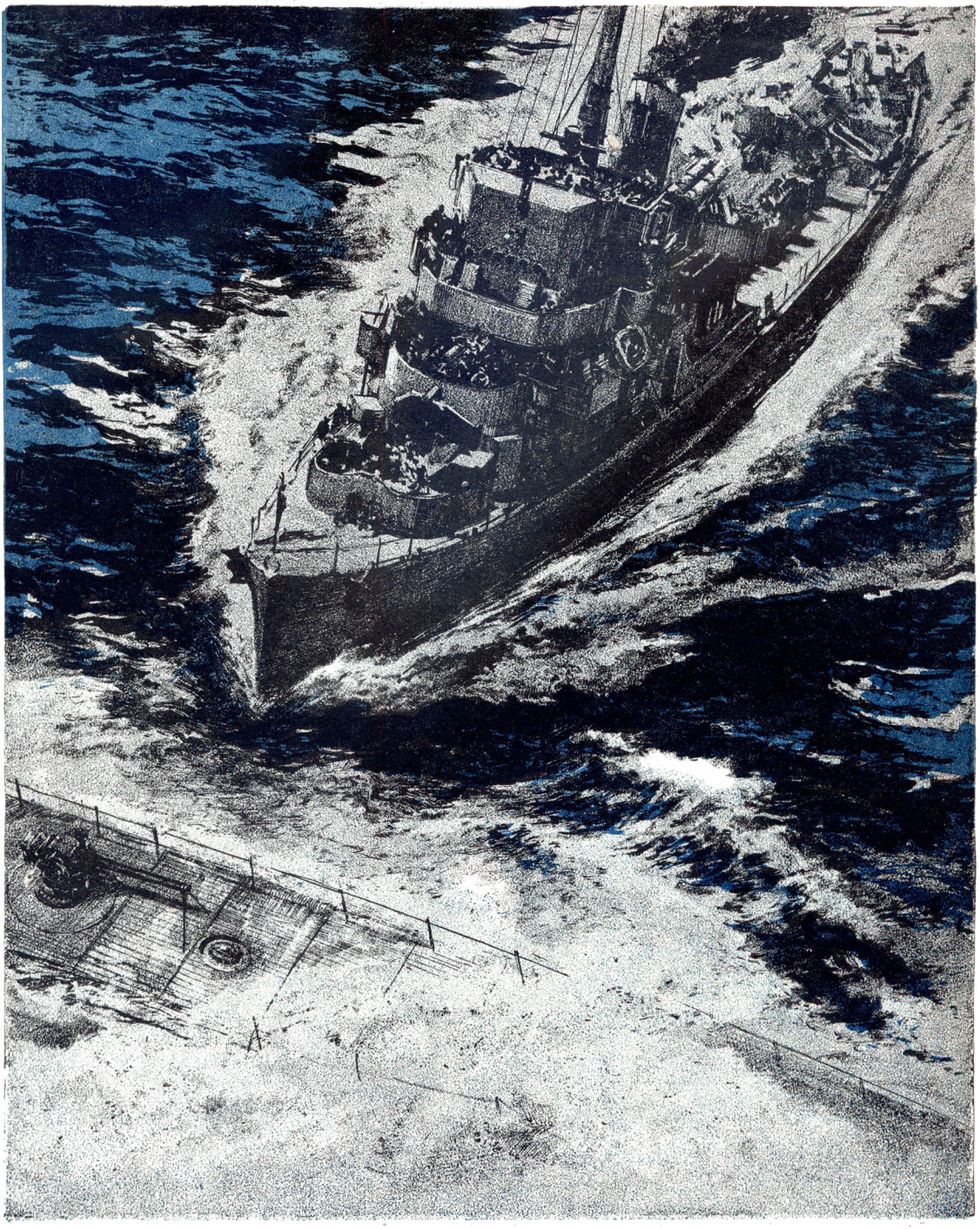
In situations like this, with two anti-submarine vessels against one submarine, it was sometimes arranged that one ship would collect all the sonar information while the other one made the attack. It had the advantage that the submarine didn't know when the attack was coming, but it required the closest coördination between the two surface vessels. The attacking ship crept in at slow and silent speed, with sonar silent, while the assisting ship did all the pinging.

"It's a tough plotting problem, though," the Captain added. "Only Neal has had experience at it, and I need him in the sound-room."

"We'll try it," Blane decided. "I'll run the plot. CIC used to be my old battle station during the war." For some time he had felt like a fifth wheel, watching Gibson and Neal struggle with the attack, while he strove valiantly to keep from interfering. A few terse instructions were given over TBS to *Dodger,* and they were ready.

The Commodore ran the plot in Combat Information Center, taking sonar ranges and bearings on the submarine as Neal relayed them up to him from the sound-room, and radar ranges and bearings on *Dodger* as she crept in to attack. With these he plotted the position of all three ships, and sent out to *Dodger* by voice radio the ranges and the course she had to steer to the dropping-point. It kept him busy, doing by hand a more complicated job than the sound-room had been doing with their mechanical aids.

He found that he had lost most of his old skill of doing three things at once with two hands, listening to the reports coming in, and simultaneously keeping a flow of information going out to *Dodger* over the microphone.



But once again he was the nerve center of the attack.

It wasn't surprising that they missed on the first attack. There were plenty of chances for error, Blane thought.

"They are zigzagging down there at two hundred feet," he said, unconsciously speaking aloud. "If she turns away just before they drop, my hand methods of plotting are too slow to catch her at it. We miss with the whole pattern."

Stockton never lost contact this new way, and *Dodger* made a wide sweep at slow speed, to come in again for a new attack. The submarine evidently couldn't figure out why the sonar ship kept such a safe and respectful distance.

The submarine commander must be puzzled by the new tactics. END

Blane went on plotting. To him also, it became a problem of pips and lights and lines upon a chart. At the critical moment he muttered to himself: "She zigged away again. I'm sure of it." And then without thinking of the illogic of his action, he held his fire beyond the instant of the plot solution. He closed his eyes and counted rapidly to the magic number seven before he shouted into the radio microphone, the order: "Fire."

Until *Dodger* could turn and come in again, there was no use plotting data and sending out vectors for her to steer. For a moment there was nothing for Blane to do. He leaned over the plotting-board and cursed himself for a fool. The very thing for which he had criticized Neal: Playing hunches! He deliberated on whether or not to confess to Gibson. The Captain couldn't very well eat him out as he had Neal, but for the moment he wished he could—and would.

SUDDENLY he felt a thud of an explosion. The impact of still another detonation struck *Stockton's* hull.

"You got him, Commodore. You got him," Neal's voice came jubilantly over the battle phone.

Stockton raced toward the area of the detonation. The sound-room was now directing the attack, and Blane climbed back up on the bridge. As *Stockton* passed through the critical water, she erupted depth charges from both sides and raced on. *Dodger* was turning to come in again, and the *boom! boom! boom! boom!* of *Stockton's* exploding depth charges seemed to emphasize the urgency of their maneuvers.

For a while they lost sonar contact in a sea of seething wakes and boiling explosion swirls. *Stockton* was first to regain it. As she cleared away and came down again on another run, the stricken submarine suddenly emerged on her port bow.

"Left rudder. Stand by to ram!" Gibson shouted.

Blane watched the submarine's hull grow out of the water before *Stockton's* rushing forefoot. He saw a man struggle through the enemy's conning-tower hatch. Strange that this monster should be inhabited by human beings! The shock of collision threw him in a huddle of loose gear and broken instruments against the sound hut.

When he struggled to his feet again, he saw that the destroyer had ridden over the submarine just abaft the conning tower. The two hulls were locked together in an embrace of twisted steel; the submarine grinding and crushing the destroyer's bow, the destroyer relentlessly bearing down on her enemy.

The conning tower projected out on *Stockton's* starboard bow. From it a dark figure trained a spitting machine-gun along the destroyer's deck. Behind this lonely stalwart, another figure heaved up out of the grotesque and battered hull—another and another.

"Repel boarders! Repel boarders!" Blane shouted as he recognized their desperate intent.

The submariners were working now toward *Stockton's* forecastle under the protective hail of machine-gun bullets. The bullets spattered through the bridge structure and sang of swift hate through the rigging. The destroyer's guns could not depress enough to reach the submarine. They raised upon the sterile sea a crop of angry futile splashes.

"All back, all back full," Gibson gave the order.

The machine-gunner on the submarine went down to some missile that had found its way into desperate hands. The hedgehog crew rallied from behind their shield to meet the boarders with clubs and fists and wrenches. White water from the frantic screws welled up along *Stockton's* side. The locked hulls ground together more violently, then lurched and broke apart. The guns, *Stockton's* guns, found their target in a continuous hail of shells and bullets. *Dodger* stood impotently by, unable to fire into that close knot of desperate antagonists.

As *Stockton* broke clear, she kept up a rain of gunfire. *Dodger's* gun joined in the slaughter. The submarine had been pulled around by the violence of their uncoupling, and the two antagonists were bow to bow in the final moment of their battle, while the distance opened out rapidly as *Stockton* backed away.

The submarine had a short time to live in that hail of exploding shells. But she had one last powerful blow to deliver before she rolled over and went down. Somewhere beneath that deck swept clear by gunfire, some one had found an opportunity to fire her torpedoes. They probably were unaimed, but *Stockton* was a sitting duck as target. A torpedo caught her aft, and in her crippled condition there was nothing she could do but take it.

BLANE heard the shout, *"Torpedo!"* and then it seemed the world exploded all around him. He was lifted violently off his feet, and when he was slammed down on deck again, it seemed all the lights in the world had gone out. For an instant he thought he had been stricken blind, for suddenly it was black night. Around him all was dark with smoke, black acrid smoke, and through it rained a black ugly rain of oil, showering on *Stockton* from skies that only a few feet away were bright summer still. The heavier débris blown upward from the wreck amidships came thundering down. It was miraculous that anyone could be left alive.

"All hands abandon ship. All hands abandon ship," he heard Gibson give the order. For an instant he tried to protest, and then he felt a sickening lurch, and briefly saw the wreckage amidships. It was only a minute before the ship itself would abandon the surface of the sea.

HARRY GIBSON never quite knew how he himself got into the water after he gave the order. There was no one left on the bridge, he was sure. He was conscious of trying to fulfill the tradition of being the last man off the ship, but the oil was in his eyes, and covered his body; oil covered the sea and everything that was in it, and he couldn't be sure what was happening anywhere except right around him. He remembered the sharks when he found himself swimming, and he wondered if the oil would keep them at a distance. He floundered near a rubber boat, and someone helped him slide into it. As he wiped the oil from his eyes, he saw other rubber boats picking up survivors. It was wonderful that so many of *Stockton's* men had survived the holocaust. He started to organize the work of rescue. He recognized Neal beneath a disguise of oil, as they picked him up. Neal recognized the Captain in return.

"She worked like clockwork, Captain," said Neal in irrepressible enthusiasm. Gibson looked back at *Stockton* as she lay stricken and sinking. To leeward spread a pool of her black oil lifeblood. The stack lay canted at a drunken angle. His first command! He loved that ship. Through the cruel wound in her side the insatiate sea washed in and out. She was settling rapidly.

"Yes, yes," he agreed. "She was wonderful."

"But you're right about not hedging results by last-minute hunches," Neal went on.

It took Gibson a moment to realize that Neal was talking about his sound-room. It was *Stockton* that was wonderful to the Captain, and her sonar was only a small part of the miraculous whole that was ever greater than the sum of all its parts.

Someone spotted the Commodore in the water. They paddled the rubber boat toward him.

"I wish that I'd been born a girl baby and never strayed so far from home," Commander Blane complained as he climbed into the rubber boat.

BASSARIS

LITTLE KNOWN OUTSIDE HIS NATIVE CALIFORNIA, HE HAS AN ADVENTUROUS LIFE IN THE TREETOPS

by VANCE HOYT

A WEIRD and querulous cry shattered the deep silence of coming dawn. It floated through the gloomy shadows of the forest like the haunting scream of some ghostly beast.

The small creature that uttered the fierce but pathetic appeal was as singular in appearance as was his summons. Known as the bassaris, he inhabits the South and Far West. Seemingly he is three creatures in one, for the bassaris has the face and ears of a fox, the ringed tail of a raccoon, and the graceful, slender body of a pine marten. Often he is called the ringtail cat, or civet cat, or raccoon fox, or the cacomistle of Mexico. But Bassaris is his real name. . . .

For two nights Bassaris had felt the pangs of a great loneliness. He had wandered far and wide in search of his missing mate. His yearning call, however, had brought no answer from Bassaria, the vixen and mother of their four hungry cubs.

But suddenly, as he paused at the edge of a small meadow and again voiced his weird cry, a faint sound came to him.

Moving with astonishing agility, Bassaris soon reached a tree from which swung an object high above the ground.

Bassaris, of course, had no way of knowing that this was a trap that hung suspended at the end of a rope. He only knew that his mate had answered him, and that somehow she was concealed in the swaying object and was struggling to get out.

Although it was a situation he had never before confronted, Bassaris was not of a tribe that would recognize defeat. With his long black-and-white ringed tail fluffed and arched like that of a fox, he literally ran up the bole of the tree and gingerly moved out on the limb to where the rope was tied.

For a space he looked down at the box trap, swaying and tilting from the

A great owl bore away one of the cubs. There was no opportunity to prevent the disaster.

frantic efforts of his mate to escape. Then he carefully backed down the rope, clinging to the hemp with his long sharp claws.

The struggle within ceased immediately. A low, desperate bark greeted his presence. In reply, Bassaris answered with a soft tender note that sounded for all the world like the twitter of some bird.

Now certain that it was his mate, Bassaris attacked the box with the might of his sharp teeth and claws like something suddenly gone mad. Frantically he tore at the wooden structure until he finally cut through the roof to a tin lining. But that was as far as he could go. Seemingly all his efforts had suddenly come to nothing.

STILL he did not give up. In his desperation, he began to gnaw at the rope, although there was no thought in his mind that the act might prove a solution to his troubles. Bassaris was simply tearing away at everything that was in sight without clear reasoning.

With his needlelike teeth he unexpectedly severed the rope, and he and the box dropped to the ground with a frightful crash. The next instant he saw his mate scamper away through the brush as the door of the trap slid open from the impact.

Bassaris quickly overtook her, and they hurried off through the woods, thrilling to the company of each other. Coming to a spring of snow water, Bassaria quenched her thirst. Then they directed their course toward the den, the hollow of a large sugar pine.

But, ever-cautious as they neared the den, they left the ground and took to the roof of the forest. Running out upon the limb-tips of the trees, they leaped from one to the other with almost the aërial skill of flying squirrels. The sun was breaking in the east when they reached the hollow pine.

As they ran along the great limb below the entrance of their lair, wee noises of glee issued from the cavity and four tiny faces peered out at them. . . .

Bassaris and his mate did not stir in their snug lair until long after nightfall. Nor would they have awakened then if some sound had not startled them.

The foxy face of Bassaris peeped out, and his large-pupiled eyes surveyed the floor of the forest beneath him. Instantly they held fixed on the forms of two creatures moving about the butt of the tree.

One of them was Shee-gawk, the little spotted skunk; the other was a large porcupine, who was rattling his dry quills in rhythm to the carpentry of his chiseling teeth.

As he gnawed away at the bark of the pine, old Porky prevented the skunk from climbing the tree. An energetic but calm beast, he was making the chips fly, seemingly taking no notice of the skunk's presence. However, it was apparent that each time Shee-gawk attempted to mount the tree, the crafty old fellow moved around directly above the intruder.

Neither was a beast of aggression. The weapon of each was entirely that of defense.

Hissing and spitting like a cat, Bassaris charged down the trunk of the pine to a short distance above the porcupine. But there he discreetly stopped, for he well knew the danger of porcupine quills.

Old Porky, however, kept right on gnawing at the bark of the tree. The only evidence of irritation he evinced was to raise his quills like rattling sabers whenever the ring-tailed cat approached too near for comfort. Nor did he cease his chiseling until daylight, by which time he had completely cut a ring around the tree, sealing its doom.

Shee-gawk had long since left the scene in favor of other localities more to his liking. But Bassaris did not desert his stand in defense of his home.

Although Porky came back that night to his task of cutting deeper into the trunk of the pine, Bassaris was forced by hunger to go in search of food, his mate remaining in the den to protect their young. But before the moon had risen he was back with the carcass of a large woodchuck.

By this time old Porky had deserted the ring he was chiseling around the tree and began slowly to eat his way up the bole. More furious than ever, Bassaris charged the gnawer. But his efforts availed him nothing. Serene and self-confident in his armor of quills, the porcupine kept right on moving up nearer to the den, and the precious young.

Once more sunrise put a stop to his carpentry. And he went grunting off to his lair for the day, tired but filled with the sweet juice of the tender cambium of the conifer. Nor did he return that night, much to the relief of Bassaris and his mate.

IT was long past time for the cubs to leave their hollow tree and become worldly-wise. So, in company with their parents, four small ring-tailed creatures moved out on the great limb below the entrance to their den.

Clinging to the bark of the limb with their sharp claws, the cubs began to play. Height meant nothing to them, for these furry wildlings were arboreal creatures. Thus they scampered about among the branches of the pines, thereby strengthening their growing bodies and acquiring the cunning ways of their parents.

Then suddenly tragedy was upon them. A swish of wings, a muffled scream, and a great horned owl, large as an eagle, swept down through the topmost branches of the pine and bore away in its talons one of the cubs that had ventured too far from the protection of the vixen.

The deed was performed so quickly that there was no opportunity for either parent to prevent the disaster. But the unhappy lesson did not go unheeded.

The next night, when the horned owl returned for another feast and sat perched on the top branches of a dead cedar near by, blinking great eyes and clacking his beak hungrily, Bassaris and his mate did not take their cubs out on the great limb.

Besides, their troublesome enemy old Porky had returned to his work of slowly but surely severing the foundation of their home.

But old Porky was a rather stupid creature. Relying entirely upon the protection of his deadly coat of quills, he feared no enemy, no matter how large or well-armed with teeth or claws. He was so confident in his powers for defense, that he did not even heed the loud clacking sound that came from the top of the near-by cedar.

THEN the thing happened, with almost the speed of a darting wasp. A humming of pinions whined like taut wires. The next instant the porcupine leaped into the air as if he had suddenly sprouted wings.

Even then old Porky held to the infallibility of his armor as he flayed the great bird with his quilled tail. However, the virtues of his defense only hastened his complete undoing. With a scream of pain, the huge owl released his talons, and Porky fell to his doom.

Yet even as the owl dealt destruction, he likewise met his own fate. Several of the long quills from the porcupine's lashing tail had been driven deeply into the breast of the killer—and he who lived by claw and beak followed his prey to earth, never to rise again.

For a long time Bassaris and his mate stared with unblinking eyes into the moonlit sky where their enemies had suddenly vanished. But they possessed no means by which they could fathom the inscrutable ways of the wild. They only knew that old Porky and the horned owl would never return to threaten the lives of their three remaining cubs.

Bosses of the

A TUG dispatcher is a busy man who sits high in a Battery skyscraper and plays chess with a score or more of tugs scattered over a board that embraces the 421 square miles of the New York harbor area, the biggest harbor in the world.

He tells 'em where to go, what to do. He does this in an interesting variety of ways, including some plain and fancy hollering.

His chessmen are tugs. From the shore they don't look very large. Yet they are the bosses of the harbor. They are built on the same general lines as a video wrestler, squatty and not precisely lovely in appearance. Nearly five hundred of them are needed to handle the diversified shipping in the biggest and busiest harbor of them all.

They are expensive items, costing as much as seven hundred thousand dollars a copy, and may be muscled with over two thousand horsepower.

The Diesel engine is playing a major rôle as a propulsion unit for modern tugs. The Diesel engine alone, however, has not been entirely successful. The Diesel-electric is a more complicated and expensive type of drive, but it is the answer to a tug captain's prayer. The final drive is through a motor; in backing and filling, the man at the wheel has at his command a choice of twelve speeds, fore and aft. This gives the tug a greater agility, a graduated push and pull that is instantly available when and where it is needed. The controls are right at the fingertips of the skipper—no bells to ring to advise the engineer what is needed. One tug company, a pioneer in the field, now has thirty-six Diesel-electric tugs under their flag—and more are being added.

They push and pull the shipping of the world, ranging from rusty tramp freighters to the sleek, lush and regal beauty of the two *Queens*. Without their strength and agility, the big and little ships would be almost helpless in the thick harbor traffic, especially in the delicate problem of maneuvering in close quarters, so essential in parking a ship in a narrow berth. Parking a big ship or getting it out of dock isn't an easy task. It's no job for an amateur to tackle and it's one that is almost impossible for a large ship to accomplish alone.

The hollering is out of this world. Tug companies have offices strategically located high in the tall buildings facing the waterfront, usually in the Battery. There are usually two dispatchers, casual fellows with a sense of humor, a gift for salty repartee and an air of knowing their business. There's a girl at a busy switchboard,

THEY PUSH AND PULL THE SHIPPING IN THE WORLD'S GREATEST HARBOR; AND THE HOLLERING FROM THE WATERFRONT OFFICES IS REALLY SOMETHING SPECIAL.

by HARRY BOTSFORD

Harbor

a noisy, crackling short-wave radio receiving and sending set, a pair of outsized megaphones and a huge detailed map of the sprawling harbor area.

Shore-to-ship radio is expensive to operate, as the charges are based on the number of calls made and length of time involved in the conversation. Tug companies are canny, and smartly frugal when it comes to unnecessary spending. Consequently their dispatchers rely heavily on the holler system in communicating with the fleet of tugs under their direction.

THESE men have sharp eyes. When one of their tugs looms out of the harbor murk and mist, the dispatcher grabs a megaphone, leans out of the window and cuts loose. At the source, the voice isn't loud or even penetrating, but it lances cleanly through the roar and clatter of West Street traffic, across a medley of harbor noises and manages to reach its destination. It's a great performance, this long-distance hollering, and there are probably less than a score of dispatchers who can do it well. I've been on the receiving end, in the wheelhouse of dozens of tugs. I've heard the skippers get their orders, *viva voce* and then have seen them signal an O.K. To me, the shore-to-ship message was only a blur of confused sound and sheer gibberish. But the skipper understood, knew exactly the character of the next job, where it was located and what was to be done.

Tug skippers are a race apart. They know the 421 square miles of harbor area as a farmer knows his barnyard. Failure to know these waters is to court disaster in a major and most expensive degree. The area in which their cocky, bustling craft function contains the trickiest deep water in the world. The currents shift and change with the tides. Each stretch of water has peculiarities that change with amazing rapidity at different times of the day. A tug skipper must have these factors catalogued and mentally filed. If he is towing or pushing a big ship, he must know how to control the speed of his engines to exert the proper degree of push or pull that will effectively and safely move the big ship. He must anticipate every possible contingency. If he errs, the fate of several million dollars' worth of ship is in the balance. If the ship is damaged, if the fault is his, his company is liable. One single mistake, and the pilot may be forced to retire to the deadly monotony of shore duty.

A tug skipper has to spend a long apprenticeship before he has the knowledge and experience sufficient to merit the treasured Pilot's License, the sheepskin of his profession. One mistake can cost him that valuable document. He can't afford to second-guess.

The powerful low-slung ship under his command is built to push and pull, to scuttle like a frightened water-bug from one job to the next. A waterfront poet once came up with a definition of a tug, one that is often found posted in towboat offices:

I push, I pull—
I pant and chug
I'm nothing but
A dirty tug.

The poesy is a partial libel. Tugs are not dirty. Even the boiler-room is clean; the engineer babies his engines, keeps them as immaculate as machinery can be kept.

The cook takes special pride in keeping the galley cleaner than most kitchens. Of the seven-man crew on an average tug, the cook ranks as a VIP—a very important person. In between meals, it's his job to see that there is an abundance of hot, strong coffee available, to keep a platter filled with thick and tasty sandwiches. Salt water generates tremendous appetites—and he cooks accordingly.

Dinner starts soon after eleven in the morning. The men eat when they can temporarily get away from their duties. The only time the entire crew sits down to the table covered with a clean, red-checked cloth, is when the tug is docked, waiting for orders—which isn't often. The men eat silently; the white-aproned cook stands attentively in the galley door, anxious to see if the men like what he has prepared. Or, if there are any complaints, or service dishes to refill.

A typical dinner is a meager collection of roast beef, tender and juicy, with a big bowl of thick brown gravy, mashed potatoes lashed with butter, corn on the cob, cole slaw, sliced tomatoes, crusty French bread, coffee and a huge peach shortcake: A good meal, superlatively cooked. A left-handed and inept cook is an abomination. Give a tug a deft and experienced cook and labor turnover shrinks to a mere nothing. A good cook is always in demand; he is forgiven casual derelictions, such as being drunk and disorderly, fighting with friends or strangers. He's worth keeping. He is also worth the generous wage he is paid.

Strangely enough, the two firemen, who obviously do most of the manual work on a tug, are often dainty, choosy eaters, contenting themselves with moderate seconds on everything. The skipper and mate, however, are the real trenchermen. After two heaping plates of assorted calories, they really settle down to a job of memorable catch-as-catch-can eating.

THE atmosphere on a tug is highly informal. The crew knows who is boss. They may be on a first-name basis with the skipper and mate, but when an order is issued, they jump to it. As a rule, however, they know what the order will be and are ready to execute it quickly and well.

Horsing a twenty-five-thousand-ton ship out of dock, aiming it down-harbor toward blue water, is a sweet and unhurried job of coördination between three tugs. They converge easily on the ship; hawsers come overboard and the deck hands grab them and expertly make them fast around the bitts. The skipper of one tug climbs aboard the big ship, repairs to the bridge and takes command. Until he leaves, he is the supreme boss of the project and not even the ship's captain outranks him.

He signals nonchalantly; a tug whistle shrills briefly. In the wheelhouses bells jingle telling the engineers what is wanted. A tug's steering-wheel spins; the engines drum and strain as the lines become taut. Slowly the inertia of the great towering mass of steel is whipped. The hulk stirs lazily, obeying the pull of one powerful tug, the imperative push of another, the gentle but firm nudge of a third. The ship slowly, majestically eases out of dock and into the harbor traffic. Beside her, the tugs appear tiny, almost insignificant, like terrier puppies worrying a mastodon. But, every foot of the way, the tugs hold this great ship in complete and obedient control. The skipper scrambles down a ladder, lines are cast off, one of the tugs toots a good-by and the big ship is on her own, headed for blue water and some far-away port.

Some of the tugs working in the harbor today have exciting and impressive war records. A few of them went overseas to the wars. They towed sections of a gigantic drydock big enough to float a modern battleship—right into the fighting zones of the Pacific. They got through Jap sub packs, eluded Jap planes, delivered their bulky consignment safely. The drydocks were quickly assembled, put into service. The Japs never did understand how it was possible for us to repair our combat ships so quickly.

When D-Day rolled around, the major rôle for several exciting days was played by a cast of hundreds of tugs under the command of Captain Edward J. Moran, a New York tugboat expert. His job was to tow huge sections of portable docks and harbors across the Channel, place them precisely in place. It was a tough job; there were mines, attacks from air and sea, fire from land batteries. But Moran coolly completed his job—so satisfactorily that he was decorated, promoted and praised and otherwise honored. They learn to do things in the New York harbor area and Moran, who comes from a tug-boat family, simply put his practical knowledge to work on what has been characterized as the largest and most critical towing project the world has ever known.

DRAMA—raw, exciting, colorful—is often the daily diet of the tug operators. Always, because of the nature of things, it is unexpected. Last October, a frantic S.O.S. from the French liner *Caen* reported extreme difficulty. The big ship had been lurching heavily through enormous Atlantic swells, about 150 miles from Ambrose lightship. There had been a sudden and savage jar and the ship slowed, stopped, rolled helplessly in the midst of a stormy, relentless sea. The propeller had struck some submerged and solid object and the great and valuable ship was helpless.

A sturdy little Diesel-electric tug, manned by men who knew the tricks

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

On a tug, the cook ranks as a VIP—a very important person.

of ocean towing, started for the damaged ship. At times the mountainous waves threatened to sink the tug. Several times they had to heave-to in the sixty-mile gale. But there was no thought of turning back.

Arrived on the scene, it was found that the U. S. Coast Guard Cutter *Campbell* had already come to the rescue of the *Caen*. After great difficulties, a towing hawser had secured the two vessels, but under strain the hawser snapped like a piece of twine.

The little tug became boss of the situation, but an unexpected difficulty arose. Putting a hawser aboard a tossing, rolling, pitching ship is a task that calls for complete coördination at source and destination. No one on the *Marion Moran* could speak French. There was no member of the crew of the *Caen* who could speak English. Fortunately, there was a linguist on the Coast Guard vessel who could speak French. There ensued a three-way relay that is probably unique in sea annals. The hawser was finally put aboard and the *Marion Moran* started for the safety and shelter of the New York harbor area. The speed was a bare 4½ knots; the storm continued unabated in its fury. Twice, destination was changed. Eventually, however, the tug proudly brought its tow into the Chester, Pa., docks—one hundred eighty miles, through tempestuous seas, plus seventy-five miles of upriver towing. The ship safely in dock, the *Marion Moran* refueled, strutted down the river and back to New York—mission accomplished.

ANYTHING can and does happen in the tow-boat business. Last May a million-gallon gasoline tank on the Cleveland waterfront sprung a leak and soon the surface of the Cuyahoga River for a considerable area was covered with gasoline. A single spark would ignite the gasoline—and immediately set off stock tanks of petroleum products in the area—tanks that contained an estimated 100,000,000 gallons of inflammable products.

For a dramatic interval, the fate of the big city was in the balance. A single spark would generate an explosion that could cause millions of dollars of damage, an incalculable loss of life. The police and fire departments of the city were helpless; the Coast Guard couldn't think of a thing that could be done. Men sweated and swore. . . . The gasoline in the leaking tank must be removed or the menace would become a stark, tragic reality. Local vessels were coal-burning—and their open fireboxes would have ignited the volatile fluid. Across the river, a Diesel-electric tug was docked. It was from New York—frantic telephone messages reached the tug's headquarters on the Battery. The crew and skipper said they were willing to take a chance that they would not be burned to a crisp. They were given an O.K. on the hazardous venture.

Cautiously, the little tug plowed through the choking gasoline fumes, towing a barge. At any second a spark from a motor vehicle or some other source might start a destructive explosion. The tug reached the leaking tank and calmly piped twenty thousand barrels of gasoline into the barge and towed it safely away. Most of the citizens of Cleveland do not know to this day how close their downtown sector came to utter destruction, nor that it was saved only because of a valiant tug crew, accustomed to taking chances. . . . Raw courage, a capacity to weigh chances, the ability to guess correctly—these are qualities that characterize the tugboat folks.

It's a great performance, this long-distance hollering, and there are probably less than a score of dispatchers who can do it well.

OWNERSHIP of tugs in the New York harbor is largely vested in several families. One generation teaches another its lore; it instills in each generation a fierce affection and a high respect for the tow-boat business. They raise and train their own brains. They are proud of this fact, but they are conservative folk, not given to boasting.

Otherwise, they could merely ask their dispatchers to do something about it, and those solid and capable gents would pick up their megaphones and tell the world in clear and unmistakable words that the tugs are the bosses of the big harbor, that they can handle anything that will float. If in a lyric mood, they might quote the unknown poet laureate of the harbor:

Into their berths
With a push and a pull
I nestle along
The curve of their hull.

With a belch of smoke
And a flirt of heel
I slide along
The line of their keel.

A toot of my whistle
A ring of my bell
And I'm off like a regular
What-the-hell.

PTARMIGAN 72

Our planes fly to the North Pole and back as a routine, these days—to report on the weather! It's a rather special flight, however, and civilians are not allowed aboard.

by C. B. COLBY *Illustrated by* CLAYTON KNIGHT

IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM of a giant hangar at Ladd Air Force Base, Alaska, a group of young American airmen are waiting. They look and talk like U.S.A.F. men anywhere; but they are marked men with a mission: Tomorrow morning they leave for the North Pole. If they are lucky they will return across the thousands of square miles of open water and drifting ice-floes between here and the top of the world. The nearest living thing will be either straight down—through twenty feet of sea ice—or a thousand miles over the horizon.

It took Admiral Robert Peary nearly twenty years to realize his ambition to reach the Pole, back in 1909. These youngsters will be back "home" tomorrow evening.

All members of the 375th Reconnaissance Squadron (Very Long Range) Weather, they and their colleagues make flights to the North Pole and back several times a week the year around. Their mission: to gather and disseminate weather information as they fly. The project is called "Ptarmigan." The personnel of the project who reach the Pole, are "Pole Vaulters." Briefing for tomorrow's mission, Ptarmigan 72, gets under way.

The young blond lieutenant tamps out his cigarette and drops it accurately into the cut-down fruit-juice can beside his folding chair. Picking up some papers, he walks to the speaker's small desk and turns to face a dozen or so other young men.

Conversation and chair-scraping on the concrete floor dies to an occasional muffled cough as Lt. David Laughman begins to call the roll:

"Lieutenant Hess?"

"Here!"

"Lieutenant Risovi?"

"Here!"

"Lieutenant Steinbrenner?"

"Yo!"

Lieutenant Laughman completes and checks the list. "Well, we're going to try Ptarmigan 72," he announces.

One of the chairs creaks as the occupant shifts his weight. "I wish you wouldn't always say, 'Well, we're going to *try* it,' Lieutenant!"

"O.K., we're going to fly it!" Laughman corrects good-naturedly with a grin. "The procedure will be as usual: No article of civilian clothing whatever will be worn on the mission. Take-off will be at five o'clock tomorrow morning. Breakfast at three at the usual mess. There will be transportation at the gate for those living off the base. . . . Sergeant Huntley, are your engines all set for take-off?"

"Yes, sir, all but Number Two, and that is getting a final checking right now, sir."

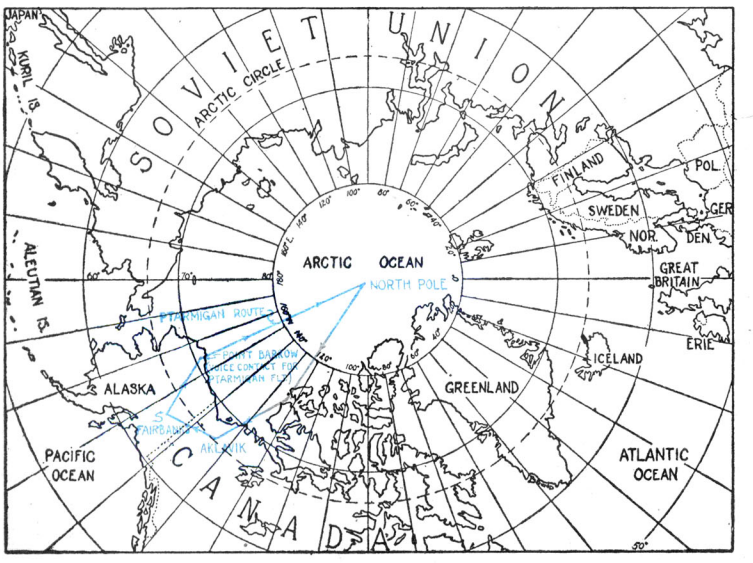
"Roger. Thank you. Lieutenant Thompson, you will be in charge of the aft compartment and will be the last to leave in event of a crash-landing and the last to bail out if we use chutes. There will be an extra one up front and another aft in case someone happens to be in either compartment without his own. Keep your personal equipment near you.

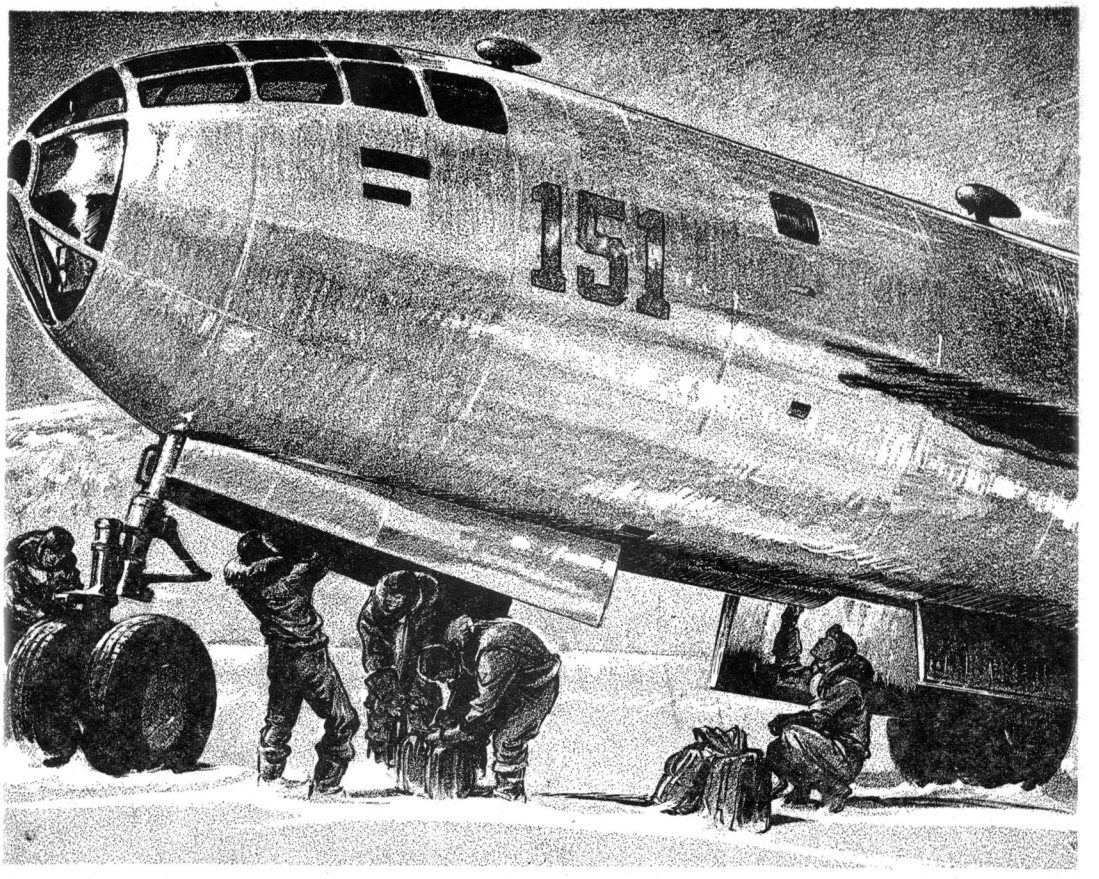
"We'll fly at eighteen thousand feet the entire mission and will pressurize" (cabin compartments maintained at lower-altitude pressure for crew comfort). "Plenty of oxygen aboard, so if you should feel bad turn the valve to one hundred percent if you wish. If any of you have colds or ear trouble, be sure to let the engineer know so that he can warn you ahead of time if we have to depressurize. I want you all to keep on the intercom all the time. That's important.

"P-80s and 51s may vector on us sometime during the flight. Report them as soon as you spot them. Don't let any of those jokers get in on you without being spotted. Other planes will be over the area, so keep an eye out for them and report them immediately.

"Take-off weight will be 131,500 pounds. We will have plenty of fuel for the trip—as usual. . . . Lieutenant Risovi, may we have your report?"

The big chap with the cigar and unruly hair lifts his bulky frame from the folding chair and saunters to the front of the room. The mission is outlined in string on the colored wall map. He ponders the route a moment, looks solemnly at his cigar stub.





Lieutenant Laughman personally inspects 151's exterior. "Dave" leaves nothing to someone else's memory.

"We'll have high strato" (clouds) "for take-off and some low cumulus clouds to Barrow with some high strato on top. There will be clouds here, and here, and probably a 'high' here and a 'low' here"—jabbing his cigar at points along the route.

"It will be mostly overcast at the Pole," he continues, "but we may find some holes by the time we get there. I'll have a later report before take-off but it looks like a good ride all the way around—for once. No trouble," he concludes, and goes back to his seat, relighting his cigar.

Lieutenant Laughman continues the briefing. Ptarmigan 72 is beginning to roll.

THE story behind these Ptarmigan flights is a saga of men and aircraft pitted against the most cruel and treacherous weather and terrain on the globe. It is all directed at one goal—filling in some gaping holes in the weather map, that scientific crystal ball which predicts what weather America may expect for next week's (or month's) harvests, shipping, military operations, and even for family summer picnics.

From reports flashed by hundreds of weather stations all over the continent, tomorrow's weather is forecast, but with each step north, it becomes more difficult to erect and maintain these tiny bases and their complex equipment. In the vast area between Alaska and the Pole—"the birthplace of the world's weather"—it is impossible to establish such weather-eye posts on the shifting ice floes blanketing the Arctic Ocean. Impossible, that is—or was, until the United States Air Force's Air Weather Service tackled the problem.

Headed up by Brigadier General Donald N. Yates (he set the date for the Normandy invasion), this organization decided if such outposts could not be maintained on the ground they would have to take to the air to do it. The 375th Reconnaissance (VLR) Weather, commanded by Col. Karl T. Rauk, was given the job of running those airborne weather stations.

Col. Rauk carefully selected a crew of experienced specialists. And great care was needed, for these non-stop Polar loops are challenges that must be met successfully every time. A downed aircraft would make the proverbial "needle in a haystack" stand out like a neon sign on a dark night by comparison.

EACH member of the "Pole Vaulters' " several teams is a veteran at his particular chore. Pilots and navigators in particular are skilled in flying four-engined aircraft on long, trackless, and usually instrument-weather missions. As well as the ability to twist the knobs on an automatic pilot, resourcefulness must be part of their proven background and make-up. And it is; for example:

Lieutenant David Laughman, Jr., skipper of Ptarmigan 72, has read and studied every report of Arctic flying, ice-cap landing, and Polar survival ever published. He has made a careful study of all angles of setting down a B-29 on the ice-cap. He does not

The ice-cracks run in fantastic patterns; one can pick out grotesque faces or the silhouette of one's home State.

laugh off the dangers of such a landing, but neither is he frightened at the prospect. For the landing would be "cushioned" by a vast amount of knowledge learned the hard way by others before him.

So far no serious emergencies have marked the quarter of a million miles clocked off by Ptarmigan flights since the first one reached the Pole March 17, 1947. You can bank on the "Pole Vaulters." They take no chances on "chance!"

AFTER the briefing, crew members pick up their gear and hop a weapons-carrier down the line to where a Boeing 151 squats on the concrete. With her tall tail painted bright red and her red wingtips (for easy spotting if down on the white ice-cap), she is a member of the exclusive family of converted B-29 Superforts used by the 375th. Members of the squadron have great faith in its mechanics. They are the best in the business.

The pilots, weather officer, navigators, engineer and radio men tote their equipment to the nose of the ship and pass it up through the hatch behind the nose wheel. The rest of the crew climb the little ladder on the starboard side of the aft compartment.

His gear stowed, Lieutenant Laughman drops back down through the nose hatch and personally inspects 151's exterior. "Dave" leaves nothing to someone else's memory. He pokes into recesses in the landing-gear wells, runs exploring fingers around the landing-gear struts for a trace of leaking hydraulic fluid, and looks at the tires.

Huge multi-wheeled tank trucks back under the wings of 151 and begin pumping eighty-five hundred gallons of high-test gasoline into wing and auxiliary bomb-bay tanks.

Gear stowed, fuel in, all instruments checked and rechecked, the crew members drift away. About twelve hours till breakfast. . . . The sun dips slightly below the range of hills to the north. It never gets dark here at this time of the year.

Breakfast is routine.

Back down the long concrete apron to 151, now undergoing last-minute preening before take-off. The crew toss their parkas and hand gear up into the belly hatches of the ship. Lieutenant Roger Thompson wears a wicked-looking Smith & Wesson .38 special revolver and a full cartridge belt over his heavy flying-suit. ("I never had to use it and I don't want to!")

Everything checks—crew aboard, ladders stowed, hatches sealed. The bomb-bays suddenly thump shut. A mechanic trots out before the left wing, a CC-2 fire extinguisher rolling behind him. He holds up one finger. Engine Number One sluggishly turns its prop in a sort of half-awake gesture. Once more it twists—a leap ahead—a half turn in slow motion. With a great belch of smothering blue-and-white smoke, it leaps into action. The smoke-cloud disappears into tattered shreds. Two fingers held high and Number Two engine stutters into life. Three and Four follow quickly on the right wing.

Four-thirty-five. The aircraft strains at chocks and brakes; 151 is ready for the runway.

The skipper's hand waves and mechanics drag away the chocks about the wheels. Ptarmigan 72 moves toward the runway. At the downwind end, 151 swings into position. The intercom speaks crisply:

"Pilot to Lieut. Thompson. Ready for take-off?"

"Thompson to pilot. Aft compartment secured. Personnel in semi-crash positions for take-off."

"Roger." Then over the radio: *"Air Force one-five-one to Ladd Tower. Ready for take-off."*

"Ladd Tower to Air Force one-five-one. Cleared for take-off. Wind zero."

"Roger. Thank you."

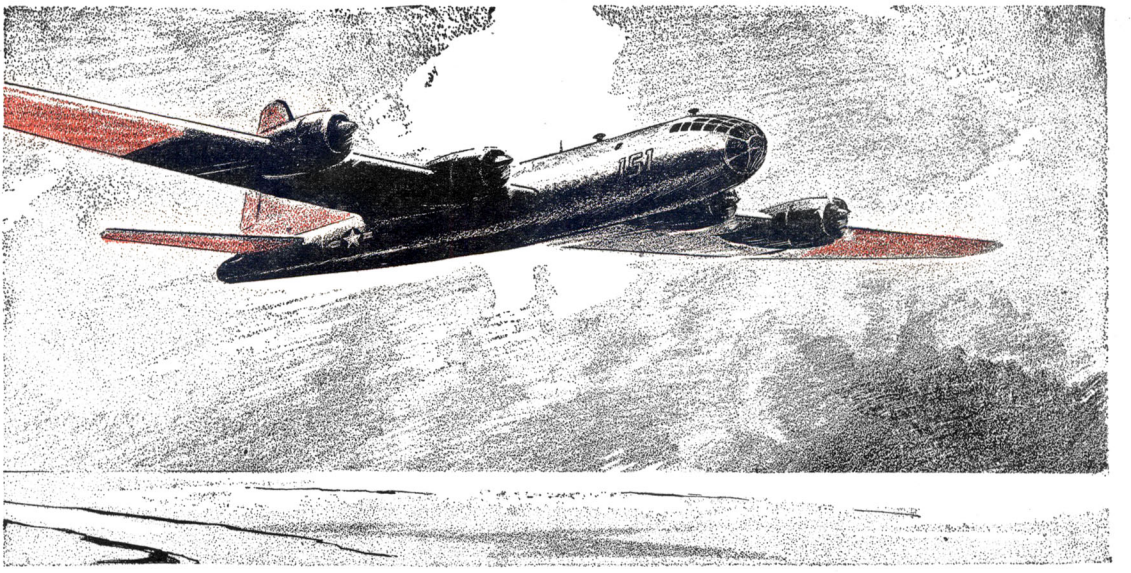
Number 151 pauses like a bull before it charges. Then her quartet of throttles move along their quadrants. Down the runway the big Boeing thunders, gathering speed with every revolution of the four engines. Co-pilot Hess has his eyes fixed upon the air-speed indicator as it travels around the dial. Pilot Laughman grips the wheel, his eyes glued to the line of scrawny Alaskan fir trees which mark the timber beyond the distant end of the concrete racing beneath him.

"Eighty . . . ninety . . . one hundred—" Hess drones into the intercom. Laughman moistens his lips. *"One twenty . . . one thirty. . . ."* Those fir trees are getting bigger. You can see the branches now. *"One hundred and forty . . .* ONE FIFTY!"

The hands on the control wheel ease it back and with a haughty disdain for gravity, the Ptarmigan 72 leaves the concrete and skims out over those fir trees, bending their tops with the tornado of their passing. A couple of hundred feet of climb and then a leveling-off to backlog safety with speed. Two miles farther, over Fairbanks' log cabins, a gradual climbing turn in a sort of "three-county" sweep, and 151 roars back over the field at two thousand feet, for a final heading check. Next check point: Barrow. Take-off time: 4:58 A.M.

LAUGHMAN'S voice on the intercom gives permission to move about. The crew begin to pick up their special duties.

Technical Sergeant J. H. McGivern and Master Sergeant C. D. McCall, who sit in the aft blisters as "scanners" to watch the engines for trouble signs, loosen their belts and settle back for the long haul. Lieutenant Roger Thompson and Master Sergeant Tom Richardson check their radar 'scopes scanning the terrain below. They check the pulsating silhouette on the



'scope glass with their detailed maps. Weather Officer Risovi was right. The weather is good and the clouds are there—right where he said they would be.

Out over the green Yukon River valley, past the little flight strip at Stevens on the river-bank, over the Endicott Mountains and then the Brooks Range perpetually buried under tons of snow. Point Barrow lies straight ahead as glistening mountains and valleys slip slowly, steadily beneath the red-tipped wings.

A little over an hour has passed. The serious part of the mission is still far ahead. On automatic pilot (without which the accuracy and efficiency of Ptarmigans would be impossible) the Boeing drones along steadily with an occasional slight adjustment by Laughman of the trim-knobs on the auto-pilot control panel. Twinkling lights play back and forth across the little panel as the auto-pilot corrects itself and the plane's course and signals the changes with flashes from its indicator lights.

It is fifteen past the hour. The intercom clicks open:

"Engineer from left scanner. One and Two O.K."

"Engineer from right scanner. Three and Four O.K."

"Roger. Thank you—"

And the intercom goes silent.

The glare of the sun-lighted snow and the clouds above can make an airman sleepy. Pilot Laughman wears dark sun-glasses to prevent this or a "white-out"—a phenomena which can cause a pilot to lose sight of the real horizon in the blinding glare. Occasionally co-pilot Hess dozes a bit, but never seems quite to relax. Any slight change in the rhythm of the engines or trim of the ship and his eyes are sweeping the instruments before him, checking the throttle settings and overlooking nothing. He wears no cap, just his intercom headset clamped on.

Wiry Lieutenant Laughman, his headset clamped over a soiled long-visored cap with a built-in "hundred-mission" look, seems never to relax, either—his fingers making a slight adjustment here and there, resetting the gyro-pilot and flicking various switches of the multitudinous instruments which convey so much to the veteran pilot and so little to the layman.

Not much work for navigators Steinbrenner, Cain and Cliffe on this leg of the trip. The radio beam, auto-pilot and CAVU (Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited) weather makes Barrow an easy target. From Barrow out and back to the first landfall, late this afternoon, they'll be busier than a ping-pong ball juggler in a high wind. Barrow is coming up a bit to the left now.

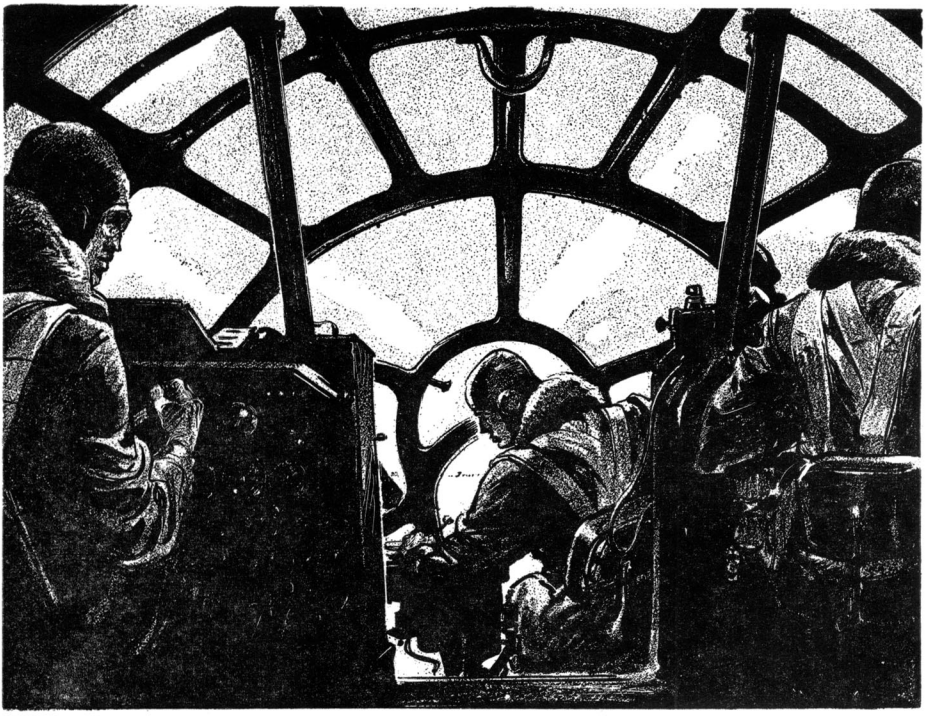
In the spring it is not too tough to make out where the shore begins and the land stops. The sea ice is melting and open patches appear in the black Arctic ocean. In winter, land and sea merge and radar is about the only method of detecting the rear shoreline. The plane slips over Admiralty Bay, and Lieutenant Risovi points a stubby finger at the almost invisible "town" of Wallikipi. Then his lips form the word "Barrow."

The radio towers (Barrow is the voice contact for Ptarmigan flights) and then the landing-strip turn slowly beneath the wings as 151 swings to a new heading—roughly straight up the 159th meridian. Lieutenant Laughman's watch points to 7:15 A.M.; the next turn will be at the top of the globe.

Now the scanners concentrate on their vital job and the three-man navigation team begins an exacting, hours-long chore of no mistakes—or else! A year ago a B-29 on a special mission over the Pole made a slight miscalculation because neither stars nor sun were visible to shoot with a sextant. It wound up a bit off-course for Alaska—on a two-mile frozen lake in Greenland.

Navigation over this part of the globe is doubly difficult. The magnetic compass is almost worse than useless for you are above the magnetic poles (there are three, all far south of the actual Pole itself) and there are no check-points below. Radar observation of cracks and faults in the ice-floes is about the only way even an estimate of your drift away from the course can be spotted. Shots at the sun in summer and the stars in winter are often difficult. Clouds in summer or winter and the Northern Lights can raise merry hell with a sextant shot just when you need it most. Not only is it an exacting job determining where you are going, but where you have come from—making it no simple problem just to "turn around and go home again."

From here on, too, the radar operators demonstrate a keener interest in those electronic silhouettes of the terrain below flickering across their hooded viewing screens, and Weather



Illustrated by Clayton Knight

"The Pole in ten minutes!" . . . To be at the top of the world can never be merely "routine."

Officer Risovi really gets down to work.

Lieutenant Risovi must prepare from his altimeters, psychrometers, thermometers and his other special gadgets, a complete picture of the weather every half hour. He must make a running cross-section chart of all clouds and other weather phenomena as he spots it. He's "top dog" of the gang from now on; the trip is solely for his reports. Big "Ed" settles himself in his seat, runs his hand up over his forehead in an ever-futile gesture to get that hair back where it belongs, and hunches over his table, his pencil working.

Lieutenant Steinbrenner draws neat lines on his polar grid map and enters 151's position as just having "turned to the right" at Point Barrow, Alaska. He spins his steel dividers thoughtfully and picks up his mike:

"Dead Reckoning (navigator who plots the course and position of the aircraft) *to Astral* (the navigator who takes sun and star shots with the sextant): *let's have a shot and a course heading."*

"Roger—just a minute." Captain Carroll Cain tosses off his battered cap and hoists himself up into the padded tunnel over the bomb-bay. He crouches there with his head raised in the astrodome set into the top of the aircraft. He lifts the compact aviation sextant from its mount in the transparent bubble of the dome and turns dark filters down over the sun lens. He fits the red rubber eyepiece to his eye and focuses the instrument upon the sun, adjusting it until the relationship between the horizon and the orb are perfect. He jots down a few figures from the devices scales, checks them again to be sure, then replaces the sextant. He ducks down out of the blister, blinking in the comparative gloom of the cabin, drops out of the tunnel and picks up his headset and mike. His lips move as he reports the correct heading to "DR" (Dead Reckoning) Jay Steinbrenner.

The Lieutenant scribbles on a pad and speaks into the mike again:

"DR to Radar: Let's have a wind-drift reading, please."

"Roger . . . I get a one and one-quarter—I repeat, one and one-quarter wind drift."

"Roger. Thanks." A pause while Steinbrenner's pencil hurries over paper in fast calculations.

"Dead Reckoning to Pilot: Your heading is so-and-so; we have a one and one-quarter wind drift, according to radar."

"Roger. Let us know if you get another drift reading. We are going to transfer fuel in about ten minutes."

More and more white patches appear on the surface of the ocean nearly four miles below them. Presently the floes join edges in larger areas, blotting out the ocean almost entirely except for the cracks. These ice sheets —many of them miles across—have become an almost solid expanse of white. Like the finely crackled paint on an old windowsill, it now stretches as far as the eye can see clear around the horizon. The cracks run in fantastic patterns in all directions and one can pick out the outlines of grotesque faces, or the silhouette of one's home State. Above the crackled "paint," cloud-layers drift in space, their shadows far below and to one side giving the angle of the sun and their height above the floes.

The intercom snaps: *"Engineer to crew. We are about to transfer fuel* (from bomb-bay tanks to wing tanks). *Extinguish all lights until advised transfer has been accomplished."*

Cigarettes are snuffed out and ash-trays poked into to be sure all sparks are out. The plane drones on as the engineer manipulates valves and pumps. Huntley watches fuel-gauge needles tremble upward on some dials and toward the zero on others. They steady down and he picks up his mike again: *"Fuel transfer has been accomplished. Smoke when you want to."* So far the engineer's job has been routine: Cabin pressure holding O.K. Engines turning up smoothly and in tune. No excessive vibration. Fuel consumption normal and temperatures and oil pressures right on the button. Time for a cup of coffee!

Every thirty minutes Lieutenant Risovi turns back from his table in the nose to hand a message—coded for brevity, not secrecy—to one of the pilots for relaying back to the radio desk. From here either George Dixon or Wesley Kattner dot-dash it out over the air waves—this vital information from the "weather station" they said we couldn't build.

The audacity of these messages is startling. From this tiny man-made satellite miles above the vast icefields and storms of the Arctic a steady stream of them pour down over the chilly slopes of the Polar cap. They hurdle storms and weird electrical barriers set across their path and crackle these terse weather headlines of tomorrow into sunny weather stations as far away as Hawaii—even while the "station of origin" may be battling icing, Polar storms or even impending tragedy, as they are received.

More and more cloud-layers drift below 151 to obscure the Polar cap. Occasionally they break apart. Miles below, light green or bluish patches—startling in this world of white—mark "pools" of sea water atop the ice.

Strange puffball-shaped cumulus clouds mushroom up through the frosty air to hang like white silk barrage balloons across this path to the Pole. Floes cracking to expose the warmer water start thermals of steamy air spiraling upward. They rise and cool into these odd "balloons." Occasionally, over to the left of 151, she is paced by a circular rainbow with the shadow silhouette of herself riding in its center. It is almost noon.

The temperature outside the plane isn't bad up here in the sun—about 32° to 35° below zero. Inside the sun-warmed plane it is much warmer—too warm for heavy clothing or those electrically heated suits to be plugged in. Today the Polar storm-gods are kindly. The Pole is coming up!

The intercom crackles: *"The Pole in ten minutes!"*

No matter how often the team hears that curt announcement it still charges the air with tension and anticipation. To be at the top of the world where less than a dozen men have ever set foot can never be merely "routine," no matter how often accomplished.

The navigators go into a huddle, check instruments, take one more shot at the sun for luck. They can't be wrong. All agree. Wrist-watches say 12:15; 151 is at the Pole—where there's no place to go but south. The intercom snaps: *"Over the Pole!"*

THE young men in flying-gear of the United States Air Force peer through the windows. It doesn't look any different down there—or does it? It's the top of the world—there *is* a difference! Here is the very center of the earth's rotation, where the world's spinning means little. Here there is no such thing as "north." Below that cloud-layer all the meridians of the globe meet, four miles below. And one's left hand can be a day behind the right—across the date-line.

The crew feels the difference. "Over the Pole" does things to "Pole Vaulters." Some on their first "loop" sense the thrill of accomplishment—a challenge met and won. Veteran "Vaulters" chalk up another mission well on its way to completion. Every mile from here on back is toward safety and civilization. They have made it again!

A TENSION all would hate to admit, vanishes like the turning-off of a too-brilliant light or the stopping of an annoying dripping in the night. A hole in the cloud "floor" appears and Master Sergeant Harold Quiring grabs his camera for a quick shot at the ridge-pole of the world. The intercom chatters like a New Hampshire party line:

"Well, where's that Pole?"

"I was right—the stripes run around it clockwise."

"I don't see Peary anywhere down there."

"Hey, look! Doctor Cook!"

"Risovi, want that can of apricots now? You can be the first man to eat an apricot over the Pole."

Ptarmigan 72 makes a slow majestic sweeping circle about one hundred and fifty degrees to the right. From Saturday to Sunday and then back to Saturday again across the international date-line, then heading south on the new heading for their first landfall—the western tip of Prince Patrick Island, a thousand miles away.

From here on home the road is "downhill," down over the top curve of the globe. The crew relaxes a bit. Electrically heated food-lockers are broken open. Cans of hot hamburgers, stew and beans are gingerly opened with gloved hands. Sandwiches are consumed and the big GI coffee-jugs and cans of fruit are given a rough workout.

More weather observation reports are handed back; the sun still shines in the right windows. The scenery is monotonously familiar. All Ptarmigan tracks are kept as close as skill and instruments can keep them to those of previous flights for two reasons: one, that the weather reports will all be from along the same route; and, two, in an emergency a search for those telltale red tails and wingtips will be narrowed. As an added check, shore radio stations take "fixes" on the aircraft at predetermined times. The navigators estimate their positions at those same ticks of the chronometers for later comparison. The results of these comparisons would amaze anyone but a Ptarmigan navigator.

The hands on the dial before Lieutenant Laughman read 3:40 P.M. when Jay Steinbrenner picks up his mike, puts it down again, checks some figures and then calls the pilot:

"DR to pilot—we'll have a landfall in about ten minutes, according to my calculations."

The plane thunders on, her tanks lighter by tons. Some of the crew, spelled by others, catch a few winks of sleep. It's a long grind, no matter how the weather breaks.

Far ahead a cloud-layer takes on a "different" look. Lieutenant Risovi turns to the pilots with a grin, pointing: "Prince Patrick!" The navigators feel pretty good. It's a cinch from here.

A new heading is fed into the automatic pilot and 151 swings slightly west across Beaufort Sea. Two hours and a half later, over widening cracks in the ice-floes, appear open water and broken clouds, another shoreline slips beneath. . . . And then Aklavik—the last lap.

FROM the brown dots of Aklavik's cabins on, 151 begins her long let-down for Ladd Air Force Base, losing altitude with every mile. Down she glides, past Fort Yukon astride the Arctic Circle, the Crazy Mountains and out over the green Tanana River Valley. The radio range of Ladd, dead ahead, comes in strong now.

Lieutenant Laughman and Walter Hess snap on throat mikes, flip the yoke on the auto-pilot to turn the controls back to their skilled hands for the landing, and contact Ladd tower:

"Air Force one-five-one, ten miles northeast of field at two thousand. Over."

"Ladd tower to Air Force one-five-one. Cleared to land. Wind west, ten miles."

"Roger. Thank you."

The big Boeing swings over Fairbanks and back toward the field from the east. The warning buzzers and red lights go on where the perimeter road crosses the downwind end of the runway and a jeep pulls up and waits; 151 slips down across the field edge and flares out over the concrete. A moment of hesitation—then rubber burns off the tires in a pungent blue puff as the plane greases in for a landing.

The great aircraft gradually loses speed, brakes to a stop and turns off the runway onto the taxi strip. Watches read 7:57 P.M.

Ptarmigan 72 is on the books. Mission accomplished.

Ptarmigan 73 coming up!

A MAN'S REACH SHOULD BE GREATER THAN HIS GRASP; AND LIFE WITH FATHER WAS NEVER DULL, FOR HE WAS ALWAYS GOING TO DO SOMETHING BIG—BUT BIG!

Papa's

by NEILL WILSON

THE dusty train lurched and rocked, or halted for long spells in the hot sun, and Mother sat staring out the window, her eyes narrowed to pinpoints because she was in thought. Papa's letter lay on her lap. I knew she was deeply worried. But when Amity or I spoke to her, she turned a face that was lively and smiling. When we grew hungry, she opened the hamper that smelled of ham and chicken and sandwiches from other journeys, and she got up and went to the range at the end of the coach and made a place among the other passengers' pots and pans, and boiled us some chocolate.

Amity and I had changed schools nine times when Papa sent for us to make this expedition. We were riding tourist, as always. Mother said the rattan seats were cooler anyway, and more sanitary. Papa's letter had been unusually spirited. Mother had grown quite excited, and remarked: "I wonder if this is really it?" Later, though, the anxious look returned.

We reached the end of rail after an August ride during which the rattan seats weren't cool at all, but only slippery.

Papa met us at a prairie station in a hired buckboard. He had a broad-brimmed pearl-gray hat on. I'd never known him so gay and jolly.

"I like your hat," Mother said. Her tone showed admiration for more than just the hat. She and Papa were in love with each other to the end of their days.

"Going to have a bigger one soon," said Papa. "A hat to really match this country. It'll be a beaut." Papa was a big, shaggy man who'd once been a professional singer, a basso; but the livelihood from choir work and teaching had been too skimpy. His voice naturally boomed and rumbled, and it was easy to see why he liked Texas. There was space, which was what he craved.

The station wasn't Carmencita. It took us three days to reach Carmencita, and we camped out on the way. That was delirious fun for Amity and me, and Mother enjoyed it too. She'd shed her anxieties, and when she was carefree like that, she was very pretty. She went kind of limp, though, when Papa casually mentioned something to her. They were sitting close together on the front seat, Amity and I behind.

Mother wailed: "You mean, John, the position didn't come through?"

Papa had been drawn to Carmencita by prospect of a job as land agent for a railroad. I don't know whether it was to buy land or sell it, but there was to be $125 a month, and use of a horse and buggy.

"That blew up, but there's a better one in sight." Papa's strong, sweet smile dissolved Mother, as it always did. We continued over the rising prairie country, and came out on a flat piece that broke off abruptly. Papa called it a mesa. He reined up and exclaimed: "How's this for a view?"

Wherever we'd lived before, there hadn't been any such hills or much of a view.

We sat there. Papa seemed to fill his frame with the pungent air and that wonderful view. There was a gorge flanked by mesas that rose like stairs, and a far white mountain. Where a valley widened below the gorge, there were sandy plains. Mamma cried out, and got down. The wind blew her brown hair. She had to cling to her skirts.

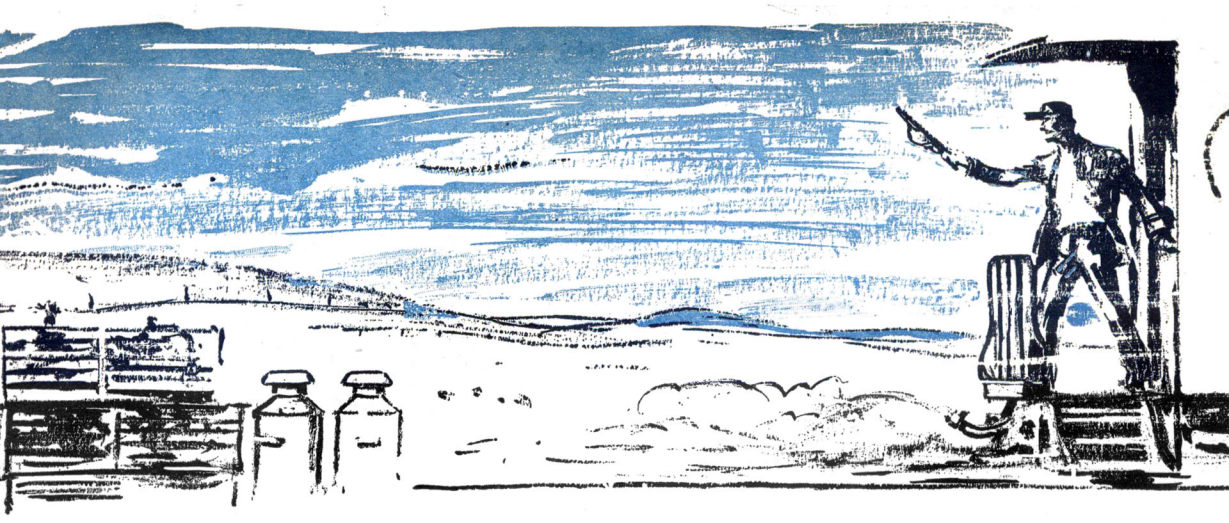
Papa said: "The pity of all this!"

"Pity?" said Mother. "I think it's marvelous."

"Such erosion. Look at those fissured slopes."

"Do you suppose cloudbursts did it? Everything seems dried up now."

Papa's voice dropped to its deepest, the tone he used when he had a great truth to announce. "Lou Ellen, have you never realized that the United States is three thousand miles long, two thousand miles wide—and only a foot deep?"



"I like your hat," Mother said. . . . "Going to have a bigger one soon," said Papa.

Fifty-Dollar Hat

"You mean a twelve-inch foot?" said Mother.

"Or even less. Upon that thin skin of soil, our ninety million people find support. And as legacy for the future generations, we are letting it blow and wash away."

"Let's camp here for the night. The children can run down to that brook for water. Roger, here's a pail."

We camped there, though it was farther to the brook than Mother thought. It was hundreds of feet down. The brook, though shallow, turned out to be half a block wide.

In the morning we turned away from the verge of the mesa and drove down to the sandy plains and over them. Carmencita wasn't much of a town. It had one business street. Papa stopped in front of a little building and let Mother read its sign. It said JOHN BAXTER, *Real Estate.*

"But, John! You tried that in Minneapolis and Winnipeg. And Guthrie. And Fargo," cried Mother.

"I reached those places too late. Didn't get in on the ground floor. Here it'll be different."

Mother's eyes narrowed to little points. They always did at a foretaste of worry and fear.

Papa had a house for us. It was a frame house in an unfenced field not much different from the prairie we'd driven over. But he said our street would soon be the residential thoroughfare of the metropolis of west Texas. "I've named it Amity Avenue." He tweaked my sister's ear. "Over yonder is the site I've picked for Lou Ellen Park. I mean to give it to the city. Its owner doesn't know that yet." He was buoyant beyond measure over the future of Carmencita. Two railroads were building toward it, one from the north, the other from the east. It was as plain as a white hat on a tall Texan's head that they'd make a juncture right at Carmencita, and there'd be roundhouses, machine shops, stockyards, hotels, stores, and a boom. "But I'm not waiting for that," he said, giving Mother a squeeze, "before buying you the prettiest bonnet in Fort Worth."

"I'd rather have a high-closet steel range." Mother eyed the second-hand Army stove Papa had set up for her. "As for hats, yours comes first. I want to see you in it."

"There'll be hats for all of us." Papa had decided to let us in on a thumping secret. "I got to know a fellow on the train—stockman, politician, and all that; he had one of the biggest hats you ever saw. Used to be one of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders." He let that sink in. "He's going to try to get me the appointment here as postmaster."

Mother's eyes narrowed again, because Papa's grasp had always been shorter than his reach. But the amazing thing is, the appointment actually came. Papa's friend was a big Republican, and there weren't very many of those in Texas. Papa dashed home, and he caught Mother up and they did a whirl in the parlor. He cried: "This means everything. Now we shall go to Fort Worth, and you shall pick out your range and bonnet."

"And you your hat," reminded Mother. "The hugest hat in Texas."

We all made the buckboard and train trip to Fort Worth, and came back with Mother's range and bonnet, a school outfit for Amity, and hat, loud shirt and pair of leather chaps for me. Papa, though, returned in the same gray hat. It showed stains from campfires, and the dust that always blew in Carmencita. He'd tried on most of the hats in Fort Worth, and one had been simply stunning. But he'd decided to wait until he had more money. "The hat will still be there," he told Mother when she protested. "Even in Texas, people don't walk into a store very often and lay down fifty dollars for a hat."

Papa's job as postmaster turned out wonderfully well. He got $175 a month for it, and had no trouble finding a Miss Esterhaze to do practically

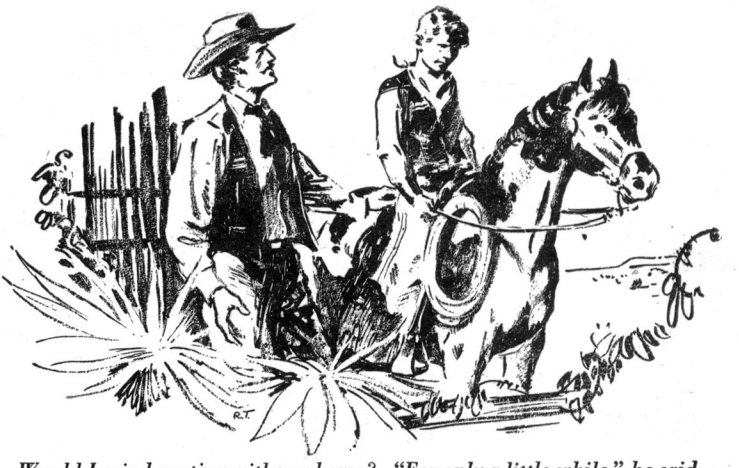
all the routine work for eighty dollars, leaving us ninety-five dollars to live on, and Papa free for what he called policy and organizational matters, and a slight bit of real estate. And for something else, too. At last he could realize one of his life's ambitions, and be publisher of a newspaper.

I THINK it was the Rough Rider who wanted to be a Senator, who helped Papa start the newspaper. Papa went to Fort Worth again for a press, linotype and display type.

"Do come back this time with the hat too, John," Mother pleaded. "The postmaster of Carmencita and publisher of its newspaper ought to have a suitable hat. A grand hat." Papa's old hat by then was pretty shabby. But with his first clear fifty dollars he'd bought the low piece of land, with its alkali flat and its prairie dogs, that he wanted to name Lou Ellen Park and donate to the city. With his second fifty he'd bought a little mustang and saddle for me, for he felt that a boy in Texas simply had to have a horse. We were sure, though, he'd come back this time with his fine new hat.

But he didn't. The press had cost more than he'd expected. Also there'd been newsprint, which he'd almost forgotten about. By the time he reached home, his old hat really looked dingy, because it never had been a really good hat, and some rains had fallen on it. Mother cleaned it as well as she could, and he wore it with lots of dignity. But she sighed sometimes. She wanted all Texas to see her handsome husband in a befitting hat. "A regular white mountain of a hat," said Mother. "Nothing else will set him off as Nature intended." . . .

Papa came home with the old hat, but scarcely able to keep from throwing it in the air.



Would I mind parting with my horse? "For only a little while," he said.

In our house on the edge of town, Mother fought dust, but sang as she worked. She never had looked so pretty. She didn't have her habitual companions, worry and fear, any more. Why should she? We had ninety-five dollars a month sure-fire. Carmencita was going to be a rousing place when the railroads got there. And Papa was the leading citizen. The paper didn't produce any income, but Papa explained that. "Right now we're plowing it back in, Lou Ellen. But there'll be a splendid harvest. You'll see." A number of times he almost bought a hat, but he'd decided that nothing less than the fifty-dollar number would satisfy Mother, and each time there arose some unexpected expense, like hiring an extra printer because Sam Hall went on a bender, and getting out a special edition for the Rough Rider when he came to town. And Miss Esterhaze insisted on a raise to eighty-five dollars a month. The railroads, too, were slow in coming to Carmencita. They had reached points forty and fifty-five miles distant, and there they were, leaning on their shovels. Papa said it had something to do with a tight money market.

But even without his fine hat, he was a striking figure; and railroad or no railroad, he was radiantly confident of the future. He loved every greasewood bush, every tuft of bunch grass in Texas. Often, at evening, he would hitch up and drive us out to a lookoff opposite the point where we'd camped that night. We'd stare in awe at that plunging gorge, those setback mesas, and the white snow or cloud mountain in the dim distance. Papa would sit thinking. Pretty soon it would come, in his deep rumble: "The United States is three thousand miles long, two thousand miles wide—and one foot deep. How long will it be even that?" On one particular evening he got down, walked to the brink, and stood there. He said over his shoulder to Mother, "Lou Ellen, do you see anything noteworthy here?"

"I see a very battered hat," said Mother.

"Look farther."

"I see a great white mountain up at the head of the valley." Mother adored that mountain.

"Look more intently."

"I see a hole in the ground, and a stream in it about as big as a puddle, and everything below it and around it dry as dust."

"You don't see green farms? You don't see dairy fields, orchards, roads, transmission lines, powerhouses?"

"You must be feeling dizzy, dear," cautioned Mother. "Don't stand so near the brink."

"LOU ELLEN, I've been a stupid fellow. At last I know what brought us to Carmencita. It's as plain as the mountain that's such an obsession with you. I've been brought here by the hand of fate to build a dam."

"A dam?"

"The Carmencita Dam."

Mother gasped, "A dam. The dear man wants to build a dam!"

"To keep a sizable chunk of the United States from blowing and washing away."

"On ninety dollars a month, he's going to fasten down the United States."

"I and the Carmencita Daily *Register,*" said Papa, "are going to fasten

down this part of Texas, anyway. And create prosperity undreamed of. I'll talk to our merchants. I'll talk to the bankers at Fort Worth."

"For heaven's sake, don't stir until you get a new hat."

"I was about ready to plunge in the matter of that hat. But I'd better hang on to the fifty for expenses—there's no telling where this business will take me. We'll clean the old hat once more. Sweetheart, this has been a stupendous evening!"

ALL the drive home, Mother's eyes were pinpointed. Papa had been going to make a fortune once, selling typewriters. But the machines, after he bought them, proved to have nonstandard keyboards. After he'd sold just one, and been turned down a hundred times, the rest rusted in our cellar in Minneapolis. When they'd been sold for junk, Papa learned that the keys and keyboards could have been changed quite readily. And at Davenport he'd joined with a man who saw riches in towing logs down the Mississippi from Wisconsin. But the towboat they bought, and named the *Lou Ellen,* didn't have power enough to go upstream. After it washed into the Rock Island bridge, and was run up on a bank, it was sold —to pay a judgment won by the railroad.

"A dam," murmured Mother.

"The biggest dam in Texas," boomed Papa.

"First it was to be the biggest hat. Now it's to be the biggest dam."

"I'll have them both!" vowed Papa. "Alongside a fifty-million-dollar dam, what's a fifty-dollar hat?"

I suppose Mother could have replied, "Alongside a fifty-million-dollar dam, what's a ninety-dollar income?" But she didn't. They'd come as near to quarreling as they ever had in their lives. "I know you can do it, John, if you say so." It was her battle cry in a crisis.

Papa saw the merchants, but of course that was only a gesture. At most he hoped for a few hundred dollars. What he got was hoots. So he went to Fort Worth. Mother had worked hard on his old hat.

Maybe it was his home-cleaned hat, maybe it was simply his unsuccessful record as a promoter, but he didn't have any luck in Fort Worth, either. All he brought back was a new dress each for Mother and Amity. I learned long after that he acquired those by spending three days in a department store window, demonstrating men's garters.

Just the same, he didn't give up his dream of a dam. When word came that the two railroads had shelved further construction indefinitely, he didn't give up his faith in Carmencita, either. Not even when some of his advertisers closed up and moved.

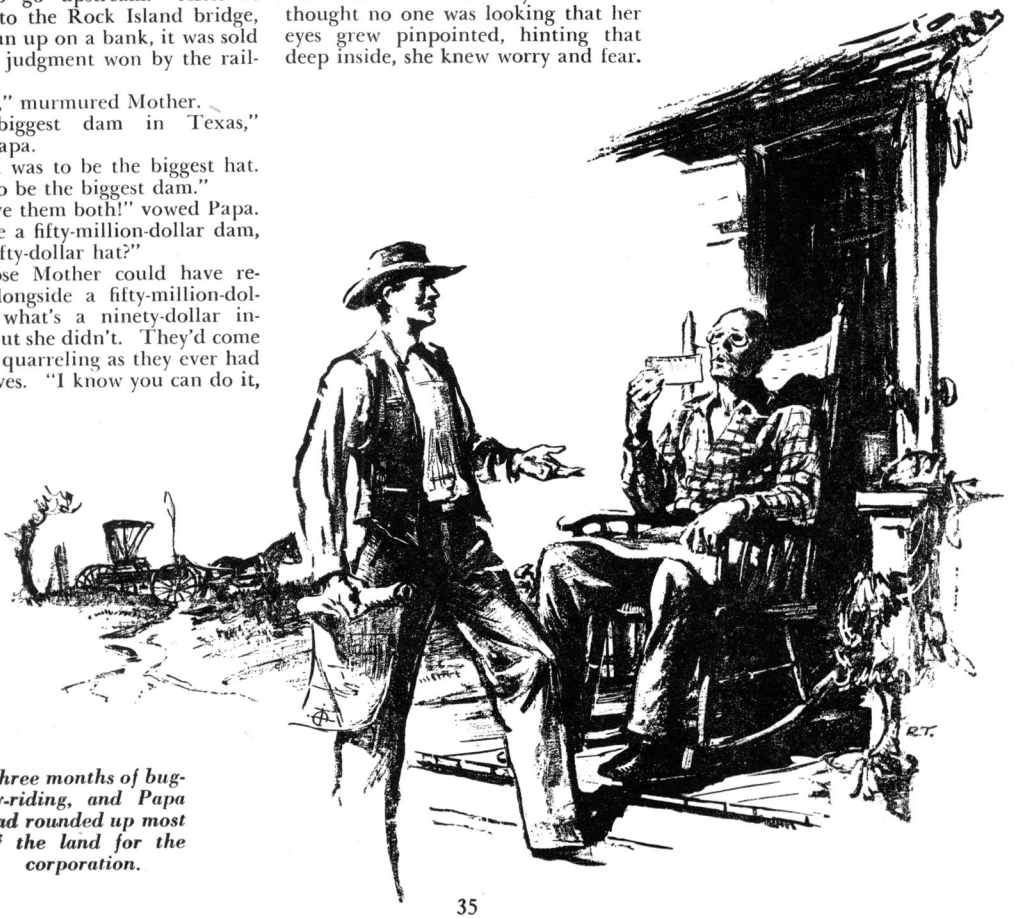
"I'm going to stay right here and build that dam," he swore to Mother.

"John Baxter, I'm positive you'll do it," affirmed Mother. A ring of unbeatable confidence, the sound I'd heard many times before, came into her voice. It was only when she thought no one was looking that her eyes grew pinpointed, hinting that deep inside, she knew worry and fear.

The paper temporarily had to become a twice-monthly. Postoffice receipts fell off, and Papa had to take a cut there too. But with lightened duties at the paper, and no real-estate business at all to distract him, he had more time than ever for brooding about his dam. Not a week went by but he was out there, wading quicksands and climbing mesas.

ONE day he took me aside and asked, embarrassed, if I would mind parting with my horse. "For only a little while. Then I'll buy you a real trained cow-horse, Roger." I told him of course he could sell Jimmy. He wanted the money for a trip East. "I have concluded to see those railroad men. They're used to large undertakings." Once more Mother fell to work with the gasoline bottle on his hat. He drove off to the railhead with a neighbor who had to go on cattle business.

"Remember, John," Mother said at parting, "failure isn't in you." They exchanged a Texas-size kiss, and her eyes were big and warm. The brooch that she always wore at her throat was gone. She was a girl to stand at



Three months of buggy-riding, and Papa had rounded up most of the land for the corporation.

a man's shoulder! After Papa drove off, though, I didn't dare glance at her. Papa's dream was so grandiose, his chance of achieving it so tiny. . . .

So, when it came, the telegram was almost unbelievable. At first it didn't even make sense. "Fifty-dollar hat in sight. As good as on my head." Mother thought and thought, then announced: "Children, he means he has met with real encouragement. He has coded it, because he doesn't want the town to know."

Papa came home, still wearing the old hat, but scarcely able to keep from throwing it in the air. "Those magnates are a frosty-eyed bunch, but they're sharp as steel traps. As soon as I unrolled a rough map, they were impressed. They're sending engineers to make a preliminary report," he whispered, hugging us. "I'm to have a block of stock, if it goes through, but that's only part of what it all means. I'm to have a salary, and horse and buggy, and the responsibility of buying up land below the damsite at sagebrush prices. Mind now, not a word."

THE engineers came, so secretly that nobody except Mother and Papa knew it. Their report must have been favorable, for Papa acquired his horse and buggy, and was away days at a time. He kept his old hat, though; he said it would never do, in this stage of delicate negotiations with certain big ranchmen and landowners, to show personal prosperity. But he bought me my cow-horse. Three months of buggy riding, and he'd rounded up most of the land below the dam site for the Carmencita Water & Power Corporation at an average price of five dollars an acre. "I let a few homesteaders alone," he told Mother. "Poor devils, they've earned a break. Once the dam is completed and the lake backed up behind it, land that's now good only for jackrabbits will be worth a hundred dollars an acre. Ditched and developed, it will be worth three hundred, five hundred. Think what the value of their farms and my stock will be!"

"Surely you can get yourself the fine hat now," urged Mother.

"Not quite yet. My contract with those New Yorkers called for gathering in range lands for the corporation at a bargain, but nothing was said about city lots here in Carmencita. I'm going to pick up certain corners for you and the children, and I need that battered old hat to keep the price down."

Inside of a week he had all the options he could rake and scrape for. Then it was that the Carmencita *Register* came out with the blazing headline:

"DAM TO REVOLUTIONIZE VALLEY!"

"Even though those jackals drove me out, I nailed down a chunk of Texas that wind and water can't ravage."

Almost within hours after the little edition was issued, life in Carmencita was transformed. In a day or two all the stores had reopened. Former merchants who were slow in getting back couldn't even obtain locations. Papa's real-estate business soared. Lumber began arriving by mule teams for dozens of new buildings. A big corps of engineers showed up, this time without secrecy. They put up houses and offices out near the gulch, and started drilling. Papa was tremendously thrilled. He gave Miss Esterhaze a fat raise. He had more than one man could possibly attend to at the newspaper, and there were constant civic meetings. He wanted Carmencita to grow to a plan. He had the plan complete, with high school, park, city hall, fire-house, a three-story hotel and a union depot. But he had to fight for his ideas, and it all took time. Above all, he wanted to be out at the dam site. We went there almost daily.

"What's the name of that mountain off there?" a man asked Mother. He was busy at a table on a tripod, making a map.

"I call it Hat Mountain," said Mother promptly. "Doesn't it look like one?"

"Some hat," commented the man.

"My husband has promised to buy himself a hat, and that is exactly how it will look."

"Some man," said the map-maker. "Okay, lady, Hat Mountain she be." Mother told this to Papa, and he laughed, and pledged: "I haven't forgotten the hat, sweetheart. It's just that I'm so busy. A trip to Fort Worth is out of the question. But there'll always be a hat!"

"I'm afraid they'll make you mayor, in that dirty old thing," moaned Mother.

"That's one job I'm trying to dodge, and a fifty-dollar hat would simply make it a certainty!"

But they made Papa mayor anyhow. And Carmencita boomed.

The paper had bounced back to a weekly, then a thrice-weekly. Out on the prairie, gigantic caravans wound westward, followed by the clank of track-laying. One glorious day we heard the whistle of a work-train locomotive. The railroad hadn't come to Carmencita, but it was only five miles distant, and the great shovels it brought were set to chewing up the bed of Carmencita River, where the dam was to rise. Up on a mesa a tremendous gravel pit was staked out

Illustrated by Raymond Thayer

and stripped off. There were barracks, warehouses. The postoffice at Carmencita did so much business that Papa gave Miss Esterhaze two assistants.

"Now get that hat," begged Mother.

"I will be frank, sweetheart," said Papa. "I am carrying several pieces of property on rather thin shoestrings. One of these days the corners I have picked up will be occupied by rented buildings, and we'll be rich beyond accounting. Right now, fifty dollars are—well, they're fifty dollars."

Mother laughed: "Of course, John. We mustn't hazard a valuable business corner for the sake of a hat."

So during this period, Papa wore his old hat as a kind of banner. Word got around that he was stubborn about it; that he'd sworn to wear it until the dam was finished. I know that he privately longed to go to Fort Worth and buy that fifty-dollar beauty and flourish it in the faces of the bankers. But in simple fact, he never had been so hard pressed. The *Register* had become a daily. That meant a rotary press and more newsprint, and more ink and more payroll. The corner lots he was carrying kept his hands continually behind his back, transferring funds from one pocket to the other.

And one day the expensive newsprint that he'd had to buy came out with a small box on page one. Papa had tried to make it casual, like an ordinary story on the weather. But the news it announced wasn't casual. It was appalling.

Work on the dam was going to suspend.

The cause, Papa's box suggested, was probably a passing mood of caution in the money markets. It couldn't be anything serious, or his partners in the East would have informed him. As soon as the market for bonds turned upward, work on the dam would roar ahead.

But there were excited knots of people in the streets.

Next day a press association bulletin from New York brought a different explanation. Work on the Carmencita Dam in west Texas had been ordered stopped, the message said, until further studies could be made of the side-wall anchorages.

Papa at once rushed an editorial onto the front page declaring that this was a rank canard, designed to create unrest; that he had personally read every word of the geologists' report upon which the whole project was founded, and that it had pronounced the rock sound to the core. Questioning the solidity of that rock now was a part of the general mental instability that always went with an election year, he pointed out, causing investors to see things under the bed and promoters to pull in their horns. As soon as November was behind, and the Republican landslide recorded as usual, the eternal rimrock of Carmencita Valley would once more be seen as solid and impregnable, and work would go triumphantly forward.

But many people didn't read Papa's editorial, and of those who did, many didn't believe. A lot of them trooped out of Carmencita, leaving unpaid bills; some moved out so fast they left the unwashed dishes on the table. The next news story followed fast. Datelined *New York,* it said that suspension of work at the dam could be regarded as permanent—the project was virtually dead.

That did it. On the heels of the dead beats followed the honest people who had nothing to gain by staying, and jobs to seek elsewhere. Lodging-houses emptied. Restaurants and stores put up shutters. The new three-story hotel, that was to have been named for Papa, stood as an idle framework. Population melted like snow on the desert. Advertising in the *Register* evaporated.

Out at the dam site, machinery was loaded on the work-trains. The trains rolled eastward and didn't return.

In vain Papa insisted that it was a temporary lull. "If it isn't election jitters, it's some promoters' jiggery-pokery," he charged. "Somebody is merely scheming to pick up, at a dime an acre, such land as I wasn't able to buy in at five dollars. I wouldn't be surprised if those railroad scalawags are after property in Carmencita too. Offers will be made for valuable town lots, whole blocks of them, when prices have been driven down enough."

"John," Mother pleaded, "why don't you buy your hat now? Then you'll have it, no matter what's ahead. It'll prove to the world, more than anything you can say in an editorial, that you have faith in the dam and all things Texan."

"Sweetheart," said Papa, "if I had fifty dollars, or fifty cents, I'd buy land! I'll hock my interest in the *Register,* I'll mortgage this house, I'll sell Roger's horse again, to buy land and to hang on."

I don't know how we did hang on, that autumn. We made out somehow. Papa had to dismiss Miss Esterhaze's assistants, and she didn't like that, and called him a Republican blackleg. So he let her go too. Mother and Amity and I sorted the mail

and sold the stamps. Papa put the *Register* back on a weekly basis and ran the press himself. He was so sure work would resume on the dam that he kept a headline standing, and a reserve of paper for the extra. But work didn't resume, and his wires to the magnates in New York went unanswered. So he knew that his judgment was right. They were freezing him out too.

He used the last of the newsprint to tell his shrunken circulation what happened in the elections. The nation had split three ways. The Republicans, who had reigned from McKinley to Taft, were out. A Democrat named Wilson was in. A whole new army of postmasters would be appointed. . . .

We lived, that winter, upon the proceeds of Jimmy II, and the piecemeal sale of Papa's stock in the Carmencita Dam. Even though the stock brought practically nothing, his belief in the dam didn't waver. "It'll start again. You'll see," he boomed. "Carmencita will yet be a big town—a whale of a big town. If I can only cover one or two of my corner-lot options—"

We hung on until May. That's when the last of Papa's options died, the one under the half-built Baxter Hotel.

By that time Papa was at a place called Prince Rupert, in British Columbia, looking into certain opportunities. A postcard came, and I dare say Miss Esterhaze read it, for she was postmistress then. But Mother didn't care if Miss Esterhaze knew. She read aloud to Amity and me: "If you and the young people don't mind traveling tourist, you'd better join me here. One of the Canadian railroads is thinking of making this its terminus, and the place seems to have a splendid future. We'll be in on the ground floor—"

Dear, courageous Papa! And Mother too! She threw off the pinpoints, and cried gayly: "New scenes! New adventures! We'll soon be away from this dust and desolation. Luckily there isn't much to pack. I've sold about everything." Sometime, when they're handing around hero medals, they ought to strike one for every man who just struggles all his days to make a living—and double-sized ones for the wives. . . .

Anyway, Amity has been married four years, and I have a fast-developing law practice in Los Angeles. I induced Papa and Mother to drive with me to Carmencita a few weeks ago. Papa hated to leave the horseshoe tournament at Long Beach, but I whispered a certain promise in his ear, and he agreed to the jaunt. We scarcely recognized Carmencita. Blocks on blocks of fine stores, a sprawling union depot, an imposing city hall with a statue in front of it, a velvety park with trees and swans: Lou Ellen Park. In one of the stores we saw what we wanted. A magnificent white hat.

"Eighty dollars!" exclaimed Papa. "That's a lot of money, son."

"A fifty-dollar hat for eighty dollars is a bargain, in these times," I told him. We went in and bought it, Mother smiling brightly; the pinpoints of worry and fear had been gone from her eyes, ever since I won my first case. She was mighty proud of Papa when he put the hat on. "But I do wish you'd had it when you had that picture taken—the one they made your statue from," she lamented. We went out, and Papa stood in front of the Daily and Evening *Register* and tried to take it all in—the crowds, the circulation trucks that lined the curb, the eleven-story Hotel Baxter, and the fine postoffice. A lady asked him: "Can you tell me the way to Amity Avenue?"

"Right up that way, ma'am. Five blocks north," he said with a sweep of his snow-white hat. And to me: "Let's go out now and look at the dam."

Ten minutes later we stood at the brink of the tremendous spillway. Up valley, far behind the winding blue lake, Mother's mountain stood radiant. I could see her comparing Papa's hat with it, and looking pleased. Down valley, green acres stretched as far as we could see. Alfalfa, grain, gardens, orchards and pretty houses.

Papa enjoyed the scene deeply. He pointed. "Seems like I had a pretty fair idea, son. Even though those jackals drove me out, I nailed down a chunk of Texas that wind and water can't ravage. It sure looks nice."

The wind, which had been playing with his hat, changed tactics and veered up under the brim. Papa grabbed. Too late! The hat sailed high. It glided out over the spillway, dipped, plunged, flashed once in the froth, and was gone.

Papa stood awhile, staring toward where he'd last seen it—then grinned his sweet old grin. "Had it awhile, anyway," he said. "Mother saw how I looked. Fact is, I was a little alarmed about wearing it back to Long Beach. Those fellows down there are mainly from Iowa, and wouldn't understand a Texas hat."

Mother still clutched the paper bag that held the fedora he'd worn into the store. She took it out and put it on his head. "You look splendid to me in any hat, John. Hold that now, with both hands."

As we left, she cast a glance up-valley toward Hat Mountain. She blew it a laughing kiss.

Arms and the Woman

IV

Margaret Corbin: Artillerywoman

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Illustrated by Charles B. Falls

WAR in 1776 was not the super-military, regulation-ridden affair it later became, and when John Corbin of Virginia enlisted in Proctor's Pennsylvania Artillery, he took his wife Margaret along on the campaign. Being an artilleryman, he could count on some transportation—a spare horse, gun-carriage, or ammunition-wagon—though it was unlikely that the strong, determined woman he had married would need any. Family life in the artillery had plenty of precedent. Gunners in European wars had gone in for it, and boys born in camp or in the wagons on the march were dubbed "sons of guns."

Margaret, then twenty-five, was welcome with the battery as a nurse and cook, but it was fated that she would never bear her husband a child. His outfit drew the desperate detail of defending Fort Washington, situated on Manhattan Island at the present Fort Washington Avenue and 183rd Street.

Retreating through New York after the disastrous Battle of Long Island, General Washington had beaten off the British at Harlem Heights, but with the combat at White Plains the enemy began an encircling movement that threatened the entire American Army. Washington knew that to enable him to break free with his main force, the fort which bore his name must be held. He garrisoned it with twenty-eight hundred good troops and gave the order to stand fast.

Margaret Corbin remained in the stronghold, surrounded by bastioned earthworks and three lines of redoubts. She might have slipped out

John dropped with a wound that soon proved mortal. Grimly his widow kept right on serving her gun.

—it was bound to be no place for a woman—but she was not leaving her man. By November 15th it was too late; King George's expeditionary force, eighty-nine hundred strong, hemmed in the defenders by land and water. Gunports of warships anchored in the river were open and ready for action, heavy artillery was emplaced, and assault regiments poised in the trenches. Summoned to surrender, the American commander, Colonel Magaw, replied, "Actuated by the most glorious cause that mankind ever fought in, I am determined to defend the position to the last extremity." Some years later a similar though less elegant defiance would ring in beleaguered Bastogne, in the Battle of the Bulge. Margaret, an outspoken person, would, one feels, have preferred the 1776 equivalent of "Nuts!"

When the British bombardment broke, she was close by John's side in the northern redoubt station of the two-gun battery in which he served as a matross, loading and swabbing the bore of the piece. A fury of shellfire thundered down on them. Gunners began to fall. Instantly Margaret stepped into the place of one of them, grasped a rammer staff and went to work. John did not live long to be proud of her; he flung up his arms, reeled and dropped with a wound that soon proved to be mortal. Grimly his widow kept right on serving her gun.

Redcoat infantry and kilted Highlanders advanced to the assault. Hessians in blue coats, yellow breeches, and tall brass-mounted caps fixed bayonets and charged with shouts of *"Hoch!"* American cannonball plowed through their ranks. Maryland and Virginia riflemen, picking off the officers first, mowed them down in swaths. The storming waves ebbed but flooded on again under cover of a terrific bombardment from all the British guns. Powder-grimed Margaret was not on her feet to see them sweep in and overwhelm the fort. She lay bleeding on the ground with one arm nearly severed and part of a breast mangled by three grapeshot.

Wagons jolted her to Philadelphia with other wounded prisoners of war. After partial recovery, she was released on parole and assigned to the Invalid Corps, that remarkable outfit of disabled veterans who did garrison, guard and even riot duty—an organization which would be revived in the Civil War.

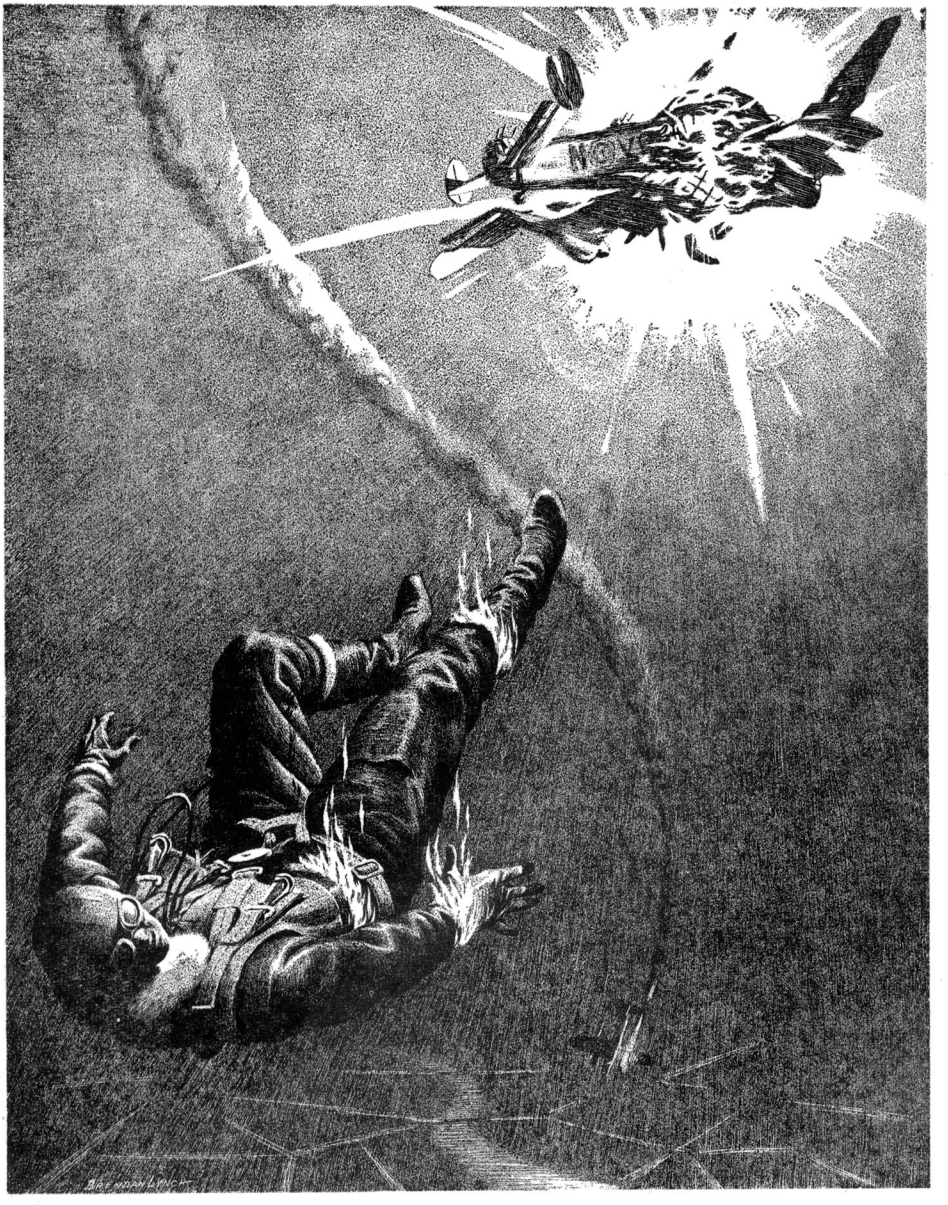
In 1779 Congress voted Margaret Corbin a pension of one-half the pay of a soldier for the rest of her life, plus one complete suit of clothes or its equivalent in cash. She was carried on the rolls of the Invalid Corps for pay and rations, but when the liquor allowance was withheld because she was a female, she protested vehemently. A woman she was, but she had manned a gun, fighting for her country. After a flurry of official correspondence, the General commanding stated: "It appears clearly to me that the order forbidding the issue of rum to a woman should not extend to Mrs. Corbin." But while directing that all stopped rations be turned over to her forthwith, the General cautiously added, "Perhaps it would not be prudent to give them all to her in liquor."

"Captain Molly," she was called—a name which has caused her to be confused with the later artillerywoman, Molly Pitcher. The sharp-tongued woman veteran allowed no one to forget her brief but glorious career. Clad in an artillery coat, she accepted salutes as her due.

Her later years were hard. She was without a home and family—when she was five, her father had been killed by Indians and her mother taken captive. Badly crippled by her wound, she required a hired woman to care for her. The half-pay of a Revolutionary private did not go far, and she was reduced to making her chemises from old tent canvas and bedsacks. It was her misfortune to have fought and bled in a war where the gratitude of the United States toward its defenders manifested itself in a meager fashion.

When she died, she was buried in an obscure grave. Years afterward patriots, rediscovering her gallant record, caused the body to be exhumed and moved to the cemetery at West Point where it rests beneath a stone with a bas-relief depicting Margaret Corbin valiantly serving her gun.

They Fell *without* Parachutes



"Funny," he thought, "but if this is dying, it doesn't seem so strange."

Have you heard the legends of men who fell from airplanes without parachutes and did not die?

They are not legends.

Here are five authentic ones. They are not stories I heard from someone who heard from someone who heard from someone. I knew all five of these men personally. I met them in German prison camps.

Some one hundred thousand Allied airmen were shot down during the war. About ten thousand of them survived. In ten thousand ten-to-one chances for a man's life in the air, you find miracles like these:

ABOUT midnight on March 23, 1944, eighteen thousand feet over the Ruhr, a German fighter's cannon-shells ripped open the wing of a British Lancaster bomber like a great can-opener and found the gasoline tanks. A crimson flare of explosion, and

—and Lived!

The remarkable stories of five wartime airmen who survived falls of many thousand feet.

by PAUL BRICKHILL

streamers of flame trailed into the darkness. Blazing gasoline sluiced along the main spar into the fuselage till it was a sea of fire.

Two of the shells had hit the tail turret and set the hydraulics oil alight, and twenty-year-old Nick Alkemade sat in a bath of fire as he pumped short bursts at the night fighter, till it too trailed fire from its port engine.

He only then became conscious of the furnace he sat in. It hit him through the melting rubber of his oxygen mask and his goggles, and he saw his leather flying-suit burning.

Over the intercom he heard the superfluous command from the pilot to the crew to bail out. Alkemade was wearing his parachute harness but the actual parachute canopy pack was clipped as usual in a rack in the fuselage just by the turret doors. He pushed at the doors and reached back for it, and got a cold shock at seeing the tunnel of flame that reached to his turret.

He couldn't touch his parachute pack. The canvas cover was burned off, and the silk already nearly dissolved. It was too quick for horror—just a feeling of sickness and a clear little wish to get it over quickly. He felt nearly empty of fear, like so many airmen just before they died, because when so much happens so quickly it is too much for the mind to grasp.

He turned the turret to starboard beam and back-flipped through the doors that opened onto the black well of space, three and a half miles deep. As he came away from the dying bomber, he half-sensed, half-saw a great flash from her as she blew up.

He fell as though he were nose-heavy, and found himself strictly at attention as though it were a formal occasion. The rushing air tore the flames from his clothes.

"Funny," he thought, "but if this is dying, it doesn't seem so strange."

Most people have shuddered to think what an airman feels who falls without a parachute. Alkemade can't tell much about it. Soft veils closed about him, and in unconsciousness he dropped into the unresisting abyss of the night, turning slowly over and over. . . .

Three hours later—checked by his watch, which was still going—he opened his eyes and saw pinpoints of stars through a screen of pine branches above. It was a quiet and rather lovely night.

"My God," he murmured aloud. "I'm still alive."

The branches had broken his fall, and then he had dropped into a deep snowdrift, and the snow and his lined leather kit had softened the blow still more.

He had a bump on the head and a twisted knee, so that he could not move away. The Germans found him there. They found the suspension straps of his parachute harness still clipped down, and no parachute at all.

I met Alkemade a few weeks later in prison camp. The only traces he had then of the affair were burn scars around his eyes, and an officially signed document that read: *"It has been investigated and corroborated by the German authorities that the claim made by Sergeant Alkemade is true in all respects, namely that he made a descent from 18,000 feet without a parachute and made a safe landing without injuries, the parachute having been on fire in the aircraft. He landed in deep snow among fir trees."*

(There is no catch in this. Science has established that the terminal velocity, or maximum speed, reached by a free-falling human body is only about 120 m.p.h., no matter from what height the body falls).

In the prison camp, Stalag Luft III, between Berlin and Breslau, we had several of these parachuteless freaks.

There was Ken Burns, who was sitting on a four-thousand-pound bomb when it went off, and then he fell seventeen thousand feet without his parachute opening. He still likes flying.

He was born in Portland, Oregon, but his parents were English, which is why, in 1943, he was a wing commander (Lt. Colonel) in the R.A.F. with a D.S.O. and two D.F.C.'s.

On August 31, that year, he was over Berlin on his 49th mission when a German night fighter set his Lancaster on fire at eighteen thousand feet over the target area. Burns baled his crew out and then aimed his plane (with bomb-load) toward the target, and just about had her trimmed to stay in the dive when the fire reached the four-thousand-pounder bomb in the bomb bays—and the flash lit the sky for miles.

It blew the plane to bits; but because of his armor-plated seat, didn't quite disintegrate Burns. He dropped unconscious to the ground over three miles below.

He came to (like Alkemade) about three hours later, lying in soft plowed earth. He felt his foot hurting and reached down to it. He couldn't feel anything there. Fear held him. No foot! He got himself to look down. It was there, all right. And then he felt sick when he saw why he hadn't felt it. It was his right forearm that was missing. It was caked in blood and mud where it had dug into the soft earth. There was no sensation from it.

He was able to stagger to his feet, and found he still had his parachute on—unopened. In a way, the explosion that should have killed him had saved his life, because it had ripped open one flap of the canvas cover of the parachute, and a streamer of silk had trailed out—probably enough to take the edge off terminal velocity.

Burns saw he was standing in a cabbage patch with a group of spindly pine trees almost overhead. They apparently broke his fall before he hit the soft soil. He struggled out of the garden, and some German railroadmen found him. German doctors, like all doctors with a freak, fussed over him.

They found that the explosion blast had collapsed one of his lungs, but

Illustrated by BRENDAN LYNCH

He dived over the side, getting a swift glimpse of the ground about 150 feet below.

from a weal on his throat they deduced that as he was blown out of his seat, the intercom cord of his helmet radio had tightened chokingly round his throat and saved the other lung from collapse.

He had not bled to death, they explained, because the explosion had affected his heart so that his pulse was faint and thready for hours, and because the accidental semi-burying of the stump in the soil, plus coagulation, had also checked the bleeding.

The Germans at that time overlooked one other thing. Weeks later Burns collapsed in an interrogation cell and only then they found he had a cracked spine. He spent months in plaster, and then joined us at Stalag Luft III wearing a great, piratical sort of hook where his arm used to be.

THERE were a lot of Poles in the R.A.F., but the luckiest one was a good-looking, clean-cut slightly balding flight lieutenant called Gutowski. In November, 1941, he was escorting some bombers back from a raid on Lille in France when his Spitfire caught a direct hit from flak and spun.

When Gutowski got her out of the spin he was a couple of thousand feet below and a couple of miles behind his squadron, trailing a dirty black stream from a burst oil radiator.

A flock of Focke-Wolf 190's dived on the straggler. Gutowski got one of them, but his plane was hit several more times. He found himself in an inverted spin, got out of it into a normal spin but was too low to pull out.

Moving like lightning, he unclipped his straps and dived over the side, getting a swift and shaking glimpse of the ground that he estimates was only about 150 feet below.

A second later, just as the silk was starting to stream out of the pack, he hit—with a nice soft bounce—on a big pile of beet leaves about six feet high and ten feet across. He rolled unhurt to the ground, and saw the wreck of his plane smoking about ten yards away.

BY rights, Pilot Officer Fred Bist should have been buried where he hit the ground in France. It would have been easy, because he made quite a dent. He was an affable character who shouldn't really have been in the Canadian Air Force, first because he is an American (from one of the Northern States, as far as I remember), secondly because he was overage for air-crew, and thirdly because, come the war, he was a theological student about to be ordained.

However, one night in mid-1942 he was mid-upper gunner in a Boston bomber on an intruder patrol over France. They were down to about five hundred feet strafing ground targets when they got a direct hit from flak. There was an explosion; the airplane broke in two; and Bist popped out like a champagne cork, minus his parachute pack, which was clipped in a fuselage rack.

Unconsciousness spared him the distress of being five hundred feet up without any visible means of support. He dropped like a stone (as far as he knows) onto a plowed field, and has no idea if there was anything else that broke his fall.

Eventually he recovered consciousness, to find two German soldiers leaning over him. They carted him off to a hospital with a broken neck, lumps of flak in his back, a broken hand and severe burns.

German doctors were so impressed at finding a live body in a field without a parachute that they gave him special care, and Freddy survived with a crooked neck, planning to go back to theological college in Montreal with consolidated faith. . . .

Probably the first man ever to fall without a parachute and live was a wiry little Welshman, Leading Aircraftman George, tail-gunner in a Sunderland flying-boat in 1940. I didn't know this man personally, but I got his story from a man who lived with him in another prison camp and I believe it is true.

His flying-boat was set on fire by flak during recce over Norway in that inglorious campaign of April, 1940. They were about fourteen thousand feet. George crawled back from his turret to get his parachute pack which was stowed in the hull, but the flames beat him to it and he returned parachuteless to his turret to wait dolorously for the end. It came unexpectedly in a thunderous explosion that blew his turret (with him still inside) off the flying-boat.

Surrounded by bits of disintegrating turret, he fell in carefree unconsciousness, down and down.

Some Norwegians saw him drop, with horror, and noted where he plunged into the snow on a hillside with a fine flurry, like a bomb-burst. They climbed up to the spot to bury the pieces and found George, still passed out, breathing gently many feet deep in the snow.

The irony of it all was that, though George was unhurt by his fall, he was badly burned by the explosion, and at the other extreme, frostbitten (losing part of his ears) by the snow that saved his life.

ANOTHER such secondhand story concerns a French artillery spotter, Capitaine Larmier, a plump, fair-haired little man in his early thirties. I got these facts from an R.A.F. officer

who met him soon after his downfall, and I accept them as reliable.

It was the morning the phony war ended on May 10, 1940, and the Wehrmacht crashed into France. Larmier was spotting low over the battle as passenger in a Potez 63, type 11, a fast and handsome twin-engined airplane.

A light flak shell slammed through the tail and damaged the controls. The Potez started to nose down. Larmier didn't wait for the inevitable. He jumped over the side, saw, as he jumped, that the plane was under one hundred feet, and pulled the D-ring of his parachute immediately.

There was no hope, of course. Parachutes need four hundred feet to be effective. As with Gutowski, the silk was just streaming out of the pack when he hit—the top of a haystack, bounced, and stayed up there, winded, shocked and dumfounded.

There his luck ended. Larmier was no needle. The Germans found him, and he went on to five years behind barbed wire.

FICTION has nothing like the inside story of what happened to a man you heard of as almost a legend in the Battle of Britain, Douglas Bader, the legless fighter pilot who shot down German after German and was showered with decorations. Both his legs had been amputated after a bad crash in the early thirties. Sheer guts and two aluminum legs made him an ace in 1940.

In autumn, 1941, he was leading his fighter group over France when a free-for-all started with a formation of Messerschmitt 109's.

Bader picked one as tough as himself; in a head-on attack neither one would give way and the two fighters collided with a glancing crash that left the German pilot dead and Bader spinning down out of control with one of his metal legs pinned rigidly in the damaged cockpit. No matter how he tugged, he couldn't free it.

For any ordinary man, it would have meant an unpleasant death, but Bader just unstrapped the trapped leg, pulled himself over the side of the cockpit and floated down by parachute, with one empty pants-leg flapping. He landed heavily on the other metal leg but was not much hurt. It was the only time he'd ever been glad he'd lost his legs.

(The affair resulted in one of the few chivalrous incidents of the war. One of the German aces, General-major Galland, kept Bader as a guest on a German airfield in France till an R.A.F. plane flew over and dropped a spare leg.)

Different altogether is the story of Bren Hooper, an Irish squadron leader in the R.A.F. He took his bomber to Bremen in June, 1942, on his sixty-fourth mission, after which he was listed for a trip to America as an instructor. They dropped their load and at about twelve thousand feet were nearing the Dutch coast on the way back, almost out of the flak and fighter belt, when a sharp warning from the tail-gunner was blotted out in the mad crash of cannon-shells slamming into the plane.

Hooper's instrument panel blew to bits in his face, and a sudden glow under the port engine cowling blossomed into flame.

He shoved stick and rudder into the same corner and the portly bomber hoisted her tail and peeled off steeply to dodge the fighter and (so Hooper hoped) put out the fire.

He held her in the dive toward a thin layer of cloud at about three thousand feet, and the plane built up to the fastest speed of its career. They lost the fighter, but the flames only grew, and as she rocketed into the cloud, Hooper eased back on the stick to pull out.

Nothing happened. He hauled back harder. Still no effect. The controls, even the tail trim, had packed in. It was the last straw for Hooper. Already bleeding and shaken from the shells in his cockpit, he quietly passed out.

Trailing flame like a comet, the Wellington rocketed out below the cloud, still heading down at 300 m.p.h., completely out of control.

Aërodynamics came to the rescue. Increased speed creates more lift on the wings and makes a plane lift its nose. Slowly, of its own accord, the bomber's nose began to pull out of the vertical dive.

But the ground was getting mighty close. The plane was less than one thousand feet now, and a pop-eyed front-gunner had a paralyzing view of the race between earth and aërodynamics—the result, a dead heat.

AT nearly 300 m.p.h. the heavy airplane just got her nose up in time to hit flat fields near Groningen in a screaming skid that ripped up her belly like a gutted fish. She slapped her tail on the ground; the tail turret (with gunner still inside) snapped off and went somersaulting over the fields while the rest of the plane went charging on like a fiery monster for half a mile before she jerked to a smoking, crumpled stop, minus wings, engines and other oddments.

The silly sequel is that the crew scrambled out almost unhurt, dragging Hooper with them, also suffering no further damage.

The sillier sequel is that the tail-gunner also scrambled dizzily out of his turret several hundred yards back, he too being almost undamaged.

Silliest of all, he was so dizzy he fell into a nearby canal and was nearly drowned.

I'VE left the greatest miracle of all till last, because anything after it would be anti-climax. It concerns an Australian with a chin like Cary Grant who was blown out of his plane at seventeen thousand feet without a parachute.

His name is Joe Herman, and on the night of November 4, 1944, he was on his thirty-third mission, a slim dark youngster of twenty-two who was captain of a Halifax bomber caught by searchlights over Bochum, in the Ruhr, just after they'd dropped their load.

Flak came whistling up at them, and as they dived to escape it, Herman, for the first time in his career, told his crew to clip their parachute packs on their harnesses. He was too busy handling the plane to clip his own on, which was a mistake.

In two minutes they were nearly clear of the target area and its flak, when there was a crash in the fuselage from a direct hit. Reflected in the perspex windscreen, Herman saw fire leap up just behind the main spar of the wing.

The engineer was crawling back with an extinguisher when two more solid explosions shook the plane. One shell smacked behind the port inner engine and the other into the starboard outer. Wing gas tanks around each exploded into flame. In two seconds the whole plane seemed to be a mass of fire.

Joe Herman shouted into the intercom:

"Bail out! Bail out! Bail out!"

In his earphones, faintly, came the voice of Flying Officer Irish Vivash, mid-upper gunner, from Tamworth, Australia: "I think my leg's broken, Skip. Can you help me?"

Herman couldn't leave his seat. He had to keep the Halifax straight and level while the crew bailed out, so he told Vivash to try to get help from the engineer. When he thought they'd all got clear, he jumped out of his seat and went back to get his parachute pack and to see if Vivash was O.K.

He'd just got to the engineer's platform when he saw Vivash crawling down the fuselage, and then out of the corner of his eye he saw the starboard wing fold back. In a flash, the heavy bomber whipped on her back and started to spin.

Herman threw up a hand to brace himself against the roof when the roof suddenly vanished in a brilliant flash as the plane blew up. Next thing he knew he was falling and falling—and then he remembered: he didn't have his parachute on.

"Be careful of my right leg, Joe; I think it's broken."

He felt a piercing chill and panic welled up. Then the horror became too much for his mind to grasp. The crisis passed, and he felt unaccountably calm. Dimly in the dark he thought he saw shapeless bits of the plane falling near him, looked with sudden hope but couldn't make out his parachute pack among them.

Inevitably, as he fell, he started to think of what would happen when he hit, and the ghastly panic came back. He couldn't put the horror out of his mind. One moment it was too unreal to be true and next moment he knew with a terrible sick fear that it was inescapably true.

He started counting seconds, and felt his body prickling with sweat. He found he was turning over and over slowly in the air. One moment he'd see soft stars, and next a black void with a silver ribbon that he took to be a river. He had a sudden desperate hope that he would hit the water and perhaps even live, but he knew that hope was futile.

Brutal imagination returned in full strength, and he fully and finally realized that in a few seconds he was going to die very horribly. He felt like screaming, "Oh, God, don't let me die like this," but doesn't remember whether he spoke the words or not.

A second later he hit with a stunning thump.

He had another moment's utter mental hiatus and then a queer floating feeling. He thought he'd hit the ground and been killed, and then he thought: "If this is death, it can't be too bad."

THEN Herman heard a voice. It was almost in his ear and he recognized it. Irish Vivash! It said: "Is there anyone around?"

Herman came out of his mental void, and found he was fiercely clinging to a pair of legs, both arms wrapped tenaciously round them.

(It's all just about unbelievable. I can only say that Air Force interrogators believe it, and so do I, because I know Herman, and because I lived with thousands of shot-down airmen like him for a long time and I know that these things *do* happen).

Herman answered: "Yes," he said. "I'm down here."

"Where? Where are you?" It was Vivash's voice again.

"Here! Just below. I'm hanging on to your legs," said Herman.

"Be careful of my right leg, Joe," said Vivash. "I think it's broken." (Actually it wasn't broken, but his legs had seven flak wounds in them and were quite numb, which explains why the dazed Vivash didn't realize Herman was hanging on to them.)

"O.K.," said Herman. "Any more of the crew about, do you know?"

"I think the navigator and radio op. are round somewhere," said Vivash. (As far as they can gather, this was about five thousand feet up as they floated down by Vivash's parachute).

"Good show," said Herman, and for a while they fell in silence, too stunned to do more than accept the fantastic situation.

They worked it out later that Vivash was just opening his parachute after a delayed drop when Herman arrived, so that he was still falling very fast. Herman must have fallen on top of him, going a little bit faster, and instinctively grabbed Vivash as soon as he touched. As Vivash was still falling fast and some of Herman's momentum was checked by falling on him, his grip was not torn away. Both men say they hit with a terrific thump, and Herman says he was dazed and winded by it.

THEY kept descending in this dazed silence and Herman felt he was dreaming, except that his arms were aching intolerably. Then Vivash spoke:

"When we get near the deck, d'you think you'll be able to drop off?"

"Maybe," said Herman, then looked and thought he could see tree-tops rushing at them in the dark. "Look out," he said, and then they brushed tree-tops and hit hard, Vivash collapsing on top of Herman.

They rolled apart and lay gasping until Herman hauled himself to his feet with sharp pains in his chest (two broken ribs, he later discovered). Vivash got up then, in agony from his legs, but able to hobble along.

The two of them tried to get back across the Rhine, and held out for four days till winter's cold beat them and they were caught at a German farmhouse while trying to get some food and warmth.

There was a queer sequel to this queer story. Herman had married Betty, an English girl, and she refused to believe he was dead after hearing he was missing. Shortly before she heard he was a prisoner of war, she dreamed she saw an airplane crash, but as it hit, *two* men climbed out *together* and walked away.

The Long Journey—*by HAROLD HELFER*

AT four P.M., on July 26, 1903, an automobile limped into New York City. It was battered and scratched and full of mud, and one of the rear wheelguards was missing. The two occupants, bearing a strange resemblance to the car, had faces processed by the sun to the color of shoe-leather and wore battered, beat-up-looking canvas coats and caps. But history was made.

The car had journeyed from San Francisco to New York City in sixty-three days, the first automobile to span the United States from coast to coast.

Nowhere in the pages of automotive history are there to be found more intrepid souls than Dr. H. Nelson Jackson and his "man Friday," Sewell K. Crocker, who not only served as chauffeur and mechanic but swam rivers when that was necessary to get the auto across to the other side.

Dr. Jackson decided on a dare—and for a wager of $50—to make the epochal trip. He'd been over to the University Club in San Francisco and a great argument broke out as to whether it would be possible for a horseless carriage to travel across the continent. Although several attempts had ended in failure, most of them coming to grief on the hot sands of the desert country, Dr. Jackson stanchly took the position that it could be done. So stanch was his position, in fact, that before the evening was over the doctor, in whose veins ran the truest of sportsman's blood, felt honor-bound to attempt the trip himself; and one fine morning, on May 23, 1903, to be exact, he started out.

Deeming it best to avoid the sands of Southern California, Dr. Jackson struck out on a northerly route. It wasn't long, though, before he was wondering about the wisdom of his decision. He found himself lifting boulders to make the ruts and paths of the Sierra Nevada range passable for his Winton car and his tires had taken such a beating over the rough terrain that when 700 miles from San Francisco he had to stop and wait for more tires to be sent to him.

The Winton plugged gamely ahead. The main trouble was that there were no roads for any consistent distances and rivers and streams frequently had no bridges at all.

To get themselves out of ruts, sand, mud and buffalo-holes, the two adventurers—Dr. Jackson and his untiring helper, Crocker—depended chiefly on what they called their "block-and-tackle" strategy. They would make the block fast at a point some distance ahead. Then they would attach the rope to the car, start the engine and make the machine literally pull itself out of its difficulty. They used a variation of this stratagem in fording rivers, Crocker swimming across with the rope. Whenever they could, though, they tried to span the bridgeless bodies of water by sheer force of the car's engine or by floating it across, using the revolving wheels as substitute propellers.

DR. JACKSON and Crocker sometimes found themselves picking their automotive way through long stretches of pathless forests. Sometimes they would go a whole day without seeing a human being. They were once stuck for thirty-six hours without food. Once Crocker had to walk twenty-nine miles for some gasoline. Sometimes they couldn't get gasoline and had to settle for benzine. Occasionally a cowboy, out of kindness and curiosity, would ride ahead on his horse to scout and pick out the way for them.

They once had to use the block-and-tackle strategy seventeen times in one day, to keep themselves unstuck on the journey. They made sixteen miles that day.

They discovered that they could get bogged down in the sands of northern Nevada as well as the sands of southern California. But their worst stretch of traveling, as far as they were concerned, were the swamplands of Nebraska. Sometimes the car would get so mired down that the engine would be completely submerged.

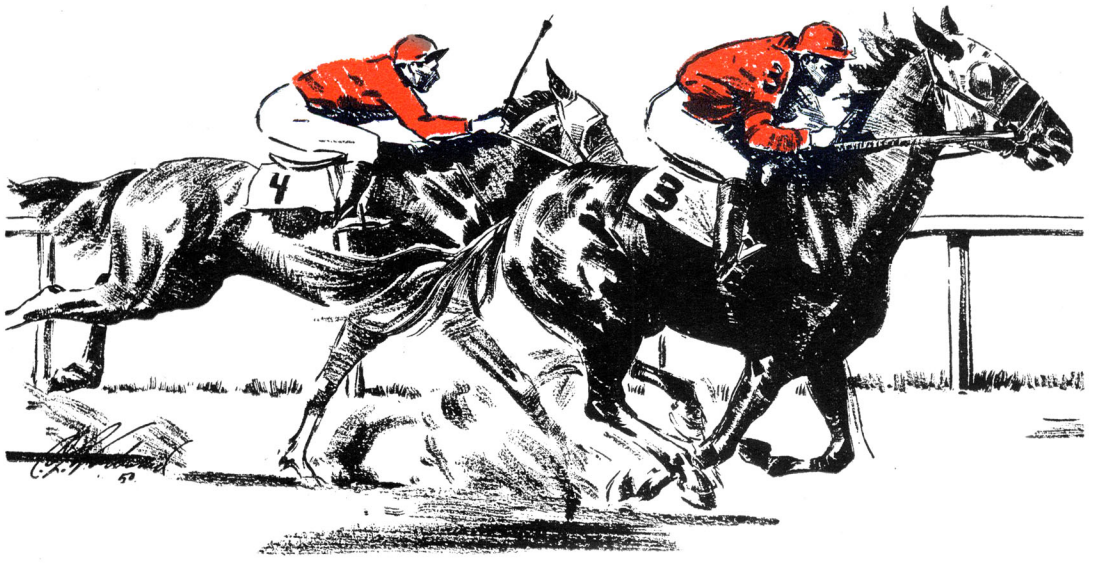
But the ingenuity and determination of the two stout-hearted troupers always won out. They carried a "small machine-shop" along, with which to make repairs, since garages were all but unknown. Sometimes blacksmiths lent them a hand along the way to keep their car together. When an axle broke, they patched things up by fitting the broken ends into a pipe. Once, when a bearing gave out, they kept going by borrowing a part from a mowing-machine.

FOR at least half of the six-thousand-mile journey the people along the way never had seen a car before. One terror-stricken farmer and his wife nose-dived themselves under their wagon when they saw the contraption coming down the road; but as a rule news of the coming of the wondrous vehicle would precede them, and there were welcoming committees and thronged streets to greet the enterprising motorists.

For all the mud, boulders and travail, the Winton finished in a burst of glory, making it from Little Falls, N. Y., to New York City, a distance of two hundred and thirty miles, in twenty-four hours, its best record for the trip. Dr. Jackson's wife and his father, an Episcopalian minister, got in a car and drove up the Hudson to meet the conquering heroes.

And to this day, it is said, there never has been a more joyous honking of greeting horns.

The Crooked Circle



He got off the bus, crossed the parking lot to the administration building and slowly walked up the gray steps. On the top step he turned to view the Greenville racing strip lying at his left. A morning mist shrouded the back stretch, and he saw a dark bay emerge from the mist and swing into the far turn. The effortless strides of the bay as it neared the three-eighths pole indicated the strip was firm despite the early morning showers.

He entered the building and walked up to the second floor. A door there was marked GEORGE THOMPSON, *Steward*. He opened the door and went in.

"That's like painting the petals of a rose," he said to the girl at the desk, who was using a compact.

"For a line," said the girl, "that stinks." She snapped the compact shut, and her eyes considered him, taking in the worn leather jacket and the unpressed trousers. "Oh, it's you again. The boss isn't in. He's in Florida. Or maybe it's Alaska. I forgot which."

"An appointment this time, honey. In case you've forgotten the name, it's Danny Miller."

"In case I've forgotten, he says. My Lord, it's been giving me nightmares. Take a seat. He's busy on the phone."

He sat in a chair near the wall and fished a half-smoked cigarette from his pocket. It was bent, and he tried to straighten it. It crumbled between his fingers.

"There's a fresh pack here," the girl said. "Help yourself."

He shook his head. "Never touch 'em."

"Okay, you're a big shot. But do me a favor. Look at the wall and not at me. That hungry look disturbs me."

But not as much as it disturbed him, Danny reflected.

There were pictures on the wall, framed photographs of racehorses with attending trainers holding the reins. He had seen them before, during the three months he'd been haunting George Thompson's office. That is, he'd seen them all except one.

The light in the office was poor, and he leaned forward for a better view.

There was no mistaking the animal, the slightly dappled gray coat, the slender almost delicate legs, the proud head held so erect. That would be Gray Adjutant, holder of the six-furlong record at Greenville.

He had ridden the colt just three months before. A green apprentice, fresh from a county track, and he had ridden one of the outstanding two-year-olds. It had been a big deal.

"It's his wife he's talking to," the girl said.

Danny nodded. "I can wait."

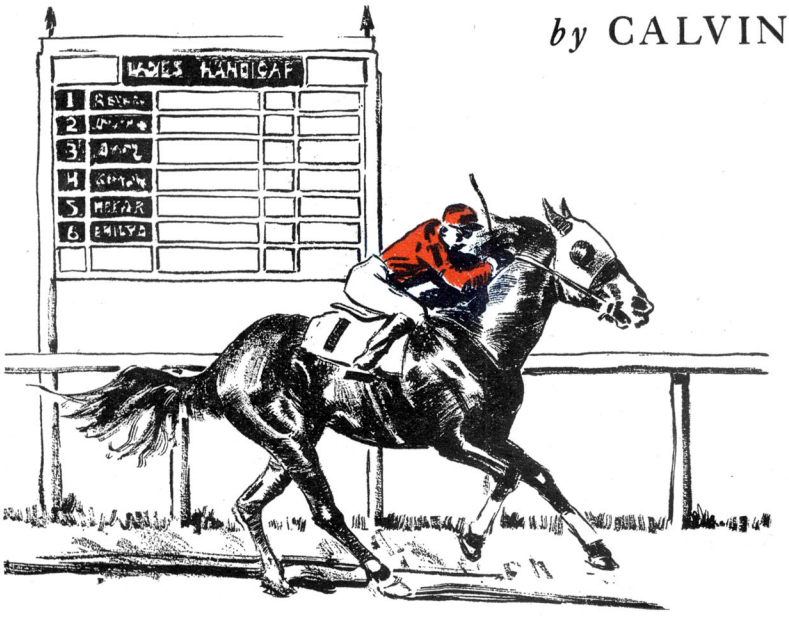
The colt had lost just one race during its career—the day he had ridden her.

"Or maybe I should say he's listening to her," the girl said. "She's a windbag."

Danny nodded again. He wasn't listening. He was looking at the picture, not really seeing it. The picture had become suffused, the image of the colt dark and blurry, blurry like the memory of his first day at Greenville. Of course some moments stood out, moments like the ache in his belly as he swung aboard his first mount, his awareness that a thousand eyes were watching as he wiped the sweat from the palms of his hands. He could recall moments like the smell of the damp turf, and the green things growing beside it, the pungent odors of sweaty animals, the swelling sounds from the stands as he guided a thousand pounds of straining horseflesh down the stretch. He could recall

THE SPORT OF KINGS AND CROOKS AND MANY PLAIN ORDINARY PEOPLE CAN BE SERIOUS BUSINESS FOR A JOCKEY.

by CALVIN J. CLEMENTS



"A little more, baby. Just a little!" Danny felt the mare's last desperate lunge.

these moments because they were special—special, like meeting Frank Sneider for the first time.

Sneider, the owner of Gray Adjutant, was a big man with shrewd eyes and a ready smile, and he had intercepted Danny on his way to the jockey-room after winning his first race.

"Always glad to see a new boy coming up," Sneider said, taking Danny's hand. "How did it feel to come through on your first day?"

How did it feel? Ten thousand people had roared as he slipped through the inside to clip the favorite by a nose. His name had rippled through the stands. How did it feel?

"Great," Danny said. "Simply great." He was pleased that Sneider had noticed him. The big man owned a large stable, and might keep him in mind for an occasional mount. There were whispers about Sneider, whispers of gambling syndicates and the wrong kind of rides at the right time. But then, people at the Greenville track were always ready to talk.

"You're riding for a good man, too," Sneider said. "Of course, you may not get much work. Jenkins has a small stable."

True enough. Pop Jenkins' string was a small one compared to Sneider's, and Danny would need other mounts to really get anywhere. It was Pop Jenkins who had spotted him at the Arizona county fair and given him a railroad ticket East and a contract to ride. "You've got the makings of a great rider," Pop had told him. "All you need is a little time. I'll take the gamble, and maybe it'll pay off for the both of us." There had been a young girl with Jenkins at the time, his daughter Annie, small and dark-haired, with disturbing gray eyes. She had smiled at Danny. It had been a day rich with promise.

"I want you to ride Gray Adjutant today." Sneider said. "The boy I had scheduled didn't show up. The race isn't too important, really a warm-up for the Juvenile Stakes, but it might do you some good to be seen aboard the colt. How about it?"

How about it? For the moment he thought he hadn't heard Sneider right. Gray Adjutant had won six in a row, and was being talked of as a cinch to take the Juvenile. An apprentice riding a stake-horse! How lucky could a guy get, his first day?

Pop Jenkins was thoughtful when he announced he was riding Gray Adjutant. "Watch your step, Danny," the old man advised. "Frank Sneider was a charter member of this track when the natives here christened it 'Crooked Circle.' The day might be gone when a crooked ride was the rule rather than the exception, but Frank Sneider is still here and as prosperous as ever. The stewards are gunning for him, and watching his riders pretty closely."

"All right, Pop. Say the word, and I'll drop it."

But Jenkins shook his head at that. "It's legitimate enough that Sneider wants to lighten his colt with your bug allowance. Just keep in mind when you're dealing with him that he's a gambler first and a sportsman second."

You rode the breeze when you rode Gray Adjutant. Smooth-gaited, with the long sure stride of a champion, the colt had taken the lead from the barrier and held it into the stretch. "Just sit tight and hang on," Sneider instructed him before the race. "He might slow in the stretch, but spare the whip or he'll stop. Let him feel the bit, and he'll walk away with it."

Sit tight and hang on.

That's what it amounted to until the eighth pole was reached. Then the colt faltered, and Aegean Night, the second choice in the race, ranged alongside. Danny put his weight against the bit and clucked to the colt. Instead of responding, the colt broke stride. Aegean Night drew away.

Frantically, Danny snugged the reins, cursed the colt when he continued to lag, and then, finally, snapped back the whip.

The whip did it. The colt leaped ahead, a world of power left. But too late: Aegean Night was at the wire, six lengths in front, and Gray Adjutant finished a poor second.

The cursing from the crowd that had heavily backed the colt to odds-on was something he tasted for days afterward. They jeered derisively, shouting accusations of crooked riding as he dismounted and weighed out.

He was called before the stewards. George Thompson was there, also Sneider. Thompson, his face hard and grim, said: "Make it good, Miller—make it damn' good! What kind of an exhibition do you call that?"

Still clouding his brain was the humiliation he had received at the scales, and he began fumbling for

"Just sit tight and hang on. He might slow in the stretch, but spare the whip or he'll stop."

words, attempting to explain the colt's actions.

Thompson cut him short. "Why did you delay in using the whip?"

Carefully he explained his instructions to spare the whip for fear the colt would stop, and he glanced at Sneider for verification when he finished.

Sneider was slowly, almost painfully, shaking his head. "Miller, I said *don't* spare the whip or he'll stop. It's well known that Gray Adjutant needs a constant whip in the stretch. You must have misunderstood me."

Danny stared his dismay. "But I'm positive I heard you correctly—" And suddenly he understood. It was crazy, really, but it added up: Sneider had wanted his colt pulled, had wanted him to lose. The colt's fine record meant nothing. *A gambler first; a sportsman second.*

That Thompson was not blind to the situation was evident by his sudden coolness as he turned to Sneider. "Then you feel the blame is Miller's? Your story is that he misunderstood you?"

Sneider shrugged. "It's understandable for a boy to be nervous on his first day. But as for any blame, I feel I should share it for not being more explicit."

Thompson started to reply, then tightened his lips. He turned to Danny. "Miller, you'll be idle until we look into this further."

"Now, wait a minute," Sneider protested before Danny could speak. "Give the kid a break. I've already admitted I should have elaborated on the colt's performance when entering the stretch. Why set the boy down?"

Thompson ignored the question. To Danny he continued: "I'll contact you later, Miller; but for the present your license is revoked. If you want a reason, call it a bum ride, inexperience or anything else you choose."

"Look," Danny said. "It's not fair. I—I—" He broke off. Anger at being victimized filled him. He turned and started for Sneider. Thompson grabbed his arm and swung him back, as easily as if handling a child.

"Miller, I know of no better way to lose your license than to put on a performance for the newsmen. I said I would contact you. Now go and get dressed."

He remembered the walk to the locker-room, the quiet side glances of the other riders as he changed into street clothes. It was easy to read their thoughts; he had attempted to throw a race, and had not been too clever about it.

"The story is on the toteboard," Jenkins said to him later when he returned to the barn. "The odds on Aegean Night dropped to five-to-two in the last few minutes of play. It took a lot of outside money to drop those odds against a colt like Gray Adjutant. Money of that kind comes from one place—a big book that has been heavily loaded."

"You don't have to tell me, Pop. I know. I was the sucker, the slob. That hurts, but not as much as Thompson's attitude. What kind of a racket are they running here? Sneider gets a hard look, and I get set down."

"Thompson did the right thing, Danny. The crowd won't forget that ride in a hurry, and you couldn't appear too soon. As far as Frank Sneider is concerned, what can Thompson do as long as Sneider insists he gave you the right instructions? Thompson is trying to put him out of business, but if he pressed this charge it wouldn't stick, and the papers would have the usual field day that they have when they get hold of a Greenville racing scandal."

"That still adds up to the jockey being the patsy, Pop. It's not right."

The old man sighed and shook his head. "It may not be right, Danny, but what can be done? You can't put a man out of business on an uncertain charge, and the hearing would accomplish nothing except perhaps taint your name. Do you want owners, in the future, wondering where they heard the name Danny Miller, and trying to remember what kind of an affair he was mixed in? Some might even recall the incident as a loud-mouthed jockey excusing a poor ride. No good, Danny. No good for you."

There was logic of a kind in this. The relationship between owners and a new rider is a thing held in delicate balance. Hurling charges at Sneider would bring him no satisfaction, and he would be taking the risk of being marked as a trouble-maker.

"You'll be back in a week or two after the stewards talk it out. Take it easy until then."

But it hadn't been a week or two. At the end of the second week he had gone to Thompson's office and was told he'd be sent for when the matter was settled. A month passed, and he went back. The answer was the same. It had added up to ninety days of cooling his heels in Thompson's office and receiving evasive answers.

"Stop making faces at me," the girl said. "He's ready to see you."

George Thompson, thin-faced, with heavy glasses supporting a furrowed brow, leaned back in his chair and nodded a silent greeting.

"We're okaying your license, Miller." He removed his glasses and began toying with them. "I suppose you know your honesty has never been questioned in this office. A few days after you rode Gray Adjutant, we managed to fit the pieces together pretty well. The colt had been entered for that particular race three days before Pop Jenkins brought you to Greenville, and heavy bets had been placed before Sneider even knew you existed. It follows that Sneider had an arrangement with a rider, an arrangement that for some reason flopped at the last moment. Perhaps the rider got cold feet.

"Anyway, Sneider was in a spot and elected you, a green boy from out of town, counting on your ignorance of the colt's need for a heavy whip. We knew all this, but there was no proof. We had a decision to make: grab Sneider and try to make a weak charge stick against a battery of expensive lawyers, or wait for a break and nail him properly. Well, time marched on, as they say, and we didn't nail him."

"You knew the guy was crooked, and yet you set me down for three months. Nice going!"

"Miller, I did that in your interest. The other stewards were for forgetting the whole thing, but I held out for a ninety-day suspension; now—now, don't get riled up! Some day you'll thank me for it. If you had gone back after a week or two, the crowd would've got you. They'd have razzed you every time you appeared. Things like that grow. They'd forget the original reason for doing it, but you'd still get the razzing. You'd break under it, and quit. I've seen it happen."

DANNY shifted his feet. He knew the steward was right. Justice was one thing, and common sense was another.

"Anything else?"

"One other thing: Your license is issued conditionally." Thompson leaned forward and his knuckles began rapping the desk for emphasis. "You're riding on the condition you leave Sneider alone, that you don't make an ass out of yourself trying to get even. Sooner or later we expect Sneider to stick his head out. We'll be on hand to chop it off for him."

"Now look," Danny said. "I owe that guy something. If you think I'm going to forget—"

Thompson snorted. "So *don't* forget. Remember! But what good will it do you? What could you do? Nothing. When you climb down off

"You knew the guy was crooked, and yet you set me down for three months. Nice going! If you think I'm going to forget—"

a horse, you're out of your league. Listen, Miller: two years ago the Governor was set to close this track. It was a stinkhole. It was 'Clean it up, or else.' As it stands now, it's in pretty good shape and getting better. The only publicity we're getting is in the sporting pages, and that's the way I want to keep it. Let me find a news item about a jockey punching an owner in the nose, and that jockey is finished!"

Danny slowly let out his breath. "Okay. That's it. Anything else?"

"Jenkins is expecting you to ride today. Good luck."

He nodded to the young colored boy cooling a chestnut filly outside the Jenkins barn and walked inside. Pop Jenkins was sitting at a small kitchen table, his gray head bowed in thought, the stub of a pencil clenched between his teeth. He looked up at Danny, and his weather-wrinkled eyes brightened.

"You didn't have to stay away, son. You could have paid us a social call, if nothing else."

"Sorry, Pop. I haven't been feeling very social-minded."

"Come back with anything on your mind, son?"

"If you mean Sneider, Pop, he's forgotten. Thompson says it's that, or else."

"Thompson's a smart man. Riding's your business; you stick to it. I have a horse going today. You'll be aboard."

"I want to thank you, Pop."

"Don't thank me; just ride this one in today so I can pay a few of these." He indicated the papers on the table.

"Headaches, eh?"

Jenkins nodded. "Come here, and I'll show you my current one—the one you're riding in the Ladies' Handicap."

Danny followed the old man to the end stall. A broad-chested reddish mare lifted her head from the feed box at their approach, and her dark eyes flicked suspicion. Danny softly whistled as he recognized the mare. It was Rexburne out of Ganshee, who for five of her seven years had whipped the best at Greenville.

"You're moving up in the big time, eh, Pop?"

A wry smile touched Jenkins' lips. "And ready to come down with a crash. I figured she'd have a year or two of good racing left, and went in up to my neck to buy her."

"And she hasn't got it?"

"She has, but she's been bucking hard luck since I bought her." Jenkins shook his head. "She's got to click today, Danny. I can't afford to dig a deeper hole."

"What's her chances?"

"It's a small field, six running, and she's by far the best of them. Gandy Dancer—that's Sneider's mount—is second best, but a very poor second."

"Then what are you worrying about, Pop?"

"Maybe it's Frank Sneider," said Annie Jenkins, walking into the barn.

She was a small girl wearing jodhpurs and a silk shirt opened at the throat. Her brown hair was shoulder length and framed a combination of freckles and gray eyes that invariably left Danny a little breathless. She held out a hand, and Danny took it.

"It's nice to see you, Danny. I should say some mean words about your ignoring us, but I won't. Did Pop tell you about the heavy betting Sneider is doing on Gandy Dancer?"

Danny shook his head. He was studying the warm gray eyes and rapidly coming to the conclusion he'd been a fool for wasting three months.

"He's putting everything on Gandy Dancer that he can raise," Annie said. "He's even borrowing on his horses."

"Any idea what makes him so sure of the race?"

"That," Jenkins said, "is something I'd give plenty to know. When Sneider goes all out on an underdog, you can be sure something's in the wind. You're going to run into trouble on the track, Danny. Somebody's going to ride herd on you. You can count on it." A note of desperation crept into the old man's voice. "The purse will better ten thousand, Danny. I need that. I need it bad if I'm going to stick around."

Danny patted the stooped shoulders. "Okay, Pop, let's run over the card and see how it shapes up."

They sat in the small kitchen, Danny and Jenkins studying the entries for the handicap while Annie prepared coffee. "Gandy Dancer has Smith up," Danny said thoughtfully. "He's clever but you couldn't buy him for a million bucks."

Jenkins agreed with this. "You won't get trouble from that direction. Sneider would never take a chance on having his horse disqualified for trick riding."

"That leaves Sheba with Joe Wycoff aboard, Dark Day with Charles Brinkley—" Danny broke off and stared at Jenkins. "Pop, I believe Brinkley has ridden for Sneider before."

Jenkins nodded. "But so has about every rider at this track at one time or another. It doesn't prove they're crooked."

"Has Brinkley ever ridden Gray Adjutant?"

Jenkins' brow contracted. "I believe he has but it still doesn't prove—"

Danny rose from the table. "Maybe we can narrow this down, Pop. See you later. I've got some fishing to do."

Jenkins' jaw went slack. "Fishing? An hour before post time?"

Annie, setting two cups on the table, caught the meaning. "Danny, don't go near Sneider. He'll only upset you—and this race is too important."

Danny grinned from the doorway. "Sweetheart, it's only for a little talk. I'll even shake his hand if he sticks it out."

"What did you say?" Annie asked softly.

"I said it's only for a little talk. I'll even—"

Annie turned back to the stove. "Never mind. I thought you said something else."

Inside the Sneider barn a cubicle near the door contained an ancient desk and several chairs. Behind the desk sat Frank Sneider, his bulky form attired in blue slacks and sport shirt. A cautious smile appeared on his face as Danny entered.

"I hope there'll be no melodramatics, Miller."

"What would it get me?" He sat down in the chair facing the desk.

Sneider leaned back in the chair and nodded pleasantly. "I'm glad you feel that way about it. You know I've always been sorry about that affair. It was probably the worst blunder I've ever pulled. I never dreamed the stewards would see it as anything more than a poor ride by a green kid. I felt pretty bad about it when they set you down."

"I'll bet it kept you awake nights," Danny said.

Sneider smiled faintly. "For a few nights it did, but I won't ask you to believe it."

Danny looked curiously at the big man. "You're not denying you're a crook, that you backed Breezing Home that day?"

Sneider chuckled. "I like the word 'gambler' better." He reached across the desk for a cigar. "No, Miller, I won't deny I bet against the Adjutant. But if you're thinking of using the admission in some way you can forget it—I'm packing in after today. This place has changed too much—for the better, I'll admit—and it would be a mere question of time before Thompson handed me my walking-papers. I don't mind though, I've made plenty. Which reminds me you've got a few dollars coming."

"Shall I tell you where to put it?"

Sneider shrugged and removed the cellophane wrapper from the cigar. "No harm in offering it."

"Why did Brinkley back down on the Adjutant?" Danny asked suddenly.

Sneider was in the act of touching a match to his cigar. His hand paused and he stared at Danny over the flame. He lit the cigar.

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

The pattern shaped up as they swept around the clubhouse bend, Rexburne fourth but running easily. . . . . There was still a long way to go.

"What makes you think it was Brinkley?" he asked finally.

"Things like that get around," Danny said. "There's not many secrets in the jock-room."

Sneider nodded thoughtfully. "I suppose not."

"It no longer makes any difference," Danny said. "But I was curious why he backed down. After all, he's handled the colt several times and could do pretty much as he pleased with it."

"That's exactly the reason he got jittery at the last moment," Sneider said. "He knew a good ride would be expected of him and felt Thompson might rule him off for life if the cameras caught anything peculiar—" Sneider stopped short and his eyes narrowed a trifle. "You're a clever boy, Miller," he said softly after a moment. "I completely forgot you were riding Rexburne today. 'Forewarned is forearmed.' Is that the idea?"

"Figure it out," Danny said, getting to his feet. "You're the bright boy. If you're real bright you'll scratch Gandy Dancer to cancel your bets."

"And that would leave you with a pushover; Jenkins gets a nice fat purse and you get the girl. Nice happy ending, eh, Miller?" Sneider chuckled. "I'm more of a gambler than you think. Gandy Dancer will run and my bets will stand. They amount to a hundred thousand and I'm betting it that you don't outsmart Brinkley."

"I hope you're at the winner's circle when I trot in," Danny said. "I want to see what a man looks like after he drops a hundred grand."

Sneider laughed. "I'll be there, Miller, but I'm afraid *you* won't."

The six mares that were entered in the Ladies' Handicap were led into the paddock stalls. Leisurely, almost lazily, so as not to excite them, their equipment was adjusted and secured.

"Stay well in the rear of Dark Day," Jenkins said for the dozenth time. "Don't move until you near the stretch. That's where Brinkley will try to take you out, where it counts. Pass him with everything the mare has."

Danny nodded. He wore the orange silks of the Jenkins Stable, a bright green horseshoe design across the breast. The silk felt cool against his skin. It was good to be back.

He saw Annie entering the paddock gate. She wore a gray turtleneck sweater and a trim riding-skirt. The sweater was a little snug.

"Look what's coming, Pop. And I'm supposed to keep my mind on the race."

Jenkins cast a critical eye over his daughter's apparel as she approached.

"This is the opening wedge, son. Her mother pulled the same thing on me thirty years ago. It's supposed to make you think of a fireside, slippers and things."

"I'll buy it," Danny said. He grinned at Annie, who was glaring at her father while attempting to maintain composure.

They went to the walking ring then, and riders were ordered up. Jenkins tapped Danny's booted leg and issued last-minute instructions.

"You're aboard the best horse, son. Don't forget to lay off the pace. And what ever happens go down fighting. Don't let up until someone's nose hits that wire."

"I'll be with her all the way, Pop."

"Keep off the rail, away from pockets. Take plenty of room—you don't have to save ground. Above all *watch Brinkley!*"

DANNY nodded again and they moved out onto the path and down to the racing strip. It was a beautiful day for racing, the turf firm, the air velvety warm, the sky overhead an unbroken blue. The handicap had attracted a large crowd and the usual cramming took place along the rail to view the horses close at hand as they paraded by.

A redheaded girl at the rail waved several mutuel tickets at Danny.

"Hey, good looking," she called. "Get that sleepy look off your face. These are riding on you!"

Danny only half heard her. He was studying the three mares ahead of him. Gandy Dancer, prancing alongside an outrider, was a fast starter but had little heart in the stretch. He should have no trouble catching her there. Behind her came Sheba, speedy but unmanageable on the turns. Far up ahead, approaching the starting gate, was Dark Day with Brinkley aboard. At a mile, Danny knew, Dark Day could give a good account of herself, but this race was a mile and three-sixteenths. The two mares bringing up the rear Danny dismissed; they were outclassed and would need plenty of luck to touch any part of the purse.

The assistant starters took charge at the barrier. Gandy Dancer was led in first, then Dark Day. Rexburne went into the Three spot, Danny clucking to her softly. Sheba, displaying her usual bad temper, was led to the front of the barrier and backed in. Wycoff, the rider aboard Sheba, young and pink-cheeked, swore softly as the mare fought the bit and sought to kick the gate down. Finally she quieted.

Danny glanced at Brinkley, sitting quietly on Dark Day. The rider was looking straight ahead, his lean mouth set in a grim line, his pale eyes without expression.

The bell rang and the gates snapped open. Danny brought back his whip to forestall lagging. Rexburne responded and when she hit her stride he held her in hand, easing into fourth position.

The pattern shaped up as they swept around the clubhouse bend: Gandy Dancer in front by two lengths and still going away, Sheba second a half length in front of Dark Day, and Rexburne fourth but running easily.

Danny grinned as he saw Dark Day moved off the rail in front of him. It left open the shortest route for passing—and a beautiful way to be pocketed.

At the half mile Gandy Dancer had increased her lead to five lengths, and Danny fought the temptation to go after her. He knew Smith was attempting to draw him into an early sprint. There was still a long way to go. Gandy Dancer would be dropping back.

At the far turn he was proven correct. Gandy Dancer began to slow under the blistering pace. She was four lengths ahead, now three. Sheba was still second; a length back came Dark Day. They neared the stretch. Danny clucked to the mare. She lengthened her stride, inching up to Dark Day. "Now, baby. . . ." He snapped back the whip. The mare leaped ahead, well on the outside. She sailed past Dark Day, beautiful head outstretched, mane flying. Dark Day dropped to the rear, out of the running.

The roar of the watching crowd swelled in Danny's ears. They thundered into the last turn, Gandy Dancer by two lengths, Sheba by one, Rexburne ranging up. It was all over but the shouting.

HE overtook Sheba, head and head; she bumped him slightly and he moved over. Again Sheba pressed in, and as they took the curve she suddenly bore out, forcing Rexburne into the center of the track, into a wide sweep. Precious ground was being lost.

"Straighten that bum out!" Danny snarled. And then he saw the rider alongside was only going through the motions of fighting his mount's head, that Wycoff was actually working on slack reins.

Watch Brinkley, indeed—watch a rider who had probably nothing on his mind except a small riding fee! How Sneider must have laughed when he left the barn!

He swore in helpless rage as he was carried toward the outside rail. To pull Rexburne into Sheba and attempt to straighten both horses might bring them to a dead stop. There was only one thing to do: Lose more ground.

Savagely he applied the whip, pulling the mare into a wider sweep, clear to the outside rail. As he straightened into the homestretch, free of Sheba, he groaned when he saw Gandy Dancer had increased her lead to six lengths.

It was too much to overcome. He saw that even as the animal under him shot ahead, eager to display the speed she had harbored.

"Everything you've got, baby!" He fed her the whip, giving her the full sweep, letting her hear the whine, then snapping it to her flank. He worked his arm in rhythm with the mare's flying hoofs. The quarter-pole flashed by. He was four lengths back, now three, now two. A thunderous roar rose from the grandstands as they witnessed the last headlong rush. A sixteenth to go. Two lengths behind. It was hopeless.

"A little more, baby. Just a little!" Danny murmured.

PERHAPS the mare heard and understood the words, perhaps it was the urgency of the tone, more possibly it was something recalled out of the past, something handed down through fine breeding. Whatever it was, a sob caught in Danny's throat as he felt the mare's last desperate lunge.

He turned his head as they flashed under the wire. Inches separated the two horses—inches in his favor. . . .

He stood in the irons and let her have the bit for a furlong, then trotted her back to the winner's circle. Near the circle he caught a glimpse of Sneider, pale and unsmiling, his eyes fixed on the toteboard, waiting for the photo confirmation.

A shout went up from the crowd, and Sneider turned slowly away.

"All right, Miller. Bring her in."

He rode into the circle and Jenkins, grinning broadly, held up a silver cup for him to see. When he stepped off the scales the old man threw an arm around his shoulders.

"A few more rides like that, Danny, and we'll be moving into the big circuit."

"Sure, Pop, we'll make it. It's a cinch."

"Somebody seems to have worries," Jenkins said, tilting his head toward Wycoff, who stood before a frowning George Thompson.

"Congratulations, Danny!" a voice said beside him. He turned and Annie's arms went about his neck, her lips pressing against his.

"Hey," said Danny, after a breathless moment. "You had to go up on your toes."

"What's wrong with that?"

Danny sighed his contentment. "Nothing wrong, honey. Nothing at all."

What more could a jockey ask for?

Alexander of Moscow

An American officer who fought for a time in company with the Russians tells of his very determined little Muscovite protégé

by WILLIAM A. KNOWLTON

IT was December of 1945, Berlin's first winter under her multiple conquerors, when I first met Alexander. The cold, bitter wind blew in gusts against the frost-rimmed windows of my battalion headquarters; outside, bent Germans, leaning into the flying snow, pulled tiny sledges of twigs along the street through a chill that penetrated even our unbombed buildings. In my office, over the sounds of the outside storm I could hear the rumble of an energetic conversation in the outer room where my adjutant held sway. Soon my door opened and Mac the adjutant peered in. "Sir," he said, "there's another one out here!"

There was no question as to whom he meant: ever since some enterprising Russian soldier had discovered that the American captain who commanded the motor battalion had once been with the Red Army, a steady stream of Soviet soldiers from private to colonel had passed through our portals seeking new parts for their vehicles. One glance at each dirty and battered "Stoodebakeroo" was usually sufficient to tell even an unqualified observer that preventive maintenance was unknown. They rarely got a part, because we were in short supply ourselves, but still the procession tramped into the office in search of the American officer who spoke Russian.

"Send him in," I sighed, and went over the brush-off routine mentally. The door closed, opened and closed again. I heard a pair of heels click, but the voice which started to report in Russian was not like any I had ever heard before. Startled, I looked up from my work, and there was Alexander.

He was the youngest soldier I had seen in the Red Army. His undersized body was encased in a torn, dirty Soviet uniform; but in place of the usual boots he wore thin-soled shoes and torn sheepskin leggings. A pinched face and a dirty field cap would have completed the picture but for two things: his hair was bright red, and the eyes which peered out at me lent a pixie-like quality to a freckle-sprinkled face. Out of uniform he would have looked far more Irish than Russian. But while I still stared, he completed his report, and then asked again: "Permission to speak?"

"Permission," I replied.

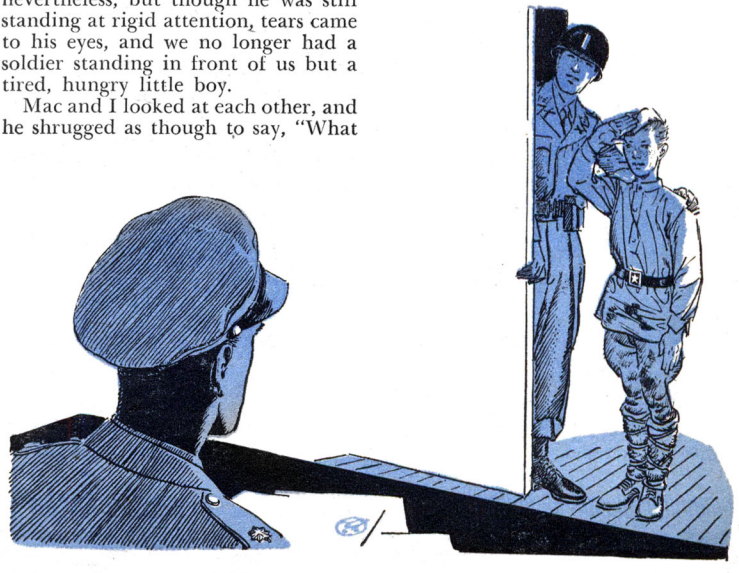
"Comrade Officer," he started, "I was on furlough in Moscow from my division, and I must return to Weimar. I have come this far, but have not been able to find a truck going in my direction. Can you give me a ride to Weimar?"

Now, ordinarily we had no vehicles entering the Soviet zone of Germany, let alone going to Weimar, deep within their Zone of Occupation and some distance from Berlin. However, by pure chance there was a truck in my motor pool waiting for Russian permission before making a trip to the area very close to Weimar. It had been waiting for almost a month, but Soviet authorities promised that the permission would be through "any day now." I started to refuse him, nevertheless, but though he was still standing at rigid attention, tears came to his eyes, and we no longer had a soldier standing in front of us but a tired, hungry little boy.

Mac and I looked at each other, and he shrugged as though to say, "What the hell!" So I asked Alexander to sit down, and explained to him that we ordinarily had no communication by vehicle with Weimar, that purely by accident we had a truck prepared for a trip to Thuringia, and that provided his comrades ever came through with permission, he could travel with that truck. In any case, his visit with us while awaiting transportation was not to exceed a few days, because we had no wish for trouble from his authorities.

Then I offered him some cookies from a package in the drawer of my desk. "Oh, no, thank you," he said. "I have already eaten my supper." But the look in his eyes belied him, and he finally wolfed down the whole package. In between bites we managed to extract his story, and a strange one it was.

His name, we learned, was Alexander Sergeyevich Ivanorov, and he was a private in the artillery at the age of fifteen. His home was near



He was the youngest soldier I had seen in the Red Army. While I stared, he asked again: "Permission to speak?"

Moscow, and he had joined the Red Army at the age of eleven, when the Germans were drawing near his home and it was a question of leaving or fighting. Any suggestion that he was only a mascot he vigorously rejected; he had been, he informed us, a telephonist in an artillery battalion of an infantry division, and he had four medals. For proof he pulled out four dog-eared, creased *"Spravka,"* which certified that Alexander Sergeyevich Ivanorov had been awarded the medal for the battle of Warsaw, the battle of East Prussia, the battle of Berlin, and one other which we could not well decipher, so torn was the paper. He had left his division in Poland for a fifteen-day furlough to Moscow, but there the similarity to any furlough schedules I knew ended. As near as we could make out, he had been handed his papers and told when to come back.

Travel to Moscow and then to his home had been fairly simple and congenial: there were many people tramping east in those days, and trucks loaded with war booty had been frequent. But Alexander had arrived at his home to find the house bombed and gutted, his family gone, and no one who could tell him of their whereabouts. So the furlough had been spent in Moscow with several sailors, also on leave. From the tales Alexander told us, it was easy to see that his companions had not been the best influence in the world. The furlough time rapidly drew to a close, and Alexander returned to Poland. But where his division had been was a group of new faces—his division had been transferred! He dashed to the nearest headquarters, reported and asked where he might find his division. "In Germany," was the brusque answer.

"Where in Germany?" he had asked.

"I am sorry," said the commandant, "but that is a military secret. They are in Germany somewhere, and it is up to you to find them. Give me your furlough paper. There, I will write on it to show that you reported here. Now go to the headquarters at Frankfort-on-the-Oder, and they will extend your time two days to allow you to find your division. Dismissed."

And that was how Alexander had appeared in Berlin two cold days later —two days which he had spent without food or shelter, wandering from Frankfort-on-the-Oder. In desperation while stumbling along Berlinerstrasse, he had asked a German where he might find transport to Weimar. The German had told him that there was only one motor pool in that area, the American pool on Winfriedstrasse, and that his Allies might help him. And so my battalion was temporarily enlarged by the addition of one undernourished and very junior Russian soldier with four medals.

Within two days the symptoms of our later troubles developed. Permission for our truck had not been granted. By this time Alexander had become the mascot of the battalion, despite the fact that he spoke nothing but Russian. No one could resist the shy pixie face and red hair. American food agreed with him, and he started putting on a little weight. But most of all, that worried look began to leave his face. For the first time in several years he began to enjoy the normal pursuits of a healthy boy, to play with some of the other mascots in the area, and to tag along with the young Master Sergeant who had "adopted" him on evening visits to the Red Cross Club. Here he contributed his share of the entertainment by singing lustily and nasally such songs as *"Katyusha"* and *"Tachanka."* Although he had enjoyed only three years' schooling, his mind showed a natural grasp of things mechanical. He would sit for hours by the window taking to pieces such wonders as cigarette lighters and lamps, and surprisingly enough, putting them back together in fair shape. But something was still on his mind, and I soon found out what.

My door opened and closed. "Comrade Captain, permission to enter?"

"Permission, Alexander," I said.

"Permission to speak?"

"Permission."

"Comrade Captain, I would like to buy a uniform," said Alexander.

"I agree with you, Alexander," I stated, "and I will see where I can have a small Russian uniform made for you. The one you have is pretty worn."

There was an embarrassed pause. "You don't understand," said a small voice. "I want an American uniform. I wish to join the American Army."

Alexander informed the policeman in no uncertain terms who won the war, and then sailed into him.

"You can't do that, Alexander," I explained. "You are a member of the Red Army, and our guest until the truck leaves for Weimar. Your comrades are going to take a dim view of your suddenly disappearing and joining the American Army, even if our people would allow it."

A persistently stubborn argument followed. He was in the forgotten age group, he told me. Stalin had made provisions for everything, according to what he had been told, and Stalin had provided that certain small boys between ten and twelve years old could be selected for military school from the Army. But Stalin had forgotten his age group: those children too young to be full-fledged members of the Red Army, and too old to go to military school. His family were dead. He had no friends. The commander of his artillery battalion in combat, whom he had loved, had been transferred, and the new commander was not a good man and did not appreciate Alexander. No one would miss him. He wished to join the American Army. In vain I argued that it could not be done, that we had rules against it, that Stalin would certainly not countenance it, and that he was still a member of his Army. I told him that he would be at a disadvantage with such a limited Soviet education out in a world where children his age were in their tenth year of school. Even the explanation of how illegal it was did not deter him. He wanted to join the American Army.

Finally I no longer had the time for what promised to be an interminable argument. "It's been two days since you arrived, Alexander," I explained, softly, "and we still have no permit for our truck to enter the Soviet Zone. If the permission does not come soon, we must send you back to the Soviet authorities." And that ended our conversation. I heard the door close as a subdued boy left the office.

ALMOST a half hour had passed when the door flew open again, and Mac burst into the room, his face longer than I have ever seen it. "My God, sir," he said, "we've had it! Alexander has killed himself. He committed suicide in barracks." We all raced down the stairs and over to the barracks where Alexander had been living. The door to one room had been smashed open, as evidenced by the splintered area around the latch, and there were so many excited soldiers inside that there was barely room to move. In the center of the group was a weeping boy.

Alexander, it seemed, had not committed suicide; he had merely attempted it. But his preparations had been thorough. First he had locked the door; then he had looped a strong piece of wire around a pipe which ran along the ceiling, and formed a rough hangman's knot. Next came the final touch of thoroughness: he had tied his own hands so that he would not be able to reach up in his struggles and undo himself. Fortunately a soldier friend had come looking for him, found the door locked, and smashed in just in time to grab Alexander in his final struggle to kick over the heavy table under his feet. His plans would have gone through to a macabre finish had not the Germans made such heavy, solid tables.

Bewildered M.P.'s stared with horror as a figure sailed by them.

Several hours later a very meek and tearful young soldier sat in front of my desk as I told him that we looked with disfavor on his committing suicide in my barracks. We discussed the advantages for him in going back to his own people. I explained that taking his own life in our area, with the attendant publicity, was a poor return for our hospitality toward an ally, and that I wanted his promise as one soldier to another that he would never, never kill himself again. Tearfully he swore that such a thing would never happen again, and that he would abide by my decision for his future. We shook hands on this, and Sergeant Rosner took him back to quarters, where friendly soldiers took turns watching him all night, just in case.

OUR arrangements for his return were again interrupted the next evening, however. Alexander had had a cold all day, but we had assumed the runny nose to be symptomatic of his youth. As I remembered my childhood in Massachusetts, all the little boys of my acquaintance had noses which ran more or less continuously all winter long. But by evening it was obvious that Alexander was very sick. At eleven o'clock his temperature had risen suddenly to 103°, and his breath was coming in rasping gasps. There followed a wild ride in the battalion ambulance all over Berlin trying to find an American hospital which would admit him as a patient. Russian hospitals were out of the question: not only had we never seen any near the center of Berlin, but on a cold winter night we did not want to wander all over the Soviet Sector trying to find one. By one-thirty we had finally persuaded the harassed duty officer of a hospital in the Tempelhof area to take Alexander in, and we left, knowing him to be in good hands.

Several men from the Battalion went over to the hospital the next night after duty to see their little red-headed friend, but found him gone. Two Russian soldiers, they were informed, had arrived in a big and dirty truck. Alexander had been carried off by them to a Russian hospital outside Berlin in the Soviet Zone. "Well,"

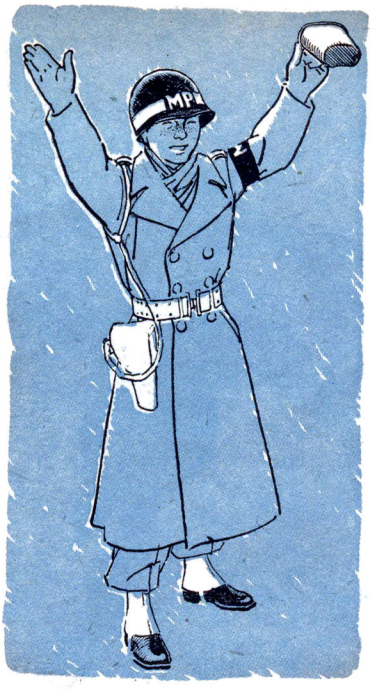
said Mac, "I guess that's the end of Alexander—he's probably on his way to Siberia now." And so the battalion settled down into normal routine, minus Alexander.

It must have been about two weeks later that the door to my office swung gustily open, and a cheerful voice called: "Greetings, Comrade Captain. Permission to enter?" I stared up with wonder at a resurrected Alexander—a small, scrubbed boy, with a clean uniform. One glance at that beaming face obviated my having to ask him whether he was glad to be back. He pointed proudly to the cap in his hand. "Look, Comrade Captain, they gave me a new hat, and also something to eat." With that he exhibited to me a moldy piece of bread covered with greasy fat. Evidently the Soviet hospital had discharged him with no clearer instructions than before.

I sighed. "All right, Alexander. You report to Sergeant Rosner again, and I will decide what we are going to do with you." He smiled again, somewhat apprehensively, saluted and left, while I pondered what to do with our foreign friend.

A two-week battle of telephone calls with the Soviet authorities followed. They wanted him back, but they would not send after him. Events had reached the point where we felt that it was to his ultimate good to return as soon as possible, for already we were becoming aware of the stigma which the would-be-safe Soviet citizen attached to any association with the West. Finally a decision from the Central Soviet Commandatura came through. We were told that a transport was being made up at the beginning of the next week to take all of the young children who had fought with the Red Army back to Russia. There, we were told, they would be sent to special military schools in preparation for a future with the Army. Although we were dubious of these children's ultimate destination, we agreed that Alexander would be present at the Commandatura in time to join the formation.

The remainder of the week was a long way from being quiet. Alexander was really enjoying himself. First, the roads all froze over in a spell of cold weather, and Alexander went skating on them. That would have been in order, had he not decided to extend his field of operations. A bewildered M.P., standing guard at the great double gate to General Clay's headquarters, stared with horror as a figure sailed by him with long strides. The second look showed him a small boy in Russian uniform skating up to the main entrance on roads that were meant for cars alone. It



Suddenly I rubbed my eyes and stared. Was that Alexander?

took several hours for us to explain that one, and to retrieve Alexander from the local M.P. headquarters.

The next day the ice melted—but Alexander had a bicycle which he had borrowed. It was the German police who called me this time. It seemed that a German policeman had stopped Alexander to ask him for his pass, and to determine who or what he was. Back-talk ensued, and Alexander was invited to step to the local station for a chat. To the surprise of all the onlookers, Alexander informed him in no uncertain terms who won the war, and then sailed into the poor policeman to give him the licking which would have occurred, had not plain-clothes *Kripo* (Kriminal Polizei) agents stepped in. A violently protesting boy was dragged off to the German jail. Recovering Alexander this time took visits with both the German police and the Counter-Intelligence Corps. But we finally brought him back to the battalion, still outraged that a German had dared to question him.

I might reasonably have expected that our worries would be over, with Alexander's departure only twenty-four hours away. But he had understood more than we realized of our conversational attempts to gain his freedom. He knew little English, but he had become aware that he was to be sent back to his people within the next few days.

Little did I know what was in that Slavic mind when I sat down at my desk to work that night. It was quite dark and cold when Mac burst in again, as he had some weeks before. "Now we've really had it!" he announced. "Alexander's really committed suicide this time. He hanged himself in the barracks—with a necktie from the end of his bed!"

Again we galloped over to the barracks, and again we dashed in through the freshly repaired and now freshly splintered door. As if matters had not been complicated enough, the fuse had been blown at about the same time. So it was into a quiet and dark room, lit only by some flickering Wehrmacht field candles and a flashlight, that we entered. The room was full of hushed soldiers, and on the bed lay a prostrate Alexander, while a new replacement who had once been an aid-man worked over him trying to force his breathing. I asked what had happened.

"Gee, that kid has real guts," came one answer. "He locked the door, noosed his necktie around his neck, tied the other end to the head of the bed, pulled up his legs, and hanged himself off the side of the bed. What a helluva note—hanging himself with a necktie."

"He must of found out he was going back home again," said another voice.

"Things must be good back home," came a third and acid voice.

It seemed as though we had been standing there by the bed for hours when Alexander first started to breathe again, although it must have been only minutes. As he came to, he glanced wildly around the room with frightened eyes. "Why am I here?" he cried, hoarsely. "*Pochemoo ya zdyes?*" We calmed him as best we could, and softly talking, tried to persuade him to sleep. Eventually, and with the help of some pills, Alexander fell into a deep, noisy sleep. Still weak from nervous tension, Mac and I returned to the office, but we couldn't work any more that night.

Late the next morning a very quiet and well-escorted Alexander left to join the convoy of children returning eastward. The WAC officer who took him over to the Soviet Zone stayed until he was packed away into the bus, and on her return told us of his departure. Apparently he had reconciled himself to his future, for she said that he had seemed happy, had waved good-by, and was last seen sitting by a big window in the rear of the bus.

For the second time the battalion settled down to a routine without

Alexander. The longer he had stayed with us, the more the men had become attached to their small friend. They felt a genuine regret at losing him, and the barracks seemed quite lonesome. "Well," said Mac, at dinner that night, "so ends the story of Alexander." But we should have known better.

It must have been the middle of the next morning that I heard the timid knock on the door. While I looked in disbelief, the door swung open, and a very subdued Alexander entered and saluted. The whole story was told by the marks on his face—long scratches and gravel marks on the right side of his face and head. I now remembered with clarity that Alexander had been sitting near a big window in the bus. There was no question in my mind but that he had dived out, and the subsequent conversation bore me out: our child-soldier had departed from the bus as it neared Frankfort-on-the-Oder, familiar territory to him.

A MOST pitiful scene followed. Tears streamed down his face as he told me that whenever a Soviet soldier returned from a prolonged absence in another Zone or with another power, it was assumed that he had been a prisoner. The inference was that life is so good in the homeland that only imprisonment can keep citizens from returning. I had my own ideas on that after the two suicide experiences. Further, Alexander told me, three times was "out," and he was listed as twice a prisoner. If he were returned a third time, there would be a long and painful period of forced reëducation in a camp devised for the purpose.

I did not know what to do. He left the room, his cheeks still smudged from tears, and went over to the barracks to leave his equipment. By now my superiors had ordered his return, even though I had been already engaged in trying to send him back. At the same time I knew the Soviets well enough to know that since they had placed him in the convoy and sent him on his way, they would not acknowledge the possibility that he might have "jumped ship." This dreaded reëducation camp lent another aspect to a problem already complicated with many facets. And there was no doubt in my mind as to my future should he commit suicide again in my barracks. It was a sleepless night that I spent, trying to reconcile official and humanitarian views.

But the next morning there was no problem any more: Alexander had disappeared. All his clothes and belongings were gone, as was my Russian-English dictionary. Of course, the possibility was always with us that Alexander had gone down into the bomb shelters and hanged himself again but the dictionary convinced me that he had further operations in mind for this world. Nevertheless we searched the cellars thoroughly; and for weeks after, Mac and I were a little nervous over the possibility of suddenly finding a long-dead Soviet soldier tucked away in some obscure corner.

Winter passed, and spring came to Berlin. We thought of Alexander less and less frequently, although on top of my desk was a little booklet which always reminded me. Alec had made it shortly after he had first arrived. As I recall, it celebrated his first acquaintance with a stapler, and was a little booklet made of scrap paper stapled together. On the cover, typed with a German typewriter, was the inscription *"Kapitanu Noultonu ot Aleksandra."*

But work took so much time, as our soldiers were redeployed but our duties were not, that we soon remembered him only fleetingly. Finally in April my orders came to leave Berlin. The next few days were full of work, as I packed my things and prepared to turn the battalion over to my successor. Since I had several vehicles which had to be returned to Frankfort-on-the-Main for repairs, a convoy of lame cars was arranged so as to make the trip accomplish two aims.

Very early on a cold April morning, our string of vehicles finally left Berlin. As we wound through the streets and parkways on our way out, I noticed an M.P. Company lining up for breakfast outside their mess-hall. Suddenly I rubbed my eyes and stared again. The convoy couldn't be stopped, and the mess-hall had slid rapidly past us, but I thought I saw in the mess line a little figure in a natty U. S. uniform. There was a high gloss to his shoes, and the small M.P. armband stood out on his sleeve.

I think I know who that little figure was. I hope I was right, and that Alexander has finally found a home.

The Great Walking Contest

WITHOUT much doubt, the greatest athletic contest of all time, as far as the number of participants is concerned, occurred seven years ago. Almost literally, the entire populations of Sweden and Finland were involved.

It was, strangely enough, at one and the same time very democratic and informal, and yet very much blue-blooded and official too. It was official because the Riksdag or parliament of little Finland sent the challenge to its Scandinavian neighbor, and it was accepted by the Swedish Riksdag. The citizens of Finland were to meet the citizens of Sweden in a walking contest. The winner was to be the country which could muster, proportionately, the greatest number of walkers who could cover 15 kilometers (9 1/3 miles) in two hours and twenty minutes. Women could compete too, and their requirement was to make ten kilometers (6½ miles) in one hour and forty minutes. The contest was to last from May 4 to May 25.

From the very beginning things did not look too bright for the larger country of northern Europe. On May 9 more than 250,000 Finns had qualified in the walking contest, while only 100,000 Swedes had done so. And because of its bigger population, Sweden had to qualify twice as many walkers to win.

Patriotically to stir their constituents to victory, two hundred members of the Swedish Riksdag entered the contest and came through. But ninety-eight members of the Finnish Riksdag, including seven women, did likewise. And not only that: Risto Ryti, president of Finland, J. W. Rangell, Prime Minister, and three other cabinet ministers also entered and qualified.

Sweden did not give up, although things continued to look dark for her. Swedish generals exhorted their soldiers to get into the contest, and thousands did. College students, workers, housewives—everyone was urged to get in there and walk for the honor of their country. Fervor was high, and hundreds upon hundreds responded every day. But whenever more Swedes got into it, so did more Finns, and the wonder was where they all came from.

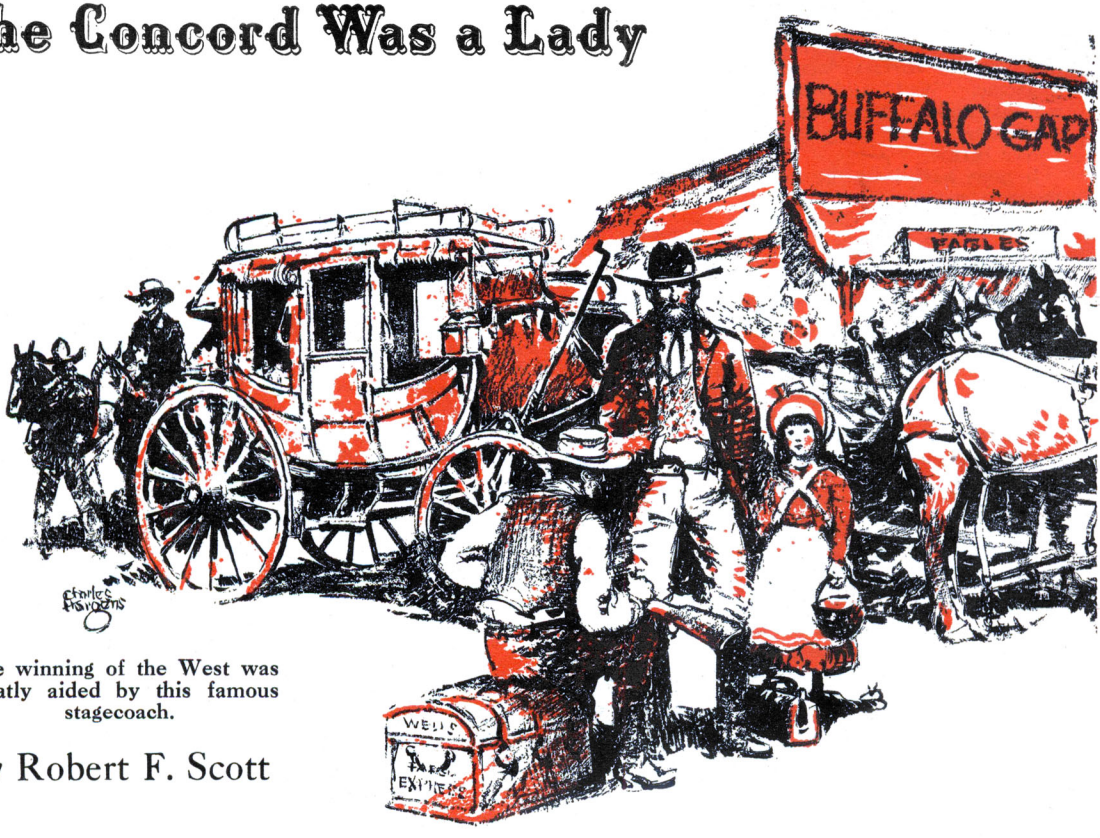
Finally, in a last desperate measure to rally his countrymen, Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf and Crown Princess Louise of Sweden participated in the competition amidst the cheers of their subjects.

But alas and alack, it didn't turn the tide. The final result was: Finland, 1,400,000; Sweden, 1,100,000. Finland's score is all the more remarkable when you consider that she has only a population of about 3,650,000, which means that more than one-third of her population, men, women and children, qualified.

While the contest was strictly a pedestrian affair, as you might say, it was not without its moments of drama. Seven hundred and seventy Finns took the test in snowstorm; and a ninety-year-old woman, Kajsa Lehti, covered her ten kilometers in one hour and thirty-nine minutes.

—Harold Helfer

The Concord Was a Lady



The winning of the West was greatly aided by this famous stagecoach.

by Robert F. Scott

THREE years before the outbreak of the Civil War, one of the first westbound stagecoaches of the newly established Butterfield Overland Stage Company was stopped in Texas by a band of six hundred admiring Comanche warriors. The driver and passengers sat in patient resignation while the Indians wonderingly examined every part of the vehicle. They lifted up the leather seats; they opened the cargo compartments and turned out the mail-sacks; they peered at the wheels, the couplings and the trappings. They marveled at the intricate scrollwork and ran their fingers delightedly over the smooth finish of the finely sanded and painted wood. Finally, their curiosity satisfied, they told the driver in halting English: "You go now. Make swift-wagon go!"

To the Indians of the West, the new coaches of the overland passenger lines were a thing of wonder, and for them they coined the appropriate and descriptive name "swift-wagon." To the white man they were known more prosaically as the "Concord Coach." During the middle of the Nineteenth Century, the advertisements of almost every stage line of consequence in the West contained the distinctive announcement: "ONLY GENUINE CONCORD COACHES ARE USED ON THIS LINE."

The wonderment of the Indians and the sincere pride of the stage operators were indeed well deserved by this remarkable vehicle. The Concord coach was a product of the ingenuity of the Yankee craftsmen working in the town of that name on the banks of the Merrimac River in New Hampshire. For many years a near-monopoly on the manufacture of these coaches was enjoyed by the firm of Abbot, Downing & Company, whose factory at one time covered six acres and employed over 275 skilled artisans.

Lewis Downing, a wheelwright, had founded the company in 1813, the year his first Concord wagon was sold for sixty dollars. In 1826 he hired J. Stephens Abbot to make three coach bodies for him. So successful were these, that a partnership followed and eventually developed into the firm of Abbot, Downing & Company. The new product of the firm was a radical departure from existing standards, for designer Abbot took the traditional "egg-shaped" British coach and made changes in the design so that the Concord coach emerged as an entirely new vehicle. The top was flattened, while the body was made wider and more roomy, with space for nine passengers on three transverse seats inside. Outside there was room for at least a half-dozen more; but like the jeep of the recent war, the carrying capacity of a Concord coach was almost without limits. Sometimes it carried as many as could crowd on the roof, in addition to those inside.

AT the front and rear were the "boots"—leather cargo holds that could swallow an amazing quantity of mailbags, express boxes (when not stowed right under the driver's feet), the passengers' baggage, and even an occasional stowaway. The usual crew was two: The laconic driver, idol of all small boys of the day, and a shotgun-carrying messenger, whose presence beside the driver became necessary to protect valuable shipments from marauding highwaymen.

The workmanship of the Concord coach was indeed a joy to behold.

Illustrated by Charles Hargens

Its sturdy frame was constructed of well-seasoned New England ash, and so cleverly held together was it that the joints were hardly discernible. The decking and panels were of the clearest poplar obtainable. Wheel spokes were also made of ash, thoroughly seasoned, hand balanced, and fitted to the rims and hubs with such care and precision that the wheels never warped out of line, in spite of hard usage under extreme conditions in all parts of the world. The brakes—on the rear wheels only, for the day of four-wheel brakes had not yet dawned—were controlled from the driver's seat.

Bright colors reflected the natural tastes of the times for vivid decoration. The body of the coach often was painted a gaudy English vermilion, with straw-yellow wheels, axles and pole. Frequently the doors were decorated with miniature landscapes by noted artists of the day. Weighing over 2500 pounds, the Concord was a masterpiece of the coachmaker's art and cost more than two thousand dollars, a considerable investment in those days.

The secret of the overwhelming success and widespread popularity of the Concord coach lay in the fact that the graceful body was not cradled between the wheels on ordinary wagon springs, but on "thoroughbraces."

These were about a dozen long and wide thicknesses of rawhide, either laced or riveted together. The thoroughbraces are usually described as a set of leather springs to ease the shocks of the road on the passengers. While this may be one purpose they served, their chief function was to act as shock-absorbers for the benefit of the team, not the passengers. Thanks to the damping qualities of the thoroughbraces, violent jerks were not transmitted to the team, and the gentle rocking motion of the body enabled them to surmount many otherwise difficult obstacles. No matter how rough the road, the animals could concentrate on steady pulling and thus arrive at their destination in a fresh condition. To the early stage operators, the care of passengers was secondary to the care of livestock, and for a very good reason: horses and mules were difficult and expensive to replace.

Equally important in relieving the animals of road shocks that might be transmitted to them through the harness from bumps or holes in the road was the style of loose hitching practiced in the West. In this, the breast-straps and traces were connected with plenty of freedom, as contrasted with the tight hitching of the English coachman. A loosely harnessed team was able to benefit from the shock-absorbing action of the thoroughbraces, although the passengers in the coach at the same time might be receiving a severe jolting.

What was perhaps the fastest and roughest ride of all time has been described by Mark Twain. It seems that Horace Greeley was leaving Carson City by stage for a lecture engagement farther west, and very unwisely told the driver, Hank Monk, greatest of stagecoach drivers, that he wanted to get through quickly. Cracking his whip, Monk started the coach down the slopes of the Sierras at such a terrific pace that Greeley soon began to regret his request for speed. With sparks flying from the brake-blocks, the coach slithered around the many hairpin turns, scattering gravel over the edge of the precipice each time. The jolting finally became too much for the editor, and he begged Monk to slow down, saying that he wasn't in such a hurry after all. The driver's classic advice to his famous passenger was: "Just keep your seat, Horace. I'll get you there on time."

The first Concord coach had reached California in 1850, after having been shipped around Cape Horn, and was an instant success. With the opening of overland communications to the goldfields, many others were soon to be seen on every road in the West, but the American frontier did not have a monopoly on their services; thousands were exported from the New Hampshire workshops to Mexico, South America, South Africa and Australia, where they earned the same fine reputation for sturdiness and dependability. For a time a competitor of the Concord appeared in the Troy coach, manufactured in Troy, New York, by coachmakers Charles Veasie and Orsamus Eaton. However, the Troy coach never achieved the popularity of the Concord, and its makers later turned to the building of railroad cars.

The excellence of the Concord coach eventually brought prosperity to Abbot, Downing & Company and to the little town of Concord. Additional business was created during the Civil War when contracts poured in for ambulances, army wagons and gun carriages. Immediately after the war a new and more serious threat to the supremacy of the Concord coach appeared as railroad building began to increase, and steel rails were pushed forward over the plains and mountains. Stage lines became shorter as they shuttled back and forth in the ever-narrowing gap. The dramatic meeting of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads at Promontory Point, Utah, in 1869 marked the beginning of the end for the Concord coach. As the network of rails grew wider, the stage lines retreated farther into regions the railroads did not reach.

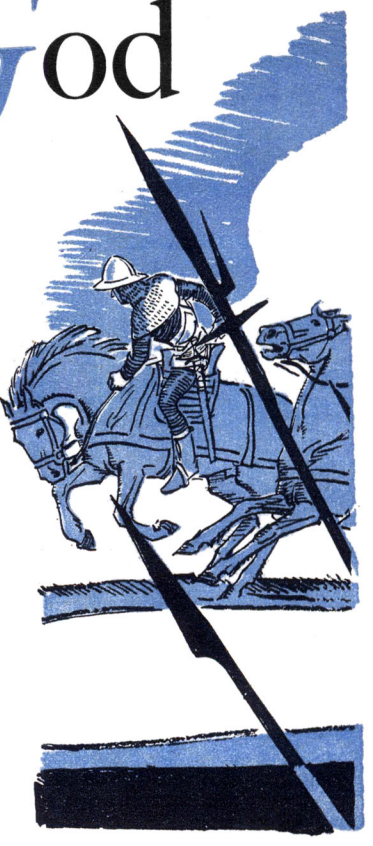
It was the advent of the automobile that finally sealed the doom of the Concord coach. With the decline of horse-drawn transportation and the rapid development of motor vehicles, Abbot, Downing's business fell away to a shadow. For a time the company managed to struggle along by manufacturing replacement parts and repairing wagons, and from 1915 to 1928 it made motor-truck bodies. However, the competition for cheap transportation soon spelled the end for Abbot, Downing's skilled craftsmen, and in 1928 the firm was liquidated.

Thus came to a close a glorious era of transportation history. The Concord coach is gone from the scene, but it should be remembered not as the dusty, dried-up relic of the museums of today, nor as the worn and dingy replica of the movies. A speeding Concord, drawn by a team of eager high-spirited horses in the hands of an expert professional driver, was a romantic and picturesque sight, as exciting and as beautiful to a stageman as a clipper ship under full sail was to a sailor. It is no wonder that a driver always spoke of his coach as "she," never as "it." There were no two ways about it: The Concord was a lady.

Warrior of God

Jan Ziska had lost one eye; but he devised a horse-drawn tank and fought the not so Holy Roman Empire to a standstill even after he lost the other eye

by E. B. LONG



There are many legends

FROM out the rocky escarpments of Tabor the chant, *"Ye who are the warriors of God"* rolled onto the wide Bohemian plains; and Papal armies trembled and fled. They fled from a small host of heretics led by a blind man. They fled because a military genius, shortly after the dawn of the Fifteenth Century, dared to combine armored tanks, mobile artillery and intricate tactical combinations with the religious fervor of the first glimmerings of the Reformation.

The name of this blind man was Ján Ziska, who, in the twilight of life, dominated central Europe for five years and broke centuries of military tradition. In fact, it was not until two world wars had been fought five hundred years later that the full effect of Ján Ziska was felt.

Ziska came out of the misty legends of Bohemia, and has left behind the uncertain facts of his life mingled with the certainty of his genius. In south Bohemia there once was a village of Trocnov, and near that vanished town was an oak tree. Under this oak the mother of Ján Ziska is said to have sought shelter from a thunderstorm which drove her from the field where she was working. Under this tree the infant Ján, called Ziska or red-headed, was born around the year 1360.

For two centuries the tree was protected by superstition and veneration. The blacksmiths of the region asserted that the slightest splinter of the Ziska oak affixed to their hammers added strength to their blows. But by the beginning of the Seventeenth Century the aged oak had been cut down by the authorities, and a small chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist was erected on the spot.

Aside from the legend of his birth, there was nothing unusual about the first sixty years or more of the life of the minor noble, Ziska. He and his brother Jaroslav became soldiers of fortune—an occupation most common in the Europe of their time. One contemporary journal calls him a guerrilla and robber, but he also served in the court of King Wenceslaus at Prague. Furthermore, his letters show him to be well educated and to have had good command of language.

There are vague records of Ján's fighting with many forces, including the Teutonic Knights against the Poles and Lithuanians. Rumors of his prowess come from the fierce battle of Tannenberg in 1410. Later he served with the Hungarians against the Turks, and even fought with the English at Agincourt in 1415. Somewhere in these wanderings he had lost an eye in battle. Long before, his wife had died, and home life interested him little. Now the adventurer returned, approaching old age and stagnant retirement in the Bohemian court.

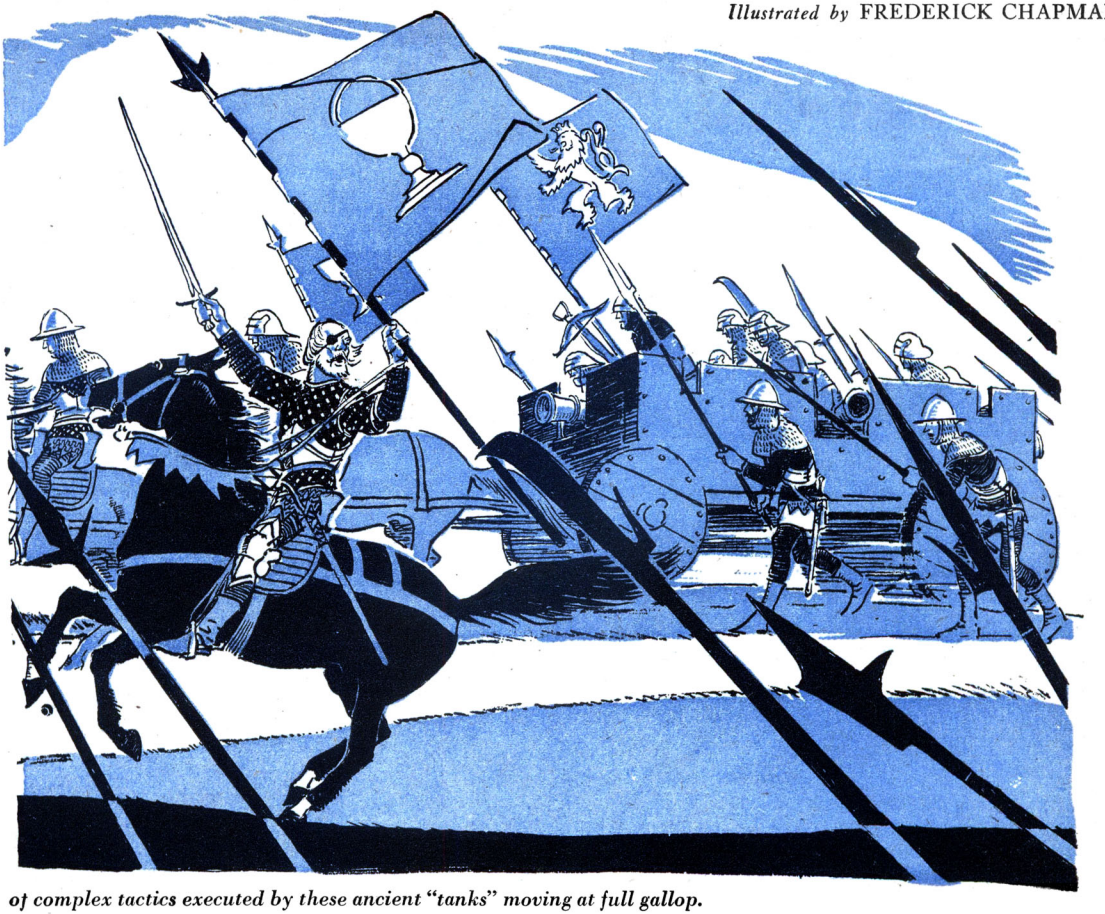
But it was not to be a calm aftermath for a distinguished veteran home from the wars. Bohemia was rising under the banner of John Huss.

Huss was a prominent professor of philosophy and theology, and well thought of in the Roman Catholic Church until 1391, when he fell under the influence of the writings of the heretic Wycliffe, and began to denounce indulgences, masses for the dead, use of the Latin language and other church rites. The people turned to Huss, and the church felt compelled to suppress him. The suppression led Huss to the fiery stake in 1415, and the coals of his pyre ignited revolt throughout Bohemia and the surrounding domains of the Holy Roman Empire—fires that roared for seventeen years of war, and whose embers have never entirely died. And adding to these flames was the burning but comparatively unknown mind of a chamberlain in King Vaclav's court in Prague.

Ziska had heard Huss preach in the Bethlehem chapel. The extent of his religious zeal compared to his political passion for uniting Czechs and Poles against oppression is not known. But it is told that King Vaclav asked, shortly after Huss' death, why Ziska was wrapped in gloom. The bald old man with a large head and a big patch on his right eye wrinkled heavy features even more and replied: "Most gracious King, how could I be merry, when our faithful leaders and true teachers of the law of God are being burned to death by the false priests." King Vaclav answered: "Dear Ján, what can we say now? Mend it for thyself; we wish thee well in it." Ziska took the King at his word and began his kind of mending.

Meanwhile the ground was prepared for his coming. Meetings had been held throughout the land; revolt was common talk; but everyone had a different idea of how to bring it about. Attempts at peace and reconciliation with the Church and its state, the Holy Roman Empire, were tried and failed. In 1419 Ziska's name appears in connection with the storming of the new town hall in Prague, held by the church; and it is believed he took part in the many conferences in the rural areas. Pillaging, destruc-

Illustrated by FREDERICK CHAPMAN



of complex tactics executed by these ancient "tanks" moving at full gallop.

tion of Catholic homes, brought open war a little closer. Priests were captured and brought as hostages to the hills. Ziska, as the most experienced of the Bohemian military men, began formally to organize an army. He occupied Mala Strana, part of Prague, and threw the imperialists out.

At first his "army" consisted of only a few hundred peasants armed with scythes and flails. But not for long. Ziska understood what the Pope and Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund, would send against the Bohemians. He knew his novices at war would be no match, despite their undoubted zeal.

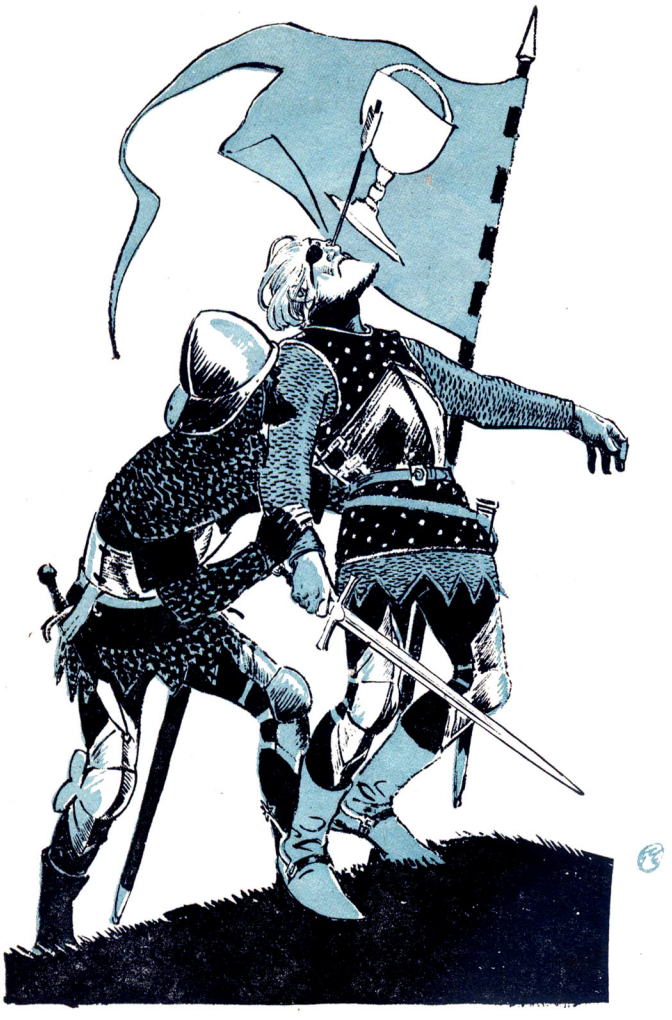
He began his plans by picking a fortress. Ziska chose the rugged, inaccessible hill town of Austie, renamed Tabor, about five days' march from Prague. Tabor means *encampment* in Bohemian. It also refers to Mount Tabor in Palestine, ancient fortress and rumored to be the scene of the Transfiguration. But whatever its meaning, it soon had a new one—a meaning that meant bloody war, great victories and a revolution in fighting methods.

Here Ziska began beating his peasant host into an army. A sort of military communism was set up. Everyone went to work. Women and the aged labored on the fortress, while the fighting men drilled. Children were trained as ammunition bearers. New recruits were obtained from Germany, Poland and all of central Europe. This motley crew was whipped into shape by the zeal and ability of the one-eyed, slightly stooped, dark-mustached Ziska. He became the most rigid disciplinarian since Rome.

At the conferences of the chieftains around the twelve rough stone communion tables in Tabor's square, Ziska ordered the formation of a fast but small body of scouts mounted on horses. He had wagons built to carry the guns or artillery. Heretofore artillery, then called bombards, had been used largely for siege, and were extremely unwieldy and nearly immovable in battle. But with the wagon-mounted cannon of Ziska, the guns were able to fire hundred-pound stone balls with ease, and were rapidly transported and aimed.

Through his experience, Ján Ziska knew that Eastern Europe had lagged badly behind even the somewhat primitive fighting methods of the West. And so the man who has been ranked by some with Alexander and Napoleon Bonaparte, knew he needed more than mobile guns. Instead of separate cavalry, infantry and siege artillery, Ziska developed tactical combinations that were almost modern task forces. He trained his soldiers in all branches to conduct complicated formations in the face of the enemy instead of mere mass attacks. Mobility was more important than body armor. But he did not stop with all this.

Ziska recognized the failure of medieval armor against shot and shell and gunpowder. He knew that infantry were now subjected to a destructive fire that soon might cut down his comparatively small forces



At the siege of Raby Castle, Ziska lost his other eye from an arrow wound.

and bring about defeat. Therefore there came about the revolutionary "*Waggenburgen*" or wagon-forts—the tanks of their day.

For many centuries warriors had fought from behind wagons, but the Hussite wagon-fort was different. It was an armored car drawn by horses. The iron-plated wagon was used for baggage during a march, and when needed, twenty warriors equipped with crossbows and hand-guns fired from the loopholes in the wagons. There are many legends of complex tactics executed by these ancient "tanks" moving at full gallop. And the results of Ziska's fighting show clearly their effective work.

But it was to be at least two hundred years before anyone else profited by Ziska's novel experiment, and only in recent years have military leaders utilized the full potentialities of a weapon originated five hundred years ago.

In addition to the army itself, Ziska recognized another great fault of the forces with whom he had so long fought. Straggling, desertion and disobedience were sternly put down, and the long train of camp followers and prostitutes that was a commonplace among European armies did not trail the Hussites into Tabor.

Ziska at first did not rush his newly organized, completely different army into headlong combat with the overwhelmingly large forces of Sigismund. Instead he sent them out on short forays to gain experience and to test his equipment. Each time they went out a little farther, however, and each time they came back wiser and more ready.

Ziska by this time had quite a reputation, and it had been well gained. His enemies were not yet aware of his revolution in warfare, at least not to the extent they were soon to be. Earlier, Ziska captured Pilsen with the aid of his knights, and held the town against several sorties by Bohuslav of Svamberk, who tried to reconquer the place for Sigismund. He demolished four forts in the area and defeated Svamberk again at Nekmer. In February of 1420, however, his active, trained forces still numbered only four hundred men and twelve wagons—but he had defeated armies many times his own size.

The Hussites did not stay at four hundred long. In Tabor the peasants continued to exchange their flails with spikes driven into them, for swords and crude guns. Along with the extreme military discipline, the religious life was not forgotten. Ziska inserted into military regulation the verses of their battle hymn: "*Ye who are the warriors of God, consider not the numbers of the enemy and never run from him. Risk not your lives, ye warriors of God, for avarice or loot. Ye warriors of God, neglect not the fight for the gathering of booty. Ye warriors of God, remember the army parole, obey your captains, observe their movements and hold fast to your troop. God's warriors must help each other.*"

With the late spring of 1420, Sigismund and Pope Martin V became alarmed and determined to stamp out the heretics. They set out with a force of around thirty thousand men for Prague, knowing that they far outnumbered Ziska and his band, now totaling from four to nine thousand. Although Ziska had not completed to his satisfaction his organization and his new system, he fortified himself outside the city walls on Mount Vitkov. There, on the 14th of July, 1420, occurred the first major Hussite battle. Defeat would have meant the end of the revolt, the victory of the Papal forces, and probably would have doomed Ján Ziska to obscurity and death.

At the height of the contest a hurriedly built blockhouse of the Bohemians began to give way, and Ziska himself leaped into the front line with the battle cry, "*Hard at them!*" Women and children followed him. One woman screamed above the din: "*No true Christian shall retreat.*" She died on the hill of Ziska. The Emperor Sigismund was beaten by the much inferior force he had hoped easily to crush. He had suffered the first of three major and three lesser defeats of his campaigns or crusades against the heretics.

While awaiting these crusades, Ziska had not been idle. He extended his

domain rapidly with small, compact forays against Papal monasteries, cities and forts. The hymn-singing warriors struck swiftly to force the enemy to fight at a disadvantage and when necessary, laid such a tight siege that no one could resist them.

Victories came faster now. On November 1, 1420, Sigismund was defeated again at Pankratz, and on November 2, the legendary fortress of the Vysehrad—near Prague—fell to Ziska.

Then in 1421, at the siege of Raby Castle, the Hussites suffered what appeared at first to be a mortal blow. Ziska lost his other eye from an arrow wound. Now totally blind, it seemed that the aged leader might have to cease active labors.

However, his blindness worked as a blessing. Ziska was now forced to give orders to his subordinates and let them do the work. They had been so well trained they were able to execute his every plan, and became so skilled in his tactics that he knew when the day—not too far off—would come when he could no longer lead them at all, they would be ready to carry on.

By this time the stories of his blindness, his exploits, his being at several places apparently at one time, made Ziska and his followers seem agents of the devil himself. They were unbeatable, and many larger armies trembled when going into battle against the wagon-forts and Hussite warriors. Often he would strike first at one body and then another from interior lines. At the battle of Usti, twenty-five thousand Hussites routed seventy thousand Papal soldiers.

Ziska penetrated into Moravia and Austria by stopping Sigismund at Deutschbro in January of 1422. Later campaigns moved into Silesia, Saxony, Bavaria, Thuringia, Franconia, as well as a major effort in Hungary.

The Hussites undertook an all-out offensive in 1422 with a full scale invasion of Hungary, following the Moravian campaign. The wagon-forts advanced this time in two parallel columns, enclosing the rest of the army and forming protection. They were never dealt a serious blow in the victorious fighting.

Not always did Ziska operate on the offensive. At Luditz and Kuttenburg, for instance, he chose a defensive line with the bombards and wagon-forts. Then, after beating off the initial assault, Ziska launched a murderous counterattack amid the confusion. During these later campaigns Ziska liked to choose a favorable position on a hill and then have his wagons filled with stones and rolled down into the midst of the enemy.

Ziska was almost without ambition for himself, if that may be said of any man. He never received anything but subsistence for his labors, and was said to desire no political power. However, he did declare the countries of Bohemia and Moravia united in 1422. He set up a government that was

Ziska liked to have his wagons filled with stones and rolled down into the midst of the enemy.

quite democratic for the period. Ziska himself was welcomed with the pomp of a king at Prague in December of 1421, but called himself the "administrator of the communities of Bohemia inclined toward and observing the law of God." Ziska, despite stories of cruelty, was able to forgive, and Sigismund did open negotiations for peace, but they were unsuccessful.

But all was not peaceful or easy at home, either. For although well trained to take over Ziska's military duties when he was gone, the various groups in Bohemia still, like so many revolutionary bodies, could not agree on the political setup. Furthermore, they were not all as devoid of ambition as Ziska, and quarrels and severe fighting broke out.

For instance, Prague did not remain contented under Ziska. In 1424 the city refused to recognize his authority, and Ziska subdued it by arms.

However, the danger from without was lessened. By 1424 the power of the Crusaders had dwindled. The Papal armies no longer were able to reorganize after disastrous defeats. Lithuania and Poland declined to take part.

Ziska was never beaten in his Hussite career. However, there were times when he was hard pressed indeed. When hemmed in by the nobles of Prague in 1424, he was saved only by the timely arrival of Hynek Bocek of Kunstat. Then too, just before this battle he was in danger of being murdered. He had received from the mayor and councilors of Hradec Kralove a letter written by the hand of a Priest Ambrose to the effect that a prisoner told them someone in Ziska's camp was conspiring to murder him. The name of the would-be killer was pointed out, and that is the last heard of the affair.

But discord continued to mount, now that the crusades had been broken. Ziska still did not trust the people of Prague. But he took an allied force of twenty thousand and set out for Moravia once more when it looked as if some sort of peace might be obtained. At the siege of Prbyslav the blind leader died, nearly seventy years of age, but still able to lead in person. Ironically, death is said to have been caused by the plague or other illness, not by wounds.

A legend tells that Ziska left orders for his skin to be made into a drum, to frighten his foes. But even if this was done it would have made little difference. The very name of Ján Ziska and his Hussites by this time struck terror into all who opposed him.

In the course of five years he destroyed six crusades against him, fought at least thirteen major battles and nearly a hundred less important combats without defeat of any kind. There is no career in history that shines any brighter, though some are better known. For Ziska, there was no dictatorship at the end of the fighting, no crown, no glory; just a grave. He left a strong revolutionary armed force that carried on until 1434, when internal strife and the lack of a Ziska brought an end to the Hussite wars.

But there was and is no end to the work of Ján Ziska. Although blind and an aged veteran, he turned his thoughts ahead to changing warfare to protect his country and gain victories with little, to be there first with the most force, to utilize every advantage, to fight with zeal for his beliefs.

Artillery, wagon-fort tanks, strict organization, a humility that scorned ambition, all are part of the man who was called a rare zealot for the law of Christ. Whatever the religious or political issues, the words of his temporal regulation show the idea with which he undertook all his work—*"For our Dear Lord God, for His sacred Martyrdom, for the liberation of the truth of the Law of God, the Saints and their praise for aiding the faithful to the Holy Church and especially for the Czech and Slovak language."*

The mother of Ziska sought shelter from a storm . . . . and under this tree the infant Ján was born.

Intercept and Destroy

CAN A GUIDED MISSILE BE LOCATED AND SHOT DOWN BY A MODERN JET PLANE? BECAUSE OF A BITTER WARTIME MEMORY, COLONEL MORDAUNT UNDERTOOK THE HAZARDOUS EXPERIMENT HIMSELF.

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

COLONEL JOHN MORDAUNT was facing another decision. . . . It was to be scrawled on a sheet of form paper and tucked away in the official envelope. After that, after the sweat and mental turmoil, it was to be addressed to the General.

Mordaunt reflected on all the decisions he'd made since that eventful day in December eight years before. Some of the decisions had been good, some even inspired—and a few much better forgotten.

But at thirty-five, Mordaunt suddenly discovered it was hard to forget. In the old days one could wash away the dregs of a sour decision with a four-hour sweep across the Channel, leading his Mustang outfit against the Abbeville Kids, or doing a bomber escort with the Forts. The slip-ups of the day before could be erased by greater problems of judgment.

In the war days too, there had been Pamela Bonnington.

Colonel Mordaunt rubbed the tips of his fingers along his lean bony jaw. The friction raised a cold tremor that trickled across his cheek and halted in a dull spot just below his right temple.

"Damn!" he muttered. "What am I beefing about? There's only one answer. . . . And I think—" He stared into the mists of his past. His eyes were the pale blue of the man who seeks distant horizons. He was neat, and anyone who could draw straight lines could produce a caricature of John Mordaunt. "If I've made a mistake—well, I guess I've made plenty in my time."

The corner of the assignment form curled up with derision, and so he turned away and watched the long slit of sunlight bend its form across the hangar until it plated the floor, the portable benches and spread the gilt up the rear wall and finally bathed the Radar Rapier with a sheen of pale gold.

"The Radar Rapier," he muttered under his breath. "A fine phrase!

You look good, standing out there with your long bodkin nose pointing at nothing. You photograph well, you brazen wench. Your kind always does. You dress up a newspaper page, and what they say about you reads fine. It sounds good in the easy-to-read print. You make a fine topic of conversation, and the man who flies you next time will become a national hero. Either that, or—"

Mordaunt lit a cigarette, frowned through the plume of smoke and studied the machine as he had studied it since they began assembling the parts and fitting the equipment. There wasn't another like her anywhere—he hoped. They'd never put anything like this together before. A jet fighter with additional rocket impulse tubes that would slice her through the sonic barrier as easy as a hot wire through butter. That they knew. What they did not know was what she would do when they sent her against the Navy's guided missile—the Creep, they called it.

The Creep was to be launched from a submarine three hundred miles away at sea. The Radar Rapier had drawn the experimental mission to intercept and destroy.

The Colonel admitted someone had a day ahead of him. Whoever he appointed to fly the Rapier would be expected to take off from the secret Research and Development field, and cruise at six hundred until the radar screen picked up the Creep. Once the contact was made, the headache would be on. Someone aboard that submarine would play tricks with a small control standard, and the guy in the Rapier would have to knock the missile down before it passed some arbitrary range point—and thus prove what the Navy had contended for years; that the guided missile had made all air defense obsolete.

"He'll be doing over six hundred before he pumps in the first rocket tube," the Colonel reflected. "The Creep will be approaching at any speed the Navy guys decide on. After that, it'll be fun and games."

THE rest he diagnosed in his mind. If the radar took the Rapier dead on into the Creep, the new .60-caliber guns aboard the jet-rocket ship might nail it head-on. That set up the grim possibility of the interceptor slamming into a wide pattern of débris—débris composed of chrome steel, a tough bronze nose-cap, several stainless steel fins and hunks of jacket that would hit the Rapier with the force of a Jerry .88. Suppose a chunk went into the air scoop?

If the jet pilot let her sneak past to attack from behind, anything could happen. Once the Navy Joes had her in the clear, they'd pour in the soup and begin jinking her all over the sky. That meant kicking in the rest of the rockets to trap her.

Brother, what a blackout!

All that, and the decision. On paper it looked as if it'd be either Major Valentine Braid, who was tough and ambitious; or Lieutenant James Mordaunt, who was capable enough—only he happened to be the Colonel's brother. The General would okay either pilot, but there was more than simply scribbling a name down on a sheet of paper. There was the old maze of memory to negotiate. The mistakes of the past, and that indefinable yearning to atone for the grimmest mistake of his career.

HE looked again at the Rapier and it reminded him of a bolo blowpipe fletched with a pair of triangular swept-back wings, from which the rocket ports projected like elliptical orifices. The tail pipe of the jet appeared as an upright ellipse at the end of the fuselage. The rudders and elevators were thick in chord and raised clear of the blast line, which gave the Rapier a cocking-main rooster appearance. But one chunk of metal in that air scoop would—

An insistent buzz from his desk phone alerted him from his reverie.

"Hello," he said, knowing what the call portended.

"Staff Sergeant Graves, sir. Major Braid to see you."

Mordaunt sighed, turned and took another look through the window at the Rapier. "Send him in," he responded, and turned the assignment sheet over.

Major Braid bustled in, cheerful and vibrating with energy. He saluted. "'Morning, Colonel. Glad you could see me."

"I know." And Mordaunt grinned. "Have a cigar?"

"Not until after the Creep job," Braid grinned sheepishly. "That's what I came about."

"I haven't decided."

"Good! I want that test job, sir. I need it badly."

"Proving it's time you quit flying. However, go ahead."

"It's important to me, sir. I'm getting on."

"Sure. You must be all of twenty-six."

"Twenty-seven in August, sir. I guess I've gone as far as I can go, unless Uncle Joe gets nasty. I'm thinking of my future."

"But there isn't much future chasing guided missiles in a jet-rocket job."

"I've got a wife and two kids. Sure, there's lots of guys with six kids working in the A. & P., but I'm thinking of myself, and if that's bad—that's how it is."

"This can be rough, Val." The Colonel dubbed out his cigarette. "In the first place, we don't know what she'll do the minute we start firing those guns. I don't think they should be in the wings, in the first place. There's a lot of muzzle-impact shock that may take those wings off."

"I'm not afraid of that."

"If you should beat the blackout chasing her, you can still whang into a lot of loose stuff and break up."

"There're only two ways to get her, sir," the young major muttered. He was a tightly knit man with a blue chin. His eyes were small and piercing. His hands moved expressively when he spoke and he sat crouched to put over every sentence. "We have to get her coming or going. There's no chance of a deflection shot—at that speed."

"All I know is that we're supposed to prove the Rapier can find and destroy a guided missile. How we do it will be up to the man I select for the test."

"I'll knock her down if I have to crash her," Braid said and left a cold silence after his words. "I'll get her down, sir."

"That wouldn't prove anything, and you know it. We have a new radar set to find her, and they've given us the latest air weapon to shoot her down. That's what Research and Development wants, and that's what we have to prove."

"I KNOW—I know," Braid said impulsively, and began fumbling for a cigarette. Then he remembered, interlocked his fingers. "But I want that test job, Colonel. I need it. The guy who gets it and pulls it off will be on his way up. I have it all figured out. After I do it, every high-school kid they can teach to fly the Rapier—and there will be hundreds of them—will think nothing of going upstairs and playing shooting gallery on Navy missiles. But it's the guy who does it first! Look at Yeager, who took the XF-1 through the sonic barrier first. He's in line for anything he wants. He gets a medal, and Washington calls him Joe. That's what I want."

"This will be tougher than Yeager's job. You don't honestly believe it's simple, do you?"

"I'm as good physically as any man on the field," Braid exploded. "If that job can be put through top-speed aërobatics, I can do it."

"I like your spirit," Mordaunt conceded.

"Thanks. You put my name in, and I'll guarantee she comes down, and that I come back with the pictures."

"You always did," the Colonel agreed, and started to rub his chin. "However, I'm still thinking it over."

Illustrated by Clayton Knight

This unmanned thing was the scourge that had wiped out all he had lived for.... It had been a V-1 that had fallen on Euston Station.

"Why can't I have my answer now?" Braid growled belligerently. "Why can't I? Do we have to compete with this brother act on everything?"

The Colonel finished rubbing his chin. "You're off base, Braid. I'll pick the man I believe capable of the job. That's all!"

"I just want the same shake as anyone else in the test pool. I'm entitled to better than that, but I'll settle for an even break." Braid scowled, and started for the door.

"So that's it," Mordaunt pondered, and winced with the slamming of the door. "Now I'm tied up with a family-prejudice situation. If I select Braid, the boys will figure I'm keeping Jim out of a rough deal. If I select Jim—it's a brother act."

All that brought up a dozen other possible situations, among which was the possibility of selecting Sommers, Cantliffe, Buckie Proust or Hank Martin. Put any of those names down, and he could be up the creek. Braid would holler that he was eased out because he had stated openly that he needed the job, that he was after promotion and national publicity. If he kept Jim Mordaunt out of it, they'd say he figured it was too tough for his brother—that any of the others

were expendable. If Sommers, Cantliffe, Proust or Martin were selected and got away with it, Braid would hate him as long as he lived. On top of that, Jim would forever regret he'd been a brother of the man who had made the selection.

The old decisions came marching back in typical disorder. There was the day he selected Buzz Fessenden to do the road strafe just before the Normandy invasion. The time he allowed that kid named Cartwright to go on one more show in hopes he'd get his tenth Jerry before he went home for his thirty-day furlough. The night he planned to talk it over with Pamela Bonnington, that English Wac officer, and get her to stay over and marry him in the Holborn registry office the next morning. Pam would have done it in a minute, but he'd remembered he was up for a decoration the next day, and Pamela started back for her base—only, she never got out of Euston Station.

What a difference Pamela Bonnington could have made in his life! All the memories she could have laughed away with her lilting voice, the kindness of her kisses, and the full range of her understanding. But he had let her go because of his respect for military tradition, and the reward of a glinting bauble that turned out to be dross.

THE door opened again with no preceding knock. Mordaunt looked up, startled.

"Hi, John," young Jim Mordaunt greeted with a souped-up display of bounce. "You're not busy, eh?"

The Colonel figured the set-up and grumbled: "Isn't my office gendarme out there?"

Jim laughed. "Sure. He figures I know you, I guess. I heard that Braid was in ahead of me. What's the decision?"

The Colonel wondered if he had ever looked like Jim. The kid was thin and willowy, and there were still youthful curves to his face. He carried the challenging expression that marks the younger son of a large family. Parental discipline had been worn thin by the time Jim came along, and he had grown up amid freedom, endowed with the spirit of independence and the gleam of conquest.

"Braid was in here," the Colonel admitted wearily.

"You're not going to let this brother status interfere, are you?"

"I don't know why I should," John managed a sheepish grin. "I had very little to do with it."

"Good! Just figure I'm another test Joe available for the Creep job. Since you're saddled with the responsibility of the job, I figure I'm the one who should carry it out—*that* sort of a brother act."

"Nothing like having my mind made up for me."

"Let's quit horsing around, John. You can't tag Braid with the test. Why, he's married and has a flock of kids!"

"Two, to be exact," the Colonel corrected.

"Two or twenty, he has certain responsibilities."

"Braid figures he has a lot to gain. As a family man, he could use the promotion he figures would come."

"Listen, pal. You give it to Braid, and commercial aviation gets a consulting engineer. Everyone on the base knows he's ready to pull out and tie in with one of the big manufacturing companies."

The Colonel winced, and tried to cover. "I don't suppose he could be hated for that. He's a good man, Jim."

"He's too good, but I figure the whole test crew has a moral responsibility to stay in—considering all the Top Secret stuff they've been on over the past few months. Or am I being quaint in my ideas?"

"No. Keep those quaint ideas, kid. I wish I had a few; but I also have to consider this Creep deal a trifle above any man's personal ambitions—or family loyalty."

"Here we go," young Jim grumbled.

John ignored that and continued: "This is what it really amounts to, Jim. The crowd in Washington has been squabbling about unification and getting some very messy publicity. We have to act above all that. Right now we're working with the Navy to perfect a new system of national defense. The Navy has devised a guided missile, and plans to drop it on some predetermined target here on the mainland. The Air Force has to devise a defense against it. Both services are really playing for keeps, but at the same time they are working together—just in case some other outfit tries to pull a Pearl Harbor for home consumption. That's what we're up against, Jim."

"WE'VE been through all this, John," his brother complained. "The choice should be simple. As far as I can make out, only Braid and I want the job. Hank Martin's off his feed with a bad tooth. Proust figures he can't compete with Braid. The others just seem willing to see what happens."

"Let's suppose," the Colonel said after a few seconds of reflection. "Let's figure our positions were reversed, and you had to sit behind this desk. Who would you select?"

"That's not fair," the youngster laughed. "If I were Colonel John Mordaunt, and I had this mess dropped in my lap, I guess I'd get up on my two hindlegs and do the job myself."

"Being thirty-five wouldn't make any difference?"

"I'm not talking about you. I'm talking about *me* being Colonel John Mordaunt. In other words, twenty-four or thirty-five, I'm your man."

"I like your spirit," Mordaunt said for the second time that morning.

"Then it's all settled?"

"Yes, it's all settled." John Mordaunt reached for the overturned form. He scrawled a name on the dotted line, and signed his own beneath it. "Not that I'm announcing my choice yet. It has to be okayed by the General."

"Thanks, John. I understand," Jim said solemnly. "And whatever happens, don't worry. I wanted the job, and that's the way it is."

Mordaunt smiled, slipped the paper into the envelope and sealed it. "Give this to Graves outside, will you? I want it to go in the noonday pouch."

"Youth must be served," Jim grinned, and patted the envelope.

"Youth will be served—something awful," the Colonel reflected when his brother had gone.

COLONEL MORDAUNT rubbed his chin again and revolted at the shudder of warning. He turned and stared out the window, past the gleaming Rapier and out through the great doors to the heavenly blue beyond. It suddenly occurred to him that he had been staring at blue skies for most of his years. Mostly blue, at any rate.

Thirty-five years meant he had been born during a cataclysmic epoch called a Great War. He hadn't remembered much of that, but always insisted he had been downtown on Armistice Day. That he could remember, because all one had to do was to repeat what others had seen and remembered. But he recalled in detail the great Air Age of the 1920's, the dizzy period of refueling flights and the Roman holidays that marked the transatlantic and transpacific attempts. The great names of the times like Clarence Chamberlin, Bert Acosta, Donald MacMillan, Russell Maugham, Réné Fonck and Charles Lindbergh. The papers had been full of monoplanes, biplanes, semi-rigid airships and flying boats. Never had there been a period equal to it for a youngster. It had brought the fun and thrills of a great aëronautical era. Crazy, but wonderful conquests were attempted. New heroes were crowned overnight. They said it was only a matter of months before everyone would be flying.

But another World War loomed on the horizon like a threatening front

of bad weather. The long-distance and transoceanic stars became test pilots, and new words were added to the vocabulary of the high-school crowd.

They spoke glibly of blackouts, 9-G test dives, of multigun fighters and of three-element formations. Little did they know that the romantic era of flying had passed. Endurance was to be reckoned in the number of miles a four-engined job could carry a one-thousand-pound bomb. Speed computed in the time it took to get an interceptor up to twenty thousand feet. The world suddenly had enough pilots, and the call went out for navigators, air-gunners and radio operators.

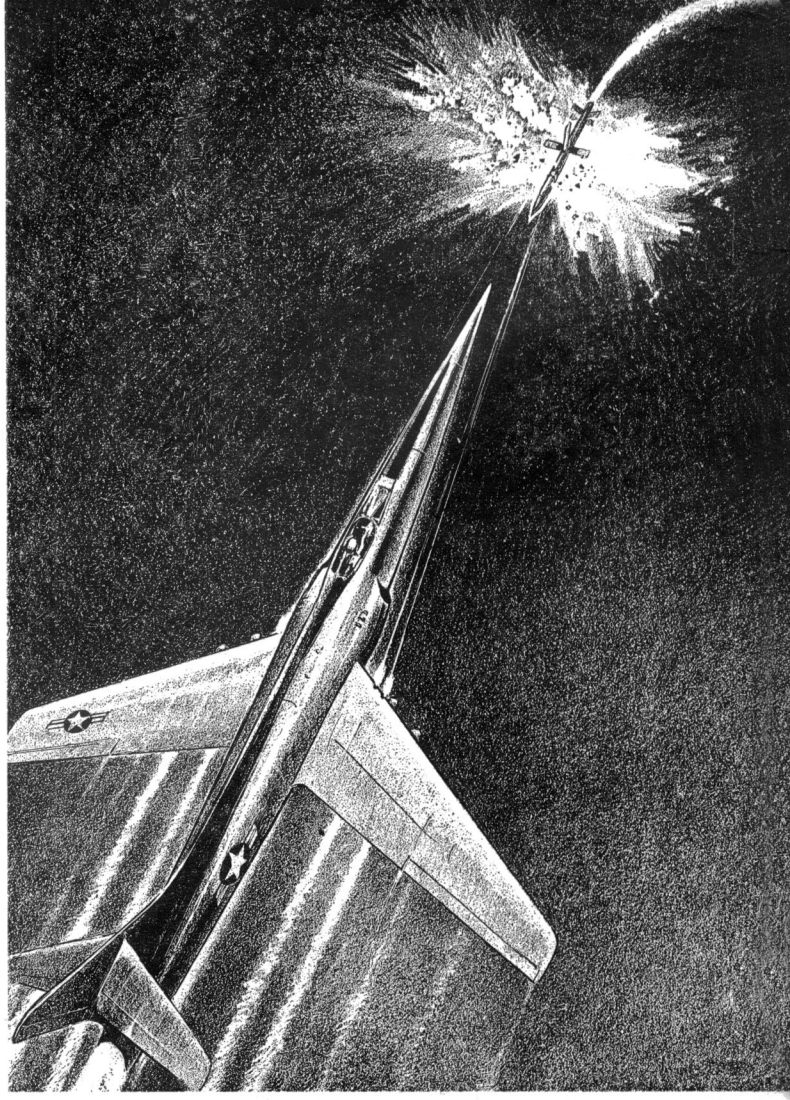
Mordaunt remembered all that, for he had grown up with the era. He had worshiped the memory of and gloated in the history of the Aces, the half-legendary heroes of the War in the Air who had dueled with the German *Staffels* in the high halls of the heavens. Years later, when hosts of them bravely turned up as retreads in his own organization, he knew another glorious epoch had come to a close. They were pudgy and bewildered in this new air world. They associated with the men and the equipment of the day, but their eyes and memories were in the past. . . .

"Just as I'm living the days of 1944-'45," he said aloud, and glanced around anxiously to make sure Jim had left.

FRUSTRATED by his memories and reflections, Colonel Mordaunt reached for his cap and went out into the hangar. The mechanics and civilian technicians were still grooming, refueling, checking and re-checking the Rapier. No one took any notice of him when he sat on a bright blue chemical drum and looked on the quiet efficient activity.

With a speed greater than sound his mind hurtled across a hundred miles of desert waste and leaped on over the white-capped rollers of the Pacific where an ultra-modern submarine waited to discharge the Creep. He had seen a detailed photograph of the long slim bullet body and the gleaming stainless steel fins. They had sent a cut-away drawing to show what was inside. The fuel chambers, the igniters, the mechanical brain hidden in an eight-inch tube. The threads and sections of the nosecap; the dimensions of the war-head, and the details of the push rods that actuated the directional vanes. He could see it with his mind's eye, the grim efficiency and wickedness of the missile, and with each minute he hated it more and more.

The impact of memory struck with the thud of a solar-plexus punch.



Pressing the gun button, he held her spot-on. There was a black roar. Then an egg-yolk spatter of flame.

For the first time Mordaunt realized that the Creep represented all the forces that had destroyed the great pageant of his youth. This unmanned thing that was to hiss across space alone minus the positive guidance of human hands, was the scourge that had wiped out all he had lived for, all he admired, and the one person he loved. The effort required to resist the rising surge of bile left him cold and trembling.

For the first time he caught the full analogy of the Creep. It had been a V-1 that had fallen on Euston Station. A pilotless missile had exploded Pamela Bonnington out of his life—that gay sweet Pamela, who, had she lived, would have forever held him within the aura of his greatest and most satisfying days. A wicked instrument of fiendish hate, loaded with explosive and sent across a defending strip of water, had blindly sought out and destroyed the living monument to all his ambitions.

Now another and more villainous projectile was being prepared three hundred miles away.

Colonel Mordaunt rejoiced in his decision. It was as if Pamela Bonnington had reached out from somewhere high in the blue and guided his hand. . . .

For the next two days he haunted the hangar that housed the Rapier.

The others wandered in too, some nurturing the hope the great adventure would be theirs, but they encountered no gleam of approval in the Colonel's eye when they approached. Invariably he simply scowled at them and walked away.

"I'm not worrying," Jim Mordaunt whispered to Hank Martin. "He's just waiting until the assignment comes back from headquarters. He'll loosen up when he knows."

"He knows already," Hank said. "He's planning to take it himself. I can tell by the look in his eyes. He figures he can get away with one of his wartime deflection shots."

"But John's thirty-five," protested Jim. "He knows all about blackout. He can fly the thing, of course; but he'd never come out of the first turn."

"Five'll get you ten," Hank argued, and walked away.

"I wouldn't take that bet," Jim admitted thoughtfully.

JIM had been right. The General roared in before noon the next day and charged headlong into Mordaunt's office. General Piper was chunky and iron-gray. He had a nose like a spade, and breathed like an asthmatic tractor.

"Clever son-of-a-brick, aren't you?" he raged full blast, and slammed the door behind him. "Gimme that test-assignment sheet, John. You know why!"

"Take it easy, Jerry," Mordaunt said soothingly. They had been in the E.T.O. together, and the rank was off when they were alone. "You signed it—and with your eyes wide open."

"Dammit, you know I never even looked at it. I just saw the name 'Mordaunt' and figured you'd assigned Jim. *'J. Mordaunt'* was all you wrote, and then added some doodling that could have meant any rank. Haislip, my aide, caught it after he had made a copy, but couldn't tell me until after the assignment went out. Are you crazy, John?"

"Could be, but I'm the only one in the pool with shooting experience. I mean, I can knock that thing down, Jerry."

General Piper tightened his lips, his eyes and his grip on himself. "I'll take the grief for the mistake," he tried again, "but you're not flying that hell-box. Not on this show, at any rate."

"But you've okayed my selection, Jerry. None of those kids can be considered. Braid is married and has two kids. Jim—Jim doesn't have the right attitude. Martin has a wisdom tooth that's raising hell, and none of the others wants any part of it."

"Let's go nuts and talk sense," the General said, and sat down. "The Navy has put one over—a beaut! If you get it on your radar, what are you going to do about it?"

"Shoot it down! Intercept and destroy. That's exactly what it says in orders."

"So you go in with fixed guns, which means you have to attack dead on—if you are still conscious. But what do you do when the damn' thing breaks up only a few dozen feet ahead of you? You'll be hitting plenty knots, John."

"I'll get her down—if I have to crash her," Mordaunt said, and sat up with a start. That's what Braid had said, and he had ripped him up for it. "Don't you think I've thought it all out?"

"Sorry. I'm rescinding that assignment. Give it to someone who can take it."

"I'm the only man in the country who's entitled to that show, Jerry. It was set up for me."

"Do me a favor, will you, John?"

Mordaunt wagged his head negatively. "You'll look good before the Armed Services Committee telling them how we did it. You can get yourself another star, Jerry."

There was fully two minutes of eye-to-eye dueling until the General said: "I'd sooner be busted to a buck-sergeant, but I'm beginning to understand, John. You mean Pamela."

Mordaunt began to rub his jaw and fight the cold tremor. He hoped the General wouldn't bring up the same line he had rung in on Jim. The one about keeping it above a man's personal ambitions. If he did, he knew he was sunk.

"Yeh," the General said. "Maybe you can get her with a deflection shot. We want no more of that buzz-bomb hell. Go get her, kid."

"Thanks, Jerry. I'll get her."

"I don't know about you, John. But I need a drink."

THEY rolled the Rapier out shortly before noon the following day. She carried the high whiff of pungent chemicals and dirty lampwicks. Underfoot glistened the crystal foam of overflow that left a metallic stench in the nostrils. A long black steel-armored hose snaking from the liquid oxygen generator throbbed like an exposed vein. The armorers, one eye on the pressure gauge, tightened the panels covering the ammo boxes, and swabbed off the muzzle cups of the guns. A couple of divisions over the red mark, and those fuel flasks banked in the fuselage would wipe the base clean.

They had a radio panel set up in the back of a truck, and were in touch with the Navy guys at sea. Mordaunt and the General stood nearby, watching the eyes of the kid with the headset.

"You all right?" the General inquired, and lit another cigarette from a four-inch butt.

"Nine minutes," the kid in the headset chanted.

"I'll be all right," Mordaunt said, and avoided the eyes of Jim, who was standing, a wretched figure, near the front bumper. "Just keep talking—anything."

"You have a chance to clear if you go in for a deflection shot," the General obliged.

Mordaunt nodded. "I might consider a deflection shot."

"Eight minutes!"

They were putting the wrench to the supply tube and running in the starter dolly for the jet. "I'll just say so-long. Just like in the old days. We'll figure on a drink when I get back. A double—"

"SURE. Sure, John. We'll track you as long as we can on our screen; but remember, kid, this is no simulated target. That damned thing's loaded. If you hit her, she'll let you have it. Those guys out there can make her do a rumba. If you miss, they'll let her come through to register on our screen, and that will be it. They'll turn her around and let her go into the sea, but they'll always be able to say—"

"Seven minutes!"

"Okay! Let's ramble," Mordaunt said, and strode heavy and wide-legged in his G-suit to the spindly ladder hooked to the cockpit sill. He went up and over and eased his rump into the seat. The slipstick boys appeared on both sides, standing on the wing roots, a dreary garland of suety faces, hollow at the temples, lower lips trembling.

There were the same old words, the same old warnings, the same old fumbling attempts at handclasps.

"We'll be all right," the Colonel said, and waited for the starter mechanism to take over. The kid at the radio panel held up a full spread of fingers, and Mordaunt nodded—and winked. The kid grinned and tried to wink back.

The starter coughed, caught it in the teeth and spun the turbine blade. When the hiss reached a high pitch of outrage, the Colonel snapped in the I-16 switch and the igniter plug torched the mixture. A broken spear-head of flame fanged from the tail-pipe. She gushed a chiaroscuro smoke ring, grumbled and finally settled down as the mixture smoothed out and drove a widening plume of dust across the tractor-bitten area.

The kid in the headset was showing four fingers now. Mordaunt yelled, "Let's go!" and began to button up

and ease the canopy forward. The engineers swarmed down and moved away to a half-circle and stood resting their blackened hands on the hips of their denim pants.

"Here I come, Pam," he whispered. "This one's for you, sweetheart."

With a final look around, he eased the brakes off, flicked a salute at the General and rumbled her around into the wind. He felt better already. The belly strain was off, and there was no icy tremor along his jaw line. The Rapier tried to fishtail when he opened her up, but she smoothed out again, and he let her streak across the dry lake bed.

He checked the panel as she began to ease off and get the wheels clear. His decision was all there in a few flickering dials: the fuel for the jet; the pressure in the alky-oxygen flasks; the air-speed indicator and the ammo-box counter. There was a Machmeter, an accelerometer and half a dozen temperature recorders; and there was the round greenish-white radar screen that reflected his helmeted head: His window on the view to the future.

He punched the wheels up and checked out. *"Mordaunt to tower. X3-Rapier airborne. Over!"*

He received a routine reply, a time check and a confirmation code word indicating the Navy was ready too. *"Roger!"* He switched off and cut in the radarscope.

He circled the desert base once, and then rammed for the operating level. He hit forty thousand and headed for the vapored fringe of blue marking the coast.

"Okay, gentlemen," he muttered, "let her come."

He had fifty thousand feet of free air below him when he crossed the coast. He was seven seconds ahead of schedule, and he checked his approach course again and swept on through a thin layer of alto-cirrus and came out in the blinding blue. Another glance at the life-sustaining oxygen gauge, and he turned his attention to the graduated screen before him.

"I'll be seeing you, Pam."

There was a break in the even swell of electronic impulses flowing from the center of the screen. A golden earwig could have made the same impression on the opaque shade of a bridge lamp, but it was enough. The Creep was approaching, and the earwig on the screen indicated she was high in trajectory. He pressed his head and shoulders against the padded seat-back and punched in the two central rocket tubes.

Whammo! Someone smacked the back of the seat with a wet plank when the rockets caught. Mordaunt gasped, refocused his eyes and saw

"That was it, Pam. I did the best I could."

she was knocking off Mach 4. He held her in the climb and watched the wriggling earwig spatter, reorganize and clamber to the fawn-colored ring eight spaces from the zero spot. When he got his breath, he eased back more on the stick.

The earwig became more distinct, showed an oval head and experimented with a wriggling antenna. The Colonel did not dare look at the Machmeter. Instead he yanked at the gun-loading handle, just to make certain, and fingered for the trigger button placed inside the spade grip of the stick.

The blue was turning black; and below, the world had taken on a flimsy scarf of indistinct horizon. The sea was streaked with a lazy throw of gray yellow, and the earwig seemed to be trying to claw through the screen, and slipped three more rings.

"Keep coming, baby. Keep coming. Keep coming."

All about him was dead silence. No prop scream, no front-engine roar. All power sound punched well behind. Everything was astern, miles and miles away. As far behind as the E.T.O., his Mustang squadron and his daylight sweeps across the Channel. If he listened carefully, he might hear the rhythmic beat of the pressure pumps, the interior activity of the hydraulic system; but all John Mordaunt's physical intensity was concentrated in his sense of sight. He had to watch that earwig drifting down the screen.

"This is our day, Pam. I'll be seeing you."

The screen swell was broken again, and he saw the insect flick an antenna toward the zero spot. Now it was time to—

He forced his head up against the heated pressure and looked over the panel. He caught the long milky plume reaching out toward him from the black curtain beyond. The Creep was disclosing her arrowed course by dragging a telltale vapor trail. There wasn't a second to spare. Mordaunt treadled lightly to the right and leveled off.

"Deflection shot, hell!" he breathed. "She'd leave me standing."

Once the trail straightened out and became a white dot in his reflector sight, he punched in the last two rocket tubes. He had to get within range before those Navy guys could synchronize the two radar tracks and put the Creep on evasive tactics.

"Here I come, Pam."

He sat and took it. Pressing the gun button, he held her spot-on, and—

There was a black roar. Then an egg-yolk spatter of flame that slapped a crazy yellow design against the billowing black curtain. The Rapier bucked against a wall of concussion, and then bored on into the pattern of smoke and flame.

"Here I come—"

The Rapier plunged on through. There was a slight swishing as though someone brushed off the wing roots. He still had his hand on the gun button, and the stuff was pooping out, sparkling and burning into the blue-black beyond—a hundred golden earwigs zipping across the void.

"Pam!"

But the wings were still there. He looked out and made certain of that. Glass was still in his canopy; the jet engine was still perking. Nothing had gone into the scoop to take the turbine out. It so, the wheel would have broken up and hacked the tail away. The tail was still there!

He swung over in a two-mile circle and stared at what was left. Just a sooty black smoke-blob where the vapor trail ended. A big black mop on the end of a long white handle.

He spoke solemnly: "She must have blown herself to filings; there couldn't have been a hunk large enough to scratch the dural. What one of those could do—downtown. Baby!

"Well, that's it," he said with finality, and switched in his radio. *"Mordaunt to tower,"* he reported. *"Navy missile type Creep intercepted and destroyed.... Over.... Correction! Tell the General to make that drink—a triple!"*

He relaxed and continued to circle until the rocket fuel was exhausted and sat staring high into the sky.

"That was it, Pam. I did the best I could, but I guess it wasn't my day, sweetheart."

Scapegallows Spoils

FRANCOIS VILLON, lately of Paris and the King's Court, hurled his wineglass, in sudden anger at himself. Glass broke against the wall, and wine flowed like bright blood against the plaster.

"Saint Michael!" he swore at the huge man seated at the table. "I shall die of old age unless the ban against me is lifted."

Bagot grunted unintelligibly past a mouthful of broiled fowl. He was like an ape, huge and grotesque, his shaven head as shadowed as a melon, great muscles swelling full against his shirt.

"Old age is better than a gibbet noose at Montfaucon," he observed finally, and reached for the wine bottle. "D'Estoutville will hang you out of hand if you stick your long nose back in Paris."

The poet-rogue grinned despite himself. He and D'Estoutville, Pro-

Illustrated by JOHN FULTON

A STORY OF FRANCOIS VILLON, A GREAT POET, A GREAT LOVER, AND SOMETHING OF A RASCAL. THE STORY DOES NOT DEAL WITH HIS POETRY, THOUGH IT HAS BEEN FAMOUS FOR FIVE CENTURIES.

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

vost of Paris, had run their feud through many months. Their mutual respect had an element of friendship; but the exigencies of their professions had made them enemies, too.

"Dying there would be better than living here," he said in sudden loyalty. "Paris is my mother."

"And the devil your father," Jeannette said softly from the doorway, and came across the room.

She was dark, and the flame of life was softly smoldering within her. She was fire, muted now, but able to blaze at a commanding wish. She stood beside the poet, and he was conscious of her appeal, for her breasts were soft and round, and the long lines of her body were smooth and gently curved.

"You are a witch," he said, and caught her by the arm.

She sank to the couch, and now her perfume touched his senses, and he could feel the driving urge within him. She smiled and sank her head to his shoulder, and her arm stole up, her fingers tangling in his dark hair.

"Then I shall cast a spell upon you, one you cannot break," she whispered in his ear.

"Ha!" he chuckled mockingly, but his lips were at the hollow of her throat.

For the moment then he could forget. He could dismiss the knowledge from his mind that he was banished from Paris, his life forfeit if he returned. A bit of moskeneering had done that, swirled him up in a mocking twist of fate and cast him from the city which was his life.

HE had robbed Cosin de Cayeux; that he had admitted. Like shadows, he and Bagot had slid through the darkened rooms of de Cayeux's house and stolen a string of matched pearls, twenty gleaming balls of milky opalescence. Valuable they were, truly, worthy of a King's mistress, and so he and Bagot had taken them from the merchant.

Pierre Garoux had bought them, as he bought many stolen things, haggling and whining about his poverty, yet his eyes caressing and his fingers trembling as he placed the pearls away, while Villon counted the money paid. That is, he had bought all but one pearl, which Villon had kept for some perverse reason, and which now was at Jeannette's white throat.

The robbery had been well planned, and such was the skill of the poet-rogue and his giant companion, that they had not been seen. But de Cayeux was a man of wealth and prominence, and so his cries had roused the law in all its majesty.

D'Estoutville's men had come and questioned, but had received no satisfaction. Villon's purse was heavy and his heart was light, and his mocking answers had brought hot blood to the faces of D'Estoutville's men.

And it was then that fate had whipped a vicious blow at François Villon; for de Cayeux had gained the ear of the King, and when he was done talking, such suspicion had been roused that a declaration of banishment had been cried against the poet.

It was unjust, or so Villon had thought, and now memory rankled in his mind.

"Banished because of past misdeeds," the orders had read. *"His life*

is forfeit to the King's Justice should he return before the lifting of this banishment by Royal Decree."

And so Villon had left Paris, coming to this wayside tavern, where he could see the spires of Paris and wonder at the vagaries of fate. Plans he had made, many plans, and none had come to life. He had even thought to buy back the pearls, those still left with Pierre Garoux and those which Garoux had sold to Saul the Jew, who was Villon's friend and one of the most successful buyers of stolen goods in all France. But even that plan was not sound, and so he had ceased planning at last, content to wait for the time. Yet now and again, even as now, his thoughts swung to the banishment decree, and anger would light his dark eyes.

"A sly, treacherous trick," Villon muttered aloud.

And then he laughed, for in him a devil lurked, born of his mockery and view of life. He was a poet and a rascal, and within him forces fought for expression in a way few men could feel. It suddenly amused him that he, who had bluffed and brazened his way through so many misdeeds, could not find a solution for this.

He sighed, closing his eyes against the soft fingering of his dark and curly hair. He was dimly grateful that the wayside tavern had furnished so lovely a doxy for his entertainment. And because he read aright the promise in her eyes and pose, he knew there would be compensations for his banishment in the weeks to come.

BAGOT belched loudly and wiped greasy fingers on his shirt. Fed now, with skeletons of two fowl disjointed and gleaming on the table, he was ready for other activity.

"Enough of this wench, François," he said. "A game of *glic* with some travelers below might pass the time and fatten our purses."

"You go, fat pig!" Jeannette said in sudden anger. "François and I would be alone."

"Ummmm!" Villon murmured in agreement, nuzzling the warm spot below her ear.

"A pox on you!" Bagot growled to the girl. "And anyway, François, you forget that Etienne has been waiting for you this past hour."

François Villon sat reluctantly, eyes half-closed against the idle fondling of his hair by Jeannette. At rest, his face had the lean sharp look of a hawk, his nose bold and thrusting, dark eyes ever alive as though searching for something never found.

"And what does he want?" he asked, groping for a slim-necked wine bottle.

Jeannette bent forward and nibbled at his ear. "Send him on his way," she said. "Send them both on their ways, the boy and this pig."

The poet sighed and shook his head. "Maybe he brings news from Paris," he said. "Bring him up, Bagot."

The bench creaked as the huge thief came to his feet. He crossed to the door with a grace uncanny in a man so great.

"Etienne!" he bellowed, then waited patiently, picking at his teeth with his belt knife, a blade so keen he used it for the shaving of his face and scalp.

Feet pounded on the outer steps which led upward from the taproom, and then a man, young and unsure, came timidly through the door.

"Come in, Etienne," Villon cried, and pushed bottle and glass forward. "Wine? For the ride from Paris must have been hot."

THE younger man ducked his head nervously, staring from person to person. He was from the University, but he wore shirt and trousers now, the monklike-cloak discarded for reasons of heat and anonymity.

"Thank you, monsieur," he said, "but I wined below."

He hesitated, and the first hint of impatience came to the poet-rogue.

"What is it, Etienne?" he asked. "Speak up."

"Monsieur Villon," Etienne said, coming close to the couch, "I come to beg a favor."

"A favor!" Villon said, and his sudden mocking laughter filled the room. "Etienne, I am a fugitive; I cannot grant favors."

Jeannette nodded. "So go away, boy," she said. "And you too, pig!"

"Women," Bagot observed to no one in particular, "serve one purpose. Why they were given a tongue, too, I shall never understand."

"Enough, enough!" Villon snapped. Then his tone softened. "Etienne, I know not what you want, but probably I can do nothing. Unless it is that you need a few pieces of gold."

"A few pieces!" Etienne's laughter was low and bitter. "I need a thousand pieces."

"A thousand—" Bagot stared, all movement stilled, his craggy face mobile in surprise. "You speak like a ninny. Do you think François can enter the King's treasury?"

"Quiet, Bagot," Villon said, and now the surprise was gone from his eyes as he studied the younger man. "That is a small fortune, Etienne," he finished. "What makes you think that I would have such a sum, or having it, would pass it along to you?"

Etienne wiped sudden perspiration from his forehead, his eyes hunted.

"I do not want it from you," he said desperately. "I want you to take it from Pierre Garoux."

Bagot growled deep in his throat. "François is no thief," he said in blind loyalty, ignoring the facts.

"The boy is mad, François," Jeannette cried. "Send him away, and we shall talk of better things."

"No, no, wait!" the poet said seriously. "Now, start at the beginning, Etienne," he finished. "What of gold and Garoux and myself?"

Etienne drew a deep steadying breath. "Garoux robbed me," he said in a rush of words. "My brother—he was your friend at the University—sent me family treasures to be sold. Garoux made the best bid, so I sold them to him for two thousand pieces of gold." His thin hands balled in sudden futile anger. "But he tricked me, for when I returned home, I found that only one of the two pouches held goldpieces; the other was filled with worthless brass coins."

Bagot laughed. "The old devil!" he said. "So he did it again. Once, he did the same to me; but my blade at his navel, and he disgorged like a squeezed cherry casting its pit."

François Villon smiled despite himself at the thought, for he too, had had dealings with the greasy moneylender. Pierre Garoux was a man famed for the chicanery of his dealings with everyone. Garoux's thoughts were as twisted as a clump of snakes, and so clever was he, that he was seldom bested. He bought and sold anything, stolen or otherwise; in fact, only a few short weeks before, he had bought the proceeds of the robbery which had precipitated Villon's banishment from Paris.

"Garoux, eh!" Villon said thoughtfully, and smoothed his mustache.

HE had no real desire to entangle himself in this affair. Yet, as Etienne had said, he and the other's brother were long-time friends. And too—he smiled gently, a devil rising in his bold eyes—here was a chance to visit Paris again.

"And what do you expect me to do?" he asked.

Etienne shrugged, faced now with decision and having only vague hope.

"I thought you could ask for the gold," he said, "or threaten him. After all, you are of the *Coquille.*"

He gasped, for it was then that Bagot's razor-keen knife reached out and touched his spine. He was perfectly rigid, afraid to move, as the giant thief loomed over him.

"He is a spy, tolling you into a trap," Bagot growled. "I've seen it happen before. D'Estoutville would like nothing better than to find you back in the city."

"Please!" Etienne begged.

"Enough, Bagot!" Villon said impatiently. "I know the man. Put

that knife away." He stared at the frightened Etienne, then nodded as though in answer to an unspoken question. "Give him his thousand pieces of gold," he finished.

"Saint Michael!" Bagot blurted in surprise. "That will take all we have. Are we to impoverish ourselves for a mere tale?"

"But, François—" Jeannette began, and the poet cut her speech short, reaching up and touching the single lustrous pearl she wore on a fine chain at her throat.

"Give him the money," he said shortly. "Garoux will be more than glad to repay us."

"You are mad or drunk, or both!" Bagot growled.

But to him the word of François Villon was law; and so, even though he scowled blackly at the frightened Etienne, he was turning toward the door.

"Come with me," he growled. "Do you think I carry that much gold in my shoe?"

"Monsieur Villon," Etienne was saying, "I do not know—"

The poet grinned at the other, rakehell in his manner, his eyes glowing with the mockery of his thoughts.

"Get you along, and give my best wishes to your brother." His grin faded for a moment. "You are to tell none of this," he finished warningly. "You have received the payment you claimed, and you have no more to do with this affair. Do you understand?"

"Of course, but—"

"Bah, come along," Bagot said roughly, and his huge hand literally catapulted the smaller man from the room. He paused for a moment, staring at Villon. Then doubt faded in his pig eyes, and he grinned at the lean rogue. "François," he finished, "it is good that we are going back. To tell the truth, I am a bit tired of this country air and narrow-bottomed doxies." He smiled in anticipation. "Now Marie, there is an armful."

He closed the door, and Villon laughed aloud. It was hard to recall a time when he and Bagot had been apart. Like blades they were, matching and aiding each other, he the keen and flickering and Bagot, broader and slower, but just as deadly in his work.

But there was a sense of humility in him, too, that such a man should love him as a son. Like many men who defy the world, whose souls cry out with voiceless words, who have so much to tell and so little time in which to achieve, François Villon was sometimes amazed to know that others could understand him even in part. No man he acknowledged as master, and few as equals. But in the almost illiterate gargantuan Bagot he sensed a bit of himself, and so they were friends.

"Villon," Ladier said in a tight whisper, "they come for you—the Watch!"

He leaned back, groping for the wine bottle, and Jeannette pouted prettily at his side.

"You are a fool, François," she said. "If you must throw your gold away, why must you cast it so far?"

Villon gulped the sweet heady wine, and his free hand stole about the back of her slender neck. Then it reappeared again, and so clever were his truand's fingers, he had unclasped the fine chain and stolen it before she noticed. She gasped and tried to retrieve it, and he held it away from her, the great shining pearl dangling milkily below his fingers.

"Garoux is a sly fox," he said, "perhaps too sly. He bought a handful of these from me for a pittance. Now, perhaps, it is time he gave me full payment."

"Ha!" Jeannette smoothed her skirt over a warm thigh. "I have heard of this man, and he does not give charity to anyone—not even to you." She leaned soft curves against the poet in promise. "Give up this mad idea of returning to Paris," she finished. "If it is money—well, I have a bit. And what has Paris to offer that is so much more than you will find here in the peace of the countryside?"

Villon sighed, feeling her fingers stealing through the dark hair of his head. For a moment, resolution wavered. Then he gripped the single pearl tightly in his fist.

"A week," he said, "seven days, and then I shall return." He kissed her mouth, and the flame of her ran through his veins.

"A week," she whispered, "no more."

And then there was quiet in the room until Bagot pounded on the door and called that the horses were ready.

"A week," Villon said at the door, buckling on his sword-belt and catching up his flaring cape.

He blew a kiss, and for the moment he was not a man, but rather the legend he had become, rakehell and daring, eager and alive, a mocking devil in his eyes. And then the panel slammed behind him and he was gone.

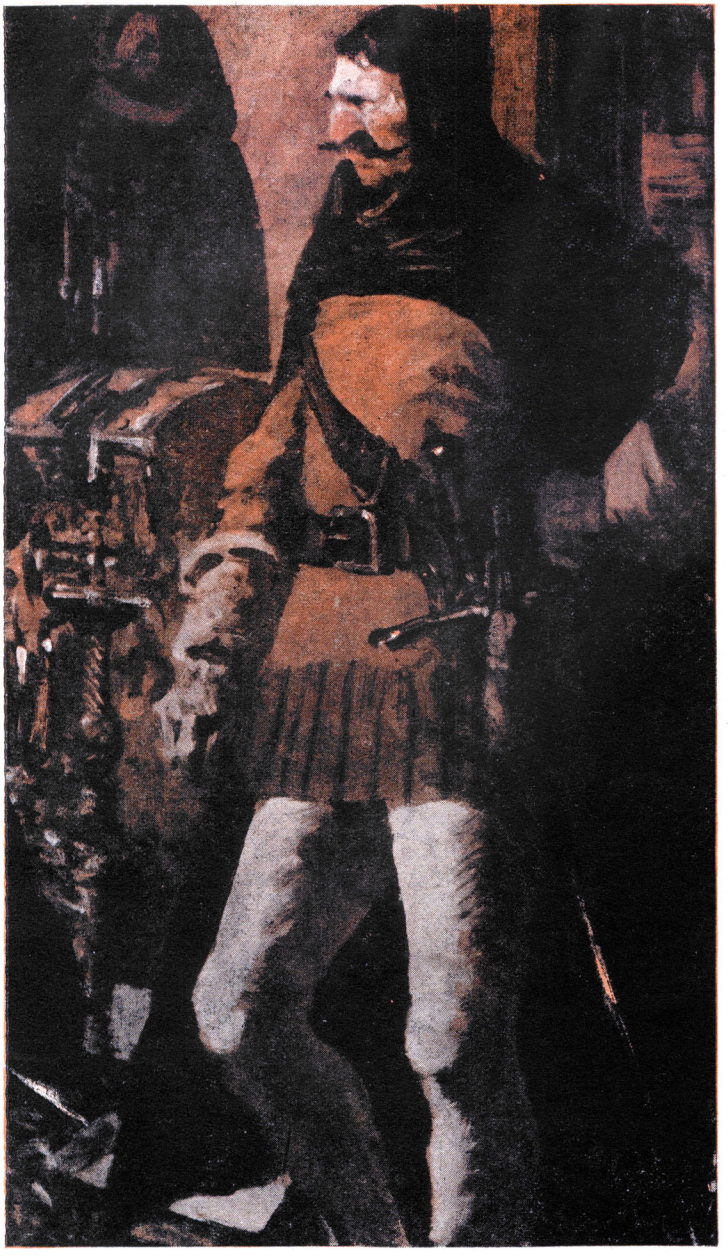
So it was that François Villon came back to Paris. He arrived early in the evening, when the dusk was like thin smoke from tall chimneys, when the guards were tired and the gates were filling with passing people.

He was a student now, his monklike robe his only disguise. His sword was flat to his leg, and he bowed his head as though in thought. A hundred people jostled about him, and he went unnoticed through the East Gate.

He breathed deeply, eagerness within him. Paris had borne him, and he had suckled at her breast. Thief he was, of the streets, but he was of the University too, and he had walked the marble floors of the palace as well as the cobblestones of the streets. His poetry had sung in his heart and he had given it to the world. It was harsh and brutal, lacking the milky softness of his peers, and so it had shocked. But it was truth, as he saw it, and so his fame had crept high among men of letters, even while the unbridled passions which were his legacy from the gutter made him known among those who lived by the quickness of their wits and legs.

He walked the streets of his birth, and he wondered how men could endure any other place. Life was here, brilliant, bright, ugly and exciting. This, to him, was the hub of all creation, for he felt the pulse of her life, and the devil in him had brought that pulse to existence with songs and *ballades* such as the world had never known.

People were here, crowding the streets. Mummers played for coins at



"Lift that sword from the table, and I split you like the hog you are," Bagot growled.

the corner, wary of the Watch which patrolled regularly. Students hurried along to late classes, their robes making them strangely like the priests who ruled them with iron discipline.

Pilgrims, on their way to the tomb of St. Catherine, passed with bowed heads. A judge rode by, clad all in scarlet, from the Palais. Archers thundered wildly past, their horses crowding people to one side, their way marked by hurled words. Even a friar, obese in his black and white habit, turned the anger of his gaze after the horsemen.

Villon grinned at all he saw and paced along with a lithe tread. Behind, Bagot trailed him with the dogged persistence of a bully bodyguard, suspicious of everyone, his only concern for the poet who walked so blithely toward a gibbet noose.

"For the last time," he had begged just outside the city's gate, "stay here and let my knife deal with Garoux." He held a blade of grass aloft and shaved it asunder with a tiny flick of the blade. "It will be as easy as that."

"You're an old woman," Villon had laughed. "Now stop your cackling," He frowned. "If we are separated, we shall meet at the Blind Sow."

But there had been no trouble; and now with night creeping stealthily nearer, there was less chance of being identified by any of D'Estoutville's men. And such was the esteem in which most men held Villon, there was little likelihood that a police informer would spy him and give his name to the Watch.

He whistled softly as he walked, a tune rollicking in his mind. He was remembering Jeannette, and his promise to return as soon as possible. A shiver walked his spine as he remembered her gentle fingers on the nape of his neck.

"Saint Michael!" he said. "Now, there is a woman!"

He smiled at the thought, and turned down the Street of Thieves. He sighed a bit in unconscious relief, for now he was comparatively safe. The Watch did little more than perfunctorily patrol this street, under direct orders by D'Estoutville, thus making it a haven for many of the crimps and truands and moskeneers of Paris. Here it was that a torn shirt or a fortune in King's jewels could be sold. Here, even deadly enemies lived side by side in an undeclared amnesty, for by a common knowledge each man knew that betrayal of one meant betrayal of all.

The houses were scabrous with age, leaning drunkenly like ancient men. Windows were blank, shutters dangling; and a stranger might have thought that only poverty existed on this crooked street of weary buildings and weed-grown lots.

But wealth was here for those who knew how to tap its source. Plunder came silently in the night, and money exchanged hands. Intrigue grew naturally, for many were the nobles' carriages which had come to this street under shadow of darkness that a bully, or a hundred bullies, might be hired for a bit of bladed statecraft.

And now, seeing the street again for the first time in days, François Villon chuckled deep in his throat and waited for Bagot to join him on the walk. Men and women passed by, and if recognition came to their eyes, their faces lacked expression.

"Hurry, Bagot," Villon said to the giant. "We've much to do this night."

"I don't like the smell of this, François," Bagot rumbled, his gaze darting suspiciously about. "One loose tongue —and you'll stretch gibbet chains at Montfaucon."

"Bah!" Villon grinned, and tapped the great thief on his massive chest. "You get about your task. Find Guy Ladier, and then see Saul and tell him that I wish the loan of fifteen hundred in gold, which shall be repaid within a day."

"But, François—" Bagot argued.

"The poet turned away. "I'll wait at the Blind Sow. Be back within two hours, at the most."

He walked on, knowing Bagot would argue; and then he smiled at the muttered curses of his friend, and turned to see the man hurrying away. The task would be done; if Bagot had been asked by the poet to charge the blades of D'Estoutville's men, that he would do, for such was his loyalty to Villon.

Bagot disappeared into the doorway of a house, and Villon went along the street. He paced leisurely until the turning of a corner brought the battered sign of the Blind Sow into view. His gaze flicked about, searching for the Watch, but now night was almost come, the streets slowly becoming deserted. Satisfied, he walked to the tavern and pushed through the door.

Warm hungry odors thrust at him, and he could feel the gnawing of hunger in his stomach. The tavern was well filled, laughter rising, the banging of tankards a harsh obbligato to the singing of a lutist by the wide fireplace. Gerimonde, the innkeeper, scurried about, arms filled with platters, his shrill voice prodding at the ale girl, who worked endlessly at the foam-spouted kegs.

Villon spied an empty table in a near corner and went that way, sliding onto the seat and keeping his cloak's hood drawn about his face for concealment.

Gerimonde bustled up, wiping the perspiration from his fleshy face with the palm of one hand. He bowed jerkily.

"Sire?" he asked. Then recognition came, and he blanched, instinctively turning so that his bulk shielded the poet from view. "Villon!" he gasped. "What manner of madness is this that you come here? Be gone before the Watch spies you."

Villon grinned, mobile mouth alive. Gerimonde lived in perpetual fear, of the Watch and of the truands he served. But his worry now was based on more than fear; it was built on friendship.

"Wine, Gerimonde," he said, "and stop sweating. Bagot will be here shortly, and then we shall leave."

"But—" the keeper began.

"Wine," Villon repeated.

Gerimonde turned away, shaking his woolly head. Villon grinned at his back, then relaxed. Across the way two soldiers, clad in bright blue-and-red uniforms, laughed loudly and sought the affections of two doxies from the street. Closer, a group of University students roistered for the last few minutes before curfew was rung on the bells of the Sorbonne.

Villon sighed, remembering, then accepted a wine bottle and mug from the perspiring Gerimonde. The keeper hesitated, then hurried away, and the poet drank slowly, savoring the life of the tavern.

Minutes passed. The lutist, slowly growing drunk from gifts of wine, sang gayly, his *ballades* written by Villon a year before. A fat monk backed to the fire and, lifting his skirts, warmed himself at the flames. The ale girl still hurried, foaming glasses balanced precariously.

Then the door opened and Bagot entered, giving one searching glance about, before spying Villon and coming his way. He sank tiredly to the bench and reached for the wine.

He drank, Adam's-apple lifting and dropping, and when he set the bottle aside, it rang emptily. Blowing a huge breath, the thief gazed at his friend, then thrust a heavy pouch across the table.

"There," he said, "I delivered your messages, and now I bring the fifteen hundred from Saul. And I still think you're mad."

"Good!" Villon answered, grinning as he tucked the heavy pouch beneath his robe, where another was caught by his belt. "Come, we've much to do."

He dropped a coin for the reckoning, then strode across the tavern and out the door. Nerves were beginning to tighten in him now, and impatience bit at him. Bagot was a huge shadow at his side as they paced the dark street. The moon was not yet risen, and the streets were almost fully deserted. Three bowshots away, the Watch's lantern gleamed yellow.

At a cross-street, Villon paused, studying the front of a large house. Dim light stole through shutter cracks. This was the house of Pierre Garoux.

"You know what must be done," Villon whispered. "Now do not fail."

Bagot grunted, fingering his knife. "Take care," he answered. "Garoux hates your liver; he'd slit your throat for a copper piece."

Villon laughed softly at the thought. Then he was pacing across the cobblestones, Bagot like a huge shadow at his side, and his hand was battering dull echoes from the sturdy door of Garoux's house.

There was silence, and he knocked again. Seconds passed, and then a peephole panel slid aside and a single eye peered warily out.

"Go away," a voice cried, "go away and let honest men gain their well-earned rest."

"Honest!" François Villon retorted mockingly. "Open, Garoux, before the Watch discovers I am your visitor."

"Open up, Garoux," Bagot growled, "before I kick the door in and you with it."

"Villon!" Garoux said in surprise, and bars slid back on the door. "Come in, come in," he finished, opening the door.

Villon and Bagot entered, blinking against the light of the lamp held aloft by Garoux. There was the smell of decay and age here, the air stale and musty. Pierre Garoux busied himself barring the door again, then thumbed them down the short hall.

"This way," he said.

He led the way, shadows dancing on the walls. The others followed, entering the main room of the house. Garoux set the lamp on a table, then turned, hands rubbing one against the other.

"You risk death," he said, staring from eyes as bright as those of a raven. "Your need must be great."

"Great enough," Villon said easily and leaned against the wall.

His gaze went about the room, and as always, surprise touched him. The room was like a merchant's shop, clothing hung on wall pegs in wild confusion, weapons racked in one corner. Here were silver services, and there was a bale of skins waiting for the furrier. This was a storeroom and a business room and a living-room for Garoux, now hovering at the edge of the center table.

"Well,"—Garoux's voice took on its professional whine—"let me see what you have—although I am so poor now I know I cannot buy."

Bagot grunted. "Had I your wealth," he said, "I would never lift my hand in work again."

"Work!" Garoux sneered.

"Enough!" Villon said, and his dislike for this man was sour in his mind. Garoux was gross, clad in a dirty robe, his hair-studded chest like bulging pink fat which needed shaving.

"What is it?" Garoux asked, and sudden caution came to him. His right hand slid back and cupped about the pommel of a sword on the table.

"Lift that sword from the table, and I split you like the hog you are," Bagot growled in sudden threat.

Garoux grinned weakly. "I meant nothing," he said. His gaze went to Villon. "What have you to sell? I

swear I will give you the finest price of any man on the Street."

"Not sell," Villon answered. "I've come to buy. I want those pearls you bought from me a month ago."

Garoux's laughter was relieved. "Oh, those!"

VILLON nodded. "I'll take them back, all of them." He grinned. "I've a doxy who likes their feel about her throat."

"So!" Garoux licked fat lips and massaged the thin hair about his bald pate. "Well, I have but a few left. Saul the Jew took ten—for a niggardly price. I lost money."

"How many do you have?" Villon asked.

"Nine."

"Good." Villon lifted the money pouch from beneath his cloak. "You paid me a hundred in gold for each; I shall give you a thousand for the nine. That is a fair profit."

"A thou—" Garoux shook his head. "Oh, no. I have taken risks, and Saul gave a hundred and fifty for each. Surely, you jest."

Bagot fingered the razor-keen knife in his belt. "Why pay," he said to Villon, "when I can disgorge the fruit so easily?"

"Villon, we are friends," Garoux whined in sudden plea.

François Villon shrugged in faked anger. "All right," he said, "I shall pay a profit. Fifteen hundred for the nine." He tossed the pouch onto the table. "Now, hurry!"

"A moment," Garoux said and the rage in him was as naked and coiling as a snake.

He hesitated, then hurried from the room, closing the door carefully behind as he went out.

Villon grinned at Bagot and waited. Bagot shrugged his contempt of the moneylender, then leaned against the wall, idly stropping the already-keen knife on a leathery palm.

And then Garoux was back, a tiny leather pouch in his hand. He gave it to Villon and watched anxiously as the other examined the nine lustrous pearls glowing softly in his palm.

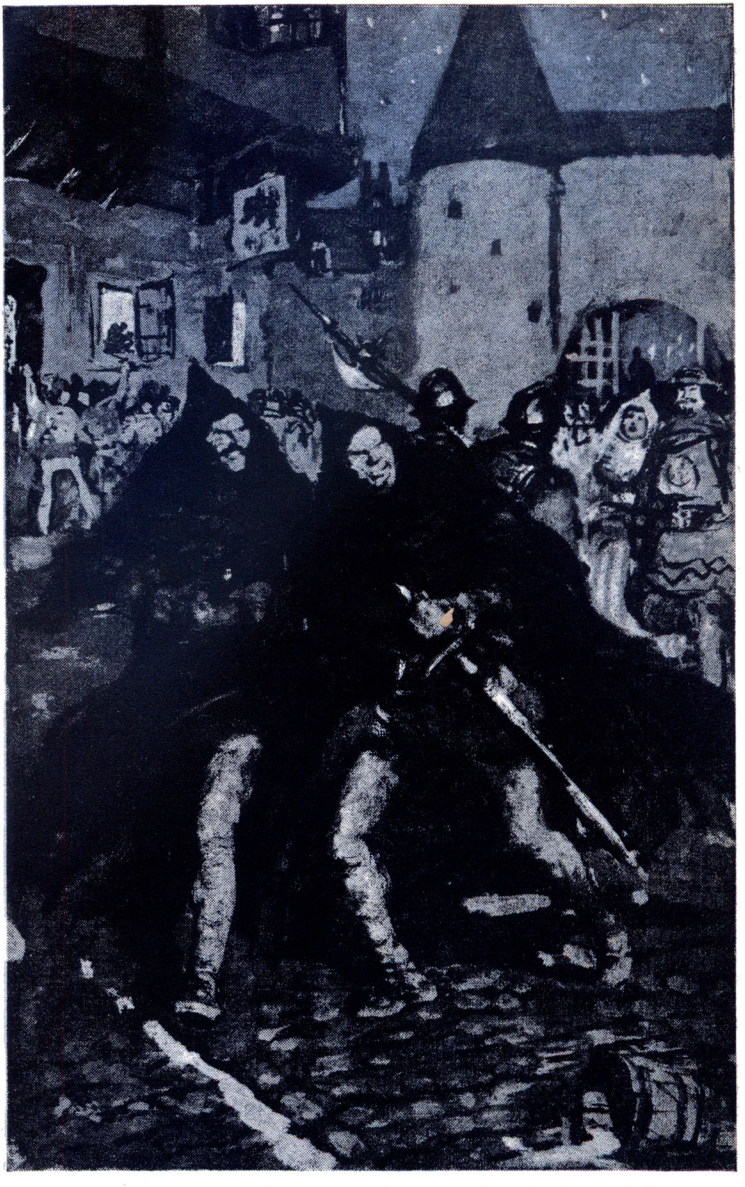
"They are the pearls?" he asked.

Villon nodded and returned them to the pouch and handed it to Bagot.

"Go to Saul the Jew and tell him I want the other ten," he said. He glanced at Garoux. "With your permission, I'll wait here, for the streets are hardly safe."

Garoux swallowed. "If you wish," he said finally.

Bagot nodded and went through the door. There was the sound of bars grating inward at the front door; then Garoux hurried to rebar the portal. He returned, sweating profusely.



"Hurry, Bagot," Villon said. "We've much to do this night."

"Wine?" he asked.

Villon shook his head, knowing the quality of the other's cellar. Garoux hesitated, then went about the table and sat, opening the money pouch and stacking the gold coins with the stifled eagerness of a miser. Villon watched, a devil lurking in his dark eyes.

"A friend of mine came to see me," he said suddenly.

"Oh," Garoux said absently.

"An Etienne Drouart."

Garoux's gaze flicked up, and for a second his fingers poised motionless over the gold. He was dangerous then.

"Etienne Drouart?" he repeated cautiously.

Villon nodded. "You know him," he said easily, but now his hand had dropped casually to the robe slit. The sword was heavy at his thigh. "You cheated him of a thousand in gold."

Garoux was quiet, measuring and estimating the mettle of the man he faced. His eyes hooded, flicking from the lithe rogue to the sword on the table.

"So?" he asked.

"Father, let's see your features." He flipped back the monk's hood. . . . "A thousand pardons, Father!"

"It would be a kindness if you gave him full value," Villon said mildly. "He and his brother can ill afford the loss."

Garoux laughed then, thinly and cruelly. "Give him full value!" he chortled. "Villon, you are a fool. This is not a game I play; if others are less clever, then the hurt is theirs."

Villon nodded. "I thought those would be your words," he admitted. "But I promised Etienne I would ask."

Garoux shrugged. "Are you his keeper, or I?" he said. "If he walks with men, let him play with men's rules. I don't—"

His voice failed at the savage pounding on the outer door. The sword whipped from the table top, and he half-rose, fear in his face.

"The Watch!" he cried. "They'll hang me too, if you're found here!"

Villon had whirled about, sword free now, his lean face alive and eager. The pounding continued, but now a faint voice could be heard.

"It isn't the Watch," Villon said.

Garoux darted about the table with a ponderous grace and stood at the hall entrance, listening. Then he disappeared, and a second later his voice was heard at the door.

"Villon!" a voice answered. "Bring Villon to the door."

The poet brushed Garoux aside and peered through the peephole. Then ignoring Garoux, he threw the bars and jerked the door open. A man was there, face frightened in the dimness.

"Villon," he cried, "Bagot has been taken. The Watch caught him near the Blind Sow. And D'Estoutville was there, too."

"You're lying!" Villon's tone was savage.

"I do not lie," the man protested. "You know me—Guy Ladier. I saw Bagot taken away, and he barely managed to whisper to me where you were."

Villon hesitated, and Garoux groaned in terror. "Get away from here, Villon," he said. "I cannot risk my life for you."

"Was that all?" Villon asked, ignoring the whining Garoux.

"No!" Ladier hesitated. "They found some pearls on Bagot, and D'Estoutville said aloud that the only way Bagot could escape a hanging by morning was for the rest of the pearls to be returned within the night."

"He said that?" Villon asked, then nodded. "Very well, he shall have the pearls." He found a coin and laid it in Ladier's hand. "My heart's thanks," he finished.

And then the man was gone, vanishing in a whisper of running footsteps. Villon sheathed his sword, his shoulders suddenly squared with decision.

"I've got to see Saul and get the other pearls," he said. He bent forward, searching the dark street with narrowed eyes. "And yet the Watch is probably in wait for me at this moment." He whirled on Garoux. "Will you go for me?" he asked.

"I?" Pierre Garoux asked, startled.

"Yes, you." He found the second money-pouch beneath his robe and thrust it into Garoux's hands. "Here is fifteen hundred in gold, and if that is not enough, tell Saul I shall pay any amount he demands."

"Any amount!" Garoux whispered, and his chin suddenly lifted. "All right, Villon."

Villon's face lighted. "You are a true friend, Garoux," he said. "I shall wait at the Blind Sow for you. Gerimonde will find a hiding-place for me, if the Watch should make a search." He drew his cloak tightly about his lithe body. "But hurry, and don't haggle over price. Bagot's life is at stake, and morning must see an end to this affair."

"I'll be at the Blind Sow as soon as possible," Garoux agreed.

Villon turned away and into the street, and paced toward Gerimonde's tavern. Behind him, Garoux's door slammed. Villon smiled, and then he laughed, his mockery a dark and forceful thing.

"You filthy pig!" he said, and a prowling cat arched its back and spat at the tone of the poet's voice.

And then François Villon strode briskly and silently into the night.

It was after midnight, and now the Blind Sow was almost empty of customers. A drunken soldier slept in a far corner, wine bottle clutched in his hand. Four students from the Uni-

versity still laughed and roistered at a side table, and the fat monk had gone to sleep so close to the fireplace there was danger of a hot coal setting him aflame.

The ale girl cleaned desultorily, while Gerimonde rinsed and stacked dishes and glasses and mugs in the kettles of water near the ale kegs. Two doxies counted their night's earnings at a far table and eyed Villon and Guy Ladier, speculation in their sharp eyes.

François Villon sat at ease, picking at the bones of a duckling, dry yellow wine gleaming in a bottle before him. Impatience was in him; but he had learned long before that waiting was a part of living, and so he had waited through the hours for Garoux to appear at the tavern.

"Will he come?" Ladier asked at last, and the poet nodded.

"As surely as the sunrise," he said. "You know his mind as well as I do. If there is profit to be made, then he will appear."

CANDLES smoked; flames bobbed, as the door opened. Then Garoux was in the tavern, treading heavily toward the corner where Villon waited. Perspiration gleamed on his face, and his right hand was tight about a pouch at his waist.

"I got them, Villon," he said, standing before the table, speaking softly so that no others could hear.

"Fine," Villon said, sucking a scrap of meat from a duckling bone. "Give them to me."

Pierre Garoux backed a step, and now his crafty nature was revealed fully in the expression on his face.

"Not so fast," he said.

Villon frowned. "You said that you got them; then give them to me so that I may pass them to D'Estoutville."

Garoux shook his head. "They are not yours," he said. "I bought them from Saul, and so they are mine."

Anger came to Villon, and his hand tightened into fists. "I do not like jesting of this kind," he said. "I gave money for those pearls."

Garoux flipped a heavy money pouch onto the table. "There is the money you gave me for the pearls," he said. "There was not enough for Saul." His eyes narrowed. "I bought them with my money."

"Your money!"

François Villon fingered the pouch, then nodded as though in answer to an unheard question, smoky laughter drifting upward into his eyes.

"All right," he said, "I know what is in your mind. What profit do you want—two hundred, three?"

"Three—" Garoux laughed harshly. "Do you know what that thief, that robber of a Saul, wanted for these pearls? He asked four thousand in gold, and I barely talked him into selling for thirty-five hundred."

"Thirty-five hundred!" François Villon laughed, the sound ringing bright and free.

"Aye!" Garoux said sourly. "Thirty-five hundred I paid. But don't laugh too loudly, for you will pay five thousand in gold for them."

"You're mad!" Villon said.

"Not so mad," Garoux grinned. "It is very simple: pay my price or watch your friend hang at Montfauçon."

Villon shook his head. "You are as slimy as I thought," he said, and his voice lifted. "Bagot!"

A huge shadow moved from behind the ale kegs and resolved into the angry figure of Bagot. He came across the floor, hand at his knife, his craggy face stony with the desire for vengeance.

"Count yourself favored," he said, "if you still live a minute from now."

"Bagot!" Garoux wailed, his face ashen, as he cowered against the wall. "But you were taken by the Watch!"

Bagot stopped, towering over the gross moneylender, his great hands beginning to lift. Only Villon's sharp words stopped him.

"Do not harm him, Bagot," he snapped.

"The dog would have sold my life for a few pieces of gold!" Bagot growled.

Villon nodded, his eyes hard.

"But the pearls!" Garoux cried. "You needed the pearls to free Bagot—" Knowledge came to his eyes. "It was a trick!"

François Villon smiled, but there was no softness in him then. Anger still swirled in his eyes, and he was as lean and deadly as any ferret which has caught a rat.

"It was a trick," he admitted. "Bagot was not taken by the Watch. I paid Ladier to deliver that message."

"But—" Garoux began, trying to understand.

"You bought back your own pearls," Villon said softly. "After I bought them from you, Bagot took them to Saul. Ladier gave his message, and your own greed for a profit tricked you into going to Saul to buy pearls which you thought I needed to save Bagot's life."

"You've robbed me!" Garoux said in sudden blinding rage. "Robbed me of thousands in—"

François Villon felt the anger swell the muscles of his hands, and he was still for a minute. Then he touched the money pouch on the table.

"This borrowed money will be returned to Saul." He smiled. "And you say you paid thirty-five hundred for the pearls, eh?"

"You thief—" Garoux mouthed.

"Now I paid you fifteen hundred for the pearls which I sent to Saul. And there is the sum of one thousand in gold which is owed to Etienne Drouart. Together, that makes a total of twenty-five hundred in gold, leaving a balance of one thousand."

"Villon, I plead with you, do not rob an old man of—"

Villon glanced at Guy Ladier. "A hundred in gold to Ladier for his mummery with the message." He nodded. "And that, of course, leaves the sum of nine hundred in gold to be split among Saul and Bagot and myself." He laughed softly. "A nice night's work."

Garoux stiffened, and his hatred was naked and ugly. He looked from man to man, and he shivered in the ecstasy of his rage.

"I'll kill you for this, Villon," he said, "if it's the last thing I ever do on this earth!"

Bagot's hand smashed him back against the wall, and his keen blade drew a drop of crimson blood to the skin of the fat man's greasy throat.

"Villon?" he pleaded.

But the poet shook his head in deep disgust. "Let the swine go," he said. "His threats are meaningless."

Bagot growled deep in his throat, then drew reluctantly away, keen blade still lifted as though to strike.

FOR a moment Garoux hesitated. Then he whirled and was gone, his face white and strained. The door slammed, and Gerimonde sighed in relief back at the kegs. Blood, he had discovered long before, makes a stain hard to wash away.

Guy Ladier fingered the coins given him by Villon, then grinned and stood.

"For the gold, my thanks," he said. "For the entertainment, my eternal gratitude. Garoux has cheated me more than once."

He nodded at Bagot, and then he too was gone, slipping through the front door like a shadow. Bagot grinned and sat down at the table.

"Saint Michael!" he bellowed. "Am I hungry! Gerimonde, a bird or two or a piece of pork. And a jug and a pastry and whatever else this hovel has to offer."

François Villon laughed softly, content now. The events of the night had been a lark, a bit of excitement such as he could never do without. That all had moved smoothly did not surprise him, for he had planned well, knowing the cupidity of Garoux and playing on it.

And so he sat and drank his wine and watched the gargantuan Bagot eat a meal which would have been sufficient for four ordinary men. He hummed a bit as he waited, not anx-

ious to leave the city again, and yet realizing that D'Estoutville must know of his presence before too much time had passed.

So when at last Bagot belched comfortably and wiped his mouth on his sleeve, Villon rose and gathered his cloak about him.

"It is time to go," he said, and memory came brightly to his mind. "After all, I promised Jeannette to return."

"Bah!" Bagot growled lazily. "That doxy has another man by now."

The door slammed open, and Guy Ladier darted into the room. The University students glanced up, then went on with their singing. The soldier and monk snored, and the two doxies stared indifferently.

"Villon," Ladier said in a tight whisper, "they come for you."

"What?" Villon snapped.

"The Watch! I followed Garoux and saw him stop and talk to the Watch. I could not hear what he said, but I snaked close to them, after he had left, and the Watch was talking about you."

"Where are they now?"

"Just down the street," Ladier said swiftly. "They wait only for D'Estoutville to arrive and lead them in person."

"We've got to run," Villon said, his eyes alight with excitement.

"I should have slit his throat," Bagot said savagely. "François, you are too goose-livered."

"Let's go," Villon snapped, but Ladier caught his arm.

"Messengers were sent to bring others of the Watch. This street is surrounded. You'll never get through."

"Saint Michael!" François Villon whispered. He frowned, the thoughts whirling in a maelstrom in his mind.

And then he laughed aloud, as an idea came. It was dangerous, but it might work, and the very daring of it tickled his sensibilities. He sat on a stool throwing back his cloak.

"Your knife, Bagot," he said. "And be quick, for time grows short."

Bagot hesitated, not understanding. And then, following the line of the poet-rogue's gaze, he began to grin. His knife came free of its scabbard and he bent forward.

"This may hurt, François," he said.

And then he began to work, while Villon's mocking laughter rang softly in the tavern and the customers stared in blank surprise. . . .

The Watch's lantern swung about and beat its yellow glow against the two men in the street. A sword lifted menacingly, and the Watch came forward in stalking caution.

"Halt," the cry came. "Who are you?"

The tall monk hesitated, his face shadowed within his hood. The ape-like man at his side watched from steady little eyes.

"What is it, my sons?" the monk said quietly. "Why do you stop a man of the church?"

"Who are you?" the question was repeated.

"I am Father Florimonde of Angers, and this is my guide, for I am a stranger here." The monk turned a bit, steady patience in his voice. "If you are crimps, then rest assured that I carry nothing of value but the Word."

"Let him go," a bully said. "We search for Villon, not a priest."

But the first watchman laughed cynically and moved forward. "I've heard of this Villon," he said. "Father, let's see your features."

His free hand darted out and flipped back the monk's hood. A bald pate gleamed in the light; the naked face stared in silent reproach.

"My son—" the monk began, and the watchman dropped his hand in confusion.

"A thousand pardons, Father!" he said. "We search for a notorious rogue we know to be in this neighborhood. It is best that you pass before there is action."

The priest nodded. "I think," he said deliberately, "that would be best."

He lifted his hood and was about to move on, when a tall man stepped into the circle of lantern light. Big he was, and his uniform was that of a noble.

"What is this?" he snapped.

"Sire, we stopped this man and priest, thinking one might be Villon."

"And—" prompted D'Estoutville.

"They are as they seem to be."

The monk turned his shadowed face to the Provost. "My son," he said, "I have distressing news which I must pass to you. I was approached by a man named Pierre Garoux but a short while ago. He offered me what I believe to be stolen pearls, claiming I could sell them at a profit for the church." Indignation came to his voice. "The church does not take such unworthy profits to carry on its work."

"Garoux!" D'Estoutville said, and he too reached out and laid back the monk's hood. For a second he was silent; then his voice came, soft and compelling.

"You say Garoux has the pearls?"

"I swear it," the monk said. "But your men must go fast, for I imagine his house has a thousand hiding-places."

Robert D'Estoutville smiled then. "Now that is strange," he said. "We search for a man because of pearls. Could these be the same? And is it possible that we hunt the wrong man?"

The monk shrugged. "I could not say," he admitted.

D'Estoutville smiled. "If the pearls appeared on Garoux, then it is obvious that François Villon must be innocent. If that is so, then I further imagine that Villon will be roaming these streets shortly, his banishment lifted."

"If such is God's will," the monk said piously.

D'Estoutville laughed aloud.

"Then pass on, Father," he said, "while I find this Garoux." He paused, then continued: "You know, I have the feeling that François Villon will not be found this night."

The lantern light moved on, as the Watch went down the street. The monk and his huge companion waited a breathless moment, then sighed in slow relief. Then they stiffened a bit, for D'Estoutville had reappeared on silent feet.

"Father," Robert D'Estoutville said gently, "you are a stranger here, and so I must caution you. Change your barber, for the humors in the night air of Paris are bad for open wounds —and I can see that the barber who shaved your head left a cut or two in his hurry. Good night, Father, and a safe journey."

And then he was gone, his soft laughter friendly and warm in the night air. And behind, François Villon rubbed his hand over his newly-shaven scalp and lip and blessed the fortune which had placed his friends in so many places.

"He knew you," Bagot said in dull wonder. "He knew you, and let you go."

"It was a fair exchange, me for Garoux, and he is much worse than I," Villon said.

Then he laughed aloud. "Now for the country inn and Jeannette," he said gayly. "Come, Bagot—I shall race you to where we left the horses."

Amusement lay in Bagot's voice. "Like that?" he asked.

"Like what?" Villon answered.

And then he understood, and the ironic humor of the moment brought dark merriment to his eyes. Bald as an ancient he was, bald and beardless; and it was Jeannette's delight to run her fingers through his dark curls.

"Oh, no!" he whispered.

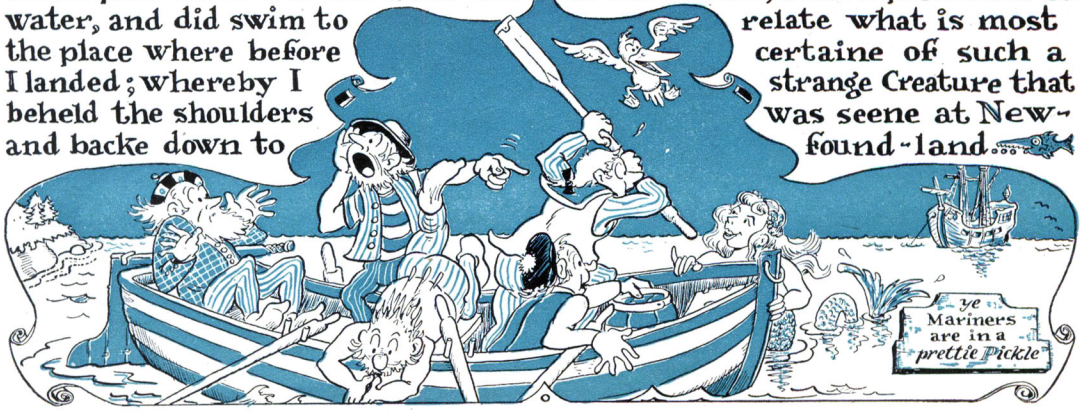
"Oh, yes!" Bagot answered. "Come, Francois," he finished. "That doxy will wait long for you to return."

Side by side, two moskeneers to whom life was an exciting thing, they went down the street. Their laughter rose and mingled in comradeship; and then they were gone into the night.

ye Mermaide

From "Captaine Richard Whitbournes voyages to New-found-land..." This and other likely stories are to be found in "Purchas his Pilgrimes..." Here all newly illuminated for the *scientific* reader by Peter Wells, who draweth from fonde memorie...

Now also I will not omit to relate something of a strange Creature that I first saw there in the yeere 1610. In a morning early as I was standing by the water side, in the Harbour of Saint Johns, which I espied verie swiftly to come swimming toward me, looking cheerefully, as it had beene a woman, by the face, Eyes, Nose, Mouth, Chin, Eares, Necke and Fore-head: It seemed to be so beautiful, and in those parts so well proportioned, having round about the head, all blew strakes, resembling haire, downe to the Necke {but certainely it was haire} for I beheld it long, and another of my companie also, yet living that was not then farre from me, I stepped backe, for it was come within the length of a long Pike. Which when this strange Creature saw that I went from it, it presently thereupon dived a little under the water, and did swim to the place where before I landed; whereby I beheld the shoulders and backe down to the middle, to be as square, white and smoothe as the backe of a man, and from the middle to the hinder part, pointing in proportion like a broad hooked Arrow; how it was proportioned in the forepart from the necke and shoulders, I know not; but the same came shortly after unto a Boat, wherein one Will^m Hawkridge was... and the same Creature did put both his {sic} hands upon the side of the Boate, and did strive to come in to him and others then in the said Boate: Whereat they were afraid; and one of them strooke it a full blow on the head; whereat it fell off from them: and afterwards it came to two other boates in the Harbour; the men in them, for fear fled to land: This {I suppose} was a Mermaide. Now because divers have written much of Mermaides, I have presumed to relate what is most certaine of such a strange Creature that was seene at New-found-land...



Take the Nozzle, Major!

A rookie fireman has to prove himself in any case. But Pete McGee had been a commissioned officer in wartime, and Captain Crowley, of the Fire Department, a private. That really stacked the cards.

by JAMES F. CASEY

IT was a Saturday morning—hot, and August. Defying the humidity in a crisp white shirt, Captain Dinny Crowley sat at his desk in the office of Engine Company 102, chewing on a dead cigar, and feverishly pecking with two fingers at a battered typewriter. Behind him, Fireman "Tug" Lauro leaned an unbelievably wide torso on a defenseless mop. Both were considerably startled, when a lengthy blond individual, dressed in the height of summer fashion, and a snazzy bow tie, came barging into the room.

He was Peter McGee, fresh, but fresh, from two years of selling expensive pots and pans to reluctant housewives. He pulled up short in front of Lauro, throwing him a snappy but exaggerated salute. In a loud voice he announced himself.

"Peter Aloysius McGee reporting for duty, sir. The city is saved!"

A wave of astonishment passed over Lauro's rough-hewn face, followed by one of extreme pity. He made with the thumb in the direction of the Captain, attempting at the same time to convey by multiple facial contortions that he wasn't the officer, and that Peter Aloysius McGee better remove that grin from his face.

McGee caught on, and about-faced to the desk.

Captain Dinny had a face like a grandfather hawk, and the build of a middleweight wrestler. His scalp, up to the snowy hairline, grew crimson. He gripped the edge of the desk hard, apparently undergoing a stroke. McGee drew back in alarm.

"Mister," the Captain finally managed to explode, "with one exception, no probationary fireman in the history of paid fire departments has ever failed to make that same silly speech. The exception was me. Now, turn around, go out that door, knock and reënter as humbly as your rank and good manners demand."

McGee flushed, and bit back an angry reply. He felt like going out the door and down the stairs and to heck with you and your fire department, bub—but he didn't. Remembering the fruitless years of pots and pans, he went through the little scene with stiff-lipped dignity; and he brought it off very well, much to the admiration of Tug Lauro, who winked and made a V for Victory behind the Captain's back.

Having announced himself all over again in the proper manner, McGee dug some papers from an inside pocket, and placed them on the desk. "Here's my warrant of appointment and character investigation," he said.

Ignoring the warrant, Captain Dinny picked up the other sheets. He thumbed through them idly at first, and then with considerable intensity. McGee watched him nervously. From time to time, the Captain nodded his

"Kids! Didn't you hear her? There's kids up there!" he shrieked.

head as if agreeing with himself on something. Finally, he tossed the papers into a file basket, and looking up, measured McGee with an unfriendly smile.

"Very enlightening," he said, "but did you bring any turnouts with you?"

"Huh?"

"Turnouts! Work-clothes! Any American male over three years old ought to know that firemen do not respond to fires in their Confirmation suits."

"Nobody told me about clothes."

The Captain shook his head sadly, and turned to Lauro.

"Fix this boot up with some clothes."

"Yes sir!" Lauro said.

"And introduce him to a mop and some brass polish until I get through here. . . . You know what I mean."

"Yes sir!"

Tug Lauro's locker was at the far end of the bunkroom between two high arched windows that overlooked a tiny handball court. From its crowded depths he fished out dungarees, a blue chambray work-shirt, and a pair of Army shoes dyed black. McGee changed clothes. The pants were several inches too short, and the shoes stood out like two coal scuttles. The shirt would have wrapped around him almost twice.

Lauro laughed. "Now you're a fireman."

"Yeah, but for how long?" McGee's eyes went back to the office. "What's eating that guy, anyway?"

"You, you're a boot. A Johnny-come-lately. It's traditional. From now, until the next proby gets appointed here, you run the stores, take in all the crummy details, and get blamed for everything that goes wrong, no matter what. Also you will be chief-in-charge of the mop, the broom, and the brass polish."

"Sounds like chicken to me," McGee said. "I thought I left that all behind me in the Air Force."

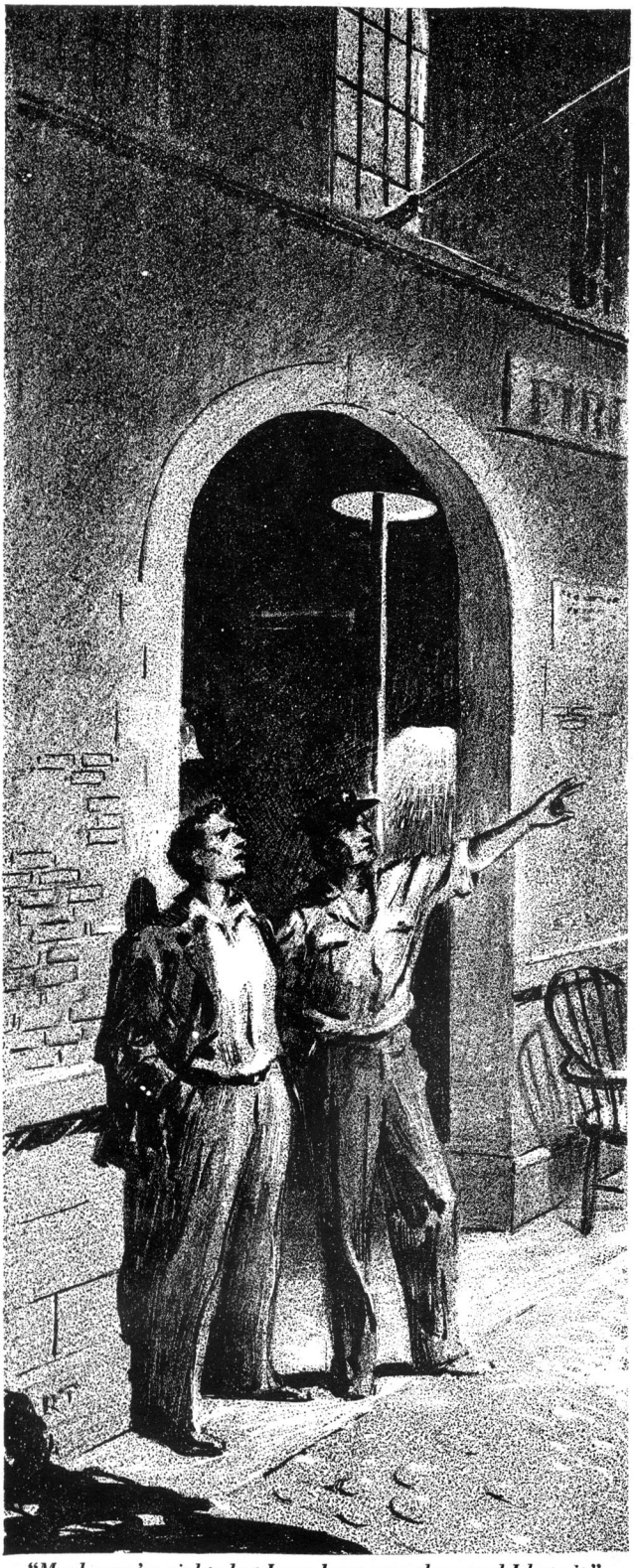
"The Air Force?" Lauro frowned. "Were you by any chance an officer?"

"Yeah. A major."

Tug Lauro gasped. A solicitous look settled on his face. He reached out and took McGee's hand.

"I'm awful sorry for your troubles," he said.

"What's wrong with being a major in the Air Force?" McGee wanted to know.



"Maybe you're right; but I was born over there and I hate it."

"Nothing. Nothing at all. It's a wonderful way to spend a war. But there is this: Captain Dinny Crowley at the tender age of forty-one answered an urgent call, issued by the Army, for professional fire-fighters of officer rank to conduct an expanding fire-fighting program. The Army being what it was, he wound up as a mess-boy in an Air Force officers' mess. . . . It left him a bitter man."

"Maybe he won't find out," McGee said without any hope.

"The character investigation—it's all there in black and white."

McGee groaned. "A couple of hundred companies to pick from, and they had to assign me here." He waved his arm around, taking in his new surroundings for the first time.

The planked floor was scrubbed white, and the beds made up poison-neat. Thick paneled oak doors had the soft sheen that only age and care can bring. The light bulbs were set in ancient gas fixtures. He liked what he saw, and a well-shaped jaw jutted out a little farther.

"I think I'll stay," he told Lauro, "Captain Dinny or no Captain Dinny."

Lauro grinned and took him by the arm. "You'll do," was all he said.

THEY headed for the stairs leading to the apparatus floor. Halfway down, Lauro pointed over the open balustrade at two gleaming red trucks, so big that the old walls seemed to fit them like a glove.

"Those are fire engines," he said. "The one in front with all the gadgets is a pumper. The other is a hose-wagon." Then he pointed to a glass partition behind the wagon. "That conceals what is laughingly called a sitting-room. In the early days of this joint it was a stall for horses."

Downstairs McGee was introduced to Firemen Rober, on housewatch, and Averill, polishing one of the brass sliding-poles. Tug Lauro briefly explained the workings of the alarm systems, and the two-way radio. Then he escorted McGee to the rear of the house, along one wall of which was a pipe rack loaded with helmets and rubber coats.

McGee tried on several of each, finally getting his size. Measuring McGee's feet with his eyes, Lauro grabbed a pair of boots from the floor. They walked to the back step of the pumper.

"Throw your helmet and coat up on the hose," Lauro told McGee. "If we get a run, kick off your shoes, hop into these boots, and get up on the step. You get into the rest of the outfit while hanging onto that strap on the way to the fire. Just like in the subway. And now, how's about a cup of cof—"

The radio on the housewatch desk squawked. The alarm bell hit in. Lauro stiffened like a hunting dog, except for his lips which were silently counting the taps of the bell.

"Turn out!" Rober shouted. "Blanton and Reid Avenues. First due!"

In smooth, quick movement, Lauro was out of his shoes, booted, and up on the back step of the pumper. McGee clawed at the high Army shoes which he had laced and tied. Rober raced past him, flinging cap and jacket to the floor. The Captain flashed down the front pole. Motors kicked over, coughed, then smoothed to a steady roar.

"C'mon!" Lauro yelled, as the truck started to move. He reached down, grabbed McGee by an arm, and yanked him up on the step. They sped out the door.

Hanging on with one hand, McGee clumsily tried to don the rubber coat. A sharp turn at the corner almost tore his arm from its socket. Lauro helped him with the coat and slapped the helmet onto his head, while the pumper snaked through traffic, picking up speed. Cars coming from the opposite direction seemed to be standing still. They passed a truck loaded with chickens, so close that McGee could have grabbed a big rooster by the neck. He gulped. Lauro grinned wickedly.

"First run," he shouted above the roar of the siren; "make a wish!"

McGee held on with both hands. "I wish I was home in bed!"

At Blanton and Reid, an excited citizen waved them down a side street, where wisps of smoke wandered lazily out of a service alley between two towering apartment houses. The pumper jerked to a stop at the curb. Captain Dinny hopped out of the front seat, and ran to the head of the alley. He looked down the alley; then turned, shouting:

"Ten lengths! Stretch with the pumper."

"Grab some," said Lauro, and he pulled an armful of hose into the street. McGee followed suit, all thumbs and elbows. When ten lengths of two-and-half-inch hose were laid out on the pavement, Lauro grabbed a brass controlling-nozzle from a wooden peg on the side of the apparatus.

He waved to the driver. "Take it away!"

McGee watched, mouth agape, as the pumper moved down the street to a hydrant, leaving a trail of connected hose which ended at the threaded brass fitting in his hand.

"Hold tight!" Lauro spun the nozzle onto the hose. Then he looped about twenty feet of it over his shoulder. Telling McGee to do likewise, he dragged it into the alley.

Captain Dinny was waiting for them about halfway down. He stood in front of a large gray metal door with his hand on the knob. Streamers of smoke pushed out around the frame and through the keyhole. His eyes were red and streaming. His nose ran black. He looked at McGee and spoke to Lauro.

"Rough! A basement storeroom about thirty feet in—old mattresses and beds goin' like hell."

Lauro grabbed the nozzle from McGee.

"Nix!" Captain Dinny's lips had a nasty curl. "McGee will take the nozzle. . . . *Major* McGee, that is."

"But he ain't even on the job a half hour yet," Lauro objected.

"You heard me. Give!"

McGee took back the nozzle with trembling hands. He eyed the Captain apprehensively.

The Captain yanked open the door. "Okay, Major—in we go. Into the dark brown yonder."

Black, acrid smoke poured out, enveloping them in a thick cloud. It tore at McGee's eyeballs, sent strangling fingers into his throat. Wracking coughs shook his body. He reeled back. It was too much, too soon.

He dropped the nozzle and ran.

Halfway up the alley McGee stopped, drawing in huge gulps of air to his tortured lungs. He leaned against the wall weakly. His helmet had fallen off; his tousled blond curls were plastered wet against his forehead. He looked like a small boy who had been chased by the cop on beat for pinching apples. He felt like one too, and he wanted to hide somewhere and rest. But loud, raucous laughter brought him up short.

He looked back. Miraculously, the alley had cleared of smoke. Captain Dinny leaned on Lauro's shoulder, laughing fit to die. Lauro grinned.

Shame and anger surged through McGee, as he realized where and what he was. He walked back slowly. The big door was wide open. About a foot inside, on the floor of a service elevator, a few puffs of smoke trickled off the remains of a janitor's mop.

McGee clenched his fists, and turned to the Captain who had slumped to the ground, eyes streaming with merriment; but before he could take a step, Lauro looped the hose around his shoulders, effectively pinning him.

Illustrated by RAYMOND THAYER

"Very enlightening," he said, "but did you bring any turnouts with you?"

"Shut down, and up we go. Open it as soon as we hit the top."

"Let's get this back on the rig." Tug spoke casually as if nothing had happened. The Captain didn't notice the by-play. McGee struggled for a moment, then shrugged, and trooped dejectedly out of the alley, dragging the hose behind him. He would always remember his first hour in the Fire Department. . . .

A probationer's schedule called for attendance at the drill-yard uptown, Monday through Friday from nine to five; twenty-four hours in the firehouse on Saturday from nine A.M., and off Sunday. Lauro, working on a regular schedule, didn't catch up with McGee until the second Saturday night-tour. He found him sitting in the bunk-room, chin in hands, staring out at the handball court.

"Hi," Lauro said, and walked over to the stove to fix a pot of coffee. McGee didn't know he was there.

"What's eating you?" Lauro spoke louder.

"Captain Dinny Crowley," McGee said, without looking up.

"Well, cheer up. He's going home at six o'clock."

"No such luck; he's working for the Lieutenant tonight."

"So what? No committee work on the night-tour. What can he do to you?"

McGee grabbed a "book of rules and regulations" from the table. He waved it under Lauro's nose.

"I have to know ten chapters of this by midnight. Then I become your assistant on housewatch. By three A.M. I'm supposed to be letter-perfect in the alarm signals and radio procedure." McGee ran a hand through his hair. "I guess that worker cooked my goose."

"What worker?" Lauro was genuinely puzzled.

McGee couldn't believe his ears. "The one . . . the one where I ran like a thief."

"Oh, that!" Lauro waved his arm deprecatingly. "Forget it! Why, on *my* first run I fell off the rig. My second was a two-bit fire in a tailor shop. For a gag, someone yelled that the roof was falling in. I jumped through a window without benefit of opening it. They had to use the Chief's car to catch me."

McGee laughed and straightened up in his chair.

"You're good for my morale, Tug. I wish I could say the same for the Captain."

"Aw, he ain't a bad egg once you get to know him," Lauro said—and meant it.

"Nuts!" McGee answered. "He's a sadist—a misanthrope. Look at my hands. The nozzles are getting skinny, and the linoleum in this joint has practically disappeared."

"Why don't you apply for a transfer if you can't take it?" Lauro's voice was all innocence.

"And let that Mick think he got the best of me? Not in a million."

Lauro turned to the stove to hide his smile.

The Captain came back for coffee after roll-call. Pointedly, McGee got up from the table and walked out on the apparatus floor. The Captain followed him with his eyes, dislike and annoyance all over his face.

"Wise guy," he said to Lauro.

"He's not a bad kid," Lauro objected. "Why don't you let up on him a little?"

"I'll run the Company, Mister; you just see that he does that twelve-to-three watch properly."

"Yes sir." And Tug Lauro subsided into silence.

TRADITIONALLY, firehouses are ancient, red brick, two-story buildings with arched windows and doors, and maybe a fancy cornice at the roof. Engine Company 102 must have set the pattern. Built just after the Civil War in a section that was then far uptown, it was now sandwiched in between grimy tenements and tall factories, and definitely downtown.

At midnight, McGee was leaning against the wall in front of quarters, and wondering what stories the old building could tell if it could talk. It was a fireman's firehouse, he told himself, and he was glad he belonged. Glad, except for Captain Dinny.

"Admiring the view?" Tug Lauro cut into his thoughts.

"Sort of," McGee said without turning around. "It has what might be called squalid beauty. Something for a realist to paint."

Lauro seemed surprised at this answer. He inspected the street carefully, as if seeing it for the first time. Bare ceiling fixtures from the tenements across the street sent harsh yellow ribbons into the night. A row of garnet lights went up one side of a factory, warning of an elevator shaft. Somewhere an infant whimpered at the oppressive heat. A drunk made a noisy exit from a nearby saloon.

Lauro snorted. "Maybe you're right; but I was born over there,"—he pointed to one of the tenements—"and I hate it!"

McGee was startled by the bitterness in his voice. He waited for an explanation, but none was forthcoming. The silence became embarrassing. He decided to change the subject.

"Has Laughing-boy gone to bed?" he asked.

"Lay off him! I told you he was a right guy." Lauro spoke harshly. He was still glaring at the tenement.

McGee stiffened and walked away to the housewatch desk. Lauro had never spoken to him like that before. Annoyed and hurt, he sat down at the desk and thumbed idly through the assignment cards. Lauro followed him in a moment later, placing a thick hand on his shoulder.

"Sorry for the dramatics, Pete." His voice was normal and he looked so abjectly penitent that McGee came around immediately.

"Forget it," McGee said.

Lauro's eyes went back to the tenement. "It was just that you picked the wrong time, and the right place to jab me in a tender spot. You see, twenty years ago a young fireman with more guts than brains went up the side of that building with a scaling ladder, and picked a woman and a scared ten-year-old kid out of the flaming top floor. . . . I was the boy, and the woman was my mother—I had a younger sister who wasn't so lucky."

McGee swallowed hard, patting the hand on his shoulder. "And the fireman was Captain Dinny?" he asked.

"You're right," said Lauro.

A long silence followed, a comfortable silence in which the two friends collected their emotions—a silence finally broken by Tug Lauro who told McGee that if he didn't want to get his pants chewed off in the morning he'd better get busy learning those signals. McGee concurred and lost himself in study. Lauro wandered into the bunkroom, settling down with a novel. . . .

Time went on. McGee found himself in another world. A world of bells—bells that could send one, or a hundred, pieces of apparatus screaming to a distant part of the city. There was a signal for an ambulance, and one for a chaplain. There was even one for tolling the death of a member. He turned each page eagerly. It amazed him that this little book of signals could, when translated into electrical impulses on an alarm circuit, do so much.

At two o'clock he placed the book carefully, and with considerable awe, on the desk. He rubbed bleary eyes, and walked back to the sitting-room. Lauro was deep in a novel. McGee lit the gas under a pot of leftover coffee.

"Had enough?" Lauro asked.

"My eyes are burning."

"Persevere, my boy; remember Captain Dinny."

"How could I forget him?"

McGee got two thick mugs from the cupboard. Sugar, and a can of evaporated milk, stood always on the table He sat down waiting for the coffee to heat, and eying Lauro speculatively.

"Tug—"

Lauro looked up quickly, caught by the tone of McGee's voice.

"What is it?" he asked.

"What's wrong with me? Why is he so everlastingly down on me? There must be more to it than my being a Major in the Air Force." McGee's face was a study in exasperated misery.

Lauro straightened in his chair. He dropped the novel onto the table. He took a long time replying.

"Let's go back to the first morning you walked in here," he finally said. "It was hot and humid; Captain Dinny was hard at work on the monthly reports. You come barging in, fresh as a daisy, and all dressed-up like an ad in a men's magazine. You crack wise—"

"I didn't mean anything by it," McGee cut in; "it's a new job, and I'm nervous as all get-out."

Lauro shushed him with a hand. "I know, but Captain Dinny has no sense of humor. . . . So, as I was saying, you crack wise, and drop your life history on his desk. He reads it. It's all there in black and white: a home in the suburbs all your life; high school, college, the complete education; and to top it off you breeze into the Army and become a Major."

"I still don't get it. Outside the Army, what's wrong?"

Lauro answered earnestly: "It's not you exactly, Pete—it's him. . . . Captain Dinny was born on a street just like this one. He never even completed grammar school. At an age when your biggest job was digging your old man for the price of a Prom ticket, he was working down on the piers—but hard. Now do you get it?"

"I get it," McGee said glumly.

The coffee-pot sizzled. He got up, filled the cups, and sat down again. Now, he understood Captain Dinny, but would Captain Dinny ever understand him?

"Will he ever let up on me?" he asked Lauro.

Lauro stirred his coffee thoughtfully. "It all depends . . . it all depends."

McGee wanted to ask on what, and why, and how, but he never got to it. The alarm-bell clanged harshly in the night stillness. The radio gave out a long, warning tone-signal. Both of them dashed out to the watchdesk. Lauro looked up the station in the assignment cards. McGee flipped on the alarm lights, shouting: "Get out!"

Figures flashed down the poles, shirt-tails flying. Captain Dinny hopped into the front of the pumper.

"Bartlett and Eight!" Lauro yelled to the chauffeur. "First due!"

He leaped up beside McGee as the apparatus rolled out the door.

Five blocks away from the street-box you could smell it—faint and acrid like the remains of a campfire. Lauro looked at McGee and shook his head knowingly. His lips were pulled tight and a queer smile played around his eyes. The smile was familiar, but McGee couldn't quite place it.

"Pull up your boots—all the way," Lauro said.

McGee was still pulling as they turned into Bartlett Street—a narrow street, and incredibly rubbish-filled. Four-storied railroad flats faced each other grimly, from corner to corner, differing only in the numbers painted over the narrow doorways. Number 515, in the middle of the block, was the scene of operations.

The sky over the roof-top glowed a dull orange. The third- and fourth-floor front windows were lost in billows of smoke. On the opposite curb, a faded woman in a faded housecoat, forcibly restrained by neighbors, was screaming, "My baby! My Johnny!" over and over again.

Her voice chilled McGee right through the heat, the rubber coat, and everything. His heart started to pound, and great deeds filled his head. But the cold-water voice of Captain Dinny brought him back to reality.

"Two lines! Stretch with the pumper." The Captain pointed up into the smoke. "Rober—stay with the hose-wagon—operate that turret pipe into the top floors. Break as many windows as you can."

They waited—it seemed like hours to McGee—while the pumper hooked up to a hydrant. They waited while a big hook-and-ladder screeched to a stop, and sent an aerial ladder into the smoke almost in one operation. They waited while police cars and apparatus and people—hundreds of them—filled the narrow street.

They waited while the woman collapsed to the sidewalk, a limp, pitiful heap.

Captain Dinny didn't even glance at the woman, and he made no attempt to go into the building. McGee couldn't stand it.

"Kids! Didn't you hear her? There's kids up there!" he shrieked at the Captain like a schoolgirl.

"He went up that building for a woman and a ten-year-old kid."

"I heard, I heard. But we're no good without water." The Captain's voice was edgy with concern. No sarcasm this time, and no tricks. His lips were pulled tight like Lauro's, and the same queer smile played around his eyes.

McGee remembered the smile then. Over Bremerhaven he had seen it; over Hamburg too, and lots of other places. He got the tightness in his chest again, and the belly-flutters. The short hairs stiffened on the back of his neck.

And then, air hissed out of the hose. Water!

In they went. McGee had the nozzle; the Captain backed him up and Tug—McGee knew now where the name came from—fed them the line. Black, punishing smoke met them in the vestibule, and thickened to floor level in the hallway. They groped up the stairs, with Captain Dinny cursing out the fire smoothly and elegantly, and Tug, an unseen grunt-and-cough, below them.

Captain Dinny held him back at the bottom of the third flight. The smoke above them had color now. Dark red.

"Give it a dash," he said.

McGee opened the nozzle. The line bucked and throbbed in his hands. The red faded into blackness.

"Shut down, and up we go. Open it as soon as we hit the top."

THEY pushed up the stairs. Overhead a skylight crashed through. McGee drew his head into his shoulders, as a shower of broken glass and hot water bounced off his helmet. Blood from a cut on his nose trickled saltily into his mouth. He was cooked, and he wanted out—but Captain Dinny's knuckles bore into the small of his back.

"Ah, ventilation!" the Captain said when the glass had stopped falling. "It'll clear up now." He sounded as if announcing a summer zephyr. McGee just coughed.

But it did clear up, a little. Cool air pushed up behind them, thinning out the smoke in the stairwell enough for McGee to take in his surroundings.

They were at the front of the building in a narrow open hallway. At each end of the hall were two doors, angling into each other, opening into the right and left flats. The one on the right in front of them oozed smoke, and its counterpart in the rear was a mass of flame, almost burned away, and opening into another and larger mass of flame.

McGee opened the nozzle, and started down the hall, belting it over his head and all around.

"Wait! The kids!" Lauro threw a section of hose over the banister and joined them on the landing.

McGee turned just in time to see the door, frame and all, splinter under Lauro's shoulder. More smoke, a fresh supply, rolled out to meet them. McGee crouched low. He was ready to call it quits. His head throbbed, his eyelids felt like two pieces of sandpaper. Captain Dinny had other plans.

"Stay here," he said to Lauro. "Keep the line going. If I don't come out in about three minutes— Well, you're on your own." On hands and knees he entered the apartment.

"He'll die in there," McGee said.

"He's a very stubborn man," Lauro said.

"I'm not, and I can't take much more of this. I gotta get out of here."

"You stay!" Lauro's voice rasped. Thick fingers dug painfully into McGee's shoulders. He stayed. Minutes passed. The nozzle crackled and popped. No Captain Dinny.

And then Lauro—it was like a broken record: "Stay here . . . line going . . . three minutes . . . on your own."

Alone and waiting, McGee wondered how in hell you tell three minutes without a clock. The fire crackled and hummed; overhead he could hear the *thunng* of axes against roofboards. The deck-pipe sloshed against the front of the building.

He waited until the three minutes just had to be up; then, lashing the nozzle against the banister, he aimed it in the general direction of the fire. His head felt as if it had a steel balloon inside that was slowly expanding. His legs hadn't much feeling at all. He had every right in the world, he told himself, to go down the stairs and out into the beautiful, hot and humid fresh air. He actually started. But conscience and pride went to work, along with the happy thought that here was a chance to show up Captain Dennis Patrick Crowley.

McGee couldn't resist. He crept into the front room in the wake of the others.

Only it wasn't a front room. It was a narrow inner hall stretching from front to rear, and all the more poisonous smoke and fumes were having a convention there. No use, no chance of trying the back; the heat was face-stinging. McGee headed for the front, following the direction of the floorboards, sweeping his hands all around as he had been taught. He felt a door, entered, and found himself in a small interior bedroom. He followed a wall until he came to a window. Frantically, he tugged at it. It wouldn't budge. He pulled off his helmet, crashed it through the glass. Leaning far out, McGee took suction on the not-so-sweet air of the courtyard.

Refreshed and relieved, McGee remembered his duty. He searched the room, under the bed, in a small closet —places where children usually hide. No kids. He crept out into the hall.

AT last he crossed a door-sill and found himself in a big front parlor. He banged into a chair, and then what his hands told him was an old upright piano. A table lamp crashed down on his helmet. He became confused and panicky: the smoke was thicker than ever. Groping feverishly for a window, or a wall that would lead to one, McGee stumbled over a crumpled figure in rubber coat and boots: Tug Lauro—McGee could tell that by the size of the shoulders.

McGee's composure returned. Remembering the instructions of Proby School, he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and lashed Lauro's wrists together. Lying flat, he wiggled under Tug and managed to get the stocky man's arms over his head and one shoulder. He felt for the floorboards again, and took off, hoping and praying that he was headed in the direction of the front windows.

Lauro's weight bore down on him. The muscles in his arms quivered

painfully from the terrific strain of creeping and carrying at the same time. Twice his elbows buckled, and he fell flat on his face with Lauro's weight squeezing the little remaining breath out of him. Each time he got up on his knees by a terrific effort of will. Then he came to a door-sill, the same one he had passed before.

McGee fell flat again with despair and exhaustion. He cursed himself for a stupid fool. He realized that there was no longer any hope, any chance, of reaching a window. But there was still the hallway.

ONCE more he got up on hands and knees, his muscles shrieking their protest; but now the smoke was taking its toll, and the strain. A sense of drowsiness and extreme well-being came over McGee. His head bobbed rhythmically to the pealing of a distant bell. First his knees, then the rest of his body, seemed to leave the floor, and he floated blissfully toward the ceiling.

It was peaceful and quiet for a while. Then some one had him by the hips, dragging him down, down, down. And something was over his mouth, smothering him. He twisted and clawed at his mouth. A hand pressed into his back, gently but firmly. A voice said:

"Easy does it, kid, easy does it."

The voice was Rober's. McGee opened his eyes. He was back in the street, wrapped in blankets, and lying face down on the sidewalk. Rober was straddling him, giving artificial respiration. A medical officer held an inhalator-mask firmly to his mouth. Beside him, Lauro was getting the same treatment.

"I'm okay," McGee said weakly.

The doctor nodded his head to Rober, and removed the mask. Dimly, McGee was aware of being lifted, turned on his back, and carried. A needle bit into his arm. Somewhere a starter whirred, and that was all that he remembered until the next morning. . . .

Peter McGee awoke with bright sunlight in his eyes. He was undressed and between crisp white sheets. He raised his head for a look, and promptly fell back in a wave of nausea and dizziness. Recovering, he rolled over to get away from the sun, and found himself looking into the smiling mug of Tug Lauro.

"Where are we?" McGee asked.

"City Hospital," replied Lauro.

"What time is it? Or should I say what day?"

"It's the morning after the night before," Lauro said.

McGee settled back in the pillow to digest this information. Slowly, step by step, he pieced together the events of the night before. When he came to Captain Dinny, he sat up with a jolt. His eyes went around the crowded ward, bed by bed.

Lauro chuckled. "He's not here."

"Is he— I mean, he isn't—" McGee couldn't bring himself to say it.

Lauro chuckled louder. "Not even close to it. One will get you five that, right now, he's tearing into a feed of bacon and eggs."

McGee's stomach flipped over three times at the mention of food. He lay silent for a time, picturing Captain Dinny eating a platterful of ground glass and arsenic. The thought pleased him. Then another thought formed on the edge of his consciousness. He pushed it back indignantly. Impossible! But it re-formed, and welled up in his brain. It demanded an answer. He turned to Lauro sadly, knowing in advance what the answer would be.

"Captain Dinny got us out, didn't he?"

"Of course. We're his boys." Lauro burst out laughing at the expression on McGee's face.

"What happened?" McGee asked bitterly.

"It was very simple. Captain Dinny found the kids unconscious on the floor of the front room. He took them to a window, and down a ladder. Then he came back up the stairs and got us."

McGee let it sink in, twisting the sheets viciously.

"And I thought I was going to be such a hero."

"You were," said Lauro. "—My hero!"

He looked hard at McGee, then down at the floor.

McGee blushed and looked at the ceiling. At least he had made the grade with Tug. But there was still Captain Dinny. Always Captain Dinny!

"You'd think the lug would come down and see how we are. For all he knows, we might be dead."

"He was here an hour ago. Rode down in the Chief's car."

"Did he gloat over my unconscious form?" McGee asked.

"On the contrary. He tucked in your sheets, brushed the hair out of your eyes, and gave you a gentle pat on the shoulder. Then he yelled blue murder because we didn't have a special nurse."

"I CAN'T believe it," McGee said. But a pleased smile settled on his face, as he toyed with the idea that life might be a little more bearable in Engine Company 102.

"It's true," Lauro said, very seriously. "Last night was one of those situations where we separate the men from the boys. Captain Dinny gave you an A for deportment."

McGee's smile widened to a contented grin. "Now, he'll treat me just like one of the boys?" he asked eagerly.

"Now—" Lauro's grin was wider than McGee's, "—now, he'll treat you just like any *ordinary* proby."

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" McGee howled.

Lauro roared. McGee tried to frown, but it came out a chuckle.

They both fell asleep.

Lauro laughed. "Now you're a fireman."

Occupation

IT had been a hard day in the salt-mine—and if you think I'm using the term salt-mine as a loose reference to some plushy air-conditioned office, please be advised that I'm talking about a dank mucky pothole burrowed into the bank of the Rhine River at Karlsruhe; one of those underground German storage bins that are continually being uncovered in the Occupied Zone. Sometimes they're stacked with paintings, sometimes filled with gold and silver, sometimes piled high with documents. This one was filled with—well, I didn't know. So far, it seemed filled with the miasmas of a century and little else, but we'd only checked the first level fifty feet from the river. There was lots more to go.

It had taken all day to get that much done, and I was in a black swivet. The troopers of my Zone Constabulary battalion ducked under dripping overhead beams, electric lanterns gleaming murkily in the dampness, feet sloshing in the slime, while I wandered sloppily from group to group, waiting, watching, hoping for some of the stuff to turn up. Finally I called a halt, and after telling off a guard squad, dismissed the search details for their evening meal. Hopping into my jeep, I ran back to the battalion headquarters in the big *Kaserne* just north of the city of Karlsruhe.

The first thing I did when I hit my desk was to send for Lieutenant Gilbert, my battalion Intelligence officer. He came into my office, a worried look on his thin bespectacled face.

"Now look, Gil," I began, "I haven't quarreled with any of your methods in this racket. I've accepted your recommendations and approved your activities. This battalion, as you well know, is charged with maintaining law and order in the Karlsruhe area. That's what the Zone Constabulary is for. But don't sit there and tell me we're doing our job when something like this salt-mine business turns up the way it did. I'm betting we're being snookered into something we can't handle."

Gilbert rubbed his nose with a slim forefinger, then took off his glasses and wiped them carefully on his handkerchief. Settling the glasses back on his nose, he looked at me, gray eyes som-

Admiral

THE ZONE CONSTABULARY HAD DISCOVERED ANOTHER SALT MINE, AND PICKED UP A GERMAN WITH A RIFLE, AND THE MAJOR FELT HE WAS BEING SNOOKERED INTO SOMETHING MIGHTY HARD TO HANDLE.

by FRANKLIN M. DAVIS, JR.

ber. "Major Scott," he said, "I've felt all along that with our present system of patrols, road check-points, and undercover agents we're in one-hundred-per-cent touch. This salt-mine thing will break our way yet."

"One-hundred-per-cent touch, eh? Break our way? Hell, your people didn't even know about the salt-mine being there! You call that being in touch?"

Gilbert looked rueful. "Major, my people swear they didn't know a thing about that. Not a thing."

"In other words, we should be damn' glad Private First Class Klugievitz was *fatt-booting,* then?"

Gilbert crossed one shade-33 trousers leg over the other. "Guess so."

"Baloney! You mean to tell me that if Klugievitz hadn't been drifting off that particular river bank with that fat blonde and his ukulele, we still wouldn't know about that mine?"

Gilbert nodded.

I slammed back in my chair. "Look, that Kraut Helwig must have thought he was invisible! How else do you figure he popped out there in front of Klugievitz with a damn' rifle in his hand?"

GILBERT ran a hand through his curly hair. "Major, I sweated Helwig personally. The man swears he was out there hunting, that he didn't know about the salt-mine, that he wasn't paying any attention to who was on the river or anything else. He was hunting."

"You mean to tell me he expects us to believe he was out there hunting with a rifle *still in cosmoline?*"

"That's what he says."

"By golly, if the court gives Helwig the death penalty for unauthorized arms-possession—which it won't, of course—I ought to request hanging from the flagpole in front of the *Rathaus!* That'll show some of these jokers! Now, listen to me. I know there's munitions around there somewhere, no matter what Helwig says. What worries me is this: where are the rest of the munitions, and what's going to be done with them?"

Gilbert pursed his lips. "Major, there's no doubt about it. If there are munitions in that mine, it's a definite security threat."

"Don't I know it! What do you think's been worrying me ever since Klugievitz found the place? That's why I'm sniping at you. Here we spend a good thousand marks a month paying off a bunch of half-baked undercover stool pigeons, and they can't even tell you about the place until some romantic dogface falls into it. We can't wait until a bunch of storm troopers come roaring up Kaiserstrasse with Schmeissers cutting loose, can we? Damn' right we can't! There's bound to be stuff there. Or what's worse, there was something there lately. Where is it? How do we find it?"

Gilbert squirmed in his chair. "Gosh, Major, I'll build a fire under my people, and I'd suggest we tighten up the check-points and patrols. I think—"

I held up a hand. "Look, you're missing the point, Gil." I stepped to a large-scale map of the Karlsruhe area that was hanging on the wall behind me. "Listen, this is where Klugievitz saw this Helwig. Right here." I tapped a finger on the map. "That's just above the bridge into the French Zone. See where the river takes a big swing to the east here? That mine is right in this east bank, with the entrance three hundred yards north of that old pillbox. Can you see any vehicles getting in and out of there loading up arms? Hell, there isn't a road, and the ground's too marshy for any kind of cross-country work. This is some kind of river racket, that's what it is. Don't you agree?"

Gilbert looked unhappy. "Gosh, I guess it is, at that, Major. Then it won't do much good to tighten up the road controls, will it?"

"No, it won't. But get your stool pigeons snooping around those barge captains that hang out in the slips off the end of Oranienplatz. See what they're talking about, what's cooking down there. Meanwhile, I'll fix a surprise for this guy Helwig. This is going to take some high-pressure salesmanship."

"What are you going to do?" Gilbert asked curiously.

"You leave that to me. This is a spot for an old-timer to take a hand. You get those stoolies going, and I'll check with you tomorrow at noon."

After Gilbert left I collared the battalion sergeant-major. I gave him some specific instructions, emphasizing my points by jabbing a finger into my palm. "Ten men," I told him, "and every one's got to be an expert with the carbine or rifle."

When the sergeant-major took off to call the companies for the detail, I went back to my desk, swiveled my chair so I could study the map, linked my fingers and sat chewing a thumbnail. Here's how I was figuring: My battalion, the first battalion of the Twentieth Armored Cavalry Regiment, Zone Constabulary, had been in on a lot of odd deals. We'd caught black-marketeers, opened up housing units, chased down war criminals, run a baseball school for German kids, performed military funerals, run security police, and marched in parades. I knew that as long as the job got done, the higher-ups at Regiment left the methods up to me. All they wanted was results. Still, I thought, maybe I was going too far, getting a little out of line, with my plans for this man Helwig.

BUT my ego was bruised. I'd been running the battalion ever since the Constabulary had been organized, gone through the various changes of organization and policy, and thought I knew Karlsruhe like the back of my hand. It upset me to find a whacking big salt-mine three years after I'd been in the place, and it made me madder than hops to think that maybe a bunch of wise Krauts had been outsmarting me all that time.

I scowled and fumed at the map. The Rhine, a broad band in blue, mocked me. The Rhine flows from the Alps of Switzerland to Rotterdam in Holland on the sea, splitting Germany like a silver knife. Flowing through the vineyards, valleys and green earth of a country whose destiny has been shaped around its winding length, the Rhine and its tremendous watercourse reflect a thousand years of history. Today its barges and tugs carry fifty million tons of goods a year for Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, and a host of other countries across the world. That's about sixty per cent of the pre-war tonnage. Karlsruhe is not a

principal port on the river—at least, not any more. Mannheim, to the north of Karlsruhe, and Strasbourg to the south, are the two closest major ports. But every barge coming out of Basle, which is in Switzerland, for any port on the river except Strasbourg, has to pass Karlsruhe, because Karlsruhe is so far south in Germany on the French border side. Karlsruhe still maintains minor traffic on the river, mostly coal and scrap iron, so the long low barges and the sluggish tugs are no strangers, and there are always a few tied up in what the Allied bombers left undestroyed of Karlsruhe's slips.

I glowered at the map, checking the drainage lines around the mine, noticing how flat the land was at the river's edge; but for the life of me, I couldn't figure out where in that muck-heap any munitions might be hidden. I was half-convinced that one rifle doesn't make a stockpile, but I kept coming back to the cosmoline. When you store weapons, you swab 'em in cosmoline. That thick grease keeps the moisture out, and you can't fire the piece until the cosmoline is cleaned off. So, why one rifle? Why the cosmoline? And Helwig wasn't hunting. We knew that. Germans don't get hunting licenses for rifles—not in Karlsruhe, anyway; and besides how can you hunt with a gun in cosmoline?

I wrung my brow, but the only idea I got was to bring in mine detectors the next day to give the layout a good going over. Then I gave up, deciding I'd have to wait and see how I made out with Helwig.

In the morning the detail was waiting at battalion headquarters. Ten men, wearing battle-jackets and blue-and-yellow-striped Constabulary helmets, trousers bloused into field boots, looked at me with mingled expressions when I explained what I wanted them to do.

"Now, maybe it won't have to go that far," I told them; "but if it does, all you have to do is aim at the cards pasted up on the sandbank over the targets. Shoot at them. Under no circumstances are you to aim at the man Helwig. Is that clear?"

They all looked at me as if I had suddenly sprouted horns on my head, but nobody said anything.

"Okay, then, wait here until I give you the word to fall in."

I went over to the battalion guardhouse. The Corporal of the Keys came out to meet me. "Corporal, you been on all night?"

He was a tall thin lad, not more than twenty. "Yes sir. Came on at six last night."

"Anyone try to see Helwig?"

"No sir."

"Who brought him his food? One of the regular mess attendants?"

"Why, no sir." The Corporal looked surprised, as if he'd just thought of something. "One of the German kitchen police brought it over."

Damn! That was bad. I'd overlooked a bet there. Still, maybe it didn't make any difference. I hadn't wanted Helwig to be able to get word out to anyone; but on the other hand, we'd had Helwig in custody about twenty-four hours, and by now somebody must have known something was wrong. The fact he hadn't returned to wherever his home was the day before might have been enough to alert the salt-mine crowd, whoever they might be, that something was wrong.

I went back to headquarters, where I had Herr Ernspiker, one of our staff interpreters, translate into German a little paper I wrote. Then, taking the interpreter with me, I went back to the guardhouse and had the Keys take us to Helwig's cell.

Helwig lounged on a cot behind a barred door, his hands behind his head, his breakfast dishes scattered on the floor of the narrow cell. He was a young man, around twenty-five, with a strongly chiseled face. His arms and shoulders, bulging through his cheap blue cotton shirt, looked coiled with muscle, and from the contemptuous glance he shot at me out of green eyes that flamed under his heavy brows, I could understand why Gilbert hadn't got very far with him.

"Okay," I told the interpreter, "read the poop-sheet."

The interpreter started to gargle in German while I studied Helwig. The interpreter was reading:

"By order of a special military court, Baldur Helwig is sentenced to death before a military firing squad for unauthorized possession of arms. Sentence effective at once. By order of Major Scott."

Helwig sat up straight on the cot. He spat some German.

"What's he say?" I asked the interpreter.

"He says he doesn't believe it, that he didn't even get a hearing."

"Ask him what he thinks he got when he talked to Lieutenant Gilbert."

Helwig yammered at the interpreter's comment.

"He says it's ridiculous," the interpreter told me.

"Yeah," I said, whipping a handkerchief out of my pocket. "This is how ridiculous it is. Bring him out, Corporal."

"Tell him where he's going he won't need a priest. Ask him if he wants the blindfold," I said.

The Corporal opened the cell door and yanked Helwig to his feet. Standing, he was tall, about six feet, and he glared at me as though he were going to tear me apart.

I blanketed his gaze with the handkerchief, blindfolding him, and tied the handkerchief tight behind his head. He started to curse.

"Tell him to shut up," I told the interpreter.

The interpreter said something, and we moved off. Out of the guardhouse, I led Helwig past the detail. "Fall in behind me in column of twos," I told the sergeant in charge.

The rifles and carbines slapped as the detail shouldered arms and marched off behind me. Past the gleaming white stucco of the battalion headquarters we went, down through one corner of the motor pool, crunching through the sandy soil of the barren waste past the vehicle standings to where we had the battalion pistol range. I halted Helwig beside one of the big pistol target frames and told the detail to halt on the firing line. Looking up to be sure the target-cards were fixed high on the sandy backstop behind me, I took the blindfold off Helwig. He blinked in the sunlight, and I know that determined jaw dropped when he saw the ten armed soldiers a scant twenty yards away. Looping a strip of target cloth through his arms, I fastened him to a target frame.

Then I stepped away from him. "Firing squad," I ordered. "Ten-*hut!*"

The squad stiffened to attention, two ranks of five men each.

"Front rank, at trail, two paces forward, *march!*"

Trailing their weapons, the front rank stepped out.

"Front rank, *kneel!*"

The five soldiers in front knelt, the five behind still standing. Their faces under the helmets looked white and strained. The sun felt hot on my shoulders.

"With ball ammunition, load and lock!"

Bolts rattled and clicked as each trooper loaded his piece with a clip of ammunition. The steel-jacketed slugs, peeking from the black clips, twinkled in the sunlight.

I turned to the interpreter. "Ask Helwig if he wants the blindfold."

Helwig stammered something.

"He says, isn't he going to have a priest?"

"Tell him where he's going he won't need a priest. Ask him if he wants the blindfold."

This was the crisis. Naturally, I had no intention of shooting Helwig. The angle was, though, to scare him into opening up. Looking at him, tied to the target frame and apparently digesting my crack about not getting a priest, I could see a thin film of sweat beading his forehead close to his short-cropped light hair. His green eyes narrowed. Knots of muscle appeared at his jaws. *Was he going to crack?*

Not that tough Heinie! Drawing himself as erect as he could against the target frame, he braced his arms against the cloth loops. His head came back. In a strong clear voice he shouted: *"Verdammte Amerikanische Schweinen! Heil Hitler!"*

I gritted my teeth. Going to call my bluff, was he? *"Fire!"*

The weapons went off, a ragged crash that bounced off the sandbank and reverberated across the range. Ragged, because I'd forgotten to give the firing squad the command to aim. This joker Helwig was making me lose my grip. I looked at him. He was still stiffened against the frame, but as the noise died away, he relaxed, then turned toward me. *Ptew!* He spat at me. He missed me, but it was an eloquent comment on my melodrama.

I FELT like a first-class jerk. I'd got exactly nowhere. I carried it off as best I could. Directing the sergeant in charge of my firing squad to clear pieces, I waited until the weapons were cleared and dismissed the squad, holding out one trooper as an escort for Helwig.

As the detail marched off, I turned to Helwig. He was lounging against the target frame, a sardonic grin on his face, a contemptuous look in his eyes. I untied him and turned him over to the trooper. "Take him back to the guardhouse."

I shuffled off toward the battalion headquarters, just shaking my head. What a sap I was! I'd wasted half the morning, and I was no nearer a solution than I was before. I rubbed my jaw. What was the next step? I thought—

"Will that be all, sir?" The little interpreter had been trotting along behind me. I looked at him for a moment, almost as if I didn't see him, primarily because my mind was still focusing on Helwig. The interpreter was a short stocky little German, with a battered cap on his head.

"What's that you say?" I asked vaguely.

"Will that be all, sir?" Ernspiker repeated.

I thought a minute. *One rifle still in cosmoline; one big collection of potholes; one stubborn German. What is the answer, anyway?*

Then it hit me. "Judas!" I said. "Here's something you can do, right now. Go on down to the Rathaus and check with all those offices down there, the *Polizei Praesidium, Arbeitsamt, Wohnungsamt,* the whole works. I want you to get every scrap of information you can on this Baldur Helwig—where he went to school, who he hung around with, what the police have on him, what he did during the war and where he did it; what women he knows, or if he's married what his wife's background is. Check his Nazi Party background, too. Get me every scrap on him you can, and if there's anybody down there that knows anything about him that isn't in the records, find out all about that too. Make notes on it, in English, and when you get all you can, come on back here. Okay, Ernspiker?"

The interpreter bowed stiffly from the waist and his wattles shook. *"Jawohl, Herr Major!* Yes indeed!" He scuttled across the area on his errand.

KNOW what I was thinking? Here's Helwig, a big sharp-looking Heinie with plenty of nerve. Not a superficial surface courage, but bone-deep. He was scared out there in front of the firing squad, as who wouldn't be? But he didn't crack. Heil Hitler or not, the guy had plenty of guts. That was why I couldn't figure out that stupid "hunting" alibi which he had given us when we nabbed him with the rifle!

It didn't make sense. Here's a man, now, who's unquestionably playing some dangerous game. He's smart, crafty; he must be playing for big stakes. He's got enough moxie to stand up in front of a firing squad and take his rap. Maybe he knew I was bluffing; maybe he's got the Americans taped and knows we don't operate that summarily. But he couldn't have been sure. Still, he stood up there, just the same.

So—someone like that, running all the risks involved in a shady deal under the Americans' noses—ordinarily he should have had a better alibi for having that rifle. So, I reasoned, he doesn't know anything about rifles! He probably didn't know it was cosmolined!

I went into my office and checked with my operations officer. "What's the word from the mine? They find anything with those detectors?"

"Not a thing. All they've found so far is a student cap and the remains of a bag lunch in a big pit on the second level."

"Student cap? Bag lunch? Holy smoke, get that stuff up here right away!"

THE operations officer went off to pass the word to the mine detail, and I sent up to Gilbert's office for the rifle. The more I thought, the more confused I got. But the rifle was something concrete, something I could heft, something to hang onto.

Gilbert's chief clerk brought it down to me. I took the weapon and told the clerk, "When Lieutenant Gilbert comes in, tell him I want to see him right away."

Then I examined the rifle again. It was the standard German Army rifle, clip-fed, bolt-operated, and it had the general appearance of our old U. S. Springfield, except the sight-leaf was graduated for meters, not yards, and the sling arrangement and bayonet stud were different. I looked at the front retaining ring at the balance. It was dry; no cosmoline there. There wasn't any grease around the set-screws in the trigger plate or in the butt-plate, either. There was plenty of grease in the muzzle, and the bolt was smeared, and so was the chamber, though I couldn't force the bolt all the way open to check the whole chamber. Right away, I discarded my theory that Helwig didn't know anything about rifles; that had seemed weak, anyway. I couldn't imagine a man such as Helwig seemed to be, growing up in Germany and fighting a war and not knowing anything about small-arms. It seemed funny, though, that if this rifle were greased for storage, that the metal parts weren't *all* covered. How come a dry retaining ring, butt-plate and trigger-plate? How come?

Just then Gilbert came in. I put the rifle down and held my hands away from my clothes to be sure I didn't get any of the grease I'd picked up from the weapon on my uniform. "Hey," I greeted him, "what'd you dig up?"

Gilbert slumped into a chair and shook his head. "Major, I don't get it. We can't find anything out down there at those barges. Oh, they're squawking about the coal rationing and stuff like that, but there's not an item on what we want. I'm beginning to think maybe Helwig was hunting after all. Did you get anything out of him?" He looked at me eagerly.

"Not a damn' thing," I said, wiping the grease off my fingers with my

Illustrated by O. F. Schmidt

"He expects us to believe he was out there hunting!"

handkerchief. "I got a little melodramatic, and racked him up before a firing squad. He didn't flinch, though. He's a tough cookie. Couldn't crack him. I got a new angle, though. First off, the detail found a cap and a bag lunch, or at least part of one, down in the mine on the second level. It may be something some kid left, or it may be a lead. We'll check it as soon as it gets here." The grease was sticking to my fingers, and I had to rub hard to get it off. "Look, Gil. Wasn't there any grease on the butt-plate and trigger-plate on that rifle when you picked it up after Klugievitz brought Helwig in?"

Gilbert thought a minute. "Gosh, I don't remember, Major. The muzzle and bolt were smeared, and I just thought it was cosmoline. It looks like it, certainly, but I can't remember whether the other parts were covered with it or not. Why do you ask?"

"Because I think we've taken the wrong slant on the whole thing! Look at this stuff; it's got graphite in it!" I rubbed my thumb and finger together. "This isn't a preservative grease; it's a lubricant!"

Gilbert stared. Then he picked a bit of grease off the muzzle and tested it thoughtfully. "By golly, you're right, Major. But still, wouldn't this work as a preservative grease, anyway?"

I frowned. I was so anxious to get on the track, I was accepting all kinds of wild theories. "Well, maybe so. But here's what you do. Go over to the Assault Gun Company and check with Klugievitz again. See if he remembers if there was grease on the parts. Maybe some came off on his uniform or something. Then, when the Three gets the student cap, see what you can make of that, will you? I'm going to go down to the mine, then on down to the barge slips myself. I'll see you later."

On the way out to my jeep, I told Gisela, my German secretary: "I'll be out for an hour or so. If Herr Ernspiker comes in while I'm gone, be sure to have him wait right here for me."

I called for my jeep, and when Zimmer, the fresh-faced trooper who drives for me, pulled the vehicle up outside, I went down and hopped in. Brilliant with its blue-centered yellow Constabulary markings over olive drab paint, the jeep had a big plate marked BATTALION C O on the front bumper, and it was equipped with a siren and a radio. "Let's go down to the salt-mine, Zimmer."

We were just whipping out of the big *Kaserne* gate when I saw Ernspiker flapping his arms at me, the topcoat kicking up a trail of dust as the tails flew out behind him. He came running over to the jeep. Zimmer stopped as Ernspiker bustled up, his fat face beaming with pride. "Oh, I have all kinds of information, Herr Major. I have found—"

"Thanks a lot, Ernspiker. That was quick work," I cut him off. "Let me have the notes, will you?" The more I thought about this whole deal, the more confused I was, and I was eager for any fresh piece of information.

ERNSPIKER looked disappointed at having his valedictory interrupted, but he handed me a wad of notes and stood by the jeep, flicking his fingers on the fender, while I leafed through the pages. Nothing seemed too significant:

Baldur Helwig, born 18 June 1920, unmarried, educated in Karlsruhe. One year at University of Leipzig. Military service; Reserve duty with Fifth Baden Fusiliers 1938; enlisted German Navy 1939; served on submarine duty, rank of Able-Bodied Seaman. Discharged by Allied Screening Board at Flensburg in 1945. Returned to Karlsruhe in September, 1945. . . .

There was a lot of trivia about his home and his neighborhood, none important. Then, *Party affiliation: Member Hitler Jugend.* That explained that *Heil Hitler* crack. Then:

Employed at Port of Karlsruhe as a barge-checker from September 1945 to date. No police record. Expert swimmer. Record of request for gasoline for pleasure motorboat denied by Military Government in October 1945; new request denied November 1945; new request denied January 1946. . . .

Barge-checker! Expert swimmer! Pleasure motorboat! Oh, brother, now we were getting somewhere! "Nice work, Ernspiker. This is fine. You can go on back to work. If I need you later I'll send for you."

I turned to Zimmer. "Head for the salt-mine." As the jeep bucketed along, I was thinking that Ernspiker's notes explained a lot. Obviously, if Helwig had been in the Baden Fusiliers and the Hitler Jugend and the German Navy, then he knew something about rifles, and my ignorance theory on the cosmoline was all wet. And as a barge-checker, swimmer, and a pleasure motorboat enthusiast, then Helwig must have spent plenty of time on the river. The light was beginning to dawn. Or was it? So far, all I'd proved was that the guy

had river interests, and therefore river connections. But I was on the track; I was sure of that.

It was just a short haul from our barracks out to the salt-mine. Our rehabilitated *Wehrmacht Kaserne* is north of the city-and within two miles of the river, so in a few moments we were mushing over soft ground, past the demolished pillboxes that were now blasted monuments to the German Army's defense of the Rhine. Easing down the bank, the Rhine, sluggish, turgid, and the color of coffee with too much cream in it, stretched a mile wide before us, the French Occupation Zone visible as a line of overhanging brush on the far bank.

Out in the river, headed north, was a long, low houseboat tug, three barges loaded with coal meandering behind it. The tug had its superstructure on the forward starboard deck, just a small cabin with a tall smokestack that could be tipped down to let the vessel duck under low bridges. Starched curtains, as much a part of a Rhine tug as the propeller, were moving gently at the cabin window. On the deck, a tiny figure at the distance, somebody was walking slowly back and forth; and in a small dory, trailing on a painter off the tug, an even smaller figure, presumably a boy, was trailing a fishline, his head bent over the water slipping past.

Maybe that's not one of them, I thought, *but I bet my answer is in one of those barges on that river out there somewhere.*

The jeep slewed up to the entrance to the mine, a gaping hole in the river-bank bolstered by heavy timbers, the rest of it going back underground, a great warren close to the river. A trooper was standing in front of the entrance. He put down his cigarette and saluted.

Returning his salute, I got out of the jeep. "Get Sergeant Jensen, will you, please?"

JENSEN came out, a rangy man with a dark heavy face and the three stripes and two rockers of a sergeant first class on his sleeve.

"'Morning, Sergeant Jensen. Find anything besides that hat and the lunch?"

Jensen shook his head. "Nothing else, sir. I sent that hat and lunch in already."

"Yeah, I know. Okay, call it quits. I think we're barking up the wrong tree."

"Quit, sir?" The sergeant looked puzzled. Obviously he couldn't see the sense in leaving the job unfinished.

"Yeah, knock it off. Take the detail in. I'll call for a truck. I think we're barking up the wrong tree."

"Start talking! I want to know what you're doing here and who you're waiting for!"

"Yes sir." Jensen saluted and went back inside, and I could hear him calling his men.

Back in the jeep, I sent a radio call for a truck to pick up the search detail, then told Zimmer: "Okay, head for Oranienplatz. I want to look around those barge slips."

On the basis of what we had now, I was convinced that we would get farther if we set some kind of trap—give Helwig a chance to pick up loose ends, I was thinking; or if we went at it right, maybe a raid on the slips would pay off. Three or four hazy ideas were half-formed in my mind. I was still mulling over the odd unrelated facts we had, switching my viewpoints, turning things around, figuring.

Zimmer had the jeep headed down the cobbles of upper Kaiserstrasse. He honked impatiently at a huge charcoal-burning truck hogging the road, finally swung past the truck to zip through a long row of dingy buildings, their façades chipped and cracked from the street fighting of the war. He slowed to let a ragged German youngster chase a ball into the street, then took a corner fast, splashing water on a huge red-lettered election poster reading *Wahlt KPD!*, meaning *Vote Communist.* Then we were in the narrow pitted thoroughfare of Oranienplatz.

THE street narrowed toward the river so much that you wondered how it could squeeze the houses so close without buckling the quaint mansard roofs and cracking the many-paned mullioned windows. This was an old part of the city, and the myriad smells of too many people living too close together mingled with the flat dead odor coming up from the river. We turned down the cement runway that ran at right angles to the slips reaching into the river, Zimmer slowing the jeep almost to fast walking speed.

The slips, great notches cut into the river-bank and reinforced with concrete, were in pretty bad shape. Steel cranes hung at dizzy angles from shattered bed-blocks, rusty and useless. A sunken barge, highlighted

in the sun, leered out of the mud. The few people moved lazily back and forth, listless, without purpose. The whole area, broken down, wasted, the work of years blasted in a single raid, had an aura of indifference, as

though the twisted steel and broken concrete had been cast up by a scornful river with the words: *I've been here for millions of years and I'll be here eons longer. What are the works of man to me?*

Barges, broad, low, flat, lay at loading positions, and along the waterfront the thick quiet was ruptured with the rattle of coal down chutes, or the mournful peep of a tug pulling into the river. As we rolled along, I counted about ten tugs, all apparently identical save for the color, and the number of children scampering about.

Suddenly something caught my eye. I looked at it, passed it over without being sure anything was odd, then looked back. Sure! On one tug, low in the water at one of the uppermost slips, was a pair of heavy davits on the forward port side of the deck. I motioned Zimmer to stop. I looked over the tug carefully.

The name, *Rosamunde, Karlsruhe* was on the bow and stern. Except for the davits, it seemed conventional enough; it had the stern auxiliary steering-wheel mounted horizontally, long, low deck-storage space, the curtains, deck-house—it all looked all right. The davits, thick and heavy, somehow looked out of place to me, though.

With those davits, they could swing a heavy boat in and out of the tug. But why a heavy boat? Why not the light dory trailing in the water like the other tugs? The point bothered me, and as we went back toward Oranienplatz, I checked the other tugs. I counted ten exactly, and not one had davits save the *Rosamunde.*

We went back to the battalion headquarters, and my plan was firm. I was going to organize my own river navy, and I was going to trap Helwig—I hoped.

Calling my staff together, I outlined the plan. "Okay, you know what I want," I told them when I was finished. "Get on it, and we'll take a check at five tonight to see if we need any changes made. Gil, stick around a minute. I want to talk to you about something."

When the other officers had gone out, I asked Gilbert: "Did you check that student cap and bag lunch?"

"Yes sir. That lunch was fresh. There was only a crust or two of bread left, but the bread was still soft in the middle, and the paper wasn't water-soaked, the way it would have been if it'd been there any time. That hat was a student cap, you know, one of those things like a baseball cap with a wide top. It—"

"What university?" I interrupted.

"Well, the enamel on the badge was kind of chipped, but from the design we figure it's the University of Leipzig."

"Helwig spent a little time at the University of Leipzig, you know."

"Maybe so, but Helwig was wearing a soft hat when Klugievitz caught him, so it isn't his. Doesn't fit him, anyway. I tried it on him."

"Leipzig's in the Russian Zone, you know."

"I don't know whether that's significant or not, Major. After all, it could belong to somebody around here that's just been messing around the mine."

"Well, it's an angle, anyway. But I saw something on one of the tugs in the slips—some davits—that looked odd to me. What with Helwig being a motorboat man and around the river, I'm convinced more than ever that this is some kind of river racket. So, here's what you do now: After you get your other things I mentioned at the meeting, squared away, let Helwig out. Say it's because of lack of evidence or something, and put a tail on him. We've had him close to thirty-six hours now, and I think he'll hustle to close some of his deals, or at least rearrange things now that he thinks we're wise. And get a check on that Kraut KP that took his meals to him. See if he took any word out for him. Then we'll go ahead with the rest of the plan."

Gilbert hustled out of the office, and I reviewed my arrangements. I was reasonably satisfied, and when I checked with my officers at five, everything was set. There were only a few minor shuffles to be made, nothing serious; that night a tug loaded with Constabulary troopers, weapons ready, sat across the river from the mine, a radio with them that tied in with my side of the river, where close to the bank and screened from the faint moonlight by overhanging bushes, was a small fast power launch I'd borrowed that afternoon from the Army's Rhine Transportation outfit at Mannheim.

I sat in the launch with barely room enough for the soldier pilot and a radio operator. Gilbert came down to check last-minute details, bracing his feet on the sloping bank and clinging to a bush to keep from slipping into the water. "Gosh, Major, you ought to be flying some kind of banner, shouldn't you? What's the Army use when it takes to the water?"

"Mothersill's, usually. But we've done everything else around here, and

we might as well mount a naval operation now. Your people all set at the slips?"

"Yes sir. The minute any barge or tug leaves down there, we'll get a call from the radio jeep at the Kaiserstrasse end of Oranienplatz. I've got a couple of stoolies nosing around that *Rosamunde*, too. You know that KP took a note down there for Helwig?"

"Yeah, you told me that at supper. Anything new on Helwig himself?"

"Last report was an hour ago. He went into his house on Hilda Promenade and hasn't been out since we let him out of jail."

"Somebody on his phone?"

"The *Reichspost*."

"Okay. You go on down to Oranienplatz and that jeep. If anything comes up, give me a call."

"Yes sir." Gilbert slipped off into the darkness.

Overhead, the night was a velvet cape, buttoned with little gilt stars. The river lapped at the side of my launch, and I sat there feeling the night pressing in around me, wondering if I was calling the right play. With maybe too little evidence to go on, I had decided that the tug in the slip had those heavy davits to use in hauling some kind of load up out of the water. Davits weren't usual equipment on Rhine tugs. We'd already established that Helwig had some connection with the *Rosamunde;* my theory was the *Rosamunde* was hauling munitions from Germany to other countries where they could be used. Secondly, I figured that by calling off the search at the mine, I was giving the observation, if there was any, the idea we were giving up the job without finding anything, thus leaving them a few loopholes. We were tailing Helwig, hoping that he'd have to rearrange his schedule—whatever it was—and since we had the slips covered, the river covered, and I was in a position where I could watch the entrance to the mine, now a blur in the obsidian night, I thought that no matter what happened, we could handle it.

So I sat there, the launch rocking just a bit from the soft movement of the river, the pilot hunched over the steering-wheel in the cockpit and the radio operator huddled close to his small portable set. It was crowded in the cockpit; the launch wasn't meant to hold three people, being only twenty feet long, most of that sleek hood; but the Transportation people said it had plenty of knots in the engine purring so gently now.

All at once I felt stupid sitting there, all because I was guessing, and when I thought again that if the Krauts had been outwitting me for three years, there was no reason why they couldn't do it again tonight, my mouth got dry and I wished I could smoke.

Just then the radio crackled, and I recognized Gilbert's voice, distorted in the receiver. He sounded excited as he gave the call words: *"Dog Easy Three, this is Baker Fox Four."* Then he yelped the message: *"Helwig shook the tail. We lost him! He left the house and shook the tail. I say again, we lost Helwig!"*

Damn, damn, *damn!* Now what? Did that mean Helwig was getting ready to roll? And how could we pick up his trail? Surely the river was involved; then all we could do was watch the tugs and hope we'd catch him. I made a mental note to skewer Gilbert's stool-pigeon shadow when the chance came, but there was no point in wasting words on lost chances now. I took the microphone from the radio operator. *"This is Dog Easy Three. Roger on your message. Keep looking for him. Any activity at the slips? Over."*

The receiver rushed momentarily; then Gilbert reported: *"Rosamunde getting steam up. That is all. Over."*

"Roger. Keep me posted. Out."

Rosamunde getting steam up, huh? What did that mean?

Well, I sat there for one hour, two hours—and nothing happened. There was no change at the slip; the *Rosamunde* had steam up, and that was all. The pilot of my launch was shifting uneasily, as if he wanted to get going on whatever it was we were going to do. The radio operator fiddled with a dial every once in a while. I just sat. And thought....

Then I had an idea. Looking at this thing one way, the whole works was contrived of flimsy material. I had no assurance that the *Rosamunde* meant anything, davits or not, beyond the fact Helwig sent them some kind of note. That kept me focusing on the river. Actually, shouldn't the mine have been the focal point of my plans? Here I had the mine generally covered, but it was the river I'd been figuring on. There was the mine, though.

"I'll be back in about twenty minutes," I said to the radio operator. "I want to check something."

I got out of the launch, adjusted my pistol so it hung a little lower at my waist, tucked my flashlight in my jacket pocket and headed for the demolished pillbox a few hundred yards from the mine entrance. As I picked my way toward it, my feet soft on the turf, it loomed out of the dark like a great jagged mausoleum, the huge blocks of concrete upended, the entrance apparently barred by a pile of rubble. Switching on my light, I flashed the beam at the entrance and looked it over carefully. The pile of broken cement, steel reinforcing rods, and rubble didn't quite obscure the doorway; it was possible to squeeze in. Wondering at that, I slipped close to an upended block, then ducked into the pillbox proper, stumbling as the interior fell away before me. The beam of my light showed me I was in what was once the ready-room for the pillbox personnel. Now its ceiling was shattered, and sagging wire netting was punched by great hunks of concrete, huge misshapen stalactites. Crouching to get under these, I duck-walked a few steps and saw a dark hole to my left, apparently some sort of tunnel. Following this tortuous way, squatting down to get under retaining beams that pressed soggy soil above my head, my breath came fast and my heart was pounding. I pulled up short, my flashlight trained on a twist in the tunnel ahead of me. Huge cobwebs shimmered, their gray threads broken and hanging. *Someone had used this tunnel—and it led toward the mine.*

I went on, slipping in the mud, the smell of the place literally clutching at my clothes. What was ahead of me? I followed the narrow beam of my light down a long sloping tunnel.

"Ai!" As I turned a corner, a voice split the silence. I almost dropped the light. Clawing for my pistol, I had it clear of the holster before I saw that the voice came from two men crouched in a wide room off the tunnel. Blinking their eyes in my light, they moved anxious hands toward bundles, bulky and fastened with rope, ranged beside them. *"Wir gehen jetzt, gel'?"* An old man with a heavy fuzz of beard spoke up.

"What do you mean, do we go now? Who the hell are you?"

I holstered my pistol. These two weren't going to give me any trouble.

With a sharp intake of breath, the old man said: *"American!"* Then he seemed to sag.

I didn't get it at all. Neither of these men were familiar to me. The old man, wearing lumpy-looking clothes, was plucking at his coat with anxious fingers, like a small boy caught in the jam closet. The other man, much younger, just sat there, his hands hanging slackly.

"What's going on?" I said. "Either of you speak English?"

"I do, a little," the older man said.

"Well, start talking then, dammit, because I want to know what the hell you're doing here! Who are you waiting for? What are those bundles for?"

The old man swallowed, his face working, his mouth squeezing the lines of his face up and down like an ancient accordion. "It is our clothes. We are moving."

"Moving? Where to?"

He shrugged. "Out. Out of Germany."

"Oh, out, huh? Where do you come from?"

"Leipzig."

"Leipzig." I nodded. I was beginning to see the angle. "Then you're supposed to meet somebody here, is that it? Somebody's going to help you escape from the Russian Zone and get out of Germany, huh? Who are you going to meet?"

"*Me, you nosy dog! Get your hands up! Quick!*" Helwig popped around the far side of the room, a pistol in his hand.

Dropping the flashlight, I tried to yank out my gun.

Whangggg! Helwig's pistol made a terrific crash in the closeness of the tunnel. The noise made a piece of dirt fall out of the low ceiling overhead. He missed me, but I'd learned my lesson. I dropped my gun and raised my hands—high.

Helwig stepped into the room, a neat Tyrolean hat on his head, a short jacket bulging over his shoulders. His eyes were drilling into me, and the scornful cast of his face was emphasized by the twist of his mobile mouth. He ducked forward and picked up my gun. He muttered something in German to the two men on the floor. They scrambled to their feet and heaved at their bundles, looking at me obliquely in the light of my flashlight, winking at me from the mud.

GESTURING the men out along the tunnel with a nod, Helwig glared at me, the square cut of his face emphasized by the shadows cast from my flashlight. "Always snooping, aren't you?"

"I thought you couldn't speak English." I was stalling for time, any kind of time. I didn't know what I could do, but I was afraid of this joker and what he could do to me.

Helwig spat. "I get along." He waved the pistol. "Come on, Rollo, go ahead." He jabbed me in the ribs as I went by him. I stumbled down the tunnel still deeper into the mine.

We went through a maze of winding passages, damp cell-like excavations, and one or two huge caves, Helwig holding a small electric torch to guide the way, my light abandoned in the mud where I'd dropped it. His gun was gouging me at every step. We reached the entrance of the mine, and I still couldn't figure why we hadn't been able to find this route to the pillbox before we quit looking. My mind was churning. I knew I was trapped, that Helwig somehow was going to fit me into his plans. I didn't know what he had in mind until I heard him crouch by the door. He straightened, then jabbed me around and handed me the portable radio set.

"How did you get this, you bastard?" I said.

"War surplus, wise guy! Now use it. Call that thick lieutenant down there and tell him to move that jeep, and tell your yahoos across the river the problem is over for the night. Clear the river. And no funny stuff. If you get smart, I'll give it to you right here. I can still make it, but you can make it easier for me."

I fingered the microphone. Nice deal, huh? One smart Heinie tying up a whole Constabulary battalion, making me the fall guy. I couldn't stand the thought. Putting the microphone to my lips, I pressed the button. "*Net call from Dog Easy Three. Stand by to write.*" I looked at Helwig. His eyes were boring into mine; the gun pushed into my ribs. I could see my radio operators, ears stuck to their receivers, waiting for the rest of the message. I hoped they were going to get it.

Keeping my hand on the button, I slapped the microphone right into Helwig's face, twisting away from the gun and bringing my heel up into his belly. The pistol went off with a roar and I felt a sharp burn along my side, but I'd knocked Helwig off balance. I swarmed onto him and he went down. Remembering those big muscles, I didn't waste any time on Marquis of Queensberry technique. I stamped him in the belly, then cracked him on the head with the radio. He was a good dog after that. But the radio was out of order.

I made sure he was going to keep, then turned my attention to the two men who'd been inside the mine....

By the time my troops reached me and I'd sent somebody off to attend to the radio operator Helwig had conked, I was ready to answer all the questions, happy that the burn on my side was from powder-flash and nothing else. Gilbert, panting, came up. "My God, Major, I heard that noise on the radio then it went off the air. Jeez, look—it's Helwig!"

Helwig, blood matting his hair, was sitting up with his head hanging over his knees. He'd already answered a few questions for me, though, and the rest I could guess. The two men from the cave were sitting dejectedly on their bundles, gazing at the small low-slung power launch Helwig had pulled up on the river bank.

"What's the story, Major?" Gilbert was prodding me, and some of my other officers were crowding around as the troopers took the two men and Helwig away.

"We damn' near outsmarted ourselves—or maybe I should say I almost outsmarted myself—that's all. There never were any munitions in this mine. Those two jokers there were waiting for a barge ride to Holland. That explains the student cap and the bag lunch, incidentally; Helwig's been using this place as a station on an underground railway for getting Germans out of the country. Ten thousand marks and the right contacts, you get in touch with Helwig, and in a few days you're in Holland. Helwig's been doing a helluva business in Russian Zone emigrés, and a lot of American Zone people have been going too.

"See that boat of Helwig's there? That thing's got about a two-foot silhouette. With no lights and a silent engine, you couldn't see it at night unless you bumped into it. And check those davit shackles on it, Gilbert. You'll see they're covered with the stuff we thought was cosmoline on the rifle Helwig had."

Gilbert stooped to rake a finger over a shackle. "I can't tell for sure in the dark, but it feels the same. How come, though?"

"WELL, Helwig had his helpers around the zones have the passengers check into this pillbox. It connects with the mine, see? I guess we didn't look far enough to discover that, or else they have a false door. Anyway, when the *Rosamunde* was around Karlsruhe, or even as far away as Frankfurt, Helwig'd load the passengers aboard the tug, hide them below decks, then swing his launch up on the davits and get it out of sight. Just the way some of those car thieves at home hide stolen cars in moving vans. Same idea."

"Yeah," Gilbert said, "but why did he have that rifle when Klugievitz caught him that time?"

"That's easy enough to answer now. Helwig'd just put some passengers aboard, see, and one of them had the rifle in his luggage. He didn't want to have any firearms on board the *Rosamunde* in case he had to dump any passengers over the side, so he took it away. That's when Klugievitz caught him. Helwig didn't know there was any grease on it. He'd just dropped his launch off and come back for the second batch of passengers that were waiting, see? He'd handled the rifle only enough to check the bolt, and he must have had some grease on his hands from the davits. That was why Helwig tried to foist that hunting alibi off on Klugievitz, but Klugievitz had enough sense to know we don't give Germans hunting licenses for rifles."

Gilbert nodded, then grinned. "Well, we're rounding up the *Rosamunde* crew. Smuggling people, now, huh? Boy, what next?"

I grinned back. "You never can tell. But I bet I'm the first admiral who ever won a naval battle with a portable radio."

No Time

JOHNNY shuffled into the office and closed the door behind him. Johnny was slender but well-muscled, and naturally walked with a smooth unhurried gait. The slouch showed he was nervous. Greg was sitting on the other side of the room behind a battered desk. He didn't look happy—in fact, he looked mighty sore. Johnny knew he'd be that way—but what the hell!

"Sit down," Greg said. His voice sounded tired. His strong, slightly beefy face was topped by thick black hair and set on a powerful body that would take on fat as he grew older. At the moment, his solid right arm rested on the desk before him, the sleeve of his khaki shirt rolled to the elbow.

Just to show that he wasn't going to be pushed around, Johnny took plenty of time to sit. If you weigh only a hundred and sixty, you can't give ground to a big guy of maybe two hundred. If you start backing, where will you end?

"All right," Greg said. "What happened *this* time?"

"Just what're you talking about?" Johnny countered. His mobile face was set in lines of stubbornness.

Johnny was stalling. This was the second time he had been in trouble within the month, which was a high frequency for any driller, even a nonconformist like Johnny. The crew was digging a wildcat well—hunting for oil in the Sheikdom of Bahar, on the shore of the Persian Gulf. Greg was having his first chance as superintendent in charge; Johnny was one of his drillers, and at times, one of his problems. Johnny knew only too well why he was on the carpet. In eight years of kicking around the oil-fields, he had been parked on a variety of carpets before a variety of irate superintendents. But to take a work-over from Greg, his closest friend—that was something different. So he ducked and stalled—which wasn't at all like Johnny—and asked: "Just what're you talking about?"

Greg took a deep breath.

"You know damn' well what I'm talking about, Johnny. How come you left the guts of that bit in the hole, last night?"

Johnny's left hand played with the work-hat perched on his dungaree-covered knee. Even in his working-clothes, Johnny caught the eye, particularly if it were feminine. His chin was firm, and his mouth was broad and slightly twisted by habit. His blue eyes were wide apart, and the muscles of his face were forever at work, striving to keep even with the moods that raced each other through his tousled blond head.

"She was going fine up to the last ten minutes," he answered. "Making hole fast. I didn't want to pull out, just to change a bit that was digging so good."

"But when you did come out, you found you'd left the bottom half of the bit in the hole—a nice pile of junk. Wasn't there an order on the board to pull that bit after thirty hours?"

"Yeah."

"But you ran it nearly thirty-five."

"It was digging fine."

"What d'you suppose we keep records for? The records show that you can't trust those bits over thirty hours. That's why the order was on the board."

For the first time since he had entered the office, Johnny permitted his eyes to stay level with Greg's. The hard lines of his tanned face softened, and a hint of a grin played around his wide mouth.

"Hell! I know it now, Greg. I was just a damn' fool. Sure, I know about the order—but the bit was going so well, I figured everything was O.K., and I'd knock out another fifty feet of hole."

Greg didn't look sore any more. He looked sad and rather solemn—like a judge with a big oval face.

"So now we have a nasty fishing job," he commented. "Maybe we can clean it up in a week, with luck. Or maybe we're in trouble for a month."

Johnny didn't say anything, but his hint of a grin faded.

"And just about three weeks ago, it was a case of rassling with an Arab. There were orders about that too, weren't there?"

"Yeah."

"How many times have I told you to keep your hands off the Arabs, even in fun?"

"Aw—we were just fooling around."

"Even after you'd been told what might happen."

"Sure. I know. But I told you, Abdullah's a good kid."

"That's what driller Barney Dikes thought," Greg answered, "when he was teaching the watchman how to box. But somebody slipped, and the watchman lost a tooth and went to the police. So the watchman gets damages, and Sheik warns me about abusing his people, and Barney isn't with us any more."

Greg paused, but Johnny remained silent.

"Last month, it was your derrick-man—who was working without a safety belt."

"The belt was broken—and besides, that kid is like a cat in a tree."

"Even a cat can slip on a wet brace."

BOTH were silent until Greg asked sharply: "How many chances do you think I can give you?"

His voice cracked slightly, and he cleared his throat hurriedly. This wasn't just another driller sitting before him. This was Johnny, a part of his life and growth. Nervously, awkwardly, he turned his solid bulk in the swivel chair as though seeking escape. Then, because he had known from the start what he had to do, he added harshly: "I can't keep you. I can't. I don't dare."

Johnny's blue eyes suddenly opened wider, but he remained silent, watching the powerful young man hunched behind the desk.

"I don't know what else to do, Johnny," Greg continued. "There's a

to Quit

LOST TOOLS IN A WILDCAT OIL-WELL NEAR THE PERSIAN GULF COMPELLED GREG TO FIRE HIS BEST FRIEND. . . . AND THEN CAME THE FANTASTIC DIVING JOB.

by PHIL McCONNELL

letter in the basket right now from Brisby in New York. He keeps crying about the money running out, and that if we don't find oil quick, he'll have to make what he calls a change in policy. We may have to move out, maybe drop the concession. I keep sending in the geological reports showing we ought to be breaking into something in the next hundred feet or so—any time now. This is no time to quit—but what the hell! The boys with the cash are getting cold feet. Now here comes a fishing job—more delay! More cash spent with nothing to show for it! I have to report trouble. And maybe they say: 'That's enough. Hang it up.' Maybe they let us keep going for a while. Suppose they do give more time. How do I know you won't have us in more trouble next week?"

GREG didn't look like the superintendent or the judge. He looked like the plaintiff.

"This would be a lot easier," he complained, "if you weren't one of the best damn' drillers in the business. But my God, Johnny, you're like a—like a buzzsaw on the loose. You've got the stuff, but nobody knows what you'll do with it."

A little of the grin came back to hover around Johnny's mouth, and he said: "Why, sure, Greg. Sure—you've got to look out for the Company. Don't get up such a sweat. Gosh, you'd think this was the first time I ever got fired."

Greg swung from the desk and rose. Johnny watched him curiously as he strode, head lowered and hands in pockets, across the tiny office and back, and then stopped before the one window to gaze out across the pale sweep of the desert. Standing and walking, he didn't look like a judge. He was just a solid young man of about thirty. When he spoke again, his voice had lost its irritation.

"I never thought I'd have to do it, Johnny. I never thought you'd make me do it." He added: "It's going to make the folks unhappy—but dammit—"

"For the Lord's sake, snap out of it," Johnny interrupted. "That's always been the trouble with you! You take yourself too damn' serious. What the hell! There's plenty of drilling jobs. I don't think I was made for the pioneering stuff, anyway," he continued. "Three months since I've been as far as Basra. Hell, fellah! I'm due."

Greg, turning from the window, managed to smile weakly.

Johnny asked: "When can you get me out?"

"There's no hurry," Greg assured him. "In fact, I'd like to keep you for a few days, if you're willing—until Chet Brogan gets back from Cairo. We'd be short of drillers until Chet gets back. Of course, that's up to you."

"O.K." Johnny answered almost too readily. "Those gals in Basra can wait a few more days. Make it easy on yourself."

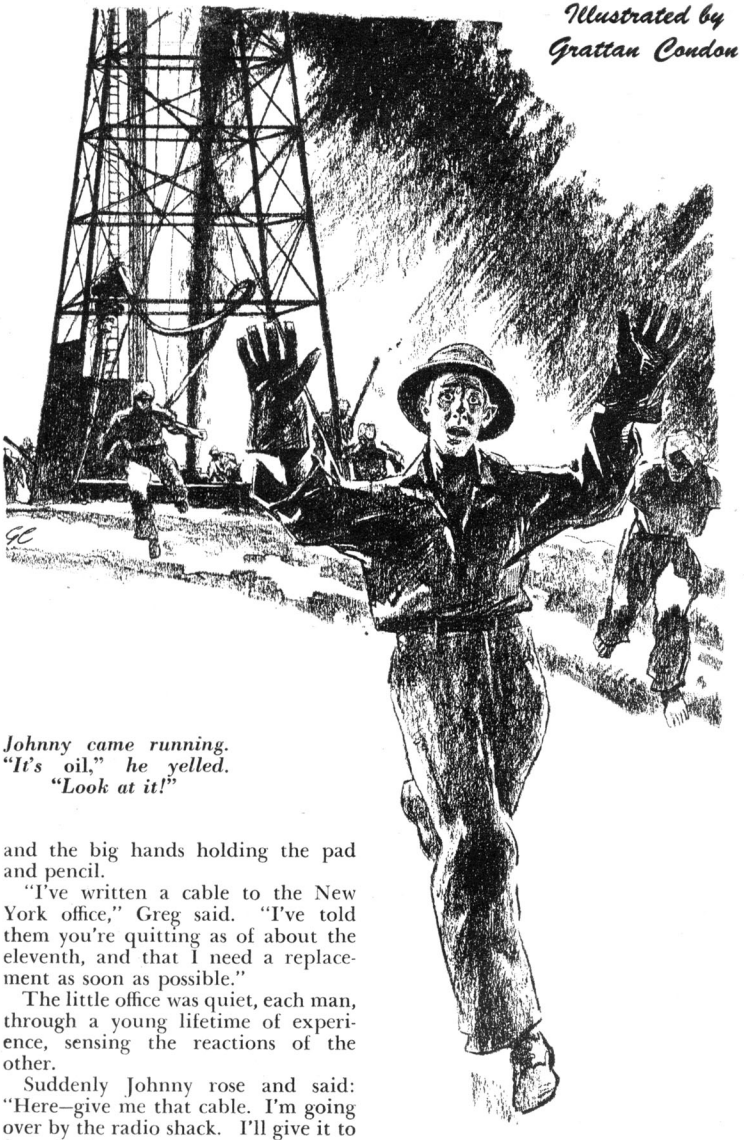
"This is the eighth. Chet should be back day after tomorrow. I'd like to have you work three more days—through the eleventh."

"Three days it is."

Greg seated himself again, pulled a cable blank from the desk drawer, and wrote hurriedly. Johnny watched his dark close-cropped head bent so seriously over the sheet. The lines around Johnny's mouth softened, and his eyes were kind, almost fatherly, as they studied the heavy shoulders

"Orders!" Johnny shouted. "If you and Seaton don't know how to fish for junk, am I supposed to go along too? I got the junk."

Illustrated by Grattan Condon



Johnny came running.
"It's oil," he yelled.
"Look at it!"

and the big hands holding the pad and pencil.

"I've written a cable to the New York office," Greg said. "I've told them you're quitting as of about the eleventh, and that I need a replacement as soon as possible."

The little office was quiet, each man, through a young lifetime of experience, sensing the reactions of the other.

Suddenly Johnny rose and said: "Here—give me that cable. I'm going over by the radio shack. I'll give it to Squeaky."

"The clerk can take it when he goes home."

"Nix, General. I've given you enough trouble. I'll take care of it." Smiling, Johnny extended his hand.

"O.K." Greg answered listlessly. He wasn't smiling.

Holding the cable form in his left hand, Johnny stepped around the desk and placed his right hand on Greg's shoulder.

"Listen, honeybunch," he said softly. "Who is it getting the can—you or me?" Greg didn't answer, and Johnny added: "No hard feelings, son?"

Greg gave him a sickly smile.

"No hard feelings. Hell, no. I only wish—"

Johnny slapped Greg's shoulder.

"Come on, kid. Remember me? I'm Gootch."

At the door, he turned and, grinning, repeated his query.

"Remember me?"

Greg's smile broke full and easy for the first time during the interview, and he answered: "Yeah. You're Gootch."

"Remember me? I'm Gootch." It was as silly as most cherished household sayings, starting from little or nothing, tossed back and forth in the intimacy of daily life, worn thin, but acquiring with age and use a lustrous patina, a special significance to the chosen few. Greg Bryce and Johnny O'Keefe picked theirs from a fourth-rate vaudeville act which had played for a week in the old Wentworth Theater. At the respective ages of eight-and-a-half and nine, Johnny and Greg doubled in screaming laughter when the skinny clown leaped from the wings, flattening his opponents right and left with a long slapstick, and yelled his war-cry: "Remember me? I'm Gootch!" For no apparent reason, the gag stuck in their minds. By repetition, it was raised to the dignity of a password, a symbol of secret understanding. Even in those days, Johnny and Greg were a team, living in the same block of neat California bungalows in Fresno, attending the same grade school, fishing together along the San Joaquin River. They played with the gang, but usually straggled home together.

By the time they reached grammar school, they had formed the habit of saving part of their allowances to spend for a movie on Friday night. Afterward, their homeward route would lead them past Johnny's house first. Johnny would say, "Let's sit," or perhaps he wouldn't say anything and they would sit anyway. They usually perched on the front steps, a little in the shadow away from the rays of the street light at the corner; and on hot summer nights the air held the smell of dust and freshly cut grass. Old Man Drew would come out from his house across the street and would turn on the lawn-sprinkler; and the hiss of the rushing water would be only a breath ahead of the coolness spreading across the street.

"Feels pretty good," Johnny might say, and Greg might agree; but mostly they just sat and felt the night breathing around them. The street lights would die, and Old Man Drew would come out and turn off the sprinkler, and they could hear the streetcar bumping over the crossing down by the drugstore. Greg would say, "Gee. I gotta be getting home," and Johnny would answer, "Aw—what's the rush?" and no one would move. They might argue a little about the movie or the morning history lesson, but mostly they would sit together in silence until Greg would exclaim: "Gee! I *gotta* go."

"See ya tomorrow," Johnny would say.

"Sure thing," Greg would answer. "G'night."

And just before he reached the corner, Greg probably would turn and call, "Remember me?" and he would hear Johnny's chuckle and the answer: "Yeah. You're Gootch." . . .

Greg's bulk and Johnny's slenderness began to show in the high-school years. Greg developed into an unspectacular but dependable fullback;

Johnny into a highly spectacular but undependable quarter-miler. Greg did what the coach ordered, and given half a chance, could be expected to produce a two-yard gain consistently. Johnny trained when he felt like it, usually according to his own ideas. In his senior year he won his event three Saturdays in a row—then failed to qualify against the same runners in the Valley Conference Meet because, in the meantime, he had developed a new theory about eating hamburgers before a race.

The boys graduated together, Greg in the upper third of the class. Johnny barely scraped through because he saw no point in boning on modern history and solid geometry. They went south to the oil-fields together, and together applied for jobs on a drilling crew. Johnny learned rapidly, and in spite of his lesser build, could swing the pipe-tongs more skillfully than Greg. In four years he had his drilling job (when Greg still was hoping for his); but Johnny and the foreman argued once too often, and Johnny went down the road. That was the first time they had been truly separated since their grammar-school days; for when Greg talked about quitting too, Johnny told him not to be a fool. He, Johnny, had had enough of the oil-fields, anyway. He announced that he was out for a change of scenery.

He drove a truck for a year, then quit to learn diving in a San Francisco shipyard. The war and the Army took him, used him in spite of his unwillingness to fit the mold, and at last, sent him home, no doubt with a feeling of relief. He returned to diving, but after another argument, headed back to the oil-fields and the drilling rigs.

Meanwhile, Greg plugged steadily ahead. He was a foreman when the Army took him, a better foreman when the Army released him. When the Persian Gulf job came along, Greg was given the superintendent's spot and told to hire a crew. He had been interviewing prospects for three days when the door of his office was swung open and a strong voice shouted: "Remember me?" And Greg joyously started from his chair, roaring in reply: "You old sonovagun! You're Gootch!"

That had happened eight months ago.

Greg had completed the hiring of the crew, had collected the thousands of equipment items, from drilling engines to toilet paper, required in the modern pioneering of a barren land, and had shipped men and supplies to the site. There in the early days of the job he learned how to operate, how to exist, in the desert, and how to work with a strange nomadic people. In spite of difficulties, the job started on schedule. In the beginning, drilling progress was satisfactory; and the tough rock brought up by the drilling bit gave encouraging signs. Then came mechanical failures, delays, arguments with the ruling Sheik, and the growing queries from the men with the money, the boys behind the big desks back in New York.

Greg began to learn what he must give in exchange for the larger figures on his pay check, began to realize that, with a tough job before him in a tough land, he too had to be tough—even with Johnny. So he had fired his side-kick, and Johnny had slapped him on the back, and as a parting gesture, had said: "Give me that cable." Greg, sitting discouraged in his office, couldn't decide whether, in this closing act, Johnny had wished to make the grand flourish, or to be a little kind. But he hadn't time to dwell on the idea.

He left the office and found Bill Seaton, the drilling foreman, busy in the storehouse. Bill was an old hand, rich in experience, and dependable. As Greg had expected, he found that Bill had started the usual steps in attempting to recover the broken steel now lodged in the bottom of the hole and barring further drilling progress. Bill had instructed the afternoon crew to run a device called a junk basket, designed for use in such an unfortunate situation.

The following morning at daylight Greg drove to the well. The driller from the graveyard crew shook his head. No recovery—junk still in the hole.

In the afternoon, Bill strode into Greg's office and lowered himself comfortably into the visitor's chair. He had nothing encouraging to report. He added that Johnny O'Keefe was at it again—wanted to run a homemade tool.

"Johnny argues we should try a poor-boy basket—you know—have the welder cut some long teeth on a plain joint of pipe. Thinks that will get over the junk."

Greg shook his head.

"Too dangerous. Might work, but odds are we'd leave more steel in the hole."

"That's what I told him," Bill agreed. "But he sure argues. Says we'll get mighty little with what we're runnin'."

"Tell Johnny to close his trap and do what he's told," Greg snapped. "Who's running the job—you or him?"

Bill nodded and rose.

"That's how I figured it," he said.

The third day of fishing brought no better results than the first two. In the late afternoon, Greg reluctantly prepared his weekly cable reporting progress to the New York office. He made it short:

LOST BIT ASSEMBLY AT 4268
(stop) FISHING

He couldn't think of anything better to say, so he tossed the cable into the outgoing basket and started his daily inspection of the camp.

The bunkhouses were set on the top of a low brown hill, minute oblong bits in a brown sweep of dead land filled with wind-scorched rock and barren sand. The sky also was empty of life, the sun suspended and seemingly fixed above the western skyline. Greg, standing before the bunkhouses, turned toward the one bit of relieving color in this world of emptiness: the deep blue stripe of the Gulf on the eastern horizon. But he scarcely noticed the blue water, his attention being focused through habit on a thin black tower rising between him and the Gulf, a puny thing in the distance, like blackened match-sticks joined at the top and spreading toward the ground, with other thin sticks interlacing. The seeming sticks were the heavy steel members of the derrick standing over the drilling well some three miles distant.

Greg turned to look toward the derrick casually, but immediately he was aware of a blob of haze or mist which blurred the derrick's straight lines. Then he saw a small dust-cloud racing across the desert, following the road from the derrick to the camp. A car was coming from the well, its following feather of dust skittering along the road like a scared rabbit hunting cover. Greg ran back down the path to the office and was standing beside the building when the car skidded around the corner and slid through the sand to a stop. The foreman was behind the wheel, his weathered face hard and dark.

"She's blowing out!"

"Blowing *out!*"

"Yeh. That's what that damn' hole's doin'."

"But how in— What's happened?" Then as a second thought, "What's she making?"

"Flowing water—water and mud when I was there. Looks like plenty pressure. I was down at the pier. Then I came back, and she was blowin'."

"Why didn't you shut the rams?"

"Gears jammed somehow. They won't shut off."

"What about the master gate?"

"Can't get at it. The cellar's full of mud and water."

"Can you rig a packer to shove down the casing?"

"That's what I figured to do. I got a setting tool and a production packer."

"Been in lots of tight places. I'm a pretty good diver—even if I am a hell of a driller."

"Screw it to a joint of drill pipe. Put on a high-pressure gate. Get the yard crane moving."

Quickly, Greg gave the few orders needed. "Who's the driller?" he called as he started for his car.

"Johnny O'Keefe," Bill shouted after him. "Him and his crew are still tryin' to close the rams."

The road to the well was a winding strip smoothed through the sand, twisting abruptly to avoid sharp outcrops of rock. Greg drove as fast as the skidding tires would permit, cursing each bend that slowed him. As he approached the derrick, he could see a fountain of dark liquid within it, tossing and swaying like a wind-blown tree. Johnny came running to the car as he stopped.

"It's *oil*," he yelled. "Look at it!"

He waved his arms, which showed long black smears. His wet pants, plastered to the hard muscles of his legs and buttocks, were glistening black.

Greg, lost in the calamity of the blow-out, asked: "What happened?" The sickness of another failure was in his voice. A hissing and rumbling was in the air, like the sound of steam escaping from a huge boiler. The growl of the rushing stream dwarfed the cries of the Arab workmen cowering before the monster.

"Dammit, look!" Johnny cried. "We got *oil*. Ain't that what we came here for?"

Greg suddenly realized that the dark fountain shooting from the center of the derrick and pouring down the slope in a broad stream, was jet black and frothing brown. First he felt like cheering; then he felt like cursing. He had wanted oil, but not a wild well. This was better and worse than he had expected, better in that oil had been found, worse in that the field might be ruined if the wild well were not brought under control promptly. If the wild flow continued, the hole might cave, and the rock blown from below might form a cavern into which the surface rock would fall. Then a crater would form: a great funnel in the earth, into which derrick and machinery would be drawn while the oil continued to waste into the sand. Above all this rose the menace of fire. At any moment a flying rock might strike steel and cause a spark which would transform the black fountain, the surrounding buildings, the men themselves, into a giant's flaming torch.

Greg led Johnny to the far side of the tool-shed, where they could talk against the roar of the well.

"Now give it to me from the start," he ordered. "What happened?"

JOHNNY was grinning again.

"I got the junk out." He didn't try to hide the triumph in his voice.

"How?"

"Well, when I came on this morning, the graveyard crew had just pulled your junk basket again, and with nothing in it. Last night, I came down here and took the welding torch and fixed up a poor-boy basket, myself—out of a piece of casing. So, when there wasn't anything in that patented gadget of yours, I said, to hell with it, and I ran my own."

"Even after you'd had orders not to."

"Orders!" Johnny shouted. "If you and Seaton don't know how to fish for junk, am I supposed to go along and be an ass too? Dammit, Greg, *I got the junk.*"

"Go on," Greg said.

"O.K. So I ran my basket, and I let it down easy. I touched the junk; then I worked the basket down about a foot, maybe more. I figured I was over the junk, so I put on a little more weight to close the basket, and brought it out." He paused for the full effect, then announced: "I had the whole damn' works—except maybe one of the bearings."

Greg said: "Well—I got to hand it to you. But what happened next?"

"We laid down the basket, cut it open with the torch, and found the junk. That took time, maybe half an hour. Then I came out here to find a new bit. I couldn't find the right kind. Dick Gleason, he was out working on the pumps, changing valves. Nobody was on the derrick floor except the Arabs. I heard Abdullah yelling. I came running back, and there was the mud shooting out of the overflow. Dick and I got the crew on the rams, tried to shut them; but they jammed. We bent the controls trying to turn them."

"We must have been in the oil pay before we lost part of the bit," Greg commented.

"Must have been. Maybe I helped open it when I dug out the junk. Guess she was building up to blow all the time we were out of the hole working on the basket. I don't know. All I know, she came in fast. Bill came up while we were trying to shut the rams, and she was shooting mud and water ten feet over the floor. After he lit out for help, I began to see oil. Then she really did start to roll."

Greg scratched his chin. "All right, my fine-feathered friend," he said. "We got it. Now what do we do with it?"

But before Johnny could reply, Greg had started back toward the well.

"Get your Arabs back on the upwind side," he ordered. "Get them out of that gas. Throw a cable or a couple of ropes around that Diesel tank. We'll have to move it to let the crane in close."

The other American drillers and their crews had gathered quickly. Before the hour had passed, Bill Seaton was back with his equipment. The crane was rolled into place; protecting shields were set up; and the battle was started—men against the stored power of the violated earth.

A mechanic armed with a heavy wrench and protected by a face-mask to which a hose was attached, fought his way under the derrick floor, trying to determine the cause of the failure of the rams, an arrangement of steel jaws installed as protection against trouble of this sort. The man was drawn out, exhausted and almost overcome by the buffeting of the flow. The failure was inside the rams, where the mechanic couldn't reach it. Next, the crane swung a massive steel plug over the fountain and tried to lower it, forcing it, like a cork in a bottle, into the pipe from which the fountain shot. But the power of the escaping fluid was too great, and the plug could not be driven downward.

DARKNESS came, and floodlights were rigged to illumine the spouting column, and the small humans in glistening black who moved futilely about its base. A black river poured from the well, a rippling frothing band of hot liquid ebony carrying weaving highlights on its small greasy waves. It boiled from the cellar beneath the derrick, fed from the column that shot vertically a hundred feet and fell back around its own base.

The men clustered near a floodlight and waited for the next move, Greg and Bill standing at one side, talking briefly, studying the flow.

Johnny, soaked in oil, joined the two men.

"I can shut it off, Greg."

Greg was tired. He had listened to half a dozen screwball suggestions within the past hour.

"Yeah," he answered without interest.

"I can close the master gate."

"Sure," Greg answered, "if you can work under ten feet of oil. That's the gate you should have—" But he stopped. Why talk about what should have been?

"Yes," Johnny said, picking up the thought, "that's the one I should have shut when things started happening. Only it was too late when I got to the well. But," he added, "I can do it now."

"How?"

"Go in in a diver's suit. There's one at the pier," he added hurriedly as though he feared interruption.

GREG thought for a moment, then asked: "Who ever dived in oil—hot oil?"

"That doesn't mean it can't be done."

"It would go right through the suit—that hot stuff."

"Yeah. In a little while—but I don't think right away. It'd have to work its way through the rubber of the suit."

"What about the heat? It's probably a hundred and forty degrees in that oil."

"I can take it for a while."

Greg wasn't looking at the well, now. His eyes were fixed solemnly on Johnny.

"One leak in the hose or suit," he argued. "Just a little gas—and you're done."

"I can do it, I tell you. The suit's there—the air-pump and all. I can get it quick—in half an hour."

Greg again looked at the roaring column and at the black river flowing from the cellar. Ten feet down was the big valve—ten feet of smothering hot oil between the air and the massive steel gate. If a man could turn the hand wheel on the gate, he could cut this fountain at its base almost as quickly as a gardener stops the water flowing from a lawn hose.

"Get the suit, Johnny," Greg said. "I haven't agreed yet—but I might try."

"*You* might try. Whadda you mean?"

"I mean I might try it—taking it easy."

"What in hell do *you* know about diving?" Johnny exploded. "Do you think just any sap can dive?" He thrust his head forward. "I wasn't suggesting a funeral."

"A man ought to be able to keep his sense of direction for a few feet," Greg argued.

"This isn't where I'd start learning," Johnny growled. "Anyway," he added, "you're too big. You couldn't get into the suit."

They brought the diving equipment from the pier, and Johnny arranged the gear beneath a temporary shelter placed close to the derrick and beside the hot black river. Johnny was helped into the suit—all but the helmet. He sat on a box, giving instructions in a low voice.

Greg tested the air-pump and the telephone. Occasionally he glanced toward Johnny O'Keefe.

(Summer nights in Fresno, and the cool air from the water-sprinklers across the street. Once, Johnny fell into the river, and I pulled him out. He was blue and still when I dragged him onto the bank. Then the water trickled out of his mouth—then he gagged, and more water came out, and he began to cough a little.)

"Is the air coming through the hose line, Johnny?"

"It's all right, Greg."

"Try the phone. Stick your head close to the helmet."

"I can hear you fine."

Greg came and stood beside Johnny.

"What about the cribbing in the cellar, fellah—and the drain lines? How are you going to keep your hose line from fouling?"

"Been in lots of tight places with a hose line before. I'm a pretty good diver—even if I am a hell of a driller," he added, smiling faintly.

"Forget it," Greg said brusquely. "Now listen," he continued. "We're going to take this easy. First, we'll test everything after your helmet is on. Then we'll help you into the oil stream outside the cellar stairs. Get down in the oil, but try to keep your helmet out. If everything is all right, then go down the steps just far enough to put your helmet under. If everything isn't as it should be—even a whiff of gas—jerk twice, and we'll pull you out—and quick. You aren't to go into the cellar until I tell you to. Remember that. Not until I *tell* you to."

"O.K., Greg."

They bolted the helmet in place, then screwed on the face-plate. Bill Seaton and Greg grasped Johnny by the arms and helped him rise. Still supporting him, they staggered to the edge of the black stream, Johnny dragging first one weighted foot, then the other, like a crippled *Frankenstein's* creation. Bill let go, but a moment longer Greg held Johnny's arm. Through the grease and muck, their hands gripped hard. Then Greg let go, and Johnny sat down awkwardly. Slowly he crawled into the hot stream, and the waves rippled around his clumsy bulk.

Greg stepped back to the telephone by the air-pump.

"How is it, Johnny? Can you hear me? You all right, Johnny?"

Johnny's voice, muffled but firm, replied: "O.K., Greg—O.K. It's kinda warm."

"Can you take it?"

"Sure."

"All right, Johnny. Go ahead when you feel like it."

The shape moved against the stream like a Cambrian monster returning to its primeval slime. The body disappeared, and only the domed head moved forward above the surface of the stream. Then it too sank from sight, and the greasy rippling surface was unbroken. A living man stood sweating beneath the flowing oil.

"Stop, Johnny. You're under. Hold it. Are you all right, Johnny? You all right?"

From the hot unseen world, a distant voice said: "All right, Greg."

"Any smell of gas?"

"Can't smell any."

"Is the air coming through?"

"Yes. I can breathe all right."

"Then we're ready. Now go ahead—easy."

The air-line and the life-line slipped away like two snakes sliding gently into the stream.

(There were snakes along the river—black snakes and rattlers. When I had to walk through the tall grass, I always imagined a coiled rattler just ahead of my foot. I'd imagine the cold raw feel of its scales on the bottom of my foot, the jerk of the muscles beneath the scales, the sting of the fangs stabbing my bare leg. Johnny never was afraid of snakes—at least, he never admitted it. He'd charge on through the grass while I went around by the path.)

The muffled voice through the earphones said: "There's a pipe here—up at my chest. Ought to be the fill-up line."

"You're right. That means you're well into the cellar. How are you? Any smell of gas?"

"No—I'm all right." The voice seemed tired—or perhaps it was the way the sound came through the telephone.

"Can you stoop down and get under the pipe?"

No answer.

"Johnny! You all right, Johnny?"

The voice grunted and said: "I got under."

The earphones carried a sound like strong breathing.

"You still all right?"

"Yes." A pause, and the voice said thickly: "I—can't turn. Something in the way."

Through the telephone came the rasp of toiling lungs.

"Can you get back, Johnny? Forget the gate. Can you back out?"

The distant voice, gasping and uncertain, answered: "Don't know. Something in the way here. Awful hot."

"Snap out of it, fellah." Greg tried to keep his voice steady. "Take it easy. Take hold of your lines. Feel back along them. Find that fill-up line. Get back under. We'll pull you out. Get back to the fill-up line."

"O.K.—O.K."

"Take up the slack in the lines," Greg spoke to the men beside him; but when two of them nervously complied, the voice from the cellar gasped: "No—no! Don't pull the lines. I'm caught some place. For God's sake, Greg. Don't let 'em pull."

From the base of the roaring column, the unbroken stream slipped away in the darkness.

(The damned stinking stream! I sent him into it. I did it. I sent him into that boiling hell. I stewed him just to stop the damned vomiting bitch. Oh, God!

You're the superintendent. You're the big shot. You hire and you fire and you entertain all the important visitors. But the fellows with the money don't give you much time. They don't know anything about digging for oil—they don't want to know. All they want is interest on the investment If you don't get it, someone else will. So you do the best you can, but you let men stew, you cold-blooded—)

"Greg! I found the—wheel! I got it!"

The voice was hoarse, but stronger under the spur of achievement.

"It turns!" The breathing was in gasps.

"Forget the wheel. Let it alone. Get out! To hell with the wheel."

The roar of the rushing column changed—lessened slightly.

"It's turning. Am I doing any good?"

Greg heard himself yell: "Yeah! Yeah! You're getting it, Johnny!"

The roar was dying.

"Easy, Johnny. Easy. Don't close it too fast. Easy. Easy."

The growl died to a sullen gurgle. The hiss of the last escaping fluid suddenly was cut off, leaving the patter of dripping oil and the gurgle of the black stream flowing from the cellar. Greg heard a faint ragged cheer from the men, like the tired cry of relief from pain.

"All right, Johnny. Go ahead when you feel like it." The shape moved ahead like a Cambrian monster.

"It won't—turn any more," the voice wheezed.

"It's stopped, Johnny. Dead. Get out, fellah. For Christ's sake! You made it—but can you get out?"

The sobs rasped through the earphones. "Sure. Sure. I got loose—going forward. Pull the lines—easy, now—easy—"

They pulled him from the lessening stream, a slime-covered floundering animal. They placed him in a sitting position on a box, and someone frantically unscrewed the face-plate. They removed the slippery helmet, and someone wiped the sweat from his face. It kept running into his eyes. They lifted him from the suit and carried him, sweat-soaked, to the shelter of the tool-shed. He was breathing normally now, and they wrapped him in a blanket when he shivered in the night air. At last they left him, with Greg squatted beside him. He managed to grin.

"How you feeling?" Greg asked.

"O.K. I'm fine. Kinda tired."

Johnny beneath the blanket looked smaller than usual beside Greg's bulk. His blond hair was a sodden mat.

"Diving in oil. That's a new one for the book," Greg said, and added awkwardly: "That was—really something new."

"Don't make it a part of the rules," Johnny chuckled. "You can pack me in ice from now on."

GREG was silent. He was looking down at Johnny's grease-smeared nose.

"Looks like we—uh—you got it this time," Johnny ventured.

"Looks like it," Greg answered.

A tractor clanked past the shed and moved with its racket, in the direction of the well. Its engine backfired and was quiet. Johnny shifted his weight and propped himself on his right elbow.

"Feeling better?" Greg asked.

"Yeah. Think I'll make it." He paused, then added casually: "Think I can still make tomorrow's boat."

Greg said: "Hell, Johnny. I'm sure mixed up."

Johnny didn't help him.

Greg said: "You lousy so-and-so—why can't you play ball?"

"Play ball!" The old light of battle was back in Johnny's eyes. "Me? Sure, I play ball. I *always* played ball with you. Why, here, today—"

"All right—all right. You win. I quit," Greg interrupted. "And now," he added ruefully, "I suppose I go back and send another cable saying, please disregard O'Keefe's resignation, it isn't so."

"I wouldn't worry about that," Johnny advised him, showing the old grin in all its power. Then when Greg started to speak, he added: "You see, I didn't send that first cable. I figured you'd wake up in time. I just tore it up."

The Patriarch

Illustrated By
BENTON CLARK

YOU CAN'T TRUST A MAN WHO SMILES ALL THE TIME . . . AND THERE CAME A DAY OF RECKONING.

THE sins of man are many. He will kill. He will take that which belongs to others—money and cattle and all that can be turned into money. Aye, and other things: A good name—a woman's virtue—a man's home—a friend. And who can say with certainty that murder is a greater crime than thievery?

Dave Cray was hitching up when Gramp hobbled out of the cabin and came across the trodden earth of the yard. Sometimes Dave wondered if he hated the old man. The years had made his hair white, had scarred his gaunt face with deep lines. They had brought rheumatism to his gnarled and twisted muscles until there were days when he could not walk. But Gramp didn't hate nor speak ill of anybody.

No, it wasn't that Gramp had ever done anything wrong. It was just that he'd brought Dave out here to Gunsight Flat to dry up with the wind. There'd come a day when Dave's bones would whiten under a hammering sun set in a brassy sky. A million years from now somebody would dig them up like the Gable kids had dug those queer-looking bones out of the sand dunes to the north, bones that must have gone through uncharted eons since some misty day when creatures that were no longer here walked the earth.

"Don't lose your head with Solly," Gramp said in the same even tone he used whether it was a good day or a bad day, whether the rheumatism was giving him its special brand of hell or had for the moment forgotten him.

"I ain't making no promises," Dave replied, climbing into the buckboard.

"You got Luke's list?"

"I've got it."

Dave spoke to the team and wheeled out of the yard, keeping his gaze ahead on the twin tracks that cut straight north through the sagebrush. He didn't hate the old man. He knew that. You couldn't hate a man who had waited for death with the uncomplaining fortitude Gramp had. It was just that Dave Cray's life would have been different if Gramp hadn't settled here. . . .

There were the early treasured years in the Willamette valley with its people and cities. There was Dave's gem box of memories: the valley in spring and the smell of its rich life-swelling earth; the first lamb tongue; Indian summer days when the Cascades were blurred by smoky distance; the cries of other children as they played tag through a July twilight, the thrill of the game itself, and his first kiss when he had caught Ruthie Norton back of the big oak.

DAVE had been twelve when the news of Lee's surrender came to Oregon. That was when Gramp sold the place. "Ain't much sense in going west—just fall into the Pacific. We'll go the other way, and I aim to keep on believing what I believe."

So they had gone east—over the Cascades, through the Douglas firs and then the pines on the east slope, around the lava flows that an enraged nature had spewed out upon the earth like the fiery vomit of an animated prehistoric gargoyle.

Across the Deschutes—the Crooked River—the John Day: Searching, always searching, while the empty miles twisted behind in trackless solitude. Rimrock and sage and pine forest—or pine forest and sage and rimrock. No reception-committee, unless it might be a marauding handful of Snake Indians. No band to blare out a brassy welcome. . . . Only the lonely miles.

Then Gramp found it: Gunsight Flat, an emerald in a gray sage setting—pines in the nearby mountains—a crystal-clear creek—fish—antelope—deer—bear—and hay-land in the flat that would never want water, for water was always there.

Dave, watching Gramp, knew this was the end of the search. The twisting seeking tracks would go no farther. But the empty miles were there, all around them, running away in any direction as far as Dave could see and on beyond into the unmeasured distance.

"We won't starve," Gramp had said. "Fish and game a-plenty. A fine land to become a man in." He pulled at his beard that had been black then, and a glint was in his eyes that comes only to a man when he feels the ultimate in satisfaction. "A land where a man can think what seems fitting to think."

They had gone back the next summer for more horses and stock, for seed and tools. It was the last time they had seen the Willamette valley. Others had come: Luke Petty, Fred Gable and his cabinful of kids, Jared Frisbie, loud-talking Abe Mack, and more and more, until the whole flat was taken.

Then came Smiling Jim Solly with his wagons and cattle and his fine-riding buckaroos; and there was pigtailed Ann Solly, riding a bay mare up at the head of the column alongside Smiling Jim. Seeing her that first time, Dave thought her corn-yellow hair was as fine as real silk, as beautiful as gold in the sun.

Aye, the sins of man are many. . . . Standing with the thief and the murderer is the one who says his daughter shall not see the man she loves. If they run away together, he will follow them and hang the man and black-

of Gunsight Flat

by WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER

snake his girl and bring her back. Smiling Jim Solly would have done exactly that—and kept his smile through all of it.

"Don't lose your head with Solly," Gramp had said.

Well, maybe Dave wouldn't lose his head, but he'd kill Smiling Jim Solly. Ann wouldn't hate him for it. . . .

The buckboard left the sage flat and climbed the bald face of the rimrock by a twisting route, dropped over and came down to Solly's store. There was no money in Gunsight Flat except what Solly had brought, but there was a deal of swapping. Solly had cattle and winter shelter, but he had no hay-land. The Flatters, as they were called, had hay. Every autumn, wagons rumbled into Solly's cañon with the hay and built credit for the Flatters at the store.

Only this winter it would be different, for Solly had steadily built a carry-over of hay until now he wouldn't need any for another year. Dave, his eyes sweeping the long row of round weather-browned stacks, choked with the fury of his anger. Smiling Jim Solly would look at you and say you could buy his sugar and salt and coffee and dried peaches if you had money. That was the way it had been with Jared Frisbie and loud-talking Abe Mack—the week before, when they had come.

As Dave tied his team in front of the store he saw Ann working in her yard. He grinned; he wanted to yell; he wanted to get up on the buckboard seat and holler like a rooster when a hen comes off the nest with fifteen chicks. Smiling Jim Solly could laugh in your face and say he'd starve you to death if you didn't sell to him, but he couldn't keep his girl from loving one of the Flatters he despised.

Dave picked up a rock and weighted down the letter he'd written the night before to Ann. Smiling Jim Solly was slick, but he wasn't as slick as his daughter and one Dave Cray. Solly would raise Cain if he ever found out. Dave's jaw set stubbornly. Let him find out. It had to come to a showdown sometime.

Smiling Jim Solly was in the back of the store, one of his long cigars tilted at a cocky angle between his teeth. Half a dozen buckaroos squatted on the floor or sat on a counter, listening and laughing to the big tale Solly was telling. He was a bragger, Smiling Jim was. He liked to talk and he liked to hear his audience laugh.

There were some Flatters over there, too. Jared Frisbie and Abe Mack were helping themselves out of the cracker barrel, only Abe wasn't as loud as usual. The only racket he made was when Solly finished his story. Then Abe laughed louder than any other two men in the store.

Dave stood there in the door, half-turned so he could watch Ann run across to his buckboard and get his note. It was the way they always worked it. If Dave stepped out of the

"Don't lose your head with Solly," Gramp said. "I ain't making no promises," Dave replied.

doorway, Ann knew her father was watching.

As soon as Ann had the letter and had slipped it inside the bosom of her dress, Dave stalked into the store. Smiling Jim saw him, all right, but he didn't pay any attention. He tilted his cigar a little higher and started on another windy.

There were several things crowding Dave, but mostly it was Abe Mack and Jared Frisbie coming back after the way they'd been turned down cold last week. It was worse standing there filling their bellies with Solly's crackers. But it was a hell of a lot worse for Abe to laugh like that at Solly's sorry jokes.

"Here's some things Gramp wants." Dave shoved a ragged corner of paper under Solly's nose. "Likewise there's Luke Petty's list."

Solly looked mad because Dave had butted into his yarn. He chewed on his cigar a minute. His mouth was still smiling, but his eyes weren't. He said, "Got any money?"

"No, but we've got hay."

"You know damned well I ain't taking no hay."

"How do you expect us to eat?"

"Eat your hay, if you've got so much."

They laughed—especially Abe Mack. Funny about that laugh: it sounded like a mule's bray. The Flatters eating hay might be funny to Solly's buckaroos, but it wasn't funny to a Flatter and Abe was a Flatter.

"Maybe you're horse enough to eat hay, Solly," Dave said evenly, "but we ain't. You don't need to get so smart about not taking any hay, neither. There's gonna be another year."

"By that time you Flatters will be starved out and you'll sell your places to me like I've been asking you to for the last five years."

"Then you're nothing but a thief."

When a man was rich like Smiling Jim Solly and had the power and dignity that money gave him, and when he liked to have other folks bow and scrape around, you didn't call him a thief—not more than once. Solly wasn't smiling. Nobody was laughing. It was the first time Dave had seen Solly when he wasn't smiling.

"You're a brave man or a fool," Solly said slowly. "Either way I'm telling you something you'd better listen to. Get out of this country and don't never come back."

DAVE laughed. So Smiling Jim was going to run him out of the country! Suddenly everybody was still. Nobody else had laughed. Dave took a long breath. He said, "Solly, what would you do if your hay burned up?"

He shocked them. Seems it's all right for a man like Jim Solly to make threats and talk tough, but the little fellows like Dave Cray weren't supposed to do that.

They had forgotten to breathe. Everybody but Abe Mack, who took an extra-deep breath—the way a man does when an idea has crawled up his spinal cord into his brain.

"You threatening me?" Solly asked.

"No. I'm just giving you something to chew on along with that cigar. I reckon big talk can blow both ways."

Solly laughed. "Only I wasn't making big talk, kid. I'm just telling you that if you stay in these parts, you're likely to meet up with an accident."

They all laughed then, all but Dave. The laughs were a little shaky, as if it wasn't real funny but they knew Solly expected them to laugh. Abe Mack's was the biggest and loudest.

Dave said, "I'm sure gonna run, Solly. I'm gonna run like hell." He picked Abe Mack up, turned him over and dropped him head-first into the cracker barrel. Then he walked out.

ANN wasn't in sight when Dave stepped into the buckboard. That was the way it should be. She'd come. He turned the team and wheeled up the grade to the top of the rim. He was a little uneasy about what Gramp would say when he heard the way things had gone.

A dozen times since Smiling Jim Solly had come to the cañon, Gramp had said: 'He's a bad one. You can't trust a man who smiles all the time. There'll come a day when we'll have to have it out, and if we don't handle it right, there'll be some shooting."

Dave hadn't handled it right. Uneasiness deepened in him. He felt he shouldn't have called Solly a thief. It was up to Dave now to fight or run, and he didn't want to do either. Not till Gramp said it was time.

He turned off the road when he reached the plateau above the rim and followed it until he came to a cluster of junipers. There he waited—and presently Ann came, as he knew she would.

Looking at Ann was like seeing a million stars flash across a sky that was gloomy black a moment before. When he kissed her he forgot his uneasiness, he forgot about the empty miles and the lonely years, forgot the childhood memories that had been his treasury. He even forgot that Smiling Jim Solly was her father.

Then she was motionless in his arms, head on his chest, and his heart was pounding with great hammering thuds. He was remembering things now, the things that he had forgotten a moment before.

"It can't be this way," he said. "Turn your horse loose. He'll go back."

"I can't."

Smiling Jim Solly came with

What he saw in her brown eyes frightened him. He had seen something like that in a doe's eyes when she was badly hurt. He said more roughly than he intended to, "You don't owe him anything. You owe it to yourself—and to me!"

She drew his arms away from her and walked to the rim. The wheel ruts of the road were like tiny threads laid through the sage. The flat lay below her, the dots that were houses, the brown haystacks squatting in the grass stubble.

"No, I don't owe him anything," she said, "but I have seen him kill men. I know the pride that is in him, and I know what it will do. I couldn't stand it if he killed you."

She mounted and rode away. That was the end of it. The stars were gone. It was a black sky again, gloomy

his wagons; and there was pigtailed Ann riding a mare up at the head of the column alongside Smiling Jim.

black, and the years lay ahead like the twin tracks through the sage. Only they didn't end here in the flat. Somewhere out there, beyond the horizon, lay Dave Cray's destiny. It wasn't here.

Ann Solly was gone. Dave would never look back again; there was nothing to hold him now. Gramp would be dead soon. There was a world to see, a distant world that waited out there beyond where the twin tracks disappeared in a sea of sage. . . .

But he didn't go that day. Gramp listened to what had happened in the store. He packed his pipe and lighted it, eyes narrowed with feeling, face lines as deep as irregular furrows plowed across a brown and aged field. But there was no reproof.

"It's been a good place to live," Gramp said at last, "but I knowed, the day Jim Solly drove his herd across the flat, that we'd have to fight. I've been hoping we'd get it settled afore you had to plant me. Saddle up, Dave. Tell the folks to meet here tomorrow night."

Dave rode that day, uneasiness biting at him again. He couldn't leave today—nor tomorrow. He'd have to wait until he'd buried Gramp up there on the rim, a spot he'd picked out years before. It was a gossamer bond, but it held him as no clanking chain or jail bars could have held him.

He told them all and they said they'd come. Smiling Jim Solly would have to get up in the morning if he wanted their places. It'd take more than a year to starve them out. They'd got along before he'd started his store. They'd sent their own freight-wagons to the Dalles and they'd do it again. Dave didn't have the heart to tell them that they had had money in those days, and didn't now. They had hay, but they couldn't haul hay across those unmarked miles, and nobody would buy it if they did.

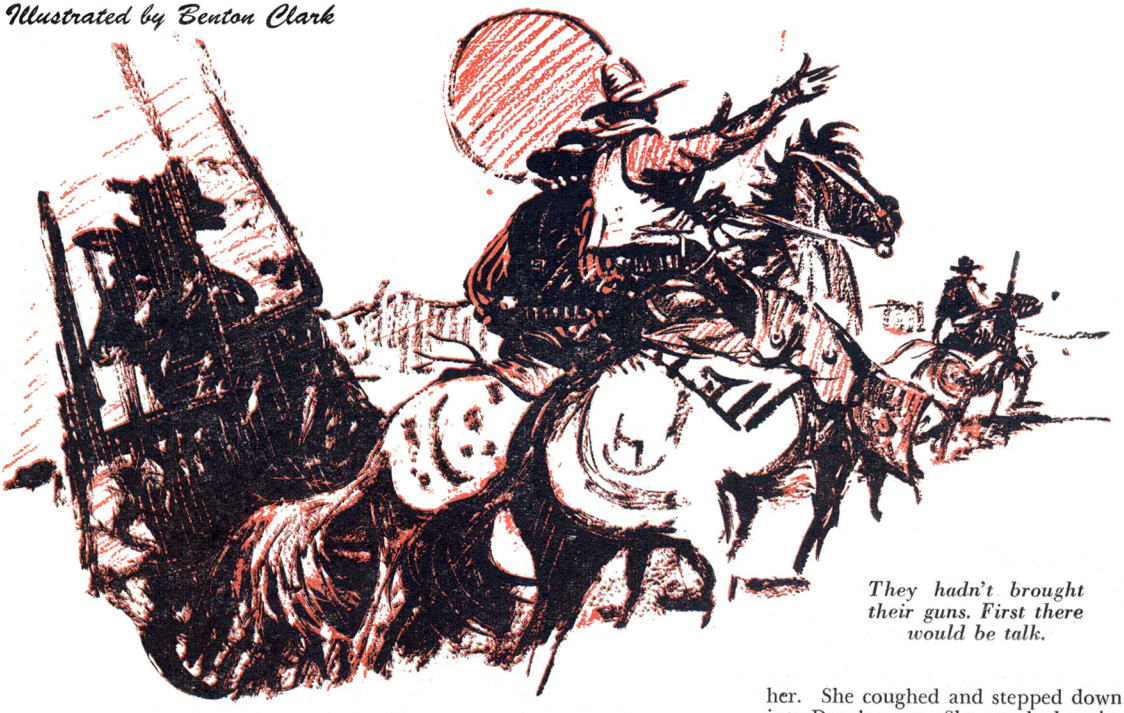
Even loud-talking Abe Mack listened, a grin on his lips that was meant to be friendly, but his eyes had a way of touching Dave's face and sliding off like the slimy trail that marks a snail's passing.

"I'll be there," Mack promised. "Solly ain't gonna push us off this flat."

They were there, with the sun still showing a red arc above the western horizon, the promise of tomorrow a shining brightness above the edge of the earth.

They hadn't brought their women, for this was men's business. Nor had

Illustrated by Benton Clark



They hadn't brought their guns. First there would be talk.

they brought their guns. First there would be the talk. Then the fighting if it had to come. But there was no talking yet. They respectfully waited for Gramp to start it. All but Abe Mack who had much to say whether anybody listened or not.

Then Gramp got up from where he'd been sitting under a poplar, a poplar he'd planted the second year he'd come to the flat. He knocked the dottle from his pipe into the palm of his hand. They stopped their chatter. Even Abe Mack braked his tongue to silence.

"We all came here for our own reasons," Gramp said in his even-toned voice. "That ain't of no importance. What is important is that we put a part of our hearts, aye, our souls, into what we've made home. When folks do that, they don't move off 'cause Smiling Jim Solly gets it into his head to have what is ours.

"Trouble is, Solly's smart. He knows it's too late in the year to get wagons to the Dalles and back. Besides, we ain't got money. Now I've been thinking about this ever since Dave came back from the store yesterday, and I can't see no way out. Come spring, most of us will be riding over to the store with our tails dragging. We'll be begging Solly to give us anything he feels like for our places."

It was true. What would life be without coffee, or tobacco, or salt? They had always stocked those things in the fall when Solly's wagons got in from the Dalles. It was late summer now and they were out. There was no hope except from the shelves of Jim Solly's store.

"We can steal from him," Fred Gable said. "He's fixing to steal from us."

"You reckon a winter's supply of coffee is enough to pay your kids for the loss of their pappy?" Gramp asked. "That ain't the way, Fred."

They were silent then. They knew that Gramp was right. They looked at each other, a hopelessness spreading among them like a psychic plague. The sun was almost gone now, just a red slash along the horizon. The glitter of the sunset had spread to be echoed by clouds low in the east. The deep purple of dusk began building below the rimrock. It seemed to move in now, as it always did when the day had spun its allotted thread.

They were still silent when they heard the thunder of hoofs on the road between them and Solly's store. They fell back, edging toward their horses, thinking of their women at home, of the guns they did not have.

"Don't nobody go," Gramp said. "Solly's a patient man. He won't be pushing—not yet."

It was Ann. Dave recognized her before the others, bent low on her horse's neck, riding as only a girl raised in the saddle can ride.

She came thundering into the yard and pulled up, dust rolling around her. She coughed and stepped down into Dave's arms. She coughed again, and he led her out of the dust.

There was no telling what they thought. Even Gramp stared at her with cold eyes. They didn't know, and Dave didn't tell them—not then. He waited, like the others—not knowing and, like them, a little scared.

"Somebody burned our stacks," she said. "Dad's coming with his men."

They stood like chiseled granite, thinking of this and what it meant, but mostly they thought about what Smiling Jim Solly would do and what this gave him a right to do. But to Dave Cray it meant something else. It meant that Ann had at last cut loose. She was giving to him what a woman owed to the man she loved. Suddenly the golden childhood memories were gone. This was his life. This was his home. Here was his destiny. His arm tightened around her to hold this thing that was his.

"Thank you, Ann," Gramp said. "Does he know you're here?"

"No."

Dave had never told Gramp about him and Ann, but Gramp saw it now. He had a way of knowing things like that.

"Go inside, girl," Gramp said. "I think the way has been shown us."

She went without question. They waited while that last trace of the sun was lost to sight and the scarlet began to fade in the west, while purple slid out across the flat from the rimrock. They heard the horses. "A dozen," Luke Petty said. "We ain't got a

weepon amongst us, Gramp. What have you got inside?"

"The weepons I've got inside will stay there," Gramp said, more sternly than he usually spoke. "This ain't the night for fighting."

They shuffled uneasily, and Mack muttered; but they stayed until Smiling Jim Solly came out of the dusk, a dozen buckaroos fanning out on both sides, guns cased on their hips.

"My stacks were burned today," Smiling Jim Solly said coldly. "Nobody was home but Ann. She was in the store, so she didn't see who done it. Rest of us was north on Cold Creek, but I don't have to have anybody tell me. Cray, you asked me yesterday what I'd do if my stacks burned. You denying you fired 'em?"

"*I* didn't do it!" Dave shouted. "It'd be like you to fire 'em yourself—just to blame it onto me."

Solly's cold smile broke now into a raking laugh. "No, I wouldn't do that, Cray. I told you yesterday to get out of the country. I reckon you're fixing to, but first you had to fire my stacks so I'd buy your crop this year."

DAVE, staring at the man, knew that was the way it would look to anyone. He said, "I didn't do it, Solly. Gramp knows I was here all day."

Solly lashed them with his raking laugh again. "So you think I'd believe the old coot? Not me, Cray. I knew about this meeting you was having, and I'm guessing you figgered you'd boost the price on me. All right. I'll make a deal, but I'll make it my way: I'll buy your places, and I'll pay you a fair price—but you're turning in this year's crop for nothing, to pay for what Cray burned."

"Hell, Solly, you can't do that!" Abe Mack yelled. "We've got to have stuff out of your store this winter."

It was plain enough to Dave. Jared Frisbie, who had been in the store with Mack the day before must have had the same thought, for he said in cold fury: "Abe heard Dave ask Solly what he'd do if his hay burned. . . . You knew Solly would jump Dave, didn't you, Abe?"

"How would I know?" Mack cried, and backed away.

"How did you hear about this meeting, Solly?" Gramp asked.

"Mack told me," Solly said. "He told me he saw Cray riding over the rim early this morning."

"You got a limb that'll hold Mack's carcass?" Fred Gable bellowed. "We don't want the likes of him around."

"There will be no act of that kind," Gramp said sternly. "Mack, be out of the country by morning. You've got no family to hold you. What you did was bad enough, but putting it off on Dave was worse. Git, now!"

Mack left in haste and without dignity. Solly said darkly: "Don't make no difference who done it. Mack was a Flatter. You'll make that hay good."

"You can have Mack's hay," Gramp said quietly, "but you'll pay the rest of us. I wouldn't be surprised if you put Mack up to burning your hay just to give you an excuse for shoving us off the flat. I know what you are, Solly. You came after the rest of us were here. You came after we'd made it safe for your money and your cattle, all the time thinking you'd work it around to own the land that's ours. We'll never go, Solly. If you murder us, our blood will be on your shoulders. It will be in your dreams and in your soul."

"I ain't worried about my dreams," Solly said contemptuously.

"We've had our dreams, Solly, dreams about our homes. You had money to hire your work done. We had our two hands. Maybe we won't live to see the day, but it will come when a million people live in this country. A million people with hands and faith. Your kind can live with us if they want to. If they don't, they'll have to go like Abe Mack went."

"You're a fool, old man," Solly raged. "I ain't worrying about the million people. I'm worrying about the hay I've got to have to get me through the winter."

"You'll have it for a fair price. You'll be fair with us, Solly, because you've got to live with us the same as we've got to live with you. You think your money gives you the power to ride us down. That makes you a fool. Your money can't even buy you the thing you want more than anything else in the world."

There was silence with only the breathing of thirty men rasping into the stillness. Then Smiling Jim Solly, who had lost his smile a moment before, asked: "What do you mean?"

"Ann!" Gramp called.

SHE came out of the cabin and across the yard until she stood beside Dave. Her hand sought his. She held her head high, proud and defiant.

"Tell him why you're here, girl," Gramp said.

"Go home," Solly said through gritted teeth.

"It's not my home now. I'm staying here."

"You see how it is, Solly," Gramp said. "All the money and power and pride in hell can't buy your girl's love and it can't keep her away from the man she loves. We understand that, Solly, but you don't. You'll have to work for her love if you ever have it."

Aye, the sins of man are many, and there must be compensation for them. There must be life, as there is death; there must be love, as there is hate. Smiling Jim Solly shriveled in the eyes of those who looked at him. Dignity garbed Gramp like a cloak, but there was no dignity about Solly. He turned his horse and rode away, his men lining out behind him.

"You can go home and sleep well tonight," Gramp said. "That was the only way anybody could touch Jim Solly."

Then it was just Dave and Ann and Gramp, and the sound of horses' hoofs dying across the flat. There would come a day when the empty miles would not be empty, when train-whistles and the shrill scream of whirring saws slicing pine into lumber would cut the high thin air. There would be people and cities; there would be the echo of children's laughter. There must be compensation, the companionship of tomorrow to replace the loneliness of yesterday, the goodness of the Gramps to balance the sins of the Jim Sollys. It takes time to understand these things, time and human dignity and a willingness to understand.

And Dave Cray did understand. It was a fine land to become a man in—a land where a man could think what it seemed fitting to think.

Singing

Then they were at the top. The blades bit, flashed out, bit again.

WHEREVER axemen gather today in Australia, they talk about the Corbett brothers, remembering the two men as likable giants who could wield an axe faster than a nagging wife can wield her tongue. In Gippsland, in eastern Victoria, where the tall eucalypts climb the mountains like marching men, and where the wedge-tailed eagle leans against the breeze, a brown cross in the blue of the sky, Paddy and Jack Corbett are treated with the reverence reserved for heroes.

They were born in Gippsland, in the country below Mount Kootapatamba. That is aboriginal for "waters where the eagles drink," and it is wild, tough country, the sort of country that finds the weakness in man and tests the extent of his stamina and endeavor. Paddy was ten when Jack was born, but people now never think of them as kids, but only as men, the biggest men in the district, and always inseparable. Paddy was the taller by an inch, the louder in his laugh, the more spontaneous in his friendliness, and for those reasons people always noticed him first. But they never overlooked Jack. He was shy and hard to know, but his presence had the quiet dominance of the tall timber in which he worked. When a man is six feet three and weighs two hundred and twenty pounds, you can't overlook him, no matter how quiet and shy he is.

Their mother died when Jack was born, and their old man, Bluey Corbett, reared them. Bluey was a giant too, the mold from which his sons had come, the top axeman for the timber company that worked the Kootapatamba district, and his method of rearing his sons was strictly rough and ready.

They got their schooling, all right, something Bluey himself had never had, but they learned other things: to care for themselves at home when Bluey disappeared on one of his periodical benders; to wield an axe with artistry and to care for it as they would a friend; and to fight the wild red horses that are the terror of the timber country, the bushfires that can travel faster through the eucalypts than a car can speed along an open highway.

JACK was sixteen when Bluey was killed. He was working as a swampie, helping bring out the timber, waiting for the day when he'd be a faller like his brother and his old man. This day they were working in timber that had been thinned out. There was a breeze coming up the narrow valley, singing a whispering song, and the trees were waving at the tops, like ballet dancers making up their minds to dance but never quite getting to it. Bluey was high on a three-hundred-footer, topping it so that when it fell the smashing of the upper branches wouldn't split the trunk as it hit the ground.

Jack heard the cry and looked up, expecting to see the top beginning its long swishing fall. But the tree was shivering madly in the sudden gust of wind that had slammed up the valley. For a moment that was all he could see, the tree scribbling furiously across the face of the sky; then the tiny figure detached itself and began to fall—slowly, as if it were being held back by its own determination to

Axes

TREES GROW BIG IN PARTS OF AUSTRALIA; CUTTING TIMBER IS SOMETHING SPECIAL, AND THE CHOPPING CONTESTS ARE EXCITING.

by JON CLEARY

live—and the axe which Bluey still held in his hand glinted like a tear in the sky. . . .

The next day Jack left the hills and applied for a job in the mill's office. He stuck that for four years; and then, because he was a Corbett and the father's blood was still alive in the son's veins, he moved out into the timber again. But not as a faller. He took a job as a jinker, driving the horses that pulled the logs down to the small timber train that carried them down to the mill. It was a job no one had ever expected a Corbett to take, but because he *was* a Corbett and one of the two biggest men in the district, no one said anything.

It was Paddy who finally did say something. At Bluey's death Paddy had become the company's top faller, had taken on his old man's mantle and given it an extra shine.

"I dunno why you don't come in as a faller." It was payday, and he and Jack were walking home from the mill. "You'd get more money than you do for driving those blasted nags. You're wearing out your pants sitting on that jinker."

"I can always buy another pair," Jack said in his quiet voice. "And it's not far to fall from a jinker seat."

"Meaning?"

"Dad fell a long way."

Paddy walked in silence for a while. "If I didn't know you better, I'd say you were a dingo. But you've never shown a yellow streak in anything else. Only thing is, I bet Dad would've been disappointed in you."

"You don't know," Jack said. "You don't know what he was thinking that last time he fell."

So Jack stayed on the ground, and Paddy climbed to the whispering, dancing tops, and if people talked about them, it never got back to the Corbetts.

But a timber-worker's life isn't all work, and it is on his day off that he makes his reputation and gives it a chance to spread. For on his day off an axeman likes nothing better than to try his skill against other axemen, and it is in the wood-chopping contests, at carnivals and shows all over the country, that an axeman makes his name.

There was only one show a year in the Kootapatamba district, down at Bunyip Flats, and the first two years Paddy entered the wood-chopping contest he went through undefeated, winning with such ease that people were already talking about him as better than his old man.

One Sunday not long after his second success Paddy was sitting on the back veranda of their house, running the oilstone over his two racing axes. A high sunburned wind had polished the sky to a pale brilliance and in the clear sharp light the frieze of trees along the ridges seemed to be cut from green steel. The timbered ridges stretched away on either side of the valley and beyond the town the river shone in the bright sun as a twisted dazzle of silver.

"You know, Jack, I think I'll go in for some of these other shows. I might even go as far as Bairnsdale, or even farther. A bloke might do some good for himself. There's money in it."

Jack grinned at him. "Your reputation's gone to your head, mate. Some of these blokes outside are pretty good."

"So am I." Paddy's conceit wasn't the sort that annoyed you; he grinned, and suddenly it wasn't conceit, just the confidence that schoolboys have. "I checked my times in the underhand chop and they're as good as any of last year's winners at Bairnsdale. And my tree-felling time was better, twenty seconds better."

"Righto, you're good," Jack said, still smiling. "But how are you going to get the time off?"

"Old Watkins will give me a couple of days when I want them, so long as I don't make a welter of it." Paddy was running the oilstone delicately over the axehead; the edge of the blade was just a thin streak of light. "If I turned out to be good, a champ, it'd buck him up no end. You know what he's like. He used to be a pretty good axeman himself, once."

Jack picked up the other axe and ran his thumb gently up and down the blade. Then he said, "I'll go with you."

Paddy looked up at him, surprised and puzzled. "You mean swing a kelly?"

"Yeah," Jack said. "I used to be able to swing an axe as good as you, once. I'll give you a run for your money in the underhand and standing chops. You're getting a bit big in the head."

"What about the tree-felling?" Paddy said.

"You can have that on your own."

"Still don't like being up in the air?"

"I'll stick on the ground," Jack said. "I'll leave the aerial stuff to you blokes that like to show off."

Paddy picked up a thick chip, tossed it and caught it on the hair-thin edge of the axe blade. "One of these days I'll catch you on the end of a kelly like that. You're giving too much lip for a young brother."

So they took to following the country shows, and Paddy proved his confidence in himself. The only man who could take an event from him, and that wasn't always, was Jack. But in the tree-felling no one could get within coo-ee of Paddy and the time came when he was conceding up to two minutes' start and was still winning. That was when they began to talk of Paddy as the best axeman ever, calling him the Master, and Kootapatamba realized it had a hero.

The cucalypts peeled their bark and the river drank in the melting snows and flooded and the bush-fires stampeded along the ridges; the year repeated the pattern of the years before, and everybody grew older and maybe a little wiser, and the fame of the Corbetts spread across-country.

Paddy and Jack never married, because they weren't the marrying kind, but they went to dances and had fun with the girls and if they broke a few hearts, the damage didn't appear permanent; no girl stayed unmarried for long around that district.

Then in the fourth year of their fame they decided to branch out. They asked for a week off, which Old Man Watkins gladly gave them because they were the best advertisement he had for the mill, and they crossed the border and went up to Sydney for the Royal Easter Show. The Sydney Show is the big one of the whole country, when the bush comes to town and shows the city dwellers just

"They said you was big. But that don't make no difference. It's the way you swing a kelly that wins races."

what it is worth. For just over a week the city speaks with the slow bush drawl and if it is open season for confidence men, the outback people don't leave only their money behind; they leave a reminder that the country can't do without the men and women of the tall timber and wide plains.

The axemen of New South Wales and Queensland, the men from the Dorrigo and the Atherton Tableland, had heard of the Corbetts and everyone knew this was going to be the biggest year yet in the wood-chopping events. The Corbetts were here, and there was also Ben Dyson. He came from the jarrah forests of the south west, a big-shouldered, big-mouthed youngster with the reputation of being the best axeman the west had ever produced, and if anyone hadn't heard of his fame Ben Dyson himself soon put them wise.

"You met this Dyson bloke yet?" Paddy said. He and Jack were standing on the Bridge, having a day's sight-seeing before settling down to the main purpose of their visit to Sydney. Below them the harbor was freckled with sunlight and across the water the houses on the hills of Mosman were quiet beneath the colored crust of their roofs. To the right the commercial buildings downtown climbed one above the other, a jumbled pattern of sunlit walls, flashing windows and plunging depths of shadow. The city looked big and impressive, but Paddy and Jack would be glad to get back to the mountains. "I've heard a lot about him," Paddy added.

"If he can't chop," Jack said, "he can certainly skite. He's been yelling his head off ever since he arrived that he's going to show the Corbetts how to use an axe. You know how to use one?"

"I've got a fair idea," Paddy said. "You just lift it up and then drop it. That the idea?"

"That's close enough. Don't drop it on your foot, that's all."

THE wood-chopping arena next afternoon was crowded. The tiers of seats were packed, none of the spectators aware of the hard boards beneath them and all of them looking down on the arena and the axemen with the quizzical eyes of experts.

Paddy and Jack were honing their axes when Dyson came ambling over toward them. He was squarely built, almost as wide as he was tall, and his red-brown face repeated the pattern of his body.

"You're the Corbetts," he said, and sounded as if he were going to spit. "You're supposed to be pretty good."

Paddy, right off, didn't like the look of Dyson nor his manner. He opened his mouth to give a blunt, impolite answer, but Jack got in first. "We've been lucky. We hear you're pretty good, too."

"We'd have been deaf if we hadn't heard it," Paddy said.

"Yeah, I'm all right," Dyson said. "But luck didn't have anything to do with me winning. Would you like to see how far your luck goes this afternoon?"

Paddy was on his feet now; Dyson wasn't short, but Paddy towered over him. Then Jack stood up on the other side of him, and Dyson must have felt he was back home in the tall jarrah. He looked up at the Corbetts. "They said you was big. But that don't make no difference. It's the way you swing a kelly that wins races."

"We'll be winning a couple more this afternoon," Paddy said.

"You reckon?" Dyson said. "You like to try your luck again and have a little side bet?"

"Yeah," Paddy said; temper was bubbling behind his words. "I've got fifty quid that says you don't win either the underhand or the tree-fell-

ing this afternoon. The same fifty says that one of us will win 'em."

Dyson grinned, a gap-toothed sneer. "This is going to be an expensive day for you. No prize money, and fifty quid out on a bet." He said over his shoulder as he walked away, "I'll collect off you later. Don't run out on me."

Paddy stood looking after him, running his thumb up and down the blade of his axe. "He's the first one I've met like that. Most of 'em are all right, but he—"

"Keep your shirt on," Jack said. He had stood quietly by while Paddy and Dyson had swapped words, but Dyson had been aware all the time that he was talking to both of them. You couldn't separate them. "It's too close to starting-time to get excited about him. And you were a bit hasty chucking around our fifty quid. I'd rather had a look at him first, then had a bet."

Paddy looked at him, and his temper, fired by the brush with Dyson, still had control of his tongue.

"That's your trouble," he said. "You're too bloody cautious. Just like a dingo."

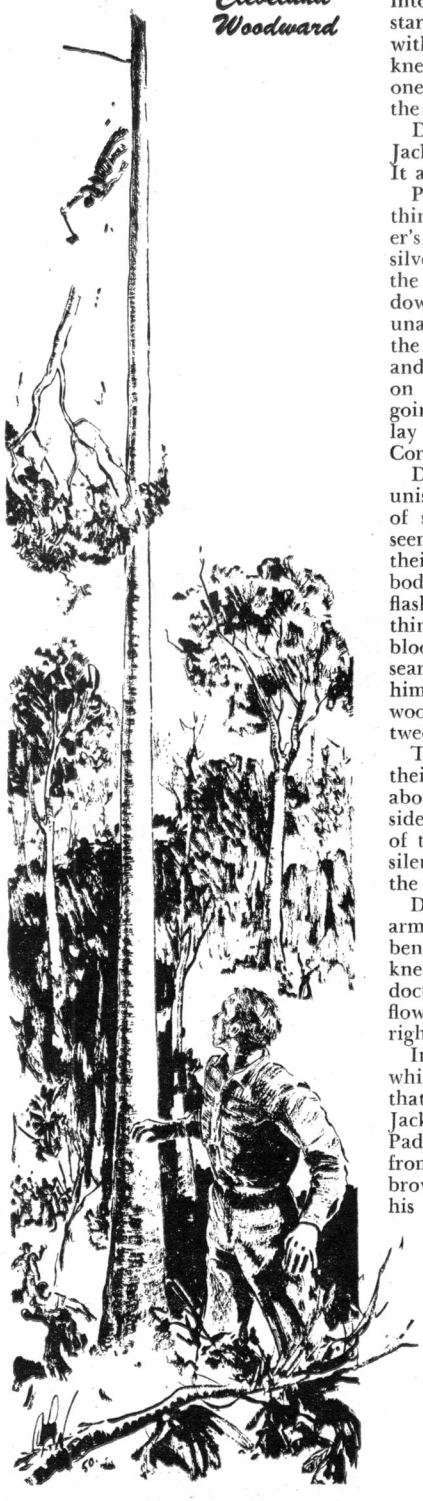
Jack's hand tightened on the handle of his axe; then abruptly he turned and walked off to where the officials were holding the draw for blocks in the first event.

It was the fifteen-inch underhand chop. Now a fifteen-inch log mightn't sound a tough proposition to some overseas axemen, but all I ask is, have you ever dug an axe into a piece of Australian timber? If there's anything tougher than the local hardwood, then it's got iron or stone in it. So a fifteen-inch log is a test of any man's strength and skill.

Paddy, Jack and Dyson drew blocks one, two and three. There were seven other men in the event, but the draw had centered interest at one end of the arena. Word of the side bet, spread by Dyson, had reached even the people in the topmost seats and there was a feeling of electric expectancy in the air; they were going to get their money's worth this afternoon. Beyond the arena there were the shouts and laughter of the rest of the show crowd, the hundred thousand people milling through the display pavilions and crowding round the main ring where the horse events were in progress; but no one here at the wood-chopping heard the outside noise: it was just a distant murmur on the edge of their minds.

The axemen sauntered to their places, checked the steadiness of the cradles that held the logs, rubbed their hands in the dirt, getting rid of the sweat, then stepped up on to the blocks. For a few moments their feet, clad in sandshoes, scrabbled for a hold, then settled down. They raised their axes, easing their bodies into a crouch, and waited for the starter's gun. It was a scratch event, with no handicaps, and everyone knew the winner had been reduced to one of the three men at the end of the line.

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward



Dyson looked along at Paddy and Jack. "It should've been a handicap. It ain't fair to you amateurs."

Paddy straightened up to say something, but at that moment the starter's gun cracked. Nine blades sliced silver arcs in the air, biting deep into the wood; then the tenth blade flashed down. But Paddy was off-balance, unable to strike his proper rhythm, the thing every axeman must have, and to the experienced eyes looking on it was plainly evident he wasn't going to win this race. The winner lay between Dyson and the other Corbett.

Dyson and Jack were chopping in unison. The blades were just streaks of silver in the air and the blocks seemed to be disintegrating between their clinging feet. Heads bent, bodies crouched, sweat-oiled arms flashing, neither man could hear anything but the pumping of his own blood in his ears, feel nothing but the searing breath forcing itself out of him, see nothing but the axe and wood coming away together from between his feet.

They reached the halfway point in their blocks together. They sprang about in the air, turning to the other side of the logs, not even coming out of their crouch. In that moment of silence in each man's body, he heard the scream and the moan.

Dyson kept chopping, head down, arms swinging, the block diminishing beneath him. But Jack was already kneeling beside Paddy, yelling for a doctor, doing his best to stanch the flow of blood from the almost-severed right foot. . . .

In the small emergency hospital, while they waited for the ambulance that would take Paddy into the city, Jack sat beside the stretcher on which Paddy lay. He was covered in sweat from the exertion of his chopping, his brown shoulders gleaming with it and his blue singlet turned black, but

Then the tiny figure detached itself and began to fall—slowly, as if it were being held back by its own determination to live.

"Only thing is, I bet Dad would've been disappointed in you."

when a nurse put a blanket about him he hardly noticed her. He just continued to stare at Paddy, lying quietly on the stretcher, his tanned face yellow against the white pillow. Then Paddy opened his eyes.

"How's it now?" Jack said.

"Pretty grim." Paddy's face twisted in a weak grin. "Wonder what the old man would think of me? Chopping off my own foot."

"What happened?" Jack said. "Did your block slip?"

Paddy shook his head slowly on the pillow. "It was my own fault. I shouldn't have let Dyson get my goat. I stood up to tear a strip off him, and that was when the gun went off. You know how it is. I was trying too hard, thinking about beating Dyson instead of chopping wood." He stopped for a while, biting his lip. "I'm sorry about calling you a dingo. I didn't mean that."

"Yeah, I know. Forget it."

Paddy nodded, and lay quietly for a moment. Then he said, "Dyson. Did he win?"

"I don't know," Jack said. "I suppose so. Most of the others gave up when they heard you yell, but that cow kept on chopping."

"Dead keen to get his fifty quid, eh?" Paddy was feeling the pain; his eyes were thin and seemed unable to focus, and the muscles in his big face moved restlessly. "Get his address. Tell him I'll send him a cheque."

Then the ambulance arrived. The ambulance men carried Paddy out to it, joking about his size and weight, and Jack followed them. They put Paddy aboard; then the driver said, "You going with him?"

"No." Jack looked in at Paddy. "I'll see you later, mate. Look after yourself."

Paddy raised himself on an elbow. "Where you going? You're up to something, I can see that. You going back to see Dyson?"

"Yes," Jack said.

"Forget it," Paddy said. "It isn't worth fighting about. And you could lick the daylights out of him, one hand. Forget it, mate."

"Lie down," Jack said. "I'll see you later."

Paddy looked at him for a moment, then shrugged one shoulder and lay back. "Righto." He bit on his lip again, then he flipped a weak hand. "Don't bring me flowers. Make it fruit."

The ambulance drove away. Jack walked slowly back through the pushing, yellow show crowd toward the wood-chopping arena. In his blue singlet and long white trousers, massive as he was and with the blanket still wrapped round his shoulders like a shawl, he attracted almost as much attention as some of the girls outside the side-shows. People turned to stare

after him, girls giving him the eye and men wishing they had his size, but he saw none of them.

At the arena the axemen crowded about him, asking after Paddy. Jack told them where they could get in touch with him, then walked slowly across the arena. Dyson was leaning against the rail, honing his axe.

"That was tough on your brother," he said. "Tell him the bet's off."

"It's still on," Jack said, and his quiet voice was almost a whisper; the words were soft, but somehow they had the mutter of thunder and the crash of timber and the roar of flames, all the ruggedness of the man's life in them. Dyson's hone stopped dead on the axe. "You made the bet against either of us."

"What's the matter with you?" Dyson said. "You blaming me for what happened to your brother, or something?"

"In a way," Jack said; he stood holding the blanket about him like an old man. "But I just didn't like the way you kept on chopping. Everybody else stopped. But you kept chopping."

Dyson began to hone the axe again. "I been looking through the programme. You ain't in the tree-felling. I heard about you. You don't get off the ground. You leave it to your brother."

"I'm not leaving it to him this time," Jack said. "I'm taking his place. We cancel out the underhand chop, and start from now. The winner of the tree-felling takes the fifty quid. That all right?"

Dyson straightened up, looked at the gleaming blade of his axe, then looked at Jack. "Suits me. If you wanna throw away your money—"

The word got around that the bet was still on. Somehow even strangers to wood-chopping learned that Jack Corbett, who had never been off the ground before, was substituting for his brother, the best of them all, and when the draw was called for the event the arena was so crowded they had to call in the police. But the crowd was quiet; this was one time they realized there could be no distractions outside the arena.

The "trees" are upright poles thirteen and a half feet high, with the block to be chopped nailed firmly to the top. The axeman cuts a nick in the pole, fastens a board in it, stands on the board and cuts a second nick, inserts another board and once again cuts a nick and inserts a third board. Standing on the top board, he cuts halfway through his block, swings down, dismantling his boards as he comes, and repeats the performance up the other side. His race is over when the severed block topples to the ground.

The crowd was still thick in the showground, but strangely it seemed quieter now. Here in the arena there was a brittle stillness, the onlookers absorbing the tenseness of the men walking out to stand beneath their trees. Ordinarily, axemen are relaxed, untroubled by nerves before a race, but this race was different. There was more than just prize-money involved in this.

Jack stopped beneath his tree and looked up. His big face was like a mask and of all the axemen, he looked the most relaxed. But when he looked up at the tree, it must have grown to the height of a tree that lived in his memory, a tree from which a tiny figure had begun its last long fall.

The men were moving their shoulders, testing their grips on their axes, going through all the small actions that suggested nervousness. Even Dyson seemed to have absorbed some of the tension of the other men and kept rubbing his palms on his trousers as if he were already sweating freely.

"Choppers, stand to your blocks!"

The men set themselves, waiting. Then the gun cracked, breaking the silence, and as if the gun had been fired for it too, the crowd began to scream, glad to let go. The axes swung, straight and true, then the first boards were in and the men were swinging up. Dyson and Jack were already cutting their second nicks, balancing dangerously on their narrow perches. Up they went, now seven feet above the ground, then the third board was in and they were slamming the first scarves in their blocks.

Jack was a stranger to this sort of chopping, but the blood of his father and of his brother was thick in him; inheritance and instinct gave him balance, and he worked with the grace and ease of an old-timer. The board was quivering beneath his feet, but he couldn't feel it. All of him was concentrated on the block before him and his axe swung in a wild, rhythmic frenzy, the blade seemingly alight with hate as it bit into the wood. Chips flew and fell, yellow in the sun, and the crowd roared itself hoarse.

Dyson was first to go down. His axe stopped, and he was swinging effortlessly down, dismantling his boards as he went. He was on the ground when Jack started to come down. In the next moment the crowd that knew the Corbetts saw the resemblance between the brothers, another of the things that made you always think of them as a pair. Jack came down in Paddy's style, what seemed to be one long drop, yet he brought all the boards with him; then his axe was biting into the other side of the tree.

Then they were at the top. The blades bit, flashed out, bit again. Jack could feel his breath splitting him apart, the blood tearing through him, his muscles weakening under the pressure. Everything in him seemed concentrated in the flashing silver blade: the shock of it slamming home, the dizzy speed of it as it swung, all feeling in the axe seemed to be part of his own feeling.

Then the blade had swung through and the block had fallen. Jack leaned against the tree, seeing Dyson's block just beginning to topple, a second too late, then he flopped on his board, dropping his head on his chest, and strove desperately for his breath and to quiet the mad powerhouse of his body.

He sat like that for almost a full minute, while the crowd cheered and men clustered at the foot of the tree waiting for him to come down. Then he stood up. He lifted his axe and with one hand drove it hard into the block. He stood like that for a moment, a giant figure against the sky, and there were men staring at him who knew he had won more than a race, had done more than save the Corbett pride. That last blow with the axe had been the last blow in the killing of a ghost.

Well, that's it. The Corbetts went back to Kootapatamba and in time Paddy's foot was almost as good as new again. He was almost as good an axeman again. Maybe he was as good, but this time there was someone who could always beat him, in the underhand chop and the standing chop and the tree-felling. But Paddy never felt jealous of Jack. They were the Corbetts, and that was all that mattered. And anyhow he'd been the champ himself once.

The people around Kootapatamba still talk about that race in Sydney. And at the weekend the kids go down to the small house at the end of town and listen in silence while the two giants tell them how to swing a kelly, what a man must know to be a champion axeman. Weekdays the kids sit in the schoolroom and think of the time they'll be out in the timber themselves. They listen with one ear cocked for the crash of a falling tree, and there are other things they hear that we grown-ups never hear. When the eagles scream they hear in it the wild laughter of Paddy, high on a tall one. They don't hear Jack. But then he always was the quiet one. His voice, they say, is in the whisper of the tops. Kids can see and hear their heroes in all the things of earth and sky, and the Corbetts are heroes, all right.

LEFTY FARRELL

A Complete Book-length Novel

by JAMES EDWARD GRANT

MICHAEL JAMES FARRELL SAT IN THE PRISONERS' wickiup in the Municipal Court, North District, of the City of Chicago, and waited for the bailiff to call a name. Not his own name, but the convenient one which he had given the arresting officers—and for which he had produced proper identification.

As he sat, he looked about him. Some three rows back in the crowded room sat a burly man who wore a mouse over his eye and a glower of hate over his entire countenance. This hatred was directed at Farrell. And though Farrell kept his face bland, he grinned inside at the black eye: the old left hook had not lost its zing. One belt, and Mr. Big had gone down as if hit between the eyes with a Nip carbine bullet. Farrell had seen men go down just so.

The bailiff's voice droned on, and Farrell turned to look back over the courtroom. The blonde girl was there, the *cause célèbre,* so to say; she made him a move of sympathy or affection, or something, and he let his eyes drift past her and suddenly felt electric shock.

The girl was there—not a girl, a woman. She was young, but you would never call her a girl. She had been matured by the time she was twelve. She wore a tailored suit and a link of furs about her neck, and managed to look cool even in the heat of Chicago's July. Instinctively, his grifter's eye tabbed the furs as expensive. He looked into her green eyes and kept his face blank, waiting for a cue. There was none.

He turned away. This was the third time he had seen her. Once when he was walking out of the warehouse where his pinball machines were stored, and then again the night he'd hit—or rather had been forced to hit—the burly gent. Three times could not be coincidence.

From the corner of his eye he could see the blonde semaphoring him with her eyelashes. He affected not to notice. That blonde! Really not his type. But he'd been annoyed at the big man. Farrell had gone into the Stables, a bar where a crap game ran in the back room; and where the players were mostly musicians from the union headquarters up the street and not likely to recognize a pair of flats, or shapes, if the phonies were well handled. He could qualify as a handler.

As he went along the bar to the back room, he noticed the blonde and mentally tagged her as a possible third or fourth choice if nothing better turned up. But women were for later; economics were for now, and so he went on to the back room and shouldered into the crowd around the pool table.

He made a few small bets behind the line until the dice came to him, and then made a point and passed out, using the house dice. Next time around he naturaled and let it ride, and made a point and still let it ride. Then he paused and made an any-crap bet to copper the throw; and as he did, he switched to the flats and bounced a seven off the back edge of the pool table.

A big burly man caught the die on the bounce, and Farrell set his feet firmly on the floor and for a moment wished he had not sworn never again to carry the difference. But the big man merely growled, "Looks all right," and threw the die back to Farrell, who sighed in relief.

Farrell squeezed down the bet for appearance's sake, and did not dare to switch back with the eyes still on him. He threw an eight, and then switched and made it with the house dice. He was two hundred and ten ahead. He squeezed down to the ten-dollar bet, pointed, and missed out. When he looked up, the big man was giving him a loser's look of hating everybody, and winners in particular. Then the big man left.

Farrell stayed a few minutes longer and won and lost a few bets; this was for appearance. Then he went out to the bar and ordered a drink, at the same time dropping the pair of shapes and the pair of flats into the inside pocket of his coat, so neatly cut to hold four dice.

The green-eyed young woman of poise, the one he had seen looking at him in the warehouse yard, was seated at the end of the bar, something long and cold before her. Farrell looked at her until their eyes met, but hers were so full of disinterest that he looked away. He chalked it up to coincidence that he had seen her before.

His drink came, and as he drank he saw that the big man was talking to the blonde; and as he watched, Big Boy went over to a pinball machine and began to play. Farrell slid a few feet down the bar and gave the blonde the Word. Then some more words.

And finally she said with her eyes half-cocked at the burly man's back: "I'll give him the powder-room routine. . . . I'll meet you in the parking lot out back."

THE blonde came into the parking lot, and he stood at the car door, a man of manners, a temporary gentleman with etiquette and all, and seated her, giggling, in his Ford. Then he closed the door and went around to the driver's side—and stopped flat-footed. For the burly one came charging.

"No, you don't," he snarled. "No dame airs out on me. Put up your hands, pretty boy. I'll change your face."

He stood alert and dangerous on firmly planted feet, and his wide, puncher's shoulders were set. The blonde screamed, and Farrell smiled his winsome smile and touched the Ruptured Duck in his lapel and said in polite placation: "There's a misunderstanding, Jack! . . . And fight? . . . I'm a wounded vet, and I'm not supposed to go for any excitement. Heart."

Still smiling, he watched the hesitation come into the warlike face, and the battle-set shoulders droop. And

THIS novel, like all other novels printed in BLUE BOOK, *is purely fiction and intended as such. It does not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any person, living or dead, is used, it is a coincidence.*

"Mac and I are leaving for Eagle River day after tomorrow—fishing. Mac will die of a heart attack."

still smiling, he whipped in the left hook that started from the planted heel of his right foot and surged up until his hips swayed like a golfer's swing and then locked, and the whole hundred and eighty pounds were in the knuckles of the wrist-stiff left fist.

The big man gave a slow, whistling grunt and went on his face; and then bad luck and a thief's instinct caused trouble. Farrell's hand went, as if automatically, into the fallen man's pocket and then he was in the Ford and backing out, and the big man was up and yelling hoarsely.

The black-and-white police car blocked the entrance to the parking lot, and two wary coppers hit the cement and stood looking at him as the burly one came out of darkness, venting loud and anguished wails.

As the coppers came to the Ford, Farrell flipped the ingeniously-fashioned pocket in the left-hand door, and shortly the concealed door compartment contained his wallet and the big man's money, and in his hand was another wallet with other identification. He was anxious not to be arrested under his own name—for reasons.

The big man wailed his sucker's wail, which is sweet music to so many ears; the coppers gazed upon credit cards and driver's license made out in the handy name; and Farrell was booked, charged by the wailing one, and jugged.

THESE were facts preceding his appearance here in Municipal Court. He was not perturbed. The fat man's money had not been found on him. There were no witnesses. It was just a fight behind a saloon.

No, he was not perturbed. He even felt a lift. The green-eyed lady with the auburn hair was in the courtroom. Three times could not be coincidence. She *was* drawing a bead on him. And be it said, he found this not astounding. It had happened so often before; although this, he must admit, was the top of the form chart; the nearest to handicap class.

It had been happening to him since he was seventeen and was a roustabout for Minnie Mitt on the carny circuit. Minnie liked him—perhaps because she hated women and sensed that he would make many unhappy.

She used to sit, two hundred and sixty pounds of her, and sip her gin while he broke the spread and loaded it on the truck. "Mike," she used to wheeze asthmatically, "you're only a kid. But you got that damned way of looking at women. It ain't fresh, or insulting either, but it's kind of got contempt in it. Hardly any dame but will feel she has to prove to you she ain't contemptible. Especially them who most rate contempt."

He learned a lot from Minnie Mitt. For one, he learned the finger language, the modified deaf-mute language that the mitters and the glass-ball workers use on the carny. By the time he was spieling for the spread, he could spill a tip into the tent, and over their heads his fingers told Minnie: "The tall dame asked her girl friend is Eddie serious. . . . They were kidding the little fat man about a real-estate deal. . . . The blonde has a wedding ring but the guy's not her husband."

He transferred the information he gleaned from the chatter of the mob during the spiel, and ever so many were amazed at the second sight of Minnie Mitt.

"Mike," she said one night while he tooled the little truck over a rain-swept road, "you're wasting your time learning all those dice and card hustles from Kansas and the boys. You don't need them. You got eyelashes."

She tilted a bottle and swallowed noisily. "You got something else. It's hard to tell what you think, from the way your face looks. And, that's a help in this world we got to live in. When your face acts like a three-sheet, you give the rest of the world an edge. You can make your face any way you want to, no matter how you feel inside. That's better than the combination to John Ringling's safe."

Minnie loved him, maybe. Like a son, you'd say, if such provincial emotion could be thought a part of Minnie Mitt. But when the Man tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Fort Ord, son. . . . The bus leaves tonight at eight. Don't bring clothes. Your Uncle will provide," Minnie was not lachrymose.

"You won't come back, of course," she said, "and I'm glad about it. Because your pitch should be higher-class. . . . I'm gonna tell you something important. Don't never be afraid of a lie because it's too big or too hard to believe, if you're telling it to a woman. If you've just run through your seventh wife, tell the new dame you never used the word 'love' before, because it's something sacred. She'll believe it because she'll want to believe it. I'm giving you a secret weapon, Mike. That's dames' weak spot. There's some things they want to believe so hard that a smart guy can put any of them in his pocket."

Good old Minnie!

NOW, he twisted in his seat to look at the green-eyed woman. He made his face as bland as hers, and wondered what it was she wanted to believe so hard she would, even if it were a lie. Her gaze regarded him as if he were furniture.

And with his still expressionless face he looked into her green eyes, just a shade darker green than a dice-table cover, he would judge, and a thought struck him suddenly: This dame's eyes are always wide open; never once had he seen her blink. Well, that made two of them; he was of firm intent never to look upon the world or its people without his eyes wide open and wary.

Then the drunk cases were through, and assault and battery became the order of the court, and the clerk called for James Cready; and Farrell rose, this being his handy name.

He put upon his face the winsome smile which was suitable for judges and other elderly marks, and prepared to tell the tale, to wit: he had taken the big man's girl, and the big man had taken to throwing punches; and defeated in combat, had yelled "Thief!" loudly but falsely.

But he was almost shaken out of his aplomb when the robbed one copped a plea. Copped a plea for Farrell—conduct which did not fit in with his previous glares of hatred. Decidedly did not fit in. Farrell recovered himself and listened.

"Your Honor," the big man said, "I wish this whole thing could be called off. I charged this fellow with taking my money, but after I got home, I found it in another pocket. And after I cooled off, I got to admit, I kind of forced the fight on him."

The judge shook his gray head wearily. "You weren't robbed? But you so charged! . . . You're aware you've committed a felony?"

The big man squirmed uncomfortably, and Farrell looked at him. Who'd got to him? There was no answer to all this.

"This young man has spent a night in jail on your charge." The blue eyes under the gray thatch were severe.

Farrell said hastily: "I'm willing to forget everything, Your Honor. . . . I mean, it was just a disagreement—over a girl."

"This is not the first time men have disagreed on such grounds," the judge said, and got his laugh from the crowded courtroom and waved a dismissal.

As they walked away down the courtroom aisle, the big man said from the corner of his mouth: "I catch you in the right spot, pretty boy, I'll beat your brains out."

Farrell said nothing, seeing no profit in so doing, and went down three floors to collect his belongings. The green-eyed woman was not in the courtroom as he walked out. The blonde was, but he gave her a blank look and

Illustrated by John McDermott

"Don't be an utter fool. . . . There's forty million dollars at stake. You hear me? Forty million!"

passed her by like payday. She did not look so good compared to the lady with green eyes.

He went downstairs and got his possessions, which made a pleasant feeling in his pocket. Outside, he looked for her convertible, but it was not in sight. He had expected otherwise. There were four hundred and twenty dollars in the money clip in the door compartment of his car. He felt good, pocketing the enemy money.

He went to the warehouse on Belmont Avenue and spent several hours repairing the pinball machines which were his stock in trade. This was a perfect business. You could not get yourself killed as you could if you tried the slot-machine business, which was the self-appropriated monopoly of certain hardy, quick-tempered fellows. It was profitable, this route of pinball and record-playing machines, and it took him into many cocktail bars and plain saloons in a logical manner. There were crap and card games running in many back rooms. Also, the legitimate occupation furnished a bulwark. The police look quizzically at a man who eats and drinks and does not toil in the open. And a man with a suspended sentence over him is never anxious for quizzical looks from coppers.

His repairs finished, he took his kit of tools and left the warehouse for his afternoon collection and repair route. When he walked out the door the convertible was parked at the curb. She was in it.

His own car was on the opposite side of the driveway. He started forward and she said: "Lefty!"

Her voice was throaty, as he'd expected. He crossed back to the convertible and stood looking at her. He said nothing. Carny motto: When you don't know what to say, let the sucker do all the talking.

The silence hung almost a minute, and then she said without inflection: "Do me a favor, Lefty. Don't wear that tie with that suit."

He kept his face bland. He said: "Beat it, sister."

She sat while he went across the street and got into his car and drove away. In the rear-vision mirror he saw her start the convertible and go up the street in the opposite direction.

When he returned at six o'clock, the convertible was parked in front of his warehouse. He went past her as if she did not exist, never glancing toward her hand-waved gesture calling him over. Inside, he put away his sack of nickels and his kit of tools and got out a deck of cards. He practiced the Memphis riffle and the injog, and then dealt thirds for half an hour, looking out the window at the auburn head in the convertible. Finally he threw the cards in the desk drawer and smoked two cigarettes while he read the newspaper.

Then he left the warehouse. She was sitting as before. She called him: "Lefty!"

He stopped beside the convertible and looked at her. "Do me a favor," he said. "Change that lipstick. It makes you look like a B-girl who was lucky enough to stumble into a charge account. And I hate type-casting."

She laughed silently, her oddly tinted eyes regarding him. "Lefty," she said, "accept my apologies. I thought because you were a cheap dice hustler and an ex-carnival shot, I could talk to you as if you were a cheap dice hustler, and so forth."

He said: "A lot of guys must have slapped you in the mouth before now. Or anyway, should have. . . . What did you give the big clown to make him sing so sweet in the courtroom?"

"I had him given a thousand." She was offhand.

Farrell snorted. "That's five-eighty profit for a mouse on his eye."

"Chicken feed," she said. "Think in pennies, and you wind up with pennies."

He said: "I'm beginning to fall in love with you."

She opened her purse and took out a thousand-dollar bill which she put on the seat.

He looked at her calmly. "You want change for that?"

She laughed, and her teeth were unbelievably white. "Farrell," she said, "I keep underestimating you."

"Yes," he said, "you do. And your third strike may come up any minute. Our brief acquaintance may end on a sour note. So be a nice little broad and keep your tongue in hand."

"Broad," she said. "Broad?"

"Figure of speech," he said. "By no means advice against wearing slacks—nothing to do with your figure."

She said: "Our acquaintance may end on a sour note, at that."

He looked at her for a long moment, very level.

"Just you listen to me close, real close," he said. "Also, if you look at me close, real close, you'll see I'm wearing long pants. Feel my face. I shave. I'm all growed up. If I was ever in one place long enough, I'd vote. So I don't get dictated to by dames, even ones designed like you, with next year's chassis. So take that order-giving tone out of your voice from here in."

She heard him out, and there was silence, and then she said: "Get in."

He said: "Get out."

The unblinking look weighed him, but she did not ask for a reason. She opened the door and got out. When she stood before him on the sidewalk, he nodded grudgingly: "You're the right size. I like the head-on-shoulder type of broad." He leaned closer and sniffed. "And you smell of soap and showers. I can't stand perfumy dames."

LONG-LEARNED precept: be rude to a dame only so long. Then say something she can take to heart. Quoth Minnie: a woman's got to have something she can kind of embroider up for her vanity. Toss one of those pieces of embroidery in among a ton of insults, and guess what she chooses to wear over her heart and keep under her pillow at night.

But looking down into the green eyes, he knew he had not fooled this woman an iota. There was admiration in the way she was looking at him, but it was admiration for technique: an artist approving a fellow-craftsman's brushwork.

Her laughter trilled. "I certainly underestimated you, Lefty," she said. "I thought you'd be an utter mug. But you have class. You're an adroit workman. Me too. Get in."

There was a tickle inside him. This doll was used to being the manipulator; she ran the show. Well, let's see what the future will bring.

He kept his face considering, as if he might refuse her invitation, and then waved his hand carelessly. "I'll drive," he said, and put her in the car and got behind the wheel.

He put the car under a tree on a curve in a parkway, shut off the motor and looked at her. "Let's see how deep the water is, luscious. . . . What do you need me for?"

She spoke in her slow, confident deep-throated way—with no particular inflection; just a statement of fact. "I don't need you. Maybe I can use you."

He said: "What's the loser's end?"

"Jail," she said. "That shouldn't frighten you. Not on the basis of your past."

He looked at her. "You and J. Edgar!" he said. "*Thorough* is the word for you."

Her eyes got quizzical. "Tell me something. On the record, you ought to talk dese, dem and dose. . . . And yet, when you wish, your English is good enough, and there's no Hell's Kitchen in your accent."

"Brother Aloysius," he said. "Chalk up one for the good brother. He took a liking to me."

"Illinois House of Correction for Youth?"

He nodded. "You got me blueprinted, luscious. He taught me to talk and to read and some other things."

"He try to teach you honesty?"

His chuckle was without humor. "You should understand. There's some people allergic to honesty. I wonder how much trouble that's made for the guy whose wedding ring you're wearing?"

She said: "Don't let that worry you."

"I wasn't going to. Anyway, there's your answer. The brother took special pains with me. He liked me."

"I'll bet," she said. "I'll bet so many people have. Mostly women."

"That," Farrell said, "is not discussible. A gentleman never mentions a lady's name in a saloon—or in a parked car with another dame. You told me the loser's end. What's the winner's end?"

She said: "You can get rich."

"A deal," he said promptly. "And your end?"

"I get richer than that," she said.

He looked at her a moment. Then he reached across and pulled her against him. "Let's have a little something on account."

There was a statue in his arms. A statue carved of ice. He let her go and said: "That was little enough."

"I hated Romeo," she said. "And Tarzan, too. And Casanova also. . . . Any time I want you, you'll know you've been sent for."

She slid a little on the seat and pulled the thousand-dollar bill out from under her. He looked at it as it lay on the seat between them.

He said, casually: "All that for me? Goodness gracious!"

"It depends," she said. "Would you trade half of the first joint of your little finger for that?"

She was completely matter-of-fact. Experience had made him hard to surprise, but he showed his surprise now, looking at her.

"*Una mas?*" he said. "That's Mex for 'once more,' please."

She took a small gold pencil from her purse and made a line across his finger just above the nail. "Your finger's got to be cut off up to there."

"Dracula," he said, squinting at her. "You don't look it, but you sound it. You're not on goof balls, are you, luscious? You don't puff those long slim weeds?"

Her gaze was unruffled. "All you have to do is say yes or no."

"I'm to get a grand for having that much of my little finger cut off?"

"The thousand is just a one-hundredth of one per cent advance. Earnest money."

"You intrigue me, luscious," he told her. "But nine-tenths of an iceberg isn't visible. Hidden under water. Cold water. You remind me of an iceberg in more ways than one. I may go along with you. But I want to look at the ledger. Tell me all about it, and then I'll say yes or no."

She lit a cigarette before she answered him. "No," she said calmly. "I need a black-haired man with blue eyes, just thirty-two years old. With half a finger-joint missing. That's enough for you to know. Because while I am completely limp with admiration for your tall, wide-shouldered frame and your manly profile, and your positively ever-so-virile self-assurance, I have sincere doubts of your intelligence. Say yes or get out."

"We have just returned to the Insult Department," he said. "I guess with you it's habitual. You're on it like a mainliner. And I got a rule against slapping mice, no matter how flip they get. My rule isn't based on being a gentleman. It's just that there's so many, so very many, mice. Let's not say adieu; just good-by."

He got out of the car and walked around to the curb-side. She caught his sidelong look as he passed in front of her and said: "Don't trouble memorizing the license number. It's a rented car."

She turned the key in the ignition, and the starter made its plaintive sound. "I'm disappointed in you, Michael Lefty Farrell," she said. "I never expected caution from you."

He waited until the motor sounded, and she dropped the gear lever into the forward notch, and he said: "I'll go as far as that quarter-inch of finger for that grand."

It could not be said she sneered; it was just that her smile said she tabbed him second-rate. He looked at her and said: "Your face tells me that isn't good enough. I've got to go all the way or not at all. Right?"

She nodded. "Cross the Rubicon or stay on the bank. See! I read books."

He said: "Why don't I just take your grand and then tell you fond farewell?"

Her laughter tinkled. "Because you're a thief, Lefty. That's why you won't."

"That," he said, "you can prove on the record—and is a perfect reason why I might air with your thousand."

"No," she said. "A thief is like a hop-addict. A quarter-grain only makes them want a bigger bang."

She moved the gear lever. He said: "Wait! I'm thinking. I may go along. Love makes a man do so many things. I feel it urging me on."

"There'll be time for love," she said. "And now you've had time to think."

THE car moved minutely, and he said: "Put an asterisk beside my name. I'm in!"

She motioned him into the car and moved to give him room. The thousand-dollar bill was still on the seat. She pointed at it, and he put it in his pocket.

"One more thing," he said. "One more important thing, luscious: Don't call me Lefty."

"Why not?"

"Never mind!"

She smiled. "Don't call me a broad."

"Deal," he said. "What now?"

Her head nodded across the park. "The Park Emergency Hospital. You walk in with your smashed finger, and the doctor snips. You don't tell him your right name. And you say your finger was caught between the posts of a gate over there by the swan lagoon."

"And how," he asked, "does it really get mashed?"

Her eyes were calm, meeting his. "You put it in the car door-jamb. Up to the pencil mark. And then close the door."

"There was a kid in the reformatory," he said. "Loved to cut off cats' tails."

"There is nothing Freudian in this," she said flatly. "Afraid?"

He got out of the car again, leaving the door open.

She said: "In the front opening. By the hinge. The metal surfaces meet very closely there. Just up to the pencil mark."

The muscles in his back were tense as he put his finger in the door-jamb.

She said: "Don't look at it. You may pull away automatically. It'll be worse if we have to do it twice. Look at me—and meet me here Wednesday at noon."

They looked into each other's eyes, and she smiled, and with no motion that he saw, slammed the door. The pain hit him, and his nostrils narrowed and he could feel hurt in his jaws from the clenched teeth. She opened the door, and he put a handkerchief around the smashed finger and she leaned out of the car and pulled his white face down to hers and kissed him; and she was not a statue then, of ice or of any other substance.

"Farrell!" she said. "That's something on account."

He watched the convertible move off, and turning, walked toward the sign that said EMERGENCY HOSPITAL.

Chapter Two

HE SAT IN THE LADIES' BAR AT THE ATHLETIC Club in a gloomy booth, ordered a soft drink and waited for Vincent. A tall blond man sitting with two women let his eyes meet hers with careful carelessness, and she gave him a hard glare of annoyance. The tall man's hair was as if marceled, rolling back in even waves—and blond, even as the hair of Joe Mervyn.

After six—no, seven years, she thought bitterly, any remembrance of Joe Mervyn set her teeth on edge. At times she wondered how her dead father would have reacted to the tale of her association with Joe. He probably would have laughed. That big fellow with all the chins? St. Peter calls him "Whirling" Ben. Keeps spinning in his grave—laughing.

The high-grift crowd had known him as Large Ben, and he was a top roper for Charley Kress' big stores, which were located in Miami and Atlantic City; moving with the seasons and the marks, who are sun-followers and so peripatetic. Large Ben had seen that she got an education, though it was in many different schools and was, some might say, unique in its fashion. When she was not in school somewhere, he let her travel with him; and by the time she was fourteen, she knew all the scores. For amusement, Ben once let her find the leather for a mark—on a boat from Havana to New York. He later rode the mark to Miami, where he was roped and put on the send and came back with a bundle. Ben's end was close to twenty thousand, and he blew it all for pearls, which he sent to Brandy where she was in school in Cincy.

To find the leather is a business-man's term among the gentlemen engaged in the high-grift business. In company with a mark (or sucker or mooch or chump or tab or savage or barbarian, or any of the other thousand words for "victim"), the confidence man finds a wallet; this wallet is stuffed with money, but more important, it is the property of a man high in the circle of horse-racing, stock-trading, grain-trading, or some similar game of chance, legitimate or otherwise. The mark, or mooch, or et cetera, cannot fail to believe in the honesty of a man who would return such a wallet, nor trust in the advice of the grateful loser when it is returned. This is what sales managers in big office buildings describe as "winning the prospect's confidence."

She was still in school in Cincinnati, though she was twenty then, when Ben and Charley put another mark on the send. To Goshen, Indiana (a strange place it always seemed to her), and this particular mark came back on schedule, but without the bundle. Instead, he brought back the vigilant officers of the law. Something went wrong with Charley's cool-out—which is a hazard con-men have to face philosophically—and each got a couple of years.

She saw Ben the last time in the prison hospital at Lauderdale. They'd opened him up, shaken their heads, and just sewed him up again; and he knew he'd made his last point-out. . . . He wept no tears; let it be said for the high-rolling grifters, they know there are two sides to a coin.

He said: "Brandy, there are those who'd say I was a lousy father. . . . I don't know about that. Talker Bent-

ley in Philly—you know him—has the location of a couple of boxes. What's in them is yours, and nobody else can get at the stuff. I don't know how much it is exactly, but you won't have to hustle hash—or anything else."

He coughed for a full minute. "There's one thing, though: I kind of worry about you. You're a little too hard-headed. That sounds funny, coming from me. But I always got my laughs. You don't."

She said: "Don't worry about me, Ben. I'm smart. You made me smart."

"I did that," he said, "but I didn't make you cold-blooded—and you are. Well, what the hell! . . . There's no sense us bawling all over each other like 'East Lynne' or a pair of marks that found out the payoff wasn't there. So long!"

She got up and walked out, and four days later Ben was dead. And in Philly, Talker Bentley took her to the two safety-deposit boxes, and she picked up just under fifty thousand dollars in cash. And be it said, there was no such nonsense as probate fees and inheritance tax. Such troubles are for marks.

She met Joe Mervyn beside a swimming-pool in Beverly Hills, California, which seemed an excellent place to meet people with money. His hair had ever such even waves and was blond, which went well with a mahogany tan, and his smile was bright and open and honest.

And in six months Joe Mervyn had her money and her pearls; and she had experience, which is said to be of considerable value. And what made the sight of a marceled man nauseous to her was more than the money. She had been played for a mark.

She worked in a tab show, and she was a waitress, and for a short time a showgirl in a musical that took a month to die on Broadway; and by then Charley Kress was out and operating, and she went to him.

He blinked morosely. "Brandy," he said, "I'll give you some dough for Ben's sake. . . . But I hate to use a woman on the grift. They steer well because the marks are easy for them to find. But they always bobble the later play. It's got to do with emotions. Especially a stand-out dame like you, with all of nature's equipment."

"Charley," she said, "don't worry about me and emotions. Not ever!"

The fifth mark was Vincent Mailer, whom she met on the Super Chief. He went for ten like the tweedy gentleman he was, and never raised a beef. He was even superlatively regretful that she had lost a little money when the tip they had received so fortunately had turned out wrong, and a different horse had crossed the finish line.

She cooled him out very nicely and shipped him to his home in Chicago, with a firm date for Saratoga next season—and a week later was no end surprised when she opened the door of her Biloxi Hotel suite for the expected room-service waiter with breakfast. Vincent Mailer stood there, tweedy as ever.

He gave her his reserved smile, and entering, put his hat on her bed, hoping aloud she was not superstitious. While they looked at each other, there was another knock at the door, and this time it was her breakfast. He waited to kiss her until the waiter was gone and then seated her and spread her napkin.

She was Ben's daughter, and words came easily, and he listened politely through some chit-chat.

"Brandy," he said finally, "stop it. I'm a lawyer, you know. I understand confidence men—or women—shy away from lawyers. I guess you didn't know my profession at first." He looked at her for a moment and smiled. "You can save all the rebuttals. I am not here to call the police. I freely admit I can prove nothing. I met a girl. She found a wallet that had some clippings identifying a man as the top horse-race fixer in that shabby sport. Grateful for the return of his wallet, he let us bet the same horse he did. With *his* bookmaker. I, of age and reason, bet ten thousand dollars on a horse who lost. . . . That's past! . . . Let us go on to the next point. Will you marry me?"

Big Ben's training proved its worth. She kept her face straight. "Why?"

"The reasons are too numerous to mention," he said. "One, I have ridden the Super Chief a thousand times. Not often alone. Yet my last trip stays in my mind as such a happy interlude, such a satisfying interlude, that I don't mind in the least that its finale cost me ten thousand dollars. That's reason enough."

She said, knowing what to say: "Me too. . . . After the Chief, I regretted having to go on with the play. But the wheels were in motion then."

Perhaps she'd have said it without Ben's training; she had an instinct for the proper thing to say to marks. "And I know I show how flustered I am. Well, I *am* flustered. And proud, too—that a rich man should want to marry me."

His outspread hands stopped her. "Let's keep the record straight. I am not rich. I have a big income, but I am not rich. There is a difference, the tax structure being what it is. But I have enormous prospects." The light-blue eyes looked into hers. "I am not rich, but I live as if I were. You would live that way too."

"All right," she said. "It's a deal, Vincent."

He said: "Before we exchange the required fervent embrace, there is one more reason I propose marriage. I have brains, or a mind, or whatever you choose to call a well-educated intellect. You have cleverness and ingenuity and all the talents of—"

"Of a thief?"

They looked at each other. He nodded slowly. "Yes," he said, "of a trained thief. I told you I have a large income. I inherited a fine legal practice. I've improved it. I stand close, very close, to several of the country's largest fortunes."

She wet her lips and smiled at him. "You think we'd make a pair?"

"Yes," he said. "I think we'd make a pair."

"Vincent!" she said, smiling at him. "I love you. The required fervent embrace now, if you please."

They were married in Hubbard Woods. Mr. Murfee MacIntyre gave the bride away, he being Vincent's most important client.

On the fifth day after their wedding she discovered—or was informed by Vincent—that he was sixty-odd thousand dollars short in a discretionary escrow account which he managed for an estate. She knew the sudden annoyance of the big-time grifter for the short con-man. Milk-bottle thief! This was the high grifters' most derisive term, describing a thief of small vision and without the imagination necessary for big operations.

Here was a man standing in the presence of millions, and he stole a comparatively small sum in a manner that must eventually result in disclosure. It took several years, but she forced him to liquidate most of his holdings and gradually replace the money. She had larger ambitions.

But ever since that evening the phrase *milk-bottle thief* always popped into her head at first sight of Vincent Mailer. It did now when she saw him enter the grill.

He came across the room, nodding to several acquaintances. He kissed her on the cheek, avoiding lipstick. "We're going to the Spanglers', aren't we?"

Her decision sprang full-born and without thought. "I can't," she said. "There's something I must do."

He sat down, his face resentful.

She said: "Don't act like that. I think I've found the man."

"*A* man?"

"Don't be so damned tiresome!"

There was a minute's silence, and she said: "Don't be an utter fool. . . . There's forty million dollars at stake. You hear me? I'll say it again. Forty million! Would you ever have been able to think that big?"

"No," he said, still sullen, "I wouldn't have. And it still frightens me when it's said aloud."

She said: "I'm not frightened."

He glowered and she put out a hand toward him momentarily and said, "Don't be an idiot, Vincent. . . . You know I've spent months checking every criminal record available in the State—we must have a man with a criminal record—and now that I've found him, there's a million things I must do. I just can't go to the Spanglers tonight."

His hand on her wrist stopped her rising. She met his hot, resentful eyes. He said, hoarsely: "It's not that damned Tod, is it?"

"No," she said evenly, "it's not that damned Tod."

"He infuriates me! A gigantic oaf with the I.Q. of a land-crab."

She said: "We need him. Or we might."

"Promise me!" he said. "Promise me it's not Tod!"

"I promise," she said, and with a motion of her hand brought a waiter to their table. "Bring Mr. Mailer an old-fashioned, Irving, made his special way. And give him the check for my drink." She smiled down at Vincent. "I must run! See you later, darling."

She brushed her lips against his cheek and went out.

In the lobby she stepped into a pay phone and dialed a number. When Farrell's voice answered, she said: "Farrell, I want to see you."

There was a pause, and then he said: "I guess it's all right. I've got a date, though."

She chuckled softly, knowing he would say just that, whether or not. "Look, Farrell," she said. "Drop the technique. Also your date. . . . Just stay where you are. . . . I'll come there. Of course I know the hotel. I know all about you, Farrell."

In his room Farrell dropped the receiver in its cradle, gazed at his bandaged finger and grinned. "Not all, baby," he said. "But keep living in your dream world."

Chapter Three

HE MET HER IN THE PARK. THREE MONTHS had gone by, and they had met many times—either in the Park, or in the North Side apartment she had him get. She'd given him the money for the rent. But though she was loose with money, she'd insisted on his keeping the job with the pinball outfit, for the same reason he'd kept it before: a dice hustler with a record needs a legitimate job in case of any trouble with the vigilant officer of the law. Strangely, he had something over fifteen thousand dollars of his own, part in his pocket and part in a box in an all-night safe depository on Halsted Street, but he let her pay the bills. Had the righteousness of such conduct been questioned, he would have been surprised no end.

The apartment was spacious and overlooked the lake. It had a record-player, and within a month had a large, oddly mixed library of records. Her taste in music was as varied as in other things. She spoke a reasonable French, and her choice in clothes was faultless. Once, killing time in a Michigan Avenue shop, she'd amazed him by discussing a Beardsley etching at length with an impressively bearded art dealer; and that night she had shown him a switch on the Mississippi heart hand that he had never known.

She laughed when he thought all this odd. "You can learn a little something from any man," she said. "Add up a great many little somethings, and you've got a lot."

"There isn't a man who doesn't regret something."

Minnie Mitt! One of the weapons a woman uses best is jealousy. She wanted him to be jealous!

So Farrell laughed. "You've met smarter men than I met dames, then. None of mine spoke French."

"That," she said, "I learned from a book."

A month went by, and he still called her Luscious. He knew neither her name nor her plan. He knew that she was still judging him, weighing him in for some possible part in a play. And he knew it was a big play.

Once when she left the apartment he took out down the back stairs and went through the alley and down a cross-street to Sheridan Road, intending to take a cab and tail the convertible. As he came onto the Drive, she stepped out of a shop doorway.

The look she gave him held contempt.

She said: "Farrell—can't you forget you're a cheap dice hustler?"

"Natural curiosity," he said, trying lamely to be flip.

"It's time you were told something," she said. "We're aiming at forty million dollars. Go home, and try to act big time."

She watched him while he went around the corner. He had grinned at her as he turned away, but inside, he was fuming. She had the whip hand, and he was trotting home like a slapped school kid. And what was worse, he knew she knew who held the whip and relished it. He went back to the apartment. . . . Forty million! He grinned. He'd let her hold the whip. For now.

NOW she came along a gravel walk and took his hand as he got up from the bench. She looked at the amputated finger-end.

"Good," she said. "It's beginning to lose that new look."

He said: "Do we walk? Or do we go up to the apartment and play records?"

The unblinking eyes looked at him. "How do you vote?"

"Records," he said instantly.

She smiled a little. "You're madly in love with me?"

"My heartbeat would bust a doctor's stethoscope all to hell. I love you more than life itself." His voice had flourish and furbelows and swirling capes and dueling pistols.

"You love me more than money?"

"No," he said instanter. "No more than you do me. But each of us knows what the other means."

"Isn't it wonderful," she said cheerfully. "We understand each other so completely. That's because we're so much alike."

"Aren't we, though? Walk or records?"

"Walk," she said and took his arm. "It's not that passion does not cry its urgent invitation. It's that business cries a louder and more logical one."

He looked at her walking beside him. "That walk!" he said. "Like a stake winner coming out of the winner's circle with the wreath of flowers. Luscious, you walk like class. Were you ever a showgirl?"

"Only," she said, "long enough to show myself to the right people. And don't call me Luscious. It sounds like a tropical fruit, like a mango or something."

"My field is narrow," he said, "you being nameless. Unless you want to tell me?"

"Now's the time," she said. "Brandy."

"Huh?"

"Brandy. It's short for a horrible family name—Brandenburg. Brandy Mailer—*née,* a horrible Polack conglomeration of syllables."

"How'd you spend your time before you wound up with all those furs and jewelry and crisp coarse currency?"

"Mostly," she said, "I spent my time wanting them. And scheming. . . . There's the bench."

"What bench? What makes it a special bench?"

"Because," she said, "Vincent will meet us there."

He sat down beside her. "I won't ask who Vincent is. I've had almost too much information for one man to absorb in one day. I know your name."

She smiled her slow, wide, open-eyed smile, and leaned over to kiss him on the lobe of the ear. And as she did, a big limousine slid up to the curb twenty feet away and stopped. The car was empty save for the liveried chauffeur, a hulk of a man with a tin ear and a bent nose. He was looking at them, and the gaze was evil.

Brandy looked up. "Where's the boss, Tod?"

Tod never took his baleful glare off Farrell. "Walking Precious," he said. "I dropped him up a ways."

She looked up the gravel path, and Farrell followed her gaze and saw a man coming along with an ancient cocker spaniel on a leash. He came toward the bench, a tall man, pushing fifty, in tweeds. He had the intelligent distinguished graying head that would befit an assistant Secretary of State, or a Judge of the Appellate Court, or a character actor who played those things on Broadway. He sat down; and when he spoke, his voice was cultured, though his words were short of affability.

His eyes ran up and down Mike and he said: "I find him not nearly as prepossessing as your description. You said he was attractive. He looks like a model in a cheap clothing store."

Farrell took an active dislike to Mr. Tweeds. He observed to no one in particular: "All this flattery may go to my head. I may lose control and strike out in all directions."

The man put cold eyes on him and said in the same calm tone which was his natural way of speaking: "If we go any further with this plan, you will become accustomed to my making statements regarding you personally—disparaging statements."

Farrell said, "I don't get it."

"It isn't necessary that you do," the man said, and bent his head in thought. There was silence save for the asthmatic wheezing of the cocker. Then: "I dare say he's as good as we can do. How does the finger look?"

Brandy lifted Farrell's hand and held it out. The man squinted at the finger and nodded abruptly. "It should look perfect by this winter."

He broke off to lift the cocker to his lap. "Until then the details are your concern, Brandy."

Again there was silence while the man looked at Brandy's hand which was still holding Farrell's, and the look was a silent comment of disapproval. She continued to hold the hand, and Farrell stifled a chuckle. This intimate gesture annoyed Mr. Tweeds, and she enjoyed annoying him. But he kept his face straight and let his hand lie in Brandy's, and looked over the man's head to where the chauffeur was still glaring at him.

The man gave up the silent struggle and rose, holding the cocker. He said: "When will I see you in Florida, Brandy?"

She said: "At the moment I couldn't say exactly."

He digested this, hating the words, and then turned away, walked down to the curb and got in the door Tod was holding open. Tod gave Farrell one last look of hate, and climbed in behind the wheel.

As Farrell watched the car pull away, he said: "I gather that was Vincent. Would I seem too nosy if I asked what the rest of his label is?"

"Vincent Mailer."

"He doesn't look your type."

She let her gaze rest on him. "Could you describe my type?"

"I'm too modest."

"Vincent's all right," she said, "except that his ideas don't have scope."

Farrell said: "You'll handle that."

"Yes," she said, "I will. But you're not to worry about Vincent. I'll handle him."

I'll bet, Farrell told himself. *I'll bet.*

She said: "Some stupid jealousy could make trouble. Vincent will behave just as I say."

I'll bet, Farrell said again silently, and for an instant disliking Mailer, still managed to be sorry for him. Aloud he said: "You told me not to worry about him. Cross my heart and hope to die! I won't worry."

She laughed, and rising, pulled him up. "Let's buy some records," she said. "With a long slow retarded samba beat to match our mood. And go play them."

"That chauffeur," he said, chuckling, "that ape. He hates me because he saw you kissing me. At first I thought it was loyalty to the boss. Then it hit me."

Her eyes were demure. "I guess Tod's in love with me." And she added chastely: "Not that I ever gave him any encouragement."

He laughed again. "I love you. We make such a team we should wear matched harness. Let's get those records with the long slow retarded beat to match our mood."

Chapter Four

IT HOUSE WAS IN EVANSTON.

She opened a gate with a key and took him into a well-kept garden. "Caretaker's day off," she said. "I'd just as soon he didn't see us—though it won't matter too much if he does."

They went into the house. It was not too big, but in good taste. Farrell looked about, and felt an oddness in the house.

"No dust," he said. "But it feels as if nobody's lived here for a long time."

"Twenty-eight years," she said. "Come on. I'll show you the rooms, and you memorize them."

"Why?"

"You were right. Nobody has lived in this house for years. But it is necessary—or may be necessary—that one day you must have a vague, bare remembrance of this house."

He stood there, his eyes on her, and she came to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Darling, why ask questions? Just trust me."

He laughed in her face, and after a moment she laughed also. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to sound like that. I guess neither one of us is long on trusting people. But you can't be told everything at once. I've got to keep it so—rather, Vincent and I have to keep it so that we can drop you out of the deal if we decide to. . . . So just come along until you know how the house is laid out."

He looked at her. "My first hunch was right," he said. "Impersonations racket of some kind."

She shrugged. "You don't get a medal for figuring that correctly. Come on."

They went through the house, and then she went and sat on a divan in the library while he went through the house again alone. When he returned, she was smoking.

She looked at him through a puff of smoke and said: "Sit down, Farrell."

He sat down. She said incongruously: "Do you have any remembrance of your parents? The vaguest?"

He shook his head. "None."

She said: "You've probably got a grudge against them—because you had to grow up without them. That's why you like to fight."

"I don't like to fight."

"Yes, you do. The record says so."

"The guy I hit with the gun? That wasn't smart. But I had it in my pocket, and he had friends. He picked up the deck to look at it. I'd thumbnailed most of the face cards, and if he saw the creases, there would have been a Donnybrook. So I belted him."

She said: "There were others. And then you were a prize-fighter. Lefty Farrell. You must have liked it."

He grinned. "For the dough. But I found it wasn't there. I didn't move well enough to the right."

Her eyes said she didn't understand, and he explained: "A southpaw—a left-hander—has to move fast, often, and quick and always to his right. Otherwise he brackets himself for a right cross. Then birdies sing."

She said, smiling, as if the words had a pleasant sound: "Lefty Farrell."

"Don't call me that."

"Tell me why."

He shook his head. "Don't know. I just don't like it."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Do," he said. "Do, please. You want me to lie down on the divan and remember all my dreams. That's the new racket, you know."

"You were a sucker. And that you *can't* stand. You took the beating, and other people took the money."

He grinned at her. "Do tell, Doctor Broad," he said. "I guess my secret is out. So that's it."

She said, "I can't stand men with evenly waved blond hair."

"I guess you're right," he admitted. "Unless you're a champion, you're a sucker to climb in there." His eyes were amused as he looked at her. "So you were played for a mark too?"

"Just once," she said.

"Me too. Just once," he said. "I swore off for life."

She pulled his head down and kissed him. "I think we'll be very happy together, Farrell." Her voice was a purr. "Here's a little something more on account." . . .

The next day he went to the library. He looked up the Evanston house in the City Directory. It was listed to Mr. Murfee McIntyre. He looked up Murfee McIntyre in the Dictionary of Corporate Directories and found he was on the boards of seventy-three corporations. He also looked up Mr. Vincent Mailer in the phone book, found he was an attorney, followed that and discovered Mr. Mailer was listed as attorney for McIntyre Holding Corporation and many others.

He did not think it necessary to relate this activity to Brandy, and she offered no information further than what he already knew. When he queried her, jocularly or otherwise, she smiled her slow smile and brushed him.

"Farrell," she said, "relax. You're living better than you ever did. Plus me. Doesn't that make you happy? Mainly me, I mean, not the mundane things."

"Mainly you," he said dutifully, and kissed her, which was decidedly not a chore.

"You liar," she said, chuckling. "Relax. Time is what we have an overstock of."

Chapter Five

IN DECEMBER SHE GAVE HIM ORDERS AND LAID out the full play—and he caught his breath. It was so perfect! It had none of the faults of the normal high con which involves lies, which are faults only because if the mark trips the grifter in a small lie, he becomes wary. And wary marks do not manipulate well.

He said: "You laid out this play. . . . Vincent hasn't got the class."

"I did," she admitted. "But it wouldn't work without Vincent's clients. So I'm not taking too big a bow."

"One thing," he said. "This may take a lot of time. Several years. Five. Maybe more."

"We're financed for the long pull," she said blandly, and put money in his hand. "Here's six thousand. . . . I will see you in Florida. Naturally, I'll contact you when I want you. If we meet accidentally, we're strangers."

She rose, and he looked at his watch. "You've got a couple of hours before plane time. Let's play some records."

The green eyes looked at him with amusement. "Farrell," she said, "you're trying to restore the balance to what you think it should be. You don't like my holding the whip; try to get used to it. See you in Florida."

He bought a Cad convertible and added to his wardrobe. There was some trouble with reservations at the Breakers, but within a week he was established there and spent his time lolling on the beach. The rich were there in the usual coveys and in their usual aura of safety. For Palm Beach is the best-policed community in the world, though this efficiency is not visible to the naked eye.

There was a tap on the door his second day in Palm Beach, and the pleasant-faced pudgy man who entered did not need introduction. Farrell had never seen him before, but his grifter nose smelled copper.

He said: "Mr. Farrell. I wonder if I could have a few words."

The words regarded the fact that in Chicago one Michael Farrell of amazingly similar description had been involved in a fight, following what had or had not been a crooked card game, and during said argument, discussion, fight or what-not, this Farrell had smitten a gentleman on the head with a pistol with such force as to make the smitten one languish between life and death for several days. Assault with intent and possession; suspended sentence. A mistake, no doubt! Case of mistaken identity! Two different people, hey, Mr. Farrell, ha-ha?

"Look," Farrell said. "I'd just got out of the Navy, and I had this Nambu automatic. And I guess I thought I was still tough. This guy threw a right at me, and I countered with my souvenir."

"Mm," said he of the pleasant face without inflection. "In Chicago you are associated with the slot-machine game, and—"

"Excuse the interruption," Farrell said. "I have a route of juke-box machines. It's different, you know."

"I know. And you're in Palm Beach to—"

"To tell you to go to hell." Farrell was pleasant.

The copper laughed, and dropped his good manners. "You must not be intending to work, thief—or you wouldn't risk a slap in the mouth."

"Look," Farrell said, "I'm loaded. Look in the safe downstairs. I've got money there."

"Nine thousand, four hundred," the policeman said promptly. "I'm just here to tell you not to work in Palm Beach. Because we'll not only pinch you, but we'll beat your brains out as well."

He rose. Farrell said: "I'm just here for the sunshine and to see how the other half lives. And maybe meet a millionaire dame craving a husband."

"There ain't no such animal," said the cop. "I've been here thirty years. They all want guys with foreign names. See you."

He went out, and Farrell went back to loafing on the beach. He met Brandy occasionally in a little place in Delray down the coast, and again she laughed at his impatience.

"Just keep hanging around the beach," she told him. "You've got to meet the McIntyres spontaneously. It'll happen. Relax, Farrell."

He was bored. In Miami he would not have been. The track and the gambling joints would have provided him with friends in short order. In Palm Beach you are invited places, or you do not go. He was not invited.

By now the point-out had been made for him. He'd seen Mr. Murfee McIntyre on the private beach which adjoined the hotel's strip of sand. The intended victim was small and fat, with a thatch of silver hair and bright blue eyes. He was, Farrell knew, seventy-eight years old, and machines were required to count his money, for there was not that much lead for pencils. He seemed an innocuous character at sight; this Farrell did not regard as too convincing evidence. Guys smart enough to make it in bales are usually adept at block and counter-punch. But if Mr. Murfee McIntyre looked harmless, what could you say of Mrs. M., who was seventy-six, with a gentle vagueness at all times like a woman wondering whether the gas had been turned off before leaving the house. Mrs. M. was almost always surrounded by small children; orphans were her racket.

But though he lolled within eyesight of the McIntyres and their friends and though the McIntyres spoke to almost one and all, they overlooked Farrell. And his orders were to be unostentatious.

One night he got orders to drive down the beach for a meet, as Farrell would have called it, and a conference, as Vincent Mailer would have said.

VINCENT MAILER sat on the edge of the chair in the patio of the cocktail bar in Delray and looked out at the moonlight on the Gulf Stream.

"It hasn't happened spontaneously," he said. "I thought it would. Both Mac and Maida are so abominably gregarious. They speak to anybody and everybody. No discrimination. So damned democratic. I guess we must expedite the matter. You'll see that he comes to the handicapped-children thing day after tomorrow, Brandy. Have someone else with you, and just casually strike up a conversation on the beach."

"Rest assured," Brandy said. "Will do."

"Yes," Vincent Mailer said with no inflection. "I will rest assured. I'm sure you will be able to strike up a conversation with a supposedly strange man. Practice, they say, makes perfect."

"Why," Farrell said languidly, "don't you people keep this lovey-dovey conversation private? I'm blushing. I really think love-making in public is *de trop. Regardez.* I speak French now, too."

Vincent Mailer looked at him from opaque eyes. "Farrell," he said, "you really shouldn't wear that muffler. It makes you look like the young fellow in the advertisements showing how Palm Beach lives."

"Thanks for the advice," Farrell said gratefully. "And let me say I love your girdle. It makes your figure so trim."

Brandy laughed and said to Mailer: "Let Farrell wear the muffler. It's better if he appears a bit *gauche.* After all, he's what he is. An orphan raised without your Groton-Harvard background, Vincent. . . . And let's stop this pointless squabbling."

"Squabble?" Farrell said, surprised. "I thought Vincent and I were such good friends." Quickly he was furious. He lifted Brandy's hand and lit his cigarette from hers. He continued to hold her hand and looked up at Mailer with innocent eyes. "Vincent and I have so much in common."

Vincent Mailer arose. "Follow me back to the Island, Brandy?"

She said: "I'll finish my drink. Go ahead. I hate to follow another car. It makes me feel like low man on a totem pole. Particularly following you. Your driving's so methodical, Vincent."

Mailer looked at her and walked out into the darkness.

Farrell said: "What's that word? Exude? That's what he does with charm."

Her laughter trilled. "You two disliked each other on sight."

He looked at her for a level moment. "Look," he said finally, "sometimes you're different than ordinary mice. And then sometimes you're just ordinary. It gives dames some kind of lift to sit between two guys and feel unspoken battle flowing back and forth. It gives her quite a kick. Because she knows there wouldn't be any battle unless she was there to cause it. You enjoyed hell out of the conversation."

Brandy carefully put out her cigarette, and as carefully lit another. He laughed shortly.

"You're making up your mind whether or not to get mad," he said. "Or angry, as you'd call it. And you decided not to. Because you've decided I wouldn't be impressed."

She said: "Farrell, where'd you ever learn so much about women?"

"I studied," he said. "I studied hard. Look at my toil-worn face. See the callouses on my hands."

"You hate me," she said. "You hate me because I only let you push me around a little bit. And every so often I set the brake and make you sit where you belong. Taking orders from me. If it was a man giving the orders, you wouldn't take it so hard."

He said: "Some of your orders are *so* pleasant to follow."

Rising, she said: "The Coronet. Follow me. Or we could go in one car."

"Let's take both," he said, and deliberately made his face so that his eyes shone with desire for her. And he let his gaze roll slowly from her toe-tips to the froth of hair on her forehead, and approved so visibly of what he saw and at the same time made up his mind that tonight the positions changed.

"I'll be five minutes behind you," he said.

"I'll wait," she said.

"Yes," he said, watching her go out. "You will."

He saw her car pull out of the parking space and go south. He went out and got in his car.

A few miles south of Delray he stopped in front of a cocktail bar. Not that he wanted a drink particularly,

"Millionaires should be careful who they tap for their son and heir. There's all that money."

but there was in him a bubbling amusement. It would do Brandy so much good to sit in the Coronet and wait. And wait. He chuckled, and went into the bar.

Chapter Six

THERE WERE A GOOD MANY SAILORS IN THE place, each wearing a sweater on which was spelled *Melinda.* He'd seen the big private yacht in the harbor. These were the paid crew. This was evidently pay night, for the crew was charging the bar and the slot machines, which in Florida bloom from November to May and are otherwise illegal.

A sailor came out of a back room and through the momentarily opened door Farrell saw men grouped around a green table. The itch stirred in him, though his pocket was bulging comfortably.

He went through the door. Five of the *Melinda's* crew sat around the table. They were playing blackjack.

They looked up and he said: "Private war, or can anybody get in?"

His expensive clothes were not to their liking. He made his grin cheerful. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not slumming. Ex-seaman first-class. Underwater demolition." He picked out the one with the insignia on his cap. "How about it, Boats?"

The boatswain nodded. His voice was slurred with whisky. "Sit down, mate."

Farrell sat down. "Women and children stand back," he said. "It ain't a fit night out for man or beast. What's the limit?"

The boatswain showed gold teeth in what was meant for a smile. "Take it easy on yourself," he said. "And keep your eyes open. There ain't an honest character in the crew. That's Pete; that's Eddie and that's Walter; and the one with the broom on his lip is a low character in spite of his appearance. His name is Mr. Charles Allister. He likes to fight."

Farrell grinned at the mustached Allister, who did not return the grin. He was obviously a gentleman who disliked people. He said to Farrell: "You pushed into this game. Put your money on the cloth; we don't play on jawbone."

Farrell widened his smile and accepted this as humor, which obviously was not Mr. Charles Allister's intent. Farrell also decided that the first accident of the evening, if any, would happen to none other than Mr. Charles Allister.

Originally he had no intention of handling the cards. The game was small, and he was loaded and also he felt good; a dictatorial lady was being stood up; and there was nothing she could do but bear it, whether she grinned or not. So he flipped the cards honestly and made the pointless conversation which men enjoy while winning and losing money. But then mathematics decreed that Allister split aces and double up and hit a king and a jack, and Farrell smiled and paid him two hundred and forty dollars. His smile was genuine-appearing, whatever his feelings.

Twice around, and it was his deal again, and he held it honestly long enough to run through the deck and make the riffle. He gave them to Allister to cut, and then dealt him two aces. Allister split the aces and Farrell seconded him with a deuce and a trey and then two face cards and broke both hands.

The big man banged the table and said ugly words regarding his luck. Farrell smiled and wished him better luck next time, and all the faces looking at him were without suspicion. But then he felt something cold pressed gently against the back of his neck.

He half turned, and a sailor was standing there with a length of what had once been a marlinspike but had been cunningly reshaped for other uses.

This sailor had his eyes half closed, and he was happy. "A guy came around to all the Pacific bases," he said. "Taught us how not to get clipped. You can't see a guy deal seconds if he's good. But if you close your eyes you can hear the snap as the second comes out."

A SILENCE fell, and Farrell filled in with practice. "Look," he said, "this is all wrong. If you guys want to take my money away from me on a lie like this, I can't do a thing. There's a mob of you and I'm all alone. And the croaker at Vets' Administration said my heart—"

The boatswain pushed Allister away. "The guy's got a bum ticker," he said. "We wouldn't want to kill him.... I got a better idea. There's that tattooing joint. We'll have him inscribed."

This seemed genius, and they beamed—and Farrell put a left hook four inches deep into Allister's well-muscled solar plexus. He let Allister fall into the boatswain's arms, and when that gentleman was fully encumbered with his slumping mate, Farrell put a right hand on the boatswain's chin. The others came forward willingly, even gayly. It looked like the proper rounding out of an evening ashore.

The bartender lost a quick decision in the doorway, but the sailor who hit him caught a full right cross from Farrell, and while the doorway was thus cluttered with threshing men, Farrell went like a hare down a corridor and out a side door.

He crossed the front of the place at high speed. A girl in dungarees and free-flowing shirt-tails was putting coins in the cigarette machine. Her coins and dungarees were deposited on the ground by Farrell's hustling passage, and the sailors, always gentlemen, stopped to pick her up.

FARRELL went a hundred yards down the highway and then doubled back. But there was no chance to get to his own car and he had no intention of spending the night in the mangroves. He cut across the fence and was going to make a run for his car when the girl and three sailors, among them the boatswain, came out of the darkness from the hard road.

Farrell went to earth in the back seat of a decrepit station wagon which smelled of fish. He heard the voices approach. The boatswain said: "We'll look around back of the cars, sister.... Do we catch him, turn your head away. It won't be a fit sight for a beautiful young girl who ought to accept our offer of a beer later."

The front door of the station wagon opened. She laughed back at the sailors and turned and looked down into Farrell's face. Still looking at him, she said: "I hope you catch him, fellows. And tattooing him's a wonderful idea."

She drove the station wagon out onto the hard road and when the distance was proper, said: "You might as well sit in front. I carried a sailfish back there this morning. You won't smell fragrant."

He climbed forward and gave her an extra special helping of cheerful smile. She said: "Not quite so winsome, please.... Can't a grown man find a better way of making a living than being a professional gambler? Those sailors don't earn very much."

He looked at her. She was small, and let it be said, ragged. The shirt had come from Navy surplus, and if the dungarees cost two dollars, inflation had set in. She was barefoot.

He said: "Would your name be Huckleberry Finn?"

She said: "A wit. A subject changer. Would you put your arm around me, please?"

"Huh," he said. "Huh?"

"Your arm. Around me. It's simple, really."

He put his arm around her and said: "Can it be that I'm confused?"

"I can't reach the pedals very well," she said. "The man who lent me this wagon has long legs, and there's no adjustable-seat gadget. I need somebody to brace against."

He said: "Tell me the story of your life. How did you get so poor and ragged? You must have tried hard."

"I come," she said, tooling the wagon along the tree-lined road, "from poor but honest parents who contracted mortal illness from overwork and malnutrition. Then a rich man came along. He had a curly mustache. But I spurned him. He plied me with pearl necklaces but I spurned him. Nice work, spurning, if you can get it. Especially spurning pearls."

He said: "Is this kind of jive normal with you?"

"Not at all," she said. "I was merely trying to keep you amused until I could dump you out at the cab stand at Delray—where you can get transportation to go elsewhere and cheat more people."

He said: "Poor selection on somebody's part. They saved the wrong one out of the litter."

There was a four-mile silence, and she turned into a gas station. A freckle-faced boy with an over-abundance of teeth came out to the battered station wagon.

He said: "Hello, Kathy."

"Hello," she said. "That sign: *No Charge Accounts.* Does that apply even to poor little me?"

"Well," Toothy said, "I only work here, Kathy. Of course—"

"Never mind," she said, inspecting the interior of a shirt pocket. "I had some money but I dropped part of it while I was getting cigarettes out of a machine.... Give me one gallon."

"Shoot the works," Farrell said. "Live. Give us two gallons. Even five."

"One," she told the boy, ignoring Farrell. "I had almost a tankful this morning, but I lent some to a man who couldn't get an outboard motor started."

Farrell reached out of the car and took the boy by the shoulder. He said: "Put five gallons of gas in this heap or I'll get out and have words with you."

The gas machine made its clicks, and Kathy said: "If I spurned pearl necklaces, a mere five gallons of gas will get you no place."

Farrell grinned. "You're growing on me," he said. "But not by leaps and bounds."

She pulled the wagon out of the gas station and said, "Gulf Stream or Palm Beach?"

"Palm Beach," he said, and when she turned the car, he saw the 64-sheet on the side road: "THE GREAT SEABOARD CARNIVAL. A MONSTER SHOW—100 ATTRACTIONS."

He twisted the wheel. "You owe me something," he said. "Go down that road to the beach. My father was frightened by a Ferris wheel. I got to ride."

She looked at him for an instant. "Stop it," he said. "You're not my type. I really want to go to the carnival."

HE started the gag to amuse himself and Hudson Maney. And then it grew. By the looks of her clothes, she could use a ham and a side of bacon. By the looks of her clothes she could use anything.

And of course a carny worker never raps first, and so Hudson looked blankly at him over the counter of the roll-down out-count and he looked as blankly at Hudson and said: "My girl wants to try—" and then gave her a hurly-burly of words to persuade her to accept the use of his quarter and in the midst of the hurly-burly of words he tossed in the carny double-talk: *A keyesop feeysore theeysee leeasaydy.* A cop for the lady! Let her win.

And the out-count scored a red number, which is a mathematical impossibility. A red number wins you a ham and it takes cheating on the first add-up to come out with a red number. So if the counter worker doesn't cheat in your favor, you never win, which is what makes an out-count a device of honor on the midway.

So she won a ham and a side of bacon and stacks of canned goods, and Hudson Maney paid and never blinked or smiled. And she won kewpie dolls and candy and canes with ribbons and it was amazing how the stacked milk bottles fell even when the ball she threw seemed to miss.

The back of the station wagon was loaded, and she said suddenly: "A fortune-teller.... I love them."

And he looked up, and Minnie Mitt was standing in the door of the spread and looking at him as if he was just another midway mark. And he looked into Minnie's eyes and gave Kathy a quarter and said: "Charge.... Look into your future."

She went into the mitt stand, and he grinned. So often Minnie had described him ever so minutely to girls who

were sure to meet a tall young man with black curly hair and blue eyes behind long eyelashes. Right sudden, then, they would meet such a man.

He went down the midway for a word with Hudson and Mark and the boys; and when he came back, Kathy was standing in the dark by the side of the station wagon and looking up at the unparalleled sky of Florida, and there was an odd wonder in her eyes.

She said: "She couldn't have seen you. Not from here to there in the darkness. But she described you so. And she said at first I wouldn't like you because you hid your best side—"

"You're talking about this dizzy fortune-teller?"

"I know it's silly—but the things she said—"

He picked her up in his arms and kissed her—deftly, naturally and not violently, but with a note of respect which is, of course, a basic part of the routine. Minnie's motto: *Always make a dame think there's something sacred about it; that's what she wants to think.*

THEN they were facing each other, and suddenly Farrell said without thinking or weighing, which was not usual with him: "That fortune-teller's an old friend of mine. She just told you that to make it easy for me, if that was my play."

And again there was silence, and then she said in a small voice: "I was counting. I almost got to a hundred. If you hadn't told the truth by then, I was going to walk away. I think maybe I was going to cry afterward—but I was going to walk away. It would have been so awful if you'd wanted to believe I could fall for such a shabby emotional device as a fortune-teller's prophecy."

He said: "You're not going to walk away?"

And he couldn't believe how important it was.

"No," she said. "I'm not going to walk away."

He said incongruously: "You're so little."

She said: "Were they right? Those sailors? You're a crook?"

"Well," he said, "I can do tricks with cards."

His mouth was full of cotton.

She pushed him back and looked at him. "That hurts."

"People got to eat," he said. "You should know that. Dollars got to be got. Otherwise you don't eat, and you wear the kind of clothes you're wearing. I'm going to see, though, that you eat. And wear. Mink, for instance."

She was still leaning back, looking at him. "I guess," she said, "I'd feel the same way if you had a big disfiguring birthmark. . . . I wouldn't like it, but it would be part of you. So I'd accept it. If I couldn't change it, I'd accept it."

She put her hands up to his face and looked at him, and it was as if she were sorry for him.

"Darling," she said, "why are you so frightened?"

He looked at her and his brain was not working out the problem in its usual precise *a* to *b* to *c*, but he nevertheless understood that she was the first who had ever looked completely inside him.

"Darling," she said, "don't be so frightened of being poor, of not having money. Once you're not frightened, you won't have to do these things."

"It *would* happen to me," he said. "I would get stuck on a loon. Please," he coaxed, trying for flippancy, for any change of mood that would bring back his courage, "pretty please! Don't knock money. They'll put you away in a zipper bag. That's insanity."

She held him close, and he was seventy pounds heavier and a foot wider and a foot taller, and still it was as if he were small and frightened, and she were strong and sure; and he had a sudden insight that what makes thieves is really fright, and he couldn't remember not being frightened. And he put the thought away—with effort.

"You're strange," he said. "You're very odd."

"No," she said. "It's you. You're strange."

He kissed her again. "Come on," he said. "I want you to meet a friend. Damned if I know why, but I do."

He took her into the mitt spread, and they refused Minnie's gin, and the rest of the mob drifted in; and he said yep, he was doing pretty good these days; and nope, it hadn't been so bad in the Navy; and yep, he was scared no end at Okinawa. And she sat close at his elbow and liked the mob; and she was also beside him when they sat on the tailgate of the station wagon and watched the spreads being broken and loaded. And the mob went away with careless, "See you," and the two sat there and looked at each other.

"Coffee," she said. "I'll make you coffee. But first let's go by the Children's Clinic."

She drove the battered station wagon to the vast Palm Beach estate which was now a winter home for sickly orphans shipped down from the cold cruel North. In the rear of the Home she found an aged watchman who called her Kathy, and whom she called Uncle Gerry. She gave him the hams and bacons and canned goods and also the midway slum, the kewpie dolls and such.

"Hey," Farrell said as they drove out, "that gag about charity begins at home. There were good vittles in that load of stuff. And I want you fattened up."

"I had dinner," she said.

He said plaintively: "One is supposed to look to the future, you know."

She said: "You're hungry?"

"I give up," Farrell announced. "I was talking about you. And you're talking about me. Yes, I'm hungry. What's open about three A.M.?"

"I'll smuggle you into the kitchen," she said. "But you'll have to be quiet."

So they drove into the service yard of a mansion second to none on Palm Island, which is by way of saying the ultimate, and she let him into a vast kitchen and flicked on a few lights and went about preparations.

A kitchen mechanic, Farrell thought. Well, not for long! Not for more than let us say the next ten minutes. Because if ever in her life she waited on anyone again, it would be on Michael James Farrell.

A GRAY-HAIRED man in a dressing-gown came into the kitchen. He looked with neither surprise nor disapproval at Farrell, and said: "Kathy bring you home?"

You could not be belligerent with a man so mild and old and wearing such a harmless face, but Farrell wanted to hit someone, anyway. Because Kathy had to say yes sir, and no sir, he wanted to bury a left hook in someone's midriff and then whip over a right, and so he said: "This is not the information bureau, Pop. . . . If you want to ask Kathy something, she's inside that two-acre icebox."

As the gray-haired man blinked, Kathy came out of the icebox, toting edibles.

She said: "Wolfy, this is Mike. Wolfy's the butler, Mike." She went to the long range with her load. "Mike's hungry, Wolfy."

The butler put out a hand. "My name's Wolfram. Kathy's not much on last names."

Farrell said, "Farrell," and shook hands.

Kathy was breaking eggs, and Wolfram said: "Kathy, I do wish you wouldn't take the gardener's station wagon. It's going to fall apart any day."

Kathy said: "I got a sail—small one, but he put up a very gallant struggle. Sit down, you two. Bacon-and-egg sandwiches."

Wolfram said: "So naturally, you let him go." He put a humorously sad eye on Farrell. "If they don't struggle, she lets them go because they're weak and pitiful. . . . If they do fight, it's because they're gallant."

A bacon-and-egg sandwich can be a culinary masterpiece. They were. So she could cook! And maybe she would. For a man named Farrell. None other.

Malda McIntyre said pleasantly: "The little boy I lost was left-handed."

Kathy bit into a sandwich and eyed Farrell. She said: "Mike, did you ever throw a discus?"

"All right," he said. "I'll go along with any gag. What's a discus?"

Kathy slid off her chair and fell into a stylized pose, using a plate for a discus. "Like this."

"I've seen the picture," Farrell said. "Why?"

"You got a job," she said. "Tomorrow you throw the discus."

Farrell looked at the butler, who seemed unperturbed by this outlandish conversation.

"I'll get you a doctor tomorrow," Farrell said. "They can cure these things now. They put an electric band on your head and shoot you full of volts and amperes."

Kathy mopped her plate. "Wolfy," she said, "put him in the Harrison room. Tomorrow he throws the discus. You can fix him up with the usual guest stuff in the way of pajamas and such, and tomorrow have one of the chauffeurs run over to his hotel and get whatever he'll need."

Ants began to crawl on Farrell's spine. It couldn't be!

Wolfy said without any true concern: "You'll have to explain to your Uncle McIntyre that you brought a strange man home. I just do as I'm told."

"Uh-huh," Kathy said. "Except when you disagree with what I tell you to do."

Training stood by Farrell. He did not utter astonished ejaculation; he did not gulp nor swallow nor give vent to a whistle of surprise. But he was out of words. So she was Murfee McIntyre's niece!

He let Wolfy lead him through the massive house and up baronial staircases and into the Harrison room, which was not a room but a suite. And when Kathy kissed him quickly behind Wolfram's back, he said nothing. He needed time to think, and a grifter knows you must never neglect thinking. And when he was finally outfitted and Wolfram left, Michael James Farrell sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I'll be damned," he said aloud.

There was no profanity in his whisper.

He put his hands behind his head, and furrows knit his forehead. He was thinking: could a guy like him, a grifter with a record, marry a sweet, nice girl, who was the only girl for him, and then live off her money? Would this be kosher? He overlooked the oddity that this was the first time in his life he had ever asked himself a question involving ethics.

Chapter Seven

THERE WERE ALMOST A THOUSAND CHILDREN ON the vast lawns, and the tableaus were almost as big a success as the pony rides. And in the tableau Farrell was the major success. Attired in a breech-clout and sandals, he was crouched in the pose demonstrated by Kathy. But when the curtains swept back, there was first silence and then a giggle here and there, and then a gale of laughter. For the first time in history a left-handed discus thrower had been presented to the public.

When he left the rear of the tented stage and started for the dressing-room, Brandy intercepted him.

She said: "Vincent and I had quite a shock. You weren't on the beach this morning so that I could strike up an acquaintance. So our first sight of you was as a discus-thrower—and left-handed, at that."

Farrell said: "I'm left-handed. When I fall into position to heave something, I naturally grab it in my left hand."

She said: "How'd you get the job?"

"Kathy," he said, "drafted me."

"Where'd you meet Kathy?"

"It's a long story."

"Synopsize it."

"She gave me a lift."

The green eyes were innocent of intent. "Those scrawny girls can get away with that sort of thing. She has a flair for it. However, it certainly suits our purpose."

Farrell's face was bland, and he was somewhat irritated that it was hard to keep his voice the same way. "Flair for what?"

"Oh, the unconventional. Picking men up casually, and such."

Vincent Mailer came up in the van of some people and introduced himself, and the conversation turned to left-handed discus-throwers and was completely airy, and Farrell went to change his clothes.

When he came out of the dressing-room, he had to make his way through a crowd of children, most of whom it seemed to him were cross-eyed. Kathy made her way through kids, and he glowered at her.

She came to him and said: "You were wonderful. I'm tempted to kiss you in front of all the children."

He said: "You in the habit of picking up guys? And casually, at that?"

Her dark eyes blinked at him, and then she grinned. "I'm gregarious. I talk to everybody."

"You did," he said succinctly. "Up to now.... And what was the idea of playing me for a sucker? Letting me think you were as poor as ten-days' rain."

Her voice had a tinkle in it. "I suppose you'd refuse to marry a rich girl?"

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe."

"Relax," she told him. "I'll tell you exactly how much money I have: Fourteen dollars, and an airplane ticket back to Chicago. Of course I get my two weeks' vacation pay when I get back."

Farrell said weakly: "But—Uncle Mac, and—"

She laughed. "Mac and Maida aren't my relatives. I'm an orphan. I was raised in Maida's orphanage—one for children with upper I.Q. ratings, I'll have you know.... I'm an honest working-girl now. But I've always called them aunt and uncle. And they have me down here every winter, and to the Hubbard Woods house almost every Sunday."

Farrell said: "Do you mind if I shake my head? Hard?"

"After cocktails," she said. "There's cocktails for all the people of age in the third largest drawing-room. There's only two hundred, so they'd be lost in the second largest. Come along."

They went through children, and Farrell muttered: "All these kids are cross-eyed or have a gimp. It would be a rough place to walk through with a hangover."

She said: "Today's for the handicapped groups. I was one of them once. Teeth. Braces fixed that, so I have a perfect bite now, in case you want to be bitten."

"These McIntyres," he said. "They must get kicks out of these brats—or else they'd just send over the dough, and not have them underfoot."

She stopped abruptly, and when he turned, she was looking at him oddly. He said: "I step on your foot or something?"

"Maybe," she said. "Don't you get kicks, as you call it, out of seeing these children cared for and made happy?"

He said: "I like my kids all curly-headed and cute as Billy-be-damned."

She said: "You'd better get used to it. I'm assistant director of the McIntyre Foundation for Handicapped Children."

"That's when you worked," he said. "Now you're the pretty girl hanging on my left arm and saying: 'Oh, darling, you shouldn't have brung me them sables, and I already got a bushel of diamonds, and gee whiz, what'll we do with another yacht, when already we got three.'"

Her eyes twinkled. "And have you brung home on a slab some day when you cheat at cards and somebody goes rooty-toot-toot." She pulled him into an alcove and kissed him. "I'll keep on working, darling. And you'll get a job."

It did not seem the time and place to acquaint her with his opinion of honest labor. He seized a moment when people were not passing through the hallway to kiss her and said: "One consolation, baby. We can't have in-law trouble, ever. Me, I'm an orphan, too.... And you let me do all the worrying about money."

They linked arms and went to where the cocktail party was being held in a room suitable for infantry maneuvers. People came, and Kathy tossed off careless introductions, and Farrell thought: *This is fine, just fine. Look at me now, will you? How are you, Mr. Phipps, glad to meet you, Mr. Bostwick, pleased, Mr. Phelps Dodge, and it must be great to have your racing stables and yachts and if you'll please just wait a bit, the colors on that two-year-old going past the wire are Farrell's colors, and the girl standing in the winner's circle is the Mrs., and will you please move over with your small two-hundred-footer because Farrell's* Kathy *needs harbor room.* It was pleasant to know that the rich are just like other people. He intended to act just so when he came into his. Democratic—up to a point.

He was standing in a group when Maida McIntyre came up to them. She smiled her vague smile at Farrell, and looked at him with filmy eyes.

Her voice was as vague as the rest of her. "Young man," she said, "you were very cute. A left-handed discus thrower!"

Farrell wondered why Kathy's eyes were warningly intent on Mrs. McIntyre's face as he said: "Just naturally grabbed that gadget in my left hand. I didn't plan to get a laugh."

Maida McIntyre said pleasantly but without inflection: "The little boy I lost was left-handed."

And Kathy's voice said softly so that Farrell barely heard: "Aunt Maida, you know you're not to talk about—"

The old lady's voice lifted enough to override and ignore Kathy. "He was left-handed. And had dark curly hair."

Farrell was listening to her as the waiter passed, and he automatically reached for the drink on the tray and was half turned when Maida McIntyre shrieked. He turned—to see her eyes riveted on the mutilated finger of his left hand.

As she started to fall, Kathy grabbed her, but in a split second Farrell was there and so the old lady never touched the floor. And then there was commotion, and servants came, and Mac McIntyre and more servants.

Kathy went with them and didn't come back, and Farrell had another drink and was going out the door when Vincent Mailer called. Farrell stopped and stood in the hallway.

There were witnesses listening curiously who could observe that Mailer's manner was disapproving, snobbish even.

"Young man," he said, "Mr. McIntyre would like your name and address. He would like to see you in the morning."

"Michael Farrell," said Farrell. "The Breakers."

At nine the next morning McIntyre phoned from the lobby and asked permission to come up. Farrell told him to come. Then he got into a monogrammed gown and sat in a big chair, smoking a cigarette and wondering just how much money forty million was.

Chapter Eight

VINCENT MAILER WAS WITH MCINTYRE. He preceded the aged man into the room and nodded curtly at Farrell, who closed the door behind both men. Mailer said: "You met Mr. McIntyre at the children's thing, Farrell. He'd like to talk to you."

"Cinch," Farrell said. "Sit down, Mr. McIntyre. You sit down too—whatever your name is."

Murfee McIntyre said amiably, "His name's Mailer. And you mustn't mind him. He's acting like a lawyer whose client is acting like a fool."

Farrell looked at the blue-eyed little man, so simple and harmless—and was not deceived in the least by appearances. You go not gather jillions by being simple and harmless.

He said: "If *you* ever act like a fool, it'll spoil your record."

"Don't believe it," McIntyre said calmly. "I bet on Willard at Toledo.... You know why my wife fainted yesterday, Farrell?... Is it all right if I call you Mike?"

"Yes," Farrell said. "And about the fainting; people said you people lost a small child somehow—long ago. And it had a smashed finger like mine and should be about my age. I wish it could all come out even, Mr. McIntyre, and I could be your long-lost son and inherit your dough. Let's not kid ourselves. These things don't happen, these million-to-one shots."

"Don't they?" Murfee McIntyre asked. "I've won several. At worse odds. Kathy says you're an orphan. Or

so you said. She thinks you may have said it as a joke, as the conversation was on a jocular plane."

Farrell nodded. "I'm an orphan. St. Vincent's—Chicago. When they got me, they guessed my age at about four. That makes me thirty-two. On what date I don't know. I'm a man without a birthday."

The old man stirred in his chair. "Mike," he said, "I agree with you that it's a million-to-one. But in thirty years we've chased a great many million-to-one shots. Would you mind if I put investigators to work on you?"

Farrell looked at him an instant and then turned his eyes to where Mailer sat in stiff disapproval. "Mailer," he said, "beat it. I want to talk to Mr. McIntyre alone."

This was as per the script, and Mailer snorted and looked at McIntyre who said: "You heard him, Vincent."

The lawyer went to the door and turned to say: "I'll wait in the lobby, Murfee, in case you need me."

"I won't need you," McIntyre said. "I may be quite a while. Don't wait."

His tone was affable, but he had dismissed so many people it was not even necessary for him to jerk his head. Farrell grinned as Mailer nodded in acceptance and left.

WHEN the door closed, Farrell said: "I don't like that character."

The old man said: "Odd. Most people do."

"He talks down to me," Farrell said. "I can't go for people talking down to me."

"I can't either."

Farrell turned to look at the tycoon. "Who the hell could talk down to you?"

"Not many. Not now. But in fifty years there's been an impressive total. What was it you didn't want Mailer to hear?"

Farrell said: "Secret. You'll keep it?"

"Yes."

Farrell got up and paced the room. "You're going to check up, whether I give you the nod or not. It isn't necessary, Mr. McIntyre. I know. The orphanage has no record past some friendly soul finding me on the street—there's not even a record of on what street—and bringing me to the Halsted Street police station. From there I went to St. Vincent's. Nobody ever appeared to claim me. It's not unusual. There're a hundred or so kids found every year and never claimed."

McIntyre said: "You tried to investigate your past, then?"

Farrell stopped and looked at him for a moment. "No," he said, "I didn't. But the criminal investigation department of the District Attorney's office of the State of Illinois did."

"You had some trouble with the law?"

"On occasion. Look, Mr. McIntyre, I know even a man in your spot, sitting on the top rung and looking down, is sucker enough to hope for a happy ending in a thing like this. I imagine you and your wife have suffered a lot all these years. I'll bet a lot that you'd have felt better if you could even have been sure the kid was dead. That would have been better."

"Much better," McIntyre said with quiet earnestness.

Farrell said sincerely: "I'm sorry for you. But I say drop the whole damned thing. I'm not your kid. I know that somehow, even though there may be a long-shot chance. I know it. And if I were, you'd be disappointed."

The old man scowled at him. "I don't understand."

"Let me give you a full rundown on me. I wound up in the reformatory after I got out of the orphanage. Then I worked with a carny—carnival. After I came out of the Navy, I was a fighter for a while and then I hustled as a gambler. . . . What the hell, as what you'd call a card sharp! I'm telling you this because you can check through the police. The adult part of my life you'll find pretty unsavory."

Murfee McIntyre repeated: "Unsavory? An unusual word for your background."

Farrell snorted. "Twenty-one months' garrison duty in the Underwater Demolitions Depot at Guam. You could drink beer in the canteen, or go to the schools the Navy set up. Me, I don't like beer."

"I went to night school," Murfee McIntyre said reminiscently. He rose and went to the window and stood there looking out at the Gulf Stream. "Ever hear how I made my money, Mike?"

"You juggled money."

"Now I do," the old man said. "I was an uneducated fourteen-year-old Highland Scotch immigrant. I got a job in a mill. I was a little fellow, and the lifting was hard. So in my spare time I rigged up a sort of block-and-tackle crane to help with the lifting. In a few days every man in the mill had a makeshift crane. I quit and went to making hoists. So I made a fortune out of the simple discovery that all human beings are lazy. Nobody likes to lift or push or pull heavy objects. In ten years McIntyre Mechanical Hoist equipment was in every factory and mill in the country. Everybody was using my labor-saving equipment. It was fun in those days. Now I juggle money, as you say. Not nearly as much fun."

He went to the table. "There's still some coffee in the pot. May I have a cup?"

Farrell nodded, and the old man filled the cup. "Know why I'm telling you this, Mike?"

"No," Farrell said.

"Because," McIntyre said, "you ought to know something about a man if he's going to invite you to be his house guest."

"Me?" Farrell said on a rising note.

"It'd be a favor." McIntyre squinted at him over the coffee cup. "Just while the investigation is going on. If the change in your plans costs you anything, I'll make it up to you."

Farrell grunted. "The investigation won't prove anything. I've never had that much good luck."

"It's a deal, then." McIntyre put down the cup and went back to look out the window.

HE was silent for a moment. "Mike," he said finally, "twenty-eight years ago I was moving my headquarters from Omaha to New York. My son—naturally named Robert Bruce McIntyre—was four. Maida, my wife—was bringing him to New York from Omaha. She fainted in the Polk Street Depot in Chicago while changing trains. She was subject to fainting spells. Still is. She recovered three days later in a hospital. The baby had evidently wandered away during the excitement of her fainting. That's the last we ever heard of him, although we spent time and money. It was a blow that knocked me kicking. It was worse for Maida. Only son, and born of our middle age. Some months before, she had slammed a door on the baby's little finger. That stuck in her mind more than its importance seemed to deserve. She was convinced she was a careless mother. Which wasn't true. On the contrary! But between us, it affected her mind."

Farrell meant it when he said: "I'm sorry."

McIntyre said: "I suppose there are a thousand black-haired blue-eyed orphans with no fingernail on the left-hand little finger." He sighed gently. "It would sort of affirm my belief in God if your right name was Robert Bruce McIntyre."

Farrell chuckled without humor. "You could have done better. That word: *Unsavory.*"

Murfee McIntyre went to the door. "Hell," he said. "There isn't a man, prelate or layman, who doesn't go

to bed regretting something in his past. You pack, and I'll send a car for you." He stopped with the door open. "One more thing, Mike. If you want it on that basis, I will be happy to pay—"

"Nix," Farrell said abruptly. "I've got a stake in this lottery," he said. "Blue-chip stake."

"Let's hope it turns out well," McIntyre said. "And Mike—Maida will undoubtedly be a damned nuisance to you. There've been other times in our long search that we had hope, and invariably she drove the young fellow crazy trying to sew on buttons that hadn't come off, and so forth."

Farrell looked at the pleading in the tycoon's eyes and was sorry for him. He said gruffly: "I'll go along."

McIntyre nodded and went out.

Farrell stood looking at the door. He shook his head abruptly and said aloud: "Farrell, you are on the edge of the biggest touch in history. And because a gray-haired old mark starts yapping about a lost brat, you get tearful. Come, come, Farrell. Be your own true self."

He went to look out the window at the homes of the Stotesburys and the Phipps, of the Igleharts and the Whitneys, of the Graces and the Rockefellers. "That," said Farrell to Farrell, "is for me."

KATHY was in the car that came to get him. She squeezed his hand and was excited.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful, as improbable as it sounds?" Her voice was ecstatic. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if there really were great big rock candy mountains and fairy godmothers and pumpkin coaches, and you turned out to be Robert Bruce McIntyre?"

"Yes, indeed," he said. "All that money."

She sat up straight and looked at him. "But that part of it doesn't matter."

"What part doesn't matter?"

"The money."

It was his turn to sit up straight and look at her.

"The money doesn't matter," she repeated. "But it would make Aunt Maida so happy. Cure her of those spells of vagueness. Don't you see, the money doesn't matter."

He leaned over to kiss the lobe of her ear. "Darling," he said. "My darling, it's all right. You be the impractical idealistic visionary of the family; and me, I'll be practical and think about money, and we'll be happy ever after."

The chauffeur's back was immobile, and so Farrell leaned a bit farther and kissed her more satisfactorily. . . .

Vincent Mailer came out of the library and called to Murfee McIntyre as the old man started up the main staircase.

"Mac," he said, "it's ever so important."

McIntyre looked at him for a moment. Mailer was bubbling with suppressed excitement and with a kind of happy vindication.

The old man turned on the stairs and followed the lawyer into the library. Mailer closed the door. His normally calm tones held excitement.

"Mac," he said, "after I left the hotel, I went to the Chief of Police with the idea of having him start checking any possible criminal background of this Farrell. It wasn't necessary. They already have a good deal of information, as they have on any stranger who comes to the Island. He's got a criminal background, Mac."

"Really?" McIntyre said grimly.

"Yes. Stood trial for a felony. Assault with intent. And he's a known card sharper."

McIntyre looked at his lawyer and snorted. "Dammit, Vincent, the boy was honest enough to tell me all this himself."

He turned on his heel, and leaving the library, trotted up the stairs. Mailer came out through the hallway and through the house to a patio where Brandy was sunning herself.

"Your father would be proud of you," he said with a quiet smile. "Confidence is being built bigger and stouter than Boulder Dam. Mac was furious with my report. It seems Farrell confessed all. In a burst of candor, as per orders."

He bent to kiss her, and she gave him her cheek. He straightened, saying: "It was a brilliant psychological touch, Brandy."

"I'm a genius," she said without inflection.

He let this hang, and when he spoke again, his tone had changed and now it was carefully careless. "Of course we've had one providential piece of luck. I refer to Kathy and Farrell getting interested in each other."

She said: "I guess she's interested in him."

"That," Mailer said in the same voice, "is not exactly what I said."

Her eyes were green agates for a second as she looked up at him. Mailer laughed shortly. "Sauce for the goose, Brandy," he said. "Sauce for the goose."

Chapter Nine

THAT IMPRESSIVE AND DEBONAIR DEAN OF THE high grift, Mr. Yellow Kid Weil, once stated that the most essential ingredient in a properly concocted confidence game is that the victim must never feel urged. Each step forward must seem to be taken of his own volition.

And Farrell had to admit admiringly that this play was set up in such a manner as to earn Weil's approval. The McIntyres went, as the saying supposedly goes, hook, line and sinker. And the play was perfect because all Farrell had to do was tell the truth: "I don't know who I am."

Murfee McIntyre's investigations proved no more rewarding than had the police depositions. Farrell could not be traced back past a lost child brought to a police station in Chicago two days later than the date on which Robert Bruce McIntyre, four, had vanished.

For this lapse of forty-eight hours there could be explanations, and Maida McIntyre had one of her own. "Some good soul," she said, "undoubtedly saw a hungry, crying child and took him home to feed him and let him get some rest and kept him a few days."

Her eyes were vague and kindly as always; and Farrell, looking at her, thought cynically that this was the most apt description of Maida McIntyre; she believed there were good souls in this cruel world.

At first he had been extremely ill at ease with her. Her smiling benevolence came close to lunacy, he thought at first. She believed in good and ignored the presence of evil; he believed the world was otherwise constituted.

But soon he learned that she did not expect answers to half her questions, and he became accustomed to her affectionate and often disjointed conversation. He knew that had the McIntyres not had jillions, there were people who would claim Mrs. McIntyre was, to be blunt, a loon. But her oddities did no one harm. On the contrary, she sluiced Murfee McIntyre's money about among the needy as if with a fire hose.

"You know," Farrell said to Kathy as they lay on the beach with the warm Florida night wrapping them, "I get a funny feeling once in a while. She boils my eggs at breakfast, with a little table gadget that Mac manufactures. I'm not a boiled-egg man, but she likes it, so what the hell! And she looks at me as if I were Di Maggio and had just belted one over the fence blindfolded. And Mac sits there and looks at her, and he's happy because she's happy, and I feel like a cross between the fly in the ointment and a gun."

"What's a gun?"

"A pickpocket."

"Why should you feel like a pickpocket?"

He rolled over on his back and looked at the Florida stars. "Because this old lady thinks I'm the long-lost heir. And I know I'm not."

"I'm sure you're not. But what of it?"

He said: "You're sure I'm not? Why?"

"Heredity," she said. "Genetics. Mac and Maida are both brown-eyed. It's rarely that brown-eyed people have blue-eyed children. But what of it?"

He said: "Explain that. That 'what of it' business."

"What of it? You're making her happy. Which she's never been. So?"

"So?" he echoed. "Millionaires should be careful who they tap for their son and heir. There's all that money to be inherited."

"Oh, damn," she said, and sat up to light a cigarette. "As if the money mattered."

He looked up at her silhouetted against the stars. She had a job and a one-room apartment and nothing else; and she said and meant it, money doesn't matter.

"Baby," he said. "Baby! Please don't knock money. It upsets me when you do. You've never been cold and hungry. About money your ideas are warped. So for us, I'll do all the thinking about money. Because I hold it in its rightful place. I've been cold and hungry."

She bent to stretch herself across him, and her lips were warm on his, and her voice was vibrant with compassion. "You poor darling! Cold and hungry. You'll never be again."

He held her close and echoed her vow although they were perhaps thinking of different methods of accomplishing the same. "No, baby," he said. "Not ever again for me. And not ever once for you."

A WEEK later Kathy had to return to her job in Chicago and Farrell drove her to Miami and put her on the afternoon plane. And when the DC-6 rolled down the runway and began to snarl for altitude he watched with his lip between his teeth for this was surely the most important take-off in history, and should an engine quit his heart would quit with it. The Six climbed high and went far, and he watched it until it was out of sight, then went to the bar.

And in the bar he met a ring-toss worker who was breaking a jump to join a new tent show in Tallahassee, and they sat and talked of this and that and the people they knew on the carny circuit; and when the ring-toss man got his plane, Farrell was a little loaded and drove back to Palm Beach with great care.

Instead of going home—as he now unconsciously called the McIntyre place—he went into the Pompano bar and got himself a double.

Brandy was there with some of the polo crowd, and she said for his ear alone: "The Coronet.... Right away."

He drove back south and was sitting in his car in front of the Coronet when she drove up. They went into the private suite they were familiar with; and if this seems strange, remember a fact that is true, though most writers lie about it: a man in love must talk with a woman; if not his own, then any other. It would be a simpler world if women understood this.

Farrell sat with Brandy and drank stiff Scotch and water, and she said, her throaty voice vibrant: "I've always underestimated you, Farrell."

He said: "All this is going to my head."

"I hadn't expected that you would be smart enough to charm Kathy as you have. It adds the perfect touch. Mac and Maida can hardly resist the Cinderella ending. Long-lost son meets orphaned protégée and love follows."

Farrell reached out and took her hand in his. He put his thumbnail on the bone behind her second knuckle, and when he pressed, her lips went white. His voice was casual though drunken, and he said: "I never hit but one dame. And I always regretted that. She took four hundred-dollar bills out of a seam in my shirt while she thought I was asleep. I guess what roiled me most was that she knew where my plant was. Everybody hates to be outsmarted. I knocked her through the canvas wall out into the middle of the midway. Now you just say what you were going to say next, and we will see what happens."

He loosed his hold, and she took her hand into her lap and regarded it, and with effort composed herself.

"I guess I was wrong," she said. "I guess you're in love."

"Yes," Farrell said. "Yes."

He got up and made his drunken way out to his car. He drove with what he thought was great care to the McIntyre house and went up to the Harrison suite, stumbling occasionally. He fell in the bed and was immediately asleep, and only half awakened when a white-haired old lady came in and removed his shoes and tie and spread a blanket over him. When she left, he flung off the useless blanket. He sat up and regarded his unshod feet.

"Damn," he said. "I feel like Charley Ross."

He got to his feet and went out for a swim.

He swam twenty lengths in the pool and the hangover was fading when he heard Murfee McIntyre's voice calling: "Mike, hey, Mike!"

The old man was standing behind a long glass window in the little room which adjoined the bathhouse, and where Murfee McIntyre had a library so he could read and still watch the crowd around the swimming-pool.

He waved Farrell in, and Farrell climbed out of the pool, brushed himself with a towel and trotted around to enter Mac's little room. He trotted through the doorway and stopped with his feet in moist concrete.

"Dammit," he said. "I didn't see it."

"Hop out," Murfee McIntyre told him. "I meant to yell at you that I had some cement laid there. Those blamed flagstones had got to rocking when anyone stepped on them, so I had a man come up and lay some cement."

Farrell hopped out of the wet cement and sat on a chair, and Murfee McIntyre got him a newspaper to put his stained feet on and Farrell looked down at a millionaire tending his feet and said gruffly: "Cut it out, Mac. . . . Maida makes me feel uneasy enough without you going for the foot-washing business."

Murfee McIntyre laughed gently and went back to his desk. "Mike," he said, "thanks for going along. Every morning you eat the eggs the way Maida fixes 'em. Thanks."

"What the hell," Farrell said. "I'm living right good. I wish I *were* your kid."

McIntyre shrugged. "Maybe you are. Could be.... The issue is in doubt, but nothing can be proved one way or the other. The injured finger is a patent factor. Anyway, I've been looking for a job for you. I think I've got the right one.... That is, if we all want to go on thinking you're my son. I know you don't believe it. Me, I say it could be or not be, even chance either way. Maida's sure you're her boy. You want to come back to Chicago with us to live?... And take this job?"

Farrell said: "Mac, wouldn't I be an idiot not to?"

Murfee McIntyre said: "You could steal money from me if you wanted to. I like to think you wouldn't want to. Would you?"

The old man's eyes were shrewd and searching. Farrell said: "I like money.... Just remember, I didn't ask to get cut into this deal. It was an accident."

McIntyre grinned amiably. "This job. I've got a company designed to take long chances with capital.

McIntyre's Ventures, Inc. It's risk capital. It finances anything that shows promise in the hope that some deals will show a profit which we can take under the capital-gains tax law. Inventors and promoters by the dozen come in with deals. We've got plenty of technical men, engineers and scientists and such. I'd like a man at the head of the company who could winnow out the false from the true. A man with an eye for phonies."

It was Farrell's turn to grin. "You think I should qualify?"

McIntyre put his arm across Farrell's shoulder. "Mike," he said, "whether you're my son or not, I like you. You're big and tough and ugly, the way I'd like a kid of mine to be.... Mike, you're serious about Kathy?"

Farrell said, "Any objections?"

"No," Murfee McIntyre said. "No objections.... Mike, there's something I want to tell you—this: money isn't so damned important."

Farrell looked at him. It is so easy to low-rate money when you have it all.

Chapter Ten

THEY ALL CAME BACK TO CHICAGO, AND FARrell was good at his job. A dozen a day came in with their propositions, and with his trained nose he smelled out the phonies, the promoters with nothing to deliver, and the idiot visionaries.

He lived in the Hubbard Woods house, which was perched on a bluff above the lake and had spacious grounds and a long staircase nailed against the bluff that led down to a boathouse and a private beach.

One day Brandy whispered in Maida McIntyre's ear, and the two women took him with overdone carelessness to the other house which was so carefully kept up and never lived in—the house where Robert Bruce McIntyre had been born. It had been Brandy's idea that he should carelessly appear to have some subconscious memory of the room which she had showed him that day six months before. But he sat in the house and refused cue after cue.

And when they left, Brandy said quietly to him: "You bobbled the play, Farrell. If you'd appeared to remember where the nursery was, it would have riveted Maida to the idea you're truthfully Robert Bruce."

"Nuts," Farrell said shortly. "She's sold already—so far that she makes me nervous. I'm not anxious to play any weepy scenes with her."

"Maybe," Brandy said judiciously, "you're getting too big for your breeches, Lefty."

He met the green eyes. "Look, broad," he said, "we're in this pitch together. It's big, and I won't blow it. But I told you once before: take that tone out of your voice."

Then Maida McIntyre came to join them, and further conversation in that vein was impossible. He left the women and went to his office in the Loop....

Vincent Mailer put his briefcase on the top of Murfee McIntyre's desk. "Mac," he said affably, "there's a few small matters. They can wait. There is one thing of importance on my mind."

Murfee McIntyre said: "Unload it, Vincent."

Mailer rose and walked to the window. "As you know, Mac, I have never liked this Farrell fellow."

McIntyre grunted.

"However, Mac,"—Mailer came back to the desk—"I think possibly it is because our personalities clash. Also perhaps—and I wouldn't say this to anyone but you—because Brandy seems taken by him. These things may trigger my dislike."

"Your Brandy," Murfee said, "at times gives me a severe pain. I'm being blunt, Vincent. But what about Farrell?"

"You're smart. We couldn't explain no bullet-hole."

Mailer sighed. "I think that in the lottery as at present constituted, there is probably one chance in seventy thousand that he is the missing boy." He raised his hand to stop McIntyre from speaking. "However, I don't believe it matters much to you. As long as Maida is happy, I don't believe it matters a damn to you."

"Not a damn," Murfee McIntyre said disconsolately.

"Therefore," Mailer said quietly, "despite my dislike of him personally, I believe we should do some work on your will. You're not going to live forever, Mac. And you'll want the young man to inherit..... So my advice is to draft a new will immediately. Should you die without so doing, those charities would receive all the money save the arrangements you and Maida have made for her care if you die first. I don't like to talk this way, Mac, but you're a realist. Death comes to every man."

"And particularly," Murfee McIntyre concurred, "to seventy-nine-year-old men with removed gall bladders and non-functioning pancreas glands."

He got up and went to the window and looked out upon Chicago's skyscrapers. He thought a long moment.

When he spoke his voice was decided. "Vincent," he said, "I'm not going to leave the boy one red cent."

There was silence, and when the old man turned, the lawyer was white of face. "Vincent," McIntyre said, "if he's my real son, he'll have the ability to create..... And if he has that, money will flow to him. Money's fluid, Vincent; it isn't a static thing. And Republican that I am, I still believe that inherited money is a cue to laziness. I don't believe in it. So I'm going to start changing the will. But not as you suggest—not to give the boy a big share. I'm going to change it so that we will start disbursing it at once to the foundations I have selected.... Some small part will go to those pointless things Maida has—"

He broke off and came over to the lawyer. "Vincent," he said in alarm, "you're very pale.... What's wrong?" He hurried to the desk. "Miss Fall, summon the company doctor at once. Mr. Mailer has had an attack."....

"Me mudder's got a goiter," the ten-year-old boy with the worn clothes said to Kathy, "and I can't go home without selling these last three papers, or me old man will be mad. When he gets mad, he hits us. . . . Me old man don't like us."

They were sitting in the Water Tower Parkway, and Kathy opened her purse, but Farrell glared at the boy and said: "Take off. . . . . We're working this side of the street."

Kathy said: "Don't joke, Mike."

His hand reached over and closed her purse. He said, "Not joking," and pointed at the newsboy. "I told you to take off."

The boy said: "Gee, lady, you should have a better guy than him."

Kathy said: "His father beats him." She gave the boy two one-dollar bills and took his three papers and said: "If your father beats you, you should go to the police."

The ragged boy went around the corner of Michigan Avenue and up Chicago, and she turned a hard look on Farrell.

"How could you be so brutal!"

Farrell said: "Stop. Let us forget it, because I love you, and if you are a sucker, I will put up with it."

"That boy," she said, "that poor boy!"

Farrell reached over and took the newspapers from her lap. "Yesterday's papers," he groaned. "Honey lamb, why can't you recognize larceny when you see it?"

And then it dawned on him that only the larcenous recognize larceny, and he kissed her. "Baby," he said, "buy all of yesterday's papers that you want to. Because I intend it shall be ever thus. You shall want for nothing. Now I have to go and meet Brandy and Vincent."

She looked at him. "Have you ever kissed Brandy Mailer?"

"Kathy," he said, horrified, "how can you say such a thing?"

And she went over and got on the bus, and he smiled after her and grabbed a cab and went to the Drake.

Chapter Eleven

VINCENT MAILER WAS VERY COMPOSED. BRANDY sat in a chair overlooking the terrace. She was downcast and did not look up as Farrell entered.

Mailer told Farrell to seat himself. "A most untoward thing has happened," he said. "We misjudged Murfee McIntyre. He does not intend that his money shall be inherited, regardless of whether or not this is his real son. He is about to disburse the money to various charities."

Brandy said: "The careful plans of mice and men—"

Mailer rose. "You two seem defeated. . . . . Hah! I have the simplest of solutions."

Farrell said: "If he wants to give away his dough, what can you do about it?"

"You cheap thief!" Vincent Mailer said without rancor. "The same goes for you, Brandy. You could not figure a way out of this. Not all your training with your father, not all your background, would enable you to cope with this. . . . And you, Farrell, do you know a way out?"

Farrell grunted. "We're whipped. If Mac spreads his dough around, what can we do about it?"

Mailer said: "He will die intestate."

"What's that?" Farrell asked.

"Intestate? Without having made a will."

But Farrell objected. "He *has* made a will."

"Yes," Mailer said. "One copy of which is in my files. The other copy of which is in a safety-deposit vault to which I have access. Don't worry. Mac will die intestate, and there will be no copy of the will offered in evidence. Farrell, you will inherit. There will be no will, and the sole heir will inherit. We will handle Maida easily."

"This," Farrell said without interest, "sounds very interesting—if everybody happens to be in the right place at the right time when Mac dies. And if on schedule you can destroy the two copies of the will!"

Mailer said: "Mac will die on schedule."

Both Farrell and Brandy looked at him.

HE seemed triumphant. His voice was a braggart's. "You two," he said, "you two thieves! A slight disarrangement of procedure, and you are willing to quit. My mind is worth ten times both of yours. Mac must die at the right moment. He will."

Brandy's eyes came round to look at Farrell, who was blank of face, and Mailer laughed again. "Neither of you," he said, "neither of you could have coped with this. I did. Mac and I are leaving for Eagle River, Wisconsin, day after tomorrow—fishing. Tod is driving us. Mac will die of a heart attack."

Farrell got up to look out of the window. He could feel Vincent Mailer's eyes on his back. Brandy rose. She seemed to be thinking aloud. "You're a bigger man than I thought, Vincent," she said. "Much bigger."

Vincent Mailer laughed, and it was an ugly noise in the room. He said: "Farrell, like all cheap confidence men, I suppose you are frightened of murder."

Farrell turned to look at him, and Mailer's eyes were bright and hard and triumphant. As they looked at each other, Brandy's voice came into the silence.

"No," she said judiciously, "there isn't much that Farrell is afraid of. But like me, like all grifters, he shrinks from capital crimes. Suppose you tell us, Vincent. Suppose you tell us what will happen on the way to Eagle River."

Again Mailer's laugh sounded in the room. He said "Mac has coronary conditions. Tod will throttle him. The symptoms are exactly like a coronary heart attack. I've checked it medically."

"Yes," she said. "You are a bigger man than I thought, Vincent."

Farrell said: "Count me out."

There was silence, and during the silence he thought of the pleading in an old man's eyes while a slightly wacky old woman drooled at him. And of being drunk in bed, and a useless blanket being spread over him and his shoes removed, and—

Vincent Mailer said: "I never intended that you should have a choice, Farrell."

The lawyer came over and turned Farrell to face him and said: "You're so tough, your fists are so quick, and you're such a competent man with women—women like Brandy. Well, Farrell, your fists won't avail you now. You'll do as I say."

Farrell's feet moved on the floor, positioning, but just before he punched, Brandy's voice said: "That will be all, Lefty."

He looked at her, and she said, "I don't like the way it turned out. But Vincent's right. Mac must die intestate."

Farrell said: "Really?"

His feet were set. Vincent's hand was in his tweed sport-coat pocket, but he was never going to have time to get it out when Brandy said: "Don't do it, Farrell. You have no choice."

Thieves' instinct made him listen, and she went on: "Suppose your Kathy, your ever-so-precious Kathy, found out that you'd gone to an Emergency Hospital and had the end of your finger cut off, pretending an accident, and then came down to Florida to show the amputated finger to Maida. Do you suppose your Kathy, your sweet, scrawny, skinny Kathy, would ever let you touch her after that?"

Farrell turned to look at her, and she said: "You look dangerous. I never saw a man look so dangerous. You look as if you might willingly kill us both."

Farrell's tongue wet his lips. "Do I?" he said. "Do I, now?"

Her laugh was carefree. "You do," she said. "Yes, you do, Farrell. You look almighty dangerous. But you'll go along, Farrell. Because you aren't afraid of much, but you're afraid that Kathy might look at you with scornful eyes."

Farrell went carefully to the door. He turned and said to Vincent Mailer: "I'll go along. I don't intend to throw my own angle away just because I like an old guy who's going to die anyway."

Mailer said: "I admire your logic. I despise you, Farrell, but I admire your logic."

Farrell said: "One thing: Any time I've had some drinks, walk wide of me. I may forget the balance sheet. I may hit you; and if I do, I'll kill you."

Vincent Mailer laughed cheerfully.

Brandy said: "Farrell, you're more man than I ever knew." She came across to stand a few feet away from him. It was as if she was afraid to come too close. "Farrell," she said, "as well as I know you, I underestimated you again. I hate that skinny girl."

"Good night," Farrell said, and went out the door.

Brandy stood looking at the door, and after a moment Vincent Mailer said: "That was in the nature of a confession, Brandy..... You admitted there was something between you and Farrell. That barbarian Farrell!"

She smiled at him. "Vincent," she said, "you're ever so cultured. You will never know that barbarians have something."

He went over and sat down in a straight chair and looked at her from cold eyes. "One thing," he said quietly. "One thing I have proved clearly. My mind is the best and clearest and most unafraid of any of the three. You must admit that, Brandy."

"You cultured jerk," she said. "You cultured jerk!"

FARRELL went home; because the next day was Friday and Kathy would come to spend the week-end, he relaxed and waited. And while he waited he thought, and so early Friday morning he phoned Mailer and said briefly: "Come out here. Double quick, because I have something to say."

When they came into the library, he was seated at the desk looking at a full quart of whisky. Brandy went to sit in a deep chair, and Vincent Mailer sat on the arm.

He said: "You made your summons very urgent. We drove out instantly. What is it?"

Farrell did not answer. He continued to regard the whisky as if it held a curious answer of some sort. "Funny," he said. "I meant to drink this. Instead, I've been looking at it for over an hour."

"Really," Vincent Mailer said. "Couldn't we come to the point?"

"There's something funny," Farrell said, "in a guy thinking he was going to need a jug and then finding he didn't."

Mailer rose, but Brandy put her hand on his arm and said languidly: "He'll tell us what he means to. I have a hunch, a strong hunch, that it won't be pleasant."

Farrell looked at Mailer until the older man re-seated himself. Then he continued to look at him with definite relish. There was enjoyment in his voice when he spoke.

"You're out," he said. "You ain't in any more."

Mailer said: "I don't follow."

"You don't follow my carny lingo? The hell you don't! You're out. You don't own a piece of the pitch any more. Blow. Take off."

Brand said: "Farrell—"

Farrell repeated: "Take off. Take the broad with you."

There was silence in the room, and Mailer said: "You are out of order. You must have been drinking."

Farrell said: "I feel as though I've been drinking. But I haven't. But it dawned on me! Like a voice from heaven, like *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin,* I don't need you. This morning my father, who looks at me and is proud because I'm big and tough and ugly, and because my nose is broken, and if he had a kid I'd be his kind of kid—so he thinks! This morning he talked to me."

Mailer lit a cigarette. "So you think you don't need us any more?"

RISING, Farrell went to the wall. He removed a picture and revealed a wall safe. The knob responded to his twirling, and the door swung open. Farrell returned to the desk without touching the inside of the safe.

"Need you?" he said. "Bud, I got that. Just me and Murfee McIntyre. He gave me the combination this morning—when he was leaving for work, and I was enduring a hangover. It's got the damnedest things in it. A single certificate that's all there is of the stock of McIntyre Process. You can't temper aluminum without McIntyre Process. The proxy's got my name on it. There is no money in it. It's a corporation not for profit. But it means the holder's an important man. He wants me to vote it in case he should check out suddenly. Then there's a foot of Maida's hair that she cut off twenty-some-odd years ago, and a silver-plated baby shoe. Me need you? Tell me why. I'm in the winner's circle. The new champion."

Mailer said: "If I talk, I ruin you."

"Prove something," Farrell laughed. "That you set up all this? The record's straight. They know all the truth about me and have accepted me. You won't talk. This way I kick you out, and you're still a big shot around town—though you're out of all the McIntyre interests; you resign. But talk, and you're a lamster, running from the wrath of Murfee McIntyre."

Brandy said: "Tell him, Vincent. He thinks we're fools enough to have let all the cards in his hands."

Mailer said: "Do you think the surgeon in the Emergency Hospital couldn't upset your apple cart? He looks at you and at his records, and identifies you as the man whose finger he amputated hardly a year ago."

Farrell looked at him and grinned. "You figure every angle, Mailer. You're smart. Maybe I'd better change my mind about kicking you out of the pitch."

"Maybe?" Mailer said. "Hardly maybe. Positively."

"The last voice you have heard," Farrell said cheerfully, "was that of Vincent Mailer."

He slid open the desk drawer and shut off the tape recorder. He had removed the tape, and was halfway across to the safe before Mailer got to his feet. The safe door closed, and the combination spun as Mailer clawed at the back of Farrell's coat.

Then with relish he caught Mailer's elbow and pulled him forward so that his head would be coming into the uppercut....

To Brandy he said: "I always wanted to hit Vincent. I thought I would enjoy it. I was right."

Brandy said: "You're throwing a fortune away. Why?"

He looked at her. "Damned if I know," he said cheerfully. "I've spent a couple of days trying to figure out my motives. It could be maybe that a rough old guy who scrambled himself into millions called me son and got all watery-eyed; or it might be that I came home drunk one night, and an old dame who could qualify as not too bright sneaked in and tucked the covers over me. Of course, it was too damned hot for blankets, but she sure tucked them in. Maybe those are my reasons. Maybe it's that any guy has only just so much louse in him, and I didn't measure up."

She jeered: "Lefty turns square. The sawdust trail."

He was still cheerful. "Proves me the squarest mark of all time, doesn't it? The perfect mooch. But I did it."

Mailer got to his feet. Brandy said: "Go out to the car, Vincent."

She watched him go and then came over to Farrell. "Listen to me," she said. "You've lived here with the McIntyres, but you've never known about money. Because they don't use it like money. It's all foundations and crippled kids and boards of directors of funds. Money should be spent on a boat as long as the Holland Tunnel with the crew in uniform and you with braid on your cap. It should be spent on chateaus, and Cap Antibes, and shooting-lodges in Scotland, and your own string running at Hialeah and Aintree. Listen to me, Lefty Farrell, I know how money should be spent. Destroy that record, and let's go."

"Nope," he said. "I'm pig-headed. Once my mind's made up, and so forth."

She looked at him sharply. "It's a switch," she said. "Love conquers all. It's Kathy.... Look, Farrell, all the things you said to me! Didn't they mean anything?"

"Sure did," he said. "Just as much as what you said to me."

He watched her go out of the library, and suddenly he wanted to swim, and thought that maybe there was something symbolic in wanting to be washed by water.

He went down the bluff steps and was in the boathouse when he heard footsteps coming down. He stopped and watched Tod come in. The big man was in uniform, and his manner was impeccable.

"Mr. Mailer's duffel bag," he said. "He wants it."

Farrell kept his expression disinterested, and jerked a thumb toward a locker; and as Tod started to bend, he jumped across the intervening space. The big man spun away from the kick that would have crippled him, and showed broken teeth in a humorless grin.

Farrell said: "Sent you down to knock me off, hey? I overlooked one there."

"Good," Tod said and took the snub-nosed thirty-eight from his pocket. "Stand over against the wall."

He watched Farrell laugh at him and said: "You anxious for a big round hole in your belly?"

Farrell said: "No go..... How would you explain me with a hole in me?"

"You're smart," Tod said, reversing the gun so it made a handy blackjack. "You're smart. We couldn't explain no bullet-hole."

Without moving, he shoved a bench aside, clearing a path between himself and Farrell. Farrell's voice was bright. "Conk me and drown me. That's your orders?"

Tod's foot shoved a dressing-table aside. "I used to be a lifeguard," he said cheerfully. "I used to play water polo. Last one in's a sissy."

He made the lunge and swung the clubbed pistol, and Farrell blocked the blow which he knew was subterfuge, and let Tod get the headlock which was his real intention. And as they slid off the boat-dock edge into the water, he took in a lot of air and even was chuckling a bit. Between the two there was no chance to tell the big man what was so amusing—which was that Seaman First-Class Michael Farrell had earned his rating as a qualified underwater Demolition Expert. One of the requirements is the ability to stay under water two and a half minutes.

He gave the big man a few minutes' resuscitation, then hung him over a bench. He grinned. The whites of Tod's eyes were shot with red ribbons. When most of the water was out of Tod's lungs, Farrell tossed him onto a bunk. He took the thirty-eight from Tod's pocket, and heaved it into Lake Michigan.

Then he trotted up the stairs to the house. As he came across from the bluff, a car was disgorging Murfee McIntyre and Kathy. She came toward him, her face lifted, but he brusquely ignored her. He was astonished that he felt so good.

Her puzzled eyes were on his back. He said to Murfee McIntyre: "You're not going fishing up in Wisconsin. I just tipped over many an applecart. Come on into the library."

He led the way. The old man and Kathy followed him, and in her something psychic was working such as they say works between lovers; in the library she went to sit on a divan, her feet curled under her and her eyes wide upon him.

Murfee McIntyre, puzzled at his strange manner, said: "Mike?"

But he got no further, for Farrell said: "The world is about to come to an end.... Wham, bang, the atomic bomb is among us. Nobody talk, everybody listen. Mac, I'm sorry for what you're going to hear."

He got the recording device from the safe and set it on the machine. Before he turned the switch, he said to Kathy without looking at her: "You'll meet another guy you'll be in love with. That I hope for.... Just remember this: I didn't know you when the play started. Mac, listen."

He played the recording through; when it stopped, he shut it off, and there was silence except for Kathy's sobbing. And still sobbing she came over to where he sat, and would have put her arms about him, but he sat so rigid and resolute she just leaned against him.

He looked at Murfee McIntyre, who got up slowly and went to a file cabinet and lifted something heavy from the cabinet. There was a piece of cement there, and Farrell looked and saw his own footprints.

"Mike," Murfee McIntyre said, "you remember this: I called to you so you had to run through the wet concrete. Well, I've always had a print of Robert Bruce's baby foot. It was made in the first house we ever owned when he stepped in the new concrete I was laying for a cellar. I had yours checked against it by the foremost anthropologists in the world. Nobody's feet ever change, Mike. They can prove that you're not Robert Bruce McIntyre."

Farrell said: "You knew that, then, since Florida. But you went along."

The old man's dark eyes were moist. "Mike," he said, "my wife was happy. Could my money matter against that?"

"Look," Farrell said hastily, "you're a lot of man, Mac. Give me this kind of break: Don't holler copper. Let me see if I can make an honest living, and let me see if Kathy would have me, if I could."

"Oh, damn!" she said between sobs.

And there was silence in the room, and Murfee McIntyre said. "I wasn't gambling such a lot, Mike. There isn't any money. It's all going to be given away. I believe in that because money is a fluid, not a solid. It must flow. And what I make wouldn't do you any good whether you were or were not my son. It's got to flow again. This may not be clear, but it's my best explanation.... Anyway, I liked you, Mike. Thief or not, you look a man in the eye."

They stood there, the three, and from the terrace came the querulous voice of Maida McIntyre. "Michael," she called. "My dear, my dear boy, where are you? ... I want to show you my first camellia."

It was very quiet in the room, and Murfee McIntyre said in a calm voice, "Your mother's calling you. I wish you'd go."

The two men looked at each other, and suddenly the old Scotchman smiled.

Farrell turned to look at Kathy. "Would you go with me?" he asked humbly. "Would you go with me? It matters such a lot. Would you go with me?"

"Anywhere," she said, rising. "But anywhere."

Who's Who *in this* Issue

(Continued from Page 1)

PAUL BRICKHILL

straps. Only in the last few hundred feet did he struggle clear—to come down in a minefield!

He worked on the famous tunnel escape at Stalag Luft III, after which fifty Allied airmen were murdered by the Gestapo. His book, "Escape to Danger," tells that story. He is now just completing another book on prisoner-of-war escapes.

Since the war he has been a foreign correspondent for the Sydney *Sun* in London, Europe and New York. Lately he has been feature-writing for the Sunday *Express* in London.

William A. Knowlton

I WAS born and schooled in Massachusetts. The Army had always interested me (to the extent of three short tours with three different outfits before I was seventeen), and in 1938 I sailed for Hawaii, where I became a private in the Infantry. The next year I entered West Point, where among many interests I found time to do some writing for *The Pointer*. By First Class year I had reached the rank of Battalion Commander, when my class was graduated in January of 1943, six months ahead of time.

In May of 1943 I joined the 7th Armored Division, in whose Reconnaissance Squadron I spent the whole war, first as a platoon leader, and then as a troop commander from the early days of the Bulge. My troop was often selected to join infantry divisions for short fights; and it was in the course of one of these missions that I first saw Russians. While attached to the 82nd Airborne Division in the closing days of the war, my troop was given the mission of crossing the line of Soviet-American demarcation and greeting the Russians, who were supposed to be a kilometer away. We went nearly sixty kilometers, crossed two fronts, and finally wound up behind the Russian lines, from where we fought our way back with the 191st Russian Infantry Division.

This mission not only won me the Silver Star, but during my eight months in Berlin led to much dealings with the Russians, many of whom remembered me from the mission to the north of Berlin. The *Reader's Digest* bought a letter which I wrote home and published it in August of 1945. This success, plus my experience in Berlin, led me to "Alexander," my second effort. As incidental information I am married to the daughter of a frequent BLUE BOOK contributor, Fairfax Downey, and am presently stationed at Fort Knox, where I am being taught by another BLUE BOOK author, Frank Davis.

JAMES F. CASEY

James F. Casey

I WAS born in Brooklyn thirty-four years ago. Went from prep school directly into the Great Depression, taking on any number of jobs ranging from slate-roofer's helper, to stock clerk in the basement of a paint factory. Hopped into the relative security of the Fire Department twelve years ago, and have been there ever since.

I'm married, have three red-headed daughters and a son, without whose inspiring presence in the back yard, asleep, or locked in the bathroom, I would never get a thing on paper.

A little writing, an occasional game of four-wall at the "Y," and taking care of my brood provides a rather full life.

Neill C. Wilson

NEILL C. WILSON conducts his writing business at present on a cherry orchard in Sonoma County, California. His office, or factory, is a room in a tank house, and he believes he is the only writer who has a typewriter that writes under water—1800 gallons of it, in the tank overhead. As the supports of the tank house are not too strong, he may yet ride the tank down—typewriter, unfinished story manuscript and all. If this is not performing in the true spirit of adventure, he will return to some of the activities which he had hoped were put aside forever, such as running the Grand Cañon, in Arizona, and Hell's cañon of the Snake, in Idaho, with a two-oared skiff. Once he climbed Mt. Shasta—alone, because nobody was handy for company—in order to have a 14,161-foot-high box seat for a solar eclipse; and once he lost his pants on a train in Burma and almost found himself pantless, penniless and ticketless four hundred miles from his ship. The pants were grabbed through a car window while he slept. (But the train guard saw it, yelled, and recovered the garment.) He still wonders what a shy, modest tourist would do.

The characters in his stories all seem to have the habit of being outdoors, or getting up immediately and going outdoors. He doesn't know why. Maybe because there's so much outdoors, all of it interesting.

NEILL C. WILSON

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE FOR ADVENTUROUS READING ★ JUNE, 1950

Ten Short Stories, including **SCAPEGALLOWS SPOILS** *by Wilbur S. Peacock;* **PAPA'S FIFTY-DOLLAR HAT** *by Neill Wilson;* **THE CROOKED CIRCLE** *by Calvin J. Clements;* **NO TIME TO QUIT** *by Phil McConnell;* **SINGING AXES** *by Jon Cleary;* **INTERCEPT AND DESTROY** *by Arch Whitehouse*