BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER

25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES... XLIV
ARKANSAS: *Painted by Maurice Bower*

A Complete Book-Length Novel
APPOINTMENT IN NEW ORLEANS
by Tod Claymore

UNDERSEA ARMADA
by Michael Lauler

OUR FORGOTTEN WAR WITH KOREA
by K. Jack Bauer

Many Short Stories and Features

THESE UNITED STATES . . . . XLIV—ARKANSAS

Ark-an-saw

WHEN LaSalle laid claim to the entire Mississippi Valley for France in 1682, he granted his friend and lieutenant Henri de Tonti a large concession at the Quapaw villages, on the Arkansas River. Here, in 1686, de Tonti established the Arkansas Post, the first white settlement in what later became Arkansas—indeed, the earliest French settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley. The Post and Catholic mission flourished in New France until 1718, when the Western Company took possession of Louisiana territory.

In 1668, at the age of eighteen, Henri de Tonti had entered the French army. He lost his left hand in the explosion of a grenade, and replaced it with a metal hand. Though he covered his hand of iron with a glove—whether velvet or not is not recorded—Tonti later found it useful for the purpose of knocking out the teeth or cracking the hands of rebellious Indians when he became an important member of La Salle's exploration projects on the North American continent.

The Arkansas region became American territory with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. When Louisiana became a State, Arkansas was included in Missouri Territory. When Missouri was admitted to the Union, the first capital of the State was de Tonti's Arkansas Post; but Little Rock soon took its place.

Ambitious leaders rushed Arkansas into statehood in 1836, before sufficient settlers had arrived in the area to justify this step. One reason was to get banks. Three banks, underwritten by the State, promptly failed and left a debt of three million dollars for the new State to pay. The young State of Arkansas was predominantly Southern in sympathy, as most of the settlers came from the old South. In 1860 the State seceded from the Union with only one dissenting vote. After the Civil War and reconstruction period, Arkansas adopted a new State constitution; it has been used to advantage in establishing the State on a sound financial basis after its early vicissitudes.

The name Arkansas is derived from that of an Indian tribe living west of the Mississippi and north of the Arkansas rivers. Captain Zebulon Pike spelled the name "Arkansaw" in 1811, thus providing the phonetic basis for the present pronunciation of the State's name. In 1881 the Arkansas legislature adopted *"Ark'-an-saw"* as the official pronunciation.

The only known diamond mine in North America exists in Arkansas; and from the State comes ninety per cent of our bauxite, which is of vital importance as the source of aluminum. The hot mineral springs of Arkansas are the State's great natural attraction; these curative waters range from 95° to 147° in temperature.

Arkansas is a proud State, and anyone who trifles with its name asks for trouble. An Arkansas representative in the Congress of the United States once chided a legislator for rhyming the name of his State with *Kansas.* His words are history: ". . . You may compare . . . the discordant croak of the bullfrog to the melodious tones of the nightingale; the classic strains of Mozart to the death bray of an apoplectic mule. . . . But change the name of Arkansas? Never!"

Readers' Comment

Required Reading for Writers

It was not until recently, this year in fact, that I have rediscovered your Blue Book. I do remember having seen it in my home when I was a youngster and therefore knew of the magazine's existence. But as I advanced in years it was just another magazine, and to my way of thinking, most of the reading in these publications leave much to be desired.

This year I started a writers' course, and among the requirements was the reading and study of the Blue Book. The author of that course deserves my thanks. He not only sold me his course in writing, but also sold me an inexpensive admission to many hours of constructive entertainment and a new source of knowledge. This he accomplished by including the Blue Book in his list of reading requirements.

Earl R. Gilbert

Adventurous in Spirit

I read and like Blue Book because I find that it is a magazine for the adventurous in spirit as well as the poetic in heart. Its stories take one from say, the shores of ancient Crete to the vaporous reaches of Venus from the lusty mining towns of the old Mother Lode country to the sand-swept hamlets of Saudi Arabia.

The stories appeal to those who are seeking a complete escape from life's grim realities and are not the flippy, fluffy kind that once read are as soon forgotten.

The authors appearing in Blue Book know their backgrounds thoroughly, so the reader has a brief education on the mores, manners, regionalism, physical aspects, etc., of the story's setting and its characters. The reader feels that he too has been there.

Vinton A. Walker

The One True Friend

This really isn't a letter in the strictest sense, to the Editor; but Jack Porter's letter in your February issue inspired me to give additional counsel.

John Quincy Adams said: "When all have deserted you, the one true friend we can all have that will never leave, is books." They are with you all the time, never too tired to open and bring forth comfort, joy, merriment and high adventure. I believe we can be thankful that men can still create mental imagery; and so thanks for a fine and well-written magazine, Mr. Editor. I think you should thank such people as Jack Porter; don't *you?*

Lester E. Groft

BLUE BOOK

September, 1950 **MAGAZINE** **Vol. 91, No. 5**

A Complete Book-Length Novel

A Novelette

Eight Short Stories

Stories of Fact and Experience

Special Features

The short stories and novel 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*

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Printed in U.S.A

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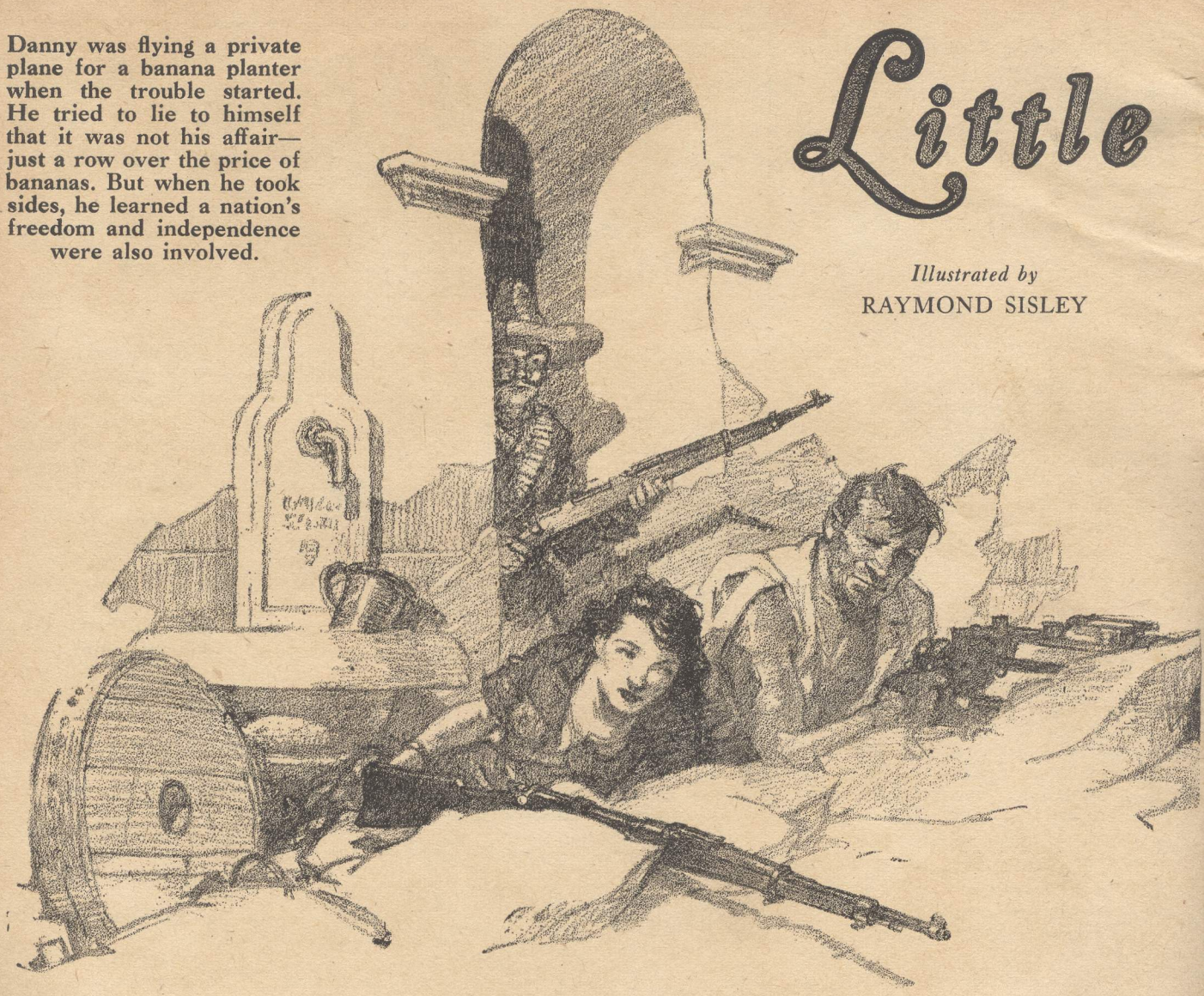
Danny was flying a private plane for a banana planter when the trouble started. He tried to lie to himself that it was not his affair—just a row over the price of bananas. But when he took sides, he learned a nation's freedom and independence were also involved.

Little

Illustrated by
RAYMOND SISLEY



THE girl was drinking chocolate, and it bothered Danny Lathrop. In the middle of a hot afternoon, while everything steamed, and bugs crawled across the floor, she drank chocolate. She looked across the top of the cup with blue eyes that neither smiled nor frowned, but looked inside a man and tried to make him give serious answers. She said: "You're a bitter, cynical little boy, Danny Lathrop."

Six foot one, with two hundred pounds of solid meat on me, and she calls me a little boy! Danny thought.

He said: "I've been around. Somebody's always getting excited about things that are going to happen, but never do happen. I'm not impressed."

She put down her cup, and her lips smiled at him. Maybe her eyes couldn't smile. He didn't know. As far as he was concerned, the guy he worked for owned a jungle full of bananas, and at some place across the world another big guy had decided to do something about the price of bananas. That's all it was. That's all it ever was. Danny Lathrop owned his own airplane. After a devil of a long time of saving money, he owned it, a five-place cabin job. He liked flying it, and what was more important, he was getting paid good money to fly it. He felt a sudden irritation. "Look, Helen," he said. "Sure, Lopez is having a little trouble. I don't know what kind of trouble. Maybe he's not paying his banana-pickers enough money. Maybe somebody's cutting in on the market. I don't know, and I don't want to know. He pays me my salary every two weeks. He doesn't tell me how to fly an airplane; I don't tell him how to sell bananas. Forget it, will you?"

"This man who's out there with Lopez now," she said. "This could be important, Danny. Terribly important. What was he like? Tell me that much."

A half-hour to spend with a beautiful girl in the middle of nowhere, and she wants to talk about trouble! He didn't like it. He said: "Why do you want to know? So you can write a story? He's a short, fat man, and he has a bald head and a fat belly, and he's probably kind to dogs and old ladies. Look, let me tell you about the moonlight. Up there above the clouds when the moon's shining—"

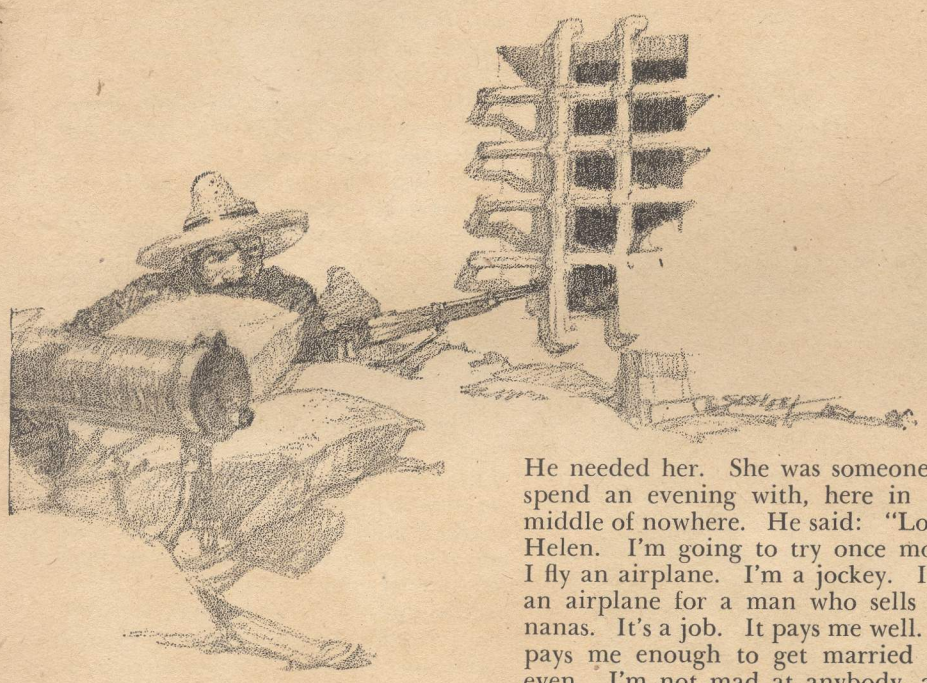
"If he's just a business man, as you say, Danny," she said, "why would Lopez have you fly him in here in the middle of the night? Hasn't it occurred to you that there might be something wrong with his passport? Why didn't he come in on the regular airline and up by train if his passport—"

Danny beat his forehead with the heel of his hand. "Passport, passport," he said. "What do I care if there's something wrong with his passport? Life's full of people having passport trouble. I've seen them at airfields all over the world."

She looked at him, and her face was serious. "Thanks for the chocolate, Danny," she said, and she stood up.

Man on a Balcony

by THOMAS THOMPSON



She was small, and her hair was dark and her eyes were blue. Her eyes bothered Danny, and he didn't like admitting it. She was always tangled up in things. Everything had to be big and important. She had come here to write a book, and now she knew generals with gold braid on faded uniforms, and she had dinner with the Mayor. When she had first told Danny of the book, he had liked her and understood her completely. You could make a lot of money writing a book. That was something Danny Lathrop could understand. It was like his own case. Danny had come here because he had an airplane, and a man named Lopez wanted a pilot.

She said: "Danny, if you don't want any part of it, why don't you get out of here? Why don't you go home?"

HOME? Where was that? In the cockpit of a P-51 over Burma, maybe. Or on the Normandy beach. They died like flies on the Normandy beach. But she wasn't talking about that—not this Helen Mulrooney. She never let up on a guy.

He paid the grubby waiter for the chocolate, and it was important that things stay the same between them. He needed her. She was someone to spend an evening with, here in the middle of nowhere. He said: "Look, Helen. I'm going to try once more. I fly an airplane. I'm a jockey. I fly an airplane for a man who sells bananas. It's a job. It pays me well. It pays me enough to get married on, even. I'm not mad at anybody, and I'm not sticking my nose in anybody's business. Can't it be as simple as that?"

"I don't think so, Danny," she said. "I don't think you think so."

He watched her leave, and he sat there awhile, feeling the heat of the old, broken town that had started to be a city a thousand years ago. There was grass between the cobblestones, and the plaster had fallen from the buildings in chunks, exposing the gray bricks. Guns did that to plaster. But there were no guns now. People came and went, and kids played in front of loaded burros. And out at the plantation, Danny's boss, Lopez, fought with his help and worried about the price of bananas.

And this thick, short, fat man with the bald head and the big belly—what was so exciting about that? Maybe he knew how to handle labor trouble. Maybe he knew how to get more money for bananas. It had been a routine trip for Danny Lathrop. He had flown out to the coast, picked up the fat man in the middle of the night and brought him back to the plantation. It was all very fast and very smooth, and it was something Danny Lathrop could understand. Lopez was big business; and big business didn't always bother with customs and passports. As simple as that. "Nuts," Danny said, and he went outside.

His white linen suit was wrinkled from the squall that had driven Helen and him into the café. The sun was out now, and the jungle steamed, and the town steamed, and Danny's suit steamed. He remembered that Helen had looked cool, and he wondered how she could stay cool when she was always tangled up with rabble-rousers like Consuela Mariveles and her brother Manuel and the tin generals and the Mayor. That Mayor—

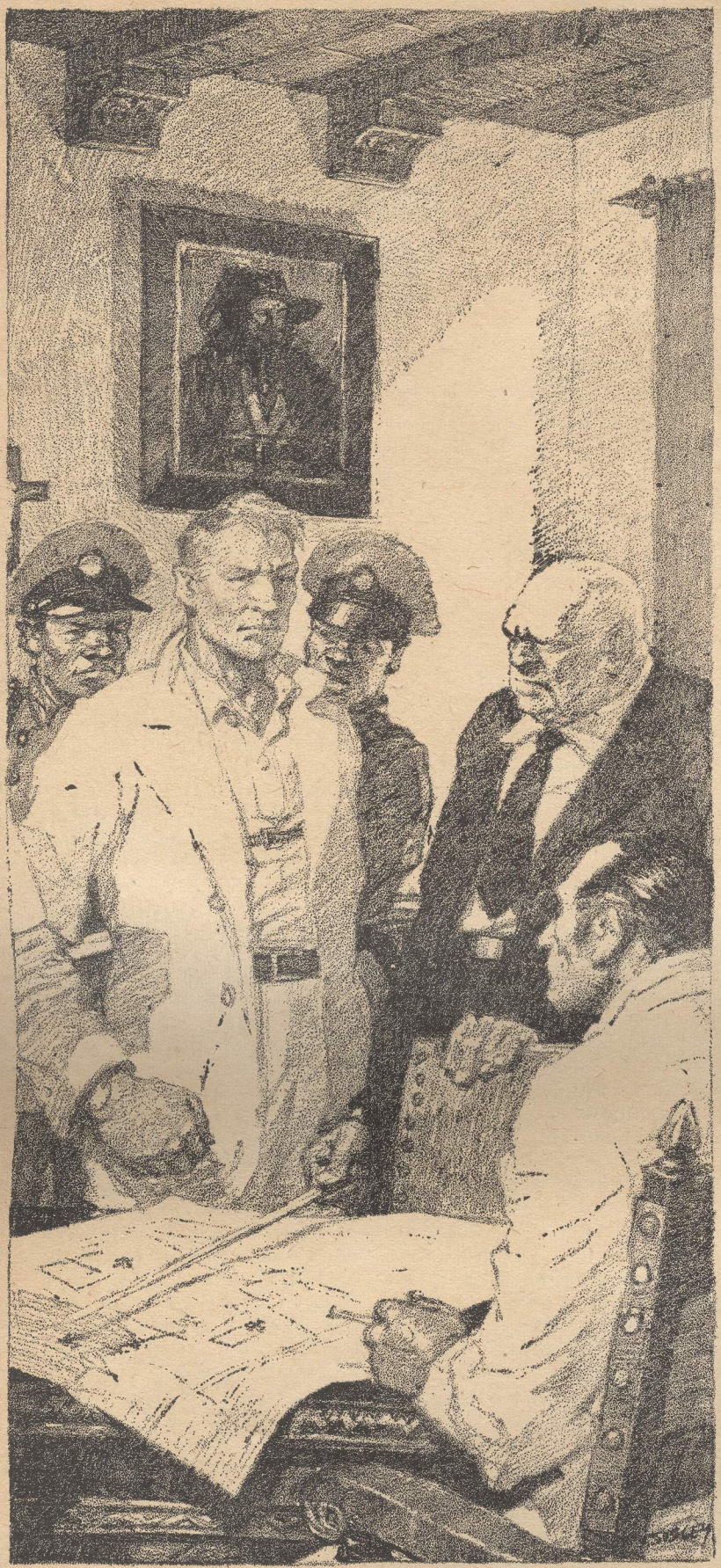
The hand on Danny's arm was polite but insistent. He looked around and saw the policeman and said: "Not again."

"IF you'll pardon me, señor," the policeman said. "The Mayor—"

"The Mayor," said Danny, "wants to see me. What Helen Mulrooney can't find out, the Mayor can." He was annoyed and sharply angry, but not surprised. The Mayor knew everything. A little brown coconut of a man who dreamed through the morning and slept through the afternoon, yet knew everything. He didn't have enough to do, running the town. He was always sticking his nose into the business of Lopez. "We will say nothing of this," Lopez had said that night Danny delivered the short fat man to the plantation. "My competitors—"

Danny had agreed to that, and nothing had been said. If keeping his mouth shut was part of earning his pay-check, that was all right with Danny Lathrop. But now Helen Mulrooney knew about the fat man, and the Mayor knew, and they were trying to make something big of it. He wished Helen would spend more time being a woman and less time changing the world. Danny had had his share of changing the world. You shot people you didn't know, and nothing ever came of it. Danny shrugged. "Lead off, General," he said to the policeman.

They went up the street past the old building with the arch in front and the flag on top. That was the City Hall. This was where you stood in line and looked at people, and peo-



"We need you. It would be unfortunate if you decided to leave."

ple looked at you. Sometimes proclamations were posted, and people marched up and down the street with placards. "To have a dog license or not to have a dog license, that is the question." They voted on such things, and they had a big time, and the Mayor loved it. It was all right with Danny Lathrop.

DANNY and the policeman did not stop at the City Hall. They went on down the street where the town stopped and the jungle started, and neither made much fuss about it. He saw the familiar long porch, and the Mayor was there with a tall glass, and Helen was there.

"It was nice of you to come, Danny," Helen said. She pretended not to see the policeman.

"It was nice of you to ask me," Danny said. "He was a short, fat man with a bald head and a fat belly. I told you once."

"Señor Lathrop," the Mayor said. He had a fan, and he kept fanning himself, and he always smiled. "You own your own airplane, I believe, Señor Lathrop?"

There was a long silence, and Danny looked at Helen. She was looking down the street toward the town with its broken pavement and its shell-marked buildings and its passive people who could sleep all afternoon and get excited about a dog license. Here in the middle of nowhere they could get excited. He answered the Mayor's question. "Sure. It's no secret. I own my plane."

The Mayor smiled. "I am glad," he said. "I would not like to think of you leaving with no future ahead of you. But with your own airplane, you can find other work, no?"

"Wait a minute," Danny said, and he felt the color at his throat. "My papers are in order. I've got a job."

"I too have a job," the Mayor said. "It is to see that foreigners are not hurt in things that do not concern them. It has been pleasant knowing you, Señor Lathrop."

Danny looked at Helen and she would not meet his eyes, and now he was concerned. He said: "Look, Helen: If you really think there's any chance of trouble—" Sometimes these banana-pickers got hot-headed. "They won't bother us," he said positively, "but if you'll feel better, I'll take you out of here."

"Thanks, Danny," she said. "I like it here; I like things the way they are."

"You are a rare woman, Señorita Mulrooney," the Mayor said. "A rare woman." The Mayor stood up. He offered his hand. "Good luck, Señor Lathrop. If I may make a suggestion, it would be that you tell your employer that the climate no longer agrees with you."

Danny put on his Panama and started down the steps, and then he stopped, one foot before the other. Across the street he saw two of the Mayor's soldiers lounging against the building, and he knew they were not there by accident. An American jeep came around the corner, and there were more soldiers in that, and they had guns. They went in front of the house, driving slowly, and at the end of the street they turned around and drove back again. He went back on the porch and took Helen's arm. "You're getting out of here," he said. "We'll fly out to the coast, and in a day or so when it's over, we'll come back in. I don't look for anything to happen, but it's a good excuse for you and me to have a good time."

She looked at him, and smiled with her lips, but her eyes were serious. She stood up and put her hand on his hand, and he felt the pressure of her fingers.

"I wish we could, Danny," she said. "I really wish we could."

"Why in the devil can't we?" he said bluntly. "There's nothing keeping you here. Lopez will give me a couple of days off. I'll even let him dock me, if he wants to."

"You're very big-hearted, Danny," she said, "but I'm not going any place."

It made him mad. Not because he felt there was any danger involved, but because she was being stubborn. He said: "You've written too many stories. You're getting melodramatic." He pulled his hat tighter on his head and went hurriedly down the steps and out onto the street before she had a chance to answer. He was sorry he had lost his temper. That wasn't any way to handle a woman. He'd have a little talk with Lopez and then he'd buy a bunch of flowers down at the corner stand. . . . The Mayor and Helen and the Mariveles kids had a way of getting stirred up over nothing.

He drove the company station wagon along the green tunnel that was the road, and in time he crossed the bridge and saw the headquarters of the Lopez plantation. Below him was the dome of the corrugated metal hangar and the green of the landing strip. He looked at the wind sock he had set up, and the tension left him.

One of the boys took the car, and he walked up onto the long veranda and went into the cool house without knocking. Lopez had treated him right. He had known a month after coming here that Lopez was not well liked in the town, but it had made little impression on him. Every place you went, somebody was disliked and somebody was liked. . . . He had known Helen three days—three days of dumb amazement at finding her in a place like this—when he started kidding her about her friends. "These Mariveles kids," he said, "this Consuela and her brother Manuel—the way they rant against Lopez! What have you got there, a couple of budding revolutionists?"

She had been completely serious in her answer. "They just like things the way they are, Danny," she said. "I don't think your friend Lopez does. He can't tell the Mayor what to do, and he doesn't like it."

He hadn't wanted to argue about it. The moon was over the jungle that night, and here was an American girl with dark hair and blue eyes and the scent of the night was in her hair. He said: "Don't take life so seriously, baby. You'll never get out alive."

He stood in the big room now, and there were open windows on three sides. He could look down over the sea of green, over the thatched huts of the workmen, across to the loading shed where a gasoline-driven scooter brought the cars along a narrow-gauge track. The scooter was there now, and then he saw the Mayor's soldiers. There were six of them, and they seemed to be herding some of the workers into the shed. He watched it a minute, a frown between his eyes, and then he went down the hall and turned in at the room that was Lopez' office. Lopez was there. So was the short fat man. So were four of the Mayor's generals.

Perhaps they weren't generals; he never knew. They were all generals, as far as he was concerned. Helen had tried to straighten him out a dozen times, but it never made much of an impression on him. A comic-opera army, at best. Danny Lathrop had had enough of armies, anyway. The short fat man turned slowly, and his pale eyes were hard. He said: "What manner of interruption is this?" He did not click his heels. Danny expected it.

Lopez said: "Danny, my son, we were just talking about you. Mr. Maxim, here, was complimenting me on having such a fine pilot."

Danny looked at Mr. Maxim, the short fat man with the bald head. Mr. Maxim did not look as if he had ever complimented anyone on anything. His eyes were pale gray with a greenish cast to them. They were round, like his head; and if his eyes had lids, it wasn't noticeable. He stood in the middle of the room near a table, and he had a wooden pointer in his hand. On the table was a map, and Danny was tall enough so he could see over Mr. Maxim's shoulder. It was a map of the town, and there was an X where the City Hall would be, and there was an X at the Mayor's house. Danny looked at the map, and he looked at Mr. Maxim. Danny had been in a hundred briefing-rooms. He knew Mr. Maxim was not selling bananas. He thought fast, and he was worried. Then he said, "Lopez, I'd like to take a few days off. There's some work on the plane I can't do here. I'd like to fly out to the coast for a few days—"

"You have picked an unfortunate time for a vacation," Mr. Maxim said. He had a small mouth. It was red and moist, and it smiled. It would be a nice mouth to hit, Danny thought. A pink tongue wet the lips of the small mouth. "You will go to the coast, Mr. Lathrop," Mr. Maxim said, "—with me." He held the wooden pointer in his two hands, much as some men hold a fencing foil to flex it. He looked at the two generals and said: "As I was saying, gentlemen—"

Danny could hear Mr. Maxim's soft, almost childish voice, talking to the generals. "You will have twelve of your men here—so." He pointed. "They will remain loyal to the Mayor until the signal is given. It will give the Mayor a false sense of security, and it is better so—" He mopped his bald head with a silk handkerchief. "A skirmish here"—he pointed—"to distract. It will be as if there is labor trouble."

Danny walked across the room and halted by Lopez.

Lopez was lazy. He was lazy and smart. He had made a lot of money, and he wanted to make more. Danny said: "Look, Lopez. So you want to sell more bananas. I don't care, see? But there's Miss Mulrooney. I'll take her out of here for a few days until you get things straightened out. She's an American, Lopez. You want an investigation?"

Mr. Maxim could talk and look at the map and listen at the same time. He said: "There will be no investigation as long as Miss Mulrooney stays out of it. It is unfortunate that she has so many of the wrong friends. Perhaps we can convince her it is none of her affair. Gentlemen," he said to the generals, "you can count on the rifles."

Danny looked at the men, and he knew he was in it, whether he liked it or not. This wasn't selling bananas. This Maxim was a professional revolutionist, hired by Lopez. He looked at Maxim, and he started adding things up. If Maxim didn't start it, maybe someone else would. There were always revolutions going on somewhere. Men with airplanes sometimes got into them and got paid for it. He thrust out his jaw. "Get this, Maxim, and you too, Lopez: If you want me to do extra work, I get paid for it. I don't fly around at night hauling guns for free."

"You sound like a sensible man," Mr. Maxim said.

"Never mind the compliments; just show me the folding stuff," Danny Lathrop said.

"By all means," Mr. Maxim said. He motioned with his hand, and two soldiers came into the room. They had guns with bayonets, and they placed the bayonets just under Danny's shoulderblades.

Lopez said: "We need you, Danny, my twin. It would be unfortunate if you decided to leave now."

DANNY flew Mr. Maxim out to the coast that night, and he knew there was a .45 automatic at the back of his neck. He said: "Look, Maxim, I'm not sticking my nose in your business. You don't need that gun. All you need is money."

"Of course," Mr. Maxim said. The .45 automatic stayed at the back of Danny's neck.

There were clouds below, and the moon was above, and it was the kind of night to make a man think silly thoughts. Sometimes Danny thought like a hero. He could wreck the plane, and that would be the end of Mr. Maxim. The end of Danny Lathrop, too. He'd have to get back and talk some sense into Helen Mulrooney. If the Mayor and Consuela Mariveles and her brother Manuel wanted to play rough, let them play. That was their business.

There was a tramp freighter in the harbor, and on it were a few boxes that were marked SHOES. The boxes came ashore without trouble and were hauled out to the airport, and no one was around when the boxes were loaded into the five-place cabin plane. The aft seats had been removed and the boxes fitted. "Shall we return, Mr. Lathrop?" Mr. Maxim said. He made the question mark with the muzzle of the automatic. Danny was getting a little tired of Mr. Maxim. . . .

There were fires at the edge of the town when they circled in for a landing. Mr. Maxim saw them, and he smacked his lips and said: "Good, good!" Danny kicked the rudder hard, and then he straightened for the glide. The wheels touched the ground, and he brought the plane in for a perfect landing.

But it wasn't good. It seemed that way at first. Danny took the station wagon and started for town to see Helen Mulrooney. They let him get as far as the bridge at the edge of the Lopez plantation, and then two soldiers stopped him. It made Danny mad. He came back to the house, and his face was red and his hands were made into fists. He said: "Look, Lopez. When I'm in that airplane, you're my boss. The minute I get out of it, nobody's my boss, see? You're not telling me what to do with my spare time."

But they did tell him what to do with his spare time. They told him, and they used guns to back it up.

There was always plenty of news around the Lopez place. It came in twenty times a day, just like front-line news coming in to field headquarters. Mr. Maxim's soldiers took the town, and Lopez paid. There was a puppet in the City Hall—a thick-lipped man who couldn't sign his name, but could do what Lopez told him to do. There was much talk of a "People's Government."

But one thing was wrong: It had gone wrong when the soldiers went to get the Mayor. Three of Mr. Maxim's generals had gone to do the job. They had been the Mayor's generals just a few days before. Good, loyal generals. Then, for a slight raise in pay, they had been Mr. Maxim's generals. They were nobody's generals now. They were dead generals.

And now there was talk of a guerrilla band that hadn't surrendered. A band that struck at night out of the depths of the jungle. A few soldiers who had remained loyal to the Mayor, a handful of men and a couple of women. . . . Danny didn't like the sound of those women. Helen Mulrooney was just crazy enough to get mixed up in it. They found a couple of Maxim's sentries, each with a piece of wire around his throat, and now it was getting so sentries sometimes deserted their posts and the people of the town were restless.

MR. MAXIM cursed and raved. His cheeks had grown gaunt and his eyes brighter, and once when Lopez chided him for not winding things up fast enough, Mr. Maxim slapped Lopez across the face. . . . Sometimes it was hard to tell if Mr. Maxim worked for Lopez, or Lopez worked for Mr. Maxim. There was more talk of the two women and now it was Danny Lathrop's business. That crazy Helen Mulrooney!

Danny was out working around his plane. He had a large crescent wrench in his hand. He wasn't trying to make it fit anything. He looked up, and Mr. Maxim was standing there watching him. "We must have more ammunition, more guns," Maxim said. "We will go to the coast tonight."

Danny Lathrop took a deep breath. "If you go, you'll fly it yourself," he said. "I haven't been to town for a week. I'm going tonight."

The .45 automatic came out of Mr. Maxim's pocket. "No, Danny," he said. "You are going out to the coast. Get in the plane."

They could fight over the price of bananas if they wanted. That was all right with Danny Lathrop. He would fly the airplane for them as long as he got paid enough. But damned if any man was going to stop him when he wanted to go see how his girl was making out! Mr. Maxim had tried to tell him once too often.

Danny forgot the gun. He had the wrench in his right hand. That hand came up from the waist and the wrench landed solidly against Mr. Maxim's chin. Mr. Maxim went down hard, landing on his back in the sodden grass. His fingers tightened and the gun exploded, and Danny saw six soldiers running across the landing-strip.

His first thought was of the plane. That was his baby. It had taken a long time to get it. But somewhere in his mind, crowding out even the thought of the plane, was the thought that Helen might be mixed up in this—that crazy Helen Mulrooney! There was a shout, and then the sharp snap of a rifle and a bullet whined by his head. He started to run, zigzagging back and forth. It was a hopeless sort of running, for this was nowhere, and there was nowhere to go. Another bullet kicked close to his feet, and then he plunged into the tangle of vines and vegetation, and he crawled on hands and knees while the day's heavy rain poured down on him.

HE was a big man, and that was against him. His breath was pounding in his lungs; his hands were torn, his clothes ripped. He came to a stream, and floundered into the soft ooze at its edge and thrashed his way across. He tried to clamber up the steep bank on the other side, and he slipped back into the dark water. A hand reached down and gripped his shirt collar and hauled him up. He stood there, panting, shaking, the water streaming from his clothes, and he felt the bore of a pistol being pressed against his chest. A voice said: "We were after the plane, Señor Lathrop. But if we stop the pilot, the airplane takes care of itself." He remembered the voice, but it was hard to recognize Manuel Mariveles.

He didn't know why he should have been so happy to see Manuel. He had never liked the guy. He was a thin-faced youth with dark, piercing eyes, who hung onto every word the Mayor said and ranted about politics. But he was a friend of Helen's. "Is Helen all right?" Danny said. He didn't pay any attention to the gun in Manuel's hand.

"It is none of your concern," Manuel said, "but she is all right." The pistol pressed tighter against Danny's chest, and now he noticed it.

"Wait a minute, Manuel," Danny said slowly. "I'm not taking any sides in this thing."

"You all talk the same," Manuel said. "Let us go farther back, where the shot will not be heard."

"You're short-handed; I'm out of work. Give me a gun."

They walked half an hour, and then a thin whistle, like some night bird, piped once and was gone. Manuel listened. The whistle came again, and Manuel made an answering signal. In a short time four more men slid out of the dense vegetation. Two wore the tattered uniforms of the Mayor's army; the others did not even have shirts. Their beards were like smudges of black. They carried rifles, and one man had two belts of cartridges across his shoulders. He was a brown, round man. Danny said: "Mayor!"

The Mayor still had his smile, but little else remained of the soft-spoken man who dreamed in the morning and napped in the afternoon. He had a knife thrust into his belt, and there was a dirty bandage across his chest. He gave a quick order, and then led the way, and in a little time they came to a clearing. There was a leanto there, thatched with broad leaves, and Helen and Consuela were in the leanto.

Helen got up slowly, and she stood there looking at Danny Lathrop. He felt a driving sweep of relief. "You crazy half-wit," he said, because he could think of nothing else to say. "Come on, I'll get you out of here."

Helen looked at him, and she shook her head slowly from side to side.

"Wait a minute," Danny said. "You don't have to stay here. You're an American citizen. They can't hold you."

"No one's holding me, Danny," she said. "I thought by now you'd know that."

He looked at the men, and he looked at Consuela Mariveles and they were all watching him in a way that made him feel unclean. He said: "Look, you're not going to run around out here in the woods alone, see? If you stay here, I'm staying with you."

"I will make the decisions, Mr. Lathrop," the Mayor said.

Danny felt a hint of perspiration on his forehead. He had no intention of leaving Helen alone, mixed up in this crazy mess. He looked at the men, a pitifully small band of hold-outs, and then he looked at the Mayor. What the hell? One side was as good as another. "I'm looking for a job, Mayor," he said. "I had a fight with Maxim. I kissed him on the chin with a wrench. I'm fired. *Kaput.* I don't work there any more. I'm looking for a job."

"I'm afraid we couldn't pay you much, Mr. Lathrop," the Mayor said.

"Pay—who cares?" Danny Lathrop said. "You're short-handed; I'm out of work. Give me a gun. I'll take orders. I've taken lots of 'em. After it's all over, you and I can sit down with a tall drink and talk about it. Maybe you'll need a dog-catcher or something. I do you a favor, you do me a favor, see? I'm good at this business. I've had experience."

He looked at Helen Mulrooney, and she was crying, and he didn't know why she was crying. He went over and tried to put his arm around her, and she moved away from him. The Mayor looked at him coldly. "How do I know I could trust you, Mr. Lathrop?"

"Why not?" Danny asked. "You think I'm in love with Maxim? He pushed me around. I got tired of it. I'd like to punch him in the nose. What have you got to lose?"

"Nothing, Mr. Lathrop," the Mayor said. "If you'll take orders, we can use you. If you don't, we can get rid of you."

THERE was no way out of it. Danny didn't like it particularly, but at least, he could keep an eye on Helen and see that she stayed out of trouble. There was some hope, for he knew how these things worked.

Danny took his orders. In between times he figured ways and means of getting Helen and himself out of it, but he never got around to leaving. One night he had to kill a guard at the edge of the plantation, and there was no regret in him at doing it. It was one of Maxim's men.

It was a slow war. At first there was only the farmer a few miles south of town who gave them food. Then there were the three workmen on the Lopez plantation; and one night they stood in the jungle and watched Danny's plane burn. He watched it, and he cursed silently to himself, seeing five years of work and saving go-

Helen dropped her jammed rifle and snatched up a huge banana knife.

ing up in smoke. For the first time since he had joined the band, Helen came and stood beside him. She took his hand and squeezed it tightly, and when he turned and walked back into the jungle, she walked with him. She said: "It had to go, Danny. Maxim might have found a pilot."

"Sure," he said. . . . Two guards were killed that night; and Manuel wiped his knife by the glow of a small fire.

They captured one of the boxes marked SHOES, with the aid of the workmen. They packed it on their shoulders, running through the jungle, always running. And when they broke open the box, there were new rifles there, but no ammunition to fit the guns. Danny Lathrop got to his feet. He was bearded now, and his shirt was gone. "It's no use this way," he said. "I've seen it happen a dozen times in a dozen places. You kill one, and there's ten more to take his place. It's too slow."

"Some of the soldiers are still loyal to me," the Mayor said. He had started listening to Danny's ideas. "If they only had a chance—"

"If we could get to the people," Manuel said.

"What people?" Danny said. "The ones Maxim has hired to run the machine guns? That's the way you get people. You hire 'em."

"Not my people," the Mayor said quietly. "If I could see them and talk to them—"

"So why don't you stand on the City Hall balcony?" Danny said. "Maybe they'd like that." It was meant to be sarcastic. He was sick of this same old fight, over nothing. But even while he said it, he knew it wasn't sarcastic. It was the truth, and it had always been the truth.

And that was the way the plan was born, a sarcastic remark in the heat of anger. An impossible plan, but by now all things were impossible, and one was as good as another. Danny watched the plan grow, and he saw the light in the eyes of his companions, and he couldn't keep out of it. After all, it had been his idea originally. It was like planning a strategic play in a football game.

He listened to Manuel's report, and he carefully sketched a map on the ground as Manuel told of the sandbag barricade and the four guards in front of the City Hall. They waited for two days, checking their watches, making sure; and when they were ready, Danny said excitedly: "It might work, by golly! It might work!" He turned and saw Helen slinging a rifle around her shoulder, getting ready. He said: "Wait a minute, baby. Not you."

The men stood there, hard-faced men who hadn't always had hard faces,

and he saw Consuela with her dark hair and her dark eyes and the little khaki cap on her head. The Mayor said: "We'll need every man, Danny."

"Men, yes," Danny said, "but not the women."

"I give the orders, Danny," the Mayor said. "We can spare you better than we can spare the women."

Danny looked at Consuela and he looked at Helen, and he knew he couldn't turn them back. They had lived with this much longer than he had. They believed in what they were doing, while he held back, trying to convince himself that the world moved on the price of bananas. He had no right to stop them. Right or wrong, it was their game. He shrugged his shoulders, and the nine of them moved off through the jungle, and two by two they split off to meet again at the edge of the town.

There was pale moonlight on the cobblestone street, and the arch of the City Hall stood ghostly, its torn plaster a stipple of light and shadow. Danny moved along the side of a building, the sweat thick in his eyes. A dozen steps more. He saw the guard, just where he was supposed to be. The butt of Danny's rifle drew back and jabbed wickedly. He felt the soft jar, and he stepped over the body and moved on. A block away, Manuel was moving the same way; and across the square, Consuela and the Mayor. He thought of Helen, and maybe he prayed. He hadn't prayed since a night on a beach in France. He moved on, and now he could see the barricade in front of the City Hall.

There were four guards behind the barricade. They were dead guards. Manuel and Jaime had done their work well. Danny crawled behind the sandbags and waited. He wanted to move the bodies, but there was no time for that. In a little while he heard a small sound, and he turned his rifle. Helen came out of the thin darkness and crouched beside him. She hid her face against his chest. He said: "This is crazy, baby."

"It's not crazy, Danny," she said. "You know it's not."

It was a long night. One by one, Consuela and then the men joined them, until there were nine in all. "The Mayor is inside the City Hall," Consuela said. "We had to kill one of the guards. The Mayor is talking to the others. He thinks they are loyal to him."

He *thinks*. How could a man think? He had to *know*. The dawn came out of a distant sea and spread its light across the peaks and the dense, sick green of the valleys. The town was dead, and behind drawn shutters men and women slept fitfully and tried to figure what had happened to them. Another hour. There was no sound from the City Hall at their back.

The guard changed at six. This was the crucial time. There was ammunition in the pit behind the barricade, and they had already taken the rifles and the hand guns from the dead guards.

"You know the machine gun, Danny?" Manuel said.

"Like a brother," Danny said. His hands closed over the breech of the familiar weapon. He adjusted the knobs. The guard came down the street, four abreast. They swaggered along, their rifles slung over their shoulders. They were not townsmen; they were not part of the rebellious army. Danny glanced at Helen. He said: "Close your eyes, baby. It won't be pretty." The machine gun started to talk.

The chattering bursts of the gun awoke the town. People poured from buildings, and then went screaming back into buildings. Directly across the street a door burst open and a dozen soldiers spilled out. With a lunge of sheer brute strength, Danny changed the position of the gun, and he saw Consuela and Helen, rifles to their shoulders. Manuel staggered back under the impact of a bullet, but he kept yelling orders. More soldiers poured out onto the street, and the little band of guerrillas was forced down and the soldiers moved up.

Helen was sobbing as she dropped her jammed rifle and snatched up a huge heavy banana knife.

It was all over. It was no good. There weren't enough of them to stop it. Danny, gritting his teeth, worked the machine gun, and answering bullets sprayed sand from the ruptured bags. The soldiers were moving in; they'd never quit moving in. And the people of the town stood back, their jaws slack, doing nothing. Doing nothing! Maybe they were waiting to be paid.

And then they were shouting and pointing—pointing up. Danny craned his neck, and on the balcony above the arched door he saw the little Mayor. A little brown coconut of a man with cartridge belts across his shoulders, and a dirty bandage on his chest. He was flanked by a dozen soldiers.

There was silence. The townspeople looked up, and the soldiers in the street stopped. Only for a split second. But it was long enough for them to hear the Mayor's voice. "My people! We have taken the City Hall—" There was a burst of fire, and now the soldiers on the balcony were firing down, down at the soldiers in the street. And those soldiers on the balcony weren't rebellious. They were still with the Mayor a hundred per cent. They weren't generals. Even Danny Lathrop could tell that. He quit the machine gun and took a rifle.

They were fighting out there in the street now. "Long live the Republic!" Civilians were fighting soldiers, fighting with fists and with pieces of plaster, and now some of them had guns, and soldiers were fighting soldiers. Some of them died, and a lot of them lived, and the longer they lived, the harder they fought.

They took the town. Only nine guerrillas at first, but now there were five hundred. They took the gasoline scooter, and Danny and Helen watched it head up the track toward the Lopez plantation. Men were clinging to it, men with guns. Danny put his arm around Helen. He looked at Consuela, and her eyes were bright, and she was smiling and crying as she worked at bandaging her brother's wound. The little Mayor was wounded, but he was standing erect at the rail of the balcony, and people were cheering.

That little round Mayor— He wasn't getting paid to stand there and get himself shot. Danny tried to figure it out. He heard Helen say: "What now, Danny Lathrop?"

He tried to grin. "A job, I guess."

"A political job? Or perhaps a banana plantation? You have to get something out of it, you know."

He looked up at the little Mayor standing there, fighting to keep himself on his feet. A little man: a man who got excited over elections; a man who didn't get paid much; a man who thought an argument over whether or not there should be a dog license was something for the people to decide. Not much of a man in the scheme of things, but he had turned a battle just by standing out where people could see him. Danny Lathrop wiped the perspiration from his forehead. You kill one man like that, and then another and another, and pretty soon there's nobody left to worry about the little things.

Danny thought of the last few days, and the days stretched back over the last few years. He was over Burma; he was on the Normandy beach. And each time he had told himself he was fighting because of the price of bananas, and each time he had been lying. A man could lie to himself only so long. He looked at the little Mayor, and he looked at the girls. He said: "Sometimes I make awfully bad jokes with my mouth, Helen."

She put her head close to his chest. "I never did listen too hard to what you said, Danny," she said. "I just looked at your eyes."

He kissed her. It seemed like a good idea, so he kissed her again, and then he held her away and he looked into her eyes a long time. They were blue eyes. And they were smiling.

An attack by the super-submarines of the near future against our West Coast is met by a small but intrepid American force.

UNDERSEA

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JOHNNY BARNETT, in civilian clothes, leaned back in his chair with a contented sigh. The increasing tension of the world could pass him by for the time being. After weeks of searching, he had finally managed to rent a small house for himself and his wife, and now they were together again. The months of maneuvering with his group of submarines was over. After the months of work, of trial and error, and new tactics, finally the fusing of his group into one perfect team was complete. Even though the radio blared out strident warnings, Johnny didn't care. He had his wife with him, and fifteen days' leave. Johnny leaned back contentedly.

The sounds and smells of cooking smote his senses from the kitchen. "Oh, boy! Fried chicken!" thought Johnny ecstatically. Soft music emanated from the radio for a change; warm late forenoon sunshine filtered down through the leaves and into the living-room. Johnny's eyes started to close lazily. Abruptly the telephone rang. Instantly Johnny was alert, a question in his mind. They had only moved in the previous evening. No one knew where he lived but the executive officer of his group. Johnny paled slightly, then shrugged. "Must be the previous occupants," he thought, as he reached for the telephone.

"Hello," said a voice. "Commander Barnett, please."

"I'm afraid you have the wrong number," said Johnny, coldly. Over the phone he heard:

"Alfred Thompson calling."

"I'm sorry. I don't know anyone by that name," said Johnny, and hung up.

This time his face was paler. Gone was the sleepiness; a look of alertness commenced creeping into his eyes. He picked up his hat, said over his shoulder: "I'm going down to the store for some cigarettes, honey."

"Don't be gone long, dear; this chicken is almost ready."

Johnny hurried down to the corner service station, where there was a pay telephone. Inserting his nickel, he dialed a number. A moment's pause.

"State Highway Commission," came over the wire.

"Barnett, J. C."

"A 13. Identify."

"August 1, 1934."

A pause.

"Okay," said the voice. "Where are you?"

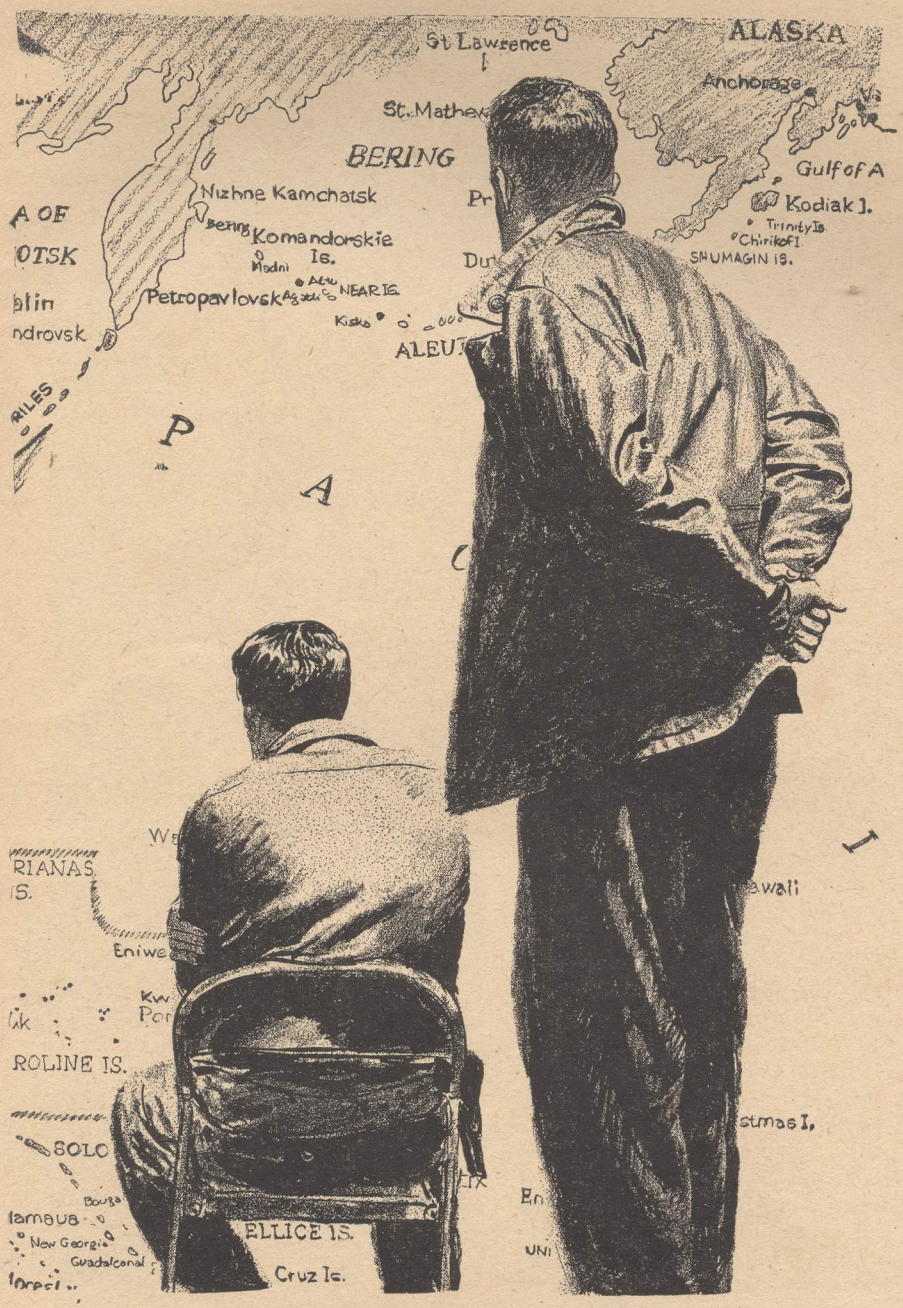
Johnny gave the address of the service station.

The voice replied. "Navy 136792 within five minutes."

Johnny gulped. "Okay," he said, and hung up.

Moodily he strolled out to the edge of the curb and leaned against a telephone pole. Just when everything was set, here came orders again! Johnny thought back to the last two years of double telephone calls, identifications, hush-hush investigations of various sorts. Sometimes he was almost afraid to stay home nights, when he could get home, for fear he might talk in his sleep. All on account of that squadron of subs of his. "More maneuvers," he thought disconsolately, thinking of his wife, the fried chicken, and fifteen days' leave he had just commenced to savor.

It was hard for anyone to believe, on this bright, sunny spring day of 1962, that there could possibly be any nation or any group of nations willing



"Gentlemen," he said, "three of those submarines are carrying atomic bombs!"

ARMADA

by MICHAEL LAULER

to go to war. Although the United Nations, as a going concern, had failed because of the imperialistic policies of Russia, everyone thought that World War II would be the last war. Johnny, although he had been training for World War III in strictest secrecy for two years, still could not envisage the ultimate possibility. So the present call to him was merely more orders from the Navy. He looked up the hill toward the house, wondering how many days it would be this time before he got back. "The Lord knows poor Lizbeth is used to these absences," he mused.

A squeal of brakes, of rubber on pavement, as a gray sedan drove up beside him. Although Johnny recognized the Navy driver, he still automatically checked the number of the car. Checks and double checks upon everything he did were second nature to him now. He opened the door, looked at the driver, said: "Barnett, J. C., Lieutenant Commander."

The driver repeated, "August 1, 1934." Johnny settled in the seat.

"Well, at least I'll never forget my birthday," he thought to himself. "I wonder what would happen if some day I did run up against a spy." He remembered a good friend of his, Bob Livesay, a year ago when they were both lieutenants. Bob gave the wrong answer one night, just out of curiosity. The next day Bob suddenly went on leave, and a week later was on his way to the farthest sightar base in northern waters. He also remembered Warner, who made one date too many with a strange beautiful woman who had an exotic voice, and an expensive car. Johnny was one of those who was called in to identify the body. Warner wasn't a very pleasant sight. Elliott was lost during maneuvers a month ago under rather peculiar circumstances, but intense investigation could not show that anything subversive was responsible for the disappearance.

As they went through the Submarine Base's only gate, Johnny leaned forward to be identified by the guard. He noticed absently that the guard was twice as numerous as usual, before he started through the yard, past the shops, the drydocks, the storage basins, until they came to another gate with the big letters over the top of it: TORPEDO SHOP. *No Admittance.*

"Well, at least this secret has been kept," Johnny thought as he got out of the car and went through the complicated rigmarole of identification, corrected identification, check and double check, before he was allowed through the gate. He hurried toward the big building, and disdaining the main entrance, dodged through the door in the side. A few steps down a dirty nondescript hall, and he entered a room which could have been a ready-room in one of the old flat-tops. He saw that he was the first to arrive.

Johnny went over to the coffee table, idly noticing that, as usual, the sugar can was full of little brown coffee drippings, which always irritated him, poured himself a cup of black coffee and went back to his own chair to sit down to drink it. He stretched his long legs under the chair ahead, ran his hand through his black curly hair, and moodily contemplated the map of the Pacific Ocean on the bulkhead in front of him. One by one the members of the group came in. First, Tony Whittington—he of the million-dollar family and democratic smile,

which was for once a very sober smile. Then Al Sanchez, with his usual flashing grin and good humor; followed in rapid succession by Dick Powers and Chick Matthews, the touchdown twins from Annapolis of previous years; then the irrepressible Robbie Burns, and last but not least, Joe Krakowski, the big handsome blond Pole who thrilled a hundred feminine hearts a day, but whose own heart, since his wife had died in a motor accident, had been wrapped up only in his three-year-old daughter.

The enlisted personnel were beginning to come in by this time, and took their places in the space allotted to each member of the group. Johnny's crew, Chief Torpedoman T. J. Heenan and Chief Machinist's Mate Oscar Olson, came in with a "Hi, Skipper!" and sat down by Johnny. Of the group, only Tony seemed to look very grave; all the rest of them were wondering what it was all about, and grumbling because they had been yanked away from their daily pursuits at this hour of the day. Finally, Tony sat up and said, "Don't you guys know what's going on?" then walked over and flipped on the radio. The rest of them stilled their chatter to listen to what the radio would have to say.

As it warmed up, they could hear a news bulletin coming over the radio: "We will not retreat one inch in Europe. We have fought since December 7, 1941, for freedom of the peoples in the world, and we will not be stampeded by this ultimatum or by any other threats!" Then the announcer's grave voice: "Ladies and gentlemen: You have just heard from the Secretary of State. Stand by for further news bulletins."

By this time the radio had the complete attention of every man in the room. Tony opened his mouth to speak again when the side door opened, and in came a group of three men, led by Rear Admiral Darling. Swiftly Tony snapped it off, as all hands jumped to attention.

"Carry on, gentlemen," said the Admiral. He turned around and motioned to the two men with him. "This is Captain Donahue, of Naval Intelligence. This is his assistant, Lieutenant Walker."

Johnny was really beginning to get interested. A sudden call, hush-hush like this, and an interview with the Old Man, no less, indeed meant something was in the air.

Admiral Darling said: "Gentlemen, before we proceed, I'd like Captain Donahue to tell you some of the things he has just told me. They will explain the situation, and you will then understand why I had to call you all back from leave."

Captain Donahue, a short, spare man with a naturally cheerful countenance, which now was very grim, cleared his throat again. "Gentlemen, let me review briefly the history of the last few years, as it has a lot to do with the coming events. As you doubtless remember, the Russians, back in 1948 and 1949, attempted to throw the Allied Occupation powers out of Germany by a 'cold war,' as we called it then. This was contrary to the treaties made during and after World War II. Finally, under pretense of putting down riots, the Russians sent thirty additional divisions into Poland, Austria, and Germany to reinforce the thirty already there. When we found that these new divisions were equipped, not to police a state, but to conquer a country, we took countermeasures. We shipped overseas half a million men. The upshot was that Germany and Austria revolted; the Russians were not ready to go to war, and so retreated east of the Vistula, where they agreed, by treaty, to remain.

"Eventually our occupation forces began gradually to be reduced until, by late 1961, we had only a police force remaining. Germany finally was on her way to reconstruction, and had already made notable progress. But Russia never could forget this loss of prestige. After purging a large part of the existing government, a group of even more extreme radicals took over the Cominform. We have always known that sooner or later this radical group would endeavor to take back the German territory which Russia had lost. That time, gentlemen, is now here.

"As you have undoubtedly heard over the radio, Russia delivered her ultimatum to our State Department this morning; we either get all of our forces out of Germany immediately, or Russia will move in and occupy. Obviously, if we accede to her demands, she will move in anyway. Russia has massed 127 divisions along the Vistula and is now fully prepared for a major war.

"Furthermore, gentlemen, she is not going to use those thirty days in waiting for us to remove our occupation forces. Our information is that she is sending from secret bases in the Pacific a fleet of twenty of the huge supersubmarines she has been building for the last three years. These submarines have an ingenious oxygen re-vitalization system, and are capable of cruising ten thousand miles underwater without contact with the surface in any manner. They have a maximum speed of twenty knots. This fleet has been picked up by our sightar stations off the Kuriles, and should reach our West Coast in about three weeks. Once they arrive there, they will remain hidden until the expiration of the ultimatum."

Captain Donahue turned around to the map of the Pacific area on the wall in back of him. Picking up a pointer, he tapped a spot slightly north of the Kuriles. He said: "The Russian submarine fleet, at eight o'clock this morning, was in this position. They are traveling the Great Circle Route, apparently, at a cruising speed of about ten knots. They are of course running submerged, and will probably run submerged all the way. Now, in these areas"—he swiftly pointed out seven different points on the map—"we have seven sightar stations, and I believe we will be able to follow the progress of this fleet to its destination."

The Captain faced squarely toward the sober group of young men. There was no mistaking the deadly seriousness of his mien. "Gentlemen," he said, "three of those submarines are carrying atomic bombs!"

He waited a moment for his statement to take effect, then continued: "We have not been able to discover precisely how the enemy plans to deliver these bombs, other than that some means of effective delivery, probably by a form of rocket fired from the submarine, actually does exist." He paused again, then resumed with what Johnny thought he detected as a slight tremor in his voice: "One of the bravest and most unselfish patriots this country will ever have, gave her life for that bit of information. . . .

"If we knew just which cities Russia planned to attack with these bombs, we could order them to be evacuated. But we don't have any way of finding this out, though we can make some shrewd guesses. Even so, the industries contained within them would suffer severe damage, if not complete destruction, for we could not possibly get them out also. Naturally, we're going to evacuate the most obvious target areas as a precautionary measure, but our best chance of defense is in stopping that fleet before it is able to launch its bombs."

Laying down his stick, Captain Donahue relaxed his voice ever so slightly. "Let me remark that the information I have just given you is top secret, and as accurate as it is humanly possible for it to be. You will on no account divulge it or discuss it now or at any time. Even after it has been officially released by higher authority, you are not at liberty to make known your prior knowledge of it. And one thing more: the United States has never been fooled by the Russian attitude. We have been preparing for this war since 1951, and we are ready."

Picking up his cap, Captain Donahue gravely surveyed the assembled group, and he and Lieutenant Walker

turned to leave. It was a very sober group by this time. Each man was a little pale.

As Admiral Darling looked about and saw the look of steadfast determination settle on the countenance of each man, he knew that he and his board had chosen them wisely. If anyone could stop the Russian fleet, the small group of seven tiny submarines they represented could do it.

The Admiral spoke: "We know for a fact that the Russians believe their big subs are the best in the world. Your Killer boats are not suspected by them, and in fact are known only to a very few people in this country. The Department of Defense has other well-kept secrets, and I am sure that the outcome of the hostilities will never really be in doubt. You will take reserve oxygen for each ship, and enough provisions for thirty days. You will cruise submerged at all times. You will stand automatic communication receiving watches, but will under no circumstances transmit. We will contact you when necessary. You will carry emergency war load of Mark IV rocket torpedoes. Commencing one week from today, we will have a tender at latitude 53° 45′N, longitude 165° 30′E in case of difficulties, or if you need ammunition or supplies. It will be in that position for thirty-five days and will then return to base. You will depart individually and travel independently, and rendezvous in ten days. That's all, gentlemen. I regret that I cannot permit you to return to your homes in the time that remains, nor even to communicate with your families. You'll find everything I've told you, and a lot more, in the secret operation order which I will personally deliver to each skipper as he gets under way. Barnett, I'd like to see you in my office."

Admiral Darling led Johnny to his office, pointed to a chair and said: "Sit down, Johnny." He leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. "Of course, you understand this is war. Don't be deceived by this thirty-day ultimatum with Russia. This undersea armada must be destroyed as completely and as quickly as possible. If it is destroyed completely, the Russians will never know what became of it, and, of course, they will not be in a position to ask any questions. Since they left Russian shores, the submarines have not communicated with Russia, which means that they are traveling in strict secrecy. Apparently they have no intention of communicating with headquarters, nor is anyone, so far as we can determine, communicating with them."

The Admiral smiled slightly. "Unfortunately for the Russians, we might have a few surprises for the boys in the Kremlin. If their fleet runs into trouble, and if they should be so naïve as to query us, we'll give them the bland look of complete and injured innocence. So if you have any qualms about performing an act of war in peacetime against a so-called 'friendly power,' forget them. Understand, Johnny, we are at war. They have already made the first move.

"Each one of your men will be allowed to write as many letters as he wishes before leaving. These will be censored and mailed in thirty days. Meanwhile, your families will receive by telegram notice that you are on duty. All the telegrams are exactly the same, and signed with the names of the individual men. After two years of this secretiveness, it must be a bit boring to you, but I can assure you that it has all been necessary. Now that the time has come, our work has not been in vain. We have secret weapons ready in many fields, and the men trained to use them effectively. We have tried to be prepared for all foreseeable emergencies—it just happens that the honor of striking the first blow in defense of our country falls to you."

Illustrated by John McDermott

Just when everything was set, here came orders again! All on account of that squadron of subs of his.

The Admiral stood up, shook hands, and left. Johnny slowly walked out to the briefing-room and looked over the assembled group. The first soberness was beginning to wear off, and the light of anticipation and excitement had begun to show in the eyes of each man present. They were excitedly talking among themselves when Johnny opened the door.

Briefly, he outlined the substance of his talk with Admiral Darling, and passed along the instructions received.

"We'll get under way at four-hour intervals," he said, "exactly as we've always drilled. Joe,"—turning to Krakowski—"do you mind being the first one under way again, so that the rest of the fellows can have more time to write letters?"

This had been practically routine, at the Pole's own suggestion, during the whole of the training period. However, at Johnny's question, Krakowski slowly answered, with a twisted smile: "I don't mind, Johnny, but how about letting me hold up long enough to write one letter?"

The others stared. Krakowski had never before written to anybody. But Barnett, looking behind the mask of the tall blond lad's eyes, suddenly knew that the letter he wanted to write would be held in trust for a little three-year-old girl.

After a few more minutes of desultory discussion, during which the order and times of getting under way for all seven boats were fixed, watches synchronized, and final good-by's said, the group broke up as each man went his separate way.

An exit, on the opposite side of the briefing-room from the one which they had used to enter, led into the interior of the huge barnlike building. It had been built over a sunken drydock, and the interior of the building was mostly water. Equipped with a double set of locks, the entrance to the drydock had been considerably deepened so that the "pig boats" could proceed in or out at any time of the day or night, all the while remaining submerged.

Moored along one side of the dock were seven rather strange-looking craft. About the size of a B-29 bomber fuselage, they resembled it also, to a remarkable degree, except that the tail section looked more like a fish tail instead of an airplane tail. There was no suggestion of wings, however. These were the mysterious undersea boats which could travel at a speed of sixty knots twelve hundred feet below the ocean's surface—and the existence of which only a dozen people not directly connected with them so much as suspected.

The various machinists and mechanics, who had been so faithfully tending them through the arduous months past were just finishing their work of loading supplies. These men had all been held incommunicado for two years. All were volunteers; few were married, and their families had been under the impression that they had been stationed in outposts in Alaska all this time. These were the men who had put the craft together—the machinists who had installed the machinery, the ordnance men who had perfected and installed the Mark IV torpedo fire-control system, the scientists who had invented, developed and tested nearly everything. In fact, here stood almost every man in the United States who knew about these boats. Many of them showed the strain of their long work.

Having hung his civilian suit in his locker and donned clean but disreputable khaki pants and shirt, Johnny strolled over to see how they were all getting on, and was pleased to see that all the boats would be ready to leave on schedule. At least one member of each crew was already checking his own boat from stem to stern. As the news of what was going on spread to the handlers, the hubbub inside the building became an uproar.

"Well," said Admiral Darling, when informed of it, "let 'em talk. It's the first time in two years they've been able to open their mouths without somebody objecting. Let 'em talk their heads off. It'll do 'em good."

At exactly 16:00 the two men of Lt. Krakowski's crew went aboard their ship. After saying good-by to Admiral Darling, who handed him a thick and heavily sealed envelope, Krakowski with a broad smile held out his hand, and said to Barnett: "So long, Skipper. See you in ten days." He shook hands with Johnny, flipped him and the Admiral a salute, and went aboard. Johnny saw the hatch close and the slight quiver of the stern planes. Admiral Darling by hand motion ordered the front gate opened. Almost inaudibly the ship began to slide under the surface. A dim green light went on in front of the craft. Slowly it got under way and disappeared through the drydock entrance into the bay. Johnny found himself trembling slightly. He went back to his office. And so all afternoon, all that night, all the next morning, at four-hour intervals, one by one, the members of the group crawled into their ships, shook hands with the Admiral and with Johnny, waved "so long," and slowly sank beneath the surface. Finally it was Johnny's turn. He looked around him at all his friends, waved them a good-by, said to Olson and Heenan, "Well, here we go, boys." Admiral Darling gripped his hand, clapped him once on the shoulder, said not a word. And the last of the seven strange submersibles disappeared from sight.

It was two o'clock, the day of Johnny's summons. In Johnny's house, a pretty, quiet young wife looked at a table through the tears in her eyes. All her best wedding silverware, all her fine dishes. This was going to be a real treat, this first leave of Johnny's. Now the chicken was cold and the gravy thick. She blinked back the tears; she had known since Johnny left. She remembered Johnny's last remark: "I'm going to the store for some cigarettes, honey." Somehow she had summoned the strength to answer, even as her heart nearly stopped beating: "Don't be gone long, dear. This chicken is almost ready." . . .

In New York, a society matron leaned across the bridge table and remarked: "I do hope there won't be another dreadful war, with all the rationing and those horrid things. My poor Tony hasn't been home for two years." Complacently, Mrs. Whittington played another card. . . .

That evening, two pretty girls sat alone in an upstairs room, all dressed for a formal dance. They were beginning to realize they weren't going to that dance. They would never go to another dance with Lieutenant Powers or Lieutenant Matthews. . . .

On a farm in Nebraska, a gray-haired woman knelt in prayer, clasped a telegram to her chest, praying: "Dear Lord, take care of my Robbie. Amen." . . .

In a large bank uptown, one assistant cashier said to another: "Jim, that Navy lieutenant just sent us another wire. You'd better phone his home and tell the housekeeper that we will take care of his business affairs until he gets back again. Say, that baby of his must be pretty old now, isn't she?"

"Yes," returned the other, "she must be around three—a cute little blondie." . . .

In a small town in New Mexico, a very young wife—and her mother—were just finishing dressing to go to church. Al Sanchez' wife was going to the cathedral to burn a candle for her husband, and to pray that he would be back to see his child, shortly to be born. . . .

Johnny settled into his seat in the control cubicle, and slowly eased the throttle forward. There was the familiar slight hiss and hum as his boat got under way. He leaned forward and switched on the recognition lights.

Cruising at about eight knots, he slowly threaded his way over and around the rubbish, outsized rocks, and old iron that littered the bottom of the bay. By now he knew every rusted anchor and submerged reef by sight, and there were also the markers that the group themselves had planted. As soon as he cleared the entrance to the harbor, Johnny submerged to three hundred feet, put on the automatic pilot. Then he turned his head and said to his crew: "All right, boys, I'll take the first watch."

Heenan and Olson left their maneuvering stations and took up their interminable game of acey-deucey.

Johnny set the automatic pilot for a cruising speed of twenty knots, pushed away his safety belt, and leaned back in his comfortable bucket seat, reviewing in his mind the sequence of events which had led to his being where he was now.

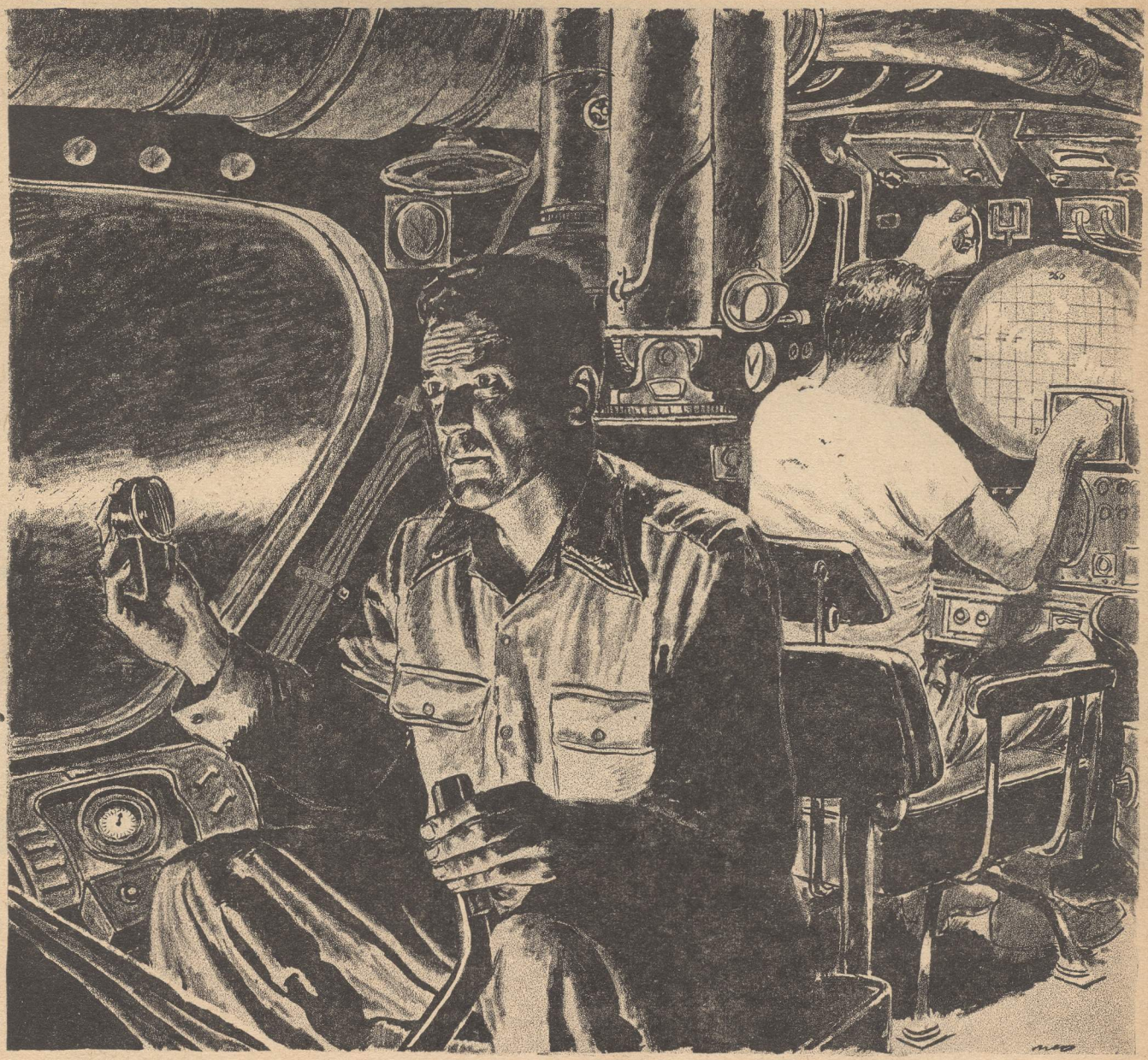
Johnny had just turned eleven as World War II ended, and he hadn't had a chance to follow world happenings too closely since his graduation from the Naval Academy in 1956. He remembered in 1960 he had a nice berth on the U.S.S. *Walrus,* a conventional submarine with snorkel and batteries. He had just received his promotion to senior grade Lieutenant, and had just returned from two weeks leave, which included his marriage and honeymoon. He felt as though the world were his oyster; all the clouds were rosy, and everything was right with the world.

His dreams were rudely shattered that April morning as he received a summons to appear immediately in the Squadron Commander's quarters.

As Johnny hurried to answer the summons, he searched his soul for the reason. "Fitness report is O.K.," he thought. "I haven't run any ships on the mud. I haven't insulted the Admiral's daughter; what is it?"

Pausing before the Squadron Commander's door, on the cabin deck of the submarine tender alongside of which lay *Walrus,* he wiped the faint beads of perspiration off his forehead, straightened his uniform, removed his cap, took a deep breath, and announced to the enlisted orderly:

"Please tell the Commodore that Lieutenant Barnett is reporting as ordered."



"Lord," Johnny thought, "if this fool U. R. D. isn't working, I'm a gone goose."

"He's waiting for you, sir," the sailor replied. "He said for you to go right in." He opened the door to the Squadron Commander's quarters.

"Well, here's for it," Johnny had thought, as he stepped across the threshold.

Captain Smith, a very grave and severe officer whom his juniors frequently accused of having forgotten his youth, if he had ever had one, for once seemed fairly affable. Turning to the Flag Officer with him, he motioned with one hand to Johnny and said: "Admiral Darling, this is Lieutenant Barnett. I'll be in the Operations Office if you want me, sir."

Rear Admiral Darling, wearing submarine dolphins and four rows of decorations—uppermost among which Johnny in amazement distinguished a Navy Cross with three bright gold stars emblazoned thereon—smiled at him, sank into a comfortable chair, waved to another chair near by, and said: "Sit down, Lieutenant."

Johnny sat down in some bewilderment. The Admiral continued:

"My official position, Barnett, is Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Undersea Warfare, and I've come here from Washington for the express purpose of seeing you. I'm looking for some volunteers from the fleet who possess the following requirements." He marked them off on his fingers: "Above average intelligence, courage beyond question, the ability to keep his mouth shut at all times and in all places, more than average ability in submarining, high manual dexterity. We have looked over every junior officer in both submarine forces, with the assistance of the Force Commanders, and we have picked fifty, of whom we will choose ten for special training. This is all I can tell you, except that it will lead to very early submarine command, may prove to be risky, will definitely require great personal sacrifice, and may give you the opportunity to render a service of incalculable value to your country. It is strictly a volunteer job, and you will have to be able to take a lot. Your record in the service is excellent. If you do not care to volunteer, it will in no way affect your record; and frankly, it looks as if you have a better than average career ahead of you in submarines, as it stands. If you want to volunteer, I will have the Bureau of Personnel detach you without relief, to my staff. You don't have to answer immediately; tomorrow will be soon enough."

"You don't need to wait until tomorrow, Admiral; I'll take the job right now."

The Admiral laughed. "That's as I expected, Barnett. The dispatch requesting orders for you is already drafted and ready to send as soon as I release it. You should have your orders in a day or two. From this moment onward, you will tell no one, not even your recently acquired bride, what you are doing, whom you are working for, or any information of any kind pertaining to your actual work. As you will nominally be working on torpedoes, you will get a short lecture every day from torpedo experts in what they have done during the day, so that you will be able to converse with other people without arousing suspicion. You may talk as much as you want to about any work these lecturers tell you, pertaining to torpedoes. Just don't be too talkative; make it sound a little hush-hush; but not so much as to arouse comment."

The Admiral stood up and held out his hand.

"Welcome to our little band, Johnny. Take a couple of days to wind up your affairs here, and come to Washington as soon as you can. You're a little behind the rest of the lads, because I just didn't have the heart to interrupt your honeymoon."

Johnny, slightly bewildered, shook hands, turned on his heel and left the room. As he did so, the dawning sense of recognition came upon him with a rush. Admiral Darling had been one of the most successful submarine commanders during the early days of the war against Japan, and later on as a Squadron Commander, had led a six-boat wolfpack on a sweep through the Yellow Sea which had netted fourteen cargo-carriers and a Jap cruiser sunk! His picture had been most prominently featured in all the newspapers, and Johnny, at the age of eleven, had pasted it in his scrapbook of war heroes.

Seated again in *Walrus'* tiny wardroom—strange how commodious it would seem to him later—he lighted a cigarette to calm his befuddlement, and tried to think.

"It must be pretty big," he decided, "if Admirals interview Lieutenants to take on a job." He wondered what the job could be.

JOHNNY had always specialized in mechanics, especially the new motors run by hydrogen peroxide, and he had done considerable study, but no actual research, on the use of atomic fuels. He knew that the Navy had one large submarine already powered by nuclear energy, that it was not considered economical to use it on surface vessels, which could get abundant air for combustion of chemical fuels, and that it was considered impossible to get light enough equipment to power anything smaller than a four-thousand-ton vessel with atomic power. Johnny wondered if perhaps his work had something to do with his new job.

"Well, I guess there's no use worrying for a day or so until my orders get here," he thought.

While he was sitting there in reverie, wondering what it was all about, another summons came from the Squadron Commander. Again he went to his quarters on the tender, this time to receive a dispatch from the Chief of Naval Personnel: "LIEUTENANT JOHN C. BARNETT HEREBY DETACHED PRESENT DUTY PROCEED REPORT IMMEDIATELY WASHINGTON D.C. . . ." The date-time group showed that it had been sent exactly fifteen minutes previously.

At this moment a blinking red light in front of him aroused him from his reverie. Glancing at the underwater visi-screen, he saw they were approaching a school of whales, so he took off the automatic pilot, eased the ship down to eight hundred feet for about ten minutes, then came back up to three hundred feet. The visi-screen being now cleared, he replaced the

Ahead he saw a blinding flash and a terrific explosion. "Skipper, I think I got the head man."

ship on automatic pilot and resumed his reverie. . . .

He had reported in Washington the Monday morning following his interview. There in an out-of-the-way office in the Pentagon, he had met the group of ten officers with whom he would work for the next few years. He found himself to be the senior officer present, had become more or less the leader of the group, and eventually found himself officially designated Group Commander. Of the original ten, seven remained. Each member of the group was given his own crew of two enlisted men, also obviously "selected" volunteers. One by one, technicians, scientists, machinists, began to show up; and finally, after a month, they were all moved bodily to the Pacific Coast station from which he had just departed. Soon, supplies and crates began to arrive and the entire organization went to work, strictly on a ten-hour-day basis.

The first thing that struck their eyes was the extraordinarily rugged construction and odd design of their future ships, but by this time no one asked any questions. Unfamiliar and surprising pieces of equipment showed up, were duly installed, and seemed to fit easily and nicely into their designated locations.

At the end of each day's work the entire organization was given a short lecture on progress of the torpedo work they were theoretically supposed to be doing. Admiral Darling went under the theory that few, if any, human beings were so built that they couldn't talk at all or make at least one slip over a period of two years; he would give them something about which they could talk.

After the new construction there followed the testing of each craft individually, and finally group maneuvers and underwater target practice. They worked out various methods of attack and defense in case of opposition by surface craft, underwater craft, and even in case they ran up against other ships similar to their own. They finished perfecting their arduous and painstaking work, and the entire organization was granted fifteen days' leave, their first sizable leave in two years. And the day after their leave started, here they were all back again; only, this time, it wasn't maneuvers.

He heaved a sigh, looked over the instrument panel for the umpteenth time to see that everything was working properly, and saw by the panel clock that his watch would be over in five minutes. He called to Heenan: "Your watch in five minutes, Irish. And Ole, how about getting some chow ready?"

As Heenan shortly came up to take his place at the control seat, Johnny stopped aft to his "office," as he euphemistically called the tiny crowded area around his narrow bunk, to bring his log up to date. Then he went to check over the entire craft, as was his habit at least once every four hours when the ship was in operation.

As soon as Olson had food prepared, he and Johnny sat down to a rough-and-ready repast. The talk, of course, was of the news they had received, and how their new craft would meet the emergency when their seven tiny boats closed in combat with the Russian fleet of twenty huge submersibles. There was considerable speculation, which included Heenan on watch less than three feet away, as to whether the Russians had any fighter craft similar to the group's. Johnny told them what Intelligence had told him; so far as was known, there were none. None of the large submersibles being built in the last few years could compete in speed, maneuverability, or in diving depth with them. No other country had the visi-screen, for viewing objects underwater. Johnny also told them that no other country had the Mark IV rocket torpedoes.

"So you see," he wound up, "as far as we're concerned, they are merely twenty sitting ducks. All we have to do is knock them over, then go home and get our medals."

Heenan grinned: "Boy, I hope you're right, Skipper, but it sounds too easy. I was in the last fracas, and believe me, we had no tea-party then."

Johnny laughed.

"Well, that's what they told me. If it's as easy as that, it's certainly all right with me."

"You sure ain't a-woofin', Skipper," chimed in Olson.

"This is the worst part of the whole thing," Heenan said over his shoulder. "This just sittin' here, waitin'. I know we're moving, but I just can't get used to goin' through the water without no noise. I wish them atomic guys had've at least put a little *'chug-chug'* into their motors, or sand in the gears, or something. Even that Mark IV only goes *'pfffffft'* when it's discharged. But at least it makes a noise when it hits."

And so the interminably long days passed, with nothing but an occasional ship or school of fish showing on the visi-screen. As their operation order contained explicit orders to travel submerged at all times, Johnny could not allow the luxury of surface cruising

even for a short while each night. Nine days from port, he cut his cruising speed to fifteen knots. From then on, Johnny was to be either in the pilot's seat, or not far from it, twenty-four hours a day. When the automatic gyro-navigator showed them to be eight hundred miles from the rendezvous, Johnny re-checked his charts, pin-pricked the location of a sightar station about 150 miles ahead and to starboard. According to the operation order, if he had received no information since leaving port, he could, if there was time, check into the sightar station. Readjusting the automatic pilot to his new course, he increased speed to sixty knots and headed in the direction of the sightar station.

Two hours later, Johnny slowed down and switched on the Underwater Recognition Device. He put the B-phone receivers over his ears, and shortly was rewarded with the monotonous *"ping-ping-ping"* which showed that he was in contact with another U.R.D. set. He set his transmitter to give the proper signal, and eased up still more on the throttle. Soon the huge bulk of the sightar station came into focus on his visi-screen. Motionless, it balanced at five hundred feet, in shape not unlike a tremendous, bloated submarine.

As Johnny watched the figure of the sightar station on the screen, he saw one of the turrets slowly begin to revolve in his direction, and his forehead became slightly damp with perspiration.

"Lord," he thought, "if this fool U.R.D. isn't working, I'm a gone goose." He saw the turret steady with a dead bead on him.

Nervously, he kept repeating the recognition signal, and finally heard a cautious voice say: "Okay, you talk, but don't move."

Johnny spoke the secondary recognition signal carefully, followed by his own identification. He could hear a sigh of relief over the phones when a voice came across: "Okay. Who is it? Barnett?"

Johnny mopped his forehead and replied: "Whew! I wish you guys would come through with your answers a little faster. With that damn' turret looking me in the face, I was almost too paralyzed to talk."

"You should be," was the answer with a chuckle. "She's loaded with Mark IV ammunition. This is Captain Sather. What can I do for you, Johnny?"

"I didn't realize it would be you, sir. What's the news? I haven't heard anything."

"Here's the latest: Reds sighted passing Station 4 about three hours ago. The original fleet has been augmented by twenty small submarines, apparently high-speed craft. They have been holding maneuvers and target practice while traveling. They have ammunition similar to Mark IV. It apparently is shot the same way as Mark IV, and travels at about the same speed. Begins to sink at maximum range of five thousand yards, and will explode on lightest contact. The escorting subs are extremely maneuverable, and show speeds up to forty knots. This information has been passed on to Admiral Darling, and two more groups will be sent as reinforcements to intercept any of the fleet that gets by your group."

Johnny blinked; his throat felt dry as he realized that he and his group of tiny boats were suddenly up against severe odds, and that casualties might be heavy. They were in for the battle of their lives! This, also, was the first time he had known there was more than one group in existence. He had suspected the presence of another group on the Atlantic coast, but had no idea there were any other groups besides his own in the Pacific. This project certainly had been kept a secret!

"Got all that," said Johnny after a moment. "What's the news from topside?"

"Russians have moved up sufficient forces to overrun Europe on twenty-four hours' notice. Intelligence reports indicate they are going to try to do it without the use of atomic bombs or bacteriological weapons. They are equipped to send over radioactive clouds, but will probably not use them because of the danger to their own forces. Reinforcements have been landing, or are about to land, in western Europe from America at the rate of ten thousand troops per day. These are all special-service troops. The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimate that it will take the Russians about six months to push across western Europe, at a cost to them of four million men, and a cost to the defense of less than one million casualties. It is believed they are staking everything on their first attack. If they do not win within the first few months, their chances are small.

"All members of the military establishment of the United Nations have been alerted for instant action. Economic pressures have already been brought to bear to persuade the Russians to back down on their ultimatum. However, no success is anticipated. Hostilities will commence on Sunday, the 15th. Intelligence expects the first blow to be struck by the submarine fleet you are after, and the hope is that if none of them get through, Russia will be completely thrown off her stride and back down. In the meantime, world tension is increasing to the breaking point. There are riots from all points of the globe. All recruiting stations in the United States have been flooded for days. Apparently everyone believes that if war does start, this will be the end of the world as we know it. The President sent this message yesterday to all troops on the front lines: 'This issue is not in doubt. Democracy can and will win. Good luck, and God keep you.'

"That's all there is, Johnny. I'll report your group in position and ready for action. I've been given orders that you cannot send out any messages."

"Yes sir, I know," said Johnny. "Thanks for the information. I'll be seeing you, Captain. Wish us luck—and if I don't see you—" His voice choked for a moment.

"Okay, Johnny," the older officer's voice came gravely and respectfully. "Good hunting to you, and best of luck!"

Resetting the automatic pilot once more, Johnny settled back in a brown study, as his boat sped swiftly toward that no longer distant rendezvous. Possession of fighter submarines by the enemy was most serious news! Least of the problems thus posed was the change in battle tactics which became necessary. He set himself resolutely to think the new situation through.

Hour after hour went by slowly until they were within an hour's run of the rendezvous. At this point Johnny abruptly decreased his cruising speed to five knots, and switched on his U.R.D. set. He was rewarded immediately by hearing the *"ping-ping-ping"* of at least two other phones.

"A-13," said Johnny, over the phones. Then he gave his name and rank.

Back over the phones came:

"No. 2, Whittington."

"No. 5, Burns."

"No. 3, Matthews."

"Okay—form One Eight," said Johnny.

In formation, they slowly continued until, one by one, three more recognition signals came over the phone.

"No. 6, Sanchez."

"No. 7, Powers."

"No. 4, Krakowski."

As soon as they picked up Krakowski, Johnny called to them:

"All right, fellas, huddle. I'll give you the latest dope." They closed in as he shut off the motors; then Johnny gave them the news he had picked up at the sightar station. He gave it to them slowly, so that no word would be lost, as he knew that all three men in each craft would be listening.

"Anything to report on your way up here?"

The American ships cruised the entire length of the Russian fleet.

All answered in the negative.

Johnny spoke again: "Now here's what we'll do, fellas: We'll cruise line abreast at ten knots until we make contact. I'll take the starboard flank at one hundred feet. Form in numerical order from right to left, distance five miles, depth spacing one hundred feet. When we sight the enemy, we'll use anti-submarine tactics, making the initial attack in formation at full speed. After the first time we dive through the enemy formation, it will be every man for himself, and watch out for those enemy fighters! Get 'em from beneath or astern if you can, where they will probably have a blind spot. Tony and Krak will go for the rear of the formation with me. Al, I want you to stay up in front and ride herd on them to see that none slip through. Not one single ship must get through our attack. Try to pick off the small ones, which are their fighter craft, first; then we will be able to get the big ones easily. Don't take any chances, though. Remember, we have to get all of these guys. And that'll be quite a day's work! Keep track of the ones you hit, if you can, so we'll know how many we still have to tag."

The nagging thought that had been bothering Johnny ever since he left port recurred. How would he be able to tell which ships were carrying the atom bombs—perhaps it was just as well not to be able to! Whoever shot one of those ships would probably be eligible immediately to collect on his life insurance!

"Well, as they used to say in the war," thought Johnny, "who wants to live forever?"

For several hours they crept slowly forward, every sense alert, communication receivers meticulously tended. The visi-screens of all seven boats were on full gain and maximum search, though it was hardly to be expected that the first contact would come from them. Still, it would not do to be caught by surprise.

Suddenly a red light glowed on Johnny's receiver, and a buzzing noise emanated from it. Swiftly, Heenan stripped a short section of paper tape from it, held it up to Johnny.

"FOR BARNETT PICKED UP TWENTY THOUSAND SHARES AMAL CAN AT FIVE AND ONE HALF WILL SELL AT SIX."

To Johnny, this meant: "TWENTY ENEMY SUBS HALFWAY BETWEEN POINTS EASY AND FOX. INTERCEPT AT FOX." It was not signed, but he knew that it was from Admiral Darling.

A quick check of the charts; then Johnny opened up on his interpack talk-back set: *"Boss to wolves. Change front to northwest. Gallop!"* He threw the rudder right, changed course to northwest, rested his hand lightly on the throttle, and waited.

Powers, on the far end of the line, was the last to acknowledge; simultaneously he gunned his boat to forty knots, and changed course to the right. All the other boats did the same, at varying speed and direction. Exactly sixteen minutes after Johnny's command, all seven boats shot off as one, speed forty, course 315°T.

For three hours they sped along, silently and grimly, each man occupied with his own thoughts. Suddenly a faint voice on the talk-back set was heard: *"I got 'em, Johnny. This is Tony. They're cruising at three hundred feet about twenty miles ahead of me. Fighter craft."*

"O.K." said Johnny. *"Boss to wolves—stand by!"*

Rapidly the tension in the subs arose. Johnny was leaning forward as if he could pierce the dark wall of water in front of his visi-screen. He could hear the short breathing of Heenan, down to the right of him, as he toyed with the dials of the Remote Torpedo Control gear. He heard Olson humming a tune, as Olson always did in moments of excitement. It was Olson's business to see that all machinery in the sub functioned correctly. At the moment, however, there was nothing for him to do, and so he was standing behind Johnny, staring also at the visi-screen.

Suddenly a gasp came from Olson: "That's them, Skipper!"

The screen showed a veritable cloud, it seemed to Johnny, of small craft about fifteen miles dead ahead. Rapidly he counted. There were twenty of them.

"They're sure taking a chance," he muttered, as he gazed at the screen, "cruising with all their fighters in one bunch like that. Wonder if they've got visi-screens too?"

As he spoke, he saw the images on the screen change formation and start to head in his direction. Johnny yelled into the phones:

"This is Boss. Charge . . . Charge!" As an afterthought, he added: *"And don't miss. Good luck, fellows!"*

He rammed his throttle to full power, headed straight for the right-hand edge of the enemy group. With his left hand he adjusted his safety-belt, motioned to Heenan and Olson to do the same.

Rapidly, the range closed to less than three miles. Suddenly there was a loud *"Swoosh!"*

Johnny jumped, startled.

"Good God," he said. "They have better ammunition than we have!"

He drew a bead on the nearest boat, then touched off one round. As he did so, he pulled his control stick into his belly and went into a steep climb. The hiss and hum in the sub deepened, and the speed shot to sixty-five knots and even higher, as Johnny pushed the throttle full open, past the red mark where he had always been told to stop until his speedometer indicated close to seventy knots. As he leveled off at the top of his climb in order to dive on the enemy,

he felt a sharp concussion, as though a large hammer had struck the side of his craft.

Johnny grinned at Heenan. "Not bad shooting, Irish. I took a chance on that long one, and got 'im." He picked up the pack phones.

"Boss to wolves. Boss to wolves. Their ammunition shoots twice as far as ours. Use our No. 3 tactics."

He saw by the screen another vague shadow approaching from starboard. He drew a bead, saw the ghostly shape enter his sighting ring, and pushed the button to release another shell. Immediately he dived, and heard another *"swoosh"* as an enemy rocket passed overhead. There was a tremendous *"bong"* as his own shell struck the enemy, followed by three explosions, of which one sounded slightly different from the others. Over the phones he heard: *"No. 4, Krakowski. I got one."*

"No. 3. I got one, Johnny. Powers got one, but they got him, too."

"That's five of 'em, Skipper," said Olson, who was keeping track.

At that moment, in swift succession, there were two explosions.

"Hot damn, Johnny, I got two." He recognized the voice of Whittington. *"Here's another son of a—"* A tremendous explosion in his ear phones cut off the sentence.

The battle had now changed into a regular dog fight. Thirteen Russians left, and five Americans. Thirteen to five. Diving, turning, twisting, climbing, now slow, now fast, the nearly equally matched adversaries stalked each other in the inky depths of the ocean. But the excellent underwater rockets of the Russians could hardly equalize the speed and maneuverability of the American ships. The Americans would charge in, fire, then turn and climb or dive away from the Russians before the Reds could align their rocket tubes to shoot back.

Al Sanchez missed on his first dive through the enemy, banked and descended vertically to one thousand feet, then turned and came back with a tremendous burst of speed directly through the Russian cordon. Three times he saw ghostly shapes appear within his sights; one too late to shoot at, one was flashing the battle recognition signal and so was friendly—the other one he didn't miss. Then immediately he caught another enemy in his sights; he closed up swiftly. The Red dived away. Al laughed at this. No underwater ship in the world had gone as deep as he had. Down, down, down, he rode the tail of the Red sub. Seven hundred, eight hundred, one thousand feet—then suddenly, before his eyes, the enemy boat collapsed like a crushed egg. Where a submarine had been was now a twisted, mashed-up mess of metal and machinery. Al could not recognize a single fragment of the gruesome hash as part of a submersible. He stared fascinated, at this awesome display of the power of the sea, gulped, and swung his craft in a long, looping climb out of the depths, and up, back to the fight raging above.

At eight hundred feet, he caught a shape to one side which turned out to be a Russian, damaged and sinking. "Better be shot than crushed like that other," he muttered. He swung in a short turn until the enemy was broadside in his sights. He noticed a star above the hammer and circle on the short, squat conning tower that all the Russian ships had. He slowly drew a dead bead and fired. Ahead he saw a blinding flash and a terrific explosion. An instant later a *"clang"* rang through the sub which sounded as though a giant had hit it with a tremendous sledge hammer. His ears rang for minutes while the crew replaced broken light bulbs with the tougher but not so satisfactory battle bulbs.

"Skipper, I think I got the head man. He carried a star."

"Attaboy, Al," replied Johnny.

Two more enemy boats he caught in his sights and drew up to fire on them to send them to their own Red heaven. He didn't see the third one come up under him.

Over the phones, Johnny could hear the chatter of the other skippers as slowly the victories mounted: as near and distant explosions announced the end of one aggressor after another. However, all the explosions were not victories for the Americans. The odds now stood eight to four, with the main Russian fleet yet to be engaged. Johnny strained at the straps holding him in his seat as he fairly jumped up and down in his hurry and eagerness to finish off more enemy. In his anxiety to score victories in order to get at the main fleet, he missed several shots.

Robbie Burns, the irrepressible, had spent one-half of his life, it seemed, trying to keep out of the clutches of Navy regulations. He already had had two reprimands and one Court, which had dealt with him very easily. Due to appear before another Court, Robbie was technically under arrest. This time he knew he was through. Robbie's girl friend had been in an auto crash while Robbie was driving her car in an hilarious mood. One death resulted; the girl was disfigured. Robbie had made arrangements to marry her in the hospital. . . . "My God! Yesterday was supposed to be my wedding day," he thought.

Robbie, never one to pay too much attention to discipline or regulations, had gone hunting on his own. In a steep climb, he caught his ship just before she broached. Then, practically standing her on her nose, he rushed for the depths again. Soon he caught sight of three enemy in column, traveling fast. Swiftly he drew up from astern, eased alongside. With a grin on his face and a glint in his eye, he muttered: "O.K. you punks; if you don't know I'm here, you soon will." Still the three drove straight ahead. Rapidly he figured his distance and course, then straightened the ship, gunned her to seventy knots, and pushed the firing key as he crossed ahead of the leading ship.

Quickly he turned, just in time to catch the leading Red sub in his screen as his torpedo tagged it. "One," he said.

Then the second sub, unable to dodge in time, crashed into the débris of the first. *"Two!"* Robbie yelped, as another tremendous flash and bang occurred. He saw the third sub turn toward him to miss the wreckage of the previous two. He could see it was too close to miss.

"You're too late," grinned Robbie, as the sub slid into the wreckage.

The grin froze on his face as he saw the Red shoot at him. Frantically he pushed his control stick forward. This time, together, there were two tremendous explosions. . . .

Matthews was strictly regulation. He had had his orders; he stuck to them, and to his training. On his first attack he caught a deflection shot on one Soviet sub which missed, and a snap shot a disappearing Red that didn't. His climb carried him through the enemy formation up nearly to the surface. He drew off to one side, turned his screen toward the enemy, and soon picked up a sub. He checked to see if he was the only other sub in the near vicinity—he was.

Swiftly, as per doctrine, he drew up to within two hundred yards dead astern, took plenty of time, followed the turns and twists of a desperate enemy attempting to escape until he had a clear shot; then—one less Russian. Swiftly, precisely and methodically, he repeated the maneuver. Three more he blew to a bolshevik heaven. Then, on a quick turn—a spent, sinking shell caught him. . . .

Krakowski was an unusually handsome person, modest, soft-spoken; and he played the piano like a wizard. He had only two loves—his daughter and his submarine, and was totally oblivious to other women or other distractions. He was probably the officer in the group most respected and loved by his men, and perhaps, next to Barnett, the finest leader and most efficient individual. Now, although neither of them yet realized it, the

fate of the West Coast rested in the hands of himself and Barnett. As he made his first attack, Krakowski crossed himself, and leaned forward alertly. In his tremendous rush he passed a vague shape to one side, just disappearing out of his vision. Quickly he turned, saw a Russian sub rapidly disappearing in the distance.

Krakowski was the finest marksman in the group. He wouldn't miss a shot like this. As he announced over the phone: *"No. 4, Krakowski; I got one,"* another sub loomed up right in front of him, so close it took quick work on his part to avoid collision. As he drew away, he snapped a quick stern shot and was pleased to hear the resultant effect, although he thought for a minute it would blow him and his submarine clear out of the ocean.

Johnny, who had been pretty busy, and Olson, who had been keeping track of the various explosions, looked at each other. Olson very soberly said: "Skipper, I count twenty-five."

"Yeah," replied Johnny. "I counted twenty-five, too. Let's see." He cut his speed to ten knots, and started to cruise through the battle area. Starting at one hundred feet, he went down to one thousand feet, and then returned in spirals. As he neared the surface the second time, he heard over his ear phones:

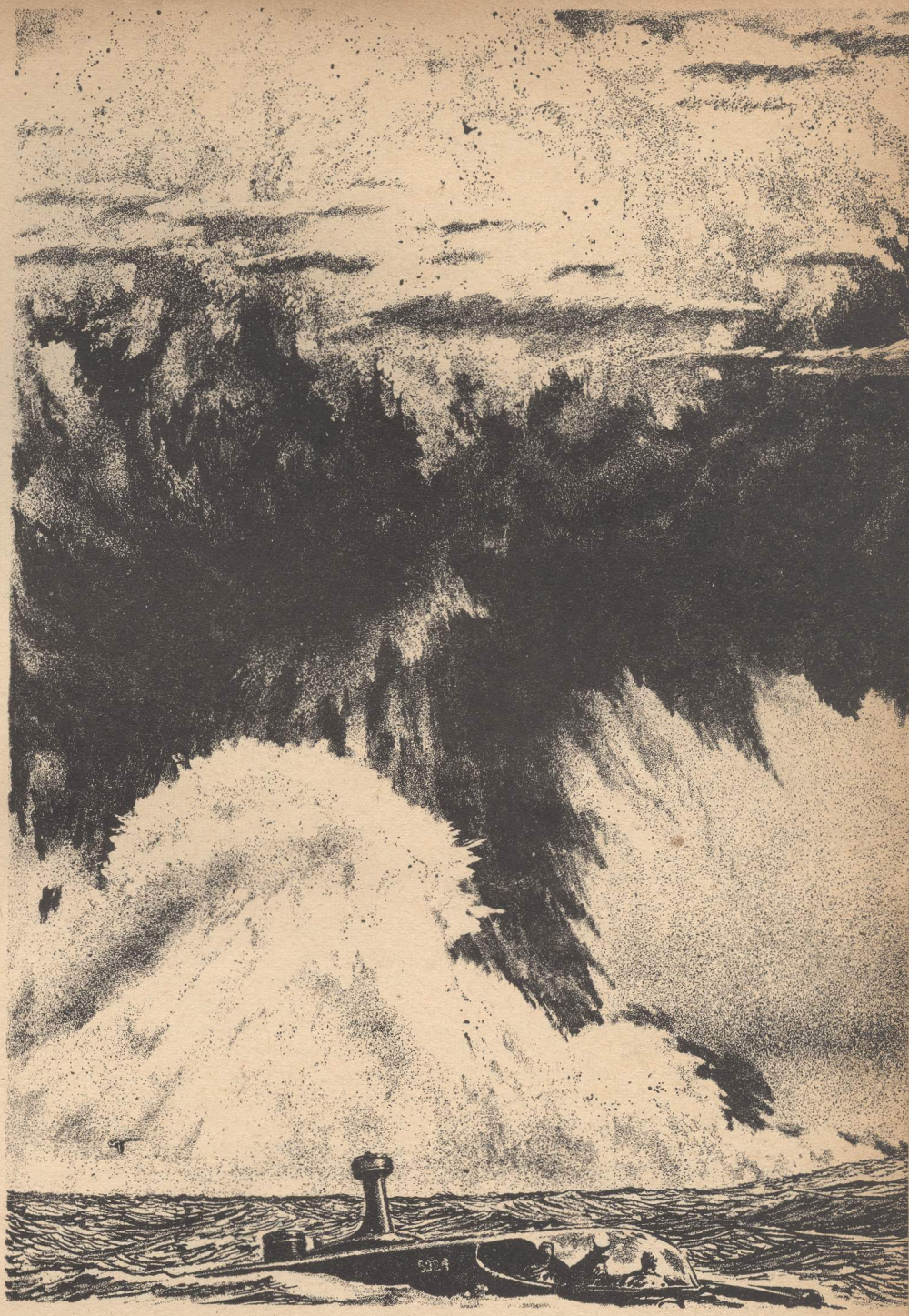
"No. 4, Krakowski. Are you there, Johnny? Can you hear me, Skipper? This is Joe. Come in, anyone."

"Okay, Joe," replied Johnny. *"I think you and I are all that are left."*

"I was afraid of that," replied Krakowski. *"But did we get all the Reds?"*

"I'm sure we did," said Johnny. *"I counted twenty-five explosions, which meant twenty of them, and five of ours. Let's get together and see how we stack up. Can you see me?"*

"I see you, Johnny. You are just ahead of me."



Almost immediately, the ocean stirred, heaved, boiled—the atomic bomb burst! Then water and steam spread out and began to return to the sea!

Soon Johnny saw the shape of the other craft ease into his screen. They both turned off their motors, and Johnny said: *"Excuse me a minute until I see how my crew is getting on."* In front of the torpedo fire-control panel sat Heenan, perspiration running down his face, his dungarees soaked with sweat, eyes bulging with concentration, oblivious to anything else that went on around him.

Johnny leaned over and tapped him on the shoulder. Heenan jumped and looked up as startled as if he had just been awakened from a deep sleep.

"Fight's over for a while, Irish," said Johnny. "Krakowski's ship and ours are all that are left," he continued gently. "How's the ammunition holding out?"

"We've got an even dozen rocket fish left," said Heenan.

Barnett stared. He and Joe Krakowski had twenty enemy subs yet to account for!

Quickly he checked over the rest of the craft. No seams were visibly weakened. There were no leaks, and the atomic power plant dials all showed proper readings, indicating that, despite the tremendous speeds, and radical maneuvers he had been using, it had stood the gaff beautifully. He remembered the axiom of high speed underwater: From twenty to forty knots your fuel consumption went up eight times. From forty to sixty it quadrupled once more, so that from twenty knots to sixty knots, fuel used was as one to thirty-two, and this without counting the amount consumed during mere acceleration!

Johnny looked at his watch. The battle had taken a little over one hour. Thank God for the Nuclear Energy System! It had provided the margin of victory over the slower but many more numerous hydrogen-peroxide-powered submarines of the enemy!

The problem was now to find the main body of Russian submarines. The mission which Johnny's group had been sent out to accomplish had not as yet been achieved, and they had already lost five of the original seven boats. If only they could contact the main body—but how? It stood to reason the Red fleet must have

changed course, leaving the fighters to hold off the Americans, and had probably increased speed, to boot.

There was only one answer to the problem, so far as Johnny could see. Despite the strictest orders, he would have to ask for more information. This, he figured, was justified, since no one had suspected the presence of the enemy fighter craft.

Once he had made up his mind, Johnny's automatic transmitter commenced stuttering out a jumble of unrelated signals, all the time showing an amber light in the top of the case. Less than a minute after it had stopped transmitting, the red light came on, and Heenan pulled out a strip of tape.

FOR BARNETT AMAL CAN NOW AT SIX AND ONE HALF SHALL I SELL

"Hot damn, Krak!" shouted Johnny. "Old Darling is right on the job as usual! Fall in behind and let her rip!"

With Joe Krakowski's submarine keeping on his tail as if glued, Johnny set course southeast at sixty-five knots. The two subs fairly burned through the water, running, once again, at a depth of five hundred feet where no turbulence from their wake could boil to the surface. For half an hour they swept on in this manner, but no sign of the enemy did they see. Johnny began to worry.

"Joe," said he, *"we may have run past them. You scout due north of here, and I'll scout south. Rendezvous in position Hypo in one hour."*

"Right, Skipper!" And Number 4 roared off to the north.

Minutes passed. Suddenly, Johnny noticed a faint, distant blur on his visi-screen. *"Joe!"* he shouted. *"Joe! Come back! I've got them!"* He yelled into his pack-phones as though by the very power of his lungs he could reach through to Krakowski before the other got completely out of range Johnny cursed the impulse which had led him to split his team, wished he and Krak had both headed south—completely forgetting the fact that they might both just as well have headed north!

He thought he heard a faint reply in his earphones; couldn't be sure, but throttled down to half-speed to give Joe a chance to catch up, if indeed he had replied, and also, to enable him to look over the enemy formation a bit. As he overtook it, more slowly, now, he saw that the Reds were cruising in a broad V, with two vessels in column at the apex. They were at about three hundred feet, and had evidently increased speed to twenty knots. As he approached, with his visi-screen on full power and super-range—no good for searching, but excellent for picking up detail at a distance—he noticed that the shape of the two subs in column at the apex of the V were different from the rest, and also different from each other. Gingerly, he closed in a bit. It wouldn't do to be spotted at this juncture!

Johnny's heart gave a flip-flop as he realized the import of what he saw! The leading submarine had a complicated derrick and catapult structure built on her deck aft of the conning tower. Close behind her followed the second sub, with three odd cylindrical tanks, one abaft the other, in the same place!

"By God, those are rocket catapults!" he thought. "They have huge rockets on the first sub, and all the atom bombs are on the second one!"

At this moment, Krakowski's voice came through his earphones again. *"Good boy, Johnny! I'll be up with you in ten minutes!"*

Then the idea struck Johnny.

"Joe, go about ten miles to the rear of the last sub and pick off any that might try to get away."

"But Johnny, you can't get twenty ships all by yourself."

"I got an idea, bub. You get back there till I call you, and pick off the stragglers."

Rapidly, he ran his screen the length of the fleet, counting. All twenty Reds were there, each one so immense as to make Johnny's ship appear like a rowboat alongside a dreadnaught.

Olson, now pale and wobbly, and with a terrific battle reaction, was vomiting in the bilges. He was the ship's engineer but fortunately the automatic machinery had not needed his ministrations lately.

"I'm probably the only guy in this man's Navy who ever got a medal for counting up to twenty-five and then tossing my cookies," he grinned, woefully.

"From the looks of this job," Heenan replied, "the only medal you'll get will be pinned on by a fish."

"Knock it off down there," ordered Johnny, "and get ten of our twelve remaining torpedoes ready with no propellant, only enough to get them out of the tube, insert the hovering devices, and set them all at three hundred feet."

The two set to work and soon had the ten shells ready. Johnny glanced at his watch, and saw that Krakowski had had time to get into position.

Now Johnny slammed this throttle to full emergency power once more, and described a wide circle around the enemy fleet, keeping well out of range of their lower-powered visi-screens—or whatever detection apparatus they had. Finally he calculated he was in correct position, dead ahead of the apex of the V. He slowed down, and as rapidly as possible he dropped out the ten shells which had, by means of the hovering devices, been converted to so many mines. Immediately he gunned his ship to the limit once more, and headed for the surface and as far away as he could get. After surfacing he continued to run at top speed until he figured he had about eight miles between him and the Russians, then slowed to thirty knots, but continued on his way nevertheless.

This was the first time in ten days any of them had had a chance to see the sky, so Heenan and Olson were called up to join their skipper at the open hatch. For some reason or other, they all seemed surprised that it was daylight of a cold, clear day, the sun about four hours over the horizon.

"Watch over there," Johnny pointed, "and pray."

Suddenly a tremendous shock was felt that literally rattled the bones of the stout little submarine. Shock wave after shock wave of frightening proportions tossed and threw them about on the surface—like a cork in the midst of a rapids. Almost immediately, far astern the ocean stirred, heaved, boiled; and then appeared the mushroom shape of an atomic bomb-burst! Up, up, up into the sky, until half the clear area was obliterated as the water and steam spread out and began to return to the surface of the sea!

All three stared awe-struck, fascinated at this terrific display of unleashed power. They could hardly comprehend the sight or the effects of this monster they had unbound. Fear flickered momentarily across the countenances of the three men as, looking at the cloud, they began to realize slightly the immensity of this terrible weapon.

"Johnny! Johnny! Are you all right? Answer! Johnny! Johnny! What in hell happened?"

Johnny breathed a sigh of relief. Thank God, Krakowski was O.K. He only sounded a little bit upset.

"I'm okay, Joe. We just set off the bombs aboard the enemy sub. Guess that got all of them, but we'll look around to make sure."

For six hours they circled the area, around and around, careful not to approach too closely to the center of the explosion area, until they were sure that not a sub, a piece of débris, or even a live fish could have survived the dreadful convulsion of the forces of nature which they had unleashed.

"All right, Joe, let's go home."

With no feeling of elation, with heavy hearts because of the friends they had lost, the two American submarine fighters turned toward home and a war yet to be fought.

Historic Cats

Some 25% of people, it is estimated, just don't like cats. The other three-quarters, however, will find much of interest in these anecdotes of cats that have shared in history. First comes Sathan, Familiar of Witches.

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

WHEN the Devil came seeking mortals as his prey, he appeared as a black dog, a toad, or a serpent, so people avowed. But his favorite form when he wished to serve as a companion to witches was that of a cat. And never, declared superstitious Sixteenth Century England, had the fiend wrought more havoc than in the years he prowled about in a feline shape that bore his own name, Sathan.

Sathan was a white spotted cat whose baleful glare frightened the folk of the Chelmsford countryside. Some of them shuddered with that strange, real dread of cats which has been recognized since the time of the Greeks whose language had a word for them: Ailurophobes—persons who hate the creature that waves its tail.

Once the evidence of Sathan's wicked work was seen, no one ever doubted that he was a witch-cat. It was whispered that he had come from abroad and had swum the Channel to reach England. Others insisted that he had craftily used a bishop, about to take ship from France, as his passport and had arrived, perched on the prelate's shoulder. Actually the cat was given Elizabeth Francis by her grandmother, who at the same time was reputed to have taught her grandchild to renounce God and practice witchcraft.

Sathan, curled in a basket, spoke to his mistress in an uncanny, hollow voice. While he partook of milk and bread, it was only when Elizabeth let him lap a drop of her own blood that he would perform an evil service. First she employed the cat to bewitch a neighbor's hog which sickened and died. Then she demanded riches of Sathan, and lo, a flock of eighteen black and white sheep was found grazing in her pasture, though later all mysteriously vanished. Something of more permanence, a wealthy husband, was next demanded of the cat. There Sathan's spells failed. He could not force Andrew Byles to marry his mistress, but the man for his stubbornness soon lost all his goods and died.

Another husband, though less well-off, was provided. The couple quarreled, and a daughter born to them cried constantly. The witch caused Sathan to kill the infant and to lame her spouse by changing into a toad and hiding in his shoe. Dreadful events multiplied: Valuable cattle perished, and at length black arts caused the death of Elizabeth's husband, then of a neighbor and his wife.

Witch-hunters now commenced the merciless persecutions which in England and later in America would send hundreds of unfortunate women to the gallows or the stake—victims of coincidence and of their own and neighbors' spite, whipped up by cruel and senseless superstition. Elizabeth was tried at Chelmsford in 1556, confessed and was hanged.

But Sathan, which had served his mistress with malignant fidelity for more than fifteen years, escaped. Just before her arrest she had traded him for a cake, along with her knowledge of sorcery, to Mother Agnes Waterhouse. Again the neighborhood was afflicted with one misfortune after another, as Sathan in return for his reward of a drop of the new witch's blood obeyed her commands. A brewer who had refused Mother Waterhouse a bride found his beer spoiled. Butter soured in churns. A hog, three geese, and a widow's cow died after their owners had fallen out with the old woman whose familiar was a spotted cat. Nobody managed to catch Sathan, though elsewhere men wounded cats found lurking at the scene of a disaster, and next day the women to whom the cats belonged were seen bearing cuts or bruises.

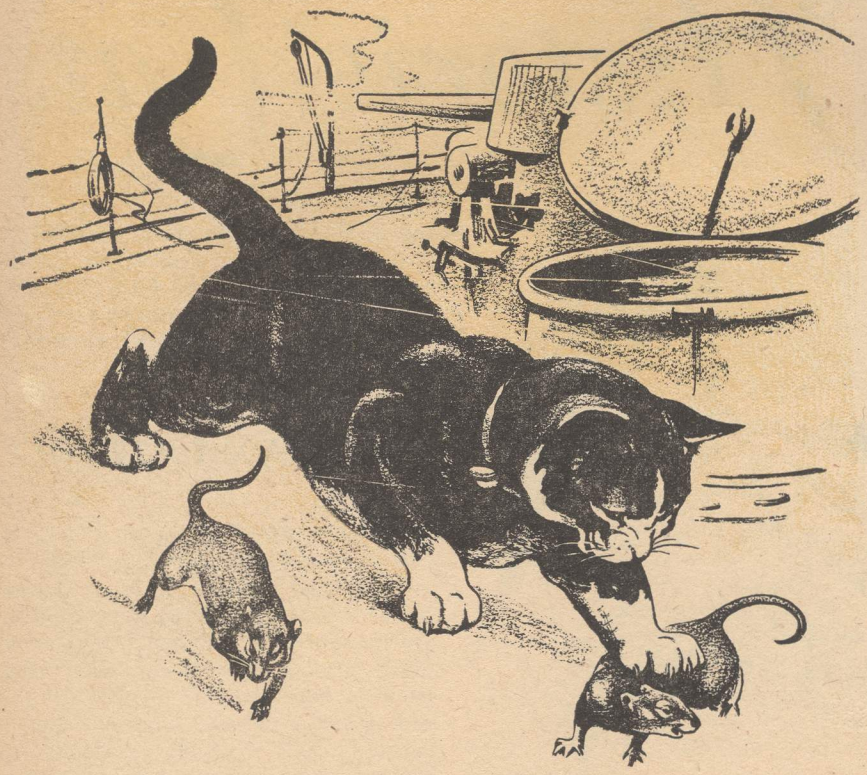
Hysterical panic spread through rural England. It was said that Sathan warned Mother Waterhouse to stay home or she would be hanged or burned, but she did not heed him and was dragged before the witchcraft court. At the trial, Queen Bess' attorney demanded of her:

"When did thy cat suck thy blood?"

"Never!" she made denial. But plain on her nose and face were marks where she was accused of pricking herself to feed the demon. In the year 1566 hangmen dropped a noose around her neck and swung her high against the sky.

SATHAN vanished. There is no record that he shared the cruel fate of countless other cats which through the Middle Ages and later in supposedly more civilized times were dipped in oil and set afire, hurled from towers, beaten to death with whips and knotted ropes, scalded and flayed alive because the poor creatures were suspected of being instruments of the Devil. As late as 1911 a great stir was caused in Pennsylvania by a cat charged with witchery.

On Hallowe'en it is declared to be a black cat that rides the broomstick behind a beak-nosed, hook-chinned old woman in a conical hat. But it might better be a white spotted one in the image of Sathan, the most famous witch-cat of them all.



Simon—British Navy Hero

SIMON, a member of the crew of H.M.S. *Amethyst,* was a sober cat, and attentive to his duty. He sailed not only the ocean blue but the clay-yellow Yangtze River. When big Chinese rats boarded in ports, Simon repelled them or fought bloody battles with them across the decks in the valiant tradition of British tars from the days of Drake onward.

The ship's cat was standing his watch below one day when the *Amethyst* received sailing orders. Conquering armies of Communist China, sweeping the Nationalists before them, had closed in on the capital, Nanking. The Admiralty directed the trim little gunboat to speed up the Yangtze full steam ahead, relieve other British gunboats and carry provisions to the British Embassy. Simon leaped from his bunk, a petty officer's cap, and stood muster as a Royal Naval Animal Auxiliary should. His muzzle, chest and forepaws gleamed white and neat against his black coat. From the leather collar around his neck hung his identification disk.

Before the *Amethyst* could complete her dash upriver, the troops of the Chinese Reds had advanced to the north bank. Their artillery caught the *Amethyst* in the bend below Nanking and opened a vicious bombardment on her and other British vessels, flouting the rights of a neutral power and forcing all the small flotilla to retreat down the tortuous river, hazardous with shoals. All ships made their escape but the *Amethyst;* battered by shell-fire converging on her—her guns knocked out of action and her steering gear cut—she ran hard aground on Rose Island.

Simon took cover from screaming shells that riddled thin armor-plate. Through the high-strung nerves a cat possesses, he could sense the mounting tension, as the *Amethyst's* plight grew more desperate. Her captain fell mortally wounded; sixteen other friends of Simon's were killed; and their bodies had to be lowered overside to burial in the yellow waters. Lieutenant Commander Kerans, taking the bridge, put sixty of the crew ashore on the south bank to carry back a call for help to Shanghai, and ordered rifles served out to fight off the Reds if they tried to board.

But four-footed boarders—big, ravenous rats—managed to swarm onto the decks of the gunboat from the island where she was stranded. Simon sprang to arms. With tooth and claw he pounced on them and scuppered them. The flash of exploding shells singed his fur, and steel splinters cut his face and legs. But Simon, never leaving his action station, fought one furious combat after another with the fierce rats.

Cruisers and planes, dispatched to the rescue of the grounded gunboat, were driven back by Red batteries. Great Britain, exhausted by mighty efforts in the Second World War and unready to enter another conflict which might bring Soviet Russia to the aid of Communist China, was forced to leave brave men to a doubtful fate.

For three dreadful months the ordeal endured. Yes, the *Amethyst's* weary survivors could still grin when they tallied Simon's score as at least one rat a day. His was real and valuable service, since but for Simon's valiant battling the ravages of the rats would have further depleted the ship's dangerously dwindling food stores.

At last the stranded *Amethyst* made repairs. One night she slipped her cables and got clear, fighting her way through the Communist gantlet, breaking through a blockading boom. Safe at last at the river mouth, the crew spliced the main brace with grog by special wirelessed command of King George, and Simon drank his sovereign's health in a saucer of milk. Lieutenant Commander Kerans was decorated for gallantry, and back to England went official dispatches commending Simon for "his determined attitude, which did much to improve crew morale."

After the voyage back to England, the doughty ship's company of the *Amethyst* paraded through cheering crowds. Simon could not be with them, since he was undergoing the six months' quarantine required of all animals entering the country. Yet Simon's day was coming. Reporters and photographers flocked to visit the hero, for from the hands of an admiral or the Lord Mayor of London, he was to receive the Dickin Medal, called the Animals' Victoria Cross. That decoration, founded by Maria Elizabeth Dickin to reward heroic deeds for king and country by animals, had been conferred on fifty-three dogs and horses and on one American-hatched pigeon. Simon would be the first cat to win it.

ALAS, on the eve of the award Simon, worn down by hard service, caught cold, and a day later he died. His medal must be given posthumously. They placed him in a little coffin, draped it with the Union Jack and buried him in a pet cemetery, with the marker over his grave inscribed: *"In Honored Memory of Simon, D.M."*

No one could deny that Simon, D.M., was worthy and courageous kin to the Lion which with the Unicorn upholds the arms of Great Britain.

Cristobal Colon—Spanish War Trophy

BIG naval guns thundered, as the Spanish fleet steamed out of the harbor of Santiago, Cuba. On that July day of 1898, Admiral Cervera had determined that he would no longer submit to being bottled up in port. He would sink the blockading American Navy or fight his way through and sail back to Spain.

Below decks in the Spanish cruiser *Cristobal Colon,* a gray tabby cringed in terror. She was seagoing, a veteran ship's cat, and had heard the guns fire in target practice, but never before had she known the dreadful, clanging explosions of hostile shells raining down on her floating home. Her sailor friends, manning the batteries and stoking the white-hot fires in the engine-room, could spare no time to comfort her.

A hail of American steel, avenging the battleship *Maine,* blown up in Havana harbor the previous February with the loss of 268 lives, smashed into the Spanish squadron. Three of its vessels, smoke and flame pouring from them, ran ashore. But the cruiser with the gray tabby aboard escaped to flee down the coast in a running fight. The *Oregon* and the *Brooklyn* pursued her hotly, guns of their forward turrets pounding her mercilessly. No more than a wreck ready to sink was the *Cristobal Colon* when the American ships overtook her, and seamen from the *Oregon* boarded to rescue the wounded. The Spanish fleet was destroyed, and the way clear for our Army to complete the conquest of Cuba and liberate the island from the yoke of Spain.

One of those saved from the sinking Spaniard was the tabby cat, terrified but unhurt. Sailors gave her to Captain Clark of the *Oregon.* He named her Cristobal Colon after her ship and sent her to his brother in Michigan to keep for him until he was assigned to shore duty.

Now began a triumphal journey for Cristobal. Tacked to her traveling basket was a placard which read:

TO GOOD AMERICANS

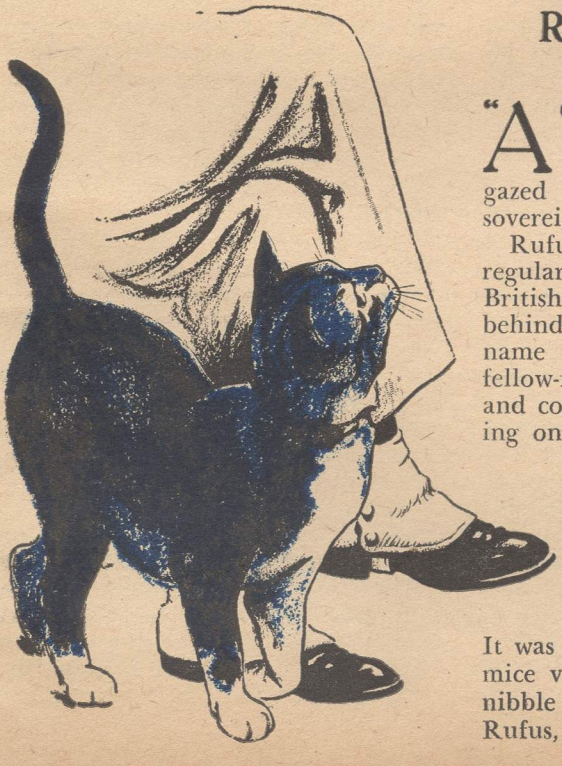
Treat me kindly and give me food, as I am a prisoner of war from the *Cristobal Colon,* being forwarded by my captors, the crew of the *Oregon,* to their gallant commander, Captain Charles E. Clark, whose brave efforts forced the *Colon* to surrender July 3, 1898.

Crowds gathered at stations to welcome Cristobal. She was photographed and "interviewed," and some reporters were so enthusiastic that they declared she had been Admiral Cervera's own pet. After she was installed in her new home, visitors kept coming to see her. Soon it became plain that she was such a famous cat that she could not retire to seclusion. She graciously acted as a patroness for a military tea given to raise funds for an Indianapolis kindergarten. Her charming manners won hearts and more praise, for she never failed to advance to the front of her enclosure and put her paws up to greet guests.

Chicago next requested a personal appearance by Cristobal. Since that city was the home of many of the crew of the *Oregon,* she could not refuse. At a number of large gatherings she received, reclining in a basket on a cushion of red and yellow, the colors of Spain. In appreciation of her service as a war trophy, she was presented with a medal.

Battle fatigue, along with her travels and appearances, proved too much for Cristobal. She returned home worn out and laid down the last of her nine lives.

Rufus—the Treasury Cat



"A CAT may look at a king," runs the saying, and so might Rufus. But he did better and gazed calculatingly at many golden sovereigns.

Rufus, a large sandy tomcat, was a regularly-employed civil servant of the British Empire. Proud traditions lay behind him; he was the sixtieth of his name to serve the Treasury. With fellow-felines he patrolled the rooms and corridors of the Treasury Building on Whitehall Street in London.

Illustrated by Carl Burger

It was at the peril of their lives that mice ventured out of their holes to nibble at packages of banknotes. Rufus, an able and crafty mouser, lay in wait, pounced—and another would-be despoiler of His Majesty's currency bit the dust.

At first the sandy tomcat always brought his catch to the officer of the head of his division, but when he and his trophies were picked up, carried out and put down beside the trash can in the hallway, the intelligent Rufus understood the proper procedure. Thereafter the charwoman found his prey of the previous night laid out in a neat row beside the can.

While Rufus may have indulged in a midnight snack and not have displayed all of his quarry but only enough to prove himself the good and faithful toiler he was, it is true that cats should not be left to forage entirely for themselves. The best mousers are given regular meals, since otherwise hunger makes them too anxious to stalk successfully. That important fact was appreciated by the

British Empire, which carried Rufus and its other cats on the payroll at a wage of four cents a day each to cover board.

Now, by 1930 living costs had risen. As Rufus must have become aware, four cents a day would no longer buy enough food to sustain a kitten, let alone a full-grown, hard-working cat. Perhaps it was with this discrepancy in mind that he paid a visit one evening. Ordinarily he was disinclined to sociability, and merely bowed to Treasury officials in passing because he was absorbed in his duties; but the moment had come for action. Rufus strolled directly to the office of the Chief.

In Rufus' day and age you would no longer find the King in the counting-house counting out his money. Such was the task of the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and that gentleman, Philip Snowden, was seated at his desk, making up a budget of $2,500,000,000—no less. He looked down to find a big sandy cat rubbing against his leg ingratiatingly. Having made his manners, Rufus sauntered over to peer at the coals flaming in the grate. He arched his back lazily, lay down, rolled over and presented his stomach to the warmth. Anyone could take note that a little more milk and catmeat would warm that stomach internally as well.

Mr. Snowden recognized Rufus. He had heard of this cat which left by the ash-can daily testimonials of his prowess as a loyal servant of the King. Consequently he shuffled through the papers before him until he found an item under State administration. Upon it he wrote, *"Approve increase in cats' pay."*

EVERYONE said it was due to Rufus that the budget provided for two cents more per day per cat, a handsome fifty per-cent raise.

The budget bill was submitted to Parliament, debated and voted. In honor of his achievement, Rufus was afterward known as Treasury Bill.

Bulgarian Bell—

Mascot of the Black Watch

OFTEN regiments on a campaign pick up stray dogs, for lonely soldiers and lonely dogs crave each other's companionship. A wagging tail, a pat, a scrap of food, and a new mascot trots after the marching column. Cats, though, usually avoid the uniformed strangers, tramping into a city or village, and hide till they have passed.

So it was a surprising event that occurred one day in 1854 when the 42nd Royal Highlanders encamped near the Bulgarian town of Varna. A tall Scot, seated by a fire, felt a furry body rub against bare knees below the kilt of green and blue tartan, so dark that it had given the regiment its name of the Black Watch. The soldier stared down at a thin cat which calmly returned his gaze and mewed ingratiatingly. Purring, she arched her back under stroking by the roughened but gentle hands of the Highlander and his comrades of the first company. She would not leave after she was fed, but had plainly attached herself for rations.

They called her Bulgarian Bell, and she became as much a member of the regiment as if she had taken the Queen's shilling. A cat might be considered an odd mascot but not by the Black Watch. Bulgarian Bell's predecessor had been a deer named Donald.

At Varna the Highlanders embarked for the Crimea where the allied armies of Great Britain and France would lock in bloody conflict with the troops of the Czar. Along with the regiment sailed Bulgarian Bell. When the Watch landed and took up the march, the cat was assigned transportation in a soldier's knapsack. Extra burden though she was, she was a highly popular detail. The man who took this turn carrying her was exempt from all other fatigue duties on that day.

Hills frowned down on the Black Watch's bivouac by Lake Touzla, and on those heights were entrenched battalions that were the flower of the Russian army. Smoke wreathed them, as cannon thundered the overture for the Battle of Alma. While the Black Watch mustered for the attack on the plain below, an officer strode along the front of the first company, demanding the whereabouts of the mascot cat.

"Here, sir," spoke up a soldier and lifted the flap of his knapsack.

Out popped the head of Bulgarian Bell. Calmly and with marked interest, she looked over the battlefield where shells burst with a roar and flash and musketry rattled. A sharp order, and bagpipes shrilled the assault. Up against the enemy's position marched the Black Watch with the rest of the Highland Brigade, the Guards, and troops of France. And on with her regiment advanced Bulgarian Bell, probably the first and only cat to go into battle.

Inclosed in the knapsack, she could not see the colors waving proudly over the kilted ranks nor have sight of the red hackles, those crimson feathers tossing on the bearskin headgear of the Watch like the fighting crest they were. But she could hear the command, *"Charge!"* that leveled bayonets and she could feel herself jounced in her carrier, as the Highlanders swept up the slopes. Clamorous in her ears was the din of volleys and, high above them, the skirl of the royal pipes.

After a time there was quiet again and an end to movement. Bulgarian Bell was let out to survey a victorious field from which routed Russians streamed in retreat.

The cat went on with her regiment to Balaclava. She did not witness there the gallant but disastrous cavalry charge of the Light Brigade nor the subsequent fighting in which the Scottish infantry took part. It had been decided that her life should not be risked by going into action again, and she had been sent back to the safety of the regimental hospital.

Bulgarian Bell missed active service—marches and voyages and evenings beside the campfires with her kilted friends. She pined for them, sickened and died. Her career had been brief, but she had lived to become a proud tradition of one of the most gallant regiments in any army—the Black Watch.

Muezza—Pet of the Prophet

A WHITE cat slept deeply on the broad, outspread sleeve of the robe of her master, seated on the flat rooftop of a dwelling in the city of Damascus. Because she belonged to the dark man with the burning eyes on whose garment she lay curled, Muezza was held in high honor. She was the beloved pet of the Prophet Mohammed, founder of a fiercely zealous religion which had spread beyond the borders of Arabia and on deeper into Asia, a faith destined to flood through Africa and on into Christendom.

Followers of Mohammed often had watched him gently lift Muezza so that she could finish her bowl of milk, or hold her in his arms while he preached to his disciples. It was no wonder that Muezza, sharing the veneration accorded her master, was surnamed Abuhareira—ancestress of cats—and that she had won kindness and mercy for her kind. Here in Damascus there was an endowed hospital for cats.

As Mohammed meditated, and Muezza slumbered by his side, the sun sank slowly. It was the hour of evening prayer. Muezzins appeared on the balconies of towering minarets and called the faithful to worship. "There is no God but Allah," their echoing voices chanted. "Great is Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet."

Mohammed stirred and half rose to obey the summons of the priests. Least of all could he neglect them but must spread his prayer rug and prostrate himself toward Mecca, decreed a holy shrine because it was his birthplace. Yet, looking down at the white cat in peaceful repose on his garment, he could not bring himself to disturb her.

Quietly he drew his knife. A slash of its keen blade, and the portion whereon she slept was severed. Only then did the Prophet answer the call to prayer, leaving Muezza still soundly asleep upon the cloth.

The tale of Mohammed's fond consideration of his cat was told in many a market and caravanserai. Storytellers, embroidering it, related that when Muezza woke from her nap on his robe, she went up to her master, rubbed against his legs and purred her thanks for his thoughtfulness. Whereupon the Prophet, understanding that she was showing her appreciation of his deed, passed a hand three times over her arched back, thus giving to her kind immunity forever from any harm on that part of the body. So that is why cats, falling or dropped from a height, are said to land on their feet.

Muezza's prestige as the pet of the Prophet lived on after her, and for her sake Mohammedans everywhere cherished cats. The Great Mameluke Sultan of Egypt, El Daher Beybars, founded an asylum for homeless cats in Cairo. In Constantinople cats were treated as kindly as children. An Arab chronicler borrowed the story of Noah from the Bible and added a tale of the creation of the cat, relating that when mice overran the Ark, Allah caused the lion to sneeze, and the cat ran out of his nostrils. "From that time," proclaimed the scribe, "the mouse has been timid and has hidden in holes."

Christian artists adopted that Arab legend. Ignoring the fact that cats are not once mentioned in the Bible—perhaps because they were sacred in Egypt, hated land of Hebrew bondage—a Renaissance painter depicted a large and dignified pussy at the head of the procession of animals leaving the Ark after the flood. Another painting protrayed a cat lying in the place of honor at the feet of Adam and Eve, and still another showed one remaining in the Garden of Eden while the first man and woman were being driven forth.

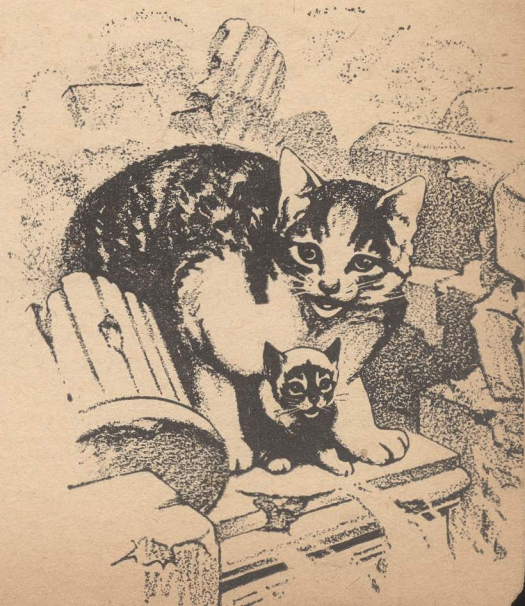
Although the tradition founded by Muezza inspired Christian artists, it failed to win kindness to cats of Christian countries. During cruel centuries, thousands of the poor creatures were branded as familiars of demons and witches—and tortured and killed. But in Moslem lands the memory of Mohammed's white cat blessed the feline race. And to this day nurses in Cairo tell children the story of her undisturbed rest on the severed cloth from the Prophet's robe.

Faith—a Cat in the Blitz

IT was a mystery why the scrawny gray tabby with white breast and paws chose to settle down in the London Church of St. Augustine-with-St. Faith. Prospects for mousing must have been scant, since church mice are proverbially poor. Perhaps it was the peace and quiet, beloved by cats, and soft cushions to lie on; or maybe the tabby trusted that here the Lord would provide as He so often does for stray cats seeking a home.

The verger put her out, but the tabby had made up her mind and back she came, appealing to higher authority—the rector. Let her stay, the Rev. Mr. H. Ross ruled; she could live in his quarters on the top floor of the church house. Named Faith after the second patron saint of the parish, she fulfilled her religious duty by regularly attending services, where she sat, quiet and attentive, in a pew or the choir stall. The congregation was proud of her, and she began to rival the reputation once made by the pet of another London church, St. Clement Danes, a cat fond of organ recitals, christenings and weddings, and considered good luck, black though he was, when he marched down the aisle in front of a bridal couple.

Faith gave birth to a black-and-white kitten, marked so much like a panda that it was named for that bear-like animal. It was 1940 and war-



time, with the bombs of the German blitz raining down on the city, but mother cat and kitten bravely endured the Nazi hate along with other Londoners until one day when the rector noticed a sudden uneasiness in Faith. Four times she carried Panda down three flights from the rector's rooms and installed her in a wall recess on the first floor, and as often Father Ross carried them both back—until after Faith's fifth move, he let them stay.

Had some strange instinct given the mother cat warning? Three nights later German planes made a heavy raid on London, and a bomb, scoring a direct hit on the rectory, plunged through the spot where the cat-basket had stood, and gutted and fired the building. The rector, fortunately absent, hastened back and disregarding firemen's warnings, made his way to a vantage point where he could see into the blazing ruins. He shouted Faith's name, and at last heard faint mewing in answer.

There in the recess, miraculously still intact, crouched the tabby, her kitten shielded between her paws. "Her attitude and look," the clergyman declared, "said quite unmistakably: 'Why haven't you come to fetch us sooner?'" No panic for Faith. Though there seemed to be no escape through the fire ringing her, she would stand protectingly over her kitten till the last.

As flames crept closer and closer to the penned-in cats, Father Ross could hold back no longer. He seized an ax, hacked through the barriers, and helped by firemen, crawled through the gap to bring out Faith and Panda, singed but unhurt. No sooner were they clear than the floor crashed through into the cellar. Safe in the church vestry, Faith licked her kitten lovingly, and her purring sounded to their rescuer like "such a song of praise and thanksgiving as I had never heard before."

Though the brave people who saved hundreds of animals during the blitz asked no credit for themselves, they were prompt to insist that recognition be given the valor of dumb creatures, behaving gallantly under terror from the skies they could not understand. So it happened that a special medal was struck by the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, an organization with a record of fine service in war and peace, and the decoration presented with ceremony to Faith. Both the medal and a certificate, which hangs with the cat's picture in the Tower Chapel, bear these words:

"From the P.D.S.A. to Faith of St. Augustine's, Watling Street, E.C. For steadfast courage in the Battle of London September 9th, 1940."

Our Forgotten Korea

Because the crew of a wrecked American ship had been murdered, we sent a task force to Korea in 1871. Then we had superior weapons; our losses were three killed and twenty wounded; while the Koreans had several hundred casualties.

by K. JACK BAUER

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War with

Illustrated by JOHN McDERMOTT

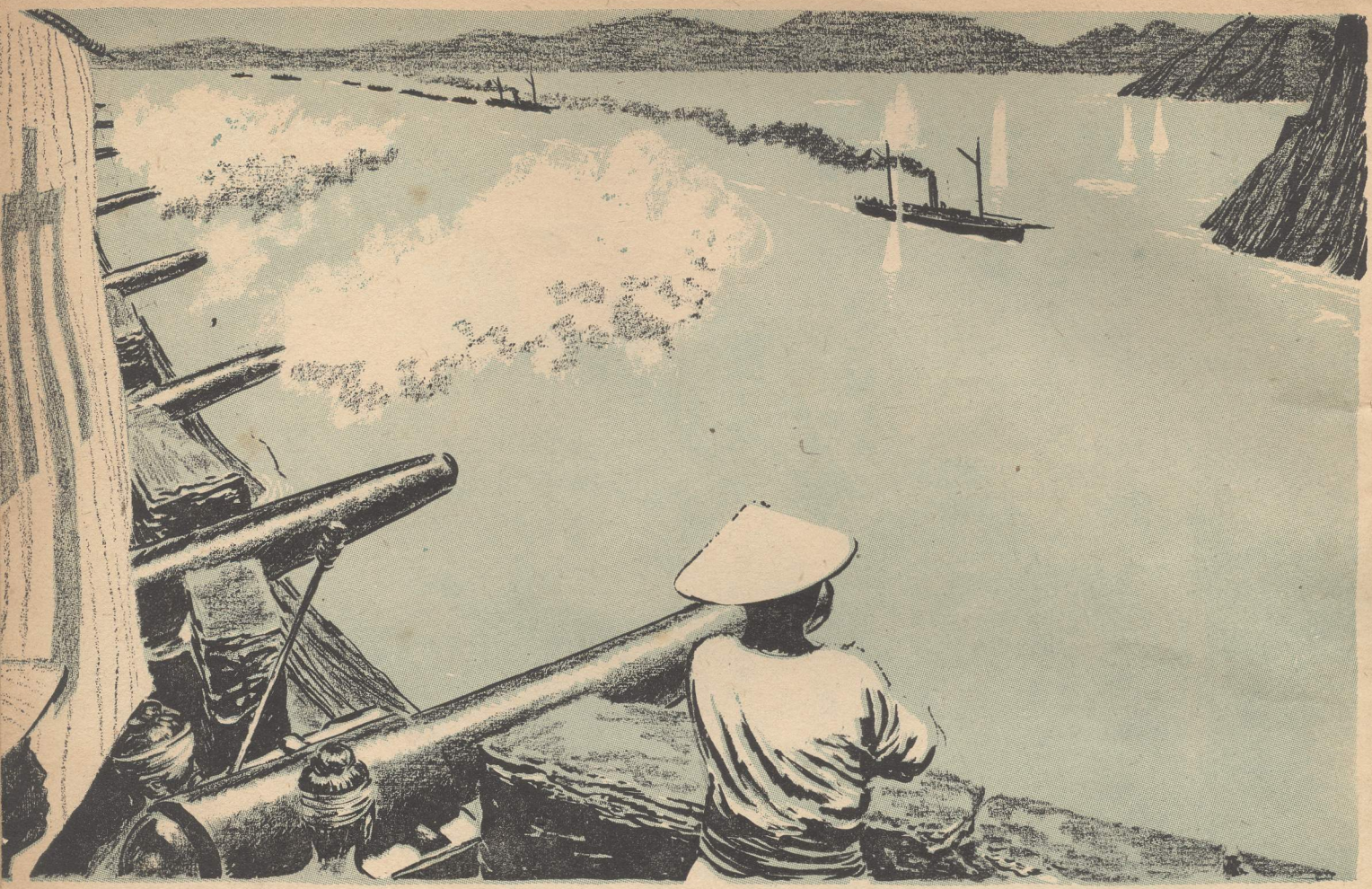
At 11:15 Casey gave the order to rush the Korean works.

WE read much about the current American intervention in Korea; but little has been written about our first intervention there seventy-nine years ago. This interests us today not only as the first American intervention in Korea but also as the largest single naval operation between the Civil and Spanish-American Wars, and as an example of an early amphibious operation. This first intervention was occasioned by two factors: first, an attempt to open trade; and second, to secure satisfaction for the loss of the American trading schooner *General Sherman* in Korean waters.

In 1871 Korea, "The Hermit Kingdom," was under the suzerainty of the Manchu Emperor of China but had pursued a policy of complete seclusion since the invasions of Hideyoshi in 1592 and 1597. By Korean law any violation of this seclusion was punishable by death, as several French missionaries discovered in 1866 when the government took steps to combat the spread of Christianity. This led to the French punitive expedition under Admiral Roze which in October, 1866, attacked the Korean positions on Kang-wha Island and was badly beaten. However, when the American ship *Surprise* was shipwrecked on the coast in June, 1866, the crew was well treated and returned to the outside world through China.

The immediate cause of the American expedition was the destruction of the American trading schooner *General Sherman* in Korean waters in September, 1866. This vessel was owned and commanded by an American, W. B. Preston, and carried a mixed crew of Americans, Englishmen, Malays, Chinese and Portuguese. The ship left Chefoo on August 8, 1866, in an attempt to open trade with the Koreans at Heijo, and was able to penetrate well inland on the Ping-yang River because of the very high water. This was done over the strenuous objections of the Korean officials. However, when the water receded, the ship was left stranded on a sandbar. This presented a very serious problem to the Korean authorities: how to keep these foreigners from contaminating the natives, since it would take considerable time before the *General Sherman* could be got out. This dilemma was settled by an order from the King-Regent to burn the ship and kill the crew. Consequently fire-rafts were sent down upon the ship, and the crew killed as they attempted to escape ashore.

News of the destruction of the *General Sherman* did not reach the outside until November, 1866. Then word was received through Chinese officials at Peking that the ship had been wrecked on the Korean coast,



The Monocacy *passed at 300 yards, and the Koreans opened a heavy fire which she immediately returned.*

while later word from the French punitive expedition was more accurate. Consequently Commander Robert W. Shufeldt, U. S. Navy, who was later to negotiate the first treaty between Korea and a Western Power, was ordered with his ship, the *Wachusett,* to Korean waters to investigate, but he found the Korean authorities uncoöperative and was able to do little more than confirm what was already known.

In April, 1868, Commander John C. Febieger in the *Shenandoah* was sent on the same mission, but he met with like failure, as the Koreans refused to deal with anybody who did not come under direct instructions from "the sovereign of the United States."

On the strength of this apparent willingness of the Koreans to negotiate with a special envoy, and a persistent rumor that four of the *General Sherman's* crew were still alive but held in captivity, and on the advice of Frederick F. Low, the Minister to China, and George F. Seward, the Consul General at Shanghai—both of whom felt that a strong show of force would have a restraining effect on the anti-foreign feeling then prevalent in China—an expedition was authorized. Rear Admiral John Rodgers, commanding the United States Asiatic Squadron, was ordered to convey Minister Low, as special American envoy, to Seoul, the capital of Korea, and to support him with force if necessary. Low was instructed to demand an audience with the King-Regent of Korea and to secure satisfaction for the destruction of the *General Sherman.* Low was also instructed to arrange and conclude, if possible, a convention for the protection of foreigners shipwrecked in Korea.

As a consequence of their orders, Rodgers and Low conferred at Peking in November, 1870. They agreed to follow a plan based on the one used so successfully by Commodore Perry in Japan. According to this plan, after Low had informed the Korean authorities of the purpose of the visit, the fleet would sail away, to return in a month for the Korean answer. The following May was set as the opening of the operation.

Consequently, Admiral Rodgers ordered a force consisting of the flagship *Colorado* (Captain Cooper), *Alaska* (Commander Blake), *Benicia* (Commander Kimberly), *Monocacy* (Commander McCrea), and *Palos* (Lieutenant Rockwell) to assemble at Nagasaki in late April and early May. On May 2 the last ship, the *Colorado,* arrived, carrying Minister Low and his party of two secretaries, two Chinese interpreters and five shipwrecked Koreans.

The next two weeks were spent in training the squadron, particularly the landing force. According to Admiral Schley, who was there, after this training period, "It is doubtful if there was a more efficient, better trained, or more capable squadron afloat."

On May 16, 1871, the squadron cleared Nagasaki and headed west across the East China Sea until it was off Quelpart Island. There it headed northwest until it touched the Korean coast. On reaching the coast, the squadron proceeded slowly and with the utmost caution, as the charts with which the squadron had been provided were found to be practically useless. (The charts were from a set made up by the French punitive expedition of 1866.) On May 19th the squadron anchored in the Ferrières Islands. It then moved slowly up the coast in dense fog to Roze Roads off Eugenie Island, where it arrived on May 23rd.

Here the first communication was established with the Koreans. An unofficial note from the Koreans was sent to the squadron requesting the nationality of the squadron and the purpose of the visit. Minister Low

and Admiral Rodgers sent back a note stating that the squadron was American and its mission friendly, and requesting an interview with the proper officials. This American note was sent by the Korean officials ashore to the authorities at the capital, but no immediate answer was forthcoming. The squadron waited a week in Roze Roads for the answer, spending the time surveying the route to Isle Boisée.

The squadron then moved up to the Isle Boisée anchorage, arriving there on the morning of May 30th. This anchorage is just inside the mouth of the Salée River, not far from the present-day city of Jinsen. All the ensuing operations of the expedition were based on this anchorage.

LATER, on the 30th, a Korean junk was sighted bearing down on the squadron. It came to anchor amid the squadron and proved to contain four lesser Korean officials who bore a letter stating that high officials were on the way from Seoul, and that they would probably arrive the next day, which they did. When these officials arrived, however, they were a great let-down, as it turned out that they were only officials of the third and fifth rank, without any credentials and quite evidently without any plenipotentiary powers. Minister Low refused to see them, sending instead his secretaries, who informed the Koreans that only officials of the first rank, empowered to conduct negotiations, would be received, and that only to such officials would the full purpose of the American mission be made known.

The Koreans on their part stated that if the squadron was in Korean waters because it lacked provisions, then the Korean government would be glad to furnish them. They requested in any event that the squadron please leave Korean waters, as the Koreans had no interest in foreigners. The Americans were also informed that if their mission was to change the Korean way of life, they would not succeed, as the Korean civilization had stood for four thousand years against all comers. Admiral Rodgers feared the approaching typhoon season and wished to move his force farther up the Salée River away from the open anchorage off Isle Boisée, and so informed the Korean officials. No objections were raised by them, so preparations were made to begin surveying the river the next morning.

A well-armed surveying expedition was organized under Commander H. C. Blake in the *Palos*. He had with him the *Monocacy* and four steam launches under Lieutenant Commander H. F. Picking. This force left the Isle Boisée anchorage June 1st. It worked its way about ten miles up the Salée to a point where the river takes a sharp double bend between high banks. Here the current, which below the bend was very swift because of twenty- to thirty-foot spring tides and high flood waters, was about eight knots, or just fast enough so that the larger ships could not go slow enough for the launches to take accurate soundings or sights. The current was also swift enough to throw the force almost out of control under Point Sun-tol-mok.

This was a distinct disadvantage, as the Koreans chose this time to open fire from the forts that lined the river. The Koreans fired first on the three launches that were in the lead, and then on the two larger vessels as they swept past. The *Benicia's* launch had fallen behind with a fouled screw and had to run this gantlet alone a little later. The surveying force immediately returned the fire, the ships having cleared for action when the fortifications were sighted and seen to be manned.

The fire of the surveying force drove the Koreans from their guns, and the force was able to anchor around the second bend, in the calm water under Hydrographer's Fort, with only two men wounded (one of whom had lost two fingers when a launch howitzer recoiled on his hand) and a few rigging lines cut in the larger vessels. It was discovered later that one of the chief reasons for the phenomenally poor shooting of the Koreans was their guns. These lacked any lateral train and were set for a fixed range.

While running through the second bend, the *Monocacy* hit a large uncharted rock, but was able to get off almost immediately, although leaking badly. When the tide turned, Commander Blake returned to the main force at Isle Boisée anchorage without meeting any further opposition from the Korean batteries.

When Admiral Rodgers received Commander Blake's report, he issued orders to Lieutenant Commander W. S. Schley to organize a force to return the next morning and destroy the Korean batteries. However, these orders were canceled later in the evening, it having been decided to postpone the attack for ten days. Several factors contributed to bringing about this delay: First, it gave the Koreans more time to answer Minister Low's demand of May 31st, that they send a high official to negotiate. Secondly, it gave them more time to make a suitable reply to Low's most recent note of June 2nd, demanding amends for and disavowal of the attack on the surveying force. Thirdly, in ten days neap tides would occur which would reduce the strength of the current. The delay also gave the squadron more time to prepare the attack.

No answer was made by the Koreans until June 9th, when an answer arrived to Low's note of June 2nd. The Korean answer stated that it was the practice of the Koreans "to fire upon all who attempted to pass the gates of their empire," and that the commander of the forts only did his duty. The Korean note again pointed out that if the squadron needed supplies, the Koreans would be glad to furnish them, but that Korea had no interest in intercourse with the outside world.

The attack was set for the next afternoon, June 10th. It was decided to confine the punishment to the destruction of the forts which had fired on the surveying party. This was undoubtedly due to an unwillingness on Rodgers' part to allow his landing force to get out of range of the supporting naval guns, in view of the earlier defeat of the French punitive expedition when it pursued the Koreans inland.

The landing force was organized into ten infantry companies of about fifty men apiece, and two batteries of artillery. These were supported by the Pioneers and the Hospital Corps. The whole force was under the command of Commander Blake, with his headquarters aboard the *Palos,* while the landing force was under the command of Commander L. A. Kimberly. The whole landing force numbered 651 men, including 105 Marines; it carried seven twenty-pound rifled howitzers, and it was embarked in twenty-two ship's boats. The force was armed with the new Remington 1867 Navy Rifle, which proved very effective. The *Palos* and *Monocacy* were detailed to give fire support.

AT ten on Saturday, June 10th, the *Monocacy* and two of the steam launches got under way. This force was to carry out the bombardment of the first of the forts, the Marine Redoubt. The landing force got under way at ten-thirty, with the *Palos* towing the boats carrying the landing force and with the two remaining launches bringing up the rear.

At about 13:00 the *Monocacy* reached the Marine Redoubt, a square stone fort with walls about twelve feet high. From its left side stretched a long water battery mounting about thirty guns, including five or six 18-pounders and two 32-pounders. The rest of the guns were small ones, two- and four-pounders, of a very primitive breech-loading type. In these guns the top of the breech was closed only by a hinged bronze flap extending for the length of the chamber. A small gun, loaded before insertion,

Then followed a series of hand-to-hand struggles with no quarter asked.

was placed in the chamber, the flap was closed, and the gun fired.

The *Monocacy* passed the Marine Redoubt at about three hundred yards distance, and the Koreans opened a heavy fire on her, which she immediately returned. The *Monocacy* then anchored about 550 yards northeast of the water battery, and from there kept up a steady fire until the Koreans were forced from their guns at about 13:45.

At 13:35 the *Palos* arrived off the mud flats below the Marine Redoubt where the landing was to take place. Commander Kimberly and Lieutenant Commander Picking decided upon the landing point, and the boats were cast off from the *Palos*. The force landed at 13:45 and formed into companies at once. The infantry immediately advanced on the right flank of the Redoubt, which the Marine advance guard entered without opposition as the Koreans had evacuated the fort on the approach of the landing force.

The artillery, however, did not reach the higher ground back of the Redoubt until 16:00 because of the soft mud in which the landing had been made. Although from seaward the landing place looked like a good one to Kimberly and Picking, it was really a band of soft mud, interlaced by tidal gullies five to eight feet deep and almost imperceptible until they had been reached; these gullies extended a quarter or a half mile to higher ground. The mud was so soft that the men sank up to their thighs, and the guns up to their axles. The guns could be moved only by putting a gang of seventy to eighty men on each.

After casting off the landing force, the *Palos* weighed anchor and stood through the narrows off the Marine Redoubt to join the *Monocacy*. But when opposite the Redoubt she hit an uncharted rock and stuck there until 21:00, when she was floated off with the aid of the high tide. She suffered several plates stove in and could be kept afloat only by constantly using her pumps. She was too badly damaged to take an active part in the remainder of the operation except to guard the boats.

Meanwhile, in the Redoubt two companies were detached to destroy the fortifications, and four others to assist in bringing up the guns. The rest of the force turned to and prepared an encampment for the night on a plateau that rose behind the Marine Redoubt and was protected by a rice paddy in front, mud flats on the left, and an outpost encampment of Marines on the right. At 16:30 the companies left to demolish the Redoubt were recalled and pickets placed.

During the evening the Koreans were noticed gathering in large numbers on the right flank of the encampment, and at 24:00 they were observed making a great amount of noise, whence it was concluded that they were preparing to attack. Consequently the Marine outpost was withdrawn and a few rounds fired by the artillery, which drove the Koreans off into the woods.

THE next day, June 11, was Sunday, but the force was awakened at 04:00. In the first streaks of the dawn of a beautiful but very hot day, the force, except for Lieutenant Totten with one company of infantry and some Pioneers who were detailed to complete the destruction of the Marine Redoubt and its stores, took up the advance on the next fort, Fort Monocacy. This advance was across terrain as bad as that of the day before. The country was a succession of steep hills with deep irregular gullies between. The artillery was got through only by widening the trails and filling in the gullies wherever possible. Where this was not possible, the guns were lowered by ropes down one side of the gully and hoisted up the other. The artillery was a great handicap to the speed of movement that Kimberly

wanted, but the guns were necessary because they kept the large force of Koreans on his left flank from attacking until the landing force had reached better defensive positions.

Late the evening before, the *Monocacy* had moved up to a position five hundred yards northeast of Fort Monocacy. Here the *Monocacy's* fire forced the Koreans from their guns, and they evacuated the fort during the night. When the landing force began its advance in the morning, the *Monocacy* furnished fire support, shelling the woods ahead of the advancing troops, and firing occasionally into Fort Monocacy to insure that the Koreans did not return. The other fortifications were also shelled occasionally as a harassing measure.

At 17:15 the Marine advance guard of the landing force entered Fort Monocacy, a square stone fort similar in construction to the Marine Redoubt and mounting four 32-pounders and fifty-three of the small breechloaders. Here the force halted only long enough to demolish the works and to allow Totten to rejoin.

On leaving Fort Monocacy, Kimberly headed for the main Korean positions around Fort McKee on the peninsula that formed the second bend in the river. To do this, Kimberly had to swing to the right, which would expose his rear to the Korean force on his left flank. However, Kimberly discovered a hill on his right that controlled the only good approach to Fort McKee and covered his line of advance. Kimberly threw forward his right wing under Lieutenant Commander Silas Casey to seize the hill. This was done easily, as the Koreans had neglected to occupy it. On this hill Kimberly posted Lieutenant Commander W. K. Wheeler with three companies of infantry and a section of artillery under orders to hold it at all costs. Wheeler immediately threw up earthworks, which were put to good use, as the Koreans, the moment they realized their mistake in allowing the Americans to occupy the hill, launched two separate attacks in an attempt to dislodge Wheeler. Both attacks were beaten back with considerable loss to the Koreans.

At 07:00 the *Monocacy* moved to a point twelve hundred yards south of Fort McKee, where she kept up a strong fire on Fort Palos, the fort across the river on Point Sun-ol-mok, until 10:00, driving the Koreans from their guns. This kept Fort Palos from firing on the landing force as it advanced. At 10:06 the *Monocacy* shifted fire to Fort McKee and kept it up until 11:00, when fire was stopped on signal from shore as the landing force prepared for its assault on Fort McKee. At 11:20 the batteries at Fort Palos opened again, and again the *Monocacy* returned the fire and silenced the guns.

Meanwhile the main body of the assault force pushed forward to the crest of the last hill before Fort McKee, where it rested for fifteen minutes to recover from the excessive heat of the day. Fort McKee was a slightly irregular fortification built of stone like the rest of the Korean fortifications, but mounting no artillery; it was constructed on the apex of a steep conical hill rising about 150 feet above the ravine that ran along its front.

Kimberly gave the command of the attack on Fort McKee to Lieutenant Commander Casey, so that he himself could remain on a hill about midway between Casey and Wheeler with the reserve of one company of infantry and a section of artillery. Kimberly chose this hill, because it gave him a commanding view of the battlefield and both Casey's and Wheeler's forces.

At 11:15 Casey gave the order to rush the Korean works, an order that was carried out with "splendid dash and courage." The Koreans kept up an incessant small-arms fire from their antiquated weapons on the six companies that charged up the hill. In spite of this fire and the rocks that the Koreans rolled down the hill to make up for their lack of artillery, the Americans reached the parapet of Fort McKee at 11:20. The first man into the fort was Lieutenant H. W. McKee, who immediately fell, mortally wounded. At the same time Captain Tilton with the Marines on the right and Master McLean with one company on the left were able to turn the Koreans' flanks and open an enfilading fire on the defenders in the fort. Then followed a series of hand-to-hand struggles with no quarter given and no quarter asked, in which the Koreans suffered heavy losses.

By 11:50 the Koreans were so disheartened by their heavy casualties and the fire that broke out in their barracks that they broke and fled from the fort. One large force tried to escape by the road that ran along the south side of the point, but was met by the fire of Lieutenant Commander Cassell and the reserve force. Cassell's fire forced the Koreans back, leaving their dead piled two and three deep. The remnants of this force attempted to escape by swimming the river, but many were drowned. Those Koreans that attempted to escape along the northern shore of the point were met by a force under Master McLean and driven back. This almost complete annihilation of the Korean forces around Fort McKee, following the two unsuccessful Korean attacks, so completely demoralized the force before Wheeler that it broke and fled in confusion.

The losses in these battles were most unequal. This was due in great part to the excellence of the new Remington rifles carried by the landing force, and the lack of adequate modern weapons by the Koreans. The Koreans left 243 dead and about twenty wounded on the field around Fort McKee alone. How much greater the Korean losses were is not known, but they were considerable. Fifty flags and 481 guns were captured by the U. S. Navy landing force. The landing force lost a total of only three killed and ten wounded.

As soon as the Koreans had left the scene, Kimberly called in Wheeler's and Cassell's forces and set about destroying the fortifications. There was no further contact with the Koreans, except for a short exchange of fire at 12:00 with the batteries of Fort Palos.

Orders arrived during the evening to re-embark the landing force and return to the Isle Boisée anchorage the next morning. The force was recalled because it had accomplished its mission and because Admiral Rodgers did not want to risk the *Monocacy* and the *Palos* any longer than necessary in the uncertain river currents.

The landing force was re-embarked by 07:30 June 12th, taken in tow by the *Palos* and *Monocacy* and reached the main squadron at 10:30. The men were then returned to their respective ships, and the few prisoners were taken aboard the *Colorado* for questioning. These prisoners were released after questioning.

The squadron waited until July for some communication from the Korean authorities, as it was expected that the show of force in the destruction of the forts would cause the Koreans to open negotiations; but no communications came, and neither would the Korean officials on the scene undertake to forward Low's notes to Seoul. Rodgers felt that the approach of the typhoon season made it improvident to hold the ships on the unknown coast any longer. He felt also that his force was too small to force its way to Seoul, and that it could probably be better employed elsewhere. Consequently the force put to sea on July 3rd and set sail for Chefoo, except for the *Palos* and *Monocacy,* which went to Shanghai for repairs.

Thus ended the first American intervention in Korea. While this expedition failed to accomplish any of its aims except possibly to enhance the prestige of the United States in the Far East because of the decisiveness of the destruction of the forts, it did prepare the way for the negotiations of Commodore Shufeldt in 1881-1882, which led to the Shufeldt Treaty, the first treaty signed by Korea with a Western Power.

The Captain with the

A TRUE STORY OF WARTIME ESPIONAGE, BY THE AUTHOR OF "SPIES AND TRAITORS OF WORLD WAR II"

by KURT SINGER

ON June 10, 1935, a blonde, well-groomed, slender young lady boarded the Munich express at the Anhalter Bahnhof in Berlin and went to a first-class compartment. In Munich that evening she changed to the Rome express, taking another first-class compartment in the wagon-lit.

She was a cosmopolitan type. It was impossible to say whether she was English, Scandinavian or German; she held aloof from all the other passengers.

When the train approached Kufstein and the Italian border, her compartment was entered by a group of the uniformed officials who are supposedly indispensable for allowing—or forbidding—people to cross a frontier into another country. The lady showed her passport; she was British and her name was given on the passport as Helen Holborn.

Another passenger on the same train attracted attention. According to his passport his name was Fernando Queseda, and he had been born in Barcelona. He was a typical Spaniard, with gleaming black hair, olive complexion, a graceful body, large nose and long thin hands. He said that the only cash he had with him were the legal ten marks in change. He was asked to open his bags. An elegant wardrobe, a great many silk shirts, perfumes and a travel kit trimmed in silver, were revealed. The customs officials did not search further; the man's odd air of assurance, and at the time of irony, seemed to put them off. In any case, he was traveling first class.

In Rome the travelers scattered in all directions.

The evening of the following day, June 12th, the Englishwoman arrived at Parker's Hotel in Naples. This quiet, aristocratic hotel is much used by British visitors to Naples. The hotel management took the lady's passport, as Italian regulations prescribed. She went immediately to her room. The following evening she left the hotel dressed in a simple blue suit and carrying a bouquet of white carnations. When she got into the taxi, she asked the porter to interpret for her. The porter gave the order to the taxi-driver to take her into town.

She got out as soon as they entered the city limits and walked the rest of the way to a restaurant in the little old port of Naples. This restaurant, called Ci Teresa, was filled with a colorful crowd. The lady lingered at the entrance. One of the waiters saw the bouquet of white carnations, rushed up to her and said that unfortunately there was no table where she could sit alone, but if she did not mind—

He led her to a table in one corner.

A gentleman was sitting alone at the table. He rose at once. He would be honored, he said. The lady sat down. Almost at once the headwaiter reappeared, leading another guest to the table. There was none other than Fernando Queseda, who had ridden with Miss Holborn in the same train all the way from Munich to Rome.

The three people had not yet met, but each one knew about the others and knew what he had to do. They at once began conversing in low tones.

MISS HOLBORN'S real name was Angelica Dubrow; she was a German, and an agent of the Gestapo's newly established Spanish section, the very existence of which was a closely guarded secret even within the Gestapo itself. Of Baltic descent, she had entered the profession of espionage comparatively young, and under the Weimar Republic had served the government in an international counterfeiting case. At that time she had used still another name. At the moment she had not come from England; nor had she passed the Dutch-German border; these fictional entries on her passport had been made to enable her to carry a rather large sum of money in foreign currency.

Fernando Queseda was even more practiced in the profession of espionage than the young woman. He had, however, one disadvantage which occasionally made trouble for him. His picture had once been published in a newspaper in connection with a well-known scandal—a Spanish business man had tried to bribe a Spanish president to obtain permission for a gambling casino on Malorca. Queseda had also been implicated in smuggling American cigarettes into Spain.

The newest spy in the group was Gaston d'Ette, the Italian. He had formerly been a traveling salesman representing an Italian automobile company abroad, and had entered the game of espionage only after Mussolini took power.

EACH of these persons had been selected carefully by the three secret services involved; they had special qualifications for their mission, which was to bring about decisions of vital political and historical importance. Franco, who had once been chief of the Spanish general staff in Madrid, had already assured himself of the personal loyalty to him of the Spanish troops in Morocco—the colored troops. He was already making the first moves in the game that was to raise him to mastery of all Spain.

Spain and Franco were the subjects of the conversation of the three who sat at a table in the Restaurant Ci Teresa in Naples. They appeared to be simply chatting idly, but what they were saying was serious indeed.

General Franco and those who stood behind him had put over a remarkable *coup;* they had persuaded both the German and the Italian governments of something that was very much to their own interests. Since there now existed a Fascist Germany and a Fascist Italy, Franco had argued the power of Fascism in Europe would be immensely strengthened if a Fascist régime could be set up in Spain. The Spanish conspirators proposed to Berlin and Rome that an air fleet be sent secretly to Spanish Morocco. With its help Franco would be able to take power in Spain in one lightning blow. With eighty planes—a powerful air force for those days—the regiments of the Spanish foreign legion, who loved Franco, their former chief, together

Red Beard

The silence was broken by a thunderous explosion. They had to drag Fräulein Dubrow into the car.

with the native Moors, could be sent to attack any place in Spain.

Berlin and Rome agreed to his proposal—with all the more enthusiasm, since payment for the planes was guaranteed by certain Spanish industrialists. The eighty planes were to be shipped from Germany to Italy. Italian motor factories would supply the motors.

But how would these planes be sent on to Morocco? It was out of the question to fly them there; even had they been flown one at a time, it would have attracted too much attention. In 1935 the power of Britain still counted for something; and since Britain was unfriendly toward Franco, there might be trouble if the British found out about the planes. It was therefore decided to crate the eighty planes and send them secretly to Spanish Morocco by ship.

The crates would be shipped on ordinary freighters to Naples. There they would be transferred to small Italian vessels and sent on to their destination in Spanish Morocco. They would be labeled and declared to the customs as toys from Nuremberg, and "small assorted ironware" from Solingen, and would be addressed to a firm in Naples. This firm would also rent the freight space for transshipment.

The other two agents at the table listened with growing excitement as the Spaniard grimly told them that all these arrangements would have to be changed. The plan to send the crates to Spanish Morocco aboard small freighters was out of the question, due to changed circumstances.

"What do you mean? We can't change our plans now," Gaston d'Ette said.

Angelica Dubrow was flabbergasted.

THE Spaniard explained why they had to change plans:

"A mysterious ship has been raising the devil in the Mediterranean, in the vicinity of the ports where the crates are to be landed. In fact, the ship has been causing trouble at every important point along the entire Moroccan coast. The captain is generally called Le Capitaine Solitaire, because he is always alone and is usually met with in waters that are just barely navigable. No one knows who his employer is, but the chances are that he works for the British secret service."

Queseda went on to explain that the mysterious captain had turned up in June, and that since his appearance nothing that happened in Morocco could be kept secret. Small radio transmitters were working in the area, sending messages to the British secret service. If those planes were sent by freighter to Spanish Morocco, he added with a mournful attempt at humor, it might turn out to be a season of many shipwrecks.

"Well, how do you think we can arrange it?" Fräulein Dubrow asked.

With bombastic phrases about the solidarity of all Fascists, Señor Queseda proposed that the Italian government jump into the breach by taking the crates to the nearest airplane factory and having the planes assembled. German and Italian pilots could fly them to Spanish Morocco.

The Italian, Gaston d'Ette, blew up. "My country cannot do anything of the sort," he retorted.

Fräulein Dubrow had an idea.

"Our problem is to ship a mountain of crates to a certain place without attracting attention, and then to assemble the eighty planes out of the parts, isn't it?" she said. The two men looked at her, fascinated. She was an attractive woman. Undisturbed, she continued:

"There are places under the Italian flag that are not in Europe. What about the Libyan desert, for example? A temporary factory could be set up there, near a port, and the planes assembled. Then at night they could be flown along southern routes to Spanish Morocco, and nobody would be the wiser."

The three agents passed this suggestion on to their superiors. All three sides thought well of it. The Italians pointed out that near the small port of Zuara, fifty miles west of Tripoli, there already existed an army repair shop for servicing of military planes. This would do splendidly as an assembly plant. The situation of the place was ideal—out of the town, in the middle of the desert, and therefore easy to guard. It would be a simple matter to keep away uninvited spectators.

The agents therefore decided to transfer the crates in Naples to the small freighters. But the destination was changed from Spanish Morocco to Zuara.

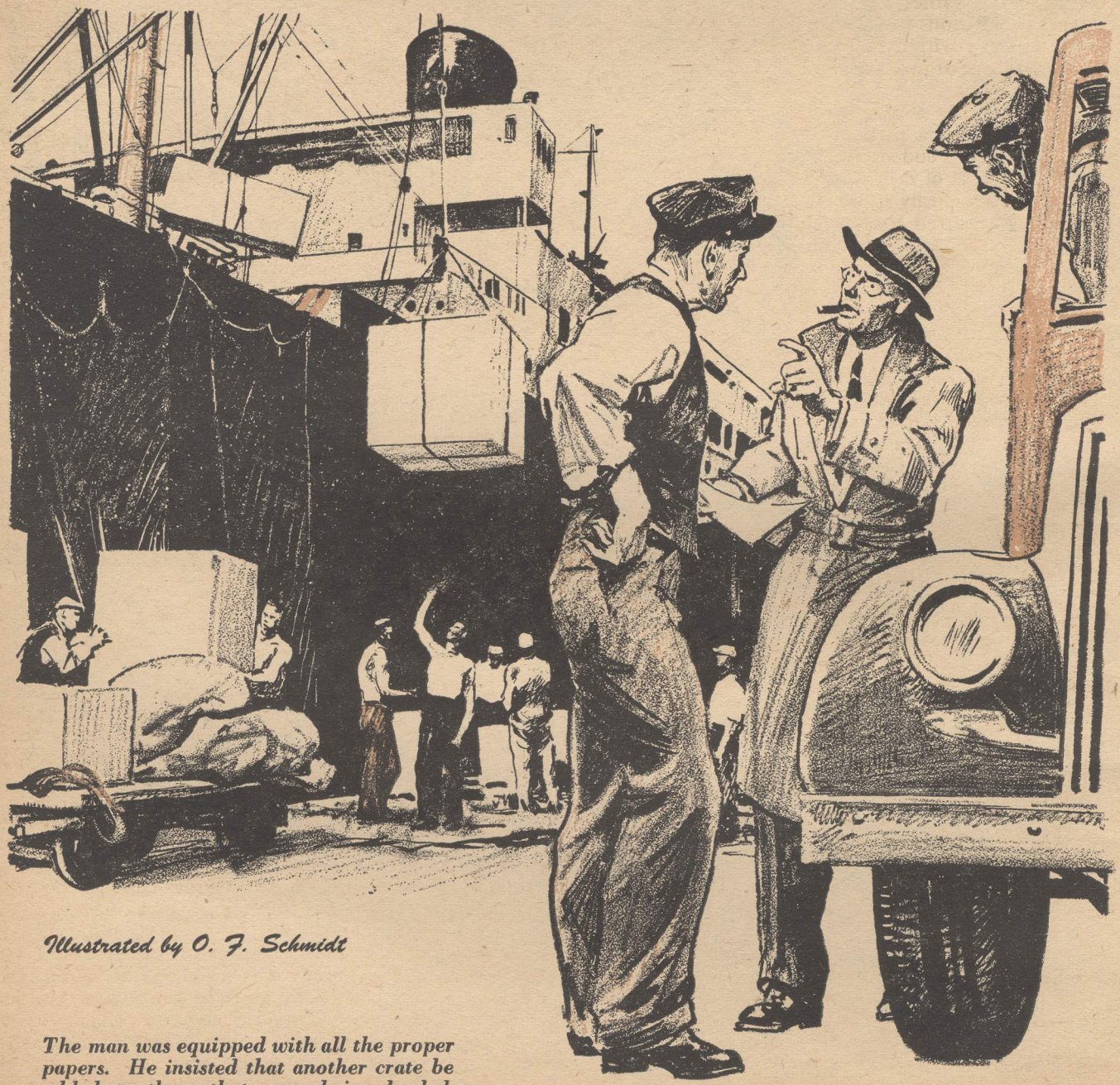
The other two agents were overjoyed and showed it. Fräulein Dubrow was the only one who kept her head.

"Since we know just who our enemy is," she pointed out, "we have to keep an eye on him. How much do we know about this mysterious Capitaine Solitaire?"

"He is a British seaman," Queseda answered, "member of the International Transport Workers Union, about thirty years old. Sometimes he wears a beard; sometimes he's beardless. When he is unshaved, he can't be mistaken; his whiskers are red. But we know more about this ship than about him. It's about twenty-five meters in length, Diesel-motored, an exhaust-stack back of a low bridge, no masts—a typical smuggler's boat."

The dossier was not very satisfactory. Apparently the man could be identified only if he were right with his ship, and if he weren't shaved.

For the present the three agents had nothing to do in Naples but wait for the arrival of the "toys" and "ironware." They were quite unaware of



Illustrated by O. F. Schmidt

The man was equipped with all the proper papers. He insisted that another crate be added to those that were being loaded.

something that happened in the meantime at the port of Emden in Germany. While the planes were being loaded onto a freighter, a truck drove up to the pier. Beside the driver sat a man who was described later on as wearing a light-colored raincoat, a stiff hat and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. One of his upper teeth was missing, and in the gap he held a long cigar.

The man was equipped with all the proper papers. He insisted that another crate be added to those that were being loaded aboard the ship. The first mate argued angrily with him, but the man took the loud wrangling in stride. He seemed to know that no matter how much the first mate stormed, he would obey the orders from his company, since they were in written form, and would take on this extra crate.

The crate was conspicuously marked with diagonal red lines across its sides and with instructions in German and Italian to handle with care. With all the others, it was stowed away in the hold of the ship.

At that moment something happened that made all their discussions pointless.

In the desert, at a place so lonely that it seemed the end of the world, although the town of Zuara was fairly near, the Italian army air base had been hastily prepared for assembling the expected air fleet. Barracks had been set up for the pilots who would be coming soon. To make the place even more secure, a barbed-wire fence had been erected around the entire area, and a formation of Italian police and an army regiment had been ordered to reinforce the usual guards.

The tiny insignificant town of Zuara itself had never seen a shipment of freight as large as the cargo that was brought in during the early part of July, 1935. The natives gasped and made the wildest guesses about what could possibly be inside those crates. But they were given little time to look on. As soon as the crates were taken off the ships, they were loaded into trucks and vanished into the desert.

All three agents were at the port when the precious freight arrived. They went along with the crates to the air base itself, and lived in one of the barracks while the ironware and toys were magically turned into airplanes. Their sole thought was of how many days it would be before they could leave this ghastly place in the desert.

Aside from their boredom, they had every reason to feel content with themselves, and Fräulein Dubrow ignored the frequent passes made by the men.

She was more interested in the promised bonus for her good work. So far as she and the men knew, no one had the slightest suspicion that an air fleet was inside those crates. At this point there seemed to be no possible way that the shipment could be interfered with. The planes were sure to arrive safely at their destination.

On August 16, 1935, the chief of police came to see the agents toward evening. He brought a bottle of wine with him, and they drank together.

"Anything going on at the port?" Angelica Dubrow asked him.

"Not a thing," the police chief replied. "Just a British fishing smack with a damaged motor that's come in for repairs."

He was amazed at the effect of his remark on his three companions.

"What's the length of that ship?" they demanded nervously.

The police chief was experienced with ships and shipping. "I'd estimate it at about twenty-five meters."

For a moment none of the agents dared to ask him what the captain looked like. All three had a premonition of trouble. At last Fräulein Dubrow put the question.

"A good-looking fellow," the police chief replied. "He has a kind of reddish beard."

The three began shouting at him all at once. He shouted back at them that nothing had happened. The man was in the port, and really did have a damaged ship. "I saw the damaged parts myself. But if you want, we can go right over and arrest him."

They rushed to the chief's car and roared out to the port. There lay the boat. And none of them had the slightest doubt that the ship belonged

to Capitaine Solitaire. The three agents began discussing what to do. But at that moment something happened that made all their discussions pointless. Something happened that was talked about for years afterward along the African coast of the Mediterranean, and that was described in a thousand different versions.

For the silence was broken by a thunderous explosion, an explosion rapidly followed by several more. At the same time, from the direction of the plane factory in the desert, yellow, white and red flames shot high into the air. A pillar of fire sprang up, and the natives of Zuara began shrieking frantic cries of terror.

The Italian and the Spaniard flung themselves into the car. They had to drag Fräulein Dubrow in; at first she objected to going along. They drove madly out into the desert toward the glow of the fire.

When they arrived, they found the entire factory in ruins. It was a sea of flames, and nothing could be done.

The three agents almost gave the police chief a beating. He seemed strangely unmoved by the whole affair. He escaped from them, gasping out the promise that he would arrest Capitaine Solitaire. When he reached the port he did not arrest the captain, but he seized the ship and put two policemen aboard, ordering them to shoot if the slightest attempt was made to put the vessel out to sea.

Then, magically attracted by the glow of the fire, he rushed back to the desert to report that the ship had been seized—and what should he do now?

Two weeks later two Italian policemen came to see the Italian consul in the French port of Oran. They reported that they had been assigned to guard an English fishing smack in the port of Zuara. Suddenly the boat had been out at sea, though they could not figure out how it had happened. The ship began to rock, and they became so seasick that they were helpless as children. Their guns had been taken away, and they were expecting to be dumped overboard. But instead they had been put ashore at a lonely spot near Oran.

This was how Capitaine Solitaire and the British prevented Generalissimo Francisco Franco from taking over Spain as early as 1935.

The Italian government exiled its agent, Gaston d'Ette, to the Liparian Devil's Island. It was said that after six months there d'Ette committed suicide.

What happened to the Spaniard, Fernando Queseda, is unknown. The beautiful German agent, Angelica Dubrow, was seen in Rio de Janeiro in 1938. So far as is known, she never returned to Germany. THE END

He knocks off a rye and orders the bartender to set one up for me.

Deadlier than the Male

Tales of the Town—II

by REUBEN HECHT

IT was a Friday night, and I just had made the Garden as the fight crowd broke. I forget which fight it was. Before I know it, the door of my cab opens and slams shut. I didn't even get a chance to look at my fare. As we start to pull away, a hoarse voice says to stop on the corner of 43rd and Eighth.

When we get to the corner, I stop and ask him: "Now where to."

He says to me: "Come on in."

I say: "That's okay, I'll wait." He insists I come in with him and says he'll only be a few minutes—he has some business to attend to.

The guy was sober as a judge, so I figured I might as well go in with him. Anyway, I could keep an eye on him. Ordinarily, I shy away from drunks. If I spot one on the street giving me a hail, I ignore him. They get you into trouble! If they don't get sick in your cab, they'll want to start a fight. It means calling a cop, and what not.

So we go into the saloon. This guy is really a hunk of man and not bad-looking, either. He stands at least six feet two in his stocking feet, and probably rocks the scale at two fifty, if not more. I say to myself: *This is one guy I wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley—unless I had a baseball bat in my mitt.*

We walk over to the end of the bar, and all of a sudden that section clears itself like magic. The bartender says something like, "Hello, Jim," to my fare, "What will you have?" He knocks off a rye with a beer chaser and orders the bartender to set one up for me. I tell him I'm sorry, but police regulations didn't allow me to drink while on the job. All the guy does is snort disgustedly and he says: "Take something." The bartender hands me a bottle of Seven-up, and I drink it from the bottle.

We stayed about fifteen minutes, long enough for my fare to have another shot. He takes a look around, says "so long" to the bartender, and out we go. He didn't pay for the drinks.

As I got behind the wheel, I give a sigh of relief and to myself I'm thinking: *That's a close one. Now I can take the guy home.* Tonight was one night I didn't feel like tangling with a drunk.

We ride just about three blocks, and he tells me to pull up on the corner again. *Oh, Lord,* I mumbled, *here we go again.* I still don't know where I got up the nerve, but I turn to him and ask him to pay me off. He gives me a look and says: "What's the matter; what are you scared of?" I tell him I'm not scared, but I couldn't afford to lose my job by making the rounds of the saloons. I could almost feel that sock on the jaw.

So, in we go again. As we stand before the bar, a couple of guys start walking away from us, giving us all the elbow room we need—enough for six guzzlers. He finishes his two shots of rye in the same time it takes me to put away another bottle of Seven-up.

This time I knew I was hooked and couldn't wriggle out unless I wanted to get stuck for the fare myself. I said to myself: *The hell with it, I'll play along.*

For the next couple of hours we make regular stops along Eighth Avenue, never driving more than three of four blocks at a time. And in every joint we go into, they all seem to know the guy. In only one bar did I see him take out a couple of bills to pay the tab.

All this time I'm putting away Seven-up until it's coming out of my ears. Another bottle, and it feels like I'm ready to split. I must have had enough gas in me to make a deal with the gas company. Try drinking a dozen bottles of Coke or Seven-up sometime.

In one of the joints he takes a breather to go to the little-boys' room. The minute he ducked out of sight, I asked the bartender who this character is, and he tells me that he is a big-shot with one of the breweries. Everyone's afraid of him because when he gets a load on, he gets pretty ugly, and they didn't want to offend him because it might affect their beer supply. Sober, he's a regular Joe.

FINALLY, I tell my fare: "It's three o'clock; how about heading for home." He looks at me and doesn't answer me right away. I think, *Oh, oh, here's trouble coming.* To my surprise he says "Okay," and gives me an address in Forest Hills. He slumps in the back seat and falls asleep. By the time we reach his house, he's really cutting wood. His snoring sounded like it would wake up the street.

I get out of the cab, and it takes me five minutes to wake the lug up. When I tell him he's in front of his house, I could swear he sobered up in a second. He turns white, like a scared kid, and begins to plead with me to come in with him.

"No, you ring the bell first," he says. Only he doesn't sound so tough. I couldn't make it out. I figured I had nothing to lose, except maybe a poke in the nose, so I ring the bell once, twice, and put my finger on the button again—when the door opens.

A NICE-LOOKING lady about his age, no bigger than a nickel bag of peanuts and weighing about ninety-five pounds, wearing one of those fancy things women wear at bedtime, looks at me.

"I've got your husband in my cab, and I don't think he feels so good," I tell her.

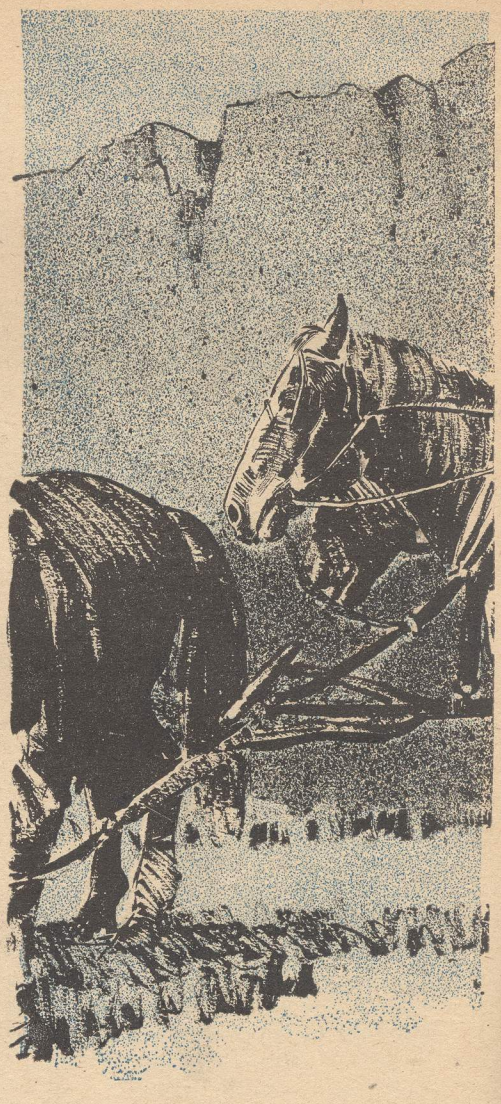
"Oh, you mean he's been off on a toot again," she says with a laugh. "Help him in. I'll pay you."

She stands at the door, and I go back to the cab. The guy pleads with me not to leave him alone, and says he won't move unless I go into the house with him. I help him out, and he's a bit unsteady on his legs. He sticks one arm on my shoulder, and I almost hit the sidewalk. It was like someone dumped a couple of hundred pounds of potatoes on me.

Once inside, the little woman goes to work on him. While she's going through her purse to pay me off, she gives him a tongue-lashing that's a beaut. What made it so funny was looking at them. It was like a neighborhood kid telling off Joe Louis. The guy doesn't say a word, except look very meek. When he finally opens his mouth, all that comes out is, "Yes, dear," "I'm sorry, dear," and "It won't happen again, dear." And out of a clear sky, she hauls off and catches him right on the button with a right hook, and down he goes.

Back in the cab I start laughing, but good. Boy, oh, boy, what would those bartenders give to see this show!

The Mail Goes Through



THE DEAN OF AMERICAN WRITERS HERE CONCLUDES HIS MEMORABLE STORY OF THAT POTENT FACTOR IN THE WINNING OF THE WEST—THE PONY EXPRESS

by SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

Illustrated by CLEVELAND WOODWARD

IF the original trips of the Pony did not quite live up to the timetable they came near enough to it to satisfy the public. The newspapers cheered the new service. It had not only broken the previous records; it had cut them in two.

Accustomed as we are to high speed now, ten days between St. Louis and San Francisco seems slow indeed, but in 1860 it was lightning.

"The Pony," Arthur Chapman writes in his entertaining history, "was as far ahead of the stagecoach in those days as the airplane is ahead of the railroad train today."

The promoters of the business were not wholly satisfied. Before the riders had settled into their routine, Russell, Majors & Waddell met at St. Joseph headquarters to take stock of the operations.

"We're losing men," Russell said.

"We're losing money," Waddell said.

"We're losing horses," Majors added.

"Pony Bob Haslaw predicted that," Russell pointed out.

"Yes," Majors agreed. "Our relay stations are too far apart. We've got to put in more."

"That will cost more money," Waddell said.

"Not more than wearing out horses," Majors countered. "And men," he added.

Waddell glanced at a sheet of paper and frowned. "Nearly half of our men have quit already. I thought we picked them for their hardihood, Mr. Majors."

"The boys are tough; the work is tougher," Majors replied curtly.

"How can we continue in business if that keeps up?"

"I've got three applicants for every vacancy," the operations man returned. "The Pony is the most popular institution in the West."

"And pretty nearly the most expensive, I expect," Waddell rejoined.

"Have you got the figures there?" Russell asked.

"Roughly. You won't like them."

"We didn't expect to make money from the word go," Majors remarked. "Let's hear the bad news."

The financier opened a ledger and ran his finger down a column.

"Here it is. It's costing us sixteen dollars to carry a letter."

"An ounce of gold for half an ounce of mail," Russell commented.

"And we collect five dollars for it. It will be costing us close to fifty thousand dollars a month loss, as I figure it. That, gentlemen, is not business."

Russell's spade beard took an angle indicating that the rugged jaw back of it was sticking out.

"We're getting the mails through, aren't we?"

"We are," his partner agreed.

"And doing it better than it's ever been done before," Alexander Majors declared.

"I've never quit a contract yet," Russell snapped.

"That's the point," Waddell complained. "We haven't got a contract. The Government isn't paying us a cent. What's Gwinn doing in Washington? Nothing!"

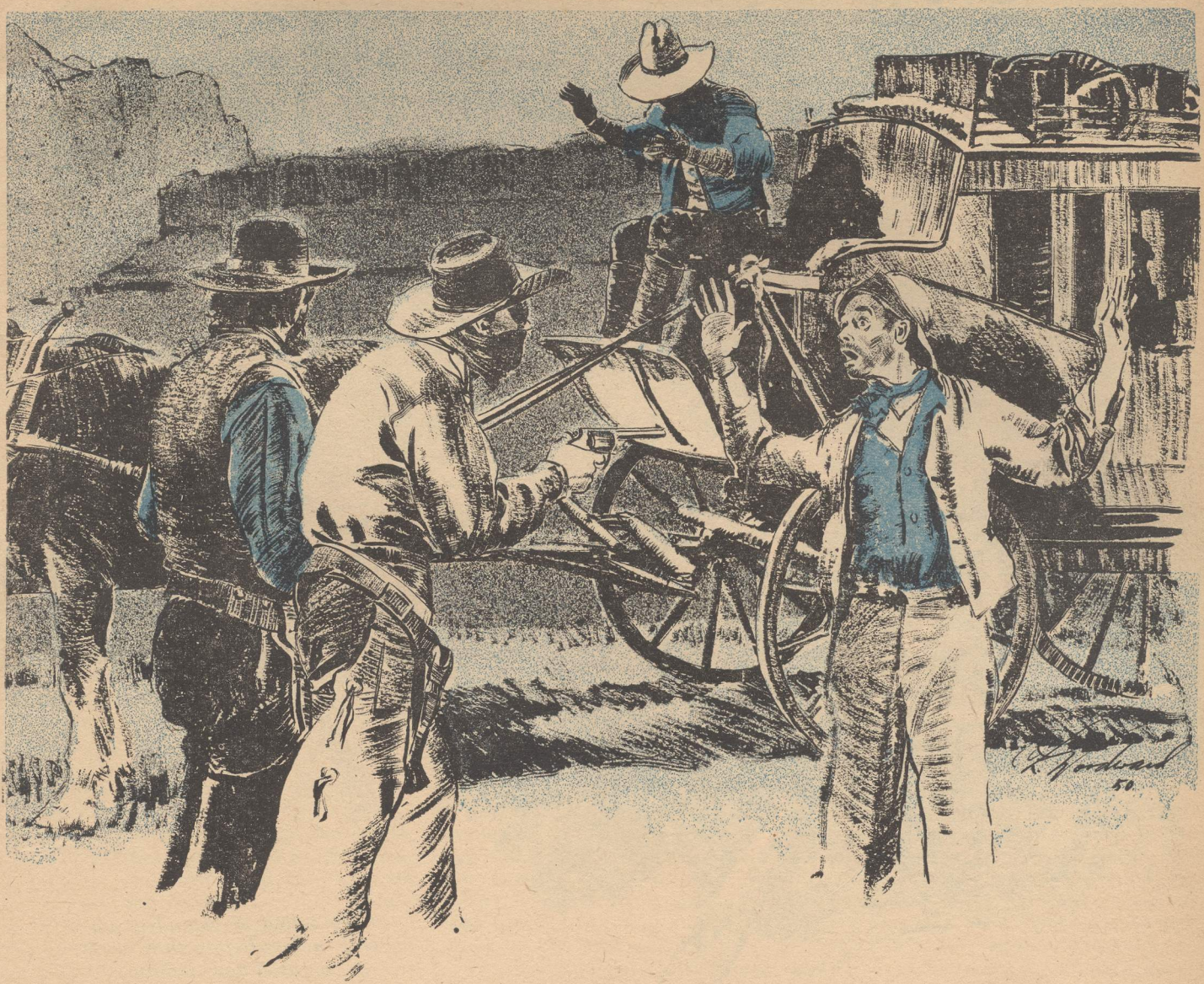
"Senator Gwinn has a bill up now for the Post Office to pay us a subsidy for carrying the mails."

"We've certainly earned one," Majors said. "Look what those other fellows have been tapping the U. S. Treasury for."

They exchanged notes on earlier enterprises which had drawn or were drawing Government money.

"If those wiseacres at Washington can afford to invest seventy-five thousand dollars in mail-camels too soft-footed to stand our hard desert—" Russell began.

"Whatever did become of those camels?" Waddell broke in.



Majors laughed. "They tried to station them with the other animals. The mules didn't like the looks of 'em and ran away. The horses couldn't stand the camel smell, and *they* ran away. Then the camels ran away, and that ended it."

"Butterfield is still drawing his seventy thousand dollars every month," Waddell said.

"For a route seven hundred miles farther than ours," Russell said.

"And ten days longer," Majors added.

"Butterfield has strong influence in Congress," Waddell said reflectively.

"Especially with the Southern members," Russell said.

"Yes," Majors assented. "The South is going to need California if war comes. So they'll want to keep the Butterfield Route open."

Russell flattened his folio down over his knee with a sharp crack. "Then the nation is going to need our Overland Route the more."

"Let the nation pay for it, then," Waddell said.

"California is back of us," Russell declared. "The Governor has petitioned Washington for a subsidy of nine hundred thousand dollars a year for the Overland."

"For that we'll run a daily mail," the enthusiastic Majors exclaimed.

Waddell was gloomy. "I see no prospect of our getting it. Our money will not last forever."

"While it does last, I stick," Russell said.

"I stick," Majors backed him up.

"I don't know," Waddell muttered.

CHAPTER VIII

THE original trip fell a little behind schedule. Nobody criticized the company for that. The wonder was that the mail had come through at all against such odds. What did a day or two of delay matter!

The great point had been proved. Mails could come through, snow or no snow, by the new method of relays. The public was enthusiastic. The newspapers cheered the Pony. Previous records had not only been bettered; they had been cut in two.

Trouble with Indians was always expected, never sought. Every division had its rules for dealing with the tribes. They may be boiled down to the following:

If it is one Indian, be friendly. If it is three Indians, be cautious. If it is ten Indians, run.

Never shoot first. If you must shoot, shoot low and keep on shooting.

Take no unnecessary risks.

Remember, the Indians were here first. They have their rights.

The Pony Express is here to make friends, not enemies.

If trouble comes, think of the mails first, your pony second, and your skin last.

In the beginning, the land was free to the Indians, just as the sky was, the water of the streams, and the trees of the forest. They did not claim to

They killed or wounded several raiders before they were captured and tied up.

own it. No Indian understood ownership of land. Land was part of the earth. The earth belonged to all.

Certain tribes ranged certain areas. Sometimes they fought for hunting rights. If a tribe was defeated, it moved on to another locality. There was space enough for everybody.

The whites came. First they were the Mountain Men of the 1830's. They were the daring trappers, seeking beaver pelts which they took back to St. Louis and sold for three dollars a pound. Their long rifles made them respected. The tribesmen could understand men who came, collected their furs and went again. These palefaces did not molest the reds unless attacked. They were too few in number to spoil the hunting-grounds. There was still room enough for both whites and reds.

The Mormons came in the late 1840's. There were thousands of them, under able leadership. They were brave and determined men, ready to fight in their own defense. But they did not want to fight. They wanted to settle and live in peace.

Around them were the Pah-Utes, most warlike and dangerous of the tribes. They watched the great invasion with fear and dismay and anger. Attacks upon the long trains proved that arrows were no match for bullets. Every covered wagon was a small and well-defended fortress of its own.

The savages cut off and killed a few stragglers, and ran off a few animals. But they soon learned that this warfare cost more than it was worth. It took them a little longer to find out that these white men were willing to be friendly.

They had no intention of taking over the land, nor any taste for wanton killing. They were ready to respect the Indians' hunting rights and tribal customs. Soon when a Pah-Ute met a Mormon on the trail, they exchanged the peace sign, and went on about their business.

The Forty-niners were a different lot. They did not understand Indians nor want to understand them. Their wagon trains too often provoked shooting affrays with no reason. To them, the only good Indian was a dead Indian. Numbers of them were killed in trying out this cruel theory. In some cases the gold-hunters rounded up Indians like animals and compelled them to wash out gold in the stream-beds without wages, until a committee of miners put a stop to the slavery.

All this undid the good work of the Mormons. As the coach and freight lines developed the bad feeling improved. Kindly station-men gave refuge to winter-bound redskins, saving them from freezing or starvation. Often the mule corps, engaged in repair work, would bring in lost hunters and care for them until they were able to go on.

When the Pony Express began its work, there was no open warfare. The Shoshones, the Pawnees and the Kickapoos were friendly. The Pah-

Utes, the Cheyennes, and the Crows were unreliable.

Evil tales were spread on both sides. Strayed wagons, it was reported, were attacked without reason. Men, women and children were slaughtered and scalped. Horses were repeatedly stampeded and run off at night. This last was undoubtedly true. The Plains Indian, in war or peace, was a natural horsethief.

On their side, the Indians had their grievances. Brutal or frightened immigrants on the trails would often fire on a lone Indian, riding peaceably about his business. There were ugly stories of camps destroyed, and squaws and papooses shot down in cold blood. The feeling between whites and reds was uncertain, the balance between peace and war delicate.

The Pony Express riders held to the company's precepts of giving no offense, and never shooting unless forced to it.

Few Indian horses were as swift as the carefully chosen ponies. Few Indian riders were as skilled as the hard-trained company couriers. In a pinch they could always outshoot the savages. But their best chance was flight, not fight. Besides, it saved time.

For the first few weeks of operation there was no interference except nature's bad weather, with the riders. Then reports of Indian trouble spread along the route. Night raids on wagon trains had run off horses. Oxen were found slaughtered in the mornings. There had been several shooting affrays, with the savages not always in the wrong.

The mail-men were exposed to special risks. For one thing, they rode alone, and after the overweight Spencer rifle was discarded, lightly armed. Unless they were greatly superior in numbers, the raiding bands hesitated to tackle a wagon train. It was too risky a business, riding up against ready riflemen who fought coolly behind the cover of their wagons.

A lone horseman was different. He was natural and easy prey—if they could catch him. It was always an exciting race, even though the pursuers lost. And they were especially eager to capture the mail boxes. Those little locked leather oblongs must be full of strong magic. Otherwise, why did the ponies bearing them always outrun the Indians' horses?

The Indians doubtless did their best. Yet, during the whole term of the Pony Express' existence only one mail was lost with its carrier. Several riders came in, bullet-ridden and dying. Once a riderless mare brought in the *mochila,* leaving the rider dead on the prairie where he had been ambushed. A San Francisco newspaper declared that the Pony Express was "simply inviting slaughter on all the foolhardy young men."

In those days of early summer, when the relays changed at the station, the professional talk was all of Indians. In the brief two minutes allowed for the shift, it would be:

"Any bands eastward?"

"Didn't sight any. Signs on the trail, though, twenty-two miles out. A dozen at least."

Or perhaps a bit of expert advice: "Look out for that alder patch by the ford. I saw smoke there."

Or, more grimly: "Better take an extra scalp along, Jim. When I cut loose, there were a couple of hundred red devils galloping down from the mesa."

CHAPTER IX

It was war.

The Pah-Utes took the warpath late in May. There were nearly eight thousand of them, armed with the short, powerful, big-game bows which few whites could bend; and many had rifles. They overran Nevada.

Other tribes joined. The Shoshones in California had been on good terms with the palefaces. There was a treaty. But one evening a cowardly immigrant took a pot-shot at an aged and inoffensive Shoshone from the safe shelter of a covered wagon. There was no excuse for it; the old man toppled to the ground and died. That set the tribe off.

For hundreds of miles along the route there was no safety against ambush or raid. At one time, two-thirds of the entire trail was through hostile country. Mountain, valley and desert, the country was in arms against the invader. Any white was fair game for a red. Any red was fair game for a white.

Whoever else may have been to blame, it was not the Pony Express men. Their one concern was to get the mails through. Nevertheless they suffered more severely than any other body of men. Along the trail, beset with ambushes, and in the lonely stations, they were terribly exposed.

Reports of tragedy became more frequent. The Dry Creek Station was stormed, and every man in it killed. Pony Bob Haslaw reported having found the dead body of the Cold Springs keeper in the ashes of the burned cabin. A few miles farther on at Sand Creek he persuaded the man in charge to leave with him. It was none too soon. That night the Pah-Utes tore the place to pieces.

This same Pony Bob took a desperate chance when he found his advance blocked by a war party of thirty Pah-Utes armed with rifles. Drawing his revolver, he rode coolly up to them. At the last moment the leader gave the peace sign. Bob returned it and rode through unharmed. His boldness may have daunted the band. Or it may be that the Pony Express' reputation for fair play toward the reds had saved him.

Howard R. Egan's was a typical experience. He rode into Schell Creek, to find his relief down with ague and nobody to carry the *cantinas* to the next relay station, twenty-seven miles West. The mail must go through; it was his job to keep up the tradition and carry on. Because of the Indians, he waited for the dark, then set out for Butte. This part of the trails was hard going, up and down sharp ridges and through steep cañons.

In one of these he saw the reflection of light in the sky. Moving cautiously forward, he came in sight of the fire. Warriors were posted on both sides of the gulch. There was another passage seven miles to the north. Should he turn his mustang and try that? How did he know but that another band was waiting there to waylay him?

While he was debating, a dog made up his mind for him. It had scented him and now rushed down the hillside, barking loudly. Young Egan whipped out his revolver, jabbed spurs into his mount, and thundered down the cañon, yelling like a demon and firing into the air.

The war party may have thought that a whole squad of cavalry was after them. Or perhaps they had in mind those little leather boxes full of magic. Bad medicine, doubtless! They scuttled up the cliffs of the arroyo like so many lizards, and the Pony Express man rode through to safety.

Not so fortunate was a half-breed Mexican rider who may have been José Zovgaltz. His name is doubtful; only the record of his courage has come down to us with certainty. He rode into the Dry Creek, Nevada, station, drooped over his saddle. Bullets had pierced his body. A dozen arrows stood out from his own shoulders and from the hide of his mustang. The rider tumbled from the saddle and died. But he had brought his mail through.

At the Egan Cañon Station the single-room cabin was surrounded by yelling savages. The two whites in charge, Henry Wilson and Albert Armstrong, busily engaged in eating their breakfast, ran for their rifles. Lying on the floor and shooting from cracks in the wall, they killed or wounded several of the raiders before

the door was rushed and they were captured and tied up.

Brush was brought in and piled around them. They were to be burned alive in their cabin. Luckily their captors were hungry. They gobbled what was left of the breakfast and rifled the storerooms for more. While they were thus engaged, the white men, who had given up hope, heard hoof-beats echoing from the cañon walls.

They shouted. Answering calls sounded like the sweetest music they had ever heard. A band of soldiers sent out from a neighboring fort burst in. Eighteen Pah-Utes were killed. The survivors rushed out, flung themselves upon their ponies and escaped.

Other raids were reported, with stock run off, stations looted and burned, and in several cases, the defenders killed. Thanks to the swiftness of their ponies, the riders generally escaped. They were the ones who brought in the bad news.

THE Pony Express Company called for help. Unless the Government could safeguard the route, the riders would be withdrawn. Alexander Majors, who was the experienced fighting man of the firm, declared that he would allow his riders to risk their lives no longer. The service was stopped on the last day of May. No more mails East; no more mails West.

A loud outcry arose. Already the settlements had come to rely on the regularity of the Pony service. They wanted their letters, their newspapers. The Government had better do something about it and do it *NOW!*

Carson City sent out a force of 105 men to punish the tribe. Major Ormsby was in command. The Major rode out at the head of his force, gayly announcing that he was "going to get an Indian for breakfast." He did not know much about Indians. If anyone in his command knew more than he did, it was not evident in the fight which followed. An ambush surprised the careless whites. Nearly half of them were killed, including their leader. The survivors were chased back to Carson City.

Now the fate of the whole mail service was in the balance. Not only this, but all traffic was threatened. Wagon trains would not dare attempt a route beset by such a force of savages. The overland trade was in a state of paralysis. Alarmed, the Government acted with decision. A sufficient force of army regulars chased the Pah-Utes into the high mountains and scattered them in a battle waged in a June snowstorm. After that, there was no warfare on a large scale.

But damage had been done to the Pony Express, worse than the destruction of its property. The proprietors had hoped to get an allowance from the Post Office Department for maintaining regular mail deliveries. If the deliveries were not regular, what claim could be made for Government support? For three weeks not a pony had moved eastward or westward.

Worse, the company was losing its riders wholesale. Cold, hunger and privation, long hours and short sleep, they could stand. But cruel Indians, fifty to their one, were another matter. To ride into a station expecting refuge and rest, and to find a heap of ashes and a huddle of scalped corpses was an experience to shake the stoutest nerves. Rider after rider turned in his gun and saddle.

Russell and Majors met in Salt Lake City to take stock and determine on their future course. W. W. Finney joined them.

"Washington is complaining," he said.

"Let 'em complain," Russell replied bitterly. "They aren't paying for this."

"No, and they're not likely to, if there are any more stoppages."

"Let 'em keep the Indians off our backs, then," Majors said. "We'll do the rest."

They sent for Bolivar Roberts.

"We've lost a lot of men," Russell said to the grizzled veteran. "And we're going to lose more."

"Lily-livered tenderfeet," the other said in disgust.

"Can you find riders to replace them?"

"Plenty."

"Enough to increase the service from one mail a week to two?"

Majors and Finney uttered exclamations of surprise. Roberts stared, then laughed. "Why not?" he said.

Finney spoke up. "Is that our answer to the Government?"

"That's our answer," the head of the company answered resolutely.

Stations were rebuilt. Stock and equipment was replaced. The riders took saddle on June 26th. There was never again a day's interruption to the service.

Poring over his ledgers at the eastern end, Waddell figured out the company's war loss at seventy-five thousand dollars. It seems to have been too much for him.

His name appears no more in the record of the company's activities.

CHAPTER X

INDIANS were not the only human enemies. Parts of the route were infested with outlaws. They operated in bands, small and large.

They were evil characters from the East, crooked gamblers who had been driven out of the towns and camps, and professional criminals, or disappointed miners who had gone broke and then gone bad. Man for man, they were far more dangerous than the redskins, for they shot straight, were well mounted on stolen horses; and they were ruthless.

STAGECOACHES were the usual prey. The bandits would lie in wait at a ford in the river or a narrow cañon in the hills. They would know when the stagecoach was due. They might even have information as to how much gold it was carrying.

There would be a warning shot. Two men with leveled rifles would be blocking the road. Others would appear on the sides of the cañon.

"Hands up!" the command would come. Then: "Throw down that box."

Seldom was there any resistance. The odds were too heavily in favor of the hold-up men. Next it would be: "Passengers out!"

The unhappy travelers would be lined up and stripped of their valuables. Only then would the coach be allowed to go on, while the renegades rode off with the booty to their secret hideout. . . .

When travel was thin and there were few coaches or wagon trains moving, the bandits might go after a Pony Express rider. There was always a chance that the mails might carry something valuable. No case is on record when outlaws succeeded in actually holding up the Pony. But several riders were pursued and shot at. This would not do. The Government had helped to clean out the Indians. It was either indifferent or helpless as regards the well-organized bandits.

"No law west of Fort Kearney," was the saying in those days. Later, when the Overland Pony Express took hold, it was amended to: "No law west of Fort Kearney except the Overland."

It came about through the company's having hired a man who was himself a sort of outlaw.

Jules Reni was a big, powerful, bullying French Canadian. The settlement of Julesburg, Colorado, had been named after him. Here the traffic split, part of it going on west to California, the rest turning south to Pike's Peak, Cripple Creek and Denver.

It was an important junction. It was also a very tough town. Jules ruled it. He used to brag: "I'm the law here." That is a dangerous thing to say. Our city bosses today sometimes take that attitude. They often end up in jail.

Alexander Majors of the Pony Express knew Julesburg, and knew Jules. For a tough town, so he figured, a

tough representative was needed. Jules was already in charge of the stagecoach station; and Majors appointed him Superintendent of the Overland with authority over its Pony Express riders.

It was one of the company's few mistakes. What Majors did not know was that Jules Reni was suspected of giving advance information on stage travel to the outlaw bands.

For a while the station ran smoothly enough. Then the operation slackened. There was evidence that the mails had been tampered with. Equipment was allowed to fall below standard. Worst of all, the relay ponies were not properly cared for.

Majors sent word to Jules, calling him sharply to account. But the big Frenchman had been boss too long to take orders from anybody. He swaggered around the barroom declaring that *he* was running Julesburg. No company could tell *him* his business.

The company officials met to decide what was to be done. They agreed that the superintendent must be replaced.

"Jock Slade is our man," Bolivar Roberts declared.

JOCK SLADE was a noted character throughout the West. He had fought in the Mexican War and liked to be called "Captain." He was a quick draw and a dead shot with either hand, a "two-gun man." He had driven stage and fought Indians.

"Will he take it? It's a dangerous job to try to put Jules Reni out," Russell said.

"That's the reason he'll take it," Roberts returned with a smile.

Majors shrugged. "Set a thief to catch a thief," he quoted. Slade's own reputation was by no means free of suspicion.

By this time it was regarded as the highest compliment to a young man's qualities to be offered a job with the Pony. Slade accepted promptly, got his orders and came to Julesburg.

He and the man he was to supplant met in the open street. Cautious citizens, observing the meeting, ran to cover. The big Frenchman glared at the smaller man.

"Your name Slade?"

"Captain Slade," the other said quietly.

"Going to work for the Pony?"

"That's the idea."

"*You* won't last long," Jules said.

"Maybe not. But while I do, the mails are going out on time."

Jules scowled. One charge against him was that, owing to his slack ways, the schedule was not kept up at Julesburg.

He passed on, cursing. The expectant townspeople were much disappointed. "What! No shooting?" Jules was credited with having killed several enemies. But Jules knew, if his fellow-citizens did not, that Slade was a killer. He was not taking any chances. He knew a better way.

A few days later as Slade was rounding up some stray mules, a charge of buckshot, fired from a thicket, knocked him from his horse. Jules, satisfied that he had finished the man who had taken away his job, rode off into the mountains for a short vacation.

BUT the shooting was not popular. Drawing on an enemy in the open street was considered all right. A man was supposed to watch out for himself. Ambushing was foul tactics. Powerful though Jules was, he figured that he had better keep out of the way for a while and let it blow over.

An overland stage took Slade to St. Louis, where surgeons removed most of the lead from his body. In a month he was back at his post. Jules, learning of this from a hunter whom he met on a side-trail, sent word that he would kill Slade on sight.

Slade did not wait to be killed. He formed a posse, ran down Jules, shot him and cut off his ears. These were nailed to the station door as warning that the new division superintendent was not a man to fool with.

The slayer gave himself up to the military at Fort Laramie. The officers held a hearing and decided that the shooting was justified. Slade said that the locality was infested with bandits. There would be no peace or security for immigrant wagon, stage or Pony Express until the dens where the gangs lived were cleaned out.

The soldiers told him to go ahead and do the cleaning. They would back him.

It soon appeared that he did not need much backing. A few miles to the west, where the road led into a nest of hills, a stage was held up, the express boxes carried away, and the passengers robbed. Four of the highwaymen were known to have gone to a lonely ranch-house. All were heavily armed. Attacking them from the open would be dangerous business.

Slade took a couple of his stationmen and a few reliable Julesburg citizens, and led them to the place. Ordering them to wait in the bushes, he went forward alone, kicked in the door and called upon the four men to surrender. When they reached for their guns, he opened fire. Two out of the four were killed outright. One was mortally wounded. The fourth escaped through a window, but was shot down as he tried to run away.

Several other exploits, less bloody, convinced the brigands that they would be better off away from the section commanded by Jock Slade. Holdups became few and far between on his part of the Overland Trail.

The men under Slade were trained to ride hard and think fast. One morning a slender youth rode in and said he had been sent by Mr. Majors. The superintendent looked at him in astonishment.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-two."

"Don't try to fool me," the superintendent warned.

The boy's eyes snapped: "Are you calling me a liar, Mister?"

"And don't try to bluff me. You're short of seventeen, or I'm a gopher."

The applicant grinned sheepishly. "Maybe I am—a little. But I'm mighty strong for my age."

He was taken on as an extra. When he had proved to the boss that he could ride and shoot, "he got his pony," as they said on the Overland. He proved himself a good courier, and a cautious one until one day he found himself in a corner.

Two "bad men" were reported on the trail east of Kelly's. They had tried to hold up a stage, but had been beaten off. That day the young courier had a special box of money in his charge. Possibly the "road agents" might know of this. They had ways of finding out.

The Pony Express rider figured out a plan. Over the *mochila* with the regulation boxes, he threw a second leather blanket with four *cantinas*. They were stuffed with papers.

HE was halted in a narrow pass by the order:

"Hands up and get down."

He dismounted and tried to argue. The two men laughed at him. After all, he was only a boy. One of them became impatient.

"Come on, kid. Pass out the stuff, if you don't want your carcass shot full of holes."

"Oh, go on, take it, then!" the rider whined.

He threw the spare *mochila* in the man's face, whipped out his revolver, and shot him through the shoulder. Instantly he was back in the saddle. He rode the second bandit down and escaped with money and mail.

The boy was William F. Cody, afterward known all over the world as Buffalo Bill.

Word went out among the outlaws that the Overland would protect its own, and that if any of them were molested on the trail, there would be a harsh accounting. "Captain" Jock Slade was not the only superintendent to clean up his district.

To interfere with a Pony Express rider was "bad medicine." The bandits confined their operations to stage coaches and wagon-trains. They let the Pony alone.

CHAPTER XI

BY midsummer of 1860 the Pony Express had settled down to regularity. All the weaklings were weeded out, and their places taken by youngsters of tougher physique and hardier spirit. Now eighty seasoned horsemen were riding the route, and there was a waiting list for any vacancy.

The Pony Express was an institution. The West was proud of it. Every respectable citizen felt an interest in its success. The communities which it served were rooting for it as, today, people root for their baseball or basketball teams.

Twice a week mails came and went. New stations were set up. There were 190 of them now. As a rule they were ten or twelve miles apart. The farthest were separated by not more than twenty miles. Eleven miles an hour was the average expected of the mail-carriers.

Over the greater portion of the trail this was easy. With a clear, level track, a pony carrying the XP brands could cover his twenty miles in an hour. Mountain travel was more difficult, and slower; but this could be and was allowed for. What could not be reckoned in advance was the emergencies which so often threatened to upset the timetable. It is these that bring to the Overland records the tales of endurance and heroism.

Pony Bob Haslaw was one of the famous riders. It was said that his way of making a mustang's acquaintance was to flick it on the nose. If it did not try to kick him in return, he passed it up for something with more spirit.

His route was through the worst Indian country of Nevada. At the height of the Pah-Ute war he rode into Reece River Station, expecting to change horses. His mustang was jaded; it had already carried him seventy-five miles.

Not a single mount was at the station. Even the mules had been taken for the fight against the Indians. The next station was fifteen miles away.

The disappointed man climbed back upon the weary animal and set out again. At Buckland's, a rider named Richardson should have relieved Pony Bob. He refused.

"He dumped the blanket," Bob reported in the slang of the Overland.

Whether Richardson was affected by sickness or cowardice is not known. It is the only case of record where a Pony Express rider refused duty in the field. Those who resigned had always finished their runs.

Though there was no relief for Haslaw, there was for his mount. Haslaw pressed forward on a fresh pony. Thirty-five miles, and he changed again. Thirty-seven farther, and another change. Then a final thirty to the end. Jay Kelley relieved him. He had come 190 miles and was entitled to a rest.

Little rest he got. The courier from the West had come in badly crippled from a fall. For him to go on, was out of the question. The station-master woke Pony Bob out of the deep sleep of exhaustion, and explained what had happened.

"Will you take the *mochila,* Bob?"

The rider yawned and stretched. "How long have I been asleep?"

"An hour and a half," the other said, stretching it a little.

"That's enough," the horseman said. "Saddle up."

Back over the route he started. At Cold Springs, where he had changed mounts a few hours before, he found five dead men. The Indians had raided the station and run off the horses.

Risking himself on a wearied horse in a country alive with redskins was a desperate chance. Pony Bob took it. At Bucklands he found the Division Superintendent, who had just ridden in. Superintendent Morley officially ordered him to wait until evening. There would be no chance of getting through while it was light.

No man ever needed a lay-off more than Haslaw needed that nine hours. With a young and high-mettled mustang between his knees, he set out at dusk. Twice he sighted Indians. Once they sighted him, but could not catch him.

He got back to his starting point without mishap. He had made 380 miles in the saddle with less than eleven hours' rest, and only three hours and a half behind schedule. For his courage and devotion, the company awarded him a bonus of one hundred dollars.

IMPORTANT Government messages went out from Washington for California early in June, 1860. The directions were "Rush." At Midway, 318 miles from the railhead where the mail was transferred from the train to the Pony, Jim Moore waited. He was one of the Overland's fastest and most reliable riders.

To the division point at Julesburg was 140 miles, two regular runs. Rather than turn over his boxes to a less experienced man, Moore chose to ride the whole route. By changing horses frequently, he came in several hours ahead of time.

There the mails from Sacramento arrived at almost the same time. Again the directions were *"Special. Rush."* The regular courier should have been on hand to take the *mochila* on eastward. He was not.

"Where's Dan?" Moore asked.

Station-master Slade shook his head sadly. The experienced plainsman knew what that meant.

"Indians?" he asked.

"Maybe. Maybe outlaws."

"Got anybody else?"

"Nobody good enough."

"All right. I'll take the shift."

He allowed himself ten minutes' rest. The ground was easy, rolling prairie all the way. The road was dry. Changes of pony were waiting at every station. According to Pony legend, Moore made the whole run, westward and return, two hundred seventy-five miles, in fourteen and three-quarter hours.

That figures out to more than eighteen miles an hour, an almost unbelievable rate to keep up so long. It was probably a record for speed.

The endurance record goes to Jack Keetley, also a plainsman. He rode three hundred forty miles at a time when the Company was short on riders. This meant thirty-one hours in the saddle without rest, making an average of eleven miles an hour. The last five hours he slept most of the time.

"It was all right as long as I didn't fall off," he said. "The pony knows the route as well as I do."

Another of the faithful mares brought the mail in alone, while the rider lay beside the trail, wounded.

RISKS were many, various, and sometimes ridiculous. Riding through the winterbound Rockies a Pony man known as Sawed-off Cumbo heard what he thought was the report of a rifle close by. Instinctively he flung himself from the saddle, with such violence that he broke two ribs when he hit the ground. As he peered cautiously about, revolver in hand, another sharp sound overhead made him feel foolish.

What he had heard was the crack of a piñon tree branch under pressure of the sap, frozen in the sub-zero cold.

Another rider, approaching a mule-team immigrant wagon in the early dawn, heard the crack of a rifle, and just to make it more convincing, the *zing-g-g* of the bullet close to his ear. A very apologetic upstate New Yorker crawled out of the wagon to explain. Waking up and seeing a lone horseman in the half-light, he had taken him for a hostile redskin.

Somewhere on the long stretch between Beaver Creek and Freemont's Orchard, Colorado, Tony King, riding east, and Henry Farley, riding west, were scheduled to pass on the trail. It was September. The locality was free of Indians and outlaws. The two couriers had nothing to worry about but making their time.

King rode into Beaver Creek looking worried.

It was always an exciting race, even though the pursuers lost. They were eager to capture the mail boxes.

"Something must have happened to Henry," he said. "I didn't see hide nor hair of him."

About the same time, Farley pulled up at the Freemont Orchard station with a long face.

"Better send a search party out for Tony," he said. "I didn't pass him anywhere."

Reserves were hurried out from both stations. They came back grinning. Unmistakable tracks had been found in the soft earth. Tony and Henry had passed halfway within a few rods of one another. Both had been fast asleep. The wise ponies had kept the trail.

Bolivar Roberts was in the habit of giving the new men brief advice.

"Treat your pony like your mother. Your life may depend on it."

Many a rider had cause to bless him for that bit of wisdom.

CHAPTER XII

California had been well served by the Pony Express. The time was coming when it would be of vital service to the whole nation.

As the year 1860 drew toward its close, the division between North and South became more marked. If the break came, California's course might make all the difference. Its gold could buy foreign supplies and foreign aid in case of war.

It had been admitted to statehood as a "free" State. Slavery was forbidden within its borders. Nevertheless there was a powerful Southern settlement. Nearly half of the population favored the South.

There was a strong element, including many men of Northern birth, who wished to make the Far West into an independent nation. One of these, a New Englander who had moved to the Pacific Coast, thought that war was sure to come. If it did, he wrote:

> . . . . We shall secede, with the Rocky Mountains for a line, and form an Empire on the Pacific, with Washington Territory, Oregon, and California, and we shall annex all of this side of Mexico. . . . We don't care a straw whether you dissolve the Union or not. We just wish that the Republicans and Democrats at the Capitol would get into a fight and kill each other all off like the Kilkenny cats. Perhaps that would settle the hash.

Strange to say, when the split did come, F. A. Buck, the writer of the letter, had a change of heart and became an active supporter of the Union.

Abraham Lincoln was elected on Nov. 7th, 1860, defeating President James A. Buchanan. The news, telegraphed to St. Joseph, was in the mail-box of the Pony Express rider almost as soon as the last click of the receiving instrument was over. The next wire was at Fort Churchill, Nevada.

The Pony Express was the connecting link across eighteen hundred miles of mountain, plain and desert. So swift and sure was the travel that the San Francisco newspapers had the result in their special edition of November 19th.

Lincoln's victory encouraged the Union faction on the Pacific. The California Legislature passed resolutions of loyalty to the flag. The Pony was first in getting the good news back to Washington. Special editions of the Eastern newspapers, printed on tissue paper to save the costly postage, arrived with every mail-horse. The Overland was keeping up its schedules with wonderful regularity.

Still the Government which owed so much to it would not give it a dollar's worth of help. Postage charges were cut in half. That reduced the

company's operating income. It continued to carry the mails.

Toward the close of 1860 the California skies darkened on the Union cause. The Knights of the Golden Circle organized, with the object of invading Mexico and wrestling from it the province of Sonora. An independent Republic of the Pacific would be formed. Then, when the South broke away from the North, the new Far Western nation would join the Confederacy.

At first the Knights were supposed to operate in secrecy. But sixteen thousand members cannot keep a secret very well. It became known that fifty thousand muskets had been shipped from the Springfield, Mass., arsenal for the use of the Knights.

THE Pony Express carried that news. It bore back from Washington instructions for the defense of the State. Probably there has never been a time in our history when more fateful and important messages traveled back and forth.

The Government used the Overland route almost entirely. Because the longer and slower Butterfield Route across the desert was controlled by Confederate sympathizers, it was used by the Southerners. That difference of ten days gave the Federal authorities a great advantage.

All this had been pointed out to President Buchanan by the California legislature. One argument was that the railroads would eventually span the continent. If the Overland Route was maintained, the railroad would follow its course, and reach the coast earlier than if it went south.

Without money the Pony service could not be kept up. A bill was offered in Congress to make the Overland the only official mail route. It would carry all transcontinental mails twice a week in each direction. The Post Office Department would pay it $900,000 a year.

The bill was allowed to die. President Buchanan did nothing. The Pony Express Company continued to lose money. Russell and Majors held a consultation. How long could they keep on at this rate?

"Until January 1st, anyway; the Government *must* come around by that time," said Russell, always hopeful.

"Until we go broke," declared Majors, the never-say-die.

Spring of 1861 came slowly in the mountains. Winter was still heavy in the passes when the nation waited for the news which might decide its fate. Unless Lincoln's inaugural message in March set forth a policy of fairness, it was almost certain that California would secede at the State election in the fall.

It was a time of extreme nervous tension on the coast. Never had news been so anxiously awaited.

"Clear everything for the President's message," the order went out to all stations.

The pick of the riders were laid off to rest and be in prime condition. The best of the ponies were kept from the trail until they were afire with nervous energy.

Such experienced plainsmen as Jim Beatley, who always picked the wildest horses, and Bill Campbell on his famous Ragged Jim, were held for the special duty. For the dry country and the alkali plains there were the Gilson brothers, Pony Ned Van Blarican, Bronco Charley Miller, and most famous of them all, Pony Bob Haslaw. Warren Upson, the lad of steel, weatherproof young Boston, and Irish Tom Ranahan, the adventurer, were detailed to fight the blizzards of the heights.

It was sixteen hundred miles from telegraph wire to telegraph wire. The poles had been pushed forward to Fort Kearney. The first rider started from there as soon as the last word was written down by the telegraph operator.

Fair weather attended the start. The third rider ran into March rains. Streams overran their banks. A pony was carried downstream on the Big Sandy. Another was lost in quicksands on the North Platte. Both riders saved themselves and their mail.

From then on it was a continuous fight against misfortune. At least three animals were ridden to death. Salt Lake City did not get delivery until March 12th. To Fort Churchill took five days more. The impatient San Francisco papers took the message from the wire on the 17th, nearly two weeks after its delivery in Washington.

It was one of the Pony's worst performances. Bad as it was, it proved faster than the rival Overland Mails of the Butterfield Route.

The message, with its calm courage, its determination to preserve the Union at all costs, put new heart into the loyal Westerners. The Pony Express was doing its part to save California to the nation.

CHAPTER XIII

POLITICS boiled in Washington. The Post Office Department was involved in scandals and charges of graft. Congress hesitated to appropriate money for the extension of mail service. Soon it would have to decide upon the official postal route to the Pacific Coast.

Here was the Pony Express' great chance. Month by month it was sinking deeper into debt. Every letter in the *cantinas* cost it sixteen dollars. It received only about three dollars for carrying it. Yet, if the Government gave it a fair and reasonable contract, it could still pull through.

Two unfortunate occurrences hurt the company's reputation and lessened its chances of getting the needed contract. A firm which had supplied feed and equipment to the stations could not collect its money. It sued. The court attached the company's livestock in Utah for the debt. This meant that the creditors could take possession of the ponies and stop the service. At once there was a public outcry. Salt Lake City would not permit itself to be cut off from the fastest and most reliable connection with East and West that it had ever enjoyed. The firm which had brought suit decided that interference with the Pony would be foolish. The service went on without the loss of a day.

But worse was to come. A clerk in the Department of the Interior stole three million dollars in the form of bonds. The Department was in control of all the Indian tribes. The bonds were Indian funds. Half a million dollars' worth of them turned up in the possession of William H. Russell.

HE borrowed money on them to pay the costs of the Pony Express and keep it running. But he could not prove his right to have the bonds. He was arrested and thrown into jail.

Bail was set at two hundred thousand dollars. Russell's friends raised two millions to get him out. They would not believe him guilty. Perhaps he was not.

The case was extremely complicated. There is at least ground for suspicion that a rival company had engineered a plot to drive the Pony Express out of the field. Because of its competition, the southern route had been falling behind. H. H. Bancroft, the leading historian of California, suggests that a trap may have been "set for him" (Russell) "by friends of the southern route."

Somewhere there was a weakness in the case against him. It never came to trial. His friends stood by him, and a great ball was given in Colorado to celebrate his release.

But his good name had suffered. Everybody knew that the Government would not dare give him the contract he sought, even though the Post Office Department might recommend it.

Through Russell the company had announced that it could continue to January 1st, 1861, without outside help. New Year's Day came and passed, and the Pony riders continued to ride. Nobody knows how it was managed. There is a legend of a

courier who rode into his "home" station on the first of the month to collect his pay.

"If you get paid," the stable-master said, "the ponies don't eat."

"Okay," the rider said. "Give 'em their oats."

As far back as the previous August a newspaper had published a warning:

"There is a strong probability that the Pony Express will be discontinued . . . that Russell & Co. will get no mail contract."

By the beginning of 1861 the strong probability had become a near certainty. President Russell seems to have faded into the background. Senator Gwinn, the chief political supporter of the Pony, had lost influence in Washington. He was known to be for the South and against the North.

Majors kept on alone. The newspapers backed him loyally. They knew when they were well served. Until the telegraph wires spanned the continent, they were not likely to get anything as good as the Pony delivery.

It was expensive, but a saving of a week or ten days was worth it. Sometimes it fell behind, as it did at the beginning of February, when it came in three days late.

"That's the end of the Pony," its enemies exulted.

They were silenced when the reason for the delay came out. Trains east of the Mississippi had been blocked by a heavy snowfall. When the Pony took over, the schedule was kept up in spite of winter difficulties.

The California legislature gave voice to its faith on February 4th by resolving "that our Senators in Congress be instructed, and our Representatives requested, to obtain an appropriation in aid of the Pony Express Company."

Advocates of the stagecoach service against the Pony got a further setback late in the month. One of the principal newspapers complained:

"The mail from the States arrived on Monday, but our portion of it was too wet to be opened, and we have hung it up to dry."

Newspaper presses being held up while important news was drying out was not favorably regarded.

The Pony Express took better care of its mail.

CHAPTER XIV

POLITICAL events came thick and fast now. They affected importantly the Pony Express.

Before the fateful year 1861 was well under way, it was plain that war was coming. Seven States had seceded from the Union by March.

The Butterfield Route, chief rival of the Pony Express, was going from bad to worse. The cost of carrying mails over its long line was between sixty and seventy dollars a letter. As Post Office funds were being poured out to support it, the Government was standing the expense. Any time that war broke out, the Southern forces could capture most of the route.

With this in mind, the authorities at Washington ordered John Butterfield to close down and move his coaches and livestock north to the Central Route. A combination was made with the great Wells-Fargo Express Company, which had been operating its stage lines through the West. This meant that Russell and Majors were to be frozen out. It was the beginning of the end of the Pony Express.

Congress acted. It would not give a cent to the company which had pioneered the service. To the new Overland Mail Company it undertook to pay a million dollars a year.

Stagecoaches were to be the chief carriers. They were to run six days a week in each direction. They contracted to cover at least 112 miles a day. This, of course, was hardly half of what the swift mares and hardy mustangs could and did do.

So the saddle animals were kept on.

FORT SUMTER was fired on by the South Carolina rebels on April 2nd. War was declared. The bad tidings were carried to the Coast not by the Butterfield—Wells-Fargo lumbering stages, but by the swift relays of the reliable Pony.

Before the month was over, Butterfield had sold out to the Wells-Fargo people. A gaudy figure now appears upon the scene. Benjamin Halladay was put in charge of general operations.

Ben Halladay was a Kentuckian. As a young man he came out to the frontier seeking adventure and his fortune. He got both.

He was a mule-skinner, a ranchman, and afterward chief owner of the rich Ophir mine. He drove ox-teams, eight-mule outfits, and stagecoaches. Constantly he edged Westward. Denver knew him. He did business with those shrewd business men, the Mormons, in Salt Lake City. Carson City was his next stop, but its opportunities did not come up to his expectations. Sacramento was better; San Francisco was best.

There he got into stagecoach transportation as an owner. When Russell, Majors & Waddell started their Pony Express Company, Halladay was prosperous. He was in sympathy with the new adventure, and cashed the company's drafts in that first bad snowbound spring season when it might have been unable to buy fodder for the livestock and food for the men without that help.

Ben Halladay knew as much as any outsider about running the Pony Express. The Wells-Fargo people made a wise choice in putting him in charge of operations. It may very well have been his judgment that kept the ponies traveling, after the bulk of the mail was entrusted to the coaches.

Exactly when he took over control from Alexander Majors does not appear. It must have been before May. Congress would hardly have voted the new million-dollar contract without the assurance that the old management was or soon would be out.

HALLADAY'S scale of operations was high, wide and handsome. He had a special coach built for his personal use. Eight horses drew it. The interior was fitted up like a Pullman sleeper. The curtains of the bunk were silk. The candlesticks were solid silver. Bright-hued designs were painted on the panels.

The proprietor of all this magnificence lived up to it in his personal appearance. His clothes were cut from the finest broadcloth. His beaver hat was the tallest and glossiest to be had. Every button on his fancy waistcoat was a different jewel: diamond, sapphire, pearl, ruby and fire-opal. A huge and costly emerald held his ascot tie in place. His whiskers were of such heavy growth that, according to legend, he successfully concealed the precious scarfpin when a gang of "road agents" held up his coach and robbed him of his other valuables.

In his splendid "special," he made a show trip from Sacramento to St. Joseph in the fast time of twelve days. (It would have been slow for the Pony.) Every town on the route turned out to welcome him. There were brass bands and cannonades and enthusiastic newspaper articles. It was an imperial progress. One editor called him the Emperor of Transcontinental Traffic. He probably liked that very much.

He had a royal temper, too. Opposition infuriated him. Bankers in Denver, to which he was running a branch line, complained that he was overcharging them for express shipments. The Rocky Mountain *News* took up the charge editorially. The big boss' answer was to change the route and bypass the city by sixty miles.

Nobody knew where or when the fancy Halladay coach was likely to appear. He liked to act as his own route inspector. A Pony Express rider, with time to spare, was covering his last lap in an easy canter when he met the coach. A bearded face was

thrust out of a window, and a voice shouted to him to stop.

"You know who I am?" the voice demanded.

"Yes, you're the Big Boss."

"Who owns that cayuse you're on?"

"The company."

"Who owns those fancy silver spurs on your boots?"

"I do."

"Then put 'em together, son! Put 'em together!"

The horseman jammed the spurs into the animal's flanks and made speed for the rest of his course.

Under Halladay's energetic management, the Overland Mails' operations expanded greatly. At its height the company owned 110 coaches, 1750 animals, including mules, and employed 450 men. The claim was made that they carried more than fifty tons of mail in three months.

Halladay sold out his interest for three million dollars.

CHAPTER XV

PONY EXPRESS NOTICE—Orders having been received from W. H. Russell, President Pony Express Company, I hereby transfer the office and everything pertaining thereto to Messrs. Wells, Fargo & Co. All letters to be forwarded by Pony Express must be delivered at their office on Second Street, between J and K, Sacramento.

J. W. Coleman,
Agent Pony Express Co.

THIS was the notice which was printed in the Sacramento *Union* of May 16th, 1861. It only made official what had happened. The original management was ousted.

It was hardly more than a year since operations started. It was less than a year of actual mail-carrying, since six weeks were lost in the Indian uprising. The Russell-Majors-Waddell combination had served the country well, but got little thanks.

If the Government had been as generous to them as to their successors, there is little doubt but that they would have carried out their contracts faithfully. They put about seven hundred thousand of their own money into the effort. Their total receipts were little more than one hundred thousand. It requires only an exercise in mental arithmetic to figure how badly they came out. Why they were so shabbily treated by Congress will always be a mystery of politics.

While the great bulk of the mail now crossed the continent in the slower stagecoaches, the Pony was still of first importance. All urgent messages, whether by letter or telegraph, traveled "on the hoof." The method for newspaper dispatches from the war centers in the East was this:

The news was telegraphed to Fort Kearney, Nebraska. This was the farthest the wires had been carried West. There the first of the fast mares was waiting. The rider made speed on the first lap of the long relay races—seventy-five miles, perhaps a hundred; in emergency even farther.

Meantime the wires from the Coast had reached out eastward four hundred miles to Fort Churchill. The instant that the mustang galloped in on the final lap, the waiting telegrapher sprang to his wire, and the news shot across space with electric speed.

Thus the critical developments leading up to the Civil War reached the eagerly waiting public beyond the Western mountain ranges. It was the men in the saddle, not the men on the coach seats, who brought the reports of the firing on Fort Sumter, of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, of President Lincoln's call for volunteers, and later, of the disaster at Bull Run.

In return, heartening news came back. California would not secede. The Union cause was gaining daily. The sentiment for an independent republic was dying out. The Pony Express was a vital link in holding the loyal Unionists of the North and those of the Far West together.

The Pony Express was changing. With the elimination of Russell and Majors, their trained and trusted men had left. Bolivar Roberts was gone, and so was B. W. Ficklin. Buffalo Bill Cody had already resigned. Wild Bill Hickok had quit. The scanty records indicate that several of the couriers had succumbed to pneumonia and tuberculosis, and others had died of accidents. Exactly how many were killed while on duty by Indians will never be known.

We do not know that the death rate among the riders was very high. One authority believes that, in all, more than two hundred horsemen were employed. As not more than eighty were working at any one time, this represents a large labor turnover.

At the time of the change of management, there were probably not twenty left of the adventurous young men who had started with the service. Some, accustomed to the quiet forcefulness of bosses like Major Roberts and Ficklin, did not like Ben Halladay's circus methods. Others could stand so much and no more of physical and nervous strain. They switched to the safer and quieter trade of stagecoach driving.

Any firm in the West was glad to get a graduate of the Pony Express school for a driver. It was common knowledge that these young fellows were the best in the business. They could be depended upon for courage, resourcefulness, knowledge of the country and a top degree of expertness in handling anything that traveled on hoofs.

One of Bolivar Roberts' men who turned in his *mochila* and saddle because he did not care to ride for anyone else, was Warren Upson, the hero of the breakthrough when snow blocked the first delivery through the Sierras. Another was Little Yank (last name unrecorded) who rode at one hundred pounds, and preferred an eight-hundred-pound to a nine-hundred-pound mustang. Little Yank claimed to have lost twenty-five pounds that he could ill spare, in the furnace heat of the alkali desert, but this is probably an exaggeration.

Two of the men recruited by W. H. Russell are believed to have dropped out about this time. It is known that Don C. Rising, a crack prairie rider, completed a full year of service before resigning. Alex Carlisle was reckoned to be his equal. But long hours of duty and privation ruined Carlisle's weak lungs. Shifted to an easy run, he stuck it out until he could no longer sit a horse.

That was the spirit of the "Pony."

COMPETITION over land could not kill off the Pony Express. Its finish came through the air.

As far back as June, 1860, Congress had passed an act awarding forty thousand dollars a year for ten years to any company that would string a telegraph wire across the great gap between the Middle West and the Far West. The East was well supplied with telegraphic communication at this time. Los Angeles was connected with San Francisco, and California had pushed its wires eastward into Nevada.

The Congressional offer brought about the formation of two new companies. They were after that forty thousand dollars. A young contractor who had built lines in the East now came into the picture. Edward Creighton does not figure conspicuously in our historical annals, but he was a vital figure in the development of the West.

So was James Gamble, another forgotten man. Gamble worked from the Sierras westward. Creighton, who had made a survey of the entire route, following the line of the Pony Express, started from the Missouri River and pointed his poles toward Salt Lake City. The one who should reach that goal first was to win a cash bonus.

Indians were a threat. The builders passed word along to the tribes that the wires were "bad medicine,"

Slade went forward alone, called upon the four to surrender. When they reached for their guns, he opened fire.

and anyone interfering with them would be in trouble with the air spirits. The Pah-Utes, still trouble-makers, though the war was over, did not believe it. They took to shooting at the wires as they were raised.

As far as could be, the Pony Express mail-men "rode herd" on wires and poles, protecting them from the red raiders. At one time the military were turned out to prevent a raid on the field quarters.

A minor raid put an end to the trouble. A small band of marauders stole a keg from an outpost of the advancing line. To them, any kind of barrel meant the white man's fire water. This one, however, contained acid for the batteries.

The Indians drank, but not very much. An immediate stomach-ache convinced them that the telegraph line and everything connected with it was bad medicine indeed. Thereafter they treated it with respect.

At his end, Creighton employed strategy. The Plains tribes were alarmed lest these mysterious threads of metal, strung between earth and sky, might bewitch and scare away the game. The contractor got in touch, first with a Shoshone Chief, then with a leader of the Sioux, and assured them that the poles and wires were friendly to good Indians.

Why, the two chiefs could exchange messages if they would like to. Not at all believing in it, they consented to try. Questions and answers were exchanged across the breadth of Wyoming Territory. Later, the two Indians met and satisfied themselves that there had been no trickery. The telegraph was *good* medicine.

The race between the Gamble and the Creighton crews was close. The Eastern line was longer, but passed through easier country. By the early part of September, Creighton's men were within four hundred miles of Salt Lake City. Three weeks later his rival reported a gap of only sixty miles between pole and pole. Five miles a day was considered a good average in that rough country.

EARLY fall found the race neck-and-neck. Then, in the last lap, Gamble drew ahead, only to run into bad luck. His supply of poles gave out. He led his men into the mountains nearby to cut trees. An early snow hampered them.

Two precious days were lost. When they came into Salt Lake City, the Eastern linesmen were celebrating. They had raised their final pole two days earlier.

All through that section of the country there was great rejoicing. The completion of the telegraph was important not only in itself. There had long been a feeling that where the wires could go, rails would follow. Without telegraphic connection, the railroads could not operate. The wires marked the way. The long-awaited trains would come next. They did come, but not for nearly eight years. And the rails were laid where the hoofprints of the Pony Express had pointed the way. . . .

It was late October, 1861. Washington had congratulated San Francisco over the three thousand miles of wire. It was the farewell to the Pony. Top news would henceforth travel through the air. The "brass-pounder" had taken the place of the horse-wrangler.

About the same date as the first coast-to-coast message, the last horseman rode out of Atchison, Kansas, for the Pony Express. Overhead hummed the wires. Heavy stages rumbled east and west with the daily mail. There was no longer any danger on the once perilous route, and very little glory.

From saddle to saddle the *mochila* with its last mail was swung. The riders passed from swing station to home station and rest. There was no great haste. Yet for the honor of the Pony, its staff kept up to the old hard schedule.

Many of the stations were dismantled, the equipment scattered. The mules and horses had been sold. It was the close of nineteen months of test and trial and endeavor possibly as rigorous as any in our history.

The last rider on the last lap had hard luck. Cantering toward Sacramento, the mustang fell on its rider—his name is not known certainly; it may have been Bill Cates—and broke his leg.

He rolled loose, but was unable to walk or to catch his grazing pony. So he crawled. There was the toot of a horn, and the stagecoach pulled up.

"Pile in," the driver called. "We'll get you there."

The injured man shook his head. "This is the last Pony mail, and it's going in by pony."

A passenger jumped out. "I used to ride for the Pony—on the Carson Link stretch. Will you let me take in the *mochila?*"

The rider nodded. They loaded him into the coach. His substitute caught the mustang, set spurs to it, and galloped away.

So the last mail went through—and by Pony.

CHAPTER XVI

Stations kept no books on their men. So there has been lost much of the record, often heroic, often violent, sometimes grim, occasionally ridiculous, which makes up the short-lived history of the Pony.

Men of the kind who rode the mails are not much given to talking about themselves. Still, there were times when floods stopped the traffic or snow blocked the trail, or stalled wagon teams jammed the passes so hard that not even the mustangs could pass. Then the riders lay over in the bunkhouses, swapped tales. Some of them have come down to us.

All the West knew of Wild Bill Hickok. Nobody will ever know the exact truth of the gunfight which gave him his nickname. James Butler Hickok, when twenty-three years old, applied to the Pony for a job carrying the mails. His six-foot-plus was too much weight for the light-built horses to carry. He was taken on as stock-tender at the Rock Creek, Nebraska, station.

A disappointed gold-seeker named McCanles had turned back East and built a toll-bridge at Rock Creek. He was a rough, hearty fellow, proud of his strength and his wit. Young Hickok had a big nose. Dave McCanles made it a subject of his humor. He called the younger man "Duckbill." The name stuck. Hickok did not like it.

A business dispute arose between McCanles and the Pony Express Company over a rented building. The station-master went to the McCanles house, taking with him Hickok and another company man. Two friends of McCanles were at the house. It was three to three.

When the shooting was over, the three men of the McCanles faction were dead. One story is that they were shot down, unarmed. The court which tried the Pony Express men did not believe that. They were acquitted on the ground of self-defense.

Nobody ever called Hickok "Duckbill" after that. As a scout for General Custer and afterward law-enforcing Marshal of Abilene and other tough towns, he became as famous as Buffalo Bill himself.

The company's oath bound its men not to quarrel or fight among themselves. Considering the youth and high mettle of the employees, it is remarkable that there were not more feuds. The case of Bob Jennings was an object lesson in the danger of molesting a Pony man.

Jennings was a tough, ugly hunter who supplied the stations around Fort Laramie with fresh meat. He lost money at draw poker to a quiet, well-behaved keeper of a small "swing" station in Wyoming. He swore that he would "get" Hod Russell, the winner of his hundred dollars. Two days later Russell was shot and killed from ambush.

Jennings took to the brush. The fellow-employees of the murdered man formed a posse but could not catch him. They pressed into service a famous scout, Buffalo Bill Comstock.

Comstock was part Indian. It was easy for him to disguise himself as a Sioux. Two volunteers, said to be Pony Express riders, accompanied him on the man-hunt. They traced the murderer to a camp on a small creek. At first he held them off with a rifle, but Comstock made the peace-sign, and he was completely fooled.

They captured him without bloodshed. He was brought in, bound, to where a group of grim Pony Express men were waiting. A quick trial followed, and he was hanged then and there. . . .

Winter riding over the passes was the most severe duty. The "snowboys" were picked for endurance. Occasional mention is made of frozen feet, hands and ears, as if frostbite were all in the day's work. The prairie blizzards were as dangerous as the mountain snowfall, though less frequent.

William Campbell rode a hard winter relay, one hundred miles along the Platte River between Fort Kearney and Cottonwood Springs. On his first trip, a three-day blizzard swept the prairie. The temperature dropped to zero. Snow was two to three feet deep along the route.

But important war communications were delivered to him at Fort McPherson to be carried on east. He reached his home station, Fort Kearney, exhausted. His relief rider was not there. No station helper could be found to risk himself on the drifted route.

Twenty miles had to be covered to Fairfield. After a few minutes' warm-up, Campbell hit the trail again. Half of the time he pushed through on foot, leading his mare. Though twice lost in the blinding gusts, he recovered the road and came in after four hours' travel, having used four horses. His entire trip had been made in twenty-four hours.

The only other successful effort to get through during the storm was by a four-mule wagon. It took three and a half days for the 120 miles traveled by Campbell in one day.

Few references to wild animals are discoverable.

The only animal really feared by the riders was the buffalo. Singly or in a small herd the bison were harmless and even timid. But if a rider were surrounded by a large herd, his chances of coming out alive were slim. The horses sensed the danger. A stampede of buffaloes would put a prairie horse to flight at top speed.

Many times the riders were obliged to go far off the route to avoid the many herds. But there is no record of loss of either man or horse from wild animals.

A touch of comedy is supplied by the invention of a Leavenworth citizen named Fortune. Sometime in June, 1861, Mr. Fortune called at the Pony Headquarters to see President Russell.

"I've got something that will beat your ponies," he said. "Fortune's Patent Prairie Steamwagon. Good for twenty-five miles an hour."

"Where will it run?"

"Anywhere from here to the mountains. I'll take eighty thousand dollars for the patent."

A test was appointed for the Fourth of July. Russell appointed a rider named Riley to accompany the inventor. Riley had been a steamboat man and was supposed to know about engines. His account of it came down by word of mouth:

"First she made ten miles an hour. Then she made fifteen. Then she

made twenty. Then she snorted. Then she bucked. Then there was a big boom and a puff of steam, and they picked me out of a sagebush. Mr. Fortune went to the hospital. His wagon went to the junkpile. I went back to my pony."

CHAPTER XVII

ONLY once has the present writer come into direct contact with the Pony Express.

Nearly fifty years ago I spent part of a winter at the Ray, Arizona, copper mine, in the Gila Mountains.

Riding across desert one day into the low foothills, I got off my horse to pick a few cholla spines out of my hand and arm. I had incautiously brushed the tall cactus in passing. Having rid myself of the venomous little barbs, I climbed up a few feet from the trail and was seated on a flat rock, viewing the country, when a slow *clop-clop-clop* came to my ears, and a man rounded the elbow of the hill, riding a dispirited mule.

By his outfit I knew him to be a prospector, seeking copper or other valuable minerals. I gave him good-day, and he stopped and looked at me. He was a gaunt, bearded, serious-looking old fellow, short, slim and alert.

"From the East?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Thought so," he said. "Been sitting here long?"

"No," I said.

"Didn't kind of look around you before you settled, did you?"

"No," I said. "Why?"

"Thought so," he said. "There might be critters around that sun-warmed rock."

"Critters?" I repeated.

"Might be a sidewinder or two," he went on. In the speech of the desert a "sidewinder" is the slender and lively rattlesnake of the dry places. "And there sure *is* a tarantula," he added, pointing at the squat, hairy, pin-eyed creature which appeared ready to leap.

I slipped hastily from my perch and climbed into the saddle. We rode along together. It developed that, before he became a "grubstaker," he had been a stage-driver, and before that had ridden for the Pony Express. I understood him to say his name was Jim Morse. But I have found no Morse in the lists of the Pony. It may have been Jim Moore, who was one of Bolivar Roberts' recruits. I remember that he spoke of Roberts with enthusiasm.

Morse—or Moore—rode a relay in the high desert of the Carson Sink when the stations were far apart. Warming to my interested questions, he told me of an adventure which he seemed hardly to regard as an adventure.

"All in the day's work," he said.

His story ran something like this:

"Bolivar Roberts put me on the dry stretch because I'd hunted some in the Mojave Desert to the south. The Pony had been going only a few weeks, and there had been some trouble with the Pah-Utes. Some of our boys felt their scalps getting loose, and quit.

"That made the rest of us ride double tides. I wasn't getting much sleep. My mustang was easy-gaited, and I could get a catnap now and again.

"It was a fairly hot day. Somewhere around one hundred or maybe one hundred five—nothing out of the way for the place and time. I was dozing along when it happened. Ever see a cactus owl?"

I nodded. The small and solemn bird which sits on a cactus branch and interestedly watches every movement of the human who comes into its view was familiar to me.

"This one must have flown right up my cayuse's nose. When I woke up, I was down in the sand with a couple of my ribs broken and a crimp in my right leg. The fool mustang was hoofing it out of that country as fast as he could go.

"Maybe I'd grabbed the *mochila* in my sleep. Anyway, it came off with me. That was all to the good. I had the mail. But there was ten good miles of alkali desert between me and the station. And my mouth was full of alkali dust. Ever eat any alkali?"

"No," I said.

"Well, it's no good to eat and not much better to breathe. It gives you a terrible thirst. And that Sink of the Carson is pretty much all alkali dust. Why, a lizard crawling along on his belly will raise a cloud that shuts out the sun.

"Not reckoning on anything happening, I hadn't been sparing with my canteen. There was mighty little liquid left in it. And was I dry! My mouth felt like the inside of a last year's tomato can. And ten miles to crawl, carrying that *mochila!*"

"Couldn't you leave it and get it later?" I asked.

HE shook his head. "A Pony man didn't come in without his *mochila!*" he replied. "I knew I'd have a black tongue before I got there. And a man don't live long in the desert after his tongue turns black.

"I dragged myself up on a little rise and looked around carefully. Somewhere in those side-hills I'd heard there was a *tenaka.* That's a natural tank of rainwater.

"I took another look around, and there was a kind of blue ripple not a mile away. Well, it might be water or it might be mirage. I settled down to crawl the dust like a sidewinder."

"It was water. Not very much of it, but water. My ribs stopped hurting. I scarcely noticed the dust in my throat. I was right up on the pool before I noticed the bones. Right there was where the animals had died that drank the poison water.

"I was powerful thirsty, but I didn't want any arsenic in mine. There was just one thing to do—head for Desert Wells and chance it.

"I reared up to take another look around before I started. It was then I saw him, standing beside his horse. But was he a white man or an Indian? I was too far to make out. Of course, if he'd mount, I could tell."

"How's that?" I asked.

"An Indian always mounts from the right-hand side," he explained. "That's what this fellow did. When he got nearer, I saw he had a rifle. He was a Shoshone. That might be good, but more likely it was bad. They were mostly on the warpath.

"I HAD my .44; but a Colt's isn't so good against a rifle. Still, I had to make a showing. I got to my feet and kind of moved my revolver. He slid off behind his mustang.

"That looked like war. Just then my pony cantered up to speak to his pony. My Indian saw the brand. He looked at the pony, then he looked at me, then he put his rifle down and walked toward me.

"That looked like peace. He made the peace sign. I made the peace sign. Then I made the thirsty sign. He nodded and loped back to his mustang to get his olla. That's a kind of pottery thing they carry.

"I've had a lot of drinks in my life, but I never tasted anything as good as that water. It was even kind of cool. An olla keeps it that way. He brought up my pony and hoisted me into the saddle, and we rode in together.

"My Shoshone had just enough English to make me understand. This was the way of it: He had tried to come over the pass, and had been caught in the big May snow. He was three days without food and all done in. So he bunked down in a drift to die.

"One of the mule squads, breaking trail for the Pony, found him. They took him in and thawed him out and fed him. I found out afterward that he took a good look at the brand on the mules so he'd remember it. That's what saved my life."

My prospector acquaintance paused and stroked his beard reflectively. "Some folks," he remarked, "say the only good Indian is a dead Indian. I don't hold with that. Good-by to you." And he was off.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT became of the daring men who made up the Pony Express? For a great number of them the trail is lost. Many became useful, a few prominent citizens. Many died by violence.

Most notorious of the lot was "Captain" Joseph (Jock) Slade. After he'd cleaned the bandits out in the Julesburg section, he took to drink. The company was obliged to discharge him. He shot, but did not kill, the Pony Express official who notified him of his discharge. After that, he turned outlaw himself.

Twenty-six deaths by bullet were charged against him, several of them cold-blooded killings. He joined the gold rush for a new field in Montana.

Virginia City was the center. It was as lawless as Julesburg had ever been, and much bigger. There was an elected sheriff, named Plummer. He turned highwayman himself, and with his posse, pillaged and murdered the miners returning East with their bags full of gold-dust.

A committee of Vigilantes was formed by the better element. They tried and hanged the sheriff and twenty of his gang. Whether or not Slade ever belonged to the gang is uncertain. There is some evidence to show that he joined or tried to join the Vigilante Committee.

What is certain is that in the clean-up he was arrested for shooting up saloons and dance-halls. In court, he tore up the warrant and threatened to kill the judge.

This was too much. The Vigilantes hanged him.

Slade's young assistant, William F. Cody, ran a very different course. Upon leaving the Pony Express he became a noted scout and hunter. Unlike some of his associates, he was always on the side of law and order. Later in life, as Buffalo Bill, he was a leading figure of the circus and show worlds.

The record is not quite so clear in the case of Wild Bill Hickok. Whatever dark spots there may have been in his career, he ended as an officer of the law, feared and respected. "Jock" McCall, one of the many "bad men" of famous Deadwood, killed him in a gun-fight in 1875.

Pony Bob Haslaw was also an official serving as deputy U. S. Marshal at Salt Lake City, after several months of as dangerous employment as could be found. He drove stage out of Virginia City in the days of the Sheriff Plummer. Pony Bob, as a law-abiding citizen, may have been a member of the Vigilante Committee that hanged the outlaw sheriff.

One of the few riders who "lasted the route"—that is, served from start to close of the Pony—was Johnny Frey. He joined General Blount's Union Scouts, and served with distinction until he was ridden to cover by a band of Arkansas Rangers. He killed five of them before succumbing.

With his appetite for adventure still unsatisfied, Charles Cliff, another of the pioneer recruits, took a job as a freighter. When his eight-mule wagon was held up by a band of one hundred raiding Sioux, he and his helper held them off till a wagon train arrived.

The Indians fled, leaving three bullets in Cliff's body to remember them by. He left the trails shortly afterward and went into business.

Little is known of the case of Melville Baughn, a "second winter" Pony man, except that he was legally hanged for murder. Alex Carlisle died of tuberculosis.

Bill Campbell made his pile selling mules to the Government, and added to it by contracts for railroad and canal work. Another successful graduate from the Pony route was Bill Hamilton, who became a prominent insurance man in California.

Probably the only millionaires in the roster were the Gilson brothers, Sam and Jim. They turned to mining in Utah, and developed Gilsonite, a mineral used in road-building. Their old associate on the trails, Jay G. Kelly, became a prominent mining engineer in Denver.

Nobody ever got rich out of the mail borne by the Pony. But several fortunes were lost. Both W. W. Finney and Bolivar Roberts are said to have died in very moderate circumstances. President Russell's claims against the Government were never satisfied; nor were those of Alexander Majors.

To be sure, Ben Halladay made a large fortune by selling out to the Wells-Fargo Company, but the three million dollars which he received did not last long. Having successfully run a stage line, Halladay thought that he could conduct a much more complicated form of traffic. He put his millions into a railroad. It failed, and he died poor.

ARTHUR CHAPMAN, who traced down a number of the Company's men in after years, writes in his excellent book, "The Pony Express:"

"Nine out of ten of the riders, after they had quit the saddle, went into occupations utterly prosaic. Nor is that a subject for wonderment. The West could offer no other adventure which would not seem flat and unprofitable."

The last of these indomitable horsemen is long since dead. They have left a record of daring, loyalty and devotion unsurpassed in our national history. THE END

Air Lift

Our special correspondent reports on this gigantic job.

AT eight thousand feet, above a solid undercast, we bucked a thirty-knot headwind two hundred miles southeast of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. Our ship was a battered DC-4, veteran of the Berlin air lift, and now the property of a three-plane charter airline. Except for the two pilots, our crew, like myself (the navigator) were ex-wartime airmen.

At Shemya, we had been talked in by GCA, the radar ground-control-approach system. We had broken out of the soup at less than a hundred feet, dead-centered over the end of the runway by the teamwork of our pilot's skill and the pinpoint instructions coming to us in the disembodied radio voice of the GCA operator on the ground.

We had left Shemya, a fogbound little island on the tip of the Aleutian chain, at sunset that evening, with a hundred-foot ceiling and a thirteen-and-a-half-hour forecast to Tokyo. On a commercial operation, with our thirty-one-hundred-gallon fuel capacity and such a forecast, we might have had to off-load cargo or cancel the flight. But this was not a commercial operation. We were flying under contract to the Air Force, and we weren't dumping cargo. We carried a load of eleven thousand three hundred pounds. Percussion caps, the manifest said, bound for Japan and Korea.

I climbed down from the astrodome and sat at the navigation table, plotting my hourly star fix. Behind me the radio operator asked anxiously: "How are we doing?"

"We're doing fine," I told him. "Right on forecast."

He grinned. "Say, you should hear the flight reports I'm getting. The air's full of ships."

We had seen some of those ships. At Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base near San Francisco, where we'd picked up our cargo; at Elmendorf Field in Anchorage, Alaska, where we had refueled and had breakfast. We knew they were flying it the same way we were—straight through, stopping only for gas.

But we weren't prepared for what we saw in Japan. We made our landfall and flew down over the neat, terraced hills of Japan. Two hours later we circled the airfield and came in for the landing.

to Tokyo

by PETER DOLLAR

At the end of the strip sagged the skeleton remains of the once great Japanese war plant, blackened tribute to the accuracy of our wartime B-29's. And on a blocked-off runway, parked wing-tip to wing-tip, was a large array of cargo aircraft. There were DC-4's and -6's, Stratocruisers and Constellations. Their wings bore the insignia of MATS (Military Air Transport Service); of the scheduled airlines—Northwest, Pan American, British Overseas; and of a host of charter outfits like ours—Overseas National, Transocean, Flying Tiger Lines, and many others. In the parking strip behind the terminal were a half-dozen of Chennault's CATS DC-3's from Hong Kong.

Moving among the planes, lift-trucks unloaded the precious cargo for processing and reshipment to the battle lines in Korea. Yellow gas-trucks sped down the strip and parked under the wings, pumping in fuel for the long return to the States.

Our wheels touched, and we rolled down the runway toward the end of the line.

The co-pilot said: "Holy smoke! Where'd they get all those clunks?"

"Clunks?" The little radio op was craning to see out the cockpit window, his eyes shining now. "Those aren't clunks, Mister. That's the Korean Air Lift!"

I glanced over at him and smiled. He was right. It was brand-new, this first great trickle of the might of America, carried six thousand miles across an ocean by air. But there would be more, much more, to follow.

We braked to a stop at the blocks, and gathered up our gear. We would have eighteen, maybe twenty, hours here. Time to walk down the main street of the town, taking in the foreign sights and sounds; time to get some sleep and to come back to the airport again.

We'd take off then, eastward bound with a cargo of P-51 engines for ver-haul in the States. We'd fly *via* Wake and Honolulu this time, one of a hundred planes in the air, manned by a hundred crews like ours.

It was the duty of some of these men to fly. With others it was the money it paid. And to some, like our chubby radio op, it meant just a bit more—they were proud to be part of the Korean Air Lift.

AFTERGLOW

A FRENCHMAN HAS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HIS GIRL AND HIS INVENTIONS.

by GEORGES SURDEZ

THERE was a nondescript mass of rusty iron and greenish brass bolted to the old oak bench, and an assortment of objects of metal, wood, tile and porcelain in boxes, with a number of tools that somehow appeared clumsy and old-fashioned. But I could not quite understand the excitement shown by my two companions. They had unrolled a bundle of large sheets of stiff paper discovered in a sort of locker in a corner; they pointed and clucked: "Astonishing, marvelous, phenomenal!"

I knew they must have good reason. Monsieur Farnier had been a mining engineer of some distinction before retiring to collect odd books; and his son, my good friend, was reputed an ace in his mechanized cavalry unit when it came to motors, guns and marksmanship. We had met in North Africa, and he had asked me to come to France for a couple of weeks because his home was in the Jura Mountains, where I had spent several years of my boyhood.

We were in the village of Saint-Pierre-aux-Bois that day, because Far-

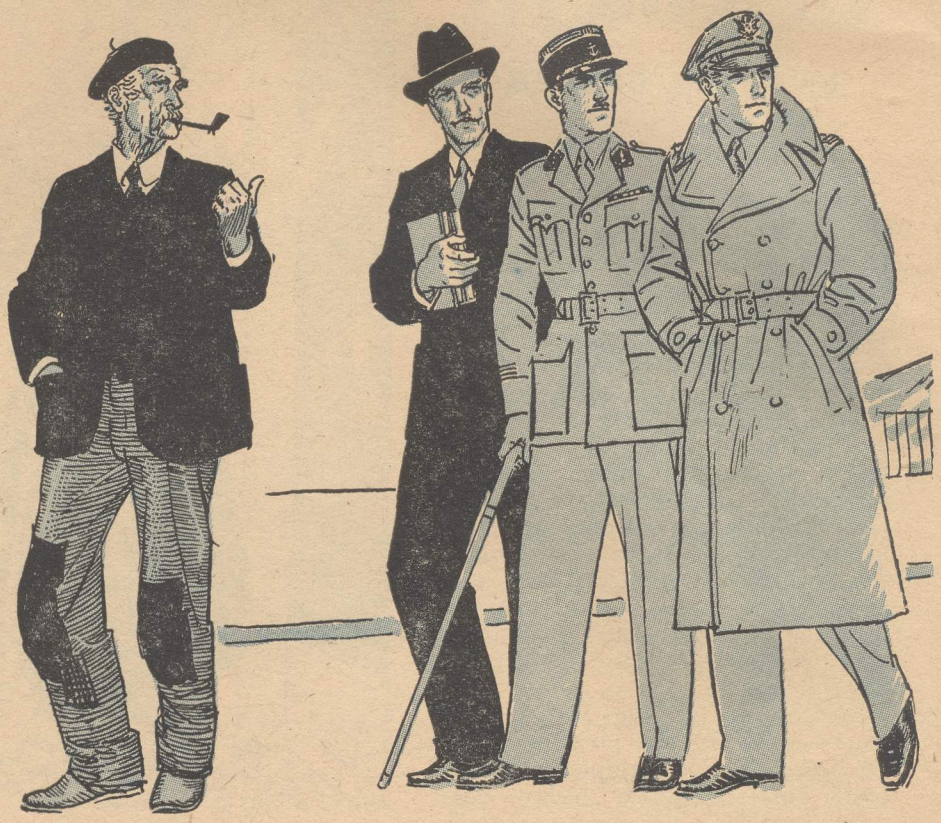
nier Senior wanted to look over some papers offered for sale, hoping to find a rare book or two in the mass. We had been taken to this small shack by an old fellow nicknamed Babiole, who explained that the people who owned the place wished to realize on the furniture and junk before the buildings were auctioned off.

Babiole claimed to remember me very well, although I had spent but a few months in the village and that more than eighteen years before. I did not believe him at the time, as I was still under thirty, but I do now: He was seventy-eight, and elapsed time does seem to become thinner, more translucent with added years.

"It's Old Lady Barisot's place," he had explained to me as we walked from the Inn. "All her kids have gone to live in the cities, and she's going to live with her oldest, Angeline, whose husband is in wholesale groceries in Bordeaux. You remember her man, old Fernand? Oh, yes, you do. All you town kids were after him; he'd make you toy rifles out of wood, and show you how to turn out wire traps—got him now? Used to be a blacksmith by trade, he did. But he was sixtyish already when you were around. He'd been nine, ten years older than me now." He chuckled and winked broadly: "Seeing these gentlemen are friends of yours, I'll give them a bargain on anything they like."

Monsieur Farnier, smoothing his close-clipped white mustache, had remarked to his son: "That's our luck. Here you bring an American from Morocco, and he gets us cut rates with the local folks."

Babiole had unlocked the door of the small building with a big key, ushered us into the old shop: "That's where Fernand fooled around until he turned serious," he informed us. "This place was locked up for over forty years. But when she decided to sell out, with his being dead all these years so it wouldn't contradict her, she let me open up and clean a bit. I dusted and swept, did what I could, as you see."



Babiole peered back at us, indicating with a twist

Monsieur Farnier had found several very intriguing old textbooks on mechanics, geography, science, a number of curious almanacs. It was the young one, the officer, who had first really looked at the work-bench and the motor clamped to it. Then he had discovered the drawings, *épures*, charts; and he and his father had started on a queer, broken conversation without much meaning for me.

"It would have worked—yes, his idea was right, but there was no suitable metal then. . . . God forgive me, but isn't this the embryo of a spark-plug? Look at this, a cylinder, vanes—a sort of turbine. . . . What's the date on this one? 1866! It's a repeater, based on the Chassepot rifle. . . . Look here, he had solid tires on the wheels of this cart, but he knew what would be needed—he was working on a steel spring for the spokes—"

"He had something, then?" I asked.

"Something!" They turned to me excitedly. "Why, he must have been a genius, and a great artist. Untaught, yes, but an instinctive artist. See here, even you can see that the draftsmanship is superb, and look here and there at those little silhouettes he sort of jotted down, probably while thinking—life, movement. He had a sense of line comparable to Ingres', and no more flaws than Doré. He could observe; he had a fine sense of color—look at this sketch for a mountain hotel—Courbet would not have disavowed that trick of deep distance."

"Inventor, architect, painter," I remarked, "—a rural Leonardo da Vinci, eh?"

"You've said funnier things," the young Farnier retorted.

"Going to take some of it?" Babiole wondered placidly.

The price he quoted was ridiculously small, not much more than the worth of old paper and metal scrap. Farnier Senior immediately tripled it, and for several minutes I was treated to a peculiar, amusing scene, the seller trying to beat down the purchaser. Babiole somehow was under the impression that the price had gone up because he had claimed friendship with me, the gentlemen's guest. Like most elderly French peasants, he had an excessively sensitive moral cuticle.

We stopped at the café outside the railroad station to cement the deal over a couple of bottles.

"Who was this old Fernand?" Monsieur Farnier asked after a while. "And what happened to stop him from—from becoming what he should have been? From what you say, I gather that he lived to be quite old, and yet you said his shop had been locked up many, many years."

Babiole then told the story, and he told it well, but in great detail, with long sips from his glass and tremulous puffs from his pipe.

It seemed that Fernand Barisot was not a local boy. He had been born somewhere in the north, Dunkerque or

Illustrated by FREDERICK CHAPMAN

of his head: "That's her on the doorstep, over there."

Honfleur, and had been trained as a blacksmith, locksmith, mechanic. He had happened to stop in the village on the then-required tour of France —a man could not establish himself as a craftsman without having traveled. He had seen and fallen in love with young Marie-Louise Chrétien, the daughter of a farmer.

He had settled in the village, obtained a job as an assistant with the blacksmith. Marie-Louise, then seventeen, had liked him well enough, even loved him, for he was tall, handsome, with good speech and city manners. But her father was against the match, because Fernand was not only an outsider but was reputed somewhat crazy. Cold sober, he would imagine the maddest ideas, about steam cars that would use ordinary roads, balloons that would transport passengers faster than trains, guns that would shoot like a *mitrailleuse*—he would speak about hotels with the mineral water from the sources piped into each and every room.

He had hired a little shack to live in, and he shut himself up to work on foolish trinkets. Most of his wages went back to his boss for use of the forge for the bulkier pieces he manufactured, and on materials for his "inventions" from the outside. The schoolmaster often said there was not a nutty mechanic in all of France who did not trifle along with such absurd fooleries.

Marie-Louise did not want a ridiculous husband, a man who worked for another. She was an only child and would inherit a big farm; and she told Fernand, flatly, that if he wanted to marry her, he would have to sober up, lock up his shop and turn to farming like a sensible man.

Well, Babiole told us, he was a proud man and would not give in. He loved Marie-Louise, and no other woman ever mattered in his life. She loved him enough to turn down several fine prospects. But the years went by, two, four, ten, and she was twenty-seven, an old maid and by local standards approaching middle-age. She had to make a decision, and she told Fernand that she would make up her mind to marry somebody else unless he turned the key in the lock of his shack and swore never to enter it again.

And midway through the eleventh year, he yielded, pressed by the presence of another suitor, younger and richer than he was.

The Farniers smiled sadly, and the older said: "Clever woman! She probably robbed herself of a fortune —he was getting quite warm in several directions, from his papers; and she robbed France of an inventor on a par with the Americans: Edison, Ford —practical inventors rather than research students, of which we have enough. I'd like to tell her—"

Babiole chuckled: "Wouldn't be any good—her mind's kind of gone back. She's eighty-odd, you know."

We walked out of the Inn, along the single street. Then Babiole peered back at us—he kept two steps ahead, as became a guide—indicating with a twist of his head: "That's her on the doorstep, over there."

We looked at her curiously, at this Circe who had stolen a glory from France. She was a bundle of rusty black huddled on a straight chair, with a face as brown and wrinkled as a baked apple, vacant eyes like coffee beans in a blob of egg, huge swollen feet in battered sabots, gnarled claws drooping over her creaky knees.

"Hello, Mother Barisot," Babiole called out.

"Hello, son, hello, Aristide!" she croaked back.

Babiole laughed: "Aristide's not me—he's the baggage-man. She calls him Babiole. Set in her ways, you understand."

"Yes, yes," Monsieur Farnier grumbled as we passed by.

We half-halted, some distance away, to look back. She was hunched, mumbling and quivering. She had been set in her ways!

"Makes one think, doesn't it, son?" Farnier said.

"It does, Father, it does," the young officer admitted.

"So much talent, so much promise, and what for? Take a look at her!"

It was then that old man Babiole turned on us. Somehow, he appeared to grow inches, and I remembered that he had been quite tall in the past. He was not angry, not resentful; there was an expression of pity on his rugged mask. And there was a glow in his eyes, a beautiful light that was not wholly the reflection of the splendid afternoon sun.

For a moment, he seemed about to make a speech. Then his shoulders sagged, he turned away, sucking his pipe. And his voice came back, muffled: "Yes, look at her, gentlemen. But you will never understand. Not now." He paused and then concluded: "She was worth it, I can tell you. You should have seen her—fifty years ago!"

Singing Red

Tales of Whippoorwill Valley—I

by EWART A. AUTRY

MANY times around stoves in country stores I have heard the folks of Whippoorwill Valley discuss the effect of music on birds and animals. I have heard the tale of the old-time settler who soothed a pack of hungry wolves with a lively jig on his homemade fiddle. There is also the oft-told tale of the man who had the habit of feeding the birds that lived around him. At feeding-time he would sit in the yard and strum dreamy tunes on his banjo as a signal for the feathered flocks to gather around. These tales and many others like them have lived through the years. I cannot say how much truth there is in them, nor how much effect music really has on the creatures that live in the woods. I have seen hound dogs sit on their haunches and howl at strains of sweet music. If it has that effect on them, it is only reasonable to assume it may also affect the things that live along the trails and in the treetops.

I never hear the subject discussed but that I think of a story my grandmother used to tell. It belongs in the yellowed pages of yesterday's tales, just as it belongs to Whippoorwill Valley. Its characters once walked these trails, and lived and loved within the echoing walls of these age-old hills. They have long since vanished, leaving no trace, but theirs is a story which forever belongs in the annals of Whippoorwill Valley.

It is the story of Lota, of Paul, of Charley and of Singing Red. It is the story of two boys, a girl and a fox. It is also the story of a violin which cried out its love songs in the night, and found a strange response along the valley trails.

In the year of 1845 Lota Wade was born in a cabin on the eastern rim of our valley. Her mother had died when the daughter was born, and Lota had grown up under the care of her father, who had sought diligently to be both mother and father to his motherless child. When she blossomed into young womanhood she was probably prettier than any girl who has ever walked the trails of our valley. There was about her the slenderness of birches which grow along our creeks, and the grace of the redbuds that crown our hills. Her hair was the gold of our sun when it slides behind Peekaboo Rock, and her eyes the blue of our violets when they push the dead leaves off in spring. There was about her a fathomless sweetness like the fragrance of Sweet William riding down the valley on a west wind, and in her voice there was the soft music of the waterfall which sings night and day beside the cabin where she was born. All of these things were enough to make the old men of our valley sigh over the dead years of their youth, and the young men dream of houses in which they would be kings, and wherein the soft footfalls of the beautiful Lota would echo throughout the passing years.

Paul Renfro was born one year before Lota, and the Renfro cabin was on a direct line across the valley from that of Josiah Wade. In winter when the trees were bare they seemed very near to each other, although the distance must have been the full length of a measured mile. As Paul grew into young manhood there was about him the slender strength of a young hickory which has pushed its roots down between the rocks and wrestled mightily with the north winds. Dark hair sloped quickly from a face always tanned by sun or wind, and his dark eyes were mirrors for the multitude of dreams which seemed to walk forever by his side. There was something about him which made him love the gold of the sunset as it lingered over the crest of Peekaboo Hill, and the parade of scarlet leaves as they rode down the creek to their watery graves. There was always about him the quietness of the pine trees when the winds are far away.

The folks of our valley were not surprised when Paul learned to play the violin. There had always been some kind of musician in every generation of the Renfro family. None of their music had ever gone beyond the limits of Whippoorwill Valley, but they had been content that it should be heard only around their firesides and those of their neighbors. Folks said that the music of Paul was different from that of those who had played before him. It lacked the lively tunes which started heads to bobbing and feet to tapping out their rhythm. It was soft and sweet, and perhaps had its beginning in the secret places of Paul Renfro's heart. It was the kind of music which made the old folks gaze into the dying embers of their fires, and the young folks peep up at the stars.

CHARLEY SHAW was born the same year as Paul, and in a house about a mile down the valley. I say he was born in a house—because no one in the valley ever called Old Man Shaw's place a "cabin." It was not fine as measured by the standards of the outside world, but it was finer than any other house in Whippoorwill Valley. It was located in the center of the valley because the Shaw land stretched from hill to hill and even climbed over the top of Indian Ridge. The older generation of Shaws had started with a small place in the valley, but had extended its acres by ruthlessly pushing aside all who stood in their way. They were the kind of folks from whom no one ever borrowed sugar nor salt, because they would not look with favor on anyone who came to their door to borrow.

Charley Shaw was cut true to the pattern of his family. He grew up like a squat water oak which relentlessly pushes out its limbs until it has overshadowed the smaller saplings around it. He was short of stature, and his head popped up from his shoulders with slight space of neck between. His gray eyes stuck out a little too far as if vying with a big nose and mouth for prominence on his face. His hair stood up stiffly on his head like the bristles of a bulldog going out for battle. His speech was

short and brittle as if he were afraid some word would be wasted.

There was little imagination in the life of Charley Shaw, and little room for dreams. The sun going down behind Peekaboo Hill meant nothing to him except that it was time for the stock to be in the barn, and supper on the table. Scarlet leaves floating down the creek were to him but nuisances which would clog the channel and cause the water to overflow on his father's farm. The Shaws did not believe in dreams, and to them nothing was beautiful unless it could bring profit to the house of Shaw.

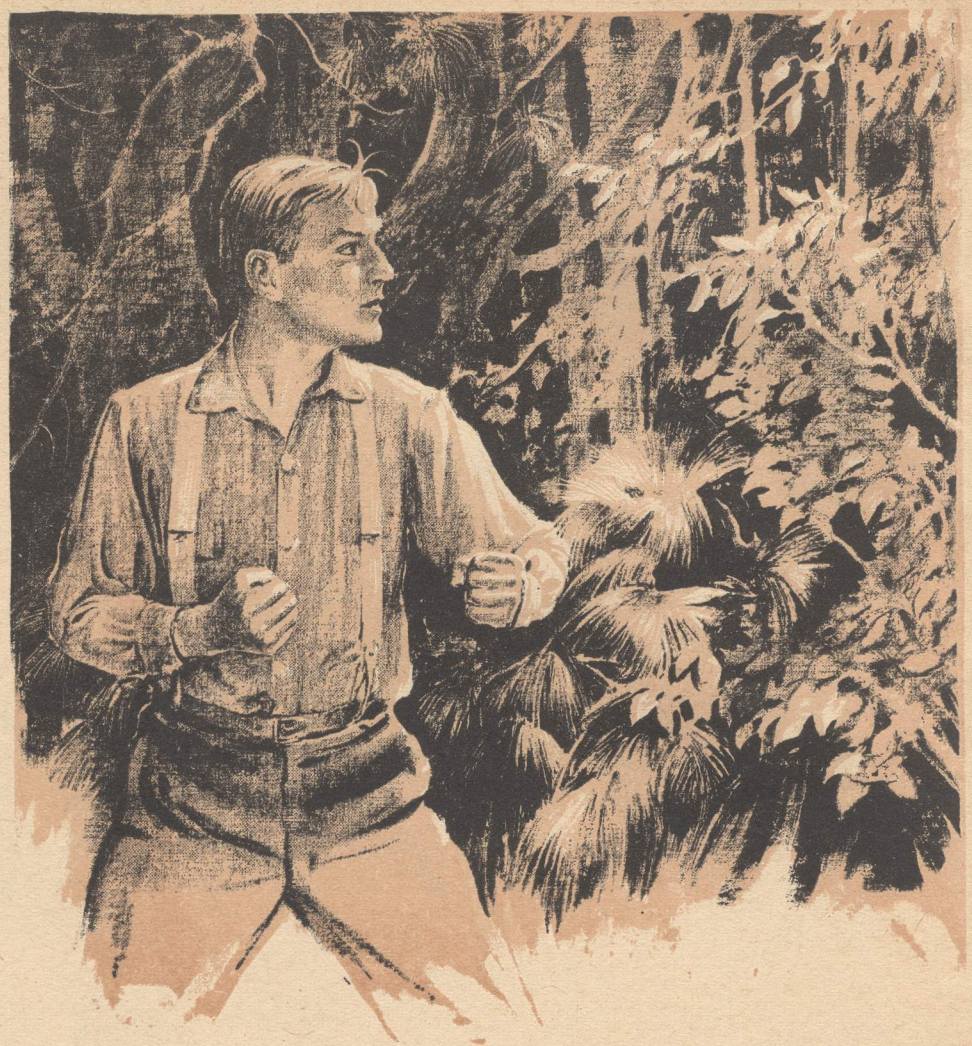
Folks of the valley were not surprised when Paul Renfro and Charley Shaw started courting Lota Wade. Paul and Charley were eighteen and Lota seventeen when the courting began. Folks were not surprised because it was but natural that a boy like Paul, who loved sunsets and scarlet leaves should be thrilled by the beauty and gentleness of Lota Wade. It was also natural that Charley should go courting to the house of Josiah Wade since he felt that the best of everything in Whippoorwill Valley should wear the brand of Shaw.

Folks began to wonder what the outcome would be. They weighed the house and broad acres of the Shaws against the cabin and scant acres of the Renfros. They thought, too, of the grim determination of the generations of Shaws, and the easy-going spirit of all of the Renfros who had ever lived in the valley. The majority of folks hoped that Paul would win, but in their hearts they felt that he

was fighting a losing battle. "The Shaws always get the things they want," they whispered, "and Charley wants Lota Wade."

There was a difference in the way the two went courting to the cabin of Josiah Wade. Each Saturday night Paul would tuck his violin under his arm and walk along a valley trail to sit with Lota. On Sunday afternoon Charley would gallop up the valley road on a fine gaited horse, and hitch it to the gnarled cedar which stood in front of the cabin door. Folks could only guess that Paul played his violin and dreamed in the presence of Lota, and that Charley talked of his cattle, his horses and his broad acres. Folks wondered what Josiah Wade thought about the whole thing, but he was not one to talk out in public of the things which concerned his daughter.

This is where Singing Red comes into the story. He is an important character, because had it not been for him, the story would probably have had a different ending. He came in one night when Paul was on his way to see Lota. It was a beautiful moonlit night, and as Paul started across the valley, he tucked the violin under his chin and started playing. He had not gone far when suddenly he heard the weird howl of a red fox coming from up the valley near the foot of the hills.



It startled Paul at first so that he stopped playing, and stood still. He did not hear the howl while he was still, so in a moment he walked on, playing as he went. As soon as the strains of the violin floated over the valley, the red fox howled again. Paul played all the way to the Wade cabin that night, and the fox walked parallel to him across the valley, and howled to the strains of the music. Paul called Lota and her father to the cabin door, and played while they listened to the howl of the fox.

"He's singing with the music," said Josiah Wade, and that was the beginning of the name "Singing Red."

Thereafter when Paul went to see Lota on Saturday nights, he would play his violin as he walked across the valley, and the red fox never failed to send forth his howl to join the strains of the music. The story became known up and down the valley, and many of the neighbors would listen for the voice of Singing Red. It could be heard farther than the violin, and when folks heard it they would nod their heads and say: "There goes Paul a-courting across the valley."

The story came to the ears of Charley Shaw, and he went up the valley one Saturday night and sat alone listening to the fox and the violin. His heart was filled with bitterness as he saw the cabin door of the Wades flung open wide, and Lota silhouetted in the candlelight listening to the music of Paul Renfro and Singing Red. He had brooded for a long time over the fact that a Renfro dared to compete with him for the hand of Lota Wade. There was still bitterness in his heart when he galloped to the Wade cabin the next day.

"Did the fiddler and the fox come to see you last night?" he inquired sarcastically of Lota.

"That is none of your business, Charley Shaw," Lota replied hotly.

"It is my business," snapped Charley. "It's my business because you belong to me."

"And who gave you that idea?"

"Well, I've been coming here, haven't I?"

"So has Paul Renfro been coming here," she replied quickly. "But he doesn't think he owns me just because he comes to see me."

"Do you mean that you consider his coming just as important as mine?"

"I certainly do, and why shouldn't I? You needn't think just because your name is Shaw no one else matters."

Charley looked for a moment at the fire in Lota's eyes, then laughed and changed the subject. He was still in an angry mood, however, when on his way home he met Paul at the crossroads. Abruptly he swung from his horse and hitched it to a sapling.

"I want to talk to you," he said, approaching Paul.

"I'm listening," replied Paul quietly.

"I'm tired of you going across the valley to see Lota," said Charley angrily, "and I'm warning you right now to stop it."

"And what business is it of yours?" asked Paul softly.

"It's my business because she belongs to me."

"Did she say so?"

"No, but I'm saying it."

"Well, that doesn't make it so, and I'm telling you right now, I'm going to see Lota whenever I please, and no Shaw is going to stop me."

Charley lowered his head and rushed at Paul like an angry bull. Paul quickly side-stepped and tripped him as he went past. From then on it was a rough-and-tumble fight, the like of which had probably never been seen at the crossroads. Charley fought with a fury which sent him rushing and surging at his lithe opponent. Paul fought calmly, and placed his blows as deliberately as if he were picking out the notes on his violin.

It turned into a rough-and-tumble fight, the like of which had probably never been seen at the crossroads.

No one knows how long the fight lasted, but Elijah Long happened to be coming up to the crossroads when it ended. Charley made a rush, and Paul met him with a hard right to the nose, which sent him staggering backward to sit down hard on the ground. He arose slowly, wiped the blood from his nose, and without a word, walked to his horse, mounted and rode away. Paul looked after him until he disappeared around a bend—then, whistling softly, turned up a trail toward home. Elijah said the ground was torn and tramped as if two bulls had fought, and it was littered with bits of clothing and even splotches of blood.

The fight seemed to have no effect on their courtship of Lota Wade. If Lota knew about it, she never mentioned it to anyone, not even to Paul or Charley. They continued to call on her at their usual times. Charley still galloped up the road on his gaited horse, and Paul walked to the music of his violin and Singing Red. Folks still talked and wondered what the end would be.

Things might not have been settled as soon as they were had not Josiah Wade chanced to discover Charley setting traps up the valley one Saturday afternoon. Charley was flustered at first when Mr. Wade walked up. It was probably because he hadn't aimed to be caught setting the traps, especially by Lota's father. Then too, the traps were on Josiah Wade's land, and he had never been one to allow much trapping. But Charley quickly recovered his composure and faced Mr. Wade defiantly.

"If Singing Red crosses the valley tonight, it will be his last trip," he said. "I aim to put a stop to that foolishness."

Josiah Wade was another one who didn't believe in wasting words. "Take up every one of your blasted traps and get off of this land," he said shortly. "I'm not aiming for that fox to be caught, and I'll tan the hide of the fellow that catches him."

Well, there was no room for argument, and it didn't take Charley long to get his traps and get off. He rode up to the Wade cabin at the regular time the next day, but he didn't even get a chance to hitch his horse. Lota was out by the time he had dismounted, and there was in her eyes the same fire he had seen once before.

"You need not hitch your horse," she said. "Father told me what you were doing yesterday afternoon, and I despise you for it. There is no room in our parlor for anyone who would seek the life of Singing Red. I'm just sorry that you've wasted so much of my time already. I'm sorry even that the neighbors have seen you galloping up to our door. I'm asking you now to ride back down the road, and don't ever ride up this way again."

Lota turned and walked quickly back into the cabin. Charley looked after her for a moment, then mounted and spurred his horse back down the road. That closed one chapter in the wooing of Lota Wade by Charley Shaw.

Lota told Paul the whole story the following Saturday night. "I sent him away, Paul, and I don't want him to ever come back," she said. "I sent him away because he was trapping for Singing Red. I could never care for a man who was mean enough to do a thing like that. I have a strange feeling about Singing Red. I have a feeling that he belongs to you and me, Paul, and that no one has a right to hurt him."

"Yes, Lota, he belongs to you and to me," replied Paul softly. "When I play those love songs across the valley, I think no one understands except you and Singing Red. Perhaps he, too, has loved, and the voice of my violin touches something inside of him which makes him point his nose toward the stars and howl. Perhaps he has loved and lost, and the music awakens some dim memories which he hardly understands. It is wonderful to love and never to lose the one you love. I love you, Lota. I think you know that. Perhaps I have never told you right out in words, but I've tried to speak my love through the voice of music, and I believe you have understood. I shall love you forever, and if I lost you, there would be no song left for the strings of my violin."

"And I love you, Paul. I loved you even before your violin sang to me across the valley. Then when you started speaking your love with music as you came, I understood. Each night you played, my heart went out to meet you, and walked across the valley with you and Singing Red. I want nothing better in life than to belong to you, and to walk forever by your side. I hope you will always remember those love songs you play across the valley."

"I could never forget them, Lota, and I shall play them as we walk the valley trails together, and even when

our feet are too old and tired to walk them any more, I shall play with the same tender love as when I crossed the valley to you."

Josiah Wade found them in each other's arms. They arose and stood hand in hand as they told him of their love. He listened silently until they had finished, then took their joined hands in both of his. "God bless you," he said slowly. "You may never own anything much except a cabin in the valley, but you'll have happiness, and that's more than anything I've ever heard of on this earth. My profits have been few, and the best thing I possess today is the memory of my happiness with Lota's mother. Lota is like her mother, Paul; they are the kind of women who make up for everything else a man may ever lose on this old earth." Josiah brushed a hand across his eyes and walked from the cabin.

The story might well end with Paul and Lota standing hand in hand in the cabin of Josiah Wade, with his blessings resting upon them, but it was not destined to end so quickly. The War between the States had been lengthening its grim shadows until it had reached even to remote places like Whippoorwill Valley. Before the wedding day of Paul and Lota it swooped relentlessly down into the Valley and carried away the last of the young men to join the thinning ranks of gray-clad soldiers. Both Paul and Charley were among those who had to go over the hills and far away from the familiar trails of their childhood.

On the night before he had to leave the next day, Paul and Lota walked up to the head of the valley where Whippoorwill Creek springs from the bosom of moss-clad rocks. It was a spring night of full moon and whippoorwills and crickets. There was a small breeze stirring, and the pine trees above the rocks nodded their heads solemnly and whispered as if they understood that sorrow had come to the valley. Paul and Lota sat upon the rocks, and the moon-bathed valley below them was like a mystic fairyland into which the echoes of war could never enter. The hills were like stern guardians over it, and fireflies were watchmen carrying their

torches between the hills while moonbeams danced wildly on the bosom of the stream and a mockingbird poured forth a song which seemed to have no end.

Paul drew the bow across his violin, and as the strains of music floated to the valley, they heard the voice of Singing Red rising from down by the creek. As Paul played, the fox came nearer, and once they glimpsed him howling from a moonlit rock not more than a hundred yards away.

Paul laid down the violin, and took Lota in his arms. "I'll come back some day," he whispered. "We'll build a house above these rocks and each night at whippoorwill time I'll play for you and Singing Red."

"It wouldn't be so hard to see you go if I only knew that you'd be back," replied Lota with a catch in her voice. "But the uncertainty of it makes me afraid. Life will be a nightmare until that horrible war is over. Be sure of one thing, Paul, and that is that I shall pray night and day for your return to me."

"I shall return," said Paul firmly, as he stroked her hair. "I feel in my heart that God would not let a man die with so much happiness waiting for him. Yes, Lota, I'll be coming back. Just you be listening, and some night you'll hear me and Singing Red coming across the valley."

They sat for a long time and talked of the future when there would be a house above the rocks, and no shadows of war nor thoughts of parting. When they arose at last, the wind was high in the pines, and the song of the mockingbird had come to an end. . . .

The months that followed were long and lonely for Lota Wade. She prayed and waited always for the return of Paul Renfro. She no longer heard the voice of Singing Red, but often she went down to the creek and found his tracks. She had a kindred feeling for him, because she felt that he, too, was lonely for Paul Renfro, lonely for the voice of a violin which sang across the valley.

Little news came back from the battlefronts, but there was enough to make the people of the valley realize that all was not well with their armies of gray. There were stories of raiders in blue galloping across the nearby country, but somehow none of them ever descended into the valley. Hard times did descend, but they were not much harder than the folks had always known. They quickly learned how to brew their coffee from parched corn meal, and to use sorghum molasses for sweetening. They didn't mind these things so much, but all up and down the valley there was a longing for the dawn of peace.

Illustrated by
CHARLES CHICKERING

Josiah stepped quickly from the shadows. "Lay one hand on her, Charley Shaw," he said, "and I'll give you something you'll remember until your dying day."

It came at last, and folks began to watch anxiously for their men to come home. Perhaps no one in the valley was more anxious than Lota Wade. No direct news had come from Paul since the day he had gone away. She waited with hope and fear, fighting furious battles within her heart. Her hopes were in her prayers and in the calm confidence of Paul that he would return. Her fears were nurtured by the stories that drifted back of the terrible toll the war had taken.

Then Charley Shaw returned. He went straight to the cabin of Josiah Wade and stood before Lota. "Paul won't be back," he announced bluntly. "He was wounded, and died soon after. I was with him when he fell, and he wanted me to bring you the news."

Lota stood for a moment like a slender tree swaying in the wind, then collapsed in a heap on the floor. For days she was like one walking in the midst of a hideous nightmare; then gradually she grew calm again, although in her eyes there was mirrored the kind of sorrow which even time could not erase.

Charley Shaw started calling often at the home of Josiah Wade. Lota had many questions to ask him about Paul. He told her of how he and Paul had become good friends, of how he had held Paul's hand until he died, and of how Paul had asked him to do everything he could to make her happy. Lota listened quietly to all of it, and there came into her heart a warmer feeling than she had ever known before for Charley Shaw. She thought with gratitude of his sitting by Paul's side and ministering to him in his last hours.

Perhaps that was what helped to influence her when, three months after his return, she promised to marry Charley Shaw. "Paul wanted me to do everything I could to make you happy," Charley reminded her when he proposed. "I can better do that if you are married to me."

The news of their engagement drifted up and down the valley, and folks shook their heads in disapproval. "She'll never be happy with him," they said. "She needs love, and that's something a Shaw never gives except to his stock and acres of land. And

Charley hasn't changed," they said. "no more than a leopard can change his spots. Lota will find it out, and she won't have much to live for."

The wedding was set for the last Sunday afternoon in April, and the day approached too rapidly for Lota and Josiah Wade. Too rapidly for Lota because there was no gladness in her heart as she looked forward to it. Too rapidly for Josiah because he could see the deep-rooted sorrow in his daughter's eyes, and knew that her wedding with Charley Shaw could never erase it.

On the last Thursday night before the wedding Josiah and his daughter finished supper early, and moved out to sit for a while in the bright moonlight before retiring. Josiah had just fixed up his pipe when suddenly there came a cry of anguish from down by the creek. For a moment, they were puzzled, not knowing what to make of it. Quickly it came again, then it dwindled away in a pathetic howl. "It's the fox," cried Josiah, leaping to his feet. "It's the fox, and he's in trouble."

He ran, swiftly as he could, toward the sound, but Lota, being younger, outran him, and was the first to reach Singing Red caught fast in a steel trap by his right front foot. He was whining and surging the full length of the trap chain in a desperate attempt to get free. By the time Josiah arrived, the fox's strength was about spent, and he sank to the ground as if awaiting the blow which would take away his life. Josiah quickly pressed his shoe down on the spring of the trap, and the foot of Singing Red dropped free. He lay for a moment panting and trembling; then realizing he was free, arose slowly and trotted away, limping on the injured leg.

"He hasn't been in the trap long," said Josiah, "and the leg is probably not broken. It ought to be all right in a few days. Who do you suppose set that trap?"

As if in answer to that question there came the sound of hurrying feet coming up the creek. They moved back into the shadow of some bushes and waited. In a moment, Charley Shaw came panting up to the trap with a stick upraised. He lowered the stick in surprise and cursed aloud when he saw the trap was empty.

Josiah started forward angrily, but Lota pushed him back. "Let me talk to him," she whispered. Swiftly she walked out into the bright moonlight and stood facing Charley. He could hardly have been more surprised if the ghost of Singing Red had walked out to meet him. He was speechless as he stared at Lota Wade.

"You thought you had him this time, Charley Shaw," she said bitterly. "You sneaked in and set your trap to catch him. You were listening and heard him cry when he got caught, so you came with your stick to beat his life out. We heard him, too, and beat you here and set him free. He is just as free from you now as I'm going to be. I thought perhaps you had changed. I should have known better. You have just been trapping for me as you were for the fox. If I had married you, I would have been just as miserable as he was in that trap tonight. I am thankful that when you caught him, you set me free forever."

By this time Charley had recovered his power of speech. "Yes, I caught him," he said angrily. "I caught him because I saw you down here one day looking at his tracks. I knew you were thinking about Paul Renfro. I caught him because I knew that as long as he made tracks on this creek he would be a link between you and Renfro, and a wall between you and me. I caught him because I hated him. I only wish I could have beaten his brains out with this stick."

"Yes. That's just it, Charley. You want to beat down anything or anybody who stands between you and whatever you want. If you can't do it in daytime, you'll sneak around and do it at night. Thank goodness, I found you out before it was too late. Now take your trap and go from here. Go off of this land and out of my life."

Charley looked at her for a moment in silence, then took an angry step forward. "I'll teach you, my young lady, not to talk to me like that!"

Josiah Wade stepped quickly from the shadows. "Lay one hand on her, Charley Shaw," he said, "and I'll give you something you'll remember until your dying day."

Charley took one look at him, then turned and strode hurriedly away. Josiah Wade made an angry move after him, but Lota stepped between them. "Let him go, Father," she said. "Let him go down the creek forever."

Well, that is almost the end of the story my grandmother told, but not quite. It was the end for Charley Shaw, but for Lota Wade there was a new beginning, a beginning as bright as the sun when it drives the mists from Whippoorwill Valley. That beginning was one week from the night of the ending for Charley Shaw.

It was a night so beautiful that Lota had stayed awake for a long time and watched the stars and listened to the whippoorwills calling to each other from the hilltops and in the valley. Finally, though, she had drifted off to sleep, and thought at first she was dreaming when she heard her father's voice saying, "Lota, Lota, listen! Listen to Singing Red." Suddenly sleep was gone, and she knew it had not been a dream, for loud and clear the voice of Singing Red was rolling down the valley from the rocks where the creek is born. Then she heard something else, faint at first, but gradually rising in volume until it flowed like a golden stream in at her bedroom window. It was the singing of a violin, the violin of Paul Renfro, playing once again the familiar strains of his love songs.

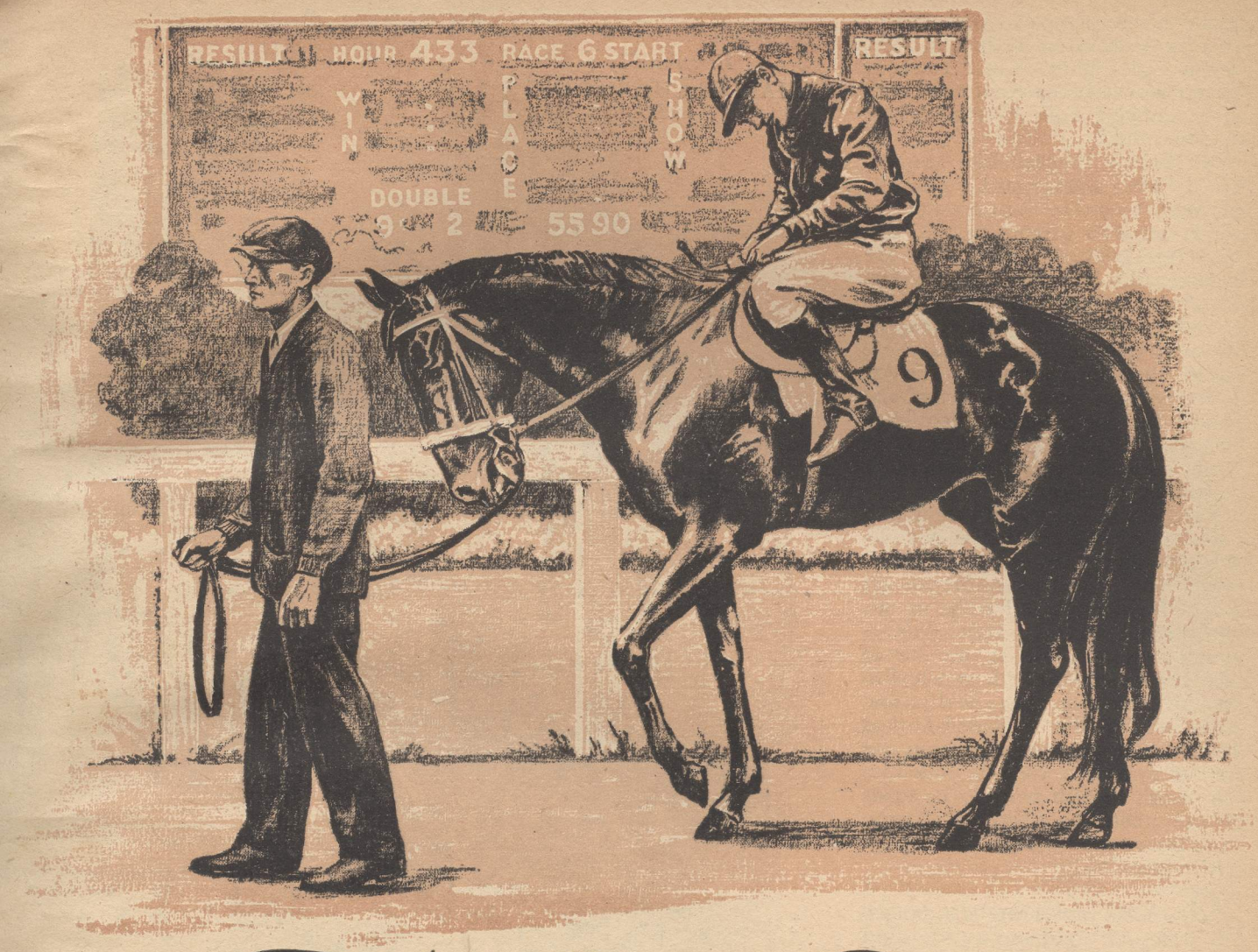
With a glad cry in her throat, Lota Wade hurried into her clothes and ran out to meet him. He laid down his violin as she approached, and he swept her into his arms. "Oh, Paul, Paul!" she sobbed on his shoulder. "You're back, you're back! And I thought you were dead."

"Not dead, my sweet, but wounded and in a hospital for a long time," he said when he had kissed her.

"But Charley Shaw said you were dead," she sobbed.

"Charley Shaw didn't know," he said bitterly. "He knew that I was wounded, but never even came to see if I were dead or alive. But let's forget that. I'm home now, and about as well as ever. Things like that won't ever matter to us any more. Let's go to the house and see your father, then walk up the valley to the rocks."

They sat for long hours on the rocks that night. Paul played again the old songs he had played there once before on a night which seemed so far away, and Singing Red answered gladly as he galloped across the valley. A mockingbird sang, too, among the treetops while fireflies carried their torches between the hills, and moonbeams danced like fairies on the bosom of the creek. They sat until the wind came up, and the pines whispered and nodded their heads together as if they understood that love had come again to walk the trails of Whippoorwill Valley.



The Last Ride

THE GIFTED AUTHOR OF "CAPPY RICKS" AND "THE PRIDE OF PALOMAR" IS IN FINE FORM HERE.

by **PETER B. KYNE**

IT was, perhaps, Johnny Borden's destiny to be a race-rider. While at birth he had been as long as the average baby, he weighed less than four pounds, which moved his father to nickname him "Skinny." Also there was the power of suggestion to lure Skinny to his destiny, for his father had been a premier jockey until—with the curse of weight descending upon him—he had retired to become manager of John K. Ringwood's breeding establishment. Here Ringwood had a fast mile track on which he trained his youngsters and tested the best of them before sending them to the races, and Skinny grew up in equine society.

Indeed, when he was ten years old he was earning his spending-money ponying short two-year-olds around the track, since it is not well to put weight on a youngster too soon. Also, as a volunteer rider he had, before graduating from high school, ridden in a hundred private trials; so when the older Borden died and Skinny knew he was not going on to the university, he decided, naturally enough, to be a jockey. He knew that if he developed into one of the best and was thrifty he could accumulate a competence much quicker than in most other jobs.

When he asked Ringwood to engage him as exercise-boy and apprentice rider, however, the latter refused, although he knew Skinny had a nice seat, a way with horses and an extraordinary sense of pace, all very important qualities in a race-rider.

"I think you might develop into a popular jockey, Skinny," he said, "but it wouldn't be kind of me to encourage you to embark upon a vocation you will have to abandon in your middle twenties. While you'll never be considered a runt in so far as your height is concerned, your bones are very small and you have cockeyed metabolism or some chemical bodily imbalance which keeps you thin. But I suspect you're the physical type that matures late. . . . I think the saddest

person I ever knew was your father, when he discovered he had to fight weight and couldn't win. You're a carbon copy of him at your age. How about studying to be a veterinarian? I'll stake you."

But Skinny thanked him and declined; and since youth must be served, he set out to learn his trade on the Frying Pan Circuit, as the half-mile tracks in the Northwest are known. Also he rode on the county-fair tracks. A year of this and he drifted back to California to apply for an apprentice rider's license. He wanted the mile ovals now. The day he received his license an owner who wanted the five-pounds-apprentice-allowance in the weight assigned his horse, gave Skinny the mount in a six-furlong handicap.

Now, if a rider gets into trouble in a six-furlong race he must be extremely lucky and extremely clever to win, because he has so little time to get out of his trouble and make up his lost ground. At the start Skinny's mount was bumped to his knees; later he was shuffled back and had to take his horse around the field to find room to run. But he sensed he had a brave, honest horse under him, one anxious to run, so when he came into the stretch in fifth position he made his run before the others, deciding to trust his mount to maintain his excessive speed.

Of course race-riding is a dangerous profession and many a race is lost by a good jockey who will not accept risks. Skinny would—and he won by taking his mount through a hole on the rail. As his horse nosed in, Skinny struck his boot a resounding slap with his bat and yelled "Get over!"—and somehow he had room. The sports-writers hailed his ride as phenomenal and bade the public keep tabs on Skinny Borden. That advertising helped, and presently his agent had little trouble keeping Skinny busy.

John K. Ringwood watched the boy's meteoric rise to stardom and finally offered him a contract—but to test Skinny's sporting blood, he offered, instead of salary, ten per cent of all purses Skinny won for him.

Skinny told Ringwood dryly that he accepted his apology—and on the tracks around Chicago that summer he won three major stakes for his employer. Returning to California for the winter meetings, he won the Santa Susanna and the Derby and two ten-thousand-dollar stakes at Santa Anita Park, for he was permitted to accept mounts in races where Ringwood did not have an entry. That year Skinny's income was over forty thousand dollars; but Ringwood, still convinced that the boy was to have but a brief

Illustrated by
CHARLES CHICKERING

bout with Fortune, warned him to make hay while the sun shone.

"Save your money," he exhorted. "Be content with your riding fees and never bet on a horse. There is no short road to fortune. If you wish me to do so I'll supervise your investments. The yield will not be large—but you'll collect it. Keep out of the cheap races. No standard riding-fees for you. Play hard to get, and the cream of the crop will come to you. Never risk your life for peanuts."

Skinny accepted Ringwood's advice and never regretted it. He wished he could find a fine girl he could love enough to want to marry, but not until he was twenty-four did he meet Maisie Doane—and then he had to give away considerable weight, for Maisie was a sizable, lovely lass who, in a wrestling match with Skinny, could have broken his back with falls. Before committing himself with Maisie, Skinny had Ringwood meet her. The latter finally endorsed her heartily and Skinny was the most amazed fellow in the world when she agreed to marry such a shrimp as he was, and brazenly admitted she loved him. He was a very lonely young man and never quite knew which sentiment for Maisie moved him most—love or gratitude. There was nothing he would not have done to make Maisie happy except buy her a blond mink coat and many jewels and permit her to make an occasional two-dollar bet on his mounts. He had seen too often how the mink

"Play hard to get, and the cream of the crop will come to you."

coats and jewels on jockeys' wives appeared and disappeared and knew these movements represented the rise and fall of the tide of fortune that must ever be the portion of horse-players. Skinny was resolved to keep his fortunes at the flood until he was forced to retire; he wanted Maisie and any little Bordens to be safe, then.

John K. Ringwood gave them a honeymoon trip to Hawaii and a less expensive wedding gift to Maisie was a book on diet, authored by a celebrated biochemist.

"Remember, Maisie," he warned, "that fat is the arch-enemy of the Borden family. By refraining from combining carbohydrates and proteins in the same meal you can give Skinny heavy, health-giving and non-fattening meals that will tend to reduce his weight—this will spare him hunger pains and help preserve your married happiness. Job and his boils had a sad life, but Skinny Borden's life is destined to be even sadder. Job could eat, despite his boils, but Skinny will be out of a job if he doesn't keep his weight down."

In their stateroom Skinny said: "That advice the boss gave you is good or he wouldn't give it, but—no diet for me on my honeymoon. That's unholy!" Maisie thought so too, so Skinny was weighing a hundred and thirty pounds before Maisie went to work on him.

By employing heroic measures she got his weight down to 120. He had been 118 when he married her, but that weight would never be his again. Nature was beginning to assert her authority. Maisie kept him at 120 for a year, but it was one constant battle—and for both of them much of life's enjoyment disappeared. Slowly he crept up to 123 and there he stuck, which meant his mounts were limited to those that carried an impost of 128 or more. However, this was not so bad, since in the case of a money rider and a known weight-carrier, a pound overweight would be waived. After all, live weight is to be preferred to lead pads and a light boy, and the horses Skinny rode were the tops of the handicap division.

So Skinny's income did not suffer greatly, although his mounts were more infrequent; whenever he had a few weeks between races Maisie relented and permitted him to accumulate two pounds, for she knew she could always knock that off in three days with a skim-milk diet. However, she was harried by the thought that if undernourished Skinny must, eventually, contract tuberculosis.

They lived in Hollywood because, with six major tracks in California, Ringwood no longer raced outside the State unless he shipped one horse out by plane to compete in a particular stake; in which case Skinny flew to the job.

Suddenly Skinny and Maisie decided it was time to quit. Hunger, gnawing at Skinny, made him irritable and he snapped at Maisie and hurt her feelings. It was nice to earn big fees but health and marital happiness rated priority, so Skinny asked Ringwood to cancel his contract.

Ringwood made no objection. "But for Maisie's care we'd have parted two years ago," he declared. "However, I wish, Skinny, you'd ride one more race in my colors. As you know, Nobility is nominated for the hundred-grander at Hollywood Park, and I don't care to entrust him to a strange rider. He will, I think, carry not less than a hundred and twenty-six pounds."

"I'll ride him, Mr. Ringwood. I'll do anything for you, but you may have to stand for two pounds overweight."

"I hope not, Skinny—but do the best you can by me."

So Maisie began making up menus that contemplated food of trifling nutritive value, including spinach, which is said to have none at all. Skinny had always loathed spinach. He was low enough to rejoice secretly when Nobility came in from a morning workout very lame, and was promptly vanned back to the farm for the attention of Ringwood's own veterinarian.

The big race was to be run on Saturday. Late on Wednesday afternoon Nobility returned to the track and on Thursday worked a mile and an eighth—a pipe-opener for the hundred-grander. Skinny rode him and reported him as fit as a horse can be. On Friday evening a horse-owner

Skinny said: "The kid might have two strikes called on it."

named Dominic Baldocchi telephoned Skinny and requested permission to visit him that evening to discuss a matter that might prove of mutual interest. With some misgiving Skinny agreed to receive him.

"Who called?" Maisie asked, and Skinny told her. "But he's the owner of Rexburne," she protested, "and he has Rexburne nominated for the big race. He must know you're the contract rider for John Ringwood. . . . I think that, under the circumstances, a sense of ethics would indicate that he discuss what he has to discuss with you after the hundred-grander."

"If you talked to him about ethics he'd think they were something new in athletic contrivances," said Skinny.

"He can't have in mind engaging you to ride a horse for him next week, because if he reads the papers he knows your mount on Nobility will mark the finish of your riding career. I wonder what he has on his mind."

"I do too, Maisie; that's why I agreed to see him. I suspect it's something not quite kosher. I haven't been propositioned since I rode on outlaw tracks and I have a curiosity to know if anything new in racetrack skulduggery has been invented. When he comes, Maisie, you retire to the kitchen. Your presence might inhibit him."

"Is he a bad character, Skinny?"

"It's suspected that he doesn't own the stable he's supposed to own, that he is fronting for a Chicago mob. I know he's watched pretty closely. I rode Rexburne three times for him and the last time the horse equaled the world's record for a mile and an eighth. He can fly—and I suspect he's a stayer, because after that record race he was still wild to run. If he can hold his speed for a mile and three eighths, as he'll be asked to do tomorrow, he might take first money."

"If he does, I'll cry," said Maisie. "I want you to quit in a burst of glory—and we can use that ten per cent of the winner's share of the purse." She put her arms around Skinny. "I saw the doctor today, and he says it's true."

Skinny said dolefully: "I wish it hadn't happened while I'm feeling and looking like a sick cat. The kid might have two strikes called on it, what with having a shrimp for a father and one for a grandfather."

"The Doanes," Maisie comforted him, "have never produced pony-sized girls and all the boys have been light heavyweights."

"Well, it's wonderful news," Skinny agreed, "and there's only one thing that could make me nearly as happy."

"What's that?"

"A stack of waffles *that* high—smeared with maple syrup, ham and eggs, a baked pear—"

Maisie shut his mouth with kisses.

"WELL, Mr. Baldocchi," Skinny greeted his visitor, "what's on your mind?"

"Are you open to a proposition to throw the hundred-grander?"

Well, there was no sense fiddling around, so Skinny said:

"Spread your hand and let me take a look."

"If you win with Nobility tomorrow afternoon your share of the winner's purse will be around eight thousand. If you place, your riding fee will be around two thousand. You stand a very good chance of winning unless you run into hard racing luck, but if you'd be content to make a place, it would be worth twenty grand to you."

"You interest me, Baldocchi; but I've never pulled a horse and I never shall. Twenty grand isn't peanuts and I know I'd get it in cash and so wouldn't have to list it on my income-tax return, but there's only one way I can earn it and that's a way where I'll never be suspected of giving Mr. Ringwood and the public the double-cross. After I weigh out on Saturday I'll be through as a race-rider—and on my way back to the jocks' room I don't want fifty thousand people booing me and the newspaper boys hinting that my ride on Nobility had the aroma of stale fish."

"I KNEW that was exactly the way you'd feel, Borden, so I've cooked up a scheme I think you'll agree is perfect. Now, you and Mr. Ringwood and his trainer must have handicapped every horse nominated for the big race. How did you folks dope it?"

"Nobility to win, your horse Hot Pursuit to place; Pluto and Fiddler might be a dead heat for show, and Scappose should take fourth money. On the other hand we might as well admit that's all wishful thinking as far as Nobility is concerned. I claim a blanket can cover the first three. But those four horses are outstanding; I think they've all been fairly weighted, and if Nobility loses I'll have no excuses."

"Some friends o' mine are makin' a future book on the race in Chicago, where they got protection, an' down in Tia Juana where they're free o' the California anti-booking law but close enough to do business unless the Mexicans take a notion to go pure, which they haven't done so far. Two weeks ago Nobility came in from a workout dog-lame an' Ringwood sent him back to the farm. My friends got scouts all over this stable area an' they reported it'd be a miracle if the horse was a starter. The newspapers overlooked the news so my friends upped the short price they'd been layin' on Nobility to 10 to 1 and booked a lot of wagers."

Skinny grinned. He saw the picture now. For the benefit of those not grounded in racing lore, be it known that "future books" usually are operated by a syndicate of gamblers with excellent financial resources who, months before a race of

national interest is to be run, begin booking bets on the entries. They lay a price on every horse nominated as soon as the list of probable starters is published and their rule is "Play or pay"—that is, if the horse on which one wagers in a future book should win, one will collect; but if the horse doesn't start the bet is lost. Future book operators have to be very careful to keep their book in balance and it was obvious now to Skinny that Nobility's return to the track and the certainty that he would be a starter had thrown the future book out of balance.

"How much do your friends stand to lose if Nobility wins?" Skinny queried.

"They'll pay out more than the book has took in," Baldocchi replied cryptically. "Nobody wants to go to all the expense of operating a future book an' then finish in the red. On the other hand if Nobility doesn't win my friends will do all right. They only took win bets on him, an' the other four horses you dope as among the tops were booked at short prices. They got fooled on Nobility. What was wrong with him?"

"A nail in his frog. There was considerable pus and inflammation, but the vet drew it out with hot poultices and the horse wasn't walking lame four days later, so he finished training at the farm. He'll run the race of his life tomorrow."

"In your handicapping you overlooked my horse, Rexburne. He an' Hot Pursuit'll run as an entry."

"THERE'S no record that he ever ran more than a mile and an eighth; so in figuring him for a mile and three-eighths we had to throw him out."

"On a certain Chicago track, on a Sunday afternoon, I set him down over that course and he finished strong and I clocked him in time that makes him a probable winner tomorrow. He's fit, he likes to run, he can run—and all he needs to win is some assistance from you."

"I'm listening, Baldocchi."

"By the time the field—there'll be not less than twelve starters—go into the far turn, it'll be pretty well strung out, so the top horses will be bunched at the turn into the homestretch. What horse should be out front?"

"Rexburne should be."

"We'll assume that, with you maybe a length behind and the others fighting to catch up. Now, you've ridden Rexburne, so you know that if he's asked he can turn on a sudden dazzlin' burst of speed that'll take him clear of the leaders if he don't happen to be there when the boys make their run. Naturally, he'll be on the rail, the shortest way home; if he isn't on it when they start their run he can get out far enough to cross over without fouling and get on the rail. Then you pull in behind him.

"Nobility is a headstrong horse and has a habit of lugging in to the rail. He likes the rail just as much as some horses dislike it and always carry wide. He needs a strong boy to ride him—and you're so weak from tryin' to make the weight that, by golly, you can't keep him from luggin' in! An', of course, unless you take him out at once, he'll run behind Rexburne to the finish. Why? Because Hot Pursuit's rider will be instructed to spurt and lap you on the right so you can't get out without fouling him as you cross over, an' you can't take back to go around Hot Pursuit because you'll foul the horses following.

"So what do you do? You do your best to make a place—but the chances are you'll not. Mr. Ringwood knows the horse will lug in if he can, and he knows you're retiring because you can't continue to make weight and remain healthy. Naturally he'll believe it was his own fault for not having a stronger boy up; he took a chance and that happened. Ten thousand people with their binoculars on you can't see anything wrong. The public—and the stewards will say: 'Well, the favorite got pocketed. Just one of those things.' "

"And if," said Skinny thoughtfully, "Rexburne starts his run at the three-quarter pole and has the strength and speed then that he had when I rode him last, and if he's out in front, he'll win unless he drops dead. Well, Baldocchi, your scheme is perfect, but its success depends on a race-track miracle—and I've still to see one. Suppose your horses, for some reason we just can't imagine now, fail to get up in time? I can't wait for them if Nobility is in front or within striking distance of it. He'll be full of run and I'll have to boot him home. It isn't worth twenty thousand dollars to me to finish my racing career with a listless stupid ride."

"Of course, Borden, this idea is crazy. As you say, its success depends on a race-track miracle—but my friends think that they have at least a fifty-fifty chance for a miracle, so why not make an even-money bet of twenty thousand, to save a million? With you coöperating—well, we'd like to win with Rexburne, of course, because there's been no money bet on him to speak of, but any other horse will do if he noses out the Ringwood horse."

"Well, I'll coöperate—on two conditions. Your Rexburne has to be up in front and on the rail when we go all out for the money—and I have to be lapped and pocketed for fair. Otherwise the deal is off and I go on to win."

"On the other hand, Borden, I got to stipulate that if Rexburne ain't up to do his stuff but Hot Pursuit is there to double for him, the deal holds. As a matter of fact it will have to hold, no matter what horse is on the rail in front of you. You got to lug in behind that horse."

"But if I can lug out without fouling I must be free to do it," Skinny insisted. "I can't afford, for twenty thousand dollars, to fail to see an opening Mr. Ringwood and the stewards will see. That's my deal. Take it or leave it."

"I'll have to talk it over with the boys first."

"Talk it over. There's the telephone yonder."

"Will the wife listen?"

"No. She's out in the kitchen making up a menu a goat would gag on."

BALDOCCHI talked to Tia Juana and upon hanging up he reported: "They don't like it so well, but on the other hand they can realize your position. . . . Here's the twenty grand—in used bills; if I paid you in fresh new century bills, you might think I was slippin' you high-class phoneys.

"But I'll tell you one thing, Mister: Once you get into that pocket you'll have a hell of a time getting out, because any jock that comes up alongside you will do his best to keep you there and make certain that if he can't win he'll try to get the place-money. This isn't the deal my friends hoped to get, but since it's the best they can get they'll go for it. But I warn you, Borden, that if they have reason to suspect the double-cross they won't like it. Some of the boys have bad tempers and they pay off grudges."

Skinny repeated the conditions so there could be no possibility of a misunderstanding, and Mr. Baldocchi took his departure.

Maisie joined her husband, who told her all that had happened. "And this twenty grand is yours, darling," he added. "Don't be ashamed to take it; I'm going to earn it honestly. There are no race-track miracles—although, by jiminy, these fellows have a good formula. I've seen worse bets won. I'm giving them odds of 500-to-1 and they're gamblers and the right odds should be even money."

He called Ringwood at the latter's hotel. "Skinny speaking, sir. Have you decided to start Valle d'Or as entry with Nobility tomorrow, or scratch him?" he asked.

"No, Skinny. I'm afraid the route is a trifle too long for him and when in doubt one should not pay a five-thousand-dollar starting fee. I'm far from sanguine that he can be in the

money, although I *am* curious to try him out over that distance."

"Please start him, Mr. Ringwood, and I'll pay the starting fee. I want him to run interference for Nobility—and without him Nobility may not be in the money. Please don't ask questions, Mr. Ringwood. I have a hen on."

"Very well, Skinny, hatch the egg. Valle d'Or will start. Too bad you're not twins so you could ride him too!"

"Please tell your trainer, sir, not to give the jock his riding instructions; I'll do that in the jockey-room. Thank you, sir. Good night."

Skinny turned to Maisie. "Maisie," he quavered, "I'm so scared I'm *really* weak now! I'll be down to weight, but I'll be lucky to finish the race; I'm liable to fall off!" Then he did something he had not done since his father's death: he commenced to weep, and Maisie noted a touch of hysteria. "I'm scared," he kept sobbing; "I'm scared to death! I should have begged off on this last ride. If I fall off and the field rides over me, His Nibs will never know his old man."

Maisie put her arms around him—those firm strong young arms twice as big as his own—and soothed him and kissed his tears away as if he had been her little boy instead of her husband. But she was badly worried over the contract Skinny had taken with Baldocchi, until he pulled himself together and explained to her just why his honor could not be placed in jeopardy when the starter sent the field away for the hundred-grander.

But Skinny did not sleep well that night. He was ridden by the thought that on this last ride the luck of the luckiest rider on the American turf would go sour; he had a cold gone feeling in his stomach and he perspired so with apprehension that by daylight he had lost a quarter-pound in weight and felt correspondingly weaker. Maisie drove him out to the track—he had to be in the jockey-room by twelve o'clock—and at parting he quivered because he had a feeling that he was seeing her for the last time.

The field got off to a perfect start, with the exception of Hot Pursuit. Always a bad post-horse, he was standing on his hind legs just as the gate opened, with the result that he was trailing the field at the clubhouse turn. Rexburne, a very fast starter, spurted and took a position on the rail immediately and in front, so Skinny knew his rider had orders to make the pace, which seemed to confirm Baldocchi's statement that a mile and three-eighths would not be too great a distance for him.

Skinny lay fifth on Nobility, declining to run the horse out in pursuing one of the fastest horses in the world, for he knew that in long races the leaders generally came back to the ones behind, the dogged ones, the durable ones who set a pace and maintain it. Skinny watched Valle d'Or, lying third by two lengths and as the field turned into the back-stretch he saw Valle d'Or being shaken up and hustled up beside Rexburne and even past him.

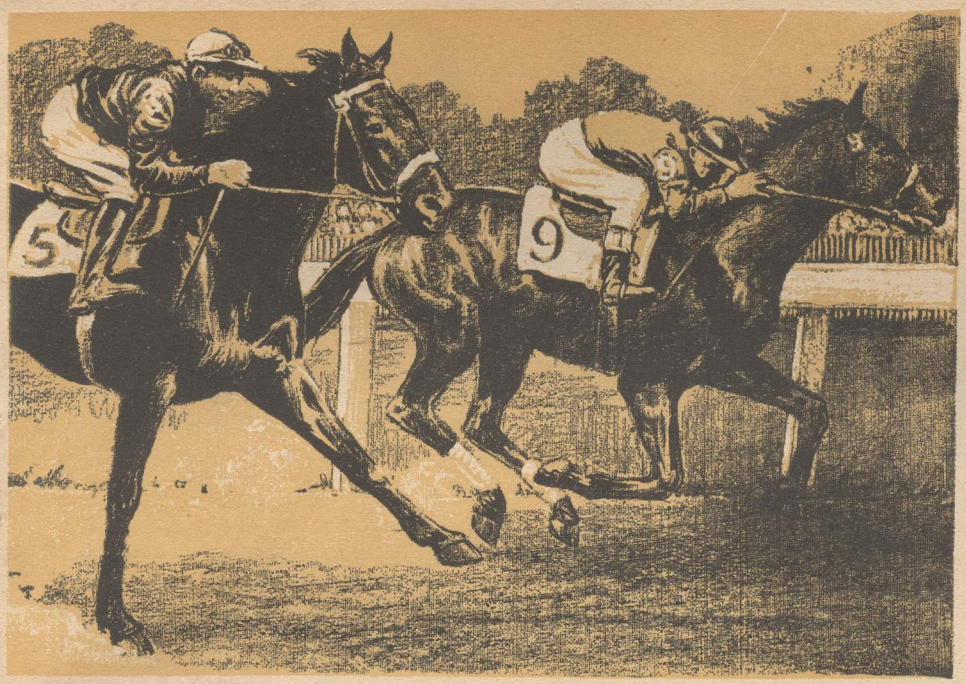
Instantly Rexburne, without waiting for urging, closed the gap, only to have Valle d'Or open it by a neck. But again Rexburne evened matters and now, Skinny knew, both horses were at the greatest speed of which they were capable. He moved up to third place by two lengths, but without extending his mount. He had his gaze fixed on the flying leaders, waiting for that which experience had told him he must see—and as they went into the far turn he saw it.

When a pugilist is hopelessly defeated his chief second admits it by tossing a towel into the ring. For some mysterious reason a horse, upon deciding he is beaten, throws up his tail. Rexburne, having come to that decision, was slowing to a common gallop as Nobility thundered past. At the turn into the home-stretch he was leading, with Valle d'Or second by a length.

He was at the three-quarter pole when the Baldocchi colors—cerise blouse and green cap—came even with him. Hot Pursuit was up, but Skinny knew there was no time now to form the pocket without fouling Nobility; they had only about twelve seconds to go, to the finish. Hot Pursuit held even with him until the last sixteenth; then the furious drive to catch up and overhaul Nobility took its toll and Hot Pursuit slipped back, while Fiddler's black head crept even, then gave way to the red bay head of Valle d'Or, with Pluto's gray head at Valle d'Or's saddle girth.

All this Skinny saw and dimly realized; he started whipping; faintly he heard the deep sustained roar of the crowd and saw the finish line flash by—then automatically he was pulling Nobility up, hoping to slow him to a walk, in time, because black dots seemed jumping up off the track at him. . . .

Nobility was jogging back to the finish line when Skinny slid off him and lay unconscious in the soft cushion of dirt. The truck ambulance picked him up and brought him back



He was waiting for that which experience had told him he must see.

to the placing-judges' pagoda, where the track physician met him and in about ten minutes brought him out of his faint.

"Who won?" he whispered.

One of the placing judges answered: "Nobility by a nose; Valle d'Or, Fiddler, Pluto, each by a nose in the order named. Four-horse photo finish."

"And Hot Pursuit?"

"Sixth."

A pony man had picked up Nobility and his trainer had claimed him and led him into the winner's circle; after Skinny had weighed out with his tack, Maisie assisted him to the winner's circle, where she placed the traditional floral horseshoe around Nobility's neck, while the press cameras clicked and the announcer said goodby to Skinny, for the public; then his valet carried him pickaback down to the jockey-room while the crowd cheered continuously; and then he was shedding his boots and the Ringwood colors for the last time, and donning his street-clothes. At the jockey-house gate Maisie met him with a large hot-beef sandwich; munching on it, he went with her out to the parking area, after the sports-writers had interviewed him, and at their car Dominic Baldocchi awaited them.

He drew Skinny off to one side. "Well," he said ruefully, "we didn't pull off the miracle!"

"Don't couple me in the betting with you," Skinny protested indignantly. "*You* didn't pull off the miracle—but *I* did. It needs a man who knows how, to do that."

"And you knew how?"

"If I hadn't, I'd never have taken your twenty grand! I don't mind telling you now: I've ridden Rexburne three times. The first time he got nowhere because he was short in his training for the distance; the second time he was fit and I knew then he was a very fast horse and a stayer. I was winning; all I had to do was sit tight. At the head of the stretch he was out in front and I hadn't let him out; then a horse dropped from the clouds and was pulling ahead of us—and I let out a wrap and Rexburne almost jumped out from under me in his hurry to overtake his competitor. It took all he had, to do that, and then they ran neck and neck—and a sixteenth from home, with all the run in the world still left in him, Rexburne quit—and finished fifth, when if he'd been brave and honest he'd have won or dead-heated." Skinny smiled a knowing smile. "He's a front-runner and so often front-runners are like that. They remind me of a salesman who calls five times on a new prospect, fails to get an order, decides he and his goods aren't liked—and never calls again."

"But how could you be sure he'd dog it today?"

"He's like his owner. He can't help giving out the double-cross—or trying to."

"Did you tell Ringwood's trainer to enter Valle d'Or to run Rexburne ragged, so Nobility could come on and win?"

"Of course I did. There was nothing in our agreement prohibiting me from doing that."

"Well, I got to admit you didn't double-cross me, but you certainly outfoxed me. But if Hot Pursuit hadn't been left at the post so his jockey had to run his heart out to catch you, he'd have won the race."

"He's a very fast horse and brave and honest. I've ridden him twice for you, remember. But I was never afraid of him because I knew he could never get so far ahead of Nobility he'd have room to cross over to the rail without fouling—and that would disqualify him; but even if he had and I pulled in behind him as per contract—oh, yes, I wouldn't have double-crossed you; I don't care for one-way rides in a murder car—I'd have got out of the pocket."

"Tell me," Baldocchi urged.

"Two years ago, at Tropical Park, a horse coming up behind cut your horse down. Your good contract rider Engel was up, and in the spill he was so badly hurt he spent four months in a hospital. That experience left him with what the nut doctors call a phobia, or fear-complex. I've noticed since that no matter where he is in a race he has a habit of taking quick looks around to see what's threatening him from behind, and finally I doped it out that he was scared.

"You see, Baldocchi, I've been pretty successful because I study jockeys as well as horses, and try to familiarize myself with their peculiarities. At the autumn meeting at Tanforan Park I found myself pocketed behind Engel, on Hot Pursuit, running on the rail. There wasn't enough room for a snake to get through, but I rode up close to Hot Pursuit, gave my bootleg a loud rap with my bat and yelled: 'Get out of my way, Engel! I'm coming through on the rail.' Perhaps my reputation for dodging into holes other jockeys avoid may have helped, but at any rate Engel obligingly pulled over and I got through to win—with Valle d'Or. Twice since then I've worked the same racket on Engel. Perhaps you'd better speak to him about it, although I doubt if you can cure him. It's pretty hard to disobey the direct command."

"WHAT do you mean?"

"Well, if a big man, not in uniform, pulls his car up on the left of your car, honks his horn and waves you over to the curb, you'll pull over to the curb. He has merely assumed the authority you automatically thought he possessed. Of course, you'll ask him who he thinks he is, and tell him to show a badge—but you'll obey first."

"Well, I'll be damned! However, you've given me a twenty-thousand-dollar education. The next time Rexburne is entered in a stake the public will remember how he quit in this one and will tab him as an in-and-outer, unreliable—and he'll be a big overlay in the betting. I'll instruct Engel—he'll be a better jockey, now that

you've retired and can't work your psycho racket on him—to ride the horse exactly as you rode him when he equaled the world record for a mile and an eighth." Baldocchi grinned. "I'll get the twenty grand back, and more! Thanks for the buggy-ride. What are you going to do now?"

"Oh, after a good rest I'll become a public trainer. Got horses in my blood. Good-by, Baldocchi."

WHEN Skinny slid into the car beside his wife he suddenly commenced to tremble violently.

"Are you going to faint again, Skinny?" she queried anxiously.

"No. I guess it's the reaction from ten years of fear," he confessed. "When I was a kid and rode trial races with two or three two-year-olds up at Mr. Ringwood's stock-farm that was fun because there really wasn't any danger—but when I became a professional I realized the danger when riding under colors. Maisie, the jocks I've seen killed and broken up! The trainer never lifted me into the saddle without saying: 'All right, Nervous Nellie, quit shaking and remember my instructions.' And I never did ride to orders, because I always knew more about the horse than the trainer did. *He* never rode one!

"I was always so frightened that I had to prove I wasn't; so I took chances most jocks would avoid. But I won more races—and then I couldn't stop, because I knew Mr. Ringwood was right about the short haying season and I wanted to get mine before weight got me."

"Unfortunately Baldocchi can't be ruled off the turf on hearsay evidence, Skinny."

"He'll be through in California after this meeting ends, but the job will have to be done carefully. It's too dangerous for me to denounce him. But Mr. Ringwood will tell the California Horse Racing Board, which will order its secretary to tell all race-track managers the Board prefers that in the future, when Baldocchi applies for stalls for his horses there won't be any—and if somebody else takes over his string that somebody will become so discouraged trying to get his nags entered that he'll stay out of the State."

Then Skinny brought another secret fear out into the open: "I'm five feet seven and a half tall, Maisie, and after you get me up to a hundred and fifty pounds His Nibs or Her Niblets will never suspect Daddy used to be a shrimp."

Maisie's right hand stole over and covered his. "You were never a shrimp to me, Skinny! I always knew you had a V-8 motor in your Model T chassis."

And Lo, the

THE AUTHOR OF "THE MASK OF MEDUSA" AND "THE MAGIC STAIRCASE" HERE OFFERS A FANTASY THAT IS SOMETHING SPECIAL

I DON'T know why I'm bothering to write this. It's undoubtedly the most useless bit of writing I've ever done in a career—I suppose you'd call it that?—devoted to defacing reams of clean copy paper with torrents of fatuous words. But I've got to do something to keep my mind occupied on this cheerless March day in the Year of Grace 1960. And since I was in this from the beginning, I might as well set it down as I remember it.

Of course, my record of those first days makes no difference now. But then, nothing matters much now. Perhaps nothing *ever* really mattered much, actually. I don't know. I'm not very sure about anything any more. Except that this is an absurdly unimportant story for me to be writing. And that somehow I must do it, none the less. . . .

I've said I was in this from the beginning; that's a laugh. How long ago it really started is any man's guess. It depends on how you choose to measure time. Some four thousand-odd years ago if you're a fundamentalist, a dogged adherent to Archbishop Usher's chronology. Perhaps three thousand million years ago if you

Illustrated by Brendan Lynch

"Here," Abramson said. "See for yourself."

Bird!

by

NELSON BOND

have that which until a few short weeks ago vaingloriously we used to speak of as a "scientific mind." I don't know the truth of the matter, nor does anyone else. But so far as I'm concerned—and you and all of us—it started about a month ago. On the night the city editor, Smitty, wig-wagged me to his desk and grunted a query at me.

"Do you," he asked a bit petulantly, "know anything at all about astronomy?"

"Why, sure," I told him. "Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and something-or-other."

"How?" said Smitty.

"And Pluto," I remembered. "The solar family. The planets in the order of their distance from the sun. I had a semester of star-gazing at school. Some of it rubbed off."

"Good," said the C.E. "You've just won yourself an assignment. Do you know Dr. Abramson?"

"I know who he is. The big wheel on the University observatory staff."

"That's right. Well, go see him. He's got something big—so *he* says," appended Smitty.

"Cab?" I asked hopefully.

"Bus."

"Astronomically speaking," I suggested, "a big story could mean a lot of things. A comet striking earth. The heat of the sun failing, and letting us all freeze to death."

"Things are tough all over," shrugged Smitty. "Suburban busses run every twenty minutes until midnight."

"On the other hand," I mused, "he may have run into some meteorological disturbance that means atomic experiment. If the Reds are playing around with an H-bomb—"

"O.K., a cab," sighed Smitty. "Get going."

ABRAMSON was a small slim sallow man with shadowed eyes. He shook my hand and motioned me into a chair across the yellow oak desk from him. He adjusted a gooseneck lamp so it would shine in neither of our faces, then steepled lean white fingers. He said, "It was good of you to come so promptly, Mr.—"

"Flaherty," I told him.

"Well, Flaherty, it's like this. In our profession it isn't customary to release stories through the press. As a rule we publish our observations in technical journals comprehensible, for the most part, only to specialists. But this time such treatment does not seem adequate. It might not be fast enough. I've seen something in the heavens—and I don't like it."

I made hen scratches on a fold of copy paper.

"This thing you saw—a new comet, maybe?"

"I'm not sure I know," said Abramson, "and I'm even less sure I *want* to know. But whatever it is, it's unusual enough and, so I suspect, important enough to warrant the step I'm taking. In order to get the swiftest possible confirmation of my observations, and of my fears, I feel I must use the public press to tell my message."

"All the news that's fit to print," I said, "and a lot that isn't; that's our stock in trade. What is it you've seen?"

He stared at me somberly for a long minute. Then:

"A bird," he said.

I glanced at him in swift surprise. "A—a bird?" I felt like smiling, but the look in his eyes did not encourage mirth.

"A bird," he repeated. "Far in the depths of space. The telescope was directed toward Pluto, farthermost planet of our solar system. A body almost four thousand millions of miles from Earth.

"And at that distance"—he spoke with a painful deliberation—"at that incredible distance, *I saw a bird!*"

Maybe he read the disbelief in my eyes. Anyway, he opened the top drawer of his desk, drew forth a sheaf of eight-by-ten glossies, and laid them before me.

"Here," he said. "See for yourself."

THE first photograph meant little to me. It showed a field of star-emblazoned space—the typical sort of picture you find in any astronomy textbook. But on it one square was outlined in white pencil. The second photo was an enlargement of this square, showing in magnified detail the outlined area. The field was larger, brighter; a myriad of glowing stars diffused a silvery radiance over the entire plate. Against this nebulosity stood out in stark relief the firm, jet silhouette of a gigantic birdlike creature in full flight.

I ventured an uncertain attempt at rationalization. I said: "Interesting. But, Dr. Abramson, many dark spots have been photographed in space. The Coalsack, for instance. And the black nebula in—"

"True," he acknowledged. "But if you will now look at the next exposure?"

By the third week it had reached naked-eye visibility.

I turned to the third photograph, and for the first time felt the breath of that cold, helpless dread which in the weeks ahead was to come to dwell with me. It depicted an overlapping portion of that field surveyed in the second print. But the dark, occulting silhouette had changed. That which was limned against the background of the stars was still the outline of a bird—but the shape had changed. A wing which had been lifted now was dropped; the postures of neck and head and bill were definitely altered.

"This photograph," said Abramson in a dry, emotionless voice, "was taken five minutes after the first one. Disregarding the changed appearance of the—the image, and considering only the object's relative position in space as indicated by the parallax, to have shifted its position to such an extent in so short a time indicates that the thing casting that image must have been traveling at a velocity of approximately one hundred thousand miles per minute."

"What!" I exclaimed. "But that's impossible. Nothing on earth can travel at such a speed."

"Nothing on *earth*," agreed Abramson. "But cosmic bodies can—and do. And for all that it has the semblance of a living creature, this thing—whatever it is—is a cosmic body.

"And that," he continued fretfully, "is why I asked you to come out here. That is the story I want you to write. That is why no moment must be wasted."

I said, "I can write the story. But it will never be believed."

"Perhaps not—at first. Nevertheless, it must be released. The public may laugh, if it wishes. Other observatories will check my discovery, verify my conclusions. And that is the important thing. No matter what it may lead to, what it means, we must learn the truth. The world has a right to know the threat confronting it."

"The threat? You think there is a threat?"

He nodded slowly, gravely.

"Yes, Flaherty. I know there is. There is a thing those pictures may not tell you, but that will be recognized instantly by any trained mathematician.

"That thing—bird, beast, machine or whatever it may be—travels in a computable path. And the direction of its flight is—toward our sun!"

My interview threw Smitty for a loss. He read copy swiftly, scowled, studied the pix, and read the story again, this time more slowly and with furrows congealing on his forehead. Then he stalked over to my desk.

"Flaherty," he complained in a tone of outraged indignation, "what is all this? What the hell *is* it, I mean?"

"A story," I told him. "The story you sent me out to get. Abramson's story."

"I know that. But—a *bird!* What the hell kind of a story is *that?*"

I shrugged. "Frankly, I don't know. Dr. Abramson seems to think it's important. Maybe," I suggested, "he's got rocs in his head."

It was too subtle for Smitty. He smudged the bridge of his nose with a copy pencil and muttered something uncomplimentary to astronomers in general and Abramson in particular.

"I suppose we've got to print it," he decided. "But we don't have to make damned fools of ourselves. Lighten this up. If we must run it, we'll play it for laughs."

So that's what we did. We carried it on an inside page, complete with Abramson's pictures, as a special feature, gently humorous in tone. We didn't openly poke fun at Abramson, of course. After all, he was the observatory chief of staff. But we soft-pedaled the science angle; I rewrote the yarn in the style we generally used for flying-saucer reports and sea-serpent stories.

This was, of course, a terrific boner. But in all fairness to Smitty, how was he to know this was the story to end all stories? The biggest story of his or any newspaperman's career?

Think back to the first time *you* read about it, and be honest. Did you guess, then, that it was gospel truth?

We soon discovered our mistake. Reaction to the yarn was swift and startling. The *Banner* had been on the streets less than an hour when the phones began to ring.

That, in itself, was not unusual. Any out-of-the-ordinary story brings its quota of cranks crawling forth from the woodwork. Discount the confirmation of the local amateur observer who called in to verify Abramson's observation. His possibly lucid report was overshadowed by the equally sincere, but considerably less credible, reports of a dozen naked-eye "witnesses" who also averred to have seen a gigantic birdlike creature soaring across the heavens during the night. Half of these described the markings of the bird; one even claimed to have heard its mating call.

Two erstwhile Civilian Defense aircraft spotters called to identify the object variously, but with equal assurance, as a B-29 and a Russian superjet. One member of the Audubon Society identified the bird as a ruby-throated nuthatch which, he suggested, must have flown in front of the telescope just as the camera clicked. An itinerant preacher of an obscure cult marched into our office to inform us with a savage delight that this was the veritable bird foretold in the Book of Revelations, and that the end of the world could now be expected momentarily, if not sooner.

These were the lunatic fringe. What *was* unusual was that all the calls which flooded our office during the next twenty-four hours were not made by screwballs and fanatics. Some were of great importance, not only to their instigators but to the scientific world, to mankind in general.

We had fed a short take to the A.P. To our astonishment, from that syndicate we received an immediate demand for follow-up material, including copies of Abramson's pix. The national picture magazines were even more on their toes; they flew their own boys to town and had contacted Abramson for a second story before we wised up to the fact that we had broken the number-one sensation of the year.

Meanwhile, and most important of all, astronomers elsewhere in the world set their big eyes for the arena of the thing first spotted by Dr. Abramson. And within twenty-four hours, to the stunned dismay of all who, like Smitty and myself, had seen it as a terrific joke, verifications were forthcoming from every observatory that enjoyed good viewing conditions. What's more, mathematicians verified Dr. Abramson's estimates as to the thing's speed and trajectory. The bird, estimated to be larger in size than any solar planet, was conceded to be somewhere in the vicinity of Pluto—and approaching our sun at a speed of 145,000,000 miles per day!

By the end of the first week, the bird was visible through any fair-sized telescope. The story snowballed, and in its rolling picked up all the oddments lying in its path. A character who introduced himself as a member of the Fortean Society—whatever *that* is—came to the office armed with a thick volume in which he pointed out to us a dozen paragraphs purporting to prove that similar dark objects had been seen in the skies above various parts of the world over a period of several hundred years.

The central council of the P.T.A. issued a plaintive statement deploring scare-journalism and its evil effects on the youth of our nation. The Daughters of the American Revolution passed a resolution branding the strange image a new secret weapon of Uncle Joe's lads, and urging that immediate steps—undefined but drastic—be taken by the authorities. Locally, a special committee of the ministers' association called to advise us that the story we had originated tended to undermine the religious faith of the community; they demanded that we print a full explanation and retraction of the hoax in the earliest possible edition—which was, by now, a complete impossibility. Before the end of the second week, the black dot in the skies could be viewed with binoculars of moderate power.

By the middle of the third week it had reached the stage of naked-eye visibility. Crowds gathered in the streets when this became known, and those with good eyesight professed to be able to discern the rhythmic rise and fall of those tremendous wings now familiar to all because of the scores of photographs which, by this time, had appeared in every newspaper and magazine of any importance.

The cadenced beating of those monstrous wings was but one of the many inexplicable—or at least unexplained—mysteries about the creature from beyond. Vainly a few diehard physicists pointed out that wings were of no propulsive help in airless void, that alate flight is possible only where there

are wind currents to lift and carry. The thing flew. And whether its gigantic pinions beat, as some men thought, on an interstellar atmosphere unguessed by earthly science, or whether they stroked against beams of light or quantum bundles, as others contended, these were meaningless quibbles in the face of that one stark, incontrovertible fact: the thing flew.

With the dawning of the fourth week, the thing from outer space reached Jupiter and dwarfed it—an ominous black interloper equal in size to any cosmic neighbor which man had ever seen. . . .

I sat alone with Abramson in his office. Abramson was tired. Tired and, I think, a little ill. His smile was not a success; nor had his words their hoped-for jauntiness.

"Well, I got what I wanted, Flaherty," he admitted. "I wanted swift action, and I got it. Though what good it is, I don't know. The world recognizes its danger now, and is helpless to do anything about it."

"It has hurdled the asteroids," I said. "Now it's approaching Mars, and it's still moving sunward. Everyone is asking, though, why doesn't its presence within the system raise merry hob with celestial mechanics? By all known laws, it should have thrown everything out of balance. A creature of that size, with its gravitational attraction—"

"You're still thinking in old terms, my boy. Now we are confronted with something strange and new. Who knows what laws may govern the Bird of Time?"

"The Bird," I repeated, "of Time? I seem to have heard the phrase."

"Of course." He quoted moodily, " 'The Bird of Time has but a little way to fly—and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing.' "

"The Rubáiyát?" I said.

"Yes. Omar was an astronomer, you know, as well as a poet. He must have known—or guessed—something of this." He gestured vaguely skyward. "Indeed, many of the ancients seem to have known something about it. I've been doing a lot of reading during these past weeks, Flaherty. It is amazing how many references there are in the old writings to a great bird of space—statements which until recently did not seem to be at all significant or important. But which now hold a greater and a graver meaning for us."

"Such as?"

"Culture myths," he said. "Legends. The records of a hundred vanished races. The Mayan myth of the space-swallow; the Toltec quetzlcoatl; the Russian fire-bird."

"We don't know yet," I pointed out, "that it *is* a bird."

He shrugged.

"A bird, a giant mammal, a pterodactyl, some similar creature on a cosmic scale: but what does it matter? Perhaps it is a life form foreign to anything we know, something we can name only in earthly terms, describe by earthly analogies. The ancients called it a bird. The Phoenicians worshiped the 'bird that was, and is again to be.' The Persians wrote of the fabulous roc; there is an Aramaic legend of the giant bird that rules—and spawns—the worlds."

"Spawns the worlds?"

"Why else should it be coming?" he inquired. "Does its great size mean nothing to you?" He stared at me thoughtfully for a moment. Then: "Flaherty," he asked strangely, "what *is* the earth?"

"Why," I replied, "the world we live on. A planet."

"Yes. But what is a planet?"

"A unit of the solar system. A part of the sun's family."

"Do you *know* that? Or are you merely parroting the things you were taught in school?"

"The latter, of course. But what else could it be?"

"The earth could be," he answered reluctantly, "no part of the sun's family at all. Many theories have been devised, Flaherty, to explain earth's place in this tiny segment of the universe which we call the solar system. None of them are provably inaccurate. But, on the other hand, none of them are demonstrably true.

"There is the nebular hypothesis, the theory that earth and its sister planets were born of a contracting sun. Were, in fact, small globules of solar matter left to cool in orbits deserted by their condensing parent.

"The planetesimal and tidal theories each are based on the assumption that unfathomable eons ago another sun by-passed our own, and that the planets are the offspring of that ancient flaming rendezvous in space.

"Each of these theories has its proponents and its opponents; each has its verifications and its denials. None can be quite refuted or wholly proven.

"But"—he stirred restlessly—"there is another possibility which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been expounded. Yet it is equally valid with any I have mentioned, and in the light of that which we now know, it seems to me more likely than any. It is that earth and its sister planets have nothing whatsoever to do with the sun. That they are not, nor ever were, mere members of its family. That the sun in our skies is simply a convenience."

"A convenience?" I frowned. "Convenience for *what?*"

"For the bird," said Abramson unhappily. "For the great bird which is our parent. Flaherty, can you not conceive that our sun may be a cosmic incubator? And that the world on which we live may be, merely—an egg?"

I stared at him wildly. "An egg!" I cried. "Dr. Abramson, you're joking."

"You think so? You can look at the pictures, read the stories in the magazines, see the approaching bird with your naked eye, and still think there exists anything more incredible than that which has now befallen us?"

"But an *egg!* Eggs are egg-shaped. Ovoid."

"The eggs of some birds are ovoid. But those of the plover are pear-shaped, those of the sand-grouse cylindrical, those of the grebe biconical. There are eggs shaped like spindles and spears. The eggs of owls, and of mammals, are generally spheroid. As is the earth."

"But eggs have shells!"

"As does our earth. Earth's crust is but forty miles thick—a layer for a body of its size comparable in every respect to the shell of an egg. Moreover, it is a *smooth* shell. Earth's greatest height is Mount Everest, some thirty thousand feet; its greatest depth is Swire Deep in the Pacific, but thirty-five thousand—a maximum variation of about twelve miles. Why, to feel these irregularities on a twelve-inch model of the earth you would need the delicate fingers of the blind, for the greatest height protrudes but the hundred and twentieth part of an inch, and the lowest depth is but the hundredth part of an inch below its surface."

"Still, you can't be right," I argued desperately. "You've overlooked the most important fact. Eggs hold life! Eggs contain the fledglings of the creature that spawned them. Eggs crack open and—"

I stopped abruptly. Abramson nodded, creaking back and forth in his ancient swivel chair, the creaking a monotonous rhythm to his nodding. There was sadness in his eyes and in his voice.

"Even so," he said wearily. "Even so. . . ."

So that was the second great story that I broke. I was still fool enough to get something of a bang out of it at the time; I don't feel the same way about it now. But, then, I don't feel the same about anything any more. I guess you can understand that. The coming of the bird was such a big thing, such a truly big thing, that it dwindled into insignificance all the things we used to consider great, important, world-shaking.

World-shaking!

I'll make it brief. There's so little purpose to my telling of this story.

But there may be in it a fact here and there you don't know. And I've got to do something—anything—to keep myself from thinking.

You remember that grim fourth week, and the steady approach of the bird. We had settled for calling it that by then. We were not sure if it were bird or winged beast, but men think—and give names to things—in terms of more familiar objects. And that slim black shape with its tremendous wings, its taloned legs and long, cruel, curving beak looked more like a bird than an animal.

Beside, there was Abramson's world-egg theory to be considered. The people heard this, doubted it with a furious hope—but feared it might be true. Men in high positions asked what could be done. They sent for Abramson, and he advised them. He could be wrong, he acknowledged. But if he were right, there was only one hope for salvation. The life within Earth must be stilled.

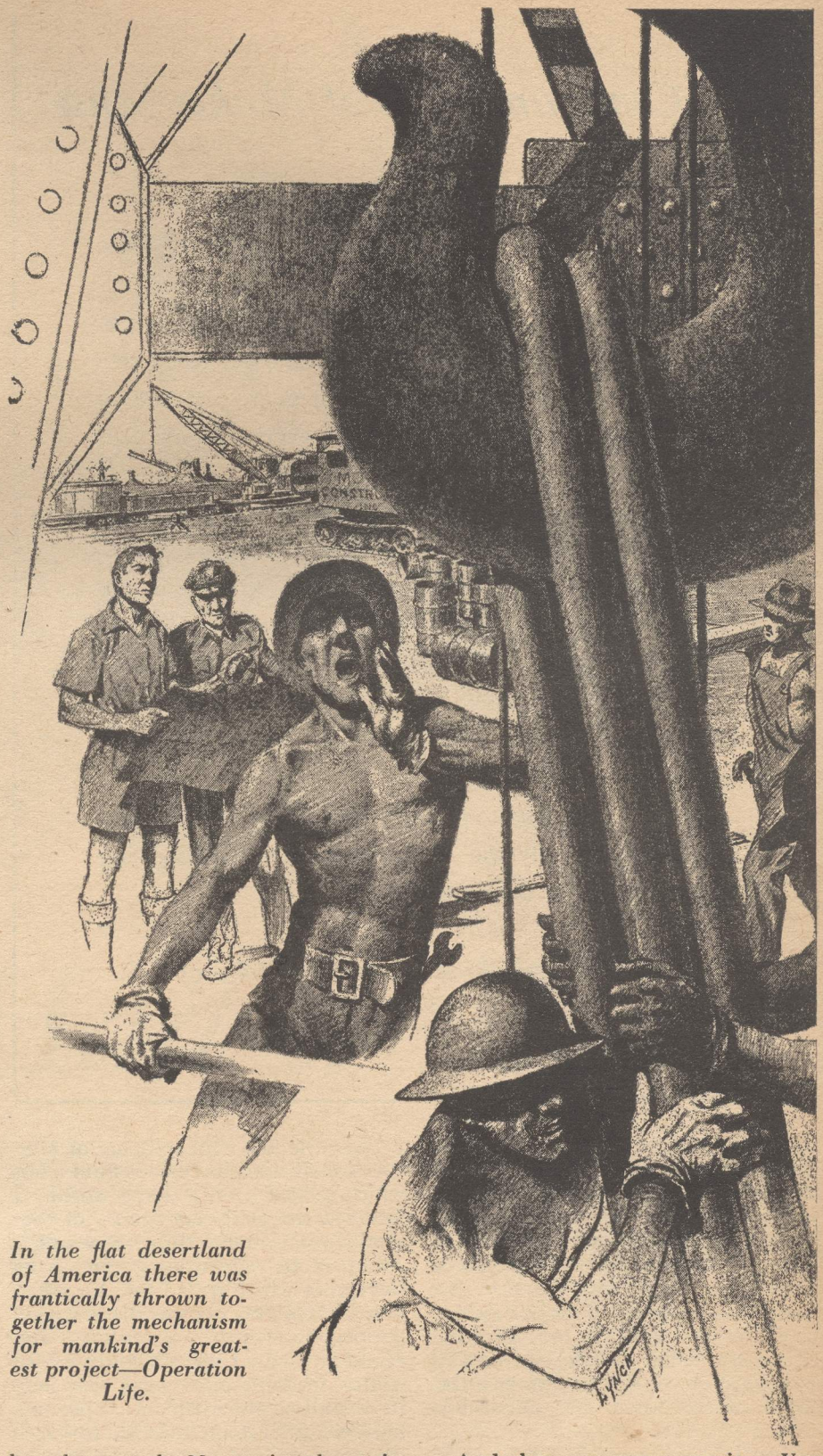
"I believe," he told a special emergency committee appointed by the President, "the bird has come to hatch the brood of young it deposited God knows how many centuries ago about that incubating warmth which is our sun. Its wisdom or its instinct tells it that the time of emergence is now; it has come to help its fledglings shed their shells.

"But we know that mother birds, alone and unaided, do not hatch their young. They will aid a struggling chick to crack its shell, but they never begin the liberating action. And with an uncanny second sense, they seem to know which eggs have failed to develop life within them; such eggs they never disturb.

"Therein, gentlemen, lies our only hope. The shell of Earth is forty miles in thickness. We have our engineers and technicians; we have the atomic bomb. If mankind is to live, the host to which we are but parasites must die. That is my only solution. I leave the rest to you."

He left them, still wrangling, in Washington, and returned home. He saw little hope, he told me the next day, of their reaching any firm decision in sufficient time to act. Abramson, I think, had already resigned himself to the inevitable, had with a wan grimace surrendered mankind to its fate. He said, once, that bureaucracy had achieved its ultimate destiny. It had throttled itself to death with its own red tape.

And still the bird moved sunward. On the twenty-eighth day it made its nearest approach to Earth, and passed us by. I don't know—nor can the scientists explain—why our globe was not shattered by the gravitational attraction of that gigantic mass. Perhaps because the Newtonian theory is, after all, simply a *theory,* and has no actuality in real existence. I don't know. If there were time, it would be good to study, and to learn the truth about such things. At any rate, we suffered very little from its nearness—all things considered. There were high tides and mighty winds; those sections of earth subject to earthquakes suffered some mild temblors. But that is all.



In the flat desertland of America there was frantically thrown together the mechanism for mankind's greatest project—Operation Life.

And then we won a respite. You remember how the bird paused in its headlong flight to hover for two full days around that tiniest of the solar planets—the one we call Mercury. Briefly, as if searching for something, it flew in a wide circle in an orbit between Mercury and the sun.

Abramson believed it was looking for something, for something it could not find because it was no longer there. Astronomers believed, said

Abramson, that at one time there had been another planet circling between Mercury and the sun. Watchers of the sky had seen this as late as the Eighteenth Century, and had called it Vulcan. Vulcan had disappeared, perhaps had fallen into the sun. So thought Abramson. And so, apparently, the bird decided, too, for after a fruitless search it winged its way outward from the sun to approach the closest of its brood still remaining intact.

Must I remind you of that dreadful day? I think not. No man alive will ever forget what he saw then. The bird approaching Mercury, pausing to hover motionless above a planet which seemed a mote beneath the umbra of those massive wings. Men in the streets saw this. I saw more, for I stood beside Abramson in the University observatory, watching that scene with the aid of one of his telescopes.

I saw the first thin splitting of Mercury's shell, and the curious fluid ichor which seeped from a dying world. I watched the grisly emergence of that small, wet, scrawny thing—raw simulacrum of its monstrous parent—from the egg in which it had lain for whatever incalculable era was the gestation period of a creature vast as space and as old as time. I saw the mother bird stretch forth its giant beak and help its fledgling rid itself of a peeling, needless shell; stood horrified to watch the younger bird emerge and flap its new, uncertain wings, drying them in the burning rays of the star which had been its incubator.

And I saw the shredded remnants of a world spiral into the sun which was its pyre. . . .

It was then, at last, that mankind woke to action. The doubters were convinced at last, those who had argued against the "needless expense" and folly of Abramson's plan were finally silenced. Forgotten now were selfishness and greed, politics and interdepartmental strife. The world they infested trembled on the brink of doom—and a race of vermin battled for its life.

In the flat desertland of America there was frantically thrown together the mechanism for mankind's greatest project—Operation Life. To this desert flew the miners, the construction engineers, the nuclear physicists, the men skilled in deep-drilling operations. There they began their task, working night and day with a speed which heretofore had been called impossible. There they are working now, this minute, as I write, fighting desperately against each passing second of time, striving with every means and method they know to reach and destroy, before the bird comes, the life within our earth.

A week ago the bird moved on to Venus. Throughout these seven days we have watched its progress there. We cannot see much through the eternal veil of mist which surrounds our sister planet, so we do not know what has for so gratefully long a time occupied the bird. Whatever it is, we are thankful for it. We wait and watch. And as we watch, we work. And as we work, we pray. . . .

And so there is no real ending to this story. As I have said before, I don't know why I'm bothering to write it. The answer is not ready to be given. If we succeed, there will be ample time to tell the story properly—the whole great story, fully documented, of the battle being waged on the hot Arizona sands. And if we fail—well, then there will be no reason for this writing. There will be none to read it.

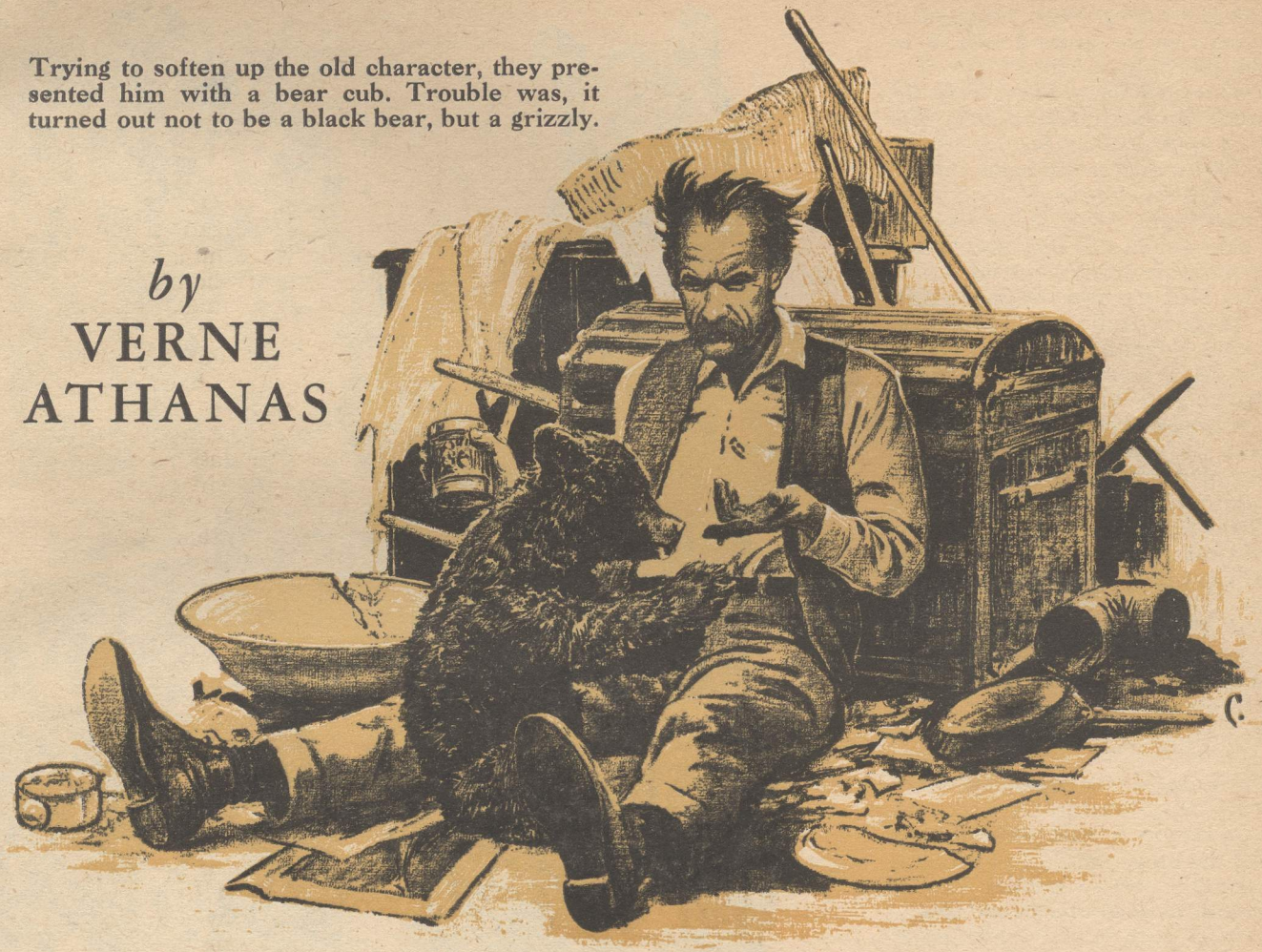
THE bird is not the greatest of our fears. If when it comes from Venus it finds here a quiet, lifeless, unresponsive shell, it will move outward—we believe and pray—to Mars, then Jupiter, and thence beyond.

That is the end we hope to bring about. Soon, now, our probing needles will penetrate Earth's shell, will dip beneath the crust and into the tegument of that horror which sleeps within us. But we have another more tormenting fear. It is that before the mother bird approaches us, the fledgling may awake and seek to gain its freedom from the shell encasing it. If this should happen, Abramson has warned, our work must then proceed at lightning speed. For let that fledgling once begin to knock, then it must die—or all mankind must die.

That is the other reason why I write. To keep from thinking thoughts I dare not think. Because—

Because early this morning, Earth began to knock. . . .

Trying to soften up the old character, they presented him with a bear cub. Trouble was, it turned out not to be a black bear, but a grizzly.



by
VERNE
ATHANAS

Lije Had a Bear

LIJE CORBERRY hunted varmints sometimes, and prospected sometimes; and he lived alone and liked it. Some people said that he liked living alone only because he had never been able to figure out how to rid himself of his own presence, but that may not have been true. He was, however, known far and wide as a crotchety, snappish, ornery old man.

His home was a small, rough, dilapidated—and to Lije's taste comfortable—little pole-and-log shack. Within its one room, Lije cooked his meals, ate, slept, and washed his shirts, skinned out his varmints, and took his ease, on cold nights, with his wool-socked gnarled old feet inside the oven, and his villainous charred pipe puffing blue smoke.

As one of the boys said afterward: "It was jist about the only thing to do. Somebody, sooner or later, was goin' to give Lije somethin', and we done it. We give him a bear."

Of course, it wouldn't do to come right out and give Lije a bear, or anything else, as far as that goes. The giving of gifts is usually conducted with some ceremony, but Lije wasn't the kind that you walked up to and handed something. That is, Lije wasn't the kind you walked up to, saying, "Here. I brung you somethin'," and then stand back waiting for him to beam and protest: "Oh, you really shouldn't have."

Lije would never say such a thing. He'd be more likely to look at you fiercely from under his scraggly gray eyebrows and demand: "What t'hell you butterin' me up fer?"

So all in all, it was decided that the gift should be anonymous, given without ceremony, and without any trimmings. Besides, nobody ever figured out how to do a cub bear up in a fancy gift wrapping. Cub bears are likely to protest bitterly at being gift-wrapped; and a cub bear, fiercely protesting anything, is a thing to make strong men think twice. So the boys waited until they were sure that Lije was well clear of his shack, and they shoved open the door, dumped the young bear inside, and closed the door, going away afterward with that warm glow that comes to the human breast from an unselfish gift unselfishly given. As one of the boys virtuously remarked: "That little b'ar'll be a sight of comfort to an ol' man like him."

The sound of something splintering within the shack caused the speaker to glance over his shoulder, and he walked a little faster. Further sounds of breakage caused the group to walk more hurriedly; and though Lije was not in sight, by the time the group reached the edge of the timber around

the clearing, they were walking with considerable speed, some of them in fact touching the ground only at irregular intervals.

They waited there, huddled in the darkness of the timber, waiting for Lije to come back. He did, finally; and they waited with bated breath and cocked ears for the explosion they were sure would come. They waited—and waited—and still they waited, but no sound came from the shack.

They held a whispered conference. Jug Murphy said dolefully: "We shouldn't oughta done it. That ornery ol' polecat is jist like as not to skin that pore little bear alive and turn it loose to catch its death of cold. I think we pulled a hummer, boys."

Isaac McStrumfedder gulped noisily, and shifted his feet uneasily. Jug's word-picture was getting under Isaac's hide, and Isaac had a skin of cured mule-leather. He gulped again, and said hoarsely: "Let's go see, boys."

They sneaked in toward the shack quietly. Old Lije had lighted a lamp, for the one window showed a pale yellow glow. They sidled up, and peeked in, holding their collective breaths.

The place was a shambles. The stovepipe was down in three sections, one cocked at a vainglorious angle across the stove top, still dribbling soot onto the open oven door. Canned goods and sacks and boxes and sundry other oddments of Lije's personal effects were strewn from hell to breakfast—for such is the nature of bear cubs when penned in unfamiliar surroundings. But of Lije, and the bear cub, there was no sign. Ike McStrumfedder gulped again—audibly.

Then Jug Murphy said in an awe-stricken voice: "By my sainted maiden aunt Matilda, would you look at that!"

They crowded closer, and saw what Jug Murphy saw.

LIJE CORBERRY sat spraddle-legged amidst the jumble of destruction. Between his knees the bear cub was hunkered, forepaws folded piously across its hairy little chest. And Lije was dipping a finger in a can of larrup—blackstrap molasses—and holding it out. The cub's pink tongue described a flashing circle, and the finger was innocent of molasses. He grunted pleasurably, did the cub, and grinned widely, showing his baby teeth, and then the thing occurred that made history in Rockpine County.

For the first time in the memory of man, Lije Corberry smiled. A seam split in his leathery old face, and his yellowed teeth showed. More than that, a series of strange grunts were coming from Lije's scrawny old chest. It took a while for them to identify the sound. Lije was laughing. For the first time in forty-seven years—and some of them had known him that long—Lije Corberry was laughing.

Jug Murphy staggered back into the arms of his friends. "Take me home," he said. "Take me home and lay me down. Mother, I've come home to die. I've seen it all."

But Jug hadn't seen it all, by any means. Probably nothing in the history of Rockpine County ever had such far-flung repercussions as had the giving of a cub bear to Lije Corberry.

In the first place, the boys had been under the impression that they had given Lije a common black bear cub, known to the naturalists as *Euarctos americanus,* though not a man among them could have pronounced it. It became obvious to even the dumbest of them before the year was out, however, that what they had given Lije was not *Euarctos americanus* but *Ursus horribilis,* which is the naturalist's six-bit title for a grizzly bear.

And Lije named him Oscar.

Now from here on, the story gets a little unbelievable, but Jug Murphy and Isaac McStrumfedder will swear on a stack of Bibles the height of Murphy's bar that every syllable of it it true.

To begin with, a grizzly-bear cub is not much bigger than a kitten at birth. But they do grow most amazing. And Oscar had Lije to stuff him with larrup and sourdough biscuits and baked beans. In his third year, Oscar weighed in at just a trifle under half a ton.

Then, some people insist that all the bears were in hibernation when the brains were passed out. Lije Corberry would have fought the man with

Isaac was acting most peculiarly—his mouth open, a shaking hand pointing.

his fists who said so. A waste of time, because all he would have had to do was invite the man to watch Oscar in action. Oscar was a smart bear.

He never, after his first month with Lije, ever touched anything in the shack again. But he knew to the minute when meal-time was, and he'd go over to the bunk, drag an empty dynamite box out, shove it over to the table, and climb up on it, being careful not to put his elbows on the table, for Lije had taught him, with a short chunk of stove wood, that it was bad manners to hook your elbows over the table.

He ate out of a plate, just as Lije did, only his plate was cleaner when he was done. Then one day the dynamite box collapsed with a terrific crash, and Lije suddenly realized that Oscar was growing up. The distinctive hump that marks a grizzly was coming between his shoulder-blades, and his little pugged cub nose was beginning to spread into a formidable muzzle and powerful jaw. He walked with a sort of a rolling slouch, with his keg-sized head swinging forth and back while his little eyes took in the trail.

He still walked the rounds of Lije's trap-line with him, but for some reason the catch was falling off. Lije woke up to the fact one day that Oscar was responsible. Wherever he walked, he left bear smell, and while Lije didn't think it was too bad a smell, all the varmints in the woods seemed to consider the trap-line out of bounds, nowadays. Lije watched a little more closely after that, and he noticed that when Oscar strolled out of the shack of a morning and vented a gruff *woof!* which was just Oscar's way of saying good morning to a nice day, even the dickey-birds fled for the tall uncut, screaming bloody murder. So Lije sighed, and gave up the trap-line. He got out his prospecting tools, and as he scraped the rust from them he spoke to Oscar.

"Oscar, m'boy," he said, "we're goin' to have to go out and find us a little pocket. They's no pelts on the boards, and no bounty money comin' in. Betwixt yore appetite, and the varmints you skeer away, we ain't hardly got eatin' money."

Oscar cocked his head to one side and made a sound in his chest like a hive of bees swarming. That was his sound of agreement. He usually agreed with anything that Lije said.

But before they went prospecting, Lije decided to drop in on the boys at Halfway to get a drink and a few possibles for his grub sack. Halfway wasn't much. It was a stage stop, and Jug Murphy had a sort of tavern where you could get a meal or a drink or both, and he had a couple of rooms upstairs where a beat-down stage passenger could grab a little sleep. Isaac McStrumfedder was the stage company agent, hostler, barn cleaner and local wit.

So when Lije drifted in to Murphy's bar and hooked a heel on the pine scantling footrail, and an elbow on the bar, Isaac sniffed. He remarked to Jug Murphy: "You smell something?"

Jug sniffed too. "Somethin' jist smells like a bear, is all," he said. Then he noticed Lije, with a great, obvious start of surprise. "Why, Lije!" he said. "Who drug you in?"

Lije gave him a grunt and held up one finger. Jug poured a shot. Lije swallowed it, grunted dryly, set the shot glass back and raised his finger again.

"S'matter?" inquired Jug. "B'ar got yer tongue?"

"Haw!" snorted Lije. "Haw!"

ISAAC MCSTRUMFEDDER seemed to have something wrong with him. He was acting most peculiarly—he was staring at Lije, and his mouth was open, and he was backing slowly away, and one shaking hand was coming up in a confused pointing gesture.

It seemed to be infectious. Jug Murphy suddenly backed into the back bar, with an accompaniment of jingling bottles, and his mouth was making gasping fishy motions, though he said nothing audible.

Lije looked at him, and then at Isaac, and then he glanced casually over his own shoulder.

"Why, hello, Oscar," he said. Oscar *woofed* gently, and reared up against the bar, towering above Lije by a head and a little more. He looked at Lije closely, then hooked his elbows on the bar in a careful imitation of Lije, planted a huge rear paw on the scantling footrail, and buzzed amiably.

Lije grinned faintly, grunted, raised one finger to Jug Murphy, and then jerked his thumb at Oscar. Jug, moving with the precise care of a sleepwalker, set a shot glass before Oscar, poured with a triple nervous clink of bottle against glass, and retreated in haste.

Oscar sniffed the tiny glass, thrust out his tongue, and tasted. Then his great barrel of a head snapped up in startled amaze, and he grunted, a great gusty grunt that rattled the bottles on the back bar. He slapped, and the glass sailed across the room, whistling like a shell, little amber droplets spinning in its wake until the glass exploded against the far end wall of the room.

"Ha!" snorted Lije gleefully. "You can't fool a bear, Jug. He knows that varnish-remover ain't fit to drink."

Jug gulped. He stared in fascination at Oscar and then at Lije. He gulped again.

"Give 'im a beer,' said Lije.

Jug drew one, and slid the foam-collared schooner before Oscar as if it were full of scorpions. Oscar sniffed. He flicked out about a foot of tongue and tasted. Then he thrust his muzzle into the schooner and inhaled, a great gusty inhalation, and the collar of foam was suddenly a few lonesome bubbles huddled in the bottom of the glass. He burped lustily and smiled widely—a smile that showed all his fine white teeth, some of them as long and thick as a man's finger.

Lije demanded: "What do we owe you?"

Jug Murphy's lips moved for some time before anything audible came out.

"My treat," he said. "I mean—I'm eyeing – eh – on the souse – *house!* – dammit."

Lije thanked him kindly, and turned to leave. He went out, with Oscar slouching at his rolling stride beside him, and Oscar stopped at the door. He turned his head to Jug, and smiled again—again showing all his teeth—burped gently, and was gone. Jug took a huge drink of his own bar whisky, a thing he'd never have done in his right mind, and leaned against his bar. He and Isaac carefully refrained from looking at each other.

BOTH Lije and Oscar enjoyed their prospecting trip. Oscar displayed a positive talent for fishing, though some purists might consider his methods unethical. He would wade into a likely pool, stamping his great clawed feet and stirring up such a fuss that all the fish in the pool straightway hit out for the other side of the world. When they came to the far bank, with Oscar trampling at their finny heels, they huddled in shocked fright—which was a mistake. For Oscar sailed in with both forepaws; every cuff fetched some five gallons of water and a mercifully stunned fish out onto the bank where Lije garnered them, humming a little tune he remembered from his youth—something about bringing in the sheaves.

At night, full of fish and sourdough biscuits, they lay down to sleep; Lije rolled in a blanket and huddled back-to-back with Oscar, who gave off as much radiant heat as an air-tight stove with hair on it. And every day Lije pecked and prodded around in likely spots for gold.

Oscar took little interest in such goings-on. He prospected the bushes for berries, snooped under flat rocks for beetles and grubs, and being a very sensible bear, curled up in the sun and slept, whenever these other pursuits bored him.

He was awakened from his honest slumbers by a whooping yell from Lije. Oscar grunted, lumbered to his feet, and moseyed down to where Lije was working. To all intents and purposes, Lije had gone crazy. He was capering around on a little sandbar in the creek, splashing half the time in ankle-deep water, prancing to and fro and whooping like a drunken Comanche. At intervals he would dig his big goldpan into the water at his feet and fling the water high in the air, let out an ungodly yell as it fell back on him, and prance some more.

"We're rich, Oscar," Lije shouted. "We're filthy, stinking rich!" He flung another pan of water high in the air and let it fall on his grizzled head. Oscar *woofed* gently.

AN hour later, Lije was no longer capering. He was swearing in a low bitter monotone, and he was scrabbling frantically in the bedrock pocket with his shovel. He was no longer filthy rich. That was all it had been —a pocket. It netted him perhaps

Comanche whoops began to ring along the creek again. "We're rich," he shouted. "We're filthy, stinking rich!"

twenty-five ounces, which wasn't to be sneezed at, with gold at sixteen dollars an ounce, but he was a long ways from being rich.

Oscar soon tired of watching this grim labor, yawned, and wandered off, with no more than a sniff at the heap of black sand and glittering yellow that Lije had piled on a square of buckskin.

He wasn't really hungry, but he picked up a few slab rocks to see what might be under them in the form of appetizers, and garnered a few spicy beetles and one fine taste of red ants.

A chipmunk popped up on a rock and sassed him vigorously. He wouldn't have made a good bite for Oscar, and Oscar wasn't even in good appetite, but he was in need of diversion, and he took off after the chipmunk with a ferocious growl, and the little varmint promptly skittered into a tiny hole under the rock.

Oscar hooked his left forepaw under the lip of the rock and yanked. Though the rock was the size of a large kitchen range, and pretty solidly bedded, Oscar flipped it aside with no more than a small grunt and began to dig.

Oscar was a pretty good digger. Inside five minutes, a buggy could have been backed into the hole he made; rock and dirt and such sundry roots as were in the way funneled out behind him in a spouting stream. Every few seconds he would pause and snuff at the tiny hole of the chipmunk, who still preceded him. It was a fine noise, that snuff, like firing a large gun in a small room, and the chipmunk squeaked in horrified terror each time, and dug as if all the fiends of hell were riding his striped toothpick of a tail.

THE chipmunk wasn't as good a digger as Oscar, but he had to displace a lot less dirt to get through, so he was able to hold his own pretty well. And thus matters stood when Lije got tired of scrabbling and cussing and went in search of Oscar.

He wasn't hard to find. His explosive snuffs echoed and volleyed down the rock banks of the creek bed, though by the time Lije came up, a chunk of Oscar's posterior no larger than a hairy dinner plate was all that was exposed to view, but the fountain of rocks, dirt and roots still arched into the air and fell pattering onto the sizable pile of tailings heaped on the slope.

Lije leaped back as a fist-sized rock whistled by, and shouted. Oscar paid no heed, even if he heard it. Lije swore, and looked around for a handy stick. He had never struck Oscar since he had come of an age of reason, but he figured to get Oscar's attention with a few jabs of the stick. Then something in the pile of tailings caught his eye, and he dropped to his knees to see better—and then the Comanche whoops began to ring along the creek again.

"We're rich," he shouted. "We're filthy, stinking rich!"

WELL, there's been several stories since. Some of them got it that Oscar brought the first nugget to Lije between his teeth. Some say Lije was a damn' liar from start to finish. But you talk to Jug Murphy or Isaac McStrumfedder.

They'll tell you that Lije did get stinking rich. He stayed rich for almost a year. But he got mixed up with the wrong crowd, and when he was done, he had a few bonds and such, that paid him a few hundred a year, but he wasn't rich any more.

Lije went back to his old shack. He hunted varmints sometimes, and prospected sometimes, and was known far and wide as a crotchety, snappish, ornery old man. But when strangers scoffed about Oscar, Jug or Isaac would say serenely: "Jist hang around awhile, stranger."

And if the stranger did hang around until about three o'clock in the afternoon, he'd look at the door, and his hair would raise his hat just a little.

For a large grizzly bear would come in, almost half a ton of bear, and he'd rear up to the bar and hook an elbow over it, and plant one rear paw on the rail. Jug would set out a schooner of beer, the bear would inhale, and that was that.

After he burped gently, Jug would hand him a pretzel, and make a mark in the little book behind the bar.

Then the bear would leave, burping politely. Around his neck, if you looked for it, you'd see a collar. As wide and thick as an Army garrison belt it was, and glinting letters on it spelled out OSCAR.

Very few of them ever had the nerve to examine it closely enough to discover that those letters were made out of solid gold.

SPORT SPURTS

UPON being complimented by police for his flying tackle of a holdup man, Howard Brown, Detroit Lions guard, replied: "That was just a plain tackle. Flying tackles are illegal. I never make 'em."

* * *

In Calcutta, India, basketball-players go shirtless, and have charcoal numbers on their backs.

* * *

In 1940, John V. Sigmund swam down the Mississippi from St. Louis to Caruthersville, a distance of 292 miles, for the longest swim on record.

* * *

Of 112 sportswriters polled in a pre-season survey, only one—Ed Friel, of the Newark Evening News—picked both the Yankees and Dodgers to win last year's pennants.

* * *

Only six ball-players in the history of the game have hit fifty or more home runs in a season—Ruth, Kiner, Mize, Foxx, Greenberg, Hack Wilson.

Jockey Lester Piggott, who recently won a race at Haycock Park, London, at the age of twelve had a grandfather, Tom Cannon, who won a race at the age of nine.

* * *

Pepper Martin, who was too old for the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team a decade ago, was last season—at 44—a place-kicking specialist with the Brooklyn football Dodgers.

* * *

Satchel Paige, the ancient Cleveland hurler, once struck out Rogers Hornsby five times in a single game.

* * *

Babe Ruth got only $600 a season when he first signed with Baltimore.

* * *

All track meets in Australia are run on grass.

* * *

The highest number of runs ever scored in a major-league game was the 26 to 23 licking the Cubs pasted on the Phillies in 1922.

—by Harold Helfer

AN OLD-TIME MYSTERY BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE RHEBAVILLE MURDER."

by MERLE CONSTINER

The Affair

RAIN lashed at the basement shop as Mr. Arlie sat behind his counter, compounding stomachic pills. Through the window he could see a patch of deserted cobbles, and the brick face of the tavern across the street, the Iron Sparrow. In compounding stomachic pills Mr. Arlie used an English recipe—powdered rhubarb, gentian, oil of mint; and his patients much favored them over those of his predecessor. The stomachic pills of Mr. Arlie's predecessor had been composed simply of red pepper and mucilage. Outside, the Atlantic gale wrenched at the swinging shopsign: JNO. ARLIE—PHARMACIST & PHLEBOTOMIST—SPICES & CASTILE SOAP. Thunder cracked, and young Beach Kirkendall stumbled in out of the downpour, blond, husky, tense. He said: "I want some blood let, Mr. Arlie. I want you to draw about forty ounces."

Mr. Arlie laid down his spatula. "Forty ounces," he said amiably, "would float the *Constitution*."

"I'm a sick man," Kirkendall said. "I'm in a bad way."

Casually, Mr. Arlie nodded. For months, now, the whole town had known young Kirkendall was in a bad way. He was in love with a married woman.

"Mayhap I'm working too hard. I'm going to pieces."

Again Mr. Arlie nodded. He set a basin and a clean towel on the counter by the sperm-oil lamp and Kirkendall bared his forearm.

The woman's name was Jenetta Chesney; and her husband, Blann, was notorious as a wife-beater. He'd been a wife-beater long before young Kirkendall, a master carpenter, had come to town and taken lodging with them. Two days of it, and Kirkendall had had four fights with Chesney, and had moved to the Iron Sparrow. Now when Mrs. Chesney and Kirkendall passed on the street they ignored each other. But everybody knew, and everybody felt sorry for them.

"I'll let a pint," Mr. Arlie decided.

He slid the basin under the young man's arm and punctured the vein within the bend of his elbow with a sharp lancet. Attentively he watched the blood accumulate; like his fellow-phlebotomists, Mr. Arlie held bloodletting to be very beneficial indeed. After a bit he stopped the flow with an olive-oil plaster. "Two shillings," he said.

It was while Kirkendall was donning his jacket that they noticed the pool of water on the flagstone floor, seeping beneath the shop door and gathering in the center of the room.

"Pfah!" Mr. Arlie exclaimed in annoyance. "An obstruction in the gutter!" It was an old story to him: a big rain, refuse in the gutter, and a puddle on his shop floor.

He got his garden rake from the storeroom, put on his battered beaver, and they went out the door and up the steps into the gale.

That was how they found the body of Blann Chesney—crumpled in the gutter, gathering backwater.

Thus did the long turbulent night begin.

Young Kirkendall loped to the Sparrow for help. Almost instantly a little group of men poured from the inn door at a half run, led by spidery Judge Quance, carrying a cut-glass bar lamp. The rain, blowing now in

at the Iron Sparrow

formless sheets, pounded the lamp from his hand and smashed it against the pavement. A great hallooing set up, and storm lanterns were brought. Mr. Arlie—because of his prestige and wisdom—found himself in charge.

"I must have passed him in the storm," Beach Kirkendall said. "I must have passed within a yard of him!"

A lanternlight examination of the body and vicinity disclosed some surprising things. The pistol ball which had killed Chesney had entered beneath his chin and had ranged upward, giving the impression that he had been slain by a dwarf. A short riding-crop lay beneath Chesney's thigh, the same riding-crop which had earned him his brutal reputation.

The pistol itself was found ten feet beyond the body, in the entryway of a bakershop. Chesney's own pistol! A murmur went up when it was found. It was a large weapon, and freakish in that it had a spring-controlled dirk, or bayonet, attached to its muzzle. It had been purchased in a Government warehouse in Baltimore, and Chesney had been very proud of it. It had been fired, and there was blood on the dirk and in the entryway.

Mr. Arlie said pensively: "Very interesting. And very satisfying."

The drumming roar of the rain wiped out his words.

He gave a sign with his hand, and the body was carried across the cobbles and into the tavern.

The Iron Sparrow had long been a vital center for the town's activity. Now, in 1827, it was well over a hundred years old. Upstairs under its

sloping roof were four snug bedrooms. Downstairs were two parlors, a sitting-room for travelers, a kitchen, and a commodious room at the foot of the backstairs, a home within a home, wherein the chubby landlord, Mr. Ripple, lived with his wisp of a wife and three roly-poly children. Chesney's body was placed on a day bed in the travelers' sitting-room. A further examination was made of it, but nothing new was learned.

Of the Sparrow's two bar parlors the long front room with its sanded floor was open to the public. At the end of the hall was the gentlemen's parlor.

A PANEL of inquiry, including among others Judge Quance, Mr. Ripple and Mr. Arlie, retired to the gentlemen's parlor to talk things over.

Young Kirkendall was delicately excluded from this assembly.

It was suggested, however, that he should remain within call.

Strictly speaking, Mr. Arlie was no gentleman. His father had been a bondboy, and Mr. Arlie had attained to his position by an inherent kindness, long hours of study, and much privation. Always when he stepped into the gentlemen's parlor he felt transported into another world. It was a low-ceilinged room with a huge fireplace and two tiny diamond-paned windows. There was a black-and-white braided rug on the bright indigo floor, and the walls were buttery and golden with waxed maple wainscoting. Judge Quance always felt at home here. And so did Mr. Ripple—because he owned it, and cleaned it. But Mr. Arlie, deep in his heart, considered it as a pleasant voyage into ancient history.

When they had seated themselves and Mr. Ripple had brought in Madeira, a gentleman named Steptoe said: "An hour ago I stood in the public bar with this Chesney. He had his crop under his arm. He was drinking himself into a state of rage. He was bent on thrashing his wife—he said so in so many words."

A gentleman named Vantule agreed. "The crop itself told the story. It's happened many times before."

Steptoe lighted a segar. "I wish I'd killed him myself. I propose we dismiss the whole thing."

"We can't dismiss the law," Judge Quance asserted coldly. "Watch your speech, gentlemen."

"You'll never get a conviction."

"I'll get a conviction for murder. These days of violence must stop."

"I don't think it's murder," Mr. Arlie declared. "I think it's self-defense."

They stared at him.

He wiped the moisture from the lenses of his square spectacles. "Chesney was killed in a struggle. He encountered someone, and drew his pistol, and stabbed or slashed this person with the dirk. He used the dirk because it was silent. A tussle followed, and the pistol fired. This explains the death wound under the chin. He was killed with his own pistol in a struggle, and that means someone killed him accidentally, in self-defense."

There was a long moment of silence. Steptoe said: "Then the man involved bears a stab wound?"

"Or a cut wound, yes."

The black windows by the fireplace flared green with lightning, outglowing the feeble lamp on the table—as though outside in the night giant emerald-burning candles were being whisked up and down the winding, narrow streets.

Jenetta glanced up. "Beach!" she said.

Judge Quance's cheeks were cupped and grim. "Very well. I'll grant you your struggle, Mr. Arlie. And a nice bit of reasoning it is. But how did it start? Who attacked whom? Was it self-defense, or is your suspect guilty of manslaughter?"

"I have no suspect," Mr. Arlie said.

"There's a law to take care of manslaughter," Judge Quance declared. "I'd like to talk to Kirkendall."

Landlord Ripple took a deep drink of his own Madeira. "You leave that boy alone," he said huskily. "He's a good boy, and a good townsman. He can't stand to be dragged into this. Mrs. Ripple says the women are perfectly certain that he's acted all along in honor; that Mrs. Chesney has acted in honor, that there's been nothing wrong between them. That's what the women say, and the women know. Mrs. Ripple says—"

"Call Kirkendall," Judge Quance ordered.

BEACH KIRKENDALL had been a militiaman. He entered the room in long military strides and stood gravely at attention just within the door. It so happened that both Vantule and Steptoe were old Army men. Added to their natural sympathies in the case, they were suddenly overcome with the young man's fine bearing. Vantule said: "I've seen the image of this boy on too many battlefields. I can have no part in this." He picked up his hat and stick and left the room. He saluted Kirkendall as he went through the door, and Kirkendall returned the salute. Steptoe remained, but he sat in fierce silence.

Judge Quance dipped pen into inkpot, pulled a sheet of foolscap before him, and waited.

"Beach," Mr. Arlie said. "We want to ask you a few friendly questions. First, have you talked this over with anybody?"

"No, sir. I don't talk much. When we found the body, I brought the word here to the inn, as you know. I said: 'Blann Chesney's been killed.' Since then, I mean after that, I've been upstairs in my bedroom."

"Did you come to my shop tonight?"

"Yes sir."

"At what time?"

"I don't own a watch."

"Neither do I," Mr. Arlie said affably. "But that's beside the point. You were unwell, and asked me to let some blood?"

"That's right. You let a pint."

"And how does bloodletting affect you?"

"I must have passed him in the storm," Beach Kirkendall said. "I must have passed within a yard of him!"

"It almost swoons me. I don't know why, but it does."

"That I can attest to," Mr. Arlie declared. "Now, here's what we want to know. Could you, after a sixteen-ounce venesection, have gone out into the beating rain, confronted muscular Blann Chesney, and in a violent life-and-death tussle wrested his pistol from him?"

Kirkendall hesitated.

Judge Quance frowned. "Answer the question, please."

A sudden glint came into Kirkendall's bland blue eyes. "Bloodletting drains me down to a child—a sick, weak child. I couldn't have wrested a pistol, or anything else, from Blann Chesney, the way you said."

"Would you swear to that?" Judge Quance asked.

Kirkendall said, "I would indeed," and Judge Quance put down his pen.

Landlord Ripple released a whinny of relief. Steptoe grinned. "Now," said Mr. Arlie, "just roll up your sleeve and show them my olive-oil plaster. It might be a good idea to actually prove you have had some blood let tonight."

Docilely, young Kirkendall obeyed.

SHORTLY afterward, the meeting broke up, and everyone left the room in high good humor. Only Mr. Arlie and Judge Quance remained. The Judge appeared shaken by the finality of the testimony, and profoundly confused. Over and over, he mumbled; "Most perplexing, most perplexing." Mr. Arlie agreed effusively—and he wiped a circle of sweat from his wrists.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Arlie was on the verge of a nervous collapse. He'd just consummated one of the few deceptions he'd ever attempted in his life. A momentous one, and dependent upon another's man's good judgment. He wasn't too worried about this aspect, though. Kirkendall had shown himself to be alert and cautious.

Mr. Arlie was a man of deep sentiment and hidden sensitivity. He wanted Beach Kirkendall to marry Jenetta Chesney. For them to accomplish this, it was imperative that they come through this business unblemished. It could be done, and it had to be done: A tremendous task, but Mr. Arlie enjoyed tremendous tasks.

Judge Quance, his spindly legs stretched out before him, sat by the fire drying his gaiters. His black claw-hammer coat hung on a chair-back, drying too. A long black segar was clenched between the hard little knuckles of his fist, and his piercing little eyes were sparkling and harsh in secret speculation. There were recesses in Judge Quance's mind which even Mr. Arlie had never been able to explore. He was tough as whitleather, and as cold as a gunflint. In the old days when there had been a King,

Judge Quance would have been a King's Man. He tossed his segar into the fire, got to his feet, and said: "Let's go call on Mrs. Chesney."

Mr. Arlie protested: "She's already heard. A runner has been sent. Our presence would only—"

Meticulously, the Judge donned his half-sodden coat. Mr. Arlie followed him through a side door, across the stableyard, into Dock Street. The shops were shuttered now, and dark, and the cottages were shuttered. The wind had dropped, but the rain continued, coming straight down in pellets, as though fired against their hat-brims by phantom muskets.

They turned down a muddy alley known as Cherry Lane.

Judge Quance said: "I don't hold with wife-beating. But how a man manages his household is his own business. That's the law."

"Fiddle-de-dee!"

"When our fathers were young men, it was not only murder but *treason* for a wife to kill her husband. Right here in this very country, sir!"

"So now it's Mrs. Chesney herself who—"

"Someone did. You can't confute that. Someone did."

THE Chesney cottage was located at the bend of the alley. Lacey water dripped from its neglected eaves; and rotting planks, laid zigzag across the mire of the front yard, served as a makeshift walk to the door. Golden candlelight shone from the parlor window. When Jenetta had married Chesney, she'd owned a small farm left to her by her father; Chesney had thrown it across card tables and into cockpits. That was the law, too: A wife's property was her husband's. Judge Quance rapped on the door.

Mr. Arlie said mildly: "Let's be human about this. Human."

The door opened, and Mrs. Chesney asked them in.

The floor of the little room was unpainted, as were the plaster walls. The feeble ball of light which hovered about the candleflame, the rain rattling against the clapboards, gave Mr. Arlie the feeling of being caught in a trap. A trap indeed, he thought. Unhappy, and moved almost beyond speech, he turned his attention to the woman who faced them.

Jenetta Chesney was young, with hair like carved applewood. She was dressed in a simple frock of dark calico, and for the first time, Mr. Arlie realized that she was very beautiful. She seemed stunned, and had been crying.

Judge Quance leaned against the mantelpiece; he was drenched to the skin, but unaware of it, and little puddles gathered around his boot-soles. He asked, "Is this the woman?" and Mr. Arlie, his mind on other matters, answered: "Yes."

The girl waited, bewildered.

"You've just heard Mr. Arlie identify you," Judge Quance said crisply.

He fetched out foolscap from the tail-pocket of his coat, located pen and inkpot and moved them to the mantelshelf. "Confess, madam."

Mr. Arlie boggled. He hadn't identified anyone for anything. Judge Quance had simply asked him if this was the woman, and he'd said yes. It was: she was Mrs. Chesney.

The girl listened, mute with confusion and alarm.

Judge Quance pretended to explain. "As you know, Mr. Arlie's shop is in a basement. When he sits behind his counter, he looks out on the street, at the face of the Sparrow. All day long he sits there and watches the villagers come and go. Tonight the street was deserted. Tonight he saw Blann Chesney leave the tavern, saw a woman emerge from the shadows and approach him."

It was such a fabulous lie that Mr. Arlie was nonplused, but finally, he said: "Chesney was killed in the entryway of the bakershop. I can't see that entryway from my counter. When I identified Mrs. Chesney a minute ago, I meant—"

Stridently, Judge Quance rode him down. "So we are now prepared to take your statement, madam."

"I've been home all evening," Mrs. Chesney said. She was deathly pale in the candlelight. "Mr. Arlie must be mistaken."

Mr. Arlie said: "No, Mrs. Chesney, I'm never mistaken. I have a crystal-clear memory and an eye for detail. I'll never forget the donkey."

"Donkey?" Now it was Judge Quance who was boggling.

"Nor the five sweet little children," Mr. Arlie added.

"Children?"

"Yes, indeed. I have an eye for detail. The donkey, the children, and the woman emerged from the shadows —exactly as you have described. The woman was leading the donkey. . . . No, the children were leading the donkey. . . . I remember it all vividly. It was so domestic and touching."

"I have no children," Mrs. Chesney said. "And no donkey."

"Don't apologize," Mr. Arlie said. "Neither has Judge Quance."

Mrs. Chesney smiled. It was a slow, timid smile, and a very beautiful one.

"It this the woman?" Judge Quance thundered. "I mean this is the woman, is it not?"

"I doubt it," Mr. Arlie said benevolently. "I think we're going at this wrong. I think we should first locate that donkey. I'd know him anywhere. He had a lopside jaw, as though he had a coconut in his cheek. Like this." Mr. Arlie inflated one cheek and demonstrated.

Mrs. Chesney laughed.

I'll wager that's the first laugh she's had in many a moon, Mr. Arlie reflected.

WHITE with rage, Judge Quance rammed the foolscap into his coattail and threw down the pen. Mr. Arlie bowed, the Judge mumbled a frosty farewell, and they departed.

Halfway down the board walk, Mr. Arlie said suddenly, "Wait," and went flying back; Judge Quance observed him in the open doorway in intensive conversation with the girl. When he rejoined the Judge in the alley, the Judge said: "Did she confess?"

Illustrated by
RAYMOND THAYER

"He saw Blann Chesney leave the tavern, saw a woman approach him."

"So now we are prepared to take your statement, madam."

"I wasn't after a confession. I offered her advice and money. She refused the money, but I think she's going to accept the advice."

"What kind of advice?" The Judge was on him like a ferret.

"Advice to be happy. With instructions and directions."

The glassy rain was powdered, now, into a penetrating drizzle. As they turned from Dock Street to Main, Judge Quance said bitterly: "You sold me out, my friend. With all the nonsense about donkeys and children."

"Jenetta Chesney's no more guilty of Blann's death than—say, you."

"Me?"

"Certainly. How do I know there isn't a dirk wound under that ruffled shirt-front of yours?"

"I see you don't understand these things too well," Judge Quance retorted tolerantly. "Motive. What would be my motive?"

Frankly, Mr. Arlie didn't know, so he cudgeled his brain. He came up with an old, half-forgotten scandal.

"Four years ago, before Blann Chesney was married, your bull terrier got into his chicken coop and killed two of his champion gamecocks. A week later, on market-day, at Saturday noon in the town square, Chesney got out that cumbersome pistol of his and shot your terrier dead before a crowd of about three hundred farmers and townsmen. He claimed the dog was vicious—and nothing came of it."

"If nothing came of it, nothing came of it."

"On the surface, that is. You're a harsh and rather vain man, Judge Quance."

They passed through the glow of a street-light, and Judge Quance's face was relaxed and thoughtful.

This was merely conversation to Mr. Arlie. Most gentlemen of Mr. Arlie's acquaintance pretended to a study of birds, or poetry, or sea shells, but Mr. Arlie studied the gentlemen themselves.

At last Judge Quance said: "Dog-killing is a misdemeanor, at the worst. Man-killing is a felony. I'm too much of a barrister to place them in the same category."

"Of course," Mr. Arlie said cheerfully. "I hadn't thought of that."

In front of the Iron Sparrow they separated. When Judge Quance had disappeared in the direction of his home, Mr. Arlie circled the inn to the rear and climbed an outside staircase to the second floor. He stepped out of the drizzle into a dimly lighted hall, and knocked on a door. Beach Kirkendall called to him to enter.

It was Mr. Ripple's cheapest room, but immaculately clean. The roof sloped almost to the floor, and on the wall was a colored picture of the American navy attacking the Tripolitan pirates. There was a low bed, a cane-bottomed chair, and a battered pine wardrobe. Kirkendall, in his shirtsleeves and holding his head in his hands, sat on the bed and stared at the floor.

The air was fragrant with the clean scent of balsam.

Mr. Arlie said: "Kirkendall."

Slowly, Kirkendall looked up.

After a moment his eyes cleared. "Mr. Arlie! I'm glad to see you, sir. Sit down. I want to talk to you."

Downstairs Mr. Ripple and his wife were bolting doors and windows, banging around, locking up for the night.

"I want to talk to you, too," Mr. Arlie said quietly. "But this is not the time nor place. Come to my shop in one hour."

He shut the door softly behind him as he left.

That hour in his shop was a long one for Mr. Arlie.

He put up a few powders in yellow papers, mixed a jug of honey-and-myrrh throat gargle, and renewed his stock of conserve of red roses.

He enjoyed mixing conserve of red roses.

He took a pound of red rose-buds, stripped them of their heels, and using a wooden pestle, hammered them to a pulp in his mortar; he then added two pounds of double-refined sugar, beating it and smoothing it into the rose pulp. The medical properties of sugar conserves were very slight, but they made a convenient base for pills

and boluses containing iron or mercury or tin. Unmedicated, too, they were delicious confections, and nothing gave Mr. Arlie more pleasure, or braced him more at the end of a fatiguing day, than a nibble of conserve of red roses.

And this had been a fatiguing day.

The conserve was finished, and sampled, and stowed away in a glass jar, and Mr. Arlie was washing the pestle and mortar when Kirkendall entered. He was frowning and listless.

"You lost something—and I found it," Mr. Arlie said gravely. "Come back into my sitting-room."

He lifted the hinged flap in the counter, and young Kirkendall trailed him down a narrow, dusty passageway. They passed the door to the storage room, that to Mr. Arlie's bedroom, and entered a closed door at the end of the hall—a rickety closed door with a spume of golden lamplight issuing from beneath its sill.

Jenetta Chesney sat on a footstool before the cold fireplace. She was serene and poised, and there was a wool shawl about her straight shoulders. She glanced up.

"Beach!" she said softly.

Kirkendall stood stock-still. . . .

Mr. Arlie's parlor, like Mr. Arlie's life, was entirely a workroom. There was a big lamp on the scarred mahogany table, a broken-down sofa, and a scattering of shabby but comfortable chairs. The walls, once yellow, were aged to russet and runneled with ancient water-stains. On either side of the alley door, the door through which Mrs. Chesney had arrived, were windowseats crowded with rare medical herbs growing in terra-cotta flower pots. Suspended from a fishnet overhead were fronds and stalks, hemlock, foxglove, pennyroyal; along the wall from pegs hung little willow baskets of liquorice and cinnamon, snakeroot and lavender, crab's claws. The room was stuffy with the musky odor of oil of almonds and lemon peel.

Mr. Arlie, mindful of his duties as a host, broke the red sealing-wax from a bottle of brandied figs, and passed them around on a not-too-clean platter. They were courteously declined.

"You love this girl?" Mr. Arlie asked.

Kirkendall jerked his head in a nod. Cords stood out in his muscular throat.

"And you, madam?"

Jenetta Chesney simply smiled.

"In that case," Mr. Arlie said judiciously, "—get married."

"We can never marry, not in this town," Kirkendall declared. "Not because of Blann's death, but because of other things. Ever since I came to town, people have been talking about us. Jenetta couldn't stand it."

"There's a town out in the Indiana country named Vincennes," Mr. Arlie declared. "Many hundreds of miles away, over mountains and rivers and vast forests. The West is growing up. It needs master carpenters. You could start tonight. You could take a boat to Baltimore tonight. Mrs. Chesney could leave next week."

Kirkendall grinned.

Jenetta Chesney said earnestly: "I'm not a frivolous woman. It is only decent that I go in mourning."

Mourning for Blann Chesney, Mr. Arlie thought. This is a strange world indeed.

"I must mourn for a year," Jenetta Chesney said firmly. "A black veil for six months. The first three months across my face, and the second three months back over my bonnet. Black bonnet and black gown for at least a year. It is only decent."

"You can be decent in Vincennes," Mr. Arlie explained politely. "You can do your mourning in Vincennes."

After a bit of further discussion it was settled.

Kirkendall's sickness had dropped from him and Jenetta Chesney, years younger now, became grave and lovely. Her eyes showed that finally, with these two men, she felt secure.

She drew her shawl over her head and stepped to the alley door. "We'll never know," she asked, "—who killed Blann?"

"We'll never know," Mr. Arlie agreed.

"He killed himself," Beach Kirkendall declared. "Judge Quance would never believe it, but he must have killed himself. Here's the way I figure it: He stepped into that entryway out of the rain and examined his pistol. Somehow the dirk-spring was released and the dirk pricked him. In his drunken confusion he shot himself. It's the only logical answer."

He folded the shawl about Jenetta's throat, and kissed the fringe. His ears glowed brick red because of Mr. Arlie's presence. She pretended not to notice him.

"Vincennes," he said, and she answered, "Vincennes!"

Alone with Mr. Arlie, Kirkendall said: "I'll write you."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Mr. Arlie declared. In the first place, he knew that Kirkendall was no scholar, and that the mere writing of his signature was for him a labor that passed all understanding; in the second place he considered a link with the past unwise. "Simply give me your word you'll be good to her."

"I swear it," Kirkendall said. A great trembling overcame him, and he could scarcely utter the words.

Mr. Arlie hid a smile. They shook hands, exchanged brief farewells, and the young man departed.

The clock on the mantel said six minutes to midnight. Mr. Arlie picked up the lamp and crossed the hall into the kitchen. He built a fire in the stove and put on a kettle of water. While the kettle came to a boil, he took off his threadbare coat, his waistcoat and his shirt.

He was wearing no undershirt. A neat bandage, bloodstained and somewhat rumpled now, stretched across his chest from armpit to armpit. He removed the bandage and cleansed the long, shallow dirk-wound. This done, he applied ointment and a clean bandage.

He himself had killed Blann Chesney, and the death had occurred exactly as he had described it to Judge Quance.

He'd been sitting behind his counter compounding stomachic pills when Chesney had swaggered from the door of the Sparrow swinging his riding-crop. That crop had been enough for Mr. Arlie. He'd left his work, had confronted Chesney in the entryway, and had warned him against any mischief. A tussle had ensued. Chesney had drawn his pistol.

Mr. Arlie had caught a slash across his chest, and Chesney had caught a bullet in his chin.

Death was no stranger to Mr. Arlie. In his youth he'd stood against the British and the Indians. He was not broken-hearted over the incident.

The problem all along had been whether to confess or conceal his part in the affair. His natural honesty said confess—but there'd been Mrs. Chesney and young Kirkendall. Never, he knew, as long as they lived in this town, would they marry. Handled properly, the incident could be used as a lever to force them into greener pastures.

Mr. Arlie thought of Judge Quance, and chuckled. It was a genuine pleasure putting a first-class mystery over on his old friend Judge Quance.

When the bandage was changed to his satisfaction, Mr. Arlie produced a waistcoat from the bottom of the woodbox; it was his second-best waistcoat and had a bad knife slash from armhole to armhole. Carefully, he burned the waistcoat in the kitchen stove. But first he cut off the buttons and saved them. They were good horn buttons, and there was no sense wasting them.

He donned his nightgown and brushed his teeth while the waistcoat burned.

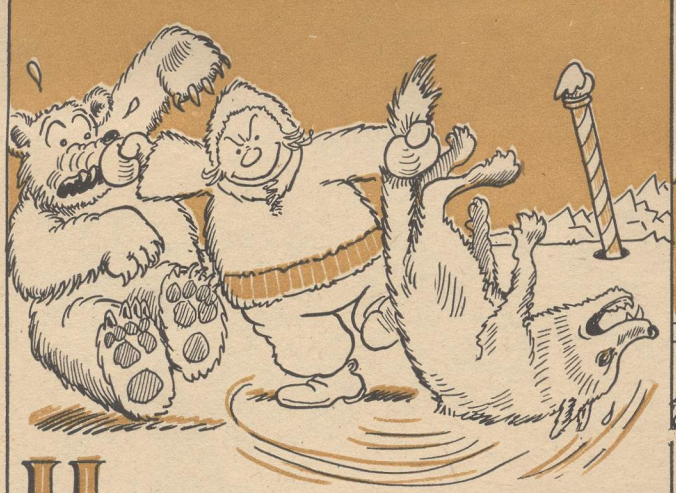
It was two o'clock before he made his way to his little cubbyhole bedroom and crawled between crisp clean sheets. Outside, the gale had risen again, and the black snarling rain clawed at the window pane; but Mr. Arlie was placid and contented.

I Have a Friend

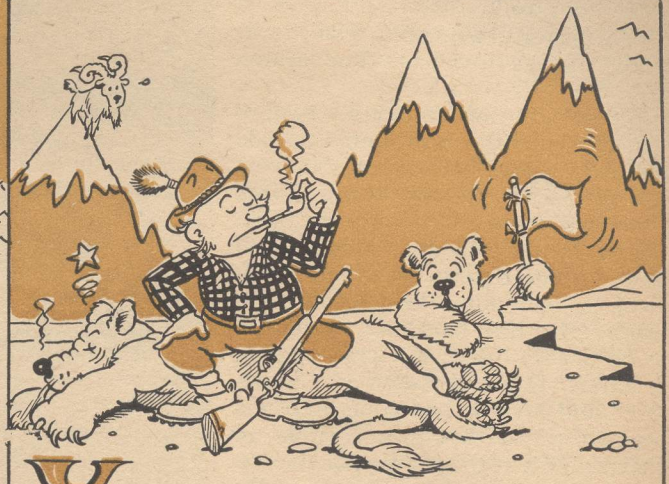
a bitter ballade, by
Peter Wells

Who delighteth in the Outdoor Life. His walls bear testimony to his love, and his words also...

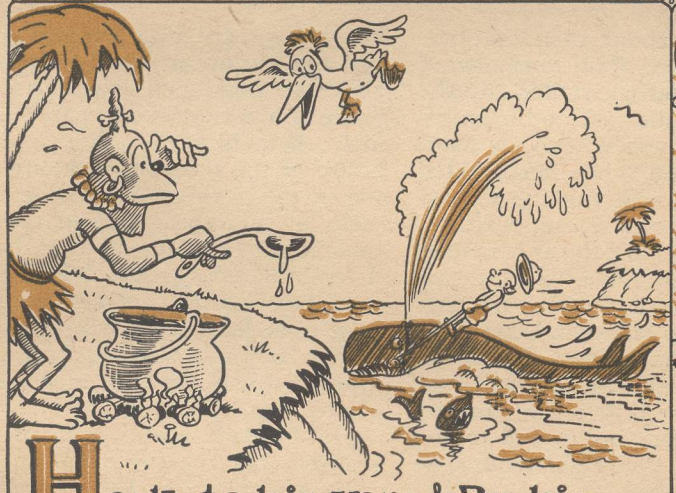
"In my youth--" he will say... and the tale that followeth will dazzle the mind with its tallness...



Hardships incredible hath he undergone - nor is he hesitant to acquaint you with his travail.



Yea, by him was the wilderness tamed: the dread denizens of the mountains payed him homage!

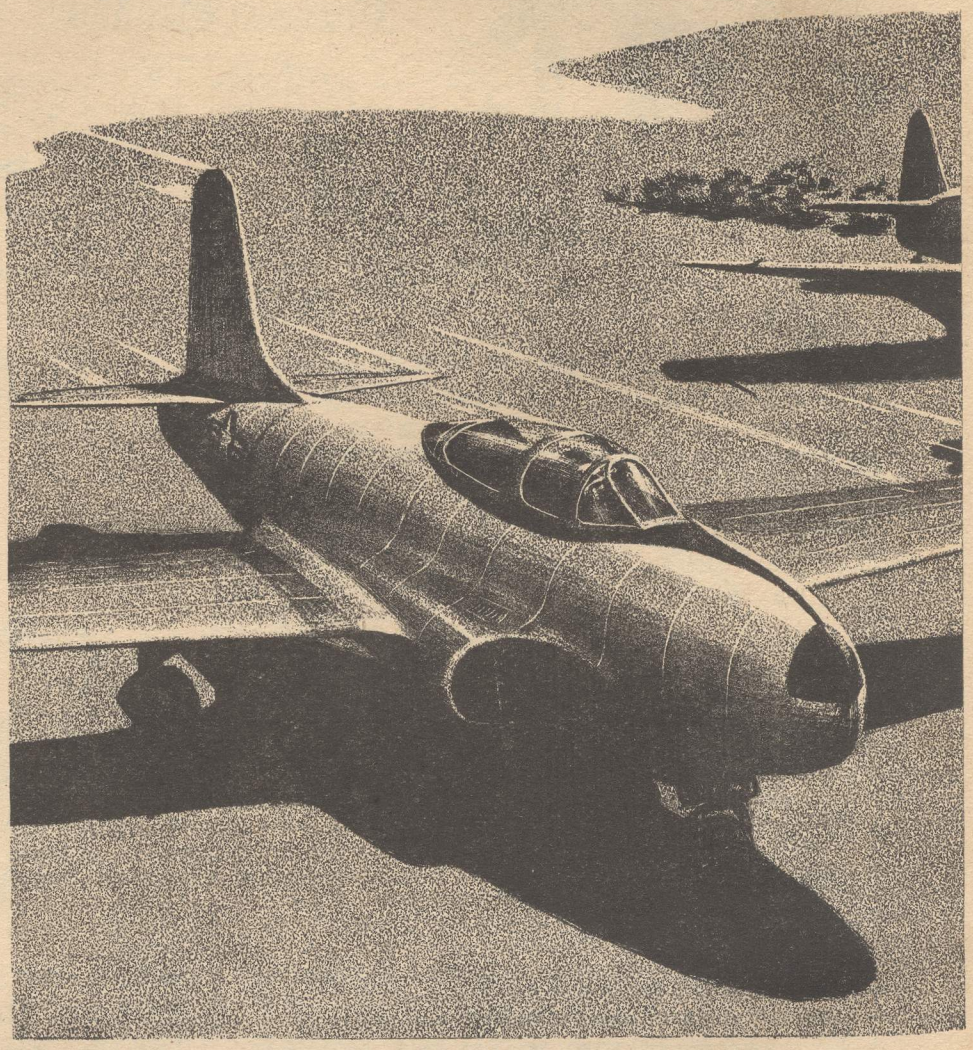


Hark to his yarn! By him was the Ocean Deep itself conquered, strange lands bore his footprint, *Ad Terrorem Omnium!*

But, ho! *Today* he goeth not even for a *stroll* in ye park without express permission of the wife of his bosom, and his life is strangely like unto thine & mine, *Friend!!!*

There is more than one important difference between a jet and a propeller plane—and a crook who forgets is incompetent

Everybody's



DAN CLAYTON saw the two men come into the Club Castillo—saw, but didn't really notice. One had a rolling, bulldog walk, and the other a drape suit, a profile and a duck's-bottom haircut. He watched them go to the bar, order beers; then he blinked gloomily and turned back again and tried to pay attention to what Norbert Mack was saying.

"I guess jets are all right," Mack was saying, "but I'm strictly a prop-and-engine man myself." He was big, and he had a skullcap of wiry hair, and a spread-out, battered face that should have been good-looking, but somehow wasn't.

Martha, sitting next to Dan, said: "Yes. That's just what Pop always says."

Dan almost howled aloud. Pop, in this case, was Colonel Tom Czernak, Director of Operations at the base, and practically the same thing as Dan Clayton's commanding officer. Dan was a second lieutenant. Mack hadn't missed that, either; when he'd first come to their table he'd squinted at Dan's tarnished bars and pretended to be unable to tell if they were gold or silver. Dan had mumbled, "Shavetail," and Martha had gone on to explain that Mack ran a couple of charter AT's at the municipal airport, and had been in the Colonel's outfit in the war.

It was the same thing again: that damn' ghost that popped up wherever Dan Clayton went. They'd all been in that war, and although they didn't actually rehash much of it, there was always a kind of silent understanding passing from eye to eye. Like a secret handshake! And Dan was ineligible: he'd been just getting out of cadets when most of them were being discharged. He'd been a second lieutenant since.

He tried now to get into things a little more. "There's not as much difference between jets and prop planes as you'd think," he said. "The stick works the same in both."

Mack laughed, and took his eyes away from Martha just long enough to glance at Dan. "It's the speed, kid," he said. "In combat you make a pass"—he used his hands—"and that's all. No chance for flying skill."

"I think you'd change your mind if you flew a jet."

Mack kept his big grin and shook his head. "Uh-uh."

It was right about then that the thing happened. Dan remembered that Martha Czernak smiled faintly, switching the smile back and forth between both of them as if to say *Now, boys, don't scrap.* He remembered glancing at her and thinking what a strange beauty hers was—not beautiful at all according to all the measurements, because her eyes had the suggestion of a slant and her cheekbones were just a little broad and there was a cleft in her chin—only he'd decided some days ago that it was for him; that was why he didn't like this guy Norbert Mack butting in and taking up the evening. And right about then the thing happened.

Funny—it came casually; it wasn't clear at first just what *was* happening. There was the sense of a scuffle up at the bar. Some people were backing away. Dan turned his head to look, not really expecting anything. He saw the bartender raising his hands above his head, and even this didn't strike him as anything in particular at first. Dan blinked mildly and was aware of the six-piece orchestra blaring in the next room, and the movement of the crowd around the crap table in the room just beyond the bar. A nightmarish, gaudy, brassy place, the Club Castillo, and Dan wouldn't have come here in the first place if he hadn't been all mixed-up inside, and kind of thirsty for a lot of noise and glare.

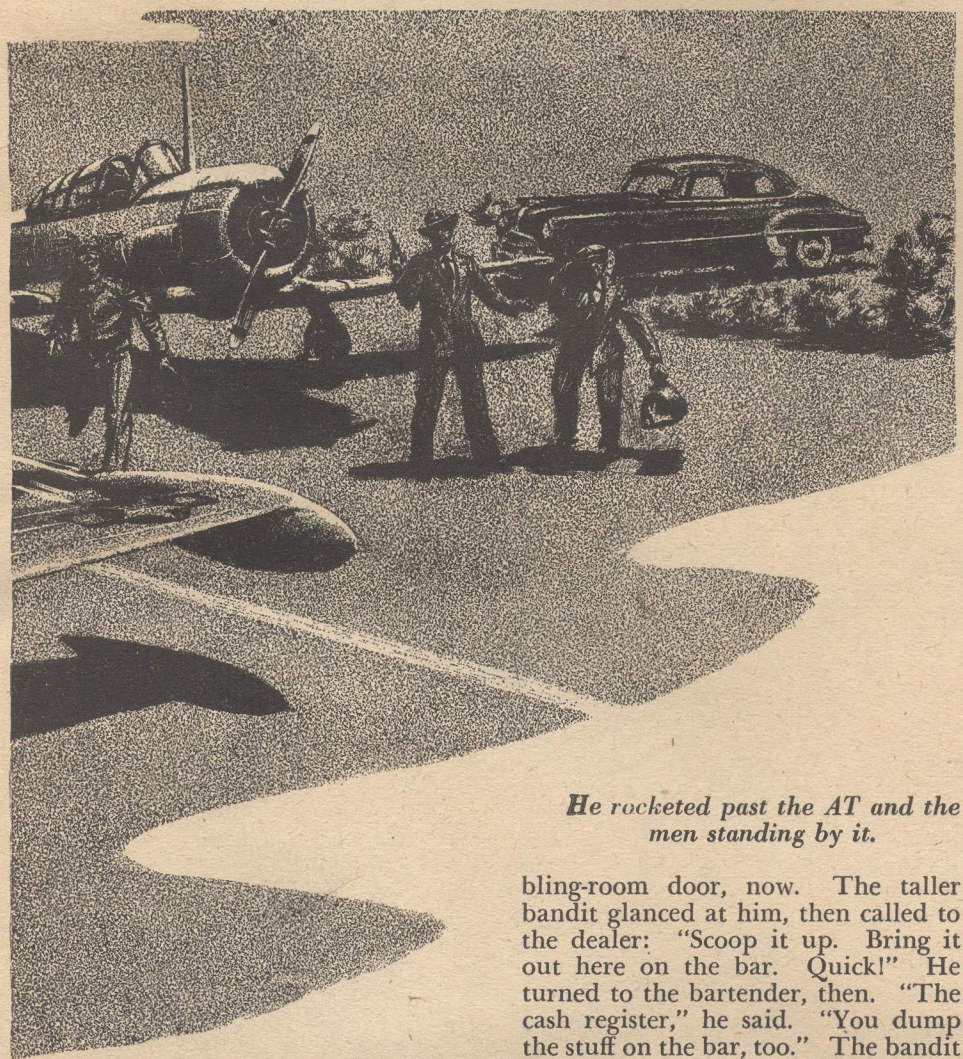
He blinked again, and then he realized that the two men who had just come in were backed away slightly from the bar and pointing something at the bartender; each was pointing something!

The one with the profile and the drape suit turned around slowly, and

a Hero

by WALT SHELDON

Illustrated by Brendan Lynch



He rocketed past the AT and the men standing by it.

Dan saw that the something was a .38 pistol with a long barrel, in this case. The hush came over the period of a moment or two, like water draining suddenly, but not too suddenly, from a sink. Then it was quiet. Then everybody was staring. And the tall one in the drape suit said in a soft voice: "It's a stick-up. Nobody moves, nobody gets hurt."

Nobody moved, not just then, anyway. Dan stared open-jawed with the rest. He noticed that in these last few seconds the stocky bandit had waddled quickly over to the gambling-room and was covering everybody in there.

Norbert Mack, across the booth, growled: "Why, those punks, those lousy punks—"

"Sh, Norbert!" said Martha's voice quickly. "Don't start anything!"

Bulldog-face had everything covered nicely from his spot at the gambling-room door, now. The taller bandit glanced at him, then called to the dealer: "Scoop it up. Bring it out here on the bar. Quick!" He turned to the bartender, then. "The cash register," he said. "You dump the stuff on the bar, too." The bandit was calm enough, but Dan saw that his lips were too red against his pale face, and that they worked in and out nervously. Both the bartender and the dealer hopped fast; both dumped green piles on the bar. The bandit kept his gun trained, his eyes roving, and he stuffed the money into his side pocket with one hand. When that pocket was full, he shifted the pistol and stuffed the other one. There was still money left. He called to his partner, "Get it." The partner came over, and the tall one crossed and changed places with him.

Dan suddenly realized that Norbert Mack had been edging to the outside of the booth. He heard him muttering: "Just one little chance, that's all I want, just one little chance—"

Dan felt like telling him not to be a damn' fool, but didn't. The man was probably bluffing—kidding himself, anyway. He'd probably developed in his mind the idea that he was a hero, and had to live up to it. Maybe he was just trying to impress Martha—pointing up the fact that he'd been through things and Dan hadn't. Dan kept his mouth shut hard.

The two bandits had the money now. They were in the middle of the bar space; they were just between Dan's booth and the bar. Somebody near the gambling-room stirred, and the taller bandit whirled and moved his pistol.

"You hear what I said?" His voice was still soft. "Nobody moves, nobody gets hurt."

A big bulk flashed past Dan—Dan caught it from the corner of his eye. It was a full second before he realized that Norbert Mack had launched himself from the booth, and was diving toward the stocky bandit. Martha, behind Dan, gasped, and somebody screamed. It was a good second before either of the bandits realized that Mack was moving. The bulldog-faced one whirled just in time to see Mack hit his middle with those big shoulders, topple him. The other one whirled too.

Dan didn't really know just what he did, then, or exactly why he did it. All he could think was that a man was about to get killed, and it didn't seem to make any difference that that man was Norbert Mack, who damned well might take his girl from him one of these days. Dan moved too. He dived for the tall man; he saw in that blurred instant that the tall man was reaching for something in his hip pocket. He couldn't understand that—it didn't make sense; but on the other hand, it didn't matter. Bulldog-face had sprawled toward the bar, dropped his gun. He was trying to regain his balance and get it again. Norbert Mack was on his hands and knees; he was trying to get up too. The tall bandit was standing over Mack and reaching for this thing in his pocket, and Dan was throwing himself at the tall bandit. All this was happening in the same tick of time.

THE tall man's arm came down toward Mack's head in a vicious arc just before Dan reached him. Dan glimpsed the blackjack; heard it crack like a fungo bat on Mack's skull.

Then he swung at the tall man.

It was quite a surprise. The tall man was not only fast—he was good. His head flicked neatly to one side,

dislodging a few strands of that duck's-bottom haircut, and Dan's punch spent itself in thin air. One clear thought stabbed through: *He'll shoot now—now I'll know what it's like.* Dan stumbled forward with the force of his own blow.

There was a loud, yet oddly muffled noise. Very close to Dan, very close to his own ears and skull and teeth, but at the same time it had a sense of detachment. He knew, but found it hard to believe, that he was being struck on the head.

There were a few flashes, then blackness. . . .

Coming to was strange; coming to always is. Voices, first, no words understandable, just swirling hollow voices as if from an iron tunnel. Then when sight came, perspective was all distorted and the people standing over him looked like willowy giants, and the room curved away into space and he had a devil of a time realizing that he was still in the bar room of the Club Castillo.

"He's waking up," said a voice.

There was a blue uniform going back and forth somewhere up there. A flash-bulb popped.

Martha was bending beside him, her hand on his shoulder. "Dan! Dan—are you all right?"

"Sure, sure." His lips were thick. His head ached horribly. He turned it. Norbert Mack was sitting on a chair just a few feet from him. Somebody in a white coat was looking at Mack's head. There was an open bag, the smell of antiseptic.

Then a deep, harsh voice called out: "Keep those people away from that body there!"

Dan said thickly: "What body?"

"They shot a man," said Martha. "They shot a man just before they left."

Nothing was really very clear for the rest of that night. Dan felt he didn't really wake up until the next morning—and at that, he was still fuzzy-headed when the sergeant pounded on his door and bawled that the Colonel wanted to see him right away.

Dan staggered through his matins. Even brushing his teeth made his head ache, and he stared at himself in the cracked and specked mirror of the B.O.Q. washroom. His face was disappointing, as usual. Not that it was homely—or handsome, either, for that matter, but something was

The tall man's arm came down toward Mack's head in a vicious arc just before Dan reached him.

missing, something indefinable: That faint, burned-in look they all had when they'd been through combat. Last night's mix-up hadn't given him any of it. . . .

He cooled off his heels for a few minutes in the Colonel's outer office, and he tried to put together neatly everything that had happened last night. They shot a man; that was the main thing. They barged to the door, the one with the profile and the one that looked like a bulldog, after they'd slapped Dan and Norbert Mack to sleep. And somehow things were all fouled up, and nobody knew exactly what he was doing, and at the door somebody got in their way—or they thought he did—and they shot him.

The witnesses all had different stories. Some said there had been two, some said three shots. There were two bullets in the man. He was an unimportant man—if any live, breathing man can really be called unimportant; but anyway he was just a man, his name was legion and he was an average, perfect example of an innocent bystander. The captain of detectives who took charge had told Dan all of this. The white-coated young doctor from the hospital had looked Dan over and said no concussion, and then the flight surgeon had spent at least an hour fussing over him in the dispensary as soon as he got back to the base. He'd had a shot to help him sleep.

Now the Colonel's door opened, and a red-headed sergeant stuck his head out and said: "Okay, lieutenant."

Dan made the usual salute in front of the Colonel's desk, and before he even brought his hand down, he saw things were boiling inside the Colonel.

"Sit down, Clayton," said Colonel Tom Czernak quietly.

Czernak was an old-young Air Force colonel. Dan knew he was in his forties, because he would have to be to get through West Point and have a daughter as old as Martha. Airwise, he was younger than that. He was short and tanned, and had strong, stubby hands and close-cropped hair with only the beginnings of gray in it. He was a hot man, even in a jet, a very hot man. Dan said, "Yes sir," and sat down.

"Quite a hassel out at the Club Castillo last night," said the Colonel. He folded his hands in front of him.

Dan said: "Yes sir."

"Too bad somebody had to get killed."

"Yes sir."

"You take a couple of thugs like that, robbing a place, and they're all keyed up. It doesn't take much to start them off. They don't mean to kill when they walk in, but they get nervous. Especially if somebody starts something, they get nervous."

"Yes sir."

"Stop saying 'yes sir' and listen," said the Colonel.

Dan said: "All right."

The Colonel unfolded his hands. He put them flat on the desk. He leaned forward a little. "This fellow Norbert Mack was pretty foolish to start what he did. But your judgment was *very* bad in trying to be a hero after Mack had already failed."

Dan frowned and said: "I wasn't trying to be a hero."

"Maybe not consciously," said the Colonel. "But you were. I've been watching you, Dan. You hold your shoulders a little too straight. You take crazy chances in the jets sometimes. You knock yourself out at gunnery practice. Just because you didn't get a taste of war, you have to prove something to yourself." He leaned back, keeping his hands flat. "I appreciate an eager beaver, Dan, as Director of Training; but you're going too far with it. You've got to simmer down. A man was killed last night. There's no way we'll ever tell for sure if starting that mix-up led to his being killed. But it's something to think about." He lifted a paper on his desk. "Your promotion was going through, Dan, and the C.O. asked me to approve informally. I'm going to have to hold it, now that this thing's happened. I don't want to sound stuffy, but it makes me doubt your judgment, Dan."

Dan stiffened. "I still think I had a good chance when I tried to slug that bandit. I still think so."

The Colonel said: "Maybe. But sometimes the results decide if a thing was good judgment or not. That's rough, but that's the way it is. You'd have learned that if you'd had combat—"

There it was again. If he'd had combat. Dan Clayton, the uniniti-

ated, the outsider. What did a man have to do to be anybody in this man's world—get born just in time for a war?

Dan felt his face redden, and he held himself tightly.

The Colonel said: "That's all, Dan"—and Dan left.

Dan had never really gone very deeply into anything like a study of the subconscious, and so he didn't recognize that insistent pecking in the brain for what it was. All he knew, as he strolled back to the B.O.Q. that morning, was that something bothered him. Something wasn't right, something wasn't logical about this holdup, and the scrap, and the killing and everything.

He frowned as he walked, and tried to think about it.

He ran into Martha coming out of the commissary with two bundles filling her arms. She looked smart and fresh this morning, but then she usually did. She wore a skirt and blouse with a yellow corduroy vest, and her blonde hair tumbled back over her neck and shoulders. She'd kept house for the Colonel since Mrs. Czernak's death a few years ago; she was a fixture on the base. She knew more about the Air Force than most adjutants did. She said: "Good morning, Dan."

He said: "Hi." But he felt a chilliness inside. Not that Martha's smile wasn't pleasant and her words cheerful enough, but there was a difference this morning. A faint and slim difference that was sensed rather than thought out. She felt as the Colonel did about Dan's judgment last night. Just when he'd begun to make a little progress with her, too—

She talked then, and it was just as if Dan was a stranger and she was knocking herself out to make conversation. "Have you heard the news? They had it on the radio this morning. The whole town's quite excited about the whole thing. They've got the State Police out looking for those men, and the District Attorney's trying to decide whether to call in the F.B.I. or not. That was because you were involved, and you're a federal employee."

And Dan said, "Yes" and, "Sure," and, "Uh-huh." And they stood there awhile in front of the commissary and talked. Strangers.

Dan felt rotten and hollow and sick when he got back to his B.O.Q. room after a quick chow in the officers' mess. He sprawled on the cot with his hands behind his head and stared up at the white-painted wallboard ceiling. He turned his portable radio on absent-mindedly.

Something about the whole business was still poking at his mind, trying to get in. What the hell was it? What was wrong somewhere?

He wished the flight surgeon had marked him for duty. There was gunnery practice in the TF-80's again today, and he would rather have been in a cockpit keeping his hands busy. It was hell to lie here with nothing to do but stew.

What was it the Colonel had said? *Sometimes results decide if a thing was good judgment or not.* Nuts! He supposed the Colonel half-expected him to go out and chase those bandits down and catch them with his bare hands. Maybe that would make his judgment right. Nuts! Nuts to the Colonel, and nuts to the Air Force and nuts to every battle star in it! Nuts to Norbert Mack and the way he'd butted in!

The radio warmed to life, and it was the news announcer in the middle of his newscast. The big story, too; the one the town was buzzing about: ". . . certain to be caught, Sheriff Hutchins said this morning, because the few roads leading from the city have all been blocked since last night, and the bandits haven't had time to get through the cordon. From witnesses' descriptions, the men have been tentatively identified as Larry Monks, 31, of Los Angeles, a former seaman, and Antonio Rucci, 27, who served three years in a California prison for armed assault. Colorful Sheriff Hutchins further declared that —quote—a lizard couldn't wriggle through the trap we've set for these men, unquote."

Dan snorted to himself and snapped the radio off. Nuts to Sheriff Hutchins and the State Police, too! To everybody! To all the blasted heroes all over the place who called anything "bad judgment" when somebody in their own tight little fraternity didn't do it.

Maybe it was his throbbing head that made him think crazily like that.

He lit a cigarette. He went across the room and took a map from his small pile of cross-country paraphernalia, pushing his Weems plotter and E-6-B computer aside. He unfolded the map; it was a sectional—scale, 1 to 500,000—and it showed the country for a good three hundred miles. He knew most of that country intimately; he'd flown dozens of problem courses over it in the clear Western weather, and he knew all the landmarks and check points. He traced the two main roads, vertical and horizontal, that intersected at the town. He looked at some of the smaller ones, most of them either petering off or winding back to one of the main highways. Everything in between was just sagebrush and rabbits and not much else. So there were only a few roads to block, and it seemed Sheriff Hutchins was right when he said a lizard couldn't have wriggled through.

Then out of nowhere a thought came lobbing like the bright ball of a tracer bullet; it struck and exploded.

Maybe not a lizard—*but what about a bird?*

It was funny how the whole idea started putting itself together then. It was like a chemical experiment where cloudy stuff in a glass swirls and swirls, and then all of a sudden begins to form something solid.

Dan kept staring at that map and thinking: Take it step by step, now. The bandits must have known they'd be chased within minutes after they left the Club Castillo. They must have realized that, to knock off a crowded place in a town of fifty thousand in the first place. They must have known there were only a few roads leading to and from the town, and that those roads would be blocked in a couple of hours after the thing happened. Even rank amateurs would have known these things in advance—and these boys didn't look like rank amateurs.

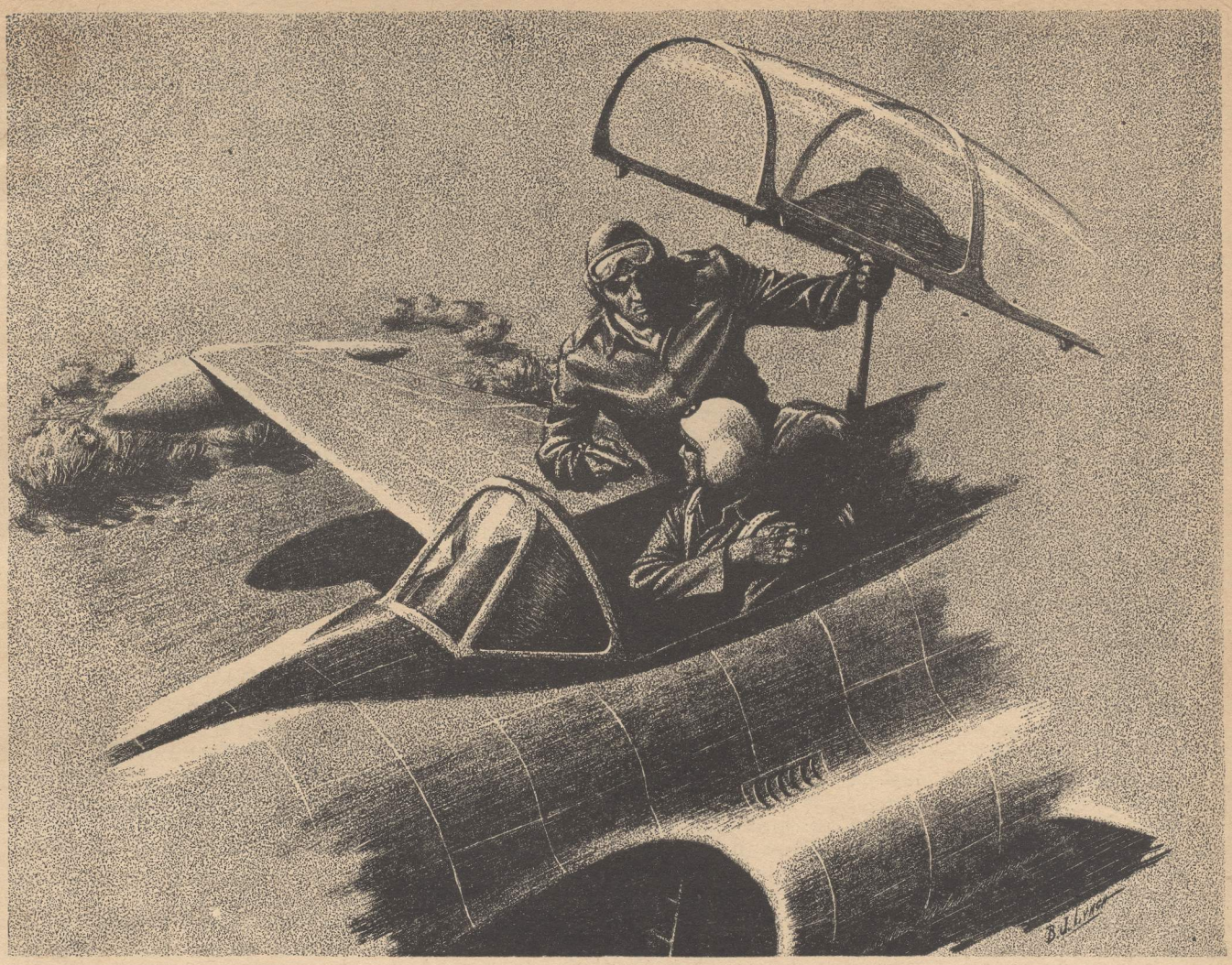
So the point of all that was just this: they didn't have any intention of escaping by highway.

Okay. So far, so good.

And now Dan began to see the thing that had been bothering him all along. The idea whose elements didn't jibe. There had been something phony right from the beginning about Norbert Mack growling and jumping at those bandits. True, Dan had tried some damfool heroics himself, but when Dan had moved, things had been pretty well mixed up and in spite of what Colonel Czernak seemed to think, there *had* been a chance. But the next thing was the business of the blackjack. Why had the tall bandit—the one named Rucci —fumbled for a sap when he had a perfectly good long-barreled .38 in his hand? He had no aversion to using the pistol; he'd proved that by shooting the man at the door. He'd used the sap on Dan because it had been handy at the time.

There seemed to be only one answer. He didn't want to kill Mack, and Mack knew all the time he was going to be slapped over the head and put to sleep. Why? Mack was a pal of theirs—or at the very least a kind of business associate. How? Well, Mack had a couple of charter AT's at the Municipal Airport. . . .

Dan used the phone down at the other end of the B.O.Q. building and asked the base operator for outside. He got the Municipal Airport. It was a small outfit and the manager there acted as janitor and engineer and flight instructor, and probably book-



"Okay, boy scout," said Mack, "this is where you get off."

keeper too. His answer was disappointing. "No, Lieutenant, Norbert Mack's AT's are still in the hangar; they've been there since last night all right. And Mack hasn't checked out of the field in the last twenty-four hours, either."

DAN hung up and stood by the phone awhile thinking it over. Maybe he was crazy; maybe that crack on the head was making him think in ever-diminishing concentric circles. Maybe.

He picked up the phone again and asked for the tower.

"Sergeant Davison," said a bored voice.

"Jerry? This is Dan Clayton. How're conditions up there at seventy-five feet?"

"Oh, hello, Lieutenant," said the voice, only slightly less bored. "Up here it's visibility and ceiling unlimited, no icing, no turbulence, in fact nothing at all, and I'm tired and wish I was off duty, and so do the guys with me."

Dan said: "I want you to do me a favor, Jerry."

"Sorry, I never do favors for anybody below the rank of major or above corporal."

"Do this on spec, then. I'll probably be a general some day. Look, you can see the Municipal Airport from there, can't you?"

"Yes, on a clear day," agreed Davison.

"There are no other kinds around here. So listen. I want you to keep an eye out for any AT-6's taking off from Municipal. And as soon as one does, give me a call. Pass it on to the guy who relieves you, so he'll do the same thing. If it's night-time, Municipal will call in and give you traffic on it, so you'll still know."

"Okay, Lieutenant," said Davison. "I'll make an exception and do it for you. Where you gonna be?"

"Either here, in the B.O.Q. or at mess or down at Operations. The only other place I think of is on the Colonel's carpet getting chewed out."

"Not to be curious or anything, Lieutenant," Davison started to say, "just what is your interest in a civilian AT?"

"It's a long story," Dan said. "And maybe some day I'll be able to tell it to you. With an ending."

Dan hung up. He went back to his room and pored over the map again. Any number of pastures around where an AT could land, and for that matter, even several auxiliary fields used to shoot practice landings. Roads led past most of these. All of them were within the broad circle formed by the spoking of the highways—which meant that anybody could get to them without passing a roadblock.

He smoked another cigarette, then had an afterthought and went to the phone again and called Operations; he managed to sound casual enough to get a TF-80 checked out for him. He said he'd pick it up on the line sometime during the afternoon.

HE went back to his room again. He smoked some more and he paced. He tried reading, but couldn't read; he tried the radio but couldn't listen to it. He paced some more.

He was just about ready to amble over to the mess-hall when the phone down at the end of the building rang. He exploded from his room and ran

for it. It was Davison. There was an AT-6 taking off from Municipal right now. Dan forgot to say thanks; he slammed up the receiver and dashed outside and headed for the line.

He tried not to look in a hurry in Operations while he had a form filled out for a local flight. He tried not to look in a hurry as he grabbed his chute from the bin and then stalked over the ramp to the front of the hangar where the jet waited. He tried not to look in a hurry to the crew chief as he climbed in.

He pulled off and started for the runway almost at the instant they wheeled the battery cart away. He called the tower, and he was clear for immediate take-off. He checked his flow valve once at the end of the runway, and then he shoved the throttle, poured on the kerosene, and the ship raced for all the blue sky ahead of it.

As usual, he felt better the moment the wheels left the ground and he was streaking along, leaving a roar and a swath of shimmering heat behind him. He felt better because he was doing something about matters, too. He felt confident and somehow whole in the two-place trainer, the ship he knew from A to Z, and knew even better than the prop-and-engine jobs Mack had sworn by.

He roared to five thousand above terrain in a mighty hurry, then banked back and forth and started to look around.

At first he could see nothing. He was patient. He kept looking and let his eyes adjust to space and distance. Then he saw it: a silvery thing below him and to the south, looking a little like a waterbug scooting over a pond. He banked carefully, hung his nose in its wake, then back-throttled until he almost mushed along, so that he wouldn't overtake it too quickly.

He hadn't been flying five minutes before he knew that AT-6 was headed for Auxiliary Field Number 2. He saw it bank for a shallow circle, and he saw the single runway of the practice field, and the dirt road that ran past it; and then he saw the speck of a car parked at the edge of the runway. He supposed the others had spotted the Lockheed training jet by now, but it wasn't likely they'd think it too important. Jets were nothing new in this neck of the desert; the townspeople didn't even bother to look up any more when they heard them rumble by. Dan started a slow, high circle over the auxiliary field and kept watching.

The AT-6 landed. It looked slower and clumsier than it actually was, with its thick wings and stubby radial nose. Two tiny figures came from the car near the runway and started to run toward it.

Dan started to touch his throat mike; he was only thirty miles or so from the tower, and they ought to catch him loud and clear. They could relay his information to the State Police, and within a few minutes have a small army of armed cops closing in on the field. Dan himself, with a few close passes, could keep the AT from taking off.

But Dan remembered suddenly. He remembered that he still wasn't *sure* it was Mack in the AT-6; he remembered that he had no actual proof the men down there would be Larry Monks, who walked like a bulldog, and his well-dressed pal Antonio Rucci. He could make passes over the field all day if he wanted to, but at jet speed he'd never be able to identify. Besides, he'd drain the tanks of kerosene making low passes like that—a jet didn't really use its fuel properly until it got up around the place where the hems of angels' nightgowns trail.

There was just one way for Dan to be sure.

He heeled the jet over and started a curving, shallow dive for the field.

He saw them standing there by the AT as he came in—three of them—just absurd little dolls, just stick figures. He couldn't tell who they were, and of course he couldn't see their faces to know what their expressions might be. He jockeyed the Lockheed until it lined up with the right side of the runway and he made a kind of quick, silent airman's prayer he'd have clearance to land without smacking his wingtip tanks into the AT.

He glided in; he traveled slowly enough now so that he could hear the roar of his own jets more clearly outside, and the queer clankings and groanings in the machinery under him. He watched his air speed, dropped her low and shallow, and saw the sagebrush whizz by beneath him. He came in flat. An instant after the end of the runway flashed by he heard his tires go *vmp vmp!* and he fought the thing a little, keeping her steady. He rocketed past the AT and the men standing by it. Only then did she start to slow down. She coasted, and before she stopped fully, he kicked her around in the other direction so that she faced the AT. He jacked the bubble-canopy back on her mast. He stood up in the cockpit.

There were two bright flashes down there by the other airplane, and he heard, in the next instant, two loud shots.

He ducked—fast. Then he told himself he was a fine, fat-headed fool to have landed like this. He had his answer, though—he knew who the three men were. He heard two more shots. Something went ping! along the root of the wing, then ricocheted away.

Funny, he didn't feel scared or excited or anything. Yet he wasn't exactly cool. He felt a little like laughing. He felt as if all this might be kind of a joke, and he'd be able to find the point if he thought it over a bit.

Only he had to think of other things now. He had to think what the devil he ought to do next. The radio, that was it, the radio. Now that he was sure, he'd better call a cop, as the saying went. He keyed and called the tower, and gave his number. *"Go ahead three-five-seven,"* said Sergeant Davison's voice.

"Get this carefully," said Dan. Slowly and in words of one syllable then, he told the Sergeant where he was and who was with him. *"Relay that to the State Police as fast you can, Jerry,"* he finished. *"Me, I'm now going to try to get out of here."*

"Good luck," said the Sergeant. He clipped off.

Dan heard another shot. It sounded nearer. He kept hunched in the cockpit and inched the throttle forward. The jets roared, and the ship grudged forward. He rose a little to see if the runway was aligned. He saw three figures on it and they were all running toward him. Norbert Mack's bulk was in the lead; a man shaped like a bulldog and a man in a smart, dark drape were abreast behind him. All three had guns. Mack and Rucci fired on the run, both at the same time.

It felt then—suddenly—as if someone had picked up a two-by-four, swung it, and slammed Dan in the shoulder with it. The next thing he felt was a momentary burning pain, and after that numbness all the way to his elbow. He dropped back. Involuntarily, he grabbed for the painful spot and then when he took his hand away again, he saw that it was red and sticky. His vision blurred; he felt dizzy. He felt stupid. He couldn't make up his mind what to do next. He wondered if he could fly the jet one-handed. Probably he could, but he wondered then if he'd stay conscious. He wondered just how serious his wound was, and just how many pints per hour he would bleed. Ought to be a flow meter on the damn' thing. Whoa, there—crazy thought, that—he was getting hysterical—have to watch that—

The airplane seemed to have stopped. He must have cut the throttle as he fell back; he must have done that without thinking.

He tried to get up again. He wanted to see if the runway was still aligned. He wanted to take off. He wanted to get the hell out of here.

A big shape loomed suddenly at the side of the cockpit, and he looked up and he saw first of all the big ugly hole of the forty-five-caliber automatic pistol pointing his way, and then he saw Norbert Mack's spread-out, heavy-set face floating just above and behind it.

"Okay, boy scout," said Mack, "this is where you get off."

Dan couldn't think of anything pointed to say, so he said, "Go to hell," instead.

Mack grinned at him. "Nice of you to come along, kid," he said. "The jet'll take us where we're going faster than the AT."

Dan stared. "You can't fly the jet."

"The hell I can't," Mack said. "You want to hear it? Fifteen hundred thrust for take-off, stalls at ninety even, and in fact it's even simpler than a prop-and-engine job. I read the flying mags, kid—"

"Mack, don't be a damfool. You can't get away. What are you going to do—go on the lam and leave your AT's and everything else behind?"

"The AT's wouldn't fetch five hundred apiece. My cut's a lot better than that—the Club Castillo's a gambling joint, remember. The boys got a little more than peanuts last night. But I'm wasting my time, kid. I got a date in Mexico. Are you gonna get out of that cockpit, or am I gonna haul you out?"

Rucci had scrambled to the wing and was standing just behind Mack now. He was looking over his shoulder. His pasty, handsome face was twisted. "Is this the wise punk?" he said. "Is this the smart guy, the buttinski?"

Dan was trying to think, and what was more he was trying to think fast. He was finding it difficult. Through his mind flashed the idea of jamming the throttle forward suddenly, hoping he'd spurt away before they could shoot him. But then he saw that he had already rolled nearly half the length of the runway. No room for take-off, now. He'd have to turn around and start again—

Start. . . . Start. The way you started a jet. Sure—there was one thing Norbert Mack hadn't thought about.

"Come on, Mack, move over," Rucci was saying. "Let me finish the smart punk. He almost loused us up last night."

"Let him get out of there first," said Mack. He kept his dark, deep-set eyes on Dan. They were flat and cold. "I don't know how he found us here, but he's probably used the radio already. Did you use the radio, eh, kid?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?" said Dan.

Mack nodded. "That means you did. If you hadn't, you would have said yes right off. So now we're in a little hurry. Rucci, you cram in that back seat with Monks—"

With his good arm Dan reached forward and cut the switch. The jet engine died with a harsh, fading whisper. "Give me a hand," he said, "and I'll get out."

MACK gave him a hand. He was weaker than he thought from the shoulder wound. He swayed, and almost fell as he stood on the wing. He slid to the ground as Mack pushed heavily past him and legged into the cockpit. Rucci and Monks got in each other's way piling into the rear seat.

Dan started running. There was sagebrush ahead, right along the edge of the runway, and he ran for it. His legs didn't want to run, and his shoulder throbbed and burned, and the whole world rocked crazily before his eyes—but he kept running. He zigzagged as much as he could without throwing himself completely off balance.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

He heard the shots behind him. He saw a spurt of dust and chipped macadam a little ahead and to his right, and he heard the screaming of a slug in ricochet.

The first clump of sagebrush was just ahead.

Wham!

Something knocked his left leg right out from under him. He pitched forward; his momentum carried him into the sagebrush. He hit it with his face, and it scratched and prickled.

And then he heard more shooting, but this time it was coming from all directions. Lots of it. It sounded as if somebody had roped in the whole auxiliary field with a giant string of firecrackers and then set it off. He wanted to lift his head; he wanted to find out what the devil was going on. But he couldn't lift his little finger, let alone his head. He was getting sicker and dizzier by the second. The world was getting gray.

The firecrackers popped away for another moment or two, and then the world got black instead of gray. He felt cold for a while, warm for a while, and presently he felt nothing at all.

ALMOST right away, when consciousness came, he knew that he was in a hospital kind of place. He smelled the antiseptic, and he saw the white walls and ceiling. He saw the hanging flask and the hose and felt the pressure in the crook of his arm. Transfusion.

"You lost a lot of blood," said the voice of Colonel Tom Czernak, and Dan turned his head and saw the Colonel standing there.

"Dream or real?" asked Dan.

The Colonel chuckled. "Real enough. The State cops brought you here. That is, after they took care of your three playmates, they did. You'll probably be in the hospital awhile. Just about long enough for your promotion to go through, for a guess."

"Oh," said Dan. He didn't feel triumphant or anything. Just tired. He said: "Give the jet plane a promotion, Colonel. It held them there till the cops arrived. Mack forgot you need a battery cart to start the thing—he couldn't do a thing after I clipped the ignition. What the hell, he's a prop-and-engine man, anyway. Just like you, Colonel."

Czernak laughed. "Okay, Lieutenant. You win. We'll all keep our mouths shut about jets and the younger generation—and speaking of the younger generation, there's a female member of same out in the hall waiting to see you."

"Well, bring her in!" said Dan, managing to lift his head a little. In this man's Air Force, he reflected, a colonel doesn't kiss a hero on both cheeks, but his daughter might do something of the sort.

APPOINTMENT IN

by TOD CLAYMORE

Illustrated by James Ernst

OUR AIRPLANE FROM LONDON TO ROTTERDAM was delayed by weather, and we reached the ship about ten minutes before she was due to sail. That didn't make us very popular. A doctor, and some sort of immigration official had been waiting on board for an hour to examine us, and they saw us in Sarah's cabin. When that was over, I got Sarah settled in her cabin. She hadn't been sick on the air trip, but from what I had seen of the sea, I was sure she'd be sick after we sailed.

"I'd like you to lie down for a bit, darling," I told her. "You didn't sleep much last night, and you've had a hectic day. I think you should have a little rest."

"But Daddy, I want to look over the ship," she said.

"Everybody's very busy just now, and you'd be rather in the way. You'll have twelve days to look over the ship. Just lie down and try to have a little sleep."

"All right. But I'm not a bit sleepy." She bounced up and down vigorously on the bunk a couple of times and then settled herself. "Will you tell me a story?"

"Oh—when I can think of one."

"About an elephant," she insisted. She smiled cheerfully at me from the bunk. "Isn't this exciting!"

"Madly gay," I agreed. I began to put some of her things away, and when I looked at her again, she was fast asleep. Clangings and bangings and a feeling of vibration told me the ship was getting under way.

After a few minutes I left Sarah there sleeping, and went onto the little deck outside the row of cabins, and clung to the rail. I had to cling to something. Great waves were tossing their white untidy heads in all directions, and every time the ship rolled, the horizon seemed to plunge dizzily downward, pause for a moment, and then climb rapidly. Seen from the deck of the S.S. *Flora,* 8,179 tons, now homeward bound with a cargo of scrap metal and nine passengers from Rotterdam to New Orleans, the picture gave me no feeling of exhilaration.

Soon, I reflected, I must go back to Sarah. I couldn't reckon on her sleeping for over an hour, and she had been asleep for about that time now. When she woke up, she was going to begin being seasick, and I must try to look after her a little. That, I felt, is the least a father can do for his nine-year-old daughter.

I was just trying to make up my mind finally that it must be done, when a hearty slap between the shoulder-blades sent me lurching forward into the rail. I turned, feeling like murdering someone, and there was Sarah.

"Hallo, Daddy. Isn't this fun?"

Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining with glee and excitement. The little brute wasn't seasick; she was thoroughly enjoying herself. And she had a young woman with her.

"Hallo," I said.

"Daddy, is this a *tempest?*"

"It's rough," I admitted. "I thought you were asleep."

"I got up because I wanted to see the *tempest.* And then I met—" She indicated the girl with her, but I couldn't catch the name. The deck of the ship tilted suddenly downward at an utterly horrible angle, flinging us all together in a jumble against the rail. Sarah yelled, *"Whe-e-e!"* in a delighted voice; the girl and I each put an arm around her. The ship slowly righted itself.

"The weather is very rough," the girl stated; she spoke precisely, in the manner of one who has had to learn English.

"Isn't it," I said politely.

I noticed that she was very beautiful, because I happened to be looking at her. She had fair, silky hair that was blowing about in the wind, and calm, lovely blue eyes, and a wonderful complexion. But I didn't care what she looked like. It didn't interest me.

"Nearly all the passengers are seasick except us," stated Sarah with ghoulish satisfaction. "Aren't you glad we're not seasick?"

I didn't answer. Sarah gave me a long, thoughtful look, and then added in a slightly awe-stricken tone: "Daddy, *are* you seasick?"

"A bit," I said defensively. "What of it? So was Nelson."

Her lips twitched a little; and I thought, for a moment, that she was going to laugh. But she didn't laugh. "Poor Daddy!" she said sympathetically. "Is it horrible? How do you feel?"

"Just seasick," I said.

"If you are not well, you should lie down," the girl told me. She spoke seriously, and her expression indicated that she was really concerned. But I didn't take kindly to the suggestion. Seasick, or not seasick, I still had to see that Sarah didn't get swept overboard.

"You go and lie down, Daddy," urged Sarah. "We'll be all right. She can draw elephants."

She thrust one hand into her raincoat pocket and brought out a crumpled piece of paper. On it was a pencil drawing of an elephant.

NEW ORLEANS

One of the drunks took a swing at me. I ducked. Then something hard hit me with blinding force, and I went down.

"It's good, isn't it?" she said.

"Very," I agreed unenthusiastically. A steward came up to us.

"All passengers inside, sir, please. Captain's orders," he said.

So then we had to go inside. That meant leaving the cold fresh air, and entering an atmosphere steam-heated to about seventy degrees, and smelling slightly of engine oil; it seemed to hit me like a kick in the stomach.

"You lie down," urged the girl again. "I will look after your daughter."

I wasn't in a state to argue, so I said "Thank you" and lurched off to my cabin. I took my clothes off, flopped into the bunk, and swallowed three aspirin tablets. All I asked now was to be left quite alone.

But I wasn't left alone. After a few minutes a knock came on my cabin door, and I cursed mentally and shouted: "Come in."

The girl entered. She came in carefully, holding her left hand against the wall to steady herself; in her right hand she carried a glass.

"Drink this," she said. "It will make you sleep, and you will feel better."

When I am ill, I can do without angels of mercy, and I dislike medicine; and anyway, I had taken three aspirins. However, one has to be polite, so I sat up and took the glass from her; and as I did so, the ship heeled over at an angle of about thirty-five degrees. The girl staggered, half turned away from me, and grabbed a fixed dressing-table to save herself from falling. That gave me my op-

portunity. While her back was turned, I tossed the contents of the glass swiftly into the wash basin. When she had recovered her balance, I was sitting up in my bunk with the empty glass in my hand.

"Thank you," I said. "That was delicious."

She smiled and took the glass from me. "Now you sleep. The little girl will be all right."

I was grateful, and hoped that now I should be left alone. The cabin grew darker. After a time I heard the door open gently, and Sarah's voice whispered hoarsely: "Are you awake?"

"Yes," I said. "Put the light on." She did.

"The mate says I'm a born sailor," she announced proudly. "I've had some supper—scrambled eggs and canned peaches. Now I've come to say good-night."

"Don't talk to me of scrambled eggs," I said. "How do you like your new friend? Is she nice?"

"Very nice," said Sarah emphatically. "She can draw tigers, too."

"She's a bright girl," I agreed. "All right, darling, you pop off to bed. Don't forget to clean your teeth."

"I won't." She grinned at me impishly. "Have you cleaned yours?"

"Never mind that. Good night, poppet."

"Good night, Daddy." She came and kissed me.

She went. The ship rolled and pitched, and when the screw came out of the water, she vibrated horribly. I lay there, awake, and presently I began to feel a little better. With me, attacks of seasickness never seem to last for more than a few hours. . . .

It must have been after eleven when the door of my cabin began to open again, and this time I closed my eyes. I was sure it couldn't be Sarah, and I didn't want to talk to anyone else.

Soft footsteps entered the cabin, and paused. After that nothing happened for two or three seconds. I opened my eyes very slightly.

The girl was standing in the middle of the floor, clutching the dressing-table to brace herself against the rolling of the ship. Her expression was intent and wary, and she did not look like an angel of mercy. She looked like a kid stealing jam. Her lips were slightly parted, and the tip of her tongue was showing.

Holding on with her left hand, she used her right to open, very quietly, all the drawers in the dresser. Most of them were empty. The next thing was my coat. She reached out for it gingerly, as if afraid it might bite her, and went through the pockets with a sort of quiet, desperate haste.

When she had looked through my coat, she still held in her hand a blue leather wallet and a bunch of keys. The wallet contained nothing except a driving license, forty dollars, and a cable from my friend Louis Curel. She read through the cable and then replaced the wallet in my coat.

After that she had a little trouble in finding the right keys for my cases. Once she dropped the keys with a clatter, and I closed my eyes quickly. There was a pause, and I knew she was looking at me, so I kept my eyes closed. Then I heard her sigh deeply and turn back to the cases. When I looked again, she had one of them open and was glancing quickly through the contents.

I suppose I could have shouted "Hi" or something, but the idea didn't even occur to me. For one thing, that would have meant a big dramatic scene, and I dislike big dramatic scenes, especially when I am feeling seasick. For another, I was much too curious to see what she would do. There were no important documents, secret plans or uncut diamonds in my cases; I had nothing to hide, and nothing really worth stealing. Anyway, she didn't seem to be stealing anything. So I let her get on with it.

When she had finished, she locked my cases and put the keys back in my coat pocket. Then she came over to my bunk, and lying there, with my eyes closed, I felt her fingers lightly straightening and arranging the sheets and tucking me in. She had finished searching my belongings, and now she was being an angel of mercy again! Then I heard the cabin door close gently, and she had gone.

So there I was, lying on my bunk, full of wonder and curiosity. This girl had come into my life from nowhere; I didn't even know her name. Calmly announcing her intention, she had given me something to make me sleep; and then she had gone through my things. She hadn't taken anything, but that might easily have been because she hadn't found anything worth taking.

All the same, I didn't believe she was a thief. But if she wasn't a thief, what was she?

I had expected the voyage across to be rather dull. It now began to look to me as if it might be very interesting.

Chapter Two

In the morning the sea had calmed down a little. When I had washed and dressed, I glanced into Sarah's cabin. She was asleep, so I left her to it, and took a look around. All the passengers' cabins were situated on the same deck, four on each side. I had been assigned a double-berth cabin located at the after end of this deck; then there was Sarah in a single-berth cabin, then a narrow passage, leading to the outside deck, then two more cabins, and then the Captain's quarters, stretching right across the deck, with the portholes looking out forward. A companionway led to a lower deck similarly arranged, with the officers' cabins and a dining-saloon with two long tables in it. Stewards were busy laying these tables. Outside the saloon was a notice board with a big notice on it.

Swan Line
New Orleans
S.S. *Flora*
Notice to Passengers

Meals will be served at the following times

Breakfast	7:30—8 a.m.
Dinner	11:00—11:30
Supper	5:00— 5:30

Passengers are asked to coöperate by being punctual for meals, or they won't get them.

No alcohol is served on this ship. If you want cigarettes, see the Chief Steward.

No maid service is provided on this ship; passengers who ring the bells in their cabins will be doing just that.

A. A. Lundstrom, *Master.*

While I was reading this notice a man came up to me. He was a big man, untidily dressed in old khaki clothes, and his massive forearms were liberally illustrated with ships in full sail, eagles fighting, and other pleasing designs. His face was fat and rather yellowish, with a long, pointed nose, very pale blue eyes, and a big mouth that turned up at the corners. On his head he wore a round knitted cap of white wool, below which was a fringe of fair hair.

"Good morning, sir. Enjoying yourself?" He spoke in a deep, rough voice.

"Just looking round," I told him.

"That's righd. You go ahead an' look around. If you see anyding wort' looking ad, you come and dell me, because I'll be mighdy inneresded."

His accent bewildered me. It seemed to belong to no known nationality. Sometimes he changed his T's into D's and sometimes he didn't.

"I'll do that. Who do I ask for?"

"Just ask for de Capdain. But you won't have to ask for me. You'll see me around."

"Captain Lundstrom?"

"That's righd. There you have id, Mister—"

"Claymore," I said. We shook hands. "Are you a Norwegian?" I asked.

"Born and reared, dere. Bud when I was sixdeen, my fader, he say to me, you get the hell oud of dis and stay oud, and I admired his foresight so much I never been back since."

"You've lived in the United States."

"Yes sir. Lived in New Orleans this thirdy years. Me, I'm an American. Only my parends taught me the wrong language, so I don'd always speak right. Well, sir, I got dings to see to. We'll be meeding."

He nodded and walked away. I went to rouse Sarah. She was awake this time; she smiled at me and swung her blue pajamaed legs over the side of the bunk, and jumped at me, and kissed me.

"You're better. Is breakfast nearly ready?"

"Any minute now. You get dressed quickly, or you'll miss it. They're very strict on this ship."

"Are they? Will there be a lot to eat? I'm terribly hungry."

A clanging gong announced breakfast, and we found that one of the long tables in the saloon was for ships' officers, and the other for passengers. Most of the officers seemed to be present; the only other passenger was a man I had seen on deck the previous afternoon. He was tall, swarthy, dark-eyed, dark-suited, and he looked up from a book, said "Good morning" briefly, and then went on reading.

A STEWARD came with a menu. We could have orange juice, cereal, eggs, grilled bacon, sausage, and a choice of tea or coffee. Sarah beamed with happiness when she saw this bill of fare, and asked for everything except coffee. All I wanted was tea and toast.

"They're real eggs, too," said Sarah, greatly impressed. "Not even powdered eggs. This *is* a nice ship."

When we were halfway through breakfast, the girl entered. She seemed uncertain where to sit, till Sarah waved and beckoned to her. Then she came over and joined us.

"Good morning. I am glad that you are better."

She had on a simple gray dress, and looked prim and quiet, like a Quakeress. The smile she gave me was cool and distant. I smiled back, and said: "Thank you."

"Have some eggs," Sarah urged her. "You can have real ones—two of them." Then she smiled at Sarah, and this time the smile was a real one.

"Let's get acquainted," I suggested. "My name's Tod Claymore, and this is my daughter Sarah."

"My name is—" But I couldn't catch what she said.

"I beg your pardon. Would you mind spelling it?"

"Taimi Lanner, *T-a-i-m-i L-a-n-n-e-r.*" (She pronounced her first name as *Timey*).

"Taimi Lanner," I repeated. "Are you from Norway?"

"I came from Finland."

"You speak English very well. Did you learn it in England?"

"No."

"At school, then?"

"No. I have learned English in a concentration camp."

She made this statement quite matter-of-factly, and it shook me a little. I found it difficult to visualize her in the horrors of a concentration camp. A steward took her order—orange juice, toast, and coffee.

"Were you in a German concentration camp?" I asked.

"Yes. For two years. There was an English lady there—a singer, who had been married to a German. She taught me English and some music."

"And eventually you were liberated," I said fatuously.

"Yes—by the Americans. But my friend died."

Did she mind about her friend dying? Had she ever been in a concentration camp at all, or was she just lying to me?

"What part of America are you going to?" she asked.

"New Orleans."

The steward brought her breakfast, and she went on: "Are you going on business? Or to stay with friends?"

It was her turn to ask questions, but she knew the answer to this one already, because I had seen her reading my cable. She knew just where I was going.

"Friends," I said. "I'm going to stay with a man named Louis Curel."

"He's got a big house," put in Sarah. "And three motorcars, and a lot of dogs and horses, and this ship belongs to him."

"This ship belongs to him." That was something she didn't know. She spoke quietly, and then she smiled again, but that smile was part of a defense mechanism; she had switched it on automatically, to cover up a jolt. For some reason she didn't want Louis Curel to own the ship, and in point of fact, he didn't own it. I said so.

"It's not his ship. He's merely a director of the line."

"He got us on it," said Sarah.

"That's right," I agreed. I had finished my toast and I pulled out a cigarette packet. "Louis was in England a few months ago," I went on. "He asked me and Sarah to visit him in New Orleans sometime. I said we would, and didn't give it another thought. What happened then is that a party of French school teachers had booked all the accommodation on this ship for this voyage, and at the last moment they canceled. Louis heard about it, and reserved passages for me and Sarah, and cabled telling us to come. We only just got our visas in time to catch the ship."

She nodded. "I knew there were cancellations. That is how I got on the ship."

"The mate says we'll get there just in time for Mardi Gras," put in Sarah. "That's a sort of big fancy-dress party. I love parties."

"I hope you will enjoy it." She beckoned a steward. "I wish for a little coffee, and orange juice, and toast, on a tray," she went on, in her careful English. "They are for an old gentleman who is not well."

The steward brought them, and she took them away. So there she was, being an angel of mercy again, tending the sick; and presently, when the old gentleman had gone to sleep, she would probably look in on him quietly and search his cabin. I glanced up as Sarah gave me a little kick under the table.

"Daddy! You like Taimi, don't you?"

"She seems all right. I don't know much about her yet." A thought occurred to me, and I went on: "Tell me, when you were talking to her yesterday afternoon, before I went to lie down, did you tell her where we were going—to Mr. Curel's house, I mean."

"Yes, Daddy. Why?"

"I only wondered."

"Did you sleep all right? She told me she was going to give you something to make you sleep."

"Yes, darling," I said. "I slept beautifully."

THE ship normally carried twelve passengers, but only nine were traveling on this trip. At dinner three more came into the saloon, an ex-G.I. named George Harding, sandy, freckled and cheerful, with his blonde Belgian wife, Yvonne, and a bulky Dutchwoman named Mrs. Moller. The Hardings were returning to Cairo, Illinois, after a visit to Yvonne's parents; the Dutchwoman was on her way to visit a married niece in Mobile. In reply to a question from the ex-G.I., the silent passenger at the end of the table told us his name was Elmer Gains, and

he was returning to New Orleans after a business trip to Holland.

At supper another passenger appeared, making the number present up to eight. This latest arrival was an old gentleman who must have been seventy or more. He looked frail and ill, and the movement of the ship bothered him a lot. Coming into the dining-room, he almost fell; and Taimi rose quickly and helped him to our end of the table. She introduced us.

"Mr. Swenson, Mr. Claymore, Sarah." We shook hands.

The old man sat down carefully, and smiled at me; there was a peculiar knowingness in his expression. "I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Claymore," he said; and I had the feeling that he already knew a good deal about me.

The Captain entered, and came over to us.

"Glad to see you're bedder, Mr. Swenson, sir. We had it a liddle rough, heh."

"Too rough for me, Captain. I'm getting old."

"Gedding old," said the Captain. "Who isn't? Me, I ged older an' uglier every day, an' de girls don'd like me no more. Never did like me much; dad's why I wend to sea."

"Say, Captain." It was the ex-G.I. who spoke, and he seemed worried. "Is this really the last meal of the day? Seems to me I'm liable to get a little hungry in the night."

"Sure id's de last meal. Dis is one of dem hell-ships; didn' nobody tell you? After dis you starve—unless you got de energy to step into de galley an' open de ice-box. You just go right ahead if you're hungry; ead anyding you can find It don'd cost me nudden; de company pays."

The Captain went to his own table; the meal continued. Mr. Swenson smiled at me.

"How's tennis, Mr. Claymore? Do you play much these days?"

So he did know something about me—that I used to play tennis.

"Not much," I answered.

"Is there any chance you'll be at Forest Hills this year?"

"None at all." I smiled. "I haven't played championship tennis since 1939."

"The war, I suppose."

"Yes. I was six years in the R.A.F., and since then, with a hungry daughter to support, I haven't had the time. But I still play occasionally."

PERHAPS I should explain that it was through tennis that I met Louis Curel. I was introduced to him at Wimbledon in 1938 by Poppy Laleham, that grim old battleaxe who went on playing first-class tennis till she was sixty, and always had a bottle of gin under the umpire's seat. Louis and she, playing together, had won a lot of cups before the first World War.

In spring, 1939, I stayed with him in a villa he was renting in the south of France, and played in some of the Riviera tournaments. I hadn't seen him since, but I'd seen plenty of Poppy. That terrifying old woman is always crossing my path.

"The war interfered with a great many things," said Mr. Swenson. He turned to Taimi, smiling. "You'll probably have gathered that Mr. Claymore used to be a very well-known tennis player."

She looked completely indifferent, and the smile faded from Mr. Swenson's face. After that, conversation just stopped. Taimi didn't seem to want to talk to any of us. Even Sarah gave up trying to talk and concentrated on eating. The amount of food my slim, sylphlike daughter can stow away into that ceaselessly active figure is a never-failing marvel to me.

At half-past seven I saw Sarah to bed, and then read for a bit. Soon after nine, feeling bored, I wandered down into the saloon. None of the passengers was there, but three of the ship's officers were playing cards; and a little apart from them Sarah's two friends the mate and third mate were having coffee and sandwiches. They invited me to join them.

"Get yourself something to eat, and a cup," the mate invited me. "You'll find plenty in the icebox. I'll show you. Then you'll know where to go next time."

He looked like my idea of a mate, brawny, weather-beaten, and cheerful, with a peaked jockey cap stuck on his head, and a twinkle in his blue eyes. His name was Bob Smalls. The third mate was a good deal younger, a man of twenty-seven or -eight, tall and rangy, with dark hair and eyes and a friendly smile. He reminded me a little of Gary Cooper some years back, and his name was Lee Johnston.

We sat and chatted, and presently the mate went to his cabin and fetched a bottle of gin and a box of cigars. The rest of the evening passed very pleasantly.

Chapter Three

ON A SMALL CARGO SHIP, WITH ONLY ONE saloon to eat and sit in, the passengers just have to try to make the best of one another. We did that. When the gong went, we trooped obediently in to meals, and laughed when plates and glasses slid about the table. There were still only eight of us, because the remaining passenger, an old woman who had come on board with a bad cold, had not yet appeared. Her meals were taken to her cabin by one of the stewards.

"Do you think she'd like it if I went in to see her?" Yvonne Harding asked.

"Like it?" The steward sounded bitter. "That old crocodile! You keep out, lady. She'd probably bite you."

At our end of the dining-table we were very polite. Taimi smiled, and spoke when she was spoken to, and got away from the table quickly when she had finished.

"What's the matter with everyone?" Sarah asked me, when we had just left the table after dinner on the third day of the voyage. "Meals aren't fun any more, except the eating part."

"Aren't they?"

"No. And Daddy!" She lowered her voice to the hushed whisper she uses for imparting secrets. "I saw Taimi crying—I saw her through her porthole."

"Darling." I tried to sound very shocked. "You mustn't look through people's portholes. Only newspaper writers and blackmailers do that sort of thing."

"I didn't," protested Sarah indignantly. "I was climbing, and her porthole was there, and I *saw* through it. I didn't *look* through it. And I haven't told anybody except you."

"Why did you think I ought to know?"

"Daddy, don't be difficult. You're her friend, aren't you? We both are." She smiled at me confidently, as if that was all settled. "Now I'm going to see Mr. Marling. He promised to show me the engine-room."

Later in the afternoon I saw Mr. Swenson leaning against the rail, and I joined him. He greeted me with a little smile.

"It's calming down," he said.

"Yes." I paused for a moment, and then plunged right in. "You seemed to know something about me the first time we met. Do you, by any chance, know Mr. Louis Curel?"

"Quite well," he answered without hesitation. "That's how I know a little about you, Mr. Claymore. I've heard him speak of you on several occasions. For many years, before I retired, I handled Mr. Curel's legal business—and also the business of this shipping line."

"I see. Then I suppose you always cross on their ships."

"Well, no. I flew over. I'm returning this way because I happened to hear in the company's Stockholm office that there were unexpected vacancies on this ship."

"In their Stockholm office? Of course—the name Swenson is Scandinavian," I remarked. "Are you from Sweden?"

"My parents were; I was born in America. But I speak the language, and sometimes I go over on a visit."

"Taimi—Miss Lanner is Scandinavian," I went on hopefully. "Did you ever meet her in Norway or Sweden?"

"I met her in Finland. In fact, I was of some help in getting her a passage."

"A queer girl," I said. "Very reserved. One might almost think she was afraid of something. Have you noticed it?"

I was pumping him shamelessly, and at any moment I expected a snub. He stared away out to sea. Then, abruptly, without looking at me, he spoke again.

"It's difficult for people like you and me even to imagine what her life has been. She was in an underground movement. She and her father belonged to a group which believed Finland's best chance lay in an Allied victory. They were caught, and sent to different concentration camps. She was imprisoned for nearly two years."

"Did she tell you this?"

"I heard about it from people in Helsinki." He paused again, staring out over the rail. "Think of that life for a girl of her age—the constant suspicion and uncertainty! Always dreading the stab in the back, the hand on your shoulder, the treachery from someone you trust. Do you wonder—"

His voice trailed off. I tried to prompt him.

"I see what you mean. It's become a sort of habit with her not to trust anyone too much." I paused, and then added deliberately: "When you helped her to get a passage on this ship, did you tell her you were Mr. Curel's lawyer?"

"No, I didn't. You must understand, I had no authority to bring her back with me. I couldn't allow her to think that—that in arranging her passage, I was in any way acting on behalf of the family."

"In fact, you think the family may not like it."

"I fear they may not." He paused again; the faded eyes behind the gold-rimmed pince-nez were shrewd. "I used to be a lawyer, you know, Mr. Claymore; I haven't been unconscious of your cross-examination of me—or of your interest in Miss Lanner."

"I didn't flatter myself you had," I told him, smiling. "I'll admit that I am interested in her."

"She's a very beautiful young woman—and very charming. But don't allow yourself to become too interested in her. Perhaps I should explain that, when you approached me a few minutes ago, I had already been seriously considering taking you into my confidence. I must confess that I'm greatly worried about the probable results of my visit to Europe and the actions which I took there. These results will chiefly involve Miss Lanner, and it is on her behalf that I should like to talk to you. Mr. Louis Curel is a friend of yours; your representations will carry a certain weight with him."

"Will they?" I said doubtfully. "I hope so. But let me just get things right: I understand that Louis Curel sent you over to Helsinki to make some inquiries about Miss Lanner, and you decided to take her back to New Orleans with you. But you didn't tell her you were Louis' lawyer because she might have hoped for too much at the end of her journey. Is that so?"

"No. It wasn't Louis Curel. It was Mrs. Curel who asked me to go to Helsinki."

She went through the pockets with desperate haste.

"Mrs. Curel? I didn't even know there was a Mrs. Curel. How long has Louis been married?"

"He isn't married; I am referring to Mrs. John Curel."

"Oh." I tried to remember what Louis had told me about his relatives, and went on: "He's got a sister-in-law, hasn't he, or is it two sisters-in-law. And aren't there some children?"

"He has a sister and a sister-in-law, both widows. They live together. And there are two children—though they're hardly children any longer. Francine de Saram is twenty-one, and Paul Curel is twenty-six. He'll be twenty-seven in May, if he's alive."

"If he's alive?"

"Yes. Paul's father, John Curel, died suddenly just over a year ago. He'd had a weak heart for a considerable time. Paul was in Germany with the occupying forces when it happened, and he got leave to fly home. The airplane that was taking him crashed."

"But—he wasn't killed."

"Not quite. Sometimes, for a few moments, he seems to recognize somebody; then everything clouds over again. Mostly he lies there, vacant and quite helpless. He's been like that for over a year." The old man sighed deeply. "He was a fine boy—such a very fine boy."

I knew that anything I might say would be quite inadequate. But I had to say something.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," I said lamely. "Is there no hope that he'll recover?"

"None, the doctors say. They wonder that he's lived so long. But I think myself that there might be a chance if—"

He broke off. Sarah's voice hailed me as she came out of a companionway onto the deck. Taimi was with her.

"Daddy! We've been down in the engine-room. It was fun."

"Was it, darling! Then I bet you're thoroughly dirty. You'd better wash; it will be supper-time in a minute."

As if to confirm my words, the supper gong banged loudly. Mr. Swenson smiled at Sarah and Taimi, and turned to me.

"It looks as if we shall have to end our talk, for the present. We might renew it a little later."

"I'll be alone in my cabin from nine onward," I promised.

The three of them went in, but I stayed where I was for a time, thinking; and it seemed to me that the pattern of things was beginning to take on a sort of shape. And yet, things did not quite fit in. I couldn't understand why Taimi had found it necessary to search my cabin.

Behind me the porthole of a cabin was suddenly brightly lit. I heard the sound of running water, and of a man softly whistling "Shenandoah." That would be Elmer Gains, the silent passenger, getting ready to go down to supper. It occurred to me that he might easily have overheard our conversation. The thought did not worry me; I couldn't see that it mattered if he had.

I crossed to my own cabin, which was on the other side of the deck, and found Sarah. We went down to supper.

VIOLENT banging on my cabin door made me look up from my book, and I half opened my mouth to shout: "Come in." Then the door opened, and I just sat there, staring. Poppy Laleham was standing in the doorway!

She was the last person I had expected to see on that ship. Let me be frank, and admit that she was the last person I wanted to see on that ship.

She looked terrible. A shapeless old purple dressing-gown, worn over a vivid yellow nightdress, covered her long, skinny figure. Her white hair was wild; her complexion, normally a weatherbeaten brown, had a yellowish tinge; her long nose, inflamed by a cold, stood out like a red beacon. Her black eyes, bright and glittering, and rather watery, seemed to be looking at me with an expression of peculiar malignity.

"Poppy!" I said feebly. "How the—"

"What's the good of saying Poppy?" she interrupted; her voice was like something that hasn't been oiled for years. "My God, why ever did I get on this misbegotten tub? I expected a comfortable voyage, with plenty to eat and drink; and now, after being tossed about for three days like a—a—"

"A rose petal," I suggested. She glared at me.

"Will you get up and do something?" she demanded shrilly. "Or do you imagine I like to have my cabin strewn with drunks when I'm not feeling well! I always knew you were useless; I didn't guess you were paralyzed."

"If it comes to that, I didn't guess you had drunks all over your cabin," I answered. "Let's take a look."

We passed the door of Sarah's cabin, and the passage that led to the deck. Poppy's cabin was next.

Old Mr. Swenson was lying face down on the floor, as if he had just fallen through the doorway. Poppy stepped by him and went to her bunk; I bent down over him. There was blood on his head, and a little on the carpet; his wrist, when I lifted it, felt flabby.

"He isn't drunk," I said. "This is Mr. Swenson, the company's lawyer."

"Then you'd better do something for him. This company's going to need a lawyer before I'm through with them," said Poppy viciously. She flopped onto her bunk and pulled the bedclothes up round her knees.

"Just take it easy a minute," I told her. "I'm going to fetch the Captain. I think this man is dead."

The Captain's quarters were only a few steps away. When I entered, he was sitting with his feet on a desk, reading letters.

"Come right in, Mister," he said. "Don't bodder to knock. The ship belongs to you."

"You can have it," I said. "I just came to tell you that Mr. Swenson's very ill—maybe dead. He's lying on the floor of Miss Laleham's cabin."

"You don't say! Okay, I come." The Captain stubbed his cigar out and took his feet from the desk. Poppy was still sitting huddled on the bunk, with the bedclothes clasped round her knees; she didn't say anything. The Captain bent over Swenson and made a brief examination.

"Poor old gendleman!" He turned to me. "You like to give me a liddle help, Mister. We take him to his cabin."

Between us we carried Swenson's body to his cabin, which was across the deck, and laid him down on his bunk. No one saw us. At that hour the passengers were all in their cabins, or down in the saloon.

"What happens now?" I asked.

"Why, we bury him. I'll have to read the funeral service. In the morning, I guess."

"What about the cause of death?" I asked.

"Um-hm. You think dat's important?" He stared at me consideringly. "You go along to my stateroom, Mr. Claymore. Just go dere and wait for me. I'll be wid you in a minute or two."

He sounded unfriendly. He didn't look very friendly, either. So I went to his stateroom, and waited. A quarter of an hour or more must have passed before he came in; he went to his desk, sat down, and took a cigar from a box on the desk. He lit it unhurriedly before he turned to me.

"Now sir, we have a liddle talk." He blew out smoke and looked me up and down again thoughtfully. "You're a colonel or someding, aren't you?"

"I was a wing commander in the war, but—"

"Sure. Dat's it. A commander. I got a message from de Company to take care of you, but I don't know what it means."

"What what means?"

"To take care of anybody. Me, I'm just an ignorant old sailor. I wouldn't know how to take care of nobody. Anybody coming as passenger on dis ship, dey takes deir chance."

"That's all right," I said. "I don't need taking care of. I thought we were discussing Mr. Swenson."

"All right, Colonel. Go on and discuss him. Whad you want to say?"

"I was wondering what the cause of death was."

"He was a friend of yours—or a relation?" His voice was sarcastic. "List'n, Mister," he went on. "Dis ship rolls a liddle. You may have noticed it. De old gendleman was weak in de legs. So when de ship rolled, he put a hand against de cabin door to save himself, an' id came open an' pitched him right into de cabin, an' he got a bang on de head. Maybe you saw."

YES, I had noticed that Mr. Swenson's only apparent injury was on the front of his head, and the Captain's explanation had already occurred to me. But I wasn't happy about it.

"I believe Mr. John Curel died suddenly about a year ago," I suggested. "Just after that, his son had a bad air crash. Now someone else connected with the family has died suddenly." I paused, wondering how to go on. Should I tell him about Taimi searching my cabin?

"Why, sure." The Captain's voice was suddenly soft and soothing; he might have been speaking to a child. "You're a wrider, aren't you, as well as being a colonel. You make up stories, and write dem down, and make plendy money."

He shook his head emphatically.

"Me, I ain'd smart enough to do dat. I gotter see dis ship goes on, an' I don't want no dime mysteries upsettin' de passengers an' unsettlin' de crew. I'm telling you dat, Mr. Claymore. You understand."

"Or else, what?" I asked. "Shall I be made to walk the plank?" I shrugged. "All right, Captain, I won't frighten the passengers. But I'm not satisfied."

"No." He smiled at me. "All right, Colonel. When we ged to New Orleans, you say what you like. Go to de police, an' to your friends de directors, an' say: dat Captain Lundstrom's no good. Den dey give me de sack, an' I have to sing in de streets for a living. De only suppord of my poor wife and child."

"That would amuse me a lot," I said. I rose. "Have you really got a wife and child, Captain?"

"Cerdainly I got one. Every sailor got a wife and child somewhere. Me, I took mine fifdeen years ago for bedder or worse, an' if it turned oud worse, I guess dat's good enough for me."

He took a cigar from the box on the desk. "Try one of dese, Commander. Dey cost six cents each, an' you can chew 'em or smoke 'em. All you need is a strong constidution."

I took it, and said "Thank you." When I reached the doorway, he had his feet on the desk and was reading his letters again.

Poppy's cabin door was open, and she called to me as I passed by it.

"You took your time," she remarked disagreeably. "Sit down over there, unless you want to catch my cold, and tell me about it."

"About what? The old man's dead, if that's what you want to know. I've been with the Captain."

"The Captain was nosing about in here for a long time," said Poppy. "I can't think why."

"Do you remember just what happened when the old man fell in here?" I asked.

"Remember? Naturally I remember. I heard him lurch against the door, and then he just fell in."

"Did you notice whether he hit his head?" I asked.

"Of course he hit his head," she said impatiently. "You try falling into this cabin without hitting your head. He gave it a good crack on that wash-basin, but I didn't imagine he was dead. I thought he'd only knocked himself out." She looked at me suspiciously. "You wouldn't be hinting that someone banged him on the head and tossed him into my cabin, would you?"

"No," I said. "What are you doing on this ship, Poppy? I didn't know Louis Curel had invited you too."

"He didn't." She gave a cackle. "I heard him asking you—it was at that cocktail party he gave at the Dorchester, and I got him into a corner and invited myself. After all, why shouldn't he have me on a visit? He's got a big house, and lots of money, and I'm sick of rationing."

"Why not?" I agreed. I struck a match and lighted the Captain's cigar. "Tell me, Poppy, did you ever know any other members of the Curel family?"

"I knew John a good many years ago. He played in men's doubles with Louis."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"No good. No real use at all. His backhand was hopeless—purely defensive. And he wasn't much good overhead."

"What sort of a *man* was he?" I asked patiently. "I'm not talking about his tennis."

"I don't know. And why should you care?" She sniffed. "What's that thing you're smoking? It smells like old rope."

"It's a dried banana," I said. "I found it in my cabin, and now I'm going to take it back there. Good night, Poppy."

Chapter Four

At breakfast the Captain announced Mr. Swenson's death. He spoke briefly. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have sad news for you. One of de passengers, Mr. Swenson, was daken ill and died in de night."

There was a hush, and then a subdued chorus of sympathetic comment. George Harding asked: "When will the funeral be?"

"The funeral will nod be public," the Captain said.

Sarah didn't eat much breakfast. She was distressed by the old man's death. Taimi didn't eat any at all. She looked cold, as if she wanted to shiver. . . .

At dinner Poppy Laleham entered the saloon for the first time. She appeared in the doorway, tall and skinny, clad in an old dress of rusty black, and stood there for a moment surveying the scene; and while she stood there everything stopped and everybody stared. I will say for Poppy that she has no objection to being stared at. She looked us all over calmly, and even contemptuously, then came toward the empty place that had been Swenson's and sat in it.

"Anyone sitting here?" She gave a cackle. "Too bad if there is." She turned toward Taimi, and took a good long appraising look at her, and then looked at me and gave another cackle.

"H'm," she said.

"I'm glad you're better," said Sarah politely.

"Are you? Your father isn't." She glanced at me again and let fly another envenomed shaft. "How's Sabrina?" she asked. Sabrina is a girl I know in England.

"All right, I believe." I spoke coldly, because I didn't want to discuss Sabrina with Poppy, or anyone else. Last time I saw Sabrina, she told me, amicably but very firmly, to walk out of her life and stay out. She said I distracted her from her duty, which was to look after her sick father; and she made it quite clear that she meant it.

"What do you mean, you believe," said Poppy. "Aren't you two—" She paused as a steward put down a plate of soup in front of her, and drew it nearer to her; and just then the ship rolled, and the plate of soup tipped neatly over the edge of the table and fell into her lap.

"Wow!" yelled Poppy, then uttered a very unfeminine word, and sprang to her feet. Sarah gave a little gurgle, shut her lips tightly, and looked resolutely downward; her face went pink with suppressed emotion. Taimi reached out quickly with a table napkin and began dabbing at Poppy's skirt. A steward joined in with a dishcloth.

"For heaven's sake, Tod, tell that child to laugh, if she has to," said Poppy fiercely. "I suppose she gets her sense of humor from her fishwitted father."

"Probably," I agreed. "Go on, Sarah, laugh if you want to. Poppy won't mind."

A sort of muffled explosion came from Sarah, and she began laughing helplessly, holding her ribs. Poppy thrust herself away from the table and marched out of the saloon. Other people, infected by Sarah's merriment, began laughing too.

Even Taimi was laughing. Her eyes were shining; her cheeks were faintly flushed; she looked, for the moment, young and care-free. Then she became conscious that I was glancing at her, and the laughter seemed to fade abruptly from her eyes, and then from her lips.

She stayed like that. She didn't give me a chance to speak to her. At meals, with Poppy's gimlet eyes watching me, I had no wish to speak to her. Between meals she avoided me; but if by chance we met anywhere, she made a quick excuse to get away.

And the voyage went on. The sea became calmer; the sun came out; passengers sat in low chairs out on the

I thought, numbly: "My God, I'm being drowned!"

deck; and life became a regular routine. The only excitements that occurred were porpoises, or shoals of flying fish.

Every evening, when I had put Sarah to bed, I used to wander away up into the bows, and lean over the rail. I liked it up there, alone, in the dark, with nothing between me and the horizon, listening to the hiss as the ship drove through the water and watching the creamy phosphorescent wave curl away from the bows. At about nine I would wander down to the saloon and chat, over a sandwich and a cup of coffee, with the first mate.

We passed through the Straits of Cuba and entered the Gulf of Mexico, and still I hadn't spoken to Taimi. And then, in the end, on the last afternoon of the trip, I did speak to her. That night we would enter the Mississippi; the following morning we would go ashore in New Orleans. It happened that I saw her alone, leaning against the rail. The sun was shining on her fair hair, and she looked young, and wistful, and somehow rather unprotected. Acting on a sudden impulse, I went up to her and leaned against the rail beside her.

"Don't go away," I said. "I want to talk to you."

She gave a little start when I spoke to her. The face she turned to me was smooth and placid—her protective mask. She didn't say anything; she just waited.

"Please don't think I'm being unfriendly, or prying. I don't mean to be. But I'd like to ask you one or two questions."

She didn't answer. She didn't even give a glimmer of response. It occurred to me that in the past she might have heard from the Gestapo very much the same opening speech that I had made.

"Look," I said. "Don't be so damned suspicious of me. I don't mean you any harm. Before I came on this ship, I didn't even know you existed."

"Then why do you wish to ask me questions?" she said.

"Because—well, dammit," I said, "I've got a right to ask you one question, anyway: Just what were you looking for that night you searched my cabin?"

That shook her. I saw the look of fear that came into her eyes; she shrank from me a little. But her voice was quite steady.

"I do not understand."

"Then I'll tell you. I didn't take the sleeping-draught you gave me. I was watching you all the time."

This time she didn't shrink; she was ready for it. And that was her trouble. She had been in an underground movement, and a concentration camp, and she was ready for anything. So she didn't shrink but she didn't answer. Words were dangerous.

"Just get this into your head," I said impatiently: "You needn't be afraid. I'm not trying to harm you."

For a moment an expression of doubt came into her eyes. I thought she was on the point of being reasonable; then abruptly the balance tilted the other way.

"Then why don't you leave me alone?" she asked; it was the first time I had heard any real warmth in her voice. "Leave me alone and go away."

"That's an idea," said a slow, drawling voice behind me. "Why not leave her alone?"

I turned. Lee Johnston was standing just behind me; his Gary Cooper features looked stern and noble. We looked at each other; and Taimi took advantage of our preoccupation to go quietly away.

"I'm just a ship's officer," Lee went on. "And if I hit a passenger, I'll be making plenty trouble for myself. But I'm thinking it might be worth the trouble."

"If you hit me, you may be making more trouble for yourself than you anticipate," I said irritably. "I wasn't doing her any harm. I only wanted to ask her one or two questions."

"The answer is no, to all of them," he told me. "She told you, and now I'm telling you, and you'd better take notice."

That irritated me again. He looked so terribly stern and noble.

"All right, Galahad," I said. "Just now she's probably in her cabin, crying. Why don't you do something about it—go along and comfort her! She'd like that."

He stared at me, and color mounted to his cheeks. I thought he was going to hit me. But he didn't.

"I will, too," he said. "I'll do that. And if I find you've harmed her—" He turned and strode away in a determined manner.

I LIT a cigarette, and leaned against the rail, feeling baffled and disgusted. My effort to talk to Taimi had gone over like a lead balloon. I turned gloomily to go to my cabin.

As I went through the doorway that led from the deck to the cabins, I saw Lee walking slowly away from one of them. He paused, and I paused too; we eyed one another. He looked puzzled and pale, except for his right cheek; there were red marks across it.

"How many rounds did it go?" I asked.

"What?"

"When you want to force your attentions on a girl, always handcuff her first," I advised him. "That makes it easier."

He didn't say anything. He started forward, brushed past me with a violence that almost knocked me over,

and vanished down the companionway. Somewhere in the officers' quarters I heard a door slam.

Taimi didn't come down to supper. All the talk that evening was of disembarkation in the morning. After supper I told Sarah a story, and when she was in bed, I went up to my accustomed place in the bows of the ship.

The night was dark, but the sea was slightly phosphorescent. It seemed very still and peaceful up there—nobody to quarrel with, no one to argue. I hate quarreling and arguing.

And then, suddenly, someone tried to murder me.

The first thing I knew about it was that my legs seemed suddenly to rise from the ground. I felt them being swiftly lifted, and someone pushed me; and I found myself falling.

The water was cold; it seemed to grip my body in fingers of ice. Gasping, I saw the bright lights in the portholes of the ship slide away; and I thought, with a sort of numbed astonishment: "My God, I'm being drowned!" Then I saw a bright light flaring on the water, and I swam toward it.

The light came from one of those life-belts with a flare on it that ignites when it touches the water. I grabbed it and hung on, with a feeling of immense relief. In the distance the ship was turning; I could see the long line of portholes swinging round.

Shivering with cold, I was dragged up into a ship's boat and wrapped in a blanket. Someone put a bottle to my lips, and I gulped down brandy, which made me cough.

Curious passengers watched me being helped along to my cabin. The Captain and mate between them rubbed me vigorously with a rough towel and thrust me into my bunk. The Captain sat down on the end of the bunk.

"All right, Mister Mate," he said. The mate went out. The Captain turned to me.

"Well, Colonel, dat was a silly ding. You t'ink us sailors hasn't got enough to do widout nursing a lod of damned feeble passengers who ain't got de sense not to fall overboard. You held up de ship for half an hour."

"That's too blasted bad!" I said. "But the water looked so delicious I felt I just had to have a swim. Who told you I fell overboard?"

"You mean you didn't fall overboard," said the Captain slowly.

I was angry. I felt I had every right to be angry.

"Don't be so stupid," I said. "Someone gave me a good swift push, and if I can find out who it was— Who gave the alarm?"

"Mister Johnston, de t'ird made. He was on de bridge, leanin' on de rail, an' he heard a splash an' t'ought he saw someding in de water, an' he didn't take no chances —he jusd yelled 'MAN OVERBOARD!' an' flung a lifebeld. You was dawgawn lucky, Mister."

"Very lucky," I agreed.

"An' you t'ink somebody just heaved you over, heh? Somebody you quarreled wid, maybe? Somebody who don'd like you."

"That's possible."

"An' whad you goin' to do now, Misder?"

"Sleep," I told him. "But I wonder. . . . Would it be possible, Captain, to find out quietly where people were when I went over—or if anyone was seen coming away from the bow?"

"I wouldn'd t'ink so. De deck's preddy dark, an' as soon as de alarm sounded, everybody started running aboud." He grinned. "Maybe dey ain'd finished yet. Nex' dime anyone dries to bump you off, you keep your eyes open an' see who it is."

"I will, if I can remember. But it's not likely to happen on this ship. I take it we'll all be ashore pretty early in the morning."

"Yes sir; an' I'll be mighty glad, because dere's only one t'ing I wand to do wid dis load of passengers, an' dat's to get rid of dem all off my ship." He rose. "An' for Gawd's sake, Colonel," he added, "don't go an' ged yourself murdered during de nighd. Do me a favor; waid till you get ashore."

He went. When he had gone, I lay back on my bunk, thinking, and what I was thinking was that I was damned if anybody, man or woman, was going to try to murder me like that and get away with it. I hadn't harmed anybody; I didn't even know what it was all about; but now I was quite determined that I was going to find out. Suppose I had been killed, and Sarah had been left alone on the ship, thousands of miles from home, with no father and nobody to look after her? The idea filled me with anger.

A knock sounded on the door. It opened, and Lee stood in the doorway.

"Hallo, there. How're you making out?"

"All right. Come in. And thanks for giving the alarm when I went over. It was lucky for me you happened to see me."

"That's all right. Forget about it." He smiled uneasily, and sat down where the Captain had been sitting. "I want to say I'm sorry about this afternoon," he said. "I guess I was all wrong."

"Not all wrong," I admitted. "She doesn't seem to like me very much. But I wasn't molesting her, as you seemed to think."

"Of course. I should've known." He smiled at me again, and offered me his hand, and I took it; we shook hands solemnly. Then I gave him a cigarette, and took one myself, and we were friends again; and I was pleased about that, because I liked him.

"How about meeting in New Orleans and having a drink together sometimes," I suggested. "Give me a ring at Louis Curel's house. Will you be in port long enough, do you think?"

"I'll certainly do that," he said. "We'll be in port a week; we've got some refitting to do."

Chapter Five

SARAH CAME CHARGING INTO THE CABIN, flung herself on me and kissed me with unusual heartiness. I was hardly awake. "Daddy! You fell overboard!"

"Yes, darling."

"Oh, Daddy. You—you might have been drowned." Her lips were trembling a little. I sat up and put an arm around her.

"But I wasn't," I pointed out. "I swam about for a little, and then I was picked up and I'm quite all right." I paused and added: "Hello—what's this? We don't seem to be moving."

"We aren't. We're there."

"Good! Do you know that they call New Orleans *The City That Care Forgot,* because everyone there has so much fun."

"It looks nice," she said. "There's a big shed with lots of things in it."

We disembarked at about nine. Before we went ashore, there were a few formalities. We all had to interview a couple of immigration officials, while a policeman stood by watching, saying nothing.

Louis Curel was on the dockside to meet us, a slim man of sixty, with gray hair, dark eyes and handsome, regular features. He had an air of elegance, which was saved from being an air of superiority only by his quiet, pleasant manners.

"Miss Laleham. This is a great pleasure." He made it sound as if it really was a pleasure. "And you, Tod.

And is this Sarah? Welcome to New Orleans, Sarah. I'm very glad to meet you." He turned back to me. "We'd better see about your luggage."

All the passengers' luggage had been brought off the ship and piled up inside a shed. A couple of Customs officials were waiting to examine it. Louis beckoned one of them; he made a brief pretence of examining our trunks; and a colored chauffeur took them away to a Ford station wagon, while we followed Louis to a Cadillac. As we were leaving the shed, I noticed that Taimi had also been met. A fat, mustached man was helping her with her luggage. That was the last I saw of her for the time being.

Louis lived in a long white-pillared house, set well back from the roadway in a garden of smooth lawns, shady trees, and flower beds blazing gayly with azaleas and camellias. A colored butler met us with a welcoming smile as we went between tall columns flanking the front door into a lofty hall.

"What a wonderful room!" I said. Louis was pleased.

"I like it. The furniture's mostly old French, and of course the paintings are French. The ceiling designs were done by an Italian artist in 1860, and the big chandelier was put in at the same time. This house is my hobby, you know." He smiled. "Of course, it's much too big for me, really. My sister-in-law, Grace, is always urging me to get rid of it and buy a smaller place, but I don't think I shall."

A fat Negro mammy entered through a doorway somewhere at the back of the hall, and came toward us, smiling broadly.

"Ah, here you are, Anna!" Louis said; and to me: "Anna looked after my niece Francine when she was a child, and I think she'll enjoy looking after Sarah."

"Yes suh, Mister Louis, I shorely will." Anna smiled genially at Sarah, and Sarah smiled back at her and held out her hand. "How do you do?" she said primly.

Anna put a fat arm around Sarah, and laughed richly. "Ah'm fine," she said. "An' ah's thinking you an' me's gwine get along together an' have some big doings." At this Sarah laughed, and looked highly delighted.

Our rooms were on the second floor, two beautiful airy rooms, each with a veranda and a communicating door leading to a shared bathroom. I left Anna to see to Sarah's unpacking and changing, and started on my own. Presently Louis came into my room.

"I'm afraid I must leave you for a time. If there's anything you want, ask Joseph or Anna for it."

"I think I've got everything, thanks," I said.

"If you feel like going out, you'll find a Hudson in the garage," went on Louis. "You can take it yourself; or Wilbur, my chauffeur, can drive you. We're having a small dinner party tonight—only relatives; and there'll be a Carnival Ball tomorrow night. My niece Francine has got you a ticket for that, so I'm afraid you'll have to go." He smiled. "It's the Krewe of Neptune, and Francine is to be the Queen."

"I'd like to go. I suppose this ball is something to do with Mardi Gras."

"Very much so. It's one of the big balls that lead up to it. I imagine it will be quite a lavish affair."

He put his hand into his pocket and produced two small keys.

"Here's the ignition key to the Hudson. You'd better keep it so that you can use the car whenever you need it. And here's a latchkey to a side door of the house. I want you to come and go just as you like; I think you'll find plenty to amuse you." He smiled again. "We rather pride ourselves, in New Orleans, that every citizen is entitled to pursue his own inclinations in any reasonable or even unreasonable way."

"That sounds wonderful. Does it always work out?"

"Not always. Things happen, you know. This morning, for instance, I didn't want to go to my office, but I find I have to. It's about poor old Swenson. Did you meet him on the ship?"

"I sat next to him for a couple of meals. His death was very sudden, wasn't it?"

"So I understand. I suppose that's what made Captain Lundstrom decide that a post-mortem would be advisable."

"A post-mortem!" I repeated. "But there can't be a post-mortem; they haven't got a body. He was buried at sea."

"Er—no. He wasn't buried. Captain Lundstrom brought the body back to New Orleans." He paused and added: "In cold storage."

"I see," I said. But I didn't. Or rather, it seemed to me that Captain Lundstrom had not been nearly as sure that Swenson's death had been natural as he had pretended. But why?

I didn't discuss the matter with Louis, because he had to go. After he had left me, I took a bath and changed my clothes, and then went to see how Sarah was getting along. She also was taking a bath, and I told Anna that I would wait for her downstairs.

A door from the hall led into a drawing-room, and I went in to take a look. A girl was sitting at one end of a long settee, drinking coffee and eating rich chocolate cake. She looked at me over the back of the settee, and smiled. There was a little smear of chocolate on her mouth. She rose.

"You're Tod," she said. We looked at one another across the settee, and I have to admit that she was worth looking at.

She was dark and slim, with black hair and pale, creamy features. Her eyes were almond-shaped, the color of brown sherry, and more intoxicating. Her mouth was small and impudent, and seductive. She was as pretty as a butterfly, or a flower.

"Will I do?" she asked. Her smile was friendly and a little teasing. She held out a hand, and went on: "I'm Francine, and I've been dying to know what you're like, so I came round to take a look. Are you flattered?"

"Not yet," I said. "What am I like?"

"A bit solemn—but perhaps you'll improve. Come round here and talk to me."

She took me by the wrist and led me round the settee; we sat side by side. "Would you like some coffee and cake?"

"No, thank you."

"A cigarette, then." We both lit cigarettes, and she went on: "Tell me about yourself. I know you're a wing commander, and a writer, and that you played tennis for England."

"Ireland," I said.

"But you talk like an Englishman," she objected. "Not that it matters. I wonder if we're going to like each other, Tod. What do you think of me?"

"I think you're a popsy," I said.

"A popsy. I suppose that's an English word. What does it mean? Is it the sort of thing you ought to call a girl?"

"It depends on the girl."

"That doesn't sound awfully flattering. But I don't care. I think I'm going to like you, even if you are a bit solemn." Then she reached out impulsively and grasped my arm.

"Oh, Tod, tell me about the adventuress. She was on the ship with you, wasn't she?"

"The adventuress?"

"Yes. *That woman.* You know about her, don't you?"

"Do you mean Taimi Lanner?" I asked.

"Of course. Tell me about her."

"I can't tell you much," I admitted. "Except that she's very pretty. You tell me something: Why do you call her an adventuress?"

"Because she is one. What would you call her?"

"I don't know. What is she supposed to have done?"

"*Supposed* to have done! It's what she *has done.* She's only made an absurd claim that she's Paul's wife—that's all!"

"So that's it!" I said slowly. "But—are you sure it's absurd? Paul was in Germany, wasn't he? And she was in Germany. Isn't it possible—"

"No, it isn't." The gayety had gone from her face; she looked indignant. "Are you telling me you believe what she says?"

"She hasn't said anything to me," I pointed out. "As soon as she heard I was coming to stay with Louis, she shut up like a clam and didn't speak to me any more."

"How disappointing for you, when she's so good-looking!" She rose impatiently from the settee. "But I don't think you're rich enough for her, Tod—or helpless enough," she added.

"Hi," I said. "Don't lead me a dog's life." I smiled, and reached up, and took hold of her arm. "Sit down, Francine; let's talk," I urged.

I gave her arm a little tug, and she slumped down on to the settee beside me. She was very close to me.

"What's the good of talking, when you keep taking her part?" she asked petulantly. "I believe you're in love with her. Are you?"

As she spoke, she turned to look at me, and as I have said, we were very close together. A strand of her hair tickled my face, and I found myself looking right into her eyes at close range. I think I have already mentioned her eyes. And her lips, very red and tempting, were quite close to mine. I kissed them.

The odd thing is that I didn't mean to. I am normally, as she had said, rather a solemn person. I don't go around kissing strange girls. But there it was: I kissed her.

She thrust herself out of my arms and edged along the settee. She looked very angry. For a moment she didn't speak at all; she just stared at me. And I stared at her.

"Why, you—" She didn't seem to know what to say. I didn't know what to say either. She thought of something first.

"Is that the sort of thing you do in England—kissing girls as soon as you meet them? You'd better start rearranging your ideas in this country."

"I don't usually do it," I said, "—in any country."

"I suppose you think you're irresistible; is that it?"

"Not at all. Far from it. I'd say I'm sorry, if I thought it would do any good."

"So you should say you're sorry! Why shouldn't it do any good?"

"Well, it wouldn't unkiss you. The thing's done. It just happened."

"But why?" She looked scornful. "Did you think I'd like it?"

"I didn't have time to consider your probable reactions," I explained. "I must have thought *I* should like it, or I wouldn't have done it."

"Oh." I saw, with relief, that her anger was dying down. "And did you?" she asked unexpectedly. "I mean, did you like it?"

"Very much," I assured her. "It tasted of chocolate."

"What a good thing you like chocolate!" She frowned, but her eyes weren't angry. "Now look, Tod. You're never to do anything like that again. Will you promise?"

"I don't know about that. I hate making rash promises; one can never tell what may happen. The trouble is, you're so damnably kissable. Hasn't anyone told you?"

"Well, you certainly have a nerve," she said slowly. "Uncle Louis told me you were a shy, quiet man," she went on. "Shy and quiet—ha-ha! And I believed him. I really believed him. I even thought it might be quite amusing—" She broke off, smiling suddenly, and to my surprise, blushing a little.

"What did you think might be quite amusing?" I asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all, you snake-in-the-grass! We were talking about *that woman* when fate stepped in, weren't we? Let's talk about her."

"All right. She claims that Paul married her in Germany, and you don't believe it."

"No, I certainly don't. Paul would never have married anyone without telling his mother. And why did she have to wait for ten months, and then make her claim through a night-spot entertainer and a crook lawyer."

"A night-spot entertainer?"

"That horrible Ronnie Marvin, from the Seven Dwarfs. And Eddie Fettinger, the crookedest lawyer in town. Tod, it's really filthy. To try a thing like that on a boy in Paul's position. . . . She's an unspeakable woman; she must be."

She meant every word of it. I could see that.

"Exactly what happened?" I asked. "Tell me from the beginning."

"You know about Paul's accident, and how he is. He doesn't speak; he hardly even moves; and—and he's going to die very soon."

"Yes, I heard about that. I'm sorry, Francine."

"A few weeks ago Ronnie Marvin called to see Aunt Grace, and told her Paul had a wife in Europe—and what was she going to do about it? Of course she showed him the door. Then this crooked lawyer Ed Fettinger wrote to her."

"Who is Marvin, and where does he come from? Did he ever know Paul?"

"Oh, yes. He lives in New Orleans, and he and Paul enlisted together and got friendly. They were separated when Paul got a commission, but later on, Marvin was a sergeant in Paul's company, in Germany."

"And he claims that Paul married Taimi Lanner in Germany. But nothing was mentioned of this till ten months after Paul's crash."

"Nothing at all. We'd never even heard of Taimi Lanner."

"Paul never mentioned her in any of his letters?"

"Never. But he did know her. We've checked with people who were in Germany. And Ronnie Marvin knew her quite well. They must have hatched this plot up between them when they were sure Paul wasn't going to get any better."

"It could be that way," I admitted.

"Could be? It *is* that way. Don't you believe me?"

"Of course I believe you," I assured her hastily, but I wasn't being quite accurate. I was sure she believed everything she had said, but I wasn't quite satisfied with her version. There were still things that needed explaining. Why had Taimi searched my cabin? Why had someone tried to kill me?

Poppy's entrance interrupted our discussion. She had dolled herself up in an ancient dress of contrasting reds and browns, and looked like something you'd expect to find squatting outside a teepee. There were introductions. Then Sarah came in, and there were more introductions, and Sarah gladly accepted a piece of chocolate cake—a very big piece.

"Darling," I pointed out, "that's a rather rich cake. You won't make yourself sick, will you?"

She gave me a contemptuous look.

"*I* wasn't seasick," she remarked.

When Sarah had eaten her cake, we went out. Francine took us in her Buick convertible. It was pleasant to drive, in the warm sunshine, after the cold English winter we had left, and to see the shops piled full of things that we could actually buy. In Canal Street, the main thoroughfare, workmen were busy putting up decorations and stands in preparation for Mardi Gras. I liked New Orleans a lot, and I still like it.

Francine dropped us off at Louis' house, and went on to her own home. A telephone message was waiting for us: Louis was very sorry he couldn't get back to lunch. We had ours, and as soon as it was over, Sarah went off to find Anna. Poppy and I were drinking coffee when Mrs. Curel called.

She was a handsome, well-tailored woman, brown-haired, clear-eyed, with a look of brisk decision. She greeted us cordially.

"I'm sorry you had to lunch alone. If we'd known, we'd have sent for you to have luncheon with us." She settled herself in a chair. "How do you like New Orleans, Miss Laleham?"

"Seems all right. The food's very good," said Poppy.

"Yes, the Creole cooking is good, particularly in this house. Louis does himself very well." She smiled. "I lecture him sometimes on his self-indulgence. Of course, Louis is very rich; but if he spent less time and money on this house and more on his business, he might be very much richer." She paused. "But it's no good talking to him," she added. "He's a Southern aristocrat. He does what he likes."

"You're not a Southerner?" I asked.

"No, nor an aristocrat. My father and mother managed a small hotel in Toronto, and I was a bookkeeper in New York when I met my husband. I was a good bookkeeper, too. I still am."

She spoke good-humoredly, without malice, a plain-spoken woman speaking her mind plainly. Changing the subject abruptly, she went on: "My niece Francine tells me she came to see you this morning. Isn't she attractive?"

"Very," I agreed.

"A little thoughtless and frivolous, perhaps, but she'll settle down soon, when she's married. I think we've found the right man for her."

"She won't marry him," put in Poppy. "Not if you've found him for her. They never do."

"Oh, I think she will." Mrs. Curel brushed Poppy's remark off lightly and turned to me again. "Francine tells me you met that silly girl, Miss Lanner. I'd be interested to know your opinion of her."

"I hardly spoke to her," I objected. "She kept strictly to herself."

"Didn't like you at all, did she!" said Poppy. She grinned horsily at me. "Queer girl," she added. "Always gave me the impression of being afraid of something."

"That's interesting—very interesting. I believe that you're right. Of course I don't know the girl—but I'm half inclined to feel a little sorry for her."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I think she's been talked into this thing. She's let herself be persuaded, and she's afraid. That was poor Mr. Swenson's opinion."

"Did he say so?"

"That's what he wrote to me. I had a very full report from him. Of course, there's no truth in her claim—none whatever."

"Then why did he bring her to America?" I inquired. "He did bring her."

"Yes. You see, she was coming, anyway. It didn't really make much difference whether she came with him, or later, on her own. Mr. Swenson thought that if he could bring her with him, and win her confidence, he might be able to persuade her to abandon her part in this—this plot. I think he was genuinely sorry for her, and wanted to help her."

"According to Francine, she's doing it for money," I said.

"So she is, and Francine despises her for it. But Francine has never mixed with people outside her own circle. And she's always had everything she wanted. She can't possibly understand."

"But you do."

"I believe so," said Mrs. Curel confidently. "I make a point of meeting people—all sorts of people. You'd be surprised by some of the people I know. I think it's so important that one should try to understand everyone's points of view, even if one doesn't agree with them. Now this girl, Taimi Lanner, imagine what her life has been for the last few years. She was hungry, hunted, imprisoned. She lived for years in an atmosphere of lies and conspiracy. That life became part of her."

"Do you think so?"

"It was bound to. I'm not blaming her for it. Then she met Paul and—let's be honest and admit it—he may have amused himself with her a little. And then left her. She knows we have plenty of money. Now she sees a chance to take some of it away from us, and why shouldn't she? From her point of view, I mean. What I'd like to do is to have a good straight talk with her."

"That would be very cozy," I said.

"Of course, if she goes on with this stupid business, she'll have to be dealt with—drastically dealt with. I won't compromise with blackmail and fraud. But I don't want to be hard on her. I'd like her to be reasonable, so that I could help her—find her a situation and give her a fresh start in life. You might tell her that, if you see her."

"If I happen to see her," I agreed. "But that seems unlikely. I don't even know where she is."

"Don't you? I could easily find out for you, if you're interested. But I don't expect you are." She rose. "I must be going now. I have to see Francine's carnival dress. You are coming to the ball tomorrow, aren't you?"

"Louis did say something about it."

"You'll enjoy it. Afterward you and Francine and Henry will be going on to a supper dance at the Roosevelt. Oh, I forgot—you haven't met Henry, have you?"

"Not yet."

"My nephew, Henry Marden, I think you'll like him. He and Francine—but I mustn't anticipate. Francine would be furious if she thought I had an inkling. These young people!" She shook her head amusedly. "It's been a great pleasure meeting you, and I'll look forward to seeing you again this evening."

She went. Poppy turned a gimlet eye on me.

"Broad-minded, isn't she," she observed.

"Delightful," I agreed. Poppy gave a cackle.

"You thought so. Then why were you looking at her as if you'd like to hit her with a brick." She chuckled maliciously. "Gave you the hands-off signal, didn't she? The girl's practically engaged. And the other doesn't like you. Heard from Sabrina lately?"

"No, I haven't heard from Sabrina. And I don't expect to hear from Sabrina, if that's of any interest to you."

"You always were a damned fool," said Poppy jeeringly. "And now you're in a mess, aren't you? So's the little blonde girl, the one who doesn't like you."

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"I've got ears, haven't I? I heard what that woman was saying. And what Francine was saying this morning."

"What Francine was saying—" I said slowly. "My God, Poppy, you are a dreadful old creature. I suppose you had your ear glued to the keyhole."

"No need for that. The door wasn't closed. Why didn't you mention you were pushed overboard?"

"Who said I was pushed overboard?" I asked.

"Nobody." Poppy grinned like a gargoyle. "But if you'd fallen, you'd have gone round explaining just how it happened. You'd have made quite a story out of it. And you didn't. Another thing: who killed old Swenson?"

"What makes you think he was killed?"

"I don't *think* he was killed. He *was* killed. You know what that means, don't you? The police will be asking questions—asking questions of you, and of your girl Taimi. Have you thought what you're going to say? Has *she* thought what she's going to say?"

She looked like an old vulture, squatting there beady-eyed, staring at me. I didn't answer. I couldn't answer. I had nothing to say. . . .

It was six when Louis Curel came in, and my first glance at his face confirmed my worst fears. He looked grave and worried.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get back for lunch." He sank into a chair. "This business of poor Swenson's death has taken an unpleasant turn—a very unpleasant turn. He was poisoned."

Chapter Six

I GOT THE RESULT OF THE INQUEST JUST BEfore I left," Louis went on to say. "They found that the old man had taken a large dose of opium."

"Opium? But does opium kill quickly? I thought it began taking effect by sending people to sleep," I said.

"So I understand. That probably would have happened if he hadn't tried to leave his cabin. The theory seems to be that he felt himself growing faint, and made a big effort to—to obtain help, and of course, he hit his head when he fell. He was in very poor health, you know."

"What made the Captain suspect something was wrong? Why did he bring the body back to New Orleans?"

"The Captain and Mr. Swenson were old acquaintances, you know. It seems that Captain Lundstrom had visited him from time to time in his cabin, and had noticed that he took medicine at intervals from a large bottle. After Swenson's death the bottle wasn't there. Captain Lundstrom looked for it, and could not find it. Lieutenant Michael Flynn is to be in charge of the case. As you two were the first to find the body, he'll need to ask you a few questions. I've suggested that nine-thirty in the morning would be a convenient time."

At about six-thirty the dinner guests arrived. Mrs. De Saram was an older edition of Francine: slim, good-looking, with a lot of charm and an amused twinkle in her eyes. Henry Marden, Mrs. Curel's nephew, was a fair, brisk man of twenty-eight or so, with a friendly manner and a small mustache. At a guess I would have put him down as an accountant, and my guess was right. It turned out that he was an accountant.

We sat about in the drawing-room, and drank dry sherry, and talked politely. I was asked the usual questions about England; I answered them. From time to time Mrs. Curel, smiling indulgently, corrected my answers.

The dinner was good. It was also very dull. It was a very polite dinner party. Afterward we sat in the drawing-room and went on being polite, and I felt rather sleepy because I had eaten too much. At half-past ten the guests went home.

He wasn't expecting it; I gave him everything I had.

Louis and I had a whisky each, and Poppy a large gin, and then Louis announced his intention of going to bed. "But you do what you like," he told me. "The whisky's here, and if you feel inclined to read, you'll find plenty of books in the library."

"I might take a drive round before I turn in," I said. I wanted to take a look at the Seven Dwarfs.

At eleven-thirty the long rows of night-spots in Bourbon Street were doing a big trade; the street was brightly lit, and thronged with people and traffic. Sounds of music came from nearly all the houses. The Seven Dwarfs was a corner house on the intersection of Bourbon and Napoleon Streets. A neon sign blazed outside it:

THE SEVEN DWARFS
Continuous Floor Show
LILITA
and
her famous
Sarong-stealing
Parrot
Polly Lonsdale
(The Moo-moo girl)
Ronnie Marvin
Billie Ward
No entrance fee or cover charge

I parked the car, and went in. Rows of tables were set, in semi-darkness, round three sides of a small, brightly lit floor space. At the back of the floor space was a raised platform where a four-piece band was playing.

I found an empty table at the edge of the floor space, and ordered Scotch, which cost a dollar. It wasn't good Scotch. Lilita herself had just started her act. She was a slim, slant-eyed girl wearing a long embroidered cloak. On her shoulder was perched a large white parrot.

The band went into a Javanese number, and she began a slow shuffling dance. The parrot squawked, rose from her shoulder, fluttered around her and, with some fuss, removed her cloak. It then removed various other garments, while she went on with her shuffle. Finally, while she stood still, in a statuesque attitude, it removed her sarong. That left her wearing a bunch of roses; they may have been artificial roses. It also ended the act.

The next turn was a leathery-looking, slick-haired little man with a broad grin, who told a succession of stories into a microphone with machinelike rapidity. He seemed to enjoy telling them; the audience seemed to enjoy hearing them; but the vicar wouldn't have liked them. I listened for a bit, and then decided to call it a day. I had seen the place where Taimi's friends lived, and I didn't feel too happy about it.

I paid my check, tipped the waitress, and rose. As I turned from the table, the comedian stopped abruptly in the middle of his patter and turned toward me. To the tune of "Heigh ho, heigh ho," from "Snow White," he sang:

"Don't go, don't go,
By God we need the dough—"

And then he came to the edge of the floor.

"You're not going, sir. Not right in the middle of my act. It gets better presently. Sit down, and relax. Enjoy yourself. Have a drink. Have one on the house." He motioned a waitress. "Get the gentleman a drink, Milly."

I smiled, sat down again. When he had finished his stories, the comedian did some acrobatics. They were pretty good; and I judged that his hard, leathery look was not deceptive. To do the stunts he did, he needed muscles like steel wires.

Directly his turn was over, I rose to leave. As I stepped through the doorway into Bourbon Street, a couple of men fell quietly in beside me. One of them took me firmly by the left arm. The other had his hand in his coat pocket, and there was something hard in that pocket. He jabbed it against my back.

"Keep walking," he said.

I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything.

"This way."

We turned to the right, into the first doorway. The door had been left slightly ajar; it yielded to a push. Inside was a passage, with a door on the left leading into an office. I saw an untidy roll-top desk, and three chairs. Ahead was a flight of stairs. The passage skirted the stairs and vanished into the back of the house. Somewhere, on the other side of the passage wall, I could hear music. The house had two entrances; it was as simple as that. I had walked out by the Bourbon Street entrance, and been brought in by the Napoleon Street entrance.

"Upstairs," said the man with the gun.

We went up a couple of flights to the top of the house, and entered a bedroom. Clothes were lying about, and odd articles of a gymnastic nature—dumbbells, Indian clubs, a punching bag. From various places pictures of the leathery comedian stared down at me. One showed him in uniform, wearing a sergeant's chevrons. The two men who had brought me up talked briefly. One of them was very tall; the other was very short. The short man carried the gun.

"Okay, Shorty," said the tall man. He went out. Shorty locked the door on the inside and put the key into his coat pocket.

"Sit down there," he said. He pointed to the bed.

He was short, but he was very broad. His face looked as if it had been hit with bottles for years, and their only effect had been to dent it a little.

"Just a minute—" I began, but he interrupted me. "Siddown," he said. "An' button your lip."

"Look," I protested. "You can't do this." My remark seemed to amuse him.

"We're doing it," he said. "Siddown. There's someone wants to talk to you in a minute or two."

"I don't want to talk to anyone," I said stiffly. "And if you don't let me go, I shall shout for help."

I opened my mouth wide, and he took a quick pace toward me, leaning forward, and thrust one of his big hairy fists up to within an inch of my face.

"One squawk out of you—" he began.

He didn't get any farther, because I hit him. His face was just in the right position, and he wasn't expecting it, and I gave him everything I had, right on the chin. A stab of pain ran through my hand and up my right arm, and I knew that I had hurt that hand again; but his head went back sharply, and I dug my left hand into his stomach, and he grunted, and his head came forward again. This time I didn't hit him because my right hand was hurt; but I grabbed a handful of his hair, jerked his head sharply downward, and brought my knee up to meet it. My knee and his chin met exactly as planned, and he went over backward to a sitting position, fell over sidewise, and curled up. I took the pistol and the key of the room from his pocket, and left the room, locking the door after me.

I checked the pistol to see if it was loaded, and then went down the stairs. Just as I reached the bottom, Taimi came out of the office into the passage. We both stopped and looked at one another.

"Hallo," I said.

"You!" She was very surprised. "What are you doing here?"

"Just visiting. Shall we go in the office?"

She looked doubtful for a moment; then she went in. I followed her, and put a chair by the window, and sat on it. She kept away from me, on the other side of the room, and leaned back against the desk.

"Why have you come here?"

Her voice did not sound friendly; but it did not sound hostile. She had on a simple black dress, and her fair hair and blue eyes made her look very young. She also looked very solemn, and a little bit frightened. I smiled at her, for no reason at all. Or rather, I smiled at her because, quite suddenly, I was sure that all the things Mrs. Curel had said about her were untrue. To my surprise, she smiled back at me, though briefly.

"Tell me why you searched my cabin," I said. She looked downward, and hesitated. Then she answered:

"I was looking for my papers." She looked up again, meeting my eyes. "But I did not mean to do you any harm."

"Why did you think I had your papers?"

"Because you were a friend of the Curel family," she said. "Sarah told me that."

Before I could ask any more questions, I heard a sound of footsteps outside the room, and men's voices. The men were coming from the back of the house and making for the stairs. I heard a gruff voice say: "I don't like it, Ronnie. You shouldn't of done it." Another voice answered: "Ah, hell, Dad. I want to talk to the guy."

I shouted: "Come in here and talk."

The footsteps stopped, and then came hurrying back. Two men appeared in the office doorway; they looked

surprised and angry. One of them was the leathery comedian; the other was a shabby man with a bald head, walrus mustache and a big stomach. I recognized him too. He was the man who had met Taimi at the boat.

"Ronnie Marvin, I believe," I said to the comedian.

He didn't answer me; he looked at Taimi. "Hell, Taimi, what's the idea? Did you let this guy loose?"

"I—no—" She seemed confused.

"She didn't let me loose," I said. "That was Shorty. And he lent me his gun."

I held up the gun. I wasn't uneasy any more, because I knew that nothing much could happen. Between me and the crowded sidewalk (or banquette) was only a pane of glass and a curtain. And I had a gun.

"Shorty!" Ronnie looked at me; his expression was tense and hostile. "What's happened to Shorty?"

"He's asleep. I hypnotized him." They stared at me as if I had gone suddenly mad, and I went on: "It's something I learned in India. You look a man full in the eyes, and use a little willpower, and he goes to sleep. Look, I'll show you." I leaned forward and stared Ronnie Marvin right in the eyes, and he looked quickly away. I leaned back in my chair again.

"I can do it to animals too," I said. "Has anyone got a cigarette?"

A SECOND passed before the meaning of this question seemed to sink in. Then Ronnie's hand went to his coat pocket; he pulled out a packet and threw it to me. I lit one and threw the packet back.

"What was the idea in having a gunman march me upstairs?" I asked. "I was there, in the club. If you wanted to talk to me, why didn't you just come over and talk?"

"Shorty's no gunman." The fat man spoke gruffly, rather apologetically. "Ronnie lent him the gun it's an Army one. I told him he shouldn't of."

"Hell," said Ronnie. "I told you, I wanted to make sure of him. What's he doing, snooping around here? He's a friend of the Curels, isn't he? Those rats! And he's been bothering Taimi."

"I could have bothered Taimi a damned sight more, when she was searching my cabin," I pointed out. "Couldn't I?" I looked at her, and she nodded slightly; she didn't answer. "What was in that sleeping-draught you gave me?" I asked.

"It was two pills. Some pills my doctor in Finland gave me when I could not sleep. They would not hurt you."

"Just a minute, Mister," the fat man said. "I run a night-club here. You have a right to come into it. And Ronnie shouldn't of done what he did. But what were you doing in my club? Why did you come here? I'd like you to tell me that."

"Certainly. I was snooping. I want to find out who killed old Swenson, and who tried to kill me."

"Who says old Swenson was killed? What's this you're trying to put over?" Ronnie demanded harshly. He looked at Taimi. "The old man just died, didn't he?"

"He died, all right, from opium poisoning." I said. "And he wasn't buried at sea. I'm giving you the result of a post-mortem that was held today." I paused to let this sink in. "And who pushed me overboard?"

"You—you were pushed?" Taimi spoke slowly, pronouncing each word separately. They were all looking at me, waiting.

"I was pushed," I said. "I don't know who by. So let's start from the beginning. Taimi claims Paul married her in Germany."

"He did marry her in Germany. Damn it, I ought to know, because I was there. I was right there, at the ceremony," said Ronnie emphatically.

"How is it no one else knew about this marriage?"

"It would of caused trouble. American soldiers weren't allowed to marry women in Germany then, and Paul was a captain. It had to be secret."

"When did he marry her? Was it just before he left Germany?"

"Yes. But it wasn't because he was leaving. It was because she was leaving. It was all fixed up before he heard his father was dead."

"Where was she going?"

"Back to Finland." It was Taimi who answered. "I had to look for my family."

"And Paul wanted to be quite sure of you. I see that. But why did you wait ten months before you wrote to him."

"That is not true. I wrote often—two or three times every week, for a long time."

"Did he ever answer?"

"He wrote once, from Hamburg. That is all. Of course he had had his accident, but I did not know that. I was in Finland."

"Did you write to New Orleans?"

"Yes. To his home, in New Orleans. Many letters."

"What happened after ten months? Why did you decide to come out here?"

"I wrote to Ronnie."

"That's so. She wrote to me," stated Ronnie. "I still have the letter—or rather, my lawyer has it. I can remember it almost by heart." He smiled slightly. "She says she found my address in a book, and hopes I will forgive her the liberty, but can I give her any news of her husband. She says she is very sorry to bother me, but she has written many times and had no reply—" He broke off again. "Hell," he said, "I went to see Mrs. Curel, and she high-hatted me." He flushed angrily. "She told me I was crazy. Then she got nasty and talked about blackmail. I was so mad I sat right down and sent Taimi her fare out, and then went and saw my lawyer."

"Ed Fettinger."

"Yeah. You know him?"

"I've heard of him," I said.

"FROM the Curels, I guess," said the fat man shrewdly. "And I know what you heard. You want to understand, Mister, that I run a night-club, and a man that runs a night-club is likely to need a lawyer every now and again; and when he needs a lawyer, the sort of lawyer he needs is Eddie Fettinger."

"He sounds interesting," I said. "Now let's go back a bit. Those papers you were looking for in my cabin, Taimi: What were they?"

"The letter Paul wrote to me from Hamburg, And a certificate of marriage from the pastor at Michenau."

"When did you lose them?"

"When I was talking with Sarah, the first afternoon on the ship. I left them in my cabin."

"And so you suspected me."

"Sarah had told me you were going to stay with Mr. Curel," she said apologetically. "Who else could I suspect, except Mr. Swenson?"

"Oh, you suspected him too. Had you told him about your marriage?"

"Yes. At first, in Helsinki, I thought he was my friend. Then I was not so sure. And then I found out that he was connected with the Curels."

"Mrs. Curel says he wrote her, saying he'd investigated thoroughly, and was quite sure you weren't married to Paul."

"Then I am right—he was my enemy. He stole my papers."

"No," I said. "I don't think he was your enemy. I think he liked you. I don't believe he stole your papers. But if he did, who killed him? Who has your papers now? And who pushed me overboard?"

Nobody seemed to know. The fat man spoke next.

"This Mr. Swenson—you say he liked Taimi. Did he talk to you about her? Did he tell *you* that he thought she and Paul weren't married?"

"No. He began talking to me about her, but we were interrupted. He was on his way to tell me the rest of the story when he was killed."

"He was on his way—" Ronnie took up the point eagerly. "Look, how do you know he wasn't killed to stop him from telling you they *were* married."

"I don't know why he was killed, or why I was tossed overboard. I'd like to find out." I paused. "There was a man on the ship who could have overheard me talking to Swenson. Did any of you ever hear of Elmer Gains?"

I saw from their expressions that my inquiry had made a direct hit. The fat man spoke.

"Sure, I've heard of Elmer Gains. I know him. But he doesn't come into this business."

"He was on the ship," I said. They both turned toward Taimi. She nodded.

"That is so. There was a man with that name on the ship."

"But you didn't tell us that," said Ronnie impatiently. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"I—I do not understand. Who is this Gains? To me, he was just a passenger."

"Just a passenger," said Ronnie. He laughed hollowly. "But why should he want to kill old Swenson, and throw this guy over the side?" he asked. "It's screwy."

"Maybe somebody hired him," I suggested.

The fat man shook his head. "No sir. Nobody hires Elmer. If he killed the old man, it was strictly because he had his own reasons. But I don't like it. I don't see where he fits into the deal."

"Who, exactly, is he?" I asked.

"Why, he's a gambler. I guess that's what you'd call him. He has interests in this town, and in Tampa. Pretty big interests."

"So that doesn't take us very far," I suggested.

"It doesn't take us any place," said Ronnie. "The whole thing's screwy. You, for instance. You come in here and sit around as if you owned the joint, and tell us about Elmer Gains. And you're staying with the Curels. So just whose side are you supposed to be on?"

"Nobody's; but I'm not against Taimi. You can say that I'm against whoever it was that tried to drown me."

"That makes sense," said the fat man. "Let's have a drink. What'll you take, sir?"

From the way he spoke, I judged that he wasn't sure of me, but he didn't want a quarrel. I didn't want a quarrel, either.

"Scotch, thanks."

"Then I guess we'll all take Scotch."

He went heavily from the room. Ronnie turned to Taimi and said: "We'll have to see Eddie tomorrow. He'll need to know about all this."

"I suppose so," she agreed. The prospect did not seem to give her any pleasure. She looked at me, and her look told me there was something she wanted to say. But she didn't say anything.

"You might as well take this back," I said to Ronnie, and gave him his pistol. He said thanks, and put it into his pocket.

We were halfway through the drinks when a peremptory knocking sounded on the house door. I drew the curtain slightly aside and looked out. There were two men there, and I guessed where they came from.

"I think it's the cops," I said. "They've probably come to ask Taimi questions about Swenson. I'd just as soon they didn't find me here."

"Go out through the club, into Bourbon Street," said the fat man. "You'll find a door at the end of the passage."

I found the door, and went out, through the club, into Bourbon Street.

Chapter Seven

As usual, Sarah came in to wake me up. "Get up, Daddy. You're *very* late. I had breakfast hours ago. I'm going out soon."

"Who with?" I asked.

"Some people," Sarah answered vaguely. "Anna says they've got two little girls, and we're going to Lake something-or-other, and I'm staying out for lunch." She grinned at me disarmingly. "You're going out too. I arranged it."

"Who am I going out with, anyway?"

"Lee Johnston. He rang, and I spoke to him, and Mr. Curel said it would be all right for you to go. This is where." She handed me a piece of paper on which was written: *La Louisiane, Iberville Street, 12:45.* "What are you going to wear today?" she went on. "Let me choose your clothes."

"So long as you don't heave all my things out and leave them strewn about on the floor. I'm going to shave now."

When I came downstairs, Louis was just leaving for his office. He reminded me that Lieutenant Flynn would be calling at half-past nine. Poppy joined me in the dining-room when I was halfway through breakfast. She had already breakfasted; she merely wanted to talk.

"Well? Did you find out anything last night?" She sat, looking like an old vulture, staring at me across the table.

"A little," I admitted. "Taimi claims she wrote Paul regularly from the time he left Germany, and didn't get any answer."

"She'd have to claim that, whether it's true or not. What about her friends? Did you meet any of them?"

"Ronnie Marvin and his father. They're—" I paused.

Poppy gave one of her chuckles. "Go on," she said. "Tell me they're rough characters with hearts of gold."

"They're all right," I said lamely.

Poppy sniffed skeptically. "Has it occurred to you, my poor, feeble-witted young friend, that you're going to be very unpopular in this house very soon?" she asked. "I mean when you tell the police that Louis' sister-in-law is trying to swindle a poor girl out of her husband."

"I know," I said irritably. "I'm in a mess. Does that satisfy you?"

She grinned at me. "Such a nice little guest! Louis invites you to the house, and the first thing you do is to try to have his relations sent to jail. He is going to be glad he asked you."

But to my relief the police did not ask me any awkward questions. Two of them called, Lieutenant Flynn and Sergeant Bristol, and they interviewed me and Poppy separately. Their manner was friendly. The Lieutenant did most of the interviewing. He was a short, grizzled man of fifty or so, with one of those saturnine, rather humorous Irish faces, and a twinkle in his eyes.

"Sorry to have to bother you, Mr. Claymore," he said. "I understand you and Miss Laleham found Mr. Swenson's body. You were the first on the spot."

"That's so." I told him how Poppy had knocked on my cabin door, and how I had gone out and found Swenson and reported to the Captain. When I had finished, he nodded.

"That checks with what Miss Laleham says. Nothing else you can tell me, Mr. Claymore?"

"I don't think so. Of course, I didn't know the old man had been poisoned. I took it for granted he died naturally."

"Sure. Why wouldn't you?" He took a cigarette I offered him, and added: "Been in Ireland lately?"

"Two or three months ago. One of my uncles has a house near Lough Erne. You're Irish, of course, Lieutenant."

"Irish-American, I guess. I spent a month in Ireland ten years ago." He rose. "I'll be getting along."

"Well, good-by, Lieutenant, and good luck with the case," I said. "Do you think you'll solve it?"

"I always think I'll solve a case, so I think I'll solve this one," stated Lieutenant Flynn matter-of-factly. "Okay, Mr. Claymore; maybe we'll be meeting again."

We shook hands and parted. Half an hour later Joseph, the butler, told me I was wanted on the telephone—a Miss Brown.

"Claymore here," I said, and a voice at the other end of the wire said hesitatingly: "This is Taimi."

"Oh, *that* Miss Brown. What happened last night? Was it—the people I thought?"

"Yes, it was the police." She paused, and then went on abruptly: "I should like—" and then paused again, and said in a sort of rush: "I should like to speak to you—not on the telephone."

"All right. Let's meet somewhere. When?"

"This morning at twelve. In a café, perhaps, where we can talk."

I considered quickly. At twelve forty-five I was meeting Lee Johnston at La Louisiane, and it could do no harm if he and Taimi were to meet. He'd probably like to meet her.

"Make it twelve, then, in the entrance to La Louisiane. I'm not quite sure where it is, but it's in the French quarter, somewhere quite near you."

"I shall find it." She rang off.

I was there punctually. Taimi was five minutes late. When she saw me, she smiled, but there was no heart in her smile. I took her to the bar, which was at the far end of the restaurant, and we ordered Budweisers.

She sipped her drink, then spoke without looking at me.

"Have you seen Paul—my husband?"

"No, I haven't seen him."

"What have you heard? Is it true that—that he will die? Please. I wish to know the truth."

"They don't talk about him much," I said. "But from what I have heard, I don't think there's much hope that he'll ever recover."

"Oh." When she looked up, her eyes held an expression of blank misery that shocked me.

"I do not know what to do," she stated. There was a sort of hopeless finality about the way she spoke.

I didn't know what to do either, so I went on talking. I wanted to help her somehow.

"Did the police ask a lot of troublesome questions last night?" I asked.

She nodded. "Why did I come to New Orleans? When did I first meet Mr. Swenson? Did I like Mr. Swenson? Did I quarrel with Mr. Swenson? What was I doing on the ship the night he died? Was I ever in an underground movement? Did I ever kill anyone when I was in the underground movement? Did I ever use opium? If I am Paul's wife, why did I go to the Seven Dwarfs and not to his house? Why do I have a passport as Taimi Lanner and not as Taimi Curel? Why, why, why? Many, many questions. And now I must not leave New Orleans."

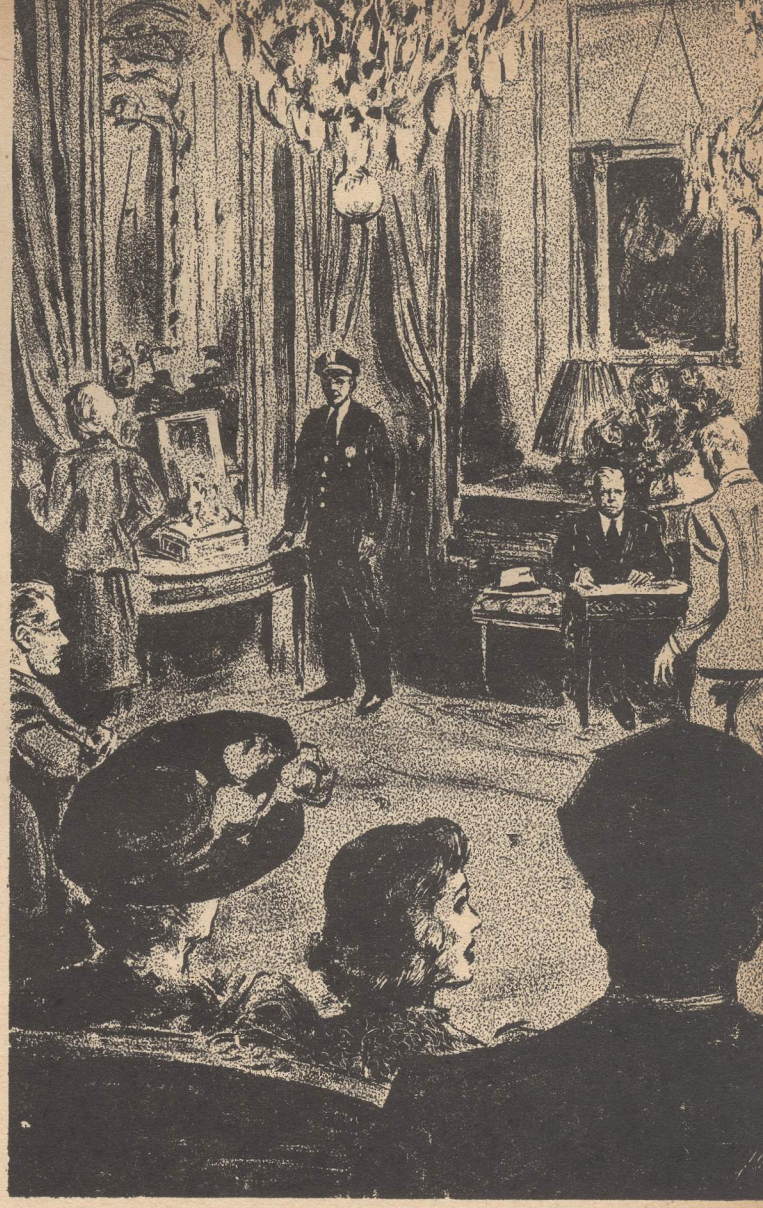
"What does your lawyer say about it?" I asked.

"That man!" Her tone expressed an utter contempt. She went on speaking in a monotonous voice; the words sounded odd in her precise, carefully taught English. "He says: *'They'll try to pin this murder on you, but don't worry, little lady; they won't make it stick.'* And he says: *'We've got a fight on our hands, but a couple of hundred thousand dollars is worth fighting for.'* " She caught my arm suddenly, half crying; her voice cracked a little. "The money—it is always the money they talk about. But I do not care about the money. They will not understand that. When I said I wished to see Paul, he said: *'Never mind about seeing Paul just yet. He wouldn't know you, anyway.'* He thinks only of the money."

"He may be right about Paul," I said. "From what I've been told, he doesn't recognize anybody."

"He is my husband," she insisted. "I should be with him if he is ill." She looked steadily at me, and then went on, speaking with determination. "The lawyer will do nothing. So now I ask you, because you are a friend of the Curels. Will you tell them that if they will let me be with Paul, I will sign papers so that they can keep all the money. Their lawyer can prepare the papers. Only if Paul dies, I should like to go back to Finland."

I must confess that I didn't like this idea at all. The notion of going to the Curels as Taimi's ambassador, and telling them solemnly just what they could do with their money, did not appeal to me. But she was deadly serious; and after all, she had plenty to be serious about.



Poppy said: "Look out. They're trying to trap you!"

"It will be up to the police, or the immigration authorities, whether you can go back to Finland," I told her. "I'll pass on your message to Louis Curel, but I can't say what he'll do about it. How about the people you're staying with—Ronnie and the old man. Do they only think of the money?"

"Not Ronnie. He would like to help me."

"He's in love with you, isn't he?" I suggested.

"Perhaps, a little. But he was also Paul's friend, and Paul trusted him."

"Tell me about it," I said. "Tell me about Paul. I'd like to know a bit more."

"He was nice." She spoke softly, but there was warmth in her voice. "He was kind, and he laughed a lot—it was strange to hear someone laugh in Germany then. He used to come over to the Displaced Persons Camp every morning with the doctor and the Sergeant—that was Ronnie; and he would say: *'Hello, Nurse,'* and then he would smile and ask about my weight, because I was still thin."

"Where you in charge of the nursing at this camp?"

"Not for the whole camp. There were Red Cross nurses, but not enough of them, and we had many sick. I had done some nursing, and I spoke English. I had a hut with twenty beds."

"And then you married Paul secretly?" I said.

"Yes—in the little church at Michenau. I was going to Finland, and Paul wanted to marry me, but his Colonel would not have allowed it. The church had a big hole in the roof, and no windows. Afterward we had coffee and cake in the pastor's house, and Paul gave the pastor two pounds of American coffee."

I knew it had all happened just as she told it. But a secret marriage, in a ruined church in Germany, paid for by two pounds of coffee—would such a marriage be held legal in an American court?

I didn't mention this, because I caught sight of Lee's long figure threading its way between the tables toward us. I said hastily: "Here's Lee; he's lunching with us."

"Lunch! But I must go—" she began.

"No, you mustn't. Be a little sociable; stay and have lunch. You've got to eat somewhere."

"If you wish," she agreed. But she didn't seem very sociable.

THEN Lee saw us, and a look of astonishment crossed his face; he grinned broadly.

"Why, say! You two getting together, heh? Not fighting any more?"

"Just drinking beer," I said. "We haven't had a cross word for minutes. Have a beer."

We had one. While we were drinking it, I spoke to Taimi.

"I want you to tell Lee your story while we have lunch," I told her. "He knows his way around this town, and I don't, and he might be able to help."

She looked at Lee consideringly; and he looked at her as if he'd like to eat her. "If I can do anything to help—" he said. They stared at one another for a long moment, and it seemed that I was no longer in the party. Taimi flushed very slightly.

"Very well. I will tell him," she agreed.

The story took up all of lunch, and as it went on, Lee's lean, thoughtful face grew more and more worried.

"Seems to me the first thing you have to do is to get rid of that lawyer," he observed. "And leave that night-club where you're staying."

"Leave the Seven Dwarfs? But why? Ronnie is my friend."

"He may be, but that's not the sort of place where a girl like you ought to live."

"I have lived in caves, and cellars," she said gently. "And in concentration camps. I do not grumble about the Seven Dwarfs." She rose. "Now I must go. Thank you both for the beer and the lunch."

She went. I looked across the table at Lee.

"Now you know the position," I said. "Any ideas?"

"It's terrible," he said solemnly. "She doesn't realize the spot she's in."

"Doesn't she? Don't forget she's been in an underground movement, and a concentration camp. This isn't the first time she's been up against it."

"I can't imagine it. A girl like her, in a concentration camp. She's so—so beautiful." But the way he looked at me, he seemed unable to imagine it. "They're going to try to pin Swenson's murder on her, all right," he went on vehemently. "I know that."

"How do you know?"

"The police lieutenant was on the ship nearly three hours yesterday asking questions, and nearly every question pointed to her."

"Did he ask any questions about Elmer Gains?"

"He asked questions about everybody, but mostly about Taimi. What is this about Gains?"

"I think it was Gains who tossed me overboard. He listened in to a conversation between me and Swenson." I told Lee about the talk I had had with Swenson; he shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't understand. What do you figure is the tie-up between Gains and the Curels?"

"That's what I'm wondering," I said. "I only know Louis. You live in New Orleans; you probably know more about the family than I do. What do you know about them?"

"Why, they're just the Curels," he answered. "Louis is the richest, but the others are all pretty well fixed. When John died, a year or so ago, he left a couple of million."

"And he was Paul's father. So if Paul dies, and Taimi's his wife—"

"She'd get her widow's portion."

"So that's the money the lawyer's talking about—Taimi's share of Paul's estate. Who would get the rest?"

"His nearest blood relation—Mrs. Curel."

"I wonder if Mrs. Curel knows Elmer Gains. She told me she prided herself on knowing all kinds of people."

"That could be. I see what you're driving at. But even if she does know him, it doesn't prove anything."

"Not yet. But it might lead to something."

"Um-hm. It might lead to plenty of trouble. Gains is not the sort of man to fool with."

A waiter brought the check, and we both reached for it. Lee got it and paid it. The waiter went away. Lee stared at me moodily.

"We've got to do something," he said. "We're not getting anywhere, just sitting here talking."

"You're quite right," I said. "So let's do something. What'll we do? You tell me."

For a moment he looked as if he wanted to hit me. Then he smiled his pleasant, friendly smile.

"Okay, so I don't know what to do, either." He rose abruptly. "I've got work to do on the ship this afternoon. How about meeting again tomorrow?"

"Same time, same place," I agreed.

Chapter Eight

I WANTED TO SELECT MY MOMENT FOR PASSING Taimi's message to Louis Curel, and I didn't get a chance during the day. Louis did not come in till it was time to change, and then we had an appointment to go to the house where Mrs. De Saram and Mrs. Curel lived, for dinner, and then on to the Carnival Ball given by the Krewe of Neptune.

For those who don't know what a *Krewe* is, perhaps I'd better explain that it is an organization of men which exists solely for the purpose of giving a parade and a masked ball during the Carnival season in New Orleans. There are various Krewes—Comus, Proteus, Momus, Neptune and others; and they vary in social importance. The balls given by the Krewes are usually very lavish affairs, and each of them is graced by the presence of a king, a queen, dukes, maids of honor, and other high-ranking masqueraders.

We left Louis' house at about seven to go to Mrs. De Saram's. She lived in an old house in the French Quarter, a wonderful house, built round a courtyard, where azaleas were blooming and a fountain was playing. To reach it, we had to turn off the main roadway through an arched gateway with graceful wrought-iron gates.

Dinner was not a very hilarious affair. Eight of us sat round the highly polished candle-lit dining-table—Louis, Mrs. De Saram, Mrs. Curel, Poppy, Henry, Sarah and I, and a quiet efficient-looking girl who was introduced as Nurse Watkins, and was the only one not in evening clothes. Francine wasn't present; she was away somewhere with the maids of honor, making final preparations for her appearance as Queen of Neptune. The meal was good, and very well served, with plenty of champagne; and that was the only thing that had any sparkle. A note of cool courtesy prevailed, which seemed to be directed mostly toward me; they made me feel like a guest who has been invited by mistake.

We watched the parade from the windows of an office in Charles Street, and then Sarah was taken home by Anna, and the rest of us went on to the Municipal Auditorium where the ball was being held. We sat in a big balcony, looking down at an empty dance floor, with a big stage, curtains drawn, running across one end.

A band came in and played a number. Then there was another short wait. And then a whistle blew. Henry nudged me. "The maids of honor are coming in."

A GIRL escorted by an old gentleman walked slowly across the whole length of the floor toward five chairs which were set a little to one side of the stage. She was nice looking, and she had on a beautiful dress; there was a lot of applause. Three more maids of honor came out, one after the other, and were escorted to their seats. The middle chair was still vacant.

"Now Francine—the Queen," Henry whispered.

There was a hush of anticipation as Francine, with her escort, came out on to the floor, and then, as she began to walk across it, there was a storm of cheering and clapping.

She had on a dress of some white, lacy stuff, with a very full skirt that seemed to float. She wore a crown; and a long elaborate train, glittering with a design of gold and silver, trailed behind her, spreading fanwise over the floor. But it wasn't her clothes, though they were gorgeous, that made everyone get up and cheer. It was Francine. She was smiling, obviously delighted with the reception she was getting. She glanced upward, raising a slim hand in graceful acknowledgment of the applause, and everyone loved her. She looked like something that has stepped out of another world—a world of romance, in which queens are young and gay and breath-takingly lovely. Even Poppy was impressed.

After that there was a lot of ceremonial—all very picturesque and ornamental, till the actual dancing started. When that began, I was a little surprised. New Orleans is full of pretty girls, and I had expected to see a lot of them dancing; but the women who were dancing were mostly elderly matrons, circling very sedately with their elaborately masked and costumed partners. Poppy leaned across me, and whispered piercingly to Henry:

"What's this? Is it a joke? Are they trying to be funny, picking out those partners?"

"Well, no." Henry looked confused. "You see, the members of this Krewe are all rich men," he explained. "This ball has cost them sixty thousand dollars. The partners picked for the call-outs are mostly their wives."

The ball finished at midnight; and the Curels, Mrs. De Saram and Poppy went home, while Henry took me on in his car to the supper dance at the Roosevelt, where we were to join a small party.

"How did you like it?" he asked as we drove along.

"Fine. And Francine was lovely."

"Wasn't she!" he agreed enthusiastically. "But she always is."

"Yes." I hesitated, and added: "Are you engaged to her?"

"No." His answer was curt. He looked sharply at me, then as we almost hit the back of a taxi, he looked at the road again. "What gave you that idea?"

"Well—your aunt—"

"I wish she wouldn't." There was a weary exasperation in his voice. "It doesn't do me any good. It makes Francine madder'n a hornet, and Mrs. De Saram just laughs. That's not right, either. Whenever Aunt Grace starts in with those hints of hers about me and Francine, Mrs. De Saram just smiles as if she knew better, which is worse."

"You mean your aunt wants you to marry Francine, so she tells people you're going to."

"That's about it." An urge to unburden himself was on him; he continued: "It's the same with my job. My aunt brought me down here and got me into the family business—Louis' business—to reorganize things—cut out waste and make more money. And what happens? If I make a report to Louis, he reads it, and thanks me for it, and then he doesn't do another thing."

"So you think the family business is badly run?" I suggested.

"No, no, I don't say that," he answered hastily. "You can't run a business badly and make the money Louis does. But—oh, hell! I often wish I could go back to my old job in Seattle. But ever since I was a kid, Aunt Grace has paid for all my schooling, and so long as she wants me here— That's how it is."

WHILE he was in this talkative mood I thought that I might as well take advantage of it and ask a few more questions. "How is Paul? The Curels don't say much about him, and I don't like to ask."

"He's very bad. In fact—" He paused, as if doubtful whether to go on, and then decided he would. "Francine doesn't know yet, they didn't tell her because of the Carnival Ball, but it's pretty near the end. The last day or so he's been getting much weaker." He paused again. "In a way, it will be a good thing," he went on soberly. "He could never have recovered; and to lie there day after day, not knowing anyone, hardly even realizing what was going on— It was his head injuries did that. Louis had specialists from all over the world to see him, but none of them held out any hope."

"Did you know him when he was well?"

"No. But he must have been a fine chap. I know Louis liked him a lot; he meant to train him to take over the business." He flushed, and went on: "That's another thing that makes my position difficult. You see, my aunt brought me down here to—to sort of take Paul's place; only, the Curels don't see things that way. They're friendly enough, but to them, I'm just an outsider."

He parked the car, and we went into the Roosevelt to wait for the rest of the party. There were six of us in all, Henry and I and another man, and Francine and two other girls. Francine had changed from her ball dress

into a simple evening dress. The exhilaration which had carried her through the ball was gone; she looked tired, and a little sullen, but still very beautiful. Her greeting to Henry was grudging, and she didn't seem to see me at all.

I danced with a girl named Lucile d'Alroy, and then with a girl named Betty something-or-other, and then with Lucile again. After that a dance began, and I found myself next to Francine, and neither of us was dancing.

"Would you care to dance?" I asked. Apparently she didn't hear me, so I added: "My leprosy isn't catching."

I saw anger flash into her eyes, but she didn't turn away. "Very well. I'll dance with you if you want to," she said. She made it sound like a declaration of war.

We began dancing, and I could tell how she felt by the way she danced. Her feet were with me; the rest of her was in opposition. We did nearly a complete circuit of the floor before she spoke. Then she said, very coldly: "Did you enjoy your lunch?"

THERE it was. She knew Taimi had lunched with me. And if she knew, the Curels knew too. Of course they did. That was why they had been so polite all the evening.

"Yes," I said. "It was fun meeting Lee Johnston again."

"I'm not talking about anyone called Lee Johnston," she said freezingly. "I'm talking about *that woman.*"

"Why do you always call her *that woman?*" I inquired. "Her name's Taimi Lanner." Before she could answer, I went on: "She rang and asked if she could see me. She wanted me to take a message to Louis. I was meeting Lee anyway, so I told her to come along."

"Oh. She asked if she could see you."

"That's correct. But I didn't notice you lunching in La Louisiane this morning."

"I wasn't there. Aunt Grace told me you were lunching with her."

"What a woman!" I said. "She knows everything. I suppose it wouldn't be possible that she's having me followed about—or having Taimi followed about."

"Why shouldn't she?" She seemed to relent a little, and went on in a voice that was casual: "But you were only with her because she asked you to meet her. You wouldn't have been with her if she hadn't asked you?"

"Quite right. I had a date to lunch with Lee Johnston, and she asked me to meet her at about the same time."

She didn't speak for a few moments, but the stiffness went out of her. She glanced up at me abruptly, and her dark eyes were very bright and beautiful.

"Tod—I want you to tell me something, honestly. Just give me an answer, yes or no, and I'll believe you, whatever Aunt Grace says. You're not on Taimi Lanner's side, are you?"

She wanted me to say no, and I wanted to say no. I wanted terribly to say no. For a moment I wished wildly that I'd never met Taimi Lanner, never even heard of her. But—

"I am on Taimi Lanner's side," I said.

"Oh." Her eyelids fell swiftly, hiding her eyes. She spoke very quietly. "I'd like to stop dancing."

"Let me explain—" I began, but she interrupted angrily: "There's nothing to explain. Will you take me off the floor, please."

"But there is something to explain," I protested. "If you'd only listen for five minutes—"

"I don't want to listen. I don't want to hear anything about that murderess."

When she said that, I had the sensation of going cold all over. I stopped dancing, and took my hands off her. We stood facing one another for a moment, coldly hostile. Then we both turned to leave the floor.

"That was a rotten thing to say," I told her. "And it was a lie."

"It wasn't a lie."

"It was a lie. You'd be afraid to hear the truth. You couldn't take it. That's why you won't let me explain."

"Go on, then, tell me the truth." Her voice was contemptuous.

We paused again, just off the floor. All around us were people in evening clothes having a good time, and we were confronting each other like something out of the last act of "Rigoletto." A feeling of angry hopelessness came over me.

"How can I explain anything here?" I demanded. "For heaven's sake, can't we get away from all these people for five minutes? Then I can explain."

"So now you—" She was beginning to say something very cutting, but she broke off as Henry joined us. He said: "Hi, you two!" As he looked at us, the smile left his face. "Is anything wrong?" he asked.

"What do *you* want?" said Francine. Before he could tell her, she added impatiently: "I'm sick of this dance, and my head aches. Tod's seeing me home."

"That's too bad," said Henry sympathetically. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing at all, thanks, Henry. I'll be okay." She tried to make up for her previous meanness by speaking more kindly, and giving him a smile. She turned to me and added: "I'll get my wrap and meet you in the lobby."

Her car was parked just round the corner from the hotel. She unlocked it and got into the driving seat. I followed.

"You said you wanted five minutes." She glanced at a small jeweled wrist-watch. "I'm listening."

"All right. In the first place, Taimi is married to Paul. They went through the ceremony in a little ruined church in Germany, and he paid the pastor with two pounds of coffee. I don't know if that marriage is legal in America, but she thinks it is. And she isn't after money. She loves Paul, and she wants to be with him, and if he dies, she doesn't want any money."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes. She asked me to pass on a message to that effect to Louis. That's why I was with her this morning."

"And you think she really meant it?"

"Yes, I know she meant it."

SHE seemed for a few seconds undecided how to answer; then she turned to me and spoke.

"Tod, can't you see she's just making use of you?"

"No, I can't," I answered emphatically. "Do you mind if I point out that I know Taimi, and you don't. You'd think differently if you met her."

"I doubt it. She wouldn't find me quite so—so susceptible to her charms. I'm a woman."

"I don't care if you're a whirling dervish," I said. "I'm telling you that if you met Taimi Lanner, and if you have any sense or perception at all, you'd realize that she's absolutely honest."

"Would I?" she said.

"Yes—if you had the courage to meet her."

"Courage." She gave a short laugh. "All right, Tod, I'll take you up on that. I will meet her."

"You will. That's fine, Francine. When?"

"Now."

"Now?" I echoed. "But that's impossible. How about some time tomorrow?"

"So that she can be all briefed and ready. No, Tod, it must be now. You said you wanted me to meet her, and I'll meet her now. She's at the Seven Dwarfs, isn't she. We'll go there and have a drink."

I still hesitated. She saw my hesitation.

"What's the matter? Are you afraid to take me there? Do you think I've never been to a night-club? Or were you only lying when you said you wanted me to meet her?"

She meant to make me angry, and she succeeded.

"All right, then," I said. "Let's go."

She reached out at once, and turned the ignition key, and started. We drove in silence.... The club was fairly full, but I found a table near the entrance, and we sat down. On the floor the spotlight was playing on a young man conjuring with top hats. I ordered drinks, and gave the waitress a note to Ronnie Marvin: *"Please ask Taimi to come and speak to me alone. —Claymore."*

We waited for a time sitting like strangers on either side of the table. I felt that we were out of place there in our evening clothes; people at other tables were looking at us curiously. In the distance I saw the squat, powerful figure of Shorty coming toward our table. He was looking at us, and there was an expression of grim seriousness on his face. I leaned quickly toward Francine.

"If there's any trouble, get out of here as soon as it starts," I said.

Her dark eyes met mine curiously; I couldn't tell what she was thinking. Then Shorty was standing by the table, and he was a grim sight to me, with his battered bruiser's face and big hairy hands.

"Who taught you to hit, Mister?" he said.

I tried to look casual and unconcerned, but I was very scared. I knew that if he hit me, I should go over backward, chair and all. I had the feeling that he would enjoy hitting me all the more because Francine was there.

"A man named Lewis," I answered. I was trying to watch him, ready to duck, and to be casual at the same time, and sheer nervousness made me voluble; I had to go on talking. "You see, my father was an amateur champion, and he wanted me to be one, so he made me take a lot of boxing lessons."

"Would that be Ted Lewis?"

"Er—yes. Ted Lewis. Do you know him?"

"I seen him fight." A broad grin suddenly split his ugly face. "That's okay, Mister; that's all I wanted to know. If you got nuttin' to do sometime, drop in. I might buy you a beer. I guess you're busy now."

Still grinning, he turned to Francine, and took a good long look at her, and winked evilly. "You want to be careful, lady; he hypnotizes 'em," he said. He walked slowly away.

"Tod, who is he?"

"The bouncer. An ex-pug. I had a little trouble with him the other night, and hit him before he was ready. Phew!" I said, and I smiled weakly. "My, was I scared!"

"Scared?"

"Terrified. I thought he was going to hit me." She smiled, and for a moment we were friendly again. "Look, Francine," I went on, "I don't think it's a very good idea to stay here. Let's go."

"We can't do that—not before Taimi Lanner comes. It would look as if we were running away."

"Who cares?" I asked.

"I do. So do you. You know you're not really scared. You'd hate to run away."

"I wouldn't," I protested. "I'd much rather run than fight. I'm better at running."

I saw that she didn't believe me. "You don't seem to mind fighting with me," she said.

"I hate fighting with you, Francine."

"You mean you'd rather run away."

"No. I mean—" I broke off then, because at that moment I saw Taimi approaching only a few paces away.

"Oh—hallo," I said, rising hastily. Taimi glanced at me, and there was a sort of interrogation in her look. Then she looked at Francine.

"What is your answer?" she asked.

Francine didn't make any answer. She didn't seem to know what Taimi was talking about. She too looked at me interrogatively.

There I was between the two of them, and I felt pretty awkward. On the floor the conjuror had left, and Ronnie Marvin was doing his turn. Shorty passed our table again and leaned thoughtfully against a pillar near the door. I pulled out a chair for Taimi, and we both sat down. I felt I ought to say something.

"This is Francine de Saram, Paul's cousin," I said.

Taimi hardly even glanced at me. She was looking at Francine.

"Have you brought the answer to my message?" she asked.

"No," said Francine.

"Then why have you come here?"

Speaking for myself, I wished we hadn't come. I could see right away that the meeting was a flop. And there was another thing I had been wrong about. I had imagined that Taimi would be cool and placid, as I had always known her—just a lovely mask, giving nothing away—and that Francine would be glowing and indignant. Things were the other way round.

Francine was the cool one. She sat there, looking quite exquisite, like an expensive flower, and she looked as cool as a flower. Taimi didn't. She had obviously dressed with some care; I imagine that was why she had kept us waiting so long; but her attitude was uncompromisingly hostile, and her blue eyes were blazing.

"This meeting was my idea," I said. "I thought you two ought to try to understand each other a bit." But I knew that wouldn't do any good. Taimi had come down eagerly expecting an answer to her message, and she was bitterly disappointed. All she was thinking of was Paul.

"What is there to understand?" she demanded. "These people have taken my husband; they have stolen my papers; and now they are trying to put me into prison."

"What papers have we stolen?" asked Francine. Her voice was level and quite casual.

"A letter Paul sent me from Hamburg, and a paper given to me by the pastor of Michenau. They were stolen from me on the ship."

Francine didn't answer, and it was plain she didn't believe a word of it.

The conference had reached a complete deadlock. Nobody had anything to say, because there was no point in anyone saying anything more.

We just sat for a few seconds, and then I saw two men coming toward the table. One was the fat man, Ronnie's father; the other was a slickly dressed, dark-featured man of forty, with carefully brushed hair and a manner of great geniality and self-assurance. Francine glanced at him, then rose quietly.

"I'm going," she said. As I rose too, she added: "No, don't you come. I don't want you with me. You stay here with your friends."

"You're not leaving, Miss De Saram. Oh, don't go just yet," said the genial man.

He spoke persuasively, smiling confidently at her, and laid a hand lightly on her arm. I stepped forward between them, and seized his wrist, and jerked his hand away and said: "If she says she's going, she's going." Francine turned without haste, gathering her evening wrap round her, and made for the doorway. Then she was gone.

"Who the hell are you, and what do you want?" I asked the genial man. Old Marvin answered.

I gave a yell, and a bullet plopped into the mattress.

"This is Mr. Fettinger, Taimi's lawyer."

"That's so. Glad to meet you, Mr. Claymore." He was still genial, but I was far from genial. I turned toward Taimi, and I saw from her expression that Fettinger's presence was as unwelcome to her as it was to me. Old Marvin spoke, sounding apologetic.

"I thought Ed ought to know that Mr. Claymore and Miss De Saram were here."

She sighed, as if this was just something she couldn't cope with, and turned to me.

"I am sorry." She took my hand, and pressed it gently. Her eyes were very bright; she was near to tears. "You have tried to be kind," she murmured. "But you see, it was no good. She—she did not wish to understand." She held my hand a moment and added. "Please believe that I am grateful."

"That's all right," I said. And she walked away.

"Now, Mr. Claymore, suppose we have a little talk," said Fettinger. When I looked at him coldly, he added, smiling: "You can't lose anything by it, can you?"

I shrugged. Since I was here, I might as well listen to what he had to say. I sat down, and the other two sat down.

"Well?" I said.

But he was in no hurry. He ordered drinks, and offered me a cigar, which I declined, and lit one himself.

"This is a tricky case," he said. "Very tricky. What I'm wondering, Mr. Claymore, is just what you expect to get out of it."

"Nothing."

"I believe you. You're in it just to help Taimi Lanner, because you like her. All right, then. What does she expect to get out of it?"

"Her husband."

"Husband!" He unclasped his hands and clicked a thumb and first finger in a derisive gesture. "She hasn't got a husband. The man's as good as dead. He won't last another week. What she needs is a live husband," he went on. "And she'll easily find one, with her looks, and the money she'll have if someone can talk her into acting like a grown-up person."

"You mean she should buy herself a new husband—a this year's model," I suggested.

He seemed to think that was funny; he laughed heartily. "She doesn't like me," he went on, with an air of great frankness. "She thinks I'm only in this for what I can get; and of course, she's dead right. I do my best for my clients for the money it brings me; that happens to be my business. I'd like to do my best for her, but she won't listen. But if you were to talk to her—"

"And say what?" I asked.

"I'll tell you: I want her to write me a letter authorizing me to settle this business out of court. She's to agree to give up all claim on Paul Curel, and to leave the country, in exchange for a cash payment of two hundred thousand dollars." He raised a finger and wagged it at me. "Mind you, we may not get that. We may have to settle for a hundred and fifty thousand."

"Is that all?" I said. "Only a hundred-fifty thousand?"

I SMILED at him, but not because I liked him. "And what about the murder charge?"

"If she'll act sensibly, there won't be any murder charge," he said.

"Fine," I remarked. "But has it struck you that a letter like that, from her to you, would do her no good at all if it fell into the wrong hands. In fact, it would look like an attempt at blackmail. You get Mrs. Curel to write offering to settle out of court for a hundred and fifty thousand, and maybe I'll advise Taimi to consider it. Not that she's likely to accept my advice."

"Isn't she?"

"No. Now I'd like to ask a question: You said Paul wasn't likely to last another week. Who told you that? Was it Mrs. Curel—or would it be Elmer Gains?"

He laughed again, and even his laughter seemed false. His eyes were not laughing.

"Why would Elmer tell me a thing like that?" he asked in an amused tone. "That's something else I've been meaning to talk to you about. I think you'd better change your mind about Elmer. He's a very nice guy—unless he's crossed. Let me see, didn't you have a little accident on the ship?"

"I didn't have an accident. I was thrown overboard."

"Is that so? Well, you were lucky—that time. I'd like you to go on being lucky."

"Nice of you," I said.

"Yeah. I'm like that. I always try to settle things on a reasonable basis, if I can. I'd like you to be reasonable. I think you will be, when you've thought things over."

"I wouldn't rely on it," I said.

He only smiled. I saw Ronnie Marvin coming hurriedly toward the table. He still had his stage make-up on, and he looked very angry. Ignoring me and Fettinger, he turned on his father.

"What's the idea of this? I told you *not* to ring Elmer."

So he had rung Elmer Gains, and Gains had sent Fettinger. That didn't surprise me.

"That's all very well, son," said old Marvin stubbornly. "But I gotta consider my own interests. I want to stay in business."

Fettinger rose, still smiling. He looked down at me.

"You'll change your mind," he predicted confidently. "Come and see me when you're ready. I'll be expecting you."

He went. Ronnie turned sharply toward me.

"What was the idea bringing Miss De Saram down here? Who thought of that one?"

"I did. I wanted her to meet Taimi, but it didn't work out. I wouldn't have brought her if I'd known anyone was going to ring Elmer Gains."

"It was you brought Elmer into this, Mister," old Marvin pointed out. "You as good as said he killed Swenson." He looked at Ronnie, and then back at me. "I ain't no commando," he went on. "I'm old and fat, and I want to keep out of trouble. I've nothing against you personally, you understand, but I'd like you to stay away from this place, if you don't mind."

"What was that Ed was saying about you changing your mind and going to see him?" Ronnie demanded.

"That's exactly what he was saying. I told him I wasn't going to see him, but he seems to think I may change my mind."

"Maybe you will," said Ronnie shortly. "You got a car parked near here?"

"No. I'll walk down the road and pick up a taxi." I felt suddenly fed up with him, and his father. I rose, turned from them and walked through the doorway.

THE time was about two in the morning, and there were still a good many people in Bourbon Street, though it wasn't crowded. I saw a taxi coming, and stepped to the edge of the sidewalk (banquette) and hailed it. Near me a group of drunks was standing arguing; they seemed to turn toward me as the taxi drew to the curb. What happened then all took place very swiftly.

Without warning, one of the drunks took a swing at me. I ducked, avoiding the blow. Then something hard hit me with blinding force on the side of the face, and I went down, sick and dizzy, clutching at the side of the taxicab. Someone gave me a kick on the thigh, and another on the shoulder, and I crossed my arms in front of me, trying to shield my face. No one else kicked me, but I became aware of a thudding and grunting going on above me. I tried to raise myself, and found a man was standing over me, straddling me with his legs. Another man came tumbling to the sidewalk beside me, blood streaming from his mouth. He had an ugly face, so I hit it. Then a hand seized the collar of my coat, and dragged me upward, and thrust me into the taxi; I fell sprawling in it on my hands and knees. The taxi started, and I felt another hand under my arm helping me up on to the seat.

"You all right?" said Ronnie Marvin. I found I was sitting between him and Shorty.

"Far from it." I raised a hand to the side of my face, which felt horribly tender and painful. "What happened?" I asked.

"That was a hint," said Ronnie, "so that you'd change your mind and see things Ed's way. I know Ed, and I know Elmer; so when you left, Shorty and I went out after you." His eyes were shining; I saw that he had enjoyed the fight. On the other side of me Shorty had the pleased air of a battered tomcat who has just swallowed a saucer of cream.

"Elmer must be pretty scared of you, to pay you all this attention," went on Ronnie. "You'll need to look out for yourself."

"Scared of me!" I exclaimed. "Now, why in heaven's name should anyone be scared of me?"

"Maybe you know too much about what happened on the ship," he answered. He looked at me steadily. "You're Taimi's best bet, and I've been telling her so."

"I am?"

"Sure. Who else has she got? I'm just a lousy performer in a lousy night-spot. Nobody's going to believe what I say. Ed's on the other side; he'll do what Elmer tells him. I'd never have hired him, if I'd known Elmer was interested. But you're a wing commander, and a tennis champ, and a friend of the Curels. If you talk, somebody's likely to listen and start taking notice. So you've got to be kept quiet."

"Isn't that wonderful!" I said gloomily. "So I suppose every time I go out, I shall have to keep my eyes skinned to see that half a dozen toughs don't beat me."

"That's about it—except that next time they won't just beat you up." He paused, and added quietly: "If you feel like that about it, why did you get mixed up in this business?"

"I wish I knew. I'm like your father; I'm not a commando. All I want is a quiet life."

"So I suppose you'll be going to see Ed Fettinger. Is that it?"

"No, I sha'n't. I don't like him." He grinned, and suddenly I felt very irritated. "Damn it," I complained, "I came to this town to enjoy myself; and so far, I've spent my whole time being kidnaped and beaten over the head with blackjacks. I don't think it's funny."

"It's too bad," said Ronnie, but he was still grinning. Shorty plucked my sleeve.

"Tell you what," he growled hoarsely. "You go and see Elmer, and beat him up. Use the old Ted Lewis left-right-left on him. Let me know when you're going; I'd like to be there."

They were both grinning at me, thoroughly pleased. But I wasn't pleased; my outlook on life was definitely gloomy. The taxi drew up outside Louis' house, and I got out. Ronnie raised a hand in salutation.

"So long, Tod. Be seein' you soon."

"I hope not," I told him.

I went up to my room and looked at myself in a mirror. My clothes were dusty and bedraggled: my white waistcoat was torn; I had a livid bruise on my right cheekbone, and the beginning of an enormous black eye. Where I had been kicked, my limbs were stiff and aching.

Then a thought occurred to me, and I almost went mad with anxiety. Francine had left the Seven Dwarfs alone; I wondered if she had got home all right. Cursing myself for not thinking of this before, I ran downstairs to the telephone in the hall and rang Mrs. De Saram's number. After a little delay Francine answered.

"Hello. Who's that?" She sounded quite wide awake.

"Me. I only rang to make sure you got home all right."

"Of course. Why shouldn't I?" She paused and added: "What happened after I left?"

"Nothing much.... I had a few words with Fettinger, and we didn't get on, and when I left the club, I was beaten up. He had it all laid on, waiting for me."

"You were beaten up! Tod, are you badly hurt?" There was concern in her voice.

"I've got a black eye, and—"

"You've got a black eye?"

"Yes." There was another pause. Then she spoke deliberately.

"That's good. It serves you right. I wish you had two black eyes." There was a click as she hung up.

Chapter Nine

WHEN I WENT INTO THE BREAKFAST-ROOM Sarah sat up and stared at me with a piece of toast and marmalade in her hand, halfway to her mouth.

"Oh, Daddy! Who did that?"

"A man." I sat down. "He hit me with a stick last night."

"How beastly of him!" She put the piece of toast back on her plate. "Did you knock him down?" she asked hopefully.

"No, darling. He knocked me down. I didn't even see him."

"What a pity! I suppose he ran away. If he hadn't run away, would you have knocked him down?"

"Yes," I said. "And scalped him."

She gave a little grin, and then came round the table to me, and kissed me gently and patted my shoulder. "Never mind. It will soon be well," she added consolingly.

Poppy gave a cackle. "That certainly is a beautiful black eye," she observed. "Are you sure you got it from a man?"

She poured some coffee and gave it to me. Joseph, the butler, entered and came to me.

"Mr. Louis' compliments, sah, and he'd be glad if you'd see him in the library when you've finished breakfast."

"Certainly," I said. Poppy gave another cackle.

"This is where your poor father gets what's coming to him," she remarked cheerfully to Sarah. "I don't think he's going to enjoy it any more than getting that black eye."

"What have you been doing, Daddy?" asked Sarah, with interest. "Have you been tactless?"

This amused Poppy again. "No, my pet. He's been much worse than that. He's been well-intentioned," she said.

I didn't want much breakfast. When I had had a cup of coffee and a piece of toast, I went to the library. Louis was standing with his back to the door looking out of the window. He didn't hear me till I was halfway across the room. Then he turned.

"Ah, Claymore." He called me Claymore, not Tod. I saw a look of surprise cross his face as he noticed my eye, but he didn't comment on it. "I think we must have a little discussion. Will you be seated?"

THERE it was, that cool courtesy again. I might have been an ambassador from an unfriendly power. I sat down, but Louis remained standing on the hearthrug, tall and slim and elegant, looking at me gravely.

"To begin with, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me why you took my niece Francine to the Seven Dwarfs night-club last night."

I hadn't been expecting that one. I wondered how he had found out so soon, and who had told him.

"Well—the fact is, I wanted her to meet Taimi Lanner, and she said she'd meet her then or never, and we were quarreling—and so I took her."

"Oh. So that's how it was." I saw that he had grasped my explanation instantly. Before he could say any more, I added: "I'm sorry about that, and about other things. You've been very kind, Louis, and I appreciate it, but I think I'd better leave your house as soon as I can."

He nodded, and I knew that he was relieved.

"Yes, I quite see your point." He paused, looking at me curiously. "All the same, I must admit I find your attitude a little difficult to understand."

"It's quite simple. I merely think that Taimi Lanner is in the right."

"You think my sister-in-law should allow this girl to blackmail her for two hundred thousand dollars?" he asked ironically. "That's what I find difficult to understand."

"You call her *this girl,*" I said impatiently. "And Francine calls her *that woman,* as if she were some sort of female delinquent. But she doesn't want two hundred thousand dollars." I rose and stood facing him, and felt myself getting angrier. "She's been in an underground movement," I went on. "She's been in a concentration camp. She's had dirty tricks played on her ever since she was a kid—and now your family is getting together to continue the process. Not content with denying her her right to her husband, you're trying to pin a charge of murder on her."

My words seemed to bounce back as if from a rubber wall. He didn't even resent them. He was a little sorry for me.

"I see how you feel. But one must face facts, you know. She's made this claim to have married Paul, but my sister-in-law has poor Swenson's assurance that there's absolutely no truth in it."

"Your sister-in-law is a liar," I told him flatly.

When I said that, the temperature of the room seemed to fall about ten degrees. The way he looked at me, I understood that if this had happened fifty years ago it would have meant pistols for two and coffee for one. He spoke quietly.

"You have the insolence, in my own house—" he began. But I didn't let him go on.

"Insolence, my foot!" I said crudely. "Who do you think killed Swenson? Who threw me overboard, and tried to kill me? Who had me beaten up last night? I'll tell you. It was your sister-in-law's little playmate, Elmer Gains."

"Gains!" I saw that I had startled him, and I pursued my advantage.

"Yes. Last night someone told him I'd taken Francine to the Seven Dwarfs, and he sent Fettinger down there. When Francine and Taimi had gone, Fettinger tried to persuade me to get Taimi to write a letter offering to settle out of court for two hundred thousand dollars. I wouldn't, because I know Taimi doesn't want two hundred thousand dollars, and I was pretty sure that if she did write a letter, it would be produced against her. Fettinger warned me I'd better change my mind, and when I left the club, I was beaten up. It all smells a little to me. That's why I'm on Taimi's side."

He listened attentively, looking me straight in the face. When I had finished, he turned from me without speaking, and went to a writing-desk. I watched, wondering what was coming next, while he wrote a note, folded it, and put it into an envelope. Then he came back to me.

"I think your friend should have a reputable lawyer," he said evenly. "And you may find, before this matter is concluded, that you need one yourself. Here is a note to Mr. Fosdyke, of the firm of Fosdyke and Joliet."

FOR a moment I didn't grasp what he meant. I stood there, letting him hold the note out to me; and I knew he was very angry, but this anger wasn't directed at me. I took the note.

"Oh—thanks." I didn't know what to say.

"New Orleans is very full at present, because of Mardi Gras; you may have difficulty in finding accommodation," he went on. "Don't feel you have to hurry away. Take a day or two, and move when you're ready."

"Oh—thanks," I said again. "Look, Louis," I added blunderingly. "I'm sorry about all this. I hate the whole blasted business. But what can I do?"

"Nothing, Tod." He seemed to thaw a little; for the first time during the interview a slight smile touched his lips. "Nothing, except what you think is right and honorable." He held out his hand. "I'm sorry, too, that this unpleasant situation should have developed. I was looking forward with pleasure to your visit."

That was that. I left the room feeling very solemn. In the hall below, Poppy intercepted me.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Nothing much happened," I answered. "Louis regretted that a difference of opinion was going to cut short my visit, and gave me the name of a good lawyer."

"That's Louis. He always does things with a bit of an air. But don't you make any mistake about him, young Tod. For all his airy manner, Louis can be very tough

indeed when he makes up his mind about it. If you've got him up against you, I'm sorry for you."

"All right, all right." I spoke impatiently, and regretted it, and added: "Damn it, I like him."

"So you have to quarrel with him," observed Poppy sardonically. "What about money? If you're going to stay in a hotel with Sarah, you'll need quite a lot. I suppose you want me to lend you some."

I could hardly believe it. For years Poppy had had the reputation of never lending anybody anything.

"Thanks a lot, Poppy; I think I'll be all right." I saw an expression of relief cross her face; she went on quite cheerfully: "That's good. Because if I lend you money, and you get murdered. . . . But I'll tell you what: If anything happens to you, I'll see that Sarah gets back all right. You'd like her to go to your uncle in Ireland, I suppose."

"Yes," I answered. She grinned at me.

"Don't look so glum; it may not happen."

In a very gloomy frame of mind I left Poppy, and went to the nearest telephone to try to engage a couple of hotel rooms for me and Sarah. In turn I rang the Monteleone, the Roosevelt, the Jung, the St. Charles and the Senator hotels. All of them were full.

It occurred to me that Lee Johnston would probably know of some small hotel or guest-house where I might go, but I wasn't meeting him till later. I decided to fill in the interval by going to see Mr. Fosdyke.

I sent in the note from Louis, and was kept waiting for a few minutes in an outer office. Then a secretary told me Mr. Fosdyke would see me.

He was a tall gaunt old man of seventy or more, with craggy features, white hair, cut very short, piercing dark eyes, and a straight, thin-lipped mouth. There was a look of impatient energy about him. He motioned me to a chair, examined me as if I were a specimen, and shot a question at me.

"Why did Louis Curel send you to me? Are you a friend of his?"

"Well—in a way."

"Why didn't he send you to his own lawyer?"

"Because we're on opposite sides."

"What? And he sent you to me! He must be very sure of his case. Did he tell you I'm the best advocate in New Orleans?"

"He told me you were a good lawyer."

"H'm. What is the case? Tell me from the beginning."

I told him the whole story, omitting nothing. He listened, frowning, occasionally making notes. When I had finished, he leaned back in his chair, staring at me.

"Good Lord!" he said. "The Curels, of all people—and Elmer Gains—and this Finnish girl; what a mixture! This thing is going to explode on New Orleans like a powder magazine."

The idea seemed to please him. Then he became suddenly very businesslike.

"About this marriage: If it can be shown that it took place in Germany, according to the recognized laws of that country in existence at the time, it will be held legal here. But what were the recognized laws of Germany at that time? Was the pastor empowered to perform a marriage ceremony in that church between an American soldier and a Finnish refugee? What records, if any, were kept of the marriage? But we can go into that later. The first thing I mean to do is to apply to a judge for an order that Miss Lanner—Mrs. Curel, rather—shall be allowed to have access to her husband. When are you going to bring her to see me?"

"As soon as I can—that is, if she'll come."

"If she'll come! Are you mad, young man? Are you insane?" He brought his bony hand down with a sharp slap on a pile of papers. "Go away. Get out of my office. Get hold of that girl and bring her to see me. Don't come here again without her." He thrust aside the notes he had made, picked up another paper, and began reading it.

I left his office and rang the Seven Dwarfs; a strange voice told me that Taimi was out. I was already late for my appointment with Lee Johnston, so I went next to La Louisiane. He was already there, propping up the bar, and with him was a familiar burly figure—Bob Smalls, the mate of the *Flora*. He grinned broadly at the sight of my black eye.

"Look what you've got!" he observed cheerfully. "Did someone give it to you or did you just pick it up?"

"I bought it," I said.

We settled down to a little drinking, and I told them the latest developments.

"One thing you don't have to worry about is where you're going when you leave Louis Curel's," Lee told me. "Plenty of room in my mother's house, in Gretna. I'll tell her you're coming."

"That's very nice of you. But are you sure?"

"Certainly I'm sure. Mother likes having house guests." He smiled his friendly smile, and added: "Mother will want to get a couple of rooms ready. Would you like to come to the house about six?"

"Now you got a lawyer and a place to live," observed Bob Smalls. "That's two things you don't have to worry about. What's your next move going to be?"

"I think that's rather up to my lawyer," I suggested.

"No sir. You need a lawyer to handle your legal business, but what about your illegal business? You got thrown overboard, didn't you? And you got beaten up. Are you going to let them get away with it?"

"They haven't done me much harm so far," I pointed out.

"Not so far," agreed Lee seriously. "But right now Fettinger's wondering what he'll do to you next. That's not going to help you any, or Taimi either. You've got to get him wondering what *you're* going to do to *him*."

"And if you want any help," said Bob Smalls, grinning broadly, "we've both got time to spare."

"I'll remember that," I said.

A waiter told us that a table was ready for us, and we went to lunch. But the waiter had only just finished taking our order when I saw Francine enter the restaurant. She stood just inside the doorway, and then she saw me and came toward our table. I rose and took a couple of steps to meet her.

"I'm sorry to interrupt. I—I want to speak to you. Sarah told me where you were."

She was pale and quiet.

"What's the trouble, Francine?" I asked.

"There's no trouble. At least—it's about Paul and Taimi Lanner." She paused, then added abruptly: "If she wants to see him, she can."

"What!"

"It's difficult to explain, but—but I've been thinking about it," she went on. "If, by any chance, she *is* his wife, and he dies, and we don't let her see him first. . . . You understand what I mean, Tod. It would be horrible, wouldn't it? And if she isn't his wife, she still ought to see him, so that she can realize what she's doing."

"Do you want her to come to the house?"

"Yes. But it will have to be now—in about the next hour. Aunt Grace has gone to see Uncle Louis; she'll be back at about three."

"Then she doesn't know of this idea of yours."

"Oh, no. She mustn't know, till afterward. I shall tell her then."

"What about your mother?"

Sarah came charging in, and fell upon Taimi.

"She knows, but she won't interfere. If you'll bring your—your friend to the house, I'll let her in and take her to Paul. But she mustn't stay very long—not more than about ten minutes. And Tod—"

"Yes."

"Paul's very ill, you know. He—he's dying. She'll only see him. He won't speak to her."

"She knows he's very ill," I said. "I'll go and see if I can find her. She was out about half an hour ago. You'll be waiting at the house?"

"Yes, I'll be waiting."

I made my excuses to Bob Smalls and Lee and hurried to the Seven Dwarfs. Ronnie Marvin answered my knock. This time Taimi was in; he called her. I gave her Francine's message, and saw the look of gladness come suddenly into her eyes.

"She says I can see Paul!" She paused; the gladness faded, and was replaced by suspicion. "But why? Why is she doing this?"

She suspected a catch. This made me suddenly irritable, and I answered roughly: "Because she's a very nice person, and she wants to be fair to you. Do you want to come, or don't you?"

"Better go, Taimi," urged Ronnie Marvin. "Miss De Saram's on the level. I'd take a bet on that."

"You mean she is really going to let me see Paul? There is no trap?"

"There's no trap," I said emphatically. "But if you're coming, you must come now. Mrs. Curel's out, but she's expected back at three, and Francine wants you to see Paul and be away again before she comes back."

"That old so-and-so!" said Ronnie.

"Are you coming, or aren't you?" I asked Taimi.

"I am sorry. Yes, I am coming." Suddenly she smiled at me radiantly, seized my hand, and touched it with her lips. "Oh, I am so happy. I shall not be a minute."

She ran up the stairs, as excited as a schoolgirl, and I must admit that she was quick. When she came down, she had changed her clothes, and done her hair and her face, and she looked young and happy. Sitting in the taxi, she smiled at me, and squeezed my arm.

"I am going to see Paul. I can hardly believe it."

"Don't expect too much, Taimi. Remember, he's very ill," I warned her.

"He will get better," she assured me confidently.

We reached the house. Francine opened the door to us. Taimi was looking the picture of happiness; it shone eloquently from her eyes; but Francine was looking pale and tired.

"Please come in," she said quietly.

"I'll wait out here," I told them.

I had kept the taxi waiting, and I stood chatting to the driver. I don't know quite how long I waited; but after a time the door of the house opened, and Taimi and Francine came out together.

Taimi looked like a sleepwalker. Her face was chalk pale, and her eyes had a dazed, unseeing look in them. Francine spoke to me.

"Look after her. She's had a terrible shock."

I took Taimi's arm and helped her into the taxi. She moved mechanically, going where she was put. In the taxi, she sat down quietly and stared in front of her. I glanced back at Francine. Her eyes were trouble-haunted, and her face was as pale as Taimi's. She murmured: "She didn't realize. I—I tried to warn her." And then she turned away with tears running down her cheeks.

I said to the taxi-driver: "Drive round for a bit—find somewhere quiet." We drove. I didn't speak to Taimi; I thought it better to leave her alone. After a minute or so she gave a deep sigh and turned slowly toward me.

"He didn't know me," she said in a flat, dull voice. "And I—hardly knew him. . . . I knew he was ill. But I thought that when I could go to him, he would get better."

I saw that for days—for months perhaps—she had been day-dreaming of him. But she had been day-dreaming of the Paul she had known and loved. She had imagined him weak and ill, but she had believed that if only she could go to him, his recovery would begin.

"It does not matter whether I am there or not," she went on in that bewildered voice. "There is nothing I can do for him."

She caught her breath, and I saw she was trying not to cry. I pulled out a handkerchief, and gave it to her, and said: "Cry if you feel like it."

We drove on through the streets of New Orleans, gay with their flags and decorations for Mardi Gras. Soon we came to quieter streets, and then a park with a long avenue of oaks. The sobs that shook Taimi became less frequent. At last they died away, and she sat up.

"I must not cry; I am being silly." She seemed to square her shoulders. "It is all over," she added. "I shall never see Paul again."

"But—why not?" I protested. "I mean—didn't you want to stay with him, and nurse him?"

She looked at me gravely.

"Yes, I wished to stay. But I could do nothing for him. I have done nursing; I have seen men— And also I spoke to Paul's nurse. He feels nothing, knows nobody. I could do nothing if I stayed; I should only be in the way."

She was being very sensible, facing facts. The dream was ended, and she was looking squarely at the reality.

"But I am very unhappy." The words escaped from her in a mere whisper.

"I'm terribly sorry, Taimi."

"Other people have had misfortunes," she said with a queer sort of dignity. "These things have to be borne. But now—what am I going to do?"

"There are things you still have to think about," I pointed out gently. "As soon as you're up to it, I want you to come and see a lawyer."

"A lawyer? I do not need a lawyer."

"But you do, Taimi, and I've got a good one. Fettinger's no good to you."

"I know. It does not matter. There is nothing more to be done."

"But there is, Taimi. There's this murder case. Swenson's death. You must have a lawyer."

"I did not kill him." She glanced at me, shook her head slightly, and went on in a quiet, obstinate voice: "Please. I know you mean to be kind, but I will see no more lawyers."

"But—" I began again, and then I gave it up. I had spoken at the wrong time.

I leaned forward and gave the driver the address of the Seven Dwarfs. The taxi drew up, and I got out; and then I saw Lee's tall figure detach itself from beside the doorway.

"I wanted to see Taimi, but she was out, so I waited here," he explained.

She got out of the taxi, and didn't say anything; he didn't say anything to her, either. I think he was shocked speechless by the look on her face. Then she took a step toward the doorway, hesitated, gave a kind of shiver, and turned to me piteously.

"I—I hate this place. I cannot come back here. I cannot. What shall I do?"

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll find somewhere else for you."

Lee stepped forward quickly, took her by the elbows, lifted her quite easily off her feet, and put her back into the cab. With one foot inside the cab, he paused and spoke to me over his shoulder.

"I'm going to take her home; Mother will look after her," he told me. "I'll be seeing you later." He pulled the cab door shut behind him, and the cab drove away.

Thank heaven for that, I thought. . . . The next thing I had to do was to go back to Louis' house, and pack up my things and Sarah's, then move over to Lee Johnston's. As I entered the hall of Louis' house, a couple of men sitting there rose quickly and came to meet me.

"Are you Tod Claymore?"

"Yes." At the back of the hall I saw Anna and Joseph, watching; they looked scared and uncomfortable. One of the two men showed me a badge.

"Lieutenant Flynn wants to talk to you. We've got a car outside."

"All right." I looked round as Sarah came out of the drawing-room. She ran to me.

"Daddy, I'm so glad you're back. Something's happened, and everybody's being peculiar."

"Are they?" I glanced at Anna and Joseph, and they wouldn't look at me; they looked the other way. "Is something wrong?" I asked.

"Let's go," said one of the policemen brusquely. I patted Sarah on the shoulder and said: "Look, darling, you go and do a little painting or something. I'll be back soon."

We went out to the car. The policemen, uncommunicative, sat on either side of me. We drove to Mrs. De Saram's house.

Chapter Ten

THERE WAS A CROWD IN THE BIG DRAWING-room—Mrs. De Saram, Poppy, Francine, Mrs. Curel, Henry Marden, Lieutenant Flynn and Sergeant Bristol. I stepped into the room, and saw them all waiting there. No one greeted me.

Francine, sitting close beside her mother on a settee, glanced quickly at me and looked away again. I noticed she had been crying. Mrs. Curel was pale and composed, her large figure upright in a hard chair. Poppy was apart from the others, standing by the window; her face was flushed, and her eyes were glittering. She looked like an old wolf at bay.

Lieutenant Flynn sat at a small table, facing everyone, with Sergeant Bristol standing by his shoulder. As I entered, he turned his head toward me; his stare was threatening and unfriendly.

"So here you are! I'd like an account of all your movements this afternoon."

He made that simple request sound ominous, like an accusation.

"Certainly," I said obligingly. "I called at this house. Then I took a taxi ride. After that I had a drink, and then your men brought me back here."

"You called at this house in my absence, without my knowledge, and you brought Taimi Lanner with you." Mrs. Curel spoke calmly, merely stating simple facts.

"That's so."

"You knew Mrs. Curel was out, and you knew what time she was expected back," said Lieutenant Flynn. Before I could answer, Poppy said quickly: "Look out, Tod. They're trying to trap you."

I knew that already. As soon as I entered the room, I realized that I hadn't been brought there to be offered a cup of tea.

"Are they?" I said. I put my hand into my pocket and brought out a cigarette packet. Sergeant Bristol turned on Poppy, and said patiently, "Will you be quiet, ma'am," and she answered defiantly: "No, I won't." She looked him up and down contemptuously, and added: "You don't think I'm going to let myself be bullied by a lot of cotton-picking cops!"

These were wrecking tactics. Poppy was in a fighting mood, mad as a hornet. But there is always some method in her madness. At the moment I knew she was trying to rattle the police, to put them off their stroke.

LIEUTENANT FLYNN sat there, cold and patient as a sphinx. He hadn't even glanced round at Poppy. He was concentrating on me.

"You knew what time Mrs. Curel was expected back," he repeated quietly. "No good denying it. I know you did."

"That's all right. I knew what time she was expected back. I wasn't going to deny it."

"Where did you go when you left this house?"

"I've told you. I went for a taxi ride."

"Quit stalling. I said *where* did you go?"

"I don't know." I paused deliberately, because I was in no hurry. If they were trying to trap me, my best bet was to go very slowly, and think before I spoke.

"You see, Taimi was feeling upset," I went on. "So I told the driver to drive about for a bit, and he did. I didn't notice where we went." I paused again, and added: "Who cares where I went, and why?"

"You pretend you don't know? Then I'll tell you: Just after three, Mrs. Curel got back to this house. There was a car waiting outside. As Mrs. Curel stepped out of her car, someone in the other car took a shot at her."

He was watching me like a cat stalking a rabbit. But it didn't make sense. There was Mrs. Curel, self-possessed and upright, a little pale, but otherwise the picture of health. So that was all right.

"He didn't hit her, I hope," I said.

"No, he didn't hit her. . . . He hit her brother-in-law, Louis Curel, and killed him," he said.

"Louis—" I think I must have gone very pale. "D-do you mean that Louis is dead?" I stammered.

"He's dead." The matter-of-fact, level voice seemed to ram the fact home with the force of a punch. The voice went on coldly, with the same grim patience:

"Mrs. Curel told her niece and her sister-in-law that she'd be back about three. She didn't tell anyone else. They didn't tell anyone, except you. And that car was there waiting for her."

"But you can't possibly think I killed him!" I protested.

"Why not? And if you didn't, someone told those men what time Mrs. Curel was coming back to the house. You can't get away from that."

I couldn't. The realization made me feel slightly sick. I had told Taimi and Ronnie Marvin what time Mrs. Curel was expected back; and I remembered very clearly the remark Ronnie had made.

"I'll tell you why not," burst out Poppy, charging into the fray like an old warhorse. "Because if Tod had aimed at Mrs. Curel, he wouldn't have hit Louis. When Tod shoots at anything, he hits it. It's one of the few things he's any good at."

"I don't think Mr. Claymore shot my brother-in-law." Mrs. Curel's voice was calm and dispassionate, in contrast with Poppy's fiery trumpeting. She added: "Obviously he told those people what time I was coming back, but I don't believe he had any idea what the results would be."

She was shielding me, and I didn't want her to shield me. Heaven knows, I needed help, but not from her.

"You did tell someone. Who was it?" The Lieutenant almost shot the words at me. I had to answer.

"Ronnie Marvin was there when I called at the Seven Dwarfs for Taimi Lanner. He heard what I said to her," I answered reluctantly.

"Ronnie Marvin." The Lieutenant nodded slightly, and I understood that everyone in the room felt that I was responsible for Louis' death. If I hadn't told Ronnie what time Mrs. Curel was expected back at the house—

"I suppose you'll arrest Taimi Lanner, and this man Marvin?" asked Mrs. Curel.

"Yeah. I'll have them both taken in. But he'll have an alibi and—" The telephone interrupted. Sergeant Bristol took up the receiver.

"Hello . . . Oh, it's you, Lanahan." There was a long pause, and then he said, "Okay—hang on there," and turned to the Lieutenant.

"She's not there. The Marvins say they don't know where she is. They haven't seen her since early afternoon, when she went out with Claymore."

THEY were talking about Taimi. Lieutenant Flynn nodded slightly again, as if this too was something he had been expecting.

"All right. Tell Lanahan to leave someone there on watch, and take Ronnie Marvin to headquarters. As soon as Taimi Lanner shows up, if she shows up, she's to be taken in too."

I heard Sergeant Bristol give this message on the telephone. Lieutenant Flynn turned back to me.

"Now you'd better start talking," he advised me quietly, "—unless you'd like to go with the others."

"What would you like me to talk about?" I asked. He was patient, but he meant to pin me down.

"Talk about Taimi Lanner. You've been working with her against the Curel family ever since you landed. Where is she?"

I didn't care what happened to Ronnie Marvin. If he was responsible for Louis' death, they could skin him alive, and I wouldn't move a finger. But Taimi was different. She was innocent, and miserably unhappy. I couldn't stand by calmly and let them drag her off to jail.

"Isn't she at the Seven Dwarfs?" I asked. "I left her there."

"That's a lie. The Marvins say she hasn't been back."

"I couldn't possibly care less what the Marvins say," I told him. "I'm telling you I took Taimi back to the Seven Dwarfs in a taxi. I didn't actually see her go into the place."

"Where else would she have gone? Listen, Claymore, I'm warning you. If I take you inside, you'll talk, so why not save yourself trouble and do it now."

"That sounds reasonable, but I still don't know what I'm supposed to talk about. I mean, if you're hoping I shall reveal a lot of incriminating details, you're going to have a big disappointment, because I don't know any incriminating details."

"That's probably true, Lieutenant." Old Mother Know-all, Mrs. Curel, was butting in again. "It's hardly likely they'd have told Mr. Claymore their plans. It's my opinion that they've been taking advantage of his—his misguided sense of chivalry, and using him."

I COULD see what she was after. She wanted to push me aside so that she could throw everything at Taimi.

"That's right," I said. "I'm just a chivalrous old halfwit. But I'm still on Taimi's side, and if there's going to be any talk of taking me anywhere for questioning, I'd like to have my lawyer with me."

"You haven't got a lawyer," said Lieutenant Flynn contemptuously. "Ed Fettinger's thrown up the case. He says the whole thing is just a swindle."

"That's good news, anyway, if Ed Fettinger admits that his case is just a swindle," I remarked. "Because he's acting for Elmer Gains, and has been all along. My lawyer is Mr. Fosdyke, of Fosdyke and Joliet, and he thinks we can't lose."

Of course this was only a bit of bluff, but a shock of surprise seemed to go right round the room.

"What's that?" demanded the Lieutenant. "You say you've got Fosdyke acting for you."

"Yes." I tried to look surprised and dignified. "You don't imagine I'd play with a crook like Fettinger, do you? When I get a lawyer, I get a good one. Louis Curel sent me to him, this morning."

"I don't believe it," burst out Mrs. Curel. She had had a shock, but in a moment she regained control, and added: "Though I don't know. It may easily be true. Louis told me he wished someone would persuade you not to act so—so stupidly; and he may have thought Mr. Fosdyke would be able to do it."

Lieutenant Flynn pushed back his chair, and rose.

"All right. That'll be all for now." His cold, thoughtful glance lingered on me for a moment. "I'll be wanting you again pretty soon, so don't get far away."

"Any objection to my moving to another address?"

"You go on staying right where you are," he answered curtly. "I want to have you where I can find you."

I didn't argue, because I didn't want to move over to Lee Johnston's house while Taimi was hidden there. The two policemen who had brought me to the house, and Sergeant Bristol and Lieutenant Flynn all left then, and Mrs. Curel went out of the room with them.

A kind of deadness seemed to fall on the room when they had gone out. I heard Poppy give a deep sigh.

My glance met Henry Marden's and he smiled very slightly. "By golly, I thought they were going to arrest you," he said.

"So did I," I said.

Then I became aware that Francine was looking at me intently.

"Tod," she said, "you—you told those people—"

The words died away on her lips. She sat there looking at me, and I couldn't say anything. I knew she was blaming me for Louis' death, and I knew she was right.

"W-what are you waiting here for? Why don't you go away?" she said brokenly.

"Francine." Henry spoke very gently, but with an abrupt movement she rose to her feet, crying, and hurried from the room. Her mother went out after her.

"She's all mixed up," said Henry to me. "She didn't really mean that. She blames herself as much as she blames you."

"You mean she blames herself because she trusted me. That fills me with elation," I said bitterly. "Oh, well, I suppose she's right."

"For heaven's sake, Tod, are you going to spend the rest of your life being sorry for yourself and standing there talking about it?" demanded Poppy in a tone of extreme bad temper. "Go out and do something, man; don't be so damned feeble!"

I didn't want to do anything, but something had to be done, and the first thing I did after I left Mrs. De Saram's house was to ring Lee from a public call box.

"Is Taimi there?" I asked.

"Yes, but you can't talk to her. The poor kid's all in. Mother gave her a sleeping-draught and put her to bed. Will you be along directly?"

"No, I won't be coming, but the police probably will, if they can find out where Taimi is."

"The police want her? What for? They can't see her tonight."

"You tell them that, if they call, and see what they say. Louis Curel is dead."

"Louis!" He sounded very startled. "How? What—"

"Some men were waiting for Mrs. Curel when she got back this afternoon, just after Taimi and I had been to their house. They shot at her and missed, and killed Louis."

"They shot at Mrs. Curel—and killed Louis!" He spoke in a sort of awed whisper, as if he'd just seen a battleship blow up. "That's terrible, Tod. He was a very fine man. But how do you know they shot at Mrs. Curel?"

"Because they were waiting, and she was expected back, and Louis wasn't expected, so they couldn't have been waiting for him," I explained. "Besides—" I went on to tell him how I had mentioned to Taimi and Ronnie Marvin that Mrs. Curel was expected back at three, and what Ronnie had said.

"But they can't pin that on Taimi," Lee expostulated indignantly. "What this guy Marvin does hasn't anything to do with her."

"You may believe that," I said. "But who else is going to? Ronnie brought her to this country. He sent her her fare. She's been living at the Seven Dwarfs. He engaged a lawyer for her—a lawyer who has thrown up her case because he says it's a swindle. And don't forget this. If Taimi's case is a swindle, there's only one person who had any reason to murder Swenson, and that's Taimi."

"Of course, if you like to put it that way—"

"I don't like to put it that way," I interrupted him. "That's merely the way it is. The point is, the police are after Taimi. What are you going to do about it?"

"Hell, do you think I'm going to turn her over to them? What do you think I am?"

"I haven't given the question a moment's thought," I said. "But let's get this clear. Are you prepared to hide Taimi from the police, even if it gets you into trouble? And does your mother agree?"

"I haven't asked Mother." There was a pause, and then he went on: "I don't want to get Mother in trouble, but Taimi can't be moved tonight. Maybe tomorrow we'll have to take her some place else; I don't know where yet. I'll have to do some figuring."

"Okay," I said. "You keep her quiet, and don't let anyone see her, and I'll ring you in the morning, if I'm still free."

I hung up the receiver, and then looked up Mr. Fosdyke's private address in the directory, and took a taxi to the house. An elderly woman opened to me; she looked as if she might be Mr. Fosdyke's sister, and I found out later that she was. She told me Mr. Fosdyke was out.

"What time will he be back?"

"I couldn't say. Don't suppose he knows himself; it depends whom he meets. He often stays out pretty late, Saturday nights. She hesitated for a moment. "Sometimes he calls up and tells me what time he'll be coming in; sometimes he doesn't bother. You can come in and wait for a time, in case he phones. But I'm going out myself at eight o'clock."

I went in, and waited in a library lined with lawbooks till eight o'clock, and Mr. Fosdyke didn't ring. There was nothing for it but to leave a written message, and go back to Louis' house. I did so reluctantly.

Something leaves a house when the owner dies; I felt it as soon as I entered.... From the drawing-room came the sound of low voices. Sarah and Poppy were there; they stopped talking when I came in. Poppy looked at me inquiringly.

"Did you see the lawyer?"

"No. He was out. I left a message."

"H'm. You've been long enough about it. Lieutenant Flynn called; he only left five minutes ago. He wanted to see you."

"Then thank Heaven I wasn't here five minutes ago. Is he coming back?"

"Not tonight. I told him you were with Mr. Fosdyke, and he said he'd be here again early in the morning; he'll expect to find you in."

"He gave me a stick of chewing gum," put in Sarah.

"Big-hearted Flynn!" I said. "Did you tell him you aren't allowed to use it?"

"Yes. He said nuts."

"Mrs. Curel's been here too," said Poppy.

"That old harpy! What did she want?"

"Mostly to strut about and look important and act as if she owned the place," answered Poppy in her tartest voice.

Joseph brought in a tray of drinks. He didn't seem to want to look at us. Poppy poured herself a gin and me a whisky. As I took my glass, I couldn't help remembering that it was Louis' whisky. I wondered whether I ought to drink it.

Sarah came over to me and sat on my lap, and put her head on my shoulder.

"Daddy, why aren't we going to Lee's house? Is it because Mr. Flynn won't let us?"

"That's about it, poppet. He wants us to stay here."

"Is it because Mr. Curel is dead?"

"Yes, darling." I took her hand in mine. "You see, this is a police case, and till it's solved Lieutenant Flynn wants everyone to stay where they are so that he can find them if he wants to ask any questions."

Presently Joseph came in and announced dinner; and we had it. Afterward Sarah went to bed, and I went up with her.

"Stay with me till I go to sleep," she asked.

It was nearly half-past nine before she went to sleep. When I went downstairs again, Poppy was not there; I took it that she had gone to her room. I stayed for a time in the library, and tried to read, but that wasn't any good. After a time I opened a French window and went out on to the lawn. The air was cool, and the turf was soft; a slight breeze ruffled the azaleas. In the distance, looking toward the city, I could see the sky glowing brightly with the reflection of the lights of New Orleans.

I strolled up and down aimlessly, and after a bit my footsteps took me toward the big wrought-iron gates set

The Mardi Gras—a vast moving display of color and pageantry.

in the wall that surrounded the place. The gates had been closed, but looking between the bars I could see, just outside, the long black shape of a parked car.

I watched it suspiciously for a few moments; no sign of life came from it. But I had the impression that someone was sitting, very still, in the driver's seat. The car was a Buick convertible; its outline, even in the darkness, had a familiar look. I was beginning to feel very frightened. There was the car, and I wanted to look into it, but if I stepped outside the gate I might get shot. I didn't want to get shot.

Nerving myself, I pushed the gate open and stepped toward the car. Nobody shot at me. My hand touched the door handle, and I peered in through the open window.

Francine was sitting at the wheel of the car, slumped back in the driving seat, her head sunk on her chest. With a feeling of wild panic I wrenched the door open and thrust myself into the car.

"Francine!"

As I touched her, she moved, startled. She raised her head and looked at me dazedly.

"What— Oh, I must have been asleep," she said.

I gave a deep sigh and dropped limply into the seat beside her.

"I hope you enjoyed your nap," I said. "Sorry I woke you up."

"Don't apologize." She stirred and sat upright, wide awake now. "Just get out of the car, and I'll go home."

"I'll do that," I promised, "when I've recovered the use of my limbs. My God, you frightened me."

"Frightened you?"

"Yes. When I looked in the window and saw you reclining there, it didn't occur to me that you'd chosen this quiet spot to have a little nap."

"I didn't choose—" she began, and then broke off, and added; "What's the good of talking? Will you go away?"

"Not yet," I said. "Let's try talking. I want to ask you something. Do you really believe that Taimi had anything to do with what happened this afternoon?"

She didn't answer. I turned toward her and seized her wrist gently.

"Do you?" I persisted. She shook her head slightly.

"No. Not really. That's why I came to see you."

"You came to see me, Francine?"

"Yes. But I wouldn't have, if you hadn't come out."

"Why not?"

"Because—oh, I don't know. It's all so confusing. This afternoon, when she came to the house, and I saw her with Paul, I—I felt very sorry for her."

"You mean you thought she was genuine."

"Yes. I did then. But when Uncle Louis was killed, just afterward—it was awful. My thoughts just seemed to go round and round."

"But you don't think now that Taimi had anything to do with that, do you?"

"No. Nor does Henry. He said so."

"Did he? He's on my side, isn't he?"

"Yes. He always has been. He likes you."

"Does he? Perhaps that's because he doesn't like his aunt very much."

"I don't think so. It's partly because you were a flyer. He told me he'd like to talk with you about flying sometime."

"Any time he likes," I said. "Does he know anything about it?"

"Henry?" She was astonished. "Didn't you know? He was a captain in the Army Air Service, and got a Congressional Medal of Honor."

That shook me a bit. I like to think I am quite a judge of character, and I had regarded Henry as a pleasant, harmless sort of chap, good at adding up figures, clean about the house, and otherwise unremarkable. And how wrong I had been about him!

"Sorry I spoke," I said. "He knows all about it, and I'm glad he's on my side. But we were talking of your thoughts going round and round. What happened then?"

"Oh, I thought and thought, and I didn't know what to do, and—and suddenly I made up my mind I'd come

and see you. And when I got here, I got all muddled again, and couldn't make up my mind and—and I suppose I fell asleep."

"I don't wonder. I expect you're worn out."

"Yes, I'm tired." She said the words in a sort of sigh. "Paul's been ill such a long time. Month after month, waiting for him to die. That sounds awful, but you know what I mean."

"Yes.... Hasn't he ever talked at all, or recognized anybody?"

"Not really. Sometimes he mumbles a little, but the words don't mean anything. It doesn't matter to him who's there or who isn't there. He's just a wreck, with a little flicker of life in it. Oh, Tod, it's been terrible."

"You liked him a lot, didn't you?"

"Everyone did. You'd have liked him too. He was a bit like Louis, only more—more modern. He always knew what people wanted without their telling him. I can understand how your friend felt seeing him this afternoon, after knowing him as he used to be."

She paused. Then she spoke quietly:

"You're very fond of her, aren't you?"

"Fond of her? You mean Taimi? Lord, no," I answered. "I think she's fine—brave, kind, beautiful; she has everything. She reminds me of Joan of Arc, or somebody. But I'm not fond of her."

"Why not, if she's as wonderful as that?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I'm a woman-hater."

"Oh, Tod." She gave a little laugh. "I was thinking.... We've got a little shack—just a living-room, three bedrooms, and kitchen, on the Bayou St. Christophe. It's in a lonely place, but it's quite habitable. No one would ever think of looking for her there."

"You mean I can hide her there? That's very generous of you, but I don't know that it's a really sound idea. I'd rather keep you out of it."

"Because you're a woman-hater?"

"No. You know I'm not a woman-hater where you're concerned. So stop trying to flirt with me," I said severely.

"Trying to flirt with you! Well, you certainly have a nerve! Who said I was trying to flirt with you?"

"Nobody yet. But you're always sitting with me in parked cars."

"Oh, you're impossible. And if I do sit with you in parked cars, nothing ever happens. You—you woman-hater!"

"Francine!" I could see her eyes; there was a touch of the old mockery in them. I reached out toward her, and she said sharply: "No. No, Tod, you're not to." And then pleadingly: "No.... Oh, Tod, please—" But I did. Some time passed.

After a bit she raised her head from my shoulder and said gently: "Tod, this is all wrong. Especially now. Let me go, please. We've got to talk."

She pushed herself away from me. "Let's talk about Taimi," she said.

"All right," I agreed. "You think she may really be married to Paul, and isn't just a greedy swindler?"

"Yes. I'm sure she wasn't pretending, this afternoon."

"Then your aunt, Mrs. Curel, is an unscrupulous swindler."

"Oh, no," she protested. "I don't think she's that. She's made a mistake, the same as I did."

"It won't do, Francine," I pointed out. "Someone killed Swenson on board the ship. If Taimi killed him, it was because he was going to report that she wasn't married to Paul. If anyone else killed him, it was because he was going to report that her story was true."

"But Aunt Grace couldn't have killed him. She wasn't on the ship."

"Elmer Gains was."

"Elmer Gains. But—" She stared at me. The name had given her a shock, as it had given Louis a shock.

"Didn't you know Elmer Gains was friendly with your aunt?"

"No. That is—I did know that Mother told Aunt Grace not to invite him to the house."

"You did?"

"Yes." She suddenly flared up at me. "What is this? A cross-examination?"

I took her hand in mine again. "Look, Francine: I can't help asking questions. I want to know things about Elmer Gains."

"He's a crook. What are you hinting?"

"I'm not hinting; I'm asking. How often did he go to your mother's house?"

"Only once. Uncle Louis and some other people were there that evening; it was rather embarrassing. You see—"

"I see that Louis and your mother didn't want Gains included in their visiting list, and told your aunt so. How did she take it?"

"She didn't mind; she only laughed. She thinks we're rather stuffy and old-fashioned."

"She would. But let's get back to Gains: Louis knew that Gains was on board the ship. Didn't it ever occur to him that Gains might have killed Swenson?"

"Yes. But he thought Gains was on Taimi Lanner's side. You see, Fettinger was Taimi's lawyer, and Fettinger and Gains always work together."

"Oh, I see. He thought Gains and Fettinger and Taimi and Ronnie Marvin were all in the swindle together."

"Yes. I thought so too. That's why I walked out of the Seven Dwarfs that night when Fettinger came in, and why I was so angry with you. I thought you were being an awful fool."

"Did your aunt say that Gains was on Taimi's side?"

"No. She didn't mention him at all. We knew only what she told us. And the letter she had—she said she had—from Mr. Swenson, seemed to show that there wasn't anything to worry about."

"So Louis didn't really take much interest."

"No. For one thing he had a lot of confidence in Mr. Swenson. It wasn't till Mr. Swenson was killed that he started to be worried, and then it was mostly on your account. He thought you were getting yourself into trouble."

"Misled by a pretty face, as your aunt put it. No, Francine. That's not right. I talked to Swenson, and I'm fairly sure he was on Taimi's side. That's why he was killed. And it was because I'd talked to him that I was pushed overboard, only I wasn't killed. Which made things a little awkward for Gains and your aunt."

"*Pushed* overboard? I heard you fell overboard."

"I fell, all right, but I was pushed first. And that was Gains, though I can't prove it."

"Then this afternoon, when Louis was shot—do you think that was Gains?"

"No," I admitted. "I'm afraid it was Ronnie Marvin hitting back in the only way he understands. But Taimi didn't know anything about it."

There was a silence. Francine gave a deep sigh.

"I must go, Tod. But I'm on your side, and I don't care who knows it. But, Tod—about Taimi. Where is she now?"

"In Gretna, with Lee and his mother."

"She can't stay there. She'll have to go to the shack. I'll take her there in the morning; or if I can't, Henry will. I may not be able to, because of Paul. Now I must go. But you'll be hearing from me in the morning."

She leaned forward, kissed me very lightly on the chin, and withdrew her hand from mine. "Good night, Tod."

I watched her car drive away, then went back into the house.

Chapter Eleven

HALF AN HOUR EARLIER I HAD BEEN SUNK IN despondency. Now I was on top of the world. I sat in the library, in a glow of elation, thinking about it—or rather, thinking about Francine. Then Mr. Fosdyke arrived.

I heard the front doorbell ring, and rose unwillingly and went into the hall. Joseph was just opening the door to Mr. Fosdyke.

"I want to see Mr. Claymore.... Ah, there you are. What have you been doing? Why haven't you brought that girl to see me? And what's all this about Louis Curel being shot?"

"Come into the library," I invited him.

He followed me, and I motioned him to a chair, but he seemed to find it necessary to walk up and down.

"I want to know everything," he said.

"It's true enough, unfortunately, about Louis being shot," I told him.

"I know it's true," he said impatiently. "Everyone in New Orleans is talking about it, and apparently the police are looking for my client. I want to know how it happened."

"They say someone pointed a gun at Mrs. Curel and hit the wrong person. That's how it happened."

I went on to tell him the whole story of the afternoon's events, not omitting that Taimi had said she wouldn't see any more lawyers. I also told him something of my talk with Francine. When I had finished, he stopped in front of me, rubbing his hands together appreciatively.

"What a case!" he exclaimed. "This is going to make legal history in New Orleans; I wouldn't miss it for anything. But I warn you; it will probably cost you all you've got." He smiled at me, and then went on briskly: "Now about this young woman, Taimi Lanner: I must speak to her as soon as possible."

"If she'll speak to you."

"Don't you realize that if she's arrested, and tells the police she has no lawyer, I shall have no standing where she's concerned. They'll be able to throw the book at her—Swenson's murder, Louis Curel's murder, conspiracy to defraud; and I shan't be able to do a thing. Damn it, if anyone ever needed a good lawyer quickly, that young woman does. Can't she see that?"

"I think she's too miserable to care."

"She'll feel differently in a few hours, when she's had some sleep. You must make her. Tell me about this fellow Marvin. Is he likely to try to incriminate her?"

"No. Even if he admits the murder himself, which I doubt, he won't try to drag Taimi into it."

"If he doesn't admit it, and they pin it on him, nothing he says in her favor will make much difference; they won't believe him," commented Mr. Fosdyke. "What we need is a really good witness, someone who'll make a big impression on a jury—and it seems we have one."

"Have we?"

"Yes sir." He smiled with the air of a competitor exhibiting a prize-winning entry. "Didn't Miss De Saram offer you a hide-out for Taimi Lanner? You close with that offer quickly. Take the girl there. If the police want to arrest her, make them arrest her there."

"That doesn't strike me as a very good notion."

"Doesn't it?" He laughed. "Don't you understand? Can't you imagine what it will do to a jury if I get Francine De Saram, the prettiest girl in New Orleans, and Louis' niece, onto the witness stand to testify on Taimi Lanner's behalf? Can't you imagine what it will do to the police when they know I've got her as my star witness? It may even make them think twice about arresting Taimi."

"I still think it's a bad idea," I said. "She can't say anything except what I've told her, and that isn't evidence. I think we'll keep her out of it."

"Don't be a fool." He brushed aside my objections. "Do you want to win this case, or don't you? Let me tell you something. I know these Curels. They're stiff-necked as the devil; they've got steel in them. If Francine De Saram told you she's on your side, she's with you a hundred per cent, and damn the consequences. She'll want to go on the stand."

"Oh, yes. But I'd rather she didn't."

"Not quite cricket, eh?" He spoke sarcastically, apparently more in sorrow than in anger. "I believe I'm considered about the best advocate in New Orleans," he went on, very politely. "Am I to run this case my way, or do you prefer to run it your way?"

"Well, since you ask, I prefer my way," I said mildly. "At any rate, for the time being, let's keep Francine out of it if we can."

He raised his clenched fist in a gesture of infinite exasperation, and looked upward, like an old prophet calling down fire from heaven. "Of all the—" he began, and then picked up his hat. "I won't keep you any longer now. You must be very tired. You'll be hearing from me again tomorrow. Probably about midday."

"What am I to tell Lieutenant Flynn when he calls in the morning?" I asked.

"Tell him anything you like. But don't try to be too clever with him. Believe me, my young friend, anyone who tries to be too clever with Lieutenant Flynn is making a very great mistake. I shall be seeing him myself tomorrow."

He patted me kindly on the shoulder; and now he was like an old prophet blessing a young disciple. I looked at him suspiciously.

"You're very benevolent all of a sudden," I said. "I wonder just what you've up your sleeve."

He laughed. "That's what they all wonder," he assured me.

WHEN he had gone, I really felt tired. I went up to Sarah's room to see that she was asleep. Then I went on to my own room and strolled idly through the long open window onto the veranda outside. The garden below me was quiet and dark, but the sky above New Orleans was bright, and I could hear the incessant growl and murmur of traffic. Only three weeks earlier I had been living quietly in a placid Cornish village, and now I was in this warm, vivid, colorful city, caught up in a whirlpool of events with a lot of people I hadn't even known a few days previously. I wondered what Sabrina was doing, and whether she still sat out in the garden at night to listen to the nightingale. I wondered how Sabrina and Francine would like each other if they ever met.

I turned back through the open window into my room, undressed quickly and got into bed, and in a couple of minutes I was fast asleep....

I don't know how long I slept. It must have been my bedside light being switched on that woke me up. I opened my eyes resentfully, then sat up, and a voice said: "Take it easy, shipmate. Just stay where you are."

Elmer Gains was standing by my bedside.

For a moment I didn't believe it: I thought I must be dreaming. He was standing by the bed looking down at me, smiling slightly; his right hand held an automatic pistol hanging loosely; it wasn't pointed. The house was quiet; nothing seemed to be stirring, and the light, on a little table at my bedside, shed a soft glow through the room.

"How did you get here?" I asked

"I got here. But if anybody wants to know how I spent the evening, I'm over in Jefferson County in a poker game."

"Nice for you. Are you winning?"

"I'm doing all right." He reached out, and drew a chair close to the bed, and sat in it. His blue pin-stripe suit was neat, but a little too wide in the shoulders; he moved easily, with the unhurried deliberation of a cool gambler; and his expression was one of complete composure.

"That was a dumb play of Ronnie's—to shoot Louis Curel," he observed. "But that's always been Ronnie's trouble; he never stops a minute to think. Lucky for Taimi she didn't go back to the Seven Dwarfs."

"Yes," I agreed.

"Maybe Ronnie has an alibi," he suggested.

"Possibly. Perhaps he was playing poker."

"Sure. Like me, now." He smiled again very slightly. "I'd like Taimi to leave New Orleans," he said.

"Did Mrs. Curel send you here to tell me that?" I asked.

"Nobody sends me any place. You don't need to worry about Mrs. Curel. I'm taking care of her."

"What can you do to Mrs. Curel?"

"Almost anything. She thinks she's been smart, and she's been smart enough to put herself just where I want her."

"So you're going to blackmail her?"

"Not for money, if that's what you're thinking—though she'll have about eight millions when Paul dies. I don't need money. I can use her in other ways."

He paused. His voice deepened slightly, became harsher. "You may have heard that the Curels don't like me visiting them. From now on, they're going to be my best friends, and they're going to have to like it."

"You mean you're going into society." A startling thought came to me, and I added: "Just a minute: You say Mrs. Curel will be worth eight millions when Paul dies. Is Paul by any chance Louis' heir?"

"Paul and Francine, between them." I had a feeling he knew what I was going to say next, but I went on and said it.

"And when Paul dies, Taimi will be entitled to a quarter of all he leaves—that's the law in this State."

"Sure. If she can prove she's his widow." He shook his head slowly and emphatically. "But don't kid yourself. She can't prove anything."

"But you can," I suggested. "You stole Taimi's papers, on the ship."

He didn't answer, but his silence was a tacit admission. He was so sure of himself that he didn't mind what I knew, or guessed, about him.

"And suppose you use these papers to blackmail Mrs. Curel, and she goes to the police. Won't they be rather apt to think it was you who killed Swenson?" I asked.

"*I'm* not going to blackmail Mrs. Curel. You don't think I carry papers like that around with me! Someone else may blackmail her." Again he smiled that slight, confident smile. "And so what if the cops do think I killed Swenson? Who's going to prove it? It wouldn't be the first time they thought I'd killed somebody." He shook his head slowly. "I'm gambling that she won't go to the police."

"Of course," I said. "You're a gambler. What are you gambling on now, coming here like this?"

"On your having sense." He leaned back, folding his arms; the barrel of the pistol stuck out from under one armpit. "Taimi doesn't stand a chance of winning a case against the Curels. She'll be charged, along with Ronnie, with conspiracy. They may not be able to pin Swenson's killing on her, but that'll all be taken into account when she gets her sentence. She'll be lucky to get off with ten years."

He leaned forward slightly, bringing the argument nearer to me.

"If Taimi can't get Paul, she's not interested in money. She told Ed Fettinger that, and he says she meant it. Maybe she told you too."

"Yes," I agreed.

"Okay, so she can't have Paul. She knows that now. Then what's keeping her? She's not *anxious* to go to jail, is she? You don't want her to go there. She ought to get out of town—go to Europe or some place. Anywhere she likes. I can fix it."

"Why should you?"

"Hell, I don't want her to go to jail. I want this case to fizzle, without too much stink. That way I'll be saved a lot of trouble. I'll be saved the trouble of killing you."

"I'd hate to give you that trouble," I said.

"Then use your head. You see how it is: You've been talking about me. If Taimi's arrested, you'll talk at the trial, about me and Mrs. Curel. Your evidence won't do Taimi any good, but it will hit the headlines, and that will do me a lot of harm. So I'll have to see you don't give any evidence."

"You make everything sound very simple."

"Sure it's simple. I want Taimi to get out of town. She can have fifty thousand bucks to take with her. I want you to keep your mouth shut. With her gone, there'll be nothing for you to talk about. There'll be no talk, no trial, no headlines. The case will just die, and Mrs. Curel will take over the Curel interests, and I'll take over Mrs. Curel."

There it was, and I must admit that I was tempted. I knew that Taimi would be only too glad to leave New Orleans. All she wanted was to go home; she didn't want any more dealings with lawyers. It would suit me, too, if the case were just to fizzle out. No more fear of being bumped off at the next street corner, no worry about Francine being called as a witness, and Sarah and I would be able to go on with our ordinary lives again.

It was tempting, but I knew that it stank. It meant handing everything over to Gains.

"How about it?" he asked. "Does Taimi leave New Orleans with a wad of dough, or do you want her arrested?"

"That's a question she'll have to answer herself," I said. "I'll ask her."

"Okay with me. Get some clothes on, and let's go."

I stared at him in amazement. "I can't ask her now!"

"Sure you can. We'll go right along and see her. I've got a car down the road. If she says yes, I want her on a ship before morning."

"That's impossible. She's had a sleeping-draught."

"I guess we can wake her." He made a slight movement, just a flick of the wrist at me, with the pistol. "Get moving."

I didn't move. His features seemed to tauten: an ugly look came into his eyes. "Get moving," he repeated harshly. "I sha'n't say that again."

I looked into his eyes, and I knew he meant to kill me anyway. The story he had told me was true enough; and yet it was all part of a bluff. He wanted Taimi out of the way. He wanted me to stop talking about him and Mrs. Curel. But he wanted me to lead him to Taimi so that he could rid himself of both of us at the same time. If I went with him to that car down the road, I should never come back.

I knew what was in his mind, and in the same way, he knew what was in mine. For a moment we looked at each other with complete mutual understanding. Then he spoke again.

"Okay. You asked for it."

He kept gasping like a fish, saying: "Don't, don't!"

I saw the gun move. He wasn't in a hurry. He brought it round slowly to bear on me, watching me, giving me a chance to weaken. I sat there in my bed practically rigid with fright, waiting. And then I saw a shadow move in the open window.

The bedside lamp jumped sidewise off the little table and went out abruptly with a splintering crash, plunging the room into darkness. I gave a yell, and rolled frantically over; then there was the short angry bang of the pistol, and a bullet plopped into the mattress beside me. I rolled again wildly, and fell to the floor on the farther side of the bed, in a jumbled mingling of bedclothes. Gains sprang for the window; he moved quickly and silently; and then there was another yell as he collided with somebody, and a crash as they fell over. I heard a brief pattering of feet on the veranda, and he was gone.

"Damn the man!" said Poppy's voice heartily, somewhere in the darkness. "You all right, Tod?"

"Barely," I said. "Still intact, but very shaken." I disentangled myself from the bedclothes, and rose. "How do you happen to be here?"

"I was trying to hear what you two were saying. Where's that shoe?"

"Shoe?"

"Yes, shoe. One of those things you put on your feet. For heaven's sake, Tod, don't dither. Put a light on, or strike a match or something. I want my shoe."

I moved over to the door and switched on another light. I saw Poppy pounce on something. It was a shoe.

"The one I threw, of course," she said. "You don't think I knocked that light over by spitting at it." Bending over to put the shoe on, with her hair flying wild, and her beady eyes gleaming, she looked like something that had flown in to haunt the place.

"Who was he?" she demanded. "I only saw his back."

"That was Elmer Gains," I said.

"Well, you are a damned fool to ask him here. What did he want?"

"I didn't invite him in. The first thing I knew he was standing by my bedside. I think he wanted to kill me."

"That's what I thought," said Poppy. "And he might have done it if he hadn't talked so much. The way you two were muttering— And it was the same when you were talking to Fosdyke. I could hardly hear a word."

"So you were listening when I was talking to Fosdyke!"

"Of course I was. You know I always listen," said Poppy shamelessly. "Bit of luck I happened along this time, though. I went out on to the veranda because I couldn't sleep, and saw your light was shining, and came along to have a look. Saved your life, didn't I?... Hallo, what's this?"

"This" was Sarah in blue pajamas, who came sleepily into the room, rubbing her eyes.

"I heard a bang," she explained. "It woke me up."

"That was your father, thrashing about in bed. He knocked the light over and broke the bulb," Poppy told her. "It woke me up too."

"It made a lovely bang," said Sarah. "Just like somebody shooting."

She raised her hand to her face, and opened her mouth wide, and yawned. I put a hand on her shoulder.

"Back to bed for you," I said.

"I'm going to make some tea in my room," Poppy said. "When that child's asleep, come in and have some."

Chapter Twelve

"THERE'S A LETTER FOR YOU," SAID POPPY. "From Sabrina."

"Is there?" I could see it lying there by my plate, addressed in Sabrina's unmistakable handwriting, and it filled me with a sense of foreboding. Either someone was dead, or she was engaged—though why should I worry if she got engaged?

"Open it, Daddy," urged Sarah. "I want to know what she says."

Poppy knew all about me and Sabrina, and she was watching me like a weasel as I picked up the letter and opened it:

Dear Tod:

I expect by now you're in New Orleans and having a wonderful time. I've just read a book called "Crescent Carnival," and if it's anything like that you must be enjoying yourself.

Things in St. Liss are very much as usual. We had a big frost last week and there was skating—great fun. Colonel Gawe went through the ice up to his waist, and his feet got stuck in the mud at the bottom. It took half an hour to get him out, and his language raised the temperature several degrees. I learned some new words.

Give Sarah my love, and tell her Mutt misses her, and Candy is getting fat; she needs someone to ride her. Daddy is much as usual. He has his good days and his bad days. He sends greetings.

Don't write unless you feel like it. I know you must be very busy. —*Sabrina.*

"What does she say?" demanded Sarah.

"Mutt misses you, and Candy's getting fat. Here—you can read it." I passed the letter over to her.

"Is that all she says?" asked Poppy; she seemed to be highly amused about something. I must confess, I was mystified. At our last meeting, Sabrina had made it

quite clear that henceforward we were practically total strangers.

"You'll have a lot to tell her when you answer, won't you," went on Poppy maliciously. "All about Taimi, and Francine, and the gay time you're having. That should interest her a lot."

"There isn't much you can write about from St. Liss except things like Candy, and skating," remarked Sarah. "We mustn't be too long away; I don't want Candy to get too fat. Besides, I expect Sabrina misses us."

ALL the Sunday papers had banner headlines about Louis' murder, but almost no information except that he had been shot. I glanced through them while I waited impatiently for Lieutenant Flynn. I wasn't looking forward to that interview. It was after ten when he and Sergeant Bristol came. Sarah went out to meet them in the hall, and he grinned at her and produced a packet of chewing gum. She took it, looking at me doubtfully.

"She's not supposed to have that," I said.

Sarah gave me a seductive smile.

"You can't say I mustn't have this packet, because the police gave it to me, and if you don't let me have it, they might arrest you," she told me.

"That's right, kid," said Sergeant Bristol. He and the Lieutenant and I went into the library.

"Fosdyke not here yet?" queried the Lieutenant.

"No. Is he coming?"

"Yeah. He called me last night, and I saw him early this morning—and Taimi Lanner."

"Oh. . . . You saw her."

"Yeah." His eyes, cold and searching, stared into mine. "You told me yesterday you didn't know where she was."

"What would you have done?" I asked. "She was in a state of collapse. I wanted to give her a chance to pull herself together and see a lawyer. And I knew she hadn't had anything to do with Louis' death."

"You held out on me, the same as you did that first time I saw you. It's about time you stopped trying to act clever."

"The first time you saw me I was a bit cagey," I admitted, "but then, I was a stranger here and I didn't want to get myself mixed up in anything."

"You've been acting as if you didn't want to get yourself mixed up in anything!" The deep-set eyes looked at me steadily. "The fact is, you just love raising hell. Everywhere you go you raise hell. If there's a fight within a hundred miles, you've got to be in it."

"What!" I exclaimed. "I hate fighting. If there's a fight going on, I'd run a hundred miles to keep out of it."

"You hate fighting." He sounded sardonic. "You might as well know I checked up on you with Scotland Yard. For a man who hates fighting, you seem to have been mixed up in an awful lot of trouble at one time and another."

"That hasn't been my fault. I—" I broke off as the door opened, and to my relief, Mr. Fosdyke came into the room. He looked very spruce and businesslike, for all his seventy-odd years.

"Welcome," I said. "I need a little reinforcement badly. These policemen are sapping my morale."

"Are they?" He smiled, looking very jaunty and pleased with life. He sat down. "Now, gentlemen, if you have any questions to ask my client, go ahead and ask them. We have nothing to conceal."

"Nothing at all," I agreed. "If there's any information you want from me, you only have to ask for it. And while we're on the subject of information, I think I ought to tell you that Elmer Gains tried to shoot me last night."

"He did!" Lieutenant Flynn seemed to find this fact unremarkable. "Where were you?"

"Here, in this house. He came in. I take it you're not having the place watched, or you'd have seen him."

"It would take six men to watch this place, with all the grounds round it. You're not that important," said Lieutenant Flynn. "You say he came right in here. Anybody see him except you?"

"Poppy saw him, but not to recognize. I'd better tell you what happened."

I told him. He listened with an air of patience.

"That's twice you claim he's tried to bump you off. The first time was on the ship, and there were no witnesses. And then last night—again no witnesses. What do you expect me to do?"

"Damn it," I protested, "you can't expect me to hire a hall and invite an audience when someone wants to assassinate me. I know he has an alibi; he was playing poker in Jefferson County; but I expect Ronnie Marvin has an alibi, and that didn't stop you from arresting him."

"Ronnie Marvin hasn't any alibi."

"Well," I observed, "I can't help feeling that if he hasn't got an alibi, he probably isn't guilty."

"He hasn't got an alibi, so he's not guilty!" Lieutenant Flynn shook his head. "I'm not a champion boxer, or a tennis star, or a wing commander. I'm just a dumb cop with a routine job and quite a lot of experience, and I tell you this: When there's a crime, and there are two lots of people involved, and one lot has money, and the other lot wants some of that money, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it's the lot that wants the money that commits the crime. Like in this case. And you don't solve a murder by picking the most likely suspect and saying he couldn't have done it. If you want to say Ronnie Marvin is innocent, you show me someone else who could have done it."

"Okay. Look at yesterday: Four people knew Mrs. Curel was coming back to the house at three. They were Mrs. Curel, Mrs. De Saram, Francine and I. I told Ronnie and Taimi. Only one person knew Louis was coming to the house. That was Mrs. Curel; and it was Louis who was shot."

"That's quite a point," observed Mr. Fosdyke; but Lieutenant Lynch shook his head. "Words," he said tersely. "Show me some evidence."

"I'm coming to that. In this case Louis had the money, and Mrs. Curel wanted it. But she could only get it if Louis died before Paul, because if Paul died first, he couldn't inherit from Louis, and she couldn't inherit from him."

"You believe that, do you? Or is it something you just thought of?"

"Something I just thought of," I admitted. "But there it is. Paul's likely to die at any moment. Louis couldn't have been killed at a more convenient time for Mrs. Curel."

"Paul isn't likely to die at any moment; he's dead already." Mr. Fosdyke made this statement so calmly that it took a moment to sink in. He added: "He died about ten this morning."

I HAD never met Paul, but the news of his death shocked me; and I thought of Taimi, and what it would mean to her, and of Francine.

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said.

Lieutenant Flynn rounded on me. "You're sorry. Why? Was he a friend of yours?"

"No. But I couldn't help hoping that some miracle might happen, and he might get better."

"So all you want is miracles; it's likely you'll need them." He considered me for a moment. "You've withheld information. You've made a lot of wild statements about people—Elmer Gains and Mrs. Curel, without bringing a single shred of evidence to support your

statements. I've been mighty lenient with you so far, but don't count on it. And don't kid yourself about Taimi Lanner. Because I haven't arrested her for the Curel murder, that doesn't mean she's in the clear." He turned to Mr. Fosdyke. "Remember what I told you, and see that he sticks to it."

That finished the interview.

"What is it he told you that I have to stick to?" I asked Mr. Fosdyke when the Lieutenant had left.

"I've given him an undertaking to produce you or Taimi Lanner any time he wants you. I've been pretty busy since I saw you last night."

"I gather you've seen Taimi."

"I went to see her first thing this morning, and Lieutenant Flynn questioned her later, in my presence. I've advised her to go to Miss De Saram's shack; in fact, she should be there by this time; and I want you to leave this house and go there too."

I STARED at him. "Didn't I tell you to keep Francine out of this?" I demanded angrily.

He returned my stare with interest. "You did: and it was a piece of damnable impertinence. I'd have you know that Taimi Lanner is my principal client, and I propose to act, in her interests, as I think best."

Of course he was right. Anyway, the thing was done.

"Damn your eyes," I said. "Have you spoken to Francine?"

"Naturally. I'd better tell you what I have done. Last night, after I left you, I rang Flynn. I told him that my client, Taimi Lanner, was not trying to evade arrest, that she had a perfect answer to any charges that might be brought against her, and that he could see her this morning. He wanted to know where she was; I told him I'd tell him that later.

"Then I rang Miss De Saram, asking her to confirm what you'd said—that I could count on her help and coöperation."

"What! You rang her last night?" I exclaimed. I had sat with Francine in the Buick, protesting nobly that I wanted to keep her out of the case, and within about an hour, in the middle of the night, my lawyer had roused her from sleep to drag her into it!

"Certainly I rang her last night; I had to. I wouldn't let that worry you too much; she understands. I explained my views, and finally she agreed she'd take Taimi Lanner down to the shack at ten this morning, or if she couldn't go herself, Henry Marden would take her.

"This morning at half-past seven I was down at the Johnston house, seeing Taimi Lanner. I had a little trouble with her; the fool girl tried to tell me she didn't need a lawyer. I had to persuade her that she did need a lawyer, for your sake."

"For my sake?"

"Yes. It won't do you any good if she's thrown into prison and charged with fraud, blackmail and complicity in a murder. You'll be regarded as an accomplice. That's what I told her; it made her see reason."

"You're an unscrupulous old devil," I said. He ignored that.

"Then I saw Flynn at his home. I told him that if he wanted to arrest Taimi Lanner, he'd have to bring a definite charge against her, and he'd have to arrest her in Francine De Saram's shack. That made him think a bit. Finally we agreed on the compromise you've heard about—that I'd produce you and Taimi Lanner any time he wanted you."

"What did he have to say to Taimi?"

"He asked questions; she answered. She didn't make any damaging admissions."

"Did he believe her?"

"Probably not. The main thing is, he hasn't arrested her—not yet."

"Why should he arrest her at all? I mean, if he hasn't already."

"Some more evidence may show up, or some pressure may be brought to bear."

"What new evidence can possibly show up?"

He looked at me with a sort of tolerant pity. "Do you think this is a parlor game? Try to realize that we're up against two very powerful and unscrupulous people who'll try everything against us from murder and manufacturing evidence to using political pull. There's another thing: You remember I told you I was going to make inquiries in Michenau to see if I could find any record of Taimi's marriage. I can't do that. Since Taimi and Paul were there, there's been a readjustment of territory, and Michenau's been incorporated in the Russian zone."

"I suppose Mrs. Curel knows that."

"Of course she knows it. That's why she's so confident. But we're not beaten yet."

"It's a pity we can't get hold of some evidence—real evidence, I mean," I said. "For instance, those papers Gains stole from Taimi on the ship."

"Yes." He gave me a sharp, searching look, and shook a finger almost threateningly at me. "If you've any idea of knocking Gains down and getting those papers, give it up. You'll never succeed. Anyway, I'd take a bet those papers are locked away in a safe in Fettinger's office, where nobody can get at them."

"Are they? Then what do you want me to do?"

"Stay alive. I'm going to take you down to the shack this afternoon; I want you to stay there."

Chapter Thirteen

THE SHACK WAS NOT QUITE AS PRIMITIVE AS I had expected. It was a frame building set on a narrow peninsula, with the water of the bayou lapping against a landing-stage ten yards in front of it. Trees clustered all round it, their branches draped with long beardlike streamers of Spanish moss. A rough track led away from the house toward the Cajun village of St. Christophe, about a mile and a half away.

The interior of the house was paneled with cypress, and the furniture was solid and comfortable. In addition to the big living-room, there were three bedrooms, a kitchen with every modern appliance, a couple of bathrooms, and another room where guns, fishing tackle and other sporting appliances were kept. Outside were a garage for a couple of cars, and a boathouse, built out over the water, with two canoes and a small power-boat in it.

When we arrived, we were met by Mrs. Johnston, Lee's mother, who had gone there, so Mr. Fosdyke told me, to keep an eye on things. She was a brisk, capable-looking woman, with an expression of cheerful kindliness.

"I've heard so much about you from Lee that I feel I know you already," she told me, as we shook hands. "And this is Sarah! I think you're going to like it here, Sarah."

I could see from Sarah's expression that she thought so too. She likes any place where there are trees, water—and plenty of mud.

"Daddy, may I explore?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, if you'll promise not to go far away. Which do you mean to do first, tear your clothes on a tree, or fall into the bayou?"

"Be quiet, Daddy." She made a smiling, impudent face at me, and darted off to start her explorations. Mr. Fosdyke refused an offer of coffee, and said he must be getting back. "And remember, don't leave this place," he warned me. "That's all I ask you. I'll let you know if there are any new developments."

I carried Sarah's things into one of the bedrooms, and my own into the gun- and fishing-tackle-room, where I intended to sleep. Then Mrs. Johnston gave me some coffee and cookies.

"Where's Taimi, and how is she?" I asked.

"She must be asleep, or she'd have come out. I'm making her rest up as much as I can. She's doing fine."

"Does she know about Paul?"

"That he's dead? Yes, she knows that. Henry Marden told us when he came to fetch us this morning."

"So he brought you here? I suppose Francine couldn't make it. How did Taimi take the news?"

Mrs. Johnston considered for a moment.

"I think it did her good," she answered slowly. "All this long time she's been thinking about him—worrying herself to death. Now that's finished, and she knows it's finished, she can start thinking of something else. She can begin living again." She added: "Lee's coming out this evening—bringing some stores from the house."

"Good. I want to talk to Lee."

We both looked round as Taimi entered from one of the bedrooms. She was wearing pajamas and a man's long dressing-gown that reached right down to the floor—one of Lee's, I guessed. She came in slowly, a little shyly.

"I woke up and heard voices," she explained. "I did not know you were here, or I would have come out before. I must get dressed."

"Have some coffee first," invited Mrs. Johnston.

"Please." She took the cup Mrs. Johnston handed her, and sat down by me.

"The lawyer told me you are in trouble because you tried to help me. I am very sorry."

"No need to lose any sleep worrying about me," I assured her. "I'll be all right."

"I hope so." She looked down at her cup, and sighed, and looked at me again. "It seems I have to be either a murderess or a millionaire, and I do not wish to be anything. I only want to be quiet."

"A murderess or a millionaire—that is about the strength of it," I agreed. "If you're really Paul's widow, you're a millionaire; if you're not, the inference is that you killed Swenson. What a situation!"

"You drink your coffee and let Mr. Fosdyke figure all that out. And take one of these cookies." Mrs. Johnston pushed the plate across. Then Sarah came charging in, muddy up to the waist, and saw Taimi, and fell upon her with a whoop and kissed her, and then turned to me, blazing with sensational news.

"Daddy! I saw a big animal on a sort of little island. I think it was a crocodile or something."

"An alligator, I expect," said Mrs. Johnston placidly.

"Ooh, an alligator! Come and see, Daddy." Then her eyes fell on the plate of cookies, and she stretched out an arm. "May I?"

"Why, sure." Mrs. Johnston pushed the plate nearer to her. She took one, and ate it.

"I wonder if the alligator would like one," she said.

"I expect so. You and alligators seem to have a good deal in common," I told her. "You both like getting wet and muddy."

"H'm. Wisecracks," she said scornfully, and grinned at me. "Do come and see the alligator," she urged. "And you, Taimi."

"Very well. But first I must put some clothes on."

We all went out and walked between the trees along the edge of the bayou. And we saw the alligator. It was stretched out sleepily on a little clump about ten yards from the shore, and it took no notice of us whatever.

"It doesn't seem very fierce," complained Sarah.

She and Taimi went on ahead, hand in hand; their voices and occasional laughter drifted back to us. Mrs. Johnston smiled at me.

"She'll be all right when she's been with nice, ordinary people for a time," she observed. "The life she's led—the underground movement, the concentration camp, and all this trouble—it's not normal for a young girl. All she needs now is for someone to pick her up and love her, and make her forget the past."

At about half-past six Lee arrived in an old Chrysler, bringing milk, steak and other stores, and a bottle of bourbon. We had a couple each, before supper.

"Remember the last drink we had, with Bob Smalls?" he asked. "I saw Bob this afternoon; he was talking about you. He's disappointed you haven't found him anything to do."

"Is he? I wonder what he's doing on Tuesday."

"Tuesday? Why, that's Mardi Gras."

"Yes. And that's quite a party, isn't it—and I hate missing a party," I said. "And I hate to disappoint Bob Smalls. Let's talk about it again, after supper."

He and I talked about it for a long time after supper.

At eleven next morning Francine called up. I happened to answer the telephone: "Hello."

"Oh, it's you, Tod. This is Francine. How's everything?"

"Fine." I hesitated for a moment. "I'm terribly sorry to hear about Paul."

"Thank you. It's pretty awful.... But it had to happen. Let's not talk about it."

"All right, Francine. Where are you speaking from?"

"The house. Aunt Grace has gone out. Tod, I'm rather frightened. Aunt Grace went to see you—and found you'd gone. She was angry about that—your treachery and ingratitude, she called it; and she had a quarrel with Miss Laleham."

"She had a row with Poppy?"

"Yes. I don't know what they said to each other, but she was very angry when she came back here. And very confident. Terribly confident, Tod. She said she had Fettinger and two other witnesses to show Taimi tried to blackmail her, and there was some more evidence that Taimi killed Mr. Swenson."

"What sort of evidence?"

"Something about some opium pills that were found in a bottle in her room at the Seven Dwarfs."

I had a feeling of cold foreboding. Some words of Mr. Fosdyke came back to me: They'll stick at nothing, from murder to manufacturing evidence. Now a bottle of opium pills had been found in Taimi's room, and Swenson had died from opium poisoning.

"Does Fosdyke know about that?"

"I couldn't say. I haven't heard from him today."

"I'll call him. There's another thing, Francine. Does your aunt guess that you're not a hundred per cent with her?"

"I—I think she's beginning to. It's not what I've said; it's what I haven't said. Is Taimi any better?"

"Miles better—practically a new woman. Much more cheerful."

"Oh. I'm glad she's cheerful. Tod, are you sure it will be all right if I come to see you?"

"It will be wonderful. When are you coming?"

"I don't know. Not today, I expect, but as soon as I can. I must hang up now—and you will be careful?"

"Very careful."

I hung up, and then rang Mr. Fosdyke and asked him if he knew anything about opium pills having been found in Taimi's room. He didn't.

"I'm meeting the D.A. and Flynn at twelve," he told me. "They're probably going to spring it on me then."

"Does this mean that Taimi will be arrested?"

"It's probable, though I'll fight it tooth and nail, in view of the fact that those pills could so easily have been planted. Have you mentioned this to Taimi Lanner?"

The door of the house suddenly opened, and an absolute blast of fire belched from it into Gains' back.

"Not yet."

"Ask her to speak to me, will you?"

I called her, and she talked to him. I didn't want to seem to be listening, so I went out on the porch. Presently she came out to me.

"He wanted to know if I had left any pills in my room," she told me.

"Of course you hadn't."

"Yes, certainly I left some. There were aspirin pills, and there were some of the sleeping-pills, that the doctor in Helsinki gave me." She blushed slightly. "You remember."

"But they weren't opium?"

"No. Why do you say opium? Is this more trouble?"

"I don't think so," I said untruthfully. "Just routine inquiries."

I don't know if she believed me, but she didn't say any more about it—nor did I, because at that moment Poppy arrived. She came driving up in a yellow taxicab, and jumped nimbly out of it, and caught sight of us sitting there on the porch, and gave one of her well-known cackles.

"Well, well, well!" she remarked cheerfully. "The country retreat, eh. And you two romantic young people sitting out on the porch." She turned to Taimi. "Safe enough, my dear, while the sun's shining. But don't let him take you out in the moonlight. That's when he's dangerous. Like a werewolf."

She marched on into the living-room, and we followed her. "Poppy, what are you doing here?" I asked.

She took a good look around.

"Not bad," she said. "Not at all bad. There ought to be some fishing." She turned to me. "What am I doing here? What do you think? I've come to stay. I'm sorry if it means you've got to sleep in the bathroom, but it can't be helped. I couldn't stay on in that house, and I had to go somewhere."

"You had words with Mrs. Curel, didn't you?"

"A few." She said this with relish, shaking with mirth, and looking like an old witch dancing on somebody's grave. "She had the brazen nerve to tell me I ought to have warned her you were leaving, and then she demanded that I should tell her exactly where you'd gone."

"But you told her something else."

"I told her all the things I'd been wanting to tell her for a long time, and I thought up a few more. I don't mind telling you, Tod, I really enjoyed myself. But after she'd gone—well, she seems to think the house is hers now, and maybe she's right. And it is a bit awkward to go on staying in a house when you've just called your hostess a crook and a murderess and several other things you won't find in the schoolgirls' dictionary. So I came here."

Mrs. Johnston came into the room, and I made introductions. I took Poppy's things into Sarah's room; Sarah was going to have to share a room with Taimi.

I hung about the house for the rest of the day, doing nothing and feeling gloomy. In the evening Lee came to supper, and the subject of Mardi Gras came up again. Poppy began it.

"One thing about this place; I'll miss Mardi Gras," she remarked contentedly. "I'll go fishing instead."

"Do you want to miss Mardi Gras?" asked Lee, astounded. "Mardi Gras is worth seeing, I'll tell you, ma'am."

"Parades, crowds, people in fancy dress—no, thank you," said Poppy decidedly. "I prefer fish."

"I don't want to miss it," put in Sarah regretfully. "I like parades and fancy dress. Must we miss it, Daddy?"

I hesitated, because I hated disappointing her. Before I could speak, Mrs. Johnston chipped in.

"I agree with Sarah; I like parades, and I'll hate to miss it. How about you and me going back to New Orleans, Sarah, and seeing it from my house."

"Oh, yes!" agreed Sarah enthusiastically.

"We're overcrowded here," went on Mrs. Johnston to me. "You don't need me now, with Miss Laleham here. Lee can take Sarah and me back to New Orleans, and she can stay with us in Gretna for a day or two—unless you've anything against the idea."

I thought it was a very good idea. Sarah would be safe enough in Mrs. Johnston's house, and it would insure that she was out of the way if the police came for Taimi, or if anything else unpleasant happened.

"I'm leaving the car for Tod," said Lee. "Going back to New Orleans by bus from St. Christophe."

After supper I ran them in to St. Christophe in Lee's car, and they caught the bus to New Orleans. I returned to the shack.

In the morning I broke it to Poppy and Taimi that I was going into New Orleans.

"This is something you and Lee fixed up, isn't it?" said Poppy. "That's why he left the car. I hope you're not going to do anything unusually silly—though it doesn't really matter to me. I shall spend most of the day fishing."

"Will Lee come back with you?" asked Taimi. She blushed. "It is because I have to do the cooking—I wish to know how many will be here," she explained.

"Only the three of us tonight. Lee will most likely be coming tomorrow."

I had arranged to meet Lee in his own house; he had promised that Shorty and Bob Smalls would be there too. Briefly, our plan was to try to get hold of the papers which Gains had stolen from Taimi on the ship. Mr. Fosdyke thought they were probably in Fettinger's office. We intended to see.

Mrs. Johnston and Sarah had already gone out to see the sights when I reached the house, but Lee and Shorty and Bob Smalls were there waiting for me. A bottle of bourbon was on the table, and they all seemed very cheerful; the first thing they did was to push a glass into my hand.

They seemed to have the notion we were going out on an enjoyable party, but my own uneasy feeling was that we were going on a rather risky fool's errand.

"Here's luck!" I said, and I looked round at them. Anyway, if there was going to be trouble, they were a good crowd to have with me.

"You all know what it's about," I went on. "Did you get the costumes, Lee?"

"I got them."

"You said you thought Fettinger was likely to be in his office in spite of its being Mardi Gras. Anyone else got any ideas about that?"

"Ed'll be there," said Shorty confidently. "On account of the big parade passes right under his window. He'll likely have one or two buddies, and a lunch and drinks, and spend the best part of the day there—anyway, till the parades are over."

"I guess we can take care of the buddies," said Bob.

We talked over one or two more points, and then put on the costumes Lee had got for us. These were rather horrible black hooded affairs, which covered us completely, with skeletons painted luridly down the front. We looked out of them through the eye-sockets in the skeletons. When we were dressed, we drove down to the ferry, crossed to Canal Street, parked the car in a vacant lot, and made our way walking toward Fettinger's office.

The sun was shining; and the gayly decorated streets were crowded thickly with maskers in every variety of fancy costume—Indians, Spaniards, gypsies, Chinese, clowns, cowboys and other disguises. Bands were playing; trucks gaudily decorated and packed with light-hearted revelers passed slowly through the crowds. Rex, Lord of Misrule, was King of New Orleans for the day, and nobody had any worries. Except me, that is; I was worrying quite a lot.

In St. Joseph's Street, where the big parade was due to pass soon, the crowds were even denser. All the office windows were lined with spectators, and people were perched on stepladders, soap-boxes, lamp-standards—anything they could climb on to get a good view. We four hooded skeletons elbowed our way through the crowd by sheer force till we reached a postion at the top of the steps that led to the arched entrance to the building. Fettinger's office was on the second floor; we went up to it by the stairs. Listening outside the door, we could hear, inside the office, a sound of voices and clinking glasses.

"He's there, all right," said Shorty. "What now? Do we go in?"

"Better wait till the parade begins to go by," said Lee.

We went back to the top of the steps in the entrance. The crowd was jammed even tighter now, as police cleared a thoroughfare down the center of the street. From the distance came a sound of music, swelling louder, and a murmur of expectation ran through the crowd.

"Sounds like they're coming," said Lee.

A detachment of motorcycle police came slowly along the street. Then came a band, resplendent in uniforms of gold and scarlet, with a drum major twirling his stick expertly; the noise of music rose to a triumphant blare. Behind the band was a cavalcade of Janissaries, or some other form of Oriental soldiery, gorgeously robed and masked, with tossing plumes and streaming banners, and mounted on fine prancing chargers. These were the knights, the bodyguard; and behind them, magnificently enthroned on a float that was a mass of Oriental towers and cupolas, came Rex, Lord of Misrule, bearded and affable, with a crown on his head, his scepter in one hand, and a glass of champagne in the other. As he passed, he bowed graciously to his hoarsely cheering subjects, and toasted them in champagne.

From my vantage point I could see a vast moving display of color and pageantry—floats, bands, men and women marching. A body of Texas Rangers began to ride by, splendid-looking men on beautiful horses; the crowd gave them an uproarious welcome. Lee touched my arm.

"Ready?"

"Okay."

We entered the building. No one was about; the long passages, lined with office doorways, were deserted. Everyone was watching the parade. When we reached Fettinger's office, Bob Small rapped sharply and tried the door handle. The door was unlocked; we just walked in.

We were in an outer office, with tables for a clerk and a secretary, and a row of chairs for waiting clients. On one of the tables was part of a lunch—and partly consumed bottles. Across the room a half-open door led to an inner office.

Three people were looking out the window of the outer office, two men and a woman. The woman and one of the men were dressed up as Indians; the other man had on ordinary clothes. The woman turned her head and raised a hand in greeting.

"Hi, look who's here! Take a drink, fellas." She plucked at the sleeve of the man dressed as an Indian and said: "Any more glasses, Joe?"

"I don't know; better ask Ed." He turned casually; but when he saw us, he stood rigid, staring. I think it was our silence that struck him as ominous. "Who are you?" he demanded, then raised his voice on a sharp note of urgency and called: "Hey, *Ed!*"

Ed Fettinger came from the inner office, dressed in the white cap and apron of a chef. He was smiling jovially, but when he saw us, the smile left his face.

"Who the hell—" he began.

I stepped up to him, grabbed him by the collar, and exerting all my strength, practically heaved him through the doorway back into the inner office. As he staggered, his foot caught on the corner of a desk and he fell heavily. The Indian uttered an exclamation and stepped forward quickly, and Shorty hit him, knocking him sprawling on his back. I don't think he was too steady on his feet, anyway. Lee, standing with his back to the door said: "You all just keep quiet, and nobody will get hurt."

I followed Fettinger into the inner office and Bob Smalls came close behind me. There was another man inside, by the window; he looked at us, open-mouthed and frightened.

Bob Smalls jerked a thumb at the doorway and said: "Out, you—and keep quiet." The man bolted out quickly. I stepped to the door and locked it.

Fettinger, sitting on the floor, stared at us. His fat face looked gray and sweaty.

"W-what's all this?" he asked. His voice quavered a little.

"Open up that safe," Bob said. He was doing the talking. We had arranged that I shouldn't say anything, because of my English accent.

"W-what? W-what's the idea—" Fettinger just burbled agitatedly for a few moments. From somewhere in his clothes Bob brought out a long, glittering, sharp-pointed knife. He dug the point gently into Fettinger's back.

"Open up, brother," he said invitingly. He applied pressure and Fettinger gave a yelp and crawled away, looking back over his shoulder with a frantic expression on his face. Bob followed, keeping the knife point at his back; it made a little depression in the cloth of his fancy costume.

Bob kept on pressing with the knife, guiding Fettinger till he had him right up against the safe. Then he went on pressing. Fettinger gave another yelp, and began hurriedly to work on the combination. All the time he kept gasping like a fish, and saying: "Don't—don't—" When he had opened the safe, Bob guided him a little to one side of it, and stood over him.

Well, there it was; the safe door was open. I knew I must keep calm, but I didn't feel calm. What I could see inside the safe looked like a lot of account books, files and thick envelopes. An odd conviction came to me that the papers I was looking for wouldn't be there. I was quite sure they wouldn't.

The envelopes had typewritten labels. The first I looked at was labeled *"Frankinson"* and contained photographs of a man and a blonde having quite a lot of fun, and a couple of letters beginning *"My own darling Lottie"* and signed *"Your ever loving Gerald."* The next envelope was labeled *"Wright."* The next was labeled *"Curel."*

I stared at it for a long moment uncomprehendingly. The label was typewritten—just one word, Curel. My fingers were trembling as I opened the envelope.

There were three enclosures. The first I looked at was worded in German—a certificate of a marriage between Paul Curel and Taimi Lanner, signed by Franz Hiller, pastor, and witnessed by Ronald Marvin and Hans Lustig. The second was a letter from Paul to Taimi, written on the eve of the flight to America which had ended in such disaster. This letter, I felt, was Taimi's, and hers only; I did not read beyond the opening paragraph.

The last enclosure was an air "letterette," posted in Helsinki and addressed to Mrs. Curel in New Orleans. It was from Mr. Swenson, and I had no scruples at all about reading it.

My dear Mrs. Curel,

I am writing to report briefly the results of such investigations as I have been able to make, and to acquaint you with the steps which I have decided to take to deal with the situation which has now developed. I greatly fear that some of these steps may not meet with your entire approval, but I must point out that I have been forced to act as I thought best in very difficult circumstances.

I was unable to make any inquiries in Michenau, since an adjustment of frontiers has brought this village within the sphere of the Russian occupying authorities, and even had I been able to go there, it is doubtful whether my visit would have served any useful purpose, as it is unlikely that any ecclesiastical records will have been considered worth preserving by the present authorities.

Continuing my inquiries, I came here to Helsinki, and have become acquainted with Miss Lanner. Without disclosing my connection with you, or the nature of my errand here, I have succeeded, to some extent, in gaining her confidence, and have ascertained that she is planning to sail shortly for the United States in order to claim what she genuinely believes to be her rightful place as Paul's wife. Whether this claim would be upheld by an American court is a matter on which I am not at present prepared to give an opinion. However, on one aspect of this affair I am happy to say I can be reassuring: Miss Lanner does not belong to the "adventuress" type. She is a quiet, reserved girl, very guarded in her demeanor, unusually nice-looking, and her parents were highly respected people in this town.

"Got what you want?" asked Bob. I glanced up from the letter and realized that he was getting impatient. I knew that I had found what I wanted, and more than I had expected; there was no need to read any more. I folded the letters and thrust them into the hip pocket of the suit that I was wearing under my costume.

We tied and gagged Fettinger and left him on the floor of the inner office. When we went out, we locked the door on the outside and kept the key. In the outer office everything was quiet. Lee and Shorty were standing grimly dominating the four others, who were sitting looking scared and saying nothing. Bob spoke to them.

"You guys enjoy life? That's great. Elmer likes you to enjoy life so long as you do it quietly." He jerked his thumb at the inner office. "That guy talked too much."

"Elmer!" exclaimed one of the men. "You mean—"

"Forget it. I never said that," Bob interrupted him. "Stay here for a couple of minutes, and then go somewhere else, and don't talk. That way you'll save your friends the expense of flowers."

We left. Below in the street the parade was still passing. A high-school band was going by, all girls, dressed in fetching green uniforms, playing with zest, and stepping out like a beauty chorus. We dumped our costumes in a men's room and went out by a side exit into a quieter street.

"That calls for a drink," said Bob. "How about it, fellas?"

They were pleased and excited, and they wanted to celebrate a little. I wanted to get along to Mr. Fosdyke's house and hand over those papers. But I couldn't refuse to drink with them after all the help they had given me.

"Let's do that," I agreed.

We went into a bar in Bourbon Street. I bought drinks and we took them to a table. Lee looked at me anxiously.

"Did you get the evidence?" he asked

"And then some. I got a letter from Swenson to Mrs. Curel that's going to sink her without trace. She must

have shown it to Gains just before he went to Europe, and he stole it—he probably intended to use it to blackmail her."

"Is this going to put Ronnie in the clear?" asked Shorty.

"I don't know. It should help. It certainly shows that Mrs. Curel is the big villain of the piece."

"I think we might have another drink on that."

He and Bob went to fetch the drinks, leaving me and Lee at the table. Lee looked at me, smiling.

"Taimi's going to be pretty grateful to you."

"And you," I said. "If you hadn't carried her away in your strong arms, she'd be in prison now. I suppose you'll be coming to the shack tomorrow."

"I don't know. I don't think so." I noticed that in spite of his smile, he was looking depressed. "Nothing for me to do out there," he added.

"But there is. You know what your mother said. She said that what Taimi needs is someone to pick her up and love her. That rules me out. I never was good at weight-lifting."

"Oh." He flushed scarlet. "You mean—" He stopped, as if he found the effort of speaking too much. Then he went on: "You mean you and Taimi are not—" He stopped again.

"She likes you better than me," I told him. "I can't think why. So good luck, old man. Go in and win. And when you two are happy together by the fireside, with all your children round your knees, think of me sometimes out there in the jungle, lonely in my little tent, with the lions howling—"

"Ah, shut up." He scowled at me, and then his features relaxed slowly in a grin. "I will come out tomorrow. And lions don't howl. They roar."

Bob and Shorty came back with the drinks, and we had that round, and another. Then Bob suggested going on to another bar, but I had the sense not to agree.

"Not now," I said. "I must see Fosdyke. These papers are burning a hole in my pocket. I want to be rid of them."

"Don't you lose them," said Lee anxiously. "Like me to come with you?"

"No need for that," I said. "I'm not drunk yet. That's why I'm going now."

Driving through the crowded streets in Lee's car was a slow business. When I got to Mr. Fosdyke's house no one was there. I rang, and banged on the door, and then went back to the car and smoked, and hoped he'd come soon; but he didn't come. I wanted to get those papers to a place of safety. The best thing would be to take them back to the shack, and hand them over to him there.

I wrote a note and pushed it through his letter-box. It said: *"Have taken vital evidence from Fettinger's office. Come and get it as soon as possible.—Claymore."* That should bring him out in a hurry, as soon as he'd read it, I thought. . . .

Dusk was falling when I reached the shack. I saw a light in the living-room as I drove past the front of the house. When I turned the corner, toward the garage and parking space, which were at the back, I saw two cars already parked there. That gave me quite a jolt for a moment, till I recognized the nearer car as Francine's convertible. The other car I did not know, but the thought came to me that it might be Mr. Fosdyke's.

I jumped from the Chrysler, hurried round to the front of the house, and went in. Francine and Henry and Taimi were there—and so was Mrs. Curel.

"Oh, here you are, Tod," Francine said in a tone of relief.

I didn't have to look very closely to know that a first-class row had been taking place. Taimi, sitting apart from the others, had on her old guarded expression. Francine looked pale and very angry; and Henry, next to her on a settee, was leaning forward staring at his aunt with undisguised dislike. Mrs. Curel was standing, looking cold and severe, like someone delivering judgment. She turned to me as I entered.

"I should like an explanation of your presence here?" she demanded.

Before I could answer, Francine spoke.

"I've told you why they're here. I lent them the place."

Mrs. Curel ignored that. She was waiting for me.

"That's it," I said. "Francine lent me the place."

"As she was perfectly entitled to do," put in Henry.

Mrs. Curel didn't seem to hear his remark. She was only dealing with me.

"You're a plausible rogue, Mr. Claymore," she went on thoughtfully. "You must be, to be able to persuade Francine to act so foolishly. And Henry—I'm disappointed in Henry. I thought he was grown up."

"I'm grown up, all right, and I know just what I'm doing," stated Henry in a tone of quiet obstinacy. But Mrs. Curel still was concentrating on me.

"Luckily I suspected from Francine's manner that something of the sort was taking place, so I followed her. I think you've rather overreached yourself this time, Mr. Claymore. Of course I shall at once inform the police that you are here."

"You needn't. Lieutenant Flynn knows already."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true, all the same," put in Henry. "I've seen Flynn. There's nothing you can do about it."

"You think not." Mrs. Curel gave a contemptuous laugh, but she was flustered. "Lieutenant Flynn hasn't been very coöperative; I've noticed it," she went on. "I shall phone the District Attorney. I happened to know he has conclusive evidence that that woman is a murderess. Her presence here is an outrage."

She was being vicious, hitting out at Taimi, and that made me feel vicious.

"If it comes to that, I've got some evidence too," I remarked. "A letter from Paul to Taimi, a marriage certificate, and an air-letter Swenson wrote to you from Helsinki. Very interesting."

"I don't—" began Mrs. Curel, and her voice trailed off. She stood looking at me, and I felt that her mind was racing furiously.

Taimi rose from her chair and took a couple of eager paces forward.

"You have my papers?" she asked. She sounded breathless.

"Yes." But already I was wishing I hadn't spoken. "At least, I've given them to Mr. Fosdyke."

"But how—where did you find them?" asked Francine.

"In Fettinger's office. I called, with a couple of friends, and collected them this afternoon."

Henry grinned at me. I could see he understood just what had happened.

"So you called and got them," he observed. "It was as easy as that. Nice work, I'd say."

It seemed we all had to look at Mrs. Curel. It was her turn to speak. She stood there, erect and imposing in her smart black dress, holding a black suède bag. Only her fingers moved; she seemed to be trying to dig them into the sides of the bag.

"I suppose you all think I'm a very wicked woman," she said. "I only meant to stop that girl's claim on Paul. I still don't believe he married her—or if he did, he was tricked into it. Paul would never have married anyone without consulting me."

She paused, and then turned to look directly at me.

"You interfered," she said bitterly, "on the ship and here in New Orleans. Can't you see what a lot of harm you've done?"

I didn't answer. Mrs. Curel gave a deep sigh and turned away from us. "I'm not sorry it's finished. I was getting very tired." She turned back to me again. "What will happen now?" she asked.

"I suppose Fosdyke will show those papers to the D.A. That will clear Taimi and establish her claim. I don't know what will happen then. That will be up to the police."

"I imagine so." She nodded, with an air of considering things carefully. "*I* haven't done anything criminal," she went on. "What Elmer Gains may have done is *entirely* his concern. They can't *prove* anything against me." She smiled, with a sort of triumph. "If they can't prove anything against me, they can't take any of the money away from me," she added.

With an impulsive movement, Francine turned to Henry and clutched his arm.

"Take me away from her," she begged. "I don't want to see her any more." A patch of color came into Mrs. Curel's cheeks. She looked at Francine.

"You always disliked me, Francine," she stated. "All of you disliked me. You thought I didn't know it, but I did."

She turned to me. "They all disliked me—even my husband, as soon as our honeymoon was over. I had all that they lacked—initiative, the capacity to think clearly and plan ahead. I could have made them the most powerful family in the South, but they wouldn't listen. They wouldn't accept me. But they couldn't take my son away from me. He was a Curel, and the heir to their business, but he was still mine. I saw how they tried to influence him, to make him think as they did, but they wouldn't have succeeded. Paul would have taken my advice, not theirs. If only he hadn't had that accident—"

It was all out now, all the frustration and disappointment of years. She had an enormous lust for power, an overwhelming urge to run things and people, and for thirty years the Curels had politely sat on her.

Francine and Henry rose. Henry spoke to me. He and Francine avoided looking at Mrs. Curel.

"We'll be seeing you tomorrow," he said. "There'll be things to talk over. I'll call you in the morning and fix up—" He broke off, listening. From outside the house came a sound of tires scraping as a car pulled up abruptly.

"Fosdyke, I expect," I said.

We all looked toward the door: it was flung open violently, and Elmer Gains and two other men came charging into the room. They all carried guns. Gains took a couple of quick paces forward into the room, his gun threatening us, and said sharply: "Keep still, everybody."

We kept still. We stood and stared at him; and he stood there, with his gun leveled, and stared back at us; and if we were surprised, he was obviously just as surprised.

"What in hell's this?" he demanded harshly. "What are all you people doing here?"

He looked angrily at Francine and Henry, and then at Mrs. Curel. "What are you doing here?" he repeated in an exasperated voice.

"I came here with my niece and nephew," said Mrs. Curel in a superior tone.

"Too bad we have visitors," I remarked. "I suppose you expected to find me and Taimi alone. But you're too late, anyway. I handed the papers over to Mr. Fosdyke, and the last I saw of him he was on his way to the D.A."

To my astonishment, I saw that he didn't know what I was talking about. He had come for me and Taimi, and it had been a very disagreeable shock for him to find the place full of Curels and other people.

"What's this about papers? What papers?" he asked impatiently.

"Did you leave some papers in Fettinger's office? If you did, Claymore's taken them." Mrs. Curel's voice was still offhand.

"So that's it. That's why Ed didn't ring." Gains turned to me. "What happened to Ed?" he asked.

I shrugged. "I imagine he's in jail," I said.

He nodded slightly. He was thinking this out.

Francine made an impatient movement. "I'm not going to stay here," she stated. She looked squarely and defiantly at Gains, and started for the door.

Gains thrust out an arm swiftly and brutally, like a snake striking, and gave her a push that made her stagger. "Stay where you are!" He almost spat the words at her. Then Henry hit him. It was a beautiful punch; it caught Gains full in the mouth, and he went down with a crash that made the furniture rattle. One of the other men stepped forward matter-of-factly and brought his clubbed pistol down on Henry's head. Henry went down on his face and lay still.

Gains scrambled to his feet, blood trickling from his mouth. His expression was vicious. He raised his gun and pointed it deliberately at Henry's prone figure. Francine gave a little cry and flung herself on Henry, trying to shield him. Without really thinking what I was doing, I stepped forward and knocked the pistol barrel up sharply, just as Gains fired. The cartridge exploded; the bullet went somewhere into the ceiling. Then someone hit me on the head, and I joined the congregation down on the floor. Things went black for a bit. . . .

The next thing I knew there was a heavy weight on my chest and left shoulder. It was a man kneeling on me; he was tying my hands together. He rose when he had finished, and I saw that Taimi, Francine, Henry and Mrs. Curel had all been shepherded into a group standing together. Henry's hands also were tied in front of him.

I made a feeble effort to sit up, and Taimi stepped away from the group and bent over me. With one arm round my shoulders she raised me to a sitting position, and she dabbed my face with a handkerchief, wiping blood from my eye and lip.

"Take them outside to the car," Gains ordered.

One of the men jabbed Henry with a gun and motioned toward the door. "On your way, fella," he said.

"What are you going to do with them?" asked Mrs. Curel. "You can't kidnap Francine and Henry. I forbid it."

"You do!" said Gains softly. "Mrs. Curel forbids it! That means something, eh?" He laughed, suddenly and savagely. "You're just a mouth, the same as those others, now," he went on. "A mouth that might talk, and isn't going to talk. So you'll be going the same place they will—down in the swamp, where nobody will find you."

"Do you mean you're going to kill us?" asked Francine. She was very pale, but composed.

"What else?" said Gains. He nodded to his men. "Bring them out," he ordered.

One of the men put a hand under my armpit and began to hoist me to my feet. Taimi put a hand under my other arm and helped him. Her face was close to mine; I heard her murmur softly: "Have courage."

She was being very brave and calm. In fact, everyone was being very brave and calm, except me. Under the compulsion of the men they were moving slowly, but quite unflinchingly, toward the door. Even Mrs. Curel had acquired a sort of added dignity.

I did not share these admirable feelings. I felt most damnably frightened and sick in my stomach. When I was lifted, I let my feet drag and my head loll on my

chest, and Taimi and one of the men between them had to carry me out of the house.

A big station wagon was standing a little way from the front door. The others all got in with dignity, under their own power, but I had to be lefted in, an inert mass. My head was hurting like fury.

There were three bench-type seats in the station wagon. I was thrust along to the end of the back one, with Taimi next to me, holding me up, and a man next to her. In front of us were Francine and Henry, with another of the men, and Gains and the driver were in the front, with Mrs. Curel between them.

"All set," Gains said.

I gave a groan and flopped forward, and Taimi had to grab me. This brought her head close to my face again, and I murmured: " Penknife in my coat pocket." Francine, in the seat in front of us, turned, and said in a concerned voice: "How is he?"

"I think he is dying," Taimi said loudly and clearly. "There is very little pulse." I could feel her hand stealthily fumbling in the region of my coat pocket.

"Claymore dying?" Gains turned in his seat. "Too bad it didn't happen months ago." He spoke to the driver. "Get going! What are we waiting for?"

"I want the ignition key."

"Isn't it there? You must have taken it out."

"I didn't take it out," stated the driver emphatically. "I left it right here, in its place."

"You must have taken the damned thing out. Look in your pockets."

"Okay." Gains turned to the men in the back of the car and asked: "Any of you guys take out that key?" The two men both denied having taken it out. Gains and the driver searched the floor in the front of the car. They didn't find the key.

"God Almighty!" said Gains in a distracted voice. "Somebody must have it." He turned to Mrs. Curel. "You and those others came down in cars. Where are they?"

"Behind the house."

Gains spoke to the man sitting with me and Taimi.

"Find those cars, Ray. Get the ignition keys. One of them might fit."

The man went. That gave Taimi a bit more freedom of action. She had got the knife out, and she began to work with the blunt blade on the cord that bound my wrists. After a bit my hands were free, but I made no move. At the moment I had only my hands against three men armed with guns.

It was dark, there, in the back of the station wagon. The driver was smoking; his cigarette end glowed brightly every time he puffed. From somewhere in the distance came a sound, not very loud, as if a piece of wood had fallen, or a branch of a tree had snapped.

"I wonder what in hell's happened to Ray," said Gains.

The man sitting beside Francine and Henry spoke. "I think he's gone in the house."

"In the house?" Gains swung round in his seat. "What makes you say that?"

"I saw a light.... He must have struck a match or something. Look—there."

He pointed. The car was close to the house, and sure enough, plainly visible through the sitting-room window, was a tiny red point of light. Gains swore furiously, flung open the door of the station wagon, and made for the house. Everyone's eyes were on him.

This was my chance. I screwed my courage up, grabbed the man in front of me by the hair with my left hand, jerked his head down violently over the back of the seat, and smashed my right fist in a chopping movement into his upturned face. He gave a yell and raised both his hands; and as his right hand came up, I snatched at the gun and twisted it from his grip, and then brought the butt down hard on his forehead. He fell sidewise off the seat.

The driver rose, turned to see what was happening, and made a movement to reach his gun. I shot at him across the back of the station wagon, and he just vanished. One moment his head and shoulders were above the back of the seat; then they weren't there any more.

As my shot sounded, Gains turned quickly; he was just outside the front door of the house. At the same time Francine and Henry rose from their seats, startled; they blocked my view of Gains. I yelled to them, "Sit down," and tried to lean past them, hoping to get a shot at Gains through the car window. I was just aiming the gun when the door of the house suddenly opened, and an absolute blast of fire belched from it right into the middle of Gains' back.

He fell forward and lay with thrashing limbs, lying on his face and making queer grunting noises. With what looked like an enormously painful effort, he raised himself slightly; thrusting out his right arm he fired four wild shots at the station wagon. Then his body went limp; his face fell forward onto the ground.

I sprang from the station wagon, ran at him, and kicked the gun from his nerveless hand. Then I went on to the front door of the shack. There I found Poppy, trembling like a leaf, and clutching a double-barreled shotgun. She grabbed at me. A burning cigarette was hanging from her lower lip.

"Tod! My God, Tod! . . . For heaven's sake, Tod, get me a drink. I'm getting too old for this sort of thing."

"Darling," I said, "you're wonderful. You've saved all our lives. I knew you must be somewhere when they couldn't find their ignition key. Now just take it easy and let go of me for a moment; there's another of them round at the back."

"No, there isn't. At least, there is, but he's not doing any harm. I hit him on the head with this shotgun."

"Good old Poppy! Nice work. All the same, I think I'll go and take a look at him."

But I didn't have to. At that moment there was a blaze of lights, and a highway patrol car came sweeping round the corner of the drive into the yard in front of the house. . . .

After that there was a lot of frenzied activity all round the shack. The police took possession. Lieutenant Flynn came out. An ambulance arrived. Mr. Fosdyke came. All sorts of people asked masses of questions, which was rather tiresome because my head was aching and I wanted to go to bed. A police doctor put a couple of stitches in my scalp and congratulated me on having an unusually thick skull.

Mrs. Curel was dead—killed by that last burst of fire from Gains—shot right through the head. Gains was dying, his back full of shotgun pellets. Poppy was the heroine of the occasion.

Her story was simple. She had lost herself, fishing. When she finally found her way home, she saw the station wagon parked in front of the shack, so she peeked in through the window to see what was going on.

"There wasn't much I could do," she said. "Couldn't tackle four men with a fishing rod. So I thought it might be a good idea to go round to all the cars and take out the ignition keys."

"Brilliant," agreed Mr. Fosdyke, and Poppy gave one of her cackles. With a couple of large gins inside her, she was feeling quite herself again.

"I saw all these people brought out of the house," she went on. "So when the house was empty, I nipped in by the back door. I got a shotgun from the gun-room, and then I telephoned the police.

"Next thing I heard Gains tell one of his men to look for some ignition keys, so I went out to the cars and waited for him. When I saw him bending over, looking into the Buick, I gave him a little whack on the head."

"You fractured his skull," observed Lieutenant Flynn.

"Can't help that," said Poppy. "Better to hit him too hard than not hard enough. When I'd settled him, I went back into the house and looked out of the window to see what was going on, and without thinking what I was doing, I lit a cigarette. Silly of me, but I was feeling very jittery. I'd been lost half the day, and hadn't had a drink, and to come back late expecting a nice supper and find the place full of murderers—you see what I mean."

"It worked out all right," I said. "It got Gains out of the car." I turned to Flynn. "I take it you're quite satisfied about Taimi now?" I asked.

"Yeah." He smiled. "I always had my doubts whether she killed Swenson. I was pretty sure she didn't when we found that bottle of opium in her room."

"What?" I didn't follow. "I thought you were going to arrest her on account of that bottle."

"No sir. There were no fingerprints on the bottle. She wouldn't've taken off her fingerprints, and then left the bottle. Then there was Gains' alibi the night he visited you. I checked on that. He was playing poker in Jefferson County. But how could you have known of that unless he'd told you? So he wasn't playing poker in Jefferson County. There were other things—small things, but they add up to quite a lot."

"What about Ronnie Marvin?"

"He's okay. We never really tied Ronnie up with Louis' murder—though it suited us to let Mrs. Curel and Gains think we did. We always knew Ronnie had a cast-iron alibi."

"I thought he hadn't got an alibi."

"He didn't know he had. But Ronnie's a pretty-well-known figure—a public entertainer; and one of our men from the police department was sitting behind him in that movie all the time the picture was running." He grinned at me. "Not that we haven't appreciated your help," he added politely.

"Okay," I said. "So you could have done just as well without me. I wish you had, because all I've got out of this business is black eyes and bangs on the head."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. "You'll have got the material for another book."

Chapter Fourteen

SARAH AND POPPY AND I MOVED BACK TO THE house that had belonged to Louis. Taimi went to stay with Lee and his mother. I had an idea that she might decide to stay there permanently.

My plans were vague. Sarah and I had an invitation to visit friends in Florida for a few weeks. I thought we might do that, and then return to Great Britain *via* Chicago and New York.

One morning about three days after the night in the shack, I was sitting in the library painfully trying to write a letter, when Francine came in. I hadn't seen much of her during the last day or two. She had had a lot to attend to.

"Sarah told me you were in here," she said. "Am I disturbing you?"

"You always do," I said. "I like it."

She smiled at me, and when she smiled like that, my heart seemed to miss a beat. We sat together on a settee.

"Mother says you're talking about leaving soon," she said. "Why, Tod? You can stay here as long as you like."

"Well—" I said. "What with this and that—" I looked at her, and when I looked at her I really felt very sad about leaving. "You know," I added, "you're outrageously beautiful, Francine. No one ought to be allowed to be as beautiful as you are."

"Oh, Tod." She reached out and took my hand. Her eyes were smiling and friendly, but somehow tears were not far away. "I do like you," she said.

"I like you too, Francine. An awful lot. And when you're married to Henry—"

"What!" she interrupted. Then she blushed vividly, which made her look prettier than ever, and added: "How did you know?"

"That night at the shack. You seemed—so close together, somehow. I don't know quite how to put it, but I believe you'd hate it if Henry wasn't there."

She nodded.

"I know what you mean. But I didn't realize it myself till that night. Perhaps it was because Aunt Grace was always pushing him at me. But I know now."

"Congratulations. I think Henry's a very fine man, and you're a very lovely girl, and you'll both be very happy."

WELL, I did think that. I could see those two settling down very happily, Henry with his good humor and quiet reserves of strength and character, and Francine with her glowing good looks and warm generous nature. Oh, yes, they would settle down beautifully, and Henry would run the Curel business, and they would have lovely children, and become highly respected leaders of local society. . . . The thought of it made me feel a little wistful.

"Thank you, Tod." Francine smiled, and then leaned forward impulsively and kissed me. "I nearly fell in love with you for a bit, and I'm still very fond of you," she said.

"Will you be a sister to me?" I asked.

"Now you're laughing at me. I don't care: go ahead and laugh." She laughed too. "Will you come and stay with us?" she asked. "You will, won't you?"

"I'm already planning a long series of visits," I assured her. "I like New Orleans, and I like you, and I like Henry, so I'll be coming to see you often."

When she had gone, I went back to my letter. It was a difficult letter. I was writing to Sabrina, who had invited me very firmly to walk out of her life, and then had written to me. Now I was answering her, and I didn't quite know what to say. I looked at what I had written.

Dear Sabrina:

I was glad to hear from you, and I think you are a little hellcat.

New Orleans is a wonderful city, full of flowers and beautiful girls, and the people couldn't possibly be nicer.

That was all I had written, and I studied it and wondered how to go on. While I was studying it, Sarah came in.

"Daddy—what are you doing? Let's go out and get some ice-cream."

"Wait a few minutes, darling. I'm writing an important letter."

"Who to?" Sarah takes a great interest in my correspondence.

"Sabrina. The trouble is, I don't know what to say."

"Oh, Daddy. There are lots of things you can say. Tell her we're having a lovely holiday."

"I've more or less told her that," I said.

"Oh. Then tell her—" Sarah frowned horribly, trying to think of something. "I know. Tell her we're thinking about her an awful lot and wish she was here."

"Shall I?" I considered for a moment. "Yes, I might tell her that," I agreed.

Who's Who *in this* Issue

Ewart A. Autry

BORN January 15, 1900, a few hundred yards from where I now live. "Where I now live" happens to be about ten miles from Hickory Flat, Mississippi, and that is the nearest town.

Wandered away from my birthplace to be high-school superintendent for a number of years. Then, for thirteen years was pastor of a Memphis, Tennessee, church. Returned to live where my beloved wooded hills stretch for miles away from my back door.

Through the years I have written outdoor articles and fiction. Am pastor of rural churches. I marry the living, bury the dead, and usually speak from three to a half-dozen times each week. I write between two windows. One looks out on miles of rugged hills—the other, toward the valley which my father called "Whippoorwill Valley." Oftimes the voices of horned owls, red fox and other things of the trails drift in as I write. I gather story material as I hunt deer, quail, squirrels, rabbits, doves and ducks, and as I fish along the swift-flowing streams which thread their ways toward the Mississippi River.

Recently on a moonlit night, I was out on the trails listening to my hounds drive a red fox. Suddenly I heard the boom of a shotgun toward my house. I knew my wife was calling me home for some reason. I went, and found a young couple nervously waiting to be married. I married them, then went back to my hounds. Of such is my life!

Reuben Hecht

THE author of "Tales of the Town" is a veteran New York cab driver, and a product of the Bronx—was born in New York over fifty years ago, and is still driving. He went to P.S. 4 in the Bronx. Angelo Patri was his principal and is today the severest critic of his writing.

Hecht enlisted in the Regular Army in 1914, and saw active service with Troop G 3rd Cavalry on the Mexican border, and with the A.E.F. in France. Was honorably discharged in 1920. He is an active member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans. Awarded two New York Police Department citations credited to his hack-license record. His most interesting friends, he says, are cabbies, cops and private eyes. A group of his stories under the title "Through a Rear View Mirror" appeared in the June *Reader's Digest.*

Kurt Singer

THIS internationally-known expert on espionage was born in Austria, of Czech stock and has lived in eight European countries. He was editor of one of the first underground newspapers to be distributed in Germany and during the war he worked closely with the Danish and Norwegian undergrounds. In addition, he was often called upon to advise Allied military and Naval intelligence services. Sought by the German government on a high treason charge, Singer was able to escape the Nazi dragnet; his wife, however, was held by the Nazis as a hostage for one year.

Mr. Singer has written fourteen books, translated into 15 languages. He makes his home in Florida. He has addressed five million people during the last five years on his coast-to-coast lecture tours.

Hugh Clevely

(Tod Claymore)

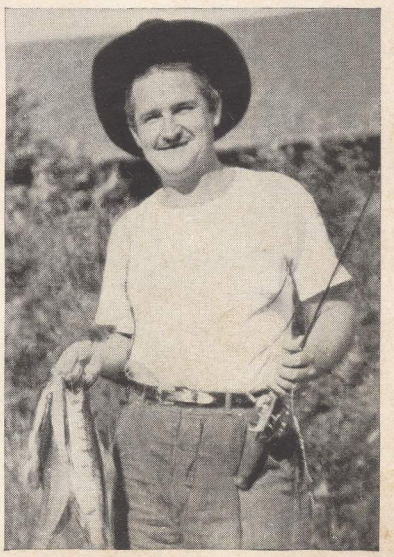
HUGH CLEVELY has been an author most of his life; he served in the R.F.C. during the first World War and in the R.A.F. in the second, rising to the rank of Wing Commander. He worked first of all with the Coastal Command, and later on had a pretty important job in Ceylon. That is why his books with an R.A.F. background were written with such authenticity.

Under the pen name of Tod Claymore, Mr. Clevely has written five novels—"You Remember the Case," "Ships with Wings" (published in America under the title "Flarepath") "Speedwell," "Nest of Vipers" and "What Else Could I Do?"

Thomas Thompson

TIRED of being one of the few native sons of California, and dreaming of salmon steaks and razor clams in Oregon, I moved to Portland two years ago—where I dream of enchiladas and tacos and other things Mexican in California. Age: thirty-six. Education: Some. Occupations: Trapper, sailor, dishwasher, singer, furniture salesman. During the War wrote books on how to fly A-20's and C-54's. The test pilots told me how; I wrote it down. Liked the sound of a typewriter so well I just kept going.

Now a wife of fourteen years' patience does the typing. A twelve-year old daughter, a monstrous dog and two goldfish keep me hard at it. I have published over 150 pieces of magazine fiction and my first two novels are now available.



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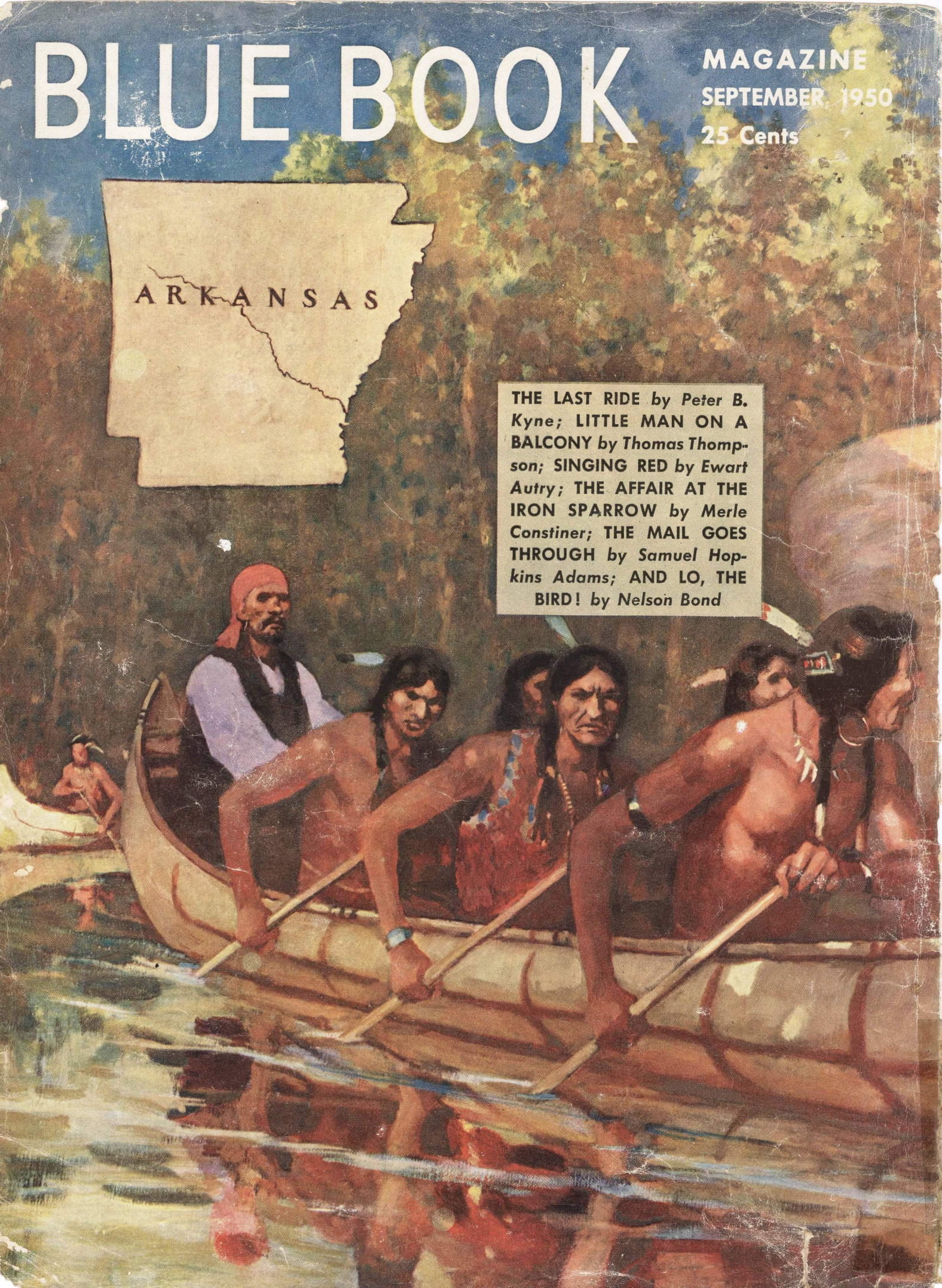

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