# BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE ★ OCTOBER, 1950 ★ 25 Cents

THESE UNITED STATES...XLV
ARIZONA: *Painted by Benton Clark*

**A DATE AT SHEPHEARD'S**
*by Sax Rohmer*

**ASSIGNMENT TO KOREA**
*by Arch Whitehouse*

**LIFE GOES ON** *by Nelson Bond*

*Three Short Novels, Many Short Stories and Features*

# WHO'S WHO IN THIS ISSUE

## *Harley F. Cope*

REAR ADMIRAL COPE was born January 8, 1898, in Dallas, Texas, where he attended grade and high school before entering the U. S. Naval Academy in 1916. A member of the Class of 1920, he was graduated in June, 1919. During World War I, while still a midshipman, Cope had duty on the *Arizona* and on the *Rhode Island*.

Before the outbreak of World War II, he commanded the Navy tanker, U.S.S. *Salinas*. He was officially commended by Admiral Harold R. Stark, then Chief of Naval Operations, for "the excellent degree of judgment, effort and seamanship displayed" during the torpedo attack on the *Salinas* shortly before the United States entered World War II. He was awarded the Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism" in bringing his ship to port.

Returning to the United States, he headed the department of foreign languages at the Naval Academy from 1942 to 1944.

Ordered to London, England, Cope had duty as Operations and Plans Officer on the Staff of Commander, U. S. Naval Forces, Europe, from June, 1944 until June, 1945. During that period he had special duty as a designated representative of the Commander to establish U. S. Naval Headquarters in Paris, France.

In August, 1945, he assumed command of the U.S.S. *Tennessee*. He was designated Commander, Philadelphia Group, Sixteenth (Atlantic Reserve) Fleet in February, 1946. He attained the rank of Captain to date from June 18, 1942, and was promoted to Rear Admiral upon retirement June 30, 1949, after thirty-three years of active service.

An author and newspaper man, Cope wrote for the Newspaper Enterprise Association from 1928 to 1939. His published works include several books, among them "Serpents of the Seas," "Command at Sea," "Our Navy—a Fighting Team," and a new book, "Saga of the Silent Service," soon to be released by the W. W. Norton Co.

Rear Admiral Cope is at present directing the American Sovereignty Campaign of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in opposition to proposals for world government. The campaign is being carried on in coöperation with the Department of Public Relations in the Washington office of the V.F.W.

Cope is married and resides with his wife at 5201 Colorado Avenue, N.W., Washington. They have two children, Harley, Jr., aged twenty-four, now on duty with the Navy as an aerial photographer in London, and Nancy (Mrs. Raymond W. Bean), of Norfolk, Virginia.

## *William Du Bois*

THE author of "The Ghost on the Ramparts," page 126, is that *rara avis*, a Floridian who was actually born and raised in Florida—though he admits to Yankee parentage. Destined originally for a farmer's career, he spent several years in Seminole country, on the north shore of Lake Okeechobee, before heading for the State University and a degree in agriculture. Finding that freshman English was easier to pass than freshman agronomy, he switched to a pre-journalism course, and was graduated from the Pulitzer School at Columbia University. He is the author of three whodunits, three Broadway plays ("Pagan Lady," "I Loved You Wednesday," and "Haiti"), and a novel of newspaper life, "The Island in the Square." In the magazine field, he has written more short stories than he can remember now.

## *Major Edwin H. Simmons*

THE first writing success I ever had was a story about dog who died of a broken heart when his master went back to England. I was then ten years old, and my teacher thought it was great. Nothing that I have ever written since has attracted so much attention. That was nineteen years ago.

Growing up, I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be a writer or a military man. World War II solved my problem. I graduated in the spring of 1942 from Lehigh University with a degree in journalism and an infantry reserve commission. I resigned the infantry commission for a crack at the regular Marine Corps in June 1942, and have been drawing my pay and rations from the USMC ever since.

During the last war I served variously, including twenty-six months in the Pacific, covered a lot of ground (with no particular distinction) and wound up in China as a public relations officer. I returned to the States in early 1946, and was detailed to the *Marine Corps Gazette* as managing editor.

*"Every Saber, Every Lance"* is my seventh sale to BLUE BOOK. It represents the type of story I like to write—a slightly fictionized account of some forgotten or misunderstood historical episode. This sort of thing requires a great deal of research, a process which luckily I like.

At the present time I'm fortunate enough to command the Weapons Company of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines. I have a wife, no children, and my legal residence is registered as Paulsboro, N. J. In getting through college I worked at various places, including an oil refinery, a fertilizer plant, a traveling carnival, a men's store, and as a fraternity-house waiter and an instructor in news-writing.

## *Sax Rohmer*

THE author of "A Date at Shepheard's" has been a globe-trotter for the past twenty-five years with Turkey, Syria, and Arabia his chosen haunts. Shepheard's hotel is one of his favorites. In fact he's one of the half-dozen individuals who has never been asked to sign a register at this hotel. He has never been given a bill when he departs, but every couple of years the manager sends him a note of his total indebtedness. Sax Rohmer was a close friend of Houdini up until Houdini's death. Houdini credited Rohmer for having developed one or two of his tricks, and Rohmer gave Houdini the credit for having presented him with a solution to two or three of his own mystery stories when he couldn't find the murderer or a rational explanation for the crime himself.

Sax Rohmer is the author of a book called "Romance of Sorcery," which is a recognized textbook on certain phases of magic. He is an authority on occultism. For years he investigated various methods of trying to break the bank at Monte Carlo. Working on a special theory of his own, he successfully gambled in Havana, Cuba, so that the establishment had to shut down to cover its losses. However, when they opened up again, they had made some change in the roulette wheel so that Rohmer's mathematical formula no longer worked, and Rohmer ruefully admitted he lost all the money he had previously gained. He still believes, however, that enough brains and patience can beat the house—assuming that it's honest.

# Readers' Comment*

## Ambassador of Good Will

You might advertise BLUE BOOK as a text-book on racial equality. Through your varied stories and articles, portraying the best characters of all skin colors, we find an entertaining, though subtle means for making us acquainted with others.

For example: the colored cop, who won his spurs, with our applause, in your March issue. The Eskimo heroes who led the reindeer herd from Alaska to Canada. Countless other tales in past issues of Indians, Chinese, other races, have given us glimpses that underneath our skin all of us are kin.

Through fiction and fact we learn to know them well. I recommend BLUE BOOK as an ambassador of good will to everyone. —HAROLD BENSON

## Interesting History

THANK you for publishing a magazine that's not afraid to use stories like "How Good Is the Red Army?" giving the propagandized version by the Reds of how good they were on the front lines. Too, I'm glad to see that you consider historically accurate stories like "Our Forgotten War with Japan" and "Weather Mission" important and interesting enough to include in your excellent magazine. Not only are they the type of stories that appeal to the adult, but they represent to the younger people a painless and pleasant opportunity to learn more about the details of otherwise boresome history.

If writers would realize the importance that past events played in the shaping of the present, they would write more about them. It is commonly supposed that the average reader is interested only in love and adventure stories. This isn't true. Given a well-written, interesting historical story, a reader will devour it hungrily from first to last, and then make it a point to learn more about the facts presented. May your magazine continue to accommodate the intellectual reader and never fail to show history as a real, living, action-packed companion to all ages. —SUDIE FRINK

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

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*Painted by Benton Clark.*

*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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# A Date at Shepheard's

A FASCINATING DRAMA BY THE DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR
OF "DR. FU MANCHU" AND "THE BAT FLIES LOW."

## by Sax Rohmer

THE streets of Cairo looked dirty and shadow-haunted, vaguely sinister, as Cartaret walked back from the garage where he had parked his Buick. Dusk had fallen, and he thought, as he came to the steps of Shepheard's Hotel, that once the terrace would have been crowded at this hour. Now it was almost deserted. He had heard no sunset gun boom out from the Citadel, and he wondered if the custom had been abandoned.

He walked through to the reception desk to ask for messages.

The hotel register lay open, and he saw that only one name had been added below his own: *"Mrs. Parradine—Alexandria."*

A woman was writing a radiogram, and a boy stood behind her guarding some baggage. Presumably the lady was Mrs. Parradine. She wore a smart tailored suit, a beret crushed down on well-groomed gray hair. She had not removed her sun-glasses. Something in the profile struck Cartaret as familiar; but he was sure he had never met Mrs. Parradine.

There were no messages, and Cartaret walked into the bar.

As a once familiar figure in Shepheard's, old Abdûl, the bartender, greeted him.

"It is good to see you in Cairo again, *bimbâshi.*"

Abdûl was mistaken in addressing him as *bimbâshi,* a rank he had never held, but Cartaret didn't trouble to correct him. Abdûl was nearly as old as the sphinx, and even his fabulous memory couldn't last forever.

"Six years since I was here last, Abdûl."

Abdûl set a tall glass before him.

"You have not changed, sir. But"—he shook his red-capped head—"Cairo has changed."

"It seems unfriendly in some way."

"It is all different, *bimbâshi.* Everything is different. All Egypt is different. We have gone back to the days when I was a boy, the days of the harem and the eunuchs."

CARTARET made a rapid mental calculation, but was unable to decide whether those were the days of the Turks or of the Pharaohs.

"You mean business is slack?"

"Not at all. It is just different. Some of those we used to call the pasha class have much power now.

*Illustrated by* L. R. GUSTAVSON

***"For visitors who like adventure," Abdûl whispered, "this is the time to come to Egypt."***

***"In another minute I should have been loose! Cut the cord from my ankles. It is hurting."***

They do things they would not have dared to do. Who is to stop them?"

"I don't know. What sort of things?"

Abdûl glanced suspiciously around the nearly empty bar and then bent forward across the counter.

"For visitors who like adventure," he whispered, "this is the time to come to Egypt. Let me tell you something that happened not long ago. You remember the young Syrian that Aswami Pasha used to bring in?"

Cartaret recalled her quite well, for Military Intelligence had posted him to Cairo during the latter part of the war. Aswami, a handsome fellow of Turco-Egyptian vintage, had a nice taste in girl friends. The Syrian Abdûl referred to was a beauty in her sullen, Oriental fashion, and at that time probably no more than fifteen or sixteen years old. He had once heard Aswami call her Sirena, but never knew her other name.

She had passed by his table one night, as she and Aswami went out together. Unseen by her escort, Sirena had favored Cartaret with the age-old smile of Eastern women. Her darkly fringed eyes were of a strange amber color, speckled with green like the eyes of a tigress. . . .

He nodded. "I remember her."

Abdûl's voice dropped still lower. As Cartaret had greeted him in Arabic, he continued in that language:

"Aswami surprised her with another man! In the garden of the villa."

Picturesque, and obscene, details followed in true Arab style. But, as Abdûl whispered on, Cartaret drew back, horrified.

"They were dragged into the villa, *bimbâshi,* and they—"

"Stop, Abdûl! Such a thing is impossible—today! There are still police in Cairo."

Abdûl extended brown palms which spoke a universal language.

"Have I not said, *bimbâshi,* that it is all different? What I tell you is true. I have a grandson who works in the garden."

Cartaret passed his tumbler to be refilled. As ice tinkled in the glass:

"Who was the man?" he asked.

Abdûl, back turned, shrugged heavy shoulders.

"I don't know. I only know that he has disappeared. The Syrian girl is still at the villa."

Cartaret suspected that Abdûl knew the man's name perfectly well. He knew, too, that when an Arab says "I don't know" it is sheer waste of breath to ask any more questions.

When Cartaret went in to dinner the dining-room seemed fairly full. But there was no one there he knew. Although he took a good look around, he failed to see Mrs. Parradine. He gave his mind over to memories—particularly to those associated with Aswami Pasha.

Aswami's luxurious villa at Bûlak contained many treasures, he had been told, feminine and otherwise, the latter including a collection of rubies made by Aswami's father and said to be the second finest in the world. Cartaret tried to recall the men he had known who had found Sirena attractive, and succeeded in compiling quite a list. Although unable to credit Abdûl's statement, entirely, he made up his mind to try again to learn the name of the man concerned. If the facts were as stated, he would be horribly disfigured for life.

The story had left a bad taste in his mouth, which a bottle of perfectly sound Bordeaux failed to remove. He went out into the lounge, with its fretwork pillars and arabesques. It reminded him of a harem, and he began to glance suspiciously at his neighbors, wondering if those who looked like wealthy Egyptians favored the medieval custom of Aswami Pasha.

He ordered brandy with his coffee.

Then, he saw Mrs. Parradine.

She was seated alone, in an alcove. She had changed into a simple dinner frock but still wore the tinted glasses. Cartaret supposed that she suffered from eye-strain. He began to study her. What was it about Mrs. Parradine which seemed so familiar?

This vague memory irritated Cartaret. He got into that frame of mind everybody has known, when a name goes darting around the brain like a mad hare that can't be captured. He was watching her, as she sipped coffee, when a boy went across to her table and handed her a message.

She read it, and seemed to Cartaret to become suddenly restless. Once, he had an impression that she was considering him in a furtive way. And then, just as suddenly, she became passive again, bending over the table to pour more coffee.

An elderly Egyptian had entered. Fat and hairless, he provided the missing link in Cartaret's uneasy

imaginings of those days "of the harem and the eunuchs" mentioned by Abdûl. Obviously, the Egyptian was looking for someone. His prominent eyes swept the lounge in a questing stare. But he was apparently disappointed. He turned slowly and went out again.

Cartaret saw Mrs. Parradine's glance following the obese figure.

Then, she looked swiftly but unmistakably in his own direction. On a slip of paper taken from a large satchel purse which swung from her shoulder she scribbled something. She slipped the note under an ashtray, stood up and crossed to the elevator.

Cartaret continued to watch her. She was very graceful, well poised. As the boy opened the gate, she turned for a moment, stared directly at Cartaret, then back to the table she had just left, then at Cartaret again.

The elevator went up.

He took a quick look about the lounge. No one had seen what had happened, for Mrs. Parradine had been screened by the alcove. He stood up, yawned—and changed his place.

The note under the ashtray said:

*"Room 36B at 10:30. I must see you. Don't disappoint me."*

CARTARET walked into the bar.

It had filled up with men who looked like officials of some sort but none of whom he knew; a totally different set from that to which he had been accustomed. He got himself a double Scotch and carried it to a seat in a corner where he could be alone.

What was he to make of this note?

That it was meant for a love tryst he dismissed as an idea too ridiculous to be considered. Without the glasses, Mrs. Parradine might be a pretty woman. She had an exceptionally good figure. But gray hair and assignations with strangers didn't mix.

What, then, did it mean?

She *must* see him! What on earth about? And why couldn't she have spoken to him in the lounge, instead of inviting him to her room?

The whole thing was utterly incomprehensible. Cartaret decided that it must be linked with that elusive memory. Perhaps after all, they had met at some time. Why the devil didn't she take off those tinted glasses?

Restlessly, he wandered out onto the terrace. A cool breeze had sprung up, but the sky was cloudless, the night lighted by a perfect crescent moon.

At the foot of the steps the head doorman was talking to a portly Egyptian.

Cartaret stared.

It was the man who had come into the lounge seeking someone....

Cartaret went back to the bar and ordered another double Scotch.

This business called for careful thought. He would have liked to ask Abdûl if he knew anything about Mrs. Parradine, but Abdûl was too busy for conversation and he didn't care to make such an inquiry at the desk.

Was he right in supposing that the entrance of the fat Egyptian had alarmed Mrs. Parradine? Cartaret believed he was. He finished his drink and went out to talk to the doorman, whom he knew slightly. The doorman had gone off duty; another had taken his place.

And the fat Egyptian had disappeared.

Cartaret wandered back into the lounge. It was beginning to empty, and he sat down and lighted a cigarette. He had dined late, and ten-thirty was not far off. Even now, he remained undecided. Some queerly underhand game was afoot. Of this he had become certain. Where did *he* fit into the pattern?

He was far from a wealthy man, no bait for blackmailers. And he had never aspired to the cloak of Don Juan.

What should he do?

A clandestine visit to a woman's room might compromise both of them. And what was its object?

Cartaret, at this crucial hour, might have failed to keep his mysterious date, except that curiosity, perhaps, is the last instinct humanity loses. At twenty-seven minutes after ten he crossed to the elevator and stepped out on the third floor.

Not until that moment did he recognize the fact that his own room also was on the third.

HIS watch told him that he had two minutes in hand when he walked along the corridor to No. 36B. Astonishment on receiving Mrs. Parradine's note might have been responsible for his absent-mindedness. But No. 36B proved to be next to No. 34B—and 34B was Cartaret's room.

He paused, staring at the closed door.

Had she deliberately chosen this room because his own adjoined it? Was he being drawn blindly into some web of intrigue?

Again, he hesitated. No amorous urge drove him. There was nothing to excuse his walking into a trap.

But on the stroke of ten-thirty, he rapped on Mrs. Parradine's door.

There was no reply.

He rapped again, louder, then rapped a third time.

Silence....

Man is a complex animal. Cartaret's hesitancy, doubts, fears, all were swept away now on a wave of angry disappointment. He had built up a mystery, the solution of which lay behind the door of No. 36B. And the door of 36B remained closed.

He looked at his watch again. Perhaps it was fast. There was no one about, and so he walked up and down the corridor, half expecting Mrs. Parradine to appear from somewhere.

But she didn't.

Cartaret opened the door of his own room and went in, snapping the light up.

Shutters at the French windows were closed, but Cartaret went across and irritably threw them open. He stood there, one foot on the balcony, looking down at the moon-bathed gardens. The trunk of a tall palm near the window split the picture like an ink stain on a watercolor. A frog was croaking in a pond below. From some place not far away came faint strains of a reed pipe.

WHAT should he do? Mrs. Parradine's sense of humor must be peculiar if this was her idea of a practical joke. But there was that curious incident of the fat Egyptian.

He remembered something, for he knew Shepheard's well. These rooms formed part of a large suite. His balcony continued right past the window of No. 36B.

Stubbing out a cigarette which he had lighted, Cartaret stepped onto the balcony and glanced to the right and to the left.

Light streamed from the window of No. 36B. Mrs. Parradine's shutters were open.

He walked quietly along and looked into the room.

It was in wild disorder—and a woman lay gagged and tied to the bed!

The shock was so great that Cartaret stood stock-still for perhaps ten seconds, one hand on the partly opened windows. His ideas were thrown into chaotic confusion, not only by this scene of brutal violence but also by something else.

The woman on the bed was not Mrs. Parradine!

This woman had raven black hair. The eyes glaring across at him were amber eyes flecked with green. As Cartaret ran to release her, he nearly stepped on tinted sun-glasses which lay on the floor.

Like a sudden revelation, the truth burst upon his mind.

Mrs. Parradine had been a disguised Sirena . . . for this was Sirena!

He unfastened a silk scarf tied tightly over her mouth.

"I had one hand nearly free," she whispered, hoarsely. "Scissors—on the dresser."

Cartaret ran across, found the scissors and ran back. As he began to cut the cord with which she was trussed up, Sirena wrenched her right hand clear of the fastenings.

***Obviously, the Egyptian was looking for someone. His prominent eyes swept the lounge in a questing stare.***

"Look! In another minute I should have been loose! Cut the cord from my ankles. It is hurting me."

When at last she sat up, stiffly, Sirena pointed.

"Fasten the shutters. The door is locked."

She dropped back weakly on the pillows, watching Cartaret bolt the shutters. He turned to her.

"As the door is locked, how—"

"They climbed to the balcony." Sirena spoke wearily. "They went that way too. Where are you going?" She sat up.

"To call the manager."

Sirena smiled. "Please sit down. I know you don't understand, and so just listen. Please."

"Let me get you some brandy."

"Not yet. I am all right. You can help me. You must help me. But you can only do it in my way. I escaped this evening from Aswami's villa."

*"Escaped?"*

"Yes, escaped!" Her eyes flashed. "It had been planned a long time. I had the gray wig made and hid it. I came to Shepheard's because I thought they would never look here. I hoped my friends would come for me. But I had word tonight that I must find some way of joining them."

"Was that the message you received in the lounge?"

Sirena nodded.

"I had seen your name in the book, I remembered you, and I thought I might need someone to help me. I managed to get a room near yours. You see, I dare not give myself away down there. That's why I asked you to come here."

Cartaret watched her. Six years had dealt lightly with Sirena. She was still beautiful, but had suffered. She told her strange story with the simplicity of a child.

"You really mean you have been a prisoner?"

"Yes. Ever since a terrible thing happened. But I knew I could trust you, for you were Rod's friend—"

"Rod? Do you mean Rod Fennick?"

"Yes."

"Then he was the man—"

"Yes. Rod was the man. Who told you?"

Rod Fennick had been a squadron-leader in the Royal Air Force. He wasn't a regular officer. He had joined up early and made great head-way. Cartaret rather thought that in civil life he had been a sort of charm-

ing parasite; one of those ornamental but useless young men who used to haunt the Ritz bars in London and in Paris and who sometimes turned up at Cannes. But he was good company, a brilliant and fearless fighter pilot. If Rod was a black sheep, it was plain that he had been thrown out of a sound flock....

"Abdûl told me," Cartaret said. "He mentioned no name, but I thought it might be Rod. Is it all true—all he told me?"

Sirena gave Cartaret an almost scornful glance. Unfastening the top of her dinner frock, she turned her back to him and let it drop to her waist.

"Look."

Cartaret looked. Sirena's shoulders and the creamy skin as far down as it was visible were wealed with lash marks, old and new!

"Good God! The dirty blackguard!"

Composedly, Sirena re-fastened her dress and turned to him.

"Didn't Abdûl tell you?"

Cartaret nodded grimly.

"Yes, Abdûl told me."

"And about Rod?"

"Yes. Is that—true?"

Again the tigress eyes flashed, dangerously.

"It is true. You remember"—she swallowed—"how handsome he was? Now—" She paused for control.... "He has been to a famous French specialist—and there is hope. But it will take a long time, and cost a lot of money."

"It's almost incredible! Surely the authorities—"

Sirena's smile was openly scornful now.

"I told you you didn't understand. Everything here is different."

Almost an echo of Abdûl's words!

"What happened tonight?"

"You saw Selim come in?"

"Selim? The fat Egyptian? Yes. Who is he?"

Sirena's full lips curled contemptuously.

"He is in charge of some of Aswami's treasures! I was afraid, although I didn't think he had recognized me. I was wrong. As I came out of the bathroom, a man who had climbed from the garden to the balcony and hidden in here, sprang on me from behind. They think I am safe until all the lights are out. Then, they are coming back for me."

Cartaret was thinking that this fantastic affair belonged to the days of the Caliphs, not to the prosaic Twentieth Century. But all he said was:

"They'll have a surprise."

Impulsively Sirena threw her arms about him.

"You must get me away! You have a car. It was this I wanted you to do. But now—it is even more urgent. I *must* be out of here before midnight."

As Cartaret drove his Buick from the garage he was wondering to which particular variety of fool he belonged. The rôle of knight-errant he had never fancied. In this particular case, the captive princess was far from a paragon of injured innocence, and her Prince Charming ranked pretty low.

But the atrocious behavior of Aswami Pasha had fired his blood. Rod Fennick might be no model of an English gentleman, but he was, or had been, a gallant officer, and there are more civilized methods of dealing with fickle girl friends and their admirers than those once practiced by the sultans of Turkey....

"Mrs. Parradine," gray-haired, bespectacled, and wrapped in a mink coat, joined Cartaret as arranged at the corner of Sharia El-Maghrabi, below the Continental. With one swift backward glance, she jumped in beside him. The night air was chilly, as it often becomes in Cairo.

She carried no baggage other than her large satchel purse. She nestled up to Cartaret.

"I don't think I was followed. But drive quickly. I will tell you the way to go."

Cairo's streets were curiously deserted, except in one district through which their route lay, where discordant music and harsh female voices disturbed the night. They left the city by an unfamiliar gate and drove right out onto the fringe of the desert. Cartaret tried to imagine where they could be going.

He slowed down and glanced aside at his passenger.

She had discarded the gray wig and was combing her hair. Its blue-black waves gleamed in the moonlight.

"Which way?"

"Follow this road."

"Road? It's hardly even a track!"

"It is an old caravan road. But you will have to drive slowly."

In this, at least, Cartaret agreed with her. The path was more like a dry ditch than anything else, beaten out by generations of camels stepping in one another's footprints.

Cartaret had groped his way along several miles of this when Sirena directed him to turn east. He could see nothing vaguely resembling a surface, but all the same, as he obeyed, he found himself driving on a sandy but practicable road again.

He recalled, at this moment, that such a road had been made in those dark days when Rommel's Afrika Korps lay like hungry jackals watching the flesh-pots of Egypt. It led to an emergency landing-strip long since abandoned.

Evidently, this was it.

Cartaret saw a few tumbledown buildings, desolate under the moon. Sirena had the key of one, at some time used as an office. She opened the door and they went in. Some papers were littered on a desk before which was placed an old cane-bottomed chair. An almanac and a map were pinned to the wall.

The night was diamond-clear. Sirena had left the door open, and silver light poured right in, touching a dilapidated divan upon which she had thrown her mink coat and the leather satchel purse.

She sat there with the moon mirrored in her amber eyes and smiled at Cartaret.

"Safe at last," she said. "Free! We have some time to wait."

She opened a little cigarette case and offered him a cigarette.

He crossed, lighted one for her. She looked into his eyes all the time. Then he lighted his own. He went back and sat down in the broken cane chair.

There was a silent interval, until:

"I'm sorry you won't make love to me," Sirena said softly. "It would make it so much easier."

"Make what easier?"

"To tell you the truth."

"Then all you told me was a lie?"

Sirena shook her head.

"Not all of it. You know, I didn't lie about how I was treated. You have seen. And it's true what Abdûl told you about Rod, and what I told you, too. I slipped away from Aswami's house while he was taking a siesta, and when Selim came into Shepheard's tonight, I knew he was looking for me."

"Then I'm afraid I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that Selim didn't recognize me. But I knew, when I saw him, that I must get away at once."

"If he didn't recognize you—" Cartaret began.

"Then who tied me up, you mean? Well, that's what I think it only right to tell you. I tied myself—with some cord I got from the porters' office! You were so quick that you didn't notice my right hand was really free already."

Cartaret watched her in a new way. Either he had formed an entirely wrong impression of Sirena's character, before, or she had changed. There was something ingenuous about this confession. She wanted to play fair. And there was an undercurrent of sadness.

"Whatever did you do it for?"

"I wanted to make you excited! I thought—because, you see, I know the

Service mind!—that if I didn't, you would try to call up consuls and police; and that would have spoiled everything. I had seen Selim looking for me. I knew he would have been to the police already—"

"Aswami has no legal claim. He can't detain you."

Sirena sighed like a tired child.

"Truly, you don't understand. Please believe it was the best way—and forgive me."

"I don't believe it was the best way, but say no more about it. What would have happened if I hadn't walked along to your window?"

"I should have half untied myself and called out to you. You see"—a new expression came into the amber eyes—"you are still thinking about me as I used to be, before I knew Rod. I love him. I have never loved anyone else, and I never shall, even if—he stays as he is."

Sirena dropped her cigarette on the floor and crushed it out under her foot.

"Suppose I hadn't been staying at Shepheard's? What should you have done?"

Sirena shook her head.

"I don't know. Thank God, you were. I wouldn't have dared to hire a car. Selim will have called up every garage."

"I always thought Rod had gone back home long ago."

"No." Sirena shook her head sadly. "Rod and a partner bought an old transport plane. They carry goods, and sometimes passengers, between Egypt and Persia."

*"Look!" Sirena's creamy skin was wealed with lash-marks, old and new!*

CARTARET checked a question just before it could be spoken. He was listening intently, listening to the drone of an approaching engine.

Sirena stood up and threw the mink coat over her shoulders; she picked up her satchel purse.

"I must go," she said. "Do one more thing for me: Stay here until we have left. Just close the door. No one ever comes to this place."

Cartaret nodded.

"As you say."

Sirena moved close to him. She slipped her arm around his neck.

"I am glad, now, you didn't try to make love to me. For what you have done I thank you with all my heart."

She kissed him. It was a kiss of pure affection. . . .

When she went out and closed the door, Cartaret found that through a cracked window he had a partial view of the landing-ground. He saw a plane touch down and a mechanic scramble out. Sirena was helped on board, and the plane was away again in record time. . . .

Cartaret stood there for several minutes, thinking it all over. The shouted instructions of the pilot had been clearly audible—and the voice was the voice of Rod Fennick. . . .

He was awakened early in the following morning by a disturbance in the next room. Then followed a banging on his door.

An English assistant manager came in. He was accompanied by an Egyptian police officer in a field marshal's uniform.

"Sorry to bother you, Captain Cartaret," the manager said. "But this officer wants to know if you heard anything unusual taking place last night."

Cartaret collected his thoughts.

"At what time?" he asked.

"At about half-past eleven."

"I was out then. I didn't return until after one. Why?"

"A certain Mrs. Parradine had the next room. She was seen to go out at about eleven-thirty, and she hasn't come back. Her baggage contains the suit in which she arrived, toilet articles, and so on, and a lot of tissue paper and cord. The whole room is in a state of disorder."

"What do you suspect? Suicide?"

The manager glanced aside at the police officer.

"We don't know. I apologize again. Obviously, you can't help us, as you weren't here."

They went out.

Cartaret had just come from the bath when the manager returned, alone.

"I couldn't tell you while that damned policeman was standing by," he explained. "But this disappearance of the mysterious Mrs. Parradine is probably linked up with something that happened out at Bûlak last night."

"What happened there?"

"One of Aswami's girl friends drugged him and got clear away with a haul of his priceless rubies! I wasn't on duty when Mrs. Parradine arrived—but I wonder. Aswami's a nasty bit of work, and my own sympathy is entirely with the lady, even if she left without settling her account! Knew you'd be curious, so dropped in to tell you."

For a long time after he had gone, Cartaret sat smoking and trying to find out where *his* sympathy lay. He recalled the horror which Âbdûl had whispered. He recalled Sirena's eyes when she had said, "You remember how handsome he was? . . . He has seen a famous French specialist. There is hope, but it will take a long time and cost a lot of money—"

These recollections settled the point.

But he changed his plans. He decided to leave Cairo that morning.

# Write

**Tough people may be soft-hearted sometimes; but they deal with crooks according to their own standards.**

"CHICAGO, Chicago, you wonderful town." That's just the way so many of her sons, real and adopted, feel about the Lady of the Lake. Chi is a rough, robust mother, but a tender one too; and she raises some very interesting children. Maybe it's the air. You get off the rattler at the Union Station, and take a deep breath. "Why, anything, anything could happen to me here," you say; and you're dead right: anything can. Walk along Michigan Avenue, almost any night, say from the Art Museum to the I.C. Station. Maybe a dozen men will ask for a bowl of soup, or the price of a bed, and maybe a girl or two will ask, though for the most part they seem to work the Loop. Give it to them too, if you can. They're not all bums. They're not all tramps. Many a one lands in Chi with less than the price of a Halsted Street flop, and goes on to fame and fortune. Of course, not a few wind up on West Madison, the real Skid Row, the street of the desolate, the abandoned and forgotten. You don't have to go to Port Saïd, or Marseilles, or even East St. Louis.... Chicago has everything.

Now, this is about a man—and a woman who in some ways was like the city she adored. Her story isn't all here, because for one thing, it is still far from over. Also, it is not all known to anyone, for she is an unconscionable liar, and perhaps she herself cannot tell you, for liars at last convince themselves. Call her Martha Townsend. She had many secrets, but this is the worst of all: for several years she has been thirty-nine years old.

Now, can you very well keep such a thing quiet, when there are people to say: "Why, that Marth! I saw her dancing at the Boston Oyster House, underneath the Morrison Hotel. At the College Inn, just up the street. At Colosimo's, on the other side of town,

*"So.... So you're in a jam.... What is it, a woman?"*

# *Your Own Ticket*

## *by* EDWARD L. McKENNA

long after Big Jim was shot—yeah, but that wasn't yesterday, either." Marth always worked around Chicago when she could. It was fun, and it was far away from home.

Where was her home? A little town in Colorado—Sellinac, she said. Maybe it was; maybe it wasn't. A million small people love to gossip about big ones, or to write stories about them.

This Marth was a big person, in lots of ways. Even physically, she was pretty big: she was five feet eight, a hundred and thirty-two, slim, round-breasted, and with long, lovely legs.

She had fine eyes and a contralto voice that was good for an octave when she sang, and for the whole scale, when she was talking—and that's not bad, for anybody, unless you want to be Dorothy Kirsten.

Secrets? Well, she had a lot of secrets; and at her age, who hasn't? For one thing, she had a daughter growing up. She didn't tell that to everybody, and even to those she trusted, she gave several different versions. One was that the girl was with her wealthy father. One was that she was with Marth's own people.... She wasn't: the kid was with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. And the convent wasn't anywhere near Chicago, either. ... Who was paying for this? Why, Marth!... Marth was paying for it, by doing one, two, three and a kick, a break, a time-step, and a shuffle off to Buffalo. Doing it in Chi, in Milwaukee, in Peoria, in Moline, in Tulsa, and Oklahoma City, and St. Louis and K.C.

A HEROINE is supposed to be pure as the driven snow; so all right, then. To a man, purity means absolute, steadfast, unswerving devotion to an idea—and the complete forgetfulness of self. These things she had. She had the reputation of being hard to get, and many a night-club rake said no, she couldn't be made. A good fellow, a good sport, a regular gal, they said. Didn't go for the sauce much, might take a drink to be sociable. Carrying a torch for somebody, most likely, they said.... It's surprising how effective this explanation is, even with the habitués of cafés, night-clubs, drums and dives. About all a woman entertainer has to say is: "Look, Bud. I got a boy-friend, see? This time it's for keeps." Lots of times, that's all that's necessary, if the kid keeps her head, and doesn't drink too much.

Marth wasn't a Catholic girl. She wasn't much of anything, she said. She was close; she was miserly with her money. She ate little, when she was paying for it. "Keep my figure, keep my figure," she would say—and maybe she didn't! She would do without food; she would skimp and save on everything but clothes, because passable clothes are equipment in her business, even if you're hungry.

She played the numbers; she played the races and the dogs. She said many a prayer, the gambler's prayer: "Give me a break. Please, please give me a break, just this one time!" Then, you see, where a girl not working in a café might get candy and flowers, Marth might get a dollar or two, or five or ten. For what? For her company, and for no other favors.

What was the girl really like? Well, for one thing, she was a romantic, as liars often are. Her idea of a splendid time was to sit with her feet in lukewarm water tempered by Epsom salts, while she read or reread Robert Service's "Ballads of the Yukon" or Laurence Hope's "Indian Love Lyrics" or "Enough Rope" by Dorothy Parker. As for Omar Khayyám, he wrote that book for people like her. The girls she worked with thought she was deep, a great reader. Probably she thought so too. She loved what she thought was poetry, as a blind man loves the sea; and she had her dancer's sense of rhythm, which helped her to remember. And then she had this fine frog-in-the-throat contralto.

"Say a piece, Marth. Say a piece."

"Ah, Love, could you and I with *Him* conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then,
Remold it to our heart's desire?"

Or, " 'Less than the dust beneath thy chariot wheels,
Less than the rust that never stained thy sword.' "

Or, " 'If you can keep your head when all about you—' " Well, what do you want, in a night-club, Einstein? Verlaine wrote for chorus-girls too.

Martha's bank-book, however, was her favorite literature. Once her money was in the bank, there it stayed. She'd give her last fifty cents to the insurance man, every Thursday, or send it to him, if she were on the road. When she was twenty-seven, she made her will. She left every cent to her daughter Genevieve, at school with the Sacred Heart nuns. A couple of very tough eggs, big Larry McGloyne and his mouthpiece, Tom O'Hara, witnessed that will; and doubtless O'Hara still has a copy of it, for he is a most reliable man, to a client.

THIS done, it was only a question of, "Every little breeze that's sighing means love undying at sundown," or "You must realize, smoke gets in your eyes," or "I don't know how I ever spent the lonely hours—" She had many a lonely hour, and many an hour, too, when she wished for loneliness. People like her don't die. That's too easy.

So, she got her break—got it by praying for it, playing for it, keeping on praying, working, gambling, keeping on. Then, maybe another long shot romped home, or a number clicked, or somebody who had just made a nice score with the dice broke down and gave her a few chips. Marth had a good reputation with some bad people. It was generally understood that Big Larry McGloyne was Marth's dog in the manger, and that he didn't like the idea of people trying to move in, even though he never got farther than the doghouse himself. Larry was considered by some otherwise very careless people to be worth a certain amount of thought.

Marth used to see her daughter two or three times a year, and then only if she were looking good and in the money; otherwise she'd just send her something for Christmas or her birthday. She told her daughter she had a dress-shop at Fort Wayne, and a post-box there, for Genevieve's letters. So at last the time did come, and she went to get her daughter. She looked as if she came from a dress-shop. There was no chorus-girl, no line-dancer, or café-performer about Marth, once she donned her war-paint. She had a shape like the little sister of the Winged Victory. Everything about her was straight lines, except where Nature intended otherwise. From the back, she was her daughter's image, and from the front, only a little more so; and she was anyway thirty-seven, every day of it, though you'd lay six, two, and even against it, if you didn't happen to know.

"Genevieve," she said. "Jen—Jen, I've sold my shop. Honey—we're going to live in New York."

"You and I, Mother? You and I?"

"Come on, come on! Look at me, crying like a fool. . . . Stop it. Snap out of it. . . . First we're going to get you some clothes. Then we're going to New York. . . . Why, you—you're better-looking than I was, when I was your age."

"I'm not. I'm not. You, you're the most beautiful—"

"Stop that. Ruin your complexion. . . . Excuse us, Sister. We're a little upset."

"Of course. We thought for a while we might keep Genevieve. We thought perhaps she had a vocation."

"I— Jen, do you—do you want to stay here?"

"Oh, no, Mother, no. I want to be with you. I can't believe it."

They left with benedictions, and about a carton of mementos. In the taxi, Marth lighted a cigarette.

"Could I—could I have one?" said Genevieve.

"I thought you were going to be a nun. Was I scared!"

"Oh, no, Mother. I'm not good enough."

"I guess you are," said Marth. . . . Genevieve was lovely too, not like Martha, nor the Winged Victory, but with the charm and innocence of your sleeping child. "Ah," said Martha, to herself, "I'll get her little red-and-white peppermint-stick dresses, and plain colors. I'll get her evening dresses, tulle or organdy, *bouffant*, with wide long skirts. She'll be a knockout. No perfume, or something very light. My daughter! My daughter!"

She turned to Genevieve. "Do you drink?" she said.

***"Jen—Jen, I've sold my shop. Honey—we're going to live in New York."***

"No, Mother."

"If I catch you taking a drink before you are married, I'll skin you alive. I'm not asking you to promise. I'm telling you."

"You can't keep me from promising. I promise."

"Promises are no good. I never ask anybody to promise anything. . . . You kept up the piano?"

"Yes—I'm not really good."

"Go on! They'll take one look at you playing, and think you're Chaminade. . . . You can dance, of course?"

"Oh, yes; I love to dance."

"So did I. . . . Listen, Jen: I got fourteen thousand dollars. I got seven hundred more right here, in my k—in my bag. I had fifteen grand, I mean, fifteen thousand. I gave the Sisters a couple of yards. What's the use? They're going to say prayers for us, and all. We could use them."

"Oh, Mother, I'm so glad you did. They were so good, so kind to me."

"Well, you can't be a piker all your life. I mean, a short sport. . . . I mean, you know—cheap. Well, anyhow, I'll give you twenty-five a week, and buy your clothes."

"I can't—I don't need all that, Mother."

Martha laughed. "You can't, huh? You'd be surprised." It had been a long time since Martha had any twenty-five a week just to spend. Perhaps she never had had it. But this was different. This was her daughter.

AND, strangely enough, her daughter was a lady. She was pretty; she was charming; she was simple; she was kind, and she was as good as gold. She regarded her mother as a somewhat noisy Sphinx, or maybe as one of the more attractive Cumæan Sibyls. She wouldn't go to the corner without consulting Martha.

Illustrated by JOHN McDERMOTT

*It was understood that Big Larry was Marth's dog in the manger, and that he didn't like other people trying to move in.*

"That girl's too good. She's just too good," said Marth. She had sinister designs concerning Genevieve. She wanted to make a good home for her, and to help her get a better one. Who appreciates a home more than an actor, a dancer? Who appreciates a permanent place, a solid, substantial marriage, more than a woman who has spent three-quarters of her life eating at lunch-counters, staying at sleazy hotels? Marth could have stayed at better places; she'd had her chances. . . . She thought their West End Avenue apartment was a palace, and she kept it immaculate. Jen loved it too, and they learned to cook, and to keep house, together; and it was a fine new game to them. The men who came to beau Genevieve around, and there were soon plenty of them, thought it was all fine, and so it was. Marth could be as blunt as a ten-cent-store knife to them, or to her daughter, and regally hospitable to those of whom she approved. She should have had an accurate and discerning calculus of men, of their characters and their ways.

Jen got the very best of them. His name was Arthur Trent. He was well-to-do, and still he worked; he was a lawyer. He drank little, and he was a fast man reaching for a check, or finding something for a beggar. Good family, good college, good physique, thirty-four years old, no previous marriages, no appearances in divorce-courts except as an attorney. Marth doubtless looked at him with the veiled eyes of the leopardess in the Central Park Zoo when she sees some large, husky party gazing at her. He treated Genevieve as if she were some small, breakable doll; and Marth as if she were a Justice of the Circuit Court. She knew he knew better, and smiled to herself. "That boy is no dummy," she said. "I'm not putting over a thing, on him—and I don't want to, either. Let him see how sweet my daughter is, how fine."

He called, one afternoon, about four o'clock.

"Jen's out, Arthur," said Marth.

"I know she is. . . . Mrs. Townsend, Jen is going to marry me."

"Oh. Oh, for that, I'll buy us a drink."

"I'll make it. . . . Mrs. Townsend, Jen and I are going away for a couple of weeks. Then—then we want you to make your home with us."

"I—I couldn't do that, boy, I guess. I don't believe in that. You see, Arthur, I'm a good fellow, and you're a good fellow, but we went to different schools together, like they say. I wouldn't want to cramp Jen's style, or yours, either. . . . You see, Jen's young, and she can learn. Arthur—

I'm not ashamed of so many things I've done, but I'm ashamed of some places where I've been."

"I don't see why."

"Never mind. . . . You do see—God bless you for your good heart. My girl is lucky. I'm so glad it's you. . . . No. I'll stay here for a while. Then I'll go West again, maybe Chi, maybe Moline, maybe the coast, open up another little dress-shop."

"If that's what you want, we'll talk it over, later. . . . Maybe you'd let me—maybe you'd let us help you. Any time—any time. Not that you need it. . . . Get us another drink, huh? You know, Mrs. Townsend, Jen would never have a drink with me. She said she promised you."

"Arthur—you may think this is funny, coming from me. I don't think any woman should have a drink of hard liquor until she is thirty. It ruins a woman's looks."

"If taking a drink makes you keep looking like this—"

"Ah, now, stop. Don't kid an old lady. Make me another highball then, Arthur—just this once. Arthur, you couldn't make me any happier if you gave me a million dollars."

"That's about what you're giving me," he said. "You couldn't give me any more."

That's what he thought.

He and Genevieve were married, and seemed quite happy. They used to see Marth regularly, and take her to lunch or dinner. On her own birthday, Genevieve gave her mother a mink coat; she never knew when her birthday was, and perhaps Marth didn't, either. Arthur wanted to buy Marth a car. "I'll settle for a case of Scotch," she said. Actually, she ate little, and drank still less. She liked a drink in the late afternoon. She still had a few thousand dollars left. After that was gone, she didn't quite know what she might do. . . .

One day, about eleven in the morning, her telephone rang. "Yes? Mrs. Townsend," she said.

"Arthur. May I come up?"

"Sure. . . . Something wrong?"

"Yes."

"I'll be here." *Now, if that girl of mine is making a fool of herself,* she thought. *They're always like that, when they're a few months gone. Maybe he went out, sat in a poker-game, got a little tight—or something.* Or something. . . .

Her buzzer rang. Her son-in-law stood before her, and he didn't look so good.

"Hello, Arthur. You have your breakfast? I put the coffee on, as soon as you called."

"I couldn't eat. I'd like a drink."

"Sure thing, sure thing. Sit down, my son." It was the first time she ever called him son. "How do you want this—plain? I'll have one with you. . . . Now. You want to talk, or you want another drink, first?"

"Yes. Please."

"So. . . . So, you're in a jam. . . . What is it, a woman?"

"Yes."

"It generally is. Just happen lately?"

"No. No. Good heavens, no! Before I even saw Jen. . . . Going to sue me for maintenance. Maintenance of her child."

"Is it your child? Would you know?"

"How could it be? I am married to Jen for fourteen months. This kid is two months old. What do you think I am? I've done bad things, yes, but—but—"

"Take it easy. This babe got the goods on you?"

"She's got some checks she was smart enough not to cash. And she's got some letters."

"Oh, Arthur! You're a lawyer. Is this all it is?"

"No. This woman was my client. I represented her, in her divorce."

"Oh. . . . Oh! Disbar—"

"That's it. You got it right. That's disbarment. I was running around with her, at the time. She can prove it."

"What's she want?"

"Fifty thousand. I haven't got that kind of money—and that wouldn't be the end of it."

"Didn't you tell Jen you were—you were around, before you met her? What's the matter with you? You're almost thirty-six. We got more savvy when we're fifteen than a man has when he's thirty. . . . It's no time to tell Jen, now. . . . Listen. I knew two men shot themselves. They were both yellow dogs. One of them got my name mixed up in it, and I was nothing to him. Nothing! Don't you tell Jen any of this. You hear!"

"Ah, Jen. Jen—"

"See here! If you're yellow, I'll give you a gat. I don't want my girl with a man that's yellow. But if you're not yellow, and you'll do what I tell you, maybe I can fix this. . . . I'm— Arthur, I never was in the dress business. I was a chorine, a hoofer, and—and—well, I— Look here. This is the old shake, and nothing else. Is this dame show-people? No, huh? Just a party-girl, huh. . . . Then she ain't doing this all by herself. She's got some greasy little rat who's steering her. In the shakedown racket, they're nobody. Boosters, pineapples—that's all they are. A good yegg, even a good torpedo, wouldn't even say hello to them. . . . They can be talked to. They can be seen. . . . Listen: You get out of here, right now. You go to Chi—see. I'll give you the name and address of the fellow to ask for—Tom O'Hara. You stay with him till I say, 'come back'."

"How about Jen?"

"I'll think of some lie to tell Jen. I'm good at that. . . . You got any money? I got five hundred stashed away. I always keep getaway money. . . . Clothes? You can get what you want, in Chi. Five yards ought to last you two weeks."

*I got to get him out of here,* she whispered to herself. *He's an all right fellow, but he's no good for this.*

"What's her name, Arthur?" she said. He told her, and she nodded. "Never heard of her," she said. . . .

She got him, protesting, on a plane. Then she got Long Distance, and asked for a number in Chicago. She got her number. "You, Tom? Martha Townsend. . . . Yeah, yeah, Marth. . . . O.K., thanks. Tom, I'm sending a guy out. He's my son-in-law. . . . Yeah, he's a little hot. . . . No, no rap, so far. Heat's on him a little, that's all. And Tom, I want Big Larry to call me, from outside. Here is my number. . . . Thanks, Tom."

When she got home, her telephone already was ringing. "Marth," she said. "I knew you'd call. Always could depend on you. Yeah, I want some help. Maybe the big job, uh-huh. Yeah, it's for me. . . . No, no, I'm O.K. . . . No. *Not* you, just a coupla the boys. . . . Oh. Oh, you will, will you? All right."

She knew where to go. First, she had things to do. She rummaged in her trunk, and took something out, and wiped it carefully with an oiled rag, and then put on a pair of old gloves, and went over it, stock and barrel, and dropped it into her bag. Then she smiled, and stripped off her clothes and took a shower, and dressed carefully, as indeed she always did, and made her way to a little restaurant in South Brooklyn.

She walked up to the bar. "Tony?" she said.

"Yeah," he said.

"I'm looking for the Big Fellow."

"Yeah. Wait in the back. He's catching a plane."

In came Big Larry. "Hi, Tony." "Hi, Toots. Looking good, all right. How's about giving us a great big kiss, make it the odd once, huh?"

"Sure. You betcha," said Marth, and kissed him, and he grinned. "So. What gives?"

She told him. "Your son-in-law, huh?" he said. "Thought it was you. That's why I came. What you say the bim's name is? . . . Never heard of her. Just some punk. Fifty gees, huh? She must be nuts. He got that kind of chips—your son-in-law?"

"No, Larry."

*"Your son-in-law, huh?" Big Larry said. "Thought it was you. That's why I came."*

"He better be your son-in-law," said Larry. "Excuse me, Toots. I make some telephone calls."

He came back. "Larry," said Marth, "just put the finger on this tramp, for me. I'll settle it. Look." She opened her bag.

"Leave us see that," he said. "That's a nice one, for a lady. I'll just take that—you might hurt yourself with it. . . . Whassa matter with your son-in-law, he can't fix up this stuff?"

The phone rang. Presently he came back, grinning. "Whadya know, Toots! Know who she is? Only an ordinary hustler, been on the town for years. This ain't no big job. This is strictly a small job. . . . Now, look. Suppose I do this for you. So what?"

"Write your own ticket. You practically called me a liar, just now."

"I write my own ticket?"

"Yes. You heard me."

"Then I put you in a cab, Toots. Where you staying?"

"I live by myself, Larry."

"All by yourself, huh?"

"That's right."

"Well, I might have a couple of things to do. You meet me here, maybe four, five o'clock tomorrow afternoon." . . .

At three-thirty, Martha, all tailor-made dress and lipstick and rouge and a wave and Chanel No. 5, came into Tony's. Tony said: "The Big Fellow, he says: 'Give the lady anything she wants.' "

"Thanks. I'll wait for him."

At four-fifteen in came Larry, smelling of hair tonic. "Double Scotch, Tony. Double for the lady."

"How did you make out, Larry?"

"You see me, don't you? Some letters, here. I think these are all the letters. . . . She ain't gonna bring no suit. That's what I hear."

"Larry—did—"

"Nah, nah, nah! We just persuaded her to leave for Jersey, or some place. You see, Toots, a very sad thing happened. Her boy friend, the one was telling her to sue this—this guy, he's in the hospital. He met with a bad accident. Oh, he'll be all right. But I don't think he is gonna be innarested in no suits, not for a long time."

Much pleased, he looked down at his freshly manicured hands. Marth reached across and put her own hand on his wrist. "O.K., Larry," she said. "Let's go."

"Wait a minute, Marth. You said: 'Write your own ticket.' Well, I'm tearing it up, just like you do at the track. I see you go to town for this punk, this here son-in-law of yours. So it's all right."

"I don't welsh," she said. He looked at her; her mouth was unsteady, and she was trembling.

"You still married, Marth?"

"You dope! I never was married. I called myself Mrs. Townsend. That was for my kid. I thought it was a nice name."

"What do you know! What do you know? Me, I never was married, either. I'm a Polack too, you know. McGloyne? My name is Stepniak."

"How did you know I'm a Polack?"

"They're the only ones look good when they're for— when they're your age."

"I am not forty," said Marth.

"Well, have it your own way. Make up your mind, though. Yah got to put something down on the license. So, you never got married before, huh. Well, we give it a try, huh?"

"Larry. How come you never—never mentioned this, before?"

"It just never occurred to me, Toots."

"It's going to be awful nice, to be back in Chi. It's too quiet, in this town," she said.

# Assignment to Korea

FIELD ORDER 71 was a yard-long teletype strip that sent a depleted fighter group from an air base in Japan to a target nestled in some foothills thirty miles east of Pyongyang, and gave Brian Corinth the best war story he'd ever filed for *Week-End Magazine.* That show opened what the boys later called Hell Week, when they lost more F-80s than the Big Brass allowed should be mentioned. The murk over Seoul was nine-tenths and the Weather Office in Tokyo could promise nothing better for nearly forty-eight hours.

"Sangkwong it is, then," the General said, and wished they'd fight a war where he could pronounce the names. "With concentration on that tank-repair park. Keep me posted on the weather."

Captain Bob MacLean was logging some sack-time when Bill Pritchard, the Public Relations officer, shook him up and announced: "Hey, Mac! Here's a friend of yours. Rise and shine." He turned to the war correspondent and grinned. "That's your home-town hero, chum. See you at dinner, if you two ever get talked out."

MacLean cranked to his elbows and stared into the half light of the gloomy hut. He might have been young and good-looking once, but he had seen too many long-range missions in the last two weeks.

"Hiya, Bob!" the war correspondent half-whispered, and squatted on the corner of the black metal cot. "It's Corinth – Barney Corinth. Gwyn asked me to look you up. Shake out of it, pal!"

Captain MacLean squinted through sleep-swollen eyelids, coughed and palmed the oily fringe from his furrowed forehead. The squint gave him the expression of a sullen brigand. In his initial haze he tried to connect Corinth with some target area. He remembered Warnemunde, Hamm, and places like the submarine pens at St. Nazaire. Corinth had to be in Greece. What the hell were they doing in Greece?

"Just four days ago I was dancing with Gwyn," the war correspondent rattled on. "Now I'm back at the old grind. Pop gave me a farewell party at the club, and Gwyn was there. Flew through yesterday. You remember me—eh, Mac?"

The sleepy airman ground out another hacking cough. He closed one eye and brought the speaker in more distinct. "You were dancing with Gwyn? . . . Barney Corinth?" he inquired churlishly. "I don't get it. She didn't tell me."

"Listen. I was finishing up a script for Majestic Pictures when this mess breaks out. Old Slater of *Week-End Magazine* asked me to pick up the assignment—"

"You saw Gwyn?" MacLean sat up peevishly and tossed the blanket clear. He zipped his pants and frowned at the neat and tidy man at the end of his bed.

"Just four days ago," Corinth repeated.

"You got yourself another war, eh?" MacLean muttered. He was thinking it was pretty soft for these newspaper guys getting priority trips, circling around on the fringe of these wars. Getting all the glory and hunks of currency. Their names over the war stories they milked out of the poor devils who fought the wars for them. Back home they got the dinners and the dances. Maybe they got more—with other guys' wives and girls. He remembered this Corinth character after the last one. The son-of-a-brick had been everywhere and seen everything, to hear him tell it. He'd nested up a sweet spot for himself.

Outside, a jet opened with a roar and began tearing long strips of calico. "You saw Gwyn?" Mac repeated. He scowled and reached for a butt. "How'd that come about?"

"Like I said. Pop threw a party. Gwyn happened to be at the club on some Red Cross session and Pop hauled her in. I had a couple of dances with her and she asked me to look you up if I got out your way. She gave me your Group number, and all that."

A WARM smile broke the harshness of MacLean's expression. "Hey, you saw Gwyn? How was she? How does she look?" the questions torrented out unrestrained. "I mean—what was she wearing? How's she taking it?"

"She—she looked fine, Mac. I only had a dance or two."

"What was she wearing? Give with a detailed picture, scribe. I always like her best in green—you know, with her copper hair and her eyes. She's all right, eh?"

Corinth looked puzzled. "I guess I didn't notice. She had something smart—and nice. Gwyn always looks smart, whatever she wears."

Mac doused the butt. Sure, this monkey wouldn't be looking at Gwyn's clothes. He'd have his eyes where there wasn't any. He was that sort of a guy. He'd be too busy taking in the other features. Imagine not remembering whether she wore a green gown or a yellow cocktail dress!

"I got an air-mail letter this morning," he challenged. "She didn't mention you. Maybe she forgot."

"She danced with lots of guys," Corinth tried to explain.

MacLean pawed around for a towel and a soap-box. "Sure. Take it easy while I wash up, eh?"

Corinth waited. . . . Command had the targets and aiming points lined up. They were figuring the routes in and out beyond Taejon; the bombing altitudes and radio procedure. Once more the teletypes were clattering; and outside, the birds were tuning up for evensong and a creaky wheeled cart was hauling the garbage away.

A door at the opposite end burst open, and the Special Services officer came in and began packing up some gear on a bed three aisles away. He stuffed it carefully in a B-bag, wrote something on a shipping tag and stacked it near the door. Corinth watched but didn't ask any questions. He knew that guys were getting killed in this war, just like in the last. Guys weren't coming back from missions, and other guys were packing their bags for shipment.

MACLEAN came back with a slow limp-kneed gait and began to fold his blankets. He still looked bushed in spite of the wash-up.

"So you're still in this writing racket, eh?" he said, and shoved a comb through his thick curly hair. "You never did get hooked for real duty, eh?"

Corinth colored. "I didn't wait for the draft in the last one. I volunteered years ago, but the medics said no."

"Too much sugar in your water?"

Corinth wondered why all this gripe. "Nothing like that," he said. "Just enough to make me 4-F, but not bad enough to keep me out of Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and a few of those resorts."

"Sure. I know. I read some of your stuff once. You sure had a lot of luck, as I remember."

"All sorts of luck," Corinth admitted, and then brightened. "I figure there's a good story to you jet guys. Back home they got the idea jets aren't paying for their keep. I figured you could give it to me straight."

*"I'd like to get you a story,"* MacLean reflected bitterly. *"I'd like to show you what a jet has to do, Buster. I'd like to take you over Korea and have you sweat one out—low down."*

The correspondent was saying: "I mean, you guys aren't getting in the box score. They say you can't spend enough time over the area. Maybe when you get an air-strip to work from in Korea, eh?"

"Maybe you should find out for yourself," MacLean growled suddenly. "I could fix you up. We got a T-33 two-seater jet here. It's used for check-out flights and Army observers. If you could stand a little altitude going over—"

"I've been on oxygen," Corinth caught himself saying. "Out in the Pacific—in the last shindy."

"You could get it straight. An eye-witness job," the jet Joe was saying, but thinking: *"This will be a party like you never saw in any California country club."*

Mac knew the layout of that country club. The dining-room had big French doors and it was simple to step out and wander down to the first tee. He'd heard a lot about that bench under the trees near No. 1.

"Maybe I could go—on a milk-run," Corinth said hollowly.

"Milk-run, hell! You can get that stuff from public-relations handouts."

"That guy Prentice said you were about through, Mac," the reporter parried. "I mean, your tour's about up." There was no percentage in going on a mission with a man who had used up most of his time. Mac was acting like a ghost clutching at something secure. As if he hoped a war correspondent would bring him some measure of luck. He'd had the same thing at Tarawa when he was with that infantry outfit. A war correspondent was supposed to be better than fighter cover when they hit a beach. Stuff like that.

"I got maybe four more—and I finish up," Mac said, keeping his eyes on Barney. "Don't worry. I'll get you back."

BECAUSE Barney Corinth was endowed with one quality of fear that canceled out another, he said: "It's okay with me—if they'll let me go."

"Sure they'll let you go. The B-29s took some Judy on a bombing mission the other day," Mac's eyes were like polished stars. "You ought to go once. You haven't seen a war until you've done a jet mission, keed!"

And Corinth added the snapper: "Yeh, I guess I should go once. Maybe when I get back home, I could tell Gwyn what it was like. I know you heroes never open up."

Mac got that fast. Corinth had it all worked out. He even figured on going back and seeing Gwyn and telling her what a pushover jet missions were. Why not? It was a four-to-one-bet in any book. If he gets back, I still have to make three more trips.

**A correspondent learns what war is like aboard a jet-plane on a dive-bombing mission.**

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

It takes only once to write everything off. . . .

There was doubt in the gray eyes of Captain Pritchard when MacLean outlined his plan to take Corinth over to Korea in the two-seater job. The public-relations officer was long and lean, and his thoughts moved in lagging advances but he had been at his job long enough to assay most situations. "I don't like any part of it," he said, and tried to figure Mac's angle.

"He wants a real story on a jet strike," Mac argued. "If he does one trip, he'll see plenty."

"Maybe, but they won't let him write most of it. You know that, Mac."

"They won't be able to argue if the guy actually flies the mission," MacLean persisted.

"We've lost half a dozen correspondents already," Pritchard pointed out. "Suppose you get knocked down? Just suppose he stops a hunk of flak? What's in it for him, Mac? He's a civilian. His wife won't get any Government insurance—"

"He hasn't got a wife! The guy's on his own," Mac argued, and reflected that Corinth could have his pick when he went back this time. He might even pick Gwyn. He didn't like any of that country-club business, because Barney didn't have a straight story on it. He couldn't remember what Gwyn wore! He should have been able to see if the lights were on. . . .

"It might not be too bad," Corinth muttered. "I mean—going with a man like Mac, who has had so much experience."

"This is Korea, chum," the public-relations man said. "Whatever he did in Europe is all behind him. Then he was on Mustangs. Today he's tooling a jet, and everything happens faster—and much lower down. These Kor-reds have ack-ack stuff that makes Jerry's look like a putty blower."

"That's what he wants to see," MacLean stated savagely. "Get him a chit for a flight outfit, and leave the rest to me."

So it was settled, and Mac introduced Barney to the others in his flight when they went into the bar. There was Jerry Parkington, his deputy flight-leader; Ollie Bates, who did tricks with beer glasses; Hugh Simons and Pinky Sprague, the *Mutt* and *Jeff* of the outfit. They all looked at Barney as if he were fresh out of an asylum.

"I thought Mac was a friend of yours," Parkington said under his breath, and frowned when he heard what the correspondent had bought. "You know that T-33 is practically a trainer-job. No guns or anything."

Corinth nodded, but he didn't look too certain. "It might turn out to be a milk-run," he said hopefully.

"There are no milk-runs where Mac is concerned. That guy can make a routine engine-test as hot as a dogfight. He's still the same old Mac. A great pilot, but still trying to win the war on his own."

"Still—I guess I ought to go once."

"I hope you're in shape. Ever ride in any high-speed equipment? Have you any idea what it's like to pull out of a six-hundred-m.p.h. dive?"

Barney avoided Parkington's eyes. "I guess I'm all right—that way. There's nothing wrong with me except—" And he tried to explain why he had never been able to get into the armed services.

A puzzled frown delayed Parkington's response. He put down his mug of beer. "I can't imagine anything like that. It doesn't show, but it must affect your outlook—"

"It's just something you don't talk about," Barney said, and tried to smile. "After all, no one can really understand it, and I'm not sure what I'm trying to explain."

Parkington replied vaguely: "Of course! How can you explain not enjoying something you've never experienced?"

"Well, it hasn't affected me so far, and I guess Mac will make it as easy as he can."

"He'll give you plenty of opportunity to see everything. I know that MacLean," Parkington charged, and looked at Corinth's eyes again. Park was only living to get Mac's lead position in the formation. He'd had all he wanted of Captain MacLean. The whole flight admired him, but their admiration wasn't the kind they nurture in Sunday School.

They were briefed on Mission 71 at 04:50 hours. The room was dank and musty and its features stood out stark and harsh under the brittle glare of unshielded bulbs. The pilots drifted in sleepy and blinking, gorged with a tasteless breakfast.

The strike was outlined on the wall map with lengths of scarlet worsted, blue grease-pencil and bleary cross-hatching.

The Old Man was saying: "Formation will be important on this mission. Your main target will be the advanced tank-repair depot here at Pyongyang. At the approximate Time over Target the B-29s will be attacking the Wosan ammunition dump and the Aussies will fly a Mustang sweep over Chinnampo, mainly to draw enemy fighters from this area."

"This'll be good," Mac whispered to Barney. "You'll maybe see the smoke from that bomber attack too."

Corinth said nothing. He was chilled and the breakfast was pumping a rancid tang back into his throat. The S-2 officer snapped off the lights and threw a photograph of the target area on a screen.

"The repair depot is square, approximately twenty-two hundred feet on each side," he explained with a length of picture-molding for a pointer. "Your approach will be here. Your aiming point here—"

"You're gonner get a story, Buster," MacLean added. "We'll go down with each ship of our flight. We'll make four passes instead of one—see?"

"You'll go all the way down, even though you carry no bombs?" Corinth inquired, and wondered if the mission would be scrubbed.

"I'm taking rockets. Had a launching rack fixed on during the night. We'll give 'em hell!"

The weather officer crawled up on the platform. He waited until a vertical cross-section of the weather over Korea was flashed on.

"It's not good—but it's not too bad. On take-off you'll have six-tenths, thin cirro-stratus above twenty-five thousand. Visibility two to three miles in haze. Thin patches of alto-stratus up here at twelve thousand with tops at fourteen thousand. You won't have to worry about freezing your tails off," he closed with the standard jet-fighter gag.

He got his laugh, crockery-brittle, but it was choked off by the opening roar of an F-80 jet engine screaming from a nearby dispersal point.

Corinth was fixed up with a heated liner, a fleece-leather suit and a Mae West. The supply sergeant checked his parachute and told him to bring it back if it didn't work. Helmet, goggles and oxygen mask were bundled into his arms and he followed Mac out to the weapons carrier with the buoyancy of a condemned man. A Red Cross girl offered him a cup of coffee in the corridor, but Barney never saw her. Three jet pilots were on their knees before an unshaven Padre chanting a toneless prayer.

Once the dank pall of the briefing-room was shrugged off, the pilots worked up a counterfeit program of horseplay. They straddled the hoods of jeeps, dangled their long legs over the tailboards of the trucks and bellowed libelous invectives as they circled the perimeter track. Corinth huddled down and wondered how much of that he could write.

"Climb down!" Mac ordered as the carrier dragged to a halt before a banked-up dispersal bay. The line crew was stretched out on work tarpaulins beneath the needle-nose of the two-seater jet.

*Three jet pilots were on their knees before an unshaven Padre chanting a toneless prayer.*

"Where's your regular ship?" Corinth asked, for something to say.

"Over in the next bay. The one with *'Lady Guinevere'* painted on the nose. Get it? *'Lady Guinevere.'* You were dancing with her a few nights ago," Mac said with a scowl.

"Lady Guinevere?" Corinth dropped most of his loose gear in the dust. Then he said: "Oh, I see. That's for Gwyn."

"Yeh, Gwyn. The gal you can't remember much about."

"Gwyn would like that," Corinth said, and wondered who thought that up. It didn't sound like Mac.

He tried to remember more about Gwyn. He'd danced with a girl who was custom-built and moved like a thoroughbred. Things like that he could remember. Her nonchalance was bewitching—and misleading, for her pride was in a man, and Corinth knew there would never be any other man in her life. He was, as Parkington had said, a great pilot. The kind who fought wars with savage intensity; just as he lived every other phase of his life. Barney wondered what Gwyn would think of her man if he ever went back.

"I like the name," Corinth said, and looked across at the script lettering again.

That only whipped turmoil in MacLean's mind and put the red ball of hate on the wheel. *"Sure he likes the name, but five will get you ten, Gwyn doesn't mention that country-club business. The Red Cross meeting; maybe her mother's asthma and all the clinical details—but there won't be a line about Creepy Corinth."*

For the next few minutes Mac made sure Barney's helmet was fitted correctly and that his oxygen line was in order. He stood on the wing and carefully strapped the correspondent into the front seat.

"Now look, Barney," he explained petulantly. "You're in a jet and she can do six hundred—downhill. If we get into trouble—well, first I'll release the canopy. You loosen your seat

straps and wait until I tilt her over, so you can clear safely. You know about the 'chute?"

"You mean—jump out? I thought we went out automatically. Ejector-seat business."

"That's comic-book stuff. You get out yourself, if you have to," Mac said bluntly, "but don't go until I signal—and don't foul the stick."

Mac plugged in his phones so he could listen in on their radio contacts and then slipped into the control seat behind. The line crew stood off staring up at Corinth, while Mac kicked in the starter and opened up the jet engine. At first there was a choked roar and the T-33 vibrated like a panting rhino. Gradually the pressure-power smoothed off, and much of the initial roar was filtered out. Barney heard Mac talking to Parkington. "You lead the formation, Park. We'll take the tail spot."

"Oh, Mac!" Parkington protested. "You got a passenger. Give him a break."

"I'm giving him a break. He can only see forward from his seat, and he wants to see what it's like. You take the lead, Park."

"You're the doctor," Parkington answered, and Mac rolled his jet out of the dispersal bay.

One by one the F-80s raced down the long runway, each leaving a farewell belch of kerosene stench and blue smoke. As MacLean hoiked her off the runway Barney sat huddled against the back of his seat, his fists clenched across his middle. He felt as if he was locked inside a rampaging torpedo.

Within minutes they were high in the sky and Japan was far behind. By now Corinth had relaxed somewhat and he was able to concentrate on the four jets ahead and below. They seemed to be fitted loosely together like self-same parts of a jigsaw puzzle dropped on a tattletale-gray tablecloth. All the confusion of the take-off had been eradicated and Barney sensed an indescribable rushing sensation. There was no vibration at all. Just a quiet tenseness that kept the hair on his neck tingling.

"Too bad you didn't bring a camera," Mac was saying into his helmet. Barney tried to turn around and look at his pilot, but it seemed impossible to twist his neck. "However," Mac went on, "you probably couldn't handle it if we got to kicking around any. The pressure gets rough unless you're in shape."

"There's nothing like that—wrong with me," Barney protested. "I'll be all right, no matter what happens. I'm usually lucky, Mac."

*"Sure,"* Mac said to himself, *"you'd probably like something to happen. You'd like a story like that to crow about. You'd like to write how you went on a hot mission to get a feature —but the jet you flew in, piloted by a home-town pal, got knocked down. Wouldn't you like to make that sort of a headline! The intrepid war correspondent might even figure how he could escape and get back through the lines by swiping a Red tank. You'd think of something hot like that, wouldn't you?"*

"You'd better be lucky," Mac said aloud, and they began to slice wings through the fringe of piled-up clouds and Barney wondered whether they were over Korea. Frost began to brush powdered designs on the canopy until Mac turned the heaters up and Barney saw the four jets below had huddled into an even tighter pattern.

A new babble of voices filled his helmet, and he tried again to look back at Mac for reassurance. The pilot was listening intently, his eyes slitted and flashing as he unscrambled the word signals.

"There's an L-5 below somewhere spotting targets for some other outfit. We can expect hate any minute now."

"Are we over Korea?"

"Sure. We're north of Seoul. We should be over the target any minute now. Keep your eyes open."

"How should I know?" Barney protested, and then something exploded above them. He cringed and heard Mac laugh. He wondered what that was—the explosion. He looked ahead, but all four jets were still there in that cramped formation. The pressure came on suddenly as Mac tilted their nose down and plunged through the cloud carpet.

They came out over a drab patchwork of rice paddies, snag-toothed hills and a few roads that seemed to come from nowhere and have no destination. Now he was looking down the tails of the jets and seeing the stern points of the wing tanks, the long slim penetration bombs just outside the air-scoops and the quartet of pencil-like rockets under the wings. They seemed puny weapons to attack a factory or a concentration of tanks. They seemed no more offensive than the feathered darts he had tossed in the locker room of the club back home—only five nights before.

"Keep your eyes open," bellowed Mac. "We're going down. Watch Parkington. He'll go in first with his rockets and then come back with his heavy stuff."

Corinth's eyes were open. Wide open—as if they were being pulled apart so a doctor could flick out a cinder. He worked his cheeks trying to get the lids back and stop the tears. He felt as if he was trapped in some compression chamber and all the ooze in his joints was being squeezed out.

"There goes Parkington!"

Corinth looked but there were no jets in sight anywhere. Finally he caught one almost alongside of them. Parkington was going down almost vertical—and they were winging down with him! Corinth peered over the nose and saw the saw-tooth design of a set of roofs blasting up, widening and enlarging at a preposterous rate. Two smoky streams swept from the jet alongside them and mushroomed into a maze of gray-blue metal. There was a puny explosion and to Corinth it seemed he was looking at a badly focused strip of news-reel film snapped from a plunging bomber. He saw nothing else because of the pressure, until they were back winging along with another jet job.

"See that? You see Park's crackers nose in there?" Mac was shouting over the intercom. "One of them, anyway."

Corinth saw nothing like that. He was trying to make his eyes focus on the frame of the windscreen.

"Pinky's going down now. Keep your eyes open. That Pinky's good!"

They were tail-up again, rushing at the tilted world. Barney tried to brace himself but his feet and legs were solid marble so he forced his head back against a metal plate behind him and listened to the frantic intercourse filling his helmet. He saw Pinky start down and he saw Pinky's rockets splutter away—and that was the last he saw of Pinky.

Mac was screaming like a madman as they yanked out of the chest-crushing dive. They came up through a column of smoke and Mac choked out: "Pinky augered in! Pinky didn't pull out!"

Corinth let the war go its way. He was helpless against the punishment of pressure. He retched at the stench of his own sweat and he wondered what they were complaining about back home—that jets couldn't stay over the target more than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes? It seemed they had been diving and zooming amid this carnage for hours. Dive—scream—lurch—zoom—peel off. . . . Dive—scream. . . . It had been going on for hours. Pinky had been dead so long they could have a memorial built in his honor.

Corinth was exhausted, spent, physically flayed and mentally groggy. He wondered why Mac continued these repeated passes when he could have stayed above the target, circling in comparative safety. What more was there to see that could be put into words? This hideous flash from a molten world! A picture spewing from invisible rolls, toned with the gray-white of his everyday world, but capable of wounding the mind, leav-

ing scar tissue of memory that would never fully heal.

Rockets had spurted from outboard racks. Bombs had plunged in a wide arc toward the tangled wreckage below. A man had been devoured in the fiery maw of the writhing dragon, and it all boiled into the pattern of war. Corinth hated his puny part in it, and he would have willingly traded Pinky's merciful plunge into oblivion, could he forget what he had seen. To be excused from ever typing the words on paper and thus adding pages to a scarlet history.

But while the frantic babble of battle went on about his ears, he tried to work out a lead paragraph, sifting his mental reactions and splintered impressions amid the frenzy of fighting, the spatter of coördinates, the patois of a service, the profane boasts of accomplishment.

*"I went on a jet-fighter strike today with a formation attacking a tank-repair depot in North Korea,"* he repeated over and over through the distraction of the sound-track whipping through his ear-phones. *"I have seen war as it has never been seen before—"*

MacLean was bellowing: "You've been fool-lucky in the past. I hope you're lucky now."

The implication made Corinth stiffen, and he managed to get his head around and look at the pilot. Mac was an enraged beast glaring with lynx eyes at the dials and switches banked before him. Corinth looked past him and realized they were back in formation, skimming the jagged ridges of the Korean hills.

"Sure, I'm always lucky," Barney responded. "When do I turn on the influences?"

"We got trouble. We were clipped when we took down our rockets."

Corinth wondered when all that took place.

"See those red lights on that panel?" Mac snarled. "They mean trouble. The radio is out—I can't contact the other guys—except by signal flare." He continued some frantic business with the switches. "Our main tank has been opened up."

The lights on the panel made no sense to Corinth. "You mean, we force-land somewhere in South Korea?"

Mac wagged his head negatively. "We need six thousand feet—even if we get far enough south. They're bulldozing one out somewhere, but it's not ready yet."

"Don't these tanks self-seal?" Barney inquired, and peered back at the other jets.

"Only in the comic books. I'll try to figure something. You'll know what to expect when you see what colored flare I pop off."

Barney wondered why a self-sealing tank wouldn't seal. He turned back, hunched up and tried to work out another lead for his story. *"I went on a jet-fighter strike today with Captain Robert MacLean. We were hit over the target and had to force-land in enemy territory—"*

Then he remembered they had indeed been hit, and that a tank was so damaged it no longer held fuel—fuel they needed to get back to safety.

"How bad is it, Mac?" he finally asked over their intercom set.

The pilot took another look, and the cursor of his skill flipped along the slide-rule of his mind, and the product left him numb. The old bitterness and cold hate for the man up front who had unwittingly set up this predicament, came back to intensify the percentage against them.

"Watch this—you'll know," Mac growled, and reached down for his signal pistol. He inserted a cartridge and rolled the canopy back a few inches.

The spluttering fire-ball leaped out, arching forward and eventually died against a patch of azure-blue sky. "There's your story, chum," he said bitterly to Corinth.

The correspondent sat staring at the faint smoke streaks drifting down the sky. He turned and looked at Mac, resignation in his eyes. "But I don't get it, Mac. The flare, I mean."

"You saw it, didn't you? You saw that red flare. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Red? . . . I can't tell what color it was, Mac. Sure, I saw it, but—I'm color-blind, Mac. Everything's—like a dull gray to me."

Mac closed the canopy again and stared unbelievingly—just as Parkington had stared. "You can't tell colors, Barney? Color-blind, is that it? You can't see those red lights on the fuel panel? You couldn't see what color that flare was?"

Barney had turned back, hoping they'd at least get down in South Korea, where he could file his story. He had all the details racked away by now. A straight narrative story of what it's like to do a rocket raid with the jets. What it feels like to go in at six hundred m.p.h., and what you see when penetration bombs bite in. He had a sweet line about Pinky Sprague, who represented all men who had fought and died, and he knew that line would please a lot of people who maybe hadn't smiled in weeks. That Pinky was a great little guy.

MacLean was staring at the fuel gauge again, and coming up with a great resolution. "He can't tell colors—reds, blues or greens. He can't see the trees, the flowers or the blue sky. Everything's gray in his life—no colors in his world. He can't see a woman's hair, her lips or her eyes. He doesn't know what a real woman looks like. He danced with Gwyn, but he doesn't know she has copper-colored hair, that her eyes are periwinkle blue or the shade of lipstick she wears. He can't tell whether she's wearing a Nile green dress or a yellow sweater—or what those colors do to her. To him, Gwyn's just a figure in a lousy fogged-out snapshot."

Mac went to work manipulating the petcocks and pumps that would transfer fuel from the ruptured tank, pumping it into the wing tanks, checking the flow and weighing the net against the mileage back to safety. It was a task that had to be done right, or disaster would take over. A man had to know and remember the sequence of fuel flow, the pressures and the devious paths the precious liquid could safely take to be salvaged and stored in an undamaged container. It was no time for trial and error. One mistake in bypassing, and the priceless gallons would be lost—the few gallons that meant all the difference between a ghastly pile-up in enemy territory or a belly-landing on what the bulldozer boys had already hacked out near Taegu.

He slapped Barney across the shoulders and grinned: "Don't worry, pal! I'll get you back somewhere. You'll get your story, keed!"

It took more than fighting to sit and work it out. It took pilotage of the finest order, a skill and degree of physical discipline not even Barney Corinth would ever understand, interpret or put into words. It took fortitude, staying power and the determination to accept no compromise; but there are no words for the explanation of such courage.

"This'll be a beaut, Barney," Mac went on as he sat through those fear-sickened minutes checking the responses on the various dials. "Like you said, you'll be able to tell Gwyn what it was like. I'd never be able to tell her. When I'm with her, all I can do is sit and look at her—just speechless."

All that time the T-33 was maintaining her position in the formation, roaring like a winged comet through the broken pattern of cloud, protruding peaks and the opposition of turbulence and updrafts. It took a pilot like Captain MacLean to salvage the last few pints of power-producing solution from that shell-damaged system and store it in what secure space he had left.

It took all that, and it took a guy like Barney Corinth to tell it, after they had belly-landed on the strip at Taegu.

# Submarine Dilemma

**What happened when the *Gato* surfaced—and found a live depth-bomb on her deck.**

## by REAR ADMIRAL HARLEY COPE, U.S.N., Ret.

THE submarine service spent a lot of time preparing for the war they knew was coming in the Pacific and tried to provide for all possible eventualities. Even actual experiments with live depth charges were conducted to see what would happen to various instruments on the bulkheads in the compartments when the depth charges began to explode and the submarine was shaken like a rat in a mastiff's jaws. Of course they had to play it a little more conservatively than the Japs did later, but nevertheless it was very realistic. But in spite of all their planning and experiments they overlooked one little possibility, for which they can be forgiven, for it only happened to one submarine during the entire war. But on that particular boat—the *Gato*—the Skipper, Lieutenant-Commander Robert J. Foley, spent quite a few bad moments trying to figure out what the answer in the book should have been, and then he wasn't too sure the one he found was the right one.

This event occurred during the submarine's seventh war patrol. It was late afternoon on December 20th, 1943, when the *Gato* earned the dubious distinction of being the only submarine ever confronted with this particularly trying situation:

A two-ship escorted convoy was sighted and Bob Foley quickly moved in to the attack. Describing the first act of the drama, he wrote in his diary:

*"Battle Stations. Targets in sight. One large cargo vessel or tanker with four goal posts and engines aft. . . . The other ship was just a cargo vessel. . . . The two escorts were the new type we had met recently with very unpleasant results. Every effort was made to reach position for a close shot at the large vessel, but the zigs during the later stages left us on the side near the smaller. Also through no effort on our part the two Marus lined up on the firing bearing. . . .*

*"Commenced firing bow tubes at the middle of the smaller target. After three were seen running normal favored the stern of same as that was the bearing of the middle of the large target. While watching the near escort for the first move heard tremendous explosions.* Gato *was shaken. Swung periscope to target. The near one was blown up. Pieces were flying through the air as high as 300 feet. The burst covered the whole field of the periscope. In a few seconds the air cleared and all that remained of the smaller Maru was one mast sinking rapidly at a large angle. Had a glimpse of the large ship still there but could not tell much about it. Do not believe that the torpedoes had time to reach her. . . . Ordered deep submergence."*

AND for a very good reason. The escorts were now taking an active interest in the deadly intruder.

The submarine quickly rigged for depth charges, actually rather philosophically. There was always a price to pay for an attack. Just before the first explosion, Sound reported a "gong" ringing in the distance. But before the irrepressible diving officer could frame an appropriate wisecrack the first of the nineteen exploding charges snuffed it out aborning. They experienced a savage depth charge attack that buffeted the crew about until they were often reeling like punch-drunk boxers. When the position of the onrushing escorts indicated that they were about to let go the crew unconsciously reached out for something to give them support.

"This was the worst depth-charging we had ever received," related Bob Foley. "Practically all of the charges seemed right on top of us and the ship was shaken violently with each. However, the *Gato* took it very well. These new escorts were too proficient," the Skipper added ruefully. "They spotted us accurately and stayed on. Although we were at all times about seventy feet below our test depth . . . none of our bag of tricks was effective in shaking them until after about two hours when a slow gradual turn seemed to leave them astern."

Groggy and battered though she was there was still plenty of fire left in the *Gato's* eyes. And unfinished business, the still unaccounted for freighter, had to be taken care of—an operation that had been rudely interrupted by the escorts.

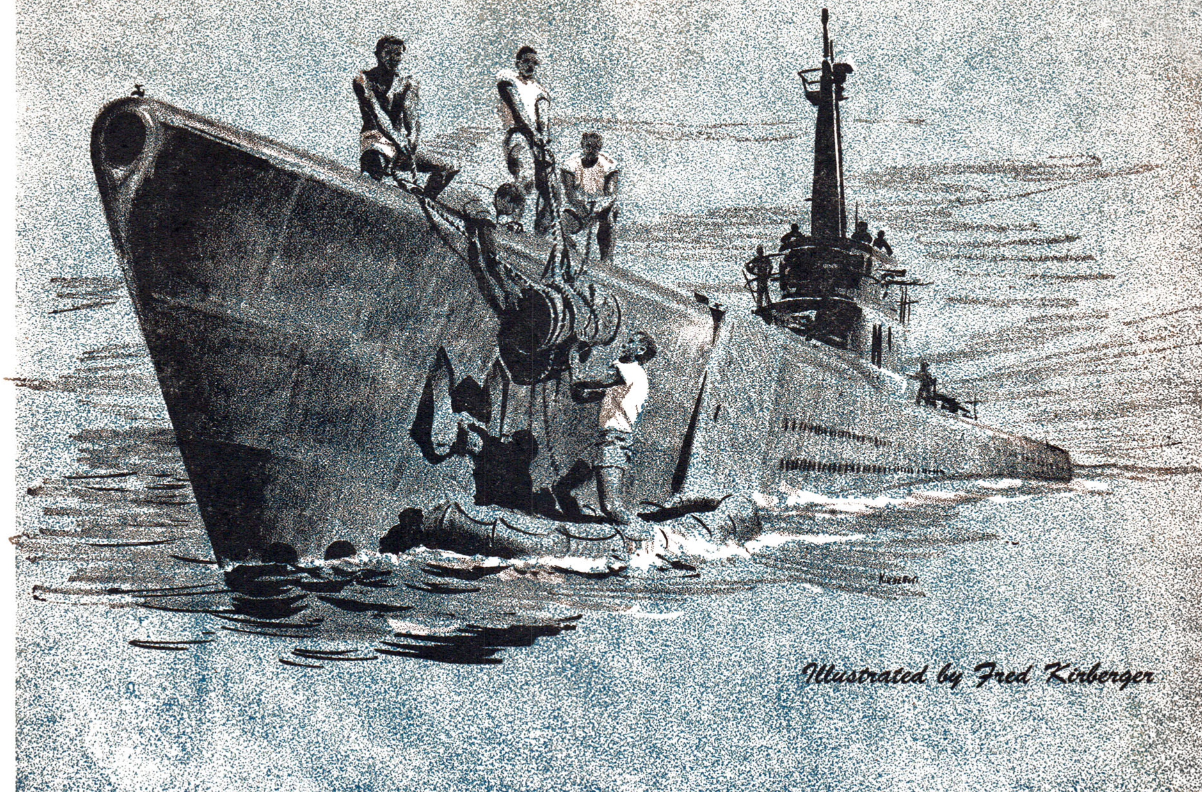
Shaking the water off like a huge whale, the *Gato* surfaced and sped along in the wake of the escorts—a sure way to locate the freighter.

The escorts were at first surprised to find the submarine barging into their midst looking for trouble, for in their books they had already written her off. So just to make sure the books would not need changing they swung around and opened fire with every gun that would bear.

It didn't take the *Gato* long to get the word about the unfriendly atmosphere of the neighborhood and they were soon high-tailing it for the horizon with every ounce of power that could be coaxed from their four engines.

*"Situation resembled a five-ring circus,"* recorded the Skipper. *"Gato was simultaneously, (a) Outrunning two escorts, (b) Trying to overtake the Maru, (c) Reloading the forward tubes, (d) Making some necessary repairs."* But the momentous sub item (e) was not added until later.

DURING the early moments after surfacing, Bob Foley was intent on accomplishing two things: locating and destroying the freighter, and clearing up the woozy feeling in his head induced by the savage pounding of the depth charges. After the escorts had started sending a fusillade of bullets his way and they were trying to dodge them, the Skipper was aware of a fresh western breeze coming in over the bridge. He was grateful to it for caressing his face and clearing his head. He raised his head to get more of it and unconsciously peered over the bridge in the lowering visibility of first dusk to see if any damage had been done forward. In a moment he stepped back, shaking his head dubiously. Maybe that pounding was




*The lethal charge was gingerly and tenderly lifted and lashed into one of the inflated boats—and set adrift.*

causing him to see things, he muttered to himself. Something like that had happened once during his boxing days at the Academy. Surely that must have been an apparition out there on deck. Bob rubbed his eyes and looked again. It was still there!

Catching the quartermaster by the arm, the Skipper pointed down over the bridge. The quartermaster's eyes bulged: "Gawd, Cap'n, it's one of them things!"

Even before the Executive Officer had poked his head up the bridge hatch after the Skipper's hasty invitation, the word had flashed through the boat with the speed of a choice bit of scandal. The mystery of the "gong" that had been heard was now cleared up. They had a new shipmate, and a very unwelcome one indeed. A large metal can lay on deck, an unexploded depth charge!

While the Skipper, Executive Officer and a couple of others went into a huddle down on deck, the quartermaster calmly added sub item (e) to the Skipper's recorded observation: *"Trying to dispose of one unexploded depth charge without blowing our rudder off."*

But how to get rid of the unwelcome visitor posed a very neat question. Submarines naturally have no way to launch such projectiles. They are always on the receiving end of that particular type of missile. The *Gato* carried no bomb-disposal experts who could quickly render the charge harmless, so the suggestion to roll it overboard was dismissed. Their luck had been phenomenal so far. It would be better not to push it any further. It was, therefore, the consensus that with their dearth of knowledge concerning such explosives it would be unwise and dangerous to play around with the mechanism at all. One mistake would be one too many.

Things were beginning to build up to an impasse when the youngest Ensign on board, who had a diabolic turn of mind, darkly suggested they return it to its donor. At first his remark was met with incredulous stares but the Skipper soon grinned and nodded his head in approval when the plan was explained.

Quickly the preparations were made. The *Gato* was brought to a stop and the lethal charge which almost had the *Gato's* "number" inscribed on it was gingerly and very tenderly lifted up and lashed into one of their inflated boats—with a slow leak in it—and set adrift. When last seen in the gathering dusk, it was bobbing along merrily in their wake amidst lusty farewells from the *Gato's* crew who were counting the minutes until the time when the eager pursuers would run afoul of their late guest. Sad to say, the exigencies of the situation didn't permit them to linger long enough to observe the results of their handiwork, but every member of the *Gato's* crew is morally certain that it returned to its former owners with interest.

*Tales of Whippoorwill Valley*

II

# Shadows across the Slough

A story of that tragic chain of destruction which seems to be part of Nature's plan.

*by* EWART A. AUTRY

THE two bitterns circled slowly over the swamp, their long necks craned downward, and their keen eyes searching for danger below. The sun was like fire burning the tip of Indian Hill, and the shadows were already in the valley, and spreading out to climb the ridges. The bitterns were in from a long feeding trip down to the lower marshes, and were ready to go down to their regular roosting place on a half-sunken log in the middle of a slough. The slough had been their home for three seasons, but they had never dared go into it without first circling carefully, and searching for danger in the tangled swamp.

They had built three nests at the edge of the slough, but had not a single young to show for their labors. The ruthless marauders of the swamp had either destroyed the eggs or the young before they were ready to fly. That should have been enough to cause them to flee from the swamp and seek a new nesting place. They have a peculiar habit, though, of nesting near the same place year after year until one of the nesting pair is destroyed or dies of natural causes. The survivor will then depart, and is usually never seen around the old nesting place again.

They circled lower and lower on that early spring evening, and their eyes told them of no danger below. Finally they swooped down beneath the tangled limbs and settled on the log. The decaying log had collected soil from high waters, and had grown several crops of grass and weeds. The green stuff was not yet up, but the dead grass and weeds made a perfect camouflage for the roosting bitterns. They walked up and down the log and preened their feathers, as a bright red cloud floated over and cast some of the colors of the sunset down into the murky water of the slough. When night took hold of the swamp, they stuck their heads under their wings, and became as motionless as two knots on the rotting log.

Though the bitterns had seen no danger, four sets of eyes had watched hungrily as they swooped down to their roosting place. Four things with the power and the desire to kill marked the spot where they came down. Each in its own way instinctively made plans to take away the life and taste the flesh and blood of a bittern before morning.

The nearest of the four was a big turtle which had lived for dozens of years in one end of the slough. His head was barely sticking above the water when they passed a dozen feet above him on their way to the log. His near-sighted eyes could not tell him whether they settled on the log or in the water, but his nose, which was very sensitive to odors in the air or in the water, told him they were not far away. There was only a slight swirl of the water as he withdrew his head and started swimming slowly toward the unsuspecting bitterns. His only chance of success was to find them in the water. He had once caught one of their wading young by pulling it under the water and holding it there until it had drowned. It had then been an easy matter to drag it to his nest under a bank of the slough. He had even been able to catch full-grown ducks in the same manner. His awkwardness made it almost impossible for him to catch anything out of the water, but in the water his awkwardness gave way to speed and skill. He was the master of all things that dwelt in the slough, and not one of them dared get near his ugly head, which could strike forward with an uncanny speed.

The bitterns were still preening their feathers when he stuck his head close to the surface of the water not three feet from them. He knew at once that he could not hope to catch either of them as long as they stayed on the log, but there was a chance that one might step into the shallow water for a moment. Slowly the turtle sank to the bottom, and crawled up against the log. There he rested, with his head a few inches below the surface, and his little eyes fixed on the bitterns. The birds, totally unaware of the ugly creature lurking beneath them, finished with their feathers and settled for the night. Only then did the turtle move, and that was to swim away in search of other food. Thus ended their danger from one of the things which had watched them go to rest.

Another of the four was a big bobcat which was watching from a nearby hillside. His ears twitched, and his stubby tail wiggled rapidly as he saw the bitterns come down from the sky. Unlike the turtle, he did not attempt to reach them until darkness had fallen. Instinct told him they would be asleep by that time, and also that their eyes were of little use to them in the dark. On the other hand, the big cat was never at his best until after dark.

CAUTIOUSLY he followed his nose toward the bitterns' roosting place. Now and then he lay flat on his belly and sniffed the air around him in search of danger to himself. The swamp mud which reached from the edge of the hills to the slough was not much to his liking. Like most of his kind, he much preferred to do his hunting where the ground was dry. The nearer he came to the roosting place of the birds, the more water he found mingled with the mud. He would probably have turned back had

he not been very hungry, but the scent of the bitterns was sweet to his nostrils, and drew him onward across the swampy ground.

He stopped short when he came to the edge of the slough. He could see the bitterns on the log, but there were thirty yards of water between him and them. He would have to be far more hungry than he was before he would either wade or swim for food. Slowly he began to circle the slough, looking for some way by which he could reach them without getting wet. Once he climbed out on a leaning willow, and found that the bitterns were not more than ten feet below him. He could probably have leaped directly on top of one, but there was the question of keeping his balance on the log, and then the problem of getting away from the log without getting wet. Finally he gave up and went back in the direction whence he had come.

For a little while there was peace around the slough. A fat frog crawled up on the log with the roosting birds and started singing in a bass voice. He was soon joined by a chorus of others from all around the slough. A few fish cut across the surface of the water and started the reflected stars to twinkling. The big turtle sat as still as a rock on the bottom of the slough and waited for some living thing to come within reach of his quick jaws. The bitterns slept on, not knowing that death had been so near.

The third watcher of the homecoming bitterns was a hungry horned owl which had spent the day in the green foliage of a pine at the foot of the hills. The birds circled very close to him as they prepared to go down for the night, but leaning against the trunk of the tree, he had remained unnoticed. When night came, he first flew down the valley in search of food, but his only reward was a field mouse caught far from its hole. Still very hungry, he went back over the swamp on silent wings, and circled above the place where the bitterns were roosting. He would have much preferred a rabbit, but bitterns would be better than nothing. The tangled mass of treetops above the slough made it impossible for him to see the sleeping birds as he circled above the trees, so he came lower and lower until his broad wings were casting huge shadows on the water. The fat frog saw those shadows and suddenly hushed his song. In a moment he leaped into the water and disappeared. All of the other frogs hushed, and there was a splashing of water all around the slough as they caught sight of the swooping shadows and leaped in for safety. One of the bitterns stirred uneasily, and half removed its head from under its wing, but quickly settled back to sleep.

It was that slight movement which betrayed its exact roosting place to the hungry owl. He would have struck suddenly and with unerring aim had it not been for a screen of willow limbs between him and his prey. He circled and sought an open place through which he could plunge with the power of sudden death in his powerful claws. It was, though, as if Nature was holding her protecting arms around the sleeping bitterns. At no point around the slough could the owl find an opening large enough to enable him to make a safe and certain strike. Unless he could strike from the air, there was no other way in which he could hope to catch one of the birds. He depended wholly on the power of his wings to drive his weapons to their target. Finally, he flew away from the slough, and rested in a tall pine where he hooted his disappointment to the stars. His hooting caused one of the bitterns to lift its head from under its wing and listen. Satisfied that the owl was far away, it went back to sleep not knowing that there had been grim shadows across the slough.

Fourth and last of the hungry watchers was one far more sinister and dangerous than either of the other three. He was a black mink which had a den under a caved-in willow on another slough about three hundred yards from the place where the bit-

terns roosted. He was at the door of his den when the bitterns circled above the swamp, and he watched with eyes that were yellow and evil.

He was a short-legged, slim-bodied creature, measuring not more than twenty-five inches from tip to tip. When the birds finally went down, his lips parted slightly and a slow growl issued from his throat. His parted lips showed long white teeth which were as keen and sharp as daggers.

By nature he was cruel and bloodthirsty. Regardless of how well fed he was, he would never pass up an opportunity to kill, even though he might do no more than taste the blood of his victim. His nightly trail was a long one, and it was always strewn with the grim evidence of death. Nothing that lived in the swamp was more hated and feared by all smaller creatures than the black mink from under the roots of the fallen willow.

After night had come, the black mink did not go at once to the roosting place of the bitterns. There was no hurry. The night was before him, and the bitterns would not leave their roost before the first light of day. He left the den and turned up the valley, with his nose sniffing the air, and his footfalls as soundless as if he had been a black ghost moving through the night. He had not gone far when he met a lumbering 'possum searching slowly for something to eat. The 'possum stopped directly in his path and looked at him. The mink growled viciously and the 'possum moved aside to let him pass. If the 'possum had been a young one, he might well have been the first victim of the prowling shadow.

The first victim, though, was a mockingbird roosting in a tangle of briers. The mink caught her scent when he was still a hundred yards from her. Quickly he crouched and moved toward her, pausing every few feet to listen and sniff the air around him. When five feet from the unsuspecting bird, he made a leap which carried him directly upon her. She gave a single terrified cry and beat her wings futilely. Sharp teeth slashed her throat and she lay dead directly beneath a half-finished nest. Her single cry sent her mate fleeing from the other side of the brier patch. While the mink feasted on her flesh, the mate called to her anxiously from the dark foliage of a nearby holly.

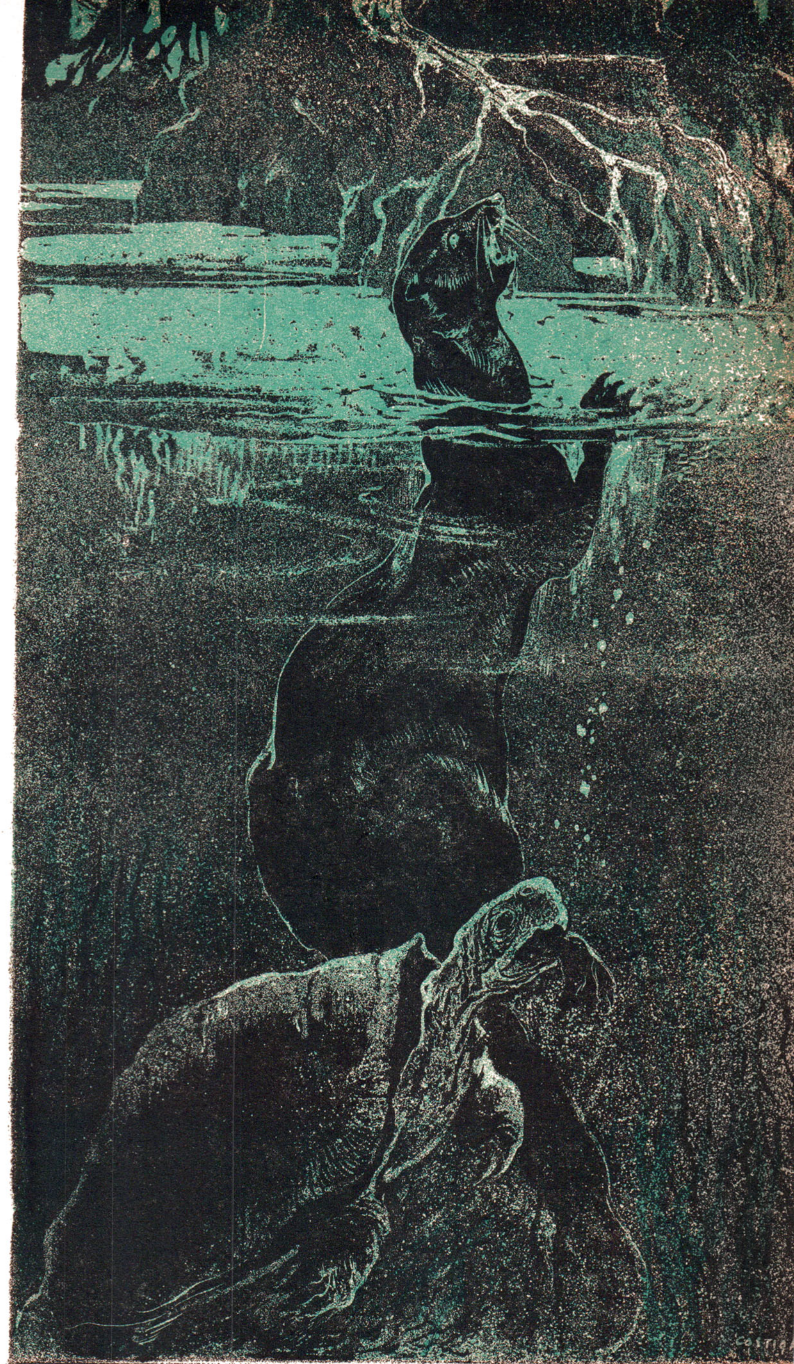
A young rabbit, a cardinal and a quail fell to the killer's sharp teeth, before he finally turned toward the roosting place of the bitterns. He was no longer hungry. In fact, he had eaten a very small portion of each of the last three kills. He was not hungry, but he would seek to kill until the first light of day crept over the hills and seeped down into the swamp. That was his greatest pleasure, next to that of the mating season when he would bring a female to the den beneath the willow.

A late moon was slanting into the water when he came to the edge of the slough where the bitterns were roosting. So silent were his movements that he did not disturb the even course of life around the slough. The chorus of frogs was singing, and it kept right on singing as the dark shadow crouched at the edge of the water. A school of minnows played on the surface, and their ripples wrestled playfully with the moonbeams. The big turtle still rested on the same spot as if his life were an everlasting span, and the passing of time were as nothing. The fat frog was singing beside the bitterns, and they slept on, not knowing that there was a deadly shadow lurking at the edge of the water.

The span of water between the shore and the log where the bitterns roosted meant nothing to the black mink. In fact, he spent much of his

*Illustrated by*
JOHN COSTIGAN, N. A.

*The big turtle floated upward; his stout jaws gripped a hind leg. The mink screamed in terror.*



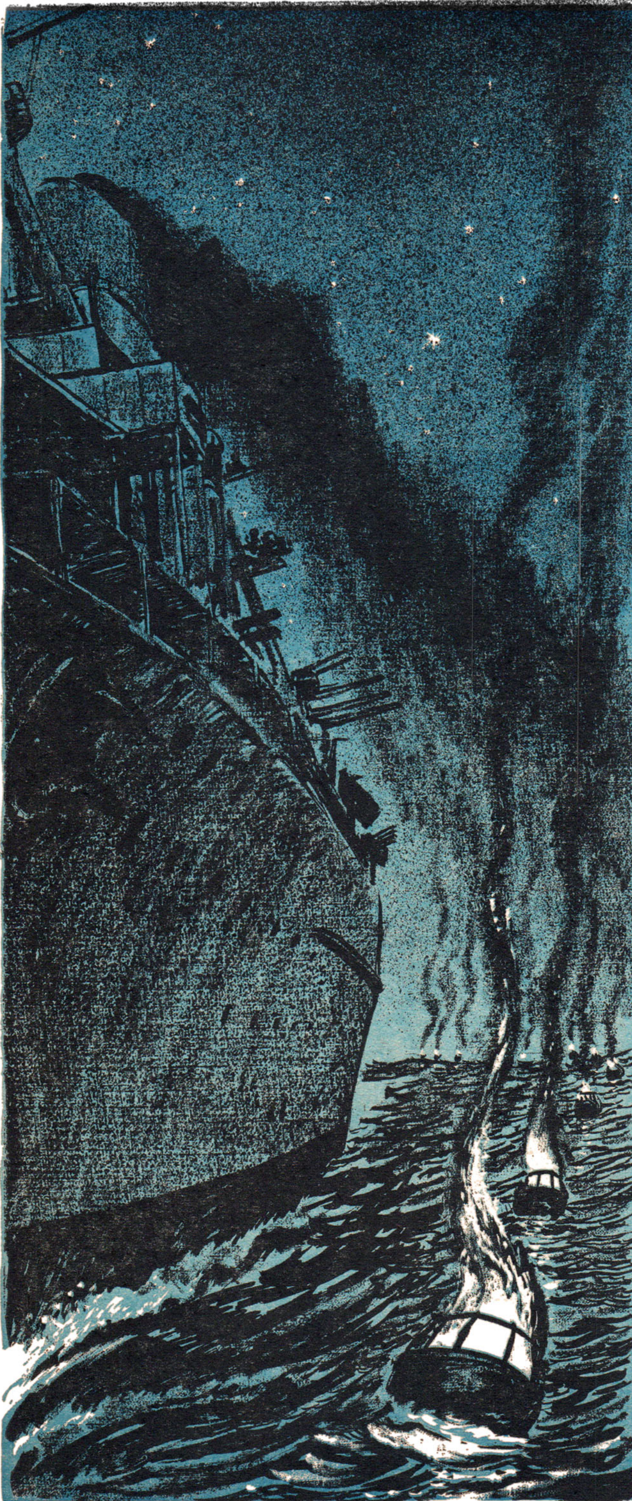
time in the water and could swim and dive with the greatest ease. There was hardly a ripple as he slipped into the water and started swimming toward the log. He swam with his nose barely sticking above the surface. So silent was his approach that not even the singing frog was aware of his presence. He climbed onto the log about four feet from the sleeping bitterns. It so happened that the female was the nearest to him. She did not know that death had arrived until the sharp teeth had slashed through her neck. No cry came from her throat, but her wings beat the log as she died. Her startled mate leaped from the log and spiraled to the treetops, then sped away, crying above the swamp.

The big frog cut off his song and splashed into the water. All of the other frogs became silent, and the minnows played no more on the surface. A passing cloud blotted out the moon, and the darkness around the slough was heavy, as if Nature had drawn a curtain over that scene of death. Other living things were there, but a brooding silence reigned in the murky waters and around the shore.

The mink held the body of the bittern on the log, and sucked at the flow of blood. Some of it escaped from him, however, and ran down the side of the log to form a red splotch on the water. The big turtle stirred as he caught the warm scent of blood. Slowly he crawled across the bottom of the slough until he was near the log. Cautiously he floated toward the surface until he could see the mink and the bittern. He did not understand what had happened, but the scent of flesh and blood was good, so he sank back to the bottom of the slough and waited.

It did not take the mink long to finish with the bittern. When he had sucked the blood, he was ready to go without even a taste of its flesh. Before slipping into the water, he crouched on the log and looked around for danger. His evil eyes scanned the shore line and the trees above, but they could not see into the murky depths of the slough. Slowly, then, he slipped into the water. The big turtle floated upward, and his head darted quickly forward. His stout jaws gripped a hind leg of the mink. The mink screamed in terror, and there was a threshing of water as he sought desperately to twist around and bite at his assailant. The turtle drew his head almost completely into his shell, and sank to the bottom still holding firmly to the leg of the mink. For perhaps five minutes there was a continuous disturbance of the water where the turtle had gone down, and then the water was still. Slowly a splotch of blood arose toward the surface and mingled with that which had flowed from the bittern's throat.

The big frog came back to the log; and at his signal, the chorus began to sing. The cloud drifted away from the moon, and the school of minnows played again on the surface of the slough, their ripples wrestling gleefully with the moonbeams. Far down the valley a solitary bittern beat its wings through the darkness and cried for a place to rest.



*This Oriental deviltry is as bewildering as it is confusing.*

# The

**We knew the *Houston* had been lost fighting against overwhelming odds at the start of the war in the Pacific. Not until that war was over, however, did we learn of her gallant last battle or of the fate of her crew.**

ON the night of February 28, 1942, the U.S.S. *Houston,* Admiral Tommy Hart's former Asiatic flagship, vanished without a trace somewhere off the northwest coast of Java. The mystery of the *Houston* remained complete until the war ended and small groups of survivors were discovered in Jap prisoner-of-war camps, scattered from the island of Java through the Malay Peninsula the jungles of Burma and Thailand, and northward to the Islands of Japan.

Of the 1,008 officers and men who manned her, approximately 350 escaped from the sinking ship, only to be captured in the jungles of Java, or as they floundered helplessly in the sea. Of the original survivors, only 266 lived through the ordeal of filth and brutal treatment meted out to them in the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

To me the story of the U.S.S. *Houston,* especially the last three weeks of her valiant battle against tremendous odds, is one of the great epics of the United States Navy, yet historians of World War II seem to have neglected it completely.

What happened to the *Houston* that night is a nightmare of many years' standing, yet each incident of that wild battle lives in my mind as vividly as though it happened only minutes ago.

On that fateful evening of February 28, 1942, I stood on the quarterdeck contemplating the restful green of the Java Coast as it fell slowly behind us. Many times before I had found solace in its beauty, but this night it seemed only a mass of coconut and banana palms that had lost all meaning. I was too tired and too preoccupied with pondering the question that raced through the mind of every man aboard, "Would we get through Sunda Strait?"

There were many aboard who felt that, like a cat, the *Houston* had expended eight of its nine lives and that this one last request of fate would be too much. Jap cruiser planes had

# *Galloping Ghost*

*by* COMDR. WALTER G. WINSLOW, U.S.N.

shadowed us all day and it was certain that our movements were no mystery to the enemy forces closing in on Java. Furthermore, it was most logical to conclude that Jap submarines were stationed throughout the length of Sunda Strait to intercept and destroy ships attempting escape into the Indian Ocean.

Actually there wasn't any breathing space for optimism; we were trapped; but there had been other days when the odds were stacked heavily in the Japs' favor and we had somehow managed to battle through. Maybe it was because I had the Naval Aviator's philosophical outlook and maybe it was because I was just a plain damn' fool, but I couldn't quite bring myself to believe that the *Houston* had run her course. It was with this feeling of shaky confidence that I turned and headed for my stateroom. I had just been relieved as Officer-of-the-Deck and the prospect of a few hours' rest was most appealing.

The wardroom and the interior of the ship, through which I walked, was dark, for the heavy metal battle ports were bolted shut and lights were not permitted within the darkened ship. Only the eerie blue beams of a few battle lights close to the deck served to guide my feet. I felt my way through the narrow companionway and snapped on my flashlight briefly to seek out the coaming of my stateroom door. As I stepped into the cubicle that was my room, I took a brief look around and switched off the light. There had been no change, everything lay as it had for the last two and a half months. There had been only one addition in all that time. It was Gus, my silent friend, the beautiful Bali head I had purchased just six weeks before in Soerabaja.

Gus sat on the desk top lending his polished wooden expression to the cramped atmosphere of my stateroom. In the darkness I felt his presence as though he were a living thing. "We'll get through, won't we, Gus?" I found myself saying aloud. And although I couldn't see him, I thought he nodded slowly.

I slipped out of my shoes and placed them at the base of the chair by my desk, along with my tin hat and life jacket, where I could reach them quickly in an emergency. Then I rolled into my bunk and let my exhausted body sink into its luxury. The bunk was truly a luxury, for the few men who were permitted to relax lay on the steel decks by their battle stations. I, being an aviator with only the battered shell of our last airplane left aboard, was permitted to take what rest I could get in my room.

Although there had been little sleep for any of us during the past four days, I found myself lying there in the sticky tropic heat of my room fretfully tossing and trying for sleep that would not come.

THE constant hum of blowers thrusting air into the bowels of the ship, the *Houston's* gentle rolling as she moved through a quartering sea, and the occasional groaning of her steel plates combined to bring into my mind the mad merry-go-round of events that had plagued the ship during the past few weeks.

Twenty-four days had elapsed since that terrifying day in the Flores Sea, yet here it was haunting me again as it would for the rest of my life. My mind pictured the squadrons of Jap bombers as they attacked time and again from every conceivable direction. After the first run they remained at altitudes far beyond range of our anti-aircraft guns, for they had learned respect on that first run when one of their planes was blasted from the sky and several others were obviously hit and badly shaken. But that first salvo almost finished the *Houston*. It was a perfect straddle, and the force of those big bombs seemed as though a giant hand had taken the ship, lifted her bodily from the water, and tossed her yards away from her original course. There had been no personnel casualties that time but our main anti-aircraft director had been wrenched from its track, rendering it useless, and we were taking water aboard from sprung plates in the hull.

That day the crew had only the steady barrage from the anti-aircraft guns and Captain Rook's clever handling of the ship to thank for keeping them from the realms of Davy Jones. But there was one horrible period during that afternoon when the Nips almost got us for keeps. A five-hundred-pound bomb, and a stray at that, hit us squarely amidships aft. Some utterly stupid Jap bombardier failed to release with the rest of his squadron and Captain Rooks could make no allowances for such as him. The salvo fell harmlessly off the port quarter but the stray crashed through two platforms of the main mast before it exploded on the deck just forward of number three turret. Hunks of shrapnel tore through the turret's thin armor as though it were paper, igniting powder bags in the hoists. In one blazing instant all hands in the turret and in the handling rooms below were dead. Where the bomb spent its force, a gaping hole was blown in the deck below which waited the after repair party. They were wiped out almost to a man. It was a hellish battle which ended with forty-eight of our shipmates killed and another fifty seriously burned or wounded.

I strove desperately to rid myself of the picture of that blazing turret—the bodies of the dead sprawled grotesquely in pools of blood and the bewildered wounded staggering forward for medical aid—but I was forced to see it through. Once again I heard the banging of hammers, hammers that pounded throughout the long night as tired men worked steadily building coffins for forty-eight shipmates lying in little groups on the

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*After the first run, the bombers remained at altitudes far beyond range of our anti-aircraft guns.*

fantail. We put into Chilatjap the following day, that stinking fever-ridden little port on the South Coast of Java. Here we sadly unloaded our wounded and prepared to bury our dead. It seemed that in the hum of the blowers I detected strains of the Death March—the same mournful tune that the band played as we carried our comrades through the heat of those sunburned, dusty streets of Chilatjap. I saw again the brown poker-faced natives dressed in sarongs, quietly watching us as we buried our dead in the little Dutch cemetery that looked out over the sea. I wondered what those slim brown men thought of all this. . . .

The scene shifted. It was only four days ago that we steamed through the mine fields protecting the beautiful port of Soerabaja. Air-raid sirens whined throughout the city and our lookouts reported bombers in the distant sky. Large warehouses along the docks were on fire and a burning merchantman lay on its side vomiting dense black smoke and orange flame. The enemy had come and left his calling card. We anchored in the stream not far from the smoldering docks where we watched Netherlands East Indian soldiers extinguish the fires.

Six times during the next two days we experienced air raids. Anchored there in the stream we were as helpless as ducks in a rain barrel. Why our gun crews didn't collapse is a tribute to their sheer guts and brawn. They stood by their guns unflinchingly in the hot sun pouring shell after shell into the sky while the rest of us sought what shelter is available in the bull's-eye of a target.

Time and again bombs falling with the deep-throated *swoosh* of a giant bull whip exploded around us, spewing water and shrapnel over our decks. Docks less than a hundred yards away were demolished and a Dutch hospital ship was hit, yet the *Houston,* nicknamed "the Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast" because the Japs had reported her sunk on so many similar occasions, still rode defiantly at anchor.

When the siren's baleful wailing sounded the "all clear," members of the *Houston's* band came from their battle stations to the quarter-deck where we squatted to hear them play swing tunes.

God bless the American sailor, you can't beat him!

Like *Scrooge,* the ghosts of the past continued to move into my little room. I saw us in the late afternoon of February 26, standing out of Soerabaja for the last time. Admiral Doorman of the Netherlands Navy was in command of our small striking force. His flagship, the light cruiser *De Ruyter,* was in the lead, followed by another Netherlands light cruiser, the *Java.* Next in line came the British heavy cruiser *Exeter* of *Graf Spee* fame, followed by the crippled *Houston.* Last in the line of cruisers was the Australian light cruiser *Perth.* Ten Allied destroyers made up the remainder of our force. Slowly we steamed past the ruined docks where small groups of old men, women, and children had assembled to wave tearful good-bys to their men.

Our force was small and hurriedly assembled. We had never worked together before, but now we had one common purpose which every man knew it was his duty to carry through. We were to do our utmost to break up an enemy task force that was bearing down on Java, even though it meant the loss of every ship and man among

us. In us lay the last hope of the Netherlands East Indies.

All night long we searched for the enemy convoy but they seemed to have vanished from previously reported positions. We were still at battle stations the next afternoon when at 14:15 reports from air reconnaissance indicated that the enemy was south of Bowen Island, and heading south. The two forces were less than fifty miles apart. A hurried but deadly serious conference of officers followed in the wardroom. Commander Maher, our gunnery officer, explained that our mission was to sink or disperse the protecting enemy fleet units and then destroy the convoy. My heart pounded with excitement, for the battle later to be known as the Java Sea Battle was only a matter of minutes away. Were the sands of time running out for the *Houston* and all of us who manned her? At that moment I would have given my soul to have known.

In the darkness of my room the Japs came again just as though I were standing on the bridge . . . a forest of masts rapidly developing into ships that climbed in increasing numbers over the horizon . . . those dead ahead, ten destroyers divided into two columns and each led by a four-stack light cruiser. Behind them and off our starboard bow came four light cruisers followed by two heavies. The odds weigh heavily against us for we are outnumbered and outgunned.

The Japs open fire first. Sheets of copper-colored flame lick out along their battle line and black smoke momentarily masks them from view. My heart pounds violently and cold sweat drenches my body as I realize that the first salvo is on its way. Somehow those big shells all seem aimed at me. I wonder why our guns don't open up, but as the Jap shells fall harmlessly a thousand yards short I realize that the range is yet too great. The battle from which there will be no retreat has begun.

At twenty-eight thousand yards the *Exeter* opens fire, followed by the *Houston*. The sound of our guns bellowing defiance is terrific; the gun blast tears my steel helmet from my head and sends it rolling on the deck.

The range closes rapidly and soon all cruisers are in on the fight. Salvos of shells splash in the water ever closer to us. Now one falls close to starboard, followed by another close to port. This is an ominous indicator that the Japs have at last found the range. We stand tensely awaiting the next salvo, and it comes with a wild screaming of shells that fall all around us. It's a straddle, but not a hit is registered. Four more salvos in succession straddle the *Houston,* and the lack of a hit gives us confidence. The *Perth,* 900 yards astern of us, is straddled eight times in a row, yet she too steams on unscathed. Our luck is holding out.

Shells from our guns are observed bursting close to the last Jap heavy cruiser. We have her range and suddenly one of our eight-inch bricks strikes home. There is an explosion aboard her. Black smoke and debris fly into the air and a fire breaks out forward of her bridge. We draw blood first as she turns out of the battle line, making dense smoke, Commander Maher, directing the fire of our guns from his station high in the foretop, reports our success to the Captain over the phone. A lusty cheer goes up from the crew as the word spreads over the ship.

Three enemy cruisers are concentrating their fire on *Exeter*. We shift targets to give her relief, but it is not long after this that *Exeter* shells find their mark and a light cruiser turns out of the Jap line, smoking and on fire. Despite the loss of two cruisers, the intensity of Jap fire does not seem to diminish. The *Houston* is hit twice. One shell rips through the bow just aft of the port-anchor windlass, passes down through several decks and out the side just above the water line without exploding. The other shell, hitting aft, barely grazes the side and ruptures a small oil tank. It too fails to explode.

Up to this point the luck of our forces had held up well, but now there is a rapid turn of events as the *Exeter* is hit by a Jap shell which does not explode, but rips into her forward fireroom and severs a main steam line. This reduces her speed to seven knots. In an attempt to save the *Exeter,* whose loss of speed makes her an easy target, we all make smoke to cover her withdrawal. The Japs, aware that something has gone wrong, are quick to press home an advantage, and their destroyers, under heavy support fire from the cruisers, race in to deliver a torpedo attack.

The water seems alive with torpedoes. Lookouts report them approaching and Captain Rooks maneuvers the ship to present as small a target as possible. At this moment a Netherlands East Indies destroyer, the *Koertner,* trying to change stations, is hit amidships by a torpedo intended for the *Houston.* There is a violent explosion and a great fountain of water rises a hundred feet above her, obscuring all but small portions of her bow and stern. When the watery fountain settles back into the sea it becomes apparent that the little green-and-gray destroyer has broken in half and turned over. Only the bow and stern sections of her jack-knifed keel stick above the water. A few men scramble desperately to her barnacled bottom, and her twin screws in their last propulsive effort turn slowly over in the air. In less than two minutes she has disappeared beneath the sea. No one can stand by to give the few survivors a helping hand, for her fate can be ours at any instant.

It is nearing sundown. The surface of the sea is covered with clouds of black smoke, which makes it difficult to spot the enemy. It is discovered that Jap cruisers are closing in upon us, and our destroyers are ordered to attack with torpedoes in order to divert them and give us time to reform. Although no hits are reported, the effect of the attack is gratifying, for the Japs turn away. At this point the engagement is broken off. The daylight battle has ended with no decisive results; however, there is still the convoy, which we will attempt to surprise under the cover of night.

We check our losses. The *Koertner* and H.M.S. *Electra* have been sunk. The crippled *Exeter* has retired to Soerabaja, escorted by the American destroyers, who have expended their torpedoes and are running low on fuel. The *Houston, Perth, De Ruyter,* and *Java* are still in the fight, but showing the jarring effects of continuous gunfire. Only two destroyers remain with us, H.M.S. *Jupiter* and H.M.S. *Encounter*.

The *Houston* had fired 303 rounds of ammunition per turret, and only fifty rounds per gun remain. The loss of Number Three turret has been a great handicap, but there are no complaints for the *Houston* has done well. The Chief Engineer reports that his force is on the verge of complete exhaustion and that there have been more than seventy cases of heat exhaustion in the fire-rooms during the afternoon's battle. We are in poor fighting condition, but there is plenty more to be done.

During the semi-darkness of twilight we steam on a course away from the enemy in order to lead any of their units which might have us under observation into believing that we are in retreat. When darkness descends we turn and head back.

Shortly after this H.M.S. *Jupiter,* covering our port flank, explodes mysteriously and vanishes in a brief but brilliant burst of flame. We are dumfounded, for the enemy is not to be seen—yet we race on, puzzling over her fate and blindly seeking the transports.

An hour passes with nothing intervening to interrupt our search, and then high in the sky above us a flare bursts, shattering the darkness. Night has suddenly become day and we are illuminated like targets in a shooting

*A few hundred yards away I turned, gasping for breath, to watch the death of my ship.*

gallery. We are helpless to defend ourselves, for we have no such thing as radar, and the plane merely circles outside our range of vision to drop another flare after the first one burns itself out, following it with another and still another.

We cannot know for sure, but certainly it is logical to assume that the enemy is closing in for the kill. Blinded by the flares we wait through tense minutes for the blow to come.

On the ship men speak in hushed tones as though their very words will give our position away to the enemy. Only the rush of water as our bow knifes through the sea at thirty knots, and the continuous roaring of blowers from the vicinity of the quarterdeck, are audible. Death stands by, ready to strike. No one talks of it although all thoughts dwell upon it.

The fourth flare bursts, burns, and then slowly falls into the sea. We are enveloped in darkness again. No attack has come, and as time passes it becomes evident that the plane has gone away. How wonderful is the darkness, yet how terrifying to realize that the enemy is aware of our every move and merely biding his time like a cat playing with a mouse.

Now the moon has risen to assist in our search for the convoy. It has been almost an hour since the last flare, and nothing has happened to indicate that the enemy has us under observation. During this period Ensign Stivers has relieved me as officer of the deck. I climb up on the forward anti-aircraft director platform and sprawl out to catch a bit of rest before the inevitable shooting begins. I hardly close my eyes before there comes the sound of whistles and shouting men. I am back on my feet in a hurry and look over the side. The water is dotted with groups of men yelling in some strange tongue which I cannot understand. H.M.S. *Encounter* is ordered to remain behind to rescue them.

Now we are four, three light cruisers and one heavy. We plow on through the eerie darkness. Suddenly out of nowhere six flares appear in the water along our line of ships. They resemble those round smokepots that burn alongside road constructions with a yellow flame. What exactly are they, and how did they get there? Are they some form of mine, or is their purpose to mark our path for the enemy? No one dares to guess. Either eventuality is bad enough.

As fast as we leave one group astern, another group bobs up alongside. We cannot account for them, and this Oriental deviltry is as bewildering as it is confusing. None of us has ever seen such a phenomenon before. We continue to move away from them, but other groups of floating flares appear.

The uncertainty of what is to follow is nerve-wracking. We look back and there, marking our track on the oily surface of the sea, are zig-zag lines of flares which rock and burn like ghoulish jack-o-lanterns. We leave them on the far horizon and no more appear. We are again in welcome darkness.

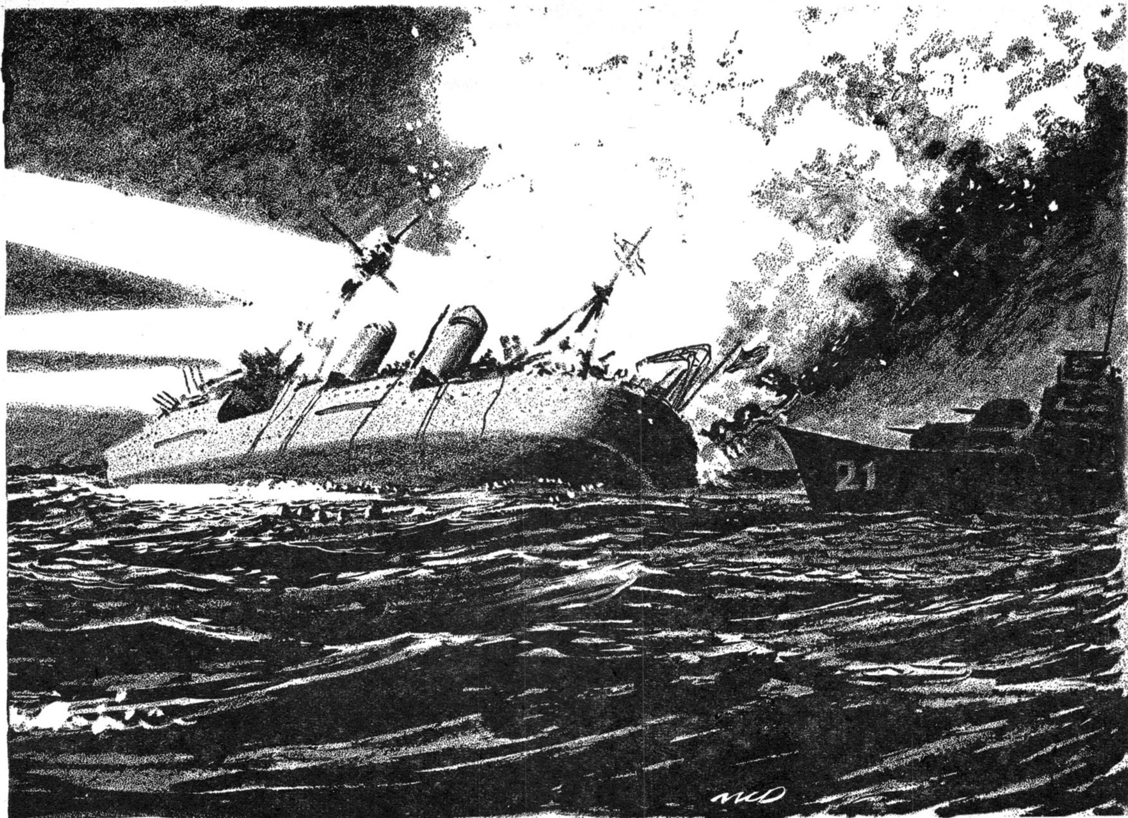
At approximately 22:30, lookouts report two large unidentified ships to port, range 12,000 yards. There are no friendly ships within hundreds of miles of us, therefore these are the enemy. The *Houston* opens up with two main battery salvos, the results of which are not determined, and the Japs reply with two of their own which throw water over the forecastle. With this exchange of fire the Japs disappear in the darkness and we make no effort to chase them, for we need all of our ammunition to sink transports.

There is no relaxing now. We are in the area where anything can happen. Hundreds of eyes peer into the night seeking the convoy, as we realize that the end of our mission is approaching.

During the night the order of ships in column has been shifted. The *De Ruyter* still maintains the lead, but behind her comes the *Houston,* following by the *Java* and *Perth* in that order.

A half hour passes without incident, and then with the swiftness of a lightning bolt a tremendous explosion rocks the *Java* 900 yards astern of the *Houston*. Mounting flames envelop her amidships and spread rapidly aft. She loses speed and drops out of the column to lie dead in the water, where sheets of uncontrolled flame consume her.

Torpedo wakes are observed in the water, although we can find no enemy to fight back. The *De Ruyter* changes course sharply to the right, and the *Houston* is just about to follow when an explosion similar to the one that doomed the *Java* is heard aboard the *De Ruyter*. Crackling flames shoot




high above her bridge, quickly enveloping the entire ship.

Captain Rooks, in a masterpiece of seamanship and quick thinking, maneuvers the *Houston* to avoid torpedoes that slip past us ten feet on either side. Then joined by the *Perth,* we race away from the stricken ships and the insidious enemy that no one can see. How horrible it is to leave our allies, but we are powerless to assist them. Now that Admiral Doorman has gone down with his blazing flagship, the Captain of the *Perth* takes command, for he is senior to Captain Rooks, and we follow the *Perth* as he sets a course for Batavia.

What an infernal night, and how lucky we are to escape. It seems almost miraculous when the sun comes up on the next morning, February 28, for there have been many times during the past fifteen hours when I would have sworn we would never see it.

The *Houston* was a wreck. Concussions from the eight-inch guns had played merry hell with the ship's interior. Every desk on the ship had its drawers torn out and the contents spewn over the deck. In lockers, clothes were torn from their hangers and pitched in muddled heaps. Pictures, radios, books, and everything of a like nature were jolted from their normal places and dashed upon the deck.

The Admiral's cabin was a deplorable sight. At one time it had been President Roosevelt's cabin, but no one could have recognized it now as such. Clocks lay broken on the deck, furniture was overturned, mirrors were cracked, charts were ripped from the bulkhead, and large pieces of sound-proofing that had come loose from the bulkheads and overhead were thick in the rubble on the deck.

THE ship itself had suffered considerably. Plates already weakened by near hits in previous bombing attacks were now badly sprung and leaking. The glass windows on the bridge were shattered. Fire hose strung along the passageways were leaking and minor floods made it sloppy underfoot.

The *Houston* was wounded and practically out of ammunition, but there was still fight left in her, plenty of it.

These events accompanied by many others played upon my mind in the minutest detail, until at last my senses became numb and I relaxed in sleep.

It was nearly 24:00 when, *Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!* the nerve-shattering "General Alarm" burst through my wonderful cocoon of sleep and brought me upright on both feet. Through two and a half months of war that gong, calling all hands to battle stations, had rung in deadly earnest. It meant only one thing, "Danger"—man your battle station and get ready to fight. So thoroughly had the lessons of war been taught us to the sharp, heartless clanging of that gong that I found myself in my shoes before I was even awake.

*Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!* The sound echoed along the steel bulkheads of the ship's deserted interior. I wondered what kind of deviltry we were mixed up in now, and somehow I felt depressed. I grabbed my tin hat as I left the room and was putting it on my head when a salvo from the main battery roared out overhead, knocking me against the bulkhead. We were desperately short of those eight-inch bricks and I knew that the boys weren't wasting them on mirages. I flashed my light to assist me in passing through the deserted ward-

aircraft weapons, but which now suddenly found themselves engaging enemy surface targets.

As I stepped on the bridge the *Houston* became enveloped in the blinding glare of searchlights. Behind the lights I could barely discern the outline of Jap destroyers. They had come in close to illuminate for their heavy units which fired at us from the darkness. Battling desperately for existence, the *Houston's* guns trained on the lights, and as fast as they were turned on, just as fast were they blasted out.

Although the bridge was the *Houston's* nerve center, I was unable to find out what we were up against. This was mainly because the tempo of the battle was so great and every man stationed there so vitally concerned with his immediate duty that I was reluctant to butt in at such a time and ask a question that had little relative meaning. What we had actually run into was later estimated to be sixty fully loaded transports, twenty destroyers, and six cruisers. We were in the middle of this mass of ships before either side was aware of the other's presence.

SUDDENLY surrounded by ships, the *Perth* and *Houston* immediately opened fire and turned sharply to starboard in an effort to break free. However, the fury of the Japs was not to be denied and the *Perth* was mortally wounded by torpedoes. Lying dead in the water, she continued to fire with everything she had until Jap shells blasted her to bits and she sank.

When Captain Rooks realized that the *Perth* was finished he turned the *Houston* back into the heart of the Jap convoy, determined in the face of no escape to sell the *Houston* dearly.

At close range the ill-fated *Houston* pounded the Jap transports with everything she had, and at the same time fought off the destroyers that were attacking with torpedoes and shellfire. Jap cruisers remained in the background, throwing salvo after salvo aboard and around us. The *Houston* was taking terrible punishment. A torpedo penetrated our after engine-room, where it exploded, killing every man there and reducing our speed to fifteen knots.

Thick smoke and hot steam venting on the gun deck from the after engine-room temporarily drove men from their guns but they came back and stayed there in spite of it. Power went out of the shell hoists which stopped the flow of five-inch shells to the guns, from the almost empty magazines. Men attempted to go below and bring shells up by hand, but debris and fires from numerous hits blocked their way. In spite of this they continued to fire, using star

*"Captain dead,* Houston *dead, Buda die too."*

room and into the passageway at the other end, where a group of stretcher-bearers and corpsmen were assembled. I asked them what we had run into, but they didn't seem to know. I left them and climbed the ladder leading to the bridge.

As I climbed there was more firing from the main battery, and now the five-inch guns were taking up the argument. I realized that it was getting to be one hell of a battle and I started running. On the Communication deck where the one-point-one's were getting into action, I passed their gun crews working swiftly, mechanically, in the darkness without a hitch, as their guns pumped out shell after shell. Momentarily I caught a glimpse of tracers hustling out into the night. They were beautiful.

Before I reached the bridge every gun on the ship was in action. The noise they made was magnificent. The *Houston* was throwing knockout punches. How reassuring it was to hear, at measured intervals, the blinding crash of the main battery, the sharp rapid crack of the five-inch guns, the steady methodic *pom, pom, pom, pom,* of the one-point-one's; and above all that, from their platforms high in the foremast and in the mainmast, came the continuous sweeping volleys of fifty-caliber machine guns which had been put there as anti-

shells which were stowed in the ready ammunition boxes by the guns.

Number Two turret, smashed by a direct hit, blew up, sending wild flames flashing up over the bridge: The heat, so intense that it drove everyone out of the conning tower, temporarily disrupted communications to other parts of the ship. The fire was soon extinguished, but when the sprinklers flooded the magazine our last remaining supply of eight-inch ammunition was ruined, which meant that the *Houston* was now without a main battery.

Numerous fires were breaking out all over the ship and it became increasingly difficult for the men to cope with them. Another torpedo plowed into the *Houston* somewhere forward of the quarterdeck. The force of the explosion made the ship tremble beneath us, and I realized then that we were done for.

Slowly we listed to starboard as the grand old ship gradually lost steerageway and stopped. The few guns still in commission continued to fire, although it was obvious that the end was near. It must have torn at the Captain's heart, but his voice was strong as he summoned the bugler and ordered him to sound "Abandon Ship."

When I heard the words "Abandon Ship" I did not wait to go down the ladder which already had a capacity crowd, with men waiting; instead I jumped over the railing to the deck below. That was probably a fortunate move, for just as I jumped a shell burst on the bridge, killing several men. I trotted out on the port catapult tower where the battered and unflyable hulk of our last airplane spread its useless wings in the darkness. It contained a rubber boat and a bottle of brandy, both of which I figured would come in handy, but I was not alone in this, for five people were there ahead of me.

DESPITE the fact that we were still the target for continuous shells and the ship was slowly sinking beneath us, there was no confusion. Men went quietly and quickly about the job of abandoning ship. Fear was nowhere apparent, due possibly to the fact that the one thing we feared most throughout the short space of the war had happened.

Captain Rooks had come down off the bridge and was saying goodby to several of his officers and men outside his cabin, when a Jap shell exploded in a one-point-one gun mount, sending a piece of the breech crashing into his chest. Captain Rooks, beloved by officers and men, died in their arms.

When Buda, the Captain's Chinese cook, learned that the Captain had been killed, he refused to leave the ship. He simply sat cross-legged outside the Captain's cabin, rocking back and forth and moaning "Captain dead, *Houston* dead, Buda die too." He went down with the ship.

During this time I made my way to the quarter-deck. Dead men lay sprawled on the deck, but there was no time to find out who they were. Men from my division were busily engaged in the starboard hangar in an effort to bring out a seaplane pontoon and two wing-tip floats that we had filled with food and water in preparation for just such a time. If we could get them into the water and assemble them as we had so designed, they would make a fine floating structure around which we could gather and work from.

I hurried to the base of the catapult tower where I worked rapidly to release the lifelines in order that we could get the floats over the side and into the water. I uncoupled one line and was working on the second when a torpedo struck directly below us. I heard no explosion, but the deck buckled and jumped under me and I found myself suddenly engulfed in a deluge of fuel oil and salt water.

Up until that moment I must have been too fascinated with the unreality of the situation to truly think about it and become frightened, but when this sudden torrent of fuel oil and water poured over me, all I could think of was fire. It was the most helpless sensation I ever had experienced in my life. Somehow I hadn't figured on getting hit or killed, but now I was gripped with the sudden fear of blazing fuel oil on my person and covering the surface of the sea. I was panicked, for I could figure no escape from it. The same thought must have been in the minds of the others, for we all raced from the starboard side to the shelter of the port hangar. No sooner had we cleared the quarter-deck than a salvo of shells plowed through it, exploding deep below decks.

Events were moving fast, and the *Houston* in her death throes was about to go down. There was only one idea left in my mind, and that was to join the others who were going over the side in increasing numbers. Quickly I made my way to the port side and climbed down the cargo nets that were hanging there. When I reached the water's edge I dropped off into the warm Java Sea. When my head came above the surface I was aware that in the darkness I was surrounded by many men, all swimming for their lives. Frantic screams for help from the wounded and drowning mixed with the shouts of others attempting to make contact with shipmates. The sea was an oily battleground of men pitted against the terrors of death. Desperately I swam to get beyond reach of the sinking ship's suction. As much as I loved the *Houston* I had no desire to join her in a watery grave.

A FEW hundred yards off I turned, gasping for breath, to watch the death of my ship. She lay well over to starboard. Jap destroyers had come in close and illuminated her with searchlights as they raked her decks with machine-gun fire. Many men struggled in the water near the ship; others clung desperately to heavily loaded life rafts; and then to my horror, I realized that the Japs were coldly and deliberately firing on the men in the water. The concussions of shells bursting in the midst of swimming men sent shock waves through the water that slammed against my body with an evil force, making me wince with pain. Men closer to the exploding shells were killed by this concussion alone.

Dazed, unable to believe that all this was real, I floated there, watching as though bewitched. The end had come. By the glare of Japanese searchlights I saw the *Houston* roll slowly over to starboard, and then, with her yardarms almost dipping into the sea, she paused momentarily. Perhaps I only imagined it, but it seemed as though a sudden breeze picked up the Stars and Stripes still firmly two blocked on the mainmast, and waved them in one last defiant gesture. Then with a tired shudder she vanished beneath the Java Sea.

The magnificent *Houston* and most of my shipmates were gone, but in the oily sea around me lay evidence of the carnage wrought by their last battle. Hundreds of Jap soldiers and sailors struggled amidst the flotsam of their sunken ships; and as I watched them drown or swim for their lives, I smiled grimly and repeated over and over, "Well done, *Houston!*"

## SPORT SPURTS

**BACK in 1893, twenty-three men came to bat for the Chicago Cubs in one inning.**

* * *

**Al Zarilla's inside-the-park homer at Fenway Park in Boston on September 2 of last year was the first inside homer there in twelve years.**

* * *

**Battling Levinsky once fought three bouts in one day—in Brooklyn, in Manhattan and in Waterbury, Connecticut—receiving only $400 for the triple-header.**

—*By Harold Helfer*

# A

**Because he had missed out on a scholarship at the big school, he found himself a stranger in this small one—and a halfback taking over the fullback's job.**

*"We need halfbacks like we need a shot in the head," said Pop. "In my day, a fella just wanted to play football."*

HANSFORD U's football team deployed and shot a play at right tackle. Colorado College's stalwarts plugged the hole and there was no gain. Hansford took time out. The ball was on Colorado's ten-yard line. The time was late in the final quarter. There had been no score.

Larry Harper sat on the bench, opening and closing his hands. He was a large young man with heavy shoulders and strong football legs and a large gripe in his heart. He muttered to Lansing and Fearing, the other sub halfbacks, "What a raggedy-tail outfit we are! Down there four times—and no score."

Lansing said, "This is not W.C.U., bub."

Larry winced inwardly—they all knew he had tried for a scholarship to W.C.U. They all figured he had been weighed and found wanting. He fell silent and stared at the field.

Pop Lawford walked slowly toward the bench. Guy Treadwell, Hansford fullback, was limping around, the trainer holding his arm. Pop said, "Harper."

The big halfback started, scowled, then got up and went forward. He stood, towering over Pop, dangling his headguard.

Pop was very old. He had coached more football teams than anyone in the nation. Pop had been very great in his day, but he was very old now, tanned and seamy and a trifle bent. Only his eyes were bright and probing. He said, "Treadwell had a bad knee last season. I don't want to take any chances."

"I'm a halfback," said Larry.

"We need halfbacks like we need a shot in the head," said Pop. "You want to play football?"

"I never practised at fullback."

Pop turned to stare at Treadwell. The big man was still limping. "In my day, a fella just wanted to play football. Okay, Harper; go back to the bench."

Larry said quickly, "Now wait—I didn't mean it that way."

"Then go in for Treadwell," said Pop quietly, still not looking at Larry.

On the field Treadwell growled and protested. Larry overheard him say to Ray Summer, "That damned J.C. transfer can't play football. He's dreamin' of W.C.U."

# Shot *in the* Head

## *by* JOEL REEVE

But the referee was calling time and Treadwell had to go, still grumbling, still limping. Ray Summer gave Larry a quick stare. Malloy and Georgie Gray, the halfbacks, muttered together. The Hansford team huddled. A hell of a pleasant beginning to a football career, thought Larry Harper.

The team shifted to single wing. Larry was in the slot. Summer gave the snap-sign, the ball came back in a direct pass to Larry. He dug in, seeking his hole inside tackle.

There was a quick opening, with Colorado valiantly throwing men into it as fast as they could get there.

Larry dug with his cleats, found purchase, hurled his body through the hole. He blasted a secondary defender with a straight arm. There was a second when everyone from Colorado threatened him.

Then he twisted away, got his head close to the ground, rabbitlike, and scudded. The safety man, shouting for aid, dived into him. Larry butted and strove. They went down and rolled over on the grass together.

The referee's whistle shrilled; he was raising both hands. Larry got to his knees, blinking. He stayed there a moment. It was the first time he had carried the ball for Hansford in a game—and he had scored!

Nobody said anything. He went back and blocked while Ray Summer converted.

The game ended almost at once: Hansford 7, Colorado 0.

Larry Harper roomed alone. Transferring from Junior College after sophomore year, the only football candidate in that category, he had walked into a situation over which he had no control. The men who had come before him had already made their alliances, formed their college friendships and clans.

Also there was the matter of his ambition to attend W.C.U. The newspapers had carried that story. The coach at the big college, Red Jackson, was a former pupil and assistant to Pop Lawford. Two of Larry's former teammates were due to star on W.C.U.'s team: Freddy Wolfe and Dean Parsonet, a halfback and a fullback. Larry had hoped to be the other halfback in that combination, with canny Nonny Hale as quarterback—a slick offensive backfield for any team.

Larry had not made the grade. Red Jackson had chosen Ord Ordway and some others, but Larry never received a bid. He had therefore matriculated at little Hansford, which had a game scheduled against W.C.U. that year—just a breather—with some vague idea of showing Red Jackson a thing or two.

Sitting in his room, he realized what a joke on him that was. Hansford with its tiny squad didn't even have a surplus fullback of any merit. W.C.U. had three or four.

Larry's chores done, he realized that he was lonely. He got up and went out into the pleasant fall evening. In the entire school there was no one upon whom he could call for companionship. He walked, head down, hands in pockets.

At Junior College he had been one of a bunch of good fellows. He had never been a leader, a stand-out, but he had been accepted. The burden of his loneliness weighed upon him. He went into the tiny town upon the edge of which the college nestled and turned a corner.

He almost ran down Pop Lawford. The old man had his battered felt hat over one eye and was strolling slowly along. He put out a veined, sinewy hand and said, "Just a minute, son."

Larry said, "Hello, Coach." His face lighted, he was aware of a lightening of spirit. "Lousy game today, huh?"

"Well," said Pop, as they walked on, side by side. "Yes and no," said Pop at last.

They went along for a block or two in silence. Larry was satisfied to have company, anyone to walk with.

They came to an ice-cream parlor and Pop said, "I'll treat."

They went in and sat down. A small girl in a white apron and a short dress came to wait on them. Pop said, "Nelly, this is Larry Harper. He's my new fullback."

Nelly said, "It's about time you gave Guy relief! His knee won't stand the grind. He can't pivot in the T, and he can't get started from single wing."

Pop said, "Well, Larry here is a halfback. Mebbe he can't work in. But he's all I've got of the right size."

Larry was aware of round brown eyes scrutinizing him. The girl stepped back, put small fists upon shapely hips. She said, "He'll weigh one-eighty. A halfback? He ought to have speed. He'll do—if he's any good."

"You missed the game today?" asked Pop gently.

"Did I ever miss one? He picked his hole and got lucky." She shrugged. "What kind of ice cream, Larry?"

"Vanilla," mumbled Larry. He felt like a patient in front of a doctor's fluoroscope. He tried to stare angrily at the small girl with the pretty legs.

He couldn't make it. He managed only a silly grin. He was gawking after her when Pop said, "She's been goin' around with Guy Treadwell a lot. She's Hansford's top fan. Spunky li'l' gal, an orphan. Owns a piece of this shop; waits on tables because the boys—and the townies—are nuts about her."

Larry said, "She's pretty fresh."

"Ha!" said Pop. "You ain't seen nothin'!" He changed his tone abruptly. "You hear what I said? You're my fullback."

"Yeah."

"I ain't got two platoons, like W.C.U. My fullback plays a lot of football. Course he don't play like we did, in my day, sixty minutes or die on the field." Pop laughed. "What dummies we were! And for years afterwards, guys in there too proud to come out—and with knees worse'n Treadwell's, with busted noses and collarbones strapped up—dyin' for dear old Rutgers."

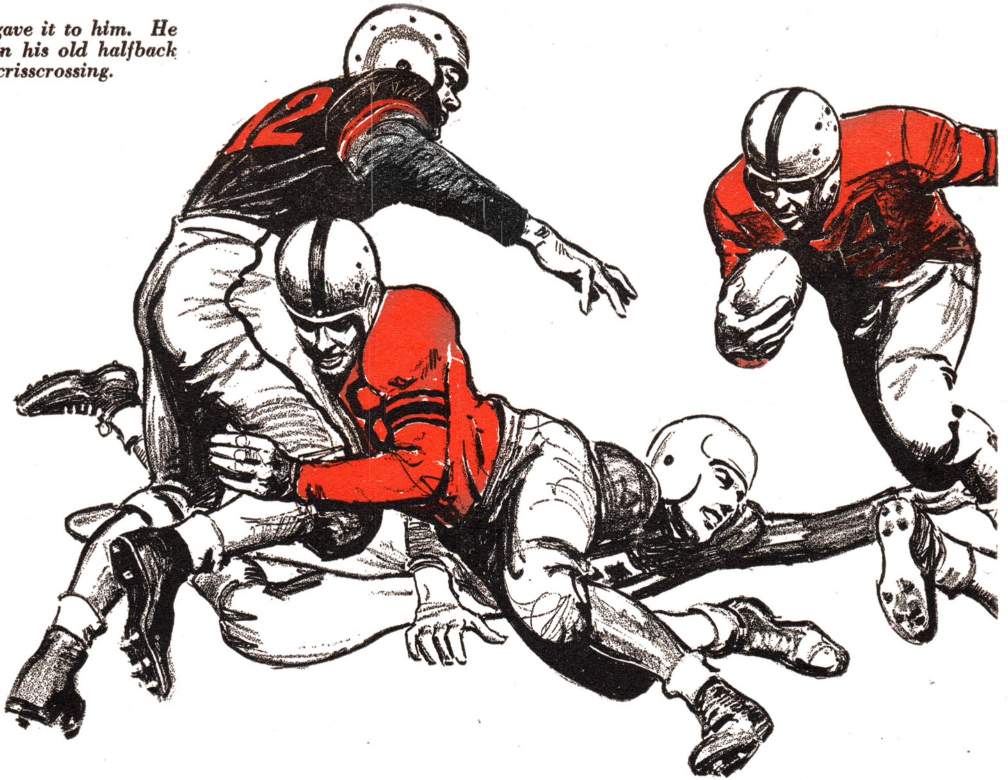
The girl set the ice cream down before them. She said, "That was the stupid era. Now the boys are smart."

"You're so right," said Larry, beaming upon her. "Smarter and faster and—"

"Like Caesar—ambitious," she cut in. She walked away.

Pop chuckled. "Sure is a pert gal. . . . Now on that play you ran today,

*Again they gave it to him. He swung out, in his old halfback style, crisscrossing.*



when you scored. Your timin' was off, you know that."

"Off? I scored!"

"Their backer-up was two steps out of position," said Pop mildly. "You cut like a halfback and fooled him besides. It wouldn't work against —well, against W.C.U." He squinted over his laden spoon at Larry.

"Oh—I see."

"I taught that Red Jackson a lot," said Pop somewhat smugly. "He's got fundamentals in his skull. You listen to me, son. I got things to tell you. Listen here!"

LARRY listened, but his eyes kept going to the girl. On her part, she seemed not aware that he was on earth. But when they left an hour later she glanced at him; her lashes were long and curly, and they drooped just a moment before his stare. Somehow his step was very light walking back to the campus with Pop. As they were parting, Pop's final words alone brought him sharply to earth.

"About the way the guys feel, I dunno. That's up to you. They figger you think you're too good for Hansford. You can play that any way you want. All I ask is good football out o' you."

Larry said, "I don't feel I'm too good for anybody."

"Sure," Pop nodded. "I know; but *they* don't. See you at practise tomorrow, son. Early, now!" And he plodded off in the night. He stepped briskly for a man his age, Larry thought. He thought briskly too. . . .

Guy Treadwell was a handsome, blond young man with muscles all over him like bumps on a log. The injured knee was a cross nigh impossible for him to bear. It affected his disposition in a highly adverse manner. Limping around, following the practise session while Larry played fullback on offense, his comments were caustic and finally personal.

He complained, "This J.C. whiz doesn't hit in there. He ducks around like a halfback. He *is* a sort of halfback."

Pop said, "Jest leave it to me, Guy."

"W.C.U. will tame him. His old pals will be layin' for him," said Guy with some satisfaction. "My knee will be all right for the St. Cecelia game."

Pop said, "Could be, Guy. Don't make cracks where he can hear you. It don't help any."

But Larry had overheard. His ears were burning. He worked like a horse, learning the fullback spot.

At night he walked into town for his ice cream. On the night before the W.C.U. game he was talking to Nelly—her last name was Barr, he had ascertained—when Guy Treadwell and Ray Summer and Malloy and Morey Lane, end and captain of the team, entered. The footballers took the big table in the center of the room. Summer, a lean but rugged character, looked over and said, "Hi, Larry! How about some of that poor service, Nell?"

Treadwell said, "Keep your cotton-pickin' mouth off my my girl, Ray."

"We pick cotton with our hands," drawled Summer. "And anyway she ain't your gal. I got dibs on Nell."

The banter was good-humored and smooth and Nelly went over and took their orders and gave better than they sent. Larry sat against the wall and hated them and hated himself. The only one he didn't hate was Nelly.

He had been pretty mixed up about Nelly—a girl living alone and managing a large ice-cream parlor and palavering football like a man. He hadn't quite known what to think about her. He was a very inexperienced lad when it came to women. And Nelly was, he decided that evening, a woman; not any older than he, but a woman,

right on. He saw Treadwell look at her without kidding and he knew Treadwell was aware of her womanliness, too. He sat there, his face stiff, knowing the football players did not want him to join them, and thought about Nelly. Then he thought about Pop and football and himself.

THEY would take the buses to the big city tomorrow and go like lambs to the slaughter against W.C.U. He would see Freddy and Dean and the others, his friends, in the blue-and-gold of the enemy. And he would be an outcast, doubly so; the boy who had not made the grade at the big school—and who was a stranger in his own camp. He sat and thought about it.

Nelly finished waiting on the big table. She called a girl from behind the counter to take over the business. She removed her white apron and smoothed down her simple frock. Larry watched her, waiting for her to join Guy Treadwell.

She walked past the big table. She walked to where Larry sat alone. She took the chair opposite him and said sharply, "Stop feeling sorry for yourself."

He started. "I'm not!"

Then she smiled. "You are—and I don't really blame you. You haven't had a good deal here. Tomorrow you'll get your brains knocked out playing most of the game. But cheer up; I'm your pal."

"You are?" He gulped back his eagerness. "Uh—thanks, Nelly. You have been swell to me, you and Pop."

She said, "I'm going up to the game, you know."

For a second he didn't get it. Then he leaped at it. "Uh—could I see you afterward—if I'm in one piece? Could we maybe go some place, for some fun?"

She said, "Guy asked me; I turned him down. I made you ask me."

He regarded her and it was as if for the first time. He found his voice strong and confident. "Nelly, we've talked about football. We understand each other, maybe."

"I'll know for sure, tomorrow," she said. "But I want to go out with you, however it turns out."

"It can only turn out one way," he said grimly.

She shook her head. "That's what the team thinks. Ray, Georgie, Sam, even Morey. Guy—he's the worst of all. That's why— But never mind. But that's not what Pop thinks."

"We can't win."

"Winning—that's nothing. Hansford's real games are against Compson, against St. Cecelia, in its own league. Tomorrow will tell the story and you know it, too."

Larry considered this. "Why, yes," he marveled. "I have the same feeling. Make or break."

"It will be interesting," she said dryly.

He could not take his eyes from her. He was aware of silence at the big table, knew everyone's eyes were upon him, registering disfavor. He smiled, leaning toward her a little. Let them hate him, he thought. He did not blame them for hating him. . . .

There was time; there was too much time. In the morning they tried the grass of the huge Municipal Stadium which was W.C.U.'s stamping-grounds. The Hansford team was well-drilled, as Pop's teams always were and will be. They went through signals without a hitch.

But where was the heart? Larry Harper knew it was lacking. Maybe the others knew, but they were too preoccupied with their own private thoughts to speak much among themselves, and of course they seldom had much to say to Larry.

POP walked the sidelines, finally whistled them off the field. The turf was fine. The rows and rows of empty seats went around the circle of the concrete pile and gave back echoes of Pop's whistle. It was morguelike as they went to the dressing-room. Pop had very little to impart. They dressed and recessed until game-time, sticking together, resting, still without words.

Guy Treadwell found Larry, drew him to one side. The handsome lad's brow was dark, his eye glittered. "I hear you're dating Nelly after the game."

Larry said, "Go away, Treadwell. Don't bother me."

"Damn your soul, your damned superior soul—"

Larry said, "Look—I'm playing football today. You go and be *Cyrano* some place else. Or *Othello*. Or anyone from English B you want to play."

Treadwell said, "You're a four-flushing jerk. You're—" He caught himself, took a deep breath. He turned on his heel and walked away.

Larry did not feel it, one way or the other. He wanted to be alone. There was too much time before the game. He almost ducked Pop, but Pop caught him.

Pop said, "I didn't ask for this game. They scheduled it to make some money. But we got this game."

"A funeral is more fun," snapped Larry.

Pop said, "Fun? Who plays football for fun?" His eyes were on Larry, sharp and questioning. "That was another day."

"The old days," gibed Larry. "Broken hands, broken noses, shin-guards on splintered shins. Brave old days!"

Pop said, "Yeah. Dumb, wasn't it, like we said?"

"If this damned game would only start," Larry said savagely.

"It'll start. It'll end, too. And we'll either have a team—or we won't."

"That's what Nelly meant," muttered Larry. "Why does everybody tell *me?*"

Pop patted his arm. "You'll be all right, son. You'll get smeared, but you'll be all right."

Seemingly, years dragged by—but Pop was right: The game started.

While the stadium was far from sold out, there was a good yelling crowd, because it was a nice day and W.C.U. was as yet untried against top opposition and fans wanted to see what the Blue-and-Gold could do against one of Pop's little teams. It was sunny and rather warm. Larry Harper walked back with the others after Morey Lane won the toss.

Lane looked at his teammates. His face was blank, his lips stiff. "They can only play eleven at a time," he called. "Let's go in there!"

That was fine talk. Larry swung his arms to loosen the shoulder pads. Ray Summer looked grim. Malloy and Gray jittered in position. Morey raised his arm, Paganni of W.C.U. ran forward with the Blue-and-Gold streaming at each side of him, toe-hit the ball—and the battle was joined.

Gray, the speed boy, could have had the ball on the goal-line. But he yelled, "Harper!" and made ready to block. Larry came under it fast, from an angle.

There was the funnel, up the middle. He could run into it. He saw Blue-and-Gold jerseys flashing, thought he recognized Pinky Levin, an old acquaintance, a great end. He cut.

He hit behind Tug Wilson and Jay Nogrady, tackle and guard of Hansford. They had managed to keep their feet and he came up behind them and yelled "Sideline!" and they swerved, as Pop had taught them. He ran easily between them and they fended off tacklers as though they were playing any old team. He skidded to the sideline and held it for five, ten yards, walking the tight rope of chalk. He saw he was caught. He stepped outside. He was on the thiry-yard line, a fine run-back.

He jumped to position in the huddle. Ray Summer chanted a signal. Larry shut his teeth down hard.

He was in the box of the T, and Ray fed him the pigskin. He blasted where there should have been a quick opening. He met something like granite. He drove and dug. They piled on him.

One yard, one measly yard! Inside Larry a metronome began to swing, ticking loudly, almost deafening him.

*"Nelly, this is Larry Harper. He's my new fullback," Pop said.*

This was stupid, suicide football. He stared at Summer.

Ray started to call a number, hesitated. His eyes met Larry's blazing gaze. He changed the signal.

Larry took his place. The ball went to Ray. Larry slid over. Pinky was slashing. He hit the big end and drove him. Georgie Gray skidded inside and tincanned, out-foxing the secondary.

It was a first down. The tiny Hansford contingent stood and howled until larynxes were sore.

That was all. Ray had to kick on fourth down. He booted a sweet one, out of bounds on the W.C.U. fifteen-yard line.

A whole new team in blue-and-gold trotted onto the field. Freddy Wolfe and Dean Parsonet paused to wave at Larry Harper. Pinky Levin even gave him the clenched fist of admiration. Paganni clapped his hands.

Larry stood, staring at them. They had been his pals, his teammates; now they were strangers, benignly tossing him a crumb of approbation from their old affection. He was rooted for a moment, many memories flashing through his mind.

Then he was in action. Pop had sent in Fearing and Lansing and some linesmen, skillfully using his slim forces to best advantage. Larry went to his position backing up behind Morey Lane and Tug Wilson and Nogrady. W.C.U. went to work.

Nonny Hale seemed to be willing to take it very easy. He merely sent Parsonet straight into the line. The fullback got five yards.

Then Wolfe carried, on a simple cross-buck. The big fast W.C.U. forwards lunged. Wolfe scampered. Nogrady was dumped. Wilson was shunted aside. Larry Harper struck the blocker, used his legs and his arms and found Freddy. He dragged down the halfback and slammed him over.

Freddy looked at him, lying there. He said softly, "Hey, pal! You wanna play, huh? Just like always, only different."

"This is no tea-party," snapped Larry.

"Oh?" Freddy went back and spoke in the huddle. Parsonet and the others turned and grinned at Larry.

The next play came over right tackle. It was an avalanche and Larry went down under it, grabbing legs. Ordway carried and it went for a first down on the W.C.U. thirty-yard marker.

Larry got up very slowly. Morey Lane was regarding him solemnly. Larry said, "If you'd drift a minute, then slash, I can back up closer."

Morey said, "Huh?" but the thought penetrated.

W.C.U. came, in almost leisurely fashion, again at the strong side. Morey drifted. Larry crashed in. Morey swooped and sliced Wolfe's legs from under him, stopping him after a one-yard gain.

Again they came and again Morey got them, with Tug and Nogrady, suddenly fighting like madmen, holding their ground. A blocker knocked Larry for a loop, but W.C.U. had to punt.

That was a swift quarter of a game, Larry thought. There was blood in his mouth now and he ached a little, but his legs and wind were all right. He looked at the scoreboard and laughed within himself. There was no score.

Morey Lane came close. He said, "That was a hell of an idea."

"The big slobs," said Larry. "The hell with them!"

Ray Summer appeared from nowhere. He said, "Larry, I hate to use you so much. But you're the only one who can gain. Guy will be in for you if you get too pooped."

Tug Wilson chimed in from behind him, "Geez, Larry, you're makin' half the tackles."

"Damn them," said Larry again. "They think they're just playin' with us."

It was Hansford's ball on their own twenty, second and five. Ray called the signal and Larry humped himself. Nogrady and Wilson, tigerish, opened a hole. He made the first down.

Ray was punting fifty yards that day, sometimes more. W.C.U. settled down. Wolfe, Parsonet and Hale began to go. They came up to midfield; then they shook Pinky loose and Hale threw him a long one.

Levin scored as the half ended and it was seven-nothing for W.C.U.

In the dressing-room, Pop gave it to them. He scored their mistakes; he praised few of their efforts. He lashed them with advice. Then he said, "There's no such thing with me as a moral victory. You lose—and dammit, you've lost a game! I was ready for you to blow this one to hell and gone." He paused and his old eyes grew bright. "Now I ain't ready any more! Go out there and play yourselves some damn' football!"

Larry managed to be the last one out. He looked eagerly at the stands next to the exit of the ramp.

Nelly was there. She was wearing red, the school color. She was leaning over. He had never seen her like this, emotionally stirred. Her lips were parted to show her white even teeth, and her eyes glowed like—like Pop's eyes.

"Honey, is it all right?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said fiercely. "Not yet, darling."

*Illustrated by O. F. Schmidt*

*"Honey, is it all right?" he asked. "Not yet, darling," she said fiercely.*

Guy Treadwell turned and looked back and saw them. He took one step, then retreated.

Larry said, "Maybe it won't be. But here goes nothin'."

He blew her a kiss. People saw him and cheered mockingly, but he, uncaring, ran after the team. . . .

It got to be the last quarter.

There was no player on Hansford who had not been relieved, except Larry Harper. He stood out there—and it was Hansford's ball on the thirty and the score was seven to nothing for W.C.U.

On the sidelines, Red Jackson was talking to himself. On the bench, W.C.U. men huddled in shame. Four, five, six touchdowns should have been the margin, everyone agreed. But it was still seven to nothing. Jackson sent in more big fresh men.

Ray Summer said, "Can you do it, Larry?"

"Make me a hole," he said hoarsely. He no longer felt the pain of his bruises. He no longer felt anything but rage and impotence as they hammered him to earth time and again.

Nogrady, playing the game of his life, made a small hole. Larry wriggled into it, began thrashing his legs. He got two yards.

"Wilson!" he begged. The big tackle looked abashed and half dead.

Again they gave it to him. He bashed past Wilson and then there was a free moment as Nogrady threw a block. He swung out, in his old halfback style, crisscrossing. Wolfe had just come in on the wing. He spun at his old teammate, remembering, threw a fake stiff-arm, then spun away. Freddy never could handle that one when they were playing together.

He got over past the secondary and the field was broken. He was gasping and his feet were leaden. He knew he could not run very far; he knew it.

He heard a voice. It was Morey Lane. Then he saw Summer, who had caught up with the play. Then Nogrady blasted an opponent off his feet. Lane panted, "Straight away, Larry!"

He put down his head. He couldn't see. He didn't know what went on in the field. He saw Morey bang off a tackler. Then he got his second wind.

Someone clipped Morey off and there was the last man, a fleet safety man. Larry's legs felt better. He put on a burst of speed. A man dived from behind and missed him. The safety man came over.

Larry went straight for him. The W.C.U. tackler eagerly braced to meet the onslaught.

Larry drifted like a thistle on a breeze. He ran around and now his straight-arm spanged a headguard. He leaped and cut again. He sped alone—and across the goal.

He wanted to lie down then and rest. But he could not. He had to stand, head erect. He had to find Wolfe and the others; he had to give

them the old signeroo—the clenched fist. He had to make a mocking face at them.

Ray Summer converted. The score was tied. The W.C.U. adherents, the experts, the wise men, sat stunned and disbelieving.

There was strange silence among the Hansfords as they went back to receive. Morey Lane broke it.

He said, "Larry—why don't you take a rest? Pop will put Guy in if I ask him to."

"Why don't you ask him?" mumbled Larry. He staggered a step. He caught himself. "You want to ask him?"

"Hell, *no!*" said Morey Lane.

Ray Summer said, "Drag the line, Larry. Take a rest."

Nogrady and Wilson hovered near him. Both were in bad shape, but both had enjoyed some relief in the game. Wilson said guiltily, "Geez, Larry, they'll be comin' hard now."

Larry said, "You stay on them, you hear me? You stay under them." He hardly knew what he was saying. He was completely bushed, for the moment.

Wilson kicked off. And the Blue-and-Gold came roaring.

It was a race with the clock. Larry heard the timekeeper give the sign. Two minutes were left.

W.C.U. had passed and run to the twenty. Again and again Larry had attempted to snag one of the airborne tosses. It was the only chance, he kept saying. Intercept and run it back. It was their only chance now.

Morey soothed, "Okay, Larry, okay. We're rushin' the passer. Okay."

Then W.C.U. came on the ground. Weary, dog-tired, Wilson and Nogrady gave ground. Larry went in and under the plays, driving into the ball-carrier.

It was third down. The ball was on the Hansford five. It was goal to go—the ball game in the balance and two plays left and the time to run them. . . .

Of course he could not pick out the bit of scarlet which was Nelly in the stands. But he could see Pop. The old man stood with his hands behind his back, alone and straight on the sideline. Red Jackson might race up and down, feverishly consulting with aides, sending in last-gap substitutions. But Pop just stood and calmly watched and Larry wondered "What price moral victory, now, old boy?"

A big new tackle came in opposite Wilson and Nogrady. W.C.U. set itself and sprang to wrest the last five yards to victory. Larry yelped a defense signal and hurled himself forward. Parsonet came behind the new tackle. Larry hit like a whirlwind. Parsonet gained two yards.

Jackson wasn't so smart, thought Larry. He looked for another sub to tip off direction of the pay-off play. None came.

He stood up, trembling a little. W.C.U. was a long time in the huddle. They came out, formed up. There was dead silence in the stadium. The timekeeper raised his gun. Hale, no longer debonair and slothful, snapped numbers; W.C.U. bent like a bow, then launched in an all-out plunge.

It was Wolfe, taking it from Parsonet, trying a sneak. Larry saw it first. That day he had second sight, he thought. He began to run. He ticked off a blocker with an elbow. He got outside Morey.

Then Morey, who had drifted, moved up. Another blocker was stripped. Larry flung himself across space. One hand grabbed a heel. He lifted his arm.

Freddy Wolfe went head over tin-cup. The flag marking the corner of the playing-field quivered. It was a red flag, the color of Hansford.

The referee, kneeling, squinting, did not hesitate. He stepped forward, held out his hand for the ball. The gun went off and he stood there, adamant, as W.C.U. protested loud and long that Wolfe had scored.

The game was over.

In the dressing-room, Pop said, "I take it all back. It's good enough for me. I take it all back." He was holding Larry as though he would never let go. "This dumb guy! This stupid throwback! It'll never happen again, Larry—I'll never punish you like that again."

"Punish me?" Larry was looking at Guy Treadwell, at Guy's clean fresh uniform, at his handsome, unmarked face. "Punish me? Hell, Pop, that was more damned fun than a circus."

Morey Lane was shouting, "Bring on St. Cecelia. Bring on anybody. Bring on Notre Dame!"

They hovered around Larry, patting him. Guy Treadwell came over.

There was a brief silence. Guy spoke into it, low-voiced: "I'll buy it, Harper." He held out his hand.

Larry said, "Sure, Guy, sure." He broke away. He said, "Later, we'll fan it. Later. . . ."

He got out of there fast. He found Nelly waiting, alone. He grabbed her and kissed her, very gently.

She said, "That was nice."

He said, "Let's find a nice quiet place."

She said, "I want to hear all about it. How you should have won and all that nonsense."

"Won?" He held her arm tight. He wasn't tired any more. He led her toward the exit. "We won, didn't we? We've got a ball-club, haven't we? What's winning?" The End

# Yankee

**Supplying arms to Europe is no innovation for us. Consider this episode of the 1830's.**

More than one hundred years ago Sultan Mahmud II asked a visiting Frenchman:

"And what is the greatest wish of your heart? I will grant it if it is within my power. Speak."

The Frenchman spoke. Mistaking Turkish politeness for a true favor, he said:

"If you please, Your Majesty, I wish to see the most beautiful woman of your harem."

Not batting an eye, Mahmud II murmured an order. In a half-hour a covered tray was brought to the impertinent guest. When the cover was lifted, the Frenchman saw a woman's head. And it was indeed beautiful, even in death.

But Commodore David Porter, American chargé d'affaires in the Ottoman Empire of the time, was more subtle and careful. He knew his moody Mahmud. When he wanted something of the Sultan, he first made sure that it was also in the Sultan's interest to do the thing for him.

In the 1820's and '30's Mahmud was hard pressed by his assorted enemies: the rising Greeks, restless Bulgars and Serbs and rebellious Egyptians, among others. In October 1827 his fleet was destroyed at Navarino by the combined navies of Russia, England and France. By 1831 Mohammed Ali, self-made ruler of Egypt, was threatening Constantinople. To crush his foes, Mahmud needed a new fleet. Commodore Porter saw his country's chance: he arranged for Yankee shipbuilders to bring men and material to the shores of the Golden Horn.

In August 1831, Henry Eckford, the canny Scotch-American shipwright of New York, sailed into Istanbul with a brand-new 26-gun corvette. "Beautiful!" exclaimed Commodore Porter as the man-o'-war rode at anchor in the Bosporus. His was a different appreciation of beauty than the Frenchman's. Here Mahmud agreed readily and murmured pleasantly. The Sultan paid Eckford the neat sum of $150,000 for the corvette. He advanced Eckford $50,000 more for further live-oak and other ship-lumber to be brought from the States.

Meantime part of the naval yard of Constantinople was set aside for Eck-

# Frigates for Turkey

by ALBERT PARRY

ford's use. Of some five thousand workers there, fully six hundred were put under Eckford and his twelve American mechanics. These six hundred were Turks, Greeks and Italians, each receiving slightly less than half a dollar a day. The American mechanics, with their daily wage of two dollars, were surely the most aristocratic employees that Near Eastern laboring ranks had contained up to that date and for a long time after. But the workday of the American shipbuilders at home was fifteen hours long, and there is no evidence that this was reduced in their new locale on the Horn.

The Eckford sector of the Istanbul yard was truly a bit of America transplanted. Late in 1832 Commodore Porter boasted in his report to Secretary of State Edward Livingston:

*The American part of the establishment, entirely under American control and American regulations, and over which the Turks exercise no authority, occupies a space as large as the Navy Yard at Washington, with workshops, mould lofts, forges, etc. etc.—nearly all put up since we have been here. It may seem extraordinary, but it does not appear that any of the diplomatists here have any idea that there is anything like American influence in operation among the elements of the Marine of this country.*

American influence was in fact of more than one type. Since June 1831 a Reverend William Goodell, a missionary from Massachusetts, was tolerated by Mahmud II in his capital. Dr. James E. De Kay, Eckford's son-in-law, thus described one of Reverend Goodell's services: "It is certainly not among the least of the novelties of our situation to hear a Yankee clergyman preaching in Italian on the banks of the Bosporus to an audience composed of half a dozen different nations." Italian was used because, except for Eckford's group, not many of the Christian worshipers understood English.

Thus began the life of the new American colony on the Golden Horn—and almost ended before it could really grow. For on November 12, 1832, after a short illness, Henry Eckford died.

His eldest son was in Turkey at the time. Entrusting the contracts to Commodore Porter, young Eckford placed his father's body in a casket of wine. Thus preserved, the old gentleman was shipped back to New York for burial.

The live-oak, which Eckford had brought from Georgia and Florida swamps, was in the works when he died, and another frame for a ship was on the way from the States. Other blueprints were in preparation. But now Mahmud II sorrowfully said that no one equaled old Henry's genius. It was no use going on with his plans.

The Sultan reckoned without the Commodore. On December 16, 1832, Porter was able to write to Secretary Livingston that after Eckford's death *"there was but a few days' interruption in the building of the ship which had been placed by him on the stocks for the Grand Senior."* The Commodore patted himself: *"By a little*

*management I have been able to give the impulse . . . . induced His Highness to continue the construction under American superintendence, and on the most liberal terms."* His solution had been simple: Why not take Henry's aide and foreman in Turkey, Foster Rhodes, and put him in charge? The Sultan agreed.

Such was the making of Rhodes. Not a great shipwright, not as gifted as Eckford, Rhodes of Connecticut held his own tolerably well. His name did not go into the annals of American shipbuilding with any resounding force beyond that episode of the Golden Horn. But with the start already made by Eckford in his year in Turkey, Rhodes pushed on and completed the work. Incidentally, the fortune that was to be Eckford's became largely his.

The Commodore gave young Rhodes his astute counsel. The Commodore acted as Eckford's estate administrator. In brief, the small-statured and oft-ailing but ever busy Commodore actually ran the Sultan's naval yard. And the greatest day of Porter's triumph came on May 18, 1835, when a 74-gun frigate begun by Eckford and finished by Rhodes was slid off the stocks of Istanbul.

This very mode of launching was most revolutionary for the Turks. They were by then still in the centuries-old habit of hauling completed ships by ropes—by main force, which sometimes meant months of labor. No wonder that on that May day Mahmud's capital of a half-million inhabitants was agog.

A richly embroidered tent was installed in the naval yard for the Sultan. All the houses opposite were cleared of their dwellers to make windows available for the four hundred veiled ladies of Mahmud's harem. *"Lines of soldiers around the ship . . . . and stretching two lines of boats across the harbor to prevent the crowding of innumerable kaiks which swarmed to witness the novel spectacle,"* Porter described to his Secretary of State the next day. And Henry Wikoff, a passing playboy from Philadelphia, added: *"All the dignitaries of the empire turned out in force. Even the sluggish population of Stamboul wended their way thither, half anxious, half curious, as if about to witness a miracle. Opium-smokers laid down their pipes, and the snarling dogs almost ceased to bark."* Deep and low murmurs of wonder came from the great throng as the majestic Yankee ship glided down into the Horn.

That very moment the Sultan rose to pin upon Rhodes a marvelous miniature likeness of the ship set in diamonds. Soon all the Turkish pashas and all the Russian, English and French attachés were milling around Rhodes and Porter to offer their congratulations. The ship was indeed a thing of grace and power. Quoth Wikoff:

> *Dumfounded and amazed, the immense throng were silent. For to a Turk, mechanical agencies were utterly unknown. Profoundly moved, the vast multitude dispersed, and sought the refuge of their mosques to commune with Allah over this incomprehensible phenomenon. There was some danger that day of Mahomet being deposed, and of Mr. Rhodes being declared the true prophet.*

For four years thereafter Rhodes and Porter were the strong men behind Mahmud II's throne. Rhodes built one ship after another; Porter managed the high finance and clever diplomacy which made the continued contracts possible.

Rhodes labored mightily. We have a glimpse of him at work from Wikoff's notes: ". . . . *his coat off, his sleeves rolled back, a Greek cap on his head, and an immense diamond pin glittering on his shirt-front . . . . a tall muscular man, with a pleasant countenance, offhand manner, earnest and energetic."*

The Sultan spent a lot of time in the naval yard.

Wikoff asked: "Does he interfere with you much?"

"I don't allow him to," Rhodes replied. "I carry out my own ideas. If he makes a good suggestion, I adopt it; if it is a bad one, I reject it. I think I astonish him sometimes. At others he is amused."

"Lucky you are not a Turk!" exclaimed Edwin Forrest, the celebrated actor who was with Wikoff on this trip.

Wikoff and Forrest visited Rhodes in his sumptuous house given him by the Sultan. Fitted out in a Western style, it pleased Wikoff: clearly Rhodes had not become demoralized by Turkish delights. "He had contracted no fancy for cushions, but sat like a Christian on a chair, with his legs before him." There was even a Boston rocking chair in the house! Nor had Rhodes succumbed to "the attractions of polygamy and the charms of Circassian slaves, though he could have well afforded either."

He could have indeed. Urged by Wikoff, Rhodes spread out his dazzling row upon row of presents received from Mahmud: rings, snuff-boxes, chains, pins and stars, all set with huge diamonds of the first water.

"Lucky for your posterity to have such heirlooms," Wikoff remarked.

"My posterity must take care of themselves!" Rhodes snapped back.

"A true American!" commented the Philadelphian.

Rhodes went on: "What do I want with such gewgaws? I intend to sell them to the highest bidder in the best market."

Whereupon Wikoff, being quite rich himself, bought of Rhodes a star-shaped breast-pin of seventy diamonds. Casually he postscripted: *"I broke it up afterwards into sundry rings, which I distributed amongst my female favourites."* The worldly Philadelphian had in fact as many lady friends (both in Europe and America) as Rhodes had of the Sultan's diamonds.

Rhodes built ships for Mahmud II and garnered Turkish pounds of sterling and jewels of gold and stone till 1839. In that year Porter was away in the States on a short leave. In that year the Sultan sickened and died.

Seeing his opportunity, a Turkish pasha trumped up a quarrel with Rhodes and discharged the Yankee shipwright. Rhodes could have been reinstated on Porter's return, but, his feelings hurt, he refused to reënter the service. Instead he soon became a constructor with the American Navy. Neither he nor the Commodore liked Mahmud's son, the new Sultan Abdul Mejid. All chance for resumption of Yankee work for Turkish admirals faded in 1843, with Commodore Porter's death. By then the Turkish fleet seemed strong enough, anyway.

Ten years later, on November 4, 1853, at Sinop on the Black Sea, the Turkish fleet met the Russian fleet. The Turks were decisively beaten. For among other things the Russians also had in the meantime been buying Yankee ships, some from the very same able firm of Rhodes and Eckford.

Drawings by Charles B. Falls

*Illustrated by Brendan Lynch*

THIS EXTRAORDINARY STORY IS BASED ON THE THEORY OF THE NOBEL-PRIZE-WINNING SCIENTIST ARRHENIUS, THAT THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE IS FILLED WITH THE "SPORES" OF LIFE.

by NELSON BOND

# Life Goes On

AFTER an unguessed time, Carruthers stirred. After uncounted hours of black nothingness, Carruthers stirred and rose and looked about. He stood upon the crest of what appeared to be a monstrous crag, the rocky hilltop of some pebble in the sky, a lonely land unmarked by human artifact. Above, the vault of airless space was spangled by the fierce, eternal stars: Aldebaran and Vega, Betelgeuse and Deneb. Carruthers scanned them with a spaceman's eyes.

"Well," he said, "at least I'm in the solar system. But where? For all I know—"

He paused abruptly, startled and dismayed. He had voiced his thoughts aloud. Yet though his body ached with cosmic cold, no hoarfrost film of breath appeared before his lips.... Nor had he heard his spoken words!

A sudden terror gripped him. He whispered hoarsely, "This is it, then? I'm dead?"

He lifted his hands, held them before his searching eyes. Strong, sun-bronzed, muscular hands, they did not seem to bear the fleshless fingers of a fearful ghost. But—

*—But how could one living move and sense and feel... and yet not breathe or hear?*

Carruthers groaned, and with an effort forced his tortured mind down the gray, sluggish paths of recollection....

Remembrance surged back slowly. Winterby and himself, the sole survivors of the crash that wrecked the spaceship *Catapult,* Earthbound from

*"I'm dead, of course," Carruthers said to himself. "But—can this be death? Death should be a final peace. How can the dead feel hatred, as I do?"*

Saturn. The dreadful panic of that final hour. The frantic haste with which they cast off from the dying ship in the only undamaged lifeskiff. Then the slow days of aimless wanderings through the void as fuel tanks drained and rations dwindled low, hope waning within them as sextant readings showed the nearest human colony to be so far away that while *one* man might reach its haven alone, two must surely die for lack of food and drink and precious oxygen.

And then the hour when, roused from fitful sleep, he struggled to one elbow to find the wolf-lean face of Winterby above his own, to feel the hands of Winterby at his throat. The other spaceman's lips were thin and hard.

"It's you or me, Carruthers. There's not enough of anything for both of us. Maybe I can make it alone. So—"

Then came the blow.

What happened next was like an evil dream. Numbed and half-conscious, Carruthers felt his companion half lift, half roll him to the airlock, slam the gate and press the lever that expelled the port. The outer lock-gate clanged back in its groove, the icy silence and the cold of space rushed in. The emptiness sucked Carruthers to its still embrace, stifling his half-drawn breath, his leaping pulse, stilling his heart, his very thoughts. Then nothingness. . . .

And that was all—till now.

Now he stood upon the rim of a stark hill upon a mote of matter whirling in the infinite debris of space. He stood without breathing, with unbeating heart; he existed in an airless, heatless void; a living paradox: one who endured despite the unendurable.

So went Dan Carruthers' thoughts.

"I'm dead, of course," he said to himself. "But—can *this* be death? Death should be a sleep and a forgetting. A final peace. How can the dead feel hatred as I do? . . . Winterby!" He growled the name. "If I could only meet him once again. Winterby—"

He stopped. A voice, so thin it seemed the whisper from a dream, spoke words not of his mind's imagining.

*"Carruthers—"*

Startled, Dan Carruthers whirled. No living creature stood within the circle of his searching gaze.

*"Carruthers—"*

"Who speaks?" Carruthers cried. "Who calls my name?"

The soft voice answered, and suddenly Carruthers realized it was not one but many tongues that spoke. Nor were they really tongues as men know tongues, because the bee-thin echo rose within himself. It stirred along his veins, his ganglia, through his neural passages as through the wires of a power line hums the insistent current of a dynamo.

The voices said, "We are not one entity, but many brethren, infinitely small, who have waited upon this gray and lifeless shard of rock for untold eons. We are sentient but fleshless. Until now we have lain immobile, unable to find body for that personality which is ourself.

"Now, at last, the way to life has opened to us. When a short time ago your body drifted to our prison rock, chance offered us a vehicle in which to dwell, and spawn, and live, and grow."

"You are—in me?" choked Carruthers, appalled.

"We are not merely in you; we *are* you. It is our life-force that lifts your stumbling body to its feet, enabling it to move. Your memories are ours, as soon ours will be yours. Our brethren flood your brain-cells as on your native Earth in spring a hive is overrun with swarming bees.

"We are an ancient race reborn in you. Your flesh provides for us a citadel in which to breed and live again."

"Then that is why I do not have to breathe in airless space?" stammered Carruthers. "That is why I stand in

subzero cold and still do not turn to ice?"

The answer came back softly: "That is why. The personality which was yourself, Carruthers, is no more. Only your fleshly housing still endures.

"But do not fear, or give in to despair. The change is great, but it brings recompense. Our host will always worship at the shrine of your great goodhood which has given us life—and in the fullness of the years to come, you, too, will share the glory of our race."

"Glory!" cried Carruthers bitterly. "What kind of glory is this? I'd rather die outright than be a walking corpse, the deathless host of spawning parasites. Let me die! Give me a swift and clean destruction. Let me end this grim travesty on death."

He struggled to throw himself forward, willing his limbs to hurl his body from the hilltop to the crags that lay below. But he could not move. The minuscule intelligences gripped his muscles in a band of steel, and through his veins the gentle voices coursed:

"Don't be afraid, Carruthers. For a little while your brain may be tormented, true. But soon all human trends of thought will vanish; then you will be truly one with us. Our dreams will be your dreams, our thoughts your thoughts; our racial memories will be part and parcel of yourself.

"Behold, within this little time already you have grasped a portion of our stranger lore. Open your mind to us, Carruthers. Read our past."

Carruthers let the voices have their will.

THE invisible swarm within him spoke the truth. As one who drifts in fever-haunted dreams, Carruthers felt himself to be a dancing spore no denser than a sunbeam. Lithe and free, unhampered by a fleshly covering, he found himself afloat in darkling space. Whence he came he could not guess, nor where his destination lay. But deep within his sentience dwelt a knowledge, deep and strong, that he must float until that time when he and those who swirled about him in a filmy cloud should come to rest upon a fertile world where there was water, earth and sustenance.

There, instinct told him, he must seek a living cell, within it take root and lend to it his quota of intelligence, that it and he might merge and he infuse its protoplasmic ignorance in order that from its primeval blob, in ages hence, might Man evolve. . . .

The vision faded. Carruthers murmured softly to himself, "There was an Earthly scientist, Arrhenius by name. Long years ago he voiced the theory that from a source unguessably remote in time and space, throughout the void are universally diffused the spores of life, which, when they find a resting place which will sustain them, spawn and germinate. Then—this is what you are? And what I have become companion to?"

He did not need their assenting response. He knew without it he had guessed the truth. And with the assurance came a quietude, an acquiescence to the master plan of someone—or of something—greater than himself.

And yet—yet there was part of him which remained a human still. For in his heart still burned a human flame, the fierce and unforgotten fire of hate. That he must die . . . while Winterby, his murderer, still lived, this was the thing that filled him with dark fury. Winterby—

HE sensed a quickening along his peopled veins, as those who were a part of him were stirred by his emotions as he had been by theirs. And to himself he voiced the silent thought, "If I could only meet him once again, for but the briefest moment—"

"You can, Carruthers," said the voices.

"I can?"

"But certainly. You have but to will the deed, and with the speed of light your resurrected body now can span the farthest reaches of the vault of space.

"A short time since, this enemy of yours whisked by our rock in his metallic skiff. Pursue him if it pleases you to do so. We who are your friends, care not."

Carruthers whirled; his arms rose high. And like an arrow speeding from a bow, his body flashed into the yawning void.

Brief was the journey; in an instant's time Carruthers hovered once again beside the fleeing skiff. Inside, contentedly unaware, Winterby drank in celebration of his triumph. Drank and laughed and lifted high a glass in mocking toast.

"To you, Carruthers! Too bad it had to be this way. But it was you or me, and I could not—"

His laughter ended in a sudden gasp. The wineglass fell and splintered on the deck as through the cabin doorway stepped the man whose body he had jettisoned in space.

"Carruthers!"

Carruthers' voice was cold and grating.

"Yes, Winterby. I have come back —for you."

"But you—you can't come back!" screamed Winterby. "I killed you. You're dead, Carruthers; dead!"

Carruthers nodded grimly.

"True. But even so, I have you as companion."

"No!" cried Winterby. From its holster he tugged a heat gun. "Go back! Wherever you came from, go back!" he cried—and pressed the stud.

A tongue of flame lashed out to bathe Carruthers in a flood of lethal coruscation. A hole that widened like a sloughing sore appeared in Dan Carruthers' breast; the stench of burning flesh was nauseous. But Carruthers felt no pain. Laughing, he moved steadily forward on the other man.

In vain Winterby hurled his gun away and scrambled for the airlock, reckless of the certain doom awaiting him outside. Carruthers' hands were icy as they closed about the throat of him who had once been shipmate and friend. The strong fingers tightened, froze, relaxed, expelled. And Winterby slipped lifeless to the deck. . . .

Then slowly said Carruthers to himself, "Now there are two of us, both doomed, both dead. Two lifeless bodies fit for clay and worms—upon the Earth we sprang from.

"But out here there is a better purpose we two can serve. Within my carcass—soon, perhaps, in his as well—reside the fecund spores of life: Life which, if given an opportunity, can people a new planet, a new world. A better world, it may be, than the one which gave us birth.

"I am not sure. Already, now, the thoughts which were Carruthers' fade and merge. I am becoming, as they said I would, a part of themselves as they are part of me. Before it is too late, then, there is one final gift I can give them; one last service I can render to the spores—"

He turned to the control-board of the skiff. With slow, uncertain hands he set the dials, establishing a new trajectory. Setting a course toward a distant spot in space where, between the orbits of red Mars and mighty Jupiter, a host of lifeless asteroids pursue their endless rounds about the mother Sun.

"Here we will find," mused Dan Carruthers, now one with his symbiotic guests, "water and food and air. On Iris, Ceres, Pollux we will breed—and in the centuries that lie ahead, evolve into our destined perfect form."

So whispered Dan Carruthers. Then he fell. A myriad bee-thin voices sang his dirge.

ALL this was long ago. In later days men marveled to discover crawling life upon the erstwhile sterile planetoids. Marveled, and in their blind complacence did not see that on one far and distant future day when *their* empire had toppled, from these rocks would spring anew the hardy seed of Man.

Thus two men died that Man might always live. Thus life was born upon the asteroids. . . .

# THE CAT

THIS IS THE TRUE STORY OF A WOMAN SPY WHO PUT DELILAH AND MATA HARI IN THE SHADE

## *by* KURT SINGER

MANY people in France can still remember the notices on the Paris bulletin boards which announced that forty-year-old Micheline Carré had been condemned to death on January 8, 1949, by the Fourteenth Criminal Court.

This woman, it was revealed at her trial, was known under the alias of *La Chatte*—the Cat. She was extraordinarily beautiful, a delicate brunette with fine white teeth and marvelous eyes. The Cat was one of the greatest of European women spies. Lieutenant Colonel Marcel Achard, an officer who had played a vital rôle in French Intelligence during the second World War—he was a member of the Deuxieme Bureau and chief of General Paul Juin's Intelligence service—said at her trial:

"Madame Carré performed remarkable services for the French Army. During the years she worked for us she was able to deliver to us many of the German Army's plans of campaign."

Why, then, was she condemned to death by a French court? Had she worked for both sides, and if so, why? Why do so many spies work for friend or foe? Long before Dr. Klaus Fuchs betrayed the secrets of the atom bomb which he was helping to develop for England and America, Madame Carré provided an example of schizophrenia, of a split personality engaged in espionage. But the French did not take the trouble to investigate the motives of a great spy.

This is the story of a woman who put Delilah and Mata Hari in the shade.

In 1939, in a small village in Southern Algeria, lived a woman of thirty named Micheline Carré, née Balard. She was married to a French army officer whose pay was so low that she had to take a post as a schoolteacher.

Pretty little Madame Carré wore her brown hair in bangs over a shapely forehead. Her brown eyes looked out from under thick brows. The full lips revealed straight white teeth. Her figure was perfect. Her legs were remarkably expressive and somehow said a great deal about her personality; when she crossed her legs, every muscle of them seemed to be alive.

Madame Carré's lower middle-class neighbors in Algeria were suspicious of her, for she seemed to be far better educated than was considered proper. She dressed simply, as she had to on her teacher's low salary, but somehow always contrived to appear elegant.

If a man from the outside world happened into the remote village where Micheline Carré lived, her success was assured. But her conduct was always exemplary. It was impossible to say whether Micheline Carré was happy in Algeria. But it is understandable that the moment the war broke out, she decided to go to Paris.

Circumstances made her decision easier to carry out. France was calling upon all women to join the nursing corps. Micheline did so at once, and breathed a sigh of relief when at last she had her ticket and her traveling permit in her pocket. Now, she told herself, her life would begin.

"She told herself"—how do we know? It so happens that Micheline Carré kept a diary. Later on she added to it and made it a "confession," a remarkable human document that we shall have occasion to quote.

Before she left, she met her husband in Algiers. He was leaving for the front, and—to anticipate—this proved

to be their last meeting. He soon fell in battle.

Algiers was depressing. In her diary she wrote:

> *Algiers is gray, I was irritable; I turned my suitcase over to two Arabs who led me to the Hotel Terminus, where I took a room. But when I wanted a bath, there was an insect running around in the tub.*

She found the hotel in Algiers swarming with bedbugs. While she was waiting for her ship, she walked around the suburbs, to her the only interesting parts of the city.

One dark evening she was sitting on a bench in the picturesque Arab quarter of Algiers. A young white man, little more than a boy, dressed in the uniform of a French parachute regiment, came along and sat down beside her. In the darkness he took her for an Arab girl. She wrote in her diary:

> *He was utterly charming. He was overjoyed because he was going back to France. I did not explain who I was, but talked to him in the jargon and dialect of an Arab girl from the Algiers suburbs. What charming and tender little phrases he whispered to me as we sat there! He invited me to go to a café with him. When he saw me in the lamplight and realized to whom he had been saying all these pretty things that were addressed to the heart of an Arab girl, he became frightfully confused. I freed him from his confusion, and invited him to breakfast with me next day. My relationship with him was a charming and simple idyl.*

The parachute troops sailed on the ship that took Micheline to the Continent. Micheline noted in her diary,

> *The parachute boy was on the ship throughout the voyage.*

She arrived in Paris and moved into a hotel in the center of the city. In her diary she wrote:

> *What a country and what a city! It is unimaginable that the boches can conquer Paris. The old historic buildings, the Seine and the quais —we are, I am, all of these things. The boulevards, they are life. I walk through the streets, I sit in this café and that. What sensations come to me! I am in the world; I am happy; I am in heaven. And I shall do my part to see that hell doesn't win victory over heaven.*

Next day she reported for duty and was given nurse's training. She stayed in a hospital in Paris. She was considered a hard-working, reliable person who cared devotedly for the wounded. When France collapsed, she was terribly shocked. Like half of France in those days, she fled from the Germans. She set up a first-aid Red Cross station in Beauvais and then moved on over the highways of France. Eventually she ended up in Toulouse.

Again on her own initiative she organized as assembly center for the wounded. She suggested to French officers that they set up a reception camp for soldiers who had become detached from their units. In the course of her efforts she met up with a man who seemed to need her help more than others. He was a Polish general staff officer who was a liaison man to the French army. He had fought the Germans, been captured and escaped. Finally, wretched, starved, tired and ill, he fell into the hands of Micheline Carré. She rescued him from his misery, clothed him, nursed him back to health and gave him new courage.

He was called Roman Czerniawski—a name she could not pronounce. She called him "Armand" and he gave her the nickname of "my cat" on account of feline grace. The relationship of the two was more than a love affair. Armand confided to her his plan to set up an espionage and resistance movement in France to spy on the Germans and fight them wherever possible.

The Cat joyfully agreed to his plan.

They first had to find out where certain officers of the French Army were located. Some were in the unoccupied zone; some were living secretly in the occupied zone. The Cat plunged into the work with zest. France was still in a turmoil; millions of people were still moving over the roads, and conditions on the Spanish border were chaotic. The Polish colonel could not travel about freely and dared not appear at all in occupied France. The Cat had to make the contacts. It was she who located and brought together the men with whom they were going to work. The group which called itself *Interallio,* soon became very active in the French Resistance movement. Colonel Marcel Achard joined it.

Achard was an important personage. The other members of the group, with the exception of the Polish colonel, were all amateurs at espionage. Achard had contacts, through Spain and Portugal, with the British. To the Cat, he was God.

Achard realized that the present stage of the war presented one chief problem: Would the Germans remain at the Spanish border, or did they have an agreement with Generalissimo Franco to march through Spain and attack Gibraltar?

Armand assigned the Cat to find out the German plans. She went to Bordeaux, then to Bayonne and Biarritz. There, close to the border, an S.S. tank unit was stationed, and was evidently preparing for a campaign. Air units were being assembled in Bordeaux. Officers from those units appeared in the Café de Paris in Biarritz. The Cat wrote an account of this in her diary:

*A boche officer came in and said, "May I sit at your table, madame? I want to ask you for some information about the city."*

*"Yes," I said. "As a matter of fact I'd like to ask you a question."*

*"Fire away."*

*"You're wearing the Luftwaffe uniform and yet you don't seem to be a pilot. I don't recognize your insignia—"*

*"I'm what you would call in France a colonel in the quartermaster's corps. That is my function in the airforce. All supplies for the Luftwaffe in Bordeaux area are in my charge."*

They drank champagne, in the restaurant at first, and later elsewhere. She noted in her diary:

*I took care to see that I kept a clear head. Otherwise I had no restraint.*

Later she was able to report to Armand that the Germans were preparing to march through Spain. However, she stayed in the region and kept track of the German preparations. She was the first to realize that they were slowing down, and it was she who transmitted the significant news that the Germans had given up their plan to attack Gibraltar.

When she was back with Armand, she was deliriously happy.

*How I love Armand! I call him "mon petit Toto," and cry out "General, à vos ordres." We embraced and leaped and danced about in the hotel room. The whole world and victory over the world seemed to lie in our hands at that time. Life with him was like flying through the air. I did not know what I would some day do under his orders, but I had unlimited faith in him.*

Colonel Achard had his group working throughout France, and the Cat worked with him, of course. Their success during that first period was in fact tremendous, as Colonel Achard later stated in court. In the British Intelligence Service, where the group was known by the name of "Valenty," Achard's agents were highly respected.

The names of the most important members of the group, as well as their aliases, were listed in the British offices—and this fact was later to be very

***"He was utterly charming.***

*Illustrated by* MAURICE BOWER

*What tender little phrases he whispered to me. . . . My relationship with him was a simple idyl."*

*The Cat had to make the contacts. She was assigned to find out the German plans.*

important. The British knew all about Colonel Roman Czerniawski, *alias* Armand; about Micheline, *alias* the Cat; and about other undercover workers as well, including the French aristocrat Pierre de Vomecourt.

During this period the group arranged with the British about drop-points where weapons for the Resistance movement could be dropped from planes. Other points on the coast where boats could land were decided on. The group smuggled people over the Spanish border and into Switzerland, hid deserters from German prison camps and in general carried on a game of high stakes for *la Patrie*.

One day Armand and the Cat discovered that they needed someone to help them with minor tasks—going into cafés and restaurants, getting picked up by Germans and gathering whatever information could be got by such methods. The Cat looked around and found such a person in Luneville. Her name was Renée Borne. Since she was going to be working closely with Armand, the Cat saw to it that this new assistant was the opposite of Armand's "type." Renée—or as she was soon called in the Resistance movement, Violette—

was also a yielding and devoted woman, however; and the Cat was not a little chagrined to find out after a while that Armand also loved Violette.

Sometimes the Cat felt troubled when she looked at Violette. In Paris, where they were staying temporarily, she urged Armand to send Violette out to the provinces, to some less important post. Armand smiled and told the Cat she was jealous.

"It isn't that," Micheline protested. "I have a feeling of impending disaster."

"A feeling of jealousy, you mean," Armand laughed.

But it was actually Renée Borne, *alias* Violette, who wrecked the group.

Violette had been ordered to pick up some minor information—on where a certain regiment was being sent. Near the Gare du Nord she met a German non-commissioned officer who spoke to her, and she began cautiously questioning him. She did not notice that behind the soldier a man was sitting, reading a French newspaper and closely following their conversation. Nor did she notice that the man followed her when she left the café. She did not suspect that she was being shadowed during the next few days. Shifts of civilians took turns following her. She was seen with Armand and the Cat. Both their headquarters and their apartment were discovered through shadowing Violette, and on November 18, 1941 at five-thirty A.M. Armand and Violette were arrested by the German counter-intelligence service of Admiral Walter Wilhelm Canaris.

A FEW hours later Micheline Carré was captured. The military police caught her in her hiding-place and brought her to a military prison. The quiet in her cell made the Cat frightfully nervous. She knew nothing at all. Had Armand been arrested too? Who else had been caught? Was she the only one of the group?

With a shudder she thought of the torture probably awaiting her. The night with its horrors was yet to come.

Night fell. In her dark cell the Cat decided that death was certain for her. And she began to tremble as she thought of the forms it would probably take. Suddenly the ceiling light was turned on. The door opened, and a man in a German uniform entered.

The Cat remained where she was, sitting on her low stool. She gave him a frightened look. By now she was thoroughly familiar with military insignia; she recognized that the man was a sergeant. Had he been dressed in civilian clothes, he might not have been taken for a German. The word "boche" somehow did not apply to this man. He was not the typical "squarehead."

The man's actions also took her by surprise. He lingered at the door, leaning against the wall and looking silently at Micheline Carré.

The Cat grew restive. She stood up. "Monsieur," she said, "why have I been arrested?" He did not answer. His silence bewildered her.

After a while he began to speak. "You have lived in Algeria?"

"Yes, in Algeria."

"Paris is a wonderful city, isn't it? A grand city."

She stared at him in horror.

"Are you afraid?" he asked. "What are you afraid of? I'm not going to hurt you at all. I know you're an intelligent woman. Do you know that with that coiffure of yours you look like Joan of Arc?"

Later she noted in her diary:

> *That was the most frightful part of it. The man who entered my cell was human.*

This "human" person did not ask her any questions about her activities in the Resistance movement. He talked about Algeria, France and Paris. He spoke in a gentle voice, without accent. The Cat was horrified at herself when she realized that she was engaged in a polite, pleasant conversation with this man.

He made a cruel joke. "It's so uncomfortable here. Shall we go somewhere else?"

She realized abruptly where she was. Shrugging in despair, she looked down at the floor. When she raised her eyes, the sergeant had vanished.

The light in the cell went out. Later she wrote:

> *From infinite, unreal distances the music of Mozart's Requiem came to me vividly, as though it were actually being played.*

Soon the door rattled. The light went on. Armed guards stood in front of the cell as the door opened. A corporal signed to her to follow him.

Bare corridors—bars—an office. The corporal signed a paper. A door, another door. A barred gate opening. And then. . . .

Who was that? It was the sergeant who had visited her in her cell. But how strange he looked! He was wearing civilian clothes, elegant gloves, a flashy tie and a Basque cap. He had a cigarette in his mouth, and looked like an elegant Frenchman of the Boulevard des Italiens.

Like a man of the world, the gentleman in the Basque cap led her up to a big automobile and told her to get in. "In the back seat, please. And leave the curtains down."

Nonchalantly, he slid into the driver's seat. She saw the unusually large rear-view mirror at once. He could keep his eye on her. The car started; a gate opened; and she was in Paris again. Where were they going? The car drove far out of town. There was the Maison Lafitte. She could see it clearly through the windshield. And what was this huge park-like garden, this villa?

The Cat shivered with fright again. For the huge palace belonged to the famous French actor Harry Baur. And as she well knew, the German army had confiscated the building and was using it as its counter-espionage headquarters. If she was being taken here, everything must have come out. For no petty figure in the game would be brought to this house. Above the entrance to this building there should have been placed the inscription that Dante put at the mouth of his hell: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

Everything seems altogether unreal—polite servants, an elegant salon. And she is left alone in it. She sits in a comfortable chair and stares out of the window into the dark park. From far away the noises of the great city reach her ears. No one seems the least bit concerned about her.

Suddenly the door opens. The man who has brought her here asks her to come along.

WHAT happened that night?

The diary does not say. Later on the French court tried very hard to find out. The presiding judge of the court, M. Drapier, asked during the trial:

"Tell the story exactly as it happened. You came to Harry Baur's villa?"

"I've told it exactly as it happened, but I'll tell it again. After fourteen months of struggle and ceaseless work for the Resistance movement, I was arrested and taken to Harry Baur's villa, the Maison Lafitte. I was in the power of the Germans. Sergeant Hugo Bleicher did not leave me alone for a moment."

"Then you found out the name of this sergeant?"

"He called himself Hugo Bleicher."

"Was his military rank really that of a sergeant?"

"I don't know."

"Was his real name Hugo Bleicher?"

"How could I possibly know, Your Honor?"

"All right. You were Bleicher's prisoner. Did you become his mistress?"

"Can't you put yourself in my place, Your Honor?"

"Answer my question."

"Must I really tell you all about it, Your Honor?"

"Why did you become his mistress?"

"Bleicher said to me: 'If you don't fool with me, you'll be free tonight.' Well, I didn't fool with him."

*It was Violette who wrecked the group. She did not notice a man*

"Didn't it shock you—you, the widow of a French army officer—to become the mistress of a German sergeant?"

"Very well, Your Honor, it shocked me."

"What else happened that night?"

Silence.

"We all want to know what happened that night. This is what you must explain to us. For fourteen months you admittedly exposed yourself to great danger in working for your Resistance group. And after one single night you forget your whole past, forget France and yourself, and in the eight hours after that night you turn over to this Sergeant Hugo Bleicher the thirty-five most important fighters in the French Resistance. Now, what happened that night?"

Judge Drapier fixed his eyes on the defendant and gazed steadily at her for a full minute. . . .

The morning after that night, the Cat and Hugo Bleicher—who was again wearing civilian clothes—had got into a small car with French number plates. They drove into Paris and stopped at the house where Monsieur Rocchini was in hiding. It attracted no attention when several more cars stopped. There were only civilians in them, harmless civilians. One man got out and bought a newspaper; another tried his luck in a tobacco shop.

The Cat went upstairs and knocked on a door, using the prearranged signal. The door was opened at once. Rocchini and Frank were there, both prominent members of the group. They were taken aback when they saw the man at the Cat's side; they did not know him.

"Something must be done," the Cat whispered. "Armand has been arrested."

***reading a French newspaper and closely following their conversation.***

The two men were horrified.

"Don't worry about him," she said, indicating Bleicher. "You don't know him but he is one of us."

Five minutes of excited conversation followed. The Cat said to Bleicher: "Go downstairs and start the car so that we won't waste any time."

The Cat stayed two or three minutes more. Then there was a knock at the door. She opened it. Germans with drawn revolvers shouted: "Hands up!"

This was the standard, carefully-worked-out recipe. During the next eight hours it was applied again and again, until thirty-five leaders of the French Resistance movement had been arrested.

For two months the Cat ran around on Bleicher's leash, carrying on her game. She knew about everything, and now she betrayed everything she knew. She sent all her fellow-resisters within reach to prison. But the man whose head Bleicher wanted most was Colonel Achard.

Strangely enough, the Cat did not betray Achard. Later on the Colonel testified in court: "She knew where I was hiding, but did not betray me."

The Cat managed to make excuses to Bleicher. She said she didn't know where Achard was. She offered to find another very important man, Pierre de Vomecourt. Bleicher started to get excited when he heard the name. Then he grew thoughtful. Apparently he recognized that there were even bigger possibilities in this business.

The Cat returned to her old headquarters. Bleicher's procedure had been flawless. The men who were caught had had no time to give warning; nothing had come out at all.

For the next two months the Cat went on playing her former part. None of the men and women in the

Resistance movement dreamed that their trusted and courageous comrade, Micheline Carré, was the terrible traitor whose existence they were now beginning to sense. They had all the less reason to suspect her because it was she who reorganized the shattered group work and inspired everyone with new courage.

At night the Cat was secretly driven to Villa Baur, and every night she betrayed the plans that had been made during the day. At one time she reported that the chief worry of the people in the Resistance movement was how to resume communication with Britain. All the liaison men had been arrested.

When Bleicher heard this, he ordered the Cat to get Pierre de Vomecourt to come to Paris. He explained to her that Vomecourt would have to be sent to England for the Resistance movement. She must persuade her comrades that Vomecourt was the most capable and logical person to go.

On the following night Bleicher told the Cat he had a surprise for her. "When you get home, you'll find Violette there. She's never really been arrested, of course, because she's working for us. Violette will keep her mouth shut; you can be sure of that. Take care of her; her assignment is to stay in the Resistance movement."

The Cat carried out all her orders. In "Pam-Pam," a bar on the Champs-Elysées, she met Pierre de Vomecourt and others. She made her proposal, and it was accepted. It was decided that Pierre de Vomecourt would try to get to England to inform their friends across the Channel of what had been happening, and to obtain fresh instructions. But the secret paths that led across the border into Spain had been discovered by the Germans through treachery. And the Germans now also knew the location of the small landing-places where boats could take Resistance members out to sea, and later to England.

A few days after this conversation, the Cat saw her friends again. She said she had found a way to get to England. She explained that she would have to go along with the handsome Pierre de Vomecourt. Under the circumstances she must accompany him to England, since she was so well known. Only her own presence would insure trust and the authority of the Resistance movement.

The others agreed at once, and applauded her decision. This was their cunning Cat, the heroine of the Resistance movement. She deserved her fame; she was the smartest, the best of them all, as well as the bravest.

Bleicher saw to it, of course, that the Cat got out of France safely. Once out, it was no problem to get to England. Bleicher had accomplished the incredible feat of getting his agent, the Cat, and Pierre de Vomecourt, who suspected nothing, of course—into the War Office in London.

For nine months the Cat worked there. Everything she learned she sent to France by the new channels that the Resistance movement had set up. All information went to Violette, and Violette reported to Bleicher.

But then came the second black day in the Cat's life. The British counter-intelligence service proved to be more skeptical than the brave men of France, and finally Scotland Yard saw through her game. In July, 1942, she was arrested. The British kept her in prison until the end of the war.

While she was in prison in England she wrote in her diary a passage addressed to her former comrades in the French Resistance movement:

> *Oh, how much I have endured! Never shall I be able to find words to express my deep and endless sorrow, or to describe my fears. But I am not alone. You too, those of you who are still living, will not fall asleep tonight; you will be with me. You, the dead, and I—we will live by our own laws in a world I have found for myself.*

Calmly she stood before the French judges in January, 1949, her eyes resting dreamily on the gilded ceiling of the baroque courtroom.

The prosecutor spoke: "For two months she practiced the worst kind of treason. Her malice, her cunning, her perseverance in evil, her memoirs, from which I have read you excerpts and which describe her as what she is, a brain without a heart—you will have to judge all this. And you will recognize that there is only one possible penalty: Death."

The defense attorney said: "I admit her guilt. But you must consider that this woman was faced with the choice of life or death. Do not forget that from the beginning of the Resistance on, she was a heroine. Would you put to death those who at the beginning sowed the seed of faith and later overestimated their own strength?"

*"Condamné a mort"*—"condemned to death," was the verdict of the court.

But before this sentence was pronounced the Cat lost control of herself—the only time she did. She cried out to the court: "I await the verdict without fear. But I must keep remembering that while the death sentence is being asked for me in this court, Hugo Bleicher is living free in—Hamburg!"

A few months later the President of the Republic of France commuted Micheline Carré's sentence to life imprisonment.

The End

# Arms and the Woman

## VI

## *Mary Anne Talbot Powder-Monkey*

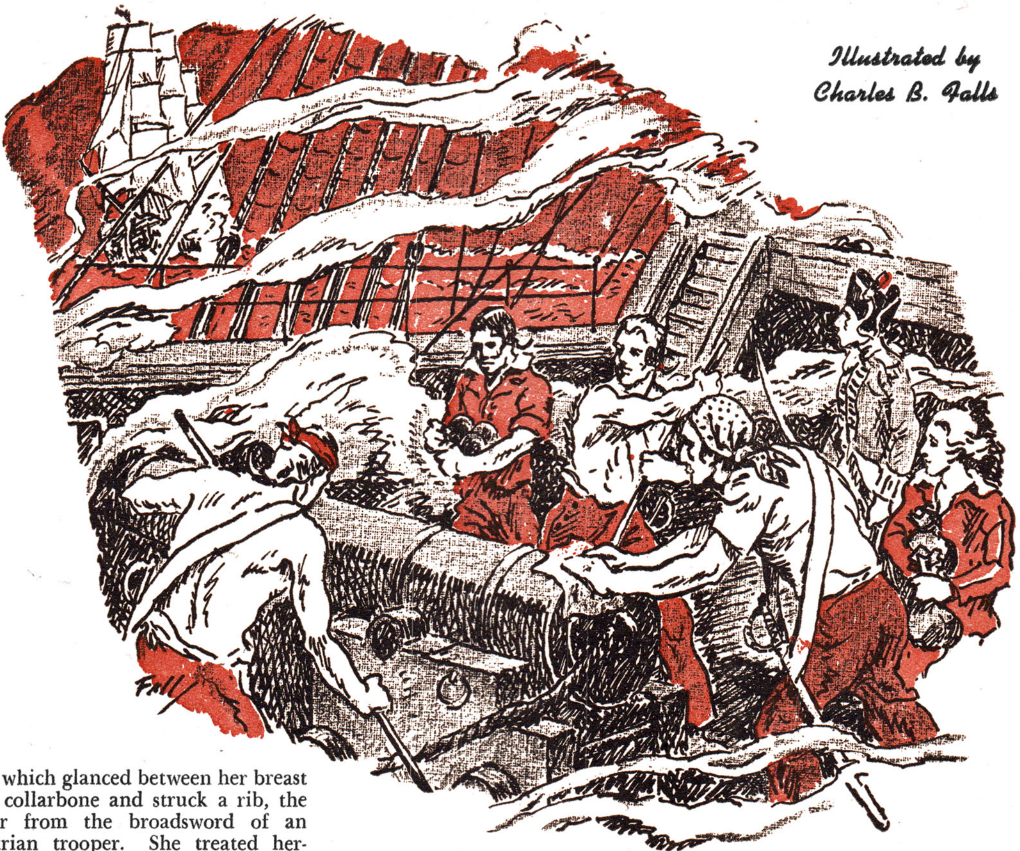
by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Destined to help Britannia rule the waves, Mary Anne Talbot was born, as she herself declared, "to experience a large portion of the disagreeable circumstances incident to human nature." Under that head might rank the fact that she was the youngest of a family of sixteen illegitimate children. That brood, according to her story, resulted from "a secret correspondence" maintained by her mother with William, first Earl of Talbot and a colonel of militia. Mary Anne, postscript to the correspondence, obviously voluminous, was a surviving twin.

Human nature popped up again when Mary Anne was fourteen, and Captain Essex Bowen, of the 82nd Regiment of Foot, persuaded her to elope to London. Instead of marriage lines, the betrayed girl was read army orders sending Bowen to duty in Santo Domingo. Again the Captain proved persuasive. Mary Anne clad her slight figure in male attire, took the name of John Taylor and shipped as his foot-boy.

Taking no chances on her sex being discovered, Bowen insisted she play her part—even overplay it, to Mary Anne's way of thinking. She waited on him and ate scraps. In storms she was forced to help the crew man the pumps or to swarm aloft. It would turn out to be excellent training for the Navy, but it was hardly the girl's idea of a honeymoon cruise. Once ashore, the Captain enrolled his companion as a drummer-boy in the regiment on the threat that if she refused, he would sell her as a slave. It was no change in Mary Anne's hard lot, except that her drum now also took a beating.

Soon the regiment re-embarked, recalled for the Flanders campaign of 1792. Thumping the quickstep, Mary Anne marched behind the Captain to the siege of Valenciennes, where she took two wounds: one from a musket




ball which glanced between her breast and collarbone and struck a rib, the other from the broadsword of an Austrian trooper. She treated herself lest her sex be revealed. When she reported back to duty, she learned Bowen had been killed in an attack.

It was time to go home, Mary Anne decided. Although she had just witnessed the hanging of a deserter, she changed her uniform for the foot-boy's suit and made her way across Luxembourg and France to Calais, where, money gone, she signed on in the crew of a French lugger.

When that vessel fell in with the British Fleet under Admiral Lord Howe, the French skipper beat Mary Anne cruelly with a rope's end to compel her to take part in the defense. Stoutly she refused to serve against her own country; and her resistance, admitted by the French when the lugger was captured, saved the English girl from death as a traitor. Confessing neither her sex nor her desertion, Mary Anne joined the Navy. With her background of a natural father in the militia and a faithless lover in a line regiment, it was small wonder she had had enough of the Army and was moved to try the senior service.

Made a member of the crew of the frigate *Brunswick,* seventy-four guns, Mary Anne became a powder-monkey and cabin-boy to Captain Harvey. She was in the thick of a heavy action with the French fleet on June 1, 1794. The *Brunswick* was laid alongside the *Vengeur,* so closely grappled that the British gunners could not raise their ports and were obliged to fire through them. While thus hotly engaged, another Frenchman, the *Achille,* bore down on the British frigate and opened fire. Mary Anne ran back and forth from the powder magazine over bloody decks, swept by broadsides from both quarters. Just before another British ship came to the rescue, the brave girl dropped with severe musket and grapeshot wounds in one leg. Somehow she managed to preserve the secret of her sex during four months in the hospital.

Back on duty, she served as an acting midshipman aboard the bombship *Vesuvius* and fought valiantly again. But this time her ship was taken by two French privateers, and she spent more than a year in prison before being exchanged and sent back to England.

Home was the sailor, but shortly she put to sea once more in a New York merchantman. The new hand became a favorite of the captain's, and all went well until, ashore in Rhode Island, the skipper's niece fell so desperately in love with her that the female tar had to flee and return to England. On shore leave with the mate, they ran afoul of a press gang. Mary Anne defended herself manfully till felled by a cutlass slash on the head. Her American papers had been left aboard ship; and the mate, in love with that niece of the captain's, saw his chance and declared she was an Englishman.

There was only one way of escape now, and Mary Anne took it. She could not properly serve in His Majesty's Navy, she said (although she had—and gallantly) because she was a female. On confirmation by a surgeon, the baffled press gang retired.

Mary Anne's admission left her stranded. To earn her living she went on the stage, acting such incongruous rôles for a former powder-monkey as *Juliet* and a part in "Babes in the Wood." She also made some money by writing her memoirs, but too fond of grog and reckless, she was clapped into Newgate Prison for debt. Released, she eked out the meager pension for her wounds by domestic service and died in 1808 at the age of thirty.

# Tales of the Town–III

A NEW YORK TAXI-DRIVER ENCOUNTERS ODD SITUATIONS AS WELL AS ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF PEOPLE.

## by REUBEN HECHT

# To

THEY call it the Avenue of the Americas, but it's still Sixth Avenue to us hackies —and to most of our riders, too. At four o'clock in the morning it's pretty deserted, even in hot spots like the Times Square section, and Greenwich Village—especially during the war, when the dim-out is on. The bars and cabarets are shut, and everybody's gone home to get a little shut-eye before going to work—all except a few drunks, cruising taxis, a cop or two trying doors to make sure they're locked, and sometimes a special case like the one I'm going to tell about.

The light at Tenth Street had just turned green, and I was shifting into second when I saw her standing on the corner, flagging me down. I spot the suitcase on the curb right away, and my first thought is to wonder why a dame should choose that hour of the morning to go traveling. She had on a long, loose, light tan polo coat coming down to her ankles, but it was the gentle way she set the suitcase down on the floor of the cab, and the easy way she let herself down into the seat that tipped me off, even before she gave me the address: New York Hospital.

It's funny how fast your mind works, how many things you can think about in the few seconds between first spotting a passenger and getting under way to the address she's given you. In this case I remember thinking it's peculiar she's alone. At a time like this a husband, mother, mother-in-law, sister or at least a friend nearly always shows up to carry the bag, help them in and out of the cab, and give them some encouragement.

Not this lady. And I mean she *is* a lady. No wincing, no drawn-in breath and teeth clamped down on her lower lip, no moaning like most of them, when she gets in. I watch her in the rear-view mirror as we go tooling up Sixth Avenue. She's sitting well back on the seat, staring out of the window. Every time we pass a street light, even in the dim-out I get a glimpse of her face. She's no pin-up girl, but she's got style.

Then she catches me peeking at her in the mirror, and smiles. It's a nice smile, a little tight maybe, and you can see by her eyes that she's got a lot of pain, and is just a little scared. I think maybe some conversation might help. Besides, I'm curious. I guess maybe I was born curious.

"What I can't figure out is why women always decide to have a baby in the middle of the night," I say. It's not very funny, but it breaks the ice. She leans forward, her gloved hands folded tight on her lap, and gives me another smile.

"Do they always?" she asks.

"Yeah—take my wife for instance. Both times when our kids were born, she picks a time when I'm out pushing a hack. Once at three in the morning, the other time at five. No walking up and down the corridor for me, like most husbands. Both times the telephone was ringing when I get in the door in the morning, and it's the hospital telling me I got a nice bouncing boy."

She gets it, right away, and she's not annoyed. She hesitates just a second, then says quickly: "My husband was killed at Guadalcanal." She's looking down, studying her hands, so I can't see her face.

Maybe it's true; maybe it ain't. In this business we're always suspicious. It's what them scientific guys call an "occupational disease." Besides, that don't explain to me the absence, at a time like this, of the mother, mother-in-law, or someone. I cluck my tongue sadly and shake my head.

"You ought to have your mother or somebody to take care of you for a while."

"My mother's out in California," she answers, still looking at her hands. The way she says it, tells me to mind my own business. She's way back in the seat now, looking out of the window, far away, and we finish our ride in silence.

WHEN we get to the hospital, I stop the clock, hop out, open the door for her and pick up the bag. She hesitates a second, but I say: "I'll help you in."

She walks ahead of me. Inside the door she stops and without looking at me, says: "Thank you, driver. I can manage by myself now." There's no edge on her voice, she just seems to be thinking of something else. I drop the suitcase, she opens her purse and gives me two dollars for the fare. As I reach for change, she tells me to keep it. Then, looking up with a kind of strained smile, she says quietly: "I wish you'd do me a favor." Her hair is honey-blonde and her eyes are a deep blue.

"Sure, lady, anything at all." And I mean it.

She fishes in her purse, gets out a notebook and one of them toy gold pencils women always seem to carry. Tearing a sheet out, she quickly writes two lines and hands it to me. With it come two more bucks.

"I'm all alone here," she says swiftly, still looking at me. "I don't know anybody in New York. At a time like this a girl needs friends. I've written my name on that paper. Will you please buy some flowers with the money I've given you, and send them to me?"

I FEEL like I'm in a dream. All I can do is nod my head. She smiles, with her eyes as well as her mouth, picks up the bag and walks down the hall, her heels clicking on the hard floor.

"Good luck, lady!" I call after her. She don't look around, but I know she heard me.

There's no flower-store open at that time of the morning. A few hours later, on my way back to the garage to check in, I make a detour and park at a store near the hospital.

There's a vase full of cornflowers in the window, blue like her eyes. So I tell the man to wrap them up, all of them, and send them to this party in New York Hospital. He gives me one of them little white cards, and a pen.

I stop a minute, trying to figure out what to say. At a time like this, I ought to be a writer. I want to say something terrific, something she'll always remember. I want to tell her how I feel, but the words just won't come out. So, because I can't think of anything better, I write:

*"To Molly, with love. Ruby."* Her name was Molly.

I guess my wife can take it.

# Molly—with Love

*I spot the suitcase right away, and my first thought is to wonder why a dame should choose that hour of the morning to go traveling.*

# EVERY SABER, EVERY

"BRIG-*A-A-ADE*, prepare to mount," bawled the adjutant. "Mount. Advance by thr*e-e-es* from the right of tr-*o-o-ops*."

Trumpeter Mundy licked his lips, pressed the mouthpiece hard, and sounded the calls. The notes came out sharp and true—and a good thing they did, because the brigade sergeant-major levied certain unpleasantries for faltering calls.

The brigade moved out at a walk through the gray Crimean morning. From the other side of the Uplands came the dull growling rumble of artillery fire. There, boxed on three sides by heights, was the place the Turks called the Valley of Death.

Between Mundy's booted legs, Bertie walked smoothly along, his hoofs making in the mud of the road a *plop-squish* that was lost in the larger jingle and jounce of the column. Bertie was a good horse, but like his master, a little scrawny just now, from short rations.

Mundy, hazarding the sergeant-major's displeasure, glanced over his shoulder. The regiments looked fine, a long ribbon of polished brass and shining leather, the horses' breath steaming on the morning air: A sight he had seen a thousand times, but still it sent a prickle up his back.

Looking closer, however, Mundy could see the gray mark of the bloody flux and the false color of camp fever on the faces of too many of the lads. The whole brigade was worn down by the campaign—down to the strength of no more than a regiment at establishment strength.

Well, that was soldiering, philosophized the trumpeter, the good and bad of it! A long, cold night spent in a bell tent with a sheepskin and saddle-cloth between you and the ground. Onto the field before dawn with no breakfast. A long, wearing wait, trying to stamp the chill out of your boots while the General took his time with his kidneys and bacon. Some stupid remarks at a senseless inspection. Then, when your belly was full of it, the brigade moved out, and there was a fine moment.

He counted back. Six years of it he'd had, since 1848. Hard times then; and Patrick Mundy, eighteen years old, had walked the streets of Dublin with nothing but the clothes to his back and a way with horses.

A sharp-eyed Guardsman sergeant with a recruiter's ribbons on his hat had stood him to a pint of ale and had told him some large tales about soldiering in India and such far places. Then they had gone around to the Royal Barracks, and Mundy had seen the Sergeants' mess with the long-legged fellows doing nothing but lounging about drinking their beer and smoking their pipes. By chance the Guardsman sergeant had a gazette in his pocket and could show him the regiments with their stations and vacancies.

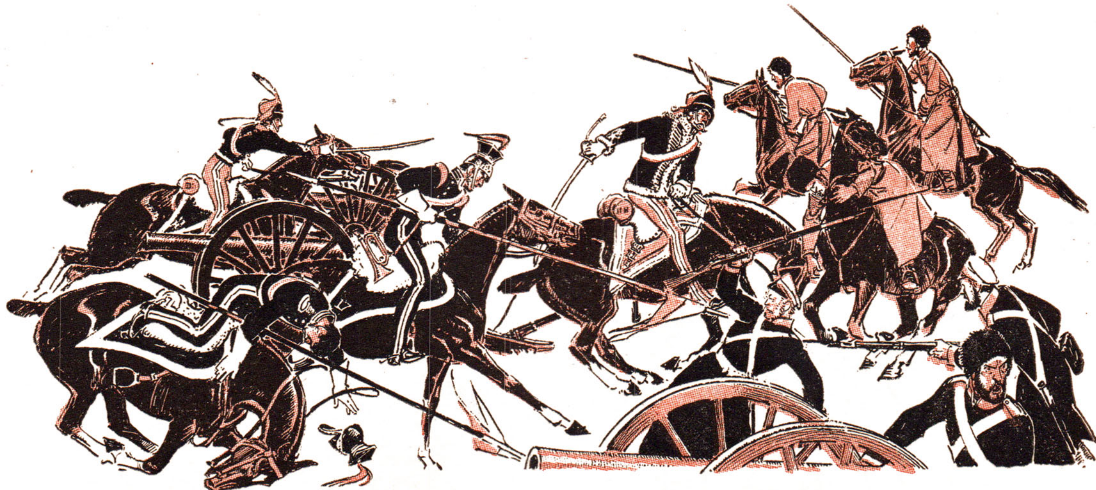
The sergeant had eyed him narrowly—no doubt with a thought to bye fees and smart money—and said that with his bandy legs, Mundy would never make a Guardsman, but there were several horse regiments under strength, and the Lancers were partial to Irishmen. So Mundy had allowed the sergeant to press the Queen's shilling into his palm.

At the recruit depot he had made the painful discovery that all sergeants were not the fine fellows the elegant Guardsman seemed. But in the barrack-yard and riding-school he readily learned the rudiments of his new profession and was posted to the 17th Lancers. And here, because he had an ear for a tune and turned out well for troop inspection, they had given him a trumpet and the shoulder-caps of a musician.

"Sound your calls loud and clear," Sergeant-Major O'Hara had told him. "Keep your mouth closed and your bowels open, and ye'll do all right."

So Patrick Mundy was first the trumpeter of a troop, and then, because he heeded the advice of his sergeant-major (and because the life of a trumpeter in active service came often to a sudden end) he was in turn trumpeter of a squadron, sergeant trumpeter of the regiment, and now duty trumpeter of the brigade.

THIS morning the General had ridden up late from Balaclava to where the regiments stood to their horses. Mundy had blown the brigade to attention, the notes coming out sweet and silvery; the long blue-



# LANCE

THE FAMOUS CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE AT BALACLAVA—WHEN WAR HAD ITS ELEMENT OF GLAMOUR AND GLORY.

by MAJOR EDWIN SIMMONS, U.S.M.C.

and-red line had stiffened; and the adjutant, full of importance and circumstance, had swept up his sword in salute and made his report: the Light Brigade, Cavalry Division, 671 effectives, October 25th, 1854, was prepared for inspection.

Nothing had seemed to please Major General John Thomas Brudenell, ninth Earl of Cardigan, as he moved across the front of the brigade escorted by his elegant aides-de-camp, Lieutenants Maxse and Wombwell, and trailed by the brigade staff. Down the line they rode, past the 13th Light Dragoons, then Mundy's own regiment, the 17th Lancers with their blue jackets, square-topped helmets, and nine-foot lances, narrow red-and-white pennons drooping from the lance-heads.

The General had passed on down the line, finding fault as he went with each of the regiments. A little less wrong, perhaps, with the 11th Hussars because they were his own regiment. (Sergeant-Major O'Hara said the command had cost him thirty thousand pounds sterling.) A good deal more fault was found with the 4th Light Dragoons, possibly because the poor lads were dragoons, and with the 8th Hussars, because they were an Irish regiment.

When the inspection was done, Mundy had sucked in his breath to sound *Dismiss* and was ready to be off to his breakfast, but the General had ordered the brigade mounted and faced in column.

Now, as they rode toward the rumble of the guns, Mundy pondered the high-shouldered back of his general and wondered. Lord Cardigan was wearing the 11th's uniform this morning, his pelisse gorgeous with gold lace and buttoned in front like a coat, and not draped from the left shoulder as was the Hussar fashion. No man could handle a brigade handsomer on a barrack parade; no man knew his regulations better; but for field duty—

MANY things, there were, which the General did not know. How could he—with everyone afraid to speak up to him, and him living aboard his yacht in the harbor, with a French cook to put out his rations? Fifty-seven years old he was, and thirty years in the service he had, and this was his first campaign. Too, there were dark spots on His Lordship's record—rumors of courts-martial and cashierings and dueling—but money and birth had combined to write these off.

This whole Crimean business, in Mundy's opinion and as discussed in the Sergeants' mess, was a strange and misfought campaign. The British didn't trust the Frenchies, and neither trusted the Turks, and no one was in complete command. The Crimea itself was a little pimple of land plopped in the Black Sea, behind which stretched all the vastness of Russia. The Allies were supposed to be besieging the Russians in Sevastopol, but it was clear to anyone with half an eye that it was the other way around. The Allies held Balaclava—such as it was—and nothing much else. Sergeant Major O'Hara, who had knowledge of such things, said that even Old Boney hadn't been able to beat the Russians on their own terrain.

The column had come now to the head of North Valley. They halted in the remains of an orchard, its autumn leaves long since shredded away by shell-fire, and reformed in double line of regiments.

The pale disk of the sun was burning off the mists of the morning, and with a cavalryman's eye Mundy oriented himself on the ground. Something had been making up during the night.

Down the right edge of North Valley stretched the Causeway Heights, with Woronzoff Road running along the ridge, a line held by six earthwork redoubts; Turkish-manned, with a single Britisher in each to show them how to work the English guns. Behind them in the South Valley—Mundy could catch the occasional swirl of a kilt and the sound of their pipes carried over thinly—were the 93rd Highlanders.

To Mundy's left rose Fedioukine Heights, walling in the North Valley and well dug-in with Russian infantry and guns.

This was all as it had been, unchanged for some days. It was to the front, range two thousand yards, that the setting was different.

*Illustrated by*
FREDERICK CHAPMAN

There a gray mass of Muscovite infantry and horse clogged the valley, and ahead of them was a line of guns, drawn up hub to hub, the morning sun touching darkly the dull metal of their tubes.

Mundy turned in the saddle and caught Sergeant Major O'Hara's eye: this was the Russian way, guns well forward for an attack.

Coming into the orchard behind the Light Brigade were the Heavies, making the Cavalry Division complete.

On the crest of the Uplands, a quarter-mile to the cavalry's rear, was a thin knot of command and staff officers standing like statuary.

Mundy looked now for Lord Raglan, the British commander, one sleeve hanging empty. That arm had been lost at Waterloo, and it was a barrack-room story that Raglan had said: "Don't carry away that arm until I have taken off my ring."

But Waterloo was forty years past, and as a man became old, his blood cooled and grew thin. There were those who said Lord Raglan had grown too cautious.

To the right front the action had already begun. The growling rumble had grown to thunder. The second and third redoubts were engaged.

*The Turks aren't holding,* realized Mundy. *The beggars are leaving their guns.*

The Russian mass swarmed onto Woronzoff Road, into redoubts two, three, and four.

*Ten thousand infantry and horse,* guessed Mundy, *and nothing between them and Balaclava except cooks and clerks.*

But the skirling of pipes reminded him that he had forgotten the 93rd Highlanders, protected a little by a rise in the ground. They made a thin bright line in their bonnets and kilts: A regiment against a corps.

Behind Mundy the Heavy Brigade went out smartly, sweeping to the rear of the sixth and fifth redoubts, but it was a mile ride to the 93rd—they'd never reach it in time.

Squadron after squadron of blue-jacketed Russian cavalry turned off the causeway to charge the Highlanders, attacking in column, Mundy observed, as was their custom.

The Highlanders knelt. Mundy estimated the range at six hundred yards when the white smoke of their first volley puffed out. At 150 yards they fired again. No time to reload. Nothing left now except bright bayonets.

But the Muscovite horsemen had no taste for closing with the rock-hard line of Scots. The leading squadrons rode off helter-skelter, more saddles emptied than not.

A solid new column of Russian cavalry, broad pennons flying, was advancing now astride Woronzoff Road. *How strong?* Thirty squadrons? A dozen regiments? Three thousand lances and sabers? Mundy could only guess.

They, intent on the Highlanders, did not seem to see the Light Brigade, drawn up quietly in the orchard. They must pass their flank within a quarter-mile of the Light Brigade.

In front of Mundy the turf stretched dull-green and firm, a slight downgrade, no ditches, no hedges, no fences. A cavalryman dreamed all his life for a chance like this. Mundy wet his lips and palmed the mouthpiece of his trumpet. He edged Bertie closer to Lord Cardigan's chestnut, so as to be ready for the command. His stomach tightened and a slight tremble moved from his waist down his legs. From the brigade behind him came the faint creaking of leather as the troopers surreptitiously tested their seats and stirrups, loosened their sabers or settled their lances.

In his six years' service Mundy had sounded many calls in many places, but never had he sent the Lancers winging across the field in a full-fledged regimental charge.

It was a well-practiced maneuver. They had done it often enough of a Saturday morning on a garrison parade ground to amuse the officers' ladies, and once in Hyde Park to impress the Queen and her household, but never in battle. And while this expedition to the Crimea had appended several stiffish affairs to the battle honors of the 17th, they had been matters of patrol activity, reconnaissance, and vidette duty which wore down a regiment's strength and added little to its glory.

The Russians drummed by, a long column on the road. Lord Cardigan's already high color heightened. Otherwise he sat impassive, holding his horse in check. Captain Morris of the Lancers rode out, shouldering Mundy's Bertie aside.

He was wearing a cloth forage cap instead of a proper helmet. In the brigade the colonels and majors were nearly all gone and the senior captains had the regiments. Morris had been with the Seventeenth since 1848, as long as Mundy himself, and before that he fought with the 16th Lancers in India at Maharajore, Aliwal, Sobraon and other heathen places whose names Mundy disremembered. Thirty-four now he was, a short stocky man with a chest like a brewer's keg.

"In another moment, sir," he urged, "it will be too late."

"Back to your regiment," answered Lord Cardigan. "I am the one who commands here."

And then the Russian column was past them, the opportunity was gone and every man in the brigade knew that it was not apt to come again.

From beyond the fifth redoubt came the high, sweet cry of a cavalry trumpet and the Heavy Brigade came charging over the mask of the Causeway Heights, the Greys and the Enniskillens in the lead. Not since Waterloo had the Scots and Irish ridden thus, stirrup to stirrup. Behind them, rolling over the crest, came the English 1st Royal Dragoons, and then the 4th and 5th Dragoon Guards.

THEY struck the Russian column headlong, murderously—eight hundred against three thousand. The bright British uniforms were lost in a sea of Russian blue and gray and green. It was a hacking, churning melee of horses and men—and then miraculously the Heavy Brigade rode through intact and the Russian mass fell back disorganized along the road.

Mundy sat with his silent trumpet and watched. The morning was half-spent and the Light Brigade had not moved from the orchard. Lord Cardigan remained stock-still in the saddle, but under his breath Mundy heard him growl: "Damn those Heavies, they have the laugh of us this day." Strange words, thought Mundy, for a brigade commander who snubs his own chance.

A little way off sat Lord Lucan, who commanded the Cavalry Division. When Cardigan failed, why hadn't Lucan issued the order? Mundy knew these were not things with which a sergeant-trumpeter should concern himself. He turned around to Sergeant O'Hara for reassurance. But O'Hara's face was bleak as he sat there with his unused saber at the carry.

A trumpeter, among other things, sometimes serves as orderly and sometimes as courier, and because of this he learns his commanders better than a regular trooper might. The Earl of Lucan was Cardigan's brother-in-law, but there was a strange, lasting feud between them and except for duty, they did not speak.

As they sat silently, a bright-uniformed rider detached himself from the command group atop Upland Heights and came slithering and sliding down the slope toward the Light Brigade's position.

*So,* thought Mundy, *here come orders at last.*

No ordinary rider could send a horse down such a grade and not break the horse's neck or his own. When he came close enough Mundy saw that it was Captain Lewis Nolan, the particular friend of Captain Morris.

Nolan had studied cavalry across the world. He had ridden with the Hungarians on the Polish frontier, had served in India, and had observed the Czar's horse troops in Russia before the war. Sergeant Major O'Hara had a copy of a book he had written and said that it was good. An all-round handsome gentleman was Captain Nolan and an Irish name to boot.

Captain Nolan pulled up his horse in front of Lord Lucan and the two seemed to have words. The Lieutenant General's voice rose loud enough for Mundy to hear:

"Attack guns! What guns?"

Captain Nolan dramatically pointed eastward down the valley.

"There, my lord, is your enemy; there are your guns!"

The pair of them came trotting the short distance to Lord Cardigan and his staff. Lucan, his temper up at being called down by a mere staff-captain, handed his brother-in-law the dispatch just received.

Cardigan read it, his flushed face darkening to mahogany.

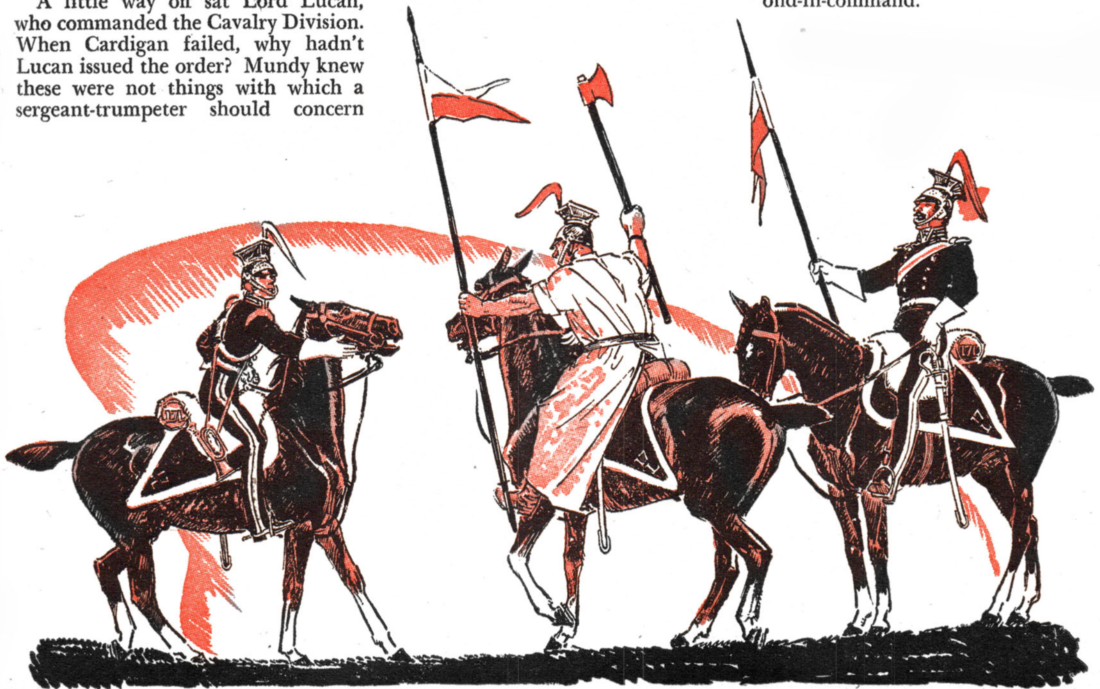
"But allow me, sir," he said, and the words came out measured and precise, "to point out to you that the Russians have a battery in the valley in our front, and batteries and riflemen on each flank."

Lord Lucan shrugged his shoulders, "I know it, but Lord Raglan will have it. We have no choice but to obey."

LORD CARDIGAN swept his sword through the glittering arc of the sword salute, but under his breath Mundy heard him mutter, "Well, here goes the last of the Brudenells.

"Trumpeter," he said, in a louder voice. "Present Lord George Paget my compliments, and ask him to ride over here."

*This is more like it,* thought Mundy, sending Bertie across the turf and bringing back the brigade second-in-command.



"We attack immediately in two lines," Cardigan told Lieutenant Colonel Paget, "our present formation."

"I think not," interrupted Lord Lucan, wedging his thin, highborn nose into the conversation. "Have the Eleventh fall back in echelon to give you three lines."

THE brigade commander's face turned purple. The muscles at the hinge of his jaw worked themselves into angry knots. The old boy, thought Mundy, doesn't like Lord Lucan's skipping a link in the downward chain of command.

Captain Nolan took this awkward moment to ask if he might ride with the brigade. Lord Cardigan glared but granted permission. Then his eye fell on Mundy nursing his trumpet.

"Trumpeter," Cardigan lashed out, "there'll be no music to send us off. For this day's work we'll need every saber, every lance. Back to your regiment."

So Mundy took his post with the 17th Lancers. There were snickerings in the ranks, and Mundy thought they were for his being sent down by the brigade commander. But then he saw they were laughing at Veigh, the regiment's butcher.

Veigh was a Yorkshire man, and here he was in his blood-stained canvas smock, having left his butchering and come up from the camp. He handed his lance to Mundy.

"Here, Paddy," he said. "Tha can use this better than me. Ah've me own weapon." He held aloft his butcher's pole-axe. No trumpet sounded—and Mundy would rather have given that call than to have been the brigade commander himself—but the brigade stepped out as neatly as though on parade. It was two hours past noon.

Mundy settled the foot of the unfamiliar lance to the toe of his boot. His trumpet was slung by its cord. Maybe before the day was over he would sound it yet. He found himself knee-to-knee with his mess mate, Sergeant Douglas. Douglas' dour Scot's face split in a grin and he winked. "It'll be a Donnybrook today," he said.

Lord Cardigan rode a regulation two horse-lengths in front of his staff and five horse-lengths behind them came the first line. Captains Morris and Nolan were riding side by side as though it were a great game.

And it did seem like a field day maneuver. Captain Morris was saying in his quiet, easy way, "Mind your dress on the right," and O'Hara was barking like an Irish terrier, "Wilson up. Moriarty back. Straighten your lance, Mundy."

There was a mile to go to the Russian batteries at the end of the Valley. Mundy counted the gun muzzles. Twelve.

Lord Cardigan was riding high-shouldered, straight-backed. Since the movement had begun his eyes were fixed rigidly ahead.

Suddenly Captain Nolan touched spurs to his horse and went curving out from the side of Captain Morris toward the brigade commander, his sword arm outstretched, blade pointing to the right front.

The General was not going to like his breaking ranks, thought Mundy.

And then, abruptly, Trumpeter Mundy realized that Captain Nolan was trying to change the direction of the attack and it was suddenly horribly clear that the General had misunderstood his orders: That they were meant to recapture the guns in the Turkish redoubts and not to charge the cannon at the end of the valley. But Lord Cardigan, eyes straight to the front, did not see Nolan.

In the same split second a single Russian gun fired a ranging shot. Mundy saw the dirt bloom up blackly just in front of the General. A high-pitched death-scream carried above the steady drumming of the horses' hoofs. The bright lace on the breast of Captain Nolan turned red. He rode on while all the brigade watched, a dead horseman, dead arm outstretched, dead knees holding him in the saddle, until his horse disappeared to the right through a squadron interval in the 13th Light Dragoons.

But Lord Cardigan held in his white-stockinged chestnut with an iron hand and never looked back.

Thirty Muscovite guns, front and flanks, roared out their first salvo at twelve hundred yards. The shells came toward them with a sighing sound, like tearing cloth, and ripped great bloody holes in the Lancers' line.

The squadrons re-dressed automatically, knee to knee, and Mundy saw that Douglas was gone. O'Hara was still there, his voice still steady and cool but the brogue thickening.

ALL guns were firing now, seemingly, cutting red gouts out of the brigade. The twelve at the end of the valley were lost in a bank of white smoke and Mundy could not see them except for the gun flashes that lanced out brightly orange.

Lord Cardigan was guiding on the center flash. He had lost his aides Maxse and Wombwell. One had been blown from his saddle. The other had had his horse shot out from under him. But the brigade still moved at the same controlled canter. Mundy watched a Lancer captain, a little frantic, try to gallop past the brigade commander. The General stonily laid his saber against his chest and sent him back to his post.

Mundy felt something strike his left leg. Was he hit? Then he saw that it was a riderless horse—Douglas' gelding—trying to shoulder its way back into line.

They were in the smoke cloud now and the guns were not two hundred yards away.

Down the line somebody in the 13th yelled, "Don't let those bastards in the 17th get in front of us," and the two leading regiments went forward in the final, thundering charge.

Mundy swept his lance point forward to the engage position. There was a gun ahead. He rode for it. The distance closed. He could see the gunners, caught with their rammer in the barrel, tugging at the staff, look-

ing over their shoulders with faces tight with fear.

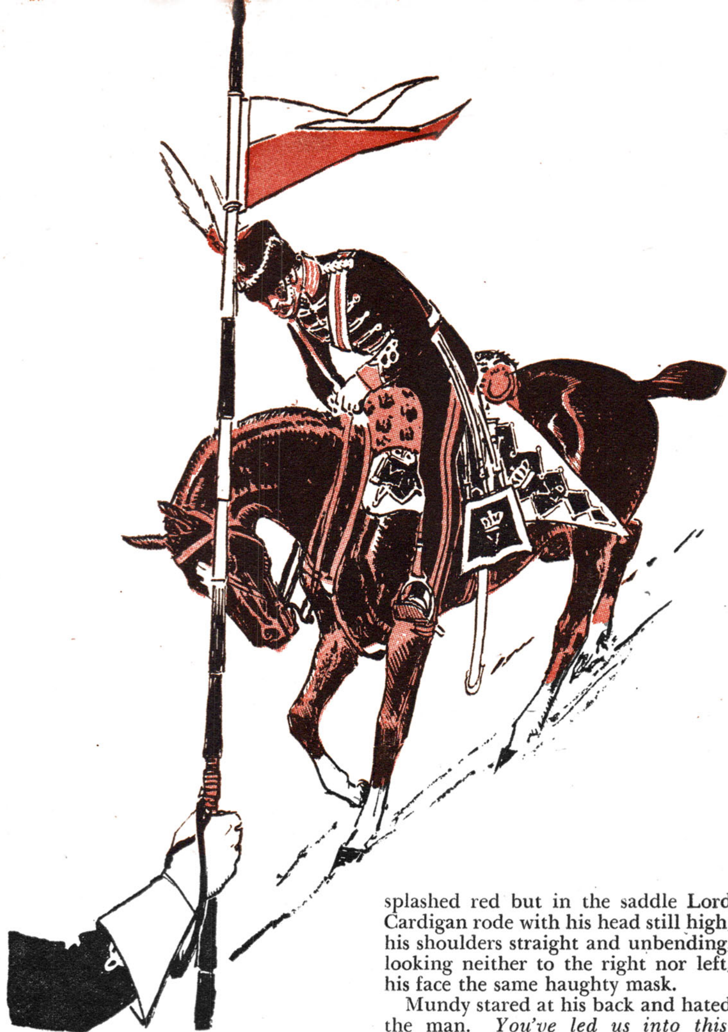
Mundy leveled his lance. Ahead was a barrel-chested fellow, bare headed. Mundy saw his face—sweat and black powder etching every line—his eyes, every whisker, and the black hairs that grew out of the backs of his hands. He saw all this as his lance point drove through the Russian's chest and his hands clutched at the lance haft.

The Russian's weight carried the lance-point down. The nine-foot ash pole bent under the strain. Mundy could not free the bending shaft and it threatened to spring him from the saddle. Luckily it was not the lancers' custom to use their slings;* he could let the thing go. He did and was glad to be rid of its awkward length. He drew his light cavalry sword and jumped Bertie over a broken-wheeled limber.

The solid mass of Russian cavalry—a forest of broad-pennoned lances—was sitting stock-still in its saddles behind the guns. Mundy caught the flash of a gold-laced jacket riding alone, straight for a Cossack squadron—the brigade commander!

He spurred Bertie to close the gap. The Cossacks—fierce looking in their fur caps and baggy breeches—seemed awed by the single splendid figure who faced them. Lord Cardigan, Mundy saw, still had his saber at his shoulder as though he could find no opponent's blade worth crossing.

A bearded Cossack gave a wild yell, leveled his lance, and came charging at the General.



Lord Cardigan laid his reins over and Ronald, his chestnut, spun like an Indian polo pony. The Cossack went thundering harmlessly by.

But a second Cossack had come in from the flank and his lance-point caught Cardigan in the leg. The General looked briefly amazed that such a crude fellow should have stuck him. Then he made a correct over-the-shoulder cut with his saber which caught the Russian lancer full in the throat and covered him with a gush of blood.

Mundy managed to interpose Bertie between the Cossacks and his General, his saber parrying a dozen thrusting lance points; then the pair fell back.

Mundy looked wildly around. By now the three lines of the Light Brigade had broken themselves in blood-frothy waves on the line of Russian cannon and the cavalry to the rear. Mundy could get only brief, bright pictures of what was happening.

Captain Morris must have lost his seat. He was standing, his sturdy legs braced apart, his head a bloody mask and his left arm hanging limp and broken. But his sword was in his right hand and it was making a whirling figure-eight that kept the Russians at their distance.

Riderless horses, without the reassuring weight of their masters, stood quietly or galloped blindly, screaming.

Sergeants and subalterns were trying vainly to reform their commands. Mundy could hear the hoarse shouts:

"Troop A here!"

"First squadron lancers on me!"

And here and there the final, fatal command was being given:

"Threes about!"

The brigade was falling back now, but not, as they had come, in a brave, charging regiment. They were withdrawing by twos and threes, the wounded and those on foot. Some stubborn ones chose to stay and die. The flank guns roared after those who went back, taking their toll.

Mundy followed his General. The chestnut's white stockings now were splashed red but in the saddle Lord Cardigan rode with his head still high, his shoulders straight and unbending, looking neither to the right nor left, his face the same haughty mask.

Mundy stared at his back and hated the man. *You've led us into this, you've killed us,* thought Mundy, *and it hasn't even touched you.* Yes, you've a scratch of a wound on your leg, but that Cossack lance-point didn't lay bare your soul. It didn't prick the bladder of your colossal conceit. There's many a fine lad back there dead because of your high-born pride: Douglas, who rode out beside me. Nolan, who tried to set you straight. Morris, fighting his heart out to save you from your blunder.

A black Irish rage filled Trumpeter Mundy. He straightened his sword-arm, brought his saber point in line with the proud back of the Earl of Cardigan, and spurred Bertie. But as he closed the short distance, he let his sword-arm drop. It wasn't in him to run a man through the back.

Then the whole world blossomed into a pinkish-brown cloud. Mundy felt himself thrown a long way into the air and, after he had floated gently in space a ridiculously long time, the earth came rushing up and hit him

with a brutish thud. He went under, down into a deep black velvety place.

When he came up out of it, he found that he was lying somewhere on shell-torn turf. Bertie was a little way off, on his back with his legs sticking up crazily and his guts blown out—Bertie, who had been down on the rolls of the 17th Lancers as Albert, A-7—name, troop initial, and number as regulations prescribed—but Mundy had called him always Bertie, no disrespect to the Prince Consort intended. Now Bertie was dead.

Mundy tried to get up. It wouldn't do at all to just lie here. But when he tried to move, his legs wouldn't work. He looked down puzzled. His trousers were a red-soaked mess. He never could keep the damn' things clean and now they were fixed for fair. There was something devilishly wrong with his hips and as consciousness came back the pain set in.

He looked around. The Valley was studded with the blue-and-red-clothed bodies and there were horsemen picking their way among them. Not British cavalry, but Cossack lancers and Mundy saw that the half-savage squadrons from the steppes were looting the dead and killing the wounded.

This, then, was how he would die. Spitted on the ground like a pig at a boar hunt. Then the Russian cannon on Fedioukine Heights and at the head of the Valley started to thunder once again.

The Cossacks began to take casualties from their own field guns. Mundy could see them tumbling from the saddle, their baggy trousers and blouses kiting in the air.

*The beggars are a little human after all,* marveled Mundy. *The Muscovites are driving off the Cossacks so that we might die in peace.*

YET when the Cossack squadrons had reformed and ridden off, the volume of fire did not fall away but rose to a new crescendo as the Russian gunners whipped the field of fallen Britishers with grape and canister.

*The Cossack lances were too slow, too incomplete,* Mundy realized bitterly, *so they've turned the guns on us.* But, he laughed to himself—or thought he did; there was no sound—he would fool them. He had an escape: He slid back into the soft black velvety place.

When he awoke again it was much later. The guns were silent. The sun was down and the Valley was filling with long, dark shadows. The pain in his hips was worse but he felt a little stronger. Experimentally, he raised himself to his elbow and found that he could drag his useless legs. At the British end of the Valley, shadowy figures were moving—stretcher-bearers perhaps. He rid himself of the weight of his sword belt. His lancer's helmet was long since lost. For some reason he still held on to his trumpet, slung by its cord over his shoulder.

He started the long way back, digging his gauntleted hands into the turf and pulling himself forward. The ground seemed to pitch and roll and it was as though he were a dog-sick recruit once more crossing the Irish Sea. The world closed down to the sod in front of him that he must claw at and pass. Sometimes this too would fade, and he would slide off into the black place again. Then he would come drifting back and inch painfully on.

But there is a limit to what flesh can endure. The exertion tore loose the clots and set his wounds to bleeding. With each pulse beat pumping away his life, he knew that he was done. Mundy rolled over on his back and looked up at the sky. The first stars of the evening were appearing.

He could feel his trumpet under his arm. He reached for it. The mouthpiece was clogged with dirt. Automatically, he pulled off his gauntlets and cleared the dirt with his finger. He let the weight of the trumpet rest on his chest and stared up into the darkening heavens. *He would sound one more call.* The call he had been denied by the brigade commander.

Mundy wet his lips, pressed that trumpet against them, and sounded the Charge. The notes came out quavering and weak, yet to Mundy they seemed full and true. He closed his eyes and let the trumpet fall: once more the vanished regiments of the Light Brigade charged across the turf against the guns. This time, however, serving the batteries weren't Russians and death, but the good lads of the Queen's Artillery. When the exercise was done, they would adjourn to the Sergeants' mess and, over their beer, fight the problem again. And Douglas would jump onto the table, shout for two swords, and do his Scottish dance . . .

"Trumpeter, trumpeter!" called a low, insistent voice. Regretfully, Mundy left the rousing Sergeants' table and came back to the Valley in the Crimea. He opened his eyes and looked into the beautiful ugly face of Sergeant Major O'Hara.

"The call was so terribly sounded," said the wry O'Hara, "that I said to myself that it could be no other than Mundy."

And he cradled the trumpeter in his arms like a baby and carried him out of the Valley.

The next several hours were pain-jagged flashes of light and dark, a harassed surgeon working swiftly in lamp-light, and then a cot in a crowded hospital tent.

The light faded away again. The night grew hideous with the booming crash of a renewed cannonade. Mundy dug convulsively at his cot. It seemed that once more he was in the Valley.

"Quit yer moanin'," said a Cockney voice from afar off. "You 'aven't got it 'alf bad."

The voice slopped a cloth in a bucket of water and laid it on Mundy's forehead.

" 'ere, that'll keep the bloody fever down."

*Brrooom — brroomm.* Somewhere in the night, shell were exploding.

"The guns," said Mundy, pulling with shaking fingers at his blankets. "Why don't they stop?"

"More noise than damage in that," said the hospital orderly serenely. "The Russkies is shooting a sort of serenade. A celebration you might sye."

"How bad are my legs?" asked Mundy.

"If you 'ave sense to live till morning, they'll be tyking you back to the 'ospital at Scutari."

MUNDY slept and then someone was holding a lantern close to his head.

"Trumpeter Mundy," said a gentleman's voice. "Mark him among the living."

Mundy opened his eyes and saw that it was Lord Cardigan. He was surprised that the General knew his name.

"What does that make the toll?" asked the General wearily of his adjutant.

"Of the 671 who rode out," said the adjutant, holding his pencil to his notebook, "only 195 are present and fit for duty; 130 are dead, 134 wounded, 15 captured, the balance dismounted. Of the horses, 475 were killed and 42 wounded. The 13th Light Dragoons came off the worst. Two officers and eight troopers answered muster. The 17th Lancers didn't come off much better."

"As bad as that," said Mundy from his cot, and then sucked in his breath for speaking out in the General's presence.

Lord Cardigan looked down at him somberly.

"Trumpeter," he said. "It was a mad-brained trick, but it was no fault of mine."

Mundy looked up, saw the sad eyes of the General and the new humility there, and understood a great many things. No man, general or trumpeter, could have ridden through that Valley and not have been changed by it. Mundy saw too that courage was a thing of many forms, that honor was sometimes more right than reason.

"Never mind, my lord," he said reassuringly. "We are ready to do it again."

# Bettin' Man

A MAN'S ENOUGH TROUBLE, SALLY BO DECLARED, WITHOUT HE'S A GAMBLER. BUT DON'T ALL MEN GAMBLE, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER?

## *by* PAUL GRIEDER

ONE fine spring evening, Jim Trusco came whistling down the road to Sally Bo Antrim's house. He'd been coming down that road three months and more, but this time it was different. He was going to ask Sally Bo a question.

He wiped the dust off his blacked boots with his red bandanna, gave an answering trill to a catbird in the sycamore, and pushed through Sally Bo's sagging picket gate. Before it creaked shut, Sally Bo was standing on the stoop.

"Go 'way, Jim," she said.

She looked mighty pretty with her corntassel hair wisping round her face and her blue eyes crackling. She had a broom in her hand but she wasn't leaning on it; she was planted solid on her two bare feet set wide apart. She made Jim glad of the question he was going to ask her.

"Evenin', Sally Bo," he said, smiling easy, and came up the path worn through the scraggly grass.

"Go 'way, Jim Trusco," Sally Bo said again, "before you get yourself whupped."

It might as well have been a lamb saying *meh-eh* to a hungry cougar relishing the sight of supper. Jim raised one boot onto the rickety step, cocked his elbow on his knee, and roved his eyes up at her, slow and grinning.

"Now who's a-goin' to whup me, Sally Bo?" he teased. "That there's a broom in your hand, not a blacksnake."

"Benjy Lummas, that's who," Sally Bo said quick, like something she'd rather have over and done.

"Benjy? You mean—Storekeeper? Calico Benjy?"

Sally Bo nodded to tell him he'd heard right.

"Now what—" The notion of Benjy Lummas laying on with anything more weighty than a writing-pencil sent Jim into a roil of laughing that would have brought Sally Bo's pa galloping if he'd had his hearing. But he was back in the woodlot fretting over Sheba, whose milk had gone ropy.

Sally Bo didn't stir; she just stood there looking at Jim and curling her toes against the splintery floor boards. But the color went out of her lips, and spread slow up into her cheeks.

"And why-for is Benjy goin' to whup me?" Jim asked between gapes for breath when he was half himself again.

"Benjy has the right," Sally Bo answered. "I'm—I'm spoken to him."

The life sort of dreened out of her when she said that, and from the way she looked at him, Jim knew there was something needed mending. He started up the steps and made as if to take her hands, but she backed away.

"Sally Bo," he said, with a smile that most any girl in the township would have traded a year of good looks for, "Sally Bo, honey, tomorrow you and me—" But she cut him off clean.

"Don't honey me and don't talk about tomorrow," she said. "It's over-late for your sweet words, Jim, except to say good-by. But before we go our ways I'm telling you this: From what I see, a man's enough trouble without he's a gambler. Thanks be, I don't have to marry to know what it can bring a family to. Like poor Ma used to say, if Grandpa Antrim hadn't laid that bottom forty on Bryan's election— And then Pa with no better sense, settin' himself ag'in' Hank Swinton, on how many seeds in a punkin—of all the babes' foolishness in the world—and partin' with his best plow-team, harness and all, to save his gambler's honor—"

The picture of how things might have been different stopped her for a minute, but before Jim could figure where to take hold, she went on:

"Benjy Lummas ain't a bettin' man, and I'll chance whatsomever else he is of good or bad."

If Jim had been looking at her he'd have seen the shining of tears she wouldn't let fall. He wasn't, though; he was studying his boots in a misery of his own, and getting little help from them. Then Sally Bo was speaking again, fierce and soft, like she knew she had to go on to the end but was afraid she wouldn't reach it.

"I'm full sorry you're a bettin' man, Jim, but you had warnin's a-plenty. And now that you've taken your low gamblin' pleasures right into God's own house, I've give up hopin'. We've got to be strangers from here on. There's no use stayin' and no use comin' back tomorrow, because I'm goin' away."

Then all the feelings she'd buried deep down so's she could say what had to be said, suddenly flooded up in her.

"Oh, Jim—the good hopes we had!" And before you could say *catawampus* she was back through the door and gone, catching her skirt up to her mouth not to let him hear her crying.

That brought Jim head-high out of his maze. He leapt onto the stoop and called her name, and he stomped around outside the house calling her near and calling her far, and even made bold to go inside and search her neat-kept room. But she had scattered out the kitchen door to Lord knows where.

When her pa came up from the woodlot, he hadn't seen her either. He didn't keep hobbles on that filly, he said; she'd be back at moonset maybe, or maybe not—hard tellin'. Goin' away, was she? First he'd heard of it, though it might be as well if she did. Betwixt her and Sheba this last day or two, the only thing wantin' for a funeral was the mournin'-crepe. Well, now, if he didn't even know she was goin', how would he know where to? Down to Reynoldstown, like as not, where her sister Jen was expectin'. But New York—Paree—middle of darkest Africa! Hard tellin'!

The language Jim used the two darkening miles back to Snipe Corners would have made Preacher Bratton admit himself spelled down fair and square in his own trade. Jim wasn't fool enough to fancy himself the only one gone on Sally Bo. If she'd named Buck Sadler or Zabe Hyson or even Mosey Letch— But Benjy Lummas! Everybody knew it was Benjy had broke Sally Bo's picket gate leaning on it, waiting till she had a mind to ask him in. But a gal likes courting and nobody took Benjy serious. Not even Sally Bo, Jim'd swear, unless there was witchcraft in it.

About the betting—well, he'd give her a right to her woman's reasons, but the rate she worked them was plumb unreasonable. Just him and Buck and the Collins boys back on the late-comers' bench near the door, getting up a little pool on how long Parson would pray. What harm could she point to? It certainly didn't rob Parson of any wind, or of any of those triple-jointed words he saved for Sunday, either.

How did she even find out, sitting 'way down there in front on the women's side, with her lashes on her cheeks the way he'd seen them other times, and her thoughts winging upwards like they'd ought to do during a prayer, and not bad, like him. 'Twas plain enough somebody must have told her, but counting out Buck and the Collinses, nobody knew. Nobody, by crikes, but Storekeeper Lummas himself—with his pious head bowed in his hand, keeping watch on them from across the aisle, and closing his eyes quick when they caught him at it!

Then hurrying out to Sally Bo's first chance he got—night before last that could have been, when he'd shut the store early, saying he had other business to attend to. Whispering it big in her ear, inventing a mort of lies to go with it, getting her wrought up till she didn't know fat from lean; and at last getting her "yes—yes—yes, she'd give her word if he'd only leave her be!"

Jim broke himself a switch off an alder and cut circles in the air with it as he walked.

"All right," he said out loud, like there was somebody walking by his side. "I'm a fool and sorry. But if you can stand there cryin' on the stoop, Sally Bo honey, and tellin' me that that uprighteous buzzard is a one to make you happy, you need a lot more of lookin' after than ever you know."

When Jim turned in at Lummas' General Store, Buck and Zabe, and Harker Tawney from over by Furnace Hollow, were cooling themselves off on Benjy's wooden veranda along with some of the other boys. Harker was telling how Big Shag, the stock-killing bear, jumped him in the huckleberry brush over on Miller's Flats. Inside the store, Benjy was making a noise working around in the dark to save the expense of putting on the droplight over the counter.

Not even bothering to say hello, Jim walked straight to the screen door and jerked it open; but then he stopped and let it slam back. Using his fists on Benjy would be just one more way of telling Sally Bo he was a fool; and likely Benjy wouldn't fight, anyhow. It needed some studying. Jim found himself a place on the far end of the veranda, reached a knife out of his pocket, and started to carve a pine slab into shavings.

Back in the store something got knocked over, and you could hear Benjy letting out a little groan and trying to put it to rights. He must have decided he was losing more than he earned, because in a minute he came to the screen door, opened it soft, not to unsettle the flies—from the swarm of them it was going to rain, most like—and slithered onto an upturned barrel against the wall.

Benjy was a careful-acting man, hardly more than a foot wide to maybe six from end to end. Even in the dimness of the clouded moon you could note the starved queasy look about him. He had life figured out. It was one of those adding-machines he'd almost bought secondhand last time down at Reynoldstown. One cent on matches, five on axle grease, three cents on this, twelve cents on that. Not to mention the per cent on loans and the mortgages under lock in the Reynoldstown Trust and Savings.

By this time Harker had trailed Big Shag into the woods t'other side of Goose Ridge; he lost him there, and the talk dwindled down. All you could hear was the far-off call of a whippoorwill, and the campmeeting of the frogs in the slough over beside the narrow-gauge tracks that brought the one-a-day up from Reynoldstown. Due about now, she was, but that

*Illustrated by*
RAYMOND THAYER

*"Go 'way, Jim," Sally Bo said again, "before you get yourself whupped."*

meant nothing—a real independent-minded train!

Here and there across the fields the lights in the houses moved from window to window: Children going to bed; everybody on Benjy's veranda seemed nigh gone asleep too. Even Jim's whittling kind of petered out. But Benjy Lummas livened up like a bat at dewfall. Feeling good, he was, hugging his secret. With Sally Bo to care for the store, and no outlay beyond bed and vittles, he'd get along fast. He'd count for something in this valley, and show up the whole pack of them—Trusco and Sadler and all the rest—for the sinful wasters they were.

He pulled his fingers to crack the joints, and looked up at the moon that was a piece of ragged yellow ribbon fluttering in the clouds. It put him in mind of what he'd read in the Reynoldstown *Valley Trumpet.*

"Goin' to be an ee-clipse this Friday night comin'," he said to anyone caring to listen.

Zabe Hyson took a minute to scratch his leg, and then reckoned he didn't like that. No kind of luck at all to plant with the moon making toward an ee-clipse, he said, and his buckwheat was late already. Just one of God's mysterious ways, Benjy murmured; no human help for it.

That was about the end of it until Jim spoke up from his corner. He'd been so quiet they almost forgot he was there. He hadn't studied out to the full just what he was going to do, but it gave him pleasure to prick Benjy by contrarying him.

"Go ahead an' plant, Zabe," he said.

"Sure, Zabe, go right ahead an' plant," Benjy cut in, loud and sarcastic. "Jim Trusco here ain't afraid to have you plant ag'in' an ee-clipse. It ain't *his* buckwheat."

It was the first time he'd ever stood up to Jim like that. Jim knew well enough where he got his starchy new pride, and it r'iled him into feeling the first stirrings of an idea. Might be this was what he'd been studying for all along.

"There ain't goin' to be an ee-clipse, neither this Friday nor next," he said. "Not even if Lummas' General Store orders one special."

"The Almighty ain't takin' orders from me nor you nor any mortal bein'," Benjy said, like he was snapping the lock on a door and putting the key in his pocket.

Hark Tawney spoke on the tail-end of a yawn. "Reckon Benjy's right about the ee-clipse, Jim. I seen myself in Bunce's Rural Almanac at home where it prophesies one."

"Couldn't happen to be wrong, could it?"

"Still an' all—"

Jim gave a scornful snort. "Still an' all what? You think the Almighty figgers out ee-clipses and then prints the almanac to match? You never find mistakes in almanacs an' newspapers an' such?" He was beginning to see daylight ahead, and was riding with both feet in the stirrups, now. "Why, a printin' friend of mine, name of Chris—fell down the stairs, Chris did, an' broke his neck three years come October—Chris used to get so reg'lar sopped, one time he printed the President's pitchur upside down

right squat in the middle of the front page."

He took the makin's out of his pocket and rolled himself a smoke. "Shucks, Hark, don't go shamin' your mother by bein' a bigger idjut than you was born. Of course Benjy there —Benjy just can't help—"

Benjy sneered something under his breath that returned the word idiot pretty plain in Jim's direction. You'd almost say Jim was waiting for that, because he unfolded to his feet quicker than there was any real call for, and walked over to where Benjy sat scrunched on his barrel.

"Any man uses unfriendly names to me has got to prove them. My money says you ain't goin' to get your ee-clipse, Storekeeper."

Benjy stiffened up to his best dignity. "All here know I ain't a bettin' man, Trusco," he said. "Never have been, never aim to be."

"I'll lay you, Jim," Mosey Letch offered.

"This is between me an' Lummas," Jim said, "his prediction ag'in' mine. Show your money, Storekeeper, unless you hone for a servin' of knuckles." And he rapped his fist none too gentle on Benjy's skull just to help him make the right choice.

Benjy let out a yelp and almost fell off the far edge of the barrel. He was in a fix for fair, and wondering how he'd got there. Jim's fists on one side, and on t'other— Down that road he saw a ruined gambling man named Benjamin Lummas, staggering to the poor-farm here on earth and to eternal sinner's flames in the world to come. It was what Preacher Bratton called a "dy-lemma," but with no grace of sweet salvation either way.

The advice he was getting from the boys didn't soothe him any, either. It was a rare sight to them to see Benjy squirm for once, like he made them all squirm when due-day came on a rent or a mortgage.

"Remember what you told me last time we had dealin's together, Benjy?" Buck called out to him. "Somethin' about a cottonmouth havin' a right end an' a wrong one, and how you was a special expert on knowin' one from t'other? Let's see you put your learnin' to work."

*Jim struck a match, and held it close to Benjy's face. "Are*

Having his own wisdom scoffed back at him by the likes of Buck, and hearing the laughter that went with it, raised Benjy's temper; but it cleared his head too, and reminded him to take a fresh look at things. For coming out of a fool's mouth didn't suddenly change wisdom to foolishness. Maybe he'd been fixing his mind too hard on the wrong end. Gambling was a wickedness as Scripture said, and no mistake. But even Scripture couldn't argue against fighting the devil with his own chosen weapons, lacking more sanctified ones close at hand. Matter of fact, there might even be times when gambling wasn't gambling at all, any more than buying flour or putting in a crop.

Jim, still standing there, rolled another cigarette, struck a match with his thumbnail, and held it close to Benjy's face for a long steady look.

"Are you settin' and thinkin', or just settin'?" he said. "My patience is almost gnawed through."

Benjy got down off his barrel. "I'm thinkin', like a man's got a right to do. And don't set things afire with your smokin'; I'm comin' right back."

He went inside, put the droplight on, and after a minute of scrummaging under the counter, fetched up a book with a fancy-colored cover. He stooped under the light with his back to the door, and he must have been moved clean out of himself by whatever he saw in the book, because when he came out he didn't even think to turn the droplight off.

If Jim's patience was frayed, his manner didn't show it, but it put an edginess on his voice. "Time's up and more, Lummas. Say which—your money or your fists."

Benjy scraped his throat and hitched himself up like a man does getting ready to say something uncommonly important.

"When a human sets himself ag'in' the Almighty, I'm proud to be the humble instrument for the chastisin' of the disbeliever. You well know that I don't hold to gamblin', Jim Trusco. But to show my mind in this matter, I'm bound to invest in the Lord's cause. Fifty dollars ag'in' an equal fifty."

Mosey Letch banged his hand down on the floor and let out a holler. "Ja-bez! Benjy's took to bettin'! Fifty!"

"And no less," Benjy hollered back in a surprised sort of way. "Cash money!"

"I ain't got fifty in cash money nor nowheres near it," Jim said. He was

*you settin' and thinkin', or just settin'?" he said. "My patience is almost gnawed through."*

the coolest one there. "I'll stake the value in buckwheat. Half the crop from my east piece."

Benjy's face did some arithmetic. "And twenty bushel additional," he said, throwing the answer at Jim and daring him to pick it up.

"You're bearin' down hard, Storekeeper," Jim said in a mild tone, more as if to give Benjy something to push against, than to scare him off.

All this while you could see Buck getting more and more roused. Suddenly he up and walked over to where the two of them stood facing each other out. He put his hand on Jim's shoulder like he wanted to lead him away from there.

"I'm your friend, Jim," he said, "and I'm tellin' you to whistle your senses back. That ain't a bet, it's a bankruptcy proceedin'."

Benjy took him up sharp. "There's a long spell of weather from now to reapin', and that east piece ain't doin' what it was four-five years ago. And fu'thermore, Sadler, keep out of the way. Like Trusco said, this is between me an' him."

He spit out a straw he was chewing and spread his lips in a smile. You could tell how smart he felt, getting the whiphand back over Jim. His plan to make him eat crow, tail feathers and all, was as plain as a beartrap hanging on a barn door. It passed believing that Jim couldn't see it, with everybody else pointing right at it. He pushed Buck's hand off his shoulder.

"That field's doin' all right, Lummas, as none here knows better than you. But if them's your terms, I'll take them."

"Them's my terms."

"It's a bet," Jim said. "No need shakin' hands. You, Buck an' Zabe an' everybody!" he called to the boys, where they were talking amongst themselves in a sort of dumfoundered way. "Bear witness, one and all, to Benjy Lummas' wager: His fifty ag'in' my buckwheat."

"His buckwheat ag'in' my fifty!" Benjy cackled, like a hen overcome with the wonder of a new-laid egg.

It took him a while to collect himself, but then he got busy shutting up the store, and the boys began to straggle off home this way and that.

Jim was standing quiet, smoking and looking out across the dark fields, when all of a sudden he seemed to start choking on something in his throat, and then he busted out laughing; and according to Buck next day he was fair rolling with it when their ways parted at the turn-off down the road. Buck said it was enough to make a man believe in ha'nts if he didn't already. . . .

Three evenings later Lummas' General Store looked like election day from the smother of people come to see the eclipse and the other two miracles—Benjy Lummas turned gambler and Jim Trusco made a fool of at his own game. It was the biggest gathering since the double funeral for

*Sally Bo came running out of the dark, barefoot and out of breath.*

John and Dimity Holman, drowned in a freshet two years before.

Old Shiner John Gosson that used to be Justice of the Peace, and Camelot Pringle and Tupper Sharpe, had named themselves judges and were out by the horse-trough passing Shiner John's telescope and Camelot's jug back and forth between them. Back of the store children were making a noise playing kick-the-stick, and women rocking unweaned babies in their arms were talking women's talk on the veranda and going in and out the screen door. Sally Bo's pa was ambulating here and there, with his hand hooked around his ear, telling about Sheba and yelling to folks to speak louder. When the women asked where was Sally Bo and would she be back soon, he said she was down at Reynoldstown with Jen and would be here when she came.

Benjy was busy with salt and gingham and harness buckles, keeping his eye on people and writing down what they owed him. Overhearing the talk, he was thinking that it would have been seemly for Sally Bo to ask him for permission to go off, seeing as they were all but man and wife already. He hoped she wasn't wasting her money on wedding pretties; he could fix her up cheaper.

Between whiles he sent anxious looks at the sky, where thunderheads were marching up from the south like a judgment against backsliders. For some folks seemed as if they'd left their wits at home with their almanacs, and there were contrary opinions abroad.

"Sun-up is sun-up, whether sky's clear or mizzly," Sam Barthelmy said. "Same with an ee-clipse, 's far as I see." Sam was a runt-size man, but he sang the loudest tenor at Pillar of Fire church and had a voice that got itself listened to.

"Might be," Pole Watchett admitted, "but there's them as got to have proof, myself among 'em. How you going to know there's an ee-clipse if you don't see it?" Pole and Benjy had had a falling out, and you might guess that had something to do with the argument, for 'twas well known that Pole had an unforgiving nature. And when Pole said yes or no, there were plenty of people said it after him.

All this time Jim Trusco was slaunching around, his thumbs riding his pants pockets, mingling with the crowd and laughing as if he didn't know he was more than half the reason for all the goings-on. Though it was coming time for the eclipse to start, you couldn't tell it by the way he acted; you might say he seemed glad to be shet of the trouble of binning that buckwheat.

But watching the sky and listening to the men take sides, some with Sam and some with Pole, maybe Jim was smarter than the whole parcel of them after all.

One minute there was the orange moon wresting itself free of the clouds. The next the rain started coming down, in a steady pour that melted the thunderheads into one black blanket and pulled it right across the sky. Everybody, children and all, ran to the cover of the veranda except the judges, who stayed out there under a horse-chestnut tree till Camelot's jug went dry. Then they got sense and came in too, with Shiner John and Camelot balancing the telescope and the jug and Tupper Sharpe between them.

There wasn't a thing to do for a while but listen to the rain flooding down and the men arguing around the stove. Jim went to where Benjy was fretting himself behind the counter, putting things half right and half wrong on the shelves.

"Looks like that sure-fire wager of yours has got sommat problematical, Lummas," he said, sociable and polite. "If you got my size in galluses, I'll begin spendin' that fifty."

Benjy almost let slip a box of grits he was carrying. "We'll let the judges speak the verdict about that," he said, bigger than he felt. "Ten-thirteen ain't past yet, not by a sight." That buckwheat—his by rights, and now nature herself raising a question of his just claim to it! Win or lose, he'd never bet again!

Shiner John, with an eye sharp on the store clock, held up his hand. "Warnin'!" he shouted. "Five minutes to go!" He and Camelot and some others went out on the veranda, and Benjy ran out too—but they came in shaking their heads. Shiner John raised his arm again, and the store got quiet. Right on the zodiacal second he brought it down.

"Thirteen minutes past ten!"

Then he scratched his ear for wisdom. For Tupper Sharpe—"a poor drinkin' man, unfitten to be a judge," Camelot called him between dignified hiccups—Tupper was snoring to heaven on a pile of sacks in the back part of the store. That left only the two of them, Shiner John and Camelot, and they barking over the fence at each other—Shiner John cleaving to the almanac, Camelot holding rootfast that what he didn't see didn't happen.

Benjy saw Jim and Buck Sadler and Pole Watchett visiting with each other, and throwing glances his way. It put him in a red-haired temper. He got his book from under the counter and held it in front of Camelot's nose, pointing out the exact printed words with his finger.

"Nary ee-clipse did I-see up yon," Camelot bellered back, waggling his whiskers at Benjy's chest, "nor did anyone else in this gatherin', includin' yerself, Ben Lummas! An' it's perjury on your soul if you dare say otherwise!"

By now the rain was letting up, and the moon broke shining through the clouds. Folks were gathering themselves to go, but every time Shiner John tried to talk eclipse to Camelot, he got "No!" louder than the time before.

"What this here sit'jation calls for," he decided, "is an onpartial party to break the deadlock, seein' as Cam

Pringle here has took it into his head to misdoubt nature's plain intentions. You, Benjy and Jim, can ye fix on anyone here present whose judgment ye'll abide by?"

Benjy's eyes swiveled round but were afraid to fix on anyone. Jim looked amiable and said he wasn't particular—he was content as 'twas.

"In which case," Shiner John went on, "an' to git someone disinfected from this debate, I say we put it to the first man or woman grown, an' sound of limb an' brain, comin' through the door. Fair an' square, that is, an' pretty good law too."

TROUBLE was, all of Snipe Corners that could walk or talk was already on the bright side of the door. One time there was a shuffle on the veranda, and Shiner John's hopes briskened up; but it was only Farley Joyner, who was a man these twenty-odd years and could pull against any three in a tug-o'-war, but still had to be lullabied to sleep at night.

Shiner John was in a swivet, what with his law gone awry, and Benjy and Camelot popping at each other like a bunch of firecrackers, and children yammering at being shook awake. Only those near the door heard the quick pit-pat of feet outside, and saw who but Sally Bo herself come running in out of the dark. She was barefoot and out of breath, with her shoes and go-to-town hat gripped in one hand.

She stood stone still for a minute catching her breath and looking around at the unexpected crowd. "Goodness," she said, "what a power of folks out on a night like this! And you too, Pa!"—going up to him and giving him a peck on the cheek. "It's a mercy if you didn't come afoot, for I'm not of a mind to walk it in all the mud."

"You're Sally Bo for sure?" he shouted in his deaf-man's voice. "First sight, I was afeerd you was a walkin' sperrit. Sheba'll be right glad. How come you home so soon?"

"Jen's mother-in-law came unexpected, and I know when my room's better than my company. But I almost didn't get here, even so. The track's near washed out down by the crick, and we crawled so slow we were almost goin' backward."

She'd put her things down on a handy box, and was dabbing her hair into place and taking in the crowd while she said this—men old and young, and the womenfolks and children, and Jim across the room, and Benjy behind the counter—all gazing at her as if they were waiting for something.

"Seems I missed a sociable?" she asked to ease things. "No word did I hear about it before I left."

"No, Miss Sally Bo, no sociable." Shiner John stepped to her and spoke in his best law voice. He was looking unburdened of a heavy load. "More a matter of business, as 'twere. And all unbeknownst ye've taken onto yerself the responsibility of which is which an' what is what. If ye'll kindly lend me yer ears while I explain—"

"Pleased to oblige," said Sally Bo.

While he was talking her eyes were going from Jim to Benjy and Benjy to Jim. Benjy kept shaking his head to the truth of it all, with his mouth cracked open in a smile. And Jim, one time when she looked at him, twitched his eye in a wink.

"An' that's the way of it, Miss Sally Bo. So now if you'll just speak yer mind—"

"Oh!" she broke in. "All your buckwheat! I can't—" She was talking straight to Jim, forgetting all the other people, and her cheeks were getting redder and redder—till she stopped as if bethinking herself, and gave her head a little angry shake. "Of course there was an eclipse! 'Twas in the *Trumpet,* and I glimpsed a mite of it myself from the train before the storm." She took two or three steps toward Jim. "He'd be a fool would hold the contrary."

At that Sam Barthelmy let out a bray at Pole Watchett, and everybody broke into talk, glad to have the question settled at last so's they could go home.

"Guess the buckwheat's yours, Lummas," Jim called out to Benjy above the commotion.

WHATEVER Sally Bo was thinking, her fingers were twisted hard together and her face was pale as a November frost. But there wasn' any mistaking Benjy. He came running round the near end of the counter with his hands congratulating each other in front of his chest. "Thank'ee, thank'ee, Miss Sally Bo!" he crowed. Yessir, she was a smart one. All that buckwheat!

The way she acted, Sally Bo didn't hear him or the talking and shuffling of the rest of the folks, either. She turned around to ask her pa to take her home, when Jim, moving quick, put himself in her way.

Sally Bo gave a vexed shake of her head that made her hair glister under the droplight. But it didn't feaze Jim. "Not meanin' to interfere, Miss Sally Bo," he said, smiling in his politest manner, "but there's somethin' I feel called on to mention. Appears there ain't a man left in this valley can't be called a bettin' man, seein' as how even Storekeeper Lummas has took it up. And so—"

Sally Bo put her hands on her hips, and threw her head back. "Cost you a good crop of buckwheat to prove that, didn't it, Jim Trusco?"

"Wuth it," he said.

She made to step around him, but he was in front of her again. "So as I was sayin'—comin' to an even choice betwixt one bettin' man"—he gave a fancy bow, with his hand across his middle—"and another"—jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward Benjy.

Everybody had got quiet except for the fretting children. This was something even more interesting than the eclipse. "I vow you'll have to wed a gamblin' man," laughed Miz' Pole Watchett, "or else wed not at all, Sally Bo."

Sally Bo turned round on her. "Are you proposin' that as a wager, Miz' Watchett?" she said. Maybe it was the tone of her voice or maybe it was just the light, but you could suddenly notice the determined set of her chin.

"'Twasn't a real bet, Sally Bo!" Benjy yelped, pushing toward her through the crowd. "'Twas a sure thing from the start, an' there's the buckwheat to prove it!"

This time Sally Bo heard him plain enough. She looked at him in a way you'd hardly call companionable. "Yes, the buckwheat," she said. "Are you claimin' the buckwheat? And claim it was no bet?"

"The way it was, Miss Sally Bo, not bein' a real gamblin' man, I—"

"Ladies' choice, ma'am," Jim said. He was standing there quiet, smiling down at her.

Sally Bo moved back to get a better look at him. All of a sudden her eyes opened wide and she gave a gasp, as if she'd seen a bottomless dark hole barely in time not to fall headlong into it. Or maybe it was more like a fog had burned away and she was seeing the most wonderful sight in the world and thinking how near she'd come to missing it.

Her gaze went round the room, seeing the crowd of faces, Benjy's amongst them. Then it came back to rest on Jim, and took him in complete, from his rain-specked boots up to his black thatch of hair that always looked like a breeze was blowing through it. She gave a little sighing laugh.

"Bettin'-man," she said, and reached her hand out.

IT didn't have far to go, because his was there waiting for it. Without a "please" or a "may I," he pulled her close to him.

"Bettin'-man no more," he said, and smiled and gave her a kiss on her cherry-red lips right in front of the whole company.

Might be this was his last bet, but it was one he didn't aim to lose.

JUST TWO THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO A YOUNG COP ON THE SUNSET STRIP, AND BOTH OF THEM ARE BAD.

# The Big Bebop

KENEALLY drove down Hollywood Boulevard at barely cruising speed. The sane end of the run behind him, he turned right at Vine, then reluctantly, right again.

The young cop at his side leaned forward. "Sunset Boulevard," the young cop sighed. "The Strip, the movie stars. I dreamed about this run, Keneally."

Keneally's shoulders swelled against his dark blue shirt; his big hands tightened on the wheel. What knothead had picked a kid cop for a run like this? "Who briefed you on this run?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Ryan, but he said you'd show me all the angles."

"He would," Keneally said, "the flannel-mouthed hypocrite! Look, kid, half this run's on Hollywood Boulevard. That part's all right. Back there, a cop is just a cop."

But the kid had turned to catch the glow of street lamps on his watch. "Couldn't you gun this heap a bit?" he urged. "It's after twelve, and the Strip's a long way out."

For not long enough to constitute a traffic hazard, Keneally closed his eyes. Maybe he should let the young cop learn the hard way. The thought stayed with him through the quiet stretch from Highland to La Brea. But just two things can happen to a young cop on the Sunset Strip, and both of them are bad.

Forewarned, the first of these can be handled rather easily. And for a young man, there is always hope that a transfer will remove him from the other.

"As I was saying," he said sharply, and the young cop sat up straight, "back there you deal with people. Maybe they're a little high, or on the lippy side, but after all, they're people."

The young cop grinned. "People? That's what you get anywhere, isn't it?"

"Not on the Strip," Keneally said. "Out there, there are no people, only characters."

A harsh indictment, but true enough from a Hollywood copper's viewpoint. The respected and respectable do not absorb his working hours, gray him at the temples, or bring the hard lump of frustration to his throat. A small but loud minority takes care of details such as those.

He listed them. Name-droppers, hangers-on, guys who'd made a picture once, and others who were waiting for a call from MGM or Warners. Sometimes a hood or two of temporary fame. He named them, group by group, with at the top as always, the lad who set the current pace. And since there was a sharp turnover in this rôle, he did not bother with exact identity, but used a title of his choosing.

"Who did you say?" the young cop asked.

"Bebop," Keneally said, for in his choosing he was not a man to type himself to time.

"Bebop, the meat-and-muscle man. The one who plays the football hero who belts out all the crooked gamblers, or the shamus who slugs his way right through the mobs that terrify us cops."

"Oh, you mean—"

"Sure, him," Keneally said. For there would always be a Bebop for the other schmooks to ape. And no different from the others, except that for the moment he's on top. There'd be new ones as the years went by, but the present holder of the rôle would be the last to plague Keneally.

"Him," Keneally said, "he's the headache to remember. Not that the rest of them won't give you grief enough. They have to have the spot-

*by* **PHIL MAGEE**

*"For two cents I'd rap you on the wig," Lieutenant Ryan roared.*

light, and if noise won't hold it they try the only other thing they know."

But the young cop no longer sat up straight, for they were almost at the Strip.

"They get tough," Keneally said. "But they know what lipping off to private citizens might get them. So, they choose the safe ones—the help, the bus-boys and the waiters."

"What a run!" the young cop murmured.

"But Bebop," Keneally said, "is the only one who knows he can afford the big kill. Bebop is the only one who chooses cops."

"What a run," the young cop said. "The Players, Ciro's, Ferranti's, the Mocambo. And you retiring Thursday, and at your own request. How could you even think of it, Keneally?"

The answers to that question had been boiling up inside Keneally for eight years of his twenty on the Force, the eight he'd cruised this beat. He gave out with them, short, sharp, and in abundance. Nor was he more than halfway through when the first call of the run cut in on him.

"Car Fourteen—Ferranti's—same old thing." The staccato pitch held overtones of weariness. And no one had to tell Keneally that the voice belonged to someone who'd served a hitch out here in the comic opera badlands.

"Ferranti's," the young cop burst out eagerly. "We just passed it. It's on the other side."

"Is it now!" Keneally said. With neither waste nor hurry he turned the squad car, drove past Ferranti's sidewalk canopy, and backed into the cab zone.

"For you," he said, "this'll be the first of many. So this time you just watch."

Ferranti met them at the entrance, and led them down a stairway. They kept well to the right, allowing room for the respected and respectable to leave unpleasant scenes. Many nodded to Keneally, and smiles well known from Coast to Coast were turned in his direction.

The young cop's eyes were wide as Keneally gave a grave but brief acknowledgment. For the greetings of the famous did not compensate Keneally for what he knew was just ahead.

The bar that curved off from the landing was deserted. The dance floor to the right was almost empty. But the tables that enclosed it were occupied in strength by the characters Keneally had described.

And in the center, as where else would you expect to find him, was the current Bebop, persuasively restrained from further violence by the admiring efforts of his friends.

Some distance off, two waiters held a fellow-worker in restraint.

Keneally strode across the dance floor. "Okay, Bebop," he said, "suppose we run along."

As many Bebops step down from their trucks as come up from the campus. This one was a big one, even bigger than Keneally. This one had the broad-backed hands and the heavy shoulders that come mostly from toil. His grin was like the one he'd worn while belting out those gamblers, but his dialogue was from his latest picture. And the present tendency toward chinching on the writing costs can be deplorable.

"Copper," he said thinly, "I told you not to call me that."

Keneally's palms were wet, and the hard lump settled in his throat. Just once to play it on the level, and the last eight years would not seem quite so bad. Of course a man who'd hit a Bebop in the face would break a butcher's thumb, but—

"Let go of him," he said. "He already thinks he's tough."

The satellites dropped back, and Bebop's big right hand went winging for Keneally's chin.

And a nice right hand it was. A right hand guaranteed to make a stunt man earn his pay. But stunt men may neither slip nor duck, and keep on being stunt men.

With an ease surprising in one of his bulk, Keneally moved inside the blow. He could have whirled, and with the spent arm for a lever tossed Bebop far across the floor.

But a Hollywood cop may not indulge such inclinations and still remain a cop. For Bebops are not men, they're property—and as expensive assets of a major industry they may no more be damaged than one of Mr. Giannini's banks.

Keneally's wrist-grab locked the back-drawn arm. In a quick half turn he faced Bebop toward the stairs. "As I was saying," he said evenly, "suppose we run along."

His grip was firm but careful, as he tried to forget the many times he'd been a public stunt man for characters like these while each in turn served brief tenure as leader of the pack. Bebop, he'd called this one, and one or two before him. Others farther back he'd named in terms he had forgotten. To him they even looked alike, and he couldn't readily recall the features of the first one.

*Illustrated by Raymond Sisley*

*Keneally gave a grave but brief acknowledgment. For the greetings of the famous did not compensate for what he knew was just ahead.*

But marching this one to the car, the meeting with the first one came rushing back to him. Never would he quite forget the unexpected blow, his own wild surge of anger. Luck had saved him then. A bigger crowd whose jostling gave no room for the swift retaliation that would have ended his career.

A bad thing to happen to a cop. Yet no worse than the knowledge that came later, that there would always be engagements with publicity-seeking schmooks, and never any choice except to play the stooge.

Ferranti hurried after them, an expression on his fleshy face that did not become a fat man. "Some day," he promised, "some day when I've cleared the paper on this trap—"

Keneally's smile was sympathetic, though he knew Ferranti's promise was only to himself. For in affairs like these the café owners of the Strip are in the same position as a cop.

A man came toward them—a gray-haired man attired in garments so conservative as to seem an affectation here in Southern California. The gray-haired man spoke softly, and to Bebop, but he didn't call him that. "I just previewed your last one. I hope you've saved your money."

The gray-haired man moved on, the young cop staring after him. "Wasn't that Lew Harrington, the big guy from—"

"Let's go," Keneally said.

"Do I ride in the back seat with him?"

Keneally shook his head. "Remove him from his audience, and you wouldn't know he's there."

Bebop confirmed this statement so completely, Keneally forgot to warn the young cap that an encore was still possible. And at the Station, the presence of two members of the press failed to remind him, even though one of them carried a camera.

Lieutenant Ryan broke off a conversation with the desk to exchange the usual insults with Keneally. From long experience Keneally aligned himself at the desk, away from Bebop.

"Keneally," the desk sergeant said, "do we have to have this ape?"

THE press boys gathered round. The one that had the camera held it high. Too late now, Keneally recalled his oversight. He yelled, but with the trigger flash, Bebop's foot shot out and caught the young cop on the shins.

"You," Lieutenant Ryan roared, glaring hard at Bebop. "For two cents I'd rap you on the wig until your chin went through your breastbone."

Keneally's sniff was audible. When Ryan thought it over, he'd induce the press boys not to quote him.

Still, it had been a tough beginning for the young cop, and with most of the night before them Keneally hoped for a return to normalcy. The routine things a cop can take in stride, like a burglary with arms, a stickup, or a stabbing. . . .

The balance of the tour was uneventful, and morning saw him home, his new life just ahead. Retirement might be the end for some, but not for Mike Keneally. For a long time now he'd spent part of every day, and all of his vacations preparing to go in with his brother, a plastering contractor. The hard work, much of it overhead, had kept his stomach flat and broadened his already heavy shoulders.

Accustomed to his reticence about police work, his wife talked of their sons, and of her brother-in-law's urgent need for another husky helper.

"He's starting that new job today, and with you and himself he has plenty of plasterers, but he's still short a helper."

"I'll try the Hall again," Keneally said.

He slept in the single-purposed manner of the athlete. Rising, he dressed himself with care. In three days he'd be a partner in a firm; he'd be a California business man. Why shouldn't he look the part? He did, and only in the other forty-seven States would he have been mistaken for a floating crap-game hustler.

At the Union Hall, the secretary was willing but not very helpful. "It's like this, Keneally: there just ain't enough guys who can stand that overhead gaff. Right now I haven't got a crying soul. But I'll tell you what we'll do. Dig up your own guy, and we'll see about the card."

Dig up your own guy? Small chance of that when so few had the ruggedness required. But walking to his bus, Keneally looked about him for the kind of hands and shoulders needed for the work.

Stopping for a traffic light, he saw them, draped across the steering-wheel of an overlush convertible.

Keneally grinned, for plasterer's helpers are not found in such conveyances. The grin became a stare, and just before the light changed, Bebop looked up and casually returned it.

That he'd been slow in placing Bebop, or that Bebop had seen him as just another sidewalk fan did not surprise Keneally. He'd been long aware that he and all the Bebops that he'd known were symbols to each other only when in character. Only on such fields of battle as the popular Ferranti's would quick mutual recognition be achieved.

There to the plaudits of the mob whose pace he set, this one like all the others who had gone before him would see the high point of attainable publicity, while Keneally looked upon the sore spot of his years.

Keneally's hands were knotted in large and eager fists. The oft-repeated wish—"if just one time"—was almost on his lips.

His grin came back, this time a little wry. He put tormenting thoughts aside, he hoped forever. For with only two more tours of duty, the odds were strongly against another meeting.

In the evening, his family around him, he added up his blessings. And a man surrounded by accomplishment can be serene despite the one big sore spot in his life. When leaving for the Station, this serenity stood him well.

"Gosh, Pop," his oldest son called after him, "all these years on the Hollywood run, and you've never brought a single one of those people over here."

"You do not," Keneally said, "go to the Zoo, and then bring the animals home."

A soul-satisfying statement, complete in itself unlike the windy mouthings Lieutenant Ryan used as substitutes for action. Pleased with the dignity of his departure, Keneally made the first run of the tour before he realized that the young cop was noticeably low.

To encourage him, Keneally laid it on so thick he perhaps impressed himself. An easy thing for a man whose feet are pointed toward the future.

"Don't let that Bebop get you down," he said. "You can time him like the weather. It'll be at least three weeks before he throws another whingding. You've seen him operate. So just step in there fast and easy, and take him like a song."

The reference to time was from experience and was reasonably accurate. But the light air of dismissal was just the bubbling over of a man whose back was on his bad days.

"Who'll ride with me when you check out, Keneally?"

"Swanson. Good man, but new out here, so it'll be your run."

They finished out the tour with nothing more than what Keneally called legitimate police work. A prowler near the Players, an attempted car-theft next to Ciro's. And his last tour on the next night was much less exciting than the formalities incident to his retirement.

Two precinct captains spoke at greater length than the chief considered necessary. Smiling at his rash subordinates, he cleared his throat in warning. And on that last bright day before the rains of 1949, the chief topped all his past performances, though there was some schmaltz in his delivery.

"I am at a loss for words," Keneally said. He was, or at least he was as close to that condition as men of his ancestry ever get.

The years flashed back for him, the bad days now obscured. Nostalgia gripped him, but only briefly. For he caught himself including Ryan in his wish to see them all again.

That the new job was under way was fortunate, since twenty years make up a big slice, even for the man who looks ahead. But short-handed as they were, Keneally had neither time nor energy to review the good days of the past, or brood upon the single sour note behind him.

One thought alone came back. The night he'd told the young cop: "Don't let that Bebop get you down. You can time him like the weather." A fine descriptive phrase, much used by Californians. But in 1949 the weather did not lend itself to timing.

Fast-driven by the inland winds, cold rains drenched the town. And in the outskirts, and on the hills beyond, a strange white substance fell.

Editors competed madly to establish the most distant date of like phenomena, then united boldly to combat the slanderous press of other States. Yet their ranks were closed no tighter than the Ridge Route out to Bakersfield, and traffic North and East.

Gas-pressure fell, unable to withstand its constant use, and to supplement the standard fuel of the region, all nearby stocks of wood were soon exhausted.

Arm-weary from a long day working overhead, Keneally scraped his shoes clean before entering his door, the savory odor of the evening meal speeding up his actions.

His wife served him in the kitchen, the oven on, its door wide open for his comfort.

"Lieutenant Ryan called," she said. "He wants to talk to you. I didn't know what to tell him."

Keneally could have told her, but he was not a man to use that sort of language in the presence of his loved ones.

"Who wants to talk to him?" he said. But curiosity is hard to down, and after second coffee he went right to the phone.

That Ryan was as glad to hear from him as he appeared, Keneally strongly doubted. Though after the preliminary hogwash, he had his doubts removed.

"With the Ridge Route still blocked solid, we've got so many boys out with the traffic squads we can't make up the regular runs," Ryan said. "So I thought—"

"That I'd volunteer for recall?" Keneally interrupted. "Look, Ryan,

one more turn around that run, and I think I'd have a stroke. I'm retired, and I like it. Can you get that through your skull?"

"But Keneally, this hasn't anything to do with your retirement. This won't be a recall."

"What's that?" Keneally snapped.

"Specials," Ryan said. "The mayor wants us to hire special cops for the next two weeks or so. And I thought you'd be willing to—"

Specials! The word hit Keneally like a blow. Specials! Civic-minded citizens, hired by the day to meet emergencies like this. Amateurs who kept the desk in turmoil, yet were forgiven all but the most grievous errors. And even then were faced with nothing worse than termination of their services.

SPECIAL cops who were not subject to the disciplinary measures reserved for regular members of the Force. No wonder Ryan hoped to count an ex-cop or so among them.

A small hope gnawed at him like the recurrence of a daydream once repressed. Two weeks? One chance in possibly a hundred. His eyes closed. He tried to make the Bebops that he'd known pass in review before him. But the plays they'd made—obscured the men who'd made them. All but the current holder of the rôle faded from Keneally's vision.

Yet the flight of fancy had its compensation, as for perhaps the first time the features of the present Bebop stood out for him in sharp relief.

"Keneally," Ryan wailed, "are you still there?"

"I am," Keneally said, "and I'll be looking at your ugly face in less than twenty minutes."

He found the young cop in a brighter mood than when they last rode out together. And he was right in thinking that Bebop had not as yet put in another bid for fame. There had of course been lesser happenings.

"Where's Swanson?" he inquired.

"Suspended. I hardly get him briefed before he beats a Gower Gulch gorilla to the punch."

"Too bad," Keneally said, quick sympathy surmounting for a moment his own resurrected hope.

His shoulders hunched against the cold, he drove through rain that made the windshield wipers useless. But personal discomfort could not deter a man as high-held as Keneally.

It did not occur to him that people, even characters, might prefer their homes on nights like these. For in the home there are no members of the press, no schmooks to shout applause.

But when three nights went by without a single need to leave the car, his one chance in a hundred seemed very small indeed. And on the fourth night the wind blew from the sea, and forced the rain back toward the mountains.

By morning there was sunshine. Not quite the golden avalanche described by local papers, but sunshine, and with it came some talk of laying off the specials.

Setting out on what might be his final tour of duty, Keneally reviewed his flights of fancy with distaste. For solid men are harsh in their self-judgments: To have built so little to so much.

The hours dragged, no longer bolstered by an ever-mounting eagerness. Yet, when the call came through, it was as he had dreamed it, even to location.

"Ferranti's," the young cop said, hard lines around his mouth.

Keneally's breath came fast. Perspiration welled up in his hands, and icy fingers seemed to play along his spine.

Skidding to a stop, he saw Bebop's convertible, and fairly leaped out on the sidewalk. Then, and only then, it came to him that a man does not rush through the big act of his life.

Despite Ferranti's urgings, Keneally walked with dignity, savoring each step. And as before, the great and near-great spoke to him in passing.

Leisurely he trod the stairway. At the bar he flexed the heavy shoulders so nicely molded by the hard work overhead. His reflection in the mirror of the back-bar gave him pleasure. For he found it good to look upon a cop who was about to play it on the level.

He'd move in fast and easy, a short left sliding under Bebop's right, his own right hand driving for the ribs. Then a sharp one-two, with encores. But always to the body. For no right-minded man would deface another workman's tools.

HEAD down to save the best part for the last, he crossed the dance floor, guided by Ferranti's heels. He heard the shrill bids for attention made by the hangers-on, and those whose stock was dropping names. He heard the stilted wit of the guys who'd made a picture once, and the raucous efforts of the boys who were waiting for that call from MGM or Warners.

But in Keneally's cast there were no supporting players.

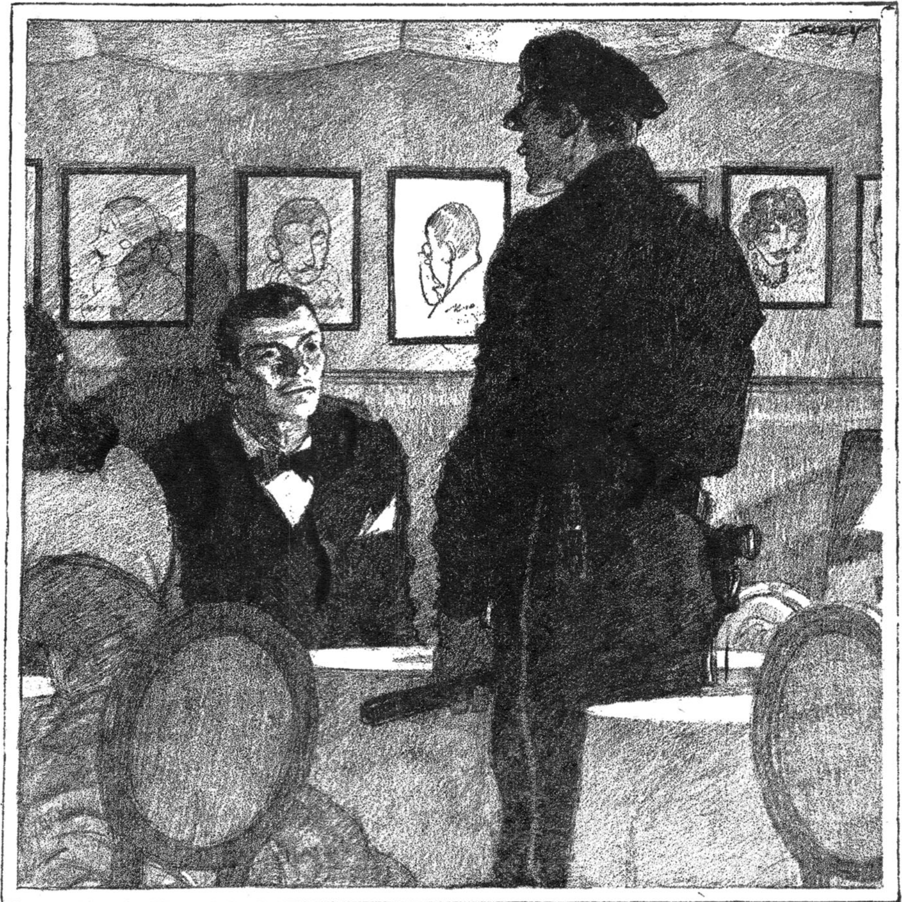
Ferranti stopped, and stepped aside. Keneally spread his feet. Weight shifting slightly forward, he looked up, his smile the smile of battle long deferred.

The smile congealed. He stared. The scene was almost as it should be: A bus boy struggling with the waiters, hot anger in his face. And the big Bebop, held back by the flattering arms of those he called his friends.

But the Bebop did not have the face Keneally had memorized.

Two of those who clustered round the new boy, Keneally recognized. For he'd seen their pictures just before he left the Station. Yet numbed by disappointment, it was no concern of his that schmooks like these should include minor hoodlums in their numbers.

*"You do not," Keneally said, "go to the zoo, and then bring the animals home."*



*"Bebop," he said gently, "if you'd like to try some overhead work, I can fix it with the union."*

"Ferranti," he said harshly, "this—this, isn't—"

"Naw, it ain't," Ferranti said. "But give a gander at him if you want to." He pointed to a distant table where one man sat alone, every line of his big body a study in dejection.

"Washed up," Ferranti said. "All through. The Studio dropped his option. He won't trouble us no more, so never mind that bum, Keneally."

Keneally'd always known Bebops come and go. But hope had not permitted thought of such a happening. And it was too late now for him to work up to a new one.

Silently he stood there, hardly seeing those before him. An attitude like that can be misleading. Especially if interpreted as uncertainty, or fear. But surely even minor hoods should know that only Bebops can afford to choose a cop. And when the new Bebop moved in, they should not have moved in with him.

The smack of fists upon his flesh brought to Keneally neither urge for battle, nor desire to dally here with strangers. For them he had contempt, but not the slightest malice.

This was interruption only, to be dealt with quickly, and in the best tradition of the Force.

Deliberately he blocked the young cop from the action. With due regard for property values, he slashed one to the new boy's stomach, then stepped back to let him safely fold.

Stepping in again, he hooked his left hand to the taller hoodlum's jaw. But the punch contained no heart. The tall hood went only to his knees, and a good dental surgeon would have him eating solids within a month or two.

If he hadn't ducked, the smaller hood would have fared even better, since Keneally deemed him worthy of no more than an open-handed swing. As it was, the swing took the hood behind the head, and his chin plowed along the polished floor.

Turning, Keneally faced the young cop. "Take these mugs in," he said. "I've got other fish to fry."

Slowly he walked toward the table where the big man sat alone—a big man whose friends now gave the allegiance to another chump who'd spend his spare time striving for their cheap applause.

A man who no doubt had little left besides that car, and that probably not paid for. A large-handed, heavy-shouldered lad, who unlike Keneally, had no job waiting, and no retirement to look to.

The phrases that he'd saved for this occasion were much in Keneally's thoughts. For while eloquence alone won't satisfy a South-of-Ireland man, he still may hold the well-turned phrase in very high regard.

"Bebop," he'd thought to say, "will you try on this one, just for size?" Or—"Bebop, would you rather hit the floor, or bounce around the sidewalk?"

Keneally sighed. He leaned across the table—big, powerful and sure.

"Bebop," he said gently, "if you'd like to try some overhead work, I can fix it with the union."

# *The* LAST

THE trouble with Grandpa was essentially simple — he was a completely unregenerate old scalawag. His hair was white and bushy and hung to his shoulders. He wore mustaches which flared with the arrogance of the horns on a Brazos steer. He was slim and rawhide tough. And his contempt for contemporary man was wondrous.

"You kids!" he stated in vast scorn. "A bunch of slick-bottomed squirts who couldn't sit a bronc if it was quarter-tied to snubbing posts!"

That was the opening blast; and always it preceded a reminiscent tale of derring-do when the West and he were young and wild, when an itchy trigger finger was as much of a social asset as a necessity.

"Now you take me and the Kid," he'd say. "We rode into Joplin one day, figuring on sticking up the first bank we came to. I was riding Lightning, and the Kid was forked on a rassle-tailed gelding he called *'Quien es.'* Now we rode—"

"You and the Kid?" my son, Tommy, made the mistake of asking once.

Grandpa's cottony eyebrows closed down, and his gray eyes bored holes in Tommy.

"You doubting my word, pardner?" he said soft-like.

Tommy squirmed. "Oh, gee, no, Grandpa," he said. "It's just that I read that Billy the Kid never was in Joplin."

Grandpa exploded, swinging around to me where I was working at the desk. "There," he said, "the living proof of what's wrong with this whole gol-danged country. Too much reading, writing and figuring. Some slick feller writes a lot of hooraw about the West and fills young-uns' heads with nonsense. Now I ask you—who lived in those days, that writer or me?"

"Well—" I temporized.

"Me, goldurn it!" Grandpa roared, and hammered a flint-hard hand on the chair-arm. "I knowed 'em all, the Kid and Masterson and Halliday and Jesse and the whole shooting match." He glared at Tommy, not frightening the boy in the least. "I was a bang-tailed cayuse, I was. There was rewards for me all over. Didn't the law run me down and stick me away—"

"Grandpa!" I said warningly.

"Aw, all right," Grandpa said sulkily. "You run along, Tommy."

"Yes sir," Tommy said, and scuttled off to do whatever kids do on lazy summer afternoons.

I LET Grandpa simmer down for a time, then swung around in my chair. He was scowling at me, but laughter lurked in his eyes, and I felt my resolve ebbing, as it always did.

"Grandpa," I said, "you've got to quit filling the children with all of that nonsense about the old West."

"Nonsense!"

"Exactly. Now you're eighty-seven years old, and you did live in those days, but that's still no reason to make those cutthroats seem noble and glamorous to impressionable children."

"Cutthroats!" Grandpa was wounded. "I rode with those boys; I suppose that makes me a cutthroat too."

I sighed. "The law caught you rustling cattle and sent you to jail for a year."

"Me a beefer—not on your tintype!" Grandpa roared. "I was the best durned bank-robber the West ever see—"

I laughed, and after a moment Grandpa grinned too. The argument was of long standing, and never would be settled, for the old county records had burned years before. The only fact that remained was that Grandpa had served a jail term. And since there was no one else old enough to dispute his word, Grandpa insisted on dyeing himself as black as his conscience would permit.

"It's a different world now, Grandpa," I said. "Let the kids build it their way."

"All right, all right!" Grandpa agreed.

"And another thing," I went on, not really wanting to hurt his feelings, "some men are coming over in a few minutes. I'd like to talk to them alone."

"Those Pinkerton men?" Grandpa asked.

"Not Pinkerton," I explained. "They're from the Bankers' Protective Association."

# OUTLAW

The old West comes to life in a head-on collision with 1950 bad-men.

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

Grandpa snorted. "They couldn't catch ants in a honey jug," he declared. "Why, me and the Kid would've run rings around—"

"Later, Grandpa," I said wearily.

After all, even if he was my dad's dad, I got a bit tired of listening to him. It was tough enough being the Sheriff of Vickston, without having a blood relative who claimed to have been the West's most feared outlaw. I wasn't any great shakes as a law-officer anyway.

My job consisted mostly of bookwork or the serving of a few legal papers. There wasn't much crime in Vickston, which suited me well enough. The pay wasn't big, but the job was really only part-time, so I made out well enough, what with it and the store. But even so, I liked the feel of the star on my vest, and I didn't like to have Grandpa run down the law.

And Grandpa must have figured my feelings right about then, for he came from his chair and went toward the door. He was just starting to say something, when the door opened and two men came through, city men.

"Sheriff Thomas?" the first asked.

"Him!" Grandpa jerked a thumb at me, and his gaze went up and down the pair. "Pinkertons!" he snorted in contempt, and went past them and outside.

The second man grinned. "What's up with the old-timer?" he asked.

"Cranky," I said, and let it go at that. Then I waved at chairs. "I'm Sheriff Thomas. Sit down."

Completely at ease, they sat; city men, these—with that indefinable stamp of men crowded in by buildings. The first was a big fellow, his suit a bit too tight. He was wearing a gun in a shoulder-holster, and he shrugged it into a more comfortable position as he sat.

"I'm Hargreaves—Burt Hargreaves, of the BPA," he said, and handed me papers from his wallet. "You'll want to check my credentials." His eyes flicked to his partner. "My friend is Klem Oliver; we work together."

"Glad to meet you," I said, shaking hands.

"Same here," Oliver said. His lips were thin, and the words seemed to slide out. He was smaller than I, and I'm not a big man. He looked completely out of place, with his pinch-waisted suit and gray felt hat. And as though conscious of the fact, he scowled, showing teeth as even and white as a girl's.

I ran through the identification papers hurriedly, not really needing them. I'd had telegrams saying these men would be along. But being rather self-conscious because I was a hick sheriff while they were big-city detectives, I put on a show. I felt a stab of envy, looking at the papers, for Hargreaves and Oliver were really big time. Three years in the FBI, in Washington, a couple of years with the Border Patrol down around Laredo, and a few years with the Bankers' Protective Association. I really felt like the amateur I was.

Hargreaves seemed to sense my embarrassment, for he smiled. "Look, Sheriff," he said, "we're not here to take any glory away from you. We only want to pull in those three boys who held up that paymaster truck up north. The fact is, we figured on splitting any reward, and you can take most of the credit—if we pull those men in."

"Well, now that's mighty white of you," I said, "—especially, seeing as how you could go about things your own way."

Oliver lit a cigarette, watching me with the beady stare of a Gila monster. It made me uncomfortable, but I pretended not to notice.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

Hargreaves shrugged. "Not much," he admitted. "Information, mostly. We didn't want to snoop too much, figuring mountain people might shoot first and ask questions later."

I grinned. "Some moonshining back in the hills," I admitted. "Might be best not to poke around by yourself." I reached for my pipe. "What do you want me to do?" I asked again.

"Well," Hargreaves said, "we figure those robbers came down this way, no matter what other people think. Mexico's handy."

"They'd never get across," I said. "The Border Patrol's got a block on every road, and they're watching the wet-back spots."

"Like that, huh?" Oliver said softly. He fiddled with a too-large ring which he wore on his right hand.

I nodded, lighting my pipe. "As you say, this country's suspicious of strangers. I'd get news of strangers riding through here within a short time after they arrived, particularly since the papers carried the story of the robbery."

"And you've had no reports?" Hargreaves asked.

"Just on you," I admitted.

Hargreaves shrugged. "All right, then, let's get at the problem another way. Since the roads are covered, how about planes? Is there a landing-field close by?"

I shook my head. "No regular fields. Fact is, the land's so mountainous, planes would have a hard time landing anywhere."

"But there are places?" Klem Oliver asked.

"A few."

"Where?"

I dug a map out of the drawer and spread it on the table. The detectives bent forward and looked, as I indicated several spots.

"Meadows mostly," I explained, "but a fair-sized plane could land and take off from a couple of them."

Oliver played nervously with his ring, sliding it on and off his finger. Smoke ran upward from his cigarette, and he squinted against it as he looked at his partner.

"Might be it," he said.

Hargreaves nodded, still bent over the map. "Sheriff," he asked, "aren't there any roads to those places?"

"Trails," I answered. "You can drive to within a couple of miles of most, but then you have to ride a horse in."

"A horse!" Oliver said.

I smiled, and Hargreaves laughed aloud. Oliver flushed, then forced a grin, but his eyes were ugly with distaste.

"Okay!" he said. "I'll try anything once."

"Will you take us out?" Hargreaves asked me.

I shrugged. "Sure! We'll drive out as far as we can, and then pick up horses at one of the ranches."

"Today?"

"No," I said, glancing at the wall clock, "it's too late. Suppose we go out tomorrow morning. That way, we can cover several of the places."

Hargreaves nodded and rose. "Okay with me," he said. "Anyway, I've got a few reports to write. Thanks again, Sheriff; you're really being a big help."

"Glad to do what I can," I said, and shook hands.

Oliver nodded shortly, not shaking hands, and they left the office. I envied them and their jobs for a minute. They sought adventure, and even got paid for it.

Then Grandpa came through the door, a slim cigar clamped in his teeth, and sat on the edge of my desk.

"You're a sucker, Sonny," he said.

"Me!"

"Sure!" Grandpa blew smoke. "Those city dudes ain't going to split no reward with you like they say. If they do catch those crooks, you can figure they'll whicker you, sure as shooting."

I'd had about enough, and I guess I blew up. "You mind your own business, Grandpa," I snapped. "As long as I'm sheriff, I'll run my affairs to suit myself."

Grandpa came from the desk, blowing cigar smoke my way, making me suddenly feel like a kid, instead of a man forty-two years old and big enough to handle himself.

"Get-aways in cars, and talks about airyplanes!" he said in vast contempt. "Why, me and the Kid would've run you ragged. We'd have forked a couple of bronc's and rode your tails off. The law—bah!"

Majestically, he turned and stalked from the room.

I grinned, despite myself. Grandpa must have been a caution when a young man. Lord knows, he sure could kick a guy around even now.

And then, because there was work to be done, I forgot Grandpa and got on with it.

*"Pinkertons!" Grandpa snorted in contempt, and went past them.*

NEXT morning while eating breakfast, I was explaining to Martha what I figured on doing that day. She listened with half an ear, as she usually does, meanwhile looking through the door into the living-room where Grandpa and Tommy were.

"There should be a plenty big reward," I said. "The crooks got away with better than two hundred thousand in bills and bonds. Why, my share of the reward would just about clear the mortgage on the house."

"Yes, Walter," Martha said, still watching through the door. Then her expression changed. "Walter," she finished, "you've got to stop Grandpa, one way or another."

I sighed. "What now?"

"What now? You just look for yourself."

I got up and looked, then went into the living-room. Tommy was hunched over the table, and Grandpa was cleaning the Colt .44 he usually kept hanging on the wall of his room.

"Six Pinkertons," Grandpa was saying, "and me and Wes Hardin hunched along the back of the saloon. 'Well,' I says to Wes, 'you take the first three and I'll take—' "

"Grandpa!" I said, very short, really feeling anger for the first time in a long while.

"Gee, Dad," Tommy said, his young eyes bright with interest, "Grandpa was just telling me—"

"I know what he was telling you," I cut in, "and not a word of it was the truth. He never knew Wesley Hardin, and they never shot up three Pinkertons."

"Six!" Grandpa said grimly and stubbornly.

"Six," I echoed. "He never shot up six Pinkertons, and he didn't ride with Wesley Hardin—who, incidentally, was a murdering cutthroat. The fact is, Grandpa bought those guns from the jail collection about ten years ago. He's never fired them."

"But," protested Tommy, "look at the notches on the handles! And Grandpa told me—"

"That's enough, Tommy," Martha said from the kitchen doorway. "You run along and play. Your father and I want to talk to Grandpa."

"But gee—"

"Hike!" I said, and he hiked.

Grandpa sat there at the table, his lean jaw stubborn, his hard dextrous hands still clutching an oil-stained rag and one of the guns.

"Grandpa!" I said.

Grandpa looked up at me then, and words faltered in my throat. "Sonny," he said to me, "maybe I do stretch the truth a bit sometimes, but that's no reason for jumping me every time I open my mouth. I *did* know Wes Hardin back in Towash, and we *did* get in a shooting scrape."

I picked up one of the guns. It lay heavy in my hand. Notches were cut in the butt.

"Seven notches," I said clearly. "Last time I looked, there were only five." I shook my head. "Anyway, that isn't important. What is, is that you're making crookedness look appealing and glamorous to the boy."

"That's right, Grandpa," Martha said quietly. "And you know right-thinking people can't have a contempt for the law."

"I never figured—" Grandpa began, and I cut him short.

"You promised not to bring those guns out again, anyway," I said. "Why aren't they still in your room?"

Grandpa straightened. "Why, because I figured on riding with you and those Pinkertons today."

"Carrying those guns?"

ring from the dust. "Purty!" he said, polishing it on his leather vest.

"Yeah!" Oliver said, reining the black close so that he could bend and regain the ring. "The Association gave it to me when I joined up; I always wear it."

His hand was soft and unmarked and white beside Grandpa's, as he took the ring and slipped it onto his finger. The silver initials *"BPA"* and small diamond glittered in the sunlight.

"Better take it to Sam, the jeweler in Vickston," Grandpa said, "and get it cut down."

But Hargreaves swore impatiently. "Come on, let's get going," he said.

Grandpa and I swung into our saddles and led the way. Riding horses was easier in this country than traveling by car. Underbrush was not too thick, and the smell of pines was strong and bright. A few birds spun lazily in the air; and high in the sky, a huge eagle sailed on wide pinions.

We rode for half an hour, then came out onto the first pasture. I hadn't been there in a couple of years, and had forgotten the rocks which stubbled it. No plane could land here.

"They all like this?" Hargreaves asked, shifting his bulk uncomfortably in the saddle.

"The other's pretty clear, as I remember," I said, and lit my pipe. Some of my original excitement was fading. "Seems kind of farfetched, now, that those robbers might use a plane."

"Gotta figure every angle," Hargreaves argued. "You want to pull out, it's all right with me."

"I'll go along," I said, remembering the reward.

"Then let's get along," Oliver said. He was taking riding the hard way, jolting up and down, not liking it a bit.

"Pinkertons!" Grandpa said in disgust.

We went on. I enjoyed the ride, for I didn't get out of town too often. It was good to be riding through the morning sunlight, to smell the land and hear a bob-white calling from close at hand.

Grandpa was talking to Hargreaves, and the city detective was taking it as best he could. "There was me and Jesse and Grat and Bob, riding like bullets through the night—" Grandpa was saying, and I grinned to myself and let him talk. After all, it wasn't often he had a new audience; and maybe—well, after all, he was a pretty old man, and he had a right to talk.

We came to the second meadow and rested at its edge. It was maybe half a mile long by several hundred

"Yep!"

I gave up. It's impossible to describe how I felt. I was mixed up and irritated and pleading and hopeful, all together. I saw that Martha had no answer, so I looked at Grandpa again.

"All right, you can come along," I said, "but those guns stay here. If there's any shooting, you'll duck for cover. Not," I added sarcastically, "that there'll be any."

And so that's the way it was. Reluctantly, Grandpa put his guns away and went out to the car. I kissed Martha good-by, and then I drove the car to the hotel and picked up Hargreaves and Oliver. Grandpa grunted a greeting, then brooded silently, as we rode. The BPA men had little to say, but they watched the road and landscape as we drove up Siller's Cañon.

The drive took about fifteen minutes, since the road curved so. Springs groaned, and the car heated up, but we made the drive without mishap; and I stopped the car at Benson's and borrowed four horses.

"Four?" Hargreaves asked, and he looked at Grandpa. "You mean he's going along?"

"Why not, Sonny?" Grandpa asked.

"But you're kinda—well—"

"Sonny," Grandpa said, finishing the cinching of a saddle, "I was forking a horse when you wore three-cornered chaps."

Hargreaves shrugged and grinned. I grinned too, knowing these city men were in for a surprise. Grandpa could ride any horse he ever met. Why, in his seventies, I caught him one day, busting a wild horse and yelling like a man a third his age. Grandpa was all whang leather; when he quit riding, he'd be either dead or dying.

Oliver was having trouble. He grabbed at saddlehorn and reins and tried to climb into the shell, and the black danced away, blowing its breath nervously.

"The left side, you dadblasted idjit!" Grandpa bellowed. "You think you're climbing into a car?"

Oliver flushed and bit back a retort. Then he circled the horse and climbed up from the left side, sitting the saddle gingerly, as though he expected the black to explode.

Grandpa shook his head in wonderment at the dumbness of tenderfeet, then went over and retrieved Oliver's

*Illustrated by* JOHN FULTON

***"Seems kind of farfetched, now, that those robbers might use a plane."***

yards wide. The grass was medium short, and a plane could land and take off without much trouble.

Hargreaves looked around, nodding to himself. Oliver dismounted and sank stiffly to the ground, rubbing his buttocks and glaring at the horse he'd ridden. Grandpa ceased talking long enough to light a fresh cigar.

"Satisfied?" I asked.

Hargreaves shrugged. "Looks pretty good," he admitted. "Let's take a ride around and see if we can spot anything, like maybe a new cooking-fire or something."

"To hell with that!" Oliver said. "I'll stick here until you get back."

"Me too," Grandpa said, and slid from his horse. "Pick us up on your way back."

He squatted beside Oliver, cigar tilted beneath his mustache. He fitted the land; he was of it and part of it. Tale-spinner he might be, and quite adept at stretching the truth; but this land was his, and he'd ridden it all his life. Maybe, I thought, and swore at my stupidity, he *had* known Wes Hardin.

Then Hargreaves and I rode away, circling the meadow, working through the underbrush and trees. We found nothing interesting, no remains of campfires or anything else that would indicate the fugitives had come this far south.

After about an hour we returned to Grandpa and Oliver. The city man was irritated, and I knew Grandpa had been bending his ear. But Grandpa was as serene as a summer day.

"Find anything?" he asked. And when I shook my head, he finished: "Didn't figure you would."

He and Oliver mounted again, the detective groaning as he fitted himself into the saddle. Then we rode back to Benson's and turned the horses loose and got into my car. The drive back was without speech; and at the hotel, Oliver hobbled across the walk, while Hargreaves said good-by.

"Looks like a dead end here, Sheriff," he said. "We may pull out any time, unless something breaks."

Visions of my share of the reward vanished. But there wasn't much I could say.

"May be news at the office," I said. "If there is, I'll let you know."

"Thanks!" Hargreaves waved a pudgy hand and went into the hotel after his partner.

Grandpa watched him go, then bit the end from a fresh cigar and spat it out the window. I started the car and went down the street to my office and parked.

"Coming in?" I asked.

"Nope!" Grandpa climbed from the car and slammed the door shut. "Think I'll get in some checkers down at the firehouse." He grinned at me. "See you at supper, Sonny."

I watched him go along the walk, wondering what wellspring of vitality he possessed. I was less than half his age, and yet I was tired because of the ride I'd had. But he walked along as arrogant and cocky and ageless as a bantam rooster.

Then I forgot him and went on about my job. The day was hot, and the jail was quiet, and I got a lot of work done. I made arrangements to take a prisoner to the capital on Wednesday, and I wrote a letter, saying I'd be glad to attend the Police Convention in September. Tommy came by, asking for Grandpa, and I treated him to a soda.

THE day over, purple shadows reaching longer every moment, I locked up and went home for supper. I was tired, and the roast beef made me sleepy; and after supper, I dozed while listening to the radio. Tommy was doing his lessons, and Martha made humming sounds as she washed dishes. Grandpa was in his room, sulking, I thought, because he'd been jumped over telling Tommy so many whoppers.

Tommy went to the door at the sound of knocking, and I was half asleep when I took the telegram. I read it twice before I understood it; and then I knew the reward was gone forever as far as I was concerned.

"SHERIFF THOMAS, VICKSTON," it read. "BODIES OF THREE BANK ROBBERS AND REMAINDER OF LOOT FOUND IN WRECKED BURNED CAR TODAY. NOTIFY SUB-DEPUTIES AND LOCAL OFFICERS OF TERMINATION OF CASE. SIGNED: J. K. FARRELL."

So that was that. I reached for my hat, figuring the BPA men had to be told.

"Be back soon," I called to Martha, and ruffled Tommy's hair. "You get to bed, son."

"Sure, Dad," Tommy said.

The Western Union boy was still at the door, and I said: "No answer, son."

"Okay!" he replied, looking past me into the room. "Where's Grandpa?"

I shook my head as I went out the door. Liar or not, the old boy certainly had his audience.

I drove to the hotel, the night just beginning to fill with moonlight. I was glad then that I was who I was and where I was. Maybe some people like the big cities, but I'm basically a mountain man.

I parked and went into the hotel, waving at Bill Clements, night clerk.

I knocked on Hargreaves' door, then went in at his call. He and Oliver were just finishing packing, luggage on the bed.

"Leaving?" I asked.

"Any objection?" Oliver said nastily.

I flushed. "Of course not. I—"

"Forget it," Hargreaves said. "He's a bit touchy in more ways than one."

"Very funny! Very funny!" Oliver said, and moved gingerly.

I grinned, despite myself.

"What can I do for you, Sheriff?" Hargreaves asked.

I gave him the telegram, and he read it before passing it to Oliver.

"Well, that's that," he said. "Was kinda thinking maybe we were on the wrong trail; that's why we were pulling out." He smiled and shook hands. "Certainly glad to know you, though," he finished. "I'll report your help to the head office."

"Thanks," I said. "Here, I'll give you a lift in my car to the station."

I reached out and picked up the nearest grip. Oliver said, "No!" and then went silent. Hargreaves made no move. Me, I felt foolish as hell, for the grip wasn't locked, and when I lifted it, the side fell down and dumped its contents onto the floor and bed.

"Hey, I'm sorry!" I said, and then I saw what had been in the grip.

I'D never seen so much money. Wads and bales, pile upon pile, and with it thick sheaves of rich-looking bonds. I swallowed suddenly and looked up.

"Why, that looks like—" I began.

"Shut up, you!" Klem Oliver said, and the gun in his hand was viciously black and deadly. "Damn it!" he finished to Hargreaves. "I warned you this caper wouldn't work."

I began to sweat.

"Shut up!" Hargreaves hadn't moved, except to whisk the gun from beneath his arm.

"Say, what is this?" I asked, but I had the answer, and it wasn't pretty.

"You figure it," Oliver said, and looked at his partner. "Now?" he asked, and his gun hand tightened.

"No!" Hargreaves shook his head. "We need time, and maybe a hostage." He holstered his gun and began cramming the holdup money back into the grip. "You bring him, and I'll bring the grips."

"You killed them," I said. "You caught the robbers and then killed them for the money."

"Bright boy!" Oliver said. "Now shut up before you get the same."

Hargreaves stood, bags in his hands. His face was hard and bleak, his eyes like polished obsidian.

"We're going outside," he said. "We're going to use your car to drive out of town. Make a break, and you're dead. Play smart, and we'll let you live. Understand?"

"I understand," I said, and wondered why I hadn't stuck to storekeeping.

We went out of the hotel, Oliver walking close to me, and Hargreaves following. I wanted to signal the night clerk, but I didn't dare. He waved at us as we left.

We climbed into the car, Hargreaves driving, while I sat in back with Oliver. He had the gun out openly now, and it nudged me now and then in silent threat.

"We'll just about make it," Hargreaves said.

"Shut up and get to driving," Oliver snapped. "Let's get to hell out of here."

Nobody spoke during the drive. A thousand plans crossed my mind, but Oliver's gun answered all of them. Hargreaves drove the road we'd followed that morning, and within minutes we were at Benson's ranch. I borrowed horses again, trying to talk naturally, hoping Benson would get suspicious. But he was half-drunk as usual, and after he'd said, "Okay, take the horses," he went back into his house and shut the door.

I saddled, while the others waited. Hargreaves weighted me down with a grip in each hand, then went ahead, leading my horse. Oliver, swearing at the agony of riding again, came directly behind. I didn't have a prayer.

It seemed like weeks before we came to the second meadow. Hargreaves stopped and lit a match to see his watch. "Fifteen minutes," he said shortly. "Get down, Sheriff."

They tied me, using the saddle rope, Oliver protesting it was a waste of time.

"Look," Hargreaves said, "the sound of shots carries like hell in these mountains. Anyway, the sheriff's a good Joe; why knock him off?"

"But he'll tell—" Oliver began.

"Shut up!" Hargreaves said. "And start gathering brush and sticks for a fire. Put the stuff upwind so the plane will have a guide."

Oliver walked away, and Hargreaves sat down beside me on the ground. He lit a cigarette, his heavy face dark and evil in the glow.

"Hargreaves, use your head," I said. "You and Oliver can't pull this off: you've been officers long enough to know that."

"Sheriff," Hargreaves said, and he might have been discussing the weather, "open your mouth once more, and I'll shoot a hole through your face." He looked at his watch again, then stared at the sky. "We've got a plane coming in a few minutes. Maybe you'll live and maybe you won't; but talking won't help, one way or the other."

I'm no hero; I never was. I shut up. Thoughts whirled in my mind like rockets. I thought of Vickston and Martha and Tommy and my sister in Butte. My first moments of fear were gone, and now there was only a dreadful lethargy. I knew the fates were playing with my life, and I knew its thread hung on the whim of the big man at my side.

Minutes passed, and then there was a tiny humming in the air. It came closer, hovering. There was a plane in the sky, but it flew without lights, and I couldn't spot it except when it blanked out stars.

Hargreaves called out, and Oliver lit the huge pile of brush he had collected. Flames crackled, then flared, and the brush pile was a yellow beacon that towered thirty feet into the air.

The plane blipped its motor twice, then circled and came in for a landing. It overshot once, circled again, and set down the second time. Oliver was running toward Hargreaves and me, even as the plane began taxiing toward us.

"Let's go!" he bellowed. "Shoot that punk, and let's get out of here."

Hargreaves got to his feet, looming over me. I tried to stand, fighting the ropes around my arms, and his foot kicked me viciously in the chest, throwing me back. Then Oliver was at his side, looking at me with such hatred as I had never thought one man could feel for another.

"Where do you want it, yokel?" he asked, lifting his gun.

The plane had taxied close, and the pilot thrust his head through the window. It was a small cabin job, but it bulked hugely in the light of the roaring fire.

"What the hell you waiting on?" he bellowed over the noise of the motor.

I tried to get up again, not wanting to be shot while lying down. It was a silly thing to think, but anyway, I tried to get up.

"Okay, copper!" Oliver said.

"Reach, you polecats!" a voice roared out at one side.

Oliver whirled, startled. Hargreaves grunted and clawed at the gun beneath his arm. I came to my feet, staring at the man who'd stepped out of the trees and into the firelight.

"Oh, *no!*" I whispered.

The man was Grandpa, his white hair flowing in the breeze, heavy Colts glittering in his hands. He hadn't a chance, and I knew it, and I was sick that he too must face these men.

"I said to reach!" Grandpa roared.

Oliver squeezed the trigger.

Grandpa shot him through the belly. He groaned and bent, and Grandpa's second bullet straightened him up. His last living act was to fire a second shot into the ground.

Hargreaves had his gun out and was lining it up. The plane pilot was firing through the window of the plane. I saw Grandpa take a sudden sidestep, and his left arm dropped. Then I threw myself at Hargreaves.

I knocked him down, but his hand lashed out and the gun blasted fire into my head. I heard him swearing steadily and viciously as he whirled and came erect. I rolled, shaking sight into my eyes again.

Grandpa was still erect. I could have sworn he was laughing aloud as he fired. Hargreaves gasped and there was a sound like a stick slammed into mud. Then Hargreaves was sprawling on the ground.

The plane motor roared, and the plane began to gather speed, turning. Grandpa dropped to his knees, pawing for the gun he had lost a moment before. Lifting and sighting, he emptied it at the plane. Metal sang, and then the motor raced crazily for a second before dying.

The plane was moving forward, and it kept moving until it hit the flaming brush-pile. It seemed to hesitate for a moment; then the explosion came, and the plane was a pyre for a voice which screamed for seconds before it faded out.

Blackness was crowding my head again, and I lay on my side, trying to make sense out of everything. Then a hand was tugging at me, and I could feel the knife biting at the ropes around my arms. I sat, and Grandpa grinned whitely at me.

"Sonny," he said, "seems like you've gotta take over now. I'm getting old; seems like I stopped a bullet."

He sat, and I saw the blood running down over his fingers. Flames crackled at the burning plane. Two men lay dead on the warm ground.

"Sonny?" Grandpa said, and I got to work. . . .

It was morning before I could talk to Grandpa again. The night had been hectic, what with packing him back to Benson's, then rounding up men to bring in Hargreaves and Oliver and the bank loot. The doctor had worked on Grandpa, giving him a transfusion, and now he'd be all right, except he'd probably have a pucker-scar in the flesh below his left arm.

I finished talking to the authorities upstate on the phone, and after some coffee in the kitchen with Martha, I went into Grandpa's bedroom. He was still white-faced, but his eyes were bright, and he grinned at me when I came in.

"Some shindig, Sonny," he said, and I smiled weakly.

"How—" I began, and he cut me short.

"Trouble with you, Sonny," he said, "is you ain't a natural officer. Somebody sticks a paper in your face that says he's the Queen of Sheba, and you start kowtowing. Not me, though: I'm so crooked I can spot a crook as far as I can see him.

"First, you told me those Pinkertons had been on the Border Patrol for a couple of years. Border Patrol, ha! Why, neither of them ever saw a horse before. And that shrimp saying he'd worn that ring for years, when there wasn't a groove on his finger; and anyway, the ring was too big for his hand. And third, why should they think those robbers would land a plane here? Sonny, you're just plain iggerant."

*"Where do you want it, yokel?" he asked, lifting his gun.*

I tried to smile, but I was feeling as stupid as Grandpa claimed I was. Grandpa nodded.

"Sonny," he said, "you must have figured out most of it by now. The way I seen it, those two *hombres* who called themselves detectives were really part of the holdup gang. The real detectives caught them, but then got killed. Those *hombres* who came here took the identification papers and money and hit for here, passing themselves off as officers."

GRANDPA smoothed his mustache, eying me triumphantly.

"I sent a telegram to the Bankers outfit, asking them for descriptions of Hargreaves and Oliver, and when the telegram came tonight, they just didn't fit. Then I saw you riding out of town with them, and I asked the hotel clerk if any calls had been made to Mexico. When I found out two had been made—well, I figured this was just about the windup of the whole thing.

"I got a horse at the stable and rode like hell toward the meadow. I got there just about the time the plane landed, and—well, you know the rest."

"Grandpa," I said, "I want you to know that—"

Grandpa snorted. "Beat it, Sonny," he said scornfully. "I don't like blubbering folks around."

I went out of the room, and Tommy ducked past me and went in. I stood at the table, looking down at Grandpa's gunbelt and guns. I was quite a bit ashamed of myself.

And then I heard Grandpa's voice coming from his bedroom, and I looked around, and Grandpa was talking to Tommy, and my son was hanging on every word.

"You're big enough now to know the truth about a lot of things," Grandpa was saying. "Sure, I told you about riding with Wes Hardin and King Fisher and Juan Bideno. Remember?"

"Sure, Grandpa!" Tommy was all eyes.

"Well," Grandpa said, "now I can tell you the truth. You know why I was riding with them?"

"No, Grandpa."

"Why, I was a Pinkerton man. I was the goldangdest toughest Pinkerton man who ever shot up a dirty slick-bottomed old owlhooter. I was kinda like a spy, 'cause I'd ride right into their camps and—"

"Here!" Martha said to me then, watching what I was doing, and then handing me Grandpa's second gun.

I grinned at her and she smiled back, and then we went into Grandpa's bedroom. Grandpa stopped talking, staring at the guns I carried. I made sure they were empty, then laid them on the coverlet between him and Tommy.

"Gee!" Tommy said.

I flushed, seeing Grandpa's level gaze on me. "There were three of them," I said defensively, "and only two guns, so I notched one gun twice and the other once. Is that all right?"

Grandpa grinned, and his fingers ran over the notches on the butts of the twin guns. He relaxed, and a reminiscent haze crept over his keen gray eyes.

"TOMMY," he said, "you notice that first notch here? Well, me and Pat Garrett was a-riding toward the Kid's hideout one night, and—"

I smiled and urged Martha from the room. I felt strangely content. The last outlaw of the Old West was dead, and now there stood in his place the last oldtime officer.

" 'Pat,' I says to Pat," Grandpa's voice went on, " 'I'll bring the Kid out if it's the last—' "

"Gee!" Tommy said.

I polished my badge a bit as I went with Martha for more coffee.

Illustrated by RAYMOND SISLEY

# Red River

CAPTAIN HARKNESS looked up from his waybills as Tom Bankston, mate of the *Dixie Belle,* came up the pilot-house guy from the hurricane deck. "Carter & Son's man's here, Cap'n. Got twenty more bales, he says."

"What'll she draw with what we already got?"

"Pretty near three foot. And we ain't never goin' to git through the Chute with that."

"Tell him we can't take 'em."

"Done told him that, Cap'n. But all these Alexandria folks is plum crazy. Hidin' the silver and sendin' the women and children to the back country—you'd think them Yankees had horns and forked tails. I told Carter's man that Banks is goin' to take Shreveport anyhow, so what's the use sendin' their cotton up there?"

"Well, that ain't our worry. And look, Tom—about passengers. I promised Colonel Pinckney we'd take him, but don't take any more without you see me. I don't want to fool with 'em this trip. I reckon there's a bunch of 'em come in on the *Baldwin?"*

"Usual passel of 'em. I just been over there. One of 'em's a widder, travelin' alone with two children and a black gal for a maid. Good-lookin', too—the widder, I mean."

Jeff Harkness laughed. "Well, we might take *her*. Where's she bound?"

"Shreveport, she says. And hard to git as hacks is, she's done got two of 'em, like the Queen o' Sheba. Says she ain't goin' to git parted from her trunks."

"Worse'n that's liable to happen to her before she gits to Shreveport, if this river— Go down there and tell them fools to balance that port deck-load! What the hell—"

Bankston vanished, and Captain Harkness could hear his loud voice on the deck below. He rose, threw a pine knot into the tiny stove, and went back to his waybills. But his attention wandered, and he glanced anxiously through the window at the river. Usually turbid with the red silt washed down from Texas and Oklahoma, now in this spring of '64 the water was almost clear, and alarmingly low for early March—so low, in fact, that in the rapids three hundred yards downstream ugly flat slabs of sandstone had begun to show. What the depth would be in the Red Chute, God only knew.

On the main deck the hands were loading the brown-covered cotton bales to a rhythmic chant, punctuated by Tom Bankston's profane shouting. The Negroes moved sluggishly in the biting wind, and the tall bulwarks of bales along the decks grew slowly. Never before within Jeff's memory had he had such a cargo of cotton northbound—cotton moving upstream in a frantic effort to escape General Banks and his army, and Porter's gunboats, already gathered at Turnbull's Island for the campaign to take the Red River and so cut off the Confederacy from the resources of the West.

The *John R. Baldwin,* loaded with refugee cotton from the downstream plantations, had tied up below the rapids, unable to cross the wicked ledges of rock in the present stage of the river. Jeff had agreed to take her Shreveport cargo, and a steady stream of drays crept along the top of the levee, making the transfer.

His eye swept the crowded wharf and the greening willows on the *batture,* and beyond, the familiar roofs of the little town. This might be the *Belle's* last trip, he thought; if Porter took the river, the old *Belle* would either be taken by the Yankees or left to rot in some forgotten bayou. It had been good, this life on the river; hard, but he had mastered it. What would happen to him if he lost the *Belle* was beyond conjecture and therefore beyond worry.

He went down to the deck. "Where's that pilot, Mr. Bankston? If he ain't here, send for him; we'll be pushin' off in an hour, and if he's layin' up drunk somewheres again we'll take her up without him."

"Yes, sir. We can do it, Cap'n."

Jeff saw the livery-stable surrey when it topped the crest of the levee, and stood watching its cautious descent of the ramp. Even at that distance he could see that the woman in it was young. She sat beside the driver, and two large tin trunks occupied the back seat.

# Spring

A STEAMBOAT PILOT AND A LADY BECOME INVOLVED IN A LITTLE KNOWN CAMPAIGN OF THE CIVIL WAR, BY—

CLAYTON W. COLEMAN

*"Surely, Captain, you could not deprive me of such a charming shipmate?"*

The driver helped her to alight. She hesitated and looked uncertainly about the crowded wharf until she caught sight of him. The wind blew her black cloak back from her shoulders as she came toward him, and Jeff fancied oddly that her slender waist was like the stem of a flower, rising from the great bell of her skirts. A somber flower, but a proud one, and perhaps a little arrogant. Her black poke-bonnet set off her fairness, and the raw breeze from the river had whipped color into her face.

"You are Captain Harkness? I am Mrs. Sally Richmond, and we must take passage to Shreveport. I spoke to your mate." Her voice, low and assured, showed maturity. Not so young at that, Jeff thought; around thirty, maybe.

"How-de-do, ma'am. You said 'we', I believe?"

"Yes; my two children and the maid are coming in another carriage. I hope you have accommodations?"

"Well, ma'am, you know the *Belle* ain't no big boat, and it ain't fancy like them Mississippi River packets. But I reckon we can take you if you ain't too particular."

Sally Richmond looked up at him. His body was slim, and his brown face, burned by wind and sun, was lean and hard. His blue eyes were surrounded by tiny wrinkles that came from squinting through the glare on the long reaches of the river, and they held that diffident aloofness with which solitary men sometimes mask their loneliness.

She smiled. "Naturally, we are prepared to— Well, to be frank, Captain, we have to get home. And I don't think you'll find us critical."

"Why, ma'am, I—"

"Mrs. Richmond! My dear lady!" Jeff turned in some annoyance to see old Colonel Pinckney hobbling toward them across the wharf. "You are taking passage on this boat?"

"If Captain Harkness will have me. How do you do, Colonel?"

"At the moment, I am overwhelmed. I assure you, dear lady, that at my age such felicities do not often come to me." The Colonel recovered from his elaborate bow and looked quizzically at Jeff. "Surely, Captain, you could not deprive me of such a charming shipmate? I am an old man, and I claim the privilege of my years."

*Contempt was edging into her voice. "You could stay out of cannon range, and let me go on alone, of course."*

"Of course I'll be delighted to take Mrs. Richmond and her party, Colonel," said Jeff stiffly "Sam! Cephas! Put that bale down and get the lady's trunks aboard. The two la'board staterooms, aft." He turned to Colonel Pinckney. "I believe, Colonel, that you have been put in a forward stateroom on the starboard side. I am unfortunately fo'ced on this trip to use some of the staterooms for cargo."

"Quite understandable, sir, under the circumstances." The Colonel gallantly offered Mrs. Richmond his arm, and Jeff watched them up the gangplank.

"Silly old goat!" he thought. "Wasn't young when he was in the Mexican War, and that's goin' on for twenty years ago." Jeff caught sight of the mate grinning at him from behind the piled bales on the deck. "Mr. Bankston!" he called. "Is that pilot here yet?"

"Not yet, Cap'n! I sent Gibbs after him. You want I should—"

"Never mind. I'll find him myself." Jeff made his way between the drays on the crowded wharf and strode up the levee ramp. A few straggling houses bordered the road, but most of the town lay farther downstream, along the deeper water below the rapids.

The pilot was not at the hotel, or in the Red River Bar; but as Jeff approached the Silver Dollar Saloon the swinging doors burst open and Gibbs emerged, supporting the limp figure of the pilot.

"Drunk again, eh!"

Gibbs' black face parted in a wide grin. "Yassuh, reckon he done had too many."

"Push him off the banquette into the gutter there, and get back to the boat. I might 'a' known it." Jeff turned and strode back toward the landing.

There was a drawn look in the faces of the people he met, and a tenseness in the air compounded of fear and excitement.

Pelham Carter came down from the hotel porch and joined him.

"Well, Harkness! The Yanks are coming up, from all reports, and I don't believe Taylor's going to be able to stop them. Not if Banks has the force they say he has. And Porter's coming up with gunboats in support. You may not be able to keep the *Belle* out of their hands after all."

"I dunno, Mr. Carter. I might can get her farther up than they can go. Up in Texas, maybe. And the war's got to end sometime."

"I'm afraid it's already ended, and we just don't realize it. I'm sorry you couldn't take that last twenty bales for me. But I know where the river stands, and maybe it's no more risky to leave it here to take its chances with Banks."

"You ought to 'a' let that cotton go last fall, Mr. Carter. A man holds cotton, it's a pure gamble. And I'll git the *Belle* up to Shreveport, don't you worry. I got to!"

Back on board, Captain Harkness supervised the stowage of the last of the cargo. Then he climbed to the pilothouse and with his battered telescope studied the sky above the downstream bend of the river for smudges of smoke. No sign of Porter's gunboats yet, thank God. He turned to the speaking-tube and shouted for Tom.

The mate's voice came up, muffled, from the main deck. "Yes, sir?"

"The manifest checks, Tom. Passengers aboard?"

"They checked on, Cap'n. No pilot?"

"Nope, I reckon you an' I'll have to take her up. I'll take the first trick. Tell Sanders to git on them engines, and then make ready to h'ist the plank and cast off. Steam all right?"

"Close up to the valve, Cap'n."

Jeff Harkness pulled the whistle cord, and the *Belle's* deep-throated roar reverberated over the river. Her paddles gradually gathered speed. Jeff swung her bow into the channel, while she still strained groaningly at her stern hawser. Then it too was cast off, and a widening stretch of water appeared between her gunwales and the wharf; a sporadic cheering rose from the crowd.

He turned the spokes to starboard to avoid a snag, and thrilled anew at the quickness of the *Belle's* response. She was shabby and small by Big River standards, and she needed repairs that the war had made impossible, but there was life in her yet. He settled to his vigil, lining up the channel by the old familiar landmarks and watching for the telltale difference in the reflection of light on the water that might mean a newly-formed sandbank or a sunken log.

The sound of running feet on the hurricane deck startled him, but he did not look around. Tom Bankston clambered up the guy behind him. "What's the matter now, Tom?" he demanded.

"It's that widder, Cap'n. She—"

Jeff turned to him quickly. "Has something happened to her? Speak up, man!"

"She's gone crazy, I reckon. She wants you to put back to Alexandria. Says she forgot— For God's sakes, Cap'n, you won't believe it, but she says she forgot her baby and left him on the *Baldwin!* Mebbe you can talk some sense into her, Cap'n. She's on the boiler deck."

"Take the wheel."

Jeff found her and Colonel Pinckney awaiting him in the dining-saloon on the boiler deck. She sat quietly, her hands on the table twisting her handkerchief so that her knuckles showed white. Colonel Pinckney halted in his pacing of the deck and faced him.

"Captain Harkness, a very extraordinary accident has occurred. We must ask you to put back at once. Mrs. Richmond's baby was left behind in her stateroom on the *Baldwin*."

Jeff looked at her set face. "How'd you come to do that, ma'am?"

"I—I thought Caroline was bringing him in the other carriage. I was looking after the baggage, and I told her to bring both of the children. But she says she thought Stephen was with me. You must go back, Captain!"

Jeff hesitated. "But, ma'am, I cain't do that. 'Cept in this here channel, there ain't hardly three foot of water under us. If we tried to turn her around, we'd stick, shore as—well, we'd stick, ma'am. Cain't the folks at Alexandria take care of him till you can send for him?"

"How could I send for him?" Anger was breaking through her anxiety. "You're being ridiculous, sir!"

Colonel Pinckney walked around the table and laid his hand reassuringly on her shoulder. "Your attitude is preposterous, Captain! Of course you'll put back to Alexandria, and at once. I demand it!"

"I'm the captain of this boat, Colonel," Jeff drawled, "and I do all the demandin' around here. Porter's gunboats might be comin' round the bend into Alex' right now, for all I know, and I don't figger on gittin' my boat blowed out o' the river."

"Porter's gunboats!" Sally Richmond's voice rose to a wail. "My baby, and those—those barbarians! I have heard what they do to children! You've got to take me back, Captain! You've got to!"

"Now, ma'am, don't pay any mind to them tales. They ain't nothin' to 'em. But I know what they'd do to this boat, if they got a chance."

"Even if the gunboats are there, they can't get over the rapids." Contempt was edging into her voice. "You could stay out of cannon range, and let me go on down in the skiff. Alone, of course—I wouldn't think of jeopardizing your precious boat or any of your people."

Jeff flushed. "It ain't me alone, Mrs. Richmond; I want you should understand that. I got thousands o' dollars worth of other folks' property on board, and I got other people's lives to think about. If I tried to put about and got aground on a sandbank—"

"Turn back, Captain! I tell you, turn back!" She ran up to him and her small fists beat on his chest. He clasped her wrists gently, and the faint scent of her hair came to him. It wasn't jasmine, exactly, but there was a freshness and a cleanness about it like the smell of spring. Not like the perfume of the women on the New Orleans waterfront, but delicate, somehow; and suddenly Jeff realized that he was arguing against himself.

"All right, ma'am," he capitulated. "We cain't turn, but I'll back her." Her quick tears of relief startled him. "And please don't cry, ma'am. It ain't goin' to be no picnic, backin' a mile and a half down-channel, but I'll do it."

Jeff climbed quickly back into the pilothouse. Tom Bankston relinquished the wheel to him and opening the stove spat into the bed of glowing coals.

"I heared her," he said. "Women oughta stay home. They ain't got no business travelin'."

"You mind your own business, Tom, and git back to the stern. I'm gonna back her."

Bankston tugged at his tobacco-stained mustache. "Told you to start with that she warn't bad-lookin'."

"That'll do—git back to the stern! And watch out for that sandbank where Bayou Rapides comes in." . . .

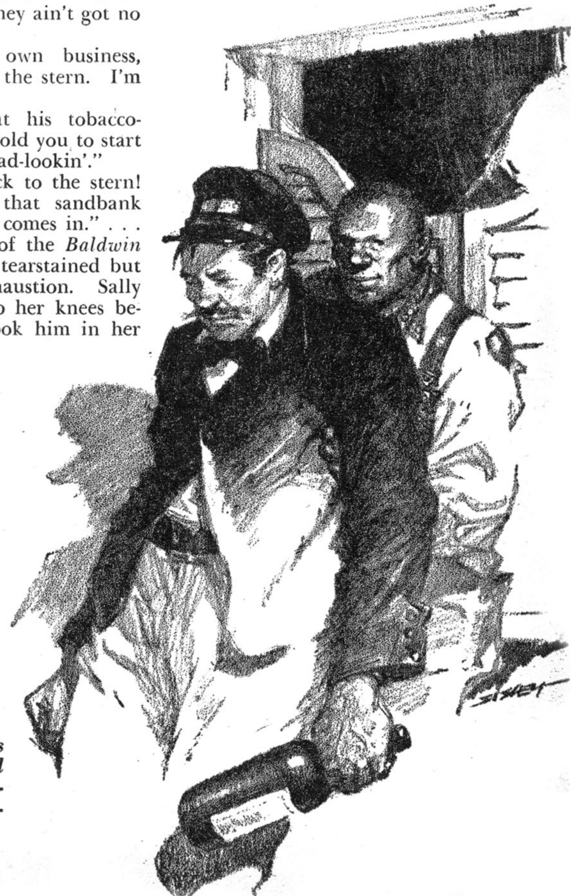
Back in the cabin of the *Baldwin* they found the baby, tearstained but safe, asleep from exhaustion. Sally Richmond dropped to her knees beside the berth and took him in her arms.

"Stephen, my baby! My little boy!" The child stirred sleepily, and she pressed her cheek against his curls. A shaft of sunlight reflected from the river through a cabin window danced on the wall and found her hair.

Captain Harkness stood awkwardly twisting his cap in his hands. "If you're ready, ma'am, we'd better be gittin' out o' here. Ain't no sign o' the gunboats yit, but they might git here any minute."

It was high noon when the *Dixie Belle* swung out into the channel again. Captain Jeff stood at the wheel, subconsciously avoiding snags and those light-colored patches of water that betrayed submerged sandbanks. For the first time he noticed the faint greening of the willows along the banks, and the emerald patches of clover here and there. The pines were beginning to show their pale green candles against the dark needles, and once among them he thought he saw the white flare of dogwood.

The changes of the seasons had never meant much to him, except in their relation to the river; late summer and fall meant low water, and



***The swinging doors burst open and Gibbs emerged, supporting the limp figure of the pilot.***

spring brought higher stages building up to flood in late May and early June. But now, above the familiar fishy odor of the river, there was something else—a perfume more imagined than real, perhaps, but that reminded him, somehow, of jasmine.

They tied up at dark at Pitcher's Landing, and took on wood. Usually Jeff had his dinner sent up to the wheelhouse, where he dined alone; but tonight he went down to the passengers' table in the main saloon on the boiler deck.

Sally Richmond and Colonel Pinckney were there before him. "I assure you, dear lady," the Colonel was saying, "there is really no cause for alarm. I know that General Taylor can take Banks' measure, even if the Yankees should succeed in getting up to the vicinity of Shreveport. Excellent officer, Taylor. I had the honor to serve under his father, General Zachary Taylor, in the Mexican War, and if young Richard has his father's—Ah, good evening, Captain!"

Jeff bowed awkwardly. "Miz' Richmond, good evenin'. Colonel Pinckney, your servant, sir!"

During dinner the Colonel told endless stories of the war with Mexico. "Why, these young fellows today don't know how well off they are, fighting in their own country. There we were, on foreign soil, never properly supplied—"

Sally Richmond was silent, and Jeff sat preoccupied with the reflection of the lamplight on her blonde hair. When she left the table his eyes followed her and he rose and walked swiftly after her to the deck. Her dark gown made a black gap in the white scrollwork of the railing. He stopped beside her.

"You're comin' up from New Orleans, ma'am?"

"Oh, it's you, Captain! No, from Bayou Sara. I've been staying there with my mother since my husband—since the news came of my husband's death."

"I'm sorry, ma'am."

"He—he was killed at Chancellorsville. Nearly a year ago."

"And your home is at Shreveport?"

"Yes, near there, at Richmond Hill. My overseer writes me that since the rumors of the Yankees' Red River campaign all of the field-hands have run away. You can't do much with a plantation without hands. I—I don't know what I'm going to find when I get home."

"I've heard of Richmond Hill, ma'am. It must be a beautiful place."

Her voice grew soft. "It is indeed, Captain, thank you. Tell me—Colonel Pinckney is very optimistic, but tell me, do you think Banks will take Shreveport?"

"I dunno, Miz' Richmond. He's got a mighty big force, they say, but Gen'ral Taylor'll shore give him a battle."

They fell silent. The saloon behind them was an island of light in a sea of blackness. The stars had begun to cloud over, and here on the deck the night pressed down around them like a somber blanket. But for the gentle lapping of the current against the hull and the croaking of the frogs, they might have been suspended in limitless space. He swayed toward her, and caught himself.

"Good night, ma'am." He bowed formally, and his voice was stiff. "I hope your accommodations are passable?"

"We're quite comfortable, Captain, thank you. Good night."

At dawn the weather had broken, and the windows of the wheelhouse were dull with rain. Jeff stood at the wheel, his eyes straining through the gray light to watch the rain-pocked water. "Git some sense in your head, Jeff Harkness!" he told himself savagely. "Yankees takin' the river, you liable to lose your boat, an' hankerin' after a woman you cain't never have. A lady, by God! An' you a ignorant river-man, raised on the St. Louis wharves!"

Tom Bankston relieved him at noon. "Rain might help the river, Cap'n," he said, "but it shore makes it chancy, holdin' her in the channel."

"Keep your eye peeled, Tom. I got trouble enough now." Jeff took his paper-work down to the saloon, where there might be a chance of seeing her. But Sally Richmond stayed in her stateroom. Once he saw the black maid Caroline in the narrow companionway, and he called to her sharply: "How are Miz' Richmond and the children, Caroline?"

"They fine, Cap'n, thank you, suh."

In the afternoon they passed the mouth of Cane River and stood doggedly up the east channel toward Grand Ecore. The mate grinned when Jeff came into the wheelhouse to relieve him. "Seems mighty funny not to be goin' up to Natchitoches, Cap'n. She pretty near turned into Cane River by her ownself. All I could do to hold her back."

"We ain't got nothin' for Natchitoches this trip," Jeff said sourly. "Nobody ain't shippin' nothin' to Natchitoches, when they know Banks'll be on to it like a duck on a June bug. Got to git everything up higher'n this, mebbe into Texas—and even that might not do no good." . . .

The second morning brought no cessation of the rain. Soundings became shallower, and Jeff dared not leave the channel even to take advantage of the slack water near the shore. In the afternoon the *Dixie Belle* opened the mouth of Red Chute and Jeff entered cautiously, his ear tuned to the monotonous chant of the leadsmen. The high red-clay banks, streaming with rain, seemed very close, and the trees crowning them almost enclosed the narrow waterway in a leafy tunnel.

"Easy water here, Cap'n," Tom said lugubriously. "But wait'll we git up to the head o' the Chute. She'll be shoaled up there, shore; allus is."

"But I'm goin' to try to make it, Tom. We'll tie up in Shreveport tonight or bust. I hope to God there ain't no trees down in the channel."

By sunset they were nearing the head of the Chute where it opened from the main river. The sheer banks had fallen away, and moss-hung cypresses marched down to the water's edge. The leadsmen's cries showed gradually shoaling water, and Jeff slowed speed until the *Belle* was barely making headway against the current. In the fading light Jeff could see the rain-spattered slick that marked the bar.

Even as Jeff reached for the bell cord to stop the engines there was a crunching shock, and the *Belle* shuddered to a stop. There was a split second of silence, and then a babble of voices from the main deck.

"Back 'er off, Ed! Give 'er all you got!" Jeff shouted through the speaking-tube.

The *Belle's* stern paddles gathered momentum, thrashing with a mighty effort, and the roiled water rushed frothing and eddying past the bows. The hull shivered with strain; then slowly, with a grating, sucking sound her bows came free and she drifted back with the current.

"Forward slow, Ed!" he ordered. "Hold 'er where she stands!"

Tom Bankston came up the guy into the wheelhouse. "She's drawin' two inches more water than we got, Cap'n," he reported. "Reckon we'll have to jettison some o' them bales."

"We ain't losin' no cargo if I can help it, Tom," said Jeff shortly. "Git out the skiff and see what we got."

The sun had dropped behind the dark cypresses and now the ominous slick water ahead had merged into the blackness. On the deck below the hands were lighting the torch baskets, and Jeff stood watching the current endlessly slipping into the flickering zone of light and out again. He leaned to the speaking-tube.

"Mr. Sanders!" he called, and his voice was taut with decision. "Ed! I'm taking soundings and if there's half a chance, I'm going to buck her over. I'll need a head of steam."

"Aye, sir," came Ed Sanders' voice faintly, and presently the sharp odor

of burning rosin seeped into the wheelhouse as the pine knots choked the roaring furnaces. Far ahead, the skiff's lantern showed where Tom Bankston and the leadsmen were making soundings over the bar.

JEFF's eye caught a dark movement on the hurricane deck below the wheelhouse windows, and he moved silently down the guy and into the lee of the larboard stack. She stood there, wrapped in her long cloak, watching the bobbing pinpoint of light from the soundings-boat ahead.

"You—you wanted somethin', Miz' Richmond?" he asked gently.

"No, Captain, I'm just worried, a little. Do you think we'll make it?"

"We'll try mighty hard, ma'am. And if we can't make it over the bar loaded, we'll dump somebody's cotton. But I'm goin' to git the *Belle* into Shreveport tonight. She's too good a boat for the Yankees to git hold of."

"You love this boat, don't you?" she asked gently.

"I reckon I do, ma'am. I never thought about it that way, but—"

"And you love the river, too. I think I understand—you feel about the *Dixie Belle* and the river as I do about Richmond Hill. If we lose them now to the Yankees, what then? This boat is your way of life, just as Richmond Hill is mine. And we know no others, do we?"

"You oughtn't to worry like that, Miz' Richmond. Before they git to Shreveport, they got to lick Gen'l Taylor, and fur's the boat's concerned, I can hide her out in some little bayou farther up."

"Well, I must see to the children. Thank you, Captain—and good luck."

He watched her disappear into the shadows and returned to the wheelhouse. The lantern in the darkness far ahead was stationary now, and Jeff knew that Tom Bankston had fixed it on a pole to mark the deepest passage over the bar. Above the roaring of the fires below he heard the creak of the oars, and then Tom was climbing the guy.

"'Tain't too bad, Cap'n. We're lackin' two or three inches, but the bottom's soft, mostly silt, and the bar ain't more'n fifty yards wide. Then you got pretty near a fathom on the other side."

"We can do it, Tom. I'll let her fall off with the current some, and then we'll hit it with all we got."

The bell sounded below and with the echo he could hear the paddles slowing. He held her in the channel as long as he could, and then as she began her inevitable swing broadside to the current he yanked the bell cord savagely and put the helm hard down. With a mighty thrashing of her pad-

*It came without warning: The rending roar of the explosion; the deck heaved beneath his feet.*

dles she righted her course and gathered speed. The shock, when it came, was not as great as he had expected—a sharp jar, then a rasping sound followed by a straining vibration as she fought to knife her keel through the slushy bottom.

She came to a shuddering stop. Tom Bankston's voice came hollowly from the speaking-tube: "Reckon we got about halfway in that lick, Cap'n. Once more oughta do it."

Jeff jerked the bell cord and slowly the *Belle* sucked loose from the mud and, aided now by the current, retreated for another attack. "More steam, Ed!" Jeff called through the tube. "Gimme all she can stand!"

"She's got all she can take now, Cap'n." Ed Sanders' muted voice was anxious. "And the injector's actin' up a little. Should 'a' had it fixed at Alex."

"Well, be careful, but try to hold the head o' steam you got."

Once more the *Belle* surged forward, trembling in every timber. Again her keel struck and went plowing through the bar, with a rasping noise as of unbearable pain. Jeff found himself pushing against the wheel in a frantic effort to help her over.

It came without warning: The rending roar of the explosion tore at his eardrums, and the deck, heaving beneath his feet, threw him shatteringly against the bulkhead. The world blacked out in a bedlam of booming steam and the crash of falling wreckage.

The cold water revived him, and he struggled to his feet in the waist-deep current, shaking his head. A warm stream trickled down his nose and in his mouth was the salt taste of blood.

Already the *Belle* was aflame, and in the flickering glare he saw, just in time, the remains of the wheelhouse with its jagged spikes of broken glass bearing down upon him. He dodged it, only to carom into the cotton bales from the deck load that bobbed about him in a grotesque minuet. From somewhere in the murk scalded men screamed in agony, and punctuating the bellow of escaping steam the engine-room bell jangled insanely.

The *Belle's* forward superstructure had blown away, and her stacks lay trailing in the river. The fire was licking at the main companionway, and Jeff fought his way toward the stern, the soft mud sucking at his ankles.

"Sally!" he tried to shout, but his voice was a hoarse whisper that he himself could hardly hear. "Sally! Oh, my God! Sally!"

Then clearly, a thin wail in the chaos, he heard her calling: "Jeff! Where are you? Jeff!" He looked up and saw her dimly, huddled with Caroline and the children against the rail of the after boiler deck. Then he saw what he had been too dazed to realize before. The after part of the main deck was still solidly enclosed with an unbroken wall of cotton bales, and the flames amidships barred all exit.

"I'm coming! Oh, my dear, I'm coming!" he tried to call, but he could make no sound above his own broken sobs. The mud and water dragged at his legs, as in a nightmare, and each labored step seemed to take an eternity. A blackened, unrecognizable figure emerged from the water beside him.

"That you, Cap'n?"

"Tom! Thank God! Stand by here; I'm goin' to let 'em down to you."

At long last he reached the paddle-wheel and pulled himself up on the slippery spokes. The larboard crank was at the bottom of its arc, and the long walking-beam offered a precarious ascent. With infinite care he climbed its narrow surface and grasped the bottom rail of the boiler deck. . . .

As dawn broke the *Dixie Belle* was only a blackened smoking hulk wedged firmly on the bar. Wearily Jeff waded ashore through the interminable rain. He had done all that a man could do, but the *Belle* was gone. "Might as well have let the Yankees git her," he thought bitterly. "Then I might 'a' got her back, after the war." Too late for that now; but, thank God, the river was still there: it would always be there. And some day he could start over.

He found his passengers huddled under a great pine, nursing a feeble fire against the rain. Sally Richmond, with little Stephen in her arms, lay dozing against the bole of the tree. Her long blonde hair lay in sodden masses on her shoulders and a black smear disfigured her cheek. He thought she had never looked lovelier—like a picture he had seen in a church in New Orleans, once, when he had gone there to a funeral.

She roused and saw him standing there. "Oh, Jeff! You're hurt—"

"No, I reckon I'm all right. Miss Sally—I been an awful fool. I never had no right to take a chance like that with you and the others, just to save a cargo o' cotton. I been a fool, and I been punished. And Colonel Pinckney, his stateroom was right over the starboard boiler. He—he's gone, I reckon." He turned away, and added over his shoulder, "Tom Bankston's gone for help, and I'll git you out o' here 'fore long."

"Jeff, wait! Don't blame yourself; maybe it was better to lose the *Belle* this way, than let her be taken by the Yankees and used against us. It wasn't your fault. But what will you do, now that she's gone?"

"I dunno. I got a little money—mebbe I'll git me a couple o' wagon-teams and go in the San Antonio trade, overland."

Sally Richmond smiled gently. "That will be hard, won't it? For you, a riverman?"

"Reckon I'll be like a fish out o' water, Miss Sally. But the river'll always be there; the Yankees can't take that. And some day, when the war is over, mebbe I can git another boat."

"And maybe, somehow, I can keep Richmond Hill. But without money, without hands . . . I don't know. It's Stephen's, though. I have to save it for him, if I can."

Jeff nodded. "We'll make out, Miss Sally. This country's rich, an' folks'll be needin' what we got. Here's Tom with a team. I'll take Stephen. You reckon you can walk a little?"

Sally nodded and rose stiffly, as Tom Bankston came through the dripping underbrush.

"Got a cotton wagon from the Trumbull place, Cap'n," he announced. "With hay in it and a couple tarpaulins. Best I could do, but it'll beat walkin'. I told Jedge Trumbull you was here, Miz' Richmond. He's plumb sorry he couldn't send the carriage, ma'am, but Miz' Trumbull, she went to Shreveport in it yistiddy. He wants you and the children to stay at his place and rest up a few days."

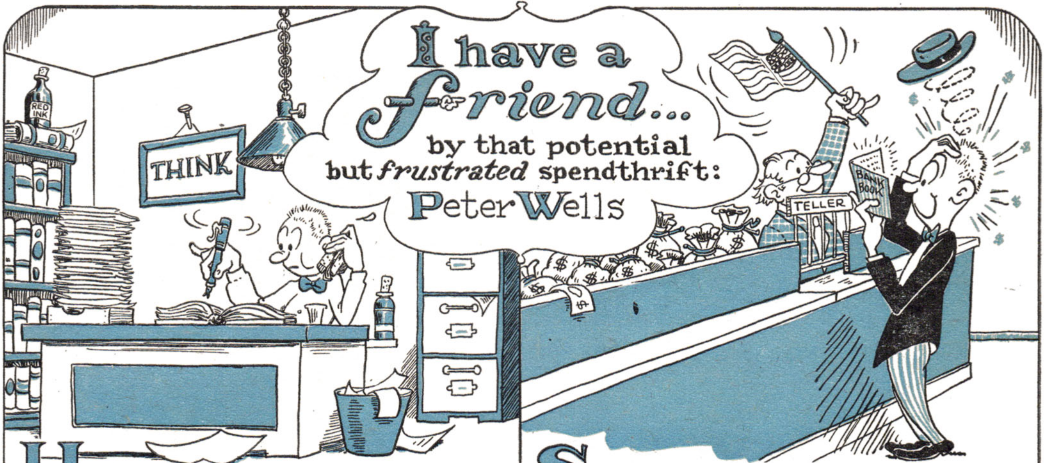
"Thank you, Mr. Bankston. The wagon will do nicely." She took Jeff's free arm and walked to the road.

Jeff helped them into the wagon and adjusted the tarpaulins against the pelting rain. Caroline and Marcie and Stephen sat in front, behind the driver. Jeff removed the tailgate and helped Sally in, then climbed up beside her.

The mules' hoofs made rhythmic sucking sounds in the soft red mud of the road and the axles creaked with a monotonous sing-song. Jeff sat, surreptitiously watching Sally's face and the slow tears that ventured hesitantly down her cheeks. She felt his look, and turned to him suddenly with a little cry.

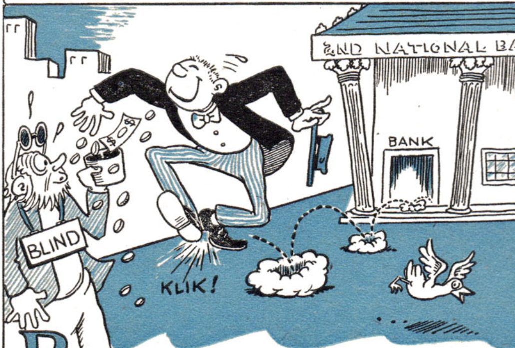
"Oh, Jeff, I'm so [illegible]d, so tired! What am I going to do?"

"There, now, honey, don't cry. Lay back and rest a little." He put his arm about her and her head settled on his shoulder. The rain pattered upon the tarpaulins, and when the breeze stirred the pine branches drops of water fell with dull plops on the brown needles below. A wisp of Sally's hair blew across his face, and in his nostrils there came again that faint perfume that reminded him, somehow, of jasmine.

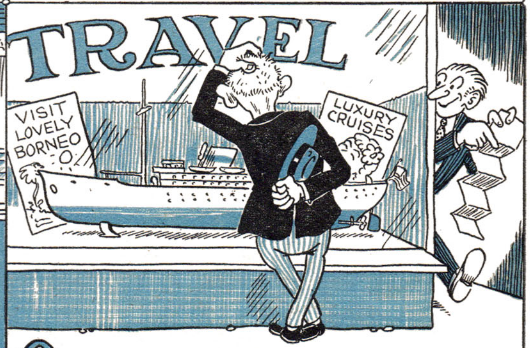



He battles the Wolf from his doorstep daily, all day. His *bank account* is his *battleground*, and hardly doth it grow with his toil!

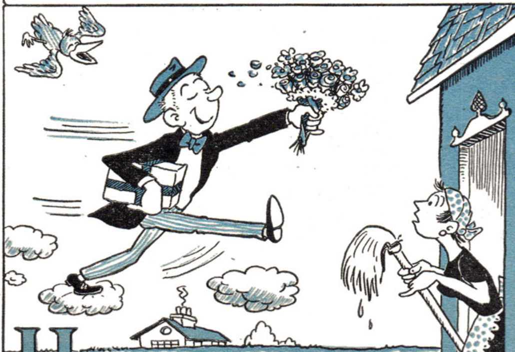
Slowly the pennies pile up by his labor...Until at long, long last — a SURPLUS!! Heigh, *Capitalism* rears its lovely head at him!!



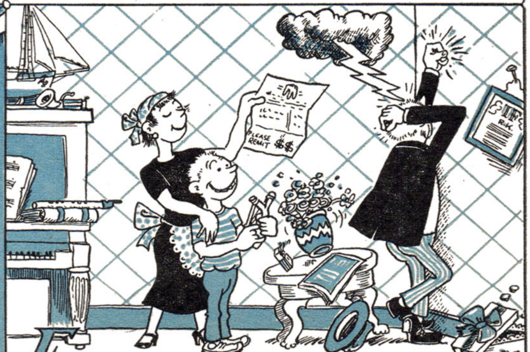

Bonanza... El Dorado! His wallet dilates in a manner most joyous! A little vacation, my boy? Certainly old friend, well have you earned it!




OHO! thinks he...Enjoy the moment: Grasp fleeting pleasure while I am able... Overmuch work maketh Jack an extremely dull boy!!



Homeward he floats, to the bride of his heart...The dear girl deserves the best! She shall have it!! Ha! Let that mop drop, Madam! Today we live!



*Eheu!* Strangely enough, the *bonanza* almost equals the bill for straightening Junior's teeth, as his practical wife, even as yours & mine, explains...

# McQuillan's Jackpot

Just as it was all set for him to marry the Widow Crotty and her junk yard, a scheming scoundrel sold her a bill of goods. But Rodney McQ. knew a trick or two himself.

by FRANK LEON SMITH

IN Canarsie, there were those who claimed that if honest Rod McQuillan didn't look out, he'd lose the dashing Widow Crotty to slick Phil Grill. Others, maintaining that Rodney knew a trick or two himself, would give you ten to one on Rod to win any game Grill cared to start. But now, on a balmy night in June, Mr. Grill came up with a new one, and this was the way of it:

A full moon was riding high over Canarsie. In the office at the Crotty Junk Yard, Rodney sat with buxom Belle in his lap; and the conversation, at his artful direction, had been turned toward weddings, and the throwing of rice and confetti.

"At the McQuillan-Crotty nuptials," said he, "we'll have the ushers pass out little cards marked as follows: *'Relatives, guests and well-wishing bystanders will kindly throw nothing but old girders, auto engines and freight-car wheels, which will be gathered with joy by our trucks!'* "

"What a scheme!" she murmured, pinching his ear.

"Ah, but I'm in rare form tonight!" He improved his hold on his lovely boss, and went on: "Now, before the nuptials, I suggest a series of showers. Let your girl friends give you a boiler shower, and one shower each of old radiators, fire-escapes, grate-bars and sash-weights."

"With that steam-shovel mouth of yours, you could be out digging me up some business." She toyed with his lapel, gave a little sigh. "As it is, I may have to shut up shop, and fire you and your friend Whispell."

Rodney gave her a fond buffet. "For a girl in the furnace of love, you keep a cool head, Mrs. C." With that, he kissed her, then leaped up, letting her slide to her feet. From the boulevard there had come the unmistakable sound of cars in collision.

"I hope nobody was hurted!" said Belle, smoothing her skirt, and Rod said: "But I hope both cars are junk! Come on, darling!" He grabbed his derby; she locked up; and out they ran.

As they sped up the tree-shaded street, a chauffeur-driven sedan stopped in front of the office and a lady got out. She went up the steps, knocked, saw that the lights were on, tried the door and knocked again. Then a convertible drew up behind her sedan, and a brisk fellow slid out and started for the step. "Oh—good evening," he said suavely. The lady regarded him in the light from the windows. "I'm looking for Mr. McQuillan," said she. "I have a demolition job for him."

The brisk suave fellow, who was none other than Phil Grill, looked quickly to right and left. "Er—in Rodney's absence, I'm the one to see. Just what is this job, Miss—"

"Mrs. Sharshug. I have a row of tenements which must come down at once, for a big new apartment building."

"Rodney's tied up on another job," said Grill swiftly. "I'll handle this for you."

At the boulevard, under the lights, a crowd had gathered. As Rodney and Belle arrived, two old sedans which had hit, were departing under their own power, and at the site of the collision, a small leathery-faced man was stooping. He was Disbro Whispell, ex-penitentiaryman and Rodney's protégé. Now he rose in disgust, and sighting Belle and Rod, he said: "Nothing but broken glass. Not even an old radiator cap."

"Never weep over a dry run," said Rod cheerfully, and with Belle in the middle, they strolled back to the junk yard. As Rodney was seeking the words to restore the fond mood of a few moments before, Belle looked down the street. A big sedan was making a U turn in front of her office, and pulling away. "Wasn't that your old girl friend?"

"Which one?" asked Rod. "Sure, in me schooldays, all the girls were crazy for me."

"Mollie Donahue—Dave Sharshug's widow. That was her car."

Rodney hadn't seen the sedan. Now, as he looked toward the office, a chill came over him. "Mrs. Crotty, was it your intent to amuse or deceive? I see nothing of Mrs. Sharshug. I see a convertible—which, no doubt, is on the stolen list. And I see your boy friend—the one with rat blood. I refer to Chiseling Phil Grill."

"Don't be calling him names!" said Belle, flaring up.

Apprehensively, Disbro Whispell glanced at the two: "Well, I guess I'll say good-night, all!" And he bore off toward the rear of the yard. Stiff with silence, Rod and Belle strode on.

Waiting on Belle's steps was Mr. Grill, with his stylish garb, pomaded hair, hard eye and fixed smile. "Is that you, Phil?" cried Belle in simulated surprise.

RODNEY glared at Grill. "Can't we turn our backs two minutes, without you creeping from under your flat rock and trying our doors and windows?"

"Rodney!" said Belle.

"Shut up, dear, till I ask this lad if he'll cross you off his sucker list, and use some other victim for the balance of the fiscal year."

With a thin smile for Rod, Grill turned to Belle. "I can throw you a nice piece of business. I'd handle it myself, but right now,"—he coughed delicately—"I have other commitments."

Belle regarded him with such awe and delight that Rod wanted to give her a little kick. "What is the job, Phil?" she asked.

"Would you be interested in wrecking Foley's Forge?"

Rod's eyes bulged, and Belle screamed with joy. Then Rod swallowed hard and fast, as for a bitter pill. A fine job like that, and brought to her by a rival, was more than the fabulous McQuillan could take. He managed a derisive laugh. "If you are interested, Mrs. C., be looking for a new man, as I'll want no part of any deal that smells of Grill!" Then he stalked away.

Lights shone at the windows in the watchman's villa, at the rear of the yard, where Whispell was waiting. "I just made the exit of me life," said Rod, throwing himself into a chair. "Me instincts were crawling to know

***"For a girl in the furnace of love, you keep a cool head, Mrs. C.," Rodney said fondly.***

more of this deal, but me dignity said: 'Get out, McQuillan.'" He fixed a stern eye on his chum. "What would you say if I told you Grill just tossed a wrecking job in Belle's lap?"

A crafty look stole over Disbro's deep-rutted face. "I'd say plenty. First I'd say he's trying to swipe your girl."

"Right!" said Rod, and Whispell went on: "Then I'd say the job was no good, or the cheap hungry crook wouldn't let go of it."

"Ah!" said Rod, and got up and paced the little room. "Foley's Forge is an old foundry, over in South Brooklyn. I haven't seen it since I was a kid, but I remember it well. A great barn of a place, with a steel frame and roof, and a tall brick stack. There were old cannon laying around, from the Spanish-American, and the Civil War too; and miles of chain cable, trod into the dirt, and anchors six and eight feet long."

"Gees!" said Disbro. "It orter be a gold mine. But there's a catch somewheres. What happened to Foley? Die off, or somethin'?

"Long since," said Rod. "It was Foley's dream to become an alderman, and he spent a fortune in politics. To get the labor vote, he promised two sewers in every street, with men working in every trench as close as their picks would let 'em. Then, in his forge, he made manhole covers, on city contracts." Rod smiled reminiscently. "On one order, by some mistake, he made the covers an inch too small, so they jumped in their sockets when a car passed over 'em. In Canarsie, when we heard a cover jump, we used to say: 'Foley the Forger!'"

"Oh, he was a crook, then?"

"Not at all. A fine man, entirely, but he died broken-hearted, for he missed by a hair in his last campaign, and never did get to be Alderman Foley."

"P-s-s-t!" Whispell signaled, and both listened. From the back door of her bungalow office, Belle was screeching for Rodney. "I can't hear you," he muttered, and sat down and drummed on the table. "For the good of me soul, I'm playing hard to get."

Belle's voice increased in volume, and suddenly her handsome blonde head was at the open door. "Rodney! Are you deaf?"

"No, but I'm quite numb, for the generosity of Mr. Grill has crushed me nerve ends."

"Come over to the office and be phoning up a crew! We're pulling down Foley's Forge, starting tomorrow!"

Rod eyed her moodily. "Did Grill let fall anything about these mysterious commitments which keep him from the Foley job?"

Belle was exasperated. "No, and I'm too much of a lady to be pushing me nose into his business. Now, will you stir your stumps and get to the phone?"

Rodney bounded to his feet. "There'll be no phoning till I survey this job for booby traps. Come on, Disbro."

In a three-way silence, they drove to Foley's Forge. Time was when one could steer by the tall stack. Now it was lost among the water-tanks on the big warehouses which crowded the old foundry on three sides. Rodney parked Belle's sedan, and with a key from Grill, she unlocked a door in a board fence. In the light of the moon, they looked on the vast old foundry, in its garden of weeds.

"A wonderful job!" Belle declared. "How kind of Phil!"

She and Rod stood looking around. Whispell was off like a bird dog, roving the foundry yard, looking it over for cannon, chain, anchors and other treasure. Reporting back to Rod, he muttered, "Gees. Another dry run. The joint's been combed."

Rod nodded. "Even to the rails of the little narrow-gauge that used to be here." He motioned with a flashlight at a heap of refuse near the fence. "This would be a joy for an archeologist, tracing back to Foley through a hundred odd trades. A cement-block company has been here, and metal-spinning, plastic toys, paper salvage, lawn furniture, and during the last war—life rafts." He shot a beam at a small office window, where a grimy "E" award flag was tacked across broken glass. "By gorry, how fast tomorrow becomes yesterday! Ah, Foley, your fine old forge is but a ruin of itself."

"Don't be running down the job!" said Belle. "I don't see any of your friends rushing to you with their jobs. Phil Grill happens to be my friend, and from the goodness of his heart—"

"Ah, give Grill's heart a rest," said Rod sourly. Stalking to the foundry, he wrenched open a door that stood ajar, and stepped inside. Whispell, with a suspicion the old place was haunted, made himself brave and followed. Rod switched off his flashlight. Now the vast interior was dappled with spots of moonlight. "The corrugated iron roof and sides have more holes than metal." Rod switched on his light, inspected the sturdy steel supports and trusses. "However, the girders alone will pay us a neat profit, though I'll not admit as much to Belle."

"But where's the forge, and the machinery, and the place where they used to boil up the iron and stuff?"

Rodney shot a beam here and there. "Gone, long since. The dump is bare as an old car-barn. There, near the butt of the big chimney, was where his furnaces stood." He aimed his light at the floor, dug with his heel, and sighed. "I was hoping for a heavy sheet-iron floor, but it's only dirt, hammered hard by the boots of time."

THEY went outside and joined Belle, who stood in a large patch of moonlight with her skirts gathered, lest some mysterious bug leap from the weeds and bite her. "Do we take down the stack?" Rod asked.

"Of course," said she. "A scaffold job."

Rodney gave a hoot. "I've never yet wrecked with a scaffold, and I'm not starting here." He looked about. "Clean sweep, eh?"

"That's right. Then we grade it."

Rodney gaped at her. "Grade? Now, why is that?"

"For a new parking lot, of course."

"Gees," said Whispell, and pointed. "What about that fort?"

In a big U, curving around the far end of the foundry and running down two sides, was a mound of weed-covered earth, maybe five feet high, and wide at the base. "Why, yes," said Belle. "Phil didn't mention it, but that dirt will have to be spread when you're leveling the site."

Rodney let go a cry of rage. "And how many more funny little tricks are there to this job? Where is Grill? Why isn't he here, pointing out details and standing up to honest questions?"

"I told you the man's busy! He has big commitments!"

Without a word, Rodney led the way to the car. Back at the office, he started calling his men. At her desk, Belle made notes of the cutting-gas, crane, trucks and other items he said he'd need. Between calls, Rod stole glances at his fair employer. Less than two hours before, she'd been in his lap. Now there was distance between them; distance put there by Mr. Phil Grill. Thinking of Mr.

*"Care for a brick, as a souvenir?" Disbro asked, blushing to the top of his hairline.*

Grill, he had an idea, and voiced it: "Maybe the catch in this deal is in the time limit!"

Belle turned on him in anger. "Will you stop biting a gift horse to death? There is no time limit! The Foley estate pays for the job, and I get the iron as me bonus. Of course, when the payroll starts, we'll not drowse on the job, but we're not being pushed. Phil says we can take three weeks or a month. The chimney alone will take time, and Phil said as much."

"H'm," said Rod, and he thought: "Maybe Phil wants to tie me up for a month in a pocket of South Brooklyn—while he's where? And doing what? Ah, McQuillan, keep your pores open and your ears stiff, for there's something here that's hidden from the honest eye!"

Early the next morning Rodney and Disbro, in their pickup, and a couple of Crotty drivers with their trucks, arrived at Foley's. Ten wreckers were waiting at the fence. Rod dealt out tools and led the attack. Down came a section of the fence. Then they flew at the foundry building, and working as though a stopwatch was held on 'em, they tore off the roof and sides, while the soot of the ages rose in clouds, and the workers got as black as minstrel men.

Whispell, who had no love for height, stayed below to help with the loading, while Rod ran over the roof like a squirrel. Wrecking was in his blood. To him, the prime satisfaction of this life was to be on a high place, tearing loose something heavy and letting it fall. He loved violence; he adored noise. He liked to shout as he worked.

As each section of metal roofing and siding was wrenched free and sent

sailing there were cheers from on high, from the ground, and from adjacent factories, where every window was full of faces. At eleven o'clock, when a big tractor walked into the yard on its cat treads, with its long, trellis-built crane angled out ahead, the last of the roof metal was off. Grinning and grimy, Rodney was standing on high, crash hat in hand, bowing to the applause of the girls in the windows of a steam laundry nearby.

In the joy of his work, he'd forgotten Grill and his petty style. Looking about, he saw that everything was going according to schedule. The crane was here. The two yard trucks were loaded and moving off. They'd be back for new loads by lunch time. After lunch, the multiple-wheeled under-slung rig he'd hired for the heavy stuff would arrive, and its first load of girders would be ready to be taken out.

Now, Disbro Whispell—in charge of ground troops, and a busy little man indeed in his hard helmet and overalls—was preparing a bunch of stout planks. The crane lifted them to Rod and his cutting crew. They set their platforms; and when torches, hoselines and flasks of gas were sent up, they began cutting the first cross-truss free, as Rodney, out on the center of it, made the crane tackle fast.

By noon they'd lifted and lowered two trusses. Well clear of the building, men with torches were cutting them in sections for their ride through city streets. As Rodney gave the word to knock off for lunch, a long heavy truck rolled into the yard. On the cab, it said: "MORXON BROS.—*Dealers in Metals.*" Signaling to the crane operator, Rod stood in the tackle hook, grabbed a cable in a gloved hand and rode to the ground.

"Hello, Morxon," he said genially, greeting the truck driver by the name of his outfit. "Lost your way?"

The driver looked at him, and at a grimy paper. "Ain't this the old Foley foundry? Well, I'm here for the iron."

"What iron?"

"Why, the iron the Morxons bought from Phil Grill." As Rod nudged Disbro, and as Disbro winked knowingly, the driver went on: "All the girders and heavy frames. We don't want that thin old roofing and siding."

"And when did Grill sell this iron to the Morxons?"

"Three weeks ago. This morning he called up and said to stand by for the first load."

Rodney smiled. "Any money changed hands—as yet?"

The driver laughed in his face. "Would the Morxons pay before they get the stuff and weigh it?"

Rodney turned to Whispell. "I knew the deal smelled—now we can begin to see the fumes. Grill sells the good stuff and saws off the rest on the Widow. All she gets for pickings is a few sheets of corrugated iron. Then we have to take down the stack and grade the place at the cost of the work and a small fee for management!"

ALWAYS vigilant, Whispell gave his, "P-s-s-t!" signal; and from the street came the sound of a car door slammed hard. Mrs. Crotty had arrived. Hired wreckers, seated with their lunch-boxes, blew crumbs so they could pucker and whistle. From factory windows came whistles that pierced the air as the handsome blonde advanced, with her high proud chest and fine legs.

Rodney lifted his crash hat with an elegant hand. "Good day to you, me dear, and brace yourself, for I have news. You've been gypped again by your good friend Grill."

He explained; then Belle screamed, as only she could scream when she felt she'd been robbed. "The Morxons can't do this to me! I'll sue 'em out of business!"

"Gently, darling," said Rod. "The Morxons, no doubt, bought in good faith. Grill's the one to jump on."

Dazed, she said: "I can't believe Phil would trick me! I'll drop this job! I'm washing me hands of it, here and now!"

*Illustrated by*
CHARLES CHICKERING

*He started to bluster; but Belle gave out with some characteristic screams, and started for him.*

A small crowd had formed, and Rod led her aside. "I've made a start, and I propose to finish. Call up the Morxon boys and tell 'em to make their checks payable to you."

"Why should I sell to them? They're me competitors—"

"Using the brains of a small child, you'll realize you're selling the iron, here on the ground, with the Morxons stuck for all subsequent hauling and handling. Call 'em up. Then call Grill, and tell him that from here on, he's out of this deal in every detail. Then, if you haven't done it already, hustle around to the Foley estate lawyer and get a paper saying you'll do the job at your price, but as your bonus for speed and workmanship, you must have *all* the pickings, no matter what their form or shape."

She said eagerly, "Rod! You've got something in mind?"

He smiled cryptically. "Mrs. Crotty, I never try for less than the jackpot. Now leap to the phone, and when you get to Grill, pour it on!"

She departed, and with her went the Morxon driver. In the laundry office, they took turns at the telephone. Then there were cross calls: Morxon to Grill. Presently, she reported back to Rod. She'd made the deal with her competitors, and Grill was out of it entirely from now on. "He was very nice about it," said she. "And why wouldn't he be?" asked Rod. "You caught him, and of course he'd smile his way out. What's he up to, himself? Did he say?"

"He did not, and why would I ask?" she said rather stiffly. "The man speaks like a gentleman at all times, and I wish I could say as much for you! When I told him how far along you were, he said he was afraid you were rushing so you'd kill yourself and half your crew, and the damage suits would ruin me."

Rodney laughed. "His concern touches me heart. Just a tickle, of course, but still and all, a touch."

Belle was annoyed. "See here, McQuillan—you tricked me into selling me fine iron to me rivals at a dealer's discount, and you better show me something to take its place, or—"

Rod gave her a playful pat on the back. "From your lips, these threats and insults are as pearls. But—can you afford it? I mean, as you stand here gabbing, a big underslung truck is ready to move here at your expense. If you don't cancel before one o'clock, you'll be stuck for a half-day's rental—"

"Whoops!" cried she, and left on the run.

Disbro moved up. "What's all this about a jackpot?"

Rod sent his gaze over the U-shaped mound. "I'm not saying, though the complete confusion of Mr. Grill will be part of the pot."

At the end of the day, Foley's tall stack stood guard over a skeleton structure, for only the uprights and a few cross-frames were left of the forge. When the last truck had gone, Rodney dug a couple of bricks from the chimney and put them on the seat of the pickup. "Publicity, for Belle," said he.

After they'd washed and changed at their "villa," they drove to the offices of the Canarsie *Landmark*. Bricks in hand, Rod went in to see Farley Cox, the editor. Fox, a dapper, perky little man, grizzled as a woodchuck, examined the bricks. "Paper weights, Rodney?"

"And a window display, if you like. That shade of red is something you never see any more, except in the old mansions where Washington once slept. Those bricks are from the famous Brooklyn arsenal, which supplied stuff for four of our country's wars. I refer to that historic shrine, Foley's Forge—"

"Hooray," said Mr. Cox mildly.

"—which is now making way for progress, with Mrs. Belle Crotty, brilliant Canarsie career-woman, in full charge of the demolition operations. Mrs. Crotty also operates a junk yard—"

"Why, you conniving press agent! So you want a story in the paper? Anything else?"

"Yes, some information: Mr. Cox, do you know of any other big demolition job, now going on, in or around Brooklyn? Or maybe one that's due to start?"

Mr. Cox shook his head. "Why ask me? You know more about those things than I do, and you'd be the first to hear." . . .

Rod and Disbro dined at their favorite steak house and headed for

home. As they neared the yard, Grill's convertible went by. With Belle at his side, Phil Grill gave Rod a lofty look, and from Belle, the lads had a cool nod. "Well, how d'ya like that?" Disbro muttered. "Can't she see through him yet?"

Rodney sighed. "I fear there is that about a crook which fascinates the ladies, while an honest man leaves 'em cold."

Disbro made no comment, but when they pulled up at the villa and sat for a moment in the car, he burst out: "Right guy or crook, no guy should be a pushover for any dame! You got to play one against the other. Make 'em jealous, like!"

Said Rod, on a haughty note, "That is not me style."

"Then change your style! Look—you're all dressed up, and any dame would fall for you. Who's that one Mis' Crotty spoke about last night? Mrs. Sharshug? She a good looker?"

"As Mollie Donahue, she was as cute as a pony. Mollie's one of the best, and Dave Sharshug left her well fixed."

"Ring her up! Take her out! Drive Mis' Crotty nuts!"

Rod was indignant. "I'm too old for schoolboy tricks, Mr. Whispell. Now I suggest we put the powers of our minds on Grill. Is he giving us Foley to keep us from something else?"

"Why not ask our wreckers if they heard anything?"

"I asked all ten of 'em, and called the local. No news. Now, me best move is to rush Foley's and be on Grill's tail when he thinks we're a month behind him."

The next day was a scorcher, but the work went steadily on. At closing time, the forge was flat. Roof and siding had been hauled to the Crotty yard. Morxon had put on several trucks, and the beams and cut-up frames had moved out fast. Surveying the job, Rod figured to take down the chimney on the morrow, and wind up the grading and the project the following day.

That evening, when he stopped in at the bungalow-office to report, Belle was reading the story in the *Landmark*. She was pleased with her publicity, and she was a pretty sight as she sat at her desk in a light summer dress with a low neckline, but Rod made himself cool to her charms. "You put this in the paper?" said she.

"I did," said he.

"Very thoughtful of you," said she. "Now, about these bricks—I'd like to sell 'em."

Rod shrugged. "So would I, but look at the facts. If you sold 'em for dump fills, they'd eat up their profit in the hauling. In the course of time, you might sell 'em as used brick, but I want to finish and leave, so I'll have the bulldozer spread 'em, though it'll lift the parking lot a bit higher."

"Maybe I can sell 'em while you're taking down the stack."

Rodney grinned. "That gives you two and a half seconds. I'm letting the stack fall by itself," And as she looked at him, aghast: "Why not? There's no subway or tunnel below."

"But it's so tall and heavy! It'll hit some building!"

Said Rod: "I've counted the brick courses and estimated the height. I've paced it off on the ground at the spot I've picked, and I have ninety feet. The stack is seventy feet, and it'll fall in less than that, for they usually put a couple of elbows in themselves and break as they're dropping."

Belle frowned. "I think you should work from a scaffold. So does Phil. And I fail to understand your rush."

He said thoughtfully: "Phil wants me to stall on the job, and he's using you as his fool and tool. Just what has he on the fire, or aren't you clever enough to find out?"

Belle tossed her head, fingered a dingbat swinging on its chain from her bosom. "Since you're so nosy, Phil's busy with his lawyers, forming a new corporation for some special work. Phil's a very successful man, with many big commitments."

"Commitments, commitments! He should be committed to jail!"

Belle smiled archly. "My, aren't you the jealous one!"

"There's an idea," said he; and to her dismay, for she was open for a date with him, he walked out.

In the villa, he put on his new brown suit and a new derby. He had Whispell array himself in his best blue serge, and a bright stiff straw hat. "Not that we're going calling," Rod said. "We'll drive around, and I'll show you some of Mrs. Sharshug's properties."

They rolled leisurely through Flatbush, and turned into a street lined with trees. "Now this block we're coming to, Mollie owns the whole of it. The Sharshug Flats, they're called. Big tenements and great rent-payers—" He stopped, stared, pointed. On the corner tenement was a sign saying that on this site there would be erected a modern apartment building.

Rod had stopped the pickup in the middle of the street. Horns sounded angrily, and he steered to the curb. "Then all these tenements will come down," said Disbro, and Rod said: "Of course, and they're rich with steam boilers, plumbing fixtures and copper and brass with a big resale value."

"Well, you're a fine one!" said a pleasant voice, and Rod turned to find a big sedan alongside, with a pretty, dark-haired lady on the back seat. "Mollie!" he cried, and jumped down. "Rodney Quinque McQuillan!" said his old schoolmate, and they shook hands. "How well you look, Rod, and so rich you couldn't be bothered with my little job!"

"Little? A summer's work, no less!"

"And the demolition must start on Monday. Where were you—"

"At Belle's, of course. Mollie, why didn't you—"

"I did, but your Mr. Grill said you were tied up, and since he takes care of everything you can't handle, he's forming the Grilco Wreckers, just for this job."

So, at last, there it was.

Rodney gave a shout. "Grill is out! I'm doing this job for you! Is that clear, Mollie Donahue Sharshug?"

"Yes, you big bully! Come over to the house and tell me about it. And bring your friend. He looks interesting!"

Next morning Mr. Disbro Whispell moved about the Foley lot in a daze. The little man had never before been entertained in a Brooklyn home. His muscles were stiff, since for Mollie Sharshug's pleasure, he had thrown handsprings and backflips in her fine living-room. When she learned that he'd been on the gymnastic teams of several penitentiaries, she had to have the whole story, and the evening held much of crime, punishment, repentance and ambition—and a satisfactory measure of demolition. Mollie, who, like Rod, had played around Foley's Forge as a kid, had been invited to watch the felling of the chimney.

A dozen times Disbro came to Rod, who, with his gang, was ripping a great hole at the base of the chimney, and wedging in a shoring of heavy timbers. "Mollie Sharshug? Ain't that a real pretty name, Rod? Mollie Sharshug! I keep saying it in my mind!" A dozen times, Rod chased the little man.

Just before noon three Morxon trucks left with the last of their iron. The crane departed, and a big bulldozer clanked in. "Where'll I start?" the driver asked Rod, who told him to find a shady spot and relax. The driver looked at the chimney. The shoring at the base had been stuffed with sections of old tires, and soaked with gasoline. Now, Rod touched it off, and stepped back. "Say!" said the driver. "Won't it hit that building?"

"We'll soon know," said Rod easily. He and all hands sat in the shade of the fence, and watched, as they ate lunch. "Just the right time for it," Rod explained. "At noon, all these plants will have their machinery shut down. It may not make much of a bump, at that."

The last smoke that would ever pass through that chimney was pouring out at the top. At the bottom, the timbers were a roaring mass. As Rod was wondering if he'd have to prop a beam and give the thing a push with a jack, it tilted slowly. As it swept its length in a long arc, it broke in three places. Then it hit with a heavy crash. Dust rose in a cloud, and it seemed that all the bricks in the world were spread on the ground.

Now, Mollie Sharshug, who'd been watching from her parked car, came running up, and a neat little figure she was, in a gay print dress, and white gloves, with the flash of a jewel here and there. Disbro was shining his crash hat in the crook of his arm. "Care for a brick, as a souvenir?" he asked, blushing to the edge of his hairline. "I'd love one!" said Mollie, and stood with Rod, as Disbro trotted off. "He's cute," said she, and Rod nodded.

"Me pride and joy, is Disbro."

SHE motioned for him to put his head down, and she said in his ear: "I've seen my lawyers and it's all set. They tell me you can prosecute that Grill, if you care to."

"I'll be too busy with me knitting at the Sharshug Flats," he said, laughing, and she gave him a friendly poke, and he poked back. They'd always been biffing friends, rather than hugging friends; but the sight of them was quite a shock to Belle Crotty, who was advancing swiftly.

"Rodney! What's going on—" Then she was flabbergasted as Mollie Sharshug turned with a smiling hello. "Why—why, Mollie! What on earth —er—just a moment, dear. Rodney! I've been worried to death about you, and that evil old chimney! Leave it stand! I'll not have you hurted—"

"What chimney?" asked Rod blandly, and as she looked for it, he peered past her. "Why, here's Mr. Grill! Hello, Phil. You know Mrs. Sharshug, I believe?"

Grill's face started to get red, then took on a greenish tinge. "Why—I—why, yes—I—"

Rodney beamed on him. "While you're finding your tongue, I'll say it for you: A few nights ago Mrs. Sharshug came in me absence to offer the Crotty company the job of wrecking her tenements. You told her I was busy on a job and couldn't handle it. You made false claims to Mrs. Sharshug, and you tried to keep me bogged here while you grabbed the better job. Well, me crafty friend, how does it feel to have a couple handsful of empty air, for all your trouble?"

Grill started to bluster; but Belle, who had been listening in blank

astonishment, now gave out with some characteristic screams, and started for him. Grill backed off. As they made their exit in that manner, Disbro stepped up. "Here's your brick, Mrs. Sharshug; I cleaned it some."

"Why, it's lovely, Disbro!" she cried, and Rodney had a coughing spell, and had to turn his head away.

Now Belle came hurrying back, and with her was Mr. Farley Cox. The dignified editor was in quite a state of excitement. "Rod McQuillan," said he, "if you're not a fool for luck! I put your blasted bricks in the *Landmark* window, and a friend of mine saw 'em! He's an architect, and he'll be along in a few moments. Don't do anything about your chimney brick until you see him! He wants the lot for the façade of our new historical society building!"

Belle gave a few joyous screams; Mollie whooped; and Rodney spoke: "He'll pay?"

"He will," said Cox, "and he'll take care of the hauling!"

Rodney grabbed Belle by the arms and waltzed her around. Wreckers, yard crew and the dozer-driver, wanting in on the excitement, and a closer view of the pretty brunette and the handsome blonde, crowded in. Rodney swept the group with his gaze, and wound up on Disbro, whose face was split with a grin, and Mr. Cox, who was beaming, as the bearer of good news. Maybe it was the friendly audience, or Mr. Cox's mention of the McQuillan luck. Anyway, for once Rodney's judgment went out of balance, and he permitted himself to indulge in something akin to a strut. "Mrs. Crotty," he said, "I have a surprise for you. Mr. Cox—a little something for your paper!"

Then he stepped back and directed the bulldozer operator to bite a chunk out of the U-shaped embankment. As he watched the clumsy machine spin on one tread, take aim, and advance with lowered blade, his pulses were pounding. A dream of his boyhood had come back to him, with X-ray scenes added. Those huge Civil War cannon were still vivid to him. For days, he'd been seeing them, crusted with rust, of course, but piled in a double tier, under the earth of that long mound. He'd been too superstitious to look, until now. . . .

The dozer went on through the mound, and on his own initiative, the driver took some more bites. Nothing but dirt, stone and weeds. Chagrin made Rod tremble. "Anything wrong, Rod?" asked Mr. Cox; and puzzled, Belle and Mollie conferred, shrugged and looked to Rod. Loyally, Disbro placed himself by Rod's side. "I was hoping for a weight of metal for Mrs. Crotty," said Rod. "I believe the joke is on me."

"Rod," Whispell muttered, from the corner of his mouth, "where'd all that dirt come from? Before we grade the place, how about looking somewhere else?"

"You're a better man than I am," Rod returned, and raised his voice for the dozer man. "Angle your blade for a deep cut and plow across the old foundry floor!"

With a roar and a great clanking, the dozer dug its trench. There was the sound of metal on metal. Rod, Disbro and a bunch of excited wreckers dug in the furrow. Buried a foot below the surface, they found, not cannon, but manhole covers. Heavy steel covers. Hundreds of them were there. Maybe thousands. The whole ground plan seemed sown with them, nested tightly, in double tiers, and packed in tar, or creosote, so they were in good condition.

AS a good newspaper man, Mr. Cox was kneeling with the others, knocking off dirt, and reading the text on the covers, and the story behind it. "WELCOME TO BROOKLYN—*Alderman Foley*," it said in big raised letters.

"Poor Foley," said Rod. "He made up all these covers, thinking he'd win. When he lost, he buried 'em till the next election—and he wasn't here for it, though he deserved to be." He straightened, dusted his hands, wiped them on his overalls, and looked for Belle.

She was standing apart, weeping softly, and he slid his arm around her. "I'm not crying for Foley," she sobbed. "But Rod, I've been such a fool—and you thinking of me interests, night and day."

"Why else am I here, me dear?" And then, to divert her, he gave her a squeeze, and pointed. "Look at our Mr. Whispell!"

At a little distance, Disbro was strolling with Mollie Sharshug. They were talking excitedly, and like kids, they were booting pebbles. "I believe he has a commitment," said Rodney McQuillan.

# FOLLOW THE

AT seven-ten on a stuffy Friday morning, I walked into Falcon Aircraft's test laboratory and was greeted by the usual smell. It reminded me of the downwind stench from an oil refinery, a fact that was not too odd, seeing that the eight test-benches lined up side by side in the lab's long, narrow room gulped hydraulic oil or jet fuel by the barrelful.

The whine of pressure pumps and motors, and the high-pitched whirr of flow-meters indicated that the crew had got down to work right from the opening whistle. I looked around: At the main fuel bench Red Conlon was completing his set-up for the test on a solenoid valve. A jittery lad, Red Conlon was, with jerky, awkward movements, but a conscientious worker just the same. He possessed pink eyebrows that blended so well with the coloring of his face that he didn't seem to have any eyebrows at all. His usual expression, therefore, was one of acute surprise.

He sent jet fuel, under fifty pounds of pressure, running through the valve. He clicked over the electrical switch on the instrument panel in order to energize the valve's solenoid. The procedure was strictly according to the book. There was nothing to it. The valve was supposed to open, and then it was supposed to close. It didn't. Instead, shorting out, it sent a bright blue spark arcing downward to the metal test-bench. There was a sputter, a subdued sort of puff, like the report from a small firecracker; and then there was a pale yellow flame dancing all over the top of the fuel-soaked bench. One spark. One fire.

Before I could even blink, Red's hand flashed high on the control panel to cut the current, but when he started to shut off the fuel, there was no place for him to reach except through a three-foot curtain of fire.

I still can't blame the boy for what he did next. That he'd be too excited to think straight was understandable. He was trying, anyway. At the same time, his actions now became disastrous. Instead of hauling down a nearby fire-extinguisher and going to work with it, he jammed a double

*"The facts are clear enough. The valves were tampered with in Falcon*

# *FLAME*

**The testing laboratory of an aircraft plant provides the unusual but typically American setting for this intensely interesting murder mystery.**

**. . . A short novel—**

## by GRANGE LEWIS

*Aircraft's hydraulics lab. The fire there was caused intentionally."*

handful of rags into a tub of water, and tried to slap the flames out by hand. It just wouldn't work. It could never have worked against a fire involving jet fuel. But aside from that, all Red succeeded in doing was to knock the solenoid valve loose from its rubber fuel line. The valve dropped to the floor. The fuel line, carrying a high pressure, began to snake back and forth, spurting jet fuel down the lab.

It came, a dull, angry, jolting explosion, quickly changing into a hissing roar. One moment the hose was spewing raw jet fuel. In the next, it had turned into a twisting, bucking flame-thrower.

Above the noise of the fire rose yells and screams from trapped men. I started to curse, the way you do when you stand helpless before some indescribable horror. Already the fire stretched from concrete floor to the twelve-foot ceiling, and it was surging steadily to work-tables and stock-racks, jumping from test-bench to test-bench. All this, accomplished in about twenty seconds!

LUCKILY for me, I was behind the fire, rather than in front of it. For some little time I'd been trying to buck the heavy-duty extinguisher, hanging by the front door, loose from its holder. At last I got it down. Have you ever tried to fight a flame-thrower with a hand extinguisher? The odds aren't with you. The best I could do was to attack the backwash of flame in an attempt to work my way to the near bench. If I could only get close enough to turn off the flow of the jet fuel! Before making much headway, however, I had to change direction. Red Conlon was cornered against the wall.

Suddenly the overhead sprinkling system cut loose. Water sprayed down with the intensity of a summer thunderstorm. It was a cascade. There was a rumble and a hiss, and a cloud of steam and smoke rose to the ceiling, where it hung suspended in a small cloud.

The working of the sprinklers automatically turned on the fire alarm. I heard the loud fire-bell on top of the building clang out its signal. Water

*Illustrated by* ORISON MAC PHERSON

*We did what we could. First one man, then the other, passed out. This seemed like a mercy.*

kept spraying down from the ceiling. As the fire diminished, Red Conlon saw his chance and darted over to his bench, where he feverishly spun the handle of the fuel-outlet valve.

That was it. Except for a flicker here and there underneath the tables, which we quickly snuffed out by hand, the fire died as abruptly as it had started. Everyone who'd been fighting the fire was drenched. My own hair was matted over my forehead, my shoes squished with water; and a torrent was still beating down on me. So I located the sprinkler shut-off, twisted it around, and turned to survey the damage. The upper end of the seventy-five-foot lab was a mess; the lower part was comparatively intact, though badly waterlogged.

Harvey Barnett, the department supervisor, was at his desk, talking into the phone. "Send me an ambulance right away," he said. "I have a couple of men badly burned."

For the first time I noticed a man hunched over near the far wall, moaning. His face was blackened, his shirt burned off. Near him was Bob Harpster, staring dully at his burned right arm. The gray skin had popped and was hanging down from his wrists in long shreds. Blood was oozing from between his fingers.

Until the ambulance came, we did what we could with first aid. First one man, then the other, passed out. Although this seemed like a mercy, for intense pain was beginning to knife through their initial shock, it also increased our alarm about their condition. There could be no doubt but that they were in critical shape.

I was shivering, not only because I was wet, nor because the frightful burns of the two men had shaken me deeply, but also because a sense of guilt weighed down on me. As manufacturing engineer of the test lab, what safety measure had I overlooked? Where had I missed?

Harvey Barnett was shaking too. I noticed that although his hair was still neatly combed, and his gray sharkskin suit was still faultlessly pressed, a dazed, horrified look seemed glued to the supervisor's handsome face. His high, aquiline nose did not have its usual sardonic tilt.

"I'll report this fire to the front office," he muttered. "You'd better get home and into some dry clothes, West."

Taking his advice, I left for home but was back in the plant inside of an hour. When I returned to my office,

a message was waiting there, directing me to report to Hugh Moser, the president of Falcon Aircraft.

Mr. Moser's office, with scale models of his earlier planes its only adornment, was filled with men from Purchasing, some engineers, a scheduler, maintenance mechanics, five vice-presidents and the works-manager.

Raising his head from between his blue-veined hands, Mr. Moser said to me: "Mr. West, how long will it take to get the lab back into operation?"

I blinked. My mind wasn't working clearly yet. With an effort, I tried to concentrate. A lot of grim-looking eyes were staring at me. "I'd say the normal time for rebuilding all the test-benches would be a month. With heavy pressure, two weeks. With heavy pressure, plus unlimited overtime, maybe ten days. On the other hand, we might have to wait up to three months for the replacement parts we'll need, especially the high-pressure gauges."

Mr. Moser's level gray eyes regarded me. "It is now Friday morning, nine o'clock. The maintenance crews will be granted unlimited overtime for the week-end. By seven o'clock, Monday morning, I want to see every test-bench back in complete operation. Is that understood?"

I groaned. I knew Hugh Moser was indomitable. Hadn't he insisted on test-flying his experimental planes until a near-fatal crash had left him permanently crippled? And then hadn't he maintained his tremendous driving force, directing his company from a wheel-chair, his brain seemingly sharpened by his own physical impairment? He was a strange man, a true genius, perhaps. But nobody ever knew whether he would rage over a delay, or accept it with Job-like patience. In so far as I had worked with him before, I had always found him an understanding and remarkably fair-minded employer.

A GANGLING, nervous young man whom I recognized as Leonard Bell, maintenance lead man, spoke up. "I'd hate to turn loose the master instruments from our gauge-room; but if they'd help, for a temporary set-up—"

"Can you use them?"

I nodded.

"Good," Mr. Moser said. "I might explain that due to constant breakdowns in the hydraulics lab, and also due to late shipments from vendors, final assembly faces a complete shutdown. Our parts just have to be tested without any more delay."

Leonard Bell kept fidgeting. "I don't know much about engineering, but it seems to me that a safety measure might be taken to prevent the type of fire we've just had."

Mr. Moser jerked his head. "Go ahead. If your idea is a good one, I'm going to be interested."

The maintenance man, permitting his Adam's apple to drop back into place, pulled a drawing out of his pocket. "The big danger from fire in our lab comes from a defective electrical part shorting out and setting up an arc to the metal test-benches, especially to a bench using jet fuel. Wouldn't a thick wooden drainboard extending over the whole top of the bench, like I show in this drawing, act as a buffer, to prevent such an arc?"

Without any emotion in his face, Mr. Moser studied the drawing, then shoved it over to me. "Would it?"

My ears started to buzz. I tried to hold back the flush that I knew was spreading over my face, but I couldn't. Bell's idea was simple. It was beautiful. Such a device should have been one of the first things I'd designed after being assigned to the test lab. As a matter of fact, if those breakdowns hadn't taken up my time.... "Would it?" I murmured. "It'd be perfect."

Mr. Moser nodded, and looked at the test-lab supervisor. Harvey Barnett said: "I agree with Mr. West. The idea is workable, and seems well thought out."

"Fine. I'm always impressed by initiative." Moser turned to his secretary. "Bonnie, this young man Leonard Bell seems to have a hundred-and-fifty-dollar bonus coming to him. Get the necessary paper-work started. Have you got Fred Schoonmaker yet?"

"I'll try again."

The room became silent except for the girl dialing. I was aware that Hugh Moser's intense eyes were now regarding me closely, an angry glint in them. "What excuse have you for not solving this safety problem yourself, Mr. West? Isn't it reasonable for me to expect competence from my engineers?"

There was no place for me to hide. Mr. Moser did not browbeat for the enjoyment of it. He wasn't the man for psychological whip-cracking. He didn't bluff. When he acted as though he were angry, there was only one reason for it: he was angry. To make matters worse, I considered his question well justified. "I can think of no excuse," I said.

Leonard Bell looked alarmed. "I didn't mean to put him on the spot. After all, I realize that Mr. West has been kept pretty busy redesigning and improving the test equipment."

Bonnie, the secretary, broke in. "I have the Schoonmaker Manufacturing Company on the phone now, and the president will be out of town on business all this week-end. The chief engineer wants to know if he'll do."

As I sighed with relief at the interruption, Mr. Moser scooped up the phone on his desk, and said: "One of your valves shorted out this morning and started a fire that nearly burned us down. I want to take up the matter with Fred Schoonmaker himself. Tell him that if he values any more business from me, he'll be out here bright and early Monday morning for the investigation. In the meantime, he'd better find out what's wrong with his valves."

Putting the receiver down, Moser faced us, and said: "We've got a lot of work to do. Let's start the ball rolling. You, Barnett, are in charge of assessing the actual damage to production parts, and getting rework and replacement orders written. Give me a preliminary report by phone as soon as possible. You, West, take a procurement man with you, and give him an inventory of replacement gauges and material you'll need for your benches. We'll have them here inside of thirty-six hours, even if we have to charter a plane to go around the country picking them up."

HE paused, staring at me bitterly. "You will also make your blueprint files available to the maintenance crews, together with any new drawings you'll have to make for temporary hook-ups. You'll complete the job today, no matter how late it takes you. After that, I don't want to see you around here again until Monday morning. Ordinarily, you'd be expected to supervise the lab rework, but somehow I don't seem to have any confidence in you. That's all."

I returned to the hydraulics lab, a sick feeling gnawing inside me. Maybe I'd had it coming to me, but no man likes to be dressed down in front of others.

The lab, of course, was a watery, blackened hole. The cleanup crew was still mopping up. Get the whole works operational again in only one week-end? Ridiculous! Nevertheless, I started my inventory of needed replacements. As the list grew, I began to realize that the cost was going to be terrific. As for the man from Purchasing, he shook his head repeatedly over the procurement problems involved.

By one o'clock that afternoon my assessment of the equipment damage was complete. From then until eleven that night I made drawings on parts that could be fabricated at Falcon. The rough drafts were going to be the only drafts. There would have to be a lot of hand-fitting on the job, anyway.

When I went home that night, I knew I would have to resign. When your employer says he has no confidence in you, when you have no con-

fidence in yourself, then is the time to leave. All weekend I grew increasingly depressed. My place was in the lab, helping in the reconstruction work, but I had been exiled. For cause.

Monday morning, when I reported back for duty, I found that the paint was still peeled, and the walls still smoke-stained in the test-room, but that the benches were once more operational. Although much of the set-up was makeshift, appearing to have been designed by Rube Goldberg, the miracle demanded by Mr. Moser had been accomplished.

Leonard Bell, the maintenance man, was sitting on a table, looking dead. His eyes were bloodshot and deeply circled, his whole body was sagging. "Seventeen hours on Friday, twelve on Saturday, and twenty hours yesterday. We could have used you."

"Thanks," I said. This was the lad who, consciously or unconsciously, had shown me up. Seeing his drawn, exhausted face now, I couldn't feel bitter toward him. After all, he'd been right, hadn't he? God knows why, but I tried the light touch with him. "Only twelve hours' work Saturday? What was that, Bell—your lazy streak coming out?"

He took me seriously, or else he was too tired to grin. "I wasn't going to break my date with my girl Saturday night," he said. "Besides, we had to wait for more equipment to arrive. You know, those gauges on the fuel bench look kind of naked. I'd better go back to my section and finish up the panels for them."

After watching his tall figure drag itself through the door, I turned to see Red Conlon standing slump-shouldered in front of his bench. He had a pump all hooked up to test; but looking even more startled and uncertain than usual, he seemed in no hurry to go beyond that point.

"I don't want any part of this bench!" he suddenly shouted. "Somebody else can have the damn' thing, somebody who won't kill people with it!"

My breath drew in sharply. "Kill them, Red?"

"Yes. Both of the boys died a few hours ago. I—I just phoned the hospital."

The men working at the other benches, dropping their tools, turned their heads toward Red. Harvey Barnett, strain showing in his face, hurried up and started to talk quietly with the boy. At length, he said: "Tom Hurst, bring your tool box up here. You're going to change places with Conlon."

Tom, a big, rawboned man who had never been known to smile, said sourly: "Temporary or permanent?"

"Temporary."

"Then I object. Red is a jinx—a hoodoo. My bench wasn't hurt any in the fire, but if Red takes it over, sure as the devil, he'll have it all fouled up inside of ten minutes."

"Absurd! Why don't you keep your opinions to yourself?"

"That isn't only my idea. All the rest of the boys feel the same way. Wherever Red is, there's trouble."

"I'll give you two choices." Barnett's face was growing dark. "Either change places with Conlon, or quit: one or the other."

Grumbling, Tom Hurst came up from his end bench. "Ten minutes, I'll let him have. I've just finished the set-up on landing-gear cylinders, so he can't go wrong there; but just the same, watch something cut loose, soon as he takes over."

We all held our eyes on Red as he moved to the hydraulic bench. I don't believe in jinxes. At the same time, I was as tense as anyone else. Conlon checked his set-up; then he got out the manual, and slowly read the test procedure. As well as anybody in the shop, he knew how to run landing-gear cylinders, but he no longer trusted himself. He turned on the by-pass valve, which was about as safe a thing as he could do, then rechecked the book.

Everything went fine. The landing gears, hooked up in series of five, operated smoothly. The pistons worked. The shafts went up and down just as they were supposed to do. Red completed ten cycles of the fifty-cycle test.

Beginning to breathe more easily, I turned away.... There was an explosion. I caught sight of a round black object that looked like a bomb come flying from the rear of Red's bench, hit the floor, then bombard the near wall with metal fragments.

As though in a trance, every man in the lab turned off his bench, and started to walk toward Red. I hurdled a work-table, and ran to the back wall. The black object was an accumulator, which holds compressed air. Two heavy steel shells are welded together to form a ball, and in one end is a small valve similar to the one in an automobile inner tube. The valve end of the accumulator had blown off, with fifteen hundred pounds per square inch of air behind it.

"I'll call Maintenance," Barnett said.

Everybody was staring at Red. He walked to the end of the room, and sat down, his back to us. We stood around, not saying a word, dead serious, suspicious, our faces leaden. Maybe I didn't subscribe to the jinx theory; but if not, how could I explain the exact fulfilling of Tom Hurst's prediction?

Leonard Bell came in and inspected the damage. I explained what had happened. "The bench didn't suffer much," he said. "Fortunately, the accumulator exploded into the wall. Dig me up another one. In the meantime, I'll fabricate a new tube to stick on the end of it. This bench will be in operation again in fifteen minutes."

The spell was broken. Men moved back to their work. I wrote out a requisition for a new accumulator, and sent the area dispatcher off to Stock to pick it up. From the back of the test stand, Bell took off the battered tube he wanted to use as a pattern, and headed for the tube-bending department.

"I'm going to take this exploded accumulator to Research," I said to Barnett. "Damn it, there's no such thing as a jinx. I want the floor swept for any metal fragments, and if there are any pieces sticking in the walls, we'll dig them out."

After we'd gathered the parts of the accumulator together, I put them in heavy wrapping paper and sealed the package with tape. Leonard Bell's opinion of the time necessary to get the bench back into operation was correct. Within fifteen minutes, he had slapped a new accumulator into place, and was running tests.

"This bench is now one hundred per cent," he said. "The regular operator can take over again."

"Does that mean me, or Eight-ball, here?" Tom Hurst asked.

Red Conlon didn't make a move. He looked appealingly at Harvey Barnett. The supervisor regarded Red reflectively, biting his lips. The whole shop was watching to see if Red would get the bench back. You could feel the tension, the absolute certainty that no matter what Red picked up, disaster would follow.

"I suppose you know how to test hoses?" Barnett said at last.

Red nodded miserably.

"Not much danger, even if you made one of them pop a connection. All you'd get would be an oil bath. All right, start testing hoses. Low-pressure ones only."

Red stepped forward, and I was glad to see he was getting sore. His Irish chin began to stick out. He coupled hoses together with quick, angry twists of his wrench, then bled them out at the bench. All at once he stepped back and pointed.

"Damn it all!" he yelled. "Say I'm responsible for *that!*"

I looked in the direction he was pointing. A small dural bleeder tube on the test stand was writhing like a fat worm. It sagged; it swelled out. Green mold started to drip from it.

With a quick jab of my forefinger, I hit the stop button and shut off the bench. If my eyes were popping, they weren't the only ones. There wasn't

a jaw in the room that wasn't sagging foolishly.

"What the hell kind of a weird stunt have you pulled now?" Tom Hurst roared.

Red turned. Two bright spots of color were in his cheeks, but his eyes seemed glazed. Without warning, he sprang for Hurst. I jumped between them. He fought to get around me.

"He's heckled me enough," Red cried. "I'm going to get him! I'm going to knock his damned head off!"

"Make one move, Conlon," Harvey Barnett said, "and I'll have a termination slip ready for you. Not that I won't give you one anyway."

Red backed away, his head down. Slowly he turned and walked out of the room.

"There's only one thing that'll make dural react the way that tube is doing," Leonard Bell said. "Some mercury must be in the hydraulic oil."

WE looked at the bench set-up. Sure enough, one of the pressure gauges was cracked. "Probably when the accumulator blew up, it cracked the glass on the gauge, and the mercury drained down into the oil reservoir, Bell suggested.

I said nothing. Getting a glass jar, I filled it with an oil sample, then picked up the package containing the ruined accumulator, and left. After that, I circled around to the tube-bending section, fished around in the scrap bin until I found the tube that Bell had used as a pattern, stuck it in my pocket, and marched over to Research.

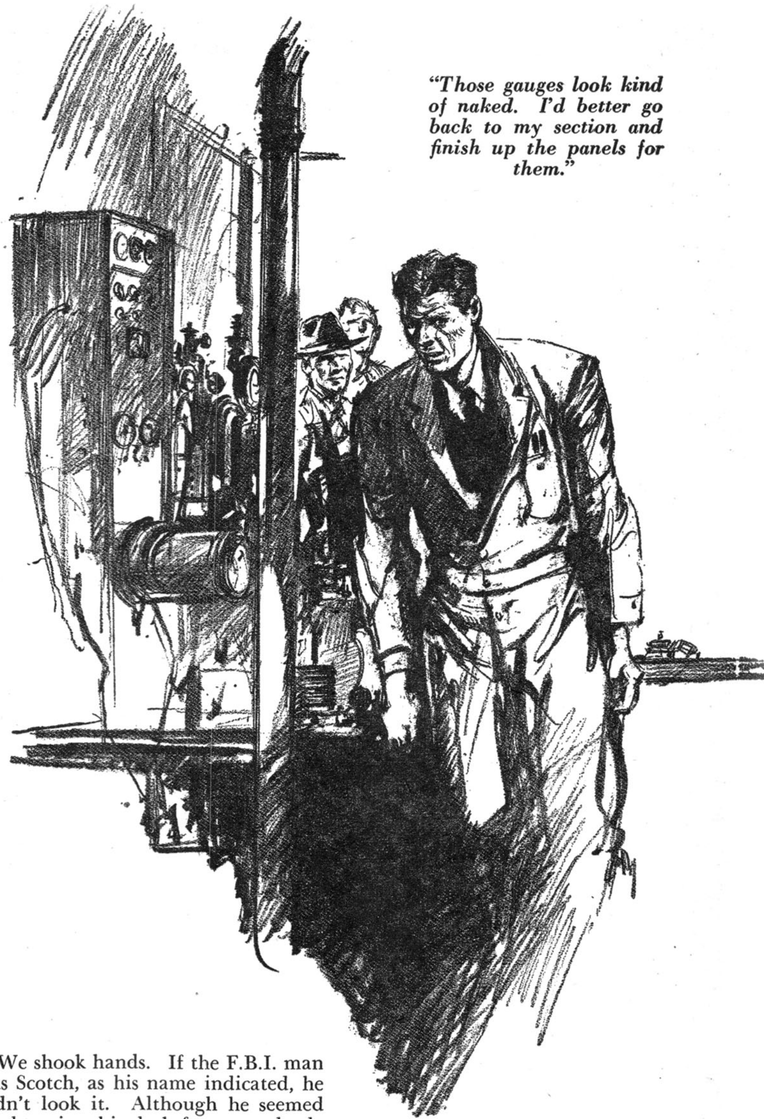
Hugh Moser was there in his wheelchair, together with several engineers and officials of the company. The latest shipment of the Schoonmaker solenoid valves, including the blackened one which had caused the fire, were lined up on a work-bench, ready for a teardown.

With a frown of annoyance, Mr. Moser looked me over and said: "I don't believe you were invited to attend the investigation here this morning. Were you?"

I explained why I had come, telling him of the latest mishaps in the test lab. Then I waited for the angry explosion. I got a surprise. It didn't come. Letting his head droop down on his chest, Mr. Moser lost himself in deep reflection. Finally he turned to a man standing nearby and said: "Did you hear what was just reported to me, Mr. Mac Speedie?"

The man nodded.

Inclining his head in my direction, Mr. Moser said: "This is Bill West, our manufacturing engineer assigned to the test labs. West, may I present Douglas Mac Speedie, the F.B.I. man who is sitting in on our investigation this morning?"



*"Those gauges look kind of naked. I'd better go back to my section and finish up the panels for them."*

We shook hands. If the F.B.I. man was Scotch, as his name indicated, he didn't look it. Although he seemed unobtrusive, his dark face was alertly intelligent, his compact body lean and muscular, and his brown gabardine suit well-cut. I decided that the reason the eye wouldn't be likely to pick him out lay not so much in his appearance, but in his quiet, reserved manner and the economy of motion he used in getting about.

"Mr. West," he said, "you described these parts failures as being a chain of accidents, with the possibility that one accident stemmed from another. In short, the flash from a solenoid valve started a fire. The fire may have damaged the accumulator, which, when it exploded, may have broken the pressure gauge that leaked mercury into the hydraulic oil reservoir. That is what your words say, yet your manner implies something entirely different."

"It does? Just precisely what does it imply?"

"Dirty work, my friend."

I took a deep breath. Yes, I'd been trying to convince myself that these events were only accidents, but I suppose some inner logic had already rejected this theory.

"All right," I said, "let's say I strongly suspect sabotage."

Mr. Moser and the F.B.I. man exchanged glances and nodded slightly to each other. "Stick around, West," Mr. Moser said. "I'll have your oil tested at once, although we won't be able to go into that matter any further, or check the accumulator, until we've disposed of the solenoid-valve investigation. Fred Schoonmaker and his engineers are coming through the door now, I see."

Mr. Schoonmaker, a tall, shaggy-haired man with a deeply lined face, entered the room with his men, and was introduced around.

"Shall we get things going?" he asked.

We gathered around a work-bench, where a technician picked up the valve which had caused the lab fire, and clamped it in a vise. With one snip of his cutter, he severed the safety-wire, then unscrewed the solenoid section of the valve and completely disassembled it.

Fred Schoonmaker picked up the empty solenoid shell, and said, in a strained voice: "All right, where is the insulator? It's a plastic ring which fits just under the cap."

We looked over the parts, some of them fused by the short, but there was no insulator among them.

"This ink stamp here says that the valve was complete and passed our inspection," Schoonmaker said. Grimly he pulled out a notebook and copied down the inspector's number. "Let's try some more."

The first thing that rolled out of the next valve was a small micarta cylinder, the insulator. Then, a dozen more valves in succession were found to contain the part.

"It looks," Schoonmaker said, "as though only one valve were missed."

"One faulty valve," Mr. Moser responded, "was enough to burn two men to death, and to cause me fifteen thousand dollars in direct damages. Well, we have about fifty more valves to go. I propose that we tackle them all."

Curiously, I looked over the long row of unchecked valves. After examining each one closely, I picked out three, and said: "How about tearing these down first?"

THAT was done; not one of the three valves contained an insulator. If I had wanted to gain the undivided attention of all the men present, I'd found the correct method.

"So you can look over a batch of identical parts and pick out the phonies," Moser said. "What have you discovered, West?"

"The lead seals attached to the valves were the tip-off," I explained. "They're hung on the safety wire and then mashed down so that they can't be taken off without cutting the wire. You'll notice that each of the good valves still has a seal identified with a large S pressed into it by a metal die. The seals on the bad valves are perfectly plain, unlettered. There you are."

Mr. Moser said, his voice husky: "We have such lead seals, and a die or press, in the hydraulics lab?"

When I nodded, he sent an engineer off to pick up the die and some seals. When they were brought to us, Douglas Mac Speedie pressed a sampling of the seals and compared them under a microscope with the ones from the defective valves.

"The same," he said. "This die is not made of particularly hard metal, and the faces of it show several nicks and ridges, which are transferred to the seals under pressure. The facts are clear enough. The valves were tampered with in Falcon Aircraft's hydraulics lab. The fire there was caused intentionally."

There was a long silence. Mr. Moser's lips were compressed, and his thin chest rose and fell in uneven intervals. At last he said: "My apologies, Fred. But be glad that you're in the clear."

IT was eleven o'clock in the morning. Mr. Schoonmaker and his men left, looking considerably more cheerful than when they had first arrived. The hydraulic-oil analysis arrived, and the suspicion that it contained mercury was verified.

"Now to take a look at that accumulator," Mr. Moser said, pulling the wrappings from around the package I'd made up.

When all the fragments were placed together, the pull of the metal showed conclusively that the accumulator had blown out from internal pressure; but of course, what other way was there for it to blow? There was no immediate evidence of sabotage.

It looked as if we were stopped in that particular phase of the investigation until I suddenly remembered the short tube I was carrying around in my pocket. I pulled it out, and then borrowed Mac Speedie's magnifying glass with which to make a close inspection. At last, with some degree of satisfaction, I passed the tube and glass among the members of the small group.

The flared end of the tube, where it had been coupled to the accumulator, was gouged and partly missing. While the tube had been double-flared, so as to enable it to withstand high pressures, it was now ground down to a paper thinness.

"Under the glass, I can see file-marks on this flare," Mac Speedie said. "That, of course, spells sabotage. But as a layman, I don't understand all the implications. Would a weakened flare cause the accumulator to explode immediately?"

"Not necessarily," I answered. "The flare might give way at once, or it might hold for a couple of hours or even a couple of weeks. Eventually, it would have to blow out. That's what happened today. Actually, when the flare snapped, it slipped free of the nut holding it to the accumulator, and the accumulator shot off onto the floor, where it was damaged enough to cause it to explode. Yes, the accumulator exploded after it hit the floor, not while it was still attached to the test-bench."

The noon whistle blew for lunch, but we ignored it. "Now that we have a clear-cut picture of sabotage," Moser said, "what motive do we have? Do I have a foreign agent on my payroll?"

"That's always the first thought in a case like this." Douglas Mac Speedie was beginning to wrap up the evidence into neat little bundles. "This lad Red Conlon was involved in every accident, wasn't he?"

"I'm not going to buy that line of reasoning," Moser snapped. "Common sense rules him out. He was always in the greatest danger. If he'd wanted to sabotage a bench, he'd have chosen one other than his own."

For the first time that day I saw Douglas Mac Speedie smile. "You've got my reasoning backward. Eliminating the theory of a foreign agent for the moment, what do we have left? Red Conlon was always the boy on the receiving end. Why wouldn't that mean repeated attempts on his life?"

WE all fell back to think that one over. In fact, we chewed on it for quite a while. I said, "A haphazard way to go about killing him. Besides, he's been jumping from bench to bench. Who could figure in advance where he'd be, except possibly the supervisor?"

"That's Harvey Barnett. All right," Moser said, "who gave us permission to eliminate Barnett as a suspect?"

The F.B.I. man detached himself from our group and went to a phone at the far end of the room, where he commenced to dial. I presumed he was calling more agents in on the case. When he was through, he said: "I think that Mr. Moser, Mr. West and I should take a trip to the hydraulics lab. You other engineers can use some lunch, I imagine."

We got over to the lab in a hurry, with Mac Speedie and I having to trot to keep up with Mr. Moser's self-propelled wheel-chair. We found Harvey Barnett seated at his desk, his chair propped around facing the front entrance, eating his lunch.

"We want to speak to Red Conlon."

"He's around here somewhere. The other men wouldn't eat with him, and left for the canteen. —Red!"

There was no answer.

"That's funny," Barnett said. "I locked every entrance except the front one, and I've been keeping my eye in that direction. Red hasn't gone out."

"Let's look around," Mac Speedie said.

We circled the lab, searching with increasing urgency all about the test

stands. Red wasn't to be found. In the rear of the lab, I pushed open the door to the supply-room, and there I found him, lying on the floor, his eyes open, his look of surprise just as apparent as ever. A wrench lay near his head, in the middle of a growing puddle of dark red uncongealed blood.

At my gasp, Mac Speedie joined me, then quickly knelt and pressed his fingers to Conlon's throat. "Dead!" he said softly. "And not over a couple of minutes, either. Crushed skull."

A growing feeling of horror, revulsion and pity went through me. The two of us stared down at the body. Why should this happen to Red, who'd never hurt anyone in his life? An icy, angry bitterness toward his murderer began to take shape in my mind.

Mac Speedie pursed his lips, knelt again, and inserted his hand into Red's right trouser pocket. There was a pronounced bulge there. He brought out three micarta insulators, which he showed to me with a puzzled hitch of his shoulders.

"What was Red doing with those things?" I exclaimed. "This doesn't make sense at all. If he was doing the sabotaging, why was he killed?"

"Maybe he was on the trail of something. How do I know? He only had three insulators. Where's the other one?"

I looked blankly at the F.B.I. man.

"There's still one insulator missing. They were removed from four valves, remember. Well, let's get going."

We went to the left side door of the lab. It was bolted shut. We went to the rear door, and found its Yale lock holding firm. On the side door on the right, a latch had been set in place from the inside.

"Mr. Barnett," Mac Speedie said, "when did the last man leave this lab?"

"They left together, about fifteen minutes ago. Why?"

"Because Red Conlon hasn't been dead for fifteen minutes. He hasn't been dead for ten minutes, or probably even for five. He's still bleeding from a head wound."

*Without warning Red sprang for Hurst. "I'm going to get him!" he cried.*

HARVEY BARNETT jumped to his feet, knocking his chair backward to the floor. "He's been killed! You mean he's committed suicide?"

"No, not suicide, my friend. Murder."

"I don't believe it!" Barnett's voice was high-pitched, thin. "I've been the only one here. I told you that nobody has either come in or gone out during lunch-time, because I locked all the back doors, and I've had my eye on the front one."

From his wheel-chair by the front entrance, Mr. Moser spoke.

"Well?" he said.

The implication was clear. Barnett's eyes grew wide, and started to sputter.

"Better come with me, and have a look," Mac Speedie said.

"I can't understand this," Barnett cried. "I can't figure it out."

Mr. Moser reached for the phone, dialed, then asked Plant Protection to send around some men.

There could be no question but that Barnett was on the spot, and knew it. He must have been acutely aware of our stony looks, as he went to see the body. Perspiration was on his forehead, and his steps dragged. "With me being here alone in the lab with Red, the finger will point at me first," he said. "I realize that. But if there is so much as one clue, it will lead you to someone else, believe me."

"The last thing I plan to do is to jump to conclusions," said Mac Speedie. "So unless you're guilty, rest easy."

In a very short time three men from Plant Protection arrived, and were stationed in the lab. Then the workers themselves began to come in from lunch. Each in turn was taken to view the scene in the supply-room. Their reactions to Red Conlon's murder seemed normal. They were shocked, dismayed and stunned. But of them all, I was especially interested to see how Tom Hurst would respond.

"The poor guy!" the big man murmured, staring down with white face at the body of the lad he had been needling only a couple of hours before. "Out of the whole gang, I gave him the hardest time, didn't I?" His huge fists slowly twisted into knots. "Just the same, I'd like to get hold of the man who used that wrench on him. I'd—"

He turned away, his steps stiff and clumsy. I could see the muscles along his bare, brawny forearms bunch up and relax, then bunch up again. "Damn it," he cried, "I ought to keep my mouth buttoned up! If I thought the way I talked about Red being a jinx gave somebody the idea to kill

*I had pictured Pearl as an empty-headed actress; yet I was liking her intensely.*

him, I'd go out right now and shoot myself. I'm not really mean."

Although I found myself sympathizing with the man, I saw that Mac Speedie's dark brown eyes were noncommittal. It is hard, of course, to tell when a person's words are genuine. But whether Tom Hurst's little speech came from the heart, or was calculated to create an effect, it was perfectly designed for easing the position into which he'd put himself by his talk prior to the murder.

After the full crew had returned, Mac Speedie said: "I understand there were several maintenance men around this morning. Where are they?"

"Leonard Bell was out at the canteen," Hurst said, "but all he had was a couple of cups of coffee. He said that he was too nervous to eat anything solid."

The F.B.I. man slowly scratched a mole on his left cheek. "Did he leave here at noon with the rest of you men?"

"No. We just saw him out there, maybe a quarter after twelve. He came back before we did."

"I can go over to Maintenance and get him," I said.

At Mac Speedie's nod, I went to the neighboring department, and found Bell stretched out on his workbench, his arms cradling the back of his head. Although he looked done in, his eyes were open, and he was gazing intently at the open top drawer of his tool-chest. Propped up there in the drawer was the publicity photograph of a Hollywood starlet whom I recognized as Pearl Underwood.

"A fan of hers?" I asked.

He sighed, and closed his eyes. "A fan? Not exactly. She's my girl. I'd like to marry her."

I was a bit startled. Bell struck me as the serious type, with probably quite a few more brains than I possessed. I wondered what there was about him to interest an actress. Although we both were about an inch over six feet, I weighed two hundred stripped, and he probably didn't top one-fifty with his overcoat on. His shoulders were thin, and his face was long and lean.

I brought him back to the lab, and Mac Speedie let him view Red Conlon's body. There was no sharp hissing of indrawn breath. There was no grasping of support until knuckles showed white; nor was there a dazed look in the eyes. In fact, there was no change of facial expression whatsoever. Offering no comment, Bell merely gazed downward, his feet spread wide apart. At last his head came up. He now appeared to be staring at a knee-length rubber apron hanging on a hook on the rear wall of the supply-room.

I hadn't noticed the apron before, although there had been no attempt to hide it. Across its front there were several splotches of blood. Suddenly, Bell turned and bolted. He ran through the door, darted between a couple of test stands into the main aisle, sped down it toward the outside entrance, then suddenly halted before a trash can and became sick.

He retched again and again, then sat down on a bench and began to tremble. His face became covered with perspiration. Leaning over, he tried to control the jerking of his arms and body by clasping his hands tightly together, but it was no good.

Harvey Barnett came over. His own face was white. "I don't see why they forced you to go in there. You took it pretty hard, boy."

"I've only had a couple hours' sleep in the past three nights."

Hugh Moser said: "We've been working you too hard. All right, we have a company doctor. Mr. Mac Speedie will undoubtedly want to interview you this afternoon, but in the meantime, why don't you let the doctor check you over?"

The F.B.I. man nodded his assent, then went over to talk to the head of Plant Protection. When he was through, he beckoned Mr. Moser and me to one side.

"This investigation may get involved," he said. "I don't have the knowledge to understand all the test-room angles. In other words, I'm going to need a technical expert in whom I can have complete confidence."

"West is your man, then. I'll release him to you for as long as you need him."

"Good."

At my look of amazement, Mr. Moser smiled slightly, and putting a

hand on my shoulder, said: "You're wondering about the reason for my sudden change of attitude toward you. Didn't you know that you've been under secret investigation for the past couple of weeks? Your final clearance wasn't made until this morning. That's why I couldn't let you work over the week-end. Hated to offend you, and make you look ridiculous, but my hands were tied. There've been too many lab breakdowns. The report says you're clean, though."

Leading the way to the office Mr. Moser was placing at his disposal, Mac Speedie said: "I don't know whether we're investigating one crime, or two. Conlon's murder might be a separate deal from the sabotage. I don't think so, though. That would leave him open as a sabotage suspect. He might have been killed as a blunderer by an accomplice, at that; but from what I've heard, Conlon wouldn't have been good secret-agent material."

"Then why were the insulators in his pocket?"

"I don't know. In the first place, the guilty man quite obviously wanted to insure a fire. That's why he tampered with four valves, not just one. The first try, however, was successful. Maybe he planned to replace the insulators, but your shipping all the valves over to Research made that impossible. With the lab swarming with workmen on the rework job, maybe he had no opportunity to take them from their hiding-place. Perhaps Red Conlon found them, became suspicious of his man, turned amateur detective, and was killed to keep him from talking."

"That ties the two crimes together."

"Yes, but there are other possibilities. Conlon might have found the insulators, yet still not have been able to tie them to anyone. In that case, he might have been killed by one of the workmen to put an end to a jinx. That seems farfetched, but you'd be surprised how powerful the voodoo instinct is even among supposedly civilized people. I wonder in what section of the country the man Hurst was raised."

"Harvey Barnett was the only one with the opportunity."

"Locked doors, eh? Give us time, and we'll get them unlocked."

FOR the remainder of that afternoon, and for several days to follow, I might have been the technical expert for Douglas Mac Speedie, but that did not mean that I sat in on the questioning of the lab personnel. I was called in merely to check the accuracy of their statements regarding the lab, or about matters in which I had direct knowledge. Nevertheless, I was able to pick up certain information, such as:

A. That the lab had been combed for hours by experts, and no tangible clue uncovered.

B. That Douglas Mac Speedie was only one of many agents, other than the local police, working on the case.

C. That Tom Hurst had been raised in Florida, near the Everglades, and had never passed the fifth grade in school, and was known to be thoroughly superstitious.

D. That Leonard Bell had spent two brilliant years at Cal Tech, but ran out of money, and came to work at Falcon.

E. That Harvey Barnett had made the highest grade ever reached in the management tests at Falcon Aircraft, and that he was considered a heart-breaker among the ladies.

F. That the investigation was proceeding relentlessly, but so far without success.

G. That there were no further breakdowns in the lab. . . .

A week dragged by, and nothing new turned up. I suppose a lot of undercover work was being done, but it didn't seem to bring any results.

One afternoon I dropped into Douglas Mac Speedie's office. Although I'd pictured him as a tireless machine, his eyes were now slightly bloodshot, and he seemed dejected.

"All right," he said, "my book of instructions doesn't tell me to solicit free advice, but just the same, tell me who did it."

"I'm not a detective—nor a psychologist either. I don't ask you to do my engineering for me."

He placed his elbows on his desk, and leaned toward me. "By your mildly insulting manner, I deduce that an idea is rolling around in your head, and wants out, but that you're a little bit afraid of it."

I hesitated. Not only was I running the danger of making a fool of myself, but I also might be doing an injustice. And yet, with the information I had available, I could find only one answer.

"If I'm away off base, just let me know," I said, pulling out the drawing Leonard Bell had made for the fuel-bench drainboard. "Within an hour of the fire in the lab, this drawing was presented, the idea being that its use would prevent another flashing up from an electrical short. The plan is well thought out, don't you think?"

"Quite so. But then, Mr. Bell is a clever fellow. I suppose your point is that he had no time to make this drawing after the fire, and the fact that he was able to pull it from his sleeve at the time he did was too pat, and indicated he had prior knowledge that there'd be a fire."

I gaped at the agent. "My brick didn't make much noise when it landed. You're away ahead of me."

"Not so far. Tracing any suspect to subversive elements has been a bust. Perhaps you've fitted Mr. Bell with a motive I haven't thought of."

I regarded Mac Speedie suspiciously. "Any time that I could turn up a motive that you've overlooked!"

"I'm not being whimsical. In fact, I couldn't be more serious. Sure, I'm drawing you out; I'm picking your brains. That's because I need every idea I can find. Go ahead. What was Bell's motive?"

"SUPPOSE that he's a moth flitting around a flame, the flame in this case being the starlet Pearl Underwood, a lovely but expensive girl. Can Bell afford her on his regular pay? I doubt it. Now suppose he went about fouling up operations in the lab. He'd have to make repairs on overtime. Overtime pay mounts up. In order to continue playing up to Miss Underwood, what would be cleverer than for him to make sure that his pay-check was constantly being padded with time and a half, and double-time? Does it figure?"

"It might. Let's see." Mac Speedie drew a typewritten sheet out of a folder. "He had overtime in the past two months as follows:

" 'Replacement of clogged filter on Bench I, four hours; ditto on Bench IV; tearing down of fuse-box because of crystalized fuse, two hours; repair of internal leak on Bench II, eight hours; tearing down of Bench V to locate pressure drop, six hours; replacement of flow-meter on Fuel Bench, eight hours,' and so on. The total is more than a hundred overtime hours. Yes, Bell was kept busy, no matter what the cause."

"But with Harvey Barnett standing watch over locked doors, how could he have got in to murder Red Conlon?"

"My dear West, as lead man of Maintenance, he had to have access to all manufacturing departments. He carried a master pass-key. Locked doors would have been no obstacle."

My jaw hung open. "Why didn't I think of that!"

"If you didn't, I assure you that the idea occurred to our Mr. Barnett. In addition, he presented Bell with the same motive for murder that you did."

"No!" My head was spinning. "Why haven't you moved in on him, then?"

"What direct evidence have I got? A jury doesn't convict on mere theories, especially when the defense could point out alternate suspects who might fill the bill just as well, such as that big heavyweight Tom Hurst. You see, Hurst has a violent disposition, and he has spoken out against jinxes. I believe the police have been forced to go to his home three times to

*When Barnett arrived his manner was a trifle hesitant, even wary.*

stop him from beating his wife. So far, all he's used on her are his fists."

I sighed. "Does Bell point his finger at Tom Hurst?"

"No. At Harvey Barnett."

"Ah-h! Why?"

"For personal reasons. The two men have no use for each other. I can't see where Barnett would have gained from any dirty work, however. He's independently wealthy."

That just about wound up my meeting with the F.B.I. man. I decided that I was ill-equipped for master-minding, and that I'd leave it to him to run down the evidence he was looking for. It must have been slow coming, for another week went by without any arrests, or even any more news. The *saboteur,* it was apparent, had come to the conclusion that it was no time for any further rocking of the boat. There were no more accidents in the test lab.

At last Douglas Mac Speedie called me to his office. "Although Leonard Bell has covered up beautifully," he said, "we've decided that he's our boy. Would you like to help Mr. Moser and me smoke him out?"

I sat down hard. For some reason, my knees were shaking. "Being one of the bloodhounds never appealed to me. I don't think I'm going to enjoy this. Naturally, though, I'll help you in any way I can."

"Good. This will be strictly a psychological gambit. Bell has been seeing his girl friend every other night. This evening they'll be at the Forty-seven Club, out on the Sunset Strip. I hope your tux won't smell too much of moth-balls."

THE Forty-seven Club offered choice music, food, surroundings and drink, all for choice prices. Dimly lit booths with seats fashioned of zebra skin lined the walls, and in the center of the room, fringing the dance-floor, which could have been covered by a bath-mat, there were individual tables set up with a fine display of linen and silver.

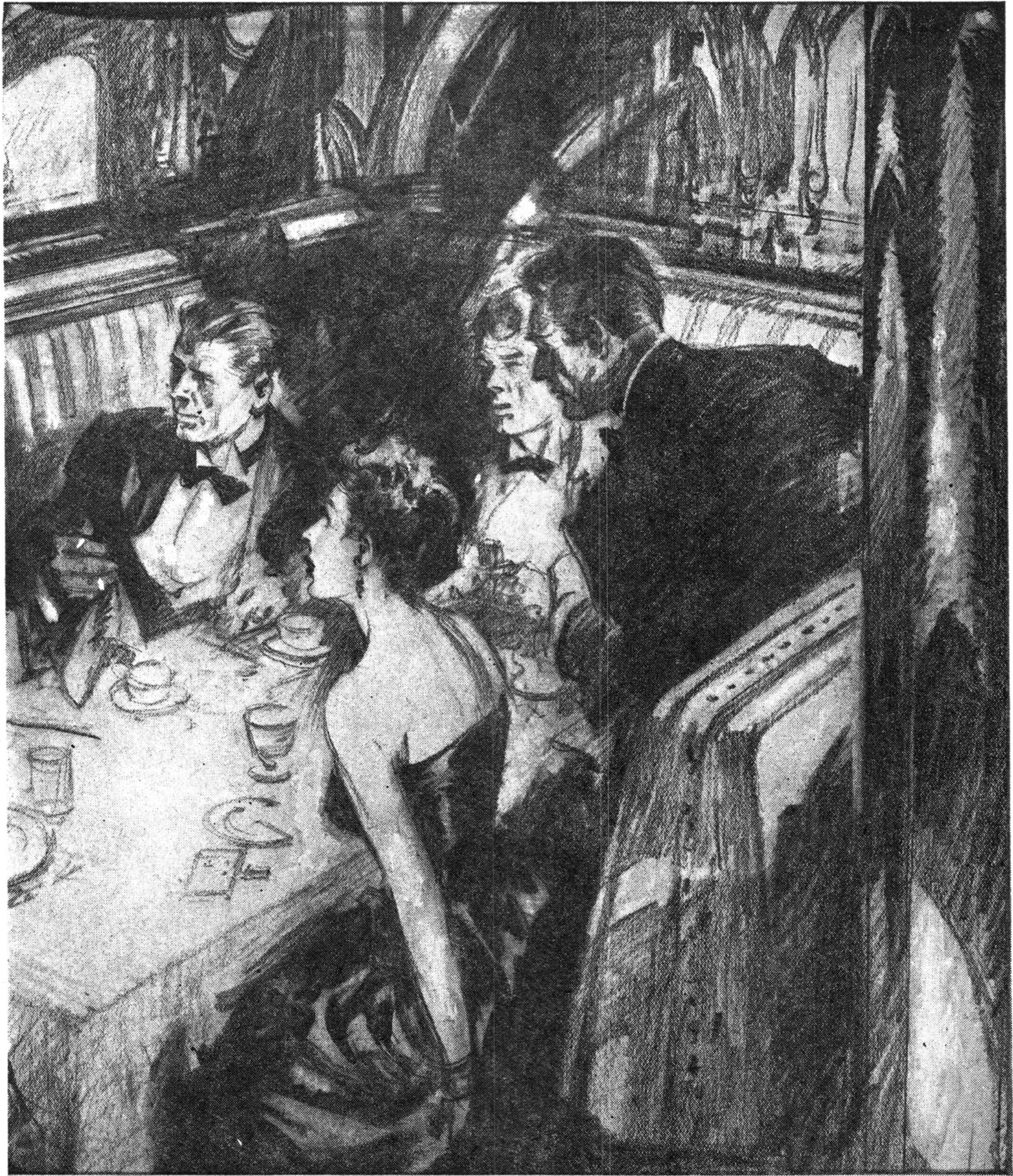
Douglas Mac Speedie looked suave in his evening clothes, and Mr. Moser distinguished. We were seated in a booth designed for privacy, and after we'd ordered our dinner, Mr. Mac Speedie said: "There they are now, sitting down at that far table. Bring them here."

Numbly, as though I were acting in a play, I rose, walked over, and said: "Mr. Moser's compliments, and he wonders if you'll join our table."

Leonard Bell was not at all enchanted by the idea; but when the girl heard that Mr. Moser was president of Falcon Aircraft, she rose eagerly to her feet.

The general idea is that the most beautiful women in Hollywood are the stars. This is not true. *They* can get by on talent. It's the starlets and stock girls who are made of the dream stuff. The one essential they must possess is beauty. Pearl Underwood was the prize of the current crop.

She had dark auburn hair arranged in an intricate coiffure. Her broad forehead was snowy white, and underneath calm eyebrows and thickly fringed lashes that really looked real, she had big, luminous brown eyes. Delicate hollows showed under slightly high cheek-bones. Her complexion was flawless, with not too much make-up to mar it. Her body was custom-built.



She was wearing a bare-shoulder evening gown of sea-foam green taffeta. On one of her long tapering fingers was a large square-cut emerald. Her voice was softly vibrant.

Deeply impressed, I led the way to our party. Mac Speedie and Moser were entirely cordial. The older man smiled from his wheelchair, and the F.B.I. man rose, bowing gallantly over the starlet's hand.

"What are you ordering tonight?" Mr. Moser asked.

"I am having *vichyssoise,* crab-meat cocktail, a New York cut steak, a baked potato, broccoli with cheese sauce, baby limas, a glass of milk," said Pearl, "and a strawberry mousse. A working-girl's diet."

Mr. Moser's face lighted up. "If you can do it, I can do it. I'll change my order to the same."

"Pearl is going to sing tonight," Bell said.

"You sing on a full stomach?"

"On any kind of a stomach." Pearl's lovely eyes were smiling. "I haven't learned to be an artiste yet. But I keep trying."

"You dress like an artiste," Mac Speedie commented.

"We must be seen. We must be talked about and photographed.

Luckily, my studio has a well-stocked wardrobe department."

I noticed that Mac Speedie was staring at the girl quizzically. Something was troubling me too. Her eyes were warm and full of zest, but her lips were cold and expressionless. I had never seen a combination like that before.

Her eyebrows went up, and as though she could read our minds, she said: "I had a tooth pulled this afternoon. Stiff jaw."

"And you're still going to sing?"

Leonard Bell frowned. He didn't seem to be enjoying himself. "Tell them the truth, Pearl."

"Too many detectives around here," she said. "All right, I was once in a train wreck. Some face nerves got cut. Now I can't smile; I practice in front of the mirror for an hour every morning, but so far I haven't found the right combination. In Hollywood, I'm just one more dead-pan among the other dead-pans. But it doesn't matter so much, does it?"

There was a short silence. "The expression in your eyes," Mr. Moser said, "compensates for everything."

"Thank you." She took a moment to inspect herself in a mirror, saw that she needed no repairs, and said: "If you'll excuse me, I'll now take my still empty stomach over to the microphone."

She rose swiftly and was gone, her chin up, her gracefully sloping shoulders superbly held, her walk lithe and quick. I was uncomfortable, ill at ease. Something was wrong, and I knew what it was. I had pictured Pearl Underwood as a cheap, empty-headed actress, and nothing more; yet here I was, liking the girl intensely. I was going to have to drop my preconceived notions about her into a wastebasket. Her voice, incidentally, was excellent, if you like the type that is two registers lower in singing than in speech.

Slowly, I remembered that I had a rôle to play tonight. Mac Speedie had given me careful instructions on what to say, and how to act. Unwillingly, beginning to hate myself, I turned, faced Leonard Bell and held a stare in his direction. The other men did the same.

"If anybody was worth it, I guess she was," I murmured. "I hardly blame you."

"Say, Bell," Mac Speedie broke in, "we've located three of those valve insulators. What did you do with the fourth?"

The young man frowned slightly. "Now comes the third degree, I suppose, that I've been waiting for. My answer is—what insulators?"

Mac Speedie ignored the question. "I'm interested in your reactions on the day of the murder. You looked at Red Conlon's body as calmly as though you were inspecting a rack of ham. And yet the sight of the bloody apron made you sick. Why was that?"

"You've asked me that before."

"I'm asking it again."

"I've answered it once."

"Then you'll have no trouble answering it twice."

A slow flush was beginning to creep into Leonard Bell's cheeks. He took a drink of water, his trembling hand making the glass clink against his teeth. With his napkin, he carefully wiped the palms of his hands. "I was *not* calm when I looked at Red's body. The sight of the apron turned my stomach because it showed that the murderer was so cold-blooded that he could neatly hang up the apron just as though he had finished a job in a butcher shop."

"And yet the speed of the murderer, and the way he was able to cover up all tracks, shows that he has an active and acutely intelligent mind."

Moser leaned forward. "I am firmly convinced that Mr. Bell is a brilliant man."

"Undoubtedly."

"I'm just intelligent enough to know that you have no evidence against me, and furthermore that you won't be able to stampede me into making any incriminating statements." Bell got to his feet. "I came here tonight because Pearl was singing. Right now I am moving to a spot where I can hear her in peace. After that, I'm going to the washroom and get an aspirin for my headache."

"Good enough," Mac Speedie said. "See you later."

I blinked. "What if he makes a break?"

"He won't get far," Mac Speedie answered, apparently unconcerned. His eyes met Moser's, and he shrugged. "No luck so far, eh?"

"Maybe I'm not up on the latest crime-detection methods," I exclaimed, confused and exasperated, "but where is this night-club third degree getting us? What did you expect to find out, especially by your hit-and-miss method of questioning? Frankly, I'm disappointed."

"Stick around awhile longer and relax," Moser said. "Maybe you don't get the picture now, but we've been laying the groundwork for a big scene. When the time comes, you'll understand what we've been driving at. Now let's listen to Miss Underwood."

We only had time for the last note of Pearl's encore. She stepped off the orchestra dais, and was starting to thread her way toward us, when a man stood up at a nearby table. She stopped suddenly, then held up her hand, palm out. The man sat down again. With a tingling shock, I realized that the stranger was Harvey Barnett.

"What goes on here?" I snapped. "Don't tell me you also have Tom Hurst on the scene, dressed as a waiter!"

"I thought of it," the F.B.I. man admitted, "but I decided not to overdo the act."

Pearl Underwood appeared by my side. I moved over, and she slipped into the booth beside me. It was a pleasure, until I noticed that she was no longer full of sweetness and light.

"Mr. Mac Speedie, even from the stand, I could see you putting the heat on Leonard." The young actress' voice crackled with ice. "I'm pretty good at judo. Mess with my boy, and I may break your good right arm. Also your left."

Mac Speedie raised his eyebrows. "As one judo expert to another, I advise you not to try it."

Leonard Bell rejoined us. Nobody said anything. The air was getting taut. For the first time I was beginning to feel that Mac Speedie knew exactly what he was going to accomplish, which still left me, in my ignorant state, feeling like a babe in the woods.

"I really believe that all that overtime you got wasn't enough," the detective said. "I'm sure that Miss Underwood is a luxury far too expensive for you."

Pearl glared at him. "Oh, how could I have overlooked it? I forgot to order my usual caviar tonight."

Leonard Bell's face was set. He looked dangerously near to losing control of himself. "Pearl won't say it, because she probably feels it would embarrass me. The fact is that she often sings for her supper. Tonight, for instance, there would have been no tab for me to pick up. There rarely is."

Pearl's eyes softened as she looked at the thin young man. "They didn't get you to admit anything?"

Bell looked genuinely astonished. "Of course I didn't admit anything. All they gave me was some idle talk."

"Only talk?" Mac Speedie murmured. "Suppose now we begin to turn a few screws." He beckoned a waiter and said: "Will you please ask Mr. Harvey Barnett to join us?"

I don't know why my heart took all this time to start thumping. But it did. Perhaps my excitement was increased by the fact that I hadn't the slightest idea of what was going on.

When Barnett arrived, I had to admit that he was an impressive-looking man. His manner was a trifle hesitant, even wary.

"I believe that you are well acquainted with Miss Underwood?"

"I certainly am." He seated himself opposite her, shot us all a questioning glance, then looked at Pearl. "I enjoyed your singing."

"Thank you."

I noticed that he couldn't keep his eyes off the young actress—not that I blamed him for that, but his whole expression was one of hungry, almost uncontrolled yearning. It was a naked, revealing look. "He's right," I thought, so surprised that I was unable to fit this factor into the picture. "He knows her well, and there's no mistake about that."

"Miss Underwood," the F.B.I. man said, "you're now completely surrounded by admirers."

"Then the evening should be getting downright delightful. Why isn't it?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Moser, "your trouble is that your admirers are so many that they tend to get in each other's way."

"I am aware of only one admirer here that I give even more than one little toot about."

Mr. Mac Speedie stroked his chin thoughtfully. "That's odd. I understood that you've been seeing a lot of Mr. Barnett, that he was one of your favorites."

"Wrong. I haven't even spoken to the man since he killed Red Conlon."

"That's not true. You told me to come here tonight to hear you sing." Barnett's eyes popped, his jaws sagged. "What are you trying to do to me?"

My mouth was hanging open too. Pearl Underwood had thrown in her big line so skillfully that its effectiveness wasn't immediately apparent. But when it hit, it was with a delayed reaction, just like an anti-tetanus shot. Even with my brain in its scrambled state, I was becoming conscious that there was some uncanny timing to this scene.

"I did what?" Pearl asked. She rose to her feet, reached across the table, and slapped Harvey Barnett hard across the face. His hands came up involuntarily to protect himself, but they weren't fast enough. She slapped him again, then fell back.

There was quiet, except for Barnett's heavy breathing. He had five accusing sets of eyes on him.

"Why would I kill Red Conlon?" he asked.

"Easy," Mac Speedie answered. "He discovered some evidence pointing to you as the *saboteur* of the hydraulics lab."

"But that's silly. I'd be interested in having my section run smoothly, not in trying to gum it up."

"Oh, good Lord!" I ejaculated, rocking back and forth. "I see the picture now. You and Leonard Bell were both after Pearl. By tying up Bell night after night on repair jobs, you thought you could cut in on him! That's why you planned all those breakdowns."

"I'll concede that you got more than you bargained for in the fire," Mac Speedie said. "You could hardly have expected Red to have fought it so stupidly."

"You filthy, underhanded schemer!" Pearl blazed. "And a murderer to boot."

Barnett's head jerked back. He was taking her words even harder than when she had slapped him. The pupils in his eyes were dilated. Breathing heavily through his open mouth, he jumped to his feet, staring transfixed at Pearl. Mr. Moser clapped a thin hand on him and tried to pull him down. Barnett brought his fist over and knocked Moser away, but before he could get out of the booth, Moser had him once more.

With a lightning movement, Barnett's left hand flashed out for the steak knife. Just as fast, a waiter hit him on the head with a water pitcher. Barnett fell forward into the aisle, and before he could get to his feet, I was jumping on him.

The waiter motioned with his hand, and three policemen rushed up and slapped handcuffs on Barnett.

"Good work, Norm," Mac Speedie said to the waiter. "An excellent job."

"One of your agents, I suppose?" My voice was probably shaky.

The F.B.I. man nodded, and said to one of the policemen: "You have the proper warrant for Barnett's arrest. Go ahead and use it." They took him away.

Pearl Underwood had a napkin to her eyes, and she was crying.

"If this whole scene was cut and dried," I said to Mac Speedie, "and you knew Barnett was the guilty man all along, why did you turn so much heat on Leonard, here?"

Pearl suddenly reached for Leonard Bell's hand. "Forgive me, darling, but I had to emote tonight, and you know that even if I am an actress, I can't do it cold. I need a warm-up."

"The only way to get past Barnett's guard was through Pearl," Mac Speedie explained. "She was his one weakness. And if the way to get her in the mood to play the scene right was to ruffle up her feelings, we were the men to do it. Nothing was more calculated to get her so keyed up emotionally than for us to pick on her boy. Of course she knew what we were doing, but we got her going just the same. That was a nice bit of acting, Pearl."

"And I was the patsy," I complained, "who was brought along to lend this scene the proper amount of —um, what's the word I'm trying to use?"

Pearl was blowing her lovely nose. "Realism."

"Realism? That's not what I meant. Wide-eyed stupidity," I said.

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# Last Laughs

*by WEBB GARRISON*

Thomas Kelley, who died at Redwood City, Calif., in 1929, probably thought he was being highly original when he willed that his two nieces throw dice for a $2700 diamond ring.

* * *

Mason Less, a prosperous South Carolina planter, was less personal in drafting his last laugh. He hated *all* his relatives. So he left his extensive holdings to the States of South Carolina and Tennessee jointly. "It is my will and desire," he wrote, "that no part of my estate shall be enjoyed or in any wise inherited, by either or any of my relatives, while wood grows or water runs."

* * *

William Shakespeare's domestic life is said to have been considerably less than placid. The whole truth may never be known, but this much is certain: the poet's will, dated March 25, 1616, provided that his wife should receive nothing but his second-best bed!

Then there's the case of a Glasgow doctor who left his estate to his sister. But he did not fail to remember his spouse. "To my wife," he decreed, "as a recompense for deserting me and leaving me in peace, I expect the said sister Elizabeth to make a gift of ten shillings, to buy her a pocket handkerchief to weep in after my decease."

* * *

A London cab driver managed to accumulate a comfortable nest-egg, but the nagging tongue of his wife wouldn't let him enjoy life. So one foggy night, he jumped into the Thames. When the will was read, his widow discovered that in order to receive any property, she must walk barefooted the entire length of Downing Street on each anniversary of his death. Carrying a lighted candle in her hand, she was to pause at every corner and read aloud a paper confessing that had her tongue been shorter her husband's days would have been longer.

# One Scaly Dragon

A moneylender finds an astonishing item among his victim's goods and chattels

by KENNETH CASSENS

MR. CROPPITT was more snappish than ever, even for a Monday morning. His bushy white eyebrows bent down over a look more steely than usual, the manager stared at Homer Jenks. . . . To Homer, Monday was a day worth doing without; with his boss in this vile mood, he should have "stood in bed." Ethel Slocum, the office secretary, showed in her face that she fully shared Homer's feeling. Homer recoiled a step away from the polished mahogany desk, reaching for the dark paneling with a steadying hand. Under the impact of Mr. Croppitt's frown, his gimpy leg was feeling most unsteady again.

"Yes sir," said Homer insincerely, hoping that for this miraculous once a soft answer would turn away wrath. "Yes sir." The one-and-a-half-leg-man for Brotherly Finance Corporation's Portland office batted innocent blue eyes at his boss. But Benjamin C. T. Croppitt merely looked as if he had bitten into an unripe quince, finding the tartly bitter fruit too sweetish for his taste. Homer felt his mousy brown hair lifting, his scalp and neck prickling, his leg aching.

"Jenks," growled Mr. Croppitt, "any more of this monkey business of going soft with people, and out you go. These people borrowed our money; they signed contracts putting up cars or furniture or whatever it happens to be for security. They agreed to pay the regular small-loan rate of three per cent a month. Jenks, you get every item on every chattel mortgage, even if it means throwing somebody's sick grandmother into the street. Yes, and get everything else of value you can get away with. They're only faking distress, anyway."

"Yes sir," replied Homer Jenks audibly, with an inner sigh. He knew that in most cases the distress of his victims was very real—as real as his own, after an expensive auto accident that followed a factory layoff had forced him into this fundamentally unwelcome employment. "I understand, sir. Every item. Still, this one—"

*"They're only faking distress."*

"I don't care what it is!" roared Benjamin C. T. Croppitt. His heavy jowls shook angrily. "Bring it in!"

Homer Jenks faced the Friendly Yes-man with the Engaging Personality with dogged despair. "But this item," he protested, "on the mortgage of this El Miro Ponderoso, the magician—I don't know how Ethel ever let it slip by in writing up the mortgage—one scaly dragon, sir—"

"Doubtless just a cheap gewgaw on his mantel shelf, to impress credulous customers," grated Croppitt. "Bring it in, and everything else, or—"

"Or?" ventured Homer, realizing immediately that he should have gone without further protest.

*"Else."* There was finality in every bristling white hair on Benjamin Croppitt's bullet head. Ethel Slocum ventured a commiserating wink, with a throat-cutting gesture as a parting salute. The door-closer hissed, and Homer limped gloomily down the echoing stairs, ignoring the elevator, which would be minutes in responding at this time of morning.

The revolving door that gave on the street had been set in motion by a shabbily but neatly dressed young woman, her blue eyes, momentarily raised to Homer's glance, vivid but quickly veiled. She was pretty, but bore the careworn look common to the typical customer of the Brotherly Finance Corporation. Homer sighed, and pushed on the door to escape to the watery sunshine of the drizzle-interrupted day. He'd be seizing this new customer's shoddy patched-up furniture some day, most likely. This dampness wasn't helping his limp any.

The boarding-house in which El Miro Ponderoso had set up his pitifully inadequate business of overt entertainment and covert wizardry was the reverse of impressive. The paint-peeled front, the worn steps, the sagging shutters and cracked window panes belied the stage name of the magician. Rather, the setting matched the real name, *Elmer Puddle,* signed beneath the more imposing one on the chattel mortgage nestling in Homer's hand.

*"Item,"* he read, *"one crystal ball."* What in time would BFC do with one crystal ball? *"Item: one bed. Item: one bed-davenport."* He sketched quickly through the familiar, usual list. *"One easy chair. Three dining-room chairs."* And he stared again at the notation near the bottom, that had roused instinctive fear: *"Item: one scaly dragon."* The eloquently sparse list dragged on through its detailing of all a man's accumulated worldly goods, so pitifully scant. . . .

Homer Jenks sighed again, and lifted his eyes to find the inevitable sign: *"Bell out of order."* He knocked gently, fearful lest the door fall down. Even that had happened to him, once. The lady who answered his knock was cracked of voice, her hair of iron gray pulled back in a severe style that added nothing modifying to its unattractiveness.

"I'm from the Brotherly Finance Corporation, ma'am," explained Homer Jenks. "I'm here to pick up this stuff on a mortgage of El Miro Ponderoso."

"Oh, that poor Mr. Puddle!" sighed the landlady. "He borrowed from you people so he could pay me the rent—it's paid until next Saturday, poor man. Well, he's much better off, I must say."

"Better off?" asked Homer, startled. "You talk as if the fellow's dead."

"Indeed he is," replied the woman in her cracked and whining voice. "Killed yesterday, by a taxi that he never saw. He was always going around with his chin on his chest, poor man, dreaming of some crazy good fortune, with his head in the clouds, poor man."

Homer roused from his attempt to picture a man with his chin on his chest and his head in the clouds, and waved the chattel mortgage. "I'd better get this stuff together quickly, then, and out of the way," he said. What he did not say, but had in mind, was: "There may be other creditors." Then he added: "Now, Mrs.—"

"Lackey," supplied the landlady. "Harriet Lackey."

"Mrs. Lackey, if you'll let me into this fellow's room, I'll check the items. May I use your telephone to call a truck, ma'am?"

"I haven't a phone," she explained, "but there's one in the grocery store on the corner. What items did he pledge to your concern?"

"An easy chair," replied Homer from memory. "A bed-davenport, some chairs, one scaly dragon, and—"

Mrs. Lackey's drab face brightened. "Oh, you're taking Clarence? I'm glad; I wondered what in the world I could ever do with him, poor creature. He tried so hard to make me understand something, but I couldn't fathom what he meant. I couldn't simply turn the poor thing out in the street, and the circuses and zoos simply wouldn't take Mr. Puddle's letters seriously. If he hadn't been killed, I'm sure Mr. Puddle would have sent Clarence back where he belonged."

"Clarence?" asked Homer, bewildered by the meaningless recital.

"The scaly dragon," replied the woman, her explanation leaving Homer no less befuddled than before.

"What is this scaly dragon?" he inquired. "Isn't it just some sort of shelf ornament? Some kind of window dressing for this magician business?"

"Clarence? Oh, my, no," went on the landlady, shivering a bit against the chill of the recent drizzle. "He's real."

"Real?" cried Homer, his leg hurting, but his surprised gray cells hurting worse, if that were possible.

"Oh, gracious, he certainly is, the poor thing," said Mrs. Lackey. "Mr. Puddle brought him through from something he called the fifth harmonic, or something like that. I never could understand half what the poor man was saying. Mr. Puddle—El Miro Ponderoso, you know—thought he'd make a million out of Clarence. But everybody thought he was crazy, and wouldn't even make an attempt to investigate. I'm certainly glad you're taking the poor thing; we ran out of feathers several days ago. Clarence eats nothing else, you know."

Homer's jaw sagged, then firmed in disbelief. He looked at his legs, certain that at least one of them was be-

*"Aughnngyarrk!" yawned Clarence. "Yipes!" cried Homer Jenks.*

ing pulled. "I'll look at the stuff," he said crisply, to forestall further nonsense. "Then I'll make that telephone call, as soon as I know what I'll need by way of a truck."

But Clarence was indubitably real. Very real. Scaly, as he had been described, with six legs ending in six-clawed toes and a tail nearly twelve feet long. A red-crested head reared from a slender iridescent green neck; a forked tubular tongue licked out toward Homer's face in a friendly yet terrifying fashion. Leathery eight-foot wings knocked whitewash and chips of plaster from the dingy ceiling. Yes, Clarence was real.

*"Aughnngyarrk!"* yawned Clarence, displaying a jagged row of gleaming purple teeth. The flicking tongue glowed phosphorescently.

"Yipes!" cried Homer Jenks, tripping backward over what appeared to be a fire extinguisher of the two-and-a-half gallon size. He was saved from a backward fall only by the surprisingly wiry right arm of Mrs. Lackey. "Ooooh!" moaned Homer weakly. Steadied, he summoned strength to set the rocking fire-extinguisher straight in its corner near the door. The leg-man wiped sweat from a taut, creased brow.

"He's not as bad as he looks," soothed the landlady.

This was made immediately apparent. The creature laid a scaly head against Homer's trembling leg, which Homer was at the moment too frightened to move. A rumbling purr came from the saurian's throat, and the tubular tongue flicked in and out between the thick green lips harmlessly. Homer, somewhat reassured by this pacific demonstration, regained his ability to breathe.

*Gee, this is nice,* came a completely unbidden thought. *This fellow seems like a pretty swell guy.*

Homer's perturbed brain almost turned a somersault. It must be his own thought; it was inside his skull. Funny, his leg felt better where the saurian's scaly head had pressed it.

Yet, deeply buried in his subconscious was the realization that the thought was "exonoutic," impressed on his gray cells from somewhere outside his own brain. For surely Homer Jenks would never, at this moment of introduction, refer to so terrifying a creature as a real scaly dragon, despite his innocuous name of Clarence, as "a pretty swell guy."

One thing was sure: he couldn't stand here until he grew roots into the shabby carpet. He had to call a truck and have the unfortunate Mr. Puddle's effects removed to the warehouse maintained by the Brotherly Finance Corporation, to be readied for the salesroom. Then he thought for a frantic moment of what a truckman would have to say at sight of and about Clarence. He had to do something about the scaly dragon: he had strict orders to bring the creature in.

Well, then, he'd do exactly that—and not to the warehouse, but to the BFC office. He hoped the light would be exactly right so he could see Mr. Benjamin Croppitt's face when Clarence twitched his scaly legs and tail through the office door, behind his terrifying head. If, that is, Clarence should prove willing to go! What to do with a recalcitrant dinosaur-like creature with six legs and two immense leathery wings was a problem Homer Jenks hoped not to have to face.

But when Homer Jenks looped an improvised rope of gaudy neckties from El Miro Ponderoso's rack about the dragon's neck, Clarence proved completely amenable. Still hardly believing in the creature's actuality, Homer led the saurian down the rickety steps and toward the corner grocery store. No truckman or taxi-driver would approach the beast; that was sure. If he took Clarence anywhere, it would be afoot, despite the gameness of his too-recently lacerated leg. Well, he'd make one last pleading call. If Mr. Croppitt continued to be inexorable, he'd have to lead the animal to the office. Despite his limp—which, strangely, seemed to be improving—he half hoped, half feared, that such a deed would be required. It might be worth the pain and effort to deposit the scaly dragon, both figuratively and literally, in his superior's lap. He wondered vagrantly for a moment if Mr. Croppitt wore a corset, as office scuttlebutt had it.

The grocery store was like innumerable others. Its windows were in grimy need of a washing that would do little good after the first three hours; its stock was faintly greasy with soot from the many inadequate chimneys of the squalid neighborhood. A child was stretching upward to lay a penny on the counter, eyes dancing at sight of the lollipop proffered in exchange by the short gray-haired grocer with the dark-rimmed glasses too big for his thin face.

"Use your phone?" queried Homer, the lollipop transaction over.

"Behind the desk," said the proprietor. "Town call, ain't it?"

"Yeah—Forest exchange. I'll pay you for it, though, anyway."

"No need," said the grocer. "Go ahead."

The desk was littered with order books and with spiked slips waiting a harried clerk's attention. The truck was quickly arranged for; and then Homer Jenks debated calling the office. Finally, he dialed the exchange letters and the first two figures, then changed his mind while reaching for the third, and hung up. This, he reflected, should be really good. He could stand it, limp and all.

Clarence, tethered outside, was sniffing over the window of the store, his forked tubular tongue pulsating redly. *Get out of that,* thought Homer, wordlessly. The dragon pulled back his head sharply, eying Homer reproachfully through the pane of the grime-streaked window.

Puzzlement tugged at Homer's brain. Could the dragon be a—a—what was the word? *Telepath,* came the clear thought—a person capable of telepathy, either/or sending and receiving. Homer blinked. It must have come from his own brain—but too quickly to be characteristic. Ho-

***"I don't care what it is!" roared Mr. Croppitt. "Bring it in!"***

mer turned to the counter and expressed his thanks, then bought three ten-cent chocolate bars in payment for the use of the grocer's telephone.

Two small boys, clothed somewhat raggedly, and accompanied by a smaller girl with stringy hair and a thumb in her mouth were staring at Clarence. "What movie you advertisin', Mister?" asked one of the boys.

"The Invasion of Mars," said Homer, inventing a title on the spot. "It'll be at the *Bijou* a month from now."

"Gee, Mister," said the little girl, removing her thumb from her mouth exactly long enough for the words to escape, "you gonna give away passes?"

"Sorry," replied Homer, faintly uncomfortable, "but I can't right now. I'll keep you in mind, though. Here—have a chocolate bar." He distributed the candy to the youngsters.

Illustrated by
CHARLES CHICKERING

*"Outside!" the girl gasped. "There's a—a something—outside!" She collapsed with a moan.*

THE children were left behind after a turn or two away from the rutted, narrow alley, but they were soon replaced by a growing group of larger boys, awed at first. But after a few moments, one of them ventured to throw a rock at the dragon's long scaly tail. The tail, however, was less awkward than its appearance. The prehensile tip fielded the flung stone neatly, and sent it back to miss its flinger's head by a scant inch. And this was done with not the slightest turning of the dragon's head in the direction of the boys. Thereafter, the creature was treated with careful respect by his growing train of followers.

A newcomer, doubting the whispered tale of the dragon's prowess, attempted to jump on the slender tip of Clarence's tail. He was promptly swept from his feet, with scarcely time for a squall of fright, and deposited in a puddle left by the morning's drizzle. There were no further assaults.

But by the time Homer had reached the better streets with his pet, he had decided definitely to call Benjamin C. T. Croppitt with an *Or Else* of his own. He stopped at the first sign advertising a public telephone and hitched Clarence to an awning pipe, barely noting the name "CLANCY'S" on the window.

It was not until he was inside that the combination of sight and scent made Homer aware that he was in a bar and grill. Hah! Suppose he should say to Mr. Croppitt: "I'm calling from Clancy's bar." Well, he wouldn't say it; he went to the telephone booth, the dim lights and shuttered window somehow making Clarence far less real than when Homer had been leading the beast along the streets. But the dragon came back to sharp actuality when a customer thrust his head out of the door, to bounce back in with a wild yell. The man's hat rolled off as he staggered back against the wall, eyes goggling, jaw wagging soundlessly after his first affrighted shout. Homer leaned on his good leg, rubbing at the other for a moment.

"Whassamatter, Owens?" inquired the bartender, with a brogue straight from Ireland by way of Maine. "What's eatin' ya?"

"Clancy," gibbered the customer, "th-th-they ain't n-no use havin' t-television inside, when you got the walkin' and jumpin' horrors tied to your awnin' outside!"

"Whaddayamean, horrors?" asked Clancy, striding to the door. He turned back, face blanching, to stare at Homer. Homer Jenks turned from the telephone to face the bar's proprietor with a sinking feeling.

Mr. Croppitt's final word had been: "No, I want no explaining. Bring that scaly dragon in. If this wild yarn of yours is to cover the fact that you've broken it, I'll take the cost of repairs out of your hide, so help me!"

Homer's frantic "But—" had been followed by a click as loud as it was final. "You asked for it, boss," muttered Homer, grimly. Then he lifted his eyes, to find himself confronted by an irate Clancy, face alternating between white and red, an extended finger shaking as he pointed it at Homer's middle.

"D-did you see anything s-s-strange outside when you came in?" stammered Clancy, wheezing with an asthma apparently brought on by his strong excitement.

"Me?" asked Homer. "I saw a taxi going by, a few puddles from the rain we had, a—"

"You didn't see a dinosaur, or somethin'?" demanded Clancy. "A craytur with—"

"Oh, that?" asked Homer, pacifically. "That's just Clarence. I'm taking him to the office. He's only a scaly dragon."

"A scaly dragon, is all," muttered Clancy, taking his head in both hands and shaking it as if to clear his brain.

"Where's the nearest Alcoholics Anonymous?" queried the shaken customer. "I want to sign the biggest pledge they've got."

"Just get out of here," begged Clancy, "and take your pet with you, while I try to forget—*waaaaaagh!*"

Clarence had poked an inquisitive head inside the door. His flicking tongue was luminescent in the gloom.

"Two pledges," muttered the customer. "Ten. A dozen!"

"Just go," pleaded Clancy, "before I break down and cry. Or something."

"I'll go," promised Homer, then added magnanimously, "and I'll leave Clarence with you as a pet."

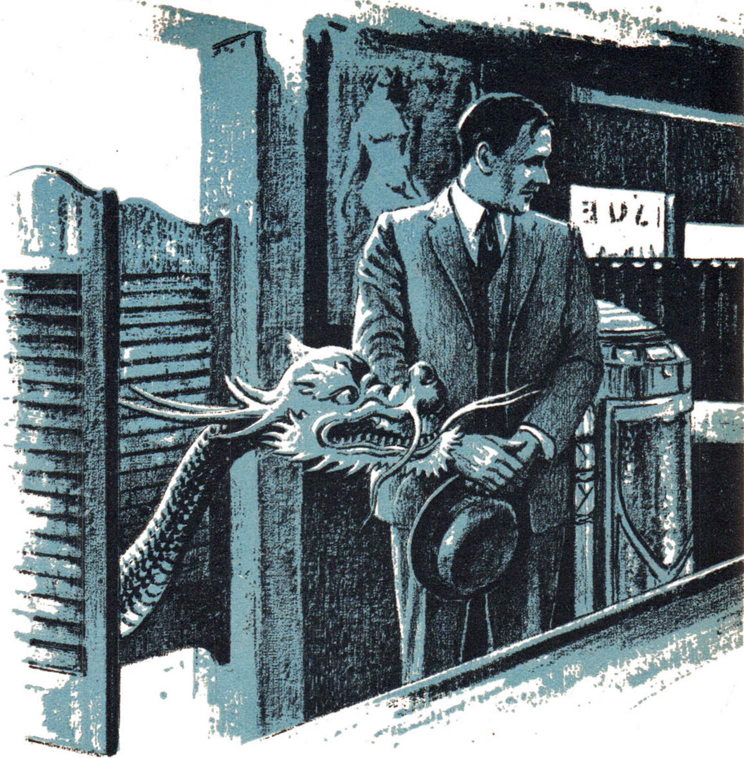
"Leave him," growled Clancy, his courage returning, "and I'll remember me ould skill with a bungstarter."

"Twenty pledges," murmured the ashen customer. "Fifty!"

"Git," said Clancy, ominously. "On your way, me lad."

"A hundred pledges," moaned the customer. "Clancy, give me three fingers, neat."

It was fortunate that the mid-morning lull was on the streets, and that the noon exodus of office workers and shoppers was not yet begun. Even as it was, Clarence was the cause of scarcely less commotion than a three-alarm fire, and of a bit more than would have been caused by a parade of bathing-suit models with two brass bands and a float-supported plate-glass swimming pool. Even Homer's limp was forgotten and he, shaken from long anonymity by the morning's strange events, began to bask in the light of this unexpected fame. He had not too much chest to thrust out for a proper pouter-pigeon strut, but like a scrawny old maid who has blundered by accident into a nudist colony, Homer made the best of what he had. Though BFC's leg-man's figure would never be called commanding, the interest generated by his strange companion inflated Homer's ego to the danger-point. Another mile of this, and he might even have courage enough to talk back to Mr. Croppitt. As for his gimpy leg, both the accident and the limp were buried too deeply for memory in the recesses of a strangely changing mind.



His emboldening was completed just in time. For with a screech of tires that brought even Clarence's green head swiveling around, a police car pulled up abreast of the odd pair. The single officer in the car yanked at his emergency, then slid from under the wheel to confront Homer Jenks, fuming.

"You! What is this whatchamacall-it—where's your permit for a parade? Who do you think you are, the ghost of Bring-'em-Back-Alive?"

"Officer," answered Homer with a calm smugness he could not have mustered an hour before, "I believe I saw something in the Portland Daily *Cablegram* about a new policy for Portland's police force. Something about politeness first."

"So I'm to march up to a gangster, am I," queried the officer, reddening, "and say, 'Please, won't you surrender to me, Mr. Swillinger, pretty please?' Yeah—we got a new policy. So, please, sir, tell me who you are and where you think you're going with that thing—before I unwind your head and stuff it down your own throat. And remember, I said, 'Please.' And furthermore, where's your permit?"

"By chance," said Homer, "I am a quiet and peaceable citizen, taking an item of property to my home office." He rubbed at his left leg, wondering what ever had ailed it. Both legs felt wonderful, now. Hey—this Clarence: there really was something about him! "I am also a taxpayer," continued Homer, "with a perfect right to the street and sidewalk."

"You," warned the policeman, "are an obstruction to traffic, a danger to drivers, and you are conducting a parade without a permit."

"I am merely," protested Homer Jenks, "escorting Clarence, itemized in a document now in my possession as '*One Scaly Dragon,*' to the offices of the Brotherly Finance Corporation, pursuant to the orders of Mr. Croppitt. For any further information you'll have to call him. And two persons, or one person and a dragon, do not constitute a parade. Otherwise, nobody could take a dog for a walk."

"A dog's gotta have a muzzle, a leash and a license," snapped the officer. "You've got none of them."

*If this officious person persists in his opposition,* came a clear exonoutic thought, *I may be able to cull from his mind further details of something concerning a certain fireman's wife.*

The officer's face turned beet-red. His mouth was working as he gasped and shrank away from Clarence. Homer stared at both his companion and the policeman. Then the beast was a telepath, after all!

*A telepath,* agreed the soundless thought, *but not a beast. I am a person, by every definition of the word. Now, sir, if you'll escort me and my friend to the place we wish to reach, we'll forget what I just mentioned.*

"Just move along," breathed the suddenly humbled policeman, "and I'll pace you to the side door of the Plackett Building."

Homer Jenks smiled affably. "Thanks," he replied. "And I don't remember a thing that's been said or thought, with the exception of your last generous offer."

But the final hurdle had not been surmounted. Homer had not paused to think of the complications involved in getting a saurian with eight-foot wings and a twelve-foot tail through a revolving door. Nor had Clarence, despite his unexpected perspicacity, foreseen the difficulty.

By now, realizing the dragon's reliability, Homer had taken off the leash of neckties. Going in through the door, he was faced by the shabbily-dressed but definitely pretty girl he had earlier seen, now on her way out of the building. Homer turned to look back for Clarence, only to have the girl erupt from a suddenly accelerated door into his startled arms. Instead of going on out, she had apparently gone full circle.

"Outside!" she gasped. "There's a —a something—outside!" The girl then collapsed with a moan, sagging against Homer with a weight that almost carried him to the floor under

*"D-did you see anything s-s-strange outside?"*

her. Ungallantly, Homer let her slide gently to the worn marble, then stared through the glass at the puzzled dragon, still outside. His leg wasn't so good, now, and he couldn't support both the girl and himself.

*I didn't mean to frighten the young lady,* came the apologetic thought, unimpeded by wood, glass, or the brick and stone of the walls. *But—I can't navigate through that strange sort of aperture that's closed even when it's open.*

"But I can't leave you out there," wailed Homer.

"You're so right," came the muffled voice of the escorting police officer. "Get the janitor; these things can be swung together and locked open."

But there would be difficulty, too, in getting the creature up the marbleized iron stairs, with their twisting turns. Homer, however, half turned to find the building's custodian, when a thought formed again in his mind.

*Let me catch your mental picture of the building more clearly,* came a swift command from Clarence. *Oh, yes—go to the third floor, and open the window that opens on the corridor. These wings aren't just appendages. I can fly up and crawl in; the aperture seems to be large enough.*

The girl was stirring, and Homer was suddenly stricken with a sense of responsibility for her. "Lady," he begged, "can you stand up? Can you walk?" The girl's eyes fluttered in response, and Homer continued: "You'll be all right. I'm going to get the creature that scared you out of the way."

Her eyes, an intense blue, were now fully open. "If you mean you're leaving me here, brother," she said flatly, "you're extremely wrong. Where you go, I go. I'm not taking one step alone until I'm sure I'm not nuts. What did you say the thing was?"

"A dragon is the best word I know for him," admitted Homer, "though he seems to be rather more than that. Come on upstairs with me, then."

THE elevator slid to a stop at the third floor, and they tugged together at the sash of the window at the corridor's end. In a matter of seconds, Clarence was scratching at the window sill with clawed front feet; then, with a faint scraping of leathery wings, the creature was inside. The girl, standing behind Homer, thrust a cautious head past his protecting shoulder. Then she observed in a tone of surprise, "Why, he's nice. A lot nicer than that Mister Croppitt, who had such a time over lending me fifty dollars. I'll never call a sourpuss like him 'an old dragon' again."

*Thank you, young lady,* came the courtly thought.

The first glimpse of Mr. Croppitt's face was worth all the morning's effort. The doubly doubled chins, the sagging jowls, were no longer the terrifying appendages of a scowling and unfriendly face. Instead, they were sagging blobs of terror-whitened fat, dragging downward with fear.

*He's not quite sure he's sane,* came Clarence's explanation. *He's getting the idea that you've hypnotized him somehow. Or that the young lady has done something to him.*

"Who said something?" asked the puzzled girl. At her query, Ethel Slocum straightened from an opened file drawer, looked up, and fled from the room with a squeal, papers trailing in a tornado of debt memoranda.

"Clarence is a telepath," explained Homer. "He can project thoughts into your mind, and read your thoughts in return. Be careful, little gray cells, what you think."

"Can you read my mind?" queried the girl. "If you can, I apologize. And I don't feel that way about you any more, anyway."

"I don't mind," grinned Homer, "so long as what you think now is nice."

*Me too,* came the exonoutic thought.

BENJAMIN C. T. CROPPITT finally regained control of his larynx, though the voice that emerged was a husky remnant of his usual hack-saw grating. As he spoke, his jowls continued the flaccid trembling. "Jenks," he said, trying to control a quaver, "you're fired."

"Mr. Croppitt," retorted Homer firmly, "I obeyed orders to the letter. You said, 'Bring that scaly dragon in.' I brought him in. Now he's your baby."

"Miss Gilfoyle," inquired Mr. Croppitt, acid slowly bubbling back into his voice, "what's your connection with all this?"

"I merely got the wits scared out of me by your pet," replied the girl sharply. "And I think I'll establish the fact right now, before witnesses, that I'm a nervous wreck."

"If you plan to get a larger loan than the fifty I gave you," grunted the recovering financier, "you're mistaken. Now, just leave me with Jenks, please."

"You *gave* me?" exclaimed the girl. "I'm paying three per cent a month, Mister, on every penny of it. I'm paying for this show, and I'm staying to see it out—or else, if I'm compelled to go, I'll sue."

"Sue? For what, on what basis?" grated Mr. Croppitt.

"Sue for a million, on the basis that I'll never be the same again. This

*"What is this whatchamacallit? Who do you think you are—the ghost of Bring-'em-Back-Alive?"*

creature was brought in under your orders; Mr. Jenks said so," warned the girl.

*Homer,* the implanted thought came, *let's get out of here. I don't like this old foodle-poodle. And I think you can help me back to my own sphere.* The dragon's tongue flicked in the financier's direction.

HOMER ignored the thought for the moment.

"What'll I do with this creature?" asked Homer, hoping that Mr. Croppitt was telepathically blind, or that the thought had been screened from him. "Do you want me to tether Clarence to a desk leg, or shall I put him in an interview-room?"

"You're still fired," raged the Yes-man with the Engaging Personality. "Get out, and take your beast with you."

"If I'm fired," pointed out Homer Jenks, his boldness growing, "I'm no longer responsible for your dragon. Good-by, Mr. Croppitt. I can't say I've been happy to work with you. Be good to Clarence. Are you coming with me, Miss Gilfoyle? I'm afraid the show is over."

"You might as well call me Myra," said the girl. "I feel as if we'd been through a lot together."

"My name's Homer," agreed the ex-leg-man for BFC. "I'm one of the unemployed. But I can stake you to a lunch, Myra. Good-by, Clarence."

*If I didn't know what you were thinking,* commented Clarence in his silent fashion, *I'd be worried. I'll play along, though.*

"I think after lunch," continued Homer, "that I'll be a vacuum-cleaner salesman."

"I haven't any vacuums that need cleaning," wisecracked Myra Gilfoyle. "But perhaps I can think of some friends who have dirty vacuums."

"You can't leave this beast with me," protested Mr. Croppitt, visibly shaken. "What does he eat?"

"Feathers," said Homer. Then, on puckish impulse, he added; "Finery, financiers—anything beginning with F."

*A trifle exaggerated,* came the dragon's exonoutic thought. *But I'll string along.* The fluorescent tongue gleamed as green jaws armed with purple ivory gaped widely. A fierce thought grew immense in the dark-paneled office: *I wonder if this fellow tastes as blubbery as he looks?*

Homer grinned as the financier started wildly, then popped under his desk, with the round of his buttocks faintly visible. There was no doubt that the manager of BFC had caught the menace, if not the exact thought. From his undignified position of comparative safety—save from attack in the rear—the manager's voice quavered humbly, "Mr. Jenks, you are still employed by us. And your task for the rest of the day is to dispose of that—that monster."

*Homer,* queried Clarence, blinking sorrowfully, *do you think I'm a monster?*

"Of course not," answered Homer. "Come on, Clarence." Homer realized as he turned that his soreness of tortured leg-muscles was completely gone. And he knew, now, that Clarence had something—a great deal to do with it. Gratitude welled up in him toward the dragon.

The door closed behind the strangely assorted trio. There was a sound of scraping furniture, a darkening of the frosted window that suggested a hastily erected barricade.

"MYRA," Homer confessed, "I really don't know what to do."

"You *are* fired, Jenks," rasped Mr. Croppitt's yelling voice from behind the furniture-reinforced door. "And don't come back, or your pet, either."

*Let it pass, pal. You could do worse than to come home with me, both*

*of you,* came Clarence's reassuring thought. *As for that guy, I can spill some dirt: he's been selling repossessed goods and putting excess profit in his own pocket.*

Homer stored the last bit of information away among his gray cells, and attacked the earlier invitation. "What do you mean, home?" he asked. "The boarding-house where I found you?"

*No. I mean the quantum harmonic where El Miro Ponderoso found me,* transmitted the dragon. *The fifth harmonic—yours is the third. Some people call it a dimension, but the term is a misnomer. All harmonics have all dimensions, all six of them, and are intertwined beyond the fourth. Am I beyond your depth?*

"I drowned long ago," admitted Myra.

"Me too," added Homer.

*Meantime, I'm hungry,* added Clarence, with a mental groan. *Where can we get some feathers?*

"I've some feather pillows in my apartment," supplied Myra. "I want to trade for some foam rubber ones, anyway."

"But how'll we get Clarence through the streets?" puzzled Homer. "And it won't do for me to go to your apartment with you, anyway, will it?"

*I don't have to walk,* interrupted Clarence. *I can hover overhead, and follow you, even if you take a bus.*

"I'm not worried about you," smiled Myra. "And we'll have Clarence for a chaperon. I haven't any family to worry about me, and the neighbors will all be busy eating. Of course, if you're worried about your safety—"

Homer flushed. "You got me, pard," he grinned. "No, I was worried about you, Myra. I haven't any folks, either, by the way. Clarence—alley-oop, flaps up, retract your landing-gear, do whatever you do—and take off. How far's your place, Myra?"

"Eight blocks—a ten-minute walk. We won't bother with the bus; I've got to pick up something for our lunch on the way."

"Hey, I was going to take you to lunch," protested Homer.

*Keep your thoughts fixed on me from time to time, and I can follow you,* came the impressed thought.

"Okay," agreed Homer.

Scaly six-toed claws gripped the sill of the open corridor window, and, with a momentary heavy flapping of his leathery wings, the dragon soared, to hover effortlessly above the buildings. Homer, still more than a little bewildered by the kaleidoscopic shift of events, punched the elevator button. Myra, obeying the universal foible that no other person can make proper use of such a contrivance, pushed it in her turn.

Fortunately, scarcely one person in a thousand, in a city, ever looks up. In a rural area, Clarence would have been spotted immediately; in Portland, no gaping crowds gathered to stare at the hovering dragon.

"Myra," mused Homer as they walked briskly along, "we got problems. I'm out of a job; you've no money, or you wouldn't be borrowing; and we've got Clarence on our hands. I don't feel like saying *'Scat'* and shooing the poor thing away. I've an idea Clarence would be helpless without us. As far as this 'fifth dimension,' or whatever he called it, is concerned, it sounds to me like hooey."

"And if we did go with him," added Myra, "I'm sure a diet of feather pillows would never agree with us. Here's the Green and White—let's get some hamburger."

"I'll buy the meat," proffered Homer, turning in past the gleaming front of the store. *Stay aloft, Clarence,* he thought silently. *We won't be long.* "How much, Myra?"

In a few moments, having a bit of luck in finding a cashier free to check them out immediately, they were on their way down the steeply sloping street toward Myra's apartment. The two rooms were tastefully if sparsely furnished, and scrupulously clean.

"Clarence can come in for a landing," said Myra, and with a hiss of wings, the dragon was in the street below the second-story window. Myra flung it wide, and, with some squeezing and scraping, the dragon made it into the small bedroom, filling it, however, to the point of suffocation. The two humans were thereby confined to the kitchen.

"Here, Clarence," said Myra, "I'll rip open a pillow for you." She clipped at the threads that held the ticking, and shortly the dragon was consuming the feathers with his licking tongue. The scent of frying hamburger rose from the lighted gas stove, where Homer was getting at the preparation of a meal for the two human beings.

"We've one problem less," sighed Homer after a few minutes. "We're not quite so hungry as we were."

"That's a real blessing," commented Myra. She added, speaking to Clarence, "Clarence, how do we get you home?"

*It's really quite simple,* explained the dragon. *Among El Miro Ponderoso's effects is the apparatus with which he visited my harmonic, and brought me here. He refused to send me back, and I cannot operate the machine myself, due to digital difficulties. The dials, you see, and the console tabs, are constructed for human use.*

"I haven't an idea in the world as to what you're talking about," interrupted Homer. "But I'll do my best to help you, pal."

The dragon sighed, and continued his explanation: *The magician thought he'd make a pot of money, but nobody would believe him when he described me. Then, as you know, he died. I'm glad a person as understanding as Homer came along.*

"Me too," said Myra, and her glance was not for the dragon.

Homer merely looked bewildered, then said, "Anything for a pal. But—this apparatus is among Ponderoso's stuff? Unfortunately, it's all in the clutches of Brotherly Finance now—meaning, Benjamin Clutch-Tight Croppitt. And I have all the chance of getting any of it that a skunk has of being elected president of the perfumers' association."

The dragon's response was an audible, "Oof!"

"Can't we catch the truckman before he gets to the warehouse?" asked Myra Gilfoyle. "I'm in this with you right to the end, you know."

"I'm afraid not," sighed Homer, after a glance at his wrist watch. "Maybe if I crawl to Mr. Croppitt—no, he'd merely gloat. That's just what he's hoping I'll do. He can say 'No' in seven languages, just by looking at you."

"You're telling me?" shuddered Myra. "Look, Homer—can't you get to the warehouse, while they still think you're an employee, and maybe—"

"It's an idea," agreed Homer. "Stay here with Clarence, Myra—what's your phone number? I'll dust over and see what I can do. The apparatus, whatever it is, wasn't listed on the mortgage, I'm positive. But I also know mighty well that the driver picked it up; it's BFC policy to pick up everything that's loose, and listen to protests later—with a deaf ear."

"It sounds like a fine way to get into trouble," was Myra's comment. "Don't they have to go by any rules?"

"Rules, yes. But Benjamin C. T. Croppitt interprets them so long as he holds down the top desk. Not all finance men are like that. But what'll we do with Clarence if I can't do anything?"

"Listen, cautious Homer," advised Myra, "you're a leg-man: use 'em. Use 'em fast, and worry later. I'm not a bit afraid of Clarence any more; I think he's ducky—and I want to help him as much as you do."

Clarence purred, laying a sinuous head on the girl's shoulder through the bedroom door. The dragon caressed her cheek with his tongue, and Myra did not shrink away. *I think it would be a grand idea for you two to join me in my dimension,* he argued in silent mental speech.

"And eat feathers?" protested Myra. "Homer, on your way."

*There are other edibles there, that mammals can eat,* Clarence reassured her. The thought reached Homer as he trotted down the steps and out of the chipped front door. But he had other fears, fears that were not groundless.

For, when Homer Jenks reached the warehouse, he found Mr. Croppitt ahead of him, recovered from his fright and sniffing eagerly for possible profit for himself among the deceased magician's effects. Big as life and twice as unnatural, Mr. Croppitt glared at Homer as a dowager might glare at a cockroach on the rim of her punchbowl.

"There's an item in that truckload, sir," ventured Homer desperately, "that doesn't belong with the rest. It wasn't on the mortgage, and—"

"The owner hasn't objected, has he?" grated Mr. Croppitt, white brows lowered in a fierce scowl.

"The owner is dead," admitted Homer, immediately realizing his mistake. Now, the chance of successful pretense of acting as the owner's agent was done with. And he realized with a further sinking that he had no idea what he was looking for.

*Woe is me!* thought Homer.

Suddenly an object took shape in his distraught mind, and he realized that Clarence, unhindered by the distance of many city blocks, had received his distressed thought, and was projecting an image of the apparatus he sought. It was something rather like a large brass fire-extinguisher, having two dials and a keyboard of stops resembling an organ's console down its side. There was a vague impression of a hazy hoop of light attached in some way to the object, and of a vortex of churning power inside its shell. Unnamable wires and bus-bars projected at crazy angles, like a television antenna gone mad. And one stud on the machine's upper part suddenly glowed a danger-warning red, with the caution, *Don't touch this,* transmitted clearly.

OTHER information was coming through, and Homer stiffened.

"Mr. Croppitt," he said determinedly, "I've got to have an item from that material. You've always forbidden your collectors to feel squeamish about any means of getting BFC their full due; now it's my turn, with you as the victim. How much did you make on that Slattery deal, when you took a whole houseful of furniture on a seventy-dollar debt? BFC got only their two hundred and seven dollars of payment of principal and interest; but the stuff must have brought a full five hundred. Whose pocket held the rest of the money?"

Benjamin C. T. Croppitt grunted, paling. "Four hundred and thirty dollars was all—" he began, then turned paler still with realization that his own anger—or a mental drive from the outside—had forced him to give himself away. "BFC has always got all that was coming to them," he snapped.

"And a reputation of being heartless wolves—for your benefit!" charged Homer. "While you raked in ten times the profit the organization did. I remember a few other deals, now."

"I'll not listen to your threats!" blustered the financier.

"You don't have to," murmured Homer, suddenly making his voice cloyingly sweet. "But the attorney for BFC's head offices will, and maybe the State's Attorney as well. You operate under a pretty strict license, as we both know."

BEADS of sweat were on the white pudgy face. And Homer Jenks, long trained to know the signs of breaking, pressed home his advantage.

"All you need to do," promised the leg-man, "is to let me take one piece of apparatus, useless to anyone who doesn't understand it. You may come too, if you want to protect your interests. Do that, and I forget what I know."

The financier was scowling fiercely still, but his fingers trembled nervously. "And I suppose you'll club me into giving you back your job?" he grated.

"I wouldn't work for you again if you were the last man on earth," answered Homer, oblivious to the illogic of his statement.

"What guarantee do I have that if I agree, this ends the matter?" demanded the financier.

"The same guarantee that you have that I'll raise merry Nell if you don't," barked Homer Jenks. "My word."

"I'll go with you, just to see how crazy a man can get," decided Benjamin C. T. Croppitt. "Now, what's the gadget you want?"

"I'll find it very shortly," promised Homer.

When he saw the apparent fire-extinguisher, he remembered stumbling over it earlier in the day. A closer inspection than he had then made now showed the curious antennae folded against the brass of the cylinder.

"Take it and come along," directed the financier irritably. "But what good it is, is beyond me, Jenks. I'm coming with you to find out, though."

"I'm not sure what it's for myself," admitted Homer. "But Clarence knows."

"I'm glad somebody does," grated Mr. Croppitt. . . .

Clarence could not turn around in the small bedroom; and it was chancy work getting him down the narrow stairs. But it was done, and the dragon stood at last on the warm asphalt of Jewel Street, sniffing the exhaust-tainted air of the sun-warmed afternoon. The puddles were gone; and little trace of the morning's drizzle remained.

At the dragon's mental direction, while Mr. Croppitt watched sourly, Homer Jenks unfolded the complicated antennae. At the touch of a button, the organ-console stops came into view. One stud glowed redly, and Homer remembered the prohibition concerning it, so carefully avoided its vicinity.

*Press one, three, four, and seven,* came the directive. *If you want to visit my world and return to your own later, press eight, two, and five to preset for a return in an hour. The machine will become invisible in thirty seconds, so it is unlikely to be disturbed.*

"I'll try anything once," agreed Homer. "Myra, you can stand by and watch the machine, can't you?"

"Nothing doing," said Myra firmly. "I'm going with you."

"Don't touch that red stud, anybody," warned Homer.

A glowing circle of hazy light appeared, about eight feet in diameter, attached to the apparatus at one side. *Run, and jump through quickly,* came the dragon's command. Then the creature himself leaped for the hoop, to vanish from the street, leaving only a faint stirring of the still afternoon air to mark his passing.

"Take my hand, Homer," directed Myra. "And—let's go, before I get too scared!"

"I'm in this up to my neck," admitted Homer. "I might as well be over my head! Okay—jump!"

"What about my fifty dollars?" wailed Benjamin Croppitt as they ran past him. "And my machine? It's vanishing!"

THEY tumbled to purple grass on the lush surface of a strange and richly colored world. The trees grew feathers instead of leaves; and Clarence was already licking up a meal. With hissing wings, others of his kind arrived excitedly, to gather about their returned friend. Their vibrating tongues, in this new environment, formed audible sound somewhat resembling the deeper tones of a pipe-organ.

The chorus of voices was strangely melodious; and the thoughts were as understandable as Clarence's terrestrial ones had been. Homer and Myra, now on their feet, stood absorbed in wonder.

"Kah-Renz!" one of the dragons was crying excitedly. "Oh, Kah-Renz! It's so good to have you home!"

*"I'm not afraid of Clarence any more," said Myra; "I think he's ducky." Clarence purred.*

"It's a great relief," replied Clarence. "Oh, yes—I brought some friends. Homer and Myra—meet my wife, and my son, and some of my neighbors."

They were interrupted by a tearing crackle from the hazy circle behind the two humans. A hurtling object that might have been Mr. Croppitt came briefly into and out of sight.

"The fool!" cried Clarence. "He pressed the red stud; he must have! Now he's gone into the seventh dimension—a horrible one, full of grublike and spiderlike creatures, always preying on each other. And he's destroyed the machine to boot. It will take twenty years to build another! You don't know how sorry for you I am, Homer and Myra."

"Then we can't get back?" wailed Myra.

"Not for a long time," admitted the dragon. "But you'll be well fed here—there are cereal grasses, and edible fish and mammals—and we'll take complete care of you."

"We'll be wards of the Government?" queried Homer.

"Government?" The dragon's nose was wrinkled. "We have none. We need none. We can all understand each other with or without speech; there's no cheating, no lying, no thieving, and we abhor murder."

"No income tax?" inquired Homer, trying to adjust himself to the new concept. "No rent to pay? And—no human beings except ourselves?"

"And you most welcome," said Clarence. "No, to all your questions."

"Brother," cried Homer, "there's no hurry about that apparatus for getting back!"

"What about me?" asked Myra Gilfoyle, her voice small.

"Clarence—you and your friends, come a bit closer," requested Homer. "I, Homer Jenks, in the presence of God and these witnesses take thee, Myra Gilfoyle, to be my lawfully wedded wife; to love, honor, and cherish, to have and to hold. If I've left anything out, I think it'll be excused under the circumstances."

"You certainly did leave something out," snapped Myra.

"What?" queried Homer, startled at her vehemence.

"You didn't ask me."

His face fell, and he turned scarlet. But before he could speak, Myra laid a finger to his lips.

"This is my answer," she said, her look demure. "I, Myra Gilfoyle, gladly take thee, Homer Jenks, to be my lawfully wedded husband, according to the laws yet to be of the human race within this place. I promise to love and honor thee, to cherish thee in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, for better for worse, until death do us part."

Homer turned, his arms open, a shout of joy on his lips. His leg was forgotten; it was as good as new; it was better than new!

After a moment's contemplation, Clarence and his friends tiptoed a little distance, then took off in whirring leathery wings to clear the tops of the scattered feathery trees. Their melodious speech-tones faded from human ears too oblivious to hear.

**THE AMERICAN DRAGOONS GOT INTO THE LONG-ABANDONED FORT THE WAY ETHAN ALLEN, IT IS SAID, GOT INTO TICONDEROGA — THROUGH THE LATRINE. BUT THEY HAD A HARD TIME TO HOLD IT AGAINST THE SEMINOLES.**

# Ghost *on the*

HERE on the sunbitten riverbank, the dog-fennel was head high—a green wave of fern that rose from the lip of the stream to merge with the palmetto scrub on the higher ground. Hunched like a cautious caveman, Brevet-Captain John Carter studied the fort one more time, before he rose to his full height and moved boldly forward. In the hot stillness all around him, three full squads of the First U. S. Dragoons heaved to their feet in unison—and followed their officer in a long arc. Mills rifles at the ready, eyes narrowed after hours of squinting into the glare of the Florida afternoon, the Army converged on Fort San Juan—and held its collective breath as it drew within gun range. *If Coacoochee is holed into that ancient Spanish bastion,* thought Carter, *it must spout death in another moment. If we've outdistanced him after all—if we can put those same gray walls between us—we may even keep our hair till morning.*

The year was 1841; and the First Dragoons, fighting through four grueling years of Indian warfare in the Territory of the Floridas, had been knit long ago into a compact engine of destruction. This afternoon, the small force under Carter's command had sallied forth from headquarters in St. Augustine to check on the precise damage Coacoochee had inflicted in his last raid. Pausing but briefly at the Picolata ford, they had stabled their mounts within the stockade, and proceeded down the east bank of the St. Johns on foot; for the First Dragoons, despite its resounding title, had operated as infantry during most of this nightmare conflict. They had learned long since that cavalry had its uses—for the first gallop to the edge of Indian country, for the even more important dash back to Augustine when help was desperately needed. But actual missions went more smoothly afoot, or in a dugout canoe: it was better to hug the earth when one entered the scrub, to play the game by Coacoochee's rules.

Or so Brevet-Captain John Carter reasoned once again, as he counted heads among his command. Learning their trade in a hard school (where a slip meant death, with or without torture) his dragoons had shed most of their uniforms at the Picolata stockade. The long light-blue coat with its flaring white revers and bandoliers made far too good a target among the palmettoes; and the high-crowned Army hat had betrayed too many scouts to a well-ambushed enemy. Today nearly all the command resembled beavers more than soldiers — stripped to their smallclothes, and daubed with river mud and bits of greenery to blend their bodies with the terrain. Carter himself wore nothing this afternoon but tattered nankeen trousers, thrust into an ancient pair of riding-boots. Only the rain-tarnished insignia at his sword-belt proclaimed his rank: and a short Cuban machete swung here, in place of the inlaid saber he had brought from West Point—and discarded years ago. Only the thin smile that creased his hawk-proud profile betrayed the fact that he had risen above fear—that he was actually enjoying this familiar game of matching wits with the Seminole.

Already the fort seemed to loom above the slowly converging column, a cool rectangle of repose in that sundrugged prairie. Built of solid coquina blocks (slave-quarried, over two centuries ago, for the heirs of the *conquistadores),* Fort San Juan flaunted its four trim sentry-boxes against the sky, like pepper-cans in Brobdingnag. Carter would not have been too surprised to see a steel helmet thrust from that moss-covered port on the terreplein, or to hear a Spanish bugler sound the call to quarters. Certainly this time-worn redoubt should offer some defiance to the soldiers of a brash young republic, whose possession of the Floridas had been legalized only a few years ago. . . . Carter's smile broadened at the fantasy. After all, he had bivouacked often enough in this relic to know that those stout walls enclosed a tiny courtyard, and no more—that the sentry-boxes had been rattlesnake-dens for a century.

"KEEP your head down, Corporal! Where's Grady?"

"Gone ahead, sir." Corporal Simpson, leading his squad into the shadow of the bastion, step by cautious step, offered Carter his best lupine smile. "I'd say it was safe to spring the gates. Grady can smell a Seminole at a hundred yards. He'd be

# *R*amparts

by WILLIAM DU BOIS

back long ago, if they were waiting for us—"

"I gave Sergeant Grady no orders to proceed."

"Sorry, sir. Reckon he thought you'd appreciate a little scouting."

John Carter scowled in earnest, and forced himself to cling to the last scrap of cover, a great scarlet burst of poinsettias a scant fifty feet from the gate. It was quite like Grady to take this risk—knowing (as only Sergeant Grady could) that risks of this sort were usually worth the effort. Thanks to Grady, they had played tag with Coacoochee's braves ever since noon—and kept a safe jump ahead. His own eyes told him there was no Indian sign in that coquina mass—or along the faint corduroy road that snaked through the scrub, to join the King's Highway to the east. Grady (who hunted Indians with all five senses) would probably endorse that conviction in a moment, with his usual flair for independence. Meanwhile, the command would do well to flatten in the last of the dog-fennel, and wait.

Carter checked the position carefully, estimating his chances. He had never fought off a Seminole attack from behind those walls, never considered the little fort from the standpoint of a last-ditch defense. He had no doubt that he must fight in a matter of moments; the Indians, dogging his column all day long, had merely lost contact for a while, thanks to their shortcut along the bend in the river-bank. *Thank heaven, those walls were built to outlast time itself,* he thought: *even from here, I can see that the gates are still sound on their hinges. . . .* The Army itself had built those gates, when the Army had still used the fort as a kind of supply-depot—in those distant years when the Indian wars had been confined to the southern peninsula. Even now, when the bastion was used only as an occasional bivouac, he had made sure the portals did not rot in their frames.

*If we can get inside the walls,* thought Carter, *we can hold off four times our number, with a little expert bluffing at those sally-ports. If Evans is now on the road to Augustine, with my message to the General, this mission will have succeeded beyond my wildest dreams.*

But this was no time to dwell on the stratagem that had brought him so boldly into contact with Coacoochee's war-party. Or to assure himself, in advance, that Ralph Evans would get through unharmed. For the present, it was enough to count heads in his command—and pray that Grady would signal that the coast was clear.

He could wish now that they had devoted more time to clearing the brush around the walls, and that he had taken time in Augustine to check on the fort's history. He knew vaguely that it had been built at the order of a Seventeenth Century Spanish governor, when there was a ferry, of sorts, across this neck of the St. Johns. At that far-off time, the trace to the King's Highway had been a wide, much-used road—and the fort had stood as a kind of reminder to the Indians (who, it seemed, had been surprisingly friendly under Spanish rule) that peace could be enforced even this far from St. Augustine and the *Castillo.*

Carter remembered this much, clearly enough. He knew that the Royal Engineers had found it advisable to swing the King's Highway to the north, to make a crossing of the St. Johns at Picolata—that Fort San Juan, built with such toil and sweat at the edge of this green jungle, had been abandoned for the last century of Spanish rule. In his forays with Grady, he had stumbled on other such relics, along the tidal rivers to the east. Grim coquina bastions that marked an ancient crossroad wiped out years ago by the encroaching palmetto. Weather-worn customhouses, their cannon-rests deep in sand, that served now as bird sanctuaries at some abandoned harbormouth, within sound of the pounding Atlantic surf.

WHEN *this Indian war is over,* he thought, *Fort San Juan will suffer a like fate.* Already the fierce sub-tropical growth had crept round the coquina. In another year, that stand of cabbage-palms would invade the tiny courtyard. This poinsettia-bush that now served as his ambush (and he found time, even now, to wonder how that shrub, imported so recently from Mexico, had flowered in this corner of the Florida wilderness) would run riot on the terreplein, and thrust its strumpet head from each loophole. . . .

High on that same terreplein, a mockingbird called, so softly that he was hardly sure he heard. He pursed his lips, and echoed the sound, letting the notes die in the still air of afternoon. Sergeant Grady, a shaggy baboon of a man with all the agility of his simian counterpart, thrust head and shoulders above the breastwork, and beckoned him forward, even as he held a warning finger to his lips. Grady, reflected Carter, had never looked less military—or more competent. He came up to the gate on the run, with the command at his heels.

"How'd you get inside, Grady?"

"Latrine, sir. Just the way Ethan Allen took Ticonderoga." Grady had already slid over the breastworks, and coasted down to ground level. "All quite proper. Hadn't been used in over a hundred years. Opens direct to the river, through the shell bank."

"Why are you whispering?"

"Didn't want to waken the old gentleman, Captain. Some sort of dominie, to judge by his cassock. Sound asleep in the courtyard. If you'll hold your breath, you'll hear him snoring."

"Is he alone?"

"Certainly, sir. You may go in when you like. Gate's wide open—"

But Carter had already sprung the stout cedar portals and whipped inside. As always, the chill of those ancient stones closed in on him instantly, as though he had plunged from the heat of midafternoon to the depths of some oubliette. There was the compact courtyard, its white, sandy floor tracked by lizards and the claws of a foraging raccoon. There was the dungeon-keep, sweating coldly in the sunlight, its eyelike window solemn as a staring owl's. There was the live-oak (green and dripping moss when the first Crusade was preached) spreading its benediction above the sulphur spring that bubbled cheerily under the terreplein. And there, snoozing in the grateful shade, was the priest, his palm-thatch hat low on his eyes, his brown, corded cassock tucked up against the heat—a silver-haired, mahogany-tanned friar who could have belonged to any century.

Without turning, Carter knew that his command had spread into the courtyard as quickly, and as silently, as prowling cats: he heard Simpson whisper an order, to send his squad down the terreplein. *We're in possession now—and we're safe for the moment!* He tasted that thought exultantly, telling himself that he must inspect the defenses immediately, that he had no time to waste on a walking priest who had chosen an Army bivouac to doze an afternoon away. And yet, without quite knowing why, he found himself anchored in the island of shade under the live-oak, studying the sleeper intently.

"He seems very much at home, Grady."

"I'll give him a nudge, sir, if you like. Though they do say it's bad to speak to a dominie after noon, unless he speaks first." Grady took a cautious step into the shade. "Perhaps he's a ghost that's lingered after daylight. You might say he fits the time and place—"

"You might, indeed."

The Padre stirred, and pushed the palm-thatch sombrero from his eyes. He smiled gently, as though he had known Carter always.

"Good afternoon, Captain Carter. Have I blundered into the midst of a war?"

Carter clicked his heels sharply, and bowed from his waist. The Commanding General in Augustine had always insisted on politeness to all gentlemen of the cloth, regardless of their denomination. A Unitarian by birth and inclination, Carter had always regarded the brown Franciscan cassock with a certain awe, when it had whispered past him in the plaza, or marched in solemn file down the cloister across the way from barracks. Probably this was one of the brothers, he thought. It was well known at headquarters that these walking priests, who ministered to Indian and white alike in the scrub, could go where they liked, unmolested. Some said that these fathers, bound to disapprove of a bloody Indian war, were spies for Coacoochee. Wiser observers (and Carter was among this number) realized that the friars had been friends to the Seminole too long to change their habits.

*"Perdone, Padre mio—"*

"My English is adequate, Captain." The Padre spoke with ease, with only a slight slurring; his voice had an oddly pleasant timbre. *He might be speaking from another world,* thought Carter. *Perhaps Grady is right—he's a ghost, after all.*

"Have I the honor of your acquaintance, Padre?"

"By no means. The name is Father Miguel, Captain. Medical brother of Nuestra Senora de la Leche, returning from an errand of mercy on the Oklawaha. Naturally, you wouldn't know of my work. But I know of yours. And I apologize again for intruding—"

Carter turned to bark an order down the terreplein. Grady, he noted, was still at his elbow, with his familiar grin intact—and he resisted the temptation to send the Sergeant about his business. He might need Grady's wisdom, if he found he could use this unexpected visitor in the task before him.

"It's I who must apologize, Father Miguel. Arrows and lead will be flying here in another moment."

"I've been shot at in several languages, Captain. So far, I've survived."

"Perhaps I'm not making myself clear. Coacoochee crossed the St. Johns yesterday, below Picolata, with at least three hundred braves. Unless I miss my guess, he's closing in on this spot now, from four sides." Carter glanced briefly at the terreplein, where a dragoon stood at each loophole, an extra rifle beside him. Instinct told Carter that his command was already disposed to its best advantage, but he felt he should make a show of authority, regardless. "If you'll excuse me while I inspect our battle-stations—"

"Your men seem quite ready. And I can assure you that there's no way for Coacoochee to get inside—unless he storms the gate. No way but that ancient latrine-passage—and that's too narrow for attack, even though your sergeant came up it easily enough."

Grady gasped in surprise: "How did you know I came that way, Father?"

"There was no other entrance save the gate. And I'd barred that when I came in, lest a razorback disturb my nap." Again the priest offered Carter his disarming smile. "Forgive me if I seem to teach you your business, *Señor Capitan.* The fact is, I've made quite a study of this fort; you might almost say it's a hobby of mine. In its way, it sums up all that Spain might have done in the Floridas—and failed to do, so dismally—"

Carter took a determined stride toward the terreplein. "With all due respect, Padre, I must inspect just the same—"

"By all means. May I accompany you?" The old priest mounted the breastworks in one long-legged step, keeping pace with Carter as the latter moved from loophole to sally-port. "As you see, these four sentry-boxes can sweep the horizon. No enemy on earth can surprise you by daylight. I needn't tell you that the Seminole does not often fight in the dark—"

Carter stepped into a sentry-box, after a quick glance to make sure it was free of snakes. As Father Miguel had said, the fort had been well-placed. Scrub and savanna, and the chocolate-dark sweep of the river itself, lay like a relief-map at his feet. The dusty-green palmetto plain seemed desolate, and too still for belief. Along the St. Johns, the dog-fennel seemed to bunch like frozen green foam. Inured as he was to Indian ways, he still found it hard to believe that this dead landscape could be swarming with savages at this very moment—murderers all, who could

*The First Dragoons, fighting through years of Indian warfare, had been knit into a compact engine of destruction.*

imagine no greater prize than the scalp of Brevet-Captain John Carter. Unless it was the headpiece of his sergeant. . . . Carter turned sharply, annoyed to realize that Grady had stayed close behind him on his tour of the ramparts.

Grady spoke—as coolly as though this were the parade-ground in Augustine, rather than a battle-station. "May I suggest that I take over here, sir? You've had a hard afternoon."

"I'll ask for your suggestions as needed, Sergeant."

"Your pardon, Captain—but the good father's right. We've done all we can. We're standing by, with all the loaded rifles we have. You'd do well to sit awhile in the shade."

Carter nodded grimly, and cursed the slight wave of dizziness that had come with Grady's words. Both knew that he had risen from a fever-bed for this duel with Coacoochee.

"I'll rest here," said Carter gruffly, "—in the shadow of the parapet. Go to the north sentry-box, Grady—and keep a sharp lookout." He settled on the cool stone shelf, with his head between his hands—and waited for the dizziness to pass. When he looked up again, the Franciscan was kneeling beside him, with a tin cup of water and a gray-white pill on his open palm.

"Peruvian bark, Captain. I'm sure your regimental surgeon has prescribed it."

Carter smiled his gratitude, and swallowed the bitter medicine that was beginning to be called quinine. The spring-water, as he well knew, was almost as unpalatable as the pill itself—the sulphur water of the peninsula at its worst. Father Miguel chuckled at his involuntary grimace.

"Strange, isn't it, that Ponce de Leon once drank at that very spring —hoping it was the fountain of youth?"

Carter leaned back against the coquina, letting his tired nerve-ends unlimber. There was something oddly soothing in the Padre's manner.

"Do you honestly believe that Ponce himself once stood on this spot?"

"It's a matter of record, Captain. That spring has bubbled here from the earliest times. The Timucuans considered it holy ground: let's hope they've passed on their belief to the Seminole."

"I'm afraid there's small chance of that."

"I understand, of course. You'll be insulted if Coacoochee hesitates to join battle, now you're behind this wall." The Padre's eye twinkled as he continued to stare blandly into the palmetto plain. "It's well known all over the peninsula that you're the Army's leading scourge. If we don't count the sergeant who assists you so brilliantly, I suppose you've killed or transported more Indians than any other commander of equal rank—"

Carter bowed stiffly. "The compliment is accepted, sir."

"Your heart would be strong medicine, if the Seminoles could roast it at their council-fire tomorrow." Father Miguel's expression did not change by a flicker as he turned to look into Carter's eyes. "Of course, you considered that too, when you came this deep in the scrub, with only a small force of regulars—"

Carter blinked in earnest. "You read my mind too well, Father."

*The Franciscan spoke quietly. "I stay with my white brothers."*

"Thanks to your Sergeant Grady, you knew that you could come within range of the war party. Thanks to his skill, and your own, you could risk exposing yourself deliberately. You could pretend to stand and fight on the river bank—and then withdraw just in time to retire here. As for Coacoochee, his next move is obvious. He'll pin you down, and wait for the rest of his force to cross the St. Johns. Perhaps I should warn you that he has a much larger force than you anticipated. Nearly a half thousand braves, if you count the renegades."

"May I ask how you know so much?"

"A medical missionary knows many things, Captain—particularly when he has spoken both Seminole and Greek since boyhood."

"Perhaps you have also guessed why I took this risk?"

"It seems rather obvious. You hope to last till morning—when your commanding general will relieve you in force."

"Precisely, Padre."

"Does he know that you'll seek refuge here?"

"At the moment, he knows nothing—only that I'm out on a routine patrol. Only that we left our horses at the Picolata stockade. Fortunately, I was able to send back a messenger, the moment I knew there was a chance of getting this far alive. He should be at Picolata now, saddling a fresh horse for the return to Augustine. It's only an hour's ride from the stockade."

"Are you sure he got through?"

"There's an element of risk in every war, Padre. But I'd stake a great deal on Lieutenant Evans. He's been with my company from the first—"

"Lieutenant Ralph Evans," Father Miguel murmured the name, and smiled again. "An excellent choice, Captain. I've watched him ride often at your dress parades in the plaza. Granted, he's a bit of a giant to get through the scrub undetected, and that blond mane of his would be rather conspicuous in open country. But there's no braver man in your whole regiment—and no faster courier—"

"Apparently you've made quite a study of the First Dragoons."

The old priest let his fingers run down the coquina of the breastworks. "I make a hobby of men, Captain, as well as monuments to the past. I'm well aware that you young warlocks are carving out history here. True, I wish you could go about your task with less blood-letting—but you may put that down to my profession. We Franciscans were always good friends of the Seminole—such good friends, that we never even realized he was a menace to Florida's future." He seemed about to say more, then broke off abruptly, and vaulted down to the courtyard. "I've detained you too long, Captain. Sergeant Grady is calling."

But Carter was already on his feet, to plunge for the sentry-box in a crouching run. His senses, relaxed by the Padre's presence, had snapped back to the hard tension of war: his ear, tuned to the slightest threat from outside, had not mistaken those raucous catbird calls, as though a whole chorus of jays had swooped into the scrub on invisible wings.

"Sign's coming thick now, sir," said Grady. "Thicker than cow-ticks in August. If you ask me, they'll jump us from the north—there's more cover on this side."

Carter, peering through the loophole, nodded a silent agreement. He smiled wryly when he noted that Corporal Simpson, anticipating his order, had already shifted the bulk of their fire-power to the northern rampart. *Come what may,* he thought, *we'll sound like a full company—for a moment, at least. If we can give Coacoochee pause, he'll probably squat, and wait for morning.*

A WAR-DRUM sounded dully in the heart of the dog-fennel—two low, throbbing beats, like the rumble of a far-off earthquake. As though in answer to the signal, Carter heard a bowstring twang in the palmetto thicket

just under the north parapet of the fort. He saw the heavy snout of the arrow, aimed deliberately high, arch in a singing parabola over their heads —and knew that the archer had aimed direct for the live-oak in the courtyard. In that same flash, he saw that this was no ordinary shaft—and that it was not wood that caused it to gleam like white gold in the sun. Turning with its flight, the flint bit home in the tree-trunk. The arrow, quivering there haft-deep, flaunted its burden like a golden flag. Long before he could scramble down to join Father Miguel in the courtyard, he knew what the archer had wrapped round his shaft.

There was a written message, too—stitched firmly behind the arrowhead. He held the bit of foolscap in his hand for a moment—unwilling to read the scrawled words. His eyes insisted that that tuft of sun-dried blond hair was Lieutenant Evans', and none other. His brain, fumbling with Coacoochee's latest challenge, refused to grasp the import of that ghastly proof of doom, before a shot had been fired.

"If you like, Captain," said the Padre, "I'll translate that message."

"No translation's needed, Father."

"I referred to the written words in your hand."

"My Spanish is adequate, thank you."

DESPITE himself, he found that he could grin as he read the message aloud. It was quite like Coacoochee (who had once danced with the General's daughters in the *Castillo,* when the nation was at peace) to go back to the language of the dons:

*Señor Capitan:*

*As the Attached Proof will Demonstrate, your Messenger will never reach Augustine.*

*As I am prepared to Demonstrate, none of your Command will live till Sundown if you force me to Attack.*

*This time, as it happens, we have not come to take Scalps—only Food, and Seed-Grain. All we ask of the Army, on this occasion, is your Valued Person—to use as we See Fit.*

*March through that Gate, Unarmed, in the next Five Minutes, and we will spare your command. Stay where you are, and we will Come to Get You.*

The ultimatum was unsigned, save for the crudely-drawn head of a wildcat—Coacoochee's other name, and a signature he had scrawled in blood on a hundred farmhouse doorsills, from Fort Brooke to the St. Johns. Carter knew that the words themselves had been dictated to Abraham, the chieftain's Negro slave and sense-bearer. For all his fire-breathing eloquence, the Seminole could neither read nor write.

"Shall I go, Grady?"

He had spoken the question aloud, sure that his Sergeant would be waiting at his elbow. The murmur from the parapet—where the whole command had crouched to listen—was his own reward.

"You know better than to ask, sir."

"Tell us, anyhow." Carter turned to Father Miguel with a small, ironic bow. "The Padre feels we've been too harsh with the enemy."

"You weren't at the battle of Okeechobee, Father," said Grady. "You weren't with us when we picked up what was left of Major Hutchens, in Twelvemile Hammock. They stripped him naked, and turned him loose in that swamp—smeared with fresh blood, for the mosquitoes to bleed white. And then there was young Pickering—our last company commander. Lord help us, the Captain and I both saw that one. Spread on a wagon-wheel like a big white eagle crucified—and broken away from his backbone, joint by joint. They took three whole days for that bit of fun—and they enjoyed every moment." Grady considered his next words carefully. "Course, they've probably got other plans for Captain Carter—he's lasted longer. I wouldn't put 'em to the test."

THE friar bowed his head. "Perhaps if I were to intercede—"

"This is our war, Father," said Carter. "I can't ask you to mix in it. My guess is they'll let you go free."

"What of the others?"

"We live or die together. It's as simple as that." Carter was still troubled by the memory of Guy Pickering. His classmate from the Point had led them into a *cul-de-sac* much like this, on a low hummock above Tampa Bay. Beleaguered for days in an impromptu palmetto barricade, with half their number dead about them, Guy had preferred to give himself up, on the enemy's solemn promise that his command would be spared. That afternoon—and the afternoons that followed—he had stood with

***The canoe veered sharply, seeming to stop dead—directly above him.***

*"No sign of the Seminole. We can close at will."*

Grady behind their sketchy breastworks, and heard his friend scream away his life under the tomahawk and the cane-knife. The enemy had attacked incessantly while the Captain still lived—and continued to wail, like a monstrous captive bird, on the upended wagon-spokes across the prairie. . . .

Grady spoke easily. "Best go inside the dungeon, Father, and let us handle what's coming."

"Never in this world, Sergeant. And I *was* at the Battle of Okeechobee. Attached to General Zachary Taylor's own command, as a headquarters surgeon. I was needed then—I may be needed this afternoon." Again the friar seemed about to say more—and again he drew back beneath the live-oak as the first riflecrack sounded outside the palisade.

Carter was on the terreplein again, before the echo of that signal-shot could die. He was in time to hear muskets cock all down the waiting line, to see the first brave come cheering from cover and bear down on the northern face of the ramparts, and the stoutly barred gate. Others followed in his wake—a scuttling brood in warbonnets, grotesque as prairie-chickens in that sea of dust-green palmetto fronds. Glimpsed and lost, and then glimpsed again as they zigzagged in their perilous cover, the converging Seminoles seemed to sprout from the earth itself. They fired as they ran—wildly, as an Indian will at such moments. Carter and his Sergeant exchanged grins as the first lead of the head-on attack spattered harmlessly into the massive blocks that shielded them. *The enemy is as realistic as we,* thought Carter, unlimbering a longnosed pistol in each fist. *He knew that I'd stand firm, with no nonsense. Now he attacks, without even waiting for my five minutes' grace to expire.*

One of the regulars—a new man from the regiment's replacement pool—laid his cheek on his rifle, and drew a bead on one of those wildly dancing heads below. Grady darted down the line to lay a hand on the man's trigger-finger.

"Easy does it, Larry. We'll give 'em a volley when they're under the walls—and not before."

RIFLE-FIRE seemed to be popping from every side now, though the Seminoles had vanished, for a time, in a deep gully of dog-fennel where the fort's outer moat had once gaped wide. Carter watched a few firearrows smoke hungrily into the courtyard, heard them fizzle out in the sandy floor. Then, with a nightmare whooping, the hostiles erupted in a dense red rout from the last scrap of cover, and ran for the wall and the gate in roughly parallel columns. Carter saw at once that Coacoochee had thrown his whole strength into this rush. He counted at least a hundred bonnets in that yelling onslaught, and guessed that as many more were laying down a protective fire from the screen of palmetto.

Ten of the braves carried a peeled-down cypress, pointed to make a battering-ram. Others staggered under the weight of notched pine-boles, which they obviously planned to use as scaling-ladders. Again, Carter found he could laugh aloud at this travesty of a planned attack: Coacoochee, who could hit and run so expertly in the deep gumbo of the Glades, might still be outmatched this afternoon. The next moment would tell the story, even as it tried the firepower of the First Dragoons.

"The ram first, Grady. Just in case it's strong enough to split the gate."

"Right you are, sir. Count off, Simpson."

The corporal flattened at his loophole, and whispered down the line of rifles. Ten marksmen in the first squad, naming their targets in advance, waited with eyes glued to sights as the heavy cypress ram, and its ten panting bearers, swayed into the shadow of the north wall.

*"Fire!"*

The battering-ram, flung violently backward for its first contact with the gate, froze in midair: the bearers, their copper-red arms knotted in unison for that fatal assault, seemed to collapse along the rough surface of the log, as though the effort was beyond their strength. Carter did not need the thwacking impact of lead on flesh to know that each marksman had found his target—that the ten braves would sprawl about their burden to a man. Grady's long rifle-drills had paid off handsomely before, in tight moments such as these.

"Those scaling ladders now! Pick your targets!"

The first pine-tree had already slapped against the wall as the remaining dragoons began shooting at

will from the breastworks above. Firing at that angle, it was absurdly easy to pick off these would-be invaders one by one, to permit the lead man to thrust his bonnet above the parapet before sending a bullet through his brain. Decimated by that first deadly volley, clubbed down from the parapet by a score of expert rifle butts, the hostiles hesitated in the welter of their own dead, howled their rage, and broke for the cover of the dog-fennel, their war-feathers dragging in the dust.

Turning at last from his command-post, Carter saw that four of the braves—running at an angle in the north wall where a cabbage palm protected them from direct fire—had gained the parapet, and plunged for the courtyard. He watched Grady tackle their leader, roll with him in the sand in a tooth-and-toenail tussle; he saw Corporal Simpson, cool as a martinet even now, seize an extra rifle, and spatter another invader's brains on the coquina with the butt. Then it was his own turn to duck, as two red fists just missed closing on his throat. In that flash, he realized that another small group, filtering craftily into the wake of the demoralized attack, had chosen this suicidal moment to swarm up the ramparts to count heads for Coacoochee.

HE fired twice as he rolled free, dropping the two remaining Seminoles in their tracks. The last of the invaders was upon him before he could reload: a tall, iron-muscled brave, naked as an eel and twice as slippery. The knife flashed in the westering sun, just before his hand closed on the man's wrist: his free fist, twined in the Indian's scalp-lock, strained desperately to break the other's all-but-fatal grip as the knife broke free and stabbed wildly, missing his throat by inches and splintering against the stone.

The Seminole stank of old woodsmoke and fresh bear's grease, of river mud and sweat that no rain could wash away. The man's hate was part of that stench, as tangible a thing as the hammered tin amulets at his breast, the necklace of rattlesnake-fangs that snapped in Carter's hands as he strove to turn the ornament into a noose. Weaponless, the Indian could only reel free and run for his life along the parapet, as Carter struggled to ram a fresh charge into his pistol-chamber. If that brave could gain the ground again with an exact count of their number, they were lost indeed.

He heard a gun crack as he raised his own pistol-barrel, and knew that it was Grady, shooting from the courtyard—and dropping his man across the parapet with a bullet in his spine. Simpson, still panting from his own tussle in the courtyard, loped down the parapet to finish the job with a single casual thrust of his own knife. Carter made no effort to intervene as Simpson and Grady took the hair of the four victims who had dared to penetrate the breastwork. Both men had more than earned their trophies.

Grady vaulted to the parapet with his grin intact: even now, Carter could marvel at the Sergeant's aplomb —a *sang-froid* that could rise above such trifles as the thick pump of blood at one shoulder, the furrow of nails on one cheek, where practiced steely fingers had just missed gouging an eye from its socket.

"If I do say so as shouldn't, Captain, I managed that rather well."

"Give the rest of us a little credit, Grady."

"I have, sir. Didn't I divide the hair with Simpson?"

Carter glanced at his senior corporal, who was just knotting the last scalp in his belt, as nonchalantly as another man might pocket his wages. He saw that Simpson (who had just wrestled with death no less grimly than Sergeant Grady) was unruffled by the action—even smiling a little, through his thick mat of whiskers—the smile of a good citizen who has discharged the day's task with credit, and is prepared to take tomorrow in stride. There were no other casualties along the parapet. Even the green replacement was babying his rifle now—and humming a wordless tune.

"Ask the Padre to look at that neck-wound, Grady. The knife may have grazed the jugular."

"My veins grow deep, sir. It's a habit they learned years ago."

"That's an order, Sergeant. I'm taking no gangrene cases back to Augustine." Carter knocked on wood, solemnly enough, as Sergeant Grady came crisply to attention, and stumped over to the spring, where Father Miguel had already opened his medicine-bag and spread out compresses and probes in a professional row. *Heaven knows we're as far from Augustine as ever,* he thought. *As the Padre just remarked, Coacoochee will merely squat in the scrub for a while, and wait for his own reinforcements to cross the St. Johns.*

He paused briefly to wonder why he should be quoting the Padre in his thoughts now. Then he turned to Simpson, with his best parade-ground manner.

"Rations when you're ready, Corporal. And a double issue of rum for each man. I'd say we've earned it."

He stood for a long time in the sentry-box as the canteen passed, refusing his own ration with a ritualistic smile: tonight of all nights, the commander would need a clear head. From where he stood, the scrub and the river-bank seemed quiet as ever, untouched by time or war. Thanks to the growing twilight, he could barely pick out the tumbled bodies of the enemy, there in the whispering green sea of palmetto. As always, the evening breeze brought a false sense of coolness to this sun-weary land: only the ear of a practiced Indian-fighter would know that those bird-calls along the river bank were Coacoochee's pickets, and not a covey of whippoorwills.

How much of his youth had gone by in tight corners such as this, with life itself a thing to be enjoyed for the moment, and tomorrow a hard-earned promise that might never come? How long would he stand at attention at some perilous outpost, with death clustered thick in the growing dark, and no real desire to look beyond his pistol-barrel at the future and all its spurious promise? He smiled again at his own impatience, letting the questions go unanswered. There was still a little water in the tin cup on the parapet. He sipped it absently—and found that he could endure the sulphur taste, after all.

Old settlers in the Floridas, who had drunk from those same deep springs since childhood, had even grown homesick for that same water, when they were forced to leave the Territory. *The Padre's right again,* thought Brevet-Captain John Carter; *this is the authentic fountain of youth, even if Juan, Ponce de Leon never knelt at its brink. The royal Governor did well to name the fort in honor of that eager optimist. Come what may, I must justify his faith tonight. Now that I've drunk of these waters, I must prove to Coacoochee that I can live forever.*

FATHER Miguel pulled the last of his neat housewife-stitches taut, knotted the loose ends snugly, and bit the silk thread away at Sergeant Grady's shoulder. Grady, sucking stoically on his double tot of Jamaica, had not batted an eyelash while the wound was being dressed and closed. Now he rose from his ordeal with a nonchalant flexing of the great corded muscles of his upper arms—permitting himself only a slight wince as the wound burned along the freshly wakened nerves. Carter, smoking a segar in the deepening shadow of the live-oak, came forward to inspect the Padre's expert surgery. Save for the tumbled red bodies in the courtyard, and the businesslike gleam of rifle-barrels along the parapet, Fort San Juan seemed the epitome of peace. Even the cook-fire, lighted in the open hearth beside the dungeon, blended gratefully with the long eve-

ning shadows. A casual visitor, observing these soft-voiced men at their evening meal, would have sworn they were hunters, camped here after a record bag in the scrub.

"Think you can handle the sentries till midnight, Grady?"

"Why not, sir? I was never better."

"Take a detail at once, then, and toss those bodies overside. Coacoochee will be showing a flag soon, to bring in his dead."

"Can't we wait till after rations, Captain?"

*"Now,* I said!" Carter eyed his sergeant sternly, reading the wish in his eye. *Scalps are one thing,* he thought. *You're taking no Indian hide to barracks, to sell to recruits for razor-strops, or tobacco pouches.* He stood beside Father Miguel for another of those odd, contented silences, while Grady stumped off with his unwilling detail, to lift the Seminole corpses, one by one, and heave them into the dusk-dimmed palmettoes. When the Padre spoke at last, his voice was gentle as ever—and even more distant.

ONCE more, Carter turned in the shadow, to assure himself of the man's presence.

"I hope they spare the poinsettia-plant, Captain. Only last spring I set out that shoot myself."

"They tell me it's new to the Floridas."

"Brought in from Mexico—by a friend of Mr. Poinsett, your Secretary of War. Named in his honor, of course. I can still pretend it's a symbol of peace. Or of a better day, at least—"

"Red's the color of war, Father—"

"Give us another century, my boy. No one will remember where that lovely flower got its name. When this peninsula teams with happy people, who'll pause to think that men once fought and bled here?"

"I expect no thanks, Father, just because I do my part in making the Floridas safe for the future. After all, it's my job."

"We were speaking of blood-letting, Captain." The old priest's voice was still gentle as the breeze in the mossed boughs overhead. "So far, you've got off lightly. Only your sergeant has lost blood so far—and he has it to spare, I gather."

"Do you blame me for defending myself just now?"

"Certainly not. You had no choice. That's my only regret, Captain—the fact that you must go on fighting this war to the death, without compromise. Of course, you feel it's the white man's destiny to occupy this peninsula—all of it?"

"Political and moral questions are none of my concern, Padre. My task is to keep the peace. To capture what lawbreakers I can—and to kill the others."

"Tell me one thing: do you believe these red men have souls?"

Carter smiled thinly, even as the Unitarian within him answered, without hesitation. "I believe they can be redeemed in time—if they're transported to the West."

The Franciscan sighed. "We're in agreement there. Removal is the only solution, now that a land-hungry young nation is pressing into the peninsula. How many have you transported so far?"

"Four thousand, perhaps. Actually, there are only a few hundred hostiles left in Florida. But they're united as never before. And they persist in leaving swamps like this, to cut throats almost at will. A wholesale defeat, on this spot, could go a long way toward ending the war."

"It's a tragedy, then, that your scheme miscarried."

Carter shrugged, as he accepted his ration-tin. "To put it mildly! This is probably the last meal any of us will enjoy on earth."

"You feel sure he'll attack again with dawn?"

"So far, Coacoochee has no way of knowing our real strength. Now that we've thrown back his first assault, he'll take no more chances in the dark. It'll be another story tomorrow, when his full force has crossed the river. With five hundred braves howling for my scalp, he'll be forced to take this rampart, no matter what it costs him."

"Again we are in agreement, Captain. I'd say you've just two courses open. Make your peace with God—or send your best man upriver to the Picolata stockade, and Augustine."

"We tried that."

"You can try again, with darkness —*via* the passage. Grady entered the fort that way, from the river's edge. You could reach the river as easily."

"Did you say *I,* Padre?"

"I said the best man, Captain. It's well-known that you're the strongest swimmer in your regiment, next to Grady. Your sergeant can't go far with that shoulder."

"You'd have me desert my command, at a time like this?"

"They'll hold, with Sergeant Grady in charge."

Carter frowned up at the parapet. He saw that his sergeant was squatting on his heels just above them, listening intently. "Picolata is ten miles upstream."

"My canoe is moored round the next bend. In a cove, below a lightning-blasted oak. We'll have a full moon in just one hour: you can't miss the spot."

Grady entered the argument, gently enough. "You'd be safe from that point on, sir. Coacoochee will have his whole force pinned here. They'll give you an armed escort at the stockade. You can be in Augustine in an hour. The General's been waiting all day for some word—"

"Let me think this out, Grady."

"Of course, sir. But we both know you could lift this siege by morning—with a thousand men behind you. The whole First Dragoons—and they'd be mounted, this time."

*"Quiet!"*

Carter had not meant to shout. Quartering the courtyard in long, nervous strides, he paused at last to glare up at Grady—and struck fist to palm.

"It might work, at that—if I could leave the river-bank alive. It's in Coacoochee's line of fire."

"That's another risk," said Father Miguel. "It need not be too great. With your permission, I can create a diversion on the parapet, at that very moment."

"A diversion, Padre?"

"We're agreed that the Seminole is superstitious? That he looks on this spot as sacred ground, where ghosts of the old *conquistadores* walk by moonlight? We can time your departure to the minute. At that instant, I could expose myself on the parapet—"

"And draw their fire?"

"Not as a mortal, Captain. As the ghost of the Spaniard for whom this fort was named. As Juan, Ponce de Leon. Complete with armor—"

"And where will you find armor?"

"Here in the dungeon, my friend. A cuirass and helmet. I'll admit it's a bit rusted, but it'll serve—"

"There's no Spanish armor in this fort, Padre. I've bivouacked here a dozen times—"

The Franciscan's smile was still gentle. "Perhaps I explored a bit more thoroughly, Captain. I've said that the study of this ruin is a hobby of mine."

"You'd take that risk—for us?"

"For you *and* the Seminole, *hijo mio.* There's a condition I have not yet mentioned. You must return tomorrow with an overwhelming force. You must promise to take prisoners for transport wherever you can."

CARTER took another turn of the courtyard, if only for the sake of form. Already he knew what his answer would be.

"It's a bargain, Padre. And I can't thank you enough."

"No thanks are needed, Captain. Considering my calling, I could hardly do less."

"May I see that armor now?"

"Of course—"

But a shout from the palmetto nailed them to their tracks. A long-

drawn wail, primitive as man's first despair, though the Spanish was distinct enough.

*"Olé! Que tal, hombre?"*

"Who's there, Simpson?"

"Black buck in feathers, sir—with a white flag."

Grady was already at a loophole. "It's Abraham, Captain. Coacoochee's sense-bearer."

"Let him come closer, if he's unarmed. I suppose they want to take back their dead."

"It's more than that, sir. He's asking for a parley."

Carter felt his heart leap. Could he believe that Coacoochee—convinced that there was a fully armed force within the fort—wished to arrange a withdrawal?

"Talk across the parapet, Grady. I won't show my face for the moment."

The Sergeant cupped his hands, and bellowed in a Spanish that was both atrocious and fluent:

*"Aquí, Abraham! Por su salud, lentamente!"*

Carter heard the shuffle of bare feet in the sand outside the gate, saw a square of white egret-feathers thrust above the gate on a pole. The Negro's familiar singsong Spanish came out of the dusk, though Abraham himself was still invisible.

"Will Captain Carter parley with the great Coacoochee?"

"Let him stand forth!"

"And with the great chief's son Tuskenegee?"

"And with Tuskenegee—no more!"

The pause seemed endless, before the palmetto rustled, and other feet whispered into place beside Abraham. Grady, staring through a loophole with his aplomb unshaken, barked another order.

"Come forward—and drop your arms."

"We would speak within the fort."

Carter stepped toward the parapet, and spoke in a whisper: "Is it a trick?"

"I don't think so, sir. They dropped their muskets in the scrub. Can't pretend we're afraid of two Indians, and one black."

The Padre stepped forward. "Perhaps it would help if I opened the gate, Captain."

Carter considered quickly. "Let them wait a moment more. Bring Simpson down from the terreplein, Grady—along with his squad. Leave the rifles at the loopholes. And call Butler and Davis from the sentry-boxes. We must look stronger than we are."

No one spoke as the dragoons moved slowly along the parapet, and dropped into place behind Carter. Simpson came forward without being asked, and opened the camp-stool that was also standard equipment in these rare meetings between white man and red. *We might be rehearsing for some grotesque melodrama,* thought Carter, as he counted heads.

"Ready, Grady. And keep that gateway covered."

Father Miguel's cassock whispered in the sand of the courtyard as he lifted the bar and swung one-half of the portal wide. Prepared as he was for the tableau outside, Carter drew in his breath sharply. Seminoles and Negro stood in a tight triangle, with Coacoochee at its apex. In that dying light, the chieftain loomed before them larger than life, and magnificent as some tribal god. His braves might fight stark naked, and daubed with slime: Coacoochee was in snow-white buckskins, feathered prodigally at knee and elbow. A garish headdress of porcupine quills, topped with a whole tail-spread of flamingo plumes, framed the copper-dark mask he had turned toward Carter. On his breast, three hammered-silver plates spread in great half-moons that caught the last red blaze of the sunset.

Abraham stood at the chief's right, in a council-robe of flamingo-feathers—his staff held high in a gesture of peace, his slave's status indicated by the bone-wedges at each ear-lobe, and the brass ring in his nose. Tuskenegee, the chief's tall son, stood at his father's left. He wore nothing at all but a pair of crossed Army bandoliers, and a battered cavalry hat with a dozen heron-feathers in the band.

Illustrated by
BENTON CLARK

*In a full-armed swing, Coacoochee sent the knife in the earth. "I sign all treaties so."*

No one spoke for a taut moment—and no one stirred save Abraham, who continued to wave his flag of peace in slow circles above Coacoochee's headdress. Carter sat rigid on his campstool with folded arms, and matched the Seminole's stare. He had learned the value of silence at the start of a powwow.

"Go with God, Captain," said Abraham at long last.

"Go with God," said Carter—and lifted one hand, palm out. The dragoons duplicated the gesture, to the last man. The Padre, asking Carter's permission without words, stepped forward to offer Coacoochee his hand. To Carter's astonishment, the chieftain dropped to one knee and kissed the Franciscan's robe.

*"Buenas tardes, jefe!"* said the Padre—and lifted the Seminole with a gesture.

*"Buenas tardes, Padre mio!"*

"Your pardon, great chief," said Carter. "We must parley in our language only."

Coacoochee's face hardened into its familiar mask: he stared at Carter and beyond, his eyes slitted with hate. "I will address the Captain through my sense-bearer."

"As you like. Will the father of Seminoles break bread with us?"

"Coacoochee breaks no white bread," said Abraham.

*"Surrender to us now, and we let your men go free. You have the great chief's word."*

*This too is ritual,* thought Carter: *I know my lines by heart.* "The white man was Coacoochee's brother, not so long ago."

"The Spaniard's, yes," said Abraham. "Never the *Americano's.*"

"If we entered his hunting-ground, we came there to bring abundance and peace."

"For yourself perhaps. Never for the Indian."

"Speak from Coacoochee's heart, Abraham. His heart has better wisdom."

"If you came in peace, Captain Carter, why did you bring your guns? If you wished us abundance, why did you transport so many of us to the desert of the West?"

"Our West is not a desert. Your own chiefs went out with our Army, to inspect their new hunting-ground. You had their report—"

"Our chiefs lied. All but Osceola, who is dead."

"Coacoochee knows that these arguments are in vain. Today it is he who breaks the peace, not us. His braves have no right to cross this river. This land is ours. His lies to the south."

"In the great swamp, where you banished us. The Seminole is not a swamp Indian."

"You signed our treaty. You agreed to retire to the Big Cypress—"

"Coacoochee is here for but one reason. To find food to bring back to his squaws and his young. To find medicine to make his heart swell with pride again." Abraham tossed his staff aside, and let his hand drop to his scalp-belt. "*Your* heart will make such medicine, Captain. Surrender to us now, and we let your men go free. You have the great chief's word."

"So the great chief would eat my heart. Is that all he asks?"

"Your heart and liver, Captain. The rest we would feed to our dogs."

Again a long silence clamped on the courtyard. Carter let it last to the breaking-point. "The great chief must forgive me. I've no intention of dying."

"So we must kill you all?"

"We threw you back once, Abraham. Try us again, and you'll feel our full strength."

"We know your full strength, Captain Carter. It is quite useless to pretend."

"Will you hear *my* terms, now?"

"Gladly."

"March from the palmetto, four by four. Drop your weapons at the gate, and sign a treaty for transport to the Arkansas prairie."

"We are through with treaties, Captain Carter—and you are already dead men." Abraham bowed deep in the direction of the Padre. "All but the holy father, of course. We wish him no harm; we ask him to cross to our side while there is still time."

The Franciscan spoke quietly, with his eyes on Coacoochee. "I stay with my white brothers. And I advise the father of Seminoles to sign their treaty."

Coacoochee held up his hand for silence. His English was halting, but adequate: he spoke directly to Father Miguel, ignoring Carter entirely.

"We have no wish to fight here, *Padre mio.* We know this is sacred ground." He strode over to the spring with the words, dipped his hand, and scattered the droplets in a solemn half-circle, as though he were propitiating an unseen deity. "Ghosts walk here by moonlight; it is not good to make war on such a spot. But our white enemy will not yield. What must be, must be."

Carter rose, and made the final gesture of the powwow—as ritualistic, in its way, as all the others. Grady came forward at his sign, to unstrap a saddle-bag; Grady offered the rolled parchment with a flourish. It was a peace-treaty, of sorts, needing only names and dates: a standard document, carried by all company commanders in the field—for those rare occasions when a tribal unit came forward voluntarily to ask for Western transport.

HE saw that the Seminole had recognized the document at once, saw his face freeze in a devil-mask of hate. But it was too late to draw back now. He unrolled the parchment with a flourish that matched Grady's—bowed low before Coacoochee, as protocol demanded, and offered the treaty for his inspection.

"Read our terms, father of Seminoles. You'll find them generous."

Army and Indian stood eye-to-eye for a moment, unstirring. The knife-blade flashed from the Seminole's doeskin sleeve, splitting the taut foolscap with a tearing screech, like a drumhead breaking. Completing the gesture in a full-armed swing, Coacoochee sent the knife hilt-deep, in the earth between Carter's feet.

"I sign all treaties so—like my leader, Osceola. We have no more need of words, *Señor Capitan.* You die when I choose."

He turned with the last shout, and stalked into the palmetto, his shoul-

ders proud. Tuskenegee spat in the earth of the gateway, and followed. Abraham, lifting his flag of truce in a last sorrowful gesture, melted from sight in his master's footsteps. Carter stared gloomily at the empty gateway, with the ripped treaty clutched in his fists. The parley could not have gone more dismally if he had planned it beforehand. . . . He spoke without turning, as Grady slammed the gate and the others scurried to their posts.

"Apparently we must make use of your generous offer, Padre. May I see that armor now?"

"You may indeed, my son."

He heard the clang of metal behind him, heard Grady's appreciative chuckle, and turned in astonishment to find himself facing a *conquistador,* complete from jack-boots to high-peaked helmet. *It's old Ponce himself,* he thought, *risen from some dim grave to help us when we need him most.* Then he saw Padre Miguel's lean brown face smiling in the shadow of that rusted steel, and found he could laugh aloud, after all.

"You've lost no time, Padre."

"We've no time to lose, Captain. It's just a half-hour to moonrise."

Now Father Miguel was in the courtyard, walking ponderously from the dungeon—a small man bowed down by the weight of steel. And yet, when he looked again, Carter decided that the Franciscan was anything but slight of stature, despite that load of metal. Already, he seemed to tower in the faint new starlight like a figure from a more heroic time.

"You wished to see the armor. I donned it, while you finished the parley. No, *hijo mio*—do not come too close: it might spoil the illusion—"

"Tell me just what you'll do, Padre?"

"It's very simple, really. You heard Coacoochee just now: he believes that ghosts walk here by moonlight. Very well: I shall *be* a ghost—on that northern rampart—at the precise moment when you emerge from the passage and make your break for the river. If I succeed, I'll hold their attention, while you swim away. If I fail, we fail together."

"Do you still endorse this, Grady?"

Grady's voice emerged from the thick shadow of the ramparts. "I endorsed it once, sir. That endorsement goes double now. But I think we should talk over details."

Father Miguel bowed—as deeply as his ancient armor would permit. "By all means, Sergeant. I'll await your decision here." He settled on the camp-stool that Carter had vacated—a life-size *conquistador* still, in the growing sheen of moonlight.

Carter and Grady walked down the parapet, with averted eyes. Each was trying hard to appear casual—to cover the fact that they wished to be well out of earshot before they discussed the Padre's stratagem in earnest. Carter spoke first, with one elbow on the coquina, and the dead segar still clamped in his jaw.

"If you've reservations, Sergeant, this is your last chance to voice them."

"That's my first point, sir. We can't have reservations. Whether this plan works or not, it's our only chance."

"What's your second point?"

"A question, Captain: Will Father Miguel seem real, come tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid that he's real enough. Whether he's friend or enemy is another matter."

"I don't doubt his friendship. From where I've been sitting since we came inside these walls, he seems to be everybody's friend—including Coacoochee."

"Does that mean he intends to betray us?"

"I won't answer that, sir. Not until you set my mind at rest. Is he a ghost, or not?"

"Ghosts don't walk by daylight."

"Maybe they don't. But how did he know I took that latrine passage, when he was sound asleep? How could he tell you just why we came into the scrub today, before you said a word? How did he find that suit of armor in that dungeon-keep—when we both know it's bare as poverty's bones?" Grady tossed up his hands. "That's Point Two, Captain—and you must admit it's a sticker. Will you still insist he's real?"

"I say he's an honest antiquarian from a cloister in Augustine—with a love for all the world. I think he's read history correctly—and believes the Indians' only hope is to yield. I say he's honestly trying to help us stay alive. Could I leave you in charge here, if I thought otherwise?"

"Fair enough, sir. That brings us back to where we started. Or should I say, to Point Four? You say he's real—but will you risk walking across that courtyard, and striking a lucifer on that armor plate?"

Carter fell silent, and strode moodily across the parapet, to stare down into the rectangle of sand boxed so neatly in these coquina walls. The moon had climbed fast, above the screen of yellow pine to the east of the palmetto plain. Now, it silvered prairie and courtyard alike—making its own magic about the tall, armored figure that waited there, patient as time on the Army camp-stool. Carter grimaced as he glanced down the parapet, and saw that the dragoons were taking their sentry duty very seriously indeed. So far, no one had ventured so much as a glance at Father Miguel. . . . Or was this indeed the Padre, or a wraith from an older time?

"I'll be honest, Grady," he said at last. "Right now, I wouldn't touch him for the moment. Especially, with a lucifer match. But I still say he's on our side."

"So do I, sir." Grady considered a moment in turn. "Not that I've one good reason why. You've left me in tight corners before, and we've come through. This is the first time you've left me with a banshee. Even if it's a friendly species—"

"You couldn't pick a worse moment to go Irish on me, Sergeant."

"Sorry, sir. And I won't wish you luck on your journey—that's bad cess too, you know. Shall we look at that latrine together, now—and ask Simpson to hold the lantern?"

The bull's-eye (fed with the best whale-oil wick, and shielded to throw its light in one direction only) starred the gaping hole at Carter's feet, the faint scrabble of Grady's descending bulk. Already the Sergeant's touseled head seemed a mere dark pinpoint in the hungry blackness that engulfed it. Carter was sure that this was the oubliette he had dreamed of this afternoon, when they had dared to enter Fort San Juan one more time. His mind refused to grasp the fact that this was merely the ancient drain, carved in the living coquina of the wall—and opening, a scant ten feet below, to the shelving bank of the St. Johns.

"Can you hear me, sir?"

He jumped to attention at the Sergeant's whisper—and bent closer to the steep-slanted tunnel to whisper in turn.

"Perfectly. Though I don't see how you'll get back."

"Come down and try for yourself. Simpson will hold the lantern. There's plenty of room at the bottom."

Carter handed the lantern to Corporal Simpson, who was quaking visibly, there on the verge of that sheer drop. Before he lowered himself into the tunnel in Grady's wake, he risked a second glance at the quiet figure of Father Miguel—who still waited unstirring in the midst of the courtyard. Rusted though it was, the moon had begun to pick out silver high-lights in the armor. The moon, painting that sandy rectangle with its cold white magic, gave the silhouette of the old *conquistador* an added dimension of reality: his long shadow, etched like ink on the courtyard, was clear-cut as a medallion. *Ghosts don't cast shadows,* thought Carter—*not even by moonlight, not even in a haunted fortress.* The thought comforted him a little, as he lowered himself into the yawning mouth of the drain.

The bull's-eye lighted his path. Once the first queasy recoil from the sweating wall had pinpointed his skin with gooseflesh, he found that it was easy enough to descend, thanks to the rough edges of the coquina blocks and the firm handholds they offered. He could see that the drain (widening into a sort of shallow cave as it approached the base of the fort) opened where coquina and earth were joined, in a maze of brambles and wild grapevine. Already the whisper of the river made its heartening music. He drew a deep breath, and let himself plummet down the last six feet of the descent, landing with a soft thud beside Grady, who squatted like a contented djinni in the deep shadows of the wall.

"Quiet does it, sir," the Sergeant whispered. "There's a war canoe out there in the shallows. You could spit in their eye, if you liked."

CARTER parted the tangle of grapevine to watch the dugout skim by in the prodigal wash of moonlight. A dozen braves, leaning hard on their paddles, had already pointed their prow into the deep water beyond. Obviously they had just crossed from the far shore of the St. Johns, and had swung closer to the fort than prudence warranted. Downstream, where the palmetto opened to reveal a half-moon of beach, Carter counted a half-dozen other canoes, drawn up precisely. Council-fires were glowing among the pines on higher ground; here and there a war-drum muttered in the darkness. There was no other sign that three hundred Seminoles now ringed the fort on three sides, with more to come. Only this narrow wedge of coquina, abutting directly on the water's edge, was unoccupied by hostile forces. Carter noted that Coacoochee could rake it with murderous fire, from that sandy beach upstream, the moment his suspicions were aroused. From the cave where he was crouching, the slope of shell and bramble seemed naked as the face of that high-riding moon.

"Why'd you bring a rope, Grady?"

The Sergeant hefted the long dark coil on his arm, and tossed it cautiously into the river. "That was a cotton-mouth, sir. Afraid there's a nest of 'em somewhere about. Good thing for us I saw him first."

"So I must avoid snakes as well as Seminoles?"

"You can manage, sir, if you go down that bank head-first. No snake's dangerous, unless he's spooked—"

"What about Coacoochee?"

"He'll be watching the ramparts, if we can trust the good Father—"

"Back we go, then, to check watches. Even if I can find his canoe, I've a long swim ahead."

In the courtyard, he found the protection of those thick walls was more comforting than ever. He fought off the inertia that had begun to close around him, and handed his pistols to Grady, along with his sword-belt and the insignia of his rank. If he was lucky enough to reach the river, he could use no equipment but his fins. Father Miguel, immobile as ever on the camp-stool, did not stir as he approached. He put aside the absurd conviction that the armor-clad Padre was really cast in bronze, a statue to commemorate a more heroic time. It was reassuring to find the smile under that steel visor was tranquil as ever.

"Ready when you are, Father."

Father Miguel rose with a nightmarish creaking, and settled the heavy cuirass more comfortably about his wiry frame. "Let me make sure I understand. First, you go to the bottom of the drain, and wait in the underbrush. I'll stand on the rampart to the north, while the Sergeant holds his watch on me, here in the courtyard. When he gives me my signal, I walk along the ramparts in plain view of the hostiles. You'll give yourself a full minute after that signal, to make sure I've gathered and held their attention—"

Carter nodded mutely. The Padre's dead-level tone had done much to still the mad thud of his heart. He spoke quickly, forcing the huskiness from his tone.

"You'll be a first-rate target in the moonlight. What if they don't believe you're a ghost?"

"If I draw their fire, you mean? So much the better for you, my boy—"

"I can't let you take this chance. One of my own men could wear the armor as well as you—"

"Let us not discuss that aspect, Captain. Each man must play his own part in this life: I have chosen mine."

Carter bowed his head—and his Unitarian soul did not flinch when the old priest lifted his hand in a silent benediction. "I can't thank you enough now. If I live, I'll do my best."

"Say no more. Your risk is far greater than mine."

"I'd give a great deal to see you perform."

"Perhaps you shall, if you swim fast enough."

PASSING Grady on his way to the drain, Carter paused to lift his machete from the sword-belt. It would be useful in the brambles, and could be discarded if he lived to reach deep water.

"I won't promise to return, Sergeant. I'll only say that I'll do my best."

"Keep that steel between your teeth, sir. Don't let them take you alive. If they give you time, cut your own throat first—"

"A comforting suggestion, Grady. I'll keep it well in mind." Hip-deep in the steep-slanted tunnel, he offered the Sergeant his hand. "Remember, you're in charge now. Don't let the Padre die if you can help it."

"If you ask me, sir, the good Father will outlive us all."

SOMEHOW the ancient drain felt a great deal colder, now that he was negotiating it alone. The bramble thicket, and the narrow cave at its base, seemed to box him in an insufferable embrace—as though he were truly a captive condemned to his oubliette, destined to remain here until only a time-yellowed skeleton marked the spot. He glanced up just once, comforted a little by a glimpse of Grady's face above.

Then the Sergeant's whisper reached him—a voice from the living end of a tomb:

"A minute to go, sir. Cut for your life when I whistle."

Carter unlimbered the machete, until he could hold it like a scepter in his right fist. Resting heavily on both elbows, he lowered his body among the brambles of the slope, until his head and shoulders were clear of their prison.

Daring now to estimate his chances, Carter saw that it was scant ten feet downhill to the St. Johns, that there was space between the underbrush for an agile swimmer to wriggle through. . . . Then, as a moan rose out of the darkness, he forgot the risk he was taking, and concentrated on the sensation the Padre was creating on the rampart overhead.

One by one the war-drums had choked off to silence: across that strip of water, the council-fire had blanketed out abruptly, as though the Seminoles feared to betray their presence. He saw the enemy crowd down to the water's edge, to stare up at the rampart, watched them kneel by the dozens to hide their faces in their arms. The wailing grew, as others crowded forward to look, and shrank back in turn from what they observed above him.

And then Grady's whistle had stabbed at his eardrums, and he was sliding down that naked moon-silvered incline, forgetting everything but the need to reach the chocolate-dark water, and the blessed protection it offered. And yet even as he forgot, a sixth sense clamped down on his muscles, freezing him in his sandy wallow—then sending him back on his haunches as his eyes picked out the coiled shape of death, wound like a spring at the water's edge, and hissing its warning from a fanged, cotton-white mouth.

The pause had saved his life: the moccasin, lapped in a tight six-foot coil, had not quite struck, though its dust-black profile still vibrated with rage in the bath of moonlight. Planted where it was, and defying him to advance, the snake barred his access to the river as efficiently as any Indian sentinel. *Probably it's the mate of the monster that Grady just killed,* thought Carter: *I've never seen a bigger cotton-mouth, not even in the 'Glades.*

Knowing there was just one way to save himself, he took that way before his sick fear could master him. His body swiveled to the right, to anchor his heel more firmly in the whispering sand; he thrust his booted foot forward, and stamped boldly, straight at the heart of that hideous coil. The cotton-mouth struck; the machete, whipping round in a lightning arc, smote the quivering neck a safe six inches below those nightmare fangs. Honed as lovingly as any razor, the Cuban cane-knife severed the snake's head from its body a scant second before the fangs could do their work.

He never remembered flinging the madly thrashing coil aside. He knew only that the caution of the veteran Indian-fighter was with him still, as he wallowed noiselessly into the muck at the water's edge, and swam into the shallows. There was no time to look back now, to wonder how intently that horde of savage eyeballs was riveted on the ramparts of the fort. He knew only that the muddy shallow seemed never-ending—though even here, there was a safe four feet of water under his silently-moving body. He knew only that his chance for life was increased with each clean-limbed stroke that drove him toward the river channel, flowing sweet and dark in the moonlight.

***"You wished to see the armor. . . . Do not come too close: it might spoil the illusion."***

HERE at last was the sandbar that had been his goal from the start. Beyond, the river would deepen in earnest.

Once he could put that screen of marsh-grass between him and the bank, he could pause to take his bearings. . . . He wallowed deep, and clung to the muddy bottom with all his strength as a huge war-canoe swam into sight at the sandbar's head, and all but grazed his backbone in its last sprint toward the shore. Spread crabwise as he was, he could feel the roil of the paddles, the slap of the steersman's sweep as the canoe veered sharply, and seemed to stop dead, directly above him. He sensed that this last boatload of warriors was staring at the fort, as open-mouthed as the others. Even more insistently, his lungs told him that he must reach the air again, or perish in the dugout's shadow.

Playing the patient crab, even now, he dared to swim on, letting his back and shoulders touch the barnacled cypress above him, and following the long, inert shadow of the sweep as it stirred the first flags of sawgrass on the sandbar's rim. To his agonized ears, a bull elephant would have made less sound in that marshy wallow: the Indians at the paddles, staring at the ramparts of Fort San Juan, did not even turn as he broke surface at last and struggled deeper in the sawgrass, striving to put the sandbar between him and his enemies.

As the sawgrass thickened, the razor-sharp blades slashed cruelly at his flesh, but he could not pause for trifles now. Only when the solid hump of the bar had risen between him and the canoe did he pause to draw a real breath. Only then did he dare to inch from river to earth, to study the land he had just quitted.

Perhaps a hundred copper bodies were still clustered along the sandy beach; as many more lurked fearfully in the shadow of the pine grove; every face was turned toward the east, and the fully-risen moon. Hanging as it did just above the sentry-boxes of the fort, that cold lunar radiance made a perfect backdrop for the figure that now stalked gauntly along the ramparts. It paused to stare out fiercely over the palmetto prairie—and then stalked on, wrapped in a majesty all its own.

*"He's more wraith than man; I can only pray he's on our side."*

Carter found he was staring in turn, as breathlessly as any savage on the bank. His mind insisted that the tall shadow on the ramparts (the shadow that was, somehow, almost translucent in that moon-dappled armor) could be no one but Father Miguel. His eyes, watching the ghost walk in its special preserve, insisted, no less strenuously, that this was a spirit from the other world. His heart (contracting in an atavistic spasm of fear) seemed to leap to his throat as the apparition spread its steel-clad arms wide in that unearthly light, and let the rusty clanking wing across the prairie. . . . *Grady's right,* he thought: *He's more wraith than man, and I can only pray he's on our side.*

A vast, primeval howl of terror rose from the massed copper ranks along the river. The Indians at the paddles howled in unison, and sent the canoe hurtling inshore, to the solace of their tribesmen on the bank.

In that instant, Carter found that he too had made himself small on the sandbar, that he had just escaped joining in that banshee wailing.

Then he remembered what he had risked death to do. The chocolate-dark tide claimed him easily as he spurned the sandbar and dug for the channel.

Low to the water like a cruising alligator, he could afford to ride with the river-current for a while, and let the night shape its own pattern. Grady will last till dawn, he told himself—even with a ghost for company. Grady's the eternal sergeant who can take most things in stride.

He looked back just once, before the smooth-flowing St. Johns swept him round the bend. The figure on the ramparts had vanished into thin moonlight. Fort San Juan was only a dark mass against the sky—a monolith in that sun-wearied prairie, standing four-square against the savage threat that still ringed it. *They've had their lesson tonight,* he thought: *Grady and the others are safe till dawn. Of course, things will look different in the light of day: I've a long journey between now and morning, if I'm to turn that threat aside. . . .*

THE ring of his horse's hoofs on the cobbles of the barracks had never sounded sweeter in his ears; St. Francis Street, like the whole sleeping town of Augustine, had never seemed more civilized. For the past hour (as his mind strained forward to this ultimate moment) he had been moving too fast to think. The scramble to uncover the Padre's canoe, in the shadow of that lightning-splintered oak; the long, safe anticlimax of his voyage down the St. Johns, under that high white moon; the thunder of surprise at the Picolata stockade, when he had bellowed the password from midstream and dug for the ferry-slip with all his strength—all this was behind him now, part and parcel of the nightmare he had somehow, mysteriously, survived.

Part of that same nightmare (a bit removed from its ghoulish center) swirled round the stockade, as he had roared his commands for action—as sutler and groom had bustled in the stables to saddle a half-dozen cavalry chargers, and thrust extra carbines in each saddleboot. He had ridden into Augustine in less than an hour, leading his escort at a screaming hand-gallop—straight as a questing arrow to the city gates themselves (they had swung wide at his challenge, as though the sentries expected his coming), and straight down the long, balconied length of St. George Street.

Now, shouldering an indignant orderly aside as he gained the stairway to the General's own quarters, Brevet-Captain John Carter could feel peace settle upon him, as tangibly as healing balm. Here in this mellowed courtyard (with jasmine breathing its fragrance to the moon, and a guitar throbbing softly in the courtyard beyond) it was simply incredible that thirty-odd members of his command were trembling for their lives some eighteen miles to the west. Even more incredible that he had come out of that man-trap alive. . . . *I must cling to that nightmare with all my senses,* he cautioned himself. *How else can I convince the General that it's real?*

The orderly was still sputtering in his wake; he turned to push the boy firmly from the landing.

"With all due respect, Captain—he left positive orders. No one was to disturb him—"

"No one but *you*, Jack," said the General's voice, behind the latticed door. "Let the Captain in, sir! You

should know by now he's always welcome."

The military commander of the Floridas sat bolt-upright in the vast bed, with a chessboard on his knees and a tall glass clutched in one paw. In that light, the General was a grotesque figure that, somehow, did not inspire laughter: a great bull of a man in that cambric nightgown, with a tasseled cap tilted coquettishly over a balding forehead. Carter noted at once that his general officer was in excellent humor, despite the lateness of the hour—and prayed that the mood would survive the news he brought.

"Sit down, Jack—and pour yourself a glass. What's been keeping you? Someone said you were dead, but I knew better."

CARTER opened his mouth to gasp out his message: something in the General's snapping blue eyes choked the words in his throat. "You sent me on patrol, sir—"

"That I did, indeed. A routine affair, to pin down Coacoochee. Never mind that now: I've a bigger job ahead for you. And for that rascal Grady. Why isn't he with you?"

"If the General will permit me—" Carter began.

"Never you mind. The troop's ready: you can take command at once. But first you must find him, of course. See you bring him back safe, if you do nothing else—"

"Grady, sir?"

"Who cares about Grady? Who even mentioned him? I'm speaking of Father Miguel de la Cruz, the archivist at Our Lady's. Or are you unaware that such a monastery exists?"

"If the General pleases—"

"Stop interrupting. You know the Prior is my oldest friend, don't you? Well, this friar I just mentioned is Father Luis' *alter ego,* if you'll pardon my Latin. If Father Miguel dies, Father Luis declares his own life is hardly worth living. Must I remind you that Father Luis has enough friends in Washington to have me recalled, and banish you to barracks?"

"If you think Father Miguel is lost, sir—"

"He's worse than lost, Jack. Gone off to Indian country like a trusting booby, to heal a sick child in Coacoochee's own hut. Gone since Friday, if you please—without a by-your-leave. My guess is the old fellow is losing his mind. I can hardly tell Father Luis that, in so many words—"

"Please don't blame this on *me,* sir—"

"I'm blaming you for nothing, Jack—so far. I'm only explaining that we're *both* dead pigeons, if this old fellow isn't found, *pronto.* D'you think you can find him—with Grady to help? Pick your own patrol—as many as you like. The whole regiment is standing by for marching orders—"

"Including mounts, sir?"

"Full marching order. We're dragoons, aren't we?"

"Would a thousand be too many, General? If I promised to bring back Padre Miguel—and at least three hundred Seminoles?"

"This is no time for levity, Jack!" The commander of the Floridas smote his knee with one great red fist—so furiously, that the chessmen exploded to the four corners of the bedroom. "I've sat here all night, waiting for you to report. If you can't find this unfortunate priest, no one can. But now you're here, I'll waste no time in joking—"

"Hear me, sir, I beg you—"

"Send Grady here at once. He'll make sense if you can't. I know you've been daft, since that last bout of fever—"

*"Hear me! I demand it!"* It was Carter's turn to smite the counterpane, with both fists. The General, frozen to his pillow by this incredible bit of *lèse majesté,* could only gape. That open mouth, and half-open ears, was all Carter needed.

"The Padre is safe. With Grady, at Fort San Juan. That's what I came here to tell you. If we can relieve them by dawn—"

The General's ears opened wide. So wide, that Brevet-Captain John Carter dared to sit down on the immaculate counterpane, and snatch a map of Eastern Florida from the General's own bookcase, as he began to talk in earnest.

IN the courtyard, while the bugles sang their orders in the dead of midnight, he had been delighted that the General's gout forbade him to take command in person; it was more than enough that their commanding officer should curse them from his balcony, and issue stentorian last-minute orders, until the last trooper had clattered through the arch. Cantering down St. George Street in that same inky midnight (with the moon only a vague memory now, behind the city wall) he could accept the startled nightcaps on every balcony as his due—and twirl his sideburns a bit, as a pair of familiar eyes questioned him from an iron grille just beyond the Plaza.

It was easy enough, indeed, in that high moment, to salute the populace crisply and to tell the lady—without words—that he would be back at that same iron grille, with his *serenata,* day after tomorrow at the latest.

It was another matter, here on the rainswept prairie, in the last half-hour before dawn—with a thousand hard-bitten cavalrymen awaiting orders in a long double-file, and terror of failure perched on his shoulder like a carrion bird.

He had commanded regiments before now, thanks to seniority and death—in the shambles on the Withlacoochee, at the bitter stalemate above Okeechobee. But those had been holding actions, with the battle-pattern already hardened; his job had been merely to keep order, maintain liaison, and hold the enemy to his cover. It was quite another matter to sit here in the streaming rain, with a much-folded map on his saddle, and know that his next order might doom that beleaguered company at the fort—or what was worse, send the whole First Dragoons careening into a death-trap no less terrible than Dade's massacre in '37. . . . He squared his shoulders, and shook off the mood, along with the cold cascade of raindrops at his hat-brim. The General had intrusted him with his first real command—and the General's trust would be rewarded.

Willy Emathla, the Mickasukie scout who had ridden with the dragoons since their first day in the Floridas, ghosted out of the mist on his cow-pony, and cantered up to the command-post, with a grin that banished all of Carter's doubts.

"Both wings in contact with the river, sir. No sign of Seminole. We can close at will."

Carter rose in his stirrups, and looked back down the column of steaming horseflesh, until the last gleam of metal was lost in the rainy dark. Their attack had the classic virtue of simplicity; the General had pinpointed it to the last detail—he had only to issue orders. An enveloping movement, with both segments of that long, double column following their outpost-riders to the banks of the St. Johns, at points well above and below the fort. A gradual tightening of that living noose, until the circle closed about the fort, just before dawn. . . . As a corollary, an auxiliary force of five hundred militia, portaging every canoe in Augustine to the Picolata stockade, would dig upstream to join the attack, when Coacoochee began his expected exodus to the boats.

OUTNUMBERED three to one, and pinned between the carbines of the cavalry and the far-from-negligible blasts that Grady would send down from the ramparts, the Seminoles seemed doomed in advance. Why did he hesitate to give his final order, even now? Why, when the whole action had moved like clockwork to this precise point, did he still refuse to trust Father Miguel?

"When you're ready, sir—" It was young Elkins, of course—fresh from his books at the Academy, and eager to draw his first blood. Carter smiled absently at the boy, and wondered if he would be so eager for action, in four years' time.

"You may pass the word, Mr. Elkins. No talking hereafter, until the bugle sounds charge. I'll ride with the left wing. Stay with the vanguard, Willy—and report back as needed."

The troop moved silently—the well-trained mounts taking the trace between the palmetto-clumps with all the grace of cats on a pre-dawn prowl. Carter had marveled before at the precision of these cavalry chargers—so ready to thunder in a head-on dash, so much a part of their riders' caution at a time like this. He smiled again at Elkins—and the boy's urge to let some of his exuberance burst forth in words. He was obscurely glad that he had ruled out words, even though there was little danger in noise, this far from their quarry. Somehow, this hunting expedition had got beyond words long ago.

A huge magnolia, its branches heavy with milk-white blossoms, spread its fragrance against the night—assailing his nostrils with its cloying sweetness. With no real surprise, he saw that he could count each moon-round flower as they passed. The next tree, or the one after, would show its branches against the gray sheen of dawn. Once again, he blessed the General's sixth sense—the instinct of the warhorse that had put a whole regiment in marching order. Even an hour's delay in their departure from Augustine could have spelled disaster.

***"Call Butler and Davis from the sentry-boxes. We must look stronger than we are."***

HERE, finally, was the rough gash in the pines that marked the *Camino Real*—the King's Highway of Spanish days that had once given Fort San Juan a reason for being, then sheared off to the north and west. They crossed the wagon-ruts (grass-grown now, at the end of this long Indian war) at a fast trot, plunging for the deep cover beyond. The night was still profound in the tree-choked trace they were following, but he could smell the dawn, feel it moving in the first sleepy stir of birds in the branches overhead.

John Carter strained his ears into the darkness ahead, wondering why the scouts had sent back no word: surely they were almost at the river bank by now.

Once they had ringed the fort and its besiegers, it would be hard indeed to show Coacoochee a shred of mercy. He had not forgotten his promise to Father Miguel: naturally, he would do his best to force a surrender, but war was war. Indian warfare was the cruelest of all, no matter which side was lifting hair: he could feel the hate of four bitter years boil down the column, itch at a hundred trigger fingers.

These men had fought over the peninsula since that first desperate stand at the Withlacoochee, when Osceola was still alive: one of the two survivors of Dade's massacre rode with his own company. He had recruits among the scouts who had seen a lifetime's savings wiped away when their farm was put to the torch; still others had returned to those gutted homesteads to find wife and children murdered.

If Coacoochee fought back, as he surely would, how could Carter ask such men to take prisoners, and to forgo killing—when his own instinct cried out for death?

Behind the long, cautiously advancing column, a faint light glowed in the east—too gray, as yet, to qualify as dawn, though the shape of tree and thicket grew more definite with each portentous ticking of the watch in Carter's brand-new tunic. That handsome sky-blue uniform was part of the unreality that had dogged him, ever since they had left barracks. Obviously, the commander of so ambitious an action had no choice but to hold aloof from the fracas—ready to watch it as a unit, ready to speed couriers to his wings and order the climactic charge. That same commander must look the part, when he dictated surrender terms and accepted his neatly herded prisoners. Carter could not escape the conviction that he was acting in some weird masquerade—with no cues available for the final scene.

Far ahead, a mockingbird called from the blue-gum thicket; he answered instantly, as he recognized Willy Emathla's signal. The mounted

column ground to a halt, there in the spongy muck of the hammock. Carter rode ahead, ducking his head above his horse's mane to escape the loops of wild grapevine, straining his eyes into the clearing gloom. There was no mistaking the pale lemon light that glowed across the palmetto-prairie just beyond. No denying the solidity of Fort San Juan, four-square as time on the shell-bank a scant quarter-mile to the west.

Willy, sawing on his bridle, pulled to an expert stop in the shadow of an oleander, where swamp and prairie joined.

Carter read the concern in the scout's face, even before he signaled permission to speak.

"We're too late?"

"Of that I'm not sure, *Señor Capitan*. But Coacoochee has gone."

"He gave us till dawn—"

"Perhaps the Wildcat breaks his word, and attacks early. It would not be the first time—"

"You're sure he's not on the prairie?"

"I scouted his camp myself, *Jefe*. There are no canoes on the bank. His cook-fires have been cold for hours."

Carter weighed the stunning news, and felt his own heart go down in the balance.

Coacoochee, he knew, might easily have stormed the ramparts at midnight, when his full force was assembled. The well-known aversion of the Indian to night-fighting had been overridden before—though Coacoochee's braves (more primitive than most) had not yet violated the taboo. Of course, it could be a trick even now. If the hostiles had sensed their coming, they might be waiting in ambush.

"What's your opinion, Willy?"

The Seminole scout bowed his head in thought.

"I would say that the Wildcat has returned to the Glades—"

"But why?"

The scout shrugged.

"Perhaps he reads the future at last. Perhaps he sees that the white man has come to stay."

"But only last night, he said—"

"*Perdone, Señor Capitan.* The heart of Coacoochee will defy you to the end, and beyond. The mind of Coacoochee can grasp wisdom."

"What if he's waiting out there—ready to jump us in the dark?"

"See for yourself, *Jefe*. The dark has gone while we talked."

Carter thrust a cautious head from the green haven of oleanders, and blinked in the blaze of sunrise. Even now, after his years in the Floridas, he could forget the sudden violence of these sub-tropic dawns. In the dank swamp behind him, mist still dripped like rain from the cypress and blue-gum: here at the prairie's edge, the screen of water-oaks was diamonded with moisture. On the prairie, the palmetto-fronds shone like flame in the full glow of daylight.

Standing high on its shell-bank, Fort San Juan seemed to clutch night to its heart, despite the blue gleam of day.

*"Bugler! Sound the charge!"*

He did not turn, as young Barnes shook out the brass-throated horn: timing the action perfectly, he lifted his new cavalry saber high. The first wild note split the peace of morning. All down the line, he heard the officers unlimber their side-arms, heard the grunt of knee on horseflesh, the click of a cocking rifle that had spelled war for his eager ears, on a dozen disputed fields. Then, with an *élan* that transcended thought, he burst into the open, to lead his column across that palmetto prairie. From the cover to the north, he heard an answering bugle, saw Lieutenant Elkins flash his saber in greeting as the right wing of the assault converged on the fort in that same headlong rush. From the corner of one eye, he saw that Willy Emathla, urging his pony into a matching gallop, had unlimbered his own snub-nosed carbine, and was singing loudly as he rode.

*This is no time to sing,* thought Carter: *you know as well as I that we're storming a bastion of the dead.* But he felt his own throat expand in the long, keening wail that circled the prairie, sending the night-birds spiraling in the swamp. For an instant, those wild wings seemed to blot out the sun. Then he forgot everything but his objective—the gray-white coquina mass that refused to accept the benediction of the sunrise.

Far down the circle of cavalrymen, someone began to shout in earnest. Other voices took up that bellow—and once again, Carter heard his voice blend with and rise above the others, as the thirty-three stars of Union broke out on an impromptu flagpole above one of those sentry-boxes, as casually as though the United States Army had kept a cavalry post here forever, with enough spit-and-polish to run up the flag at sunrise—and to sound a brisk tattoo in the courtyard, to answer the bugle of the First Dragoons.

Carter tried hard to saw his mount into a trot again—but there was no restraining the cavalry now. The victory-shout was in every throat—before any rider in those converging columns was sure that victory was in the making, within that somber square of coquina. The commander of the regiment, rising high in his stirrups, and clinging to his saddle with two frantic knees, cupped his hands to shout his order.

*Even now,* his whirling brain was insisting, *this can be a trick. Coacoochee, and five hundred Cuban carbines, may be waiting behind those ramparts, to pick you off as you roar up to that gate, as easily as ducks in a target-range.*

Then the gate burst wide—and Sergeant Grady, magnificent in the feathered cape of a Seminole chieftain, burst into view, with both hands spread wide in welcome. Still sawing madly at his bridle, Carter had a glimpse of Corporal Simpson, his cheeks distended like miniature bellows, blowing a frantic obbligato to their charge, and of massed copper bodies within the courtyard, heads bowed in submission, arms raised in a ritualistic gesture of surrender—of Father Miguel, serene as time itself, crouched over a cook-fire beside the spring, and beaming his happiness to all the world.

Sergeant Grady poured coffee from a blackened pot, handed the first cup to Carter by rote, and beamed cheerfully around at the waiting circle of officers.

"It's really very simple, gentlemen," he was saying. "Captain Carter saw it happen. He can explain—far better than I."

Carter offered his brothers-in-arms an apologetic smile. Most of them had served with Grady; all of them knew he would tell the story his way, or not at all.

"Continue, Sergeant," Carter said. "We've had a long night, but we're still wide awake. In fact, you couldn't have a better audience."

Grady speared a hunk of bacon with a well-sharpened willow wand: his smile, as he looked round the circle, was all but seraphic.

"The gentlemen all know of the hoax, of course? How Father Miguel walked on the ramparts as Ponce de Leon?"

Carter nodded.

"You may continue from there," he ordered.

The Sergeant's eye moved to the gatepost, where the Franciscan friar still stood—his hands spread wide in benediction. One by one, the captives within the courtyard continued to file from fort to prairie—into the hollow square of cavalry, which shepherded them in turn to the river-bank, and the flotilla of Army canoes.

*Come noon,* thought Carter, *and we'll have over three hundred of those red devils in the stockade at Picolata, meek as so many sheep on a New England hillside.* He forced iron

into his tone, even as he banished that too-peaceful image.

"Speak up, Sergeant. You've already said that Father Miguel walked out that gate and entered Coacoochee's camp around midnight. You say that he returned, an hour before dawn, with three hundred Seminoles in tow—all of them willing to be transported to Arkansas—"

"Precisely, Captain. Isn't that what you found, when you rode up just now?"

Carter's tone was impatient as he inquired:

"Shall I call Father Miguel, or will you fill in the gap?"

"There's no gap, sir. We misjudged him, that's all." Grady looked at his company commander, with something akin to reproach. "And I'm sure you'll agree we've no right to disturb him now. After all, those heathen savages are giving up a great deal, for his sake—"

"Are you telling me that he persuaded three hundred of Coacoochee's tribesmen to emigrate—under their chief's nose?"

"That sums it up, Captain."

"When did this begin?"

"Long ago, sir. The moment Florida became an American territory. Father Miguel saw the writing on the wall. He worked night and day to make the Indians see it too." Grady spread his hands above the cook-fire: the gesture was oddly pacific, an echo of Father Miguel's own ritual at the gate. "Of course, the war came between. Starvation, too—and hotheads like Osceola and Bolegs and Coacoochee himself. Diehards, who kept insisting yesterday could turn into tomorrow—"

A LIGHT began to dawn on Carter, but he held his peace: Grady would never forgive him if he spoiled the climax.

"So the Padre has been preaching peace on these medical missions?" he asked.

"Peace and migration, sir. Even when he sat in Coacoochee's own house, nursing the young. The elders had begun to listen long ago. So had the medicine-men—and some of the young. Bucks with three wives, eighteen papooses, and no grain for winter—" Again, Grady spread his hands above the fire. "Three hundred or more had started to move out of the Glades last week, to answer his call. Whole families, for the most part—and a few braves who were tired of bleeding for a lost cause—"

"Are you telling me this was the force we fought yesterday?"

"On the contrary, sir. The diehards came too. Coacoochee and company, no less. All the fighting men he could drum out of Big Cypress—and all the bad medicine he could dream up to lure those three hundred deserters back—"

"You mean that Coacoochee attacked us yesterday, while the others stood by?"

"Exactly, Captain—on the far bank of the river. With nightfall, they began to filter over—burning to give themselves up. Of course, the old Wildcat was in control of the council-fire. Told 'em you'd agreed to surrender with the first light. Father Miguel gave 'em the only medicine that would stick, after that. You saw him pour it down their throats, from the river?"

Carter nodded mutely. Without turning, he knew that the circle of blue-coated officers had nodded too—bemused by the Sergeant's story.

"It was easy, after that. Every red infidel at that campfire knew that the ghost of the fountain had cast his spell around this fort. All of them—even the die-hards in war-paint—knew they'd done wrong to leave the Glades.

"The good Father had just one more risk—but it was well worth taking. He walked through those palmetto flags—right up to Coacoochee's council-fire. He slapped down the last war-drum, and asked for immigrants to Arkansas. You saw how many followed him—"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Carter found that he was on his feet, with no conscious sense of transition.

"Tell me one thing more, Grady. Had Father Miguel planned this—this migration from the first?"

"He had indeed, sir. Fort San Juan was the rendezvous. You might say it was too bad we spoiled things by bringing in the Army—but I'm not sure. Three hundred Seminoles need a bit of managing, come morning, if you ask me—"

"And Coacoochee? What of him?"

"Moving south again, Captain. Perhaps two hundred strong, in the canoes. With no ammunition to spare, and little corn for winter. If you ask me, he'll have less than a hundred braves in his command after the first cold snap comes—and even less, when the squaws begin to howl in earnest—"

CARTER squared his shoulders, and stared round the circle of officers. Now, of all times, was the occasion for a clarion call to arms. An announcement that no man in the First Dragoons was to sleep out of his clothes until Coacoochee, too, was drummed into some stockade. Reading faces in that intent circle, he knew at once that it was a poor time for heroics. He had promised the General three hundred prisoners, and he would deliver. Coacoochee would live to die unmourned, in the fastness of the Glades.

Once he had saluted his juniors, there seemed no real need of words. Each man in the regiment had pursued that diehard enemy, round the clock and the seasons. With five hours' start, they all knew pursuit would be a wasted effort.

It seemed far simpler to walk to the gate of Fort San Juan, with Grady at his side—to stand for a moment, in the clean bath of sun, and watch the last of the captive column file down the river-bank. Father Miguel walked with the stragglers, a papoose slung on one shoulder, his face lifted to the dawn.

"I never even thanked him, Grady. Not properly, at any rate—"

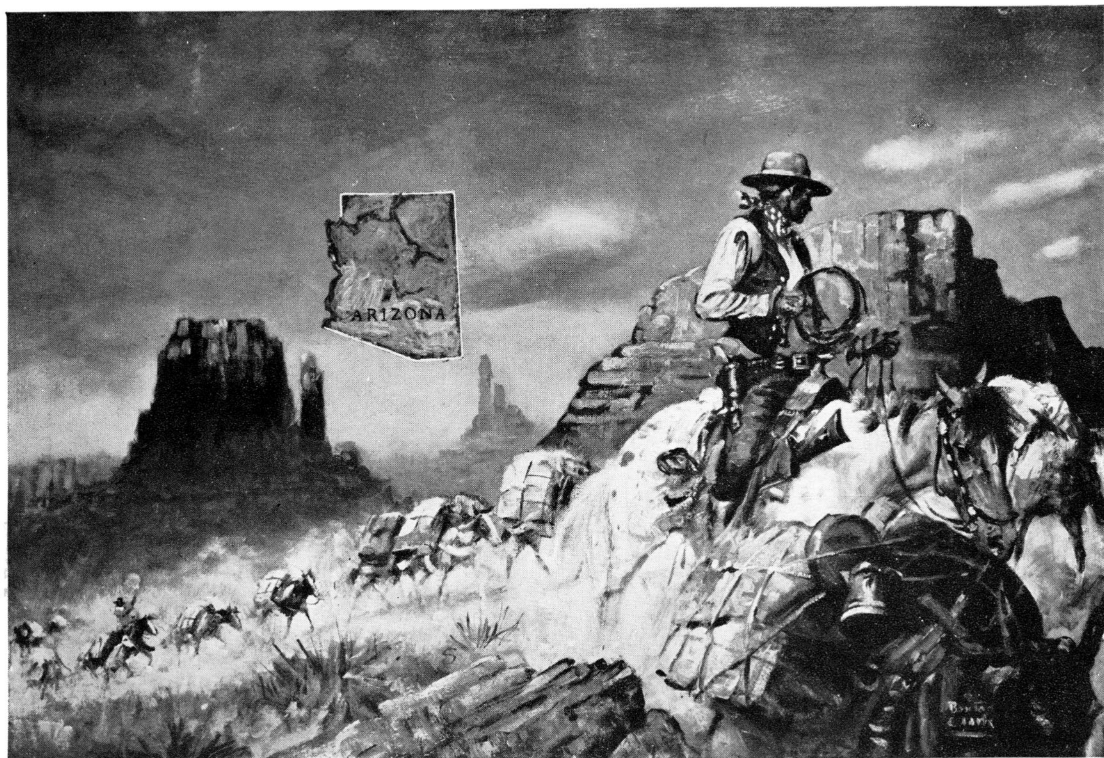
"He thanked *you*, sir. For clearing out when you did. Said he'd never have been able to lure those heathen inside, with a warlock like yourself in command."

"Of course you managed perfectly—"

"It's the Irish blood, Captain. Don't hold it against me."

Carter found he could laugh after all, despite his bone-deep weariness. "Speaking as an Irishman, would you still call the good Father a ghost?"

"Never in this world, sir. Who ever heard of a ghost casting a shadow at sunrise?"




## These United States . . . . XLV—Arizona

# The Baby State

ARIZONA was the forty-eighth State to be admitted to the Union. She's proud to call herself the Baby State, but she's the baby of the United States in seniority only. In area, Arizona ranks fifth. For her wide expanse of scenic grandeur, many rank her foremost.

The Territory of Arizona was first extensively opened to the outside world by the coming of the railways in 1888, but they broached only a small section of this vast area. To penetrate the fastness where Arizona's mining and scenic treasure was held, there was no substitute for the pack-train, and the surefooted pack-horse carried supplies and provisions into the most remote mining camps. On the trip out, they were heavily laden with copper and gold ore or concentrates.

Today, great highways carry the rich ore from Arizona's mines to the railway centers of the State, which ranks first in copper and second in gold mining. But the pack-horse is still a part of the Arizona scene. For each year many thousands of Americans come to Arizona to ride trails which within living memory were fought over by Apaches and Federal troops.

The State today has the second largest Indian population in the United States—mostly Hopis, Navajos and Apaches. One of the six Marines who won a permanent place in American history when they raised the Stars and Stripes on Iwo Jima was a full-blooded Pima Indian from Arizona.

Spanish missionaries were the first white men to enter Arizona, in the Sixteenth Century. During Mexican rule from 1821 to 1856 all white settlements except Tubac and Tucson were abandoned because of fierce and frequent Apache raids. But Anglo-American trappers traversed the Gila Valley as early as 1826, and this same valley was used by American military expeditions during the Mexican war. One of these, the Mormon Battalion, captured Tucson in 1846. The treaty that ended the war left nearly all of Arizona south of the Gila to the Mexican State of Sonora. The Gadsden Purchase secured that territory for the United States in 1853, when it became apparent that here must lie the route of the newly proposed Pacific coast railway.

On February 14, 1912, the territory of Arizona was admitted to the Union. Her first governor, W. P. Hunt, served seven terms in that office.

In the north of the State is the Grand Cañon of the Colorado River, with an awe-inspiring breadth of four to eighteen miles. It is rich not only in beauty but also in the geological records that it holds, records that are many centuries old. In the east is the Petrified Forest of pine and cedar trees, turned to stone by the action of waters rich in mineral content.

Besides producing one-third of all the copper in this country, Arizona mines quantities great or small of every mineral known to this country, except tin. It ranks third in citrus fruit produce.

The Apaches, whose great chief Geronimo surrendered to the U. S. Army only sixty-four years ago, preserve on their Arizona reservations a custom that has been overlooked in our American heritage. No married male is permitted ever to speak to, or even look at, his mother-in-law!

# BLUE BOOK

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