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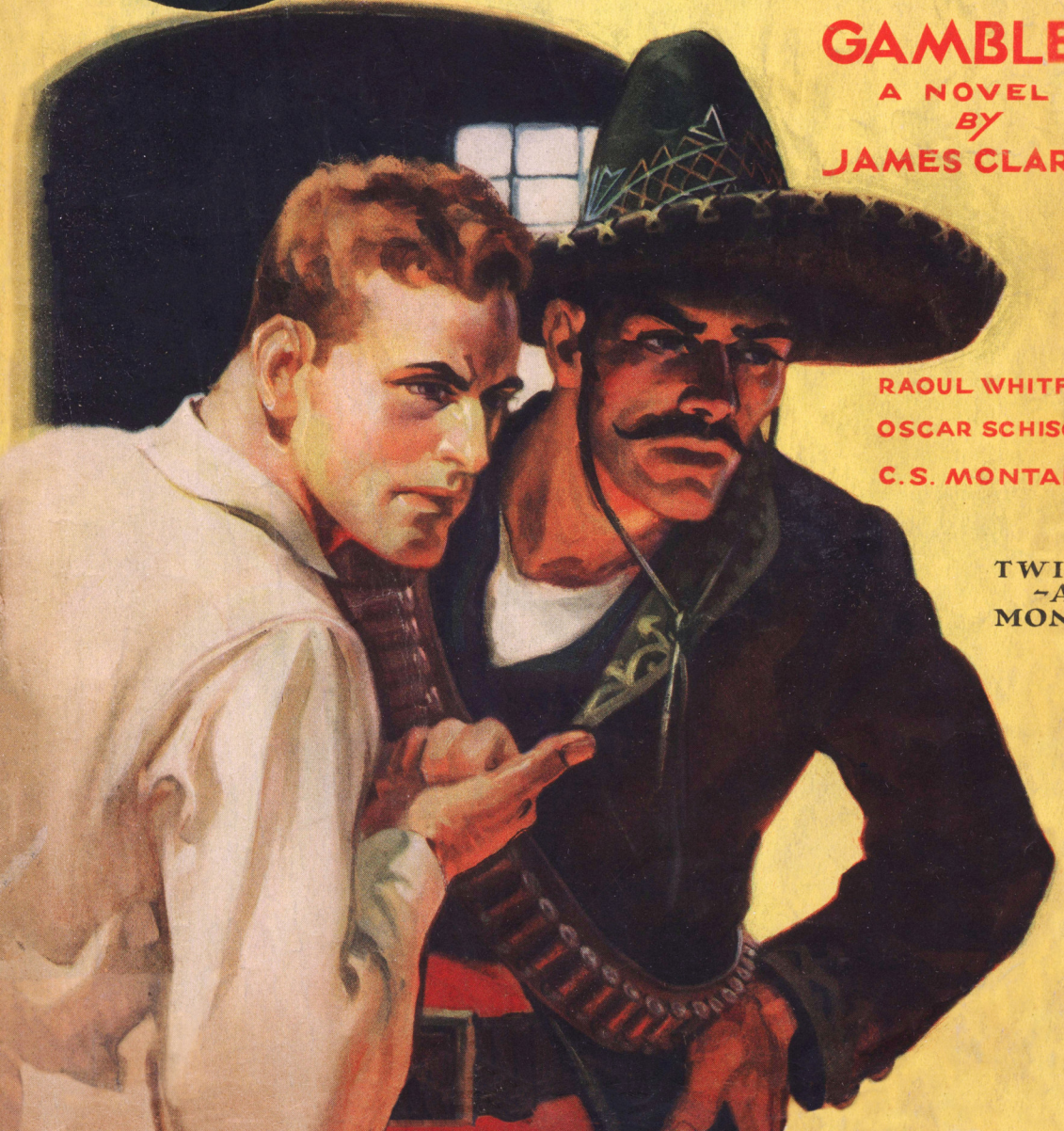
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The Popular
Complete ★
Stories

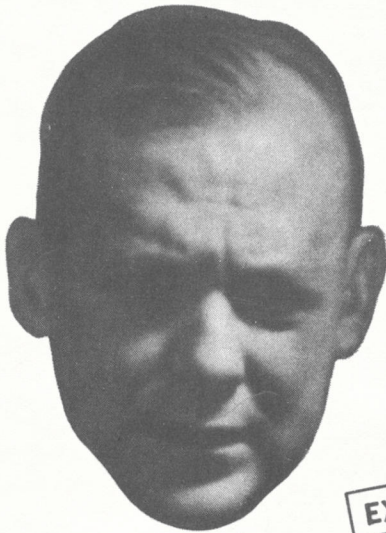
GAMBLER
A NOVEL
BY
JAMES CLARKE

RAOUL WHITFIELD
OSCAR SCHISGALL
C.S. MONTANYE

TWICE
-A-
MONTH



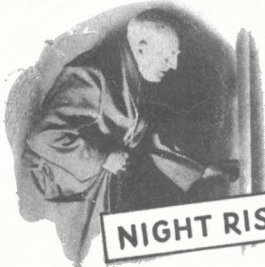
This Little Gland Robbed Me of Sleep and Health



HEADACHES



SCIATICA



NIGHT RISING



EXHAUSTION

Until I Discovered a New Hygiene for Men Past 40

IT had been coming on for years—this devilish thing called "Prostate Trouble!" I gave it little thought at first, because I figured that all men experience a certain change about my time in life. That was my big mistake. I thought it was just the breakdown of oncoming age and that I would have to put up with it. I did for a while, but a year later, my condition went from bad to worse at an alarming rate.

These Common Symptoms

My sleep was broken a dozen times every night. In fact, one hour's fitful sleep was a luxury. Pains had developed in my back and legs, and I was chronically constipated. I was run down in body and almost broken in mind—practically an invalid at 58. I talked to scores of men. In fact, I talked to practically every man I met or could get to listen. As I look back now I think I was practically insane on the subject.

Faces Surgery

has been my experience that a of men past 60—and a sur- mber even at 40—had one ressing symptoms, but i it as bad as I did. my doctor, of course. offer me but little re-

lief. I spent hundreds of dollars in an effort to avoid an operation, for I had learned that gland surgery was usually dangerous. This insidious little gland that robbed me of sleep and health now threatened my very life.

The Turning Point

Then I read one of your advertisements. I admit I mailed the coupon without the slightest hope. There probably never was a more skeptical mind than mine. But this simple little act turned out to be the biggest thing in my life.

I can never thank you enough. I am now sixty. I can go to bed at ten o'clock and sleep straight through. My doctor has pronounced me in normal health. My entire body is toned up, and I feel almost like a youngster. I have had no return of the trouble, and now use your pleasant treatment just fifteen minutes a day, over one or two months, just to make sure that I keep my perfect health.

Millions Make This Mistake

When I was at my lowest ebb, I encountered so many prostate sufferers that I know there must be millions of men doctoring for sciatica, pains in the back and legs, bladder and kidney weakness, chronic constipation, loss of physical and mental capacity and a host of supposed old age symptoms, who should probably be treating the prostate gland! In fact, I learned not long ago that certain medical authorities claim that 65% of men at or past

middle age suffer from disorders of this vital gland.

My advice to these men is, not to make the mistake that I made. Send the coupon for that little book, "The Destroyer Of Male Health." Find out the facts about this little gland, which the book contains. It explains a prominent scientist's discovery of a new home hygiene—explains how, without drugs or surgery, without massage, diet, or exercise, this method acts to reduce the congestion and combat the dangerous symptoms.

Scientist's Book Sent Free

See if these facts apply to you. Learn the true meaning of these common complaints and see why these ailments in men past 40 are so often directly traceable to a swollen prostate. The book, "The Destroyer Of Male Health" is sent without cost and without obligation.

Simply mail the coupon to W. J. Kirk, President, 7650 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 303 Van Nuys Building, Dept. 76-E, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 76-D, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Can.

W. J. Kirk, President,
7650 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio

Please mail me at once your Free booklet, "The Destroyer Of Male Health," and full details about the new home treatment. I am not obligated in any way.

Name

Address

City State



WHAT *will* you be doing ONE YEAR *from* today?

THREE hundred and sixty-five days from now — what?

Will you still be struggling along in the same old job at the same old salary — worried about the future — never quite able to make both ends meet?

One year from today will you still be putting off your start toward success — thrilled with ambition one moment and then cold the next — delaying, waiting, fiddling away the precious hours that will never come again?

Don't do it, man — don't do it.

There is no greater tragedy in the world than that of a man who stays in the rut all his life, when with just a little effort he could advance.

Make up your mind today that you're going to train yourself to do some one thing well. Choose the work you like best in the list below, mark an X beside it, and without cost or obligation, at least get the full story of what the I. C. S. can do for you.

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Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X:

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MARCH 15th NUMBER, 1932

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Yes, right now, I'll give you groceries at rock-bottom, wholesale prices and a wonderful chance to pocket \$10 to \$15 cash profits in a day. L. C. Van Allen, of Illinois, reports profits as high as \$125 in a single week. Gustav Karnath, a farm laborer in Minnesota, says, "Made \$20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. B. L. Hedges, of New York, writes, "Never before have I made such money. Never fail to make a profit of from \$18 to \$20 a day." Of course some of my people make more than others. But these earnings of a few of my Representatives show the wonderful opportunities that are waiting for you. And right now I offer you an *even greater* proposition than I gave these people.

Big Profits for Pleasant Work

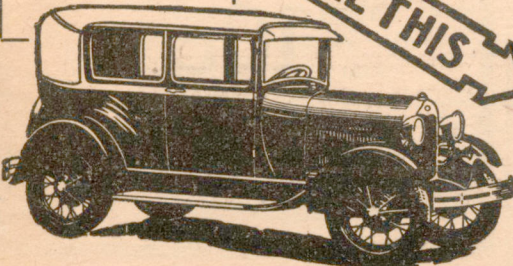
I am President of an old-established, million-dollar manufacturing Company. We distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. We have thousands of customers in every state. Last year our Representatives made nearly *two million dollars!* Now I invite you to share in these big profits. I'll help you make money from the very start. And I will give you Groceries and other Household Supplies at *savings of nearly one-half!* Thus you have a wonderful chance to *make big money* and also *save big money.*

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If you want to get groceries at our rock-bottom wholesale prices—and a chance to make \$10 to \$15 in a day besides—send me your name at once. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity. I will give you full details of my amazing new plan without cost or obligation. I'll give you the big opportunity you've long been waiting for. It may mean hundreds—even thousands of dollars to you. So don't lose a moment. Mail the coupon NOW!

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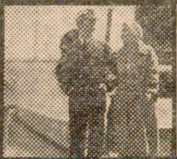
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You have many jobs to choose from

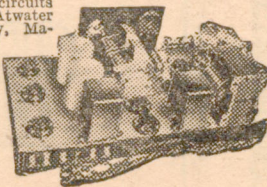
Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers and pay \$1,200 to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually need testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$7,500 a year. Radio Operators on Ships enjoy life, see the world with board and lodging free, and get good pay besides. Dealers and jobbers employ service men, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay \$30 to \$100 a week. There are many other opportunities too.

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All entries must be sent to the Publicity Director's office, E. A. Williams, Studio 342, 1023 N.



Sycamore Ave., Hollywood, California. Only one suggestion for a name should be submitted by each contestant. Everyone is invited to submit a name, and in case of ties, duplicate awards will be given. Officials say that any name may win the \$750.00, even if submitted on a post card or scrap of paper. If you can use \$750.00, here is an opportunity to get it. Send your suggestion at once.—Adv.



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CONVICT 6138, escaped from the State Penitentiary; Name, Charles Condray; age 37; Height, 5 feet 8 inches; Weight, 141 pounds; Hair, light brown; Eyes, gray.

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They laughed right out loud ...when I offered to play —but a moment later a hush fell over the entire crowd

"LET'S all give my country cousin a great big hand!" cried Helen, dragging me out to the center of the room.

Everyone at the party started to clap. "What's he going to do?" someone called out. "Are we going to be entertained with an exhibition of fancy hog-calling?"

"No—cousin Ned claims that he can play the piano," replied Helen, "but I'm sure he's fibbing. I happen to know that there isn't a piano teacher within miles of his home."

"Just the same I'd like to see if you big-towners can dance as well as you can wise-crack," I retorted not taking any offense.

"For goodness sakes, please don't play 'Turkey in The Straw' . . . you know this is no barn dance," one of the boys pleaded.

I Let Them Have Their Fun

So they thought I was a "hick"—that folks from the country couldn't learn to play music just as well as people in the city. They thought, too, that they were giving me a great kidding. If they only knew how I had been toying with them right along.

I started to zull out the piano bench and someone started to "moo". "S-h-h-h-l—let him have his little joke," said my cousin Helen. But they kept up the razzing. "Hey there—that's a piano bench not a milk-stool."

"No fooling—and this is a piano, not a writing desk. Honestly, it plays—listen!" And without any preliminaries, I broke into a medley of popular songs. There wasn't a sound in the room. I only wish I could have seen their faces for I knew that I had given them a surprise.

"Keep it up—that's great, Ned," shouted the chap who had been doing most of the riding.

"Yes, please don't stop," begged Helen, "we want to dance."

No second invitation was needed. I played every number that they placed before me. Suddenly they started to pump me with questions.

"Put one over on us, didn't you, Ned?" said Helen.

"You're certainly the last person at this party I thought could play. How about letting us in on the secret?"

No Secret

"Have you ever heard of the U. S. School of Music?" I asked.

A few of my friends nodded. "That's a correspondence school, isn't it?" they exclaimed.

"Exactly," I replied. "They have a surprisingly easy method through which you can learn to play any instrument by mail in just a few months without a teacher."

"It doesn't seem possible," someone said.

"That's what I thought, too. But the Free Demonstration lesson which they mailed me on request so opened my eyes that I sent for the complete course.

"It was simply wonderful—

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- Harmony and Composition
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- Juniors' Piano Course
- Violin
- Clarinet
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no laborious scales—no heartless exercises. My fear of notes disappeared at the very beginning. As the lessons came they got easier and easier. Before I knew it, I was playing all the pieces I liked best."

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To prove how practical this course is, the U. S. School of Music has arranged a demonstration lesson and explanatory booklet which you may have free. They show how anyone can learn to play his favorite instrument by note in less than half the time and at a fraction of the cost of old slow methods. The booklet will also tell you about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*.

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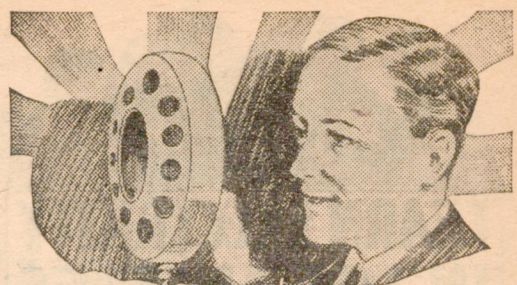
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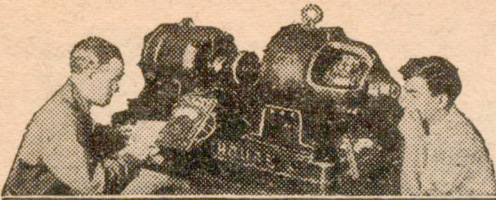
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Epitaphs of the North

By Jack Aston

HERE lies a guide who took a fool
A-hunting up near Lake La Farge
The fool mistook him for a moose—
Both fool and moose are still at large.

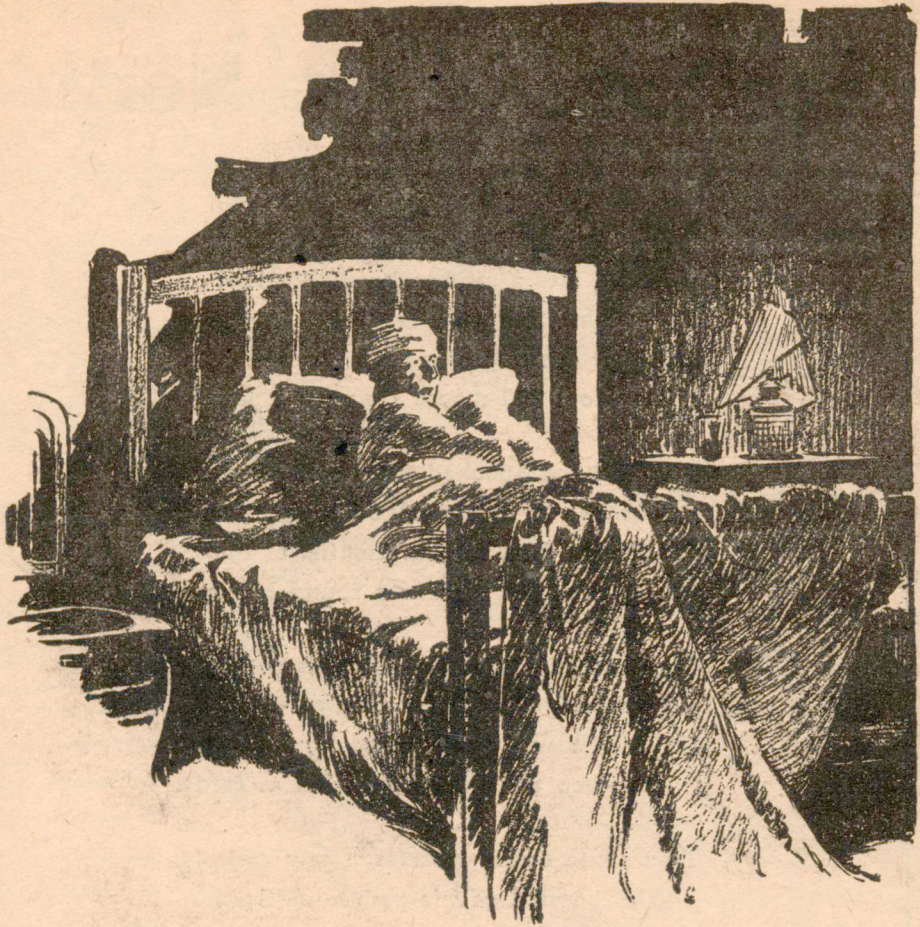
This lad pooh-poohed at grizzly bears;
Said he: "I drive 'em off with stones!"
We missed him for six months or more—
And then the Mounties found his bones.

The gambling man beneath this sod
Was buried by his loving pards;
He taught two Cree braves how to play—
And then tried cheating them at cards.

This stone commemorates a guy
Who boasted of his paddle skill;
He shot Hell's Gulch at spring-flood time—
The boys are looking for him still.

This fellow never had much luck;
Year after year he sought for gold;
The day he made a strike he died—
'Twas simply that he'd grown old.

Here lies in sleep a dance-hall girl;
A wayward kid whose laugh was gay;
She flirted till a fight was on—
And then stepped calmly in the way.



GAMBLER

By James Clarke

CHAPTER I. A TOUGH SPOT.

THEY should have stayed out of the valley, away from the border. "Brick" Wilson and "Kentucky Joe" Branch were dry behind the ears. They'd been around enough to know better. Besides, they might meet people they didn't want to meet. And where the two

towns sprawl, one on each side of the United States-Mexico line, July temperatures read from one hundred ten up. And the Mexican town is iniquitous. Beer flows from the tap and dollars jingle out of the pockets of honest men into the gambler's till.

But the animal, man, is not a very reasonable animal. He does what he wants, not what he should do. The grim rock-and-cactus country



A real man's devotion to his pal when all the cards are stacked against him.

where the Boulder dam is being built grew monotonous and all too dry. Kentucky Joe and Brick Wilson remembered golden beer flowing out of a tap and the jingle of silver coin. They therefore asked for a week off; got it, and departed for the south—sleeping in a day coach so most of their five hundred dollars would be left for losing over the green cloth tables with alluring signs such as “odd,” “even,” “red,” and “black.”

“This time,” Brick Wilson said firmly, as they stepped off the afternoon train, “we stay out of trouble, see? Last time we started out for some fun you broke your leg.”

Kentucky Joe grunted.

“I don’t ever look for trouble, you red-headed goat. A guy gets plenty, without asking for it. Say, I wonder if that bartender, Monte, still works at the Hoot Owl? He can make a silver fizz——”

So, with the exchange of insult and advice in which friends delight, they crossed the international line—though they should have known better.

"I know that guy," Kentucky Joe said an hour later over his beer. "That's Ching Paulson."

They were in the Six Bits Bar, a dim, high-ceilinged room which contained round-topped tables and—at this hour—very few people. Brick Wilson saw a slight, blond man in a linen suit. He sat facing them, with his back to the wall, and sipped at his beer as if it were so much cold poison.

"What's the matter with him?" Brick asked. "He acts like——"

At that moment the man looked up. Kentucky Joe grinned in recognition. The man put down his glass and stared at Kentucky Joe with eyes which changed swiftly. They widened with instant, startled recognition. Then fear came into them and a look of terror. The next moment he had recovered himself. A hard, impersonal expression took the place of fear. He looked at Joe a moment longer, then turned away, as a man turns from a stranger who is staring at him.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Joe said, and stood up.

BRICK followed Joe to the man's table. Joe stood there, balanced squarely on his feet, and looked down. The man kept his face averted.

"Ching," Joe said, "what's the idea? You know me. What do you want to stall me for?"

The man turned. For a moment it seemed as if he would deny knowing Joe Branch. But the impersonal look faded from his eyes and fear came back. He wet his lips, and his voice was low, heavy with feeling.

"Joe, if you're hot, beat it! Take a run out and let me alone."

Joe pulled out a chair for himself and sat down.

"So that's it, is it? I'm not hot, Ching—not any more. Blackie Solano's dead, and I'm on the up-and-up. Have been for a long time. Nobody's going to think anything about us talking to you. Meet my partner, Brick Wilson."

Paulson shook hands. Brick saw that he had an intelligent face, haggard under the valley tan, blue-black around the eyes. His hand, picking up the beer glass, trembled.

"That was a dirty deal Solano gave you," he said to Joe. "Railroading you to the big house. You were lucky to get away from that mob. Artie Cross is dead, too."

Brick Wilson did not say that he knew how "Blackie" Solano and Artie Cross had died. They had had Joe Branch right where they wanted him, to use or break as they chose. It had been necessary that they die if Joe was to stay alive, let alone stay straight. What had happened was best forgotten.

This man did not look like a crook any more than Kentucky Joe. The plain, hard strength of Joe's face was matched by refinement in Paulson's. He went on talking.

"Some tramp killed Solano in a jungle with a rock. You're lucky, Joe."

Brick had hit Solano with that rock, to keep him from shooting Kentucky Joe. The memory rose in his mind and faded again. This man was afraid. He wanted to tell them something and couldn't get started.

"Yeah," Kentucky Joe said. "I'm lucky, all right. What you doing for a living, Ching?"

Paulson took a quick sip of beer, put down the glass, and stared at the table. One trembling hand reached

up to smooth his hair, and the gesture somehow suggested desperation.

"I can't stand it!" he burst out suddenly. "I can't stand it any longer."

He reached abruptly for his glass, drained it, and filled it again from the pitcher. He was a little steadier, now.

"You'll think I'm crazy," he said. "Maybe I am. But it's got me down. I can't sleep more than an hour or two every night. I can hardly work. I can't get drunk, even. And there isn't any way out. I've thought till I can't think any more, and it's no use. I'd kill myself, but I haven't even got the guts to do that." His mouth twisted in a curious smile of self-contempt.

BRICK and Kentucky Joe were silent, waiting for what he had to tell. But though Paulson wanted to talk, he could not seem to get the words to come. Finally Joe asked:

"What kind of a job is it?"

The question seemed to release something in Paulson.

"It's a bank," he said. "The bank where I work. I've got to tell some one or I'll go crazy, and you're square, Joe. You wouldn't squeal on a fellow."

"Of course not," Joe said. "Wilson's regular, too."

"They're coming to-night, from Los Angeles. I've given them the lay and the keys to the grille doors leading into the safe. Everything's set—I can't stop it!"

Paulson lifted his glass with a shaking hand. His haunted eyes stared at Kentucky Joe.

"Listen; you know how it is, Joe. They had you on the same kind of a spot—only you got out. I was a youngster when I got into it the

first time, keeping books for an insurance company in San Francisco. A man came in and said he had some silk he wanted me to sell. It was good silk. I sold it to women customers and the boys in the office. The man said it was smuggled.

"I'd sold three lots for him before I tumbled. By that time I'd got used to making big money and didn't care where it came from. I kidded myself that it was a business proposition; that it wasn't my affair if the stuff was stolen as long as I didn't do the stealing. It's hard to tell how deep you're in till you're over your head.

"I sold a lot of silk, and other crooks began coming around with stuff for me to get rid of. I sold that, too. But when they wanted me to handle some furs from a robbery that was all over the front page, I balked. I said I was going to quit.

"'Like hell you will,' they told me. 'You're a fence, buddy, and you sell what we bring you and like it. Play nice, or some cop will put the arm on you—if you live long enough.'

"They had me, see? I had to do what they said. One mob I'd been working with decided to knock off the insurance office. I gave them the lay and the time when the night watchman would pass. But I couldn't stand working in a place that I'd helped to rob. I went to Stockton. They followed me there, and stuck up the express office where I worked. I drank myself out of that job to keep from thinking about it.

"I hid out for a while, then went to the coast. I thought they'd forgotten about me, but they hadn't. They were just waiting till I got in solid. That time a night watchman was shot. He didn't die, but I thought he was going to.

"That's the worst of it now. That's what I think of all night when I can't sleep. I wouldn't mind getting caught. It would be a relief in a way. But if this keeps on, somebody's going to be killed and it will be my fault. I can't stand it, I tell you!"

Again his hand passed across his hair, as if he were trying to brush away some weight pressing down.

"I know," Kentucky Joe said. "I know how you feel."

"And even if they don't kill anybody," Paulson burst out, "my life's shot to pieces. I've always got this hanging over me. I'll lose my job. I'm set here, because I'm really a good bookkeeper. I could work up pretty high. But my nerves will go to pieces and I'll be out in the street. Where'd I get another job, with times the way they are?"

PAULSON glared from Kentucky Joe to Brick Wilson as if daring them to argue or doubt him. Paulson was in a very bad way. When Kentucky Joe was thoughtful he drummed with his fingers on the nearest hard surface. He was drumming now on the table. Brick sat back and waited.

"Ching," Joe said abruptly, "you won't spill this to the cops, will you?"

Paulson raised his eyes slowly, as if ashamed.

"I've tried," he said. "Twenty times I've made up my mind I'd tell the police next morning. But I can't do it. The mob would bump me off, of course. That's one thing holding me back, but it's not the biggest thing. Somehow, when you string along with crooks, you begin thinking the way they do. If I told the cops I'd be a squealer—a rat. It's crazy, but I can't bring myself to turn them in."

Kentucky Joe nodded in understanding.

"Who's in this mob?" he asked.

Paulson told him. "You know some of them," he said. "They used to work for Solano."

Kentucky Joe nodded. He looked across at Paulson, his black eyes very direct under their straight brows.

"We'll stop this for you, Ching. I know how tough it is to be in a spot like you're in. And I've got something to pay those mugs off for, myself. I'd like 'em better in the big house than out loose."

Hope and paralyzing fear struggled in Paulson's expression.

"How—how'll you do it?"

"The less you know," Kentucky Joe told him, "the better off you'll be. We'll stop their clock, and nobody's going to even think you had anything to do with it. Come on, Brick."

CHAPTER II. FIXED.

THEY left Paulson staring after them and went out into the sun-white street. Brick Wilson grinned as they walked toward the line, tipping his straw hat back off his friendly face where freckles showed darker than the tan.

"I thought you weren't looking for trouble," he said.

Kentucky Joe made a pass at him. "There won't be any," he said. "This is one time when the cops are going to be some use. You can get back over here in a couple of hours and start losin' our money, you great, big gamblin' man, you!"

In their hotel Kentucky Joe telephoned the town's one newspaper and asked for a reporter by the name of "Howdy" Tucker. He was not in, but the telephone girl would be glad to deliver Joe's message. He joined Brick, grinning.

"Howdy must have been trying out his line on that dame," he said. "She started to pur the minute I said his name."

"What do you want with that wild Indian?" Brick asked him. "He's nuts."

"All newspaper guys are nuts. But Howdy's a good kid, and I thought maybe I'd help him break a story."

They sat in the stream of an electric fan. The glare in the street faded as the sun wheeled down behind the mountains to the west. Brick jingled the coins in his pocket impatiently. Over the line, play would start soon in earnest. Always something came up to keep a man from his fun.

A long, weedy figure came through the door, paused a moment to accustom eyes to the gloom. Howdy Tucker was bareheaded. He had a long, oddly-shaped face, a lopsided grin, and gray eyes with a glint which suggested that he would probably try anything once—or twice. He was grinning when he came up to Brick and Joe.

"Little Bright Eyes said a gentleman by the name of Branch wanted to see me. Have you seen a gentleman around here?"

"Sit down, you newspaper tramp!" Joe said. "Sit down and listen to what I gotta say."

The reporter drew up a chair and put one hand back of his ear. It didn't take him long to get it down. As Joe talked his grin faded, his face became grave. Then a light came which is only seen in the eyes of reporters sensing a story full of bloodshed and disaster. By the time Kentucky Joe finished, Howdy Tucker was hugging himself.

"What a story! Oh, boy, will this knock 'em dead in the streets! Joseph, you wouldn't kid a fella?"

"I'm telling you," Joe said, and Howdy apologized.

"O. K., and listen; when you print your story, say the tip came from out of town. Tell the cops that, too. Spread it around so people will believe it. You better go line up those cops right now. Tell 'em to bring all the men they can spare. This mob is a tough outfit; and when I say tough, I mean they'll try to blast their way out if they get in a jam."

Howdy left. Over Brick's grumbled protest, the partners stayed on the American side of the line for dinner and went back to the hotel to wait. Kentucky Joe wanted to know what the police said.

IT was after eight before Howdy Tucker came in. He was not grinning. His eyes were angry, and he looked tired. He flopped his lean frame into a chair and began to curse the police department, from the chief down.

"You couldn't drive anything into a cop's thick head with a hammer and cold chisel. I talked to everybody; talked myself blue in the face. They told me to go roll my hoop. Said newspapermen were always hearing goofy rumors and trying to stir up trouble. They said if I'd bring in the guy that gave me the tip, maybe they'd do something. What about it, you two?"

Brick Wilson and Kentucky Joe looked at one another. An uncomfortable silence settled. Howdy Tucker drew angrily on his cigarette. Finally Joe said: "Son, there's reasons why we can't get mixed up in this. The cops haven't ever been good friends of ours. I served time for what somebody else done, and Brick's past is nobody's dang business. We're on the level—both of us. You know that. But cops ask too many questions.

There's another guy we've got to protect, too. We can't go to the station."

Howdy Tucker threw his cigarette away and stared scowling out the door. "You'd think," he said, "that a cop would be glad to get a hot tip and stop a thing like this before it happens. But not these birds! They wait till the old gray mare's out of the barn, then come around to lock up."

Howdy paused, wrinkling his forehead. "I've got a little something on the chief I could use for a club," he went on more slowly. "But the paper wants to hold it for the fall elections. They figure to get a couple of aldermen, too. But there's one man on the force that has sense. He's a plain-clothes dick by the name of Root. He'll come with me to-night and we'll show these other mugs up. Then I'll write a story that'll be a story."

"You and this dick and who else?" Joe wanted to know.

"Root's a good man. He's got guts enough to tackle 'em by himself—and stop 'em, too. I'll be there with bells on, and spread it all over tomorrow's paper."

"You mean," Joe said, "that this one dick will try to handle the mob by himself? And you'll hang around to get a story? I told you that outfit was tough."

Howdy Tucker got up. He was grinning again.

"I want orchids at my funeral," he said. "Orchids and a steam callope."

When he had gone Brick Wilson regarded his partner with one eyebrow tipped up, and a humorous, quizzical smile on his mouth.

"Did I hear you say," he said, "we weren't letting ourselves in for any trouble? I came down here for some gamblin', Joe."

"Go ahead——" Joe began angrily, then stopped. "This ain't any time to wisecrack, Brick. We got things to do. We haven't got a gun, even."

AT three minutes past eleven, Root, the plain-clothes man, and Howdy Tucker came down the street toward the Golden State National Bank. The square brick building was at that time full of money because of melons. Carload after carload rolled out of the valley town every day for the eastern markets. Pay rolls had to be met, trucks serviced, railroad charges paid. All this took negotiable cash.

The street, that night, was very still. Root and Howdy heard their own footsteps. They heard dogs barking off in the town. In the middle of the block, shadows flickered as a soft night wind moved the big lights at the corners. The bank's side door was in shadow, but a little farther down the street the long shape of a powerful touring car was visible. Its motor was running, the sound barely audible. Beyond the car, a man stood on the curb, facing up the cross street. "Huh!" said Root, and stepped quickly into a doorway.

Standing beside Root, Howdy saw the man leave the curb, and saunter toward the corner. They left their doorway and gained another, in the building next to the bank. The man turned back, walking slowly.

The figure of another man materialized from the dim bank door. The two met and the second turned back. He stood beside the door while two more men came to the sidewalk. They were carrying what appeared to be heavy bags. The big car's motor hummed louder, faster. A fourth man came from the bank, carrying something under his arm.

Root drew his service revolver and stepped out.

"Drop it!" he said. "Drop it and put up your hands!"

The first man—the lookout—whirled to a shooting position. His arm came up. But Root was ahead of him. His service revolver spoke twice. The man staggered, went to his knees. Howdy, knowing that it was no use, cried in a choked voice:

"Look out, Root!" and instantly the night was ripped by a snarling rattle of shots. The man who came last from the bank had opened up with a submachine gun. The first burst sounded like something tearing. Root went down on his face. The big touring car crept toward Howdy, and men began piling into it while the gun sprayed the sidewalk where Root lay.

Above this noise Howdy did not hear the other shot. He saw a faint white flash across the street. The rattle of shots died suddenly. The gunman staggered, dropped the weapon, and went down.

Howdy darted out from shelter. He snatched Root's shoulder and dragged him into the doorway. Noise filled the street again. The men were in the car, now, all shooting across at the spot where a single gun cracked at intervals. Buildings echoed with the crash and spitting of firearms. The car was in gear, moving. The mob was getting away.

A broad-shouldered figure came from the narrow alley behind the bank. The outer fringe of the car's headlights fell on Brick Wilson's face and sandy hair. It glinted from the machined steel of the gun's firing mechanism as Brick picked it up. Howdy saw him tuck the stock under his arm, against his hip. The gangsters in the car were still shooting across the street.

Brick Wilson turned that weapon

loose on them at a range of five feet. Again Howdy Tucker heard the rip of shots tearing the night. The car stopped. One man screamed like an animal. The other shooting stopped. Howdy Tucker remembered Brick's saying that he had been a machine gunner during the war. His hand did not falter. Slowly he pulled the mechanism back along its worm gear, spreading death.

Howdy turned his eyes away. For a moment he saw a figure running from across the street. This man disappeared through the bank door.

THEN silence, heavy and appalling, fell. Howdy looked to see Brick Wilson shake the gun. It was empty and he laid it down. The big car was very silent. Off in the town were sounds of action. Some one was running swiftly. Then came the shriek of a motor-cycle siren. As Howdy Tucker stepped from his doorway, Brick Wilson passed him.

"Good going, kid!" he said, and was gone up the street.

Howdy walked down, looking for the lookout Root had shot. He was nowhere to be seen, and Howdy concluded that he had gotten into the car.

The police ambulance took away Root, who was breathing, though shot five times. It came back for three very dead gangsters and two who would die in a short while. Many people came to stare at the riddled car, and all the policemen on duty worried around and asked questions. Howdy Tucker answered as many as he could. He did not feel superior toward the police. He felt very angry and a little sick. Root's blood was all over his hands and clothes. It got on the paper as he made notes. He told them that he did not know who had shot from

across the street, nor who had picked up the machine gun. They were strangers to him. When he went into the bank with the police, he noted that the bronze grille doors had been battered with a steel tool, evidently in opening.

Two hours later, when he had finished answering questions at the police station, Howdy found Brick Wilson and Kentucky Joe playing rummy in their room at the hotel. He had not yet written his story. There were things he wanted to find out.

Brick's face, as he turned toward the reporter was strained; his smile a mere contortion of facial muscles.

"How's that detective?" he asked.

"Root? He may live. They aren't sure yet. The docs are still taking slugs out of him up at the hospital. He was hit five times."

"Maybe," Kentucky Joe said, "this will teach those cops some sense. Maybe they'll listen when somebody tells them what's coming up."

Howdy grinned. "Maybe we'll have a new chief and a new force after I break this story. But they couldn't have handled it any better with a riot squad than you guys did. Judas! When Joe started shooting from across the street to draw their fire I didn't know what the hell. Then Brick stepped up and took that chopper just like it was a rivet gun or something. You're a whole police force by yourselves! I never saw anything——"

"Shut up, will you?"

Both turned to Brick in surprise. He sat glaring at Howdy Tucker, clenching and unclenching his big, freckled hands. His face was very white. After a moment he got hold of himself.

"I don't want to hear about it ever again," he said. "It's got my goat, kind of. I'm a workingman, not a

killer. In a war, you don't give a damn. It's your job to knock people off. But in peace time—those mugs had it coming, but I don't want to think any more about what I done."

THE room was full of painful silence for a while. Howdy Tucker looked down at his hands, remembering how they had been covered with blood. Neither he nor Kentucky Joe knew what to say. Then—on a sudden inspiration—Howdy pulled a flask from his pocket.

"You need a drink," he said.

The flask was full of tequila—Mexican cactus brandy that burns all the way down and keeps on burning. Brick Wilson took an inch and a half off the flask without a shudder, wiped his mouth and passed the bottle to Joe. When all three had drunk, the reporter said:

"Just one question I'd like to ask, Joe. Why did you go in the bank and jimmy up the locks on those doors? That was an inside job and you know it."

All the friendliness went out of Kentucky Joe's face. His look was cold and hard—harder than any one would have believed he could look. Howdy Tucker sat very still in his chair.

"There's some things you know," Joe said slowly, "that you'd better forget. You didn't see me go in that bank. Understand?"

"O. K., Joe. I didn't see you go in the bank."

"Right. And remember, you don't know who we are; and the tip came from Los Angeles. Keep us out of it, see?"

"I will if you say so," Howdy said. "I didn't tell the cops anything, and the chief's so scared of what I'll put in the paper he don't dare ask too many questions. Only you guys are

cutting yourself out of some cash. The insurance company has a standing reward for stopping bank robberies."

Kentucky Joe shook his head.

"You mean all right, kid, but we wouldn't live to spend the money. I used to know some of that mob—some of those dead guys—and they've got friends. Besides, we'd have to answer a lot of dumb questions the cops would ask. Forget that reward."

"What about Root?" Brick Wilson put in. "He'll be needing plenty of jack if he pulls through. Five bullets can do a guy a lot of harm."

"Good," Howdy said. "That can be fixed, easy. I've got to chase along. See you to-morrow?"

Joe, from whose face the hard look had gone as quickly as it came, grinned, motioning toward Brick.

"We'll be over the line," he said. "This red-headed stiff wants to buck that tiger so bad I can hardly hold him. Gamblin' Wilson, that's him."

But when the door had closed behind the reporter, Brick turned to Joe seriously.

"Why did you jimmy those doors, Joe? You might have got caught in there, and what a sweet jam that would have been! It don't make sense."

"Sap," Joe said. "You never will know your way around. If the doors are scarred up, the bright cops figure it's a plain outside job. This puts Ching Paulson way in the clear. He's fixed. How about some bed?"

CHAPTER III.

MURDER BY PROXY.

IT was not that night Kentucky Joe awakened in darkness, but the next. He awakened feeling as if his head were swelled out like a balloon and there was a trip hammer trying to beat in the top. His

eyes were gummy, his mouth dry and evil-tasting. His body felt strange and far away. He had all his clothes on, even his shoes.

These were sensations, rather than thoughts. He felt too badly to think. Then he knew this for the worst hangover he could remember—even the morning after he'd tried mixing Jamaica rum and champagne that night in Marsalies. And somehow, it didn't seem right. He had been drinking over the border, but he couldn't remember when he began to get drunk. He should remember. Still, he felt so bad that his whole mind was woolly. Maybe later—

Then Joe noticed that the windows were in the wrong place. Light showed along the cracked blinds, pale light from a street lamp. His room faced an alley, or should. Joe ran his hand along the bed and felt wood and a dirty sheet. Their room had an iron bed and clean sheets. He was in a different room.

Beside him the sheet humped up over an inert body. Joe decided it was time to wake Brick and talk things over. He didn't like this. Maybe Brick would remember. They'd better get out of here, anyhow. Joe shook the shoulder beside him. His lips felt puffed and his tongue too big for his mouth.

"Brick!" he mumbled. "Wake up, Brick!"

But Brick made no reply. The form beside Joe slumped back into its former position the moment he let go.

"Drunk," Joe said to himself. "Drunker than a sheep-herder. Brick, snap out of it!"

Still no reply. Joe shook the shoulder furiously, calling to Brick. Then, growing angry, he shoved him violently away. There came a soft jar as the inert form struck the floor. Joe peered over the edge of the bed.

"Brick?" he called questioningly.

No sound answered him. Not so much as a sleeper's groan. Kentucky Joe pushed his legs, which now felt like pins and needles were sticking into them, over the bed. He went to the wall and hunted for the switch. There was none. He groped his way across toward a window, and saw the spidery shadow of a cord dangling from the ceiling.

When Joe's fumbling fingers at last turned it on, the dim, fly-specked bulb showed what was on the floor. The man was not Brick Wilson. A stranger lay there, staring up with wide-open, glassy eyes. The front of his white shirt was blood-caked.

For a long time Joe sat on the edge of his bed staring down at the silent figure. He did not know this man, had never seen him before. The face was sallow and lean. He'd been shot twice. Big caliber, soft-nosed slugs had torn through his chest, one over his heart, the other up near his neck.

Joe sat there wondering if he could have shot this man. The shock of finding that he had slept with a corpse had not roused Joe. It had numbed him, adding to the dull misery which filled him till his brain refused to work. He couldn't think. He couldn't remember. He didn't see how he could have shot the man. Why would he do that? And why would they be in the same bed? But he couldn't be sure. If he'd been too drunk to remember, he might have done anything.

And where was Brick? When had Brick left him?

AT last Joe arose and crossed to a washstand. He filled the enameled bowl from the pitcher and washed his face. Then he put his whole head in the water. It was tepid, but his head began to

clear a little. The pins-and-needles feeling was going out of his legs. Pretty soon he'd snap out of it and do something; just what he didn't know.

Kentucky Joe had his head buried in a towel when the door opened. He ripped the cloth from his eyes and saw a slatternly chambermaid. She goggled at him, one hand on the door frame.

"Excuse me," she said, and smirked.

Then the woman's glance fell on what lay beside the bed. For a long moment she only stared with bulging eyes. She screamed. Her voice rose in a high, hysterical yell. She turned and plunged down the hall, still shrieking.

After a moment Kentucky Joe closed the door. He stood looking down and under his breath cursed the dead man, whom he was now sure he had not killed. Even dead drunk, he wouldn't do a thing like that, and he had thrown away the gun he had used last night—not wanting it to be found in case of trouble. If he was going to get out of this, he'd better be moving. But the windows, he saw when he opened the curtains, faced a paved street from the second story. The street lamp was almost level. If he jumped, he'd likely break a leg. There was no rain gutter near, nor a fire escape. It must be down the hall.

As Joe turned toward the door he heard excited voices and tramping feet.

"I'll stop him," somebody said. "I'll blow his damn head off. Herb, you watch the back stairs. He can't get out." Joe sat down on the bed, throbbing head between his hands, and waited for the police. An unsuccessful break for freedom would look bad. They came in a few minutes. Joe grinned a little when he

heard them tramping outside—at least four men. One lone detective had gone out to stop a whole gang the night before.

They told him to let them in before they started shooting through the door. When he opened the door they entered with drawn guns. One man held a gun at Joe's back while another in plain clothes snapped handcuffs on.

"Who is this guy?" he asked.

"Never saw him till just now," Joe told him.

"Never saw—cut out the funny stuff. Think murder's a joke? Why'd you kill him?"

"I didn't kill him."

"No? I suppose he died of heart failure, huh? Where's your gun?"

"I haven't got a gun."

The other men had been turning everything in the room upside down. One of them brought up a .45 revolver from under the mattress.

"Here it is, lieutenant."

The detective lieutenant broke it open and looked into the cylinder.

"Two shots fired," he said. "Come on, you!"

THEY put Joe into a patrol wagon and drove him down to the jail. But they didn't lock him up right away. The jail was small; a low brick building with offices at one end. They took Joe into the chief's office and sat him down on a straight chair.

It seemed as if they didn't know what to do. Men in uniform and out of it came, stared at Joe, and went away again. A little group stood clustered about the chief's desk, deep in talk.

Presently the chief detached himself and came over. He had a beer-paunch and soft, fat hands. When he tried to look fierce at Joe, he only looked vague and puzzled.

"You'd better come clean," he said. "There's no use trying to deny you shot that man while he lay asleep. It'll go easier with you if you confess."

"I'll talk when I get a lawyer," Joe said. "Not before."

The chief stared at him a moment longer, then went back to his desk. Then men started talking again. They seemed to be arguing about what to do with Joe first. A patrolman at the door kept his gun in his hand, as if he expected Joe to make a break at any moment.

Joe sat and waited for what would happen next. The men argued in low, tense voices. In the quiet street outside, the ambulance went by on its way to the morgue. Its bronze bell clanged softly. Joe couldn't think; not yet. He could only wait.

A new man came from the street. He had wide, stooping shoulders and walked heavily on flat feet. His great hooked nose, red-veined, seemed to spread over his whole face.

"Hello, Keppel," the detective lieutenant said.

The newcomer jerked a thumb over his shoulder at Kentucky Joe.

"That him?" he asked.

"Yeah."

The man walked heavily over to Joe. His eyes, peering from the fleshy face, were cold inside their red rims.

"So you knocked him off while he was asleep?" he said.

Kentucky Joe met the man's stare and said nothing. Keppel did not go away. He continued to peer at Joe, moving closer and closer. Suddenly a smile came to his thin mouth, showing the points of yellowed teeth.

"Were you ever in stir?"

Joe looked at him squarely.

"What's it to you, cop?"

Keppel's smile grew a little.

"Plenty," he said, his eyes half shut as if to help him think.

"You were there," he said. "State prison, 1923. Sentence commuted for good behavior."

His smile said that he was pleased to find a man who had been released for good behavior now arrested on a murder charge. The chain on Kentucky Joe's manacled wrists jangled as his grip tightened on the chair. His body was straining upward against the pull, as if he would rise and hit Keppel in spite of himself and the handcuffs.

"You're that screw!" he said. "You laid me out with a blackjack."

The smile left Keppel's mouth. His red-rimmed eyes stared into Joe's a moment before he turned away.

"I know this one," he said. "They had him in the State pen during '23. I never forget 'em, you know that."

The chief looked over at Joe nervously.

"We'd better lock him up," he said. "Put him away and keep him there till they come and take him to the county seat. He won't tell us anything and we can't take chances with a dangerous——"

"Let me talk to him," Keppel cut in. "He'll tell me something."

CHAPTER IV.

JOE GETS THE WORKS.

EVIDENTLY, Keppel had pretty much his own way in that police department. The chief was reluctant, but in a moment they were leading Joe into a bare room with barred windows facing the street. Keppel closed the door behind him and drew down the blinds. He turned on a brilliant light in the middle of the room. As the man moved toward him, planting

one flat foot heavily before the other, Joe braced himself. He knew what was coming.

Keppel came within a foot of the stool where Joe sat and looked down at him.

"You're dumb," he said. "You mugs are all dumb. The minute you get sore at a man, you grab a rod and smoke him. That's all you know how to do."

Joe said nothing. Keppel moved an inch closer.

"He took that roll off you shooting craps so you followed him to his room and knocked him off. You didn't have any more sense than to touch him, and the girl came in while you were washing off the blood."

"Did I?" Joe said.

"'Did I?'" Keppel mimicked him. "Why try to stall, you rat? Why don't you come clean and save yourself some trouble?"

"If you know so much," Joe asked, "maybe you can tell me how I shot him twice without anybody hearing it?"

Keppel laughed silently. His yellow teeth showed in mirth.

"A cinch!" he said. "How does a pete man muffle the explosion when he shoots a safe? He puts blankets around it. This guy was in bed, and you put your gun under the covers—under a pillow."

"Smart," Joe said. "Go ahead and tell me some more. Tell me why they kicked you out of State prison. You made a good racket out of being a guard."

Keppel's lips closed over his smile. He moved up till he was almost touching Joe.

"You're going to talk now, tramp. It's your turn. Who is that guy, and where did you put the roll you took off him?"

Joe shrugged his square, thick shoulders.

"Figure it out, cop. You made up a good story this far. Go ahead, finish it."

The smile came back to Keppel's thin mouth. His cold eyes were lighted. In a moment they would blaze. Joe knew that. He knew Keppel for a man who went a little out of his head when working over a prisoner. He liked beating people up. At the penitentiary, he had often had two or three men in hospital at once.

"Won't talk, huh?" Keppel said. "Want me to make you talk, do you?"

"Go ahead, have your fun."

KEPPEL brought the flat of his hand down on Joe's cheek and ear. A slap can jar a man more than the blow of a bare fist. Even though Joe moved with the blow, his whole head rang. Keppel hit him on the other side.

"Who's that guy you killed?"

Joe said nothing. Keppel slapped him again, quickly; one—two, one—two. Joe's head bobbed back and forth and he drew up his legs as if in agony. Between slaps Keppel kept repeating: "Who was that guy you killed? Tell me who he is, tramp!"

Joe would not have answered if he could. In the brief instants when his head was erect he looked into Keppel's grinning, brutal face. He gathered his legs up farther, drawing himself into a knot as if to escape the pounding.

Very suddenly he let go. His feet landed in Keppel's stomach and sent him staggering across the room. For a long moment the ex-prison guard stood clutching his middle and gasping. Kentucky Joe laughed.

From now on, he knew he was in for a very bad time, but he'd had one chance. He was still laughing when Keppel rushed. Keppel

grabbed Joe's collar with his left hand and smashed his right into Joe's face. His right arm moved like a piston in short, wicked jabs. Two to the belly, one to the face. Joe's ear would swell up from that one. What he'd do to this guy if he just had his hands free. Things began to grow a little hazy. The battering went on, but Joe didn't know much else.

He thought the door opened, but couldn't be sure. Keppel went right on beating him to a pulp. Somebody was shouting. Keppel kept on. The shouting grew louder, nearer.

Then there were no more blows. Joe, seeing dimly, realized that two men were holding Keppel by the arms and having all they could do. Keppel was cursing them, trying to wrench loose. His lips were drawn back over his teeth, his pale eyes burning.

KEPPEL was dragged out of the room. The chief, more vague and worried than ever, came and looked at Kentucky Joe. He shook his head and called a policeman who helped Joe to his feet and out into the office.

Howdy Tucker was there, very white in the face, very worried and wrought up. Joe grinned, as well as his battered mouth would allow. But Howdy didn't grin back. He stared at Joe for a moment, then whirled on Keppel.

"You damned animal! You rotten barrel of fat! I hope you had your fun doing this, because it's the last time you'll ever beat up a man in this town."

Keppel, whom the men had loosed, snarled at him. The light had died from his eyes, but he was still ugly.

"Speak your piece, sister! Maybe you think a jail's a Sunday-school. You newspaper guys are smart.

Yeah, smart enough to interfere with justice."

The fat chief said, "Now, boys —" but Howdy cut him short.

"Justice!" he said. "All you know about justice is the boots and a black-jack." He turned to the chief. "Get this; if anybody hurts this man, if he doesn't get treated right while he's here, I'm going to raise such a howl you'll wish you'd never been born. You know what I mean. I'll have half the men in this department hunting a hole to hide in. Be seeing you, Joe."

He plunged out, leaving them staring at each other uncomfortably. Keppel, the first to move, spat toward the door and shambled out. The chief said wearily, "Take him away," and a uniformed cop led Joe back into the dimness of the jail.

CHAPTER V.

HEADED FOR THE CHAIR.

ON his back in the narrow iron bunk, Joe slowly and painfully collected his thoughts and put them together as one might fit together the pieces of a broken jug. The .45 found by the police was his starting point. He had never had that gun in his hand, let alone hidden it under the mattress. Drunk he may have been, but not so crazy. Also, it was impossible that he had shot a man twice, put him in bed, and gone to sleep beside him.

The gun and the body had, therefore, been planted. It would not have been very difficult to bring a body up the back stairs of the house in which he had awakened. Joe had noticed on coming out how dim the halls were, how few people had been about, and that the tumble-down rooming house stood on a dark, quiet street. No, it would not have been hard.

But he, himself, had been brought up as well as the dead man, and in such condition that he remembered nothing about it. The answer came suddenly to him, so simple that it made him grin. He'd been doped; fed a "Mickey Finn"—whisky with knock-out drops in it. Nothing else could have made him feel so terrible when he woke. The oldest trick in the world.

He remembered, now, that he had been drinking with strangers. He and Brick had met this bunch at a bar. One claimed to have belonged to his old outfit in the army. Three of them had sat at a table swapping yarns while Brick went off to find some gambling. He had promised to meet Brick later. They must have fed him the Mickey Finn soon after, thrown him into a cab and brought him to that room. It had been dusk when he sat down with the strangers. Now it must be after midnight.

This left two questions unanswered, both important. Why had they framed him on a murder charge? And what had happened to Brick Wilson? Only time could answer the second. He puzzled about the first, staring into the dark. It was easy enough to see why men might want to fasten the murder of the unknown man on an innocent party. But why Joe Branch? Had they simply picked the first likely-looking man? Not if he could still make a good guess. The frame-up had been too carefully staged, and there was his stretch in prison to make his guilt appear more reasonable. Somebody wanted him sent up, and had taken this way to accomplish it.

A light flashed on in the corridor. Joe saw the night guard walking toward him, carrying something. It was a tray. Joe went to the gate of his cell. A narrow, steel-bound

slot had been made through the bars, head-high. The guard shoved the tray of food through this without opening the door. Evidently they would take no chances with Joe Branch.

The guard wanted to talk. "Tucker had this grub sent to you," he said. "You've got a hell of a drag with the papers."

But Kentucky Joe had talked to enough cops for one night.

"I'm lucky anybody gives me a break," he said. "Thanks, buddy."

THE guard lingered while Joe carried the food to his bunk, but drifted back down the passage when he saw he would get no more words. The steak and fried potatoes were good, but Joe found he could only eat a few mouthfuls. The drops in his drink were still working through his system. He felt pretty sick.

The coffee, black and scalding hot, was the only thing that did him good. He sat sipping it with the tray on his knees, still trying to puzzle out the forces which had placed him here. It was very bad, this situation. Circumstances had sprung up to catch and hold him as suddenly and inescapably as the snap of a bear trap. He saw no way of beating a murder charge. All the circumstantial evidence was against him, and his prison record would make a jury believe that evidence.

Whoever had planned the trap must have known of his record. The more Joe thought the more he realized that the whole affair had a deliberate, malicious aspect. Somebody wanted him out of the way—and badly enough to make the means as unpleasant as possible. Who?

As Joe thought he stared down at the tray on his knees. And gradually he became aware of the news-

paper on the tray's bottom. He looked at it quite a long time, only half conscious that he was doing so, busy with his thoughts. Then he realized that he was staring at a picture. He bent suddenly closer.

The picture was only one column wide, not very distinct. But as Joe bent closer, the man in boots, work clothes and a wide-brimmed hat was unmistakable. The man was himself.

Joe slipped the paper from under the dishes, unfolded it and read. The story was Howdy Tucker's account of the foiled bank robbery. Two unknown heroes had come out of the dark, shot down the robbers, and disappeared into the dark again. Their identity was unknown. Only one clew remained to identify these saviors of the community; a group photograph of some men who had worked on a river dyke in the vicinity some years before. The member of this group, whose picture appeared below, bore a striking resemblance to one of the men who had saved the bank. So far, the paper had been unable to learn his name.

Kentucky Joe's knuckles whitened as he gripped the sheet. Knots of muscle showed along his jaw. His black brows drew together over his angry eyes. The damned young idiot! The brainless cross between a coyote and a rabbit! Howdy Tucker had got him into this fix. Somebody who knew him, some one connected with the gang had seen the picture and recognized him. They had taken this way of putting him on the spot.

FOR a long time Joe sat with the paper in his hands, motionless. They had caught up with him again; the gang which had gotten hold of him when he was an irresponsible youngster home from the war. He had thought he was clear, done with them. He had

helped Ching Paulson get clear, too. Now he faced a murder charge and the electric chair. And all because of a picture in a newspaper.

Through Kentucky Joe Branch, who had always taken life as it came, feelings flowed stronger, more mind-shaking than ever in his life. They followed on each other's heels; hot anger against Howdy Tucker, bitterness and despair.

Steps roused him, steps approaching his cell. He looked up to see that the corridor light had been turned on again. Kentucky Joe put the paper down and went to the gate to meet Howdy Tucker. The reporter's face was still white, his mouth working. His first words showed that he had guessed why Joe was in jail.

"I could go out and cut my throat! Honest, Joe, I never thought anybody'd recognize that picture. We needed a picture to make the story more live, and I just ran it. What a fool!"

Joe Branch was himself again. "This isn't any time to moan around," he said. "I'm headed for the hot seat. We've got to do something, if there's anything we can do."

"I'll get you a lawyer," Howdy burst out. "Look, Joe, maybe we can beat this rap. It looks bad, but we can prove you and Brick stopped that holdup, and that'll check against your having been in stir."

"Sounds good," Joe said. "But you can't tell 'em about me and Brick stopping the bank job unless you tell 'em I was in with that gang once. That makes me out a bad egg who would likely murder somebody and go to sleep alongside him."

"I know who tipped you off to the bank job," Howdy said. "Paulson told me the whole thing. He was crazy wild when he heard you were in jail. I had all I could do to keep

him from coming down here and confessing before I talked to you. He'll spill the whole thing when you come to trial. You'll get out of it, Joe."

Joe shook his head decisively. "Ching Paulson ought to have a break. I don't want him to go up; and it probably wouldn't do any good. I know how you feel, kid. You made a dumb play, and you want to make up for it. But there's just one thing you can do for me. Find Brick Wilson."

Howdy Tucker stared at him in unbelief.

"You mean you aren't even going to try to defend yourself? Don't be a fool, Joe!"

"Find Brick! I know what I'm doing. Find him and tell him what's up."

Howdy opened his mouth to argue, closed it again. Kentucky Joe's face and tone had command, an urgency. In spite of himself the reporter felt that Joe did know what he was doing.

"Get going," Joe said. "We haven't got much time."

Reluctantly, Howdy went down the passage, leaving Joe looking after him through the bars.

CHAPTER VI. THE TIP-OFF.

THE international boundary had been closed for some hours. It was illegal to go from one country to the other now. But this was not one of Howdy's worries. There were half a dozen well-used paths by which a man who knew his way could cross without being stopped. Fifteen minutes after he left Joe the reporter was walking up from the railroad under the low, awninglike roofs which slanted over the sidewalk of the Mexican town.

His troubles had begun. This town, whose chief reason for existence was the thirst of men for alcohol and their itch for gambling, was not large. But to find one man whom few people knew by sight would not be easy in a peaceful village. And there were secret places here, and not a few of them; all the way from underground chambers beneath the innocent butcher shops and herb stores of the Chinese to carefully guarded offices where the leaders of this community of vice and violence did their business.

Howdy drifted in and out of gambling dens until he was dizzy from looking. At the Mariposa he took a table to study the dancers on the floor. He saw people whom the police of more than one State would have been glad to come up to. He saw those whose pictures decorated sporting sections and the fronts of theaters. He did not see Brick Wilson.

The watch on his wrist showed half past one and the welcome chill of deep night had crept down from the mountains when Howdy dragged into the Hoot Owl and climbed wearily up on stool. Down the bar a party of men were laughing at somebody's story. The bartender unfolded his arms and came over. He looked at Howdy sharply.

"Tough night, Mr. Tucker? Got a follow-up story on that bank shooting?"

"Set out that bottle of Colonel Glenmore," Howdy told him. "Set it right here where I can reach it."

The bartender watched him down two straight drinks. Then Howdy said:

"Monte, do you know a guy that used to be around here some by the name of Brick Wilson? He's red-headed and got a face full of freckles and brown eyes. Always reminds

me of an Airedale dog; you know what I mean, the color and everything, and the way he looks like a good guy, but not anybody you'd fool with. He stands about five feet eleven—big across the shoulders."

As he talked, Howdy was watching the bartender's pale face. He saw, for an instant, a twitch of muscles and a gleam in the eyes as if his description of Brick had clicked in Monte's brain. But the look was gone as quickly as it came and all expression died from the smooth face, leaving it blank and expressionless as the polished bar.

"No," Monte said. "I don't know him. He might have been in here and me not remember. They come and go, Mr. Tucker—too many to keep track of."

But Howdy had seen that flicker of recognition.

"The hell you don't know him," he said. "Where is he, Monte?"

The bartender shrugged, his face still a plaster image.

"Believe it or not, I don't know him, and I ain't seen him."

Howdy leaned across the bar and spoke in a low, tense voice.

"Get this," he said. "I'm a friend of his, and I've got to find him. It's important. I've got to find him right now. A friend of his is in a lot of trouble. If you know anything, Monte, come clean!"

Monte looked at him queerly.

"Friend of his, huh? You ain't after him to get a story."

"Judas, no! I got to find him, Monte. I——"

"That's different," the bartender said. "Listen——"

With his hands planted in the manner of a bartender telling a racing tip, he whispered to Howdy until the customers down the bar shouted for service. The time had been enough. Over his shoulder Monte's

lips said almost soundlessly: "You can find it, Mr. Tucker. Take care of yourself. Them guys might be kind of nervous around a stranger."

HOWDY went out, turned from the main street into a narrow, unpaved, unlighted one. Between a disreputable bar and a Japanese barber shop he found a stairway. Beside it stood a man lounging in the deep shadow. Howdy walked straight ahead till he came abreast of the entrance. Then he turned suddenly on his heel and went in. But Howdy's strategy was needless. The man said nothing.

The hall on the second floor was dark, but down toward the end Howdy saw a yellow block of light where a transom was open. A steady curl of blue smoke poured through this opening, as if a huge mouth were exhaling. Before the door Howdy paused a moment. He heard a faint clicking sound, then the whirl of stiff pasteboard. A voice said, "Cards?"

Without knocking, Howdy turned the knob and pushed the door open. Half a dozen men turned to look at him. These were onlookers, part of the dozen or more who stood peering over the shoulders of those who sat at a round table or leaned against the wall. Some merely stared. One or two frowned. Not one of the players even glanced his way. But a slight man in a green silk shirt turned swiftly from his place beside the door. His face, made curiously unpleasant by a thin nose which had been twisted by breaking, scowled up at Howdy. His hands were behind him, and it seemed for a moment that he would block Howdy's path and speak to him. But after a moment of scrutiny the scowl faded to a disinterested look, and he turned away.

At the time, the man made little impression on Howdy Tucker. While he closed the door behind him, he searched the smoke-thick room for Brick Wilson's red head and freckled face. As he expected, Brick sat in the game. Bent down toward the cards nearly hidden by the size of his hand, his face wore the rapt, intent look of a man whose whole being is given over to one thing. Worshipers have that look; lovers have it—and gamblers. His eyes were mere slits, his body motionless, until, with an impatient gesture, he tossed his cards onto the center of the table.

Howdy moved toward him and, as he came close to the table, his eyes opened wide and round. A man had stacked five blue chips on top of greenbacks and shoved them calmly into the pot. The bills were hundred-dollar United States notes. Howdy saw more. The banker's tin box was full of bills, and two showed the yellow bellies of thousand-dollar notes. But it was Brick's stack which stretched Howdy's eyes wider and rounder. Before him were chips piled up like the great wall of China. He had more than the banker. And under those stacks of chips were bills.

BY the time Howdy had edged in through the watchers to a place near Brick, all had dropped out except the man who had shoved in the hundreds and blue chips and a huge man who wore a battered Stetson pushed back off his perspiring forehead. The big man called, showing queens against tens. As he drew the pot toward him he looked across at Brick with a half grin.

"There's one you don't get!"

Brick grinned, but made no answer. The man who had lost said:

"Too little for him. He don't come in for chicken feed."

Before Howdy could make up his mind to speak to Brick, a young man with a swarthy, reckless face began to deal.

"Pasture poker!" he said. "Let's have some action around here."

Cards slid face-down before the players. Brick looked at his, raising the corner. The deal went round again, face up. The big man got a queen and opened with a blue chip.

"Sucker money!" he grunted.

The deep tan of his face and the weather wrinkles in his neck, which for all his size was not fat, set him down for a rancher; one of those men who refuse to take on any civilized polish no matter how much money they have. Howdy recognized him as "Big Dick" Chambers, an influential Valley man. He could afford to lose. One man dropped out. Brick received a nine and shoved out chips carelessly. The others stayed also.

The third time around a red queen flopped down in front of the rancher. He shoved out five blue chips, which appeared to be worth a hundred dollars each, with the air of a man going after somebody. The next two men folded their cards. But Brick Wilson, with the same careless shove, stayed with him though he had no pair showing. One other man stayed.

There were now four cards out, three face up, one down. The watchers gathered in, and the curious tension which stretches from man to man and electrifies a whole room grew. In spite of his heavy, rock-like calm the big rancher was on edge. Howdy saw his nostrils draw in. Only Brick Wilson, facing a pair of queens with a lone nine, appeared absolutely unmoved. The dealer wet his thumb.

He picked and dropped a king down in front of the rancher. He wet his thumb again. The card turned in the air and the explosion of grunts and exclamations broke. Brick's card was the nine of clubs. The third player was folding his cards before he got the seven which did him no good.

Howdy realized that his hands were clenched and breath came quick. The rancher was picking up chips. He shoved his stack of six into the middle, his eyes on Brick. Brick took five blues off a stack, held them a moment, then counted out five more. He looked at his hole card and shoved out the ten chips.

A grunt came from the rancher, but he did not hesitate. He reached down to a hip pocket, drew out a worn leather wallet and counted out four hundred dollars in all sizes of currency.

"Turn 'em over!"

Brick, without a word, flipped his hole card into view. It was a third nine.

"You son of a gun!" the rancher said. "You red-headed fool for luck!"

A Mexican across from Howdy spread his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"He is not possible to beat. Me, I'm glad I don't play in these game."

The banker turned to the big rancher.

"This is your night to get taken for a ride, Dick. I didn't think there was anybody luckier than you, but this guy's it."

"Better not buck him, Mr. Chambers," some one else said. "He's too lucky to live."

But Chambers had already taken out his check book and was writing.

"Can't last forever," he said. "And when it breaks, I'm going to be here

to take him. Louie, take this check down to the Tecolote and cash it. Bring up some drinks while you're at it. What'll you have, gents?"

The invitation included the whole room, and while the little waiter—glad to make money when off duty—scurried around taking orders, the players relaxed. One or two got up to stretch. Howdy touched Brick on the arm and stepped back startled.

For Brick Wilson, who had seemed the calmest man in the room, had whirled on him suddenly. His eyes looked out from beneath their lowered lids angrily and his mouth was a tight line. But a grin came almost instantly.

"Hello, news hound! You just got here in time. This is my night, boy. I'm the curly wolf, the grizzly bear from Bitter Creek. You see that last hand? I been doing that since nine o'clock. It's murder."

A SUDDEN tightness gripped Howdy's throat. He could not, for the moment, say anything. Murder! His hand was still on Brick's arm. He pulled Brick after him till they were a little apart from the press of men.

"Listen," he said. "You've got to get out of this game right now, pronto. Give 'em their money back—anything. Somebody planted a stiff in Joe's bed when he was drunk. They've got him in jail over there. He wants you."

Brick did not appear to be listening to what Howdy said. After the first few words his look traveled over Howdy's shoulder toward something or some one on the far side of the room. Only when the reporter stopped speaking did he face him again.

His hand fell heavily on Howdy's shoulder. Brick's face was very red,

his eyes unnaturally bright and intense. When he spoke, his voice was too loud.

"Quit—hell! These are friends of mine, see? Friends! Can't pull out when I'm in 'em for all this money. Got to give 'em a chance to get it back."

Howdy blinked, and tightened his hold on Brick's arm.

"Don't you understand?" he said. "They've jailed Joe on a murder charge. He's in a hell of a jam and he wants you."

"I will not go to bed." Brick's voice was even louder. "What do you mean, coming around trying to bust up the best game I ever sat in? You're goofy, that's what you are! Goofy."

Howdy's eyes hardened.

"You drunken bum! Can't you understand? You can't let Joe down. He's——"

"Get out!" Brick turned Howdy around and began shoving him rapidly toward the door. "You're drunk yourself. Go on home to bed. Get your bottle and go on to bed. Your mamma don't even know you're out."

Every one in the room had been listening. Now they all laughed. Howdy, helpless in Brick's grip, felt himself grow red as he was pushed through the crowd toward the door. There was nothing he could do. He stopped struggling, and they covered the last few feet in a rush. Some one opened the door.

For an instant Howdy saw the man he had noticed when he came in, drawn up tense and somehow menacing beside the open door. This time he was certainly going to bar the way. But before the man could move, Brick shoved Howdy violently. He half fell through the entrance, caught his balance in the dark hall. The door slammed and he heard Brick's voice from within.

"He wanted me to go to bed! Can you tie that? I sent him home to bed himself. His mamma doesn't even know he's out."

Half an hour later when Howdy came into the jail his face was still hot from anger. He roused the guard and hurried him back to Joe's cell, making no reply to his sleepy questions.

Joe rolled out of bed with a squeak of springs and came to the door. His voice was cool and level.

"Find him?"

"I found him all right, the yellow, bone-headed tramp! He was in a poker game and he wouldn't leave. Kicked me out. Either he was too drunk to know what I was talking about, or he's letting you down, Joe."

"He knows, all right. And he ain't letting me down. Don't get Brick wrong, son."

"But he wouldn't come, Joe. When I told him you were——"

"You fool," Kentucky Joe said. "Brick would never get out of that room alive if he went now. He may never come out at all. I sent you to tip him off."

CHAPTER VII.

A MARKED MAN.

BRICK, watching the deal go round, raised his glass and sipped tepid beer while his eyes once more searched the room, picking out individuals, studying faces, reading the situation in attitudes, glances, low-voiced talk he could not hear when men turned quickly to one another. It was not the first time he had looked warily, carefully over the top of cards or glass, nor the tenth. The game had ceased to be sport long ago; before Howdy Tucker had come in two hours before. It was a blind, a mask

from the shelter of which he looked as a lone Indian fighter might from a willow-screened buffalo wallow.

Big Dick Chambers was all right. Brick had been sure of that when they met over the Tecolote blackjack tables. He had become more sure of it as the night went on. Even the rancher's insistence on dealers choice—they were playing draw and five-card stud—hadn't bothered Brick. The other players accepted it, knowing Chambers. He had plenty of money, liked to gamble, but preferred private games like this where he could have his own way. Brick felt sure that his invitation to join the game had been on the level.

The man on Brick's left was a wealthy tequila distiller. Sweat ran down his oily brown face, and he gave off a violent odor of perfume; but he played a good, strong-minded game and took his losses with a white-toothed smile which was likable. Of the rest, all but two were nondescript. The saloon keeper next Dick Chambers and the man who said he was a cotton factor both looked like hard customers.

But it was not the men in the game who concerned Brick most. Over by the door that little man with the twisted nose still stood as he had been standing since long before midnight. Every time a man passed in or out, he looked him over, tensely suspicious. The other man stood against the wall between the windows. Earlier, he had been near the table, watching the game.

He was a curious person. Above high, swarthy cheek bones, his eyes were set perfectly flat. They reminded Brick of the eyes of a fish. He wore his hat pushed far back over straight black hair, and, in spite of the hot night, a carefully-fitted gray coat covered shoulders as broad as Brick's own.

Even before he singled out these two, Brick had had the uncomfortable sensation of being watched. When he first looked at them, they did not appear to notice him. The small one's attention was obviously on the crowd when Brick turned. The bigger man had a favorite spot on the wall at which he stared continually with those flat eyes, hardly ever moving except to finger a white silk handkerchief in his breast pocket. The motion would bring his hand convenient to a gun in a shoulder holster.

THEN, beneath the excitement of the poker game, another tension grew. The men knew something Brick did not. He could tell by the way eyes turned to look at him, and men spoke hurriedly to one another. Brick's feeling of puzzled discomfort grew. Then he connected the whispers and glances with the two, and it became plain that they were there because he was.

When Howdy came a great deal more became plain. Before the reporter spoke to him Brick had guessed that something had happened to Kentucky Joe. As he played poker, watching over the tops of his cards, he had seen a signal pass between the two men. It wouldn't do to let them think that Howdy was delivering a message. He had played drunk and dumb and gotten away with it.

He was conscious, now, as he had been since Howdy came, that these men were there to kill him. Whoever had framed Kentucky Joe would naturally try to get Joe's partner. Brick didn't need a second guess to be sure that their part in stopping the robbery had leaked out. Somebody was out to even the score. These two gunmen—the big one probably—would either force a quar-

rel here, or shoot him the moment he was alone.

For two hours now he had played his crazy winning streak, stalling along. The gunmen simply waited a chance. The feeling of tenseness and strain in the room had grown. The players knew. It affected every move they made. Chips were pushed out carefully, voices lowered. Every man was careful, guarded, waiting. Every man except Dick Chambers. The rancher laughed and joked and cursed his cards as if this were the friendliest game in the world. But Brick, meeting his eyes across the table, was sure he knew that the air held a threat, that Brick was a marked man.

The room was stale with the smell of liquor and tobacco smoke, stifling hot. Outside, the night had gone almost cool, but the buildings did not have time to lose their heat between sun and sun. Brick wondered how the big gunman stood wearing his coat. He must have some reason for it.

It was an idle thought, sandwiched in between the poker game and the continual question which beat on Brick's mind and rang no answer. How was he going to get out of this? He had to get out. Kentucky Joe was in jail, framed on a murder charge. They'd make the charge stick, too; unless some one dug up evidence to show that it was a frame-up. Howdy would help. But he couldn't get Joe out. He didn't know enough about the sort of people he'd have to fight.

If anybody could help Joe, it was himself. And right now it appeared to Brick that he couldn't because he'd be dead before daylight. The other poker players were men he had never seen before. There was little prospect that they would help. In that town a man's own quarrel—

and his death—were his own business and the business of his friends. Brick had no friends. The Mexican police would never be permitted to find out anything. He had to get himself clear—away, and he had no weapon.

Brick looked down at the five cards that had been dealt him and mechanically tossed in chips to open. Three fourths of all the chips in the game were now before him. And the run of luck which had brought them in was holding. He simply could not lose. On two-card draws he had filled bobtail flushes which would have made anybody throw in his cards. He drew to inside straights and won money. Things next to impossible happened.

Of the five cards in Brick's big hand two were sixes. He called for three cards. The fat Mexican also took three. The cotton factor one, the saloon keeper two. Chambers folded up his hand with a disgusted grunt.

"Bet 'em," somebody said to Brick.

He knew better than to bet against a one-card draw. A third six had come in, but he should check the bet just the same. But Brick was not playing careful poker now. He might, he told himself, just as well have a little fun—a little excitement—out of this game. He might never sit in another. He shoved a blue chip into the pot, just to see what would happen.

To his surprise, the Mexican threw in three. The cotton factor threw down his cards with an oath. Three of the others stayed. Brick wanted to know what the Mexican had caught on the draw, and he wanted action. He raised to six hundred dollars. The Mexican raised him back, though his supply of chips was growing lean. Brick met him, and raised again.

THE Mexican glared at him, hesitated, shoved in everything he had to call. Brick grinned at himself inwardly. He was going to lose this one, and deserved to.

"Three little sixes," he said, and turned them over. "This one's to you."

But the Mexican only sighed and carefully folded his cards with fingers flashing expensive rings.

"I did not theenk," he said sadly, "you had enough to beat tens over aces. Now why did I theenk that?" He shrugged and rubbed the white silk covering his paunch with brown hands. "My name is Hilario Maris Cisneros y Flores. I have play poker my whole life, but never yet did I meet such luck as what you have got. It is too much. I weel go home."

His white teeth flashed as he grinned at the others and stood up.

"You should go, too, my friends. It is wise."

Brick did not see or hear the gunman till he pulled out a chair.

"Can I sit in?" His voice was perfectly flat, as flat as his eyes. He pulled greenbacks off a huge, round roll and offered them to the banker. The saloon keeper answered his question.

"Why not?" he said sourly. "Wilson would just as soon take your money as anybody's, Tanner."

The gunman's flat eyes looked at Brick for an instant before he began counting the chips the banker gave him. Big Dick Chambers frowned, but only said:

"Your deal, Wilson."

Brick felt the small hairs rise along the nape of his neck. They always rose like that when he was in a tight place. He put his hand back there and found he needed a hair cut. This gunman, Tanner, was not in the game for fun. Brick knew

what he was there for. He didn't even have to hunt for the reason. Tanner had chosen this way to force a quarrel.

And what a swell time he had picked! Brick had won all this money, raked it in. He had taken long chances and won, run into high hands and won. He was a stranger here. How easy it would be for Tanner to accuse him of being crooked. And it was Brick's deal.

He looked at Tanner, who was stacking chips, paying him no attention. The others were waiting. Big Dick Chambers's eyes held a questioning expression Brick had noticed before. He took a deep breath.

"Give me a new deck, will you?" His voice sounded a little queer, strained, and higher than was normal. Tanner had a gun under his arm. Brick had nothing but his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

GAME'S END.

ALITTLE while before, one of the gamblers from the Tecolote had come up with some sealed decks. He was off duty and now stood beside the banker, watching. The banker tossed a deck to Brick. Holding it in his hands, unopened, Brick looked round the table. He grinned.

"I've won plenty to-night," he said. "And there's a lot of money in this game. Maybe it would be a good idea if somebody took my deal. I want everybody satisfied."

The gunman turned his head sharply, but his eyes showed no expression and he said nothing. Dick Chambers simply looked at Brick. But the cotton factor surprised him by saying:

"Nobody's said anything about you being crooked. Go ahead and deal."

"I'd rather somebody else took it,"

Brick said. "You all know this fellow?"

He nodded toward the dealer from the Tecolote.

"We all know Miller," Dick Chambers said. "It's O. K. with me if you want him to deal."

The others nodded, all except Tanner, who was still looking at Brick.

"Is it all right with you?" Brick asked him.

Tanner looked at him a moment longer before he spoke: "Let's play poker. What do I care who deals?"

"Will you deal 'em, Miller?"

"Sure," the dealer said, moving around the table. "What do you want?"

"Draw poker," Brick said, and handed him the new deck, its seal still unbroken.

As the pasteboards slid smoothly from the professional's hand, Brick realized that he was taking a long chance. If he lost with this man dealing, Tanner might make it an occasion for getting ugly. The gunman had been waiting a long time. He'd use any possible excuse. But even at that he wouldn't be in as bad a position as if he won on his own deal. He might be able to talk himself out of a quarrel.

The game was opened for fifty dollars. Tanner raised before the draw. Two men dropped out. Brick stayed. Miller began giving out cards. Two to Tanner, one to the cotton factor, three, as usual, to Dick Chambers. When the draw came round to him, Brick said:

"I'll play what I've got."

Tanner bet three hundred and everybody else dropped except the factor, who called. Brick didn't want to tangle with Tanner.

"Call," he said.

"Three ladies," Tanner said, showing his queens.

"Beats me," the factor muttered.

Brick laid down five clubs. "Too bad," he said, and scooped in the chips.

It seemed to Brick, as Tanner looked at him, that his set, cold face grew stonier still. He sat looking at him for a full twenty seconds, not moving, but about to move. It seemed as if he would make his play in spite of the neutral deal. Below the table Brick's right hand clenched, though he didn't know what good a sweet right hand would be against a gun. Then Tanner scooped up his cards and tossed them to the next dealer, his flat eyes turning toward the wall.

Brick's hand unclenched, but he did not relax. Tanner's first chance had gone by. Brick had outthought him this time. But he was still a long way from the American line and Kentucky Joe—a mighty long way. He was in a dangerous town, friendless, unarmed, with two professional killers waiting a chance at him. There was nothing he could do but play poker and wait for whatever break came, his or theirs.

IT came to Brick suddenly that he might also wait for daylight. Dawn would be about five, over two hours away. If he tried to get away from the room at night, they'd get him. He didn't know how he could manage in daylight. But his chances would be better. He settled to it and his luck still held. Cards—which under other circumstances would have made him happy for a week—came his way and he cursed them. For, about the table faces grew longer, more weary, and discouraged.

No sign of dawn showed in the sky when the saloon keeper quit. He had been sullenly silent for an hour. Now he threw in his hand, cashed the two hundred dollars' worth of

chips he had left and went without a word to any one.

Dick Chambers hunched his bulky shoulders forward.

"One gone," he said. "I'm for staying with this buzzard till we get him. How about it, you men?"

There was a blank, hesitant silence. They fingered their chips, shifted in their chairs, rubbed jaws where the stubble of beards was beginning to show. Brick sat slumped and heavy-eyed, as if too tired and too dulled by drink to care what happened. But beneath their drooping lids his eyes studied every face. His body was taut, ready for action. They were, he felt sure, about to break up. If he went over the table after Tanner he might—

Tanner spoke, and for an instant Brick's jaw hung slack in jolted surprise.

"I'll stick. I ain't so yellow I'll quit when a guy has luck."

It was this last that decided them. They were sensitive as most men about being told that they are afraid. The game went on.

But it was not until four or five hands later that Brick puzzled over the reason for Tanner's unexpected action. Tanner had, ever since his first hand, been playing them close to his gray coat, very close. Brick also noticed that his fingers played continually with a diminishing stack of chips. The one time that he stayed, he lost, and his face took on that marblelike hardness Brick had seen before.

On this particular hand Tanner opened for a cautious twenty-five dollars. All stayed, but no one raised until Brick's turn came. He held nothing but a pair of deuces. He had, however, seen Tanner glance all around the table before he put in the puny twenty-five. On a sudden hunch, Brick raised a hundred.

Tanner's eyes were on him when he shoved in the chips, but when his own turn came, he was staring at the wall. Very casually he met Brick's raise. Two of the players dropped out. Brick took three cards, Tanner two. Chambers asked for one and looked glum when he saw it.

Brick bet another hundred. Tanner raised him a hundred. Brick raised again. All the others were out. With his eyes still on the wall Tanner fingered the chips needed to call, picked up three more blues and held them a moment. But instead of betting them, he let the chips slide out of his fingers and said, "I'll call you."

Brick did not show his hand. "Two little pair," he said.

Tanner's expression could not have been said to change. But the stiffness went out of him. He looked, as he turned up three kings, once more as if he were made of flesh.

For the first time in many hours, Brick was amused. He felt sure that his hunch was correct. Tanner hated to lose money. He had stayed in the game—when its breaking up would have given him exactly the chance he wanted—because he could not resist the temptation to get his losses back.

BRICK settled down to some of the most peculiar poker of his life. Up to now he had tried to win, riding this lucky streak for what it was worth. Now he tried to lose. Not that he cheated himself. It was no more in him to do that than to cheat another. He simply grew reckless beyond reason. He came into pots where no man with his cards had a right to be, raised anything before the draw, stayed with stud till the last card was down.

He would keep Tanner in that game by using his money for bait.

For a while his wild playing brought results. The cotton factor picked up a pot. Another man outstudded Brick and took another. Dick Chambers won one. Around the table eyes gleamed. Weary, sagging faces took on new life. When Brick lost for the fifth time, Dick Chambers hunched forward in his chair.

"His string's played out," he said. "Let's take him, boys!"

Brick, drawing four cards to a lone ace, felt a little of the tightness go out of his chest. Just give him till daylight and he'd get clear. He didn't know how, but he would. He had to. Kentucky Joe was over there in jail, depending on him. It was characteristic of Brick Wilson that he did not think of his danger in terms of his own life, but only as it affected his partner. If he got killed, he couldn't help Kentucky Joe. But after the night, he'd have the sun on his side.

He lost the pot to Dick Chambers, lost there more in the next half hour—two of them to Tanner. They settled down to take Brick's money away from him. But Brick's freakish luck had the nine lives of a cat. It had seemed gone, entirely. The huge stack of chips had begun to melt. Then, drawing to a pair of eights, he caught a jack full.

From that moment on, Brick couldn't lose no matter what he did. It was exactly as if unseen hands were stacking the deck for him. And the others, before long, began to lose hope again. Brick saw the tired lines come back to their faces. Tanner began fingering his chips. They cursed their cards and Brick's luck, but dully. Even on the rare occasions when Brick's hand was topped, they did not buck up. They knew,

with the fatalistic sureness of gamblers, that his luck had not broken.

The dark, small hours before dawn had come. The crowd of onlookers, which long ago had begun to dwindle, melted until there was no one else in the room except the crooked-nosed man by the door. He leaned against the wall, weary. But his ferret eyes were still awake, his thumbs perpetually hooked in his belt near the hip pockets where Brick knew must be a gun, or perhaps two.

BRICK, red-eyed, worn out, aching with the long strain, raked in the pots he did not want. The game had settled into a weary monotony. The others no longer believed Brick could lose. Brick, hoping to lose, no longer believed that he could. He watched Tanner's face grow harder, more immobile, his fingers touch his chips more nervously. The others were mostly silent, now, glum. Time and again Brick told himself that he was a fool not to drop out of pots he knew he could win, throw in his cards, and let a poorer hand beat his own. He couldn't do that. He played his cards as they came, as he always had and always would, accepting what life brought and dealing with it directly, without dodging.

Along toward four o'clock a curious thing happened. Word had evidently gotten around that a stranger was taking Big Dick Chambers and some other high players in an all-night game. Now the night crowd of spectators was replaced by the early risers. They came by ones and twos, some on their way to work, some coming from it. They filled the room once more, whispering together, pointing out Brick who had become a seven-day wonder, like the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

Brick hardly saw them. He was dog-tired. His eyes burned. But though his body lay back in the chair as if he were too drunk and too sleepy to care about anything, he watched every move that Tanner made. There was no telling how much more poker the gunman was good for. He hated losing money, and he had lost a lot. Brick, though he had been trying for hours, had as yet thought out no way of getting out of his immediate trouble when the game broke up—as it must before long. There was also the possibility that Tanner would try at any moment to force a quarrel; the kind which would make Brick's death look like justice instead of murder.

He wished he had never heard of the game called poker. This was hard work, wearing him down. And he had too much to think about, too many things to watch to notice spectators or anything else.

Once again Dick Chambers, who was backing his belief that Brick's run of luck must end to the limit, called for chips. The banker turned to his box and held up one lone red fifty-dollar counter.

"That's all there is. If you want any more, you'd better ask Wilson."

Three men simultaneously pushed back their chairs. When Chambers argued for continuing, they shook their heads.

"It'll take two months to pay for this night," the cotton factor said. "I don't wish you any hard luck, Wilson, but I hope you break your neck."

Tanner, very tight about the mouth, counted his few chips, then stared off at the wall. "I'm through, too," he said.

Brick would have felt more comfortable if Tanner had looked at him. He sat quite still, slumped heavily in his chair, while the banker shoved

across almost the entire contents of the cash box. There was no thrill in the wads of bills which were too many to go in one pocket. The long game was ended. Nothing now stood in Tanner's way. In a moment Brick would be alone.

BRICK looked up and saw that the crowd had already begun to move toward the door. All the players except himself were standing. He saw something else. The windows, which had for so long been black, now showed as gray blocks. The lights had begun to dim. Outside, it would be nearly day.

Suddenly, as if the light had somehow got inside him, Brick grinned; and the grin was joyful. The idea which had leaped up full-grown in his mind was cockeyed. But if it worked, it would be the biggest joke in his life. He stood up.

"Wait a minute!"

He said it loud enough for every one to hear. They turned and saw a solid man with sandy hair and square face flushed red. His eyes were red and he leaned heavily against the table. Once more it appeared that Brick Wilson was quite drunk. He grinned with childlike friendliness.

"Breakfast," he said. "Everybody eats on me. Big cele-cele— Big blow-out. Come on."

For a moment they stared at him. Then somebody laughed.

"O. K., Red! I'll eat off you and plenty!"

Somebody else said: "He ain't had a meal in three days!" Then everybody was laughing. As they started out another man halted to ask where he wanted them to go.

"Ham an' eggs!" Brick said. "Any place got ham an' eggs."

"Tim Yick's—"

They had already started, the

whole group taking up Brick's offer on a sudden whim. Brick moved unsteadily around the table toward Tanner, who stood with his hands against the stomach of his gray coat. The flat, ominous eyes regarded Brick, but he did nothing. He was still held back by the presence of so many people. Big Dick Chambers stood near by, and he looked at Brick also, quizzically, not without friendliness.

As Brick came up he grasped Tanner firmly by one arm and put his hand on Chambers's shoulder.

"Goo' friends," he said. "Play all night together and nobody got sore. You be my guests, see? Eat at same table, just us three."

"Why sure," Chambers said in his big voice. "We'll eat with you, Red."

Tanner shrugged his shoulders. As the three moved toward the door he tried to pull away. Brick held his arm fast, closing his powerful workingman's hand down on the elbow. It was Tanner's right arm, the one he would have to use to get to his gun in a hurry.

The slight man was watching them with his ferret eyes. He made a slight sign with his head in response to a movement of Tanner's and began edging away from the door. Brick stopped short. He took his hand from Chambers's shoulder and motioned to a couple of husky young workingmen who stood near.

"Stop that guy! He's trying to sneak out. He's got to come eat."

The two turned toward him, grinning.

"What guy?" one of them asked. "Where."

Brick pointed to the guard. "Him. Grab him, see? He's got to eat breakfast. Ever'body's got to eat."

The two looked at each other briefly, laughed and descended on

the man, amused to carry out as good a drunken idea as this seemed to be. He squirmed in their grasp, cursing and threatening them. But they hauled him along. Brick urged Chambers and Tanner forward. Three abreast they descended the dirty stairs and moved along the street.

CHAPTER IX.
BRICK LAUGHS.

BRICK did not let go of Tanner and Dick Chambers till they were in the Chinese restaurant. The whole crowd had come in ahead of them, and cheered as Brick led his two companions to a table set for four against one wall. He pulled out the first chair and shoved Tanner at it.

"You sit here."

Brick motioned Chambers to the opposite side of the table. "This is where I'll sit," he said with a grin like a pleased child, and sank into a chair that placed his back against the wall.

But when he looked Tanner was not in his place. He was standing stiffly, hands at his sides, looking down at Brick with those flat, fishy eyes.

"Sit down," Brick said. "You got to sit down."

The corner of Tanner's mouth opened and words came out of it.

"Who you ordering around?"

Brick blinked and turned to Big Dick Chambers. Chambers's eyes still had that quizzical expression, wondering what it was all about, wondering about Brick.

"He's got to sit down," Brick said to Chambers. "Doesn't he have to sit down to eat?"

"Most people sit down to eat," Chambers said.

Brick turned back to Tanner, who stood as before except that his hands

were flat on his stomach. The right hand began to move upward. With a sudden motion Brick stood and put his hand on Tanner's shoulder. He let it slip off the shoulder and took a firm hold of the arm just below the armpit.

"You want fight?" he said. "If you don't want fight, sit down before I slap you down."

He pushed Tanner backward and jerked his arm heavily at the same time. The gunman sat down with a jar. The crowd was clamoring for food. Brick now added his voice, loud and boisterously.

"Tim Yick! Where's that Chinnee?"

An old Chinaman came shuffling up, bowing and grinning.

"Ham an' eggs. My party. Ever'budy's got to eat ham an' eggs." Brick turned suddenly on Tanner. "You, too! You got to eat ham an' eggs."

Tanner must have decided that this was not the moment to make his play. You could shoot a drunk any time. There were a lot of witnesses. He stared at Brick a moment, then turned away. Tim Yick was already on his way to the kitchen, and in a few minutes trays of food began to come in. Brick ate his order, and invited everybody to have another.

ONLY Dick Chambers and a few others accepted. Many drifted out, tired of the show or called by a job. But at least half stayed to see what Brick would do next. He ate his second order slowly and in silence. Then he called for more coffee and sent a waiter for tobacco and papers. But he did not light the brown tube once he got it made and in his mouth. After a prodigious yawn and arm stretching, he shouted for Tim Yick.

"That enough?" he asked, giving him a hundred-dollar bill.

Tim Yick protested that it was about sixty dollars too much.

"Keep change," Brick said. He got to his feet. "Sleep, now. Go over border an' sleep. You come, too. Good friends."

Tanner got up at once. But Dick Chambers did not move. He sat studying Brick, his great shoulders hunched out over the table. Brick met his look, and after a moment a gleam of humor came into the big man's eyes.

"All right, son. I'm with you."

On the way out, Brick managed to get them once more on either side of him. Once he stumbled, caught at Tanner's arm for support, and held on. A cruising taxi stopped at his yell. As they crossed the sidewalk, Brick saw out of the corner of his eye the slight man with the twisted nose. He stood with his back against a wall, watching them.

"You first," Brick said and boosted the unwilling Tanner into the cab by an elbow as one might boost an old lady. "Now me, in between my pleasant guests."

Tanner looked puzzled, annoyed, as if he didn't understand how this had happened. But he could not, Brick knew, kill him while Chambers was in the cab. Neither could any one shoot him through a window while Tanner and Chambers flanked him.

The taxi whirled through the glitter of morning light falling on the drabness of the town waking from its hang-over. Brick sagged back against the cushions as if about to sink into deep, beautiful sleep. His eyes were closed. He looked more than half drunk and almost out. But all down inside himself Brick Wilson was laughing—laughing long and riotously.

CHAPTER X.

BUSINESS WITH BRICK.

THEY stopped in front of a small hotel, out from the business section of the American town. Brick stumbled out, heavy-eyed, wabbly on his feet.

"Go to sleep now," he said. "See you some more. Good friends."

He paid off the cab with a twenty-dollar bill, telling the driver to take Chambers and Tanner anywhere they wanted to go. He got a room with a bath, and stood under the shower for fifteen minutes. Then he put on all his clothes except his shirt, and lay down on the bed.

The thing he expected came sooner than he had counted on. In the corridor outside he heard the tramp of a man's feet. Brick rolled off the bed, careful not to make a noise, and stood listening. The striding steps changed to an almost inaudible, catlike padding. Then an automobile horn sounded insistently out in the street and he could hear no more. Brick moved over to the door. When the automobile was quiet he caught the faint sound of a man breathing on the other side of the door. Brick flattened himself against the wall.

A key slid into the lock with so little noise of metal on metal that a listener on the far side of the room could not have heard. The lock turned. Slowly, with no creak of hinges, the door swung inward. A gun barrel protruded, the blunt snout of an automatic. Brick held his breath. A hand and wrist followed.

Brick's right hand clamped down on the wrist with the same swift dart which enables a man to catch a fly. He jerked the wrist toward him, crossed with his left. His first landed jarringly against a jaw.

Though Brick held his wrist, the man sagged to the floor. Brick wrenched the gun from his grasp, and looked down. It was Tanner. His flat, fishy eyes had a half-dazed look, but he was conscious.

Brick kicked the door shut, locked it. He gestured at Tanner with the automatic.

"Get up," he said.

When Tanner was on his feet Brick slapped him all over, searching for weapons. With the automatic he had taken away and the revolver he found between Tanner's waistband and body, he crossed to the bureau and put them in an upper drawer.

WHEN he turned, Tanner stood in the middle of the floor. For once, the gunman's stonelike face showed expression. His mouth hung slightly ajar and his eyes almost bulged, they were open so wide. He looked as if he thought Brick had gone crazy.

"Now," Brick said, "we'll get down to business."

"What d'you mean?"

"There's some things I want to find out. You can either tell me, or take a beating you'll remember all your life."

Tanner's eyes flicked toward the drawer where Brick had put the guns. Brick was between him and the bureau; a hundred and seventy pounds of very solid man planted squarely on strong legs, shoulders hunched a little, chin down. Brick was looking at Tanner in a way that made him touch his thin lips with his tongue.

"Yeah?" he said, trying to make it sound contemptuous.

Brick paid no attention to the contempt or the syllable. He said: "Who shot that man and planted him on Joe Branch, Tanner?"

COM-3B

Tanner was as tall as Brick, nearly as heavy. He had been in plenty of fights around pool halls, and in the St. Louis alleys where he had grown up. He knew what to do. Instead of an answer, his right struck for Brick's jaw, swift and straight, with the power of a rigid arm and shoulder behind it.

But Brick's jaw was not in the way. It had moved down a few inches and Tanner's hand felt numbing pain as it bounced off a skull covered by sandy hair. He felt another when Brick's left sank into his stomach just above the place he had carried his second gun. Tanner backed off, trying to cover up, trying to stop Brick with short jabs to the face.

It wasn't any use. Brick took those jabs without even a change in the expression of his set, square face. He seemed not to feel them. Perhaps he didn't. Perhaps there wasn't room enough in his mind for anything but Kentucky Joe held in jail on a false murder charge. He came in, battering Tanner, and drove him up against the wall. When Tanner tried to clinch Brick shoved him away and knocked him into a corner with a right to the stomach.

Tanner held his hands over his face, struggling for breath.

"Lay off!" he said. "Lay off!"

Brick stood over him, clenched hands dangling at his sides.

"Come clean," he said. "Tell me what I want to know or I'll smear you all over the floor. Who was that stiff they planted on Kentucky Joe? Who put him up there?"

TANNER took away his hands from his face. For a moment it looked as if he would refuse to answer. But Brick's straight, menacing stare beat him down.

"They called him Chicago Oakley."

"Why'd they knock him off?"

Tanner looked at Brick again, swallowed hard before he could answer.

"I heard he ratted on somebody."

"Who?"

"I dunno."

Brick's shoulder and right hand drew back.

"You'd better spill it," he said. "I aim to find out if they have to pick you up with a shovel."

"I don't know, I tell you. Honest, guy, I—— Don't sock me again!"

"You're a yellow bum," Brick said. "Put up your hands and fight, will you?"

But Tanner only crowded back farther into his corner.

"I don't know who he squealed on or who bumped him off! Give me a break, guy."

"I'm giving you a better break than the cops would. I'm giving you a chance to fight. Who told you to go out and get me?"

Again Tanner's tongue moistened his lips. His eyes moved away from Brick fearfully. Brick moved closer.

"Who sent you?"

"The—the big shot."

"Who's the big shot?"

"He'll—he'd bump me if he found out I told you."

"You'll wish he had if you don't come clean. I mean business, fella."

Without looking up Tanner said in a very small voice: "Bones Hervey."

Brick stood a moment considering. "Bones" Hervey's car had been pointed out to him as part of the profits from Hervey's big gambling house over the line. It sounded as if Tanner might be telling the truth.

"Did Oakley spill something on Hervey?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't know, I said!"

"Listen," Brick told him, "I'll give you five to come clean before I start working you over. One——"

At two, Tanner began to protest that he'd told everything he knew. At four he was whining, begging Brick not to hit him. When Brick said five, he was crouched against the wall, arms covering his head.

Brick stood looking down at him for a moment.

"You're a fine brave guy when you've got a rod," he said. "Damned if I don't think you're so scared you're telling the truth. Now tell me just what you heard, and who you heard it from."

"You won't sock me?"

"I won't if you talk fast and tell it straight. Spill it!"

Tanner took his arms from around his head.

"I heard Oakley got bumped from a bartender in the Monterey. That's all he knew; that Oakley had got the works. Then a woman came in and said they'd taken Oakley across the line to frame some guy with. She wanted to know what it was all about, and we didn't know either. Then pretty soon the big shot sent for me and told me to go up to that poker game and get you. That's all I know, so help me——"

Brick studied the man for a moment in silence. Then he said, "Lie down on your belly." He planted one foot on Tanner's back, reached to the wall to rip off the wiring for the service bell, and began tying the man.

"You're going to the jug," he said. "Charge: assault with deadly weapons. If I find out you've been lying, I'll spring you out and beat hell out of you."

Brick put on his shirt, removed Tanner's shoulder holster, and buckled it on in silence. He took the shells from the second gun, put them

in his pocket, and holstered the shoulder weapon under the coat of a linen suit. A grin came to Brick's face. He took Tanner's roll of bills from his pocket, pried the gunman's jaws wide, and stuffed the roll, which was mostly wood with greenbacks on top, between them.

"Bite on that," he said, and went out.

CHAPTER XI.

GET BONES HERVEY!

SHADES were drawn in the lobby against the strong light of the valley sun. As Brick passed through, a dark mass stirred from the dimness of a chair, rose to a great height, stepped into Brick's path. He recognized Big Dick Chambers.

"Now that you've polished off with coyote, what next?"

Brick looked up at the big man belligerently.

"What's it to you?"

Dick Chambers put a huge hand on Brick's shoulder.

"Now don't get sore! I've been onto you since way last night, and boy, I hand it to you for the way you played drunk and kept all of us standing around so Tanner wouldn't get a chance at you. It was some smart. He left me about a block from here, and I followed him back. He's poison with a gun, and I figured he'd take a try for you here. I got to your room just in time to hear you slap him down. I'm with you that far, but I don't know what it's all about. Let's hear it."

"Well——" Brick began, then hesitated.

"Sit down and tell me about it?" Chambers said. "Hell, son, I like you. Cottoned to you right away. I've got considerable influence in these parts, if I do say it myself, and you're in a jam."

It was, Brick realized, good to have somebody to talk to; some one to stand shoulder to shoulder with him. Even last night, during the long tension of that poker game, Chambers's presence had helped him to go through. He sat down and began to talk, hesitantly at first, then with freedom.

Leaving out Paulson's part, he told Chambers about the bank affair, and enough of Kentucky Joe's past to explain why they had tried to stop the holdup.

"I don't know how they found out," he finished, "but somebody in that mob, or some friend of theirs is wise, so they framed Joe and sent that two-for-a-nickel torpedo out to get me."

Big Dick Chambers settled back into his chair.

"Nice people to tangle with," he said dryly. "What are you going to do with Tanner?"

"Thought I'd have him locked up," Brick said. "Might use him later as a witness. But I don't know. The police will want to know why he was after me, and it might be better not to have it get out that I'm trying to beat this charge against Joe. I could do more if they thought I was dumb."

"I'll tend to it," Chambers said, and went to a telephone. While he was gone Brick sat wondering why the rancher was going to so much trouble to help them. But he could not think of any self-seeking motive he might have had and decided there wasn't any. Chambers appeared to be a type of old-time Westerner; the kind who remembers a time when men had to stand together in face of peril of all kinds—from high water to marauding Yaquis. His success and money had not made him forget. If he liked a man in trouble, he'd help him, without ask-

ing too many questions or thinking of being paid.

"They're on their way," Chambers told Brick, sinking again into his chair, and turning his keen eyes on him. "What's your play, son? You got away from them over yonder when it looked like no man could. But it don't seem as if you're any closer to getting your friend loose."

"I'll get him out," Brick said, "and I'll put somebody else in his place. Tanner told me who his boss is; who sent him out to get me. And if the same man ain't behind what happened to Joe, I'm a Dutchman."

Chambers turned to face him squarely, his eyebrows drawn up in surprised curiosity.

"Who is it?"

"A gambler by the name of Hervey—Bones Hervey."

Chambers's eyebrows went up another quarter inch. His lips pursed as if to whistle, but no sound came.

"Bones Hervey!" he said. "Son, you're up against something, right!"

"What about him?" Brick asked. "Is he—"

HE broke off the question because a small car had stopped in front of the door and two uniformed policemen with a man in plain clothes were getting out. They looked about inquiringly until Dick Chambers called them. The man in plain clothes was Howdy Tucker. He stood behind, staring with unbelieving eyes while Chambers talked to the police. The policemen took Brick's key and went upstairs for Tanner. Howdy grabbed Brick by the arm. His mouth worked.

"You're all right? They didn't get you?"

"Do I look like a damn ghost? Say, what do you know about this business, anyway?"

The clerk and half a dozen loungers in the lobby were staring with the peculiar look of people trying to hear something that it none of their business. Chambers said, "We better go where it's quiet," and the three moved to a far corner around a writing table.

"I know too much about it," Howdy said. "It's all my fault."

Then he told them about the picture, and the details of Joe's arrest.

"I ought to wring your neck," Brick said when he was through. "But right now I haven't got time. What I want to know is how much they've got on Joe. Can they make this murder rap stick?"

Howdy looked glumly down at the floor while he knotted and unknotted his hands. His face showed how badly he felt.

"I offered to get him a lawyer," he said. "But Joe won't talk. Says he don't want a lawyer till he hears from you, Brick. He made the county prosecutor sore, too. He's one of these cold, high-minded guys that figure nobody gets into jail if he's innocent. He'd try to convict his own mother. It made him sore that Joe wouldn't tell him anything. Besides, Joe's been in the penitentiary, and this prosecutor thinks a man that's been sent up can't be anything but a crook the rest of his life. All he knows, he got out of books; and he's bad news in the courtroom."

"Yeah," Brick said. "That makes it tough. But what have they got on Joe? What's the evidence?"

Howdy looked up at him, his face still misshapen from worry.

"It don't look so good. When they found Joe in the room with this Oakley mug, Joe said he didn't have any gun. They found a .45 with two shots fired. Oakley was shot with a .45. This ex-prison guard that's on the force—guy named Keppel—fig-

ured out how Joe might have shot Oakley in the hotel without anybody hearing. He figures Joe had a pillow over the gun to muffle the sound and shot Oakley while he was drunk and asleep. One of the pillows was missing when they went up there to look. Of course, somebody took the pillow after Keppel had his idea, but it looks bad for Joe. Besides, they found two empty .45 shells in a flower bed in front of that hotel this morning."

BRICK cursed. "Who ever framed Joe sure did his job thoroughly. They didn't miss a thing."

"He'll probably go to the chair for this if it comes to trial," Chambers said. "But that's like Bones Hervey. I've known him since he was making the mines and construction camps with a pair of phony dice. He hasn't got any more conscience than a rattler, and he's as smart as they come. It's well-known he's mixed up in every kind of dirty business there is around here. And they've never even had an excuse for arresting him."

Brick, who had been sprawled wearily and dejectedly in his chair, pulled his body suddenly erect. His feet scraped the floor as he gathered them under him.

"There's just one thing for me to do; go get Hervey. And I better be on my way."

Slowly, in startled silence, the others turned toward him. Howdy Tucker was the first to recover speech.

"You'll—what?"

"Get Bones Hervey. Bring him over here and make him clear Joe."

Howdy exploded. His voice rose high with excitement.

"You'd have a chance just like butter has a chance in a hot skillet!

Didn't Hervey try to have you knocked off? Do you think he'd let you live half an hour once you were prowling around over in his territory? He owns a big part of that town—the worst part. Besides, how'd you get anything out of him? Even if you got him over here, he'd claim he didn't know anything and probably get you pinched for assault."

"It's the only thing for me to do," Brick said.

"You're nuts," Howdy said. "Screwy!"

Dick Chambers added his persuasion.

"Don't do it, boy. Bones Hervey's bad medicine. I know. Don't go r'arin' over there and get yourself killed for nothing. We'll figure out some scheme."

"My partner's in jail on a murder charge," Brick said. "I'm going to get this guy Hervey and have Joe out."

THIS simple thing that Brick said silenced them. Howdy Tucker felt rather than understood the intensity behind the words. To Big Dick Chambers it was clear. Memories in him rang to it. He had known the West when a man's partner was somebody he fought for, shared with, died for if necessary; no matter what he did. Both knew that they could not stop Brick.

"All right, son," Chambers said at last. "If that's the way it is, you've got to go. But there's no use getting killed any sooner than you have to and I know one or two people that might help some. Come on."

Howdy, with some idea of delaying what he believed to be Brick's certain death, suggested that they go and see Kentucky Joe. But Brick did not want to connect himself with

his partner just then—and seeing Joe could do no good.

As they made their way down the street, now basking in the sun's full glare, he gave Brick directions for reaching the quarters of a woman known as "Fat Agnes" on the other side of the border.

"She knows everybody that's been in that town during the last twenty years, and she knows everything they've done. You go up there and tell her you're a friend of mine. She hates Hervey on account of some old trouble, and she owes me for a favor or two. It might be she'll tell you something you need to know. Agnes don't talk for nothing. But it'll be worth what it costs."

A grin came briefly to Brick's face.

"Money's the only thing I've got. Seems I was in a poker game a while back. Can't just remember."

Chambers chuckled and led the way into a warehouse near the railroad tracks. Here great piles of green watermelons stood waiting to be put aboard iced freight cars. Small boys with their wagons were busily carting off three and four at a time, melons which were not missed out of the huge quantity. Trucks continually rolled in with more.

Dick Chambers walked toward a truck which had nearly finished unloading.

"This is one of mine," he said. "You take it and drive across the line. They'd spot you the minute you got over, walking. But nobody'll notice another truck driver."

The rancher called his own driver, told him he had a day off with pay, and watched Brick start the motor and examine controls and gearshift. It was a sweet-running truck.

"O. K.," Brick said, shutting it off. "I won't forget this, Chambers. If

I can ever pay it back or if I can do something for—"

"Wait," Howdy Tucker said suddenly. "You can't go like that—in that coat."

"I've got to have a coat," Brick said.

"Got an overall jumper around, Pete?" Chambers asked.

The truck driver got one from a nail on the wall.

"It was kind of cold this morning. I just happened—" He stopped, batting his eyes as he saw the gun slung under Brick's shoulder.

Brick tossed down his own coat, got into the jumper and started the motor again. Dick Chambers held up a huge paw.

"Good luck, son. I—dang me if I don't wish I could go, too. If I wasn't so old—"

With a great roar from the motor Brick was gone. Howdy put his hand to his brow and found it cold.

CHAPTER XII.

MEN ARE FOOLS.

BRICK found the number Chambers had given him on a large adobe house somewhat away from the main part of the town. He drove by slowly, left his truck twenty yards down the street and walked back to ring the bell. A very pretty young Mexican maid, wearing a white cap and apron over her black uniform, answered. Brick was startled, embarrassed. For a moment he looked foolish. The girl smiled, and asked him in fair English if he wanted to see some one.

"I want to see a woman they call Fat Agnes, but I guess I've got the wrong house.

The girl laughed outright. "No, you have not the wrong house. This is where Mees Agnes live. Come inside."

She left Brick in the first room off the long hall and went away with a click of high-heeled shoes. For a while Brick could only sink into the coolness and quiet of the room. The thick adobe walls beat back the sun, all noise, all of the world outside. It was the first peaceful, restful place Brick had been in for a day and two nights which now seemed an entire age.

The maid came clicking back. Miss Agnes would see him in her own rooms. Brick followed her, aware that he hadn't shaved, and of the dirty overall jumper on his back.

The sitting room into which the maid ushered him was small and so crowded with furniture he didn't see how a person moved. Tables, chairs, magazine racks—everything the stores sold seemed to be there. The most noticeable objects were seven long-legged dolls smoking cigarettes, and an adding machine.

On a rocking-chair in the center of this room sat what Brick took to be a woman. Some light-green cloth cascaded down in steps over great rolls of flesh to bare, broad feet planted firmly on the floor. There was no doubt about this being Fat Agnes. She had four chins. She overflowed her chair. And crowning the red-dyed hair was a pink boudoir cap.

BRICK did not laugh at Fat Agnes. The small black eyes peering from fallow folds of her fleshy face were shrewd and penetrating. He felt the power of her the moment he came in the door. The maid closed the door behind him.

"What do you want, young man?" Her voice was low as a man's, and husky.

"Dick Chambers said for me to come and see you——"

The woman motioned to a chair separated from her own by a small table holding glasses and some bottles. "Sit down. Any friend of Dick's is welcome here. In trouble, aren't you?"

Brick's startled glance met her eyes. They looked sharp enough to see the thoughts going round inside his skull.

"It's a friend of mine," he told her. "He's been framed. "He'll go to the chair if I don't do something, and I've got to work fast before—I'm liable to get mine any time. They've tried once already."

He stopped. If, as Dick Chambers said, this woman knew everything that went on in the town, she would have guessed by now that he was Kentucky Joe's partner. Brick waited for her to speak, but all Fat Agnes said was:

"Go on. Have a drink and talk." She poured out the foaming contents of a bottle.

He told the story to her, as he had told it to Chambers, adding the information Howdy and Tanner had supplied. He didn't quite know why he talked so freely. Dick Chambers's word was the only guarantee he had of her trustworthiness, and Dick was also a stranger. But Brick, without thinking much about it, had always been able to size people up pretty well, and there was a quality about Fat Agnes that made him want her help. As she listened, the only live thing about this mountain of flesh was her eyes, yet she appeared wise—hard and wise.

When he finished she asked briefly: "What do you think I can do about it?"

"I want to find out who killed Oakley. This man Hervey's back of Joe's trouble, I'm pretty sure. At first I figured I'd get him and try to make him talk. But he's a big shot,

and it might not go so good. Now I'm trying to get something on him. If I can hang the killing on the right man it'll clear Joe just the same. Dick Chambers said you knew everything that went on in this town."

A slight, grim smile which might have meant anything came to Fat Agnes's mouth.

"I'll have to speak to Dick about his big talk again."

"But you do know," Brick said. "You know who killed Oakley."

"Maybe I do," she said. "Maybe I don't. What makes you think I'd tell you?"

"You don't like Hervey. I thought maybe you'd be glad to see him get in trouble. This is his scheme—framing Joe."

"Henry Hervey is a yellow hound," Fat Agnes said evenly. "Seeing him stood against a wall and shot is the only reason I'd get up at dawn. But that isn't cause enough for me to tell what I know—if I do know anything."

BRICK grinned. "I've got other reasons," he said, and began pulling bills from his pockets. Fat Agnes's small eyes moved to watch him stack the greenbacks on the table.

"That's different," she said. "When you get to a thousand, stop. Where'd a working fellow like you get all that money?"

Brick grinned again, putting away what was left.

"Poker," he said. "Dick Chambers contributed quite a bit."

"You're the fellow had all that luck. I should have known." Her hands gathered in the bills and ran through them, counting. She started to speak, but stopped abruptly. Her eyes glanced from the money to Brick twice before finally coming to rest on him.

"I'm an old fool," she said. "But you look like a good sort, young man. Too good to get killed by Henry Hervey. I'll give you your thousand back and tell you nothing."

Brick reached to his pocket again, but her gesture stopped him.

"I like money," Fat Agnes said. "But not enough to send a young fool out to be killed. Get out of here, young man. Get out of town. And don't come back. Henry Hervey's too big for you to fight!"

Brick met her look squarely.

"Kentucky Joe's in jail. If I don't get him out, he goes to the chair. You—you're white, but if you won't tell me what I want to know, I'm going after Hervey right now. It's the only thing I can do."

Fat Agnes sighed, folded the money and tucked it into the bosom of her dress.

"Men are fools. Just because one's going to die, maybe, another one goes out and gets himself killed to prove he's a friend. Driveling idiots!" She snorted and went on.

"Henry Hervey shot Oakley himself. He does his own killing once in a while, when there isn't any danger in it. There's a thing or two you don't know. One of the men that tried to rob the bank got away—the lookout. He was hurt, but he got back over here. Went to Hervey."

"This Oakley'd had a quarrel with Henry Hervey a while before over some opium he'd run. He was one of Hervey's men, and Henry had him up on the carpet when the lookout came in. It seems Oakley had threatened to get even with Henry. When the lookout told what happened over there, Henry thought he'd given away the bank robbery. He shot Oakley where he stood."

Fat Agnes turned on Brick suddenly.

"You don't quite believe that, do you? You're wondering how I can know so much. Let me tell you, young man, that everything that happens gets to be known. Somebody talks. And when people talk in this town, it comes home to me. I'm telling you facts—take it or let it alone.

"About an hour after he'd killed Oakley, some one showed Henry Hervey the paper with your friend's picture in it, and told Henry he'd shot the wrong man. Henry's humorous. He decided to kill your friend with Oakley's corpse. They doped your friend, waited till dark, took them over the line in a closed car and up to that hotel. If anybody over there saw them do it, Henry Hervey's got enough money and power to stop their mouths. Very neat."

For the past few moments Brick had been listening with only half his mind. The other half was busy with an idea; a hunch, half formed, a little vague. When Fat Agnes's voice stopped he sat motionless, still trying to get hold of it. She waited quite a while, watching.

"Well?" she asked sharply. "You going to take my advice and have your hide, or be a fool?"

"One more thing I want to know," Brick said slowly. "Where is this mobster that got back? The look-out?"

Her eyes probed at him a moment before she answered.

"There's an herb shop in Chinese alley called Ah Lung's place. He's up above there in an apartment that belongs to one of Hervey's men—if he's alive. Better stay away from there."

Brick stood up. "Thanks," he said. "You've helped me out a lot."

"You'd have got killed just as easy without wasting your thou-

sand." Fat Agnes held
"I'll say this much for
a man, if that's any compliment.
Men are fools."

CHAPTER XIII. IN CHINESE ALLEY.

BRICK walked away from Fat Agnes's door, still deep in thought. He climbed into the truck and drove out past the government buildings to open country where cotton fields bordered the road. All about him the flat, tan plain of the valley—desert beyond this area of intense cultivation—stretched to a shimmering horizon. It was big and lonely. He could think better out here away from people. Also, open country was safer.

For half an hour he drove aimlessly until the vague idea which had come to him at Fat Agnes's became a plan. He took time to work it out, checking up on the various steps until he felt sure he had not left anything out. He would not have bet money on its success. Too many things had to be left to chance, to the coöperation of others, to the unpredictable workings of men's minds. But it was the best he could do.

Dick Chambers's truck came booming back into town and stopped at the first saloon Brick came to. He bought a drink, then called the hotel where Chambers would be waiting, he had said, word of Brick's death. The conversation was curious, and would have made the bartender's eyes pop if he had understood English. It ended by Chambers saying he would call the governor of the Mexican territory, whose headquarters were in the town.

Brick had time for a leisurely drink before the phone rang again. Then he compared his watch with Chambers's, and was off.

As later, he left the head of Chinese Alley. Here, between close-set two-story buildings, the sun came down as water runs into a crack; a cruelly hot place this late in the morning, drowsy and almost deserted. Yet for Brick, each doorway and barred window held a threat. He walked warily, keeping close watch on either side, but without appearing to be more anxious than any truck driver hunting an address.

Beside Ah Lung's small, odorous shop a stairway—remarkable in that it was clean-swept—led upward. When Brick hesitated before it, a Chinese came shuffling out of the herb store and stood before him. His hands were tucked into the full sleeves of a black silk jacket and his bony, Oriental face looked anything but friendly.

"Wlong place," he said. "You wantee some other place."

"Bones Hervey sent me over here," Brick said. "Don't be standing in my way, chink. Something might happen to you."

The Chinaman was instantly all smiles, bowing, and apology. Brick went up the stairs to find himself in a small square hall with three doors leading from it. One of these was open and he could hear the low murmur of voices. Brick moved to the wall and looked in.

PROPPED up against some pillows at the head of a cot lay a man whose face had been hollowed out by weakness and pain. Its pallor and the great circles under his eyes were startling because he was covered up to the chin by a white cloth. Beside him sat a fragile Japanese girl. Her slender hands moved deftly as she trimmed his shaggy hair. The man evidently was telling her the story of his life.

Brick pushed the door open and stepped through. Both heads snapped in his direction. The girl, with terrified eyes, shrank back. The man's hand tore loose from the barber apron. A terrible grimace of pain spread over his face as he tried to reach beneath the pillow. He tried again.

"Drop it, buddy," Brick said. "You won't need that rod. I ain't here to do you any harm."

The man's face would not have been pleasant at any time. Now pain twisted the loose mouth into a grotesque of its normal sneer. The telltale marks of a drug habit showed plainly in his eyes. He spoke with an effort.

"Who the hell are you?"

Brick moved nearer. "Never mind who I am. If I'd known you'd act like this I'd never have run the chance of coming up here. I ought to've played it safe and let 'em put the arm on you."

The man's eyes were searching his face. "What d'you mean?"

"I mean you're going to get pinched if you're here half an hour from now," Brick told him. "You better lam, and lam fast."

"Hooey!" the man said. "I never seen you before. Why should I believe—"

"All right," Brick said. "I told you, and that's more of a break than you had coming. I'm getting out before they find me here."

He started for the door, but the man's voice came after him.

"Wait a minute! This don't sound right. Bones Hervey's taking care of me. He said there wouldn't anybody bother me up here. He wouldn't—"

"You think Hervey wouldn't turn you over to the cops if they were crowding him? What a sucker you turned out to be! If they had some-

thing on him and they said, 'Hervey, we won't push this if we can have the mug that got away from that bank job the other night. Otherwise, we'll make you plenty trouble,' what would he do? He'd turn you over so quick they wouldn't have time to change their minds! Do what you want, fella, but if I was you I'd scam."

"You mean," the man said slowly, "that Hervey's turned me over to the cops?"

Brick shrugged, and in that instant the room became full of tense, listening silence. A motor car had turned into Chinese Alley and stopped below.

"I got to lam," Brick said. "I can't get caught in here. I'm pretty hot myself."

BRICK went to the door, but many feet were already pounding up the stairs. Brick backed into the room.

"No use," he said. "This is what I get for bein' a fool."

The man, cursing his pain, was trying to get at the gun under his pillow. Brick reached beneath his coat, tugged at his own gun. Small, khaki-clad Mexican soldiers burst into the room, five altogether. They covered Brick and the man with rifles. A trim officer with a pistol belted at his side followed them with extreme deliberation.

"You had best come quietly, señors," he said politely.

When two soldiers took his arms, Brick commenced to struggle. Two more were necessary to hold him, and hustle him out the door. He fought them till they were well down the stairs, and finally succeeded in taking hold of the banisters. The soldiers were still trying to pry him loose when the officer came after them. He gave a sharp

order in Spanish to his men. They let Brick go.

"You are Señor Weelson?" he asked.

Brick nodded, panting. "Thanks," he said, keeping his voice low. "I had to put up a scrap to make him think I was being pinched. Can you take him over the line right now?"

"It is irregular. There is yet no extradition, but the governor has written an order. Do you wish us to send the Japanese?"

"Hold her till to-night, then let her go." Brick looked out the door and saw that a crowd, mostly Chinese, but containing a few white men, had collected around the police car. "Have one of your men shut the door so I can get down the back way without him seeing me, will you? I don't want any one to see me leave here. And thanks again."

The Mexican officer gave the order and shook hands, though his face wore a juzzled look. Brick went upstairs past the gangster's closed door and found another which led to an outside stairway at the rear of the building. He went into a Chinese saloon and drank bad beer, waiting. When he heard the police car and the ambulance which had followed it drive away, he went to the truck.

CHAPTER XIV. IMPORTANT BUSINESS.

THIS time Brick drove straight into the heart of town. The white stucco walls of the Traveler's Club gave back the light in shimmering waves.

"It's another of Bones Hervey's layouts," his informant of yesterday had told Brick, "and believe me you'd better not go in there if you ain't heeled. They play for money in that place, and I don't mean four-bit pieces. Hervey's got his offices upstairs."

The man had gone on to say that special guards patrolled the gambling rooms all the time play went on, and other guards were stationed on the stairs and in the hall leading to Hervey's office, to discourage uninvited visitors. Brick drove around the block and left the truck. Only one outward sign betrayed the fact that he was about to try the thing which three well-informed people had already predicted would get him killed. As he crossed the street, Brick hitched up his belt.

From the street, a narrow alley led into a courtyard. Brick stood at the head of the alley and scanned the rear wall of the Traveler's Club. It was as blank and bare-looking as a jail. Beside the windows a metal fire escape zigzagging up the three stories was the only relief to the white expanse. Because of the glare, Brick could not see whether any one was looking through the rear windows.

He left the alley and walked straight across the court. If any one was looking Brick couldn't help it. He'd just have to go on till he met opposition. The fire escape did not reach to the ground. A swinging ladder was folded against its last platform twelve feet above. Brick stood against the wall a moment, considering, then dug toes and fingers into the depressions where bricks had been offset to make a band around the door. A moment later he had grasped the fire-escape rail and swung over.

The metal door leading inside was closed, probably—Brick told himself—locked with a spring lock. The chances were he'd have to go through a window. This wasn't the floor, though.

He had no plan, did not know how he would get into Hervey's office or just what he would do when he got

there. He couldn't make a plan because he didn't know just whom he would have to get past or where they would be. He didn't worry about these things, or about what would happen to him. Having made up his mind that he must get Bones Hervey in order to clear Joe, he simply went about doing it. If he failed, it would be because somebody shot him—and that was that.

He climbed toward the third floor silently, slowly, letting his weight down on each metal step a little at a time so it wouldn't creak. If some one had seen him from a window, that person was waiting a better chance, for no sound or movement warned Brick of danger.

PEOPLE were talking, however. Looking up, Brick saw an open window to the right with Venetian blinds drawn over it. The talk came from there, voices of two men; one level and even, the other high and querulous, with a foreign accent. Brick climbed farther.

He had reached the top platform before he saw that the third-story door stood open. Brick's head ducked down on the instant. A man inside could shoot him off the ladder so easily and have an excuse for doing it. People didn't enter places in the natural course of business by way of fire escapes. Then it occurred to Brick that the door might be open for air.

He went on up, more slowly and cautiously than before. The hall beyond the door appeared him in contrast to the glare outside. Brick could see nothing. He stood a moment, poised to go in. His muscles tightened to take the step, but he stopped himself. Once more he listened and strained his eyes. Nothing there. This time he'd go.

A match flared in the gloom be-

yond the glare, and a man's face, bending over the flame, leaped into life. Brick settled back on his heels. He couldn't move out of sight without attracting notice. He'd be seen anyway as soon as the man turned his head. There was nothing to do but rush. He didn't know who the man was, but Hervey's office was near, and he couldn't afford to find out whether or not he was a guard.

In the instant Brick hesitated, the man blew out the match, and, as he did so, turned in the opposite direction. Brick heard him take a couple of steps, stop and prop himself against the wall. Very carefully Brick moved out of range of the door.

He had to get that man. In the instant when the match flame revealed his features, Brick had recognized him as one of the two men he had left talking with Kentucky Joe. He must be one of Hervey's men. But he had to be put out of the way silently, without rousing another guard or Hervey himself.

Brick fumbled in his own pockets without finding what he wanted. He thrust his hands into the truck driver's jumper, and touched an inch-long machine bolt. He moved up close to the door, reached round the jam and threw. The bolt fell with a clatter at the hall's far end.

Two silent steps and Brick was inside. He saw the man, six feet away, standing with his back squarely turned to look toward the place the bolt had fallen. Brick was on him in a flash.

His right arm slid round the man's neck, tilting back his chin, wrist bone pressing tight against the jugular vein. A hold like that strangles, cuts off the voice, and renders the victim very helpless for a moment. In that moment, Brick took the man's gun from his waistband.

STILL keeping pressure on the man's neck, Brick pressed the muzzle into his side and spoke softly in his ear.

"One sound out of you and you're dead. Turn around."

He released the man, who turned obediently. Brick searched him for other weapons but found none. In the room to the right, talk still went on, louder now. The high voice with the foreign accent was whining. Brick's attack had been so sudden and so silent that those beyond the door knew nothing.

"Is that Hervey's office?" Brick said in the man's ear.

"Yeah."

Brick turned him around, touching the small of his back with the gun. It felt clumsy in his hand so he exchanged it for his own.

"Knock on the door," he said. "Tell Hervey you want to see him. Say you've got to come in, it's important."

The man obediently approached and rapped on the metal. The voice which answered was precise, clear, smooth.

"Yes?"

"It's me, chief—Al. I got to see you."

"Let it wait. I'm busy."

Brick pushed the gun muzzle into the man's back, hard.

"I got to see you right now, chief. It's—it's important."

A shade of annoyance came into the smooth voice.

"All right! Come on. The door isn't locked. Only make it short."

The man hesitated. Brick prodded him again. The door swung open on the brightness of a square room. Over the man's shoulder Brick saw the little guard who had watched all night by the poker-room door. This man saw Brick. His hand darted toward his hip.

Brick put both hands on the other man's back and shoved. He half lifted and half hurled him straight across the room, and followed. It was not a large room. Gun in hand, Brick saw him strike the little guard, saw them both go down in a tangle. He turned.

A plump, smooth-haired man sat resting an automatic on the edge of his mahogany desk. The gun covered Brick's stomach. The man smiled.

"I ought to shoot you now," Bones Hervey said. "But I'm curious. I want to find out why you came up here."

"Shoot me and we both kick off," Brick said. "I'll get you before I drop."

Hervey shook his head, still smiling.

"You made a mistake, brother. You covered my men instead of me. You couldn't get your gun around in time."

A grin, quick to come and go on Brick's face, answered Hervey's smile.

"Your mistake," he said. "I haven't got my hand in my left coat pocket for fun. There's a rod in there." Brick raised his voice a little. "And I'll damn well drill you if either of those mugs gets up or goes for a gun. I'll get you, and then get them."

THE smile faded slowly from Bones Hervey's face and fine wrinkles spread across his forehead. The gambler, ruler of his own world, the man who held power of life, death, and fortune over many, faced across six feet of space something he had never been up against before. He saw a stocky, sandy-haired, square-faced man who held a gun in one hand and said he had another in his pocket. A plain

man, a working stiff who made his living by the strength of his back and the skill of his hands. No one could ever mistake Brick Wilson for other than what he was. But Hervey saw more, felt more than that. For Brick had stepped out of the ordinary clay of humanity. He was more than himself; as men who turn back in war through storming machine-gun fire are more than themselves. Back in the American town, Kentucky Joe lay in jail. Brick had come to get Hervey.

Brick took a step. Hervey raised the automatic. Brick looked down the gun and walked on. He turned entirely from the other two and took slow paces toward the gambler. Hervey might have shot him down at every step. Instead, he sat there and let Brick walk up to him.

When Brick was a yard away, Hervey's eyes flicked toward the wall where there was now a disturbance. Brick's own gun dropped with a clatter. His arm shot out and wrenched the automatic from Hervey's grasp. He whirled swiftly to stand behind the gambler's chair. The slight guard—the man with the twisted nose—was on his feet aiming a gun. The gun wobbled in his hand.

"Tell him to put it down," Brick said to Hervey. "If he shoots, he'll pot you. If he don't, I'll get you both."

"Drop it, Pete."

The little gunman let his weapon fall to the floor. His face was stupid with surprise. The other man, Al, stood with his arms dangling and his jaw slack.

"You," Brick ordered, gesturing with the automatic, "tie him up. Take his belt and tie his arms down."

The man called Pete tied the other under Brick's direction, tied him tight. Brick searched Hervey, found

nothing more deadly than a bunch of keys.

"Now you tie the other one," he said.

While he was cinching up the belt around the man's arms, Hervey spoke once.

"Just what do you expect to get by this?"

Brick didn't answer him. He waited until the job was done, then moved close to Hervey.

"We're going down to your car," he said. "Right down through the main room. I'm going to walk on the right side of you with a gun in my pocket. You'll speak to your people, just like you were liking it. If you make one funny move, or try to get help I'll empty the gun—and it won't be at the floor."

Hervey tried to smile. His lips wouldn't quite make the curve; he looked almost sick.

"I believe you," he said.

On the stair they passed a guard to whom Hervey nodded. The long room with its rows of apparatus for games of chance was sprinkled with people. Hervey's guards were easily recognizable. All of them, Brick knew, were armed. So were the cashiers and dealers. They stared curiously at Brick's disreputable clothes.

Brick walked close to Hervey, touching him now and then with the hard lump the gun made inside the pocket. Under the urge Hervey played his part well. He nodded to several men, smiling slightly. He even appeared at ease. As they neared the outer door a bald man who might have been the manager came hurrying up. Evidently he had something on his mind, and Brick's finger took up the trigger slack. But Hervey forestalled him.

"I'm going out, Stanley. See you later."

The man dropped back, staring at Brick. "All right, Mr. Hervey."

Hervey's car stood at the curb near by. "You drive," Brick said, and stood behind Hervey while he unlocked it.

"Where are we going on this ride?" Hervey asked as the motor started.

"I'm not going to rub you out," Brick said. "Not if you don't try to get away. Drive over to the American side—you and I are going to the jail."

As they crossed the railroad tracks Brick said: "You know who I am, Hervey. You're going to talk, now. You're going to clear my partner on this murder thing you framed."

CHAPTER XV.

ONE SLIP.

THE first man Brick saw when the car pulled up in front of the jail was Big Dick Chambers. He came hurtling out the door, hatless, his great shoulders seeming about to burst from his clothes. He yanked the door open and peered in, first at Brick, then at Hervey. A great smile spread over his face.

"I'll be blowed to hell!" he said, staring at Brick again. "I'll be blowed plumb to hell!"

Brick grinned. "Wait till I get this bird out of the car," he said.

Brick made Hervey get out first and walked him into the office. The chief, two or three other men and the lieutenant of detectives stood around, looking worried and as if they didn't know what to do. Dick Chambers turned on the chief.

"There now," he said. "He got him. I told you he would, and he did. Now do your stuff!"

The fat chief looked more puzzled and worried than ever.

"I——" he began. "I can't arrest Mr. Hervey. He——"

"You what?" Chambers roared.

The chief looked from Chambers to Hervey, who had begun to smile.

"You see how it is, Mr. Chambers," the chief said placatingly. "We can't hold Mr. Hervey unless we have evidence that he broke the law. It wouldn't be legal and I'd get into serious trouble."

"Wilson'll produce evidence," Chambers said. "It may take some time, but he knows Hervey killed Oakley and framed his pal."

But the chief shook his head. "False arrest's bad business. I can't touch him—can't touch him at all. Whatever Wilson's done is beyond police jurisdiction. We haven't been shown a thing to make us take Wilson's word against Mr. Hervey's. How do we know Wilson isn't a crook like his friend? You'd better be careful yourself, Chambers, how you go slandering people around here."

It was then that Brick blew up. He grabbed the fat chief by the shoulders and drew him up till hardly six inches separated their faces. The look on Brick's face made the policemen draw in toward him nervously. For a moment speech would not come, then it broke like the sudden bursting of a storm.

"You fat, lyin' tub of lard! You cheap, yellow rat. Can't arrest him! Why not? You arrested my buddy, didn't you? You pinch guys you haven't got a thing on, just because they might be suspicious, and beat hell out of them to find out. I'll tell you why you can't arrest Hervey. Because he's got money, that's why. A man could buy the whole dang department with the jail thrown in if he had the jack. That's the way cops work in this country; stick the poor guy in the jug, and let the rich one

go. It don't matter what you've done if you can pay."

Brick drew back a little from the frightened chief, letting go his shoulders.

"All right, let him go. But if you do I'm going to smear that putty nose of yours all over your fat face."

The fury of Brick's speech left them all silent, some angry, all uneasy. Surprisingly Bones Hervey's smooth voice was first to break the silence.

"He'd just about do that, chief," he said. "The man's crazy, or drunk, but he means what he says." Hervey looked around at all assembled.

"I don't know what this is all about," he went on, "but of course I'll stay till it's cleared up. If any one has a crazy notion that I murdered a man, I want the rumor spiked once and for all. A man can't have a suspicion like that following him. Suppose we sit down and talk it over."

BRICK turned around and stared. He had never seen anything like this performance of Hervey's. The plump, beautifully-dressed man—more striking than ever because his waxen paleness stood out in contrast to the tanned skins around him—stood there and told them what to do. He appeared as a man of culture and complete honor, whose reputation has been falsely mud-splashed. Hervey was smiling a little. Already people were finding chairs, perching on desks, making themselves comfortable against the walls. Keppel came in heavily and grinned, showing his yellowed teeth.

Brick sat down, feeling suddenly as if he had been hit in the stomach. Hervey was guilty, and he had thought that when he brought the man in, the case against Joe would

be cleared up quickly. Now Hervey was lying himself out of it, sliding smoothly away. The police wouldn't stop him—nobody would. They'd keep Brick himself from stopping him. He felt as if he were fighting against an invisible net which enmeshed his arms, made his strength useless. Brick knew how to fight, when fighting meant action. He didn't know how to fight lying and hidden double-dealing.

Big Dick Chambers had moved around and now leaned over Brick's chair.

"Howdy Tucker's up in the hospital with a notary and a cop," he said in an undertone. "That gangster you sent over's in a bad way. They're taking a deposition. What we've got to do is keep this going till Howdy gets here with the evidence."

Brick nodded, only half taking in what Chambers said. Hervey was looking at him. A faint satirical smile was printed on his mouth, which, in a moment opened to let out words.

"All I know is this, gentlemen: I was doing business in my office over the border when Wilson came in and held me up at the point of a gun. I'd never seen or heard of him before, and I was naturally startled." Hervey paused to smile again. "He didn't explain what he wanted, simply kept his gun trained on me and ordered me to drive here.

"I'm not saying anything about this abuse now. I will deal"—the smoothness of Hervey's voice scarcely hid the underlying venom—"with Wilson later. But I do feel that I'm entitled to an explanation."

The fat police chief's face was drawn into a knot of distress. He spoke in the tone of a man whose wife has scolded him for being late to dinner.

COM-4B

"We don't know any more about this ridiculous charge than you do, Mr. Hervey. Yesterday we found a man named Joseph Branch in the same room with the corpse of a fellow named Oakley. Branch has a prison record, and all the evidence points to his guilt, so we're holding him, of course. He's to be moved to the county seat this afternoon to wait trial. But ever since his arrest people"—the chief looked from Chambers to Brick—"have been making us trouble. This morning Mr. Chambers came with a wild story about a frame-up. Now Wilson brings you in at the point of a gun. It's all absurd; no sense to it. I've a notion"—he glared at Brick—"to lock you up, too."

"That's fine," Brick said. "Joe Branch and I save your bank from being robbed, so you throw us both in the brig and don't even try to help clear Joe on this murder charge. Just a lot of flatfeet trying to keep law and order!"

He turned suddenly on Hervey. "You know what you did plenty well, but I'll tell it just the same. You're in with this jug heavy job that tried to rob the bank, and when we stopped it, you thought Oakley'd tipped somebody off. You shot Oakley and when you found out you'd made a mistake you framed this murder rap on Joe Branch. Go on, lie out of it!"

Hervey was still smiling. "I suppose," he said, "you can bring evidence to support this crazy charge? Perhaps you saw me shoot Oakley and carry him over to a hotel room?"

"You slipped up just once, Hervey," Brick told him. "You sent the wrong guy to shoot me. He's here in jail now, nursing a sore jaw; unless these big-hearted cops have let him go. He talked once, and he'll talk again."

"He's still here," Dick Chambers said. "Let's have him out and see what he has to say about his boss."

CHAPTER XVI.

ESCAPE.

TANNER, Brick told himself, would talk and the police would have to hold Hervey. Then Howdy would come in with the wounded man's statement. They did have evidence to convict Hervey. The truth had only to be brought out. The gambler's smooth talk had confused Brick, mixed things all up. He was pretty tired, he realized.

Two uniformed policemen brought Tanner in and sat him down in a chair. He looked sullen. One-half of his face was swollen and discolored from his fight with Brick. Hervey was looking at Tanner and smiling.

"Am I supposed to be this man's boss? Never saw him in my life."

Brick leaned forward, his hands clenched on his knees. Tanner had not yet looked up from the floor.

"Tanner," Brick said, "you told me Bones Hervey sent you to knock me off. There he is. Now tell it so everybody can hear."

Tanner's head jerked up. For a moment a startled expression was on his face, but the look hardened. His flat eyes grew narrow, studying Brick. He grunted once and turned to Hervey, whose mouth was still smiling. Tanner's gaze moved from Hervey's sleek head to his white shoes and back again. There was the hint of a smile on his own mouth as he turned to the chief.

"Never saw him before," Tanner said. "What's this all about, anyhow?"

Brick got half out of his chair, then sank back again. They wouldn't let him knock the truth out of him

there. Dick Chambers breathed loud enough through his nose to be heard all over the room. Keppel laughed. Again Hervey was the first to speak. He appealed to the chief.

"You can see for yourself. This man Wilson's either crazy drunk or he's deliberately trying to make me trouble."

"Sure," the chief smiled. "Sure, Mr. Hervey. We never believed any of it. Do you want to make a charge against him?"

Hervey shook his head. "I won't bother," he said, looking at Brick. "Wilson won't make me trouble again. I'll be going, now that this is settled."

He rose, but Big Dick Chambers was on his feet first. Hervey would have had to walk through him to get out, a thing an all-American full back would have had trouble doing.

"Just a minute," Chambers said to the chief over Hervey's head. "You forgot something. You forgot you had a man up at the hospital getting a statement out of that gangster the Mexicans sent over a while ago. I think Hervey'd better stay till we find out what he said."

"What's he got to do with Mr. Hervey?"

"Plenty," Chambers told him. "If you cops would try to find out something instead of pinning every crime on the handiest person, you might get the right man once in a while."

"All the same," the chief said, "we can't hold Mr. Hervey on a vague thing like that. How do we know this man's even connected with the bank robbery like he's supposed to be? You must be crazy, too, Chambers. I advise you to get out of Mr. Hervey's way."

"It looks damn funny to me——" Chambers began, but Hervey himself cut in.

"I demand to be released. This is

absurd and insulting. If Chambers won't get out of my way of his own accord, you'll have to take him out."

THE weight of a gun was heavy in Brick's pocket. He looked at Big Dick Chambers, glaring down from his great height on the police as if daring them to take him from Hervey's path. That was one fine man, Chambers. If he stood up alongside Dick, the two of them could probably stand off the whole roomful of cops till Howdy came. They'd get pinched if anything went wrong, but what the hell.

Brick's hands tightened round the gun butt and he stood up. But no one, not even Chambers was watching him. Outside a car had stopped. Brick looked round in time to see Howdy Tucker come galloping across the sidewalk.

The reporter's hair was all ruffled on his bare head, his eyes glistening with excitement. He slapped Dick Chambers on the shoulder.

"We got it! Boy, what a story! What that guy didn't tell." Then Howdy saw Bones Hervey. He turned round to locate Brick. "You got him! You got the rotten skunk! That makes it unanimous."

In the midst of Howdy's wild talk a plain-clothes man had come in. He laid a crisp, folded paper on the chief's desk.

"There she is," he said. "All signed and witnessed." His glance traveled round to Hervey.

The chief picked up the paper. The next instant the detective who had brought it in went to the floor. Four men let out exclamations of surprise and jumped. They were too late. Hervey, showing strength and agility of which Brick had not thought him capable, had slugged the detective behind the ear. Before any one could reach him, he snatched

the deposition from the chief's hand, whirled and started for the door.

If Big Dick Chambers had stayed in his place, Hervey would not have had a chance. But Chambers had moved toward the desk. Brick, in the act of drawing his shoulder gun, saw that no one stood between Hervey and escape except Keppel. The ex-prison guard turned toward Hervey who was almost upon him. Then Hervey was in the door, disappearing. Keppel had not moved.

Firing as he ran, Brick was first after the gambler. His shot struck the wall behind Hervey. He reached the sidewalk in time to see him half falling into his big car. Brick threw down and fired again. But the instant of time it took him to level the gun was enough. The door swung as he fired, and his bullet struck glass which did not break. He fired twice more. Great, discolored marks appeared, but Hervey, now feverishly starting his motor, was safe as if his car were a tank. The big motor came to life, clashed into gear, went thundering down the street.

The men had poured out and stood watching Hervey's car flash away toward the east. He was a block away—two blocks away, almost instantly. The highway stretched before him straight and white as a sword.

A man in uniform and puttees ran from the group and across the street. He threw himself on a motor cycle, kicked it into power and shot out after the big car. The fat chief sighed.

"He can't catch him. Hervey's car is too fast."

BRICK, struck suddenly by a thought, turned on him. "Where's Tanner?" Nobody knew where Tanner was; nobody had seen him since Hervey made his break. The chief sighed again.

"I guess he got away, too."

"The hell he did!" Dick Chambers spoke from the doorway, where he stood holding a very subdued, limp gunman with one huge arm. "I had to fall on him to do it, but I got him. Somebody lock him up. Hervey made it, huh?"

Brick pointed down the highway where the glistening speck of Hervey's car was disappearing.

"Somebody's chasing him on a motor cycle, but there ain't a chance he'll get him."

"One thing to do," Dick Chambers said decisively. "Stop him when he tries to cross the border. We know the roads, and that's what he'll do."

Chambers had spoken to the chief, who stood patting his stomach and looking up the highway. He turned his vague stare on Dick Chambers as if he didn't understand.

"Don't stand there like a wart on a log!" Chambers said. "You let this sidewinder go, by bein' dumb. Are you going to let him get back across the line where you'll never get him?"

The chief swallowed hard, patting his stomach as if something hurt him in there. "I guess we'll have to go after him," he said sadly.

Dick Chambers cursed him fully and fluently, as no one but mule skinners and old-time cowmen can curse. The chief only blinked. Men were already moving to get out the police cars. Howdy Tucker said:

"You better come along, Dick. You know this country better than anybody. I'm going out with Held." He motioned toward the detective who had gone with him to get the deposition.

"You bet your neck I'm going," Chambers said. "Wilson and me'll take that old cactus jumper of mine and work between the roads. Get gone, you men! D'you think this is a parade?"

IT took Brick and Chambers ten minutes to get his battered, noisy, but powerful car out of the garage; time enough for Brick to cool down and start remembering things.

"We better get Joe out," he said. "He's been in that hoosegow long enough, and he might be some help."

Chambers nodded. When they got to the jail, the fat chief and a turnkey were the only ones on duty. The rest, the chief explained, were out trying to head off Hervey or on regular duty. He seemed very well satisfied.

"We came to get Joe Branch," Brick told him. "You've had him here quite a while for no good reason, and we need him."

The chief looked as if he were going to explode. "Let that man go! I should say not! He's booked on a murder charge."

"Listen," Brick said as if explaining something to a child. "Hervey killed Oakley. If he didn't, why'd he run when that statement came in? Get Joe out of here and get him quick."

"Nothing's been proved—not a thing. The only evidence I've seen so far shows Branch is guilty. I'd lose my job if I let him out."

Brick turned to Chambers, rapping his knuckles on his head.

"Soft," he said. "He's got fat up there and gone goofy."

Chambers leaned over the side of the car to get closer.

"You're going to lose your job anyhow. Try not to be any more of a nitwit. Turn Branch loose before you get into more trouble than you already are."

But the chief's drooping mouth was set stubbornly.

"Even," he said, "if I knew he didn't do it, I couldn't turn Branch loose till the prosecutor comes."

Dick Chambers threw his car into gear with an angry jolt. "We'll get a writ," he said, "and get him out of there so fast it'll make you dizzy. Of all the rat-brained, pop-eyed, three-chinned, sow-bellied—" The rest of Chambers's lurid remarks on the chief were lost in the pounding roar of the motor as they drove away.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEATH CAR.

WHEN Dick Chambers said he would work between the roads, he meant just that. Not along dirt tracks twisting between highways, but across open country.

"I figure he might cross the border hoofing it," Chambers explained to Brick. "I don't say he will, but he might. Gambling and sporting houses aren't Hervey's only business, by a long shot. He runs liquor and Chinamen and dope; he's never been caught at it, but he does. And his men have got hideaways and trails all along the border."

So, instead of watching by a known road, they went looking for a man on foot. Chambers's car took to open country like a seal taking to water. On the highway she was too loose, out here in the rocks and sand, her very looseness was a help. She could tilt at a thirty-degree angle and not go over, wriggle between rocks and up a steep slope, clear obstructions and dodge cactus.

For a while, they followed a fence built on the international boundary. Then the fence ended. And with the fence stopped all sign of men's presence. Out here was nothing; not a thing but the burning rock and parched soil, cactus, mesquite, and more cactus. The country which looked so level from a distance was broken by small hills, and steep-

sided gullies where the sudden rains of winter had gouged the land. Strange granite rocks sat up from the plain like small outposts of some ancient castle now gone. The great heat and light fell and surrounded them, washing hotly against faces till even their tanned skins burned afresh; heating the metal car as if in some huge, slow forge.

Now and then a jack rabbit started from their path and went loping off through the sparse growth with long awkward leaps. More rarely a rattlesnake wriggled away. An occasional desert bird flew. They saw no one. At the tops of hills Chambers stopped long enough to get out the glasses and scan the land as far as it was visible.

No human thing moved in the great hot plain for an hour of travel. Then they came upon the motorcycle policeman, sitting his machine at the point where a dirt road twisted like a desert snake over the border. He had, he said, kept up with Hervey until he took to the dirt. Then the big car outstripped his light machine and he had taken this short cut hoping to head him off.

Brick and Chambers wished him luck and went on. Another hour passed, two, three, without any sign of either Hervey or even the police cars. Once a Mexican appeared on the sky line, walking behind a burro loaded with wood. But he was in Mexico, and heading east.

THE sun had slid well down the hard blue sky behind when Dick Chambers, working down a slope, jerked the brake suddenly and brought them to a slithering stop. A sound; the sharp *ping-g* and whine of a rifle shot going by overhead brought them both out of the car and behind it; guns

out, waiting. No other sound came for a full five minutes, then with laboring motor a small gray car poked its nose out of a canyon and came toward them.

"Federals," Chambers said, and stepped from shelter, holding a white handkerchief.

The car came up and the two immigration-service men got out. They shook hands with Dick Chambers.

"We're stopping every car we see," one of them said apologetically. "Met a couple of cops a while back and they told us they were after Bones Hervey. They never help us, but we'd like to lay hands on that egg ourselves. Only thing we've seen so far's a smash-up, but I don't think it could have been him. Looked more like a police car. We're going in to find out if anyone's missing."

"We're hunting Hervey ourselves," Chambers told him. "Where was this smash-up? Anybody hurt?"

"About three miles over east. If there was anybody under that car he's carrying a harp now. It's burned all to hell—nothing left but the metal."

"We'll go have a look," Chambers said, getting back in.

"Follow that road we were on," the officer told him. "The car lies just off of it, piled up against a rock."

One feature of Dick Chambers's driving was its speed. He claimed that the faster you went the easier you rode the rocks and the less chance there was of sticking in sand. He covered the three miles in about ten minutes, in spite of making three dead stops for turns too short for the machine.

The wreck lay, as the officers had told them, against a rock; a mass of twisted metal from which smoke was still rising slowly. It appeared very

small in the sweeping country. When Brick and Chambers came up, they found the marks of feet where the Federal men had walked around, but no other sign. The Federalists had not turned the car over. Dick Chambers walked round and looked at the smashed motor.

"Must have been doing thirty-five or forty when they hit," he said. "Let's turn her over. This car's the same make as the police use."

THEY had to douse the metal with water from Chambers's canteen before it was cool enough to take hold of. Then the two big men got their backs into it and heaved. The car stirred, came up a little. They heaved again. A shower of fine white ash rose up to get into their mouths and eyes. But finally Chambers got his shoulders under. He held the car up, sinews cracking with the strain, while Brick turned around. He pushed as Chambers straightened. The car toppled with a crash.

They backed off long enough to get eyes and mouth clear. Smoky ash still made a cloud over the place where the car had been, but it was settling now. They went to look. Everything not made of metal had been destroyed by fierce gasoline flames. Not a piece the size of a man's finger was visible. Brick and Chambers got sticks and began to poke among the ashes, each grave with the thought that a man, pinned under this car, might have been destroyed without a trace.

Neither spoke. The ash made them cough, but they worked silently, stirring the débris for some trace of a man now gone back to his original dust. The wide silence of the desert closed in till the sound of Chambers' car cracking as it cooled was loud.

Suddenly Brick plunged in his hand above the wrist. He snatched it away with a throwing motion. The object struck a rock with a ringing noise. "What's that?" Chambers asked.

Brick didn't answer, but found the hot object where it lay between two cactus plants. This time he picked it up with his handkerchief, holding it carefully with a fold and using the rest for a polishing rag. When Chambers looked over his shoulder the letters "P o l" already stood out from the black. It was a detective's badge: No. 7.

"I don't know who that is," Chambers said. He took the badge from Brick, handkerchief and all. The back was thickly coated with soot. Chambers rubbed a streak down the middle, then began to polish vigorously. "Look," he said. Engraved, roughly as with a knife blade, were the words, "George Held."

Above this single token of the man who had burned to death Brick's eyes met Chambers. Then he looked down at the ash, stirring in the light breeze.

"Howdy Tucker was in that car," he said.

Chambers nodded, saying nothing. His own eyes looked bleakly at the rock where the car had struck and turned over. He began poking again with his stick. After fifteen minutes' search, Chambers turned up a fire-warped belt buckle. But they found nothing more. A buckle and a badge were all that was left of a man—or two men.

"Was Howdy wearing a belt?" Chambers asked.

Brick scowled at the ground, trying to think. "I can't remember," he said at last. "Must have been, though. I'd have noticed suspenders. And I know that he didn't have on any coat."

BRICK began searching the ground for tracks, hoping that Howdy had crawled away. That was possible. But by now, blowing sand had obliterated even the footmarks of the Federal men. It was useless. Brick straightened up after a little while.

"Let's kind of scout around here," he said. "If he's crawled off somewhere, we can't leave him. I'd rather Hervey's get away than Howdy check out because we didn't hunt for him. He's likely hurt badly if he's alive."

Brick took the lower slope of the small hill from which the rock stood up. He worked out slowly to about two hundred yards, then came back by a different way and repeated. He searched every crevice of rock, every depression in the ground, every place which might hold a man. He was alone, Chambers having taken the upper slope. He felt badly. Since this trouble started the good men, the decent, those who had guts, all seemed to get hurt while the cowards and the crooks were safe and free. First Root, killed without reason; then Joe's trouble; now Held and Howdy Tucker. The end was not in sight, either. With Hervey loose there was no telling what would happen, except that something was bound to, and that bad. Howdy was a darn good kid, even if he had been a fool about that picture.

After an hour, Brick gave it up. He came back to find Dick Chambers sitting on the running board of his own car, somberly rolling a cigarette. No use to ask if he had found Howdy or any trace of him.

"We'd better go back to town," Chambers said. "Hervey's either caught or safe in Mexico by now, and I'd like to find out if anybody knows anything."

Brick nodded. "I want to get Joe Branch out of that hoosegow," he said. "Jail ain't any place for a man when he's sober."

"He's probably out now," Chambers said. "The prosecutor'd make the chief turn him loose when he hears about Hervey. I feel like hell about Howdy Tucker. I could bust down and bawl like a kid."

"It's what Joe and me get," Brick said grimly, "for messing with somethin' that's none of our business. We tried to do a no-account guy a good turn and look what happens; Joe lands in jail, Howdy gets knocked off and we'll have to lam out of here the minute Joe's clear. Hervey'll fix it so we can't stay around this neck of the woods and live long."

"I don't know," Chambers said slowly. "He's in a pretty tight fix himself. He——"

Chambers broke off suddenly. A great frown came over his whole face. "By hell!" he said, striking the wheel with one big fist. "There's somethin' funny about this. There were three men heard that gangster confess. Hervey swiped the record, and now two of those men are dead—out of the way."

"That's right," Brick said slowly. "There was Howdy and Held and that notary public. Dick, do you reckon somebody killed 'em before they ran into that rock? It's funny they'd hit it, just driving along. It ain't natural they'd do that."

"We didn't find any bullet in the ash."

"Yeah, but it might have been there, or in the car or on the ground. If it wasn't that Howdy and Held were the ones who heard that fella confess——"

Dick Chambers glanced swiftly at the declining sun. "Too late now," he said. "But to-morrow we'll come

back and sift down that ash. If Hervey killed Howdy Tucker I'm going gunning some myself!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

NO HELP.

DARK was gathering in earnest when they reached the police station. In the brightly lighted room three men sat about; Keppel, the lieutenant of detectives, and the young motor-cycle officer—who was the only one who looked as if he were alive. He started up when the two came in, but the others sat their chairs as if nothing more than office routine was going on.

Chambers stood just inside the door and looked them over. "Where's the chief?"

"Home," Keppel answered. "Did you think he'd be waitin' for you with a brass band?"

"He'd better get down here," Chambers said, "and damn quick. There's two men been killed out there."

"Yeah?" Keppel said. "Who?"

"Young Tucker and your man Held. Maybe this'll make the chief get busy. Home! That's a fine place for him to be with things like this going on."

"They ain't dead," Keppel said. "These mugs are just conscientious. They'll be along."

"Think so?" Dick Chambers's eyes were hard, turning on Keppel. He walked over and dropped what they had picked up on the desk. "There's Held's shield and a belt buckle we found in the ash under their car where it burned."

The young motor-cycle officer crossed swiftly and picked up the shield.

"It's true!" he burst out, as if speaking to himself. "Those immigration guys said there was a police

car burned out there, but the chief wouldn't let me go. Hervey got Held——"

Keppel snarled at him. "What the hell makes you think Hervey got 'em? Held just run his car into a rock and it burned up on him. That's all. Keep your face shut till you're dry behind the ears."

For a moment the officer looked as if he'd hit Keppel. But he turned suddenly and went back to his place. Keppel asked Chambers if the buckle and badge was all they had found.

Chambers nodded. "What are you going to do about it? Sit there and rest your flat feet?"

Keppel's red-rimmed eyes looked at him unblinking. He grinned faintly.

"What d'you expect me to do, break down and cry? They're dead, ain't they? And burned up so there's no bodies to bring in."

Brick crossed over to Chambers. "No use, Dick," he said. "These guys think all a cop has to do is draw pay and beat prisoners somebody else brings in. Anything that's done, we'll do ourselves. We'll get Joe Branch and——" He turned to Keppel. "Where is Branch? He's out, isn't he?"

"Maybe you think this is a boarding house," Keppel said. "We ain't turning murderers loose to-day—no, nor the prosecutor either."

For a moment Brick stood staring at Keppel in unbelief. Then the lieutenant of detectives spoke nervously.

"We got orders to keep him. The prosecutor said to hold him till there was evidence against Hervey. Can't have a dangerous man get away."

"Dangerous!" Brick all at once had no more to say to these people. He spoke to Chambers. "Come on, Dick. Let's get that writ of what-do-you-call-it. They can't hold Joe."

OUT on the sidewalk Chambers stopped him. "Listen," he said. "We can get this just as well after we've had some grub. You haven't eaten since morning, and I only had a sandwich. A man's got to eat."

Now that Chambers mentioned it, Brick realized that his backbone felt like it would saw a hole in his stomach. "All right," he said. "Only let's make it—— What do you want?"

This last he addressed to the motor-cycle officer who had come up behind. The answer was low-voiced, hurried.

"Take me along to eat," he said. "I've got something——"

"Come on!" A huge hand on each of their arms, Dick Chambers hurried them to the car.

In a hash house around the corner they gave their order and turned to the cycle cop. His face was frowning in an expression of worry and puzzlement.

"It's about Keppel and the chief," he said. "They ain't coming clean with you, and it's mighty funny the way they act. The prosecutor would have let Branch go if the chief hadn't talked him into holding him. The chief even wanted to have Branch taken over to the county seat, but the prosecutor wouldn't stand for that. Chief and Keppel had to talk mighty hard to make him say your friend had better be kept here, but they finally convinced him Branch was dangerous."

"We'll get him out," Chambers said. "Judge Spiker will give us a writ. But it don't matter so much now. If the prosecutor doesn't believe he's guilty he won't push the case; even if Bones Hervey gets clean away."

But the cycle officer shook his head. "The chief and Keppel talked

smooth and fast," he said. "They got some reason for wanting Branch to go up for this. When they got through with him they had the prosecutor believing he ought to get a conviction because Branch has been in stir, if no other reason. You know how that shellback is about ex-cons."

Silence held while a waiter set food before them. Chambers picked up his fork, laid it down.

"And they wouldn't let you go and find out about Held's car when the Federals told you?"

The cycle officer shook his head. "It's funny, the way they act."

"I'll say it is! If there's a one of 'em has his job when I get through, my name isn't Dick Chambers. You go back there when you've eaten, son. Go back and see what you can find out. And what's the name of the notary that took down the confession?"

"Malone, I think. J. J. Malone."

ONCE started, Brick and Chambers found that they were too hungry to be satisfied with one order. The cycle officer left them waiting for a second; waiting in a silence filled with hot anger and preoccupation with grim thoughts. With his pie, Chambers asked for a telephone book and leafed through it for the notary's home address.

"We'd better get him first," he told Brick, holding his finger on the type. "We'll take him over to Judge Spiker's and have him tell the judge what he knows. That'll speed the thing up."

"He's the only one," Brick said. "He's the only one knows what that mobster said—except Hervey."

J. J. Malone's house was a bungalow on the edge of town. A light burned inside, and as they walked up

they saw a woman silhouetted in the window. She held a small child in her lap and rocked gently.

From the porch they saw her place the child on a couch before she came to the door. Her face, peering out at them a moment later, looked drawn. Her voice was high and anxious, saying, "What is it?"

"We wanted to see Mr. Malone," Chambers said. "Is he home?"

"He's not here." The high note of anxiety made the woman's voice sharp.

"Can you tell us where he is, ma'am? I'm Dick Chambers, and it's mighty important for us to find——"

The woman swung open the screen. "Come in," she said. "I thought you were another of those—those men."

The bright room was cheerful, the pleasant home of a man and woman. The child on the couch slept in spite of the voices. Chambers and Brick took the chairs toward which the woman motioned them.

"What men?" Chambers asked. "You'd better tell us all about it, ma'am. It might be something we ought to know. There's been trouble in this town."

"I certainly will tell you. It's frightened me. I'm glad you came."

Two men had driven up just before dinner time and she had answered the bell. They looked, she said, "like men from across the border." Not Mexicans, but Americans who preferred the life over there. She had not let them in, and when her husband came, they had taken him down to their car.

In a few minutes he had come back and gone straight to the bedroom, where she had found him packing a suitcase. He was pale, she said, and his hands trembled, but he did not explain anything.

"I've got to hurry," he had said.

"Got to make the six-ten train. I don't know when I'll be back."

As he left he had kissed her and said, "Don't worry."

When she finished, Brick and Chambers looked at one another, then away. Brick began to pick at a thread in the upholstery of the chair arm. Malone's wife broke into the silence.

"Oh, what's happening, please? If anything happens to Jack——" Her glance went involuntarily to the child.

"I wouldn't worry about him, ma'am," Dick Chambers said. "He isn't in any danger so long as he's out of town, and he can come back in a few days. Can you describe those men that came; tell me just what they looked like?"

But Mrs. Malone could not. Her glimpse had been brief and the worry of her husband's departure had blurred the impression. She could only say that they looked tough. Chambers was not able to recognize either.

"They were afraid your husband would tell something he knew," he told her. "But you don't need to get upset. He's safe enough, now. Thanks very much, Mrs. Malone."

THEY drove away in silence, heading back toward the center of town. Half a dozen blocks had passed before Brick spoke.

"That makes three," he said. "Now nobody in town knows what he said."

"It settles one thing, anyhow." Dick Chambers spoke slowly, as a man does when thinking. "Held didn't smash up by accident. Somebody shot him, or crowded him off the road. Hervey either had it done, or did it himself. Now he's run this notary public out of town. No use to go and see Judge Spiker now,

either. He'd have given us a habeas corpus on what the notary could tell. If it scared Bones Hervey it must be pretty bad. But now we haven't got enough evidence with everybody bucking us like this. They've got us stopped."

"It's damn funny, the police tryin' so hard to send Joe up and not doing a thing about Hervey. There's more in this than you can see right plain, Dick. I wonder if Ching Paulson knows anything about it—about Hervey."

"Who's Paulson?"

"Fella that works in the bank. Joe Branch got us into this trying to help him out. Paulson gave that gang the layout of the bank and opened up the doors. They had something on him and made him do it, but he's trying to shoot square. That's why we helped him and tried to keep him out of it. Joe's awful soft-hearted about a guy in a jam like that, on account of—of something that happened once."

"I know how he feels. Would this Paulson tell it if he knew anything?"

"Guess so. Joe seems to think he's a pretty good guy."

They finally located Paulson in his boarding house. The slight, blond man was more pale and shaken than when Brick had first seen him. The moment he got in the car, words came tumbling out of his mouth in a hysterical stream.

"This is terrible! Joe Branch helped me and now they're going to send him up for murder. I tried to tell them what Joe did that night, but Tucker wouldn't let me. I can't sleep. It's terrible."

"Shut up!" Brick said. "Cryin' about it won't help Joe any. What do you know about Bones Hervey?"

"He's a big gambler. Owns a lot of places over the border. They say he's——"

"Do you know he's tied up with the mob that tried to rob the bank?"

Paulson's pale-blue eyes opened very wide on Brick. "No!" he said. "No, I didn't know anything about that."

"Do you know anything more about Hervey—anything he could be jailed for?"

"They say——" Paulson began, but Brick cut him short.

"What people say is no good. Do you really know anything you can prove?"

Paulson shook his head. "I never mix with crooks; except when they come and threaten me the way they did. I hadn't any idea Hervey was in the gang."

"No use," Brick said to Chambers. "He can't help any."

"But isn't there something I can do?" Paulson wanted to know. "I can't stand having Branch in this trouble because of me. I'll tell——"

"What good would it do Joe for you to lose your job and get pinched?" Brick said. "Everybody knows by now that Joe and I stopped the robbery. They're accusing Joe of murdering that guy Oakley, and what you tell won't make any difference. You just lie low and keep your mouth shut."

They dropped Paulson at his boarding house and drove on, aimlessly, silently, each busy with the problem of what to do next.

CHAPTER XIX. FOOL'S LUCK.

THEY had reached open country one the far side of town before Brick broke the silence by swearing at himself.

Dick Chambers's big laugh boomed out clear and natural, as if a solution had lifted all weight off his mind.

"We're dumb, Dick. A couple of

saps. All we've got to do is go get another confession out of that mobster. He can tell us just as well as he told the others."

"When a thing's right under your nose," he continued, turning the car around, "you most likely don't see it. The best way out's generally the most simple—if you've got sense enough to find it."

But to obtain a second confession turned out to be a more difficult task than either of them imagined. The nurse on duty at the hospital desk refused them permission even to enter the gangster's room. His condition had been critical for some hours—a wavering between life and death.

Dick Chambers insisted that the resident physician, whom he knew slightly, be awakened. He explained the situation and the doctor's ill temper quickly changed to alarm and decision. He sent an orderly for the nurse assigned to all night duty in the gangster's room.

"If this man dies," he said, "it won't be any great loss. And what he has to tell may save a couple of lives. I'm all cut up about young Tucker. He was an impudent pup, but I liked him."

When the nurse came the doctor held a brief, low-voiced conference with her over the chart of the patient's condition. When he turned to them again his face was very grave.

"He has been in a coma for several hours. There's very little chance that he'll live, and he may not recover consciousness at all. Sometimes they do, just before death, and sometimes not. He may not be able to talk, even if he comes to."

Brick looked up from the worn spot in the floor at which he had been staring. "I'll stay," he said. "I'll wait in his room. We've got to get anything he says."

"You haven't had any sleep," Chambers said. "Better let me, or somebody else—"

"I've got all my life to sleep. If this guy says anything, I want to be there and hear it."

Chambers looked once at Brick's set face and did not argue.

"Doc," he said, "give him a cup of coffee, will you? I'm going out and 'tend to some things. I'll phone, Brick."

IN a straight chair by the head of the gangster's bed, Brick sat waiting out dark time which passed as slow as a sluggish stream. On a cot in a far corner of the room the nurse lay asleep. He couldn't see her. He could not see anything except the white pillow and the gangster's wasted, pain-racked face, illuminated by a feeble, shaded lamp. The man looked dead. His breathing was inaudible. He lay perfectly still. All about was quiet, heavy as the dark beyond the lamp's circle.

Brick had no idea how long he had been there. The nurse was supposed to wake and look at her patient every hour, but Brick was sure that she didn't. This man was going to die, anyway. Die. A lot of men had died since they first met Ching Paulson in the saloon. Root, and Held, and Howdy Tucker. His own chances to live long were not very good; not with things going the way they were.

Brick tried to shake gloomy thoughts from him. It wasn't the men who were dead who mattered now, but the living. If the man on the bed died without speaking, Brick didn't see how they were going to fight the frame-up against Kentucky Joe. He'd fight it, and he believed Dick Chambers would, but Brick didn't see how they could help.

Half an hour after he left, Dick Chambers had called to say that he could be reached at a certain hotel, and that he had a notary ready to come at a moment's notice. He had also said something about "getting some men together and trying to run this town right." Brick hadn't understood. He thought about it now, and still could not make out what Chambers meant. What could be right about a town where the police were as stupid as this, and probably crooked beside? Give a man a uniform and a badge and he could get away with a lot. Give him money and he could get away with almost anything.

The night dragged on and on. Brick was lonely, depressed, and found it increasingly hard to sit there. He was tired to the bone from lack of sleep and from the strain he had been under. Yet simply to sit and wait was harder than driving effort would have been. He wanted to do something, work, fight, go somewhere, to get Joe free and Hervey behind bars. And he had to sit still and wait for a man who lay as one dead.

To get Hervey was the thing that mattered now. Joe might possibly go free on a trial by jury. But even if he did, neither of their lives would be worth a nickel. Brick doubted that they could get out of town quickly enough. If the man on the bed came to life and talked, they could do it; bring Hervey over for trial, or make him skip the country—if the man talked.

THE nurse had come to look at him and gone back to sleep. She told Brick it was half past twelve, then. It was plain that she had given him up. The man didn't interest her any more. She could do nothing. She had forgot-

ten about him, almost. It came to Brick, as he looked at the man for the hundredth time, that nurses were like soldiers in war: death and suffering didn't affect them much. It was a job—dealing with life and death—and you couldn't afford to let it get to you.

They wouldn't let him smoke here. Brick chewed hard on a piece of tough dental gum the doctor had given him and tried not to want a cigarette. Each time he had looked, the gangster appeared nearer dead than alive. He'd gotten so he expected him to be dead every time he looked. Now he wouldn't look again for a while.

A slight sound in the bed brought Brick round with a jerk. What he saw was very strange. The gangster lay with his head bent upward from the pillow. His sunken eyes, wide open now, stared out into the dark with a look which combined more terror mixed with desperate fury than Brick had ever seen before. It was uncanny, for Brick, following his look, could see nothing but the dark.

If Brick had had time to reason, he would have thought the man in delirium, seeing some specter out of his past. He did not have time. As he looked, the man's hand went plunging toward his pillow in the gesture Brick had seen before. He was reaching for a gun.

Brick acted on instinct which drove his muscles in a surge so sudden no thought even got started. He rose from his chair and in the same motion hurled himself head down toward the place he knew the door to be.

In the enveloping dark his shoulder struck, and he knew he had run against a man. His momentum carried them both off their feet. Close beside him a gun went off with a

terrific crash. Then he was on the floor, and the room was filled with a woman's screaming.

Brick was half under the other's body. He felt the man squirm, tightened his right arm and heaved. The man turned over. Brick's left rose and struck. His knuckles crashed against bone. Too high. He struck again, a short, downward jab. This time teeth gashed the flesh of his hand, but the body went limp.

Brick lay there a moment, recovering himself. He started to sit up. A great flood of light leaped into the room. He blinked, and looked up to see the doctor standing over him. The orderly was just behind. Brick looked down again. Beside him, face up, lay Bones Hervey. His clothes were disheveled and the half-grown beard on his face made him look dirty. His right hand still loosely held a black automatic.

The nurse was still screaming. She sat up in the cot with eyes distended and mouth open, letting out yell after yell of hysteria. The doctor walked over and slapped her sharply twice. She stopped crying, and the room became very quiet. Brick got to his feet, still looking at the man on the floor.

"It's him," he said. "He came to get this mobster before he talked. I just got to him in time by luck."

The doctor looked toward the bed, then walked over swiftly. When Brick reached the bedside he was stripping covers off the gangster whose face was contorted in a rigid grimace of agony. His hand and arm reached stiffly toward the pillow. When his body was exposed it showed no fresh bullet hole. But the doctor said:

"He won't ever talk now. Hervey killed him just as surely as if he'd shot him. His heart stopped from the extra exertion."

It took Brick a moment to get things straightened out in his mind. The gangster was dead. He'd never tell anything. They had no way, now, of proving who killed Oakley. But they did have Hervey himself. Brick didn't know just what could be done, but he was sure of one thing: that Hervey would not get away again. He went to pick up Hervey's automatic and handed it to the orderly.

"I'm going to phone," he said. "If he wakes up, keep him here."

The orderly grinned. "He won't wake up for a while. Man, you certainly did sock that fella!"

CHAPTER XX.

CROOK FOR CROOKS.

THE office at the jail was crowded. Behind his desk sat the chief, looking worried and puzzled and as if he'd like to be far away from there. Keppel sat stolidly against the wall, turning his red-rimmed eyes balefully from Brick to Dick Chambers, who stood beside the door. Two men Brick had never seen before were near Chambers; tanned, carelessly dressed Valley men, who yet had about them the air of substantial citizens. Their faces were serious and set. The young cycle officer and the lieutenant of detectives were over near the chief, and beside Brick was Bones Hervey.

The gambler did not look as he ought to look. In spite of two missing teeth he wore the same half smile which had been there that morning when he faced his accusers. He was speaking, and he did not speak as he reasonably should.

"You can arrest me," he said, "but what for? I went to the hospital to see that man, and Wilson here attacked me. The girl at the desk was

asleep, so I came right on upstairs without disturbing any one. I'm a citizen, you know, and I'll stand on my rights. My lawyer can have me out inside an hour, and make it pretty hot for anybody that has interfered with my liberty."

It was hard for Brick to believe, that any man could so smoothly claim the protection of law and right when he had done what Hervey had done. He had known plenty of liars and crooks in his day, but none like this. Mixed with Brick's anger against him was a sort of admiration for his control of himself and ability to play a part. Keppel spoke.

"You can't jail a man that ain't done anything. I wouldn't stand any more from these birds, chief. They've made a monkey out of you long enough."

Dick Chambers, lounging beside the door, said quietly: "Nobody asked you anything, Keppel. Shut your mouth. We're asking you to arrest Hervey, chief. And I'm telling you, you'd better."

The fat chief was running his tongue over his lips. At another time, Brick would have laughed at the helpless, bewildered look of the man. The chief looked at Chambers, opened his mouth, closed it again. Keppel was staring at him. The ugly face and red-rimmed eyes seemed to Brick to hold a meaning he did not understand. The chief caught the look and shifted his glance away.

"I can't arrest Mr. Hervey. Don't you see there's no charge we can bring? Be reasonable, Chambers."

It didn't make sense. The chief was deliberately fighting for the liberty of a man whom he should have been glad to put behind bars, on any excuse. And all the while he insisted on holding Kentucky Joe. Keppel, the gorilla in uniform, was

urging him on. Brick was about to tell them what he thought when he saw Dick Chambers move away from the door.

THE rancher stood erect, now. He seemed to tower, and dominate the whole room by his size and the strength of his personality. Every one else appeared small. He was about to say something, and all were waiting to hear.

But the telephone's abrupt jangle broke in too soon. Before the chief could take it, the cycle officer's long arm had reached for the instrument. He said, "Police station," and turned almost at once to Brick. "For you, Wilson."

In a dead silence Brick put the receiver to his ear. The voice which came to him was faint and labored, as if the speaker could hardly talk.

"Brick? This is Howdy Tucker. Is it true you've got Hervey?"

Brick told him it was. "I'm up at the hospital," Howdy said. "They're trying to make me stay. Send somebody in a car, and for Judas's sake hold Hervey! I——"

Brick slammed the receiver on the hook.

"Howdy Tucker's at the hospital," he told Chambers. "He says for somebody to go get him."

Keppel and Bones Hervey were both on their feet before he finished.

"We can't keep Mr. Hervey here all night," Keppel said hurriedly. "It's an outrage, the way he's been treated. I'll just take him in my car to make up——"

It was then that Brick found out what Chambers had meant by "gettin' some men together and running the town right." Before Keppel's words had more than registered on his brain, he saw the two strangers move to block both doors. They

had guns in their hands. So did Chambers, and all three looked as if they meant business."

"That's enough out of you," Chambers said to Keppel. "You aren't fit to wear a badge and neither is your boss. It's been a long time since this State saw a vigilance committee, but there's one taking over right now. Son"—he nodded at the cycle officer—"take my car and bring Tucker. Keppel, sit down. Hervey, if you move from where you are, we'll shoot you."

Keppel sat down, looking dazed. Hervey stared at Chambers. He was not smiling, now. The chief patted his stomach, muttering to himself.

Chambers's car roared away, and a silence, heavy and tense as the moment when a dynamiter presses the key to fire his charge, settled on the room. Chambers and the two strangers stood watchful-eyed by the doors, covering the room. Keppel glowered at them like some sullen, stupid animal suddenly attacked. Hervey's smooth face showed great furrows that had not been there before.

All but the three Vigilantes turned at the first sound of the returning car. It stopped with a scream of brakes and a moment later Chambers stood aside to let the two in.

HALF of Howdy Tucker's head was caked with dried blood, and a fresh trickle ran down one temple. His left arm hung in an improvised sling. The tan had all faded from his face, leaving it gray, and he leaned heavily on the cycle officer's shoulder. He looked straight at Keppel, and as he looked, the ex-prison guard stood up, wrenching at the service revolver in his Sam Browne belt.

Brick reached for his own gun, but one of Chambers's men was be-

fore him. A shot crashed and Keppel grunted with pain. He took his right forearm in his left hand, nursing the pain of its breaking. Brick seized Hervey's arms from behind as he reached for a weapon. The gambler relaxed. The other stranger took away Keppel's gun, and Chambers said:

"Get handcuffs on Hervey."

As the cycle officer snapped the steel over Hervey's wrists, the chief suddenly pointed a finger at him and shouted: "He did it! He framed Branch. He's—he's a crook!"

And Hervey, with a trace of his old smile, answered: "And so are you, chief. I've given you bribes enough to send you up for twenty years, and you'll go when I do. Keppel will, too."

So the gunfire of charge and countercharge commenced. It lasted a long time. Once started, these partners in crime tried to outdo each other in revelations. The chief and Keppel, in Hervey's pay, had done their best to make Hervey's frame-up of Joe Branch work, as they had helped him often enough before. Keppel was deep in Hervey's illicit trade back and forth across the border, and the chief had been well paid to keep eyes and mouth shut. They told enough to keep Hervey in prison the rest of his life, without a conviction for murder. And he in turn implicated them. Though in Keppel's case, there was no need.

Finding himself in deep trouble when the wounded gangster made his statement, he had tried to do away with witnesses by shooting Held when the detective's car was moving fast. Howdy Tucker, thrown clear of the wreck, had retained consciousness long enough to crawl behind the shelter of rocks and saw Keppel set fire to the spilled gasoline, evidently believing him to

be underneath with Held. He did not know whether Held was still alive then or not. Fortunately, Keppel was in too much of a hurry to look for him, and Howdy, after a torturing afternoon of wandering lost under the blazing sun, had come at last to a ranch house and finally been brought to town.

"They made just one mistake," Howdy said when he told about it. "They didn't take that gangster seriously enough. Keppel wasn't here, and the chief sent an honest man up with me to get the confession. He told plenty, too. He thought Hervey had double-crossed him and was out to do him as much harm as he could. That was a smart scheme of yours, Brick, making him think Hervey'd sent the cops after him."

The man who had shot Keppel came in just in time to hear Howdy say that.

"From what I hear," he said, "Wilson's been mighty smart all along. The town's got a lot to thank him for, one way and another. I'm a lawyer here, and I never thought to see Hervey in a cell. Any favor we can do you—"

A weary grin came to Brick's face. "How about letting Joe Branch out?" he asked.

THEY went back to the cell, Dick Chambers striding in the lead with the keys. Kentucky Joe was at the bars, peering anxiously down the dark corridor.

"Where's Brick? If they got Brick I'll—"

Then Brick was in the doorway and gripping Joe's hand.

"You're out, boy," he said. "All in the clear."

Neither was a man of many words, but they could mean what they said. Joe's handclasp tightened for a mo-

ment like a vise. "Thanks, Brick. I—you——"

"Forget it," Brick said.

The others crowded round, then, congratulating Joe, trying to tell him everything that had happened. They stood around in the corridor all talking at once. When the confusion let up a little Kentucky Joe laughed. He hit Brick lightly on the shoulder with his fist; his face aglow with devotion.

"Now this is over," he said, "you can get back over there and do your gamblin'. Maybe you'll have a chance at some honest money with Hervey out."

Brick suddenly reached into his

pocket and hauled out a wad of bills. He handed them to Joe.

"You go," he said. "Me, I was in a poker game last night that'll cure me the rest of my life. You go over if you want to. What I'm going to do is climb into your bunk and sleep."

As he spoke, Brick stepped through the cell door and sent it clanging shut behind him. "And if anybody wakes me up before day after to-morrow I'll bust him one on the jaw."

When the laughter died down, Brick Wilson's rhythmic snores were heard rising from the darkness of the cell.



A NEW GOVERNOR FOR HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

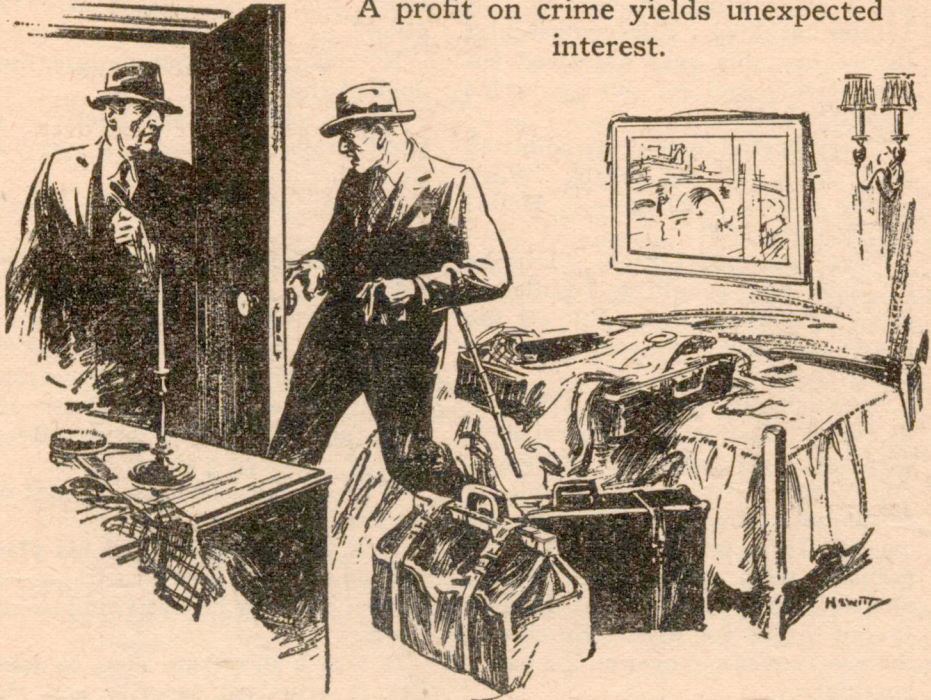
LAST November, Major Ashley Cooper was appointed the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Two hundred and sixty-one years ago, Charles II. of England issued the first charter to the company and a long, unbroken line of distinguished traders have held that post and contributed materially to the building up of the great Northwest.

The chain of stores operated by the company in western Canada is not the main business of the corporation; furs are its principal concern. The company operates three hundred and twenty fur-trading posts and the chief factor, Ralph Parsons, of Winnipeg, recently began a tour of inspection to these posts which will require three years to complete.

"We have," said Major Cooper, "a national and humane duty to perform in providing for those Indian and Eskimo trappers who can no longer live by the bow and arrow. They have been educated to a higher standard of living and must have rifles and ammunition. Neither could we cut down their supply of bacon and buy fewer furs. They are citizens of Canada and have every right to subsist in their chosen way."

Developments in Canada, he pointed out, have had important effects on the administration of the company. The railroad has gone to Churchill on Hudson Bay and to Moose Factory on James Bay, and this large area in future will be served by train instead of boat. Air transportation of stores and supplies is to be tried in place of transportation by canoe and dog train. On Lake Mistassini there is a post that can be reached in five hours by plane, but is four or five weeks from civilization by older methods of transportation.

A profit on crime yields unexpected interest.



ONE PEARL MISSING

By Oscar Schisgall

DON EVERMAN opened the door of his Monte Carlo apartment to find Harvey Linton, a study in black and white, on the threshold.

"Well!" Everman exclaimed cheerily, drawing a long cigarette holder from his lips. "You've deserted Madame d'Aubrelle quite early to-night, haven't you? I saw you at the opera half an hour ago."

Linton offered no direct reply. He entered, his face taut and earnest.

"I came straight here," he said. "I don't want to hang on to these pearls any longer than necessary!"

Everman's eyes, widening, shone.

"Oh! So you got them," he whispered.

"Of course!"

"Any trouble?"

"No. It was easy enough."

"Does madame know of her loss?"

"Not yet. She probably won't discover it until some evening when she decides to wear them. I took the things out of her jewel case. Look here, Everman, I hope you've got the money for me!"

"Certainly," Everman assured him, smiling. "Come into the library and let's have a look at the things."

In the library the gray-haired fence switched on a lamp that stood beside a desk. He sat down, a bulky

figure in evening clothes; and as Linton unfolded a silk handkerchief before him, his eyes narrowed appreciatively and he put aside his cigarette holder.

"Very pretty luster," he admitted as he bent over the pearls. "Very pretty indeed. They— Hello! String's broken!"

"Yes," snapped Linton. "I broke it. The thing caught as I pulled it out of the jewel box. But all the pearls are there; you needn't worry about that."

Everman did not speak. In fact, he remained silent for several minutes while he examined the gems, one by one. A queer little smile, a contented smile, hovered about his massive features. These things, he realized, were easily worth fifteen, almost twenty times what he had agreed to pay for them. He turned the pearls over and over on the handkerchief.

"Well?" finally demanded Linton impatiently.

"They look quite satisfactory, old man."

"Then let's get this deal closed! I want to get out of here and draw a free breath."

Everman leaned back in his chair. He picked up the cigarette holder and regarded his visitor speculatively.

"Tell me," he said after a pause, "just what are the chances of these things being traced to you?"

"None!"

"You're sure of that?"

"Listen, Everman," Linton rasped in exasperation, "this isn't the first job I've pulled! You ought to know by this time that I cover my tracks pretty well! I never got you into trouble yet, did I? Even back in New York you were safe with me! You needn't be worried about this. Jacqueline d'Aubrelle is going to

swear that burglars got into her villa!"

Everman considered a while, then nodded and rose.

"Very well," he said quietly. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll get you the cash."

And he walked out of the room.

THE instant Don Everman was gone, a change swept over Harvey Linton. He grew rigid. His eyes flamed. His cheeks became deathly white. He snatched an automatic from his pocket. He held the weapon low, concealed behind the back of a chair.

With his feverish eyes fastened on the door, he waited.

This was the climax of his plan. He had induced Everman to get the money, and now he was going to kill the man!

It was a desperate step to take. But it promised security and one hundred thousand francs in cash.

The sound of approaching steps ended Linton's thoughts. He stiffened and held his breath. Everman came into the library with his head bent, for as he walked he was counting bank notes.

"I hope you won't mind ten-thousand-franc notes," he said. "I took them because they're easier to carry than a big wad of—" He raised his head, halted, gaped. "Good heavens!" he gasped. "Linton! Don't! You're crazy!"

But the horrified outcry issued too late.

There was a single angry crack from Linton's automatic.

A crimson rose suddenly bloomed in the very center of Don Everman's dress shirt. He swayed. He looked very bewildered and dismayed. He reached out for support and found none. He began to sag down, his incredulous eyes fixed in amazement

on Linton's ghastly face. He was still holding the money, and his hand rose unsteadily, as if to offer the bank notes for his life.

And then, without having uttered a sound after the shot, Don Everman collapsed in a huddle. He was dead!

It must have been the thump of his fall that aroused Harvey Linton. He blinked, sucked in his breath. With a cry stifled in his throat he sprang forward, wild-eyed, and succeeded in tearing the money out of that rigid, clutching hand.

When he had it, crumpled in a ball, he jammed it into his pocket. He swung to the desk and swept the pearls into the handkerchief, began tying it into a little bag.

And half a minute later Harvey Linton, with his pockets holding both money and pearls, dashed out of the apartment, down a flight of steps, and into a tranquil Mediterranean night.

IN the morning, as he stepped out of his hotel, Linton drew a deep breath and rather contentedly apprised his position.

He had not, as Everman had supposed, actually stolen the pearls. No. His plan had been much craftier and safer. At the opera, last night, Jacqueline d'Aubrelle had worn the string; and later, as he escorted her home in a taxi, he had managed to catch his sleeve among the gems and break the cord.

For this awkwardness he had insisted on atoning by having the pearls restrung. And Madame d'Aubrelle, after laughing at his abject contrition, had indicated her trust in this charming American by saying:

"Eh, *bien*, very well, then, if you insist. But take them to Corval. He has restrung them once before and he is reliable."

So now, on the morning after Everman's murder, Linton went to Corval. He intended to have the string replaced and to return the pearls to Madame d'Aubrelle in scrupulous good faith. A profit of one hundred thousand francs would be his—and no possible connection with crime.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Monsieur Corval, the jeweler, when Linton entered his shop. "These are the pearls of Madame d'Aubrelle, *n'est-ce pas, m'sieu'?*"

"Why, ye-es——"

"Madame, she has telephone' me only a few minutes ago to say that m'sieu' would bring them for her. I remember these stones very well."

He was a tall, cadaverous man, and when he smiled across the counter in his ingratiating way, the expression accentuated every bone in his face.

"Will it take very long to string them?" Linton asked.

"*Non, non*. Perhaps half an hour, no more."

"Then I'll be back."

When he left the shop, Linton strode across the public gardens to the Café de Paris. He sat down with forced deliberation and ordered coffee and cognac. He leaned back, folded his hands over the knob of his cane, and surveyed the colorful crowds already gathering for the morning *apéritif*.

He knew he was safe, and he had every reason to be gratified. In his wallet was one hundred thousand francs; more than enough to satisfy his needs for the next month. The pearls, too, were safe and would soon be returned to Madame d'Aubrelle. Moreover, he was confident that he had left no clew of himself in Everman's home. Even the automatic which had fired the fatal shot now lay in the Mediterranean; before go-

ing to his hotel last night he had thrown the weapon far out from shore.

The early editions of the newspapers, through which he had searched at his hotel, had presented no report of the murder. No doubt the body had not been discovered in time to lend sensation to those sheets.

But now, as he sat at his table in the Café de Paris, Harvey Linton saw a newspaper truck stop at the curb. Four boys ran from it to deliver the latest editions to the stands about the public gardens. He wanted to jump up and rush for those papers, but a resolve to be calm restrained him. Presently he signaled his waiter.

"Send somebody to get me a paper, will you?"

"*Certainement, m'sieu'.*"

A MOMENT later, when he looked at the front page, his muscles snapped to rigidity. He sat up stiffly, every sense alert. Yes, it was there!

MURDER DISCOVERED AT MAISON BLANCHE!

M. Donald Everman found shot to death. Concierge finds body. Empty wall safe in bedchamber, left open, hints at burglars.

So that, Linton excitedly muttered to himself, was where Everman had kept the money: in a wall safe.

He could not read French very readily. He had to grope from phrase to phrase, making rather free translations. But the gist of the report was clear enough. Nothing in it startled him very much until he reached a paragraph midway down the column.

Harvey Linton suddenly caught his breath with a gasp.

Luckily it was an inward, inaudible gasp. He leaned forward in stupefaction, his eyes wide, his lips

parted. For just a second he forgot that scores of people might be watching him. When he remembered, he shot a quick, almost guilty glance around. Then he gulped down his liquor in one mouthful and bent again to translate that paragraph:

So far the police have one possible clew which may help them to trace the assassin. It is a pearl which was found on the floor of the library, close to M. Everman's body. Since it is a gem of unusual quality, it is hoped that its ownership may eventually be traced.

That was all—just a few short sentences. But they roused a tempest in Harvey Linton; a tempest that swept terror into his mind.

A pearl!

What if somehow, through the magic of a skilled detective, the gem were actually traced to Jacqueline d'Aubrelle? What if she, in bewildered innocence, admitted that she had intrusted her pearls, on the fatal night, to Harvey Linton?

Linton sprang abruptly to his feet. He called for his check, paid the waiter, and walked away.

Linton walked twenty minutes to steady himself, then went back to the establishment of Monsieur Corval. He determined not to yield to panic. He must behave calmly!

As soon as he entered the shop, the gaunt jeweler hurried forward to meet him. He looked a little anxious, a little regretful.

"Ah, m'sieu', I am glad you have return'! I have already telephone' Madame d'Aubrelle."

LINTON halted in surprise, though a dark premonition surged through him.

"Why?" he asked coldly. "What's wrong?"

"One of madame's pearls is missing!"

"Wha-at?"

"Missing, m'sieu'—lost! Once before I have restrung them, and my records show there were a hundred and twenty-two on the string. Now when I count them, *voilà*, only a hundred and twenty-one!"

"Well!" muttered Linton, scowling. His heart pounded heavily. "That's strange. What does Madame d'Aubrelle say?"

"She says she thought all the pearls were in your handkerchief, m'sieu'. She asked if you would have the goodness to look in your pockets."

As he searched his pockets Linton tried to appear gravely concerned. The hunt was futile, however, and finally he shook his head.

"Possibly in my evening clothes," he suggested.

"Ah, yes! But, of course! You will see, m'sieu'?"

"I'll go back at once, yes. Er—what about the string?"

"Oh, it is ready," said Monsieur Corval. "With the one pearl missing, *naturellement*. And madame requested that I string them as they are. Will you take it?"

"Yes, I may as well."

"If," generously offered the jeweler, "you find the lost pearl, bring it in, m'sieu', and I shall be glad at any time to add it to the others."

Linton nodded his thanks. He paid for the work and watched while the pearls were wrapped in a small box. And as Monsieur Corval tied the last knot in the binding cord, a man entered the shop.

He was a ponderous man with a formidable gray mustache. From the corners of his eyes Linton glanced at him. Something about him—his air of authority, perhaps, or the simple, baggy clothes, or the heavy black shoes—brought an odd sense of discomfort. Just why he

should suspect this stranger of being a detective, Harvey Linton scarcely knew. Possibly it was because he was looking in apprehension at every one who approached him to-day.

The man remained silent until Linton moved away toward the door. Then, taking an envelope from his pocket, he leaned across the counter.

"Monsieur Corval," he said, "I have here a pearl I should like you to examine. Perhaps you can identify it. I've been asking every jeweler in town. You see, we found it this morning beside a murdered man, and if we can trace it——"

That much Linton overheard. And though it was uttered in French, he understood every terrible word.

Already halfway through the door, he dared neither stop nor look back. His face became deathly pale, the color of chalk. A spasm of terror all but strangled him. He had the feeling that the Law was just behind him, about to tap his shoulder. When he emerged on the sidewalk, he scarcely knew which way to turn. A few steps he took with abnormal rigidity. Then, as though fearful of pursuit, he shot back a wild glance. He saw nothing to frighten him, yet he abruptly lurched into a rapid stride, almost a run, toward his hotel. And in his head thundered the frantic thought:

"I've got to get away! I've got to get away quick!"

WHEN Harvey Linton burst into his room, he was breathing hard. His eyes were afire. Tiny drops of perspiration covered his forehead, and a little rivulet of them wriggled crookedly down his temple.

He locked his door, even jammed home the small bolt. Then, flinging

his hat aside, he darted across the sunlit chamber to yank a pigskin grip from under the bed. From a closet he took another piece of luggage. He opened them and started wildly, without system or care, to cram in his clothes.

"What a break!" he gasped.

He jerked open a drawer and literally dumped its contents into a suitcase. On top of the bureau was a portrait of Jacqueline d'Aubrelle; one she had given him at his insistence some weeks ago. She was wearing her pearls. The sight of the picture momentarily checked him. He stared at it, then sneered and hurled it into his luggage.

"One little pearl!" he rasped. "One damned little pearl! Why the devil didn't I stop to look over Everman's floor? There was no rush!"

He knew precisely what was going to happen now.

Corval, the jeweler, would identify that pearl as Madame d'Aubrelle's. At least, he would suggest its being hers, which was bad enough. Through her the detective would promptly proceed to trace the gem to Linton's possession at the time of the murder. And then—

"But they can't pin the killing on me for that!" he tried to tell himself as he stuffed a suit into a valise. "They can't prove anything!"

Immediately another side of his mind retorted:

"That's crazy! Whatever happens, they'll have to hold me and look into my record! And that means I'm done! If they don't paste this murder on me, they'll deport me back to the States! And that spells jail! I've got to get away quick!"

As he packed, Linton's mind raced. He had in his pocket more than one hundred thousand francs in cash. Also, he had the pearls! There was no point in returning them now. Be-

sides, he could not afford the time it would take him to go to Jacqueline. And they constituted a fortune too big to be sacrificed when the sacrifice could avail nothing.

He realized, of course, that his running away would rouse the police of all France to a grim hunt. But of that he wasn't afraid. He'd been hunted before and he had always managed to slip away. Better to be free and sought than in prison, charged with murder! Once out of Monte Carlo, he would find a way to take care of himself.

Linton stopped to look at his watch. A drop of perspiration splashed on its dial. It was five minutes after ten.

He uttered a hard little sound and plunged back to the packing.

In the lobby, before coming up, he had searched a time-table to discover that he could catch a Paris-bound train at ten thirty-five. Not an express; but it would do.

To confuse the police, he intended to buy a through ticket to Paris. But he'd get off at the next stop, Beaulieu, and jump into a bus for Marseilles. He'd reach Marseilles by nightfall; and if he could secure passage on a boat—preferably a freighter—bound for some Oriental port.

It could be done. It must be done! With one hundred thousand francs and pearls worth—oh, infinitely more!—a man could live like a prince somewhere in the seclusion of the East!

Linton locked the valises at ten fifteen. Soaked with perspiration, he swung toward the telephone and was about to call the hotel clerk when he stopped. Stopped and stared at a haggard ghost in a mirror.

What on earth was the matter with him, anyhow? Was he going crazy?

"Of all the insane things to do!" he gasped.

He'd been so madly excited, he realized, that the folly of checking out of the hotel now had scarcely occurred to him. Why, if he did that, the police would immediately watch the trains!

"I've got to leave these things here!" he told himself. "I'll just go out and the cops will wait for me to come back! Meanwhile I can get to Marseilles——"

Of course! Any clothes he might need he could buy there. By stepping out of the hotel as if he were merely going for a stroll, he could delay pursuit for hours. Why had he allowed so obvious an idea to escape him? Such confusion of mind would never do! He'd have to get a grip on his nerves.

Linton kicked his luggage into a corner. He snatched up his hat, sent a final glance around the room, and unlocked the door. He started to step forward into the corridor.

But he didn't.

He stood paralyzed.

At the door, with a hand raised as if to knock, was the massive detective who had been in the jewelry shop!

LINTON, when he confronted that stocky, mustached detective, jumped back with a gasp. His distended eyes blazed with the accumulation of all the fear that had been torturing him for hours. His face, already moist and haggard, assumed a ghastly, livid hue. He knew very well, if he thought of it at all, that his conduct itself must incriminate him; but he could not shake off that palsy of horror.

"What—what is it?" he demanded hoarsely. "What do you want?"

The detective did not immediately reply. He stared queerly at this

white-faced, horrified figure, and his eyes narrowed shrewdly. He peered beyond the man, about the room; saw the packed luggage, the empty drawers half out of the bureau, the empty clothes closet.

All that he surveyed, slowly, before he looked back at Harvey Linton. Then, with an odd smile, he said:

"So I arrive just in time, eh, m'sieu'?"

"What do you want?" Linton repeated in a voice not his own.

"You, m'sieu'."

"Me? What—what for? What do you mean?"

"For the murder of Donald Everman!"

Linton blinked. "Murder?"

Very significantly the detective's hand disappeared in his pocket.

"I must ask you to accompany me to headquarters, m'sieu'," he said.

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"It will get us nowhere to dispute the matter here. I must ask you to come, m'sieu'."

"I tell you," Linton almost screamed, "I don't understand what this——"

"A search at headquarters," curtly interrupted the detective, "will settle that! If you have the money on——"

"Money?"

"One hundred thousand francs."

At the mention of that sum Linton felt an icy quiver ripple through his body. He had been fighting to meet the detective's eyes with a steady stare, but now it wavered.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded thickly.

The big man did not move. His eyes were hard and glittering. He stood with his head slightly thrust forward, his hand still in his pocket.

"Yesterday," he said softly, "Mon-

sieur Everman withdrew a hundred thousand francs from his bank. There were ten ten-thousand-franc notes in the packet. It is fortunate that, because of the large denominations, m'sieu', the bank has the serial numbers of these notes. Possibly they are in your wallet? Or your baggage, there? I will not press you now. We can go into that at headquarters. Let us start."

But Harvey Linton stood petrified.

And yet, curiously, it was not to this disastrous point of the incriminating bank notes that his floundering mind tried to cling. He was wondering, in a chaos of bewilderment, why the detective did not mention the pearl. He sucked in a sibilant breath.

"Look here!" he gasped. "This is all crazy! Why do you come to me with this?"

THE police officer yielded to a Gallic shrug. With the motion his slim hand emerged slightly from his pocket, and Linton had a brief but shocking glimpse of a revolver.

"I shall be quite frank," the detective said in his soft-spoken English. "I have no wish to trick you, m'sieu'. I do not think that will be necessary. I came to you because we have found you are one of Monsieur Everman's friends. To-day we are questioning all his friends in the hope that perhaps they can help us solve the mystery of his death. You, m'sieu', were merely one among the others. Until I arrived here, I did not suspect you of having killed your friend."

Fully thirty seconds passed before Linton appreciated this acknowledgment. Then:

"Wha-at!" he whispered hoarsely.

"You see, I am frank. But *que voulez vous?* I come here and find

a man in such terrible fear that he is white, sweating, shaking, ready to scream at the sight of a policeman. The morning after his friend is murdered, I find him with his baggage all packed, ready to rush out just as I come. So I must form my conclusion, m'sieu'. And when I accuse you, *voilà*, your actions alone are enough to disgust a jury. I must take you at once to headquarters!"

"But——"

Whatever Harvey Linton might have said was crushed by the sudden trill of his telephone. He scarcely heard it. There was another ring, and a third. He swept an exasperated glare at the instrument. Its sound crashed into his head, disrupting and exploding whatever coherent thoughts he was struggling to frame. Its persistence maddened him.

"Better answer," advised the detective. "Then we will go."

Linton moved to the telephone like an automaton, in a daze. Not a word had been said about the pearl! He couldn't understand it. He saw only that this detective had come to call on him quite casually, as a matter of routine. Had he received the man calmly, with an air of innocence, he might have talked his way out of all connection with the crime! It had been his own insane terror—born of that single lost pearl—that had brought calamity upon him! Now he must go to headquarters, where those accursed bank notes would link him with the killing! Where merciless investigations would link him with his past.

"*Nom d'un nom!*" snapped the detective. "Aren't you going to answer that telephone?"

Linton answered in a stupor.

Through the wire came the merry, laughing voice of Jacqueline d'Aubrelle.

"Ah, but you are going to laugh!" she giggled. "The funniest thing happened! About that pearl, I mean! You were worried, *non*, 'Arvey?"

"Pearl?" he repeated huskily.

"Yes! We thought it was lost, eh? But *non*! It must have fallen into my gown; and when I undressed last night it probably dropped to the carpet and rolled away. For my maid, she has just found it under the chaise longue, and I——"

Harvey Linton put down the telephone. He was trembling. His knees were behaving wildly, and he had to seize a chair to keep himself from collapsing. That pearl—the pearl that had created and inflamed his calamitous terror—under Madame d'Aubrelle's chaise longue.

When he turned back to the detective, his skin looked like parchment. His mouth was so dry he could scarcely force a word through

it. But, desperately, he managed to speak. He knew the question he wanted to ask was dangerous. But he couldn't suppress it. He had to know.

"You brought a pearl to Corval's! A pearl you—you found at Everman's apartment!"

"Eh?"

Linton blurted: "Whose pearl was it?"

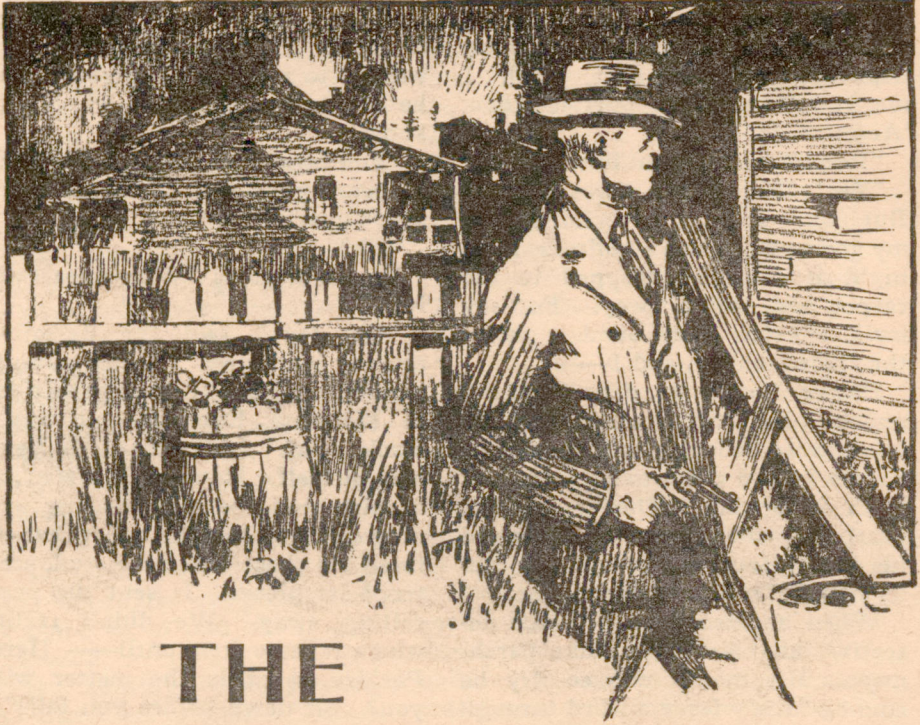
"Oh, that," said the detective, arching his brows. "A few minutes ago we identified it through a friend of Monsieur Everman. It was a black pearl. It belonged to Everman himself. He used it, m'sieu', as a shirt stud—he was wearing evening clothes. But the bullet that entered his chest broke the stud, scattered its pieces. It sent the pearl rolling away. We didn't realize where it came from until—— Here! *Parbleu*, what is the matter with you? Sit down before you fall!"

MOUNTY POSES AS A RED

RECENTLY a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman at Toronto, Sergeant John Leonard, told from a witness stand that for seven long years he lived a dual life. He posed as a Communist and sat in secret conferences, where plots to wreck the government were being hatched, in order "to get his men."

Facing nine Communist defendants on trial for conspiracy, the scarlet-coated officer told how he had worked with them, plotted with them, issued orders to them, and accepted advice from them during those seven years. To maintain the tradition of the service—the Mounties always bring in their men—he had acted the dual rôle, putting aside his uniform and donning the shabby clothing of a workman. He managed to be elected secretary of the Regina branch of the Communist party of Canada, and then found his way into the inner circle of officers. Here he gathered the material necessary to arrest his men.

Uncle Sam's secret service men do not ride horses like the Mounties, but there is no valid reason why they should not establish for themselves a similar tradition. Quite recently a remarkable bit of detective work on the part of a special agent of the bureau of investigation came to light. This agent went to live among the real Apaches of Arizona in order to find the Indian of that tribe who had killed a young woman anthropologist. The agent remained among the Apaches four months and then he, too, brought in his man.



THE CYCLONE SHOT

CHAPTER I. AFTER A STORY.

RED light flared from a mile of plant stacks along the right bank of the river. Smoke drifted lazily toward the slope of Halltown, more commonly known as "Helltown" by the steel workers of the district. Other plant towns along the river were not built on such a steep slope; the wind had a chance to blow ore dust, and cinders and heat away from the houses. But in Halltown everything was sucked and pushed and dumped against the slope, and in summer Halltown rated its other name.

The speeding cab in which Jeff McReady was riding lurched over

cobbles. Jeff leaned back in the seat and tried to keep his head from bumping against the roof. The driver was obeying his orders; he had obeyed them all the way from Pittsburgh, more than ten miles away. Now they had reached the limits of Halltown, and in what Jeff figured must have been record time.

He was grinning when the cab driver turned his head. The driver's name was Colombo, and he was a favorite with reporters on the Pittsburgh *Dispatch*. His first name wasn't Christopher, but he was generally known as Chris. He was short and stocky, and very quick. He had a brown face with a broken nose—a relic of a short career as a prize fighter. Shad Borne, city editor of the *Dispatch*, often said he'd put



By Raoul Whitfield

A newspaper man who
played hunches and did
not pull his punches!

Chris on the staff if he could think as quickly as he could move.

The driver asked Jeff in a husky voice:

"Police station, eh?"

Jeff McReady nodded. "And don't take the cab inside," he replied. "I'll go in alone."

Chris chuckled and missed a huge truck filled with sheet steel by only a foot or so. He was very proud of his driving ability, and he liked to drive for reporters. Most of the time they were going somewhere in a hurry, and that was the way Chris liked to travel.

He swung into a street that sloped up sharply. It wasn't very wide, but it was well lighted. It was Halltown's main street. Cheap stores lined both sides of it, and husky mill

workers off shift were moving along the sidewalks. The time was almost nine o'clock of a day that had been cloudy and very hot.

The cab swung to the right, moving slowly along a narrower street. On a frame building showed a green light. On the sidewalk near the light was a small crowd. There were two cars at the curb, but neither were taxis. Jeff McReady smiled a little grimly.

"First out, maybe," he grunted.

He leaned forward as Chris slowed down the cab. "Take it around the corner," he ordered. "Just out of sight of the entrance. Stay back of the wheel. We may have to go somewhere in a hurry."

Chris grinned and ran the back of a strong hand across his nose.

"What is it; a murder?" he asked.

Jeff McReady grunted. "A murder up here?" he replied. "These boys don't play that way."

Chris grinned more broadly. "No; they just kill each other, instead!" he muttered.

JEFF McREADY slammed the door of the cab behind him and moved toward the police station. He was almost six feet tall, with a lean face, light hair, and very blue eyes. He had good shoulders, and he was stronger than he looked. He'd been on the *Dispatch* staff for more than a year and he liked it. He wasn't a star man; he didn't have a perfect nose for news. And Shad Borne had a trick of sending him into tough spots. He didn't get the soft breaks, and often he didn't get what he was sent after. But he always tried.

Inside the police station he turned toward the sergeant's desk. He hadn't been in this station for two months, and he had never seen before the man who was back of the desk. But he smiled and said:

"Hello, sergeant. Who did it?"

The sergeant was a small, thin man with hard, gray eyes and a very hard mouth. He narrowed his eyes and looked at Jeff for several seconds.

"Who are you?" he asked coldly.

Jeff continued to smile. "McReady, from the *Dispatch*, sergeant," he said. "We got a tip that something happened out here. I came right out.

The sergeant nodded. "Is that so?" he said, and there was irony in his voice. "You came right out, eh?"

Jeff nodded. "That's it," he agreed. "I came right out."

The sergeant lifted his right hand from the police blotter and pointed toward the entrance.

"Fine," he said without any particular enthusiasm. "Now suppose you get right out!"

Jeff McReady stopped smiling. "I'll have a look at the blotter first," he said.

The sergeant shook his head. "I'll bet you won't," he replied.

Jeff smiled again. "A desk sergeant wouldn't let me look at a police blotter, not long ago, in Pittsburgh. He lived right around the corner from the station. Three days later he was riding an hour to the new station he'd been transferred to—an hour there and an hour back."

The desk sergeant pointed toward the door. "That was in Pittsburgh," he said. "This is Halltown, and a Pittsburgh paper doesn't mean a thing to us out here. Get out!"

Jeff shook his head. "A safe was blown open in the plant office, about forty minutes ago. Our readers will be interested."

The desk sergeant called sharply: "Mike, Johnny!"

A husky, gray-haired officer in an ore-stained uniform came into the room from a rear door. The sergeant said:

"Where's Mike?"

The officer frowned at Jeff. "In the plant, looking the pay car over to see——"

The sergeant cut in sharply: "All right; throw this reporter out of here."

Jeff grinned at the officer.

"Don't bother," he said. "I was just about to leave."

He moved toward the entrance. The sergeant looked at him coldly and said grimly:

"We run this town; not the Pittsburgh papers. What we want you to have we'll give you. And we'll give it to you after we grab these crooks."

Jeff nodded without turning or

stopping. "We're a daily paper; not a monthly," he replied, and heard the sergeant swear at him.

JEFF reached the street and the police station door slammed behind him. Eddie Burke, from the *Press*, grinned at him.

"Nice town. I've been here fifteen minutes and all I know is that there's been a robbery," he said.

Jeff frowned. He'd thought he was the first reporter on the scene, and he wasn't. Not only that, but Eddie Burke was a good man. Jeff said thoughtfully:

"It's going to be tough, and the bulldog edition is due on the streets in a couple of hours. How about working together a bit?"

The bulldog edition was on the streets of Pittsburgh at ten forty-five. It was the first edition of the morning paper, sold to the after-theater crowd, and giving just a bite of the day's news.

"Nothing doing," declared Burke. "I get a kick out of licking *Dispatch* men."

Jeff McReady shrugged. "Right now I might know something you don't know, Burke," he said.

"That's all right, too," Burke agreed. "That is, it would be, even if you did."

Jeff went toward Main Street, walking rapidly. Halltown had always been a good town for news, if the news could be gotten. Jeff had a hunch that Eddie Burke knew people in town, storekeepers and workers. Jeff didn't. But the uniformed officer who had been called to throw him out had given something away—a tip. Mike was looking over the pay car.

It was the first of the month and Jeff knew that the steel workers were paid inside the plant; the pay car being hauled by a locomotive

from one section to another. He whistled softly.

"They robbed the pay car in the plant," he muttered softly. "Probably some workers did it. Good story."

It would be a good story if he could get it. Might even be a big story. But steel-mill officials didn't like reporters. In fact, they disliked them very much. It dated back to a time when there had been a serious strike, and the newspapers had sided with the workers of the Pittsburgh district. After that few reporters had gotten inside a steel plant.

Jeff McReady turned in the opposite direction from that taken by Burke. There were four entrances to the plant, and he had already decided that he must get inside. The main entrance was at the foot of the sloping Main Street, but it would be carefully guarded, he knew that. The guards were tough fellows; they had to be. But perhaps at another entrance he'd have a chance.

He went to the cab and Chris grinned at him.

"How many dead?" he asked.

Jeff frowned. "I think it's a stick-up, Chris," he said. "But they won't talk. They threw me out."

Chris whistled. "It's the best place to be thrown out of—a police station," he muttered.

Jeff smiled grimly. "Just now it isn't," he contradicted. "You stick here. I'm going down the line and see what I can find out."

Chris climbed down from behind the wheel.

"I know a fellow who works in the plant here," he said. "Will that help?"

Jeff shrugged. "It might. If he doesn't live far from here see what you can find out. Meet me here in twenty minutes. And don't talk about the paper."

CHRIS went toward Main Street. Jeff was about to go down the street next to it, to the plant, when he saw a car speeding in the direction of the police station. A siren wailed, and there was the squeal of brakes.

Jeff crossed behind the car as it stopped in front of the police station. The group hanging around scattered, and one of the men muttered:

"They got some one."

Two men piled out from the back, the second jerking a third by the arm. The third man was dressed like a mill worker; his clothes were ore stained. He said protestingly:

"Take it easy. Don't jerk me around. I'll tell you what I know."

One of the detectives grinned. "All right, Lasser," he said. "Get inside and make it fast!"

The one who had been jerked from the car was smiling oddly. He glanced at the green light over the station entrance. His face seemed very pale to Jeff. He said:

"Sure, I'll talk."

He made a swift movement with his left hand, reaching up under his right armpit. The gun was in sight before one of the detectives shouted a hoarse warning.

There was a sharp crash; the detective who had jerked Lasser from the cab tried to lift his hands to his head, then slumped on the sidewalk. The gun crashed again: and then the weapon of a plain-clothes man sounded from behind the one who had been called "Lasser." Lasser's body sagged and he turned his gun on himself. There was a third crash. He fell heavily.

Jeff McReady backed against the wall of the police station. The crowd was suddenly moving in all directions. The sergeant and another officer ran from inside.

The sergeant who had ordered Jeff from the station got things organized. And Jeff went in as the wounded plain-clothes men were carried in. The sergeant had his hands full, and Jeff kept out of his way. Ten minutes later he was in a phone booth a square distant, talking to Shad Borne.

"This is everything I've got," he told the city editor. "The plant paid off to-day. The pay car was held up by a small mob. Five or six men. They were dressed like plant workers, and they might have been. The police went after a man named Lasser, because he was in town and had a record. They didn't expect to get much from him. He said he didn't know anything much. They searched him, but they didn't look under his right armpit. In front of the station he figured it was going to be too tough, so he shot two of the detectives—county detectives up from Pittsburgh—and then shot himself. One detective dead; and Lasser's dead. The other isn't badly hurt; shot in the leg. Names are . . ."

Shad Borne cut in. "Never mind that. I'll send Bailey right up. How much did the crooks get?"

Jeff said: "I don't know. They won't talk. I've only been here ten minutes or so. Ran right into this shooting. Got thrown out of the station—"

The city editor cut in again. "Find out how much they got. If Lasser killed himself he must have figured it was a bad spot. They must have got plenty, and probably they killed to get it. Get after the story. I'll send Bailey and a photographer, but don't wait for them. Phone me when you get something. Remember we've got a ten-forty dead line."

Jeff said: "O. K.," and hung up. He went outside, and heard the clang

of an ambulance bell. A red roadster with the exhaust open came up the slope at high speed. There was a girl back of the wheel, and she was good-looking. She looked at Jeff and waved, smiling. Jeff waved back, and the girl frowned and turned her head to the front again. The roadster sped on up the hill, and a voice behind Jeff said:

"Smart guy, eh?"

Jeff turned and looked at a husky man of about his age. The husky one was frowning, and Jeff grinned at him.

"I thought she was waving at me," he said cheerfully. "Sorry."

The husky slashed out with his left fist, but Jeff saw the blow coming. He ducked and stepped in close, working both arms like pistons. The bigger man groaned and tried to hang on to Jeff as he fell. Jeff pulled away. Men crowded around.

"He took a crack at me because I waved back to a girl I thought was waving to me," Jeff said. "He isn't hurt much."

He moved away. A short man caught him by an arm and said softly:

"Better get out of town. That was Gerry Blaine you knocked out—mayor's son."

Jeff whistled. "Who was the girl in the red roadster?" he asked.

The short one grinned. "Georgia Reed, old man Lane's niece," he replied. "She's all right."

Jeff wanted to ask who old man Lane was, but there wasn't time. Behind him they were pulling Blaine to his feet.

JEFF hurried past the police station and turned the corner. Chris was just stopping the cab as he made the turn. He said:

"I found Polinski, this Polish friend of mine. He didn't know any-

thing, but he called a girl friend of his daughter, who works in the plant. All she could tell him was that they stuck up the pay car near the open hearth furnace line at five minutes after four. They were just getting set to start paying the four-to-twelve shift. They gave the strong box a cyclone shot."

Jeff asked: "A what?"

Chris grinned. "A cyclone shot—a big dose of nitro. The strong box in these pay cars is pretty tough; it's almost like a safety vault on wheels. They shot the cashier and the dynamite stuff killed one of the guards. Then they went in and got the pay envelopes."

Jeff whistled softly. "How much?" he asked.

Chris shook his head. "I asked Polinski, but he couldn't even make a guess. A lot of money, though, because that same car carries the pay for the twelve-to-four shift, too."

Jeff nodded. "I've got something to work on," he declared. "How did they get away?"

Chris shrugged. "There was a lot of excitement. The bandits split up and ran for it. They wore masks and mill clothes. There were four or five of them."

"All right, Chris," Jeff said. "Run me over to the general offices. Know where they are?"

Chris nodded. "Did you get anything while I was gone?" he asked, as Jeff climbed inside the cab.

Jeff grinned. "I got bawled out for waving at a girl," he said.

The driver jerked his head around. "Say, I thought you were after a story!" he explained.

The newspaperman chuckled. "The story's business—this other was pleasure," he replied.

Chris rattled his cab around the corner, then jerked his head sideways again.

"Who bawled you out?" he asked.

Jeff said: "Fellow named Blaine—the mayor's son. He took a swing at me, too. I knocked him down. He has a weak stomach."

The driver swore. "Blaine's son!" he said grimly. "That isn't going to help you any—knocking him out. Blaine runs the town, but he does what old man Lane says."

"Who's old man Lane?" Jeff asked.

"You're a swell newspaperman!" Chris grunted. "Lane's the general super of the plant."

Jeff grinned.

"It was his niece I waved at," he said.

Chris swore again. "Maybe we'd better head for Pittsburgh," he suggested. "I haven't got enough friends to help you much—not up here."

The newspaperman sat back in the seat as the cab swayed. He could see the line of towering blast furnaces, to the left along the river.

"Stay with it, Chris," he said grimly. "We've got a lot of things to find out about this—cyclone shot."

CHAPTER II.

INSIDE JOB.

THE general office building was large and vine-covered. The vines were stained red from ore dust. As the cab slid up near the entrance of the building Jeff McReady leaned forward and spoke to Chris.

"I forgot to tell you that a man named Lasser—an ex-crook—just shot two county detectives, in front of the police station. Then he shot himself. He's dead, and one of the detectives is dead. They figured he knew something about this cyclone shot of yours. Perhaps he did, and got scared of a third degree. Or perhaps it was something else."

Chris's eyes were wide. "Two dead!" he exclaimed. "And you just tell me."

Jeff nodded. "I'm going to try and get to old man Lane. I know enough to make him tell me the rest, maybe."

Chris frowned. "Maybe," he said doubtfully.

"Get back here in fifteen or twenty minutes, and see what you can find out about Lasser," Jeff ordered. "Where he lived, what he served a stretch for; everything you can find out about him. It's five after nine and that only leaves an hour and a half before the bulldog. I've got to work fast."

"It may be dangerous," Chris grunted. "Will the paper—"

"If you get killed the sheet'll bury you free of charge," Jeff said as he got to the sidewalk. "They're generous that way."

He went inside and a uniformed plant guard came toward him, frowning. There were quite a few people in the corridor, among them he saw Eddie Burke.

Jeff said, looking serious: "I'm from county headquarters; got to see Lane right away."

The guard didn't appear much impressed. "You look more like a reporter," he replied.

"How does a reporter look?" Jeff kept frowning.

The guard shrugged. "Mr. Lane's secretary is inside the third door," he said, pointing down the line. "I'll let her say 'No' to you."

Jeff said "Thanks," a little grimly and shoved open the third door.

A tall, severe-looking woman stood near a desk and said:

"Yes?"

Jeff looked serious again. "I want to see Mr. Lane," he stated.

The secretary said wearily: "I'm sorry. Mr. Lane is in conference."

Jeff nodded. "Naturally," he agreed. "With a pay-car robbery and four men dead, there'd have to be a conference."

The secretary said: "You're a reporter."

Jeff shrugged. "I don't want to make any mistakes," he told her. "I've got practically the whole story, and I want Lane to check it."

The secretary turned to a big man who was sitting near the door that led into what Jeff supposed was Lane's office. She gestured toward Jeff wearily. The big man got to his feet.

"Just step outside now and come back to-morrow," the big man said in a deep voice.

Jeff spoke rapidly. "I want to see Mr. Lane about something that may be important to him, and to the plant."

"Perhaps you can see him to-morrow," the big man said. "Just step outside, please."

Jeff frowned. "I'd like to get things straight—" he started, but the big man's eyes were very cold.

"The police will cooperate with you, very likely," he suggested.

Jeff grinned. "I don't think so," he said.

The big man took him by an arm and led him to the door. He opened it politely and gave Jeff a gentle shove.

"Sorry," he said grimly.

THE uniformed officer was a short distance away, and watching Jeff closely. As the door closed behind him Jeff said, looking into the room he had left:

"The second door? The room on the other side? Thanks."

He spoke loudly, but the big man just closed the door. The guard heard his words, and Jeff went along the corridor, passing the door to

Lane's private office. Farther along was another door. He looked at it, then faced the uniformed guard.

"Is that the one?" he asked.

The guard scowled. "If they said so then that's it," he replied.

Jeff opened the door and walked into a small room. It had the air of being a private waiting room—an anteroom to Lane's office. He closed the door behind him. The bluff had worked. He drew a handkerchief from a pocket and ran the cloth over his face. He was very hot, and the plant sounds pounded into his ears; the beat of rolls, screech of the cranes, whistle of donkey engines.

When he lowered the handkerchief he saw the girl. She had been standing at one end of the room, near a small table that held a telephone. Her back was to him, but she was turning now. He stared at her as she faced him. There were tears in her eyes. She was the girl who had driven the red roadster up the Main Street hill, only a few minutes ago.

She straightened when she saw him. She was slim and dark, and very good-looking. She touched her eyes with a tiny handkerchief, then narrowed them on his. He forced a smile.

"Hello, Miss Reed," he said. "I'm looking for your uncle."

He watched her hands clench at her sides, and anger show in her eyes.

"Steady," he said. "I'm not being smart. I waved at you because I thought you waved at me. I know your name because after Blaine tried to hit me I asked who you were. And I am looking for Mr. Lane."

She was inspecting him carefully. Her eyes were dark and nice, and some of the anger went from them.

"Blaine struck you?" she queried in a steady, cool voice.

He shook his head. "No, but he

tried to," he said. "I knocked him down. I'm from the *Dispatch*, Miss Reed. Newspapermen aren't liked much in Halltown. But this looks like a pretty big story, and it's my job to get it. I want to tell Mr. Lane what I know; perhaps he'll tell me the rest. We're not a yellow sheet; all we want is what happened."

She stood very still. Then she asked quietly: "What do you know?"

He hesitated. She said: "I won't talk to other reporters if they come to me."

JEFF smiled. "The pay car was held up in the plant, just after four. Two men were killed. I don't know just how much the crooks got. They were dressed as plant workers, and wore masks. They all escaped. About twenty minutes ago county detectives who came up from Pittsburgh brought a man by the name of Lasser to the station. He was an ex-convict and they wanted to question him. He drew a gun and killed one detective, wounding another. He was shot, and he shot himself. He's dead. That makes four dead, since the robbery. And that makes it a big story."

Her eyes were wide. "Two more killed just a little while ago?"

He nodded. "I'm telling you this, so that you'll help me," he said.

Her eyes narrowed again. "Why should I?" she asked simply.

Jeff shrugged. "Why shouldn't you?" he countered. "I'm in a tough spot. I've only got an hour and a half before the first edition goes on the streets. I've been thrown out of the police station—no information there. Your uncle's secretary just had me shoved out of her office—Mr. Lane is in conference. I've knocked down the mayor's son—this fellow Blaine. That was self-de-

fense, but it won't help me any. I want to know how much the thieves got; the names of the men killed in the plant; the details——"

She lifted her right hand in a gesture he thought intended to stop him from going on. He was silent. She turned away, then faced him again.

"Plant officials hate newspapermen; you know that. Your city editor knows it. Because the condition exists, and because you whine about it, is that any reason I should help you?"

He smiled grimly. "I'm not whining about it," he said quietly. "I've got part of my story and there's just a sporting chance of getting the rest. I liked the way you drove that roadster of yours up the hill. You acted as though you liked it. And I thought you might like a fight. Giving me a lift is——"

He checked himself. She was smiling, with firm lips pressed together. She parted them.

"And if you don't get your story you'll be fired, I suppose?"

He shook his head. "No, I've fallen down on the job before. I'm not a cub reporter. But I'd like to get this particular story for the first edition. Not just a bite of it; the other papers will have that. I'd like it all—all there is to get. I'd like to know as much as the police know, and the plant officials."

JEFF looked beyond her, toward the door that he guessed led to Lane's office. A low murmur of voices reached the anteroom.

The girl said: "There'll be the devil to pay if Blaine catches up with you."

Jeff McReady nodded. "They'll shove me in jail long enough to keep me from getting my story," he said. "And there isn't much time——"

The girl moved over and stood

very near him. Her dark eyes were on his.

"If I help you will you help me?" she asked softly.

Jeff grinned. "I'll help you, even if you don't help me," he replied instantly. His face sobered. "But why do you need help?"

"Something's very wrong; something besides these murders, and the pay-car robbery. I'm frightened."

Jeff smiled. "You don't act it," he said.

"I am." Her voice was very low. "I'm afraid of several things. And I'm afraid to tell you—the publicity will——"

Jeff McReady looked her squarely in the eyes. "I'm not that sort of a newspaperman," he said. "A lot of us are on the level. If it's personal and you say it's not for publication, I'll——"

He stopped. She said suddenly: "All right, this is it. Three days ago Tim—that's Uncle Lane, I call him Tim for Timothy—received a threatening letter. Yesterday he received another. He laughed at them. He wouldn't go to the police——"

Jeff interrupted, as she hesitated: "Why not?"

"Because he wasn't sure of Howard Blaine, the mayor."

Jeff whistled softly. "Politics, eh?" he breathed. "Blaine runs the police."

She nodded. "Blaine's bad—he's been mayor for six months. Tim fought against him, but he was tricky. He promised the workers all sorts of things. And the man running against him wasn't strong. Even so, Blaine just got in. The first three months Blaine wasn't so bad; and then things commenced happening. There were some murders, and the workers were getting stuff to drink. Things have become constantly worse."

Jeff's eyes narrowed. Here was a story—a town out of control of the better element. Timothy Lane fighting a crooked mayor in one of the country's biggest steel plant towns.

The girl said: "So Tim just kept the letters and told me they were harmless jokes. But I don't think he thought so. And then——"

Her lips quivered a little. She stood very straight, her hands clenched at her sides.

"And then this robbery," Jeff said slowly. "And Lasser killing—and dying himself. You think perhaps it's an inside job; this cyclone shot."

She said in a puzzled tone: "Cyclone shot?"

Jeff grinned. "That one had me licked a little while ago. It's the nitro crooks use to blow open a safe or vault. When they use a lot of it and do the job big they call it a cyclone shot."

She nodded understandingly. "I think"—she said very slowly—"it may be an inside job."

"I'd like to talk with Timothy Lane," he said grimly.

Her voice was steady but very low. "So would I. That's why I said I needed help. He's disappeared: no one has seen Timothy Lane for over two hours!"

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE OUTSIDE.

AT nine thirty Jeff McReady talked to Shad Borne from Halltown. He said steadily:

"The pay car had money for two shifts—about one thousand men. Average pay envelope was about one hundred and fifty dollars. Figure one hundred and fifty thousand in the pay car, but that isn't accurate. Might be more or less."

Shad Borne said: "That's enough

for the killings—in these times. But a thousand envelopes are pretty bulky, Jeff. How'd they get the stuff away?"

Jeff McReady spoke grimly. "There's something funny up here. I think the mayor's crooked, and maybe the police, too. I've got a hunch the police didn't get in the way too much. And here's something to keep tight—it may be a beat. Timothy Lane, the general superintendent, has dropped out of sight. For some reason the officials are keeping that under cover; and the local police, too. I think the county detectives know it, but they won't admit it."

Shad Borne swore softly. "Sure of that, Jeff?" he asked.

Jeff said: "Very sure. Got it from a good source. Lane had three threatening notes, but he didn't go to the local police. My information is that he's afraid of the mayor, who runs the police."

The city editor said: "In other words, the town's gone wrong, out of control. It's a story, Jeff."

"It sure is. The pay-roll money gone. Four dead. And the general super vanished after receiving threatening notes."

"Did you see the notes?"

"No," Jeff replied. "But I've talked to one who did. Name not for publication—too much on the inside. The threats were to the effect that if Lane didn't resign he was to be killed."

Shad Borne said: "You're sure that's straight, Jeff?"

The newspaperman's voice was firm. "Positive, I'll stake my job on it," he replied.

The city editor said grimly: "That's a bet; stick in close and see what happens. Give Bailey a lift. He should be in town by now. Get a picture of Lane, if you can. Tell

Bailey to get pictures of the mayor and the chief of police; we may not have them here in the morgue. No clew, eh?"

"The local police haven't got a thing," Jeff replied. "I haven't been near enough to the county bunch to know what they've done."

"Find out right away," Borne ordered. "The paper's been playing up Creely. If he's there tell him he owes us a break. Stay with it."

Jeff hung up the receiver and went outside. The cab, with the window curtains partially down, was near the small drug store. Jeff got inside and sat close to Georgia Reed.

"Thanks for letting me turn over the Lane disappearance," he said. "If you think the local police may be laying down on the job I'll get after Creely, of the county bunch."

THE girl shook her head. "I'm afraid for Tim," she said in a shaken voice. "If the police rush those who have him; if he's been kidnaped—"

Jeff nodded as she hesitated. "The police seldom gain much, on a kidnaping," he agreed.

Chris twisted his head. "What next?" he asked.

Jeff said: "Drive past the police station, Chris, and I'll see if I can spot Creely and find out what the county detectives know."

"You're takin' a big chance," Chris muttered.

"Sure, but the paper's got a lot of the stuff," Jeff said. "I've got to take chances to get anything else."

The girl said softly: "Uncle Tim tried to get this Lasser out of town. Blaine said nothing could be done. Chris found out where he was arrested by the police. If we went there—"

Jeff shook his head. "Not you," he said. "There's something very

wrong about this whole deal. If Blaine was using Lasser, why did he turn on the police? He would have felt safe. And yet I've got a strong feeling that the robbers got away in a car or cars, and that the police didn't do much to stop them. The money was in separate envelopes and there were thousands of them. If I could get to some one who saw the stick-up——"

The girl said slowly: "Blaine is bad, but I don't think he'd stoop to a pay-car holdup."

Jeff shook his head. "He might stoop to a job of protection, if he got enough money."

The girl said: "Would he get enough to make it worth while?"

Jeff grinned at her. "You've got a good head," he told her. "You ought to be on the sheet."

Georgia Lane shook her head. "I don't like newspapers," she said with finality. "I'm working with you because I think you'll help me, if there's a chance. I want to find Tim."

"That's one reason," Jeff said shrewdly. "There are two others. One is that you don't like this Blaine or his son. Even if you did wave to him. And I knocked him down. That doesn't make you mad."

She smiled a little. "A better one is that I don't like Blaine or his son, and that I'm afraid of what they might do to you," she said. "What's the third reason?"

Jeff grinned. "You don't like newspapers," he said, "but you like me."

Her eyes widened on Jeff's blue eyes, and then they got narrow again. Anger showed, and then died. Jeff chuckled.

"Why not?" he said. "I'm all right. Just so long as you don't have to marry me and live on my one hundred and forty a month."

She looked at him with a curious half smile on her lips. Then she looked worried again. She said thoughtfully:

"Tim was terribly angry about the pay-car robbery. I saw him for a few minutes in his office, at six o'clock. I'd just driven up from Pittsburgh and had heard about the robbery. Tim wasn't frightened or worried about himself. He was just furious."

Jeff said: "Why? Did he think there had been a let down somewhere?"

She nodded. "There were two plant police supposed to be on duty at the car; one inside, and one outside. They were special guards. The one inside was badly hurt in the explosion, and the one who was supposed to be outside hadn't been found. Tim thought that he'd left the car, just before the robbery. He was very angry about it."

Jeff frowned. "One guard wouldn't have been able to stop them," he said thoughtfully. "But why did your uncle jump at the conclusion he'd left the pay car?—I wonder. The crooks might have forced him to go with them. Or he might have been blown——"

JEFF checked himself as the girl shivered a little. The cab passed the police station slowly, and Chris said:

"That's Creely, isn't it?"

Jeff nodded. He recognized Creely and one other county detective. Also, Bailey had arrived with a *Dispatch* photographer named Hobbs. Jeff said:

"Get around the corner, Chris. Wait for me."

The girl touched his arm as the cab slowed down.

"Be careful," she warned quietly, "of the police—and of Blaine."

He nodded and left the cab. When he reached the sidewalk in front of the Halltown police station, Bailey and Hobbs were arguing with one of the local police. Bailey waved to Jeff.

"They won't let us inside," he muttered. "What are we going to do?"

Jeff grinned. "Get the stuff from the outside and give this local bunch hell in the paper to-morrow," he replied.

The local officer scowled at him, but said nothing. Jeff said to Bailey and Hobbs:

"Wait around a bit and I'll tell you some places to go." He went over to Creely, who grinned at him. They walked a short distance away from the others and Jeff spoke very softly: "Got anything?"

Creely was a big, heavy-set man who looked like a detective. He was smoking a stogie. He hesitated and Jeff said:

"Shad Borne told me to look you up. He said to tell you the paper likes you, and wants to keep on liking you. Anything you tell me will be under cover, if you want it that way."

Creely nodded. "Looks like an inside job, McReady," he said. "And more than just robbery. They used a cyclone shot on the pay-car cage room. They didn't have to go at it that strong, and they must have known that they didn't. And here's one for you; the general superintendent is missing."

Jeff looked surprised. "Lane?" he muttered. "Is that straight?"

Creely nodded. "Straight," he replied. "He got all the reports at his office. He was talking with officials at seven. But he was alone a little after seven. He left the office, got in his car and was seen driving toward the merchant mill—that's

where they finish the steel, down the river about a mile. That's the last he's been seen. He drove himself in a closed, black car. We can't find the car. But don't use my name, McReady."

Jeff said: "Right—and thanks. What's the next move?"

Creely shrugged. "The crooks had two cars in the plant—a brown sedan and a black, open car. They got away in those. We're trying to pick the cars up, but we haven't got much of a description. And we're looking for Lane's niece. She lives with him in the big house on top of the hill."

Jeff said: "What do you want with her?"

Creely hesitated again. "Keep this under cover—so far as my name figures," he said. "There are two or three angles to this deal. The general super has had some threat notes. They were left at his house. We want to talk to the girl about them."

"Right. How much did the crooks get?"

Creely shrugged. "Around fifteen grand," he replied. "Not enough for so much killing. Revenge in it somewhere; trying to hurt Lane, maybe."

"Do you figure Lane's disappearance has anything to do with the bunch that did the pay-car job?" he asked.

Creely shrugged again. "We're not getting anywhere," he said grimly. "And the local police are running around in circles."

"How about Lasser? Was he mixed up in it?" Jeff asked.

The county detective frowned. "I think so," he said. "He lost his nerve when he saw what was coming. He was a good hater—so he shot down two of the boys. Then he turned the gun on himself. We're trying to find out who he played with."

"Fine," Jeff said. "I'll be around. I'll look you up now and then."

Creely nodded. "It's spread out," he muttered. "Any one may run into a lead. If you do—give me a break, McReady."

"Sure," Jeff replied.

JEFF went back to Bailey and Hobbs, and told them what pictures would be important. Bailey said:

"How do things stand, Jeff?"

Jeff related hurriedly the manner of the robbery and Lane's disappearance.

Bailey grunted. "What a story," he declared. "You worked fast, Jeff."

Jeff grinned. "I've had a scrap and I knocked down the son of Blaine, the town's mayor. The mayor and Lane weren't getting along together, there's talk that Blaine is crooked. So I may be slammed into jail yet. If I am, get the paper to squeeze me out."

Bailey grinned. "Sure," he said. "There's no chance of you paying me that five bucks you owe me, if you stick in the hoosegow and Shad docks you for not working."

Jeff glanced at his watch. "It's five of ten," he said grimly. "Meet me here at ten thirty and I'll give Shad all I have for the bulldog—and all you have."

"Any suggestions?" Bailey asked.

Jeff half closed his blue eyes. "You stick on the pay-car holdup angle. I'll work the disappearance of Timothy Lane. And watch yourself, Bailey. The local police won't give you a thing. It may be just a natural dislike of Pittsburgh papers, or it may be that they're afraid we might uncover something."

Bailey widened his eyes. "And there's the bulldog dead line," he reminded.

Jeff nodded. "Eddie Burke's around—and the boys from the other papers. The biggest thing we've got to worry about is that something will break just before the first editions get on the streets and that they'll get it and we won't."

Bailey swore. "I'm all eyes and ears," he said. "And fists, if necessary."

Jeff nodded and looked at Hobbs's camera. "That your good one?" he asked.

Hobbs grinned and shook his head. "Not the best, but it works," he replied. "I've had one smashed, up here, already. Three or four months ago."

Bailey muttered. "Swell village—Helltown!"

Jeff's blue eyes were very narrow. "Yeah, for a cyclone shot," he agreed, "it's just perfect!"

CHAPTER IV.

MORE DYNAMITE!

JEFF was ten feet or so from the cab when a voice called sharply: "Hold up, there!"

Jeff turned and saw Gerry Blaine hurrying toward him, a grim expression on his face. He was alone. But he turned his head and called toward the corner: "Come on, Babe, this is the one!"

Jeff stood with his feet apart and his hands at his sides. He heard Chris start the cab engine. Blaine came up within several feet of him.

"We want you in the station," he said in a nasty voice.

Jeff shook his head. "I've already been kicked out—must be a mistake."

The husky one shook his head slowly. "No mistake," he replied sharply. "Assaulting an officer—"

Jeff grinned. "What officer?" he asked.

Blaine said: "Me, I've been sworn in by the chief of police for this emergency."

Jeff's grin faded. His blue eyes held a hard expression.

"Forget it, Blaine," he said. "You can't frame me this way. You tried to hit me and I knocked you down. That's all there is to it."

Gerry Blaine's face twisted with sudden rage. His hands clenched. Jeff said:

"Take it easy. You'll go down harder the next time."

Blaine turned his head slightly, but kept his eyes on Jeff.

"Babe!" he called sharply. "Make it fast."

But no person appeared from around the corner. Babe apparently didn't hear Blaine. Jeff said, grinning again:

"Better go back and get him, Blaine."

He half turned his back on the husky son of the town's mayor. But as he turned he saw Blaine move forward, both arms swinging wildly. Jeff swung and ducked. One fist missed him, but the other struck him a glancing blow, knocking him off balance.

He got away from a second rush. Blaine was fighting wildly, mad with rage. Jeff kept away from him; and the third time he rushed he brought up a sharp right-hand blow that battered Blaine's guard high. Jeff's left caught him heavily on the chin—his arms dropped. He staggered and Jeff stepped in close and hit him hard, just under the right ear. He went down in a heap.

Chris shouted: "Look out, Jeff, here comes another!"

But Jeff had already seen the lumbering form of Babe round the corner. He turned away from the motionless figure of Gerry Blaine and ran for the cab. It was already mov-

ing as he jumped on the running board. The girl shoved the door open, and Jeff got inside. He heard an officer shouting at him as he dropped down on the seat.

Chris twisted his head and shouted: "Where to?"

Jeff was breathing heavily; he looked into the wide, dark eyes of the girl.

"I'd like to see one of those threat notes," he said.

She nodded. "Straight up the hill —" she started, but Jeff shook his head.

"Turn to the right at the next block," he told the driver. "Then swing up the hill, on the next. We don't want them to see where we're going."

Chris shouted back: "Them? You don't think that guy you knocked cold will be doing much looking around, do you—not right away?"

The girl was frowning. "He didn't hurt you?" she asked.

Jeff grinned. "Not much," he replied. "But he likes to try."

THE cab swung to the right, and turned to the left again. The grade was steep, and Chris shifted into low. Georgia Reed spoke above the gear sound.

"Gerry Blaine has been bothering me for weeks. I don't like him, or his father. A few months ago he wouldn't have dared—"

She broke off, and there were tears in her eyes again. Jeff said slowly:

"You feel pretty certain that the Blaines have something to do with this cyclone shot?"

"Yes. And perhaps with uncle's disappearance. And yet—Tim's a fighter, and an important man. If they are caught—"

She stopped again. Jeff said grimly: "They probably don't intend to be caught."

The cab had reached the crest of the hill. The girl said:

"To the left, please. It's that big, stone house."

Jeff saw the house, long and low.

"Is there a rear drive?" he asked Georgia Reed.

She nodded. "Around to the right," she said.

"Take it," Jeff instructed Chris. "And go in as quietly as you can."

Chris grunted something. The cab went down a narrow street and through a small gate into the rear driveway. As they descended Jeff said:

"Stick with the cab, Chris. Be ready for a quick get-away. My batting percentage will be pretty low in Halltown, from now on."

Chris frowned. "Check!" he replied.

The girl led the way to a side entrance, and rang a bell. They were waiting for the door to be opened, when a sandy-haired, middle-aged man came around from the front of the house. He looked at Jeff and then at the girl.

"I'm Venton, from the local police," he said slowly. "Chief Keller sent me up. Wanted me to ask you to drop down to the station, Miss Reed."

The girl stood erect, facing the detective. Her eyes showed fear, and then the expression vanished. She said firmly:

"What about, Mr. Venton?"

The sandy-haired one shrugged. "Just some questions," he replied.

A small Japanese opened the door. The girl looked at Jeff and he smiled back at her.

"Sure, that's all right," he said. "Might help the police. Mind waiting a few minutes, Mr. Venton?"

Venton narrowed gray eyes. "Who are you?" he asked a little grimly.

Jeff smiled cheerfully. "Just an old friend of Miss Reed's," he replied. "Know Gerry Blaine pretty well, too. I was just talking to him."

Keller said: "Yes? Well, I can wait a little while, I guess. I'll smoke out here."

JEFF nodded and followed the girl through the house into a very large living room. She faced him and asked softly:

"What do you think they want?"

Jeff shrugged. "In any case, you don't go down there," he advised. "They may be afraid of what you might know. If they have questions let them come up here."

She said in a shaken voice: "Somehow I'm afraid. I know that Tim was worried about the mayor and the police."

Jeff smiled at her. "Let me see one of the threat notes," he said. "There just might be a chance——"

His words died away. A figure had stepped out from behind a tall screen at one end of the room. The girl followed Jeff's eyes and uttered a low cry. The man came toward them, smiling a little. He had a lean face and gray hair. He was in uniform; the uniform of the town police. But there were gold bars on his shoulders.

He bowed slightly to the girl. "Sorry, Miss Reed," he said in a husky voice. "Had to ask your Jap to be quiet about my being in here. I've been poking around a bit. You're looking for these?"

He extended several sheets of white paper that had been folded. Georgia Lane said bitterly:

"You broke in here and found those notes."

The uniformed one's eyes held a peculiar, hard expression.

"The chief thought you might ob-

ject to coming to the station, Miss Reed. I have a search warrant. I'm Rawling, lieutenant under Keller. I think you'd better come along with me, Miss Reed."

She shook her head. "No," she said very steadily.

Jeff spoke grimly: "What's the charge, lieutenant?"

The officer smiled at him. It was an unpleasant sort of smile.

"And you, too—Mr. Reporter. The charge against you is assault on the person of an officer of law."

"And what do you want the girl for?" Jeff asked.

The lieutenant of police rattled the papers he held in his left-hand fingers.

"Attempted blackmail," he said huskily, a thin smile on his lips. "Perhaps more than that. But these threat notes to Timothy Lane—they were written by this girl!"

For seconds there was silence, and then Georgia Reed said very steadily:

"That is a lie!"

The police lieutenant continued to smile thinly.

"I've compared the writing on them—the disguised scrawl—with writing the Jap tells me is yours. I'm an expert on these things. There's similarity; enough of it to suit me."

The girl said: "Why would I send threatening notes to my uncle?"

Rawling shrugged. "For money," he said simply. "You wanted it, and he wouldn't give it to you. Others wanted money from Lane, too. They talked with you, and you thought you'd be safe enough. The others were waiting for a chance to get Lane away from the plant or the house. When the pay car was held up—that was a good chance. They took Lane, and you thought you'd be safe enough, with the police after

the pay-car bandits. You even were willing to have publicity. You aren't bad-looking. You had this reporter going. I suppose you told him the police were crooked in this town, and the mayor——"

He broke off, shrugging. Jeff McReady stood very still. He was thinking fast. After all, he knew little about this girl. If there had been a kidnaping planned—this was the right time for it. And it wouldn't be the first time on record that a niece had tried to blackmail a man.

THE girl said slowly and calmly: "He's lying, McReady. They're afraid of me. They're afraid of what Tim might have told me about the police and the mayor. They want to get me where I can't talk."

Rawling's eyes were very small. "Bunk!" he said sharply. "All right, both of you, out the front way and into the car there. Blaine gave me a good description of you, Mr. Reporter."

Jeff said suddenly: "Let me see the warrant for the girl. A search warrant doesn't mean you can take her to the police station."

The gray-haired one said grimly: "You'd better be pretty careful, news hound. We don't like your breed in this town."

Jeff smiled. "Naturally you don't," he replied. "And I don't like yours—in any town. The girl stays here until I get in touch with plant officials."

He checked himself, stared at the lieutenant of police. Then he said to the girl:

"Ever hear your uncle speak of a Lieutenant Rawling, Miss Reed?"

She spoke firmly. "Never. There's a Lieutenant Cotts; and I'm sure he's the only one."

Jeff nodded. "So am I," he said

slowly. "This man, and the one outside. They're not from the town police. And they won't take you to the station. They bluffed your Jap."

The gray-haired one made a swift movement with his right hand. The gun shone dully in the light from a center table lamp. Without turning his head he called:

"Dan—watch that Jap! Fix him right. Then go back and take care of any other servants. After that—come in here. We've got a wise guy to take care of."

The girl stood straight, with the back of a slim hand pressed against her lips. She made no cry. Jeff McReady looked at the gun.

"They've got your uncle and they want you," he said very slowly. "The police stuff was a bluff."

The hard smile still played around the thin lips of the gray-haired one.

"This gun isn't a bluff!" he said very grimly.

Jeff said nothing. He knew that Gerry Blaine had talked with this man, had given him his description. That tied Blaine up with the kidnapers of Timothy Lane. The girl had been right; the general superintendent had been right in his suspicions. And Jeff knew that Blaine must have been very sure of himself—very sure that these men would not fail him.

A door slammed—there was the shrill voice of the Jap, protesting. And then there was silence. After about thirty seconds the one who had been outside came into the living room. He looked at Jeff and the girl, then at the gray-haired one and the gun.

"The Jap's quiet," he said. "I'll look around in back."

The gray-haired one nodded. "Make it fast," he said. "We've got places to go with these two."

The other man went from the

room. The gray-haired man said very softly:

"You're in this all the way. I'm not bluffing any more. Neither of you will be hurt if you do as you're told. When we get what we want all three of you will be turned loose. If we don't get what we want—"

He broke off, but the meaning of his unspoken words was clear.

Jeff spoke slowly. "And Gerry Blaine is in this all the way."

The gray-haired one's eyes flickered with hardness.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said sharply.

A TELEPHONE bell rang. The one with the gun stiffened, glanced toward the low table in a corner of the room. For several seconds no one spoke. The bell made insistent sounds. The gray-haired one glanced toward the phone again, then looked at the girl.

"Answer it," he ordered. "Act as though everything is all right. Don't make any mistakes."

The girl walked to the telephone, and Jeff followed her. The gray-haired man went near it, too, but stood facing Jeff and the girl. He held his gun a little higher.

Georgia Lane lifted the receiver. She said: "Yes, Miss Lane speaking." There was a little silence except for the squeaking sounds over the phone and the heavy breathing of the one who held the gun. Then the girl said: "Oh . . . no? Where?" There were more squeaking sounds. They went on for almost a minute. Then the girl said: "No, not a thing, Mr. Rand, not a word. You don't think there was any connection. . . ."

More sounds, indistinguishable, came over the wire. Then Georgia said: "Yes, I'll drive down in a half hour or so. Good-by."

She hung up. The gray-haired man said cheerfully:

"Like hell you'll drive down in a half hour! What was all that about?"

The girl looked at Jeff. "The assistant superintendent at the plant. He wanted to know if I'd had any news of Tim. They've caught the pay-car bandits—the police picked up a suspicious car fifty miles from Pittsburgh. There was a fight. One of the bandits was already dead; he'd died in the car, and one was killed. One of them confessed. They had come from another city, and two workers in the plant had helped them. The police got all of the money. Mr. Rand doesn't think they had anything to do with uncle's disappearance."

Jeff McReady frowned. "I'd like to call my paper——" he started, but the gray-haired one was smiling grimly.

The girl said: "Mr. Rand says the local police didn't try very hard, but he doesn't think they were mixed up with the bandits. It was just that they are against Tim."

Jeff nodded slowly. He looked at the gray-haired one's narrow eyes.

"The police got them," he said slowly. "And they'll get you."

The gray-haired one moved his gun arm slightly. His words were low and husky.

"Maybe. But until they do, or until I get fifty thousand——"

He shrugged. Jeff said: "You'll have three of us on your hands. Three of us missing. You're bucking my paper, and the money behind it."

The man with the gun chuckled. "A lot your paper'll care about a missing reporter!" he breathed. "Just so much more news for them."

Jeff smiled grimly. The girl said: "Tim won't pay fifty thousand."

The gray-haired one smiled coldly. "No? Maybe the steel plant will. And maybe Lane will, when we bring you along."

THERE was a movement behind the one with the gun, and Jeff's body stiffened. He tried desperately not to betray what his eyes saw, but the gray-haired one swung his body. Something moved downward; there was a dull sound. The one with the gun slumped, and Jeff saw Chris framed in the open window beyond the corner.

The gray-haired one's body thudded as it struck the thick rug, but not loudly. Jeff was at his side in an instant, twisted the gun from his right hand. Chris came in through the window, and Jeff said very softly:

"That was swell. But we've got to get the other fellow."

The voice of the other one cut in on his soft words. He was speaking from the next room.

"Others must be upstairs or out, Joe. You all right in there?"

Jeff muttered as hoarsely as he could: "O. K., Dan."

He moved swiftly toward the thick curtains at one end of the living room. But Dan came into the room when he was still several feet from them. He had a gun in his right hand, and his eyes stared at the gun Jeff held. For one, flashing second he hesitated. Then the gun came up.

Jeff cried sharply: "No!"

The gun crashed, and Jeff felt stinging pain in his left shoulder. He squeezed the trigger of the weapon he had taken from the gray-haired one; there was another roar. He saw the man who had fired at him sway to one side, his gun slip from his fingers.

Chris moved forward and got it. Dan was groaning, on his knees. Jeff looked at Chris, who said foolishly:

"The police!"

Jeff said: "No, we can't be sure of them. These two were working with Blaine, I'm sure of that. See where he's hit—how badly."

He ripped the shirt sleeve off his left shoulder, shoving the coat material back. The skin was torn, but it was little more than a scrape. The girl was at his side.

"You're hit!"

Her voice was unsteady. Jeff grinned at her. "Just a scrape," he breathed. "But we've got these two. And if we can make them talk—"

She stared at him, said excitedly: "We'll get to Tim."

He nodded, and added grimly: "And I'll get a story that'll be loaded with more dynamite than that cyclone shot!"

CHAPTER V.

A SWELL STORY.

THE time was ten fifteen by Jeff McReady's wrist watch. Jeff and Chris stood looking down at the one who said his name was Dan Roody. The gray-haired one was lying on his back, hands bound behind him and a gag in his mouth. The gag was to stop him from swearing at Roody. He had been quiet until Roody's nerve had started to break, and then he had tried to stop the other man from talking. And Jeff had gagged him.

Roody was saying: "Collins and I jumped Lane—he had slowed down for a steel truck. We got into his car, and Collins used the gun, jamming it against him. He drove to the spot we told him, and we changed cars. Then we took him to the house. He swore he wouldn't pay money for his release, and Col-

lins got the idea if we had the niece he might act differently. He wanted to work fast, while this pay-car chase was on. The police would have so much to think about we'd get a better break." Roody's pale face twisted. "We got a better one, all right!" he groaned bitterly.

Jeff said: "How did Gerry Blaine figure in this?"

Collins battered his heels against the rug in protest, and the wounded one hesitated. His thigh was tightly bound—the wound was below the ribs and not serious. Jeff spoke grimly.

"The more you talk, and the faster you talk, the easier we'll make it for you. How did Gerry Blaine figure?"

Roody said weakly: "He lost money to Collins—gambling. Collins was sore because he couldn't pay. He went to Blaine's father and said he knew he was taking graft—that he'd have to come through. The old man said it was up to his son to save his neck; he had his hands full. Gerry Blaine came to Collins the next day and said his father could handle the police; if things got tough they'd frame some one. Collins and I were to grab Lane and hang on to him until he came through. Gerry Blaine said his father liked the idea of the superintendent having to pay out big coin."

Jeff nodded his head slowly. "A rotten mayor—a pretty bad police chief. And then you got a break. The pay car was smashed. Blaine wasn't in on that—young Blaine or his father?"

Roody shook his head. "I don't know anything about that," he declared. "I don't think Blaine was in it, but maybe the chief of police didn't rush after the crooks."

Jeff straightened up. He looked at the girl.

"We've got enough on the Blaines to run them out of Halltown," he said. "And there'll be a police clean-up. We've got Collins and Roody. Now we'll go get your uncle."

Chris said grimly: "If Roody is figuring on trapping us——"

Roody interrupted weakly: "I'm giving it to you straight. I've told you where the house is. There's only Cramer guarding him. He's got a gun, but if you go in the back way and do as I said——"

He stopped talking. Jeff turned away and went over near Collins. Collins's eyes were open, and he looked at Jeff with hatred in them. Roody said slowly:

"Don't leave me in the same room with him."

Jeff spoke rapidly: "We'll take Roody along and drop him at the plant hospital. Those plant guards you called for should be here any time now. The two of them can handle Collins. Let's get Roody into the cab."

The girl said: "I'm going with you."

Jeff grinned at her. "Sure," he agreed. "But we're moving fast. I've got a dead line to beat."

She said: "That darn newspaper!"

CHRS and Jeff carried Roody outside. The girl followed them. Two plant guards came running around the side of the house. When they had Roody in the car Jeff said rapidly to the guard:

"A crook named Joe Collins is in the living room, tied and gagged. He kidnaped Timothy Lane. Stay with him until we get back."

"You going after the super now?" one of them asked.

Jeff nodded. "Right now," he replied. "We'll drop this one at the plant hospital—he worked with Col-

lins. He's been shot, but Collins was just slugged on the head with a blackjack. Watch him. The Jap will show you where he is."

They went into the house. When the cab was moving down the grade toward the plant Chris twisted in the seat and muttered:

"Don't tell the police I carry a blackjack—it's just for protection against tough customers. A guy can't be too careful these days."

Jeff smiled grimly. Georgia Reed looked at him with her dark eyes.

"Gerry Blaine made a serious mistake when he tried to hit you because you waved to me. We might not have met, and you wouldn't have known about Tim."

The newspaperman said: "Then he didn't make any mistake—not for us, anyway."

The cab swayed on and they were very close to each other. But Jeff kept his right arm around the wounded man's shoulders. He was thinking about Timothy Lane and the house where he was a prisoner. And Shad Borne and the dead line that was only minutes away now.

THEY parked the cab five houses from the one that edged the railroad tracks. The five houses were all the same; little more than ore-stained shacks of one story each. It was a bad section of a bad town. One house had lights showing through dirty windows. Jeff said to the girl:

"You stay here, Georgia—halfway between the cab and the house. If anything goes wrong drive the cab to the general office and get help."

She was looking at him with a peculiar expression, and he realized it was the first time he had used her first name. But she nodded.

"O. K., Jeff," she said. "But be careful when you go in."

Jeff nodded and touched her arm. He and Chris went forward quietly. Plant noises filled the night, and the engine of the cab was running. Near the house Jeff turned and looked back. Georgia Lane was standing in the dirt of the street; she waved. Jeff waved back.

"No mistake this time," he breathed softly. As they reached the house, he said: "You stay in front, Chris. Keep that gun in your hand. I'll go around back with the other. If I get inside all right and don't call you within a couple of minutes come in or get help. Clear?"

Chris frowned. "How about me coming with you?" he asked.

Jeff shook his head. "I don't think Roody was lying, but it might be a trap," he said. "You watch things here."

The cab driver nodded. Jeff went around one side of the house, keeping low. There were only a few small windows. Inside one that was curtained with burlap he caught the faint gleam of a flickering light—a lamp. He went very quietly to the rear, found the narrow, wooden door Roody had told about. He gripped the gun he had taken from Collins tightly in his right hand. When he raised his left hand to knock against the wood his left shoulder stung a little, and he remembered the narrowness of his escape. Collins was desperate, and Roody had tried to kill. This third man, Timothy Lane's guard, might put up a fight.

Roody had said two quick knocks, a pause, and two more. Jeff knocked twice, swiftly and sharply, waited a few seconds, then repeated the two knocks.

There was no sound from within the house. In the distance there was the hiss of steam escaping under pressure. A switch engine wailed long notes.

COM-7B

Seconds passed, and then, very suddenly a latch made sound, on the other side of the door. A voice that was thin said:

"Joe?"

Once again Jeff tried to imitate the husky voice of Collins. He said:

"Open up, Cramer!"

He didn't do it too well, but there was a huskiness in his words, and the thickness of the door was between them. And he had used the right knock.

The door opened inward—half-way. Jeff leaped forward, caught the dull gleam of gun metal in Cramer's right hand. He struck hard at the right arm and the gun was battered against a wall of the house, just within the door. Cramer swore and tried to strike with his left fist. But Jeff had him against the wall. He hit him heavily with his left, over the heart, and as his body sagged, he slashed at his jaw.

Cramer slipped down and lay propped against the wall. Jeff got the gun and straightened up. He called softly:

"Lane!"

He heard a mumbled reply. Cramer was groaning and trying to move and Jeff went to the door and called sharply:

"Chris, come on around!"

Chris came around and Jeff pointed down at the figure of Cramer. "Keep your gun on him," he said. "I'm going in after Lane."

JEFF went a few feet down a narrow hall, saw a half-opened door. The room beyond was lighted by a lamp, and in one corner was the figure of a heavily built man, wearing a rumpled palm beach suit. His ankles and hands were tied, and there was a cloth over his mouth.

Jeff moved to his side and untied the gag. When he had the hands

free, Tim Lane wiped his lips with the back of one of them. Jeff worked over the rope that bound his ankles, helped him to his feet.

"Who are you?" the plant superintendent asked thickly.

Jeff said: "Jeff McReady—news-paperman."

The plant superintendent grunted. He was moving about, loosening the muscles of his legs and arms. He said suddenly:

"Georgia——"

Jeff grinned. "She's all right. She's outside, waiting for you," he cut in. "She'll tell you what the game was while I get to a phone."

Tim Lane pointed a finger at Jeff. "If you use my name I'll raise hell!" he breathed.

Jeff grinned. "I got a bullet scrape and a lot of fists thrown my way trying to get you free, Mr. Lane. We've got your three kidnapers, and I've got a story the other newspapermen don't know anything about. I've just got time to get it to my city editor and it's going through!"

Tim Lane glared at him. Jeff said: "Your niece is outside."

He went out and ran to the road. The girl was coming toward the house. She said anxiously:

"You're not hurt, Jeff?"

He grinned. "No; and neither is your uncle," he told her. "I want to get to a phone."

He ran on down the street, and headed in the direction of a small store he'd seen on the way to the house. It had a telephone, and he used it. He used it for ten minutes, talking very fast. Then Shad Borne cut in.

"No time for more, Jeff. Come on

back and write the rest. I'll get this in the bulldog. Nice work."

Jeff said grimly: "How about a raise—I'm thinking of getting married?"

The city editor swore at him and hung up. Jeff grinned and walked back to the cab. Chris was still with the prisoner, but Georgia and Timothy Lane were near the cab. Lane said hoarsely:

"I was driving to the merchant mill when they jumped me. Georgia says that the Blaines were involved in this and that one of the prisoners will talk. And the police have the pay-car robbers. I know the local police didn't try very hard to stop them, after the strong room was blown apart."

Jeff said: "They used too much of a dose of nitro—and they got themselves caught. Even with the breaks. But I got a swell story."

Timothy Lane frowned. The girl was smiling.

"You earned it," she said simply. "Tim can clean up the town now, with what we know about the Blaines."

The plant superintendent smiled slowly. He held out a hand to Jeff.

"Most newspapermen are no good," he muttered.

Jeff looked at the girl as Lane walked away, swinging his arms to restore circulation. She smiled at him.

"I think we could do things together, Jeff," she said quietly. "We might like each other pretty well. Will you come up to the house tomorrow and see if we get along?"

He grinned at her. "Will I?" he breathed exultantly. "Like a cyclone shot!"



For Services Rendered



By
C. S.
Montanye

The Canary Kid "collects."

THE "Canary Kid" sat down at a table in the Brentwood grill. Occasionally, he liked to lunch there. The Brentwood was on Forty-second Street, not far from the Grand Central railroad terminal. The Kid found some pleasure in the assortment of types that made the Brentwood grill a rendezvous. He believed it sharpened his mind and whittled down his wits to card-index mentally those whom he appraised. Once, several months past, the Kid had unearthed a valuable lead there.

Almost the first person his blue eyes focused on was Jonathan Sanvel. The man was three tables

away, eating with his customary nervous haste. He was tall, thin to the point of gauntness, with a scraggly thatch of mouse-colored hair, red-rimmed eyes, and a mouth that was merely a tight-lipped gash in his pale face. Sanvel's brown suit needed a tailor's iron, his high shoes were badly off for a polish and a stringy black cravat had slipped away from his old-fashioned, starched collar. Not a prepossessing individual or hardly one to be copied for sartorial smartness, still the Canary Kid had some idea of Jonathan Sanvel's wealth and the important position the man held in the art world.

Sanvel was a dealer in rare art

objects. He maintained a suite in a Madison Avenue skyscraper. His clients were listed in the social register. It was Sanvel who had completed a certain wealthy woman's priceless set of Chinese porcelain after she had despaired of ever seeing any more of the fragile ware. For a Westbury millionaire Jonathan Sanvel had located and arranged the purchase of a noted suit of Milanese armor. It was Sanvel who had been the go-between in the matter of the fourteen black Spanish pearls.

In a way the Canary Kid envied the other. Sanvel's work aroused the artistic side of the Kid's nature that found some faint expression in the elegance and perfection of his clothing. Back in his apartment at the Barclay Towers, where the Kid dwelt under the name of Stephen Alden, he had one or two valuable though trifling antiques. The Kid had long felt that he would like to be the possessor of some sixteenth century painting, some highly valuable and rare object.

While the Canary Kid mused, he noticed a short, stocky youth in a gray suit coming down the center aisle. He was looking around, darting quick glances in either direction, as if searching for a table. Still, the Kid saw in the next minute, the newcomer had no intention of being a guest in the Brentwood grill. Almost at the same minute the Kid took in the youth's sallow countenance, glinting eyes and crooked nose, the other leaned to Jonathan Sanvel's table, adroitly slipped a folded piece of paper under a knife and moved on. He turned at the rear of the place and cut across to the stairs. As quickly as he had appeared on the scene he vanished up the steps with little more than a backward glance.

Sanvel, unfolding the piece of

paper, reacted to it in a way that made the Kid narrow his own eyes. Its affect upon Sanvel was startling. A wave of color suffused the antique dealer's pale face. One of his bony hands went to his chin. He fingered his lower lip nervously. What principally caught and held the Kid's keen attention was the appearance of fear in Sanvel's red-rimmed eyes. The man crushed the paper, tossed it under the table, and signaled his waiter for a check. He arose quickly, reached for his disreputable felt hat, and hurried out.

The Kid got up, went over and picked up the crumpled piece of paper. He slipped it in his pocket, went back to his own table and waited until the curiosity of those who had seen him lean for and retrieve it had abated somewhat. Then he smoothed out and studied the penciled scrawl. There were just a few words. They read:

To-night. Ten. This is your last chance.

WHEN the Kid left the grill he walked west through Forty-second Street to Broadway. The Kid went on as far as Forty-sixth Street and turned west again. Close to Eighth Avenue he ascended the front steps of what appeared to be an ordinary private house. He rang the bell and a few minutes later was in the foyer. The private house was a bland mask shielding the activities of a popular pool room where bets could be made on a horse entered in any race on any track operating in the country.

"Is Joe Traill here?" the Kid asked the man at the door.

"Down in the wire room. I guess you know the way, Mr. Alden. Second door to the right and straight through."

The Kid descended to a large, smoke-fogged chamber where a telegraph instrument chattered, telephones buzzed and shirt-sleeved men wearing green eye shades above tilted cigars were busy chalking up betting odds on the charts decorating the plain, painted walls of the inclosure. Some customers were lined up at the pay-off wicket of a small booth or consulting the charts. Among them the Kid saw the small, wizened figure of the thin-faced, furtive-eyed little crook who had assisted him so ably in the past.

"Hello, big boy. Who let you in?" Traill began as the Kid joined him. Then he caught the Kid's arm and lifted a hand. "Wait! Listen. The third hop at Louisville is just coming in. I've got a finish riding on the Gallant Girl. They wrote me down for twenty, eight and four, but I smacked the whole five bucks right on her nose."

A voice spoke through a small megaphone from the region of the telephones.

"Third race at Churchill Downs, gentlemen. They're at the post." He mentioned the post positions of the six entries. "They're off! A perfect start. At the eighth, Easter Pirate in the lead by two lengths. Sketch Book second, Gallant Girl third——"

Joe Traill nodded.

"It's a mile gallop, Kid. Weather clear; track fast. Pascuma has the leg up on the filly. Wait'll he begins to ride!"

"The half," the voice continued. "Sketch Book has moved up fast and taken the lead. Gallant Girl second. Afterglow third. They're turning into the stretch. It's still Sketch Book, Gallant Girl and Afterglow in the——"

The Canary Kid smiled thinly.

He had met Traill at a race track. He supposed when they parted to go their separate ways it would be at some place where the horses were running. He watched the little crook's face mirror his inner excitement. In that thirty seconds of suspense, Joe Traill invariably found more drama and thrills than he could discover on the stage of any theater. The pressure of his hand on the Kid's arm tightened.

"Finish of the third at Louisville. Afterglow first by a length and a half. Sketch Book second by one length. Sandy Mac third. Time for the mile, one minute forty-four and two-eighths seconds."

The Kid laughed.

"There's five dollars that will never worry you again, Joe."

"Can you beat that?" Traill's tone was dazed. "I got that gopher right out of the feed box. Honest, when a goat like her don't cop after they pass the word it's time for the police to investigate!" He shook himself. "What's on your mind, pal?"

"I want to talk to you," the Kid stated, drawing Traill aside. "I want you to dig up some information for me and I want it in a hurry."

Traill blinked.

"Yeah? What kind of info? Kid, are you on something hot? Boy, do I need ready cash, too? These leaping tunas have taken me to the cleaners for a fact. I'm nearly a century in the red. Who do you want the word on?"

The Canary Kid made sure he was in no danger of being overheard and explained rapidly.

"I was lurching at the Brentwood grill an hour ago. Jonathan Sanvel had a table near mine. Some one who looked like a front man dropped in to pass a message to Sanvel. It frightened him out of his dessert.

Joe, I want you to circulate around the hot spots and ask a few pertinent questions. Try and find out what possible connection Jonathan Sanvel can have with the underworld. Get all the dope you can and reach me at the Towers as soon as possible."

"But suppose I flop on it? A lot of these gimicks are afraid to chirp even to their boozin' friends. On the level, sometimes it's harder to make a guy talk than it is to blow a jewelry-store can. I'll do my best to——"

"And make it snappy!" the Kid interrupted curtly. "To-night at ten is the dead line, the zero hour. I'm heading uptown directly. I'll expect word from you before dark."

Joe Traill looked doubtful.

"I don't know. I'll do my best, but these clams——"

AT the Barclay Towers, where the Kid's lofty rooms overlooked Central Park, he re-read the crumpled note of warning. His mind toyed with the idea of Jonathan Sanvel in the clutch of the underworld. It might be that Sanvel had attempted something illegal and given some crook a hold on him. Sanvel might have smuggled a valuable article, or it was possible he had sought the help of some crooked accomplice such as the one who had slipped him the note. There were a dozen or more different ways Sanvel might have slipped and left himself open to an attack.

The Kid felt one of his old hunches stir within him. He seemed to scent profit, a profit that could be gained and derived without the danger to himself of the law's interference. With any luck he might, playing his usual lone hand, step in at the proper moment, take momentary command and bow himself out

of the night's drama with a substantial gain on the credit side of his ledger. It all depended on what Traill unearthed, what information the Kid could learn.

A CLOCK in the corner had chimed nine thirty when Joe Traill pressed the hall door-bell. He came in, red from the cold of the street, his thin face expressionless but his eyes alert and bright. The Canary Kid turned to him with an eagerness he made no attempt to conceal.

"Nine thirty! Where have you been? What have you found out? Talk, and talk fast, Joe!"

Traill drew a long breath.

"Honest, you sure do hand me the tough ones, partner. Since I left you at the horse parlor I've been wearing my feet out. Talk about your fallen arches!" He helped himself to a cigarette, lighted it and inhaled deeply. "All the same, Kid, they can't stay closed on me all the time. And let me tell you something right now. You got a swell lead on this here Sanvel baby. It's torrid, I'm telling you!"

"What's the word?" the Canary Kid rapped out impatiently.

Traill took another drag at his cigarette.

"Sanvel's in a jam with Ed Barry and Barry's mob!" he said tersely. "I won't waste time telling you how I had to mooch around with a lug to the ground. Sanvel's been acting as a fence for Barry now and then—mostly then. Barry brought some goods up from Miami not long ago and Sanvel unloaded them at a fancy figure. Stolen stuff, of course. Sanvel fixed the stuff up so its previous owner couldn't recognize it with a microscope——"

"Sold it and forgot to kick back the mob's share," the Kid finished.

Joe Traill smiled crookedly.

"You've got your thumb on it, pal. He told Barry to beat it—knowing the mobster couldn't squawk—and Barry's been laying for him. Tonight's the pay off. Either Sanvel comes across or he's due for a lot of fun that won't get a laugh out of him. That's the set-up, but I can't figure where you get a break in, Kid. Believe me, it's bad messing around with mugs like Barry's boy friends."

While Traill spoke the Kid had become busy. With a glance at his watch he slipped off his jacket, slung the strap of his rubber shoulder scabbard over his neck, tightened the buckle and looked at the ammunition clip of the automatic revolver in the holster. Then he replaced the jacket, donned a dark, unobtrusive topcoat, pulled a felt hat down over the blond hair which had given him his sobriquet and turned to Traill.

"Stay here," the Kid ordered shortly. "I don't know if I'll need you or not. I'll try and get a call through to you if I do."

"Yeah, but—"

The Kid shut the door on the little crook's question. In the street he signaled the first taxi that came along. He gave the driver a Madison Avenue address, climbed in, looked at his watch again and urged speed. The taxi cut into Broadway, went east through Fifty-ninth Street and turned south on Madison Avenue. The Canary Kid thought fast. It was probably that Jonathan Sanvel did not realize his own acute danger. Ed Barry, the Kid had reason to know, was inclined to be deceiving. A crook who had come up out of the ranks by his own cleverness and intelligence, Barry was a soft-spoken, mild-mannered individual. Barry's success had been due almost entirely to the fact he never bothered with small, petty

jobs. He plotted and engineered large, lucrative and daring hauls on a grand scale. He was always careful to make sure of the apparently inconsequential details and he kept out of the penitentiary by covering himself cleverly.

Yet, for all of his mild manners, Barry was not one to allow himself to be cheated or double-crossed. He would be patient just so long and then, through his mob, he would strike with unerring accuracy. Once more the Canary Kid looked at his watch. It was six minutes of ten o'clock. The traffic light on the street beyond turned from green to yellow and then to a blazing red. The Kid noted the street number when the cab stopped. There was no time to delay. He paid the toll on the meter, alighted, reached the sidewalk and hurried down the street.

THE Canary Kid soon reached the building where Jonathan Sanvel maintained his office and rooms. It took but a few minutes to reach Sanvel's suite. There he stopped, his eyes narrowing. Not only were the ground-glass doors unilluminated by any light from within, but the doors themselves were locked tight.

The Kid frowned. Had something gone wrong? Had Barry changed his plans and struck earlier than the hour mentioned in the warning note? Or, the Kid asked himself, was he too early? He consulted his watch again and found the answer on the face of the timepiece.

The hands still pointed to six minutes of ten o'clock. The watch had stopped.

Down in the lobby again, The Canary Kid spoke to the elevator starter after he had found a clock there showing the correct time to

be some twenty minutes past ten. The starter was generous with his information.

"Mr. Sanvel? He went out about ten minutes ago with two men. I don't know whether he'll be here tomorrow. You see, he sold his business."

"Sold out?"

The starter nodded. "So I understand."

In the street, the Kid hurried to a corner drug store. In a minute or two he had Joe Traill at Barclay Towers on the wire.

"Where does Barry hang out, Joe? Where will I be likely to find him now? If the mob was going to line somebody up for a kidnaping or a croak where would they be apt to handle it?"

"Barry makes his headquarters at the Fifty-Fifty Club," Traill said. "You know that hot spot."

"Yes, I think I do."

"Watch your step if you're going after bear in that joint," the little crook cautioned. "It's plenty poison, believe me."

The Canary Kid rang off and entered another taxi. The scene shifted to Broadway. While he rode toward the carnival of light the Kid mused. He knew the Fifty-Fifty Club by reputation. It was a tough joint crowded with Barry's hirelings. Had they taken Jonathan Sanvel there for his final reckoning? The Kid remembered the elevator starter said Sanvel had left with two men. Did that imply that the dealer in *objets d'art* had departed chaperoned by two of the mob or was Sanvel making a hasty exit before Barry could put the finger on him?

The Canary Kid's speculations ended abruptly a few minutes later as the cab drew up to the Fifty-Fifty Club.

The Kid mounted four steps and

went through a wanly lighted arched doorway. The resort boasted no brilliant incandescent sign; it was as if it needed and wanted no advertising. The Kid walked into an entrance foyer and from there went into a second room where a number of people had gathered at the small, round tables. The Kid swept the place with a glance in which he failed to find either Barry or any of Barry's lieutenants.

A waiter answered his questions readily enough. Mr. Barry's apartment and rooms were on the top floor of the building, three flights up. The Kid considered his next move. By no stretch of the imagination could the night's adventure be called a "safe job." Still, if he was to succeed he knew he would have to learn whether or not Jonathan Sanvel had been escorted from the Madison Avenue address to the Fifty-Fifty Club. With his topcoat over one arm the Kid mounted a stairway on which the carpet had been worn to a dusty thinness.

In what Joe Traill might call its "hay day" the building had once been the stable adjoining an old residence. It had been altered and remodeled beyond all distinguishing appearance. But the Kid told himself he was ascending to what, in a half-forgotten day, must have been a haymow. The third floor landing received him. A half dozen doors were either closed or opened into the darkness of the rooms they guarded. The Kid paused at the head of the stairs and listened. If unexpectedly discovered there he had a trumped-up story ready that would be plausible enough. He wanted to see Ed Barry on a personal matter; wanted, if Barry received him, to throw in his lot with the mob. But the Kid had no intention or wish to use the tale. The

principal thing was to learn if Jonathan Sanvel was there, and to this end he strained his ears to the faint grumble of voices emanating from a room at the very end of the landing.

THE Kid found he was never destined to interpret the conversation; for in the next minute the knob of a door somewhere close at hand clicked. The Kid selected the nearest dark room and glided into it. Now the landing resounded to voices.

"I'll go down and tell Johnny to get the heap ready. What did Ed say about the time?"

"Better tell Johnny twenty minutes."

"How about the plates?"

"Let him use the New Jersey markers."

"O. K."

Footsteps dwindled out on the stairs. The odor of a cheap cigar filtered into the room where the Kid stood motionless. The second man who had come out seemed content to loiter on the landing. But the Canary Kid was hardly conscious of his presence. Tiptoeing soundlessly into a second room that opened into the first, the Kid found the gray light breaking the darkness through a grimy skylight.

The Kid's glance moved to the wooden ladder rearing up to the skylight. As he appraised it he heard a door open and shut—voices. He drew back beyond the filtering stream of the gray light while a lamp was lighted in the room he had just left.

A stocky youth in a gray suit had locked the door opening on the landing and dropped its key in his waistcoat pocket. He snapped the ash from his cigarette and lounged across to the man whom he had accompanied into the room. The

Canary Kid felt the quick tensing of his pulse. He had made no mistake in his calculations. For all of the safety that lay in flight, Jonathan Sanvel was in the other room. The Kid could see him as he faced the youth in the gray suit, his voice tremulous with indignation.

"This is an outrage! You can't do this! What are your plans? I demand that you release me instantly! I'll expose Barry to the police! I'll——"

The other made a gesture.

"Cut it. You'll expose nobody. You'll keep your clam shut and do what you're told to do. If you're sensible you won't get hurt. But if you try any funny stuff there's likely to be an accident and that's gonna be just too bad—for you!"

"But where do you intend taking me?"

"Over to Jersey. Ed thinks a change of air will do you a lotta good. Pipe down and be nice. We won't have long to wait. Johnny'll bring the boiler around in five or ten minutes."

Listening, the Canary Kid's thoughts passed alertly through his mind. What was occurring was obvious. Barry was having Sanvel removed from the scene. A car would slide up to the Fifty-Fifty Club, Jonathan Sanvel would enter it and that would be the end of things for him. Somewhere over in the darkness across the river, Barry's mob would train their gats on Sanvel, toss his bullet-riddled body into a swamp or thicket and ride back again with all the satisfaction of a job well done. The necessity of immediate action steeled the Kid to purpose. Whatever was to be accomplished must be concluded in the short, uncertain interval before the arrival of the car.

The Canary Kid slipped out his

automatic. Swiftly, he moved to the threshold of the other room. "Gray Suit" saw him and dropped a hand toward his hip. The hand stopped midway and joined the other in reaching for the ceiling. The Kid spoke in a low, vibrant voice.

"One word and I'll blow your nut off! Stand just where you are and don't move an inch! I'll take charge of the artillery in the pants pocket!"

He moved lightly across the room, frisked the other and let his eyes flicker in the direction of Jonathan Sanvel, who viewed the new turn of events with open mouth and astonished gaze.

"In the other room," the Kid said hurriedly to Sanvel, "there's a skylight with a ladder leading up to it! Get it open while I take care of this gentleman! Don't waste a minute. If they find us here when they come back we'll both work for the undertaker!"

Sanvel closed his mouth.

"But I don't know you."

"Open that skylight!" the Kid snarled, and his rasping impatience made the dealer move with alacrity.

PRESENTLY, from the room where shone the gray light, there came the scrape of rusty bolts and hinges. The Kid continued to draw a bead on the youth in the gray suit. Not a word was spoken until Sanvel's thin, fluty tones drifted in.

"It—it's open!"

The Kid stared into the shift, glinting eyes of the one he confronted.

"Take a tip," he warned. "Any loud-mouth stuff on your part and you'll draw lead! Move on in front of me. You're going up on the roof with us!"

The youth in the gray suit was through the skylight with the Can-

ary Kid, gun in hand, behind him, when a staccato knocking on the door of the first room broke out. The Kid drew himself through the skylight, pushed the glass dome back in place and chuckled under his breath.

"Right on to the end house in line!" he commanded crisply.

"Have a heart!" Gray Suit whined, when the Kid prodded him with the nose of his automatic. "Barry will have me cooked for this sure! I'm as good as gone right now!"

"In that event," the Kid murmured, "you won't have any objection coming with us!"

The end house backed up against a commercial building. Iron fire escapes were across a three-foot gulf. It was an inconsiderable task to climb over and descend their steps. They went down into a gloomy area-way, cut through a basement and emerged on the avenue. Another minute and the Kid had herded Sanvel and Gray Suit into a taxi. The Kid laughed when they passed the Fifty-Fifty Club and saw the open touring car with drawn curtains waiting at the curb.

There was no hint of laughter in his voice when the cab crossed Times Square. There the Kid spoke to the driver and turned to the ex-member of the Barry mob.

"Here's where you drop off. Take it on the lam! Good night and good-by."

The taxi started off again. The Kid shut the door and looked at Jonathan Sanvel. The man, dazed by the quick succession of events, seemed at last to understand he had won clear of a hardly realized danger.

"I don't quite understand who you are," he began, "but I—I guess you have helped me a lot."

"More than you'll ever know," the Kid informed him shortly.

"So," Sanvel went on, "if you'll tell the driver to take me to Madison Avenue——"

"I've already told him. It just happens I'm going with you, Mr. Sanvel. You see, I'm one of those unabashed persons who always like to be well paid for services rendered. I have no sympathy for any one who does a good deed and melts into obscurity. I hope I make myself clear."

"You don't," Sanvel cried thinly. "I don't know what you're driving at."

"Then I'll tell you!" The Canary Kid's voice was diamond-hard. "For what I've done to-night I expect a gift of appreciation. You have a rather large and well-stocked establishment, Mr. Sanvel. From your stock I shall select a fitting souvenir to crown this night's little adventure. Something by which I shall always remember you pleasantly. Do I make myself clear?"

"I've sold the business," Sanvel stammered. "I'm sailing to-morrow morning for Europe."

"But to-night you have the keys and a key is all that's necessary. Are you hedging?" the Kid asked in a brittle voice. "Make up your mind and do it quickly. I know how you double-crossed Barry. Either you give me my choice or back to the Fifty-Fifty Club you go."

Jonathan Sanvel coughed.

"You can pick out anything you want," he answered grudgingly.

At the Madison Avenue shop the Kid finally selected a painting. It was small and identified as: "Venetian Mood, by Rodolfo Lamberti, 1634." Sanvel told the Kid it was an old masterpiece. He helped wrap it and shook hands cordially. The Canary Kid took his prize down to the street and the last taxi he would ride in that night.

"Barclay Towers," he directed. "Central Park, west, no hurry."

THREE afternoons later, Joe Traill, coming into the living room of the Kid's apartment, asked questions that had been troubling the little crook for some time.

"Listen, pal. What about Ed Barry and the mob? How did you come out of it? You told me it was hot, but I haven't seen no dough around. How did you break?"

The Kid laughed.

"I got an oil painting out of it; a masterpiece done in the year 1634 by Lamberti, the ace of his age. I took the picture down to Weddle on Fifth Avenue to have it cleaned up and framed. I went down to get it this morning."

Joe Traill whistled.

"A painting, huh? That sounds like big kale. Just the other day I was reading how some millionaire had one of these old pictures and found out that it was worth plenty cash. How about yours?"

The Kid selected a cigarette and lighted it.

"I'm afraid my 1634 masterpiece isn't worth any considerable sum, Joseph. I'm also afraid that Mr. Jonathan Sanvel, now on the high seas, is chuckling up his sleeve. It grieves me to say so, but I should have known better. Sanvel snapped at the hand that saved him and all I have is the experience."

Traill knit his brows. His furtive eyes flashed over to the Kid.

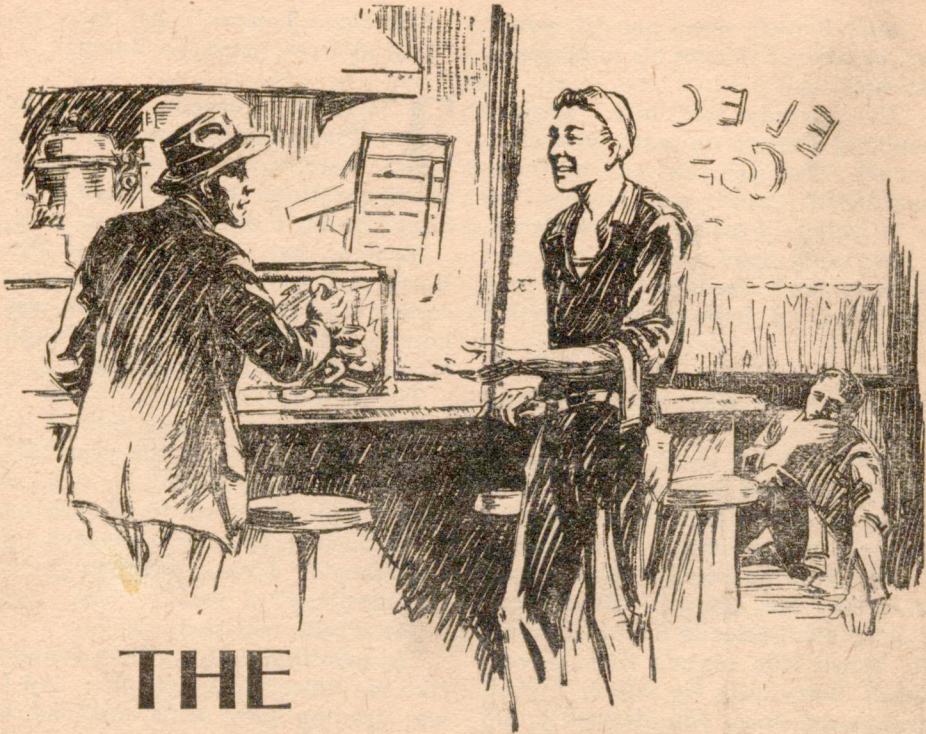
"How do you mean?"

"Weddle started to clean up the picture," the Kid explained, "and found something under it."

"Yeah? What did he find?"

The Canary Kid smiled thinly.

"Under my Lamberti 1634 masterpiece," he replied, "Weddle discovered a portrait of Mussolini!"



THE SIZE OF THE SINKER

By L. Paul

Watch out when Johnny Buck calls you "buddy"—he's going to break you as he would a doughnut.

YOUNG JOHNNY" BUCK was dunking his second doughnut when the little old man came into the Elegant. The old man was no different from any of the regular customers of this waterfront eating place; that is, his clothes had seen better days and he seemed concerned with getting quantity rather than quality in the food line. The Elegant specialized in that.

Young Johnny Buck was big and

husky, though his belt was drawn tightly over a flat stomach. Young Johnny was impulsive, given to sudden likes and dislikes, and when you heave one boss into a harbor and cram another into an empty pork barrel, jobs are apt to become scarce for the heaver and the crammer.

The little old man climbed up on a stool and absorbed a plate of the Elegant's ten-cent beans. He laid a quarter on the bar and, when he got his change, he hesitated only a moment before investing it in a five-

cent cigar and a cup of coffee with two sinkers. Young Johnny Buck nodded approval, for there were times when he had invested a quarter in just that same way.

The big, pudgy waiter scooped up a plate, slid back the door of a glass case and selected two doughnuts. Johnny Buck noticed that one of these was broken and but half its proper size. His eyes roved from the pudgy waiter to the little old man in his seedy clothing. Young Johnny had a kind heart. He scowled at the waiter and said:

"For why don't you give the old lad a break, buddy?"

"I ain't in a giving mood." The waiter leaned over the bar, the broken doughnut in his fat fingers.

"'Tis a crime, buddy," Johnny Buck said mildly. "You can see the old-timer's out of luck. Save the broken sinker for some husky that can stand bein' short changed on his feed. Give the old lad the full nosebag, see?"

"There's things drift in here I don't like." The waiter stared angrily at Johnny. "There's big bums, for instance, with big mouths."

The little old man, in a squeaky voice, tried to calm the troubled waters:

"'Tis nothing to me, lad. Them beans was fillin' an' that sinker'll plug the odd corner, the way it is."

But Young Johnny Buck was started. Young Johnny had got off his stool. Now he was facing the big waiter and he was grinning in a way his intimates knew for the sign of trouble to come. Now he was asking:

"Was you ever on the police, buddy?"

"Naw," the waiter growled.

"Then mebbe you have a brother on the police?"

"I have that," the waiter grinned.

"Is it meeting him would suit you, you big bum?"

"I knew there was a reason for dislikin' your guts." Johnny Buck nodded happily. "For if there's anything I hate it's the police. The fights they've spoiled on me, mister," he explained, turning to the little old man. "And the way they fights themselves when they starts in, forgettin' the Markiss o' Queensberry ever made rules, bustin' in on a guy with clubs and wagons, and a judge the third man in the ring. So"—and Johnny leaned over the counter—"we'll just get goin', you half-sinker-size oppressor o' the poor."

ONE long arm reached out and snaked its way to the waiter's collar. His big body lifted suddenly, sprawled across the counter, and bounced off to the floor. Young Johnny gave him time to get his balance, and then sailed in. The waiter swung up a stool, but Johnny, who had dodged a bar-room chair, wasn't scared of a lunch-room stool. He ducked, struck twice; and folded that waiter over his fist. He lifted him with a blow to his pudgy jaw; then dropped him backward into the show case with a crash of glass. And then, hoisting him back over the counter where he dropped to the greasy floor. Young Johnny pointed to the broken glass of the show case and said to the little old man:

"You got a sinker comin' to you. Will you now be so kind as to help yourself, buddy?"

"You stop callin' me 'buddy,'" the little old man squeaked. "I seen what 'buddy' means to you," and he stared at the waiter, now struggling to his trembling legs. "If that's the way you handle your buddies, what would you be after doing to an enemy, if such you have?"

"Will you be eatin' that sinker?" Johnny growled. "After me takin' the trouble to get it for you, the least you can do is bite it so he can't sell it over again. And me, I got to be movin' on. 'Tis unhealthy this place will be when yon fat hash slinger get his wind back and hollers for his brother, the cop."

"Will you let me move along with you, lad?" The little old man bit a big chunk out of a doughnut and then dropped it on the counter. Young Johnny Buck grinned patronizingly. He figured the old down-and-outer was scared of city folks. Like as not, until Johnny championed him, every one had been plaguing and cheating this little old chap. Young Johnny said:

"'Tis a caretaker you need, mister. And having nothing to do, it's me that will take on the job. Now, just where might you be bound?"

"I'm by way of hitting the train this night," the little old man answered. "My name it is Riverdog, which name you might call my working moniker, though they wouldn't let me scrawl it so on the register, up to the bunk house where I slept last night."

"Them charity folks is particular," Johnny said. "Well, I guess if you got any stuff up there we could amble up and get it."

"That sure suits me." Riverdog nodded, and led the way around a corner and up a street that rose toward Montreal's upper town.

Young Johnny followed him for several blocks in silence. Then he bawled:

"Say, Riverdog, do you know where you're headin'?"

"I sure do." Riverdog kept right on moving.

"I didn't know they had flop houses up this far," Johnny grumbled.

"They're always improving this here city," Riverdog laughed. "We head in here." And he climbed stone steps and pushed at a revolving door.

YOUNG JOHNNY, whose life had been lived in other circles, charged that door like a clumsy bull. It sprewed him out into a marble lobby and into the arms of a man in a blue uniform amply braided with gold. Young Johnny eyed this man angrily and muttered something about "Police," but little Riverdog winked at the uniformed porter and grabbed Johnny's arm.

"This is where I have my flop," Riverdog said. "It's not what I'm used to, and I will say a bunk house with a bit of spruce tips under a blanket suits me better, but such as it is, Johnny, you're welcome to it." And he led the goggling Johnny to an elevator. Johnny followed meekly. He was in a world beyond his ken. The carpet in the hall seemed to fold over his big boots. The suite of rooms Riverdog led him to was, he felt sure, such as a king might hire. Riverdog shut the door and then sank into a deep armchair where he lay chuckling.

"So you'd save a poor old man," Riverdog cackled. "And you'd not let a waiter pass me a busted sinker. And what may your name be, my Galahad of the water front?"

"I'm Johnny Buck. And 'tis no obligation you are under to me, Riverdog. 'Tis a week I've waited for a chance at that guy in the Elegant."

"But I am under obligation to you, Johnny Buck. For the tedium of being retired is gnawing at me. And the disgustin' business of being rich is corruptin' me. And why was I down there at the Elegant? Be-

cause I had a fancy for some beans, and when they serves them here in this hotel they're like to put paper collars on the dish and shame them with a French name." Old Riverdog sighed. Then he went on:

"You see a broken man, Johnny Buck. Here I sits with a million to my name. And my sons is pilin' up more. Lumbermen? Heaven forbid! They calls themselves that, with their fine mahogany desks and their females writin' polite letters on a dozen typewriters. Lumbermen? 'Tis not so, I lumbered. And it is not so I will lumber, by the pants o' Paul Bunyan. For, know you, Johnny Buck, I'm a man of resource." And he pointed to something that lay crumpled on the floor in a corner. "And what is that?" Riverdog asked.

"'Tis a waiter's suit." Johnny stirred the crumpled heap with his toe.

"You agree with me there," Riverdog cackled. "But for their shame, gentlemen wears the duds at times. And 'twas me put them on last night, my two sons insistin'. 'Twas past midnight before I got over the shame o' so much white boiled shirt. But after that—well, to make a long story short, I betook meself to the club—which same, in case you don't know, is a bar of sorts with plush lining and the bottles out of sight. And there I did fall among thieves that figured me soft in the brain on account of the clothes. And what with one thing and another, and a habit of catching straights in the middle, I cleaned them up. And when I'd nicked them for their ready cash, I took checks. And when I had enough of them checks I got an inspiration. And one thing leading to another I gambled the lot against something I hankered for. And what did I win, think you?"

"How would I know?" Johnny complained.

"I won a drive," Riverdog declared happily. "A small drive."

"A drive? Now I know you need a keeper," Johnny cried. "You had their pants and you risked 'em, pockets and all, for a drive. Was it a drive in a hearse, maybe? I guess I'd best be sticking to you, old man. For, sure, you'll never pay for this grand room with your business worked like this. A drive, is it?"

"A drive—and stick you will, Johnny Buck. Just try to get away. A small drive it was, but complete with wanigan and lumberjacks, on a river I never seen. And it's there we're going, Johnny Buck, you and me. For I'm told the drive is coming too slow, and if there's anything I like it's taming lumberjacks."

"So it's that kind of a drive?" Johnny asked. "I heard tell of them. I met some good men offn drives. But for their habit of wearin' claws on their boots they're near to being Christians. Go with you I will, little man."

Old Riverdog got up and began to caper about the room. "Oh, to be working again," he cried. "'Tis the end of gilt-edged loafing for me, Johnny Buck." And then he clapped one hand to his side.

"So you have a pain?" Johnny sympathized.

"The grandfather of a pain," Riverdog moaned. "Do you think I may have et something that disagreed with me? There was a big steak last night, and when I come in toward dawn I mind I bribed a lad to rustle me some ham and eggs. And them beans this morning. But hell, I guess it's just being idle done the damage. We'll go get us an outfit, Johnny Buck. And we'll hit north to-night. I'm crazy to see that drive I won."

RIVERDOG and Johnny slept on the train that night. They ate a simple breakfast in the diner, which took about an hour and a half. They got off at a siding where a tote road led into the bush. Riverdog had selected their outfit. There were two long pack sacks, which Riverdog said were turkeys and these held blankets, spare socks and boots, and a few such luxuries as toothbrushes and shaving soap. Riverdog complained that city life had made him soft.

They followed the tote road for an hour and came out on the bank of a river where an idle sawmill loomed up out of the forest.

"This is the place," Riverdog grunted. "Yon'll be the office." He pointed to a little shack by the mill.

The office contained a man. This man was black-haired, swarthy of face, lean, and long. Riverdog hailed him:

"Would this be Dennis's mill?"

"It would. But we're not hirin' men," the lean man growled.

"And why not?" Riverdog persisted. "Is the drive not near? And will you not be startin' the saws? And have you some priceless method of takin' the men from the drive with their pockets full o' pay and turnin' them into mill hands regardless of their grand thirst?"

"I got a miraculous way of heavin' bums out on their ears." The lean man rose. He made a grab for little Riverdog, but what his hands closed on was a mite huskier and tougher. In fact, it was Johnny Buck. What happened, Riverdog could scarcely follow. But when it was over, the lean man was curled up in a knot on the ground outside and the merry song of the May birds was not filtering through his ears to any extent. Old Riverdog bent over him, and then growled at Johnny:

"I fear, Johnny lad, you have been bustin' up an employee." And then, suddenly, he clapped his hand to his side and groaned.

"It was the breakfast, I reckon," Johnny suggested. "Now you'd best go slow on vittles for a spell, boss."

"Shut up, Impudence!" Riverdog winced. "Do you heave a can of water on yon sleepin' beauty?"

Johnny obliged. The lean man sat up and rubbed his jaw.

"They told me the railroad was comin' in," he moaned. "But I didn't believe 'em. And now—why in hell didn't that engineer whistle for the crossin'?"

"'Twas me, and no engine hit you," Johnny explained. "And this little man is your new boss, and the politer you are the easier will life be."

"I'm your new boss," Riverdog corroborated Johnny. "Here is the document to prove it. My name is Riverdog, if that means anything in this neck of woods."

"Why didn't you say that first?" The lean man got to his feet. "It would have saved a lot of trouble."

"It was no trouble to me," Johnny grinned. But the lean man fished inside his mouth with a hooked forefinger and took out bits of red rubber.

"That there plate cost me eleven bucks," said he. "Sure as my name is Mart Glasgow, I'll have the law on you."

"The law?" Johnny snorted. "It's a long walk to the nearest law. So maybe you'd better talk to the old gentleman here."

HE turned to Riverdog. But Riverdog had sunk down on the ground, white-faced, his hands to his side. Johnny bent down and helped him to his feet. Riverdog groaned:

"Oh, why didn't I listen to that doctor? It's an appendix I'm after havin', Johnny. And here's the fun all spoiled before it's begun. And here's my nice little drive up this river, that I'll never see. For it's carved I must be, Johnny Buck, and that right off."

"Give me a hand with him," Johnny ordered, and Mart Glasgow came to his assistance. They carried old Riverdog into the office and made him as easy as they could. And then Mart Glasgow hitched up a team of horses to a buckboard and they freighted Riverdog out to the railroad. There was a doctor on the southbound train by good luck, and after a word from him of a reassuring nature, Johnny installed old Riverdog in the sleeper and, standing over him, made a promise:

"I have never seen a drive," said Johnny Buck, "but I'll have a look at yours. I know nothing about such things, but I've found in this sad world that if you tell men firmly to do things right, them things gets done. And as you may have noticed, Riverdog, I got a way of talking that——"

"Say no more," Riverdog groaned freely. "Don't distress me by describing what I'm going to miss. Do you think I brought you north to pick daisies? I'll be back when I'm pruned, Johnny Buck, and I trust there'll be a tale worth telling me."

And with that, the conductor said the train had to go on, and so Johnny swung off to the platform. Mart Glasgow was just getting on the car ahead and, as the train began to move, Johnny reached up and got him by the slack of the pants and dragged him off again. Mart Glasgow glowered at the train as it pulled out, but he knew what Johnny could do when roused, and so he was almost polite when Johnny asked:

"Just what is a drive, and where?"

"A simple matter," Mart Glasgow explained. "Did you ever see a match floating down a gutter? Well, let the gutter be Moose River, which is that water by the mill. And let the match be a few thousand saw logs. Then chaperon them logs with a bunch of worthless idle jacks. That's a drive."

"Only that?" Johnny grinned.

"Only that," Mart Glasgow told him. "The logs is up there. You want them down by the mill. That's the drive."

"Thanks for all that knowledge," Johnny said. "I'm a bit impulsive as you may have noticed, and if I've hurt your feelings you'll pardon me."

"The bush is full of impulsive guys," Mart Glasgow grinned meanly. "There's Larkin, he's bossing the drive, for one. But you'll find that out yourself. Impulsive? Larkin would have been a sergeant in the police this day, but that he got impulsive with a prisoner once."

"Now may Heaven be praised!" Johnny cried. "Would you believe luck could be so good? A policeman this Larkin was?"

"The jury called it justifiable homicide," Mart Glasgow explained. "But you'll see this Larkin."

"I sure will," Johnny told him. And with that, they parted. Mart Glasgow waited for the next train, while Johnny beat it back to the mill on Moose River, and following that stream, started off to find the drive.

JOHNNY BUCK had grabbed some provisions at the mill. But they petered out around the end of the fifth day, and he had not yet come on the drive.

But if he was short on grub, he

was long on information. His idea of a river was a broad sheet of smooth flowing water. Moose River turned out to be different. There were rapids here and there, and now and then a falls with a dam at the top and a log chute slanting down to the pools below. And, as Johnny thought, he had never struck a country where there were so few corners. However, as city corners had cops on them most of the time, he could stand that.

He got up, hungry, on his sixth morning and, after an hour's walk, came on a pile of saw-logs, neatly stacked by the bank of the river. He guessed he was getting closer to his goal. Another hour's hungry tramping and, coming round a bend, he saw the water no more. Instead, from shore to shore, save where fangs of rocks shoved through, saw-logs formed a bridge. They lay every which way, tangled like jackstraws. It was a jam, though this Johnny Buck could not know. On the shore several men sprawled lazily. They had long poles with spikes and hooks on the ends of them, and short heavy things like pickhandles with spikes on them, too, and they were basking in the sun quite comfortably.

There was one man, however, who was not idle. He was a little old man with a long gray beard, and he was prowling about on the jammed logs like a cat on a roof.

Johnny Buck came up to the loafing men and hailed them:

"Would this be the Dennis Drive?"

"It might, at that," one of them told him.

"And for why is it waitin' on the siding? And where is the main tracks? And is it waitin' for the up express?" Johnny asked innocently. For, if it is, I can tell you that I've

seen it myself, that there's no traffic on this river headin' up. And so, if you'll be so kind, will you be takin' them cruel-looking tools of yourn and start this drive moving?"

"And who the hell might you be?" a jack asked.

"I'm a friend to old Riverdog that won this drive at a game of poker," Johnny explained. "And I'm holdin' the fort while he has his plumbing overhauled. And you boys, you'd be employees, I reckon."

"You might call us that." The jack got up. He was as big as Johnny.

"The pity of it." Johnny backed off a pace. "Here I feel mean, and what do I find? An employee! And I got a hunch old Riverdog don't like his employees all busted up. And so, if you'll act calm, I'll be greatly obliged."

"This here drive is ten miles long," the jack explained. "My name it is Corrigan. What Corrigan says, he stands by. You can find trouble in every mile of the ten, but in the mile where Corrigan stands, you can find a great war."

"You interest me. I might say you tempt me," Johnny grinned. "I might even continue this little talk after hours, on a pleasure basis. But just now, I see afore me a job of work, and a batch of employees. And what I'd like is a word of sense."

"I can give ye that." The little gray-bearded man had scrambled ashore. "Ye asked if this is a drive. It was. When I run it last year, the logs moved. But since Larkin took hold things is changed."

"He sure changed you, Canthook," Corrigan grinned, and the little gray-bearded man caressed an ugly scar on his neck. Johnny had seen lumbermen fight once. He guessed how that scar had been made.

Canthook, however, disregarded the taunt. He grinned amiably at Johnny. Johnny threw him a question.

"This Larkin, is he an employee, too?"

"Lad, ye got a lot to learn," Canthook told him. "On a drive the boss is king. In fact there's two men in the bush that ain't employees. One is the boss, a king like I said. The other is the cook, and he's an emperor."

"The cook!" Johnny echoed, his hands straying to his belt. "And is the king mebbe visitin' near the emperor?"

"It is likely," Canthook told him. "But have ye come in an official capacity? And is it true that old Riverdog has bought this drive? Or are ye a nice young lamb lookin' for hungry lions?"

"It's me that's hungry," Johnny groaned. "So will you take me to Emperor Cook? 'Tis but etiquette to see the emperor before I calls on the king." And then he turned to Corrigan. "Do you keep on resting, you and them others. For I'll be back, and when I come I'll have the cord of the quitting time whistle in my pocket and if you are religious, pray for a full moon—the light'll be needed to brighten up our toil."

CANTHOOK showed him the way upriver. The water for a mile was choked with logs. Riverdog's little drive held enough saw-logs to build a small town. Farther up stray logs floated down and, here and there, idle lumberjacks loafed in the spring sushine.

"Poor lads," Canthook mourned. "How they're going to change. And what'd your name be, and what'll you do first?"

"Johnny Buck—eat," was the reply. And with that they went on in

silence, until, tied up to the shore, they discovered the wanigan, a shack on a shallow-draft, stoutly-built scow. Instead of a mast, the wanigan had a length of stovepipe and, as he came closer, Johnny thought the smell was grand. But though the odor of baking pies drew him on, he stopped for a moment as a question came to him. And he said to Canthook:

"Did this Larkin beat you up, old-timer?"

"Twice," Canthook replied.

"I'm sorry for once, but glad for twice," Johnny laughed. "It proves you had guts." And he grinned. "But if it'd been three times, it would have proved you a fool. For he's big, is he not?"

"Bigger'n you," Canthook told him. "You open that door and you'll see him, playing cards with the timekeeper. A grand graft. He wins mostly, and then the timekeeper sticks a new name in his little book, and Larkin draws the pay. Oh, since Dennis got rich and went to town, hell's been poppin' up here."

"But what about the emperor—the cook?" Johnny asked. "'Tis my experience that cooks is lonely minded. They holds a kitchen more sacred than a church."

"You will see," Canthook grinned. And Johnny pushed open the wanigan door. Two men sat at the table, playing cards. One of them was small and young, and he, Johnny guessed, was the timekeeper. The other man, a good two inches taller than Johnny, had a fighter's jaw on which grew an ugly bristle. His big, knotted hands cuddled five cards. It was Larkin.

By the stove a little, bent man was busy with pots and pans. He had a wizened face in which two fiery eyes glowed. Now and then his

red hand would clutch a heavy poker and the eyes would swing in his head until they dwelt on the two card players.

"That's Jinks, the cook—the emperor I told you of," said Canthook.

"A man I'm pleased to meet." Johnny breezed in. "For I've et nothing since yesterday, your royal highness, and if you got a pie idle, I can put it to work."

Jinks, the cook, grinned crookedly. Perhaps he had seen Larkin's upward lifting glance of anger. Perhaps he just liked Johnny's smiling face. Or, more likely, being an artist, who worked in flour and fat and jam, he craved the perfect public to appreciate his handiwork.

He took up a pie and a knife. Larkin dropped his cards and grated:

"Git out, or I'll throw you out, stranger." And he got to his feet. "Canthook, you got no sense? You crave more gentling?"

Old Canthook remained in the doorway. "Lumberin'!" he growled contemptuously. "This here is Mr. Larkin, Johnny. He drives the river with a deck o' cards, and leaves Providence for to do his work."

"I'll fix you after." Larkin turned on the cook. "You hand out no grub to this big guy."

"Since when was you handlin' my job?" the little cook yelped. He dropped the pie and reached for the poker. Johnny saw that the end of the poker was red-hot.

Larkin turned on Johnny. "You aim to move, or git moved?"

"Speakin' of movin'—" Johnny sprang past him and yanked the timekeeper to his feet, "I reckon you an' your little book can take a walk. Take a census. I'm checking you up later. You'd best produce a man for every name drawing cash."

LARKIN moved toward Johnny clumsily. Johnny twitched the timekeeper off his feet and heaved him toward the door. Old Canthook caught him and speeded him on his way. Johnny was in the door now. Larkin, head down, charged after him. Johnny leaped forward. "It'd be a shame to ruin that there pie," he said. "We can argue out here on the ground, Larkin."

"Just what are you driving at?" Larkin had followed him. Now Larkin, methodically shedding coat and outer shirt, was preparing for war.

"I thought you'd guessed," Johnny told him. "I'm the new broom that sweeps clean. And I don't need no dustpan for dirt like you. I heard o' you, you cop-trained bully. Will you walk into my beauty parlor, for I got an itch to move that big nose of yours and lift your face, and them ears that won't listen to reason might make nice vegetables when they're cauliflowered. And aside from that, you're standin' between me and my next meal. Is that enough, or do you want more conversation?"

The timekeeper had hustled down the bank and was now out of sight. The cook stood in the door of the wanigan. He said casually:

"I got a hunk of moose meat that'd go grand fried with onions."

"You can put it on now," Johnny told him. "I like mine rare. You just got time to broil it." Then Larkin, with a roar, charged, and Johnny set to work.

But this was no easy job. This Larkin was a heavy man and strong, and hard as well. And the first time Johnny got a blow home to that barrel chest, he glanced up in surprise to see if, by mistake, he had hit a tree. And when Larkin swung an uppercut to Johnny's head, the sun went out and a lot of stars began

to dance over the treetops, and the treetops themselves seemed to be nodding down at Johnny as if to watch him fall. Only Johnny did not fall. He shook his head, and the sun came back again, and Larkin winced as Johnny thudded that right fist of his into a thick, corded neck. And now they were locked together, and Larkin, as they fell, raked Johnny across the shin with his calked boot. And Johnny, beginning to get mad, caught a thumb that fumbled for his eye and bit it, and the fight was no longer a pretty thing to see.

How long it lasted, Johnny never knew. His guess was a year. They got to their feet finally, both battered, gasping, almost worn out. They surged toward each other, and Larkin swung one final blow that died almost before it reached its target. The target, however, was Johnny's empty stomach, and the blow bent Johnny forward so that all his weight was behind the fist that seemed to flash toward Larkin's jaw. Larkin went down and rolled over and skidded along the mud of the steep river bank. He brought up for a second on a stranded log, and then man and log together slid into the water. Johnny Buck stood there, swaying on weary legs.

"I reckon that starts the drive," said Johnny Buck.

Jinks the cook grinned. Jinks said:

"See what fools folks is about vittles. If I'd put that steak of yours on to fry, it would have been overdone."

THE gang dropped in to supper that night, filled with curiosity. They had seen Larkin depart. They had noticed certain changes in his appearance,

changes that did not improve his looks. All they could get from Johnny Buck, or from Canthook and the cook, was this—as Johnny Buck put it:

"River driving is sure a dangerous game. Mr. Larkin was teachin' me some of the angles an' we met with an accident. Seein' he got hurt worse'n I did, I promised I'd stay on and hold down his job for him."

The gang had their own ideas. But all that they were sure of was this: Larkin had gone. So had the timekeeper, and a big, grinning greenhorn thought he was going to boss the drive. They waited patiently for an opportunity to gentle Johnny Buck.

But Johnny, though green, had good advice on tap. Old Canthook put him wise to things.

"Larkin hung the drive here because he was lazy. It ought to have gone another forty mile with the first freshet. Now we got to use the water stored in the dam upstream. I can go and handle the dam. Once the water comes, this jam'll lift and bust. Then for fifty mile it is plain sailing. All you got to do is keep the logs moving."

"I been told that," Johnny answered. "The logs is here; they ought to be down at the mill. We shift them there. It's like matches floatin' in the gutter."

"I seen you been taught," Canthook laughed. "You seen them logs piled up below? That's a jam. You're like to have a worse one down at Horseneck, which is a mean bend full of rocks. It's fifty mile to Horseneck."

"And what is to be done with a jam?" Johnny asked.

"Why, the boss walks out and figures which is the key log," Canthook explained. "Then the best jacks free that log, and the drive goes on."

"Ain't that simple?" Johnny answered. "I thought this here river driving was tough work."

"Tough work?" Canthook checked a smile. "You won't leak if I whisper a secret? Reason so many lads come river driving is they like a rest. It tones 'em up for hard work in the barrooms when they gets their pay. Well, I'll handle the water at the dam for you. I needn't tell you that you've got to handle these men."

"I reckon I can do that," Johnny said simply. "I didn't tell 'em how I gentled Larkin. Know why? Well, it might make 'em ambitious. That Corrigan lad, now; if he knew there'd been a fight, he might figure he'd missed some fun. Every fight breeds a winner and every winner gets competition, and I come here to drive logs, not bust noses."

CANTHOOK looked at Johnny Buck sadly. Canthook knew that gang. He knew that right now Corrigan and half a dozen others were sizing Johnny up, figuring when and how would be best to tackle him.

But Canthook guessed that Johnny would come through all right. He left next morning for the dam, and toward evening the water began to rise a bit in Moose River and the logs began to chafe and Johnny, herding the men down, set them to work. Wisely, he gave no detailed orders. These men knew their stuff. Work, after a long spell of laziness, was not so bad. They got the drive under way, and down the river it crawled.

But the work was hard. When they came to a falls, the logs had to be guided into the chute. The wanigan had to be dismantled and built again on another scow below the obstruction. Or, where the country

suitied, it had to be dragged overland and launched again below.

And Johnny knew nothing of the work. Only his knowledge of men saved him. He passed the words to Jinks that the boss wanted no graft on the grub, and the meals began to show the effect of that. He picked out the natural leaders in the gang, Corrigan and a half-breed named Laroche, and he camped on their tails. The other men followed like sheep.

But it took them ten days to reach Horseneck, and all the time the water was dropping. Up at the dam, Canthook was eking it out.

It was a gray dawn that saw the jam form. Weary men in wet clothing stood on the bank while the logs came thudding down, to heap up in confusion. Johnny, at the tail of the drive, got the news and came a-hopping.

He stood a moment, staring out at the tangled saw logs. Corrigan, leaning on his peavy, grinned. Johnny saw that grin. He longed to handle Corrigan, to settle the big jack once and for all. He guessed that Corrigan was a better man than Larkin. But Corrigan, in one respect, was a better man than Johnny. He knew all about drives. He could pick the key log in that jam and start the tangle moving once more.

Johnny turned to him.

"What's next, Corrigan?"

"That's up to you." Corrigan grinned maliciously. "I reckon you'd best step out and show us what to do. You're boss."

"I guess I will." Johnny peeled off his coat and grabbed a pike pole. He sprang out clumsily on a log, stumbled and straddled another, sprawled off that and slid down the greasy side of a third and splashed into a pocket of open water. He had made, perhaps, twenty feet. As his head broke the surface, he heard

loud laughter. Johnny Buck saw red, now. He climbed out and crept back to shore.

"You find the key log?" Corrigan jeered.

"I know where it is," Johnny replied, voice cold and face grim.

"Is that so?" Laroche, the half-breed, sneered.

"There's two key logs," Johnny said gravely. "They ain't out there. I found 'em ashore."

His eye caught Laroche's. Laroche backed away a pace. Johnny dropped his pike pole and turned to Corrigan.

"I reckon it's you, then," said Johnny Buck. "Do I get fair play?"

The lumberjacks shouted. They got Johnny's meaning. Corrigan stripped off his shirt. The two men stood facing each other, ringed about by the gang of river drivers.

RIVERDOG got out of bed. He slid into a dressing gown, and shook off the nurse as a horse might shed a fly. He ambled down tiled corridors till he came to an office where the gang boss of this private hospital sat. Riverdog eyed this great doctor morosely and said:

"You told me I had to rest up till I was fit to be sliced? Well, I ain't resting here none in bed. Pain's gone. I guess I'd best move out for some real relaxation."

The doctor eyed him speculatively. "If you'll promise to take things easy it might be all right. You aren't building up much here, for a fact."

"You got good sense," Riverdog grinned. "Speaking man to man, I think a few days in the country might help."

The doctor had a vision of Riverdog lying in an invalid chair on the veranda of his son's country house.

"Go to it," he said.

Riverdog, once dressed and free of restraint, made his simple preparations, ending with the purchase of much transportation. He hit the mill on Moose River at dusk. He hired a man to pack his truck and slowly began to follow the upstream trail. His old eyes scanned every bend for signs of the drive. He came, finally, to the lower end of Horseneck. Here he saw logs and to spare; a towering pile of them, with water trickling through the dam they formed. It was as pretty a jam as Riverdog had ever seen.

But where were the men? Not out there on the logs bucking trouble. There was not a man in sight. Riverdog broke into a limping trot. This wasn't exactly relaxation, but a jam didn't cater to rest in Riverdog's world.

The trail led up over a rise. He could see the near end of the jam now. The gang was there. But what in hell was up? It looked like a fight. Riverdog grumbled:

"Just like them selfish jacks. Enjoying themselves while my good logs get stuck."

He shouted weakly. But nobody heard. The ring of watchers broke suddenly, and Riverdog saw that one of the two combatants was down. The other, standing there, was Johnny Buck. Even at that distance, Riverdog could recognize Johnny's grin.

Old Riverdog shut up. He stole on, keeping in the brush out of sight. So long as Johnny was boss, he'd let the big boy run the show. He stopped where he could get a good look at things without being seen.

But what was Johnny doing now? Bending over the prone Corrigan and dragging him along toward the river's edge? And that other man, following meekly, just where did he fit in?

Johnny Buck, now saying something, seemed to be checking the other men:

"I want his damn brains—that's all. And I want your arms, Laroche. And the rest of you rummies can stick ashore. Come along, buddy."

And, dragging the half-senseless Corrigan, Johnny Buck stepped clumsily out on the jam.

HE paused once, where that pocket of water showed. He dipped Corrigan in. Corrigan's eyes opened wider, and he made feeble efforts to rise. Laroche led the way now, and Corrigan, after a few yards of bumping progress, got to his feet. For a few steps it was Johnny who supported him. But lumberjacks are tough. Soon Corrigan was going it alone. Soon he was steadying the unpracticed Johnny, as they approached the center of the jam. Now, with Laroche beside him, Corrigan was poking and prying at the tangled timber. He paused once, and though old Riverdog could not hear the words, he knew that Corrigan was telling the clumsy Johnny Buck to go back. Once that key log started, the jam would be no place for a novice. But Johnny shook his head. Riverdog saw Corrigan glance at Laroche. He saw Laroche nod assent. Then the two of them closed in on Johnny and grabbed him, pinioning his arms to his sides. The gang on the shore broke for the jam. They came swarming out and, for a moment, Johnny Buck and his captors were hidden from Riverdog's eyes. Then the gang surged shoreward. Corrigan was alone by the key log. The others were lugging a fighting, struggling madman to safety. Riverdog grinned:

"So he can be riled? Thank Heaven, he's human."

They dropped Johnny on the safe, dry ground. They stood, a barrier of flesh, between him and the peril he wished to face. And out on the jam, Corrigan twitched the key log free. The dam creaked and shivered. Corrigan danced shoreward.

Riverdog came out of the bush. Nobody saw him come.

Johnny Buck saw old Riverdog. He broke through the gang and grabbed the old man by the arm.

"What in hell are you doin' up here?" bawled Johnny Buck.

"Relaxing," Riverdog explained. "Just resting up a bit."

He grinned at Johnny. "And what was all that traipsin' around for?" he asked. "Just why does a clumsy ox like you have to go out on the jam? And for what reason do you beat up employees?"

"You seen all that?" Johnny laughed. "I had my reasons. I wanted to see if this here Corrigan could take a licking. Apart from that, I knew he was a good man. Now I settled that, we can give him this drive to handle."

"You seem to be handling it all right yourself," Riverdog said.

"You'd say that," Johnny glowered down at him. "But you don't haul me off my regular job."

"And what may that be?" Riverdog asked.

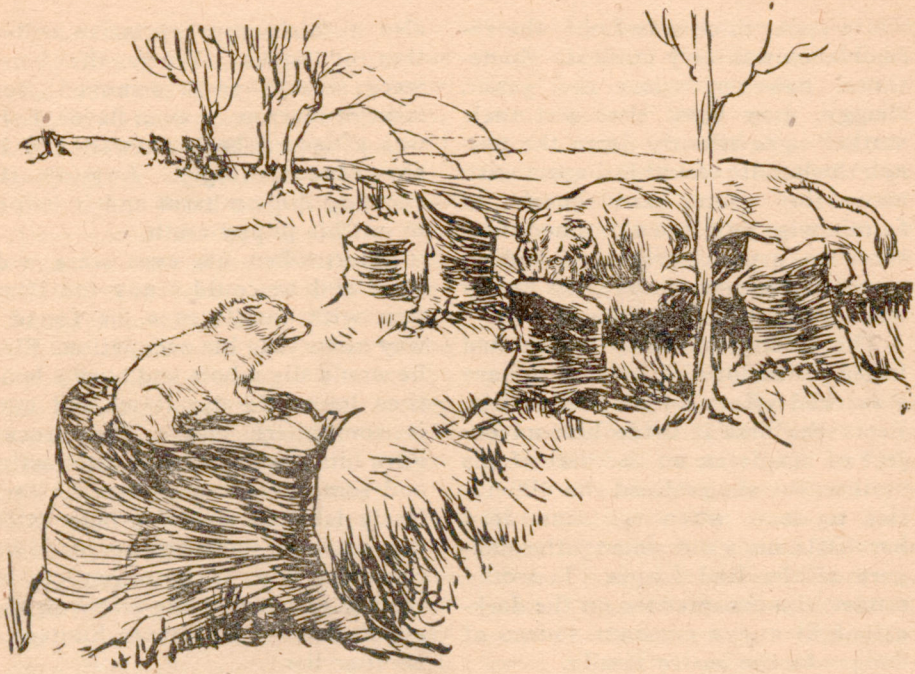
"Lookin' after you," Johnny stated.

Riverdog grinned. He grabbed the pack saddle from his guide. He opened it and took out a greasy paper bag. From it he produced a dingy, flattened object. This he offered to Johnny Buck.

"Have a sinker," said Riverdog. "Hell, it's busted."

"That's all right, buddy," Johnny Buck took a hefty bite.

"You stop calling me 'buddy,'" Riverdog grunted. "I see what happens to your buddies, Johnny Buck."



SABER AND FANG

By Bigelow Neal

The white warrior of the Bad Lands proves his courage!

LOBO was born in a den high on the face of Hellgate Butte. The entrance to the den was between two ledges of sandstone. The upper ledge, projecting a foot or so from the face of the cliff served partly as an awning and partly as a support for a drapery of creeping cedar which shaded and concealed the entrance. The lower ledge, extending in the form of a semicircle, furnished a convenient observation platform as well as a secure and wind-proof playground for the young folk of the wild.

There were six of them in the be-

ginning. Five resembled dingy brown puppies as indeed they nearly were, but Lobo, the sixth and last, was, to use a slang phrase, "something decidedly else again." There could be little doubt as to his relationship to the others, for he had the same pointed little ears, the same sharp nose, and the same beady, buttonlike eyes. But his color, unlike the others, was, from the day of his birth, as white as new-fallen snow.

When born, the six all put together—and they were wrapped in a compact bundle most of the time—were about the size of a partially inflated football and, except for the

white spot which was Lobo, the resemblance was very marked. Sometimes, however, when the gaunt, shaggy, gray beast that was their mother came silently down the tunnel, the bundle would fall apart with many tiny grunts and squeals, to form a wiggling line along her sides there to grunt some more and to squeal some more until they finally went sound asleep on the job.

The oddity of color which had fallen to the lot of Lobo was to have a marked effect on his entire life. From the first it made him an object of suspicion on the part of his mother, for she realized the difficulties to come when she must lead her little ones out among the dangers of the Bad Lands. It would render him conspicuous on the darkest night and a constant source of danger to the entire family.

And so the lot of Lobo was not an easy one even from the beginning. Sometimes she would allow him to eat and sometimes she would not. Frequently, when he rooted along her sides and got too near her great jaws, she would snap at him or cuff him, or perhaps throw him end over end. Often, by the time he had picked himself up out of some corner, and after the thumpings of his fear-stricken puppy heart had subsided, he would return to the line only to find that the cupboard was bare indeed.

But Lobo's was an optimistic disposition. Although there were occasions when he huddled in some lonely corner, and others when the walls of his little stomach chafed against each other, there were also the long hours of his mother's absence when he found many exciting things to occupy his mind.

For instance, there were a good many sticks scattered about the den that needed chewing. There was

also a fairly representative collection of bones. While the bones were several years removed from meat or marrow or even flavor, Lobo was a natural-born chewer, and he chewed accordingly. Anyway, the chewing did no harm and it helped to cut his puppy teeth.

Later, when his eyes were wide open and he could study the situation with intelligence, he found a way of varying his occupation. First he would dig a hole and bury a bone, then he would dig it up and bury it somewhere else. The process gave him great personal satisfaction and some exercise. When he carelessly left the end of a bone sticking out and some brother or sister ran away with it, he never lost his temper or showed the slightest disappointment. He simply hunted up another bone.

One night the mother had hardly left before she was back again, carrying the dead body of a jack rabbit which she deposited on the floor of the den. Then she left them alone. By some instinctive process the youngsters found that jack rabbit was good to eat and, although the rabbit was nearly as large as the combined litter when they made the discovery, there soon came a time when it was reduced to a little skin and a few bones, while the puppies had swelled in proportion. Lobo went to bed that night with a plume of rabbit fur on the top of his nose, but his rest was broken by certain pains in the region of his stomach, causing him to thrash about and even to bark a bit in his sleep.

IT was at the end of six or eight weeks and the puppy had become about the size of an ordinary garden variety of house cat, when for Lobo, the days of care-free puppyhood came to a sudden

and violent end, and the shadow of a great tragedy settled over his future.

One bright May afternoon, when a warm sun streamed down the mouth of the tunnel, Lobo was bitten by the bug of exploration. It so happened that his mother had not come home at all that morning, and when she did come in the afternoon, she seemed very tired. She was also short of patience, and when the litter lined up for their combined supper and breakfast she struck at Lobo savagely.

Retiring to a corner, the puppy dug up one of his bones and chewed disconsolately until he became convinced that the operation was merely adding fuel to his hunger instead of appeasing his appetite. Finally, passing the sleeping family, he went to the tunnel and crept up a little way. He knew he had no right to do it. Time and again he had been punished for this same offense, but the urge to explore had grown stronger day by day.

Slowly and cautiously the adventurer worked his way up until he came to the drapery of cedar. For the moment he contented himself with sniffing eagerly at the aromatic branches and the pungent needles, but his activities broke away at a section of the drapery and the view which opened before him caused his eyes to grow large and round with wonder.

He was looking out over the Bad Lands of Dakota. Before him was a tumultuous and chaotic tangle of hills and buttes. Below was a maze of wandering valleys and canyons. They seemed to begin nowhere in particular and to end in much the same place. Their only claim to orderliness lay in hopeless confusion. In places their flat floors were covered with mats of gumbo weed and

irregular patches of grass, but mostly they glared back at the observer with the lifeless, glassy stare of blue-white alkali.

Here and there coulees and draws scored the sides of the larger buttes, and where springs seeped forth from beds of lignite coal, there were clusters of poplar, chokeberry and plums, while down near the level of the canyon floor the draws were choked with buffalo berry and thorn-apple bushes, with here and there a box elder, ash, or cottonwood towering high against its cliffs.

To Lobo it was a land of wonder and mystery. Having no actual knowledge of danger the impulses which made the hair on his neck, alternately rise and fall, as well as those which made his nose tremble and his lips draw back in tiny snarls came in the form of instinct. He saw nothing to fear and yet he trembled at everything.

A breeze came up out of the canyon, and the little fellow moistened his nose with his tiny pink tongue and wiggled his nostrils again and again, as he sorted and catalogued the scents on the evening air. Most of them meant nothing whatever to him, but one caused him to prick up his ears and advance eagerly to the outer rim of the ledge. There he was divided between fear of the precipitous cliff and the eagerness at what he saw on the alkali below. His nose was correct. A jack rabbit sat at the foot of the cliff, and Lobo, reasoning that his supper was there for the taking, set out to find a way down the face of the butte.

The trail, when he found it, began at one end of the ledge and zig-zagged down a deep washout. At times there was really no path at all, merely places where the veining in the face of the cliff offered footholds, and there Lobo's sharp little

claws were taxed to their utmost to prevent his going headlong into the canyon.

Nor did he make the descent without other delay, for every turn opened a new vista of adventure and mystery. Stunted sage bushes were scattered here and there, and each, gnarled and twisted by exposure into grotesque formations, called for its full share of investigation. When nearly to the foot of the path, he came upon something which sent shivers of fear along his sides, and he stopped to sniff the air repeatedly. It was a place on the slope of the butte where the earth had settled to form a deep crater. From the bottom came a slender column of smoke and gas, and as the puppy edged warily along its rim, he felt fires which year after year had been following the lignite coal veins and the withering heat of subterranean eating like a malignant growth into the heart of the butte. There were other craters also, and now, as the evening air grew still, their combined vapors formed a curtain of greenish-white fog which stretched across the canyon from wall to wall.

OWING to a bend in the course of the washout, the trail debouched on the canyon floor at a point almost below the ledge from which it began. Here the puppy came upon another phenomenon of the Bad Lands, and perhaps the most weird of all. It was an area perhaps two rods square and directly beneath the ledge, where the smooth, hard floor of the canyon gave way to a treacherous and seemingly bottomless slime-filled pit. As Lobo stopped on the trunk of a petrified log which bridged one end of the sink hole, he was looking down on a miniature lake of almost liquid mud. The slimy, quivering surface re-

sponded in horrible writhings to unseen and unfelt impulses from below, and gas bubbles, forming in the depths of the pit, came to the surface with sputtering plops, while from time to time the mud moved in writhing spirals. Lobo shrank away and passed on, but his fear would have been still greater had he known how many buffaloes and deer and elk had added their bones to that gruesome collection in the depths of the terrible pit.

Once on the canyon floor, he made for the place where the rabbit had been, and when he got there he received his first lesson in a school which was to grant a diploma only at the expense of much suffering and pain. It seemed that the rabbit had both nose and ears, and having used them throughout Lobo's noisy descent of the path, he had elected to be absent when the puppy arrived.

Finding himself obliged to be content with the smell of a vanished supper, Lobo selected a petrified stump and sat down on its top to study the situation. The first phenomenon to attract his attention was a place at the foot of the cliff, where a hole led into the clay. The hole itself was of no great interest, but when he first saw it, its mouth was partly hidden in a small cloud of dust through which a plumed tail waved from side to side. Presently the tail disappeared, the dust settled, and only the hole remained. When a moment later dirt and gravel began spurting once more, Lobo got up, turned around and sat down again so that he might have a better view. The process, whatever it was and meant, repeated itself at regular intervals and with little variation, until the puppy's mind wandered again and he shifted his gaze to the far side of the canyon.

Suddenly he was all attention. From some unknown source had come a note of danger. The wild people felt it, even though they could not see. A magpie sprang from the limb of a cottonwood and flopped away, uttering rasping cries of hate. A kingbird flew upward from the nest of his mate and sounded an alarm which sent cottontails pattering for cover, and even a warrior weasel darted for the protection of his hole. Then the sounds died away and a deathly silence fell.

She came down the bed of the opposite coulee as smoothly and as silently as the drifting mist from the lignite fires, a long, sinuous, tawny shape, and when Lobo saw her, every hair on his neck stood erect, his lips drew back and he snarled in puppy fear and in hate.

Immu-Tanka, which translated from the language of the Dakotas means "cougar," came from a place among the higher peaks. She had come into a land of peace where the wild folk had lived for many years, with no fear of the greater beasts of prey, and at her coming the very nature of the place was changed. She found it a paradise of the wild; she made of it a living hell.

Now as Lobo watched her descent to the floor of the canyon, gliding between stumps of petrified wood and mushroomed of rock-capped clay, sometimes a tawny shadow and sometimes a darting flash of yellow and white, he was too terrified to run while he could. Instead, he was held immovable in the grip of a paralyzing fascination. One moment the canyon had lapsed into the silence of watchful waiting, the next a shrill, high scream rent the air. Again and again it came, the death cries of a cottontail in the fiendishly cruel claws of the great cat. It was

not her nature to kill mercifully, for hers was the spirit incarnate of cruelty and torture, but in time the cries grew weaker and finally died away. The cottontail was dead and the reign of terror had begun.

FROM that time on, the Bad Lands was to become the land of the stalking death. No longer would the cottontails play in the moonlight. No doe would dare leave her fawn, no eagle its nest. Intermingled with the perfume of wild flowers was to come the stench of mangled flesh. The reign of the killer was on, nor was there a living thing that dared dispute her path.

From his perch on the stump, Lobo had been a horrified spectator of the tragedy. So spellbound was he that he never thought of escaping when he might do so, and now it would appear that his turn had come, for the tawny one was on the floor of the canyon and coming directly toward him. It was a terrible fear which came over him now, so great in fact that every muscle seemed paralyzed and, instead of making an effort to escape the impending doom, he merely crouched in his tracks and either whimpered in abject terror, or made pitiful little attempts at bluster by ways of snarls which, from sheer terror, choked and became almost lost in his tiny throat.

Perhaps, had he remained quiet, she might have passed without suspecting his presence, but a sound reached her ears and she turned the gaze of her cruel eyes in his direction. Instantly she paused and crouched, and now the puppy was fascinated again by the lashing of her tawny tail.

With few preliminaries, the big cat leaped clear of the alkali, but in

the hour of supreme test instinct acted upon the nerves and muscles of the puppy. When the cougar struck, Lobo was not there. A sudden spring had carried him clear and nearly to the foot of the cliff. But the move had not bettered his position, for now he was on open, level ground, the speed of the lion was as ten to one, and the end was a foregone conclusion. Without pausing for a second crouch, she lunged forward, and that would have marked the end of Lobo had not a singular circumstance interfered. When the puppy sprang away the second time, he saw before him the hole from which the dust had been spurting but a few moments before, and he took advantage of the offered refuge. And so the cat, raking the foot of the cliff with her terrible claws, received nothing for her pains but gravel and clay.

Although temporarily safe, Lobo was now between the horns of a dilemma. Behind him, the raking claws of the cat, and ahead the owner of the plume which had been waving so bravely from the mouth of the hole but a moment before. That the tail was still on duty was evidenced by the fact that the puppy found himself facing a shower of dirt and gravel, while the sound of the busily scratching feet came from just ahead. To go on was unthinkable, to retreat meant certain death. He compromised the matter by turning to face the source of greater danger and squatting where he stood.

It appeared that hope died hard in the heart of the killer cat, for after tearing at the mouth of the hole with no result save to increase her anger to blind fury, she suddenly drove one paw, down the tunnel, clear to her shoulder. Lobo saw the paw coming and retreated hastily.

In doing so he bumped into something behind and the scratching gave way to an ominous silence. The puppy was literally rear to rear with the owner of the tunnel.

Evidently the hole, primarily the home of a badger, was now undergoing extensive alterations for the accommodation of the new tenant. It was fortunate, for the extra diameter of the tunnel left room above the puppy's back and head for a phenomenon which was probably to save his life, for immediately following the bump in his rear, a shower of amber drops passed up the incline in the general direction of the lion. They went over Lobo, disintegrating as they went, and ended their flight in the nose, eyes, and mouth of the would-be killer.

Still shaking with fear of the cat ahead and with an equal fear of the unknown behind, the puppy hugged the earth and shivered. Apparently, however, the crisis had come and gone, for the owner of the tail withdrew to the farther recesses of her home, and the head of the killer disappeared from the mouth of the hole. The silence remained unbroken except for a queer gagging and choking sounds from above, and when Lobo found courage to creep up and peer out, there was nothing in sight, and only a sickening stench was left to show that the owner of the plumed tail had done his work and had done it well.

For the time being, the puppy had enough of adventure. In his relief at escaping the clutches of the lion, he forgot the fascination of the many new things about him, and forgot his hunger as well. He had but one desire, and that was to reach the protection of his safe, if sometimes unhappy home, with the least possible delay. He scuttled away with dispatch.

BUT Lobo's troubles were not over. Somewhere within the fiery heart of the hill there were confined two great agencies of destruction, water and intense heat. Occasionally it would happen that the fire would eat its way to a seam in the coal vein and, in doing so, tap an underground reservoir of water. At such a time the liberated waters rushed out into the white-hot area around and above the fire, and the instant result was the generation of a steam pressure, measurable only in millions of tons. While a portion of the pressure might escape through the burned-out vein, it usually shook the very foundations of Hell-gate Butte. This was exactly what happened as the puppy began the ascent of the trail. With a rumble and a roar, with a wild hiss of steam and thundering of falling rocks, the butte, which so richly deserved its name, trembled under the force of the explosion.

To Lobo it did no immediate harm. Although rocks showered about him and the air was filled with a blinding dust, this newborn terror only loaned him the wings of greater speed. He reached the platform in safety, ran the length of it and started down the tunnel. Halfway down, he stopped abruptly. The den and the lower part of the tunnel was completely filled with earth and rock.

It was a very lonely puppy that sat on the ledge as night settled over the Bad Lands. His mother, his playmates, and his home was gone. He was a completely helpless stranger, in perhaps the strangest land of all, with no place to go for protection and with no one to whom he might turn for help. And as darkness came, the things about him which had been interesting in the light of day became hideous, ever-

shifting shadows, under the flickering gleam of the northern lights. Then, too, a dull, wavering glow came from the burning vein and lurid lights played on the curtain of gas which stretched across the canyon. Torn between hunger, which bade him go forth in search of food, and fear of the dark world about him, which caused him to cringe at the slightest sound, he finally retreated to the mouth of what had been his home and curled himself into a shivering ball to await the coming of dawn.

Nor did daylight bring any great relief to Lobo, for when it came at last, he ventured out on the ledge again; he saw a tawny shape gliding across the floor of the canyon. Again fear clutched hard at the little fellow's breast and again he retreated to the scant protection of the tunnel, there to whimper in loneliness and fear throughout the day.

That night, however, hunger conquered and, when darkness came, its pangs overcame even his dread of the unknown. And so he set out on the greatest adventure of all, for from this one there could be no turning back. Either he would live or he would die, and it seemed that all the cards of fate were stacked against him from the first.

At the foot of the path he hesitated, for one direction appeared as fearful as another. Deciding in favor of the trees across the canyon, he had nearly reached them when he remembered that the lion had come that way, and he turned abruptly to follow the canyon wall.

All night long he wandered from place to place. He found water and it helped, but he had not eaten for the better part of three days, and no amount of water could stop the gnawing in his stomach. When daylight came, he was growing desper-

ate, but the roar of an eagle's wings just above his head gave fair warning, and he dodged into a washout to spend the day. There he found a little pool and, as luck would have it, a mouse had fallen in and was trying desperately to climb the low but steep and slippery side. Lobo helped him and then ate him.

The mouse tasted good, but the tiny morsel tended more to aggravate than to relieve the pangs of hunger. In fact, the gnawing had become so insistent that he could no longer sleep, and so spent the day wandering up and down the washout, leaving its protection only with the approach of night.

That night he learned he could, by force of necessity, exist as a vegetarian. Finding some tender grass near a spring, he stuffed himself with that and finished off with a desert of last year's dried and withered fruit from the bush of a wild rose. The next night he abandoned both the grass and rose fruits in favor of buckbrush berries and grasshoppers.

On the following night he frightened a hawk from her nest and ate up the eggs, and on the next he caught two mice and a young jack rabbit. By the end of the first week he was finding enough to eat at night so that he could sleep soundly throughout the day, and now, too, he had established headquarters in an abandoned skunk hole and was able to sleep in comparative safety.

Lobo's first real battle was fought on home ground, so to speak, when a weasel came down the hole and mistook the whiteness of his coat for that of a defenseless jack rabbit. When the dust had settled and the puppy had eaten the weasel, he went out and sat before his den commun-

ing with the stars and the rising moon. This was his first attack of sentiment, and he wore it out trying to learn to sing. He became too sentimental, however, and by the time the trembling and uncertain sounds from his throat were cut and shredded by his quivering jaws and teeth, they passed out onto the night air in worse condition than ever.

That night he stumbled onto a dead horse and found a dozen or more coyotes ahead of him. When he caught their scent it thrilled him mightily, for he believed he had come among people of his kind, but as he advanced in friendly eagerness, they slipped one by one into the shadows, and he was left alone.

In a month, Lobo had outgrown the skunk hole and had moved to the former home of a badger. Here the clay was softer and he tried to enlarge the hole as fast as he grew, but he was developing rapidly, and he was not an expert on matters of excavation. It was the need of a larger home which led to another great adventure and was to make of him an outcast from the Bad Lands.

It began when his wanderings took him back to the sink hole at the foot of Hell-gate Butte. It was nearly dawn, he had dined well and stood in need of a safe and comfortable bed. Crossing the petrified log, he climbed the path and so to the ledge and the mouth of the old tunnel. There he halted abruptly, for he had seen something staring at him from the gloom of the tunnel: two glaring points of light that expanded to fearful yellow orbs and contracted to yellowish-green slits charged with cruelty and hate. As the puppy, once again fascinated by those terrible eyes, stood trembling, he heard a soft swishing sound as the long yellow tail whipped the

sides of the hole, and he saw that the calculating green slits were slowly but surely closing up the gap between them. Lobo was no longer a coward. He came from the greatest fighters in the North American wild, but he came, too, from among the craftiest of all. Knowing he stood no chance with the cougar, he turned and ran away with all his might.

Down into the canyon he went, with the cat hard at his heels. Out into the alkali, and still the yellow fury held her pace. Perhaps she knew the people of Lobo, possibly she sensed the challenge of the future should she allow the white one to escape. At any rate he could not shake her off, and at the best he could do no more than maintain his lead.

Every living thing fled from before them. Magpies and kingbirds climbed into the morning air, screeching and screaming in anger and in warning. Deer gave way to the right and left, and a herd of wild horses thundered from sight. Almost before his nose, the terrified puppy saw jack rabbits running for life and prairie dogs barking in fright as they scampered for their mounds. Ordinarily the mountain lion does not believe in the chase. Its policy is to lie in ambush and spring without warning, but the lion on the trail of Lobo had developed a persistency worthy of a better cause. She did not give over the pursuit until she had literally run the puppy out of the Bad Lands, and when the tawny fury reached the top of a high bluff, she was looking out onto the level prairies of Dakota where she did not dare to go. But far out she saw a tiny streak of white just disappearing into the green and silver of buffalo grass and sage.

AND so Lobo, driven from the land of his nativity, became an outcast and a wanderer on the prairie; but his ancestors had roamed from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains, and the puppy proceeded to demonstrate his ability to care for himself no matter where he might be. In the timber along the Missouri, he established a temporary home. Food was plentiful, and by the time the first snow came he was larger than any but the largest dog. All that winter he kept on growing, and by spring he was taller and longer than a St. Bernard. He never became a killer of cattle, for he learned to associate them with men and his startling color made him timid, yet game continued plentiful and at the end of the second winter the once timid puppy had grown into that which he was intended to be, an albino buffalo wolf, and among the largest of his kind.

Because the people of Lobo do not mate until they are two years old, the white wolf was for many months content to be alone. Of late, however, strange longings were stirring in his breast, and once or twice his sensitive ears caught sounds drifting on the night winds, and he knew that somewhere far back in the Bad Lands there must be a female of his kind. Late in the winter, when the mating season came, he could withstand the call no longer and so one night, when the air gave promise of approaching spring and the moonlight played softly on the snow-clad prairies, the outcast answered the primal call of the wild folk and turned his face back toward the Bad Lands.

Again the shadows of night had settled over the canyon at the foot of Hell-gate Butte. In the southeast a crimson glow heralded the

rising of the moon. Overhead a varicolored banner waved from horizon to horizon, and lancelike shafts of light darted upward to pause, to tremble, and to retreat again into the northern sky. The curtain of steam, stretching across the valley, reflected the coppery glow of the burning coal vein and the rays of the northern lights. Except where the wind had swept them bare, the rocks and the age-worn hills were blanketed under a mantle of white.

On the ledge before the den which had once been Lobo's home, Immu-Tanka, the cougar, lay crouched against the rock and, since she had lain there, no sound had come from the valley below. The fear of her cruel claws was driven deep into the wild and the hills, that once had been the playground of so many living things, were all but empty of life. For nearly two years there had been none that dared dispute her path, and to-night she was looking out over a land wherein her queenship had never been challenged. But even as her eyes swept the canyon and the peaks about in search of an objective for her cruelty, a new factor appeared upon the scene.

At first the cold eyes of the cougar noted a rift in the wall of vapor below, where it eddied as if about a moving body, and there the whiteness of the steam became intensified. In a moment the passage of the body had rent the veil asunder, and the cat was looking down upon a living creature such as she had never seen before.

Standing broadside to her, the moonlight shimmered on the satin whiteness of his coat, and struck fire from the tints of bronze in his cape-like mane. Intuitively the killer felt a threat in the presence of the stranger below. She sensed it in his pose and in the smoldering fires that

glowed in his eyes. When she stirred and his gaze met hers, she felt it in the phosphorescent gleam of his fangs and in the deep rumbling snarl that forced his breath onto the still, cold air in a cloud, and the snarl was charged with hate. Long ago she had forgotten him, but he had not forgotten her, and the Lobo that faced her now was not the cringing puppy that she had once driven from the Bad Lands.

At sight of her, memories came crowding on the mind of the wolf, and with the memories came a reborn hate more terrible than ever, because of the years it had smoldered within his shaggy breast. Now his pointed ears were erect and as his gaze met the stare of the tawny cat, his eyes were flickering slits. With a leap, the great wolf reached the petrified log by the sink hole, where the mud, warmed by water flowing from near the fires, sucked and sputtered as he had seen it so long before. Giant strides carried him up the path. In a moment he reached the ledge and the two great beasts stood face to face.

At the spitting hiss of the cat, Lobo did not retreat. This time she was not to sink her teeth in the flesh of a defenseless foe. Here she had met an antagonist worthy of her steel. True, she had those terrible claws and those curved and cruel teeth, and she was as quick as only a cat can be. But Lobo outweighed her by fifty pounds, and his jaws were far more powerful than her own, while his fangs were equally as sharp, and his speed was nearly as great as that of the cougar. Lastly, he brought to this battle of giants the intelligence and cunning of a wolf.

Lobo dropped his head and ad-

vanced a step. The cat spat and hissed again. Her tail lashed the ground on either side while mighty muscles rippled beneath her tawny hide as she crouched to spring. Lobo advanced another step, and now the cat left the earth and spread-eagled herself against the sky. When she came down, she struck—nothing at all. Lobo was not there. She might have taken warning, too, from that, for as she landed on the place where he had been, she heard a sharp, metallic click like the closing of a steep trap.

Again they faced each other, and again it was the cat that sprang. Once more she found nothing beneath her, but this time the needle-like teeth of the wolf struck true. When the lion crouched for another spring there was a long gash in her side and crimson stains were spreading on the snow.

For the third time the lion sprang to the attack. This time she came low, and her claws raked the air on either side. One of them wrenched a tuft of hair from Lobo's silvery cape, but he repaid the debt with interest with another gash along the lion's flank. Again and again, she sprang, snarling, hissing, spitting, bringing to her task all the fury of her smarting wounds. But as often as she struck there was nothing there, while about her, darting in and out, with no sound but the clicking of razor-sharp teeth, flashed the cunning wolf. Once she, too, tried genuine craft. Throwing herself on her back, she waited his assault. In that position, did he attack, she could cut and slash him literally into ribbons. When he came, he passed too high for her to reach him, and

before she could recover herself another gash appeared, this one along her throat. Driven mad by fury and blinded by her own blood, she raised herself to her full height and stood erect. There Lobo saw his chance. One last flash of white, the full weight of the wolf lunged forward, and the blinded lion fell. Over and out, and then over, and over again she pitched from the ledge into the abyss below. A single wild shriek rent the air and a dull sputtering sound came up from below. The reign of terror was ended. The sink hole had claimed its own.

And now, from the ledge above, a sound arose. It swept out into the night and filled the valley, and spread far out and away among the peaks. It came again and then again: a cry of triumph and a challenge in one, the voice of Lobo, now the undisputed war lord of the Bad Lands.

High on the ledge he stood, white and majestic, blotting a pattern from the stars. His eyes shone like molten gold and his mane sparkled in iridescent splendor against the sky. And then there came in answer another sound equally mournful from far away among the hills. Slowly, the fire of battle died from the white warrior's eyes, and when the call came again, they glowed softly and with a new light. A cloud passed over the moon and once more that wailing love call echoed from the barren hills. When the cloud passed on, and the moon burst forth, there was nothing on the ledge above Hell-gate Butte but stains of blood on the snow and no sound save the whisper of the night breeze among the many shadows and the great rocks.





THE GIFT OF CHOU HONG

By William Archer Sayre

This Chinaman proved that there are two ends to every rope.

THE bell over the door of the shop on Kearney Street tinkled. Chou Hong, parting the whispering rush draperies, emerged from the inner room. Framed against the afternoon light, Chou Hong saw two people entering. One was a girl with bright blond hair and wide blue eyes. With

her was a tall, overdressed, dark-faced man who stood for a minute looking back over his shoulder at the automobile in which they had arrived.

Old Chou Hong pattered forward. "Your presence in my humble store flatters my ancestral tablets," he said courteously. "You have but to name what you wish to look at."

The man moved forward. Chou Hong's faded, nearsighted eyes saw that his aspect was one of evil. The man's mouth was cruel and tight-lipped; his nose was flattened against his dark face, and he looked like an Italian. Even the grandeur of his colorful clothing could not disguise his sinister appearance.

"Confucius says: 'A snake may wear the feathers of a bird and still be a snake,'" Chou Hong told himself.

The girl turned to her escort. "Tell him what you want, Tony."

It was then Chou Hong understood. The car, the flashy clothing, and the word "Tony." Shen Yi, Chou Hong's son, had spoken of his visitor. The man who reminded the old Chinese of a snake must be Tony Fezzari, gangster, crook, and a power in the underworld of the white barbarians. Chou Hong's mind was a secret volume in which was written many things.

Fezzari fingered his cravat. "Listen, chink. We want to look at some jade. The real stuff, understand! Don't try any of them rat tricks on me, because I know jade when I see it. Come on, trot some out."

Chou Hong tucked his withered hands in his sail sleeves. He wondered why such a pretty girl should be a companion to one so obviously vicious. Then he remembered. Shen Yi, his son, had told him other things. Shen Yi was a member of the Fang Lin Tong. His son had told him Tony Fezzari, the gangster, was engaged to marry a yellow-haired girl who sang every night at the place of the Rising Moon near what had once been the city's Barbary Coast.

"I am sorry," Chou Hong said politely, "but I have no jade for sale to-day."

Fezzari's dark face leered at him. "No? Well, somebody's a liar. They told me you sold the best jade in Chinatown."

"There are two ends to every rope," Chou Hong said courteously. "Sometimes there are two tongues in one mouth. You have been advised incorrectly, honorable sir."

The blond girl was wandering around the dim shop, looking at the ivory dragons, the kimono racks, the dusty mandarin coats, odd lamps, and the thousand and one things for sale. Tony Fezzari's tight mouth twisted into a sneer.

"Don't hand me any of that jazz, chink. We come here for jade, and we want to see some!"

Chou Hong shook his head politely. His collection of jade was not to be despoiled by the gaze of the gangster. The old Chinese understood what would happen. The girl would see something and Fezzari would help himself—without payment. He had done the same thing once before in the shop of Yen Yan on Pacific Street.

"I wear a mantle of regret," Chou Hong murmured in his stilted English. "The jade I had was sold to one who lives in a great house on Telegraph Hill."

Fezzari's small, beady eyes burned into his own. Before the gangster could speak again the girl's exclamation sounded.

"Tony, look what I've found!"

Fezzari went across to her. Chou Hong followed slowly. The Chinese looked back at the door. It was at this hour Shen Yi, his son, returned from the poultry market where he worked. Chou Hong wished the boy would arrive soon. Shen Yi was clever. He would know how to appease the wrath of the unsatisfied customers and bow them graciously out.

THE gangster and the girl were considering a large, woven-reed basket painted with the mystic symbol of the dragon. The basket had carved-ivory handles and a huge lock. A flowered scarf was draped across it. The girl with the blue eyes nodded.

"How much is this?"

Chou Hong bowed. "I suffer mentally. The basket of the expert weaving is not for sale. It descends to me from my worthy ancestors, and——"

Fezzari interrupted him. The gangster swung around and caught Chou Hong's arm in a tight grip. He thrust his dark face close to the saffron countenance of Chou Hong and spoke in a low, sibilant voice.

"So nothing's for sale when we want to buy it? Maybe you don't like our looks. I got a good mind to show you a trick or two of my own. You thieving, yellow——"

"Tony!" The girl's tone was sharp. "Remember what you promised!"

Chou Hong inclined his head. "The basket is not for sale, but if I change my mind I will put a price upon it. If you will leave your address," he said to the girl, "I will advise you."

She fumbled in the depths of the leather bag she carried, wrote something on a card, and handed it to him. Fezzari had lapsed into a sullen silence. The leer was on his mouth again when he followed the girl to the door. The bell tinkled. She passed out into the dying sunshine. The gangster gave her a quick look before he turned to Chou Hong.

"I get you, chink. You guys are not so wise as you make out. You know who I am, and you're afraid to sell me. O. K. Here's a little something to remember me by."

He drew back his hand, and before Chou Hong could move, he brought the palm of it swiftly down across the wrinkled yellow face. Fezzari's chuckling laugh, the tinkle of the doorbell, and the pant of the automobile engine were three sharp, distinct sounds. Chou Hong lifted his hand and touched the red mark on his left cheek. For a minute anger shook him. Then he retraced his steps back across the shop.

"The gods of the household have witnessed an insult," he said to himself. "When my worthy son returns I will tell him."

The shadows lengthened, but Shen Yi did not return to the shop. Presently it was the hour of the evening rice. Chou Hong lighted the flickering peanut-oil lamps and tried to read from the works of Confucius. In the street were sounds of dusk. Voices and steps and the tinkle of bells. After a long time the front door of the shop opened and closed.

Chou Hong shut the book and parted the rush draperies. He went forward to greet his son with words of welcome. But it was not the slim, square-shouldered boy he expected. A heavily built man who wore a derby and chewed on a cold cigar had come in. A strange chill spread through Chou Hong. He went quickly out to meet his caller.

The man regarded him quizzically. "You Chou Hong?" When the other nodded and confirmed his identity, the visitor continued: "You'd better come down to the station house with me. I'm Doyle from the Sixth Precinct."

Chou Hong stared. "There is something amiss, honorable sir?"

The detective frowned. "You got a son by the name of Shen Yi?"

"I have."

The cigar moved from one side

of the mouth to the other. "I'm sorry I've got to tell you this, but your son was bumped off at noon to-day. He's dead. We got his body at the station house. I've been looking for you all afternoon."

"Dead?" For a long minute Chou Hong stood motionless. His face remained an expressionless mask, but his eyes were clouded with suffering and pain. Shen Yi gathered to his ancestors! Nevermore the footsteps at the sunset hour or the boy's young laughter when the sky lantern hung over Kearney Street! Chou Hong drew a breath. "How did my son come to his end?"

Doyle looked at his watch. "It ain't a long story. I guess you know about this poultry-racket war that's been on. It was down in the duck market. A couple of killers, gunmen, drove up to shoot it out with one of the poultry dealers. They went in and got him. They were backing out to make their get-away when Shen Yi happened to come along. One of the gunmen pushed him out of the way, and the other plugged him. Emptied his gun in him. It's too bad——"

"Devils and silkworms do their work in silence," Chou Hong said slowly. "I will go with you directly, honorable sir."

"Don't you worry," Doyle said brusquely. "There's been too many killings around here lately. The chief gave out orders. We'll get the parties who knocked off the poultry dealer and killed your son."

Chou Hong said nothing. The grief in his heart was like a sword.

WITH Shen Yi cradled in the arms of his ancestors, Chou Hong waited until the fourth gong of the third moon. When the period of mourning had concluded, he walked down Kearney

Street to the Palace of Pearls. The huge building that housed the Chinese chop-suey restaurant stood on one corner, gay with lanterns. Chou Hong entered by the main doorway. Instead of passing on and into the dining room, he turned left and went down a flight of stairs. At their foot was a door where a Chinese sat, gravely smoking his metal-bowled pipe.

"Greetings, Chou Hong. The petal of the plum tree is green."

"It is silver when the sky lantern shines upon it," Chou Hong said.

"You may enter."

The door swung noiselessly open. Chou Hong walked through a corridor of painted screens. The odor of joss hung heavily on the air. A second carved door of teakwood stayed his progress. He rapped upon it softly and waited. After a minute a small round panel opened.

"Who knocks?" a voice asked.

"Chou Hong."

The door opened, and Chou Hong found himself in a small anteroom where a single tiny lamp burned. The person who had spoken to him melted into the shadows and disappeared. Chou Hong stood before the lamp and made a mystic sign. Draperies rustled, and when he turned his head, Chou Hong found some one was standing beside him. His old heart quickened its beat. The Chinese who looked at him was young, richly garbed, with a face of stone and eloquent, dark eyes.

Chou Hong recognized him as Fang Lin, the leader of the powerful tong.

"What brings you here on the fourth gong of the third moon, Chou Hong?"

"The sorrow and despair that shadow my steps like the dark wings of vultures, Fang Lin."

"What would you have of me, Chou Hong?"

"Illustrious knowledge, honorable one. My son, Shen Yi, rots in his grave. The police of the white barbarians have their wrists bound with the shackles of money. The murderer of my son walks free in the clear sunshine of to-morrow. I come to beg of you, learned and powerful master. Let the tong give me the name of the devil who murdered my boy."

Fang Lin's long-nailed fingers caressed the silken embroidery of his rich robe. He inclined his head in an attitude of thought. Finally he raised his eyes.

"The river is long, but there are many bridges. What you ask is only justice, Chou Hong. The memory of your son remains with me like unforgotten music. It is written that 'Though you place a monkey on a throne, his hands and feet shall still remain hairy.' May I offer a suggestion? Let the hatchet men of the tong deal with Shen Yi's murderer. Before the vernal season we will send you the murderer's heart!"

Chou Hong made the mystic sign again. He sighed. "Noble Fang Lin, I rejoice in your logic. Yet ancient wisdom is a carpet unrolling down my path. Soon I shall dispose of my shop, and with a few possessions return to China for solace during my last days. It is only fitting and proper that my hand hold the knife that strikes down the slimy devil who killed Shen Yi, my son. I pray that you understand."

"I do." Fang Lin struck a gong. "In three days the name of the murderer will be sent you. That is all. Go home and remember that I have made a sacred promise."

Chou Hong bowed. "I will revere your memory, Fang Lin," he said.

CHOU HONG advertised his stock for sale. He spoke to the landlord of the building about his lease. For two days the trade was brisk. He disposed of his jade at a good price. The mandarin coats and carved ivory went at profitable prices. In the entire store there was only one thing Chou Hong reserved. That was the woven-reed basket with the ivory handles. He kept that in his own room, away from admiring eyes.

On the third day, when Chou Hong drew the blinds in the store windows and lighted the flickering peanut-oil lamps, there was a quiet knock at the door. A Chinese tinsmith entered. He set down his equipment, bowed, and drew a folded paper from his tunic. He handed it to Chou Hong without a word, bowed again, and departed. For a minute Chou Hong stood with his eyes closed. Finally he pushed one of the flickering lamps around and opened the paper. It was covered with Chinese writing. Chou Hong read, folded the paper, and tucked it in his sail sleeve.

The evening merged with night. Kearney Street grew hushed. There was no moon. The darkness crouched like a dragon along the narrow pavements when Chou Hong shut the door of the shop behind him and walked north. His sadness was tempered by anticipation. Tomorrow a great ship would take him to the Walled City where he had known his youth. It had been an unhappy youth, spent beside a muddy river with a wooden yoke about his neck. He had seen the rice fields turn from white to brown, the river run turbulent and then dry. He had heard the song of birds at morning and the hum of mosquitoes at night. But he knew his return would be different. He

took back with him the savings of many years.

"Mere money," Chou Hong confided to himself, "can never equal the minted gold of a satisfied memory."

The Chinatown district ended. Chou Hong found himself in a new territory. He penetrated deeper into it. He was somewhere near the water front. The salty breath of the Pacific blew in his face. The fog of twilight had vanished, but the air remained humidly moist. He turned east and came upon a narrow street where the buildings rose up thickly in congested aisles. Chou Hong continued until he saw his destination ahead.

In the basement in one of these buildings was an all-night restaurant. Yellow light gushed from its grimy windows. A piano jangled, and the reek of cooking crept out to mingle with the sea-spiced air. Chou Hong was careful to avoid the light when he rounded the edge of the stoop and descended ten steps. He stepped into a small hallway, where a wan gaslight diffused sickly illumination from its inclosing slabs of green glass.

Chou Hong extinguished the light before he moved to the stairs. The darkness swam about him, but he could see like a cat in the gloom. His felt slippers making no sound on the treads, he mounted to the first landing. The jangle of the piano dwindled to a faint, discordant echoing. The rattle of crockery being washed faded altogether. Closer sounds were those made by people sleeping, the fitful rest of an infant, and the breeze rattling a window shade.

Chou Hong counted the doors in line, touching each knob with a finger. The fifth door was to the right of him. It was locked. He stood

before it, turning a brass key over in his fingers. Then he leaned, pressed the key swiftly into the lock, and turned it quietly. The door opened, and Chou Hong passed into the cool murk of a bedroom.

He shut the door and stood motionless for a minute. His right hand moved in under his outer garment. His fingers closed about the handle of the thin-bladed knife he carried. He drew it clear and took two steps forward. At the same moment bed springs creaked. A voice asked a vibrant question:

"Who's there?"

Chou Hong slipped forward. The man in the bed was lowering his feet to the floor, pawing at the pillow his head had rested upon. Chou Hong drew his arm back. The voice that attempted to cry out ended in a strangled, choked sob. Twice more Chou Hong struck with the knife, struck and cut as he had been taught on the banks of the muddy river where the rice turned from white to brown. Then he stepped back and dried the knife on the bed blanket.

"Shen Yi," he whispered, "your bones may rest undisturbed."

It was five minutes later when Chou Hong moved out of the dark hallway. He was not surprised to find a small automobile parked at the curb a dozen feet away from the entrance of the building he had left. In the restaurant laughter broke out. Chou Hong approached the waiting automobile. Two men stepped out of it.

"The work," Chou Hong told them, "has been accomplished. Do you wish aid in bringing the dead devil out of the house?"

"Will you stand guard?" one of the Chinese requested. "You will whistle twice if any one enters the building before we emerge from it."

"I shall impersonate a hawk looking down upon rabbits," Chou Hong answered amiably.

THE following morning toward ten o'clock the last of the stock in the shop was removed by expressmen sent by the purchasers. Chou Hong watched the removal of the final show case. He surveyed the empty store, his hands folded into his sleeves.

"The nest is empty," he told himself, "and the old bird takes wing to the land of his forefathers." He walked to the door and spoke to one of the expressmen. "There is one thing more, honorable sir. Will you come with me?"

The expressman spoke to his assistant. "Wait a minute, Mike. Looks like his nibs has another job for us. Hold everything until I come back."

Chou Hong led the way to his private sleeping quarters. The room was empty except for the woven-reed basket with the carved-ivory handles and the brightly painted dragon symbols.

"This is a gift. You will put it on your wagon and deliver it to a

young lady whose hair is bright as the sun and whose eyes are blue as the sea I sail upon. You will deliver the basket no earlier than this evening. Here is the card upon which she wrote her address when she first admired the basket."

The expressman took the card and tested the weight of the basket by one of the handles. "Say, this is pretty heavy. Must weigh a couple of hundred pounds. It'll cost you five bucks."

Chou Hong waited until the basket was carried out and put on the express wagon. Then he closed the door of his sleeping quarters and went to the window. The express wagon was drawing away from the curb. Chou Hong took a folded paper from his sleeve, opened it and looked at the Chinese characters lettered on it.

"Tony Fezzari," he read, half aloud. His almond-shaped eyes watched the express wagon disappear down the street. "How humble we mortals," Chou Hong told himself. "Once he came in a snorting chariot without horses. Now he returns in a mean cart at a slow, tedious pace!"

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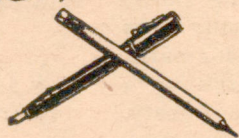
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Your Handwriting Tells



Conducted
By

Shirley Spencer

If you are just starting out to find your first job; or if you are dissatisfied with your present occupation and are thinking of making a change; or if the character of your friends—as revealed in their handwriting—interests you; or if, as an employer, you realize the advantage of placing your employees, in factory or office, in positions for which they are best suited—send a specimen of the handwriting of the person concerned to Handwriting Expert, The Popular Complete Stories, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. All samples submitted will be analyzed by Shirley Spencer, and her expert opinion will be given, free of charge.

The coupon, which you will find at the end of this department, must accompany each handwriting specimen which you wish to have read. If possible, write with black ink.

Your communications will be held in strict confidence. Only with your permission will individual cases be discussed in the department, either with or without illustrations. It is understood that under no circumstances will the identity of the person concerned be revealed.

Miss Spencer will not assume any responsibility for the specimens of handwriting, though every precaution will be taken to insure their return.

Mr. L.: I can't use any signatures in the department as a rule because that would identify the writer. However, signatures are very important in making an analysis, as they are the reflection of the personality of the writer and very often the key to a person's character.

As your signature is illegible in the sense that it cannot be deciphered accurately I am taking the liberty of reproducing part of it. It happens to be an interesting one about which to talk.

The body of your writing is simple and uniform while your signature is involved and full of flourishes

or typewriter is my
its method of expres-
interested to know
of my handwriting.
Very truly Y.

and dashes. This indicates that while you do not have an unusual mind you have developed your personality to such an extent that you

appear glamorous and forceful to others. You have dramatized yourself and through your personality impress people as being more shrewd and temperamental than you really are.

The body of your writing shows that you are even naïve in many ways—very direct, deliberate, dogmatic, stubborn—and that you pick up a new idea slowly and cautiously. That is why you say you are “decidedly skeptical,” because you always have that same attitude about anything which you think is new and untried. That is quite a sane attitude and a practical one. You are essentially practical even though you give the impression that you are an impulsive, hot-headed person. You do have a terrific temper, but are a methodical person, nevertheless.

Your signature reflects enormous pride and ambition in that flourishing and exaggerated capital. A great sense of importance, desire for approbation and personal success are indicated in your signature. Energy and vitality are expressed in it, though you are in a rather nervous condition due to pressure of some kind. It might possibly be just a natural nervousness due to age as your writing shows maturity. You can be very sarcastic when aroused and are very impatient. Those thick and sharp dashes you use as *i*-dots in your signature show that. Intensity is a feature of your signature.

G. W., Jr., Maine: Thank you for the compliment! I'm glad you like this department and the way in which I run it.

I'm rather surprised that you wish to be a doctor, for though you could study medicine and might do very well as a specialist, I do not advise

you becoming just a practicing physician. If you could specialize in psychology and become a psychoanalyst, I think you would like that. I really think that your first idea—writing—is the best solution of your vocational problem.

*I think your departure
one of the very best
the handwriting analysis
statements I have seen*

You ought to make a very good journalist and a writer of special articles. You could also probably write plays if you happened to have opportunity to get into theatrical work. I suggest a career of acting now while you are young and in school. This will cultivate your taste for the theater and give you a chance to find out if your talents lie in that direction. I think you will find that they do—both for acting and writing. As playwriting is not a very profitable career at first it is always well to become a newspaper or magazine writer first and take the writing of plays as spare time work until established.

For a sixteen-year-old youngster you show unusual force, vitality, and talent. I believe that you will go far if you direct your energies wisely. The very thick downstrokes show strong material tastes and stubbornness, and the slightly backhand, very heavy script with the tall letters expresses independence, dignity, poise, and self-centeredness. You are essentially a selfish person interested in your own talents and future, but are generous and magnetic.

F. K., New Jersey: Your fine angular writing with the uneven pressure and the appearance of scrawling across the page indicates a very quick and keen mind, a creature of moods and sudden temper and irritation, and an extremely sensitive nature.

what business
fitted for and
information
be enabled to
from this
handwriting
care to you
care in
of answer. It

You have keen perceptions, are clever, and not always truthful, because you know how to manage to say the right word or do the right thing on the spur of the moment to turn a situation to your advantage. You can be very sarcastic and biting and yet are a most sensitive person and can be deeply hurt through your feelings. Perhaps your sharpness has developed as a defense against a world that hurt you too much—the well-known defense mechanism.

Those sharp strokes and small running formations tell me that you are an exceedingly analytical person, critical, shrewd, with a mind that penetrates deeply and clearly below the surface.

As for what business you should follow, that it not a question I can answer definitely, such as suggesting one particular business. Either a person has business ability or he hasn't and, if he has, it doesn't matter whether he sells real estate or groceries. If he had very good taste, naturally I would suggest clothes, but it is just as possible that such a person might do as well in a very

high-class line of groceries where taste is required. You see why I can't pick out a specific thing for you. I can tell you this: you are the executive type. You must work for yourself or be in charge without supervision. You are not the type that can follow any routine or system laid down for you by some one else: You do your own thinking. I wouldn't suggest business at all for you really, though you evidently have not thought of anything else. You would have made a fine lawyer or financial man. Now I suppose it is too late, as I feel sure you are a mature man already established in some business. You are not the business type in the sense of being a commercial man. Your mind has to be working all the time, so a thinking job is indicated. You would have done well in the sciences.

W. P. B., North Carolina: I wish those who have interesting-looking handwriting would use black ink so I can reproduce their writing in this department. It would help me to make more interesting reading.

Your very individual writing expresses a vivid personality and a great deal of talent.

111th St. Shirley Spencer
79 Seventh Ave
New York City

Dear Mr. Spencer

Those capitals are artistic and also reveal dramatic ability. The

wide spacing and size of your script indicate a generous, tolerant nature, and the extremely long *t*-bars are an indication of driving force and enthusiasm. You are highly intuitive, analytical, vivacious, egotistical, dignified, proud, ambitious for personal success, and very talented in the constructive arts. Because you have a constructive mind you are also a good business manager and organizer, and the combination of these talents ought to make you quite successful, both financially and artistically. Engineering is also a field for

the constructive type such as you are.

Don't forget the stamped, self-addressed envelope. Canadians may send coin.

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Complete Stories

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name

Address

FROM AN ARCTIC CIRCLE CABIN

FROM the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at Aklavik, Northwest Territories, one hundred and fifty miles within the arctic circle, comes the report of a hermit trapper's stand, in his lonely cabin eighty miles up the old Yukon Trail, against the Mounties in two attempts to arrest him. Eight Mounties descended upon this "lone wolf" who fires a wicked gun, and for fifteen hours the police posse attacked with guns and bombs, but eventually had to retire because their food gave out.

The wanted trapper is Albert Johnson, who shot Constable King, when the latter, with Constable McDowell, went to Johnson's cabin to investigate the complaints of Indians that their trap lines had been tampered with by Johnson. When McDowell arrived at Aklavik, twenty hours after the shooting, with the wounded King, having driven his dog team over an eighty-mile trail in a blinding blizzard, the inspector of the Aklavik division of the Mounted left at once, accompanied by seven of his men.

Johnson's isolated cabin is on a brush-covered promontory, twenty miles upstream from the mouth of the Rat River. When Inspector Eames and his men presented themselves, Johnson, who is believed to be demented, defied the officers, with a gun in each hand. When the Mounties attempted to rush him, he greeted them with a shower of bullets from his two automatics. Quickly then, he retired to the interior of his shack and began to pepper his attackers from loopholes. When the posse began to hurl high-explosive bombs at the cabin, Johnson retreated to a tunnel dug beneath his cabin. Repeated rushes on the part of the Mounties failed because Johnson commanded all the approaches to the cabin.

During the series of unsuccessful attacks, members of the posse were able to get a glimpse of the interior of the shack. The floor was said to be five feet below the ground level, and at each corner of the cabin the trapper had bored loopholes.

Eventually, of course, the Mounties are bound to get their man. The plans are now being made for another attack, and this time the posse will work from a base and a supply camp at the mouth of the Rat River.



GET TOGETHER!

The Man We Celebrate

FEBRUARY 22nd was the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington. The present year is to be marked by remembrance of the father of our country. Probably no other two hundred years of human history have wrought such tremendous changes in the destinies of mankind. The memory of man is notoriously short, and few people are able to project themselves beyond the interests and the troubles of the passing moment. Every American citi-

zen is the heir of the leader of the Continental Army and the First President of the United States.

Just as children take for granted the unselfish sacrifices of their parents, so the average citizen accepts, without gratitude or obligation, the high heritage of his country and the sense of loyalty to its principles. When in 1776 Washington drove the British out of Boston, and in 1781 accepted the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, neither England nor the nations of continental Europe had any idea of what

changes were brewing on the other side of the sea. The thirteen original States, the nucleus of this great country as it is to-day, began the noble experiment of a democratic republic, while the nations of Europe looked on and regarded the undertaking as a dangerous and daring innovation. To-day this country occupies a place of commanding power and influence throughout the world.

This would seem an opportune year to go back and review the difficulties which confronted Washington and the founders of the republic. In the thick of domestic difficulties and world problems, it may give us courage at this time to recall the simple fundamentals of this nation's origin—the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness—and to recall the inflexible will, the high courage, and the imperious stability of that stout citizen and Virginia gentleman, George Washington.

WASHINGTON was every inch a man, and not a namby-pamby plaster saint, as he was once pictured in our school histories. Full-blooded and virile-minded, he took both pride and interest in his Virginia acres and his hounds. He had his moments of wrath—yes, cussful wrath—and he drank his glass of whisky like a gentleman. When he died, he left not only one of the best tended estates of the young country, but the memory of a rich and noble nature—“first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

The leadership of the Continental Army and the Presidency of the United States were offices intrusted to Washington by a pioneering people because the first president typified, in his ambitions and ideals, the common ideals of a vigorous and pioneering and agricultural people. Like Lincoln, Washington sprang from the land and the people of his time. His was a virile and human personality cast in a larger and more heroic mold, who rose naturally to leadership because he was able to embody in his measures for the new country the passionate faith and demands of a people who set out to live free and happy in a country which they had made prosperous by their own efforts.

SOMETHING of this virile character of Washington has passed into the character of the people of this triumphant nation. We, who are to-day the heirs of this magnificent high manhood and vigorous living, are faced with tremendous problems of work, wages, and the overblown bubble of a false economic security. Our difficulties are real and concrete; but the successful solution of them lies in the hands of a leader, who must measure up to the stature of George Washington.

This will be a year of pageants, parades, and exercises in honor of Washington; politicians and people alike, children and grown ups, must pause to take the measure of our first president who was a full-blooded man and not a pseudo saint of democracy.

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