

MAY 25¢

MAMMOTH ADVENTURE



LOOT OF BABYLON by RICHARD S. SHAVER

She pressed his hand tenderly and
whispered:



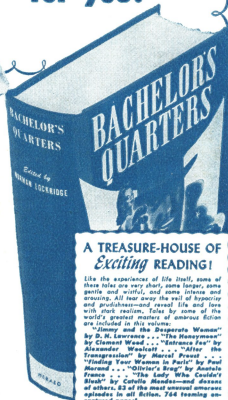
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All Stories Complete



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Marihuana, vicious and insidious drug, started Gil Hubbard on a relentless "viper" hunt!



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The Editor's Page

THIS is it! "The Loot of Babylon" by Richard S. Shaver, that we mentioned in the last issue of MAMMOTH ADVENTURE, is here at last! That's the trouble. Your editor only mentioned it, when he should have been raving about it like a madman. We've read the story three times if we've read it once and each time that we go over it we get more enthusiastic. It's one of those stories that gets in your blood. We think that "Dick" Shaver can give any of the historical novelists a run for their money. He's got the magic touch that can translate dessicated history into living, breathing reality. The fact that a man can go back into that dim, remote past and drag out people that will stir you to the core is proof of his ability. Shaver can do that—and more.

THOSE of you who read *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* know what Shaver can do in a different field than the historical novel. He's terrific there but he's better here. We swear that when you get into "The Loot of Babylon" you'll almost feel the bronze sword of Assur-Nadin grating against your backbone but don't worry about it because Assur-Nadin is no slouch with a leaf-shaped blade himself! Read that story and live.

AFTER that burst of enthusiasm, we have to come down a bit and start to hang our head. About six million—maybe not quite six million—readers of *MA* have written in concerning the January issue of the magazine. We promised, on the contents page, a story called "Primed to Kill" by Phillip Sharp. Well, it was on the contents page alright, but oddly enough it wasn't in the magazine! There were a number of other errors in the book that you probably noticed too. Our face is a brilliant, gorgeous red. When we make mistakes we do it in a big way. All we can do is apologize. Put it down to "mechanical difficulties"—it won't happen again—we keep telling ourselves hopefully.

ANYHOW, the story "Primed to Kill" appears in this issue and it is as good as we've yelled about. The author, Phillip Sharp, has put in time in the North Country and he knows what he's talking about. The yarn has a neat twist that even a radio "ham" will get a kick out of. Incidentally, Phil has been taking a rare ribbing from friends who want to know what happened to his "invisible story"—this issue should answer for him.

WE DON'T want to sound as if we're nuts about this Shaver story (confidentially, we are!) but we want to make sure that you take a

good look at the cover. It was done by Jones and it's out of this world! We had the feeling when we first looked at it, that that Babylonian pig-sticker was headed in our direction. For sheer realism, you've got to admit—as we did—that it is the best thing that we've ever had on a MAMMOTH ADVENTURE cover. We're proud of it and we hope that you like it as much as we do. And all you have to do to let us know that, is to drop us a line. We want your comments on the stories and the illustrations. They're our best guide. So let's hear from you, gang!

LESTER BARCLAY comes up this month with a strictly solid treatment of the dope game—marihuana, that is—in his "Tall, Dark And Ugly." We think that you'll like the way Les handles the slang of the real "viper." The people who use "tea" (and there are plenty of them unfortunately), have a language all their own—Les gives the complete "dope!"

LAST month we promised you "The Fragrant Vagrant" by Berkeley Livingston. It's here with bells on. Invariably "Berk" turns in a yarn with sort of an unusual slant. He's loaded this one with action and politics, a combination hard to beat. It seems where there's a political campaign, there's trouble, and with Berk's stuff, where there's trouble, there's action. Can you imagine a reformer who likes perfume? In this story there is one who practically takes a bath in it!

"BET Or Get Out" by Leonard Finley Hilts takes us back to the Mississippi River steamboat days, when a captain aboard such a craft was a king in his own right. And the boat was his queen. You'll feel that way about the *Belle of the North*. You had to be tough though, in those days, to handle the river-rats and the cheap gamblers that infested the towns bordering the River. Ed Shippen was more than a captain—he was a fighter too. When we talked to Hilts about this, we asked him if he modeled his hero on someone he knew, perhaps someone who had been in his family long ago. He laughed, but wouldn't admit it. We suspect that there is more Hilts in this yarn than he'll admit!

YOUR editor once handled a sword—he fenced a while back—and consequently he gets a big kick out of a story that has a background of swordsmanship. "The Substitute Sword" by Alexander Blade will give you as big a bang as it gave us, we think, because this excellent author brings to a conventional duel a neat trick. We'd like to talk about it here—but—the story would lose its punch, so we'll go into it in detail later . . . RAP

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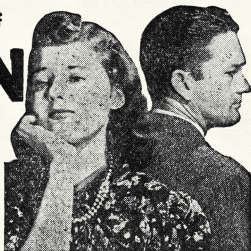
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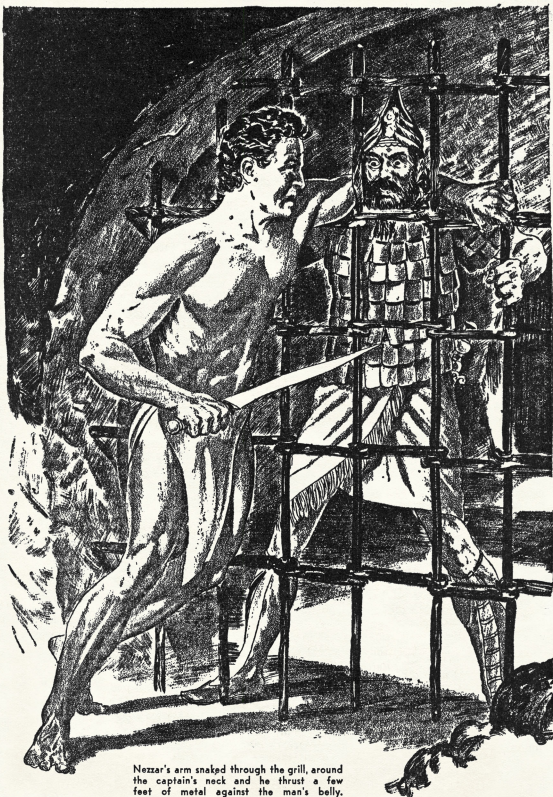
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of the Viderm formulas, complete with full directions, and packed in a safety-sealed carton. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you aren't thrilled with results, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Remember that both of the formulas you use have been fully tested and proven, and are reliable for you. If they don't help you, your treatments cost you nothing. After you have received your Viderm, if you have any questions to ask concerning abused skin, just send them in.

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Nezzar's arm snaked through the grill, around the captain's neck and he thrust a few feet of metal against the man's belly.



THE LOOT OF BABYLON

By Richard S. Shaver

Assur-Nadin held all Babylon in
thrall! But Essar-Haddon used cold steel and barbed
bronze to destroy his brother's treacherous gains—

*My throat swells with desire
My throat swells as a bull's throat
My voice is a bell, a loud metallic
clamor—*

*My wings are brazen beatings of a gong
The blood beats in me as a flood.
I am Bel, all-powerful God.
The Armies of Assyria go before me
Conquering.*

*Assur of Babylon
680 B.C.*

DARKNESS softly descended upon the city of Babylon. The brassy sun was gone. Nezzar, the slave, was glad. He left off loading the heavy bags of grain upon the wooden wheeled carts and clanked his chains back to the sleeping shed.

Lying there among the other weary hulks of men, waiting for the evening bowl of stew and soggy brown bread, Nezzar wondered about the endless home of Night.

For all the tired men in that shed, darkness was blessed relief from back-breaking toil.

Nezzar could just make out the far, tall pyramid of the temple of Bel, where night was driven away with many lights, where he knew the dread golden statue of the God Bel towered forty feet high within the topmost shrine of that vast, eight-tiered pile.

Nezzar thought of the other places of the colossal city of Babylon where night was being kept away with burning oil—and he thought of the nearby temple of Ashera, where Clois waited. Waited for his death, perhaps? What else could free him?

Nezzar thought of the lights, and the tinkle of glasses full of wine, with cooling snow brought from the mountains—and of those people who do their sleeping in the daytime. People who do not have to work as Nezzar worked.

Nezzar turned wearily in the heavy

dark, his chains rattled harshly—a familiar, angry sound that jerked him wider awake with new anger. The sound always made him angry, and the sound was always with him.

He lay and gazed at the ghosts of mist stealing quietly by the door, from the river Araxes, and at the stars twinkling above the city of Babylon—mocking stars, fortunate in aloof freedom.

* * *

CLOIS, the child of a Cyprian slave, had grown up in the temple of Ashera. She lay tonight among the nude, tattooed bodies of the priestesses, in the fragrant gardens, listening to the soft chatter of the wakeful and the louder breathing of the sleepers.

In the green vines above her hung little pods, filled with strange scent. When the pods burst, the warm summer air became weighted with delight, and it was so weighted now. In the sunlight, during the day just past, bees had hung there in a dazed dream above the graceful, soft bodies of the priestesses in the garden of the wanton Goddess Ashera. Humming birds had circled in a fiery display of glittering feathers. Now, tonight, the great moths came and swooned in clusters about the fragrant pods above her.

In the early morning, thought Clois, the birds will fill themselves with the little pods and doze all day.

Clois reached her golden-bangled arm up, and crushed in her hand a pod to augment the pleasure of the scent and under the potent influence the beauty of the summer evening swelled into a hymn of softly glowing shadows of sounds, of sleep-breathing shapes caressing her eyes; the very blackness of the night became a shining caress from some dark God. And thinking of the blackness, she thought of the deep, dark eyes of Nezzar, and all her joy

turned into a bitter sob, and she flung herself flat to the sod again and wept. That Nezzar should be slave—and herself should be chained forever to this cloying, too-sweet, abandoned life of the priestess—the wrong, empty, useless life of a temple courtesan. Clois had no illusions about the existence of Ashera. These things she did, these falsely ecstatic prostrations of her body to the demands of the lewd Goddess—were to her but . . . debauch!

* * *

Sleep came at last to Nezzar, though the muscles crawled across the black-haired swelling chest with anger, even in his sleep. Nezzar of Cal dai did not relish serfdom.

A sharp clang of iron on bronze smashed through his angry dreams, brought him nearly to his feet before the short night shackles pulled him back to the floor! Beside him crouched a dark figure, and those brawny arms, that hand that closed over his mouth—were too familiar to belong to anyone but—*Banardan!* He lay still; again and again the harsh clang of iron biting into bronze rang through the long sleeping shed. Outside came running feet and the wide shed door was lit with a torch in the hand of Hadranib, the overseer.

The brawny figure beside him pulled him to his feet, pressed a sword into his hand. A long bronze sword, a man's sword! Nezzar choked his joy. "A blade in my hand again! Banardan, my life is yours."

"Think you I would let the chains of this bastard of Sennacherib's remain upon Nezzar. I will tell my grandchildren of this night when I released Nezzar from bondage. Come on, man, no slave-keeper will keep us from freedom this night!"

Together they leapt toward the doorway, and the blade of the overseer

had hardly been engaged by Banardan before Nezzar sheathed his own in the man's fat belly. He screamed, and the angry fire that burned in Nezzar's breast subsided a little as the man who had plied a lash too often upon his shoulders, screamed in agony, tottered and fell. Together they ran through the wide door, vaulted the low wall of brick and mounted the horses that waited in the shadows of the narrow street. Together they rode into the night and freedom.

BEHIND came cries and the lights of many torches as the house of the rich Shalmazr was aroused. His personal guards, Nezzar knew, were being routed from bed, the tall horses were being hurriedly saddled, pursuit would soon raise the hue and cry behind them. The whole night-watch of the city would be looking for them! Nezzar laughed, the dark streets rattled past underfoot. This was good! A good horse between his legs, a good blade at his hip, and a strong comrade beside him. Life tasted more like living than it had for two long years!

Beside him the white teeth of Banardan showed through his black curly beard.

"Nezzar, since ourselves were banished, upon Sennacherib's murder—I have become a bandit. It is a trade you must learn—it pays well!"

Nezzar shouted back—"All the friends of Essar-Haddon have turned bandit, then?"

"Not all, but I am not alone. But it will not be for long, the young kind rallies ever a greater army about him in Armenia. When he is ready, he will return and crush the old king's murderers like fleas between his thumbs. They have not the knack of war, not they."

"Who are his murderers? It is not

spoken of in Babylon—everyone fears to mention it above a whisper.”

“The two oldest sons, Assur-Nadin and Belibus. They rule now together, Assur-Nadin here in Babylon, and Belibus at Nineveh. But not for long, Nezzar, not for long! The young lion will avenge his father.”

Banardan checked his snorting horse beside a tall wall, near a brass grille-work gate, and gave a low cat-call. The gate swung open slowly on well greased hinges, and like two shadows they entered in the darkness, the only sound the horses’ hooves on the bricks. In the dark they dismounted, and were led through the court and into the dark pile of a great house.

“Water to wash the shame of slavery from our friend, food to put spine into him, clothing to make him proud again—armor to guard him well for our strength. All these and wine, too—bring our guest!”

Banardan’s voice was loud, triumphant, happy. The thing had been done, for the future was assured. His friend Nezzar was at his side again!

Nezzar laughed and could not stop, for happiness; and the chamber, the red-glazed bricks, the hangings of painted silk, the wooden table and rude chairs and rough pottery all became to his eyes the glorious height of luxury. The laughing slave girls bathed him, oiled him, dressed him in fringed robes, sat him at table with food before him.

AS NEZZAR ate, Banardan sat straddle-legged on the bench, devouring his friend with his eyes and talking excitedly.

“I have made myself more money since I turned robber than ever I did in more peaceful ways. Do you know what I plan, now that I have your strength and brain? You will shudder! . . .”

Nezzar only murmured—“Nothing will surprise me.”

“I plan to capture the treasurer!”

Nezzar started. “Not the old Semite, Sennacherib’s bookkeeper?”

“He has turned the keys over to Assur-nadin, and his books he keeps now for the young bastard.”

“What good will he do you, if he has not the keys to the vaults?”

“He can tell me what they are, where they are, what to look for! Much he can tell me. Then we raid Babylon’s golden hoard, eh? Would that tickle Essar-haddon or no?”

“You will get us both killed, it sounds . . .”

“Bah! Look . . .”

The brawny, dark-eyed, black-bearded giant turned, opened a heavy cupboard door in the wall. A few pieces of gold rolled out on the floor—bracelets of the highest class, earrings, fillets—the cupboard was jammed with gold! Nezzar gasped.

“You stole all that, and live?”

“Babylon is rich! The houses of the rich merchants extend around us for two hundred square miles! It would be a poor thief who could not do as well.”

“Why, then, do you plan to risk your neck raiding the palace treasury? You do well enough without that!”

“Gold is the sinew of an army. Our Lord, *Essar-Haddon* comes ever nearer Babylon from the north. If this louse who rules here now has no gold, he can hire no mercenaries—even his own will desert him. I would strike such a blow for the young one we raised to be a king—not a fugitive from his own brothers.”*

* In Josephus, the historian tells of just such a coup pulled by robbers in Jerusalem. They took over the treasury of the city, murdered everyone who knew of it—became in time the ruling men of the city.

Nezzar pondered. "There is a method in your plan that pleases me. Without gold, his army would fold up at the first strong blow. The news that he could not keep his own treasury from thieves would do him little good, either. But is it possible?"

"I think so. Soon I will know."

"I am with you, if the thing is feasible. I have not relished my treatment, you know."

"Which is why I risked my neck this night for you. Had you been a craven to refuse me—you would still be wearing your nice bronze shackles."

"That chisel with which you cut them—where did you come by it?"

"It is a treasure of the stone masons. It comes from the north, from Greece. It is called *iron*. 'Tis harder than brass, it cuts it easily if you strike hard."

"And did you *steal* that iron treasure from the honest stone workers?"

"All stone workers are foreigners—I love them not. They put our native potters and plaster artists out of work with their fancy-work. Ever they come, Babylon makes them rich. Besides, I needed the tool! You should be the last to complain of its use!"

"I am not complaining, Banardan. I am your slave entertaining you with talk. Now that you have freed me, could you show me a civilized bed? These two years my hips have contested with hard ground—and lost. I have bunions on my buttocks, Bel strike me if I haven't."

From the wall Nezzar lifted a yard-long, leaf-shaped bronze sword, sent it whistling through the air in a series of thrusts and imaginary parries. Banardan looked on fondly, smiling as his friend warmed his arm to the familiar exercise after so long without a weapon.

"You have lost no speed with a reaper that I can see. You got your point into that fat keeper of yours be-

fore I could tell if his eyes were crossed or if he was just scared!"

Nezzar put up the blade again, saying only—"It's a bit light in the handle-plates. No balance—or else I have lost the feel of it."

"It is not a bad blade—but there are better. In the bazaar tomorrow—you can find one to suit."

"I'll keep the one that you brought me, for luck."

CHAPTER II

*Lilith was made out of earth and fire
Out of ivory, and laughter and air.*

*Out of song, out of silk,
Out of soft white thoughts,
Out of sounds, out of rippling hair . . .*

Maldronah of Ur

IN THE temple garden, Clois dreamed of Nezzar, not knowing that he was free, she danced the ritual dances for the cash customers, prayed her own secret prayers to the brazen limbs of Ashera, bowed her head before the metal breasts of the statue, and wondered when her life would have real meaning—when this waiting would end and life would begin in truth for her.

As she rose from her prayer, Clois heard a soft hiss from her left—and turned to see a bowed form, a man. A big man, clad in rich raiment, the fringed mantle of Tyrian purple proclaiming him either very rich or of noble blood—and as his face turned toward her in the light, Clois gave a glad cry and took a step toward him. "Nezzar!"

"Softly, little pigeon, softly. You must know better than to cry that name! Tonight I will come and take you away. Be ready! You consent?"

"Oh, my bull of battles, my lion of love, my . . ."

"Never mind the love talk, little one,

I will come. Meanwhile, do not breathe a word of me to anyone, not even your best friend, not even to the humming birds that sup your lips—till I come."

"Till you come, my Nezzar, I will not even breathe, let alone talk!"

Nezzar laughed and hurried from the temple. There were always in these places the spies, the informers, the priests, hangers-on; somehow a word uttered in a temple was public knowledge within an hour. And this time was no different, much as he had hoped, for after him darted a small, wizened figure clad only in the Egyptian fashion, a cloth about his loins. Watching him, the figure followed, the small close eyes glittering with excitement. "That one will bring a price from the king . . ." he muttered. "I must not lose him."

Night came again to the temple garden, the white moths fluttered about the vine pods' enticing intoxicating odor. But although the garden was filled with the sleeping priestesses, Ashera's acolytes, Clois was not among them, not couched beneath her favored place among the green vines. She waited instead by the wall where once, it seemed centuries before, but had been but two years—the bold Nezzar had climbed by the great old vines from the street outside—"To see what Ashera holds for me in the way of woman-flesh—without the censoring oldsters to shoo the pleasure away."

She had laughed at his bold eyes and ruddy cheeks, at the easy courage with which he had snapped his fingers at the danger he was courting—for it was no small offense to enter the cloistered place where the young Assyrian females were trained to serve the Goddess. Death could come of it if one had not influence or friends in high places. She had laughed and said; "Ashera herself will punish you if men's laws do not,

bold one." "Until then," he had answered easily, "I will at least be happy. I have seen you, found you—think you the Goddess of love herself would punish me for seeking her out in you?"

"It would be unkind, unlike her nature. But who are you? Whence come you, to do this which no man of Babylon would do?"

"I am of Caldai, from the mountains—know you what that means?"

"It means you are brave, and a great fighter, from the little I hear of the affairs of the world. Is that true? Is it true that one man of the Caldai is as good as three Babylonians?"

He had laughed—and said; "You have heard it even in Babylon, little one—how else could it be but true? Mountain air and mountain life breeds better men than these hot plains and lush valleys of yours."

NOW he was coming again, after his long slavery, and Clois knew he would come the same way—the same place in the wall, in spite of Hades or all the King of Babylon's soldiers, in spite of *anything* he would come! Had he not said so?

The night drew on, and the moon-god swam his sickle of gold overhead and on and down into the dark, soft night again—and still he came not! And Clois heard rustlings and whisperings in the dense shadows of the gardens, and the soft clank of armor carefully muffled, and she felt a great fear and dread, and felt something amiss. If they knew he was coming? If they had been overheard, if Nezzar had been recognized as an escaped slave—"Oh, Bel of the brazen wings, it could not be. You would not do that to us?" They had set a trap here for him, she knew, she could not be wrong! She paced back into the shadows, and there they waited, the linen corselets shining and

stiff with glue, the bronze helmets, the round shields! They were the soldiers of the king! Before she could cry out they seized her, a heavy hand clamped shut her straining mouth, rough hands held her motionless and silent. Her straining eyes alone could move, and they watched that lighter sky above the dark vine-laden wall, watched and prayed that that bold, loved form would not come. But come he would, she knew!

She heard her name—"Clois!" softly called. She strained and kicked at her captors, but they only choked her. Ah, Goddess above, that was her love! That darker place above the wall, that white place was his face, turning, and his black eyes seeking, seeking her—and thinking her faithless, fearful—of what? She bit and kicked—and a sword hilt on her head blacked out the horrible scene mercifully from her young eyes.

NEZZAR clambered down the vine wall. The young goddess had fallen asleep, of course—the night was near gone. The patrols had not left the streets tonight, something was amiss to keep them out. But all the king's men would not keep him from a tryst with his own Clois after two years away from her. For a sight of her face, to hold her in his arms, he would have climbed the walls of Hades, would have spat into the face of Bahu, queen of the underworld—to reach her side this night. Besides, he had promised her.

As his feet touched the ground, a net fell over him from the dark, and he bounded into the air, his blade leaped to slash it away—and a mountain of stars fell on his head. Nezzar was taken again . . .

Saith the Lord: "Though Babylon should mount up to Heaven, and though

she should fortify the height of her strength, YET from me shall spoilers come unto her.

"And I will punish Bel in Babylon; Yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall."

Jeremiah 51

The Bible

CHAPTER III

KING ASSUR-NADIN, in Sennacherib's palace, the Kasr, arose. He threw his fringed mantle about his shoulders, belted on the long, two-edged bronze sword with the golden hilt. The maidens combed his hair and dressed it with heavy-scented grease. The virgin of the night before watched the process with wide, somehow horror-stricken eyes—seeming too scared to move from the bed. Assur-Nadin paid her not the slightest attention, she had not pleased him greatly. She knew that her lot would be lonely immolation in the house of the women, and she understood and was secretly a little glad. The night had been far from what she had been led to expect a bridal night to be.

As the busy hands of the waiting women finished the elaborate toilet of the black-browed son of Sennacherib, a servile male figure came bowing to the king. The maids darkened his brows with Kohl, rouged his cheeks, reddened his lips. The servant spoke:

"The one named Nezzar, who has past acquaintance with Essar-Haddon, has been caught. He waits your pleasure."

Assur-Nadin nodded, did not bother looking at the servile gentleman. But hard upon his departure came gliding a very different figure. Her hips were a symphony of grace preaching with motion a sermon about seduction; her breast was fair and sweetly upthrusting under the thin Egyptian cotton "stola"; her lips were curling, pleasure-

bent and red as rubies: while her black Assyrian eyes were cunning, bold and artfully appraising the King's morning disposition. She glanced once disdainfully at the frightened child-bride in the bed—and to the king—

"The lion they caught for you last night bruised the hunters mightily in the chase. There is a row of black eyes and bruised arms—you should see it! This Nezzar was most wroth at being captured." Her laughter was very rich and laden with that wanton pride of wealth that is the very heart-note of luxury, a cloying laugh to hear, for a poor man; but to King Assur-Nadinum it was a very pleasant sound.

"Nezzar is strong, as I remember him. Slavery did not weaken him, then?" The King smiled upon this beautiful Solana, a hostage of his fathers, a palace opportunist, and a very privileged person. For her counsel had often been proven wise—and was sought after.

"Far from it. When he came out of his swoon in the guard house he began to take the place apart. Had the guard not been changing, and they outnumbering him some one hundred to one, he would have fought his way out of the palace with his bare hands! He is one slave who did not relish the loss of his freedom a second time. What do you want with him, anyway?"

"Come along, Solana, let us look at this captive lion. I have a plan for him—can you guess?"

Solana looked a long moment into the black and hot depths of Assur-Nadin's eyes. She saw there a fear, and a writhing desperation to avoid that fear, to beat it down from afar before it came too near—and she said—"I can guess, O king."

"You guess aright, Solana. Why should I waste a hundred thousand men when one will suffice?"

"No reason, jewel of my heart. But is he the proper tool?"

"What matter? If he should prove not, use another."

THE Assyrian King, who was somewhat scornful of the Babylonian palace in which he had chosen to reign, strode through the vast brick corridors, never glancing at the elaborate religious paintings on the walls. These Chaldean fairy tales were to him utter foolishness, and to find religion cluttering up a ruler's palace was to him only another sign of the reason no Chaldean, but an Assyrian and himself, was now the power here.

As he passed, the guards at the wide doorways held their leaf-shaped spears more erect, stared straight ahead like the lions whose backs supported the circular pedestals of the mighty columns.

Solana glided along a step behind the King, and the guards rolled their eyes respectfully, trying to avoid looking too openly at her not-subtle charms. For they all knew that those little gilded sandals of hers could quite cheerfully tread upon the throat of a people. For did not everyone know it was her who had plotted Sennacherib's murder! She was probably upon her way to arrange for the murder of some other obstacle . . . to her supremacy.

The guard threw open the heavy wooden door, jerked the chain which led to the collar about Nezzar's neck. "Stand, dog—the King is here."

"The King be damned!" muttered Nezzar—but he stood.

The sweet stench of perfumed oil announced the King's coming almost as soon as the sound of his sandals upon the stone of the dungeon's floor.

The variegated colors of his fringed robes burst into the grimy prison cell like the sun, his twisted smile white in

his narrow face—the dark eyes burning. Nezzar hated this half-brother of his one-time leader. Once, Nezzar had been a trusted officer under the son of Sennacherib. But *not* this son, *his* fealty had gone to Essar-Haddon, the younger. This one and his elder brother were hated quite as much as Essar-Haddon was admired. While Essar-Haddon took the field with his father, learning the art of war, these had skulked at home in the harem,—though older. But Sennacherib had many children, and none were favored above Essar-Haddon, he had insisted upon his being at his side. But the King was here for a purpose. He said:

"Nezzar of Caldai, you are very close to death. Your crime is one for which death is the usual penalty and none but myself can save you."

"I committed no crime, O King."

"**Y**OUR crimes are several, according to my reports. You killed one Hadranib, in escaping from your slavery—slavery into which you were condemned for lawful debts unpaid. Not content with that, you steal into the forbidden Gardens of Ashera, knowing quite well that such entrance is punishable by death. How can you say you committed no crime?"

"I went there to see my betrothed. She is not yet sworn to Ashera, she is but an acolyte. She only entered the temple after the death of her parents left her beggared. As for the debts for which I was sentenced to slavery—they were due to loaded dice. I proved the dice loaded, but the magistrate was bribed—"

"These things may be as they will, my Nezzar. Without my intervention, you will die."

"You have no reason to love me, Assur-Nadin."

The king ignored the insolent bear-

ing and the failure of Nezzar to affix his title to his name. He gestured to the guard to leave them alone—and the guard stepped out of the cell. Beside Assur-Nadin the slighter form of Solana wavered, white-robed and impatient of the stink of the place, her gold-ringed fingers to her nose in disgust. Nezzar glanced at her once boldly and scornfully, then looked at her no more. To him she was less than the least of the temple houris who tempt the gold from the people for the priests.

The king stepped nearer to the captive, and Solana put out her hand to stop him, for the bruised and battered limbs of Nezzar, the fierce, desperate glare of his eyes, the shaggy locks and clenching hands, told her here was a man who would welcome death if he could kill just one of those who had made his life miserable—who had frustrated, had stolen his new-found freedom. Who better to avenge himself on than Assur-Nadin?

"I have a use for you, slave. Long ago I knew you when you wore the colors of my father. As I recall, you were one who was detailed to care for the young Essar-Haddon?"

"That is true, I know the young king."

Nezzar enjoyed the wince of this usurper, for it was ever to him a pain to hear that everyone knew Sennacherib had intended Essar-haddon to inherit the rule—had been forestalled only by murder. To call Essar-Haddon "king" was to state this fact—and it hurt.

"If you would bear a message to his camp in Armenia, I could pay you well and grant you freedom."

"Why should I refuse, Assur-Nadin?"

The King took from his belt a short, heavy bronze blade, and from his robes he took two small bars of gold. These he held just out of reach of Nezzar's

hands.

"This," the King held up the knife, "is the message I want you to bear to my brother. And this," he held up the gold," is a small sample of what you will get for delivering the message to the hilt!"

NEZZAR was slow to realize his full meaning. As he did, a self-loathing came into his eyes sickly, for he was sorely tempted. Hard upon it came a cunning, snake-like dropping of a shield before his eyes, a film of solidity.

"Is that all you wanted of me?"

"Only to tell you that in another cell like this, your betrothed, the lovely temple girl Clois, awaits your faithful performance of my mission. Upon your return she will be given to you."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will both die! She will die slowly and painfully before your eyes—and you will die even more slowly—afterward!"

Nezzar slowly bowed his head before the reptilian, lean, sneering face of this bastard of Senacherib's. Long moments ticked by as his mind raced to find an error in the crushing coils this adder of a King had wrapped around him. Solana stirred impatiently, tugged at Assur-Nadin's arm.

"He is not the man for it. Can't you see he is not a tool? He has not the guts for such work! Better kill him and have done."

Assur-Nadin half raised the knife as if to plunge it into Nezzar's breast. Nezzar looked up and raised his manacled hands to catch the hairy wrist. But the King stepped back, turned as if to leave. Nezzar said one word.

"Stay!"

The King stopped, said quickly: "A guide will take you to the Imgur-Bel, and there at the inner gate a mount and a guide to the north will be given you,

together with all needful for the errand. I am using you only because your past acquaintance with Essar-haddin gives you his confidence—as his one-time ward and guardian of his safety under my father—you can gain his confidence and so find a time and place to do the deed. To bind you to my will I hold Clois as hostage. Remember, her death will be most unpleasant if you fail! If you die in the attempt, whether successful or not—she will go free. I have spies in the camp of my brother . . ."

Nezzar stood with bowed head, as a man struck with a sickness. As the King turned again to go, Nezzar started, as if from thought too deep for speech and said: "I will do your bidding, my King. Treachery you ask of me, and my payment will most probably be in treachery. But I ask this, for I expect in truth no other payment for this deed. Guard the girl well—or I will find a way to pay even you for harm done to her!" Nezzar's eyes blazed as he spoke of the girl. He surged toward the King to the length of his chain, his corded, slave's arms upraised and a fierce rage pouring an awesome energy through his burly, work-hardened limbs. The King recoiled from the sudden change in him, and the fear came and went again swiftly on his face, being replaced by a smile as he realized that he had in truth chosen this tool wisely. The smile of triumph went from his face as swiftly as it had come, and Assur-Nadin, his face again a dark mask with burning, unhealthy eyes, took his gorgeous, perfumed self out of the presence of Nezzar of Caldai.

NEZZAR sank to his knees with a groan as the feet of the unholy pair became faint in the distance, and covered his face with his hands. For in the two years that he had labored, and lain night after night in slavery,

alone and unloved—the love that he bore for Clois had grown and grown, as it will in captivity. Until her image had become to his mind above all other images—one hair of her head was to him more than all the gold of the earth. To have her now at the mercy of such as Solana and Assur-Nadin, who would not hesitate to have her flayed alive if it gained them one grain of profit—was too terrible to bear. Beside this tortured image of his beloved in his mind—the face of his one-time charge and friend, the young Essar-Haddon, was a thing he must kill—and could! He could—he must! Nezzar groaned in terrible anguish—for Nezzar had his honor—and honor can be a painfully exacting master.

To save that sweet face from agony unbearable, he must play traitor to a man he had once guarded with his life, and learned to love and admire. And he could do it! HE WOULD DO IT!

CHAPTER IV

MORNING found Nezzar far out on the plain beyond the outer wall of Babylon, the Nimitti-Bell. Well-mounted, richly clothed and weaponed, the bow on his back of the best Ibex horn, the sword at his side of the finest work of the Nineveh master sword-makers. The horse between his knees a blooded Arabian. Black, that horse, and tall and sleek. Long, loose limbs; and wide between the eyes, she traveled fast and easily. Nezzar caressed the smooth shoulder sadly. She was a good mare. Too good to bear a man toward the deed he must do!

Some two days later and a hundred hilly miles farther—Nezzar pulled into a shadowed gully, gazed back along his trail, puzzled. He had refused a guide, not needing one. Yet behind him steadily, persistently, followed the

small cloud of desert dust, occasionally the dark forms of riders. They were following him, no doubt about it! Nezzar concealed his horse in the brittle desert shrubs, crouched low in the shadows, stole back to watch his back trail. It could well be that Assur-Nadin had changed his mind, sent his assassins to kill him before . . . he could blunder. Why? Who was this on his trail?

As the riders came into sound range, and the eyes could see, Nezzar's mouth dropped open in surprise. This sleek she-leopard astride the sorrel stallion—that bold, too-eager face, the wide, luxury-loving, yet lovely mouth. This could be no other than Solana—following him! That she would leave the ease of the court for the hardship of the trail was too much for Nezzar's reason. There was just no understanding women! Certainly it was not for love of his own too-adult attractions, she was far younger. Nezzar puzzled, and at last light came to him. Solana was a rat, and she was leaving the sinking ship, choosing a better craft for her foraging. She was going to Essar-Haddon's armies. She knew the young King from happier times—meant to insinuate herself into his favor—perhaps to betray the secrets of his murderous, rapacious brothers. Mayhap their bounty, their favor, was not lush enough for her usurer's soul. She was seeking greener fields. . . .

Behind her powerful stallion labored the lesser beasts of six warriors. They were not Assyrians, but Egyptians. Those hardened, scarred, care-nought gentlemen who sell their sword to the highest bidder. Evidently Solana knew them well and trusted them, for upon her hands still glittered the rich rings, about her neck the florid, priceless, jeweled collar of Egyptian make. The trappings of her horse alone were worth

a man's pay for many, many years.

NEZZAR had no intencion of allowing the woman to see him, but his horse whinnied at the scent and sound of the mounts of his pursuers. The party reined in not six yards from his hiding place, the warriors drawing sword or stringing bows in alarm. Nezzar did not await a seeking shaft but stood up, holding his hand palm outward. Solana laughed that rich, cloying laugh that always raked Nezzar's inward feelings like a whip tipped with metal on his back. A slave does not like to hear rich food in a voice timbre, or to hear the carefree tones of people who do not have to work because a slave does their share and his own. Nezzar did not smile or say anything, only stood looking sombrely out of his bushes at the rich, senuous figure of this wanton of a king's court.

"I have been looking for you, Nezzar of Cal dai. I need a passport in to the King's grace, and you will provide it!"

"One day you walk with Assur-Nadin and are in his private counsel, calling him king. The next you are calling Essar-Haddon King. I cannot vouch for you, in honesty."

"Can you vouch for yourself, Nezzar? Remember?"

Nezzar's ruddy face darkened with shame as he realized what she meant. He had in truth sworn to kill Essar-Haddon, and he had meant it. "How could I succeed in my mission with you in my company? Would not the King suspect me?" Nezzar's face was simple, hiding any thought, the face of a dupe.

"Look, Nezzar, I know you will never plunge a knife into Essar-Haddon's back, whatever you may *think* you intend to do. I know men better than that! You have not the stomach for true villainy. You will consider it, and eventually you will tell Essar-Haddon

all about the deal—and he will promise to release your little temple slut from the prison."

Nezzar was angered by her naming Clois slut, but his slave's schooling in insults kept him from showing his anger, other than a slow tightening, a bulge in his jaw muscles. He did not intend this houri to find excuse for killing him, if that were what she wanted. He said:

"Solana, I do not like you. I am not enraptured at your presence. I see no reason in your being here. I know you leave Assur-Nadin and his brother to whom you are said to be married, among some hundred of other women—because they are not generous with you. Because they are two-edged tools for any hand to control, more apt to turn and cut you than to serve you. But how you expect me to be any help to you in your future whoring, I cannot say . . ."

The richly colored face of Solana became now red with anger, the wide curving lips of mockery became an animal's snarl of rage. She half raised her riding whip to lash Nezzar at the word, but her face smoothed again and she laughed.

"And if I were a mild, dutiful woman like others, who keeps always her face veiled from lustful men that none but her husband may ever see . . . Would you then speak differently, Nezzar?"

"I do not know you well, Solana. It may be that appearances have deceived me. Certainly I like you better in your present mood than ever I did when I heard the slaves speak of your debauches with awe and desire. I lay in the dark and despised you for being a wanton while Babylonia rotted, sickened under the misrule of those you lay with. I have been a slave, Solana! I do not look on things with the eyes of the free and untroubled, I am no longer

what I once was, a roistering, careless youth with no thought for the morrow. I have changed. I am not the Nezzar men once knew."

Solana gazed a long time down upon him, there in the hot sun of Assyria, her face sober and somehow mystic with deep thought. Then she roused.

"Ride on with me to Essar-Haddon's, Nezzar of Cal dai. One day you will know me better than to call me wanton. Until then, do not believe the talk of little men."

Nezzar looked at the grim, dust-streaked faces of her guard. "I have little choice but to do your will. But remember this, a warning I give you for the fair face you have. If it is your blade that finds Essar-Haddon's back instead of my own, why, mine will sheath itself in yours!"

"I have no desire to be boiled in oil by his angry followers, I can assure you, Nezzar. And if you still think you can escape that fate after *you* do that deed and claim your Clois from Assur-Nadin, I can tell you he is a man who keeps no promise, ever. With him it is a rule, not an exception."

"I had divined as much," murmured Nezzar, getting astride his own mount.

"He is a treacherous fool!" Solana slapped her mount, the beast sprang forward on the trail toward Essar-Haddon's camp near Lake Van.

THAT night, they lay beside the cooking fire, the horses tethered between low mounds of sandy earth. Nezzar lay some yards from the guards, who slept, while Solana sat brooding by the fire, her strong young body not yet weary—or too sore from the horse's back to sleep. Nezzar lay watching the flame-lit face, beautiful as Isis, as mysterious in its voluptuous, brooding grace. Nezzar wondered if she were in truth as cruel and rapacious, as greedy

and lustful as her reputation among the common people made her.

Certainly she was a woman to set a man afire, to steal away his reason and leave only a burning, slavish desire . . . too, she was so different from what a man expected in a woman. Nezzar did not realize that Solana herself did not know, was a creature of moods, of passions, of much emotion too strong for her reason to control. She did not know herself whether she was evil or good, wanton or virtuous. She was a creature formed by her environment, adaptable wholly to changes in that environment. She mirrored evil when in contact with it, and so escaped its harm. She mirrored virtue when faced by virtue and so escaped the vengeance of virtue upon evil. She did all this as does the chameleon, without being conscious of any inner change. That she had no convictions about good or evil or logic or religion. For Solana was what is called an opportunist—and an opportunist is a much deeper character than shallower, more simple souls ever realize. For the conflict between good and evil in men's brains is partly a result of false thought—and who can say if the thought in that dark voluptuary was false or true on this sin-laden earth?

Nezzar knew only that this woman was a mystery to him, with her evil reputation and her at once sinister and yet frank and open face—a face she scorned to veil except when some official ritual demanded.

Lying thus watching the beauty of the night and the beauty of the fire light flickering caressingly over the lovely face of the court seductress—Nezzar felt a light blow upon his cheek, a small sharp pebble fell upon his chest in the light.

Nezzar did not stir, only turned his head slowly toward the deep shadows

from which came the stone.

Out of the dark rose the fiercely bearded face of Banardan! He made one cutting motion with his hand across his throat—pointing at the sleeping figures with his other. Nezzar did not move, only looked again for a long moment at Solana, the woman of a man he despised and hated. Then he slowly shook his head, stroked his mustaches with his fingers—held his hand for a moment, palm outward in a gesture meaning “wait.”

Solana at last arose, wrapped her robes and the saddle blanket around her, lay down upon the ground by the fire, her back to Nezzar. After a time, Nezzar wriggled gradually, quietly out of the circle of light, arose and walked toward his friend.

HE CLASPED the brawny, sword-calloused hand gratefully—for Nezzar was troubled—and troubles fell lightly on Banardan’s wide shoulders. Banardan whispered:

“How much did Assur-nadin-sum give you to assassinate his brother?”

Nezzar’s eyes widened. “How could you know that? By magic, or by bribery, or by sheer intelligence?”

“There was but one reason that dark snake would release Nezzar of Cal dai. That reason was that you kill Essar-Haddon. A fool would know that much. So when I heard that your life had been spared, I rode out of the city, saw you on the trail to the north, and knew that you were bound for Armenia. I followed, avoiding the trail for fear you would be followed by others making sure you earned the gold.”

Nezzar’s eyes closed in pain. “You followed for but one reason then. To kill me before I kill Essar-Haddon. Is that true, or will you have another way of the truth?”

“If you mean to kill him, why then

I will kill you, naturally. But because Assur-nadin thinks you mean to kill his brother, it does not follow that you do mean to keep your word to that one.” Banardan spat. “Who finds it needful to keep a promise to a liar, one who never finds it good to keep a promise himself?”

“The King is not ^{*}that great a fool. He has Clois. You know what that means.”

“And do you mean to rob us all of the chance of having a fair ruler for one little temple doll? Women there are to be had for a handful of gold anywhere. Slave girls, and others of better upbringing, maidens from the most sheltered harems in Babylonia can be had. Just leave an order with the dealer, he will supply you. One does not need to throw one’s life away for that.”

“It is not so simple, Banardan. I love that girl more than life!”

“Even so, Nezzar, you will never kill Essar-Haddon. My sword will see to that.”

“I hope so sincerely, my friend. But I saw no other way to prolong her life and my own than to swear to accept his gold for the deed.”

“That is understood. Now go to Essar-Haddon and tell him your story fully. He will find an answer to your dilemma, and a hard-fighting job for yourself under his banner. If anyone can save her, he can.”

“I do not think he can, Banardan, but I had decided to do just that thing. If my story brings him down on Babylon in force, and if Babylon falls, under his rage, why, in the melee little Clois may be forgotten by Assur-Nadin. And if not, why there is no better thing we could do, now is there, friend?” Nezzar’s voice was sad, for he realized the girl’s chances of surviving were slim, no matter how the dice fell.

Banardan was also thoughtful, but

not so gloomy. "There is this about it, Nezzar. If you did kill the rightful king and return to the usurper for your reward, he would laugh and have you killed, saying that he did not want the story spread. Then Clois would be sold as a slave. Or worse."

BANARDAN gestured disgustedly toward the sleeping forms about the fire. "How came you to get entangled with yonder houri? Has she come along to wheedle you into keeping your promise to her masters?"

Nezzar shook his head. "They caught up with me when I stopped to see who or what was following me. I can not fathom her. She goes to Essar-Haddon as one goes to a strange eating house, to see how the fare is there, I guess. What else there may be to it, I don't know. She is no common courtesan! She is a warrior's woman, wild and untamed and very much beyond the common ways of reason. To us, it may be that her coming or her going are of no import. Again, she may have dark designs for her former masters, for whom she shows anger. It is not for us to decide."

"We could wipe them out in their sleep in one quick stabbing run. Why wait till she is in the young King's favor, and her foot on our necks. Come, man, warriors must choose their masters more carefully than that."

"Nay, Banardan, I'll not! Nor permit it, either. Wait till I slip my horse's tether, we'll go on without them."

Underfoot the moon-softened desert harshness fled by their racing mounts. Banardan laughed, saying: "So the envied Solana found her masters too harsh, and has fled to Essar-Haddon. Perhaps you are right, and in that dark head she carries the King's future. Maybe Astarte stayed our hands from the slaughter back there. She should

know much of value to the true King. Haih, there will be a blood-letting and a vengeance when Babylon's master comes, when Sennacherib's veteran warriors batter down the brazen gates and let in the death upon the treacherous brothers. Haih, I would not miss it . . ."

"Those harem decorations will never stop the wrath of Essar-Haddon, unless he has changed much the last two years. I rode with his father, I trained the sword arm of the son . . . Assur-Nadin is not the man to thwart him of his due. . . ."

INTO the night rode Banardan, the erstwhile bandit of Babylon—and Nezzar of Caldai, escaped slave—toward the destiny of Essar-Haddon, future ruler of Assyria. Or so the stars foretold, and so a warrior's instinct assured.

Nezzar murmured into the dark: "And I thought the bastard Assur-Nadin would deal aright—I had it in my heart to kill the young King."

Banardin answered: "We are all vile when faced with such decisions. But a man finds an honorable way out of such dilemmas, a fool and a knave always gets himself into worse snares."

"Knowing the man as I do, I can tell you he would never pay you good gold or let one valuable slave like Clois out of his hands. A trained dancer like her brings too high a price, and Assur-Nadin has a mercenary soul, a heart that is a balance pan hung on cheating, golden chains. So do not feel that playing the honest man has cost you your Clois. She is doomed anyway, no matter what, unless Assur-Nadin falls."

Nezzar slowly raised the naked sword toward the sinking moon. "May this blade pierce my heart if I rest one day until that false king dies."

"I'll add Bel's blessing to that, Nezzar."

CHAPTER V

THE long journey northward wore on, the flat alluvial plain of Caldai lay far behind, the waters of the Tigris, too, they turned away from, and on into the increasingly wild and waterless desert, relieved at last by the blue waters of lovely Lake Van. They rested then among the trees.

Northward and westward, they learned, lay the army of Essar-Haddon. Along the lake shore rode the two companions, white birds starting like sudden upward souls from their horses' tread.

Openly they rode, and now stretching before them lay the banners and tents of Essar-Haddon, the favorite son of Sennacherib. The hearts of the two Caldai were inclined toward him for several reasons, but chiefly because they had felt the cruelty of his half brother, the viceroy Assur-Nadin, the elder of the brothers. Sennacherib had given Babylon to Assur-Nadin, but had intended the rule of the Empire to fall to Essar-Haddon. Assur-Haddon had arranged differently!

As the two riders neared the vast, sprawling host of tents, the martial bustle of the encampment, an officer rode out to meet them. Younger than either of the riders, the officer reigned his horse some twenty feet from their weary mounts, looked them over superciliously. Ordinarily little love was lost between the Assyrians and the Caldai, but among the southern hillmen were many who had served Sennacherib well, and the officer did not know whether to sneer or smile. He managed a composite expression, said: "Who are you and what is your purpose?"

"We come from Assur-Nadin, and we

bear news for the ears of Essar-Haddon alone." Nezzar knew his tale would not bear any intermediary putting the wrong interpretation on his words.

The officer laughed. "There is little chance your gaining the ear of Essar-Haddon this day. He is in counsel with the generals even now."

Nezzar grinned. "I would not answer for your ears did you keep my message from him. It bears upon the very counsel he holds now with those same generals. Can you tell the king that Nezzar of Caldai, his boyhood warder, waits. He will see me, never fear."

Nezzar of Caldai was a famous name among warriors, and the young officer's face lost its somewhat superior expression, he said only: "Wait here," and reigned his horse sharply around and galloped off.

Nezzar grinned at Banardan darkly. "Let's hope this young prince is not in love with his older brother, else we will not be believed."

Banardan nodded. "If he should conclude we are sent by the Caldai rebels to cause dissension among the sons of Sennacherib—if he should not believe that Sennacherib was murdered by Assur-Nadin—if he should have a different view of his older brother's character than the one so generally held in Babylon—it may go hard with us."

"Against that chance I hold the fact he remembers myself and my honesty—but the years are long, he was young, he may have forgotten myself." Nezzar looked gloomily down on the wide-spreading bright-colored tents, that scene of military life that both quickened and chilled his blood—for none knew better than Nezzar that an army brings blood and death and misery in its wake. The chariots wheeling under the blood-red late-afternoon sun, charging across the dusty plain—the bowmen at their endless game of target

practice, the earthen stockade around the great camp, the blazing forge of the armorer straightening bent spears and swords, and in the center the great pavilion of Essar-Haddon.

NEZZAR sighed, but the eyes of Banardan glittered greedily. "There will be loot aplenty in the wake of those veterans of Sennacherib's."

"Aye, once the army is headed toward Babylon, the days of Assur-Nadin's rule are numbered. These are the warriors who overthrew Tyre and Sidon, and defeated our own Merodach-Baladan; they *are* Sennacherib, the real king. Themselves are the Empire."

"If Assur-Nadin had put his knife into his father with forethought, he would have done it when these veterans were elsewhere than under Essar-Haddon. To kill Sennacherib in truth, he would have had to put a knife into each of those veterans. For that army is the iron body of Sennacherib, and Essar-Haddon holds their loyalty in his hand. I would not be in Assur-Nadin's boots, does ever the young prince learn the truth."

"Well, Nezzar, we bring him the truth, there is no reason to fear he will fail to know the truth once it is put before him. He was ever a sharp one."

They sat their horses, waiting, and now from out the wide opening in the earth works surrounding the camp rode the officer who had first met them. This time he was followed by a half dozen riders in rich armor, the bronze and and gold glittering, burnished under the late sun. They wheeled in exact formation, three on each side of the two Caldai, and the officer managed a smile of welcome.

"Essar-Haddon sends his greetings, bids you wait his pleasure. You will be quartered with me, so I will take you now to my tent to cleanse yourselves

and to eat the evening meal. I think the King intends to send for you after he has eaten."

"So the young lion has not forgotten Nezzar of Caldai," Nezzar grinned. "He has not changed, I see."

"Nay, the king is a warrior still—the rough ways of the camp are his ways—no perfumed court rigamaroles for him." The officer rode beside them, unbending, his natural antipathy toward all the Caldai losing itself before the sun of the King's favor.

As Nezzar and Banardan swung themselves wearily from their mounts before the striped cotton of the officer's sleeping tent, a heavy hand struck him between the shoulder blades, and a young, deep voice bellowed: "Nezzar, you old bull of Babylon, how many years has it been since we rode together? How long it seems!"

Nezzar turned, taken aback by the warmth of the burly young ruler, when he had last seen him he had been a slim youth and beardless, though hardened and sinewy from the campaigns of his father. The bearded adult, grinning from ear to ear, embraced him heartily, saying: "Thought you I would put on the high and mighty with you, you beer-tub?"

"Six years is a long time, but I had little doubt of you. I bear serious news for you, very serious. We must speak alone, for I know not what import you will give to my words—it may be that others should not hear."

"**B**USINESS can wait. Tell me what you have been doing all these years while I have been learning to become a king—only to be robbed by my "loved" brothers. Tell me all about yourself, and we will plan what comes next."

"There is no time for that. I have been a slave for two years, that is

enough to tell you. I have another thing to tell you. . . ."

"Well, then, come in here, bring your friend. Any friend of Nezzar's is sure of Essar-Haddon's welcome. Where did you find this grave-robber, Nezzar. Has a grievously dishonest face."

Nezzar laughed. "Your judgment of character has improved, I see. I owe Banardan my life twice over. He released me from slavery at the risk of his own life. Is a better hand with a blade than my own, and you are the best judge of what that means."

"Don't believe him." Banardan was somewhat abashed at the bearing and utter contempt of the usual royal ceremony and dignity by Essar-Haddon. "His sword is ever a breath faster than my own. He lets me win in sword-play to please me."

As they talked Essar-Haddon led the way into the tall tent, some twenty by twenty inside, and squatted on the rude skins which were the only furnishings, beside the arms and armor hanging from the tent pole. He signed to the armored guards who had followed him, and they withdrew, to take up posts outside the door. The young son of Sennacherib looked at Nezzar expectantly. "Now, spill it, and then we can talk about old times."

Nezzar told his tale well, omitting nothing, and as he talked the face of the King grew more and more sober. As Nezzar related the words of Assur-Nadin-sum in the dungeons under the palace in Babylon, the King smacked his hand into his palm and swore an oath: "By the mighty breath of Bel, by the teats of Ishtar, by the twining coils of Bahu, I will have his head for this. So that explains his silence since the death of my father!"

Nezzar felt a glow of relief spreading through him. If he had not been believed . . . He added: "In Babylon

it is common talk that Assur-Nadin murdered your father, and his own."

"'Tis quite probable. But he failed to murder my father's army, and they are mine, more ways than one they are mine. Think you he can defeat them on the open field?"

"He does not think so, hence his offer to me. And I love that girl, Essar-Haddon, I love that girl. Yet I could not bring myself to do the deed."

Essar-Haddon squinted his black, snapping eyes and looked at Nezzar soberly: "Canny as ever, old fox. You knew well enough the snake would kill you and sell the girl once you had done his bidding. So you come to me. I understand; I like smart men. Another would have tried the dagger on me and lost his life as well as his girl. Once I put my foot on Assur-Nadin's throat and let my sword drink his blood, your maid will come out of that prison and into your arms, I swear it. I will not forget."

"Your character is the reason the army is yours more ways than one, Essar-Haddon. They know you well, that you are none of these knife-in-the-back sneaks that stink up palaces with their intrigues. They know whose knife it was drank Sennacherib's blood, too. Such things get around."

"Even so, we must play the game sharply. The armies of my brothers meet at Khanirabbat but a fortnight from now. Methinks I will meet there too. They should be overjoyed, eh, Nezzar."

Nezzar grinned grimly. "They will be delighted to see you. I'll place Assur's gold that he gave me on that."

"Hurl his gold in his face that day, eh? You are a man, Nezzar, never fear for my regard. I remember how well you served my father. And for that girl of yours, I prophesy happiness. 'T've business that can't wait since see-

ing you. Forewarned is forearmed. I was of two minds about my brothers and what they intended toward me. Was within an ace of accepting Assur-Nadin's overtures. . . . Hah."

"You don't mean me to believe that?" Nezzar laughed. "You're not that easy. You must have realized the truth."

"Nevertheless I meet with my brothers at Khanirabbat." Essar-Haddon laughed. The strength and war-like spirit of his father was in him, and more besides, a natural magnetism for men that made merely seeing him pump the blood faster in the veins, made unseen trumpets to blow, made glory and courage the finest things in life. It was easy to understand why: "My father's army is mine." For no other man could have led those men, after Sennacherib, but this son! His hands were the reins. The Army was the Empire!

CHAPTER VI

MORNING and the Assyrians' brazen sun thrusting boldly back the dark. The red clay of the bank of Lake Van, the shaggy felt and cotton tents struck by the veterans of Essar-Haddon, the piles of spears gathered and stowed in the great baggage vans drawn by many horses—the morning fires swiftly used and then covered with earth. Essar-Haddon marched today. The dark God, Bel, chuckled somewhere far off to see his vengeance upon the murderer of Sennacherib, his vengeance rolling now with thousands of wheels, war chariots thunder, and the mighty tramp of that Assyrian army before which the whole earth trembled, and *would* tremble.

In one of the great baggage vans a woman sat nursing Essar-Haddon's young son—Assur-Banipal. Near at hand a harpist roared a war-song to the morning, a song about the deeds of Sar-

gon, the warrior grandsire of Essar-Haddon. The baby stirred and lifted its round red arms as though already reaching for the sword.

Toward Khanirabbat rolled the strength and the courage of Assyria, marched the blood and flesh that was to make Babylonia the greatest nation of the known earth. With them rode the bandit Banardan and his friend Nezzar. Waited the two treacherous brothers, hoping to do with the son what they had done with the father.

Far off on the Nile, the echos of that war thunder would one day be felt. Egypt would one day bow her head to the same power that rolled resistlessly toward Khanirabbat.

Through the morning confusion of the great army getting under way rode Solana toward the King Essar-Haddon. That was a meeting!

On a low hill, surrounded by his generals, splendid in their harness of war, the waiting, nervous horses stamping. The strong brown fearless faces of these veterans were fully capped in greatness by the man who led them. He was the leader, plain to the eye.

Up to this man above strong men rode Solana, the beauty and the grace and the threat of her boldly evident. The glances of her eyes were rich, and dangerous; thrilling even to these hardened soldiers. She dismounted and made obeisance to the King, who raised a finger to tell her to rise. She said:

"I find the court of Assyrian power under Assur-Nadin not to my liking. I come to you, as I think the whole land will come soon or late. I am your servant if you so will it."

Essar-Haddon was puzzled. This one he had thought deep in the intrigues and the councils of his brothers. Did they send her as spy? Yet about her was something, a controlled seething

rage as at some insult. Something made her words seem to tell far more than they did. Essar-Haddon said:

"How do I know that you come to serve, and not to betray? Why should you come to me whom you do not know well, when you have been so intimate with my brothers? Of what value to me could a woman be—aside from the pleasure of your company, the sound of your voice, and the light of your eyes?"

"I bring you certain information which I will give to you if you guarantee me sanctuary from the wrath of your brothers when they learn I have turned to you. Likewise I bring you the pleasure of my company and the light of my eyes if it so pleases you. Moreover I can wield a sword, as you may have heard, with the strength and ability of a man. I can fight for you! What more can anyone bring you. I am *Solana*. Is that not enough for you?"

"We will see, *Solana*. It could well be enough for any man, I would say."

* * *

LATER that day Nezzar and Banardan broached a plan of theirs to the King, after he had eaten and was resting under the last trees at the south end of Lake Van, the last trees they would see for many days' travel.

"I have a plan to make the one who holds Babylon as poor as a beggar. Would you like to hear how that might be done. O hope of justice for Assyria?" Banardan was grinning as at a joke.

"To beggar my brothers, without battle! What do you mean? What is the jest?"

"It is no jest. Old Symeon, the Semite bookkeeper of your father, can easily be gotten hold of. You recall he held the keys to the treasure vault for your late father. Now Assur-Nadin keeps

them on his person, but much can be done. . . ."

Essar-Haddon looked shrewdly at Banardan. "You propose to get hold of the person of the Symeon, the treasurer of my father, and by some means learn from him how to open the treasure vaults which hold the gold which will pay the armies we march to war against. That is what you are saying?"

"That is what I propose. I have been doing a little banditry to keep from starving, and the business has less difficulty than an amateur like yourself would think. Give me a hundred of your best, your most cunning cutthroats. We enter Babylon disguised, replace the guard of the treasury in the night, remove the gold and hide it in a place I know well. In the morning they will find dead guards, no gold. Can you defeat a penniless enemy?"

"That I can, my friend. I will risk a hundred men on your wild idea. But bring me back my hundred, gold or no gold." Essar-Haddon was grinning widely as he anticipated his hated half-brother's face as he learned of the disappearance of his sinews—gold to hire mercenaries.

He slapped Banardan on the back, turned to Nezzar. "You accompany your friend on this insane expedition?"

"I will have to go along to keep him from losing his head, I suppose. We work well together, it seems."

"What of this woman, *Solana*, who comes. Think you she spies for Assur-Nadin?"

Nezzar looked across the grassy, horse-trampled grass to where *Solana* again approached, picking carefully and daintily her way toward the King. He looked at the young fresh face of Essar-Haddon. He shook his head gloomily, for she was so obviously a possible snare. Even if her intentions were good, her influence on the young

king could become so great and so sensuously distracting from ambition's hard road. . . . He said, "She is not as other women. She treads a road she does not see clearly, and I do not understand her myself. She is not an ordinary woman. I would beware of her. Listen to her for what she can tell you of your enemies in the court and what they plan. But do not let your senses, your affections be ensnared by her deadly charm—do not let her put a ring in your nose. Her intentions can well be just that—to pick the winning horse in the race and make him her own. She could well do that to a man."

Essar-Haddon looked at her long, the grace of her hips, the dark lashes, brows and midnight hair setting off her olive skin, the glitter and polish of her evident even at the distance. Closer she came, smiling with flashing teeth at his young regard of her beauty. Essar-Haddon murmured to Nezzar: "She could well do that to a man!"

"MIGHT not be a gentle hand upon such a ring, Solana's."

"Tis decent bait for a man-trap, though!" Essar-Haddon laughed, walked out to meet Solana in the sun on the grass, with Lake Van sparkling in the distance. Watching them together, from her place in the wagon van, a woman held a baby named Assur-Banipal—sighed to see her man talking with the palace houri, and laughing. Nezzar watched too, shaking his head. Somehow the ways of Empire were too evident in that meeting. Men followed a man they respected and admired, and an adventuress winds the man and the fruits of their loyal effort and blood and sweat around her fingers for an ornament. But it could well be that Essar-Haddon was of another stripe, and the winding not so easy as it might appear. Certain in him was the stubborn pride

and vaunting ambition of his father—never would he be a woman's tool. Too, Solana, playing deftly her variant parts, scheming ally of the treacherous Assur-Nadin—turncoat patriot coming to aid Essar-Haddon—might well be above ordinary concepts of morality—might well be above the baseness timidity would attribute to her. Nezzar turned to his preparations for departure . . .

CHAPTER VII

A HUNDRED scarred and leather-faced warriors at his back, Banardan rode toward Babylon again. At his side, Nezzar, laughing and feeling more accustomed to the invigorating air of freedom. At their back the approving clink of tempered weapons, the glances of men accustomed to follow and to judge those whom they followed—proud to ride at the back of two broad and hearty ruffians such as these appeared. By reputation they had heard of these two—and some half dozen of them had ridden with Nezzar in the days of Sennacherib's campaigns.

The peasants along the banks of the Tigris came out to watch the band ride by, and shouted an occasional bit of banter after them:

"Men who cannot rule their wives ride to war . . ."

"Back to your pigs, clodhoppers," the soldiers would shout back, but these were familiar people; it was all in fun.

* * *

Banardan led them to a wood, some miles outside the Nimitti-Bell, (the outer wall). There the horses were tethered, a camp built and five of their number detailed to watch the horses and hold them in readiness for flight.

The rest divested themselves of their more apparent military garments, retaining only their weapons. They covered themselves with the ragged robes of beggars, manufactured on the spot by dirtying, tearing, and allowing the horses to trample their own clothing. Dressed thus like distressed and homeless men, they filtered through the gates by twos and threes, to gather that night at the house of Banardan, where Nezzar had rested so gratefully after two years of slavery.

It was a rollicking company that drank Banardan's wine and marveled at his treasure and dallied with his slave girls when his back was turned.

It was a serious company that set out through the streets that night for the greatest exploit of Banardan's career as a bandit—the looting of the King's treasury under his very nose!

Through the center of Babylon runs the Araxes, the "River of Babylon." Across this river, which bore a part of the waters of the Euphrates in a brick lined channel, was a thirty-foot wide drawbridge. At each end of this bridge lay a palace. The greater of these, on the eastern side of the river, was Banardan's objective.

But this stronghold of the ruler of Babylon could not be entered openly. And crossing the drawbridge to get to the city's greatest building, to pass through either of the two great brazen gates of the palace, meant calling out the guard to operate the drawbridge and the heavy machinery of the gates.

Such things were not for them. Common men traveled across the "River of Babylon" on boats which lay waiting at the quay which ended each of the east and west streets of greater Babylon.

There were large ferry boats for cattle, for carts and for chariots. There were also small rowboats for rent, with

or without a man at the short oars.

BY TWOS and threes the "beggars" rented these waiting boats, and drifted down the current of the sluggish brown tide.

Looking up at the first of the three great walls surrounding the palace and the person of Assur-Nadin, Nezzar said, remembering his own imprisonment deep with the seven mile circuit of those massive walls, "I only hope you know what you are doing, Banardan. This is no nut for one hundred men to crack."

Banardan laughed nervously. "I know a thing or two about this pile that the king would give a dozen heterae to learn. You will see."

A great vine clambered the brick bank of the man-made channel of the river, its huge leaves shadowing into deepest darkness the faint light of the stars. Here under the shadow of the mighty walls the boats gathered, and when Banardan had counted noses, he opened a water gate, worked with a chain and lever—and one by one they glided silently through into the channel which brought the water that irrigated the hanging gardens. Here was a basin some hundred feet long and fifty broad, and turning slowly within the rounded end of the basin was a great screw, lifting the water up and up for seventy-five feet to the top of the arches supporting the hanging gardens. Here, the only sound was the plash of the water spilling from the rims of the great turning screw, and the walls rose precipitous and wet overhead, arching together to form a roof over the water-floored chamber Banardan said—"What could be better for our purpose. Here wait our boats, and this place is looked into only occasionally by the engineers who built the great water machine."

The great tube of the screw rose on a slant upward in the darkness, and the

rims of the screw could be marked by the slots left in the tube to examine it for debris which might clog its working.

"Here lies our ladder to wealth," whispered Banardan. "This water screw feeds the whole of the many tiered palace gardens with water, and at each tier, upward for eight tiers—is a channel and basin which are filled with water—and covered with bricks. We can pick our entry way from here, and follow the channel unseen into almost any part of the palace, for the whole is furnished with fountains and pools fed wholly from this source. I have traveled through almost all of these water channels unseen by any . . . and returned the same way. Where this barrel of my belly can go, there can you also go."

Doubts of Banardan's wild scheme abruptly left Nezzar. Certain he had both entry and exit here.

CHAPTER VIII

SYMEON, the treasurer under Sen-naccherib, and now the bookkeeper under Assur-Nadin, was tired. Formerly a trusted officer, now he was but an account-keeping slave. His chambers in the second tier of the palace were damp, part of the older building on which the vast pile had been erected.

He sat tonight studying some very old clay tablets in the dead language of Accad, for Symeon was a student. The oil lamp guttered, the room was chill, and Symeon was miserable. It is not good to get old.

He looked up as the coarse woven hanging of the low door swung aside, dropped again behind a burly figure in breech clout, a sword his only other departure from a state of nakedness, and that borne in his hand. About his waist was a string of oddly shaped keys and sharp, small slivers of metal.

Symeon stood up, peering uncertainly at his abrupt visitor, who put his finger to his lips.

Symeon spoke:

"There is little need for silence, these apartments are not apt to be visited by anyone but servants, and they who serve Assur-Nadin are learning rapidly to keep their tongues still about what does not concern them." Symeon's voice was harsh and shrill, he made little effort to lower its strident sound.

"Aye, but my life depends on silence, I am Banardan. Have you heard the name?"

"I seem to remember it. There is a price on your head, if I am right. You are a robber?"

"Yes, and tonight you will help me loot Assur-Nadin's gold!"

"I have no access to the storerooms and vaults. How can I help you?"

"Would you want to, old man? Would you enjoy Assur-Nadin's face did he find his store of gold gone? Have you the wit to want to help me?"

"If it went to overturn the snake, I would enjoy it. But, if you had the gold of Babylon, oh Banardan—what would you do with it?"

"I take it to Essar-Haddon in the morning, Symeon. You have not been dealt with so well but what you care not if Assur-Nadin lives . . . The gold will help to bring him down!"

"What can you do alone? An army is needed to haul the treasure, to guard it. A hundred mule loads . . . A thousand men could not guard it from the King's anger . . . You are mad!"

"I am not mad. I have here keys and pick-locks made by the most cunning thieves of Babylon. I need only a guide through the cursed tricky corridors of this brick labyrinth. I need you to tell me where the stuff lies, and how to return here with it. The rest I will attend to. You need not risk a hair of

your head. . . ."

"If I am seen with you, it means my death, after."

"Go with us! To Essar-Haddon, the rightful ruler . . . Your fortune would be made when he conquers Babylon."

"I have had my share of fortunes, 'twould not be for the gold, but to strike back at Sennacherib's murderer, did I help you. Come, sit down, I will draw a map of the palace showing you where lie the vaults. It were best to plan this carefully. It could be done, did one have enough ready blades and swift young hands to bear it away . . ."

BANARDAN sat on the rough stool at the wooden table, saying—"It is not needed to bear it far, not all of it. Just to get it out of Assur-Nadin's hands so that a war will find him short of gold to pay his men—that is why I am here."

The old man sat scribbling rapidly on a clay tablet with a stylus—Banardan bent his head to watch. "The vaults lie in the under passages between the pinnings of the palace—there are guards here, and here, perhaps a hundred in this room wait their turn, on duty here and here are a dozen always. Here at the door of the vaults there are always fifty armed men. They are awake and none can approach this great brass door to the treasure without passing through this room."

"The locks, man, the locks! Describe them to me. I do not want to shed my men's blood only to find the skill of some lock-maker greater than my own. . . ."

"They are of Nineveh workmanship. Of brass, the levers are many—I remember when they were put in, the King and I marveled at the intricate machinery of the interlacing levers. But I cannot understand such work."

"Draw them for me; I have made a

study of such things, the last years. I will know, picture them on the clay."

The old man, now interested and excited at the prospect of denuding the hated master of his wealth, quickly made a crude drawing of the workings of the locks. Banardan laughed aloud, forgetting caution.

"Such things have been out-moded by modern craftsmen of Babylon. We have opened those old things with a woman's bodkin. Ah, this will be a night's work. . . ." He rubbed his thick palms together. "Symeon, tomorrow you can laugh at this Assur-Nadin, and ride off a free man, a self respecting man, a rich man. And if you know aught of the young Essar-Haddon, you will know well you have a future still, old as you are. He will not forget."

"Tis a bold and clever idea, this you have of stripping the King of his gold before battle. Bel grant you luck. I have given you what I know, on my honor." The old man turned away from the fresh, ruddy face of Banardan, sighed heavily. "If only I were young enough to bear a sword to aid you. But I would get in your way. I will remain here. The journey is too hard."

"Might get yourself killed at that. We will come for you, if we have time. . . . Well, enough. If we do not, they would never suspect an old man. To the work, and may Bel aid us!"

CRAWLING back through the slime coated water channels, down the great brass screw to the first level, wading waist deep again into the dark water tunnel that ran full length of the immense Kasr. Cursing, the hundred followed the burly Banardan—hoping their trust in his cunning and the feasibility of his plan was not a fool's hope.

In his hand Banardan clutched the clay tablet on which Symeon had scratched the plan of the first level. In his head Banardan held a vision—of the face of Assur-Nadin on the morrow, did they succeed. The expression on that face led him on, spurred him to a mad pace through the dank, low water tunnel.

Yacin, captain of the Guard on duty at the treasure vaults, heard a strange scraping under his foot, or was it from the wall? Puzzled, he followed the sound down the corridor, listened to the low murmur of voices, subdued—subterranean, ghostly. The hair prickled on his head; he hurriedly repeated a phrase from the Prayers of Istar, to protect him from the ill-favor of Bahu, the queen of Hell.

Nezzar loosened the grating where the water welled into an oval pool in the center of the crossing corridors. Easing the heavy metal to the floor of the pool, he waded, stooped, out into the dim light, thrown by the smoky oil lamps hung at intervals, on chains from the wall. Over his head he heard a sudden curse, the scrape of leather on bronze as a sword was drawn behind him. Whirling, Nezzar saw the swarthy, angry face of the Captain, Yacin, as he said—"A thief stealing in by the water channel, eh. Thou wilt soon be the spirit I at first thought I heard."

The long, leaf-shaped blade descended on his unprotected head. Nezzar fell face downward in the shallow water to escape the stroke, rolled scrambling away to the far side of the pool. He got his own blade free, scrambled, slipping over the low rim of the pool. Cursing, the Captain raced around the pool, intent on the death of what he thought was one lone sneak-thief.

As Nezzar engaged the sword of the Captain, scrambling out of the dark

opening into the pool came the men of Essar-Haddon, filling the pool with their near-naked bodies, scrambling to stand erect on the slippery tiles. One of them casually reached with a broad spear and shoved it under the Captain's ribs. As casually, Banardan began to strip the armor, weapons and under-clothing from the bleeding corpse. Washing off the stains, he put on the man's still warm clothing—stood for a moment to be admired—a Captain of the palace guards.

"Assur-Nadin's best," cried Nezzar, laughing.

"Hush your bellowing mouth," grinned Banardan, "there are more of these flunkies around."

"And we need more of their flunkie outfits, why worry?" asked Nezzar and the warriors laughed, too loudly for comfort. Death seemed very close here in the dark under-chambers of the mighty tiered palace.

Acting as the scout, the map held openly in his hand, Banardan advanced down the long corridor toward the treasure chamber. As each cross hall was passed and seem to be clear, he beckoned on the wet, near-nude warriors, running along with naked swords gleaming, following his martial, loud tread with whispering steps of bare feet. From shadow to shadow they flitted, white teeth flashing nervously, fiercely, blackbeards still dripping from the water.

CAME now the corner of the short hall leading to the treasure room, and on guard two Assyrian spearmen, standing stiff and straight, leaf-headed spears erect, swords hanging horizontal at the broad leather belts, linen cuirasses shiny with new coatings of glue, painted wooden greaves on their shins—conical helmets shiny with fresh burnishing. Their young ruddy faces

were bored, their beards silky with youth. Banardan grunted to himself; these sprigs would not need much effort to prune.

Banardan paused in his regular, unhurried pace, paused directly between the two sentries—said—as the shadows behind him flitted closer and closer:

"The commander has sent me to relieve one of you while the regular census and tax-questioning takes place. As soon as you return, the other may go, and I will remain till both of you have been registered in the new rolls now being drawn up." Banardan gestured to the taller of the two—"You may go first."

"I know of no census or tax-question. My taxes have been paid in full. What is this . . . ?" The tall youth looked at Banardan suspiciously.

"Know you that Assur-Nadin prepares for war, and must have money. Everyone is being questioned to see if more money can be raised for war. Get along with you, it is an order."

Slowly the other complied, handing his spear to Banardan, starting off down the corridor, turning twice to look back. It was most irregular . . .

As he turned the corner out of sight, Banardan could not restrain a smile to hear the loud thump of a sword hilt on his thick skull. Within minutes back he came, but how changed. He was not the same man, somehow.

As the new sentry came up to Banardan, he handed him the spear, saying: "I see that our comrade has been detained for further questioning and yourself was sent instead. That is good and thoughtful of the Commander—it saves my heels a night of sentry duty." Banardan turned to the other sentry, saying—"Give me your spear while you make your report, I will take your place till you return."

The man smelled a bad odor, but did

not know what to do with it. Reluctantly he gave up his spear, started off down the corridor. He had not reached the corner when a shadow glided from behind a pillar and brought a blade gleaming up to his throat. The man turned, striking out with his hands to avoid the sword blade. Silently the blade went home into his throat, was drawn cutting across—Banardan heard bone grate under the edge. Swiftly the corpse was stripped, dragged off. The blood was cleaned up with the rags which the attackers took off, to replace with the armor of the dead man. As Nezzar came up to him, Banardan asked—"Are you concealing the bodies in the water tunnel?"

"Aye, all are out of sight, and the grating will be replaced till we return. Half await in the water tube yet."

NOW ahead lay the main prize, and inside the first bronze gate lay a chamber in which fifty or more guards were on duty day and night. Banardan had a plan, but would it work?

Strutting in his Captain's regalia, pompous and flustered of face—Banardan strode up to the wide grillework of the gate to his guard chamber which was the principal barrier. Loudly he shouted—

"The prisoners in the dungeons have overpowered their guards—without help they will escape. Hurry—they fight upward through the east ramp. Make haste!"

Delivered of this message, Banardan turned, hurried back over the path he had just trod. As he passed the crouching, fierce-eyed shadows—he gestured, held his hand to his throat, cutting. To each of the warriors he passed—Banardan hissed—"Kill, now, or we fail. Kill—kill!"

Back to the oval pool by which they had entered, Banardan bent over the

now replaced grating—shouted, "No more of that hiding. I have brought out the guard of the treasure room on a pretext. If they pass here, we will die. If we stop the last of them here—we live. Come out . . ."

Behind him Banardan could hear sharp cries, the clash of bronze on bronze, the rush of feet. Turning, Banardan raced back to the end of the corridor. As one of the guards won through the ambush, came gasping to him—saying:

"The prisoners swarm in the halls, my men have died—!" Banardan pointed silently toward the tiled pathway past the shallow pool. About the pool waited his fifty. The man turned toward the pool, seeing the fierce faces waiting for him, turned back to Banardan with a gesture of despair. Even as he opened his mouth to speak, Banardan ran him through, started back up the corridor to the treasure room.

Almost regularly, at intervals of six feet, lay the corpse of an Assyrian, stripped of his armor. Busy beside each was one of his men, donning the dead man's clothes.

A score of feet from the guard room, Banardan stopped, stood waiting where he could see both the wide bronze grille and the littered path of struggle behind him. The corpse stripped and the clothing changed—each naked dead man was dragged off out of sight, stuffed into the grating of the pool water-tube. Still Banardan waited, till behind him stood fifty men in the armor and colors of Assur-Nadin.

FIFTY men ranked behind him, looking more like palace guards than the dead men ever had—Banardan walked up to the great brass grill, and rattled the chain and lever of the lock.

"Open up; your comrades fought nobly and the Commander has given

them the rest of the night off. He has sent me to replace the guard."

The officer inside, still holding about twenty men—looked at Banardan curiously. "Who in Bel's name are you—a new officer? I thought I knew all those who served in the Kasr."

"Recently returned to duty after a long absence. My name is Berosus."

The man hesitated, looking askance at the unfamiliar faces about Banardan. But Banardan did not hesitate, his long arm reached through the grill work, seized the officer by the neck and pulled him close. Even as he did so Nezzar reached under Banardan's arm and shoved half a sword length into his body. He would have fallen to the floor, but Banardan, understanding Nezzar's action, held the body upright, meanwhile talking.

"You don't remember me?—why, don't you recall the days we rode together against Tyre. You bore the shield of Assur-Nadin; I rode beside you. How could you forget me, your brother-in-arms. Why man, we have slept side-by-side around the same campfire."

As Banardan's bull voice rolled on, talking to the sagging corpse, Nezzar's hands, shielded from the sight of the guard room, went to the man's belt, ripped loose the great brass keys, fitted them to the lock swiftly till the great lever loosened, dropped—the grill swung aside. Then Banardan dropped the corpse.

The men sitting on benches along the walls and dicing together to stay awake—turned and stared aghast at the prone, bleeding body. In upon them poured the sudden, silent, fiercely grinning men of Essar-Haddon. Not half a dozen blades cleared the scabbards before all were dead or standing stiff against the wall, hands spread wide—a sword against their chests.

Swiftly the change of costume went on in the guard room, Nezzar at the now wide open grill very much "on duty" in case any official showed up to look into the uproar—and Banardan busy with his picklocks and assortment of great keys on the intricate mechanism of fifty year old locks.

Time ticked slowly by, nothing happened. A water clock in the center of the big chamber swung its great wheel slowly, the splashing drops singing their song of precious minutes passed. Banardan panted and cursed before the great metal door of the inner treasure vault.

Nezzar, standing nervously waiting, bethought him of Clois waiting for death or himself to return from an assassin's deed—somewhere in the living tombs of the dungeons beneath his feet. Nezzar wondered why he was here, when everything alive within him cried to fling himself raving with naked sword through the long dark corridors and down into the dungeons, slaying every keeper until his own Clois stood before him. But he had not even mentioned her to Banardan on the journey here. He knew that if he had Banardan would have barred him from the mad attempt—for to enter the vaults was risk enough without adding to it a man's desire to release the prisoners who waited by the thousand beneath the ruthless walls of the Kasr—for Assur-Nadin's word of death or torture or release.

AS HE stood thus watching the long silent corridor for possible danger, around the far lion-footed pillars came toward him a vision his eyes did not rejoice at seeing. Her hips swaying in her own insolent, too-suggestive swagger, her full lips curving in a secret mockery of all laughter and of all men—her dark eyes steady—her step light

and carefree—came Solana!

Straight up to Nezzar's startled self, her voice as she paused before him full of rich amusement at his gaping face—"What do you here in the King's treasure vault, Nezzar of Caldaï? Were you not to place a blade in Essar-Haddon's back?"

Nezzar peered a long time at that mocking lovely face before he snarled—"She—devil, you have learned of our doing from the young King—returned to thwart us. Well your treachery will cost you your life!"

"On the contrary, Nezzar—Essar-Haddon sent me to assist you, if possible. Besides there are one or two things stored in those vaults that Assur-Nadin would not let me have willingly. So tonight I take them unwillingly."

"How can you assist us? We have won this far alone. What could a woman do for us?"

"There is the little matter of unlocking the door. Banardan seems to have little success. That is really why I am here. I know how to open those locks—he does not. He risks all upon his skill at picking a lock—but he will find these not opened so easily as those of the petty merchants he robs of nights."

Her rich, leisurely, mocking voice soared through the big room, clear to all. All had their eyes upon her but Banardan who still stood before the great enigma of the lock mechanisms, his back bent, his movements slow—discouraged.

"Send the woman here, Nezzar. She might be an angel in disguise. Certainly she was close to Assur-Nadin, might know somewhat of these doors devilish innards."

Solana swaggered across the room full of desperate men, her eyes mockingly alluring to each they fell upon. Each knew she might, probably was a

spy, a woman who would, immediately she was out of their sight—call down the whole soldiery of the city upon them. All knew her as turncoat—yet all waited silently to see her prove herself by opening those treasure doors to their chief.

"Here—" Solana pointed to a little lever hidden in the glazed earthenware ornamentation of the wall around the brass door,—“is the reason I am here. If you had failed to trip that lever, and had succeeded in operating the lock and opening the door, a weight inside would have fallen. Far overhead, a string pulled by that weight would have released a block that holds an alarm bell in place. The whole palace of the Kasr would have been down upon you in minutes.”

"If you knew all this, why did you not tell us sooner?"

"I had first to deduce why you and Nezzar disappeared from the camp! Then I had to ask the King's permission to follow and help you—I had to come myself because no other knows all the hidden springs of this vault. After you release that lever, you press here and here and here—" one by one those ringed, too-luxurious fingers pressed the bricks around the great brass door in a certain intricate order. "Now use your keys upon the lock, Banardan, you great oaf, and bless a woman's wit."

Banardan turned again to the lock, inserted his keys one by one, and at the fourth try gave a sharp gasp of relief, for the great levers inside could be heard to move. The big bar slid back under his hand. As Banardan pulled the great door open, the little-used hinges creaked protestingly.

Spread before their eyes was the stored wealth of Babylon—bar on bar of gold, wooden keg after keg of jewels, the crowns and ornamented weapons

of a dozen conquered rulers of the past! The big, bronze-lined vault was crammed with wealth! And Solana's mocking voice was quite as rich, quite as valuable and somehow splendid, as any glittering object before them as she said—"You see, the lock was not so much, but there has been added to it a hidden release mechanism—without knowledge of which no one could operate the lock. That secret is known only to Assur-Nadin and myself—since he himself had it put there."

BANARDAN pulled himself together, the sight of this wealth had for a moment unnerved him. "To work, men, we must hide all this in the water tunnels before morning—and leave things here apparently untouched."

Solana entered the shadowed treasure vault, strolling here and there through the piled gold, fingering a jewel here, a bauble there. She selected certain gems, certain ornaments, thrust them into her girdle. Neither Banardan nor Nezzar said a word in protest. Most of the men were doing likewise as they trotted in and out, grunting under the loads.

Nezzar followed Solana as she left the vault, took her arm as she walked past the open grill of the outer door. She turned upon him like a panther, her eyes glittering. "Do you not trust me yet, you great ox?"

"It is not that. Lovely and courageous you are, and never a question shall I ask you of your doings again or speak against you. But seeing that you are well disposed toward ourselves and toward the leader we love—there is a favor I would yet ask of you."

"Ask," Solana curved her lips invitingly her long lashes sweeping her olive cheeks—"now that you have learned courtesy—ask. I shall listen, at least."

"There is one thing I treasure above gold in this pile of greed and cruelty. Remember the day I first saw you?"

"The little temple dancer whom Assur-Nadin said he had imprisoned, I'll wager! She languishes, weeping and pining for you, not far away. You want me to tell you where?"

"If you can do nothing more, tell me where she might be in all this maze of rooms and passages and waiting pitfalls. I . . ."

"You don't know what to do unless you see her, your heart throbs for her till you cannot think—you fear for her, etc., etc. Spare me the sentiment, Nezzar, and I shall take you to her."

"Take me to her? What do you mean?"

"You recall that I have been here with Assur-Nadin and that the guards know me by sight. I have not been away long—they would not know—the king would not announce I had left his arms—he would be too ashamed! Even so, they would not know if I had not returned—and what harm in seeing a little prisoner like Clois, of no importance to anyone? Come along, and act like a simpering courtier, a slave to my beauty—and a stool-pigeon to his nibs, Assur-Nadin. Can you do that, Nezzar?"

"I can try, but I greatly doubt the result."

"Flatter me, be obsequious whenever anyone might hear—and whatever I say—agree with me twice over, and loudly!"

Nezzar laughed—"That is how his officers sound."

TOGETHER the courtesan and the soldier strolled away from the laboring looters of the vaults of Babylon, down the long ramp to the lowest level of all, beneath the water line. The passages dripped with moisture, the

air was dank and stank, and Solana held her hand daintily to her nose. The guards straightened and saluted, and Solana barely noticed them as they passed. Nezzar returned the salute, shivering as he did so lest his awkwardness betray him. But his very ineptness passed for bashfulness at the nearness of the great lady . . .

Clois, pale and haggard from long days in the dark and the sorrow at the loss of all she valued just when it had seemed to be hers—raised herself from the moldy straw, peered blinded at the light held by the guard who unlocked the door. Solana entered, bent over the girl, lay a hand against her cheek soothingly and reassuringly. As the guard left the cell she bent and whispered—"Do not say his name aloud! Otherwise, all is well."

Nezzar, stooping low in the tiny cell, saw the white face peering up at him as Solana stepped aside, fell to his knees with an involuntary cry of joy, embraced the poor girl who was too startled to understand at first. Then, she gave a shriek of joy and wrapped her arms about Nezzar's stout neck. Solana brushed a languid hand to one eye, smiled a twisted, cynical smile at the two "children" before her. "Heart-rending," she said, mockingly, but Nezzar was beginning to understand Solana. Her voice now had a little quaver of something not quite worldly in it.

Echoing her voice, but sinister in its evil implication—came a man's deep voice—

"Touching, very touching!"

Solana whirled, Nezzar looked up from the tear-stained face of Clois—both gasped the word together—"Assur-Nadin!"

"That broad back and stout arm of Nezzar could not go unrecognized here. When he has once been a guest—no

man is forgotten by these who see so little of the crowded life of the city. And when they informed me that Nezzar accompanied you, Solana, curiosity compelled me to see what you two were up to."

Nezzar's brain, whirling in desperation like any trapped animal's—came out with the words—"I accomplished the mission you gave me—I return to claim my reward. Is there anything strange in that?"

"I met him as he entered the city—came along to see the lovers reunited, my Assur-Nadin. A woman is always interested in love." Solana's voice was cool, unshaken, tinged with subtle allure and awareness of the male presence of the swarthy Assur-Nadin.

Assur-Nadin pondered them, swinging a jeweled dagger slowly between his thumb and finger. "Where have you been the last fortnight, Solana. Sitting up with a sick friend?"

"If you would not believe that, Assur-Nadin, I can think of a dozen tales to tell you. I had things to attend to—in the city."

"Strange you were seen riding to the north by those who recognized you. Could you by any chance have been to see my young brother?"

"I could have traveled that way to make sure that Nezzar did his work, couldn't I?"

Assur-Nadin came to a decision, his swarthy face darkened with anger, and he made a sudden motion with his hand. From their places sprang the black slaves who sat here and there about these dungeons—waiting for menial tasks—or for worse. "Bring them to the place of questioning!" . . . Assur-Nadin strode out the door, and behind him wheeled a rank of waiting soldiery—four on four on four—at least a score of men guarded him tonight. Solana cast a glance at Nezzar cursing in the

grasp of two tall Nubians. The glance said "Think you he suspects?" and Nezzar answered—"He means to find out, so beware what pain wrings out of you. He can know little, there is no need his learning more."

THE low words, in Accad, unfamiliar to the Nubians, was unheard by any who could understand.

Within a short time both Solana and Nezzar were stretched upon the wheel, Assur-Nadin's face peering down upon them. They groaned—grateful as each sound passed their lips that it was not a scream of madness.

"You're the man who loved me," said Solana, gasping—"why do you do this to me. You are he who meant to slay his brother to have no rival for me—what do you mean by this?"

"I think you know. I mean to find out!"

CHAPTER IX

BANARDAN'S men went serenely on with the evacuation of Assur-Nadin's gold. Load after load passed through the grating into the water-tunnel, waiting their leisure to pass it on down the water-screw and out to the waiting boats. As the last bit of jewelry was gathered up and placed in the last sack, Banardan looked around for Nezzar and Solana.

"They walked off together. Saying something about going to the prison cells . . ."

Banardan groaned. He had forgotten Clois and Nezzar's attachment to the girl. He deduced that Nezzar had begged Solana to help him get the girl. His two hands went to his head and he held it thus as though it were splitting with pain—for it was, with vexation. The project was on the last step to success, and this had to happen.

They had not returned, and the guard would be changed within minutes—a hundred or so more of the tough Assyrian warriors to dispose of. Were they to be traced to their exit in the water tunnel, the whole thing would become a death trap for them.

Banardan saw the last of the gold into the tunnel and with his own hands closed the bronze grating through which they had entered. Remained the job of carrying the most valuable of the treasure through the low tubes, waist deep in water—the hardest part of the work. And only a slim chance that their method of entry would not be discovered.

Banardan with a dozen of his best, clothed in the armor of the guards, returned on the double to the chamber before the treasure house. Even as they swung the great door closed and reset the locks as before, the echoing march of the replacements sounded on the ramps from overhead.

Banardan stood in the doorway, the bronze grill unlocked, but his hand holding it closed, as the replacements halted, grounded their spears, and the officer barked at him—

"Where are your men? What has happened?"

"Nothing of importance. Some kind of ruckus in the prison wing. They needed help, I sent it to them. I'll go that way as I leave, make sure that everything is all right. It is possible that the commandant relieved them of duty after the fight, so that they had no need to return."

"Where is Yacin? Why are you here? Who are you anyway?"

"Yacin was called away by the imminent death of his old mother. I replaced him. Everything is in order, I assure you."

"This is not according to regulations. I shall report the matter, and your part

in it. Your name, please?"

"My name is Baladan, my rank you can see. I resent your attitude."

"Baladan, eh! An accursed Caldei spy, eh! I'll get to the bottom of this. Probably some relative of Merodach-Baladan, the Caldei rebel. Well, get on with you. There'll be no more such carelessness. We're lucky the treasure door is still on its hinges."

Banardan wheeled, his men marched off behind him. Banardan chuckled to think this officious pup would have to explain when the truth came to light. Down the ramp to the prison level they marched, his men grounded their spears with a military snap outside the great metal doors of the prison. Banardan advanced to the door.

"Open, in the name of Assur-Nadin!"

AS THE great doors creaked ajar, Banardan's heart fell; he stepped back. On the rack groaned Nezzar, two stout Nubians turning the windlass!

Solana's lovely body, nude but as yet unmarked, was stretched upon the wheel, her feet bound to a ring, the wheel slowly bending her back to the breaking point. Over her stood Assur-Nadin, a hot-iron in his hands with which he was about to sear her face.

What caused Banardan's heart to sink, though, were the score of picked men standing about the King, men far above the average soldier in physique and size and from appearance—in experience. Banardan wished heartily he had kept his full force at his back—but a man cannot foresee everything.

The thief's wits of him boiled, seeking for some slight opening to pin a trick upon—and he came out with:

"Commander sent me to tell you that an army approaches the city from the north. That it can be none but Essar-

Haddon and his forces from Armenia." Banardan delivered this lie with a dull, mechanical voice, stood as if made of wood.

"What Commander, Captain? I talked with my general not twenty minutes ago. Mean you Arioch?"

The cruelly smiling, dark, vengeful face had turned for a minute from the deed it was about to do, and the look in Solana's eyes rewarded Banardan for the lie.

"Who are you anyway?" Assur-Nadin strode nearer the wooden figure of Banardan, holding the long red-hot iron rod in his hand. The flickering flames of the fire for the irons fell on the stiff, unsmiling face—and Banardan saw that he was recognized. The King dropped the hot rod, turned to his officer to cry out—and Banardan acted before the shout reached his lips. Assur-Nadin remembered the man he had wronged, driven from the army years ago.

Banardan's sword sang from the leathern sheath, splinters from the inner wood flying from the force of the draw, and with the same movement he had leaped, placed his elbow around the King's neck from the back, held him in a vise, the edge of his sword hard against the throat just under the chin, the blood trickled where the edge touched the shrinking flesh. Banardan cried—

"Draw a blade to help this rat, and your so-called King dies. And after that, many of you will die before you slay us. We are not beardless youths to die without struggle, but men who know what a man's weapons are for. Now lay down your arms and enter the cells—and your lives will remain your own."

Banardan's dozen, at his action had lifted spears, drawn their swords, stood ready to defend their lives. One by one the swords of the score of Assur-

Nadin's dropped to the floor, ringing louder and plainer than speech in the sudden silence. One by one they entered the cells, were locked in. As the last of them was thus rendered harmless, Banardan laughed a short hah! of triumph, tossed the shivering king like a bundle of straw from him. He stumbled and fell into the arms of the soldier standing next to Banardan. Moving still with the sure, thrilling rapidity of a man in battle, Banardan's sword flashed once, twice, and Solana fell from the wheel to the floor, lay face downward writhing in the pain of release. In a second the ropes about Nezzar's limbs parted. He sat up slowly, groaning loud enough to bring down Kasr itself upon them, smiling and grimacing at the same time and rubbing his red-ringed wrists and ankles ruefully, gingerly.

"Better put a sack over that one's head" groaned Nezzar, pointing with one anguished hand at Assur-Nadin. "We have to take him along, it would not do to have him recognized in the passages."

"**H**A, TO take him to Essar-Haddon—to say—'Here is your treasure and the man who would own it!' That will be a pleasure." Banardan picked up a filthy rag from the floor, wrapped it about Assur-Nadin's face roughly, heedless of his attempts to stop him.

Solana raised herself slowly from the floor, her racked body still unable to control its motions, and Banardan bent to help her. As she came up her arms went round his neck and she pressed those luxurious, famous lips upon Banardan's.

"Never was a kiss more deserved by man, or more readily given by woman!" she said, as she released the burly warrior.

"Never was a kiss more devastat-

ing!" remarked Banardan, his voice softened from its usual harsh imperative to a mild, calfish bleat. Nezzar laughed heartily at the sudden change in him. Solana's voice, somehow silencing them all, since they knew her better—went on—

"We cannot leave here! The men working, bearing away the treasure, would be betrayed did we walk off and leave these soldiers in the cells to tell of us. We must stay here, and by subterfuge and lies and any pretext, keep both Assur-Nadin and his men from talking to anyone until the morrow night. Then we can go, swiftly and unburdened, but not until then!"

Banardan's voice was still the stricken moo of a calf as he said to Nezzar—"Her wisdom is as matchless as her beauty!"

Nezzar moaned aloud—said—"I see her power over men is matchless, but I see no wisdom in remaining within the clutches of the palace gang. Is there no way we can leave without involving those bearing off the treasure? It is hardly wisdom to think we must wait here for discovery. Only the Gods have preserved our lives thus far. It has hardly been due to our cleverness. . . ."

But Banardan was close beside the languishing Solana, his hand on her soft arm, his eyes gazing down into the dark depths of her eyes, and around him the miserable stinking prison had become a bower of roses shaped for his love.

"Bah!" said Nezzar, and set about making their stay there safe as possible. He had been in this place before, knew how it operated. At the door he posted the old man he knew always sat there, his head showing in the door opening through which he surveyed all visitors before opening the door. Behind him he posted a young, quick warrior, spear

point at the old doorkeeper's back, himself out of sight of the door.

"If he cringes slightly at the sight of someone outside, he must open the door. If he looks unaffected at the sound of steps, he is to say 'No admittance without proper authority.'"

THE day dawned, slid by silently, only the sighs and moans of the prisoners, the soft talking of Banardan and Solana where they sat side by side—the occasional step of a soldier outside on his way to his post, or a squad hurrying by on the double. One of these single passers' footsteps stopped, called to the old man who sat at his accustomed place at the door grille.

"Heard you the news, gaffer? Assur-Nadin has disappeared!"

The old man grunted, the spear point in his back preventing him from indulging in the gossip he loved. Nezzar crouched nervously out of sight, waiting for the visitor to pass on, waiting for the night and freedom.

"For all the luck they have had searching for the King, he might as well be locked in one of your cells. Spirited away as if by magic, he was in the night!"

The steps passed leisurely onward toward the upper levels, and Nezzar breathed easier. The day dragged on, the chief amusement being the taunting of Assur-Nadin by the soldiers of Essar-Haddon.

"A dozen of the young lions are sufficient to invade your palace and hold you prisoner—what think you Essar-Haddon's veterans will do to you on the field of battle?"

"I know what I will do with you before you leave this place—" the king would snarl, and the warriors would laugh and prod him with a spear.

"You mean you know what we will do with you if we have to leave this place

before we are ready. Hah, that will be a pleasure, to run a keen blade around your throat and pull that stupid face of yours clear of the ugly body— hah! Or maybe to impale you on one of these sharpened posts, if we have time. Oh, we will get fun out of you yet, you imitation King.”

Purple with rage, Assur-Nadin would roll over in his bonds, so as not to face his tormentors—but they would cheerfully turn him back again and spit in his face. To all of which Banardan payed not the slightest attention, being busy talking with Solana, who seemed taken with the burly leader. And in truth he was handsome, his great strong arms surmounted by bull-thewed shoulders and neck, red cheeks and clear intelligent eyes; his black curls falling gracefully over his olive skin. Banardan was a man’s man—but he knew the ways of the court and the gossip of the market place, the secret talk of thieves as well as somewhat of the ancient wisdom of the past. Solana found him fascinating.

Nezzar mused that Banardan must be as a draught of fresh water to a woman who for long had danced attendance upon such as Assur-Nadin.

* * *

Night again, and time to move. The prison doors swung open, Nezzar and Banardan led the way, behind them, Clois and Solana, shrouded with ragged veils to the eyes. Behind them two other women pushed along by the soldiers roughly. They were Assur-Nadin and his chief officer, clad in the garments of Solana and Clois, beneath which their arms were bound and their mouths gagged. After them in military precision marched Banardan’s twelve, up the ramp to the scene of last night’s work, knowing that today

the missing company of guards would have been noted, the cause searched for, the way more perilous by far than before. At the pool where lay the exit used by them before, they entered the water tunnel, and Nezzar blessed Bel and all his works fervently as he heard the bronze grating being pushed again into place behind them. Along through the tortuous winding of the tubes, stumbling now over bars of gold spilled and left in the water, and Nezzar laughed as Assur-Nadin fell over a bag of his own treasure left by the looters in their haste. Painfully down the water screw, wet through-and-through. The chill night air was felt, stealing in through the river gate with the water.

NOW at last they neared the opening to the river. Their hope that their men would have left a boat for them was dispelled. The dark sweep of water, the steep wall above was empty of life. Far above they heard the sharp greeting of guard to guard as they paced the great street-wide wall of the Kasr, and Nezzar chuckled to think how useless was all such ostentatious watchfulness when men set their minds to overcome it. He had learned a vast truth in the last few weeks. The truth that what man can devise man’s mind can likewise overcome and set at naught.

As Nezzar listened to the sounds from above, he realized from the stir that something was different, and sharply it came to him—

“The guard has been doubled, Banardan! They are somewhat worried about the disappearance of the King. I wonder if the looting of the vault is yet learned?”

Banardan only grunted, set about stripping off the Babylonian armor. Stripped to a loin cloth he lowered himself into the dark water.

"I'll bring a boat of some kind, we have to get out of here."

He swam off into the night, darkness swallowed him.

Solana, not noticing his departure, suddenly saw what he was about, called after him in a low voice—"Come back, Banardan!" But he heard her not, swan on."

Nezzar said—"Why call him back?"

For answer she took from her cloak a torch, wrapped in a greased cloth, and striking a light within the shelter of the water tunnel, waved the lit torch sharply to and fro. It could have been seen only from directly across the river. Within short minutes came the slight creak of a sweep on its swivel, the ripple of a bow wave, and a long high-bowed craft slid into the water opening from the river. Solana said—"Hassan, thank you for being faithful." The man was one of her Egyptians.

Nezzar thrilled to the rich sound of her gratitude. Her voice was one made for the purpose of expressing the deepest emotions. Nezzar was learning every day what a pearl was this "courtesan". Thinking of the opinion of the city toward this "wanton", Nezzar knew that men never know who are their friends in the ruling class, but take rumour for truth, and appearances for fact.

The craft easily held the party, and they slid silently out upon the waters of the River of Babylon. Nezzar knew that freedom was near, if only they could pass the great water gate of the Imgur-Bel, where the Araxes passed under the wall and on into the plains of Araby.

Past the brightly lit quays at each end of each street they glided, past innumerable lamp-bearing small boats ferrying the traffic of the mighty city across the river that bisected it's vast-

ness and looming massiveness.

NEARER, nearer came the water gate, where paced the guards who watched ever the in-bound traffic, but were not usually greatly concerned over the outbound boats. Nezzar swore.

"If only Banardan were here, I would know what to do. As it is I don't know whether he planned to take the boat out of the city or to filter out as we came in, by twos and threes. They must be watching boats for the King—"

Nearer now, and they could see a great jam of traffic about the several booms of the water gate. It was evident that each boat was being examined with care. Nezzar threw his weight upon the long sweep, the boat came hard around, shot toward the far bank. They landed on the brick quay at the end of one of the wide, paved streets.

As they unloaded, Nezzar glanced quickly beneath the veils of the "women", Assur-Nadin and his officer Hasdrabal, to see that the gags were in place. They made confused gurgling sounds the faces beneath the heavy veils were purple with rage—or was it just plain fear?

Their party of eighteen jostled along through the crowded streets, past the wine shops, the beckoning houris, the whining beggars. Past the great temple of Bel, its vast tiered splendor, each tier fronted by a great brass gate. The wide steps thronged with the plaid-wrapped figures of the priests, busy as ever with their mystic comings and goings on the God's imperative errands, their solemn faces proclaiming that the fate of heaven and earth rested on each of their fat shoulders. The whole vast edifice was topped by the gilded shrine where the God him-

self occasionally rested from ethereal flights. Or so they said, although Nezzar had another opinion.

Past the busy heart of the city now, they plunged gratefully into dark narrow windings of the poor section. Hurrying along behind the figures of Solana and Clois, who led the way, with Nezzar beside them.

The horses of the troop had been left some miles outside the outer wall. Had the men with the gold reached them, taken them all? What had happened to the gold? Nezzar's head buzzed as he worried—the party should never have been split.

They got the King through the great North gate easily enough, and trudged on North toward the grove where the horses waited. It was a good half-day's journey.

As they entered the shade of the wood, Nezzar rushed ahead to see whether or no the horses still waited, the guards still watched—and ran head on into a dozen war-chariots.

A WHOLE company of Babylonian foot soldiers camped where had been their own horse and nothing else. Nezzar stopped, remembered he still wore Babylonian colors and armor, and no lion of Essar-Haddon's on his shoulder patch. He walked back toward his own party, hoping to turn them aside into hiding before they were seen. But it was no use. A good dozen of the waiting soldiers flung themselves upon him, ground his face into the dirt while they bound him. When Nezzar recovered his wits from buffeting of the short struggle—he saw his companions likewise bound, and Assur-Nadin standing free and snarling over Solana's white, discouraged face.

Beside him an officer kicked Nezzar carefully in the face, to coincide his actions with Assur-Nadin's mood to-

ward them. "We have been waiting for you some hours. Thought you to steal away our king without search? Did you think a hundred horse could graze for days without being noticed? What did you use for brains?"

Nezzar mentally agreed with them. If Banardan had been along, he would never have walked into this trap! Damn, why couldn't he take care of anything without his help? If Banardan had been a slave, he would have escaped the first week. Nezzar, no—he would wait two years for Banardan to find and release him!

Assur-Nadin gloated. He was exhilarated after his sudden release, and it took the form of a super-gloat on his face. He kicked each of the party in the face, smiling widely the while. Then he asked Nezzar—"Is it true that Essar-Haddon is dead?"

"If you're too dumb to guess there's not much use my telling you," grunted Nezzar, too discouraged to be much interested. Assur-Nadin kicked him again. Nezzar cursed at him.

The party was prudently and heavily chained in a line, the company formed ranks, the march back toward Babylon began. The sun was sinking now, the day nearly gone. Nezzar prayed a short prayer to his private God, and asked Bel's pardon if by any chance he should be mistaken in his doubts of the existence of the Assyrian divinity.

The dust blew from the wide plain, the sun scorched now more than before their ill luck. They trudged silently on toward the vast walls, their spirits too black for talk. The soldiers talked in the ranks, the officers admonished them in gruff barking commands, officious, with the King there to watch. Nezzar felt a deep disgust with all the works of man. The towering walls ahead seemed to him the work of idiots, without art or grace, the sculptured

scenes in bas-relief on the glazed brick seemed to him the foolish dreaming of children without culture or sense.

The brazen gates swung wide to admit them, the inner machinery groaning with the weight. Nezzar's heart sank deeper in a pit from which he knew it would never rise. Assur-Nadin's revenge would be a terrible torment into death, he knew.

The opening gates were still a hundred yards from the riders that headed the column. Assur-Nadin was now astride a tall black, his chief officer beside him, the captain of the company just behind. On a gallop round the tower that flanked the gate came a troop of Assyrian cavalry, headed by a great black-bearded ruffian in the uniform of a Captain of Babylon's army. He spurred through the gates ahead of the column, as if in too great a hurry to heed their presence. Nezzar heard Assur-Nadin curse as the cloud of dust from the speeding horses settled on his face, choking, blinding.

Nezzar could hear in the wide chambers just within the gate, a part of the wall—a great shouting and the bark of orders. He wondered vaguely what it was all about. His dazed brain gave a leap—the blood began to surge through his veins—for that burly blackbeard could have been no other than Banardan!

AS THEIR column came abreast of the gates, Nezzar saw the rows of spears. A force was drawn up in military formation just inside the wide open gates. But the inner gates, which should have been open for their free and unhindered passage, were closing! Into the wide opening of the hundred foot thick walls marched the first part of their foot. He saw the horse, the chariots that had led the column, drawn up at the side, the riders dismounted, a

harangue in loud voices going on. Nezzar pressed nearer to hear, dragging the chained prisoners along in his wake.

"... a likely story. You, the king? Dressed in woman's clothes—riding a horse the King would never look at twice, accompanied by officers unknown to me ..."

Nezzar heard the bull voice of Banardan in full flight, saw the flunky force of the gate guard kow-towing respectfully beside him and looking at Assur-Nadin as if he had crawled out of the wall crannys. It was *too* good!

"Somewhat you resemble the king, it is true.—But that is not enough to make you king of Babylon! You are an adventurer, who has heard of the King's disappearance and has come to take advantage of your likeness to the king—dressed in these trumpery lies and disguised garments to make your story sound true. Where is the great seal of the King, always worn on Assur-Nadin's finger?"

The officer in charge of the gate echoed Banardan slavishly—"Yes, where is the king's great ring?"

Nezzar remembered the night in the prison when Banardan had pocketed the ring, saying—"This may come in handy." It was, coming in handy by its absence.

Banardan shouted, as Assur-Nadin, his face a mask of fury and frustrated rage—tried to shout him down uselessly, his voice lost in the rush of brassy sound from the bandits throat ... "Turn these prisoners loose, they're probably witnesses to the true king's whereabouts that you have captured and intend to silence by killing later. We'll find that out—we'll ask them!"

Banardan strode over to Nezzar. "Here, you look honest. Is that man Assur-Nadin, the king?"

Nezzar looked at the man, his face

was the most satisfying sight he had seen in years. Nezzar shook his head. "He has a resemblance, but I myself know he is an imposter. He has the king imprisoned but a few miles from here. We came upon them where they had taken Assur-Nadin, and this one making up his face to look like him, and they made us captive to silence us. It is even as this honest Captain says!"

Banardan strode back to the king, rubbed a forefinger over his kohl-darkened eyebrows, touched a finger-tip to his rouged cheek. "See," Banardan shouted, "the man is made up like a stage player to look like our king. We are not such fools as to let him get away with that. Here, you of the gate-watch, hold these men, I will take my men and these prisoners and ride to where the real king is imprisoned. Wait, we will return at once! Give these men mounts, they will guide us to the place."

Banardan didn't give the watching, overawed soldiers a chance to wonder why it took eighteen people to guide the troop of horses to the hiding place, but stood silently as Banardan selected the best horses available, and mounted the captives. They rode away toward the copse where they had been captured by the King. The company who had waited there for their return, many of whom had not yet entered the great gate, stood watching all this stunned; unaware that it was anything but a necessary formality in the process of losing and finding Kings.

ONCE out of sight of the walls, they set spurs to the horses, and flew like the wind, turning from the wide trail toward the river.

Nezzar shouted above the thunder of hooves—"That was the smoothest performance I have ever seen you do. Wait till we relate it to Essar-Haddon!"

The clear bell of Solana's rich voice

chimed in—her high clear laugh ringing above them all.

"The fools knew not whether it was their king or not, and when Banardan rubbed the rouge from the King's sallow cheek—I thought I would burst out laughing in front of them all!"

Clois, bending over her mount's neck beside Nezzar, her eyes still wet with tears, was also laughing. She cried to Nezzar—"Now I know why you are a warrior. It feels so good to get out of trouble after you are in it!"

Banardan checked their laughter, shouting—"We must put half Assyria behind us before we laugh. They will be after us before the sun sinks. It will not take Assur-Nadin long to right the confusion we have thrown them into. Then after us will come the best and fastest horses in Babylon, and men skilled in tracking—"

"By the way, Banardan, what became of the treasure?" Nezzar asked.

"We buried it in the waters of the Araxes, the same night. We spent the day waiting for you to come down the river, but when we saw a guard had been set to search all boats leaving we knew you would come out some other way."

"How did you find our comrades, after you returned and found us gone?"

"When I swam away, I stole a moored boat and returned. When I found no-one, I let the current carry me down stream. I saw familiar faces on a huge cargo boat. I boarded it, found the villains swilling wine and gambling over the treasure on a boat loaded with wind casks. They had boarded it from the small boats, slain the crew, put the treasure aboard, and were quietly getting blind drunk while they waited for some sign of the rest of us. We passed the water gate with only a wave of the hand from the guard. They knew the boat, and at that time there had been no

alarm. Somewhere down the stream outside the city, we sank the treasure in midstream, set fire to the boat and set out to march around the city to our horses."

"Aye. But where did you get the horse I saw you on, the horse you ride now?"

"Well, warriors like ourselves do not love to walk afoot. We are cavalry, charioteers when necessary, but we prefer a horse's back to other methods of travel. We stole them in the night from a caravan of merchants from Nineveh, encamped outside the city."

Nezzar sighed. "Banardan, I must learn this trade of banditry more thoroughly. It makes for a resourceful man. We would all be dead if this venture had been undertaken by another leader!"

Solana sighed too. "Ah, our Banardan has earned more kisses than I can ever give him, now. What do I owe you, Banardan?"

Banardan's voice again did a ridiculous somersault from bass to bleat. "I will tell you of that tonight, when there is time. Now we must ride, upstream and in the water. It will be a miracle if we are not caught. Khanirabbat is too far away for comfort."

THEIR horses took to the stream, waded up the swift current, the water up to their bellies. The slower pace worried Nezzar, he looked back toward the still visible sprawl of the vast city behind. Between them and the walls a yellow dust cloud rolled, wide and yellow. Visibly the base of it moved. Nezzar shouted—"They follow already!"

They neared the wide sweep of the Euphrates, where the man-made channel they were following joined again the main river. They ascended the steep yellow clay banks, started up the

green grass plain toward the north. Trees and shrubs hid them from view, likewise hid their view of the pursuit. They could only ride, and wonder when they would be overtaken. Nezzar realized they were far from safe, yet.

They came out of the trees upon a wide travel-beaten highway paralleling the river. As they emerged upon this, Nezzar made some to ride south and some north, so that the direction which they took upon the road would not be clear. Banardan, noting his care, stopped, talked for a moment with a wizened oldster among the ranks. He dismounted, began to strip off his weapons and armor. Dirtying his face and tearing the few undergarments remaining, he looked like any of the beggars to be seen about Babylon.

"Stand here and direct them west—" shouted Banardan to him, as they rode off. The hard highway, covered with the marks of many hooves, would not reveal their direction by any prints intelligible from the others.

Up the road a half mile, Nezzar tethered the man's horse in the bushes near the road, left a marked stone showing the spot by the road. He could rejoin them after the pursuit had been misled.

But, in spite of their efforts, within a short hour, the dust cloud was close, the glint of the sun on weapons visible in the dust. The whole rolled swiftly toward them like a terrible storm cloud, the horses black thunder-heads, the sound of the chariots the thunder.

CHAPTER X

FAR off on the plains of Assyria, Essar-Haddon's armies rolled nearer Khanirabbat, unresisted. Essar-Haddon was surprised that nothing stayed his march down upon Khanirabbat. He did not know the perplexities which had come into the life of his elder brother.

Nor did his brother Assur-Nadin know the trouble he, Essar-Haddon was bringing—nor when.

Scouting troops of cavalry scoured the wide green plains ahead for sight of the armies from Babylon.

Behind Essar-Haddon's gold and white banner, glorious with the Lion of Assyria—behind the glory and meaning of that banner, floated the banners of twenty-two kings, who had sprung to back him against the cruel Assur-Nadin. Cyprian Princes with Greek names, Egyptian adventurers, Ethiopian chiefs—it was varied, that army—but spined by seasoned Assyrian warriors, and sparked by Essar-Haddon's young genius.

Proudly Essar-Haddon counted the daily growing force; time was playing on his side, a good omen. Even the Caldai, ordinarily antagonistic to all things Assyrian, considering Babylon their own—sent their contingent to Essar-Haddon. It was heart-warming.

Nearer and nearer to Khanirrabat, the bastion of Babylon, rolled the armies of the Assyrian heir. But nowhere could he find word or sight of the forces of Assur-Nadin. It was into the camp of this waiting and wondering Essar-Haddon that there rode at night-fall a small and wizened warrior, mounted on a crow-bait of a horse. He was the only one of the hundred he had sent with Banardan and Nezzar to loot the treasure vaults of his brother by stealth. Loud was the laughter his generals and the kings and princes of his following heard from his tent as this small wizened man told his tale.

Essar-Haddon issued from his pavilion with his arm about the small man's neck, his great height bent nearly double with laughter, the little man supporting half his weight, for Essar-Haddon was laughing too hard to stand alone. At last Essar-Haddon

straightened up, wiping his eyes.

"Know you where are the armies of our enemy?" Essar-Haddon asked the assembled company of personages, come to hear the news from Babylon.

"Nay, if we did, would we be waiting here?" asked Habanukr, prince of Samarkand, his ruddy bearded face comically quizzical.

"Assur-Nadin has ordered his whole army out to chase down Nezzar of Caldai, Banardan and the courtesan, Solana. While we search for him, he searches for these three, consumed with rage at what they did to him!" Essar-Haddon bent over, roaring with laughter. "His whole army chases a hundred horses up the banks of the Euphrates and cannot catch them."

The company joined in the laughter of the King, not fully understanding. For they did not all know what Banardan and Nezzar had done to the King. The King related the story fully, and the plain roared with the laughter of an army as the story was passed outward, mouth to mouth, as ripples on water. The whole plain of the Khanirrabat roared with the mighty laughter of an army. How Assur-Nadin was forced to wear woman's clothing, how he was kept captive in his own dungeons for a day while they made away with his treasures. The whole story, receiving more embroidery each telling, rolled on and on across the plain till each cook-fire was discussing the possibility of Nezzar and Banardan escaping the wrath of the degradation of Assur-Nadin. Essar-Haddon looked about at the company of knights and nobles, gleaming with gold and burnished bronze shields, the tassled pennons that flew above the tents—the stacked spears and the sensed might of his army—and Essar-Haddon said: "As Assur-Nadin stalks this puny prey which his anger has settled on, let us

stalk Assur-Nadin and deprive him of his revenge. It is our duty to retrieve these intrepid agents of ours, we cannot sit here!"

So it was that the tents of the host of the Assyrians were struck, and following the lead of one wrinkled old warrior, the mighty power of Assyria south across the arid plain toward the Euphrates—and toward the place where a hundred horse dodged and hid from an encircling army.

AS THE sun set behind that mighty scene of the forces of Assur-Nadin rolling onward toward them, Banardan cursed, his voice awe-struck. "The King is mad, or I am mad. Or he has called out the full force of all his armies against us! As far as eye can reach the dust clouds roll, the mass and thickness of the cloud is filling the sky—how many thousands or tens of thousands would it take to make such a stir?"

Nezzar, who had also been astounded by the sight of the vast pursuit—said: "He has learned of the loss of his gold, and he has to find us or flee from his own men. For he can no longer pay their wages—he *must* find us. So—he has given his generals the order, 'find us or die'—and they are obeying."

Solana, sitting astride her horse, wearily looked up. "We must ride all night. Else in the morning will we find ourselves in the midst of that array of men and horse and baggage—not even a jackal could slip away from them then. We must ride on and on till our horses drop."

"And drop they will, before many hours," said Banardan.

Back where they had mounted upon the hard highway a ragged beggar stood, and watched the horse and chariots troop by for an hour; for another

hour the cavalry cantered by, and then for two hours the foot and baggage wains, and it was pitch dark and the moon was high. And he started trudging off on foot, for the passage of this army had rendered all chance of his relocating his comrades again hopeless. And in a short while he found the horse left for him by Nezzar, and mounted it and rode through the night toward Khanirrabbat, where would be the armies of Essar-Haddon, soon or late. So it was that Essar-Haddon learned that the armies had set out from Babylon, and guessed they had been ordered out to surround the band under Banardan. Likewise Essar-Haddon guessed that Assur-Nadin was desperate from the loss of his gold, and had ordered out his armies in a last despairing effort to find those who knew where the gold had been hidden.

SO IT was that across the plains between the Euphrates and Khanirrabbat a weary, thirsty band of a hundred, with two worn-out women and many sick and saddle-galled men, were followed by a mighty army of tens of thousands. And from the north, toward the trail made by these two nearing forces, came down the might and laughter and strength of Essar-Haddon.

In the day the burning sun took its toll of the band of fugitives; one by one their horses foundered, and the riders mounted two astride. Their own mouths like dried leather with thirst, the horses foam-flecked and staggering, plodded on—And ever drew nearer the awful might of Assur-Nadin's legions. And as the sun sank again, the pursuing army made camp. But for them was no camp and no rest, but only on and on under the mocking moon, across the still burning-hot plain, on and on, and now but a dozen horses left them.

The rest staggered in a long line behind, on foot, and all knew that morning would see their deaths, and that the death would not be pleasant when they were led before Assur-Nadin.

Before that morning sun blazed its rim above the low hills half of them had fallen, and the others had given up and sat waiting for the death the morning would bring.

Now the light of the sun brought some few of their heads up from the stupor of exhaustion, Banardan and Solana and Nezzar, not so weary as the less vigorous and sturdy of their number—and they looked upon the brassy hot rim of the sun with eyes which said—"Today is the last day I will look upon the sun—and it does not even come up pleasantly for me, but angrily and suddenly."

As Banardan raised his head, and looked at the sun across the raven locks of Solana, his surprise to see a column of riders where none should be, was great. Could Assur-Nadin's wolves have passed them in the night by some miracle—and they lay surrounded?

Even as he pondered what these riders were a trumpet sounded, then another and another, until brazen sudden waves of sound swept down out of the eye of the sun, passed the strewn figures of their little band where they lay, rolled on and on across the desert herbiage, over the low hills beyond, and struck into the vast night camp of Assur-Nadin with a fearful strength.

Hard upon these battle notes of the trumpets, the war-chariots thundered down the slopes past Banardan and Nezzar, the scythes fastened to the wheel's spokes making an ominous glittering magic in the morning light. Hard after the chariots, but farther on, thundered the troops of Assyrian horse, and near at hand, on the highest of the low hills, Nezzar could make out the white

and gold pennon of Essar-Haddon. The glittering richness of the armored figures clustered about him—the dozens of mighty names attached to those princes filtered swiftly through his brain, bringing with them a train of thoughts of the power that must now be unleashing before them.

"Banardan," asked Nezzar—"where are we?"

"We have almost reached the city of Khanirrabat, Nezzar. Here must the army of Essar-Haddon have waited word of Assur-Nadin's movements, and we brought that to him, eh?"

SOLANA and Clois stood in embrace, looking up at the golden lion of Essar-Haddon flying from the summit of the round hill. Clois was weeping great tears of happiness. Solana was smiling and stroking the soft hair of the younger girl soothingly. Nezzar, seeing the two women in the joy of release from fear, realized that no longer did he think of Solana as a sinister debauchee, or an adventuress of the court of Assur-Nadin, but rather, as a clever woman who found a way to make events transpire as she wished. That Clois thus embraced and wept in her arms spoke much of her to Nezzar, for the gentle dancing girl would never become friendly to an evil person.

The worn, thirsty and utterly weary warriors about them, too exhausted to quarrel over the dozen drooping mounts still left them, stood and found energy to send cheer after cheer ringing after the riders racing by. The pennons whipping gold-and-white from their spear heads—quivers crammed with war-arrows, their faces afire with eagerness to close with the enemy.

The desire to relate the events of the past days to Essar-Haddon burned within Nezzar, and as he swung himself to horse and drove his spurs deep into

the weary flanks of the gaunt mount, he saw the same desire had moved Banardan, and the two raced off toward the group of generals and princes about the young King.

The warriors bawled after them—"Bring horses, we will miss the looting, the fight will be over before we wet our blades!"

Banardan roared back at them—"No fighting for any of you, that's an order. You're in no shape for this brawl; try sitting on your hams for awhile!"

* * *

Down upon the far-sprawling night-camp of the Babylonians thundered the war-fury of Sennacherib's warriors. Vengeance on the murderers who had slain their leader, who plotted against his loved son—spurred them on, vengeance rang in their battle-crys—vengeance drove home the spears with particular fury and accuracy. As the spear shafts broke after repeated use, the long swords and crescent-headed battle axes began to ply.

The Babylonians, surprised, some of them still in their sleep, had no chance to form a tactical front, hardly chance to get hands to weapons. They did not even have a chance to choose between flight and battle. The cavalry crashed through the tent lines, flinging torches, spearing or stabbing any who showed their face. Hard on their heels came the hardy Assyrian foot, cutting the tent ropes, dropping the gaudy fabric upon the heads of many a dignitary and officer before he was aware the camp was attacked. Those who managed to evade this first onslaught of the advance guard of Essar-Haddon's force, dashed for the tethered horses, only to find the whole encampment circled continuously by the scythe-wheeled chariots, cutting down all who tried to flee. Horses ran screaming,

maddened through the uproar, plunging and trampling. The confusion was complete, too complete for efficient slaughter. Even Essar-Haddon's veterans were at a loss to keep track of the furious pace of events, of the complete mix-up of persons and war-standards. Much of the Babylonians' force were bivouacked without tents, scattered without any great attempt at order, their companies marked their place by thrusting a spear with the officers' fringed pennon in the ground, the men sleeping helter-skelter about these penons.

WHEN the charge came down upon them with war-scream and trumpet they rallied in ragged groups about these standards, trying to form a shield wall against the horse. These little islands of resistance held out till the first fury of the attack had spent itself and passed on in pursuit of the fugitives, streaming across the plain toward the river, or galloping bare-back on horses they had managed to catch and mount toward the low hills to the east.

The battle dissolved into a ragged, multi-direction pursuit of these fugitives. Into a scramble through the overturned and burning tents and baggage wagons for loot. Into intermittent assaults upon the beleaguered battalions of Babylonians rallying round their standards here and there along the wide battlefield. As the horse raced on and left the camp behind, the foot marched up in better order, mopping up.

Bow-shot range from the scattered groups, these experienced foot crouched behind overturned chariots, dead horses, or heaps of the slain, and lobbed a steady flight of arrows into these still optimistic Babylonian warriors, cutting them down steadily, never giving them a chance to assemble together, keeping them where they were till the heavy

chariots returned from the more serious work to ride them down and crush them utterly.

Banardan and Nezzar urged their unwilling mounts up the slope toward Essar-Haddon, looking back occasionally upon the wild scene of rout behind them.

"The wolves have become rabbits, suddenly!" Banardan shouted to Nezzar, in exultation in the utter defeat of their recent pursuers going on behind them.

"Aye, they chased a fox and caught a lion!" Nezzar shouted in reply, laughing to think of Assur-Nadin receiving the news of the battle. "When Assur-Nadin gets the word he will not know whether to grow wings like a bird and fly away from Babylon, or grow claws like a mole and burrow into the banks of the River of Babylon."

"Not being able to decide, he will probably sit there cornered like a rat and wait for the rat-catcher."

"Being born a fool, that is what he will do. Hope that the walls of Babylon will protect him. And hope in vain."

As they dismounted and approached the exultant group of richly dressed men about Essar-Haddon, the young King himself sprang from out the dignified and glittering group, seized Nezzar about the waist and near crushed his ribs in with a bear hug. As he released Nezzar he clamped an arm about Banardan's shoulder and kissed him on the cheek.

"You must have heard . . ." said Nezzar, rubbing his ribs ruefully.

For answer, Essar-Haddon pointed at the wizened face of Ibn Hambul, and Banardan shouted in his bull's bellow—"It comes clear to me now. This one found his way to you yesterday, told you of the forces Assur-Nadin let loose upon our trail, and guided you in this entrapment."

"Is a fox, that one. Was beloved of my father, if you remember. Is beloved of me, I can swear to that." Essar-Haddon was at his best, his ruddy square face beaming, victory flushing him like wine. "And he told me of the looting of the vaults, of the trapping of the snake in his own prison. Ah, for a poet to tell this tale as it should be told. Oh, for a sight of the face of my brother when he learned his gold was gone."

"Much credit goes to Solana. The temptress smoothed the way, told me how to open the vault—helped greatly. She is a valuable woman, Solana."

Essar-Haddon nodded, sobering. "I shall try to reward her—what think you she wants?"

"You will have to ask her that. But I can make a guess, though I will not."

"And she asks me for you as a slave, Banardan, I will give it her. Just punishment for a scoundrel of a bandit like yourself."

"And you had seen them together in the prison you would not think that a jest, my King," said Nezzar. "They were mooning together like children just betrothed. And what is a husband but a slave?"

CHAPTER XI

ESSAR-HADDON that same day proclaimed himself King of all Assyria. Determined to hold his court in Babylon, the army moved forward toward Babylon rapidly. The city had not time to provision for a siege before the lion-banners of Essar-Haddon were waving before the gates.

The Nimitti-Bel, or outer wall of Babylon, enclosed a space of some one-hundred square miles, being over forty-two miles around. One hundred great brazen gates pierced the walls at irregular intervals. The height of the walls

was three-hundred feet, varying slightly according to the slope of the near level ground.

Great square watch towers, two-hundred-and-fifty in all, flanked each mighty gate, chariots drove constantly along the top of the wall, it being wide enough for a four horse chariot to turn upon.

The sight of these vast walls did not in any way discourage the horde under Essar-Haddon. For they had breached these walls before under Senaccherib, when the Caldai had revolted, and did not see any reason why it could not be done again.

The siege was made difficult by the River of Babylon, which bisected the whole plain about the city. To lay siege to the city, and place a force sufficient at each gate to keep it bottled up—he had to separate his forces on each side of the river. No general trained under Sennacherib would consider such an action—and Essar-Haddon had an answer to this dilemma.

The Araxes, a man-made arm of the Euphrates, connected with and supplying the great moat about the walls and traveling through the city in a brick lined channel, was his problem. This Gordian knot he cut at its source, where the river connected with the Euphrates, some dozen miles northward of the city.

Here out upon the yellow-grey flood of the Euphrates, a great boom, formed of fishing boats and timbers lashed together, was floated, swung in the current, came athwart the source of the River of Babylon.

From this bridge across the river, great timbers were driven down into the mud of the river. From timber to timber vast mats of woven willow were lowered, weighted with stones. Sandbags, stones, mats of willow, and the luckless fishermen's boats, sunk amid stream, completed the dam, and the

River of Babylon shrunk day by day as they worked till a mere trickle of stagnant water was all that marked the channel—was all that remained in the great moat that protected the city.

As the great ditch from which had come the clay for the walls of the city lost its protective flood—as the walls lost their moat, so did the spirits of the Babylonian nobles ebb and disappear.

A few half-hearted forays against this dam building, which ended in a mad scramble to reach again the great gates before the hard riding horsemen cut them down—were all the attempts they made.

DAY by day the city sat behind its terrible walls and waited for the doom that grew more apparent as their river grew less visible.

As the waters of the river disappeared, a mule train waited south of the city. At the head of the ten score baggage beasts sat Banardan and Nezzar, and about them the hundred warriors, now permanently attached to Banardan with Nezzar as second in command.

Clois had remained in Nezzar's tent, content to let the masculine world severely alone—but beside Banardan rode Solana, face bared to the hot wind from the south-land, eyes dancing not to miss a single sight or sound that might add to the thrill of being alive.

As the rails of the boat marking the place where the treasure had been abandoned came from the lessening tide, they rode slowly out upon the clay.

Strewn from many a burst bag, the bottom was littered with bars of gold, with glittering jems, and Solana, laughing, rode her horse into the water and bent swooping upon an Egyptian diadem, glittering with rubies and amarynths, placed it laughing on her black locks.

Assur-Nadin's treasure had at last found its way into the rightful hands, would now finance the siege of Babylon, did Essar-Haddon need it.

Nothing revealed the fear in which Assur-Nadin and his army held the army of the King more than the fact that their return to the camp, some forty miles slow journey—was unheralded by any attack. Nezzar wondered whether they were too stupid to deduce what the mule train was carrying, or just too fearful, like a turtle, to come out of their shell. The chariots, carrying the guard officers, rode proudly from watch-tower to tower atop the wall, and fierce eyes glared down upon them from each embrasure, but not an arrow arched feathered flight down upon them when they neared the mighty wall, and not a cry gave admission that their errand was seen or understood.

"'Tis a duty to kill such timid rascals," murmured Nezzar to Banardan. "They would not reach out a hand to grasp a fortune."

"Why should they? Assur-Nadin would be too niggardly to reward them, if they did! They have not even bothered to report our journey—for fear of awaking again his anger! Sure, he must go into a fit at the mention of Banardan or Nezzar."

"Or of Solana!" cried Solana. "I know why they do not mention our presence. The last time they went out to catch us and left their wall behind—they lost the whole army. Certain it is they do not wish to repeat such a mistake."

Banardan did not know the troops of horse, the hundreds of chariots, that could be seen from the height of the walls, but could not be seen by himself, which Essar-Haddon had detailed to guard the route of their treasure train.

* * *

THE area within the vast walls of Babylon, far over one hundred square miles, was nine-tenths gardens, parks, and orchards. It was a city that lived by irrigation—water from the Araxes and the Euphrates flowed everywhere through the city in irrigation ditches, most of them of brick.

With Essar-Haddon's damming the source of the water, the beautiful gardens of Babylon began at once to wither and die from the burning sun. Food, always plentiful, became scarce, then disappeared from the great markets. The people, already sick and tired of Assur-Nadin, knew this last and greatest misfortune coming upon them was solely due to his greed in seizing what was rightfully his younger brother's—the throne of Assyria. They knew, too, from report and their own observation, that only a miracle could protect Assur-Nadin and themselves from the wrath of Essar-Haddon. Loud were the grumbles of the hungry and every day thirstier people. There was little provision within the walls for catching water, for rain was infrequent, and the river supplied all their needs. There were a few wells and springs, but as the river disappeared, the water table fell, and these dried up, disappeared. Babylon was waterless—was dying.

But Essar-Haddon, calculating his time carefully, did not wait for the vast city to die, for the plagues of hunger and thirst to do his work for him. He wanted the city alive, to make his court and the center of his state there.

So it was that his armies began the march down the great brick channel of the river bottom, which passed under the vast walls in a series of great arched openings. Here the Babylonians began hastily to erect barricades, everything they possessed was thrown into the river channel under the walls to stop the natural breach. Gilded furniture

from the rich merchants home, rough wooden benches from the poor folks quarters, sculptured chunks of granite torn from the brick buildings' cornices and doorways—the bodies of some fifty high placed officers whom Assur-Nadin had beheaded because they counseled the only obvious solution—surrender. Assur-Nadin clung viciously to life—he would not die while his people lived on. And he knew his brother would leave him life never.

All of these things cast into the channel of the river made but a barricade some fifty feet high under the great water gate, now swinging idly over the chasm of the water channel, where no water now bore off the filth of the city—or brought in upon its bosom the merchandise on which the city industry was based. Nor did the boats bring in the wine from the south, the grapes from the vineyards, or the food from the farms of the countryside, or the fishermen with their boat-loads of fish from the Euphrates.

Lumbering along each bank of the Araxes, like two chess rooks suddenly made brobdingnagian by magic were two vast towers Essar-Haddon had been building since the army ringed the walls after the river had been dried up. Each bank of the river was wide and beaten firm by the towing of the boats upward against the current, the feet of centuries of oxen had made a broad highway of the clay banks of the Araxes. Down this gift from the laboring beasts Essar-Haddon drew his assault towers, vast, square, wheeled buildings, reaching up the three hundred feet necessary to sweep the walls above the river channel with their fire. On the huge top of the swaying towers archers swarmed, and as the top of the wall came in range, the arrows swept it clean of life. Nothing living could withstand that hail.

FLANKED thus by the towers, just as today our chess sets are flanked by the rooks, the horse and foot of Essar-Haddon advanced slowly upon Babylon, down the brick river channel, keeping pace with the slow, laborious movement of the towers upon the banks. Beneath the vast weight of the wooden towers, covered with bulls hides, green, to ward off fire-arrows—beneath this vast weight of timbers and men and weapons, the great wooden wheels screeched on their axles. Crow-bars manned by dozens of men, bars thirty feet long—pried the wheels around. Under the wheels, which ran solidly repeated clear across the width of the tower, were heavy hewn planks, and as quickly as the tower lumbered past a row of these planks, the warriors seized them and ran around to the front, braving the showers of arrows from the walls, and placed them again in a triple flooring of wood, so that the towers progressed quite as fast as they could build its roadway.*

Atop the walls, pitch smoked in great bronze cauldrons, stones were gathered and great piles of the Babylonian brick—somewhat larger than our brick of today. As the forefront of the army came under the great river arches, the pitch was poured upon them, the bricks were thrown in obedience to orders, arrows were fired. But it was all rather perfunctory, for most of the Babylonians could read the writing on the wall—wanted the matter over with quickly. But spurring them on were the officers

* Even today—we have not found a better way of moving heavy objects across soft ground. But steel pipe has been substituted for the wooden rollers of the ancients. Sometimes these rollers were fastened to the tower by an axle, more often they were left free, and as soon as the weight rolled off—were carried to the front again. Personally I will bet these towers were moved by free rollers and planks, and that the wheel was not used because of its axle being too apt to bend or jam.—Ed.

of the palace, the gilded favorites, who stood to lose an easy living and gain one of hard work or death. Spurring on these officers was the dark sinister face of Assur-Nadin, who had no compunction about beheading fifty of them at a time for cowardice—as he had shown. As soon as the pile of mingled junk, offal, dead men, bricks and furniture—which had been thrown athwart the river channel was thoroughly saturated with the boiling pitch cast down upon them, the soldiers withdrew again up the channel of the river. On the city side of this barricade, upon the slimy bricks of the river bottom, stood rank on rank of foot, fronted by scores of scythe-wheeled chariots. These Assur-Nadin planned to loose upon the northern army as soon as it breached the barricade.

Upon the fifty foot high intricacies of the mass of junk of the barricade roosted and sprawled thousands of bow-men, their shafts twanging steadily out upon the approaching mass of Essar-Haddon's might. He at first sent certain men under great shields of bulls' hide close to inspect this barricade, and as they withdrew under the rain of pitch and brickbats from above, he laughed, for he saw an opportunity.

NOW these same men, some hundreds of them, took fat fire-pots in their hands, and again made the perilous approach to the barricade, peering up through sight holes in their heavy square shields, ducking the heaviest missiles, letting the others rain harmlessly on their thick turtle-shell shields. Beneath the barricade they thrust the fire-pots, igniting them, and from the now pitch-impregnated mass a vast column of smoke began to rise upward, driving off the bow-men who were the chief threat, and rising and hanging all about the vast arches and walls over-

head, so that any fire from the quarter was necessarily made with streaming eyes or blindly, for the smoke obscured all sight. Since his men had also reported to him the army Assur-Nadin had prepared waiting in the channel of the river for him, Essar-Haddon now turned his attention to the towers, and led his officers to the top of the towers, now within a score of feet of the walls.

They were vainly endeavoring to drop grapples upon the walls, so that a few men could swing across the lines and help set their draw-bridge firm and guard it for the first attack. The smoke hindered them as much as the wall's defenders, and the idea was unfeasible, anyway. Blinded by the smoke from the burning barricade, the defenders either remained out of sight within the watch towers, or lay face down, dead. Essar-Haddon, looking over the situation, gestured to the men below, and the vast tower inched forward closer, closer and at last the draw-bridge, which was their protective wall as well, dropped forward, its metal shod end sinking sharp points deep into the bricks of the wall. As the bridge fell in place, Essar-Haddon himself led his warriors across onto the wall-top, and a cheer went up as they touched foot on Babylon's wall.

Out of the watch towers rushed the defenders. Now that they had to fight, they would, smoke or no smoke, and shield met shield and blade clanged against blade as the Babylonians strove to match the sword play of the fierce men of the plains and the hills of the north land.

Back and back, they forced the men of the city; fierce the fight and ever poured from the tower top across the bridge the shouting bearded veterans of Essar-Haddon, eager to slay, and eager to clinch the advantage before something happened to make their path

harder or almost impossible.

Within the tower a vast artery of men beat, up and up the tall ladders within they swarmed, and out upon the wall top. Firing their arrows now down upon the waiting forces in the river channel, screams of rage and mortification came up as they saw their plan turning upon themselves, and Essar-Haddon leaving them to wait while he entered the city over the wall-top.

But Assur-Nadin and his officers, gilded palace loafers though they mostly were, yet knew something about warfare. Plotting the position where the towers would most likely meet the wall, Assur-Nadin had caused sappers to dig beneath the walls and at those points most apt to be beneath the tower's position, to dig a pit. This had been done, the sappers had been at work day and night, since the towers had begun to be constructed. But their work was ill-done, their hearts were not in the task, and the pits were ill placed. Now, in the recent movement of the tower forward to the walls, one corner of the tower on which Essar-Haddon had ascended came to rest over this pit. At first it had held, due to the triple plank-ing placed there beneath, but as thousands of men raced up the ladders placed spirally about the interior of the tower, their movement caused a steady swaying motion which caused a crumbling to take place under that corner. Gradually the tower leaned, more and more, until suddenly, with a great screaming from a thousand throats suddenly finding themselves falling, the tower toppled outward from the wall, carrying its load of soldiers to their death and injury. Essar-Haddon looked sadly down, despair gripped him. He was marooned with but a few hundred men upon the top of the wall, separated from his army by a gap of three hundred feet and the whole force

of Assur-Nadin's trying to reach him.

CHAPTER XII

UPON the tremendous eight-tiered temple of Bel, the fringe-robed priests stood and peered down upon the vast turmoil of their city, swung their censers, and offered up prayers to the God.

Upon each of the eight tiers, the hours, trained all their lives in the seductive display of their bodies to lure coins into the priests' coffers, swarmed now the balustrades of the separate levels, and watched the marching soldiery, on their way to bolster the defense of the walls. Watched the screaming rabble as they fought and looted and dodged the decreased force of disciplinary soldiery—watched the gloomy pile of the Kasr—"the Admiration of Mankind" for a sign from Assur-Nadin—though what sign they expected they could not have said.

Upon the first level of the eight-tiered pyramidal building were the chambers of the lowest class temple prostitutes—called priestesses, it is true. But their servitude to the priests was complete and their abasement to the collection of money for the temple included prostitution in all its antique intricacy—an art they were trained to from childhood. These chattered about the nature of the soldiers under Essar-Haddon, whether they would be more liberal than the troops now in power in the city—and whether the siege would end while there was food and water—or whether they faced starvation and death before the city fell. Themselves, they knew, were the most dispensable of the city's people, would feel the worst pinch of shortages—already had been reduced to one meal a day.

Each tier upward was graduated,

was inhabited by women of greater beauty and youth, of more complete mastery of their "art". Those on the seventh level were the priests' own, could be acquired by citizens only by the payment of large sums of money.

Within the topmost shrine, a gilded pavilion of stone upon the top of the vast pyramid of Bel, resided a woman seldom seen by mortal men—the "bride" of Bel. Once a year, upon a certain night—Bel was supposed to come to earth, and she waited there within the shrine for his coming. In the morning she was always found upon the bridal couch—a burned, crisp corpse—incinerated by the intense fire of the "love" of God. Then from among the most beautiful of the priestesses was chosen Bel's betrothed, and again she waited one year for her death. Many were the whispers as to the truth of this mystic death, but it was upheld by all truly religious as the heart of the ritual, the proof of the existence of Bel. So it was that once a year a seared corpse was taken from the golden shrine and buried with great ceremony.

Within this shrine, peering out from her numerous veils, a young and beautiful maiden observed the armies marching through the streets—the turmoil and the shouting, and she wondered—but none dared approach her, and none might she ask what was toward. She was consecrated to Bel, and must there reside alone until he came for her.

From the topmost tiers of the Temple of Bel could be clearly seen the great northern water-gate, the squat watch towers flanking it—could be seen the swaying approach of the ponderous assault towers, could be seen the rush of Essar-Haddon's picked men and himself from the tower onto the wall.

Watching, the maiden within the

shrine on the top of the vast temple screamed as the great tower tottered and fell from sight, bearing with it a thousand men to their death. About her on the temple platform she could hear the priests exult the "Bel strikes to defend his city."

THE other assault tower was not yet in contact with the walls, but was being pushed forward inch by groaning inch, the distance desperately measured by the warriors behind the tall hinged draw-bridge to know to drop their protection and rush across it to the wall. Desperate their situation, for Essar-Haddon was cut off by circumstance from their strength, and would fall to Assur-Nadin. Without him they knew they would soon be fleeing from Assur-Nadin across the plains. For it was the resourceful leader and their faith in his ability that kept that army together—and they all knew it well.

Below, Nezzar and Banardan and his hundred hovered under the mighty arches of the water-gate, watching the burning mass of the barricade, trying to decide whether grapnels to pull the barricade apart were feasible or whether to fling water upon the fire and swarm over.

The fall of the tower apprised them of the plight of their King.

The generals of the horde of Babylonians in the channel of the dry river, waiting to overwhelm the enemy as they entered over the barricade, realized they had their lion trapped as the tall tower fell thunderously to the ground.

By their orders, the chariots of the wall guards were got out all along the wall top, and these thundered down upon the King and his men from left and right.

Trapping a lion is well and good,

but the net had not quite closed around Essar-Haddon. He stood facing the crushing mass of the chariots, a great naked sword in his hand, his head bare of helmet, his square, good-humored face not good humored, but flaming with rage and battle energy. His brown arms rippling with good Assyrian muscle, he spread his sturdy legs as though to take the charge of the chariots upon his chest and thrust it back by main strength. Four-horse chariots are not things easily stopped or turned aside, but as the first thundered down upon him and his men, he grasped the reins of the rearing horse, and with his sword slashed it hard in the neck, to madden it. Keeping its flying forefeet from his body by holding it at arms length, he turned the maddened horse to the wall edge, a low parapet not two feet high, and sprang aside, to watch it rear and plunge and fall headlong over the wall edge. Its weight held for an instant by the weight of the other rearing chargers, Essar-Haddon slashed at their broad rumps with his swordpoint, driving them over by pain. Down, down, horses screaming, driver plunging headlong and screaming to his death, the chariot plunged the full three hundred feet down the outward-buttressed wall, striking the wall to leave great bloody splashes where its fall remained marked.

As this feat of courage in the face of overwhelming odds was seen by his whole army below and by the city's people, a cheer went up, those who did not see soon learning of it and likewise cheering.

His men, taking heart in the instant of time allowed them, took also a lesson from his horse-wise handling of a charging war-chariot. As the next thundered closer, each horse found a clinging figure leaping beside it, forc-

ing it nearer and nearer the wall, to leap the parapet and plunge downward to death.

TWO, three more they sent over after the first. The chariot drivers, seeing how easily their threat was disposed of, drew rein along the wall top, waited for someone in authority to rescind the order or come and drive the chariots themselves.

Assur-Nadin, at the rear of the army waiting in ranks in the river-channel, fumed and swore and cursed Essar-Haddon. Finally he took his picked corps of guards, those large and sleek warriors who Banardan's men had locked in the cells of the prison, and five hundred of the crack troops of Babylon, and began the long climb up the stairs within the walls to the top. He was going to "personally" superintend the demise of Essar-Haddon!

As he came out of the great watch-tower on the right of the water-gate, he aligned his men shield to shield across the wall top, advanced behind this barrier upon Essar-Haddon, who had taken his stand directly over the river channel.

He moved to the attack, his men outnumbering Essar-Haddon's some four-to-one, though the width of the wall made this advantage of little use, as only some forty men could face each other and fight across the width of it. As he advanced upon Essar-Haddon—the other still slowly advancing tower reached a point where the warriors inside the top judged the bridge would touch the wall-top. The huge iron-shod bridge dropped with a great clanging upon the parapet of the wall. Across rushed the eager warriors, and as Assur-Nadin advanced he saw a steady stream of fierce fighting men aligning themselves at Essar-Haddon's back from this source. His advantage

with which he meant to kill Essar-Haddon had suddenly become a deficiency. His face paled, his limbs trembled, he edged to the rear of his troops.

Assur-Nadin wished heartily he had stayed behind the whole of his army. Essar-Haddon, his black hair flying in the breeze, his young beard parting to left and right of his strong sinewed neck, cheered a loud and triumphant "Istar" as he charged into the fight for the life of Assur-Nadin. He meant exactly what his elder brother had meant, to remove this threat once and for all.

His long blade like a flame, the spears of his men thrust beside him expertly, protecting him from all possible harm as they loved to do in battle. For they knew of old that when you have a kind and honest leader, no cunning to keep him can be too great, the need for such men among the tyrants of their day was vast. Essar-Haddon's progress through the somewhat less enthusiastic company of the Babylonians was rapid. Hurling men left and right as the spears about him rendered them *hors de combat* before he could reach them, Essar-Haddon cursed his assiduously careful comrades for not letting him get a blade into a live man.

The shield wall of Assur-Nadin's was pressed back, bulged inward in the center, parted in a six man gap; Essar-Haddon hurled through and through the next line of shields. But after him came his spear-men, shouting, too, but not forgetting never to let a blade approach the monarch. The spears of the Babylonians reached for Essar-Haddon viciously, continually, for all knew the battle would end with his death. But behind the spearmen flanking Essar-Haddon the bows twanged in keen-eyed anticipation of every thrust. The men melted before the charging King, the lances dropped

short of his breast as if by magic. It was magic, the magic of the love of his fighting men who had raised him!

ON THE outer fringes of this spear-head of furious energy following the angry, eager young king, the tall body-guards of Assur-Nadin held desperately to keep from being forced over the wall edge. But the furious drive of the Assyrians was like a wedge, not to be denied. Even though they killed the men pushing against them, they came on, held up by their comrades. One by one they toppled, screaming, from the walls, each with long bouncing leaps down the fearful height, marking his course with blood and mangled flesh.

Now Assur-Nadin, seeing this automatically destroying engine of legs and spears and flashing swords, and steadily twanging bows, nearing him; decided his flight was strategic. He turned, and leaving his men, sprinted for the nearest wall tower and the stairs, some half mile along the wall. Essar-Haddon, furious at this sight, raged and leaped his way through the remaining Babylonians, sped after him with naked sword in hand before his followers could catch up with him.

In full view of the city, Essar-Haddon pursued Assur-Nadin. His men, all engaged, could none of them withdraw, nor could Essar-Haddon's free themselves of the entanglement to pursue.

So it was that Babylon was treated to the sight of its craven king pursued along the wall top, and the feet of Assur-Nadin were followed by silence from his dispirited people, while the flying feet of Essar-Haddon were followed by cheers from his laughing host beneath.

Assur-Nadin ran, and the men of the enemy made disparaging remarks to

each other—

"See how his knees knock together. Is he knock-kneed, like a woman, or is he just afraid?"

As Essar-Haddon's stronger legs brought him close, Assur-Nadin's fringed, multi-colored robe fluttered as he began to leap like a rabbit in futile efforts to escape.

"Stand and fight, you murderer!" bellowed Essar-Haddon after his half-brother's flying form, but it was useless. He came to the watch-tower, within which a stair led downward, and plunged through.

Essar-Haddon stood at the wide door of the tower, visible to everyone, shaking his sword and bellowing after his brother every insult he could think of to make him come back and fight. From below arose the thunderous laughter of the multitude, a laugh which took Essar-Haddon to their hearts and forever repudiated the false brother.

At the flight of their king, the Babylonians on the wall top flung down their weapons with expressions of disgust. They were herded off down the assault tower ladders to the camp below. Watching them, Nezzar knew they would not be prisoners long, for this war was near finished.

Outside, in the tent of Nezzar among the sprawled tents of the besieging camp, Clois looked up from her work to hear the mighty roar of laughter coming out of Babylon. It was a peculiar battle to bring such laughter from the throats of warriors, she thought.

The officers who had surrounded Assur-Nadin before his flight, last to be taken down the ladders, leaned over the low parapet of the water-gate, shouted to the army waiting below—

"Surrender to Essar-Haddon. It is not fit for men of courage to serve the coward. He is fleeing for the palace—

let him fly. We will have a king who is a man, now!"

THE twang of bow-strings, the war shouts, the uproar of battle along the barrier under the water-gate had ceased as all paused in their efforts to watch the flight of Assur-Nadin.

The battle did not begin again. Striding back to the great arches over the multitude of armed men in the channel of the river, Essar-Haddon bellowed: "Throw down your arms and you are guaranteed safety. Keep on fighting and we will drown the city in blood. I am king, those who do not know it yet will be dead before sun-down."

The foremost ranks of the army in the channel began to throw down their weapons, chiefly because the slimy bricks of the channel were strewn with the dead who had received the arrows from across the smoking barricade.

Nezzar and Banardan began to toss grapnels on ropes into the cluttered timbers of the barricade, teams of horses pulled the mass open. Their men swarmed through, herded the front ranks of the Babylonians peaceably out of the city.

Those in the rear, not sure of their officers' intent, began to retreat along the channel through the city. Overhanging the channel were tall buildings, in the windows of which the people hung, watching the battle. These began to throw offal down upon these retreating soldiery, and to scream at them for stupid pigs, not to get the warring over with and rid them of Assur-Nadin while they had a chance. As the gap between these retreating soldiers and the advancing Assyrians did not decrease, they began to hasten their steps, turning and running full tilt along the great brick-paved channel toward the center of the city, in their minds the shelter of the walls of

Kasr. This palace, a great fortress, would hold them while they learned whether or no they must surrender. Chiefly these were men who were new in the army, who did not know that Essar-Haddon was not of those who slew all he captured, who did not know that warriors do not serve a man who cannot face a sword's edge himself. These were officered by Assur-Nadin's favorites, men guilty of many cruelties upon the Babylonians, who knew that they would not survive did the people get a chance at them.

It wasn't good tactics to follow the fleeing troops and Banardan and Nezzar busied themselves with the operation of mopping up. Street by street the city had to be cleaned of all possible resistance. There wasn't much.

By nightfall the whole of Babylon was patrolled by Essar-Haddon's troops. In the "Admiration of All Mankind", the great palace of the Kasr, Assur-Nadin and his "loyal" troops were bottled up.

Essar-Haddon repeatedly swore he would tear it down stone by stone and kill Assur-Nadin with his bare hands, if he would not fight with a sword. For some reason the man's cowardice angered him more than his murderous greed, for that flight along the wall had put shame upon the blood of Senacherib. No use to say that brother fleeing brother did not put shame on the blood, for Essar-Haddon did not mention that he was ashamed of his half-brother.

The city subdued, the army surrounded the palace, proceeded with the same siege tactics as before. The walls were huge, nearly half the height of the city's walls, the outermost wall being some seven miles in circuit. Inside that were two other walls, and inside that the walls of the palace building.

Though but a third of his forces had

remained loyal, Assur-Nadin had yet plenty of men for the defense of the palace walls. It was still a tough nut to crack, though the moats, like every other water course in the city now, were dry as a bone, still those walls must be breached, the blades and arrows of the defenders faced, the soldiers slain until the King was at last a captive or dead.

ESSAR-HADDON rode the seven mile circuit on his black stallion, brooding silently on how best to do the job. Riding beside him, as was often the case now, was Solana, and not far off Banardan. Still farther rode quietly a dozen officers as guard, and among them Nezzar and Clois, for the king was interested in them, asked often for them.

Through the city, the markets were set up, trade began to flow back by camel caravan to the streets of the city, the slow return to normal life was already going on. When the river was once again filled with Euphrate's water, Babylon would live again, no matter who kinged it in the Kasr.

But crouched within the huge building, among his sculptured lion pillars, brooding on his golden throne, was a murderous beast who must be slain. And prowling through the city were an army of men who had no great love for either the Babylonians or the Cal dai.

Rioting and looting could yet sweep the city, plunge it in the bath of blood the strong, careful hand of Essar-Haddon had so far spared it.

The calm, musical voice of Solana charmed the evening and the brooding thought of Essar-Haddon.

"Always, Essar-Haddon, there is evil in those you love. But there is good, too. You must not think too much about it. In the eyes of my little

sister, love her though I did, always came little selfishness's. Errant evil impulses swept across her like wind across a pond, ruffling her into ugly little characters waving hideous childish hands at me. Yet she grew up, and learned to hide and control such evil winds, and is good today. Your half-brother did *not* grow up. The evil winds came and found him weak and ruled him. But that is life on this sad earth! We all know it, and face it, and choose our friends among those who understand that evil is foolishness and witless men ruled by passions they do not understand or think of the source. We do not brood, or pucker up our face in sour patterns and aged lines. We laugh and think of our brave comrades, such as Banardan the bandit who looted the King of Babylon's hoard—or of Nezzar, who has so many brave deeds behind and has never betrayed a friend. These things are good, we hold fast to them, and forget the false things!"

"Your voice rings a bell in a temple—and that temple my soul. You speak as an angel might speak. Where did a girl like you get such wisdom?" Essar-Haddon's voice had the brazen ring of a bull's throat in it, yet was now subdued, so that she only shuddered slightly with the male impact of it upon her. Or, mayhap, pondered whether the ring might be placed in the nose?

She subtly chimed her own voice a little to harmonize with the heavy bass ring of his, and went on speaking. And Banardan drew closer, to drink in the dark, sweet music of those two voices, and to think how strange some things are—such as leader—love, and such as the love of a woman. For he bore both loves within his breast, and when he heard Essar-Haddon and Solana speak together, the beauty of their voices tore his breast with hooks, for he knew

Essar-Haddon had but to put out his hand and the beauty and the life of Solana would be his, locked up in his woman's house forever. And never would he see her again. And he knew she felt his pain, for he heard it in her voice. Yet he loved his king, and knew no way out of that dilemma.

NEZZAR rode, his arm about the shoulders of his sweet Clois, and was oblivious to the pain of his comrade, or of the trouble in the breast of his king. And her voice was a temple bell in his ears, the temple of Ashera, was ever a goddess won't to please a man, nay, bound to enslave a man.

And about them evening descended on the vast city, and a kind of breathless peace. The sentries marched their rounds, the soldiers drank their beer and went to bed, the houris sat in their windows waiting. The hot wind stole sleepily across the streets and down the alleys into the hidden cellars where the robbers and the thieves and the outlawed men sat, in greater confidence than usual, for tonight no-one was looking for them. And outside the city a great camp full of captives chafed and pondered the ways of kings and of men, and wondered whether they would live through the morrow. But they did worry greatly, for Essar-Haddon was said to be a merciful man unless there was cause for anger. And his anger was with Assur-Nadin.

And inside the tall pyramid of Bel the priests slapped their sandals pettishly across the stone flags, across the brick pathways, and snarled at the waiting women angrily. For none of them knew whether Essar-Haddon worshipped Bel or hated him. And much depended on whether he had inherited his father's awe of his God. Much depended.

And inside the golden shrine on the

top of the temple of Bel, a young girl knelt and prayed to her god to come and embrace her and free her mortal body forever. And in her mind a dark, kind face of a youth contended with the image of the great burning face of Bel, and won! And tears came to her eyes and she flung herself down on the cold stones and wept. For she loved a youth and no God, in truth.

A little wizen-faced beggar of a man watched the King ride by with Solana, and brushed past Nezzar and Clois as he strode toward the Kasr. And if Nezzar had known who he was he would not have enjoyed the touch of his garments.

He went up to a dark shadow in the great wall of the Kasr, and looking about and seeing no-one, he knocked gently. The small door in the shadow opened silently to him, and he slid within.

"Take me to the King," said the wizen beggar with the pointed nose, and the servant answered—"Yes, master, at once!"

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE center of Babylon, across in Araxes, ran the great draw-bridge by which the Palace of the Kasr was reached from the other half of the city. It ended where it entered the seven mile circuit of the Kasr's walls. On the other end lay another palace, not so great in size. Assur-Nadin had chosen not to man the bridge and the other palace, as there was no point in spending manpower and they were not built for defense as was the Kasr.

The floor of the bridge was level and very strongly built. Here Essar-Haddon chose to build his rams, for they could be more easily pushed up to the gates and the walls above the Kasr end of the bridge were not so

easily defended, nor so high.

But the gate was brass, the height of three men, wide enough to admit two chariots abreast. It was the width of the gate that pleased Essar-Haddon for a blow in the center applied great leverage against the hinges.

His ram was long, roofed over the whole length with triple planks, and over that with green bulls hide, to protect against burning pitch. Beneath the roof two hundred men could stand and swing the great log, tipped with a great hammer of bronze, against the gate.

A thousand archers advanced across the bridge behind the ram. The towers from which the machinery of the draw-bridge was operated, which was in the center of the length of the great arched bridge, were not manned. The bridge had been left up, but Essar-Haddon's warriors swarmed up the great stone arches from the river channel below, dropped the draw-bridge, unopposed by anything but a shower of arrows from the walls. The range was too great for the arrows to be effective.

On across the bridge the great ram rumbled. Behind the ram the archers marched, bows strung and arrows on the nock, waiting to pick off any defense that showed itself on the walls above the gate.

As the ram rumbled into contact with the great gate, stones were rolled off the wall top to fall with a great thunder upon the roof of the ram and the laboring men within flinched. But the roof held, the stones bounced high off the roof, to crash on down into the river channel.

On the other side of the Kasr, at a smaller gate, a similar operation moved against the Kasr, and the heavy drum strokes of the ram heads against the gates could be heard clear across the city.

Two hundred shoulders heaved, the ram swung back. Two hundred backs bent, and the ram drove home. The great brass gate valves shuddered with the stroke, clanging terribly. Bowmen appeared on the walls, shot fire arrows smoking long arcs down, to stick and burn in the roof of the wheeled ram. From the accurate fire below, many of these fell, some came tumbling down to crash on the roof of the ram, lie there crushed by the fall.

On the walls of the smaller castle at the far end of the bridge, Essar-Haddon stood with his heavily-muscled brown arms crossed on his chest, watching and musing how best this Kasr might be crushed. Beside him stood Solana, saying little, but looking like a gift from Paradise.

Solana had been much talked of by the men under Banardan, of her part in the affair of the treasure raid. And as well she often rode forth, armed like a man, through the camp, taking part in the games and contests. This was highly approved by the warriors and she was called—"The Warrior Woman." She was considered a kind of lucky creature, favored of the Gods, and apart from the restrictions of normal flesh in her abilities.

TODAY she had chosen a warrior's attire, wore a short fringed garment reaching to her knees, leaving her strong arms bare. Upon her head rested the conical Assyrian helmet, about her waist the long straight Assyrian sword. Her chest and thighs were covered with a linen cuirass upon which small round plates of bronze were sewn. Not bulky, it was form fitting. Her dark, red cheeked beauty was not in any way lessened by such masculine attire, nor did it seem unnatural to her if one had seen her use a sword.

They stood looking across the deep

valley of the river channel upon the vast sprawl of the Kasr, and Solana said:

"The beast hiding within those walls tried to hire me to kill you, you know? I refused his offer, more than once, and he hired Nezzar to do the deed. But Nezzar, too, knew better than to consider an oath to an oath breaker binding."

Essar-Haddon smiled. "At first I suspected you had come for that purpose, or else to spy upon me for my brother. As the days passed, I realized you were above such treacherous doings, that your associations had given you a repute you did not deserve. I awaited the revealing of your character fully with interest. The expedition of yourself to the aid of Banardan's wild scheme, and Assur-Nadin's torture of yourself, fully explained your motivations to me. Lately I have forgotten my first suspicions of you."

"I came to you only because I wanted to meet you. I had heard such tales of you, of the boy who was raised in the war-camps by the mighty Sennacherib, to be a warrior fit to succeed him."

"You yourself must have grown up in a war-camp, from your aptitudes, from your love of horses and weapons."

"Aye, my father never let me out of his sight. Did you ever hear of Babr El Khalidan?"

"Nay. Who was he, your father?"

"He was the Sheikh of a great band of Arabs roaming the southern deserts. He had been to court, to Nineveh, to Tyre and Sidon, and knew the evil of such things. He preferred the free life of the desert plains, his horses and his men and his family. He loved to teach me, to have me ride by his side as I grew older and able to wield a sword like a man."

"How came you to Babylon and to the life at the court?"

"As a hostage. My father fell in battle with the soldiers of the King, your father, Sennacherib. My father refused tribute or taxes, and relied on his knowledge of the land to elude all your father's tax-gatherers. When they caught him, they killed him. They took me as a hostage to compel the tribe to pay taxes."

"And your people loved you, and paid. And you lived on in the court to insure they would continue to pay?"

"Yes, my people loved me."

"So, you learned the ways of the court."

"Yes, I learned to pretend, to act, to lie, learned the ways of the jackals of the courts."

"Did my brothers pursue you?"

"Among the others were your two half brothers. I learned to use them to keep off the others. I had to cultivate them, to pretend evil."

"They are evil, well enough. Your life must not have been easy?"

"One day I will go back to my people, and forget the ways of luxury and cruelty and the paths which are called power."

"You may go when you wish, Solana. You may stay if you wish, I will not compel you, ever."

"My heart, just now, is confused. I know not whether to go or to stay."

"Does your heart belong to that great braggart, Banardan, or does it belong to another?"

"I have a very soft spot for Banardan. It would be hard never to see him or to hear him bellow again."

"Does your heart belong to me, Solana?"

"I cannot say!"

"Is that court policy speaking, or your honest self. I would want no woman who thought she must because I am king."

"I will not answer!"

"You are acting like a woman!" Essar-Haddon laughed, and his laugh rose above the distant steady thunder of the ram upon the gates of the Kasr.

The great brass gates resisted the heavy ram remarkably well. So well, in fact, that the ram soon needed a new head. As they paused in the work to fit the new head to the splintered end of the shaft, the great gates swung open a few feet, and quickly out of the gap rolled a smoking keg, followed by a half dozen more. These broke into flame as they stopped against the legs of the men under the roof of the ram. They had rolled kegs of burning oil out upon the attackers!

The men fled the fire, many burned, and the ram roof burned before sufficient water could be carried to put it out.

Watching, Essar-Haddon pondered just what to do to crack the Kasr without all this usual interchange of boiling oil and arrows.

NOTHING but rage filled his mind, and he cursed Assur-Nadin. Soon twenty rams replaced the burnt one—one for each gate of the great Kasr.

The sullen thunder of the rams rolled over Babylon, and many a Babylonian cast eyes upon another and grinned to hear the doom of Assur-Nadin thus royally sounded.

To each of the thousands of enemies Assur-Nadin had made, that sound was like the trumpets from Paradise, like the drum beats of an angel's wings.

To the poor of the city, begging now from the soldiers of Essar-Haddon, from the hated Assyrians, the sound meant hope. To the merchants it meant an end of fear and unjust taxes.

Only to the soldiery in the Kasr did the sound spell fear. They knew not whether they would be slain or be allowed to surrender. And only to one

man did the sound spell real terror and hate for Essar-Haddon, and that man his half-brother, Assur-Nadin.

To the dead Sennacherib, turning in his grave, the sound meant revenge.

To Solana it meant an end to her sycophancy, an end to pandering to the wantons of a hated court, an end to fear and deprivation for her nomad people.

To the warriors under the heavy roofs of the rams, it meant hard work. They cursed in unison, and if the Gods heard the uses to which their names were put, they were merciful, considerate of extreme endeavour.

To the weeping "Bride of Bel", in her high isolation, the sound meant only struggle and death among the more foolish of mankind.

To the wizen-faced small rat-nosed individual who had stolen through the small postern gate of the east wall, it meant that his job would be that much harder. For he had undertaken to aid the King Assur-Nadin to escape at the last moment, in disguise. He had promised him a place of refuge in the city, where he could hide for a time till the search for him died out—and aid to get out of the city and off to Nineveh and his other traitorous brother who ruled there.

To the houri and the dancing girls, the sound meant that soon the victory celebration would begin, and wine and money would flow their way from the soldiery.

To the Astrologers, it meant that the stars in their courses had decreed the death of Babylon, for Babylon had fallen. But as usual, they were wrong, for the wild, fecund, rich and debauched life of Babylon was just reaching the ascendant.

To old Symeon, sitting where Banardan had forgotten him in his damp chamber under the Kasr, it meant that soon he would see Essar-Haddon and

perhaps receive a reward, some comfort for his old bones again.

And one by one the great gates crashed in and the warriors of Essar-Haddon smashed through, blades dripping red, nor boiling pitch nor scalding oil, nor spear nor javelin nor arrow stopped them, but only death. And the warriors of Babylon surrendered by the scores. The second wall lay before them to breach or climb or tunnel under.

And they commended and cursed the builders of the Kasr, all the many engineers who had labored through a century to build this fortress within a fortress city, and set to work.

And again the rams swung, and the thunder of the bronze ram-heads filled the city, and the knees of Assur-Nadin smote together in time with the blows of the great rams. These gates crashed in, and the warriors smashed through, and the walls of the palace lay before them.

AS THEY smashed through the gates of the second walls, the gates of the third wall were just closing behind the retreating warriors who still remained loyal to the murderer Assur-Nadin. Banardan raced forward and threw a great timber into the closing of one gate. Many men laid hold of the timber and pried the gate open, and some hundreds rushed through even as the rams began to swing against the other gates. Banardan blew upon a trumpet, to tell the army where an entrance was, and warriors began to pour through the gate behind.

Now they rushed through the great open arches of the Kasr entrance, hard after the retreating soldiery, and bronze clanged against bronze. Swords flashed and turned red across the wide palace corridors, and spears glinted and dipped, and men fell and were trampled

as the retreat went deep into the Kasr.

Assur-Nadin, sitting on his golden lion throne that was not his, but meant for Essar-Haddon—heard the tumult and the death-screams and the clang of weapons. He knew that his time was near. He rose and cast off his kingly robes, fringed with gold and scarlet, threw off his jewel-hilted sword, threw off the three-tiered helmet that was a crown.

And he stood attired like a ragged beggar, and a wizened beggar took him by the hand and led him through a low door into a narrow passage, and so out of the Kasr.

As the soldiers sought Assur-Nadin through all the many halls of the Kasr, he stole among the warriors and the watching people as a beggar, and made his way ever nearer the outer walls of Babylon. Essar-Haddon cursed and stormed, but there was no sign of his half-brother within all the searched chambers of the mighty Kasr.

Assur-Nadin was consumed by a murderous hate for his disgustingly vigorous and able younger brother.

He followed his guide, the long-nosed spy who had betrayed Nezzar to him one time. He now was conducting him out of Babylon, expecting to go with him to Nineveh and perhaps to future conquest over Essar-Haddon.

Assur-Nadin was quite willing to leave, but as they entered a narrow street leading away from the Kasr, a party led by Essar-Haddon cantered up the street. They paused near the two cowering beggars, paying them no attention, and Solana's clear laugh rang out above the bass rumble of Essar-Haddon's jest.

The sound went through Assur-Nadin like a flame of hell-fire. His Solana should be laughing with the man who had brought him low.

Under his cloak Assur-Nadin

clutched a long dagger. It was his refuge of last resort, in case their disguise were penetrated before they were clear of Babylon and of Essar-Haddon's power. It also happened to be the same weapon with which he had dispatched Sennacherib, his father, not so long ago.

BEHIND Essar-Haddon's great black horse cantered the lesser mounts of his guard, six powerful men, officers of his army. But, not wishing to be intrusive on the chatter of Solana and Essar-Haddon, they were some distance to the rear. Just space enough . . .

Assur-Nadin's black hate-filled eyes calculated the distance. There was room and time to plunge the dagger into the back of the King, to turn and leap up the narrow walkway between two of the buildings. No horse could follow, reasoned Assur-Nadin. Then, his flight would be to some purpose, and with Essar-Haddon dead, he and his brother could overcome the lesser leadership which might be pitted against them, and win again the wealth of Babylon for their own.

The thought, the plan, and the act were simultaneous. His ragged figure, unwearied by the battles which had worn his men, leaped from the shadows in which they lurked. One had seized the sword-belt around Essar-Haddon's waist, the other hand held aloft the dagger which he would plunge into his back. He drew back his arm, put all his strength into the blow.

Solana, seeing the swift, furtive movement behind her King, screamed, and as swift she leaped from her horse through the air. Her supple, lovely form fell between Essar-Haddon and the flashing blade of Assur-Nadin. She screamed again as her weight bore Assur-Nadin to the bricks of the street.

Their weight on his belt threw the king from his horse.

Essar-Haddon, dumbfounded, turned to see his delightful Solana sprawled on the pavement, her back glittering in the sun where the dagger haft protruded. A red stain spread swiftly through the soft white fabric of her veiling over-garment.

The fall and the double weight of Assur-Nadin and Solana had torn Essar-Haddon's sword belt from his waist. The weapon was clutched in Assur-Nadin's hand as he struggled from under the weight of the dying courtesan.

As he stood up, his eyes took in the guards of the King, leaping from their mounts a few paces away. They took in the woman at his feet, and lighted with triumph as they saw that Essar-Haddon now faced him weaponless, and that in his own hand he held the famous sword of the King. With a snort of evil satisfaction he drew the sword and with the same motion thrust it into the King's breast. Essar-Haddon staggered back with the sudden force of the blow, but his brawny hands seized Assur-Nadin's wrist, pulled him close in a bear hug of desperation.

The force of the embrace made Assur-Nadin cry out and the sword dropped ringing upon the soiled bricks. His luck ran out with that cowardly blow

The officers seized him, twisted him loose from the King's arms, held him, panting with desperation and hate, before the blazing face of the King.

Essar-Haddon looked at him for a moment as one would look at something unutterably repellant, then spat full in his face. Then he bent, lifted Solana in his arms. Her face was pale, strained—her eyes barely opened. But she managed a smile, saying—"Did he get blade into you, O my king?"

"His thrust tore my side, that is all. Is your wound serious, flower of my love?"

"My death is very near, my King. One favor I ask, noble one! Let me see you kill this thing that walks like a man but thinks like a snake. Before I die, let me see *him* die, so that I may die in peace?"

"One wish I will see granted, O Solana, that! How long, think you—have you?"

"I will live so long as it may take you to do the deed. I will remain alive that long!"

Essar-Haddon, his face dark with something greater than anger, stood up from the fallen form of Solana, the white veils spread round her like the petals of a great flower, fallen and crushed underfoot—

FROM one of the men holding Assur-Nadin he took a sword, from the bricks he picked up his own weapon. He looked at the officers holding Assur-Nadin as they opened their mouths to object. They closed their lips again. "Release him!" They obeyed; they knew their king.

As Assur-Nadin shook himself free from their grasp, Essar-Haddon tossed the officer's sword to him. He caught it by the hilt, and in the same motion whirled it up and over in a blow at the King. Essar-Haddon caught the blow on the back of his sword, flung it aside, thrust—and Assur-Nadin leaped back. They circled, and Essar-Haddon, his bull-voice somewhat the sound of a file, and something of the sound of earth falling on a grave, said "My brother, I shall kill you now, and it shall be all my life my sweetest memory."

The six guard officers formed a ring, centered by the white flower of Solana's figure, over which the two blades rang and rang again. She laughed, a chok-

ing laugh, saying—"Assur-Nadin, remember when you promised me your life for my love?"

The sweating would-be King made no answer, and Solana laughed. "It is one promise I will see you keep, my little man-who-it-not-a-man!"

Her face turned to the furious mask that was Essar-Haddon's, and she said—"Take your time, my King—I will stay alive till you are done. Mayhap longer!"

Round and round her recumbent body Essar-Haddon drove the usurper, his blade cutting through the desperate defense again and again, but not to kill. No, each time his flashing sword approached Assur-Nadin, a little red lump of flesh and fabric leaped outward from arm or side or shoulder, the force of his blows paring bits of flesh from the craven each time. Assur-Nadin could not stand this, and after this had happened a dozen times, each time that he saw his parry was avoided—he screamed aloud in anticipation of the flaying stroke that was coming.

Each time the sword of the King took another strip of flesh from Assur-Nadin, Solana laughed. And each time she laughed, a little blood welled from her mouth, and the face of Essar-Haddon grew darker with greater anger.

The blades clashed; the figure of Assur-Nadin was covered with his own blood; he circled desperately. But his legs weakened, he could not keep away from the hewing blade that followed his every movement.

The sword blade followed him, quivering, quavering, and ever and again it darted at him, and each time he screamed, and each time another bit of flesh and rag lay upon the bricks near Solana. And each time her laugh rang upon Essar-Haddon's ears with satisfaction, and upon Assur-Nadin's ears with the sound of a harpy wetting

teeth in his blood—craven blood.

AT LAST, his body covered with blood, Assur-Nadin broke, ran screaming from this fate that had found him. The sword he had been given he flung from him like something that had bitten him. He flung himself upon one of the guards, screaming and groveling, but the man flung him back into the ring before Essar-Haddon. He got to his feet, and flung himself again against the men ringing him about, for many soldiers had been drawn by the sound of the combat, and ringed the scene, watching approvingly.

"He does not deserve sword death, Essar-Haddon." Solana's voice, clear but weak, gave the King pause. He stood for a moment, wiping his blade with a bit of cloth. Then he sighed to an officer. The man drew the bow from one of the soldiers standing in the ring. He bent over the cowering wretch that had wanted to be king over better men, drew the bowstring tight about his neck. He looked up at Essar-Haddon, who nodded.

Solana half raised herself to watch the face of the thing that crouched beside her. The officer tightened the bow-string, using the bow as lever. The face of Assur-Nadin blackened, his mouth opened, he died, and staring into his eyes were the lovely eyes of Solana, and that was somehow terrible to see that hate that could live in her eyes where so much nobility and brave enterprise lived as well. As Assur-Nadin died, Solana relaxed, fell upon her arms on the bricks. Essar-Haddon raised her, carried her toward the Kasr.

SOLANA lay on a great, golden couch by the lion throne of the Kings of Babylon. On the throne sat Essar-Haddon, and about Solana bustled a bushy-bearded doctor of Babylon. His

fringed mantle quivered, the alembic gurgled over a tiny fire in a brazier. The side of Solana lay bare and lovely with a gaping wound-mouth marring the ivory. The little doctor fussed busily at his work.

Over her crouched Banardan, and tears streamed down his face. "Solana, I do not ask much, only that you stay alive, so that I may see you. My heart; it has never suffered so; it bursts my ribs with pain. You cannot do this to me! You see, Solana, courage may live in woman, but seldom does courage live in a woman able to act and to accomplish—you are a warrior's dream on the nature of woman and what it should be . . ."

Solana murmured—"For a great bragging bully such as you, tears and eloquence all at once are somehow charming. You are a man, Banardan. There are other women for you to love."

Essar-Haddon, brooding over the painful scene, said, "There are other women, Solana, but there are few warriors' women such as yourself. Just stay alive, and hereafter no man shall say whether you are to come or go, do this or do that. For you there shall be

always freedom, a warrior's freedom! If I know you, you will fight death for a life such as you can live in the Babylon that will be."

"Men who understand." Solana's voice was low, but clear. "That I should live to meet men who understand Solana's heart! For the freedom you offer, my king, I may stay alive."

* * *

The water came back into the River of Babylon, and food and trade came with it. The hanging Gardens bloomed again under the hot Assyrian sun. On the great eight-tiered temple of Bel, the priests swung their censers and chanted their prayers. Within the gilded shrine on the top of the pyramidal structure, a maiden wept.

* * *

The armies of Essar-Haddon began to make ready for the march upon Nineveh. And Empire went with the armies of Essar-Haddon. As long as he lived the armies of Assyria were triumphant.

THE END

THE ELUSIVE TREASURE

By ALICE RICHARDS



*Adventure still plays the siren and the Lorelei—
And salvagers have been, are, and will be—the suckers!*



IN THE little town of Lewes, Delaware, a modest monument stands for all to see. This little statue bears the following inscription:

"Here Rest The Remains of

Captain James Drew,

Who Commanded His Britannic Majesty's Sloop

of War

De Braak

In which he lost his life when foundered at the Capes of Delaware, the 10th June, 1798."

Captain James Drew was made commander of this famous old frigate, which was built of oak and teakwood in 1787, when the *De Braak* was

taken from the French, who had captured it from the Dutch, the original owners. With Letters of Marque, the *De Braak* set sail for foreign waters the following spring, in search of Spanish ships supposedly in the Caribbean, known to be laden with great riches. But, after two weeks' search, one of the group of British ships spotted a galleon on the horizon and the chase started, which was to leave the *De Braak* alone. She was a faster and better-made ship, and soon outsailed her squadron, finding herself alone very soon, and in very bad weather.

Deciding to try a lone hand with his "one-ship

fleet," Captain Drew found success on his side. He took as first prize a Spanish galleon heavily laden with gold and silver bars, which the crew labored long hours to transfer to his own ship. Next, the British vessel conquered five other ships of Spain, also filled to the brim with riches. The next prize was the very rich *St. Francis Xavier*, which Captain Drew captured off the Delaware Capes, and when this was completed, with the treasure and loot from the ship already stowed away in his hold, and the prize ship in tow, the Captain decided that it was time to set sail for Halifax, with his 215 prisoners from this and previous captures in his hold. When, on May 25, they reached the lee of Cape Henlopen, they met with a terrific squawl. It hit so hard and so rapidly, that the *De Braak* was instantly overturned, filled and went down in fourteen fathoms, taking with her the 215 shackled and ironed Spanish prisoners, the captain of the ship, and the enormously rich cargo, valued at this time to be approximately \$15,000,000.

THE following year, the British government sent a small ship, the frigate *Hind*, to begin salvage work on the vessel, together with the help of a Halifax ship. No sooner had they anchored over the spot where the vessel had gone down, than a great and roaring storm arose and swept the bay, sweeping both ships away from the spot. When they returned, they found the posi-

tion of the sunken boat had been shifted. Twice while trying to attach steel cables to the wreckage, storms drove them from their work, and although numerous tries were made later, the project was finally abandoned by the British.

In 1804, again an organized party of the frigate *Assistance* and the salvage ship *Resolute* made an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve the treasure, but after using all the known devices of that time, it was still found to be impossible to raise the wreckage. From time to time, the *De Braak's* wealth was tried for by certain individuals, but to no avail. Almost seventy-five years went by, and the wreckage was almost forgotten, when, in 1880, small bits of wreckage said to be from the *De Braak* were washed ashore on the sands near Lewes, and there were rumors of ancient coins being found, which brought on an era of feverish activity at the place of the wreck. All this activity lasted thirteen years this time, but still no treasure was uncovered. In 1932, 1935, and 1937, newer and more elaborate methods were employed to overcome all the obstacles that had kept this treasure from anxious hands for so many years, but every effort came to nothing, and brought no success.

And at this time, the remains of the vessel *De Braak* still lie, covered by mud, only fourteen fathoms deep, just one mile off Lewes, Delaware, a lure for adventurers in the guise of treasure salvors, to come and get it!

THE MONEY IS HERE!

By CHARLES RECOUR

Do you want 3,000,000 dollars in gold?
Come and get it—with a diving suit!

CARRYING a passenger list of 440 persons, and a hold filled to capacity with general cargo, the White Star Liner *Republic* sailed from New York harbor, bound for Gibraltar, Genoa, and Naples, the night of January 22, 1909. The vessel came into the thickest part of a fog blanket off No Man's Land, which is 26 miles southeast of Nantucket South Shoals Lightship.

Besides the general cargo, the *Republic* carried supplies for Admiral Sperry's fleet, which at this time was just returning from its trip around the world, and relief items for the victims of the then-recent Messina earthquake. And, tucked away in the strong room, there lay \$3,000,000 worth of American "gold eagles."

AS THE steamship followed its course along the Narrows, the fog thickened intensely. The boat was equipped with all new radio equipment, and had one radio operator, who was busy with well-wishes from friends of the passengers until long past midnight. At this time, he retired to his berth and knew nothing more until 5:40 A.M., when a tremor running through the boat signified

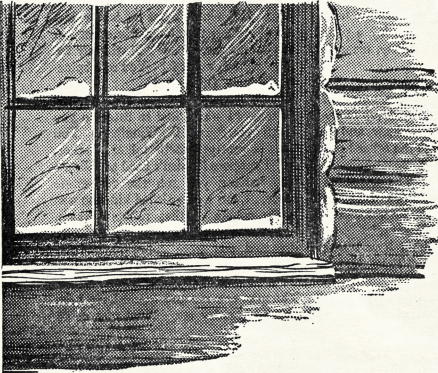
that the engines had been stopped. Following this, the port side of the *Republic* was ripped apart from its body by the sharp stern of the Italian steamer, *Florida*.

ANSWERING the call put through by the radio operator, two Coast Guard cutters endeavored in vain to tow the disabled liner toward Boston, after rescuing all but six of the passengers of the vessel. But even to this port, which was the closest near the accident, the liner couldn't make it, for it began to settle so rapidly. The master of the damaged vessel was forced to order the ship abandoned, and the *Gresham*, one of the Coast Guard boats, took on all the crew and passengers, just before the *Republic* sank in thirty-eight fathoms.

And today, with but one attempt to raise her on the books, the vast hoard of American "gold eagles" still lies waiting in the strong room of the sunken *Republic*, until some enterprising and adventuresome man finds an adequate method of salvage in such deep water as she lies. That this will happen is almost certain.



**The North country is still wild, desolate—
But criminals should know that there are plenty
of things that radio can stop—even to a murder**



Archer stood over him,
tensely, with a .45 at
his back

PRIMED TO KILL

by Phillip Sharp

A BOBBING dot against the far tree line in the glimmering expanse of snow, slowly took shape as a man on snowshoes. Moving up with the swift practiced ease of a woodsman, his quick shuffling stride covered the ground with deceptive speed. At the top of a ridge he paused, took a red handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. He was a small compact bearded man. His open mackinaw revealed a long hunting knife strapped to his side. A loop holster slung around his neck held an ancient forty-five caliber automatic.

With apparent delight he surveyed the scene around him. Snow-covered

hills stretched in all directions. It was a blood-stirring picture. Buttoning his mackinaw he started off again, in the bracing, but not penetrating cold. Another hour's run brought him over the crest of a hill where a cabin standing on the reverse slope could be seen. The bearded man stiffened at the sight of a smoking chimney. He advanced cautiously to the cabin. Frost on the window made it impossible to look in. He paused irresolutely for a moment, then with a sigh, opened the door and walked into the cabin.

A giant of a man in brand-new North Country clothes—a red lumberjack shirt and heavy corduroy trousers

stuffed into laced-up boots—sat facing the doorway. In his lap lay a pistol. The big man smiled—a lazy, menacing smile.

"Surprised to see me, Gilson?" he said. "It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

The smaller man's shoulders sagged. He threw off his mackinaw and fur cap. It was as though the other hadn't spoken.

"Come on, Gilson." The smile didn't change, but the giant's eyes narrowed. "After seven years the least I can expect is to find you pleasant."

"A lot you care about how I feel," Gilson said bitterly. "How did you find me?"

"It took a little thinking. I remembered you once mentioned a sister in Edmonton."

"Beatrice would never tell you where I was!"

"No, but I knew what a sentimental fool you were about her, so I looked her up and when I found she was receiving letters from this ungodly place from a Malcolm Gilbert—not a very original choice of names, was it?—I knew of course where you were. I'd have looked her up sooner, but with the police on my trail, I found it convenient to change my address to the United States for a few years. And here I am." His tone changed. "I want to know where the money is, Gilson. And God help you if you don't have it!"

"Don't get excited, Archer," said Gilson tonelessly. "You're standing within ten feet of it."

ARCHER looked around the room, relaxed, and broke into a smile. "Cautious Matt Gilson. You were afraid to spend the money, eh?"

Gilson spoke with sudden energy. "I wouldn't touch a penny of it! It's blood money!"

"There's your weakness again. Too

much sentiment. What difference does it make where the money came from, or how it was gotten? It will still buy the same things, won't it? You're a spineless chump, Gilson."

"My chump days are over," flared Gilson. "I was a fool to listen to you seven years ago in Winnipeg. You were a pretty smooth talker, Archer, and I suppose it wasn't hard to talk me into helping you rob the real-estate office. I was a dissatisfied kid who was easily convinced that robbery was a harmless adventure. But if I had ever dreamed you were going to kill the caretaker, a defenseless old man—"

"A simple case of self-preservation. The man saw me and would have been able to identify me. What else could I do?"

"You were seen anyway. It didn't do you any good to kill the poor fellow."

"That's true," the big man admitted. "But of course I couldn't foresee that. Anyway, for sixty thousand dollars, I'd kill a dozen men. And while we're on the subject of money, where is it?"

Gilson picked up a hand-axe and with the blunt end, knocked on what seemed to be a solid log in the wall of the cabin. A section fell away, revealing a hollow cache. A small water-proof bag lay there. With a cry, Archer seized it. Emptying the contents on the table he stared possessively at the rolls of bills.

"Sixty thousand dollars!" he murmured. "This has almost been worth waiting seven years for." He turned to Gilson. "You know, I had made up my mind to kill you when I found you. When you failed to show up at the pre-arranged meeting place I was sure you had crossed me and taken the money for yourself. But I'd have found you no matter how far you went. You would never have been able to hide from me."

"Don't flatter yourself," said Gilson

sourly. "I wasn't running from you. The police had your description and I knew it was only a matter of time before they knew who you were. I didn't want to be seen with you—not after you had shot the old man. The only reason I didn't get rid of the money was that I was afraid it would be traced to me. So I just carried it along wherever I went."

Archer beamed. "Just so I could show up and get it. Very thoughtful of you, old man. I'm glad you don't expect your share, because, frankly, I don't have any intention of giving it to you. It really makes matters rather simple, doesn't it?"

"I mean it about the money," said Gilson. "Take it and leave. I don't want any part of it."

"I'll be glad to," said Archer. "If you think—" He broke off. "What's that?" He pointed to what appeared to be a radio, but with a great many dials and panels.

"Just a short wave set," Gilson said. "It keeps me in touch with Albert Point and some of my neighbors who have short wave sets."

"Turn it on," Archer ordered. "But don't do anything else with it."

GILSON snapped on a switch and then set about preparing a meal. The fire was low so he went out to get some wood for the box. The temperature had dropped alarmingly and an icy wind nearly drove him back into the cabin. Small spidery snow-flakes were whipping around his head. It looked like rough weather. He came back with an armful of wood. Archer was pouring himself a cup of coffee.

"When were you expecting to leave?" Asked Gilson.

"Right after supper. Why?"

"I don't think you'll be going anywhere till tomorrow. There's a bliz-

zard coming up."

Archer rubbed some of the frost away from the window and peered out. "It looks like a big one," he said. "How do you know when it will end? I've heard of storms lasting for weeks."

"Not this one," said Gilson with certainty. "I know the weather here."

"What do you do in a blizzard? Just sit and wait for it to blow over?"

"What else can you suggest?" Gilson smiled wryly. "I've enough food here and it's warm. It's as much as your life is worth to poke around outside."

"Oh, I don't mind spending a little time with an old friend," said Archer mockingly. "Especially when I'm made so welcome."

The men sat down to eat. The excitement of the sixty thousand dollars sharpened Archer's appetite. He talked and ate, without allowing either function to interfere with the other.

"I don't understand," he said, "why you stayed here. I can understand why you came in the first place, although there was really no need for it."

"What do you mean there was no need for it?"

"Why, the police were never looking for you. They don't even know you exist. It was me they were hunting."

Gilson became suddenly thoughtful. "You really mean that? They never knew about me at all?"

Archer laughed heartily. "What a joke! Here you've been holed up seven years trembling for fear the police were after you and all the time you could have remained in Winnipeg in perfect safety . . . And with sixty thousand to spend."

"I told you I wouldn't have touched the money. In a way I'm glad I didn't know. I'll admit when I came here I was running away like a frightened animal. I was almost crazy with fear and my only thought was to hide. This

seemed like a good place. At first I thought I couldn't stand it—that I would lose my mind living alone, but I began to get used to it. Then I found I was enjoying the North Country. I seemed to have a sort of feeling for hunting and trapping. It was as though I had been waiting all my life for this. I like the people and I love the work. I don't ever want to leave here. I've never been happier in my life."

"You can have it," Archer said contemptuously. "I'll take a little excitement and bright lights with mine. As far as I'm concerned you can live in this hole, but if the police ever catch up with me I'll know who tipped them—"

THE radio set in the corner suddenly came to life with a crackling series of staccato taps.

Archer leaped to his feet upsetting the coffee.

"What's that?" he demanded.

Gilson smiled. "Jumpy, aren't you? It's just a routine storm call asking if everything is all right." He started for the radio.

Archer's pistol leaped into his hand.

"Stay away from that thing," he warned.

Gilson shrugged. "All right, but if I don't answer the call we'll have a dozen rescue parties down here in twenty four hours."

Archer stood rigid—uncertain. "What do you say in answer to the call?"

"Just one word. OKAY."

"All right. Send it. But don't start sending a message. If I even *think* you're crossing me—"

Gilson sat down and swiftly tapped out a single word. Archer stood tensely over him with the pistol pointed at his head.

"Is that all?" he asked tersely.

"That's all."

"Get away from the radio." His arm swept the set to the floor where it lay hopelessly shattered. "That's just in case you get an urge to talk over that thing while I'm asleep."

Without a word Gilson started to clear the table of dishes.

Archer's exultation returned. "If you weren't such a mouse of a man, Gilson, you'd kill me, wouldn't you?" he said tauntingly. "But you're afraid. You can't justify murder under any conditions. You just don't have the courage."

"It isn't a question of courage," Gilson flung over his shoulder. "You'd be surprised how quickly I'd kill you if you gave me the right reason."

"You do seem to be more of a man than the snivelling boy I knew seven years ago."

"It's possible that I've acquired a new set of values since then."

THE dishes and food cleared away,

Gilson wondered where he would put Archer to sleep. The big man settled the problem in his own fashion. He walked over to the single bunk, prodded it experimentally, and said; "For a man who owned sixty thousand dollars you don't live very well." Sitting heavily on the bed, he unlaced his shoes and lay down.

Gilson resignedly pulled out an old bearskin improvised sleeping bag, spread it on the far side of the room and settled himself down for the night. He felt strangely at peace with himself—for the first time in years. In a short time both men were sound asleep.

Morning came with a cold crystal clearness. Gilson had been a good weather prophet. Some time during the night the snow had stopped, and except for a slight whining wind, it was serenely calm outside.

When Archer woke, Gilson was al-

ready up and preparing breakfast. The odor of coffee drifted across the room. Archer sniffed appreciatively.

"I'll say one thing for you," he said. "You've certainly learned to cook."

"I learned to take care of myself—I had to. Pull up a chair. Breakfast's ready."

The men fell to eating. Archer reaching for biscuits noticed that Gilson had stopped eating and was regarding him thoughtfully.

"What's the matter?" asked Archer. "Got something on your mind?"

"It's a funny thing," Gilson said slowly. "Yesterday when I was coming over the hill I could see that someone was in my cabin. I had left a banked fire, but it had been stirred and the chimney was throwing smoke. It never occurred to me that it might be you. I was sure it was the police and I was finally caught. Then when I saw it was you, I wasn't any happier. I thought you had come to kill me and I was ready for it. Of course what you really wanted was the money, and for a moment—only for a moment—I had the wild hope that you would take the money and go—that I would never see you again."

"That's all I want," Archer assured him. "You'll never hear from me again."

Gilson shook his head wearily. "You're not that kind of man, Archer. For all your size, you're one of the littlest people I know. If the police ever caught you—and they will one day—you'd implicate me in an instant." He held up his hand to silence the other's protest. "Yes, you would. So I knew that if I let you go I would never have another peaceful moment. It was then I decided to call the police and we'd both go to jail."

Archer leaped to his feet with a curse. "You wouldn't dare!"

"I already have."

"When? When could you have done it?" Archer demanded savagely.

"The radio. When you thought I was giving an OKAY to the storm call."

"But you only sent a few letters. I watched you . . ."

"That's true. I sent the word POLICE."

ARCHER'S smile was a hideous thing. He slowly levelled a pistol across the table at Gilson. "I think my original idea of killing you was the best one after all. I don't know now whether you're telling the truth or not, but you won't be around to know anything about it." His finger tightened on the trigger.

There was a blasting roar of a pistol fired in close quarters. It wasn't Archer's pistol that had gone off. A stupid surprised look came on Archer's face, the unfired pistol dropped from his fingers as he slid from the chair to the floor.

Gilson stood up with the smoking pistol he had fired under the table in his hand. He spoke to the dead man. "You were right about me being a sentimental fool, Archer. I would never have been able to kill you except in self defense." He stooped and swiftly took the bag from Archer's pocket. After counting the money and making certain that the entire sum was intact, he returned it to the dead man's pocket. Then he went back to the table and poured himself a fresh cup of coffee.

Brock, the Royal Northwest Mounted policeman who had come with the rescue party recognized Archer at once.

"You took a long chance," he told Gilson. "This fellow is a killer. We've been hunting him for years."

"He acted mighty suspicious," said Gilson. "Wanted to know how to get to Churchill without going through Point

Albert. When I tried to answer the storm call last night he pulled a gun on me. I told him I was sending an Okay message."

"That was using your head, lad," put in Branders, the wizened agent from the Point.

"This morning I saw that he was going to put me out of the way before he left, so I just let him have it first."

"It was the smart thing to do," Brock said. "It wouldn't surprise me if there was a reward but for him. You deserve it."

Branders cackled. "He should have known he couldn't keep away from the mounties. They always get their man."

Gilson's hand went to his chin. "That's just what I told him. My very words."

CROSSING THE LINE

By CHARLES REEVES

★ **T**O HEAR that the Jolly Roger has flown at the main of the majority of American Men of War as recently as this year, may come as a surprise to many people. They shouldn't be alarmed though; it is less harmful than it may seem. The Jolly Roger is merely a symbol that the ancient equator ceremony "Crossing the Line" is taking place on board the ship. The flag is broken out at the mainmast and flies for the length of time it takes to convert the "lowly, slimy Pollywogs (those who have never crossed the equator) into exalted Shellbacks (the old salts who have been through this ordeal before)."

"For many decades the ceremony has been a part of the naval and merchant traditions of the world. As with all traditions, there is much protocol and precedence. A few days before the equator is reached, the shellbacks gather together and make plans for the ceremony. King Neptune is chosen; usually he is the member of the crew who has sailed over the equator the most number of times. He also has a complete court to aid him in carrying out the plans.

Almost all the initiations are essentially the same, varying only in detail, so most of the old timers already know their jobs. The plan starts to work, chairs with juice to them are rigged, tanks are built, and one of the most important things, subpoenas are printed. These summon every lowly pollywog to the Royal Court. This is one time when rank does not have its privilege, all, whether Admiral or Seaman have to answer.

The actual start of the ceremony is on the evening before the equator is reached. The ships heave to, the Jolly Roger is broken out and King Neptune is piped aboard and convenes the crew of the ship. Here the subpoenas are handed out and all hands are warned that tomorrow the ship's scuppers will run red with pollywog blood. The ship then gets under way on its course but the evening is by no means peaceful. The ship is usually manned by 75% Pollywogs and 25% Shellbacks and tradition has set aside the night before the initiation as belonging to the new men. Anything they can do to the old timers is per-

missible, but the following day is sacred to the Shellback and woe to the man who is identified as a ringleader of the night before.

Early in the morning the initiation begins. You are routed out of your bunk by a stream of salt water from a fire hose, made to get into a fresh clean uniform and stand inspection. After inspection, individuals are herded with electric pitchforks to the Royal Court and there the charges are read off and punishment is awarded. In all cases it is the same; everyone is guilty, everyone gets the same punishment.

From the court you are taken to a high platform and seated in a tippable chair. A Royal dentist shoots your mouth full of stinking fluid and the Royal barber cuts your hair exactly down the middle or any other way his fancy dictates. As an added attraction you receive a complete coat of lubricating oil. Then you are tipped over backward into a tank of 50% salt water and 50% fuel oil. In this tank are Bears whose job it is to keep ducking you until you holler "Shell-back."

At this point you are thrown out of the tank and into the hands of a waiting mob. This is the last part of the initiation and all you have to do is to crawl on your hands and knees through a double line of three hundred or more men all armed with clubs made of canvas bags stuffed with rags and soaked in fuel oil.

The only pollywogs who can get out of this ceremony are men who are too old or those who are excused by the doctor. Occasionally there have been cases where the pollywogs have outnumbered the Shellbacks so heavily that they have refused to go through the initiation. This happened in a task force just before the war. A destroyer with all but five of the crew Pollywogs, mutinied. This was a mistake. The commander of the task force waited until the rest of the ships had finished their initiation, ordered the destroyer alongside his carrier, put a relief crew on the "can" and put the reluctant men through the Royal Works aided by twelve hundred new and eager Shellbacks.



DEEP SEA TREASURE



By PETE BOGG

TO MOST people, the mention of the word "locksmith" conjures up pictures of a rather unexciting life. One locksmith, however, has had enough thrills and narrow escapes to fill the lifetime of several men. His name is Charles Courtney, and his fame has spread around the world. He has opened safes which contained the crown jewels of the Romanoffs, chests that Alfonso, King of Spain had taken with him in his abdication, and literally scores of supposedly breakproof strong boxes both above and below the sea. In a life such as this, he has had many thrills, but one experience will always stand out in his memory. This, his most hazardous mission, came after the close of the 1st World War. It nearly cost him his life. He was reluctant about handling the job, but it was the biggest challenge he had ever had, and also, there was a tremendous amount of money involved. The man who finally convinced him to go ahead was the infamous Sir Basil Zaharoff, the munitions king. Zaharoff told Courtney of the events that led up to this strange job, and showed him how his help was needed to make it a success.

It seemed that Zaharoff was a member of a syndicate which had learned the position of the sunken wreck of the H.M.S. Hampshire. During the war, the Hampshire had been loaded with \$10,000,000 in gold and was sent to carry both the gold and Lord Kitchener, England's greatest hero, to Russia in order to finance and bolster the Czar's wavering army. Through some method, the Germans had learned of the departure and position of the ship and sent a mine-laying submarine to sink it. The sub was lucky, planted its mines in the right place and the Hampshire struck one and went down carrying with it Lord Kitchener and 650 men. Now, years later, the syndicate had decided to raise the gold. They had discovered the wreck a year earlier and since then had been getting men and equipment ready. Courtney and another man, Costello, were the only experienced divers in the party. However, there were fifty ordinary divers to do most of the preliminary work. On the way to the wreck, the men were briefed on what they were up against. Shifting waters had almost buried the wreck in the sand; dynamite couldn't be used; they would have to be careful with a torch so as not to explode the ammunition; and worst of all, they would be working at the unheard depth of 385 feet. It was a real tough job, with plenty of thrills and adventure to look forward to. Soon the wreck was reached and the preliminary dives were made. The gold was supposed to be in the Captain's

cabin, according to the information they had, and when a way was cleared, Courtney went down to break in the door. This is a day he and Costello will never forget. They landed on the wreckage, attached a tackle to the door and slowly pulled it open. Right before them in that sealed room were the preserved bodies of two officers. The bodies were disturbed by the current and it gently carried them past the two divers. Courtney reached out and grabbed at a hand as it floated past, the hand came off the arm and the body went on. At this point, both men decided that they had had enough for one day and signalled to be hoisted topside.

THE next time they went down they found several safes in the cabin's ante-room. It took three days to cut the lock-bar on the safes, but at last they had found the gold. Before them was row after row of splintered boxes filled to the brim with tarnished coins. They took all of these to the surface satisfied that their job was over. However, they found out that they had only recovered \$300,000 worth; someplace on the ship there was much more than that. The weather had become progressively worse, so it was a toss-up whether to dive again or stop for that year. They decided to make one more dive. They waited a few days for better weather, but it didn't clear up, so down again they went anyway. This, their last dive, almost cost both of them their lives. They descended, at last found and broke into the bullion room and started passing the endless boxes of gold to the ship. Suddenly the current changed, it jammed Courtney up against the wall breaking his wrist, it then threw him against the other wall and he could feel blood running down his leg. To add insult to injury, his air supply started to give out. Courtney looked around and saw that the bulkhead door had been forced shut, almost cutting off his supply of air. They were trapped. Too weak to try to force the door, they sat there and waited to die. All of a sudden the current shifted again this time swinging the door out. They hobbled out, blew the ballast out of their suits and shot to the surface. Twenty minutes later they were picked up tossing about in their big iron suits; they were towed to the ship and hoisted aboard. Costello had a crushed chest and Courtney was out completely.

They both recovered alright, but Courtney will always have a reminder with him. It seems that when he was well enough to sit up he looked in a mirror, and his hair had turned completely white.



Rusty's head shot back from the force of the blow

THE FRAGRANT VAGRANT

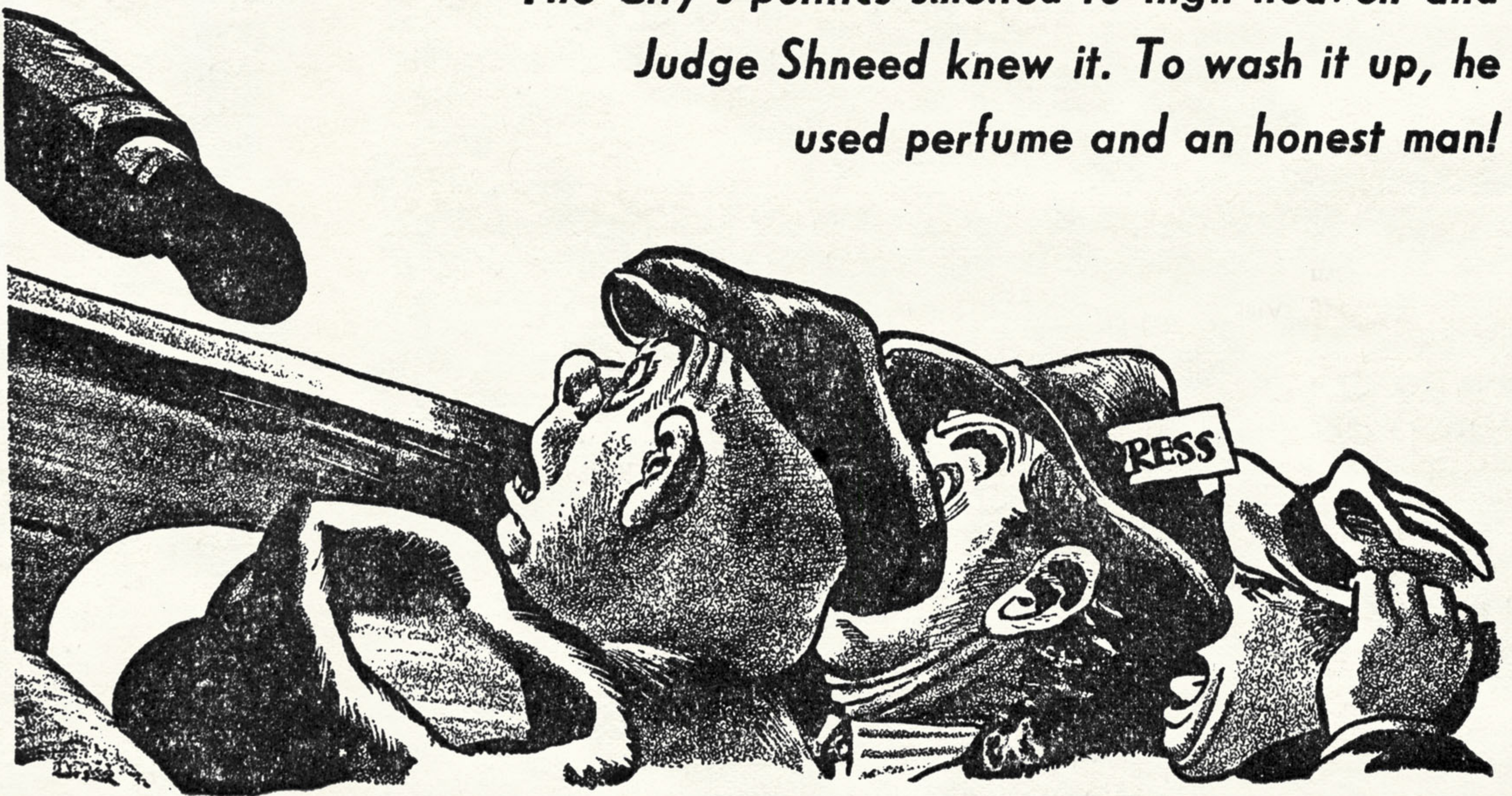
by Berkeley Livingston

JUDGE WILBUR SHNEED peered between the slats of the drawn blinds. The street below was already beginning to show signs of the high activity of noon. A number of farm trucks, dusty and weather-beaten, were drawn close to the curb. Interspersed among them were the cars of the city-people, more polished of chrome, more sleek of line, and of course more pretentious, yet somehow, less substantial. And the most pretentious, the most sleek, the most polished, was a new Buick, whose owner had somehow managed to park it so that it lay, an island of gleaming metal, with a sufficiency of space between it and the nearest car fore and aft to permit the others to clear the Buick without the chance that they might collide with

its new surface. It lay broadside to a fire hydrant. Judge Shneed placed a quarter on the ledge of the window. When Hanson, the bailiff, came in, he would ask him to note the license number of the Buick. The quarter was a bet Shneed made with himself whenever he saw a car of such obvious signs of wealth below, and parked along the hydrant; if its owner came in later in the week on a parking ticket, Shneed would place the quarter in a jar he had provided for the purpose, the contents to go to charity. The jar was quite empty.

The bailiff came in, and seeing Shneed posed against the window, smiled with the understanding of twenty years of close association, and placed the pitcher of ice-cold water on

*The City's politics smelled to high heaven and
Judge Shneed knew it. To wash it up, he
used perfume and an honest man!*



the desk. Pulling the top drawer free, he lifted a small tube of Alka-Seltzer from it and extracted two of the round wafers and dropped them into half a glass of water. Their sizzling sound broke the reverie into which Shneed had fallen.

He turned, answered thinly, the smile of greeting, and walked with quick, dainty steps to take the bubbling glass of dissolved bromide from the other's hand. He grimaced at the acrid taste, despite the long years of acquaintance with the stuff. He lifted his face, the lower half of his jaw working as he tried to bring the belch to utterance, and when it came they both sighed.

Judge Wilbur Shneed was prepared to deal Justice then.

As each defendant stepped before the bench of the judge of the Municipal Court, Hanson, the bailiff, would whisper something into the judge's ear. Shneed, encased in the musty black robe of his office, sat, his head inclined at an angle, the fingers of one hand pressed to his temple, their tips quivering slightly against the thin, dry flesh. His eyes were directed down toward several sheets of paper on which were entered rows of figures, each row representing a debt he owed.

Only Hanson saw what Shneed was looking at. To the others, it appeared as if the judge was deep in thought in matters of law.

"Joe Gustaro," Hanson whispered, acquainting Shneed with the particulars of the next case. "A workin' stiff . . . Drunk and disorderly . . . Adkins—complainant."

The judge looked up and into the red-rimmed eyes of a short, stocky-figured man in denim work shirt and trousers, whose dejected bearing showed only too plainly how little of justice he expected to get.

Beside the other stood a tall man

dressed in sport shirt and slacks, whose arrogant eyes, nose and mouth were an insult to the judge. For Shneed had more than an idea of the nature of the man. Adkins ran a saloon not far from the manufacturing end of town. He cashed the worker's checks on the stipulation that they bought drinks. It was not the first time that he had appeared against some laborer or other.

"What happened, Joe?" Shneed asked, his voice hoarsely sympathetic.

"Guy tried to walk out without paying for his drinks," Adkins said harshly.

"The court will listen to what you have to say," Shneed said in his mild manner, "when the time comes for you to be heard. Until then . . ."

"Boss," Gustaro began hesitantly, then as Shneed smiled encouragement, the words flowed more readily. "Judge. I a workin' man. I not drunk. He lies! It is so I cash my check by him. It is true I have copple drinks. But I no drunk. He cash check an' take out fifteen dollars. For why? I have fi' glasses vino. How this come to be fifteen dollars? I say I no pay. He call cop and they take me to jail."

ADKINS opened his mouth again but Shneed gave him a look which made the tavern keeper close it quickly.

"Tell me, Joe," Shneed asked. "How many glasses of vino do you have during the day. Not in a saloon . . . At home?"

Gustaro squinted in thought, his peasant face, high-cheekboned, tanned, a thick, black moustache adorning the upper lip and drooping toward the corners of the wide thin mouth, showed all the concentration of thought.

"I think about, maybe eight glasses. Some people drink water when thirsty. Italians drink vino."

"I think it would be reasonable to

assume, then," Shneed said, "that five glasses of vino would not make you lose the perception of your senses." He turned his glance full on Adkins and his voice held a note of command: "Why did you take fifteen dollars from this man's check?"

"Because," Adkins said arrogantly, "he drank up that much liquor."

"He lies!" Gustavo broke out shrilly. "I no drink wheeskey! Ask anyone. Joe Gustaro no drink wheeskey!"

"What's the difference?" Adkins asked. "I say he drank that much and so I took it out of the tab."

"But there is a difference," Shneed reminded him. "How much do you charge for a glass of wine?"

"Twenty-five cents," Adkins said.

Shneed figured silently for a few seconds, then said:

"That would take sixty glasses of wine . . . several bottles anyway. Is the officer who made the arrest in court, bailiff?" he asked Hanson.

A blue-clad figure stepped to the fore and said he had made the arrest.

"Just how drunk was the defendant?" Shneed asked.

The officer glanced toward Adkins before answering. Adkins gave him a bland look of indifference and the officer said:

"He was drunk, your Honor. How drunk, I can't say."

Shneed nodded his head vigorously several times in silence, then said, "I think perhaps the complainant made a mistake in addition. It is the court's opinion that five glasses of wine do not come to the sum of fifteen dollars, and that the complainant pay to Joe Gustaro the difference, in money, between the price of the five glasses of wine and the fifteen dollars."

Adkins' face flushed at the words. The arrogant nostrils distended so wide

they turned white, the arrogant eyes narrowed to twin slits of hatred, and the arrogant mouth tightened into a bloodless line of flesh. But the words came from him in controlled measure:

"You won't be up there long! Another month . . . then . . ."

"That will be twenty-five dollars for contempt of court," Shneed said complacently. "And another outburst like that will make it a hundred, and six months in the county jail."

Adkins drew his wallet from his hip pocket, peeled several bills from it, threw them contemptuously at the clerk and stalked from the room.

Hanson had a worried gleam in his eyes as he leaned over and whispered:

"Shouldn't a done it, judge. Adkins is in strong at the Hall. An' you know they weren't too strong on putting your name . . ."

Shneed interrupted him:

"What's next, bailiff?"

Hanson bit his lips and said:

"A vagrancy case . . . City against John Doe, vagrant."

Once more Shneed peered over the edge of the bench. This time his eyes lost a little of their mildness.

The man facing Judge Shneed was quite tall. He had wide, bony shoulders and a spare yet not thin body. He wore nondescript clothing which in some parts were little more than rags, yet though his dress was far from even sufficient, what he wore was immaculately clean. He had a lean face with high, wide forehead, sandy unruly hair and eyebrows of the same color. His eyebrows curled thickly above a well-shaped nose. His mouth was wide, sensitive-lipped and the chin below was strong and incisive.

BUT the thing about him, the something which made him a man apart was the definite aroma of perfume

which rose in overpowering waves from about his person. Shneed's eyes widened in interest. And he was forced to smile with the rest of the courtroom when the officer accompanying the vagrant held his head to one side, as if the heady odor was too much to bear.

"John Doe, eh? Vagrancy," Shneed said. "Is that true?"

"The name or the charge, your Honor?" the man said.

"Well. Either or both."

"My name is of no importance," the man said. "As for the charge . . . I'm afraid I plead guilty."

The odor of perfume was becoming overpowering.

Shneed recognized it; it was a perfume his wife used a great deal, something called La Belle Amour. He didn't understand, however, why a man had to take a bath in it. Nor for that matter why a man had to use it at all.

"Since you plead guilty," Shneed said, "I have little choice but to pass sentence. However, I am curious about something . . ."

"The perfume?" the vagrant asked.

"Yes."

"An idiosyncrasy," the other replied.

"To bathe in perfume . . . Yes. But more, too. Or am I wrong?"

The vagrant's curly eyebrows rose quizzically, and the sensitive lips quirked in a smile.

"Your Honor is quite right. It is not alone an idiosyncrasy. I surround myself in the odor of perfume so that I shall be less likely to notice the more cancerous odors of humanity. The venal odors of moral decay . . . the fetid odors of man's inhumanity to man . . . the stench of man's greed . . . the foulness of man's bestiality . . . But I philosophize. And after all, philosophy has no place before the crooked scales of man's justice."

"By the way," Shneed said, as though

he had been in some thought on what he was about to say and had been paying little attention to what the vagrant had been saying, "you bought this perfume, did you not?"

The accused eyes went wide and blank suddenly.

"Yes," he said in a firm, clear voice.

"In this town?" Shneed continued.

"Yes. At a drug store. I don't know the name of it . . ."

"No matter. The point is that you *purchased* the perfume. And as a matter of courtesy I do not think it right of the city to prosecute a man who has given of his coin toward the businessmen of the city. Case dismissed."

The vagrant turned and started off toward freedom. But he hadn't taken more than a few steps and the judge recalled him.

"If you wouldn't mind," Shneed said, "I'd like to see you in my chambers. The bailiff will escort you."

"Will you open a window, Hanson?" Judge Shneed said, divesting himself of his robe. He loosened his collar, sat at the wide plain desk and hauled out a bottle of whiskey. Hanson brought out several glasses and the judge poured the whiskey until it reached to the very top of the glass. Handing one to the vagrant, the judge said:

"Shall we drink to a better, sweeter-smelling world?"

The vagrant smiled, raised the glass and downed the drink in a single gulp. He smacked his lips, his eyebrows curling upward in surprise.

"Haven't had whiskey as good as this in a long while," he observed. "Thanks. And thanks for the, shall we say, soft brush-off."

The whiskey sent a glow of warmth and good-will through the judge's soul. There were times he needed the stimulation of whiskey. This was one time,

however, that he felt it was not needed. This strange man seated beside him, with the unkempt locks, and unruly, untamed eyes, bitter, yet oddly understanding, and of course with the strange need for perfume, was stimulation enough. From the stranger's first words Shneed knew here was a man different from the run of the mill.

"Justice doesn't always operate with a heavy hand," Shneed said.

"No," the vagrant said. "But it is a human who does the dispensing. Therefore the little quirks which make up our lives, the little, shall we say, inconsistencies, contribute greatly in the decision justice renders."

How true that was, the judge thought. His eyes were half-closed in reflection. The vagrant regarded him with steady glance. Neither saw Hanson slip from the room.

Take Tildy, now, the judge thought. She had been in good humor this morning. It hadn't been often that his wife was in good humor. He wondered, when she smiled brightly at him across the breakfast table, her thin lips parted to show not too well-fitting false teeth. Then while he ate of his bacon and eggs, she had launched into a choice bit of gossip about a friend of the family's.

He had listened with as little attention as possible, grateful that for once she had something else to talk about other than the emptiness of their lives, the frustration of their past and the hopelessness of their future. It had been long years since she had spoken a kind word about his being a member of the judiciary.

AND because she had refrained from her biting ironies, he had walked from the house which he shared with his wife and daughter, a more kindly-disposed man than was his wont to be.

Now he sat across from a ragged vagrant, whose command of the language and evident ability to think, labeled him as a man to whom some respect was due. Shneed had a sudden desire to see more of this man.

"Er, Doc," he began hesitantly, and stopped. It was going to be more difficult than he thought. Already he was thinking of Tildy's reaction to the man. But at the same time he began to formulate excuses, reasons for what he was going to do. He continued, "I wonder if you'll do me the goodness to be my guest at lunch this afternoon?"

"Is that part of the sentence?" the man asked, smiling.

Shneed smiled in return.

"The courtroom starts *beyond* that door," Shneed said.

"Then I accept with pleasure."

Hanson returned just then and busied himself in the little duties of a bailiff. But even as he moved silently in his occupations, he kept an ear cocked to what the two men were saying. An expression of dismay lighted his eyes when the judge looked to his watch and said:

"I'm sorry. But I have to run off just now. The bailiff will give you directions to my residence . . . And oh, yes. The charge was vagrancy. Which means you have no, er . . ."

"But I have," the other said understanding the inference.

"Good!" the judge said. "And don't forget. Use the front door."

And once again Hanson left the room, this time in such haste, the two looked at each other in some surprise. Shneed shrugged his shoulders, excused himself again, and left. John Doe sat, patiently awaiting Hanson's return.

Mary Belle Shneed parted the curtains and peered down the length of the walk. She could hear her mother moving about in the kitchen. The pleasant

aroma of frying chicken filled the room. The console radio gave forth with light romantic music. But the eyes of the girl peering so intently between the chintz curtains was clouded with a look that was half anger, half tears. Her mother thought Joe Tillotson was just trash!

If only her father would come now. She couldn't take another second of her mother's diatribes against Joe.

And in the kitchen, Tildy Shneed was stooped over the stove, her eyes intent on the browned carcass of the chicken, her fingers busy in the last basting of the fowl. But her mind was not on her work. She was thinking of Joe Tillotson. And from her lips words dribbled their spite against the man:

"Reporter, she calls him! Trash collector! Crime stories, he calls those vicious articles . . . Immoral doings! Drunkards and worse." Her mind thought of the phrase, loose women, but her lips refused to let the words through. She gave the bird a solid poke with the spoon and hot grease splattered back at her. A few drops fell on her bare arm and she whimpered in sudden pain.

JOHN DOE moved slowly down the street. It was called Main Street. It *had* to be called Main Street. For it was the artery of the town; from the beginning of the town to the end, all of the town's life centered somewhere on this street.

To the motorist passing through, Main Street was like all the other Main Streets he had seen in a hundred such towns scattered through the great mid-west. But not to John Doe. Nothing was ever quite the same. There were always little or great things to make each of these streets a something apart from one another.

It was an indefinable something, yet to him it was as palpable as the flesh of

his palm.

He had been walking in his seemingly purposeless fashion, his eyes missing no small detail, his ears alert the minute sounds of the town's life. And suddenly he recognized a figure coming from a tavern and knew he was right. For the name on the window was Adkins'. And the man who had just stepped from it's swinging doors, was the Italian laborer.

As if of their own volition, his feet swung inward toward the curb and John Doe started across the street. His unhurried steps quickened when he became aware of something odd. For three men had come out of the tavern immediately after the laborer. And in a matter of seconds had converged on him from behind.

Doe had seen many such incidents. The three were either a strong-arm gang or they had more sinister motives for their impending attack. Whatever their design, Doe was coming to the aid of the victim.

The tallest, heaviest man was the central figure of the attack. It was he who seized the laborer around the throat and bent him back. The other two made quick work of rifling his pockets. But they weren't quite through. After stuffing whatever they had taken from the other's pockets to their own, they began a wild smashing at his face.

It was then that John Doe reached the scene.

The tall man who held the Italian helpless was the first to feel the pent-up anger of John Doe. Doe stopped short just behind the man, kicked him hard behind the knee cap and as the other gasped in pain and sagged, loosening his grasp around the Italian's throat, Doe hit him with the stiffened side of his palm across the side of the neck. The other sank to the ground. But the

few seconds which had elapsed gave the others the chance to close in on Doe. The Italian was either too frightened or too hurt to be of any use.

They came at him from both sides and he stood erect and smiling awaiting the attack. The first ducked his straight right and came in low, head buried against his chest, arms pumping in furious fusilade against first the belly then the lower regions. The second feinted to come in and looped an overhand right toward Doe's chin.

Doe braced his legs against the man who had tried to bury himself in his belly and stuck up a forearm which caught the overhead blow; it was amazing how swiftly he parried and struck with the same motion. His blow caught the other flush on the jaw and staggered him. Then, with the speed of light, Doe switched his attention to the other opponent.

Already the punishing fists were striking at vulnerable places. Pain came from those places in sickening waves. Doe threw sportsmanship to the winds. His knee came up and landed with sickening force against the dirty fighter's face. It felt as if it had landed in a pile of sand. But it did what Doe wanted it to, knock him out of the fight. Now there was only the one who had been staggered by the first blow. He was coming in. Doe danced forward on light feet, pivoted as the other came close and as the man followed the pivot, Doe hooked a terrific blow to the point of his chin.

That made two who were out of the fight. It was the third who was the deciding factor, however.

Doe thought he had put him out of the fight. But though the blow had been a punishing one it had not knocked the other out. It had stunned him but only momentarily. Recovering, he had cautiously waited for an opening. And

as Doe delivered the *coup de grace* to what he thought was the last of his opponents, he received a blow at the back of his head which sent him to his knees.

Instinct made Doe roll away. The first kick caught him a glancing blow along the ribs. Had he remained inert his ribs would have been caved in. As it was he managed to get away from the first kick. A second followed. And a third.

There were no more.

JOE GUSTARO felt the steel band relax around his throat. The mist went away from in front of his eyes. He staggered to a nearby lamp-post and leaned weakly against it, too weak to join the fray, though he knew it would have lessened the odds. But as he regained his breath and the weakness passed from him he began to watch for a moment to attack. It came when Doe went to his knees and the tall one began to kick at him. An animal sound of fury came from Gustaro's throat. This ragged stranger, this man who had leaped to his defense, was being hurt before his very eyes and he was doing nothing about it. Gustaro lowered his head and with a bellow of rage charged into the fight. He knew nothing of the finer points of fisticuffs. But his hands were iron-hard from labor and his anger gave him an added strength. He struck savagely, wildly, trying to beat the hoodlum to his knees through sheer power.

He only succeeded in staggering the man. It was enough to let Doe get to his knees. But though Gustaro had power the other had finesse. And a boxing skill of sorts. Enough so that he was able to feint Gustaro into position for a straight right to the mouth. It staggered the Italian. In that second the tall man saw Doe come to his feet, and realised that the fight was over.

He turned and ran.

It was at that instant that the policeman appeared.

"Hey! What's going on here?" the policeman wanted to know.

He grabbed Gustaro by the collar of his shirt and turned him around.

"What took you so long, officer?" Doe asked windily. He was breathing heavily. His right hand was clasped to his side where one of the kicks had broken the skin or bruised it; he didn't know. He only knew it hurt like mad.

"Fighting, eh?" the cop said, whipping around in Doe's direction. "I ought to throw the both of you in."

"Joosta minute, officer," Gustaro said. "Theesa man come to help me. They sticka me op. T'ree men . . ."

"Three men! So you're drunk too! What three men?"

Doe looked around. Unless the policeman had materialized from the very air it wasn't possible that he hadn't seen some part of the fight. At least the last of it.

"Y'mean to say you didn't see anybody else but us?" Doe asked.

He saw the cop's eyes narrow, saw him reach for his club, and knew that in a matter of seconds he or Gustaro was going to get a trimming. Quickly, he said:

"Okay. So you didn't see anybody else. What are you going to do now?"

"F'r being smart, I'm going to throw you and this greaseball in the can. That's what I'm going to do. An' how do you like that?"

"I don't know about me," Doe said carefully. "But I know that Judge Shneed won't like it."

"Shneed? What the hell's he got to do with this?"

"I'm going to his house now," Doe said.

"I suppose he invited you for dinner?" the cop asked.

"As a matter of fact he did," Doe said.

The cop released Gustaro and stepped in front of Doe.

"I don't like smart guys like you. And from the looks of you, I'd say that the can was more what you're used to," the cop said. "So you can forget your dinner engagement."

"If that's the way you want it," Doe said. He had recovered his breath and was talking once more in his devil-may-care way again. His eyes glinted in amusement and a crooked smile played around his lips. "But I still say the judge won't like it. However . . ." he let the rest trail off.

THE cop gave Doe a look of suspicion. It was obvious that the man wasn't afraid. And it came to the cop that perhaps there was more here than met the eye. Maybe . . . His lips tightened in sudden resolve. There was one way to find out. Shneed lived only a half mile down.

Turning to Gustaro, the cop said:

"All right, you. Beat it! And don't let me catch you fighting on my beat again. As for you," he said pointedly to Doe, "we're going to take a walk. To the judge's. And your story better hang together. Because the judge'll send you to the workhouse for so long by the time you get out you'll have callouses on your elbows."

Judge Wilburn Shneed looked at the ornate clock on the mantle and sighed softly. The sound, low as it was, was heard by his wife. She looked away from the plate of chicken before her and asked:

"Something wrong, judge? Come to think of it, you haven't been eating well lately. Now I notice tonight that you left your salad . . ."

There came a loud rap at the door to interrupt her.

"I'll get it . . ." Shneed began.

"Set. I'll answer it," his wife said, rising. She was nearest the door.

". . . It's someone I'm expecting," the judge continued, also getting up. He didn't want Tildy to see the vagrant before he saw whether the man was clean or not.

She paid no attention to his protests but continued to the door. The judge was right behind her.

"Yes?" Tildy's voice rose on a shrill note when she saw the policeman with John Doe in tow.

"This man, ma'am . . . He claims the judge invited him for dinner?" the cop asked.

"Why . . . Why, that's ridiculous!" Tildy Shneed said furiously. She felt the judge's presence behind her and knew without being told that he *had* invited the man. Anger boiled over in her. Her whole day. First her daughter and Joe Tillotson. Now this. Oh, Lord! What would that man of her's do next.

"That's right, officer," Shneed's hoarsely friendly voice answered. "And thank you for bringing him."

Shneed moved hastily aside as his wife turned and marched past him. He saw in the second of her passing, the dark look of anger on her face. His heart sank, but his voice betrayed nothing, as he said:

"Please come in, er . . ."

"John Doe," Doe said, stepping into the narrow reception hall.

The judge's eyes widened, then narrowed in speculation when he saw the marks of the fight on Doe's face and clothes.

"I'd like to use your washroom," Doe said apologetically, pointing with his hand toward his ragged, and now dirty garments.

"But of course. Follow me."

Shneed took the towel from Doe and handed him the clothes brush.

"So you think Adkins set those men on Gustaro?" he asked.

"I have no proof of it," Doe said. "But do you have any doubts?"

"No. I think he is capable of it. They took the poor fellow's money. Too bad. If there was only a way . . . He has such a pull at the Hall," Shneed said in a low voice, as though he were thinking aloud.

Doe looked sharply at him, finished brushing his clothes free of dust and handed the brush back to Shneed.

"Might as well go down," Shneed said. "And don't mind Tildy's . . . my wife . . . bite. She has . . ."

"I understand," Doe said, as he followed the judge down the stairs.

TILDY'S mouth was a down-drawn, compressed, bloodless line. She watched the two men approach with stormy eyes. Her daughter, on the other hand, looked at Doe with curious eyes, conscious of his tallness and the odd strength he seemed to radiate. She saw, too, that he had an old-world manner and grace when he sat, and a complete freedom from self-consciousness.

The judge had mumbled an introduction of sorts to which Doe had answered the introductions courteously and easily. But Tildy was unforgiving.

She sniffed and said:

"Judge Shneed, I declare! What are you going to do next? First that rough-neck union organizer with his blood-thirsty views. Now this . . . vagabond."

There were times when Shneed became angry with his wife. And although for the most part he let his anger dissipate, now and then it escaped him. This was one of those times.

"Tildy!" he said harshly. "This man is a guest in our house! I have invited him here. Be good enough to show him the courtesy my invitation commands."

It was in those times that his wife felt a respect, though it was hidden, for her husband.

"I'm sorry, Mister Doe," she said contritely.

He smiled his forgiveness and said:

"May I tell something which has come to my mind? A story I have heard?"

"When you have finished your dinner," Tildy said.

John Doe lit the cigar the judge had given him, leaned back in comfort against the Lawson lounge and looked thoughtfully at the ceiling. Tildy and Mary had returned from the kitchen where they had done the dishes, and were sitting on the sofa waiting for him to begin.

He lowered his gaze to the three who were his audience and began:

"It is a story of justice. It began on a freight gondola, the kind that are used for the use of grain. It had been switched onto a string of boxcars in a town which will be nameless. And the gondola was the only empty car in the entire string. As a consequence it held a full complement of vagabonds. For this town was a switching point and the hobos and vags. gather at such places. There were some eighteen men in that car.

"The freight moved off for its destination. It was evening. It traveled all through the night, stopping once but only for a few moments, not long enough even to wake the men who, not hearing or seeing the railroad brakemen or watchers moving about, knew they had fallen into a bit of luck.

"It was early dawn when the freight stopped, and the switchman turned off a number of the cars, one of them the gondola with the eighteen men. The crashing sounds of the switching woke them. But since no one appeared, they continued to recline against the steel

sides. It wasn't until the sun rose and the cars stopped at a little siding, that they saw not all was as well with them as they had thought. For peering over the far sides of the car were a half dozen grinning men, each armed.

"The travelers were ordered from the freight, and marched to the town lock-up. And later that morning they were ordered to appear before the local judge, who, lining them up, put it quite simply to them. They would either work at harvesting the grain or spend the next six months in jail.

"OF COURSE there were shouts of, 'Frame-up,' and there were some who rebelled against the injustice and begged the rest to take the sentence. But there were a half dozen boys who were frightened and those soon swayed the others to re-consider. All but three men, the strongest, both in bodies and minds. They stood on their rights. As vagabonds, they said, they could be sentenced to the thirty days which was the law. But six months. . . .

"So the judge gave them the six months, and set the others to the harvesting of the grain.

"It took three days for them to harvest the grain. And the farmers were grateful. For on the last day, thunderheads appeared in the sky; a storm was in the making and the entire crop would have been ruined had it struck before the harvest was done. So they finished their back-breaking labor and were returned to jail in the late afternoon of that last day.

"They were returned to jail. Nor were they given an explanation for it. But the deputies who brought them told them that the judge would explain, later.

"The three men who had rebelled had been placed in a cell, a cell about eight feet square. On this last day they were

standing, their faces pressed against the bars of the single window, and looked to the outside with anxious eyes. Their ragged, grimy clothes seemed to have the weight of lead against their hot bodies. Their faces streamed sweat. The atmosphere was oppressive in its closeness. And there was an air of something about them which frightened them. They kept looking to the sky. Thunderheads marched in awesome formations above. Now and then a jagged streak of lightning plowed its way to earth. Then they saw it!

"Far to the west a greyish funnel of cloud was forming. And even as they watched it grew larger, more terrifying, and ever closer. The air grew motionless. It seemed to them that even the grey stone of their cell seemed to strain for a sound to break the terrifying stillness.

"When the sound broke, it broke like thunder; the sound was as the sound of doom in their ears. For that funnel they had seen was the dreaded twister!

"They broke from the window and ran to the door, shaking it with their puny strength, screaming at the top of their lungs for release from this death cell. But the warders too, had seen the twister approach and they had run to the cellar in their fear, forgetting the humans, the three and the fifteen locked up above.

"The twister struck. There was a maelstrom of fury whirling all about the town for a few seconds. And when the twister passed, the inhabitants came out of their cellars to see what damage had been done. By one of those strange freaks, the twister had only vented its fury on a single building, a frame schoolhouse. But in that schoolhouse were some thirty children.

There was another oddity to be observed. The jail had had its roof torn from it. And from over its walls, eight-

een men clambered. Fifteen scrambled off into the gloom. One of the three who had rebelled, remained. For one of them, the strongest, had seen the wrecked schoolhouse, had guessed the calamity, and knew that every human hand was needed. So he marshalled his two ragged friends and they ran forward to give aid. Nor were the townspeople in any mood to question them.

"They worked like madmen, forcing themselves to the task of dragging timbers, joists, planking away. The others, the townspeople seemed to have been seized by a fright so great, a terror, which had paralyzed their minds and bodies. They could only stand by too frightened by the thoughts of what they might find. So under the leadership of the one man, the other two by the strength of their arms tore away the wreckage.

"**I**T WAS then that the real miracle came to light. By some miracle several timbers had fallen in such a way as to form a pyramid onto which a whole section of roof had caved in. The children had been in one room when the twister struck. And it was over this room that the canopy had been formed. Not a child showed even a single scratch when the three men came to them and brought them to light . . ."

John Doe stopped and leaned back against the pillow with closed eyes.

It was Mary who broke the spell-bound silence.

"Oh, tell us the rest. What happened? Did they give those three men medals? They should have! Oh! I've never heard anything so thrilling. What happened?"

"No," John Doe said slowly, his mouth twisted in a wry way, as if he had swallowed a bitter something which would not leave him. "No. They weren't given medals. Not even a vote

of thanks. Instead, they were returned to jail. For they had been sentenced to six months. And justice must be served. Besides, the sheriff was receiving money from the county for the prisoners' food and lodging. Three men in his jail meant so much graft for him. And he was angry that the rest had escaped. So the three were forced to serve out their sentence."

Mary let out a shrill sound of fury and even Tildy clucked her anger at the calloused behavior of the sheriff and the townsfolk. Only the judge saw the truth in the story.

Tildy excused herself, saying she had some ice cream in the kitchen. Mary, her legs curled up under her regarded Doe intently.

"Gee!" she said ecstatically at last. "I'll bet you've had some awfully exciting experiences."

"Not too many," Doe said, smiling down into the flushed, pretty face.

There came a knock at the door. The judge looked up and said:

"That will be Joe, I expect."

But his daughter was already running to the door. They couldn't see who it was but they heard hurried whispers. There came a sound which might have been a kiss. And then Mary returned, her arm entwined with that of a tall, well-knit young man, whose blond hair and quiet good looks made him look younger than he was.

"Lo, Joe," the judge said. "Come over here and meet a friend of mine. Joe Tillotson . . . John Doe."

The two shook hands, looked deeply into each others eyes and smiled their greetings.

"Y'know, judge," Joe said after he found a seat alongside Mary, "I hear the boys down at the Hall are a little hot about the way you treated Adkins, today."

"I don't give a hang what they

think," the judge said sourly.

"And I heard they've just about decided to take you off the ticket," Joe continued.

"That's not true!" Tildy's voice came from the threshold of the kitchen. There was terror in it and fear, too. "Don't come around here with your lies, Joe Tillotson!"

"I'm sorry," he turned to her. "But it's true. I wanted to break it to the judge this way, before he got it from them."

John Doe looked from the man to the woman, from the boy to the girl. Tildy had walked to the sofa on which they were sitting and had sat on the arm, her work-hardened fingers close around her husband's shoulder. Mary sat close to Joe, her lips set tightly against the sudden moan which had come to them at the news Joe had brought.

"Are you sure, Joe?" the judge asked.

"I got it from Nelson, Wade's secretary."

"Well. There isn't much I can do about it," the judge said morosely.

"Yes there are, sir," Joe said. "You can either knuckle down to them, or defy them."

"Defy them, son. How? A municipal judge is not voted on. It's a political plum. I am a hanger-on from a previous administration, a sop to those of the opposite party. It's up to those in power to retain or dismiss me."

"There are other offices open, sir," Joe said calmly.

"Daddy!" Mary was quick to get her sweetheart's drift, "Why you can run for . . . for . . . Mayor! On a write-in ticket. Why not?"

"Why not, sir?" Joe asked also.

"Because it's too late. That's why," Shneed said. "Besides, it's ridiculous . . . er, I'd be . . ."

"Don't you think you'd make a good mayor?" John Doe asked in his strong,

sure voice.

"Of course I would," Shneed said quickly. "But as I said, it's too late."

"But you're wrong, sir," Joe said. "The deadline is not until midnight. Three hours away."

The judge pursed his lips and squinted at the ceiling. Joe was right, by gosh. But it took something beside a piece of paper. Joe was way ahead of the judge.

"LOOK sir," he leaned forward, the other's eyes intent on him. "All you need are five names, voters of course, have the paper notarized and have it in to the town clerk before midnight. . . ."

"Wilbur!" Tildy turned the judge to face her. "I've been a crank many times in the past nineteen years. And a fool too. And many times I acted as if I thought you the fool. But this time I want you to *know* that if you don't do something about this, this high-handed thing they're trying to pull on you, I'll never forgive you."

"Look, dad!" Mary chipped in. "There are four of us here . . ."

"Five," John Doe said. "Of course I am to be included."

"Five then. And you are a notary. All we need is a piece of paper."

"It may at that," the judge said in tones of awe. "Doe. I have the right to swear you in as a voter. And as Mary says, I am a notary. Gosh darn! Get me some paper and a pen, or better, Mary. You type this out, nice and legal, just the way I dictate. Scat."

"I'll get this down to the clerk," Joe said, grabbing the sheet as it came out of the typewriter. He started for the door, turned, ran back, gave Mary a quick kiss, started again and came back once more, this time to deliver a quick peck to Tildy's cheek.

"That's from your future son-in-law, Mrs. Mayor," he said, and ran from the room.

Shneed looked at Doe with eyes which suddenly seemed to have found lights in their depths. His expression of joy changed quickly when he saw the frown on the other's face.

"Something wrong?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing yet. But there is no use in celebrating prematurely. After all, you are bucking a machine, and I gather a machine that is well-oiled, runs smoothly in each precinct, has cash, and can command certain resources which are beyond your control."

"How do you mean?"

"There are ways and means of intimidation . . ."

"There are. And God help the ones who get caught at it, because they'll come up before me in court; I *still* am judge and will be until a week past election, and I assure you they will get the same brand of justice they deal."

"What about the people of this town? Are they tired of the present administration? Will they do something about it? Will the business men back you?"

Shneed arose suddenly.

"I don't know anything about that," he said. "But you seem to be a man who does. In fact I'd say you were a man who knows a great deal about a lot of things. I'm going to need a manager. Will you take on the job?"

John Doe fell back against the pillow. He hadn't bargained for that. It was true he could and did feel an interest which was stronger than the usual. But this offer . . .

Tildy sniffed loudly.

"I declare," she said. "I declare! Wilbur Shneed, have you gone out of your head? Offering this . . . this tramp, such a responsibility? Why the look of him will . . ."

"Tildy," the judge broke in. "Didn't I see you listening to the story Doe told, with your mouth hung down to your chest. You were hanging to his every word. Whether you recognize it or not, this man has the gift of gab. When he talks, people listen. And they somehow forget his get-up. In fact I think he uses those clothes symbolically. The clothes and the perfume."

"Daddy's right, mom," Mary said. "Mister Doe certainly can talk. Maybe the rich won't listen, but the poor will. And there are more of those than of the others."

"Politicians have recognized that fact for many years," Doe said. "Perhaps we'd better wait until Joe returns before I say one way or the other."

THERE was a broad smile on Joe's face when he returned. It was apparent to all, he had succeeded beyond even his fondest hopes.

He explained:

"I got the idea when I passed the paper. They aren't too crazy about Wade. But rather Wade than some imbecile like the Reform element has put up. Besides, we have a sneaking suspicion that the Reform League is working hand and glove with Wade's gang."

"So I trotted up and saw my boss. He in turn saw Jorman, the owner. And Jorman almost pounded my back in when I showed him the write-in. He is not only for it, he is going to give you the paper's entire backing, all the way, and starting tomorrow."

"Just what we need," Jorman said. "Now we'll see how Wade'll whistle at this." Further, he's going to give you all the printing facilities of the Blade. Holy Smoke! I might as well start calling you, Mister Mayor, right now."

"Better hold off congratulations un-

til the right time, son," Shneed said. "I haven't won that election yet." He turned to Doe. "Now about you, we'll have to put you up here. Mother, think we can find a spare room for Mister Doe?"

It was the crucial second. And Tildy came through, although grudgingly, as if she was still not convinced.

HORACE WADE sat bolt upright when he saw the headlines of that morning's Blade.

"Why, those cheap louses! Those dirty . . . Andrews!"

A slender man in a double-breasted grey suit, who had been looking out of the huge single window which fronted on the plaza side of the city hall, walked slowly to the Mayoral desk.

"What's all the fuss, Wade?" Andrews asked.

"Did you see this morning's Blade?"

Andrews wondered how they had ever chosen such an imbecile as Wade. He had the front, all right. Loud, vain, addicted to flamboyant gesture, and a great crowd pleaser. Wade had certain weaknesses which did not please Andrews. For one thing, he was a coward. And another, of late he had been taking himself too seriously, had been forgetting who put him where he was, and who was keeping him there. Andrews decided to remind him.

"So?" Andrews bit the word off sharp.

"So?" My God, man. Get out there and do something about it."

"Look, fancy vest," Andrews said coldly. He knew Wade hated the reference to the brocaded vests for which he had a penchant. "Just don't worry that great mind of yours about that. That's my business. Yours is to sign all the papers we bring you. And make speeches. By the way, Nelson's written one for you to be delivered to . . ."

"Just a minute," Wade said ponderously. But he got no further.

Andrews had in a single lithe move, stepped close, shot out his hand and gathering in a generous fold of the fancy vest, brought Wade's head forward with a jerk.

"You're getting a little too big, even for your britches, Wade," Andrews said softly, venomously. "Just keep in mind who and what we are. Get it?"

"Sure. Sure," Wade said hastily. "I—I just thought . . ."

"So leave the thinking to us, please," Andrews said. "We don't want you to strain the mighty brain. Now forget about the Blade. We'll take care of that rag when the time comes. And Shneed, too."

"Sure. Sure," Wade said again. "Where was this speech to be delivered?"

"At Bricklayer's Hall. Our opposition has arranged for Shneed to speak tonight also. It's going to be an interesting evening, I think," Andrews said.

Wade caught the undercurrent of threat in Andrews' voice. An involuntary shudder escaped him. He knew the things the other was capable of.

WILBUR SHNEED shrugged himself deeper into his jacket and mounted the rostrum. He looked over the packed audience and thought, must be a couple of thousand people here, the right kind of people, too. My kind. Working men, for the most part. He saw Mary and Joe sitting in the front row off to one side. Tildy hadn't wanted to come. He tried to find John Doe in the crowd but he was nowhere to be seen. He knew, though, that if he wasn't there in person he was there in spirit. It was an oddly comforting thought.

He began to speak, extemporaneously:

"Friends. Mayor Wade has just de-

livered a plea for his re-election. I must admit it was an excellent speech. What's more, I think the tears in his voice were real. I know I'd cry, too, if I thought the wonderful years of graft and corruption were at an end for me. Mayor Wade reminds me of the criminal who was up before the judge for stealing and said, 'But I only took a dollar, your Honor.' It was true. He had only taken a dollar. But he had taken that dollar from a hundred people, so he had taken a *hundred* dollars. He wanted clemency because, as he claimed, the dollar wouldn't be missed; it was such a small amount.

"And that is the issue!

"For the past four years, Wade and his gang have taken a dollar from each of you. Their theory is the same as the criminal's. It's only a dollar. And you won't miss it. But I say you do. And I say that they are no longer satisfied with the dollar, that they don't give a *damn* whether you miss it or not!

"The issue is plain and it is standing squarely before you. You are the voters. You are the ones, who in the final analysis, will make the last judgment, at the polls, for or against honest government.

"I stand for honest government! I say that the dollar in the workingman's pocket means more than any sewer built out in Podunk at a cost ten times what it should be. I say that a man, whoever he may be, and whatever his position, if he is a public servant, owes a debt to the public, and must pay that debt in the only coin he can, by honest labor for the public's good.

"Well, gentlemen, there isn't much more than that. You all know me. Some of you have been before me . . ."

There was loud laughter at that, and Shneed smiled at the sound. He felt it as a good sign.

" . . . and have found that I deal

not alone in words but in deeds. And always, whether in deeds or words, honestly. As for my qualifications, I have watched eight years of dishonest government march by from a position in that body. I can do better. I *will* do better. For the time has come for a change and the change can only be for the better.

"I thank you for your attention . . ."

Shneed stopped and looked over the heads of the audience, toward the back of the hall. The swinging doors had swung open under the surging drive of a score of men.

Shneed recognized them for what they were, river rats, minor hoodlums, and the scum of the underworld. They were men who could be bought for a few dollars to do almost any deed but murder.

They stood for a second in silent watchfulness, then at a signal from a beetle-browed tough in a tan sports shirt, they separated to take seats through the auditorium.

Shneed waited for the sounds of their entrance to die, and started to go on. But before the words left his mouth, there came shouts from all parts of the hall, "We want Wade. Get that jerk off. We want Wade!"

Shneed frowned, turned an angry countenance toward Wade, seated near the wing, and held up his hand for silence. Wade smiled broadly at the noisy demonstrators. The plan was going to perfection. Soon the second phase would be put into effect. It only needed the spark of his voice. Arising, he walked to Shneed's side and shouted above the confused yelling:

"All right, men. Thank you. It is with the deepest appreciation that I say . . ."

But if Shneed couldn't talk, neither could Wade.

"Shut up, you!" other voices joined

those of the hoodlums. Only these were directed to Wade. "Let the judge talk," the other voices commanded.

Shneed whispered furiously:

"Stop that, Wade. What are you trying to do, incite a riot?"

But Wade knew what he was doing. Already there was an argument to the right, there. Another few seconds and fists would be swinging. The cops he had planted in several nearby taverns would be coming soon. The material was there for the fire. It needed only the spark.

Whipping around toward Shneed, Wade shouted in a voice heard in the farthest corner:

"I'll thank you to let me talk, at least."

"Let Wade talk," came the echoes.

"Shut up!" others shouted.

The argument in the corner had reached the fist-swinging stage. Another fight started closer to the platform. In a matter of seconds, Shneed realized, the whole place would become a Bedlam.

JOHN DOE looked at the watch he had taken from Joe Tillotson.

He stood on a soap box in a small square of grassy land. This bit of land, he had learned, was called, Soap Box Square. It was called that because it seemed to be a gathering place for malcontents, for men who had a quarrel with life. Here they could give voice to their grievances and find a sympathetic audience. For the audience was composed of men who were in the same position as that of the speaker.

He had discovered the square on one of his walks through the districts of the city, while seeking out a plan for the getting of votes. He was surprised at the number of men who gathered here nightly.

This was the third night he had come.

And on each night he had spoken against the administration. More and more men had come to listen to him, all with vociferous approval of his words. And as they recognized the truth of his words, they came to him with bits of information about Wade and the rest of his friends which made juicy bits of news in the Blade. It was here that Doe had learned, the night before, about the plan to start a riot at Bricklayer's Hall.

"... I see by the time that we must leave this place of talk," Doe said, looking away from the watch, "and move into action! Talk is easy. It costs a man nothing . . . usually. This time it may cost a lot. Broken heads, perhaps. Yours . . . and mine! Perhaps it may mean a jail cell. I am ready to take the consequences. Are you?"

A great shout of "Yes!" rang out.

The crowd parted for Doe, and at the head of the large mob, he started for the hall, a few blocks away.

"Wait, men," Shneed shouted. "Don't lose your heads!"

"Ah, shut up," the beetle-browed hoodlum yelled from the front seat which he usurped from another. Shneed saw with horror that he had seated himself next to Mary and Joe. And as he watched, he saw Joe say something to the hoodlum. A snarl lined the twisted face of the man, and turning, he sent a blow to Joe's jaw.

As though the blow were a signal, the others who had come with the man leaped from their chairs and started swinging in wild abandon at whoever was near them.

It was at that instant that doors swung open and Doe and his followers swept into the hall. An instant of stunned silence followed their entrance. and in that instant, Doe's voice sounded clearly:

"Get those hoodlums outside!"

It was something to watch, the audi-

ence realized, after it was over, how effectively and efficiently Doe's command was carried out. But in a matter of seconds, by sheer overpowering weight and numbers, the hoodlums, who were easy to be identified, had been swept from the premises. The audience could hear the sounds of fighting from the outside, but only for a few seconds, then that too, passed into silence.

Through all the excitement, Wade stood, open-mouthed, bewildered, on the platform. The grand riot plan had somehow miscarried. His head swiveled from side to side. He was alone, except for Shneed, who regarded him with a look of contemptuous loathing.

Slowly, Wade walked from the platform past the accusing eyes of his audience and out of the doors. And there, lining up his men for the grand entrance was the captain of police.

He was a bewildered policeman at the tongue-lashing Wade gave him. But it was an empty gesture on Wade's part. For he knew Shneed had won an important victory.

"I KNEW you'd bungle it, somehow," Andrews said bitterly.

"But what could I do?" Wade asked, his voice quavering in tearful accents.

"I suppose there wasn't much you could do," Andrews admitted. "Now it looks like we'll have to employ different tactics. You say this bum, the guy they call John Doe, was the ringleader of the gang?"

"Yeah."

"And the cops have spotted a hang-out of his? Soap Box Square?"

"Uh, huh."

"Well, don't just grunt. Tell me, is he there every night?"

"Just about. He comes . . ."

"Just about's no good. I've got to be certain. Let see . . ." Andrews' eyes narrowed in concentration. He worked

his full sensuous mouth, and fiddled with short, thick fingers against a collar point. Then his fingers slapped against each other. "I think I've got it," he said. And outlined his little plan.

Wade laughed chokingly when Andrews finished telling his idea.

"Great! I think that'll take care of our hobo," he said.

Four men sat around the bare deal table in the newspaper publisher's office.

"They've played the game fair," Jorman, the publisher, said, "so far. Until last night anyway. That was a give away. They're a scared bunch of rabbits, now."

"No," John Doe said thoughtfully. "Not rabbits. Foxes. I think we can expect the dirty fighting from here on in."

"Doe is right," Joe Tillotson said. "Last night was a sample. Wade had his cops all set to pinch the place. Those hoodlums would have come before Judge Shneed with pat stories about coming to the meeting with the intentions of hearing the debate, and before they knew it, they were set on by some of Judge Shneed's mob. Of course the charge would have been untrue. But it would have put our man in a bad light. Further, the opposition paper would certainly have had their men covering the court. All in all it would have been a fine mess if it hadn't been for Doe, here."

"That's true," Jorman said thoughtfully. "In a way, perhaps it's best it happened. They're going to be a little less fussy about the way they do things. It's only a matter of two weeks before election. And if they're less careful, they'll get caught up with sooner."

The others shook their heads in agreement.

"By the way, Joe," Jorman continued, "do you have that editorial I

wanted?"

Tillotson removed several sheets of paper from his pocket, grinned at the rest, and said:

"Let me read a few lines. See how you like it. . . . 'Two weeks ago, the newest candidate for the Mayoralty office, Judge Wilbur Shneed, opened his campaign. To those who knew him, Judge Shneed was a hero, a man who had stood for the rights of man in every circumstance. But the local citizenry *did not* know him.

"Now after two weeks, from Oscar Jorman, publisher of the Blade, to John Doe, hobo extraordinary, there are no persons of any group who do not know the man and his ideals . . .'"

Jorman lifted his hand, and said:

"Excellent! Exactly what I wanted. I'll have that in the first edition. I think we've all had our say for the present. Suppose we call it quits for tonight? Can I drive you home?"

Tillotson was going home with the judge. Doe excused himself, saying:

"I've got to see some of the boys about canvassing the factories at the river's edge. I'll see you tomorrow."

THE lank figure of Joe Doe on a soap box was a familiar sight in the Square. Men came strolling over from all sides. They waited silently for him to talk.

"Fellas," Doe began in his strong voice. "There's a job to be done tomorrow."

A few voices asked what it was.

Doe smiled at their eagerness, threw up a hand for restraint and continued:

"I've noticed that we're not drawing enough of the working stiffs to the meetings. We're all working men . . ." there was good-natured laughter at the words, laughter in which Doe joined wryly. ". . . And we've got to stick together," he said.

"For what?" a voice asked.

Stunned silence greeted the query. It was the first time anyone had dared to question the rightness of their course.

Doe looked in the direction of the voice and noticed a group of some ten men who were standing at the far edge of the crowd.

"Suppose you step forward, friend," Doe said. "I'll answer that question for you."

"I can hear just as easy back here," the man said.

"Very well," Doe replied. "After all," this to the murmurs of, "Throw them out," "one of the reasons, in fact, the main one, for our coming here, is that we enjoy the freedom of speech in this square."

"So don't abuse the privilege," another voice said.

"Very well, friend," Doe said. "I'll tell you why we must stick together. Because Judge Shneed is a man who does not know the cloak of corruption. . . ."

"Fancy words," the first voice said. "That ain't saying he can't learn to wear it."

"It's possible. I don't think so, though. I know Judge Shneed . . ."

There was laughter from the group at that. One laugh had in it the sound of wild mirth. And Doe recognized the voice to whom it belonged. And knew, too, what was happening. These were men who had rebelled at his leadership. They had left the flock of his followers. He hadn't seen them about in the last week. Now he wondered what brought them back.

"Sure," the first voice said. "We all know the judge. He gave me six months a couple of years ago. How did you get to know him? By getting a six-monther, too? Or did you talk yourself out of that? For sure, you talked yourself into this." The man's voice rose until the

farthest row heard him. "Stick together, he says. Sure. Elect Judge Shneed. Then what? Maybe he'll give us free beer on Thursday night. Or maybe he'll cut down the sentences to three months. Don't make me laugh, wise guy. You ain't doin' this for nothing. How much is your cut?"

Doe knew then that they had found a way to strike an effective blow. There was no answer which could be a guarantee. He had but a single course.

"Men!" his voice was a clarion call to justice. "Listen to me!"

There were interruptions from other sections of the crowd now. He could see the faces, shadowed in doubt, hear the rising murmur of suspicion. These men were suspicious by nature. They had been raised in a school of deception.

"I tell you this. We *all* have something to gain. Every mother's son of us has a stake in this game. I never offered anything to anyone, except the satisfaction of knowing he has helped justice come.

"**M**AYBE that's not enough. Maybe it's money you're interested in. And if it is, I can't blame you. But I did not lead any of you astray with false promises. From the first, I preached and spoke of right and wrong. From the first I said it was our duty to ourselves to see that right triumphs. If that isn't enough, then I'm licked . . ."

"Balls!" a voice shouted from behind Doe. "This guy's just full of the old bull. He's like an old woman. Yapeta, yapeta. I think Rusty's right. He ain't one of us. Walks in here and tries to take over . . ."

"And what did you have before I came?" Doe shouted.

"Same as we got now," another shouted. "Only we didn't have to run around saving our souls."

Doe stood silent, as more and more

joined forces with the rebels. His lank figure, with the wide bony shoulders on which the strong head stood thrown back in determination, was a figure of strength. Gradually the bickering voices died. He waited until the last of them faded into silence. Then he spoke again:

"This is no good, men. You have only my word that I am for you. Up until now there was no question in your minds that that was the case. I want to ask only one thing. Why has it happened that Rusty and the others, the same men, by the way, who took a walk in the beginning and wouldn't have anything to do with all this, are here to-night trying to change our minds? What made them take this interest all of a sudden? Suppose *they* tell us?"

"That's none of your business," the one called Rusty said. He pushed himself to the fore, until he stood before Doe.

He was a brawny man of middle height. His nose had been broken sometime before, and his face had the welter look of the ex-pug. He looked up with beady, suspicious eyes at Doe, his lips sullen and bitter.

"I say it is," Doe said. "As much our business as your interference in our affairs. I want to know why. I want to know *how much Wade is paying you and the others!*"

Violent anger erupted from the man in front of Doe.

"Get offa there and I'll beat that preaching face of yours to a pulp, you bastid!" Rusty growled.

Once more Doe looked about him. The challenge had done something to the men watching. He could see it in their eyes. Here was something concrete, not having anything to do with words. It was the challenge direct. And it could prove to be, even though it wouldn't give the right answer, the

way out of the dilemma.

"If that's the way you want it?" Doe said, stepping from the box.

Immediately, a wide circle was formed. There were shouted cries of encouragement directed to both men as they faced each other. And as Rusty went into a crouch, the voices stilled, and all waited with drawn breath for the first blow to be struck.

Doe moved toward Rusty on light feet, his arms high, his hands held a little away from his body. He measured the other with his eyes.

Only in height did Doe have an advantage, for though taller, he was outweighed.

Rusty was low in a crouch, his arms with the elbows out, ready to catch all blows. He was flat on his feet, the slugger who knew he couldn't box and who knew he was going to take a few punches, but could, only waiting to give a few.

Doe shot a light left through Rusty's guard. It flicked against Rusty's eyes. But the blow was short and light. Rusty growled something deep in his throat and moved in, heavily. Doe danced away to the right, and as Rusty followed, he sent in a straight left to the other's nose. That punch brought blood.

It was one of the things the crowd had been waiting for. A howl of excitement went up.

But this time Doe hadn't danced quickly enough. Rusty's left hooked in through the protecting arms, and connected on the side of Doe's jaw, staggering him. And like a panther, Rusty bored in, pumping with both arms, high and low.

Doe swung back, at the same time rolling with the punches, trying to take as little punishment as possible. But his blows only encountered thick arms and sharp elbows. A blow to his mouth

mashed his lips against his teeth and filled his mouth with the salty taste of blood. It sent him back on his heels.

And Rusty was quick to take advantage.

Like a flash he was in for the kill. No feints now! No fancy foot work. Just hooks, right and left. He brought Doe's arms down with a blistering attack to the belly, then sent a right that was half hook, half uppercut to the side of the jaw. It spun Doe around and into the bodies of the crowd.

For a second, Doe hung against the men, then slumped to the ground.

A wild roar of approval rent the air.

Someone began a count and the crowd took up the chant.

And Doe got up at the count of nine.

A something that was part of him, a something which would not accept defeat made him come to his feet. He could only paw at the man in front of him, with helpless, weak hands, and stagger around on rubbery legs which didn't want to support his weight. But he was on his feet!

RUSTY took his time. He moved in close where the punches would hurt most when they connected. Once more he began the rhythmic pounding, first high, then low. Doe's face was beginning to assume the look of raw hamburger. It became evident to the crowd that Rusty wasn't interested in knocking Doe out. He only wanted to cut the other to ribbons.

It was strange, Doe thought, but the blows showering his face didn't seem to hurt as much as the first ones. He smiled deep within himself at the thought. Maybe he was a Yogi who had denied to the flesh the right to pain. An odd feeling of strength flowed through him.

And as he staggered, trying to escape the pounding fists of the other, he saw

the look of contemptuous confidence on Rusty's face. He wiped that look away with a single punch.

Rusty had followed up one of Doe's wild staggers. He was still in close. So it was he had no chance to dance away, when Doe suddenly shifted his feet and pivoted with his hips. To those looking on it was as if Doe's body had moved in one direction and his feet in another. Rusty, taken in by the pivot, moved in the direction the upper part of Doe seemed to be taking. And when Doe swung his hips inward, and swung at the same time, he had the greatest possible amount of leverage on the punch.

It caught Rusty on the bridge of the nose, breaking it and blacking his eyes at the same time.

Rusty's head shot back from the force of the blow. He was flat on his feet, the legs spread wide. And Doe sank his fist deep in the other's belly. Rusty bent in the middle. But before he was fully bent, Doe brought his right first upward, with all the force he could command, straight to the button at the side of the chin.

Rusty's head snapped back once more, his eyes rolled back in his head, his hands dropped to his sides, and he fell forward on his face.

Once more the crowd chanted the numbers. The full count of ten was given this time. He was still lying there when the crowd of men rushed Doe and carried him back to the box from which he'd stepped to take up Rusty's challenge.

They waited, wild-eyed in excitement, for Doe to speak.

Doe stood on the box, his legs suddenly weak, and his breath whistling from his lungs. He thought, Why is it that force is the only argument some men recognize. There's no doubt but that because I won the fight I proved

my point.

After a few seconds he was recovered enough to talk:

"So that's that!" he said, coming right to the point they understood best, that he could win in any way they wanted. "Now let's get back to where we were when we were interrupted. I was saying that some of us ought to line up the factory help. I guess the way we'll do that is to have some of the boys who work in those factories ask for a meeting. I'll see to it that Judge Shneed attends. See you tomorrow."

DOE became conscious of an attending shadow, as he strolled homeward to the little hotel where Shneed and Tillotson had put him up. The way led through dimly lighted streets. A feeling of futility suddenly possessed Doe.

It was a feeling as if all the forces of evil had decided to gang up on him. They were coming at him from every side. From the very beginning Wade and his cohorts had placed into the path of their opponents, every obstacle they could conceive. Doe passed a light and stopped. He put his hand into a pocket and withdrew a package of cigarettes. Bending his head, he lit the smoke. And suddenly, Doe swung around. He was just in time to see a man dart into the shadows of a nearby doorway.

Forgetting the aches of his body, and the possible danger of the course he was following, Doe shot out in pursuit. He hadn't taken more than a few steps when the other ran from the doorway. But Doe was much the swifter.

Doe swung the stranger around and looked at him in bewilderment. The man he was holding was an old man, with a grizzled beard, and the lined dirty face of one who had given life up. There was nothing but fear in the old

man's face.

"All right, friend," Doe said, loosing his fingers a bit. "Mind telling me why you are following me?"

"I didn't mean nothin', mister," the old man whined.

Doe smiled wryly. It was the usual song of the beaten when the law lays hold of their shoulder.

"You can talk," Doe said reassuringly. "Come on, now, what's the idea?"

The old man turned a frightened face to either side of Doe, as if he thought there was someone about, whom he didn't want to see.

"Well . . . Well, it's like this, mister," the old man began, "I was standin' in the Square, listenin' to you talk. An' I thought that maybe . . . maybe . . ."

"Maybe what?" Doe urged, his voice still soft.

"It's like this, mister," the song began again on the same notes. "I was with Rusty and the others when they went to this place down on Galt Street. Rusty'd been tellin' some of us that there was a swell chance to make some money. Y'know, easy dough.

"I guess there was about eight of us went with Rusty," the old man went on in his rambling way. "Man! That was some joint! Guess they had about nine miles of carpet there. Rusty tells us to wait out in the office. He's in another office maybe f'r ten minutes. When he comes out there's a guy with him.

"Oh, ain't no doubt in my mind that this guy's big wheel. Just the way Rusty's kissin' the guy's foot makes me know that. The two of 'em stand just outside the door and Rusty says, 'Don't worry about a thing, mister Andrews. I got my boys trained.'"

"Andrews?" Doe asked reflectively. "He is somebody I've never heard of before. Was there anything else said?"

"Nope. Rusty hustled us out of there in a hurry. I guess the other guy was mad, even though he didn't say nothin'. He took one look at the gang of us lined up there and he give Rusty a look that made him act, but fast."

Doe remained lost in thought for so long the tramp looked apprehensively at him, wondering whether he had done something wrong and what form the punishment would take. He had thought it an excellent idea, especially after the fight, to try and sell the bit of information. Now he wasn't so sure. And when Doe, his head still bent in an attitude of concentration, started off, the old man was still too frightened to move after him.

But there was no need for him to. Doe turned back almost immediately.

Pulling out a few crumpled singles from his pocket, Doe handed them to the old man, saying:

"Here's what you're after. You'd like to get more, wouldn't you?"

The old man, his head bent in worshipful glance at the veritable fortune in his hand, shook his head in violent agreement.

"Stay close to Rusty. He'll have to go back to this Andrews. I imagine tonight's affair was the result of that little conference they had. Rusty will have to report what happened. See if you can hear what they say. And meet me tomorrow at the Square."

Joe Tillotson pounded his fist into the palm of his hand.

"Andrews! So he's the one behind Wade! Hot dog! Why the Blade's been trying for the past four years to get the inside man behind that fat front in the fancy vest."

THEY were gathered in the judge's parlor, Doe, the judge and his family and Joe. Doe had gone right to Shneed's home. He thought the infor-

mation he had acquired too urgent for the morrow's talk. He knew Joe would be there; since the reporter had been doing such yeoman work for her husband, Tildy had relented a bit in her attitude. She still hadn't accepted him, but at least she was more tolerant of him.

"The name is familiar," Shneed said thoughtfully.

The women followed, with their eyes, the talk, as it swung from one man to the other.

"I have it!" the judge announced triumphantly. "He's that big contractor who is building the double bridge over the river."

Joe was pacing the floor in his excitement. He pounded his fist into his palm again and said:

"I'll get over to the office with this, right away. Jorman gave me full power to write my ticket on the campaign."

"Not so fast, Joe," John Doe said. "Let's talk this out."

"What's there to talk out?" Joe asked impatiently. "We've got the man . . ."

"Doe's right," Shneed said. "And you don't get what he means. 'You've got the man. We want the proof! Now we've got a lead. It may be up to you and some of those smart reporters working on the Blade to furnish that.'"

"I get it. Of course I talked too fast," Joe acknowledged. "Just talking out loud, anybody got an idea how we go about doing that?"

"Suppose we follow this plan," Doe said. "Andrews must meet with Wade somewhere, probably in Wade's office. Certainly I can't see Wade going to Andrews. Have a man stationed at the hall . . ."

"Don't have to go to that trouble. We have press facilities there," Joe said.

"Good! Put a man on Andrews tail. Wherever he goes, the tail follows. It

doesn't make much difference whether Andrews knows or not. In fact it might be better if he does. Sooner or later, he's going to meet with Wade. We'll want a transcript of the dialogue."

"H'm," Shneed didn't like the idea. "Smacks of interference, and worse, conspiracy to . . ."

"Yeah. A frame-up," Joe finished. "So that's out. Any one else got an idea?"

"Suppose we see what the old man finds out?" Doe suggested.

They parted on that note.

Doe walked to his hotel. He usually did after their meetings at the judge's. Something bothered him. He kept worrying about it. It was when he passed a drug store that he knew what it was that irritated him mentally. He had been so wrapped in the campaign, he had forgotten his one vice, perfume.

He smiled as he thought of the reason why he loved using the scents. It wasn't the same as he had given the judge, although he hadn't lied about that. There was another reason. He made a mental note to stop in and see what they had in stock.

The long-faced clerk removed the tooth pick from his lips, grunted a greeting and returned to the Racing Form, from which Doe's entrance had taken him. But as the vagrant passed him on the way to the stairs, the clerk was reminded of something.

"Hey, Doe!"

Doe retraced his steps.

"Almost forgot. You got a visitor."

"A visitor? Did he leave his name?"

"Why should he? He said he knows you. Besides, you ain't got nothing a guy like that'd take."

"What do you mean?"

"Fancy Dan. Dressed like he spends his time, all the time, with his tailor."

Doe had a strange idea who his vis-

itor might be. He was right. It *was* Andrews.

He was sitting by the single window, looking down at the lifeless street below. He turned on Doe's entrance and looked intently at the other, as Doe removed his jacket, and found a space on the bed. Doe returned the look, only his was more open, more curious.

"So you're the one they call, John Doe," Andrews said.

"I am. But you didn't come here to confirm that, did you?" Doe asked, smiling.

"No. I've got more important things to do. Like getting my man elected mayor. Doe, how much do you want for laying off?"

"Well, what are you paying these days?"

"A hundred grand. Enough?"

Doe smiled. "That would cut the profit on the bridge, wouldn't it Andrews?"

"There's other things. I'll make it back."

"I imagine you would. But what makes you think I'm worth that kind of money?"

"JUST the votes you've already cost us by that gab of yours. That's what makes me think so. Now let's talk straight. Nobody ever took me for a ride. So don't play me short. For example, I haven't asked you how you know my name or how you know about the bridge. I figured a guy as smart as you would find out such things. And I mean you're smart. Not even Jorman knows about my connections. I keep covered pretty good.

"So maybe I want to take over all the way around. Maybe that fat guy I got in the front office's getting too cocky for his own good. And maybe I want a new front man, a guy like you. I can make it damn-well worth your while."

Doe lay back against the pillow. He stared with deep interest at the peeling ceiling, as though he were finding inspiration in its cracked surface.

"I'll say this, Andrews. You don't talk peanuts. Suppose . . ."

"Suppose nothing," Andrews said sharply. "I don't come asking things every day of the week. I *give* orders. And at my terms. Take it or leave it!"

"It's a lot of money. More than I could ever gain by a life-time of labor," Doe said softly. "But we'll have to suppose. Just what do you want me to do, just stop going to the Square? Or stop seeing the judge? I'd like to know."

Andrews almost chortled with glee. The heavy sugar. They couldn't resist it. None of them. Maybe this guy was smarter than the rest? Maybe he wasn't? But that gleam in his eye only proved that he was as money-hungry.

"Don't talk like a kid," Andrews said. "When I pay that kind of dough, I want results. I want my man in. How *you* manage it, is your affair. You get a half now, the rest election day . . ."

"You're rather trusting, aren't you?" Doe asked. "Suppose I run out on you?"

"Then you'll only make fifty," Andrews said, smiling.

"So you want me to get out of town," Doe said.

"It's an idea."

Suddenly Doe stopped playing. He literally leaped from the bed and strode to the other. Grabbing a liberal amount of the other's jacket, Doe hoisted Andrews to his feet.

"Your idea stinks," Doe said, smiling. There was something in the smile which suddenly struck terror in Andrews.

He tried to bring his arms up for protection. But he was being held so close he couldn't do it. Doe shook him, as a terrier shakes a rat before killing it.

"Your idea stinks, mister," Doe said

again. "I took a beating tonight from one of your boys. And maybe I'll take a few more. Perhaps worse. I'll take it, and for nothing, for what I believe in. And for what Judge Shneed believes in. And all the rotten dough you can bring up won't make me lay off."

He hurled Andrews from him and the other slammed up against the door so hard plaster came from the ceiling.

"Now get out of here before I get to thinking too long about what you wanted," Doe said.

Doe stood for a long time looking at the blank face of the door after Andrews left. He knew that for the first time in his life he had felt like killing a man.

He stood there for a long time.

And when he turned at last and went back to the bed, there was a pensive smile on his lips.

MAYOR WADE sighed sobbingly, bit his lip and looked imploringly at Andrews, who was sitting in the leather armchair next to the mayoral desk. Andrews played with an empty glass which a few minutes before had contained whiskey. Andrews mouth expressed his hidden disgust of Wade.

"Stop acting like the kid who's had his toy taken from him," he said.

"But," Wade whimpered, "those guys got us licked. Just three more days. I've been getting reports from all the precincts. The fever for Shneed is spreading. Why they've got independent clubs all over the place. What the hell are we going to do, Andrews?"

"Look, stupid!" Andrews snarled. "Do you think I'm taking this sitting down? Not this boy. There's always a way. And I know the man who can help me. Adkins."

Wade wrinkled his brow. The name was familiar. Adkins? He remembered then. Adkins owned a tavern

down the factory way. But what about Adkins?

Andrews elaborated:

"He's my strong-arm man. Adkins has got more men who will steal, kill, lie for him than anyone else. He was the guy I went to when I needed that mob for the ruckus at Bricklayer's Hall. The only thing about Adkins, he wants a bigger in."

"So give it to him," Wade said. "You can always get him out, later."

"Might not be that easy," Andrews said. "At any rate, he's coming here. Should be here any minute."

They both looked at their watches. There was a few moments silence, a silence broken by a loud rap at the door.

Adkins, looking more arrogant than usual, walked in at the summons to enter.

"Grab a chair," Andrews said.

Adkins saw and grinned at the two who were facing him.

"You guys look mighty sick to me," he said. "Things not panning out?"

"You know the answer to that," Andrews said shortly.

"Sure. Shneed's going to win in a walk. Is that why you wanted to see me?"

"You guessed it," Andrews said. "We want that guy stopped. Got any ideas?"

"Sure. But it'll cost dough . . . a hundred grand."

Wade sputtered at the amount.

"You're crazy!" he said. "A hundred—grand! Why . . ."

"Don't you shut up!" Andrews said. "It's a deal. Let's hear it."

"Look! What's the angle about the whole set-up? I mean what's their selling talk that's puttin' them across? Honesty! They throw that word around like it means something. An' it means so much crap."

"Go on," Andrews demanded tensely.

"Maybe you guys been standin' still. But this boy hasn't. I figured that some day you'd come to me. An' I got the goods. Y'see, I always figure the guy's weaknesses before I start doin' business. And the guy that hollers wolf is usually one himself. Like Shneed."

"It wasn't in the paper, but about two weeks ago, the judge's safe in his private chambers was opened and a number of papers taken out. The judge don't know it yet, but he will. And when he sees those papers, he's just going to withdraw from the race."

"Adkins, you don't make sense," Andrews said.

"Take it easy," Adkins said. He grinned crookedly into Andrews face. Nor did he act frightened of the scowl on it. "You see about three years ago, Shneed pulled a very fast deal. He's always been strapped for dough; I guess his job just about makes him a living, and three years ago his daughter had a very serious operation. They had to get a certain doctor, who charged heavy. Too much for Shneed. But it was to get the doc or his daughter dies."

"It so happened that there was a big civil suit being tried in his court. Usually he doesn't try those things. But this time someone had asked for a change of venue, the judge they wanted was on vacation and the wind-up was with Shneed."

"So what happens? Shneed gets approached by one of the lawyers and they're willing to spend ten grand to get a judgment. An' that's the amount the doctor wanted to take care of his daughter. Shneed didn't think twice. He grabbed the dough. But the lawyer was no shnook. He made Shneed sign a paper which was made out in duplicate, that for the consideration of ten grand, Shneed had rendered services. I don't know how, but Shneed got the duplicate too. An' why he kept them

instead of burning the papers, I don't know either. But we got both . . . I mean I got both. That's what the hundred grand's for, those papers. Savvy?"

Wade and Andrews looked at each other, and slowly their lips parted in similar grins of delight. Shneed's goose was cooked. But to a turn. Adkins had the barrel. And the judge was going to find himself over it before long.

"How'll we do it?" Andrews asked.

"Easy," Adkins replied. "I'll get you the original. You call Shneed in tomorrow . . . tonight even. You show him that. And say he can have both copies if he withdraws. Otherwise the newspaper who's supporting Wade gets both copies. And that'll be all, brother."

"Fine."

"Except for one thing," Adkins said in reminder. "The hundred grand."

"You'll get it," Andrews said.

"Fifty tonight. And fifty when he gives up," Adkins said. "That's why I keep the duplicate. Just in case he stalls . . ."

"So okay. I'll have the money here tonight," Andrews said.

But after Adkins left, Andrews said, "And that's what he's getting fifty thousand."

"IT'S a phone call for you, dad," Mary said.

Judge Shneed wiped his lips, got out of the chair and went to the phone.

Tildy shouted for him not to take too long, "The chicken'll get cold, judge."

Mary handed the receiver to her father and returned to her dinner. Both women watched him with varying degrees of affection. To the girl, he was more than just father. He was everything she symbolized as good in a man, just and honorable. He was the hero of the play, the star of the movie. She idolized him.

Tildy saw him in another more intimate light. He was all a husband could be. But she saw the weaknesses Mary couldn't know, yet. Tildy had a feeling that sometimes her husband was not as strong as she wanted a man to be. Not in strength, but in the small ways of will.

They listened to the conversation, between bites.

"Hello . . . Yes this is he speaking. Ohh . . . Yes, I can but I'm at dinner now . . . Well, can't it hold for an hour or so? . . . About what? . . . What! . . . I'll be right over . . ."

They watched the judge in bewilderment as he pulled a jacket from the hall closet and started for the door.

"Judge!" Tildy called to him. "Where are you going?"

He continued for the door as if he hadn't heard her call.

"Judge! Come back here."

But the slamming door was her answer. They turned startled, frightened faces to each other. There was something ominously frightening in the way he had left. They had caught a glimpse of his face as he slipped the jacket on. It was drained of blood. And his eyes had a wild, strained look.

Without a word, Mary darted from the table, and ran to the porch. She was just in time to see the battered old sedan her father used, turn the corner of their house.

Judge Shneed drove with only part of his senses. For the most part a numbness had seized his brain and his soul. So it was that he missed seeing the excited figure of Joe Tillotson dash up the walk of the house he'd just left.

That part of his brain which still seemed to be alive could only think of one thing, the phone call he'd just received.

How had they got hold of those papers? He groaned aloud at what his

foolishness was going to cost him. He should have destroyed them that day he'd gotten the duplicate. There was only one other, besides the lawyer and himself, who knew of those papers, Hanson, the bailiff. Certainly the lawyer had nothing to gain. He was as guilty of collusion as himself, Shneed knew. As much as he hated to, Shneed could only think of Hanson in connection with the papers.

The darkened streets of the uptown district came into view. Another few minutes and he would be at the Hall. They were waiting for him there. To give him the *coup de grace*.

His soul cried aloud that it couldn't be! Why there were only three more days . . . Jorman had assured him earlier in the evening that he was in. Wade hadn't a chance. But Jorman hadn't known about those papers. No one had, except two others besides himself, and one could be dis-counted.

Now there were others who knew. What had the voice said?

"You'd better come now. Or we won't wait about giving a piece of news to the papers about *good old, honest Judge Shneed*. After all, judge, ten grand's a lot of dough to take for a bribe. The people might want to know what for . . ."

They knew, all right. That's why his caller had mentioned the exact sum involved. The public wouldn't care why he had done it. He had come to know people a lot better in the past month. They would only look at the case from their narrow view point. Nor could he blame them. A crisis had come up, and he had taken the easiest way out . . . He shook his head violently. No. It hadn't been that easy to figure out when he received the news of Mary's illness. All else had been wiped from his mind, except the fact that unless he somehow got ten thousand dollars for the spe-

cialist, she would die.

He almost passed the darkened bulk of the Hall, slammed on his brakes and skidded to a halt before a fire hydrant.

HE SAW first the familiar figure of Wade seated at the wide desk. Then, as he closed the door, he saw the other man. There was something of the animal in the other, in the way he sat, poised on the edge of the chair, ready to spring, to attack.

"Took you a long time to come," Wade said sourly. "My friend, here, was just getting ready to call the Star."

"I came just as quickly as I could," Shneed said in a low voice.

"Yes," Andrews said. "I think you did. I know I would have, had I received that call. Shneed, you're through. Might as well face it."

"About the piece of paper you mentioned," Shneed said, still in the same low voice. "You have it here?"

Andrews removed it from his pocket and tossed it to the desk.

Shneed put out a hand, which shook visibly, for it. The typewritten words blurred before his eyes. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. They had him. That dirty, sneaking rat! All those years of friendship. He wondered how much Hanson had taken to sell him out.

A sudden thought came through the numbness of his brain. The paper he was holding, this bit of incriminating evidence. If he could destroy it . . .

Wade let out a yell of anguish and started from his chair as he saw Shneed suddenly rip the paper to shreds. But Andrews only laughed.

"I thought you might do that," Andrews said, gloatingly. "In fact I hoped you would. Now I know the duplicate is worth what I paid for it."

The bits of paper floated to the floor. Shneed fell back limply into the chair

behind him. His eyes turned like a cornered animal's, from one to the other. There was no pity or understanding in those eyes facing him. They seemed filled with an unrelenting hatred.

"Shneed," Andrews bit the words off viciously. "You're going to give a statement to that yellow rag that's supporting you, to the effect you're stepping out. Tonight! No stalling on that, either."

"No!" the word was wrenched from the judge. Then in louder accents, "No!" I won't! Do your damndest. I don't care. I'll take whatever comes to me."

"Oh, fine," the irony was a flame which licked at Shneed's brain. "Now the man's a hero. To hell with my family. What do I care for my daughter? Is that why you took the ten grand bribe, because you didn't give a damn about her?"

Mary, Shneed almost said aloud, so great was his anguish. His daughter. She was more than that. She was a way of life. No. They were right. He couldn't do that. If it were Tildy . . . they could somehow work out another life, somewhere else. But he couldn't do this to Mary. The notoriety would twist her into something he hated to think of. And he knew, too, that if the decision were up to her, she'd tell him to take the consequences. She was built like that.

Shneed's head fell forward against his chest. The two watching him exchanged gleeful glances. It was obvious the man was licked.

"We have a statement for you to sign," Andrews said, picking his words with care. "The day after election, you'll get the duplicate to what you've just destroyed. Bring out that paper, Wade."

The broken man in the chair didn't

even look at the words. His fingers fumbled with the pen Andrews handed him.

"Let's go. Sign!" Andrews demanded.

Shneed scrawled his name across the bottom of the page, and dropped the pen from nerveless fingers.

Andrews took the paper, folded it in two and slipped it into his breast pocket.

"Now one more thing," Andrews said. "I've got a little debt to settle with someone. That friend of yours, that vagrant, John Doe, I've got to get rid of him. We'll need your help in that matter."

"I've arranged something for him. About ten minutes ago he got a call to go somewhere. There's going to be a welcoming committee to greet him. Mister Doe is going to wind up in jail tonight. And tomorrow he's going to come up before Judge Shneed, who is going to sentence him to a year in the workhouse for larceny. Get that, judge?"

Shneed's head came up. What was that about Doe? Sentence him . . . for what?

"You heard me," Andrews said. "You're going to sentence him a year in the workhouse, at hard labor. I'll show that bastard he can't make a monkey out of me!"

JOHN DOE rolled out of bed at the summons.

"Who's there?" he asked in a sleepy voice.

"Dave," the clerk's voice came through the thin partition. "A phone call for you."

Doe almost cursed aloud. For the first time in weeks, he had the chance to get to bed a little early and there would have to be a something to disturb his slumber. He came wide awake at the thought it might be something impor-

tant. Hurriedly slipping his clothes on, a matter of seconds, Doe ran down the stairs.

An oddly metallic voice answered his "Hello."

Doe tried to recall where he'd heard the voice before. It escaped him. The voice went on:

"Look, Doe. You want that man of yours in, don't you?"

"Yes," Doe replied, still puzzling over the voice.

"So I've got some information that'll do it," the voice said.

"Who are you and what do you want?" Doe asked.

"I'm selling Wade and Andrews . . . down the river," the voice said on quickening notes. "They tried to give me a fast deal from the bottom of the deck. And Rusty Malone don't take that from no man. If you want what I'm *giving* away, meet me next to that burger joint near Fourth and Market."

Elation filled Doe's voice, as he said, "Be there in about half an hour."

He finished dressing in a hurry. And while he laced his shoes, he thought: So the wolves are starting to fight among themselves. Good! I imagine there some things Rusty knows which Joe could put to good use in the Blade. And at this time in the campaign, any incriminating evidence would just about put Shneed across.

John Doe crossed Fourth Street, his eyes searching out the hamburger place. He spotted it, but saw it was closed. He wondered why Rusty had picked it out as a rendezvous. A figure slid out of the shadows next door to the small restaurant. Doe recognized the squat, heavy body of Rusty.

"So you come, huh," Rusty said in greeting.

"Why not?" Doe asked, smiling.

"Yeah. Why not? Maybe you're leary of what I got?" Rusty said.

"No. You probably have good reasons for what you're doing," Doe said.

"Damned right I have! But we can't talk here. Let's mosey along. I'll spit it out while we're walking."

Doe wandered why he couldn't talk there. Then he realized that neither of their appearances were too prepossessing. A cop walking by might stop them and ask embarrassing questions, and although Doe might have the answers, the other might not have.

"Yeah," Rusty began, as they strolled down the darkened streets. "They must think this boy's a jerk from no place, the way they want to push him around. Well, bigger guys than those two've found out different. Nobody pushes me around."

Doe wished Rusty would get to the point. But he knew that the other had to get his anger to the right point before it would boil over in confession. He let him talk on, without interruption.

"Get those bums you hang around with, to do this," they tell me. "There'll be half a hun'ert in it for you. Get those bums to do this . . . an' get 'em to do that. F'r what, peanuts? Not Rusty Malone!

"So when I ask them for a lift, just another fifty, what do they say? Kiss my foot! Well, I'll kiss it. But not in this world. Mister, I got plenty to say. Facts. Cases. Why I can tell you just what you want to know."

Doe was getting more and more curious. This rambling talk, with its undertone of threat. What had Rusty to sell?

They were passing a section of the business district on which there was only a single light standard.

Rusty suddenly put out a hand and said:

"Say. Got a smoke, Doe?"

The other reached into his pocket

and dragged out a pack of cigarettes. Rusty took one and putting it in his mouth began a futile search for matches. Doe smiled and handed him the pad. Rusty lit up and held the still-burning match for Doe to take a light. The other also took a cigarette and stooped to where the flame was burning in the palm of Rusty's hand.

Doe didn't see the free hand come up. Nor did he see the blackjack held in the fingers of that hand. He only felt the blow. And was smothered in a stifling blanket of darkness.

RUSTY looked down at the still figure before him and a smile of evil satisfaction came to his lips. This paid him back for the beating Doe had given him. Besides it was an easy way of making a hundred dollars. He had picked the spot just right. There was the drug store. He had already cased the place and knew the back door had a lock a kid could have sprung. The cops would be there in a few minutes.

Stooping, he heaved the inert body of John Doe to his shoulders.

He let the still-inert body fall to the refuse strewn walk in the rear of the drug store, and inserted a slender pick in the door. A couple of twists and the door opened on creaking hinges. Once more he heaved the body across his wide shoulders. And when he let it drop again, it was before a counter of cosmetics, perfumes and colognes.

Rusty picked up a bottle from the top of the counter and rapped it smartly against the glass of the case. The glass fell inward with a crash. Inserting his hand, Rusty pulled out a bottle, labeled, Misty Night, Cologne. Pulling the stopper from the bottle, Rusty up-ended it over the sprawling figure of the man at his feet. He held it until the last drop was free of the glass.

Misty Night had the unmistakable odor of forget-me-nots!

But the man who lay unconscious on the floor did not care what the odor was. As a matter of taste, he did not particularly care for forget-me-nots.

Joe Tillotson stopped in his wild dash for the Shneed door. He looked back at the car which had whisked around the corner. Hadn't the driver been Judge Shneed? Then, shrugging his shoulders, Joe trotted up the short flight of stairs and rang the bell.

Mary answered the door before the echo of the ring died.

Her face was shadowed in darkness but the overhead light gave strong highlights to her cheeks and eyes. He saw the fear in them.

"Anything wrong, honey?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know," she said. "But I'm frightened."

She led him to the living room where her mother sat, a look of fright in her eyes, and her fingers playing and intertwining with each other, in constant motion. She gave Joe a wide-eyed look of appeal.

"Okay, honey," he said to Mary. "Now take it easy. Sit down. Go on. I'm sure there's nothing wrong."

"But that phone call . . . I'm afraid, Joe," Mary said. "Daddy ran out of here without a word of explanation. He never acted so frightened of . . . I don't know what!"

"A phone call? He didn't say who it was?"

"No. He just grabbed his jacket and ran for the car."

"Joe," Tildy said in anguished tones. "You don't think something's going to happen to him?"

"Not to him!" Joe said in such a vicious voice the two women were startled to hear the usually amiable Joe say it in that way. He laid a

round package carefully on the tier table next to the chair in which Mary sat, and walked to the phone in the hall. They could hear his whole conversation.

He asked for a number and when he got it, said:

"Let me talk to Mister Jorman, please . . . I don't care if he's entertaining the governor, get him to the phone . . . Tell him it's Joe Tillotson, and that I've got the transcript of the dictagraph record . . ."

Joe turned and saw the two women, their arms about each other's waists, standing in the doorway. He smiled reassuringly at him, and turned to the phone as it gave out with squawking sounds.

"Yes, sir, I got the transcript," he said. "And I think Judge Shneed has gone down there . . . We'll I'm at his home, now, and they tell me he got a call a short while back . . . That's right, sir, they aren't wasting time . . . You say you'll meet me there . . . In ten minutes . . . Right, sir! I'll be there. Good bye."

He asked Mary to fetch the package he had left on the table. And while she was gone, he whispered a hurried:

"Don't worry, mother. They can't do anything to the Judge."

He smiled gently into the girl's eyes when she returned, and said, "See you in a little while. And when your dad and I get back, why I'm going to have to ask your mother and father an important question. Now kiss me quick, and wait for me."

The kiss was the kind no man wants to break away from.

He started to leave and remembered something.

"Look honey," he said. "Bring me that portable phonograph will you?"

They wondered why he wanted it. But the closed door didn't have the

answer they wanted for them.

JOHN DOE felt something cold pressing against his face. He rolled over and a voice said:

"Get up, you!"

Doe stared blankly into the policeman's eyes. Then recognition dawned in his eyes. He got to his feet and staggered around for a second or two. The cop eyed him with unblinking eyes, in the depths of which lurked an evil something.

Suddenly a ham-like hand shot out and slapped the staggering man a terrific wallop. It sent Doe careening backward to end up against the soda fountain hard enough to almost drive the breath from his body.

"Thought you'd get away with it," the cop said in a monotone. "Lucky thing you slipped on something and cracked your head. Or maybe it ain't so lucky."

Doe leaned back against the fountain. He knew he had been framed. It had been a beautiful job. And he had been a most gullible tool. If for no other reason, Doe knew that he'd better not talk because the cop was just itching to hit him again. Whoever had sent the man there, had also told him to muss Doe up a bit.

"Well, talk up! What you got to say?" the cop asked.

"Not much, I guess. You've got me where you want me," Doe said.

"And how, brother. You'll get a year on this," the cop said. "All right. Let's go."

The sergeant at the station thought the whole thing pretty funny, a man stealing perfume. And when the arresting cop held up the bottle, the other three men who were shooting the breeze in the station broke into loud laughter.

"That's a laugh," one of them said. "A crum bum wantin' to smell nice.

Say, Sarge. Ain't this the guy what got the big yap?"

The Sergeant smiled wryly. He didn't like the whole set-up. But the Lieutenant had given the orders. He had to carry them through. But only through the booking. There was no reason for letting the men get away with too much.

"You guys got someplace to go?" he asked. "So get going!"

Doe thanked him with his eyes. The formality of being booked was done with in a hurry. The charge read, burglary; the loot, a bottle of perfume.

JORMAN was waiting for Joe in the corridor. He had a reporter with him, a man Joe recognized as a cracker-jack feature writer.

Jorman nodded with satisfaction when he saw the phonograph and the round package.

"Nice going, Tillotson," he said. "And I see you brought an instrument. They're going to dance our time when they hear this record. Well, let's get it over with."

The door opened and the three men entered.

The smile on the fat face of Wade disappeared at sight of them. Andrews seemed to find an odd sense of satisfaction at sight of them. Only Shneed seemed indifferent to their entrance. In fact he didn't even notice them. There was a sheet of paper in front of him.

"Welcome, gentlemen," Andrews said. "Although I would have preferred a knock, it doesn't really matter. The point is, I'm glad you came in just now. I have news for you. Judge Shneed is no longer a candidate."

He wondered why they stared at him with such odd looks. For no reason he could explain, he picked up the slip of paper before the judge's hand. No

one noticed him do it.

"Andrews," Jorman said, "I think your term as mayor by proxy is about over."

Wade could only sit by with mouth open, and listen.

"Yeah? Now there's news. Tell me more," Andrews said.

"Play the record for him, Joe," Jorman said.

Joe set the phonograph down, opened the lid and set the turntable going. Then he took a record from the paper in which it was wrapped and set it on the turntable. A series of metallic squawks came out. Apologetically, Joe smiled, and slowed down the speed. A voice, that of Adkins could be heard:

'You guys look mighty sick to me,' the voice said. 'Things not panning out?'

Then Andrews reply, 'You know the answer to that.'

"Want to hear the rest?" Jorman asked.

Andrews shook his head. He was way ahead of Jorman. They had managed to sneak a dictaphone into the room. He knew what the rest of the record held on its wax surface.

"Can't blame you, Andrews. There's enough there to send you away for a long time. You too, Wade!"

"It wasn't my idea," Wade bleated. "Andrews dreamed up the whole thing. He's the guy you want."

"Is that why there's so much of you on the record?" Jorman asked.

Wade sobbed bitter denials to which no one listened. Their eyes were on the bowed head of Judge Wilbur Shneed. Slowly, the head lifted from the folded arms. He gave them all a searching glance and said:

"I'm afraid it's no good. For one thing, Adkins has the duplicate. And for another, I am withdrawing from the race."

"You'd better," Andrews said. "Because even if I'm stuck, so are you."

"Not so fast, Andrews," Jorman said. "Shneed has a lot to lose, I'll admit. But you have even more. I'll blast you to hell in my paper. There's one way you can get out of it. Give me that piece of paper . . ."

"I tore up the original," Shneed said. "Adkins has the duplicate."

"Get Adkins down here," Jorman demanded.

It was Wade who reached for and got Adkins. It didn't take long to make the other understand what the situation was. He promised to be down as fast as he could drive.

"We'll wait for him," Jorman said. "When he gets here, I'm going to tear the duplicate to bits, and then break this record. And from now on in, there's going to be . . ."

"I know," Andrews said. "An honest campaign. That damned word sickens me!"

"It should. You know so little of it," Jorman said in reminder. "I could play dirty and keep the dictagraph record. And force you to concede defeat. But I want to whip Wade and you so badly your name will be mud in this community for a long time."

Andrews murmured a surly something under his breath, and then louder:

"You've had your inning. Mind if I leave now?"

Shneed thought of something.

"Just a minute," he said. "I remember hearing you mention something about John Doe. What have you done to him?"

Andrews told him of the frame-up.

"Well, let's get him out," Joe said.

An oddly humorous thought came to the judge.

"No," he said. "On second thought, yes. This rat might have told them to

muss him up. But he'll go to trial tomorrow."

They wondered why he had set his mind to that. And wondered at the smile that played around his lips.

Andrews watched them bitterly for a few seconds, then got up and walked out. Wade still sobbed his innocence. They waited for Adkin's appearance.

THE courtroom was full the next day, when John Doe was brought to trial. A new bailiff stood by Judge Shneed's side. Shneed had given Hanson short shrift, after he learned it was he who had stolen the papers from the safe. Joe, Jorman and their friends had made it a point to be present.

John Doe stood before the bar. Shneed acted as if he hadn't ever seen him before. He went through the procedure of calling the case and when the forms had been observed, he asked:

"And what does the prisoner say to the charge of grand larceny?"

"I plead not guilty, your Honor," John Doe said.

"Uh, huh. You admit you were caught on the premises?"

"I do."

"And that your clothes were soaked in this perfume . . . ?"

"I admit my clothes were soaked. But not in perfume."

A murmur of astonishment filled the court. Joe, Mary and her mother waited for Doe to explain. They knew his quick wit had devised a scheme which would get him off.

"I plead innocence of the charge, your Honor," Doe continued, "on the grounds the charge is wrong. I committed a misdemeanor, not a felony."

Shneed pounded his gavel for silence.

"Go on," he urged.

"The charge states I stole a bottle of perfume, called Misty Night. As an expert in perfumes, I can only say that

Misty Night is a cologne. The manufacturers of that trade name do not put out a perfume, called Misty Night.

"The selling price of Misty Night is a dollar and twenty cents. Therefore I could not have committed a felony, even if it could be proved I entered the store in a felonious manner. If the charge is held to be a misdemeanor, I plead guilty and throw myself on the mercy of the court."

Judge Shneed fined Doe a dollar and costs, reached into his pocket and paid the fine, and then dismissed the court.

They all crowded into his chambers afterward; Jorman, Joe, Mary, Tildy and the most important, Doe.

"I guess we all owe John Doe, the fragrant vagrant," Joe said, "a vote of gratitude. It was he who thought of the idea of the dictograph. One of his followers down at the square is an electrician down at the hall. Through him, it was easy to plant the instrument. And maybe I'm a bit premature but I think I'll start calling the judge, your honor, the mayor, right now."

There was general laughter at his sally.

The laughter stilled as the bailiff, his eyes wide, and his hand holding a newspaper in front of him, charged into the room. He handed the paper to Shneed. The judge's face went the color of wet chalk when he saw the headlines. Andrews had given the story to the opposition. And stuck squarely in the center of the front page was the paper Shneed had signed.

The paper was a confession of guilt in the bribery business. It also stated that the judge withdrew from the race.

"I knew what it was that kept bothering me," Shneed said in broken accents. "I guess the shock of seeing and hearing you come in at the last moment, made me forget that paper. I'm sorry."

"The rotten, scheming pup!" Jorman said in bitter accents. "And I broke the records. But if it takes the last penny I possess, and the last resource of the Blade, he'll pay for this. Believe me, Shneed."

But he was too busy with his wife and daughter to listen. They stood to either side of him, their faces showing that no matter what anyone may have thought of him, as far as they were concerned, there was no better man alive, than he.

It was Joe who voiced the thought which came to some of them:

"It's up to the people, now. And I think they'll come through."

Nobody noticed that Doe had left the room.

JOHN DOE went back to his hotel, first. There was something he had to do, before he kept an appointment he had made in his mind. The old man had given him Andrews' address. He was going there, later.

A voice Doe recognized as Andrews, bade him, "come on in."

The man was bent over his bed. There was a suitcase lying on the bed and Andrews stopped putting the shirt he had in his hand into the case, when he saw who had come in.

"I—I thought it was the bell hop," he said weakly.

"You are the lowest form of animal I've ever met," Doe said in a mild voice. And with the words, Doe stepped forward and hit Andrews with all his strength.

Andrews went sprawling backward on the bed, blood spurting from mashed lips.

Doe reached out and hauled the other to his feet. Then stepping back he began to slap Andrews. The man's head snapped from one side to the other under the rain of stinging slaps.

Andrews did it so suddenly, Doe had no chance to get out of the way. For in a move so sudden, so unexpected, Andrews had brought his foot back and kicked Doe in the groin.

Pain so intense, it made him dizzy, racked Doe's brain. He doubled up and received another kick in the jaw. Luckily, his head was wobbling; the kick took only some skin from the jaw, otherwise the fight would have ended then and there. Doe somehow managed to close in before Andrews could get his foot back again for another kick. For the next few seconds, Doe hung on grimly, while Andrews slugged the back of his head with both hands.

This time Doe acted more quickly, than the other. His fist shot up from beneath, full into Andrews' belly. The other shot back as if he had been propelled from a cannon. And Doe followed. At right and left sent Andrews' head back. And a terrific right hook knocked Andrews spinning to the floor. He landed with a thud, his head jammed against the dresser leg.

Doe, breathing heavily and still in pain from the foul blow, looked down at his victim and grinned crookedly. The grin faded when he saw that Andrews was lying with a motionless that was suspicious. Doe went down on knee and looked closely at the inert figure. He needed no second glance.

Andrews was dead, his skull split when it hit the sharp leg of the dresser.

THERE was a celebration the night Wilbur Shneed won the election. They were gathered in the newly-elected Mayor's home. There was much talk

and laughter. And Mary sat with Joe whose arm was around her. He had just announced their intentions to wed, and had received the blessings, not only of Shneed, but of Tildy as well.

Somehow the talk switched to Doe. "Wonder what happened to him?" Jorman asked. "He was a strange man. Always with the odor of perfume on him. I don't understand to this day why he used it."

"He had his reasons," Shneed said thoughtfully. "And they were good enough for me. I'm sorry he didn't stay to see his judgment vindicated."

"Y'know," Joe said. "Speaking only as a reporter intrigued by a thought. I find it strange that he left the same day Andrews' body was found. And do you know that there isn't a single clue as to who did it."

"Well, if it were Doe," Jorman announced laughingly, "there would be. That perfume would linger for days. And Andrews' windows were found to be tightly closed. Seemed he had a phobia about fresh air. No. It couldn't have been our friend, Doe."

A TALL strong figure trudged the highway a hundred miles from the town he had left the night before. John Doe shook his head as he walked the road.

"So you broke your vow," he said aloud. "You took a bath. The first since you were a boy. I have to admit, that water is not as sweet smelling as perfume, but it washes away certain odors which might have harmed you . . ."

THE END

FOR THRILLS AND EXCITEMENT!
MAMMOTH ADVENTURE WILL BRING YOU
RICHARD S. SHAVER'S
NEW HISTORICAL NOVEL

THE *POURQUOI PAS?*

By MILDRED MURDOCH



You don't usually think of the French as Arctic explorers but Captain Jean Charcot and the good ship *Pourquoi Pas?* were as brave as their names were French—plenty!

JEAN CHARCOT was the captain of the French ship *Pourquoi Pas?*, and leader of the band of explorers employed by him. He was at the helm when his ship was overtaken on September 16, 1936 with disaster, and this most notable explorer went down with his prized and beloved ship. At this time, Charcot was bringing home a large party of French scientists from Greenland, where they had made a trek across ice-caps. His favorite haunting grounds were always in the ice-capped lands. The ship struck the rocks on the west coast of Iceland and sank almost immediately. Charcot at this time was 69 years of age, and was still going strong as a man full of pep and ready any time for a good adventure.

From an early age, he had been trained to become a doctor, but he had turned to exploring after devoting many years to the study of medicine, because he could not resist the feelings of curiosity his mind was filled with, and he led his first expedition in 1903. After a few years, upon realizing that this was his profession, and his first love, he had the 800-ton *Pourquoi Pas?* built specially for work among the ice lands, and their surrounding icy waters.

AMONG the most important of his expeditions was the one of 1909, which resulted in Charcot and his party discovering the land which now bears his name. After having sailed from Punta Arenas, the ship was held up in the ice near Berthelot Island, and no headway was able to be made. Charcot, deciding to do some exploring while sitting the time out, took two of his men with him, and set off in a small boat to make a reconnaissance of the islands which were near the stranded ship. When the three of them reached Berthelot Island, they were able to use to advantage a high peak on the island, to view the surrounding territory. But upon turning their small boat back toward the *Pourquoi Pas?*, they found to their utter dismay that the ice-packs that had halted them in their journey, had moved slightly, but enough to make it impossible for them to make their way back to the ship. As they had never dreamed of such a complication, they had brought no rations, and food for the next few days consisted of one biscuit divided three ways. When this gave out, they went hun-

gry.

But at last the ice gave way, and a passage was made through it that would have enabled the boat to make a safe return, but the wear and tear on the engine in the previous unsuccessful attempts had weakened it, and put the motor in such a bad condition that it broke down when the lead was at last made.

AFTER having fought to keep alive, the three starved men felt this to be the last straw. So weak with hunger and exhausted from exposure, they wildly figured out a plan of walking over the ice to where it would be possible to signal their ship, if they were were in any condition to signal when they arrived at that point. However, they were saved from what seems to have been a very futile attempt, by the *Pourquoi Pas?* finally arriving in view and rescuing them.

As if this wasn't enough, shortly after this daring rescue and the ensuing excitement, the ship ran on to a rock, and all the men aboard had to take to the lifeboats. But once more, luck was on their side, for the lightening of the boat by the removal of the men aboard enabled the *Pourquoi Pas?* to slide off the rock, and once more, all was well.

After such encounters had been faced, the ship continued southward, and in the vicinity of Charcot Land, she was once more besieged by trouble. An iceberg, which seemed more likely to appear than not in these waters, came near the boat, and when its splitting body touched the stern of the ship, one of the lifeboats was smashed. On this trip, all previous records of expeditions for that region were passed, and new land was sighted, to which Charcot's name was given.

The ship holed in for the winter at Petermann Island, where a great deal of important astronomical and magnetic research was carried on, but this was a small harbor, and a great deal of time was also spent on repairing the wreck icebergs always made of it when they crashed through.

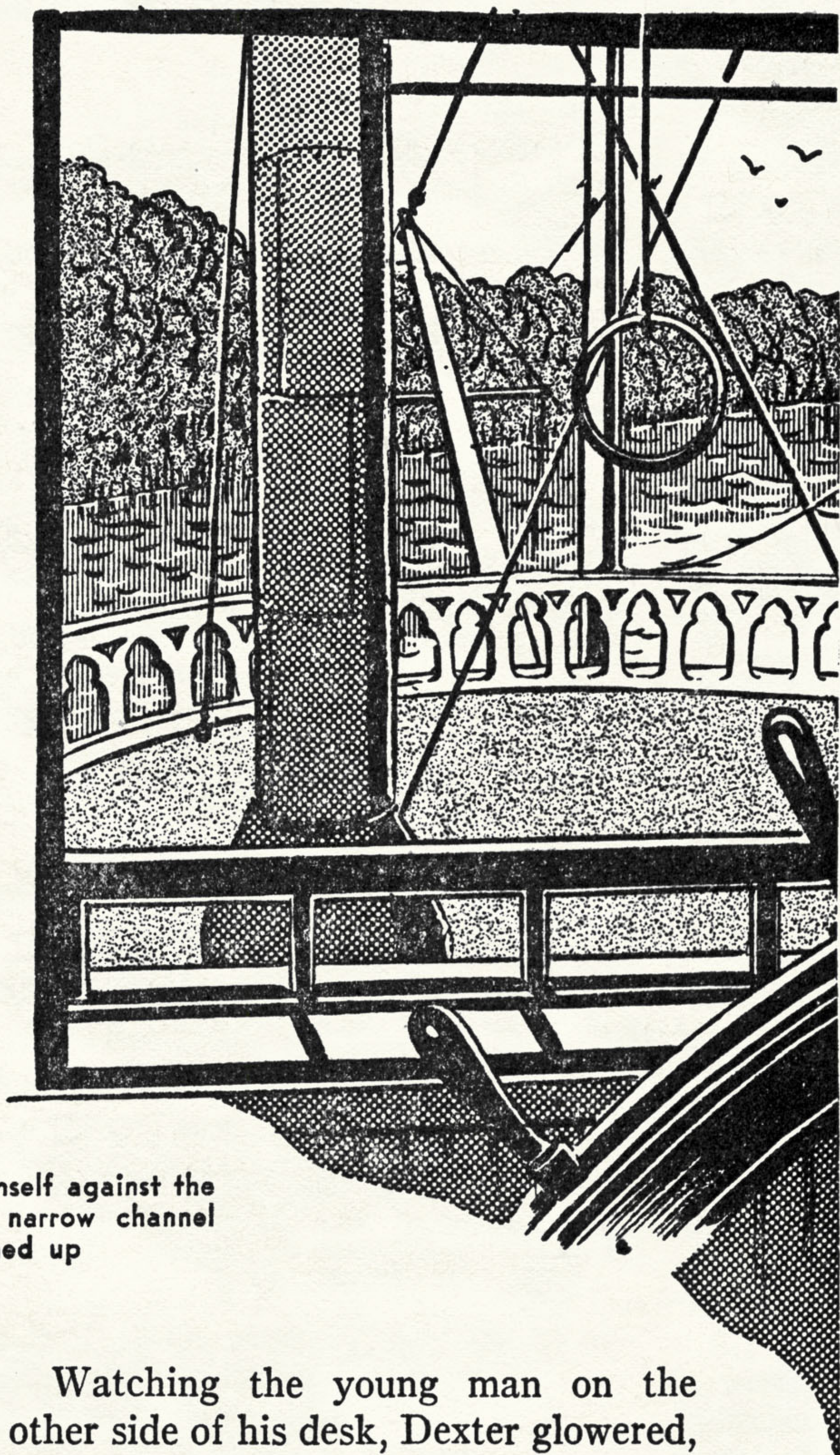
When at last the *Pourquoi Pas?* sailed into home waters, she was given the title of having been farther south than any ship in the South American sector of the Antarctic at that time, and too, she had been among the ice continually for over eighteen months, which is a record any adventurer would like to be able to come close to.

BET OR GET OUT

by Leonard Finley Hilts

*The Belle Of The North
looked like a big, beautiful
woman—and the Mississippi
river-men found her as hard
to navigate*

He braced himself against the
wheel as the narrow channel
loomed up



MARK DEXTER sat behind his desk and scowled. He was a dignified man of medium build in his late fifties, with a thin layer of blown snow for hair and a delicate pink complexion. His clothes were expensive and carefully tailored and his office was costly and ornate. Only his hands seemed out of place.

They were knobby and rough and powerful, the hands of a dock hand not of a wealthy Mississippi shipper. Dexter found in them a constant reminder that in his younger days he had a part of the sprawling, brawling beginning of the steamboat industry. Since then he had become wealthy and had become a gentleman, but his hands had refused to change with the rest of him.

Watching the young man on the other side of his desk, Dexter glowered, but he was surprised. Ed Shippen had been a waterfront bum five years ago. He had taken a shine to Ruth and Dexter had thrown him out of the house. No drunken, misbegotten, ill-kempt deck hand was going to marry his daughter.

But now Shippen sat there in well-cut clothes. His hair was well groomed and his fingernails manicured. His skin had the healthy, bronzed look that comes from years in the open and his face had a new confidence backing it up. He was tall and spare, but looking at his powerful wrists, Dexter credited him with a lot of strength.

"So you're back?" he asked.



Shippen nodded his head and grinned. "You surprised?"

Dexter's face was still somber. "A little," he admitted. "You've changed a lot, Shippen. Much better."

"Thanks."

The older man shrugged. "I suppose you've still got ideas about Ruth?" Dexter's eyes shifted from Shippen's face to the open window of the office.

"That's right. I came here to ask you for her hand. I got my pilot's papers a couple of weeks ago and I signed up to pilot the *Belle of the North* at four hundred a month yesterday. I can take care of her now, give her the prestige of a river pilot and anything that money can buy."

Storm clouds gathered in Dexter's forehead. Shippen's answer was straightforward and cocky, and he didn't like it. "I told you once before," he snapped, "that you could never marry Ruth. It's out of the question!"

"Ruth is happy at the idea," Shippen said lightly. "I told her last night that I had my papers. She wants to be married as soon as possible."

Dexter looked at the confident young man and snorted. He thought of Tom McCall, the plantation owner down at Memphis. McCall was forty and wealthy. He would make a good husband for Ruth and would give her the wealth and social position that Dexter wanted for his daughter. After his own long fight to get to the top, Dexter wanted to spare her everything and McCall was the answer.

He had come up the river once a month for the last six months, but each time Ruth had turned him down. Dexter had begged, pleaded and stormed but it had done no good. Ruth told him she was waiting for Shippen, and now Shippen was back, much improved but still an unknown quantity. And Mark Dexter didn't want to gamble his

daughter's happiness on an unknown quantity.

Suddenly, as he faced the confident young man, he realized that it was time for action. Ruth was headstrong as they came and he knew that unless he did something fast, the wedding would be over before he could say no. His mind worked rapidly for a few minutes and then the idea came.

HE SAT up straight and his eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"Shippen, the distance from St. Louis to Cairo is one hundred and ninety-four miles. I'm willing to wager ten thousand dollars that the *Belle of the North*, with you as pilot, can't make that trip in less than eighteen hours."

Ed's smile faded fast and his mouth opened. The challenge caught him flat-footed.

When he didn't answer for some minutes, Mark Dexter grinned wickedly. "Afraid to try it, Shippen?" he taunted.

Ed flushed. "No," he answered flatly. "That's not it. I was just thinking. . . ." His voice trailed off.

He had been thinking that the river was at low stage, and that this would be his first trip out as a full fledged pilot. Before this he had been an apprentice and had only taken the wheel on easy runs. The *Belle of the North* drew eight and a half feet in the bow, fully loaded. That meant a slow job of easing her through the snags and bars of the low river. To try to make it in eighteen hours would mean plenty of trouble. Especially to an inexperienced pilot like himself.

Dexter goaded him again when he hesitated. "I have a cargo I want delivered in Cairo promptly. Ten thousand dollars says you can't take the *Belle of the North*, fully loaded, from here to Cairo in less than eighteen hours. What do you say, Shippen?"

Having trouble making up your mind?"

"No."

"Then bet or get out!"

Shippen stood up. "I say you're on, and be damned! I leave the wharf tomorrow morning. Have your cargo on board."

Dexter opened his eyes wide, surprised that his bet had been taken and then laughed, slapping his hand on his desk top. "You're a bigger fool than I thought, Shippen. You may have papers as a pilot, but you're still green. And there aren't many *old* hands on this river who'd listen to a bet like that."

Shippen's bronzed face was creased with angry lines. "I said I'd take your bet and I will!"

"All right, all right." Dexter rubbed the palms of his hands together. "Of course, you know what this means. You haven't ten thousand to bet. You'll have to spend the rest of the day borrowing from friends to cover me. And when you lose you'll be in debt up to your neck. Even on that four hundred a month it'll take you a long time to pay a sum like that off."

Ed understood what the old man was driving at. It was all too clear. With a debt like that there would be no question of marrying Ruth. Dexter had realized that he and Ruth would have married in spite of his objections and he had neatly maneuvered him into a position where, if he lost, it would be impossible to marry Ruth. It was shrewdly done.

The minute he saw through the plan, Ed opened his mouth to back down. But he snapped it closed almost as soon as he opened it. That would make him a coward. River pilots were honorable, courageous, highly respected men, and backing down in any situation wasn't their way. He couldn't withdraw.

"The *Belle of the North* leaves for

Cairo in the morning," he growled defiantly. Pride and indignation bristled all over him. "Have your ten thousand in cash in the saloon of the boat before we shove off. I'll match it there. The purser can hold the money."

Dexter watched Shippen get steam up and laughed out loud. "All right, you fool! I'll be there. I hope *you* will."

Shippen didn't bother to answer, but strode from the office. After the door closed, Mark Dexter walked to the window and stood looking out. He saw the tall young pilot disappear down the street, walking briskly and weaving in and out of the slower pedestrians. He chuckled.

"Maybe there's something to that young man after all!"

SHIPPEN leaned morosely on the rail of the texas deck, behind the wheelhouse and watched the freight being loaded into the *Belle of the North*. The big white sidewheeler, ornate and majestic, lay up against the St. Louis wharf, quietly waiting as the engineer fired the boilers and began to get up steam. Coal black smoke poured from her twin stacks, made by pitch fed by the crew into the boilers, a signal to the people of St. Louis that she would be sailing shortly.

Ed's eyes actually saw nothing. He was too busy thinking of what the next twenty-four hours would mean to his future to see anything at all. For five years he had worked toward the day when he could face old man Dexter down and put in his claim for Ruth. And Ruth had waited for him, encouraging him when things looked difficult.

And now he was backed into a corner from which there was no escape. Taking a heavily loaded boat through the shoals, reefs and snags of a river in low stage was difficult at any time,

but to try to make Cairo in less than eighteen hours under those conditions was an absolute impossibility. Ten minutes after he left Dexter's office the day before he had realized how really hopeless was his position. But it was too late to back out.

Last night Ruth had told him that she would marry him anyway, no matter what the outcome of the run. But, of course, that was out of the question. A man who owed ten thousand dollars didn't take on added responsibilities, no matter how sweet a burden they might make.

A heavy hand fell on his shoulder and he turned to find Sam Walters standing beside him. Walters was the other pilot for the trip and would take the wheel every other watch. He was a river pilot with twelve years behind him and had a reputation for being solid and dependable. There was no streak of daring in him. He had a competent and plugging nature.

"I was over at Toby's last night, Shippen," he said, "downing a few and shooting some billiards. And I heard some stories about you. What about 'em?"

Walters was a roughly hewn man, with a leathery hide, eyes habitually slitted against the reflection of the sun on the river and a build like a sack of potatoes. The planes and creases in his face were etched in shadows and, added to his lumpy body, made him look like a handcarved statue of a Mississippi pilot that a sightseer might take home as a souvenir.

He was easy-going and his manner was usually friendly. Ed had met him several times while he was a cub. But now, in the bright sunlight of the texas, he was brusque.

Ed shifted his eyes, dulled with the knowledge of what he faced, back to the dock. Idly he watched two huge

darkies lug a packing case aboard.

"It's probably true," he answered finally in a dead voice.

Walters sucked in his breath quickly. "You mean to stand there and tell me that a greenhorn like you actually bet ten thousand dollars that you could make Cairo in less than eighteen hours?" There was scorn and disgust in his voice.

Ed nodded.

"With a cargo like that?" Walters demanded. He waved his hand at the big stevedores hoisting load after load aboard.

Shippen dropped his head to his hands for a minute, then remembered that he was on the texas deck, in plain sight of everyone on the wharf. He jerked his head up again.

"Yeah, Sam," he sighed. "That's the way it is."

The other pilot was speechless. He could get no blistering comment out, but could only stand with his hands on his hips and stare.

IN A LOW voice that had no inflection in it Shippen told him the story. He told the whole thing, with all of the details. Then he straightened up and looked at Walters.

"That's it, Sam. I'm forty kinds of a fool. But old Dexter ran me out on a limb before I could stop. Then my pilot's pride pushed me the rest of the way."

Walters shook his head sadly. "I know how you felt. But that's a hell of a bet. The big gambling houses in town are taking all money and giving twenty to one that you won't make it."

"Any takers?"

"Not many, I hear. Most of the old river men here know it can't be done. Somebody said Andy Russo accepted a bet for five thousand at those odds, but nobody could say who made

the bet, so I don't believe it."

Shippen began to walk slowly toward the wheelhouse. He looked up and down the mile-long St. Louis river front, saw that it was jammed with steamboats loading and unloading. Palatial New Orleans packets and dingy short haulers were tied up side by side, and in some places three deep against the wharves, waiting for their cargoes.

The river, a muddy yellow, was nearly a mile wide here, and his eyes flicked over its calm surface, thinking how friendly he had thought Ole Miss before this.

Inside of the pilot house, Walters said, "Did you have any trouble getting the money together?"

Shippen shook his head. "A little here and a little there. All from pilots I knew. It'll take me ten years to pay off."

Walters dropped his hand on Ed Shippen's shoulder again. "Shippen, you're young and you got a lot to learn. I don't have to tell you how foolish this thing is. You know that now. But I want you to know that I'll help all I can. While I'm at the wheel I'll keep her going at the fastest speed I consider safe, but I won't get reckless. Understand?"

"Sure, Sam, I understand. And thanks." It was good to know that Walters was on his side, but it didn't lift his spirits any. The odds against him were too great.

Walters left the pilot house and Ed looked around it. This was the biggest, most beautiful boat he had ever been on. During his years of apprenticeship he had to ship on any boat that his instructor signed on. And Barney Talbot, a good pilot but drunk too often, had handled a string of mediocre New Orleans-St. Louis boats. The *Belle of the North* was a far cry from those

dingy boats. She was big and beautiful, like a proud woman.

The pilot house was huge and glassed in on all sides. The windows were hung with bright blue and gold curtains and there was a sofa for the pilot to lie on when his apprentice took the wheel, during the easy parts of the trip. A long bench stretched across the back of the house, lined with leather cushions and padded back, where visiting pilots, who always travelled as guests of the boat, could sit and observe the conditions of the always changing Mississippi.

Bright linoleum covered the floor and polished brass cuspidors stood at the corners of the room. The wheel, showy with inlaid wood, stood as high as his head, and near it the engine room bells with shiny brass knobs on the ends of their cords. When the boat was under way, a young darkie, dubbed the "texas tender," stood by to bring refreshments to the pilot.

Shippen viewed the wheelhouse with misgivings. It was beautiful, it represented the fulfillment of years of dreaming. But this was probably the last time he was likely to pilot a ship that boasted such finery. Owners wouldn't be inclined to hire for a pilot a man as rash as Shippen. Their boats were worth a quarter of a million dollars, and they couldn't afford to trust them to the hands of a pilot who showed himself to be so foolish.

In a few well chosen words Mark Dexter had nicely taken care of his whole future. Ed sighed down to his boots, then left the wheelhouse and started for the salon. The passengers would be coming aboard soon, and he had to be on hand when Dexter arrived.

THE interior of the boat was lavishly decorated with carved wood-

work, gilt and crystal chandeliers. The door of each stateroom boasted an oil painting, and heavy carpeting covered each inch of floor. White coated darkies hustled back and forth, eager to prove that the *Belle of the North* had the finest service of any boat on the river.

Shippen went into the huge salon, a long lounge that looked like the throne room of a palace and glanced around. A few people had already come aboard and settled themselves in their staterooms, and were now relaxing in the soft comforts of the lounge. Ed walked among them, assuming the dignity that a pilot always wore, and ignored the curious glances that were sent his way.

He caught sight of a small, dark man who sat low in a soft chair, reading the paper and drawing on a sweet-smelling cigar. He recognized the man immediately as Andy Rocco, who ran one of the biggest gambling houses on the Upper Mississippi. It was he who was supposed to have accepted a bet of five thousand dollars, at twenty to one, that the *Belle of the North* would not make the trip in less than eighteen hours.

Rocco had apparently decided to come along on the trip and see for himself what happened. Shippen could understand his anxiety. If, by any odd chance, he should make Cairo under the eighteen-hour limit, Rocco would have to put one hundred and five thousand dollars on the line. And even to a gambler of his proportions that was a lot of money.

There was a little flurry of excitement near the door of the lounge and Ed's eyes shifted to the spot. He saw Ruth Dexter come into the room, look around apprehensively, then find him. Her face brightened and she immediately hurried across the deep maroon carpeting toward him.

Shippen's breath stopped and had difficulty re-establishing itself. Ruth was too beautiful! Long yellow-golden hair, carefully fixed under a big feathered hat. A long dress, low at the shoulders, that clung to her figure as far as the hips and then flared into a billowing skirt. An oval face of the palest ivory, highlighted by bright red lips and lively, sparkling blue eyes.

Beautiful! Beyond this world! Ed watched her come toward him and was overwhelmed. Ruth and all her beauty were his for the taking. But he had opened his mouth too quickly and once too often, and had lost her for it. He cursed himself for being every kind of an ass ever created.

"Ed!" Ruth said breathlessly, "Ed, Dad and I are coming on the trip with you!" Her voice was low and musical and sweet, like that of a muted violin. "Isn't that wonderful?"

He took her two outstretched hands in his and just looked at her. He couldn't get a word past his teeth.

Ruth frowned at him. "You're not still worried about this silly trip, are you, Ed?"

Ed smiled in spite of himself. Was he still worried? That was almost a joke. Last night she had lectured him and, according to her, that should have fixed everything up.

"Listen, Ruth," Shippen pointed out, "this isn't as simple as you think. The river is at low. . ."

The girl stepped back a pace. "You told me that whole long story last night, Ed Shippen. I don't want to hear it again!"

"But Ruth, don't you see. . ."

She stamped her foot. "No! I don't see! You love me. Or at least you say you do. Then if you do, all you have to do is to take this boat to Cairo in eighteen hours. I know you can do it if you want to."

The tall pilot's face was full of exasperation and amazement. He had heard about women's minds and how strange they were, but he never would have believed it possible for any human to be so unreasonable. He was to open up the throttle and start down the river. Whenever things got difficult all he had to do was remember that he loved Ruth and the obstruction would melt away.

He tried to object again, but she didn't even let him get started. "Ed, darling, I mean it. You're a great pilot, and I *know* you can do it. If you don't make it I'll know you didn't love me enough to try your very best."

SHE stepped close to him, gave him a swift kiss on the lips, and then retreated hastily to the deck, leaving Shippen standing in the middle of the lounge, shorn of his pilot's dignity, his face a fiery red before the amused eyes of the passengers.

Mark Dexter came in a few minutes later.

"Morning, Shippen," he said cheerfully. "You all set?"

Ed tried to brighten up but wasn't very successful. His smile broke badly at the corners. "Sure," he said. "I've been waiting for you."

"Still think you can do it, eh?" Dexter grinned. "Well, this is Mr. Jameson, and this is Mr. Norton," he said, turning to the two men who had accompanied him. "They are witnesses to the laying of the bet."

Shippen nodded to the men, and then produced a carefully wrapped package from his coat. He beckoned to the purser, who came over to the little group.

"Gentlemen, this is Mr. Talmadge, the purser, who will hold the money, and who will turn the winnings over to 'whosoever deserves them.'" He

handed the package to Talmadge. "Here's mine."

"And this is mine," Dexter said, handing his bundle to the man. Then he extended his hand to Shippen. "You're a young fool, Shippen, but you've got a lot of spunk. I'll say that for you. Reminds me of my younger days."

Ed smiled sadly back at him. "I'll give you a run for your money," he promised.

It was noon before the *Belle of the North* stood out into the river at St. Louis. Shippen had the first watch at the wheel, and once out into the channel, he ordered the engines put to a high speed. The boat began to move rapidly down the river, her big side wheels churning heavily and a strong current pushing from behind.

The *Belle of the North* was a great sight as she began her run for Cairo. All white, with two tall stacks foreward and side by side, she moved majestically out of sight of St. Louis. Her upper sides were embellished with gold filigree that sparkled in the bright sunlight. The fanciful nameplate, just aft the stacks, could be read on shore. The three wakes left by her two turning wheels and her stern blended into one long string of white bubbles that followed her like a retinue after a queen.

Ed stood by the wheel in the pilot house. Five visiting pilots had come along on the trip and were sitting on the leathered bench, watching the river and talking shop. Whenever the conversation switched back to the bed, which was often, their voices lowered. Not one of them had much faith in Shippen's chances of bringing the *Belle of the North* into Cairo on time and they said so.

A tall, gaunt pilot who looked as though he should have been an undertaker shook his head sadly.

"I brought the *Princess* up day afore yesterday," he told the other pilots solemnly, "and I want to tell you, that Hat Island crossing was a hum dinger. I did it during the day and it was bad enough. I wouldn't even think of it at night."

Another pilot, sitting on the end of the bench agreed. "I know, Detrick. There's a mess of snags and invisible reefs around her and there's an old wreck under the surface. And the river's so low you could almost wade it there. I'd tie up at night and wait for day myself."

There was a general nod of agreement in the group.

Ed handled the big wheel and didn't join the conversation, but what he heard didn't make him any happier. As a cub he had stood by, even when the river was high, and watched Barney Talbot pick his way through the Hat Island crossing. He knew a little of it, enough to go through cautiously in daylight.

That meant he had to get to Hat Island before nightfall.

AT four o'clock Saw Walters came into the wheelhouse and took over after nodding to the visiting pilots on the bench. He looked out at the river scenery around them as he took his place before the wheel.

"Say, you've done a mighty nice piece of piloting, young fellow. There's a lot of river 'tween you and St. Louis."

Shippen grinned. "I know. I've been forcing her all the way. Had a couple of close squeaks, but we're still going. I want to make the Hat Island crossing before dark. The boys here were saying it's pretty bad."

Detrick spoke up from the visiting pilot's bench. "You been making good time, Shippen. If you can get across the Hat Island place before dark I'd

give you an even chance at making your bet good."

The other pilots on the bench looked at each other, glanced at the river bank, and then consulted their watches. After some mental figuring they finally agreed that it *was* possible, *if* he got past Hat Island before dark.

They took it for granted that if the *Belle of the North* didn't reach the crossing and get through it before dark, Shippen would pull her into the bank and tie up for the night. And that of course would finish the bed. But it would be the only thing he could do. To attempt the crossing at night would be certain death.

As Shippen left the wheelhouse, Sam Walters called after him. "Ed, I'll pour all I've got into her. Try to get you to Hat Island afore dark. If we can keep this speed most of the way I believe we can do it. There are only one or two really bad spots 'tween here and the crossing, and I'll have to go easy there. But I'll do my best."

Ed said, "Thanks," and smiled his appreciation.

He wanted to go down to the salon and visit with Ruth, but he realized that he had a whole night of difficult piloting ahead of him. Four hours of sleep would do him more good, and there would be plenty of time to talk to Ruth later. He went toward his cabin to turn in.

For the first time since beginning the trip, as he walked along the deck, Shippen began to feel that there was some hope. He knew it himself, and when he had his feelings confirmed by the old, experienced pilots in the wheelhouse, his confidence began to return. He whistled lightly and the creases in his face began to disappear.

Mark Dexter was waiting for him down the deck. As Shippen approached he waved his knobby hand toward the

shore line. "We shouldn't be here until sundown, Shippen. Are you making this boat fly?"

Ed smiled and showed some of his returning confidence. "I want Ruth to see what the sunrise at Cairo looks like."

Dexter's pink face was suddenly serious. "Think you'll make it?"

"I'm going to try like blazes. Barring accidents we have a chance."

Mark turned to the rail and looked out at the river with speculative eyes. "Yes, accidents," he mused.

Shippen passed on down the deck, and Dexter stared after him with a vacant, reminiscent look. He was remembering some scenes from his own early days on the river. "Love and courage," he sighed. "What a combination!"

Ed turned into his stateroom. As he pushed open the door his eyes caught sight of Andy Rocco standing in the stern with a pencil and a little notebook. There was a deep scowl on his dark face. He looked up at the pilot and the scowl didn't disappear. There was no love in that look.

Once in his bunk, Shippen went to sleep in a hurry. Enough of the worry had been lifted from his mind so that he could relax.

AT FIRST it seemed like part of a bad dream. There was a heavy jolt, and a lot of scraping, and then a whole army seemed to be shouting. Shippen opened his eyes quickly and looked about. It must have been a dream. He was still in his stateroom. . . . wait a minute. . . . something was wrong. The boat didn't feel like it was moving, and there was a lot of noise on deck.

In three minutes the young pilot was dressed and on deck. The sight that met his eyes when he emerged from his

stateroom brought a trembling to the pit of his stomach. The *Belle of the North* was aground on a sand bar. She was listing badly, and from the angle, Shippen knew she was solidly on the bar.

He raced to the wheelhouse.

"Sam! Sam! What the deuce happened?"

Walters' face as Ed burst into the wheelhouse was sad and angry at the same time. "Tell you later," he growled as he pushed his way past Shippen. "Take the watch. I'm going down and beat the living daylight out of that starboard leadsman."

With a puzzled frown Ed watched him disappear, then turned to the other pilots for an explanation.

"He was making it through some tight shoals," Detrick told him. "It was uncomfortable going, and the leadsmen in the bow were calling the depths as fast as they could. The boat is drawing eight and a half feet and the starboard leadsman was calling depths that were safe. He had just called 'Mark Twain' when she struck. Sam should have had four feet to spare if the call was right. But it wasn't."

Ed listened and said nothing. He went to the window and watched the crew preparing to pull the big boat off the bar. They worked fast and with a will, but Shippen knew that it would take them some time. The *Belle of the North* was big and heavily loaded.

Ten minutes later Walters came back rubbing the skinned knuckles of his right hand. "That snake!" he growled. "Somebody paid him ten dollars to call the wrong depths so that we would go aground."

Ed's eyes opened. "Somebody paid him to do it? Who?"

"He said he didn't know. The man met him in a dark companionway an hour ago and passed the bill to him.

Promised him more when we got to Cairo."

"Where is he now?"

"Unconscious in the engine room. All he'll need when we get to Cairo will be a hospital."

Ed's mind searched back. Somebody had paid him to ground the boat because he didn't want her to reach Cairo on time. Who? He remembered the speculative look on Mark Dexter's face when he had mentioned accidents. Naturally Dexter didn't want him to make Cairo. That meant his daughter and ten thousand dollars. He had seen the progress the boat was making and was afraid they might make it. In order to secure the bet he had bribed the leadsman.

It was pretty clear in Ed's mind. Now, of course, by the time they got the big boat off the bar it would be too late to get across Hat Island in the daylight.

"Sand by here a few minutes, Sam," Shippen told the other pilot. His face was flushed with anger. "I've got some very pressing business below."

All of the passengers were on deck, and gathered in excited little knots, watching the efforts of the crew. Ed pushed his way through the crowds, looking over their heads as he went. He was looking for Mark Dexter. He had a lot to say to the man.

He felt a tug on his sleeve and turned to see Ruth standing in the door to the salon. She pulled him inside.

"Ed, she asked in a frightened little voice, "what does this mean?"

"That we haven't a snowball's chance in hell of making it. Where's your father?"

"He's out on . . ." Her eyes widened as she caught the inference in Ed's demand. "Surely, Ed, you don't think that Dad. . . ."

"I don't? Well, who do *you* think

bought off my starboard leadsman for ten dollars? I was making good time and Walters had her going fine, too. Somebody didn't like the idea that we might get to Cairo, and fixed us so we'd ground. If it wasn't your father, who was it?"

Ruth looked at him with horror in her eyes. Then suddenly she was angry. "You can't speak of my father that way, Ed Shippen. I won't have it. He's an honorable man. He wouldn't do a thing like that."

SHIPPEN was good and angry. "Oh, I can't speak of him that way but it's all right for him to ground my boat. He's the only man aboard who has a reason for it. And just let me tell you. . . ."

"You cad!" Ruth spat at him. Tears welled up in her eyes. "You unspeakable cad! I never want to see you or talk to you again!"

She spun around on her heel and stalked off with her head held high and her face cold with anger. Shippen took a step or two after her, then stopped. To hell with her! And to hell with Mark Dexter! He wheeled around and went back up to the pilot house.

No girl was going to make a fool of him. "I'll take the wheel for the rest of the run, Sam, after we get off this bar. I'm going to make this or die trying." He'd show both Dexter and the girl that they couldn't fool with a man who meant business.

It took an hour and ten minutes of their precious time to float the *Belle of the North* again. Finally, however, she eased off of the bar and moved into deeper water. Ed took over immediately and pulled viciously at the engine room bells. The wheels began to turn in the water.

The other pilots looked at each other as the boat began to pick up speed.

They pursed their lips and shook their heads. No steamboat could go down the Mississippi at low stage at the speed which Shippen was ordering. The fool had gone off the deep end. He'd kill them all before they reached Cairo.

Ed stood at the wheel, gripping it so hard that his knuckles were white. As snags and shoals came into view in the channel he threw it left and right viciously, steadying it for a moment only to throw it again a second later. He pulled at the engine room cord again and soon had a head of steam on that shook the whole boat.

The *Belle of the North*, under such rough handling, rocked and tilted her way down stream. Passengers glanced nervously at each other, and in the wheelhouse some of the less hardy pilots were saying their prayers. But none of them said anything to Shippen. According to the unwritten code of the river, the man at the wheel was in complete control and no one, not even the captain of the boat, could give him orders.

CAPTAIN NASH, the titular head of the *Belle of the North*, stood on the hurricane deck, holding to the rail and glanced from the placid surface of the river to the windows of the wheelhouse. Several times when it seemed that they would surely tear the bottom out on the shoal he opened his mouth to bellow at the pilot, but then remembered the rules and kept his peace.

The sun began to go down and the shadows of the trees along the bank lengthened like dark fingers reaching out across the water for the flying boat. Shippen kept his eyes ahead, his hands busy on the wheel.

Behind him the other pilots were off the bench now and standing shoulder to shoulder just behind him. Their watches were out and their eyes were on

the river ahead, looking for the Hat Island Crossing. The silence in the wheelhouse was like that of a tomb.

The sun disappeared behind the horizon and the shadows grew thicker. Night began to settle on the river.

Detrick, the gaunt visiting pilot, said, "Yonder's Hat Island. Couple of miles ahead. Too late to make the crossing now." He snapped his watch shut decisively and walked out of the wheelhouse.

Shippen turned suddenly to Sam Walters, who was standing behind him with the other pilots. "Take her for a few minutes, Sam. I'll be back directly. Keep her going until I get here."

He caught up with Detrick on the texas deck and stopped him.

"You say you brought a boat up through here the day before yesterday," Ed asked.

"That's right. And it was mighty rough, let me tell you."

"I can believe it," Shippen agreed. "Tell me how you ran it."

"You aren't going to try to run this thing tonight, are you?" Detrick asked in amazement.

Shippen shrugged. "I have to go through it tomorrow, don't I? How would you run it?"

Detrick scratched his chin. "Well, after you first start into the crossing you got to ride a bunch of reefs and snags. Some of 'em are pretty close. Then you shave the head of the island by putting her stern on the big cottonwood tree you see on shore. Just beyond that is the wreck. Here, look at this." Detrick knelt down and swiftly drew a diagram on the deck with a stub pencil. "See, here are the first reefs, here's the wreck, and here's the head of the island. After the wreck, here, is another mess of snags and then a whopping sand bar. If you don't tear the bottom out on the reefs, you're pretty

sure to go aground on the bar."

Shippen studied the diagram for a few moments. "And after you get past Hat Island, then what?"

Detrick said, "Pretty clear sailing. Just about like the river you've been through this afternoon."

Ed thanked him and hurried back to the wheelhouse. Sam turned the wheel back to him with a queer pinched look on his face. He and the other pilots needed only one glance at Shippen's face to know what was coming. He had decided to risk taking the Hat Island crossing in the black of night. The silence that settled in the pilot house was deeper than ever.

Shippen held the *Belle of the North* firm, bearing steadily down the last bend before Hat Island. The last light of day fled in a surprisingly short time, and stars began to show in the sky. The air in the pilot house was charged with the electric tenseness of waiting and wondering. The only man who seemed relaxed was Shippen himself. He whistled a little between his teeth as he handled the big wheel.

Hat Island rose like death itself from the river, a dark ominous shadow in the black of night. There was no moon to light any of the way. But Shippen kept the *Belle of the North* going.

He pulled the signal cord to the engine room. The engines slowed a little, and the watchman on the hurricane deck bellowed, "Labboard lead! Starboard lead!"

TWO shadows scrambled up into the bow. Ed smiled. After the beating Walters had given the leadsmen who had grounded them, he knew the soundings they called out tonight would be accurate. Probably a good deal more accurate than usual.

The singsong chant of the leadsmen began to fill the night like weird echoes

in a cavern. The word passers on the hurricane deck repeated their cries for the pilot.

"Maaark three! Maaark three! Maark three!" The depth of the river stayed constant for a while. Then suddenly it began to get shallow.

"Quarter-less-three! Half twain! Half twain! Maaark twain!" Two fathoms of water now. Hat Island was getting closer. Shippen gave the engine room two bells and the boat began to lose speed.

Now they were in the crossing itself. Shippen's hands were deft with the wheel, moving it, adjusting it, throwing it suddenly to avoid trouble. Using now a star for a marker, now the faint shadow of a tree, now a black bluff barely silhouetted, he steered the great boat through the first reefs and shoals.

Shippen found that he remembered many of the bad spots from his apprentice trips through here. Others he saw just in time to avoid wrecking the boat. Twice she scraped against reefs and eased away before any serious damage was done.

The pilots who had gathered in back of Shippen dared not to breathe. The only sound in the wheelhouse was the faintly audible noise of the boilers, the soft whistle of steam in the gauge cocks, and the eerie, musical cries of the leadsmen as they sounded the depths.

With careful handling, Shippen got her over the first reefs safely, and a sigh like gas escaping arose from the group behind him. Again he signalled the engine room, and the boilers were cut off completely. The *Belle of the North* drifted with the current.

The head of Hat Island now appeared, a huge jet shadow, almost on top of the bow. Ed gave a gentle roll to the wheel, and the black mass passed close on the starboard, so close that branches of the trees on the island

scraped against the wheel's housings. Along side of the island it seemed darker than ever.

Shippen searched the blue-black horizon until he found the darker shadow of the cottonwood tree Detrick had mentioned. Using this as a guide, he kept the boat close to the island.

The tension began building in the wheelhouse. The first part of the run through the crossing was over, but the second and worst part was just beginning. The water was growing shallower.

"Quarter-less twain!" came the sing from the leadsmen. Then, "Ten feet!"

"She'll never make it," someone whispered in the darkness of the wheelhouse.

Shippen spoke into the speaking tube that led to the engine room. "Stand by, stand by below."

"Nine and a half," cried the leadsmen. "Nine feet! Eight and a half feet!"

There was a breathless second and then the *Belle of the North* scraped on the bar. Her bottom dragged on the sand.

Shippen pulled viciously at the engine room signal cord and shouted into the tube. "Give her all you've got, now! Give her all she'll take!"

The faint aye-aye from the engine room was barely heard.

Ed gripped the big wheel and threw her down hard and then brought her back. The paddle wheels began churning frantically at the water. The hull rasped and ground its way along the bottom of the river, stopping and squirming a little farther. The whole boat shuddered from the strain. Shippen worked at the wheel like a madman.

Finally, the boat stopped altogether. The paddle wheels spun and thrashed at the water, but nothing happened. The hull seemed to hang on the edge of the bar, with the bow in deep water,

and the midships and stern solidly grounded. It balanced on the edge of the bar, clinging desperately to the last bit of snag.

Shippen gave one last tremendous throw of the wheel.

The *Belle of the North* moved again, slid over the edge of the bar and into safe water.

"Maaark three!" shouted the leadsmen. "Safe water!"

The visiting pilots let loose a great shout. Shippen had just shown them a piece of piloting that none of them would ever forget. It would live in the legends of the river for years. There wasn't a man among them who would have tried it himself.

Ed stood back from the wheel, his shoulders slumped and his hands trembling. "Whew, I'm done in! Sam, take over for a while."

Walters rushed to his side and took over the wheel. "That was the most beautiful piloting I've ever seen, Ed," he said.

Shippen threw himself on the pilot's couch and listened to the congratulations of all the other pilots.

"Can I make it now?" he asked them.

Detrick slapped him on the shoulder. "Why, hell, if you keep her going the way you have all day we'll be in Cairo with plenty of time to spare. Just keep off reefs from here on in."

ED TOOK the wheel again at sunup for the last few miles into Cairo. It was broad clear sailing now. There was only a hidden rock lying in the channel near the junction of the Mississippi and Ohio to watch. Then it was a few miles around the point to the wharves at Cairo.

He checked his watch and saw that it was five thirty-five. He had twenty-five minutes to dock her. It was plenty of time.

At five minutes to six the *Belle of the North* was tied into the wharf at Cairo. The passengers on deck, all of whom knew of the wager, cheered as Shippen stepped from the wheelhouse to the texas deck. A crowd on the dock, not knowing what the cheering was for, but feeling the jubilation in the air, joined in with their voices.

The visiting pilots were the first ashore, to go hunt up their river brethren. They *really* had a story to tell.

Shippen sobered up and lost his feeling of elation when he had the *Belle of the North* safely tied in her berth. It had been a wonderful trip for him and now his reputation as a river pilot was made. And he had won his bet.

But Ruth was angry and hurt, and wouldn't speak to him, so the real reason for the bet was lost. He left the wheelhouse and went down to the saloon. A crowd was standing around, waiting for the pay-off. But as soon as he was inside of the gilt room, Ed saw that Ruth wasn't among the group. His stomach hit rock bottom.

Mark Dexter walked up and shook his hand. "Shippen, that was the nicest piece of steamboating I've ever seen. Or for that matter, ever *heard* of. You deserved to win every penny of that bet."

"Thanks," Ed said solemnly. His lack of jubilation surprised everyone.

"What's the trouble?" Dexter asked.

Ed shook his head. "Nothing."

Dexter grinned. "All right. You know, this trip reminded me of my young days. It took a lot of courage and purpose. I think I'm going to be glad to have you as a son-in-law."

Shippen smiled faintly. "Keep the money in the boat's safe," he told the purser. "I'll get it later." He looked at Dexter. "Thanks, Dexter. I'll see you later."

He ducked out of the salon fast, not wanting to stay around and celebrate. He really had nothing to celebrate. The whole trip had been a useless waste of time and energy for him.

Out on deck he sniffed at the fresh morning air and headed for the gang-plank.

Passing a companionway he glanced down it and saw Andy Rocco talking with another man. He recognized the other man as the leadsman who had grounded the boat up the river. And suddenly the whole thing was clear.

Rocco was holding a big bet, and naturally wouldn't want the boat to make Cairo on time. He had been the one who paid off the leadsman to ground the ship. He took a couple of quick steps down the companionway.

Rocco spun around at his steps, just in time to meet Shippen's hard right driving into his face. The little gambler went down in a heap. The leadsman, as soon as he had seen Shippen coming, had slunk off in the other direction and was now nowhere to be seen. Ed looked down at Rocco.

"That squares us a little, you low down wharf rat!" he growled. "I ought to kick your teeth in, too."

Rocco groaned and rolled over on his stomach. Shippen looked at him a minute longer and then went back to the deck. He wasn't going ashore now. He was looking for Ruth.

HE SAW her standing outside of the lounge, dabbing at her eyes with a soggy handkerchief. She didn't look up when he walked up beside her.

"I'm sorry," he blurted. "I was wrong about your father, Ruth."

She nodded her head, still looking down. "I know." Then suddenly she lifted her eyes and smiled at him through the tears. "You really did it, Ed! You've proved that you loved me!"

The fast change of pace confused Shippen. He was puzzled. "Huh?"

She laughed. "I wasn't really mad at you. I just knew that you work better under pressure. So I applied some. I could have told you about Rocco, but it wouldn't have done any good. You see, Dad is the one who bet five thousand with Rocco that you could make it."

Shippen was stunned. "He bet five thousand on me?" he asked.

She nodded. "You looked so determined that he decided that you could do it. He figured you were made of the stuff that the early river men had. And that's his biggest complaint in life. That

all of that old spunk is gone."

Ed pushed his hat back on his head. "Well, I'll be dad-blamed forty-four carat. . . ."

Suddenly Ruth was in his arms. The kiss that followed was short, because the crowd of people in the lounge started drifting out. Ed backed away and the two of them stood looking embarrassed.

Finally Ruth tucked her arm in his. "All right, Mister Pilot, you just watch my navigation now. I'll bet I can steer the most direct course to the nearest preacher."

"No bet," Ed grinned. "No more bets for me. I've won what I want."



TRIP OF THE TROUT

By JIM MARSHALL



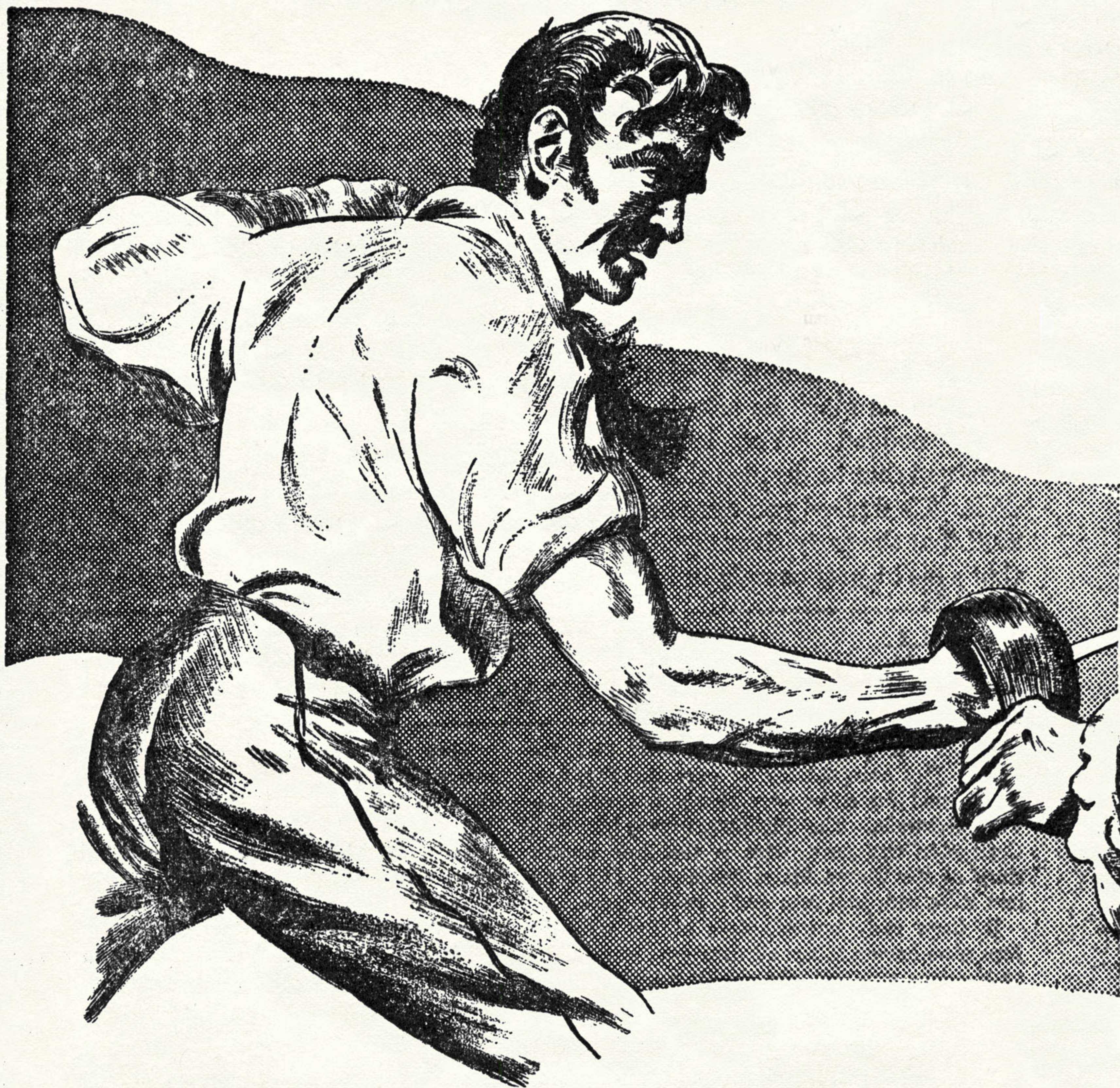
ALL hell had broken loose in early 1942, the Japs were advancing over the Far East and the Allies were slowly retreating toward Australia. The Philippines were doomed, Corregidor was next. This is the little known story of the United States Submarine Trout, an iron ship, with iron men and a golden cargo.

In those early horrible days of the war, the Japs were having things all their own way—communications were cut, the enemy navy ruled the air and sea, help, no matter how small an amount, was needed. Ammunition had to be gotten to Corregidor, and one terribly important task had to be performed. Secretly, the U. S. Government had evacuated invaluable State Department papers and millions of dollars in gold and silver to Corregidor from Manila. This had to be kept out of the hands of the Japs if at all possible. A few ships had tried to run the blockade in order to give help, but they had all been sunk. We had no planes capable of such a flight. There was only one answer, and it is here that the gallant submarine Trout sails into the picture. She was chosen to go to the aid of The Rock. A selected crew was put aboard her, men who knew those waters like the back of their hand. Then her cargo was loaded, and for a sub, it was strange indeed. It consisted of medicine and anti-aircraft shells—as much as she could take. Finally, all was ready. She was loaded heavier than any sub ever before, a concentrated mass of high explosives, liable to go off at the least provocation, and thousands of miles of enemy patrolled water to swim through—not much of a future, thought the men of the Trout.

They shoved off, outside the harbor they submerged and stayed that way during all of the days to follow, only surfacing to recharge batteries and get fresh air as a submarine has no friends. Subs all look alike, and both planes and ships shoot first and ask questions afterwards. Many days out, propellers were heard by the sound operator, it was just getting dusk, so a periscope was raised. Right before them in perfect torpedo position was a cruiser of the Japanese navy. The skipper ordered the ship to General Quarters and prepared to attack. Then he remembered—this perfect shot would have to go unfired—he was under orders to attack no one, not even Jap Men-of-War, so he continued on his course, cursing his luck.

At last, they reached their destination. When night fell, they moored to a dock on Corregidor and commenced unloading their cargo. During the day they would sink to the bottom of the bay and lie there waiting for darkness to come again. At last the ammunition was unloaded and the bullion started coming aboard, hundreds of solid gold bars. They stored it everywhere imaginable, in engine spaces, living quarters, any place there was room. And with the bullion came sacks of silver pesos and trunks of securities and State Dept. papers. Over seventy-five million dollars all told. At last the Trout was fully loaded, a solemn good-bye was said to the men who had to stay behind, and once again the sub slipped out into enemy waters on its long voyage home.

They went for weeks without seeing the sun until came the day they had all been looking forward to; Pearl Harbor was just a few miles away.



THE SUBSTITUTE SWORD

by Alexander Blade

SIR MORGAN TALBOT'S hard cruel face idly scanned the dancers at the ball. Standing with half a dozen men against the richly brocaded drapes that hung on the wall, he was easily the most commanding figure there with his great height and splendid lace-adorned clothes. And

when he spoke the others listened with servile respect.

"Indeed Sir Morgan," said one of the men, "there is as likely a bunch of fillies gathered here tonight as one might wish."

"'Tis true," said another. "I haven't seen better in the many seasons

There was the tinkle of metal against metal—and Godfrey's blade snapped!



Godfrey knew his sword better than he knew his arm—but he wasn't prepared against Sir Morgan Talbot's brand of rare treachery!

I have attended these balls."

"Aye," said Sir Morgan drily. "If you say so, than it must indeed be true, for I know no better judge, or one who devotes himself so constantly and assiduously to these petticoat pastimes."

A laugh was raised as the shaft struck home.

"I'm sure, sir," said the smarting dandy, "that the Captain of the King's Guards would do well to yield to me in these matters as I yield to him in the things in which he excels."

Sir Morgan laughed carelessly. "You try me, sir. Perhaps the flat of my sword would improve your manners."

The dandy paled. For a moment it seemed as though he would burst into tears. Then, without a word, he walked quickly away, Sir Morgan's taunting laugh following him.

A white-haired man, apparently in his middle sixties, but carrying his years gracefully approached the group.

"My Lord Greer!" cried Sir Morgan, bowing with a hint of mockery. "I trust your fortunes improve."

Lord Greer surveyed the man calmly. "When a man reaches my time of life, his blood has cooled so that the state of his fortunes seems of little moment. It is you younger men who fight for advancement."

"Fight?" Morgan raised his eyebrows. "What do you mean? I am not sure I like your words."

"They are plain enough," said Greer. "And whether you like them or not matters little to me. I speak of the death of Lord Darney whose position as Captain of the king's guards you now hold."

Morgan scowled darkly. "Old men are like toothless curs. It is common knowledge that I killed Darney in a fairly contested duel." He put his hand menacingly on his sword and

looked around. "Is there anyone who dares say otherwise?"

The group of men fell back a little. Only Greer held his ground.

He spoke without fear or hesitation. "There were many strange circumstances. However, that is a matter which will soon be employing younger and more capable hands than mine."

"You speak in riddles, old man," sneered Morgan.

"Then perhaps this will be plainer; Lord Darney's brother, Godfrey, has sailed from Spain and will land here in London tomorrow."

"That young firebrand!" Morgan was openly contemptuous. "He owes his neck to the mercy of a kindly king who sent him to Spain instead of making him answer for his escapades here."

"He has been gone for five years. I think the man who returns will not be the boy who left. And I am sure his brother's death will not go unavenged. Not if he is the Darney I think he is."

Morgan made a careless gesture. "When you see the stripling tell him that I am at his disposal. And you might also tell him," he added, "that I have had six dances this evening with the Lady Eleanor. If my memory serves me, that will be more galling to the young cub than his brother's death."

THE two men sat in the quiet room, strongly contrasting pictures of youth and age. The young Lord Godfrey Darney was past middle height, with the suppleness of the trained athlete. He was so blonde his hair seemed almost white against his strongly tanned skin. Greer had lost his habitual calm and was pounding the table.

"By Jupiter, Godfrey," he shouted. "I have been talking to you for an hour and you refuse to understand

what I am saying!"

The younger man spoke wearily. "I understand you very well, sir, but we don't seem to agree on what I am to do."

"What you are to do? There is only one thing you *can* do. Your brother, rest his soul, caught that blackguard Morgan cheating at cards, and thrashed him in full view. Naturally Morgan had to challenge him. However he made a very strange stipulation about the duel. It had to be fought in a locked room from which only one living person was to emerge. My boy, I can't tell you how shocked I was when the door opened and Morgan walked out. Inside we found your poor brother, his blade shattered at the hilt lying dead with Morgan's sword run through him."

"My lord, I know you loved my brother as well as I, and I'm deeply grateful to you, but believe me, sir, it's impossible for me to challenge Morgan to a duel."

"And why not?" thundered the older man.

"Because my brother wouldn't want me to. You see, Lord Greer, our family code forbids it. If I were to fight Morgan it would look as though I were taking up my brother's quarrel. As though my brother had summoned help. No, sir, as much as I detest the man, I must allow the matter to end as it stands."

Greer was incredulous. "Good heavens, boy! Don't you realize what that man has done to you and your family? Why the king publicly declared that the crown had been in danger all the time your brother was captain of the guards; and as a reward for slaying your brother he was made captain in his stead. Land grants which your family has enjoyed for generations have been seized by the crown and are even now, perhaps in the process of being turned

over to that upstart Morgan."

Godfrey shook his head. "This news distresses me beyond measure, but still I can do nothing."

"People will say you fear him."

"The yapping of curs in the street will not disturb me."

"Then perhaps this will stir your blood, Godfrey. Morgan has been in constant attendance on the Lady Eleanor and there is talk that a marriage is soon to take place."

Godfrey flushed beneath his tan. "I released Eleanor from our betrothal vows when I was sent to Spain. She is free to give her heart where she chooses."

Greer's perplexity was evident. "What happened to the hotheaded youth who went to Spain five years ago? Has a mouse returned in his place?"

"This is fine talk from a man who was constantly chiding me for street brawling," smiled Godfrey.

"Ah, well," replied Greer with some confusion, "you always were an unpredictable lad. Hot when you should have been cold—and now cold when you should be hot." Then suddenly he was angry again. "It is well that your father didn't live to see this day. He was a man."

"And so was my brother," said Godfrey sadly.

"The line of men in your family ended there," Greer said acidly.

"Suppose we drop this subject, sir. It is not likely to improve our tempers and my mind is made up."

"Very well, boy, but mark my words, you will find that this course you have decided upon will make you an unpopular figure in town."

THE truth of Lord Greer's words was brought painfully home to Godfrey several days later when he chanced upon some old friends on the street.

They were curt to the point of rudeness. After a few such incidents, he began to smolder. He resolved to see Lady Eleanor. Remembering the warmth that had existed between them, he was sure he would be well received—especially by her father, who had been an old family friend.

So it was exactly a week after he had arrived in London, that Godfrey found himself in the huge reception hall of the Lady Eleanor's house. A servant had gone upstairs to announce him. He waited below tingling with anticipation. At last he heard a step on the stair. Turning with pleasure, he saw that it was not Eleanor, but her father. Godfrey leaped to his feet and advanced with his face glowing, hand outstretched.

Ignoring the hand, her father spoke grimly. "I am surprised to see you in my house. Has your sense of decency fled along with your courage?"

A hot wave of anger shook Godfrey. "I looked for a warmer welcome from you, sir. However I am here to see Lady Eleanor. Will you please inform her that I await her."

"She is indisposed. She sends her apologies."

"I suppose," said Godfrey sarcastically, "that this indisposition will manifest itself whenever I call upon her."

The other nodded. "I can promise you that."

"I don't believe Eleanor has refused to see me. I have a mind to see her in spite of you!"

"What a stalwart you have suddenly become! Direct your rage to the salvation of your reputation. Your brother's death shrieks for vengeance. What are you doing about it?"

"My brother died as a soldier should; with honor and facing his foe. It was an affair of honor that ended

with his death. Everybody is determined that it become my affair. Is there any evidence that Morgan killed my brother by treachery?" Then as the other did not reply, he went on, "As I thought. Still you would have me challenge Morgan for no other reason than that he defeated my brother in a fairly contested duel."

"Fine logic can be spouted when one is seeking to preserve his skin."

It was with a heavy heart that Morgan left the house. He realized the futility of argument. All these people had loved his brother and they refused to understand his position. But Eleanor? He remembered the day he left for Spain when he had released her from all obligation to him, she had declared that no matter how long he was gone she would wait. And now he had returned to a stone wall of hostility. Was Eleanor part of it? Surely she knew he had returned . . . why hadn't she sent him a message? As though in answer to his unspoken thought, the sound of footsteps caused him to turn. It was a young girl whom he recognized as Eleanor's personal maid.

"Oh, sir," she gasped breathlessly, "you do walk so fast."

"What is it," Godfrey snapped. "Did the Lady Eleanor send you?"

"Cooee," said the girl with fresh young impudence. "You don't think I'd run this far on my own account. I have a message for you."

He hastily unfolded the note and read: *Godfrey, dear, Father would not let me see you although it was my desperate desire. Dearest, I'm so anxious to see you. Can you come tonight to the Green Lacquer Room? I will be there with Father, but perhaps I will be able to slip away for a few moments. Do not fail me if you love me. Eleanor.*

His happiness was dizzying. He wanted to sing . . . dance . . . shout.

The girl broke in. "Is there any answer, sir?"

"Yes. Tell your mistress that plague, pestilence or war will not keep me from the Green Lacquer Room to-night."

IT DIDN'T bother Godfrey that night when he arrived at the Green Lacquer Room that former friends whom he encountered turned frozen-faced glances upon him. Nothing bothered him. He was going to see Eleanor!

He wandered about the room from table to table where well-dressed men and ladies were gambling large sums of money. But Eleanor was nowhere to be seen. I must have come too early, thought Godfrey. At that moment he saw Sir Morgan. The man was wearing his uniform of Captain of the Guards. It gave Godfrey a pang to see the familiar uniform he had seen so often on his brother being worn by another. Morgan had apparently been drinking for his face was flushed. It also appeared that he was losing heavily as was evidenced by his cursing and the small stack of chips in front of him. A flunkey whispered in Morgan's ear. Morgan turned swiftly to face Godfrey. His dark, malignant face broke into a smile.

"Well, sir," he said, "welcome home. I confess I looked for a visit from you ere this."

"Indeed?" said Godfrey coolly. "And pray why should I visit you? I am not aware that ours is an old friendship."

Morgan laughed delightedly. "If rumor is to be credited, you no longer have any friends. I wonder why?"

People were deserting the tables and forming a ring around the two.

"I see," said Morgan, "that you are admiring my uniform. How do you like it?"

"I have seen it worn by a better man," replied Godfrey.

Morgan flushed even more darkly. The smile became more dangerously wicked. "It is strange that you should say so. I know of a certain quarter where it is greatly admired. A certain young lady whom you know, in fact."

Godfrey's quiet reply belied the turbulence within him. "I think it would be wiser if you said no more."

"Said no more, by gad!" Morgan belowered. "Why you young whippersnapper, d'you suppose the Lady Eleanor would ever look at you—"

That was as far as he got. The next thing he knew something exploded under his chin, hurling him to the floor. Then he was being helped up by several pairs of hands. The swaying, blurred double image in front of him suddenly resolved itself into a clear picture of Godfrey with clenched hands but perfectly calm.

"You'll give me satisfaction for this, young Darney," Morgan said thickly.

"I'm at your service." Godfrey bowed.

"Here." Morgan waved an impetuous hand at a man in the crowd. "You, Stuvey, will you appear as my second?"

"Gladly," said Stuvey, stepping out of the crowd. Then, turning to Godfrey, "And who will appear for you, sir?"

"I don't know." He looked around at the ring of faces. "I don't see anybody who—"

"Look no farther, lad. 'I'm your man.' It was Greer. The old man's face was transformed with happiness. 'I knew you didn't mean what you said. You were stalking him, eh?'"

Godfrey merely smiled at the old man, not bothering to explain what had really happened.

"You have the choice of weapons, Godfrey," said Greer. "What do you

choose?"

"It matters not," said Godfrey carelessly. "Arrange all the details to suit yourself."

At that moment, Stuvey, who had been standing to a side whispering with Morgan joined them. "Have you made choice of weapons, gentlemen?" he asked.

Lord Greer's manner was quite formal. "Yes, sir, we have. It will be swords."

Stuvey bowed. "I trust," he said, "that you will bear with Sir Morgan's whim in the matter of the place. He would like the duel to be fought at the Turk's Head Inn in a private room with all barred but the principals."

Lord Greer became volcanic. "That's the way he fought your brother, Godfrey! No, sir! A thousand times no!"

Godfrey laid a restraining hand on the old man's arm. His eyes were unnaturally bright. "Not so fast, sir. You may tell Sir Morgan that we accept his terms." Then to the furious Greer. "I should like to see how my brother died," he said softly.

"It's some kind of foul trick," Greer growled.

"That is exactly what I wish to discover for myself."

AS HAD been prearranged, they all met two hours later at the Turk's Head Inn. Lord Greer, grumbling and impatient, insisted upon going through the room where the duel was to take place. He explored every corner of the room, poking his stick behind the drapes and into closets. At last he had to admit he was satisfied. He was the last one out of the room, leaving the two opponents facing each other. Godfrey was wearing a silk blouse with the sleeves turned up. Morgan, however, had scorned to remove his scarlet frock coat, declaring that he

wouldn't even have acquired a "dew" at the end of the encounter.

"I trust, sir," said Morgan, "that you are prepared for a journey. I propose to send you to join your brother." He advanced with sword raised.

"As to that," replied Godfrey, walking to meet him, "I cannot say for certain, but I'm sure that where you are going you will not find him."

They crossed swords. It didn't take long for Godfrey to discover that Morgan was indeed a superb swordsman. They parried thrust for thrust. Both men were catlike as they circled and back-circled, neither able to find a weakness in the other. Morgan's confidence seemed to grow as they fenced. He began taunting Godfrey.

"Why do you leap away? Is this friendly? Come, let me tickle you with my blade."

Godfrey said nothing. Lynx-eyed he watched for an opportunity to make a fatal thrust.

Morgan continued his banter. "Much as I regret it, I'm afraid you will not be here to attend my marriage to Lady Eleanor—"

With unbelievable speed and the full weight of his muscular young body, Godfrey suddenly lunged straight at Morgan's heart. *The blade snapped and Morgan was standing there laughing at him!* Godfrey looked dazedly at his useless blade.

"Now you know my secret," said Morgan. "A finely woven jacket of mail will turn any blade. But you will never live to tell anyone." Menacingly, he began to close in on Godfrey.

Godfrey leaped backward putting the table between him and Morgan. Despairingly he looked around for a weapon. Lying on the table was Lord Greer's walking stick. He snatched it up just in time to parry a lunge that

would surely have run him through had it not been blocked by the walking stick. Morgan attacked furiously; his darting blade seemed to be everywhere. But although the walking stick was awkward to handle, Godfrey managed somehow to defend himself. Morgan was openly laughing now.

"And now," he said, "*the coup de grace.*"

Something was hammering at Godfrey's brain. Some message that was trying to get through . . . Something to do with Lord Greer's walking stick. All at once it came to him. *He remembered that the walking stick was in reality a sword cane!* With one movement he whipped the blade out of the scabbard. Morgan's face dropped.

"Defend yourself," gritted Godfrey. "For now you are surely going to die."

Morgan made a valiant effort, but

Godfrey, now thoroughly aroused, was too much for him. A feint, which Morgan saw too late was *only* a feint, proved his undoing. Godfrey's blade buried itself in his throat cutting to a gurge what started as a shriek.

Standing over his prostrate form Godfrey said, "That is for my brother's murder. Your armor will be your shroud."

The Gentleman's magazine carried a very fine story of the wedding of Lady Eleanor to Lord Darney, the handsome new Captain of the Guards who had recently been restored in favor with the King and again become the possessor of his hereditary landholdings. The magazine concluded the account with, "extremely perplexing was Lord Darney's delight with the wedding gift presented by Lord Greer. The gift was only an ordinary walking stick."

THE END



HUNTING QUIRKS



EVERY hunter will admit, when finally cornered, that he holds some affection for the wild life he pursues, even to the most treacherous and slinking vermin. It is also a known fact that many hunters rather shamefacedly breathed a sigh of relief when some states removed the wily fox from the vermin list and gave him the protection and dignity of legitimate game.

Even Jim Crow, whose heart is as black as his outside coat, carries with him a touch of dignity, and admiration is paid him because he is quite frank in his attitude of being a villain. He deserves the respect paid him.

There is yet another killer, the gray, fierce goshawk of the north, and the spirit which prevails around him tells of his trials on the wilderness,

and makes one thrill to the ability of this animal as a hunter, even though it is quite well known that he is the ruffed grouse's worst enemy.

BUT strangely enough, this affection holds good only up to and not including cats—non-domestic ones—whether they once were household pets or are definitely general wildcats. There is something about this cat's cunning and aloofness and self-sufficiency which refutes a feeling for kindness or warmth from any human, because it actually makes one feel the cat owns also the feeling of being pervertedly human. It is a most remarkable thing that many of the hunters feel the cat is very diabolical, and that there is only one kind of good cat—a dead one! And even then, there is some question about it!—Pete Bogg.



THE FIRST "S.O.S.!"

By JACK CORREL



WHEN the liner *Republic* was struck asunder on January 23, 1909, the brave and sharp-thinking radio operator of that ill-fated ship, Jack Binns, wrote the first line in a new chapter on sea rescue through resourcefulness.

He sent out the historic "C-D-Q!" message, a preliminary of the present SOS, using the radio in sea rescue for the first time in history. This clever move resulted in saving most of the lives of those on board, with only six lives lost.

TALL, DARK AND UGLY

by Lester Barclay

NOW that ain't the way for a man to talk," I said.

The big guy sitting on the stool beside me—he was about my height, I guessed, but a bit heavier—turned and gave me one of those shuttered looks from his mean eyes.

"Why don't you try mindin' your own business, bud?" he said. He didn't move his lips much.

I went back to my beer. I figured, maybe he's right. If the girl didn't seem to care how he talked, that was her affair. And his. But it had got

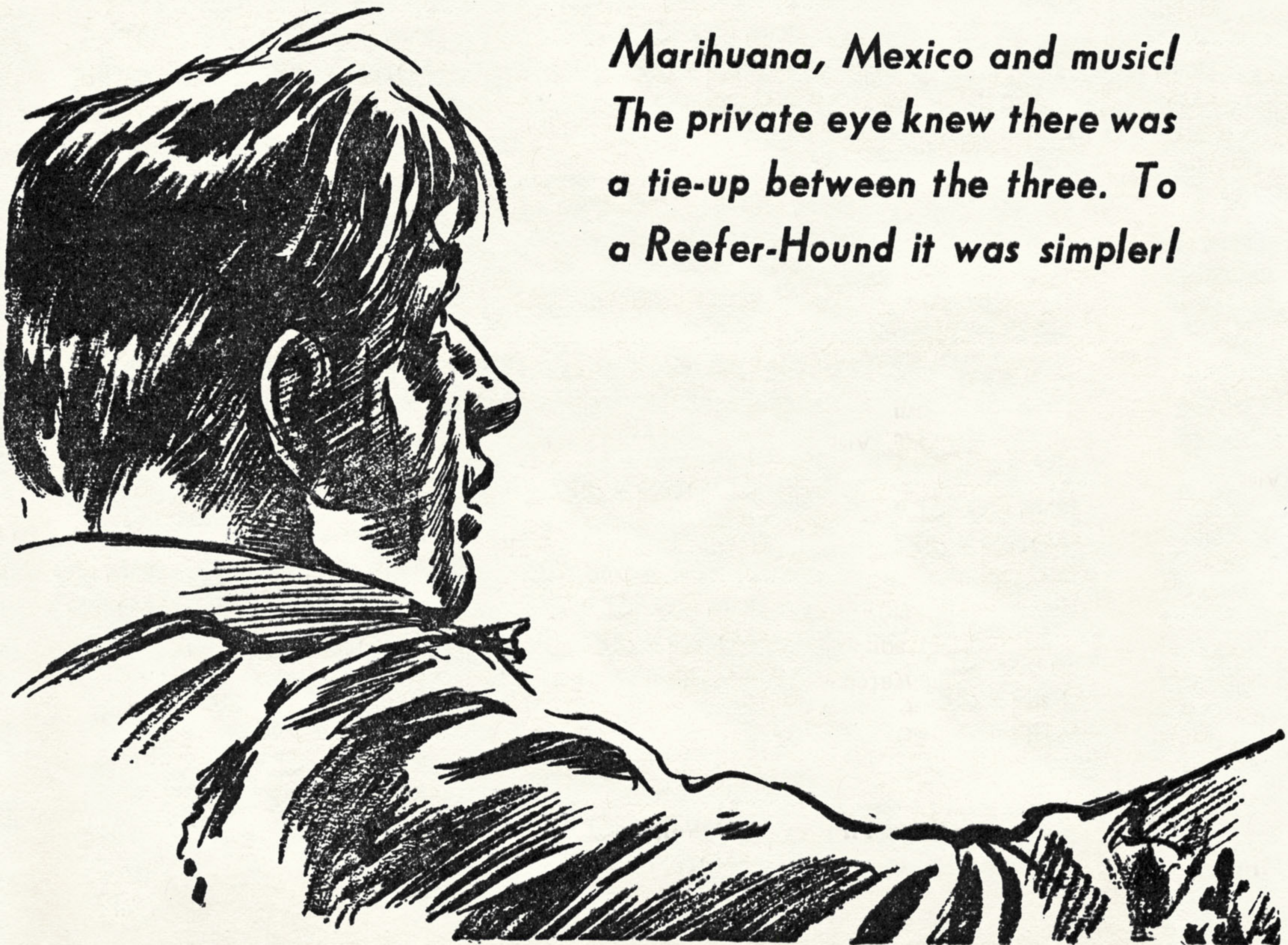
me riled. She seemed like a nice girl, and the more I saw of her in the mirror's reflection, the prettier she became.

She had her head down, as though the glass of whiskey set before her was all that mattered. Then she looked up and I knew that the whiskey and perhaps a lot more was incidental. The girl was in some sort of trouble. Her eyes spelled it out in big, brown letters.

"Jerk!" the big guy said contemptuously, stirred to make further commitment by my turning away from him.

The girl whispered something to him

*Marihuana, Mexico and music!
The private eye knew there was
a tie-up between the three. To
a Reefer-Hound it was simpler!*





Her eyes glazed with hatred, she ignored the sounds behind her

I didn't get. He gave her a furious glance and snarled:

"Shut your trap! I don't like nose characters."

I felt myself get hot, knew I was going to cut loose, tried for the barest instant to control myself, and heard myself, say:

"Well. You asked for it."

There was the most surprised look on his puss when I swung him off the stool and slapped my right into his gut. He doubled over my hand and I shook him off, at the same time crossing my left to his cheek. It landed a little high, but it staggered him. I saw the girl; she was sitting straight up on the stool, and I noticed that oddly enough there was no fear, only bitterness in her eyes, watching in the mirror.

He staggered sideways into somebody who pushed him away. I think that's what started the riot. Because in an instant everybody in the joint joined in the fight. Somebody clouted me from behind and I fell forward against the bar. Oh, well, I thought, here we go again. I pivoted around, made sure my back was set against the bar and waited for them to come to me. The bartender was out of the way, I saw. Somebody had flung a bottle and he had caught it across the side of the head. He was somewhere behind the bar, I guess. At least he didn't show up for the rest of the fight.

A red-faced guy, whose eyes were a pair of blank marks under bushy brows came for me. I let him get in, reached out and took a handful of shirt and twisted him around until his feet were off the ground and let go. He landed in the middle of a foursome who were battling in the center of the tavern.

I heard a whimpering sound almost in my ear, turned fast, saw it was the girl and whipped an arm around her, bringing her close to me. No sense in

letting her get hurt. These damnd bar-room brawls sometimes got out of hand. With her behind me a thrown glass or bottle'd have to go through me to hit her.

"Stick close, tutz," I said, hunched myshoulders, and made for the door.

There were a couple of guys who got in my way but I threw two fast pitches and they didn't bother about trying to stop me. There was quite a crowd outside the tavern, attracted by the noise of the brawl. I threw my hand behind me, grabbed her fingers tightly and made feet for anywhere but the immediate vicinity. A cab proved to be the out for that.

She relaxed against the worn cushion, but her eyes stared straight ahead. I let her look her fill and just watched her profile. It was nice but it didn't tell me anything. The driver asked:

"Where to?"

I looked toward her but she acted like she hadn't heard.

"Uh, just around . . . take the outer drive to the park," I said.

Suddenly she sighed and turned to me. Her eyes sparkled and her lips curled in a nice smile. It seemed to be the word best suited for her, nice.

"Can I take you anywhere?" I asked.

"I suppose so," she said. "But first, thanks for getting me . . ."

I cut her sharp. "That's all right. Though I can't understand why or how you got in with that jerk. But that's none of my business."

SHE felt she had to explain. "He . . . he's a . . . friend," she hesitated at the word, then went on, "I had nothing to do and he suggested a few drinks. I guess he had too many."

"Yeah," I said. "Some guys just can't take it. But what say, why have

your evening spoiled?"

She got what I meant and the smile left her eyes and mouth. She turned retrospective:

"Tall, dark, and . . ."

"Ugly," I finished for her.

"Yes," she said. "But nice."

Now *I* was nice. That word was getting a big play. And she didn't go for malarkey. I was what she said, ugly. Hell, a guy can't play pro football and be a box fighter without getting his pan shoved in once in a while.

She went on:

"About the drink, mind if I take a rain check on that?"

"Any time," I said. Then getting to cases, "My name is Hubbard. First handle, Gilbert."

"I'm Ann Howard," she said. "And now, if you don't mind, I think I'll make for the hay. I'm at the Lancaster Arms."

I knew the place, a twenty-story, grey-stone hive of one and one and a half furnished rooms on the near north side; it catered to theatrical people and to those singles who worked in the loop.

There were some cars parked before the canopied-entrance of the hotel and the cab driver had to park almost a quarter way down the block. I shifted around to get out first, and felt her fingers grip my arm. She was staring big-eyed at a couple of guys parked near the entrance to the hotel. They were either coppers or hoods, sometimes I couldn't tell the difference, and from the way they stood around, they were waiting for someone.

"Quick," Ann said, urgency in her voice. "Tell the driver to move on."

"Anything wrong?" I asked, getting back to my seat.

"Yes, I mean no," she said, still staring in fright at the two guys. "Please!"

I told the driver to go on, anywhere for a bit, then turned to her again.

"Look," I said. "I got the idea back in the tavern that you were in some sort of trouble. This makes me certain of it. You don't have to but it might be a load off your mind to let me hear about it."

She shook her head in refusal. I insisted. I'm bullheaded that way. I took her shoulders, turned her until she was facing me, and gave her the business. I guess I do better with my fists when it comes to convincing people. She did break down somewhat, though.

"I don't want to go back to the hotel," she said. That was after I had sat for a few disgusted minutes and the cab drove around several blocks.

"Where *do* you want to go then?" I asked.

She didn't know. I got a bright idea. "Okay. You don't want to go back to your hotel. We can just ride around for the rest of the night. But that'd be silly. I've got a room not far from here . . . a small residential hotel, and there's no reason why you can't use it. Right?"

I got an answer to that. But not from Ann. The driver twisted his head around and said:

"Look, Jack. I don't know what the score is, but there's a hot car following us around."

I took a quick peek through the rear mirror while the driver enlarged on his statement:

"Saw it the minute we left the Rumpot Inn."

"Are you sure?" I asked, still trying to locate the car in question.

"Brother, I been around to know when I'm being tailed. It's a Buick. There's four guys in it. Keep watching. I'm going to make a fast turn here."

I SAW it then. We'd made a turn on Ohio again and headed west. And

the first car around the corner after ours was the Buick. I caught a glimpse of Ann from the corner of my eye and saw that her lower lip was trembling. She was more than scared. She was terrified. I bent forward until I was leaning almost over the driver's shoulder and said:

"Lose 'em and there's a half a C in it for you."

"F'r half a C I'd lose my old lady," the driver said.

I shoved a bill, open so he could see the number, in his hand and waited for developments. Nor did I have long to wait. The Buick speeded up in a few blocks so that it was maybe twenty yards behind us. I knew it could only be a matter of seconds. We crossed Ashland against the lights and the Buick had as little regard for safety as we. Now we were in more darkened streets than before. Once more I leaned over the front seat and said, "The next corner . . . make a fast turn, slow down enough so we can jump out, then shoot ahead. Got it?"

He nodded in agreement. I motioned for Ann to move over so I could be closer to the door, but she seemed rooted to the seat. There was no time for niceties then. The car screeched around the corner, and I pushed the handle down, at the same time grabbed her under my arm and leaped from the cab. There was the darkness of an areaway ahead. Still half-carrying, half-dragging her, I made it just as the Buick hit the corner and zoomed around it.

I peered around the side of the house, saw that the cab and its pursuer had passed from sight, and said:

"C'mon, Ann. We've got to get to a street car or another cab."

She leaned against the house weakly, her shoulders sagging. I put my arm around her waist and led her out into the sidewalk until she regained her

composure. We weren't more than a few blocks west of Ashland, and I reasoned that at the worst we could get a street car to take us to an intersection where cabs were more frequent. We walked in silence until we hit Ashland. She seemed afraid of the lighted streets. And every now and then she turned a glance to the rear that was full of anxiety.

We were in luck. A cab discharged some passengers at a tavern near the corner and I grabbed him. I gave him my address, nor did he demur this time.

* * *

I yawned away the cobwebs, picked up the paper someone had left at the counter, finished the last of the coffee, and folded it to the first page. I've got pretty good control of my nerves but the sub-headline almost gave me the shakes. It said that some guy had been killed in a tavern brawl.

The guy's name was Halliday and he was the manager of a place called "Exports, Inc." But the part which made me hold my breath was where it mentioned the man who was supposed to have done the killing. Maybe there were other tall, dark, and ugly guys running around, but not enough. It seemed that I had run a knife into this Halliday. The girl wasn't mentioned.

There was an eight-line squib at the bottom of the page. A cab driver, one Rocco Penneli, had been found dead in his cab on Wood Street just south of Ashland Ave. Somebody had pumped a couple of bullets through his skull. And a fifty-dollar bill was found in his hand.

I dropped a dime beside the saucer and strolled into the lobby and up to the desk. The clerk said, hello, turned to look for my key.

"That's all right," I said. "I've got it with me."

So Ann was still there. I debated with myself whether to call her or not and decided against it. She might think the call was for me. It was almost ten, anyway; she should have had her fill of sleep.

I knocked on my door. I heard the faint echo, then silence. I knocked a little louder and there was a louder echo. Nothing else. I turned the knob and the door opened. There was nobody in the room. The bed had not been turned down, although there was the imprint of a body on the coverlet.

There was a faint odor of perfume in the room.

I guess I shouldn't have hoped that she would be there. It was reasonable to assume that my function of Galahad being done there was no reason for her to remain. Still . . .

I had let her use my room while I rented another for the night. I smiled wryly and moved to the dresser for some clan underclothes. Somebody had been through the drawers of the dresser and with a thoroughness that showed they knew what they were looking for. It wasn't money, either, for I always had a couple of hundred dollars lying around loose and the money was still there.

There was another thing. Whoever *they* were, what was concealed behind the clothes in the closet would have interested them. I almost ran to see if they were missing. But the two guns still hung in their holsters which were nailed to the wall. I had done that to insure them against anyone with nose trouble.

I took a much-needed shower, changed clothes and sat down to figure this deal out. No matter which way I looked the neat figure of Ann Howard stood across every path I had to walk

on. And I was going to have to take a walk. Someone was trying to plant a killing on me.

I CASED the Lancaster Arms pretty well. The coast seemed clear. I'd had enough practice to be sure of that. The cops hadn't connected Ann with the killing, as yet.

I walked into the corner drug store and phoned the hotel.

I asked for "Miss Ann Howard, room 623."

The clerk said, "I think you have the wrong room number. Miss Howard is in room 734."

I stuck my head against the door and listened. I couldn't hear anything. I don't know why I didn't knock; instead I turned the knob. It opened freely and I walked into her room. There were two guys sitting on the couch along the two windows at the right side of the room. And the door closed softly behind me.

"What took you so long, Mac?" a voice asked.

The guy behind me shoved and I staggered forward. I'm not the smartest guy in the world but I know when the odds are a little too much for mitts to handle. These boys were heeled with hot stuff. They stuck out in the palms of the guys on the sofa, and the guy behind me hadn't shoved me with a bare hand. There had been a gun in it.

I turned slowly and took a long look at the guy. He was a rather thick-built guy in his middle forties. There was a long scar down the side of his face that someone had put there with a knife blade. He had thick, bulbous lips, the lower one hanging loose showing uneven, yellow teeth. He was baldish and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. I had placed the two gees on the sofa as being ex-pugs who would be

used mostly for a muscle act.

"I might have come sooner had I known you wanted me," I said.

He grinned, a shallow movement of his lips and stepped a little closer.

"Where's the broad?" he asked.

"How do I know?" I said.

He said: "Uh huh. Smart, eh? Well . . ."

It was a signal for the two on the sofa to get to work. I was swung sharply around. The two were standing facing me, their guns no longer in the open. The one on the left made a feint with his left and I lazily started to block the right I knew would be coming up when something exploded in the pit of my gut. The guy on the right had come up with his right past my lead. I doubled over, right into an uppercut. Then they really went to work. I couldn't block both of their blows. And the one in the pit of the stomach had really taken something out of me. They knew every dirty punch in the book. And used them indiscriminately. Sometime later, I don't know how long, I heard someone say, "That's enough, boys. I want him to talk."

I blacked out then.

The first thing I saw was three pairs of legs spread about me. Well, here we go again, I thought. As though in answer, I heard the boss man say:

"Get him up."

I STAGGERED around a little in their grip, as though I was still shaky. It was a good act, though I didn't have to act too hard. I wanted them to think I was harmless.

"Now listen, character," the little guy said. "There's no use takin' a beatin'. Unless you like it, of course. All I want to know is where's the broad?"

"I told you," I said. "I don't know. I took her to my hotel and when I got

there this morning she was gone."

"So you come up here to look for her," the little guy said. "Nice going, Mac. But it doesn't stack up."

I shrugged my shoulders, for more reasons than one.

"That's the truth," I said. "And I'm not asking you to believe me. Besides, what was the idea of putting the slug on me?"

"Jees. He's deaf," one of the two goons said. "How's about givin' him a little goin' over again?"

I didn't wait for the answer to that one. I pivoted around so fast I got the hood on my right with his mouth hung down to his chin. It stayed that way when my elbow tried to plow a patch through this guy. Then I hit the boy on my left, twisting my hand so's it would rip the flesh when it connected. I tore the whole side of his face open and he spun away from me. But I forgot the little guy. He made me remember too late. Something hit the side of my skull and for the second time in a few minutes I went out. My second awakening was more painful than the first.

I rolled over on my face and felt my guts heave in pain. The left side of my face felt numb. Slowly I came to my knees, to my feet, and staggered over to the sofa. This situation needed some reflective thought. Besides, I wanted a rest. I'd had beatings before, and I knew that I hadn't been hurt bad unless the kicking they'd given my kidneys had torn something loose.

It hadn't. When I got up and made my way, painfully to the washroom, I felt pain, but already it was beginning to subside.

I felt a lot better when I got out. Except in my mind. What a dope I'd been. Just a sucker for a pretty face, a song and a dance. "Stay at my place," I'd said. She was wanted but bad. And

I had walked right into a party. Well, it wasn't the first time and I knew it wouldn't be the last.

I sat down with the red book and hunted up exporting firms. It was there all right, 208 West Van Buren.

THERE was a hatchet-faced woman sitting at a desk in the outer office. She was deep in a magazine and she looked at me with fond affection when I interrupted her reading.

"Well?" she snapped.

"Is Mister Halliday in?" I asked.

Her face kind of sagged at the name. I saw she felt badly about the murder. It was a dishonest feeling because her eyes did not lose their shrewd prying look.

She gave me the bad news and I sort of acted surprised.

"Something I can do?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said hesitatingly. Then in an irritable voice: "And I've come all the way from Mexico City . . ."

Her eyes became rounded bits of curiosity.

They blew up like miniature, puffed balloons—staring at me.

"Are you with *Importes Mexicana*?"

I nodded. Her sallow skin folded into that sad wrinkle again.

"Oh," she said, "isn't that too bad? And you've come all this way."

I was beginning to feel sorry for myself too. I sighed, lifted my shoulders in a shrug, started to walk out, then turned as if something had occurred to me which she could help.

"Look," I began. "Perhaps . . ."

The magazine was forgotten. Her eyes were bird-bright in open curiosity. *Importes Mexicana* was something she knew little about, but wanted to know more of.

"Yes?" she breathed in a low, asthmatic sort of a sigh.

"Well, maybe you can help me, though there is a Miss Howard with whom I carried on my correspondence?" I said.

Her lips tightened again.

"She isn't here either," she snapped, her tone implying an "I know why."

"Then I *have* made the trip for nothing," I said.

I watched her debate with herself. I thought, women are like cats, purr while you scratch them, scratch while they're purring. She hated Ann for some reason, probably because the girl was beautiful and the boss had taken her out. And from what I'd seen of Halliday, he was just that domineering type who were heroes to women like these. Her head shook up and down once or twice while she went over in her mind whether or not she should let me see something. At least that's what I gathered.

"I—I," she said hesitantly, "Maybe," she finished in a rush, "Maybe I can help you!"

I led her on. "You can! Good! Good!"

She smiled, a shy wrinkling of her lips. On whispered in a low, confidential tone:

"I know where the account records are."

"Swell! Could you let me know who are the . . .?"

But she wasn't looking at me. Her eyes were wide and her skin had gone taut over the loose skin. There was someone in the doorway. I cursed myself for forgetting my guns. I hadn't thought that they'd come in handy or rather that I'd need them when I started out.

I turned slowly because if whoever was standing in the doorway was heater-hot, it might go off. But when I saw who was there I relaxed somewhat. It was a little guy, slender, in a dark suit

which needed a pressing. He had a small neat face, the features fitting into each other with a smoothness that made none of them stand out in one's memory. He looked like the perfect John Doe. He smiled shyly with his mouth. But his eyes didn't wrinkle at the corners. They remained blank and wide.

He came in on gently treading feet until he stood at my side.

"Are you the one in charge here, Miss?" he asked in a voice which didn't rise much as a voice does in a question.

She wet her lips, swallowed sharply and said:

"Yes . . . something I can . . .?"

I broke in:

"Well. Guess I'll be going, then."

He didn't look at me. But when he spoke again it was to me.

"What happened to you?"

The question took me by surprise. What difference did it make to *him* what happened to me? I asked him that.

"A natural curiosity," he said reflectively.

I expected him to pull out a pipe; he had that matter of inner retreat associated with introverts; they must always be fiddling with something—hands, pipes, anything.

"An accident, a fight, and one's . . . You did get a beating . . ."

I guess the woman hadn't noticed it before. Her eyes swung toward me and her breath went out in a sharp very audible sigh.

"Well," I said briskly. "Now that's settled, I think I will scram. If it's all right with you, that is?"

"But it isn't," he said in that gentle voice. "Nothing is ever right with me. I suppose it's because of the business I'm in. Murder can't be right."

SUDDENLY I began to sweat. Not on the outside. It was an inner

sweat; I felt the blood trying to leave my veins.

He went on: "Your cheek is beginning to puff. It makes you a little uglier, probably uglier than the description they gave of you. Then again, to get back to what business it is of mine, this man who was killed last night. He ran this place. So I came here and find you. Now is that coincidence?"

"Okay, wise guy," I said. He didn't back away from my power approach. He didn't even change expression. "Who the hell are you? And what are you after?"

"I don't know . . . yet," he said. "But I'll ask around, and maybe I might get an answer."

"And maybe you might get this," I said, balling up my fist and shoving it under his nose.

The woman backed away, her hand coming to her mouth to stop the scream in her throat. But the little guy didn't scare.

"I've got a funny idea," he said, "that hitting policemen isn't a usual practice with you. I'm Lieutenant Dunn of homicide."

He let that sink in for a few seconds then resumed:

"Suppose we step into the inner office and talk this over?"

The woman panted, her face working as though every muscle had an uncontrollable tic. She couldn't make her body behave. She turned with the upper part of her but her legs remained as they were. I stepped forward, put my hand on her shoulder and said: "Easy now, sisters. Everything will be all right," and with my back to Dunn gave her a broad wink, as if to say, don't worry. I've got the angle on this.

There was a big, blond-wood desk with an elaborate set of accessories on it, stuck by one of two windows. The room was carpeted from wall to wall.

There was a blond-wood bookcase along one all. The bindings looked new and untouched. There were three leather chairs, one behind the desk, another just to the right of it and the third by the blank wall. There was a bad print of a Bellows water scene above the chair.

Dunn lifted his lean shank onto the desk and said:

"Won't you sit . . .?"

She said, "Thank you, sir."

I walked to the bookcase and looked at the titles. They were mostly law books. I could feel Dunn's shrewd eyes follow me as I moved away from the bookcase and went for a closer look at the print. The chair was in my way so I moved it a bit. The back legs of the chair had made two deep grooves in the carpet.

"Tell me, Miss . . ." Dunn began.

"My name is Stanhope. Nora Stanhope," she said.

" . . . Stanhope," he acknowledge. "How long have you worked for Halliday?"

"Three years."

"Um h'm. And are you acquainted with the business of the firm?"

I turned then and watched. Her sallow skin had grown pale and the tic more pronounced. She suddenly smiled, a vacuous mouthing. Dunn was blandless itself.

"No, sir," she said. "Miss Howard . . ."

"We'll get to her later," Dunn interrupted.

"I wasn't allowed to handle any of the office details," she continued, flushing at his words. "I guess they hired me to handle the phone calls and act as a receptionist."

"They?" Dunn asked and again I noticed how level his voice was.

"Well, Mister Halliday hired me, but Miss Howard gave me orders." Her

voice rose slightly in indigation of a remembered something. "Why she acted as if she owned the place. And when I complained, he only laughed and told me to follow her orders."

"This Howard woman; what was her function here?"

For the first time the woman's face showed animation. There was a mean look or relish in her eyes. She hated Ann and now she was going to show it. But suddenly the look left her eyes and the indecision returned to her lips.

"Why . . . why," she hesitated. "I . . . I don't really know. I've never been in her office."

Dunn's voice lifted sharply.

"Her office?"

"Sure," I said, putting my two cents in. "Can't you see that this is a two-roomer?"

"By all that's holy," he said in that so-sweet voice. "Then where's her place?"

"Across the hall," the Stanhope woman said.

IT WAS just a square room, maybe ten feet either way. And it held nothing but one of those twin filing cases. Dunn pulled at the cabinets. They were all locked but one. Somehow, I had the idea that that one was important. And it was empty!

The little guy stood there, his head down, his hands hanging loosely at his side, his back to me. Suddenly he turned to us and said smartly:

"You can go now, Miss Stanhope. Just leave me your name and address."

She lived on the forty hundred block on Winthrop, in one of those second-rate hotels which came six to the block in that neighborhood.

He waited till she left, then whipped around to me. I started to say something and was left hanging with my mouth hung down to my shoe tops when

he exploded:

"All right, wise guy, now you! It's been a pretty good show, so far, but you've only seen the first act.

"I'm going to wipe that smug look off your puss right now. Three people saw you stick a knife in Halliday last night at the Rumpot Inn! How do you like that?"

I didn't. He didn't wait for me to start beefing.

"What's more, they handed the department a perfect description of you; it was so good in fact, they even had time to notice that your tie had a blue and red paisley design," he kept slamming it at me. "Oh, we've got you all right. It's just a matter of adjusting the straps."

"It's a lie!" I yelled. "Somebody's shoving a wrong finger at me! I hit the guy. I'll admit that! But I never stuck a knife in him. Somebody's trying to frame me."

"And you're quite right," Dunn said, and when his lips smiled, his eyes wrinkled in one also. Suddenly I liked the guy. He went on; "They saw so damned much, those three guys. Everything. Yet not one of them saw the girl leave with you. But they forgot there was a crowd out side watching the fight. And as is usual, there's always some one in a crowd who notices odd things. So somebody saw you and the girl get into the cab and even, for one of those reasons nobody can explain, remembered the cab number."

"But why was the cab driver killed?" I asked.

"That's one of the things I'd like to find out," Dunn said. "I think . . ."

I broke in: "Wait! There was a car that was tailing us. The driver mentioned it. I gave him a fifty to see if he could lose it. The girl and I hopped out when I saw the Buick tailing us was faster."

Dun said: "Since you've gone so far, suppose you spill the rest."

I said, "Sorry. I can't," and showed him my wallet. The badge he saw tucked in one of the flaps pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

"It wasn't till I saw the name, Exports, Inc., that I realized I had fallen into something. I'd just come from Mexico City, had a free evening and thought I'd get a few drinks. But now . . ." I let the rest trail off.

The tight skin around his jaws and forehead slacked and his eyes clouded. He bit thoughtfully at a finger. Then he made his mind up to something.

"This puts a different complexion on things," he said. "I knew all the time it was a frame. But I had to get you to find out why. Now it's mixed up more than before."

"Maybe not," I said. "All you want is the murderer. I want something else. We can work together and get both."

He shook his head.

"I don't like it," he said.

"No," I bit out harshly. "Of course you don't! Maybe some day I'll run into an agency who will work with us without showing they're jealous of the way we do things."

He flushed at the words.

"That's a hell of a thing to say."

"If I'm wrong, I'm sorry," said said. "But that's up to you."

I watched him for a few seconds. I could almost see his mind trick. I had a pretty good idea of the way he operated. *This* guy was no dumb flatfoot. The way he'd figured out the angle of my description showed that. But because he was slow in his methods, safe and sure, I was on pins and needles, waiting to get into things. The Stanhope frustration. I wanted to see her again.

"I talked to the bartender up at the Rumpot Inn. He was the boy who had

your description down to a detail. The other two just played follow the leader on that. If there was a deal, and I'm sure was, he'd be the boy to see. Tell you what. I'll work from the cab driver angle. Will you work from the other?" Dunn said.

"With a city full of cops ready to pick me up?" I asked sarcastically.

"They'll lay off," Dunn promised. "And if you need me, give me a ring at headquarters."

I promised and left.

* * *

The first thing I did was shoot out to my hotel. The guns felt good against my chest. I was sorry that I hadn't taken them before. I told the driver to wait and he was still there when I got out. I gave him the Stanhope woman's address.

The desk clerk gave me a curious look when I asked for her room number. I gathered she didn't have many callers. And certainly no men callers. There was a ribald look in his eye and a lift to his lips which told me that the lobby would have the details to chew over as soon as I left. He pushed at the switchboard key several times, but evidently to no avail, because after a few seconds he turned to me and said:

"Must be asleep."

I said, "Guess I'll go up and try knocking."

My first raps at her door were gentle but all they got were silence. I tried a little harder with no better results. When I turned the handle the door opened.

She was lying on the bed, face down. Her skirt was completely awry. There was a pillow covering the back of her head. And under the pillow was an immense stain of blood.

I lifted the pillow. Whoever had done

the slicing had done more than enough. Her head was severed almost completely from her neck.

I went to the phone and had the clerk call the police. I asked for Dunn although I didn't expect him to be there. His low, even voice asked what I wanted.

"Somebody got to the Stanhope woman," I said.

There was a second's silence, then, "Dead?" he asked.

I said "But definitely. A knife job. From ear to ear."

Crisply, he gave orders. Get the desk clerk to lock the door and station someone there till the police came. I could hear him on another phone sending men out from a precinct station. He seemed to know that I had something else to do besides hanging around there. Because after telling me the few things he wanted, he said:

"I thought you were going to see . . ."

I cut in. I knew that someone was listening in at the switchboard. "I am. Maybe he'll be on now. I'll get in touch with you later."

There was a frightened guy in a sport coat and a pair of unpressed flannel pants telling the half dozen people who were collected outside the room to, "Be calm. Everything is all right."

I shoved my way through the crowd and pulled him to one side.

"Keep that door closed," I said. "Have somebody stand there till the cops come. There's been a murder committed."

The guy was so upset he didn't even ask who or what I was, or what I was doing there. He just nodded his head and let me leave.

I walked into a drug store on the corner for a coke and a few moments reflection. Everything had been action. Now I had to stop and think a

little.

I had the choice of several courses. I could see the head man in the district; let him have the headache. I could call the boss in Wahington; he'd love that, what with my failure in Mexico, to have something even more complex dumped in his lap. Or I could try to link up the pieces of puzzle and make them fit into something like a definite pattern.

This character, Dunn, was a heady little guy, just the kind who systematically would eliminate and reject those immaterial things which had to do with the case. He'd do it if he thought I was working on those angles. We either had to work in the closest co-operation or separately. And I hated to work with anyone. A final proof of that had been the blow-off in Mexico City, when I told the local gendarmerie where to go when they stalled on raiding the office down there. I didn't want chickens. They only laid the eggs. I wanted the rooster.

I LOOKED down at my watch. It was just three: late afternoon. I figured the bartender didn't come down until early evening. Then I got to thinking about Ann Howard. What had happened to her? What was her connection with all this. I finished the coke, turned to leave and made a sharp wheel back to the counter. I had just seen the profile of a man at the cashier's desk. It was the face of the stocky man who had slugged me in Ann's room. I kept my head down but managed to watch him in the mirror. When he left I was right behind him. I made sure my jacket was loose so that if I had to go for my guns I'd make it.

He had a small convertible parked near the corner. I hurried my steps so that when he got into the seat behind the wheel I was at the other side

of the car. He gave me a wide-eyed look as I slid in beside him. But his eyes narrowed in watchfulness when he saw the gun in my fist.

"Get it moving," I said softly.

He wet his lips and put the car in gear. We moved slowly into the traffic.

"What do you want?" he asked.

It was a logical question.

"Just talk," I said.

"I'm dumb," he said.

"That's right," I said. "The Stanhope woman gets knocked off and here you are, twenty feet from the scene of the crime."

I saw his knuckles go white against the wheel. But his face settled into the heavy lines of thick-muscle placidity I'd noticed earlier that morning.

"Where's the rest of the boys?" I asked.

He grunted a sour something. I went on:

"Y'know, you guys aren't too smart. Now if you'd have left me alone maybe I'd have just wanted to know Ann Howard better. For personal reasons. But no. You have to put the slug on me. That just gets my rump up. Now I find myself in the middle of something, me and my heater . . ."

"So what are you after?" he asked.

"I don't know, yet. That's why I want you to tell me. For instance, what do *you* want with the Howard gal?"

Once more the thick shoulders rose in a shrug. I saw him look at the gun in my hand and I suddenly realized that it was broad daylight and that anyone passing in another car could see it. I shoved it in my jacket pocket but sure that he saw the muzzle was still pointed at him.

We were moving along, where, I didn't know; I hadn't given any direction. I saw his eyes narrow and knew that he was thinking up an angle which would take him out of this. But first

I wanted something out of him.

I shoved the gun against his side so hard he grunted from the shock, and said:

BUT I overplayed my hand. He knew that nothing much could happen to him in the car and so long as he drove about like this he had the upper hand. He also realized that I hadn't the slightest idea where to take him nor what to do with him. So he turned a tight-lipped grin in my direction and said:

"So you're good at guessing. Guess that."

I felt that wild stirring of heat, his thick-skinned face swam before my eyes, and my hand came out of my pocket and swept up to his cheek. He moaned at the impact of the gun barrel and slumped forward against the wheel. I went for the wheel too late. We were going along at about thirty when he lost control. The car swerved inward, toward the curb. There a big Packard parked there. I threw my hands up, braced myself, and then we hit.

A wave of blackness came to meet my eyes. I heard the impact as we crashed, but I didn't feel anything. It couldn't have been more than a few seconds that the blackness went away and consciousness returned. My friend was still slumped across the wheel. His head was turned toward me and I saw a sliver of glass from the broken window sticking from the side of his forehead. His loose mouth hung open in a lopsided grin. He was quite dead.

I moved slowly. Nothing happened. There was the barely audible sound of excited voices coming through the window on my side. Then the door swung open and I fell toward the street but hands came up to stop me. Somebody helped me through the door. I staggered when I tried to stand straight but my rubbery legs stiffened after a

few seconds. The voices didn't make sense for those few seconds. Then I saw a blue uniform coming toward us.

"All right, folks," the uniform said. "Just move off, here."

I looked at the cop and saw he was a young fellow. His eyes were narrowed in concern. He stuck out a steady hand, and as he held me erect, he looked into the coupe. His lips pursed when he saw the dead man.

"H'm," he whispered. "Too bad. What happened?"

I thought fast. I didn't know the driver's name. There were sure to be questions I couldn't answer. I had to fake something.

I started to lean to him and when I felt his hand tighten I sagged suddenly. His other arm came around to support me. And I went all the way to my knees. There was a murmur of sympathy from the crowd and I heard him say, in bewildered tones, "Is there a doctor's office close?"

I murmured in a quavery voice, "Doctor," as if to spur him to action.

Someone mentioned an office in the corner building and the cap asked if someone would help me there. The guy who stepped forward was a big guy and he handled me as if my hundred and eighty pounds was half that. I leaned against him wearily and I wasn't faking too much, either. He helped me past the drug store on the corner and around to the entrance and up a flight of stairs. I noticed that the directory listed a dozen doctors. He picked one at random.

There was a woman in the office but my friend rang the bell at the side of the door and when the doctor appeared, told him of the accident and asked that I be looked after immediately. I saw a man in the office, but the doctor said, "In a few seconds. My patient won't be more than that."

The big guy and I sat on a bench waiting for the patient to leave. He was a nice guy, the fellow who was with me, but I didn't want him around. All of a sudden I was almost well. At least my voice was.

"Thanks a hell of a lot," I said. "But I don't think it'll be necessary to stay. I'll be all right."

He had a worried look in his eyes. That cop. Wasn't there something about staying with an injured person till he came? I saw all that in his eyes. And I had the answer which satisfied.

"I don't think I'm badly hurt; I was able to brace myself in time. Thanks a lot for coming along. But I think I'm a big boy. I'll be down as soon as the doc's done."

He thought for a second or so, then shook his head in agreement.

"Sure you'll be all right?" he was just a little hesitant, as if he hated to give up his good Samaritan role.

I smiled a brave smile, which he returned. He was still smiling as he stepped through the door. And I turned to face the doctor.

"Look, doc," I said when the door had closed on the curious woman in the outer office. "I'm okay! Just shaken up, that's all."

He shook his head, a bit wearily, I thought.

"That's what most of them think," he said. "Then I examine them . . . Well. It's amazing how many wind up as hospital cases."

"Not this one," I said. "You can see I'm not in shock. And I believe that's the big problem, isn't it?"

I almost talked myself into something then.

"Exactly!" he said, as if I'd laid the finger on the pulse of my fever. "And that's what I've got to look for."

"Aah!" I made light of it. "I'm no kid! Look!" I stuck my hand out.

It was as steady as a flame in a vacuum. Abruptly, I put an end to it by arising. Reaching in my pocket I pulled out a ten dollar bill and handed it to him. He took it, shrugged his shoulders and motioned to the other door and said, "That way, please."

I LOOKED both ways down the hall.

There was an exit sign at the far end. Good! It meant another stairway. That young cop might take it in his mind to come up. I used the far end.

There was still a crowd at the end of the street. The accident had occurred not far from the corner. I was thankful it had. My movements were pretty well shielded by the crowd. I picked up a cruising cab, sat well back in the corner and told him to take me to my hotel. Dunn had kept his word. The heat had been taken off me. There wasn't a copper in sight.

I dragged my bag out when I got to my room and slipped the secret pocket out. I had my file on the case in it. I went over it once more. And when I was through I realized that as a private eye, I was a goof. All the ingredients were there for me, it was just that I was a bad cook. I couldn't follow a recipe.

In the first place, my agency had been contacted in its New York office. They sent their report on to my boss here. And nothing had been mentioned of the probabilities of a Chicago group. Yet it was logical that the smuggling of marihuana and nylons on the black market wasn't just confined to the big town.

I looked at the report once again, telling it to myself aloud:

"Client, Ray Burcher. Came in to report that his daughter, Janice, had disappeared. Completed our investigation; his daughter found in morgue, murdered."

"Agency hired to find murderer. Daughter had gone to Chicago where she had been working in nite club. Owner, gangster, called, Harold. Connected with black market. Daughter disappeared, turned up in New York where she worked in a honky-tonk in the Village. Place was hangout for 'tea hounds.' Daughter was an addict, also.

"New York office came to a dead-end when the only connection with the girl was also found dead. The dead man was a Mexican, named, Don Moroles, a dancer at the club where she worked. It was he who was the source of the marihuana.

"Suggest you follow all Chicago leads."

But I hadn't. Marihuana meant Mexico. I knew enough about it to realize that like all narcotic or semi-narcotics were handled from a central dispensing station. And in the case of marihuana the logical agency would be Mexico. I believed in getting to the core of trouble. It saved a lot of time and usually meant breaking the case earlier. This time I was mistaken. Mexico was only the beginning. For I found out that the control seemed to be vested in others. And one of those others was Exports Inc.

So why was Halliday knocked off? And what had Ann Howard to do with it? And what did the guy who had just died want? What was missing? The file! And what could be in the file? Names, places, people.

That was what he wanted. And that, too, was what I wanted.

But how to get it? And who had it? Who else could be interested? The ring, of course. And how was I to get to know someone? By getting in with those who used the, "bow down."

I took a chance and called police headquarters. Dunn was in. I didn't even bother asking about the Stanhope

woman. I was after bigger game. He told me to hang on, and after a few minutes, came on the phone again with a list of those places the police knew. And they knew many. He didn't ask why I wanted them. Just told me where the most notorious of them were. One of them was not far from the hotel.

IT HAD a name, "The Light Edge." I stepped in and it was like walking into another of a thousand such I'd seen all over the country. An almost circular bar, stained the usual walnut, and attended by two bartenders took up most of the place. There were some eight booths, done up in red leather, along one wall. I didn't have to look to the far wall to know that the signs above the two doors would read, Kings and Queens. The place was far from crowded.

I sat at the bar and ordered a rye.

There was a small platform behind the bar, in the center, on which stood a piano, a stand with a bass braced against a curtained backdrop, and another stand by which leaned a tenor sax. I wondered where the musicians were. I didn't have long to wait.

Three fellows came out of a booth way at the rear of the room and mounted the platform. They seemed to know most of those sitting at the bar for they shouted greetings to them. The musicians were dressed in beige jackets, pale blue trousers and ties, and two-toned shoes. They didn't look older than twenty or so.

I could feel the mood of the people change the instant the musicians mounted the platform. There was a vague yet discernible excitement in the way they sat erect, in the way they forgot the drinks at their elbows. And as if it were a signal, other customers arrived to take their places at the bar and booths.

I'd heard swing music before. It wasn't new to me. I'd heard the best. Or so I thought. But these three could do something with what they had at their command which no other outfit, even larger, could do. They could take music as it was written and twist it, torture it, strain it, until it came out like something from another sphere. Yet it was beautiful, soothing, soul-satisfying. It must have been good to make me think these things. I don't know a hell of a lot about beauty. I deal with people.

I ordered another rye and waited for something to happen. It always does. If you can only wait it out. I can.

It was after they had taken their break, the first one. A rather sharp-looking character sits himself on the stool next to the one I'm on. He doesn't look like a Joe, come in for a fast beer. Nor does he give the impression of one of those hep-happy kids. Yet I get the idea that he's a musician. Maybe it was the outfit he's wearing; white gabardine jacket, dark trousers and silk shirt with dark-red tie. I wasn't sure until the boys on the stand spot him.

The boy at the piano leans over and says:

"How's it jack? Why'n't you bring the rest of the boys?"

My character says:

"We don't go on for another hour. They looked mighty sad and sounded sourer than stale milk on a couple of numbers at rehearsal. I let Harry take over."

I was giving him a slow up-and-down while they were shooting the lip. He's an odd-looking boy. He had a dark skin, which under the non-glamorous lights, looked darkly yellow. There were sacs of dissipation under his eyes, like sable chalk marks. He had wet-looking eyes which gleamed animal-like, and were never still. His fingers,

too, were always on the move, tapping out a perfect beat in rhythm with the piano, or fumbling with already perfect knot of his tie, or nervously stroking each other in a gentle massage. Then he slipped his hand into his breast pocket and pulled out a handsome pig-skin cigarette case.

IT WAS one of those wide, high ones, which hold the king size brands.

His eyes were on the smoke he pulled from it. I couldn't see them. But I did see the soft smile on the piano player's lips when he saw the cigarette my character pulled from the case.

I flashed a fast glance down to where he was still fondling the long, dark tube of tobacco, as though he were already enjoying its taste. I recognised it for a panetella, the name they gave to a kind of *reefer* popular with Chicagoans. He put it to his lips, his fingers close up against his mouth, and lighted it, taking a long, deep drag. His eyes were half-closed, and he held the smoke in for a long moment before it began to dribble from his nostrils.

His eyes opened and they were wetter, more dreamy-looking than before.

The guy at the keyboard let out a high whinny of excitement at the sight of the smoke. It attracted the attention of the other two on the platform and they turned their glances to my friend. Simultaneously, they shouted, "A true believer! Welcome, friend."

For the next few numbers I heard music played by those boys like I'd never heard before. And all the while the acrid odor of *weed* floated past my nostrils.

I sniffed loudly, as with appreciation, and said:

"Blow some of that gage my way, friend."

His mouth opened wide at my words, his tongue showed, thick and red, and

he turned to me with a wide smile.

"*Like a jelly bean?*" he asked.

I made a face and talked through my nose:

"Love it, man! Got a *code*, though. Can't get a kick out of it."

"S a shame, friend. Have a drink with me?"

I nodded and had another rye. It put us on a very friendly basis. I noticed he was drinking coke, no whiskey. We listened to the music for a while. I kept shaking my head. It got him after a bit.

"Like it?" he asked.

"Yeah. Only I don't understand it."

His lips crooked at the corners and his eyes became querulous, like a spoiled kid's.

"Understand! *Understand!*" he said in softly venomous tones. "What the hell's there to understand about music like this. You sound like a critic! Look! You've heard of dinner music?"

I said, "Yes."

"Well. Dinner music's called mood music in the trade. Like on a radio show, they have mood music to underline a theme. That's what this is.

"*Understand!* These boys aren't playing something they understand. Or something that's so difficult. They're interpreting an arrangement that's simple in theme and melody. Fundamentally, there's nothing of art in their work. But they are developing a mood in music which is suited to their number and which is best played by just such a trio. Or four-piece."

I apologised. "I guess I don't know a hell of a lot about it. But I like it at times. Like when I used to fight . . ."

He snapped his fingers suddenly.

"Damn! That's where I saw you. Kid Dugan, back in '33, at the Garden. And before that you played with the 'Cats out in Evanston. Right?"

He laughed sharply at my opened mouth. And continued:

"Sure. I was breaking into the racket, then. Sport stuff. I had one of those, high, sharp voices that register excitement and they gave me the sport stuff. Football, Boxing, Baseball."

"Is that what you are?" I asked. "An announcer?"

"Was! I'm the leader of the band now. Dale Rickert, that's me."

I remembered in a dim sort of way that I'd heard his name. He had something to do with one of the chains. Rickert enlarged on his career.

"SURE. It took them ten years to discover I knew more about music than most of the boys playing it. But that's radio. Make a name in one thing and they laugh at you if you tell them you know more about something else." He was silent for a few seconds. Then, "Say. Mind if I get nosey for a while?"

"Go ahead."

"Well. You were pretty good. What happened?"

"Same thing that happened to a lot of guys. College was all right, but it took money. And those were the days when nobody had it. That's why I quit school and took up boxing. I was good too. But not quite good enough."

"That's right," he said in shrewd observation of my past. "You were a good main-eventer, but not in there for the big stuff."

"So I made a bundle and walked out while I still had all my marbles . . ."

" . . . And?"

"Oh," I was vague. "Y'know. A job here and a job there. Now . . ."

"Now?"

"I'm a cop. Private."

This Rickert was nobody's fool. From his first words I had gathered he was shrewd, observant, and talkative.

That was the important thing. He loved to talk. And he was curious. Maybe . . . ?

"Always wanted to meet one of you Chandler characters," he said. "You look like you could play the part, too. Big, tough, ugly. Had a lot of experiences, I'll bet?"

"Some," I acknowledged.

"In town on a case?"

"Uh, huh."

The bartender came over and I ordered a coke for him and another rye for me. When we drank up, Rickert turned to me and said:

"I suppose it's nothing new to you, to hear someone say that they once had ideas of being a detective. But I've had. And I think I'd have made a good one. Tell you why. Far as I'm concerned, a case is like music. There's the simple kind and the Beethoven kind."

That got me interested.

"Beethoven kind? What's that?"

"The kind that's like the Eroica. A massive piece of architectural thought and plan. No hearts and flowers theme. It almost takes a mathematical mind to be a great composer and musician. Nothing is left to chance. Nothing is left for an amateur to fool with. The whole picture is there yet one must know all the ingredients so that one can see the picture."

"Well," I said. "I'd never thought of it that way. But I get what you mean. It's something like the case I'm on."

"Yeah? Aw, come on talk," he begged.

"All right. Here's the whole picture. There's a huge ring, operating in this country. I'm interested in only one part of it. But because that part is connected with the whole, I've got to know all the rest.

"For instance, that panetella you're

smoking. Where did you get it?"

He gave me a slow careful look through those sleepy-sad eyes. Then he looked down at the coke in front of him. But those lips stayed closed. I sighed. I hadn't hoped for too much. After all I wasn't asking for a broad's number or something like that. The stuff I was asking about was dynamite and twice as hot to handle.

SUDDENLY I noticed he was watching me from the corners of his eyes. And his cocked-head told me he was waiting for something. The boys on the band came back just then from a break. That was what he had been waiting for.

"There's an empty booth near the john. Let's get it," he said.

I had that edgy feeling while I watched him light up another of those long dark smokes. He inhaled deeply, holding as much of smoke deep in his lungs as he could. He exhaled in a thin cloud from both nostrils.

"So you want to know who does the peddling of the stuff?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Y'know," he said, "I could get my brains beat out for talking?"

We both knew the answer so I didn't say anything. He went on:

"But okay. I'll talk. In about half an hour a character's gonna walk in the door. His name's Harold. Looks like an ape who learned to walk like a man. There'll probably be two or three of his friends along. Harold does not walk alone. So he and Benjy, the owner of this joint, will sit at the end of the bar nearest the door. Benjy's one of the bigger peddlers. And he and Benjy are going to talk business. Harold is the man you want to see. But what you two are going to say to each other is something I'd like to hear."

I turned away from him and stared

at my hand clenched around the empty glass. The knuckles were white. I think it was the only sign I gave of my inner excitement.

My friend looked at his watch, whistled sharply and slid from the booth.

"Sorry, fella," he said. "Gotta scram. That session my boys are on oughta be over. Stop up any night. I'd like to hear how you made out. That is if you're still around."

I knew what he meant. I was just as likely not to be around.

About the only one who thought it odd that I should sit in a booth by my lonesome was the waitress. She'd give me a dirty look every time she'd bring me another rye; her mind was probably on the tips she might be making if there were more than just a single in the booth. It was about four ryes later that I spot the man I was looking for.

My music-loving friend had given me an excellent description of Harold. He looked exactly like an ape who had learned to walk like a man.

Thick, squat-shaped, he had immense shoulders, sloping as if he were muscle-bound; I filed that thought away for the future, and he rolled a little as he walked to the bar, like a sailor who wasn't quite used to the solid feel of the ground. Behind him, and shoulder to shoulder, came two plug-uglies. I recognized them immediately. They were the ones who had given me the trimming in Ann's place. I sank lower into the booth. For sure, I didn't want them to spot me.

Harold found an empty stool at the bar, and I noticed it was as my friend had said, near the door. I could also get a better look at him.

He had a wide, flat face, high cheek-boned. His nose was short and thick with wide flaring nostrils. His eyebrows joined across the bridge of his nose and there was another dark, thick

smudge of hair across his lip. His eyes were half-shut. The two with him took up their positions, facing away from the bar and to either side of him. No one was going to see him without their okay. More, they could see any move an outsider might make. They kept their hands in their jacket pockets.

One of the bartenders stepped up to Harold and whispered something to the man, then turned and walked to a door at the opposite end of the tavern. I hadn't noticed the door before. I gathered it led to Benjy's office. I was right.

This Benjy was quite a character himself. Small, compact, slick-haired worn long, thin face sharp-angled so that it was all high-lights, he moved behind the bar like a fancy boxer coming to meet a clumsy slugger.

HAROLD angled his head for Benjy to come close, then whispered something in the other's ear. I saw the little man start, his lips tightening abruptly and his eyebrows lifting until they were almost off his face. I could almost hear Benjy say, "C'mon," to the other, as he turned and started back to the office.

And as Harold got off the stool, his bodyguards turned and followed. They were going to pass me. It wasn't quite that dark that they couldn't see me.

I had about two seconds in which to act.

My head fell to the polished surface of the table. I made sure that my profile was turned away from them. I heard them pass me and breathed a sight of relief. Then I heard the door to Benjy's office slam. I lifted my head just in time to see some one slide into the booth opposite to my seat. The someone was a woman.

And the woman was Ann Howard! She gasped, fell back against the

leather, and threw a hand to her mouth. I stopped her but fast.

"Sh! Not a sound!"

The fear left her eyes. They grew wary and intent. She turned them way and that as if she thought she were in a trap. At last they came back to me.

Her voice was low, urgent:

"I don't know what you want, but you'd better get out of here!"

"And I can say the same to you," I said. I didn't know how long they were going to be in the office. I knew, though, that when they came out and saw her, maybe Harold might not let her out as easily as she came in. "So maybe we'd better go together."

She shook her head violently.

"No. I have to stay."

I talked fast then.

"Look! I came to see you this afternoon. These two boys with Harold, and another guy, were waiting. Not for me. For you. They slapped me around pretty good. But I think they wanted you, not me. And I think I know why. Haywood's file on the Mexican accounts was missing. You've got that file."

It was funny, but her face was no longer *nice*. It was just determined now. Her chin stuck out and her lovely lips were a red slash across her face. I liked her better that way. I realised that I liked her *anyway*. She gave me a look of deep concentration, shook her head up and down twice and slid from the booth. I followed.

We walked to the outside as though she had come there to meet me. No one paid the slightest attention. I had left a saw buck on the table for the drinks.

We walked down a bit before I said softly to her:

"Where are we going? Can't just stroll the streets."

"To my place," she said.

SHE lived in an unpretentious hotel on Leland Ave. There was a man at the switchboard who gave us a sleepy look as we passed him on the way to the stairs. She lived one flight up.

I looked the place over. It was like all hotel rooms, without character and without definiteness. Just a bed, dresser and shabby chair done in red mohair. I somehow couldn't see her in that room.

"It wasn't the nicest place," she admitted as she gestured for me to take the chair. She sat on the edge of the bed. "But I wasn't too choosy. Besides," she continued smiling in an oddly affectionate way, as if she had found the room more to her liking than she admitted, "I've sort of gotten to like the place. It affects me oddly. I feel as if the room were another skin which I place over my own. Here, I'm nobody and nobody knows me. We're shadows moving among other shadows. It's nice, y'know at times, to feel that way."

I let her talk. The time for me to spill my gab was not now. We should had had mood music with the talk.

She was saying:

"Reality is so messy; the ugliness of it gets deep down in a person. And when one is mixed up in ugliness it becomes part of one. Like with Haywood. He was ugly. Uglier than Harold. You saw him only that night at the tavern. I suppose you thought he was being vicious? No. He was *nice* there. I've seen him when he was really ugly. Like when Harold missed out on a payment."

"Harold missing on a payment?" I asked in bewilderment. "I thought Harold was the big wheel."

"Only with his muscle. Haywood had the brains. He and another, called, Stubby, a thick-faced man with the welt of a knife scar running down

the length of one cheek. He was even more vicious than Haywood."

"I know," I said softly. "He wanted something and when the Stanhope woman didn't come across, he slit her throat, from ear to ear."

It seemed like all of life went away from her eyes when she turned them in my direction.

"Her too?" she asked in a low voice. "That poor woman, with her little jealousies, and her love for Haywood. She once told me she'd die for him. So she died because of him. They had to go to her didn't they? But she knew nothing!" her voice rose for an interminable second, then sank to its monotonous recital again. I'm the only one who knows. I have the file, the names, the places."

I figured it was time now.

"And that's what I want. That file."

"You, too? Are you going into the business?"

So I told her who I was and why I was here in this little square cell without bars, talking to a woman I loved and could never know or have. For I knew she was deep in the mire of their filth. And nothing I could do could get her out. But I wanted to know why she was there; what was it that had happened to have pushed her in so deeply.

SHE kept nodding her head, like a puppet my words were moving. When I finished, she gave her head a final shake and smiled up at me with a tremulous movement of her lips; I had risen as I talked and had paced up and down the twelve-foot length of the room, I stood in front of her and looked down at her, and I knew that the kiss I was going to give her would be the first and last.

It seemed like all the gentleness in the world was imprinted on her lips.

They were soft and sweet as I had dreamed them to be.

Neither of us heard the door open.

"Now that's touching," someone said.

I didn't make any sudden move, but my right hand stole toward my holster.

"Don't be a square," the voice said.

"You're covered, copper."

I didn't hear them coming. But I saw the horror mount in her eyes. It seemed like I was never going to be fast enough for these boys. Something hit me at the back of the head. A familiar pattern of ricochetting stars swam before my eyes and the numbness spread through my brain.

I was sick all over someone's feet. Those feet kicked at me. They connected with a couple of sore spots and jerked a moan from my lips.

"Take it easy, Fred," someone said.

"We don't want any noise from that boy."

"Want me to put him to sleep again, boss?"

"No. You hit too hard. Besides, I want something from him."

I was in a car. I could smell the subtle perfume of Ann's. I wasn't tied, but I was spread across the back of the car with my face shoved against the rear of the front seat. I rolled a little and pawed gently with my hands. There were two of them in the back seat with Ann. I felt their trousers.

I felt the car stop. The front door opened and a heavy voice said, "Get them out here!"

Something hard dug into my cheek.

"Act smart and you need a new set of teeth. So get up and be a good boy."

I crawled backward until I felt the running board under me. Then I got up straight. It was like I thought. Benjy and Harold were standing beside the car. Someone shoved me from behind and I staggered forward into Har-

old who stuck both hands out and grabbed my coat jacket and jerked me around. He did it like a guy throwing a pillow and as easily.

I saw Benjy jerk for the others to follow. Harold straightened me out and pushed me, his hand holding a fold of my jacket.

It was a shabby business street whose unwashed store fronts reflected none of the lights which were thrown from long-spaced light standards. We were before one of those grimy-windowed stores. Benjy slipped a key from a pocket and opened the door.

The office was at the rear behind a plywood partition.

Harold shoved me and I staggered forward into a chair. They didn't shove Ann around but there was a look on Benjy's mouth which told me as plain as words he hoped they'd have to go to work on her. One of the muscle boys was holding her arm. She jerked loose and sat down in another chair. For a few seconds we just looked at each other. It was like a scene from a B crime movie.

"I don't know whether you're smart or just lucky," Benjy said at last. "If it's luck you just ran out of it."

He had a voice to fit his personality, razor-sharp and mean.

She gave him a twisted smile. Abruptly, Benjy switched to me.

"And you, nosey! What the hell you want?"

"Just the guy who knocked off a girl named, Janice Burcher."

Harold, who was standing beside me, sucked his breath in sharply. His fingers fastened themselves in my hair and pulled my head back until I was looking straight up at the ceiling.

"You bastid!"

He was pulling my hair out by the roots. I reached up and fastened my fingers in his wrists, tearing at the deep

tendon in the center of the hand. I heard the rush of feet and took a couple of punches on the face. Blood spurted from my mouth and nose, but my fingers held their steady grip. If I could only have turned. But Harold's weight pressed me down into the chair.

"Cut it out!" Benjy's command broke up that party.

Harold's fingers loosened their grip and the other two walked away from me.

I breathed through my mouth and let the blood drain down my chin.

"Nobody killed her," Benjy said. "She left here and went back home."

THE words came thickly from my mouth:

"Someone might as well have. She died from an overdose of Secunol. And the autopsy showed she was a narcotic."

"I can tell you who killed her," Ann's voice broke in. "And I'm the only one who knows. Haywood killed her. He broke her in on cocaine. He knew her father was rich. When the old man refused to send her more money he cut off the supply."

"You're crazy," I said. "She was hanging around with a guy named Gonzales, a dancer . . ."

"He wasn't a dancer," Ann said bitterly. "He was a peddler. The girl fell for him . . ."

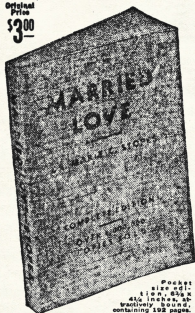
I couldn't stop him. No one could have stopped him. It took all three of them to drag Harold from her. He had leaped at her and had started pounding his fists into her face. While they wrestled him away from Ann I reached for the two guns in the shoulder holster, but they were gone.

Her mouth was open and a bloody spittle dripped down her chin. Her face was lop-sided and his knuckles had opened a wide gash in her right cheek.

(Continued on page 168)

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(Continued from page 166)

Her breath came harshly from her throat.

"That-won't-stop me," she gasped. "I knew you were crazy about her. I tried to tell you to lay off. But you wouldn't listen. All you've got is muscle. That's why Haywood and Stubby used you . . ."

"Ah! To hell with all this," Benjy said windily. He was breathing heavy from his wrestling match with Harold. "I don't care about no broad. All I want's that file of Haywood's. And I don't want conversation, either. God damn lucky thing I had a tail outside when you two took a powder."

"Now look you tramp!" he said savagely. "I want that file. If you don't start talking, what Harold just gave you is only a sample of what you'll get."

Somehow she smiled. Not one of those brave smiles. There was something crookedly vicious in it. Or maybe it was that her face was out of proportion.

"That's the first and last time any of you will hit me," she said. "And forget the file. It's in a place none of you can get into. And a letter is someplace, a letter that'll spill this whole thing sky high. That letter also tells where the file is. You know what the D.A.'d give for that file, don't you? So close your trap and listen."

"From now on things are going to be different. I'm going to be the one you see . . ."

"Let me at her," Harold begged. "I'll skin that pasty-faced broad alive . . ."

"No," Benjy said. "She's got us over a barrel but good. Haywood showed me what that file has, names, places all the business. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in stir. And if your eyes and ears are where they should be, you'd see she's telling the truth."

"That's right, Benjy," I said. "She's

already knocked off two people, Haywood and a woman who worked in the office. In cold blood."

I turned to her then and went on:

"That's right. Because she tried to frame me with the Haywood rap. She egged him into an argument with me at a bar, and as he got up to fight, she slipped a knife in his back. I know now why he had that peculiar look on his face when I shoved him. The way I got it figured, she was going to bump him anyway and I just happened to be the sucker who was in on the party."

"She also got to the woman who worked in the office. She knew the other was jealous of her and that the dame was nosey. Sooner or later she'd have to quiet her. So she went to her hotel and waited for her. They walked up to the room together and she slipped a knife across Stanhope's neck. It doesn't take much strength to do that. I knew the minute I walked in the lobby of the hotel that the Stanhope woman never had men callers. The wise guy at the desk gave me the kind of look that showed me she was an old maid. Furthermore, I must have come in not long after you left, Ann. Your perfume was still in the air. You don't use a cheap scent."

"BUT I got screwed up when I saw Stubby outside. I thought he or one of his boys had done it. I knew better tonight, when I walked into your room. That perfume you used was in every crack of that place."

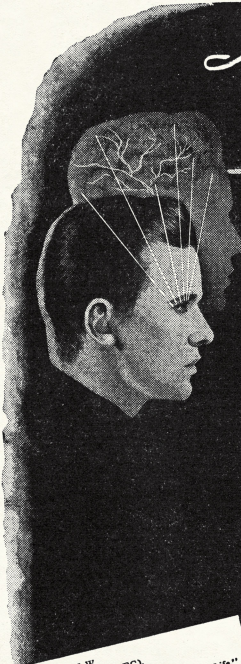
I turned away from her, sighed and got up and started for the door.

"She's yours," I said walking with short, slow steps. "You can have her for what she's worth . . . A lead nickel."

But I didn't get to the door.

"Stay where you are," Benjy said. "You ain't goin' nowhere."

(Continued on page 170)



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(Continued from page 168)

"Look," I said. "I gave you what you want. And I got what I want. We're even, aren't we?"

"Even, but that's all. Nobody walks out of this picture! You know too much!"

It was now or never. And I'd rather take my bumps with my hands swinging.

Harold had eyes only for Ann. The two mugs were staring open-mouthed at Benjy. I pivoted fast and swung my left hand down, with the fingers extended in a Judo-blow, straight into the spot below Harold's Adam's apple. He gagged, his eyes popping and staggered back. I didn't wait to see what happened. I was already on my way out. They were still staring at me; I heard Benjy mouth a command to stop me, but they reacted too slowly. I could have made it. Only I forgot Ann.

She stuck out a leg and I fell over it.

I never moved so fast in my life. I was almost up straight when they came at me. And I let them come in close. This was kill or be killed. I kicked one guy in the knee cap and he just fell down, but the other clipped me alongside the skull with his rod. It was a glancing blow, I was already ducking, but it knocked me off balance. And gave Harold a chance to get to me. He threw his fingers around my throat and just closed his hands.

I had about three seconds to work in. Clapping my hands together like I was going to pray, I brought them up as hard as I could between his spread arms. And when my hands were at his head, I brought them down, still clasped, across the bridge of his nose. I saw his eyes go blank and blood sprayed me from the fountain which spurted from the wide, flaring nostrils. He just collapsed at my feet.

It felt like a burn. I wondered how

flame could reach so deep into my body.

I didn't hear the front door go inward in a splintering crash. Nor did I hear, unless it was an echo from the dim recesses of my brain, the crashing sounds of axes at the rear door. But they did. I was forgotten in their wild rush to get out.

Slowly I turned and walked back to the chair I had gotten out of.

From the front, on the side of the partitioned office, I heard the wild booming of gunfire, heard the exultant yells of men, and knew, though I hadn't seen them or him, that it was Dunn and his boys.

I had almost forgotten him.

SHE was standing, facing me, her face drained of blood, the marks of Harold's blows standing out on her cheek and mouth, crimson splotches. Her eyes were wide and a little empty, as if she couldn't quite grasp what was happening.

Her head moved from side to side as if she had no control over her muscles. A sly grin suddenly came on her mouth.

"You won't say anything, will you, darling?" she said.

There was something tearing at my guts, and I couldn't get to it to stop it.

"You won't say anything, damn you!" her voice was a scream.

My eyes dropped to her hands. A knife gleamed redly from the fingers of her right hand. Always the knife.

"You'll—die—slower—than—the—the rest," I said. My voice didn't belong to me. It sounded like I was talking from a long way off.

She stooped suddenly and snatched something from the floor. When she straightened I saw she had dropped the knife and was holding a gun, one which one of them had forgotten in his haste

(Concluded on page 172)

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(Continued from page 171)

to get out.

Her tongue ran around her lips. Slowly her hand came up, the gun along with it. But she couldn't do it. Her breath whistled out in a sob and running blindly to me, she thrust the pistol into my lax fingers.

"Oh, darling," she sobbed. "Kill me. But quickly!"

I heard laughter welling from my lips, saw Dunn and two of his men standing in the doorway. I heard as from a great distance, a familiar phrase:

"I arrest you, Miss Howard, for the murders of . . ."

Somewhere a bell tolled . . .

THE END

BATS

By PETE BOGGS

ARE they birds or beasts? They are mammals, but no other mammals have been able to fly. Since they fly by night, they have few competitors in their kingdom, as most birds fly by day. Their peculiar traits have aroused the imagination and interest of mankind since the earliest times. Two of Aesop's fables concern their curious dual nature.

One fable is about a bat who falls to the ground and is seized by a weasel. The bat pleads for his life, but the weasel claims that since the bat flies like a bird, he is by nature the weasel's enemy. The bat secures his release, however, when he convinces the weasel that he is not a bird, but a mouse. Soon thereafter the bat is caught by another weasel, who threatens to eat him, saying that mice are his special prey. The bat assures the weasel that he is not a mouse, but a bird, and again receives his freedom.

The other fable tells of the ancient tradition of the war between beasts and birds, each in turn being victor. The bat always aligned himself with the side which seemed stronger at the time. But when peace was declared, neither beasts nor birds would accept the bat as one of their own, because of his deceitful conduct. They drove him from the light of day and forced him to hide in dark places, from which he came forth only at night. The moral of this fable is that "those who practice deceit must expect to be shunned."

THE STORY OF THE ANSON

By ALICE RICHARDS

IF ONE wanted to find a treasure ship to claim for oneself, and have a chance for some top money, what better ship would there be for this purpose than a "paymaster" ship of the British Fleet, a ship that was known as the bank of the seas? Such a boat, the 41-gun Man-Of-War frigate, *Anson*, went down near Looe Bar, in Mount's Bay, Cornwall, on December 8, 1807, when her captain, during a violent and overpowering storm, was thrown off his course and mistook Land's End for the Lizard, and was thus under the impression that his boat was just close to safe waters.

The ship was smashed to bits on the rocks, and this tragic error was the cause of the captain's going stark, raving mad; the crew, fearing for their lives, fled the ship and made for the shore and safety. Nothing further was ever heard from the Captain, and the ship soon went down completely, after being battered by the terrific pounding on the reefs and bars which separate Looe Bar from Mount's Bay.

The bullion, which the frigate was carrying to the British fleet then blockading Brest, amounted to \$1,200,000, and went down with the ship. It lies there still, apparently, for there is nothing on record to the effect that any rescue or salvage work was done in connection with this ship. On the bottom of Mount's Bay, therefore, the *Anson* awaits the hand of its salvor, who will set its treasure free from its hiding place in less than six fathoms of water.

CARIBBEAN TREASURE

By ALICE RICHARDS

THE Caribbean Sea guards in its great arms multitudes of many strange, vast and unique treasures, and among them is the notable one which the good ship *Don Carlos II* holds in its iron ballasts, and covered over with the sands of the Sea's bottom. The once-great Man-Of-War, now a rotting hulk, struck a reef on November 21, 1812, and sank immediately into Cuba's famous Matanzas Bay. It now rests on that sharp coral reef, completely covered by a heavy growth of sponge and coral, and imbedded in the soft sands, but it offers to some adventure-some soul a tempting treasure of \$2,000,000 in gold, silver and copper coins.

Today, due to the war, there still has not been

(Continued on page 174)

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(Continued from page 173)

much investigating, but there is reason to believe that at this time, the treasure is for the most part intact. Cuban divers go down at various times to look around this old hulk, and others that have bowed to the mighty waves of the Caribbean, and they sometimes bring with them to the surface a few silver pieces-of-eight, bearing dates as early as 1794. When they are stamped with dates as early as this, the coins would no doubt bring twice and even three times the coin's actual value, a fortune well worth the price it would take to back a salvaging party. But it lies there today, guarded watchfully by its cocked, silent cannons, and its searching gun-carriages, a great and very impressive memorial to the power of the vengeful Caribbean, and a challenge to anyone who has enough gumption to try to wrest this captive from its captor sea.

PIG-STY PALACE

By JUNE LURIE

AMAZING as it seems, Versailles, the glory of Louis XIV and the most magnificent and expensive palace in the Western world, was also the coldest, dirtiest and most uncomfortable abode according to our present-day standards. Though the outside landscape was uncomparable, the filth inside was indescribable. So much odorous rubbish littered the corridors that the ladies had to be carried in their chairs through these passages. A usual sight about the palace were cows and goats, for the royal family had these animals brought to the doors of their apartments to be milked.

One of the customs of the court was to permit the public to attend the dinner of the king. The only charge for admission was the regulation that men hire a sword and hat from the porter. Every day the palace was flooded with a stream of sight-seers, coming to watch their king dine in much the same way that people now watch the animals feeding in the zoo. The palace courtyards resembled a market place with merchants displaying goods of every description.

The chimneys used to heat the sumptuous palace were so wide that the rain or snow often extinguished the fires. When the fires did burn, the wind blew the smoke back into the rooms. Yet, even when they did burn, their heat was scarcely enough to warm the huge chambers. Consequently, all the people of the court had to provide some means of keeping warm. Elderly women carried charcoal footwarmers about with them, but the younger women had to suffer in their sheer gowns. No one could betray any signs of chattering teeth or shivering bones, for the king, who was remarkably hardy himself, grew irritated at any signs of weakness in others. Palace or pigsty, Versailles remains the mecca of thousands of tourists, who can then go home to the comparative luxury of their own steam-heated "palaces."

JADE-HEALER?

By JUNE LURIE

Jade is beautiful, and maybe—who knows?—healthful tool

JADE, to the ancient Chinese, was a gem possessing many supernatural powers. And in the remote regions of that far eastern land, there are people who still hold that belief. The ancient Chinese sought life everlasting and communion with the gods through this sacred stone. The living considered it a drug which could effect miraculous cures.

At late as the 16th century A.D., writers described the physical curative properties of jade medicine. In order to administer the stone as a drug, it had to be prepared. Sometimes it was chopped into tiny grains and mixed with rice; sometimes it was powdered and taken dry. Frequently it was combined with that most precious of metals, gold.

Today Chinese medical men laugh at the idea of using jade to effect cures—and they question the idea that their people of ancient times had faith in it as such. But undeniable proof remains. An investigation of the native drug shops of Peking reveals numerous remedies which include the name of "jade" in their titles—although they do not contain any form of the gem. Fei Yu Chu, "fat jade bamboo," is a root of the buckwheat genus that is recommended by the old style practitioners for persons afflicted with flatulence, nervousness, an unbalanced mind, and excessive thirst. Ginseng, another wild root which is supposed to have health-giving properties, can be bought under the name of "White or Red Jade Man Mixture."

Throughout history man has resorted to one precious substance after another in his fight against disease and death. The ancient Chinese may have lacked a sound scientific basis for their faith in the powers of jade—but that faith was as strong as the modern medical scientist's belief in sulphur and penicillin.

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(Continued on page 176)

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(Continued from page 175)

of cargo, valued at \$500,000, \$141,000 in bullion and \$50,000 worth of pig zinc, hidden by the waters of Lake Erie, near Dunkirk's south shore.

She disappeared between the ports of Dunkirk and Erie that fall night, and the bodies of her captain and eighteen of the crew were washed ashore a few days later, but the exact location of the ill-fated ship's resting place is not known to anyone, and there it waits to be claimed, just another treasure!

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By PETE BOGGS

WHEN the sailing boat "Tarpon" was lost in the Gulf of Mexico many years ago, it was known that she was carrying a huge shipment of American money in her safe, approximated at one million dollars. But the only man who knew her exact location was an old and grizzled fisherman, who readily agreed to show the spot to divers, but only on the condition that he should receive no more than fifty dollars!

"To hell with the thousands of dollars in percentage!" he was supposed to have said, "all I want is fifty dollars in cash!" And believe it or not, that's all he got paid for helping to unearth a fortune other adventurers, known as divers, finally found.

NEWSPRINT ADVENTURE

By ALICE RICHARDS

The story of "Andy" Johnson, president-victim!

THERE has always been a rather distinct but hidden scorn for Andrew Johnson, the president of the United States, who had the misfortune to follow in the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln, after spending not too brilliant a career as Vice-President. The scorn has concerned itself with him and the way in which he conducted the government that did not elect him president, the United States.

During all the length of service Johnson gave in office, he led a very miserable life, because he had never wanted the job that was thrust upon him, in the first place, and this was made all the more miserable by the various and sharp remarks about and accounts of him by all the newspapers of the country at that time. The adventures that he was supposed to have had, and the adventures that he had to take part in while endeavoring to disprove all of the

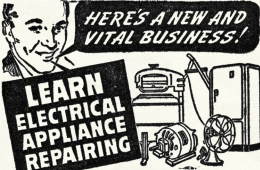
things being said about him in the news, could easily fill a book, and one of not too pleasant reading.

There are many people who will quickly jump to point out that until this recent time, nothing could be said about the way the press handled all matters concerning the president, but the words filed against Andrew Johnson in his own day, would easily prove them very wrong and in the dark.

It is already established fact and has been for a long time, that there is hardly a paragraph anywhere in the history books containing contemporary comment on Andrew Johnson and the work of his administration that can readily be accepted as fact, and at its face value. Of all the hundreds of daily messages and arguments and speeches supposedly being given on the floor of Congress in those days of great trouble, there is not one which is written up in annals which can truly be called an utterance of a statesman. And this condition stems mainly from the newspapers and political magazines of that time, for they were run by men who greatly feared and hated Johnson. Their articles, written without one bit of dignity and in no apparent state of calmness, show this quite plainly, and therefore are so very prejudiced, they are of no worth as reports on that age.

MOST of the arguments and challenges concerning Johnson and his attitude were so ill-tempered in tone, and were written in such smutty and coarse language, that they were nothing but mere stabs in the back in the war against the president.

Johnson had to contend with threats and degrading remarks about himself, but he also had to take the brunt of the responsibility for such affairs as that of the schoolteacher from Ohio who was sent to South Carolina after the reconstruction period began, to instruct the recently liberated blacks in that neighborhood that it was not worth the effort and that the teacher may just as well have stayed in his own city and taught his horse or mule to read, as to try to teach the colored folk. Such tales were spread throughout the Northern papers, and always linked President Johnson to them in one way or another, without ever actually coming right out and saying what their real feelings were. They spent page upon page describing such incidents as these, but they might just as well have saved their breath and waste of so much space, for it was quite evident they meant pure hate!



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VOODOO GODS

By ARN RICH

ABOUT the only stationary fact which one meets in seeking out important data on "voodoo" cults, is that there is no definite or stationary fact at all on the gods of voodoo and their names. It is almost impossible to discern between what one tribe in the west calls "the serpent-god Damballa," and what another tribe in the south perhaps calls "Papa Ogou." It is somewhat unbelievable to the uninitiated, but these two names previously mentioned are the same god, and just the practise of word-of-mouth has changed the real name so greatly between each village. Neither of the names are correct, actually. And this is why there has never been compiled a list of the different gods, for there is no systematic way of doing so.

Perhaps one reason why there is not a better "systematic theology" of *vodun* is due to the differences of opinion in those who have tried to compile lists. Even the priests do not agree amongst themselves which name is more correct, for they are definitely individualists and follow their own line of thinking, which makes it extremely hard on anyone seeking out the truth.

Melville J. Herskovits, in compiling a list of the names of deities, consulted with three authorities in the same valley in Haiti. At so close a range, the list was remarkable for the difference in names. It should be noted that had Mr. Herskovits compared these lists with others collected from other parts of the island, even greater disparities would have appeared. Thus, it is almost impossible to get to know all the names of the gods of "voodoo." Sometimes, there is a god in one village alone, who is unknown to all outside this little community, and who became exalted because of the process of deifying the souls of those who, in some given locality, were renowned for their spiritual power, or represent survivals of regional African deities that have been preserved in certain large family groups.

IT IS interesting to note the discrepancies in the names of the gods. Some of the inconsistencies and individual variations in the naming of the gods can be shown by naming just one case. The name of a man who did much good in Haiti was General Ogou. This was corrupted to "Ogun Gallone," in time.

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The future is dangerous. Fear fills most hearts. But may I say to you that there can come into your life, dancing flashes of the Spiritual Power of God? I mean NOW. And when you do find, and know this beautiful Power, whatever problems, trials, fears which may beset you, melt away under the shimmering Power of God. In place of these fears, doubts, and trials, there comes a love-



Dr. Frank B. Robinson

ly Peace — a Peace which only God can give —and POWER? — well —the human race knows little of this POWER, which upsets many old conceptions of God, and puts in YOUR hands, and mine, the Power Jesus promised when He said:—“The things that

I do shall ye do also.”

I want you to know of this Power. I live for no other purpose. For when this dynamic, invisible Power changed my life, my duty was very plain. TELL OTHERS—that's what God said to me, and I've been doing that faithfully for the past 18 years. Write me a simple postcard, or letter. NOW, and ask me for my 6000 word message, which will give you a slight insight into the most soul-stirring revelation from God this world has ever known. Address me as follows: —“DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON, Dept. 47-17, Moscow, Idaho and this message, which is TOTALLY FREE, will be sent by mail immediately. **But write now—ere you forget.** The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 47-17 Moscow, Idaho.

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