

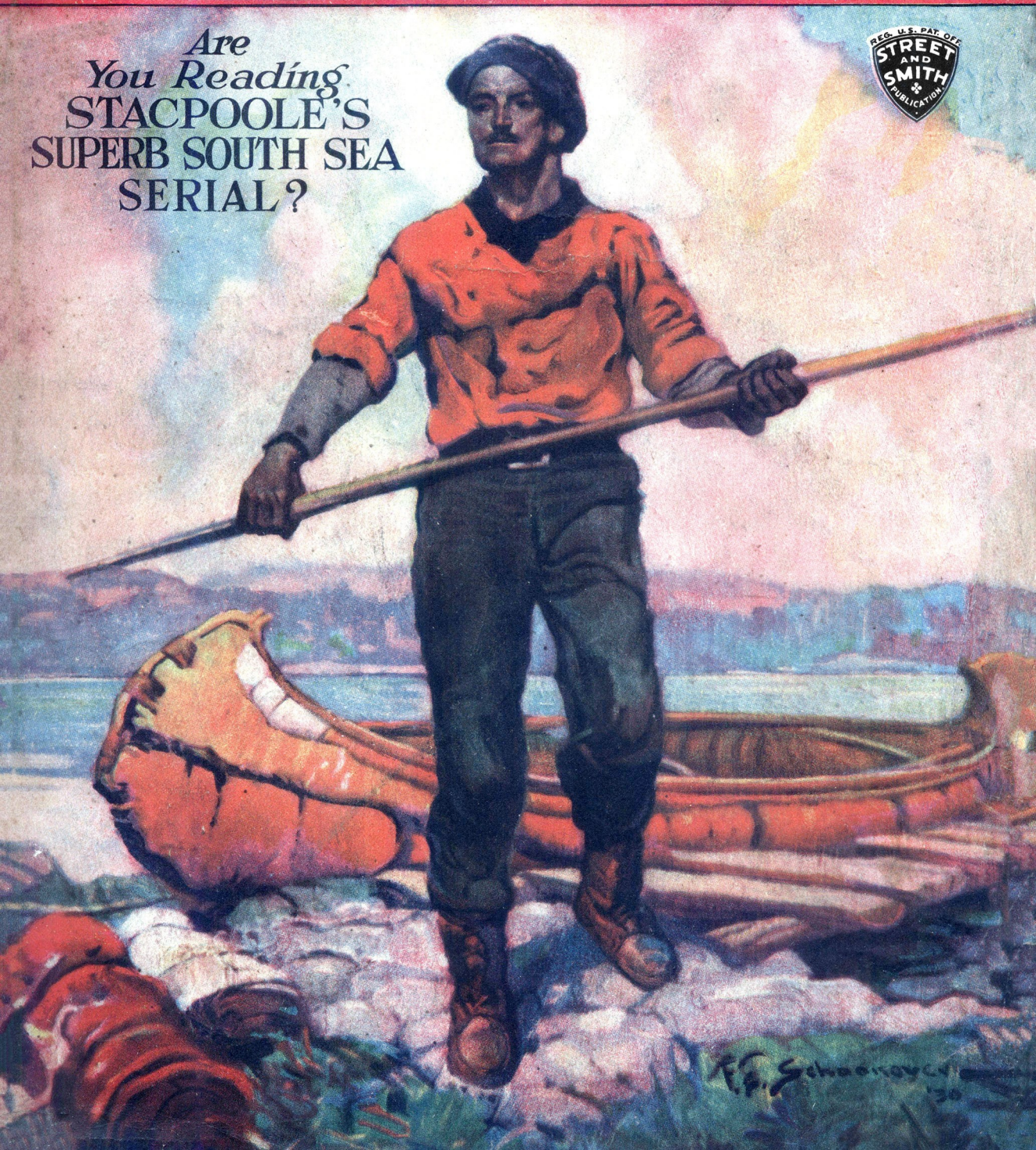
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FIRST JUNE NUMBER

The Popular★ MAGAZINE

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STACPOOLE'S
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"Why Frank—how disgusting!"



IF you, or any member of your family have the slightest evidence of dandruff, we urge you to try this treatment, which has benefited thousands:—

Simply douse Listerine, full strength, on the hair. Vigorously massage the scalp forward, backward, up and down. Repeat this treatment for several days, using a little olive oil in case your hair is excessively dry.

You will be amazed at the speed and thoroughness with which Listerine gets rid of dandruff. Even severe cases that costly so-called "cures" failed to improve, have responded to the Listerine method. We have the unsolicited word of many to this effect.

There is no mystery about Listerine's success used this way:

Dandruff is an infection caused by germs. Full

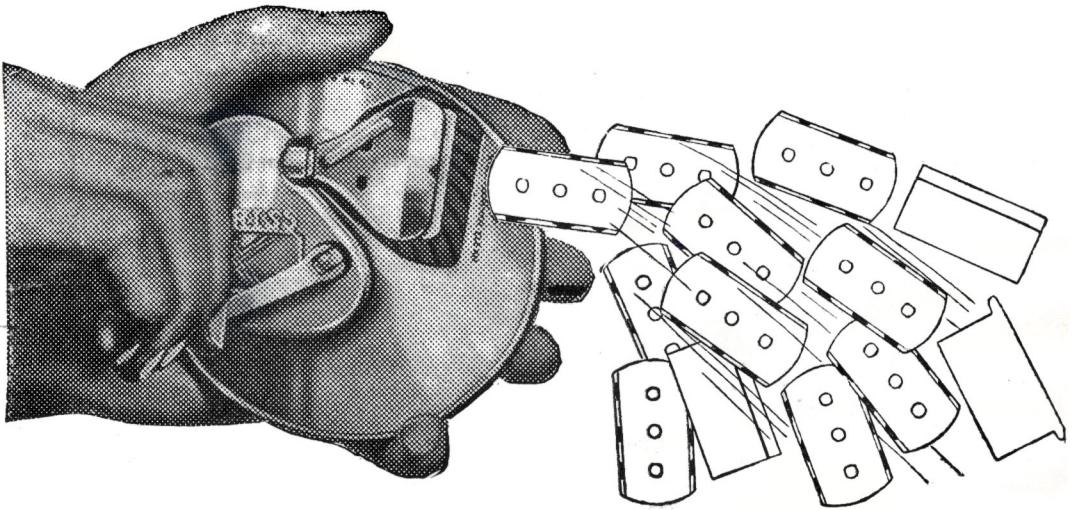
strength Listerine is powerful against germs—though so safe it may be used in any body cavity.

Indeed, Listerine's germicidal action is so intense that it kills 200,000,000 of the virulent *S. Aureus* (pus) and *B. Typhosus* (typhoid) germs in 15 seconds—both noted for their resistance to antiseptics. Yet its effect on tissue is healing.

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The safe antiseptic *kills 200,000,000 germs in 15 seconds*



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Volume XCIX

Number 6

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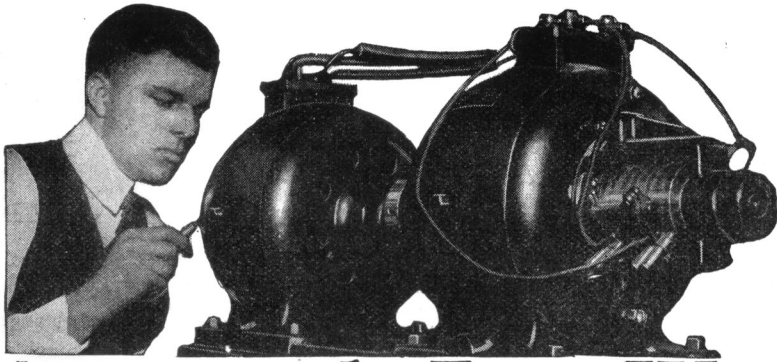
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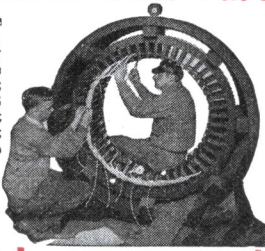
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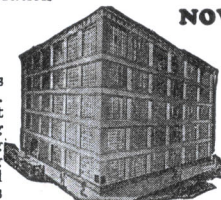
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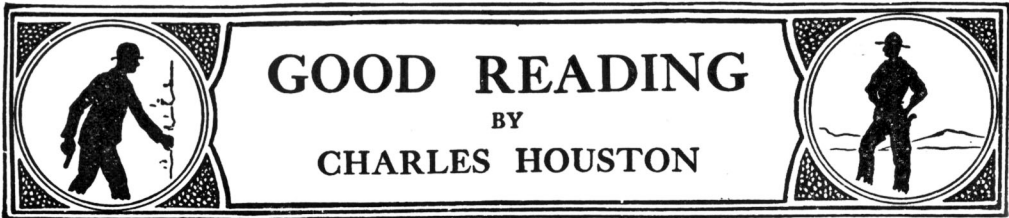
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By Vivian Grey

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It was an impulsive act, the sort of thing she was always doing, for at the start she had acted on impulse when she left her luxurious home to cast in her lot with the humble folk on the other side of the creek. It was impulse that sent her out at midnight to make her own way in the world, alone, with no money in her purse. And when Phil Rhoades found her and would bring her back, she refused, for she was determined that she would not stand in the way of the career of the man she loved.

In a way, it is true that most of us act on impulse at one time or another, trusting somehow to the hidden voices within us that our actions may be for the best. The author of this absorbing story tells what may happen when we make impulse the guide to life. It is a story of youth in the grip of a great love that is here before us, a book that we do not lay aside until the last page is read, and one that we take up again, for it is well worth the rereading.

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BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Show Card and Sign Lettering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Carrier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Grade School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects |
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Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada



Splashers vs. Lollers

A bit of quiet research among the bathers of America has revealed two rival camps of behavior—

The handsome gentleman who heads the first group believes that bathing should be in the active mood. At 7:00 a. m. he becomes unseen but *heard*. From the bathroom come the echoes of hearty splashes and noises that sound like a floor polishing machine. (Our hero is stirring up a fancy Ivory frosting with a stiff-bearded bath brush!)

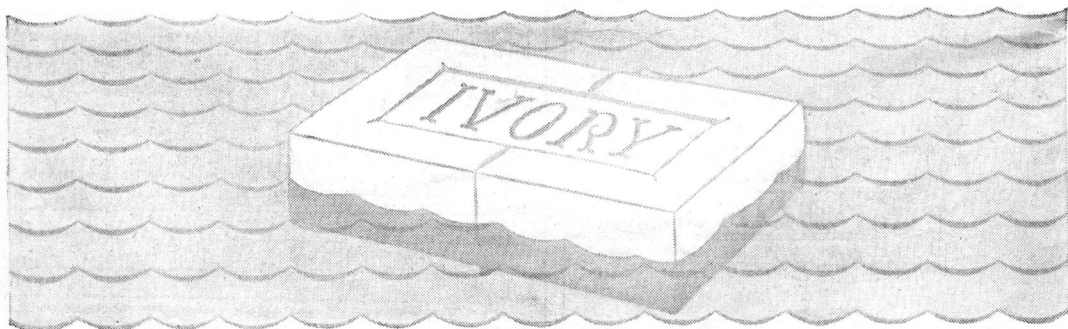
The spokeswoman for group 2 shudders at the thought of such athletic goings-on! She insists that bathing should be a restful interlude

in water as warm as a rippleless sea. And Ivory will float like a lily pad in this bland pool of content . . .

Frankly, the debate of *splashers vs. lollers* is too delicate a matter for us to pass upon. So we merely remind you that both leading schools of bathing have nominated Ivory! Ivory dares the splashers to duck it . . . and it drifts into a loller's hands. Its whole-hearted foam rinses away as lightly as dandelion fluff in a breeze. And it leaves both the skin and temper as smooth as velvet. There's no debate among bath-loving Americans on the merits of Ivory—they all *agree* that it is fine, pure soap!

. . . kind to everything it touches · 99 $\frac{4}{100}$ % Pure · "It floats"

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MAXIMS *for* MEN

By Jack Aston

III.

THERE'S many a slip 'twixt the mug and the muzzle,
But worse slips come after for guys who must guzzle.

If you stick by your friends in time of their trouble,
You'll find the investment will pay you back double.

When firing a rifle, don't jerk on the trigger;
Just *squeeze* it in slowly—your score will be bigger.

Some fools on the ground look right smart in their saddles—
You can't know a man till his hobby he straddles.

A man, for his own hide, may fight a fair battle,
But guarding his woman—he's worse than wild cattle!

When Life gives you dealings with men who act low down,
Make sure it is *you* who can call for the show-down.

The LONDON



The Death of even the Chief of Scotland Yard Was

CHAPTER I.

ALL WRONG.

AS soon as he boarded the S. S. *Senegambia* at New York, at which amazing city he had arrived only that day from Chicago, Dan Gravenhurst went directly to the purser. And as that official happened to know Dan as a not inconspicuous figure in His Majesty's Foreign Office Intelligence Department, he turned from the waiting queue to his friend.

"There's a cable for you, my lad," he

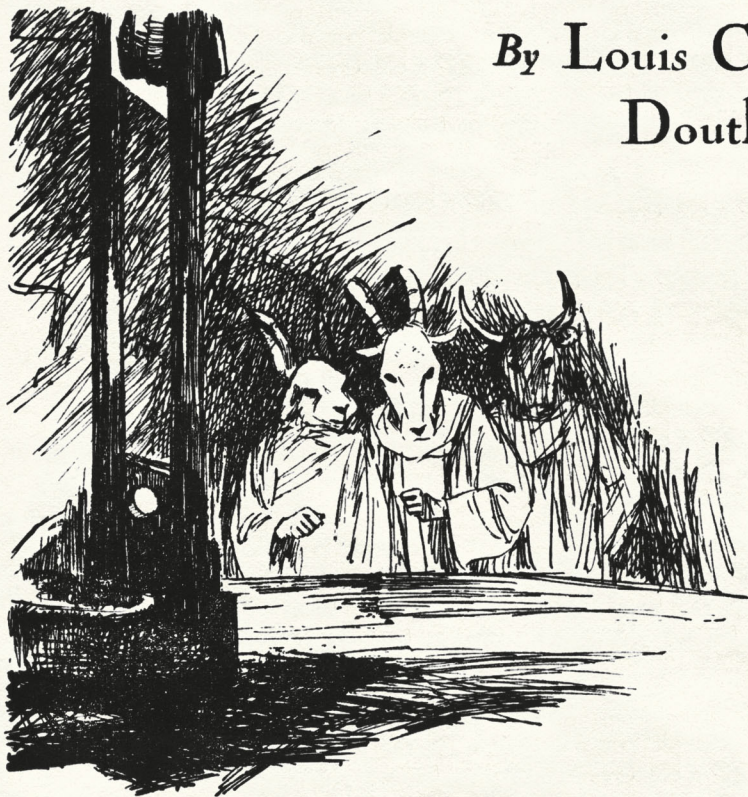
said, and reached for one of the pigeon-holes at his back. "Came about an hour ago."

The purpose of Dan's trip had been to investigate complaints by the United States concerning suspected British rum running in high places. The industry of bootlegging being as sensitive to interference as its minions' trigger fingers, his sojourn in the Middle West had not been without incident. At the moment what he felt he needed was a quiet life.

Thus, having read the message, he groaned, and turned again to the purser.

GUILLOTINE

By Louis Charles
Douthwaite



A
Complete
Novel

Threatened in this Series of Sensational Murders.

"Have you a Miss Conquest on your list?" he asked, and noticed the purser's glance lighten.

"Yes," he said quickly. "Why?"

"It happens to be my job to look after her," said Dan, not too happily, and handed him the cable. The purser read:

My daughter sailing *Senegambia*. Do what you can for her.

CONQUEST.

The purser's face showed his envy.

"You were always one of the lucky blokes," he said. "Miss Conquest's in

her stateroom now. No. 102, D deck. I s'pose I'd better put her at our table."

"Do just that, Bill," Dan said, and hurried below.

It was as he turned from the main alleyway into the short passage at the end of which was the cabin that, very abruptly, he pulled up.

For in that corridor was a man, and in the attitude of that man was something that to Dan seemed to require explanation.

Ordinarily there is nothing more significant in meeting a passenger in one

of these short passages than in meeting a fellow guest in a hotel. Four cabins ran off the short passage, two on each side; and but for one or two small circumstances he would have set the man down for the occupant of one of those.

In the first place, however, instead of facing the main alleyway, as would have been the case had he been leaving his cabin, the man had his back to it, was standing perfectly still, and was gazing steadfastly at the door of the cabin occupied by the girl it had recently become Dan's own mission to look after.

Also, and what was more to the point, as at the sound of his footsteps the man turned round to face him, Dan realized that it was by no means the first time they had met. It was that rat who had tried so hard to get into conversation with him in the Pullman from Chicago to New York.

Given an original flair for the work, there is to all those trained in espionage a certain sixth sense that teaches them to weigh up a stranger. And in the man who confronted him now Dan read that which, hardened as he was, turned him cold.

Yet it is probable that those less schooled would have found the face not unattractive. A delicate face, clear cut and of a delicate distinction, with hair in which was that kink so envied of women and movie heroes, and a pale sword-cut of a mouth whose innate cruelty was camouflaged by a perpetually pleasant smile.

But it was not until one came to look into his eyes that, in all its darkness, the real spirit of the man was disclosed. Veiled eyes they were, and of such deadly coldness that in certain moods they bore the appearance of being, as it were, frozen into his head; eyes that lighted only on the impulse either of desire or cruelty—the eyes of a killer.

The man stepped back so that Dan might pass by, and those eyes followed

his every movement until Dan knocked at the stateroom door.

"Hel-lo!" a voice came from within. And, a connoisseur on the human voice, Dan was conscious of a slightly quickened heartbeat at the sheer loveliness of the tone.

"Miss Conquest?" he said.

There was a distinct pause. Apparently the masculine voice surprised her. Dan heard a footstep and the door swung open.

And the moment his eyes rested on her the heart that had quickened at her voice set off at a racing gallop.

When, afterward, he told himself that she was lovely, he half smiled at the sheer impotency of the word. To those with understanding the most superficial glance at Dinah Conquest made them aware of those hidden depths without which beauty is so inadequate. Behind the violet of her eyes was a great serenity, in the sensitive cameo clarity of her small, straight nose fastidiousness, in the tiny upcurl of her tender mouth the saving grace of humor, and in the lovely curve from ear to chin a splendid firmness.

Her hair, a riot of well-disciplined curls, was of the color of a new penny, and her coloring the wild-rose white and pink that only hair of that particular shade may accompany. Her figure was neither tall nor small, but only perfect.

She both held herself, and looked at him, very straightly. And then, momentarily, he saw her eyes turn to the slight, lounging figure a few yards down the corridor, and those eyes of hers hardened.

Dan pulled himself and his voice together.

"I'm most frightfully sorry to bother you," he said quietly. "But as the purser's just handed me this, and"—he brought significance to bear on this next—"I don't know a soul on the ship, I thought I'd give myself the honor of presenting my credentials as soon as

possible." And he placed the cable in her hand. "My name is Daniel Gravenhurst," he supplemented.

She read the wire and her eyes lighted. "Of course I've heard daddy speak of you," she said. "Often—while I was at home—— But how did he know you were traveling on the *Senegambia*?" she went on to ask.

For a moment Dan hesitated. Near by he was conscious of a pair of very alert ears. He decided to bank upon her understanding.

"We know each other—in business," he said, his voice on the same level as before.

Comprehension came and she held out her hand.

"Then I'm quite sure I shall be fortunate in my chaperon," she said frankly, and, noticing the slightly grubby state of her hand, drew down the corners of her mouth. "But if I'm not to be put in a corner of the ship and there left lamenting for the voyage, I simply must have time to powder my nose."

The stranger was waiting at the end of the passage. Dan would have passed but the man buttonholed him.

"Say, are you well acquainted with that little lady?" he asked, his voice a mixture of aggression and familiarity that, in dealing with Dan, was unwise.

Dan's eyes were cold steel as they bored into the still colder ones that confronted him.

"Why do you ask?" he said, and his tone was quiet.

"I'd like you to know," he said, and still there was that assurance of dominion in his tone, "that I've kind of fallen for that girl. Fallen for her good and plenty. And let me tell you," he added, "that any little girl that George K. Wilkinson falls for is due for a whale of a good time, because G. K. W.'s a swell spender."

In speaking of Dinah Conquest, to the innate inhumanity of his eyes had

come a light that was sheerly avid. It was a light that in Dan Gravenhurst roused the fighting blood with which all decent men approach that which desecrates.

"Listen to me!" he said, and now, as well as in his eyes, there was steel in his voice. "On the train from Chicago, when you tried to force yourself upon me, I tried to make it clear that yours was an acquaintance I preferred to be without. Now, however, that I find you hanging about outside the cabin of the lady who is in my personal charge, it is necessary to make the situation still plainer. On this ship the only place where you're really safe is the place from which"—he gestured toward the door at his back—"the occupant of that cabin is absent."

On the face of the man he read first the dawn of a great surprise, but as he continued that surprise developed to a viciousness before which a weaker man than himself would have shrunk appalled.

"Why? What's wrong with me?" the man said, his mouth a pale, thin slash across his face.

Deliberately Dan considered him.

"You're *all* wrong," he said slowly. "Your suit's wrong. Your tie's wrong. Your shirt's wrong. Your shoes are wrong. That big diamond on your finger's wrong. Your hair's wrong. Your eyes are wrong——" He paused and then said, still more slowly: "And the reason of all this is that you *yourself* are utterly, completely, and fundamentally wrong!"

With all his experience of the world's dark places he would not have believed that any human countenance could have displayed the evil that, with this analysis, shone from the face of the man who confronted him—an evil more wicked by reason of the rigid repression with which it was gripped and held in.

"Is *that* so?" he said slowly, and with the quick confirmation of a preconceived

idea Dan saw his hand steal, as though unconsciously, to below his opposite arm. "Is *that* so?"

"A gunman!" Dan thought exultantly. "An honest-to-badness gunman!" And from that moment his interest in the man grew.

Later that day Dan interviewed Jorlocks, the purser.

"I don't know a thing about him," Jorlocks confessed amiably, "except that his passport's all right an' I don't like his face. Nor, incidentally, do I like your idea that he's carrying a gun, because with your experience probably you're right. Shall I take it from him?"

Dan shook his head.

"Not on your life!" he said. "The last thing I want is to put him wise that I'm on to him."

CHAPTER II.

THE BATTLE ON THE DECK.

THUS for Dan the brief voyage was filled with two main preoccupations, in which he found the necessity for keeping his eye on the gunman something of a nuisance. He needed both eyes for Dinah Conquest.

The more he saw of her the more infinite was her appeal. There was about her a quickness of perception that entered instinctively into the exact spirit of his thoughts. While infused with a rare fastidiousness, her whole outlook on life was frank and free and uncompromising.

"She's one of the finest," Jorlocks pronounced enthusiastically, and from that disillusioned man the tribute was great. "Had any more trouble with that rat from Chicago?" he asked.

For a moment Dan looked dubious.

"No, but I *shall* have," he said shortly.

Jorrock's face hardened.

"If that bimbo's out for trouble," he said grimly, "he can have every bit of it he wants. There's a master-at-arms on this ship who was just built and de-

signed for no other purpose— Is he keeping well away from Miss Conquest?"

Again that look of doubt from Dan.

"He keeps his distance and his eyes open," he said shortly at last. Dan had only spoken what he knew. For only when he was in the smoking room bar did the cold, reptilian eyes of the Chicagoan leave the face of Dinah Conquest—devouring it.

And while there was nothing to which Dan could take exception, the man's whole demeanor was an offense and an abomination, and Dan determined grimly that, given the opportunity, that constant surveillance should be paid for at profiteering price.

The opportunity came two days out from Plymouth. The evening had closed in slightly colder than usual, and Dinah went to her cabin for a wrap. Waiting, Dan was called to the purser's office for a wireless message that had just come through from London, and Jorlocks kept him talking.

Even as he reached the top of the companionway that led to the boat deck where she would be waiting, he was aware of the two struggling figures—and that one of them was Dinah. Silently, grimly, and with a tenacity that went to his heart, she was fighting to free herself from the steel-bound arms of the man of whose face Dan caught a glimpse in the light of a binnacle lamp. Dan's patent-leather shoes were light and the two did not hear him as he leaped across the deck.

The gunman's profile was toward him, his chin outthrust. But Dan was not out for a knock-out; for the first time in his life he was out to *hurt*. With every half inch of leverage he could obtain, his fingers entwined in the man's collar and his leg hooked about that of his adversary, he ground his knuckles into the spine; then, with his knee in the small of his aggressor's back, slowly he forced him backward.

Absolutely at his mercy as the man was, with the accumulation of a week's untellable disgust to spur him, there was murder in the soul of Dan Gravenhurst.

Inch by excruciating inch, the red haze of hate swirling and leaping before Dan's eyes, he forced his man backward, grunting, blaspheming and helpless in his grasp.

It was Dinah who saved him. Released from his grasp, in the grip of a great reaction, she had staggered helplessly against the rail. Now, however, that in some measure she had collected herself, in this new Dan, this flaming, elemental fighting force that had leaped to her defense, while it thrilled her as never before had she been thrilled, there was at that moment something that, if only for his own sake, it was necessary to check.

"Stop!" she cried. "Oh, stop! Please! You'll kill him!"

Reluctantly Dan dropped his knee but, with fingers entwined still in the gunman's collar, wrenched him to the upright.

Then, releasing his clasp as the man swayed and mouthed before him, with every ounce of accumulated strength and weight, with every last fraction of his loathing to inspire the blow, Dan struck. The punch—the poised, deliberate punch of the trained boxer—landed on the exact angle of the outthrust jaw.

If he had been felled expertly by a pole ax, the gunman could not have fallen more heavily or with less signs of life.

For a moment Dinah stood, white faced and panting, confronting Dan. Then, with a little strangled cry, she was in his arms, the gunman forgotten, all forgotten but their joy in each other. So, for a long moment, they remained.

They were disturbed by a movement behind them. Dan turned—and he was just in time. With a resilience beyond any in his experience, already the gunman had recovered from the knock-out.

His face a livid mask of rage and hate, the incredibly thin mouth just a crease across his face. Already his arm was sneaking to his left armpit. And when he saw that Dan's eyes were upon him the slinking progress of those fingers speeded to the rapidity of a snake's tongue.

But for the constraint of the gunman's position, hampering the ready withdrawal of the weapon, Dan would have been a very dead man. Providentially, for an infinitesimal moment the trigger guard of the weapon caught in some fold of his clothing. It was in that split second's delay that Dan's foot caught him fairly and squarely on the elbow. His whole forearm one hot wave of flame and temporarily paralyzed, the automatic clattered from the man's nerveless grasp to the deck.

Stooping, Dan retrieved it; stood over the writhing, prostrate, blaspheming figure.

"Now get up and off this deck!" said Dan from between set teeth, for with the thought of the unspeakable insult offered to his lady red hate descended like a curtain before his eyes. "And if for the rest of the voyage you stir from your cabin I'll have the master-at-arms put you in irons. And I don't mean maybe, either—because what I'm going to say to the captain will be short and full of meat. And don't bother to pack your baggage, either—because you won't land at Plymouth."

Slowly, with a cold deliberation that in itself was terrible, the man gathered himself together, pulled himself to the upright. In his uncertain progress, not for a second did his eyes relax the concentrated venom of their gaze. And with the awful primeval passion on his face was a strange illumination, as of the beginning of understanding.

Not until he had made laborious progress to the companionway did he speak. There, with his hand on the rail, he slowly turned, and in the calculated

deliberation of his words was a purpose relentless, implacable, and of an incredible malignancy, that was like a cold wind across the spirit of Dinah Conquest.

"Listen!" he said slowly, and the low, grating voice came from somewhere deep down in his throat. "Listen! You don't know who you're up against. That's your trouble. You don't *know*." He paused and yet contrived to make the hiatus more sheerly sinister even than the threat it preceded. "You said just now you don't mean 'maybe.' Well, when I say I'm going to get you—to get you, d'you understand?—I don't mean maybe, either."

Within half an hour George K. Wilkinson was locked in his cabin, with a steward as sentry at the door.

It was unfortunate, however, that when the *Senegambia* reached Plymouth it was necessary to stand off in the Sound until the following morning's tide. For in the interval between dropping anchor and disembarkation, in which a farewell dance added to the universal confusion of packing, George K. Wilkinson's cabin door opened from within.

In the early hours a trio of revelers, returning to the cabin next door, discovered the steward, a crumpled heap in the passageway. It was not until then that the slight splash which, six hours previously, had been reported by the watch, came to be connected with the fact that an exhaustive search of the ship betrayed no sign of the man who was known on the passenger list—and in no other place—as "George K. Wilkinson" of Chicago.

When, twelve hours later, the steward was led to the cabin, he reported that one suit of clothes, a not inconsiderable quantity of ornate jewelry, and the bulging wallet of the man, had gone also.

"What's this?" Jorrock said shortly, and took up the note that, with the beautifully fashioned skeleton key to act as

letter-weight, lay on the dressing table. It read:

Sorry I can't stay, but that whelp Gravenhurst and the girl Dinah Conquest are going to be still sorrier. So are some others as well, but them most of all.

"LARRY THE MARINE."

"And who in the world," asked the purser, turning a rather scared face on Dan, "is Larry the Marine?"

As Dan, after reading the message, placed it carefully in his pocketbook, he was wearing his best poker face—with him a sure sign of mental disturbance.

"Larry the Marine," he said, "is the cruelest and most ruthless boss gangster that ever was permitted to escape from the city of Chicago." He was silent for a moment; then added slowly: "And if I'd known two nights ago what that note tells me, he'd have been a very dead one as well."

Startled, Jorrock said sharply:

"How's that?"

"Because," Dan said slowly, "of the only two men living I'm afraid of, that ex-marine—whose real name, incidentally, is Antonio Boroni—is one." For a moment, as if in confirmation of his words, came a passing glance of unease. "And in his case, it's not only fear for myself," he added quietly.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMMITTEE OF TEN.

IN every British city are districts that, like the powerful families who at one time occupied them, have fallen upon evil times.

Large and affluent houses that once were the seats of the mighty, now ravished and bedraggled, have become transformed to evil warrens in which swarm the scourgings of the streets and the flotsam of the oceans.

There exists no better cover for those who seek concealment than these reeking habitats.

In what is known as Pansy Street,

Notting Dale, are many such houses and concealments, and of these the row of ten double-fronted, four-story mansions known as Cutler's Row are at once the least conspicuous and the most deplorable.

From the police angle Cutler's Row was a collection merely of thieves' kitchens into which, once their quarry had made cover, the game was lost. They knew that the system of intercommunication between room and room, floor and floor, and house and house, was such that not only would search be useless, but humiliating also.

There was, however, one element in connection with Cutler's Row of which even the police were ignorant. They did not know that in the fifth house, cut off strangely from the two lower floors by a complete and formidable ceiling and an entire absence of stairs, was a suite that in furnishing and appointments might have been that of a Fifth Avenue millionaire.

There were no softer or thicker carpets in London than those covering the hardwood floors of No. 5; no art gallery to display more exquisite prints than those upon the richly paneled walls. Not South Kensington itself had more unique specimens of old English furniture; no looms produced a more lovely velvet than those obscuring curtains over the unwashed windows.

Yet, strangely but palpably, superimposed upon all that perfection was an air of disquietude—an air of expectancy, of acute watchfulness, of tension. And with that apprehension went, too, something brooding and furtive, as if within those ornate walls had transpired events unfitted for witness by the outer world; something hidden and secret and sinister.

And, though they had been kept rigorously swept and garnished, until tonight, for six long years those chambers had remained unused and unoccupied.

On a night of wind and rain, however, about the Jacobean table in the center of the room that was in such strange contrast to the reek and garbage of the foul thoroughfare below, was seated an assembly as incongruous as the room itself.

A strange gathering this, and a grotesque one. Except of their leader, none had knowledge of his neighbor, his name or person or where he lived. For from neck to feet, above the ordinary street clothes of each was draped a long, gray cloak, the voluminous folds of which gave no idea of build or figure. Entirely concealing the face of each was a papier-mâché mask. Each mask was the representation of some bird or beast of prey, and of a terrible fidelity to the original.

There were two present, however, one at either end of the table, whose knowledge of his fellows was exact and complete.

The one who was at the head of the table was in stature almost a dwarf. Because of the publicity that had come to him, disguise would be useless. Therefore he was the only one without cloak or mask—a circumstance that, in this abnormal assembly, seemed by contrast to render his supremacy more absolute. For despite his frailty and lack of height there was in the pale, lined face of the man, the straight, cold mouth, and the burning, frantic eyes, a strength and power that made his dominion absolute and unquestioned. And though to an extent he treated them as reasoning and responsible beings, yet it was as servants, subject wholly to his will.

The figure at the foot of the table, his huge head incased in the mask of a tiger from which his own yellow eyes glared balefully, had about his enormous bulk a certain steam-roller relentlessness that had rendered him the ideal lieutenant. And while it was evident that to an extent he still was bound to the chariot wheels of the meager figure who

faced him, his standing was of a different order to those others. His obedience was not so blind.

The tiny figure who led the meeting spoke. The voice, quiet, but rather high pitched, had in it a restraining force that was as compelling as all that other dominance he had transmitted. It was the voice of a leader.

"The first word I have to say to you, my committee of ten," he said, "is 'welcome.' I need hardly say that this is a reunion to which for nearly six years I have looked forward with feelings of the keenest anticipation—anticipation, happily, that the loyalty of my deputy and your own devotion have enabled me to realize."

A low murmur came from those about the table. In spite of the gracious words, there hung about the gathering an atmosphere of tension—or, it might have been, of fear.

When that small man spoke again his voice had changed. Where, previously, it had been charged with a certain geniality, now it vibrated with a hate so inborn, so surging and elemental that, as though to place a greater distance between themselves and an emotion of such primeval savagery, more than one of those bizarre figures shrank more deeply into his chair.

"You, who meet me here," he said, "know what has been my experience. You know, too, that other and immeasurably greater blow that, simultaneously, descended with such crashing force, such devastation, such annihilation, upon that other person beside whom I, who stand before you to-night, am as nothing."

Like the rustle of dead leaves was the uneasy stirring of his audience. But though his words descended upon them, chilling them, in thought and feeling they were at one with their leader. His injury was their injury, his reaction to that injury—their own.

"Also," the high-pitched, vibrant voice continued, "it is a fact not to be over-

looked, that with the reassembling of this council, the activities of the police will become more manifest. When the day comes when I should report and fail to do so, it will be their purpose to discover and, when found, to destroy me—and us."

He paused to allow his words to sink into the minds of his audience. Suddenly, with a gesture almost epileptic in fury, he brought his white clenched hand in elemental savagery to the table.

"For nearly six years we have waited, my friends," he continued, and now his voice, low and clear and cold, had in it the quality of hardened steel. "In that period, except that in secret our organization has held together, we have been content to do nothing—*waiting*. Now, with this reunion, the hour has struck. And with the striking of that hour, we, too, must strike. Apart from the fact that attack will be our best defense, there is the question of"—and now his voice sunk to a hoarse, tense whisper—"revenge!"

His words trailed off on a note of inquiry as if awaiting their reaction. It was the gross figure at the foot of the table who broke into the ensuing silence. His yellow eyes behind the tiger mask had never once strayed from those of his leader.

"It depends on what form the revenge is to take," he said. "If accompanied by profit, and plenty of it, then I'm all for getting our own back. But to go gunning after the police just for the 'life-for-a-life' idea isn't my notion of fun and frolic. I don't mind putting my head into a den of forest-bred lions if there is a sporting chance of getting away with their dinner and selling their hides. But what I won't do is open the door just for the pleasure of pulling their tails!"

For a moment there was silence, tense, vibrating, in which those others were aware of conflict, the clash of two iron wills. After his six years of leadership

it seemed the gross man was reluctant to pass his scepter into other hands.

But to such a duel there could be but one end. While the gross man's will was commensurate with his body, that of the dwarf was tempered as his own spirit. His thin, æsthetic face, frozen by his own icy dominance, his small, keen eyes, relentless, irresistible, bored into the yellowed tiger eyes of the other as a drill into soft metal. And when, like a flag struck down, the gross man's eyes fell before his own, the voice of the other rang almost unearthly with the power that was his inspiration.

"I asked for suggestions," he said, "to receive only criticism—in this assembly the one forbidden thing. For such disobedience remains but the one remedy." And it was to be observed that to not one of those about him did he even glance for acquiescence to the ultimatum.

With something like a shriek the huge bulk of the man opposite shot upright from his chair. For an instant, his enormous hands supporting him by the table edge, he swayed as does one suddenly stricken. From the aperture in the tiger mask designed to give his lips free play, came little strangled sounds, gasping and incoherent. The yellowed eyes shone redly with the complete possession of his terror.

"But—but——" he managed to gasp at last—and stopped, his eyes riveted on the hand of the leader that had pressed one of a row of mother-of-pearl buttons set into the table.

Before, desperately as he struggled for speech, any other sound could issue from the mask, a concealed door beside the wide fireplace swung open. There filed into the room a procession of four that, in spite of their grotesquerie, seemed curiously at one with the brooding malignancy of the room.

Of the four figures, not one of whom was less than six feet three in height, and of a depth of shoulder that not even the voluminous folds of the dead

gray gowns they wore could diminish, three carried weapons, and the fourth a coil of rope. In procession they entered and like soldiers they lined up beside their leader, and with calmness awaited his orders.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KILLER.

RIGID arm outflung, the small man indicated the huge bulk of his vis-à-vis, who now, in a state of semicollapse, was half kneeling, half lying across the end of the table. For if his rebellion had been an attempt to discover how far down the past black years that terrible figure's leadership had been maintained, of a surety he had received his answer.

Wildly, imploringly, his stricken eyes turned from one to the other of those eight about the table. But, save by a hasty withdrawal from his glance, by neither sign nor token did one of them respond.

Remained then for him but one final chance—and that a slight one—to throw himself abjectly upon the mercy of the victor. If that plea failed—— In the past he had seen too many launched upon their last awful voyage from that room to nurse illusions concerning the result of his own defeat.

"I—I—ask your pardon," he said from between dry, rigid lips. "I—I—should have known. But I meant no harm, no rebellion——"

The thin lips of the other curved to a bitter, cynical smile; the fine eyebrows contracted. Nor, when the reply came, was it inspired by any quality of mercy.

Then those bitter lips drew down in a sneer more bitter still, that of an easy triumph. He made a gesture of dismissal to the gray-gowned figures drawn up at his side.

Except that his voice was more contemptuous, he spoke as a headmaster speaks to an urchin of the junior school.

"Very well," he said. "It is infre-

quent for me to overlook insubordination, but this is our first meeting for so long that perhaps my methods have had time to become forgotten. It would be as well to remember that, in no circumstances, do I give a second chance. Resume your seat, please."

Like some obese dog, cowed and discredited, the man in the tiger mask obeyed. But as he did so the look in his eyes was fitting to that mask.

There was complete detachment in the leader's manner as, with a cold glance at his victim, he continued:

"But for this insubordination I should already have explained, as I propose now to explain, how it is not my intention that—'reprisals,' perhaps, is a less melodramatic word than the one generally employed—shall be undertaken by any one of this organization. All who are qualified by the essentials of nerve, skill and, above all, an infinite capacity for silence, are too well known to the personnel of Scotland Yard to be detailed for the work." He paused, and when he spoke again there was an inflection in his voice that was sheerly deadly.

"I have, then, found it necessary to enlist a recruit," he announced, and, as he pressed the second of the row of buttons, his lips were ironical. "He is, I am persuaded, most adequately qualified for the task," he added significantly.

A door opened at the side of the room opposite that through which had filed the four who had been so grimly ready to execute his will upon the now completely subservient tiger. Another of those gray-cowled figures appeared, this time ushering before him a slim, lithe and untellably sinister figure—one whose face was delicately cut and, with the hair surmounting it wavy and sleekly brushed, not without a certain cheap distinction; a man cold and watchful, with veiled, unlighted eyes, as if frozen into his head.

The face of a killer.

Wary as a lynx—and as suspicious—he glided rather than walked across the floor until he faced that small, terrible figure at the table head.

As was his custom before directly addressing one whom he had chosen to come beneath his sway, the man they knew as "The Leader" directed upon the newcomer the full force of his gaze, boring into him, searching the hidden depths of the soul of the man, assimilating him, establishing his own malign supremacy.

And though, after the first inconsiderable period, as if recognizing—and meeting—challenge, the veiled eyes of the newcomer lighted with the raw fires of crude antagonism, it was only a moment before these were quenched by the ice of the other's unmoving and immovable stare. And with their subjection the eyes dropped.

A sigh—suppressed but perceptible, as if conscious that his victory had not been so cheaply won as was his custom—came from the thin lips of The Leader.

"Good!" he said. "I have had you brought here so that I may present you personally to the members of this council. Listen carefully! To-morrow you will have your instructions together with the—er—names, photographs, and personal habits of your—clients."

The other's eyes were raised now, veiled but stormy.

"That'll be all right for me," he said shortly.

"Very well, then." The Leader's voice was businesslike and practical. "From time to time information will come into our hands which it may be necessary to pass on." He reached for a small specimen glass on the table in front of him; in it was a cream rosebud backed by two gardenias. "Look carefully at this," he instructed; and his veiled eyes resting upon the blossom, the gunman nodded.

"Sure," he said curtly.

Now The Leader's tone was slow and measured.

"If you are accosted in the street by a man—or woman—wearing a boutonnière similar to this, you will listen carefully to, and carry out, their instructions," he said. "You understand?"

Because The Leader's thin voice was so peremptory and the gunman more accustomed to give orders than receive them, for a moment the battle of wills, none the less deadly for its silence, was rejoined. But this time The Leader's victory came more quickly and more decisively.

"I get you, boss," the stranger said, but on his face were the very dregs of evil.

"Then get on with it," the terrible little man said almost contemptuously; and, accompanied by his guide, the gunman glided through the door.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WITHOUT EAR LOBES.

ARRIVING from the boat train at Waterloo, Dan found that Sir Redvers Conquest had stolen an hour from his recently undertaken duties as chief commissioner of Scotland Yard to meet and greet his idolized only child. He shook the younger man's hand warmly.

"Thank you for looking after my daughter," he said, his eyes feasting on her radiance. "After you've reported at the F. O. to-morrow you'd better come and dine with us in Grosvenor Street."

"Nothing," Dan said with enthusiasm, "I'd like better." He hesitated; then, because of the unpleasantness of the knowledge that Larry the Marine was at large in the same country that held Dinah, "As a matter of fact, there's something I'd like to say to you right now, sir, if you could spare me half an hour," he added.

The commissioner gave him a keen, quick glance.

"We'll talk it over in my office," he said promptly; and Dan turned his baggage over to his own admirable valet, Keech, a gnarled and battered man with a grizzled head, barrel chest, battleship-bow jaw, and uncommonly steady, gray eyes.

In the large and efficient office at Scotland Yard Dan told his story, displaying the note the gunman had left in his cabin. And at the suggestion of harm to Dinah the old soldier's healthy face turned a shade less ruddy.

"You regard this seriously?" he demanded, tapping the note with a forefinger that had grown suddenly tremulous.

Dan's face was grave.

"You've heard of Lecenaire, sir?" he said, and the general's face turned definitely paler. For Lecenaire, one of the coolest and most deliberate mass murderers in history, was guillotined in Paris in 1836.

"The man who said, 'I kill a man as I drink a glass of wine'?" he said fearfully.

"Substitute 'bootleg whisky' for 'wine,' and you have Larry the Marine," Dan said quietly. "And Miss Conquest hit him on his most vulnerable point—and the most dangerous point of all—his vanity."

The elder's man's mouth displayed the spirit that in France had earned his reputation as the dourest fighter of forlorn hopes in the British army.

"Then he's got to be brought in," he said briskly, his trepidation gone under the stress of action. "Give me his exact description, and in the meanwhile I'll cable Chicago for his photograph."

Dan drew a rough sketch of their quarry.

"Not that it'll be a whole lot of use, sir," he said as he handed it over. "From what I've heard in America, that chap can disguise himself so that his own mother would turn him away from her doorstep."

"He'll need all his talent," the commissioner said grimly.

He used the house telephone, and presently Malpas, the chief constable, entered.

"Send out the 'all stations' call," the commissioner instructed when he had outlined the facts, "and circulate the description. Detail a search squad. We'll have that man if we have to put England through a fine-tooth comb."

Dan's flat was in Hill Street, and on his way to the Foreign Office the following morning, he directed his chauffeur to drive round by Park Lane.

Outside the new and ornate Royal Plaza Hotel, the car was delayed a moment by the traffic. It was just as his chauffeur had succeeded in extricating them from the press that Dan noticed a man who forced his way through the doors at the top of the steps to the visitors' entrance. Awaiting him there, laden with an assortment of new-looking trunks and suit cases, was a big, expensive car.

For a moment Dan regarded the resplendent, middle-aged figure idly enough. Then, astonishingly, with trembling eagerness he beat frenziedly upon the window of his own car. Some small peculiarity in the ornate man's gait, a certain gliding motion that did not fit in with the pompous portly figure, had drawn his eyes insistently to the man's ears—the one human feature impossible to disguise. And he saw at once that they were entirely without lobes—a badge of inherent criminality that had been worn by Larry the Marine.

Parker, Dan's chauffeur, jammed on the brakes. The car skidded; stopped. Parker put an alert ear to the speaking tube.

Unfortunately, in the short, semicircular drive of the Royal Plaza, the gunman's car faced the entrance which Dan's had passed, and Dan did not know if his quarry would continue straight

on—in which case to follow it would be necessary for Parker to turn—or, having reached Park Lane, it would swing round in the other direction, and so pass him.

The only thing was to wait. Already the other car was moving, and Parker was poised for instant action.

"Turn!" Dan shouted as, moving from the drive into the street, the big car continued its progress in the direction of Piccadilly.

As this point the traffic was such as to render the maneuver a matter both of dexterity and time. So, instead of direct obedience, Parker carried on down the street until he reached the further drive entrance to the plaza, into which he turned and followed the drive until he emerged at the other gate. But though by this means he must have saved a good three or four minutes, by this time the other car was indistinguishable in the mass of traffic at Hyde Park corner.

"It's no use, Parker," Dan said resignedly through the tube. "Pull up here anyway. I'm making a call at the hotel."

His card gained him an immediate interview with the manager, who summoned the reception clerk.

"The gentleman registered last night, sir," that suave official told Dan. "A Mr. Walter G. Prebble from Philadelphia. Gave up his room only a few minutes ago. Left no address where letters could be forwarded. I believe the car was from the Mayfair Hire Company."

"I'll see his room," Dan said; and the manager went with him.

However, although comprehensive, the search was useless—not a scrap of paper, not a finger print. However effective his disguise, Larry the Marine was not the one to provide the scent for his own killing. There was a telephone in the room and Dan used it.

Another blank. "We prefer to give

no information over the telephone," the Mayfair Hire people told him.

"I'll come down and see you," Dan said. He drove there—only again to draw blank.

"Until the driver reports I have no information," the manager told him. "The car was engaged 'on time,' instructions to be given to the driver as to the route taken."

Inwardly cursing the man for wasting valuable time, Dan was on the point of leaving, when the driver himself burst in—cursing even more heatedly but less silently than Dan himself.

"Bilked, sir!" he said disgustedly. "An old 'and at the game like me—an' bilked like a blinkin' novice!"

The first call had been to Victoria. There, not only had the driver helped the porter to unload the luggage, but he actually had paid the Left Luggage Office fee.

His fare instructed him, then, to drive to a firm of publishers in Warwick Lane, Ludgate Hill. Arrived there he opened the door for his fare to descend—and the car was empty. Immediately he dashed back to Victoria, but the luggage had been claimed within a few minutes of its deposit.

"Must've slipped out in the traffic jam at the corner of the station yard and Buck'n'am Palace Road," he pronounced gloomily, "an' then just streaked back for 'is gear."

On his way to the Foreign Office Dan called at Scotland Yard. The commissioner's face lighted at the news.

"That's something to go on, anyway," he said. "The obvious thing now is to track the taxi that took the luggage for the second time. It'll be stuff he bought to replace what he left on the ship."

He spoke into the telephone and a few minutes later there entered a man to whom Dan took an immediate liking. A lank man this, with rough-hewn features and lazy eyes.

"Superintendent Parrot," the commis-

sioner introduced him. "Under the chief constable, in full charge of the case."

"I'll slip down to Victoria myself," the superintendent promised when he had assimilated the particulars. "If you like to call in a little later, Mr. Gravenhurst, I'll tell you what's happened."

So, following his interview with Sir Julius Featherstonhaugh, his immediate chief at the Foreign Office, Dan looked into Parrot's office.

"That gangster's as artful as a whole barrowload of correspondence-school monkeys," the lank man said dispassionately. "He didn't use a taxi; there was a private car waitin' for him." He paused, and then added reflectively: "With his talent for make-up that bird's goin' to take a bit of trackin'," and paused again. "The time to get him'll be when he starts shootin' at you!"

Dan laughed.

"Thanks very much," he said, and left.

At a telephone booth he called Dinah.

"I s'pose you realize I'm dining with you to-night," he said after they'd chatted a little while.

"I'd try to bear up if you came to tea as well," she told him. "Particularly as I shall be quite alone."

"That won't make *me* mad!" Dan exclaimed exultantly.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

BUT when, at half past four, he was shown into Dinah's sitting room, it was to discover that she had been too optimistic. The visitor, portly and middle aged, with tinted glasses and a shock of silver hair, had one leg stretched out stiffly in front of him, and by his side a stout ebony cane. The man glanced up as Dan came in, and it seemed to Dan that he stiffened instantaneously—and that there had come to that portly figure a sudden watchfulness.

Dinah introduced him as Mr. Silsoe. "With a letter of introduction from friends of the friend I've been staying with in Washington," she explained.

"Forgive my not rising, Mr. Gravenhurst," Silsoe said courteously, indicating his rigid leg. "A legacy of the war," he added.

But with a shock that set his heart pounding, Dan was not looking at the visitor's leg, but at a feature that from all else in that beautiful room—the cozy appointments, the glowing fire, even from the vivid beauty of Dinah herself—leaped starkly prominent as a house on a bare hill. Surely there could not be two men with just those lobeless, red-dened ears!

Not by glance or movement did he betray his suspicions. If these were correct, the situation needed every last ounce of ingenuity to surmount. He had to deal with one without heart or conscience, as vicious as a snapping dog, one to whom human life was but an inconsidered pawn in the game of his own desires.

And that the man was infatuated to the last degree of desperation with Dinah Conquest became each moment more manifest. It was this that finally brought home to Dan the truth of his suspicions. For the soft Virginia drawl the stranger assumed could not drown the crudity of his voice. It was not able to suppress the hard gangster accent for which—with the knowledge that a strange dialect is easier to assume than to retain—Dan had been waiting. And that the man should have walked thus deliberately into the lion's den was proof both of his contempt of his adversaries and the devouring strength of his infatuation for Dinah.

It was, indeed, Dan's steadily mounting anger at this attitude that at last brought a crisis. The sight and sound of this little gangster of the sewers paying open court to his, Dan's, own lady, seeking, as it were, to bring her to

his own level, kindled in Dan a white-hot rage which not all his training could conceal.

His replies to the remarks that from time to time the other directed toward himself became shorter and more curt. And then with a shock he realized that the visitor had become definitely suspicious, more alert even than at first. Each was aware of the extremity of tension, watching the other lynx eyed, on a hair trigger of anticipation for the next move.

It was then that Dan determined that, until this affair should be finally settled, neither by night nor day would he be without his gun. In the meanwhile, of course, while he himself was unarmed, unquestionably his adversary would be "heeled." He didn't worry particularly about himself—after all, running into danger was only part of his job. But he wasn't going to have bullets flying about the room with Dinah there.

Surreptitiously he glanced at her. And, as for that fleeting moment their eyes met, his heart went out in tribute to her. In a situation that called for a coolness and resource that to the last degree must have taxed not only her courage, but her capacity for dissimulation, she was carrying herself with true gallantry.

She knew! Her eyes told him so. And not only did she know, but was content to wait for his first move—indeinitely if need be!

With this knowledge came an idea. He knew he could bank on her instantaneous understanding.

He rose leisurely to his feet.

"I wonder, Miss Conquest," he said quietly, "if you'd allow me to use your desk for a moment? Like a fool I've forgotten a letter that simply must catch to-night's post."

Dinah smiled.

"Of course," she said. "And as soon as it's written I'll give it to Roberts to post straight away."

Dan went over to the little Sheraton writing desk that, fronted by a magnificent Bokhara rug, stood by the window. Taking up pen and paper, he thought for a moment, and then wrote:

DEAR ROBERTS: Telephone immediately to Scotland Yard. Mention my name and ask for Superintendent Parrot. If he is not there, ask for his deputy. Tell him Larry the Marine is here with Miss Conquest and myself, and that we require immediate—

As if struck by paralysis his pen remained poised above the paper. From behind had come a little strangled gasp, and against his neck was pressed something cold and hard and circular.

"Guess I'll give that handwritin' the once-over," a hard voice remarked in his ear. "Sit still, mister—as still as in two or three minutes you'll stay for keeps."

A hand came over his shoulder and gathered up the letter.

There was a silence.

The gunman's voice said:

"A pretty tricky move, that, if you'd got away with it. The trouble is, though, that that's the kind of stunt that don't go with me, see? And now, mister, you'll just shoot those hands straight above your coco, an' turn around so I can see your face."

Realizing that never had he been nearer death than at that moment, Dan had no option but to obey. Nor did he discover anything reassuring in the fact that to the automatic held so firmly in the gunman's over-manicured hand, was fixed a silencer.

Though not for an instant did Dan take his eyes from the tinted glasses of the gunman, he was conscious that Dinah, obviously overwhelmed by this devastating rush of events and the prolonged strain of her ordeal, had collapsed inertly in her chair. It was too much to expect that she should not have given under such a strain.

Slowly, keeping the pistol muzzle pointing undeviatingly at Dan's heart, yet with an alert eye to insure immunity

of attack even from Dinah, the gunman moved step by step sidewise toward the door, to reach a point where the girl was in the direct line of fire.

"Move around to the end of that there bureau, mister," he instructed harshly. As Dan obeyed, the gunman, to clear the intervening space, thrust aside Dinah's chair. With a strangled sob of sheer terror, she fell to the floor, face forward.

"You——" Dan yelled, the red haze of hate swirling before his eyes. He gathered himself for the spring.

Plup! The report was no louder than the easy discharge of a cork from a bottle. Dan felt the wind of the bullet lift the hair from above his ears before it buried itself in the wall at his back.

"That," the gunman said from between set teeth, "is just a demonstration—not a miss on the target. Because at twenty yards I can split a playin' card in two pieces—a playin' card held sidewise. A demonstration," he added, "just to teach you to stay put. Because I don't aim to bump you off until you an' me've had a heart-to-heart talk that'll last just about two or three minutes. After that——"

His gesture with the automatic was significant.

The gunman backed to the door, felt for the key, found it, and turned it in the lock.

"I don't aim to be interrupted," he remarked, and cast a lightning glance at Dinah, who was still moaning and prostrate on the rug. He missed the look that passed between her and his own prospective victim.

"It's a pity about you, miss," he said, his harsh tone only slightly softened. "I'll tell you just how sorry I am to upset you—later," he added grimly.

Dinah, shoulders heaving, her whole slim body convulsed, wailed pitifully:

"Oh, I shall die! I shall die!"

With a chuckle the gunman tapped the muzzle of his pistol.

"It's not you who should worry about dyin'," he said, too intent upon his victim to observe how tightly Dinah's hands were closed about the end of the rug.

"Now, mister——" he began—and with a yell of savagery, sprawled headlong to the floor. For the instant both his feet were on the mat, with a jerk that drained her last ounce of strength, Dinah had pulled it from under him.

CHAPTER VII.

ESCAPE.

IT was, indeed, the maximum of unexpectedness with which the movement was executed that to an extent defeated its purpose. Following that warning glance from Dinah, with a throb of admiration and gratitude, Dan had been expecting something but had not anticipated precisely what. Thus, when it came, the demonstration was as unexpected to himself as to his aggressor—who in falling lurched with such force against Dan that he, too, lost his balance, and in falling struck his head with sickening force against the side of the bureau.

The gunman, too, came down heavily. In the instant before she sprang to her feet Dinah was conscious of the impact of his head on the floor, conscious, too, that the automatic had slid several feet across the polished oaken boards.

With one bound she retrieved it. With a movement equally rapid she was at the door and had opened it.

"Help!" she cried desperately. "Roberts! Charles! Where are you? Come quickly!"

With relief unutterable she heard the deep and concerned voice of the butler from the hall, the quick, heavy tread of feet.

Pistol in hand, she turned at the sound of other and less friendly feet. His face a mask of livid animal rage, the gunman had scrambled up. With the cautious dancing step of a polished boxer

advancing upon a harder-hitting but less-expert opponent, he was coming toward her. He wanted that pistol and intended having it.

"Stand back!" she called, and for a moment he hesitated. Then, with a distorted grin, he came on again.

"You don't dare use it, anyway," he jeered, and so forced her hand.

Blindly, instinctively, she, who never before had used a pistol, pressed the trigger. Loosely and inexpertly as it was held, she felt the weapon leap in her clasp. Like all shots fired by novices the bullet went high—but sufficiently close to the gunman's head to bring him to a sharp and sudden halt.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the rush of feet in the corridor outside, he pulled himself together. But, anticipating his intention, before he could launch himself Dinah fired again—and this time held the pistol more firmly.

As if from the slash of a sword blade she saw the blood rush to the surface of the bullet streak across the narrow white face—saw him stagger back,

The feet outside momentarily came to a sudden halt. Then Roberts, his wide, white face dripping with sweat, rushed in. He blanched still further at the sight which met his eyes.

"Wot is it, miss?" he gulped. Then, portly but dead game, he made an advance upon the gunman—a movement the razor-brained crook turned to his own advantage.

Keeping that substantial body between himself and the line of fire, he scurried desperately for the window; with a crash hurled himself through glass and lightly built frame. The drop to the garden below was but a matter of feet and he landed unhurt.

Dodging round the globular Roberts, who was staring wide mouthed at the gunman's quick gathering of himself together, Dinah dashed for the window. Running down one side of a narrow path that led to the wall at the end of

the garden, was a line of shrubs. Of this cover, crouching as he advanced, the gunman was taking every advantage. The only real chance Dinah had of a shot was when he swarmed up the wall. But to shoot when directly threatened is one thing; to kill a retreating man, another. And in the heart of crowded London, surrounded by other houses, one does not loose pistol shots promiscuously.

She turned back then to administer first aid to Dan, who was already on the verge of consciousness. Robert waddled off for brandy, and a few moments later the recently unconscious man was seated in a chair by the fire.

"That's about as near a squeak as I care for," he said. "Incidentally, I suppose you realize you saved my life? I want to say, 'Thank you,' thankfully for that." He looked at her steadily, and saw the color flood into her face. "It belongs to you more than ever now," he added, and his arms went about her.

"I think I shall be able to cope with it," she said from somewhere in the region of his upper waistcoat button.

Later Dan telephoned Scotland Yard.

"I'll come and visit the scene of the crime," Parrot said, and arrived within the hour.

"That feller's got to go through the hoop," he said when he had heard the story. "I don't know a thing about tariff reform for industry, but I'm all for protection against foreign gunmen—it'd disorganize the whole trade of crime. Takin' 'em by and large, the last thing any decent British crook has any use for is a gun. All he wants is a soft-hearted fence an' a soft crib, a quiet life an' plenty of beer. He doesn't even hate the police. We're more his friends than his enemies; crime's just a sort of game with us. If he wins he goes to the dog racin', an' if he loses he goes 'over the Alps'! More'n once I've known an officer get up a subscription to keep goin' the home of the very man he's got 'sent

down.' That's why, except on special occasions—an' even then nine times out of ten it's against some foreign outfit or other—the police don't carry guns, either. There's none bad enough to shoot; an' if the Yard knows it there's not going to be, either." He turned directly to Dan. "Nevertheless, Mr. Gravenhurst, until we've got that yeggman safely behind the bars, I'd watch my step if I were you," he said seriously. "Seems like he's got some sort of grudge against you."

"Not half the grudge I've got against him," Dan returned grimly.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO MURDERS.

THERE was a report Parrot had to make, and it was eleven o'clock before he was ready to leave his office. It was as he was putting on his coat to do so that the telephone rang.

"In Charnwood Street, eh?" he said after listening for a moment. "I'll come right away. "And a fast car carried himself, Williamson of Finger Prints, and Doctor Bennet the divisional surgeon, to the scene of the crime.

A constable was keeping the crowd back from the entrance of a mid-Victorian house.

Another officer was guarding the door that stood at the top of a flight of stairs. His face, which looked as if usually of fresh color, was rather pale.

"In here, sir," he said, and stood aside for them to pass into the flat. "Man who's lodged with her for two or three years, so Mrs. Pheelan, the landlady, tells me. She's busy with hysterics."

The upper part of the body sprawled over the table, his knees on the gaudy carpet, was a man, a thin, lined man, lantern jawed, with horribly staring, wide-open eyes. In the narrow forehead was a jagged hole from which blood flowed freely on the book outspread before him.

It did not need the divisional surgeon to tell Parrot that the man was dead.

"Shot!" that official pronounced, and indicated a smaller and cleaner wound at the back of the head.

Parrot nodded.

"Sure," he said, and pointed to the window that overlooked a small, untidy yard at the end of which was a high brick wall. In the lower pane the window glass was starred by a bullet hole; the upper one smashed by something small but heavy.

"See how the bullet's traveled upward?" Parrot said. "His attention must have been attracted by somethin' outside, on the top of the wall probably, an' he turned his head to see what it was. He knew soon enough, poor feller!"

"So it's no good looking for finger prints," said Williamson.

But Parrot did not reply. He wasn't even listening. Instead he was staring fixedly into the rigid features of the murdered man.

"Do you know who that *is*?" he said in a strained voice. "D'ye recognize him?"

The surgeon and the finger-print man, neither of whose experience had been so extensive as his own, shook their heads.

"Not the ghost of an idea," the former said decidedly.

Parrot looked at him.

"Abel Dunks," he said quietly; and the surgeon started.

The finger-print man, however, shook his head.

"That's a new one on me," he said. "Who is—or rather, who was—he, anyway?"

Parrot mentioned a necessary, though in some quarters, unpopular profession. Then, stooping, he picked something from the carpet at the dead man's sprawling feet. It was an iron nut, and, attached to it by a thin, black ribbon, was a tiny pasteboard.

He examined the card carefully; then,

to the surgeon's surprise, scrutinized still more closely the nut and bolt to which it was attached. Behind the laziness of his eyes as, carefully, he handed the exhibit to the surgeon, was something that was not indolent at all.

"This is No. 1. As they sowed, so shall they reap."

He read it slowly, and pointed a not quite steady finger to the tiny sketch in blood-red ink, that stood in place of a signature.

"What's the big idea?" he asked. "Revenge?"

He handed the card back to Parrot, who balanced it reflectively in his large and competent hand.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit," he said at last. After a pause he added: "Particularly in view of this nut and bolt."

The surgeon's brows contracted perplexedly.

"What's there funny about that?" he asked.

"Only," Parrot said slowly, "before the days of a permanent shed, when it was customary for a new scaffold to be erected for each execution, these are what they used to secure the planks of the drop!"

Between them they carried out the usual investigations, but beyond that one sinister note there was nothing. Driving back to Scotland Yard Parrot's usually placid face was furrowed and anxious.

"Why 'No. 1'?" he repeated more than once. "Why 'No. 1'? What's it mean, anyway?"

"What does it suggest?" Williamson demanded; and Parrot's blunt jaw became momentarily blunter.

"That there's likely to be a 'No. 2,'" he said curtly.

In the corridor leading to his office he almost collided with his assistant, Detective Sergeant Oates, and Oates was showing as much agitation as he ever permitted himself.

"What's the big trouble with you?" Parrot inquired disagreeably.

The sergeant stared at him.

"Haven't you heard, sir?" he gasped; and Parrot's scowl was ferocious.

"Haven't I heard *what*?" he snapped.

"That a man's been found shot dead on Wimbledon Common," Oates said quietly—so quietly that, in conjunction with his unusual manner, Parrot knew there was something more behind it.

"Who was it?" he asked.

"John Manning," said Oates.

For a long moment, his mind awlirl at this sudden confirmation of his fears, Parrot did not speak. Then, "Anything found on the body?" he asked. "Any message?"

Oates looked at him in astonishment.

"Yes, sir. A card," he said. "'No. 2.' And then a text."

Parrot nodded.

"'As they sowed, so shall they reap,'" he quoted confidently. And then, "I wonder who'll be 'No. 3'?" he said slowly.

For John Manning had been the public hangman, with Abel Dunks as his assistant.

CHAPTER IX.

no. 3.

IN the sudden and violent preoccupation engendered by the murder of the two hangmen, Parrot's mind swung abruptly from the search for Larry the Marine and his attack on Dan Gravenhurst.

After all, the whole metropolitan area was being subjected to a thorough comb-out for the gunman, and sooner or later he was bound to be pulled in. In the meanwhile the deliberate removal of two government officials, each accompanied by an implied threat of other murders to come, was a challenge that, if it were not met and quickly defeated, would undermine the public confidence in authority after a fashion he did not care to contemplate.

For the first few days, however, that gaunt and deceptively casual man was forced to the confession that he was badly up against it. In the case of neither murder was there the shadow of a clew.

The stolid and unemotional Dunks, a bachelor without ties or friends, had been shot down as he sat reading at the parlor table. Manning, a middle-aged, much married and notoriously respectable Lancastrian, on his way from Preston to fulfill an "engagement" at Pentonville for the following morning, had left his hotel in the Euston Road for a short walk before retiring, and from that moment until the discovery of his body on Wimbledon Common six or seven hours later, had been seen by none.

When he left Charnwood Street, however, Parrot took away with him the bullet that had killed Dunks. When, later, he came to compare this with the bullet that had killed the assistant executioner's superior, the calibers were the same. As confirmatory proof, the new photographic tests, undeniably as accurate as those for finger prints, proved conclusively that both missiles had been fired from the same weapon.

This, of course, was only what he had expected. What, however, *did* astonish him—and that at one and the same time both narrowed and enlarged his field of inquiry—was an experience of his own that occurred some twenty-four hours later.

It was about half past six in the evening when, alone, he left his office. And the moment he passed into Whitehall in the direction of Trafalgar Square, that alert and friendly guardian of his subconscious, of which in his career he had always been so intimately aware, and upon which long experience had taught him implicitly to rely, sounded a note of warning. As surely as though each passer-by had shouted it in his face, he knew that he was in danger—deadly, urgent and imminent.

The evening had closed in with rather more than a suggestion of fog, through which the street lamps shone with an opalesque glitter that, not wholly penetrating the fast-thickening mist, left the roadway but dimly defined.

With every step he took the inner warning sounded more insistent, more urgent. It was with certainty Parrot knew within the next few minutes would come the fulfillment of the threat, and that the stake, against which would be pitted his own alertness, was his very life.

As though to examine the cloth, Parrot stopped at the window of a tailor's shop. And as with apparent indifference he glanced back in the direction he had come, he saw no one who looked at all suspicious in the narrow ribbon of light thrown by the shop fronts.

He glanced toward Trafalgar Square; there was nothing untoward there either.

The traffic in the roadway was immediately but uncertainly reflected in the windowpane. A few yards farther down the street, however, a lamp threw onto the roadway a circle of light through which, on their way to Parliament Street and Westminster, every vehicle was forced to pass.

It was just as, reassured in spite of himself, he was turning from the window that he saw, outlined distinctly in that luminous pool, a taxicab, being driven far too quickly for safety. He caught only one glimpse of the driver's narrow, questing face—observed how he drove only with his right hand, and the dull glint of metal in the one that hung, with a kind of poised looseness, at his side.

Instantaneously, with an agility that would have done credit to a boxer in training, he quickly side-stepped into the veil of fog. Following the almost unnoticeable discharge of the gun, there came the crash of glass behind him, and within a couple of inches of his ear he heard the whine of the bullet.

When he straightened himself the taxi had passed—swelled by the fog-bound area between the lamp standards. Nevertheless he rushed to the curb, and a moment later the same vehicle streaked through the next circle of light. From the curbstone he quested for an empty cab, but by the time one appeared his chance had gone.

The tailor, hawk faced and gesticulating, met him at the door of the shop. His terror for his own skin was more than half submerged in passionate resentment for a smashed window screen of ground glass, a counter top badly scored and a roll of expensive tweed punctured to within an inch of its farther side.

"Stop that juggling act with your hands," Parrot said shortly, "and get back into the shop."

As the man obeyed, Parrot followed.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW VICTIM?

TEN minutes later he was back in his own office, his finger on one of the ivory bell pushes of his desk. When the man came, Parrot pointed to a framed motto over his fireplace.

"What does that say?" he demanded after giving his instructions.

"'Do It Now!'" the official read aloud. Parrot nodded.

"If not sooner," he said shortly, and within half an hour was gazing avidly at the many-times-enlarged photographs of three bullets that an operator projected onto the screen.

"Well, well, well!" he said slowly, for the bullet he had extracted from the bale of cloth in the tailor's shop was identical in rifling marks with the two others that respectively had drilled the lives from John Manning and his assistant.

Parrot stalked gauntly back to his own office. There for a good half hour he sat motionless, his lazy eyes concentrated undeviatingly upon nothing, his craggy brows contracted.

At last, rousing himself, he telephoned to Records, of which department an official brought him several files. These he read carefully and methodically line by line, throwing his mind keenly back to the past as he did so, analyzing each incident recorded in those grim chronicles in relation with the actual events as he recalled them.

Lastly, in his scrawling and laborious handwriting, he filled several sheets with notes, then read them carefully through.

Thus armed, he took his information across to the office of the chief commissioner. Sir Redvers Conquest, however, had gone, so it was not until the next morning that the superintendent was able to make his report. He found then that if he had possessed the least doubt as to the seriousness of the view the great man would take, his first question effectually dissipated it.

"How many murderers have you been directly instrumental in hanging, superintendent?" the commissioner asked quietly, and Parrot realized the thought from which the question was inspired. Actually it was the same idea that had been at the back of his own keenly analytical mind.

"Five, sir," he said. "'Knock-out' Battersby, the alleged boxer, who killed his wife in Sydney Street, Whitechapel. 'Long John' Friedman, who shot Police Constable Morton in the Harlow Manor burglary at Greys, Essex. He'd neither wife nor relatives, and worked alone. William Tern, who killed a girl in a brick field near Kilburn. He was the eldest son of a large family, and his parents and brothers and sisters were glad to be rid of him. 'Buck' Benton, who poisoned his invalid sister for her insurance money. She was his only relative and he'd no friends."

Parrot paused for a moment, and then added slowly:

"And Theodore Lippmann, the Anglo-Swiss, who was hanged at Pentonville about six years ago for shooting Ser-

geant Angus and Constable Perrin in the attempt on the safe at the head office of the Metropolitan and Urban Bank in Lombard Street."

The commissioner's brows contracted. "Friends or relatives?" he asked shortly.

Parrot said, still more slowly:

"One twin brother, sir, Isaac—who was arrested three days after we pulled in Theodore."

"Isaac wasn't hanged, was he?" the commissioner asked, and Parrot shook his head.

"Although we were certain he was present at the time of the murder," he said, "we couldn't absolutely prove it. The jury was not entirely convinced as to the identification, and gave him the benefit of the doubt. We couldn't even convict him as an accessory after the act."

"Carry on," said the commissioner quietly. Parrot's eyes were fixed abstractedly; idly he was watching, through the window that overlooked the embankment, a barge drop anchor in the lee of a warehouse on the Surrey shore. He hesitated a moment, then turned and looked his superior very directly in the face.

"As Isaac was hustled out of the dock while sentence of death was pronounced upon his twin, sir," he said, "I saw his face. He's half Hebrew and, in spite of his record, has all that race's sense of family loyalty. And since childhood he and Theodore had never once been separated."

Parrot paused again, and the commissioner nodded.

"Carry on," he repeated.

"As Isaac, half crazy with rage and grief, was hanging about the corridor, he was rearrested—for 'receiving.' A pretty callous business, that, on the face of it, but there was good reason for it. He and his brother, for close on twenty years, had been the brains and inspiration of the most dangerous gang of

crooks in Europe, and in all that time not only had we been unable to pin anything onto them, but we'd no idea of their headquarters.

"A fortnight after Theodore kept his early-morning appointment with Manning and Dunks, Isaac was sent 'to the country' for seven years. And again, both as he was sentenced and when he was led down below, I saw his face. It was then I wanted to burn joss sticks to whoever decided to rearrest him—because with what happened to his brother he was about as safe to have loose around London as a hungry cobra. As it was, with a bit of luck Isaac mightn't live to see the prison gates swing open, or, in the meanwhile, he might be affected with a change of heart." The corners of Parrot's mouth drew grimly downward. "What a hope!" he concluded.

"And now?" the commissioner questioned.

"He earned full remission marks and was released on license on Tuesday the eighteenth of last month," Parrot said, and his voice was filled with meaning.

To emphasize the significance of such an announcement, his eyes, which should have been fixed upon his chief, were once more gazing at the barge that, throughout the interview, he had been subconsciously watching.

"Why, then——" the commissioner began, and found himself sprawling on the floor, thrust backward as, simultaneously with his own quick dive under cover of the desk, Parrot wrenched his chair from beneath him.

CHAPTER XI.

A PRIVATE VENDETTA.

SOMETHING like an angry hornet buzzed past the spot where a split second previously had been the commissioner's head and with a vicious *phut!* buried itself in the plaster of the wall.

Parrot rose cautiously to his hands and knees to see the lithe figure that scrambled from the barge to the quay and, without a single backward glance, disappeared down a narrow passage that ran at the side of the warehouse.

Slowly, a little ruefully but, with the vivid recollection of that whining bullet, gratefully, the commissioner, too, pulled himself to the upright.

"Thank you, Parrot," he said a little breathlessly. "I wonder who that was intended for—you or me?"

"From the river, sir, and the positions in which we were, I couldn't be seen," said Parrot quietly. "In any case, at that distance they couldn't know it was me——"

Sir Redvers took him up quickly.

"This being my customary position," he said, "there could be no doubt as to who was seated at the desk."

"Not a doubt, sir," said Parrot over his shoulder, for with his penknife he was busy excavating the bullet. Half an hour later they knew it had been fired from the same automatic that already had killed two men.

"And of course," the commissioner said with confidence, "we know the name of the murderer. The only thing now is to find this Lippmann, and make him account for his movements at the time of the murders. Probably he's carrying the pistol that fired the shots—all ready for the next victim. I'll get you to send the 'all stations' call at once."

Parrot walked slowly to the door—and paused.

"I'll do just that, sir," he said quietly. "Of course, Lippman'll take a bit of finding. He's as elusive as an electric eel and, in spite of his lack of height, as nippy in disguise as a chameleon. And when we do find him he'll have perfectly good alibis—alibis, too, sworn to by reputable people; not the usual faked stuff."

His back to the fire, the commissioner turned.

"What on earth do you mean, superintendent?" he demanded. "That Lippmann isn't the murderer!"

Slowly Parrot shook his head. There was no officer in the Yard in whom Sir Redvers had greater confidence than this gaunt, lazy-eyed man from the Derbyshire dales, and when they were alone he rather encouraged the man-to-man attitude. Given the right sort of man to deal with, he had found that the unofficial attitude paid.

"Not so you'd notice it, he isn't," Parrot replied.

"How d'ye know that?" Sir Redvers demanded.

"Because Lippmann had the ligaments of the first and second fingers of his right hand severed in a knife fight in Lisbon twenty years ago," Parrot replied. "He can't use a pistol; he couldn't even sew mail bags at Dartmoor, or use a pick in the quarries. If we find him we'll pull him in just as a matter of form; but it won't be any good." He paused. "It's the man he's hired I'm going after—Larry the Marine!"

Something of the healthy, open-air color drained from the commissioner's face.

"He crossed on the same ship as Mr. Gravenhurst of the Foreign Office—and my daughter," he said quickly. "Do you think *he's* the man?"

Parrot nodded.

"I'm pretty certain of it," he said. "And with the hideaways he'll have had arranged for him there's only one way to lay hands on the man."

"And that is?" the commissioner jerked.

Very slowly and distinctly Parrot said:

"Never for one moment to lose sight of—one, Mr. Justice Hainault, who sentenced Theodore Lippmann to death; two, Sir Brandreth Trevor, K. C., who was crown prosecutor at the trial; three, yourself, under whose direction Theo-

dore was caught; four, myself, who ran him to earth."

In the significance with which he was able to invest a pause, Parrot was something of an artist, and the hiatus that came now seemed literally to throb with significance.

"Five and six," he continued at length, "Mr. Gravenhurst and your daughter."

For a further long moment there was silence. At last:

"So that it looks," the detective concluded, "as though, in addition to all those in any way connected with Theodore Lippmann's trial and conviction whom Brother Isaac has hired him to dispose of, Larry's conducting a private and unofficial vendetta of his own."

"You'd better go round to Justice Hainault and Sir Brandreth Trevor and warn them," Sir Redvers said at last. "From what you tell me, Mr. Gravenhurst is warned already. I'll make my own arrangements for my daughter's safety. You'll look after yourself, I take it?"

The superintendent nodded grimly.

"And after that gunman, too, believe me, sir," he added.

CHAPTER XII.

NO. 4.

PARROT left the commissioner busy with his arrangements. From what he was able to gather before setting out for Middle Temple Lane to interview the eminent K. C., these were designed to leave nothing to chance.

Sir Brandreth Trevor's chambers were in Harcourt Buildings, Middle Temple Lane. At the bottom of the narrow, dimly lighted stairs Parrot was obliged to stand aside to allow for the passage of a stout, bewigged and be-gowned figure of ponderous step and asthmatical breathing who, as he passed, was coughing wheezily into an enormous silk bandanna handkerchief.

In the outer office a thin-faced, mid-

dle-aged clerk was talking to a well-clad man of, obviously, his own standing and profession. Thus it was a few minutes before, the other clerk having left, Parrot was able to present his card.

"I think Sir Brandreth is at liberty, superintendent," the clerk said with formal courtesy. "A gentleman—a brother barrister—has just left him, and his next appointment isn't for half an hour."

The clerk walked over to the door that led to the inner office, opened it, and crossed the threshold.

"Superintendent Parrot from Scotland—" the dry voice commenced—and broke off into a thin, terror-stricken wail. With a bound of devastating terror he was back in the outer office, his narrow face paper-white, his thin hands twisting as with agony.

For a matter of seconds, supporting himself against the long, high desk by a trembling hand, he mouthed and gesticulated.

But in the light of recent happenings, Parrot needed no explanation. Like a flash he was around the desk and through the door of the private office. Already, though with a feeling of sick desperation about the heart, he knew what was awaiting him within. And at the first glimpse of that awful room he realized that his premonition was horribly correct.

The K. C. was slumped sidewise in his seat, prevented from complete collapse to the floor by the padded arm over which his own arm sprawled. There was a small, blue hole in his forehead from which, down the rigid face, ran a thin trickle of blood. On the writing table before him was that terrible iron bolt and nut with the cord attached, that read:

This is No. 4. As they have sown, so shall they reap.

Parrot made no examination, for, the wound being where it was, by no

possibility could the K. C. be anything but dead. And, sickeningly, Parrot realized that with the delay caused by the conversation of the two clerks and the warren of courts and passages by which the Temple is intersected, how infinitesimal was any chance of capturing the slayer.

"Who was the man in wig and gown who passed me on the stairs?" he shouted into the ears of the stricken clerk, who shook his head dumbly. At last, in a strained, hoarse whisper he gasped:

"I don't know. A stranger to me. Gave his name as L. Lake, f-f-from the I-Inner T-Temple. He—he just walked through into the g-g-governor's office as if he were ex-expected."

With a bound Parrot was down the stairs and into Middle Temple Lane that, except for an errand boy, was deserted.

He turned sharply the corner of Crown Office Row that has the Temple Gardens on its right. And on the grass, thrust through the railings, was a barrister's wig and gown.

Parrot stopped hopelessly. Crown Office Row leads into King's Bench Walk, that in turn communicates directly with Tudor Street, from which on either side branch streets that lead to the Embankment or to Fleet Street. In the six or seven minutes, with which chance had favored the assassin, he would have been given innumerable choice of get-aways.

He telephoned the news to headquarters and waited until Sergeant Barley reported from the Yard. Then, leaving the officer in charge, he crossed to the law courts where, in the king's bench division, Mr. Justice Hainault was sitting.

Neither in the almost-deserted entrance hall nor in the empty, echoing corridor was there any one to arouse his suspicion. With the whole neighborhood subjected to feverish research, it was unlikely that the killer would remain

in the same neighborhood for the purpose of committing another. But Parrot was taking no chances.

He whispered a few words to the officer at the door of court No. 9, and through the glass doors took an intensive survey of the occupants of the public benches within. The list that day contained no case of particular interest and, the one up for hearing now being of overwhelming dullness, the courtroom was only sparsely attended. Nevertheless, from the clerk at the table below the judge, to council and public, he took face by face in turn.

Looking back later it was as if the four things happened simultaneously—the subdued *plup!* at his ear; the sudden plunging of the court into dimness from the failure of the electric light; the click of the lock as the policeman turned the key in the door; the sheet of white-hot flame that instantaneously became transformed to that sickening shutter of blackness as, with a punch that would have done credit to a heavyweight in training, the fist of the lithe and agile officer at his side crashed devastatingly upon the angle of Parrot's jaw.

The policeman who previously had been on duty at the door they found trussed, gagged and unconscious in the unused courtroom near by. A uniformed officer, whose face Parrot did not recognize, had beckoned him mysteriously from the door, and from the moment he crossed the threshold and the punch, connected, he had known nothing.

At the point where it passed from the corridor the electric wire supplying court No. 9 had been filed to a condition that required only a slight jerk of the hand to sever it.

Mr. Justice Hainault was dead—shot through the brain with an automatic pistol as he sat in judgment upon his fellows.

The policeman on duty at the main entrance nodded genially to the colleague

who, without haste or perturbation, passed through into the bustle of the Strand.

The bolt and nut of the now grimly familiar pattern, with its message of vengeance, was found near the clerk's table.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COUNCIL OF DEATH.

THE tiny and incredibly malign figure at the head of the table nodded with coldly restrained satisfaction. Ranged on either hand were the same disguised figures. Opposite, an inert but avidly watchful figure, motionless but intensely alive, slumped the grossly corpulent second in command.

Some dozen feet or so from the diminutive leader, in the easy, almost provocative, attitude of one who has carried out an arduous, hazardous task with the practiced ease of the expert, stood the lithe, sinister figure who had been the *raison d'être* for that previous gathering.

In his hand was a thick wad of United States currency that, with a quick dexterity by no means as casual as it appeared, he flicked through his long, nicotine-stained fingers.

"I guess that's right, boss," he said at last. "Forty thousand dollars; eight thousand of your pounds. Two thousand a head."

The dwarf's voice broke in—quiet, but with the hidden vibration of a deathless hate.

"With," he said, "a further twenty thousand to come"—his voice dropped to a whisper, quivering like a released spring—"when your task is complete."

For a moment the other continued to flick the bundle of bills between his fingers. When he looked up his expression was vicious.

"Before *your* task is complete, you mean," he said. "Don't I have any life of my own?"

There was challenge in the tone, so

that those about the table stirred uneasily. There was a certain shaft some fifty feet below where they were seated, the contents of which bore eloquent and awful testimony to the unwisdom of such defiance. Only the huge figure at the head of the table turned his slow gaze from the gunman to that of The Leader.

"Until you have fulfilled your engagement, what life have you of your own?" the latter said, and behind the words was the shadow of a hidden meaning that, like the shiver of a chill wind among dry, dead leaves, caused again that uneasy stirring.

Even the gunman shifted from one foot to the other.

"Besides the comeback I'm stagin' for you, there's a grouch of my own I aim to satisfy before I quit this side," he said harshly. "Two—one of each kind—I'm gonna get, an' get good an' plenty. An' I need help—" he continued on something of his previous note of challenge.

The mouth of The Leader was thin as a sword cut across his face, his eyes icy.

"You are not paid to satisfy private grievances," he said. "You are paid to carry out, unquestioningly and expeditiously, my orders!"

It seemed that the cold eyes of the standing figure could not endure the chill in those they faced. As though against his own volition, he turned from that concentration of malignancy in the chair. Nevertheless, his voice retained still some measure of defiance.

"If I could do what I aim to do," he said, "I'd do it! But I can't. I've tried it out an' I can't. They're wise to me. I've helped you, haven't I? Good an' plenty I've helped you. An' if you'll stand by me I'll go on helping you till the job's through." Now his defiant eyes forced themselves to meet those of the other, and there for a defiant moment remained. "Otherwise," he added,

and from somewhere his voice had gathered a certain meretricious confidence, "I throw in my hand. Quit. Quit cold. And that," he added as once more his eyes fell, "is tellin' you."

There was a log fire burning in the open hearth. Save for the row of candles on the high polish of the table, against which those muffled, motionless figures showed shapelessly sinister as the devotees at the altar of some unholy rite, it was the sole illumination of the room.

For an age-long moment, too, the sharp crackle of the flames was the only sound to break the awful throbbing silence. At last, impinging glacially into that dreadful stillness with the remote impersonality of piling ice:

"Who are these against whom you ask my help?"

It was as though with the question there leaped into the eyes of the other a tiny, avid flame.

"Guess you've not goin' to put up any kind of kick at one of the names, anyway. It's that police captain's girl—Dinah Conquest." The flame leaped to elemental savagery. "The other a guy named Dan Gravenhurst—her sweetie."

Again that breathless, suspended silence. The thin, æsthetic cruelty of The Leader's face remained inviolable. Yet it was as if with one of those names had come a remission of some terrible intention—a reprieve. And, an idea.

"And why," the cold voice went on, "do you require my—our—help in your design?"

The reply came from lips so closely pressed that, but for the passion with which it vibrated, his voice would have been inaudible.

"Because," the gunman said, "I tried it out and fell down on the job." The almost indistinguishable lips drew back in a snarl that was purely animal. "That dame put up a bluff an' got away with it. Since then she's been watched as closely as a heavyweight in training for

the world's championship. Disguise? Me?" He made a gesture of repudiation. "Make-up's no use. She never comes to the window, never goes out. She'll see no strangers——"

The thin voice broke in, icy, unemotional:

"And the man? This Gravenhurst? He's connected with the Foreign Office, I believe?"

The words that came in answer were charged with disgust, chagrin and hate.

"He's beat it! Just faded away. His apartment's in Hill Street—he's not been there since a few days after I almost got him; an' in those few days I was good an' busy—on *your* business. Now, if you want the job I'm hired for finished, it's up to you to get good an' easy on mine. I want that guy Gravenhurst. I want him bad an' I want him quick!"

The Leader's voice, cold and dispassionate, broke in:

"If he's still in the country there are means at our disposal whereby he can be found."

"Listen!" There was an inflection of rising excitement in the gunman's voice into which, momentarily, his fear of the other had become submerged. "Listen! That guy's dangerous. He was in the same ship as me crossing over, an' I watched him. I know men. I know quitters an' I know fighters. That bird's a scrapper from Scrapville. An' me—I've landed on a place on his make-up that's tenderer than a sunburned neck. I've got gay with his sweetie.

"That guy's dangerous. I know it. It's a feelin' I have right through to my bones. Ever since I first lamped him—in the train it was from Chicago to N' York—somethin's been tellin' me he's as safe to monkey with as a nest of young rattlers. An' he hasn't quit because he's scared, either. He's quit because he's got some game on—an' that game has me—an' *you*—at the other end of his bat!"

Something like a wintry smile played

across the thin rigidity of The Leader's face.

"An interesting young man, evidently," he said. "One at the moment, however, in whom *we* are not interested. Nevertheless, if your supposition is correct and he becomes—inquisitive, he will, of course, be dealt with."

An instant, and voice and expression changed. In each was an icy venom. Superimposed was a triumph which, if rigidly suppressed, was gleeful.

"But this girl—only daughter of the chief commissioner of Scotland Yard—is another matter. Together with the man Parrot, he is the one against whom I shall derive the most satisfaction in exacting reprisals." His eyes bored into those of the gunman. "Hence I can promise you my coöperation in securing the presence of the lady in whom you appear to be—interested."

"When?" The gunman shot the question with dreadful eagerness, but in the reply was only the old deadly calm.

"As soon as it can be arranged. In the meantime, take no more active steps against her father, for it is through her that I purpose to obtain his attendance here. Then"—for the first time and then only momentarily, the voice shook—"I myself will deal with him."

"That's jake with me!" The gunman's voice was frankly avid. "Once get that dame here, an' so long's I'm paid, I don't give a hoot about the old man. An' now I guess I'll go gunnin' after that dick."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLACK KNIGHTS.

IT was a conversation between Dan Gravenhurst and Parrot that decided the former upon a plan of action which, to those with little knowledge of Oriental character, would have savored of the fantastic.

"It looks," Parrot murmured, "as if

that gunman was mixed up with an English crook who's just come back from nearly six years 'over the Alps'!"

Dan pricked up his ears.

"What crook's that?" he asked quickly.

"Fellow named Lippmann," Parrot said. "Chap who, if every one had their rights, should have been hanged as high as his twin brother, Theodore."

He went into particulars of the case as it had been outlined between himself and the commissioner.

"You've heard of the 'Black Knights'?" Parrot asked at the end; and in his excitement Dan rose half upright in his chair. He knew the Black Knights as the most formidable conjunction of criminals since the war.

It was a gang of which each department—burglary, blackmail, forgery, dope traffic and receiving—was directed by a specialist. An organization in connection with which neither time nor expense was spared for the engineering of a coup, every detail of which was worked out.

Dan nodded in reply to the detective's question.

"What about them?" he demanded.

"An outfit," Parrot said slowly, "that's so bedded in and protected that after ten years we've no more idea of their headquarters than we had in the first month they started. There's big brains behind that gang, mister, an' it was the brothers Lippmann who supplied 'em. We thought when we got 'em safely behind the bars that maybe some of the rank an' file would give 'em away—hand out some sort of hint that would help us locate the nest."

"And did they?" Dan asked.

The detective's voice was both rueful and emphatic: "Not a hint. Not a glimmer or a suggestion of a blinkin' hint."

Dan thought for a moment. This looked as if it might lead somewhere.

"And during the time the man Lipp-

mann was in prison, after his brother was hanged, did the Black Knights cease to operate?" he inquired.

"They carried on," Parrot said slowly, "only by so much as would keep the show together. They knew something, that gang did; realized that without the big brain they were liable to slip up. So, except for what you might call routine business—the importation and distribution of 'snow,' and an occasional but unelaborate country-house robbery—they lay low. Even then they'd kind of lost the expert touch; we pulled in one or two of 'em. Only we couldn't get 'em to open out. I guess the date of Lippmann's release was written in red on the calendars of what they call their minds," he added. "Isaac had a way of dealin' with conversationalists that's somehow discouragin', an' they just took their medicine."

Parrot emptied his second glass of whisky—two was his limit—and made movements preparatory to rising.

"Just a minute!" Dan said hastily; and the detective looked inquiringly at him.

"And you think," Dan suggested, "that if I could trace the Black Knights to their lair I'd have a good chance of encountering Larry the Marine?"

It was with cheerful irony that Parrot replied:

"Sure you would! And a still better chance of encountering a sudden and messy demise." He added quietly: "Maybe you wouldn't be the first, either."

"Well, probably you'd send me a wreath," Dan said.

CHAPTER XV.

THUGS.

SOME four years previously, in the guise of an ordinary seaman which Dan's mission at that time rendered necessary, he had landed one night at the West India Dock, to run into one

of the most vicious street fights of his experience.

As he drew nearer he saw four thugs—two lascars and two alleged white men—attacking a Chinaman. The latter was grimly silent as he defended himself against the four who, evidently, were out for blood. It was just as Dan drew alongside that two of the assailants drew knives.

Dropping his ditty bag, he swept aside the two who had given place to the armed attack and, with his right, hit behind the ear of the lascar who had succeeded in slightly wounding the Chinaman's shoulder. Like a log the lascar fell and like a dog the lascar lay.

Dan turned only just in time to deal with a knife stroke from the other that, had it reached home, would have been his finish.

But, warmed to his work, Dan side-stepped, and from somewhere in the neighborhood of his knee brought up his right in an uppercut that swept the other's feet in a parabolic curve to the edge of the pavement where, a crumpled, disinterested heap, he remained. At this, deciding to call it a day, the remaining thugs retired in disorder, but at considerable speed.

The Oriental turned to Dan a face the tint and consistency of a dried walnut, from which shone a pair of astonishingly bright, black eyes.

"I have to thank you, sir," he said in cultured English, "for a service greater than you know. One for which, if you will honor me with your company to my poor home, you will find me not ungrateful."

From the main thoroughfare the Chinaman led him to a side street and thence to one still narrower and more malodorous. They reached, eventually, a single-fronted shop, the window displaying an assortment of sharks' fins, birds' nests, paper lanterns, dried eggs and all the fantastic assortment of unappetizing edibles to which the Oriental

is prone. The interior appeared even more disreputable than was indicated from outside.

Then, for Dan, came the surprise of his life; for, at the end of a dark passage through a bedraggled curtain, his host ushered him into one of the most beautiful rooms he had ever seen in his life. It combined the subtle comfort of the Orient with the dignity of period furniture—lustrous old mahogany paneling and the warm magnificence of Bokhara rugs; soothing lighting and silken but not effeminate cushions.

Quietly to the old oaken table the Chinese drew two Charles II. chairs and waited until the dazed Dan was seated.

"Permit me to introduce myself as Ho Wang, formerly of Peking, and to display my gratitude in a practical fashion," he said.

"After," Dan said quietly, "I've dressed that wound of yours."

But almost contemptuously Ho Wang waved the attention aside. From a carved corner cupboard he fetched a flask of Imperial Tokay and two cut-glass goblets. Then, suddenly, from some interior recess of his clothing he produced a small wash-leather bag, and onto the mellow, polished surface of the table poured gems which for sheer beauty caused Dan's breath to catch in his throat.

Emeralds, jade green and flawless; diamonds, their facets reflecting a thousandfold the subdued lighting of the room; rubies of the true pigeon's blood.

"It was to obtain these, of course," his host said, "that I was subjected to the attentions from which so effectively you rescued me to-night. You will honor me by accepting, say—half a dozen."

Then quite suddenly Dan remembered—and laughed.

"I'm sorry, Ho Wang," he said. "Only—only I'm not quite what you imagine me. I'm not a sailor and I'd just hate to accept any reward."

"I bow, of course, to your decision,"

Ho Wang said quietly, "though you must permit me to forward you a very small souvenir of the occasion."

They chatted for an hour or so over their wine, a conversation that Dan never was to forget—the depth of the old man's knowledge, the dignity of his quaint philosophy, his all-embracing information.

To Dan a few days later was delivered a small registered parcel. In it was a ruby-and-diamond tie pin—altogether too gorgeous for a man. But what a magnificent ring it would make! Now in these later days that ring was destined for the third left-hand finger of the girl for the sake of whose safety he had decided to consult the donor.

With the jewels was a card, upon which was written, in English:

Remember, always and at whatever cost,
you may command the advice and knowledge
of
HO WANG.

Since then Dan had paid many visits to the lovely room behind the disreputable shop. Than that of the old Chinese there were few men in whose company he found more delight, or for whose character he had learned a more definite—if curious—respect.

From Western standards a most reprehensible old man, Ho Wang—receiver of stolen jewelry certainly, smuggler of silk and saccharine probably; an intriguer of devious ways, with a knowledge of London's underworld that was absolutely encyclopedic.

And in spite of the old man's record, his mode of life and outlook, there was no one upon whom Dan placed a greater reliance. He knew, rather than that he should suffer from the friendship, Ho Wang would cheerfully have faced the hangman.

So, unobtrusively, Dan left Keech in charge of the flat, and himself faded surreptitiously into the involved and

malodorous intricacies of London's East End.

In that same suit of much-stained dungaree of their first interview Dan sipped Imperial Tokay in that wonderful parlor of Ho Wang, while the Chinaman, a shade more wrinkled but brighter eyed than ever, was seated cross-legged on a cushion facing him.

CHAPTER XVI.

INEVITABLE DEATH.

THEY talked for a while on the subtleties of the old Eastern philosophers so beloved of Ho Wang. Then, his face expressionless, the old man said:

"But to-night, my friend, you are abstracted from the meditations of the great Shu Ch'ing, and even the philosophies of the wise Tao Teh Ch'ing are powerless to divorce your mind from its preoccupation."

Dan looked up with a half smile.

"You're quite right, Ho Wang," he said quietly. "I'm just hating to put you in the position of refusing to answer a question."

"There is no question, my friend, that you may not freely ask," said Ho Wang, and the impassive gravity of his wizened face remained unchanged.

Very directly Dan's gaze met and held the Chinaman's eyes.

"Very well, Ho Wang," he said quietly. "I want to know where are the headquarters of the Black Knights."

If, miraculously and instantaneously, he had been turned to marble, the Chinaman could not have remained more entirely without movement. Nor, for a space that to Dan's tense and palpitating nerves seemed limitless, did he speak.

Eventually, with impassive face, Ho Wang said:

"Of all the requests that it is in your power to make, my young friend, you have voiced the one most difficult to grant."

Slowly Dan nodded.

"That's exactly why I hesitated so long to ask it," he said gravely.

"You require the information—urgently?" Ho Wang inquired, his eyes steadily on Dan's face.

"You know of Larry the Marine?" Dan asked; and the Chinaman's nod of acquiescence came as no surprise. So far as concerned the underworld of London, Ho Wang knew everything as it occurred.

"Brought from Chicago—for an especial purpose," he said, and with the words it was to Dan as if the beautiful room became suddenly chill.

"A purpose, Ho Wang," he said, "that he has extended far beyond its original conception."

"To your own detriment," Ho Wang agreed surprisingly.

"But only," Dan confirmed, "because I am standing between himself and that—extended purpose."

His face strained and fearful, he leaned forward; for a moment allowed his hand to rest—almost with a gesture of appeal—on the old man's shoulder.

"Ho Wang," he said hoarsely, "I'm afraid; scared stiff right through to the marrow and out the other side. Not for myself—I needn't tell you that—but for the woman I care for."

His voice lowered to a still more hoarse intensity:

"She's guarded—every precaution taken to assure her safety. Against any ordinary danger I'd be prepared to let it go at that. But not with that gunman. He's out to get her. At all costs he's out to get her. I know the type and I know the man—a gunman over here as a hired murderer is as compassionate as a man-eating tiger and as scrupulous as a hungry jackal. And if he can't succeed on his own—there's the whole of that Black Knight organization to help him."

More gravely than ever Ho Wang inclined his head.

"It is not so much your reasoning with

which I join issue as your—rashness," he said, after a pause.

Dan made a quick gesture of protest.

"Rashness my foot!" he exclaimed.

"The only way for me to prevent him getting at *her* is for me to go after *him*! If ever attack was the best defense, it is in this case. And the only place I can attack him is at the headquarters of the Black Knights. And with no time to lose, either," he added.

Not for a long moment did Ho Wang speak.

"Tell me about this English girl," he said at last, and his voice was gentle.

Frankly and in detail Dan told him; replied freely to Ho Wang's penetrating questions.

Followed then the longest silence yet, one in which Dan realized in the other an increased unrest and trepidation. At last, with an almost fatalistic gesture of resignation, the Chinaman looked up.

"With these headquarters you realize what, also, you will discover?" he demanded.

"Larry the Marine," said Dan promptly.

"*Death!*" said Ho Wang. "Certain and inevitable death!"

Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"Nevertheless, find him I will," he said, adding: "With your help."

For a long moment the eyes of the two men met—and held. Then, slowly and deliberately, the Chinaman rose to his feet.

"I, Ho Wang," he said, "will go with you."

CHAPTER XVII.

BLACKJACKED!

ON leaving Scotland Yard each afternoon it was customary for the chief commissioner to drop into the Sabretasche Club for a cocktail with any friend who might be available.

On this particular afternoon Sir Redvers left the Yard about five o'clock and, followed unobtrusively by the shad-

owers detailed for his protection, walked in leisurely fashion to Piccadilly where, at the Sabretasche, he played a couple of games of billiards.

Yet in spite of a tranquillizing whisky-and-soda and the hard-fought victory of the games, he did not know why, this afternoon, he should be so anxious to get home. He had become increasingly uneasy. Not, it may be said, on behalf of himself; he took no unnecessary chances, and the threat to himself did not unduly worry him. It was the thought of danger to Dinah that turned him cold.

True, she was closely guarded and, until this gunman-murderer was laid by the heels and a check placed on the movements of the leader of that sinister fraternity, the Black Knights, would so continue to be guarded. Nevertheless, until those urgently necessary steps had been effected, Sir Redvers would not have an easy moment.

In the meantime, of those who could possibly be spared, there was not a detective in the London area who was not devoting himself exclusively to the hunt; nor a policeman not vigilantly on the lookout; not a uniformed or plain-clothes man in the length and breadth of Britain not keenly alert for one or the other of the two who menaced his life and happiness.

Yet, as he stepped into the elevator, his disquietude remained still active. Some inner sense made him aware of something impending, something inevitable; that from somewhere, imminent, menacing, loomed—danger.

He was so possessed by this feeling that, except for a casual reflection that she was of unusually strong build, he noticed but indifferently the woman in the broad-ribbed bonnet, voluminous crimson cape and starched sky-blue skirt of a famous London hospital, who was the only other occupant of the elevator.

She looked up as he entered, her large and capable hand hesitating above

the row of push buttons before which she was standing.

"Ground floor?" she inquired in a pleasant, deep voice; and he nodded with polite absent-mindedness.

Her poised finger descended, and she turned so that now her back covered the narrow frame in which the row of buttons was set. They passed the first floor without stopping.

A few seconds and then, to enable him to slide back the gate as the cage drew to a halt at the ground floor, Sir Redvers moved his glove, stick and hat from his right hand to the left.

Thinking that, anticipating his intention to press the button, she would move aside, he took a tentative step toward the frame.

She did not move, so that, unchecked, they continued the descent to the basement floor, where were the hairdresser's shop and bathrooms.

"We've come a little too far," he said pleasantly, and waited for the car to come to a standstill. After that, on pressing the necessary button, they would reascend.

But instead of stopping at the basement the elevator continued down the shaft that led to the cellars, cement walled, used as lumber and luggage rooms, coal houses and wine stores.

Sir Redvers smiled.

"Never mind," he said. "Once we reach the bottom it won't take a moment to go back again."

Even as he spoke the elevator slowed—stopped. The woman moved aside so that he might press the button for the ascent. He did not notice how stealthily, as she did so, her right hand crept beneath her cape.

To his surprise, as he turned to the frame, he heard from behind the sound of the opening gate. Checking an exclamation, he swung round, and in the instant facing her the blackjack, wielded with the skill of long practice, fell upon his unprotected head.

The cellar at which the elevator had stopped communicated by double doors to a paved yard that in turn opened to a narrow, unfrequented side street.

The Red Cross ambulance, into which the distinguished-looking gentleman suffering from sudden seizure was helped with such quick dexterity by the calm-eyed hospital nurse, moved smoothly away. One or two casual onlookers concluded that the unostentatiousness of the departure was designed so as not to disturb the patient's fellow members.

They did not know that as soon as the car turned into an even quieter side street, shutters fell with lightning rapidity which transformed the ambulance into the delivery van of Henry Rogers & Sons, bread and fancy cake manufacturers, Kilburn.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNKNOWN.

IN Grosvenor Street House Dinah was bored to the point of extinction. Used to an exceptionally open-air life, she felt that this régime of what practically amounted to imprisonment was just a little more than any girl could be expected to endure.

Yet she recognized its necessity. The encounter in her sitting room with Larry the Marine had affected her more deeply than at the time she realized. Far from being checked, the menace from that terrible man extended even to her father and the man she loved, and this was an anxiety that seemed to undermine the whole fabric of her life.

Then, to crown all, had come the disappearance of Dan. One day he had been at his flat, or spending those hours with her which now she recognized as the sweetest in her life, and the next day, following a brief note in which he told her he had been "called away."

Since then she had had no word or line from him.

There were times when she felt utterly

alone, abandoned; when she felt that she could not endure the strain; when she had to bite her lips to prevent herself screaming.

Deep down, she was gripped by a premonition of evil. She felt like a chained prisoner in a camp that at any moment might be subjected to a bombardment from some utterly relentless enemy. And it was no danger to herself, she feared. The danger was to Sir Redvers. It was in the very air she breathed—as a tangible presence about her, stark, almost palpable. And even when, day after day, quite his old, cheery, debonaire self, he continued to arrive home at the usual time, the feeling did not diminish.

It was as though in that anxious time she lived and had her being beneath a sword, incredibly sharp, suspended by but a hair's strength above her.

And one evening the sword fell.

As, following a high-strung afternoon, she was trying to compose herself to meet him with customary cheerfulness, her telephone rang. With the sound it was as if, upon the quiet restfulness of the room, impinged the remorseless beat of the very wings of death. With heart-clutching certainty she knew it as the prelude to tragedy.

Her heart so sick and faint that it was only from some hitherto unsuspected reserve of strength she was able to walk to the instrument, she unhooked the receiver.

"Is that Miss Conquest?"

The voice was low-pitched, coldly impersonal and without emotion.

"Yes," she faltered.

The voice came again:

"You are alone? No one within hearing?"

"Yes," she faltered again.

"You are prepared to swear that?"

Now, so wrought upon by terror was she, that only barely could she find words.

"I swear it!" she said at last.

"Good!" There was no satisfaction

in the word, only a calm acquiescence. "I accept that—particularly as within a few moments I shall be able to check its truth. Now, listen carefully! You wish to see your father again alive?"

It had come! Not for an instant did she doubt that. It was only the wild desperation with which she clutched at the last remnants of her strength that saved her from fainting.

Then, engendered by the dire need of the moment, came a curious, almost fatalistic calm. If, as palpably was the case, her father was in need of help, the last thing she must permit herself was a breakdown in nerve. She'd need every ounce of coolness, strength and courage she could summon.

"Obviously," she said into the receiver, and by now her voice was schooled.

As though temporarily disconcerted by its quality, at the other end of the wire came an infinitesimal pause.

"You are to be congratulated upon your fortitude," the cold voice came at last. "It will render my—*our*—task so much the smoother."

"Who is that speaking?" she demanded.

"I regret to remind you," the cold voice came back, "that your own part is less to question than to obey. And to anticipate anything of an impulsive or an unwise nature, I may say also that each and severally the officers of Scotland Yard by whom you are surrounded are under direct observation from one of our own organization. Any suspicious activity on their part—sudden entry to your house, for instance, or the sudden appearance in the street of either yourself or one of your staff—will immediately become known to us."

There was a deliberate pause.

"With a correspondingly unpleasant effect upon the comfort and well being of your father," the voice added.

That the threat was authentic she had no smallest doubt. Whoever was speak-

ing meant just exactly what he said; there was in the voice no least hint of compromise or mercy. Again, almost frenziedly, she steeled herself.

"What is it you want of me?" she asked, straining her ears to detect in the reply some slightest suggestion of weakness upon which to base her own campaign. With suspended breathing she awaited the answer.

She found no weakness. One less strong might have betrayed satisfaction in victory, but the voice of the unknown remained glacial.

"Opposite the third house from the end of the eastern side of Berkeley Square," he said, "is drawn up a car, purple in coloring, with, at the wheel, a thin, dark-complexioned driver in a wine-red livery. In the lapel of his coat he is wearing a bronze chrysanthemum. Within fifteen minutes of the termination of this conversation, you will leave the house, walk quietly and without word to your watchers, to the car. Arrived at it you will utter the one word 'Chicago,' enter it, and be driven away."

Than which nothing could have been more clear—or more utterly terrifying.

"And if I refuse?" she gasped.

"You will be unwise." Never had she heard a voice more quiet. "But *should* you be so—inconsiderate—by the first post in the morning you will receive what, as evidence of identification, is the one human feature that neither may be recognized nor mistaken. It will be a human ear, that at one time has belonged to General Sir Redvers Conquest, chief commissioner of metropolitan police."

CHAPTER XIX.

"DINAH! DO NOT COME!"

OVER Dinah's senses spread a wave of spiritual and physical faintness that threatened entirely to engulf her. For a sickening moment she clung to the

desk on which stood the telephone—that same desk on which, a few days previously, Dan had scribbled the note that, but for her own resourcefulness, would have sent him to his death.

The voice continued:

“And, at a corresponding hour the next morning, following a similar failure on your part, the postman will leave another parcel—fellow to the previous delivery. And after that, every day a parcel, each with its own appeal.” A pause followed. “An eye, for instance.”

Only partly was she able to suppress the scream that rose to her lips. It was too sheerly demoniacal to be credible! Then, suddenly, a thought struck her.

“But how am I to know actually that my father is with you?” she demanded tremulously.

The reply was as prompt as it was terrifying.

“He shall speak to you!”

There was a moment's interval. Then, clear and unmistakable, Sir Redvers' own voice—urgent, commanding:

“Dinah! Do not come! Communicate at once with Scot——” The voice broke off so sharply that with a stab of realization she knew that hurriedly, brutally, he had been snatched from the instrument.

The first voice again, almost inaudible now for the singing in her ears:

“Just one more word. To avoid inquiry from one or other of the watchers, you will, of course, leave the house in some plausible disguise. I suggest you borrow a costume from your maid. For, should you be under observation, or should the car itself be followed, reprisals will be swift and unpleasant—for your father! The car is waiting for you,” the cold voice said on a note of finality, and the telephone went dead.

And with that deadness came inspiration—to telephone to Scotland Yard, explain the circumstances, and the exact measures the gang had taken to insure immunity, and leave it to official in-

genuity to find some method of circumvention.

She would call Parrot—that gaunt but lazily alert man who interviewed her, following her outwitting of Larry the Marine. Looking back she discovered in herself considerable confidence in Parrot.

With unsteady hands she unhooked the receiver and twisted the dial; listened.

There was no sound at all.

Ears straining into the receiver, frenziedly she jerked the hook; twisted the dial again.

Again that terrible, soul-crushing silence. Despairingly she allowed the receiver to fall from her hand to the table.

As the Black Knight had foreseen everything, so he had taken precautions against every countermove. Even as he had finished speaking, the telephone wire had been severed.

For a few stunned moments she sat thinking out her plan of action. It seemed that the one suggested by the unknown was the most practicable.

Quietly she went upstairs. Her maid, she knew, was at tea with the housekeeper, so that the little room close to her own would be empty.

In the wardrobe was the neat, semi-official costume in which Dinah was accustomed to see this maid who was so much of her own height and build. She abstracted this, together with a hat that, coming far down on her head, obscured the vivid glory of her hair. A touch of make-up and a pair of purloined shoes and stockings contributed still more to an illusion to which the large shopping basket she snatched up on her way downstairs added the last note of perfection.

Since Dinah's imprisonment, the detective lounging so unobtrusively across the street had become accustomed to the sight of the good-looking maid passing in and out of the house on the various

small missions that otherwise her mistress would have accomplished for herself, so that now he allowed Dinah to pass without more than a casual glance.

To the left then and down the eastern side of the square went Dinah. And there, drawn up between the entrances of two houses, was the car.

The chauffeur, lounging over the wheel, looked at her idly as she approached. She stopped.

"Chicago!" she whispered.

In leisurely fashion the driver climbed down, threw open the door. He was neither genial nor peremptory, only calmly indifferent.

"Get right in!" he said.

Thirty seconds later, with Dinah pressed fearful and half fainting into the farther corner of the tonneau, the car rolled smoothly away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAIR OF THE TIGER.

HO WANG said calmly, countering the white heat of Dan's impatience: "Without my help you would not cross the threshold, because you would be dead. In my company, even though probably the same unfortunate result will obtain, at least you will have found entrance to the place of your desire."

Realizing this for truth, and knowing Ho Wang and his methods, Dan consented to wait until the Chinaman gave the word. Three days he froze in the seamen's boarding house in Pennyfields before the message came.

He found the Chinaman in the act of taking the shutters from the dust-laden windows.

As, in his soiled and weather-stained dungarees, Dan slouched into the shop, beyond an indifferent glance Ho Wang ignored him.

A few moments, and as if he were coming to serve a customer, the Chinaman joined him. Together they passed through the curtain to the luxurious

room beyond. There Ho Wang obtained a cheap fabric suit case, opened a door behind a curtain that led to a yard, and through to a side street that was dingier and even more malodorous than the one in front.

"Go forward alone, my son," Ho Wang said quietly. "It is unwise for us to be seen together so soon."

He gave directions where they should meet, and from this point they traveled by bus to Notting Hill Gate, from where they struck east and north to the sordid labyrinth of Notting Dale.

The street in which eventually they found themselves was long and narrow; on either side every house had fallen into decay and was occupied by innumerable families of slum dwellers.

Halfway up on the left was a row of tall, flat-fronted houses separated from other buildings by patches of unoccupied land. Upon the high steps to the front doors children screamed and played; women gossiped and wrangled; idle, unwashed men lounged.

But, curiously, this overflow did not apply to the first house in the row. While the upper windows showed the same bedraggled signs of occupancy as the other houses, except for those occasional ones who passed quickly in and out, the ground floor was clear. It was up these steps that Ho Wang led Dan.

The passageway was bare and echoing and, except for the accumulated dust and dirt of ages, the stairs were uncarpeted. Ahead, however, cutting off the back premises from the rest of the house, a stout partition ran up to the ceiling, and in this was a door which Ho Wang unlocked and, as soon as they were through, relocked behind them.

Dan found himself in an intensity of darkness and, considering the turmoil of the street outside, an amazing silence. And to his keyed-up senses, in the dark and complete negation of sound, was a quality as if they had passed from the ordinary life of the world to some ele-

ment inherently sinister—a hushed, suspended negation of activity; expectant, fearful.

The feeling was not relieved even when Ho Wang produced a flash light, by the light of which he guided Dan down a short passage so heavily carpeted that their footsteps contributed only to the hush. There was a door to the right, and through this Ho Wang passed, closing it behind him.

The room was small, the window obscured by a heavy steel shutter, blotting out all view or any chance of ingress. And, except for a carpet as thick and soundless as the one outside, the place was entirely unfurnished.

With his flash light shining then directly downward, Ho Wang went on hands and knees. His sensitive yellow fingers groped among the heavy pile of the carpet. Suddenly the fingers paused then pressed downward.

Click!

Slowly a three-foot square of carpet raised itself lid-fashion from the surrounding boards. Through the opening Dan saw a flight of ladderlike steps descending to black and unseen depths below. Ho Wang motioned him to descend.

The descent was less than Dan anticipated. A dozen steps or so, and his feet touched ground. The trapdoor fell silently into place above them as the Chinaman joined him.

"Follow!" the latter instructed, and flashed his light ahead. Dan saw that, a dozen feet away, was a door, heavy and reinforced with iron bars, the surface unbroken by any indication of a lock.

By the light of his torch the Chinaman scrutinized the brickwork of the arch in which the door was built. He paused. The yellow hand stole up, pressed at the patch of light. There was a subdued click and the door swung open.

They passed through. Automatically

the door swung to behind them. There was another click and lights sprang into being.

Dazedly Dan looked about him, and as his eyes assimilated his surroundings the brooding expectancy, that previously had struck so coldly upon his senses, intensified like a living thing about him, pressing into him, clutching at nerves and heart.

Almost as far as his eye could see was a series of archways that appeared to stretch forward to infinity, with, dividing each from its neighbor, a space that denoted a cellar similar to the one in which he now stood.

Cold, unfurnished, the walls of bare brick, the floors of rubble, it came to Dan that he stood in the foundations of the whole row of buildings, in which each house communicated directly with its neighbor.

Unhesitatingly, his feet making but little sound among the rubble of the flooring, Ho Wang pressed forward. Arch after arch they passed through, cellar after cellar they left behind. They came at length to an arch in which was a door similar to the first. Again Ho Wang manipulated the wall, and the door swung open.

In the cellar was a flight of wooden steps communicating with a trapdoor. But here, instead of mounting immediately, the Chinaman paused, lowered the suit case to the ground and, stooping, opened it.

From its interior he brought two heavy gowns of gray, one of which he handed to Dan. Correctly adjusted, while the robe obscured his body, it left his head and face exposed. He turned, to receive from Ho Wang an object that gave to the whole proceeding its crowning touch of abnormality.

For the object that Ho Wang thrust into his hand was the complete mask of a stag which, when assumed, completely covered his head and shoulders.

And as for a moment he stood in

the enveloping silence of that unearthly chamber confronted by that formless gray shape standing motionless before him, to Dan it was as though he were plunged into a living nightmare, a nightmare of the very soul and spirit. For he saw before him one who, in the mask he had adjusted, had taken on the semblance of a baboon!

Slowly the Chinaman mounted the steps, and with his frail hand thrust open the trapdoor at the summit.

When they had passed through it they found themselves in a room, long and of exceptional narrowness. Later Dan knew that to provide this secret entrance to the upper floor, a slice had been filched from the side of the house. Occupying practically the whole of one end of the room was an iron spiral staircase.

Upward, step by step, they mounted; passed through the opening cut into two separate floors. At the top was a tiny chamber, in the wall a thick, steel door, inset so closely to the wall that it might have been sealed hermetically.

In the wall on the right was a tiny bell push of ivory. The Chinaman pressed this in a series of long rings and short as though he telegraphed a message in Morse; one that none without exact knowledge could have reproduced.

And then, for the first time since they left the street, Ho Wang spoke.

"Your password," he whispered, "is 'Camorra.' When he appears, take the first opportunity to enter. For the rest you will be guided by circumstances—and fate."

Slowly the door swung open before them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GUILLOTINE.

INSTINCTIVELY, as Ho Wang made neither sign nor move, Dan waited. And suddenly, framed in that doorway, appeared a figure so grossly corpulent

that even beneath the enshrouding gray gown he wore, one could discern the rolls of fat that quivered and shook with each slightest movement.

Obscuring the head was the complete mask of a tiger that in its stark ferocity was utterly terrifying.

For a moment there was a tense and awful silence. Slowly, blankly, the head turned to each of the gray-clad figures, and although no word passed, Dan knew himself at a moment of crisis and even deadlier peril.

With the same slow deliberation that from the first had characterized him, the fat, puffy hand of the "tiger" stole to his side pocket, producing a paper upon which Dan was able to detect a list of names.

Slowly, inexorably, the podgy finger traveled to each of these in turn, counting.

The terrible head raised itself, traveled again from Ho Wang to Dan, and from Dan to Ho Wang.

Then, those awful yellow eyes burning into his own, the tiger spoke.

"Password?" he jerked, and coming from between those wide and awful jaws the voice was hollow and menacing as a knell.

"Camorra!" whispered Dan.

The terrible head nodded, turned to Ho Wang who, Dan observed, had edged a little away from the door.

"Password!" the voice said again.

Incredibly, Ho Wang turned, and as one whose limbs were frozen with terror loped slowly and stiffly toward the stair.

With a snarl that would have done credit to the man-eating tiger whose mask he wore, and a speed amazing in its agility, the big man was after him. Spellbound, Dan watched the hand beneath his robe steadying the automatic that from the first he had trained upon that huge doorkeeper.

Fascinated, at the very brink of the stairs he saw the tiger's huge hand shoot

out, close about the frail forearm of the Chinaman. And instantaneously there arose from that huge bulk such a bellow of pain as to cause Dan to shrink back, pressing himself against the wall to avoid discovery by those who so certainly would rush out to ascertain the cause of such terrific outcry.

Enthralled, his eyes followed those two figures, swaying and gyrating now on the brink of the stairs. Astonishingly, though those bull-like bellows continued shatteringly to ring out, the tiger appeared to make no effort to release his hand from the other's arm. More surprising still, it was as though by means of that hold Ho Wang was pulling him inch by inch toward the stairhead.

For an instant they seemed to sway precariously on the brink. Then, with a final scream from the tiger they disappeared. Thump by prodigious thump Dan heard their loud descent until, with a final shattering thud they stopped, apparently at the point where the staircase passed through the floor immediately below.

A few minutes Dan waited, charged to the breaking point of expectancy, every moment anticipating some move or sign from Ho Wang.

None came, and the expectancy changed gradually to uncertainty.

For while in that brief struggle at the stairhead had been every indication that the Chinaman had the situation very much in hand, and that his intention was that, willy-nilly, the tiger should accompany him down those precipitous stairs, always there was the possibility that in the fall it was he who had taken the greater hurt and that, thus disabled, the tiger had mastered him.

But, granting that, why had the latter not raised the alarm?

In any case, Dan decided at last, as there was no particular hurry, reprisals upon Larry the Marine would have to wait until he, Dan, was assured of the safety of Ho Wang.

With this object Dan hastened to the stairhead and down the steps. At the first break in the basement, where the stairs passed through the lower floor, where, also, had occurred that prodigious bump, was no sign either of the Chinaman or the tiger.

He followed then down the other flights, only to discover the trapdoor at the bottom tightly closed.

Wonderingly he opened it and dropped through; examined with his torch every inch of the way down that series of cellars. At points where the rubble was loose and powdery he saw signs that something heavy had been dragged along the ground, but toward the far end where the underfoot was hard, this petered out.

He mounted the steps, passed through the trapdoor and into the room.

The door was fast closed, and there was neither handle nor key. No stamping at the threshold or groping along the lintel and walls discovered any way whereby it could be opened.

He was trapped!

His heart beating with an apprehension he attempted desperately to beat down, he made his way back to the door through which so dramatically had appeared the tiger.

To his surprise it was opened still, and as obviously he could do no good here, and with the recollection of Ho Wang's last injunctions in mind, quickly and silently he slipped through. As if by the pressure of his feet on the farther side, the door swung to behind him.

He was in the passage, long, dimly lighted and thickly carpeted, with the far end cut off by a door, tightly closed.

It was that door he suspected that had shut off, also, the raucous cries of the tiger as so mysteriously Ho Wang had drawn him toward the stairhead. And like the closing of the one just negotiated, as Dan's foot touched the threshold, that stout and thickly padded barrier opened before him.

Then, but for the iron-bound arms which within a split second closed about him and that with gorilla strength seemed literally to press the very life-blood from his veins, he would have screamed aloud.

The scene that met his eyes was one that the distorted mind of Doré might have conjured.

Set in the center of the room was a square, four-feet-high stage. In the center of that stage, its frame a glaring blood-red, was—a guillotine! And clasped in the embrace of the *lunette*, the dull and lifeless black of which was in such vivid contrast to the milk-white neck that it surrounded, and the ghastly pallor of the face and warm bronze of the hair that hung lifelessly above the hideous, sawdust-filled basket, lay—a girl.

But ingrained to the heart's core of it with horror as was this scene, there was to its stark agony a factor that elevated it to the purely satanic.

The blade, gleaming evilly in the harsh glare of the innumerable unshaded bulbs with which the room was lighted, was reënforced to incredible weight by bars of lead. And all that kept that blade from its descent was a thin steel-wire cord threaded through an aperture in the frame. By means of a pulley suspended from the ceiling, the wire terminated at the figure who stood, frozen to immobility, in the far corner of the platform—a figure upon the quality of whose fortitude depended the life of her who, limp and unconscious, lay beneath the shadow of that accursed triangular blade.

For that man's feet were clamped to the floor, his right arm bound rigidly to his side. Of the left arm that was raised above his head, all fingers but the index were bound tightly to the palm, so that upon the forefinger, hooked so precariously through the ring with which that dangling wire terminated, rested the whole weight of the blade. And when,

from sheer exhaustion, that finger straightened, the blade would fall.

And with a flood of ice-cold horror that paralyzed his strength so that he lay limp and inert in the grip of those gorilla arms, Dan realized that she who lay beneath the shadow of that razor-sharp and weighted knife was Dinah Conquest; that he whose failing forefinger was all that stood between herself and death was her father, Sir Redvers Conquest, commissioner of the metropolitan police.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNMASKED!

WHAT is the meaning of this disturbance?" The voice, as cold as the tinkling of ice, came from the platform upon which, at a small table, was seated a man so small in stature as actually to be a dwarf; a man whose clear-cut, æsthetic face shone with a veritable aura of evil; a man whom even in the paralyzed horror of the situation Dan knew to be the fount and inspiration of this saturnalia of murder and revenge.

And seated in a semicircle before that dire platform were a full half score of figures garbed in the same grotesque fashion as himself, the head of each a replica of some bird or beast; motionless, intent, their presence but adding to the horror of the scene.

It was the figure who held Dan who replied to that frozen voice—a tall man in the grasp of whose muscular strength Dan's own steel-wire agility was impotent.

"Sorry, Leader," he said. "It's necessary. This member failed to tap the code on the door before entering. Probably only forgetfulness, but it won't do to take chances."

"I presume he passed the tiger all right?" that cold voice came from the platform. And to Dan it was as though the pale eyes penetrated the slits in his mask to bore into his brain.

Nevertheless, even through his frenzy, his usual cold, clear mind was beginning once more to operate. To discover his true identity the man would have to remove his arms from about him, and this would enable Dan to dive for his automatic. In which the case the dividing line between life and death for that glacial, demoniac figure on the scaffold would be just one split second.

"Camorra!" he said loudly; and The Leader nodded.

Within arm's length of where Dan was held was an unoccupied seat.

"Release one arm," The Leader instructed his jailer in that same chill voice, "and allow the member to tap out the code for the evening on the back of that chair."

With the words Dan's heart took a flying leap into his throat. Once those instructions were obeyed, and particularly if it were his right hand that was given freedom, he would have the chance for which with all his soul he had been praying.

But the man who held him was taking no chances. Slowly, with infinite wariness, he loosened his grip, not upon Dan's right arm but upon his left, and beneath the folds of that voluminous cloak the pistol was on Dan's right. There was still a chance, but the odds were a thousand to one.

The odds failed. Watchful as a lynx, with a frenzied dive he made to pass the automatic from one hand to the other. He was wrenched backward as easily as a reed in a gale, while a hand, iron-hard and as merciless, closed about his wrist and with a vicious wrench twisted it so that the pistol fell with a clatter.

Then, with a sudden sweep, his captor snatched the mask from Dan's head.

Already he could see that the hand of the commissioner, the forefinger of which was hooked through the ring, was shaking as with ague; that the sweat was running in streams down the agonized face.

As a man awaits the crash of all upon which his life and hope is founded, for an incredibly long moment Dan's strained ears listened for the thud that would betoken the irrevocable end of the life of Dinah.

Instead, clear cut as an icicle and as cold, came The Leader's voice.

"Than, at this moment, Mr. Gravenhurst—for that, I make no doubt, is who you are—no visitor could be more welcome!"

Frantically Dan's eyes turned to the commissioner. In view of whatever faint vestige of hope remained of rescue, how long could that palsied finger sustain the weight of that incalculably loaded knife?

As Dan was opening his lips to frame distraught, incoherent words, that other voice came again—calm, measured.

"An outside, if not a disinterested witness, of a supreme example of poetic justice," The Leader remarked. "Our principal, though somewhat unwilling, guest to-night was instrumental in cutting short the life of my brother, and it is but equitable he should act in a similar capacity to his own daughter."

It seemed that that feverish consolation could not be for many minutes delayed. With a swift contraction of the throat that threatened completely to choke him, Dan saw how the commissioner swayed on his feet, how the blood had drained from his face, leaving it of ghastly pallor; that his eyes were glazing as one on the very outer edge of collapse. And with the collapse of Sir Redvers would fall, also, that dreadful, merciless blade.

"After which," that measured voice went on, "the guillotine will have a second victim—and a third."

The chuckle with which he checked himself was that of a cold, malignant fiend.

"For upon the principle which it is the trade of a police commissioner to sustain—that of a life for a life—it is only just

that as he himself will then have been guilty of infanticide, the extreme penalty should be meted out to him."

He paused. Then:

"After which, as the recognized penalty for spying, you—yourself!"

Upon that awful assembly fell a silence in which, to Dan, only the throbbing of his own heart went to break the tense and palpitating horror of the stillness.

"Where is the tiger?"

Until that moment the obsession of his revenge had gripped The Leader to the exclusion of all other preoccupations. But now he looked about him impatiently and with quick suspicion.

Quietly confident, a deep voice in the entrance door said:

"Right here!"

A moment, and Dan had that gross, corpulent figure beside him. Lazily, but with the same quickness of movement that had characterized his lunge after the fleeing Ho Wang, he stooped to retrieve the fallen pistol.

Came then the crowning amazement of that awful and devastating night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLEAN-UP.

NOW, gentlemen," the tiger said quietly, "each of you will put your hands above your heads!" Momentarily he paused. "And the one who makes any other movement will not have time to regret it because he will be very, very, dead," he added pleasantly; but the eyes behind the insensate cruelty of his mask embraced comprehensively each figure in the room.

With an oath the one of giant strength released his hold upon Dan, and with amazing swiftness struck out. But he was a second too slow. The man in the tiger mask shot him. In the instant that his jailer, a writhing, blasphe-ming heap, struck the floor, Dan felt his own pistol pressed into his hand.

It was an object lesson from which, with one exception, those of the semi-circle were not slow to profit. As though released by a spring, their hands and arms shot upward.

But simultaneously with Dan's frenzied rush to the platform, The Leader, with a pantherlike spring, was halfway across to the commissioner, who was by now almost unconscious.

One touch, and Sir Redvers' finger, resting now by the very tip, would have fallen inertly from the ring.

Dan shot from the hip and in mid-air The Leader was stricken. Into that livid face came a look of mild protest, of faint, chiding surprise before, in an attitude almost of prayer, he slumped upon his knees where, rocking for a moment, he remained. Then with a little sigh he fell forward, and from that position did not stir until, much later, they carried him away.

Dan, however, already had leaped upon the platform, with both hands tightly clasping the wire. Within a second the commissioner had fallen fainting to the floor.

A voice, loud and only faintly irritable, shouted:

"Hurry up, you fellers!"

Amazingly a voice came back, assured and reassuring:

"Coming, sir!"

Through the door filed a procession of stalwarts, in the hand of each a heavy Colt revolver of regulation pattern.

"And now," said Superintendent Parrot, "to get rid of this theatrical outfit." And with relieved hands he lifted the tiger mask from his head, swept the gown from his body and pulled the corpulent motor cushions from beneath his coat.

With quick strides he crossed the room and clambered onto the scaffold; with tender hands released the girl from the awful clutches of the *lunette*.

"Let 'er go, Mr. Gravenhurst," he called cheerily; and with a thud that

even then brought a chill of horror to Dan's heart, the blade fell.

Bearing the still-unconscious Dinah in his arms, Dan followed Parrot to the passage outside. For it was inconceivable that she should regain her senses within sight of that dread guillotine. Leaving her to the care of Dan and her father, Parrot returned purposefully to the room where, handcuffed and abject, the ten—not nearly so impressive without the meretricious addition of gown and mask—were lined against the wall.

"Fetch that fat feller!" he instructed the sergeant, who saluted and went out. He returned with a grossly flabby and corpulent figure whose only anxiety appeared to be to render as much fulsome assistance as might be permitted to him.

"I'm shy one crook," Parrot said curtly, "one that after him"—a lean thumb indicated the huddled and lifeless form of The Leader—"I want worst of any."

The gross man nodded slowly his enormous head. Almost it was as though for a fleeting instant the shadow of a smile crossed his loose and flaccid lips.

"You mean Larry the Marine?" he said.

"I mean Larry the Marine," Parrot confirmed. "Where is he?"

There was infinite meaning in the glance the fat man threw at him.

"Come," he said quietly, "and I'll show you."

"Any tricks from you, you fat crook," Parrot said decisively, "an' I'll fill you so full of lead you'll think you're a sinker for whale fishin'. Go on ahead!"

And with the barrel of an automatic pressing painfully into his spine, the fat man moved away.

They went through a door at the far corner of the room and down a short flight of steps to a cell-like apartment some six feet square—a cell in which the only objects were a bed, a chair, a washstand, a table upon which was a meal, a

bottle half filled with whisky, an empty glass and, his arms flung wide among the debris of soiled dishes and broken food, the body of a man.

"After his work was done," the fat crook said quietly over his shoulder, "The Leader wasn't taking chances of his hireling getting away with the story." He paused, then added cynically: "Not with ten thousand pounds of good English money!"

Stepping forward, Parrot picked up the glass from which the dead man had drunk. At the bottom was a tiny white sediment.

"Cæsar Borgia stuff, eh?" he diagnosed, and as the fat man nodded, Parrot added with careless satisfaction: "Oh, well, so long as he's dead——"

For the stiffened figure who there sprawled in front of them was Larry the Marine.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRICELESS JEWEL.

IT was three days before Dinah, now fully recovered from the fall she had sustained in the struggle to reach her father, the fall that temporarily but mercifully had rendered her unconscious, was able to hear the story of her escape. And as she had not even seen the guillotine in the embrace of which for so long she had been held, she was able to bear the news tempered only with pity for her father.

"It was Ho Wang, of course, who was responsible for the rescue," Parrot said lazily with a glance at Dan. "When that fat feller came to the door to find that, instead of only the one required to make up the ten, there were two, Wang started backin' away so that the tiger'd make for him and so give you a chance to slip through the door. He remembered suddenly that though he'd given you the password he'd clean forgotten to teach you the rapped-out code necessary to admit you into the inner

room. There's no doubt that, owin' to you havin' saved his life from some plug-uglies who were out to pinch a parcel of his jewels, he liked you a whole lot, an' for all he knew he'd sent you to your death."

Dan nodded.

"I get you," he said. "The omission of that code made things a bit awkward."

Parrot, too, nodded.

"It was because Wang realized this," he said quietly, "that, though he knew he was layin' himself open to a long stretch in doin' so, he put through a hurry-up call for me. While my boys were assemblin' for battle, so to speak, I came ahead in the fastest car I could lay hands on. Wang took me through a concealed door in that ground-floor room with the shuttered window to where, trussed like a chicken, he'd got the tiger—who was unconscious. I was all for waitin' till the boys came before makin' the raid, but Wang said if I wanted to see you alive there wasn't a moment to spare. So I pinched the tiger's cloak and mask, made myself look fat with motor cushions, an' just pushed on ahead to see what I could do."

Dan had turned rather pale. He was thinking what, but for the chance rescue of Ho Wang and his jewels, Dinah's fate would have been.

Then a sudden thought struck him.

"By the way," he said, "what had Ho Wang done to his arm to be able to drag the tiger along with him?"

Parrot's expressionless face lighted to something nearly approaching a grin.

"The old apache stunt," he answered "Sewed his sleeve full of fishhooks, but needle-sharp with whacking big barbs. Once the tiger's hand closed over those

he'd have had to tear his fingers to ribbons to release himself."

Dinah looked up, speaking for the first time.

"Surely Ho Wang won't be punished?" she demanded quickly. "After all he's done?"

"As king's evidence," Parrot replied, "he won't get a day."

Lazily he dived into his pocket and produced a tiny parcel which he passed over to Dinah.

"He said would I give you this, Miss Conquest," he said.

Wonderingly she took it—and with an exclamation of amazement and delight the tiny box dropped from her fingers, as she held up a diamond-and-emerald ring almost dazzling in its beauty.

"For the love of Mike!" Dan exclaimed, and from the box extracted a card. He read aloud:

"Will the honorable lady graciously be pleased to accept this so insignificant trinket from the hands of the humble

"Ho WANG."

Something of a connoisseur, the commissioner stretched out his hand for the ring which, still rather dazedly, Dinah dropped into his palm.

For a long moment Sir Redvers gazed into the heart and mystery of those magnificent stones.

"You might like to know," he said quietly at last, indicating the emerald—flawless and of unbelievable brilliance, "that as a jewel this is both unique and absolutely priceless."

Dan's arm stole through that of Dinah.

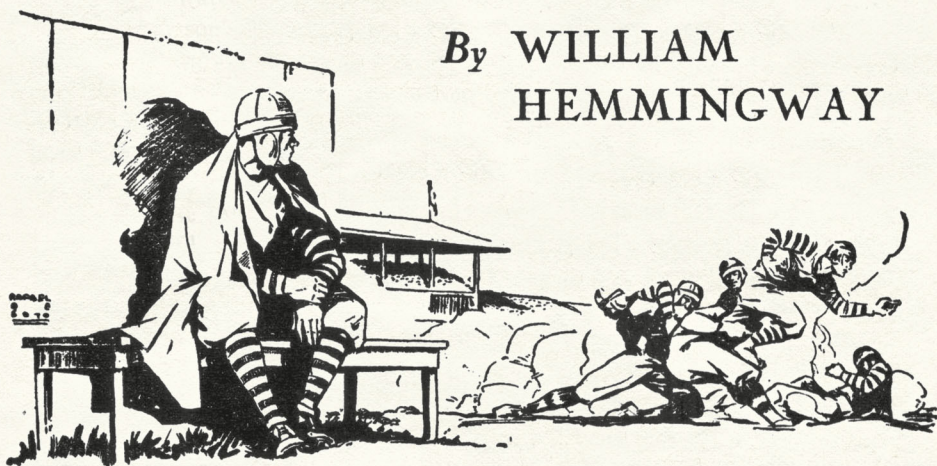
"But neither so unique nor so priceless as mine," he said.

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The PARIAH COMES ACROSS

By WILLIAM
HEMMINGWAY



Unpopular at Yale from Start to Finish, He Did His Stuff
and Made 'Em Like It.

IF Grosvenor Watson had had a grain of sense, he'd have gone to some other college. It wasn't as if he didn't know the law, the unwritten law, which, as Paracelsus or Li Po or some other wise old bird tells us, is the strongest law of all. Isn't it, though? Well, suppose you spill salt—spill it by accident, mind, not pour it—and see whether you dare fail to take up a pinch of it with your right forefinger and thumb and toss it over your left shoulder! Of course you'll do it, as men have been doing it ever since there was salt to spill, even though there never has been a statute or edict or anything else in writing to compel them.

Grove knew all about the law because it was part of the atmosphere into which he had been born and in which he grew almost all the way up. By the time he was ready to go to prep school he had told his more intimate friends that it

was a crazy law, and, if he ever wanted to, he'd kick it to Helangon or some such strange place. In his four busy years at Willets-Andover he had almost forgotten it, probably would have forgotten it completely if it had not been for the tubby Jennings girl, who knew she lacked "It" and therefore tried to earn repute as a wit by being cattish.

"So you live in New Haven?" she repeated, as Grove was dancing with her at senior prom to show his friendship for her really decent brother. "Too bad, isn't it, that you can't go to Yale?"

"Yes," he answered politely—females were the only things he bothered to be polite to—"yes; it is too bad."

But that was only to quiet her, keep her off a sore spot in the back of his mind; because, if you really must know, the unwritten law was founded upon the idea that all the people of New Haven were—er—undesirables, though certain

upper-class men used a shorter and uglier word, and therefore their sons could never expect to be welcome in Yale University, which was the intellectual, architectural, æsthetic and cultural pride of the rich old city of New Haven. Lord knows where the thing started; for when Yale was founded, to train preachers, way back in Colonial days, practically all the students came from the thriving little port and the shops and farms near by. Big factories, rich endowments and social prestige came later. Probably the sons and grandsons of the early generations rubbed in their native superiority so much that the outlander students, as a mere defense mechanism, originated the unwritten law; but at all events it has prevailed during the last three generations.

The more Grosvenor Watson tried to drive the tubby girl and her catty speech out of his mind, the more he found himself thinking of them. True, his closest friends were going to Dartmouth, and he had halfway promised to go with them—but that darned girl had thrown a bomb into his mind. When he woke up next morning he had only one word to say—gosh! For he discovered that in the night his subconscious mind had settled the question for him, and as soon as he could get a chance to see the head master alone he told him, "I'm going to enter Yale."

"But, my dear boy," Doctor Colton reminded him, "think how much—ah—pleasanter it will be at Dartmouth, with Downes and Townsend and your other friends. And you will derive quite as much benefit intellectually. There isn't a better college in the country."

"But, doctor," Grosvenor persisted, "I feel that I simply must go to Yale. You see, sir, I never thought of it seriously until lately."

"Suppose you keep thinking of it seriously for a month, and then tell me how you feel," said the head master, who

knew all about the unwritten law, but obeyed the queer inhibition against talking about it that was one of the law's most potent factors in perpetuating itself. We all smile indulgently at the taboos of the poor, deluded Polynesians, but if we look about us we shall discover our highly civilized and sophisticated selves blindly obeying taboos just as ridiculous. No? Then, sir, let us see you walk down the Avenue in a top-per and a sport suit. Taboo is law inexorable. And when Grosvenor Watson called on the head master a month later and said he was surer than ever that he wanted to enter Yale, Doctor Colton consented, though he paid silent tribute to the law by smiling a sad smile.

In spite of the evil omen, young Watson, on the day of the fall games, began to make a name for himself in several freshman events. He won the running broad with his first jump, a good ten inches longer than his nearest competitor's mark, and at that he did not seem to be trying. He fouled the edge of the circle in his first effort with the sixteen-pound shot, but in his second he was fully two inches back of the line, and still he put the shot nearly six inches farther than any one else. By the time he went to the start of the two-twenty, all Yale was talking about him. Queer thing, no one seemed to know his name except a red-cheeked, rawboned fellow from Michigan, who appeared to be his only friend in college, and he talked entirely too much for a freshman, even if his chum was a phenom.

"You ought to know all about Watson," said the awkward lad, "for he lives right here in New Haven."

"Oh!" said the senior who had been inquiring. The rawboned innocent thought the syllable expressed admiration. Without waiting to explain, the senior hurried off with his news to the captain of the varsity track team, who wanted to know. Now, the captain was a good enough fellow, hated the stupid

injustice of the unwritten law, and made up his mind on the spot that he would be nice to the astonishing freshman, even though he was a—well, a native of New Haven. So, as he saw Watson trotting toward the start of the two-twenty, he went over to the finish line and took his stance near the tape—which wasn't tape, by the way, but a frail, fuzzy line of scarlet worsted, stretched taut across the cinder track.

On the other side of the oval the captain saw a curl of silvery smoke gush upward, and, before he could hear the crack of the pistol, a huddle of lithe youngsters was tearing along the cinder path like some incredible dream animal with twenty-four confused legs all a-flying. Up the off side of the track the runners kept well together, and still held in a compact squad when they scrambled around the turn and into the straightaway. In the next fifty yards four of the pack began gradually to show in front, running in an even rank, the eight knees flying like parts of a well-balanced engine, as they dashed, stride for stride, farther and farther ahead of the crowd. The pounding of the steel-spiked shoes on the cinders thundered like the approach of a troop of horse. On came the four, evenly aligned, running as one—fifty yards from home, forty yards, thirty-five—

Then the tallest of the four, the one on the outside, with six feet of height and a solid two hundred pounds of furious force, suddenly shot out ahead, starting a new race, leaving the three as if they had no business with him, and making a big gain with every lengthening stride. There was a sight to see: the gigantic sprinter's thatch of yellow hair flapping in time with his prodigious bound, which he seemed to make with ease, his blue eyes gleaming, and a smile displaying his even white teeth, as he darted on. A dozen yards from the finish he turned his head and looked back, then eased the pace a little. Yet

his deep chest broke the tape seven yards in front of his three late companions—"in a walk," the experts said.

"Pooch" Gahagan, the dry old track coach, looked at his watch, squinted, and looked the second time. "Ho-lee sailors!" he cried: "Twenty-one-four! And a freshman, at that!"

The captain of the varsity track team heard Pooch as he walked toward Watson, tingling with admiration. The big boy was breathing easily as he strolled along, plucking a red shred from his shirt. The captain patted the youngster's broad back and laid his hand kindly on the off shoulder.

"You ran a good race, freshman," he said cordially.

"Hell! you ought to see me when I'm really running," the youth replied, looking down patronizingly into the captain's horror-stricken eyes. Oh, it wasn't as if he didn't know. He knew, all right; for the first man he had had pointed out to him on his first day in college was the captain of the varsity track team. That devastated man stood speechless now at such an exhibition of lèse majesté and contemplated the disappearing freshman as he strode off without one backward glance, head up and shoulders swinging.

"Poor simp!" the captain softly said to himself. "He'll never have a ghost of a chance. Impossible!" Something of the sort occurred to the rawboned Jim Hodges, Watson's only visible friend, who had run across the field in time to witness the incident.

"Don't you think you should have paid a little more attention to the varsity captain?" he asked as he fell into step with Watson.

"No; nor to any one else who tries to patronize me," the young giant snapped back. "No man living can get away with that."

"But he didn't mean it that way at all," Jim insisted.

"Then he'd better pick his words carefully," said Watson. "Yes, and keep

his blasted hands to himself. I know I'm the best man in Yale, but just because I live here he thinks——" He managed to choke back the rest of his speech.

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Hodges, the innocent.

"Everything, you chump!" Watson growled. "These smart Alecks think that if you live in New Haven you're a——well, you just can't come in. I'll show 'em!"

And he certainly showed them plenty when he turned out for football practice. The only trouble was that they could not feel quite certain where he played best; for, besides being one of the surest and longest punters and drop-kickers in the freshman class, he was as accurate as a machine in throwing a forward pass or being on the spot to pick one out of the air and flash the length of the field before any one could get within three jumps of him. Yet all this was forgotten when you saw him play guard or tackle; for he had some mysterious way of always tearing a hole in the scrub line wide enough for an airship to go through, and as for interference, the whole world remembers when he carried his right half through a bunch of Brown freshmen and touched down both man and ball behind their line.

But the paragon had a flaw: hit him and he'd hit back, no matter what was at stake or how important the game; and, of course, any referee will shoo a man off the field for fighting. The enemy soon discovered this failing of Grosvenor Watson's; so they always had a fellow waiting to punch him when the referee wasn't looking, knowing that, when the gentleman in white was looking he'd hit back, and so get himself invited to go away from there. "That's all right for fellows who will stand for it, but not for me," he told the coaches when they tried to show him the folly of getting even. "Any one who hits me

is going to get licked—I don't care whether it's on the field or in chapel."

This little peculiarity accounts for the fact that, although Watson played football all through college, he never got his letter, for even after freshman year they kept him in the scrub—never by any chance on the team. And the more the fatherly Walter Camp tried to explain how much they needed him as their best triple threat, and how impossible it was to play him because he was sure to get himself thrown out and so ruin the teamwork, the more convinced he became that he was a victim of the unwritten law, that he was excluded really because he had committed the offense of living in New Haven. He became such a grouch that few of his classmates spoke to him.

"Why don't you chuck football, Grove?" Jim Hodges inquired one day when he was grumbling.

"Why should I?" Watson asked. "I like the game; I don't care a tinker's dam for their varsity letter or any of their back-slapping; but I do belong in this town and this college, and it's up to me to do my bit for them. If they don't know how to make the best of it, that's their funeral."

Meanwhile Watson won glory on track and field; for year after year he was intercollegiate champion in putting the shot and in the two-twenty dash, with an occasional win in the running broad jump and the quarter-mile run for good measure. Captain, coach, and faculty athletic committee were in a pickle when they were choosing the men to go to England for the games with Oxford and Cambridge; for they were afraid that Watson's bumptious self-esteem and quickness to take offense would make trouble for everybody. But he was ten yards better than any one else in the two-twenty, and sure to win the shot; so they had to take him—with many a prayer that he would not disgrace them.

Before they had been in England a week the Oxford captain called on Dick Shelton, the Yale captain, one morning.

"I've a big favor to ask," he said, "but I hope before you say, 'No,' you'll consider that the Duke of Eastwaite is really one of the finest sportsmen in the country. He wants to know if you'll permit him to invite your Mr. Grosvenor Watson down to his place over the weekend. Says he chatted with him in the infield the other day, and he's the most original and delightful American he ever met. And the duke's a bit of a collector of Americans, if you know what I mean."

"Certainly not—oh, yes, yes, of course!" Shelton gasped. "Fact is, I'm a little surprised; for we find Watson a little—er—difficult at times. But he may go, of course."

"Thanks so much. Eastwaite says he's as charming as Mr. Choate, though he is a mere youngster; wants all his people to meet him."

Dick Shelton pondered long after the Englishman had gone, but he could not invent any hypothesis to account for such a reaction to Watson's social qualities. If he had pondered deeper he might have noted that the English had welcomed him as a typical American university man and had made much of him, not knowing in their isolation that a citizen of New Haven is a nobody at good old Yale, and that Watson had simply met the English hospitality half-way. He was invited to more great houses than any other three men on the team, and wherever he went he seemed to fascinate his hosts and his fellow guests. *Punch* had a paragraph expressing the hope that before many years England might have the pleasure of welcoming this attractive young Yankee as the American Ambassador at the Court of St. James.

All of which made not the slightest change in Watson's relations with his teammates. Some of them made

friendly overtures by gently joshing him about his intimates among the great and the near great, but he met all that with a hard eye and a most discouraging silence. He was the same old Watson, and he stayed that way to the day of his graduation. His queer sense of loyalty to his chilly Alma Mater remained unchanged, too; for when football practice was about to begin, three months after he was graduated, he journeyed all the way to New Haven and spent valuable time that should have been devoted to selling bonds to New York investors in the effort to persuade Walter Camp to let him help coach the team.

"Watson, I hate to tell you this, but it's better to be frank," said Mr. Camp. "I have already done everything in my power to have you appointed my first assistant for the season, but I'm up against a stone wall. I've told them you know more football than I do, but the committee won't budge."

"Then I guess I'd better sing low," said Watson. "Thank you, Mr. Camp, just the same." He did not sell many bonds in the next few days. How can a man sell bonds when his mind is full of football, night and day, and he is eating his heart because a lot of nitwits will not let him put his football mastery at their services? This man lived football; in his mind the world was not round but oval. And he was exiled from it, as desolate as *Ivanhoe* stretched helpless on his couch of pain while the gorgeous battle was raging near at hand. In the midst of his torture a ray of light broke, when Charley Saunders asked him to lunch and casually remarked that the faculty of King's College had got over their grouch against football and were going to let the boys play again—and would he care to pick the team and coach them, with an honorarium of five thousand dollars for his three months' work? Would he care to do it? Would he? Why waste time on foolish questions?

Too great sophistication is the bane of good football. A team made up of third and fourth-year men, especially if they have been winners, seem to lose the fierce appetite for work and craving for perfection that must inspire good football, and they unconsciously let down in their work. Remember the Eleven Iron Men? What became of them the next year? And, conversely, when Watson went up to King's College he found nearly a hundred huskies eager to play the game and ready to absorb good coaching as the desert sands absorb water. He felt inspired; and the things he taught the team about slicing through the enemy's line, of the finer strategy of the delayed pass, of the exquisite art of kicking, and especially of the surest way to hold an aggressive bunch of line plungers harmless and strew them backward the landscape o'er, were worth a football king's ransom. And, no matter how hard he worked his boys, they were out there next day, hungry for more.

As a kindly gesture, Yale had put King's on their schedule for a game in mid-October—a pleasant workout for their first-class team, and a nice thing for King's to have the honor of playing with them. They still felt that way for the first five minutes of play. Then they suddenly woke up to the fact that they were not getting anywhere. They had kicked off; the King's left half back had run the ball back twenty yards before they could stop him, but the lowly novices kept the ball for half a dozen plays, which netted them fifteen yards more, and even when Yale got the ball they could not carry it within striking distance of the King's goal line. Their plunges were blocked and thrown back and their forward passes were smothered.

"Fellows, you're playing the best football in the country to-day," Watson told his pupils as they were about to run out on the field for the second half. "I

want you to ease off a little now. Score on them if you can, but don't do it more than once. You've still got to meet some tough teams in your regular schedule, and you must not burn yourselves out in this practice game."

"O. K.! Watch our smoke!" said the captain, and the team trotted out on the gridiron, grinning like hungry men going into an appetizing dining room. They kept the ball in Yale's territory for the rest of the afternoon, and when Kelso, their tall freak right half, heaved the ball full fifty feet for an impossible forward pass, little Hannigan was jogging obliquely across the field to nip it out of the air and scoot with it across Yale's goal line before any one quite understood what the whole business was about. Absolute silence followed until Kelso kicked the goal—then all the noise in the world seemed to be concentrated on King's field. It was pathetic to see stout old King's men, who had played on winning teams away back in the '90s, whacking one another on the back and uttering raucous cries which they thought were cheers. As for the regular cheer leaders and their roaring devotees—well, they filled the air so full of noise that the vibrations slowed the ball in its flight. Fact. A professor of math who was a shark on ballistics figured it out for me on the back of a program.

Yale woke up after this calamity, and played as they had never played before so early in the season, but all they got for their work was exercise and bewilderment; for the local worms, having turned and found the turning good, kept right on at it and stubbornly fought over every inch of ground. Watson's face grew longer and longer as the minutes passed, and as I stood near him on the side lines I was more interested in observing him as a study in gloom than in watching the game. One minute before the last whistle blew I thought he was going into some kind of a fit; for his

cheeks turned purple, then suddenly faded to ghastly white. I followed his gaze, and saw little Hannigan, who had picked up a fumble, which no Yale man ever should have made but did make just the same, and now was safely scurrying with the ball across Yale's line.

I shall not write what Watson said just then, because nothing but asbestos paper could hold those hearty words. He caught Walter Camp, the Yale coach, by the arm as he was hurrying past, and held him fast.

"Oh, Mr. Camp," he protested, "I can't tell you how sorry I am. I told those fellows to score only once, for I wanted them to show something that would land me up there to help you at Yale next year—and the darned fools have run away with themselves. Gosh! but I'm sorry!"

"Not a bit of it, old boy!" replied Camp, who was a pretty good example of the true Yale spirit without any taint of the taboo. "I congratulate you and your team—and I guess this experience will teach our lads to quit taking everything for granted because they were the best of the Big Three last year. I wouldn't have had them miss this for anything: it's worth two weeks' coaching."

But the editors of the *Yale News* and the *Alumni Weekly* were perhaps a trifle resentful in their comments on the game. They discoursed on loyalty to old Yale, and took Watson's treasonous coaching of King's as a glaring example of what loyalty was not. They did not call him by name, but they analyzed his character and his actions more in sorrow than in anger, and when they got through with the job they had proved that his nature intertwined the characteristics of Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold, redoubling the worst qualities of both. Compared with poor Grosvenor Watson, the Man without a Country was a teacher's pet. Only his habit of finishing any job he began made

him stay through the season at King's. The team made a record that year which they have never beaten since, but he had no pleasure in it after that one disastrous day, when the machine he built ran away.

Jim Hodges came to town late in November and urged Watson to go up to New Haven with him and see the last game of the season. Yale and the Tigers had both beaten their hereditary rival by practically the same score, and whichever won this game would be the best team in the East; but for all that Watson made one flimsy excuse after another for not going.

"Afraid they'll hoot you out of the stadium, Grove?" Jim mocked his old chum.

"Oh, well," he grumbled, "if that's the way you feel, I'll go. Wish I'd had them a week, though, to tell them a couple of things. That Tiger team has played tag with everybody this year, but they could be—— Oh, what's the use? I'll go!"

The seats were on the very rim of the stadium, but with strong glasses the companions were able to scrutinize every play as if it were in the palms of their hands. And they saw enough to make them wish a dozen times that they had not come to New Haven. The teams were about evenly matched, yet somehow the Yale men were always a fraction of a second behind their antagonists in judging a situation and playing it. They seemed to be under some kind of handicap.

"What's queering them?" big Jim asked anxiously.

"Too much backing," Watson answered. "They have the advantage of playing on their own field, with three quarters of the crowd rooting for them, but it's doing them harm instead of good, making them unconsciously let up on the under dog. The Tigers have come here prepared to make the fiercest uphill fight you ever heard of, so their

handicap is really helping them. I wish psychology was at the bottom of the Sound, and we had nothing but straight football."

Up and down the field the battle shifted without a score until near the end of the first half, when the Tiger full back got the ball on a double pass, and sprinted over to where his whole team was tearing a hole in the Yale line and romping down the field with him. That was an optical illusion, of course, but that is the way the play looked; and the nearest Yale man was so far out of the hunt that the runner touched the ball down as slowly and precisely as if he were sticking a dry stamp on an envelope. A nice kick sent the ball tumbling over the bar between the posts, and the score was: Tigers, 7; Yale, 0.

"Too bad!" bellowed Jim Hodges in Watson's ear, and even then his voice was only a muffled shred of sound in the flood of Tiger cheers that bent your eardrums. "Too bad they got away with it. Luck of the game, though."

"Luck of your grandmother's cat!" growled Watson in Jim's ear, together with certain ugly words that need not be repeated among friends. "Our team is as good as theirs—stronger; and yet they let those fellows treat 'em like a bunch of kids. Got 'em buffaloed. Makes me sick. Bet you a hat our crowd could keep the Tigers from scoring again."

"How?"

"Well, by staying awake, for one thing, and beating 'em to the punch. Wish I had hold of 'em a minute!"

"Come on!" Jim shouted, jumping up and grabbing Watson's arm. "You've got to show them!"

"I have?" cried Watson. "I've got to show them? Are you crazy? You blamed well know they wouldn't let me within gunshot of their—damned team!"

"Oh, we're losing time. Come on!" said Jim, lugging his chum up out of his place and down the aisle.

"All right," Watson grumbled. "Quit dragging; I'll go with you."

When they came to the bleak and windy alley that led to the dressing room under the stadium, Watson drew back. "Look here!" he exclaimed, "this is just plain damn foolishness. Better drop it."

"And let them run over us?" said Jim. "Not in a million years. You wait here by the door. I won't be a minute." But the minute grew and lingered and dragged to a weary eternity, while the bumptious Watson still stood in the cold, shivering like the king on the snowy steps of Canossa, and swallowing his pride—all for the sake of saving a crowd who had made his life a burden. No, not quite all; for his fierce pride inspired him to show what a master strategist he was in football.

No one noticed Jim Hodges when he entered the big room. The players were milling around aimlessly, some of them digging mud out of their eyes and dabbing liniment on cut cheek bones, all of them forgetting to lie down and rest. The second-string men were huddled in a far corner, wondering why they had ever been born. The head coach and his assistants were gathered by a rubdown couch, trying to buck up the captain, who lay there shaking from head to foot in the grip of hysteria. A strong man with hysteria? Certainly; one of the commonest things in athletics: comes from severe nerve strain carried on too long.

"I don't mind the score!" he gulped, as if something in his throat was stopping his breath. "I don't mind the score! But the disgrace—oh, it's a crime!" Tears mingled with the mud on his cheeks.

"Mr. Camp," said Hodges, breaking through and taking the coach aside, "Grove Watson's waiting at the door; says he can pull the team out of their slump."

"How?" asked the coach.

"I don't know exactly, but he's sure he can do it, and you know he knows the game."

"He does indeed," said the great coach, and beckoned his staff to come over. "We have just one chance left," he told them. "Grosvenor Watson is outside; says he can pull us out of the slump. Shall we ask him in?"

"Watson! That fellow? Never!" they burst out indignantly.

"But he's our last chance," Camp argued. "We have done all we can, and it isn't enough. Let's try Watson; we can't be worse off."

"Never!" exclaimed all four. "Better lose without him than win with him."

"Piffle!" said Mr. Camp. "I'll take the responsibility." And hurried to the closed door. Watson had been shivering a moment before, between the chill of the air and the humiliation of waiting, as he felt, like a condemned messenger boy; but now at last they had sent for him, and he swaggered in, proud as Lucifer.

"A fine lot of come-ons you are!" he sneered at the players he had not met for a year. "You're better men than that crowd, and you've forgotten more football than they'll ever learn, yet you let them rope you in like farmers buying gold bricks. Mr. Camp, will you order your line-up in front of me?" The coach nodded, and the seven giants crouched in line six feet away, and glared at their tormentor. He threw away his hat and coat.

"Now, then!" he snapped at them. "What are you standing away back there for, like a bunch of rubes waiting to be trimmed? Push in close, where you can kill the play before it gets going! Now, 'Dutch'—this indignity to Goehring, All-American tackle—" "Dutch, I'm going through you on this play unless you can throw me back. Mr. Camp, will you start us?"

"Go!" cried the coach, and the line of giants leaped forward—that is, all

leaped but one. Before big Goehring could get under way Watson dove into him and smashed him back so that he hit the wall like a ton of concrete and hung there breathless.

"See what I mean?" Watson exclaimed. "You could have done the same thing to me, Dutch, if you'd started quickly enough. No use of your being strong as ten bulls if you're going to stand there and let the other fellow get the jump on you. Now try it again!" This time Goehring shot forward like a sprinter, stuck his shoulder into Watson, knocked him flat, hurdled him and dashed ahead.

"That's the stuff!" said Watson from the floor, and, as he picked himself up, continued: "Every one of you has got to jump into every play like that. Now, 'Bow-legs,' we'll give you a play."

With this affront rankling in his soul, Bill Russell, center, met Watson's next rush with a quick plunge that dashed him back five or six feet. The outcast invented some ingenious insult to stir the rage of each man in the line, so when he played against him the man struck fast and hard. Watson had very little breath left by the time he had finished the seven, for each one smashed him back harder than the last.

"If you fellows will nail the Tigers as you've nailed me, not one of them will get past you this afternoon," he laughed. "Look here, Dutch, and you, Bow-legs, and all the rest of you: There's a yard of grass on each side of you, and it's your job to keep it clean. You keep that grass clean, and they'll never score again. I don't say you're going to lick them—that's up to you—but I do say they can't score on you if you nail 'em."

When Yale ran out on the field, the crowd instantly became aware of a change. They did not trot; they pranced. True, they were six minutes late, and critics who knew nothing of the vital reason for the delay said that it was a mean trick to chill the fighting

blood of the Tigers. The change showed in the very first play; for Lockwood's kick-off for Yale was fifteen yards longer than anything he had done before, and was high enough to let his team get well down under it. They devoured the interference and slammed the Tiger runner to earth before he took four strides. Then the Yale line applied Watson's lesson so well that the visitors had to give up the ball after four downs that netted them a loss. The Yale cheer leaders threw themselves into the contortions of directing a fancy new slogan. The crowd paid no attention to them, but barked out the primitive Yale battle call, which sounds like the yapping of countless bulldogs eager to rend the prey. The vibrations rolled over the field in a great wave which raised the Yale players so far above their normal selves that their work became play, and they briskly ripped through the astonished enemy for a touchdown without once losing the ball on the way. Got an added point for kicking the goal, too. Score: Yale, 7; Tigers, 7.

Jim Hodges distinguished himself by letting off a yell that could be heard above the roar of the crowd. He unconsciously marked time by thumping Watson's back till it was sore, then belowed in his ear:

"What do you think of 'em, Grove?"

"Just what I've always thought," he yelled; "they're the best team."

Some day the most advanced psychologist will install his great mind in a football dressing room and accurately measure the stimuli that recreate a team when properly applied between the halves. He probably will formulate the whole business: so many units of stimulus A, which through the senses of touch and hearing impinge upon the nerve centers controlling the pituitary and thyroid glands, causing added secretions of vitalizing hormones in the blood

stream—et cetera, et cetera. And even then it will still be true that more games have been won because of some incident in that room between halves than ever will get on the page of history. Remember the Chicago University boys, who were six down in the first half, then went forth and smeared the foe because Papa Stagg told them at the door of a new two-million-dollar gift from their founder; also the downhearted Yale lads who answered Trainer Murphy's last-moment appeal to "win one more game for Mike" before he went west to die. Every football man will recall a dozen instances.

Grosvenor Watson looked at his watch, thrust it back in his pocket, and turned to his chum. "Four minutes still to play, Jim," he said. "Let's get out. We've got the Tigers salted down, 20 to 7, so the game's safe, and we can get a long start before the crowd jams the road home."

"Well," said Hodges as he lit his cigar and took the steering wheel, "I should think you'd feel proud of the job you did to-day. You saved old Yale."

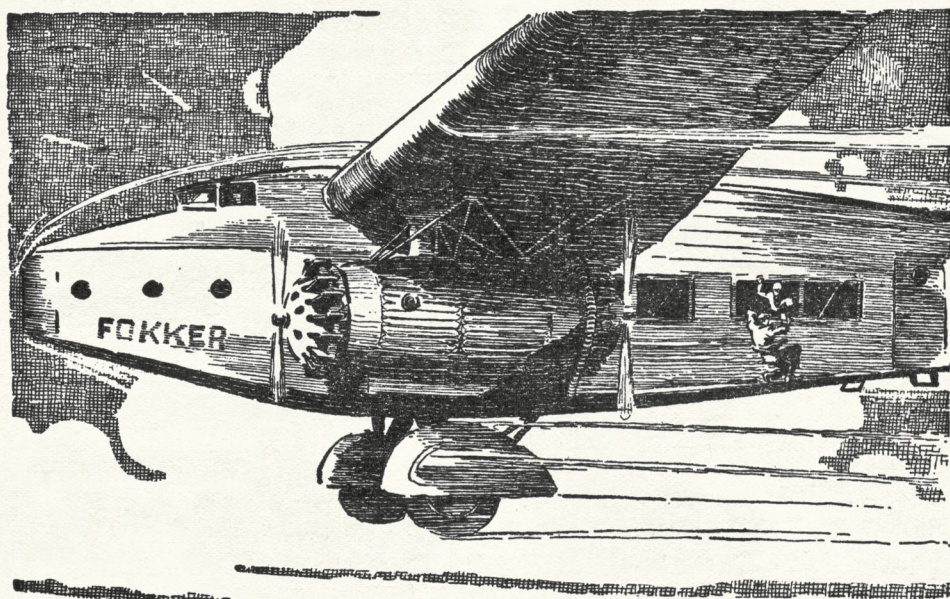
"Proud?" Watson mocked. "What in blazes is there to be proud of? Just showing those boobs something they should have known all the time? Proud because I knew the game better than any one else? Rot! I'm glad I helped Walter Camp, because he's a white man; but the rest of them—" He p'tiffed away a shred of cigar wrapper that clung to his lip.

Whereby he signified the feelings of both parties to the incident; for the name of Grosvenor Watson is unhonored at old Yale to this day. Still, the satisfaction of even a grouchy loyalty is something. Not forgetting the bump-tiousness that made him a football genius—that was the secret spring of his doing and undoing.

Another story by William Hemmingway will appear in an early issue.

The DEATH WINDOW

By A. S. GREGORY



A Man in that Plane Was Marked for Murder.

THE deafening, thrilling roar of the thirty-passenger, four-motored air liner, the *Mercuria*, melted away into a distant hum when a large, violently excited man dashed out of the field office. He rushed up to Captain Jesse Britten, traffic superintendent, who was watching the winged leviathan out of sight.

"Captain," the man shouted, "we've got to get the plane back!"

Britten stared at the field manager, William Hughes. "You ought to know, Bill, that that's utterly impossible," he said. "But why all this flurry?"

"Farrant—J. C. Farrant is on board!"

"Yes, I know all about him," said Britten. "He's that mystery key witness who is to testify this afternoon at

the oil trial in Los Angeles. Had to go by air because last night he missed his train."

"He didn't miss it!" contradicted Hughes. "He took the *Lark* at eight o'clock, but left the train at San José and came back by bus. I guess he had a hunch something was going to happen, because this morning when the train pulled into Los they found another man who had taken his berth with a knife in his heart!"

"That was a lucky break for Farrant, wasn't it?"—remarked Britten, in a matter-of-fact tone. "A man in his desperate position, a witness that the prosecution unwisely boasted would expose the whole dirty mess of the twenty-million-dollar oil stock over-issue, should have

known better in the first place than to have taken the train. It's safer by airplane, you know."

Hughes was so agitated now that unconsciously he was stabbing the traffic superintendent in the chest with a taut forefinger.

"Just a minute, captain; wait till I finish!" he exploded. "Nobody was supposed to know Farrant is aboard the *Mercuria*, but word has just this minute reached us that somehow it leaked out late last night that he had reserved passage. This morning two other men bought tickets. Either one, or both of them are gunmen ordered by that bunch of oil crooks to see that Farrant does not reach Los Angeles alive!"

"Nonsense!" Britten spoke sharply. "Didn't you tell me yesterday the passenger list was carefully selected for this trip?"

"It was!" retorted Hughes. "Only twenty were to go, instead of a full complement. That fool Paley in the downtown ticket office says over the phone that since we took one more last night he didn't see any reason why he should have turned away two more fares this morning. We know personally every one in the original list, including Farrant. But of these last two we haven't been able to find out a thing. They gave their names as F. A. Doughty, and Lew Lubin, both of San Francisco. But the names aren't listed in the telephone book or the city directory. We haven't——"

"Mr. Hughes!" a voice interrupted from the office. "Telephone."

The field manager hurried in. "It's Paley again," he said, slamming back the receiver, as Britten entered the office. "He said the police also have been tipped off about Farrant. They've wired to L. A., but a lot of good that will do! I tell you, Captain Britten, there's going to be murder!—in our plane!"

The traffic chief visibly stiffened. His ruddy face turned pale. He could not doubt that the plane never would reach

its destination. The gunman would force it down to escape after killing Farrant. Or, since there was fuel enough in the tanks for seven hundred miles, he might keep the ship flying deep into Mexico. With the rapidity and clearness of distant lightning, a dozen different fearful pictures flashed through his brain.

"I told you we shouldn't take any chances!" Britten said bitterly. "In this game we never know what's going to happen next. Even though we'd have been delayed a couple of days, we should have waited for the radio installation. Then we could have sent the emergency message to order the plane right back. A one-hundred-and-ten-thousand-dollar ship and no radio on board!"

"But the plans had been all completed, captain," replied Hughes. "The newspapers gave us a big play. We couldn't very well have canceled the trip without drawing a lot of unfavorable publicity."

"To hell with the newspapers!" retorted Britten. "We're not running this line for sensationalism. You know that our policy is first, last and all the time—play safe! If nothing happens, nothing appears in the newspapers. Instead, here we are with the stage all set for a murder on the maiden flight of our big transport! What a break for your newspapers! What a break for us!"

"Well, don't blame me for the whole thing!" snapped Hughes. "The other company heads insisted on carrying out the schedule. They let the cat out of the bag! Another bubble goes flooey! The murder plane!" There was a sob in his voice as he raised his arms, dropped them listlessly to his sides. "Do something, captain! It's up to you!"

"There's a chance, Bill! Get my sky burner on the line. Warm it up!" Britten whirled on his heel and strode into his small private office. From the hat-rack in the corner he took down his flying suit, kicked his legs into it and pulled up the zipper fastener. He grabbed up

his helmet with goggles and from the drawer of his desk took out a heavy service automatic which he slipped into the deep breast pocket.

The Hornet motor of the blue single-seater was roaring on the line when Captain Britten came running out of the office. His heart quickened at sound of the powerful throb that shook the ground under his feet. Like a whippet at leash it strained at the chocks, while the steel prop flung back a cyclone of dust. He stopped for a moment in front to run his eye over the trim lines of the little craft in which he had won a dozen racing trophies, then nodded.

The mechanic in the pilot's seat throttled down and climbed out. "She's a little cold yet, sir," he cautioned.

"That's all right, Jenkins," Britten said. "She'll soon get hot." He leaped into the cockpit, adjusted the parachute harness over his shoulders, waved.

"Farrant is alone in the last section on the left!" shouted Hughes. "Luck to you!"

Two field attendants, standing on either side, jerked the ropes that pulled the chocks from under the wheels. The quivering plane rolled off the concrete apron, then, as the pilot opened full gun, thundered down the field to zoom out of the dust cloud like a shell out of the mouth of a cannon.

One minute after the take-off the speed indicator held steadily at one hundred and eighty miles an hour. Captain Jesse Britten made a quick mental calculation. The *Mercuria*, he knew, was traveling at one hundred and twenty miles and had shoved off at ten o'clock sharp. He had started exactly twenty minutes later, so the ship now was out forty miles. His speed was one mile a minute faster. In forty minutes the passenger plane would reel off another eighty miles and would be one hundred and twenty miles out. And in forty minutes, at three miles an hour, he would cover the same distance. He traced his

finger on the map to King City where circled figures showed an air distance of one hundred and twenty miles from San Francisco. There he should overtake the liner.

"Hold it, sweetheart! It's a man's life we're racing for to-day. Give me everything you've got." He patted the cowling with the affection that only a seasoned airman can have for his favorite plane. His keen, gray eyes scanned the far horizon. Then his face tightened into a deep frown.

Ahead there soon appeared the dreaded ground fog now being driven from the sun-heated valley to the sea. Higher into the blue he climbed, but at seven thousand feet the gray cloud wall still barred his way. He remembered that Harris, the liner's chief pilot, had been carefully instructed to avoid flying blind through fog or clouds, that if he couldn't go over, to go around. He could see that the fog rose fully another four thousand feet, while off to his right the Pacific Ocean was a green smudge.

Britten swung in that direction. For fifteen minutes he flew with the scorching sun on his back. When he looked down there was water below, and the fog was hanging along the high, rocky shore line. He resumed his course.

It was now five after eleven, forty-five minutes since he started. Britten squinted his eyes until they appeared like the glittering edge of a cavalry sword. Five minutes overdue.

If soon he didn't find the liner, he'd be too late, for surely the killer would waste little time in starting his grim work. He twisted continually in his seat, staring overside, above and on all sides. His eyes roved the skies for twenty miles in every direction.

"What's that?" He strained against the safety belt to peer through his own propeller arc. He had caught a flash of light that unmistakably was the sun's reflection on a varnished wing surface. His left hand pushed the throttle hard

against the set screw. The Pitots gave the air speed at one hundred and ninety. An engine-driven bullet, and the thought of murder pounding in the pilot's brain.

"It's the *Mercuria*, all right," Britten assured himself, as he spied the four motors. Presently he was close enough to see plainly through the windows the passengers within the four compartments of the cabin as the sun's rays slanted down. By the groups around two tables, with others standing about watching, he guessed that two card games were in progress. He was surprised that none had caught sight of his ship, when it occurred to him that he was between the liner and the sun, and therefore could not easily be seen.

Britten recalled the last thing Hughes had said was that Farrant had taken the rear compartment on the left. Anxiously he shifted his glance. He had got there in time! There was the key witness whose testimony at the oil trial that afternoon would send a dozen stock manipulators to prison. The man was sitting there, calmly, with head bent over a book, unaware that here, six thousand feet above earth, he was marked for death! Now it was Britten's duty to warn this man, to warn the pilots that on board the plane rode a hired killer!

Britten eased back on the throttle until he was flying slightly higher and about a hundred feet in front of the big passenger ship. He waved. Paul Whitberg, the copilot, shaded his eyes, and waved back, but Britten saw "Pinky" Harris, at the control wheel, motion him away. At least, they had recognized his blue racer.

Then the traffic superintendent began an elaborate series of gesticulations, pointing backward and drawing a hand across his throat to signify death. Thinking that perhaps the sun in back of him was blinding the two pilots and prevented them from seeing him clearly, he ruddered to the starboard side. He dipped slightly in making the maneuver.

When he looked around the liner was fifty feet below.

"That certainly was a fool's trick," Britten told himself. "Should have pulled up higher to go across. Instead, they shot into my slipstream and dropped."

When he got lower he saw both pilots now, with the sliding windows of the cockpit pushed far back. They were shaking their fists and their mouths were wide open, hurling futile curses. Britten shrugged, shook his head, and continued pointing backward. He extended his hand as if holding a pistol and moved the index finger as if he were pulling a gun trigger. He shouted at the top of his lungs, but his voice was drowned in the mighty roar of the five motors. He took out his automatic, held the muzzle against his head and again motioned toward the cabin. Still he couldn't make them understand, and he was having difficulty in holding his position as the liner kept edging away.

"They think I'm nuts!" he cried out. He dropped back, trying to devise some means of intelligent communication. He had paper and a pen in his pockets to write a note, but there was no rope or wire to lower it with. What he should have done was to have written the message in chalk on the side of his fuselage. It was too late for that now.

"Maybe I can scare that damned gunman," Britten thought. "If he sees me flying alongside he'll know his chance of escape will be cut off."

So Britten drew up on the port side. He realized how extremely dangerous it was to fly that close to an unwieldy passenger plane, but to his mind the situation was desperate. Besides, he had the utmost confidence in his flying skill to avoid collision.

As he got into position above the great span of singing wing he saw a man slowly rise from his chair, look into the compartment ahead, then face about and, with his hands pressed against his stomach, stagger down the aisle. Watch-

ing more closely now, Britten saw the man suddenly lurch against Farrant, who was sitting as before, reading. He saw the witness jump out of his chair, then catch the sick man.

A wild premonition seized Britten. Fascinated, he watched the two men stagger aft to the lavatory. Instantly the wide window was pushed open, apparently to give the sick man plenty of air, and Farrant's head appeared. There was an odd expression on his face as he chanced to look up at the small plane almost on top of him.

"Look out!" Britten suddenly shouted, pointing. "Behind you!"

But the pilot's warning came too late. He saw an arm snake around Farrant's throat from behind and pull the witness down. He could make out the struggling forms on the floor, thrashing about with fists rising and falling, with feet battering against the walls, and the metallic flashes of a dagger. In the blasting silence he watched the mortal combat that unrolled before him very much like the climax of a celluloid drama.

The terrible sight held Britten breathless. Here he was within fifty feet of a man being murdered, and utterly helpless to aid him! He fingered the gun in his breast pocket, but he did not draw it. He dare not shoot for fear of hitting the wrong man.

The thing he had gone out to prevent was taking place right under his eyes! Twenty-three other men on board, yet none of them was aware of the horrible tragedy being enacted within thirty feet! Britten wanted to leap out of his cockpit and through that window.

He shot his plane ahead fifty feet. It was a miracle that his wheels had not fouled the liner's propellers. He leaned far down and hammered with his fist on the side of his fuselage, cursing and shouting into the faces of the two astonished pilots. The huge ship slipped away. It was all so useless.

"By God!" shouted Britten, raising his fist, "I'm going to make one of the requirements for our pilots that they know the deaf and dumb language so they can talk with their fingers in the air!"

He swept over the *Mercuria*, quickly pulled about to look again into the cockpit. Pinky Harris was there alone.

"It finally pecolated through their thick heads that something is wrong," Britten muttered. "Whitberg has gone back." Now he observed startled faces of passengers pressed against the windows. He came up closer.

Suddenly a man's head and shoulders were thrust through the open lavatory window, then slipped back. A monstrous thought flashed through Britten's mind. He looked down. The ocean was below. The murderer was trying to throw the body overboard to destroy evidence of his crime!

Closer flew Britten until he could see the whites of the passengers' eyes. There was Whitberg and a dozen men crowded around him. Britten kept pointing back, then down to motion that some one was falling. He saw the co-pilot rush back, then return and spread out his hands that there was nothing wrong back there.

Britten knew there were two rest rooms on the plane, and that apparently Whitberg had looked only in one. Of course the second pilot couldn't hear what was taking place in the other as the window was open, and the roar of the engines drowned out all sound. So Britten pointed again. Whitberg held his finger against the wall of the fatal room. Britten nodded.

At last he had made them understand there was something wrong on the maiden flight of the *Mercuria*!

Only for a moment, though. This time, out of the same window, shot a pair of legs. Legs that frantically kicked against the fuselage, blindly seeking something to stand upon.

"He's throwing Farrant out alive!" cried Britten. He felt his blood chill to the marrow.

Farther out Farrant's body was pushed until the shoulders remained wedged within the metal framework. His flying shirt tails were whipped to shreds in the air stream. The kicking feet finally smashed through the fabric to secure a purchase on the steel tubular bracing of the fuselage, while the propeller blast stripped the torn linen clear back to the tail section with a sound like a booming mill saw. Slowly Farrant fought halfway in.

Britten sucked in a deep breath. There was still a chance to rescue the key witness. If they'd only work a little faster in there. Smash the door! Again Whitberg's face appeared. Britten continued jabbing his finger backward and down. Then the copilot slid a compartment window open and thrust his head out. What he saw caused his eyes to bulge.

"Save him!" yelled Britten.

The superintendent saw Whitberg inside wave his hands and shout. Instantly the passengers rushed wildly aft. This sudden shift of all that weight changed the center of gravity and threw the plane off equilibrium. The tail went down; the nose shot up in a mild zoom, and half the persons tumbled into a heap.

When Britten followed in a zoom he saw the delay was proving fatal. With the drop of the tail, Farrant again had been shoved completely out of the window. Only one arm was inside grasping something, while a cruel fist was hammering the side of his head to break that frantic hold.

For a brief, agonized moment Britten saw the unrecognizable face, swollen and bloody, turned toward him, with the free hand outstretched, as if he could lean down to grasp it. The mouth was open in soundless screams. Stark fear was leaping in those eyes! Seconds passed—

tense, terrible seconds. Farrant was slipping with the appalling slowness of creeping death. A black object suddenly rose, and fell across the fingers gripping the window ledge. Twice Farrant's body somersaulted, then tightened up into a ball as it dropped into eternity.

Abruptly Britten whipped his single-seater away from the liner into a left-hand power spin. He looked around, caught sight of a small, dark thing far below him, and straightened into a dive under full gun. He sighted through the cross-brace wires to hold that hurtling body in line of his vertical flight.

Britten often had wondered if it could be done—scooping up a man on the wing. Only one incident was on record that he knew of. A Royal Flying Corps observer, engaged in an air battle during the war, on January 6, 1918, was accidentally thrown out of the rear cockpit when the pilot made a sudden dive. He fell in direct line with the machine for several hundred feet—and alighted safely on the fuselage back of the gun mount as the plane was coming out of the dive. It had been purely an accident, as the pilot had known nothing about the startling adventure of his observer until after he had landed.

But the thing had been done, Britten told himself. Though he was diving at such terrific speed that the altimeter could not register the descent, he estimated the distance to the water below at five thousand feet. He had plenty of room to try it.

The superintendent now was rapidly closing the gap between himself and Farrant. He could see the fluttering legs and arms. Then he remembered having read that a man could fall no faster than about two hundred and some miles an hour, at which point the suction of the vacuum created by the fall became equal to the pull of gravity. A flick of his eye showed him that the indicator had already passed the limit of two hundred and fifty miles on his air speed

dial. The taut flying wires sounded like a thousand steam whistles.

Fifty feet! Farrant was falling flat and face upward. He evidently grasped the purpose of the diving plane, for Britten saw him double his body into a sitting position and extend his arms like hooks.

Britten moved the control stick slightly to avoid striking Farrant with the whirling propeller, and started to close the throttle. He must adjust his speed to that of the falling man when coming parallel, otherwise he'd overshoot.

Suddenly he yanked the throttle clear back. He caught a mere fleeting glimpse of blurred, contorted features, of tensed fingers that scraped along the top wing as he shot past with frightful speed that he had been too late in checking!

Missed him! Britten's heart stood still. Down another thousand feet he plunged like a meteor, his propeller fluttering loudly, and his motor backfiring tails of flame from the exhaust! The white-capped ocean was coming up fast. He jiggled the control stick to rock the plane out of the vertical flight, then with a slow, steady pull, heaved back until the nose jerked up to the horizon. Right over the water he kicked the little craft into a vertical bank so that it creaked in every welded joint.

But the pilot was too far away now to get under Farrant for a second try. Like a stone the man plunged into the foaming surf, sending up a long, thin column of water that mushroomed at the top.

Britten circled the spot. He was, suddenly, completely numb. He thought, and felt, nothing.

Gradually Britten's mind cleared. He looked around. There was a high promontory with a lighthouse on top. He checked the place on his map and marked the spot where Farrant had fallen in case the body was washed ashore and could be recovered.

Then a new fear gripped the pilot. The assassin was aboard the *Mercuria*. He had made his kill; his next thought would be the greatest elemental urge in every man—self-preservation. Escape!

Britten recalled the man hadn't used a gun. Probably he had been afraid the shot would be heard, so he had used a knife. Britten remembered the flashing blade. But without a doubt the man had a gun, perhaps one for each hand. He'd force the plane on across the border!

The superintendent climbed rapidly over the shore line. Anxiously he searched the clear sky, but the *Mercuria* was nowhere in sight. Again he hurled his single-seater through the air with every ounce of power in the motor. Feverish conjectures held him rigid in his tight seat.

Soon the great spread of the city of Los Angeles came in view. He saw a half dozen machines soaring high above the numerous airports of the metropolis. But not one bore any resemblance to the four-motored transport. As he passed directly over the gleaming white dome of the city hall, he cut the gun to lose altitude. He had suddenly decided first to land at the terminal.

Then Britten's quick eye caught the wide span of wing aglint with the sun gliding majestically to his field. "The *Mercuria*!" he shouted. There was relief in his voice. He could see the propeller arcs of the engines. Dust rose behind as the wheels touched ground and the ship taxied to the line.

Britten slammed his single-seater down to a furious landing. The passengers had deplaned and hurriedly entered the terminal building when Britten came dashing up under the nose of the liner. There was fire in his eyes and his fingers were working as if they were itching to grasp something.

"Harris! Whitberg!" he yelled.

The cockpit door opened and the two pilots jumped down.

"Where is he?"

"He's in safe hands," replied Whitberg.

For a long moment Britten scrutinized his two best pilots, to whom he had entrusted the queen of the air on her maiden flight. He turned his head slightly toward the strident clanging of an ambulance. Then he burst into a vituperative torrent.

"What a couple of nice, prize numskulls you two turned out to be! I suppose you thought I was up there skylarkin', buzzing around, scraping the varnish off the big bus to give your passengers a thrill! Maybe you thought I was drunk and decided to put on a show? The greenest, dumbest pilot would have known that something was wrong, that I was trying to tell him about it! But you birds—you just sat there like a couple of ivory robots!"

"Why didn't you lower us a note, or something?" spoke up Harris, with the merest trace of a sneer. "I was on the point of turning about to come back, only we were more than halfway down, and I didn't see any logical reason to do that."

"I was going to do that," said Britten, "but there was nothing to lower a note with. In fact, I came pretty near landing on your back."

"Well, the thing's been done," said Whitberg, "and there's——"

"That's it!" snapped Britten. "It wouldn't have happened if you fellows had used your brains a little faster. Right after you shoved off, Hughes runs out with a wild yarn about this gunman being on board to kill Farrant, the star prosecution witness in this twenty-million-dollar oil scandal that we've been reading about in the papers. He had

taken the train last night, but on a hunch got off at San José, came back and reserved passage on the *Mercuria*. The man who happened to get into his berth was found this morning stabbed to death. But even in our plane he wasn't safe."

"If you want my opinion, super," said Harris, "I think it'll be called justifiable homicide."

"Justifiable?" demanded Britten. "What do you mean, Harris? Are you in with that gang of oil thieves?"

The two pilots looked at each other in deep puzzlement.

"Say, Mr. Britten," ventured Whitberg, "I think you've got this all wrong."

"Are you trying to tell me I don't know what I'm talking about?" snarled the superintendent, his jawbone growing white. "I suppose you'll be telling me next it was all a movie stunt?"

"Now, just a minute, super," said Harris, stepping closer. "Cool down, will you? Just suppose the two of us were in that cabin fighting. You knew I was hired to kill you, and you knew that I'd throw your body out because nobody would stop to count whether twenty-two or twenty-three passengers got out of the plane here, and I'd make my get-away. Simple, isn't it? And chances are it would have happened just like that if you hadn't pulled what you did to make me twist around up there to avoid a crash."

"You mean," whispered Captain Jesse Britten, his bewildered eyes opening wider with a new gleam of understanding, "that the gunman was taken for a loop?"

"Sure, now you got it straight," said Harris. "The thug was pitched out by Farrant."

Really first-class air stories, like the one you have just read, are a regular feature of THE POPULAR.





Do I Know Ports?

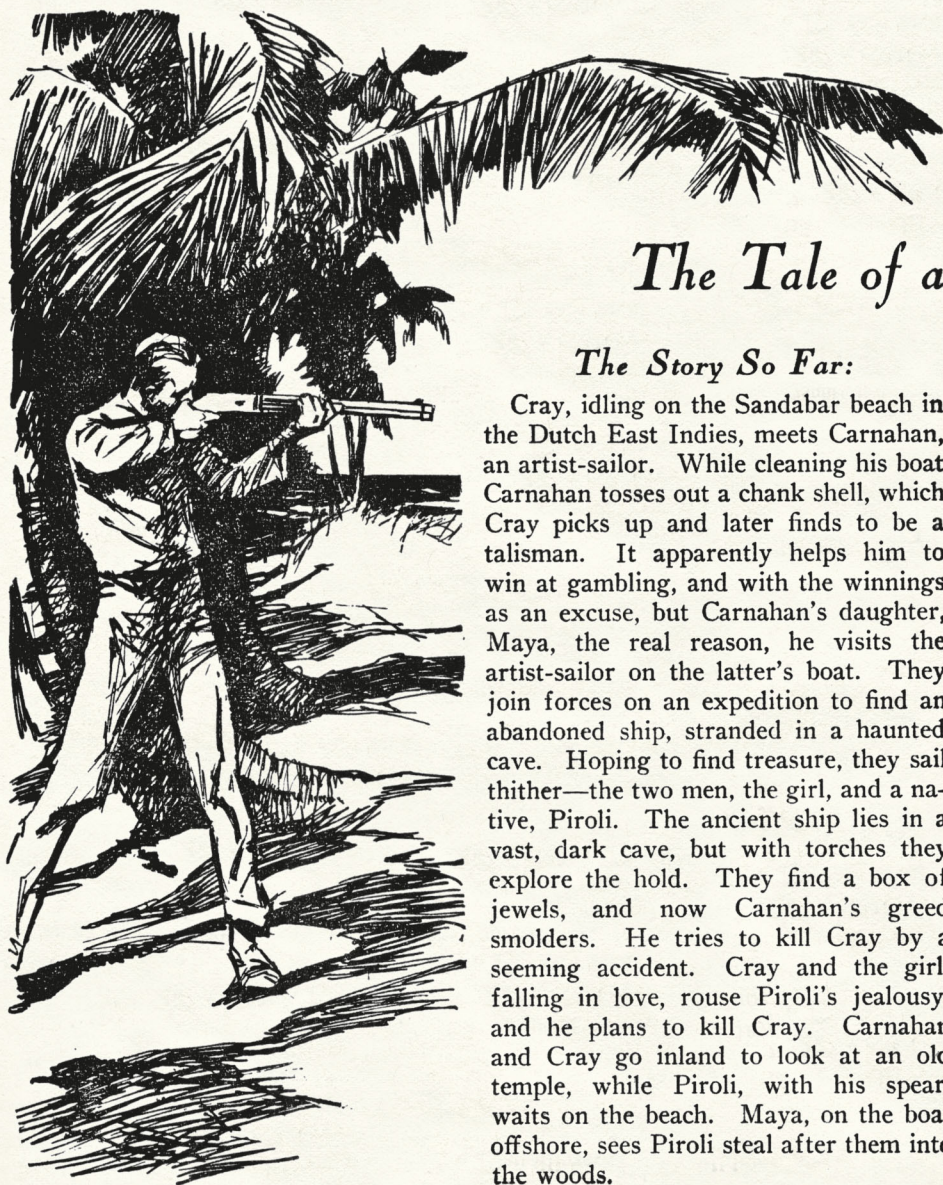
By Edgar Daniel Kramer

DO I know ports? See here, matey,
I'll be bungin' up your eye
If you keep on with your kiddin'—
An' right here's the reason why:
I've been followin' the waters
For nigh onto thirty years,
An' I've helped a lot of vessels
To get settled at their piers.

I'm at home in Yokohama,
New Orleans an' Liverpool;
If you think I ain't seen Naples,
You're a bloomin' cockeyed fool!
I've done Colon Town up proper,
An' I shipped for Baltimore,
Leavin' all the cops rejoicin'
When I quitted Singapore.

I know Rio like my fist here,
An' I've cursed the Hongkong smells;
Port Said dives can't hold a candle
To the worst of Shanghai hells;
In Havana an' Manila
I have took my grinnin' bow.
Do I know ports? Listen, matey!
What the hell you sayin' now?

The CHANK SHELL



The Tale of a

The Story So Far:

Cray, idling on the Sandabar beach in the Dutch East Indies, meets Carnahan, an artist-sailor. While cleaning his boat Carnahan tosses out a chank shell, which Cray picks up and later finds to be a talisman. It apparently helps him to win at gambling, and with the winnings as an excuse, but Carnahan's daughter, Maya, the real reason, he visits the artist-sailor on the latter's boat. They join forces on an expedition to find an abandoned ship, stranded in a haunted cave. Hoping to find treasure, they sail thither—the two men, the girl, and a native, Piroli. The ancient ship lies in a vast, dark cave, but with torches they explore the hold. They find a box of jewels, and now Carnahan's greed smolders. He tries to kill Cray by a seeming accident. Cray and the girl, falling in love, rouse Piroli's jealousy, and he plans to kill Cray. Carnahan and Cray go inland to look at an old temple, while Piroli, with his spear, waits on the beach. Maya, on the boat offshore, sees Piroli steal after them into the woods.

By
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

In Five Parts—Part III

Tropic Talisman

CHAPTER XXII.

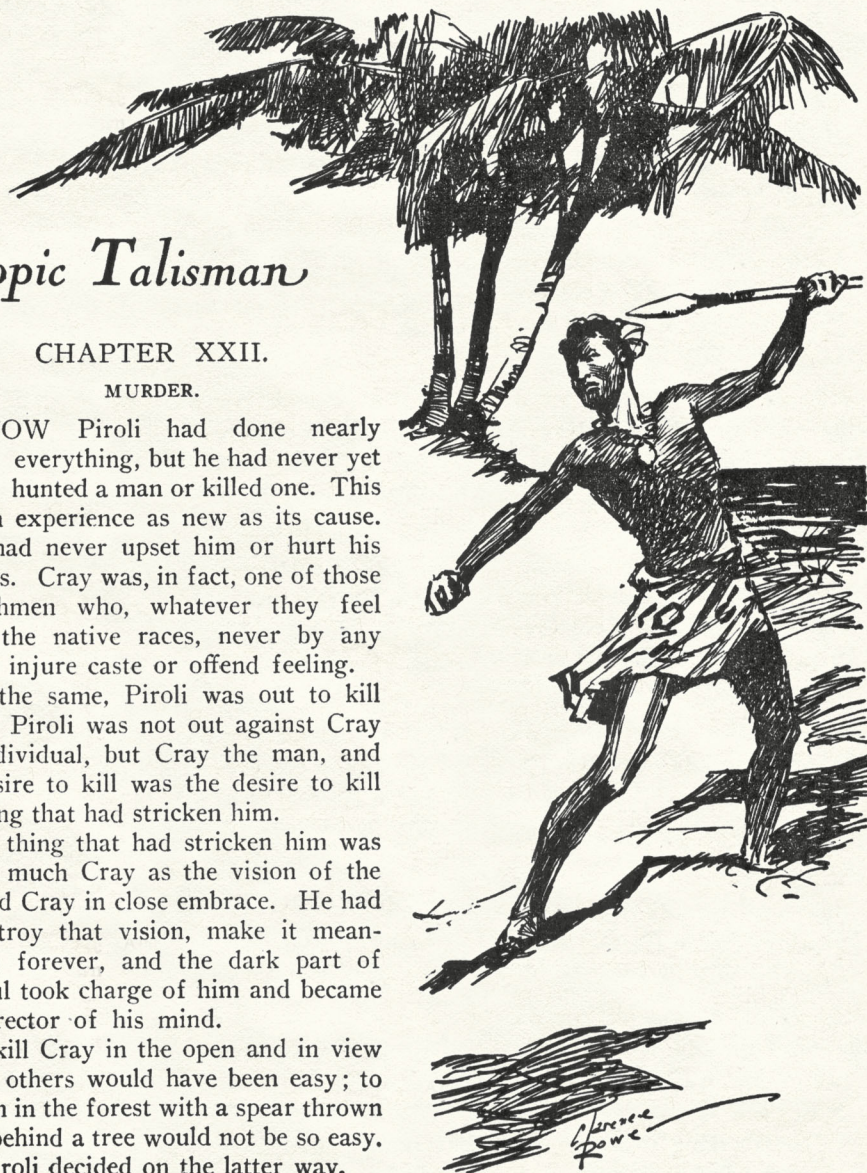
MURDER.

NOW Piroli had done nearly everything, but he had never yet hunted a man or killed one. This was an experience as new as its cause. Cray had never upset him or hurt his feelings. Cray was, in fact, one of those Englishmen who, whatever they feel about the native races, never by any chance injure caste or offend feeling.

All the same, Piroli was out to kill Cray. Piroli was not out against Cray the individual, but Cray the man, and his desire to kill was the desire to kill the thing that had stricken him.

The thing that had stricken him was not so much Cray as the vision of the girl and Cray in close embrace. He had to destroy that vision, make it meaningless forever, and the dark part of his soul took charge of him and became the director of his mind.

To kill Cray in the open and in view of the others would have been easy; to kill him in the forest with a spear thrown from behind a tree would not be so easy. Yet Piroli decided on the latter way.



The dark thing in his soul dreaded the open and the sunlight. He plunged into the tree shadows.

In the old days this temple place in the woods had been a center of resort, perhaps the center of a town, vanished because of the more fragile nature of the houses, long stamped out of existence by the feet of the forest.

This was probable because the way to it was still a path almost obliterated but treeless.

Just as a long-vanished river leaves its track, so the river of humanity that long ago had flowed between temple and shore had left its track where trees did not grow.

Cray and Carnahan had taken this old road; but Piroli, after a glance along it that showed him their figures in the distance, plunged again among the trees, taking a line through them parallel to the path.

He did not want a compass to give true direction. Keeping a few yards to the right of the temple road, he followed it as truly as though it were in sight, and so swiftly that he had reached before the others the great clearing where the temple stood—rather, the remains of the temple, for of it nothing was left but a part of a wall to the east and some huge blocks of stone that looked as though they might have been shaken out of a sack.

An earthquake had possibly done all this, and probably also had dried up the temple well by breaking or diverting its water source.

Piroli reckoned on getting the two men a bit apart, one from the other, so that he might have a clear target. Two men close together tend to confuse the arm of the spear thrower who aims to hit one of them—a curious psychological fact made known to him by hereditary instinct.

He took his place behind a tree and waited. Then the two men appeared walking side by side.

The vague plan in Piroli's head was to hide in the forest after the killing. He would not go back to the *Itang*, he would never see the girl or Carnahan again—for Carnahan, knowing the spear, would know who had thrown it. Of what he would do in the future, how he would live or how he would leave the island, if ever, Piroli had no idea. It did not matter.

He watched the men.

As they stood, Carnahan pointing out the blocks of stone and the wall, Piroli noticed Carnahan's hand going under his coat and reaching for something. Cray took a step or two forward in the direction of the ruins, then he collapsed, felled to the ground by the blow of a penang-lawyer.

Carnahan stood over the body, bent and searched the pockets, taking what he found, and then, dragging the body along by the heels toward the well, he threw it down.

He stood up, looking around him. He was breathing hard; the exertion had been great and the reaction, now that the act was accomplished, shattering.

But he soon recovered and, having looked round as Cain must have looked round even though certain that no one had seen the killing of Abel, turned and took his way back along the old temple road to the beach.

When Carnahan had told Maya to put the ring down, the vulture in his mind, awakened by the treasure, had shown its beak. It had now shown beak and claws.

The idea of sharing with another that glittering hoard was insupportable. It was the old story and hundreds and hundreds of times in the world it has been repeated, in populous cities as well as on desolate beaches.

Cray was not a man to be tricked, and his strength had lain in the fact that he could make trouble. He could make no trouble now.

Carnahan sat down for a moment on

the trunk of a palm that had fallen half across the path. When he reached the beach he would tell Piroli that Cray had gone off by himself among the trees and would be back no doubt in a minute. Then with the assistance of Piroli he would get the casks down, float them off and tow them to the *Itang*. When Cray did not turn up it would only be the case of a man lost in the woods and come to some mishap; Carnahan could make a show of searching for him and then, to-morrow morning at the ebb, he would put out.

There was no one to object to this hasty departure. Maya would care nothing, Piroli was an automaton answering to his captain's will.

So mused Carnahan as he sat on the fallen trunk. He had arranged things very well. A perfect plan ought to be perfect in all its parts and details. There seemed nothing to criticize in the plan of Carnahan, for not only had he arranged things in a plausible manner but he had got the last ounce of work out of Cray before dealing with him.

Having rested a little he went on. As he stepped out onto the beach he looked round for Piroli, but the native was not to be seen. Carnahan called out. There was no answer.

He could see the *Itang* and the form of Maya on deck—the only living thing in view except the gulls on the reef.

He sat down on one of the water casks to wait, feeling suddenly thwarted. What did that fool mean by going off into the woods when his duty was to stick here? Had he gone into the woods or along the shore line, climbing, perhaps, those cliffs?

The question came to him suddenly like a messenger from Danger, for if Piroli had gone into the woods might he not possibly have seen something?

The absolute secrecy of which Carnahan had been assured and which was for him a vital matter, suddenly hinted of a flaw. The question burned him

like a hot iron. Could Maya tell? Had she been watching from the *Itang*?

He waited a few minutes and then, going down to the boat, managed to get it afloat. Sculling with an oar in the stern, he put off.

"When you went into the trees," said Maya, speaking down at him from the deck, "Piroli took his spear and followed you."

Carnahan's lips went dry. He was a man of imagination as well as action. This was the sort of thing that made for consequences. He could see the stuffy courthouse and the judge with his papers, the native policeman, and Piroli telling a story, and the reporters writing.

He tied up the boat to the rail, went on board and fetched the rifle from its sling in the cabin.

When he came up Maya asked him where Cray was. Carnahan told her that he was still in the woods, without bothering to give any explanation; then he pushed off and sculled back to the beach.

Halfway there another messenger came from Danger, saying: "You should have told her a yarn. You should have told her Cray went off by himself and you heard him cry out; that you feared something had happened to him and that was why you took the rifle. Then Maya, in the case of future events, would have been a credible witness. Go on; you must settle with Piroli now. You can't tell whether he has seen anything or not, but that doesn't matter; the risk is too great. Piroli must be put out, out, out, and the door shut on him. He killed Cray and you have got to execute summary justice on him, even if it is on the beach. Then you will be absolutely safe."

He landed and pulled the boat up a bit; the tide was falling and it would be safe.

But where should he seek Piroli? It didn't matter—the man would have to

come back to the beach; but Carnahan did not want to do the shooting on the beach if it could be avoided. On the chance of finding his game either among the trees or near the temple, he took the old temple road, walking slowly, listening, his eyes searching among the shadows of the trees.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WELL OF DEATH.

WHEN Piroli, watching from the trees, saw Carnahan's sudden movement and the blow that felled Cray, surprise held him from moving or making a sound. He had never dreamed that there was any difference of opinion or anything to make bad blood between the two white men. Suddenly one in a flash had killed the other—for Cray had looked dead enough—and killed him by a blow from behind.

This sight was more than a vision of one man killing another, it was a test of the worth of Piroli's soul.

His was a simple soul, with dark spots it is true, but still simple and with no understanding of the nuances of vice and virtue. Morality had no high or low lights for Piroli. He had no religion; yet he had a moral sense. Even dogs have that. Piroli never lied; it was not in his nature to deviate from the truth any more than it was in the *Itang's* nature to deviate from the path set by the steersman. He was honest. He was faithful.

The thing he had seen hit all his primitive morality. The foul blow needs no preacher to explain and underscore its foulness. Piroli was shocked—shocked by the very act he had set out to commit himself, only with a spear instead of a penang-lawyer.

He did not think of that. Indeed, as he stood there, he was incapable of rational thought about anything. He imagined Cray dead; and with Cray dead, all the dark passion that had

prompted Piroli to destroy Cray shriveled up and died—became part of a dream that had passed, and was done with forever.

He watched Carnahan drag the body to the well and cast it in. Watching without a movement, he saw the murderer look round, wipe his brow, turn, and go off. Piroli waited. Then he came out into the sunlight. A bird all gold and red and with long tail feathers flew across the open space from tree border to tree border, the sunlight blazed on the well rim and the ruins beyond, and a great green lizard showed like a jewel on one of the stone blocks near by.

Piroli went to the well and looked down, and there was Cray, miraculously spreadeagled only a few yards down, face upward, eyes open, and alive—though only just returning to consciousness.

He was lying on a mattress of tree roots that had penetrated the old well walls. The cataclysm that had blocked the well had reduced its depth to about twenty feet, seeds had fallen and grown, roots pierced in and spread; the thing was a mass of vegetation dead and living. But it was no less a death trap, for, between the spot where Cray was lying and the rim, stretched ten feet of unclimbable masonry.

Piroli saw the man he had set out to kill lying dazed, half awake, yet still alive. A thrust of the spear would have finished the business, but the instinct to kill in the breast of Piroli was dead. The evil, dark something that had prompted it had lost power. To kill a half-murdered man might indeed have been an act beyond it even if it had still been in existence.

—Piroli wanted a rope. The forest was full of ropes.

Dropping the spear and taking the knife from his belt, he made off into the trees and began cutting a length of cable liana—a rope an inch thick and stronger

than manila. Trailing twenty feet of this behind him he came back, and as he came he heard Cray's voice calling for help. Pirolì did not bother to answer. Fastening an end round a projecting stone of the rim, he threw the liana down. Cray seized it but was unable to climb; he was still too weak and shattered by the blow.

"Wait you!" cried the rescuer, and dashing off cut another liana, made a loop, threw the looped end down and directed Cray to put it round him.

Then, Pirolì pulling and the other climbing as well as he could, the rescue was effected. The rescued man, tumbling over the rim, sat on it for a moment dazed and breathless while his rescuer freed him of the loop. But Pirolì, all alive now with instinctive warnings, would not let him rest. He dragged him and helped him to the shadow of the trees, made him hide, and, after returning to fetch the spear, joined him.

Then, as they lay together safely hidden, he told all.

Cray knew nothing of what had happened. Not only had he no knowledge of Carnahan's act but also his mind was a blank as to what had happened for at least two minutes before the attack. This is a common result of head injuries that stun. But for Pirolì's evidence he would have known nothing of the business.

He remembered the incident in the cave and saw it in a new light. This was the second attempt on his life by Carnahan.

The fact that Pirolì had been after his life, too, was unknown to him. It was forgotten by Pirolì.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE POISONED SPEAR.

FOR several years Carnahan had been literally Pirolì's lord and master, dominating him by personality and superiority of mind. That domination had

not been lessened by Pirolì's rescue of Cray; strengthened if anything and vivified by terror, it still held power—only the instinct now was not to obey but to run away.

This terror of Carnahan had taken possession of the native's mind and it showed itself as he sat by Cray, telling him of what had happened.

Cray, having heard the story, sat up abruptly.

Unlike Pirolì, he was not dominated.

The instinct to seize Carnahan, bind him and lug him back for trial to Sandabar, even at the risk of losing the treasure, was strong upon him. But it was checkmated by thoughts of Maya. He was her father, after all.

No, he would have to tackle Carnahan and have it out with him, here on shore if possible. He'd give him the choice of going back to be tried for attempted murder or of remaining here on this island for several months while the *Itang* returned to Sandabar, cashed some of the jewels and came back for him under a hired crew and with a hired captain.

This was the scheme that sketched itself in Cray's mind. He would tell Maya everything. It was impossible that Carnahan should ever again have anything to do with Maya, daughter or not—unless Maya refused to be separated from him, which would be unlikely when she knew all.

Cray rose. Pirolì rose also and stood by him, spear in hand.

"What now?" asked Pirolì.

"I am going to find him," said Cray. "Do not be afraid. He who would act like that is a coward, not a brave man. There's nothing to fear from a coward."

In this, however, he was wrong.

Meanwhile Carnahan, rifle in hand, was coming along the old temple path, pausing every now and then to listen and search the tree shadows with his eyes.

His plan was simple—to shoot Pirolì on sight. But there was no sign of the

game. He reached the open space where the ruins were. No sign.

Then it came to him—why not try a call? There was just the chance that the wanted one, if in earshot, might answer. Anyway, there was nothing to risk. He called. A vague wood echo answered, nothing more.

Then his eye caught sight of something on the ground near the well—a liana with a loop at one end. It had not been there before. He took it up, but dropped it when his eyes saw the liana end tied round the stone of the well rim. He went forward and looked down the well. Casting Cray over, he had not looked down. Now he saw the bed of foliage and the rope of escape and the whole thing clearly.

Cray had not been killed; he was alive, and Piroli had helped him escape.

Horrible rage and wild alarm filled the heart of Carnahan. He clean forgot that if Cray was out and alive, he—Carnahan—could not be held for murder. The blood filled his eyes so that his sight went dim for a moment, till a voice from behind made him wheel:

"Carnahan!"

Cray and Piroli had stepped from the trees. Carnahan's call had given them his whereabouts, and Piroli, taking courage from his companion, had not held back.

Carnahan stood for one moment; then the rifle flew to his shoulder. He fired, and as the shot rang out the spear of Piroli fled like a streak of light.

Carnahan staggered and dropped the gun; the spear had pierced his right shoulder. He seized it with his left hand and drew it out, and as he did so his knees gave.

He fell, striking the ground, then turned over and threw up his arms to the sky; the poison had found his heart. The arms fell, and foaming at the mouth like a poisoned dog he twitched, stretched out and lay still.

Cray's shoulder had been grazed by

the rifle bullet. He did not notice it as he stood looking down on the dead man.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NEW MASTER.

CRAV felt no compunction, no regret.

Carnahan had thrice attempted his life. He looked down at the face with the lips covered with foam, at the outstretched hand with the thin, gold ring on it and the fingers stained with cigarette smoking.

It was impossible to dig a grave—but there was the well; he pointed to it and Piroli nodded. Then, before moving the body, Cray examined the pockets of the coat. The right-hand pocket contained a few trifles; the left-hand one showed a slight bulge. Cray put his hand in and found the chank shell.

He had forgotten the thing in the excitement of the last half hour.* He had not discovered that it had gone from his pocket, and the sudden finding of it in the pocket of the dead man hit him strangely; it gave him a sudden picture of himself lying on the ground and the murderer rifling his pockets. But for what good? Why, the fool had said and evidently believed that the thing had no virtue as a luck bringer unless found. Perhaps he had considered stealing was as good as finding. Well, it hadn't proved so, as far as luck was concerned. Cray put it in his pocket and, helped by the other, dragged the body to the well edge and cast it over.

Piroli glanced down after it, then, taking his seat on a block of stone, he contemplated the ground before him. He seemed all of a sudden to have gone slack. One might have fancied him a man cast down by some sudden and disastrous news. Then he spoke:

"There is no good in this thing."

"What?" asked Cray.

"We will all of us never leave this place," said Piroli. "He who lands here will never return—or only to die."

"Why," said Cray, "you've landed here before. Carnahan told me so. He knew the place and knew where the water source was."

"He lied," said Piroli.

Cray remembered the piece of paper he had found near the locker on the *Itang*. It was in his waistcoat pocket and had escaped Carnahan's search. He took it out.

Piroli recognized it and held out his hand for it.

"This is the writing," said he. Then in his clipped English he explained.

Carnahan had got the paper from a man they had picked up at Tandjong Priok. The man had come on board as an extra hand; he was a Dutchman. He had sold the thing to Carnahan for twenty guilders, but he had absolutely refused to go on the treasure hunt, for he had said the island was well known to be the haunt of dead people from the ship that was hidden in the great cave. He had been there and seen them; they looked like birds but their voices were the voices of men.

He, the Dutchman, had gone there with two others in a prahu. They had entered the cave and with the aid of a torch had seen the ship, but the cave had suddenly become filled with wings and sounds,

"Bats," thought Cray.

And they had fled. Also they had seen the ghosts of the dead men like white birds.

He would not go back there, bad luck had followed them; the prahu had been wrecked and the others drowned. He sold the paper with the location for twenty guilders. He told of the water source, of the temple place in the wood, and of the way through the reefs, and shortly after all this he died on board owing to having eaten poisoned fish. So there it was. Not only had the two men who accompanied the Dutchman been drowned but the Dutchman also had died—though later.

Cray, as he listened to all this, could have taken a stick and beaten the lugubrious story-teller. Here was Piroli gone rotten with superstition.

There was nothing at all on this island unnatural except the dreams and actions of men. Those birds were birds. He had seen something the night before last of which he had said nothing either to the girl or to Piroli simply because other things had put the matter out of his head: He had seen one of the ghostly white birds drop a fish. The "ghosts" had disappeared last night simply because the burning of the ship had evidently sent them off to some bay farther down the coast. The bats in the cave had been evil spirits to the Dutchman and his companions because there had not been light enough to see them. It was the same all through, and now Piroli was infected like this with the idea of disaster. The idea would be sure to weaken him in time of stress; it would make him inefficient anyhow. And they had to get back to Sandabar without Carnahan!

Cray cursed the name of superstition, forgetting that legend and the birds combined had sealed the island all these years from men. Only for superstition the jewels would not have been there to find. Cray also forgot his own belief in the chank shell and the fact that it was in his pocket, and that he had carried it there all the voyage.

Behind and surrounding all his thoughts there was an atmosphere of doubt, almost of unhappiness. The expedition had been wildly successful, and they ought now to be rejoicing over the luck that had come to them and making plans for the cashing of the treasure; instead, Carnahan was lying there in the pit, Piroli was half unmanned, they had lost their leader and doubt and confusion lay over everything.

Cray knew that the disposal of the jewels and those pearls would prove to be the crux of this business and the test

of its success. How to dispose of jewels either in the East or at home was a problem beyond him, but it wanted no cleverness to see that it was a business about as dangerous as navigating reefs without a chart in shark-infested waters. Of course, he could openly declare them. That would mean handing them over to the authorities and waiting their decision—as to the legality of the find. Cray knew something of authorities and the fate of people who had to wait for even a medal honestly and patently earned. Besides, what authorities?

He did not know in the least to whom this island belonged.

Piroli was useless in the business and so was Maya. To dispose of the jewels and make profit out of them he would have to do the business himself.

It seemed strange that, as he stood now looking at Piroli sitting there in the sun with wrists dropped and a general air of having been crumpled up, it seemed strange that he, Cray, was thinking neither of the killing of Carnahan nor the loss of leadership, but of the jewels.

All thought of Maya even was pushed aside by them for the moment.

It wasn't strange really. Carnahan's death had thrown on Cray the onus of leadership, and leadership now had only one goal—not the navigation of the *Itang* back to Sandabar but the cashing of the find.

That was the logical end of the expedition; also it was the thing now most vitally essential to his life, the thing that meant beggary or affluence depending on how it was carried out.

He turned to Piroli.

"Get up," said Cray.

Piroli got up, obedient as a child.

"You have been talking like an old woman," said Cray. "I have been laughing at you all the time. The other night you would not stay to look at the birds. If you had stayed you would have seen what I saw. They were not spirits; they

were birds, fishing, and I saw one of them drop a fish it had caught. Spirits do not fish. The things the Dutchman heard in the cave were bats. I saw them because we had a strong light. Carnahan has died because he was wicked and tried to do me harm. No one can do me harm because I am protected. This is what protects me."

He took the chank from his pocket and showed it.

"Carnahan stole this from me because he knew its power, but its power is only for me. Look what it has done to Carnahan. You did not kill him with your spear; it was this that ordered you to throw the spear and made it go straight.

"Follow me now, for I am going to the *Itang* to tell of what has happened. I will say nothing of you; I will say Carnahan was killed by me, for that is the truth since this has killed him and this is part of me. Come."

Piroli came. His mind was disorganized and had ceased to function as of old. The something that had made him save the man he had intended to kill was a new thing suddenly raised from the depths of his being by circumstance—a moral force called up to face the wickedness of Carnahan.

Besides this, Cray's taking over the burden of the killing was an unconscious master stroke. Cray had thought to work on Piroli through superstition; in reality he had raised himself in some strange way to the position of master and leader.

They returned to the beach and got the boat off.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BROWN MUMMIES.

AS they drew up to the *Itang* the girl rose from the deck and came to the side. She helped to fasten the boat. Piroli, without a glance at the others, slipped below.

Maya looked at Cray. She knew quite well that something had happened. The way they had come down to the beach, the way they had rowed across, the look in Piroli's face as he turned to the fo'c's'le hatch—a hundred little things spoke to her and Heaven knows what they told her instinctive mind.

Cray looked at her full in the eyes. Looking into her eyes that morning before leaving her had been like looking into a dark sea—a sea through whose vague depths his mind had sunk to be seized and embraced by a spirit of which he knew nothing, except that its embrace had brought him new life.

Looking now the sea had darkened mysteriously; it seemed resistant to his gaze.

Then he spoke:

"Maya, a terrible thing has happened. Over there in the woods your father tried to kill me."

"He tried to kill you?"

"Twice he tried. The first time he came behind me and struck me on the head and left me so that I would have died only for Piroli. Then he came back with a gun and found I was still alive."

"He took the gun with him," said Maya; but she was not talking to Cray, she was talking to herself. And, though she was talking of her father, she was evidently thinking of Cray alone.

It came to him all at once that the fate of Carnahan was nothing to her, that his death left her quite unmoved, so long as he, Cray, was safe.

Carnahan had been her father, and she had been bound to him by all sorts of ties of companionship. Yet his fate left her quite unmoved.

It was a sudden revelation of her mentality, single centered and pitiless for all things and beings outside that center. It was also possibly a revelation of Carnahan's character and his inability to make himself even cared for, let alone loved.

Cray had not known her really till now. Young, patient, uncomplaining, indifferent to him and seeming to live in a world of her own, yet, suddenly revealing the fact that she loved him—that was strange enough. But stranger still was the knowledge that had just come to him as a hint, a whisper from the subconscious world—that her love was the love of a wild creature for its mate—of an animal to whom filial love is of no account at all.

He stood watching her.

Then, raising her eyes to his, she was about to speak when a cry from Piroli, who had just come on deck, made her turn. Piroli was pointing beyond the reefs where, sharp against the hazy blue, appeared the sail of a boat.

Cray turned, shaded his eyes and looked. Then, after running below for the glasses, he climbed to the crosstrees and leveled them.

It was a ship's boat, evidently, headed direct for the main reef opening. There were four people in her—no, three. Cray could now see distinctly two forms in the stern sheets and a third forward, his head just showing above the gunnel.

Who were they? From where had they come and what was bringing them here? A prahu would have been understandable, but a ship's boat was the last thing to be expected, the last thing desirable.

Here were witnesses!

Up to this and all along the expedition had been surrounded by the secrecy of the sea. No living things had been encountered but the gulls and sea birds.

It was like the hand of Fate, disclosed at the last moment possibly to wreck everything. A few hours more and that boat would have found them gone, the *Itang* dissolved in the shimmer of the sea and nothing but the empty lagoon, the gulls and desolation of the island.

It was like fate, and Cray, as he watched, could not but remember Pi-

roli's words about the bad luck hanging over this place and how it pursued all who came here.

The boat kept on, lifting to the gentle swell, sometimes spilling the wind from its wretched little sail, which, however, always refilled again.

And now it was engaging the reef opening and Cray could distinctly see the men, the two in the stern sheets—one hunched and huddled up, the other steering—and the fellow in the bow evidently seated on the bottom boards, his arm over the side and his head and shoulders showing just above the gunnel.

A strange boat crew, with never a hail or lift of the hand to signal that they had seen the *Itang*.

Strange faces, too.

Cray, as he hung with glasses leveled, could see now at short range those faces. They did not seem the faces of men—brown mummies, nightmares, but not men.

He slung the glasses around his neck and came down with a run.

Maya was standing at the port rail, her eyes fixed on the coming boat; Piroli, forward, was shading his eyes.

Carnahan, treasure, love, life itself—all were forgotten by the gazers as they stood without a word, watching.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WRECK.

ON the morning when Cray had fallen in with Carnahan at Sandabar, the schooner *Caraman*, bound from Bencoolen to Malli Lagoon in the Low Archipelago, was passing through Torres Strait, Cape York visible far on the starboard bow.

Nothing could seem more remotely connected than the fortunes of the *Caraman* and her crew and the fortunes of the two men on the beach at Sandabar—the *Caraman* nearly two thousand miles way, bound for the distant eastern

Pacific, the men of the *Itang* soon to sail for southern waters.

But the sea is a strange shuffler of the cards when weather is the dealer, and the *Caraman*, topsail schooner, two hundred tons, smelling of old copra and bound for Malli Lagoon and a cargo of shell, having cleared the Strait, fell under the spell of a calm that stretched from Neu-Mecklenburg to the Queensland coast and from Torres to Malaita.

There were four passengers—Dutchmen, and all pearl buyers. Van Dyne was the chief of them—a large, placid man, peaceful of soul, unshakable by events, the counterpart in spirit of the calm that held the ship.

"Come, let us play cards," was his only comment on the situation, if it can be called a comment.

When the wind came at last it found him indifferent, and the storm that followed on the wind left him unmoved.

That was a storm! It drove the *Caraman* far from her course, up north; she had to run before it through the Dampier Strait with Neu-Pommern flinging the breakers into hundred-foot ghosts of foam on her starboard quarter, and New Guinea all peaks and torn clouds to port.

Van Dyne was unmoved.

They would be late for the opening of the pearling season at Malli, if they ever reached it; if they never reached it they would be later still. Worrying would not mend matters. He played patience as well as he could with a small pack of cards which he always carried in his waistcoat pocket, smoked cigars without end and avoided speaking of the weather. He disliked unpleasant subjects.

The *Caraman* drove on. The storm had abated, but the wind still blew half a gale; she could not turn, she ran before it. She was leaking like a sieve, and to face a bad sea might have opened her out like a basket.

In that clouded weather the Papuan

coast showed far to port, and mixed with the clanking of the pumps came the cries of great shore-going gulls sailing down the wind, whirling about the *Caraman* and beating up for shore again as if to tell the news.

Was that a coast seen through the glass? Iron rocks and blowing trees, reefs spouting like whales, melancholy hills lining the gray, rushing clouds!

"Place crawling with blasted savages," said Stonnor, the master of the *Caraman*, ranging up beside Van Dyne. "They say they've given up head hunting, but they haven't."

"So!" said Van Dyne.

He went below to play patience and smoke.

He was not lazy. He was a big and very powerful man and, unlike the other passengers, he had taken a hand with the pumps without waiting to be commanded for that job; but at the moment he was free, so he went below and absorbed himself with the little cards.

Next day—a wildly beautiful day of wind, clear sky and tumbling sea, with the Papuan coast vanished from sight—the *Caraman* gave up the fight. The pumps could do no more.

As is the way with sinking ships that have been held up by the pumps, the end came with drastic rapidity—one moment the clank of iron and swish of water, the next the order to get the boats away.

Van Dyne came up.

Men were racing along the deck, some going to the falls, others hauling their sea bags on deck, Stonnor shouting orders.

Van Dyne went below again and came up with a light traveling rug over one arm, a bag in one hand, and two cigar boxes tied together and held by the string in his other hand.

A boat had been lowered on the starboard side. There were two fellows in her. Van Dyne threw down his lug-

gage, which they caught and stowed in the stern sheets.

There was no confusion on board. The other boats, half lowered from the davits, were being stowed with all sorts of things, but without special hurry. Though they had to leave the old hooker she would float a long time yet.

Van Dyne dropped into the boat after his belongings. Heilbrom, another of the passengers, proposed to follow; then he drew back, it seeming to him that he would have more comfortable quarters in the long boat.

Van Dyne's was small—an old tub that Stonnor had picked up at Tandjong Priok to replace a dinghy he had lost.

"Aren't you coming?" said Van Dyne; and as the words left his lips the *Caraman* trembled to a bursting noise from below deck and began gently to list to starboard.

A shout went up from the men crowding the decks.

"She is going!" said Van Dyne; and the fellow with him, whipping out an oar, pushed the boat away a few yards. Then out went another oar.

"Pull," cried the bow man, "or we'll be had in the suck!"

They pulled, made a distance of a cable length and a half, then hung watching.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUNK.

DIPPING now by the head and listing more to starboard, the *Caraman* was making her plunge. Of the four boats she carried Van Dyne's was the only one away. Of the three others the two to port, swinging on their davits, could not be lowered; the third to starboard had been badly handled, and she hung bashing the water with her stern, horrible to see. A crowd of men were fighting and struggling on the deck now awash.

"She's going!" cried the bow oar, a fellow by name of Jackman, a Nova

Scotian with a hard-bitten face marked with a scar from cheek bone to chin.

"She's gone," said Van Dyne. "Look, they are swimming."

Nothing but the masts of the *Caraman* showed, that and the heads of men swimming, swimming toward the boat.

Train, the stern oar, a Yankee from Martha's Vineyard, said:

"They'll board us and swamp us."

The boat forged ahead.

"Pull like hell!" said Train.

Van Dyne, looking back, saw the face of the Chinese cook, his lips drawn back showing the teeth. Beyond that were twelve or thirteen heads fanning out in a triangle. The sea had calmed down.

"You are leaving those men," said Van Dyne.

"What you want?" asked Train. "Save all an' sink all?"

"Ah, well," said Van Dyne. He did not look back again. It would be no use and he disliked unpleasant objects as well as subjects.

The clouds were going from the sky as though driven by a broom. The last of the big wind was up there; on the sea surface there was only a sailing breeze.

Van Dyne, now that he could take stock of things, recognized that he was well placed.

To begin with, all the boats of the *Caraman* had been provisioned and supplied with water some days ago when things had begun to look bad.

Stonnor was no haphazard man, and in Van Dyne's boat now could plainly and comfortably be seen the evidence of his forethought—a big breaker of water and the provisions under a piece of oilcloth, secured with a rope.

The boat had a mast and small lug sail, the mast unstepped as yet and the sail furled. There were, however, no navigating instruments. If there had been they would have been useless, as not one of the three men had any idea of navigation.

An hour later when Train raised the mast and shook out the sail, they took a course to the west, the sun, an hour from its setting, giving them direction. It was Van Dyne's proposal.

"All over there," said he, "there are islands—Gilolo and Celebes. Back east as far as I remember is all open sea. South would be Papua; we do not want that. And besides," he finished, "the wind is with us this way, and that is Luck pointing. Seems to me, my friends, Luck has been with us; do not let us go against her when she points."

"Right-o," said Train.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LAND!

VAN DYNE on board the *Caraman* had been aware of the existence of the crew, but of their individual personalities he had known nothing. They were part of the ship like the masts and rigging, things of no interest to a pearl buyer and man of business.

He had now, however, two of these people close to him. They had suddenly become part of his life, sharing with him the food and water and the chances of death and salvation.

To tell the truth, if he had been free to choose he would have chosen others than these two for companions. He had disliked them on sight when, looking down from the deck, he had met their gaze, yet he had elected to go with them.

Theirs was the only boat lowered and instinct, that instinct which had always served him well in business deals, said, "Get in."

Of the two he preferred Jackman, despite his hard and bitter face. Train's face ran to nose—a pale, crafty, curious face with closely set eyes, quick looking as the eyes of a rat.

They were both equally callous and without mercy and they had proved it, not only by rowing away from the

drowning men but by the way they had done it. All the same Van Dyne preferred Jackman.

It might be said that Van Dyne was equally callous; though he had almost protested, he had done nothing to make them row back. To have done so would almost certainly have entailed the overcrowding if not the sinking of the boat, and this curious man who took all things so quietly no doubt knew that to protest would have been useless.

Anyhow, all that was past.

The weather, that now held the sea from Neu-Mecklenburg to Palawan and from Mindoro to the Macassar Strait, gave them nothing to desire. A full and steady sailing breeze blowing from the southeast filled the sail and tempered the sun's heat.

Drawing up toward the Sulu Sea they passed several islands, all desolate and promising little in the way of rescue. At one they landed, obtained some drinking nuts and refilled the beaker at a water source discovered among the trees; then, pushing on, still on the lookout for ships, they entered the Sulu Sea.

Now the Sulu Sea is almost land locked, albeit the land that locks it is broken into islands, reefs, banks, and shallows.

Ignorant as the dead of where they were or of the place they were entering, they passed far-lying capes, misty, purple islands, and spouting reefs, and once they sighted in the distant north a trace of smoke—surely the smoke of a steamer. They held on still in the hope of sighting a ship and in no way attracted by the beckoning desolation of the islands. Then beyond Cagayan a calm took them.

The Sulu Sea is not a good place in which to be becalmed. Its semiland-locked waters are filled with tropical life, microscopic things that die in stagnation, jellyfish of extraordinary shapes and sizes that rise and float and die, killed by the sun.

On the third day of the great calm the smell of corruption began to taint the air. Strangely enough the man to note this first was not the passenger Van Dyne but the common sailor Train.

Possessed of a phenomenally keen sense of smell, he began to grumble before the others had found cause for offense. But he did not grumble long; something worse than the smell of corruption was upon them. Thirst! The water was all but run out. On the fourth day a little more than a pint was left in the beaker. Van Dyne doled it out.

He was the biggest and strongest of the three and had an ascendancy over the others—perhaps just because he had never grumbled once since the start. They recognized him as a superior man, a man far above themselves. His placidity gave them confidence, and, though they were two to one and every drop of water was a moment of life, they would not have robbed him of his share even had it been possible to do so without a struggle.

There is nothing men crave for more in moments of stress and danger than some one to look up to.

On the night following the fifth day of the calm, Train raised his head and sniffed.

"I smell land," said he.

Van Dyne, who had dropped half asleep, raised his head; as he did so something cool touched his cheek—the ghost of a breeze.

"The wind is coming," said he. "Get ready with the sail. Land! Our luck is with us." He took the tiller.

It was not till after dawn that they saw the land—a lumpy island far ahead on the starboard bow.

Through the long calm the boat had not remained stationary; a current had been leading them all the time, flowing at two knots and setting to the north.

Yes, there was the land—but how far off! It would take half a day at least

to reach it, and the sight, instead of slaking, accentuated their thirst.

Thirst has its psychological as well as its physiological significance; like the craving for tobacco it is partly an obsession of the mind. The men in the boat had been without water for not so many hours, yet they suffered as though they had been deprived for days.

The island was no longer an island but an evil spirit taxing their energies, claiming their minds, torturing their souls.

"Here is water," it said. "Come and drink." The wind in league with it blew weakly sometimes, showing hesitation in the trembling of the sail, sometimes strengthening up as though relenting.

The trees could now be seen blowing in the wind, and the reefs crooning to the swell, and beyond the reefs the spars of a small vessel—the *Itang*.

"Look!" cried Van Dyne. "At last a ship. Water now for sure!"

The others looked.

CHAPTER XXX.

COMPLICATIONS.

AS the boat passed through the reef opening Cray came down from the crosstree. He had guessed the trouble. Leaving Maya and Piroli on deck he ran below and fetched up the earthenware water bottle and three pannikins from the galley; then as the boat came alongside he leaned over and handed the water bottle down to the only man standing up—Van Dyne.

The Dutchman took the bottle and the pannikins and supplied the others before drinking himself. When he had done so he came heavily over the side of the *Itang* and stood looking around him. The fellows in the boat, having filled themselves with water, remained seated while Piroli gave them some food. They had suffered not a bit more than Van Dyne but they were of different stuff.

"They will be all right," said Van Dyne. "We had still some biscuits left but we had no water for many hours. It was the thought of wanting to drink that made them so bad. I am soon recovered, with thanks to you."

He spoke in English, recognizing that Cray was English. Then, led by Cray, he went below, walking queerly and stiffly as a man walks who has spent many hours in one position.

Down below he stretched himself luxuriously on the starboard couch. To appreciate freedom of movement one must have spent long days in the cramped quarters of an open boat.

Cray brought him food and Piroli made coffee. When he had eaten and drunk, Van Dyne asked that his cigars should be fetched from the boat. They were already on deck with his luggage and the rug he had carried when leaving the *Caraman*. They were fetched and he lit up, offering a cigar to Cray who refused, preferring his pipe. Van Dyne was something quite new to Cray. The calm way he had come on board, his quietness, his even bearing and air of having expected all this in the ordinary course of travel, astonished the Englishman.

"The *Itang*," said Van Dyne, having asked the name of the ketch, "and from Sandabar, you say? I know Sandabar very well; have business connections there. Well, well, let us hope we will soon be back in Sandabar if your voyage is finished. You trading here, captain?"

"No," said Cray, "there's no one here to trade with. We put in here—for water. The casks are on the beach yet over there and have to be towed off. I expect we'll get away to-morrow."

He wondered what Van Dyne would have thought had he known of the tragedy of Carnahan, had he known that in the locker right under the couch on which he was lounging a box of jewels worth many thousands of pounds was hidden.

Even as things were, things were bad enough.

This expedition above all things required secrecy. Jewels found in a wreck or in a cache may be claimed by the finder, but the claim has to be made good. And when all the vultures of the law and all the vulturous counter-claimants had been beaten off or satisfied, how much would be left to the finder?

Cray was not a specially clever man, but he was not a fool and he saw that the only way to make profit out of this business was to keep the affair absolutely secret.

Leaving aside all that, there was the Carnahan business. Carnahan was lying over there in the temple well. It did not matter that the killing of him was a necessity or that Piroli was the executioner; the plain facts were that the *Itang* had belonged to Carnahan, that a large fortune in jewels had been discovered, and that Carnahan, landing with his two companions, had been left behind dead.

Only Piroli and Maya knew the whole facts of this business and they were safe; all the same no secret is absolutely safe in this world where money is concerned. Carnahan would be sure to have friends or at least acquaintances, men to whom perhaps he owed money, and who might make inquiries if their suspicions were raised.

Once away from this island all would have been well since no one knew of their having come here, but now everything was different.

Van Dyne and his companions had broken in, destroying secrecy and laying the train for who could tell what mischief.

Cray looked at Van Dyne.

"So you think to get away to-morrow," said the latter. "And what is your home port, captain?"

Here was a question! A perfectly natural question, yet involving so much.

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"Sandabar," he answered, not daring to hesitate for fear of raising suspicion.

"Ah, Sandabar," said the other. "I have many dealings with them. I am a business man; I buy and sell, but mostly in curios and pearls. Let us talk business. You have made me a guest on your boat and I have no doubt you will give me a passage on her should no other ship turn up before you sail. Well, what I want to say is that I am prepared to pay for my passage——"

Cray cut him short by holding up his hand.

"That will be all right," said he.

"—at mail rates," went on Van Dyne as though he had not been interrupted, "and we will settle that when we arrive at Sandabar. So." He resumed his cigar, and Cray recognized that here was a man of a type he had never met with before.

Here was a profound and colossal serenity, an unshakable quiet, that seemed elemental and removed from the fuss and foolishness of the ordinary crowd as a mountain is remote from a city, and on top of that a hint of power and business ability not to be denied. While Van Dyne had been talking Cray had been thinking. The word "Sandabar" dropped by him had put him in a cleft stick. He would have to go back to Sandabar; if he went to any other port it would not cancel the fact that Van Dyne had in his head the port from which the *Itang* had sailed, and it was not a question of whether he would talk or not. It was a certainty. He would, of course, tell his story of how he had been wrecked and saved; the newspapers would be full of it. Carnahan had been known at Sandabar and doubtless other places as the owner of the *Itang*; questions would be asked.

Here was a nice complication!

Piroli was all right, Maya was all right, and there was no one else who knew anything of the business; all the same——

All the same it was like fate that here at the last moment an opening, however small, should be made into the profound secrecy of this matter.

The idea came to him to tell Van Dyne that he, Cray, was not the captain of the *Itang*, that the captain and owner had died of fever and that they had buried him on shore. That story would make things simple not only to Van Dyne but to the people at Sandabar.

But he put this idea aside. He could not arrive at such a momentous decision without further thought. And presently, leaving the Dutchman in the cabin, he came on deck.

On deck Train and Jackman were seated with their backs to the starboard rail, smoking. The effect of their thirst had been more of a psychological than a physiological nature and they had nearly recovered from it. But not enough to work—trust them.

Maya was forward helping Piroli over some matters in the bow, but Cray scarcely noticed her; the faces of the two new men had seized on his imagination. He did not like them. Doubtless they were honest enough fellows and his grudge against them was due to the fact that they were interlopers—all the same their faces displeased him.

He wanted to tow the water casks off and the problem was how to do it. If he took Maya and Piroli that would mean leaving the ship in charge of three strangers. No doubt they were all right, but it wasn't the thing to do.

He turned to the pair on the deck.

"Do you feel equal to lending a hand to bring some water casks from ashore?" he asked.

They rose up like crippled men.

"I tell you, mister, I'm stiff as a crimped cod with that there boat," said Jackman, holding onto the rail. Train, after standing a second, took his seat on the edge of the skylight.

"All right," said Cray. "I'll man-

age without you; it's not a big job anyhow."

He had made up his mind. He would leave Piroli on board and take Maya; the job would not be more than they could manage between them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JEWELS OF EVIL.

CRAY, going off with Maya to fetch the casks, had told Piroli to look after the ship, and Piroli, nodding assent, went below to the fo'c's'le as the boat pushed away.

The unfortunate Piroli's mind was in such a condition as to be absolutely useless for anything at the moment.

The tragedy of Carnahan only a few hours old and the part Piroli had played in it, his passion for Maya, the knowledge that she was Cray's, and the feeling that nothing mattered as they were all surely doomed to destruction—all these feelings and considerations made him useless for ship watching.

He went below and took his seat on the side of his bunk. His was a mind that thought in pictures, and the pictures that came to him now as he sat like a hypnotized fool was the picture of the birds of ill omen—the great white night birds that had even alarmed Cray till his common-sense mind had proved to him that they were nothing more than fishing eagles of a rare breed.

To Piroli they were spirits.

They were visible evidence of the evil that hung around this place, precursors of the killing of Carnahan.

He sat on his bunk edge with the great white birds flying above him in his imagination, and he was quite unconscious of the fact that there were two birds of ill omen on deck—Train and Jackman.

Train, as the boat pushed off, saw Piroli step below, then he looked around.

"Where's the Dutchman?" he asked. Jackman looked at the skylight.

"Cabin," said he with a laugh. "Ain't he a first-class passenger, different from the likes of you and me?"

Train sniffed. Then, turning to the cabin entrance, he went down, followed by the other.

Van Dyne, with one leg on the couch, was finishing his cigar. He looked up.

Another man might have forgotten the fact that they had all been castaways a few hours ago and have resented their intrusion, but he said nothing; just nodded his head in recognition of their presence and went on smoking. It wasn't his ship, anyhow.

"Well, the fixings ain't bad," said Train, looking round. "Nice, comfortable little ship for them that owns her. But what is she, anyway? Too small for cargo. And that native and that girl in dungarees—what's the meaning of it?"

He spoke to Van Dyne, who shook his head. Then Train began walking round, looking at this and that, while Jackman took his seat and began cutting up a bit of plug tobacco, his back bent and his eyes on his job.

"Have you told them any yarn?" asked Jackman, speaking to Van Dyne without raising his eyes.

"How? What do you mean?" said the Dutchman.

"Oh, Lord! Wasn't the hooker British owned and won't the board-of-trade guys be asking us about her sinking and how it was only we three got away from her?"

"That will be all right," said Van Dyne. "You will be able to explain."

"Hell!" said Jackman. "If there's any bother explaining we ain't alone in it. Question is, what did you give away?"

"Nothing," said the other. "I did not speak about your rowing away while those other men were there—in the water. Leave it so—there will be no trouble." He threw his cigar end out of the little port above the couch.

Jackson was about to speak again when Train broke in. He had taken his seat on the couch just above the locker where the jewels were stored.

"Say, folks," he cut in, "smell that! The place is a beastly perfume shop!" He turned his head to the right, then to the left; then, with unerring instinct, he lowered his head and sniffed. He gave the locker a tap with his heel, then got down on his knees, opened the locker and pulled out one of the little bales containing the attar of roses. The stopper of one of the little bottles had no doubt worked loose. It was the bale that Cray had opened and the bottles showed at once.

Van Dyne, who had just been preparing to light a new cigar, put the match back in the box.

Jackman stared.

"Well, Billy Train," said he, "if you haven't got the nose! Scent bottles—what in the hell are they doing with that stuff? Hand one up."

But Billy Train was busy. He had glimpsed the metal-bound box and in a moment had it out. He raised the lid, pulled the top covering aside and exposed the first layer of jewels. Then he fell back on his heels.

"Gott!" said Van Dyne.

The three men looked at one another as men might look in a moment of catastrophe or apparition.

It was the old metal-bound box that shouted, "Treasure!" Heaven knows it was well supported by the chorus of the jewels, but it was the box itself that told the full tale.

Treasure-trove—buried treasure—dug up by others, but here under their noses and touch. That was what seized them by the throat.

Suddenly Jackman, without speaking and like a mechanical man, moved by the release of a spring, dashed on deck. He returned a moment later, his face pale and livid like the face of a man who has been running hard.

"They're still ashore," he said, "messing with those mucky casks. Lord! look at the stuff!"

"Where's the native?" asked Train in a voice lowered to a whisper. That whisper suddenly came as the first hint of conspiracy.

Jackman swore under his breath and closed the door leading forward.

"I saw him dropping down to the fo'c's'le," said he. "No use in bothering about him. Say, Dutchman, you were a pearl buyer; give us a lead. What's the stuff worth, to begin with?"

Van Dyne had made an examination of the things, even lifting the silk cover that hid the pearl necklace.

He spoke:

"It is worth nothing," said he, "unless you can get it away from here. And seeing it is not yours or mine——"

"Stow it," said Jackman. "Give us what it's worth in figures."

"Ten thousand—twenty thousand pounds. I don't know; it all depends on the seller, and the buyer. You put that box back in its place. Can you not see it is no use to you here——"

"Dutchy's right," said Jackman. "Here, you swab, fix down the lid and shove it back and give us time to think. This stuff's no use to us here, as he's saying; there's no buyers. Shove it back, you damn idiot, before that native drifts in on us. There now, shove the scent bottles on top of it and fix the catch."

He stood for a moment, his eyes on the locker, and then, leaving the cabin, went on deck.* Train followed.

They had no hesitation in leaving the Dutchman alone with the treasure. The stuff was absolutely valueless here, absolutely safe till some port was reached. Then indeed would come the time of stress and trial of wits; till then nothing could be done.

Train felt this as well as Jackman. They stood now at the after rail watching the figures of Cray and the girl on

shore, getting down the casks. Two casks were afloat and the third was just being fastened to the connecting ropes.

"Look at them," said Train. "Him and she and that native must have brought this hooker here and dug that boodle up somewhere ashore there. Did you ever hear tell of a rummer start—and us butting in on them and me smellin' out the stuff? Lord love a duck! Only for those damn scent bottles the stuff might have stuck there forever unknown to us."

Jackman was biting his finger nails. He was staring toward the island, but at nothing, and his face with its hard ferocity yet abstract gaze was not unlike a gargoyle on some medieval building.

Then he spoke:

"Us two could work this hooker."

"What's the good of talking," said Train, "with three and a native against us?"

"Not if we had the Dutchman—there wouldn't be three then," replied Jackman.

"No, that is so," said a voice behind them. It was the Dutchman. He had come up unheard and the light wind had brought him their conversation, low pitched though it was.

"Well, you've heard," said Jackman. "How do you stand? There's no use shufflin' the cards; lay 'em on the table. There's that stuff below and there's we three against them three, and one of them a girl and one a damn native without any guts. Are you in with us, or what? Say?"

Van Dyne cast his eyes shoreward. He was quite unperturbed.

"Look," he said, "they have started with those casks; they will be here soon. We leave to-morrow. What more do you want for the present? Let things be as they are——"

He stopped. Pirola had come on deck through the fo'c's'le hatch and the three men moved apart from one another and

stood watching the approaching boat as it labored across the water, the casks towed behind it.

Pirola did not offer to lend a hand in getting them aboard, and Cray as he came on deck noticed the change that had come over the man.

Cray knew nothing of what had been passing in that brain filled with ghosts and shadows and fears and suppressed desires; he only knew that Pirola looked like a man in a dream or doped. Suspecting opium, he said nothing but turned and with the help of Van Dyne and Jackman hauled the casks on board, while Maya in the boat helped in getting them up.

That finished, Cray went down to the fo'c's'le to see about the accommodations for Train and Jackman.

Van Dyne would sleep in the main cabin with Cray, Pirola and the two new hands in the fo'c's'le.

That done Cray called Maya into the cabin.

The affair between these two was one of the strangest ever existent between man and woman. Their two minds, wide apart as the forests of Malaya from London, were yet held to-

gether by the passion that had sprung up between them like a tropical plant whose tendrils entwined them both.

Since he had taken her in his arms only a few hours ago, event had followed event so rapidly that they had scarcely time for speech. On the voyage, as though held apart by Carnahan, they had spoken little to each other. Now, alone together for a moment, events still held them apart.

He told her of his worry about Pirola. She looked at him with those dark eyes that seemed to see beyond him into some strange world of which he knew nothing.

"Pirola is a Malay at heart," she said. "His mother belonged to them. It may pass. No, it is not the opium; it is some trouble of his mind. It may pass."

"I hope so," said he. "Maya, what do you think of these new men who have come on board?"

"They are bad," said Maya without hesitation and as though she was speaking of a matter of certainty.

"The big man?" he asked.

"I do not know," said Maya. "I cannot see him as I see the others—but the others are bad."

The issue containing the next part of Mr. Stacpoole's novel will be on the stands May 20th.



WHEN SENATORS DEBATE

A BRIEF quotation from the official record of a colloquy between the eminent Mr. Norris and the solemn Mr. Shortridge on the floor of the august Senate of the United States, showing that boys will be boys:

Mr. Shortridge: "Mr. President, a parliamentary inquiry. What is the subject matter before the Senate?"

Mr. Norris: "Mr. President, I object to the senator being informed because he has been sitting here in plain hearing all the time, while I have been making the subject clear and he does not know what it is all about."

Mr. Shortridge: "Frankly, the more the senator speaks the more confused I am."

Mr. Norris: "Then the senator is due for a great deal more confusion, because I am not through yet."

A Pistol, a Coin, and a Boat

By H. G. PARKER

THE sun boiled down on Fifty Mile Spit and the quivering heat waves created a feverish feeling of unreality. Three men plodded along the narrow ribbon of blinding white sand. To their left, the motionless, steel-blue sea; to their right, an endless monotony of dingy brown sand dunes. And above, a brazen sky. Like phantoms they marched along, wearily lifting one leaden foot after the other.

The man in the lead, with the rounded shoulders of the student and the dead-white skin of an indoor life, seemed near exhaustion. He stumbled along dazedly and looked around uncertainly, as if he could not realize just what was happening.

The second man in the sorry procession was standing it better. He had the tanned skin of the athlete but was showing the strain of continued punishment.

The third man fitted into the picture as perfectly as the occasional pieces of weather-gray driftwood on the beach. His face seemed to become a brighter red by the minute, the brick-colored stubble on his cheeks almost visibly grew, and the squinted eyes, shaded by a forest of eyebrow, glared straight ahead. His stocky, broad-shouldered figure swung along tirelessly as he shortened his steps to keep behind the leader. For two days they had walked. For six hours they had not had a drop of water; and in that torment of heat six hours seemed as six eternities.

For two days "Red," with a revolver swinging loosely in his hand, had driven the other two on. By threats and slaps and with an endless stream of vile abuse he had forced them to continue.

The man in the middle stared at his feet to avoid the furnacelike glare ahead. His sufferings had carried him to the point of semidelirium. He was beginning to see and hear things which didn't exist. The ironic chuckle of the miniature breakers became the rippling of icy



cold water in a mountain brook. The rattle of pebbles in the backwash became the tinkle of ice in frosty glasses at Jack's. Dozens of frosty glasses he could hear in the rattling of the pebbles, glasses on the shady porch at Jack's, miles and miles away.

In a drooling mutter he cursed Jack, cursed Red, and cursed the spit. But most bitterly of all he cursed himself.

It was on the porch at Jack's that the fool idea of sailing along this God-forsaken stretch of sand had struck him.

"All right, you guys," growled Red, "fall out. We'll rest a while."

Coleman, the man in the lead, dropped limply. The second man drew up beside him and squatted hopelessly. Red lay at ease propped on one elbow and closed his eyes indifferently.



"Hinton," Coleman whispered dryly, "listen. Have you noticed the water lately, when he gave us that last drink. Did you see how it's gone down?" He tried to moisten his blackened lips with a parched tongue and grimaced at the bitter taste of the caked salt. "We haven't had more than a small sip between the two of us and the canteen is half empty. Notice how strong Red is going. He isn't suffering any. He couldn't go along like he is without water."

Hinton sat upright. That hadn't occurred to him. He had cursed Red for his slave-driving but he had never sus-

pected him of any dirty work. But now the seed was sown, and hatred and anger grew and seethed and boiled within Hinton. No longer was Red the derelict rising to the occasion and heroically, if ruthlessly, leading the way to safety. He was leading the way to possible safety, all right, but that was merely incidental. If they got there, well and good. It would be good advertising, perhaps a nice reward for Red. But he was looking out for his own hide first. He knew how long the water would last, how long before they could expect a fresh supply, and he was acting accordingly. Coleman and Hinton were getting only sufficient water to quiet their suspicions in case they should pull through; for every swallow he was giving them Red was taking two for himself. He was taking no chances with his own precious skin.

It sickened Hinton to think a human could even think of such a beastial act, but hatred was stronger than disgust.

"The dirty dog!" he said bitterly. "I'll get him if it's the last thing I do. He'll never get away with this."

Then he realized the helplessness of his position. Red had the gun; he had nothing. Red was strong and vigorous; he was on the verge of collapse. Tears of weakness came to his eyes.

"On your feet, you guys," yelled Red. "And don't be pulling the baby stuff, unless you want to stay here for the gulls."

Once more the sorry procession took up the march. Hinton's thoughts raced in circles but always came back to the same point. Except for his conceit and bull-headedness they would never have gotten into this fix. Jack had discouraged him, told him there was nothing to such a cruise, but he, of course, had known better.

Coleman, a teacher on a short vacation, had jumped at the invitation to accompany him. Jack had tried to talk him out of it. There was nothing to

do on such a cruise, nothing to see, and very poor prospects for fishing. His efforts to dissuade Hinton had been wasted and then he had done his best to see that the trip would be a success. He had recommended a trustworthy man with a seaworthy boat to take them on the two-week cruise. Hinton again knew better. He rather considered himself an amateur psychologist and a student of character and Jack's man wouldn't do at all. Jack's man might be all right but he looked too uninteresting. Hinton could visualize two weeks of chatty remarks on the weather and it did not appeal. Coleman, as the guest, had nothing to say. Anybody suited him.

Hinton grinned sardonically. Never again would he rely on his judgment of men. He had had his way. Red, inveterate loafer and consumer of enormous quantities of beer, was the man for him. Jack grudgingly admitted that Red knew how to handle a boat. But he had profanely said that Red was a bad choice; he was too indifferent. He was a man of some education who had drifted there right after the war and had quickly become a perfect bum. He was half stewed most of the time and respected nobody. He was free with his opinions when the notion struck him, but usually he was about as garrulous as a clam.

The certainty of conceit had won over good counsel. Hinton wouldn't listen and Red was engaged.

For a week after the start Hinton had congratulated himself on his choice. Red wouldn't talk but his silence rather added to the interest. It was worth while to try to dig beneath the surface. Red made no pretense of being other than a bum and rather seemed to glory in it. He was sloppy in dress, slovenly in his personal habits, and as lazy as they came.

There was, however, an occasional mocking twinkle in his eye and at times

a twist of the speech which promised interesting things if once he opened up. He was a man who had more to him than showed on the surface, Hinton had decided, and one who would show his true mettle in a pinch.

Hinton stumbled to his knees, wobbled weakly, and staggered up again when Red cursed viciously. For a moment he was tempted to risk everything on one effort and half turned, murder in his face.

Red swung up the revolver easily. "Better save that energy, buddy. You'll need it, and the rough stuff won't get you anywhere."

This indifferent calmness had Hinton licked. With an oath he swung around and took up the endless lifting of heavy feet. The events of the past few days repeated themselves over and over again before his bleary eyes.

They had started off cheerfully enough. They had one week of cloudless skies, boiling heat, fair fishing, and the silent company of Red. He had kept things in shape and attended to all his duties but had frankly shown that he preferred his own thoughts to the company of Coleman and Hinton. If there was anything at all to the man it was buried too deep for Hinton to drag out. He had finally given up in disgust and decided that Jack had been right. Red was a self-centered nobody.

Only once during the cruise did Red show any evidence of life. Hinton had taken it upon himself to deliver a little lecture on the spinelessness of men who permitted themselves to sink to the dregs. He had managed to make the implication rather crudely obvious. Red heard him through patiently with the same mocking gleam in his eyes which had first attracted Hinton's attention.

He made no comment until Hinton had finished, then he had yawned tiredly, and drawled disrespectfully, "You poor damn young fool. You try four years

in the trenches fighting for all that is holy, sacred and beautiful. Then come back and tell me some more about an individual degrading himself."

With that he had anchored the boat, served dinner, and seen that everything was snug for the night. Soon he was snoring peacefully.

Then came the squall. And morning found the three on a narrow strip of barren sand. Fifty Mile Spit, Red had said it was, and it paralleled the coast, about thirty miles offshore. There was not a bush, not a shrub, not even a clump of salt grass. On into the distance stretched the apparently endless ribbon of bleak sand. Of the boat there remained a few jagged planks. They had nothing in the way of supplies.

Hinton and Coleman had only the few tattered clothes they wore. Red had a revolver and one canteen of water; it was a miracle that he had saved that much in the raging terror of the previous night.

Red had taken charge. He was familiar with the spit and told them that their one chance lay in making the northern end, very nearly fifty miles away. They had only a scant quart of water to take them through those waterless miles of a blazing inferno to a problematical chance for safety.

Hinton and Coleman could see only an exciting adventure to talk about afterward. Red looked grim.

They had made about ten miles with a gradually increasing thirst but with self-control enough to limit themselves to meager sips. From noon to four, when the sun was at its hottest, they had tried to rest. There was no shade. Lying in the shallow water refreshed them slightly but added the intolerable sting of fresh sunburn to their misery.

Worst of all was the impossibility of getting away from the intolerable glare. Even with the eyes tightly closed and shielded by their arms, the glare beat in like the blows of a red-hot hammer.

They started off again. Red permitted one small sip of water. He wouldn't trust them with the canteen but held it to their lips and roughly jerked it away again before they had had time to more than moisten their lips.

Hinton swore, but up to that point he had felt that his first judgment had been correct. In the face of a horrible death Red had taken charge. He was abusive and he was rough, but he was following the one course which might lead to safety. Hinton resented the brutality and cursed Red, but in his heart he felt that in this slave driving and in the miserly hoarding of the water lay their one chance.

They had walked on through the night, rested for a few hours, and now another day was half gone. The lack of water had become unbearable. Coleman was practically all in. But still they pushed on.

Then Coleman had told him about the water and the way Red was hogging it. God! To get his hands on Red's throat and squeeze, and squeeze, and squeeze.

Coleman was badly off. He was staggering along like a drunken man. Hinton drew up with him and caught him by the arm. A glance behind showed him Red steadily plowing along with bowed head.

Red noticed the slowing down. Previously he had been half cajoling and half abusive. Now, at the sudden stream of searing profanity and vile insult, Coleman dropped to the sand, sobbing weakly. Hinton swung around with clenched fists. Again the pistol and again the realization of his helplessness. He started to spring anyway, but gave it up. The only wise course was to bide his time. The opportunity to reverse things would come. He would live in spite of hell and high water, live just to get his hands on Red.

"Calm down, brother, and we'll catch a little rest," said Red.

Coleman lay down silently. Hinton

crouched sullenly. Red snored. Only an hour this time, and then another gruff order from Red. Neither Coleman nor Hinton moved.

Steadily, with never a change in inflection, there arose a stream of profanity which flowed on until the very depths of obscenity had been plumbed. It seemed more than Hinton could stand. But there was no use trying to do anything now.

Grimly he staggered to his feet, helped Coleman up, and started slowly forward. He would pull through. He would make it in spite of heat and the devil. He must live for just the one thing—to regain his strength and then hammer Red to a cringing mass of bloody pulp.

The sun beat down with redoubled fury as the procession wavered onward.

Time for another brief rest. Coleman lapsed into unconsciousness immediately. Hinton lay wide awake, shielding his bloodshot eyes with his arm. His seething rage made sleep out of the question.

A few feet away Red lay, a contorted blot on the snowy sand, snoring heavily. With murder in his eyes Hinton glared at him. This might be his chance. He slowly twisted over. He looked around for a weapon, a stone, a stick, anything with which he might pound Red into insensibility. There was not a thing in sight. He groaned hopelessly, then tautened. It might be worth a trial; Red seemed dead to the world.

Only the soft swish of shifting sand grains marked his creeping progress. After an infinity he was within arm's reach and Red hadn't stirred. Then he moved restlessly. Hinton dropped flat.

Red grunted and rolled over on his side. Hinton gasped his joy—the pistol and canteen were clear.

Inch by inch, scarcely daring to breathe, Hinton's arm snaked out. A quick snatch and he had the canteen. Another groan from Red and another restless twitch. Hinton nearly fainted

with the suspense. He couldn't stand to be so near victory and then lose out at the last minute. A few moments of agonizing suspense and again he heard the rasping snore.

Once more Hinton's arm shot out. He had made it. He had the pistol. With a glance of triumph at Red he scuttled backward, squatted on his haunches and took a long pull of the tepid water, the most delicious thing he had ever tasted.

He shook Coleman. When the dazed eyes finally opened he poured a few drops of the stagnant liquid between the blackened lips. Coleman shivered violently, sat up and reached for the canteen. Discretion and judgment were thrown to the winds. The two emptied the canteen to the last muddy drop.

They sat facing each other, grinning widely. The tables were turned. They had the upper hand now and Red would get a sweet dose of the medicine he had been handing to them. That one satisfying drink had made new men of them. They were ready for anything now.

Hinton tossed the empty canteen aside carelessly and looked across at Red. There he sat hunched over, his arms wrapped around his knees. His face was twisted in the familiar mocking grin.

"You poor damn fools," he drawled. "You've done it now. Well, I don't know if it makes much difference. We can make the spit head in four hours steady going. If we're lucky, and find a boat there, we'll stand a pretty good chance. If we don't find a boat—and the chances are that we won't—good night."

Somehow Red's indifferent acceptance of the change rather detracted from the glory of putting one over on him. Once more they resumed the march. Red led the way this time with the same lazy shuffle. Coleman was able to go it alone now. Hinton brought up the rear with the heavy revolver stuck rakishly in the waistband of his trousers and the empty

canteen slung across his shoulder. He was stepping along like a bandmaster. Red could be the guide if he wished, but he, Hinton, was in charge of the expedition.

Within an hour thirst struck again. Coleman began to stumble. Hinton tried to help him. Red dropped to the rear and Hinton didn't protest.

Hinton threw the empty canteen away. The pistol followed. What was the difference? Let Red drive them if he wished. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered except the blazing sky, the parched throat, and the mile upon mile of hot sand that must be covered.

Red picked up the canteen and the revolver.

It was dusk when Coleman fell again. He was unable to get up, even with the help of Hinton. Hinton dropped beside him. It was no use to try any longer; he was through.

Red stood looking at them. "So long," he said casually, and went on alone.

Hinton answered with a bitter curse, then drifted off into blackness by the side of the unconscious Coleman.

Half an hour later he awoke to the taste of warm, almost brackish water, trickling into his mouth. "What's happened?" he gasped to Red, who knelt above him with a dripping canteen.

"The luck of fools. There's a skiff on the end of the spit. Left by hunters last winter most probably, and they didn't leave much."

Busily he worked on Coleman, trickling water drop by drop through the clenched teeth. "That squall that messed us up filled her with water. Most of it leaked out again but it swelled the seams and there's about two quarts left."

Coleman groaned and sat up unsteadily. Red took hold of one arm, "Grab on," he ordered roughly. "We can make it in half an hour more and there's no time to lose."

Weaving erratically through the soft

sand with the heavy load, they floundered on. Here was the end of the spit at last. Lying at the water's edge was a tiny, clumsily built skiff with makeshift oars. A small pool of semiliquid mud showed darkly in the bottom.

They propped Coleman with his back against the skiff and stretched out on the sand to catch their breath.

Red spoke first. "I'll tell you guys just what we're up against. That tub will carry one fairly safely; it's risky for two, and damn foolishness for three to even think of trying it. That means somebody's got to stay. What's the answer?"

He spat indifferently and moved the revolver around into a more comfortable position.

"It's only thirty miles across to the mainland and an even chance for two to make it. The only hope for the guy that stays is that the others will make it and send back help; and that pretty quick. A pretty good chance for those that go, and not much for the guy that stays. Well?"

Hinton could guess the answer. All this talking was plain bluff. Either he or Coleman might go in the skiff; but one thing was certain—Red would be one of the passengers. With the gun in his possession he was the boss, and no matter how much he consulted the others his plan would be the one that would be adopted. Hinton could still grin. Once an ass, always an ass. He had had the gun, had been boss for a while, and had thrown away his chance. What was the use?

Still, there was no use in giving up yet. Red was slouched on one side, resting on his elbow. Hinton's eyes glittered. He saw a chance. The man must be a fool. The pistol was lying in the sand a foot or more from Red.

By fractions of inches Hinton drew nearer to Red. It was a chance in a million. He couldn't afford to miss it.

With a fierce effort he controlled his

nerves. He took several long breaths until he felt certain that he could talk with a steady voice.

"I think I see something," he remarked casually. "Look over there, to the north."

Red's head slowly turned until he was looking over his shoulder. One lightninglike swoop and joy surged within Hinton. He had the pistol. Once more he was the master, and he would stay the master this time.

As Red's head turned back again inquiringly Hinton laughed. "I guess that settles it. I'm the boss now and what I say goes."

"I'll say you are," grinned Red. "I never saw a man so quick to grasp his opportunities."

For the second time that day Hinton's triumph was tinged with bitterness because of the utter indifference of Red. It took all the savor out of it.

"Well?" drawled Red inquiringly, "I'm waiting for orders, general."

Hinton considered. Now that he had the upper hand what was he going to do with it? What did Red expect?

There was but one thing to do—bundle Coleman in the boat, take to the oars, and leave Red to his fate. He felt the thrill of pulling slowly away from the spit, while Red, abandoned and facing almost certain death, begged and prayed for mercy. Justice demanded that Red be left.

Then he groaningly realized that he couldn't do it. For once in his life he regretted that he had been born with a sense of honor. He couldn't leave a dog like this. But still, it was only justice. Once more he gloated at the prospect of seeing Red and the spit slowly disappearing as he and Coleman made for the mainland. The struggle was short.

"We'll toss," he said briefly. "Got a coin on you?"

Red grinned and dug in his pocket. "Fair enough. I've always got a coin."

Red had been watching Hinton's face and he must have realized the nearness of his doom. He seemed almost cheerful at this sudden chance.

"Here she is." He pulled a shiny half dollar from his pocket. "This is my lucky piece. Had her ten years, and she's never gone back on me yet. Wonder what she'll do this time?"

Hinton looked at him in disgust. True to his type, the dirty dog. Sullen, abusive, and dictatorial while he had the upper hand, and now that he was on the small end, trying to be friendly and ingratiating.

"Toss it and call," said Hinton. "If you call right, you go in the boat, and Coleman and I will toss to see which one of us goes with you. If you call wrong, you're out."

"I see," Red said, with a funny smile. "That gives me one chance to get in the boat, and you and Coleman two each."

"I hadn't thought of that," Hinton said. "But one chance is plenty for you. I'm the boss, now, and if I acted the way I really felt, you wouldn't have any chance at all. Toss!"

Red looked at him a minute. Then, "O. K.," he said—and, as the coin went high in the air, "Tails!"

It landed in the damp sand with a soft thud. Red started forward. Hinton motioned him back with the pistol.

"I'll look first," he said icily.

He stooped over, and barely restrained a shout of joy.

"Heads," he said quietly, then stepped back so Red could satisfy himself.

Red stooped over and stared at the coin with an astonished air of disbelief. "Well, I'll be damned! The lousy scum. After all these years, to go back on me, now. Well, that's the way it goes."

Red strolled to the water's edge and spat noisily, carelessly dropping into a squatting position. Hinton mechanically picked up the coin and pocketed it. He stood examining the boat. Red joined

him but moved a few paces away as Hinton waved the pistol.

"I've lost," said Red; "I'll be good, mister. You can put that thing up if you want to. All right then, if you don't trust me, keep on pointing her. See that star up there?" He pointed to the northwest. "Keep headed straight for that and you'll make it. That is, provided a squall doesn't come up, or your boat doesn't fall to pieces, or you don't play out, or a few more things. There's a favoring breeze and if you get there at all you ought to make it in eight hours. Give me the canteen a minute."

Hinton suspiciously tossed it to Red's feet. With the remnants of a ragged shirt, Red carefully mopped up the last drops of moisture from the bottom of the boat and squeezed the muddy liquid into the canteen.

"Here you are." He passed the canteen over. Then he lifted Coleman into the stern of the boat and shoved away until it was floating. He waved a careless salute.

"All right, admiral, your fleet's all set. Luck to you, and if your social engagements permit you might ask them to send for me—when, and if, you get there."

Hinton hesitated. He remembered what Red had said. The chances were slim enough for those in the boat, but for the man that remained they were worse—much worse. And this down-and-out, double-crossing bum, was facing the prospect with laughter. Red had tried a dirty trick, but all the same—

"Here," he said impulsively, passing over the canteen. "You take some of this."

"Where am I going to put it?" grinned Red. "Go ahead. Get started. Every minute counts."

"I won't—" began Hinton, then stopped abruptly. He remembered again how Red had hogged the water. He could never forgive that. The chances were that even now Red had a card up his sleeve and his situation was not

nearly so desperate as he had pretended. Even now he might be planning some method of escape and chuckling at the idea of two fools trying to get this wreck to the mainland.

"Good luck," said Hinton briefly.

He stepped into the boat and settled down to his job. One look forward to see that he was headed in the right direction and one look to the stern to see that Coleman was resting comfortably, then he fixed his eyes on a star over the spit and began to pull slowly. His last look at the spit showed Red seated on the sand with his arms wrapped around his knees. His last impression was of Red's teeth shining in a mocking smile.

Pull—grunt—pull—grunt. Millions and millions of times it seemed to Hinton that he swung back and forth during that night. For all eternity it seemed he would continue to pull. Coleman was as quiet as the dead. Occasionally Hinton stopped for a sip of water and risked capsizing to crawl back and pour a few drops into Coleman. Then, with a groan of exhaustion, he resumed the heart-breaking grind.

His arms were of lead. His back felt as if a white-hot iron were being thrust into it every time he leaned back. Point Henderson would be his first sight of land. More and more frequently he twisted his head to see if the light were yet visible. A thousand times he looked and a thousand times he saw nothing. Nothing but the blackness of the water and the star-spangled sky above it. More and more slowly he pulled. Every five minutes he craned his neck to see if the light were in sight. It wasn't.

By sheer force of an almost dead will he refrained from looking for what seemed ages. He wouldn't look. He wouldn't look. Monotonously the words pounded in his throbbing head.

He could hold out no longer. As if it were being turned by some exterior force, his head slowly twisted.

There, a mere point in the before-dawn blackness, twinkled a light. Hinton stared from dull eyes. The light remained steady. Stupidly he counted the flashes. Three longs, then two shorts. It was the lighthouse on Point Henderson.

He had made it. The oars dropped from his suddenly powerless hands. Slowly Hinton slid off the seat and, as the boat rocked wildly, crumpled to the bottom.

Hinton awoke to the rattling of windows, the pelting of rain, and the whistle of a northeast squall. Lying in a comfortable bed, he looked slowly around a familiar room. From a bedside pitcher he drank long. Again he looked around the room. It was his old room at Jack's.

All recollection of the past few days was gone. Blissfully he curled under the covers to escape the delightfully rainy chill of the room and immediately was sleeping soundly again.

He lazily opened his eyes when the door banged. "Snap out of it, young fellow," said Jack cheerfully, "twenty-four hours' sleep is enough for anybody."

"How did I get here?" Hinton asked.

"A fisherman beating in before this squall stopped long enough to bring you and Coleman in. You two played in luck. You only beat the squall by a hair. Another half hour and it would have caught that yacht of yours—and then, good night."

The memory of the past few days of horror passed over Hinton. Despite his horror of the man he couldn't help but feel curious.

"And Red?" he asked.

"Before you passed out you said he was still on the spit. They went after him this morning. Couldn't get a boat out earlier."

"What's his chances?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "Slim."

"Serve him damn well right for a low-down skunk," Hinton said.

Jack whistled. "Yeah? What happened?"

Fluently and profanely Hinton detailed the actions of Red since the wreck.

"Yeah?" Jack drawled irritatingly. "Don't sound like Red. Sure he did that?"

"Coleman said so."

"A half-delirious man says a whole lot of things."

From a small pile of odds and ends on the table Jack picked up a revolver.

"This the gun you pulled the conquering hero stuff with? It was in the skiff."

"Yes."

"Good Lord, man, that thing hasn't been working for years! I gave it to Red myself."

Hinton chuckled. "What a bluff I got away with!"

"Yeah?" grunted Jack. He picked up a coin from the table. "Found this in your pocket. Must be the one you tossed with, isn't it?"

"If it came out of my pocket, yes. I remember picking it up after the final toss."

"And you say Red called tails?"

"Yes."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive. Why all the excitement?"

Jack held up one side of the coin and showed a head. He turned it over to show another head. Both sides were precisely the same.

Hinton gasped. "Why, the poor fool! What a dumb play! To think that luck should put that coin in Red's pocket at just that time! And to think that he should lose out just because he didn't know——"

"Yeah?" drawled Jack wearily. "Red's been getting free drinks for years with the help of that half dollar."

Watch our future issues for another story by H. G. Parker.

Missing—One Office Force

By EDGAR FRANKLIN



One after Another They Went to See What the Trouble Was—
and Nobody Came Back!

WELL, when this Malpero knew for sure he was dying, Mr. Hitchen," the grubby man mumbled on and fingered the brim of his grubby felt hat, "he sent for me personal and told me all about his great-grandfather. You see, all the time Malpero was sick, my wife took care of him, because the way she figured it, no matter what he was—a foreigner, I mean, and peculiar and all like that—he was a human being, too, and getting ready to shove off, and he'd always paid his room rent regular the whole five years he lived in our house. So, how I got it doped out, he was grateful and wanted to do something for us. I'm telling you this just the way it happened, Mr. Hitchen. I wouldn't want

you to think I was lit or batty or anything."

"Oh, I don't!" Mr. Hitchen smiled quickly. "Go on."

"Well, when Malpero started the line about his great-grandfather being a pirate, I thought the fever was getting him again, and he seen just what I thought and that's when he pulled the old map on me. Proof, like, you know. Say, you could have knocked me down with a feather, as the feller says, Mr. Hitchen. I'd read about them maps in books, but I certainly never expected to see one, much less own one!"

The grubby man paused to snicker. Mr. Hitchen leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"Do I understand you to say that

the man's great-grandfather actually was a member of the crew of Jean Lafitte's?" he asked.

"It was some such name," the grubby man agreed. "Some pirate that was working his racket back in them days when they had pirates, Mr. Hitchen—back when Queen Elizabeth and George Washington was alive. Well, it seems his great-grandfather, just a young lad himself at the time of course, had some run-in with the big shot, and the way it ended up, he told the big feller where to get off and then went and got him a ship of his own and started in the pirate business for himself, understand. He done quite well, too, from what Malpero said, because——"

Over in the corner of this large outer office of Briggs & Hitchen, realtors de luxe, where Mr. Hitchen maintained his acre of desk and his supervision of the force in general, Elihu Peters sat on his high bookkeeper's stool, scratched his bald spot with the butt of his pen and regarded the pair misanthropically.

The grubby man was still mumbling along and Elihu caught only a few words here and there, but in even those few he felt small interest. That matter of his own salary raise had not yet received proper attention—and Briggs was alone in the private office now. Elihu Peters slipped down from his stool and made his way to the private office.

"Excuse me, Mr. Briggs! About that raise I was going to get," he said quite loudly. "Remember, Mr. Briggs? We were talking about it before. I'm supposed to be head accountant here, and am, and also assistant bookkeeper and entry clerk and bill clerk and notary public and occasionally——"

He paused and smiled weakly, for George Briggs was glancing up slowly from the document he had been reading. He was, in fact, looking Elihu up and down—and this was the sort of thing he did exceptionally well, for George was a big-chested man, superbly tailored,

with penetrating eyes and a little, gray-ing mustache, waxed at the ends.

And he looked up and down—just what? A lean, smallish creature of fifty-four, not overclean as to linen and slightly ragged as to hair, which insisted upon working in its shirt sleeves and scratching its bald spot with the butt of its pen; a museum piece among surviving Victorian-clerk type—colorless, insignificant, born to be trodden upon.

Well, so be it! With business as it was just now, nobody could have picked a better place to get himself trodden upon, for such cause. Mr. Briggs leaned back and produced his hardest smile, beside which diamond or carborundum must have seemed mere mush.

"Good Lord, Peters!" he said. "Are you after that raise again?"

"Still," Elihu corrected and smiled at his own waggishness. "As I was saying that other time, Mr. Briggs, I got a cousin with Hanson & Hanson, doing the same work I do, or less, and getting——"

"I'm not interested in your relatives or what other people are paying them," George Briggs clipped off effectively. "As I said before, show that you're worth more and possibly we shall be able to pay more. In any case, you'll have to take it up with Mr. Hitchen. I'm rushed just now."

"Well, Mr. Hitchen is busy with some——"

"Eh? What? What's that?" The senior member glanced up impatiently from his document. "Wait till some time when he's not busy."

"Well—all right, Mr. Briggs. But about Mr. Hitchen," Elihu began uncertainly. "You see, my wife's got——"

"You're wife's got what?" George Briggs exploded. He knew the signs; he knew all about thousand-dollar operations that bookkeepers' wives have to have. Listening to that sort of thing had cost him good money in days more opulent than these. "Why, God bless

my soul! I—— Now see here, Peters! If you want to stay around here, you'll have to stop doddering and attend to business. That's exactly what you're doing—doddering! I'm—ah—not interested at all in your family affairs, Peters."

He caused his eye to grow terrifyingly harsh; he scowled; he even considered banging the desk with his clenched fist, but this last idea he abandoned, for Elihu was crumpling, quite according to schedule. Oh, to be sure, the one per cent or so of manhood in him flickered up in the shrug, the futile defiant smile, the muffled mouthing of: "Just as you say, Mr. Briggs. Only——" But with these manifestations Elihu was fading doorward; and now he had dematerialized and George picked up his document and grinned and shook his head. He hated to pull that heavy stuff on an insect like Peters—but when the whole world is banded together to kill off the real-estate business and everybody in it, what can a man do?

Outside the private office, Elihu paused frowningly to consider. Once more, it appeared, the raise proposition had been hit below the water line; but it wasn't sunk, just yet. He gazed at Hitchen.

The grubby man was still discoursing, still fingering his elderly hat. He worked round and round the brim, bending back half an inch or so as he went. Presently he would have achieved an entirely new effect in men's headwear. And he still interested Hitchen, whose attractive countenance was all but poked into the other's less animated visage; but that buttered no parsnips for the Elihu Peters table.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hitchen," Elihu said firmly. "Can I speak to you a minute?"

"I—— What? Yes, I suppose so," the junior partner answered testily and rose and drew him aside. "What is it, Peters? Did that Disbrow check come

back? I hope not, because our balance—— Is that it?"

"Not that I know of," Elihu answered. "No, it's about that raise that was promised me some time ago. You see——"

"Say, did you call me away from this conference to ask about your infernal raise?" Mr. Hitchen demanded hotly.

"That and——"

"We'll take it up some other time, Peters. I can't be bothered now."

"But——"

"I said, I can't be bothered now!" the junior member spat.

"All right. But—say, Mr. Hitchen, my wife——"

"Peters, are you in your second childhood or are you deaf or what the devil is the matter with you?" Mr. Hitchen asked; he was positively vicious this time. "I can't be bothered now about your raise or your family affairs. Can you grasp that?"

With the cold, ruthless eye of prosperous youth he crushed the rather worn, humble thing that was Elihu Peters. The curious part came in Elihu's immediate reaction. He smiled, faintly but jauntily, and turned away, saying:

"O. K., then! Let it ride at that!"

This was a pretty insolent remark to hurl at a junior partner and Elihu knew it, but Hitchen gave no heed. He was back at his desk, smiling sweetly at his grubby, mumbling visitor.

"Pardon the interruption," he said. "Go on, please, Mr.—what was the name?"

"Thomson—B. B. Thomson. Oh, say, listen, Mr. Hitchen. You *are* the same Mr. Hitchen that had them two pieces in the Sunday paper about buried treasure, ain't you?"

"I—yes, I wrote them," the junior member conceded modestly. "That sort of thing has always been a hobby with me."

"Sure. That's how I doped it after reading them and that's why I came straight to you when this broke—that

and you being in the real-estate business, of course." He paused to grin vaguely. "Well, that's how it is, anyway, sir. It's all buried, right *now*, right there in the middle of Long Island, not five miles from the railroad, not fifty miles from New York City—more'n two million dollars' worth of them old-fashioned coins and all the solid gold stuff I was telling you they stole from the churches in Mexico."

Much of Hitchen's earlier tension had dwindled away. He smiled a wise and skeptical smile.

"Great yarn, Thomson," he chuckled, "but there's one awful hole you're apparently missing. Why didn't Malpero go and dig up this fortune himself?"

"Oh, that ain't a hole, Mr. Hitchen," the grubby one explained earnestly. "You see, he got this old map and all the dope just the week he was took sick. This niece I was speaking about, Mercedes, found it in some old papers or something and brought it to him in New York. She's still here. I guess from what he said it knocked the both of them cold, Mr. Hitchen. They'd always been hearing about their crooked great-grandpa and it just handed 'em a laugh—and here the kid goes and turns up this genuine map!"

"A child?"

"Not to need feeding with a spoon. Around twenty, I'd say, and some baby, what I mean!" Thomson responded and his grin grew wide. "Oh, boy! Malpero give me her picture when he give me her address, so's I wouldn't make no mistake about her later. One o' these red-hot Cuban mammas, Mr. Hitchen, know what I mean? Eyes like a coupla saucers! Cutest little nose I ever did see, sort of sticks up in the air like it was beckoning you to come over closer. She's the only one alive that has any right in the stuff and I had to promise Malpero to give her a cut—around a third. Well, here! Give her the up and down yourself, Mr.

Hitchen. You wouldn't cry none, having to slip that gal a few grand, would you?"

He drew a dog-eared photograph from his inner pocket and pushed it toward Mr. Hitchen; and since his voice had risen slightly during this last speech, Miss Ferguson glanced up very sharply.

Miss Ferguson was the beautiful, the even queenly, young woman two desks along, and although not a soul in the office, George Briggs excepted, suspected such a thing, she and Mr. Hitchen were contemplating matrimony as a probability of the near future. So when unwholesome-looking people talked leerily about red-hot Cuban mammas with eyes like saucers and suggested paying money to them, Miss Ferguson knew sudden and acute interest. When she observed the high degree of appreciation with which Mr. Hitchen was studying the bit of portraiture, this interest warmed almost to the point of throwing off sparks.

Catching her glance, Mr. Hitchen started and at once his sparkling eyes became a shade less lustrous than the eyes of a long-dead weakfish. He flushed and tossed back the picture, his gesture indicating the discovery of, at the very least, smallpox germs upon its surface. Barely did he stay the impulse to snatch out his handkerchief and cleanse his fingers, in further demonstration of his continuing fidelity and incorruptible purity of thought and action. Ere now he had discovered that Miss Ferguson owned the kind of toes upon which other females do not tread with impunity.

"Interesting, of course, Thomson," he commented indifferently. "Let's see the map."

"That's something I don't carry with me," the other smiled.

"Umum? I see," the junior partner murmured, even less attentively, for Miss Ferguson's gaze persisted. "Well? What is it you want to sell me?"

"Huh? Why, I don't want to sell you nothing, Mr. Hitchen," the grubby man said in astonishment. "I want you to buy something for me, you being a real-estate broker and able to make a better deal than I ever could. I have to find out through some third party how cheap I can buy the land where this is buried. I don't want to start nothing till I got the legal right, Mr. Hitchen."

Mr. Hitchen relaxed and grinned; the eyes had dropped at last.

"Why, no, naturally not, Thomson. Where's it located?"

"You know where Pettiville is? Sure! Well, do you know where the old abandoned Batring farm is? It's a small farm."

"Never even heard of it!"

"If you'll leave me have that pad and pencil, I can show you," Thomson said. "Look! Here's Pettiville station and you go north on the State road about four miles and here's what used to be a blacksmith's shop, with an iron wagon tire hanging outside. Just beyond here, you turn right up the rottenest dirt road in the world, like this, and we'll say the farm starts around here—see? There's no houses on this road—nothing; there don't a car a month go over it. Here's the house, about quarter of a mile in. Get me?"

"I get you!" Hitchen breathed. As a matter of fact, since childhood's hour, buried treasure had been one of his few obsessions; interest was boiling up again. And there were some other considerations, too, so he said suavely: "And the stuff is buried under the house, is it?"

"House? Hell, no! It's in a pasture lot, over *here*!" the grubby man whispered, jabbing down his pencil and making a black dot; and then he paused, dismayed at what had slipped out, grinning sheepishly at Mr. Hitchen. "Well, that was a wise crack, huh?" he mumbled. "Well, you're on the level and you're a rich man anyhow, Mr. Hitchen;

only for the love o' Mike, keep it dark till I get this closed!"

"Oh, *absolutely*!" the junior partner purred. "Right there, is it?" His nice forefinger nail tapped the dot. "I hope you haven't gone and marked the spot, or anything like that?"

"For what? It's all on the map. It's just halfway between a big maple tree and a great big rock with—— Say, listen, Mr. Hitchen!" Thomson protested, with a muddled, uneasy smile. "You know all you gotta know to get me a price on this property."

"You bet! Point of fact, I don't want the responsibility of knowing any more," the junior member said briskly and sat back. "Only later on, if you really should happen to find anything, you must give me the whole inside story and some pictures. I'm hoping to write a series of articles pretty soon on authentic cases. However," and he smiled flittingly and glanced at his wrist watch, "I'm in the real-estate business and not the treasure business, so let's see what we're going to do here. That's wretched country, as I recall it, and acreage ought to be cheap. You'll want to put down about a thousand cash, I take it, and the rest on mortgage? All right—that's fine! Let's see now. I can't possibly look it over before day after to-morrow. Suppose you drop in or call me up—well, about Friday afternoon."

Twenty-five minutes later, George Briggs had practically finished his long, hearty laugh.

"Nut!" was his verdict, delivered in a merry wheeze. "But at that you've got the makings of an elegant pirate. Bill. What do business ethics, what does common honesty, mean to you?"

"Not a thing when a proposition of this kind's in the hands of a half-witted tramp like that!" Mr. Hitchen snapped, and an odd sight he was, with the fanatic light in his eye and the red spots on his cheeks. "George, this is what I've been waiting to get my hands on, ever

since I was a little kid! This firm needs a million dollars or so! I need a million dollars!"

"Most of us do, Bill," the senior member rumbled happily. "When are you going down to dig up all these doubloons and pieces of eight and—haw! haw! haw!—eighteen-carat chalices?"

"Did you ever see me asleep when there was a chance to pick up some money? *To-night!*"

"Not seriously, Bill? Not alone?"

"Decidedly alone!" Then the Hitchen smile became more normal. "Say, don't look at me that way, George; I'm not going to turn violent. I know that ninety-nine out of a hundred of these buried-treasure things are the bunk, but there's something horribly genuine about this one. The poor jackass is so absolutely dumb, you know. He could just as well have asked us to get a price on the place, without mentioning the treasure part; and he didn't try to sell me an interest or anything of that sort, and very plainly the fellow who gave him the map and the tip did so in good faith. Yes, sir! The damned thing looks *real!* George, you won't let a word of this leak out?"

"I'll say I won't!" George sighed. "A firm with one partner gone queer and crooked is at a disadvantage. And no matter how much you may be tempted before you sober up, don't *you* go chattering either, my boy!"

"Neither of us, George," Mr. Hitchen said quite solemnly, and they shook hands.

"Of course, there's nothing in it," the senior partner mused and caressed his chin. "I know that. You know that, if only you'd let the adult part of your brain knock some sense into the little-boy part. And spading up a few cubic yards of Long Island'll probably do you more good than harm. Only, by Judas, Bill! If anybody gets onto your antics, I wash my hands of you, and that's no kidding!"

When the private office door clicked again, once more revealing Mr. Hitchen to a presumably admiring corps of aids, Elihu Peters sighed, came down from his perch and approached with visible determination.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hitchen, but I——"

Mr. Hitchen's thoughts, all clinking, dusty gold, could brook no injection just then of drab trivialities. Literally, he whirled upon his head accountant.

"The raise, Peters?" he barked. "*No!*"

"Well—my wife——"

"Without regard to home conditions, No!"

"Mr. Hitchen, I am merely——"

"Peters, dry up! D'ye hear? Dry up! And stay dried up!" the junior partner blazed, and turned on his heel.

Peters was at best, Heaven knew, mild and insignificant, yet as he considered the retreating back of Mr. Hitchen's perfectly fitting coat it did seem that Elihu Peters was about to become angry.

"Dry up, huh?" he puffed. "All right! *All right!*"

Miss Ferguson, picking up some index cards as an excuse, came over even before Mr. Hitchen was comfortably settled at his desk.

"Who was the girl, Billy?" she asked softly.

"Girl, Madge?"

"In the picture the man was showing you?"

"Oh—that—er—girl?" Mr. Hitchen laughed unconcernedly. "That was just some relative of his, I believe."

"You seemed greatly interested in her picture? He seemed to think that you should be interested."

There was a brief pause, during which Miss Ferguson studied the top of his head and learned nothing of value. Then Mr. Hitchen looked up, wearily, impatiently, almost disgustedly. This had worked pretty well on at least two other occasions.

"Madge," he pleaded quietly, "please don't be—er—ordinary!"

"Oh, I know. I'm silly, of course," said Miss Ferguson, and her smile was disarming. "Are we going anywhere to-night, by the way?"

"Hate to tell you, Madge, but we're not," Hitchen whispered with a grin which, despite his effort to keep it bored and casual, shone with suppressed excitement and anticipation. "I'll have to be out until late."

"On business, naturally?"

"*Business*, kid!" the junior partner cried ecstatically. "Well, I hope to tell you—well, yes, business, to be sure."

Miss Ferguson stooped to bunch the cards.

"I suppose you couldn't take your little sweetheart along?"

"Not on this trip, darling," Mr. Hitchen smiled composedly.

Noon of the following day was approaching when Miss Ferguson at last saw the private office void of callers and with none waiting. She stepped in and came down upon Mr. Briggs with peculiarly relentless tread, never taking her eyes from him as she advanced.

"George," she said, "where's Billy this morning?"

"Well, do you know, that's something I've been wondering myself," Mr. Briggs confessed, with a little smile.

"You don't know?"

"I do not, Madge."

"Where was he last night?"

"Eh?" said the senior partner and avoided her eye. "He had to look over some country property, Madge. He couldn't go at any other time."

Miss Ferguson's eyes flashed. Her next remark showed just what a privileged character she was about that establishment.

"That's a lie, George Briggs!" she said. "His business, as you call it, concerned some Cuban girl named Mercedes. That much I overheard!"

Ever a mountain of tact and self-possession, George started much as if the lady had jabbed a pin into him.

"Who the dickens told you about her?" he asked brilliantly.

"I thought so! I knew——"

"If you're thinking that he had a date with her, you knew nothing of the kind," the senior member interrupted hastily. "She is—er—merely part owner of the property he went to inspect."

"Fancy that!" Miss Ferguson smiled dangerously. "And the property is so extensive that they had to spend all night inspecting it and most of to-day."

"Bill went alone."

"And that's another lie!" the girl said, without hesitation; and she leaned over him, her color high, her bosom heaving perceptibly, her eyes glinting in the most ominous way. "Listen to me, George!" she hissed. "I want to know where Billy is and I want to know all about that filthy hussy, and I want to know *now*!"

Fifteen years before, George Briggs had married the cutest little thing, with pointed chin and big violet eyes, and it may truthfully be said that he had learned about women from her. Hence if privately he cherished a fixed conviction that, in obedience to natural law, any man is bound to sit up and beg, to hold sugar on his nose and to jump through hoops when looked at in a certain way by any woman, perhaps he was not so much to blame. At all events, before this glow of feminine fury, he wilted like some delicate morning flower shriveling up before the desert's burning sun.

"Well, wait! Wait, Madge!" he sputtered. "On my word of honor, I don't know a thing about the woman, except that Billy never saw her and isn't with her. I can't think why he's not in yet, but—well, see here, Madge. Maybe I can find out something about him. I'll let you know."

Inadvertently, he glanced at the tele-

phone. Miss Ferguson's delightful nostrils dilated and she sat down.

"You find out now, George," she directed. "I'll wait."

Mr. Briggs nodded obediently. Out there in the woods of East Pettiville lived his sufficiently esteemed cousin, Arthur, a tranquil old maid who came to town twice a week, clipped some coupons, signed a few checks and then returned to his Sealyhams and the ancient couple who kept house for him in his charming villa. Arthur would be home. Arthur, in fact, answered the call himself; and as she listened the fire-red of Miss Ferguson's aura faded somewhat, for she heard George Briggs ask Arthur if he would run over to the old Batring farm, locate a pasture lot with a big rock and a big maple and then cast about for signs of a junior partner. She heard Arthur laugh and say that he would be back within twenty minutes and telephone a report. Then word came in that a personal client of Miss Ferguson's was waiting and she was forced to leave. Thrice twenty minutes had passed before she returned to hear:

"Arthur's not back yet, Madge. I just phoned. Kind of funny!"

Nor was he back at half past two, when George returned from a hurried luncheon, but Miss Ferguson was right on hand for news of her beloved.

"Well, I don't understand it at all," the senior partner conceded, and gnawed his cigar. "Art said the spot wasn't two miles from his place, and he's a fast, careful driver."

"Billy's been hurt, of course," Miss Ferguson concluded instantly. "He's had a bad wreck and your cousin's still trying to get help to him!"

"That's a happy thought, Madge," George Briggs grunted. "Bill doesn't have wrecks."

"Every one does—and *you* sit there eating a cigar while he's suffering!" Miss Ferguson answered. "George

Briggs, you call up the police down there at once and see what actually has happened!"

"Call up nothing!" George said quickly. "And don't you try that little trick, either. This was an idiot mission he started on, at the very best of it—and an abominably sneaky, felonious one at the worst of it."

"Felonious!" Miss Ferguson gasped.

George Briggs threw up his hands.

"I swore never to breathe it, but you'll probably have to know sooner or later—only keep it under your hat, Madge. Bill isn't exactly looking over real estate. He got a hot tip yesterday and he's hunting buried pirate treasure down there. You know how Bill is when any one starts talking buried——"

He himself stopped talking, for Miss Ferguson, having recoiled with one faint cry, was looking down at him. In just this way one would look down on a fat caterpillar suddenly discovered to possess the rattlesnake's virus.

"Yes, I know how he is," she said with difficulty. "He's virtually insane; and *you*, knowing that, let him go!"

"Well, my God, Madge!" Mr. Briggs cried with undue vigor. "Bill's free, white, and twenty-one! If he wants to spend his nights spading up a few farms, can I stop him?"

The lady was not even listening. Sweet lips compressed, she gazed across the room and out of the window. The tip of her right foot tapped the linoleum, the nails of her right hand drummed upon the desk. Abruptly, her expressive eyes came back to George.

"*Men!*" she said. "Well, Billy's cut himself on his shovel or fallen into the hole he was digging or some other fool thing. Where is this devilish farm, George?"

"Oh, down Petti——"

"The place itself! What part of Pettiville? How does one get there?" Miss Ferguson spat at her chief.

The eyes were drilling again With

several grumbling, clucking sounds, George produced from the top left drawer of his desk the very plan which B. B. Thomson had drawn yesterday. Oh, yes, indeed, this crude bit of cartography had been rescued and all nicely smoothed out before ever B. B. Thomson had had a chance to enter the elevator.

"Here's the lay of the land, if that's what you mean," George submitted. "The station—the road north—here's where you turn by the old blacksmith's shop and here's the farm itself and— What's the rush, Madge?"

"I'm going to find Billy, of course, if we daren't call the police," Miss Ferguson answered, quite fiercely. "I drove downtown this morning; my car's just around the corner. I can be there before dark. I'll phone you, probably at your house."

"Don't do that," the senior member said hastily, because explaining soprano telephone calls was all but impossible in his cozy little suburban home. "Call me up here in the morning, if you're not down on time. You will be, of course, because—"

He found himself alone. A moment, he was tempted to hurry after the girl and point out the absurdity of her course; in the end he merely slumped down and relighted his cigar. Too well he knew the futility of argument with a determined woman; and, anyway, if she wanted to go, let her go. It was barely possible that something really was amiss with Bill Hitchen; if so, she'd discover it and attend to it.

But as afternoons run he found this one growing more and more uncomfortable.

He couldn't concentrate as usual. Every so often, he was aware of a queer, creepy feeling. For a time, he smoked and considered calling up Arthur again, despite the housekeeper's promise that he should be advised instantly of the gentleman's return. Another space he

devoted to humming and to bootless speculation upon what, no fooling, could be detaining Bill. It certainly did seem that, even if the junior partner had tons upon tons of loot to exhume, he'd have taken time out before this to call up and say something about it.

Eventually, George dragged his wandering mind back to the point where the dictating of a few very necessary letters seemed advisable and he rang for Miss Dorothy Wells, the stenographic stand-by of the office, and waited; and having waited what seemed an unreasonable length of time, he finally stepped to the door and gazed out with chilly and dignified inquiry.

The larger office seemed deserted. Of course, he knew that Bill and Miss Ferguson were away and that Parker, who looked after the residential rentals, was uptown; but Miss Wells was similarly invisible and the spacious place was occupied only by the boy at the switchboard, by Elihu Peters at his high desk and by curly haired young Donald Kane, who attended to leases on business property. It was Kane who captured and held his attention, for while it was the habit of this attractive juvenile to beam good will upon the whole world, the glance with which he now favored George Briggs was no less than sinister.

"Where's Miss Wells?" the senior partner asked mildly.

"Gone for a ride with Miss Ferguson," the young man answered bitterly.

"I didn't know—" George mused aloud.

"I wish to Heaven I didn't, either!" he could have sworn Kane muttered as he wrote on and on.

Perhaps a minute, George waited for possible elaboration of this peculiar theme; it failed to come and he turned back to his own office, to pass into a long, confused period of vague plowing through the pile of letters which would remain unanswered until Miss Wells had finished riding with Miss Ferguson.

But at last he abandoned the effort at sending his brain in two directions at once and, facing the Pettiville conundrum squarely, took up his telephone with fingers none too steady. Shortly, he laid it aside again and swallowed at the unaccountable dryness in his throat. Well—the answer was not yet, at any rate. Here it was quarter to five and Arthur, who ran by clockwork and never missed an appointment by thirty seconds, still had not finished his twenty-minute drive.

"Mr. Briggs!" the clarion tone of Donald Kane said.

"My Lord! Make some noise when you come in here, will you?" the senior member cried. "You startled me!"

"Maybe it was your conscience, letting two young girls go off like that!" the youthful eccentric suggested, and George now noted that he was brick-red and breathless. "Mr. Briggs, I can't sit out there and think about it any longer. I want that map!"

"What map?"

"That damned-fool buried-treasure thing!" the boy explained violently. "Oh, Dot told me all about it! I promised never to let on, but a man can stand just so much and then——"

"You're speaking of Miss Wells? Miss Ferguson told her?"

"Well, in confidence, of course," Kane said impatiently. "Oh, here's how it happened, if you have to know. Madge took Dot out in the hall and they were whispering and—well, Dot and I are engaged, Mr. Briggs, and I thought it was some kind of joke and I went out after them. Well, before I got there Dot had promised to go with her and she was all excited and nothing I could say would stop her and—Mr. Briggs, I want to know how to find that place!"

"Why, Kane?"

"Because I'm going after them and see that Dot gets home safe, of course," the young man cried. "Harry Parker just came in and we're taking his car

and—oh, Mr. Briggs, how *could* you let Madge Ferguson take a little kid like Dot on a ride like that? Don't you know anything at all about that region? Well, I do! It's the most God-awful wilderness in the whole world! Crooks and hijackers hide out around there, and they have holdup after holdup and nobody ever arrested. There's even a pack of wild dogs that have tackled several men and——" He paused to shudder.

"I had no idea that there was such a dangerous area left this side of a few Western bad lands," George smiled faintly, as he opened the top left drawer again. "However, if you want to trail 'em, Kane, perhaps it's not such a bad idea. Only one thing! If you start now, you ought to be there around eight. As soon as you find them, call up my house, will you?"

"Yes."

"And if you see Mr. Hitchen, ask him to call me immediately, too!" the senior member added, as he spread out the Thomson chart.

When the tall, handsome clock with the cathedral chimes had jingled out the hour of one next morning, George Briggs laid aside the book he had been trying to read and gave ear to the faint rustle at the head of the stairs. That would be Ida, who never let him sit up after one o'clock; and Ida it was, to be sure, looking down, petite and charming in modernistic negligee, but just as firm as ever.

"Beddy-bye, George," she suggested. "He—if it is a he—isn't going to telephone you to-night."

Long since, she had ceased observing her husband's reactions. She had shaped the whole conventional collection and knew every detail of every one. Hence, having turned away, she quite missed the pale and curious smile that went with his extremely thin: "No, I—I guess he isn't!"

If Elihu Peters scribbled along unperturbedly as usual in the quiet emptiness of the establishment, at least the boy Harvey furnished a contrast which might have been considered decent. All vibrant with his half-formed sense of the dramatic, this well-grown child watched the clock. Almost invariably, Mr. Briggs arrived at seven minutes past nine. It was now six minutes past nine.

The elevator gate banged softly. A quick step crossed the outer hall. The knob turned. The big moment was at hand: Mr. Briggs had arrived! Pasty of complexion, hollow-eyed and agitated, he sent just one glance fluttering about the room before:

"Nobody here yet?"

"Only what you see, Mr. Briggs," the boy said.

"Harvey, has—any one telephoned?" George asked hoarsely.

"You tell 'em, Mr. Briggs!" Harvey shrilled, although he had meant to do the thing with great repression. "Miss Ferguson's sister called twice to see was she here and why didn't she come home last night, and Miss Wells' mother called three times already to know was she here and where was she last night, and Mr. Kane's mother called, too, to see was he here and would he call her as soon as he come in, and she was crying. And Mr. Parker's wife called to see was he here yesterday and where was he now, and she wasn't crying. And there was some old gentleman, he sounded like, Mr. Briggs, wanting to speak to you personal and wanting to know did Mr. Arthur Briggs go to your house last night, account he didn't come home. This is just since half past eight, Mr. Briggs; the phone was ringing when I come in."

He waited, then, brightly expectant, wondering if his employer meant to faint, because he certainly looked that way. George's eyes were closed and his breath came in little audible catches; he

even swayed. But at once the eyes opened again, staring about quite wildly. The police? That meant publicity at best and the answering of a thousand questions, with perhaps even more time gone in a trip to headquarters. His lawyers? He discarded that notion, too, for he could picture all the minutes that would have to be lost while old man Steele hemmed and hawed and cleared his throat.

"I can make the best time in a car," he said aloud. "Harvey, there's one of those drive-yourself places around the corner, isn't there?"

"Mr. Briggs!" Elihu Peters said loudly, as he descended.

"Huh? What?" George rasped, on his way to the door.

"Well, I beg your pardon, Mr. Briggs, but it so happens that my wife——" Elihu pursued, and his smile grew broad.

"Oh, to hell with you and your whole family!" the senior member shouted; and having gone the uttermost limit of callous discourtesy, he dashed out, yelling frantically at the elevator man behind the closing gate.

Slowly, Elihu returned to his perch. Slowly, pensively, he scratched at the bald spot with the butt of his pen, muttering the while.

"Y' gotta pipe down or hire a hall, Petey," the boy giggled, for even he dared be insufferable where Elihu was concerned. "They'll never let you shoot off your face around here. I wonder when the big boy's coming back?"

"He won't be back," Elihu said.

"How come?"

"None of the rest of 'em got back, did they?" Peters asked, and continued to stare at Harvey without ever seeing him at all. Presently he sighed: "Well, they certainly don't treat me so grand around here that I owe 'em anything." But five minutes later he added: "At that, I'd ought to do something."

"Says which?" the boy queried, without interest.

"Yep, I'd ought to do something," Elihu repeated, and slid down from his stool even again and removed his long paper cuffs, tucking them tidily into the drawer. He crossed to the closet and secured hat and coat.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" Harvey desired to know. "How long am I getting left to run this shop alone?"

"It might be quite some while," Elihu Peters muttered, as he shuffled out.

Even at that time, the passing of Mr. Briggs and his hired automobile was beginning to impinge upon the consciousness of traffic officers.

In New York one really never drives past a red light, of course; but it is also considered good form not to bump into one taxi after another or to roar through chattering coveys of pedestrians as they huddle, according to quaint local custom, in the very middle of the street; and a policeman bade George drive over to the curb while, with no regard at all for the precious interval wasted, he explained these points of usage in a clear, forceful manner. Another officer halted George on Queensboro Bridge, eagerly asking information about the fire in Long Island City to which he was so obviously hurrying, and many further minutes were lost during that conference. But at last, his heart a-seethe with burning hatred of all policemen, he reached the Island itself and there the going was better. He got up to fifty with no great difficulty and spent some time trying to reach sixty before he remembered that this, after all, was not his own four thousand dollars' worth of car.

George was without definite idea of what he meant to do, save that at the earliest possible moment he must reach the spot so incredibly capable of swallowing one relative, one partner and a perfectly good office force. He was not the type which lies quakingly abed, heart thudding, hands clammy, listening and listening for a repetition of that

queer, creaking sound below. Rather was George the sort that dashes headlong downstairs, that the burglar may caress the base of his brain with a blackjack and thus end the suspense at once—and so he drove on rapidly as might be, watching for Pettville station, finding it at last, turning north and whizzing along to the tumble-down blacksmith shop and finally heading right into the rougher going. And now, from afar, he sighted a tall old farmhouse with many broken windows and a pasture with a tremendous boulder, at no great distance from which stood a mighty maple tree, all alone.

And at once he sighted something else which caused his scalp to prickle oddly and some highly profane and really rather inane remarks to drop from his parted lips. No junior partner was visible, no human creature of any sort, in fact, but just ahead here stood a line of automobiles—Bill Hitchen's coupé up front, Arthur's stocky little foreign car just behind it, and behind Arthur's the small gray roadster Madge Ferguson's rich aunt had given her last Christmas, and immediately behind Miss Ferguson's car stood the snappy sports model Harry Parker affected while going about the business of Briggs & Hitchen!

Dribbling further unprintable comment, George lunged to the ground and ran forward. Breath paused as he forced himself to look into the Parker car, and then resumed at once, for the vehicle was pleasantly empty of mangled realtor. He stumbled on to the Ferguson car, to Arthur's car, to Hitchen's car. They were all empty.

Well— Well, then— Mr. Briggs' dumfounded eyes swept the ground. It showed thick, stubbly growth, with never a sign of a footprint. They passed to the landscape. There was nothing to be seen save rough, rolling country, plentifully sprinkled with low, gnarled trees and clogged with high and straggling bushes.

But over in the pasture, as he squinted, awaited him an object of eerie significance. It might almost be said that George gibbered as he clambered through the gap in the old stone fence and sped toward the center of the lumpy area. His eyes had not deceived him. Here was a brand-new shovel, stuck deep in the ground and standing upright, and beside it lay an equally new pickax. There was no indication that Mr. Hitchen had actually dug. Just once he had driven in his shovel and there it remained, a silent mystery in steel and hickory. *Why?*

The moment, as he stood gaping, was one of the high spots of George Briggs' whole existence. It was all, you see, so—well, so damned impossible! Bill had been here, they must all have been here; yet they were not here now and they had passed out of communication with the world. And busy little villages, not more than four or five miles away in any direction, were going about their humdrum affairs. Such things, as any one can tell you, do not happen, but this one had just gone to work and happened, regardless.

Staring about rather dizzily, the senior member removed his hat and dried his brow. That queer, creepy sensation he had known several times since Mr. Hitchen's departure came down upon him again with such force that his very skin crawled and big goose pimples stood out all over him.

Well, young Kane hadn't exaggerated a thing; this place was absolutely ghastly! A thousand people could be murdered here and it would never be discovered unless some one chanced to drive up that awful road. Well, he'd certainly have to get busy! And at once—and not, by any manner of means, alone. This was nothing for a plain business man to be tackling single-handed. George drew a deep, shaky breath; in this scraggly solitude, his very nature seemed to be changing. He had

never really liked policemen, he had never insisted upon buying six extra tickets for a police benefit nor had he ever set his alarm clock that he might be out bright and early and vote for the rise in police pay. Within the very hour, indeed, he had abhorred all policemen. Yet now he throbbed with a genuine affection for the uniformed force of which he never could have believed himself capable. Had a powerful, over-size police officer loomed up beside him just then, George Briggs almost certainly would have wept upon his shoulder.

In the thicker bushes near at hand, something stirred; and George, willy-nilly and without shame, squeaked aloud and peered in the direction until his very eyes were popping. Presently the wind howled gloomily over the abandoned Bating farm once more, howled through five empty cars now instead of four. Again there was no human being within sight.

We have dealt mainly with harassed people. No doubt the town was full of them. They were probably packing subways and department stores, office buildings and big movie houses and even expensive hotels and clubs. But there was one within whom perennially dwelt only sly and comfortable contentment and his name was Cyrus Finsey.

It is possible that you know of him. He is the attorney who takes cases and does things from which, with whatever unvoiced regret, many another legal light would shy charily away. He does these things for very wealthy people, so he, too, is wealthy. He is supremely gifted as a lawyer, so he remains satisfactorily out of jail. Cyrus is sixty-odd, fat and never well-groomed. When he laughs, one cannot help laughing with him; unless, of course, the joke happens to be on oneself, in which case one experiences a slight chill. He has a pudgy little nose and eyes that twinkle almost

constantly and this morning they were twinkling at a certain Bruce Gedron, a hardened and dessicated elderly gentleman with a neat white tie and a long church record, who really hated like sin to be seen entering this office.

"The object of the game," Cyrus was saying, "is to have this Hitchen somewhere else to-morrow, so that when you folks start your high-pressure buying of the Krouch Building from old Mrs. Krouch, she can't call in Mr. Hitchen, her one broker and the only mortal whose advice she ever took. With luck, you ought to get away with it in great shape, Mr. Gedron. The poor old soul needs the money and six hundred thousand's going to look like a billion to her, with no Hitchen around to put her wise. Inasmuch as you've got the building practically sold already for eight hundred thousand——"

"We've been over all that ground," Gedron muttered and glanced, as he always did on these occasions, at both closed doors. "Have you actually *done* anything?"

"You said you wanted something done, didn't you?" the attorney chuckled, and picked with his thumb nail at the dried egg on his vest. "You said you'd cheerfully give up five thousand to be sure Hitchen wasn't sitting in at the conference, didn't you? Hitchen won't be around."

"Why not?"

"I had him put somewhere," Cyrus explained serenely.

"You did what?" Gedron asked, in quick alarm. "You don't mean literally?"

"He probably thinks it's literal," the lawyer grinned and went at the egg with the brass edge of his ruler.

"Yes, but—why, God bless my soul! You sound as if the man had been kidnaped, Finsey! My idea was to have him receive a—a fictitious telegram, from Chicago perhaps, summoning him on mythical business."

"I know, Mr. Gedron, but that was a lousy idea," the counselor explained gently; and his chuckle grew to a rich rumble and suddenly his small eyes gleamed at the visitor. "Pull your chair over here; I don't want to shout," he said. "It isn't so often that I open up the case and let a customer see the wheels go around, but this one is too good to keep. I woke up three times last night, laughing at this one."

Now he spoke rapidly and at considerable length, grinning all the while, now and then bursting into obese laughter, giving small heed to the emotions he was so patently rousing in his visitor. Mr. Gedron's cheeks, at first purple, bleached to oyster white. His eyes, naturally rather smug and pious, grew wide with rage and then narrow with fright.

"And that's what the sucker fell for—the oldest racket of 'em all: pirate gold touched up with a little sex appeal!" Cyrus ended gayly and even slapped Mr. Gedron's bony knee. "The fathead thought he'd have to split with some beautiful Spanish dame and *maybe*——"

"But this—this—why, confound it, that's the work of a maniac, Finsey!" his client gasped. "That's criminal! That's actionable!"

"What's actionable about it?" Cyrus sighed, disappointedly and returned to his egg. "Hitchen goes to a farm to steal something. It turns out, so far as he'll ever know, that a bootlegging gang is running a still there. They see him. Naturally, they can't let him go and tell the world about their plant, so they throw a blanket over his head, snatch him into the farmhouse and keep him there. They've got orders not to hurt him."

"But——"

"And then what? You skin the eye-teeth out of the old lady, Mr. Gedron, and we're ready to spring Hitchen. The gang goes off in a truck and pretty soon he escapes. Perhaps he goes to the

police. What of it? They find a secondhand still and some bottles and the tub of mash I told you about. *Then* what happens?"

"What—does happen?" the other asked thickly.

"Why, dammit, nothing at all happens! Isn't that the perfect beauty of the whole thing?" Mr. Finsey said irritably. "Everything falls flat. He was somewhere else when you wanted him somewhere else; and to the day he dies, he'll never know what it was all about."

"I doubt it! I doubt that! The people who own this farm may easily—and then there's this man Thomson, too, who is——"

"Farm belongs to my sister's estate; some slick worker sold it to her dumb husband forty years ago," Finsey explained wearily. "And don't lose any sleep about Thomson splitting. I know enough about that baby to send him up for twenty years, any time."

"But nevertheless——" trembled from his client. "Oh, upon my word! If I'd ever even suspected that you were contemplating such——"

When finally he tottered on his timid way, the worthy attorney's eye no longer twinkled. Cyrus preferred his criminals robust, and people like Gedron—must one be frank—gave him a severe pain. And then, too, there was something about the old skinflint's terror far too much in harmony with the nagging, hunchy feeling that had been wandering around within Cyrus ever since the inception of the business, the nameless, uncomfortable suspicion that this was all too prettily bizarre, too original for complete success, at least in hands so coarse as Thomson's. He peered sharply when that very individual, plainly concerned about something, was ushered in not ten minutes later.

"What's up?" he snapped. "Hitchen didn't get away?"

"None of 'em got away, chief," Mr. Thomson said grimly.

"None of whom?"

"None of the seven."

"Seven what?"

"Seven people!"

Cyrus sat up and scowled.

"What seven people? What the devil are you talking about?"

"I'm speaking of the guests we're having at the house party down on the old farm," the caller explained dryly and with slightly truculent effect. "Now, hold it, Mr. Finsey! Just listen before you blow up, and see how much of this is maybe your own fault. See, we doped out how we'd get Hitchen—right? And then you said if anybody come looking for him in the next coupla days, we better grab 'em off, too, so's they couldn't go and start nothing—right?"

"I said that, yes. I didn't mean——"

"Well, without me being able to say what you meant, Mr. Finsey, they come and we got 'em and that's what all the hell's a-poppin' about. Benny went to Pettiville and called me up half an hour ago and he said——"

"Who is it you've got down there?" Cyrus asked.

"Just Benny and Joe and that little lad used to work with them when they was running hooch for Ryan."

"The people you've—you've captured!" Cyrus barked. "Who are they?"

"Oh, them? I couldn't rightly say, Mr. Finsey. Five men and two women so far and Benny says they're watching for more. The way they talked, Benny thought it was the office force and some other guy that come looking for Hitchen, too. And then this morning some big, rich guy checked in and Benny thinks that's the other partner. But that ain't the point, Mr. Finsey. Here's the point: Benny's *sore*, what I mean! Benny says he has to have two more good men quick or he'll start pumping lead into the whole seven!"

"Huh? What's that?" the lawyer cried, and sat up with a really violent jerk. "None of that stuff, Thomson! You know mighty well I won't be mixed up with any shooting!"

"You might be this time, Mr. Finsey," Thomson submitted, unemotionally. "You know, Benny's a terrible dirty actor when he gets wound up, and he's wound up right now. He says he positively won't take no more beatings from them or any one else, for twice the price. At that, you couldn't really blame him, Mr. Finsey. Benny ain't a boy that's accustomed to putting down riots and like that."

"Putting down what?" Mr. Finsey asked, huskily and altogether without his usual suavity and serenity.

"Sure thing—one of 'em broke out last night," Thomson grinned tartly. "The way I got it, it was like this: you see, Hitchen was easy, with three to handle him, and this guy that came after him is just a sap. But late yesterday afternoon two girls joined up and no more'n they were in the drum, Benny says, they started wanting to know what kind of a man was Hitchen, to be standing for that stuff. Well, that didn't get 'em so much at the time, but around nine o'clock a couple of husky young lads was brought in—reënforcements, you could call 'em—and them and Hitchen went into a huddle about getting loose and going away from there, and that's when the party started to get rough. The way Benny told me, it was quite exciting till him and Joe and the little lad draped a few chairs and things on their domes and got 'em calmed. But it made Benny terrible sore, Mr. Finsey. Benny says you're buying him a new suit of clothes and three new front teeth and maybe Joe'll have to see a doctor about his arm, where one of the gents bit it. Y' see, Mr. Finsey, when a guy with a rotten temper like Benny's, a guy that always packs two rods and is used to just cooling

jobs and a quick get-away with no rough stuff at all—Mr. Finsey, when a guy like that gets as sore as Benny is now, he's liable to forget he was told not to hurt——"

"Wait, Thomson," Cyrus said briefly. "I want to think."

His thin lips grew tight as he gazed at his untidy desk. Well—it had been a superlatively good hunch! Things had gone askew and promised to go farther askew; and, many little pranks as he had played in the line of business, Mr. Finsey had never been involved in the shedding of blood.

Without the slightest difficulty, he could visualize himself in the act of leaving New York, which he loved, suddenly, inconspicuously and immediately. He could see himself with long, unbecoming whiskers and an assumed name, making quite a reputation for himself as the most mysterious and retiring hermit in all the remoter depths of Canada's great forests.

"All right, Thomson. Get him two good men and start 'em down there quick," he ordered. "And Thomson! The second they're on the way, you call me up and let me know. Don't forget that. I'm uneasy. I think you're bungling this."

It was then only a little after noon. By five o'clock Cyrus Finsey hardly dared look in the mirror, for he suspected that his thin gray hair had turned to snowy white. Even at this late hour, not a solitary word had come in from B. B. Thomson, nor had half a dozen telephone calls to his various haunts educed anything but news of his complete absence from all of them.

Again early night had fallen upon the old Batring homestead. The lean, vile-tongued boy called Smitty had lighted five candles, and now, on a soap box beside the ancient kitchen fireplace, was broaching a can of beans with his jack-knife.

By dint of much cautious whispering, the second mass attack had been arranged for six o'clock, sharp, when Mr. Hitchen should raise his hand; and although not a minute before the hour they had been chatting whimsically and lazily as might be and even tossing an occasional judicious jest in the direction of the forbidding Benny, at six o'clock they surged over the top—Mr. Hitchen and Mr. Briggs, Mr. Parker and young Donald Kane, with Cousin Arthur fetching up unenthusiastically in the rear.

The underlying idea had been, of course, that Benny would be off his guard, that the heavyweight Joe would be out of doors and at a distance and that Smitty could be demolished at any time by one good wallop. But in Benny's world one is never quite off his guard and Joe, unfortunately enough, had picked the very moment to enter with a substantial bludgeon he had just found and which he thought might serve Benny better than the handle of his pistol, when it came to stunning captives.

So now, in hardly more than thirty seconds, the whole heroic episode had passed into history, and Smitty, grinning, had not even risen from his soap box. In the poor light of the candles, the heavily breathing Benny looked them over. To his perverted mind, they were good to see.

Cousin Arthur sat gasping in the corner, holding to his stomach, which had been so brutally kicked. Young Mr. Parker was just coming around again. Young Kane, who had also been quite near Joe, lay with his head in Miss Wells' lap and listened, smiling remotely, to her sobs. The rising authority on buried treasure, Mr. William Hitchen, sat panting on the floor, tenderly feeling over his cranium, deeply considering the sensations which come when one has been struck by the less-lethal end of an automatic. Benny

smiled, as well as one can smile whose mouth is badly swollen and whose right eye is large and black and newly closed. A long time he smiled directly at George Briggs, backed against the wall with the imprint of the same automatic upon his forehead and grinning crazily.

Then, briefly, Benny's surviving eye narrowed in obviously evil thought and roved to the rusty still, fireless and cold, to the pails and bottles knocked in every direction by last night's battle, to the tub of mash whence came the sickening reek of the place—but immediately the good eye whisked back to Mr. Briggs.

Like the other gentlemen, George was bruised and torn and battered, yet this did not seem to satisfy Benny. The young man's teeth showed wolfishly now; the hand which kept the gun trained on Mr. Briggs shook a little; the good eye glittered venomously, like the eye of an infuriated snake. Even a child could have told that Benny was very angry indeed at Mr. Briggs.

"*You* done that!" his soft little voice stated, as he indicated the outraged eye.

"You're tootin' right, I did!" the senior partner cried, heartily, proudly, for he was indeed the only one who had reached Benny.

"Yeah, I know you did," Benny purred. "I told you babies what was coming if you didn't lay off the rough stuff. You and me are through, brother. I'm taking you for a ride. Step!"

"What's that?" the senior partner asked, less proudly.

"You heard me," Benny assured him and indicated the door with a wave of what, George Briggs noted suddenly, was probably the largest pistol barrel ever manufactured.

"Well—oh, look here now!" he began.

Mr. Hitchen gasped chokingly. Miss Ferguson screamed. Mr. Parker sought to rise, wobbled, sat down again.

"*Step!*" Benny repeated and his low voice shook. "Do you want to take it here with the molls watching?"

Followed an inordinately tense three seconds, which George Briggs devoted to a complete study of Benny, his general character, his criminal potentialities and the pattern and substance of his immediate intentions. It was more than discouraging—but immediately after this survey William Hitchen suddenly understood just how it was that ordinary merchants turned into colonels and generals during the late war. His good old partner—oh, it might be impossible, but it was a fact, just the same!—was squaring his shoulders and setting his jaw and saying:

"Well, it—it looks as if I was up against it, Bill, and it needn't happen here. Will you see Ida as soon as you get out of this and tell her—just tell her whatever'll make it easiest, Bill?"

"George, are you going to let that little yegg take you and shoot you?" strangled out of Mr. Hitchen's personal nightmare.

"Speak nice, buddy; you might be next," Benny laughed, as ice clinks. "You! Step!"

George Briggs, befogged perhaps of eye, pallid of cheek, peculiarly short of breath, nevertheless managed a defiant laugh as he turned to the door.

"Hey, Ben!" said the boy Smitty. "Who's outside?"

"Nobody. Go look!" Benny answered.

So Smitty arose and opened the kitchen door, and in that very instant he was felled and over him bounded a big man in uniform, with a pistol and a wide-brimmed felt hat, and after him came another big man, with another pistol and another felt hat. In that instant, too, William Hitchen redeemed himself, at least a little, by heaving up the tub of mash and hurling it at Benny, upsetting the young man and quite drowning a snap decision to shoot it out. Even so, the gesture was all but wasted, for the front door of the farmhouse had been battered in by that time and count-

less men with pistols and wide-brimmed felt hats were of the company. Indeed, it was George Briggs' whirling impression, the State constabulary must have picked this isolated spot for its annual mobilization. The flitting notion that Elihu Peters, the firm's head bookkeeper, was bobbing and tripping around, somewhere in the maze of uniforms, was clearly hallucination.

However, Elihu Peters rode back to town in the drive-yourself roadster with Mr. Briggs and Mr. Hitchen, crushed in between them. Far from being in any mere limelight, Elihu sat figuratively in the glare of a whole battery of sun arcs. Mr. Hitchen, who was driving, called him "old man" and "old fellow" whenever he spoke. Mr. Briggs kept an arm draped over his stooping shoulders and patted constantly and affectionately.

"Don't you see, that's what I was trying to tell you gentlemen, about my wife," Elihu continued. "You see, her brother's been a detective for twenty years, and one time when we lived in Nineteenth Street he pointed out that Thomson man to me and told me how he'd sent him up twice already. So, soon as I saw Thomson there in the office—Lord! I knew there was something crooked right away. That's what I tried to tell you when——"

"We'll probably listen, next time you want to talk, old man," the junior member said humbly.

"So when you folks went and disappeared that way, I knew for sure something was wrong and I went and saw Dan—that's my wife's brother—and told him. Well, this was his day off, but he hopped right out and we went looking for Thomson, and I guess it was around half past one when we finally found him talking to a couple of fellers, and took him to the station house. First off, he just laughed at Dan and cursed him something horrible. Well, Dan's got a

piece of garden hose he keeps in his locker and he went and got that and took Thomson in some back room and pretty soon Thomson told him absolutely everything, even about Finsey, the lawyer, and——"

"That greedy old hyena!" muttered Mr. Hitchen, who knew of Finsey. "I wonder why——"

"We'll find out why, when my pal, the district attorney, drops the hooks into Finsey to-morrow!" George Briggs growled.

The car whirled on through the early Long Island evening. Elihu Peters drew a deep breath and laughed uneasily.

"Well, getting on this subject of greed makes it kind of embarrassing for me, because I wouldn't want you gentlemen to think I was greedy," he said. "But this, maybe, is as good a time as any other to ask if it wouldn't be possible for me to get that—well, raise?"

"You don't have to ask," Hitchen

said. "You're getting fifty now, I believe? Well, it's seventy-five hereafter."

"It's *what*?" the senior member's outraged bass demanded. "He gets one hundred a week and he's worth it!"

"What's that?" Elihu stammered.

"One hundred smackers weekly in the envelope and a bonus every year and that'll never begin to pay what we owe you," George insisted. "And see here, Peters! I—well, want to do something for you myself. I want to get you something you'd like—something your wife would like. Would you like a car? Have you got a car?"

Elihu Peters drew another deep breath and blinked from side to side, from Mr. Briggs to Mr. Hitchen and back to Mr. Briggs again. They seemed to be there and it all seemed to be so.

"No, we ain't got a car!" he cackled gayly. "We—hey, there! I ain't your girl friend, Mr. Briggs! Quit your hugging!"

In our next issue appears a corking story of the army service by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, "The Colonel Who Drank Alone."



A GENTLEMAN IN A HURRY

IN the frosty and starry silence of a winter midnight the old Georgetown section of the national capital was fast asleep save for the "West" exchange offices of the telephone company on the second floor of a building on Thirty-first Street.

Suddenly the stillness was shattered by the wild, weird chant of an automobile horn. The car, with wheels slipping, crunching, and screaming on the crackling ice and snow, rounded a corner at a rate of speed that knocked the traffic ordinances into a cocked hat. It came to a stop beneath the windows of the telephone offices.

The driver sprang to the ground and leaped to the first-floor door, upon which he made thunderous summons with both hands and feet. Also he lifted up his voice in yelps of the most abandoned, hysterical, and reckless rage.

A "hello" girl, thinking the end of the world was at hand, opened a window, thrust her fair young head into the frozen and noise-infested night and, in tremulous tones, asked what all the racket was about.

Straightaway her reluctant ears were assailed by a stream of good old American profanity mingled with a flood of foreign accent, oburgation, and protest.

"Why, in the name of a blithering blank blankety blank blank," demanded the one below, an attaché of a foreign legation, "don't you and your blankety blank company answer my telephone when I take the receiver off the hook?"

There Was a Place Where Nobody Would Hunt: And There
Was a Reason.



The PHANTOM COUGAR

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

MY first hint that the Punch Bowl had acquired a bad reputation came when I landed in Ashcroft. If I had outfitted at Lytton, the natural point of departure for the Punch Bowl country, I would not have had a tantalizing sense of mystery to start out with, and the course of things might have been altogether deflected. But I did go to Ashcroft, purposely to renew acquaintance with a few people I'd known as a youngster. And I met Bill Hayes there. Bill started the ball rolling.

In the first place, he was the only one of the old crowd I ran across. The rest were scattered. Eight years work many a change. Here the change was mostly personal, human. The bald, dry hills, the encompassing sagebrush, the far-off sentinel clumps of jack pine on the higher levels, were pretty much as I remembered them. Ponderous freight wagons still rumbled in and out of

the old Cariboo Road. The single dusty street, upon which fronted the major portion of the town, stood unmarked for better or worse by time, a new building or two, perhaps; no more. The plank sidewalk ranging along past the Grand and the Palace still maintained its ancient unrepair. The same type of men, white-hatted, booted, shirt-sleeved, sat in rickety chairs before these two hostelryes, making the same periodic pilgrimages to the respective bars.

But they were not the men I knew. Bill Hayes was the last of the old guard—the others had surrendered to changing times, retired, died, moved on to other economic battlefields. Bill told me why.

"They're railroadin' the country to death. See that new grade? That's the Canadian Northern. Two hundred miles north there's another transcontinental cuttin' through the heart uh the

province. Speculators has grabbed the best of the public land, and they're gettin' rich peddlin' it to farmers, to folks that think a hundred and sixty acres means independence. Farmers. Huh! There's bunches of 'em starvin' to death on land that used to grow fat beef steers for your dad an' me. You can't run stock on fifty-dollar-a-acre land."

"The old burg *looks* the same," I ventured.

"She ain't," said Bill. "She's blinked out. There's a line of auto stages shootin' settlers back into the hills, an' there's still some freight goin' into the Cariboo. Outside uh that there's nothin' here no more. Nothin' but a few dead ones here in town, an' a few poverty-stricken mossbacks in the hills. When this railroad work's done, the freight an' transportation business'll be done like the cow business. All we'll need'll be somebody to come along with a shovel an' bury us. But say, you look as if the world had used you pretty good, Sam. Tell us about it. What you been doin' since you growed up?"

Bill is a privileged character. He was a trail partner with my father twenty years before I was born. So I did not resent his curiosity, nor his slighting reference to my juvenile state at the time I left Ashcroft. If I was not then "growed up," I thought and felt that I was—particularly since I had reached the age of twenty-two, stood five foot eleven in my socks, and was full of an implicit faith that the world at large was my particular orange, waiting to be squeezed. I had made good, in a way. From a country kid with no experience and a lot of vague ambitions I was well on my way to top rank with one of the biggest motion-picture producers in the country. I didn't boast to Bill. I merely told him that I had laid up enough to keep the wolf from the door for a while, that my job was worth five thousand a year—and that I had a four-week vacation

on my hands—the first one in three years.

"Lucky—you ain't more'n started to live," Bill commented. "What you goin' to do with yourself in this blasted country?"

"Hunt," I answered tersely. "Hunt in the Punch Bowl."

"Huh," said Bill—grunted, rather. He eyed me sidelong, stroking his gray beard.

"You still got the old ranch?" I questioned.

"Uh-huh." He shook his head. "Sold out five years ago. The farmers got to crowdin' me. I built me up a ranch in the Punch Bowl. But I sold that last spring."

"Up in the Bowl, eh?" said I. "So you had a ranch there. Lord, I wish you still had it. That's where I want to hunt."

"Well, I'm plumb separated f'm the soil," he remarked.

"Then," said I, an idea popping into my mind, for old Bill was a camping partner after my own heart, "I'll organize a pack outfit, and you and I will go make us a camp at those springs on the north slope of the Bowl and get us a bear or two and some venison. Eh? How about it?"

But I couldn't work him up to any enthusiasm for such a jaunt. Which struck me as odd. I remembered old Bill as one who would leave bigger matters go hang to hunt in congenial company. I pressed him for a reason—it was a long time before he gave me any satisfaction.

"I'm scared uh that place," he blurted out. "I wouldn't go hunt in the Punch Bowl on a bet."

"Why?" I demanded naturally. Bill Hayes, as I knew him, was utterly unafraid of anything that walked, flew, or swam. He was, in fact, a tolerably hard old citizen, and had seen all kinds of wild West in his time. Graduates of that school don't scare easily.

"Come 'n' have a drink 'n' I'll tell you," he volunteered.

We had the drink, all right, but that was as far as the promised revelation went. We stood at the bar, smoking, and when I prompted him, he reneged on his own proposition.

"Darn it, I can't tell you," he said. "It would sound plumb loony. You'd only laugh. Go on into the Punch Bowl if you want. Maybe you'll savvy. Maybe you won't. But darned if I'll go."

That was all I got out of him. I was no wiser when I left Ashcroft. All I knew was that for some mysterious reason, hard-bitten old-timer as he was, Bill Hayes had sold a good ranch in the Bowl in order to get away from the place, and neither love of sport nor any consideration whatever would induce him to go there with me or anybody else. It was tantalizing. Very. What sort of jinx was on the Punch Bowl? Bill only shrugged his shoulders and bade me go see.

I found something further against the Punch Bowl when I came to Lillioet—the jumping-off place for hunters of bear, goats, and *Ovis montana*. There live guides, red men and white, and some in whose veins both sorts of blood mingle, tough, able outdoor men, willing to go anywhere, any time, if the price is right. But none of them wanted to go into the Punch Bowl. They didn't say why. They put me off with one excuse and another, tried to tell me of better hunting grounds. But I knew where I wanted to go. The Bowl is a game preserve, far enough out of the beaten track to be left alone—and there have not been enough hunting licenses issued to deplete its resources.

One thing I will say for my own kind, the white guides were all out. The men I tried to hire were, without exception, breeds or pure native. I grew rather peeved the second day, and, hunting up the local deputy game

warden, asked him bluntly why the Punch Bowl was taboo. He scouted the notion.

"Rats!" he said vigorously. "I guess they've got too much money. It's been a good season. Still it's funny they turn down a snap job. I never heard anything against that country. There's a professor of some sort been living in there two years, a queer old hermit with a stone house, they say. And the feller that bought out Bill Hayes is holding down a ranch at Sheep Springs. I don't know why these fellers don't want to go in there. Course, Siwash are queer."

I didn't tell him about Bill Hayes' provokingly incomplete avowal. In fact, I didn't tell him anything except that I wanted a man to pack and cook and be company, and that I couldn't hire one for love nor money—not to go into the Punch Bowl. I suppose it rather amused the game warden. He seemed to think I was a genuine tenderfoot.

The upshot of it was that I hired two horses, saddled one, packed my bed and three weeks' grub on the other, and headed for the Bowl alone. I'd been over every square mile of it when I was a kid, and if there was anything in there to scare out a man like Bill Hayes, I was inordinately curious to know what it could be.

II.

There's a trail leading north from Lillioet to a half-baked mining district. Thirty miles out my way branched westerly, and, a little north, two dim wheel ruts winding through the open hills. The Punch Bowl sits fairly high on the eastern slope of the Cascades, a great circular pit, as its name implies, fifteen miles across the floor, level and parked with grassy meadows between groves of black and lodgepole pine. Great peaks invest it like a ring of forts.

It is a beautiful spot. There are springs ice cold under the hottest sun, grass that sweeps to a rider's stirrup, trout in the one good-sized stream that threads its area, game in every wooded canyon, on every precipitous slope that lifted to a rocky timber line. I knew the Bowl like a book. My father summer-ranged many a big herd in there. There was no ranch in the Bowl then. We lived under canvas from the spring drive till we went out with the first November snow. We never considered wintering in there. We had the whole country to pick from, and there was a milder climate lower down, and less snow. But I had often thought that if I could make a pile of money some way, I'd like to come back and build up an old-time Western ranch in the Bowl, have a little isolated principality where I could run a couple of thousand head of stock, and be a benevolent despot, after the way of the old cowmen.

When I dropped over the rim of the Bowl at noon next day I sat on the crest and looked about me with a pioneer's exultation. It spread below me, majestically girdled with its mountains, peaceful, very still, green pines surrounding like a mantle, the grass of the bottoms waving like ripe wheat, yellow in the eye of a September sun. I drank it in avidly, alone without being lonely, forty-five miles from anywhere, and glad of it. The contrast to crowded streets, to elbowing throngs, moved me to further gladness. I was getting back to first principles—some of us, I dare say, are more primitive than others.

Still, one is by instinct social. I wished mildly that I had some one along to enjoy the vista, the caressing touch of winds freighted with piny smells, the perfect blue of the sky that roofed the Bowl. But unless he was the right sort, I knew I was better off alone. I say "he." Probably in a more senti-

mental mood I might have changed the gender. Only I wasn't much given to that sort of moods. Women hadn't played much of a part in my life. Not for lack of propinquity, either. In eight years of urban living I had been thrown in contact with plenty of women, all sorts and conditions of them. Somehow I had never reacted violently to their emotional stimulus. No single one of them had ever cut much figure in my scheme of things. I don't know why. It just happened that way. So I was heart-whole and fancy-free as I dipped down the sloping side of the Bowl, intent upon sport with rod and gun, my mind on camp and my own primitive cooking and a bed under the stars. There were, I knew, two separately peopled establishments in the Punch Bowl, but I was not particularly interested in them.

I was, though, whenever I thought of it, inordinately interested in what manner of thing, person, or occurrence had driven Bill Hayes out, had made him genuinely afraid to come back. What possible foundation *could* there be for such an attitude? I might have thought Bill was "stringing" me—only for those Lillioet guides. They gave no reason. They simply backed out when I told them where I wanted to go. Why? I craved to know the answer.

Queer how a thing which, considered logically, is essentially absurd has the power to so excite a man's curiosity. I lay awake half that night speculating vainly upon the matter. I had absolutely nothing to go on. That was what made it so tantalizing.

Partly because of that, partly because I was on an expedition where I could roam as the mood dictated, I saddled up next morning and rode over to take a look at the ranch Bill Hayes had built and sold. I knew the spot well enough. I'd made many a camp there. Where the professor mentioned by the game warden was located, I

didn't know, and cared less. But it happened that I came on this gentleman's place first, and perceived that it, too, had its base on Sheep Springs.

Viewing it from a couple of hundred yards' distance, I didn't need to be told that it wasn't the Rayes Ranch. There was nothing of a ranch flavor about it. One building loomed on the summit of a low knoll, a square box of a house with a little tower on each corner, and a high, glass-paned cupola rising from the center of the flat roof. It was built wholly of stone, gray sandstone, roughly masoned, a thick-walled, massive structure. Narrow windows slotted the four sides. More like the miniature copy of some feudal castle it seemed than a dwelling in a humdrum stock country. Outbuilding stables, sheds, corrals, and fences there were none. Just this somber bulk of stone. Yet not so somber, after all. When I rode closer I saw that a bright border of flowers ran along the foot of each gray wall, that on the main entrance climbing vines reached above the door arch. And a middle-aged man in a black skullcap and red leather slippers, with a short, pointed beard of gray and thick pince-nez astride his nose, looked inquiringly up at me as I rounded the corner. His eyes were a bright, piercing blue, and they regarded me with just a perceptible narrowing of the lids.

"How-d'y-do," [†] greeted.

"How do you do?" he responded—very precisely, but without the least shade of expression, hospitable, hostile, or otherwise, in his tone.

In town one would never think of halting in a stranger's dooryard and striking up a conversation. Out there it is different. I grew up in that country during a period when every ranch house welcomed passing stranger and invited guest alike. No man passed another on the trail without hearty greeting unless his haste was great. Once more in the same environment, I found

myself easily adopting the old habit, naturally anticipating the old hospitable attitude. I slid sidewise in my saddle and made a fresh start, as much in a spirit of perversity as from any other impulse. My graybeard rather nettled me with his cool indifference—as if I were but part of the local scenery instead of flesh and blood. I remarked upon the singular quality of his habitation, told him I was returned to that region after a long absence, commented on the beauty and isolation of the Punch Bowl. He replied in frigidly courteous monosyllables, but he did not ask me to get down, nor how far I had come, nor if I were hungry, nor in any wise did he rise to the occasion as the custom of the country dictated. He maintained a surprising degree of aloofness. And since a little of that went a long way with me, I shook up my horse and rode on.

"My friend of the skullcap and the four-towered house of stone is evidently all sufficient unto himself, even if he does live forty miles from nowhere," I reflected. "What he ought to have is a fence around his house, and a 'No Trespassing!' sign posted up."

I didn't waste much thought on him, however, for, close at hand, some few hundred yards distant and about a hundred feet lower, spread a typical ranch layout of the kind common in the early days. Log house, log stables, stacks of hay inclosed with a pole fence, corrals, a little horse pasture. On the flat beyond, a few head of stock grazing. It looked good to me, I can tell you. It looked like home. Perhaps the knowledge that Bill Hayes had built most of it served to spur my imagination. You can graft a range-bred man on a city, but the memory of open spaces, of wide horizons, and of friendly folk at the end of every trail stays with him a long time. I could almost fancy that familiar faces would

peer through the windows as I rode in, and well-known voices yell hearty greetings at me. Those were purely fantastic notions. Nevertheless, it pleased me to entertain them.

Instead, a girl came out on the porch as I drew up my mount. Perhaps I stared rudely. I hadn't been quite prepared for a woman. Certainly not of that type, in that place. I cannot say even now what sort of dress she wore. It was something soft and cream-colored. Her hair was blue-black, a cloudy mass above a pale oval face, and the red of her lips was like a dab of carmine on old ivory. She looked at me out of big gray eyes unwaveringly. I am not much on figures of speech, but she stood out against her background like some strange tropical flower. Ranch women, as they loomed in my youthful experience, ranged naturally in two divisions—the middle-aged and prematurely old, weather-beaten, wearing their burden of toilsome years in a rut with dull patience; and the young, who were buxom and tanned, rudely vigorous as their environment. This girl looked like a vitalized Sargent portrait. Her voice when she spoke to me served to heighten that impression, soft and clear and musical in its inflection.

"How do you do," she said. "Are you——"

She broke off short. The natural pallor of her face turned to a dead white. Her gaze struck past me, fixed and fearful. I turned in my saddle and smiled to myself, understanding her fear and discounting it even as my hand reached for the rifle slung under the stirrup leather. It was nothing. Sufficient to frighten a woman, a woman unused to prowling wild beasts. One might come unexpectedly on the like anywhere in the Punch Bowl, though the brutes came seldom so boldly to a ranch. Nothing more than a long-bodied, catlike beast, the cougar of the

Coast Range—own brother to the panther of "Leather Stocking" days. They range the length of the Rockies and Cascades, predatory brutes where game and stock is concerned, slinking cowards before man. This was an extra-fine specimen, eight or nine foot, I judged, from nose to tail tip. He stood in plain view, at no greater distance than fifty yards, tail weaving slowly from side to side, lips parted to show white, gleaming teeth. I pulled down on him with a cougar pelt as a trophy—in my mind.

Then the beast was gone.

Gone with my eyes full upon him, the foresight just drawing on his gray shoulder. I cannot describe the amazing feature of his disappearance. He did not leap for cover. There was no cover within sixty feet. I cannot even say that he moved. He was there, switching his tail, otherwise immobile. And then he was not there.

III.

I sat my horse, staring, dumfounded. The thing was incomprehensible, impossible. I had clean forgotten the girl. Her voice recalled me. She had come down the steps and stood looking up at me now, with one slender hand pulling at a wisp of my horse's mane.

"What did you see?" she asked tensely.

"What did I see?" I echoed blankly. "Good Lord! wasn't it plain enough? Don't you know a cougar when you see one? What I want to know is, where did he get to so quick?"

"I thought—I thought——" she was whispering, and swaying a little on her feet. "I was afraid it was a hallucination."

She put both hands to her face and fell against my horse. I grabbed for her and got a firm enough hold on one shoulder to keep her from falling, while I dismounted. She hadn't fainted, but

pretty near it, and I, without stopping to think of the etiquette applicable to such occasions, picked her up bodily and carried her into the house.

The door opened into a big living room, as different from the ordinary ranch interior as the girl herself was different from the ordinary ranch type, inasmuch as it was furnished and arranged with a degree of comfort bordering on luxury. On one side of a big stone fireplace stood a piano, on the other side a broad leather couch. I laid the girl on this. She was conscious, but apparently the strength had all gone out of her.

"Shall I get you a drink?" I asked.

She nodded. I started through an archway into what I could see was a dining room, on the supposition that the kitchen would be off that.

A sideboard, with a decanter and glasses on a tray caught my eye. Investigation of the ruby liquor proved it port wine. I poured a stiff drink of that and took it to her. She was sitting up by then and she swallowed the wine with a wry face. As a bracer it proved speedily effective, or she was one of those rare women who react at once from any sort of nervous let-down, for presently she shrugged her shoulder and said to me, with a faint touch of color showing in her cheeks:

"What a silly thing!"

"Which?" I inquired.

"Me," she smiled. "Getting wabbly like that. Did you *really* see that animal?"

"Well," I answered dryly, "if he'd lingered a second longer I'd have had his pelt. I can't quite understand where he went so suddenly, but I suppose that's subject to explanation. Did it frighten you so much as all that?"

"Well, yes, I must admit that it did," she said slowly. "You see, I've been here alone for three days—and it has sort of got on my nerves. My brother is in Ashcroft, trying to hire a man or

two for the ranch. When you rode in, I was hoping you might be one of them. But I can't quite make you fit the part."

I grinned. That last was a trifle ambiguous. Whether I failed to measure up or down to the typical local stock hand, I had to infer for myself. I did begin to feel a wholly unjustifiable resentment against the absent brother for leaving a girl like that three days alone in a desolate area like the Punch Bowl. And I remember thinking, in the same breath, how queer it was that I should develop so instantaneously a well-defined protective instinct. I felt that that girl needed looking after, and that the job properly belonged to me. I suppose it hits some men that way.

"No," I admitted. "I can't plead guilty to being the new hired man. I just happened to wander in."

From that I went on to tell her who I was and what brought me there, and how the Punch Bowl happened to be familiar ground. She brightened perceptibly during the recital. I learned that her name was Durand.

"Won't you put up your horse and have lunch?" she said presently. "It's almost noon."

"Thanks," I accepted gladly. "That sounds like the old days, when everybody kept open house."

"Hospitality ought to be the rule in this country, where a passing stranger is a social event," she smiled. "I thought it was."

"It used to be," I observed. "But they don't all practice it now."

I went on to tell her of my casual call at the four-towered house of stone.

"Mr. Applegard is something of a character," she said. "I've met him twice. He's a recluse, almost. Nobody knows anything about him."

Mr. Applegard certainly was a character, I reflected, as I went to the stable with my nag. His manner as well as his dwelling certified to that. I didn't

consider him an added attraction to the Punch Bowl.

The small stream flowing from Sheep Spring made its way along a shallow course between house and corals. All the flat area immediately surrounding the buildings was beaten to smooth dust by the hoofs of stock, saving only a fenced plot of green behind the house. I took thought to myself as I moved. I had marked the spot where the cougar stood. I was very curious about that beast. I wanted to know by what means he accomplished the vanishing act. On the dusty level his tracks would lie as if in new-fallen snow. I led my horse over there, stopped, looked, looked again, finally left my nag stand while I circled slowly in widening casts.

I came back to him, all up in the air. There were no cougar tracks. Not a solitary pad mark. The loose dirt spread unmarked, save for unmistakable hoofprints of stock twenty-four hours old. I glanced back at the house, and thought to discern the girl's face at a window. But I could not be sure of that. I began reluctantly to feel myself the victim of what Miss Durand had mentioned—a hallucination. And I went on to the stable in rather a mixed state of mind, in which incredulous amazement chiefly predominated. It was the sort of experience commonly and jocularly accredited to a man with about a quart of Scotch under his belt. But—the girl had likewise shared the experience. Manifestly, then— At this stage I mentally threw up my hands and stalked back to the house. I couldn't find any explanation.

IV.

I was aided in turning my back on the incident by circumstances. In the midst of our lunch Tom Durand drove up, with a Chinaman in the buggy seat

beside him, and, jogging in the rear, two stock hands, swarthy-faced young men with a touch of Siwash blood in them, which manifested itself not only in their complexion but in a sort of barbaric splendor of riding gear. They turned their saddle stock into the pasture along with Durand's team, and the quartet invaded the house in search of food.

I found Durand a pleasant young chap, four or five years older than his sister, black-haired and gray-eyed like her. But the poor devil was touched with the white plague. His cough and the hectic flush over each cheek bone betrayed his trouble. I could understand without much telling why they were there, bucking a game that was wholly strange to them. And I learned, during the afternoon, that my conjecture was right. They were up in the high, dry country, all their eggs in that ranch basket, to give Tom Durand a fighting chance for his life. They were as much out of their accustomed element in the stock business as I would be in command of a full-rigged ship. Tom had been something in a brokerage firm in New York, and his sister—well, I gathered later that she had turned her back on a promising musical career. Between them they'd raised enough money to buy the ranch and cattle as it stood. They'd got a bargain, if they had only known something about the business, and I wondered more than ever why old Bill Hayes had let go his last foothold on the range with beef steadily soaring skyward in price.

Even with that, I considered their venture unwise. I might be a trifle rusty, but I knew local conditions. I knew what a man had to do to handle cattle successfully in the Punch Bowl. Tom Durand didn't. He was full of enthusiasm, and about as practical as a small boy with his first watch. But he was a wonderfully likable sort.

Both of them seemed to regard me frankly as a social dispensation not to be easily relinquished. Isolation makes short work of formality. When mid-afternoon rolled around and I be-thought me of my camp five miles distant and my pack horse still on a picket rope, they jointly insisted that I make the ranch headquarters during my stay in the Bowl.

I didn't hesitate much about accepting. Different reasons influenced me in spite of the fact that I had planned to spend the time wandering about the Bowl, making my camp wherever the spirit moved me. I might as well frankly admit that Emily Durand was the chief reason. Perhaps that indicates extreme susceptibility. I don't think so. No one ever accused me of being mushy. Neither am I in the habit of trying to delude myself about anything, particularly my feelings. There was something about her that drew me strongly. I don't think that many men can clearly define the reasons why any given woman attracts them. There's something that stirs the emotions, rouses the masculine desire to possess, fans to a flame instincts that may always have smoldered. Not being versed in sex psychology, I do not attempt to explain the whys and wherefores. Something about Emily Durand appealed mightily to me. I didn't stop to consider whether my personality made a like impression on her. I merely recite that I was glad to jump at a chance to see a great deal more of her. It may have come into being rather suddenly, that odd feeling. I couldn't honestly deny its existence, and I couldn't play the hypocrite with myself.

We didn't say anything to Tom about the cougar. I hadn't even mentioned to her the mysterious absence of cougar tracks. I thought about it now and then, with a good deal of perplexity. But as she didn't speak of it,

neither did I. It might have been a mutual illusion. I let it go at that, anyway.

Tom and Emily rode with me to my camp, and paid me some extravagant compliments on my skill as a packer. They'd been in the country since early spring, and neither of them had fathomed the possibilities of the diamond hitch. It seemed to them quite an achievement for a man to pack three weeks' grub, his bedding, and sundries on a horse's back, and so lash it with forty foot of rope that it would ride forever. My pack horse was a fractious brute, but once the diamond hitch was on that pack all his antics were futile. We were home by sundown. The chink was in command of the kitchen, and, judging by the dinner he served, he knew his business. Afterward Tom dug up some cigars a lot better than mine and we adjourned to the porch. The two stock hands sat playing seven-up in the bunk-house doorway.

"Isn't it a peach of a place?" Tom Durand said to me. "I never was strong on scenic effects, but this gets to be. And the air! It goes to my head almost like liquor. I wish I'd had sense enough to get out and hunt a place like this two years ago. Aside from the health question, I don't think I'll ever be satisfied in town again."

The scenic effect was there, all right. The Punch Bowl lifted its towering rim high above us, one side in creeping shadow, the other a yellow blaze in the slanting sun rays. Purple and misty peaks lifted farther still. White ribbons of spraying water split the green canyons. A bunch of wild cattle came stringing out on a ridge, two hundred strong, black and red and spotted beasts, heads high, the sun flashing on their curving horns. Nearer, a saddle horse outside the pasture tinkled his bell musically as he grazed. Otherwise there rested upon the Bowl

a restful silence, an atmosphere of untroubled peace.

We walked out a little way on the grassy slope. I turned from a casual survey of the odd, towered house of stone standing sphinxlike on its little eminence, to catch a curiously intent look on the girl's face—as if she were watching for something. And her gaze was fixed on that bare, dusty area between house and corrals. Her expression changed when she saw me look. She smiled. But it was a forced smile. Tom had moved off a few steps, staring at the moving herd with a field glass.

"Looking for that phantom cougar?" I bantered.

It seemed to startle her.

"Phantom?" she echoed. I seemed to discern a quiver to her lips.

"What's the matter?" I asked lightly. "Nerves?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, in a very low tone. "I've always despised women with nerves. And still I seem to be approaching that unaccountable condition myself."

"Why?" I asked. "Surely not because a wild beast happened to stray into your dooryard? Probably you fretted a lot when you were alone so long."

"I'm sure I don't know," she said—but in a manner far from convincing, as if she knew but was reluctant to tell; which was natural enough, seeing that I was a comparative stranger. It ran in my mind that something more than the nervousness that comes of being lonely troubled her, but we didn't follow up the subject, for Tom joined us again, and we went back to the house.

I turned in early. I knew a berry thicket three miles above Sheep Springs where, at that season, bear were apt to be found, and I wanted to be on the spot at daybreak. I'd made it a condition of accepting their hos-

pitable offer that no one was to fuss about me. So I rose quietly in the little hours, made free with the kitchen stove for coffee and a strip of fried bacon, and set out.

It proved a fruitless hunt. Tracks and torn bushes attested Bruin's presence, but I failed to sight one, or even a deer. Philosophically consoling myself with the fact that I had a good many days yet to garner a grizzly's pelt, I turned homeward, getting into the ranch about eleven.

Tom and his men were out on an expedition after cattle, Emily told me. The Chinaman set me out a lunch. Afterward I was content to stretch my legs in a grass chair on the porch and talk. The morning's tramp had been a hard one, and I was pretty soft.

Again, and repeatedly, I surprised that queer, expectant look on Emily Durand's face. No matter what the subject, her eyes would presently turn questioningly over that bare, dusty foreground. I couldn't help noticing. If I'd known her more intimately I would have asked why. As it was, I took it out in wondering.

My wondering didn't last long, for suddenly her hands tightened on the arms of her chair and her face went slowly white. But her gaze remained steadily fixed, and, following its direction, I got a jolt myself.

There was the cougar again—in the same spot—and switching his tail just as before.

"Good Lord!" I made involuntary exclamation. "I'll fix you this time."

My rifle stood in a corner of the porch. As I rose to get it, the girl put out her hand. Her voice was shaky.

"It's no use to shoot. I tried it—twice."

"What!"

"Every day of the three days that Tom was gone," she whispered, "that thing appeared there at about the same

time. I shot at it. It doesn't mind bullets. It isn't real."

I had the rifle now.

"We'll see," I muttered, "whether he's bulletproof. I never saw a cougar yet that was."

I'm a pretty fair shot with a rifle. It wasn't over sixty yards. On a bet I could have plunked the brute in his thick, cat-shaped head. As it was, to make sure, I drew a bead on his reddish-gray shoulder.

The dust flew when I pulled trigger. But the cougar stood there undisturbed, his long tail weaving slow from side to side. He didn't even turn his head. I fired again deliberately—without result. And as I looked down the barrel a third time the beast seemed to be there in such plain view that I could see the white teeth between his parted lips—and then I was looking at dry, dusty earth. He didn't fade from sight, or leap away. He was there, and then he was gone.

I drew a long breath and set my rifle down. Irrational, impossible, preposterous, what you please. I tell it for what it's worth. I didn't need to be reminded that I'd looked for tracks the day before and found none, but I took my gun and walked out there, and Emily Durand followed. There wasn't a mark in the loose dirt. Only the fresh furrows my two shots had plowed.

I don't remember that either of us said anything. We stood staring blankly for a minute, then turned back toward the house. I'm not superstitious. Logically, my mind refutes all the ancient myths of spook and phantom, of disembodied spirits and haunted places. At the same time, I will admit that I took each step fighting an unseemly impulse to look back. Emily, keeping step with me, did glance over her shoulder. The second or third time her head turned she gave a suppressed little cry and caught me by

the arm. I whirled. There the beast stood again. I tell you it was uncanny. I didn't lift my rifle. The fatalistic conviction seized me that jacketed bullets would not dispel that illusion—or whatever it was. The thing couldn't be—yet, paradoxically, there it was. I think I hurried a little, even, to gain the porch, when Emily loosed that frightened grip of my arm. She brushed back a vagrant lock of hair as we faced about to view our mysterious beast, and straightened her shoulders defiantly.

"Silly," she breathed. "But it does scare me. Can you explain that, Mr. Cross?"

I shook my head. It was a phenomenon I couldn't classify, and commonplaces didn't seem to fit the occasion. The Chinese cook appeared in the doorway just then.

"You wantum—ah——" he began to address Miss Durand, breaking off when his roving black eye fell on the cougar, stationary in his pose, except for that swaying tail.

"Klooga—klooga!" he pointed excitedly. "Why you no shoot um?"

"Shoot um twice," I answered casually as possible. "No hit."

"I shoot um," he said eagerly.

He went pad-padding in his slippers hurriedly to the rear. In a few seconds he was back, a long-barreled Colt of the frontier model in his hand. Chinamen aren't much on gun play, as a rule, but this fellow went about it as if he knew his business. Perhaps he'd served his apprenticeship in a tong war or two. He was an oldish fellow, spare built, very wrinkled.

Pow! went his first shot, and the dust flew. He snarled some Oriental malediction and let go again. And just as had happened to me, while he squinted over his gun, he found himself suddenly gazing at nothing.

I hadn't reckoned on coolie superstition. That Chinaman's face blanched. The skinny hand that held the Colt

actually vibrated. His mouth opened wide and round and remained so for full half a minute. It would have been laughable to see him, under different circumstances. Then he backed silently into the house, never once looking at us, his sloe eyes wide and unwaveringly on the spot where the cougar had been.

Within five minutes we heard the clump of shoes on the back porch. We glanced around the corner, and there was Lung Chong making off, his bundle of belongings slung across his narrow shoulders.

"Lung," the girl cried sharply, "where you go?"

"I go Ashcroft," he whined over his shoulder, never halting. "No stlay heah no mo'. Velly bad place. I go all same quick."

V.

"Well, we've lost a perfectly good cook," Emily said, in a flat, expressionless tone. "I suppose the men will see something and go next. There must be a curse on this place."

"Forget it!" I said slangily. "It's the queerest thing I ever heard of, much less saw. But every effect has its natural cause, if we can only locate the cause. Has Tom seen anything like this?"

"I'm sure not," she answered shakily. The thing had strung her up to the snapping point, I could see; but she was pretty game. "The two men he had here must have seen something, for they quit in a hurry one day, without any known reason, and they acted funny. That was why Tom went to town. I'd never noticed anything, not till I was here alone. Then I began to see things. Not only the cougar—although he appeared every day."

"What else did you see?" I asked.

"It sounds incredible," she said slowly. "The first day I saw the cougar—and shot at him twice. The next day, about noon, he came again and

kept coming and vanishing for an hour. About three o'clock I was sitting on the porch here, and three men on horseback appeared in the yard. They looked like cowboys. I thought at first they were hunting cattle, and I started for the corrals, to speak to them. Then they seemed to have some sort of quarrel. One pulled his gun and shot, and the man he shot at fell off his horse. It frightened me, of course. I didn't dream it wasn't reality—until they blinked out just like the cougar does. Afterward I recollected that while I saw the puff of smoke from the revolver, I heard no report. Nor did I hear a sound, although they seemed to be yelling at each other. Then, a little after that, there was an Indian, all paint and feathers, standing right by the porch steps, making gestures with one hand. *He* seemed real enough, too. But he went out like the rest, when I was about ready to scream. Oh, it must sound perfectly crazy. I've been trying to persuade myself that I must have been light-headed—or dreamed all this. But I didn't. They kept coming and going for two hours, going through the same performance. Didn't I look at you sort of queer when you rode in?"

"Well, perhaps," I admitted.

"I couldn't tell whether you were a reality or just another vision till you spoke," she said. "If I'd been here alone another twenty-four hours, I believe I should have been clean out of my mind. I can't fathom it. It gives me the shudders. I've got so I watch all the time for something to appear, and every time I see anything it's a shock. I never believed in ghostly appearances. Do you?"

"No," I said bluntly, "I don't. No intelligent person does. I'm stumped, all right. But I don't admit the supernatural. These aren't the conventional apparitions, anyway, such as the Society of Psychical Research investi-

gates and prints learned brochures about. These appear only in broad day."

"Then what lies back of these appearances?" she demanded tensely. "What mysterious agency controls them? What are they?"

There she had me. I knew no more than she; less, for I had not seen the same number of manifestations.

"I don't know," said I frankly, "but I'm in on it whatever it is, if it can possibly be fathomed. The only thing we can do, though, is to stand pat and see what comes next. Better tell your brother, so he won't get a jolt when *he* sees something."

"He'd think we were insane," she declared. "I don't know what to do. You saw how that Chinaman took it. Other men, comparatively ignorant and full of native superstition, won't act very much different. I don't know that I could go on staying here myself if this sort of thing continues. One would never know what was real and what wasn't. It frightens me, in spite of a real determination not to be frightened."

I could very well understand that state of mind. But having had only the comparatively mild sample of the vanishing cougar, I thought that, after all, perhaps overstrung nerves might account for the more elaborate appearances. You see, I was still highly incredulous. It simply *couldn't* be anything but some trick of the vision. But I could understand her reluctance about telling Tom such a staggering yarn. Even I, who'd had ocular demonstration, doubted the actual appearance of three mounted men and a painted savage. I didn't doubt Emily Durand's word—I merely doubted the accuracy of her observation.

So we decided to keep it to ourselves until such time as these queer manifestations occurred before the others. It would be time enough to talk then.

As to what we should do more than talk—well, to me action appeared a futile consideration, like a man proposing to abate an earthquake or control the tides. No man can deal with phenomena whose factors are totally unknown.

We loafed watchfully on the porch most of the afternoon, seeing nothing. Tom Durand came in and bestowed a hungry man's blessing on the departed chink. We didn't have to devise any explanations for his exit from the scene. A Chinaman's actions aren't often explainable from a white man's point of view. Tom was chiefly regretful because it put a burden of housework on his sister. But we got around that by all pitching in on the cooking and dishwashing, breed riders and all. Then we went to bed early, I to lie awake a long time puzzling over this most puzzling thing. I fell asleep, wondering if such weird happenings lay behind Bill Hayes' reluctance to hunt in the Bowl. He had sold a perfectly good ranch for two thousand below the market price. Did visions scare Bill away? Unaccountable apparitions would be about the only thing that could possibly shake old Bill Hayes' iron nerve. I wished I could get hold of him.

VI.

Daylight found me awake, but I didn't go hunting. I had the feeling that there was bigger game closer at hand. Every man worth his salt yearns to solve a baffling mystery when it confronts him. How it was to be solved was beyond my comprehension. I didn't even know what had to be solved. It seemed to be a case of sit tight and look on. I wondered if our neighbor in the imitation fortress had observed any unaccountable appearances. I mentioned this to Emily after Tom and his men set out on another stock-hunting jaunt.

"If he did," said she, "I dare say he would merely adjust his glasses, gaze at the thing, and say that it was rather peculiar."

"Why, I wonder," was my next idle speculation, "is a man like that burying himself in a place like this? He must certainly appreciate solitude."

"I should imagine so," Miss Durand replied. "He walked by here once armed with a butterfly net and a camera, and stopped a few minutes. He seems to be an educated man, with a fondness for his own company, natural history, and chemical experiments. He asked us to drop in. We did, a few days later. He was so preoccupied that he was barely civil. He has a Chinese house servant, and he hasn't been out of the Bowl this summer. Once a month a wagon brings him supplies from Lillioet. There you have all the particulars, as I know them. Isn't it an odd-looking house? He had it built two years ago, they say. I don't think anything spooky would get on *his* nerves. He'd likely view them with cold-blooded scientific interest."

"I wonder what sort of demonstration's on the program for us to-day?" I said lightly. "I'm rather expectant." She mustered up a wry face.

"I'm more concerned with the why," she said.

That, of course, was also my chief concern, but one can't elucidate a mystery without a single key. So we set about to kill time, and succeeded so well one way and another that eleven o'clock rolled around in short order.

"Goodness! I'll have to get busy in the kitchen," Emily declared. "Tom said they would be in about noon."

She disappeared into the region of pots and pans. I lit a cigar and cocked my feet upon the porch rail, and had barely made myself at ease, when I heard the unmistakable buzz of an automobile.

Now, I had come over the only road

into the Punch Bowl two days earlier. As I remembered grades and curves, it was no road for a car, no trip a man would undertake with a motor except through absolute necessity. This had no more than flashed across my mind than the machine rolled into sight, a dusty driver at the wheel, two passengers in the tonneau. There was nothing phantomlike about them. But they surprised me mightily by their presence, nevertheless, for I knew them both. My first feeling was of amazement to see them on such a pilgrimage. I might have thought them out on a hunt if I hadn't known they were the sort of men who did most of their hunting on Broadway.

I sat pretty well back in a shady corner. It wasn't my ranch. I didn't feel called upon to do the honors. In fact, I didn't think about it; I was too busy conjecturing why Fulton Berry and John T. Slade should be in the Punch Bowl at all. Fulton Berry was chief mogul in the American Photoscope—next to the company I was hooked up with, the biggest motion-picture concern in the United States. Slade was his right bower, a sort of general utility man, a versatile beggar, who could do anything from playing a lead in photo drama to wrecking a million-dollar competitor. In my own capacity as a company representative I'd bucked up against that gentleman before. And the Punch Bowl region was so utterly out of *his* natural orbit that I had a license to wonder why he was there.

Slade opened the door and clambered stiffly out as soon as the brakes set. Emily Durand came out on the porch. Slade doffed his hat with an impressive bow.

"Is this where Mr. Tierney Applegard resides, may I ask?" said he, in his very best manner.

"No. Mr. Applegard lives in that stone house on the hill," she replied.

"Ah! Thank you."

But he didn't climb back in the car and go about his business, I noticed. He stood smiling his heavy-jawed sweetest at Miss Durand. Right there, quite on impulse, I injected myself into the proceedings. Not that Emily Durand wasn't quite equal to squelching a regiment of his caliber. But I never did like that gross type of man, anyway, and I felt a hot wave of dislike for Slade's frankly sensual stare. Probably he thought he had run across a remarkable good-looking country girl. It's an obsession of the Slade type that they're personally irresistible to the unsophisticated female. I dropped my chair legs with a thump and leaned over the porch rail.

"Hello, Slade," said I. "You're a long way from the bright lights. Some fine roads for touring in this section, eh?"

He looked up at me, and I was quite sure that with recognition he grunted something profane. But his business smile remained on the job.

"Why, how-de-do, Cross," he responded affably. "That road thing supposed to be a joke? A bit off your own circuit yourself, aren't you?"

"Oh, no," I returned. "I was raised in this country, so naturally I come back here when I draw a vacation."

"Oh, I see," Slade commented. "I see."

He looked at me shrewdly and was, I think, on the point of speaking further, when Berry reached and tapped him on the shoulder. Miss Durand had vanished within. Slade cast a fleeting glance after her as he turned to Berry. They exchanged a few sentences in a discreet undertone. I had no personal acquaintance with Fulton Berry. So I was a little surprised, to say the least, when that eminent personage—eminent, that is, in the producing end of the moving-picture world—called me by name and asked me to come down. I didn't want to seem

churlish, so I went. Slade climbed into the seat beside his superior.

"Mr. Cross," Berry addressed me bluntly, "we've had our eye on you, and your record with the International indicates that you're a valuable man. The American Photoscope wants young men with ability. The International pays you five thousand a year. We'll give you seven thousand five hundred, with a three-year contract—and a bonus of five thousand cash to sign up and get into harness at once."

I suppose he meant to take my breath away, to sweep me off my feet with this offer of big money—and he pretty near succeeded. But not so that I swallowed hook, line, and sinker. Not quite. In the first place, I felt a certain loyalty to the International. In the second place, I neither liked nor trusted the Berry-Slade combination. There was a joker somewhere in that offer. I knew where I stood with the International. This impromptu holding out of a bonanza from a competing organization smelled fishy to me, and, on the impulse of the moment, I answered Mr. Fulton Berry as bluntly as he had put his proposition to me.

"What do you want?" I asked. "The executive ability I may happen to have—or something you think I know, that you want to know?"

That last was purely random. I couldn't think of any knowledge of International affairs in my possession worth a cash bonus of five thousand to the Photoscope people. If unwittingly I had such information, I felt that I owed it to my own concern. I had never found them lax in appreciation, monetary or otherwise.

Berry eyed me narrowly.

"Well," he drawled, "both. You understand, I think."

"Maybe I do," said I shortly. "But you've pushed the wrong button. I'm not selling out. If I were, I'd seek a more reliable market than the American

Photoscope. I don't know any kind of contract you fellows wouldn't break if you wanted to. You've done it before. I prefer to stay with a sure thing. A bird in the hand, you know."

Berry leaned forward, scowling, and pointed a fat forefinger pistolwise at me.

"You're a fool," said he. "You're passing up a chance to make a good rake-off. We'll beat you to it, anyway."

"Maybe you will," I returned carelessly. "But you've never put over anything on us yet. Not in a legitimate way of business. And that's the only kind the International deals in."

That was our last word on the subject, for Berry gruffly ordered the chauffeur to drive on, and they went rolling up the slope toward Applegard's stone house. I resumed my seat and cigar, and did some tall thinking. What in Sam Hill did those fellows think I knew that was worth a bribe of five thousand dollars? Queer? Exceedingly so. The Punch Bowl was proving a region of manifold surprises.

That train of thought caused me to look up, to glance over the yard questioningly. What I saw drove the Berry-Slade combination out of my mind for the time being. The cat had come back! Yes. There was my cougar switching his tail in the same old spot. Only for a few seconds, though. Then he blinked out. And he didn't reappear, although I watched eagerly until Emily called me to lunch when Tom and his men rode in. I glanced up at the stone house and saw the big car drawn up at the door and sundry figures standing about where Applegard had his chair the day I stopped there. When we came out after lunch, the machine was gone.

No visions came to disturb us that afternoon. Somehow I labored to persuade myself that it was all an illusion. And I decided to go hunt the berry

patch again. It lay southeast of Sheep Spring, so that I passed close by the stone house on my way. It was just beginning to break day, and the square stone building loomed vague and silent on my right. And I saw another funny thing that morning. Neither more nor less than the machine which had brought those two into the Bowl wheeling south toward the wagon trail, with Berry alone in the tonneau. They were not going from Applegard's, either, but from a point where the Bowl pitches up to its mountain rim. This in that gray hour between dawn and sunrise. I wondered what had become of Slade, if he had remained as Applegard's guest, and, if so, why the machine bore away at that angle so early in the morning. Then I concluded that it was really none of my business, and rode up to my hunting ground.

I had a little better luck this time, inasmuch as failing to connect with a grizzly I potted a fat buck deer with a notable spread of horn. So that I rode into the ranch, about ten thirty, quite pleased with myself.

I found a considerable to-do there. Tom's men had their private stock saddled and beds packed to hit the trail. Durand himself was hotly expostulating when I arrived.

"Say, Cross," he turned to me, "did you ever hear of such damned nonsense? These guys have seen a ghost—a whole flock of ghosts! Ghosts in broad daylight! Suffering Cæsar! They're going to jump the ranch like a couple of scared rabbits. What do you know about that?"

He was grinning derisively, and mad as a wet hen, besides. I quite understood his predicament. He was behind with his winter preparations—I had drawn on my own local experience to point that out to him. Fall was coming on. And men were hard to get, to say nothing of the time wasted in getting them. The two stood shame-

facely before him, one scraping uneasily in the dirt with his boot heel. The other addressed me.

"It's all right to talk," he growled. "We ain't the first to see queer things around here. I didn't believe what folks told me. But I sure do now. I wouldn't stay here if you'd give me the blamed ranch."

"What do you think you saw?" I inquired curiously.

He cast an uneasy glance about the yard as he replied:

"Three men sittin' on their horses right here by the corral. Plain as the nose on your face. They're havin' a row. One pulls his gun. I could see her smoke when she went off—an' not a sound. Then they weren't there. That's plenty for me."

"Did you ever hear of anything so crazy?" Durand broke in.

"Maybe not so crazy as yuh think," the half-breed retorted sullenly. "There was a feller shot here not so awful long ago. There always was somethin' queer about his Punch Bowl. The Injuns never would stay in here."

Durand went at them sarcastically about childish belief in apparitions. I held my peace although I felt like telling him to save his breath. Your comparatively illiterate citizen with a touch of native blood has a superstitious streak that lies close to the surface. I knew those part-Siwash stock hands like a book. They're not very far from their primitive ancestors on the maternal side. What they can't understand they easily ascribe to supernatural causes, and it frightens them. These fellows had the tribal influence of implicit belief in legend of good spirits and bad. Durand hadn't seen anything, and, therefore, couldn't take any stock in what they saw. I had. I could grasp their mental shrinking. I hadn't been wholly immune from disturbing emotions myself. I knew that such sights as that vanishing cougar or the three

riders—which had once appeared to Emily—would drive half-breeds and many a white man headlong from the spot. Durand's arguments were quite useless. He came to that conclusion himself, presently.

"Hit the trail, then, confound you!" he snorted. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, doing the baby act like that. Ghosts in the middle of the day! No respectable ghost ever shows himself before midnight. Be sure you don't forget your nursing bottles."

The two men flushed all over their dark-skinned faces, but they swung silently upon their horses and rode away. Durand sneered after them.

"Well, that's about the limit," he said disgustedly. "There sure must be some jinx at work."

We hung up my deer in the smoke-house and walked over to the porch. Durand planted himself in a chair and began to smoke a cigarette—which he was not supposed to do. I didn't say anything. I didn't know where to begin. He was in a resentful, incredulous mood, anyway. So I excused myself on the plea of getting a drink, and dodged back into the kitchen. Emily was standing staring hard out a window. She had been crying.

"Oh," said I, as cheerfully as possible, "you've evidently observed the latest."

"Yes," she said. "I saw them again. So did those men, apparently. They've left, like the other two, and the Chinaman."

"Yes," I admitted. "They got scared and jumped the job. But you don't want to let that worry you. I've seen breeds quit a place because a black cat crossed the trail ahead of them. Isn't it odd your brother never sees any of these queer things?"

"Maybe *we* don't see them, either," she muttered. "Perhaps we only think we see them. But even if we could stand seeing them ourselves, I don't

know what we'll do. We can't do anything with this ranch without help."

"There must be some rational explanation for these apparently unaccountable things that we see," I remarked.

"Perhaps," she admitted. "But that doesn't make them any the less disturbing. It does frighten me when I see them. I can't help it. Goodness! What's that?"

"That," my ears told me, was the sharp thump of Durand's chair legs striking the porch floor. There followed closely his voice lifted in a single, crisp exclamation. I trotted hastily through the intervening rooms, Emily at my heels. Tom was on his feet. He looked at us with staring eyes.

"Say," he whispered, "I must be going off my head. I saw the very same thing those fellows claimed they saw—just as they described it. Look! There they are again."

VII.

He pointed. There wasn't any need. No one could have helped seeing. Myself I gazed incredulously at the mysterious trio. One rode a bright sorrel horse, one a chunky gray, the third a rangy, deep-chested black. Every detail of their rig, the angle of their hat brims, the silver conchos on bit and spur leather, printed themselves indelibly in my mind. I knew there was nothing there, yet I could see three mounted men, see the uneasy movements of their restive mounts, the abrupt gestures of the two riders who enacted that tragedy already described to me. There was the swift upflinging of the gun, the puff of smoke from its barrel, one rider sliding limp from his seat.

Then they were gone. They didn't dissolve or fade from sight with ghostly deliberation. They were there, palpitating with life and action, and then

they were not. With their passing Emily Durand pinched my arm. There was our cougar, switching his long tail.

He didn't tarry long. Tom Durand saw the beast come and go, blink into view and vanish thence, and he neither spoke nor moved a muscle. And it seemed that for his benefit there was to be a phantasmagoria of the unnatural, the incredible, the impossible—which, nevertheless, transpired before us. They followed fast, beasts and men, here and there. A gray wolf stalked across the yard. A group of men stood by the pole corral. A great antlered buck followed by two does bounded with great leaps out of nowhere and vanished likewise. A Chinaman leered at us from a distance of forty feet momentarily.

Last of all, at the very foot of the porch steps, there flashed before our wondering eyes the figure of an Indian, a primitive savage garbed only in a breechclout and a gorgeous head-dress of eagle feathers. There was a rawhide quiver of arrows slung over one shoulder. He stood with one end of a long bow resting on the ground. Slowly he lifted his left hand and swept it in an imperious gesture.

That, taking it altogether, was a little too much for Durand. He'd had no warning what to expect, and those things were enough to shake a stronger man. At any rate, with a half-articulate cry, he leaped down the steps and swung a clenched fist at the barbaric figure. Believe me, it was a jolt to see his arm apparently pass right through the feathered apparition's head. The force of the blow, checked by nothing, swung Durand clear off his balance, and he fell, striking his head against a sharp-edged stone hard by the steps. He lay there quite still, blood streaming from mouth and nose. Above him towered the bronze figure, feathers fluttering in the noon wind, arm outstretched imperiously.

I went down to him—reluctantly, I admit. I knew there was no reality, no substance in the thing, yet it seemed sinister, full of menace. I dreaded to go near, much as one who has never seen death dreads the clammy touch of a corpse. But I did go down to Tom Durand, and his sister crept after me slowly, her gray eyes wide with horror. When she pillowed her brother's head in her lap, I stood up. We were within arm's length of the Indian. I touched him. I mean to say I put out my hand and tried to touch the ruddy flesh. My fingers closed on nothing. I did not expect it to be otherwise, when I reached. The motion was involuntary.

But I made an odd discovery. I happened to step back. Immediately the warrior, eagle feathers and all, lost all form, all outline—became a vague luminosity. I moved around to face him. There he was, perfect, head-dress aflutter. So much, thought I, a little gratified that with the uncanniness of the thing I could still bring logic to bear. This aboriginal phantom lacked one dimension. And as I stepped around to confirm this deduction, he vanished altogether.

I turned my attention again to Durand. The blood flowed strongly, far more than should have resulted from mere concussion. He gave no sign of returning consciousness.

He wasn't much of a weight, only the mere husk of a man. And I picked him up, carried him in, and laid him on his bed. We bathed his head with cold water, propped him up on pillows. The cut on his head didn't amount to much. But we couldn't quite stop that deadly hemorrhage from his diseased lungs. It continued slightly, even after he regained consciousness.

"Did I dream all that stuff?" he asked huskily. "Oh, I remember now. I took a swing at the Indian and fell. I must have had a touch of d. t.'s. This

bleeding is fierce, isn't it? I feel weak as a cat."

He was a lot weaker before it ceased. But it did eventually stop, and he fell asleep.

"Has he been subject to those hemorrhages?" I asked Emily.

"Only once before that I know of," she said. "The doctor warned him against overexertion or excitement until he got stronger. I did hope so that this dry atmosphere and high altitude would help him. Oh, dear!"

She broke down utterly, which wasn't much to be wondered at. I did my best to cheer her up, and so far succeeded that presently we were busy in the kitchen, preparing a meal for ourselves and some chicken broth for Tom when he woke up.

Neither of us had any inclination to discuss the amazing phenomena we had witnessed. We had talked it over before, talked ourselves up against a blank wall. But I didn't stop thinking, little as I had upon which to base theories even of the wildest nature. I couldn't entertain a supernatural basis for those manifestations. There was no room for disembodied spirits in my philosophy of life. That was unthinkable. But—oh, well, I was simply all at sea, the evidence of my vision and the operations of my intellect at war with each other.

There was nothing further to stir me up. I kept my eye out, you may be sure. But from the time Tom Durand hurt himself and the Indian vanished there was nothing more. The ranch area lay bathed in the warm sun, somnolent, undisturbed. One might have thought some malignant power had been at work bent upon mischief, content to let matters stand when some ill had been wrought. I didn't voice any such thought. The whole thing was too incomprehensible for offhand speculation.

Tom woke up about four o'clock,

still very weak, but normally hungry. We discussed the disturbing visions casually enough while he had his broth, and we were still talking about them when Emily Durand jumped off her chair with a cry. Tom's bedroom window faced the Castle, as we had dubbed Applegard's stone house with the towers.

"Look!" she said excitedly. "Oh, look!"

I had only to lift my eyes. The air was full of sticks, timbers, flashing bits of glass. The many windowed cupola in the center of the flat roof had rent and scattered itself like a spraying fountain. The distant roar of the explosion followed close. Then smoke and flames.

"Good Lord!" said I. "Your scientific friend has blown himself up."

Tom Durand raised himself on one elbow.

"He surely has," said he. "And his house is burning, with no fire department to call out. Maybe you could do something, Cross. Run up! My horse is standing in the stable, all saddled."

I wasted no time. Durand's gray nag fairly burned the earth with his flying hoofs between the two places. But there was nothing I could do when I got there. The front door was locked. I tried to kick it in, and didn't succeed till I took a heavy stone for a battering-ram. Then a puff of hot black smoke struck me in the face. No entry there, except for a salamander. I could hear the ominous crackle of fire within. Already it was licking out the side windows. If Applegard and his Chinese servant were inside, it wasn't in my power to rescue them. I ran around the house. It was the same on all sides—heat bursting windowpanes, flames licking through, a great banner of smoke curling up from the roof. I got back on my horse and circled at a little distance.

And presently I got another surprise

in this day of surprises, for, in the edge of a clump of low brush, I rode upon a man sprawled on his stomach. I dismounted hurriedly and turned him over. His clothing was scorched and torn, hair and eyebrows badly singed, sundry, slight cuts and abrasions on both hands and face. Nevertheless, he was recognizable. It was friend John T. Slade, general utility man for the American Photoscope. And while he was not unconscious, he was dazed.

I looked at him and then at the Applegard house. It must have been a tinder box inside, for the roof had collapsed and the area within the four walls was a red-hot furnace, shooting flame forty feet in the air. I could do nothing in the face of that. So I steadied Slade to his feet, boosted him upon the horse, and led him down to the ranch.

We didn't get anything out of him till the next morning. He growled and complained about his hurts to the exclusion of all else. Without doubt the man suffered considerable pain. When, along toward evening, liberal applications of baking soda had drawn the sting from his superficial burns, he fell asleep.

But he was up, like the rest of us, with daybreak, and his first move was to head for the stone house. Tom, Emily, and myself joined him, more to view the ruin than with any hope of finding Applegard mourning over his destroyed premises—for Slade had told us that both Applegard and the Chinaman had been in the cupola when the explosion came. We might find a charred bone or two. No more.

That is practically all of them we did find; a relic or two gruesome enough to indicate that both had perished. There was nothing but a bed of hot ash littered with heat-warped bits of metal within the thick stone walls. Even the outer bed of flowers was scorched brown by the heat.

"Clean sweep," Slade remarked tersely. "Not a scrap of paper nor a bit of apparatus. A genius and his work wiped out."

"Wiped out clean enough," Tom agreed. "Poor devils."

"What was Applegard's particular bent of genius?" I asked curiously.

Slade eyed me a second.

"No object in trying to string me now, Cross," he returned.

"You take a queer tack," I retorted. "I'm not trying to string you. Why should I? I only asked a simple question."

"What are you here for?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm here on a well-earned vacation," I responded impatiently. "Is there any other personal inquiry you'd like to make?"

"And you weren't trying to make terms with Applegard?" he said, with what struck me as genuine incredulity. "Do you mean to tell me you have no idea what he had—what he was working on?"

"Cut out the mystery, Slade," I replied. "I'm here on a holiday. The man was a complete stranger to me. I know nothing of him or his affairs."

"Well, I'll be hanged," Slade grunted. "Then you must have thought Berry was setting a high value on you with his five thousand bonus. We figured you were on, and that we could use you. And, by thunder, you must have thought there was black magic at work down in your yard yesterday, eh?"

"What do you mean?" Emily Durand cried. "Those phantoms——"

"Phantoms nothing," Slade mourned. "Pictures. That's all. Just pictures. This old eccentric had worked out the biggest thing of the age. Screenless projection in natural colors. You get me? Screenless projection. We offered him a million cash for his process—and it would have been dirt cheap

at five times the price. We'd have put the ordinary motion-picture machine in the museums as a historical relic. And it's all gone up in smoke."

And there you are. Slade told us about it in detail—all he knew, which wasn't much. The American Photo-scope people had somehow learned what Applegard was working on. Berry and Slade had come to investigate. Not so much to investigate, either, as to confirm their information. Applegard had shown them enough to absolutely convince. But he wouldn't talk business, which was their primary object in coming. He didn't need financing, like so many inventors. All he wanted was to be left strictly alone until he had perfected certain details. Then he proposed to burst on the public spectacularly. He had visions, as well as being a creator of them. He had indulged in some frankness with Berry and Slade. He had turned down their offer of a million dollars because he had an ambition to dominate the motion-picture business of the world himself, single-handed.

No doubt he could have done it. He could film and project objects in natural colors and in their natural size up to a distance of six hundred yards. He showed them that he could do it. The method, of course, he didn't discuss, his apparatus he didn't exhibit. All Slade knew was that it was mainly located in the cupola on the roof.

So he stayed behind to spy. That was the sum and substance. If they couldn't buy, perhaps they could filch. It galled those two commercial brigands to see a big thing like that unavailable for their exploitation. Slade had managed to secrete himself on the roof, to spy, shortly before the explosion came. All's fair in love and war—war, in Slade's lexicon being a synonym for business. Luckily for him, he was blown clear off the roof. Applegard perished, as did his secret.

It seemed amazing, yet amazingly simple. I'd felt all along that there must be some rational explanation. Applegard was a crank on seclusion. Perhaps that was why he scared old Bill Hayes out of the Bowl, why he tried to do the same with the Durands. He may have wanted the beauty and peace of the Punch Bowl all to himself. Or perhaps it afforded him some perverted form of amusement to frighten people with his uncanny phantoms.

I can't begin to describe the sensation of relief that came to us three. And, as if to set us wholly at rest, to furnish corroboration of Slade's statement, as we circled slowly about the house, Tom himself picked up from the grass a bit of film with figures on it—blown, I suppose, clear of the apparatus or off its reel. The images were of an Indian in breechclout and feather headdress—the selfsame savage who had stood imperiously gesturing at the foot of our porch steps.

Perhaps some student of the problems of refraction and reflection will hit upon Applegard's method again. Scientific miracles are a commonplace nowadays. I could scarcely credit the explanation at the time; even with that strip of film as material evidence. I found myself wondering if those phantoms would ever cross the Durand yard again.

Of course, that was absurd. Nevertheless, I professed to be scientifically

interested in their possible return. That grew to be a standing joke among us. I kept staying on and staying on, until one day, in jest, Tom offered to sell me a half interest in the business. I took him up seriously, but I made it contingent upon—well, the upshot of the matter is that Tom Durand and I are partners in the stock business, and Emily and I are partners in the more serious business of life.

Not that we take life very seriously. Far from it. We don't have to. As I said in the beginning, you can graft a range man on a city—but there is no assurance that he will take root there, not contentedly. He likes elbowroom. He knows what it is to fill his lungs with clean air off a mountainside. He's pretty primitive under his tailor-made clothes. That's me.

So I, at least, feel that the phantom cougar did us all a good turn. We're pretty snug and independent in the Punch Bowl these days. Tom Durand will soon have as good a pair of lungs as anybody. And, in conclusion, if any doubting Thomas will take the trouble, he can get ample proof of this wild yarn's truth. There are at least four Siwash stock hands, to say nothing of old Bill Hayes and a Chinese cook, still circulating around in this country, who will swear on a stack of Bibles that the place is haunted. Screenless projection doesn't mean anything to them. They saw what they saw—and that's that.

Read O'Larkin's great novel, "The Arson Mob," complete in our next issue.



A SOUVENIR

ABOVE the desk of the owner of an exclusive shop on F Street in the national capital hangs a small piece of paper, framed. It is a check for twenty-six dollars and some cents, signed by Calvin Coolidge and uncanceled. It is highly prized by its owner, who has no intention of ever cashing it. The public is left to decide whether he cherishes it because it is a work of art or because he considers a Coolidge check a rarity.

The RIDE

By WALTER McLEOD

There Was a Car That Followed, Followed—and Wrecked a Gangster's Nerves.

THE dark-green Cadillac sedan purred through the crowded street. The evening was dark and rain streamed down the closed windows of the car so that the men inside had difficulty in seeing through them. The fur-coated man with gray fedora, who sat next to the driver, had half risen from the seat and turned around in an attempt to look out through the rear window.

"Look, Sam! Is that car still tailin' us?" He addressed one of the three men who sat in the darkness of the back seat.

"Yeh, that's the same one," the man replied after peering through for a moment. "You sure that was McCafferty, the dick, you saw, Tony?"

"Step on it, Luis." Tony rapped out the order to the driver. "Yeh, that was McCafferty, all right. I don't like the way that car keeps hangin' onto us. I got a hunch somethin's goin' to happen to-night."

On the outskirts of the town the traffic decreased and the car leaped forward like an unleashed greyhound.

"Give her all she's got, Luis," Tony ordered, and they tore along regardless of traffic signals and gesticulating cops. "Look out again, Sam. Is she still there?"

"Yeah," Sam answered.

"Then it's the bulls, sure. How in hell did they come along like that? You saw McCafferty, didn't you, 'Pug'?" He was speaking to the big man in the back seat.

"Sure, I reckernised him. He saw us, too. He's been layin' for us since you pulled that dumb act last week."

"You keep your trap closed, Pug."

Suddenly the youth, who sat in the middle of the seat, half rose to his feet. There was a note of panic in his voice.

"Where you fellers takin' me?" he cried. "This isn't the way to——"

The men on either side of him pulled him back violently into the seat.

"Keep quiet, 'Kid,'" Pug said.

Tony turned around in his seat.

"So you put the bulls after us, huh, Kid?" he demanded.

"The hell I did? What d'you take me for?" the youth retorted.

"How come they picked us up like that? Accidental? Like hell!" He turned in his seat.

"I don't know. Anyway, what's the big idea? Where you takin' me?" Kid O'Brien asked anxiously.

"That's a good one, Pug," Tony laughed.

"Yeh," said Pug curtly.

"What's the idea?" O'Brien persisted.

"Aintcha ever been ridin' before?" asked Sam. "We're goin' for a ride, see?"

A cold dread came over the Kid, a fear he had fought off many times in the past week. A month ago he could at least have met the situation without betraying much emotion. He had been schooled well. Now his thoughts were with Millie, his wife of a week, back there waiting for him.

"You ought to know, Kid," said Tony.

"You been out on these parties before, only then you wasn't the guest of honor." His voice hardened. "You rumbled the bulls. What did you tell 'em?"

"I tell you I didn't," O'Brien persisted.

"You been blabbin'. What did you tell that broad of yours?"

"Nothing at all. Jeez, you know me, Tony."

Behind them came the faint blare of a horn.

"Hear that? The bulls—an' a fast car, at that. Did that moll know where you were goin' to-night?"

"Course not. She worried me to tell her. She was kinda upset. She kept at me all evenin'. I think she sort o' figured I was comin' to see you."

"Damn right she did. That's why we got those bulls behind us. It's on account of that moll you're ridin' with us now, see?"

"What d'you want to bump me off for?" O'Brien was cooler now. He had always shown nerve. Even now it was the thought of Millie which tortured him rather than his own fate.

Nobody answered him.

They were out of the city and speeding at sixty along the almost deserted road. Away behind they could hear the distant roar of an automobile. The driver crouched over the wheel, peering through the rain ahead. Passing cars and occasional houses sped by them like blurred streaks of light.

Against his right side, grasping his wrist lightly, O'Brien could feel the bulky form of Pug Brodie, quick in action, slower of wit. "Killer," they sometimes called him. Sam Giacchino, small, lithe, implacable, held O'Brien's left arm in a tight, metallic grip. Sam was a junky. He was always doped up before he went out on a job. The Kid could tell from his steady hand that he had taken his usual shot. He shuddered slightly.

"Say, fellers." The Kid was cool, though his heart pumped painfully. "Why don't you give me a break? I haven't squealed. I came clean. I told you I'd get right out of the city. I just wanted to quit the racket account o' Millie. I'm through with it, now. I got to be. You can see that, can't you?"

Nobody answered him for several seconds. Sam peered out through the rear window, which was streaming with rain.

"What about them bulls tailin' us back there?" he asked.

"I tell you I done nothin'. How d'you know they're bulls?"

"For God's sake, Luis, can't you open her up any more?" Tony asked anxiously.

"I'm telling you the truth, fellers," O'Brien went on. "Haven't I always been a regular guy?" He addressed Tony's back. Tony did not move. "Haven't I, Pug?" He turned to search for Pug's face in the darkness.

"Yeh, you was all right, I guess."

Pug's remark brought Tony quickly around. He put his left arm over the back of the seat.

"Is that so? Well, listen, that goin' straight stuff don't go with me. I've heard it before." His eyes found Pug's. "Gettin' soft, Pug?" he sneered.

"Aw——" Pug mumbled contemptuously.

O'Brien sat back helpless. He knew the road along which they would take him. Once before he had been there with three of the men who rode with him now. There had been another with them, a squealer. He hadn't liked that part of it much.

He realized that he should have beat it a week ago, when Millie had finally induced him to quit the racket. They could have left town unnoticed and gone right away. He should have known better than to expect a hard devil like Tony Vitale to understand that he was only trying to break with them clean and on the level. He had hoped

to avoid any trouble with the gang, afterward, for Millie's sake. He had been stupid.

"That car is still hanging onto us," Sam said.

Above the purr of the motor and the steady swish of the wheels through the mud he could hear the dull roar of the surf on the beach. The other car was well behind. Only occasionally the sound of the horn came to them as gusts of wind heavy with salt spray swept along the bare road.

With a start the Kid recognized the stretch of road vaguely through the dripping windows. They had stopped about here before. He shivered.

"Gimme a cigarette," he asked.

No one replied. He knew he hadn't long now. His brain throbbed. His throat and chest ached. He thought of two blue eyes and a soft voice that meant so much to him, and he swore blasphemously under his breath.

"Okay," Tony suddenly said to the driver. The Cadillac slowed up violently with a harsh grinding of brakes. It skidded and came to a stop at the edge of the road, which was lined with low, wind-beaten bushes.

"What d'ya stop for?" said Pug.

"Get busy, you bums," Tony ordered.

As the order was given, the hands on O'Brien's wrists tightened. He was wrenched to his feet. With all his strength he tried to twist free and kicked viciously at their legs. The door was opened.

"You lousy rats!" he cried. He tried to clutch at the sides of the door. "You dirty——" He felt the hard metal of an automatic jabbed in his back. He struggled with the fury of despair. "You'll burn!" he cried.

There was a muffled crack. Something struck him in the back—once—twice, like the blows of a sledge hammer. His grip relaxed. The gun cracked again as he hurtled forward out of the car.

Tony leaned back over the seat. Aiming carefully, he raked the dark mass of the bushes which had swallowed up the body of O'Brien.

"Let's go." The door slammed to and the car shot forward as the roar of the other car sounded with increasing clearness down the road behind them.

"Step on it, Luis," Tony said in an urgent tone. "Those bulls'll be on us." He peered anxiously back through the rear window.

"Where's that flask?" Sam asked.

"Here," Tony sneered, handing back a pint flask. "Some o' you guys got the heart of a louse till you got liquor or hop in you."

"He wasn't a bad kid," Pug said slowly, as he took the flask and pulled at it.

"Good kid nothin'! He was a squealer!" Tony's voice was impatient. "How'd those bulls come on us to-night like that? Another thing: How did the Kid know we were goin' to put him on the spot?"

"He didn't know," said Pug.

"He did, only the bulls were too slow. If they'd been two minutes earlier we'd all be in stir."

"You got the bull horrors to-night. I believe the Kid was on the level."

"You do, huh?"

"What the hell's the matter with you guys?" asked Sam.

"The matter is that Pug's gettin' soft," Tony said with a sneer.

"Yeh? When d'ya find that out?" Pug's voice was hard.

The driver turned from the wheel for a second.

"What's gettin' you? Snap out of it! We gotta shake them bulls off."

"Quit arguing," Sam broke in. "We're in a jam now, without you two guys fightin'."

"You say quit it, huh?" Tony remained leaning back, his left arm over the back of the seat. "I got something to say first. I want to know how that

kid was put wise to us. How did he come to put those bulls on us?"

"What the hell's gotcha? Losing your nerve just 'cause we got bulls tailin' us?" Pug spoke impatiently.

"I tell you we been framed," Tony said. "That kid knew what was comin'. He was just unlucky the cops were slow."

"The Kid told the truth," said Pug angrily. "Gimme that flask."

"Yeh, you believe him. Well, I don't. Somebody tipped the Kid off. That's why those birds are tailin' us right now. Think they'd have a fast car like that just accidentally in that exact spot where we picked the Kid up?"

"Aw forget it," said Pug.

"What I want to know is who tipped the Kid off, see?"

"See here, Tony," Pug said deliberately, "what's on your mind? You got the horrors all right."

"Say," Sam cried, "we're losing speed."

There was a faint knock in the purring engine of the Cadillac. The speed dropped appreciably. They peered through the rear window. Down the straight stretch of road they could see plainly the lights of the pursuing car.

"We've been double-crossed!" Tony shouted. "Those bulls'll get us. If I knew who did it I'd shove this gat in his trap and——"

"For God's sake, lay off!" Pug interrupted angrily. "What's eatin' ya?"

"I know what's eatin' me, you big, dumb, chicken-hearted boob. Killer, they called you?" Tony's voice rose shrilly. "You were sorry for that kid, weren't you? How do I know it wasn't you who tipped him off?"

Pug's hand shot from the darkness of the back seat. Tony's head was dragged back as his collar was twisted about his throat. A hard muzzle drove into his back.

"You wop louse!" Pug's automatic cracked and lead tore into the body

of Tony Vitale. The Italian's left arm slithered off the back of the seat. His gray fedora toppled over his eyes as his head fell forward.

"What the hell!" The driver turned with a scared look on his face. Sam's hand caught Pug's wrist and held it. Pug wrenched himself around.

"Let go!" he said threateningly. He grabbed at Sam with his free hand.

"What ya do that for?" gasped Sam.

"No guy talks like that to me an' gets away with it," Pug shouted. "What d'ya think you're doin'? Take your dirty mitts off me!" Vainly he struggled to free his right arm.

"Are you crazy?" panted Sam.

The driver turned.

"Quit that," he cried urgently. "We'll have to jump for it in a minute."

Sam whipped his right arm free for a second. Before Pug could gain a second grip on the forearm, his hand was under his coat on his left side. Pug tried to turn him so that he could not use the gun on him.

There was a muffled crack. The gun of Sam Giacchino spat from beneath his coat, tearing through the cloth. The bullet grazed Pug's arm. There was a crash of breaking glass as the windshield shattered. The driver pitched over the wheel, a spot of blood on the back of his head.

Pug, with a fierce back-handed swing, freed his right hand and smashed the butt of his automatic into Sam's face. At that moment the Cadillac, tearing blindly along, hit the brick wall of a bridge, end-on.

There was a deafening crash as the car struck, a dull rumble as the brick wall was torn away, the thudding of the bricks falling on the bank below, and the Cadillac rose up, turned over on its side and fell thirty feet onto the rocks.

The road was lit with a blinding glare. The car which had followed so relentlessly came to a halt with a grinding of

brakes. A fur-coated man descended from the back seat and walked to the bank. Lighting a torch and cursing volubly, he clambered down toward the wrecked Cadillac. A man wearing a chauffeur's cap climbed out of the driver's seat of the Rolls-Royce and stood in the road. In a few minutes the first man reappeared.

"Four of them—all dead," he said shortly. "Damn it, this would happen just when I'm in a hell of a hurry."

"Four more, sir? Blimey, I'd call it a reg'lar massacre," the chauffeur remarked in a broad cockney accent.

"Come on, Johnson," his master said. "We've got to move. Let's get on."

They entered the Rolls, Johnson slipped the clutch in, and they shot off.

"Johnson," said the fur-coated man, as they sped along, "I can't lose any more time. It's a matter of life and death. You'll have to get out at the next town and report this business to the police. Give them one of my cards and tell them I'm on my way to a patient who is dangerously ill. Tell them I'll get in touch with them to-morrow if they want me. Then hand over to them the youngster in the back. Tell them he's shot up badly, but he'll probably pull through if they rush him into the hospital quickly. Tell them I've fixed him up temporarily. D'you understand?"

"Yes, doctor, I'll attend to that. We've 'ad an excitin' ride to-night, 'aven't we?"

Another story by Walter McLeod will appear in an early issue.

A NOTE ON PROGRESS

WELL!" as the observant old lady exclaimed, "what's the next card? Likewise, what are we coming to?"

From a girls' college in the South comes the official announcement that the institution has given up its fight against cigarette smoking among its students. So flat, final, and complete is the surrender that the college, approving a recommendation of the student council, will permit unlimited puffing of fags in tea rooms approved by the faculty, and a smoking room will be fitted up in each dormitory.

To the adherents of bygone customs and to the worshipers of "the good old days," this development will seem, as "Uncle Joe" Cannon used to say, the ultimate of the absolute.

FLYING UPSIDE DOWN

OFFICERS of the army air corps are continually getting letters from laymen asking if it is possible for an aviator to fly upside down without knowing it. Usually the inquirers explain that Mr. So-and-so has declared that he was in a plane which flew bottom up for a long time and that he did not know what was going on.

Invariably such queries are answered by the officers in letters whose general tenor is that the man who says he can fly upside down without knowing it is a picturesque, unconscionable and enormous liar. There are times in dense fog, of course, when a flyer gets so far off-keel that the ship goes out of control; but almost any man, however dumb he may be, can realize, when his weight is hanging on his safety belt instead of resting on his seat, that his head is where his feet should be.

The POPULAR CLUB

WE begin this meeting of the Club by reproducing a kick, which comes, however, from one who is obviously our friend. We must decline to follow the homicidal suggestion of Mr. C. Warren of Menindee, New South Wales, for we consider Mr. Litten a good friend and a good writer. In an early issue we are publishing a story of his, "The Muscle Racket," which will, we hope, serve to change the opinion of Mr. Warren, whose letter follows:

Can you kill that fellow F. N. Litten? It is one hundred and ten degrees in the shade here to-day, and who in hell wants to read a gruesome tale like "The Singing Mouse" in that temperature? I do not keep my POPULARS, but send them to various hospitals. Now, it might cheer up a patient if he had a yarn about that cove who went in for Christmas and afterward started East to his old home town, but this mouse yarn would make him want to die quickly. I know you like to be backed up in all letters you publish in THE POPULAR Club, but let a bush blocker tell you for once that we like something "cheerio," not gruesome. Life during the last three years' drought has been quite deadly enough without our being downed by magazines. Complimenting you on most of your yarns, from an old subscriber.

C. WARREN.

Praise and a Suggestion.

MANY thanks to Mr. John Picken, of Castor, Alberta, Canada, whose letter we print below, for his generous praise. As for the Sullivan sketch Mr. Picken speaks of, it has long been Mr. Hemmingway's intention to do it for us, and we hope that he will get around to



it before too many months roll by. Mr. Picken's letter:

Just a word of appreciation of THE POPULAR; to be a subscriber adds to the spice of existence.

I enjoyed Hemmingway's sketches of John L. Sullivan. What I would like from him now, if you can get it, is the fight in which John lost the championship.

I have been a reader since 1915, and I like it twice a month, as at present, though I don't think you should have cut down the size of it.



PROJECTILES AND BULLETS.

By Sergeant Charles E. King.

(Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.)

A POPULAR reader's hobby. Sketches must not be longer than three hundred words, and will be paid for if accepted.

AFTER the greatest war in history there were large numbers of people of this and other nations who started collecting war souvenirs. This idea was

helped along by the boys coming back. Each one was expected to bring back with him the Kaiser's crown, an Iron Cross, and one of the original Zeppelins used in raiding London. These were to go to various and sundry girls, aunts, uncles, et cetera. From this have come several branches of collecting.

There are people collecting medals, insignia, photos, and many other things. Some collect all. But mine is a very curious hobby. I collect bullets and projectiles of all kinds. The only requirement is that they must have been used in battle or have some history.

About thirty years ago I was presented with a cannon ball used at Gettysburg. It weighed about fifteen pounds. From this I have originated my present collection. It ranges from ammunition used in the Indian wars to darts used in blowguns by various Amazonian tribes. I even have the big "nine point twos" used in the World War.

At the present time I have lying be-

fore me one of my most prized possessions. It is a German machine-gun bullet, which was removed from my body by a medical officer during the war. I was most severely wounded at the Second Battle of the Marne, and had a very close escape from death.

Many of these projectiles, if able to talk, could tell wonderful stories. I sit with them and try to visualize them. Here are a German and a French bullet which collided in the air. Now, what would have happened had they not met? Would one of them have killed Marshal Foch as he made a tour of inspection? Would the other have found lodgment in some high-ranking German officer, thus making a different ending for the World War?

It is a very interesting hobby, and I wish that more people would take it up.

Every reader of **THE POPULAR MAGAZINE**, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of **THE POPULAR CLUB**.

TWO WEEKS FROM NOW

In the Second June Issue—Out May 20th

Maxims For Men—IV

JACK ASTON

The Arson Mob

SEAN O'LARKIN

A Complete Full-length Novel

Pearls Of Palos

J. ALLAN DUNN

The Colonel Who Drank Alone

MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

The Chank Shell

H. de VERE STACPOOLE

In Five Parts—Part IV

A Painting In Tangier

GEORGE E. HOLT

The Popular Club

A Chat With You

THE EDITORS

A Chat With You

MOST people who face the microphone for the first time turn pale with a species of stage fright. The thought of all those thousands—millions—of listening, critical ears, is overwhelming. It's an eerie sensation, being on the broadcasting end. Out there the world seems to loom as a great darkness, like a night view of the Grand Canyon and the heavens combined, and the darkness seems to be filled with ears and personalities. Not one personality, either; they're all different. Some may like your stuff; others may think it's rotten and twirl the dials.

* * * *

BEING on the broadcasting end, as it were, of a magazine, is not as different as you might think. Instead of a microphone you look into the grinning face of a typewriter, or down at the wiggling end of a pencil or fountain pen. The world out there beyond the windows is just as hopelessly vast, and instead of ears there are millions of eyes. And the personalities are just as numerous.

A famous actor, on being asked how he avoided stage fright, replied that he never looked at the audience as a whole, but selected one person and acted for that person's benefit. Something like being an ironworker, who never looks down at the ground for fear of getting the shakes.

* * * *

A MAGAZINE'S audience, however, like the radio audience, is unseen. You who read this may have walked past the corner down there two minutes ago; or you may be in a cabin in Alaska, surrounded by pelts. One of you, J. M., is in Nova Scotia, and G. R. is in a fort

far down South. Still another of you, G. S., sits in a club in Vancouver, British Columbia, while F. P. does construction work in Oklahoma City.

So you see—you are one man, and you are at the same time thousands of men. You may have picked **THE POPULAR** casually from a news stand, or you may have walked three days to the post office, a pack on your back, to receive it with the rest of your mail. You may be sitting in a comfortable morris chair with your feet up before you, a stogy in your teeth and this magazine propped on your knees; on the other hand you may be snatching a moment between watches on a ship rounding the Horn in a lashing gale.

* * * *

THAT is why variety, wide variety, is always our keynote. We want you, wherever and whoever you are, to be able to pick up any issue of **THE POPULAR** and find something in it to suit your temperament, tastes and mood. We look back on the present issue as one that represents this ideal of variety. Mystery, sport, the South Seas, the American outdoors, business, the air, and the underworld—all have figured in this number, embodied in good, strong stories by skilled writers.

And as we glance over our plans for the coming number, it is with real satisfaction that we call your attention not only to the wide variety, but to the all-star features it will contain.

* * * *

NAMES to conjure with—H. de Vere Stacpoole, J. Allan Dunn, Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, Sean O'Larkin—men who are born writers of dramatic, vivid fiction; names that

mean things, that strike answering chords in one's mind. Stacpoole, whose serial novel, "The Chank Shell," is making one of the biggest hits of the year—whose stories of the South Seas have won fame in every corner of the world. J. Allan Dunn, whose name makes you think of his swaggering, smashing, many-hued tales of exotic ports, and whose "Pearls of Palos," to be featured in the coming issue, is by far one of his very best. And Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, whose magical type-writer can with equal dexterity paint Paris, Mongolia, Tibet, Shanghai or the Philippines before your very eyes. Major Nicholson has written a tale you will not quickly forget, called "The Colonel Who Drank Alone."

* * * *

LAST but not least in the least, Sean O'Larkin. Mr. O'Larkin has demonstrated his remarkable versatility time and again for you. He is evidently

one of those rare story-tellers who can tell just about any kind of story. His imagination and information seem to know no bounds. This time he has looked with uncanny repertorial instinct into the workings of arson racketeers who terrorize metropolitan builders. His full-length novel, "The Arson Mob," will lead off the Second June number. It starts at once dramatically in Central Park, at the foot of the famous Obelisk—a masterly scene contrasting the unworldly beauty of moonlight falling tranquilly across the white snow, and the crackling horror of a ruthless double murder. And almost without realizing it you find yourself plunged into the heart of a dangerous, seething caldron of criminal intrigue.

Other striking and varied features will complete a number as richly gratifying as the sight of a holiday dinner. And even if you're a couple of Eskimos sitting in one of those igloo things at the north pole, you'll enjoy it.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1930.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Vice President of the Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editors*, Richard F. Merrifield and Phillip Conroy, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.;

George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

GEORGE C. SMITH, Vice President,
Of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of April, 1930. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 12, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1932.)

POP-9A

Her Name Was In All The Headlines

Out of the secluded little village of Graniteport, Janice O'Dell stepped into the feverish activity of the city room of a metropolitan newspaper. And also stepped into the life of bustling Bill Lannigan, star reporter, who promptly fell in love with Janice.



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