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SHORT STORIES
SEP 10, 1930
#593

100,000 Strong Men CAN'T Be Wrong!

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW what muscle is worth, ask the man who has plenty. Don't ask him for even so much as one ounce of his strength, for he won't part with it, but you can find out what he *thinks* about strength and vitality. Ask any strong man what muscle has done for him. Then ask yourself what you would give to be strong. (You bet your life you'd give plenty! But you don't have to.) Think of the healthy, happy lives of these men who have tasted the success made possible to them through strength and vitality. These men know now what real, live muscle can do for them. Ask them what they think of Earle Liederman, THE MUSCLE BUILDER. Ask any one of the 100,000 strong men built by Earle Liederman what they think of THE MUSCLE BUILDER'S marvelous system.

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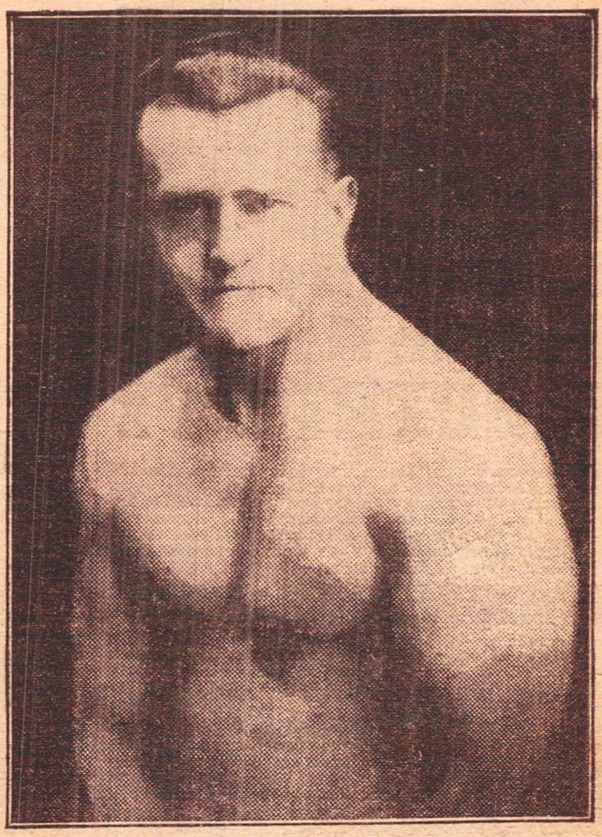
EARLE LIEDERMAN'S RECORD

Twenty years of muscle building—college training—world-wide experience in physical culture—a deep-felt enthusiasm for his life work—a sincere desire to help the poor weaklings who don't know how, and can't, enjoy life—his own splendidly proportioned and perfectly muscled body—the knowledge that his system cannot fail—all these make up Earle Liederman's record, and give him the right to *guarantee* to show results in the quickest time. That's why 100,000 strong men call him THE MUSCLE BUILDER.



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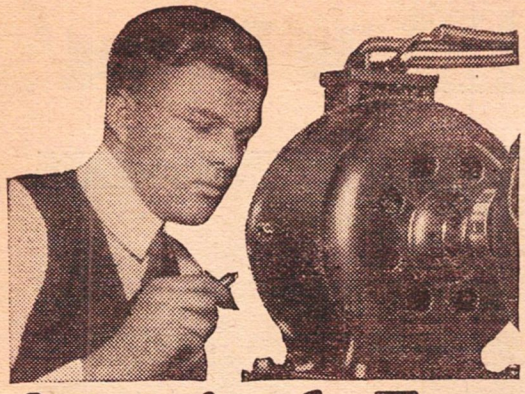

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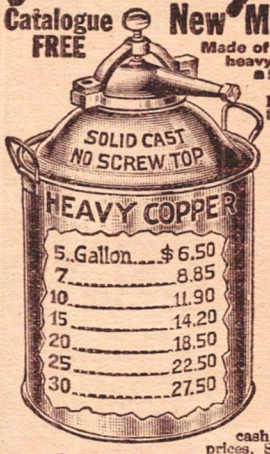

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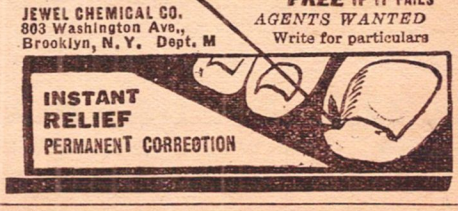

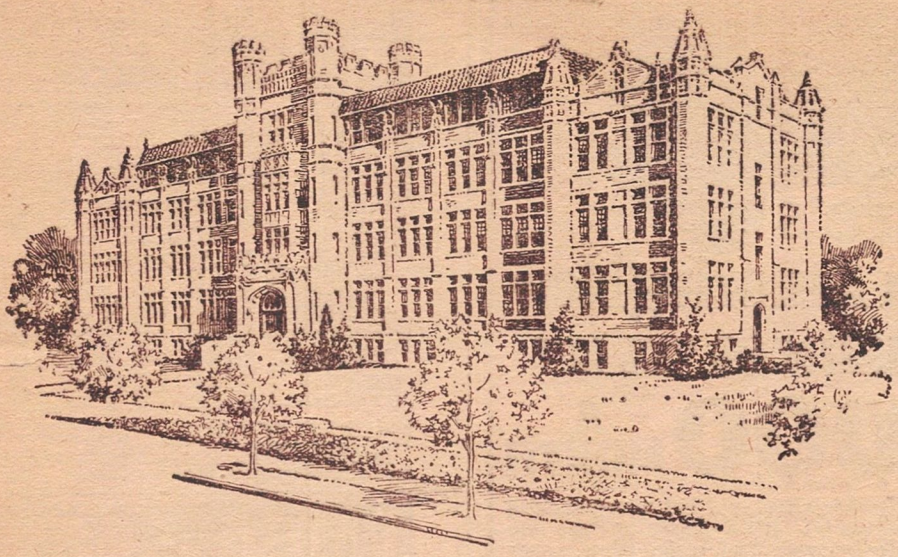

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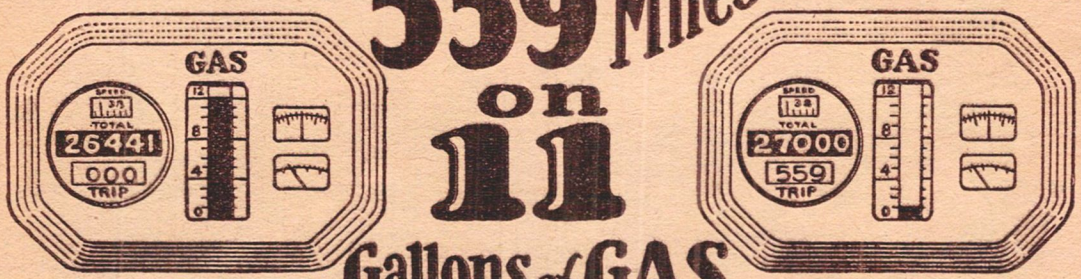

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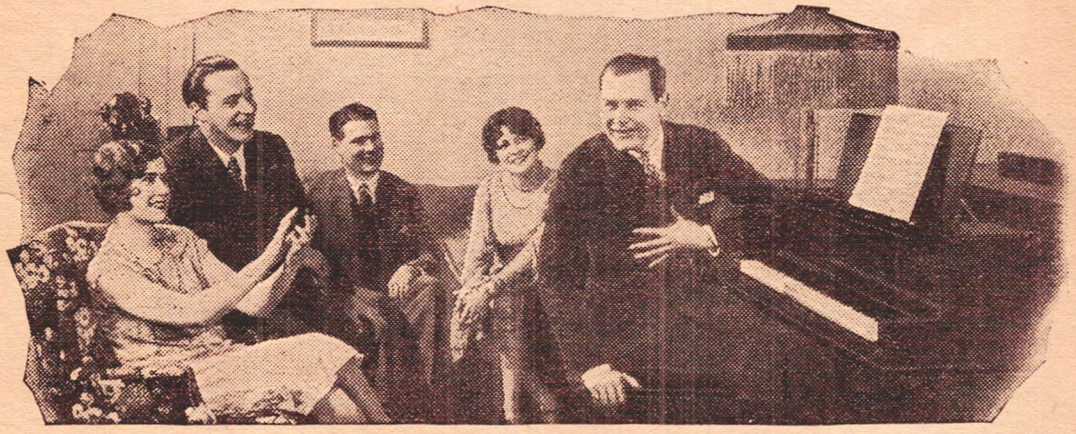
"Watch him make a fool of himself"—*I heard someone whisper*



—then I started to play!

IT was the first big party of the season and the fun was at its height. The room fairly rocked with laughter as Jim finished his side-splitting imitation of a ballet dancer.

Tom, who was giving the party, turned to me and said, "And now our young friend here will give us his well-known imitation of Paderewski."

Instantly all attention centered upon me. Feigning reluctance, I made as if to beg off, but was forthwith dragged to the piano. Admonitions of "Come on, old timer, do your stuff!"—"Don't be bashful!"—came from all sides.

They expected me to do my usual clowning—but I had a surprise up my sleeve for them. Just as I was about to begin, I heard someone whisper, "Watch him make a fool of himself—why, he can't play a note!"

I Surprised My Friends

They thought I was going to give them my one-finger rendition of chop-sticks. But instead I swung into the opening bars of "The Road to Mandalay"—that rollicking soldier song of Kipling. You should have seen the look of amazement that spread over their faces. This was not the clowning they had expected! Then Tom began to sing. One by one they joined in, until soon they were all crowding around the piano singing away at the top of their lungs.

It was almost an hour before they let me get up from the piano. Then a deluge of questions: "How in the world did you ever do it?"—"Where did you study?"—"When did you learn to play?"—"Who was your teacher?"—"How long have you studied?"

"One at a time, please," I begged. "I'll tell you all about it. To begin with, I didn't have any teacher."

"What! Say, you don't expect us to believe that, do you?"

"Sure thing. But I don't blame you for not believing it. I wouldn't have myself. As you know, I've never been able to play. But I always liked music and many a time when I was pepping up a party with my clowning I would have given anything in the world to be able to sit down at the piano and really play.

"But it never occurred to me to take lessons. I thought I was too old—and besides, I couldn't see my way clear towards paying an expensive teacher—to say nothing of the long hours I'd have to put in practicing.

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"I made up my mind to take the course. And believe me that was the luckiest decision of my life! Why, almost before I knew it, I was playing simple tunes! And I studied just whenever I pleased a few minutes a day in my spare time. Now I can play anything I like—ballads, classical numbers, jazz. Listen to this!"

With that I snapped right into a tantalizing jazz number. All evening I was the center of a laughing, singing, hilarious group. And it's been that way at every party I've attended since. * * * *

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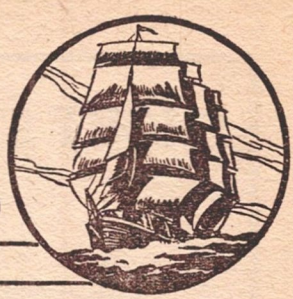

September 10, 1930

R. de S. HORN
Editor

FREDERICK CLAYTON
Associate Editor

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Cover——Gerard C. Delano

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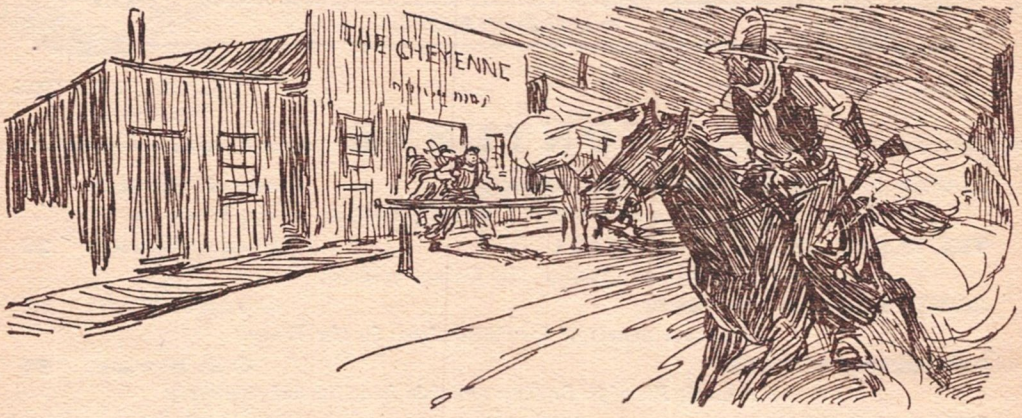
SHORT STORIES *Issue of* SHORT STORIES

September 25th



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"Murder On The Lot" **by** **THOMSON BURTIS**

a thrilling mystery of circus life

Coming Soon

TWICE A MONTH **Short Stories** SEPTEMBER 10th 1930

Whale Charring

PERHAPS you noticed not long ago, tucked away among the more obscure and less important news items in the daily newspapers, a short bit from Anacortes, Washington. When we read it, the single paragraph in which it was contained brought back the savor of old whaling days, of the fine old ships that used to glide out of New Bedford, of Moby Dick and all the rest of it. We're too young to have known any of it for ourselves, of course, but nevertheless the stories we used to read about those vanished days and the ships that sailed when sailing was *sailing* printed the picture of it indelibly upon our imagination when we were still pretty small.

As to what brought it back to mind again, the news account we've referred to reported in a brief matter-of-fact way what is distinctly a modern whaling story. A certain West Coast steamship company had had to pay a whaling company a large sum of money to cover the damage to thirty whales moored at an Alaskan whaling station, when the carcasses had been blackened by oil from leaky tanks in the steamship company's vessels. The men of the whaling station had been set to work scrubbing the washboard bellies and the broad backs of the whales, scrubbing them by hand, and with the aid of plenty of soap powder. So much soap powder was used, in fact, that the station's stock of it was completely exhausted. And so the steamship company paid for the soap powder and for the labor involved in the scrubbing. The sum agreed upon for the scrubbing, minus the cost of soap powder, amounted to about $225, or a little over $22 an hour. Fair restitution, in our eyes! Though no doubt such labor comes high, for we imagine it wouldn't be easy to scrub whales, what with the barnacle-scraping and so on that such work undoubtedly entails.

Now, how many men worked on this charring job isn't revealed, but from the fact that it took only twenty minutes to scrub a whale completely, from nose to tail and stem to stern, we'd hazzard a guess that not more than ten men worked on the job. Which would mean that each man got $2.25 an hour.

Now that's a pretty good wage; about $18 a day. These many months we've been racking our brains to find a solution for the unemployment situation, and at last we think we've hit upon it. Scrubbing whales, to us, looks like the Coming Profession.

The few details that remain to be settled are to find a whaling company with whales that are dirty enough to need scrubbing, and enough whales to keep the system moving. Spending only twenty minutes to a whale would make the whale turnover pretty big. But the idea seems limitless. The excessive demand for whales would give rise to whale breeders or whale farms, and that would furnish employment for still more men.——And so on.

The Editor.



BLOOD *on the* YUKON TRAIL

PART I

of a Smashing Novel of Corporal Downey and the Dangerous Northwest Country

CHAPTER I

AN INDIAN BRINGS SOME NEWS

BRAD TREVIS stood in the doorway of the little tent and stared out into the downpour of cold rain that obscured the far bank of the mighty Yukon.

Behind him, in the tent, "Duke" Carnation lolled on his blankets, his shoulders propped against his duffle bag, hands clasped behind his head. Once his eyes strayed stealthily from the broad back outlined against the gray smother of rain to the two rifles that leaned side by side against another duffle bag within easy reach of his hand, and his hard, smooth shaven lips tightened ominously. One swift shot, he reflected, and Madge Trevis Carnation would become the sole heir to the Trevis fortune; and, by virtue of reciprocal wills, he himself would become sole owner of the two claims on Dry Gulch which he and Brad Trevis had filed the summer before—two claims that already stood out preëminent in a district of rich claims.

The rumble and grind of moving ice, blended with the monotonous tattoo of rain on wet canvas, was punctuated at intervals by a mighty roar as a huge ice cake reared high against the barrier of a rapidly forming jam and toppled back to crash into fragments among other grinding cakes. Just one swift shot, persisted Duke Carnation's brain—and the body of a man would be crushed into an unrecognizable mass, obliterated among those grinding ice cakes.



His fingers unclasped, and a hand slipped stealthily toward the two rifles when Brad Trevis turned from the doorway. "She's a big jam—and piling up fast," said Trevis. "The water's begun to rise, and if she don't let go pretty quick we're going to have to hunt higher ground."

Carnation summoned a grin. "Damned dirty job moving camp in this," he replied.

"Yes," agreed Trevis, "but a whole lot better than getting mixed up in that—listen to that one!"

"I'm getting damned well fed up with

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Celebrated for his stories of Corporal Downey of the Canadian Mounted Police



Brutal Murder and Stolen Nuggets Bring Corporal Downey from the Roaring Gold Camp of Dawson to the Treacherous Quiet of the Big Woods

this," grumbled the other. "This is the fourth day we've hung around here waiting for the ice to run out. And now she's jammed, and God knows when she'll let go."

"It can't hold long with the water piling up behind it like it is," said Trevis.

"What makes me sore is that we're only one good day's run from Dawson," continued Carnation, "and we've got to hole up here like a couple of damned Siwashes!"

"It's the luck of the game," grinned Trevis.

"Yes, but if you'd have listened to me and started a week ago, we'd have got to Dawson ahead of the break-up."

"How the devil did I know the break-up was going to come two weeks too early this year?" replied Trevis, with a touch of irritation in his voice. He had once more stepped to the doorway and was regarding the rapidly rising water. "Six feet more, and we go uphill. The rain's letting up a little. I can see the other side, now." He paused abruptly and stared downriver where a solitary figure was making its way laboriously over ridges of shore ice, and through deep drifts of rain sodden snow. "Speaking of Siwashes," he announced, "here comes one. And, by the looks of him, he sure has been somewhere."

Once again, a stealthy hand paused midway to the rifles, and a frown of annoyance darkened the face of Duke Carnation. "If he thinks he's going to hang around and live off us, he's got another guess coming," he growled. "We haven't got any too much grub as it is—and we may be here for a week yet."

"We've got plenty," replied Trevis shortly as he turned toward the little stove. "The Siwash eats when and as we do."

AS SMOKE curled from the stovepipe a dejected and besodden figure appeared in the doorway. Cold rainwater trickled in tiny streams from the ends of his sleeves. The soggy coat, sagging open at the throat, revealed the saturated cotton shirt clinging tightly to the man's skin.

Water oozed at every movement from cracks in his worn mukluks. He swayed slightly and reached a hand toward the tent pole for support.

"Klahowya six!" greeted Trevis, in the jargon. *"Kahta mika?"* (What ails you?)

"Klahowyam!" returned the man. "Spik Eengliss, me."

"Fine," said Trevis, turning from the stove to his duffle bag. "Get those wet rags off and crawl into these. They'll fit you pretty liberally, but they're warm." Rising, he tossed the man a suit of heavy underwear, a flannel shirt, a pair of trousers, and a pair of heavy woolen socks. Gratitude flashed from the dark eyes, and as the Indian proceeded to divest himself of his sodden garments Trevis turned to the stove where already the savory odor of a moose meat stew was issuing from the pot.

"Friend of yours?" drawled Carnation who still lolled on his blankets regarding the proceeding with a sneering grin.

"He is from now on," answered Trevis, without turning his head. He tossed the Indian a pair of rubber boots. "Come on, Siwash. Pull those on, and by the time you throw a bowl of this hot stew into you you'll feel better."

When Trevis ladled out a second bowl of stew Carnation frowned. "We go on short rations so any damned Siwash that happens along can fill his belly on our good meat, eh? What's the big idea?"

"Good God, Duke! Can't you see the poor devil's weak from hunger? From now on it will be share and share alike."

"Like hell it will! If you're fool enough to split your grub with a Siwash when there's no more in sight, I'm not. You can do as you damned please; but I'll keep on eating as I've been eating."

Trevis grinned, but there was that in the eyes with which he regarded his brother-in-law that belied any hint of mirth. "You may think you will—but you won't," he said, in a low, even voice. "We're about of a size, Duke. But, I'm a better man than you are. I showed you that once; and I can do it again. If you don't believe it, just shuck your coat and step outside."

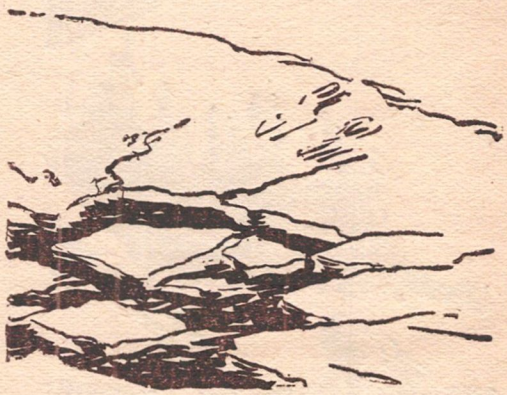
Ignoring the challenge, the other relapsed into sullen silence, and Trevis turned to the Indian who sat the empty bowl on the ground and drew the back of his hand across greasy lips.

"Where you come from?" Trevis asked.

The Indian pointed through the doorway. "Come 'cross de riv'——"

"Across the river!" interrupted Trevis. "No man could cross that river!"

The Indian nodded solemnly; "Can do.



Me—I'm come 'cross on de ice 'bout mile down. De ice all broke to hell. All pile up. She mak' de beeg noise. 'Bout 'tousan' time I'm t'ink she go out, an' me, I'm git smash all to hell een de riv'."

"What in the devil did you cross for?"

"Me, I'm got to come. Two Boston mans snowblin'. Mebbe-so dey die, no git help. Me, I'm no can get downriv' on odder side. Mebbe-so I can git down on dis side—so I'm come 'cross. But, no can do on dis side, sam' lak' de odder. So I'm no can git to Dawson. I turn roun' upriv'. Mebbe-so mak' Sandy Ferguson—'bout twent' mile. But lose my pack in de ice. Git too wet—too col'—too 'ongry. Mebbe-so I no git to Sandy Ferguson."

"I'll say you wouldn't!" exclaimed Trevis. "There weren't but damned few miles left in you, old-timer. Who are these white men? And where are they?"

"Dey are Cam'lo Beel, an' Moosehide Sharley."

"Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie!" cried Trevis, "Hell, man, they're both old-timers! It's funny they'd go snowblind."

The Indian regarded Trevis with a smile of deep wisdom; *"Chechako* go snowblin'—git los'—starve, 'cause she don' know nuttin'. She too mooch 'fraid de contry. *Skookum tilakum* go snowblin'—git los'—starve, 'cause she know too much. She ain' 'nough 'fraid de contry!"

"I guess you're right," agreed Trevis. "But, where are these men?"

" 'Bout two mile up de beeg riv' comes een wan crick. Boston mans call it Raven Crick—som'tam Beeg Crick. Siwash call *Kahkah Chuck*. 'Bout fi' seex mile up de crick Boston mans got tent."

"Why didn't you bring them down to the big river?"

"No kin do—too mooch snowblin'—too mooch no good snow for dog——"

"How they fixed for grub?"

"Got grub las' 'bout two week. But got to git doctor man. Dem too much seek wit snowblin'."

"I can doctor snowblindness, all right," said Trevis, who was already busy sorting his duffle and making up a light pack. "Come on, Duke," he called. "We've got to hustle to get across before that jam lets go!"

THE other made no move, but lay back regarding Trevis with a half-sneering smile: "Personally," he said, "I haven't lost anything on the other side of the river."

"What!" cried Trevis, staring at the other aghast. "You mean you'd let two men—any two men—but especially men like Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie suffer—die, maybe, in a tent—without turning over your hand to help them?"

"No man in his right mind would try to cross the river on that jam. It's apt to let go any minute, and if it did a man wouldn't last ten seconds. Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie have made their bed. Let 'em lie in it. This one's good enough for me. To hell with 'em!"

For a long moment Brad Trevis stood glaring down at the man through eyes narrowed to slits. When he spoke his voice cut like steel. "You're a yellow pup!" he said. "I'm telling it to you, now. I told it to Madge before she married you."

The man's answer was a sneering laugh. Trevis stepped through the doorway, turning for a moment to speak to the Indian. "How long did it take you to cross the river?"

"T'ree—four—mebbe-so fi' hour. I lose track of de time—I ain' know." He followed Trevis from the tent. "I'm come 'long," he announced.

"No, you don't! You're too weak. What's your name?"

"Moses Fox."

"You're a man, Moses," said Trevis, offering his hand. Then, purposely raising his voice: "Go back in the tent and tell that yellow dog I said that if he don't treat you right, the next time I see him he'll wish to God he had. So long."

CHAPTER II

THE JAM LETS GO

DULL red mounted to the face of Duke Carnation as he lay back on his blankets and listened to the words of biting scorn that reached him from the outside. The Indian reëntered the tent and without a word, squatted close beside the little stove. Carnation stared at him sullenly, his mind on Brad Trevis. Yellow dog, eh? Damn him! I'll show him who's a yellow dog. I ought to have knocked him off long ago. I've had plenty of chances—but—the police are no fools. He's always had it in for me. Did his damnedest to keep Madge from marrying me. Guess I'm yellow, at that. If I'd had any guts, both the claims would be mine right now. And then, to hell with Brad Trevis, and Madge, and the old man, too! There's enough in those claims for me, without waiting around for the old man to kick the bucket. Stoel offered us a hundred thousand apiece for 'em last fall—and they're worth twice that. There's only one woman in the world for me—Adele Santois! Her dancing sets a man afire! She'd leave "Frenchy" LaBelle for me in a minute—if I could show her the dust!

The Indian rose, picked up an ax, and disappeared through the doorway. A moment later Carnation heard the sound of chopping on a dead spruce. The rain beat dismally upon the canvas, and the wind was rapidly rising. The Indian returned with an armful of fire-wood and proceeded to stoke the stove. "De riv' she come up," he announced. "Pret' queek, bes' we git mor' up de hill."

Carnation answered nothing, his thoughts on Adele Santois, the dancing girl, who was the Yukon's latest darling. "If it hadn't

been for this damned ice jam I'd have been in Dawson three days ago," he was thinking. "And, now Brad will tell it around that I was afraid to cross the river to help out those two men. Or, if he don't, the Siwash will. And, in Dawson, they'll believe it. Hell! Even Adele might believe——" The thought was cut short by a sound—a sound that brought the Indian to his feet and out through the door of the tent with Carnation close at his heels. It was not the sound of the up-ending, crashing ice cakes; but a mighty, all pervading sound—the sound of a thousand cannon, far off, booming in unison. Both stared spellbound at the sight of the vast sea of high flung ice pinnacles in motion.

The jam had let go!

OTHER sounds filled the air; the rasping grind of mighty ice masses, the explosion of riven crags, the crashing of shattered cakes, and the thin tinkle of tiny fragments as the vast ice field moved majestically forward, its surface changing with kaleidoscopic rapidity amid the ever increasing roar that seemed the very symphony of abysmal chaos.

The Indian was the first to speak. "By hell! Dat man! She good man—but she smash all to hell now!"

"What's that?" cried Carnation, seizing him roughly by the shoulder and spinning him around. "You mean—Trevis hasn't had time to get across!"

The Indian shook his head: "She no can git mebbe-so half-way."

"Are you sure?"

Noting the evident eagerness of the man's words, the Indian nodded, and removing his battered cap, crossed himself devoutly. "She damn good man. She dead now."



Presently he pointed to the rapidly receding water which had risen to within two or three feet of the camp level. "De water git too much beeg. De win' she too much push. De ice she gone to hell."

"How long before the river will be safe for a canoe?" asked Carnation.

The Indian scanned the upper reach of the ice choked river. "Wan day—mebbe-so two day," he opined. "You got canoe?"

"Sure." The man pointed toward a pile of bark and brush in a nearby thicket. "My partner and I cached it there last fall. We've got a couple of claims back in the hills, and it's here we left the river. We're heading for Dawson, and we figured that if the river was open we'd use the canoe, and if it wasn't we'd go down on the ice—and we got here to find neither ice nor water that we could use."

The Indian nodded. "Mebbe-so got to patch de canoe. All tam' got to patch canoe een de spreeng. Git dry out."

"Hell!" cried Carnation irritably. "I haven't got anything to patch it with. Probably couldn't do a decent job, if I did."

The Indian smiled and pointed to the spruce forest. "Plent' gum. Me fix um."

"Get busy, then, and earn your grub. Maybe it wasn't such a bad thing you came along, after all."

While the Indian busied himself with the canoe, Carnation chopped more fire-wood and retired into the tent where for hours he lay on his blankets, thinking. When the shadows lengthened in the valley the Indian stepped into the tent and eagerly devoured the bowl of stew Carnation begrudgingly offered him. When he had finished the white man indicated Trevis's bed with a nod. "You can crawl into his blankets," he said. "He won't be needing them. What makes you so damned sure he didn't get to the other side?"

The Indian regarded him stolidly. "Me, I'm come 'cross. Took me t'ree four hour—mebbe-so more."

"Well, if it took you that long, there isn't a chance in the world that he made it. He hadn't been gone more than an hour and a half, or two hours, at the most."

"She no mak'. She dead. I'm t'ink dat bes' t'ing we tak' canoe tomor'—mebbe-so nex' day—an' go 'cross de riv' an' breeng out de two mans w'at snowblin'."

"The hell you do!" exclaimed Carnation sarcastically. "Didn't I tell you I was on my way to Dawson?"

"We no can leave two good mans snow-

blin'," persisted the Indian. "Mebbe-so dem die."

"That's their lookout—not mine. I've got business in Dawson."

"Can go Dawson w'en we git de mans. Dawson no goin' ron' 'way."

AN ANGRY retort leaped to Carnation's lips. With an effort he restrained it, and for the space of seconds sat regarding the Indian in silence, while his brain worked rapidly. Beyond a doubt Brad Trevis was dead, and only this Indian knew that he, Duke Carnation, had refused to cross the Yukon on a precarious ice jam. But this Indian would pass the word in Dawson that after the jam had broken he had also refused to make the comparatively easy journey across the river in a canoe. And well he knew what the verdict of Dawson would be. In fancy he could see the withering scorn flashing in the dark eyes of Adele Santois.

Adele Santois! If it were not for Adele he would cross the river and take the two snowblind men into Dawson. But, with Brad Trevis out of the way, the claims were his—and therefore Adele would be his—and the days of delay in finding the men and bringing them in would be for him intolerable days with Adele in the cabin of Frenchy LaBelle.

When he spoke it was to address the Indian with a grin. "I guess you're right, Siwash. We couldn't leave those poor devils up there to starve. Tomorrow we'll cross the river and hunt 'em up."

The drizzling rain, interspersed with violent showers, continued throughout the night and most of the following day which was spent in patching the canoe that was badly cracked in places. Toward evening the wind shifted and it turned cold. The run of floating ice thinned until broad expanses of the river showed free of cakes.

In the morning, while the Indian busied himself with the fire-wood, Carnation stepped to the river for water. For some moments he stood staring down at the footprints in the frozen slush that surfaced a huge ice cake that was anchored to the shore by the new ice of the night's freezing—footprints left by Brad Trevis when he had gone to the river for water. Dipping his pail, the man returned to the tent, a frown of deep concentration upon his not unhandsome face.

Breakfast over, he helped the Indian to carry the canoe to the outer edge of the big cake where no new ice had formed. Returning, they rolled their beds, and while he busied himself with the stovepipe, the Indian picked up a bedroll and stepped to the river. When the man was squarely in the center of the ice cake, Carnation fired.

Without a sound, the Indian stumbled a few steps and pitched forward onto his face, raised himself onto his hands and knees, and settled sidewise onto the ice, his arms and legs twitching feebly. Then he lay very still.

For long moments Duke Carnation stood tense, as though paralyzed by a mortal terror, staring wide eyed at the thing that lay huddled grotesquely upon the ice. It seemed to his overwrought nerves that the roar of that rifle shot must have carried to Dawson. In sudden panic his eyes darted upshore, downshore, and out over the broad expanse of river where floating ice cakes flashed white in the first slanting rays of the rising sun.

With an effort he got hold of himself and turned feverishly to the task of breaking camp. "I'm all right, now. I'm all right, now," he kept repeating aloud as his trembling hands fumbled at their work. "If I stick to my story, it'll be better if they do find his body on the ice cake. But—it must be *below* the jam! Then, if Brad should happen to escape with his life, it will be just too damned bad for him."

An hour later, Carnation slipped the canoe into the water and loaded it. With the ax he chopped the inch of new ice that bound the cake to the shore and by dint of mighty effort with a pole succeeded in working the cake out into the current. When it floated free, he laid Trevis's rifle —the rifle that had killed the Indian—on the ice near the body and, casting loose from the cake, bent his back to the paddle.

CHAPTER III

CORPORAL DOWNEY INVESTIGATES

CORPORAL DOWNEY, youngest noncom of the division, was on desk at headquarters in Dawson when a man

stepped across the floor and paused before him. He was a large man, and the young officer noted that he was evidently ill at ease. He introduced himself abruptly.



"Carnation's my name. Duke Carnation. I'm a partner of Brad Trevis. I'm his brother-in-law."

He paused, and Corporal Downey nodded, his eyes focused with disconcerting directness upon the other's face.

"I know Brad Trevis," he said. "An' it seems to me I've heard of you. Is there something we can do for you?"

"Well—maybe—and maybe not. I just wanted to report that Brad Trevis has disappeared."

"Yeah?" Downey made a note on a pad of paper. "Know anything about the circumstances?"

"Sure I do—up to a certain point. Brad and I have been working our claims on a creek back from the river——"

"What crick?"

"It isn't named. We figured on calling it Trevis Creek. It's a day's travel straight back from the mouth of a little creek that runs into the river about forty miles above here, on the east bank. We got low on supplies and started for Dawson. When we hit the Yukon a few days ago, we found that the break-up had come and the river was running so full of ice that we didn't dare to launch the canoe. We camped, and a big jam formed below us. We were low on meat, so after we'd waited a couple of days we decided to do a little hunting.

"While we were back in the hills someone came along and stole an outfit of Brad's clothing—rubber boots, underwear, shirt, pants and socks. He evidently hadn't been gone long when we got back to the tent. Brad was furious. Grabbing up his rifle, he took out after the fellow whose tracks headed downriver along the edge of the jam. That's the last I saw of him. I waited in the tent, expecting him to return any minute. Suddenly there was a hell of a roar, and I ran out to find that the jam had let go and the ice was moving. I tried to follow Brad's trail, but the rain had washed it out, except in places here and there where he'd stepped in deep slush. I gave it up and went back to the tent.

"Next day I hunted some more, but could find no trace of him, so early this morning I broke camp, and, as the river was nearly free of ice, I came here. I'm afraid poor Brad followed the thief out onto the jam and it let go before he could possibly have reached the opposite shore. He certainly didn't turn back, or he would have come to camp."

"Most likely," agreed Downey. "That was a big jam all right. We watched her go by here. If anyone was caught out on it he wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance. There wouldn't even be any remains to speak of, with those big cakes millin' an' grindin' around. There don't seem to be much we can do. If I hear anything, I'll let you know. Where do you stay when you're in town?"

"I live with my wife in a cabin down near the sawmill. Not a very prepossessing home, but the only thing we have been able to get."

DOWNEY smiled. "Houses are scarce, an' they're goin' to be a heap scarcer. A man better hang onto what he's got. Any roof with four walls in under it would look prepossessin' as hell to lots of folks, right now."

"I guess that's right. You can get in touch with me there if anything turns up. By the way, Colonel——"

"Corporal," corrected Downey.

"Well, Corporal, then—Brad and I have a written agreement to the effect that, in the event of the death of either of us, both claims revert to the other. Where will I make application for the proper transfer?"

"Well," considered Downey, "his property would have to go through the hands of the public administrator, an' there ain't one be'n appointed for this district, yet. The police are handlin' about everythin'—from carryin' the mail to the care of sick babies. You can file your agreement with the inspector tomorrow. But, I wouldn't hardly look for quick action on it. We're

awful busy, an' besides you ain't got proof of death."

"Proof of death!" cried Carnation. "Didn't you yourself just say that with those ice cakes milling and grinding around the way they did, there wouldn't be anything left of a man?"

"That's just what I was thinkin'. There wouldn't be any, what you might say, corpus delicti."

The other started. "Corpus delicti!" he exclaimed sharply. "That's a term used in cases of murder, isn't it?"

"Yump!" agreed Downey. "Maybe there's another word for it where it ain't murder, but it amounts to the same thing. Just believin' that a man was out on that jam when she let go, ain't provin' he was dead, by quite a bit. Better talk to the inspector in the mornin'. He knows more about these things than I do."

When the man had gone, Corporal Downey sat scowling at his desk.

"Somethin' smells bad," he muttered. "If that citizen didn't actually kill Brad Trevis, he knows a whole heap more than he told. His story runs a little bit too glib. Guess I'll ask the old man to let me nose around a bit, upriver."

TWO days later Corporal Downey squatted on a huge ice cake that was revolving slowly in a shore eddy and pondered deeply as his gaze strayed from the footprints in the frozen slush to the frozen body of an Indian, and the rifle that lay nearby. Meticulously, he calipered the rubber boots worn by the dead man and compared their measurement with the frozen footprints.

"The man that made those tracks wore mukluks," Corporal Downey commented to himself. "They might be Trevis's tracks, an' they might be Trevis's boots on the Injun—an' his clothes, too. It's a cinch they ain't his own. They're big enough for two of him. Carnation's a big man, too. They might be his clothes—an' his tracks in the slush. But, I'm bettin' they're Trevis's—just like Carnation said. He's pretty smart—leavin' the Injun dressed in Trevis's clothes where he'd be apt to be found. I'll bet that'll turn out to be Trevis's rifle, too. Yump—pretty damn smart.

"There's a few things he overlooked, though," reflected Corporal Downey. "Those tracks were made before the cold snap came on—an' the Injun wasn't killed till after. He never even dented the surface when he fell, an' he ain't froze in. He's layin' plumb on top of the frozen slush. It was cold—freezin'—when he was shot—'cause that blood from the back of his head froze pretty fast, an' the blood on the ice never mixed with any water—an' the foot-tracks are full of frozen rainwater. The rifle was laid on hard ice, too. It's bedded a little, where the sun hit the lock an' the barrel, but the stock ain't bedded in. Then, about this chunk of ice—it wasn't here when the jam went out—an' it wasn't part of the jam—or it wouldn't be here now. Therefore, it must have be'n above the jam.

"Carnation said they were camped above the jam, an' that Trevis followed the thief downriver along the edge of the jam." Corporal Downey scratched his head reflectively. "If Trevis had killed this Injun, Carnation would have stumbled onto him when he was huntin' for Trevis. An', believe me, if he had, he would have reported it! He wouldn't overlook a bet like that—to let the law clear the title to those claims for him. That's a couple of things he overlooked. Then there's the fact that Brad Trevis would shoot no one—white, black, red, or yaller—from behind.

"Carnation prob'ly knocked Trevis off," Corporal Downey concluded, to himself. "An' then shot the Injun, or visy-versy, an' drug Trevis out on the jam, an' left the Injun where someone would find him to make his story jibe. I know damn well that Brad Trevis never shot the Injun—an' I know damn well that Duke Carnation did. But, I can't prove it—and if he sticks to his story, the chances are, I never can. Guess I'll just shove on up to where they camped an' have a look-see."

Removing the body of the Indian and the rifle to the shore, Downey pushed on upstream and a few hours later he stood at the deserted camp site. The sudden cold snap had checked all small runs and rivulets and reduced the volume of water that poured into the mighty Yukon from all her confluents, with the result that the big river itself was several inches lower than it had

been even after the jam had let go.

Young Downey smiled grimly as he glanced at the rim of new ice, well above the water line, that recorded plainly the ax marks that had severed the huge chunk from the shore.



An hour's search revealed nothing of importance save the Indian's discarded garments that lay in a frozen heap, and the little fire and old tin can the Indian had used in preparing the gum for the canoe. "So, the Injun camped with 'em here long enough to patch up their canoe for 'em. Funny, now, ain't it, that Carnation plumb forgot to mention the Injun? Trevis prob'ly give him the clothes for the canoe job. By the looks of the ones he threw away he was wet clean through before he changed. It's plain enough to me what come off here, but if Carnation sticks to his story, I can't prove a damn thing. He's smart, all right—so damn smart that, if Brad Trevis was to show up right now, I'd have to arrest him for murder. Of course, when it come to the trial, if he was there to testify, it wouldn't take a sensible jury long to figure who was tellin' the truth. But, Brad Trevis ain't here—an' by the looks of things, he won't be!"

Chapter IV

SNOWBLIND

WHEN Brad Trevis had left camp on his mission of rescue to the two snowblind men he had hurried downriver and struck out onto the jam at the point where the Indian had left it. For a quarter of an hour he followed the back trail, climbing over upended cakes, crawling on hands and knees beneath precariously suspended fragments when the slightest movement of the jam would have buried him beneath a hundred tons of ice, edging in between cakes, climbing around others, slipping into deep crevices to squirm his way out along the edges of giant fragments, chipping toe steps in slanting surfaces—while all about him the ice groaned and thundered as displaced masses crashed into new positions.

Then, from a high pinnacle, he saw a smoother trail toward the upper edge of the jam. Where the Indian had blundered straight ahead, surmounting the obstacles as they came, Trevis used his brains. He swerved from the Indian's trail and, after ten minutes of herculean effort, found himself on a narrow strip of comparatively easy going, where what had evidently been an enormous floating pan had struck the jam en masse and, instead of rearing high and doubling backward as the smaller cakes had done, had slid up and broken away, leaving a considerable portion of its edge for the most part intact and nearly level.

Closer, now, to the upriver edge of the jam, the thunderous noise of the upending cakes was almost deafening. Beneath his feet he could feel the ice shudder and heave at the impact. Gathering himself, he sped toward the distant shore whose wooded heights were dimly visible through the fine drizzling rain. All too soon the smooth track ended, and again he was forced to scramble as best he could over, under, and around the titanic confusion of upended cakes.

AT THE end of an hour he rested for five minutes on top of a huge fragment poised near the edge of the jam. Personal peril was forgotten as the man sat staring in awesome fascination at the massive cakes that heaved and shivered, and exploded into a thousand fragments almost at his feet. He figured that three quarters of the distance across the river was behind him.

Slipping from his perch he clambered on. The shore for which he was aiming seemed close, now, while the shore he had left was lost in the mist. Suddenly he was thrown from his feet as though by the tremor of a mighty earthquake. All about him ice masses were shifting, tumbling, crashing and grinding together, with the bellow of a thousand thunders. Scrambling to his feet he leaped aside as a hundred ton fragment ground over the spot where he had been lying. With the suddenness of a blow the realization struck him that the whole jam

was in motion. In sheer desperation he managed to scale the huge fragment, leap to another, and yet another of the slowly shifting masses.

Instinctively he sensed that his only hope lay in reaching the extreme upper edge of the jam, where even now the force of impact of the newly arriving cakes was diminishing as the vast mountain of jumbled ice gathered headway. All about him cakes and fragments ground together, shifted, slithered into new positions. Leaping, falling, scrambling to his feet, dodging death by inches, Trevis worked his way against the moving mass. Only a few hundred yards away the wooded heights were slipping past.

Before him the ice cakes had ceased to rear and crash against the edge of the moving jam. The whole surface of the river seemed solid with ice—but it was a level field of cakes and pans crowded close together, and not the wild chaos of shifting crags from which he was just emerging. Only a few minutes more and, if he could gain that level field, he would be comparatively safe. Suddenly the huge fragment upon which he was poised shuddered—rolled. Frantically Trevis struggled to keep his balance on that shifting, slanting surface of ice. His feet shot from under him. He thrashed out wildly for a handhold, and the next instant an icy chill seemed to drive the very breath from his body as the yellow waters closed above his head.

A powerful swimmer, he instinctively struck out and as he rose to the surface his head encountered smooth ice. Realization struck him like a flash—he was under the floe! This was the end. A few minutes more and he'd have made it. Duke Carnation would have both claims, now. Damn Duke Carnation! The yellow dog! What would happen to Madge? How long before she would find out about Adele Santois? At thought of his sister a mighty rage surged within him. His lungs seemed bursting. With what seemed his last atom of strength, he opened his eyes and dived, turned and glanced upward. There—to the right—a triangle of light against the inky blackness!

He struck out—one stroke—two—a dozen—and his head emerged between the wedged cakes as the spent breath whistled from his tortured lungs, and he was sucking in the clean air in great gulping gasps. Elbows on the surface of the ice, he became conscious of a numbness that seemed encompassing his limbs. The ice cakes shifted a bit, and he shuddered as he noted that the opening between the cakes had become smaller.

With a mighty effort he worked his numbing legs, and after what seemed an hour of struggle, while the two cakes shifted closer and closer together, he succeeded in drawing himself clear of the water, and rolling a few feet back from the hole. He closed his eyes as a delicious stupor enveloped him. He felt fine, now. He had beat the damned river—and he was safe! He became conscious of a deadly chill. With an effort he opened his eyes and glanced about him. The hole through which he had emerged a few minutes before—or, was it hours? had disappeared. Only a few yards away the wooded shore was slipping past.

He must go ashore. Somewhere Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie were lying snowblind in a tent. He could cure snowblindness. But—time enough for that. He would rest a bit. He was comfortable here—except for the damned cold. Wouldn't the rain ever stop falling? It annoyed him—that continual drizzle against his face. He essayed to sit up and settled back. The sitting up seemed not worth the effort. But, he was cold.

GRADUALLY his torpid brain roused to a realization of his position. Might better have died quickly there under the ice, than to crawl out and die slowly of exposure. He moved his arms and legs stiffly, but persistently. After a few moments he rose to his hands and knees, then to his numbed feet. He thrashed his arms with increasing vigor as the sluggish blood began to circulate through his body. He took a few faltering steps, stamping the ice as hard as he could. A thousand needles seemed piercing his skin. His knees gave under him and he fell to the ice. Again he rose to his feet, and by sheer effort of will forced himself to walk up and down. The steps became firmer and he increased the

walk to a clumsy trot. Five minutes more, and he had regained normalcy.

He struck out for shore at a strong run, leaping from cake to cake, the red blood surging through his veins in a strange ecstasy of exhilaration. He had beaten the damned river at her own game! He was a man!



Standing on the moving floe he watched his chance, and, with a running jump, cleared twelve feet of open water to land on a rocky point. Ten minutes later, between a reflector of spruce boughs, and a rousing fire, he stood naked, wringing out his sodden clothing, while his skin glowed and tingled in the grateful warmth.

That night he camped in comparatively dry clothing beside this fire, and daylight found him plodding upriver through the fine, driving rain. He wondered how far downriver he had been carried on the moving ice. The Indian said that the two men were about five or six miles up a creek that flowed into the Yukon some two miles above the jam.

At the end of two hours he came to the mouth of a considerable creek. After much prowling about he ran across tracks in the sodden snow, up the creek, a few rods back from the river—the tracks, doubtless, of the Indian. Trevis heaved a sigh of relief. He could not have been carried more than three or four miles on the ice. He had no clear recollection of the passing of time—he had feared it might have been ten, or twenty miles.

Two hours later he rounded a bend of the creek to see smoke issuing from the stovepipe of a small tent. As he neared the tent several husky dogs rose from the snow and circled about stiff legged, the hair along their spines rising threateningly. From back-curled lips of their leader, came a menacing, throaty growl. Trevis halted.

"Hi, in there!" he shouted. "Call off your dogs!"

A head and shoulders were thrust through the door of the tent, and a flow of words luridly descriptive of ancestry, sent the dogs slinking to the rear.

"Come on in," invited the voice. "We're snowblind. Who are you?"

"Hello, Camillo! It's Brad Trevis."

"Brad Trevis, eh!" cried the other, heartily. "By God, I always claimed you was the pick of the chechakos! The Siwash got through, then! But—how in hell did you git here ahead of all the sourdoughs—Old Bettles, an' Swiftwater Bill, an' Burr McShane? They'd of come hellbent when they know'd we needed 'em. We didn't figger anyone would be along yet a while. You sure must of burned the snow, son! We figgered, by the noise, they was a big jam. Sounded like Grant takin' Bunker Hill."

"There was a jam," laughed Trevis. "I crossed on it. I'd have been here last evening if the damned thing hadn't let go before I got across."

"God A'mighty! Was you on her when she let go?"

Again Trevis laughed. "On it; and under it. I played both sides against the middle."

A HAND stretched gropingly toward him: "Put 'er there, pard. By glory, yer a meat chewer! That crossin'll make history on the Yukon. Come on inside an' cook us up a good meal of vittles. Them dough-gods Moosehide mixed up tastes like hell!"

"They ain't no worse than the moose meat you b'iled up las' night—hair an' all," defended Moosehide Charlie.

Trevis laughed as he glanced into the pan: "The dough-gods would have been better, maybe, if you'd taken the dog moccasins out of the pail before you mixed 'em."

"It's hell not to be able to see," grinned Moosehide. "But, at that, I bet, with them moccasins in, them dough-gods would stay by a man longer. They's some substance to dough-gods like them."

"I'll put on the stew," said Trevis, "and while it's cooking I'm going to doctor your eyes. It'll take several days of treatment to get them back where you can see much of anything——"

"Did you fetch some medicine with you?" cried Camillo Bill hopefully.

"No. But I can make some. There was no place to get medicine. The Siwash never got to Dawson."

"Never got to Dawson!" exclaimed Moosehide Charlie. "Where in hell did he git?"

"He got to the river and couldn't get around the jam, so he crossed to the other side. Duke Carnation and I were camped there, just above the jam, and he told us about you fellows. He was about all in—hungry and wet to the skin. I gave him a good feed and an outfit of clothing, and then came on here."

"An' that damn fourflushin' brother-in-law of yourn, I s'pose he stayed in camp!"

"Well—yes—Duke didn't come."

"You're damn whoopin' he didn't come!" cried Camillo Bill. "Look here, Brad Trevis—it's time someone spoke out in meetin' an' told you a thing or two. Course, as a man might say, God makes brother-in-laws—but, he don't make pardners, by a damn sight! Yer too good a man to be pardners with the likes of him. I wouldn't trust him two spits an' a jump out of my sight. You mark my words—he'll git you, one way or another—give him time. Course, it ain't none of my business, but if he was married to my sister, an' playin' fast an' loose with a high kickin' dame like 'Dele Santois, damned if I wouldn't jest nachelly take him apart an' lose the pieces!"

"We're not partners, exactly, though I I understand that Duke has given it out that we are. We camp together and work our adjoining claims—that's all. I warned my sister against marrying him," Trevis added, solemnly. "But he must have some good points. She loves him. She don't know about Adele Santois."

"If he ever had any good points, they broke off when he was damned young," snorted Camillo Bill. "The ones that sticks out on him now ain't good—not what you'd notice!"

"How you goin' to fix up our eyes, if you didn't fetch no medicine?" queried Moosehide, changing the subject. "Mine burns like they was full of hot ashes, an' sometimes our heads feels like they'd jest nachelly blow up with the pain in 'em."

"Got any lead?" asked Trevis. "Bullets, or anything?"

"Sure," answered Camillo Bill. "That old black powder thirty-eight cannon of Moosehide's shoots soft bullets. What you aimin' to do—shoot the snowblind out of our eyes?"

"I'll shoot it out of your eyes, all right," grinned Trevis. "Where are the bullets?"

MOOSEHIDE indicated his pack, and, after some rummaging, Trevis found the cartridges and pried a bullet from a shell. Beating the bullet flat between two stones, he tore a tiny fragment from his cotton handkerchief and, twisting it into a cone, placed it on the little lead disk and set fire to it. When it had completely burned he blew the ash away and with a small moistened swab, made by wrapping a scrap of cotton lint about a match, he collected the yellowish residue and applied it to the eyes of the two stricken men, holding the lids apart with thumb and finger. So slight was the residue that the process required innumerable burnings, but by the end of an hour the eyes had been treated and bandaged against the light.



"There," said Trevis. "Two or three treatments a day for three or four days will put you in shape. I'll smudge up some birch bark and make some eye shades. But, if this rain keeps up, there won't be much snow left by the time you're ready to travel."

"She won't keep up," opined Camillo Bill. "There's a change comin'! It's gettin' colder already. I can feel her."

Camillo Bill's prophecy proved correct. By the middle of the afternoon the wind had shifted into the north, and by evening the sodden snow was frozen to a flinty hardness.

"It would be good sleddin', now," said Moosehide Charlie. "But, I'll bet it would be hell along the river, what with ice cakes, an' all. I wisht we had a canoe."

"I don't believe we could make it along

the river with a sled," Trevis replied. "The ice is piled clear against the cliffs in places. I had all I wanted of it in about six or seven miles, without a sled. My idea would be to move camp in the morning down to the river. The trail's pretty good along the creek, and you fellows could take turns riding the sled and hanging onto the tail rope. Then, maybe we could flag someone going by with a canoe or a poling boat."

"That's the stuff," agreed Camillo Bill. "That's usin' yer head. Yer a sure enough sourdough, Brad. Yer good enough fer me to trail with, day or night. An' I never did see a sourdough that know'd enough to cure snowblind by burnin' a rag on a bullet. My eyes feels better already."

"Mine, too," agreed Moosehide Charlie. "But it sure stung like hell when he was puttin' it on."

"I'm not guaranteeing a cure," laughed Trevis. "All I know is that I saw a priest last spring fix up a bunch of Koyukuk stampeders in a roadhouse—and it worked. How'd you come to get snowblind?"

Camillo grinned sheepishly. "Jest nachelly had it comin'," he said. "Fergot to pack along any snow glasses, an' kep' puttin' off makin' eyeshades till it was too late. They's no fool like an old fool, they say, an' I guess they're right."

Camp was moved the following morning to a clump of scrub timber on a point that commanded a considerable view both up and down the river. Trevis rigged a signal pole and divided his time between cooking the meals, treating the snowblind eyes, and watching for the appearance of some craft on the river. Thus a week passed without so much as a canoe heaving into sight. The eyes showed steady improvement, however. The bandages were removed on the fourth day, and on the fifth day the three indulged in a game of stud, which Trevis peremptorily halted at the end of an hour.

"That's enough," he announced, gathering the cards. "You birds can't afford to strain your eyes."

CAMILLO BILL grinned broadly and winked painfully across at Moosehide Charlie: "He knows a hell of a lot of tricks fer a chechako, don't he Moosehide? He won't let us strain our eyes; but he ain't bothered a damn bit about the strain he put on our pockets."

"Ain't it the truth," agreed Moosehide in mock solemnity. "An' us not hardly able to see our hole card!"

"And, just for that," laughed Trevis, "you both get an extra dose of stingum in your eyes in about fifteen minutes. Maybe tomorrow your hole cards won't look quite so big."

Two days later Trevis burst into the tent, grabbed up a blanket, and dashing out again, ran it up on the flagpole. "What's the matter," asked Moosehide Charlie. "Canoe comin'?"

"Canoe—the devil!" answered Trevis. "It's a steamboat. She's coming downriver, too. I couldn't figure what the smoke was all about till she came busting around the bend a couple of miles above. I'd forgotten there was a steamboat on the river."

"It'll be Cap Reddy," opined Camillo Bill. "He wintered up around Hootalinqua."

"She sees us!" cried Trevis, a few moments later. "She's heading in!"

The sound of a whistle blast cut short the words, and the three fell to and struck camp. By the time the boat had warped to the shore and thrown out her plank, the outfit was ready, and it was but the work of a few moments to hustle it aboard.

CHAPTER V

BACK IN DAWSON

WHEN the steamer warped up at Dawson, near midnight, Brad Trevis hastened at once toward the little shack down near the sawmill where his sister lived with Duke Carnation.

"Poor kid, she'll sure be surprised to see me," he muttered. "Duke's probably told her I was killed in that jam." When the shack hove into sight he noted that there was a light in the window, and again he muttered, viciously, "That damned Duke's probably out with Adele Santois—and Madge in there waiting up for him! Camillo Bill has got him sized up about right. I suppose I ought to just knock hell out of him. There's one man the sourdoughs sure don't cotton to."

He reached the shack and tapped gently on the door. "You there, Madge?" he called. "It's Brad!"

The door was flung violently open, and the next instant a pair of arms were about his neck and his sister was talking and sobbing all at once.

"Oh, Brad—Brad! Is it really you—alive? Duke told me you were dead! He said you were out on the big jam when it let go, and that there wasn't a chance in the world that you hadn't been ground to pieces, or drowned!"

Trevis laughed and reassuringly patted the woman's shoulder.

"There, there, old girl—I'm all right. Duke had every reason in the world for believing I was dead. I was out on the jam when she let go. But, luck was with me, and I managed to make shore."

"But—why didn't you go back to your camp? Duke said he waited a whole day after the jam went out, hoping that you might have made it."

"There were two reasons why I didn't go back to camp. In the first place, I landed on the opposite side of the river. And in the second place, I had to go and find a couple of fellows who were snowblind on a creek a few miles above where I landed."

THE woman looked puzzled. "How did you know about the men who were snowblind?" she asked.

"Why—didn't Duke tell you? An Indian came into camp and reported it. He had just crossed on the jam. The two men were helpless. It was up to me to go."

"And—Duke wouldn't go with you?" There was a note of bitterness in the voice that the girl could not conceal.

"No," answered Trevis. "He wouldn't go. It's all right. He's a married man—and I'm footloose. But it's queer he didn't mention the Indian."

"No," she answered wearily. "He didn't mention any Indian. He didn't mention the snowblind men, either. He said you were out on the jam chasing a thief who stole an outfit of clothing from you while you and Duke were hunting."

"Oh, he did, did he? Then he lied. Where is he now?"

The woman was quick to note the hardness of the tone. She laid a hand on his arm, and as she raised her eyes to his, Trevis saw that fresh tears wet her lashes. "He's—up there—at one of the saloons, I guess."

"Drinking?"

"No. Duke never drinks. But—oh, Brad—I'm afraid he's gambling. Ever since he returned from this trip he's been—so different. He stays out every night till almost morning. And when he comes home he's so—so cross and impatient—and he says terrible things. Oh, Brad—sometimes I—I almost wish I had listened to you—and never married him!" Again Trevis noted the weary note that crept into her voice. "I—I guess I'm becoming—disillusioned."



"Buck up, kid!" said Trevis. "I'll go hunt Duke up. I want a few words with him."

As he turned to go the woman laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Don't—don't quarrel with him, Brad," she pleaded. "Don't hurt him! Duke works hard for his dust, Brad, and he has a right to gamble with it if he wants to. I—I don't care so very much—really. He's afraid of you, Brad. And, now that you're back, maybe things will be different."

"They will," answered Trevis in a voice that rasped hard. "A hell of a lot different!"

As he stepped through the doorway the woman followed. "Oh, Brad—promise me you won't—won't hurt him! I—I love him!"

Trevis hesitated just an instant, his eyes on the figure that stood framed in the light. Then, without a word, he turned and vanished into the night.

Brad Trevis's lips were pressed grimly as he picked his way along the path that led toward the main thoroughfare of the rapidly growing camp.

"Gambling, eh?" he muttered. "And, she doesn't even suspect the truth! The time's

come for a showdown, and——"

The muttered words were cut short by the sound of footsteps approaching at a run. Stepping into the shadow of a half-completed shack, he waited and a moment later the figure of a man appeared running toward him. As the man reached the spot, Trevis stepped directly into the path, barring the way. The man was Duke Carnation, and by the dim starlight Trevis saw that his face was drenched with blood. But what surprised Trevis even more than the blood smeared face was the look of abject terror in the eyes that stared wildly into his own. "Brad! Brad Trevis!" The name fell thickly from the man's lips in a voice that was hardly more than a half-intelligible croak.

TREVIS took one step toward him and the man cowered back, throwing out an arm as though to fend off an apparition.

"Yes," Trevis answered evenly, "Brad Trevis. I've been down talking with Madge. I just started out to hunt you up. But—what's the meaning of all the blood?"

"Blood?" A perplexed look crept into the horror widened eyes, and he mumbled his words haltingly. "What do you mean—blood?"

"Why, the blood on your face. How did it get there? Who cut you? And why in hell didn't he or she finish the job?"

Slowly the man's hand groped toward his face, and for a long moment he stood staring at the fingers that came away wet with blood. The sight seemed to clear his brain. He cast a swift look of fear over his shoulder.

"I didn't know I'd been cut!" he said hurriedly. "Let me go! I've got to get out of here! Frenchy LaBelle's gunning for me!"

The man essayed to pass, but Trevis reached out and, grasping him by the coat collar, thrust him roughly through the doorway of the roofless, half-completed shack. Stepping in after him Trevis stood blocking the doorway. He noticed that the hand that had grasped the collar was covered with blood. "Come clean," he said. "What's it all about?"

The first shock of meeting Trevis alive passed, leaving Duke Carnation's brain in a whirl of terror. How much did Trevis know? Of his story to Corporal Downey? Of the murder of the Indian? Good God! Why hadn't he sunk the Indian's body in the river instead of setting it afloat on the cake of ice? But—he had been so sure that Brad Trevis was dead! The Indian had said that he couldn't possibly be alive—couldn't have made the other shore! And here was Trevis—alive—to explain about the clothing—to give the lie to the story he had told to the police and to Madge! They'd know, now, that he had been afraid to cross on the jam—that he had murdered the Indian! Damn the Indian—he had been so sure Trevis was dead!

Just one tiny ray of hope penetrated the overwrought brain—the hope that the body of the Indian might never be found. There were thousands of ice cakes in the river—grinding and milling together—going to pieces in rapids. The chance of anyone finding that particular cake was infinitesimal, even though he had hoped at the time that it would be found. It might well float a hundred—a thousand miles unnoticed by human eye. But—there remained the story he had concocted—and the fact that he had refused to cross the jam to help men in distress!

Well—they could brand him a coward, and a liar, but they couldn't hang him for that. They might wonder at the disappearance of Moses Fox, but, without the body, they could prove nothing. He could say that the Indian went on about his business, and no man could gainsay him. Gradually, his nerve returned. Even if they did find the body, they would find it clad in Brad Trevis's clothing—and they would find the rifle that killed him—Brad Trevis's rifle—and Brad Trevis's footprints in the frozen slush of the ice cake! If he stuck to his story, Brad would have a hell of a time explaining that away! If he held his nerve, Brad Trevis might even yet swing for the murder of the Indian. But—as to Frenchy LaBelle—here was a very real, a very present menace. . . . The voice of Brad Trevis jerked his thoughts abruptly from the speculative to the concrete.

"Well—how about it?" demanded Trevis.

Carnation braced himself for an ordeal.

"I didn't know they were married—Adele Santois, and Frenchy LaBelle. Honest, I didn't! I thought they were just living together. I was up there—and Frenchy came home—and fumbled at the latch. And Adele cried out that it was her husband and that he would surely kill me, and I went out through the window. It was then, I guess, I got cut. I hadn't even noticed it! But, I'm through with her—through with her forever! Look here, Brad! If you could sidetrack Frenchy LaBelle, I'll take Madge and hit out for the claim! She's always wanted to go out into the hills."

THE evident terror in the man's eyes was far more convincing than his words. It was very evident that so long as Frenchy LaBelle remained alive and militant Duke Carnation would steer a wide course around Adele Santois. After a long moment of silence, during which his eyes seemed to bore the cowering man to his very soul, Brad Trevis spoke:

"All right," he said in a voice that sounded cold and hard as green ice. "I'll do what I can with Frenchy LaBelle. Does he know you? Does he know you were the man who went out through the window?"

"No, he doesn't know me. I know him only by sight. No—I'm sure he couldn't have seen me. I went out through the window just as he crashed open the door."

"But—the woman? Wouldn't she tell him?"

"No. It would appeal to her to keep him guessing."

Trevis stepped one step closer to the man, and the deadly menace in his lowered voice caused the other to shrink from him. "I'll take the gaff. I'm not married. It don't make any difference about me. I'll disappear for a while—and no one except the woman will know that it was not I who went out through the window. But—get this, you damned yellow pup—I'm not doing this for you! It's for Madge. From now on you treat her right—and you run straight—or I'll make you wish it was Frenchy LaBelle instead of me you had met this night! I'm not going so far that I can't come back—by a damned sight!"



Duke Carnation's heart leaped with sudden hope. He knew Brad Trevis. He knew that if Trevis said he would shoulder the blame, he would shoulder it, and no halfway shouldering, either. And, with Trevis out of the way—on the run—there would be no one to refute the story he had told to Corporal Downey, even though the body of the Indian were discovered. Carnation now found himself hoping that the body would be discovered. Then Brad Trevis would be on the run, for sure! He, Carnation, would see to it that the story of the window got around, and later if Trevis should be arrested for the murder of the Indian, the episode would go a long way toward discrediting him. Fate had played straight into his hands, and at just the moment when his luck seemed to be at its lowest ebb. Impulsively, he thrust out his hand. "That's damned white of you, old man," he exclaimed heartily. "You may be sure that I won't forget it!"

Trevis ignored the hand. "You better not forget it," he answered grimly. "Come on, let's get out of here. Wait—let's see how badly you're cut."

A superficial examination by the light of a match showed a two inch gash along the hair roots. The bleeding had almost stopped.

"Nothing serious," grunted Trevis. "You deserved a damned sight worse than you got. Just a minute, now, and I'll make my play good. I've already got plenty of blood on my hand." As he spoke, he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed it with blood from Carnation's wound. Then, being careful to allow the blood to show, he bound it tightly about his own forehead. "How does it look?" he asked. "Convincing?"

"You look like you'd been in a battle," grinned the other. "By the way, Brad, have you got a gun on you? LaBelle's going to begin shooting the minute he sees that bloody bandage."

"I have no intention of harming LaBelle," answered Trevis. "And he's not going to see the bandage until I'm ready for

him to see it." He drew his cap low over his forehead, concealing the cloth. "Come along with me," he said curtly. "You can't go home looking like that. You slip into Stoel's back room and clean up, while I hunt up LaBelle. And remember to wear your cap pulled low for a few days till that wound heals. Someone might ask questions."

Chapter VI

ON THE RUN

AS DUKE CARNATION slipped through a side door into the back room of Stoel's Gold Nugget Saloon, the biggest gambling house in camp, Brad Trevis entered the place through the front door. Save for bartenders, and dealers and two or three late hangers-on the big room was deserted. Trevis strolled over to where Stoel himself stood beside a faro table. The proprietor greeted him genially.

"Hello, Trevis! How's everything out in the hills? Don't want to take a hundred and fifty thousand for your claim?"

Trevis considered for a moment, and answered without a smile.

"Tell you what I'll do, Stoel. I'll bet that claim against two hundred and fifty thousand."

Stoel stared at the man in surprise. Trevis had never been known to gamble. The hangers-on crowded closer. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Take out a stack of chips?"

"No. Turn one card—black you win, red I win."

Consummate gambler that he was, Stoel gasped.

"A quarter of a million on the turn of a card! Well—you're on!" Reaching for a deck of cards, he tossed it to Trevis. "You shuffle," he said tersely. "I'll cut."

Trevis riffled the cards and laid them on the table, and as the hangers-on crowded close and stared in breathless silence Stoel stepped to the table and cut the deck well toward the middle, and, without himself glancing at it, held the exposed card toward Trevis.

"Ten of spades," announced Trevis. "The claim's yours." Stepping to the bar he scribbled a transfer and shoved it across to Stoel. "So long," he said. "I'm in a hurry."

WHEN Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie had debarked from the steamboat on which they and Brad Trevis had come downriver they made a bee-line for the Antlers Saloon, a place that vied in popularity with Stoel's for the patronage of the camp. As they passed the new police headquarters, they were greeted by young Corporal Downey who lounged in the doorway: "Hello, Camillo! Hello, Moosehide! Where you be'n?"

"Hello, Downey! Be'n upriver, kihootin' around in the hills."

"Hear about Brad Trevis?"

"What about him?"

"A big jam formed thirty, forty miles above here. Trevis was crossin' on it when it went out, an' he ain't be'n seen since."

"The hell he ain't," grinned Moosehide. "Who says so?"

"Fellow by the name of Duke Carnation reported it."

"That damn yellow bellied brother-in-law of his'n!" exclaimed Camillo Bill. "You bet yer life *he* wasn't out on no jam! Trevis is a man—an' a damn good one! He was out on the jam when she let go, all right—but he ain't dead, by a big sight!"

"What!" cried Downey. "D'you mean he made it to shore?"

"Sure's shootin'. But, come on up to the Antlers. I'm so dry I can't spit till I soak up a drink or two."

Corporal Downey fell in beside the two old-timers and the three entered the saloon to be vociferously greeted by Old Bettles, and Burr McShane, and Swiftwater Bill. Drinks were had all around, and for more than an hour Corporal Downey and the others listened as the two told how Brad Trevis had crossed on the big jam and rescued them from their plight.

Then, the door of the saloon opened, and Brad Trevis himself stepped into the room.

"Speak of the devil an' up he pops! Belly up, sourdough, an' wet yer whistle!" cried Old Bettles, himself the dean of the sourdoughs.

Trevis advanced to the bar with a smile. He was conscious of a distinct thrill at the words that thus publicly initiated him

into the inner circle of the old-timers. He was one of them, now—where always before he had felt that there was a difference. It was as though he had been on probation.

"Here's how!" cried Moosehide, when Trevis had filled his glass. "It ain't everyone that's smart enough to burn a rag on a bullet an' cure snowblind!"

"Yeah—an' it ain't everyone that's smart enough to skin a man's poke plumb lean before his eyes is good enough to git a right good peek at his hole card," supplemented Camillo Bill, grinning broadly.

"Yes—an' ridin' a billion-ton ice jam down the Yukon bareback ain't jest the sort of light exercise I'd recommend fer chechakos," laughed Burr McShane. "The man that can do that is a sure enough sourdough, I claim."

"Uh-huh," commented Old Bettles, draining his glass and refilling it. "But, all them things ain't sneeze-high in a whirlwind! The thing that counts was that he'd tackle the jam in the first place. That showed where his guts was. An' it's guts that makes sourdoughs—not brains. Hell's fire—take us, now—we wouldn't pan out one good three-star brain to the ton! But, damn us—we're here!"

The door opened abruptly and into the room stepped a very giant of a man, a forty-five six-gun in his hand. Inside the door he paused as his blazing eyes swept the faces of the little group at the bar.

Old Bettles, noting the glaring eyes, and the six-gun, chuckled.

"What's the matter, Frenchy?" he asked. "Lookin' fer someone? If you be, I ain't him. Come on up an' have a drink."

The man advanced to the bar, glowering: "*Oui,* I'm hont som' wan! I'm hont wan beeg man w'at go t'rough my weendow an' smash her all to hell! By Gar, I fin' heem, I'm shoot hees dam guts out!"

THE sourdoughs grinned, and Corporal Downey planned to get possession of the gun.

"Let's hear about it, Frenchy," said Camillo Bill. "I'm fer you. We're gittin' civilized, now. It's time this here window bustin' was put a stop to."

"*Oui*—me, I'm down to Stoel's—play de card—mak' de leetle bet on de w'eel. By-m-by I'm git tire. I'm gon' home. I'm com' on de door—she lock. I'm poun' on de door, an' I'm holler. I'm hear Adele Santois holler out lak she scairt, an' I'm t'ink, by hell, som' wan else in de house, too. I'm git mad, an' I'm back oop an' tak' good ron an' jomp on de door, an' she bus' all to hell, an' I'm see wan beeg mans ain' wait fer nuttin'—she jomp t'roo de weendow, an' tak her along, sash, an' all. By Gar, I ain' git good look at heem, but, I'm fin' heem, I'm shoot heem so full of holes lak you pants!"



Camillo Bill grinned and glanced ruefully at his nether garment. "That ort to keep him home fer a while," he admitted. "An' since you called attention to 'em, I guess I'll have to git me a new pair. But, about this here window bustin' prank—wouldn't 'Dele tell you who the gent was?"

"*Non, non!* She ain' tell me nuttin'! By Gar, I'm slap her 'roun fer 'bout half an hour, an' she git mad on me. She say, 'You go to hell, you beeg feesh! You wan' know so mooch, you go fin' out!' So I'm hont de man wit' de bloody face. He cut heem-self on de glass w'en he jomp t'rough. I'm seen de blood on de sash w'at he car' 'bout hondre' feet hang roun' hees neck."

"Did you beat the woman up bad?" asked Corporal Downey, with professional gravity.

"*Non!* Mebbe-so black de eye leetle bit. She too damn queek. I ain' kin lay good slap on her." The huge man paused and felt gingerly of his chin with the tips of his fingers. "She ron roun' de room fas', an' wan tam she keek me in de jaw, an' w'en she git de beeg butcher knife, I grab ma gon an' com' way from dere. Ba Gar, w'en I'm fin' dat mans an' keel um, I mus' tak' bottle of wine to Adele so she ain' mad on me no mor'. Me—I'm t'ink wan 'omans is mor' troubles for a mans than whole team of dogs!"

"You spoke a chinful, Frenchy," opined Swiftwater Bill when the laughter had subsided. "Belly up. I'm buyin' a drink."

Brad Trevis moved along to make room for the Frenchman who laid his six-gun on the bar as he reached for the bottle and glass that the next man shoved in front of him. Corporal Downey stepped to the man's elbow and was reaching to secure the weapon when, quick as a flash, Brad Trevis forestalled him.

Cocking the gun, he stepped swiftly back from the bar, keeping the Frenchman covered. Every eye in the room widened in surprise as the sourdoughs noted that the hand that grasped the butt of the gun was covered with blood. At the same instant, with his other hand, Trevis pushed the cap back from his forehead, exposing the bloody bandage.

"I'm the man you're looking for!" he announced in a cold, hard voice. "But you're not going to get me." Swiftly he backed to the door, and reaching behind him, opened it. "I'll leave your gun where you'll find it," he announced. "But don't try to follow me—or I might have to use it." The door slammed behind him, and for tense seconds utter silence reigned in the room.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Burr McShane.

"Me, too!" seconded Moosehide Charlie. "He told us, jest before he got off'n the boat, that he was goin' to see his sister! Didn't he, Camillo?"

"Uh-huh," said Camillo Bill, his brows contracted in a frown. "Uh-huh—that's exactly what he said. An' I reckon that's jest exactly what he done."

"What do you mean?" cried Old Bettles. "'Dele Santois ain't his sister!"

"Not none whatever," agreed Camillo. "By glory, Brad Trevis is what I call a man! He thinks a heap of his sister—I know that. An' the way I got it doped out—he's takin' the fall fer that damn brother-in-law of his—so his sister won't find out that her no-'count husband's be'n foolin' around with 'Dele Santois."

"But, hell's fire!" objected Old Bettles, "he was cut all to hell. Didn't you see his hand—an' the bloody rag on his forehead?"

"Yeah," admitted Camillo Bill, with a grin. "But, I didn't see *under* the rag—an' neither did you. An' I didn't see no cut on his hand—jest blood. He was makin' his play good—that's all. Brad Trevis—he's smart. An', what's more," he added, letting his glance travel from face to face, "if Brad Trevis wants folks to think he's the guilty party, not a man in this room says otherwise—no matter what we think."

INTERRUPTING the nods, and expressions of approval, Corporal Downey addressed Moosehide Charlie and Camillo Bill. "There's jest one thing I want to ask you two," he said. "An' I want you to think good before you answer. When Brad Trevis got to your tent where you was snowblind, after crossin' the jam—had it froze up yet—or was it soft?"

"No, it hadn't froze," answered both in chorus. "After he got there," added Camillo Bill, "it rained pretty near all the rest of the day."

"Enough," asked Downey, "so that it would wash the blood off a dead man before it could thick up an' freeze?"

"Hell, yes! It rained hard an' drizzled by spells."

"So long, then," said Corporal Downey. "I'm goin' out an' arrest a man named Duke Carnation fer the murder of an Injun named Moses Fox."

"Moses Fox!" cried Camillo Bill. "Why he's the Siwash that crossed that jam fer help!"

Downey nodded. "I found his body dressed in Trevis's clothes floatin' on a cake of ice right where Duke Carnation wanted me to find it, with Trevis's rifle layin' beside it—the rifle that killed the Injun. Carnation thought Trevis was dead. He had a good story all cooked up to go along with the evidence. Carnation's smart, all right—but not quite smart enough."

As the officer disappeared through the door, Frenchy LaBelle, who had stood as a man in a daze since the moment Brad Trevis had covered him with his own gun, leaped toward the door. But the sourdoughs blocked the way. "Ba Gar!" cried the Frenchman, "ain' he name Duke—de man w'at tak' ma gon? De man wit' de bloody head?"

"Hell, no!" explained Camillo Bill. "That's Brad Trevis——"

"But," interrupted the excited Frenchman, "de man w'at jomp t'rough de ween-

dow—heem nam' Duke! Me, I'm hear dat w'en I'm stan' by de door an' try for open! Adele, she holler, 'My Heavens, Duke!' she say, 'Dat my husban'—dat Frenchy La-Belle!' An' den I bus' down de door an' seen heem gon out t'rough de weendow!"

Camillo Bill's lips set firmly. Without a word, he leaned far over the bar and from some recess beneath he produced a loaded six-gun which he handed to the Frenchman. "Better take this along," he said evenly. "You might be quite a while locatin' yourn. This here Duke Carnation lives in that shack down by the sawmill. If you hurry, you might git there ahead of Downey. Moses Fox was a damn good Siwash."

"Hold on!" cried Moosehide Charlie. "Hell, Camillo! He can't go down there an' shoot the skunk, right in front of his wife. Remember, she's Brad Trevis's sister!"

"Carnation ain't down to his shack," interrupted a bartender who had come in shortly after the departure of Trevis. "He's over in Stoel's back room washin' a lot of blood off his face. I stopped in there jest a few minutes ago."

With a low cry of rage, the Frenchman dashed for the door, and among the sourdoughs not a hand was raised to stay him.

Chapter VII

CUSHING'S FORT

OLD CUSH, lean, and wise of eye, rested an elbow upon the corner of his bar and with professional disinterest watched Doc Milroy, the gambler, take the Portagee.

It was no concern of Cushing's who lost or won at his tables, nor by what means a man was relieved of his dust. A hard man was Lyman Cushing, but a just man. A man who asked no questions—nor answered any. A man eminently fitted to preside over this outland barroom and trading post of peeled logs that snuggled into its background of spruce timber, on the verge of a high bluff overlooking the fast-rushing White River.



The little community of men who foregathered to trade, and to drink, and to gamble at Cushing's Fort—as the building that housed Cushing's combination barroom and trading post was called—were men whose activities hither and yon had made it advisable that they remain away from the more thickly settled districts both of Alaska and of the Yukon. It was known that Old Cush possessed uncanny knowledge of things men guarded as secrets. They feared this man with the pale blue eyes, but they respected him, and, having sought sanctuary in the hills near the International border, they gladly availed themselves of the convenience of his bar and his trading room.

With the exception of Old Cush and his daughter, Doc Milroy, the gambler, was the only permanent resident of Cushing's Fort; others preferring to range the hills prospecting for the gold that lay in the gravel of gulches and unmapped creeks, where many claims were sluicing out better than wages. To be sure there were the Indians who, in winter by dog sled, and in summer by canoe, packed in Cushing's supplies, but they spent most of their time on the trail. Then, at times, there were woodchoppers, but these were transients at best, working because they had to when they learned that Old Cush would grubstake no man. When their needs were sufficed they would shoulder their packs and disappear into the high hills.

BUT Doc Milroy, being a man of skill rather than of toil, remained at the fort where artfully and dishonestly he took much dust from the sinkers of shafts and the sluicers of gravel. Then, too, there was Nan Cushing—and Old Cush getting on in years, and all—and there was his reputed wealth. . . . So Doc Milroy remained and prospered.

Down on the Yukon this little community was referred to as the White River gang, and Doc Milroy as its reputed leader. However, no gang, in the sense of an organization, existed—Doc Milroy being merely the dean of the outlaw community. Old Cush was the real king of White River, holding the health and happiness of many men in the hollow of an iron hand, but hav-

ing no part in the outlawry of any man. To be tabooed at Cushing's Fort meant that a man must travel far and travel fast. It was many a long mile to the Yukon, and many more to the nearest post across the line in Alaska. And for the man who essayed either journey with a light pack, death lurked among the miles.

But down on the Yukon, since Carmack's strike on Bonanza, White River and its outlaws were forgotten.

The Portagee, an ill-visaged world rover, who somewhere along life's pathway had paid with an eye for his fun, was in from the hills for supplies. With him he had brought a little sack that bulged heavy with dust. The supplies rested on the floor in his pack beside his chair. The little sack that had bulged reposed limply in the pocket of his capote, its contents represented by the single stack of chips before him on the table—and by many stacks before Doc Milroy.

With a thick, unclean thumb the Portagee raised a corner of his hole card as his single eye shot a reassuring glance at its pip. With a quick movement, more vicious than nervous, he shoved his stack to the center calling the bet of the gambler.

Doc Milroy smiled as he flipped over his hole card. "Two pairs," he announced quietly. "Can you beat 'em, Portagee?"

The other slued his chair half about and fixed his eye balefully on Old Cush. "Len' me fi' hondre. I com 'back two week."

Cushing shook his head with a bored air. "Nothin' doin'. You know damn well I never stake no one fer gamblin'."

"Hell-dam'! Ain' I always pay my debt?"

Doc Milroy stepped from the room, and the Portagee persisted. "I'm hones' mans," he urged. "I'm pay back w'at I'm git."

Old Cush shrugged. "That ain't what they say down around Saint Michael's. How about the thousan' you borrowed off the big Roosian, Barazoff? Better'n ten year ain't it, Portagee, since you slipped out of Saint Michael's in the night?"

"Hell! You know dat, eh?"

"Yeah, Portagee—an' a lot more. It's my business to know. Yer good here fer yer licker an' supplies. But, fer a dollar's worth of dust—no!"

The Portagee's single eye gleamed angrily. "Doc Milroy, he good fer de dus' fer de gamble!"

"Not an ounce. He banks with me. It's his dust I shove him when he wants it—not mine."

When Doc Milroy returned, the Portagee had gone. He counted the chips onto the bar, and Cushing laboriously penciled a slip.

"Business isn't so good, lately," opined the gambler as he deposited the slip with a sheaf of similar slips in his wallet. Hardly were the words out of his mouth when bedlam broke loose outside—loud laughter—strange foreign curses—and louder laughter. Old Cush's lips twisted into a grin.

"Mebbe she'll pick up a leetle," he hazarded. "That'll be Louis Zang. An' by the sound, he's put the Portagee on his back. With him in camp my woodchoppers won't be worth a damn fer three, four days—listen at 'em! There's some business fer you, Doc. He's got a good claim, an' he'd ort to be ripe fer a killin'."

DOC MILROY slanted the older man a glance. "Sure," he answered, dryly. "He's always ripe for a killing. But, I'm not ripe for being a killee. He brags of two killings, now—and I'm not so anxious for you fellows to hear him bragging of three. I don't want any of his meat. I tell you he's got a bad eye. Your eyes, or mine might flash red in a rage. But, no man ever saw him in a rage—yet the red's there behind the baby-blue—all the time—deep down. He likes his liquor and his hell-roaring fun—but wait till someone crosses him. I don't mind taking part of his dust—but I'd hate to nick him till it hurt. I wonder if those two killings of his are real, or just brag."

"I couldn't say."

"How is it you've got such a damned good line on everyone else, if you don't know anything about him?" flashed Milroy.

"I didn't say I didn't know," reminded Cushing. "Listen to that. He's prob'ly puttin' three or four woodchoppers on their backs to onct. I've seen him do it."

"Yes," said Milroy, frowning. "And, listen to Nan yelling for him! She ought to have more sense than to fall for a big

four-flusher like Zang—with his blue capote, and his stocking cap, and his quill leggings. By glory, Cush, if I were you I'd put a flea in her ear. He'd make you a hell of a son-in-law, wouldn't he?"

Cushing eyed the speaker stonily. "She knows men as good as I do. I'm leavin' the pickin' of a son-in-law to her."

Milroy sauntered to the doorway where he stood with his shoulder against the jamb and watched three woodchoppers try to put Louis Zang upon his back. Zang had disposed of one amid the encouraging cries and laughter of the onlookers. He stepped back to engage the others to advantage, tripped over a prowling dog, and sprawled full length upon his back. The next instant the two woodchoppers had pinned his shoulders to the ground. It was the first time anyone had put Louis Zang upon his back. The yells and laughter redoubled, with Nan Cushing in the forefront cheering the discomfiture of the champion.



Laughing with the loudest, Zang regained his feet, and Doc Milroy wondered if it were only fancy that made the baby-blue eyes glow red deep down.

"The drinks are on me! I'll buy!" bellowed Zang. "Belly up to the bar an' git yer nose paint! An' then I'll bet five ounces to one that I can put any four of you lousy woodpeckers on yer back!"

Zang's roving eyes encountered the dog over which he had tripped. With a movement incredibly swift for one of his bulk, he reached down and grasped a hind leg in either hand. Still laughing, he straightened, whirled the ninety-pound husky dog about his head and crashed him against a tree. There was a sickening sound as the brute's back struck the bole, followed by a low, moaning whimper as Zang tossed the broken animal to the ground.

There was no laughter, now, among the men who had witnessed the brutality. Only Zang laughed. Milroy saw Nan Cushing's face go dead white as the dog raised himself pitifully upon his forefeet and with pain-dulled eyes, strove to drag himself to the shelter of the thick spruce timber.

With a low cry the girl dashed for the ell that comprised the living quarters, to return a moment later with a rifle. Placing its muzzle against the back of the dog's head, she pulled the trigger.

Louis Zang laughed boisterously as he brushed bits of bark and gravel from the sleeve of his capote. "Hell! I thought fer a minute you was goin' to shoot me!"

The girl's voice rang tense as she met his laughter with scorn-flashing eyes. "I ought to shoot you!" she cried. "Someone ought! You dirty brute! You're not half as good as the dog I just did shoot!"

Zang hesitated as though to reply, but turned to the barroom door with a loud laugh. "Come on, boys, I'll buy!"

SEVERAL of the woodchoppers moved toward the door, but two or three picked up their axes and turned toward the wood. Again, from the doorway Doc Milroy caught the red glint in the baby-blue eyes as Zang roared at the delinquents: "Come back here, damn you, an' line up! When I buy, you drink! Or, I'll wind a few of you around a tree like I done the dog!"

The men came. They drank. But there was nothing of geniality in the drinking. Nor was there any return round bought. Nor was Zang's challenge to put any four men upon their backs accepted.

Zang bought again, and yet again, striving by forced laughter and boisterous words to instil something of the hilarity that was wont to enliven his sprees. The result was a signal failure. The men drank because Louis Zang commanded them to drink. No man dared flout Louis Zang.

In disgust the huge swashbuckler turned to Doc Milroy.

"What the hell's the matter?" he demanded querulously. "You'd think it was a funeral. An' you, damn you—if you won't laugh, mebbe you'll play cards! An' don't tell me you've broke yer wrist an' can't deal, neither!"

Milroy smiled. "My wrist is working," he said.

Zang slanted him a keen glance. "Just see that it don't work too good." He tossed

a pouch onto the bar. "Weigh her up, Cush, an' shove me the chips. An' there's plenty more where that come from."

The game proceeded with Milroy winning steadily, but unobtrusively. Zang drank whisky freely as he played, becoming more and more sullen as he drank, which was unlike him when in his cups. There were lapses into loud-mouthed ribaldry, during which he bet recklessly and laughed loudly when he lost, or won. He repeatedly roared his boast that he had killed two men—and would as lief kill a dozen more.

Milroy hoped the drunken bully would tire of the game. Once he himself suggested that they cash in. But Zang, pointing to his depleted stack of chips loudly demanded a run for his money. The gambler humored him.

Chapter VIII

LOUIS ZANG GOES TO SLEEP

INTO the room stepped a stranger. He swung a depleted pack from his shoulders, stepped to the bar, motioned the two at the table to join him, and ordered a round of drinks.

Now, the habitués of Cushing's Fort were suspicious of strangers. The eyes of the two players met in swift glance. They tossed their cards to the table and stepped to the bar, ranging one on either side of the newcomer.

When the drinks were poured the latter raised his glass. "I'm Brad Trevis," he announced abruptly, "from down on the Yukon. Here's how."

They drank, and Old Cush shoved the bottle toward them. "Fill up," he invited. "This 'un's on the house. Cushing's the name. This here layout—they call it Cushing's Fort."

Doc Milroy bought a round, introducing himself, then Zang thumped the bar with his fist. "Now, have one on me!" he bellowed. "Zang's my name—Louis Zang—Z-A-N-G, Zang! An' it's nobody's damn business where I come from, nor where I'm headin'. An' what's more I can put any son of a sea cook on his back that ever stood on two legs—fer the drinks, or fer the dust—that's me!"

Glass in hand, Doc Milroy took swift appraisal of the stranger. "Six foot of bone and good meat," his brain registered. He wondered whether the man would accept Zang's challenge.

Trevis was regarding Zang with a good-natured smile. "Glad to know you, I'm sure, Zang," he said. "I got the name right, did I? You do look right husky. And, barring an obvious enlargement of the ego, you should live a long time. Here's how!"

Doc Milroy grinned thinly as the huge bully scowled into the smiling face, and snarled a further boast. "I ain't never be'n sick a day in my life! An' in this neck of the woods it's the man that minds his own business that lives longest!"

"That," said Trevis, "is the thought I strove, in my blundering way, to convey. I'll buy a drink."

HE TURNED to Cushing who stood sphinxlike behind his bar. "I lost a good claim on a gamble down Yukon way," he said. "And that, together with certain reasons of my own, induced me to try my luck here."

"Sporting man?" asked Milroy, with interest.

"No—the veriest amateur when it comes to gambling." He grinned and indicated the half depleted little pouch from which Old Cush had weighed the dust for the drinks. "That's my pile—hardly enough to finance a trip into the hills."

"I'm payin' an ounce a day fer wood-choppin'," suggested Cushing.

"Friend," exclaimed Trevis, "you've hired a hand! I'll work till I've gathered an outfit."

Louis Zang had had a bad day. There had been Nan Cushing's scathing contempt—the attitude of the woodchoppers—his losses at cards—and this stranger whose manner of speech was only half comprehensible to him. The liquor had taken strong hold. And Doc Milroy, glancing past Trevis, noted that the baby-blue eyes glowed, deep down—red—like the banked fires of hell.

Cushing was speaking. "You ort to lay up enough in a couple of weeks fer a trip in the hills," he opined, pushing the bottle forward.

Trevis shook his head. "Thanks," he said, "I've had enough. A competent woodchopper should, as I see it, be able to land two consecutive blows——"

A hamlike fist banged the bar. "I'm Louis Zang! An' I can put any damn tinhorn on his back that comes b'ilin' in where he ain't wanted, an' talks like a damn fool when he gits here!"

There was a movement—incredibly swift. There were sounds—the impact of a hard-driven fist—the clashing of teeth upon teeth—the heavy thud with which Louis Zang struck the floor—and the thin tinkle of glass on the back bar. Then, the uninterrupted flow of the stranger's words:

"——at least, on the same tree. So, if you will provide me with an ax, and show me the timber, I'll go to work."

"Lordee!" breathed Doc Milroy softly, as he glanced from the smiling Trevis, casually rubbing his knuckles, to the huge figure that sat blinking foolishly upon the floor.

Old Cush never batted an eye. "Mebbe *one* of them, what you said, 'executive blows' to a tree would do," he commented, dryly. "That is, if a man's *plumb competent.*"

A silvery laugh ran through the room and all eyes turned to see Nan Cushing standing framed in the doorway, the full white throat that rose from the open collar of her shirt rippling to the peals of laughter that issued from between red lips. The laughter penetrated the whirling brain of Louis Zang, who pawed clumsily as though to brush cobwebs from before his eyes.

Brad Trevis, standing motionless before the bar, thought the girl the most beautiful, the most perfect thing he had ever seen. Their eyes met, and for long, long moments they held. Unconsciously, he took half a step toward her. And then—she was gone.

But Old Cush had seen. And Doc Milroy.

Louis Zang struggled awkwardly to his feet. He swayed dizzily, pawed the air, and lurched heavily against the bar where he reached for the whisky bottle and drank deeply.

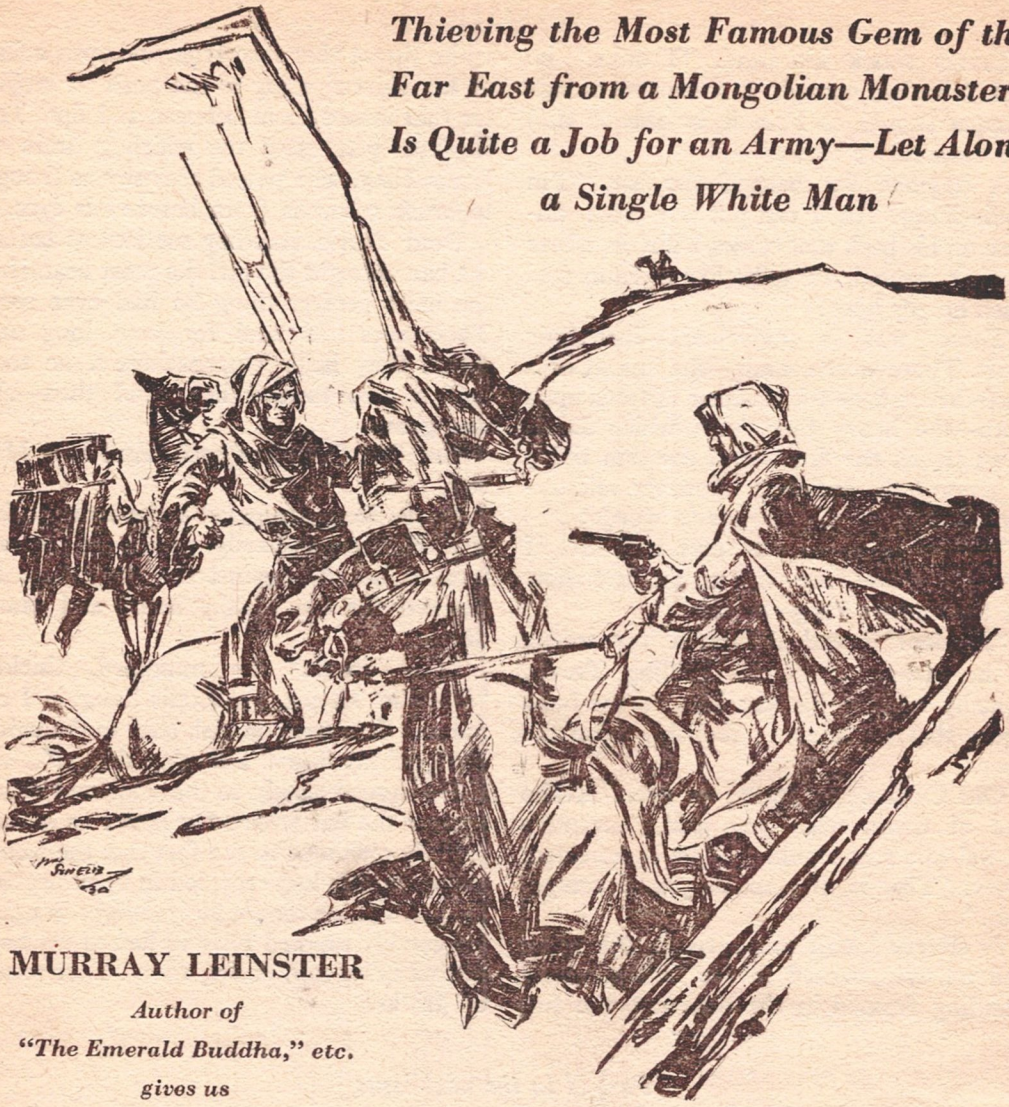
"I'm drunk," he mumbled, thickly. "S'm'p'in' hit me. I'm Louis Zang, 'n I c'n put any dam' man on hish back in the worl'. I'm gon' lay down. I wan'na shleep."

He sagged slowly to the floor and rolled against the bar where for hours he snored entirely oblivious to the fact that the woodchoppers who had crowded in upon hearing the girl's laugh took unholy delight in using his gaudily capoted form in lieu of the hobdented brass rail, during round after round of drinks.

Part II in the next issue



Thieving the Most Famous Gem of the Far East from a Mongolian Monastery Is Quite a Job for an Army—Let Alone a Single White Man



MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of

"The Emerald Buddha," etc.

gives us

Another Tale of "Collins," the Master Thief of the East

The BLACK STONE *of* AGHARTI

NO ONE but a white man would have received such an invitation as Collins received from the Bogdo Khan. For that invitation was for Collins to come and do a little first rate burglary for the Khan—no less a job than to steal the fabulous Black Stone of Agharti.

The Khan could have found plenty of fairly good thieves right there in China, of course, where thieving is as old and honored a profession as law is in London. But the trouble was that a Chinaman, had he been successful, would probably have kept the Black Stone for himself. But Collins had already achieved a high reputation on the China Coast, not only as a master thief, but as a man who kept his word once it was given. Furthermore he had achieved the reputation of stealing only in a good cause —as in the affair of the Emerald Buddha, where his thieving had been for the purpose

of saving the object of veneration of countless Buddhists.

So when he received the invitation to go to Urga, Collins accepted. But knowing something of the treachery of the Orient, he did not go as a white man. No indeed. He entered Urga, the capital of the Bogdo Khan, along with a crowd of Tartars and Mongols, Buriats and Kalmucks, all good pilgrims going to pay respect to the Bogdo Khan, who is the Living Buddha of their religion.

At the moment Collins looked like anything but a white man. He looked exactly like a Mongolian horse trader; he acted like one, and he almost smelled like one. And this last is an essential part of a disguise in China. Having entered with the pilgrims, he went on with them until almost casually he came toward the great gateway of the palace, roofed over with the same bluish-green tiles which cover all the other buildings of the Living Buddha's headquarters. He came to the guard at the gate.

As he approached he set his jaw for the truculent discussion which alone could win him the right to enter. Lamas—the Buddhist priests of Tibet and Mongolia—and those who serve them are apt to be lordly to a mere lay Mongol.

But as he approached, the guard came to an awkward salute.

"Move onward, Collins Khan," said an under-officer politely. "His holiness the Living Buddha awaits you."

Collins stiffened; he was recognized! He went on, racing his brain to find out wherein his disguise was imperfect or his plans given away. Naturally, he had trusted nobody. One does not become a master-thief without losing a good deal of one's confidence in human nature. He had not reached that eminence without knowing something about precautions. He would have sworn that there was nobody in all Urga who knew of his presence, not more than a dozen men who knew of his errand, and not one living soul save himself who was aware of his disguise.

To be greeted casually by name in the very gateway of the Bogdo Khan's dwelling was a shock. And it was not only a shock, it even amounted to a threat.

He went rather grimly toward the Russian-style house where the Bogdo Khan eats and sleeps and gives audience and prays. It was completely surrounded by lamas with no apparent function in life. As he went a ripple of comment passed among these Buddhist priests and they drew aside with murmurings of his name.

This was even more strange. Collins' jaws clamped shut. A *maramba*, no less, a doctor of theology, fluttered his cloak in moving forward to extend a welcome.

"His Holiness awaits you, O Collins," he said beaming. "He was about to send for you, but waited until you had inquired into the matter of his enemies."

Queer little prickles of apprehension ran up and down Collins' spine for an instant. This savored of magic. But in spite of having been raised by a benevolent old scoundrel in a distinctly Oriental fashion, Collins was a white man; and a white man does not believe in magic, whatever he may see.

COLLINS gave no sign of the disturbance within him. He was ushered into the room where the Bogdo Khan sat; the fat, blind man who is the incarnation of a portion of Gautama Buddha's soul; who is a drunkard, a poisoner, a shepherd to his people, a benevolent despot and the god to whom several millions of people say their prayers.

The Khan nodded benevolently to Collins, despite his blindness. He was sitting cross-legged on a sort of dais, and he murmured to himself as if continuing some private form of prayer.

He stopped, and said suddenly, "O Collins Khan, that man you have chosen to keep horses in waiting for you is not a good man. He is not a man to serve those who serve me. His name is Djam Bolon and he has killed many."

Collins swore privately to himself. He had a Buriat waiting with his shaggy little Mongol ponies outside of the city. The fellow certainly looked treacherous enough to knife anybody, but Collins had not worried over that, having a pistol that was better than a knife any day. But the Khan's knowledge of that Buriat and the hidden ponies did worry Collins. He had thought his arrangements a complete secret.

"I will give you other horses," said the

Bogdo Khan seriously, "and other servants, and I will give you my blessing. You shall go and steal the Black Stone of Agharti from those who hold it. That is why I sent for you. I could take my army and besiege the monastery where it is impiously kept, but they would foreknow all my plans and defeat my troops. So I cannot do that. Five thieves have I sent to steal this stone, and five times have they been killed. So I have sent for you, because you are the master thief of master thieves, and if you succeed I will give you the title of *Tumbaiir Hun.*"

Collins nodded. He caught at a crumb of comfort. It was incredible that the Bogdo Khan should know so much, but the Bogdo Khan did not know everything. The most important thing that Collins had done was unknown to him.

"A part of my pay I ask now," Collins said politely. "How was I known in Urga? How was it known that I inquired about Your Holiness's enemies? And how did you know of the Buriat who waits with the horses?"

The Khan on his throne smiled blandly. "Do you not know, O Collins Khan, that the Living Buddha has but to cast a horoscope, or read the heat-cracked blade-bone of a sheep, or examine the forms taken by blood spilt upon a hot stone, to read all secrets of the past and future?"

Collins said grimly, "I have my doubts."

Thereupon the fat little Khan chuckled outright. "O Collins Khan," said the blind Living Buddha, still chuckling, "you are a sceptic. My horoscopes are not enough for you, so I must tell you the truth. I received word that a white man traveled to Chita, and there ceased to be. And out of Chita came a Mongol horse trader who had not been seen before. Have I not many lamas to note such things? How many lamas are there in Urga, all of whom worship me and report all things I wish to know? A fly cannot buzz in Urga but that I know it if I choose."

COLLINS grunted. What the Bogdo Khan knew was explained.

"You see how I have lived," said the fat blind Bogdo Khan, comfortably. "Even though an enemy holds the Black Stone.

——By many spies, and a little true magic,



and by very many tricks. And truly the Black Stone belongs to me, O Collins Khan! You know that it was the chief treasure of the Living Buddhas of the past, and was stolen an hundred years ago!"

Collins nodded. He did know that the Black Stone, as everybody in the Far East will tell you, was a flat piece of black stuff, engraved with mystic symbols. Collins thought it was boort—black diamond—of unparalleled size. It was said to be four inches by six—or thereabouts—and a palm's breadth in thickness. Which meant that as a black diamond alone it was worth almost any number of millions.

But aside from its intrinsic value it was beyond all price. To the Yellow Faith it was—and is—the most holy object in all the world. And each and every follower of Lamaism believed devoutly that the engraved figures upon the Black Stone changed day by day, so that prophecies, fortunes, secrets, and all knowable matters generally could be read from its adamantine surface. To say that it was the greatest treasure of the Living Buddhas of Urga is to phrase the thing too mildly. To every layman, lama and monk of the Yellow Faith, it was the most holy thing on earth. It is a matter of history that literally thousands of men devoted their lives to searching for it, after it was stolen.

BUT now," said the Bogdo Khan, and his expression ceased to be comfortable and became very anxious indeed, "the Hotuktu of Kemchik has found it, O Collins Khan. He prophesies by it, O Collins Khan! And he speaks of a holy war against all the white races. He declares that the Spirit of Buddha has departed from me, and that the Black Stone of Agharti commands all the Yellow Faith to rise against the White Race. I have prayed, but the Spirit of Buddha has said nothing to me of those matters. I would read the prophecies

upon the Black Stone, O Collins Khan. If indeed they be true ones, I am prepared to die. But if the Hotuktu of Kemchik lies concerning what he reads upon the Black Stone, then—truly, Collins Khan—it will be necessary for me to destroy him. If lies are spread out from Kemchik, they are lies that will make all Asia a butcher's stall!"

Collins nodded again. The Living Buddha could turn the East into a welter of blood if he chose. From Tibet to the Arctic, and from the Volga to the Euphrates, he has followers who believe him a god incarnate.

"If it be truly the Black Stone," said the Bogdo Khan in a rather pitiful earnestness, "and if it indeed makes those commands, then I die and those commands are obeyed. But if the Black Stone does not speak those things—— Collins Khan, do you see that I must have the Black Stone in my hands?"

Collins nodded for the third time, forgetting that the Living Buddha was blind.

"I see," he said shortly, after a moment. "But why haven't you had it stolen before?"

"Five times," said the Bogdo Khan rather desperately, "I sent the most clever thieves I knew. Each time, as they entered the monastery of Kemchik—however well disguised—they were seized by men who laughed at them. Their names were told them. The moment of their leaving Urga—even the words of my instructions to them! All these things had been read upon the Black Stone! And then my five thieves died."

"I see," said Collins. He began to smile rather queerly to himself. "I see several things."

"I believe—I must believe—that it is the true Black Stone," said the Bogdo Khan. "I sent an envoy, demanding to see the Stone. He was laughed at. He did not see the Stone. But as he entered the monastery, a scroll was placed in his hands, and upon it was written everything that had taken place upon his journey, even to the jests about the campfire. From the Black Stone! It is known that I speak to you. It is known *what* I speak to you. Now, if you would steal it for me, speak! Name what aids you wish!"

Collins was still smiling oddly to himself.

"I need very little," he said dryly. "I wish two men, Buriats, with ponies. I wish one man for a companion. He should be the chief of all your spies, because he must be clever. Between us, we will steal the Black Stone and bring it to you."

"It shall be done," said the Bogdo Khan. He clapped his hands to summon attendants. "And there will be such treasure and such honor as you have not dreamed of, if you succeed."

Collins listened while the Living Buddha's orders were given. Then he added small details of his own. And the result was a wholesale violation of all tradition. Ponies were ready in ten minutes. The chief of the Bogdo Khan's spies was called, and he did not leave Collins' sight until they were mounted and ready to depart. He was a lean, hawk-faced lama with a livid scar upon his cheek, and Collins estimated him as a capable man. He mounted, looked at Collins without emotion, and followed impassively as Collins led the way as swiftly as it could be managed to the rough, tumbled road that leads out of Urga and branches to all the corners of the world.

THE wide-flung city dwindled and was lost to sight amid its encircling mountains. The road became a trail, rocky and boulder-strewn. Hours, and it became a path. There were two Buriats with the four ponies, flat-faced stolid little men who made no wasted movements to delay the little cavalcade. There were six shaggy little animals, two of which carried supplies. The two Buriats got every possible bit of speed of them, while traveling deeper and ever deeper into a maze of mountains.

The sun set, and darkness rolled swiftly over the world. The ponies kept on. They began to stumble, now.

"We camp?" asked Collins after one of the baggage animals went down.

The hawk-faced lama, the chief of the Bogdo Khan's spies, spoke for nearly the first time since leaving Urga. He was quite impersonal.

"The wind blows high at night. We camp yet a little farther on."

Progress became a struggle with weary

ponies over a boulder-strewn trail. Wind did begin; an icy, cutting blast that seemed to lie in wait around corners to leap out at them. In the darkness it seemed that the very mountains rocked from the force of the cold, cold winds that blew among the upper passes.

But suddenly the path diverged. A cliff fell back to one side and there was an open space, boulder-strewn to be sure, but sheltered from the wind. Without a word, the two little Buriats led their stumbling ponies into its space. In minutes, it seemed, there was a fire of dried dung, smoky and acrid, by which it was possible to thaw one's numbed limbs. The Buriats worked busily and expertly, making camp in a fashion which required the least possible time to set up, and would need the least possible time to tear down. The hawk-faced lama, who was chief of the Bogdo Khan's spies, waited impassively.

Collins was drinking the corrosively strong tea they served him—churned up with butter after the Tibetan fashion—when the fire was reached by a tiny wind which fanned it momentarily to a flame. Ruddy light glowed all about for an instant, and in that flicker of illumination Collins saw painted inscriptions upon the nearby rocks.

It was in that angular, exotic script in use in Mongolia, which looks something like Tibetan and a great deal like nothing else in the world. The hawk-faced lama saw the writing at the same time. He stood up and moved toward it. Collins followed.

It was simple enough to translate. Collins read it by the light of a glowing coal from the fire.

The Hotuktu of Kemchik sends word to Collins Khan that he is expected and will be welcomed according to his just deserts. The Black Stone describes his progress and has revealed his plans.

The glow of the coal faded out. There was only the small smudge of light where the fire burned feebly, and the dim figure of the two Buriats still moving about the duties of the encampment, and the hawk-like face of the chief of the Bogdo Khan's spies. He regarded Collins impersonally.



Wind howled and moaned and roared through the hollows of the mountains round about.

"It is the magic of the Black Stone," said the lama calmly. "All that we do is known."

Collins filled a white man's pipe and lighted it reflectively.

"How far to Kemchik?" he asked shortly.

The lama said without expression, "Three days. Two days more."

Collins smiled.

"Clumsy!" He nodded toward the inscription. "If the Black Stone had revealed my progress in Kemchik, it would yet be late tomorrow before a man could reach this place to leave that sign for me. There is someone riding ahead of us. Look!"

He pointed, and there were unmistakable signs of a camel loitering in this place. A camel will travel faster than a horse in such country. Or at least some camels will. The great white beasts that are bred by princes of Inner Mongolia will cover easily fifty miles in a day. And if there were some shorter way known to a man who had left Urga even an hour after them, he could have reached this halting-place and left this sign, and could have gone on to precede them to the monastery of Kemchik, bearing word of their coming.

"The Bogdo Khan is not the only one who has spies," said Collins.

There was menace in the gently spoken sentence. The lama regarded him sharply.

"These are your men," said Collins softly. "Give orders!"

A MOMENT of hesitation, then the Mongolian spoke something in his clacking tongue to the Buriats. They gulped down scalding tea, put stones on the unfolded quilts and sleeping-bags of felt, and mounted uncomplainingly.

Then more darkness, and more icy wind that shrieked and howled about them. Steep

descents on stumbling ponies. Precarious climbs up what seemed sheer cliff-sides. And suddenly ahead of them gleamed a fire small and smudge-like, sending a faint glow through the night.

The wind lulled, and the sound of their going went on before them. A figure started up and stared, then darted across the firelight. It was not outlined completely. Light glimmered on the side of it nearest the fire. That was all. But then a grayish, clumsy bulk appeared and something vague and dark seemed to be swarming about it.

Collins fired. He fired again, and spouting crimson flames were blinding in the darkness, though the sound of his shots was drowned out and covered over by the howling and moaning of the wind through blackness.

The shaggy ponies stumbled on. An icy blast swept over them, then there was a space of calm, and a man was whimpering over in the darkness where faint, flickering ruddy light shone upon rocky walls. Collins moved over, and a knife flashed savagely out of nowhere, and he caught it.

"We have him," he said shortly. "He won't carry a message to Kemchik now."

He dragged a padded, filthy Tibetan into the light of dully glowing dung. He slit the felted garments, probed delicately, and shrugged.

"Through the calf of his leg," he observed, "and a tear in his coat. That is all. He is not harmed."

He squatted down comfortably by the fire, while the hawk-faced lama completed the job of bandaging. One of the Buriats took four ponies and vanished into the howling dark. The other Buriat, the lama and Collins drank strong tea and nodded drowsily. The dull glow of Collins' pipe-bowl showed intermittently for a while. Then it died out.

The Buriat who had been sent back to the old camp returned with the baggage. In entire silence camp was made anew. The Buriats rolled themselves up and slept heavily. The hawk-faced lama sat and stared into the dully glowing coals. That was the last thing Collins noted before he slept. During all the night the wind howled as if many devils were abroad, but there was no alarm. But when morning broke the prisoner was dead. There was a knife-wound in his heart and no sign of an enemy anywhere.

"It is the magic of the Black Stone," said the lama coolly. "The man was clumsy, so he died lest he tell us secret things."

Collins watched an improvised burial, and shrugged.

THE march went on. Mountains loomed up on either hand. Rocky masses, thousands of tons in weight, hung poised to crash down upon the trail. And there were masses of splintered stone and places where the scrubby shrubs of the mountains were horribly deformed as the result of ancient catastrophes.

At three in the afternoon the hawk-faced lama seemed to think of his professed religion. He brought out a prayer-wheel and set it to spinning abstractedly as he rode. It was a wholly normal article of Buddhist religion. A shaft, with a tassel on the end, and a weighted cylinder with a polished brass cap. The cylinder contained the mystic phrase *"Om mani padme houm,"* written thousands of times upon parchment and coiled tightly within it. As everybody knows, to spin the cylinder produces the same religious effect as the spoken phrase, which is a prayer. And, of course, for every revolution of the prayer-wheel one has said probably ten thousand prayers, since each printing of the phrase upon the parchment has its effect at each revolution.

Collins watched absently as the sun glinted on the polished brass cap of the spinning wheel. The hawk-faced lama rode negligently, twirling the weighted cord that spun the prayer cylinder. The Buriats went on, silently as usual. They had shifted the supplies and baggage to the great grayish camel, which could keep up with the unloaded animals easily, and so made for better time. It was Collins' idea.

The prayer wheel stuck in Collins' mind. There was once a very pious merchant in Dzain who had had a monstrous water wheel geared to a prayer cylinder. But a local mechanic had put in a gear too many, and the wheel had said the merchant's prayers backwards for two years before he found it out. Then he was frantic, be-

cause he estimated the damage done was about the equivalent of one murder a minute on his conscience.

Collins was smiling rather sardonically at the notion, while the brass-capped prayer stick bobbed up and down. And then, suddenly, he was not smiling any more. The sunlight was bright. The bobbings of the prayer stick had a method. Their rhythm was irregular. A man far up on the hillside, supposing there was a man there, would see the sunlight reflected as a winking speck of light amid the approaching cavalcade. And Collins began suddenly to see a close resemblance to signals in those imagined flashes. Then, with a flash of intuition, he understood just what was being done. The lama was using the signal code of the Mongol horse thieves, who wave scarves or sashes to give warning and thus send messages as far as the eye can see. The adaption to winking lights was simple, but the code was elaborated and farther advanced. It was necessary for Collins to strain every nerve in attention to read a part of the message as it was given, and guess at the rest.



BUT a little later, when he caught a momentary glimpse of a horseman high above him, he laughed softly to himself. The lama looked at him impersonally.

"That man," said Collins dryly, "bears word that I captured the messenger who wrote the marking at our last halting-place. Also that the messenger is dead. It will be quite marvelous to be greeted with that news by the Hotuktu of Kemchik. There is no possible way he could have known it save by the Black Stone—*and by your signaling!*"

The lama turned and stared at him. The dark eyes yere piercing—deadly.

"Of course," said Collins gently. "Of course! It is all so logical! A watcher on the hillside, and a spy among us riders on our way to Kemchik. And instructions given thieves by the Bogdo Khan. Who could send word of such matters better than the Living Buddha's chief of spies? And who could conceal from the Bogdo Khan a rumor now running about the bazaar of Urga, telling of a prophecy of his that he never uttered? You, my friend! I thought you the most dangerous man in Urga. That is why I brought you with me."

Sunlight glittered oddly on something in Collins' hand as the lama moved.

"No," said Collins softly, making a warning gesture with the revolver in his hand. "Don't do that, either. Why don't you try to bribe me? You are very near to death, my friend. I'll take that weapon, so I will be less near." He took an excellent Russian automatic from beneath the lama's broad red sash.

The lama seemed to think very coolly, even with Collins' weapon bearing on him.

"What is your price, white man?"

Collins' eyes flickered. The actual name applied to him was *"tzagan Khan,"* which would have the meaning of "white man" in its present context. But his real name was known to this hawk-like lama. And one who knows a man's name does not address him by his color except in derision—or in hate. That was a slip which amounted to a declaration.

"You have betrayed the Bogdo Khan," said Collins dryly, "and you have tried to betray me. Suppose you pay for your life by betraying our third master? Where is the Black Stone of Agharti kept in Kemchik, and how is it guarded?"

The lama's eyes flamed queerly in their depths.

"Within the monastery is a great courtyard," he said steadily. "In the center of the courtyard is a tower, which is of solid stone. There are no steps within it. At the top of the tower there is a roofed platform with movable screens. Upon an altar upon the platform the Black Stone is kept. Twelve men, armed with swords, remain there night and day. They can ascend only by ladders, which it takes ten men to lift. Even when prophecy is made the Black Stone is not removed. Its signs are read by the Hotuktu of Kemchik, standing upon a balcony of the monastery, while monks hold up the stone for him to see. The

stone is in an iron frame, which is bolted by four chains to the tower itself. No thief can steal the stone."

Collins scratched his chin, and then he smiled thoughtfully. Some one of the monks wrote beforehand on the stone what they wished to have read.

"Ah, yes," said Collins dryly. "It is slate-writing. The stone is covered, and opened to show the signs have changed. Ah, yes!"

Sheer hatred poured from the eyes of the lama who was the Bogdo Khan's chief of spies. But Collins' eyes did not leave him, and somehow it was quite clear that the little Buriats would not be wise to attempt to kill or disable the white man.

"It will be amusing," said Collins meditatively, "to steal a stone guarded in such a fashion. Decidedly it will be amusing. But I had better take your prayer wheel, my friend, before you signal with it that I know too much and have refused your bribes."

His revolver steady, he took the instrument, and as he went on he practiced pleasantly with it. That was not a bad device, at all. A cavalcade of strangers, riding into the monastery, would be greeted by name, the location of their homes known and their mission already discussed. Mystery—and it needed only a single spy in their midst, twirling a prayer wheel devoutly as he rode, to signal their secrets on before them. As Collins practiced the trick, he seemed to muse only upon some such notion.

BUT at sundown, when they made camp, Collins smilingly drank the horrible salted, buttered tea, and then with a pleasant firmness displayed his weapon again, and after a certain interlude climbed upon the huge, swaying gray bulk of the camel and rode off into the howling dark. He left the two Buriats and the lama bound very tightly with ropes, but amiably instructed in the fine art of wriggling upon their stomachs so that they could reach each other's knots and chew them loose.

He secured for himself no more than an hour's start by the device, but apparently that was all he wanted. Because the two Buriats worked feverishly to free the lama, being moved thereto by his voice, and he freed them immediately thereafter, and then the three of them went savagely off into the howling, screaming wind of the mountains.

They traveled in darkness, of course, with sounds as of demons all about them. And they lashed their shaggy ponies mercilessly and made the entirely remarkable record of reaching the Monastery of Kemchik not over two hours after they thought Collins could have reached it. But he had not been seen.

Their reasoning, naturally, was at fault. They assumed that Collins had gone riding on as madly as they did themselves. As a matter of fact, they passed Collins only a few miles along the trail.

He had seen the tiny smudge of a fire, saw a solitary man encamped there, and very rationally went up to the fire and stuck a Russian automatic in the solitary person's ribs. Searching him, he found a written message from Urga, thereby establishing the solitary person's occupation as that of one of the couriers who kept Kemchik supplied with news.

And so Collins brewed more tea, drank it, and went peacefully to sleep with the messenger painstakingly tied up and considerately covered with sheepskins for warmth.

Collins heard the noise as the lama and the two Buriats went desperately onward through the night. He turned over and went to sleep again. And in the morning he trussed his new prisoner up in a rather involved fashion and went on, leaving him still covered up for warmth.

Obviously, then, he arrived at Kemchik some time after the alarm of his coming. But he was now dressed not as a Mongol, but as a Kirghiz, and he carried a written message from Urga as excuse for his arrival, and he signaled his approach to the monastery walls with the ever useful prayer wheel. He was dismounting and handing over his message, as a matter of fact, just at the time that mounted lamas were riding out of the monastery to scour the valley of Kemchik and all adjoining country for a very dangerous thief named Collins.

So that he was eating with an excellent appetite within a hundred yards of the lama

who was chief of the Bogdo Khan's spies, and well within the monastery walls, when that astute person was convincing the Hotuktu of Kemchik that every inch of wall should be guarded and no pilgrims admitted under any circumstances. The monastery, in fact, should be treated as if a state of siege existed until Collins Khan was killed.

THE chief of the Bogdo Khan's spies had described accurately how the Black Stone of Agharti was guarded. A solid shaft of masonry forty feet high rose upward in the center of a huge courtyard. It spread out to a roofed sanctuary some twelve feet square at the top. Twelve lamas with drawn and naked swords squatted about the holy object within. As Collins observed impassively, the Black Stone was consulted on behalf of the Pandita Gheghen of Dolor Nor.



The Hotuktu of Kemchik appeared at a balcony some thirty feet from the platform. Sheer, empty space hung between him and the sacred oracle. Drums boomed, and horns blew, and lamas chanted dismally, and two of the guards laid aside their swords and lifted the lid of a golden box. They came forward, holding high an iron frame from which chains depended. In the center of that iron frame was a smaller frame of silver. In the midst of the silver the Black Stone glittered. It was black, dead black, yet in the sunlight it quivered with gleams of fire.

It did not seem possible to steal a treasure so well guarded. But Collins yawned again. He observed drowsily that the buildings within the walls of the monastery were jammed close together to save space. Between the house the Hotuktu occupied, and the next building, there was an alley barely three feet wide. Collins further observed sleepily that from the roof of the Hotuktu's residence there rose several flags, fluttering from bamboo poles.

He went aimlessly back to the lodging that had been assigned to him, sat down, and presently went unfeignedly to sleep. He dozed through practically all the afternoon, waking only once to swear sleepily in the polyglot profanity of Mongolia when somebody stumbled over his legs. He was, in short, the perfect pattern of a man who has absolutely nothing to do for the present.

As a matter of fact, he did not have anything to do. Wrapped around his waist there were a good many yards of light, thin rope. Tucked in his girdle there was an object Eastern thieves know vastly well how to use. It was merely a little globe of iron, barely an inch in diameter. Collins had had his globe covered with leather, and instead of the usual rawhide thong it was fastened to a thick and elastic band of rubber. The substitution of rubber is one of the few improvements the discoveries of the West have made in the implements of the master thieves of Asia.

Those two possessions—the globe of iron and the coil of rope—were the only things upon Collins that any man could have called suspicious. They were Collins' preparations for stealing the Black Stone. They were complete. Therefore he slept.

AT TWO o'clock in the morning, or thereabouts, he awoke. He had gone to sleep with that time in his mind, and he awoke fully and soundlessly when the hour came. He lay awake a little while, listening. Three monks were talking in a room a long way off. There were many snores; the sound of animals near by; shufflings, and stampings, and now and then a cough or snort. It was bitter cold. But that cold kept down the smells, which in a lama monastery are virulent exactly in proportion to the temperature.

Collins stood up very quietly, and his progress through the devious ways of the monastery to the great courtyard was as soundless as the movement of a wraith. Then he slipped into the narrow, narrow alleyway between the residence of the Hotuktu and the next adjoining building. In seconds he was ten feet up between the houses. Inside of a minute he was testing the cornices, which nearly touched. It is

easy to brace yourself against two near walls and climb between them. If the climb had been a long one, a stick an inch or so longer than the space between the wall would have wedged itself very nicely in place wherever Collins chose to put it to rest upon. But this was only a little over fifty feet, a long climb for a man out of condition, but nothing for Collins to notice.

He was not even breathing heavily when he swung over the cornice and onto the roof of the Hotuktu's residence. He dropped down flat upon the tiles and listened. Heavy, black tiles, made in the Tibetan fashion, formed the roof. In these hills, with their snarling winds and winter snows, the roof would be solid and strong.

Presently Collins was moving assuredly toward the ridge. A bamboo flagpole supported a string of fluttering prayer flags. It came down, silently, fifteen feet of strong stiff shaft. Collins laid it across the space between the two houses and went back for others. Five minutes after he had reached the roof he had four poles and had unwound the slender rope about his waist. The first fifteen-foot pole dangled down, exactly above the spot he had chosen that day. He lapped three feet of the second pole upon it and wrapped them together, then tied them tightly.

Four bamboo flagpoles in all Collins lashed together, and they dangled heavily from the edge of the roof, the butt of the bottom pole of all, now resting on the stones of the courtyard below, padded with part of his clothing lest the wind scrape it against the wall. He had, then, a supple but strong upright pole fifty-odd feet high, and weighing more than any man could swing upright unaided. The balance of his slender cord was fastened in a long loop where the flagpole sockets had been set in the roof. And then he twisted his legs about the top of his shaft, paid out the gathered slack of his rope, and swung away from the roof in mid-air.

You see, of course, how simple it was. To swing a ladder to the top of the masonry shaft would have been impossible. To place even a solitary pole to be climbed would have been an uneasy task, and some bumping of the free end would have been inevitable. But here Collins had what was practically a vaulting pole, or better, a slanting boom to whose tip he clung, guiding alike his distance and his position by his double anchor-ropes. Safety was not his guiding consideration, but silence was.

Safety assuredly was not the sensation, clinging to a teetering, supple bamboo pole in such dense darkness that even the earth was invisible, and while the bitter cold wind of the mountains whined and moaned and shrieked all about. The shape of the monastery buildings faded into nothingness. The top of the masonry column took form, seeming to swim upward out of a vast void. A butter lamp burned within the sanctuary and shone through cracks in the screens. Voices came to Collins in the intervals of the wind's moaning; but the screens about the sanctuary served alike to shield him from hearing and view.

Twelve lamas were upon the platform; twelve men with naked swords, in a space three yards by three, a part of which was taken up by an altar. They could not all recline. It would even be difficult for all of them to sit.

TWO feet from the screens about the sanctuary, Collins looped the rubber cord about his wrist. The little, leather-covered iron globe fitted into his hand. Alone there in the darkness, clinging to a writhing pole, Collins' face twitched into a queer half smile. He slipped closer. . . .

Four men sat huddled about the butter lamp, yawning as they talked. They ignored the sacrosanct Black Stone upon its altar, as all men ignore what is to them commonplace. The other eight guards slumbered, wrapped in their cloaks, and in all imaginable positions for the economizing of space. There was no one of them who did not lie partly under some other man, and partly upon a third. They slumbered heavily, but restlessly, while the four wakeful ones talked.

Collins raised his hand, and suddenly one of the four men looked blank and queer, and slumped down beside the butter lamp. There was no sound, no alarm. A man was sitting huddled by a lamp, and suddenly fell unconscious. A second man bent to look at him, startled—and contin-

ued the bending movement; he, also, was unconscious. The remaining two wakeful men stared at each other, incredulous of their eyes—and the startled look in the third man's eyes faded and he sank back to the floor——

The fourth man leaped to his feet, his naked sword gleaming and his mouth opened to shout. But his sword was torn from his hand by an invisible force, utterly without a sound. And as he gasped, his head jerked oddly and he tumbled quietly to the floor.

Collins stepped upon the unapproachable platform of the sanctuary of the Black Stone, smiling. In his hand he held a small iron globe, wrapped about with leather, and fastened to his wrist with a strong elastic band. It could be flung exactly as a child flings a rubber ball, and it would bounce back by the force of its elastic, exactly as the rubber ball bounces back.



A man, with practice, can guess its force exactly. Up to ten feet he can fling the tiny missile, and when it strikes it is so silent and so swift that it is practically invisible. In the hand of an Eastern master thief it can stun or kill at will, and even with a mere leather thong instead of rubber, a practiced user of the iron globe will find it as useful as a revolver at close quarters.

Collins picked up the sword that had been struck from the hand of a frightened man, and began prying with the sharp point into the links of one of the chains that held the Black Stone of Agharti.

A sleeper stirred, and sank back. Collins resumed his work, and the chain fell apart. He found the second chain, the third. But as the fourth one gave, a broken link flew down and struck one of the sleepers. He sat up with a jerk.

The little iron ball darted out and back as the beginning of a yell of alarm burst from the guard's lips. Then Collins reached out his arm and caught the swaying bamboo pole, vanishing with the Black Stone of Agharti from the top of the forty-foot column of masonry and the guard of men armed with swords.

I IMAGINE that it was partly for his own amusement that Collins returned to the roof of the Hotuktu's residence, and painstakingly hauled up his pole part by part and cut the lashings. Certainly it was a little bit of vanity that prompted him to replace the poles and hide the fragments of rope so that next morning it would be utterly impossible for anybody to guess how he had reached the platform to steal the Black Stone.

But it was common sense, he says, that made him leave two other unconscious men on top of the walls of the monastery, and a rope trailing down to the outer world, to be found at sunrise.

Telling me the affair, he seemed to think that a perfectly lucid statement. I didn't understand the common sense part, and said so.

"I didn't leave the monastery," he said mildly. "I chucked the iron frame of the Black Stone in a well, and put the Black Stone itself in the stuffing of my saddle, and went back to bed. I was cold as the devil. And next morning I was one of the men who were sent to raise an alarm. I warned all the watchers on the way to Urga to catch and kill that devil, Collins, and I was told to have every way into Urga ambushed. I carried messages commanding it. But I chucked them in my last campfire before reaching town, and went on and gave the Black Stone to the Bogdo Khan."

He reflected, frowning.

"I was almost sorry, afterward," he said meditatively. "The Bogdo Khan made me angry. He was irritated because he couldn't do oracles by the stone. The figures carved on it didn't change, as he'd expected them to. Well, that was natural! But I showed him the old slate-writing trick, and that reconciled him. He gave me four camel-loads of gold pieces—that I didn't get away with."

Again I asked questions. When he tells you a story Collins is an irritating person. He leaves out so much.

"Oh, the main thing was done," he said patiently. "There wasn't a race war, and massacre of the whites, because the Bogdo

Khan had too much sense. And he used the slate-writing trick I taught him and staved off the uprising the Kemchik crowd was trying to bring on. He proved the Hotuktu of Kemchik a liar, by the very same trick that old scoundrel had used. Everything was fine! But you see, the Bogdo Khan had wanted the Black Stone for his people's sake, all along. He believed it was true magic; and when he found it wasn't, he used it anyhow to keep his people out of a mess. Sensible of him. But he hated to think that anybody else knew how he faked his prophecies from it, so he tried to poison me, and I had to duck out without the gold pieces."

Collins made the last statement without rancor. I stated my opinion of ingratitude and Oriental potentates. Collins smiled lazily.

"I got my own back," he said dryly. "I raided the Khan's treasury and took a four-inch Buddha carved in pure amber, a good many trinkets of various sorts, and about a handful of rough diamonds somebody in India had sent him. Quite a haul. And I could have taken the Black Stone again if I'd wanted to. It frightened him so that he sent word and made peace with me. I was safely away by then."

I observed that a second theft of the Black Stone would have been the expected thing. But Collins shook his head.

"No—— In Mongolia they really believe it's sacred. And besides, I couldn't have sold it anyhow."

"DESTINY"

a great story of revolution and danger in Tropical America by

ROBERT CARSE



next issue

SHOOT IT OUT!

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "South of Sulu," "Cobra," etc.

The Young Sheriff of a Western Mining Town Accepts a Six-gun Challenge

DYNAMITE is a mighty molder of character. The man who deals with that taffy-colored explosive over a period of years becomes painstakingly deliberate of action and of speech. But his brain is trained to work with the speed of a thunderbolt. The dynamite man who does not acquire these traits is destined not to remain a dynamite man for very long.

When "Dynamite" Dan Wharton gave up his job with the Avalanche Mining people to become the sheriff of Avalanche County, he took along with him these traits of character, which had been formed by five years of handling the slender yellow sticks. Daily contact with the rods of nitroglycerine and sawdust had slowed down his speech to a drawl, his actions to almost comical deliberateness. Certain citizens of Avalanche were of the opinion that his brain was just as slow.





Dan's new job was certainly not a bed of roses. He had worked hard for election, because ambition had fastened its claws in him and was riding him like a hawk. In dynamiting there was no future, but from the sheriff's office he saw stretching out over the horizon a royal road to opportunity.

The citizens of Avalanche were for the most part hard-rock men, and hard-rock men are *hard:* hard workers, hard drinkers, hard fighters, hard gamblers, hard spenders.

It was the hardness of their spending solely, that interested Dynamite Dan's worst enemy, old Jake Lorbo. Old man Lorbo ran the general store in Avalanche, and was by way of being the political boss of the town. He was the town banker—and a hard-fisted old skinflint. Free of charge, he would keep your savings in his safe; and to anyone hard pressed for money he would make loans at an exorbitant rate of interest.

Old man Lorbo had vigorously opposed Dynamite Dan's election, but Dan had ridden in on a wave of popularity. Dan's modesty, his proven courage, and his unfailing good nature had won him a host of staunch friends.

One payday afternoon, along toward evening, Dynamite Dan sauntered into Jake Lorbo's store with a cigarette dangling from his lip, a six-shooter dangling from his hip, and a very disturbing letter buttoned inside the pocket of his blue flannel shirt.

The old man was in the rear of the store, putting some money into the safe. His hands on his hips, Dynamite Dan paused beside a cracker-barrel and took in that tableau with the eyes of an owl.

The battered old safe was fairly bursting with money; little canvas sacks of gold stood on its shelves, the ends of green and yellow bills protruded from its drawers, one twenty-dollar goldback had fallen to the floor. Slightly crumpled, that twenty lay like a fallen autumn leaf. Jake Lorbo picked it up. It made a crackling sound as he straightened it out and placed it lovingly with its brothers in its overcrowded drawer.

Leaving the door of the safe wide open, the old storekeeper came limping to the front. He settled accounts with the wife of

a miner who owed him some forty-odd dollars. Besides these two and Dynamite Dan, the store had at that moment one other occupant—a ghost of a man with a face the color of cottage cheese and the eyes of a cornered rat. They were not especially hostile, but there was something loathsome and slimy about them.

DYNAMITE DAN waited for the storekeeper and the other two to be finished before he should broach the object of his visit. He was in no hurry. He was going to stage a row with old man Lorbo.

Leisurely smoking, Dan waited until the miner's wife and the rat-eyed man, who wanted only a plug of tobacco, had left the store.

The gray-haired old man turned his icy gray eyes on Dan and grunted.

Dan dropped his cigarette to the floor and carefully ground it under a heel. He slowly jabbed his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the man who had just gone out.

"Notice that guy, Jake?" he drawled.

The old man looked at him with real hostility. A quick, nervous man, Jake Lorba was always annoyed by Dan's deliberateness, his slow drawl.

"What about him?"

"Ever see him before?"

"Nope."

"Notice his walk?" Dan laconically asked. "Notice the color of his face?"

"What about him?" Jake repeated sharply.

"Convict," said Dan.

"My!" the old man said, jeering. "Ain't you observing! 'Pears to me you're wastin' your time in a town like Avalanche. You belong on some big city-detective force, where those ferretin' powers of yours could be put to some good use."

Dan smiled good-naturedly at this heavy irony.

"He certainly was interested in that old safe back there," Dan drawled. "Seemed as if he couldn't wrench his eyes off of it."

Jake Lorbo shrugged his massive shoulders.

"One of these days," he said with an exasperated air, "mebbe you'll get sick and tired of harpin' away about that old safe back there. It's funny how you carry that old safe on your mind. It's funny to me, because none of the other sheriffs ever took much notice of it."

"None of the other sheriffs knew dynamite the way I know it," Dan said quietly. "None of the other sheriffs knew just what one little stick of dynamite would do to that old tin can of yours, Jake."

The storekeeper snorted. His face was growing red.

"Supposin'," he said angrily, "you run your business, and let me run mine. For twenty years that safe has stood there. And the only men who ever tried to get into it got both barrels of my shotgun. You let me worry about whether it's a strong enough safe or not. It's my money."

"That," Dan drawled, "is just the argument. It isn't all your money. You've got the life savings of some of these miners in that old tin can. I'm speakin' for them."



"Yes," the old man jeered, "from a stump! You want to stand in right with the voters next fall, so's you'll be sure to get on the ticket for the next legislature election. And I'll call your turn on that, too! You're nothin' but a one-pint man with a one-quart idea!"

Dan's slow smile had vanished from his leathery brown face, but his expression was still amiable. Dynamite had taught him self-control. He knew that old man Lorbo hated him; would do his damnedest, when the time came, to upset his chances for election to the State Legislature.

"I'm not grindin' any axes," Dan slowly answered. "I'm only sayin' that a manganese steel, burglar-proof safe would be a mighty good investment. Conditions are changin' here, Jake. The labor turnover is growin' bigger all the time, and these new hard-rock men are drifters and boomers. We've got a tougher-lookin' gang of strangers in town today than I ever saw on a payday. That one who just drifted out of here is a sample. That guy is a real killer, Jake."

"That's your problem," the old man snapped.

"So is this," Dan answered, as he drew the letter from his shirt pocket. "That old tin can back there is gettin' quite a reputation. This letter came in this mornin' from Blueblanket. It's from Sheriff Bulow over there. Here's what he says."

Dan unfolded the letter and read, in his pleasant slow voice:

"Dear Daniel:

This will advise you that, according to all accounts, a mighty tough customer is drifting down your way. I got the tip from a hopped-up bindle stiff, who said this guy has been busy all over the Southwest for better than a year, dynamiting small town safes and pulling off single-handed hold-ups. The bindle stiff swears this guy is the one who pulled off the Amarillo Santa Fé express robbery, killing two men and making a clever getaway.

"It all checks up, and it sounds to me like 'Lefty' Dakin, who was let out of San Quentin about a year ago after a ten-year stretch. I telegraphed the chief of police of San Fran to mail you a picture of Lefty Dakin. He isn't descriptive enough for practical purposes. All the description I have of him is, he is about five-foot-ten, sandy-hair and blue-eyed. And that fits half the men I know.

"Lefty Dakin is one mighty dangerous outlaw, and an experienced yegg. He has been mixed up in a lot of killings, is quick on the draw and a dead shot. He has shot his way out of a half dozen tight corners. It might well be that that safe of Jake Lorbo's has attracted him. Lefty Dakin could open that old antique with a ten-cent can opener.

"If you run into this man, Daniel, I sure hope you beat him to the draw.

"With best regards,

"Yours fraternally,

"Ike Bulow, Sheriff."

Dan looked up from the letter to meet the full blast of old man Lorbo's furious gray eyes.

"If Lefty Dakin comes to Avalanche," he snarled, "it's your job to grab him. That's what you were elected for. As for this safe, for the last time I'm tellin' you I don't aim to spend my money like a drunken miner on any new-fangled ideas of yours!"

Dan would not say that that safe had been worrying him, yet it was a real weight on his mind. He was aware that at times it contained upwards of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in gold coins and bills. And he knew that this amount would tempt even the clever big city yeggs, not to mention the outlaws with which the Southwest just now seemed to be infested.

It was only a question of time before that safe would be broken open and gutted. But it was impossible for Dan to convince Jake Lorbo that the safe was no longer a safe.

"You run your job," Jake Lorbo was angrily repeating, "and let me worry along with mine."

As Dan turned to go, the door opened violently and Steve Gowell came thumping in on his hickory crutches. He was breathless from hurrying. For a moment he could only puff and wheeze. Steve Gowell was on a pension from the Avalanche Company as a result of crippling injuries he had received in a mine blast ten years before. Since his partial recovery, he had been serving successive sheriffs in a clerical capacity. He also swept out the jail every morning and kept the windows washed. And when the jail had inmates, he cooked their food.

"Sheriff," Steve panted, "there's a guy down to Irish Joe's a-shootin' hell out o' the place! Joe's hidin' behind the bar! He yelled at me to tell you to come on the jump!"

"Mebbe," Jake Lorbo jeered, "it's Lefty Dakin!"

DYNAMITE DAN started at a lope down the main—and only—street of Avalanche. It wasn't a long street—about a quarter mile from end to end, blocked on the West by a sprawling mound of black boulders, and ending at the East in the ruddy tailing and slag dumps below the riffle houses and smelter.

The town of Avalanche sprawled at the base of the frowning black cliff which rose up a sheer two thousand feet. The sky

seemed to press down on top of the cliff.

Forty years ago the face of that cliff had split off and come tumbling down, revealing a stratum of native copper which had gleamed, so old-timers said, like a great spatter of Inca gold. A shaft was sunk into the face of the wall and the Avalanche mine came shortly into being—one of the trickiest engineering jobs in mining history. And in time at the bottom of the cliff a town grew, a town consisting of a crooked street lined with ramshackle wooden buildings.

The grim and sinister setting of the mining town sometimes got on Dan Wharton's nerves. He would be glad to be out of it—glad to be following that beckoning road to opportunity.

Men yelled good-naturedly at him as he ran up the street toward Irish Joe's. Because it was payday, the mine was shut down. Cowmen—visitors from ranches farther back in the mountains—strolled in and out of stores and saloons. Many of them were already drunk, and some of them looked troublesome. They raised their hell in packs, these cowmen, banded together by a universal distrust of the hard-rock men. They left their horses on a tie line in a big field, where the valley widened a half mile below the town, and came straggling into Avalanche in groups of four and six and a dozen, all wearing guns, all ready and willing to use them.

As Dan hurried along the street, many of them yelled at him. Some of them had voted for him, but none of them yet knew what kind of sheriff Dynamite Dan would make. He was untried, unproved.

Irish Joe's was at the end of the street, perched on crude square stilts above the river. It consisted of two big rooms, one a barroom, the other a gambling hall. There were quarters upstairs where Irish Joe lived.

As he neared Irish Joe's Dan heard the report of a gun and saw a big crowd assembled on the porch. A number of men, attracted by his haste, were trailing along behind him. He was going to have quite an audience!

The gun went off again while Dan was crossing the low porch that led to the barroom door.

Dan pushed his way through the gaping crowd outside the door, loosened his gun, and entered the big room.

The barroom was wrecked. Chairs and tables were overturned. Numbers of window-panes contained neat round holes surrounded by spider web crack patterns. But it was back of the bar that this one-man demonstration of vandalism was most striking. The plate glass mirror, with its colored soap pictures, was splintered and shattered. The shelf below it, always decorated with neat pyramids of bottles containing liqueurs and rare beverages such as sloe gin, rock-and-rye and absinthe, was a shocking display of glass splinters and fragments and dripping puddles of colored fluids.



One attractive array of these bottles, however, was remaining, when Dan walked into the scene. This was a pyramid of green bottles of creme-de-menthe. And even as Dan crossed the threshold, the marauder lifted his gun, braced his legs apart, and fired.

With brilliant accuracy, his bullet smashed the lower middle bottle and the thin glass shelf on which the second layer rested. The lower middle bottle seemed to vanish as the lead slug went home. The glass shelf flew into splinters—and down went the pyramid.

The vandal was hatless. His hair was curly and sandy. He wore a blue flannel shirt, bleached khaki pants and high-heeled boots.

He wiped the muzzle of the gun on the knee of his pants, and suddenly burst into howls of laughter. Then he suddenly seemed to become conscious of the presence of someone behind him.

He spun about with the nervous alacrity of a startled wildcat. Bloodshot blue eyes in a pale face glared at Dan. Here, unless he was a clever actor thought Dan, was a man in the temporarily insane state that

in some men characterizes a certain degree of drunkenness.

"Yah!" snarled the marksman.

"If you're through with this demonstration," Dan drawled, "of what a wild bull does in a china shop, hand over that gun."

"Try and get it!" yelled the sharpshooter. His wild eyes darted over Dan; ran the length of him, returned to his face. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm the sheriff. *Give—me—that—gun!"*

He held out his empty hand. There was no time to pull his own gun and try shooting it out with a crack shot whose gun was ready. It would have to be a case of bluff.

With the gun in his hand aimed approximately at Dan's left kneecap, the vandal stared—and swayed. But his wild eyes did not for a split-second leave Dan's.

It was an important moment in the history of Avalanche's new sheriff. Behind him men had packed themselves in five and six deep, although he knew that they would have allowed a lane behind him for the passage of that bullet, if it came.

With his hand outstretched, he walked slowly toward the young man.

The vandal cried out harshly, "You better keep away from me!"

Slowly, heavily, Dan advanced on him, holding out his hand, palm upward.

In a voice, shrill with fury, the dangerous unknown yelled, "I'm gonna shoot!"

"You're gonna give me that gun!" Dan coldly answered.

The man's gun hand was trembling. His face had gone from a yellowish pallor to a deathly white.

A man in the crowd on the porch called out, "Look out, Dan!"

The only sound then was the slow, heavy tread of Dan's feet on the scarred floor. For a moment that royal road to opportunity which he had seen leading over the horizon from the sheriff's office looked dim; for a moment, it vanished entirely.

Then he had his hand over the gun.

AT THIS moment, the vandal recovered his poise, his courage, or his madness, or whatever it may have been. Once the gun was taken from him, he became what he had promised at first glance to be—a wildcat.

With a roar, he threw himself at Dan. He struck at the sheriff's face, he kicked out at his shin.

Dan blocked the blow to his face, turning it off with an elbow, but received the kick on the edge of his shin. He grunted with pain, and with what seemed awkwardness, blocked other punches. But it was not awkwardness. In a mix-up of this kind, Dan fought as he had handled those thin taffy-colored sticks. He thought swiftly and acted with great deliberation.

He blocked punches until the correct moment arrived, then he gave a punch of his own; and it was a knockout punch. He saw the opening and acted. He sent a smashing left into the sharpshooter's jaw, and stepped aside for him to fall.

The sandy-haired man fell face forward, plunging limply to the planks.

And not until then did the crowd outside surge into the room.

"Billy," Dan addressed a boy in the crowd, "fetch a bucket of water and dump it on this fellow."

Dan was examining the troublemaker's gun with great interest, when an old miner put his hand on his shoulder from behind and pulled him around.

"Dan," he said, "that was a mighty foolish thing to do. Nothin' brave about it. Just foolish. You should 'a' plugged this wildcat from behind, in the shootin' shoulder."

"I wouldn't feel right pluggin' any man from behind," Dan argued. But the old miner's opinion was shared by the crowd. If Dan hadn't been such a slowpoke, he would have had his gun on the wildcat befor the wildcat turned.

The boy returned with the bucket of water. Irish Joe arrived on the scene. A thin, wiry little man with a face as pinched and wrinkled as an ape's, he appeared from nowhere, cursing in a thin, furious voice.

The unconscious man on the floor had run up an awful bill of damages. Who was goin' to pay it?

Two gallons of icy mountain water aided the sharpshooter to revive. Surrounded by the gaping, grinning crowd, he sat up and ran his long fingers through his sandy hair.

Dan squatted down and looked at him.

"What's your name?"

"Spike Henty," the man said dazedly.

"What ranch you from?"

"Me?" said the young man. "I ain't got no home, mister. I'm nothin' but a pore lonesome cowboy from up Wyomin' way. I was roamin' from Wyomin'. I was a-headin' fer the Panhandle."

Irish Joe intruded now.

"You big bum," he shrilled. "Who's gonna pay for all this wreckage?"

Spike Henty from Wyomin' stared up at him. His bloodshot eyes had some difficulty focusing.

"What are you?" he asked. "Animal, mineral or vegetable? Who'll pay fer the damage? Why, brother, nobody else but me meself, as Bosun Bill the sailor said in answer to the young gal's inquiry. How much damage you reckon I done?"

"How much money," Irish Joe asked suspiciously, "you got?"

"Brother, the last time I tried to count my money my arm got so lame that I swore a red oath I would never try estimatin' my wealth until I owned one o' these addin' machines."

The crowd roared, but a surprised silence fell when the Wyoming rover pulled out of a hip pocket a black leather billfold. It was plump with yellow money.

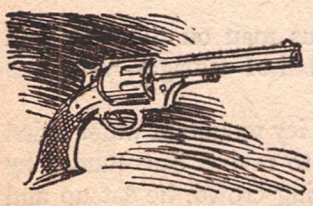
Irish Joe took one look and gulped, "Four hundred bucks."

"It was worth it," said Spike Henty. Gravely, he counted off four hundred dollars and handed the bills up to Irish Joe. This subtraction from his wealth did not seem to reduce it perceptibly.

Spike Henty struggled to his feet, saying, "Well, gents, I reckon I'll be moseyin' along."

"Just a minute," Dan said. "Where'd you get this gun?"

The sandy-haired man staggered a little and grinned at him loosely.



"'Smatter with 'at gun, Sheriff?"

"I was just interested in these four dents you've got filed into the butt here."

"Them?" said the man from Wyoming. "Why, Sheriff, they stand fer dead men."

"Your own personal dead men?" Dan dryly asked.

"Sheriff," Spike Henty gravely answered, and he teetered a little, "the gun butt ain't been made that's big enough to hold a record of my personal dead men. I took that gun off of a rustler up Big Forks way. They was his dead men. And now, Sheriff, with your kind permission I will bid you one and all a fond farewell."

"No," Dan said. "Not just yet. We are sort of gettin' to like you. Point is, we sort of want to know more about you. We want to know, for instance, where you got all that money."

"Brother," said the teetering young man, "that money stands fer the sweat of my honest toil, includin' the puspertation from my horny hands and the dew from my noble brow. The fact is, I come by most of my wealth by knowin' how to ride a pair o' gallopin' bones."

"You say you're from Wyomin'?"

"That's right, Sheriff."

"Never been down in these parts before?"

"Never been south of the Medicine Bow Range before!"

"Where'd you learn to say 'reckon'?"

"Huh?"

"I never," said Dan, "heard a Wyomin' cow waddy say 'reckon' before. Joe, are you aimin' to lodge a charge o' disorderly conduct or wanton destruction o' property against this man?"

Irish Joe, who had made a profit of perhaps two hundred dollars on the transaction, shook his head.

Dan looked about the crowd. "Anybody want to lodge a charge against the Wyomin' rover?"

Evidently no one did.

"Then," said Dan, "I'll attend to it myself."

"You'll attend to what?" snarled Spike Henty. "You big slob, you can't pinch me without a warrant. Gents, I thank you, one and all, for standin' up fer liberty, freedom and justice!"

"You ain't being arrested," Dan drawled. "I'm just askin' you firmly to be

my guest until to-morrow mornin', while I check up what you say. I've got a nice cozy room all set aside for you. Come on!"

Several cowmen in the crowd, more or less inspired by all day drinking, decided that it was about time to uphold the honor and sanctity of their profession.

"Sheriff," said a boy from the Curly Q outfit, "you hain't no right to lay a hand on this lad, and you know it."

Other punchers clamorously supported this. But the situation was taken out of their hands by one man who was apparently several degrees drunker than anyone else present.

Pushing his big Stetson back from his bronzed face, he fixed fuzzy eyes on the sheriff. His locomotion was by no means certain. In his efforts to reach the sheriff across a perfectly clear space of floor, he took one step forward, then lurched to the right; recovered himself, took another step forward, then lurched to the left.

Dan watched this strange, slow dance with amiable eyes.

The man, reaching him, placed a big brown hand on Dan's shoulder and gave him a push.

"Slissen here," he began, "you can't lock this boy up. If you lay one hand on 'is boy, I'll punch you—sheriff or no sheriff."

Dan grinned and pushed the drunk aside.

"Come on, Spike," he said.

"Oh, no, you don't!" drooled the drunk. "And I'll tell you somethin'. Sheriff or no sheriff. I don't like you." He drew back his hand and before Dan could stop him, had slapped him heavily across the face.

Dan seized his wrist in a steely grip. He was rapidly losing his patience with drunks.

"One more crack out of you," he said steadily, "and you'll come along, too."

"You don't say so!" gurgled the drunk. "Well, now, it's my turn to tell one. I'm gonna finish up whut Spike started, right yere an' now. Boys," he roared, "give me space. I'm gonna shoot out the rest o' that mirror!"

Dan promptly snapped one of a pair of steel bracelets over his wrist, and the other he snapped over Spike Henty's nearest wrist.

"Now," said Dan grimly, "I'm gonna make the rest o' you boys a speech. It won't be long. Some of you helped elect me to keep law and order in this county. I aim to do it. Avalanche has always been an easy-goin', wide-open town—a fine place to drop in on a payday and raise a little good-natured hell. All I'm doin' is drawin' the line at lawlessness. I won't have visitors shootin' up bars, even if they can pay for the damages, and I personally won't have visitors slappin' my face, homely as it is. And anybody else who steps over that deadline is goin' where these two fellows are goin'. Move along, you boys!"

HE PUSHED the two ahead of him into the street. The crowd growled and protested. A few of the men followed Dan down to the jail.

There were six cells in the Avalanche jail, good old-fashioned brick cells, each with an iron-barred door and an iron-barred window.

Dan locked the drunk in Number One cell, and the wealthy Wyoming rover in Number Six cell. This hardboiled traveler answered to the vague description of Lefty Dakin—about five feet ten tall, blue eyes, sandy hair. And Dan wanted to check up on him.

Dan sat down on the edge of the iron cot and said, "So you're from Wyoming?"

"That's my story," said the suspect.

"I'm goin' to check up on you," Dan said. "Know anybody I can telegraph to?"

"Plenty."

"What county you from?"

"Black Sand."

"What's the county seat of Black Sand County?"

"Reata," the man snapped.

"Know the sheriff?"

"Listen," the prisoner growled; "let me pay my fine and get on my way. You ain't got a damned thing on me."

"If you've been lyin' to me," Dan said, "you're apt to stay here a good long time."

The mystery man from Wyoming stretched out on his back on the cot and was snoring before Dan had the cell door locked.

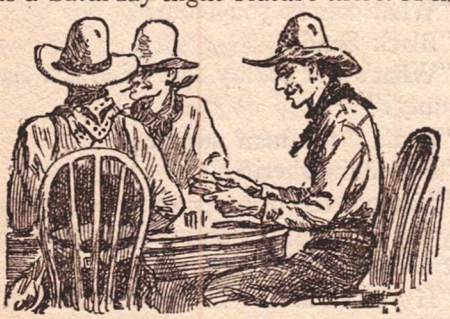
WHEN Dan went into the street and started toward the mine offices to send the telegram, the sudden night of the mountains had come. The saloons and gambling halls were already blazing with light and roaring with convivial voices. And when you could hear this sound above the roar of the river, you knew that a big payday night in Avalanche was in full swing.

Dan had heartily enjoyed such nights before he became sheriff. Now, he felt uneasy. But it wasn't the responsibility of handling a crowd of uproarious hard-rock men and punchers that worried him. He could not get Lefty Dakin the outlaw out of his mind. And Lefty Dakin was headed this way! Or was he already here?

The telegraph operator at the mine office was just preparing to call it a day, when Dan dropped in. Dan wrote a message to the sheriff of Black Sand County, Reata, Wyoming, asking for information on a man named Henty, and another message to the chief-of-police of San Francisco, asking for a full description of Lefty Dakin—return wire, collect.

The operator said, "This circuit won't be open much longer than fifteen minutes, Sheriff, and it will be dead until seven tomorrow morning. You probably won't get an answer on either of these till nine or ten."

"That," Dan said, "will be okay." And he walked back down the street. He stopped in at The Golden Gate for a bite of supper, then moved on to Irish Joe's to watch the start of the big stud game that was a Saturday night feature there. A half



dozen well-to-do ranchers made it a point to meet and play for heavy stakes, to discuss the cattle business, and to drink the excellent Bourbon that Joe imported especially for them.

Dan watched the game for a couple of hours, then, uneasy again, strolled back down the street past Jake Lorbo's store. All that money in there worried him. He pictured the outlaw Lefty Dakin looting the safe; pictured the difficulty he would have in laying hands on a man so clever, so dangerous. A green sheriff, and a notorious outlaw, famed for the ferocity with which he shot his way out of tight corners!

There was a light burning in Jake Lorbo's upstairs window. The old skinflint was probably going to bed. The store was totally dark. Dan reflected that if Jake hadn't been such a tightwad he would have kept a light burning all night near that safe. How much was in it tonight? A hundred thousand? A hundred and fifty thousand?

Dan tried the doornob. The door was locked, but the lock was an old one and a cheap one. An experienced crook could pick that lock in a few seconds.

The sheriff returned to Irish Joe's and watched the stud game a while longer. Uneasiness again drove him out into the darkness and down the street to Lorbo's store. It was foolish, he reasoned, to get so worked up over a mere rumor; but Dan could not reason away his worry.

The light at the upstairs window was out. Jake was probably in bed by now.

When he returned to Joe's, a number of old friends urged him to join a low stake jack pot game. Dan sat in. But his mind was so uneasy that he played a poor game, and at the end of an hour he was about ten dollars short.

From time to time he was interrupted to stop the fights that were continually starting. Once he was called over to the Golden Gate to separate two men who were determined to carve each other's hearts out—a hard-rock man and a cowboy. He established peace between them and returned to his ten cent limit game.

IT WAS now almost two in the morning. The roar of voices, of breaking glasses, of stamping feet had reached its height. From now on the holiday makers, especially those who had been drinking hard all day, would begin to pass out. They would fall asleep in chairs, or curl up on

the floor in corners or against the walls.

The roar of the river, only a few feet away, was now inaudible. The time would later be definitely established as ten minutes after two.

Above the uproar, Dan suddenly heard a deep and definite *thump.*

It seemed to come up from the earth; not a clearly defined sound, but nevertheless sufficiently plain to register a slight, perceptible tap on one's nerves. The ordinary men would not have been aware of it, but the sensation was one with which years of experience had made Dan familiar, and one for which his nerves tonight were peculiarly sensitive.——It was the thump of a dynamite blast, and Dan's nerves, over many years had become too keenly sensitive to that tiny shock to be deceived.

Without explaining his action, he arose hastily from the poker table, forced his way through the crowd and out onto the street. With his six-shooter ready, he dashed along the street to Lorbo's store.

One glance upheld his long uneasiness and his recent diagnosis of that mysterious *thump!*

The door of the store was open. A candle burned on a soapbox near the safe. The front door of the safe was not entirely blown off. It was dangling from the upper hinge. And the safe was practically empty of contents. In front of it was a burlap sack, and this had been nearly filled with the money from the safe.

Two men were struggling in the open space beside the safe. One was thick-shouldered and gray-haired. He wore a white cotton nightshirt. Quickly Dan recognized him as Jake Lorbo. The other man wore over his face a black handkerchief.

As Dan ran toward them, the man in the black handkerchief raised a revolver above his head. He brought the long heavy barrel of it smashing down on the old man's head.

Jake Lorbo collapsed to the floor.

Dan's long, fast strides shook the floor, the flimsy walls, and made cans and boxes rattle and rumble on the shelves.

He lifted his gun to shoot. The masked man turned about with his own gun firmly held and leveled. He gave a short, cackling laugh, and swept the candle off the box with his other hand.

"Come on, you snoopin' coyote!" he snarled. "Shoot it out with me!"

THE STORE was plunged promptly into darkness. The only light came from behind Dan, a faint glow reflected from a window across the street, or from the black rock wall behind the town.

Slight as this light was, it placed Dan at a great disadvantage. Against the faint glow, he would be silhouetted, though this advantage to the robber would not become effective until his eyes were accustomed to the store's almost total darkness.

Dan fired in the general vicinity of the man—and leaped to the right. When a bluish-red flame spat out with a roar, he swiftly answered it, trying to place his bullet exactly where it had occurred. Behind him, on the shelves, cans were tumbling down. Evidently, the outlaw's answer to his first shot had ripped into that quarter.

In the blackness, he heard the man chuckle. Again Dan fired and dodged, hoping that that slug had thumped home.

Then a flame that began blue, changed to red and swept into a mighty pillar of fire, leaped crashing to the utmost limits of the universe.

Before that fierce and awful flame, Dan dropped swiftly into unconsciousness.

He returned to life to the accompaniment of a stabbing headache. It was the most intense pain he had ever known. A cool breeze was flowing over his face. He was lying flat on his back. He was in darkness.

Dan put his hand to his head, where the ache seemed worst, and his hand came away wet and sticky. He was bleeding. Evidently he had been creased.

It took the sheriff some time to pull himself together. At first he could not sit up. Then he became aware that the store door was still open. Above the roaring of the river he heard groans.

By reaching up to the edge of the counter, Dan was able to pull himself to his feet. Clinging there, he waited listening intently. The groan came again.

The sudden belief, backed by a desper-

ate hope, that the groans issued from the outlaw, shot down by Dan's hand and now probably dying, made Dan lightheaded.

He waited for strength to flow back into his arms and legs, then he groped about on the floor until his hand closed over his fallen gun. This he held ready with his right hand. With his other, he quickly struck a match, holding the dancing flame over his head.

The burlap sack was gone!

The sheriff softly cursed. He need not waste his time looking here for the outlaw who wore the black handkerchief.

Slowly and painfully, Dan walked to the rear of the store. The groans were emanating from old Jake Lorbo, who lay huddled as he had fallen, not far from the open door of his gutted safe.

Dan secured candles from the shelf. His head felt as though it were about to split open. Blood trickled down his forehead. He brushed it out of his eyes with the back of his hand. Every step he took made the pain worse. He felt sick and faint.

He lit a dozen candles, placing them on boxes in a semicircle about the safe; then he fetched a bucket of water which he dumped over the unconscious old man. There was a lump the size of a hen's egg on Jake's head, where that heavy revolver barrel had struck.



Old man Lorbo opened his eyes and groaned more loudly. He struggled to sit up.

"Where's my money?" he gasped.

"Gone," said Dan.

"He got away?"

"He got away."

"You let him get away," the old man panted. "You didn't try to stop him!"

"We shot it out," Dan said. "He creased me."

Jake began beating angrily on the floor with his fists.

"Well, do something!" he cried. Then he peered at Dan. "There's blood all over you! Where'd he get you?"

"On top of the head. He must have whittled out quite a little groove. Pull yourself together, Jake. Try to stand up. I want you to keep sightseers out o' this store while I round up a posse. I'm goin' to have this country scoured. Stand up!"

He helped Jake to his feet. The old man groaned and clapped his hand to his hip.

"If you catch that outlaw," he panted, "I'm gonna tear his black heart out with my bare hands!" He glared at Dan. "Why don't you say somethin' about this old tin can of a safe? Why don't you say you told me to buy a manganese steel safe?"

Dan only looked at him curiously. Dan was trying to gather himself together for the longest walk he had ever undertaken—the hundred yards to the Golden Gate. The world was spinning in agony for Dan.

"What good will it do organizin' a posse?" the old man cried. "There's men been driftin' out o' this town in ones and twos and threes since midnight. You know there's still two thousand men hell raisin' in this town. How long have we been out of commission?"

"Maybe fifteen minutes," Dan said, starting for the door.

"Yes!" the old man snarled. "And where is he? Where was his hoss? Down on that tie line! With all them drunks millin' around down there, stealin' each other's hosses, who would notice a feller mountin' his own hoss and stealin' away—with all my money?"

"Just the same," Dan said, "I'm goin' to swear in a posse. And while I'm gone, keep everybody out of here. Maybe he left somethin' for us to work on—maybe he didn't. I'm comin' back to look for clues."

Dan staggered out. He did not go immediately to the Golden Gate. First he went to the jail. For that cackling voice, before the duel had started, had sent his mind flashing to the tawny-haired man with the thick bankroll who had done the shooting in Irish Joe's.

He lit a candle and looked into the cells. His two prisoners were stretched out as he had left them, both asleep, both snoring. He was thankful that there had been no jailbreak to add to his worries.

Dan staggered on to the Golden Gate.

He knew it would be hard to assemble a useful posse.

The sheriff's appearance was greeted with a chorus of sudden shouts, then a growing silence, until the Golden Gate was very quiet. Miners, cowmen, gamblers and dance hall girls gathered about Dan.

He made his explanations quietly.

"Jake Lorbo's safe has been robbed. Stripped clean. I shot it out with the robber. He creased me and got away. I want two men to guard Lorbo's door for the rest of the night. Dick Stanley and Bert Hall. And I want a posse to start huntin' him down while I give the store a fine-combin' for clues, if he left any behind. Ben Dilley, you sober enough to handle a posse?"

"Sure am, Dan!" declared a big, red-bearded man.

"You know this country. Pick your men. Organize a posse of as many men as you know personally. Go down to Blue Gap and split up there. One bunch scatter and ride toward the railroad. Another bunch scatter and go up Wild Horse Gulch. Another bunch scatter and work over through those bad lands towards the Curly Q ranch. And scatter a big gang through the Gray Hills, too——I want to warn you that this man will shoot to kill on sight. He is a dead shot. He has been blowin' safes all over the Southwest. You men willin' to help Dilley?"

There was a roar of assent.

Dan said, "Ben, you've done deputy work and posse work before. You know how to handle this. The only marks of identification I can give you is that the outlaw wore a big brown Stetson, a blue flannel shirt, faded khaki pants—same kind of outfit as that Wyomin' rambler I put in the lockup this afternoon had."

"Sure it wasn't him?"

"Dead sure. He's still sleepin' it off in his cell. Get ready, boys, and work fast. This man must be wanted in a dozen places. There's sure to be big money on him, dead or alive. But be sure to beat him to the draw."

A cowboy asked, "See his face, Sheriff?"

"No. He wore a black rag over it. Look for a guy wearin' those clothes and carryin' his plunder in a burlap sack—half a sackful."

"He can't hide that on no horse!" another man declared.

DAN returned to Lorbo's store with the entire company of the Golden Gate, girls and all, following him. But at the door he placed the two men he had deputized as guards, with orders to let no one in, then he helped Ben Dilley organize the big posse.

Then Dan began a thorough search at Lorbo's for material evidence. It was, he felt certain, a hopeless task. Lefty Dakin was far too clever a crook to leave clues. If he had left clues, what help would they be?

Dan began at the front door. With a cluster of three candles in one hand for illumination, he examined the door lock. It had not been forced. It had been picked, or worked with a skeleton key.

A faint glitter on the planks outside the sill attracted him. He reached down and picked up a length of thin but surprisingly stiff iron wire. One end was bent over at right angles.

Dan looked at it for some little time. He was certain that the outlaw had picked the lock with this short bit of hooked wire. It occurred to him that the outlaw was careless to have dropped that piece of wire there. No matter how daring a crook was, if he didn't take pains with these little details, he was apt some day to be tripped up.

Dan pocketed the little piece of springy iron wire and went on to the back of the store. Just as Dan had left him old man Lorbo was still seated on a box moaning.

"Did you send out the posse?"

"They're on the way. Have you touched anything?"

"No, Dan." The old man's voice was a whimper. The full realization of his loss was striking home. Dan knew that Jake had large sums of money on deposit in various city banks, because he had seen the shipments go out. But to the old man, this loss was as painful as if it represented his entire fortune.

Then Jake began to talk. "Dan," he said,

"you can believe it or not, but I'm a poor man. The money I've been savin' up, I put—every red penny of it—into land durin' that Southern California boom. When the boom collapsed, I was stripped clean."

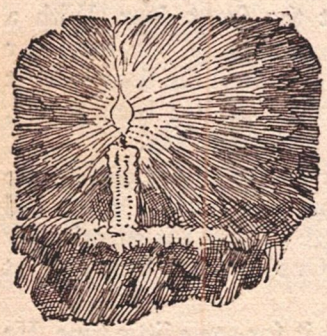
"You've still got the land," said Dan.

"It ain't worth ten cents on the dollar! Dan, you've got to nab that feller! Think of all the pennies and dimes I've been keepin' in this safe for these poor miners!"

"I've been thinkin' about them," Dan admitted. "Are you sure you haven't touched anything?"

"Nary a thing, Dan. All I did was to peep into the safe to make sure he took it all. He did. He cleaned it clean."

Dan lighted more candles and began a thorough search of the premises about the safe.



"How about fingerprints?" the old man asked.

Dan shook his head. "We're sure enough who did this. Even if we weren't, fingerprinting takes special apparatus."

"Mebbe," the old man suggested, "he didn't try to make a get-away. With all the men there are in this town, mebbe he jest cached that sack somewhere, and is minglin' with the men now."

"I thought of that," Dan said. "I've got a half dozen men circulatin', and there'll be that many more down at the tie line waitin' for any man to come along with that sack."

"He could cache it and come back for it months from now!"

"He could," Dan agreed, "but if it was Lefty Dakin, he wouldn't. Any man who yells at you, 'Come on! Shoot it out with me!' ain't the kind who would be so patient as to wait. This feller was reckless and fearless and careless. Look there!"

Dan went over and picked up, near the outer corner of the dangling safe door, a small wooden box containing three sticks of dynamite, each wrapped in paraffin paper.

"If you think he wasn't reckless and careless, look at this!"

Very gingerly the ex-dynamite man removed from a corner of the box a half-dozen small copper cartridges. At first glance, they appeared to be twenty-two caliber, long rifle shells, only they contained no bullet, and the shells were not flanged at the closed end. They were detonators—fulminate of mercury caps.

In blowing open the safe, the outlaw had made a small hole in one stick of dynamite with a pointed stick of wood. This stick of wood was lying on the floor near where the box had been. Into this small orifice he had pushed one of the detonators. He had inserted a short length of fuse in the hole in the detonator. And he had probably lit the fuse before placing the stick under the door.

"He would have," Dan muttered. "Nobody," he went on with feeling, "but a reckless, careless damn fool would ever leave detonator caps in the same box with dynamite. The jar of the explosion might have set off any or all of these caps. And they would have set off the dynamite and blown him sky high. The fellow has guts, but he must be one of these after-thinkers. Plumb careless!"

A few drops of congealing blood on the floor near the safe puzzled Dan. These reddish stains he found repeated down the store, almost to the door. But this blood might well have been his own. Certainly he had not winged the outlaw sufficiently to prevent his get-away, and he doubted that he had winged him at all.

And so, the sum total of Dan's thorough search brought to light only two facts: first, that the outlaw had picked the front door lock and dropped his improvised key; and second, that the outlaw had, in blowing off the safe door, needlessly endangered his life by leaving fulminate of mercury caps in the box with his superfluous dynamite.

JAKE LORBO said, "Well, Dan, what do you make of it all?"

And Dan answered, "Not too much. I'm pretty certain that this fellow didn't just ride into town and walk in here and blow this safe."

"Why?"

"Because he had to study out the lay of the land and figure out his get-away. He may have been in town all day. And we can be certain that he figured out his get-away to a hair. He's smart as a sheep dog—too smart to be tryin' to make his get-away now. Those posses don't mind chasin' all over the hills, they're too drunk! But they're chasin' rainbows. He ain't out there. He's right in this town!"

Jake reversed his opinion and became skeptical. "How do you figger that?"

"Because he's smart. He figured on those searchin' parties. He figgered that by tomorrow this town'll be full o' strange faces. He can stay here; and it would be like him to stay, and chuckle to himself over all the hullabaloo. Long before this, he's got that sack cached somewhere. With all these rocks, it would take a thousand men a month even to begin exhaustin' all the possibilities!"

"I don't see," Jake protested, "what makes you think he'd risk stayin' around here."

"His sense o' humor," Dan said succinctly. "And it'd be safer in the long run, too."

"But jest what," the old man said peevishly, "have you got to work on, when you bile it all dawn?"

"His carelessness," Dan answered. "He was careless twice that we know of. Mebbe he'll be careless just once more!"

The old man grunted skeptically.

"I'm out my money," he said. "The miners who kept their savin's in my safe are out theirs. And you," he said balefully, "are out that fine political future of yours!"

Dan knew that this was true. The news of the robbery, of his ineffectual attempt to prevent it, would be all over the State, as fast as the telephone, the telegraph, the mails and roving cowmen could carry it. The news would flash from ranch to mine to timber camp, until the loneliest prospector would know of the grim joke that an outlaw had played on the green young sheriff of Avalanche County.

The splitting pain in Dan's head settled down to a cruel, steady throb. He should have gone to bed and stayed there, but he was in his saddle all night long. When he was not in the saddle, he was mingling with the groups of men gathered at bars, discussing nothing but that daring robbery.

The concensus of opinion was that the sheriff had been slow to his gun. Dan's habitual deliberateness, his already famous drawl, made an excellent basis for this supposition. Dan, they said, should have been ready to fire the instant the outlaw dropped old man Lorbo.

It was impossible to explain to them that he had acted as quickly as any human could; that the outlaw had moved with the speed of a cornered rattlesnake; that it was impossible to put a bead on him until that candle was out.

Long before morning, that royal road to opportunity which led over the hills from the sheriff's office had become a dim and bitter memory. Men were beginning to think that, as a sheriff, Dan was a mighty good dynamite man.

He overheard one man say, "Back to the mines!" And stared hard at him. The man was about five foot ten, with blue eyes and, under his big Stetson, sandy hair. He had, moreover, a harsh cackle of a laugh. Lefty Dakin? Half the men in Avalanche tonight might be Lefty Dakin.

A clever crook, Dan had heard, tries hard not to be at all conspicuous. Because they were cheapest and most practical, the majority of these men wore dark blue or brown flannel shirts, washable khaki pants and big Stetsons. The outlaw had worn that garb. No wonder the sheriff of Blueblanket had said in his letter, "He ain't very descriptive!"

Dan paid frequent visits to the tie line down the valley. Men were coming and going. More men were going out in searching parties. There must be, now, upwards of three hundred mounted men fine-combing the hills for a man with a burlap sack in his possession, or a man with a very fat saddlebag, or a man whose person bulged noticeably. In fact, any lone rider was certain to be stopped at the point of ready guns and minutely searched.

That outlaw, Dan was more and more certain, was right here in Avalanche. But which of these gossiping men was he?

The sun came up and struck its first golden shafts into a town still seething with the mystery. At a little after eight, Dan went to his office at the jail, sat down at his desk, and tried to think. By noon, the town would be full of men from nearby mines and ranches. He could hear men and women asking him, at first gravely, then more and more mockingly. "Found any clues yet, Sheriff?"

And he would be besieged by disheartened men and women wringing their hands—the unfortunates who had left their savings in that damned old tin can! He thought of Jed White's widow. Every penny of hers had been in that safe. He thought of Tim Burrows. Tim wouldn't be fit for the grind of hard-rock work much longer. Tim had saved and scrimped and sacrificed, so that he and his invalid wife could spend their last years on a little California farm.



Dan, hunched down in the chair before his desk, groaned. "Maybe they were right. Maybe I could have put a bead on him. Maybe I do belong back in the mines."

The story would grow. People would exaggerate it. It would become the joke of the State. He would never live it down. He could hear people saying, years from now, "Found any clues yet, Sheriff?"

He brought a clenched fist down with a bang on the desk. Savagely, he declared. "I'll find him!" Then, in a low growl, as his eyes flashed: "Come on, you snoopin' coyote! Shoot it out with me!"

The door opened. Steve Gowell came in on his crutches, with a tray covered with a red-and-white napkin.

"Mornin', Sheriff. Any new clues?"

"No, Steve."

"I brought some breakfast over for them two fellers—and some fer you."

"Thanks, Steve."

"Drink a good hot cup o' black coffee and you'll feel better, Sheriff."

He placed the coffee, and a plate of ham and eggs, and another plate of bread and butter on Dan's desk. Dan gave him the keys to the cells. When Steve returned, he was grinning.

"If you want to see a pair of dandy hangovers, Sheriff, just take a peek at them two guests of yours. They swear and declare it's a rank injustice, being locked up like this. They don't remember doin' anything. That Wyomin' guy wants to know if he can have a leetle hair o' the dog. But the one who slapped you across the face is sickest. He's as pale as lard, and he says to me, 'Friend,' he says, 'if you, by any happenstance, ever again see me elevatin' a drink o' hard licker in the general direction of my face, will you be so kind as to step up and deliver me a swift kick right back here?' He was settin' on the edge of his cot, and by the looks of the floor, he must smoke three cigarettes at a time!"

Dan grinned feebly. He opened a desk drawer, took out a pint bottle of rye, and told Steve to give each of the men a drink.

WHILE Steve was absent on this errand of mercy, the mining company's telegraph operator came in with a yellow message blank in his hand and a broad grin at his lips.

"Here's your answer from Wyoming, sheriff," he said. "There ain't an answer yet from Frisco."

Dan took the message from him and read:

SPIKE HENTY WELL KNOWN HERE DESCRIPTION FIVE FEET TEN BLUE EYES SANDY HAIR STOP IS SON OF ONE OF WEALTHIEST RANCHERS IN THIS SECTION STOP SPIKE HAS HABIT OF SHOOTING UP BARROOM SCENERY WHEN DRUNK STOP FAMILY SENDS HIM REGARDS WANTS TO KNOW WHY HE DOES NOT WRITE TELL HIM TO WIRE FULL DETAILS HIS ACTIVITIES TO HIS FATHER AND IF HE IS IN TROUBLE WILL FORWARD NEEDED MONEY STOP HIS SISTER INSISTS HE RETURN PAIR OF MEXICAN SILVER SPURS HE STOLE FROM HER HOPE CHEST REGARDS

JACK DOUGLAS SHERIFF

The telegraph operator went out, promising to bring the answer from San Francisco as soon as it came in. Dan got up and sauntered into the jail. He paused at Number One cell and put the key in the lock.

The man who had slapped him across the face was seated on the edge of his cot in the act of rolling a cigarette. He drew a feather edge of paper across a moistened lower lip, deftly inserted the cigarette into his mouth as part of the gesture, and ignited a match with his thumbnail.

He looked up, saw Dan, and grinned feebly.

Dan threw open the door. He noticed that the floor was littered with cigarette butts.

"What's your name?"

"Don Vogel."

"Puncher?"

"Hoss wrangler. Out of a job."

"Got a horse?"

"He's down on the tie line, if he ain't been stole."

"You ride out and see Pete Lait, the foreman at the L-Bar-D. He needs a good man. There's plenty L-Bar-D boys in town to tell you the way. And listen, fellow. The next time you get lickered up, don't go around slappin' sheriffs' faces—or you're apt to get your nose punched in. Travel!"

The man with the hangover lurched to his feet, hitched up his pants and limped out.

Dan went on to Cell Number Six. Spike Henty was standing with his back to the cell door, gazing upward at the patch of barred blue sky visible through the little window.

The sheriff unlocked the door and said, "Spike, where's those silver spurs?"

The tawny-haired young man spun about, his eyes flashing. He licked his lips and glared at Dan.

"What spurs?" he snapped.

"Those spurs you stole out of your sister's hope chest," Dan grimly answered—and decided to play the joke out.

Spike Henty was pale. He moistened his lips again. His Adam's apple dived down under the collar band of his shirt and popped up again.

"The doggoned little tattle-tale!" he sputtered.

"This," Dan said, "will be a lesson to you. A big, grown-up man like you goin' around, stealin' spurs out of young ladies' hope chests! You ought to turn black with shame."

"Well, I ain't black with shame," the Wyoming rambler growled. "How about that new, elegant horsehair reata she stole off me? This ain't justice! It wasn't thievin'. It was the old law o' Moses—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a pair o' Mexican spurs for a fine, new horsehair reata!"

Dan laughed. "All right, Spike," he said. "You can roll along. Stop in at the mine office on your way out and send your old man a telegram. And the next time you come hightailin' into this town, use paper bullets when you shoot up bars. Will you have another drink before you go?"

The young man grinned pleasantly.

"Sheriff," he said, "I thank you for your extensive and warm-blooded hospitality. In fact, words plumb fail me. I reckon the drinks are on me, and thankin' you most kindly, I'm takin' sa'sparilla this fine rosy mornin'. Tell me somethin'. What was all the goin' and comin' about last night?"

Dan's smile died out. Briefly, almost curtly, he told the man from Wyoming about last night's robbery.

Spike Henty pushed his big hat over one ear and said, "Well, that sure is tough and unfortunate, Sheriff. What were you doin'—lockin' up suspects?"

"I looked in just once, a half hour or so after it happened, to make sure it hadn't been a jail break." Dan chuckled bitterly. "For a minute, there, I had the idea you were Lefty Dakin."

Spike Henty shook his head with sympathy.

"I hope you find the outlaw," he said. "Have you got my gun? It don't seem to be anywhere on my person."

"It's in my desk."

Dan returned the young man's revolver to him, and they shook hands and wished each other luck. Dan hated to see him go. He had taken a real liking to the Wyoming rambler.

Dan seated himself on the edge of his

desk and smoked a cigarette. His mind drifted over the surface of last night's events. And suddenly it came to rest on a startling, a preposterous suspicion. An idle question of Spike Henty's clicked into his mind, "What was all the comin' and goin' last night?" Dan knocked over an ink bottle in his haste to get off the desk. He ran into the empty jail. In the open doorway of Cell Number One he stopped. He looked in. He went to the cot and yanked off the gray blanket. Underneath were sheets—the heritage from some soft-hearted sheriff's wife of the past.



The upper sheet was torn in half. Strips had been torn from the center of it. Near the foot of the cot was a smear of blood.

"Bandages!" Dan exclaimed aloud. "I *did* wing him!"

But still he couldn't be sure of this amazing supposition. He looked eagerly about on the floor among the cigarette butts, turning them over with his foot, striking matches. And finally he found what he had hardly dared hope he might find.

Inside the door, partly hidden under two cigarette butts, was a short length of thin but springy iron wire, one end of which was bent down at right angles!

DYNAMITE DAN was growling to himself as he dashed out of the jail; dashed through his office, and into the street. That outlaw had deliberately been offensive in Irish Joe's, so that he would be locked up overnight! What a perfect alibi that gave him. A hundred men had seen him slap Dan's face; a hundred men would vouch that he had spent the night in that jail. He could go wherever he wished, unsuspected! In any posse that stopped him now, there would be at least one man who had seen that slap he gave the sheriff in Irish Joe's!

There was something diabolically clever about that man. A coiled rattlesnake was no surer, no deadlier. That harsh cackling laugh had been in Dan's ears all night.

No wonder Lefty Dakin had laughed! What a fast one he had put over on the green young sheriff!

This whole thing was rolling into a pretty big joke, and that outlaw would brag about it. They always did. Dan could hear men seated about campfires bursting into roars of laughter over it; could hear lone men telling passing strangers on the prairies, "Did you hear the joke Lefty Dakin played on Sheriff Wharton at Avalanche?"——Dan began to see a brighter and brighter red.——"Unlocked the cell door, the Sheriff did, and told Lefty Dakin to travel!"

Roars of laughter. Everybody in the State would be laughing.

"I'm gonna get that rattlesnake single-handed!" muttered the sheriff.

He encountered a group of men in the street, panted, "Any of you boys see that guy who slapped me yesterday at Joe's?"

"Just went down the street, Sheriff!"

On his way to the tie-line! On his way to freedom! Dan still remembered that defiant challenge, "Come on, you snoopin' coyote! Shoot it out with me!"

Reckless and foolish. Dan had matched his marksmanship once with Lefty Dakin. He ought to have learned his lesson. He ought to organize a posse. No, my God! He'd get Lefty Dakin, or Lefty Dakin would get him!

"Shoot it out! Come on!"—the words seemed to ring in his memory.

A hearty voice cried, "Hey there, big feller, what're you mutterin' to yourself about? How about that drink I was goin' to buy?"

It was the young man from Wyoming. Dan broke into a lope. The Wyoming rambler fell into a lope beside him.

"Sheriff, I'll bet you got a nice and fancy red-hot clue!"

Dan ignored him. He approached another group of men. Had they seen the fellow who slapped him yesterday in Irish Joe's?

Sure! The guy was moochin' down towards the tie line. Passed this way not three minutes ago. What was wrong?

"Nothin'," Dan snapped and loped on.

The Wyoming rambler remained tirelessly at his elbow.

"What's comin' off, Sheriff?" he asked. "We gonna start a little personal war on somebody? Lefty Dakin? Huh?"

"You go back and drink your sa-sparilla," Dan advised him.

"When there's maybe some shootin' to be done?" the young man yelled. "I ain't lammed a lump o' lead into a badman for a real long spell."

"This," Dan said angrily, "is serious, young fellow. You just leave me attend to this. I don't want you."

"Mebbe not," his light-hearted companion agreed, "but, on the other hand, mebbe you *need* me. I'm a shootin' fool, Sheriff. I drop my badmen long before you can see the whites of their eyes. I'm one of these instinct shooters. Get me to tell you about the time I ricocheted a bullet off a rock to go into a cave where a rustler was hidin'. A perfect and extra-fancy billard shot of mine! Did that bullet carom off that rock and into his brain and kill him dead?—Go on and ask me, Sheriff!"

Dan saved his breath. With his recent prisoner not more than a foot behind him, Dan reached the tie line. The man he was looking for was not in evidence. But Dan found a man he knew tightening his cinch and preparing to travel—one of the men in the Circle K outfit.

"Amos, have you seen that fellow who took a slap at me yesterday up at Joe's?"

"Nope," said Amos.

"How long you been here?"

"I got in a half hour ago from an all night's look for that outlaw. I just been feedin' and waterin' my hoss. Anything I can do?"

"No, thanks."

Dan headed back toward town. Spike Henty said, "He's doubled back on you."

"Spike," Dan said earnestly, "I'm askin' you man to man to keep out of this. This is my personal fight."

"It was before he slapped your face," declared Spike, "and carved that groove down the top of your noble dome. Anybody who slaps or creases a friend of mine has declared war on me!"

DAN forebore further argument. He was looking up the slag dump which ran in a steep slope below the refinery. In the reddish cinders which had drifted over the broken lumps he saw regularly spaced, new footprints.

Someone had recently run up that slope toward the refinery!

Dan looked up, but he saw no one. What he did see, however, made his heart leap. It was the old scaffolding which ran up the black wall behind the smelter to one of the old drifts, long ago abandoned. A man who knew Western mining could follow that drift to a transverse drift, which would lead to other drifts, and so into the new workings which were being tunneled almost at the top of the cliff. He could easily make his way into those upper workings and escape over the brow of the cliff. If he had a horse tethered up there, he could work south, over the desert, and into Texas or Mexico!

There was no doubt in Dan's mind that Lefty Dakin had planned and was executing this escape with the same reckless cleverness that characterized all his plottings.

In the path at the foot of the slag dump a knot of men had gathered. One of them now called, "Hey, Dan! You trailin' that outlaw? You want some help?"

Dan turned to shout, "Stay where you are. It's Lefty Dakin!"

He was unaware how swiftly that information flashed from mouth to mouth the length of the street, of the faces that turned upward to watch him and the man beside him as they clawed up the steep slope. From below, that scene was as clear, as vivid, as events seen on a motion picture screen.

Dan had turned and was climbing faster.

And suddenly Dan saw his quarry—saw the flash of faded khaki as the outlaw sped from one great lump of slag to another, under the very loom of the refinery.

Spike Henty did not see him until the outlaw leaped again. Then the young man from Wyoming snatched out his gun and cried, "Sheriff, I need a new notch on my gun. Excuse me for hornin' in on your party!"

He aimed and fired. Dan heard the bul-

let strike a rock and scream off to thump into the refinery flooring.

Lefty Dakin had evidently been unaware that he was pursued. With the agility of a cat, he pivoted about, gun in hand, and fired!

Dan all but heard the thump of the lead slug as it struck the Wyoming rambler. It hit high. Spike Henty uttered a savage g r o a n, f e l l backward and rolled down the slope. And Dan shouted the words that had been on his lips since a little after two that morning.



"Come o n, you snoopin' coyote! Shoot it out with me!"

He fired. His footing was insecure. The recoil of his gun almost tipped him over backwards. Certainly, the odds were all against him in this reckless duel.

Before he could shoot again, a bullet struck his hat. The next bullet tunneled through his hair above his ear, so close to the scalp that the skin stung. The next burned through the cloth of the shirt on his right shoulder, scorched the flesh, and sent him off balance again.

A roar went up from the men in the street. They thought that bullet had gone home. Then, except for the roar of the river, silence.

To recover his balance, Dan dropped to his knees—and thereby saved his reckless life. The air an inch over his head snarled like ripping canvas.

Dan brought his gun down and fired. He saw Lefty Dakin stagger back. From the twist of his body, it had been the left shoulder.

His gun came up again—just as Dan's was coming down. This shot would tell. It certainly would tell!

Dan pulled the trigger. He saw the gun slip out of the outlaw's hand. Dan shot again—and had the savage pleasure of seeing, before the outlaw plunged from sight behind the rock, a small dark spot centered perfectly between his eyes!

The man was dead long before Dan reached him. And fifty feet beyond him was the burlap sack. With two minutes more of a start, he and that bag would have been in the mine, climbing to the top and to safety.

But instead, Dan would say modestly, some time later, "It wasn't me that got him; it was his carelessness."

At the moment, as Dan turned with that already famous burlap bag in his hands and swung it over his head, the men in the town below set up a cheer that made Dan's face burn with pleasure.

He did not have to be told that that last shot of his was one of the historic shots that would be heard, if not around the world, at least by plenty of people. Telephones, the telegraph, the mails, would carry the echoes of that shot all over the West; men gathered about campfires would discuss it; lone riders meeting in deserts and mountain passes and fords would stop and talk about it.

Bag in hand, Dan went down the hill. The Wyoming rambler's descent had been stopped by an ungiving lump of slag. He was sitting up, with his right hand pressed down over his left shoulder.

"Sheriff," he said, "that was as nice an exhibition of good old-fashioned, home-cooked shooting as ever I clapped an eye on! That was how my maw taught me to meet my enemies—the way you handled him! From the bottom of my warm and glowin' heart—congratulations!"

Dan gave him a hand down the slope. The Wyoming rambler continued, "Sheriff, I like it here. I've made up my mind to settle down here and grow up with you. A couple of clever, straight-shootin' guys like us should hang together. And I ain't referrin' to any cottonwood trees, brother."

"It's a royal road to opportunity," Dan said.

The Wyoming rambler looked at him sharply, then grinned. "Royal and strewn with rose petals all the way!" he said.

Watch for "The Lockwasher" by GEORGE F. WORTS—Soon!

J. D. NEWSOM

gives us another of his famous yarns of the French Foreign Legion

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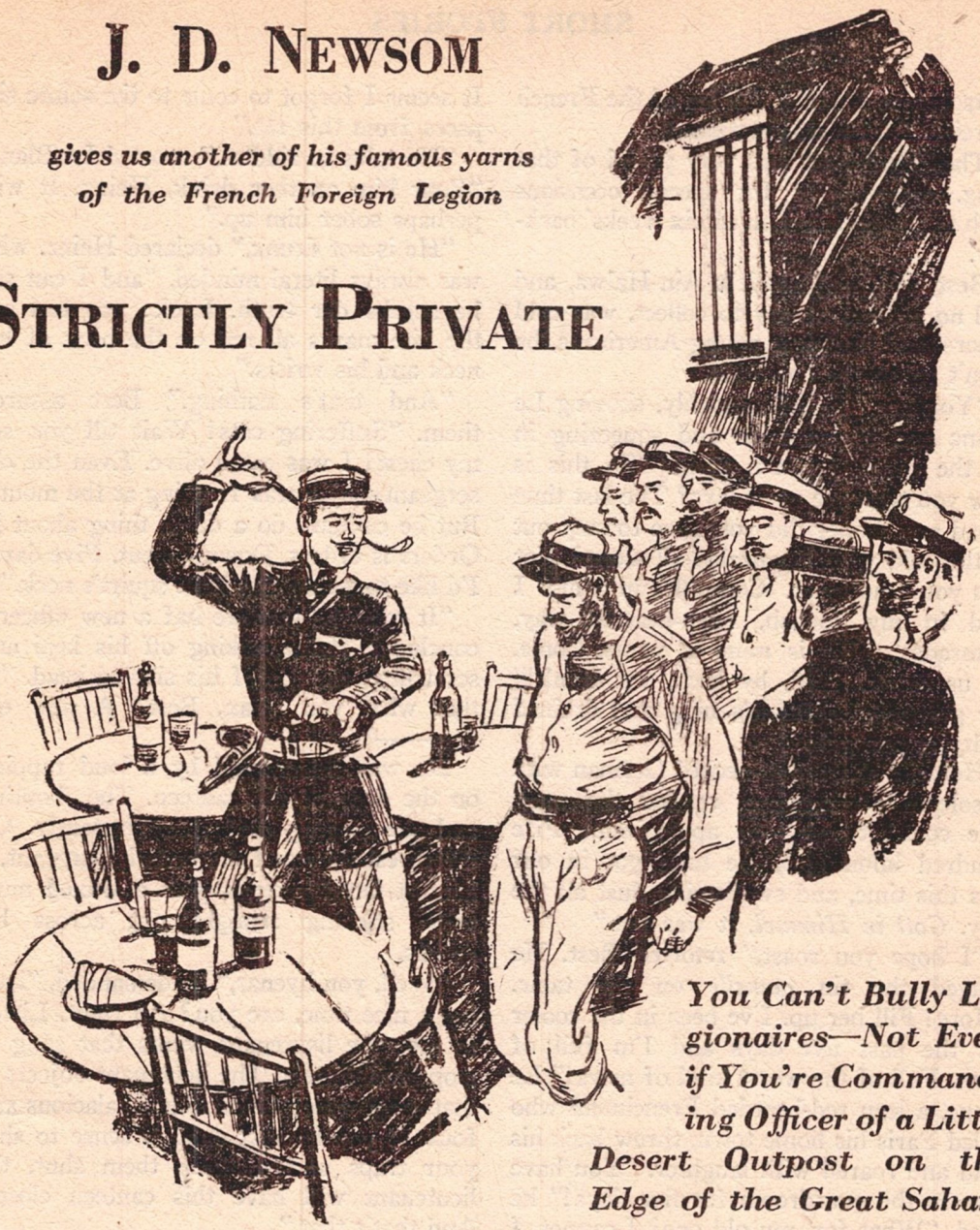


You Can't Bully Legionaires—Not Even if You're Commanding Officer of a Little Desert Outpost on the Edge of the Great Sahara

WHEN Legionaire Best elbowed his way into the canteen he found Le Blanc and Heinz, along with the rest of A Section, drinking up six weeks' back-pay.

A Section had just come in off patrol through the Djebel Hadoub foothills—a sun-blasted wilderness on the edge of the great Sahara which a camel itself, despite its alleged sobriety, would find rather arid.

The Legionaires were making up for lost time. They were pouring red canteen wine down their throats as though they were trying to put out an inner fire.

Eight bottles stood in a row on the table in front of Le Blanc and Heinz. They had unbuttoned their tunics and loosened their belts. Their kepis were pushed onto the backs of their heads. Hot, sweating, glassy eyed, they were banging their empty mugs on the table as they brayed the chorus of a particularly objectionable marching song. It had to do with the diversified amours of a mythical lady called "Alphonsine," who had had the good fortune to take up her residence at Ain-Halwa, the oasis where

Detachment Number Eleven of the French Foreign Legion was stationed.

The detachment was very proud of that song, reserving it for special occasions such as the liquefaction of six weeks' back-pay.

Best, who had not left Ain-Halwa, and had no arrears of pay to collect, was cold sober—and like most young Americans, he didn't relish the condition.

"You lice," he said amiably, shoving Le Blanc and Heinz aside and squeezing in on the bench between them. "So this is how you treat me nowadays? The last time *I* had any money did you have to stay out in the cold while I guzzled all alone? Not so's you'd notice it. 'Comrades in arms,' I said in my foolish, open-hearted way, 'comrades, what is mine is yours. Come, let us drink.' And, by heck, we drank!" He grabbed Le Blanc's mug and drained it dry at one gulp.

Heinz, a short, bull-necked German with a solemn countenance, refilled the mug. "Ve couldn't vait," he apologized. "Fife hundred kilometers, we have got in our legs this time, and swallowing dust all the way. *Gott in Himmel,* it was hot."

"I hope you roast," retorted Best. He banged the tin *gamelle* on the table. "More! Fill her up. I've been in the cooler for the past five days and I'm full of news. Full of the worst kind of news!" Le Blanc, a lean red-bearded Frenchman who called Paris his home town, threw back his head and roared with laughter. "You have been in the guardroom for five days!" he cried. "What for, my old one? I cannot, I will not, believe it!"

"Who said 'guardroom'? I mean down in the cells. Solitary confinement, if that means anything to your atrophied brain. I've been delousing myself ever since I came out. That's why you couldn't find me—if you so much as looked. Believe me, I was crawling."

Le Blanc ran his fingers through his short red beard. His eyes were round with astonishment. "You make the joshing with me," he protested, laying a large freckled hand on Best's arm. "You—in solitary confinement. But it is an absurdity. I do not swallow that fish."

"Wait till I tell you—you'll throw a fit. It seems I forgot to come to the salute six paces from this rat."

"He talks in riddles," snorted Le Blanc. "Pour him another drink, Heinz. It will perhaps sober him up."

"He is not drunk," declared Heinz, who was always literal minded, "and I can see he speaks der truth. Look: you can see the bite marks all red on the back of his neck and his wrists."

"And that's nothing," Best assured them. "Suffering cats! Wait till you see my chest! I was eaten alive. Even the old sergeant-major was frothing at the mouth. But he couldn't do a damn thing about it. Orders is orders. Down I went. Five days! I'd like to wring that little squirt's neck."

"It must be that we haf a new officer," concluded Heinz, taking off his kepi and scratching the top of his shaved head. "Is that what you mean, Best? A new officer——"

He was interrupted by a loud rapping on the door of the canteen. The shouting and the singing died away instantly. On the threshold stood the orderly sergeant, a hatchet-faced veteran with a waxed mustache sticking straight out across his cheeks.

"Well, you hyenas," he demanded, "having a nice time, are you? All right. Listen to me: the lieutenant wants that song to stop immediately. The lieutenant objects to that song, which he considers salacious and foul. If you haven't enough sense to shut your traps and to keep them shut, the lieutenant will have this canteen closed. And that's that."

An indignant clamor greeted this threat. The sergeant shrugged his shoulders. In his eyes there was a look of long suffering bewilderment.

"Easy, my infants," he said in a more confidential manner. "I didn't make the order. I'm simply telling you. I've sung that song myself many a time, but when an officer says no, it's *no*—and that's all there is to it. Try something else."

"What is this outfit supposed to be?" cried a flabbergasted trooper. "A children's nursery or a Sunday school class?"

Sergeant Tolbiac cupped his hands about his mouth. "Give 'Alphonsine' a rest," he urged in a hoarse whisper. "I don't want

to spoil your fun—you ought to know that, confound you—but what's the matter with 'The Lieutenant's Bride'? Try that!" Squaring his shoulders, he barked in his finest parade ground voice, "Detachment! Stand at ease! *Disposez!*" Then the sergeant turned on his heel and marched away, erect and as stiff as a ramrod, before any more embarrassing questions could he hurled at him.

FOR a moment a heavy silence weighed down upon the canteen, then, abruptly, someone began to chuckle. It spread, it grew into a mighty shout which made the walls rock.

A trooper jumped up onto a bench and waved his arms above his head, beating time as he chanted the opening verse of "The Lieutenant's Bride".

"Ah, que la vie est belle,
Pour une jeune mariée!"

The rest of that song is no better than it need be. Fifty leathery throats bellowed it with savage delight.

"There's your answer," grunted Best. "New officer. A dear little stranger." He spoke through clenched teeth. "Just the cutest thing you ever set eyes on. He breezed in about ten days after you pulled out, you lucky stiffs. He's too sweet for words! Scented handkerchiefs which he holds to his nose when he inspects our huts, silk shirts, a pomade. And mean! *Wow!* D'you know what he did right off the bat? Pitched into old Sergeant-Major Bourin. Called him a slack, inefficient buffoon—right on parade. He said that to Bourin, who's been running this outfit like clockwork for eighteen months! It's a crime!"

He was so mad that he sputtered incoherently. He grabbed up the nearest of the eight bottles and held it to his lips. To make matters worse the bottle was empty.

"Get me a drink, for the love of Pete!" the American shouted. "You guys get all the good breaks. You've been away for six weeks, gadding about in the open. We've been stewing in this damn dump, trying to keep this doggone looie from starting a mutiny. Everybody's sick of him. He'll bust things wide open if he ain't careful—and then, I'll bet, he'll turn around and put the blame on old man Bourin."



Heinz fought his way to the counter and came back with four more bottles tucked beneath his arms. "What for should they send an officer to command the detachment?" he lamented. "Forty men—that isn't an officer's command. And he called Bourin inefficient! *Du Herr Ye!* What did the old man do? Exblode?"

"Aw, he's a gentleman, even if he is a sergeant-major. He took it standing up. Smart as a whip. Didn't bat an eyelash. In his boots I'd go crazy. According to this new squirt everything is wrong: discipline, cleanliness, equipment, stores. You can't name a single thing he hasn't picked to pieces. He's the one and only walking compendium of all military knowledge."

"And Bourin has been in the Legion twenty-two years!" laughed Le Blanc. "Still, it may be good for him. One is told on good authority that humility is a virtue."

"That's one thing this new coot hasn't got: humility. Cocksure! You might think he'd invented the Legion. And he wants to reform us. Get that? That's why he stopped us singing 'Alphonsine.' He's going to reform the degenerate Legionaires, the good-for-nothing scoundrels! He's been threatening to close the canteen for the last couple of weeks."

"That would be a sad blow," drawled Le Blanc, fishing a crumpled cigarette out of the lining of his kepi. "If he closes the canteen I shall feel compelled to rebuke this strange creature. What is it called, do you know?"

"Do I know!" yelled Best. "I'll never forget it. It's a mile long and it fits him down to the ground: Gontrand de Montsault de Baillage. That's him all over—Gontrand. The complete aristocrat. So damned haughty, don't you know. So very refined, haw, haw!" His eyes blazed as he

spoke. "Legionaires are the scum of the earth. If you didn't know it you'll soon find out. Leave it to Gontrand to tell you where you get off. Say," he broke off, staring hard at LeBlanc "what's the matter with you? Where's the ghost?"

LE BLANC had turned chalk-white. He sat bolt upright, gaping open-mouthed at Best, while the flaming match he was holding scorched his fingertips. He threw the charred stick away and passed his hand over his eyes. And his hand shook.

"My old one," he pleaded, "would you mind repeating that name again? There is the great noise in here, and I have had so much to drink that my brain she is not functioning properly."

"Maybe we ought to get him oud in the fresh air," suggested Heinz. "To me he looks sick. When der freckles begin to show on a man's cheeks——"

"Heinz, *nom de Dieu,* shut up, will you!" rasped Le Blanc. "I want to find out who Best is talking about. What was that name?"

"Gontrand de Monsault de Baillage; Lieutenant of the French Foreign Legion, commanding, at the present moment, the Eleventh Detachment of the Third Battalion of the First Regiment. If you want any more details——"

Le Blanc's great fist crashed down on the table. His red beard bristled as he shouted: "I need no more details. I know all about that little cretin. Gontrand an aristocrat? Pah! An upstart. A tenth-rate—what do you call it in your jargon?—squire. A clodhopper. I did not think he had brains enough to pass the final examinations at the military college. But he did not get far. That is some consolation. An infantry officer! And he expected to become a gunner. Fool! I knew he could not get high marks *Ah, lala!* I shall pull his ears if he does not behave, the young Gontrand!"

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed Heinz, befuddled by this unexpected outburst. "You know of him then?"

Le Blanc helped himself to a mugful of wine and dashed the drops out of his mustache with a sweep of the back of his hand.

"Of course I know him!" he retorted. "His people were the laughing stock of Paris. They would have given their shirts to get into society, whatever that may be. Funny? *Mon Dieu!* It was the funniest thing since the Panama Canal scandals. Gontrand's father used to give me tips on the stock market on the off chance I might invite him and his wife to my house . . . And this lad sent you to the cells for five days did he? Wait till I see him!"

"Say, who are you trying to kid?" jeered Best. "Be yourself, Le Blanc. You're a soldier of the second class."

"Yes, my friend, but there was a time when I was a member of the Jockey Club!" shouted Le Blanc, growing more and more excited. "I drove my own four-in-hand to the Drags, *sacré bleu!* I am disgracefully inebriated at the present moment or I should not open my mouth. *In vino veritas.* The great confession. The Princesse de Ligne used to call me Paul, and as for the Prince of Wales——"

"Don't," pleaded Best. "I can't stand it. And anyway, I don't give a curse who you are, Soldier Le Blanc. You can't impress me by shaking your family tree in my face. I'm a self-made man, I am."

Sticking out his chest, the American thrust one hand inside his tunic and placed his other hand behind his back. "As a graduate of the Harvard Law School," he announced in a deep, rumbling voice, "I acknowledge no superiors, sir. None, sir. No, sir! I fell; but angels may fall—and I have nothing but scorn for the tawdry and decadent society to which you refer with so much conceit."

"Pah!" cried Le Blanc. "A lawyer! I thought as much. But we were talking about Gontrand——"

"A lie, sir!" The American interrupted the other Legionaire. "A downright distortion of the—hic!—the truth! We were discussing your coaching days and the Prince of Wales. Legionaire Le Blanc and the Prince of Wales! Fairy stories for the feeble-minded. . . ."

The heat, the noise and the wine had set the brains of the two Legionaires on fire. They were having a grand time. If Heinz had not been on hand to separate them Best and Le Blanc would have fought it out there and then for the fun

of the thing. Heinz, fortunately, was a steadying influence. He could drink more than any other man in the detachment without ever losing his matter-of-fact outlook on life.

"Harvard and the Prince of Vales," he told them, "dot's nothing. I was a sailor before I choined the Legion, *und* dot's something to be proud of. Let's have one more bottle. I still got a few sous left."

Before the bull-necked German could squirm his way off the bench, a commotion occurred in the doorway. Somebody blew a shrill blast on a whistle. Somebody else thundered "Silence! Officer's inspection! Detachment—'tention!"

And there was silence.

ON THE threshold stood Lieutenant de Baillage: a tall, slender young man, slightly caved in at the waist, slightly round shouldered; a very bored, very superior young man, who gazed with evident disgust at the roomful of ungirt, perspiring Legionaires.

Behind him, like a red harvest moon, loomed the anxious, glistening countenance of Sergeant-Major Bourin, whose lips seemed to be moving in silent prayer.

"Sacré bleu!" breathed Le Blanc, clutching Best's arm. "It *is* Gontrand!"

Best trod heavily on his foot.

A full minute dragged by. Without haste De Baillage tucked his silver-mounted riding crop beneath his armpit and folded his gloved hands behind his back. The sound of the flies buzzing about close to the ceiling became painfully audible. The Legionaires, with the sergeant-major's baleful eyes upon them, stood like rock.

The lieutenant drew a handkerchief from his cuff and wiped his lips.

"Fop!" whispered Le Blanc, his red beard sticking straight out. "Monkey!"

Again Best's iron-shod heel mashed his toes.

The lieutenant cleared his throat.

"Ainsi!" he drawled with elaborate sarcasm. "So I have come in person to instil a little decency into your putrescent souls! Well, here I am at last—ready to deal with you. It's high time you realized that there is someone in authority over you who will not tolerate any more of your antics. We'll have discipline," he added, his voice rising sharply — "we'll have discipline if I have to send every one of you to the rock pile! Are you trying to defy me, you filthy pigs?"



Not a man stirred, but from somewhere at the back of the room, clear and unmistakable, came a gurgling long drawn grunt. It told the new lieutenant, more explicitly than words could have done, what the stony-faced Legionaires thought of him and his handkerchiefs and his superior manner.

De Baillage's lips set in a thin, bloodless line, and two bright-red spots appeared on his cheekbones. The blank faces of the troopers confronted him like a stone wall. He realized, as he had realized many times since he had reached the Ain-Halwa blockhouse, that he could make no impression whatsoever upon these hard-bitten, sullen men. He couldn't get at them; couldn't impress them with a sense of his own importance. They were very different from the young conscripts he had dealth with in France before his transfer to the Legion. These men, though they went through all the outward motions of obedience, despised him. In this presence he felt ill at ease, and unpleasantly aware of the fact that, in case of trouble, he stood alone. Headquarters was two hundred kilometers away, across a dusty plain, over a range of blue hills. . . .

The lieutenant knew that he was cut off from the outside world, shut in upon himself, at the mercy of the most crapulous gang of cutthroats he had ever set eyes upon. Because they did not cringe in his presence, because he was belittled by their indifference, he hated them with a malignant fury which was not very far removed from fear.

Abruptly he wheeled upon the sergeant-major. "These are what you are pleased to call well trained men, are they?" he exclaimed. "You old fool! You stupid, wheezing fool, can't you see there's not a

shred of discipline left? You ought to have been kicked out of the Army long ago. You're senile!"

Old Bourin's jaw set tight. He was too good a soldier to argue with an officer, even though the latter chose to violate every rule of military etiquette. No officer worthy of his salt would have spoken to a sergeant-major in that insulting fashion. But this cad seemed to think he could ride roughshod over everybody and everything. For six weeks he had been playing havoc with the detachment. It couldn't last.

"Mon Lieutenant," the sergeant-major pointed out, "I don't yet see what you are complaining about. Most of these men have been out on patrol for weeks. Surely, they're entitled to a little relaxation——"

"If you call their debauched, animal-like conduct 'relaxation' you're as bad, if not worse than they are," rasped the incensed De Baillage. "I'll drill some self-respect into them and into you, too, *par Dieu,* if it's the last thing I do on earth! This canteen is closed until further orders. Every man present will be confined to barracks for a week. Sergeant-Major make a note of their names as they file out!"

"Very good, *mon Lieutenant,"* sighed Bourin. "Just as you say." He moistened the point of a pencil on his tongue, and held it poised over his notebook. "Come on," he grumbled. "File out. The canteen's closed."

FOR a fraction of a second no one moved, and a startled look crept into the lieutenant's eyes. He stepped back a pace, putting Bourin's broad shoulder between him and the Legionaires.

The ice was suddenly broken by Le Blanc who was too hot-headed and irrational, and far too full of red wine to bother about consequences. Ever since De Baillage had set foot in the room, Le Blanc had been growing more and more restive, despite Best's efforts to keep him in check. The injustice of the sentence made the red-bearded Frenchman's temper boil over. There was nothing half-hearted about his reaction. He tore himself away from Best and Heinz, vaulted clear across the table and barged down the aisle, sweeping the Legionaires out of his path as he called out, "One moment, Sergeant-Major! I've got a few words to say to this officer of ours."

Le Blanc spoke in a crisp, business-like voice which completely took the wind out of Bourin's sails. Inarticulate sounds came from the sergeant-major's throat, but he was too overwhelmed by the enormity of Le Blanc's crime to be of any assistance to his commanding officer.

In three strides Le Blanc reached the lieutenant. Spraddle-legged, arms akimbo, his red beard jutting truculently forward, he snapped, "Look here, Gontrand, this has gone far enough. You're making an ass of yourself, my good fellow."

De Baillage quivered with rage. He was so mad that he forgot his latent fear of the Legionaires. Never before had a damned private dared to call him an ass. It was unheard of! Monstrous! Another proof of Sergeant-Major Bourin's inefficiency.

"How dare you call me an ass!" the enraged lieutenant spluttered. "You must be out of your mind. I'll have you arrested, you insolent rascal. You'll finish your days with the penal battalion for this."

"Don't be so petulant," retorted Le Blanc. "You're an officer now, my lad, and you must try to act like one. You shouldn't meddle with the orderly sergeant's job; your place isn't in the canteen. If you come in here hunting for trouble you're sure to find plenty. You can't bully Legionaires, Gontrand; and you can't frighten them into respecting you. If you have any common sense you——"

All at once De Baillage, whose eyes had been growing rounder and rounder, let out a yelp, *"Mon Dieu!* Paul!"

"Of course it's Paul, you cretin," snorted Le Blanc. "It's taken you all this time to recognize a man who used to give you pocket money! What's the matter with you, my poor fellow? Go on; run along now; you've been making yourself ridiculous."

De Baillage glared helplessly at his tormentor. Behind the lean, sun-blackened Legionaire of the second class, who called himself "Le Blanc," he saw the hazy outline of the man who had once been the

most brilliant, most erratic leader of Parisian society: Paul de Pernardin; the man who, for no reason, out of sheer boredom, had deeded his property to his head gardener and had vanished into thin air, leaving behind an explosive "last will and testament," flaying the hypocrisy, the sham and the glittering dreariness of so-called "high society" of France. And this man today was a sweating, stinking soldier of the second class of the Foreign Legion—answering to the common name of "Le Blanc."

A WAVE of disgust swept over De Baillage as he recalled how he had fawned upon and flattered this beast. Now, however, the tables were turned. Paul de Pernardin was dead; and the man who now called himself "Le Blanc" was only a common soldier. In the Legion there were only officers and men—and the men were in duty bound to obey their officers.

"You'll remember who you're speaking to!" barked the lieutenant. "When your advice is needed you'll probably be granted a commission. Meanwhile, you'll stand at attention in the presence of your commanding officer, do you hear?"

Grinning from ear to ear, Le Blanc came up to the *garde à vous*. "There you are!" he chuckled. "How does that suit you? Discipline has been maintained; that's the big issue, isn't it? Now listen to me, Gontrand: you're acting like a child suffering from a bad attack of colic. It runs in your family, I admit, but that's no reason——"

De Baillage, driven frantic by the sound of that taunting voice, suddenly reached the end of his endurance. His hand closed on the riding crop tucked beneath his arm. He struck before he himself knew what he was doing.

The lash whistled through the air. It caught Le Blanc full in the face, ripping the flesh of his cheeks. Dazed by the blow, he rocked back on his heels, and as he swayed unsteadily, De Baillage slashed him again and again, cutting him to ribbons.

Blood poured down into Le Blanc's eyes. He could not see to defend himself. He tripped and fell to his knees. As he did so, De Baillage reversed the riding crop and brought the loaded knob crashing down onto his skull. Le Blanc rolled over, senseless, at the lieutenant's feet.



The whole thing had not lasted fifteen seconds.

De Baillage's heart was beating like a triphammer against his ribs. He was filled with a giant's strength. Single-handed, he felt, he could have subdued the entire detachment.

"Now then!" he cried. "We'll have no mutiny tonight! Fall in the first four men. Pick up that *salopard* and carry him over to the guardhouse."

A growl answered him. The atmosphere in that smoke-filled room was charged with dynamite. One spark would have sent De Baillage hurtling into oblivion, torn to pieces by an angry, snarling pack. But Sergeant-Major Bourin was too old a hand at the game to be caught napping by his own men.

He stepped forward, interposing himself between the troopers and the lieutenant.

"Steady!" he commanded without raising his voice. "Steady the Eleventh." The Legionaires saw his right eyelid flutter as he spoke. "You're going to do as you're told. You're going to file out quietly, and—" his eyelid fluttered again— "you'll kindly remember that there is still such a thing as military law which we are, *all of us,* supposed to obey. Even though one man has broken the law, that is no reason why *you* should disgrace yourselves."

The Legionaires understood. The growling subsided. Four troopers took hold of Le Blanc and carted him away. The others filed out of the canteen one by one. They did not go cheerfully, but they went, nevertheless, and the sergeant-major checked them off as they marched past him.

"Twenty-eight men," he announced

briskly, closing his notebook. "All confined to barracks for a period of one week. Is that right *mon Lieutenant?*"

"Quite right," snapped De Baillage. "Except in the case of that one man—whatever his name is."

"Number Eight-One-Five-Four-Four Soldier Le Blanc, *mon Lieutenant.*"

"Le Blanc? Is that his name? I see." De Baillage drew a deep breath. "Confound him!" he exclaimed, "I can't help it—it's his own fault. You'll hold him in the cells for court martial."

"Quite so," agreed the sergeant-major. "Just as you say, *mon Lieutenant.* Anything else, *mon Lieutenant?*"

"Why," thought De Baillage, staring hard at Bourin's impassive countenance, "why, the swine is laughing at me!" And all at once he felt weak and alone and apprehensive. The fury with which he had attacked Le Blanc filled him with shame. But it was too late to turn back.

"No, there's nothing else!" he snapped. "But if you are not very careful, sergeant-major, if I find you siding with the men instead of helping me drill some discipline into their thick heads, I'll have those stripes off your arm in a month. There's no shortage of good sergeant-majors at the depot."

IT WAS close on one o'clock when Lieutenant de Baillage finished the draft of his confidential report to headquarters.

Yawning, he sat back in his chair and skimmed rapidly through the closely written pages. Several times he nodded his head, smiling at his own handiwork. It was a good report, terse, lucid and optimistic.

Ten days had gone by since he had closed the canteen and sent the man called "Le Blanc" to the cells. Since then he had had no trouble with the Legionaires. They were ready to eat out of his hand. When he gave an order, they almost fell over themselves in their eagerness to get things done. In another month, as soon as the depot sent him a new sergeant-major to take Bourin's place, the detachment would be really efficient. His other bugbear, Le Blanc, whose presence in the cells made him feel vaguely uncomfortable, was going back to the base in a day or so with the supply convoy.

De Baillage clipped the pages of the report together and slipped it into an envelope, ready to be handed over to the convoy officer when the latter arrived. He blew out the kerosene lamp, took off his dressing gown and groped his way across the room to his camp bed.

The night was very quiet. He heard the slow, measured tread of the sentry posted outside his hut: ten paces up—halt—right about—ten paces back. From the stables across the yard came the rattle of an iron chain.

Through the front window, looking across the parade ground, he caught a glimpse of the outer wall of the blockhouse, white and shimmering in the moonlight, its embrasures standing out sharply against the starry sky. Through the window on the other side of the room a shaft of moonlight, slanting over a jet-black roof, poured into the room.

De Baillage turned his back to the light, curled himself up into a tight ball and dozed off. Then a board creaked, and the drowziness which had been creeping over the lieutenant's brain was dispelled in an instant. At first, thinking it was nothing more than the crackling of the heat-dried furniture, he refused to open his eyes. But his straining ears caught another sound—a faint, scratching noise, as of cloth being dragged over a rough surface.

His eyes flew open. He sat bolt upright in bed. Someone was standing over him. Another man, black against the moonlight, was crawling over the sill of the back window.

De Baillage opened his mouth to call out for the sentry, but before he could make a sound the cold, round muzzle of his own revolver was thrust between his teeth. The foresight of the gun gashed his upper lip.

"Shut up, you louse!" ordered a voice. "If you let out one squeal I'll put a bullet into your nut. Quiet. Got any matches, Heinz? Light that damn lamp. You don't have to be all night about it either."

De Baillage said nothing, for the gun muzzle was pressing down heavily on his

tongue. A match flared. Legionaire Heinz, the bull-necked German, fumbled with the lamp chimney. A moment later a flood of mellow light filled the room. Behind the gun, tight jawed and grim, stood Legionaire Best, the American.

"You rat!" he went on, addressing the lieutenant. "You're going to get up and come with us. You've got an urgent engagement behind the stables."

Outside the hut the sentry tramped his beat at the same unhurried pace, and the sand cried out beneath his hobnailed boots.

"I wouldn't if I were you," cautioned Best, reading the lieutenant's thoughts. "So far as you're concerned that sentry might as well be a million miles away. This is strictly private—between you and the Legionaires of the Eleventh Detachment. . . . Got that gag handy, Heinz? Bring it over."

Heinz drew a wad of dirty rags from his pocket and gave it to the American.

"It isn't as white as one of your handkerchiefs, *mon Lieutenant,*" Best chuckled, "but maybe you like the smell of shoe polish. I clean my boots with this rag."

"This is an infamous outrage!" gurgled De Baillage, as soon as Best took the revolver from between his teeth. "I refuse to allow——"

"You're refusing nothing," retorted Best, jamming the gun muzzle against the frightened lieutenant's ear. "You're going to do as you're told, or, by gosh, I'll let daylight into you."

"But you can't do this!" stammered De Baillage, hoping against hope that the sentry would hear him. "You can't, I tell you! Murdering your own officer! If it's a joke——"

"Aw, was it a joke when you horsewhipped Le Blanc?" jeered Best. "Well, this is the same kind of a joke."

De Baillage tried to gain a little more time. "Please!" he begged, wringing his hands. "Please! I don't know what you're talking about. What are you going to do to me?"

Heinz, who had edged in behind the lieutenant suddenly caught him by the hair, jerked back his head, and stuffed the dirty rag into his mouth. A muffled yelp welled up in De Baillage's throat, but nothing louder than a moan passed his lips.

"Save your breath," urged Heinz. "You'll need it." He tied the rag in a tight knot behind De Baillage's head. "Now let's have your hands. Behind your back. We'll have you all trussed up like a spring chicken before we're through." He dug the lieutenant in the spine. "Come on, grande vache, don't keep me waiting."

AS SOON as De Baillage's hands were securely tied, Best tossed the revolver onto the bed. He rummaged about the room until he found the lieutenant's riding crop.

"Handy little weapon, ain't it?" the American said to Heinz. "Flexible, strong, well balanced. What more could a guy ask for?"



"*Und* look at the silver on the handle!" grunted Heinz. "It must be worth a lot of money."

Seeing the two Legionaires with their heads close together as they examined the riding crop, De Baillage decided that the time had come for him to make a desperate break for life and liberty. He struggled to his feet and tottered toward the window.

The lieutenant didn't get far. A resounding smack over the ear sent him sprawling on the cot. He made as much noise as possible, but the sentry refused to hear the commotion; he had come to a halt outside the hut, and was softly humming a barrack room ditty—off key. The top of his kepi showed above the windowsill, nevertheless, he heard nothing.

De Baillage gave up the ghost. This was the end. He was quite sure he was going to die. Very well then, he would show these swine how a gentleman of France went to meet his fate. He squared his shoulders and raised his chin. Unfortunately his captors failed to note the change in his bearing.

Best had gone over to the writing desk

and was pulling the confidential report out of its envelope. "Here we are, Heinz," he exclaimed. "Here's the dope. It's just what this poor coot would write! Bourin is a moral coward—can you tie that? Yep, it's here in black and white. His timidity in dealing with the troublemakers almost destroyed the morale of the Ain-Halwa garrison."

Heinz shrugged his shoulders. *"Dumkopf!"* he snorted. "Old Bourin is worth ten of him."

"But you'll be pleased to hear," Best went on, "that our bold looie—damn his black soul!—has the situation well in hand. The ringleader is in solitary confinement awaiting court martial, charged with 'insubordinate conduct' which would have engendered a mutinous outbreak if this little squirt of an officer hadn't been so brave and so fine."

Then the American expressed his opinion of the report in one short, blunt word, stuffed the document into his pocket, and blew out the light.

"Let's go, kid," he added. "Gang's waiting."

De Baillage tried to hold back, but they handled him roughly, dragging him out through the back window as though he were a bag of meal. Once they reached the ground, they grabbed him by the elbows and rushed him along at a swift pace.

Two minutes later they reached a narrow courtyard behind the stables. At one end stood the horse trough, at the other the washbench where the troopers laundered their clothes. Midway down the alley, Best and Heinz stopped and shoved their captive up against the wall with the moonlight shining full in his eyes.

It seemed to him that several men were crouching in the strip of blue shadow by the stables, but the only sound he heard was the roaring of the blood in his ears.

"Le Blanc!" Best called out. "Come on over. Friend of yours wants to see you."

De Baillage's heart missed a beat. Beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead and streamed down his cheeks. If Le Blanc had been let out of his cell it could mean but one thing: the whole garrison was leagued against him. Fear clutched at his throat with icy fingers, and his legs threatened to give way. He tried to spit out the rag wedged between his teeth, but only succeeded in half strangling himself. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he choked.

"Don't cry," urged Heinz. "You ain't worth it."

LE BLANC had stepped out of the shadows and was striding across the alley. In the moonlight the crisscrossed scars on his face stood out in livid welts. A pair of filthy canvas trousers were tied about his waist with a piece of string. He wore no other clothes. He was so emaciated that his ribs looked as though they were about to burst through his tightly drawn skin.

The three troopers shook hands.

"Here's your man," said Best, "and here's your riding crop. Go to it; beat him up, croak him—just suit yourself. The sky's the limit."

Le Blanc made the switch whistle through the air and brought it down with a smack—against his own leg. "That feels familiar," the red-bearded Frenchman confessed. "I might have known you two imbeciles would devise some such scheme. You're crazy—and so am I. *Mon Dieu!* It is good to be out of that cell. It was as steamy as a Turkish bath down there."

Five minutes earlier two of the guards had unlocked the door to his cell, and had whispered to him to come out. Being a wise man he had asked no questions.

"Sure we're grazy," agreed Heinz. "But the convoy comes in tomorrow, and you would haf been sent down to the base for trial. Nobody wants that to happen. The detachment is sick to its stomach of this lieutenant. He makes monkeys of us. He hit you—dot's forbidden. Now you hit him—dot evens the score——"

"Before you start anything," broke in Best, drawing the crumpled sheets of the report from his pocket, "I want you to listen to a few well chosen words culled at random from the writings of our great commander. You can judge for yourself what he thinks of you and of us and of old Bourin. That's why we had to hang around so long: we couldn't jump him until he stopped writing and crawled into bed."

Holding the document close to his eyes,

the American read out the passage bearing upon the Legionaires and their conduct. From the shadows came a long drawn hiss.

"Silence!" cautioned Heinz. "This is a private affair. Us three and him. Nobody else is present." A piglike grunt came out of nowhere, but the German Legionaire refused to notice it. He turned to De Baillage and dug him in the ribs, chuckling, "Yust you and us. The detachment it is in bed and asleep, *mon Lieutenant.* Later on, maybe, you can make a report about us: Heinz, Le Blanc and Best. But I don't think you will make out any more reports."

Le Blanc took a step in De Baillage's direction. Abruptly, he stopped and flung the riding crop to the ground.

"I can't hit that worm," he confessed, "not while he's tide up. Let him go."

"He'll squawk," cautioned Best.

"No, he will not!" snorted Le Blanc. "If he does I'll strangle him." He strode up to the lieutenant and tapped him on the chest. "A word in your ear, Gontrand—a question. Are you listening to me or are you too filthily scared to hear anything I'm saying? Take that gag out of his mouth, Best, will you? I want an answer to my question."

"I could kill you," the red-bearded Frenchman went on, to the Lieutenant. "A few days ago I should have done so—but you're not worth the bother. I'm going to give you the thrashing of your life, and afterward do you know what you are going to do? You're going to resign your commission. You're not fit to command Legionaires, Gontrand. Your place is at home—in France—among the ladies. The Eleventh is too much for you. You could send me to prison, and Best, and Heinz—but you can't put the whole outfit behind the bars, and some bright morning, sooner or later, if you don't clear out, you'll wake up with a bayonet in your neck."

De Baillage winced. He knew quite well that he would be disgraced if the detachment mutinied. The Powers that Be had no sympathy for officers who allowed their men to kick over the traces. The Eleventh had a good record. The battalion commander had assured him that it was one of the best outfits in the district. If an outbreak occurred while he was on the spot, the troopers, undoubtedly, would suffer, but he would suffer far more, unless he could prove that the trouble was the work of a few ringleaders and not a spontaneous uprising of the entire detachment.

"Does Sergeant-Major Bourin know about this?" the lieutenant demanded. "Is he a party to this disgraceful behavior?"



"Of course not," retorted Best. "This is, as you might say, strictly private and confidential— like that report of yours. Forget Bourin! He'd be the first man to rush to your help if he knew you were out here."

De Baillage saw a glimmer of hope shining in the darkness. "You'll be shot, every one of you!" he sputtered. "This is mutiny!"

"Don't you believe it!" the American retorted. "It's what they call 'spring cleaning' where I come from. We're getting rid of a nuisance. When Le Blanc is through dusting you off—you're all through. Get out of here. We don't want you. And don't talk too much when you reach headquarters. It'll look bad if you force the whole gang to testify against you."

"The testimony of mutineers," sneered De Baillage.

"That's where you're wrong. The sentries are all on duty, the orderly sergeant is going his rounds; everything is running smoothly. You couldn't make a mutiny out of this if you tried. This is a good outfit, lieutenant; we're damn proud of it—but *you* can't whip it into obeying you."

DE BAILLAGE'S self-confidence was slowly returning. These men were unarmed. By their own admission only a few men were involved in this plot. If he could reach the main parade ground and attract the attention of the picket on guard duty, there was still a chance that he could

have these scoundrels safely under lock and key before morning.

Best and Heinz were standing a little to one side, on his left. Le Blanc stood directly in front of him. To his right, the way lay open toward the washbench. Past the bench there was a short passageway leading out onto the parade ground—fifty yards to go!

Gathering himself together, De Baillage struck out wildly at Le Blanc, and leaped sideways, yelling at the top of his lungs, "*Au secours!* Help!" But the lieutenant had tackled too many things at one time, and his coordination was poor. His fist merely grazed Le Blanc's red chin whiskers, and his leap was too short to give him a good start. Something very hard collided against his ear. He tripped over his own feet and went down heels over head, like a shot rabbit.

De Baillage wasn't hurt, however, and he bounced up again just in time to run into a wicked jab which squashed his nose out flat on his cheeks. And that blow did hurt. He did no more shouting that night, for he needed every ounce of his energy to ward off Le Blanc's savage attack.

Blows hailed down upon the lieutenant. He didn't know the first thing about the noble art of self-defense; nor did Le Blanc. Heads down, arms flaying the air, they waded into each other with great fury but little skill. De Baillage used his nails as well as his fists, and one of his blind sweeps ripped the scabs off the scars on Le Blanc's face, covering him with a wet, glistening mask of blood. This gory sight gave the lieutenant fresh courage. He smacked his antagonist across the mouth and followed this up by digging him in the groin.

The pain made Le Blanc grunt. It slowed him down long enough to enable him to see what he was aiming at, and as De Baillage rushed in, Le Blanc clouted him once more on the nose and closed the lieutenant's right eye.

Locked together, chest to chest, they fell to the ground, rolling over and over until they struck the base of the wall. De Baillage came up on top. Kneeling on Le Blanc's chest, holding the red-bearded Legionaire down with one paw, the lieutenant raised his other arm to administer the *coup de grace*. But it never fell. Le Blanc's knees came up and caught De Baillage in the small of the back. He was flung forward over Le Blanc's head. They scrambled to their feet, swaying drunkenly as they closed in. Le Blanc landed one more blow on the lieutenant's nose, then they fell into each other's arms again and went down, scraping their bare shoulders against the stone wall.

Clawing, gouging, biting, kicking, officer and second class Legionaire squirmed and heaved in the dust, which billowed up about them in a luminous cloud. When the commotion subsided Le Blanc was uppermost. He didn't attempt to protect his face, which was being mashed to a red pulp by De Baillage's fists. He caught his opponent by the ears and slammed his head down on the ground.

At the third slam De Baillage, who had been going strong, began to show signs of wear and tear. A moaning cry burst from his bleeding lips. "No! No! Oh, my head!"

"Positively—your head!" muttered Le Blanc.

And *bang!* went the back of De Baillage's skull against the sunbaked earth. He made one last feeble attempt to free himself, pushing against Le Blanc's chest with the flat of his hands, but the effort was unsuccessful. A blinding flash leaped up before the lientenant's eyes as his head crashed down once more, and all at once he felt himself slipping down faster and faster into a black and aching void.

IT WAS broad daylight when Lieutenant De Baillage recovered consciousness. He was lying in his own bed, in his own room. Versier, his servant, was bending over him applying wet compresses to his throbbing head. He couldn't breathe, he couldn't move, he ached all over. He couldn't see out of his right eye which was puffed up like an overripe tomato. He groaned dismally.

Versier, the perfect servant, smiled consolingly. "Monsieur, the Lieutenant, is doing nicely," he soothed. "Monsieur will feel better in a little while. Monsieur has had a very rough night, it would appear."

"I'm so sick!" moaned De Baillage. "So dreadfully sick!"

"It is nothing," Versier assured him. "Monsieur the Lieutenant must have fallen rather heavily, but he will get over it without a doubt."

"I fell?" muttered De Baillage, whose memory was still foggy, "What do you mean—I fell?"

As the lieutenant spoke, startling incidents came pouring back into his mind: the moonlit alleyway; Le Blanc's hairy face black with blood; Best's voice drawling, "Get out of here. We don't want you."

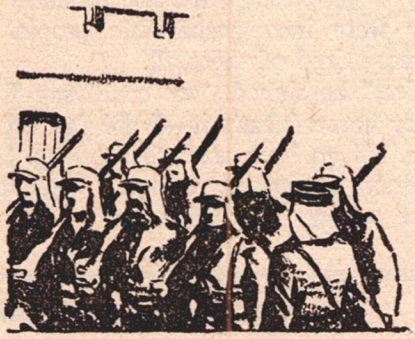
"Mon Dieu!" De Baillage exclaimed hoarsely. "How did I get back in here? What happened?"

He listened intently to the sounds drifting in through the open window. He could hear Sergeant-Major Bourin's raucous voice bellowing orders.

"I found Monsieur, the Lieutenant, lying—er—half in and half out of bed," explained Versier, who seemed to be amused at something or other. "Monsieur must have tripped up and struck the edge of the chair. It is covered with the blood——"

"Damn it!" cried De Baillage, catching the servant by the wrist and pointing toward the window. "I want to know what's happening out there!"

Dutifully, Versier looked out onto the parade ground. "The sergeant-major is giving the squads their orders for the morning," he explained. "Number One, A Section, is going off to the rifle butts;



Number Two is to scrub out the stables. Number One, B Section is——"

"But—but—but," floundered De Baillage, who had been expecting a bloody riot. "But I don't understand."

Versier's long, butlerish face expressed faint but unmistakable disbelief.

"Monsieur, the Lieutenant, fell rather heavily," he pointed out. "Monsieur will feel much better in a little while. The scalp will need a few stitches, I believe; but that need not worry Monsieur, the Lieutenant—the convoy can take him back to hospital without discomfort."

A strange odor had assailed De Baillage's nostrils. He sniffed and sniffed again. The room stank of cognac. The smell was almost overpowering. He struggled up into a sitting position and looked about. On the writing desk he was horrified to see three empty brandy bottles and a glass. The fragments of another bottle lay on the carpet. In among the bits of glass lay his riding crop, broken in two.

"What's all that?" De Baillage gasped, his eyes opening as round and wide as saucers. "Where did those bottles come from?"

Versier shrugged his shoulders. "Monsieur, the Lieutenant, knows best. I have not had time to do anything except care for Monsieur since I came into the room half an hour ago. Monsieur gave me a nasty turn, I confess. I shall be glad when his wounds have been dressed by a doctor."

De Baillage fell back on his pillows. "Fetch the sergeant-major," he ordered. "I want to see him at once!"

A MINUTE later Bourin came into the room. Out of the tail end of his eye he saw the bottles and the glass and the débris on the carpet. He looked accusingly at the lieutenant as he said, "I am very sorry to hear you met with an accident, *mon Lieutenant.* I'm glad it's no worse."

"I—I didn't meet with that kind of an accident," panted De Baillage. "I was kidnaped—nearly beaten to death."

"Really? Kidnaped!" exclaimed the sergeant-major who didn't believe a word his officer was saying. "And who was responsible for this outrage?"

"Le Blanc. That's the man. Le Blanc! He tried to murder me."

Bourin's face relaxed. He stared at the bottles and slowly shook his head. "I think you ought to reconsider that statement, *mon lieutenant.* Le Blanc is in the cells—in

solitary confinement. And *I* have the keys to the cell block."

"They were taken from you——" De Baillage began.

"That's out of the question," the sergeant-major denied quickly. "I sleep with 'em beneath my pillow."

"But he was out, I tell you!" the lieutenant exploded. "He was!"

"Huh! Well, he's right in there now. I saw him myself when I went my rounds this morning."

"He was out last night," insisted De Baillage. "I was kidnaped by Best and Heinz——"

"That's impossible, too," asserted Bourin. "They were on guard duty at the well in the oasis. Sergeant Tolbiac didn't report any absentees. I'm afraid you're wrong, *mon Lieutenant.* What you need is a good sleep, and afterward. . . ."

It was only too clear that he thought De Baillage had gone crazy. The lieutenant squirmed miserably. "Call Sergeant Tolbiac," he cried. "I'm not dreaming. I was kidnaped and then beaten. Those bottles——"

"Less said about them the better," observed Bourin, who knew damn well De Baillage had spent the night drinking like a fish.

Sergeant Tolbiac came in, looking very stiff and stern. He too saw the bottles and the débris and the empty glass.

"Best and Heinz?" he repeated, staring straight into the lieutenant's one sound eye. "Why, they didn't once leave the post! I'd like to see a man of mine leave his post while on guard duty! And what's more I can call ten witnesses to prove it."

"You're sure of it?" demanded Bourin. "You're positive?"

"As sure as I'm standing on my own two feet," lied Tolbiac. "Do you think I'm in the habit of letting my men wander away like sheep when I'm in charge of a picket, Sergeant-Major?"

Bourin glanced meaningly at the bottles on the writing desk. "That's all right, Sergeant. I merely wanted to make sure. That'll do, thank you."

He turned toward the lieutenant. "You see," he pointed out, "it's all a bad dream, I'm afraid, *mon Lieutenant.* Wine won't harm you but brandy is bad stuff in this climate. Bad!"

"I haven't touched a drop," protested De Baillage. "I'm as sober as you are!"

Bourin looked sceptical. "Leave it to me," he urged. "We'll hush it up. Tolbiac won't talk, I'll see to that. I don't want my men to know anything about this."

"You old fool! I tell you——"

"Now, now! No hysterics, please. Be calm, *mon Lieutenant.* If I were you I'd get some sleep. You're not well. Your *head* isn't well, if I may say so. If you'll take my advice you'll let me send you down to the base hospital with the convoy. It ought to be here in a few hours. We could—er—say you fell off your horse. . . ."

A sense of utter weariness crept into De Baillage's heart. He loathed Ain-Halwa and everything connected with it. Instinctively, he knew that his case would be laughed out of court if he ever made a complaint. They had him at their mercy, these crapulous Legionaires and this gruff-spoken sergeant-major who treated his men so harshly. Yet those men seemed ready to go through hell-fire for him. . . . They were incomprehensible people. He was very tired of them all.

"Yes," he sighed, "we could say I fell off my horse. That's it—I did fall off my horse. I'll go back with the convoy. Send in Versier to pack my things. I don't think I'll be coming back this way."

"Valhalla" **a gangster railroad story**

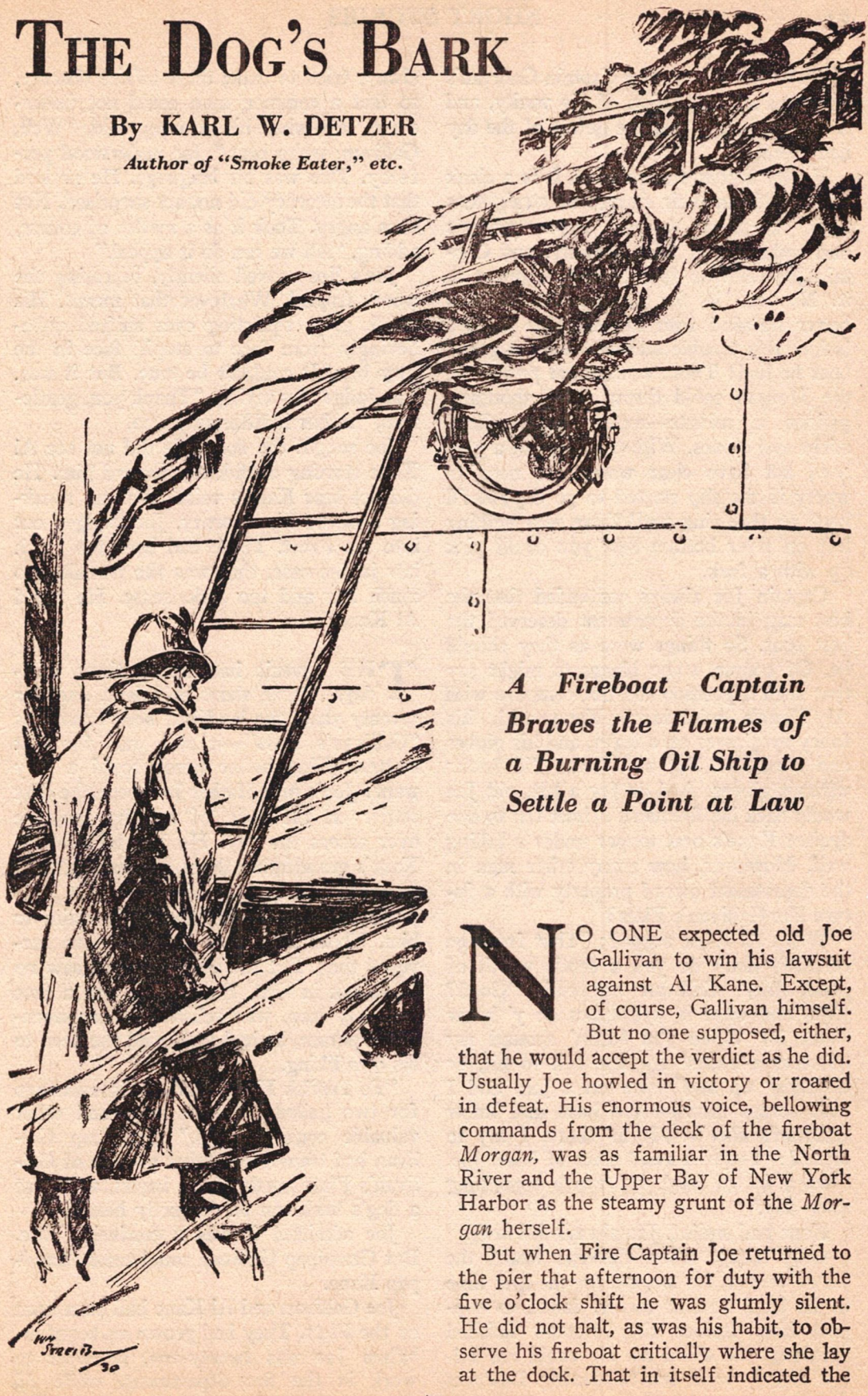
by T. T. FLYNN

in Short Stories next issue *"Valhalla"*

THE DOG'S BARK

By KARL W. DETZER

Author of "Smoke Eater," etc.



A Fireboat Captain Braves the Flames of a Burning Oil Ship to Settle a Point at Law

NO ONE expected old Joe Gallivan to win his lawsuit against Al Kane. Except, of course, Gallivan himself. But no one supposed, either, that he would accept the verdict as he did. Usually Joe howled in victory or roared in defeat. His enormous voice, bellowing commands from the deck of the fireboat *Morgan,* was as familiar in the North River and the Upper Bay of New York Harbor as the steamy grunt of the *Morgan* herself.

But when Fire Captain Joe returned to the pier that afternoon for duty with the five o'clock shift he was glumly silent. He did not halt, as was his habit, to observe his fireboat critically where she lay at the dock. That in itself indicated the

depth of his injury. For Captain Gallivan's boat was an expression of his vanity, and it was his vanity that the defeat of the day had pierced.

Vanity becomes some men. It is a cloak which adds to their stature or straightens their shoulders. Actors, major generals and ambassadors wear it easily, and Captain Joe Gallivan found hearty comfort in it. No man in the fire department was better satisfied with himself and his job before this trouble started. What a grand boat he had! Those centrifugal pumps on the *Morgan* could throw seven thousand gallons a minute—water, mud, slime, sticks and stones. With the *Morgan* a man need not have clear water; no need to worry if the slip started to go dry; she'd keep on throwing until there was nothing left on river bottom that you could pick up with a fork.

Captain Joe always contended that the best man in the department deserved the best boat. So things were as they should be. Of course, some blaggarts might say that such a position did not compare with Al Kane's mightiness—Kane with his fancy eyeglasses on a leash, and his gloves and hard hat. But a Gallivan did better without gloves. And as for a hat, old Joe would back his fireman's helmet ten to one against Kane's neat topper under a falling wall. Moreover, how many other men in the department owned property with a future like Gallivan's Flats?

When Al Kane argued: "That frontage certainly don't do you a cent's worth of good, Joe," Gallivan bellowed: "Good? Ugh, and what in hydraulics do y' know about it? When I'm loafin' around my quarters a-waitin' for the bell to hit, or skelterin' up and down on a job, and I look across through the haze and know Gallivan's slip is a-layin' there, I say to myself: 'You're a swell piece of hose, Joe. Own a lot of land. Be worth something some day.'"

Kane had smiled. Joe always did brag.

Only today, when Gallivan heard the jury's verdict, his tongue, for the first time in its hard-worked career, failed to support him. Before the foreman finished speaking, Joe stood up. He could not follow exactly what was happening. Lawyers always tried to make these affairs obscure, so that a common man could not understand. But when his attorney said, "Well, Gallivan, we're beat," Joe understood perfectly. This was his language. He noticed that the attorney did not act surprised. Not even angry. Took it as a matter of course, adding, "All we can do is appeal."

Joe's lips moved silently, repeating the word. Appeal. Whatever that meant. His small, gray, squinting eyes shifted unbelievingly from face to stupid face in the jury box. It couldn't be true. But it was. The judge was saying, "Thank you, gentlemen," rather indifferently, too.

Joe sought the door. He did not see Al Kane starting confidently toward him. He did not hear Kane's voice. Without speaking again to his attorney, Joe trudged out into the street. There had been too much law in the case, that was the trouble, too much law and too little sense. He hated Al Kane.

THE lawsuit had lasted three half-days. Three short half-days, and for seventy years the land had been known as "Gallivan's Flats"—it still was, for that matter. What better proof could a jury want? Joe's grandfather had been the first settler on the strip of marshy frontage over across the bay. He had brought Al Kane's grandfather there, too, and put him to work, and in a convivial moment even presented part of his squatter's claim to him. Those tidal flats had not been surveyed then. But the elder Gallivan saw no drawback in that. Because he was a free and easy man, who relished an unconventional phrase, he had fashioned the deed to his own liking.

"To Patrick Kane, mariner, in exchange for two gallons of high wine and other valuable considerations," Grandpap Gallivan had transferred "that portion of Gallivan's Flats north of the bayou, as far as a dog's bark can be distinctly heard."

Joe admitted it was a confusing title. But Grandpap Gallivan could trust Grandpap Kane.

Joe Gallivan and Al Kane had been born on the Flats. They had grown up together. When Joe was twenty-one, he went to work in the fire department, while Al

signed aboard ship. Al had luck, certainly; luck was the only thing that could do so much for one man in forty years. He became one of those preposterous rags-to-riches, story book characters. Did it in oil. Not by hazards or accident or battle or any of the ways a good man gets ahead in the fire business. Nothing heroic. Merely successful.

Al bought a tanker with his first fifty thousand. It paid dividends. So he bought another, and another, and another. Ask any longshore loafer on the harbor or any clerk in Wall Street or any driller in Oklahoma who Al Kane is now, and you'll hear quickly enough: "You mean Alfred Kane of Kane Oil?"

Joe remembered when Al set up his first oil storage tank on the Kane end of Gallivan's Flats. Joe was a ladderman then. He was promoted to lieutenant the next year, in command of an engine company, hose cart and tea kettle, horses and steam. Those were good days. He was fond of horses. When gasoline came into the business and the roar of motors began to drown the pleasant clip of hooves, he asked transfer to the marine division.

For fifteen years Joe Gallivan had commanded the fireboat *Morgan*. He felt at home here. This was his harbor, wasn't it? His dirty waterfront? How well he knew it! Gallivan's Flats lay just over there, cluttered with rubbish now, that some day soon would be soil for high-priced real estate. Sitting at his desk in the quarters on the wharf, he could see Kane's tankers moving ponderously up and down stream. Invariably, then, he would call to the man on house watch:

"See that big fellow with the yellow stack? Kane Oil Company. Al Kane. Ugh, and it's too bad some of ye ain't got a small drop o' his gumption. Sure I know him. Knew him 'way back when."

Then, without warning, Kane enlarged the barbed wire fence about his reservation on the Flats and began to build tanks on Joe Gallivan's cherished land.

Joe rode uptown to see Kane immediately. He stood, cap in hand, on the thick Oriental rug, his neck getting redder and redder, while the great man said, "Preposterous! Ridiculous!" and other insulting words, many of them legal, which Joe did not understand any more than the jury understood when Kane's attorneys used them today.



"I'll law you for it!" Joe howled at length. "We'll leave a judge say how far a dog can bark! I've a memory of your grandpap's small terrier. It could yelp no further'n I can heave a claw tool."

Kane had laughed. "Tell that to the jury," he recommended.

At least the jury had refrained from laughter. Sitting tonight on the port rail of the *Morgan,* watching the deck sink slowly with the receding tide, Joe tried again to piece together his grotesque memories of the day. The case had been over only six hours. But this new silence in him, this great, deep hole filled with nothing except hatred for Al Kane, seemed to have been growing for six centuries. Of all his crew, only Mooney, the senior pipeman and second in command, dared mention the catastrophe.

"Ugh, I'm beat," Joe admitted.

"He's a louse, is this Kane," Mooney ventured.

"Ugh, a thin piece of hose," Joe said. His voice was hard as rock. "He can fry and stew, Mooney. Never again will I lift nozzle to help him."

Mooney stepped back as if a slap on the face had taken his breath. The words had an unholy sound on the deck of a boat destined for such purpose as the *Morgan* was. There was something in Gallivan's voice—well, as if he meant what he said.

"Got to go get a chew," Mooney stammered, and retreating across the deck, passed around the engine room skylight and climbed the five steps of the rail ladder to the dock. Barkley, the pilot, emerged out of his glass box just then, and descended rapidly from the bridge, his heels beating a sharp cadence on the cast-iron treads. He followed Mooney to the dock, and the two men squatted there on a

squared stringer, speaking in low voices.

Gallivan watched them. Of course the crew would talk. Let them. He relighted his pipe. The night was quiet, one of those silent, restful periods that settle like a benediction on the traffic-harried river. Below in the engine room Joe heard the soft purr of the electric generator, sending its gentle vibration up through steel plates. Now and then iron doors clattered as the stokers watched their fires. Joe knew, without going down to look, that the gages in the boiler room showed one hundred and seventy-five pounds pressure. The *Morgan* could make a getaway from her berth in two minutes after the bell hit. A good boat.

"Fry and stew," Joe muttered.

Again he relighted his pipe. A freighter was moving slowly downstream, half a mile off shore. In the silence Joe heard the subdued throb of her engines, turning over at half speed. Inland, beyond the bulk of warehouses, a car honked. Then the door at the end of the municipal warehouse creaked.

HE SAT thus, absorbing the stillness, when he became aware of the approach of a figure from the warehouse entrance, a man moving uncertainly through the half light of the dock platform, like one unfamiliar with the place. Joe recognizing him, stiffened, and bit tight on his pipe.

He waited, speechless, while Al Kane paused in the door of the quarters, and Reilly, who was standing house watch, said, "Captain's across there on the port side, sir."

Kane climbed over the rail, thereby breaking municipal regulations, but Joe did not move. Light from the pilot-house slanted down on the newcomer's stiff white cuffs, on the sharp creases of his trousers, on his enraging spats, on the polished mirrors of his shoes.

"Well, Gallivan, I came away down here to talk to you."

Joe made no reply. To his crew, listening, his silence dishonored the company. They glanced one at another. The old man's health must be failing. Three days ago he would have stirred the echoes on the Jersey shore had an enemy dared come aboard his boat.

"I don't see why we shouldn't still be friends," Kane went on smoothly. "You must see now you haven't a legal leg to stand on. Your lawyer's just wasting your money, Joe, taking this to a higher court. You haven't a chance. I want to be fair. You know that."

"No, I didn't know it." Joe removed the pipe from his teeth and spit into the water. There were other things he did know, however. He guessed suddenly why the jury found for Kane. It was this hat and the fancy glasses and the gloves. They did not know, as Joe did, why Kane always wore gloves, because his hands were so scarred from early hard work that he was ashamed of them now. Joe clenched his own horny fists. The glasses, too, came out of the past. Kane had bought his first pair of glasses on a string when Roosevelt was president and Joe Gallivan was writing his papers for lieutenant. Glasses, gloves and hard hat must make good impressions on a jury.

"I want to do the right thing," Kane was saying. "There's no reason you shouldn't be recompensed a little, if it'll make you feel any better. I couldn't offer it to you before. Really needed a jury's decision to clear things up for the future. We can call it a present now." His smooth, silk-covered hand came down gently on Joe's shoulder.

Joe stood up, with his bare fist knocked away the glove.

"Don't pat me, mister! I wouldn't take any present off you. And I wouldn't give one. You cheated me, and now you come to buy me, ugh?"

"Cheated you? Why, I didn't even take all I could have got. That dog's bark you made so much of—there's all kinds of dogs, you know, Joe. Perhaps this was a mastiff. Just on the strength of that bark I could have claimed every foot of the whole half mile front, yours and mine both."

"That's a lie," Joe remarked quietly.

Kane disregarded the word. His manner even indicated that sometime he might have heard it before. "I'm ready now to meet you halfway, I've made out a check,

just for old time's sake." He reached into his pocket.

"Listen again, mister." Joe leaned forward, bulging his recently bare upper lip that looked big without its mustache. "Just for old time's sake you can fry in hell," he said. "I'll take nothing off you, not a good evenin' or a good mornin'. And you can expect less'n half that much off me. Was you eat up with fire and drownin' in smoke, Al Kane, I'd never turn on a stream for you. Not even a small mite o' a washdown. Hey—wait; you ain't the judge tellin' me when to stop. I'm talking now." Still Captain Joe did not raise his voice. His cold gray eyes cut more than any voice could. "There's the dock and that's dry land and here's the river. It's which you choose and choose quick. Get off my boat, or I throw you off, one o' the two."

Kane laughed uncomfortably. A moment the two men faced each other in the warm, dark silence. Then aboard the freighter in midstream, a dog set up an excited barking. Its sharp voice floated illtimedly to the deck of the *Morgan*.

Kane snatched at the incident. He turned his head gaging the distance to the outbound vessel.

"Half a mile," he remarked unpleasantly. "A good half mile. The length of the whole Gallivan strip. You see?"

The big oil man departed at once. Again the dog barked, a shrill, excited yelping. Kane climbed up to the platform, and to Joe's astonishment entered the quarters. A moment later he reappeared, his trim silhouette outlined in the lighted doorway. Joe watched him as he walked cautiously back toward the warehouse.

ONCE more the dog barked. The repeated sound angered Gallivan. He snapped his suspenders and started across to his office. Barkley, the pilot, and Mooney, the senior pipeman, still squatted on the dock. They had heard the conversation, but even now they had the decency not to speak. Captain Joe padded into the watch room. Reilly, sitting at the high desk under the instrument panel, greeted him uneasily. He held a slip of paper in his hand.

"That guy left this for you, sir," he said.

Joe reached for the slip. He held it close to his eyes, as if unable to believe its effrontery, and gasped once.

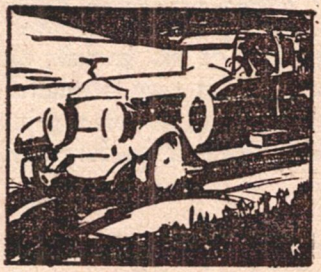
A thousand dollars, a check for a thousand. Al Kane had left his present after all! Wrath mounted quickly.

"Hey!" he cried huskily. "The devil—the dirty devil! I'll give it right back to him!"

His feet kicked out unsteadily as he stumbled down the one step to the platform. He knew this path to the warehouse better than Kane did, day or night he could walk it blindfolded. Kane would be lost in the dark. He'd catch him, make him eat this paper. Make him eat it, then throw him into the harbor. It would be a good riddance.

His running feet beat a sharp tattoo against the stillness. The warehouse door creaked, then banged as it swung shut after him. Three foggy electric lamps, high against the trusses of the roof, punctured the blackness overhead, but shed no light on the floor. Joe ran, panting, down the center. The building was six hundred feet long. At the opposite end a gray square showed the opening upon the street.

Beyond it a car stood, its parking lights shining softly. Joe ran faster. He'd stand by and watch Al Kane eat this check. Watch him chew and swallow it.



He emerged through the great square opening into the yard. The car was eighty feet away. One of its doors slammed. Its starter turned over.

"Hey—hold there!" Joe was yelling. "Al Kane—you dirty devil——"

The car jerked ahead into the street. Joe halted. Panting he stood thus, the check in his hand. The tail-light disappeared in Twelfth Avenue. Then, deliberately, as if, cheated, he must take out his rage on something, Joe began to tear the check. Once across; and twice; a third time. Again and again and again. The rip of paper gave

him satisfaction, as if he were tearing Kane himself to pieces.

"Fry and stew," he repeated. "Never lift a nozzle! I owe him nothing. Nothing!"

He swung about sharply, letting the torn paper fall. Far down the pier, beyond the warehouse, a steam whistle sounded one commanding blast. That was his boat. The *Morgan* was rolling to duty. He turned back, running even faster than he had before. His breath, wheezing through drawn lips, refused to come freely this time. It was centuries before he yanked open the door at the other end. The platform lay deserted.

Fifty yards out in the stream, the *Morgan* was turning south. Mooney, by virtue of seniority, was bellowing his commands. Old Captain Joe ran to the end of the dock. He had missed an alarm. He called imploringly; not roaring, as had been his habit. A note of supplication had found its way into his voice. The *Morgan*, giving him no heed, hooted twice at a ferry, and the ferry hooted back. His company was on its way to duty— without him.

Joe gulped and turned sickly toward the door of the empty quarters. This might break him in the fire business. He cursed Al Kane; then immediately thanked Heaven for one thing. He owed Kane nothing. He had torn up the check. Even in the face of the loss of his lawsuit, of Kane's impudence, of his own shameful failure to take out his boat, he felt a grim satisfaction. Barking dogs or no, he owed Kane nothing.

AT THE telephone under the alarm stand, he called headquarters.

"Hey!" He found his voice husky. "Capt'n Gallivan, fireboat *Morgan* . . . Yeh, yeh; Gallivan . . . Ugh? . . . Sure, they went. Without me. I was on the dock . . . No I was chasin' a fellow off . . . Yeh . . . I'll follow." There was a pause. "Not follow' em?" Gallivan repeated. "It's my company, ain't it? Yes, sir. If the big boss says so, I'll wait. Yes, sir. Where'd they go?"

Fire Captain Joe Gallivan paced the floor uneasily, for five seconds, then returned to the dock. The lights of the *Morgan* were a mile downstream now. That fire was in the upper bay, was it? In Buttermilk Channel. Near Governor's Island. In that case other companies had been called. His would not be the first to respond. A couple of other fireboats were there now, and the chief of division. What would old Tom Foley, the marine chief, say when he found Mooney in command of the *Morgan?*

"There'll be explanations."

Joe's voice clung stickily to his throat. He coughed, trying to rid himself of the weight of it. Out through the open door of the deserted watch room sounded the talk of bells, reporting changes of quarters. The Harlem River fireboat was rolling down the East River now, to take her station at the Battery, in case she should be needed in Buttermilk, and to fill in on other emergencies for the fireboats, *Mitchel,* the *Duane* and the *Morgan.*

Again at the end of the pier, Joe turned and stared downstream. He was cursing Al Kane quietly when he saw the blaze mirrored against the sky. It spread boldly across the heavens, a wavering aurora, harsher than the reflections of the city lights.

His own boat, the *Morgan,* was invisible. She had rounded the bend in the harbor line at Pier 63, at the foot of Twenty-third Street. She was halfway to the fire. Gallivan's bow legs churned uneasily backward and forward. After twenty minutes more he heard another special call tapping in precisely on the alarm recorder. That was for a Richmond boat. It was a real fire then. Half the fleet was out. Five boats. A real fire. The *Morgan* would be laboring like a gang of Chinese coolies tonight throwing her seven thousand gallons a minute. With Mooney in command. And with old Captain Joe here on the dock.

"Like a wore-out shoe," he muttered, and stamped his feet on the platform. "Me—I'm done, thanks to Kane. Done and through. Only— I don't owe him. Not a thing. Nothing."

Now the railroad tugs began to rush by, snorting, headed downstream. Joe knew that their deck hands were hastily uncoiling hose, connecting tarnished brass nozzles. He usually despised the tugs; theirs

were puny streams compared with the bombardment his boat could throw. But tonight as they scurried by, they reminded him of young fighters rushing to battle.

All the world was running to this fire. All but himself, Joe Gallivan. Again he cursed Al Kane.

It was a long workout. All night Joe strode up and down, backward and forward. The glow faded from the sky at last. The boys were beating it. The fire wasn't so cocky now. Mooney was beating it. Mooney and four other fireboats and the tugs.

THE *Morgan* limped back to her berth just as dawn crawled over the city. Joe, waiting at the pier, stared unbelievingly at her blackened sides and blistered paint. He shouted pityingly at the sight of the scorched forecastle and pilothouse, at the havoc of broken gear on her decks. In the bow he saw two men. One of them wore bandages around his head—Mooney that was, and his face was black. The other, rising, proved to be Reilly. He limped.

"Ugh, and something happened! Something dreadful to me boat! Blast that Kane!" Joe worked his lips, forming the words he did not utter. It was a boyhood habit. Grandpap Gallivan had demanded silence.

The *Morgan* nosed painfully against the dock, and the recruit, Stumpf, climbed ashore with the bow line. Gallivan made it fast, moving his arms and legs automatically while he counted his men. Three—four—six—where was Laughlin? Ah, there he was, in the stern. They all had come back, thank a decent Providence. All with blackened faces. Laughlin wore a white patch on his cheek. What had happened? What in the name of Heaven *could* have happened?

Mooney staggered as he swung over to the dock.

"We beat it, sir," he said huskily. "She was a broiler, for a bit, but we knocked her." Then, as if it were an unimportant afterthought, he asked: "Where was you at?"

"Ugh, and the dirty devil!" Joe snapped his suspenders. "I was for throwing him overboard—aye, Kane. Who else would bring such luck. I'm thankful I owe him nothing. Not a penny. Him nor his."

Mooney stared in dismay at him. "You ain't heard?"

"I've heard nothing."

"It was a tramp steamer, full of chemicals and acids and such things. Water—water just encouraged that fire. It sure had a holt, sir. Was bristlin' out all the hatches when we got there. The sides was red hot."

"But you knocked it," Joe growled, "sure and I've taught you how."

"Yes and no," Mooney said.

The others stood in the circle now. Joe smelled the smoke on their clothes and hair.

"We was lickin' it when it let go all over us," Mooney explained. "We was ablaze, sir, our whole starboard side, ablaze and afire. Me, I was up in Black Tom there." He pointed his torn glove at the water gun atop the skeleton mast over the stern. "I was throwed—we all was throwed. That explosion scattered fire like water out a spray tip. Our whole boat was blazing. No place to go." He paused.

"Ugh?" Joe prompted.

Mooney looked about quickly for help. "That tug turned its stream on us and give us a washdown," he confessed. "Sir, it's what saved us."

"It did that," Reilly assisted. "Like word from Heaven, it was, sir."

"What tug?" Joe asked. A tug saving the Morgan! The idea angered him. A despised railroad tug with one weak line saving his beautiful boat! He asked irritably: "What railroad was the tug from?"

"No road, sir," Mooney answered. He went on like a schoolboy reciting a lesson. "It was a Kane Oil Company tug. You know, sir, the *Kanoil III*."



He looked defiantly at his chief. Joe saw the issue. It stood there now on two legs between himself and his senior pipeman. It was to Mooney he had made the threat

just a few hours ago. Kane could fry and stew but the *Morgan* must never lift a nozzle.

"We owe 'em a lot, sir," Mooney finished.

Old Joe swayed. The devastating words rolled like thunder in his ears. Kane Oil. A Kane Oil tug had saved his boat. His eyes blurred. His throat filled. He tried to moisten his lips but his tongue was stiff and dry. Then he heard Mooney shout, "Careful there!" He felt Reilly's hands on his shoulders and Mooney steadying his elbows. Joe braced his feet. "Leave me be!" he commanded. But there was no power in his voice.

"Yes, sir," Mooney agreed, but continued to hold him firmly. "Let's go in, boys. I thought you was fallin', sir," he added apologetically.

Joe sat in his office while the clock ticked round an hour, and heard his own men praise Al Kane's tug. He did not once comment, merely listened miserably while one after another took up the shameful details. The story had been told twice when daylight sat down on the windowsill, as if it, too, were intent upon hearing the whole disgraceful affair.

At length the smell of morning coffee lured the men to the kitchen. Reilly came back directly. The hot cup he brought cooled at Joe's hand. He needed no coffee. He had not worked. If he had, if he had been in command, there would be no indebtedness now to Kane Oil.

WHEN the day shift came on and the night shift was preparing silently to leave, Chief Foley of the marine division of the fire department appeared importantly on the dock. Joe saw him through his office window.

"Where's the captain?" Foley asked Pipeman Carey, who stood in the door.

"In the office, sir. He ain't feelin' very good."

"That's another lie," Joe retorted through the window. But his voice disappointed him. It was as if someone else were speaking with his tongue; some old, outworn civilian. Foley raised his eyebrows when he heard it. He crossed the watchroom and, without knocking, strode into the captain's office.

"Hello, Joe," he said affably, and pulled out a chair. "Never mind getting up. You look a bit peaked."

"I'm okay," Joe replied. He made two efforts to rise. His hand trembled when he finally brought it to salute.

"You don't look so bad," the chief observed. "A little shaky, maybe, but we all are at our age. Even me—sometimes I feel a bit shaky. What I come about, Joe, was——"

"Why I missed the boat?" Gallivan supplied. He wanted to get to the point, to have this interview finished. Foley was acting sympathetic, and he didn't like sympathy. Joe snapped his suspenders irritably. "I'll tell you, sir," he said. "I was insulted; yes, sir. A fellow came down here last night. He insulted me."

"His name?" Foley asked. He took a notebook and scratched his chin with a corner of it.

Joe moistened his lips before he proceeded. "It's a name I hate to soil my tongue with, sir. It was Al Kane."

"Oh," Foley said, and scratched his chin again.

"He was for givin' me a bribe, the dirty devil. Left it at the watch desk."

"A bribe?"

"Yes, sir. Only he called it a present. And I run after him to give it back, and while I was tryin' to catch him, the boat goes for a sail."

"That's too bad, Joe. Did you—catch him?"

"No, sir."

"And the bribe? What was it?"

"A check, sir, for one grand, to pay for his indecency about my land."

"And the check?"

"I tore it up, sir."

"That's too bad," the chief repeated. "You ought to have kept it. Most anybody can use a grand." He hesitated, then stretched. "Well, Joe, how about a little vacation? You're tired out."

"No, sir." Joe snapped his suspenders.

"Think it over. You're too young to go on pension. Much too young. Not more'n a couple of years older'n me. But a vacation—six months, say——"

"No sir. What in hydraulics I want a vacation for?"

"Think it over," the chief admonished.

After Foley had gone, Joe thought it over. The fact of a personal old age was something no self-respecting Gallivan ever admitted. But here it was. He was old, worthless, poor, ready for pension. All because of Al Kane. Three weeks ago he had been young, could eat smoke with the best of them, and now Chief Foley talked pension.

He hated Kane to the point of weariness as the days marched past. His mind was made up. The *Morgan* might be indebted now to the Kane Oil Company, but indebted or not, it should never turn a water gun to save Kane property.

The issue walked boldly between Joe and Mooney. Joe suspected that the senior pipeman was ashamed for him. No matter. It had not been Mooney's flats Al Kane had stolen. Fighting fire—and he had three hot blazes in a week—Joe forgot for whole minutes the rancor that was in him. But the fourth alarm revived the threat.

THE call slammed in against the instrument panel at exactly noon, while the company, except for Laughlin who stood house watch, sat at dinner. It came from a riverside box, far upstream. Captain Joe Gallivan wiped his mouth on a paper napkin, kicked over his chair, and led his crew across the dock to the boat. The day was gloomy, with an occasional splash of rain and low clouds fastening down like tight bonnets upon the notched skyline.

Joe saw the blaze a mile off. On a waterfront track in the railroad yards, a tank car was flaming. It lifted a great black pillar of smoke, streaked with crimson toward the massed clouds that bent low to watch.

Joe stood in the *Morgan's* bow, as they steamed out to answer the fire call. Mooney and Reilly were beside him, silent. The smoke laid a curtain thick and dusty as an old wool blanket along the waterfront. Occasionally the wind lifted, exposing the fire, and again it slid down heavily.

"What color's that tank car?" Joe asked hoarsely, as the *Morgan* drew nearer the scene of the fire.

"Yellow, I think," Reilly answered.

Joe grunted. "Kane's, ugh? Well!"

The next break in the smoke proved it. It was a yellow car with black trimmings—A Kane Oil Company tank car!

"Shall I get the bow gun set?" Mooney asked, motioning his head toward the fire nozzle that would throw a heavy stream from the *Morgan's* bow when made ready.

"Wait a bit," Joe answered.

Mooney walked away. He came back directly. Again Joe saw the issue walking with him. Mooney thought him a traitor, ugh? Well, no matter. Mooney wasn't captain. Joe clamped his lips tight upon the words that were crowding behind them.

Mooney, too, said nothing. He stared across the water for a moment, then returned aft quietly and on his own initiative ordered Carey and Stumpf, the recruits, to set up a rail pipe, with siamese nozzle, off the outlets at the foot of the portside turret.

When Mooney returned, Captain Joe still waited in the bow of the *Morgan,* doing nothing. The fire lay less than a quarter mile away from the racing *Morgan* now. Land companies, dragging hose across the railroad tracks, were training their streams upon the car. Old Joe Gallivan counted them; there were five nozzles already at work.

He turned, and tipping back his head, called up to Barkley, who was leaning out of the pilot-house.

"Take it easy," he admonished. "Slow."

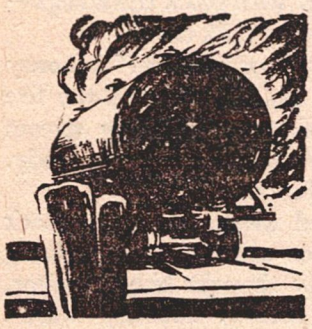
"We can run right alongside the sea wall," Barkley argued. "It's plenty deep there. Make fast to them pilings and get a good place to sock the fire."

"Do what I say," Joe commanded. "Give the bosses a toot, and drift in slow."

Captain Joe realized that all his crew had gathered around him, instead of taking stations as they usually did. But they were not looking in his direction, and he made no effort to meet their eyes. It made no difference what they thought. This was his affair with Al Kane. Let other firemen save that oil tank car if they wished. No

Gallivan ever had knuckled under to a Kane.

Barkley in his pilot-house pushed over the annunciator handle and a small bell tapped. The engines at once reduced their speed. Then he pulled the whistle lanyard and the *Morgan* spoke—two long blasts and one short. That was the reporting signal. The chief officer in command would know that the fireboat was arriving—a comforting sound, that steamy bark, to a harassed commanding officer. Now Barkley reduced from half speed to very slow, and the whole boat vibrated with the lazy turnover of the shaft.



Mooney walked around the bow water gun, eyeing it thoughtfully. He glanced once, sidewise, at the captain. O'Toole, detaching himself from the knot of men on the deck trotted aft and soberly climbed to the top of Black Tom. Experimentally, he swung the water gun that was fixed in the top of the skeleton mast on the *Morgan's* stern, and sighted along its shiny brass barrel.

"Shall I turn loose, sir?" Mooney asked.

"Not yet," Captain Joe told him irritably. He worked his lips rapidly over silent words. Again he counted the land streams. There were eight of them now. The smoke was blacker, and less fire showed through its folds. Those landsmen were beating it. Let them, if they wanted.

As the *Morgan* slid in neatly to the bank, Joe saw the white helmet of a battalion chief bobbing across tracks. He saw the officer halt and stare at the fireboat, then the helmet bobbed away again. The *Morgan* touched the sea wall and Captain Gallivan dropped to shore. He paused, fifty yards from the dying fire, observed it thoughtfully a moment, then sought his superior officer. He walked slowly, without excitement. At length he found a scowling veteran deputy chief, who chewed furiously.

"Where you been?" the officer demanded. "Where's your white gloves? Whose funeral was you at?"

"The *Morgan* reports, sir." Old Joe felt surprisingly at ease. He had fallen short wilfully, after forty-six years in the fire department, but at least he had kept his word to himself.

"Don't need you," the deputy chief flared, "not any more. Maybe you blowed a tire or was caught in a traffic jam in Times Square? If you'd been on time—but you wasn't. Report back to quarters."

The deputy chief turned away, still chewing. Joe recrossed the tracks, stumbling through cinders, and hopped from the sea wall to his own deck.

"Quarters," he growled to Barkley.

The *Morgan* pointed her nose to the open river. No one spoke until the boat had dodged a lighter opposite her own slip and Barkley had swung her expertly into her berth. When the canvas covers were back on the hose reels, Joe disappeared into his office and closed the door behind him.

THAT afternoon Marine Chief Foley called again.

"I understand it, Joe," he accused. "Sure, and you wouldn't lift a hand for Kane today. It's clear as a standpipe marker. You laid down. There's been talk you was meaning to."

Gallivan chose not to reply.

"That ain't good fire business," the chief persisted. "A year ago you wouldn't ever have thought of such a thing. You was too proud. I'd file charges tonight was you going to stick in the business. But you're not. You're goin' to ask for your pension."

"That's another lie, sir," Joe retorted.

"No name-calling. I've tried to be easy with you. The whole department's hearin' of the story, and a fine smell it puts on the marine division. You've throwed a hate on this Kane. Got your lawsuit all mixed up with the fire business. I thought once he was gone out o' sight you'd forget him."

"Gone?" The question escaped Joe. Regretting it, he ran his thumbs under his suspenders and snapped them twice vigorously.

"Touring. On his new tank boat. A week ago. It was wrote up in the papers. I says

to myself, 'Well, that rids us of *him* for a while. Maybe Joe'll be a fireman again."

Gallivan sat silent.

"I reported by whistle," he said after a moment, "and nobody give me directions. I wasn't needed."

"Speakin' of lies, Joe," Foley answered, "you ain't so bad yourself." He scowled out of the window at the sparkle of evening sun upon the water. "You've got to go," Foley decided; "there's no two ways. I can't clutter up my division with spites. Course, I hate it. If you——"

"If I what, sir?" There was nothing in Joe's voice that asked for leniency.

"I want to see your request, Joe, two weeks come Monday. Your request for pension. I'll see that it goes right through. You can take a rest. Do you good."

Twice more that week Foley dropped in casually, but did not mention retirement. Joe puttered about his desk, trying to forget his misery. He knew how it would end. He had seen other old men shaken off. One day he would be called before the physical examining board and it would be all over. He spent his day dreading the messenger, his nights awaiting new, uncertain days.

Alarms were too few. The men grumbled under inactivity. It seemed to them that the *Morgan* was not being called every time it might have been. They fretted under the slight that implied. Outwardly Joe paid no attention to them, but in his heart, as if he already were retired, he felt that hollow sense of homesickness for his fireboat and his crew, for the smell of smoke and the racket of commanding bells. He had made up his mind to one thing. The first day he got into civilian clothes he would go and see Kane. If he killed him, what matter?

The two weeks passed. Joe ignored Chief Foley's order that he send in his request for pension. But still nothing happened. No word came from headquarters. He could wait, he told himself. Certainly no Gallivan would run to meet the messenger.

He was sitting again one hot night on the deck of the boat, watching the floating yellowish haze above the city and wondering how many days he had left in the department when Laughlin, who was on watch, strode to the door of the quarters.

"Captain, sir," he called, "wanted on the telephone."

"Busy," Joe replied, without looking up. "Can't be bothered."

"Very good, sir." Laughlin returned to the desk.

Joe leaned back against the warm iron wall of the deckhouse, and there by himself, shrugged. He excused himself this way frequently now. He saw Laughlin, through the window of the quarters, slowly taking down the message. Joe did not try to hear what he said. What difference did it make? The familiar, brackish smell of warm oily water floated up pleasantly. He'd miss that smell on hot summer nights away from his boat. Miss those lights over there on the Jersey shore. He never even looked out toward Gallivan's Flats any more.

His shoulders sagged. Queer how he could feel so very much alone out here now. Through the window he saw Laughlin hang the telephone receiver upon its hook. At the same time a small breeze, straying from the lower bay, ran up the river. It seemed for a moment to cool the air, and Joe glanced upward. Clouds were trooping landward. There would be rain before morning, rain and stiff wind.

LAUGHLIN came to the door of the quarters with a slip of paper in his hand. He had paused there, about to call across to the fireboat, when the alarm headquarters telephone set up an imperious cry. Laughlin spun about. Joe strained his ears this time. For a moment he forget his misery. Laughlin was shouting into the mouthpiece.

"Yes, sir, yes, sir. Upper Bay . . . Off Kill Van Kull . . . yes, sir!"

Joe leaped up from habit. That meant fire. A still alarm. Telephoned because there was no alarm station, no street box near it. A deep water job.

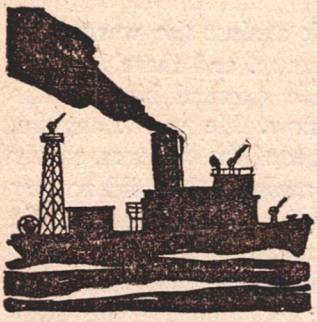
Laughlin flung off his uniform jacket as he ran.

"Roll!" he yelled, and jangled the bell beside the door. "We sail, sir," he called to Gallivan. "Upper bay off Kill Van Kull—Bedloes' Island telephone!"

"Go!" Joe ordered. There was no need for shouting. He heard the tap of the annunciator bell in the engine room as Bark-

ley from the pilot-house signaled "Stand by," heard the roar of the oil burners as the two stokers started the fans.

The rest of the fireboat company scrambled overside. Joe counted them—seven.



The two engineers already stood at their indicators. Barkley was leaning from the pilot-house window, irritably demanding directions.

Joe gave them quietly. He, too, was glad for this call. It meant at least one more workout for him.

Lines were cast off. The annunciator bell tapped precisely, the whistle opened its brass throat, and the *Morgan* nosed down the river.

Joe walked forward erectly, denying the wrench that the effort gave his back. There still was no sign of fire, but that was natural with seven miles to go. A breeze swept upstream, now that he was out of the protection of wharves and pier sheds. It blew cool against his cheeks. Someone beside him cleared his throat, and he turned and saw Laughlin with a paper in his hand.

"That message . . ." Every man on the crew was reluctant to bother the captain these days.

"Message?" snorted Captain Joe. "Ugh! They's a fire, Laughlin! Why the hydraulics you talkin' about a message? We're rolling ain't we? Sailin' to the grove!"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"But nothing!" Joe snorted. He felt like a man again. This might be the last time he would stand on his own deck, commanding the best fireboat in the fleet, but at least he could forget Al Kane in the meantime. "You handle Black Tom, Laughlin," he ordered, and waved toward the skeleton mast with its water gun perched on top.

"Here's the message," the pipeman persisted.

Joe held the paper for a minute without looking at it. Then he realized that he feared to read it. What if he were through? What if this were the message from the big bosses down at the municipal building ordering him to appear before the board in the morning? He crumpled the note in his fist.

"Ugh, I say, Mooney," he called, "take pilot-house pipe. Have the recruits set up rail pipes, both sides. Laughlin's handling Black Tom. Reilly takes bow gun, O'Toole and Stein handles turrets."

It worked the foreboding out of Joe's mind when he gave commands. He stalked lamely down to the open door of the forecastle, where, as the boat swung around the bend opposite the Ellis Island ferry slip, the single electric light within sparkled on the thirty shining brass pipes and tips, each neatly set on its pin in the semicircular rack. Joe felt the paper again in his hand. It itched his palm. He started to toss it away. Then, swearing quietly, he opened it and held it into the light of the open door.

He gulped as he read it, then thrusting it into his pocket, hobbled forward, blinking his small eyes.

"Ugh!" he shouted. "Ugh, look! There she is, Barkley—are you blind? Look!"

A dull crimson glow spread across the water. In its center, two miles down the bay, a single light flickered, went out, puffed up again. A vessel on fire. The *Mitchel* would be there already, she had only to run across from the Battery. The chief of division would be aboard the *Mitchel,* old Tom Foley, yelling like a foghorn through his megaphone.

The *Morgan* heaved herself through the water, her shaft spinning, propeller churning, driving her three hundred tons forward at seventeen knots. Minutes blew past. Joe watched his fireboat overhaul a railroad tug that was racing toward the fire. He saw a ferry lumbering upstream, vigorously cursed it. It must not delay him by crossing his bows.

NOW Joe could see the blaze distinctly. A long low vessel of some kind was flaming amidships. He climbed the bridge ladder and opened the door to the pilot-house.

"The *Mitchel's* there," Barkley greeted

him. "I see her. But they ain't got water on her yet. A hot 'un, I guess. Tugboat's taking off the crew."

Joe squinted through the window. He could not see so far as Barkley, but this was no time to admit it. In the grotesque lights and shadows, he made out the low lines of the big vessel and his fellow fireboat, the *Mitchel,* maneuvering to get near. The railroad tug, one with a crimson keystone mounted on its funnel, looked no bigger than a beaver there beneath the steep bow of the burning vessel. Figures, presumably men, were sliding down a rope from the high side of the steamer to the tug's deck.

The *Morgan* had less than an eighth of a mile to go now.

"It's an oil tanker, sir," Barkley reported.

"Ugh!" Joe replied. "I'd ruther fight dynamite!"

He peered down at the *Morgan's* two fire turrets. Carey and Stumpf were rigging rail lines, with one section each, double-siamesed into the three-inch reducing outlets at the base of the starboard gun. Stein was fussing about the bow pipe; overhead, at his station behind the pilot-house water gun, Mooney's boots were scuffing impatiently.

"That's fourteen they've took off to that tug," Barkley said. "They must be hot, way they act."

Joe stared forward, hands thrust numbly into his pockets. He might be a Johnny-come-lately at his first fire, from the excitement he felt. His fingers closed on the paper Laughlin had handed him, and he drew them away. Best to forget that message now. A hundred yards separated the *Morgan* from the burning oil tanker.

"Hey, slow down!" Joe suddenly ordered. "Ugh, and what boat *is* that?"

Barkley did not reply; instead, he moved the indicator arm of the annunciator, and at once the rhythm of the engines slowed. Joe thrust his face through the pilot-house window, staring. Through a break in the smoke he saw the funnel distinctly and the sight of it filled him with wrathy determination.

"Careful! Not too close!" he decided hoarsely.

Flame was climbing out of the two center hatches on the oil tanker. Forward, protected by the deckhouse which extended from rail to rail, members of the burning ship's crew still slid down the rope to the tug. The fireboat *Mitchel* was throwing water now. The high, arched stream, churning from her bow gun, turned pink and gold in the firelight.

"Not too close," Joe repeated, and then he cried: "Look at that stack, will you? Yellow. That's a Kane boat!"

He tipped his head and laughed, so that for a moment his helmet teetered.

"Go under port side, sir?" Barkley asked.

"Under no side!" Joe bellowed. "We go right by. We're doing no work for Kane!"

Barkley's hand trembled on the grip of the wheel. Joe fumbled along the port wall of the unlighted pilot-house until his fingers found the strap of the binoculars. Balancing himself on his toes, he squeezed the two barrels together until they fitted his eyes. He brought the lens into focus, and the deck of the tanker leaped toward him.

He saw that two men remained there at the top of the rope. One of them leaned over now and a big dog leaped from his arms. Joe's hands shook, gripping the glasses. Men on the railroad tug had caught the dog. The man who threw him down—Joe held his breath to look—the man wore a hard hat.

"Ugh, and it's him!" Joe cried. "Here, here, Barkley, turn back! It's Al Kane!"

Barkley released his left hand from the wheel and swung back, bewildered.

"Alongside now?" he demanded.

"It's Kane himself," Joe yelled. "I got a word for that dirty devil!"

Barkley swung the wheel violently. In the same instant a storm of heat swept in through the pilot-house window and a low, gurgling noise sounded from the ship. Barkley shouted, and dodged behind the slender brass spokes of the wheel. Mooney, atop the pilot-house, turned on his stream.

THE air filled with tumult. Flame leaped up from the water and down from the sky. A huge white steel mast bent like cardboard and clattered to the deck of

the burning tanker. Glass rattled against iron. The little railroad tug lifted, and canting to port, rolled away as if the larger vessel had kicked it deliberately. Fire poured out of two more hatches and blazing oil spread across the surface of the bay. The assisting tug smoked and broke into flame. Mooney by the bridge water gun, and Laughlin on Black Tom, turned their streams on the tug, sweeping it clear of fire.



Joe blinked smoke and heat out of his eyes.

"Get right 'longside that tanker," he commanded, and stamped his feet. "Quick, 'longside!"

Barkley swung his wheel again. The roar of the blazing liquid, spilling down the red-hot plates of the Kane tanker, drowned all other sound.

"Get 'longside!" Joe was screaming. "Closer!"

"I'm trying!" the pilot yelled back at him. "This ain't a rowboat!"

"You act like it was!"

Joe still could see the two figures huddled on the scorching deck. The *Mitchel* now had turned her whole battery upon the blaze. Fire aboard the tug was out. Mooney and Laughlin once more began to fling water on the tanker, a thousand gallons out of each tip.

The *Morgan's* bow gun spoke next, then the portside turret and one of the rail pipes. The fireboat trembled with her exertion. She was heaving her seven thousand gallons a minute now, streams that drove straight at the heart of the fire, or when she rolled, lifted above the deck and passed over, wetting the thankful *Mitchel.*

Gallivan's wide mouth opened again. "Get up to her!" he shouted.

Ten yards separated the two craft. Joe slammed open the pilot-house door. Heat, smashing down on him, pounded him like sledges. He staggered, and groping through smoke, found the engine room skylight, with its sixteen-foot ladder pinned against the ridge.

Only five yards now to the side of the burning tanker.

Closing his eyes, Joe picked up the ladder. He bent his face into his collar. The glass in the skylight cracked from heat. Paint was peeling off the sides of the deckhouse. The recruits had deserted their nozzles, which flung water crazily.

The high side of the Kane ship loomed over Joe, protecting him momentarily. He was forward of the bridge. The fire was aft.

He lifted the ladder in both hands. Its scaling hook caught on the tanker's rail. Hand over blistering hand, he climbed to the higher deck. At the top, heat kicked his face. He dug his head deeper into his collar.

The two men still huddled in the burning tanker's bow. One of them he never had seen before; the master, probably. The other was Al Kane, homeward bound from his cruise. Joe had come to meet him.

The tanker's master was a heavy man. Joe, trying to lift him, found his arms weak. Panting, he dragged. At the rail he paused, looking down. Stein was waiting below, his blistered face turned up.

"Catch him!" Joe yelled. He dropped the man to the deck of the fireboat, and saw Stein break the fall. Joe turned back, then, toward the peak of the bow.

"Ugh!" he was shouting. "Ugh, what the hydraulics! Listen, Al Kane, you poor soft suction, I've word for you!"

Kane's eyes were puffed shut. He opened his mouth. Joe saw his tongue protruding and again was reminded of a dog.

"I ain't come to save you! I'd go to hell first, Al Kane, 'fore I'd turn a hand for you!" Gallivan tugged, panting. "Rescue you? Not me! Not was you half down the fire's throat. It's a message I got for you!"

He was dragging Kane to the ladder. The deck burned his hands. Then a wash of spray touched his face and he knew his boys were covering him. Kane kicked out, protestingly. Still no words passed his mouth, only dry, inarticulate sounds. Fire ate all the air. Gasping, Joe hauled. Gasping, he shouted.

"Understand? A message! Wouldn't leave you burn without it! Me, I'm giving you no help—just—telling—you."

He dropped Kane over the edge and flung the hard hat after him. Reilly caught him. It was Captain Joe's turn, then, to leap. Fire, ten seconds too late, swept over the tanker's deckhouse and across the wings of her bridge down to the point where Joe had been dragging Kane a moment before. From the *Mitchel* boomed the voice of the chief of division, magnified by its megaphone. It ordered the *Morgan* back. Away from the doomed tanker.

JOE dragged his prey to the shelter of the *Morgan's* forecastle.

"Look here, Al Kane," he croaked. His blistered fingers found the slip of paper in his pocket. "This is from the lawyer, understand? *My Flats*—well, they's *mine*, see? The upper court reversed decision. Upper court, having more sense, if you can get that through your thick head, says Gallivan's Flats is *Gallivan's.*"

He stopped, panting again, and looked belligerently at Kane's puffed face. Kane's eyes opened.

"Thanks, Joe."

"None o' that," Joe bellowed. "I ain't rescued you, mind! Never! Heaven help me if I'd stoop to that. I just hauled you over so's to tell you just how we stand!"

The burning tanker drifted west and south, under the veering wind. The *Morgan* stood by, throwing water uselessly until the blaze burned itself out. When the pumps finally were still, a police boat with reporters and photographers came alongside. The newspapermen climbed over the *Morgan's* rail, and in the forecastle of the fireboat, propped in the chair where Joe had left him, they came upon Al Kane.

"We've got your dog aboard," one reporter said. "Hear him, Mister Kane; hear him yell?"

Joe paused, listening, in the portside door. He held a claw tool in his hand, returning it to its hook on the wall. The dog, on the drifting police boat, two hundred yards across the water was barking excitedly.

"Hear him?" the reporter asked again.

Kane leaned forward, opening his swollen lids. He saw Joe and the claw tool. The dog barked again. Its deep excited yelps could have been heard a half mile. Kane closed his eyes. Grandpap Kane's small terrier could have yelped no further than Joe Gallivan could heave a claw tool.

"I hear no dog," Kane said. "No. At that distance no one can hear a dog."

c o m i n g s o o n

MURDER ON THE LOT

by

THOMSON BURTIS

mystery
sudden death
the perils of flying
the thrills of circus life
the threats of knives and fists and guns

c o m i n g s o o n

LUCK *of the* WATERFRONT

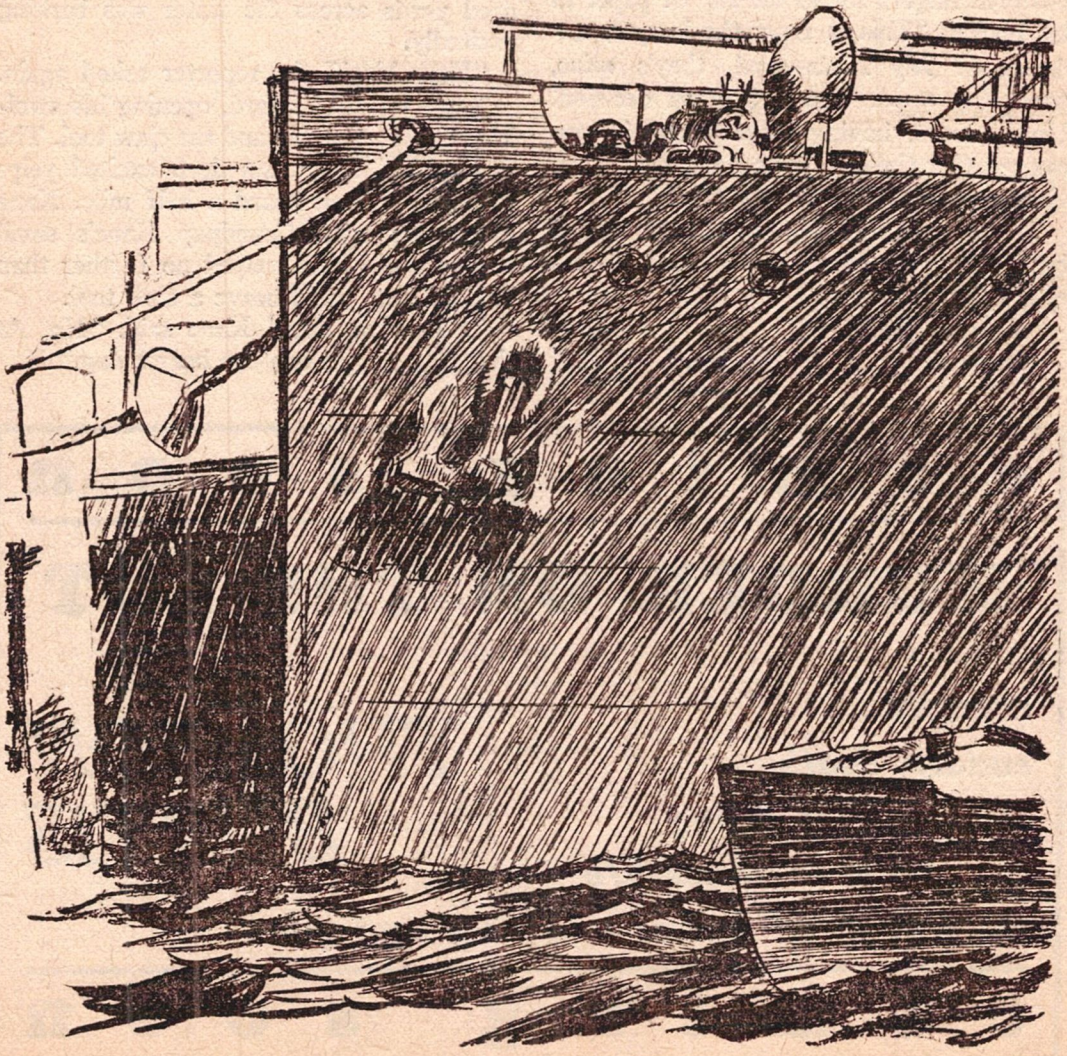
By STEUART M. EMERY

CHAPTER I

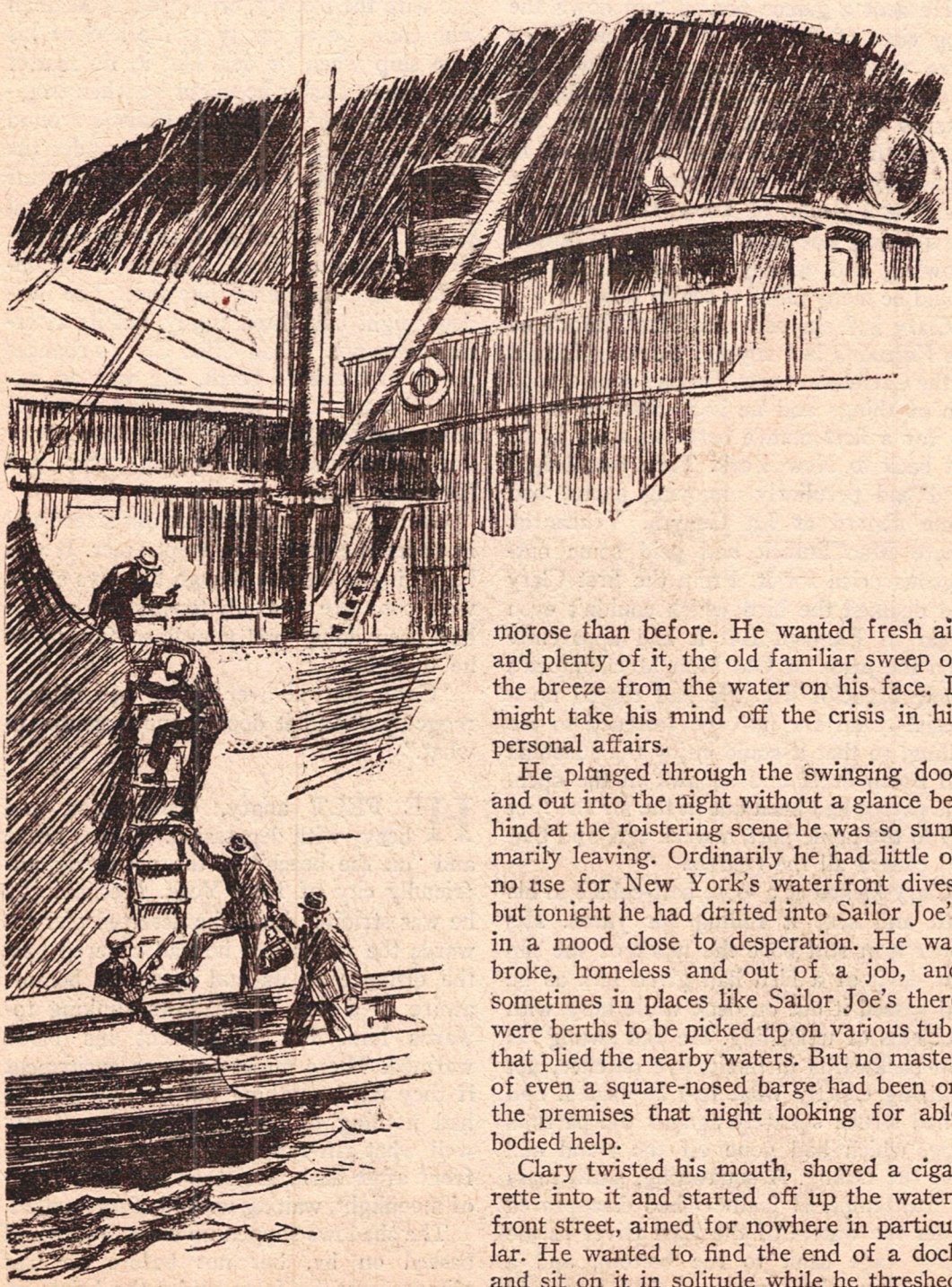
DEAD MAN'S CLOTHES

GEORGE CLARY, late second mate of the *Valenta,* fingered the two one-dollar bills in his pocket that represented his total fortune and made his way for the door of the waterfront beer-joint in which he had been trying to forget his troubles. No one offered to bar his progress or called after him as he ploughed entrance-wards, a savage look on his young, wind burned face. Clary possessed the shoulders of a husky customer and a pair of fists that were both freckled and formidable. Moreover, it was obvious that he was not in mood for companionship or pleasantries. He wanted to be alone.

In the smoke-hung and raucous premises of Sailor Joe's he had downed half a dozen schooners of prohibition beer and he had not enjoyed the process in the least. The needled stuff had merely made him more



Fate Plays a Grim Jest on a Seafaring Man When She Leads Him into the Hands of New York's Toughest Gangsters



morose than before. He wanted fresh air and plenty of it, the old familiar sweep of the breeze from the water on his face. It might take his mind off the crisis in his personal affairs.

He plunged through the swinging door and out into the night without a glance behind at the roistering scene he was so summarily leaving. Ordinarily he had little or no use for New York's waterfront dives, but tonight he had drifted into Sailor Joe's in a mood close to desperation. He was broke, homeless and out of a job, and sometimes in places like Sailor Joe's there were berths to be picked up on various tubs that plied the nearby waters. But no master of even a square-nosed barge had been on the premises that night looking for able bodied help.

Clary twisted his mouth, shoved a cigarette into it and started off up the waterfront street, aimed for nowhere in particular. He wanted to find the end of a dock and sit on it in solitude while he threshed out the situation confronting him.

"Blast that parrot!" he muttered soulfully. "If it hadn't been for that green and yellow bird from hell I'd have been a first mate by now. Why in blazes do Scotch captains have to ship feathered devils around with them?"

He sent a glance behind him down the long vista of the East River docks. They were veiled in mysterious shadows, the yellow flare of an electric arc lighting up patches of pavement at the corners, but leaving the fringe of ships and wharves in semi-gloom. From some pier a mile or so back the *Valenta,* he knew, had sailed on the morning tide with Captain MacClintock growling and cursing on her bridge. She would be many miles at sea by now.

Clary had shipped with MacClintock on the *Valenta's* last voyage, carrying freight to the Caribbean ports. He had done a good job of things and he had expected to go up for a first mate's berth as soon as he got back to New York. Then that bright eyed and peculiarly annoying parrot had come aboard at La Guayra, Venezuela, where MacClintock had paid some outrageous price for it. From the first Clary had disliked the bird which couldn't even swear in English. But it had apparently been the pride of Old Man MacClintock's lonely bachelor life. He had rigged up a special stand for its cage fastened to the railing, so that it could enjoy the sunshine and preen itself and squawk in the open. The parrot had been out in the air the first day in the home port, a week ago, and that had caused all the trouble.

Clary kicked at a loose half-cobble in his path and sent it rolling for yards. His upper arm still bore the mark of the nip that devil of a bird had given him as he had passed it out on deck while busy with problems of unloading. He had swung his arm backwards in instinctive defence, not realizing exactly what had happened, and it had struck squarely against the parrot's cage, which had gone off the stand and over the railing. A squawking, shrill mass of bad tempered feathers had disappeared under the waters of the East River as the heavy cage sank to the bottom, and a squawking, shrill mass of bad tempered ship captain had come charging down the deck.

"Ye murdered my bird, ye daft incompetent!" had shouted Captain MacClintock. "Get off my ship in sixty seconds! Ye're discharged without a character!"

It was a little thing like that which could upset a man's whole career. Useless to argue with the liverish, wild-eyed Scotchman who could be as crusty as the keel of his own ship when he felt like it, no matter how able a master he might be when tropical storms were tossing the *Valenta* around and her plates were shuddering under the impact of the seas. Clary had flung his stuff into a duffle bag and gone overside, still pursued by a torrent of Caledonian invective proceeding from Captain MacClintock's somewhat terrierlike face. The incident might have been funny, but its aftermath was not. It had killed Clary's chances for a first mate's berth. He was an ex-second mate, now, discharged for incompetence, and no decent ship wanted him. They knew MacClintock in shipping circles, and his words went.

George Clary shuffled off the street and in under the roof of an empty pier. It was beginning to look as though his days at sea were over. He was only twenty-five and he had been doing pretty well so far, or so he thought.

"Got to start all over again," he muttered raggedly. "And it doesn't much matter at what."

HE FELT angry, disillusioned and heavy with depression. He was broke and "on the beach" in the peculiarly unfriendly city of New York. Mechanically he was striding down the deserted pier towards the water and he had covered half the distance to its end when he became aware of a pair of shadows slinking towards him. For a moment his blood warmed. There might be some excitement if they tried anything out on him and he had nothing to lose. He knew perfectly well what riff-raff hung about the waterfront after dark. He stood still in a patch of moonlight, waiting with his fists knotted.

The shadows slipped up close to him and passed on by, but not before he had glimpsed ratlike faces under the brims of down-pulled caps and shifty, glinting eyes. He watched the pair scuttle out to the street

and vanish in its gloom with contempt in his mind.

"Wharf vermin," he told himself. "Trying to lift a few feet of cordage or other junk off an unguarded pier to sell for a drink. Bah! The air'll be a lot cleaner out over the water."

Thrusting his hands into his pockets he moved on and presently found himself looking down on a float, fastened to the



side of the wharf. He dropped onto it and walked to the edge, gazing moodily over the darkened stretch of the river to where the lights of the Brooklyn side gleamed in a pattern of gold. The water lapped softly against the float and its adjoining pilings and the sound had an infinite melancholy in it. It was as though he stood alone in a world of friendlessness and despair. He had never felt quite this way before.

Then he saw the body that floated face down not five feet away from him. The river had wafted it against the pilings and it was moving gently to the tide's rise and fall. Clary jumped forward and fastened one hand in the coat, lifting and pulling with all the strength of his six-foot two of bone and muscle. The body came out of the water and lay on the planking, a damp puddle dripping away from the clothes. It was that of a hard featured young man of about his own age and build, and on the temple was a discolored bruise. Clary drew in his breath and shot a glance back over his shoulder at the silent pier. The presence of those slinking shapes was explained.

"Those wharf rats did it," he rasped. "Decoyed him out here and clubbed him." His fingers were exploring the person of the victim, but all that had been left in the pockets was a sodden postcard and a clumsy key with a brass tag attached. "Stripped him of every cent he had and threw the body in the river."

It was just another waterfront tragedy at which he was attending, one of those midnight killings that warrant only a few lines in the daily press. The blow on the temple, delivered with some heavy instrument, would be enough to crack any skull.

Clary stood upright, gazing down at the features which in the imperfect light seemed vaguely like his own. But for the break in the luck, he sensed, it might have been himself. If the river rats had not already dealt with a victim they might have pounced on him from behind as he came along the pier, lost in miserable thought and incautious. In that case, his troubles would have been over.

His head came up sharply. A queer idea, the strangest he had ever entertained, had flashed into his brain, yet in his present situation it seemed to have sound logic at the bottom. Perhaps the eerie gloom of the waterfront, had brought it to him. George Clary, ex-second mate of the *Valenta,* broke and hopeless, was a failure, a drag on himself and everyone else. He had prayed silently for a fresh start, and here it was. He studied the postcard that he still held clutched in his hand. It was addressed to "Charles Malloy," care of General Delivery, New York City.

"All right," he said to the silent waste of the river flowing in front of him. "I've gone on the rocks as George Clary. I'll begin again as Charles Malloy. It's as good a name as any other. And here it is, ready-made."

A GRIM smile crossed his face. The decision was made and it was one that suited his present humor and the spirit of the night. There were no relatives or intimate friends to worry about him. He could drop George Clary out of existence the way he would drop a pebble in the river. In a different identity he might have a chance to obtain a berth on a ship and work his way up again, while George Clary, discharged without a character, had no chance. He put the postcard in his own pocket and turned his attention to the key. A glance showed that it belonged to a room in a Bowery lodging house and its possession meant that the holder had paid for a week's flop in advance. In that kind of a joint no

one ever knew who the next man was.

"It makes me a present of a place to sleep in," he muttered, "and I can stretch my last two dollars for almost a week's food. Yes, I guess I'm luckier than I thought when I wandered out on this dock. It may be that I'm getting a break at last."

The depression and futile anger of the last week seemed to have lifted from his shoulders as though it had never been. He was a new man now and from him, as such, the troubles of George Clary had vanished. Under the name of Charles Malloy or any other he chose to assume he could make the future what he pleased, untrammeled by the injustice of his former skipper. The name of Malloy would do for the present until he found his bearings.

He hardly realized until this moment how desperate his mood had been, how anxious he was to seize any opportunity that promised a clear slate with hard work and success at the end of it. MacClintock's damning report on him meant nothing to the changed individual he had become. He glanced with a feeling of pity at the man who lay at his feet, covered the face with his handkerchief and climbed the short ladder leading from the float to the dock. Whoever Charles Malloy might be, the police would find him and he would have a decent burial.

He went along the wharf with a firm stride and out into the waterfront street. He meant to walk down it for a number of blocks and then cut over to the Bowery and the lodging house where Malloy's key fitted a certain door. Only that morning he had been forced to give up his own room in a sailors' boarding place and deposit his duffle bag and its scanty contents in the nearest pawnshop in order to pay his landlady. The problem of a bed had been solved by the adoption of his inspired idea.

Under the light of an arc he paused and drew from his pocket the sodden postcard he had taken from the dead man, studying it for a possible clue to its late owner. The attempt availed him nothing. It had been mailed in Chicago some days before, but the writing of the message on the lefthand side had been rendered illegible by the water, and only the address remained. The past life of Charles Malloy, victim of waterfront thugs, must continue to remain a mystery. Clary shoved the card away and strode on, drawing in deep breaths of the cool night air, while his feet hit the pavement solidly. Already he felt in the mood for anything that might turn up.

Ahead of him, perhaps a full block, another figure was making its way along the empty street, one side of which was lined with the masts and superstructure of ships in their docks. It was a girl, tall and slenderly built, out at this hour long after midnight had struck. She was moving in an easy, reliant manner and was apparently quite at home in her surroundings. He thought that he could see a basket hung over one arm.

He quickened his stride until he had cut down half the distance between them. No girl ought to be promenading this particular thoroughfare at this particular time of night, unescorted. She would be passing the unsavory front of Sailor Joe's in another moment, and Sailor Joe's swing door had a habit of opening and projecting unruly customers into the street. Even as the thought came to him the inevitable happened. Two lurching forms made an exit from the front of Sailor Joe's, braced themselves unsteadily against the front of the building and then staggered after the girl who had cast a quick look at them and passed on.

"Hey, girlie!" called a thick, drunken voice. "Where you goin'? Stop an' talk to a reg'lar sailor who likes 'em young and handsome!"

A RAUCOUS guffaw rose from the second customer of Sailor Joe's. The pair had reeled rapidly after the girl and closed in on each side of her, heedless of a quick protestation. They were big, brawny individuals and the liquor they had consumed had made them impervious to rebuffs or pleas.

"Come along with us!" the growl reached Clary's ears. "I know some good joints that's open still. None o' yer innocent stuff goes with me."

Clary was coming forward at a run as he saw the girl snatch her arm out of the grip of her annoyer. The man was snarling. He shoved a brutal, broken-nosed face close to hers, and began to swear. He had not

expected the hand that fell like an iron clamp on his shoulder, swung him around and sent him spinning.

"I'll take care of these customers!" called Clary to the girl, who had drawn a few feet away. "Just keep on going. They won't bother you."

Most girls, he figured, would be glad of the chance to slip away unnoticed, but this one turned to him a clear, courageous face and smiled. She made no motion to go on and leave him alone to face the sailors whose pastime he had interrupted.

It was not an auspicious moment for conversation. Hurling out an obscene oath the broken-nosed man jumped for Clary, and his pal was coming in from behind. Clary ducked as a fist shot past his face and loosed a savage solar plexus smash at



close range. It went straight to the mark and the first attacker crumpled in his tracks and slithered down. Something hard caught Clary in the back and he realized that the other sailor was slugging at him from the rear.

Whirling, he took the sailor in the act of swinging his foot upwards in a kick that would have crippled him if it had landed. Clary's hand went out just in time to catch the driving foot and his fingers closed about the ankle, clutching it firmly. He knew from past experience in waterfront fighting what to do in a case such as this. A yell of pain and fear broke from the second man as Clary jerked his foot to the side in a vigorous sweep that flung him yards away onto the hard paving. He huddled there, obviously not desirous of rising and renewing the battle.

"I think that ought to take care of 'em," grinned Clary.

"It certainly did." The girl was actually laughing back at him. He saw now that she had a wide, full brow and sparkling eyes. Her chin was firmly set and she looked capable. "Thank you, sailor. Do you do that often for people?"

Her laughter was low and melodious. Clary's as he answered her was ringing with good humor. This was just the kind of a girl he had always wanted to meet but somehow hadn't. She was game to the core and mingled a wholesome attractiveness with common sense.

"I'm not called on for the rough stuff so frequently," he cast out. "But I can do it, and enjoy it, when it's necessary. How'd you know I was a sailor? I've got my shore rig on tonight."

Unconsciously he had fallen into step beside her and they were already far from the scene of the late combat. She smiled at him, showing her empty basket.

"I happen to be a captain's daughter and a captain's niece," she said. "Also I'm a nurse in the Mariners' Hospital where they bring all the waterfront accident cases. If you'd really knocked out one of those men he'd have been taken there and maybe I'd have attended him tomorrow." Her laughter rippled as she went on. "I ought to know a sailor when I see one. I've just been down to my uncle's ship to cook a decent dinner for him. He's one of those dyed-in-the-wool old-timers who never comes ashore if he can help it when he's in port and dishes up the most horrible messes for himself late at night. Since I can't reform him I can at least see that he gets a good meal before he turns in." She held out her hand suddenly. "Here I am, at my corner. Thanks again and good night."

They had passed from the waterfront and were in a sidestreet of small houses, unpretentious but well kept. Now she was leaving him as unexpectedly as they had met. It didn't seem right somehow.

"You—you're going down to your uncle's ship again late tomorrow night?" he stumbled.

She nodded.

"You—you've got someone to go along with you?" he asked.

"No one," she said simply. "He's the only relative I have."

A GLORIOUSLY tingling sensation ran through Clary. He put back his wide shoulders and favored her with his best grin.

"In that case," he announced, "I'll be here to take you down and bring you back. You don't want any more such stuff as almost happened to you tonight. What time shall I be on this spot, waiting for you?"

The girl looked at him out of mirthful eyes.

"That," she said, "is a date. Nine o'clock. But you haven't even told me your name yet. Mine is Mary Powers."

"Mine," said Clary on the spur of the moment, "is Charles Malloy. From Chicago. And I'll be here at nine tomorrow or else I won't be alive."

She was gone, passing around the corner, but her parting laugh still lingered. It was like music in the deserted, tranquil street. Clary plunged after her, but when he reached the turn she was no longer in sight. She must have slipped into the first or second house close by, but her vanishing made no difference to him. Mary Powers had said she would meet him on the corner at nine o'clock the next night and she was the sort of girl who kept her promises.

He drew out a cigarette, lighted it and set his steps towards the Bowery and a bed in a cheap lodging house. He'd land a job tomorrow, a good one, he felt certain. After that everything was going to be plain sailing. He'd see Mary that evening, the next evening, the next——

Off the river came the long drawn hoot of some vessel setting its bow for a distant port and the familiar sound made his blood run warm within him. He'd fight back to a first mate's berth or die trying. It was a new world of hope he had entered that night.

"I wonder who in blazes this guy Malloy was, anyhow," he muttered. "Whoever he might have been he sure has brought me a lot of luck."

CHAPTER II

FLOPHOUSE HELL

IT WAS not long thereafter that Clary came out of the crossstreet he had been following into the upper reaches of the Bowery. A late elevated train went crashing past on the rails above his head in a thunderous and steely racket. Down below on the pavement the shadows cast by the structure of the L almost swallowed the sidewalk, and only an occasional light glimmered behind the grimy panes of lodging house and speakeasy windows. Hopeless flotsam and jetsam of humanity drifted by with the shuffling feet of the derelict. Perhaps half a dozen blocks had passed before he slowed his stride and began to look for the number stamped on the brass key in his pocket.

In front of a four-story building, dilapidated with age and old in mustiness, he paused. A light burned dimly at the foot of an uncarpeted flight of stairs. This particular Bowery lodging house dignified itself by the name of "hotel," which meant that on the second floor Clary would find a cubbyhole of an office and a desk with a few chairs in front of it.

He smiled a little and went up the stairs. With the key that he held he could go straight to the cubicle it unlocked and to bed. He passed through a door on the landing and cast a swift, confident glance about him. Only two men, sitting in the office chairs, were awake in the entire place. The faces of both of them were cruel and predatory. Underworld was graved deep in the lines that furrowed from nose to mouth and in the stare of their eyes.

"Tough customers," Clary told himself. "But they're nothing in my life."

OFF to the left he saw a front room or dormitory where plank beds were fastened to the wall, every one of them tenanted by a bundle of rags. The windows had not been opened in years and a foul gloom, relieved only by a single gas-jet, permeated the premises. To the right a corridor ran into further semi-darkness, offering a view of closed doors to the cubicles. That would be where his room was located.

Clary shrugged his shoulders and walked down the passage, drawing out his key. He twisted it in the lock of a door numbered "6" and entered the new lodging that chance or fate had given him for a few nights. He saw a wooden double-deck

bunk with a set of gray blankets thrown over its mattresses, a chair and a cracked mirror hanging on the wall. The place was unutterly drab, unutterly dismal. At sea



he had lived in quarters even smaller than these but at least there had been the blessing of clean white paint and a fresh breeze blowing through the portholes. The unhealthy miasma of the lodging house seemed to be closing in about him, pressing him down. He felt imprisoned—stifled.

He locked the door and drew off his coat. Then he bent down to untie the laces of his shoes, but his fingers had no more than touched them before he was bolt upright. A knock had fallen, quick and peremptory, on the panels of the door. He strode over and unlocked it. The two figures he had seen in the office chairs slid into the room, soundlessly.

"Well?" demanded Clary.

The overhead light in the corridor was bad, but he had put a match to a candle in a drip-covered stand and its flame showed him the faces of the two men he had seen before in the office—men who, he realized, would be even tougher than he had figured them in passing. The larger had his hand significantly in his coat pocket.

"Who in hell do you Chicago rods think you are?" this one rasped. "We've been here close to a couple of hours waiting for you. You phoned me earlier this evening up at the joint that you'd be here before twelve. You're 'Chuck' Malloy from Chicago? Well, I'm 'Ripper' Frayne, the boss of the mob you came here to hook up with. I've got a part in a fast job for you at ten tonight. So we'll come right down to cases. The pal with me is Riggsy."

Frayne's fingers, hooked like talons, plucked restively at the cloth of his coat. He looked vicious and ready to strike at anything and everything with the venom of a snake. It was obvious that here was a drug addict who had been without his customary shot of dope for some time now and his temper was suffering.

The gang leader planted himself in the chair while his undersized companion lounged against the door. There was a bulge under his armpit and Clary knew what that would be. With no previous warning he had been plunged into a situation that was murky to say the least. Frayne drew a tiny white packet from his pocket and placed a pinch of its contents on the depression in his wrist behind the thumb. He tilted up his wrist and sniffed deeply. When he spoke again his eyes were dilated and his words tumbled out. It was clear that he would brook no interruption or explanation until he was through.

"'Runt' Wells wrote me from Chi that he'd run into you out there and that you were a pretty handy bird. He said the town was getting hot for you and you were heading East to join a New York mob. So he tipped you off to our outfit and gave you my phone number to report to when you got in. Runt walked into a bad jam here and had to clear out and so far I haven't landed a good man to take his place. He said you knew your onions on waterfront stuff."

CLARY leaned forward abruptly. Now was the time to tell this hardfaced gangster that he was not the real Charles Malloy but that he had adopted his identity on the verge of desperation when he was blindly trying to grope his way out of a chaos of despair. Ripper Frayne bared his teeth and waved aside all conversation. His tones rose, drowning out Clary's.

"You shut up, Malloy, and listen to me!" The drug he had taken had him in its grip and his eyes flared with excitement. Then his voice lowered with the instinct of caution, but it was as rapid as ever. "There's a damn fool of an old sea captain who's sold out some property he owns and has the cash, a cool $15,000, in an iron safe in the cabin of his tramp steamer. It's been there for three nights and the ship's still in port. Never mind how I got the dope. I have my own way of nosing out prospects. Runt Wells was our safe blower, but he's had to beat it or run the chance of sitting in the electric chair. He wrote me you could blow a box. So

that's your bit for tonight, Malloy. The rest of us will attend to the skipper."

"Look here——" burst out Clary, his fists tightening.

Frayne's hand shot into his pocket and came out with an automatic. A silencer was screwed menacingly over the barrel. Eyes protuberant and glaring, face set in malignant fury, he was a picture of potential murder. Behind him, following his example, Riggsy slipped a pistol from its scabbard.

"Close your trap, I told you before!" grated Ripper. "No new bird is going to talk to me before I'm through with my say. You can learn and learn now that I'm boss in my own mob, and whoever goes up against me gets a dose of lead. You may have Runt Wells' recommendation back of you, Malloy, but that don't mean everything to me. I came here to look you over for myself. Remember, I've never laid my glims on you before and I don't take any Chicago gunman on trust. We mobs may know a lot about each other in different burgs, but not everything. I've got to have a box-man for that $15,000 haul and there's no time to lose about it. You're it and you'll get your cut in the split-up. But in the meantime you'll take your orders from me and keep your face quiet. Where were you all the time I was waiting here for you? You sounded full of liquor when you called me up at headquarters."

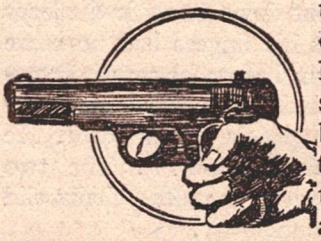
"On the waterfront," said Clary slowly. He wanted time to think and he was sparring for it, but already he sensed that the business had gone too far to be stopped. Half-frenzied by cocaine, Ripper Frayne had rushed into an outline of his next job under the impression that Clary was a gangster like himself. If he revealed himself now as the ex-second mate and not the Chicago gunman he was supposed to be, there would be the swift cough of a pair of automatics in the half-lit cubicle and he would take a handful of slugs in his body to keep him from talking.

He had been let in, neck-deep, in Frayne's plans, in the guise of Chuck Malloy, and there would be no possibility of getting out with his life unless he used his brain.

"I'm with you," he added stolidly. "Who's the captain we pull the stuff on, and what's his ship?"

Frayne stared at him with his resentment still smouldering. He was, obviously, a leader who ruled his gang of pirates with an iron hand. He was arrogant, harsh, cruel and a born killer.

"You'll learn when the time comes," he snarled, "and not before. I don't tip off my hand to every new recruit I get. Take it from me, Malloy, you're being given a chance to get in with the hottest waterfront mob in town. We've done plenty to the warehouse and shipping in New York and we're going to do plenty more. There's only been two squealers ever mixed in with us and both of 'em—" he tapped the barrel of the automatic— "got this. I've had my eye out for that kind of bird since and I'm blasted well protected. I mean to tie you in so fast and so thick with us that, if you ever think of letting out a yawp, your own hide will be nailed on the wall along with ours."



CLARY mustered an expression of carelessness and lolled back on the bunk. Ripper Frayne's gaze was full upon him and he was meeting it coolly. Robbery and perhaps murder of some aged ship captain was something he had no intention of permitting to go through. All the seafaring blood in him was boiling at the thought of the outrage on a comrade that Frayne so cold-bloodedly planned. It would be successful, he realized, if he himself could not stop it somehow. He would have to find a way of notifying the police so that the Ripper and his gang could be rounded up. Frayne was speaking again in a low, calculating voice and what he said caused Clary to tense in every muscle. This was bad, very bad.

"I don't know anything about you yet, Malloy. So Riggsy and I will just bunk in here with you for the rest of the night and take you up to the joint with us later. You know too much about tonight's job to be left alone until you've done your share in

it. You can just roll yourself up in those blankets and pound your ear in that bunk while I take the upper. Riggsy can have the chair. Both of us are light sleepers and we've got a pair of rods. Maybe you think they come tough in Chicago, but in New York we come a lot tougher."

Frayne grinned thinly and began to take his coat off. The madness of the drug was dying out of him and he would be weak and logy for some time to come. He would continue, however, to be as dangerous as a snake. Riggsy sat down on the chair and tipped it back against the wall, pulling his cap over his eyes. They remained wide open, glinting.

"I don't sleep much," he offered. "I kinda catnap, that's all."

"The joint's too far uptown to go back to," said Frayne. He was already stretched out on the upper bunk. "We'll just use you for a flop, Malloy."

"Suit yourself," returned Clary numbly.

He was trapped and the knowledge appalled him. Into what web of crime and deadly danger had he plunged himself through the madness of a moment that had prompted him to take on the identity of a man he had never known? It was too late now for self-recrimination. Ahead of him lay certain destruction if he were exposed, and the commission of a crime if he continued to ply the rôle of Malloy to preserve himself. Frayne and his mob would stick to him like so many leeches until the job was done and he was branded as one of them. He looked at the watch he had thrust under the pillow. It was already four o'clock in the morning. At ten o'clock that same night, Frayne had said, the captain's safe was to be blown open.

Suddenly the vision of a girl's face rose in the darkened, unfragrant Bowery cubicle. He had only seen her for brief minutes but already Mary Powers meant more to George Clary than he dared to admit. At nine o'clock that night he had a date to meet her. He had laughed at her and told her he would be on the corner if he were still alive. What he had said in jest the amazing twists of chance had translated into grim truth.

"I'll never be there," he groaned to himself. "Something tells me I'll be done for long before then."

He half raised himself on the blankets. Riggsy turned his head instantly in his direction from the chair by the door. His automatic rested in his lap. Overhead Frayne stirred and cursed. He too had been aroused by the faint, sliding sound of Clary's body. They were right when they had told him they were both light sleepers. He fell back and lay quietly in the gloom, vainly seeking for slumber that would not come.

CHAPTER III

THE RIVER RACKET

SITTING on a rickety chair in Ripper Frayne's headquarters, that evening, with four armed gangsters between him and the door, Clary bunched his fists in the pockets of his coat. Frayne had him more tightly in his net than ever. Three barely furnished rooms on the top floor of a waterfront hotel comprised the base from which he and his mob operated. On the ground floor of the building was a speakeasy and, as often as not, Clary gathered, the proprietor acted as a "fence" after peculiarly profitable raids. The rooms made an excellent hideaway and in case of trouble an exit was provided through a trap door leading to the roof in the hall outside.

Frayne had just put the receiver of the phone back on its hook with a click, and half a dozen tough faces were turned to him with inquiry written on them. The mob wanted action.

"That was 'Hefty' Ryan reporting from downtown," said Ripper. "He's been trailing the captain all afternoon and says he's back aboard his ship for keeps. No change in the program. It goes through."

Clary went a trifle taut.

Through sleepless hours of the night he had vainly striven for some kind of escape from the mob, but no loophole had appeared. Not once had the venomous eyes of Riggsy closed for more than a second or so. At every move he had made in his bunk, back in the "hotel," Frayne had hurled down an oath. They had had him at their mercy, unarmed and hopeless, while

the dark hours waned and another day arrived. Ripper had refused to let him leave the cubicle for breakfast but had despatched Riggsy for coffee and a handful of rolls. The gang leader had spent the morning flat on his back in the upper bunk, full of dope part of the time and utterly savage every minute. He was always that way, Riggsy grinned, when a big job was about to be pulled. About mid-afternoon Frayne had led the way to the street and hailed the nearest taxicab, pulling down its curtains and sitting with his hand on his gun all the way to the hotel rendezvous. Clary had had to discard the idea of flinging open the door and leaping to the street. He would have been full of lead before his foot struck the running board. It was only too evident that Ripper was out to "ride" his latest recruit.

CLARY now let his gaze stray about the roomful of gangsters. Their characters were stamped deep into their faces in lines and mottlings of vice. Some of them, he gathered, had done their "bit" in prison, and those who had not seen the inside of stone walls were well on their way to them. They were desperate and vicious and the worst one of them all was their leader, Ripper Frayne, whom they feared and obeyed. So far, under his leadership, they appeared to have prospered. Clary knew where the proceeds of their lootings went—into wild revels with the women of the waterfront. His chin grew set as his mind roved to another sort of girl, the one he would not be able to meet that night and whom in all probability he would never see again. He didn't even know her address. Frayne's tones brought him out of his reverie. The mob leader was



leaning across the drink-covered table, his small eyes filled with purpose.

"Here's the layout for the last time," he snarled. "Listen to me and get it right. I don't mean to go over it again for any of you. You all know the number and location of the pier the tramp steamer we're after is tied up to. Also we all know enough about a ship to get straight to the captain's cabin where the cash is. There won't be a soul aboard except the old skipper. His hands spend all their nights ashore, and don't come back until around dawn. There'll be a pier watchman from the steamship company around, but he'll be at the street end of the wharf and ought not to hear anything if we work fast. If he or anybody else does horn in, Riggsy with his machine gun can fix them all right." Riggsy showed his discolored teeth in a knowing grin. "I'll post a man at the gangplank. So that's that. I've given you all your orders before this. Follow me and we'll clean the job right. As for you, Malloy—" he bent a protracted stare on Clary— "all you have to do is to blow the box you're put in front of. There's plenty of stuff that Runt Wells left behind him in the next room."

Clary nodded. "Where's the pier and what's the boat?"

"You don't have to know," snarled Frayne. "You'll simply come along with me and I'll give you a safe to crack and a clean getaway."

"And if the captain puts up a fight?" inquired Clary. He did not know of a ship master who wouldn't battle to the finish against thieves trying to rob him of his life's savings. Frayne's teeth clicked. He motioned towards two of his gangsters crouched in their chairs. Their features were just a shade more brutal than those of the rest. "Gotz and Weber will knock him over the head. They've tapped a few to keep 'em quiet."

It took all of Clary's will power to crush down the rage that swept over him. All too clearly he could vision the smashing of the gangsters' blackjacks on the skull of an old man who would not submit without resistance to a robbery that meant poverty. Their weapons would strike him down mercilessly and in all likelihood he would be left dying on the floor of his own cabin when the mob made their escape, leaving behind a wrecked and looted safe.

This crowd of Frayne's were no better than the pirates who used to make New York their rendezvous in days long gone by, only they never dared the dangers of the sea. They slunk and lurked amid the shadows of the waterfront, piling over the gunwales of moored ships to rifle them and, if they saw fit, to kill. Steadily the determination was mounting in Clary to see this affair through to the finish and bring the plans of Ripper Frayne to ruin. He was one of them as far as they knew. He met Frayne's cold stare and shrugged his shoulders. He had no more questions to ask.

The telephone on the table at Ripper's elbow jangled and he answered. He listened for a moment.

"Come on up." He tossed a remark to his gangsters. "Hefty Ryan's arrived downstairs. Calling from the office to be sure everything's O. K. here. And that ought to be good news for you, Malloy. Hefty says he's an old pal of yours and ran around quite a bit with you in Chicago last year. He put in a good word for you when I got Runt's letter about your coming on."

AS THOUGH he had been struck in the face by a physical blow Clary stiffened in his chair. This was something he had never counted on. He had not been told that in Frayne's mob there was a member who knew the real Chuck Malloy and knew him well. He had forgotten what Frayne had said about the mobs knowing each other in the different cities. Before the newcomer who was already on the stairs no bluff would count. In a vague and general way he and the dead Chicago gunman resembled each other, but Hefty Ryan would never be fooled for a second. The instant he was revealed as an impostor Frayne would tear his gun from his pocket and shoot him down. The path to the door was barred and it would do him no good to try to get out. Footsteps were sounding in the first of the three rooms. Ryan had arrived.

Clary rose and moved to the table where the drinks were laid out. He meant to take the coming catastrophe standing up. His brain was racing desperately and he knew that he was passing through the most dangerous moment in his life. He could see the hulking figure of Ryan heading for him. The big gangster shouldered through the door and stood blinking and snarling.

"Gimme a drink," he rasped.

Frayne pointed towards Clary. The crisis had come.

"Here's your old pal, Chuck Malloy, Hefty. Have one with him."

Ryan half-turned and glowered at Clary. His face went blank and then an animal rage suffused it. He had caught the significance of the scene and had sensed that something was vitally wrong. His hand went back to his hip pocket and an automatic jerked out.

"Chuck Malloy!" he roared. "Why he——"

Swift and sure Clary had leaped before the words left Hefty's mouth. It was his one chance in a hundred and he was taking it before a bullet blasted into his body. Ryan had him cold as an impostor. Almost from his knees he brought the uppercut, the single blow that he would have time to deliver. And it would have to go home with every ounce of strength in his six foot two frame, knocking his man out on his feet, or it would be useless. It could be no such ordinary smash as had temporarily done for the drunken annoyer outside Sailor Joe's last night, but one that would be Hefty Ryan's complete finish. The power of utter desperation, the mad, terrific force of a man fighting for his life went into Clary's uppercut, and he felt his knuckles split wide open as it landed on the jaw. Ryan went over backwards, the gun flying out of his hands and there was a dull thud. His head had hit the floor. A howl burst from Frayne and his face twitched in fury.

"You blasted punk! What in hell do you think you're doing?" Clary stood back, breathing hard. Gotz and Weber were bending over the limp shape of Ryan, who lay with his eyes closed, sprawled on the floor.

"Knocked for a goal, boss!" croaked Gotz. "Hefty's out for a long, long time."

He had done it then. Relief flooded Clary. He had closed Ryan's mouth on the edge of exposure in the fraction of a sec-

ond that had been allowed him. That one punch had done the trick. He turned just in time to see Ripper's gun streak out of his pocket, its bore levelled straight at him.

"Speak your piece and speak it quick!" snarled Frayne. "What's the big idea in K.O.ing one of my best rods in front of the crowd? A pal of yours too!"

Clary shoved his chin out and mustered a snarl. "That hunk of yellow a pal of mine?" he grated. "Not so you'd know it. He swiped my girl away from me in Chicago and I've been waiting to pay him back for it ever since. I guess he never mentioned that little stunt to you. He got just what was coming to him and got it plenty."

THERE had been nothing in Hefty's interrupted exclamation to give away the truth. Clary's bluff might go over and it might not. But at least he had offered a plausible explanation, the first that had flashed into his mind, for his knockout of the gangster. He stood back and waited, eyeing the automatic that never left him.

"I've got a good mind to bump you for that piece of work!" grated Frayne. "We need every man we've got on this ship job. You're too damn fresh, you Chicago hick! By God, I'm about ready to put a slug of lead into you! I never liked you from the start and I don't like you now! Get that?"

The finger around the trigger jerked convulsively and tightened. Clary threw back his shoulders, staring steadily at the destruction that impended.

"Go ahead and shoot!" he rasped. "Then who'll blow the box for you?"

The automatic wavered and came down. Frayne's face was still black with venom, but Clary's words had scored. He flung a question to Gotz and Weber.

"Hefty's not coming to yet?"

"Not a flicker," growled Gotz. "He's due for the accident ward sure."

"Then carry him downstairs, the two of you, and have a taxi pull up in the side alley. Take Hefty down to that big hospital by the waterfront and park him. Give the docs any song and dance you want to. When you've planted Hefty, slip up to the boathouse and join the rest of us there. We're about ready to start off on the job."

"Got you, boss," answered Weber. The pair of gangsters slid Hefty's big arms over their shoulders and staggered out with him towards the stairs. For a while



Clary could hear their footsteps on the flight and then they died away. The minutes dragged by and he felt cold with suspense. If Hefty came to, even for a minute, on that ride to the hospital he would spill what he knew and Gotz and Weber would rush back, ready for murder. He could only hope and pray that Hefty's unconsciousness would hold.

"Come on," snapped Frayne. "It's time we were moving. Malloy, you'll find the nitroglycerin and the kit of tools in the next room under the loose board in the corner. Drag 'em out and, for God's sake, don't drop any of the stuff! You've done enough damage around this joint today."

Riggsy sidled to a cupboard in the wall and from its depths drew out a wicked-looking sub-machine gun and its ammunition. He fondled its barrel lovingly. Destruction at the rate of hundreds of shots a minute could be turned loose from that black snout at a moment's notice. Riggsy wrapped a mass of paper around it, so that it resembled an ordinary bundle, and grinned. He was all ready to go.

The other gangsters were standing up, passing one of the bottles on the table from hand to hand and tilting the harsh, inflaming liquor down their throats. All of them were carrying flasks as well as guns and they would be wild men when the time came to board the ship.

"Got a gun for me?" Clary asked casually of Frayne. "I was broke when I hit town yesterday and hocked mine."

A sober man back of a seven-shot automatic might have a chance yet to smash up the expedition of Frayne's mob against the steamer before it had started. Without a weapon, Clary knew, he would be helpless. Frayne smirked sardonically at him.

"None of the boys have got a loose rod on 'em. And I don't mean to give you mine. There's a gat or so cached up at the

boathouse for emergencies. You can have one of those when we get there. Load yourself with the safe blowing stuff, Malloy, and walk ahead of me. I'm seeing to it personally that you don't pull any more tricks. Wilkes—" he beckoned to a slab-faced gangster— "call up downstairs and tell 'em to have a cab in the alley. Hurry up, it's damn near nine o'clock now."

CLARY thrust from his mind for the last time the picture of a certain girl who even at this moment would be waiting for him on a waterfront corner not a mile away and went into the next room. From a recess under the floor that was pointed out to him he drew a bottle of nitroglycerin, handling it nervously, and a heavy, soft cloth in which tools were wrapped in a series of pockets.

He undid the cloth and spread it out, examining the complete kit of a safe-cracker that Runt Wells had left behind him. Drills, wedges, sectional jimmies, nippers, fuses, all were there. And he had not the vaguest idea how to use any one of them. The moment he knelt down before the safe, if the worst came to the worst and he had to make a bluff of going on, he would be revealed as a rank amateur.

He lifted the cloth and strapped it around his body under his coat. The bottle of nitroglycerin he concealed, carefully wrapped in soft newspaper, in an inside coat-pocket and followed the gang to the stairs. They went down three flights and passed out of the dilapidated hotel by a side door. A taxicab with a hard-lipped chauffeur was waiting, and they got in. The driver appeared to have carried these passengers before.

"Usual dock, Hunky," said Frayne, and the cab rolled off. The waterfront, along which they were travelling, was plunged in gloom and there was no one to notice the passage of the lone taxi and its crew. Ripper had his gun out again and Clary knew the futility of any attempt at escape. It was a long while before the cab drew up at a dark wharf and they got out. Frayne glanced carefully about him and then pushed Clary towards a boathouse some fifty yards off. Someone opened the door with a key and they were inside. "You're going to see how a high class river mob works," gloated Frayne. "Get busy with the launch, boys. We'll haul out of here as soon as Gotz and Weber show up."

Resting on the water in front of Clary was a long, gray-painted motorboat whose lines spoke of speed and power. It would slide through the river with terrific velocity and its hue would render it practically invisible on a night like this. Towards the bow was a roomy cabin and Frayne pointed to it.

"Armored," he said briefly. "We don't worry about the harbor police. They couldn't catch up to us in five years and, if they did, they wouldn't put a dent in us."

The gangsters were stripping off their shoes and putting on rubber-soled sneakers from a pile in a corner of the boathouse. They meant to be both sure-footed and soundless tonight. There rose the throaty purr of the engine, singing of unleashed force, and then it went silent again. A cautious knock sounded on the boathouse door and was repeated in a peculiar manner. Gotz and Weber slipped in when the entrance was unbarred.

"Hefty's parked," said Gotz. "Still dead to the world."

Clary breathed a sigh of relief and for the first time in many minutes felt a little safer. A grim look came to his face as Frayne held out an automatic, smirking.

"Here's the rod you asked for, Malloy. Use it if you have to."

He motioned Clary down onto the deck of the launch and followed him. The others were already aboard and the doors to the boathouse had been swung open, showing the dark flow of the East river. The powercraft was being pushed slowly out. Into Clary's ribs something hard was jammed and he heard Ripper Frayne's voice, filled with malignance.

"You're new with this mob, Malloy. It's your first time out with us. I'll be watching you every minute. A false move out of you, or anything at all that I don't like, and I'm drilling you. Don't forget that, you Chicago punk!"

"You can take your gun away," said Clary dully. Even the bulge of an auto-

matic in his pocket was scant comfort. The last vestige of hope that he had entertained had vanished. Under the keen scrutiny of Ripper Frayne himself and surrounded by the armed members of his mob he was being hurried helplessly toward an adventure which, he felt, would see bloodier work than that of mere robbery. The motorboat turned its bow down stream and began to arrow swiftly for its destination.

CHAPTER IV

CLUES OF DOOM

IN THE long, white-walled accident ward of the Mariner's Hospital, located within half a dozen blocks of the river, Mary Powers had had a hard day of it.



She should have gone off duty at seven o'clock, tonight, but one of the other nurses in the ward had been taken ill and the remaining ones were covering her absence by doing extra time. This business of being a waterfront hospital nurse was often highly exacting, but she liked it.

As she walked quietly between the rows of beds she presented a trim and soothing picture in her starched uniform and cap. She stopped at a patient or so and then passed into the small cubbyhole at the end of the ward where she waited in odd moments. Someone would call for water or want something any minute and she would be up and out into the ward again. She sat there in the glow of the night light, smiling a little. At nine o'clock she would be off and there would be a young sailor with alert eyes and broad shoulders waiting for her on a corner. Presently she became aware that an interne had stopped beside her.

"Number 33 is coming out of it," he said. "You might go over and sit there until I come back. I have a call down the corridor."

Mary remembered Number 33 who had been brought in only a short time before, senseless and with his jaw broken. He was a huge hulk of the bruiser type with an evil face, and she wondered in what brawl he had received his injury. She went down the ward to the bedside and found a stocky, stolid-looking man standing there beside the bed. He was inspecting the patient with searching eyes.

"I'm Detective Stevens, nurse," he said briefly. "Routine trip through the hospitals. Pretty often some of the men we're after get in 'em and are lost sight of for weeks. This bird looks as though he might have seen bars."

The bandaged hulk groaned and his eyelids fluttered. He began to emit ragged mutterings. The detective bent lower, a professional expression in his face.

"Who laid you out?" he asked. "Gang fight or what?"

Hefty Ryan's face contorted. He was still delirious from shock.

"Malloy!" he muttered viciously, if feebly. "Malloy—Chuck Malloy—says he's—Chicago—Malloy——"

HIS tones trailed off into nothingness and he passed out again. The detective tilted his hat on the back of his head and grunted.

"I'll bet he never knew he spilled that information," he observed. "A gangster doesn't talk unless he's out of his head. So Mr. Charles, better known as Chuck, Malloy is really in town, is he? And he's the one who cracked this yegg pretty?"

"Charles Malloy?" The question came unconsciously from the girl. "A young man—tall—wide shoulders—light eyes?"

Detective Stevens eyed her curiously. "You hit him off to a T, sister. That's the general description forwarded to us from Chicago today. He's wanted out there badly for a job and they think he headed for New York. How'd you know what he looked like?"

Mary Powers turned aside, her heart beating strangely.

"I—I just guessed at it," she said. "It's quite a common name, isn't it?"

"It sure is," grinned the detective. "But this wild tip is worth following. I'll just beat up the waterfront dives around here and see if I can get on the track of our

friend, the Chicago gunman. Maybe the receiving office has some dope on where your patient was picked up. I'll tell 'em to phone me when he gets in condition to answer questions."

He strolled down the ward and out of the door. The girl locked her fingers tightly together and slowly the startled expression faded from her face.

"It couldn't be the same person," she told herself over and over. "I'm to meet him in only a few minutes."

Another nurse was coming on duty over at the cubbyhole with the night light and she made for it to pass on the ward charts. The second girl looked up at her and smiled.

"Why so worried-looking, Mary? Your sea captain uncle sick or something?"

"No," said Mary. "I'm on my way now down to his boat. I'm not worried about him."

"You ought to be," chaffed the nurse. "You told me a few nights ago, didn't you, that he'd sold some property and had $15,000 in the safe on his ship? If I had an uncle who was as rich as that, I'd worry about him all the time. Well, good night, Mary; you'll have a nice, quiet evening cooking a late snack for him in his cabin."

"Yes," said Mary slowly, "I suppose I will."

Chapter V

THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN

IN THE gloom of the crowded cabin of the motorboat, rushing down the East River, George Clary cursed the moment's insanity that had led him to adopt another man's name. The longing to shake the identity of a broken second mate for any other one that offered, even if it were only for a night, had plunged him into a maelstrom of peril. Knee to knee with him sat the gangsters of Ripper Frayne's mob, and with every revolution of the engine the power launch was whirling them closer to the ship that was to be attacked. The craft had hardly pulled out into midstream before Ripper had barked out curt orders.

"Into the cabin with you, the whole crowd," he had snarled. "Not a head is to show until I call you out. That will be when we're alongside the boat."

Gotz had the wheel and Frayne sat beside him in the stern. The remainder of the mob were totally hidden from view in the cabin. No one passing on the river and sighting the motorboat would ever be aware that it carried armed men on board. The lights had been dimmed and presently they would be turned off altogether. The pirate craft would slide up to its quarry like a wraith in the dark. Clary recalled the location of the boathouse they had left and could make an estimate at the speed at which they were travelling. They ought to be passing Randall's Island now, where there was a station of the harbor police, equipped with launches and weapons. The rocketing launch of Ripper Frayne would pass within less than fifty yards of it, perhaps, and the police would be blind to its mission. He could vision the sardonic smile that would twist Frayne's lips as he watched the station drift astern and knew that he had a clear field for the night's work.

"Sit still, blast you!" growled a savage voice.

CLARY had been shifting restlessly in his seat, sending his glance around the cabin. A match was struck now and then to light a cigarette and in the sudden glow the seamed faces of the gangsters leaped out against the background of the dark. He heard curses, savage ejaculations and the gurgle of liquor poured from flasks into throats. The mob were priming themselves for action. Ripper Frayne, he knew, had administered another shot of dope to himself since starting. Clary felt as though he were among a floating den of wild animals being borne along some dark torrent towards destruction.

The launch hurtled on. A ship's siren rose from somewhere close at hand and the sound of it seemed to tear at the core of his being. The last time that familiar tumult had waked an echo in him had been twenty-four hours ago when he had left Mary Powers on her corner. It seemed an eternity since then. He had left his former life—the clean, free career of the man who goes down to the sea in ships—behind

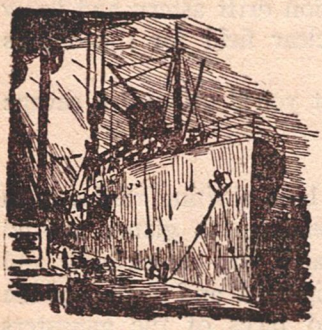
him forever and the girl too had drifted into oblivion of the past. Would he ever see her again? He realized that he would not. Either he would be linked with Ripper Frayne's mob as a guilty partner in their crimes within the next hour or he would be dead. He did not have a chance to win out against them.

"By God, I can try!" he grated.

A snarl came from the corner of the cabin.

"What in hell is that Chicago rod sayin'?" demanded Weber's voice.

"Be quiet in there," snapped Frayne from the cockpit. His whole figure was tensed. The lights of the motorboat had been switched off some minutes before and it was swinging in a slow arc for the dark line of the wharves that lay before it. The engine went to half speed, then to quarter speed, and stopped, only to resume in a quick, low burst or so. Then it went silent entirely and the powercraft drifted under its own momentum towards the shape of a ship, moored to a pier. Clary did not have to look outside to tell what was happening. The river pirates were on their quarry. He felt the soft bump of the launch against the plates of a vessel and it stopped, bobbing softly on the water. Frayne had his gun in his hand.



"We're here at the *Campion*," he called in a low, icy tone. "Come out, boys. One at a time and bring the ladder."

No sound, no cry of warning rose from the deck of the steamer overhead. In the superstructure on the fore-deck behind the bridge a light gleamed in the captain's cabin. Except for that the *Campion* appeared utterly deserted. In a stealthy and soundless file the gangsters were stealing out into the cockpit of the launch. Clary came last, his brain in a whirl of mingled emotions. He cast a glance towards the next pier. It was bare of any vessel. Ripper Frayne had planned the job to perfection. There would be no interference in the descent of the mob on an aged and defenseless sea captain, alone with the savings of a lifetime.

"The rope first," husked Frayne. "Up with you, Wilkes." Someone tossed a line high overhead, a cloth-muffled grappling iron at its end. The hook caught on the rail and the slab-nosed Wilkes swarmed up the side of the *Campion* and into its deck. Then he was hauling up a rope ladder, attached to the end of the line, and making it fast.

"All clear," he called down.

"You know what you're to do," Frayne flung at his gangsters. "Go and do it. Captain Edwards will be in his cabin. Malloy, you climb up after the last man. I'll be right back of you."

THE scrambling figures made the journey to the planking of the steamer in no time. Ropes were run from the bow and stern of the motorboat to the ship, holding the launch against it. There came the swift patter of running feet on board the *Campion* and then Clary was swaying on the rope ladder, going up rung after rung. Frayne's gun was at his rear and he knew it. He hauled himself over the rail and Ripper slid on his heels. He was making instinctly for the blur of the captain's cabin ahead of him. On the pier side of the boat a gunman crouched by the gangplank with his automatic ready. The covered wharf stretched in gloom all the way to the distant street entrance where the steamship company's guard would be stationed.

No plan of any sort had formulated itself in Clary's mind as he went rapidly across the deck. The other members of Frayne's mob were nowhere in sight. He knew that they had already reached the cabin and he dreaded what he might see when he got there. He shoved open the door and stepped inside. It closed behind him. Frayne was in also.

"Quick job and easy, boss," rumbled Gotz. "We got the skipper, O.K."

Tied hand and foot and with a look of furious amazement on his face Captain Edwards was seated in a chair. He was wrestling with his bonds, tossing and

twisting to no avail. He had been pounced upon without warning and helplessly trussed by a quartet of river gangsters who had burst in on him out of the night. His iron gray hair was awry and his eyes flamed in defiance.

"Pirates!" he croaked. "You damn scum!"

"Stow it!" grated Gotz and shoved a blackjack in front of his face. "Or you'll get this on top of your head."

Ripper Frayne sent a glance at the clumsy, old fashioned iron safe in the corner. Behind its metal door lay the $15,000 the mob had come for. He motioned to Clary, his eyes hard.

"There's the box. Let's see how good you are with the tools. Open it! And better be quick, too!"

CHAPTER VI

THE GIRL ON THE DOCK

CLARY moved slowly over to the iron safe and knelt in front of it. He untied the cloth that held the cracksman's kit and laid it on the floor. He gave the combination a twirl, knowing that it would be futile. His brain was racing and he wanted to delay as long as he could. A quick, keen flare came into his eyes and his hands fumbled among the safe-smashing assortment. None of the gangsters, he knew, could see what he was doing. The idea which had come to him was desperate enough, but it would have to serve.

"Damnation!" he swore. "The drill bit must have slipped out of the kit in the cabin of the launch." he indicated the empty compartment in the cloth. The drill bit was now slid up his sleeve and something else bulged in his inside coat pocket. "I'll have to go back down the ladder and get it. I'll need it for this job."

He rose to his feet and made as though to leave the cabin. Frayne snarled instantly and spoke to Riggsy.

"Go with him and wait at the rail. Keep that chopper of yours handy."

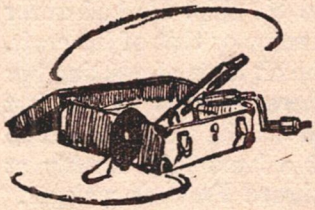
Riggsy smiled wickedly and ran his hand up and down the front grip of the sub-machine gun.

"All I got to do is press this trigger and she'll talk at a sweet clip! She's set in automatic and she's going to stay that way. Come on, Malloy."

CLARY might have known that until the job was done he would be under surveillance. Frayne was not trusting him out of his sight, as he had warned him, until he had proved his ability. He shrugged his shoulders and stalked across the deck to where the ladder hung overside and went down it. He could see Riggsy overhead, the machine-gun poised, as he stepped into the dark pit of the motorboat's cabin and quietly shut its door. He would not have many minutes to work in, but the thing he planned to do would be simple enough if he kept his nerve. He straightened up shortly, with a catch in his breath, and looked at a tiny eye of red on the floor of the cabin. Then he slipped out into the open air, closing the door again, and held up the drill bit to Riggsy. The gangster twitched the barrel of his weapon and Clary came scrambling up the ladder to the *Campion's* deck. In a moment more they were back in the crowded cabin. Captain Edwards still glowered in fettered fury and the gangsters stood in a ring about him, looking hungrily at the safe.

"You took a damn long time to find that tool," rasped Frayne. "We want to be off this ship in half an hour with the cash."

"The thing slipped down behind the cushions," parried Clary. Every minute now that he could stall off Ripper was utterly precious. He did not know just how long he had. With a deliberate motion he took off his coat and dropped it on Edwards' bed. He picked up one after another of his implements and studied them, after which he passed his hands exploringly up and down the face of the safe. He could hear Frayne cursing exasperatedly behind him at his slowness.



"Get on with it," he was muttering. "Don't take all night!"

Beads of perspiration were standing out on Clary's forehead. Ripper and his mob might not know how to open a safe them-

selves, but in a minute or two more it would be obvious to them that Clary did not know his business. Every one of them, no doubt, at one time or another had seen a strongbox opened. An expression of ghastly rage was slowly stealing into Frayne's face. Clary saw it when he cast a glance back over his shoulder. It would become suspicion and, after that, certainty. He began to feel cold all over.

From the deck outside came a low, clear whistle and Frayne looked startled. It was a signal of some kind from the man who had been stationed at the gangplank. Ripper's face contorted and he stole for the door. Clary rose and went after him, moved by some sudden impulse. He was beside him when the mob leader reached the bridge that led to the pier and crouched in the shadows of the rail.

"What is it?" husked Frayne. "Someone coming?"

"Yes," returned the watcher. "It's a girl."

Some distance down the empty pier, still vague amid its shadows, the figure of a woman was moving. She had passed by the steamship company's watchman at the far end and was headed directly for the *Campion*. She was coming aboard. In the next moment she was near enough for her face to be seen and Clary crushed down an exclamation of horror. He was looking at Mary Powers, walking unprotected into the hold-up of Ripper Frayne's mob. She had a basket under her arm.

There had been no way he could know that Captain Edwards of the *Campion* was the uncle for whom she prepared a midnight meal aboard his ship. He had never asked her for his name or that of his craft.

He had given up all hope of meeting her again and now here she was in the last place in the world that he would expect to find her. He felt a hand grip harshly at his shoulder and heard Frayne's whisper.

"Hell! It's the old man's daughter or something! Back into the cabin. She's alone and she'll walk into the trap as smooth as can be!"

THE watcher at the gangplank huddled behind a stack of boxes a few feet away, skilfully concealing himself while Frayne and Clary raced for the cabin. Through the curtained windows no glimpse of the scene within could be caught by the girl who was even now coming up the gangplank. With the blood pounding in his temples Clary stood against the wall. Light footsteps crossed the deck, the door opened and Mary Powers entered.

Ripper Frayne grinned at her. "We didn't expect you," he said viciously. "But now you're here, you'll stay."

He held up his automatic so that she could not overlook it. The girl's eyes widened as she took in the bound figure of Captain Edwards and the menacing cabinful of gangsters. Her face paled a little and one hand went to her throat. Then she gave back Frayne glance for glance.

"A hold-up, I see," she said. "You won't get away with it."

She made no effort to cry out or give an alarm in any way. She realized the uselessness of such an attempt and the threat of the automatics in the gangsters' hands. She simply stood there quietly.

"Won't we get away with it?" snarled Frayne. "We're going to walk out blasted soon with $15,000. Our big pal here—" he flung his hand towards Clary—"will show you how they crack a safe in Chicago."

Mary Powers turned and she was looking squarely at Clary. Once more her face went pale, but this time every vestige of color was drained from it and her eyes were big, dark pools.

"Oh!" she said brokenly. "Then it's true! You're Chuck Malloy, the Chicago gunman."

Clary mustered a sneer that was almost perfect, although a dead weight seemed to be pressing on his heart and lungs, and his voice was thick. "That's who I am, all right," he returned. "I'm one of this mob."

"And I—I never knew you were a crook," she flashed. "I waited for you a long while tonight and then I—I gave it up." A stinging scorn was in her voice and he could not meet her eyes. "You took me in, didn't you? You won't be out of prison long. There was a detective at the Mariners' Hospital looking for you."

"That won't bother me," said Clary.

Better the lash of the girl's contempt while he remained free to fight, if possible,

for both of them than exposure in his real person. Ripper Frayne's glance was sliding from the girl to Clary and back again.

"Where'd you ever see this girl before?" he demanded violently.

"Me?" said Clary casually. "Oh, I ran into her last night on a corner and handed her a song and dance. I never thought I'd bump into her again."

Mary flashed at him a look of utter disdain and Ripper grinned.

"Quit jawing with the skirt," he ordered. "I want that cash."

Clary crouched down at the safe, his ears strained for a sound that he hoped to hear, but none came. "I'll need the nitro to blow this box," he muttered. His hands roved around the cloth kit and then through his pockets. "Damn! I can't find the stuff! I must have left it back at the boathouse when we took the launch."

"You fool!" fairly howled Frayne. "You cursed Chicago softy! You'd forget your head if it wasn't nailed on! Do you think I'm going to have the whole job fall flat through your dumb plays? Or are you handing me the double cross?" A savage gleam sprang into his face and Clary braced himself for a shot.

"You're crazy!" he snarled back. "I stand to lose as much as any of you if I can't get this thing open."

FROM all around him the gangsters were growling oaths. They were half insane with rage at his actions. Frayne's automatic, which had threatened to cover Clary swung suddenly and was pressed against the head of Captain Edwards. Ripper's lips were drawn back in a snarl.



"Will you give us the combination to that safe?" he half screamed. "Or shall I shoot it out of you?"

Clary moved around until he was facing the mob. Mary Powers was at one side of the cabin, tense faced, while two gangsters kept her covered with their guns. There was going to be trouble and serious trouble. Either Edwards would give in and the gag would be taken from his mouth or else his brains would be scattered over the floor.

Captain Edwards stared directly into the working features so close to his own. It was evident that he had a backbone of iron. His old eyes took on an indomitable fire and twice, distinctly, he shook his head in refusal. His shoulders stiffened and, bound though he was, he gave the impression of unyielding purpose. He preferred destruction to giving aid to the pirates who had stormed his ship. A muffled imprecation fell from Frayne's lips.

"So that's your answer, is it?" His murderous expression deepened. Then his eyes glinted and he gave a crooked smile, looking sidewise at Mary. "I'll teach you," he said softly, "how I get around stiff-necked sea captains who have their daughters, or maybe nieces, visit them. You'll either spill that safe combination or we'll torture the girl in front of you. Gotz! Weber! Get ready for some persuasion on the jane. You know the stuff."

Captain Edwards' eyes started horribly in his head as the gangsters grabbed Mary. One of them had her arm in his clutch and was bending it upwards. Edwards' face contorted.

"No!" called Mary clearly. "No, uncle! Don't tell them!"

She went white with the agony of the wrenched arm and all caution dropped away from Clary. His whole body flamed with the intensity of his passion. He had risen from the safe and was planted on his feet beneath the swinging lamp, his face a mask of stone. The automatic that he had drawn from his pocket was aimed at the head of Ripper Frayne.

"Stick up your hands, Frayne, and don't move, anyone!"

CHAPTER VII

THE SHOWDOWN

THE stunned hush of amazement fell on the cabin. In one blazing second, Clary knew, he had gained complete dominance of the situation. Frayne would save his own skin in the crisis. He would realize

that Clary had him at his mercy, although Clary's own life might pay for the shot at him. He would have to order Gotz and Weber to drop Mary and she could go out the door to safety and to warn the police in the minute or so that Clary's gun could continue to cow the mob. Clary would be left alone to meet the fire of the gang, but in the fury that gripped him he was thrusting that thought aside. Frayne stared at him and burst into a mocking chortle.

"Don't laugh," commanded Clary. "Do what I tell you before I shoot."

"Shoot with what?" inquired Frayne. "You blasted stiff, I knew you couldn't be trusted. There isn't a shell in the gat I slipped you in the boathouse. It's empty! And now, by God, you're due to get yours!"

He brought up his own automatic with the silencer on its barrel and his finger crooked. There came a tiny, coughing sound in the cabin and something whizzed by Clary's cheek and thudded into the wall. Instinctively he had side-stepped as Frayne fired, pulling the trigger of his own gun. Only a click came. Ripper Frayne had outtricked him. The gang leader's automatic had followed Clary and with his second shot he would not miss.

A tremendous roar erupted and Frayne staggered back. It was dull and powerful and it came from outside the cabin. There was a splashing and water descended in a falling geyser on the decks and the cabin roof. Timbers and bits of planking seemed to be thudding down with the flood.

"Mary!" yelled Clary. "Out the door! Quick!"

HE SWUNG with his empty weapon at the jaw of Riggsy, standing beside him with the sub-machine gun poised, and as the gangster dropped he snatched the quick-firer from his hands before he could pull its trigger. With a bound he was diving for the entrance, thrusting at Edwards with an open palm on the way. The captain fell out of the chair and lay on the floor, safely out of the path of the bullets which must streak across the cabin. The girl had acted instantly and she was running for the after-deck superstructure when Clary came abreast of her. He turned and held the machine gun on the cabin door, jerking the trigger. It recoiled viciously in his grip and a stream of lead screamed out of it.

"That'll hold 'em for a minute!" he said grimly. "Run for the wireless room yonder. We'll try to fight 'em off from there. No time to try and make the wharf. Frayne will be after my hide."

The girl sped forward and into the narrow cabin. Clary jumped in after her and slammed and barred the door. He shoved the snout of the machine gun out of the window, resting his elbows on the wireless table. The curtains formed a partial screen from behind which he could shoot. He heard Frayne yelling insanely and the crash of glass in Edwards' cabin where the mob had put out the lamp. The rest of the battle was about to be carried out along the deck of the *Campion* in darkness.

"That explosion," breathed the girl, "what was it?"

"Nitroglycerin," said Clary briefly. "I slipped back to the launch we came in after your uncle was tied up and rigged up all the nitro I had with me in its cabin. It's blown to splinters now. I figured the explosion might bring help of some kind, besides spoiling a getaway. You see, I don't really happen to be Chuck Malloy, of Chicago. I'm George Clary, late second mate on a ship. I'll have to tell you later the crazy idea that made me claim to be Malloy and why I couldn't keep our date. Get down on the floor. Frayne is staging a rush."

"I'm rather glad," said Mary, "to hear your news."

She took her place, kneeling beside him without another word. She was the kind who would be cool and sensible in practically any situation. In a rattling crescendo the first shots of the mob spat out and bullets crashed into the wall of the wireless cabin. The frail curtain above Clary's head was torn by flying lead. He could see the half dozen dark shapes spread out on the deck and running at him with spurts of flame leaping out ahead of them. He depressed the muzzle of the machine gun and sent a storm of gunfire across the *Campion*. The mob's charge broke and scattered for cover and he made out a bulky figure, try-

ing to crawl away dragging a helpless leg. Gotz, the gangster who had tortured Mary, was down and screaming to his companions to come and help him. For a moment Clary covered him with his sights, his face savage, and then his trigger finger relaxed.

"Let the rat go," he snarled. "He's out of it, anyhow." Gotz disappeared in the shadows of the foredeck while Clary brushed a hand across his forehead to clear his eyes. Mary looked up at him, smiling queerly.

"Not quite the evening I thought I'd give you," said Clary. "But the New York waterfront is sort of famous for what may come up unexpectedly. The pier watchman ought to have heard this racket long ago and sent for the police."

The girl looked thoughtful. "I don't know," she said. "He's quite stupid. It may take him a long time to make up his mind what to do. He may come down the wharf to investigate."

"In that case," returned Clary, "they'll get him and we'll be left high and dry."

There could not be many more rounds left in the machine gun. The next rush would be pressed home with far more fury than the first and after that he would be helpless.

THE next moment he was leaning on the table, shooting fast and hard at the oncoming gangsters. The recoil of the quick-firer kept throwing his bullets high. He aimed it far down and spread a pattern of lead across the deck, firing as low as he could and trusting to the ricochet to stop the mob. Suddenly those in the center halted and raced back, two of them staggering. But Clary knew that the defense was done. Along each rail of the *Campion,* so far over that he could not swivel his weapon on them, a gangster had come racing and the pair of them had disappeared from view behind the wireless cabin. They would come creeping around the superstructure, close to the cabin wall where it would be impossible to get at them and shoot him down by reaching past the edge of the window. They would riddle the room and in it was no spot of shelter for the girl. One of the men, he was sure, was Frayne.



A flash of crimson told where a gangster crouched and Clary loosed a burst at him. Without warning the machine gun went mute on a choking stutter. From the darkness rose the voice of Riggsy, its operator.

"It's jammed on him! The chopper's jammed! Now's our chance, Ripper!"

A hand clutched at the window curtain from outside and tore it away. Ripper Frayne who had darted along by the rail had stolen along the cabin wall, as Clary had feared he would, and all he had to face him with was a machine gun that was out of action. He saw the barrel of Frayne's automatic jut through the opening from the side, with Ripper's face flaring viciously above it.

"Stay down!" he shouted hoarsely to Mary. "For God's sake, stay down!"

He made a frenzied grab for the pistol barrel, caught it and wrenched it upwards. "Damn you!" snarled Frayne as the shot exploded into the ceiling. He shrieked at someone close under the window. "Get him, Weber, get him!" The other half of the curtain was ripped into fragments and a second muzzle shoved into the room. Weber had risen to his feet from the deck where he had been crawling and Clary could not turn to meet the new attack, coming from less than a yard away.

"Drill him!" yelled Frayne. Weber grinned, tilted his automatic to cover Clary's heart and slumped abruptly out of sight. A single shot had cracked from the direction of the gangplank. Rocketing down the dark pier with its headlights showing red and a mass of uniforms on its running boards an automobile had pulled up alongside the *Campion.* Whistles were shrilling and police poured onto the deck, their service pistols out. One of them had just put a shot into Weber's thigh from ten yards away.

"Cover the ship!" a voice shouted. "Nail

every one of them! Shoot if they put up a fight!"

"It's the police!" said Clary awedly. "They've come in on the jump! And the launch is blown up so the mob can't get away."

He opened the door of the wireless cabin and stepped out with Mary behind him. There were a few scattered shots and then it was finished. With their hands in the air, snarling and cursing, the members of Frayne's mob were being lined up at the rail. Frayne himself, his features convulsed, was between two officers with steel around his wrists.

"Take in that big Chicago rod!" he screamed, glaring at Clary. "He's in this jam, too, and he's wanted! He double-crossed us on the job. He's hooked up with that jane somehow!"

A STOCKY man in plain clothes stepped forward.

"Put out your hands for the cuffs, Malloy," he ordered. "I had an idea the girl would lead me to you. It was a cinch she knew you when I mentioned your name up at the Mariners' Hospital a while ago, so I stuck around outside and trailed her down here. When I heard dynamite go off, and shots, I put in a riot call from the watchman's phone. Come along with us quietly, Malloy, and it'll be better for you."

"No, thanks," grinned Clary. "I'm not going to any jail. It was waterfront luck that I got mixed in with this mob." He spoke in brief sentences and stood back, watching understanding dawn on the detective's face. "I can show you my second mate's papers, if you like, and plenty of other identification. I happen to have been fired out of a job by my last skipper, MacClintock, but that was no real fault of mine."

"Out of a job, are you?" Captain Edwards, released from his bonds in the cabin by the raiding officers, had been listening to Clary's recital. "I'll say you're not! Every master of a ship around here knows what a fool MacClintock can be when he feels like it. You're First Mate Clary of the *Campion,* you are, from now on. My first is sick on me and can't sail. We clear day after tomorrow for the Central American ports. I'm not so ungrateful." A twinkle showed in his wrinkled eyes. "Anyhow, not when you've saved me $15,000. You've met my niece, Mary, have you? Well, I'm pretty proud of her."

Detective Stevens shoved a cigar into his mouth and herded the detail of police with their prisoners off the deck and down to the wharf. The automobile rolled away with its cargo of gangsters, who would not be seen again along New York's waterfront. The deck of the *Campion* was deserted except for Captain Edwards, Clary and the girl.

"I want my dinner," announced Captain Edwards in no uncertain tones. "What I've been through would make any man hungry. And you'll eat with us, First Mate Clary. You'll find Mary is one of the best cooks there is."

He stumped vigorously away towards his cabin, shaking his iron-gray head. Clary turned to the girl whose eyes were shining softly.

"Mary," he grinned. "Something tells me that you'll be cooking dinner for me for the rest of your life."

Her laughter rang, clear and alluring, along the silent deck of the *Campion.* "It tells me, too," she said.

COMING SOON COMING SOON COMING SOON COMING

"Hands Up!"

a great western story

by

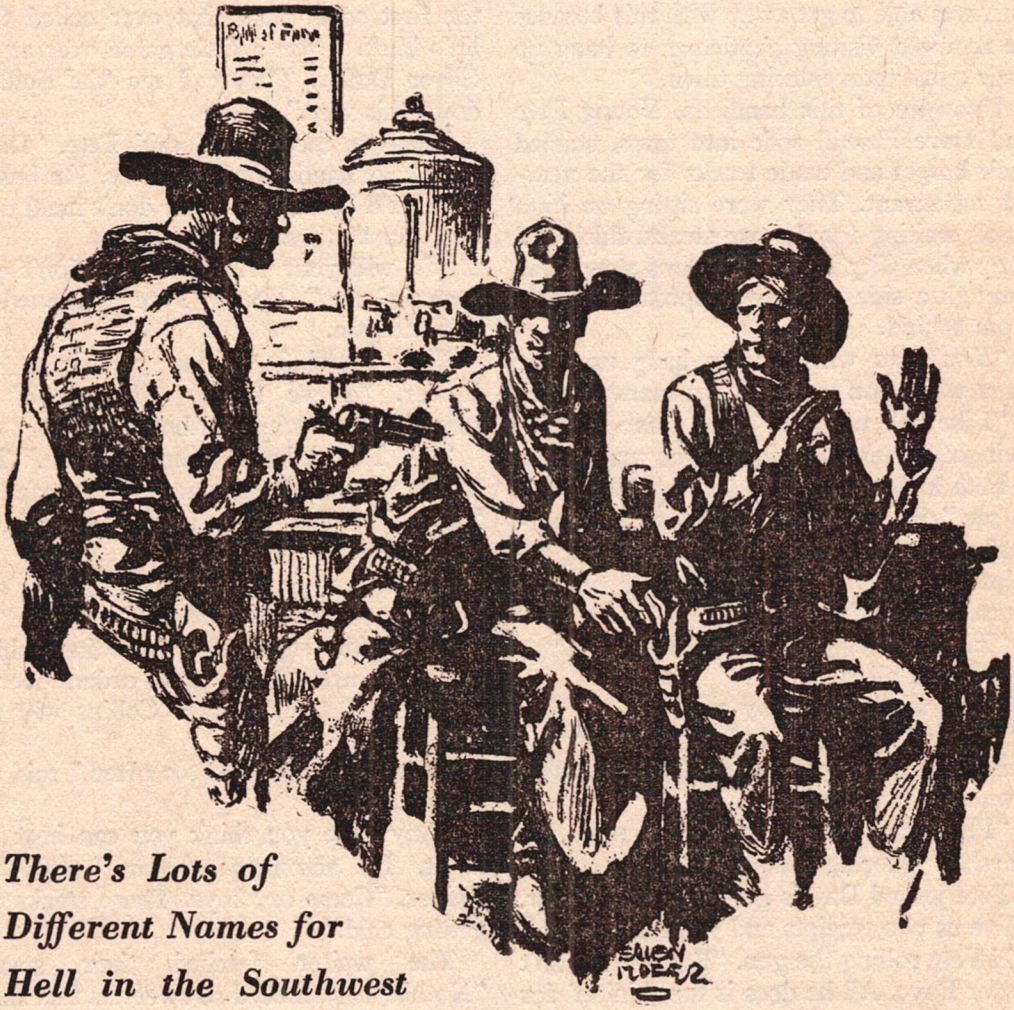
BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

COMING SOON COMING SOON COMING SOON COMING

FIVE MILES TO PERDITION

A "Young Pete" Story

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS



There's Lots of Different Names for Hell in the Southwest

THE tired horses drank at a waterhole rimmed with dusty scum. Young Pete gazed at the weathered signboard. "Five Miles to Perdition," he said. The sign pointed toward a group of cottonwoods far down the desert. "Means hell, or somethin' like that," Pete added.

"There's a place called Purgatory, out near the White Sinks," said Dave Hamill. "Funny how many different names there are for hell."

"There's a lot of different kinds of hell," declared Pete.

They rode on.

"I like mine thick and rare," said Young Pete presently. "And plenty hot bread and coffee."

"Same here—if you mean steak."

"I wasn't talkin' about wimmen," said Pete.

PERDITION admired to call itself a tough town. The mines back in the hills had closed down, but petty graft and the cowboys from Luna and Magdalena kept the hurdy-gurdy honking and the ball spinning in the wheel. Earnest but indis-

creet visitors were received with open arms, wrung dry and tossed out unto the city dump. Awakening next morning sore and sober they were haled before the justice of the peace and fined for disorderly conduct. Perdition's city marshal, Mr. Collins, was able to get away with this because he required visiting gentlemen to hang up their guns upon entering town.

Unaware of this handicap, Young Pete and Dave Hamill rode into town, stabled their horses and made tracks for the nearest restaurant. They were sitting on high stools waiting for the two steaks, thick and rare, when City Marshal Collins stepped in through a side door and approached them from behind.

"You boys will have to hang up your guns while you're here," the marshal said.

"Like hell we will!" said Dave Hamill, swinging round and facing the marshal.

Pete kicked Dave on the leg. "Leave it to me," he whispered. Then to the marshal: "Here's my gun. But I want a receipt for her. I'm leavin' town in the mornin' early."

"That's all right," said Collins.

"What's all right?"

"You won't need any receipt."

Young Pete's grin faded. "You got my gun. All I got is your word I'll get it back. I want it in writin'."

"I'll take your gun, too," said the marshal, ignoring Young Pete.

Pete jerked Dave's gun from its holster. "Give us two receipts and you can have it," said Pete rolling the gun. "But you needn't pester Dave. All he does is the thinkin' for this outfit. I do the shootin'."

"You're a tough kid, ain't you?"

Young Pete grinned into the muzzle of the gun the marshal had just taken away from him. "Just bite me and see! But don't count on that gun. She's empty. That's why I give her to you."

A dark wizened little man at a table across the room laid down his fork and laughed. The waiter, coming suddenly from the kitchen glided behind the big coffee urn.

City Marshal Collins stared at Young Pete's lean, dark face. "Hand over that gun!"

"Can't," said Pete. "Don't belong to me. What you pesterin' me for? You got my gun. And Dave, here, ain't got no gun. It ain't awful hard to figure."

The man who had laid down his fork rose and walked over to Pete. "I'd like to shake hands with you," he said. "You're the first sober man that ever called Collin's bluff. I run a little game over at the Silver Dollar. They call me 'the Spider', down this way."

"Glad to meet you," said Pete. "Dave, you shake hands for both of us. I'm busy."

"You'll be busier if you don't hand over that gun!" threatened Collins.

"So will your friends if you don't quit pesterin' me." Young Pete continued to roll the gun.

City Marshal Collins glared at the Spider. "These friends of yours?" he rasped. "That why you horned in?"

"No. I don't know either of them." The Spider turned his back on the city marshal. "Any time you want a job," he said to Pete, "just let me know."

"Thanks. Any time you want a new city marshal, just say the word."

The Spider signaled to the waiter behind the coffee urn. "Fetch those orders over to my table. I think Mister Collins will excuse us."

"You'll horn in once too often," said the marshal.

"Any time you think you can beat me to it, I'll accommodate you," said the Spider, "Come on, boys. Those steaks are getting cold."

The waiter fetched their steaks. "Nothin' has smelled so sweet as that marshal since Pansy died," said Pete. "Pansy," he explained, "was a mule. She fell into a well. Pass the ketchup, Dave."

"But the marshal's name is Collins," said the Spider.

"He's the homeliest damn catamount I ever seen!" said Dave.

Pete's eyebrows twisted in a puzzled frown. "Homely? Mebby that was it. I thought he was makin' faces at me."

THE SPIDER ate little but drank much coffee. Dave and Young Pete kept busy until their checks came. Then they took time to stare at each other. "What's yours?" asked Pete.

"Two dollars and four bits. I'm goin' to need crutches to get out of here."

"Table service costs a dollar more than counter service, here," said the Spider. "I invited you boys to eat with me. I'll take care of the checks."

"We ain't exactly broke," declared Dave.

"Better keep your change," said the Spider. "If Collins takes a notion to run you in and you haven't any cash, he'll hold you for vagrancy and levy on your outfit."

"He took me for a kid. I don't aim to let no cheap city marshal get ahead of me."

The Spider gathered up the checks. When they were out in the street he gestured toward the saloon across the way. "You'll find me there, most of the time. About Collins—let him get as far ahead of you as he likes. But don't let him get behind you." And the Spider crossed the street and entered the Silver Dollar.

"Sounds kind of like advice, at that," said Pete.

"Looks like that there Perdition sign was a warnin'," said Dave as they walked down the street. With the same thought in mind they headed for the livery barn. "There ain't no reward out for me," said Dave as they came opposite the building. "Suppose you wait and I'll get our horses."

Pete stepped back into the shadow of a doorway. In a few minutes Dave returned. "We're sure afoot," he complained. "The city marshal has left orders to hold our horses till you hand over your gun."

"Did you offer to pay the feed bill?"

"I sure did!"

They turned and walked back up the street. Across the street a short, thick man in a big Stetson was keeping abreast of them.

"He was in the livery office," whispered Dave.

"Mebby a deputy, set to watch that we don't make our getaway," Pete ventured. "Let's step in here and see if he follows us."

ENTERING the Silver Dollar they sauntered to the bar. Dave bought a drink. Young Pete, who never drank, bought a handful of nickels and moved over to the nickel-in-the-slot machine. He pushed in a nickel and pulled the lever down. The cards revolved. Pete gazed into the strip of mirror at the top of the machine. The short man in the big hat had entered the saloon and was sitting at a wall table talking with a companion. The revolving cards flickered and stopped, one card short of a straight.

"You can't beat them things," said Dave as he came up.

"But I can watch 'em go round." Pete peered into the mirror as he again played the machine. The man in the big hat and his companion had their heads together. The whirring cards stopped—three aces and a pair of fours. "You win!" said Dave Hamill as several nickles rattled down into the receiver. Pete scooped up the nickels. The man in the big hat had gestured with his thumb toward the ceiling.



A roustabout removed the dustclothes from the card tables. Pete saw the Spider seated near the faro layout, reading a newspaper. Pete thrust another nickel into the machine.

A brisk, sallow faced man entered. "Card-man," reflected Pete. The sallow faced man nodded to the two at the side table as he passed. Again the man in the big hat gestured toward the ceiling with his thumb.

The sallow faced man, known as "Slicker," put on a green eye-shade, hung up his coat and took his place at the head of the faro table.

Three cowpunchers sauntered up to the bar and called for drinks. The faro dealer spoke to the Spider, who nodded without looking up. Two more cowboys drifted in and joined the group at the bar. Dave Hamill played three or four nickels in the machine and lost.

Pete wondered why the two men across the room had pointed toward the ceiling. Could the gesture have anything to do

with the skylight directly above the faro table?

"Keep rollin' 'em," he said to Dave. "Me, I'm goin' to take a look around this joint."

Curling a smoke, Pete sauntered from table to table, pausing to watch the play, then moving on. He came to the end of the room, opened a door. The room contained a bed, a washstand, some clothing, a table and chair and a small safe. "The Spider's office," said Pete to himself as he backed out.

The adjoining door led, eventually, to an alley back of the building. Pete stepped out into the darkness. A pinch of light coming from a shaded window at the back of the dance hall next door caught his eye. The dance hall piano was going. Pete sauntered down the alley. The sound of piano playing stopped. He was almost under the window from which the pinch of light came.

"Playin' the nickel-in-the-slot machine," said someone in the room. "Him and his pardner."

"Which might be me, they're talkin' about," reflected Pete. He moved up near the window.

"We're lucky if we get away with it. The Spider. . . ."

Pete recognized the voice of City Marshal Collins.

"Easy," said the first speaker. "Bill is on the roof with a rope. A couple of minutes to twelve, Soapy 'ull start an argument with the Kid. Slicker 'ull switch off the lights. Just as he switches 'em off he'll drop the Spider. I'll raid the Spider's safe an' put the stuff in a pair of saddle bags. Bill will let down the rope through the skylight while the light is off. Up goes the cash. When the lights come on again, the Spider'll be dead, an' the dough and the Kid and his pardner 'ull be gone."

"That sounds all right, Pelcher," came the voice of City Marshal Collins, "but suppose Slicker don't get the Spider the first shot?"

"You gettin' cold feet? Listen: Somebody starts an argument at the faro table. Slicker's got that ribbed up. Slicker throws down his eye-shade and steps over to ask the Spider to settle the argument. The Spider always is settin' in his big chair near the electric switch. When Slicker gets close enough to the Spider to make a sure thing of it, he lets him have it."

There was a pause and the sound of someone striking a match. Then the city marshal's voice. "Don't you be too sure the Kid and his partner will run when the shootin' starts. Calls hisself just 'the Kid' here, but he's better known as 'the Arizona Kid' elsewhere. An' he's got a record over in Arizona. He's poison with a gun. He's been in two gunfights since he hit New Mexico. He's wanted in Vegas right now."

"The Arizona Kid! Why, he ain't much more'n a boy!" Again came a silence. Then: "I'll fix that. Just before Slicker gets busy I'll tell the Kid I'm night man over to the livery barn, and that it's all right with me if he wants to pull his freight. By the way his pardner talked to the boss when I was in the livery office, those two boys'll jump at the chance to make their getaway."

Young Pete heard City Marshal Collins make some remark, just as the piano started up again. Then he hastened back to the Spider's place.

THE long, wide room had begun to fill up. A poker game was going. Several more cowpunchers had come in. Pete got another handful of nickels and began to play the slot machine. He told Dave Hamill to mill around and find out, without asking, if the man dealing faro was called "Slicker".

Pete played the slot machine again. Dave came from the bar. "It's the faro dealer, all right," he said. "How's your game goin'?"

"Watch close," said Pete pulling the lever down. The cards whirred. "They framed it to rob the Spider's safe," said Pete. "The city marshal is in it, and that short fella with the big hat. The marshal figures to let us make a break and getaway. We're strangers in town. He'll say we shot the Spider and got away with the cash. But the cash really stays right in town. What you bitin' your lip about?"

"You asked me to find out who that Slicker fella was so you could give him a tip?"

"Not any. He's got the job of bumpin' off the Spider."

"Him. Why, they're pardners! The bartender told me."

"Pardners in business, mebby. But you can't tell how they stack up, private."

"Where did you get wise?"

"Out in the alley. Quit talkin'. Watch me win." Young Pete nodded toward the flickering cards. "Three aces—deuce—five spot. Tell me when you see the Spider come in."

"You can't beat that thing. Say, Pete, how about stickin' up the livery stable and leavin' town right now? I don't like this here frame-up."

"But I kind of like the Spider's style." Pete played another nickel. "And that city marshal is goin' to stick his foot in a gopher hole and break his neck, if he don't watch out."

"He's playin' safe."

"Nobody's playin' safe that tangles with the Spider."

"I thought you was strong for leavin' town, a while ago," said Dave.

"I was. If our horses was fresh I don't know but what I'd be willin' to take a chance. But I don't aim to let a posse shoot me up for stealin' somethin' I didn't steal. And mebby you recollect the Spider offered me a job, when he was in the restaurant? Well, he didn't mean washin' dishes."

"Think he knows you're the Arizona Kid?"

"I dunno. I saw him in El Paso once. I was with Tonto Charley. But that don't make no difference. The idea is, Dave, when you're a stranger in a town like this you got to side with one bunch or the other, or sure as hell somebody'll get you."

"Oh, I ain't so sick I can't stick around and watch you lose all our nickels," said Dave.

"All right. You stand up near the front of the bar, and when the Spider comes in, tell him quiet-like I wanter see him. If there's too many folks around, just haze him over to me. Tell him I broke my arm tryin' to pull a winnin' hand out of this here machine."

"It's gettin' close to twelve," said Dave.

"Yes," Pete nodded. "And I notice likewise, that the fella in the big hat is back. He's edgin' over this way. That'll be Pelcher. That greasy lookin' sport in the blue suit must be the one they call 'Soapy'. Here they come. You start an argument with me about my havin' your gun. Make out you're sore. When I give you your gun, you drift up to the front of the bar like I said."

THE stocky man in the big hat, and Soapy, a tinhorn gambler with a hard reputation, shoved up to the bar and called for a drink.

"I reckon I'll drift," said Dave, loudly to Pete. "I'll take my gun, if it's all the same to you."

"Like hell you will!" laughed Pete.

"You ain't takin' me serious."

Pete's smile vanished. "You sore?"

"I sure am!"

Pete handed the gun to Dave. "All right. Go and fall down and shoot yourself. I reckon this is where we split."

"Suits me," said Dave, holstering the gun and moving toward the front of the room.



Glass in hand the tinhorn, Soapy, turned to Young Pete. "How they rollin', sport?"

"Backwards. This here machine is a liar."

"Have a drink?"

"Nope. I never drink when I'm gamblin'. Might get reckless."

"You're a tough kid, ain't you?"

"The Kid is all right," said the stocky man in the big hat. He stepped round Soapy and leaned confidentially toward Pete. "Listen, Kid. I'm night man over to the barn. I heard the city marshal tell the boss to hold your horses. Seems Collins has got somethin' on you boys. It's nothin' to me. I been there myself. All I got to say is, the boss is asleep. There's nobody at the barn right now."

"I'm right obliged to you." Pete thrust another nickel into the slot machine. He

counted the nickels in his hand. "I'll shoot these, then I'm done."

The smoke swirled near the doorway. The Spider came in. "Lost your pardner?" he said as Dave came up alone.

"No. He's playin' the nickel machine. He says the machine is crooked and he'd like the pleasure of tellin' you so."

The group at the end of the bar laughed. The Spider's beady black eyes swept the room.

"Guess I'll be driftin'," said Dave stepping in front of the Spider. He leaned nearer, whispered tensely, "See him *quick,* Spider!" And Dave moved on.

The Spider made his way to where Young Pete stood playing the nickel machine. Pete looked disgusted.

"Say, Spider, I been feedin' this thing for two hours and I only won twice. It needs fixin'."

Soapy and the stocky man were so near that Pete dared not risk more than a hint. His chance came when the Spider took a nickel and played the machine. Pete leaned forward as the cards settled down.

"The machine is all right," said the Spider.

"That's right!" Pete counted the hand. "King, queen—watch Slicker an' the skylight; they're gonter rob your safe at twelve—jack, ten, nine! Well, what do you think of that!"

"I can handle it," laughed the Spider. He laid a handful of nickels on the bar and invited Soapy, the man in the big hat, and Pete to have a drink. It was nine minutes of twelve.

Young Pete took a cigar and asked the Spider for a match. "I'll take that job you offered me, now," said Pete in a low tone. "But I ain't heeled."

A couple of cowboys crowded up and shook hands with the Spider. They turned to the bar. The Spider swiftly unbuttoned his frock coat and reached for his pocketbook. Pete saw the ivory handle of a six-shooter. The Spider opened the pocketbook. Pete swept the six-shooter into his own holster unobserved. The Spider gave Pete a ten-dollar bill.

"Will that hold you?"

"Thanks," said Pete. He invited Soapy and the stocky man to drink with them. The Spider declined. "Meet Soapy—and this is his friend, Pelcher." The Spider gestured. "This is the Arizona Kid. He wants you boys to drink with him."

The Arizona Kid! Soapy was too startled to offer to shake hands. The city marshal had told Pelcher that the Kid was a bad one to tangle with, but Soapy had no idea that the slim, dark Young Pete was the notorious Arizona outlaw. Pete was surprised that the Spider knew him, but he covered his surprise with a grin. His real name didn't seem to set very well with the tinhorn, Soapy.

Dave Hamill sauntered up and nodded. "Hello Dave!" said Pete. "I thought you had drifted?"

"Changed my mind."

"Well, it needed changin'. The Spider was just askin' me to entertain Mister Soapy, here, and his friend Mister Pelcher. Mebby you can help."

"I can't sing. But I can dance to beat hell."

Pelcher saw that Soapy's nerve was going back on him. It was five minutes of twelve. "If you boys are wise," said Pelcher confidentially to Young Pete and Dave, "you'll fade while you got the chance."

"Thanks," said Pete. "Me, I'm plumb foolish."

"And I'm just as happy if I had sense," declared Dave. "You buyin', Pete?"

The bartender shoved glass and bottle toward Dave Hamill. Pete turned and surveyed the room. Beyond the faro table, in his big armchair against the wall sat the Spider, reading a newspaper. Pete surmised that the Spider was deliberately playing into the hands of the gang and would continue to do so up to the last minute. The Spider knew what he was doing. Pete was certain of that.

SOMEBODY at the faro table began an argument with the dealer, Slicker. Slicker pushed up his eye-shade. The clock above the bar mirror showed two minutes of twelve.

Handing his newspaper to the man seated next to him, and calling his attention to an article about a gold strike, the Spider got up and walked toward the back

of the room. The argument at the faro table continued. Slicker threw his eyeshade on the table and walked over toward the man reading the newspaper. In a flash Pete saw how the Slicker had planned to kill the Spider—reach up to switch off the lights and shoot him as the Spider looked up. Just then the newspaper moved. A derringer flashed in Slicker's hand. Just as he fired he saw that the man behind the newspaper was not the Spider. Another shot boomed as Slicker threw up the switch handle. Slicker let go of the switch and sank to the floor.

As Slicker shot down the man in the chair, the tinhorn, Soapy, went for his gun. Pete, watching him, thrust Dave to one side and let Soapy have it. With the crash the room went dark.

The crowd, surging toward the front door, cursed and shouted. Someone had locked the outside front doors. The crowd crashed through and into the street.

In the darkness someone groaned, Someone was dragging something across the floor. Then a voice said, "Haul away, up there!"

"They got the dough, anyway," whispered Dave Hamill.

The lights flashed on.

"My God, look!" cried Dave.

Halfway between the top of the faro table and the skylight dangled the body of a man, a rope round his neck. The body turned slowly.

"Pelcher," murmured Young Pete.

On the table lay a pair of saddle bags.

"He don't struggle any," whispered Dave. "He must have been dead before his neck went into that noose."

"It was the Spider that told the fella on the roof to haul away," Young Pete observed. "The rope must have jammed. Anyhow, the skylight was open. Now it's down."

Across the room, in front of the chair where he had been reading the newspaper, lay the body of the man the Slicker had killed. A few feet beyond, Slicker lay doubled up against the wall.

Still, statue-like at the head of the faro table, sat the Spider, a pack of cards in his hands. He was smoking a cigar. He shuffled the cards slowly.

Pete bent over Soapy. "He's done," said Pete as Dave bent down to look.

"I didn't know you was heeled," said Dave.

"Neither did he," said Pete.

The bartender's head appeared, then his shoulders. He held a cocked gun.

"Drop it!" called Pete. The bartender put up his hands.

"He's all right," called the Spider from the faro table.

The bartender came round the end of the bar and walked out into the room.

CITY MARSHAL COLLINS and two deputies, heavily armed, pushed into the saloon.

"Steady!" said Pete, as Dave made a move to pull his gun. "Let them start it."

"There they are!" cried the marshal. "Cover 'em while I investigate." He saw the swinging body above the faro table. He stopped, stared at it, at the Spider beyond.



"How does he look to you now?" said the Spider.

"What—how did *that* happen?"

"You might ask him."

City Marshal Collins walked over toward the body of Slicker, saw a man on the floor covered partially by a newspaper. He jerked the paper back. "It's Sweeney!" he said.

"Yes, it's Sweeney, another of your rotten gang." The Spider's voice was low. "And it was your friend Slicker that killed him. Slicker got Sweeney—by mistake. His mistake, not mine."

"My God, Spider!" The marshal stooped and turned Slicker over. "Who shot Slicker here?"

"Hard to tell. The room was dark."

Tired of keeping his hands up, Young Pete asked City Marshal Collins why he was under arrest.

"For robbery and murder," replied Collins.

The Spider laid down his deck of cards.

"Who was robbed, Collins?" he asked the city marshal.

"Those saddle bags," Collins pointed to the faro table, "belong to one of these two boys here—I seen 'em when they rode into down."

"That's right," said Young Pete. "But the liveryman had our saddles and outfit locked up in his office ever since we lit in town. He said it was by order of the city marshal."

"This," said Collins pointing toward Pete, "is the Arizona Kid. He's wanted for robbery and murder."

"Just a minute," said the Spider; he rose and came around the end of the table.

Young Pete's lips barely moved as he told Dave to drop to the floor in case the Spider went for his gun. "Those deputies are gettin' nervous," said Pete. "So is Collins. He don't like the Spider's talk."

"For robbery and murder?" The Spider's beady, black eyes were fixed on the marshal's gun hand, not on his face.

"You mean these boys here planted someone on the roof to haul up those saddle bags after Pelcher had cleaned out my safe? Did they talk Slicker into shooting me down while I sat reading my paper? An' those saddle bags were under lock and key in the livery offices, along with their saddles and rig—I suppose the Kid stole 'em out of the office, huh? Well there were four men in the livery office at half-past eleven an' two of 'em were your deputies!"

The Spider took a cigar from his vest. "About the murder end of it. After the safe's robbed an' everything, the Kid stops and shoots his pals Sweeney an' Slicker an' Pelcher here, when any orn'nary sensible man would 'a' been makin' his getaway, huh? An' yes, I almost forgot Soapy, there. I suppose the Kid killed him, too? Next thing you'll be saying he murdered me."

"This isn't any time to get funny, Spider."

"Then don't, Collins." The Spider bit the end off his cigar and struck a match. The cigar in one hand, the match in the other, he stood as though waiting for Collins to speak. For two or three seconds they eyed each other. The match flared up.

"Tell your men to let those boys go," said the Spider.

"Damned if I do!" The city marshal's gun flashed up from the holster. The cigar and the match dropped from the Spider's fingers. His lean hands flickered downward like the stroke of a cat's paw; reappeared with a flashing gun. His first shot took the city marshal between the eyes. Collins' arm jerked up, dropping the gun he had just drawn. The Spider fired again. Collins pitched forward, struck the corner of the table and rolled over.

AT THE Spider's first shot both Young Pete and Dave Hamill dropped to the floor. Two slugs tore through the face of the bar above them. Enraged that the deputies had fired on them when they had their hands up, Young Pete had pulled his gun as he fell. He fired from the floor. One of the deputies turned and ran. The other, shot through the shoulder, dropped his gun and thrust his hands up. The fleeing deputy had just reached the door when the Spider dropped him with a shot between the shoulders. "You can go, Smith," he said to the other deputy.

Dave Hamill lay where he had fallen. Pete rose, stooped and lifted him in his arms. Dave's face was streaked with blood.

"What the hell?" mumbled Dave as Young Pete shook him.

"You're all right," said Pete. "Just peeled yourself on the foot rail."

Dave leaned against the bar and slowly reached for a bottle. The Spider stood by the faro table reloading his six-shooter. The bartender had vanished.

"I reckon we better drift," said Dave, pouring whisky on his bandanna and wiping the blood from his face.

The Spider took up the saddle bags from the faro table. "Come on back in the office," he said.

Dumping the contents of the saddle bags onto his bed he handed the bags to Young Pete. "Don't ride any farther west than the waterhole," said the Spider. "Then turn south and head for the Pinnacles. Tell Old Man Enright at the Pinnacles that I sent you. He'll let you take fresh horses, if you need 'em."

"Thanks. How about this gun?" Pete drew the ivory-handled six-shooter the Spider had loaned him.

"Keep it," said the Spider. "Call it a day's wages."

"I'll stick—if you say the word, Spider."

The Spider shook his head. "No. I'm through, here. I figured to close up the first of the month. Slicker was the only one who knew it. I saw he was getting pretty thick with Collins, but I didn't think he had the nerve to try it on like he did."

A crowd had gathered across the street opposite the front of the Silver Dollar. As Young Pete and Dave Hamill stepped out into the alley a tall, flannel-shirted man in high laced boots and a flat-brimmed Stetson strode in through the front entrance and marched back to the Spider's office.

"Then the gang didn't get you?" the tall man said, watching the Spider stack his money and put it in the safe.

"Not yet."

The superintendent of the Bluestone mines thrust out his hand. "Awful mess—but congratulations, Spider. We'll be needing a new city marshal."

"You will," said the Spider.

DAVE HAMILL and Young Pete drew up at the waterhole. Pete reined close to the weathered old signboard, reached up and jerked it loose.

"What's the idea?" said Dave.

"It'll be the first time this sign ever done anybody any good. In a couple of hours I aim to boil some coffee. They ain't no wood in the bad lands where we're headed. That coffee'll carry us from daylight to the Pinnacles."

"The Pinnacles!" said Dave Hamill grimly. He stared through the darkness toward the bad lands south. "Funny, how many different names there are for hell."

Excitement with the French Foreign Legion



next issue

Bob Du Soe's great novelette

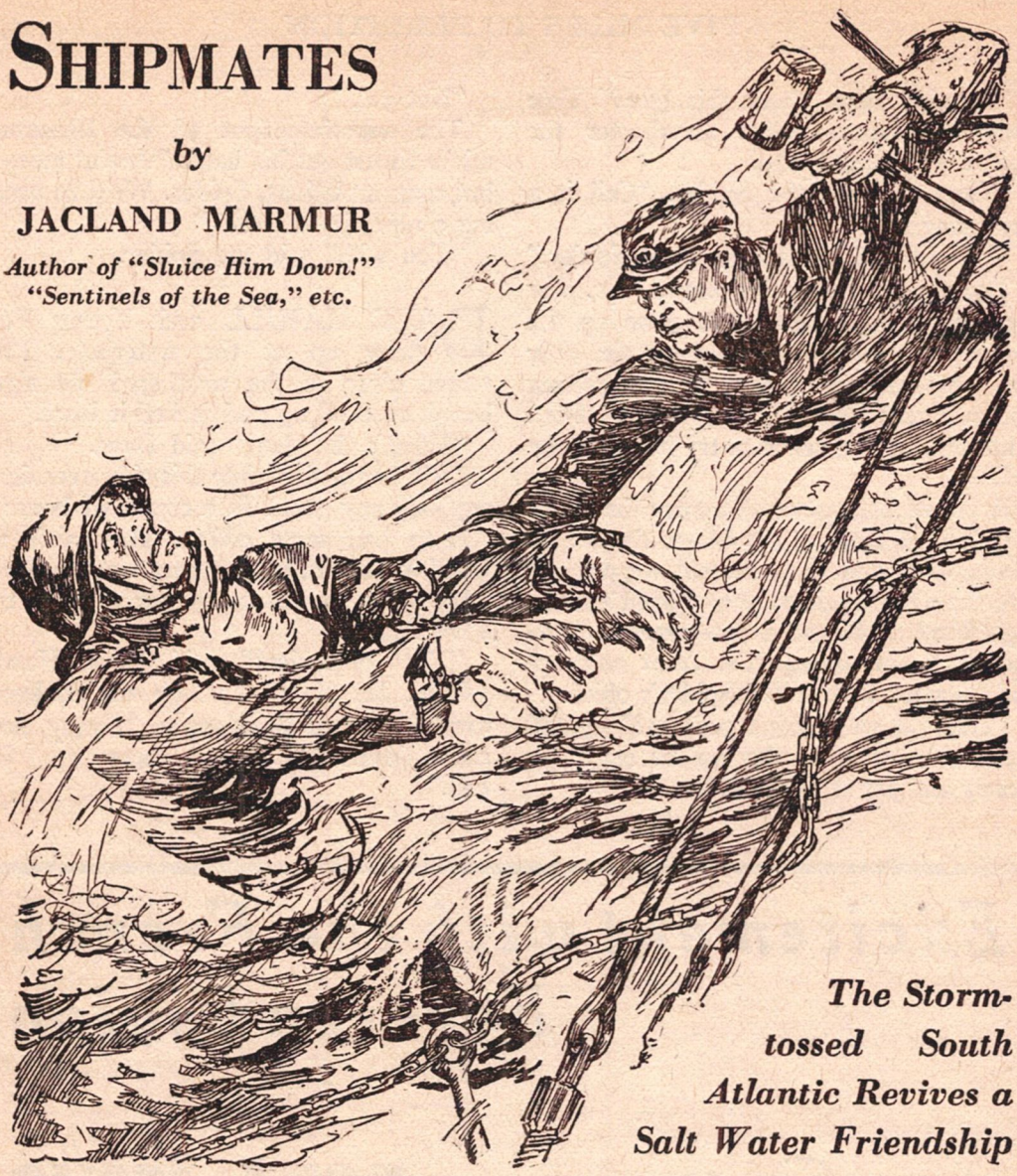
"The Sinful Three"

SHIPMATES

by

JACLAND MARMUR

Author of "Sluice Him Down!" "Sentinels of the Sea," etc.



The Storm-tossed South Atlantic Revives a Salt Water Friendship

AT FOUR in the morning the tramp steamer *Carlton* stirred uneasily at her berth in the lower basin of the port of Montevideo. Her spring lines, straining taut and groaning aloud their complaint, warped her with a low grinding sound back against the stringers of the jetty, and her narrow gangplank bumped over the freight tracks and was still. Her holds were empty and her deep-bellied, red and black hull rose high out of the water as she waited her pilot and the morning tide before steaming north to Rio for a homeward bound cargo of manganese ore. High above her bridge housing a thin wisp of steam, escaping out of her stack from her condensers, showed like a drifting white cloud against the blackness.

Off in the distance the loud *clat, clat!* of a horse's hoofs and the clutter of wheels over cobblestones betrayed in the still clarity of night the belated approach of a victoria "taxi." At the foot of the *Carlton's* shore ladder, as the vehicle clattered through the arch of the dock gates and made for the end of the quay, the shadow thrown by the short stocky figure of "Scotty" Macrae, first assistant engineer, stirred quickly out of sight, coat thrown carelessly over his left shoulder.

Jimmy Boyle, first mate of the *Carlton,*

a big blond giant of a man with twinkling blue eyes wide-set in a smooth shaven face, paid off his driver. The sleepy driver whipped his tired beast into a gallop instantly, and long before the rattle of wheels faded into silence, Jimmy turned toward the gangplank of his ship, chuckling softly to himself.

Dense shadows weighed upon the dock sheds in that early hour before dawn, and, deeply engrossed as he still was in a lingering vision of pretty Carlita, the dancer of the Pavilion Bleu uptown, Boyle was quite unaware of the waiting engineer. In fact, it is likely he might have marched up the gangway and into the messroom for a final cup of coffee without ever having known that Engineer Macrae had been waiting for him for a full hour. But the Scot was angry, and an angry Scotch engineer, after waiting an hour for the subject of his wrath, is not likely to keep silence long.

"Hallo there, Mister Longlegs!" Macrae growled, and stepped into the full light of the yellow gangway lamp.

With one foot already on the plank, Jimmy Boyle stopped, turned about, and then recognizing his engineer friend, the silent chuckle grew to a low deep laugh.

"Well, if it ain't Scotty Macrae! Where the devil did you disappear——"

"Ha' doon wi' the innocent babe stoof, Mister Boss Deckswab!" the irate engineer interrupted in anger, "an' be steppin' on to the dock!"

Boyle leaned carelessly on the handrail. Macrae dropped his coat to the dock. It was an ominous gesture.

"Why, Mac, you ain't sore, are——"

"Naw," the Scot drawled dryly. "I ain't sōre. Nothin' like that!" Then he went on to voice his complaint bitterly. "Out o' every voyage o' four months, we gets two nights ashore here in Monty. One o' them I spends aboard rollin' in grease down below while you gentlemen officers is tellin' a lousy bunch o' stevedores how to discharge a cargo o' fence wire an' ladies' shoes. Then the one night I does get ashore to see my girrl in the café, I has the fool idea to show 'er off to my friend the mate. An' the next thing I knows I'm standin' here lookin' at the stars while Mister Mate's drivin' my gurrl all over the Malécon in a damned victoria an' tellin' her what loovely eyes she has got. Naw, I ain't sore!" he ended caustically. "You maught expect as much o' a deck off'cer what——"

"But, Scotty—" Boyle was grinning broadly—"you were called away by the chief, weren't you? Now, you wouldn't be wanting me to disappoint the girl and her all primed for a good time? I was doing you a favor, man——"

"Called by the chief!" Scotty burst out in a real rage now. "Boyle, I never expected a trick like that from——"

"Aw, cut it, Scotty! Arguing here over a fool woman! She don't mean no more to you than to me. C'mon in an' have a cup of java before we shove off for——"

"Ha' done wi' the talk, Mister Mate. We be sailin' in a hour or two for Rio an' I ha' no got much time to be wastin'. Step down to the dock!"

Boyle looked in silence at his irate friend. Then, still with that broad grin of good nature on his face, he descended two steps to the dock. Scotty wasted no further time in talk. His two clenched fists came up and he led with a right. Lithely the mate of the *Carlton* sidestepped. The next instant the fight between the two old friends and shipmates was on in dead earnest.

FOR a time they fought in silence, that slow smile of good humor fading gradually from the mate's face as each impact his body took from the malletlike fists of the engineer told him that the Scot was in no playful mood. Close in they fought, and in the poor light there was little opportunity for science. It was slug for slug, a stinging rain of blows aimed at each other in the darkness of a South American dock for the charms of a girl of whom each man wanted at best only a few short hours of companionship. In a clinch Jimmy Boyle, more clear headed than the other, snapped in the Scot's ear.

"Have done, you fool! Fightin' your best friend. There's a couple o' hundred just like her in Rio!"

For answer Macrae sent a crushing left jab at the mate's body. It landed just above the heart. Boyle grunted and his knees felt suddenly weak. With effort he recovered

his balance and drove in a short perky hook to the body. The Scot stumbled with the impact and fell, crashing against an empty crate and sprawling full length on the dock. Boyle danced warily about him, waiting for his opponent to rise. The Scot came to one knee, shook his shaggy head like a terrier and prepared to rise.

It was at that moment that a figure high above the dock appeared on the bridge deck of the *Carlton,* and the captain's voice came plaintively down to them: "What's all the row down there?"

Boyle's hands dropped instantly to his sides. "Let up, Mac!" he breathed tensely. "It's the Old Man." Then he turned and lifted his head to the deck. "It's me, sir!" he called aloud in a businesslike tone of voice. "The first and I are getting a fresh water hose hooked up before——"

"Well," the pajama clad ghost on the deck complained, "it's a pity you couldn't go about it a little more quietly. Sounded like a damned row. I won't have any fighting! Interrupting my sleep. Precious little I'll get now! Pilot aboard any minute. Come up when you're through, Mister Boyle."

"Yes sir," the big first mate replied.

The figure of the skipper disappeared from the deck. Boyle chuckled softly to himself and helped his friend to his feet.

"Close call that, Mac," he grinned. "Old Man's death on a fight. No shuteye for us now, you greaseball. Get up! We sail in an hour."

A pale thread of light glowed in the eastern heavens. Slowly the grim shadows of the night gave way before the weird light of early dawn and the low sheds and the shipping in the harbor took on strange and unreal shapes.

"We finish this in Rio!" the enraged engineer growled at Boyle. Then he picked up his coat, glowered at the tall mate from under his overhanging brows, and followed him up the gangway to the deck where the sailor on watch stood doing his best to conceal his unholy mirth. . . .

WHEN six bells struck in the wheelhouse of the *Carlton,* she had dropped her pilot and, nosing her way carefully through the narrow harbor entrance between the breakwater lights, she left behind her the channel spars and the leaning fishing sloops. High out of the water she rose, gray and dirty in the early light of morning, soiling the hazy blue horizon with the jet-black coal smoke pouring from her stack.

The tramp cleared the land slowly, and empty as she was, with nothing but water ballast in her double bottoms, a vicious swell came at her from the low lying land and set her rolling instantly in long, desperate sweeps from side to side. Captain Percival, a short, heavy-set man with an eternal pucker of worry between his nervous eyes, clung to the bridge rail at the mate's side to steady himself against the heavy lurching of his empty ship.



"I don't see why," the skipper moaned in Boyle's ear, "I don't see why you and that first assistant couldn't have been quieter about your work this morning." Captain Percival found it hard to forgive the interruption of his masterly slumbers, and he went on in that plaintive, hurt tone he used always in addressing his chief officer.

Boyle, jammed securely in a corner of the bridge, listened soberly and tried hard not to smile.

"It seems to me you made an unholy racket about that water hose," the captain went on. " 'Pon my word! If I didn't know you two to be as thick as bees, I'd have sworn you were in a fist fight over some painted café girl. You take my advice, Mister Boyle! If you want to get on in this business of steam you leave the women——"

"Yes, sir," Jimmy Boyle interrupted softly, and unable to contain himself longer, he veered the conversation to professional matters. "Glass falling steadily, sir," he muttered against the wind's weight. "Don't like the looks of that windward sky."

Captain Percival frowned and stared

into the teeth of the freshening southwester. Then he grunted, a nervous enigmatic grunt that ended in a forlorn sigh.

"That's the luck for you, Mister Boyle. Making a nasty blow, I expect, and we light as a feather and a mile high out of the water. Coal burner, too," the skipper informed his first mate, as though Jimmy Boyle didn't know that. "Low powered." His voice trailed off and was lost in the wind.

Captain Percival turned suddenly and stumped down the ladder to his own deck, leaving the first mate staring after him with a whimsical smile on his wind-tanned face. Boyle lifted his stare to the windward horizon, sobering quickly as he took a turn of the bridge and ended up by staring again at that pale band of dirty yellow cloud that spread just above the land. The wind made steadily, and as the seas rose, the *Carlton* plunged more viciously from side to side, her stumpy masts describing fierce arcs across the sullen heaven.

Jimmy Boyle remembered suddenly, there on the tossing bridge of his ship, the taunting, tantalizing smile of the dancer, Carlita, and again his clear blue eyes took to twinkling amazingly.

"Imagine Scotty getting sore at that!" he grunted to himself, expressing his thought aloud.

On a sudden impulse he went into the wheelhouse and whistled down the engine room speaking tube. An instant later Macrae's booming bass voice came up in a roar of engine room noises.

"Yeah?"

"How you makin' it, Scotty?" Boyle grinned into the tube's mouthpiece. "Sleepy?"

"Go to hell! Are you no' satisfied wi' cheatin' me o' my gurrl without pesterin' me down here wi' a circulator pump ready to fall to pieces an' a pack o' spigs in the fire room that ought to be tendin' sheep instead o' firin' coal o' this hooker! Be damned to you!"

And no more than that could Boyle get out of the irascible Scot. But the mate's face, usually so good humored, twisted in a frown. Scotty wasn't the sort to be complaining without cause. He was not like so many seafarers, cursing always the ship they serve without reason or cause. If Macrae growled about a bad pump—well, then, Scotty had good reason to growl. Of that Boyle felt certain.

He pushed open the wheelhouse door and stepped out into the chill blast of the wind again, staring anxiously ahead into the trackless waste of tumbling green distance. Somewhere ahead there lay Lobos Island, the last speck of green they would see before the rising peak of the Sugar Loaf showed them the way to Rio harbor. Jimmy Boyle frowned again and paced the bridge nervously, impatient for the end of the watch and the invigorating effect of a hot breakfast and steaming coffee. For he, too, had had a sleepless night and the ship's awful rolling was irritating even his calm good nature.

AT BREAKFAST the first assistant engineer sat humped over his plate of bacon and eggs and never once raised his scowling face across the cabin table where the first mate sat next to the skipper, legs braced against the table's legs to meet the vicious plunges of the ship. He got up without a word and stumped from the cabin. Before he disappeared through the door, the chief engineer called after him.

"I'll be down right after breakfast, Mister Macrae, and have a look at it."

The Scot nodded without turning and shuffled down the alleyway toward the engine room door.

The skipper looked up quickly at the gray-haired chief engineer. "Something wrong, Chief?"

"Circulator giving trouble again," the chief engineer answered quietly, tugging at his peaked gray beard. "Between that and that rotten Japanese coal, we've a handful to take care of."

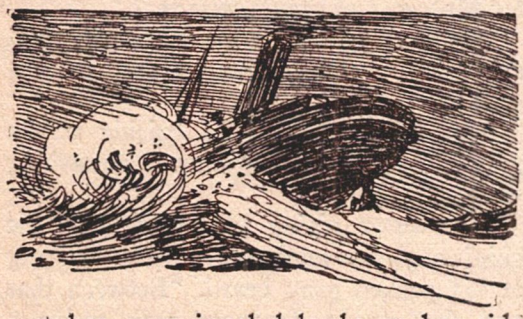
Captain Percival shook his head mournfully and clutched for his plate as it slid halfway across the table with a lunge of the laboring ship.

"Barely making five, Chief," he complained. "I've been master of this ship for ten years. Those are good engines. They're all right—if you give them steam."

He nodded his head wisely. The chief said nothing. Jimmy Boyle lowered his head to hide the smile on his lips. Poor

Percival! A sailing shipmaster, strayed by the inexorable necessity of a mechanical age into the bewildering requirements of steam. It worried him to see nothing on a ship but two bare stumpy masts and a cloud of smoke pouring out of an ugly stack. It wasn't right for a seaman to be forced to depend on a mechanical engine he knew nothing about! No yards, no clean white spread of sail a man knew how to handle in an emergency. And it gave to the simple old shipmaster a worried look and a perplexed expression no one had ever seen in the good days when skill and the plane of bellying canvas alone propelled ships and won ports out of the teeth of great gales. But when a man had a woman at home and four small mouths to feed. . . .

WHEN the first mate took over the watch that afternoon, the wind came zooming out from the land a live whole westerly gale with the strength of a continent's open stretch of prairie in its bitter throat—the angry pampers which blows coldly and furiously across the Amazon plains from the high Andes. During the day the sea had piled up miraculously. Leaden walls streaked with green and plumed with frothy lace raced madly at the rolling ship, caught her under the beam,



sent her careering helplessly on her side and then curled leeward to bare the shattering tops of the combers like the snarling teeth of some animal cheated of its prey.

The storm wrack hung low upon the tormented sea, so low that the tops of the mountainous rollers seemed lost in the low-flying clouds. No horizon was visible; only a narrow circle of lashing, tumbling green-and-gray sea flecked with crazy patterns of dirty lace in the midst of which the ship heeled unsteadily from side to side like a cockleshell. Into that torturous cavern of her existence the angry howl of the pampero shrieked, tearing at the vessel's meager shrouds, whipping the spume in a solid wall before the grim-eyed men on the tossing bridge. Cataracts of water leaped over the ship's forecastle and poured to her foredeck, while through the mist and spray and driven rain the ship's head appeared now and again in leaping fantastic attitudes of great struggle.

Captain Percival hung in the lee wing, one arm hooked about a stanchion as he shouted into the first mate's ear, half his words plucked instantly from his lips by the gale. "All—secure—Mister Boyle?"

The first mate simply nodded his head vigorously while the water dripped steadily from the peak of his sou'wester. No use to waste breath against the gale. Together captain and mate clung there, drenched with the stinging spray and the rain that whipped like hail into their faces.

"Got her—head—up. . . ." The master's voice came to Boyle again in tattered strips. "If—only—had sail!" And he shook his head ruefully.

DURING the whole of that watch the great gale made steadily, while the empty ship rolled in a frenzy of restlessness, tight in the clutch of the elements. Inside the pilot-house the helmsman struggled silently with the wheel, eyes intent on the roving white compass card, his face pale and ghastly in the feebly upthrown light of the binnacle, legs braced wide against the ship's sickening lurches.

The first mate, Jimmy Boyle, stood before the desk, clutching the rough log and jabbing entries at it with the stump of a pencil. Captain Percival stood with his grim face pressed against the streaming window, peering anxiously into a chaos of sheeting rain and flying spindrift. Suddenly the helmsman lifted his head. His face was pale and the thin lips were pressed tightly together.

"She's falling off, sir!" He spoke through gritted teeth and the ominous words came in no more than a whisper. "I can't bring her up!"

The skipper whirled about. Boyle sprang for the opposite side of the binnacle. There they stood, all three men with straining

eyes glued intently on that white circle of compass card, watching it swing slowly—slowly but surely. They stood thus for a full moment, like three men frozen into inaction by the horror they saw written on the white roving card beneath them.

"Hard a-starboard— starboard, man!" the skipper snapped suddenly at the helmsman, and his cold, hard voice after that silence fell like a brittle thing in the stillness of the small pilot-house. Outside, a sharp squall lashed itself against the weather wall and the loud shriek of the wind ended in a high, whining, long-drawn whistle.

"She's hard over now, sir," the man answered softly. "Won't answer. Been sluggish last ten minutes——"

The empty ship lunged down on her starboard beam ends and hung there. The shock threw the helmsman clear of the wheel and sent him careening against the far bulkhead where he fetched up on all fours with a loud thump. The suddenly released wheel took charge and spun dizzily. Boyle leaped for it, caught two spokes with both hands and brought it back. The helmsman picked himself up. Blood spotted his cheek. He paid no heed to it, battling his way up the steep incline of the deck to the wheel-grating again.

"My God!", the helmsman groaned. Then he took the spokes from the first mate's hands into his own. It was his job! The bulkhead clock in the chart room rang out a musical seven bells. The skipper lifted a haggard face to his chief officer.

"Listen, Mister Boyle—the engines! Stopped—no, dead slow! I'd give my eyeteeth for a spread of sail!"

For the fraction of an instant none of the three men in the pilot-house spoke. The silence was deathlike and made more terrible by the loud, insistent howling of the gale outside and the pounding of the seas against the helpless vessel's hull. Slowly the *Carlton* righted herself, swinging broadside to the seas, and plunging down to her other rail. The helmsman, white-lipped, glued his stare to the compass card as if he meant to make the ship's head swing by the very power of his will. The sound of the engines, that dull, deep heartbeat of the ship, was all but silenced.

The master spoke again. "Go down below, Mister Boyle. Quick! Tell the second mate to come on deck immediately. Hurry!"

The first mate turned without a word and tore open the pilot-house door. Instantly the gale plucked at his sou'wester and tore frantically at his flapping oilskin. Before he managed to batter the door closed again behind him he heard the bridge tube from the engine room whistling stridently. Then he battled his way down the ladder against the invisible weight of the wind at his throat, fought his way across the slippery decks, knee deep in foaming seas, into the port alleyway and plunged down into the ship's bowels.

BELOW, the loud clamor of the elements sounded far off and muffled, like the distant noises of a mighty struggle. The great seas pounded against the ship's iron-plated shell, and the mate, impelled by the awful heaving of the ship, swayed down the ladder from side to side like a drunken man. The massive steel rods flashed slowly up and down as though tired unto death. A single, shaded light glowed over the log desk before the steam gages, throwing an unholy light into the dim recesses of the engine room populated by grotesquely moving shapes and flashing steel. Coming down the starboard ladders Boyle saw the worried face of the gray-haired chief engineer. Scotty Macrae was nowhere in sight. Boyle plunged across the floorplates and ripped open the door leading into the fire room.

There, in the eerie light of the dust filled, grimy cavern smelling foully of steam and sweat and coal dust, a strange sight met Boyle's cold blue eyes.

Scotty Macrae's short, stumpy form stood on the second rung of the iron fire room ladder, his gray eyes snapping beneath the overhanging brows under the shaggy mop of tousled hair. The Scottish engineer's arms were bare and grimy, and a knife cut in the left forearm was dripping blood. But his fists were clenched into hard knots, and the muscles of arm and shoulder rippled beneath the sweat-streaked, glistening skin. Through a hole in

his torn singlet great bunches of curly gray hair showed on his powerful chest. The quiet eyes of command roved defiantly down on the fear-crazed group directly below him.

Two firemen and a big negro coal-passer, an iron shovel gripped in black hands, crouched below him on the floor-plates, stripped to the waist, the sweat streaking down their blackened backs in rivulets. For the fraction of a heartbeat that the first mate stood behind the tense group, there was utter silence in the hot cavern of the stokehole, a silence made more terrible by the far off shrieking of the gale. There was the dull, thudding impact of seas beating against the vessel's hull and the low hiss of escaping steam. Then the negro coal passer's kinky head snapped suddenly from side to side; his fear-crazed eyes blazed insanely in the mask of the black countenance. The only avenue of escape was barred by the short, powerful figure of the Scotch engineer a foot above his head. Then Macrae's bass voice of command boomed through the fireroom.



"Back, you yellow rats!" he roared. Then to the negro coal passer: "Kinky, outside! Into the bunker wi' you . . . You two, there: fire, damn you!"

The terrified firemen stepped back a half pace. The negro coal-passer's shoulders humped up over his crouching form. His shovel scraped the floor plates metallically and came back swiftly in a vicious swing. Then he sprang towards Macrae, brandishing his deadly weapon like a madman.

Boyle leaped across the distance that separated him from the little engineer and the fear-maddened crew. He struck the negro coal passer just as the shovel swept at Macrae in a savage downward curve. The force of the big mate's blow disturbed the negro's aim and the iron shovel glanced Macrae's skull. Blood streaked the Scotch engineer's cheek and matted his hair. But he didn't yell out; only his eyes blazed in anger. The next moment Boyle tore the shovel from the coal passer's claw and sent the black man careening across the fire room. The big negro fetched up in a mound of hot ash and groaned aloud.

Macrae leaped down from the ladder to the floorplates. Shoulder to shoulder they stood now, engineer and mate. Boyle's lips were pressed tightly together. The Scot growled out his command again. "Fire! Fire, you yellow rats!" Then he left the first mate's side, deliberately turning his back on the two glowering firemen and marched up to the fallen negro.

"Get up, Kinky!" the engineer spoke now in a low ominous voice. "Out in the bunker wi' you, man, before I bash in that skull for you!"

He advanced menacingly. The coal passer glared up at Macrae for an instant and crawled away. Scotty turned. The two firemen, eyes ablaze with fear, backed away from the threatening figure of the tall mate. Then one of them ripped open a lower fire door with a savage oath. Macrae smiled grimly.

The moment of danger had passed; he was victorious!

Then the grin vanished from his sullen face as he advanced toward the gaunt form of Boyle.

"I dinna think to have to do it, Boyle," he muttered sourly, "But you let me out o' a nasty hole. I'm thankful." He hesitated an instant, and then went on: "An' now I'd be thankin' you to get t'hell out o' my fire room!"

In spite of himself, Boyle smiled. Out in the engine room the oiler rang eight bells loudly. The new watch came fearfully down the fire room ladders. The chief engineer and the third assistant burst suddenly into the stokehole.

"What's up, Mac?" the chief asked anxiously.

"Nothin,' mon," the Scot replied calmly. "I reckon the circulator's gasped its last, though."

The grayhaired chief engineer flashed a keen look of understanding about the evil smelling cavern, but he made no comment.

Instead he answered the engineer's last remark with a nod.

"Have to go in on the ballast pump," he snapped shortly. "Go up an' take a blow, Scotty," he added grimly, "And come down below again. We've got a job to do!"

IN SILENCE the group of officers left the stokehole. Chief Officer Boyle climbed to the deck without a word. He needed no further explanations than those few calm words in the face of disaster. The *Carlton* was an old ship. Fear-crazed firemen and coal passers the officers might beat back to their work by courage and brawn, but a main circulator with a hole as big as your head in the iron wall that divided its interior into two compartments —that could not be driven to work.

The ship was helpless.

All this the chief engineer grimly explained to Captain Percival through the speaking tube, in short sentences. He explained that he was hooking up the ballast pump as an auxiliary, but pointed out that the engines could be turned over only very slowly.

Down the tube came the skipper's groan. "My God, Chief!" His voice came down to the engine room in a feeble tense whisper. "She's wallowing in the troughs now! We haven't enough power for steerageway! Got to keep her head up——"

"Damn it, sir, I can't help it!" the harassed engineer barked. "She's pumping more steam than water out of the overboard discharge right now and——"

"All right! All right!" The skipper turned slowly from the bulkhead, just as Chief Officer Boyle banged the pilot-house door closed behind him.

"I know," Captain Percival uttered calmly. He had no need of Boyle's report. In the face of an overwhelming disaster the deep frown of worry had vanished from the grim face of the skipper. The thin lips pressed tightly together and the calm gray eyes returned steadily, with an open, frank gaze like that of a trusting child's, the stare of his chief officer. Of the fight in the stokehole Boyle said nothing. It was a waste of words.

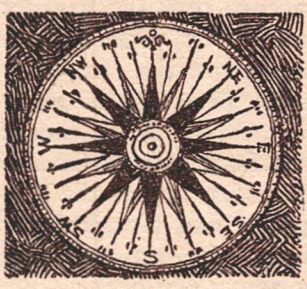
"Get for'ard, Mister Boyle." The skipper breathed his command very quietly. "We haven't steerageway. She won't come up. I've tried to bring her stern up. No use. Get for'ard and start the oil drips. She may ride it out in the troughs yet. Got to see her through it. The drift will be south and west. If we can keep afloat without grounding on Lobos——" He broke off shortly. "I'm wirelessing the agent in Monty. If she lives through this sea we'll have to put back for repairs."

Boyle nodded. "Tarpaulin on number two hatch ripped loose, sir," he reported softly. "I'm taking a gang. If we don't secure it, she'll fill her holds up. The second will be on deck in a moment, sir."

The first mate waited for no comment, but turned and made for the pilot-house door. Each man understood his work, each man knew his limitations. The end rested in other hands.

The master turned to the wheelsman. "Keep the helm hard over," he breathed.

The sailor nodded without lifting his white face from its intent study of the compass card. In the eerie light of the upthrown binnacle glow his shadow, thrown upon the bulkhead, danced immense and grotesque. Captain Percival went out in the lee wing of the bridge, clutched the rail desperately and set his dripping face against the windy blackness.



MEANWHILE, Chief Officer Boyle had gained the main deck with his gang and led them forward. Out of the blackness the pampero leaped howling upon the *Carlton* and the men who manned her, driving the sheeting rain and spray before it.

On the foredeck the tarpaulin of number two hatch, ripped free by the frantic fingers of the storm, flapped loudly in the wind. Big seas toppled over the uncovered hatch, crashing down on the wooden hatch covers. The loose canvas thundered about in the blackness and left unprotected the flimsy hatch covers.

Grimly Boyle led his men forward, crawling on hands and knees. And in the darkness that lay upon sea and land the big first mate had no time to notice the stocky form of a man crawling along behind him with a heavy topping mallet hanging from his right hand.

They pounced on the thundering canvas, Boyle bellowing commands that were ripped from his mouth by the loud clamor of the elements.

"Chips! Battens—leeward. . . .!" The big mate's orders came in broken, meaningless words.

The tarpaulin was half secured. Chips, on his knees, was hammering at the forward battens, grasping his hammer in one hand and clutching desperately at a flimsy handhold with the other. Far off in the blackness to windward the leering crest of a rising sea bared its white fangs. The ship toppled over helplessly on her beam ends. The sea raced, white plumed, to the attack. Sluggishly the *Carlton* lifted herself on her side. Then came a loud crash, and a rending of timber. A mountain of water thundered aboard over the weather rail and boiled across the vessel's deck, foaming waist deep about the struggling men. It washed them about like so many empty oil tins. Chief Officer Boyle, caught off balance, clutched frantically at the life line. Then he went under, and as the ship heaved herself upright and ploughed her lee rail under water, the sea sent him hurtling helplessly across the deck.

Boyle fetched up with a thud against the bitts, caught desperately at the chain rails, slipped, and felt himself lost again in an angry boil of water. Something clutched the big mate's arm in a viselike grip. For a moment he hung there, helpless between ominous sky and raging sea. Then slowly Boyle felt himself being dragged to safety. His feet found the deck and he floundered upright with a stinging pain in his right leg.

"Be standin' up, you thunderin' fool!"

It was Scotty Macrae's voice that almost seemed to have power over the shrieking gale and the thundering seas. Then Boyle felt his hands clutched at the life line, and in the darkness he saw the black shapes of seamen still about their battle with that live, thrashing canvas. Macrae's voice came to his astounded ears again.

"Hold 'er! Hold 'er now, ye slatherin' deck swabs, while I ram these battens in!"

Chips and Macrae sent the battens home.

The Scot turned, dropping his heavy mallet to the deck, and gritted in the first mate's ear: "I coul' no' be havin' a debt to ye, Boyle!"

Jimmy grinned feebly in the gale-swept darkness. The tormented ship wallowed sluggishly in the cavernous troughs of the seas. Over their heads the shrieking gale tore on. . . .

THE first early light of dawn revealed a leaden expanse of tumbling, lace-patched sea. On the starboard beam Lobos Island rose green and dripping above the water's edge, the gray cloud squadrons massed heavily about its rising bluffs. Overhead, in a clearing sky, the last of the dirty storm wrack swept past the careening trucks of the laboring *Carlton*. Only a single brilliant star seemed to have survived the angry night, and in the strange light the chaos of lashing seas pursued the ship. She wallowed from side to side like a frightened cripple, steam and water dripping from her overboard discharge as she barely held her own against the headlong rush of foaming combers.

In the cabin pantry Jimmy Boyle, the first mate, and Scotty Macrae, the first assistant engineer, stood braced in opposite corners, swallowing a hasty draught of scalding black coffee. The cabin boy clung to a stanchion in the door, eyes half popping from his head at each vicious lunge of the ship. Hollow eyed and grim, the two officers stared at each other. Then Macrae spoke, with a visible effort at carelessness.

"Do ye be thinkin' she'll make it, Jimmy?"

Boyle nodded. "Lettin' up now, Scotty. She'll do."

They stared at each other in silence. The cabin boy dove out through the door and across the slippery deck. The two men were alone. Outside, a last gusty squall shrieked past the *Carlton's* 'midship housing.

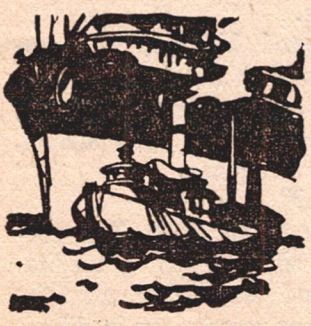
" 'Twas a long watch las' night, Jimmy," the Scot confided in a whisper at last. Something was troubling his honest simple soul. "Plenty o' time to be thinkin' an' watchin' that damned telltale floppin' nigh clean over, an' wonderin' if she'd be straightenin' up each time. I dinna think she'd live." He hesitated. Jimmy made no comment.

Presently Macrae went on in a whisper: "We been shipmates nigh five year in the old hooker, Jimmy. Oughta work together an' play together." Then his moment of sentimentality got the better of him and he staggered across the slanting deck for the door, drawing on his gloves with a muttered oath as he went. "I wanted to be tellin' ye I—I'm sorry for that—that fight in Monty," he finished gruffly over his shoulder.

Then, without waiting for a reply from the astonished first mate, he dove through the door. Boyle watched his short figure until Macrae disappeared through the fire room door on his way below. Then he, too, turned, and made his way, limping with the pain in his bruised leg, for the bridge ladder to see the *Carlton* through the last of her trouble. . . .

THAT night the tramp *Carlton,* storm battered and dirty, limped into Montevideo on her ballast pump and was dragged by a snorting tug to her berth in the lower basin. Peacefully she rode at her mooring lines, as though breathing a deep, silent prayer of thankfulness for her survival.

The agent came aboard, fuming at the delay and the expense of repairs. At the head of the gangway he almost collided with the mate and Scotty, walking arm in arm along the deck.



"What the hell!" he exploded.

"The Old Man's waiting for you in the cabin," Boyle interrupted calmly. "We're going ashore."

The agent puffed out his blue-veined cheeks and shouted after them.

"Ashore? Well, I'll be. . . ."

But Scotty and Boyle didn't hear the rest of it. They sat side by side in a victoria "taxi" headed uptown for the Pavillion Bleu. Inside the doors they stopped for a moment to survey the glaringly lit interior. Tinkling glass, the musical rustle of silken skirts, the delicious low laughter of women assailed their ears, they who had but a few short hours before listened to the pitiless howl of a great gale and the thunder of roaring green seas.

Suddenly a girl caught sight of them. The eager light of recognition lit her eyes. Her red lips parted. Quickly she ran forward to greet them.

"Oh—my friend Jimmy!" Her low, drawling English sounded delicious in the ears of the two seamen. Delightedly she clapped her hands together. "And Meester Macrae! Weel you buy a drink for Carlita?" she purred.

Jimmy looked at the Scot, grinned, and motioned almost imperceptibly with his head. Scotty grinned back at his friend and slowly shook his head. Then he turned toward the girl.

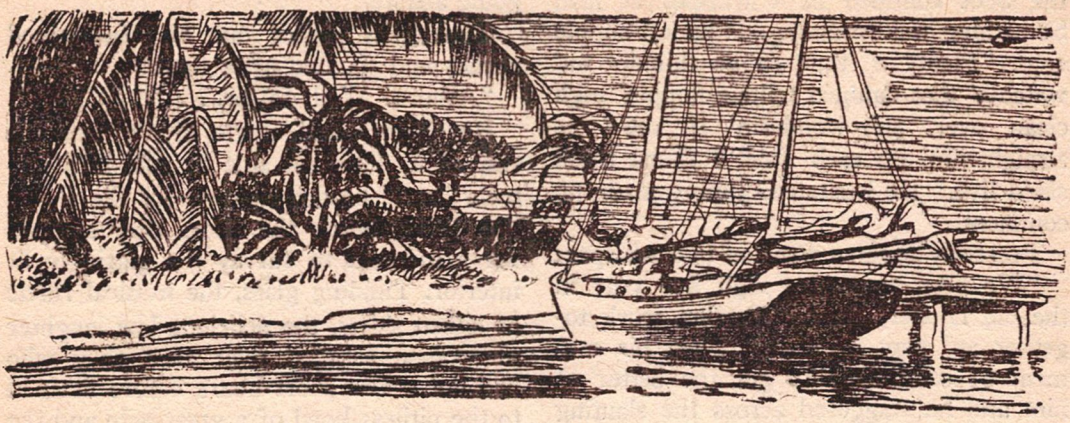
"Be runnin' along now, gurrl," he waved her aside. "You've done enough damage to shipmates for one voyage . . . Coom along Jimmy, an' let's be havin' a drink. I'm thirrsty."

They brushed carelessly past the girl. She stared after them dumbfounded, the painted smile fading quickly from her red lips. Her little mouth curled scornfully. Then she interrupted a stream of Spanish invective with a simple American expression—"Go to the hell!"

She flounced her skirt, tossed her head, and departed in search of newer prey. At a corner table Scotty and Doyle watched her, grinning broadly. Then the waiter came in with an iced bottle of Pedro Demeque. And the two old shipmates drank each other's health in solemn silence.

Another Great Sea Story by MARMUR Soon.

ESCAPE *by* JOHN ALLEN



Gunrunners' Bullets Help a Banana Country Beachcomber Square Himself

THE steady sea wind flailed the tall palms that edged the dusty plaza and lifted the drumming of the surf from the beaches far below. Except for the nervous jangling of the mechanical piano in Coco Billy's place, San Palo slept under blazing tropic stars.

Where the open arches of the saloon shed a dim radiance into the square, two white men sat on a bench under the palms. Clad in starched and faded khaki, they wore their battered campaign hats at the swanky angle sacred to the Marine Corps. One, with a corporal's chevrons, drew languid puffs from a cigarette. The other gazed upward at the great fronds swaying against the stars. Evidently they were not amused.

The piano ceased, and there came a wave of shrill Latin voices in crescendo that terminated in a swift patter of feet. The occupants of the bench, faintly interested, looked around in time to see a dejected bundle in soiled white trousers and shirt, sail across the pavement and land with a thud in the soft dust of the street. A frayed straw sombrero followed. It skimmed gracefully up into the breeze, to return surprisingly and settle beside its owner. There was a sound of receding laughter, and the piano again took up its refrain.

"Exit," observed the corporal calmly. "The management reserves the right to eject and otherwise——"

"Say," the other rose to his feet abruptly, hitching up his belt. "I'm gonna massage the jaw off that spiggoty barkeep. Heavin' a poor bum around like that!"

The corporal put out a restraining hand. "Lay off, Eddie. It ain't Coco's fault. The beacher makes passes at the ballerina, 'n' lowers the moral tone of the joint. This outpost's ruinin' your disposition. Let's slip him the price of a ride out. Come on."

He led the way across and bent over the wreck in the gutter. "Pass the *chapeau*, Eddie."

"Hand up, Bud? There y'are. Anything broke?" He felt the limp muscles of the arm under the sweat-soaked cotton sleeve, and reflected that there are worse matters than broken bones.

The man accepted his tattered sombrero with fingers that shook amazingly. He sagged to the bench beside the corporal, while the tall private, with long strides, disappeared across the plaza.

"Cigarette, fella?"

The derelict shook his head. The corporal lapsed into silence, puffing meditatively. From beyond the square came the sound of a motor car, uproarious in dilapidation. It drew rapidly nearer. A Ford touring car, marvelously rusty and battered and piloted by a languid darky who reclined on the back of his neck behind the wheel,

came to a jarring halt near the bench. Eddie descended from the running-board.

"It's all right, Corp. The Gook knows the road. He's took him before." As they hoisted the passenger into the creaking tonneau, the derelict muttered something that sounded vaguely grateful.

The corporal waved a summary farewell. "Forget it, fella. Turn in an' sleep it off. So long." They listened to the noisy departure of the flivver, heard the distant clamor of the bridge struts as it passed over the creek, and turned away.

"The guy's done up, Eddie."

"Yea. All adrift. Wonder where he came from." They strode along the dark, silent little street and began to breast the rise that led to the outpost's billet beyond the town. The corporal threw away his cigarette. "Good job we're turnin' in sober. I seen the sergeant leerin' up the beach again this mornin'. Thirstin' for some more of his 'military intelligence.' I c'n smell another nice cool hike comin'."

"Yea. An' it's mail day tomorrow, too." They lifted their voices in lusty song.

THE derelict in the flivver tonneau, jolting over the jungle road toward Muertos Creek, looked up at the spinning heavens and groaned. His head buzzed with Coco's white rum, but the malaria shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. As they made a sudden swing into the open along the chalk cliffs, the clean sea wind set his teeth chattering. He huddled shivering into a corner of the seat and looked back over the dismal vista of a misspent life.

Ten years since the War. The only good thing he had to look back upon. Sixteen months in a famous American Division. That company had been a good bunch. Most of them had died in the sunny wheatfields of France that summer day, under the stuttering machine gun fire from the woods. Life had looked good afterward. Somehow, he'd drifted down to the banana country and kept on drifting. What with the cane rum and the rotten fever. . . .

He was aware of a lurching halt. The machine stood idling vociferously, its feeble headlights played over a narrow trail that branched off seaward, up a sharp rise onto the cliffs.

"Si, si muchacho," he mumbled. "That gyrene pay you? Yea? Well—*Adios.*"

He scrambled out and turned up the path. Behind him, the shuddering wails of the flivver's transmission died away.

The limestone outcroppings of the trail cut through his worn sandals, and the thorny brush tore at his shirt as he reeled from side to side. At last he emerged into a clearing. His hut with its dilapidated thatch loomed ghostly among many shadows in the starlight.

The derelict halted abruptly. A clear whiff of native tobacco was on the breeze across the clearing. Watching, he caught the glow of a cigarette end in the gloom under the overhang of the thatch by the door. From the ravine below, there came the sound of the tramping of many mules. Now and then there was the sharp click of a shod hoof on stone.

"Cacos!" He drew back into the shelter of the trail and turned off along a fainter track edging the cliff. There, the wind took him across the chest and bore him up like a steady hand. He could hear the rhythmic thunder of the breakers on the reef off the creek mouth. On the end, where the cliffs swept back to the ravine entrance, there was another cigarette glow. He took hold of a bush, and leaning out, peered over the brink. Below, against the pale silver of the cove, something moved. He heard the sharp rattle of a block and the flapping of a sail, and drew back among the brush to consider the matter.

A schooner without lights—a *caco* pack train in the ravine—pickets out. It meant rifles coming ashore, rifles for that hill leader who had boasted notoriously of what he would do to the San Palo outpost. The realization sobered the derelict. He doffed the sombrero, and with the cool wind on his forehead there came a vision, vivid and prophetic. The Marine billet on the hill above the town; a lanky corporal with the sweat running into his eyes and firing methodically through the doorway. Other figures in faded khaki motionless on the dirt floor behind him. A crackle of rifle fire from the brush on the hillside and little points of flame in a shifting blue haze. The lanky corporal sagging to his knees, coughing.

The derelict stood up. Joyfully he sailed the tattered sombrero out over the sea. A man could square himself——

THE sentinel on the cliff edge finished his *cigarillo* and listened with approval to the proceedings below. Tomorrow the rifles would be distributed, if all went well. He, Juan, could then settle one or two private matters—preferably from ambush—without personal risk. Also, there would be raids—and loot.

He caught the sound of movement in the brush behind. Perhaps his relief. He turned, half rising. A figure in dingy white rushed him silently, out of the darkness. Surprised, thrown off balance, he slid over the edge of the cliff, clawing wildly for a hold; and his startled yell woke the echoes in the ravine.

On the beach where they found him a moment later there was a brief commotion. Orders were passed hurriedly along the creek-bed, up the line of startled plunging mules.

The derelict raced back to the clearing. Keeping in the shadow, he skirted the far side until he could approach from behind the tool shed. A compact body of panting machete men pounded by on their way to rush the cliff top. They were joined by the hut guard, who under the circumstances, seemed to prefer company.

The strategist emerged from behind the shed and entered the hut. After a brief rummaging therein, he departed cautiously up the lip of the ravine. There was no unsteadiness in his gait now. As he went he unwrapped several yards of oily rag from a Mark One service automatic, the property of a defrauded government.



A quarter of an hour later an exasperated *caco general* received the report of the cliff storming detail with annoyance. "So — we find no one above? Am I to suppose, then, that this dunce of a Juan hurls himself over for amusement? Back, pigs, and search me this gringo clearing. Must I stand thus in embarrassment, while my pickets rain down from the sky?——Name of a Name!"

Whispers, allusions to the bad name of this creek, were passed from man to man along the uneasy pack train. An evil omen, this falling of Juan. It was rumored on good authority from somewhere in the column that someone had seen curious marks on the body—not the work of human hands.

In the midst of this preoccupation a small dugout canoe, drifting silently in the obscurity under the other bank, passed unnoticed. Once clear of the creek-mouth, it was paddled rapidly seaward.

The little schooner, with her hook down in a scant five fathoms, pitched viciously in the swell that slid in over the reef. Lounging on the quarter rail, the tall, lean coast negro in command kept a careful eye on the range of a certain star against the hills. He distrusted his ground tackle in this accursed sand. Also he distrusted the arrangements of this fat goat of a *general*. A blundering lot, these *caco* leaders. Better to keep the mainsail on her, in case of trouble——

The first boatload of ammunition in small heavy cases had departed. There were instructions to fetch more hands from the beach to help in the hold. The captain examined the blue darkness offshore for signs of a snooping patrol boat. An awkward moment this, to cut and run for it with only two of his crew left aboard, and the boat out of hail.

At this moment the derelict, clinging to a dipping martingale-stay under the schooner's bow, kicked the dugout clear on the seaward side, and climbed up through the bowsprit rigging to the forecastle.

The anxious watcher on the quarter-deck heard the rhythmic rattle of oars from the returning boat. Glancing up casually at his range star, he saw it disappear suddenly behind the hill. Drifting! She moved far too fast to be dragging her hook. He sprang forward, whipping out his knife for the lashings of a second anchor. Rounding the foremast, he was instantly aware of someone in white trousers and shirt who stood by the windlass.

"So—this one has cut the cable!" Mak-

ing a primitive noise in his throat, he swerved and lunged swiftly with the knife. Just in his face there was a burst of flame, a crushing impact that spun him sidewise. The knife clattered to the deck and he fell backward, sprawling across the windlass.

The two negroes in the hold tumbled on deck at the sound of the shot, to crouch irresolute by the hatch. The derelict, by stooping a little, could make them out against the light background of the after-house. He squeezed off a shot, carefully close over their heads. They sprang for the rail and took to the water with a single splash, calling to the boat's crew as they swam.

The schooner's captor went aft then, cautiously feeling for the deck with his bare feet, alert against ambush from the shadowy places. Reaching the wheel, he cramped the helm hard to starboard. Making sternway rapidly, she responded, swinging her bow offshore.

As the wind ranged abeam, the mainsail began to fill and he slacked the sheet so that it drew with the wind over the quarter. She begun to gather headway. The man at the wheel executed a well known gesture in the general direction of the beach, then steered to pass close to the point of rocks forming the westernmost horn of the cove. The roar of the reef sounded ominously nearer on the offshore side.

ON THE beach a panic-stricken boat's crew called heaven to witness that the schooner had been boarded by desperate *gringos* with a machinegun. The scuppers had run with blood. Here were two, forced into the sea after a fearful struggle, who could give details if the *general* would but deign to listen. There was a great deal more to the same effect, all wasted on an infuriated *caco* chief who laid about him impartially with the flat of his machete, and consigned them to the devil in four Spanish dialects.

The hubbub was terrific, but the *general* remembered that there were five rifles in his command. He cast caution to the winds. There would be one pill for these insolent ones as they passed the high rocks of the point! Five wiry hill-ponies clattered out of the ravine and stretched away up the beach in a whirl of flying sand. Along the curving mile they made the best of the even going.

On the schooner, wallowing slowly through the darkness a scant hundred yards from the point, the derelict listened to the roll of drumming hoof beats draw nearer along the beach. Up forward, the wounded man, roused by the motion, began to scream in a curious strangled voice. The helmsman said things through his teeth and attended to his steering.

Sparks flew as the ponies fought for a footing in the loose shale of the slope. The derelict heard the snick of rifle bolts above the sea-wash against the rocks. He braced himself for the scattering volley that flickered like a fired powder train on the crest. A hail of steel-jacketed bullets sent the splinters humming along the deck. The wounded man on the windlass was suddenly still. A splinter bit into the derelict's cheek. He reached for the automatic and emptied the magazine. The heavy slugs ricocheted, banging among the rocks. Five rifles concentrated on the flash. The man on the wheel-box, jarred by swift thudding concussions, pitched forward and rolled to the deck.

The schooner sailed on. With a last crashing volley, rifle fire ceased. As the muscles of one of the steersman's arms jammed between the wheel-spokes, relaxed slowly, the bucking wheel kicked free and the schooner drifted in the trough of the sea.

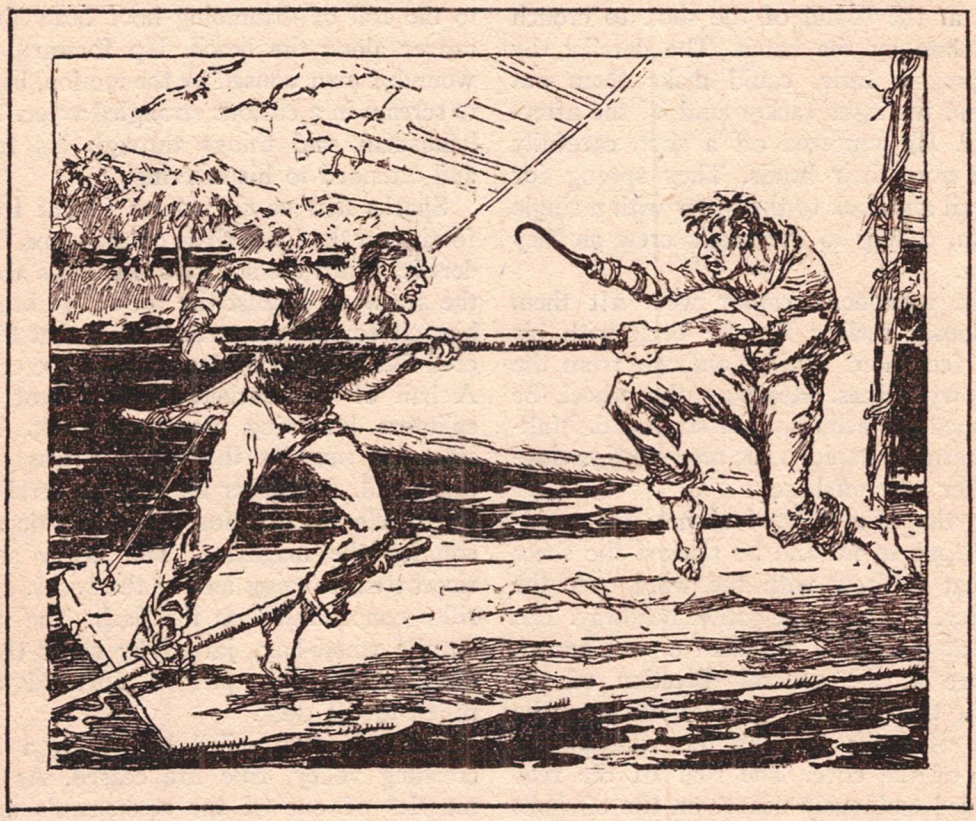
A lean gray patrol boat on the way to San Palo with the mail, nearly ran her down in the morning mist. They put the derelict, bullet riddled but still breathing, on a mattress under their quarter-deck awning and turned back on the long tow to the Base.

It was sunset when they swung into the Ozama River mouth, under the grim walls of the old castle. The Marine bugles were keening high and sweet to greet the Colors dropping gently down the tower flagstaff. The man on the mattress opened his eyes and listened, smiling. They docked in the swift tropic twilight; but the derelict had gone to join the gallant company of the wheatfields.

STEEL *and* PEARLS

by

FOREST GAYDEN



Two Castaways on a Lonely South Sea Island Battle Grimly for Life and a Fortune in Pearls

THE trade wind had died. The golden sun, tinting the placid waters of the lagoon, rested its yellow tip on the edge of the western sea. But for the deep, resonant organ note of the reef there was no sound. The tiny coral island was desolate, silent.

Jack Russell, his face and half-naked body burned brown the color of a native's, spasmodically stirred the tin of boiling rice. He sat on the end of an old half buried coconut log, watched the bubbling, puffing flakes with eyes of longing. Truly a meager fare—that rice; but one marooned mariners might well be thankful for.

A long shadow fell over his shoulder. He turned, glanced up as "Ironfist" Dudley, a mountain of flesh, strode up from the lagoon's edge.

The giant scowled down at the man by the coconut husk fire. "Hell of a lot o' help you are, Russell, sittin' up here doin' nothin' all day——"

Russell's jaw popped out. "Don't start that again. I offered to help all I could, am doin' it. Ain't a hell of a lot I can do with this bum arm."

"What about me?" snapped the snarling Dudley crooking his right elbow. "I only got one good mitt."

Russell eyed the murderous, sharp pointed steel hook that served Dudley for fingers where his right forearm and hand had been amputated. "Say," he sneered disgustedly, "I've seen you do things with that; things I wouldn't think of doing with two good hands. What about the Kanaka boy on the *Tiare?* Why, you ripped his damn——"

"Never mind what I did to the nigger," bellowed Ironfist, waving his sharp "hook-hand" menacingly. "I was skipper of the *Tiare* as long as she was afloat. Now that she's smashed on that bloody reef, I'm still boss. Boss of this bloomin' island, Russell. I'm *boss,* d'you git that?"

Jack Russell squinted up into the rage-flushed visage. "Have it your own way, Dudley. I'm not in a position right now to argue with you." He glanced down solemnly at his right shoulder. The dirty rag that bound it was caked with dried, black blood. He lifted the bandage carefully, exposed the highly swollen, purplish wound. A tingle of pain shot into his blanching face when the rag stuck.

"It's bad, feels worse today."

Ironfist Dudley sneered. "You had no business climbin' that tree in the first place," he said sarcastically. "You're a *diver.* You should have stayed in the water."

The hurricane which had destroyed their schooner had driven great waves across the little island, forcing Russell and Dudley to scramble up into a couple of sturdy young palm trees; those palms had saved their lives, but Russell, weakened by the blasts of the storm, had fallen to the hard coral rock, after the sea had subsided, and smashed his arm.

"Cut that stuff out, Dudley," Russell snapped at the hook-handed man. "I know you'd like to get rid of me. But when that hurricane broke on us, I was just as anxious to save my hide as you were to save yours."

Reflectively, Ironfist scratched the back of his fuzzy head with the tip of his hook. "I'm a thinkin' you might be better off dead. That's a coral bruise you got, an' that means coral poison. I've seen them kind o' cuts before. The way we're fixed here, without no medicine of any kind, your chances ain't so bright."

Jack Russell's face sobered. His blue eyes were troubled as he inspected his throbbing shoulder, then looked up at the hulking schooner captain. "If you'll only rush the work on the boat, Dudley, so's we can get away from here. I'm doin' the best I can, cookin', tendin' camp. I'll help on the boat, too, if you can use me."

"Aw, stow the blab! You're just a diver. You ain't no good except in the water. What you got to eat?" Ironfist reached out a great hairy paw, lifted the pot from the fire.

"Ump!" he blurted angrily, "What kind of a chow is this? What am I, a canary? Hell, they ain't 'nough grub here to feed one. I been workin', slavin' all day. I gotta eat."

Russell shook his head gravely. "I know, but there wasn't much grub in the skiff, nor water either. I figured up this morning. We got about enough for ten days full rations. Then it's plain fish an' nothing else. What few coco palms there were on this dinky atoll went down in the hurricane."

Dudley turned, glanced up at the two young palms which had saved their lives. "What about them?" he asked. "They didn't go down."

Russell grinned appreciatingly. "I know, but they're not old enough to give us anything in the way of grub."

Muttering profanely, Ironfist began to wolf the food ravenously, leaving only a few mouthfuls in the tin.

Russell watched him wipe his thick lips with the back of his hand and stride off around the curve of beach, where his hulking figure dissolved into the tropical dusk

IN AN hour the moon came up, casting its silver mantle over the placid, mirror-like surface of the lagoon. No sound was audible save the drone of the ever-beating surf on the reef a mile away. The balmy night air was soothing after the sweltering heat of the day. A kind of peace settled down on the desolate coral island.

Russell sat in the warm sand, back

propped against the log, engrossed with his thoughts.

A month before they had left Papeete, Russell furnishing the knowledge of a patch of rich shell in this out of the way lagoon. Ironfist Dudley, whom he had picked up with on Tahiti contributed his schooner, the *Tiare,* as his part in the undertaking.

According to their agreement, Russell was to do all the diving and have first look at what he brought up. His was the biggest gamble, for if he found no pearls his work would go for naught. While Dudley was certain of getting a nice cargo of shell even though not a single pearl was discovered.

The *Tiare* had been anchored beyond the reef, as the passage was not large enough to admit her into the lagoon. Thus, twice a week Russell and Dudley had rowed out to her in the skiff which Russell used in his diving. They took the accumulated shell to the schooner and brought back needed supplies for their camp on shore.



Things had gone smoothly until one day Russell brought up a pair of large, barnacle-encrusted mollusks which he had found far back in the entrance to an underwater cavern.

Upon opening them he was overjoyed to pick from the mucous mass two enormous, perfectly matched pearls. The pair would bring three times as much as all the smaller ones he had previously found put together.

From that time on, Dudley's attitude and manner changed. He was no longer satisfied with their bargain.

Then came the terrific Pacific storm, sweeping across their small, sandy island without warning. After the catastrophe, which lost the schooner and native crew and would have cost them their lives only that they climbed into the tops of those two strong young palms, Ironfist had been brooding. His disposition changed greatly in the wake of his loss. It was like the snarling waters that crashed on the reef.

AT INTERVALS warm black clouds obscured the moon. Jack Russell stirred from his reverie, gathered up the meager supplies of food and utensils and carried them up under the rude shelter that shielded them from the frequent tropical downpours. Two oars and a small leg-o'-mutton sail out of the skiff, lashed together formed the temporary housing.

Before curling up for the night he painfully lifted the bandage from his shoulder and thrust it out under the brisk deluge that had started. At the same time, Ironfist Dudley strode up from the beach. A malevolent glint flashed in his dark eyes as he watched his suffering companion.

"That coral poisonin' gits 'em quick sometimes," he said unsympathetically.

"Guess you'd find that to your liking, wouldn't you, Ironfist?" returned Russell between clenched teeth. "You'd have more rations an' could take all my pearls. That would mean a couple years high living for you in Papeete."

Russell watched Dudley's darkening face as the plain words sank home.

Suddenly the big man straightened, thrust his black chin out menacingly. The weird storm-light glinted murderously from the sharp hook-hand.

"Well, what of it?" he growled. "Why shouldn't I figure like that? What good are you in helpin' me git away from here? I'm doin' all the work. Besides, ain't I lost my lugger an' all that shell? What risk did you take to begin with? I furnished everything. All you did was a few hours' divin' every day. An' got a nice little poke o' pearls fer your trouble."

"Listen, Dudley," broke in Russell sharply. "If you recall our agreement you'll see that I took a whole hell of a lot of risk. There ain't one lagoon in a hundred the size of this that'd yield a pair of matched pearls like the ones I found. I didn't know I was going to find them. If I hadn't run on to 'em my pickings would have been pretty slim. The smaller ones won't bring half as much as what your shell would have sold for if the schooner hadn't been lost."

Ironfist Dudley grumbled his dissatisfaction.

"Tell you what I'll do," offered Russell after a moment's silence. "You rush the

work on the skiff so's we can get away from here before my arm gets too far gone an' I'll give you all the pearls except the matched ones. Our agreement don't call for any such settlement, but I'm willing."

Again the burly, grumbling Dudley mumbled his dissent, and without a word dropped to the sand in a corner of the shelter and was soon snoring loudly.

Russell rebound his throbbing shoulder, found a dry spot where the rain didn't beat in and laid down to a troubled night of sleeplessness and pain.

He was rudely awakened early next morning from a light doze by a vicious kick from Ironfist.

"Come alive, it's another day," the big man bellowed, stretching his powerful arms.

While Russell busied himself making a fire and boiling some more rice and tea from their scant stores, Dudley watched him through stealthy lids.

THEY ate the frugal meal in silence, seated in the already hot sand. When they had finished Ironfist got up slowly, pointed his hook at Russell menacingly. "I'll be takin' my share o' them pearls right now, pardner," he announced with venom.

Russell jumped to his feet. "I said you'd get 'em after the boat was finished an' we're on our way from this place."

"To hell with that. I want 'em now!" Dudley advanced threateningly.

Russell, mindful of those burly arms and that murderous hook, backed up, eyed the other calculatingly. There was no doubt but what he had a treacherous antagonist in Ironfist. The man's scowling, bearded face told plainer than words what was going on in his evil mind.

And with an injured shoulder, Russell knew his chances of winning a hand-to-hand encounter with Ironfist were remote. Only one thing to do, humor the big cuss for the moment and be on his guard for further signs of deceit and bodily harm.

"All right, Ironfist, if that's the way you feel about it," Russell said and took a small tobacco sack from the bosom of his white cotton singlet, pulled the draw strings and poured the contents out into his palm, careful to keep a respectful distance from Ironfist while he picked out the two large pearls.

Dudley stretched forth his hamlike palm. His eyes filled with greed as the tiny, smooth, limpid pellets trickled into it. Then abruptly his manner changed; he glanced crookedly at Russell, watched him return the sack to his shirt.

"Hmm!" he grunted, turning up his nose at the dozen small spheres in his hand. "These ain't so much."

"Never mind, you've got more now than's coming to you. Get to work on the boat. I'll try an' hook a couple of fish for dinner."

For a moment Dudley hesitated, scowling ferociously. Then he lumbered off.

Russell got the ten-fathom fishing line, which luckily had been in the small boat, and started to that part of the lagoon where the beach dropped steeply. Standing waist deep in the tepid, clear water, he baited his hooks with bits of smashed shellfish and dropped them over into the shadowy pools between two great coral mushrooms.

In half an hour he had two fine red snappers for his trouble. The sun was dazzling hot now. Perspiration trickled from him in rivulets. His head and shoulder ached. The meager shade afforded by the shelter in camp tempted him to knock off for the time being.

Back in camp, he heard a scraping noise from down near the boat. He turned his gaze in the direction and could see that Ironfist was moving his arms slowly back and forth across something white held between his knees in the sand.

For a moment Russell dismissed it from his mind. But the continued grating got on his nerves, intrigued his curiosity. A knife on wood could not be heard at that distance, he reasoned. But this noise was not that of steel and wood. More like steel on stone!

Scouting back behind a low dune, he dropped to his stomach, wormed and wriggled nearer until he had reached a point where he could observe what the giant Dudley was doing. What Russell saw, caused his eyes to widen. Momentary fear gripped him. Ironfist was moving the needle point of his glittering hook slowly back and forth over a slab of coral!

Russell clutched the keen-bladed diving

knife which he carried at his belt. It would be a poor weapon against a man like Dudley who could use a knife just like it in his good left hand and had as well that formidable steel hook in which his amputated right arm terminated.



There was no question now as to the burly giant's plans. Ironfist meant to force Russell to give up the two big pearls; then either kill him or leave him to die on that lonely sun-scorched atoll and make off alone in the boat.

From where he lay, thoughtfully studying the situation, Russell could see that the boat the big man had been rudely fashioning was practically ready; probably had been since the day before. Ironfist was stalling for time.

THE fish were wrapped in water-soaked coconut leaves and baked over hot stones. When Dudley came up from the beach the two castaways ate in silence, each watching the other suspiciously. Russell kept his only weapon, the big knife, close at hand ready for instant use.

When the meal was finished, Ironfist crawled back under the sail, out of the hot sun, and stretched himself full length on the sand. Russell started toward the boat at the lagoon's edge.

"Where you goin'?" roared Dudley, on his feet with a leap.

"Down to have a look at the skiff. She must be about ready."

"You keep away from that skiff! She b'longs to me. I'm workin' on her, an' you keep away, savvy?" Dudley advanced, arms swinging gorilla-like, the hook shooting off steely rays in the glaring light.

Russell kept on, head thrust back over his shoulder defiantly, his eyes on the big, crouching figure behind him.

Then, like a mad beast, Dudley charged. Russell whipped out his knife, raised it above his head. As it came down in a sweeping arc, Ironfist's murderous hook flashed, shimmered, ripped in a glancing blow across the bottom of Russell's clenched fist. The knife went spinning to the sand.

The captain of the lost *Tiare* stooped, picked it up triumphantly. "Guess you'll do as I say, *now,* Russell!" He leered fiendishly. "Git back to your fishin'. I want all the grub we can rake up. We'll be leavin' 'fore long now."

Jack Russell's hopes vanished. He had lost his only means of defense. Without his knife, Dudley had the upper hand, completely. It was a desperate game now. If the treacherous captain didn't get the two pearls before they left the island, he would certainly have ample opportunity once they were thrown together in that small skiff upon a lonely sea.

Reluctantly Russell gathered up his gear while Ironfist stood watching with a crooked, dominating sneer on his thick lips.

"An' don't show up this evenin' empty handed," he warned, pointing his hook menacingly. "I always have been boss o' this shebang, an' I always will be. Don't fergit it."

AS HE fished, Russell analyzed the situation carefully. If he put to sea in the small boat with Ironfist, his two big pearls, all he had to show for this month of hell, would be taken from him and he would undoubtedly be murdered in the bargain. If he could manage to elude Dudley and remain on the atoll he might live for a time. The day he had dived to the entrance to the underwater cavern after the big shells, he had discovered, far back in the coral rocks, a cave which was not entirely filled even at the highest tide. This discovery he had unthinkingly made known to Dudley. But, even so, the clumsy giant could never dive and negotiate the passage.

For a moment he nursed a ray of hope. Then, like a black pall, despair settled on him once more. Dudley, finding him missing, would remember at once the place, for there was no other retreat on the atoll where a man could conceal himself. All the captain would have to do would be to sit

calmly by and wait until Russell was forced to come out for food.

Such procedure would be folly, then. Apprehensively Russell turned and gazed down the shimmering beach to where the boat was being repaired. It gave him a start to see her already in the water. Dudley was tramping down to her with the oars and the roll of sail.

Russell watched for nearly an hour. During that time the small camp, which they had used since the hurricane, was abandoned. The bags of food, tin of biscuit and tea were all taken to the boat by the former schooner captain.

"It simply means that he's going to get away tonight," mused Russell, bringing up his sixth large snapper. "It'll be high tide about three hours after dark. That's as soon as he can make it out the passage."

He pondered deeply. Time was short. In another hour the sun would sink beyond the trackless waste of water to the west. Then the quick tropical darkness would fall. "If I can steal that boat," he reflected, "'specially all the grub an' stuff's aboard, I might be able to bring Ironfist to terms and gain control."

Guardedly, Russell strung the fish on a piece of line, secured one end of it to a lump of coral, then dropped them into the water again.

He left his gear and made his way up to the demolished camp. Nothing remained now but the water cask, half buried in the sand, and shaded with a sheaf of wind-lashed palm fronds.

"Where's the fish?" demanded Dudley, who had come up from the beach. He eyed Russell's empty hands.

"They ain't biting good. Got to wait till dark."

"Dark, hell! I wanta git away on the tide."

Russell tried to force a calm smile. "Don't worry. I'll have all the fish we can use long before then. After the moon comes up I'll catch plenty. You lay here an' rest, Dudley. You been busy all afternoon carryin' the stuff down to the beach, an' getting the boat ready. I'll——"

Ironfist advanced, stepped closer to where Russell stood. "Say," he hissed, "think I'm a fool? Lay here an' rest while you steal the boat. Like hell I will! You was fixin' to try it once before today. Hmph! I'll wait right down there by 'er till you come with the fish." He twisted his hook in a murderous gesture. "An' don't be too long a-doin' it, either."

Jack Russell's heart quickened. The fellow had seen through his ruse. If he, Russell, was to succeed in getting the boat now, it would have to be accomplished right under Ironfist Dudley's eyes!

Without a word Russell poured himself a drink from the cask, using the half of an old coconut shell for a cup. Dudley, a venomous scowl wrinkling his brow, drove the bung home with his boot heel and rolled the twenty-gallon barrel ahead of him down to the lagoon edge.

Digging himself into the shade under the big coconut log, Russell waited for the coming of darkness—the time when he would play a desperate game against odds.

WHEN the first rim of the moon tipped the eastern horizon, Russell started leisurely back to the ledge where he had fished all afternoon. A rosy glow up the beach reminded him that Ironfist had a fire, was probably enjoying a solitary meal.

Wasting no time, he hurriedly pulled up the string of fish, some of which were still alive. He slipped his fingers into each one's gills and broke the backbone behind the head. This was to prevent a chance splash giving him away. Then he looped them around his neck and quietly slipped into the warm, dark water.

At first, the tang of the salt in the wounded shoulder caused him some pain. But that was soon forgotten in the excitement of his undertaking.



Swimming slowly, silently, so that not a ripple revealed his presence in the placid surface of the lagoon, he headed toward a point just opposite from where the fire gleamed on the sand. It took him nearly an hour to negoti-

ate this short distance. But he could not afford to risk the merest chance of being discovered.

From the moon-splashed surface of the silent waters all that was visible of Russell was his head. Snail-like, tirelessly, he slipped nearer and nearer to his goal. At last he lay floating, not fifty feet from the boat, which was nosed bow-on to the beach.

Ironfist stirred restlessly, shot nervous, irritable glances down the coral strand. Absently the big man worked the point of his hook-hand back and forth in the coarse gravel around him. When the firelight struck the shiny metal, a wicked glint was diffused into the darkness.

At last the big man got to his feet, stretched, stood in a listening attitude, head cocked to one side.

Russell lay quiet as a water-soaked log, and watched. Presently he saw Dudley leave the fire and walk into the shadows muttering to himself.

Russell's time had come! Now was his chance. With powerful, but noiseless strokes the man in the water sent his lithe body ahead. When only ten feet from the skiff he dove and came up at the boat's side. Here he paused a second for breath and to listen. All was quiet, tomblike on that desolate coral islet. No sound save the droning of the surf on the reef and the wild night-cries of some lonely bird overhead.

He slipped the string of fish from his shoulder and hoisted them over the side. Then he tried to pull the light craft out into deep water. This was not as easy as it had looked from his watching place farther away. The bow of the boat was stuck fast in the clinging sand of the beach and would need a good shove to lift it off.

He crept to the water's edge, put both hands against the bow, shoved mightily. There was a crunch behind him. Even before he could whirl he felt cold, sharp steel against his neck.

"Just what I thought, Russell. You're pretty slick, but not slick enough to give me the slip. One false move an' I'll slit yer measly gullet!"

Slowly, hopelessly, Russell turned, was aware that Ironfist stood leering down at him, the murderous hook-hand encircling his throat.

The towering schooner captain shot a glance into the boat. "Hmm. Kept yer promise about the fish, eh? But you figured to be eatin' them all by yer lonesome, didn't you? Well, I'm gonna tell you somethin'. They ain't much more'n enough grub left fer one man, an' I'm him!"

Russell tried to back away. The hook held him, made him as helpless as though he had neither arms nor legs.

Suddenly Ironfist's great hairy paw shot out, ripped Russell's singlet down the front. The little sack in which Russell kept his pearls tumbled into the big man's hand.

"Fine! Now we're gittin' somewhere." Ironfist thrust the sack into his pocket. "Now git into that boat an' take the oars," he ordered Russell. "The tide is near slack. We'll be able to clear the passage easy."

A vicious shove sent Russell sprawling over the gunwale. He pulled himself to the seat amidship, nursing his swollen shoulder which had received a painful jolt.

"Never mind about that," yelled Ironfist, glowering. "Pick up them oars an' pull. I'm still boss, you know. Who ever heard o' the skipper rowin' his own gig when he had somebody to do it fer 'im?"

Russell cursed. The hook flashed in the moonlight, swished close to his face.

"Pull, I said!" bellowed the burly schooner captain, his dark visage reflecting a mounting rage.

Slowly Russell slipped the oars into the locks and gave way. The pain in his shoulder made him sick, but that hook and the half-mad man that wielded it, brooked no dissent.

DUDLEY settled himself comfortably in the stern and took the tiller. "Well, this ain't so bad." He chuckled mirthlessly. "I got *all* the pearls, an' a man to do my work for as long as I wanta use 'im." He leaned forward, thrust his smirking face close to Russell's. "When I git to Papeete, *diver,* my story's gonna be that all hands but me went down in the storm." His grin was fiendish in the half light. "Will they be anyone alive to deny it? No, I don't think so."

Black thoughts raced in Jack Russell's

whirling brain. That the treacherous Ironfist meant to finish him before long, was an assured fact. Probably would have sooner only that he saw a chance to get a little work out of him. Made him row. But that couldn't last long. Russell knew that his shoulder would soon be paralyzed. The pain, even now, was maddening.

They were nearing the boiling waters of the reef. A light breeze was making. It whipped the spume from the caps of the giant combers, sent it flying out over the calmer waters of the lagoon. Now they were headed straight for the narrow opening between the walls of crested rollers.

On nearing the spot, Russell could tell from the increased strain on his oars that the tide was racing in through the opening. The sound was deafening, as they were borne, up, up, on the incoming surge that boiled around them. For an instant the frail craft seemed to hesitate. Then, with a lunge, it shot down, borne with a terrific force. Hissing white foam creamed on both sides of the boat, threatened to close in and smother them. Another moment and they were through the narrows, out onto the wide expanse of open sea. After that soul-killing task, Russell slackened his pace.

"Pull, damn you, pull!" roared Ironfist as a giant wave rolled toward them.

Russell's blanching lips tightened in a grim line. "Go to hell!" he answered defiantly. He was in agony, torment, as he rubbed his aching shoulder.

"Pull, I said!" bellowed the captain again. A cold, hateful glare came into his eyes, made more deadly by the soft play of moonlight that traced a path of silver ahead of them.

Russell sat immobile, a challenge in his gaze. His glance never wavered as he watched his commander. The boat lost headway, was caught broadside on and whirled completely around, back toward the crashing, snarling breakers that thundered on the teeth of the reef.

In a panic at impending disaster, Dudley shouted. "Quick! Set the sail if you can't row!" With his good hand on the tiller, he bent forward, pointed with his hook to a set of lines directly behind Russell that rigged the small leg-o'-mutton.

Russell turned, gave them a cursory glance. A hard, wan smile played about the corners of his mouth. "Set 'em yourself, Dudley, I'm only a *diver.*"

Ironfist cursed, bellowed his profanity. Only seventy feet lay between them and the treacherous breakers now. "Set that sail!" he screamed at Russell, "or I'll rip yer guts out!"

THE boat was rapidly drifting with the swells, closer and closer to the seething, boiling mass of white water. Scarcely fifty feet lay between them and certain death on those jagged, dagger-pointed coral rocks.

With a cry of rage and fear Ironfist leaped to his feet, lunged at Russell, knocked him sprawling with the sudden, terrific swing of his driving fist. Grabbing at the makeshift halyards which were trailing at the butt of the short mast, he pulled frantically. The little boat spun as the sail filled and billowed in the strong breeze.

Ironfist made the lines fast to a cleat, spun around to take the tiller again. A bellow of profane rage burst from his hairy throat when he saw Russell standing in the stern, the tiller stick between his knees and an oar gripped firmly in his hands.

The amazed schooner captain came at him like a demon.

Russell swung the long sweep into Ironfist's stomach. The schooner captain emitted a sickening grunt, whipped a knife from his belt and sent it streaking at Russell. Russell ducked, prodded again with his oar. Ironfist lost his balance, went to his knees. The boat turned up dangerously. The snarling, crested rollers were less than half a dozen fathoms away.

Ironfist crouched, tried to grasp the jabbing oar. Russell, with superhuman effort, twisted it from the other man's grasp, sent it poking effectively again and again into the big captain's midriff.



The rolling craft wallowed in the trough of a mountainous swell. Dudley, bellowing with insane rage, brought his terrible hook into

play. He sliced to right and left, raised it above his head, brought it down with all the force in his big arm as he lunged. Russell, fighting now, with the last remaining ounce of his strength, lifted up his oar to ward off the blow as best he could. There was a loud *pluck!* as the needle-pointed hook struck the flat blade of the wooden sweep.

With a grunt of passionate fury, Ironfist jerked, tugged, pulled and twisted, but the hook remained fast in the blade of the oar. He could not draw it out!

Russell gave a quick, forward shove, forcing the burly captain against the gunwale. The giant's feet came in contact with the water cask which was rolling underfoot. He stumbled and slipped. He lost his balance, fell backwards into the sea with a gurgling scream, fighting, clawing at the shaft of wood that he could not shake off.

As the fangs of the greedy breakers sucked the tiny boat closer to their mad caldron, Russell caught up the trailing sheet, wrapped the line around his waist and brought her into the wind.

Another moment of suspense while she was getting under way He looked back, saw the moonlight flash on the dripping blade of the oar, flung high on a snarling crest. Then the sail filled, the boat crept forward, away from that roaring, malignant reef.

NEARLY four hundred miles to the northwest would be the friendly island of Tahiti. But in between would be other islands, perhaps a chance trading schooner.

Russell heaved a great sigh of relief and exhaustion. From his mouth he took two large, lustrous pellets—the matched pearls! For nearly two days and nights he had concealed them there, one on each side of his jaw, far back under the tongue.

"Guess they'll be safe in my pocket now," he mused as he steered happily into the track of warm moonlight.

c o m i n g s o o n

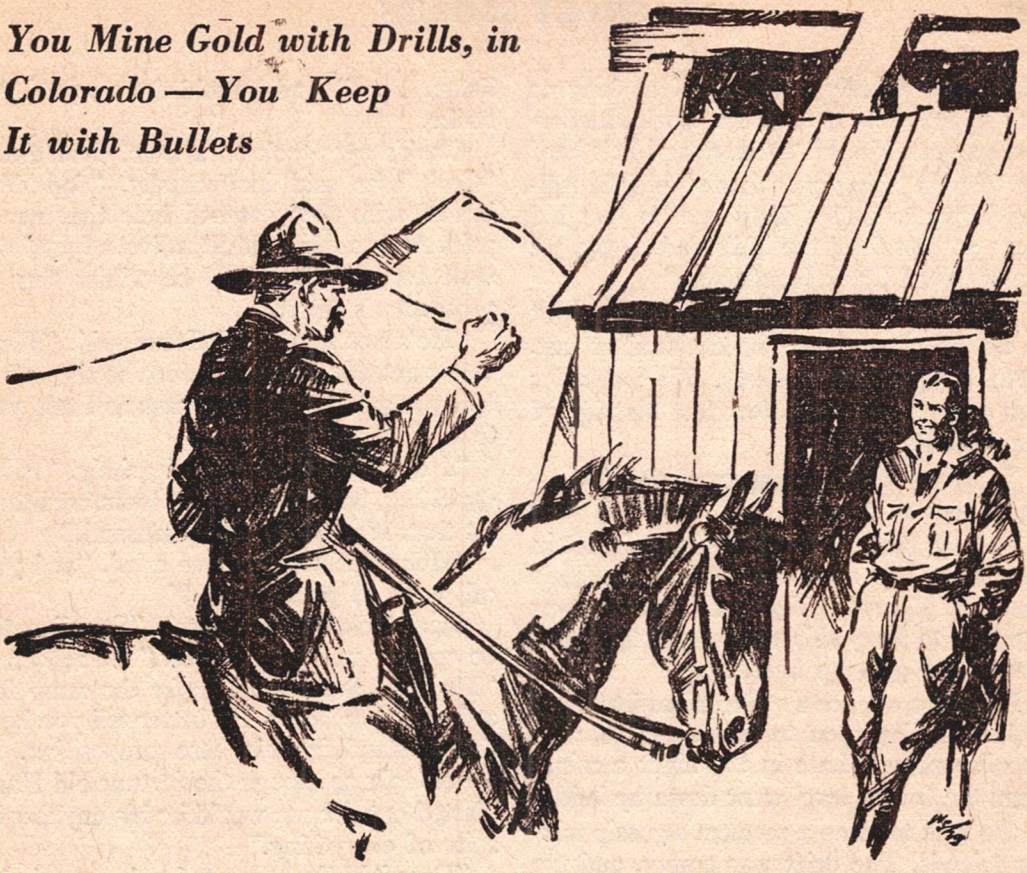
Hell's Noon Whistle Blows

a great logging novel by

ROBERT E. PINKERTON

c o m i n g s o o n

You Mine Gold with Drills, in Colorado — You Keep It with Bullets



GOLD

By BURT LESLIE

FOR more than fifteen years the Elkhorn mine yielded a steady output of low grade gold ore sufficient to make "Hard" Sturdivant one of the richest operators in the State of Colorado. Then late one afternoon the day shift on the fifth level, five hundred feet below the surface of the earth, set an unusually heavy blast. It splintered a three-foot plate of blue quartz, tore holes in seven feet of talc, and when the men came back into the drift they faced the breast of a tunnel that gleamed and sparkled with pure gold.

The day shift stared aghast. The foreman swore. Then, suddenly a miner laughed.

"That's hot," he said. "Look at it—and that gold ain't on Elkhorn property at all. We've reached the boundary. That fortune ain't Hard Sturdivant's, it's Clark Henderson's."

There was a moment of impressive silence. The foreman leaned against the drift wall.

"It's true," he said in hushed tones, "and old Hard hates them Hendersons worse than the devil hates good holy water."

The foreman strode to the main shaft and yanked the bell rope signaling for the mine superintendent. Gaffney came down on the next cage.

"See here," the superintendent said a bit unsteadily, "we can't let this be known, men. I'll have to swear you all to secrecy until I notify Sturdivant. He's down at Denver."

One of the miners spat reflectively. "Gaffney," he said, "we all know Sturdivant's rock-hard and a mean-bitten devil.

He's been a bully and a thief as long as he's mined these mountains. Clark Henderson's a good kid. He's decent and he's hard up. Surest thing you know, old Sturdivant'll try to pull a dirty one on that kid same as he ruined the kid's dad. I say, we ought to tell Clark Henderson."

Gaffney looked them over. "We've got to notify Hard first," he declared at last. "That's just plain honesty. We work for him and this is still a few feet his side of the property line."

"Maybe," the foreman muttered. "Maybe, a foot or two."

Gaffney said: "Clark Henderson's not in the camp. His mine's not operating. He's down at Colorado Springs. I want your promise to keep this strike a secret until Sturdivant gets up here."

But news of such a strike is hard to keep. Gold that lies open to men's eyes has its peculiar power. Late in the night a miner from the fourth level went down by ladder to the fifth to swap a moment's gossip with his friends. The drift was empty, and the man stood unobserved, staring, mouth open, at the millions gleaming yellow and flashing back the light of the oil lamp hanging to his hat.

By morning the story was whispered everywhere throughout the mine. Men at the boarding house across the hollow heard about the rich gold strike, and they waited eagerly to go to work.

Among them was Steve Conley. Steve was engineer on the night shift, and, though nobody knew it, he was a close friend of young Clark Henderson's. He phoned to Clark at once. Young Henderson was in the camp three hours before Sturdivant. He was a tall, broad shouldered mountaineer with steel-blue eyes and a fighter's square, strong chin.

Steve Conley met him. Steve was short and stocky with swarthy features and black hair. He was also born to fight a good fight.

"You're rich," Steve told Clark excitedly —"richer than hell's soup, man."

Clark eyed the engineer coolly. "Thanks for the fairy story," he drawled. "I own a dud mine that dad left me and I got lots of debts."

"Yeah?" Steve triumphed. "Well you listen. . . ." And he told the story of the strike.

Clark's eyes took on a keen, clear glow. "Gosh," he said ineffectually, "dad died busted with that damned hole that never paid. And to think old Sturdivant found the stuff for me. Say, he'll be wilder than a prospector's burro."

"He's not here yet," Steve said. "We'd better get things going before he shows up. Did you get hold of some cash as I told you to do?"

"I did," Clark answered grimly. "All I could beg, borrow and steal from creditors. At that, it's a scant two thousand."

"Holy mackerel," Steve cried, "and you call yourself poor, buddy!"

Clark looked at his watch. "Sturdivant'll be coming up from Denver," he reflected. "That means he won't make the camp for at least three hours. I'd better tell you how things stand in this here proposition. It about looks as though the fortune old Hard blasted out for me would be his anyhow in spite of everything."

"Does it?" Steve wanted to know grimly. "How come that?"

Clark told him.

THE Henderson mine was called the Summit. Ten years earlier Clark's father had mortgaged it in order to get funds with which to sink the mine shaft still deeper. He had believed there was gold there, but he had never found it. Sturdivant had been his enemy from the old wild days when they had fought each other openly for mine rights. The mortgages on the Summit were to run ten years.

"They've got a month to go," Clark finished, "and I learned today that Sturdivant just bought them from their original owners. In just a month he'll own the Summit legally."

"I know. But Jumpin' Jude," Steve argued, "one shipment of yellow stuff like that we opened down at level five and you can buy the Elkhorn, let alone pay mortgages on the old Henderson shaft!"

"The point is," Clark said, "how to get the shipment?"

The Summit engines, boilers and other machinery had stood idle so long that the task of reopening the old Henderson mine

was a stupendous one. To get it into operation would take days of twenty-four hour driving, working three full shifts of men. The knowledge that in one month old Hard would foreclose staggered them.

"Anyhow," Clark said, "if Hard Sturdivant gets that gold, he'll find it the most expensive wealth he ever dug out of Globe Mountain. We start our little war today."

"I'm your army," Steve declared.

"In half an hour," Clark said, "the four o'clock shift will go on at the Elkhorn. How many of those muckers do you think we could hire to walk out this afternoon and open work for me?"

"Steal Sturdivant's men?" Steve grinned delightedly. "Why say, they hate his guts. What's more, they all saw that gold on the fifth. They know you can deliver when you promise double pay. Most of 'em'd be glad to see old Hard get walloped."

"Then you go get 'em," Clark said. "I'll meet them at the Summit fast as you send 'em up the hill."

"And, boy, will old Hard roar his powder down?" Steve laughed, and then left young Henderson, swinging across the hollow toward the boarding house.

CLARK HENDERSON climbed the shoulder of Globe Mountain by the old road his father had helped grade so long ago. Up there, the Summit shaft house rose bleak and desolate against the sky. Could he win?

The shaft house was unlocked. Clark stood a moment in the door. The place was damp and cold. Rust coated the rails on the old tramway leading from the shaft out to the waste dump. To his left was the steep stairs that led up to the engine room. Would the machinery work at all? From the foot of those stairs a door opened at the side into the boiler room where stood the boilers, pumps, air compressor and where the drills were stored.

Clark went in to look at the boilers. Steam would be the first essential. The coal bins stood empty.

He was still pondering the situation when the first of Steve's recruits arrived. They were careless of the consequences in this mad plan which they were entering. For them the game lay in sharing the struggle with young Henderson whom they all liked. They had known his father.

"Looks pretty dead here," Clark greeted them. "Reckon we can snap the old hole back to life?"

"Maybe," one said. "If you'd a-seen that



gold, young feller, you'd know she was alive all right."

"First off, we'll need coal," Clark observed, "and far as I know, the closest supply is down at the Elkhorn. What say?"

"Can we get away with that coal?" The man who spoke was laughing openly. "Give me a sack and a drill to use in case that red faced fireman down there needs a wrap."

Ore sacks were found. Old buckets were discovered. These were mine buckets, two feet in diameter and as many deep.

"Work fast," Clark said. "This is a case where time buys bacon."

STURDIVANT reached the Elkhorn mine soon after dark. He found it practically deserted. Up where the Summit had stood dark, silent, cold, so many years, he saw the gleam of many lights, the red flare of boilers under heavy fires, and his ear caught the steady throb of pumps, the sharp metallic ring of hammer upon steel where drills were being sharpened at the forges.

Sturdivant's heavy jowls shook with rage. His narrow, mean eyes glittered. He drove his horse straight up the mountainside. At the Summit's door he halted.

The great pipe, leading from the mine to a deep ditch outside, belched a stream of heavy yellow water. Up in the engine room, Steve Conley and a dozen men were overhauling the big double drum hoist. The cables were badly rusted. Afraid to trust them, Steve had dispatched two men across Globe Mountain to comb the other mines for extra cable. Opposite the door in which Hard Sturdivant stood glaring, men were rigging up the cages. Tram cars were being put in shape. The forges glowed, and hammer clanged on anvil. Miners who had not sharpened steel for years were lustily

turned blacksmiths. Clark Henderson met old Hard cheerfully.

"Excuse us, Hard," he said, "if we don't stop to serve tea, won't you? Time's precious just now."

"You're an impudent young thief," Hard roared, and miners near enough to hear loitered with covert grins to listen in. "You stole my men. You stole my coal. I'll make you pay for this."

"I'm willing to pay for the coal," Clark said. "I expect to pay the men." He took a roll of bills from his pocket. "Coal at the market price plus haulage——"

Sturdivant choked and stamped his feet. "Keep your filthy money," he thundered, "I'll sell you nothing!"

"I think," Clark murmured, "a debt is cancelled if the creditor refuses payment. I have the coal."

"You'll wish it was hell's coal, and you was warmin' in it before I get through with you," old Hard bellowed.

"You know," Clark said, "I seem to remember hearing my dad tell how you once confiscated coal and tools that belonged to the Henderson's. Thanks for the example, Hard."

Hard Sturdivant turned away, only to whirl and snap, "The boarding house'll be closed tonight."

"I guess that'll be just fine," Clark told him. "I'll have tents here and up by morning and I've hired Mrs. Flaven to handle my commissary tent. She'll be out of your cookhouse before daylight."

Sturdivant went back to his horse, swung to his saddle and, giving the animal a vicious cut with his rawhide, galloped away.

The main camp was over the brow of Globe Moutain, more than five miles from the mines. He wanted to reach the telegraph office, and he hated the distance that hindered him.

TWO days were required to get the Summit mine cleared for real operations. They were days of incessant labor, and the men worked with a will that spoke more eloquently than their words, if not of their liking for Clark Henderson, certainly of their long dislike for old Hard Sturdivant. Those two days ate up money. On the third day, Clark found that over fifteen hundred of his nineteen hundred dollars was gone. He called the men together.

"I told you at the start that I was hard up," he said. "It's taken most of my ready cash to get us going. You know the layout underground. If we make it, we're all set. If we don't," he paused, "I'll likely owe you wages. I can keep you fed, though, until we have a try. If any of you feel that the chances are too great against us, I won't blame him for pulling out; it's a man's place to look out for himself."

The men gave him a cheer. In a way, they were out on a lark and they were enjoying it. After all, whatever the niceties of legal justice might be in this matter, the men felt that Clark was justified. All of them knew the story of how old Hard Sturdivant had fought his father, old man Henderson, to the break years earlier. All of them knew that Hard would never have let the news of the strike out until he owned the Summit. That was good business, maybe, but it wasn't to their liking. They went to work to cut a drift from the bottom of the Summit through toward the gold strike.

Meanwhile, Hard Sturdivant was getting his forces moving. Within those two days he had gathered from the camp enough men to resume operations in the Elkhorn. Most of these were honest miners and Hard set them at honest mining.

None of them were asked to work on the fifth level. Three days later, however, fifty hard-featured city gunmen reached the camp and were conveyed at once to the Elkhorn. Hard quartered them in the boarding house. They were to higrade the fifth level ore and haul it under guard to the smelters.

Clark Henderson called a meeting of his men.

"The presence of gangsters means that Sturdivant wants open fighting, men," he said. "Gang warfare has always been Hard's method of bullying his way in these mountains. It was with a gang of cutthroats that he finally broke my father. I don't intend to let him break me that way, but if we can avoid it, I don't want open war. That means hardship and bloodshed, and bitter memories. We've got some three weeks yet in which to win. I'm going to

leave the mine to you. I'll go to Colorado Springs and if need be, to Denver. I'll see the banks and tell them how things are up here. If I can raise enough to pay the mortgages before they're due, we'll settle all this peacefully. It's the best way; and I believe that I can get the money now. I've called you because I want your full support in everything that's done. Does this plan suit you all?"

Among the miners were a few old heads who could remember when Clark's father failed because of his unwillingness to take the right into his hands and settle it with violence. Did Clark imagine that Hard Sturdivant would leave a loophole for a peaceful triumph of his enemy? Yet, Clark was right. They knew this, and they wished him well. It was agreed that they would drive the tunnels, and that he did well to try to arrange a loan with the big bankers. Clark Henderson left the camp that night.

He was gone for eighteen days. During that trying interval he visited the mining bankers in three cities, and from them he learned how thoroughly Hard Sturdivant made war.

The Elkhorn was incorporated, and every banker of note held stock in it. Hard's lawyers had been prompt to notify them that early the next month this stock would treble and quadruple in value. The Elkhorn, they were made to understand,



had struck the richest vein discovered in the State for years. Its future only waited the fusion with the adjoining Summit property, and this would come when the mortgages in Sturdivant's possession fell due.

Clark Henderson was received courteously, listened to with interest—and loans were declined him with regret. He returned to the Summit camp desperate, to face a struggle that was marked by a long sequence of accident and devilish disaster.

Two wagons hauling coal to the Summit mine unaccountably lost a rear wheel, and tons of coal were wasted. The Summit powder house, stocked with half a ton of dynamite, was blown up in the night.

Steve Conley, the engineer, reported these and other troubles.

"We've got a traitor among us, Clark, or a hireling of Sturdivant's. Twice our pumps have been jammed and wasted a day for us each time. The air compressor was tampered with and we had to miss a shift before we could get it pumping air into the mine again." His face was set. His eyes burned with repressed anger.

"Well, Steve, I failed completely. How about the tunnel? Will we make it?"

Steve did not answer him at once. The silence was more powerful than words, however. At last he shook his head.

"It's hard quartz every foot of the way," he said. "Working like a pack of devils, we can't cut through that fast enough."

Clark said, "We've got to. In just six days I have to get at least one shipment of that gold down to the smelter."

TWO days later, in spite of careful guards, the Summit shaft house burned. The only available water was that pumped from the mine, and there was no adequate equipment to make use of it. The big frame building had stood for years; dry, it burned like matchwood, and Clark Henderson's men stood helpless watching it.

Clark drew Steve to one side. His face was white and set.

"Steve," he asked, "will the men follow me, no matter what I do?"

"Most of them will," Steve said, "the rest don't count."

"Then tell them to gather at the mess tent an hour after midnight," Clark commanded. "We'll get that shipment of gold out tonight. Have teamsters, and wagons ready below the Elkhorn tram."

Promptly at a quarter after one o'clock a group of armed men made their way down the hill from the Summit to the coal chutes of Sturdivant's mine, the Elkhorn, and stopped there, waiting for a signal. A similar group, under Steve Conley's guidance, crouched and waited for the same signal below the northern windows to the engine room. Still a third body of miners moved well around the hill and, creeping up past the mine dump, stopped just outside the ore house doors.

Clark Henderson led the largest body directly toward the Elkhorn's wide eastern shaft house doors. Inside, the tram man talked with half a dozen gangsters who lounged against a work bench. To all appearances these men were idling, but there was tension in their bearing. Hands hovered near their guns. From time to time they glanced expectantly into the night outside. Under the bluish yellow light of the big oil lamps swinging from the shaft house beams their faces showed taut, concentrated, watchful. There were others who waited with the same strained caution in the engine room, the boiler room, and down in the ore house. They were expecting the attack.

Clark gave a shrill short whistle. Followed by his miners he dashed upon the shaft house.

Simultaneously guns spoke at every point where his men waited. The night was shattered with the flash and roar. Down at the ore house three men with double sledges battered the doors while others waited close behind, guns ready.

Into the boiler room, through the coal chutes, poured the men from the Summit mine. They were received by Hard Sturdivant's gunmen. Steve Conley and his followers hurled themselves through the north windows into the engine room. There was a fury of lead to greet them from gangsters hidden back of the big hoists.

Clark Henderson and his group were in the shaft house. A rain of bullets poured from their six-guns as they charged. Sturdivant's gangsters answered with terrific fire.

And next instant the area around the yawning shaft was dense with smoke and full of fighting men. Ahead of him, across the open mine, Clark Henderson saw two gunmen. His revolver spoke. One of the two plunged forward. His body toppled and went down the shaft.

Bullets tore at Clark's coat. His hat was riddled. He fired pointblank at the man opposite. The heavy lead took the gangster full in the stomach. He crumpled, coughing, by the shaft. From the left flank, where the tram doors were open, other Sturdivant gunmen poured a volley upon the attacking miners. Clark whirled to face their fire. A bullet ripped his sleeve and burned into his arm.

Around young Henderson men surged, fighting hand to hand now. A burly gangster rushed him. Braced for the shock, Clark hurled his empty gun in the man's face. They met and locked. The gangster tried to lift him from his feet. They surged toward the open shaft. Men shouted and a mass of heaving striking bodies crashed into them.

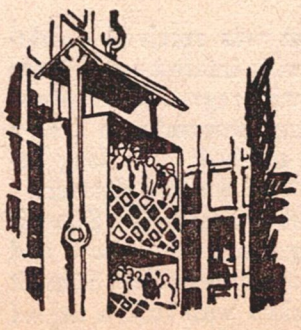
Clark gripped the gangster's throat, drove a knee upward, into the man's stomach. They fell together.

Bullets tore the floor around them. The din was deafening. Smoke thickened the damp air. Someone yelled. Clark Henderson struck his man a short, straight blow that crashed the gangster's head against the steel tram track. The body under Clark grew limp. He tore free and sprang to his feet.

From the windows separating shaft and engine room came Steve Conley's exultant shout. "We've got the engines, Clark! I'm pulling up the cages. Get ready with your men to go below!"

Clark leaped to the shaft and waved his hat. Twenty of his picked crew gathered with him.

AROUND them there was still mass fighting. In the boiler room and down in the ore house the battle raged without pause, but the Summit men were everywhere in the majority and Clark Henderson had no misgivings as to the outcome. Meanwhile, down on the fifth level, Hard Sturdivant waited grimly with a picked group of gangsters. The cages whirled to the mine mouth and stopped. Clark and his followers leaped aboard. A signal flashed to Steve. The cages plunged abruptly downward.



The speed of that descent into the earth was like the fall of a plummet. The lamps on the men's hats flared upward, the flames wavering, sputtering

and all but dying. Then suddenly, the cages stopped. The men stepped into the drift and halted.

"Lights out," Clark ordered. There was a faint sound as the miners' lamps were snuffed out. Pitch darkness swooped upon them.

"Wait here," Clark said. Then feeling with his foot for the narrow tram track, he followed it back through the drift.

Three quarters of the way along the drift there was a sump. This deep pit reached from wall to wall and was crossed by a tram bridge. It was designed to catch the water perpetually draining from the tunnel.

Clark Henderson moved ahead until he felt himself upon the bridge. There, he stood still to listen. There was no sound. No lights gleamed in the drift ahead.

"Listen, Sturdivant," Clark called, "we've got you like rats in a trap. Will you surrender or must we blast you out?"

The roar of twenty guns tore the thick silence. The air was filled with smoke. Out of the darkness came a rain of lead. Bullets spattered around Clark Henderson, tore splinters from the supporting beams to right and left, chipped bits of rock from the drift overhead. A single volley set the mine alive with heavy echoes. Clark waited till the silence came.

Still no lights showed. Again, no sound was audible. Were the men there with Sturdivant waiting? Were they advancing?

In spite of the air pumps the tunnel was stifling hot and thick with foul air.

Clark moved a few steps forward, his hands out in the Stygian black. Lungs ached. Eyes burned. Ears strained.

Halfway across the bridge he halted. His fingers touched some object. Hands seized him. He gripped the unseen enemy. The two men stood, locked, motionless, upon a bridge not more than two feet wide. Then, swiftly, with simultaneous release of pent-up energy both men strained. They bent and swayed together.

Clark Henderson knew that he was fighting for his life, intuition told him the man he was struggling with was Hard Sturdivant. One slip, one false step, now, and he would plunge into that rock hole beneath, a well of heavy yellow water from which no living man could ever climb.

Clark could see nothing. His arms were locked about the body of his antagonist. Arms were locked about his waist. The two men strained and swayed. Their breathing was the only sound. This side, then that, they bent at the waist, feet gripping the narrow bridge beneath.

Clark threw his full weight forward. His right hand felt its steel-like way toward the unseen enemy's throat, tense against his shoulder.

The other man drove a fist into Clark's stomach. They parted slightly, then gripped again. This time, Clark bent low. His arms caught the thick limbs of Hard Sturdivant above the knees. He heaved up sharply. The man doubled, but his arms were fast around Clark. Together they crashed full length on the bridge.

In the swift twist of straining bodies there in the pitch black, each man felt for a sure hold. Together they writhed sideways.

Their heads were over the bridge now. With one hand Clark gripped the rail. With his knee he pushed against his enemy. But Sturdivant's grip held. Then both men slipped, swung over the bridge side and hung there.

CLARK was suspending himself by one hand. Hard Sturdivant was hanging to him. As Clark reached with the other hand to grip the rail, Hard made a heaving effort to pull himself up by Clark's body. The strain was terrible. They swung and thrashed the thick air.

Above them, at either end of the sump, men gathered, listening. But the fighters had no breath to shout.

Using Clark's body, Hard Sturdivant was pulling himself up to safety.

Clark felt beneath the bridge with his feet, searching for a crossbeam of the supporting truss. He found it. His foot lodged in the angle made by two beams. With this to help sustain his weight he let go of the rail with one hand, struck fiercely at Hard's face, seized the throat of the Elkhorn's owner and tore downward with all the strength he could command.

Hard Sturdivant choked and his hands gave. He uttered a shrill gasp; then swung

out, and down into the yawning black pit below.

Men of both sides heard the yell; they swore with the tension of uncertainty.

Clark Henderson drew himself to the bridge. He was gasping for air and his arms ached, but he could not stop now.



If either side made the mistake of flashing a single torch, there would be a hell of gunfire.

"Hard Sturdivant is dead," Clark choked, still prostrate on the bridge. "For God's sake, don't you men go on murdering each other."

There was a moment of awed silence. Clark raised himself and faced the gunmen.

"Listen, my men have dynamite," he added. "One stick thrown into this drift will bury you all under tons of rock. Hard's dead. What have you to gain now?"

There was a pause. The silence lay like lead upon them all. The heat was burning their fevered skins.

"All right," a thick voice spoke from the drift head, "we won't fire. Give us light."

"Light!" Clark ordered, and a score of matches flickered. A score of lamps were lit. The groups at either end of the sump blinked like men suddenly shocked awake. They stared at Clark, then drew to the sump and looked down.

The yellow surface of that mud-thick water was like a hideous fester.

"Well," one of Hard Sturdivant's gunmen spoke, "I guess you win, young fella. We told old Hard not to tackle you that way, but he'd settled other scores like that over a sump. He 'lowed he could again. Here's to you!"

"All right, men," Clark said slowly, "we'll get above ground now. We need fresh air."

They moved to the two cages silently. Clark signaled. And as the cages started upward he spoke to himself.

"Well, dad—I guess we'll mine Globe Mountain after all. Too bad we can't be doing it together."

The cages broke into the open air. Men stared to see who would step out of them and who be carried. The story was told swiftly. A silence followed, then Steve Conley spoke.

"Well, Clark," he said, "you done a good job. Let's get to minin' gold."

The miners burst into a cheer.

"We have to," Clark said grinning; "I got a lot of bills to pay. Let's dig!"

coming soon **coming soon**

A "Singapore Sammy" Story

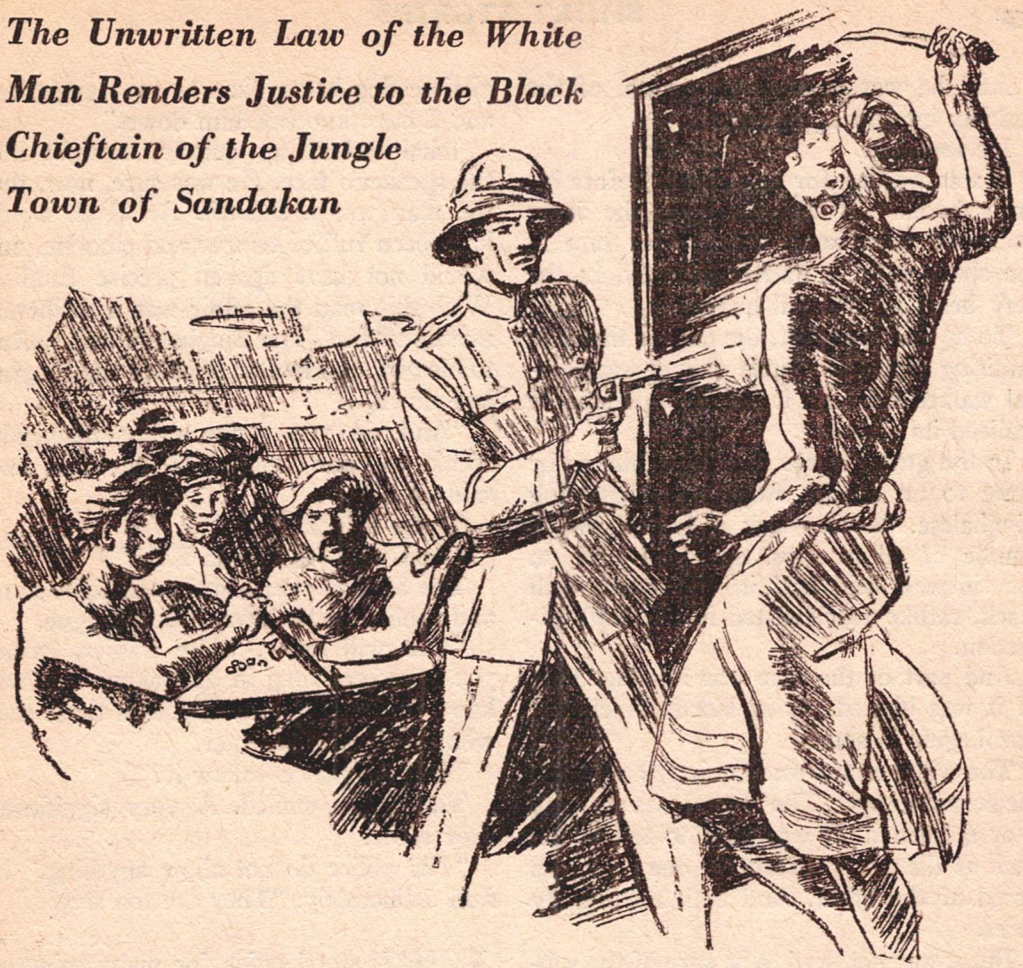
The Pink Elephant

by

GEORGE F. WORTS

coming soon **coming soon**

The Unwritten Law of the White Man Renders Justice to the Black Chieftain of the Jungle Town of Sandakan



BORNEO BRAG

By HUGH B. CAVE

Author of "Ten Paces," "The Green Eyes of Confucius," etc.

SANDAKAN is the last place in the world for a white man—especially if that white man be wearing a too clean uniform without blood stains, and if he be a gentleman underneath the uniform.

In the first place, Sandakan is one of the most remote British indents on the jungle coast of Borneo, feebly infringing on a region of fever, many snakes, sumpit blowguns, and sudden rebellion. In the next place, the British police who patrol the native quarter of Sandakan have wisely fitted themselves to their jobs. They are not the most refined soldiers in the East.

Johal, therefore, was the last white man in the world who should have gone to Sandakan. But he went.

He went because the British authorities sent him. Because they recalled him from a captain's post in the Khyber region, and ordered him to make radical changes in Borneo. Also, he went because he wanted to go. For in spite of his smooth face, with its too youthful eyes, and in spite of his immaculate uniform, the boy was no soldier of the tin parade. He had been among the Afridi of the north and the Shinwari of the south—who had obligingly shortened his name (as they generally do with a white man) from John Halliday to Johal.

And he was looking for action, of the sudden, interesting variety.

He found it.

It was waiting for him almost before his army boots had clicked across the fever docks of Sandakan. Waiting for him in the shadows of a native doorway, in the very heart of the evil quarter.

To be more explicit, the danger that was awaiting him was double danger—and Johal walked between it before he suddenly realized its presence.

In the gutter, three feet from him as he came to an abrupt stop, lay a crawling Singhalese. In the dark it looked like a bundle of filthy rags, sprawled half on the sidewalk and half in the street, with black, ratlike face twisted in the boy's direction.

And part of the face was missing. Part of it was blotted out in blood, which had just begun to spurt.

The white man turned quietly and faced the second danger. The second was an Arab —or a Suaheli. It was hard to tell in the dark of the musty street, for one is a cross breed of the other. And both are mighty races.

But it was not hard to be sure of the subdued hate in that massive body, and the fury in that set, snarling face. It was not hard at all to see the strength in those rigid shoulders, which stood six feet and several inches above the ground.

And there was something else—almost smothered by the shoulders. There was a girl.

Johal looked at her quietly. She was young and, for a Suaheli, somewhat pretty. Also, she was frightened; and she clung to the giant native as if she had been flung against him. From the shelter of his arms, she returned Johal's stare.

"What is wrong here?"

Johal stepped forward as he spoke. His glance shifted quickly from the upright Suaheli and the girl to the prostrate figure who was crawling to his knees in the gutter.

There was no answer. Not until the huge Suaheli had studied every line of the white man's face, and peered intently at his uniform, did those thick lips open.

"There is nothing wrong," the Suaheli said finally, in precise English. "The Singhalese dog has spoken to my daughter—and I have knocked him down."

Johal looked up quietly, straight into the speaker's face. He was sure, now, that the man was a Suaheli. An Arab would have been full of temper and emotion, and would not have spoken precise English. With this man the affair was a deliberate matter of fact. The Singhalese had spoken to his girl, and he had knocked the Singhalese down.

"And do you strike every man who speaks to your daughter?" the white man said evenly.

"I am Lunda Kal."

"And who—is Lunda Kal?"

The Suaheli returned that straight stare, and replied in the same exact tongue.

"You will know, white soldier, before you have been long in Sandakan. You will know also that Lunda Kal kills those men who insult his daughter."

"And the police—allow it?"

The native smiled. A very significant, slow smile.

"The police do not allow anything," he said deliberately. "They are too stupid."

JOHAL stood quiet for many minutes. Then he turned away. There was really nothing more to say. In the gutter the Singhalese dog who had felt the weight of Lunda Kal's hand had crawled to his feet and scurried away. As for Lunda Kal, he stood there, holding his girl with mighty arms. He would probably continue to stand there until the white officer went away.

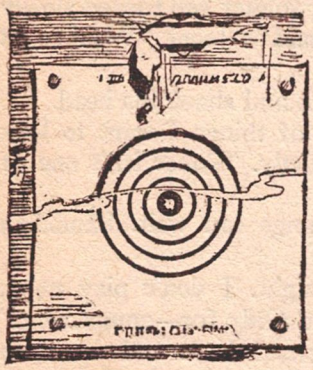
Johal turned quietly, then, and continued along the dirty street. As he went he saw little of the filth and squalor of his surroundings. His thoughts were centered quite entirely on Lunda Kal and the girl—and Lunda Kal's fierce love for that same dark-skinned daughter.

It was a short time later, hardly more than five minutes, when Johal reached police headquarters. And there again he found the action he sought. There again it was waiting for him.

When he stepped across the dirty sill, with one hand on the door, a revolver bullet pinged abruptly into the wall, not three feet from his shoulder.

He stopped suddenly. His feet remained

braced; but his head turned and his keen eyes took in the pasteboard target on the wall, where the bullet had scored a neat bull's-eye. Then he smiled and stepped forward. In the middle of the room an ape-like figure, in dirty officer's uniform, turned to look at him, gun in hand.



"Well—and what do *you* want?"

The voice, like the face, was coarse. It harmonized precisely with the dirty room and the blocked shoulders of the man with the gun. Johal did not remember when he had seen a white man's shoulders so broad—or features so swaggering. The shoulders were almost as mighty as those of Lunda Kal, the Suaheli.

Johal moved quietly into the room. Inquiring eyes were staring at him, and inquisitive faces were turned in his direction. The boy was quite aware that they were sneering. It was a long time, evidently, since these men of the British Foreign Service had looked upon a clean uniform and a face to suit.

"You expected me," he said. "Captain John Halliday is the name."

The big fellow continued to stare. His lips parted slowly in a bewildered grin. Not at all a complimentary grin. He, too, wore a captain's uniform; and because the man before him was young, he took liberties in addressing him.

"And you—you're the chap that's goin' to take charge here?"

"That's what I was sent here for."

The fellow turned around with an abrupt jerk—but not abrupt enough to hide the leering grin on his mouth. His hand, holding the revolver, swung in a broad circle, including all those other faces that were still staring.

"Meet your new chief, you fellows," he said loudly. "A hardened soldier he is—with a nice clean suit to impress the niggers. Come to clean up the native hole and make a gentleman out of Lunda Kal!" Then, dryly, "Show the captain up to his quarters while I punch a hole in this bull's-eye again."

HE SWUNG about again, with a meaning laugh. The gun came up, spoke once. A second neat puncture dotted the cardboard target beside the first. In the black circle, dead center.

"Guess they don't shoot like that where you come from, Halliday?" he said pointedly. "Guess you got a few things to learn about Borneo."

Johal stopped quietly in his tracks and stood very still. Then he turned slowly, to look directly into the big fellow's grin.

"I learn easily," he returned. "Where I came from they shoot at men—not cardboard."

That was all. The big man had no reply. Before he could discontinue staring and grope for a fit answer, Johal had turned again and was following a uniformed soldier toward the rear of the room.

The man with the gun said nothing, until a full instant after Johal had gone. Then, with a heavy sneer, he faced his comrades.

"He's right handy with words," he said. "If he's goin' to run this department with a lot of sweet language, there won't be much left of Sandakan."

"No?" The reply was a soft one, and came from one of the many faces. "Perhaps a few soft words wouldn't do any harm here, Robb. Perhaps we get too much of the other kind."

Once again Robb was too slow to grasp the meaning of the comment. Too slow to understand that these men did not think as much of him as he thought of himself.

"I'm not takin' my orders from no dude captain," he rasped. "Mart Robb does what he damn well pleases. He's been boss here for a good long time, and he's not steppin' aside for any sweet kid captain."

"Unofficial boss, Robb."

"What of it? Don't I know the ways of these murderin' niggers? Don't I know how to handle 'em? Wasn't I the man who doped out the scheme to get Lunda Kal through his girl? Did your blasted kid captain think of that?"

"No—you did that, Robb." The reply

was significant, but much too subtle to seep into Mart Robb's intellect.

"Right. *I* did it."

"You did it, Robb. You're the only man on the force who could think up a rotten scheme like that, and carry it through. You have all the credit."

Nothing subtle about that. It penetrated. But it brought only a nasty, triumphant smile to the big fellow's lips.

"And I'm the only man on the force who has guts enough to go after Lunda Kal!" he snarled back. "The rest of you are too damned yellow."

The faces dissolved. They did not argue with Robb; they knew better. The revolver in Robb's fist was a good one, and the trigger finger of the fellow's right hand was in excellent practise. Moreover, the great I Am was ever ready to curl that finger and pull it home, especially when the warmth of an argument raised that tell tale red flush on his bull neck.

So the men in the room merged back into the shadows. They were not afraid; but they did not like the man who faced them. Men who have faced death in the East do not approve of conceit, or the great I Am spirit. They like simplicity. And courage.

Four of them remained at the table, near the door that had closed on Johal. While they sat there, in a cloud of cigarette smoke, with a pack of cards spread over the board before them, Mart Robb went back to his cool, methodical practise of shooting bullets into the bull's-eye of the target. In Borneo it pays to keep in trim. It pays to be able to hit—the bull's-eye.

HALF an hour later, when Captain Johal stepped through the doorway and re-entered the room, the four uniformed men at the table were quite deeply rooted in a game of stud. Mart Robb was quite as deeply engaged with cleaning a dirty revolver barrel.

The stud game had progressed to the point where two thirds of the money was in one pile. Three cards were under each man's hand, and the fourth was being dealt. On the other side of the room, the gun cleaning was progressing more slowly, because Robb was principally interested in something else. The something was the quiet conversation that passed between Johal, of the un-dirty uniform, and the man who was dealing the cards.

That particular soldier had turned slowly in his chair and said to Johal, "Want to sit in, Captain?"

The boy smiled, and shook his head.

"There's a lot of things I want to look into," he said quietly. "Poker isn't one of them."

"The other things can wait. Sandakan won't rot."

"No—but I might. I don't play much poker, Lieutenant. Only for—amusement."

The fellow turned back and went on dealing. He didn't bother to shrug his shoulders. White men, when they have lived a long time in Borneo, don't go in for useless gestures.

But Robb heard it. He looked up casually from his gun as Johal came past him to the door. He said dryly; "Don't play much poker where you come from, do they, son?"

Johal stopped. Turned.

"Don't they?" he returned quietly.

"Well, if they're all like you——"

"They're not."

"Maybe it's a good thing. Out here we play a lot of poker. It's restful. Keeps a man from thinkin' about the heat and the niggers too much. Some day I'll teach you the fine points of the game."



Johal smiled, very evenly. Not much of a smile, but enough to harmonize with the quiet eyes.

"Thanks," he murmured dryly. "Thanks—a lot."

Robb nodded. He was not sure, exactly, whether the boy's tone of voice was significant or not. Perhaps the kid was merely thanking him; perhaps he was trying to be nasty. Robb's mind was a bit too sluggish to be sure.

He lifted the revolver carelessly and pointed it at the target. Over the sharp report and the spray of smoke, he glanced at Johal and grinned again.

"Don't do much shooting in your end of the earth, either, I guess," he said. "Not shooting like that. Shoot tin ducks and things, don't they?"

Johal looked quietly into the man's face; then down at the blocked shoulders and the unwashed uniform. And finally at the target, where the bullet had scored in the inner circle.

"You're a pretty good shot?" he asked quietly.

"Me? A good shot! Well, I don't do much bragging, son—but there isn't a man in the East who can pull a gun quicker and——"

Robb turned his revolver over with an attempt at carelessness. An attempt so full of the great I Am that it brought a slow smile to the boy's lips.

"Now, where you come from——" the big fellow began.

"Just where did I come from, Robb?"

"Just where did you——" Robb stopped abruptly, bewildered. He did not fully comprehend the boy's smile or the question. He looked sharply into that young, steady face, and found nothing there but a smile, nothing that would explain the boy's dry question.

"You're asking *me* where you came from?" he said slowly, groping for the words. "They sent you from London, didn't they?"

THE boy turned away again, still smiling.

"Did they?" he murmured.

And then he moved to the door, with Robb's bewildered stare following him. Even when the door had closed, Robb continued to gape. Was the boy crazy? Was he a blooming fool—or was he trying to put something over on the great god Robb? Robb was not sure.

But outside, young Johal went quietly along the narrow street. The smile had faded a bit, and his lips were set. These streets were strange to him, with their shadows and filth. He did not know them; and before he could hope to take charge of the soldiers back there in headquarters he would have to know all that they knew—and more. It would take a long time to learn the secrets of Sandakan's evil quarter. And if he was not careful, very careful, he would find a seven-inch knife in his back before he gained the information. Sandakan was like that.

These filthy streets were not the safest place for a lone white man whose uniform branded him to be a captain of the government police squad! For that reason Johal walked slowly, with both eyes open.

He stopped once, before he had completed the length of the street, stopped and turned quietly to watch a silent figure that moved past him. A girl, with half muffled face that bore the characteristic squareness of the Suaheli native. Something strangely familiar about her.

She was small, and dressed quite like a dirty scarecrow. Ragged, unwashed—but walking with deliberate slow steps that terminated in the shadowed doorway of the government building.

Johal made no move to stop her. Merely stood there, fifty yards from the doorway, and watched her as she stepped over the sill.

When she had disappeared inside, the boy moved forward again. But this time there was no remaining trace of the smile on his lips. They were set in a heavy frown of bewilderment.

He was a stranger here, and did not know the ways of Borneo. But why—why should the daughter of Lunda Kal go deliberately to the headquarters of the police? That question was first in his mind as he picked his way through the shadows.

It was not answered when he returned. Mart Robb who greeted him with a careless nod, did not mention the daughter of Lunda Kal. And the boy said nothing.

IT WAS two days later when Johal retraced his steps along that particular route. He knew his way now, and his steps were more confident. But they were still slow, and still cautious.

It was night, and it was raining. The streets of Sandakan's native quarter coursed under a murky, sluggish blanket of mud. Black buildings hung like spiders over the sidewalks. Windows drooled water.

Quietly, with one hand on the butt of his gun, Johal moved through the native quarter. On every side of him, smothered

in the darkness, came the sound of padded, slow footfalls and the subdued murmur of mongrel dialects. It was the sort of night when a white man, more especially a white officer, moves slowly and cautiously—with his fingers conveniently near a revolver.

In spite of it, a trace of a smile hung on the boy's lips. He was more at home in these surroundings now. A block away, deserted docks were over-run with fever rats; the dead smell of dried copra filtered through the streets. Behind these veiled doors lay the riff-raff of Asia: Singhalese merchants, Hindu money lenders, half-caste fishermen, Sikhs, Arabs, quarterbreeds. Silent figures stood in the doorways. Narrowed eyes were always watching.

Tonight, in particular, Johal noticed the eyes. They were keeping close check on every move he made. They were following him.

The boy's fingers closed a bit more firmly over the butt of his revolver. There was something sinister in the air tonight. . . .

Then, abruptly, the sidewalk behind him echoed to the soft patter of running feet. Naked feet. A querulous voice, high pitched and rasping, shrilled his name. A clutching hand closed over his arm.

Johal turned around sharply. For an instant he looked down at the ragged figure that confronted him. Then, shaking off the fellow's hand, "What do you want?" he said quietly.

The Singhalese brat was staring up at him with glittering eyes. The kind of shifting eyes that a white man does not trust. And when he spoke, the voice was a peculiar mixture of bastard English and pure Arabic.

"You come quick! Lunda Kal make murder!"

Johal's lips tightened. He suspected a trick of deception. The very eagerness of this ragged Singhalese was not genuine; it was too rapid. And then, when there is trouble in the native quarter, the natives do *not* come to a white policeman. They settle it themselves.

But Johal was a soldier. Even in Borneo, a soldier's job is to uphold the white man's law.

"Take me to him," he ordered.

The Singhalese gripped his arm again, dragging him forward. A dozen yards down the street he scurried, then turned into a narrow alley between black buildings. There, with more caution, he groped through the piles of refuse, clinging to the walls of the building.

Johal followed quietly, making sure that the Singhalese remained always in front—never behind. He knew this particular alley and the surrounding shadows. It was the hangout of the lowest natives of Sandakan. A white man, fool enough to storm that hangout, was not worth the name of a cigarette.



And there was something else. The Singhalese brat had spoken the name Lunda Kal. Lunda Kal was the mightiest of the Suahelis, the leader of the pack. In the whole of that evil quarter, Lunda Kal was the most to be feared. Only Mart Robb, back at headquarters, could match him in size; and no one, in the whole foreign service, could match him in courage. No one at all.

JOHAL'S lips formed a slow smile. Undoubtedly he would have a chance now to test the Suaheli's courage. The result would be—interesting.

But the Singhalese brat had stopped. Had come to an abrupt halt before a low door, half way down the alley, and was beckoning the white man to hurry. In another moment Johal reached the door and stepped over the sill.

He took two steps forward, in the dark. The door clicked shut behind him, with an ominous thud.

The boy whirled—and stood still. Then he smiled again. The Singhalese was gone. The door leading back into the alley was locked. Johal tried it to make sure; and the smile on his lips became grim.

They had trapped him. He was alone in the unlighted passage; and the only sound in the building was the dull scrape of his own boots.

For a long time he stood there, waiting.

There was no way back, no way out, except that narrow, sinister passage. A bullet might have shattered the lock on the door—but a bullet would have brought all the devils of this place to his throat. It was better, and quieter, to go forward.

He drew his gun outright, now, and tucked a ready finger into the trigger guard.

The Singhalese had led him here for a purpose, not for amusement. And the purpose was, without question, murder. An easy method of getting rid of the white police. Very simple and convenient. No mess, no fuss, no telltale left-overs.

Johal stepped forward deliberately. His steps were slow, scraping as they moved over the floor; and there was no other sound around him.

He was wondering when that maddening quiet would break into noise. When he would become the center of a hellish din, full of naked bodies and knives. They were waiting for him, of course. Probably they were watching every step he took, mocking his helplessness.

Then, tired of waiting, he straightened suddenly and strode forward. Deliberately he went the length of the passage and pulled open the door at the other end. And stood there, blinded for an instant by the sudden flare of yellow light from the room beyond.

He was not alone—not now. Inside the room, a dozen faces had turned to stare at him as he stood on the sill. Impassive, stolid faces without expression.

The boy made no move. Just stood there, revolver in hand, waiting. He was aware that there was movement in the room, that many of the faces had drawn back out of the light and were creeping toward him in the shadow of the wall. Working slowly forward, to get behind him where they could use knives with safety.

Still, he made no move. His eyes took in the stolid features of the men who still sat motionless, staring. Singhalese, most of them; and the room was filled with sluggish white smoke and the smell of opium. The tables were littered with tiny wooden cubes. The silent figures were bent over them—playing at the eternal game of the Orient—fan-tan.

It was nothing unusual. There were many of these dives in Sandakan. Many places where native shadows bent over ancient tables and played with wooden cubes. Much opium and much evil—as only the lowest of inter-bred natives know it. And they had brought him here for an obvious reason—to rid the police force of another soldier. Of its leader.

IT HAPPENED then, while Johal waited. Happened so swiftly that the stolid faces at the tables had hardly time to melt away into the safety of the shadows. A single creeping shape reached the wall behind the white man's shoulder. A half naked body, in filthy sarong, straightened abruptly and ceased creeping.

Johal whipped about. He was ready for it, had been watching for a long time, and waiting for the knife to come up. In the dead stillness of the room his revolver spat twice with a sharp glare of flame. The native with the knife turned slowly and fell on his face. The knife clattered from dead fingers, and fell to Johal's feet.

Then they came. They had intended to surprise him; to do the job neatly and quietly. They had failed. The result would still be the same, but now it would require weight and numbers, and many knives. And it would be messy.

But they were wrong. They did not figure on the courage behind that set face. They did not count on the boy's trigger finger, that had been trained among the Afridi of the Khyber Pass. They forgot that the man they were killing was an Englishman, and that his back was against the wall. An Englishman, with his back to the wall, is worth twenty half-breeds who smoke opium!

Johal hacked his way out. Coolly he emptied his gun into them until the last bullet had been fired. Then he swung the revolver around and gripped the barrel. Twice he stepped aside to let Arab knives imbed themselves in the wall behind him. More than twice he stepped forward abruptly and shook off a tangle of clawing forms.

Inch by inch he worked back. Back through the open doorway into the narrow passage, where the odds were not so heavy. There they could reach him only two at a

time. There, more than once, they stumbled over his outstretched boots and sprawled against his legs—where the revolver descended sharply and left them silent.

They would have killed him in the end. A man cannot forever keep his fists clenched and his eyes open. He cannot forever stand against a locked door at the end of a blind passage, and hurl back a tangle of seething natives. Eventually he must sag to his knees and go under—and then he stays under.

But the tangle was suddenly hurled aside, even as Johal lurched. The din of many voices became silent, and dissolved into a single rasping Suaheli curse. Through the passage came another figure—a huge, block shouldered fellow who hacked his way straight to Johal.

They shrank back from the newcomer, afraid of him. Johal caught their sudden whisper as they spoke his name. The name was Lunda Kal.

The boy's face lost some of its color as he heard it. He was tired—dead tired. A bloody welt ran the length of his forehead, and his eyes were blinded with it. He knew the fight was over. Knew that Lunda Kal, the mighty Suaheli, could smother him with only half an effort. And yet, when the big native confronted him, and the tangle of bodies receded to make room, the boy found strength enough to lunge forward. His clenched fist buried itself savagely in the Suaheli's face.

It was dragged down, as if it had never landed. With a snarl of pain the big Suaheli reached out and dragged Johal forward. Lifted him roughly from the floor and smothered his struggles. Then, without a word, Lunda Kal stepped to the door and wrenched it open, as if it had never been locked.



Johal was only half conscious of what had happened. He knew, vaguely, that the big Suaheli was carrying him back along the alley, in the shadow of the wall. He could see the man's face, with its straight, regular features. And he wondered why Lunda Kal had dragged him out.

THEN, quietly enough, Lunda Kal stopped and dropped his load. Not gently, not roughly—just indifferent. He made no attempt to discover how much the white man was hurt. He did not care.

With his foot he turned the boy over and looked down at him. He saw that the boy's eyes were open, watching him. Then, with a quick glance to make sure that those many devils had not followed, the Suaheli turned about to retrace his steps.

Johal's fingers closed over his leg, holding him feebly.

"Thank you—Lunda Kal——"

The Suaheli looked down again. His mouth twisted into a snarl.

"I want no thanks," he said harshly. "I do not love white soldiers."

"But—I won't forget——"

"Better you did forget. I brought you here, white man, because I do not like unfair fighting, not because I care if you die. I do not like the way those rats kill a man."

Johal forced a smile. It was not hard to smile up into those solid features and clear eyes. There is no race in the East so easy to admire as the Suahelis.

"Just the same, I won't forget," Johal said quietly. "You saved me from being mobbed, and——"

"Some day," Lunda Kal interrupted deliberately, "I will kill you myself. You are one of the police, and the police are like those rats who would have killed you. They deserve to die."

The boy waited. Something in that sudden bitter tone made him certain that more would come.

Lunda Kal stepped back. For a moment he hesitated, before he turned away. His parting words came in a quiet, impassionate voice.

"But when I kill you," he said, "I will have more of a reason than hate. And I will do it alone, not with twenty others to help me. If you are like a certain other white man that I know, you will surely die."

The words penetrated slowly, significantly. When the boy looked up again, he

was alone. The big Suaheli had stepped back into the shadows and disappeared.

For a long time, Johal lay there. His body was stiff, full of heavy pain. The blood had hardened on his face and would not wipe off. And he was fired.

In the end he groped slowly to his feet aud stumbled into the street. Somehow he found his way through the dark, through the narrow streets of the native quarter, back to the headquarters building. It took him a long time; and his steps were scarcely dragging when he at last reached the region of headquarters, more than an hour after leaving Lunda Kal's hangout.

But he was not too tired to straighten suddenly and stand tense when a huddled figure stepped abruptly out of the headquarters doorway and moved through the shadows beyond. He was not too tired to recognize the same huddled figure that he had seen once before in that district. The figure of Lunda Kal's girl.

He went forward slowly, with a bewildered frown. Many minutes later, holding himself upright with a savage effort, he pushed open the door of headquarters and stepped into the room.

FACES turned toward him, and stared. They did not speak; did not ask questions. Merely stared.

The first man to speak was Mart Robb. He stood by the table in the middle of the room, gaping at the bloody figure before him. Very slowly, then, he came toward the boy. His mouth opened in a puzzled grin.

"Well, and what happened to *you?*"

The boy returned his stare quietly.

"Natives," he said abruptly.

"Natives, eh? And what did you do—walk into some hell dive to show 'em how much of a man you are?"

"I did."

Robb stepped back and shook his head. Shook it heavily, pitifully.

"It ain't safe for you to live in Sandakan, son," he advised. "The way you shoot, and the way you fight, you ain't got any right to be holdin' down a man's job. Someone ought to teach you a few things before you go out alone again."

"Yes?" The boy spoke softly, as he walked unsteadily to a chair and lowered himself into it.

"Yeah. You better get cleaned up. Then come down and let me show you how to shoot, and how to fight. It's for your own good. Next thing you know you'll be runnin' afoul of Lunda Kal himself, and you'll get murdered so quick it won't even be trouble."

Johal said nothing. He had nothing, at that particular moment, to say. He had deliberately let himself in for this; and he had expected it. For a long time the great god Robb had waited for a chance to blow off and swagger—and now that the boy had come in with bloody face and battered body, the chance had come with him. There would be a lot of talk from the mighty Robb; and it would be better to listen—for a while.

With an effort to keep his head up, Johal got out of his chair and went across the room. At the door he turned again.

"I'll come back in a while," he said curtly. "Then you can teach me—how to fight."

Robb nodded. He was grinning as the door closed and Johal vanished. When the boy was gone, the big man turned triumphantly to the other faces in the room.

"Well, I guess I told you this would happen," he said. "I warned you the fellow was no soldier. Guess it's up to me to make a real fighter out of him."

There was no reply. The faces stared for a moment longer, then dissolved and lost interest. They were sorry, these men of the foreign service, that the young lad had thrown himself open to the sneers of the great Robb. But, after all, a beating or a killing is nothing unusual in the native quarter of Sandakan. It's to be expected, now and then, and it might happen to any white man. The boy was lucky to have come back at all. As it was, he'd soon get over it.

THEY were right. The beating was not permanent. An hour later, when Johal came through the door and across the room, the bloody face was clean again—and smiling. Without a word the boy took his place at one of the tables and lit a cigarette.

Mart Robb leaned over him.

"You ready for me to teach you a few things son?"

"Ready? Yes—of course."

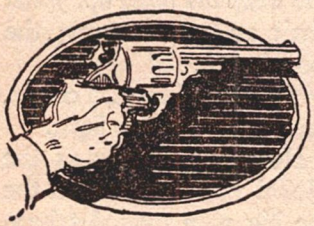
The big man drew his revolver and pointed to the pasteboard target on the wall.

"Think you can hit that bull's-eye from here the way I do?" he grinned.

The boy smiled. He could hit that target without trying twice; he knew that. But he was thinking of something else—of the daughter of Lunda Kal. In some way, he was sure, the girl and Mart Robb were strangely linked together. In some way, too, Lunda Kal knew about it—and there would be trouble. Under the circumstances, it was best to hold a card or two under the table. It was better to let the great Robb believe that he could *not* shoot a straight bullet.

"I'll try," he said softly. "I don't think I can do it."

Quietly he took the revolver from Robb's hand, and fired twice. The bullets went wide, intentionally. Robb saw it, and grinned triumphantly.



"Shootin' like that won't keep you alive in Borneo," he said. "Here—you got to learn to shoot like this."

The revolver spat again, abruptly. Dead center in the bull's-eye.

Johal nodded. Then, for a long time, he sat there and listened, and continued to listen, while the great Robb showed him each separate fine point of the art of shooting. The lesson lasted more than an hour; and during that time Johal kept strangely silent. He hardly heard the constant swaggering words of the big captain. Hardly heard the loud, concluding remarks about the wisdom of a quick draw.

"You got to learn to pull that gun out fast, son. I'm not expectin' you to get it out as quick as I do, because there ain't a man in the East can do that; but you got to be a lot quicker. Like this——"

For another ten minutes Johal watched and listened. Inwardly he was smiling. The great I Am was fast, no doubt of it, and he could shoot straight. But Johal had spent two years in the danger stations of the Khyber; and the Khyber, too, teaches a man how to draw a gun fast and shoot straight. Still, it was wiser to listen—and pretend ignorance.

In the end, Robb got to his feet and put the revolver back in his belt.

"Now I'll give you some pointers on usin' your two fists, son," he advised. "Just get out in front of me here, and learn somethin'."

Johal learned. He was clumsy—intentionally so. He made no attempt to meet the jabs and thrusts of Robb's none too gentle hands. He offered no defense; and did not reveal at all that he, too, knew something about in-fighting.

As a result, he drew a half-hour discourse, with many sarcastic, swaggering remarks, on how slow he was. He listened attentively—or so it seemed to Robb. But the boy did not improve much; and when the lesson was over, he was little better than before. It was wiser in this case, to pretend slowness. Until Johal knew the precise relationship between Lunda Kal's girl and the great Robb—and what Lunda Kal was going to do about it—it was better to be just a kid; a slow, ignorant kid who could neither shoot nor fight.

When it was over, the boy went out. Mart Robb turned to look at the many men who had been watching him; and the big man's face wore a grin of satisfaction.

"Guess the lad learned somethin' from me, all right," he sneered. "Guess he knows now who's the real boss of this outfit."

And once again, there was no reply.

TWO nights later, Johal left the headquarters building and picked his way silently through the native streets. He was tired of waiting. Tired of wondering about Lunda Kal and the girl, and about Mart Robb.

He knew only one thing—that Lunda Kal was different from the rats of the native quarter. He was the mightiest among them, and their leader; but he was also a Suaheli and a man. A killer, perhaps, but not a man who killed without reason.

Lunda Kal was the king of the native quarter. Should he die, the natives would be without a leader; and the incessant warfare between black and white would be ended. But, should Lunda Kal die, those same natives would tear to pieces the man who killed their leader. It was their way of doing things. And, until Lunda Kal

made the first move, the police could do nothing but wait.

Unless there was a reason for it, Lunda Kal would probably never make the first move. The white soldiers would have to keep on waiting and waiting—and Johal was tired of waiting!

The route he followed was an old one. It led through the darkest of the narrow streets, directly to a certain filthy alley in the rear of Lunda Kal's hangout. Johal had no definite reason for going there, except that he was tired of waiting. Perhaps, if he could gain admittance to that particular native dive, he might learn something. He might learn, for instance, the reason for the girl's regular visits to police headquarters.

It was a dead night, and hot. So hot that Johal walked slowly, with little attention to his surroundings. He saw nothing and heard nothing, until he reached the very street of his destination. And there, with a sharp intake of breath, he stepped abruptly into the shadow of a convenient doorway, and watched.

Less than a hundred yards distant, in the dark of the narrow street, a native figure, wrapped in dirty rags, came slowly toward him. A familiar figure; moving with short, nervous steps along the sidewalk. Lunda Kal's girl.

Johal watched her. He was wondering if she would go to the same native dive in which he had been trapped. Wondering, too, if she had come from—headquarters.

Then he shrank still farther against the wall, and stood rigid. Between him and the girl, a second figure had suddenly appeared—had suddenly stepped out of a hidden entry and was waiting for the girl to reach him. There was no mistaking that heavy, block shouldered form. No disputing the unclean captain's uniform and the heavy-jowled face. The man was Mart Robb.

And the girl was running now, with quicker steps, toward Robb. She spoke to him as she reached his side; and from the quick uplift of her face, Johal knew that the words were an exclamation of relief. Evidently she had been afraid that Robb would fail to keep the rendezvous.

Johal saw something else. Saw Robb grope quickly into his pocket and hand something to the girl. Saw the girl take it eagerly and thrust it into her dress. And then she turned quickly, as if she were afraid to be seen with the white man, and ran back. For a moment Robb watched her; then he, too, stepped back out of sight.

Johal waited until the fellow reappeared and strolled casually along the street, in the same direction that the girl had gone. Then, when Robb had disappeared again, the boy left his place at the wall and continued. More than ever he was determined to gain admittance to Lunda Kal's dive and find an explanation of what had just happened.

IT REQUIRED courage to penetrate that hangout again, after what had transpired before. But Johal had courage—courage bred in the Khyber region of India—and in half an hour he was moving cautiously through the treacherous alley, toward that certain door in the shadows of the building.

It took him longer, this time, to reach the barrier. There was no Singhalese to show him the way and point out the pitfalls. It was slow going, with every step guarded.

In the end, Johal found the door. His hand closed over the latch and pushed forward. The door slid quietly open, inward.



Without a sound, the boy slipped over the sill and drew the door shut behind him. Then, like a ghost, he crept along the passage.

This time he did not even reach the halfway mark. Almost before he had left the shelter of the door, a gleam of light split the passage like a knife. The inner door, at the farther end of the corridor, opened and closed abruptly. A small, deformed figure came toward him in the dark.

Johal shrank back, flat against the wall. The shadow had not seen him, he was sure of that. In the pitch blackness of the passage it was impossible to see anything. But in the brief second when that ray of light

had penetrated the dark, Johal had recognized the shadow.

The boy hung there, now, until the native was almost abreast of him. Then, like a cat, he stepped out. His hand closed over the native's mouth abruptly, smothering the exclamation of surprise that came from the twisted lips.

Noiselessly, Johal dragged the fellow back against the wall, and looked down into the black features. They were the features of the little Singhalese who had led him into this trap before.

And the recognition was double. The eyes of the Singhalese opened wide—very wide—in fear.

"Where is Lunda Kal?" Johal's words were strangely soft.

The native shook his head. He did not know.

"You know," the boy said grimly. "Tell me—or I take you back with me, to headquarters!"

The word headquarters did it. At the threat of death, the Singhalese might have kept silent; but if there is anything a half-caste native fears, it is the dread mystery of the white man's law.

"He go—to kill white man——" he whispered quickly.

"What white man?"

"Lunda Kal kill me if I tell!"

"And I will kill you if you don't. *What white man?*"

The Singhalese turned his head quickly, to look back along the passage. The place was dark, deserted. There were no eyes to see; no ears to hear.

He leaned forward tensely. His mouth was close to Johal's face.

"Lunda Kal go to kill white sahib Robb!" he breathed.

Johal was not surprised. He had expected it. He looked straight into the native's narrowed eyes, and spoke a single sharp word.

"Why?"

"White man kill Lunda Kal's girl. White man give her much opium for long time. She go crazy for opium. Go to him each day to get some more. White man make her tell what Lunda Kal do all time. And little while ago, Lunda Kal find out his girl—dead. Dead from too much opium. Lunda Kal go kill white man!"

Johal released his grip and stepped forward. For an instant he looked down at the Singhalese, studying that twisted face. No, the native was not lying. He was too afraid, too terrified at the thought of the white man's law. What he was saying was the truth.

IT WAS a clever trick—filthily clever. Robb had been poisoning the girl with drugs. She would be forced to come to him each day, pleading for the infernal white snow. And he would give it to her—after she had told him all that he wanted to know about Lunda Kal. Only a degenerate, twice brutal white man could have conceived such a rotten scheme.

And now, the drug had worked its evil. Too much of it, for a young girl. That last dose, which Robb had given to the girl less than an hour ago, had finished her. Lunda Kal had learned the truth. It would mean murder.

Then, suddenly, the boy remembered something else. Recalled the quiet words of Lunda Kal, spoken a long time ago, when Johal had first stumbled into him.

"Lunda Kal kills those men who insult his daughter."

And also those other words of Lunda Kal:

"But when I kill you . . . I will do it alone, not with twenty others to help me."

Abruptly, Johal gripped the Singhalese's arm again.

"When Lunda Kal left here, to kill the white man, was he armed?"

"Armed?" The word was a strange one. The Singhalese did not understand.

"Did he have a knife?" Johal said impatiently.

The native shook his head slowly.

"He leave knife here," he said deliberately. "Lunda Kal say he fight this white man with naked hands. He say only naked hands can repay what white man has done."

Johal nodded. Very quietly, then, he stepped away from the wall and retraced his steps along the passage. A moment later he stood outside the door, in the alley.

For many minutes he stood there, undecided. More than once his hand closed over the butt of his revolver—and released it again. He was an Englishman—a white

man—a soldier of the foreign service. And a British soldier believes, first of all, in honor.

In the eyes of the law, it was his duty to follow Lunda Kal—and arrest him. But to arrest Lunda Kal would mean to kill him. And in the eyes of justice, Lunda Kal was right—dead right. The man who had given his daughter opium and killed her, deserved to pay. Deserved, at least, to face Lunda Kal and fight it out.

It would be a square fight. Lunda Kal was unarmed. For the sake of honor, the Suaheli was going, with bare hands, to face a man with a gun. The odds were strong on the side of Mart Robb. A police officer, with loaded revolver, would stand little chance of being killed by a half naked Suaheli who carried not even a knife. And, if it came to bare hands, even then Robb was a match for Lunda Kal. Both were mighty.

Johal's gun went back in his belt. Decisively he picked his way out of the alley to the street, and turned his face toward headquarters. Whatever happened in the shadows of the native quarter, this night, would be in the eyes of the gods completely just. It was no affair of his.

But the gods had other intentions. They led his steps into the midst of it. Led him through one musty street after the other until, ten minutes later, he turned the corner of a huge, spider shaped building—and stopped with a jerk.

It was too late for him to step back. Before him, not ten yards distant, two mighty forms strained against the wall of the building. There was no mistaking those forms. Only two men in Sandakan had the huge bulk and tremendous strength of these two. One of them was Mart Robb. The other was the giant Suaheli.

JOHAL made no move to interfere. He stood there quietly, while the struggling men careened across the sidewalk and hurtled into the gutter. The face of the white man was bloody, blinded with dirt. His uniform was ripped wide from shoulder to belt, and his arms were bare.

Lunda Kal, too, showed the marks of a long fight. His face was twisted harshly. His shoulders were bleeding in a dozen places, and the blood ran down his heaving body to his legs. His hair was a matted tangle, hanging over his eyes.

But the fight was even. Even, probably, because the white man's gun had made it so, earlier in the battle. There was a spurting bullet wound in Lunda Kal's shoulder. That wound, in itself, told the story of the fight; and the revolver that had made it, lying now on the sidewalk out of reach, bore witness to the tale. For once, Mart Robb had failed to score a bull's-eye with his first shot. There had been no chance for a second try.

Johal stood there, motionless. In the dark he was only half visible; yet the half-closed eyes of the white man found him. A sputtering gurgle for help came from the big man's lips.



It was unheeded. Johal's gun remained in his belt. The gods had arranged this affair, and the gods would take care of it—particularly the god of justice. Johal did not intend to interfere. He turned quietly and walked away. Walked with quick, deliberate steps, until the corner of the building hid him from view. He did not hesitate, nor did he turn. Whatever happened back there was not his concern. Since fate had chosen to lead him into it, he did not have to remain and see the end. His destination was—headquarters.

But back in the gutter, after he had gone, the white man lurched up again. His knee, wrenching outward, smashed aside the arms of the giant Suaheli. With a last, savage effort, Robb crawled over the sidewalk, with outstretched hand groping for the revolver that lay there.

It was evident, then, that the Suaheli had won. The white man was going under. He could do no more than crawl, did not have the power to regain his feet. His only hope lay in the revolver. If he could reach it in time——

At the same instant, Lunda Kal realized his intent. The big native was in better condition—still strong and still full of courage.

Like a tiger he lashed forward.

He was quick, in spite of the bullet hole that gaped in his shoulder. But he was a fraction of an instant too late.

The white man's hand closed over the gun. He had no time to use it, to find the trigger. Only time enough to turn over, as the Suaheli's fingers gripped his throat. The gun came up over the Suaheli's head with a single lunge—and wrenched down suddenly, full on the exposed forehead of Lunda Kal.

The Suaheli's fingers relaxed. Limply they fell from Robb's throat. With a heavy lurch, Lunda Kal slumped over and lay still. He had fought fairly, with his naked hands against a gun—and the revolver had beaten him down. Sandakan has a peculiar way of meting out justice.

Slowly, the white man pushed him aside and struggled to his knees. It took a long time, a very long time, before Robb found strength enough to grope to his feet. Then he stood there, unsteadily, staring down at the man below him.

Deliberately he lifted the revolver, muzzle downward, and found the trigger. Then he hesitated. For a long interval he stood there, with the revolver pointed at the unconscious breast of the man on the sidewalk—but he did not fire. He knew the ways of Sandakan.

To have fired that revolver would have meant certain death. Positive, sure death. Lunda Kal was the leader of the native quarter. The man who killed him would be torn apart by half a thousand blood-mad natives. And Mart Robb did not have the courage.

He turned away slowly. The revolver still hung in his hand, but it remained silent. With heavy, drunken steps, the white man walked away.

IT WAS midnight when Mart Robb pushed open the door of police headquarters, an hour after leaving Lunda Kal. Half a dozen pairs of eyes turned automatically to stare at him. Even through the mat of blood that covered his face, Robb saw the stray smiles that passed across the room. For once—for once—the great I Am had found a foe to match him in size and fight.

But one of those faces was not smiling. It was set in a cold, bitter stare, looking straight at Robb. The face was Johal's; and the boy was wondering quietly what Robb would say.

Robb said it. Said it quickly, before any of the others could question him.

"Well, you got your chance now to go after Lunda Kal," he rasped. "You been waitin' for it, and now you got it."

Johal turned his head slightly, and nodded.

"What happened?" he asked softly.

"Plenty happened! That damned nigger waylaid me with about ten of his murderin' gang. Guess they knew I was too good for them single handed. Came after me with knives—the whole lot of 'em. Damned near did me in."

"Ten of them?" the boy repeated softly. "With knives?"

"Yeah. Ten of 'em with knives. I got rid of the whole bloody bunch except Lunda Kal. Dodged 'em through the streets until I lost 'em. But there was no losin' that big Suaheli. And then—say, where the hell did *you* get to, while I was thrashin' that big nigger?"

"I had business to do," Johal replied quietly. "Duty was calling. And you—did you kill him?"

"Kill him? No. I thrashed him into the ground, bare handed, and left him there. Why should I kill him—and get torn apart for it? It's a job for one of you fellows. I've done my part of it."

Johal nodded. He knew very well that the penalty for killing Lunda Kal would be death. The others knew it, too. But for a long time the foreign service had been waiting for an excuse to go after the leader of the natives—and now the excuse was here. Obviously, one of them would have to answer, and—pay the price. It was not a lovely job.

"Guess you don't want to do it, any of you," Robb sneered. "Don't feel like dyin', I guess. Well, life in Sandakan ain't any lovely thing to look forward to. You won't miss much."

They ignored him. More than that, they despised him. Hated his leering voice. One of them turned quietly to Johal and said, "Suppose we play a round of poker for it.

All of us—including him. After each hand, the winner can drop out of the play; and the last man to drop out—goes."

Johal studied the faces before him. Especially Robb's. All of them nodded silently, except one. That one was the man who had just fought Lunda Kal.

"I've done my end of it. I'm out," he said curtly.

The boy's reply was quite soft.

"You'll take your chance with the rest of us."

"And who are you to hand out orders? Who are——"

"I'm your captain."

Robb sputtered into silence, and stared. He had never seen that biting stare come so bitterly before to the boy's face. It was something new, that he did not understand. And he feared it. Without a word he took his place at the table, with the others. And Johal, with a dry smile, drew out the chair opposite him.

These men were officers of the British Foreign Service. They were men—soldiers. Ready for any kind of emergency, any kind of trouble. They made no drama of what lay before them, though it meant, without a shade of uncertainty, the sudden death of one of their number. It was poker—just a simple, every day round of poker. And the devil help the loser!

THEY played in silence. The cards went out slowly. Stud poker—one card face down, four face up. And when the first hand was through, one of the men got up quietly and lit a cigarette. His hand held three queens. Nothing else on the table could beat it. He, at least, would not die.

The others glanced quietly at Johal. He returned the glance without emotion, and shuffled the cards again. As he dealt them,



Mart Robb leaned toward him with a significant grin.

"Guess you don't stand much chance, son. Don't play much poker, do you?"

Johal stopped dealing and looked up.

"I play for amusement," he said softly.

The cards fell again. One down—four up. And this time another of the men pushed back his chair without speaking. A full house lay before him, the highest hand on the board.

There were four left now. Mart Robb, Johal, and two others. When the third hand was finished, it was Robb, Johal, and one other.

And a moment later, when the boy reached out to pull in the cards for the last deal, only two men sat at the table. One of them was Johal. The other was Mart Robb.

The three men who were out of it stood over the table, waiting for the final decision. The first two cards went out. Robb reached down and turned his card over, in the shadow of his cupped hand, and looked down at it. It was the nine of diamonds.

Johal, deliberately dealing the second two cards, ignored the first one that lay under his hand. Not until there were four cards under each man's hand—one face down and three up—did the boy look at his hidden card. It was an ace; and beside it, lying in full view, lay a deuce, a king, and a four. No good.

On the other side of the table, Robb was grinning down at a pair of kings and a four. Good enough to win.

The last card fell slowly. It was dark in the room; and the faces did not notice that Johal was dealing very, very cautiously. They saw him slide the top card across the table to Robb; and they saw that the card was of no value. But they did not see the boy turn the corner of the next top card with deft, quick fingers, and look at it before he slid it off. That card was an ace.

It would have made a pair—a pair of aces to beat the pair of kings under Robb's hand. But the boy did not deal it. He did not want to win. He wanted to lose—to be the man who went out after Lunda Kal.

There was a reason. In the whole room he was the only man who knew the truth about Lunda Kal. The others would have gone out with loaded revolvers—to kill. They would never know that they were killing a just man. Only Johal and Mart Robb knew all of the truth; and Robb, more than any of the others, would have been glad to send a bullet through Lunda Kal's heart. Robb would stand in mortal fear of the penalty; but he would be more than eager

to silence forever the Suaheli's tongue. That tongue knew too much.

THE top card, therefore, did not come off the pack. With a single quick move Johal slid his card to the table—but it was not the ace. It came, unseen, from the bottom of the pack, not from the top!

The move was deft. It left a pair of kings in Robb's hand—and left the boy's hand worthless. But Robb was watching, with catlike eyes—and he saw it. With a single abrupt jerk he swept to his feet and leaned over the table.

"I expected something like that," he said curtly. "You can't get away with it!"

Very quietly Johal dropped the cards and got up.

"You have won," he said softly. "I'm the man who has to kill Lunda Kal. Have you any complaint?"

"You're damned right I've got a complaint. I'm wise to you. You're makin' damned sure it's *you* that goes out after that dirty nigger. Want to be sure he don't get killed, don't you? He's a friend of yours, I guess."

The boy said nothing. He listened quietly to the rest of it, and he was smiling.

"It's easy to see now why you slipped off and left that murderin' nigger to kill me," snarled Robb. "Easy as hell. Takin' good care of your blasted natives, ain't you? *Ain't you?*"

"I am taking good care that you don't kill them with opium, Robb. The British government doesn't do things that way."

Robb stood tense. His face went livid as he crowded against the table. Then his ragged temper came to the top.

"You—you lyin'——"

That was all. There was only one answer, and the boy made it. With a single heave he shoved the table aside and stepped forward.

"I wouldn't say that if I were you, Robb," he said quietly. "It isn't healthy."

Robb laughed. A sneering laugh, full of triumph. He could whip this boy easily. Could kill him. The boy knew too much—knew enough to put Robb before a court-martial. To hang him. It is no slight crime to murder a native girl—with drugs.

"I'm sayin' it," the big man snarled. "You lyin'——"

The boy straightened. His hand shot up, palm open. The words were smashed back down Robb's throat. It was a deliberate challenge—and Robb met it.

Like an animal, he lurched forward. The boy could not fight him; he knew that. Even without the difference in size and weight, the lad was no match. He did not know how to fight or how to shoot. He had shown that much when Robb had given him lessons, a day or two ago.

And Johal, smiling, knew better. Knew the thoughts that were running through Robb's bull head. The big fellow thought that he could not fight and could not use a gun. But Robb had thought, too, that he could not play poker—and Robb had learned differently!

Robb did not know about the boy's two years with the Afridi in the Khyber Pass!

It was no fight. Not even a mockery of one. Robb's first mighty swing found only open air, and was returned with a crushing right hand full in the snarling mouth. Even then the big man did not realize the truth. He closed in with arms wide open, to crush the boy under him.

Johal dropped—dropped like a cat to one knee. His arms twisted about the giant's legs in a steel grip. He straightened up like a piston—and then, with lightning speed, bent double again.

THE giant left the floor. Left it, and kept going in a long, hurtling arc. He did not know the tricks of the Afridi, and he had stumbled headlong into the most deadly wrestling hold that a man can apply. The hold that sends a man flying through the air, sprawled in a knot, until some solid body brings him to a sudden, crushing stop.

The wall did that. Robb crashed into it with a heavy, sickening thud—and slumped in a heap, underneath.

Not unconscious. Stunned, and bewildered, but still alive enough to stagger to his knees and reach, with a lightning move, for the gun that protruded from his belt. That gun was a sure thing. The boy did not know how to shoot—or draw a revolver quick enough to save himself!

But once again, Robb was wrong. The boy did know. His hand started half a sec-

ond later than Robb's. It came up, gripping a revolver, just half a second before Robb's gun was clear of the holster. And before the big man's trigger finger could press home, a single sharp spit of flame came from Johal's gun.

He couldn't shoot? Perhaps not. Perhaps the Shinwari of the Khyber region had not taught him how! But the bullet found its mark—dead in the center of Robb's gun wrist. That mark was no pasteboard target; and Robb, with a dull sob, let go his gun, gripped the dead wrist with his other hand, and slumped back again to the floor. Whipped.



Johal turned quietly and moved back to the table. The men in the room said nothing. They understood—completely.

They moved away quietly. Took their places again at the scattered tables in the room. There were no comments, no whispers. And a moment later, when Mart Robb climbed heavily to his feet and stood upright against the wall, not a single face turned to look at him. The men were playing cards again. This time—for amusement.

They did not notice when the door of the room opened noiselessly from the outside. They were thinking of other things—of the boy who was their leader—and of the way he had fought. Men who have traveled adventure trails in the East love courage. Especially young courage!

Even Johal did not turn. Did not hear the door open. Did not move when a mighty black figure stood on the sill and looked deliberately over the room. The figure was Lunda Kal.

For a long time the Suaheli stood there, searching the darkness of the room for the thing he had come for. Then, very slowly and very deliberately, his hand lifted. The hand held a rigid, unwavering revolver.

It was the sound of the shot that brought the men in the room around in their chairs. They turned abruptly, to a man—and two of them half rose. In the doorway, Lunda Kal stepped forward very quietly and dropped the revolver to the floor. He was staring carefully at the man he had come to kill. And that man—standing against the farther wall—reached weakly to his throat, where Lunda Kal's bullet had found the mark. Then, without a sound, Mart Robb crumpled to his knees and pitched forward on the floor, dead.

JOHAL did not move. The others did not move. In the shadow of the doorway, Lunda Kal lifted empty hands and came toward them.

"The white man killed my girl," he said evenly. "In return, I have killed the white man. I would have done so with my hands, before; but he chose to use a gun. Now I, too, have used a gun—as he did."

There was no reply. The big Suaheli looked squarely into the faces before him—and finally stepped close to Johal.

"If I have broken the white man's law," he said quietly, "I will pay the white man's price. I am satisfied."

Johal returned the stare. Returned it without speaking. Then he swung about, slowly, from one to the other of the men who stood near him. Finally, without a word, he stepped back.

Lunda Kal waited patiently. There was nothing to wait for. Johal had nothing to say, and the men of the British Foreign Service stood quietly in their places. They, too, believed in justice.

And so, with deliberate steps, Lunda Kal returned to the door. There, with one foot on the sill, he faced them again.

"There will be no more trouble between white men and black," he said evenly. "The trouble was caused by one white man, and that man is dead."

The door closed.

Inside the room, one of the officers pulled back a chair and sat down. The others followed him. Without a word, the first man shuffled the cards and re-dealt them.

Ten feet away, Captain John Halliday—whom the Khyber Afridi had dubbed Johal—slid a new cartridge into the chamber of his revolver—and lit a cigarette.

More of HUGH B. CAVE'S Stories Soon



STAMPEDE

EVERY now and then you pick up a story with a description of a stampede in it. I wonder how many writers actually experienced one? I have—just one. But let me tell you that one is enough. There's no describing the thrill and horror of it, and the feelings one undergoes while it is happening. At least this holds good for the one I went through.

It took place in the Lightning Creek country, which is properly a continuation of brakes known as the Twenty Mile hills, a country that is quite well known for its electrical storms and freakish weather. You may imagine the nature of such storms by riding along this stream. I believe I am safe in saying that ten percent of the timber along it has been riven by lightning.

It had been a hot, dry summer that year on the roundup, and when we reached this Lightning Creek country we were finding it hard shifts with the day herd of some fifteen hundred head. Speaking of the particular day preceding the night the stampede occurred, I marked an unusual restlessness of the day herd. The day had been unusually hot and sultry, with no breath of breeze. This in spite of the fact that the herd was on the best feed we had struck in days and that water, while strong with alkali, was not the thick, stagnant water they were accustomed to.

The odd part of it was that even the men were oddly affected, strangely quiet in contrast to their usual boisterousness. When our ramrod predicted a storm brewing, we didn't laugh or dispute him, although there was not a cloud visible in the sky—just a coppery hue.

That evening the men came in with the report that the herd would not bed down. Our camp was pitched on the bank of the creek, and the herd was being held on a flat about a half a mile from the camp, at the edge of the brakes. It was sure-enough rough country, of deep ravines and sudden hills, and with plenty of scrub timber.

The second guard had to call for help. It is not the custom for the wagon men to stand guard, but nevertheless we wagon men were put on duty that night. I drew the midnight guard.

Four of us were together on that shift. When we rolled out of bed the night was dark as a stack of black cats, with the sort of thickness that you feel you could cut with a knife. Not a star visible. However the storm had not yet broken.

As we rode out we were informed that we were going to have a little taste of hell. The herd hadn't yet shown any disposition to bed down, and four men were kept busy holding 'em from making a break.

Each shift was of two hours duration. I reckon our shift had been out about fifteen minutes when there came a sudden change in the weather. There was a rumble of thunder in the distance, and a ragged flash of lightning. At brief intervals this was repeated and then it grew almost constant. The storm was descending on us fast. By

this time the herd was all on its feet and facing the approaching storm, sniffing and starting to low. Then, almost without warning, the storm broke upon us!

There came a blinding flash of lightning that struck right in the midst of the herd (later we found it had killed seven of the steers), shooting a shower of sparks and flame over the cattle with a sound like the report of a gun. I reckon it stunned the herd and us fellows alike—just sort of dazed us, so none of us could move.

Then came a crash of thunder that even caused every one of us men to flinch and that set the herd off. The cattle turned from the direction they had been facing, and were off like a shot from a gun—— And I was right in their track!

I'm not going to try to tell the feeling that surged up within me; I couldn't possibly convey it to you. But there I was, right in their midst before I knew it. I'm certainly grateful to the little horse I had that night, for if it had not been for him it isn't likely I'd be here now to tell the tale. He was a sure footed little cayuse, and it wouldn't have been possible to ride a horse over more treacherous country. I was incapable of any action—everything had come too suddenly—but that little horse turned by pure instinct, running with the herd.

Then came a deluge of rain that made running still more treacherous. When it is wet, the gumbo in that country is like grease. Cattle were in our lead and were pressing my legs on both sides, and if I had any coherent thought in my head it was that this was my end.

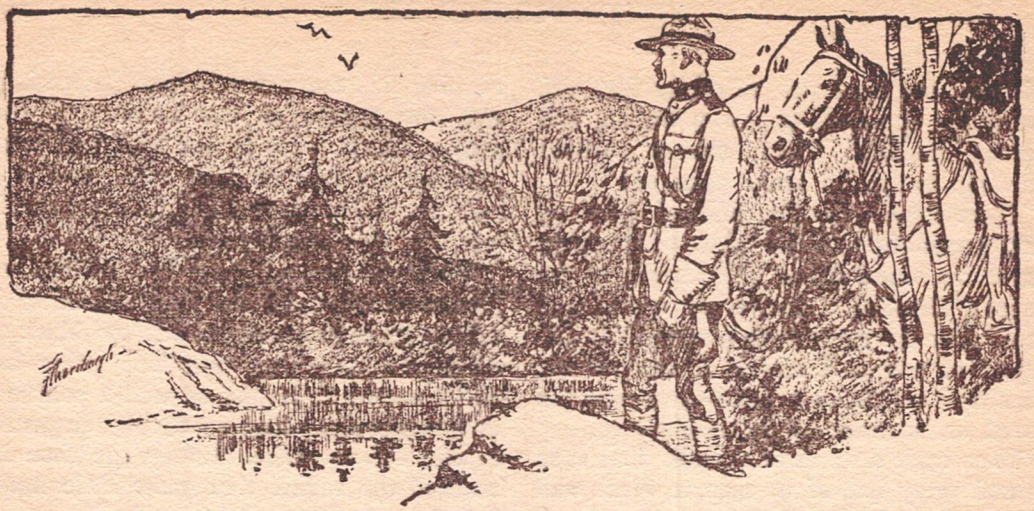
With the first of those bad ravines we dipped into, I had a sickening sensation of falling through space. It was too black to distinguish anything that was going on, and I reckon it is just as well I couldn't, or I might have done something desperate to end the suspense. But by the time he reached the ravine that game little horse had forged clear of the herd. He struck the bottom of the ravine in a heap, but he was on his feet again in a flash—and although the next few minutes seemed like hours, we were soon altogether clear of the herd, and of his own accord my horse had come to a stop.

I admit I'm right fond of horses, and I guess I've plenty of reason to be. That stampede had left considerable buzzard bait behind it (for as I said, it was a sure enough rough country) and it was only a lucky break that kept me from being part of it. Of his own volition, however, that little horse had saved me from any such fate, and I've never been able to forget it.

You can bet that a good horse is a mighty fine friend to tie to.

GLENN A. CONNOR

"Stampede" is the first of a new series of true adventures. There will be a new one in every issue of* SHORT STORIES, *some of them written by well known authors, and others by writers who are new and unfamiliar.—— Any reader of the magazine may submit one of these true adventures, and for every story accepted by the editors the sum of $25 will be paid to the author. It must be written in the first person, must be true, must be exciting, and will be published under the heading, "Adventurers All." Do not write more than 1000 words, type your manuscript (on one side of the paper only), and address it to: "Adventurers All," The Editors of Short Stories Magazine, Garden City, New York. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless they are accompanied by sufficient postage for re-mailing.



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Red Tunics

WHEN we became curious about the Mounted Policeman who serves as the model for James B. Hendryx's fine character, Corporal Downey (read the newest story about Downey, "Blood on the Yukon Trail," beginning on page 3 of this issue of SHORT STORIES) this is what author Hendryx replied:

"I'm not worth a damn at writing anything but the stories themselves. Corporal Downey is drawn from real life—but he is, of course, a composite character fashioned through the course of a good many years of association with the Mounted Police. By the way, in your letter I notice that you use the word 'Mountie'. I never use the term, as I know how the men in the Service detest it. Personally I would as soon address the Supreme Being as 'Goddie'."

Our answer is that we knew as well as Jim Hendryx that the nickname is, at least among the police themselves, tabooed. However, unless one actually has time to say "Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman" every time he means a "Mountie," we can't see why anyone should object to the latter term. Besides, we'll wager almost anything that the shortened term "Mountie" first came into use in Canada, where natives of that great country came to feel a certain familiarity with the Mounted Police and where a short, informal name became a necessity.

One thing we do know, the use of the word is so general in every part of the world today that trying to put a stop to it would be like trying to stop the flow of Niagara with a beer bung—even the R. C. M. P. couldn't do it, for all that they're a pretty capable lot.

Yet we wish to make it clear that our sympathies are with the R.C.M.P. in this case. We get Hendryx's point that the name is inapt and, being in the diminutive form ending in "ie," inappropriate; but frankly, we can't see what can be done about it. Once a slang expression of this sort gets started, there's simply no stopping it. And after all, why shouldn't we have a shorter, handier word for ordinary everyday use?

What do *you* think about it?——Are you for "Royal Canadian Mounted Policemen" every time, or do you prefer to say "Mounties"?

(In either case, don't fail to begin "Blood on the Yukon Trail" now!)

Bruisers and Blackjacks

LUCK of the Waterfront" introduces an entirely new author to you in the person of Steuart M. Emery. He knows his gangsters, as you've discovered if you've read the story; but for the information of any gangster who doesn't know his Steuart M. Emery, here's what he writes about himself:

"I started writing fiction ten years ago, as a sideline to newspaper work; and three years later I began to do nothing else but fiction. My newspaper connections include the *New York Herald, New York Sun* and *New York Sunday Times,* for which I did signed feature articles and interviews that ranged from Arctic explorers to painters of kings, and that called for cruising New York from suites in the Plaza Hotel to joints in Chinatown. I consider that all the excitement didn't end with the war, wherein I joined a cavalry outfit and promptly found myself footing it over France, along with the rest of the luckless lads who thought they'd rather ride than hike. Saw further service in Alsace and Meuse-Argonne. Among the checkered list of my writings there are three novels, a motion picture scenario, and short stories and novelettes in something over forty magazines here and in England. Probably the high spot came when a syndicate bought a story for translation into the Scandinavian!

"As regards the yarn in this issue of SHORT STORIES, the rest of New York may change, but the waterfront will always be the same, with its own peculiar, glamorous atmosphere. The atmosphere that ships and seafaring men bring to it. Along the waterfront of one of the greatest ports in the world anything can happen—and does. There are a dozen stories in every badly-lighted block of it."

Temple Robbers

THE precious stone in Murray Leinster's newest Malay Collins story, "The Black Stone of Agharti" (in this issue), has a different value from most sacred jewels of the Orient, but in order to prove that such robberies are possible, we cite an actual instance that took place only a little while ago. The temple of the goddess Bhwani, in the inaccessible hills near Bombay, was robbed of jewels covering the image. The priests in this case—for the robbery was not accomplished with the subtle cunning of a Malay Collins—were overpowered by the robbers and the temple stripped of every valuable possession, the total loss being over $50,000.—— There are still a few jewels in the Orient, you see!

Fireboat Facts

EVERY reader of Karl W. Detzer's thrilling story called "The Dog's Bark" will want to know more of those most modern of fire-fighting apparatuses, fireboats. Mr. Detzer says:

"The average fire boat has five stationary pipes, often called 'guns' or 'cannon.' They are the bow gun, located on the main deck forward; the pilot house pipe atop the pilot house; two turret guns or turret pipes, amidship, port and starboard; and 'Black Tom,' or the mast pipe, atop the skeleton steel mainmast, aft. In addition, each boat has from five to twenty-five 'outlets,' or three-inch and three-and-a-half inch hose connections, the number depending on the pump capacity.

"The 'bow gun' is a brass pipe about three feet long, its inside diameter from four inches to five-and-a-half. Its feed pipe, of the same or slightly larger diameter, thrusts out through the deck and is jointed to the gun shoulder-high. The nozzle can be pointed in any direction and at any elevation. Often the feed pipe is a double line, the two joined at the butt of the gun in a 'siamese connection.'

"It is capable of from one thousand to two thousand gallons of water a minute, again depending on the engine capacity, and also on the size and kind of tip that is used. Tips are smooth bore, except for three or four small metal fins set just inside the collar, to prevent centrifugal action from breaking the stream. They average two-and-a-half inches inside diameter, I believe the New York boats keep two-and-a-quarter inch tips on the guns in quarters, but each boat has a collection of twenty or thirty additional tips in the forecastle, to be used for specific kinds of work.

"Often the bow gun can hurl fifteen hundred to two thousand gallons a minute, at one hundred and fifty-pound pump pressure. It can be used as a battering ram.

"Recently the New York fireboat *Duane* (Engine 85) used its bow gun to smash

the three-quarter inch glass in the twelve inch ports of the steamer *Muenchen,* which was burning in North River. Driving a stream of three hundred pounds pressure, it crushed the panes that had been made to withstand the smash of Atlantic seas. In Chicago the boat *Graehm Stuart* uses its bow gun to clear away lumber piles, to remove fences and partitions, and I once saw it tear down a solid brick wall in a large building in order to give firemen a chance to get at the fire inside.

"The power of such streams can be imagined if I tell you that in Detroit, early in March of this year, a city fire boat actually attained a speed of eight knots, merely by pointing her guns aft and discharging water. She steered as easily as if her propellers had been revolving."

Zep Trip

CONSIDERING the ground that is covered in the next issue of SHORT STORIES, you readin' bozos might think of yourself as aboard the *Graf Zeppelin* speeding about the Globe and seeing most of what can be seen in the way of adventure (in the space of one hundred and seventy-six pages).——Taking off in the West, with Ralph Cummins and his great complete novel, "The Texan," you get a thrill out of watching his hero from the Lone Star State do his hard-boiled best with a smoking six-gun. Although it's only the first lap of the journey, it's one of the fastest and most exciting.

Sailing eastward for a few pages, you get the low-down on gangsters, in yarns that show two different aspects of a fast and merry life full of bullet holes, and not too long. The weapon in T. T. Flynn's railroad gangster story, "Valhalla," is an automatic; but in Eddy Orcutt's story, "Phoney Zits," you'll find the gats and machine gun that every big city gangster knows how to use only too well——Eddy Orcutt, by the way, is a brand new discovery of SHORT STORIES. We think he's a swell find, and we're going to give you as many of his stories as we can.

Buzz the prop to the North for a bit, and you'll get a glimpse of some real mangetting in the second instalment of James B. Hendryx's great new story of Corporal Downey of the Mounted. Everybody knows that a Mountie's business is mangetting, and Corporal Downey is an old and expert hand at it. And as a tip, there's still a chance to begin with *Part I* of this great serial, "Blood on the Yukon Trail," in this issue of the magazine.

The next lap of the journey is a long one; from the snow and ice of the Yukon clear down to the Banana Belt. Weapons become rifles, and the story is one of intrigue and furious fighting in Central America, with the hero an American who wakes up after a night out to find himself in the thick of the shooting. The name of

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

1_____ 3_____

2_____ 4_____

5_____

I do not like:

_____ Why?_____

NAME_____ ADDRESS_____

the story is "Destiny," its author is Robert Carse, who can write a whale of a story, as you know if you've read others of his that we've published in the past.

Then, as diversion during the long hop from the New to the Old World, there's "Trial Horse," a corking light story dealing with an unusual combination, the sea and boxing. Millard Ward wrote it.

And when we sight land again, the scene becomes that of the activities of the famous French Foreign Legion, in a bloody and hilarious novelette by Bob Du Soe called "The Sinful Three." If you like anything else in this issue you're sure to like this magnificent story.

There'll be more to this World Tour, but just at present we can't tell you what it will be. It's not yet routed. But we'll promise you that it will cover the remaining portions of both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres in grand style.



OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Filipino Arrow Poisons

FOR many years the poisonous upas tree was thought to be nothing but a traveler's tale. The idea that a tree could be fatal to any man, animal or bird that rested beneath its shade was too much for even the simplest to believe. Recent study of the poisons used on arrow points and other weapons in the Philippine Islands has shown, however, that the natives do extract a very deadly poison from the upas tree and that this and other poisons have been used by them for hundreds of years.

The upas tree poison is obtained in exactly the same way as maple syrup; that is, by boring a hole in the trunk of the tree and collecting the sap as it runs out. The liquid is creamy and is caught in small bamboo vessels which are closed, as soon as they are full, with an airtight cover. When the sap is exposed to the air it rapidly turns black.

For use, the sap is smeared on the tip of the arrow which is often cut with shallow grooves to retain the poison. If the arrow has been poisoned recently, the least scratch is sure to be fatal, but the strength of it appears to lessen with age. As little as one twenty thousandth part of a gram of the pure poison extracted by chemical means from the sap is enough to kill a mouse weighing 100 grams.

In many tribes the secret of the poisons is held by the old men who are careful to keep the knowledge to themselves. Not only are arrows tipped with it, but also the slender darts used with the sumpitan or blowgun.

These darts, called sumpits, are about ten inches long and are often made from a grass stem, with a wad of pith or fluffy down at the base to make them fit the bore of the blowgun tightly. The poisoned end is sharply pointed and the poison is renewed as often as necessary.

Armed with such a weapon the native hunter can steal up on a bird or a monkey, deliver his dart from his blowgun, pick up his game and proceed on his way in perfect silence and without alarming any other game in the neighborhood. The wound from the dart is so small that the bird or animal seldom makes any outcry, but falls to the ground dead a minute or two after being struck.

The upas tree poison, which belongs to the group known as "vegetable alkaloids,"

does not make meat unsafe to eat, though some tribes take the precaution of cutting out the part immediately round the wound.

The same upas tree poison is used on sharp splinters of bamboo which some of the hill tribes place every night in the paths leading to their villages so that they may not be surprised while sleeping. Another little known use is in the poisoned club or slugger, a curious weapon made by attaching a small, loosely woven bag of stones to a handle. The stones, which have been smeared with the poison, break the victim's skin and enough of the poison is left in the wound to render it fatal.

Other poisons are in use in the Philippines, such as one the Negritos of Luzon make from the bark and sap of two trees, only one of which has been identified. Then there is a poison made from fermented pineapple leaves; and various animal poisons are also known. But none of them equal in deadly efficiency the poison derived from the upas tree, which is strong enough to bring down the largest game found in the islands.

Escaping from Devil's Island

MOST persons misconceive France's notorious penal colony, writes Wm. P. Schramm. An archipelago of three islets comprises what is usually referred to as "Devil's Island." They are Royal Island, St. Joseph, and Devil's Island. Not more than a dozen convicts are confined on Devil's Island proper. There are a few more on the other two islets, not over fifty on all three. The main portion of the penal settlement is located at St. Laurent, on the mainland of French Guiana, some two hundred miles from Devil's Island. Here are some 7,000 inmates. The few successful escapes that we have heard of as being made from "Devil's Island" have, in reality, all been made from St. Laurent. Surrounded by treacherous, swirling water currents, thickly inhabited by sharks, escape from Devil's Island proper, is impossible. The nearest successful getaway from that tiny islet was made by a daring Paris apache named Dieudonné, who one dark night negotiated the treacherous water in a wine barrel, sawed in half. A few days later he was picked up exhausted on the mainland.

Devil's Island proper, because of its solitude and isolation, is reserved for the most dangerous characters sent out from France for punishment. It is said of Captain Dreyfus, supposed French traitor, when he was confined there, that the sharks cruising about the islet became so familiar to him that he gave them names. It is said that one of the twelve men confined there today is M. Richard, betrayer of Nurse Edith Cavell to the Germans, and that the wretched man has not yet won the respect of his equally miserable fellow prisoners.

The archipelago is much healthier than St. Laurent. Not covered with virgin forest as is the mainland of French Guiana, there are no insects to carry the deadly malaria fever germ. Thirty to forty convicts die every month at St. Laurent from malaria, which figure represents about seventy-two per cent of the yearly arrivals. Coffin building is therefore an outstanding occupation of the convicts. The caskets have played a prominent part in escapes. Because of the fact that faster progress can be made via water than over the jungle terra firma, the fugitive utilizes a coffin as a boat and flees down the Maroni River or its tributaries.

South Seas Rats

ON THE steamer path that lies between Honolulu and the Fiji Islands, writes Raymond A. Wohlrabe, lies a small part of the world that thousands of travelers see from the decks of passing ocean liners but which is still far removed from civilization. It is Mary Island—sometimes called "Rat Island" also.

There is but a single palm tree on Mary Island. A coconut drifting aimlessly about, carried by the ocean currents of the South Pacific from more prosperous islands where vegetation was plentiful, came at some distant time to the end of its long journey when it washed up on Mary Island. Eventually it took root there and grew to become what is today the only palm tree the island possesses.

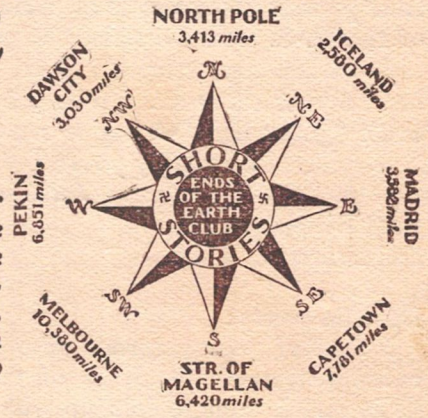
Mary Island has no human inhabitants. But it has a large population of rats. The

grandfathers of the large colony of rodents swam ashore from a ship that was wrecked upon the coral reef near the island. Most of the islands of the South Seas—even those not inhabited by natives or white men—have plenty of rats that have come there from the hold of some ill-fated ship.

A tropical climate, frequent rains providing a supply of fresh water in the crevices of the rocks of Mary Island led to rapid increase in numbers. Now they rule the island. For food, they depend upon the dead marine life washed up on the lonely white sand beaches, and principally upon the eggs which giant sea turtles lay there with the intention that the heat from the sun will hatch them.

Overpopulation has undoubtedly become a problem among the rats of Mary Island, but what a problem it would be to some luckless survivor of a disaster at sea to drift or swim to the shores of this lonely island of hungry rats!

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Dear Secretary:

I wish to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

I am a Leatherneck and have traveled some. Have seen the Philippines, Hawai, Guam, Shanghai and other parts of China. Have been from coast to coast of the U. S.

I served thirty-three months in China. Have shot wild chickens in the Philippines. Will gladly answer all letters received. Your SHORT STORIES suits me fine.

Yours truly,
Joseph R. Garretson, Jr.
Private U.S.M.C.,
Marine Detachment,
Naval Destroyer Base,
San Diego, Calif.

P.S. After Nov. 15, 1930, my address will be: Joseph R. Garretson, Jr., Pearl River, La.

Dear Secretary:

I am a reader of SHORT STORIES and I would like to join your club.

I have been somewhat of a daredevil all my life, driving racing automobiles, wing-walking on a plane, and parachute-jumping, changing from plane to plane or from fast auto to plane via rope ladder. I have found something more interesting now; that is thought transference and mental telepathy. I would like to correspond with any one who is interested in these things, or other things too.

Sincerely,
Jones McAdoo, Jr.
Room 5, 201-½ So. Elm St.,
Greensboro, N. C.

Dear Secretary:

The other day I happened to run across one of your members and he persuaded me to join your outfit. I hope I will be accepted, because I have a yen to tell of my experiences to anyone that cares to hear about them.

I have roamed about during my summer vacations and have seen the "Paradise of the Pacific," all of Mexico and *habla español.*

Recently I became interested in gliders, so I hooked up with the California Glider

Club. I made several successful flights—and we'll omit the others. I also hold a glider license. Our outfit washed out when Charley Ferguson, our president, was killed in an attempt to cross the Golden Gate in a glider. Personally I believe this feasible, and think it will be done in the near future.

I am interested in most any sport; fishing and polo especially. I would relish letters from anybody that writes English, and on any subject.

I'm seventeen years old, and hearing from persons of my age, from various parts of the U. S. would certainly be great.

So please, Secretary, old-timer, deal me one of your cards and I'll sure boost the outfit "glider high." I beg to remain,

Very truly yours,

Joe Cazessus

1208 Divisadero St.,
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Secretary:

I read of your generous offer of comradeship through the Ends of the Earth Club, and I want to join up with a good gang. I am not really an adventurer, although I have knocked about the country a little. I am a private in the 135th Collecting Company of the Ohio National Guards, and I intend to join the Marines or the Navy when my time expires.

I have been on several hunting and fishing trips in northern Michigan and southern Canada. I intend to hit Africa, South America, and the South Sea Islands before long. There is nothing I like better than life out of doors with good, plain, wholesome grub, cooked over a pine fire, and to sleep at night with nothing but the sky and stars as a roof, alongside of a good square pal.

So please put my name on that list of happy-go-lucky adventurers of the Ends of the Earth Club.

Yours very truly,

Private B. W. Pontius

545 Center Street, Van Wert, Ohio.

Dear Secretary:

I would certainly like to become a member of your club; also my pal, as I pass the magazines on to him as soon as I have read them and he says SHORT STORIES has some of the best yarns he has read for some considerable time.

I have only just started to read them regular, owing to the fact that I am in a hospital with fever (malaria) and one must read or do something to kill time; so I chose SHORT STORIES and found it very satisfying and will continue to read it.

I am only twenty-two years of age, and would like to get in touch with some of your members about my own age; in fact, I should feel very much obliged if you could get me in touch with one of your cowgirl members as I would like to know all about the life they lead out West. I am also willing to exchange photographs. I hope some day to see the shores of U. S. A. as I have relations out that way, and perhaps my wish will then come true: to be a cowboy.

Are there any members in Shanghai? If so, perhaps I may have the luck to meet them sometime. I'll close, now, hoping to receive a membership card in due course, and wishing your magazine the best of luck.

I remain,

Frederick Phillips

5246799, Private F. Phillips,
"B" Company,
1st British Worcestershire Regiment,
Shanghai, N. China.

Dear Secretary:

Please take my registration for your Ends of the Earth Club.

I am a hunter, sailor and trapper—if it is possible to be all three. I have sure wandered around this old globe some.

But I have always managed to get a copy of SHORT STORIES, even in villages where a newspaper was unknown, and although in some cases the magazines were years old, they were none the less interesting.

I was born in South Africa, so if any of your readers would like any information about that corner of the world I would gladly reply to the best of my knowledge.

Yours cordially,

Ronald D. Gleeson

262 Fourth Avenue,
Verdun, Montreal, Canada.