

DEAD MAN ALIVE AGAIN—H. Bedford-Jones

Short Stories

Twice A Month

November 10th

Beginning

25c

HIGH MESA

by
Jackson Gregory



**BIG
SHOT
SHOES**

*A complete
novel by*

**Robert
H.
Rohde**



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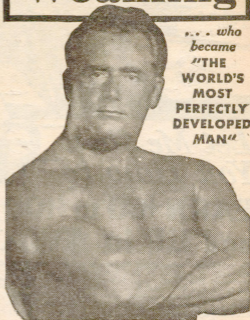
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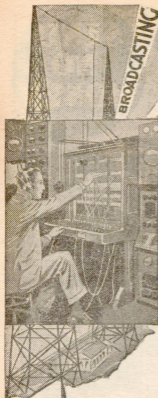
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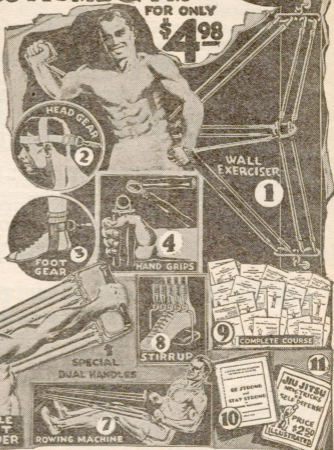
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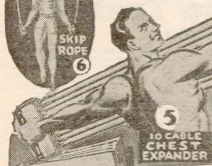
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THE GREATEST AND BEST



Short

TWICE A MONTH

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Stories



HARRY E. MAULE, *EDITOR*

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NOV. 10th, 1932

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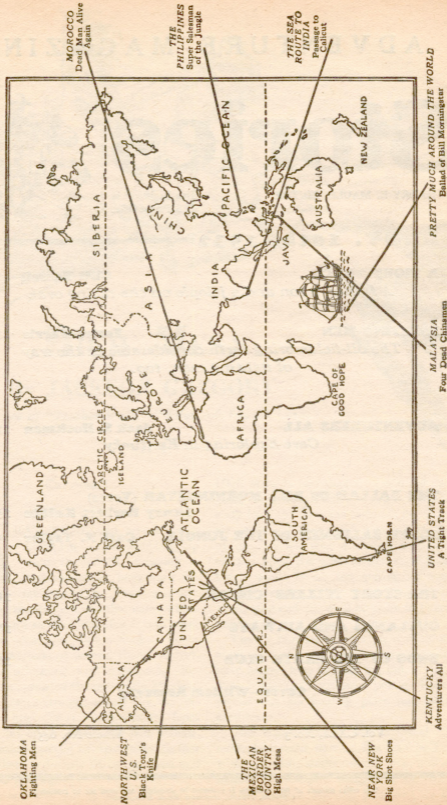
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Cover—William Reusswig

Vol. CXLI, No. 3

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AROUND THE WORLD WITH SHORT STORIES



THOSE BLAMED RED GODS

EVERYONE of us has felt the urge for far places; especially it seems to me, every one among the readers of this magazine. And it seems as if it were especially hard these days to stick to the old grind, when uncertainty is all around us, and so many of the standards we use to steer by are being upset. If only we could get away, we feel, and have a look at the problems of some husky trapper of the far North; or cast an eye over the household budget of the father of a rising young family of head-hunters—do something different. Surely this must be the cause of the floods of letters which come to us every week from members of the Ends of the Earth Club. A lot of those letters are from people who are wishing that they were at the other end of the earth from the particular one they inhabit at the moment. And a sad thing is that there are very few of us lucky enough to be able to obey the wandering urge these days. The old wolf is lurking too near home.

So when I read Jackson Gregory's "High Mesa" when it first reached us, among other high spots in the story (which you'll be bound to discover for yourselves) it struck me that here was one of the finest descriptions of the wanderlust that I'd ever read. Jerry Boyne had been:

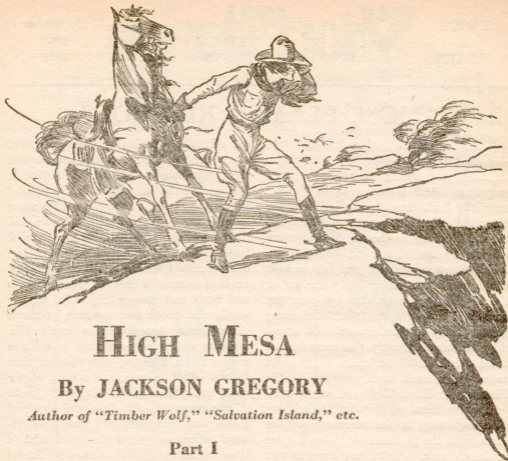
Up and away with light running feet and a heart beating high. Down to the surge of ocean where great ships were sail-

ing off to all the luring ports of earth, where the sun set red far out at sea and the quick imagination saw it making a blazing red day on tropic beaches. Out across the ocean, meeting up with many strange men with stranger tales to tell, rocked to sleep each night in the arms of large dreams. Tropic islands at last like dreams come true, blossomed on the breast of blue waters, with their strange trees and birds and flowers and men, strange smells and foods and customs. Friends chance-made, breezing into one's life, breezing out, were gone with a nod and a wave and a devil-may-care swagger; fine fellows, stout fellows, and rogues of the quick smile and quick blow—all kinds. "Come to me! I will show you wonders! I will pour rich gifts into your lap!" always whispered some far port with a haunting name. Java! Borneo! Tahiti! Madagascar! Tripoli! Tierra del Fuego! Sirens all, until visited; then only familiar places where a restless boy went up and down, growing into restless manhood, hearing newer far voices calling, "Come to me! I hold the true wonders for you!"

In these times when many of us are kept pretty close at home, it's good to read something like that. It gives us something to dream about, something to plan for when the time comes that we can once more gather up the old pack-sack and be off.



—The Editor



HIGH MESA

By JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "Timber Wolf," "Salvation Island," etc.

Part I

CHAPTER I

JERRY DROPS IN

A BATTERED old wreck of a monoplane came wobbling up from the south, bringing a world-wanderer homeward after long years. Coming home! Jerry Boyne—to give him that name which he had worn so long now that it was more his own than any other—looked down from an altitude of several thousand feet, his eyes brimming with eagerness. Beneath him sprawled the ugly little Mexican border town; straight ahead lay an expanse of gray desert which was far from ugly in his eyes. For home was yonder, just a scant handful of arid miles farther along where little hills lifted up, clean and blue and inviting.

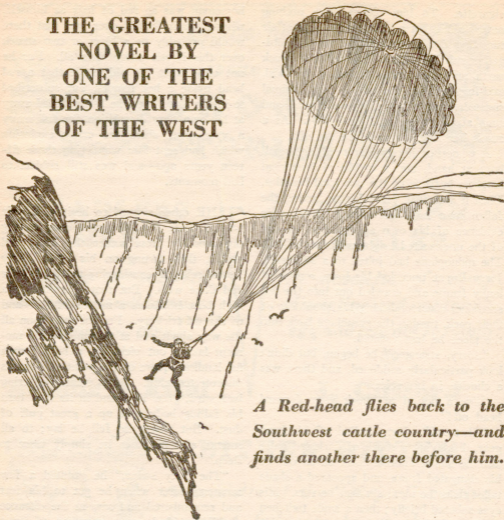
"Too bad I've got to land. I'd be at

High Mesa in two shakes. Good old dad; gosh, he's nearly sixty now! Shucks, sixty isn't old for a man nowadays. Down we settle, old lady, and give you a shot of gas. We'd take a chance and rattle on and hang the government regulations, but it would be no fun getting let down in the cactus a dozen miles from home. Well, stop and all, we'll be there in twenty minutes."

Twenty minutes or so after a voluntary absence of close to fifteen years shouldn't have seemed long to wait, but did. "Guess I'm homesick," grinned young Boyne, picked out his landing place and nosed earthward.

The village turned out to watch the monoplane come down. The landing field with a gasoline station on one side, a dilapidated, swaybacked hangar at the other and an ancient biplane, belonging to the

THE GREATEST
NOVEL BY
ONE OF THE
BEST WRITERS
OF THE WEST



A Red-head flies back to the Southwest cattle country—and finds another there before him.

Mexican border patrol being groomed close to the hangar, lay along the international boundary line and at the very edge of Nacional. Therefore, when the monoplane's bouncing wheels struck the earth, sending up clouds of dust, there were upward of a score of people, mostly children, lined up as admiring spectators. Jerry Boyne, attending for the moment strictly to business, scarcely noted the single figure on horseback, a somewhat flashily dressed young man riding a beautiful black mare and conversing familiarly with a couple of half grown, dark-skinned, white-toothed village girls.

A MOMENT later he did notice, however, and grin broadly. For though he must hold himself in some part to blame for the accident, his conscience did not in the least disturb him—and the thing was funny. This was the way of it: the ornate young gentleman on the black mare—scarcely less ornate with silver trappings on saddle and bridle—had been paying a good deal more attention to the two laughing Mexican girls than to the new arrival from the skies; he sat loosely in the saddle, one boot swinging free, the other carelessly supporting his weight in the stirrup and was engaged in rolling a

cigarette. To him planes were nothing new; to his horse this clumsy old affair tumbling down from above was an altogether startling affair. And when it struck earth and then came trundling forward, taxi-ing across the field, the animal snorted, flung up a frightened head and spun about on a single hind hoof. As a result her rider sprawled in the dirt.

A whoop of joy rose from all the small boys at hand, and a cackle of hysterical laughter burst from the two local beauties. Then it was that Jerry Boyne, seeing the fallen man leap up unhurt, grinning in evidence of his own appreciation of one of the unexpected bright moments of life. The monoplane had jolted to a standstill; Jerry Boyne uncurled his long, somewhat lanky frame and crawled out into the hot sunshine, disencumbering his shoulders of their pack, tossing the parachute back into the place he had vacated.

"Sorry, stranger," he began, but didn't look particularly saddened, and there was a chuckle in his voice.

"I've a notion to knock your damned head off!"

"That so?" Jerry pulled off his head gear, displaying a shock of dark red hair; also he shook another kink or so out of his elongated frame and appeared a shade taller than the mere six feet he was. His eyes sobered briefly; then a smile twitched again at the corners of a generously wide mouth and made merry little crinkles about a pair of very keen, forthright eyes. "Well, I don't know as I'd blame you, at that. You sure looked funny, and your lady friends didn't miss the humor. I've said I'm sorry, but I was sort of half lynchin', at that. Now if you think you can get away with it and would feel any better, why sock away, old timer."

The girls, who had suspended all titling to listen, now demanded of each other, "What'd he say?" and surrendered themselves to a fresh spasm of giggling. Jerry Boyne watched the face confronting his own turn a dull brick red, and noted for the first time that the disgruntled

horseman was as red of hair as himself, whereupon it flashed over him that there would probably be a blow or two struck over this idiotic affair after all. For he not only knew the old adage that a red head made a hot temper, but subscribed to it; the Lord knew he had whittled away at his own fiery disposition for full many a year—ever since the crazy explosion which had sent him wandering those fifteen years ago—and was still subject to bad moments.

THE other seemed to hesitate, a pair of dark, reddish-brown eyes staring out moodily from under the dusty red thatch, then swung on his heel. Jerry Boyne relaxed, considering the thing over and done with. But that spinning on a high boot heel was a matter of art—and of shrewd trickery. For the man spun all the way about and at the unexpected moment lashed out viciously, a hard brown fist landing square on the point of Boyne's unprotected chin. Jerry went staggering backward, grew limp and in its own turn his falling body sent up a great puff of dust. But where he fell he lay; to all intents and purposes he simply went to sleep.

"The dirty swine," he grunted a few moments later when he got to his feet and remembered and saw in the distance the lively black mare carrying an erect rider out of his ken. He felt his jaw gingerly. "Gosh, what a wallop. Hey, you!" he shouted briskly to a grinning Mexican leaning against the gasoline station. "Bring me a can of gas; on the run, amigo! What the devil are you laughing at?"

"You go for catch that wan, no?"

"I'll land right square on top of him next time. Of all the——"

Then his eye chanced on a figure just emerging from the saloon across the dusty road, a broad, inflated looking man in a light tan summer suit, with tan and white shoes and a glaring white straw hat encircled by a broad purple band, and Jerry

Boyne's lowering brows perked up quizzically. Just then the nattily dressed individual saw him and came running, emitting a throaty sound of welcome as he charged across the dusty road.

"Hello, Crazy Fool!" clamored the throaty voice that broke upon a high note of delight. "Thought you were dead. Why ain't you?"

Jerry Boyne's grin came flashing back, for here was a man whom he liked, whom he had not seen for upward of a year, with whom at odd times he had lived life in some of its intriguing moments.

"Hello yourself, Succulent Squash," he called back, and the two shook hands warily. "So Buenos Aires couldn't hold the accomplished Mr. Elmer Blodgett?"

"Thought you were anchored in the Argentine?" observed Elmer Blodgett.

"Behold me just arrived from Argentina. And done with foreign lands, my boy."

"In that?" Blodgett nodded at the monoplane. "Guess it was your engine I heard just now; didn't sound so good to me." He stepped closer to the monoplane, regarded it curiously, encircled it and at the end of his little tour demanded, "Make it yourself?"

"Assembled it," grinned Jerry.

"At some city dump, looks like," grunted Elmer.

"If I was you I wouldn't bank much on that engine, not the way it sounded."

"I take no chances except getting off the ground and

coming down. The rest of the time I keep high enough so if the old bird goes cuckoo, all I've got to do is step out and jump."

"Parachute?" Elmer Blodgett shivered. "Why on earth guys like you want to go sailing around up high when there's a perfectly good earth to walk on——" He

broke off abruptly and a sudden look of lively suspicion shone in his eyes. "What's the game, Jerry?" he whispered. "Rum running? Or dope or Chinks?"

JERRY smote him on a thick round shoulder.

"You couldn't see a gent with a walking cane without wondering whether he carried a knife or cocaine in the thing. If all your suspicions came true, what a rollicking old world it would be. And, by the bye, what do you happen to be doing in such a dump as this?"

Instead of answering the question as off-handedly as it was asked, Elmer Blodgett chose to look mysterious, and Jerry laughed. For it was always Elmer's way to draw veils of mystery about himself. If you asked him what he had had for supper he would manage somehow to convey the impression that if you only knew the truth of that little matter you'd be fairly amazed.

"Come and have a glass of beer and we'll talk," suggested the stout man. "Their whisky here is vile, their wine filthy, but the beer, man, is tasty to the palate and soothing to the system."

"Can't, Elmer, thanks just the same. It happens I'm in a hurry—Confound it!" he muttered as he observed the leaning Mexican still leaning. "How about that gasoline?"

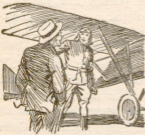
"What's the hurry, Jerry? Where to in this grand rush?"

Jerry started to answer, then checked his words and stared at his old friend almost blankly.

"Hanged if I know!" he chuckled as Elmer regarded him with a revival of suspicion.

"Haven't changed much, Crazy Fool," snorted Elmer. "Off on a dead run at the devil's beckoning, and before the devil himself has quite made up his mind where he's sending you."

"It's this way," Jerry explained. "Just two shakes ago I was promising myself that inside twenty minutes I'd be over yon-



der." He lifted a long arm, leather-jacketed, to point to the little blue hills, inviting in the northern distance. "Then a nice friendly guy fell off his horse, poked me in the jaw and galloped away without leaving me his street address or telephone number. I've got a sudden craving to look him up."

"Stranger, Jerry? Just piled off his pony and popped you one and hot-hoofed it out of here?" That old knowing look came back into Elmer's lively blue eyes. He thought best to sink his voice to a whisper again. "I ain't been here long, Jerry, old horse, but long enough to sense things! Get me? Lucky for you he used his fist instead of a bowie knife. Some secret enemy of yours, old kid, advised of your coming has his hired assassins looking for you. Let little Elmer Blodgett tell you that there are queer happenings pulled off along the border line. And if you're mixed up in something shady——"

"Whether you've been here long or short, maybe you can tell me something. Know a man named Sommers, Gerald Hand Sommers?"

"No, I don't know him. But I know of him. Anyway, I've heard his name a few times. What about him?"

"You've told me that he's still here. Lives over yonder." Again he pointed to the hills. "At a place called High Mesa. I was on my way there when I had drop down for gas—and got poked in the jaw."

"Here's where I can save you from risking your neck in that flying machine. I've got a car over back of the saloon; come along, we'll have that beer and I'll take you where you'll find this Sommers guy."

"Man, I'd be at High Mesa before you did the first mile of desert."

"Only you wouldn't find your man there. He's over at the Empire."

"What's that? Another saloon?"

"The Empire, my boy, is a ranch. A regular rancho de luxe that stretches over

half Mexico and some good bit of the old U. S. A. If you had ever come this way before, you'd know about it."

"I remember now. I'd forgotten——"

"It's got half a million acres to it," ran on Elmer Blodgett with pride, being that type of man who always manages to extract some credit for himself from whatever large account he may be delivering, quite as though he had had a hand in ordering the things he speaks of. "A woman owns it, too; what do you think of that? A widow lady, young man, and from all accounts a heller. They call her the Empress."

"They would," conceded Jerry. "Yes, I seem to remember having heard of her, too."

"Well, here's the point: There's some kind of big doings over at the Empire Rancho today and tonight, and among those present there'll be your bird from High Mesa. How do I know, not knowing him personal? I listen around, son. He's got some fancy ponies. He's entering one or two in the race at the Empire this afternoon. I know, because I'm placing a little money, and I only do that when I've nosed around a bit for scraps of info. The rancho is only over that way a bit; there's a good road and we'll be there before you know it."

He in his turn pointed and Jerry observed that he pointed in the same direction which the red-headed young man on the black mare had ridden.

"That road? Where else does it go?"

"Where else could it go? I answer you. Nowhere. Out that way, if you poked around all summer, you wouldn't find anything but Empire Ranch. Come ahead, my little one. Beer before business." He cast a last scornful look at the old monoplane. "It'll be safe here," he observed sarcastically.

Jerry let the words pass. His eyes no longer trafficked with the bright little blue hills but, brimming with eagerness, followed the way of the dusty road leading

through sand and sage to the Empire ranch.

CHAPTER II

WHAT OF THE HERITAGE?

IN A cool grove of monster cottonwoods the dance platform, decked with evergreen garlands, stood ready for the gala occasion, and already some two hundred men and women from both sides of the international boundary line gathered in the grateful shade. This way came Jerry Boyne at such a swift long-legged pace that his friend, who had not been able to catch up with him from the moment they left the car at the outer gate, was moved to gentle swearing. Jerry hung on his heels a moment but did not turn; his eyes were everywhere at once, seeking to single out one form from all this throng.

"What's eating you, Jerry?" muttered Blodgett, mopping furiously at his dripping brow with a pink-bordered handkerchief. "Follow me, can't you? I invited you to this party, didn't I? First we got to pay our respects to the Empress. Her name is Doña Luisa Blanco Fernandez, and she's no more Mex by birth than the Statue of Liberty is. New Yorker, she was once on a while; if you'll listen to me," and he began whispering, "a lively little dancer and general entertainer until she led old Don Fernandez to the altar, and that was before you were born——"

"Later," said Jerry impatiently. "I'm plowing through this mob looking for somebody, remember that. If you get track of him first, it's a man named Sommers; Gerald Sommers of High Mesa——"

"There she is; that's her," whispered Elmer Blodgett, and froze on to his arm. "Tricked out like the Queen of Siam, sort of holding court on the platform. Come ahead."

Jerry shook him off and went his way.

"Later," he said. "I've got something else on my mind right now."

"On my mind—and in my heart," he might have said, and spoken the truth. For of a sudden the fifteen years of wandering

fell away from him and he was back among his boyhood days. He had loved his father and his father had loved him; it was not coldness but heat which had separated the



two. A fiery lot were the men of the Sommers tribe, good lovers, strong haters, staunch friends, eager strikers of lusty blows. With them it was no new thing for a father and son to come in swift passionate heat to an abrupt parting of the ways. It was "Damn you, sir," and "Hell take you, sir," a door slammed and the ending of an old, well-loved order of things.

JUST now Jerry Boyne allowed himself a flick of pure sentiment. He recalled little things, the sorts of things which are so often laid away as in lavender. He mused that a few minutes ago, while his monoplane circled high above, there must have been many eyes turned aloft if for but a moment; that among others his father had no doubt looked up, then down, with no thought, "Here comes my kid home again, back around the world to see me." Spots of color tinged Jerry's tanned cheeks; his eyes were very bright as he anticipated the moment when they would rest on the tall, erect form of his father, when his hand would touch the other's shoulder, when he'd say, "Hello, Dad. I hear you've got a horse in the running today. I'm betting on him."

Beyond the cottonwood grove he caught a glimpse of a very high, businesslike white adobe wall; there were sturdy iron gates set in it near the corners, and through them and above the wall itself

he saw something of the sprawling, red-tiled house. Here was a natural oasis which the almost unlimited wealth of Doña Luisa Blanco Fernandez, who used to be Louise White, a dancing girl, had made into a green place where springtime loitered under a blazing summer sky. There were trees and shrubs and flowers on all hands. He saw also the race course where a few men began to gather, and moved in that direction, turning his head to glance into the faces of men and women who strolled in intimate groups.

It was with an actual start that he recognized in one of these small knots of humanity the red-headed young fellow with whom he had had an encounter in Nacional. But this one's eye did not chance to meet his, and Jerry shrugged and went on; if he had forgotten the chap's very existence this long it was just as well to ignore it a while longer. For, not only was Jerry burning with impatience to come upon his father, but also it struck him that any unfinished business between him and the sort of man who spun on his heel and smashed you while you were not looking, was entirely a private and personal matter. That too, like his introduction to his hostess, was a matter for "Later on."

HE KEPT seeking everywhere and now and then those among whom he went turned to look back at him, intrigued perhaps by the look in his eyes.

"He's somewhere in reach of my voice," he mused, hurrying on. "It seems funny to be so near each other again. I could yell out, 'Hey, Dad, where are you? It's Jerry come home!' and he'd hear me. I'll bump into him any minute."

And, looking off to the side where he had caught a glimpse of three men beyond a clump of young acacia trees, bump into someone he did. It was a girl who must have been paying as scant attention to her pathway as he; a startled exclamation burst from her and Jerry whipped back, snatching off his hat.

"Hope I didn't hurt you? I'm terribly —" he began contritely.

Only then did he get a good, square look into her flushed face, and he stopped in the midst of what he was saying and regarded her in the same stunned fashion a man might be guilty of were the empty air before him suddenly to fill to a vision of heaven. There are girls and girls, as Jerry Boyne very well knew; and still other girls, if you like. But never until now had it dawned on him that this everyday old world of ours held anywhere a girl like her. Not a girl of mere flesh and blood like all others, but one distilled from the essences of sweet flowers; there were roses in her cheeks and violets in her eyes—

"May I pass, please? Perhaps you haven't noticed that this path is very narrow?"

And still Jerry stared. That odd sensation which is so familiar to all of us at moments gripped and bewildered him; he told himself that of course until this second he had never laid eyes on her, yet it seemed none the less that already he had known her—somewhere—sometime, long, long ago—

She lifted her brows very slightly. He approved of her expression; also he saw her eyes better. They were far lovelier than any mere violets, not in fact to be spoken of in the same breath with that flower. Sweeter than pansies; gray, were there little golden flecks in them? Or was that a trick of the sun.

"I asked if I might pass?"

"I'll be all right in just a minute," said Jerry.

"Oh! You are ill?" she cried swiftly.

"Look here—I'm sorry I was so clumsy; guess I was looking over my shoulder. But you're not hurt, are you? Tell me; surely I have known you somewhere——"

"Oh!" It was quite another sort of "Oh!" altogether; whereas the first had breathed a sudden sympathy this one was a frozen "Oh!", as friendly as an icicle. And she elaborated, "I think that that is

the very stupidest observation that stupid men ever make, don't you? But I shall answer it; no, señor, we have never known each other. Not anywhere."

She pressed by and, rapidly twirling the big straw hat in her hands, soon passed from his sight.

"I seem to feel," he remarked as he went on, fighting the impulse to turn back after her and explain that he wasn't trying to get fresh, but had meant what he had said, "that today is going to be a day of days."

His search carried him on down to the race track with its two grandstands, a tiny one for the chosen few who were invited to sit with the quondam Louise White, dancing girl, now "Empress," a larger one for the riffraff. Half a dozen times he was treated to a start as some pair of straight, soldierly shoulders caught his eye, but each time he shook his head and sought on.

"A day of days," he told himself, and smiled. "And I can wait a minute or so. What a fool I've been, anyway! Now that I've held off all these years I'm fool enough to get impatient over another five minutes."

A SECOND time he saw the red-head of the landing field; the fellow now was in the midst of a laughing bevy of women, yet kept staring off over their heads as though he, too, sought someone.

And a second time also did he see the girl of the gray eyes. She could have seen him, so close did she pass, but very obviously did not; so obviously, in fact, that he doubted. She was hurrying, waving her big straw hat to someone, and Jerry looked sharply to see who that someone might be. When he saw he stopped short. There was a man who, once seen, was never to be forgotten; a man who somehow conveyed the impression of being tall whereas he was nothing of the sort, an old fellow who carried himself with an air. Hair and imperial were snowy white, eyes as black as ink. He dressed all in white flannels with a white silk shirt and tall-

heeled black boots and a broad brimmed soft black hat. At a glance you knew him for what he was, a Spaniard and a gentleman.

"Señor Antonio Costa! And she—by thunder, I do know her! His little granddaughter; we played two whole days together! She must have been nearly ten, then! Wonder if she remembers?"

For it had been from Señor Costa that Jerry's father had bought the High Mesa. Memories clung thick about the whole affair. Jerry, the impulsive boy, had been deeply stirred; so much had happened. A day of wandering about with the little girl, a good-bye, another day with her some two or three weeks later; the closing of the deal for the big ranch at High Mesa, and a certain explosion which had blown Jerry around the world.

Well, he'd be talking with her again soon now, saying, "Look here, young woman, every man who says he has known you before isn't just trying to flirt with you!" Watching the light of memory dawn in her dear sweet eyes. Yes, all that soon. But where had his father taken himself? Why, among a mere handful of a couple of hundred people, was he so hard to find?

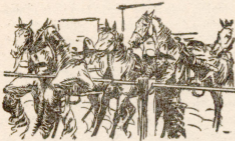
HE BEGAN asking, stopping a man here and there, saying, "Pardon, I am looking for a man named Sommers; Mr. Gerald Sommers. Do you happen to know him? Have you seen him anywhere?"

It appeared that everyone knew Gerald Sommers.

"I saw him only a moment ago," said one. "Oh, sure, he is here." And another exclaimed, "Sommers? Of course! He was on his way, I think, to pay his respects to the Empress."

Jerry again circled the dance platform, looking swiftly and keenly into the faces of all men, ignoring many a bright curious glance turned upon him from some lively young woman who also hoped to find this a day of days. From a slight distance he

made out the spot where Señora Fernandez stood, "holding court," as Elmer Blodgett had said of her. There was no doubting which one was "the Empress."



She would have attracted attention in any gathering, as vivid as a splash of crimson on a drab background. As proud as Lucifer, vain and arrogant, contemptuous of convention, a law unto herself and unto the many hundreds who in one way and another were dependent upon her, she carried herself in exactly that manner which a former cabaret dancer would almost inevitably associate with the resounding title which the border bestowed upon her.

She was a woman of fifty or close to it, but you did not guess that until you came close and looked straight into her eyes. Bold, cold eyes they were, an icy blue, as keen as knives, and a full half century old in shrewdness and disillusionment. But before he looked into them Jerry picked her out by her dress. A scarlet jacket made to her own taste, with a broad belt and a flashing silver buckle, riding breeches and high, gleaming yellow boots, a low crowned broad brimmed white hat with a long straight feather—and in her small, hard hands a cruel looking little riding whip. Beyond all this she was of medium stature, slender and sinewy and very light and quick upon her feet.

All this he took in at a glance, and his eyes sped on taking stock of those surrounding her. They were the old Spaniard whom he had recognized a few moments earlier, Señor Antonio Costa, and his little granddaughter; a young man with a tiny

silken black mustache and prominent blue eyes half veiled by drooping lids, a burly looking brute of a fellow, dressed like a Mexican *vaquero*, even to the long spurs—and two others. These two were Jerry's old friend, Elmer Blodgett, and his more recent acquaintance, the red-headed horseman of the landing field. Nowhere did Jerry see his father.

HE WAS just on the verge of drawing back and seeking elsewhere when Elmer saw him and called out to him so sharply that all those about the Empress turned and stared at him.

"Hi, Jerry! This way. I've been telling Her Majesty about you. She wants to look you over."

"Of all the asses," muttered Jerry under his breath but, since there was nothing else to be done, went forward to be presented. At least, he thought, there'd be a word or two spoken with old Antonio Costa's little granddaughter, the first of many, many words to be had with her before the promise of life fulfilled itself. He was conscious of her bright eyes on him as he drew nearer, then of the fact that she had turned her back and was saying something laughingly to the red-headed fellow at her side.

"Ladies and gents," Elmer Blodgett was saying expansively, "meet Mr. Jerry Boyne, late of Argentine, friend of my bosom. Jerry Boyne that I've known pretty near since the time we were neighbors in our cradles." He grasped Jerry by the arm and dragged him face to face with the Empress. "Señora Fernandez," he ran on, "meet my old pal, Jerry Boyne, a wild boy maybe, but a square guy."

The Empress stared at Jerry coldly. It was clear that she liked to size men up for herself and that all Elmer's effusive chatter was of no more effect on her liking or disliking the stranger than if it were a light wind blowing. Jerry, returning her look, saw the fifty years in her eyes and saw also the small hard lines in her face. Once, some twenty or thirty years earlier,

she had been a very pretty woman; now she looked hard and coarse. Coarsened not so much with the passing time as with unbridled passions.

Of a sudden there came a strange softening to that hard face, a quick smile to the red mouth and a flash of warmth into the keen blue eyes.

"Shake, Jerry," she said, and put out her strong hand to meet his in a powerful grip. "You're at home on the Empire. Take what you want; it's yours."

Jerry bowed and thanked her, and his eyes went involuntarily hurrying to Antonio Costa's granddaughter. If only the old Spanish phrase, adopted by the Empress, meant all that it said!

"I've just met a few of the Empress's friends," continued Elmer, still gripping Jerry's arm and steering him in the way he should go, "and I'll pass the introductions along. Mr. Costa, meet my old pal, Jerry Boyne. Miss Costa——"

"Beryl!" exclaimed Jerry, and made them stare, the girl most of all. It all came rushing back on him, all the content of those two days of so long ago. "Not Miss Costa at all; Miss Beryl Rodman!"

SHE looked at him wonderingly, then flushed hotly. Nothing was clearer to her than that the fresh young man who had bumped into her so awkwardly a little while ago had gone around asking who she was, and now meant to make some further pretence of having met her before.

"Right you are!" cried Elmer Blodgett. "My mistake. The name is Miss Rodman. Miss Rodman, meet old Jerry Boyne." Miss Rodman inclined her head—or merely almost did so? Elmer rushed on with his introductions, still manhandling his captive. Confronting the youngish gentleman with the swollen eyes and lazy lids, a dandyfied young simpleton who affected a swagger which resulted in being only a mince, he announced, "Señor Charles Fernandez, son of Her Majesty, widely and affectionately known as 'Prince Charlie.'"

Prince Charlie sneered and did not offer to shake hands.

Still Elmer babbled on. The brutish looking fellow in the cowboy outfit down to the long rowelled Mexican spurs, was presented. It appeared that he was known far and wide as El Bravo; he too was an American and his name was really Frank Smith. He was nothing less than the Empress's right hand—

"Left hand, if you say so, old boy," snapped the Empress. "I'm my own right, by God, and I guess the world knows it."

"And now we're all friends," said Elmer, and beamed right and left. "I don't have to introduce you two red-heads, do I? This is the man you were looking for, eh, Jerry? You've known each other of old, I take it?"

Jerry's dark eyes for a moment rested on the reddish brown ones of the man who so short a time ago had knocked him flat.

"Looking for me?" said the other coolly, and shrugged.

"Of course he was," broke in Elmer. "You're Gerald Sommers, ain't you?"

A curt nod said, "Yes;" and a flash of the reddish-brown eyes demanded, "and what business may that be of yours?"

"I was looking for a Mr. Gerald Hand Sommers," said Jerry, puzzled, wondering how this fellow came by the family name.

"Looking for me?" said the red-headed fellow a second time. Then he laughed. "I believe we did run into each other once, didn't we? There may be a little bit of unfinished business between us? I'll be glad to go into it at the proper time with you. This isn't hardly the time and place, is it?"

"You are Gerald Hand Sommers?" said Jerry dully.

"That's my name. You'll have no trouble finding me when you want me. I'm not skipping the country, you know."

JERRY stared at him incredulously; slowly a strange feeling crept over him that the promise of the day was a lie, that

eager hopes were coming down in ruins and ash heaps.

"There was another Gerald Hand Sommers," he said heavily. "An older man. He would be nearly sixty now. He lived at High Mesa——"

"He has been dead nearly five years. He was my father."

Jerry opened his lips to shout, "You lie!" But for the moment he held his peace. So great an amazement swept over him that he stared at the faces about him and was tempted to believe that this was all dream-stuff, faces in a nightmare. Jerry heard the fellow who called himself by his own name laughing and talking with Beryl Rodman; he saw her look a moment curiously back at him, then stroll away with her obvious admirer. He heard as from afar the other voices, the Empress saying something in an undertone to El Bravo, her "left hand," and Elmer's babbling voice entertaining the old Spaniard.

Dead. That, after all, was the thing which mattered—and stunned. The shock of it was all the greater because during his search for his father here in this holiday crowd Jerry had been so sure of him, had in his fancy seen him so clearly, a man hale and hearty, a man of the finest, the father he had turned his back on in wrath, the father whom through everything he had never ceased to love. Dead.

"I can't get it," he kept saying within himself, over and over.

Presently Elmer Blodgett gravitated to the Empress and Jerry stepped swiftly to the side of old Señor Costa.

"Will you favor me with a few words in private, señor?" he asked gravely. "There is a question or two that I am sure you could answer for me if you would be so kind."

The old man regarded him calmly; he had the trick, while not appearing unfriendly, of holding himself aloof. His glance had the effect of reminding Jerry Boyne that a mere casual introduction by such a man as Elmer Blodgett meant a degree less than nothing at all. Yet

though he might hold himself apart, none comported himself with greater native courtesy than did Antonio Costa.



"Of course, surely, señor," he answered simply and strolled away with Jerry, excusing himself

from his hostess with a profound bow. "It is something about the elder Mr. Sommers?" he asked presently.

Jerry nodded. Costa regarded him with a flicker of interest, so suddenly grim and bleak had the younger man's face gone.

"About his death," began Jerry.

Costa sighed. "A very fine man. It was a tragedy. Nearly five years ago as his son has told you. He was killed. Someone shot him. No one knows who did it."

JERRY stared away across the green fields of the Empire and off into the further northern distances where the little blue hills no longer laughed and invited but seemed to withdraw and dwindle in a gathering mist.

"He was a friend?" asked Señor Costa gently.

Jerry started.

"Tell me about this young man who seems to have the same name. An adopted son? Taking the place of that other son who quarrelled with his father and went away?"

"No, señor; not a son of adoption. The real son. Yes, he and his father quarrelled; he ran away. He was a boy then, perhaps twelve years old. Then his father died; killed as I have told you. He was wealthy; his son was his heir. The lawyers advertised; in time the boy, him whom you met just now, returned. That is all."

"All? Good Lord, it's enough!" cried Jerry furiously. "Look here, Señor Costa, I——"

"Yes?" said the old man, his interest intrigued by Jerry's manner rather than by his insufficient words.

"Then this fellow," snapped Jerry, jabbing an angry thumb in the general direction taken by the red-headed chap who had just now wandered off with Beryl Rodman, "is now the owner of High Mesa?"

"I see that you are strongly interested, señor." Don Antonio proceeded to build himself a thin cigarette with quick slender fingers. "It is a long story, but for you I will make it a short one. The High Mesa was long ago my home, an old Spanish grant. I was born there, señor. I had a great affection for that place." He lighted his cigarette and shrugged. "Circumstances were such that I—I decided to sell High Mesa. I sold it to the elder Mr. Sommers; that was nearly fifteen years ago—"

"I know," said Jerry.

"You know? Well, perhaps you know that I went away? To Spain, in fact. Later I—Circumstances altered, señor. I returned here with the one purpose of buying back my old home. That was shortly after the death of Gerald Sommers, the elder, and the return of his son. So now I answer your question; High Mesa is mine again."

"You bought High Mesa—from *him*?"

"Yes, Señor Boyne. Thanks to God, yes! Now have I answered all your questions? If there is anything else—?"

Jerry surprised him with a short laugh so utterly devoid of mirth that the old man's fine white brows shot up wonderingly.

"Thank you, there is nothing else. Later? Perhaps. *Quien sabe?* Who, in fact, knows anything? You have been very kind."

Antonio Costa inclined his head and moved away. When abruptly he turned and looked back he saw Jerry Boyne standing very still, his hat crumpled in his hands, his head thrown back, his eyes turned with a strange light in them toward the far blue hills.

CHAPTER III

GAMBLERS ALL

AT HIGH noon with the smell of barbecuing beef heavy on the still air and the aroma of bubbling coffee stealing upward through the blue hazes which hung over the glowing pits, Elmer Blodgett came seeking Jerry, and finally found him perched on one of the cottonwood poles of a corral.

"Hi, Jerry!" he sang out. "What's eating you? I've been hunting you high and low. They're just opening kegs of beer like it was water. Hop down, young man and follow me. What do you think you're doing up there anyhow?"

"Thinking," said Jerry, and looked keenly at his old friend, wondering somewhat vaguely what directions the circuitous Elmer's thoughts would dart off into if he knew just what the thinking was all about.

"Thinking!" snorted Elmer. "On a day like this? Don't you know there's time to ponder and times to pick your rosebuds while you can get 'em free for the taking?"

"The beer can wait, can't it? I want to talk with you."

Blodgett put his head to one side and narrowed his eyes.

"Something up?" he queried eagerly. He climbed puffing up to a place beside Jerry. "Yeah, it'll keep; the old dame sure knows how to do herself proud; they're hauling it up in trucks."

"How long have you been here, Elmer?"

"About ten days, around Nacional, that is. Why?"

"What's holding you in a place like this? I asked that once and you just looked foxy. What's the answer—between friends?"

Elmer laughed and began rubbing his plump hands together.

"Between friends, I'm looking for an investment. Heard of an opening and have been just fooling around getting the lay of the land. It's this way, Jerry; there's a gent not so far away from this stock

corral right now that's got a reputation for losing money at any sort of game the other fellow cares to mention. If it was cards, horse racing, cock-fighting, dice or dominoes, he'd fall all over himself to contribute. Me, as maybe you know, I don't mind a little friendly game of poker now and then." He flung out his hands with a little gesture of "And there you are!"

BUT when Jerry made no rejoinder but merely sat frowning into empty space, Elmer shifted, cast him a sidelong glance and finally burst out in full confidence. "It's that old Spanish fandango, Jerry. The chin-whiskered hidalgo, would you believe it? Filthy with money, the old boy is, and a sport of sports, if you hear it all.

"Played with him yet?"

"Hell, no!" cried Elmer. "You don't know the old don yet if you think any hombre can go up and grab him by the flipper and say, 'Come ahead, old rooster, let's try our luck.' Ever hear the word 'exclusive,' Jerry? It means shut the world out and lock the door. That word was made for this same old Don Spanish. I ain't had a look in. But now? Today we meet, Don Antonio Aranda Costa and Mr. Elmer Blodgett, moving in the same high circles, so to speak, formally introduced and all that. From now on, set back and watch. Come to me any time next week and I'll lend you a fortune."

"Exclusive?" said Jerry. "I'd feel that, too, if I didn't find him running with this bunch. This Empress of yours—nothing exclusive there, is there, Elmer?"

"You're wrong, boy. Friendly maybe she is in a broad and spacious, don't-give-a-damn way, but she keeps her head up and steps apart same as old Costa. Right now, for example, while the humdrum eats with its fingers and guzzles beer out of tin cups, where's she? In the castle over yonder, Jerry Boyne, foregathering with a bunch of the elite, picking chicken bones

and swigging high grade liquor. Don't get her wrong; she's a mixer all right, but she



draws the line of what they call *noblesse oblige*. Why, she says, 'Elmer, howdy!' to me as nice as you please out in the open air; but think I'd get any show to put

my hoofs on the carpets? You just bet she's exclusive, the way you learn to be in a Broadway café. But I'm nosing in on 'em, Jerry boy, I'm nosing in, and like I said all you got to do is look me up next week and I'll lend you enough good long green to go buy you a new flying machine."

"Thanks for the offer, old-timer, and most of all for the full confidence. It would appear that you will have a little extra time on your hands, while waiting for the big game to come off; also I happen to recall that you told me a while back that you had been doing a little listening around. Picking up a few scraps of information."

"Right you are, Jerry. Before placing his bets, Mr. Blodgett always feels his way, so to speak. And am I correct in assuming that you have just developed a nice lively curiosity about something?"

"I've got a pretty messy sort of story to confide in you," said Jerry thoughtfully, and Elmer Blodgett leaned forward so eagerly to hear it that he came close to toppling off the fence. "No, I'll not spill it now; there's no time for it and besides I'd rather you didn't know a thing about it while you're making a few investigations. What you don't know, you can't give away."

ELMER looked both disappointed and hurt.

"I'm not the guy to snitch," he remarked with dignity.

"It isn't that." Jerry laid a firm hand on the plump knee. "I want a talk with you later on, maybe tonight. In the meantime, Elmer, will you in your own inimitable style glean a bit of information for me? There are reasons why I'd prefer not seeming interested."

"I knew it!" murmured Elmer, his voice hushed, his eyes bright with that old familiar suspicious look. "The minute I glimpsed you fooling along the border with a plane, I said to myself——"

"Yes, I know. You said it to me, too. Well, for the present you can suppose what you like, that I'm running booze or smuggling Chinks. Meantime will you gather all the information you can about ——"

He hesitated. He couldn't bring himself to saying, "Gerald Sommers."

But Elmer spoke it for him, swiftly supplying the name. "It's that guy Sommers, ain't it? There's some mystery there, eh, Jerry? You knew his old man—now you find him popped off, a bullet in his gizzard and the young fellow up to something shady? Am I right?"

"He's the man," Jerry conceded. "I take it that already you know something of him. You intimated as much."

"All I wanted to know was what sort of horses he owns. There's racing this afternoon, and I'm leaning toward placing a small, conservative bet or so. I'll hand you a hot one, kid; bet a few beans on Lady Beryl; that's Sommers's pony for the second race."

"Lady Beryl, eh?" Jerry began hunting a cigarette.

"She's it. Named for Señorita Fandango, what? Well, that's no never mind of ours. In the same race the old don has an entry of his own; so has the Empress. It'll be some race, boy. But take my prescription and clean up. Yeah, I've been listening around. Sommers ought to know horses, from what I hear, and he's backing his own mare in the good old fashioned way; I'd say he was betting all the way down to his shirt on her."

But Jerry's interest had been a flash only; he was not concerned just now with horses and racing.

"That's all you know of him? Maybe, without seeming too particularly interested in the man, you could feel around and find out a good deal about him?"

"Sub rosa stuff?" Elmer laughed his soft, throaty laugh. "The first few toddling steps the baby Elmer took were in rubber-soled creepers! You say find out a good deal about this sport? I'll dig up everything; I'll tell you later if he's got a gold fill in his back molar or a hangnail on his little toe; how long he's been here and where he came from——"

"Do that!" said Jerry sharply, and again Elmer was galvanized, a purely delicious thrill running down his backbone. "Exactly that, Elmer. And all about his inheritance at High Mesa—and the sale to Señor Costa."

"Leave it to Elmer! And—Sh! We're due for an interruption. I'll add just this to the matter," he ran on in a voice for any to hear, "that no better beer ever came out of Germany. And I ought to know; for three months I operated a snug little brewery all of my own down in Mexico City, and—Hello, here comes Mr. Smith, I was just telling Jerry——"

THE burly cowboy, known as El Bravo and acknowledged by the Empress as her left hand, his approach heralded by the clank of his long spurs, stopped at the corral.

"You, Jerry Boyne," he said curtly, "Señora Fernandez wants you up at the house. She is having some friends in for dinner and says to fetch you."

Jerry looked down on him curiously. He was thinking how odd it was that the Empress had invited him; also he was intrigued by the messenger himself. El Bravo impressed him as being at once the most powerful and most vicious looking brute he had ever seen, and he had encountered full many a raw bucko mate and manhandling mine boss in his wanderings

up and down. This fellow's shoulders were inordinately broad and thick, his muscular arms long and equipped with enormous, hairy hands; his thin-lipped mouth and cold eyes somehow managed to convey the impression of a snake, cold-blooded and treacherous and cruel.

"Me?" said Jerry with a start, realizing that he was staring.

"You," said El Bravo, who had stood staring back expressionlessly. "Now. She's waiting."

"Gosh!" murmured Elmer Blodgett. "Hop to it, Jerry. You always were the lucky kid."

"Thanks," said Jerry to El Bravo. "Thank Señora Fernandez for me, will you? But you might explain to her that I'm with a friend I haven't seen for a long time."

"Don't be an ass," snorted Elmer.

"You can bring your friend with you."

"Not if he's not invited," retorted Jerry. There was something about El Bravo's manner that he resented; the fellow seemed to think that he, as the Empress's left hand, had but to crook a finger and have any man come running.

"Well, then, he is invited," said El Bravo, grown more surly than ever. If there was any reading a man's thought in such cold hard eyes it might be suspected that he agreed with Elmer in naming Jerry an ass, and further found difficulty in restraining himself from saying as much.

"Invited? Me?" exclaimed Elmer, and leaped nimbly down from his perch.

El Bravo shrugged and turned away contemptuously. Over his massive shoulder he said carelessly, "The Señora said that if Jerry Boyne refused to come alone, then to tell him to bring his friend along."

Elmer's eyes rounded, then the left one closed in a wink behind El Bravo's broad back.

"Watch that dame, Jerry, old son!" he whispered dramatically. "Can she read a man like a kid gloms on to the Sunday comics? Can she peer into the future, knowing from the cut of a man's eye the

way he's bound to jump? Watch her, Jerry, old horse. This sudden shining up to you, what's it mean? There's an Ethiopian in the coal bin, and maybe it's just as well I am invited, just to watch over you. Coming down? You ain't thinking of holding out on her, are you?" he asked in sudden alarm.

Jerry slipped slowly down from his place.

"Hardly," he said lightly. "Come ahead; let's follow the genial Mr. Smith."

EL BRAVO was waiting for them at the entrance through the high adobe wall. The iron gate swung open for the three to pass through, swung shut behind them; Jerry had a glimpse of the gate-keeper, a swarthy, Indian type of fellow, curiously garbed. There was a sort of cloak or ample cape lined with scarlet, high glistening black boots, peaked many-gallon hat—and a flash of steel at the fellow's belt.

"The Empress sure has got the swell ideas about things," remarked Blodgett affably. But Jerry only nodded absently and El Bravo appeared not to have heard, and the trio went on after that in silence.

At a long table in an open patio lunch was already at its beginnings. Jerry saw the empty chair at the Empress's right hand and was pricked by a little flick of astonishment as he saw that she was beckoning him to take it. On her left was Don Antonio Costa who looked up at him with just the hint of lifted brows.

"Squat, Jerry, and be one of the gang," Señora Fernandez invited with a pleasant, friendly smile. "There's a cocktail waiting for you. Drink hearty."

As he took his place he flashed a photographic look up and down the table; he saw young Charles Fernandez at the far end and noted that El Bravo was just taking a seat at his left elbow; also he marked that Beryl Rodman sat at young Fernandez's right and was under the full battery of his prominent eyes—and looked flushed and uncomfortable under them too,

Jerry thought. Half way between the two ends of the table, between a couple of young women whom Jerry did not know, sat the young man of the red hair; just beyond these three Elmer Blodgett was



being squeezed into his place.

It was a meal of much lively chatter, of three kinds of wine, of blaring music coming from a hidden but not sufficiently remote stringed orchestra, of reckless bounty in rich, high-spiced foods—altogether, Jerry thought, a sort of banquet in a nightmare. In effect, the wine and the boisterous music vied with each other, loosening and lifting voices; before the end was all din and babble, with shouts through the general confusion. For Jerry it was, most of all, an occasion for recording a number of queer fragmentary impressions. There were the servants; one wanted to count them! Louise White, now the relic of the plutocrat Ignacio Fernandez, had as Elmer Blodgett was so quick to note, “swell ideas about things.” When she spent money, as she did extravagantly, it was her determination to have that money make a showing. Crystal goblets, cut glass, solid silver. Rare French wines and brandies. Two men at the back of her chair. Liveries such as a Louise White, become Señora Fernandez, would invent. At the far end of the table her son, “the beloved Prince Charlie,” was leering at Beryl Rodman, twisting his glass, sipping, plucking at his loose lower lip, sipping—bending intimately close to her, murmuring—and Beryl, still flushed, was leaning on the arm of her chair furthest from him. At his side was El Bravo—what the devil was he doing in this gathering? Silent, seeming to heed no word that was spoken the whole time—as watchful as a

hawk. Watchful for what? It was hard to say exactly, yet there it was, he was like a body-guard. Prince Charlie's body-guard. And, marooned midway on one side of the table, the man of the red hair who called himself Gerald Sommers, a man who ate sparingly and drank with a rush and whose eyes were forever straying to where Beryl sat and Prince Charlie's eyes crawled over her. Just across the table from Jerry was the old Spaniard, urbane, giving every attention to his hostess—yet on fire within. Now and then a wild flash of his night-black eyes betrayed him.

“Tell me about yourself, Jerry.”

He started. Señora Fernandez had a little fan in her strong, sun-browned hand and tapped him on the arm.

“About me?” He shrugged. “Here, in this company, at the most interesting ranch I ever saw—?”

She leaned closer and her words were for him alone, lost to all others in the general clamor.

“What's this about you and Red Handsome?”

“Red Handsome?” At first he didn't know whom she meant.

She made a gesture with her fan. “Young Sommers. Nicknames settle along the border as thick as flies. His comes naturally enough; to begin with, he's the best looking man here. On top of that the name, Gerald Hand Sommers; it's only a step to call him Red Handsome.”

“Yes,” agreed Jerry. “And by the way I understand he has a horse in the running this afternoon—?”

“Damn his horse,” said the Empress emphatically. “You don't switch me off the track that easily, Jerry. I asked, what's this about you and him?”

Jerry stiffened; did the woman have some uncanny sense of the things she could not possibly know about? He had for the moment forgotten the encounter in Nacional.

“I don't get you,” he said guardedly.

She looked at him contemptuously. “Are you such a fool as to suppose one man can

knock another down in the morning and word of it not be all over creation by this time of day?"

"Oh," said Jerry, relieved. Then, with an assumption of indifference, he satisfied her curiosity. "I came down out of the sky in an old plane almost on top of him. His horse jumped and he spilled out of the saddle. Whereupon some girls giggled and your Mr. Red Handsome took a wallop at me. When I came to he was on his way over here."

She seemed puzzled.

"You're a pretty hefty looking boy yourself," she said bluntly. "Not yellow, are you?"

"That's no question to ask any man," he smiled at her. "If he were, he'd not admit it, and——"

"If he wasn't, he'd dodge the issue like you're doing! All right, that's a good enough answer. Never saw him before, did you?"

"Never. I just blew in, you know."

"Why?" she demanded sharply. "What brought you here?"

"On my way," he answered easily. "Up from the south. Finished down there, in the Argentine; fed up on it. Headed back north to the land where the eagle screams. Had to come down for gas, ran into an old friend—and here I am. For which," he added with a little bow, "I am duly grateful to a kind fate and Elmer Blodgett."

SHE narrowed her clever eyes to study him.

"A prowler, huh? A foot-loose bird with the itch in his heel? A boy who has been through things, or I'm betting wrong. Scars on the backs of his hands and maybe under his shirt. Want a job, Jerry?"

He hesitated but only long enough to ask himself what she was up to and to admit that he hadn't the vaguest idea.

"Thanks, if that's a tentative offer.——"

"Tentative be damned! It's open and shut. I can use you."

"How do you know you can?"

"Men like you are no foreign language

to Louise," she said with a snap of the fan. She tossed the thing from her, over her shoulder without turning, and one of her servitors caught it expertly; Jerry wondered if that was a trick of hers and the man's. "And when I say a job, I don't have a bunch of pennies in mind, either; I mean money."

"Thanks outright, then. Right now I'm not looking for a job."

"Heeled?" she demanded.

"Yes. Not so heavy with funds that I'm apt to sink deep in the sand, but in a position to take a little lay-off."

He reached for an olive and allowed himself a glance along the table; it was hard to keep his eyes away from the other end. This time he saw Beryl cast a helpless, almost pleading look toward Red Handsome, and saw Prince Charlie glare. Instinctively he turned swiftly to see whether the Empress had marked that byplay, and realized immediately that she had missed none of it.

"What have you got against Red Handsome?" he demanded abruptly, attacking the woman with her own sort of weapon.

"You are a clever boy," she said, and shrugged. She emptied her glass, watched it being refilled and lighted a cigarette. "Can you stick around a day or so as my guest? I might answer that question and we might find other things to talk about. I'm not so sure that you wouldn't like to work with me. You notice I pay you the compliment of saying with me, not for me?"

"I'm impressed. It would be interesting to know——"

"No you don't, Jerry Boyne! No pumping unless you mean business. But if you'll hang around for a few days——"

"I'm full of appreciation, but it happens that I can't. Elmer Blodgett and I have had a little talk; he thinks he's spotted what he calls an investment——"

JUST then there was a small commotion outside, an angry voice and other voices muttering, and almost immediately

one of the men in the red-lined cloaks came hurriedly into the patio, his troubled eyes turned to the Empress.

"Well?" she cried sharply in Spanish. "What sort of hell has broken loose now, Pedro?"

He came to her side and answered in a rush of words meant for her alone; Jerry heard nearly all that was said.

"It's that rancher from the Little Mesa, young Kingsbury. He is a crazy, *por Dios!* He's got a gun; he swears he'll kill somebody unless he sees you right now."

"Kingsbury, huh?" She spoke with a strange, bleak coldness and her eyes, half veiled by her lower lids struck Jerry as being every bit as cruel and deadly as El Bravo's. "And they let him through the gate, eh, Pedro?"

Pedro shrugged elaborately; that was no affair of his and he was emphatic in getting that point made clear. But perhaps he had a kindly feeling for the guard who had let the rancher through, and explained, "Kingsbury is crazy, Señora. And he has a gun. He put it in the face of any who stood in his way."

The Empress sneered at him and named him a fat-head. Then she leaned forward in her chair and her eye met El Bravo's. He immediately pushed his chair back and came to her. The table was hushed, a

f e w f a c e s
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F e r n a n d e z
s p o k e , t h o u g h
s h e d i d n o t r a i s e
h e r v o i c e , e v e r y

word was to be heard clearly throughout the quiet room.

"It's that fool, Kingsbury," she said, and fell to frowning thoughtfully. "He's outside; on the rampage. Got me?"

El Bravo nodded as though here were

nothing new, certainly no matter to bring a pleasant meal to a full stop.

"I'll step out for a word with him, Señora," he said, and turned to the door.

"You'll keep your shirt on, El Bravo!" she snapped at him. "Also you'll stand right behind my chair." She turned to the man Pedro. "Go herd that long-horn in—and you keep your eye on him, too."

BUT Pedro arrived at the doorway only in time to meet young Kingsbury coming in. The rancher barely escaped being a boy; twenty-two or twenty-three, a manly looking youngster with a fine, almost cameo face and the eyes of a dreamer—eyes, at this moment, of one whose dreams had led to madness. Dusty with desert travel, haggard, clutching a rifle before him in tense, hard hands he had the air of being equally ready for murder or self destruction.

"Well, Kingsbury," said the Empress coldly, "you're here. Speak your piece and let the ladies and gents listen in on the brayings of the pig-headest jackass in two countries."

"Bob's dead," said the boy savagely, but with a break in his voice. "Know that?"

"And who the devil is Bob?" demanded the woman, with a voice as sharp as the crack of a whip.

"Bob! You know—Bob, my brother. He—Damn you! Damn you—You she-devil!"

"Better go slow, Kingsbury," said El Bravo quietly.

"Shut up, El Bravo!" she barked at him. "Let the boy rave on. I've been called a damned sight worse than a she-devil in my time—not by so many that I can remember to my face, though," she added almost under her breath. Then, business-like again. "Shoot the works, kid. So Bob's dead? What's the rest of the story? Bob was a fool like you—"

"Damn you!" the boy screamed at her the third time, and the rifle began to shake terribly in his hands. Jerry, for one, thought to see murder done that moment



—and was pretty sure that it would not be the sneering woman who fell, but the kid himself under El Bravo's swift fire. One just knew that El Bravo was ready—and that he would not miss.

BUT Kingsbury did not lift his weapon. He glared about him, then moistened his cracked lips and strove for control of his jumping nerves.

"You tried to buy me and Bob out," he said in a queer, hushed voice. "When we wouldn't sell for less than half what the Little Mesa is worth, you tried to hound us into it. You sent a pack of your dirty dogs to drive off our stock, to wreck our water-ways, to burn us out——"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Oh, you know well enough. Everybody else knows, too. You've got a cut-throat gang that robs and burns and pil-lages at your orders. And now—now," he cried chokingly, "you've got Bob, damn you!"

"Dick Kingsbury," said the Empress, her steady gaze level on his own, "take a tip from me, will you? You're going nuts. You're half drunk, half crazy——" She shrugged. "Better watch your step, kid."

Half drunk? Well, perhaps he was, thought Jerry, watching him keenly. Poor devil. He had gone without sleep, without food, and had, just to keep going, poured much raw liquor into his agony-shot body.

Young Kingsbury looked at her out of wild, red-flecked eyes.

"Where's Bob?" he demanded harshly.

"Why, man alive, I thought you said he was dead!"

"He is. I know he is. But your murdering curs have hidden him. I'll find him; I'll find him if you've buried him a thousand miles deep; I'll find him riddled with bullets. *Bob——!*" He pulled himself up, and seemed suddenly to grow as steady as a rock. "Then I'll know, and then I'll start killing. And I'll start at

the top! You, woman; you, El Bravo, leader of border ruffians——"

The Empress made a slight gesture. Unnoted by most of the company two of Pedro's red-cloaked fellows had joined him at the patio entrance. The three stepped swiftly forward, seizing Kingsbury's arms. An instant later he was hustled out and only his screaming voice came back to assure those who had heard that they were not just awaking from an ugly dream.

"Crazy as a bed-bug," said the Empress contemptuously. She stared at her glass a moment, lifted it with steady fingers, then turned swiftly and looked straight up into El Bravo's eyes. "Yet he's more apt to hurt himself than anyone else," she concluded thoughtfully. "I know that kind; it wouldn't surprise me if I heard before the day was over that the fool had blown his own brains out. He's a weak sister anyhow."

A QUEER nervous laugh greeted her words and drew all eyes to the one who laughed at such a time. It was Prince Charlie. His face was deathly white; he was cowering low in his chair as though he had been about to slip under the table. A twitching of his muscles showed him just coming out of the grip of terror.

The Empress spoke swiftly, singling out Red Handsome. "Funny about your meeting this morning with Jerry, here, Red," she said banteringly. "He's just been telling me about it. How you fell off your horse! And I thought that you considered yourself a fancy rider?"

He shrugged and said coolly, "Did he tell you the rest of the story?"

She stood up and the others rose with her.

"The rest of the story? How could he? It isn't finished yet, is it? Now, everybody, do what you like best. I've promised Jerry to give him a bird's eye view of a ranch that is a ranch; any that like can stick along with us." She turned

to El Bravo. "Some horses, Frank; and have the Hawk ready. Come ahead, Jerry."

Jerry, accompanying her, saw how swiftly Beryl escaped from the vicinity of Prince Charlie; how Charles himself sat alone at the table, fingering a crumb of bread; how quickly Red Handsome stepped to Beryl's side.

They mounted, half a dozen of them altogether, the Empress on a plunging, rearing devil-horse of superb lines and untamed, wild spirt. Two men held the animal for her to mount, then sprang aside and the Empress with strong hand and sure seat brought the rangy, bit-fighting sorrel to some semblance of control.

A RANCH that is a ranch!" Jerry Boyne, knowing something of large ranches, of the enormous cattle holdings and plantations of South America, was still set wondering by what he came to glimpse during the next hour of this well-named "Empire." At the foot of the hill on which stood the big house, all but hidden among spreading pepper trees, was a small town with its three score of adobe huts, its store and saloon, dance hall, post office, and blacksmith shop. All were the Empress's creation, and all poured rents and revenues into her purse. She retained an army of cowboys and workmen; she paid them promptly and well, and with clocklike regularity the money came rolling back to her.

At the edge of the village, in a bare, level field, was a long shed; they arrived at in in time to see a big new biplane being trundled out—"the Hawk."

"I'm modern," laughed Señora Fernandez. "Modern in an ancient civilization, no? That helps me to get the edge on things. Climb in and I'll take you for a ride."

DUE south they sped a full twenty miles; due east forty miles; northward twenty; westward forty and returned to the starting place. "All mine,"

cried the woman with a flash of her eyes. "Over half a million acres, Jerry; a good eight hundred square miles, and what do you think of that? Think it over—and the chance I'm offering you to work with me."

During the flight he had seen great desert stretches which he fancied were not worth paying taxes on. But also he had seen fertile tracts, reservoirs, cattle innumerable, bands of sheep; tall silos like watch towers, irrigated alfalfa lands and, tucked away among little hills, two other clusters of buildings, villages sufficient unto themselves and keeping a broad stream of money rolling on and on.

"I married a cagey old don when I was only a kid, twenty-two and hoofing it on Broadway," she told him when they alighted and went up into their saddles again for the short canter to the grandstand at the race track. "I started in just to pull his leg as any girl naturally would and wound up—how do you suppose? Respecting him, that's what; he was all there. Could have been the head of the



army; had his chance once and maybe twice to be president. Not him! He used his power, used his influence—and hogged land. It's mine now; yes, my boy, the power and the influence along with it. Go down to Mexico City, nose around with the high-ups and ask 'em about the Señora Luisa Blanco Fernandez! Will they pull off their hats? Well, they'd better!"

Altogether Jerry's great day was one of kaleidescopic impressions. What had he to do with racing? The first race swept by and he was scarcely aware of it. There was Prince Charlie, lowering, plucking at

his lip, sitting between two of the red-cloaked men. Beryl had escaped him and was with her grandfather, Red Handsome leaning over her. The second race came; he caught Elmer Blodgett's eye; that one was reminding him that here was the chance to do a little betting. Red Handsome had gone; he was riding his own mount. Señor Costa was all lively interest; to be sure. He had a horse entered, also, and no doubt was backing it. The Empress said to Jerry, "Don't you ever bet? I've got the slickest little four-year-old you ever saw that's going to run away with the race. Go see if anybody'll give you a chance to clean up; take any odds you can get. It's a sure thing."

He shook his head and yet felt a stir of interest as he watched the six horses get away for a red-hot half mile. It was a beautiful start marred only by the erratic behavior of the horse on the outside; it became unmanageable just as the pistol cracked, began a wild lunging, whirled—and charged off the wrong way. The Empress burst into such a stream of curses that Jerry, though he knew better than to expect soft words from her lips at such a moment, was startled. For the boy up on the refractory mount wore a scarlet jacket. There went the Empress's sure shot, lost at the start.

The field swept by and Red Handsome, doing a pretty bit of riding on a lean, powerful roan, led from the jump and to the end. Beryl was on her feet, waving her big straw hat, excited and eager. Her grandfather looked up at her, smiled and shrugged.

"Here I lose two thousand pesos, and you cheer!" Jerry heard him say lightly.

"I had that race in my pocket," muttered Señora Fernandez angrily, "and that pocked-marked son of an Indian dog threw it away. *Pedro!*"

"Si, Señora," answered Pedro, and was ready to start even before the Empress's swift gesture assured him that he had read her mind aright.

"I don't think the boy pulled the race," said Jerry, not liking the cold gleam in her eye. "The poor devil just got rattled —"

"That's his bad luck then," she said curtly, and sat frowning moodily, watching Pedro as he hastened down to the race course and away toward the slight, stooped figure in the scarlet jacket. He caught the boy by the arm, said a sharp word or so and came piloting him back to the grandstand.

"Before God, Señora, it was not my fault!" The boy's flat, deeply pitted face, redeemed from utter ugliness by a pair of large, limpid eyes, black and fathomless, was stamped with fear. He chattered rather than spoke. "Before God, Señora! You saw; a devil entered into him!"

The Empress smiled. Where Jerry had looked for an explosion, she merely smiled. But the boy, a youth of not over fifteen or sixteen, cowered and the blood drained out of his face.

"For the love of God, Señora!"

She looked away from him with a shrug and made a swift gesture to Pedro; the gesture consisted in throwing out both hands, the ten fingers outspread.

"*No! No! No, Señora!*"

Pedro's grip tightened on the thin arm and the boy was dragged away; one sharp cry of pure terror burst from him, then he went silently.

"You dispense justice, both the high and the low, I take it, Señora?" said Jerry grimly.

"You're damned right, Jerry—and you can call me Louise, if you like. The kid double-crossed me; you saw it. All right; ten fingers for him!"

"Meaning?" he demanded sharply.

She looked at him with smouldering eyes. He was sure that she was about to say one thing and at the last moment decided on another when she replied with a shrug, "I've got my own jail. Ten days. All right, here come the ponies for the next race."

Yes, a kaleidoscopic day. The other races went by rather like a blur for Jerry Boyne. The orchestra was playing under the cottonwoods. Couples began dancing. As through a smoke screen which now and then reveals red flashes of flame, Jerry glimpsed an order of things which he did not know could possibly exist upon this western continent; he caught fragmentary impressions more frequently than true glimpses, sensing, power, the merciless, grasping power of a woman's strong hand; gun butts, sheathed knives under the red-lined capes; fear looking slant-eyed from morose faces; bodyguards as though indeed here one had to do with royalty! Hatred flashing up unexpectedly, suspicion peering out. And always music and laughter and light feet dancing.

THEY dined gaily in an enormous room at a table seating sixty guests. There was an entertainment for these favored ones afforded by four couples of young Mexicans executing some of the more picturesque of their national dances; the Empress herself was delighted with them, chose to be most gracious, gave them gold pieces and sent them to the servants' quarters to be filled with wine and feasting.

"Señorita," said Prince Charlie, more than a little drunk, "I love you. You see all this; some day it will be mine. Will you, most lovely Beryl—"

Even this Jerry overheard; it was just as the dinner broke up and there was some slight, bright confusion. And he saw Beryl whip back, break free of those about her and run to Señor Costa, followed by young Fernandez's passionate look.

"You could play marbles with his eyes now, am I right?" whispered Elmer Blodgett at Jerry's elbow. "Come ahead, kid; snap out of it. We're on our way to the casino."

Luisa Blanco Fernandez had never been Louise White and foregone her opportunity to have a little gambling hell of her

own. It was well withdrawn from the house, a sort of exotic curio, architecturally, looking under the newly risen full moon like a Japanese nightmare. Inside were gambling tables, big chairs in red and deep-blue leather and a well-stocked mahogany bar.

"Here's the one place on the ranch where money talks," announced the Empress as those following her trooped in. "Nothing's free here unless your luck wins it—and now's your chance to buy your hostess a drink!"

Antonio Costa, knowing in advance the custom prevailing here, was first at the bar, spinning a gold piece, inviting with grave courtesy for all to join him in a toast to their most charming hostess.

Money blossomed on all hands; every table soon drew its devotees. Elmer Blodgett plucked at Jerry's sleeve.

"Watch my old *hidalgo* go into action," he whispered.

Señor Costa played roulette. He was given a chair, placed a well-lined bill-fold before him—and from that moment it was clear to see that for him everything and everyone in the room, save the game itself, faded into nothingness. A warm pink crept up into his cheeks, a livelier light shone in his eyes.

Nearly everyone present made at least some small contribution at one of the altars of the goddess Luck; there were three who plunged—the old Spaniard, Red Handsome and the Empress herself.

JERRY found his chance at last for a word with Beryl Rodman. She had gone quietly and unnoticed save by him to a little alcove with a casement window looking out upon the white moonlight shimmering upon a tangle of vines. He thought that she looked lonely despite the many gathered in the room; as he came near he sensed her distress; when she turned swiftly he thought that it was something other than the moonlight which brightened her eyes, a shining wetness.

"I have been wanting a word with you

all day, Miss Rodman," he said as she turned back to the window. "I was sort of a blunderbuss this morning, but I did not mean to be—fresh. I know that that's what you though. I was in earnest. I did feel that we had known each other."

"Did you?" she queried aloofly. "By now, of course, you know that you were mistaken?"

"No. I was not mistaken."

She had to turn to look curiously at him, so gravely emphatic were his tones.

"Where, Mr. Boyne?" she asked, and did not strive to hide her incredulity. "When?" She laughed her disbelief. "It must have been very long ago!"

"It was. Long and long ago. Some day, if I may, I'll remind you; I'm sure you've not altogether forgotten. Just now—I'm rather in a queer dream, it strikes me—I'll just trust to your generosity and ask you to believe me."

"I don't like mysteries," she said swiftly. Then, in hot impulse, "I hate mysteries! I hate this place! That woman—God will need to be merciful indeed to have mercy on her soul! This place reeks, I tell you! I shouldn't talk this way—to a stranger, should I?" She strove again for light laughter and failed signally, covering her failure in an elaborate shrug, Spanish, reminiscent of her grandfather. "For you are so obviously her oh-so-devoted admirer!"

"She is our hostess, isn't she? We have at least broken bread with her——"

"As at a public hotel," she retorted. "I, for one, pay my way and owe her nothing. Perhaps you did not notice; I put down a ten-dollar bill just now on the roulette table and lost; it will go to her. Since I felt that I must come, I have paid my score."

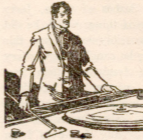
"Soon," said Jerry, "I am going across the border and up toward the High Mesa. May I come to see you, Miss Rodman?"

"No!" she flared out at him. "I tell you——"

"You hate Señora Fernandez? Well,

that is your privilege and no doubt you have reasons for your feeling. But I ——"

"You are one to sit at her right hand; you are one of her sort! And her sort, I'll tell you frankly and at the outset, are not mine."



He bit his lip to check the retort to which he was

being stung by her rank injustice. Were not she and her grandfather here, they who knew so much more of the Señora Fernandez than he did? Was not that swaggering devil, Red Handsome, here and did she not lean toward him.

Just then, before he could find the words he wanted, the outside silence was disturbed by a faint, fairylike strain of muted harmony; someone just under the window was beginning to pour his heart out through the softly touched strings of a violin. Here was no such music as the roystering orchestra had offered; something very fine and subtle; the stifed crying out of some artist's soul. Gradually the strains grew louder and presently they filled the room. Voices were hushed; Jerry, turning, looked across the room into the face of the Empress. She stared, her eyes round, her mouth was slightly open, she seemed to be drinking deep of the stirring plaint of the violin. The violin yearned on. She put her head back, her eyes were closed now—and Jerry, amazed, saw two tears slip down her cheeks.

She ran to the window at the last throbbing note, thrusting Beryl out of her way, calling sharply, "Who's there? Who are you that play like that? Come here! I say, come here!"

It was the boy with the pitted face and large, limpid eyes, the boy who had lost the race.

"Juanito! You! By God, boy, you play like an angel!"

She clapped her hand on his bent shoulder and he winced as though it had been a lash on raw, quivering flesh, an involuntary groan breaking from his lips.

"Oh!" she said contritely. "I'm so sorry, Juanito. I forgot. I would not hurt you for the world. Here—here and—here!" Her hands had been filled with coins brought from a gaming table; she thrust the money into the boy's pockets. "Go now, Juanito. Tell Ortega you are to sleep tonight in my house. The doctor will see you there. Go, Juanito, and you shall play for me all alone tomorrow."

"You know, Señora?" wept the boy, "that I did not mean—?"

"Go," she said not unkindly. "I know, Juan."

He snatched her hand, kissed it passionately and sped away, his scarred face radiant.

THE play went on. Jerry saw the Empress win and lose, lose and win. He saw Red Handsome, a look of triumph in his red-brown eyes, win and win again and go on winning. And he watched the old Spaniard, always smiling and seemingly supremely indifferent, empty his wallet before the spinning ball.

"See it?" gasped Elmer in his ear. "Who'd think the old sport would dare carry that much of the long green in his pocket? It's just inviting murder, that's all. Know what he pried loose from, Jerry? A clear two thousand bucks, and I don't mean Mex. Is he an investment? You come to me next week, like I said —"

A sinister whisper was going up and down through the room and Elmer broke off, his ever ready suspicions quickened; something untoward had happened. The word had just been brought by a couple who had gone over to the cottonwood grove for a dance and came back to start the tale which would sweep along the border tomorrow. The young rancher,

Kingsbury, was dead. He had been found with a bullet in his brain. It was said that he had killed himself. Just as the Empress had predicted. Where had it happened? No one knew. Who had found him? El Bravo.

"She commanded it done! We heard her!" It was a nervous scream from some woman, overwrought; her identity was lost to most of those present as her friends closed in about her, hushing her.

Of them all the Empress alone appeared not to have heard. She crossed the room to Antonio Costa.

"Too bad you didn't get the breaks today, Tonio mio," she said coolly. "Lost on the race and lost here again, eh?"

"It is nothing," he said curtly. But Jerry Boyne, observing him keenly, thought that there was a new grim look about the lips under the white mustache and a queer look—almost the look of the hunted and desperate—in the fine black eyes.

CHAPTER IV

LITTLE MESA

THAT moon of soft delight, the border moon, drifting serenely above the raw edges of two countries where north and south impinge, where bright, steadfast spirits gather and sodden dregs settle, shone down on what was at the beginning like a cavalcade winding away from the gates of the Empire Rancho. Under the moon's sorcery the sage bushes became a fretwork of silver and ebony, the harsh sands were softened and glistened like rippling waters, smoke trees were like ghosts, only half real, half imagined; a barranca was filled with black mystery, and a mocking bird in an old olive tree became the voice of the night's beauty. Through the silver glory of the night went the many departing guests and visitors, leaving the sprawling Empire Rancho to its own silver and ebony, its own scarlet and gray, its own menace and mystery.

These departing ones constituted at the

beginning a heavily flowing procession, queerly quiet. As swifter vehicles, desert-scarred motors, found their places at the fore, a long line, vari-speeded, resulted, breaking down into the single items of car, horseman, harnessed team, akin only in their silences and in the black shadows they dropped upon the winding white strip of road. Close to the fore of the long line went Jerry Boyne and Elmer Blodgett in Elmer's dusty car; a horn blared and they turned out, two wheels churning the loose sand, to let a long gray closed car slip by them. There went Don Antonio Costa and his granddaughter, in great haste to return to High Mesa.

The spell of silence was broken by the honking horn. All along the lengthening line voices broke out. Elmer Blodgett, jockeying his car out of the sand and back into the hard-packed road, muttered throatily:

"It's murder! Damn it, man, it's murder. She as good as told him to go do it—and he went and pulled the trick." He shivered and muttered angrily, "That woman! That snake-eyed El Bravo! *Grrh!*"

Jerry lighted a cigarette, broke his dead match in two and stared after the bobbing red light of the gray car vanishing among gray ghostly smoke trees.

"A man would be tempted to remark that they couldn't get away with a thing like that, not in a civilized world that's rolled as far as this one has from the Dark Ages."

"Then he'd be tempted likewise to be an ass," growled Elmer. "I thought that kid Kingsbury was cuckoo, like they said, when he shot off all that talk of his; now I'm beginning to think he didn't tell half of it. If you'll ask me, Jerry Boyne, we've poked in some places where the inhabitants thought themselves tough babies, but I've got a hunch they was just amateurs to this outfit. What's got you interested in this lay-out anyhow? Not just the poke in the jaw Red Handsome gave you, was it?"

"Suppose you tell me what you learned about him during the day? For I take it you gathered some information?"

"If everything folks told me was true," grunted Blodgett, his eyes busy on the road ruts, "then I learned more in one day than a man generally absorbs in a year. About him and all and sundry, as you might say. The sum total of which causes me to remark that I'd rather go up to a head-hunting cannibal king and kick him in the shins than start anything with some of these hombres. You heard Kingsbury?"

"What about this fellow they call Red Handsome?"

"That's easy. Came into this country as a kid with his dad about fifteen years ago. His old man bought the High Mesa you been talking about and about the same time him and his kid kicked up a row between them, which seems to have been the style in that family, and the kid ran away. Never showed up again until time came when someone popped his old man off—and if you're asking me about that part, I'd say go ask El Bravo or the old lady he takes killing orders off of!"

"Got any reason for that remark?" demanded Jerry sharply.

"Reason, you poor infant? What more reason do you want—"

"Go ahead. What's the rest about Red Handsome?"

"He came back only about five years ago, which was after old man Sommers was no more. Look here, Jerry, you're



in on this mess somehow; you knew that old guy; you came drifting along to see him. And you know something about this whole mess

—"

"Never mind, Elmer; I told you I'll spill

my story in time. It's your turn now."

At risk of running out into the loose sand, Elmer whipped a bright curious glance at him.

"All right," he sighed. "Like I said, Red comes back. He finds old Don Spanish on the job, bulging with money that he's just inherited from somebody in Spain, and all het-up to spend the wad to buy back the old ancestral acres. So the minute Red gets title, he unloads; and who'd blame him selling any ranch for a measly two hundred and fifty grand! Gosh, some folks is lucky!"

"Two hundred fifty thousand? Cash, do you know? Or time?"

"I do know. Cash. Red asked three hundred thousand and came down to two fifty when Don Grandee shoved the cash under his nose. Do you blame him? Red, I mean?"

"Go on."

"What do you mean, go on? That's the tale, ain't it?"

"There's a small point I thought of. He had gone off, you say, when only a kid, and had never been heard of; then he pops back and says, 'I'm the man who owns High Mesa.' It would be interesting to know just how he proved his identity. Who'd know him, a man of twenty-five or twenty-seven, for the same kid of twelve or fifteen that ran away?"

Elmer's jaw slackened, his eyes rounded and he stared. With a snap his jaw came back into its normal position and he whistled softly.

"You mean it's a skin game? Gosh! Say, Jerry, do you know the day I poked my nose into Nacional I just smelled strange doings smeared all over?" He seemed positively to thrill; no man ever had a more eager mind for darting down dark side streets, for sensing mystery even where mystery played no part. Here was subject matter for whisperings and in a hushed whisper he added, "You mean maybe Red Handsome ain't the right heir at all, but an evil impostor?"

"I mean," said Jerry curtly, "that I

happen to be Gerald Sommers myself."

Elmer started, slewed his head about, eyes bulging, and only Jerry's quick hand on the wheel saved them from swerving into a thicket of mesquite.

"What a hunch, what a hunch!" the stout man murmured approvingly. "Two hundred and fifty grand! Whew! And you might get away with it at that! Shucks, Jerry," and he laughed as a man does who just becomes aware that the joke is on him, "you fooled me a minute. But I know you for a square guy; you wouldn't pull a fast one like that, would you?"

Jerry shrugged; after all he was keener for getting information just now than for giving it.

"The point remains, I wonder how Red Handsome proved himself to be the son and heir? But I don't suppose you chanced on to that part of it."

"I did, though! Oh, you couldn't play that game even if you was serious, Jerry. He's solid o. k. It was the Empress that went to the bat for him; she took an interest in the boy, staked him to a loan to scout around and helped him locate several men who could swear to him."

"The Empress?" That, in view of a certain enmity which he had sensed to exist between the two, surprised him. "I'd say she'd rather see him flat on his back than sitting pretty."

"You got to figure on passing years and the fickleness of woman," replied Elmer sententiously. "Her and Red Handsome was as thick as thieves, but that was four-five years ago. I don't know what happened to spoil their sweet friendship, but it's sure a bad spoiled commodity right now. He's a right bold bucko, I'd say; me, if I was him, I'm hanged if I'd go prowling within reach of her hired killers."

THEY sped on for a little while in silence, then Elmer began to chuckle.

"You almost fooled me, old kid, the way you said, 'Me, I'm the long lost son!' And here I've known you more than a dozen years and know your name's Jerry

Boyne as well as you know mine's Elmer Bashford Blodgett. By the way, Jerry, what's the job the old lady was so anxious to hand you? Sounded like big money to me; why didn't you jump at it?"

"I've got something else on my mind right now. I don't know what it was; she didn't tell me."

"There's this," said Elmer reflectively not to say dreamily. "She sure took an almighty shine to you—and she's a widow! Of course she ain't so young as she used to be—and I'm not saying it wouldn't take a brave man! You know, if that dame had a guy hanging around that got on her nerves, she'd just whistle and old El Bravo would come a-running, and she'd say, 'Bozo, bump this bird off for me'—and there you'd be. Still I dunno."

They drew into Nacional, become under the moon a pretty little village, white walls gleaming softly, red tiles bright and clean, and Elmer was all for sharing his room with his friend. Jerry thanked him but shook his head.

"Stake me to some gas out of your tank instead," he said and had Elmer stop at the landing field. "I couldn't sleep tonight if I tried. I'll see you again soon, Elmer; tomorrow maybe or in a few days."

Blodgett regarded him with the liveliest interest.

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't. Going sailing, huh? It's my notion, Crazy Fool, that every time you go up in that butterfly you're taking one chance too many. Parachute? Brr." The very sight of the thing made him shiver. "Where are you going, that's what I'm dying to know? Short of a little trip to the moon, I don't know a place open this time o' night—Not back to the Empire, are you?" he demanded sharply.

"Little Mesa, this time." Jerry climbed in. "I ought to be there in twenty minutes. Give me a whirl, old party."

"I observe," remarked Elmer tartly, "that you're wise enough to say you ought to be there in that time; I note you don't say you will be there! What on earth

do you want at Little Mesa? Last time it was High Mesa. A man would suppose that with you any old Mesa would do."

"You heard what young Kingsbury said? About his brother, I mean. The kid thought that Bob had been bumped off; he was trying to make it his job to find out. I've got a hankering to carry on from where he left off. Which you might keep under your hat, Mr. Blodgett, along with any other little remark I may have dropped during the evening. Got me? By the bye, I don't know what border patrol regulations I'm breaking, but if the racket I make getting away brings any Mex officials buzzing out, tell 'em who I am, where I'm going and that later on I'd rather buy 'em no end of drinks than go to their damned jail. And so, sweet dreams and *adios*."

HIS ancient monoplane went bumping down the field, rose a trifle crookedly and more than a trifle reluctantly and winged awkwardly into the air.

Little Mesa. He knew it well enough despite the fact that he had seen it but the once and that so long ago. It at that time had constituted a part of the larger ranch, High Mesa; he wondered whether it had been carved off and sold separately by that rarely officious individual known so picturesquely as Red Handsome, or whether Señor Costa had sold it more recently to the Kingsbury boys? In either case, he fully expected to discover in the course of time that it belonged to none other than Jerry Boyne—at whom Elmer laughed for suggesting that he was any other than Jerry Boyne.

He piloted his craft into a long slow climb and breathed easier, as usual, when he had attained that precarious distance from the earth which he was in the habit of considering a safe altitude. A glance downward at the diminished moon-bright houses satisfied him, and he straightened out his course and at last headed toward those little hills which had invited so long.

"And some of this dirty pack got you,

Dad, did they?" he said grimly. "And I, who should have been taking whatever came, shoulder to shoulder with you, was off somewhere half way around the world. God forgive me for the fool and worse that I've been—and no doubt am! Why didn't I turn back home any one of the hundred times that I came so close to it?"

What swift racing years they had been! Up and away from High Mesa in a burst of boy's passion, out into the great world where adventure ever beckoned to such as Jerry Boyne; up and away with light running feet and a heart beating high. Down to the surge of ocean where great ships were sailing off to all the luring ports of earth, where the sun set red far out at sea and the quick imagination saw it making a blazing red day on tropic beaches. Out across the ocean, meeting up with many strange men with stranger tales to tell, rocked to sleep each night in the arms of large dreams. Tropic islands at last like dreams come true, blossomed on the breast of blue waters, with their strange trees and



birds and flowers and men, strange smells and foods and customs. Friends chance-made, breezing into one's life, breezing, out, were gone with

a nod and a wave and a devil-may-care swagger; fine fellows, stout fellows, and rogues of the quick smile and quick blow, all kinds. "Come to me! I will show you wonders! I will pour rich gifts into your lap!" always whispered some far port with a haunting name. Java! Borneo! Tahiti! Madagascar! Tripoli! Tierra del Fuego! Sirens all, until visited; then only familiar places where a restless boy went up and down, growing into restless manhood, hearing newer far voices calling, "Come to me! I hold the true wonders for you!"

AND now and again sharp homesickness, a deep, deep yearning for his own flesh and blood. "Dear Dad, I'm going a bit deeper into Australia; I've made a little stake and am going to try to double it. There's a good guy named Elmer Blodgett that I've sort of teamed up with; we're after gold. When we make our pile—Gosh, Dad, I get homesick sometimes." But at these times home was so far away and the moments passed, producing no more than one of the infrequent hastily scrawled notes to his father. And during all those years only two notes, almost equally brief, had reached him from the elder Sommers; he remained always ready to welcome his boy back home, but he'd have gone out and chopped his hand off before he would have put on paper either the yearning in his heart or a command. All men, according to the Sommers creed, were, thank God, free agents.

Yes, you merely put off from day to the next day the thing you meant to do, and it seemed that your intentions somehow oiled the swift-spinning wheels of time, and the years ran by; you knocked about a bit, and suddenly said, "Fifteen years!" and were all fever and rush and eagerness to get home. Too late. That melancholy bell tolling out the news that not even youth is endless, that there is such a thing as time and that it passes and having passed does not return.

In the moonlight the desert lands like a section of still, silvered ocean, slipped away and the little beckoning hills seemed at last as eager as Jerry Boyne, and came rushing along to meet him. He saw the reflected glow of the High Mesa car's headlights and obeyed the impulse to swoop down toward it, rising again sharply and so on leaving it far behind.

"That, if you only knew it, is saying 'Good night, Beryl, my dear,'" he said aloud; "and meant to inform you that despite your having missed by a good sea mile being cordial in your invitation to drop in, that's exactly what I'm going to do right soon." He grinned and added,

"It's a duty, you know, little playmate! For, so it seems to a man up in a plane, you're beginning to lean a little too far toward the sort of bozo that pokes a man while he isn't looking and steals another man's birthright—and then, damn him, cheats your own granddaddy out of a quarter of a million dollars!" His grin had faded long before he got that far, superseded by an angry scowl. "It's a mess," he muttered disgustedly. "What am I to do? Go chase old Costa and a mighty sweet girl out and say, 'It's mine; too bad, but if you want anything back go take the matter up with your fine friend who played you for suckers.' Yep, Jerry-me-lad, as messes go it's a beaut."

Lights sprang up, still ahead and off to the left. That was High Mesa; in the bright moonlight he could see the lofty tableland where the old home stood, casting a long black shadow. He could make out the many white adobe walls, the walls of the house itself, gleaming white, splashed black with clinging vines. He regarded all this a moment musingly, let his eyes run along a wavering line that was High Mesa Creek, and swerved off to the right.

Here, though of no such mammoth proportions as the Empire, was a ranch to make a land-owner's mouth water. It rippled away to north and south, east and west, sloping down into wide fields, breaking abruptly into the hills, deep gouged, clean-cliffed, barren as bare rock in places yet cupping delightful little valleys. Not over half a dozen fleet miles from the big house on High Mesa and due east were the ranch buildings of Little Mesa.

There were no lights to guide to Little Mesa, but there was the bold upland on which the house stood and Jerry picked it out from afar and circled about it, coming gradually lower until at last he could make out some detail. Ruin had swept the place; the house still stood, for it was an affair of rock and adobe, but out-sheds were black heaps and corrals were broken. A few tall thin lines of smoke stood up

almost unwaveringly aloft from a still smoldering heap of what had once been a big hay barn.

Jerry was due for a surprise with a most decided thrill in it. Faring forth from Nacional he had come looking for Bob Kingsbury, yet with hardly so much as any vague hope of finding him. As he had told Elmer he was in no mood for sleep, he must be doing something; he came then where his quick sympathies led, that was all. And yet, only a few minutes after he circled Little Mesa, he found the man whom young Kingsbury was so sure the raiders had butchered.

Not at the ranch headquarters, but off among the rockiest of the hills, some two or three miles distant, he saw a spurt of light signalling to him. He dipped lower, saw the bright flare in a black nest of boulders, rose again, took his bearings and sought a landing place. Luck was with him and within a quarter of a mile he brought his plane down upon an open, treeless plateau. He climbed out and went hurrying back toward the spot where he had seen the tongue of flame.

But before he and Bob Kingsbury ever gripped hands, Jerry Boyne came awesomely close to having his own life snuffed out. There was a second spurt of flame, this time from a rifle, a sinister scream of lead close to his ear and a snarling report echoing away among the rocks. Jerry leaped aside and behind a protecting mass of black lava rock, and yelled out angrily: "Hi, you polecat! What in blue blazes have you got on your mind, anyhow? Or have you got any mind? I've got a notion to start bammng rocks at you, same as you would at a rattlesnake."

A voice, trying to jeer, responded weakly, "Come ahead, show your damn head once more——"

"If I show anything it'll be heels, unless you put that gun away," snapped Jerry, but peered out cautiously from his barricade.

He saw a dull glow, the dying embers of the little signal fire, and made out beside

it the figure of a man lying nestled among rocks and the shimmer of a rifle barrel. The figure stirred ever so slightly, moving painfully like some broken thing.

"Is that you, Kingsbury?" he called.

"You know it's me. Why don't you come and try to finish what you started? I'm waitin' and I won't run away. It's a promise."

AND Jerry knew that the fellow with sheer grit and will power was holding himself from sprawling into a faint, that he had had to lick dry lips with a parched tongue to speak at all.

"I came looking for you, old man——"

"I know you did! I heard your motor and saw you, flyin' like the black bat you are. That's why I made a flare. Now what's holdin' you back?"

"Think I'm from the Empire, huh? Well, I'm not. Did it ever dawn on you that the Hawk isn't the only plane in the world?"

Thereupon he stepped out into the moonlight, lifted his hands high so that the wounded man could see, and stepped forward. As he came closer he saw how the rifle barrel, resting on a rock, followed him step by step.

"Stop where you are, that's close enough," said Kingsbury, and Jerry came obediently to a halt not a dozen feet from where Kingsbury lay. "And who the devil are you, stranger?"

"You said it; I'm a stranger to you. I chanced to hear something of what had happened up here, didn't have anything particular to do, did have a plane raring to go, and hopped over. And, from the looks of things, it's just as well that I came."

"How'd you hear?" demanded Kingsbury, still inclined to be suspicious. "Who told you?"

"Your brother. He couldn't find you. He thought you were wiped out."

"Where's Bud now?"

"He—he went down to Nacional and the Empire Ranch; he's there yet, I suppose.

He was trying to get on your trail."
"Why didn't he come with you?"

Jerry looked down into a haggard face, one side showing gaunt in the moonlight, the other in black shadow and decided swiftly that the worst of bad news could always wait. So he shrugged.

"I don't even know your brother; I was only one of a crowd that heard what he had to say—and it was in pointed language. He went his way and I went mine. Now if you're of a mind to have a stranger lend you a hand, speak up."

"Pull your hat off," snapped Kingsbury.

He reared up on an elbow and stared



into Jerry's face, then fell back with a grunt.

"Haven't got any water on you?" he demanded as he let his rifle slip from his hands. And Jerry, about to answer, saw that he had fainted—or died? There were blood smears, looking like ink smears, on the man's face where he had mopped at his brow, and otherwise the face was deathly white.

THERE was a canteen at the plane, for Jerry was too old a hand to go nosing across desert stretches without water and a packet of sandwiches, and he hastened back for it. As the precious stuff gurgled between the cracked lips Kingsbury's eyes opened. Jerry poured a coupful over the feverish face, gave him a second drink and squatted down on his heels to build a cigarette and take stock of the situation.

"Hurt bad, old-timer?" he questioned the wounded man when Bob, too, was

smoking. "Or just weak from loss of blood and lack of water?"

"Shot plumb to hell," said Kingsbury succinctly. He drew deep at his cigarette. "God, that's good. I'd run out." He tried to pull himself up. "I'll get 'em yet," he announced as he slid back. "And it's good news they didn't get Bud. I was scared they had."

"Strikes me," said Jerry hastily, "that you take a lot of killing, Mr. Kingsbury! Feel up to moving a bit? How'd you like to spread eagle on a bed again? This is no man's sort of sanitarium up here."

"It's a good two miles; if you'll get me a horse——"

He proceeded to faint again, and Jerry though fearing once more that the man was dead, gathered him up into his arms and carried him the quarter mile to where the plane was. It was a weird task, he and a man who might already be dead, moving heavily among the black rocks and through the white, ghostly moonlight; a back-breaking task, too, and before the end a hazardous one. But the monoplane behaved rather nobly, rose clear of the uneven surface when at another moment it must have gone crashing into the boulder-strewn slope, and a few moments later settled down in a field near the Little Mesa ranch house.

"That's one awful chance you've taken in this life and never known a thing about," Jerry confided in the unconscious man as he started to the house with him. "When you go riding with me you ought to have your eyes open and a chute ready. Well, we got away with it!"

The door stood open and Jerry passed through a shadowy room and in the adjoining one put Kingsbury down on a bed. He found a coal-oil lamp, added to the illumination with a couple of candles and bestirred himself with first aid. Man-style he slit garments with his knife and soon had Kingsbury stripped.

"Good Lord!" gasped Jerry.

That the man still lived was a marvel to him. Altogether he was wounded in five

places, each of the two graver wounds being bound in blood-soaked strips of his shirt. There was a furrow across his scalp, a notch in his shoulder and a cut along his shin to which he had paid no attention. There was a hole in his side out of which, it seemed to Jerry, that he must at last have poured out his stubborn life.

And yet Bob Kingsbury lived. Further, when bathed with warm water from the kitchen stove and rebandaged with a torn sheet, he regained consciousness.

"Slip her here, old-timer," he said and thrust out his trembling hand. His eyes roved about the room, found it familiar and came to rest on the face above him. "I forget your name——"

"Jerry Boyne."

"Thanks, Jerry."

"O. K., Bob."

"There's a jug in the kitchen cupboard. I could do with a drink and maybe you'll have a snort——"

Jerry, going to the kitchen which had open windows all along one side, was surprised to note that already the night was at an end. He caught a glint of the rising sun, fiery red and angry looking. A new sudden wind had sprung up, harsh and dry.

"Wonder how long the poor devil lay out there in the hills? A good twenty-four hours at least, maybe forty-eight and maybe longer! And still alive! But if I don't find him some pretty wise medico, and do it pretty pronto, all his gameness is going for nothing."

He brought the jug and gave Kingsbury a good stiff drink.

"Where's the nearest doctor, Bob?" he asked. "He might take an interest, you know, in looking you over. And for all I know there may be enough good lead left in your carcass to make it worth a man's while digging it out."

Kingsbury strove to grin.

"Did we fetch my rifle along?" he asked.

"We forgot it, I'd say. But shucks, man, you've had enough of that sort of thing to satisfy you for a day or so, haven't you?"

"Some of those jaspers are apt to come pokin' back," muttered Kingsbury. "If you're thinkin' of goin' off and leavin' me flat here, I'd just as soon have something handy—a monkey wrench is pretty good, you know, when a man hasn't got a gun!"

"I've got an old forty-five in my plane; I'll leave it with you if you like."

"Fine. Only don't rush off right now. Since you're electin' yourself to a sort of nurse job, how'd you like to make some coffee first? Did I dream of coffee out yonder? Coffee and cigarettes? And havin' lost a drop or two of blood, how about something to make some new? There's a pot of stew; maybe if you'd set it on the fire I could suck up some of the gravy? Damn it, I hate to ask favors—"

Jerry, anxious to be upon his errand, could not up-and-away without doing what small things lay here at his hand; he strove to do what common-sense told him a physician would order. Also he sought in small things to humor a man who had moments of feverishness in which he lost his grip and grew querulous. An hour passed and another, and Jerry at last grew restive with a fresh anxiety. The wind came in stronger and stronger gusts; the climbing sun was blood red in a sky filled with whistling sand.

"If we're in for a sand storm, I'd like to be on my way before it kicks up much more devilment," he muttered, and went to tell Bob that he was on his way.

Kingsbury lay in a heavy stupor, plunged, Jerry thought, into a profound sleep. So Jerry softly drew a table close to the bedside, set water and whisky and coffee on it, closed all windows against the wind and went out, closing the door after him. The wind tore at his flapping coat; fine sand particles lashed his face and hands. He squinted his eyes at the red ball of the sun.

"I'll make it all right," he said, and meant to have a good try at it. "The wind will help me get under way; I'll ride it out until I can climb up where

it's smooth sailing. Yep, Jerry-me-lad, we'll ride high this trip. Looking at it square in the face, we got to make it."

CHAPTER V

OUT OF THE STORM GODS

JERRY BOYNE was not to be the only one that morning who went charging off into the threat of a sand storm. When he had, some hours earlier, swooped earthward over the car making what speed it could along the High Mesa sandy road and had said something about Beryl Rodman leaning toward her red-head friend, he had been much closer to the literal truth than he could know. For with Antonio Costa and his granddaughter was this same red-head, having eagerly accepted the girl's invitation to ride with them; one of his hired men who had been left behind at the Empire Rancho was following with the horses. And now the red-brown eyes, as the red-head was thrust out of the car window, watched the monoplane recover altitude and go on about its business.

Beryl shivered. To her as had been the case with Bob Kingsbury, the roar of an aeroplane's motor spelled the Hawk of the Empire.

"Why have they followed us?" she asked nervously. "What are they after up here, at this time of night?"

"It's not the Empress's plane," was the answer, which came only after a little silence during which the speaker no less than the girl was wondering what brought it here. "It's that fellow Boyne."

The three sat in the roomy tonneau, Señor Costa's chauffeur handling the wheel Red Handsome with his back to the driver and thus facing the Spaniard and his granddaughter. The moonlight was all about them gloriously bright; there was a sort of glow within the car, and eyes, were they intent, could make more than a mere blur of a face so near.

"You are enemies, then?" Antonio Costa, regarding his guest, observed briskly. You and this Jerry Boyne, no?

There was talk of trouble in Nacional."

"Nothing." It appeared a matter to shrug away. "Hardly enemies, señor. Strangers rather."

Beryl laughed and drew Costa's wondering eyes. It was not like her to laugh at trouble between any two men, least of all when one of those men was a friend. Yet she was not altogether like



herself tonight as both men had marked and failed to understand. She had had moments of such sheer, bright gaiety that they were puzzled, so deep had her previous abstraction been, so almost frantically eager had she been to hurry home, so quiet and distraught had she seemed at times. What they did not take into consideration was merely that she was overwrought, her nerves keyed up like violin strings; laughter and tears in such a mood lay very near together. Herself hardly knowing what ailed her, she felt queerly reckless. In such a mood a girl can drive a man wild, and Beryl sensed something of that lively power and, as one of her companions was to learn, felt an impish zest in employing it. That she knew there was something at once vaguely disturbing and baffling in her laughter made that laugh only the merrier.

"What is it, Little One? Why do you laugh like that?" demanded her grandfather.

"Oh, nothing!" There she told the perfect truth and was gleeful in it—or rather that no one would know it for the truth.

"I see nothing funny," said Costa stiffly.

"No?" asked Beryl, and smiled enigmatically. "Isn't everything in the world funny? Isn't it funny, for example, when one man falls off his horse and then two men start fighting?"

It would be a long day before Red Handsome heard the last of having fallen from his horse; he flushed hotly now as he had flushed a time or two already.

"The fool with his crazy old monoplane dropped down under my nose while I wasn't looking," said the man she was plaguing, his words falling crisp and savage. "I was rolling a cigarette. He thought it was funny, too, and got his face slapped."

"Do you know, señor," said Costa soberly, "that is the thing that they told me and I found it hard to believe? This Jerry Boyne, now; I talked with him, I looked at him in the eyes. I did not think him the kind who takes a blow and runs away."

"I too looked into his eyes, *Papagrande*," said Beryl now peeping covertly at her goaded admirer. "He did not seem a coward when I was fierce with him!" Again and over nothing, she laughed gaily. "He looked ever so bold."

"Bold with the ladies, I've no doubt," said Red Handsome swiftly. "He and Señora Fernandez hit it up like a pair of long separated lovers. Or did you notice?"

"Did they?" said Beryl innocently. "How nice!" and now it was he who smiled. But he was merely storing up trouble for himself.

FOR, arrived at High Mesa where he found that moment he had counted on, when he had her all to himself, he got little solace from it. A couple of servants were astir; the headlights of the car had been sighted miles away and the house was illuminated, coffee ready, bottles and glasses set out on the sideboard. The three entered at the ancient deeply-recessed door, Señor Costa remembering to say a courteous, "*Gracias, Vidal, y buenas noches*," to the driver, Beryl forgetting poor Vidal utterly until too late; the old man had a glass of wine, a cup of hot coffee and was off to bed, suggesting that the others, unless they were mad as most young people were, had best follow his

example. They watched him go, then proceeded to have breakfast.

"It will be day in no time," said Beryl, "and I'm as hungry as a wolf."

Before coming to the table where she was to eat nothing despite her declaration of wolfish intentions, Beryl went to look out across the billowing miles streaming away as far as the border and beyond.

"Did I ever confide in you, Mr. Red Handsome, that I am something of a witch?"

"Bewitching," he said emphatically, taking the obvious opening. "And I wish you wouldn't call me that. You know I loathe it."

"A witch," said Beryl without turning, can see a black shadow like that of an enormous bat! The shadow of an aeroplane! She turned then quite suddenly and he could see the reflected still candle flames dancing in her eyes. "You were wrong; Jerry Boyne will come back! Did you notice how unusually dark his eyes were for a man with such red hair? The effect is—well, striking, isn't it?"

"Beryl, why are you this way tonight? You know I love you; you know——"

"It is still night, isn't it? But almost morning. How silly the candles begin to look."

In Señor Costa's home were only candles; no electric lights had of themselves come to invade his old world atmosphere, and he hated the smell of kerosene. On the table were tall silver candlesticks, very old and very Spanish; Beryl tried blowing the little yellow flames out, one at the time, and noting the effect. The fine tremulous light of the dawn was coming on swiftly and, as solemn about it as though she were sacrificing the lives of these little fires on the altar of the true day, Beryl extinguished the last.

"You know I love you, Beryl; and I thought——"

The table was cozily small, yet when she sat at one side and he across from her it joined forces with her in baffling the man.

"Do you know," she interrupted him,

peering down into her coffee cup as though witch-eyes might read the future there too, "that I've often wondered about love; true love, my dear."

"I love you truly——"

"And I always dreamed that love came at first sight!"

"It does. From the first day I saw you——"

"That was so long and long ago, wasn't it? When we were just a little girl and boy."

She looked at him, lifting her eyes suddenly and as suddenly began laughing again, her brief solemn mood gone. An involuntary frown fleetingly darkened his red-brown eyes; it seemed rather a habit of hers, here of late, that harking back to a time about which, as far as he was concerned, the least said, the better.

"Every time I start to say anything— Why do you always say that, Beryl? Why do you so love to tease?"

"But I'm not teasing! And why shouldn't I naturally think back to that first day. Think what it meant; the very first time I ever saw you. When, if you are in earnest and not just trifling with a country maiden's affections, you fell in love with me!"

"I did!" he maintained stoutly. "You know I did. Oh, I know what you are going on to say; if I don't happen to have as lively a memory as you do, if after fifteen years I have forgotten some little thing——"

"And I remember everything!"

She put her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands and eyed him provocatively. "Let's see; when we climbed that old tree behind the stable——"

"It was a great day; I remember the high lights of it all right," he said hastily. "We had a



ride on your pony, didn't we? Both at the same time. A funny, roly-poly pony; her name was Mariana——"

"You do remember some things, don't you! How splendid!" But her eyes mocked him, and he stirred uneasily as she concluded innocently, "Even that ride, is it that you remember it, or did I happen to burst out with it, reminding you all over, that next time we met?"

"Of course I remembered—but now, Beryl, all that's a long time ago. Today is today."

"How true!" she laughed at him. She sipped at her coffee, appeared to grow thoughtful again and observed, this time without looking up, "When we buried our treasure——"

"Pennies in a tin tobacco box," he said promptly. "Under a pifion tree in the pasture."

"Did I blurt that out, too? Or is that one of the things you do actually remember?"

"I'm sorry I've got a memory like an old sieve; but I wouldn't think you'd hold it against me. A man can't help a thing like that."

"But not keeping the one I gave you—the bright, particular penny! It was to have been a keepsake; you say you remember that! And if love really began then, at first sight as all the poets say——"

"If, over a period of fifteen years I lost it—Hang it, Beryl, when you know I am eating my heart out for you! When you have known it so long, when you've let me think that you, too——"

If she wanted some small revenge for his lack of memory of a bright day so long ago, for his failure to cherish a copper penny down through the years, she came by it to the full in the merry laughter with which she taunted him. But, amazing an already bewildered man, her whole mood of a sudden and with no slightest warning, was exchanged for its antithesis. There was no simulation now in her downright unhappiness.

"I feel stifled! How can you talk to

me of—of love? How can I listen to you and chatter as I have done? I can't get that poor boy out of my mind! I can see him all the time, his poor eyes so terribly wild and sad. They said he was crazy. Crazed with grief, with an agony of fearful uncertainty——"

"Oh. You mean Kingsbury."

"And he is dead already." She shivered. "Did El Bravo kill him?"

"Who knows? After all Kingsbury was half drunk and all nerves. I'd say that no one will ever know."

"I know! It was El Bravo. It was at that horrible woman's command, too."

"With your witch-instincts you ought to know!" he chuckled.

"How can you laugh at such a thing!"

"Great Scott! Here you've been laughing half the night!"

"And what about his brother? He said that they had killed Bob. What if Bob Kingsbury is lying somewhere wounded, suffering——"

"I don't believe it. If he's been killed, he's dead and there's an end of it. Otherwise, he's some where and will show up. But if you're anxious, Beryl, I'll have a look-see. Little Mesa, you know, is on my way; I'll be starting off to my place pretty pronto if you'll lend me a horse, and will comb the hills above the ranch house."

"Do!" She jumped up from the table, all eagerness. "Are you ready now?"

HE WAS not ready; he wanted to linger over a cigarette, to have her alone a while longer, to strive to draw her back to the one subject which interested him just then. But he said, "All right," and rose with her.

She went with him to the stable; it was almost day and a harsh dry wind was blowing.

"Beastly wind," he said, hunching his shoulders against it.

"I love it!" She could not have loved it, so rasping was it, so did it irritate the skin and sting the eyes. Yet, because she was all storm within, she welcomed this

storm without and leaned her body against it.

"You're a funny girl," he said from the saddle. "You'd better tumble into bed and—sweet dreams."

"Be careful!" she called after him, and he swung about at this first sign of any solicitude on her part, only to have her add tauntingly, "Be careful and don't fall again!"

"Damn!" he muttered so that she heard him, and jammed his spurs into his horse's sides.

"Cruel!" she whispered. "He was cruel to the horse—just as I was cruel to him! Maybe I am funny. I don't know what is the matter with me. Maybe it's just always seeing that poor boy—and that wicked, wicked woman staring at him. Oh, I feel as though I'd stifle!"

She whirled and ran back to the stable door, her light dress whipping about her in the gusty wind. Just inside, against the nearer wall, was a steep staircase leading to rooms in the loft. She had just put her foot to the first step when a narrow door at the top opened and a small, slight man appeared dimly outlined in the obscurity.

"Uncle Doctor!" she called softly.

"Coming, Miss Beryl." He came nimbly down the steep stairway, fumbling with the black bow tie at his soft white collar, his small, tight boots glistening in the half light.

"You are always coming when I need you, Uncle Doctor!"

"Yes, Miss Beryl. You're upset, ain't you? Yes, yes; I know. But everything's all right, you know."

He smiled at her now, his eyes on a level with hers, the kindly, strangely sweet and childlike eyes of a man of fifty, looking out of a clean shaven, rounded, boyish face.

"Will you have a horse ready for me, Uncle Doctor?" She put her hand gently on his thin, black coated arm. "I have to get off for a ride, all by myself. But that isn't why I wanted you; I could saddle for myself, couldn't I? But there's something

else. It's about the Kingsbury boys." The whole story, as far as she knew it, came with a rush of words, "Uncle Doctor," shaking his head over it and looking deeply pained. "Will you send some men out as soon as you can? They must look everywhere."

He stepped outside and looked at the sky.

"It's a'most day now. Yes, I'll send right off, an' I'll go myse'f. It's comin' on to blow bad. It might be better, Miss Beryl—Oh, I guess it won't hurt you. I'll have a pony saddled time you're ready."

Since she had asked it, of course he'd have it done. He was a simple, kind, faithful little chap whose supreme happiness lay in loving and serving. He would rather have done some small thing that found favor in this girl's eyes than to have been loaded down with much fine gold. There was no question of his remembering, no doubt that with him it had been love at first sight. It had been "Uncle Doctor" who had saddled the fat pony, Mariana, that day fifteen years ago, and that had been the first time he ever saw the little girl, Miss Beryl. For he had come to the ranch here with Mr. Sommers, for whom he had worked in the capacity of general handy man and veterinarian upon occasion; even then he was "Uncle Doctor," the title having been bestowed on him by the little boy who was Beryl's playmate during two days. After the death of the elder Gerald Hand Sommers, Uncle Doctor remained on here with the ranch and his horses; when Señor Costa bought the old place back Uncle Doctor stayed on. He was one in whom there was an innate need for the expenditure of a fine loyalty; that loyalty was for years for any of the house of Sommers and during the recent years had been transferred to Antonio Costa and to Beryl. Most of all to Beryl.

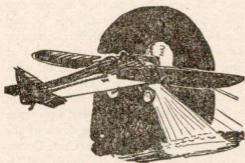
NOW it was his small, hard hands which groomed her favorite saddle animal, Silvermane, and had the mare saddled in readiness when Beryl came running

out to the stable again. Uncle Doctor looked his bright, bird-like approval, exclaiming, "That's the niftiest little ridin' rig that ever come up out'n Ol' Mexico, where they like fine things, and you sure do look pretty in it, Miss Beryl. Up you go." He held his hand for her to slip her foot into and she flashed up into the saddle. "And don't you worry none; I'll have the boys out in two shakes, an' I'll go along. Ride lucky, Miss Beryl."

The light words she tossed back to him were all blown away by the wind; she and her horse, off with a rush, seemed also carried by the wind.

"It's goin' to be an ugly day," the little old fellow said, looking at the racing figures. "But I guess she'll be all right. She's all upset; times like that a good fight does a feller good, even if it's only a fight ag'in a mean day."

It was not yet sun-up when Beryl went racing out across the fields, heading up into the rocky hills which defined the eastern limit of High Mesa, now that Little Mesa



was shorn from it, and which constituted a wild and savage no man's land between the two ranches. Her own destination was not in the least clear to her; she might ride only as far as the heart of that rugged demesne of lava rock and spiked cactus, or she might ride on and on and so come in time to the place she was thinking most about, Little Mesa, the Kingsbury ranch.

But the wild morning itself was to decide the question for her. At first she gloried in it; as Uncle Doctor had said,

it was a fine thing at times to have something to fight. Stronger and stronger grew the gusts; swifter and ever swifter came the rush of wind through the passes among the hills; her horse's mane and tail were flying, Beryl's tight little hat was whipped away and her hair lashed across her face; fine sand came streaming on the wind, swirling about her, making thin hissing noises.

She saw the sun thrusting up beyond a wildly blown thicket of mesquite, blood-red and ominous, the weird sun of a day of sand storm. "I'm a ninny; I ought to go back and to bed," she told herself and pressed straight on.

The wind grew stronger and fiercer all the while that she sped across the open fields deserted by all save herself and Silvermane, the herds having already taken shelter where they could find it. She was glad to come under the sharp, sheer shoulder of the first of the broken hills, thinking to find a quiet haven if only for a moment or so. But here it was as gusty as out on the open, and among the sharp edged rocks wailing voices screamed to the leaden heavens above.

Half a mile further on she dismounted and led Silvermane into a boulder-ringed hollow, protected somewhat by a fringe of desert willows which were wildly tossing their branches like the arms of mad men, their hard leaves rattling in the dry torrent of air. She tethered the mare here and, stooping against the wind, went on. For at last she began to realize that this was no such mere blustery day as she had mistaken it for, but one to take quick shelter from, and a few steps more would carry her to an ideal vantage spot; a spot from which she might watch, protected and yet in awe, an episode in the ancient battle of the elements.

With sand filtering into her clothing, entering at her neck, gritty in her sleeves, filtering in everywhere, in her hair, in her boots, in her eyes and ears, she pressed on those last few steps. Before her was a great rift in the breast of the hills, a steep-

walled gorge with cliffs rising sheer above it, a place known rather far and wide as Indian Gully and thick with legend. To her it was a favorite haunt; in the rock walls were places where the wind could not come. Here in the forgotten long ago some tribe of cliff-dwellers had made its home.

AS THE sinister ball of sun rose higher an unearthly lurid brightness lay over the world, a dull reddish light against the cliffs, a wan amber glow over the rims of the canyons, a pale, sickly murk down among the shadows. She was grateful that she had only a few steps to go; head down for the most part, looking up with eyes narrowed to mere slits now and again to make sure of her way, she battled with the wind about a monster boulder and snatched at it frantically to keep from being blown into the sharp-edged ravine. A little further on was the higher cliff, overlooking all this wilderness; she hurried to its base and to a worn crooked stairway in the rock. Laboriously, clinging tight, she wormed her way up a dozen steps or so and threw herself flat down; here was a wide ledge, the ruins of crude masonry walls still standing, and in this spot, behind the broken wall, she came into comparative stillness.

She rested a moment, then peered out through the ruined doorway. She could scarcely see the further side of the canyon, so thick was the air with hissing sand; she spoke to herself, aloud, and could not hear her own voice for the shouting, screaming, whistling, jeering wind raging like a mad thing imprisoned among the rocks.

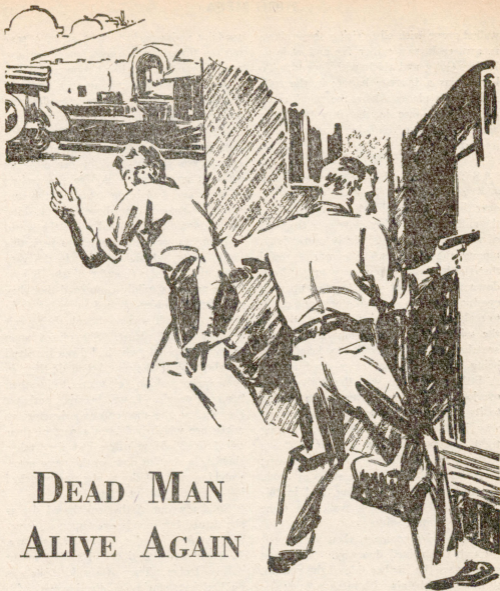
Thinking the storm must blow itself out soon, so great was its fury by this time, she crouched and looked out with fascinated eyes. The sun rolled higher and higher, and took on stranger, deeper tones of red. Now and then, sucked along the great aerial current, some blurred object

sped by and was lost from sight, a sage bush whipped from precarious moorings, a dead branch flying like a monstrous bird.

An hour passed and another and still another. What with fatigue, sleeplessness and nervous strain, what with the mad orchestration of a thousand shrill trumpeting and a distant far-away dull booming roar, there was induced in her a heavy sense of unreality, an aloofness, a feeling of body and soul being detached, the soul standing somewhere above and looking down upon the body and upon the world in tumult, a sense of remoteness from this battle ground though she lay in the very heart of it. She thought of the Kingsburys and was mildly concerned that they and their troubles seemed very far from her own life; it was as though they dwelt upon a distant planet. She mused upon the ancient people who had dwelt here and in whose place she now brooded; they, in some queer fashion, felt nearer to her than her own people. It was because, perhaps, she was at the moment experiencing an adventure which had been a part of their tribal life? How often had they taken shelter, as she did now, in this very place, watching the dull sky as she now watched it—wondering about things?

Suddenly, out of that smothered sky as she turned her moody eyes upon it, something at first formless began taking form. It caught her attention and at first meant nothing to her. Then of a sudden she was on her feet, staring wildly, icy-cold with horror. She saw a blurred thing falling, swinging, twisting, a thing that had unfolded in the menacing sky like a great blossom, that was being hurled along like a gigantic thistledown. A raging gust caught it, plucked it upward, dragged it down; it went by her with a rush, sucked down into the cliff-bound gorge and only as it vanished did she know that she had made no mistake and that it was a man dropping in a parachute.

(Part II in the next issue of SHORT STORIES)



DEAD MAN ALIVE AGAIN

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Mogul Gold," "The Blue Beetle," etc.

I
CRAIG came into his hotel room, closed the door, glanced around. The lines of his hard-boned, vigorous face hardened in a frown. Nothing here. Nothing had happened. After all this journey, it was the second day of his

stay. Not a word had come. He once more drew out the unsigned letter which had brought him here from Marseilles.

"John: For God's sake be at the Transat in Meknez on the third of November. Bring my passport. Say nothing about me to a soul. I'll communicate with you. Dangerous as hell."

*The thing that can't be done—desert from
the Foreign Legion and get away with it.*



Incredible as it seemed, he knew who had written this letter, recognized the writing at once. A man supposedly dead a year ago. His own brother.

With a deep breath, Craig crossed to the long French windows, flung them open and stepped outside. His room was on the ground floor, at the far end of the luxurious Transatlantique Hotel built on the hill. Before him was the deep valley.

Across, a mile away, rose the walls and buildings of Meknez in a gray mass, prayer-flags at the minarets of the mosques, with the enormous and endless battlements and ruins of Emperor Ismail's fifty palaces running off to the left for miles, farther than the eye could reach.

Each of these ground rooms had its little balcony, surrounded by a wooden railing. Craig dropped into a chair and

glanced across the hotel gardens. Two Arab gardeners were at work among the trees and flowers of the terrace, which came right up to the balcony along this wing of the tourist hotel. Off to the right were gay umbrella-topped tables, dotted with people at tea, served by the gaily dressed Arabs of the hotel entourage.

Craig smoked musingly. Even in repose, his rather harsh features showed character, strength, decision; his gray eyes were challenging and forceful. Restraint was written all over him—the restraint which, to those who understand men, gives warning. This American was so obviously master of himself, that he was dangerous.

"So this is Morocco, eh?" he reflected, gazing out on the warm afternoon sunlight. "Well, it doesn't come up to song and story by a long shot!"

Nor did it, from his viewpoint. Behind the hotel was the new French city, around him were all the luxuries that civilization could devise for tourists. There opposite lay old barbaric Meknez, softened by distance, details hidden by encircling walls. Groves and gardens and fertile farms lay all about but were invisible as the distant valleys of the Atlas, which only a few years previously had vomited wild tribesmen to the siege of these very walls. No, this was not the old Morocco; all that lay buried beneath the new veneer of French occupation.

ONE of the two gardeners on the terrace gradually came closer, wielding his hoe. He was a ragged, brawny man of pure descent. Except for tan, his skin was as white as that of the watching American. He worked closer to the balcony. Suddenly, something flipped from his hand and fell with a thud close to Craig; then, shouldering his hoe, he called to his companion and strode away.

Craig's pulses leaped. Leaning over, he picked up a scrap of paper rolled about a bullet and stuck there. He loosened it, and read a scrawl in French.

"Ask the maitre d'hotel to change your table away from the window. Will see you at dinner. Expect me."

Who? This was not his brother's writing, certainly.

Puzzled, bewildered, a little angry, Craig tore up the unsigned scrawl. It sounded like a dime novel, he thought angrily. He had given up business to come here on the strength of that note from his supposedly dead brother; was it some sort of hoax? Impossible. He knew that writing too well, too bitterly well. However, someone was now in definite touch with him, so he might as well stop worrying. A drink on the terrace would help to pass the time.

He left his room. In the ornate lobby he encountered the maitre d'hotel, and proffered a request to have his table in the dining-room changed. The polite Frenchman bowed.

"But yes, m'sieu, but yes! The hotel is not yet filled; we can arrange it nicely."

Craig went on to the terrace, took one of the bright yellow tables, and applied himself to afternoon tea, gazing across at the dull gray-brown walls of Meknez.

If his brother Perry were alive, then he was certainly in trouble. Craig was under no illusions regarding this, for Perry had always been something of a bad egg, a wild fellow, supposed to have been killed in a train wreck on the Riviera but not certainly identified. After all, however, he was a brother. His demise had saved him from prison on half a dozen charges, as the French police were hot on his trail.

"This is the last time I pull him out of any scrape," thought Craig moodily. "If he's really alive, that is to say. He probably came here to Morocco and got into some kind of a jam, as usual. Lucky I found his old passport! Well, anything can happen in this country."

Craig had not been importing American typewriters into France for several years, without knowing his way around.

He was well aware that Morocco, beneath this placid new French veneer, was seething; not with rebellion, which was now limited to the far Atlas, but with attempts at adjustment.

Many of the French settlers were ultra radicals. The mass of the natives was viciously barbaric, their rulers and rich men were civilized in Oriental fashion, and all were suddenly face to face with the utmost in Western civilization, from radios to bombing planes, and the adjustment came hard.

Ancient Meknez, with human bodies built into its enormous walls by the thousand, lay upon one hill, untouched, and across the valley was a new French city with its great tourist hotel. This was typical. Camel caravans trailed beside railroad tracks; tractors tilled one field, the next was worked by asses and camels yoked together.

BEING alone, Craig did not dress for dinner. Morocco in November was exactly similar to California, and a thin rain was beginning to fall with darkness. At seven-thirty he walked into the dining-room and found that he was changed to a small double table at the back of the room, away from the window.

He took his place and was considering his order when the maitre d'hotel approached and asked deferentially whether he might place another gentleman at this table; as m'sieu could see, the tables were full at the moment and an unexpected guest had arrived—

Craig assented as a matter of course. A gentleman was led forward; a man of forty, his features dark, his manner reserved. He bowed apologetically to Craig, and took the opposite seat at the table as a service was placed.

Then, for an instant alone, "Careful, M'sieu Craig. Guard your voice. My name is Sartain; an *avocat* of Meknez."

"Very neatly handled," murmured Craig, not entirely surprised.

For a little they could say no more.

The waiter and an Arab bus boy were hovering about. The orders taken, a *sommelier* appeared for the wine order. Presently, however, they were alone again, and Craig spoke softly.

"You seem to know why I'm here, from whom I expect news."

"Yes," said the other. Both men spoke with a studiously casual air, as though their conversation was of polite nothings. "From your brother."

"Exactly," said Craig.

The other smiled. "What news do you expect from him, m'sieu?"

Craig had already studied his man. Here was a lawyer, crisp and concise, who evidently risked much by meeting him. It was no time for evasion, for the correct thing, for appearances. Sharp staccato facts must be plumped out in stark reality.

"The worst," responded Craig bluntly. "But I understand nothing. Why this mystery?"

AT THIS moment the first course arrived, the first course of a dinner carefully and typically French, which could scarcely have been bettered in Paris itself; guests of the "Transat" paid high, and got full value for their money. The conversation, or rather Sartain's part of it, had to be interjected as occasion and passing natives gave them opportunity.

"Not at all, m'sieu. He is not dead."

Craig shrugged. "I know it. Therefore, he is in some kind of trouble."

"In the Foreign Legion, m'sieu. His company is stationed here in Meknez."

The Legion! Craig perceived the truth in a flash. Finding himself supposedly dead in that train wreck, Perry had contrived to hide himself perfectly from the law and everyone else, by enlisting in the Foreign Legion, of course under an assumed name.

"We cannot go into explanations," said Sartain. "I am known to be a friend of his. There will be questions asked; you see, some months ago he saved my life, and I am now repaying my debt. But I can-

not undertake too much. I have a family, m'sieu, and this affair will make a most devilish commotion, I assure you. While you are not known to be his brother, something may go wrong; I simply dare not risk too much."

Craig frowned in bewilderment.

"I don't know what the devil you are talking about!"

The other laughed. "You'll know tomorrow. Here is the card of an automobile agency where you can rent a car," and Sartain slipped a card across the tablecloth. "On the back you'll find a list of certain things you are to bring. Drive out on Highway 21 precisely at eleven tomorrow morning; be sure to leave here on the minute. Be alone in the car. After turning south on the Kenifra Highway, you'd meet him. I suggest you rent the car through the hotel here—it costs more, but by mentioning this garage you'll secure a certain car. You understand?"

Craig gave the other a sharp look.

"I understand, yes—but I'm completely in the dark just the same!"

"It is better so." The dark eyes of Sartain rested on him thoughtfully. "Your brother assured me that you would come to the rescue; well, that is your affair! But I advise you to be slow to act, my friend. Be slow to make a decision. Remember, the military and civil courts here are beyond appeal. American or not, you would suffer terribly if anything went wrong. And now—you will excuse me? The machinery is in motion. I withdraw."

Sartain rose, bowed, and took his departure.

CRAIG sat in utter perplexity, frowning, cursing the mystery. Then, as he sipped his coffee, he thought to turn over the card of the car rental agency. On the other side was a penciled list. He recognized the writing of Perry at once.

"Business suit.

Shaving materials.

Suitcase with my initials.

Shirts, attached collar. Sox, etc.

5,000 francs.

Passport.

Brown hair dye.

Horn-rimmed spectacles."

This list revealed everything to him in a flash.

"The fool!" he thought bitterly. "The cursed fool—brother or not, it's rank madness! He's in the Legion for seven years, has served a year and wants to quit. Well, heaven knows what worse trouble than that he may be in! I'm tempted to have nothing to do with it—but I can't go back on him. No wonder Sartain warned me to be slow in a decision!"

In no little agitation, Craig left the dining-room and went out on the terrace. Lighting his pipe, he strolled past the group of native guides, on down the steps, and turned to the left, heading for the French town.

He knew perfectly well that Perry could not get away with it. Mere hair-dye would not disguise him. Escape from the slavery of the Legion was impossible. To attempt it was the worst imaginable folly. It would bring Perry to a penal battalion, would bring him to jail as an accessory. Quite obviously, Perry had thought out everything, had covered all details—and so had other poor devils, all in vain.

And yet—to go back on Perry now would be impossible!

As Craig passed a café, a group of aviation officers, in their handsome deep blue uniforms, came out to a waiting car at the curb. One of them was laughing heartily.

"Fancy, my friends! I bet that rascal Gaspard of the Legion that within a week his company would be transferred to Mar-rakesh—a hundred francs on it! He'll find the orders posted tonight. A surprise, eh? Day after tomorrow they depart. It pays to have a cousin as stenographer in headquarters, no? Well, let's go pick up those girls—"

Craig went on, thoughtfully. This

company stationed here, in which Perry served, was going south to Marrakesh, eh? Perry must have known it in advance, must have counted on it. None of his comrades about to recognize him. Well, it was madness all the same, rank folly!

With a shrug, Craig cast about to find a shop where he could buy a suitcase and have it marked by morning. Fortunately, many of the shops were still open at this hour.

His decision was made. He little dreamed what frightful things hung upon it.

II

AT ELEVEN to the minute, Craig drove from the hotel in a Citroën sedan. A bundle beside him contained one of his own suits, for his clothes fitted Perry perfectly. He made two stops in the town, picking up a parcel of shirts, toilet articles, and other things, and the marked suitcase.



Then, circling past the square and the cathedral, he turned down past the camp toward the aviation field, and at the end of this swung into the

Kenifra road, Highway 21, that struck south for the hills where revolt still smoldered.

Five minutes later he crossed an old Moorish bridge, passed between rich olive groves, and Meknez was shut out, the gray-green olive trees closing in his horizon. A figure stepped out in front with a wave of the hand. Craig applied the brakes, halted, stared at the man who must be Perry—but whom he failed to recognize. This trim, erect soldier with the neat blond beard and mustache was a perfect stranger. He recalled Perry; cynical, stooped, languid, unscrupulous in money

matters, frankly lazy, pallid, drifting along on the remains of innate ability and will power. And this bronzed, healthy—

"Jack, old boy! Good gosh, I'm glad to see you!" Perry flung open the sedan door, crowded in, wrung his hand with an iron grip, then ducked into the tonneau. He shed his cap with its neck-cloth, began to shed his uniform, everything. "The clothes—these the ones? Not a minute to lose! Get me out the razor and stuff, Jack. We'll do the talking as soon as I've changed."

Craig obeyed, marveling at the rapidity with which Perry worked. Unless someone chanced along here, they were safe from observation; the hot noontide was empty of life. No time for greetings no, no time for the most ordinary word. An instant lost might spoil everything. Craig forgot all the protests he had planned, forgot everything but the necessity of helping this man beside him.

"I could always depend on you," said Perry. "Knew you wouldn't let me down! In half an hour I'll be reported absent without leave; then the fun begins. Now the razor; I'll sit on the floor back here and operate. You can bundle up those precious garments of Legion issue. We'll chuck 'em into the ravine."

WHEN Perry, after more rapid work, stepped out into the road beside the car to let the sun dry his hair, Craig stared at him in utter astonishment. The dyed hair and brows made a huge difference; the shaven features made more. He did not even recognize the face. There were little scars about the nostrils and lips that puckered them, changed them subtly but completely. Bits of cotton in the nostrils distended them, aided this change. When the spectacles were donned, and the hat Craig had brought along, Perry was a perfectly new man—and one, in French eyes, typically American.

"What's the time?" remanded Perry anxiously, bundling razors and clothes into the new grip.

"Eleven thirty-five."

"Splendid! Thanks for remembering shoes; I forgot to list 'em. Turn around, now. I'll take the bundle and pitch it out as we cross the bridge. Go back to this side the Aviation Field, then turn to the right instead of back to town. There's a road five miles out that we can take to cut across to the Fez highway, and so back to the station. At twelve fifteen the train from Rabat gets in. I want to reach the station precisely at that time, presumably arriving from Rabat. Then to the hotel, and a meeting with you, my dear brother! Slow down, now——"

Craig had turned the car swiftly. Now they were on the Moorish bridge. Perry opened the door and pitched out the bundle into the ravine below.

"You can't get away with it, you know ——"

"But I can!" Perry laughed and relaxed. "And I've got a big thing on, besides. I planned a mere getaway for myself; but something has come up. You'll see her at the hotel this evening. However, let me sketch the thing for you. I was supposed to be dead in that train wreck. The real corpse was a German chap named Hans Pfeffer. I took his papers and money and skipped. I speak German, and could make it stick. At Marseille I enlisted in the Legion as Pfeffer. I was mugged, of course, but four months ago something happened. We were building a road; romance aside, the Legion builds roads at times. A premature blast filled my face with rock fragments. They didn't think to mug me all over again, my beard grew out in hospital and covered the scars, and here I am, beyond any casual recognition."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Craig, and whistled. "Perry, in that case——"

"Exactly. The odds are in my favor. As an American tourist, I'm practically exempt from any questioning, even if recognized. In Fez, I'll have my passport given the necessary Moroccan visa. I'm

on the inside, so far as all this illegal fixing is concerned."

The car came back to the road fork. Craig abandoned the highway, took the dirt road to the right, and in ten minutes the long brown hills had shut the walls of Meknez from sight. No hurry now; a good half hour to cover ten miles.

In a flash, he perceived that Perry was absolutely right. Chance had served him with superb insistence; those seeking a German, would never dream of suspecting an American tourist whose brother was here with him. The facial resemblance to the supposed Pfeffer, also, was largely removed. Perry's company was going south in a day or so, beyond any chance meeting. Everything, indeed, was working out perfectly.

"What about the police looking for you in France?" asked Craig. The other laughed.

"There, I'm dead. When we get out, I'll go up to Tangier and take a boat from there; no need to re-enter France at all. But, Jack, I told you I had something big on foot!"

"Oh!" Craig recollected. "A woman?"

"Apparently. Got a cigarette? Thanks." Perry lit up, and puffed with keen enjoyment. "Four days ago I was in a grogshop in town, pretty well soused, spread out over a table. I woke up, and my head was plenty clear. Three birds were talking over a job at the next table; not soldiers, but a French chauffeur and two Arabs. They spoke French. I didn't move a muscle, and got the thing down pat. It's a big thing all around. But, Jack, you haven't said you were glad to see me alive and well!"

Craig regarded him for an instant, coolly.

"I don't know that I am glad," he observed without pretence. "For the past few years you've caused me nothing but trouble, expense and humiliation. Now you're a deserter from the Legion."

"And that's something mighty few ever got away with!" said Perry. "But you're

right, old chap," he went on soberly. "Let's not mention the past; it's dead. If there is any future, I promise you it'll be different. This year in the Legion has made a new man of me; a worse man in some ways, better in others. I realize it fully. I can't stick the full seven years of this hell, however. That's why I'm deserting now. And my big chance to do something decent has come. Better speed up a bit; we can't afford to be two minutes late at the station."

Craig nodded. "What about the woman?"

"Not what you might think," and Perry laughed harshly. "This French chauffeur is named Lacombe. He rents himself and his car to anyone. A woman in Fez uses him occasionally, an artist; he comes here with her today, to the hotel. They return tomorrow. She's one of the artist colony at Fez and lives in a little old palace there, the Dar ben Daoud. Her name is Teyssier. That's absolutely all I know about her, except that she has scads of money and jewels. Got the picture?"

"Sure," said Craig drily. "This Lacombe is a rascal?"

"Absolutely. He's in with the Teyssier woman's maid; they've planned to loot her. He needed two more men for the job, and got them. It comes off tomorrow night."

"Very simple, then," said Craig. "Tip off the lady."

PERRY was silent for an instant. "No; two reasons. First, I need a stake, and might as well collect a reward afterward as a word of thanks before. Second, from what Lacombe said, I am not so sure about her. He hinted that she was a crook herself. I'd like to look into the matter a bit."

"That's folly," said Craig. "Then, tip off the police."

"Did you ever try tipping off French police to anything? They take you for a criminal yourself and you get the third degree. No, I can't afford to do that, nor can you. I propose to take a look at the

dame. You may get acquainted with her. From the way Lacombe spoke, this is no petty job, but a whale of a big thing. Come on and take a chance! You're no cold-blooded fish. Forget that I'm a bad one, and jump into it. Won't hurt to investigate."

Craig laughed abruptly, as a rush of the old feeling for his brother came upon him.

"Confound you, Perry! I always did like you. All right; I'll be an all-around fool this once, and never again! In for a penny, in for a pound. Is that the highway ahead?"

Perry gripped his knee with iron fingers.

"Good for you, Jack! We'll play it out together, then. Yes, that's Highway 8, the Fez route. Swing left, and cut over to the station as we come into town."

Ten minutes later they joined a throng of other vehicles, cars and barouches, before the station. The train was just pulling in, a crowd of civilians, Arabs, soldiers, filled the place. Perry caught up his new grip, slammed the car door, and was gone.

Craig drove back to the hotel and informed the manager that his brother would arrive today or tomorrow from Rabat, but whether by train or bus, he could not say.

When the hotel autobus brought Perry, ten minutes later, the two brothers staged a joyful reunion, and the comedy was over. At the same moment, Meknez was being combed for Private Hans Pfeffer, deserter from the Foreign Legion.

III

IT WAS perhaps natural that once he arrived and registered, once he found himself completely beyond suspicion, accepted, Perry Craig should go to pieces. Luncheon over, he could scarcely get to his room. Craig saw him safely bestowed, bucked him up with a drink, and left him to come around by himself.

Lighting his pipe, Craig strolled out into the lobby and found the manager behind

the desk. From now on, he was well aware that Perry was in little danger if matters were left in the hands of the Transatlantique people, for tourists were shielded from all unpleasant contacts.

"This afternoon, m'sieu," he said to the manager, "we should like to proceed to your Fez hotel, my brother and I, by automobile. You can arrange it?"

"But certainly," was the prompt response. "Rooms of the same price? I'll telephone at once and reserve them. The Dar Jamai is a little full, but we can arrange. As to the automobile, that is another affair. All our own cars are engaged, but of course we can rent a car for your use——"

"I am returning to Fez this afternoon," said a silvery voice. "There is plenty of room in my car, if I may place it at the disposal of the American gentleman."

Craig turned. The manager, despite his astonishment, introduced him to Madame Teyssier.

As all three of them were perfectly aware, this offer was a breach of the conventions. The lady laughingly admitted as much.

"However, all things are forgiven artists," she went on. "We may do as we like, and if people account us mad, they buy our pictures the more readily! Is it not so, m'sieu?"

Craig smiled. "Some people, madame, can never be thought anything but living miracles."

Despite his polite words, Craig was alert, startled, warily suspicious. He accompanied her into the arched and tiled writing-room off the lobby, proffered a cigarette and a match, matched her friendliness with quick interest; but none the less, he remained on his guard.

Madame Teyssier, he reckoned, was thirty-five. She was floridly beautiful, rather tall, dressed in the most exquisite taste; for the rest, she was a brunette, with very red cheeks and lips, a vivacious, free-and-easy manner, but withal a certain dignity. A woman of odd contrasts, she

spoke both French and English fluently, and Craig imagined that she could fit in perfectly with either a social surrounding or an artistic studio gathering of bohemians. And she was charming personally; she knew everyone, had been everywhere. Each winter she came to Fez to settle down and paint, or so she said.

In no way carried off his feet by her swift cordiality, Craig's wariness became actual suspicion. She overplayed her part, just a trifle. Was she actually trying to sell him pictures? Perhaps.



Yet this did not go with her evident wealth. Still, one could never tell. He left her, half an hour later, convinced that she had some sort of game on hand, but puzzled as to what it was. He and Perry were to meet her in the lobby at three, and so to Fez.

He found Perry asleep, and wakened him unceremoniously. The late legionnaire woke much more himself, stretched luxuriously, and sat up.

"What's all the rush?"

"We're leaving for Fez in forty minutes," said Craig. "In Madame Teyssier's car. She and I have started a promising affair. If it keeps on, there'll be hell to pay!"

"Yeah?" Perry leaped up, grinning. "I always knew you were a fast worker! What's she like?"

"Tell you later; can't figure her yet. I'm off to pack."

CRAIG deliberately left the lady to Perry's critical judgment. Promptly at three, they met in the lobby, and he introduced his brother. The chauffeur, Lacombe, was on hand to take out their bags. He was a swarthy, pleasant man, very alert and vigorous in his whipcord

uniform and white dust-coat; his dark features were powerful, keen, unscrupulous.

In the auto court at the rear door, a Fiat waited. The three adjusted themselves in the rear, Lacombe piled their bags beside him in front. In five minutes they were wheeling out through town on the Fez highway.

Perry, for the moment at least, had assumed his old slouch. The white forehead and white jaw, in contrast to the bronzed cheeks, might have caused suspicion, except that an American tourist was so obviously above any suspicion. Confident that his brother could take care of himself, Craig devoted himself to the lady. And she met his devotion halfway.

Monsieur Teyssier? Oh, he had been an officer of Spahis, a colonel; killed in the Abd el Krim affair. Morocco was pleasant for her, because she knew so many of the officers here in the Sherifian service. They, no doubt, would help to make the stay of Craig and his brother a pleasant one. He would remain long?

Perry kept studiously out of the conversation, and Madame Teyssier was not interested in him at all. She was distinctly interested in Craig, and her questions showed it. Only a wealthy American would be a tourist here, patronizing the Transat hotels; and Craig carefully let her think what she like. He was still trying to fathom her motives, without success.

While still just outside Meknez, they came around a curve, slowed suddenly, passed a long file of marching, singing men. Perry pulled down his hat-brim, sank back in the seat. Madame Teyssier waved her hand gaily, and turned to Craig with a smile.

"A detachment of our famous Foreign Legion," she said in English.

"Good-looking fellows," commented Perry drily. It was his own company, on practice march.

The ride to Fez, that triple city in one, was not a long drive, but Lacombe made no speed. As they approached, Madame

Teyssier pointed out the new French city, off to the right, then Fez Jedid, the New Fez—only a thousand years old—in which her own dwelling was located, and beyond the Old Fez, in which lay the gorgeous palace taken over and made into a hotel by the Transat people.

They passed up over the heights, she pointed out the ruined tombs of the Merinide dynasty, and they dipped suddenly to Bab Guissa, the little city gate behind the hotel. Here Lacombe left them to summon servants from the hotel, and the lady laid her hand in that of Craig, and looked into his eyes.

"Come and see my house tomorrow—yes?" she said softly. "And I will show you my paintings, such as they are. You will lunch with me, both of you?"

"Sorry," broke in Perry. "I can't myself; I have an appointment for tomorrow noon with the British consul here, in regard to some business. But don't let me interfere, Jack—"

Craig accepted the invitation for himself.

They walked the short distance to the hotel, and found everything in readiness for them. Crossing the magnificent tiled terrace with its ancient trees and view of the city, they mounted to their rooms in the high wing. Once alone, Craig went to Perry's room, entered, and closed the door.

"Well?"

The scarred, hard-lined features grinned at him.

"Something fishy about the lady, Jack—about her manner. Perhaps you've simply made one enormous hit. You know, here in Morocco the blood runs hot—"

"Don't be a fool," snapped Craig.

"I'm not. By this time, it's all over the hotel that we came in her car. That's elegant for me; one more step above any suspicion. I'm practically safe this minute. But I'm more than ever decided against tipping off the lady to the gang raid. Something tells me not to do it. You and I can show up, get back her jewels, collar that rascal Lacombe—and pull down a fat piece of change. I can use it."

Craig flushed angrily.

"Confound you! I'm not in that business. I'll stake you out of France; back home if you like, and that ends it."

To his surprise, Perry did not flare up. "Old chap, you're square," he replied slowly. "Well, I'll do exactly what you say in this business. But—go slow! I can smell something queer about that lady, and it's not her perfume either. You visit her tomorrow, and feel things out. Perhaps you can drop on to her game then."

"Her game? Exactly what I thought myself," assented Craig. "Can we get any line on her here?"

PERRY nodded. "I know a chap who'll get my passport fixed up. He's a French Algerian, has a small bank, does a lot of shady business. It'll cost me a thousand francs, but is worth it. I'll see him right away, and may get some information from him."

It was so agreed, and within half an hour Perry had left the hotel.

He did not return, and Craig dined alone in the big room which imitated the glorious hues of the older portion of the palace. Then, pipe alight, he descended the flights of steps to the street entrance, and for an hour strolled through the garish bazaars of Fez. When he returned, Perry was not yet back.

It was nearly twelve, in fact, when Perry showed up with a laugh.

"Had a devil of a time," he exclaimed. "You know, after dark these narrow streets are solidly closed by huge gates that shut off the various portions of the city; a survival of barbaric days, as I learned to my sorrow. I had to wait until some of the Arab night watch showed up. Well, everything's fixed. The passport has its visa, and a good enough imitation to get past any casual inspection."

"Good," said Craig. "What about the lady?"

Perry shrugged. "An artist, sure enough, and wealthy. Something phoney about her, though. My informant couldn't

say just what; he had heard rumors. He warned me against being mixed up with her. She's thick with the army crowd, the officers. Say, how long do we stay in Morocco, anyway?"

"Day after tomorrow, perhaps," said Craig. "Nothing to keep us except this confounded mess you want to see through. Or shall we chuck it?"

"Not much!"

"All right. Does the chap you saw to-night know about—the Legion?"

"Lord, no! Not a soul except Sartain knows, and he's square."

"Agreed," and Craig nodded. "What about back in France? As I recall, you were traveling with a lady when the wreck occurred. Is it likely that she suspects you're still alive?"

PERRY broke into a laugh. "Frida Ginsberg? Listen, brother! That Alsatian crook was tickled to get rid of me; she was sweet, but hard-boiled. She had our bank roll, and you can be sure she was only too glad to find me dead and all of it in her hands. She's probably at the other end of Europe, or else in jail for forgery, by this time. Forgery was her long suit."

"You have a sweet past to look back on," commented Craig drily. "Suppose we keep all such friends out of the future, eh? Well, sleep tight! See you tomorrow."

He did not waken until late next morning, and then found Perry shaking him. Craig rolled out, had a quick shower, and inquired into this unseemly activity. Perry grinned cheerfully.

"Just had a great idea. We can find out exactly what time this raid is planned to-night!"

"How?"

"Easy. Get this Lacombe on the phone; the hotel can reach him for you. Tell him we're off on an evening of pleasure and want to rent his car. If he's planned the job for an early hour, as is most likely on account of the gates closing, he'll re-

fuse to go. Or at all events he'll plead a prior engagement at such and such a time. Get me?"

Craig nodded. "Good idea. We'll do it."

Half an hour later, at the telephone in the lobby, he had Lacombe on the wire. The chauffeur regretfully refused the engagement.

"I regret, m'sieu, that I have already been engaged for ten this evening. I can send someone else in my place, however —"

"No, never mind. Another time, perhaps. Thank you," and Craig hung up.

He turned to Perry with a nod.

"You were right. Between ten and eleven."

"Your pardon, m'sieu," intervened the manager, extending an envelope to Perry. "This was left a few moments ago."

Perry glanced at his name on the envelope. "By whom?"

The manager shrugged. "A native, m'sieu, no doubt some messenger. I did not inquire."

Perry tore open the envelope; then the blood rushed out of his face and he strode outside to the terrace by the fountain. Craig followed, dropped beside him at one of the tables, and eyed him, startled by the change in the man's features.

"Something wrong?"

For reply, Perry extended the note. It was neither addressed nor signed, and was in very delicate, firm writing, in French:

"So H. P. has now resumed the identity of P. C.?"

That was all. But it was enough to contract the heart and soul of the man who had just laid aside the identity of Hans Pfeffer, Legionnaire.

IV

CRAIG, a little past noon, followed one of the hotel guides along the narrow, twisting streets of Fez Bali, where no vehicles were permitted, into Fez Jedid,

and so to the Palace of the Sons of David, as the name of Madame Teyssier's abode signified. There was a gate in a high wall, a covered entrance into a patio, and on two sides of this was the dwelling itself.

Since that amazing note of the morning, nothing had happened. Craig was uneasy, anxious. Perry was keeping to his room, incredulous, nervous, badly shocked and alarmed. That any should know the truth, was positively beyond credence; yet the note spoke for itself. Someone in Fez had sent it to the hotel. Someone here knew everything. The ghastly impossibility of it was staggering. It was like seeing a ghost in broad daylight.

To the deserter, it gave a feeling of horror, as Craig could tell from his brother's eyes. The man felt constricted, bound in by unseen walls, held in the grip of a frightful suspense. One whisper of the truth to the authorities, and he was infallibly lost. So, for that matter, was Craig. Flight could do no good. Before they could reach the Spanish zone in the north, the roads would be closed. The very fact that the note had conveyed no threat, made it appear filled with unspoken menace.

In this mood, then, with everything else of lessened importance, Craig went to his luncheon engagement. As he approached the entrance in the wall a man came out; a man in the gay uniform of a colonel of tirailleurs, a man of perhaps fifty. He came to a car waiting at the



curb, got into it, and was driven away, but his face lingered with Craig. It held something awful, an indescribable stricken expression, a livid, pallid anguish. Craig touched his guide on the shoulder.

"Do you know who that officer was?" he asked.

"But yes, m'sieu, everyone knows him," said the Arab. "It was Colonel Dufrene, one of the sultan's aides. Here is the Dar ben Daoud."

A moment afterward, Craig was entering a charming and mysterious abode, ushered in by an Arab girl, who took his hat and stick and told him to make himself at home.

THE rooms were sunken two steps from the entrance; floor and walls were completely tiled in gorgeous colors and geometrical designs. The ceilings were of mosaic woods. The furniture was a blend of French and Moroccan, great leather cushions all about, while paintings were in profusion—on the walls, on easels, stacked here and there. The soft lighting, the blend of rich colors, the thick Rabat rugs on the floor, created an atmosphere of luxury.

Then Madame Teyssier appeared, radiant, jeweled, cordial. Her greeting was impressive. She was glowing, her dark eyes alight, a vibrant personality evident in her whole body. A few moments later, after a rapid glance over some pictures, a swiftly intimate chat, Craig was seated with her in an alcove of another room, low and cool, where one arched wall opened upon the patio with its fountain. The Arab girl served luncheon, but not an Arab meal.

"You live alone here?" asked Craig.

"Yes; the maid remains, the other servants leave at night," she returned. "I am only alone for a week or two. Soon my niece arrives for the winter, and then we shall be gay, so gay! She is a favorite with the officers, my little niece."

Craig was caught by a subtly sinister intonation in her voice. He began to have the feeling that something was about to happen. He became uneasy, but gave no sign of it.

"Is it safe to be alone here, then?" he inquired.

She made a gay grimace. "Safe? My dear American, Fez is much more safe

than Paris, I assure you! The Arab courts are hard on criminals; they do not exist here, as they do among us." She talked on, volubly, and presently renewed her interest in him, in what he was doing here, in his private affairs.

Craig evaded wherever possible. He gained the impression that he was being tricked, that she was laughing at him, mocking him. When the mint tea arrived, Madame Teyssier dismissed the Arab girl and herself poured the native concoction into tall shimmering glasses. Then, lighting a cigarette, she leaned back comfortably, sipped her tea, and regarded Craig with a new light in her eyes.

"You are very rich, like all Americans?" she said.

"No; I work," said Craig, and told of his business. She shrugged in evident disbelief.

"No, no, my friend! I know better. You do not come here to Morocco for a day or two, just to pass the time, unless you have plenty of money. It is an expensive trip, this. Only this morning, early, came a telegram from my little niece in Monaco, begging for money with which to join me. She always gives me some charming information, does my niece, and this time she gave me some, too."

"Yes?" said Craig idly.

Her gaze became more intent. "But yes, my friend. Would you not like to provide her with twenty thousand American dollars, for her trip here?"

Craig's brows went up in open astonishment.

"You are jesting, madame?"

She shrugged. "I seldom jest, my friend, especially about money. You are not staying long in Morocco, you said?"

"We leave tomorrow."

"How sad it would be," she observed, smiling slightly, "if you were unable to reach Tangier! For I presume you go to Tangier."

"Eh? Yes, of course." Craig frowned slightly. "How do you mean, unable?"

"Just that. One might be stopped at the frontier, you comprehend?"

"No, I don't," said Craig abruptly. "Just what do you mean? Why should I be stopped?"

"One might imagine, m'sieu, that you are traveling, not with a brother, but with a man who is even now being sought far and wide. You have not heard how Meknez is being combed for a deserter from the Legion? A German, they say, one Hans Pfeiffer."

CRAIG set down his glass of mint tea with steady hand, and produced a cigarette.

"I haven't heard about it," he observed coolly.

"But you are interested?" she inquired, watching him. He realized of a sudden that this woman must know everything. Looking up, he met her intent gaze, his eyes challenging, direct.

"No," he said. "Are you?"

"Oh, I do not blame a poor devil for trying to leave that hell!" she exclaimed lightly. "It is one of the things that can't be done, however. Something always slips up. Even a man's past may rise up to smite him at the wrong moment. Someone learns about him, slips a word to the authorities, and the frontiers are closed."

Craig felt absolutely certain, now.

"I believe you wrote a short note this morning?" he demanded. She met his angry eyes and smiled slowly, tantalizingly.

"That is true, my friend. I am so sorry for my poor niece! She should have been here a fortnight ago, but was unable to come. Now, if you would help——"

Craig sat up suddenly. "What are you driving at?" he snapped. "Blackmail? I suppose that's why Colonel Dufrene went out of here looking like a ghost, eh? Blackmailing him, too?"

Her eyes widened for an instant in startled fear. His mention of that name must have given her a shock.

"Oh, no, I ask nothing for myself," she

rejoined coolly. "It is all for my niece. Poor little Frida! It was so good of her to answer my wire quickly, at once! She used to be Frida Ginsberg, you know."

Craig sat in frozen silence.

In an instant, he knew the worst. This woman must have heard from the lips of her niece some mention of Perry Craig. She had encountered the name in the Meknez hotel, had at once scraped up acquaintance—with this result. A wire to her niece, if Frida Ginsberg really were any relative, had resulted in a quick response.

And now she knew everything. Craig was in her clutches, absolutely at her mercy.

"Abandon pretense and throw off the mask," he said crisply. "Just what do you want?"

"Twenty thousand dollars," she said. Hard lines showed about her mouth; her eyes were defiant, arrogant, masterful. "Without it, you don't leave Morocco."

"The sum is impossible," said Craig calmly. "I haven't that much——"

"Then raise it," she broke in. "Don't lie. Telegraph, cable, do what you like—but raise it."

"I cannot."

"Bah! You Americans can do anything. Go home, talk it over with your brother, then come back and set a definite time to hand over the money. Otherwise, you'll both be arrested by tomorrow morning."

Craig rose. "Very well, madame. I shall do as you suggest and return this evening."

"I shan't be home. I am going to dinner and a dance at the Imperial Hotel, the new hotel in the French city. I shan't be back until eleven or after."

Craig's pulses leaped. "Very well," he said, and bowed. "At eleven or a little after, I shall have the honor of calling, if I may."

"If that pleases you, by all means. Must you go so soon?"

Craig laughed drily, and took his leave without ceremony.

He was stunned, to tell the truth—be-

wildered—afraid he might lose control of himself. A false step here, a word amiss, and the result would be frightful. This woman knew no mercy; her eye was cold, pitiless, calculating. She stood to gain either way; by blackmailing him, or else by revealing everything to the authorities.

In one sense, he was vastly relieved. At least the enemy was now in the open, there was no more suspense regarding that mysterious note of the morning. Craig reviewed the possibilities in his mind, as he strode through the narrow, twisting streets back to the hotel. There was no way out, no way of getting clear of Morocco, except by air; and the only commercial air routes did not touch other than French soil. No, Madame Teyssier held all the cards, and knew how to play them.

In this acute peril, in this rush of personal affairs, Craig quite forgot the unfortunate Colonel Dufrene whose path had crossed his so unexpectedly.

If there were any salvation, it must come this same night. He had realized this on the moment; but he did not see how it could come. She would be gone, and Lacombe had known it. Lacombe was planning a simple robbery coup, then? Possibly not. That astute chauffeur was no fool. Perhaps Lacombe was after something more important than jewels or cash.

Force? This had occurred to Craig, but he had dismissed it. Short of killing this woman, force could avail him nothing, and murder was something he could not conceive. Besides, she was expecting him on her return home, and she would anticipate any such crudity as attempted force. Very likely she would bring one or two officers with her.

"Damn it!" muttered Craig angrily. "She's got us."

V

PERRY took it with a look of relief that the anxiety was ended, then frowned savagely as he realized that they were certainly caught.

"Queer how things turn out," he observed reflectively. "I remember Frida often speaking of an aunt somewhere; and now it's happened. Jack, we're done for. You skip out, and I'll stop here and cover things for you."

"You mean it?" asked Craig in astonishment.

"Of course. Both of us can't get away. I can go see this dame tonight and jolly her along. You hire a car and beat it for Tangier. You can get clear——"

"Shut up," snapped Craig angrily. "If you're nabbed, I'm done for anyhow, so far as my Paris business is concerned; this woman would tell my share in it. No! We'll stick, and we'll sink or swim together. After all, I think we may swim."

"How so?"

"Lacombe means to go through her place tonight while she's gone, and the two Arabs will probably take some actual loot; I have an idea that Lacombe is after some of her blackmail dope. At all events, he'll grab the chief loot. Then, if we grab him—you see?"

Perry's morose features lighted up.

"Bully for you, Jack! And you've got the details of her place in your head?"

Craig nodded.

At ten that night, the little street on which the Dar ben Daoud fronted was quite deserted, the dim street lantern fifty feet away throwing only a feeble light upon the wall and gate. Madame Teyssier might well call it safe from any alarm; a block away on one side was the mosque of the sultan's palace, on the other was the Mellah or Jewish quarter, and close by was the Bab el Amer, the gate opening toward the new French city.

Slightly after ten, three figures came from two different directions and met at the gate in the wall; two burnoused Arabs, a Frenchman in whipcord livery. There was no delay, no hesitation. Lacombe and one Arab leaned together against the wall. The second Arab mounted lithely to their shoulders, drew himself over the wall, and was gone. The

two straightened up, lit cigarettes, moved to one side. They might well be anxious. If they were caught at this game, it meant a hand lopped off in penalty, perhaps worse. The tribunal of the pasha was terrible to house-breakers.

After a moment, the gate in the wall swung open. A low voice spoke, the two



men outside passed in through the massive iron-studded gate. The street was deserted again.

Craig and Perry approached the wall, came to the gate, and tested it. The heavy bars within had been shot back; the gate moved, not upon

hinges, but in sockets at top and bottom. Under Craig's hand it swung easily. The two slipped inside and drew it shut again.

A female voice rose sharply, shrilly, then was abruptly silenced.

"The Arab maid," muttered Craig. "Better wait outside, here."

The house appeared dark, except for a Moorish lantern burning over the entrance door, which stood wide open. The ray of an electric torch flitted across a window and was gone. Then, after a moment, a lamp in the front rooms was lighted. The intruders had nothing more to fear, the place was theirs.

THROUGH sources known only to himself, Perry had that evening obtained two persuaders; firearms were impossible, but these slender slung-shots were almost as deadly, and much more silent.

The two Arabs were not to be seen, probably were plundering a bedroom. In the main room, the studio and reception

room, Lacombe was at work on something behind a wall-hanging, which he had pushed aside. Coming close to the window, Craig peered in.

"Wall safe," breathed Perry. "You were right about him. Bedrooms there, across the patio, eh? I'll look up those two Arabs. You watch this bird."

He disappeared.

Craig stepped to the doorway. He made no sound on the solid tiles; just inside was a thick Rabat rug, he recalled, and next moment he stood upon it, by the arched descent into the main room. He waited grimly, a shadow against the obscurity, and watched.

Lacombe was or had been something more than a mere chauffeur. His electric torch played on the face of the wall safe, his fingers worked nimbly. The lamp that had been lit cast only a dim glow of light across the room; the arches, the deep windows, the corners, were in darkness. As Craig waited, breathing softly, Lacombe opened the door of the little safe.

An exclamation of satisfaction broke from the man. He swiftly pulled open drawer after drawer; from one and another he seized an envelope, a packet of papers, other sheafs of documents. They made a little pile on the tabouret beside him. Watching his swift, sure work, Craig comprehended that he was watching no tyro but a finished artist. There could be no doubt that Lacombe was a criminal masking as a chauffeur, and that in his present coup he aimed at beating Madame Teyssier at her own game. There must have been jewels in that safe, but Lacombe disdained them.

A sharp cry stiffened Craig, who recognized the voice of Perry. Then silence. Lacombe had whirled at the sound and stood listening. Nothing else happened. With swift movements, Lacombe closed the safe door, pulled the embroidered hanging across it, and seized the papers from the table. He slipped a rubber band about them, stood listening again. Then,

with a shrug, he turned toward where Craig was standing.

"Let the fools save themselves!" he muttered. "She herself will swear——"

For him, the game was finished. The two Arabs might or might not be caught; their work would give evidence of simple burglary. If caught, their word would not convict him, for he must have arranged an alibi in advance. Nor was it likely that Madame Teyssier would proceed against him. As his words indicated, he could now force her to swear to his alibi.

Decidedly, Lacombe was a clever rascal, thought Craig.

The man slipped the sheaf of papers into one pocket, his electric torch into another, and stepped swiftly to the entrance. He mounted the two steps, came beneath the arch. A shadow moved at his very side, and he saw it too late. The life-saver clipped him neatly over the ear, and he pitched forward on his face, without a word.

"Jack!"

Craig turned, leaped forward. Into the main room was coming Perry—haltingly, uncertainly, hand pressed against his side. His fingers were scarlet.

"It's all right, Jack." Perry drew himself up, with a laugh. "I was more frightened than hurt. We're pretty tough in the Legion, you know."

Craig steadied him, glanced past him. "Those two Arabs?"

"Both laid out. The second one got me with his knife."

MAKING a swift examination, Craig found the knife-slash across the ribs—a nasty cut but in no way dangerous, except from the copious loss of blood. He fell to work and patched up a bandage, then glanced at his watch.

"Whew! Time's getting on. Wait a minute."

He hurried to the prostrate figure of Lacombe, who was beginning to stir. From the man he took a pistol and the sheaf of documents, pocketing these and the flash-

light. Then, dragging Lacombe by the collar out the door, he brought him to the entrance, swung open the gate, and sent him flying out into the street with a vigorous kick.

"That's that," he said, as he returned. Perry was lifting a decanter from a stand, and after a sniff and a taste, took a hearty swig. "Water?"

"No. Port, and unusually good. What next?"

"I'm going to tie up those two Arabs and leave 'em, and then wait for the lady. Lacombe broke into her safe; I got his plunder. But I don't want you around in your present shape. Can you get back to the hotel alone?"

"Me? Sure." Perry laughed. "I'm tough, I tell you!"

"Then get back. Have the manager call a French doctor. Tell him you were attacked and knifed by an Arab in a dark street, but that you don't want to make a police report. It'll be all right."

Perry quite understood that his presence would only handicap Craig now, and he assented without protest. A quick hand-clasp, and he was gone.

Craig hurried through the house, flashing the electric ray around. He discovered the two natives, knocked out by Perry, and without loss of time fell on them and bound them firmly. Near each was a bundle of loot, which he left alone. Returning to the main room, Craig settled down here in comfort to peruse the documents he had obtained. He had no intention of concealing his presence. The game was in his hands now.

How true this was, he discovered to his intense amazement upon glancing over the sheaf of papers and letters. Each was neatly labeled; most of them dealt with army officers, from generals down. Craig did not go through them. He could imagine the contents. He could imagine, too, the fat times that Madame Teyssier must be enjoying, and the influence which she must have at her command. The little parcel of letters bearing the name of Col-

onel Dufrene caught his eye, and he remembered the ghastly face of that harried man.

And he was going to buy his own safety by returning these documents to the harpy? The thought struck him like a thunderbolt. If it came to that, he was no better than the rascal Lacombe, no better than the woman herself! His brain awoke. He thought suddenly of the Arab maid—was it her cry he had heard upon entering? He took the flashlight and made his way to the room where the two Arabs lay, then into a bedroom beyond. Yes; there was her figure lying on the bed, bound and gagged. With a shrug, he turned away. She was safe enough.

But what of himself?

Craig knew very well that if he did buy escape and safety with these papers, it meant a hell on earth for the men thus concerned. The face of Colonel Dufrene recurred to his mind, haunted him afresh. He lit a cigarette and sat for a space smoking, trying to force himself to be practical about it. After all, he had to look out for number one. It was silly to do anything else.

None the less the thought tortured him. He tried to down it, and could not. Here in his hand rested the destiny of a dozen men and one or two women; their peace of mind, their very condemnation or salvation. How much she had already milked them for, he could not tell. If she knew that he had the papers, if he deliberately returned them as the price of his own safety, then—

He started suddenly, then rose. Against the wall at one side was a secretary, open. He went to it, lit the little oil lamp above it, and sat down. He found envelopes, and addressed them; no street address was necessary, in the case of these names. Into each envelope he slipped the proper documents. In a little tortoise-shell box were stamps. He stamped the envelopes, pocketed them, then lit a fresh cigarette and re-lected.

"Yes, I'll do it," he decided, and a steely

glint came into his eyes. "I can play out the game with her, just the same—promise the papers once we're in Tangier, and then laugh at her. Why not? That fellow Lacombe is out of it entirely. Good!"

His decision made, he seized a sheet of notepaper and wrote hurriedly, briefly.

"Madam: I shall call at nine in the morning. I think you will agree that the cards are now all in my hands.

*Yours truly,
John Craig."*

Leaving the note here in full view, Craig rose and glanced around. On the morrow, triumph! He had the woman where he wanted her. She would be terrorized, pliable, broken. He could force her to accompany them to Tangier by automobile, and once there could politely bid her to the devil. If ever a double-cross were justified, it was in this case, surely!

He strode across the room, passed out the door, came to the gate and paused. It swung open to his hand, and he glanced out. The street was dark, obviously deserted. There was no hurry. He could turn in the letters at the desk upon reaching the hotel. By noon tomorrow, there would be happiness in a dozen quarters.

He stepped out, closed the gate behind him, and departed. He did not see a shadow that moved against the darker shadow of the houses opposite, following him cautiously.

VI

CRAIG wakened to find an utter stranger in his room. He sat up, blinking, and glanced at his watch. Six-thirty.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, staring at the dapper Frenchman. "Who are you?"

The other bowed, came forward, produced a card bearing his photograph—the equivalent of an American police badge. Captain Marat, chief of detectives of the

local police force. He regarded Craig fixedly.

"M'sieu, you will pardon this intrusion. Your papers, if you please? According to the hotel card you filled out, your *pièces d'identité* consist of a passport. You have it?"

"Certainly," returned the astonished Craig. "Also an identity card."

He jumped out of bed and obtained them. As Captain Marat scrutinized them, a knock sounded and two men entered; two uniformed police officers, who saluted their leader.

"Well?" said Marat.

"The other, m'sieu," said one of them, "arrived here well before eleven, apparently drunk. This one came in after eleven, alone, posted some letters, and went to his room."

"Correct," said Craig. "And now, gentlemen, what is all this about? By what right have you entered my room?"

"By the right of the law, m'sieu," returned Captain Marat. "Your papers are in order; but I regret to say that your actions are not. Eh? Eh? What is that?"

The sharp exclamation broke from him. One of his men had picked up from the chair where Craig had put them, the slung-shot and the pistol. The three showed instant excitement. Marat examined the pistol swiftly, then handed it to his subordinates and faced Craig gravely.

"Two weapons, in contravention of the law," he observed. "Have you a permit to possess this pistol, m'sieu?"

"No," said Craig.

"You were at the house of Madame Teyssier last night?"

"Yes."

Marat shrugged.

"I regret, m'sieu, that you are under arrest. You left a note for Madame Teyssier, you were at her house by your own admission, you possess a pistol which has recently been used and not cleaned."

"Well, what does it mean?" demanded Craig. "I'll pay the fine for possessing the pistol, if that's what you're driving

at. It's no crime to visit a lady, is it?"

"M'sieu, between eleven and twelve last night, Madame Teyssier was murdered," came the astounding words. "She was shot twice and killed, the bullets being of the same calibre as this pistol. Her maid was found bound and gagged, her house had been looted. It is my duty to search your room and to arrest you for the murder."

The two officers began a thorough search of the room.

Craig sank back upon the bed. The woman murdered! In a flash, he perceived that he was caught in a net of circumstance. No doubt those two bound Arabs had wakened, had somehow got loose, had

killed Madame Teyssier and escaped. There was no mention of them, therefore they were out of the picture. And his own lips were sealed.



Further,

Perry was in the most acute peril. True, Perry was apparently exonerated of any suspicion; but let him be dragged into it, and the first move would be to demand his papers. Police inspection of his passport would show the forgery.

"Captain Marat, you're going a bit too fast," said Craig desperately. "True, I called on the lady last evening. She was not home. I left a note saying I would return."

"Exactly. A threatening note," said Marat. "It is known that she returned about eleven. It was eleven-thirty when you reached here, m'sieu. Here are weapons. My duty is only too clear; I regret it deeply, but you must dress and accompany me."

"I may have a word with my brother?"

"Of course, m'sieu. In my presence. When you have dressed, perhaps."

Craig reached for his clothes helplessly.

HE COULD see no way out. That Arab maid probably did not know who had attacked her; the two Arabs had fled, he did not know their names. To drag Lacombe into it, was useless. To tell the exact truth would mean destruction for Perry. The truth could be told later, if he could get Perry out of the country into the Spanish zone.

He must stand the gaff, therefore. A word to Perry, a swift warning, and in two or three hours Perry could be in safety. Then would be time enough to tell the whole truth and take his medicine on the lesser charges. Yes, he might still win out, if he could avoid any police examination of Perry's passport. The woman was dead, could not tell her story.

"Very well," he said quietly, as he began to dress. "Of the murder, Captain Marat, I know absolutely nothing. I don't see how you construe my note to Madame Teyssier as being in any way threatening."

Captain Marat smiled. "Come, come, my dear m'sieu! Personally, I sympathize with you. We know the woman's character and her business. For certain reasons, we have never been able to obtain any testimony against her. It is evident that you were one of her victims, eh? No, I must sympathize with you—but I must also do my duty. Perhaps, if you tell the court the entire truth——"

"Damn it, I've told you the truth!" exclaimed Craig, angry and once more astonished by how much seemed to be known to the police. "I didn't kill her, didn't even see her!"

"If the Arab maid had admitted you last night, m'sieu," came the damning response, "your story might be credited. But she did not. You attacked her, bound and gagged her. You entered silently. How you came to commit the error of leaving that note, I cannot say. Well?"

He turned to the two men. They had finished their search of the room, and reported nothing. None of the loot had been found. Incredulous, Captain Marat insisted on making a search for himself,

while the two men guarded the door. He found nothing.

Perry was snoring when they entered his room and wakened him. He had obtained no doctor the previous night, had said nothing about his hurt; he was a tough hombre and hard to kill, as he cheerfully admitted. Craig came to the bedside and sat down. Captain Marat remained by the door, watchful but unconcerned; for a foreigner in Morocco, there is no escape.

"What's up?" demanded Perry.

Craig winked. "Nothing much. I have some business that'll detain me here in Fez. You get a car and go on to Tangier and attend to our business there. And," he added under his breath, "don't waste a minute. Hire a car and beat it. Here's money."

"Yeah? And when will you meet me in Tangier?" demanded Perry, bewildered but cautious. Craig threw a smile at the captain.

"Oh, two or three days. Do you think our business will be finished by then?"

Captain Marat shrugged. He had agreed that Perry was to know nothing of the murder charge. His sympathy for Craig was quite obvious. So was his inflexible devotion to duty.

"Perhaps, perhaps," he responded. "It should be settled even sooner."

"Exactly," said Craig drily. He turned to Perry. "You'll go on, then?"

"Without wasting a minute. Unless I can be of any assistance to you here."

"No, I can handle it myself, old chap. Good-by, then!"

Their hands met. "And hurry," said Craig softly. Perry nodded comprehension.

Outside, the two police were waiting. Captain Marat turned to his prisoner.

"My friend, our car is waiting at the Bab Guissa. There is no need to humiliate you; one comprehends that you are a gentleman. No handcuffs, if you give your parole."

"Thank you," said Craig. "You have my word."

THE three left the hotel by the rear courtyard, passed through the twisting street to the little hillside gate, and five minutes later Craig was on his way to the prefecture in the Ville Nouvelle, the new French city rising splendidly outside the Mellah walls.

His preliminary examination was set for three that afternoon, and he was placed in a cell.

He made thoughtful computation. From Fez to El Ksar, the first town in the Spanish zone across the line, was nearly two hundred kilometers—about one hundred and twenty miles. Perry would have no trouble in getting an automobile on ten minutes' notice through the hotel, and there were no speed laws in Morocco. Tenthirty, then, should see him past the frontier and in safety.

Therefore, when he faced the judge that afternoon, Craig could tell the exact truth.

"Not too much, of course," he reflected. "Start where Perry overheard Lacombe hire the two Arabs—that's safe enough. The fact that I mailed those documents to certain officers will cinch matters; if I refuse to give their names, they'll buy chips in the game and use their influence, most certainly. The pistol can probably be identified as belonging to Lacombe, the police will grab him, and everything will come out. The woman's dead, and no one else here knows the truth about Perry. I should worry!"

Considerably cheered by these thoughts, he polished off the breakfast sent him, and settled down to pass the time.

He was dozing when, at eleven o'clock, Captain Marat unlocked the door and entered his cell. Craig came to his feet. Marat extended his hand gravely.

"My friend, I am very happy to inform you that there is no longer a charge against you."

"Eh?" Craig was astounded, bewildered. "You mean——?"

"An officer of the garrison, a certain Colonel Dufrene attached to the sultan's household, committed suicide early this

morning. A note was found from him, confessing that he shot Madame Teyssier last night. She had blackmailed him, he was desperate; he shot her, and this morning killed himself. What a tragedy! But for you, m'sieu, good fortune."

"Then I am free?"

"You are free, m'sieu," said the other. "The charge of possessing weapons has not been filed; they are confiscated, the matter is forgotten."

"Poor Dufrene!" muttered Craig, overwhelmed. "If he had waited——"

He checked himself, warned by the look in the eyes of Captain Marat. The latter lowered his voice.

"M'sieu, I have no desire to be inquisitive, me. There are certain elements of mystery in this affair which I do not wish to penetrate. A certain officer of the garrison visited me a few moments ago and requested that whatever you may desire done, be done for you."

Craig smiled. "Thanks; nothing is necessary. I shall hire a car and leave for Tangier as soon as I can get luncheon and leave the hotel."

"A car is waiting to take you back there, then."

IN HIS own room at the hotel, Craig lit a cigarette, dropped into a chair, stared through the open windows at the city of Fez outspread below. Something marvelous about it all; here Perry was in safety, he himself was free to go; the hotel would have a hired car ready at one o'clock. By three, he would be across the frontier, would meet Perry that evening in Tangier. And no harm done. One woman dead, one harpy destroyed, a dozen people safe, grateful, ready to help if need were——

"And poor Dufrene's confession did it all!" murmured Craig. "He must have come home with her. He shot her, found his incriminating letters gone, found the place looted, and in utter despair shot himself. If he had waited for the morning mail—but he did not. Well, at all events the rest of us are happily taken care of!"

At one o'clock, after an early luncheon, his car arrived. The chauffeur, a young Italian named Emile, carried out his bag. In five minutes, Fez was behind them, and the road ahead to the frontier, a smooth boulevard, was dropping behind at sixty miles an hour.

The shadow that had watched Craig leave the Dar ben Daoud, however, had by no means forgotten.

VII

TWELVE kilometres outside Fez, the highway forked, the left going to Meknez, the right striking north toward the frontier.

Just after passing the fork, Emile slowed down, drew out of the road, and halted. He leaped from his seat and opened the car door, smiling at Craig.

"Will m'sieu alight here?"

"Eh? What's wrong?" demanded the American in surprise.

The smile of the Italian widened.

"Nothing is wrong, m'sieu, nothing!" he rejoined with a flourish. "But a car has been following us from Fez. Perhaps m'sieu would like to investigate?"

"A car following us?"

Craig, in surprise, obeyed the other's gesture before he stopped to think, and turning, saw the dust and black dot of a following car. Then his car door slammed, and the mocking voice of Emile came to him.

"Adieu, m'sieu! A pleasant journey to you."

As Craig whirled, the car roared, gathered speed, moved away. Stupefied for an instant, Craig stared after it. He was set afoot here in the blinding moon glare of Morocco, on the open road, only the bare brown rolling hills in sight.

He swung around quickly, and looked at the car approaching. He recognized it after a moment. It was Lacombe's Fiat, coming at roaring speed. Then, in a flash, he perceived everything. The Italian, of course, had been in league with Lacombe.

Probably these rental chauffeurs all hung together.

The Fiat rolled up with squealing brakes, and came to a halt. From it leaped Lacombe, followed by an Arab in tattered brown burnouse, who was grinning the omnipresent Arab grin of cruel amusement. The mirth of the Arabs, like that of the Chinese, is founded upon generations of human suffering and death.

The vigorous features of Lacombe broke into an excited snarl.

"So, M'sieu l'Americain!" he exclaimed. "We meet again, eh? You were very clever last night, weren't you? But I followed you from that house, all the same. And now, my friend, we shall have a settlement. I owe you something, me!"

Evasions were vain, as Craig realized on the instant.

"Just what do you infer, Lacombe?" he demanded coolly.

The other whipped a pistol from his pocket. About the neck of the Arab was slung a curved knife, which the brown hand fingered; the brown eyes narrowed upon Craig.

"I know everything," snapped Lacombe with angry exultation. "You kicked us out, you took the papers from me. She was killed later. You have those papers; and I want them! Do you understand?"

"Quite useless," returned Craig, his eyes on the pistol. He felt a swift pulse-leap. In his excitement, Lacombe had forgotten something highly important.

"Those papers," he went on, "are by this time in the hands of their rightful owners. I put them——"

"Bah! No lies!" burst in the other, and jerked his head toward the Fiat. "I have ten thousand francs there. Do you want it? Hand them over, take the money, all will then be peaceably arranged. Refuse, and we'll take them anyway and stop your squawking. Quick!"

"You mean to kill me?" asked Craig.

"Like a chicken!"

"But there's one thing you forgot, my friends."

Lacombe glared at him, came a step closer, deceived by the American's mild manner.

"Indeed! And what is that?"

"Why, you forgot an essential item," drawled Craig. "Namely, to snap off the safety catch of your automatic——"

As he spoke, his fist lashed out.

It was true that Lacombe had forgotten this detail. As the words reached his brain, as he moved to correct his fault, Craig's fist smashed into his face. Another swift, sharp blow, and another. The pistol, knocked out of his relaxed grasp, fell into the roadside dust.

The Arab's curved knife glittered in the sunlight. A shrill cry burst from him. He hurled himself at Craig with rapid thrusts, forcing the American to turn and meet him. Lacombe recovered balance and stooped over to get the pistol. Craig's toe caught him under the ear and sent him sprawling headlong.

THE curved blade glittered in wickedly. Craig dodged it, swung around, and then slammed in his right with his full weight behind it. The blow was perfect. It caught the Arab squarely on the angle of the jaw. He took a backward dive, turned over, skidded on his face in the dust, and lay in a sprawled heap, motionless.

A crash—Craig went reeling under a terrific blow. Lacombe had dropped on his hands, kicked upward in the dreaded *savate*. Giving up all thought of the pistol, he moved like lightning, whirled to

his feet, drove in a kick that would have felled an ox. Craig barely evaded it, and in response smashed a one-two square to the abdomen. A gasp of agony broke from Lacombe, and he fell.

As he came down, his hand caught up the automatic from the dust. The sharp report cracked out. Craig felt the bullet brush his sleeve—and dropped.

He dropped upon the writhing figure of Lacombe, however.

A flurry of dust surrounded the two men, choking them. A cry burst from Lacombe, then another. After an instant the dust drifted away. Craig came to his feet, ducking his skinned knuckles. Lacombe lay motionless, blood dripping from his mouth.

"And that," observed Craig grimly, "will teach you something you'll remember, my friend!"

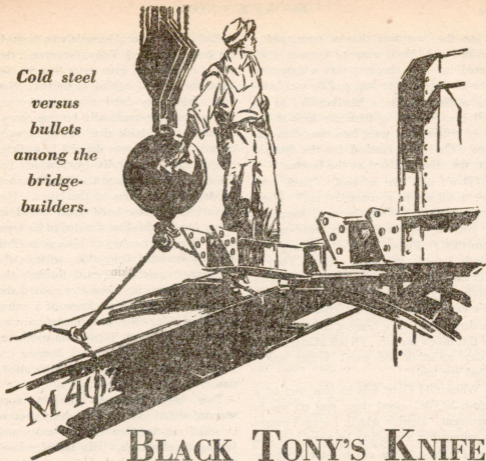
He crossed to the car, whose engine was still running, and climbed into the driver's seat. His knee struck something, and he looked down. A sheaf of thousand-franc notes lay there where Lacombe must have left it; he remembered the fellow had spoken of ten thousand francs. With a laugh, Craig pocketed the notes and threw in the gear.

"Adieu, gentlemen!" he exclaimed mockingly, glancing down at the two figures. "You've repaid me for my trouble—and now to catch up with Emile! I think I'll have an unpleasant surprise for him."

The Fiat leaped forward on the road to the frontier.



*Cold steel
versus
bullets
among the
bridge-
builders.*

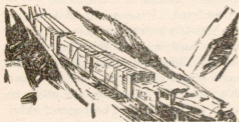


BLACK TONY'S KNIFE

By

FRANK KNOX HOCKMAN

Author of "Red Gatlin—Steel Man," etc.



BLACK" TONY MENDOZA'S knife was a thing of exquisite workmanship, from the heel of its beautifully carved bone grip to the tip of its perfectly balanced double-edged blade. Over all, the weapon was a trifle more than nine inches long, and six of these inches were hand-forged cutting steel. Keen, always ready for use in its slightly-oiled deerhide scabbard, its bone grip sticking clear of the multi-colored sash Black Tony wore, it was

at once a private insurance policy for Black Tony, and a general deterrent of violence. To the ordinary northern-bred individual, a knife inspires fear, abhorrence, and on occasion, frenzy. But to Old Gregory Bryson, Chief High Potentate of the Mammoth Construction Company, the knife of Black Tony inspired other and even more dangerous feelings. For Old Greg had no timid inhibitions.

Old Greg and I were sitting in the field office shack of the Missouri Bar bridge job

when the door was thrown open, and a white-faced, blood-smeared boomer staggered in. The boomer was whimpering like a scared coyote pup, and he was holding a dirty bandanna handkerchief to his left ear. Old Greg took one look at the gory visitor, then went into immediate action. One hand reached for the first-aid kit, the other grabbed at the boomer.

"Don't talk," he advised. "Save your breath till we get you patched up." Then, inconsistently, "What the devil happened to you—try to shave with a broad-axe, 'r somethin'? Phe-e-e-e-e-e!—What's 'at? Black Tony! Who'n'ell's Black Tony?" Turning his head to me, while his fingers busily adjusted a bandage over the boomer's ear, "What about this Black Tony?" he demanded. "He just cut the lower half of this man's ear off. I'll tell Mister Black Tony somethin' he won't forget quick. Send for him!"

When Old Greg was in that sort of a "do-it-NOW" mood there was no use in argument. Besides which, I wasn't averse to witnessing a meeting between him and our toughest camp citizen—the toughest citizen I'd ever seen in *any* camp. So I sent for Black Tony.

OLD GREG had finished bandaging the boomer, and was tilted back in his chair, with a half-smoked cigar canting belligerently upward from the corner of his grim mouth, when a timid knock at the door announced the presence of Black Tony Mendoza. The Old Man straightened up with a jerk, and his shaggy gray brows drew together in a scowl.

"Come in!" he roared in his best intimidating manner. "Quit poundin' on that damn door, an' come——" His eyebrows yanked upward in an expression of ludicrous surprise, and his gray eyes goggled. The cigar drooped slowly as his mouth sagged. Instead of the profane invective that his roar had presaged, the only sound that came from his mouth was a queer grunt.

And Old Greg could scarcely be blamed. On first sight Black Tony discouraged the taking of liberties, even more than he did on second sight—or third, or thirtieth. Not that familiarity bred contempt—by no means; but one eventually became accustomed to the shock that his appearance caused. Now, he was dressed in a dirty, ragged suit of overalls from which the sleeves had been torn at the shoulders and the legs of the pants at the knees. His powerful, bronze-colored arms ended in heavy, blunt hands that dangled to his knee caps. The short calves of his legs swelled abruptly outward from thick ankles. As he stepped quietly forward through the doorway his mighty shoulders cleared the frame by less than a thickness of a palm, on either side. But one caught only an impression of Black Tony's sub-structure, extraordinary though it was, because his face took and held all one's available attention.

Two little close-set midnight eyes snapped electric sparks from bony grottos chiselled out between craggy brows and jutting cheek bones. His low forehead sloped sharply backward to a mat of straight black hair as coarse as the fibre of a floor brush. His nose curved downward in a beak-like arch to a wide mouth at once firmly hard and as thick-lipped as a negro's. Bulges of muscle showed at the angle hinges of his jaw, and his square chin jutted like a harsh cornice above his thick, corded neck. The battered debris of a regular straw-stack of a sombrero dangled from his left hand. A pair of mud gang rubber shoes covered his big feet. He wore a ragged green-and-yellow sash, above the edge of which the polished bone grip of his knife showed.

"You sen' for me." Tony's voice had a baffling quality that defied classification. It was softly hard, courteously belligerent, sensitively ready to roar or to sigh as the need might arise. "W'at you want?"

"Yeah, I sent for you." Old Greg had had time to catch his breath—which was all the time he usually needed—and he

rose to the occasion like the fiery old Spartan that he was. "You're dang right I sent for you. Gimme that knife you're carryin'."

BLACK TONY'S eyes blazed. He made no move to draw the knife in compliance with Old Greg's order. And he spoke no word. The air was electrically tense. Old Greg rose slowly to his feet.

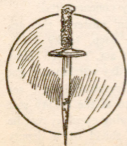
"Well?" His voice crackled like dry paper. "Do I get the knife, or don't I?"

Black Tony made a single motion with his right hand—a flash—that the eye could scarcely follow. There was a little jarring thud, followed by the hum of quivering steel. Sticking up from the floor, two feet in front of Tony, the bone grip of his heavy knife wagged and thrummed in the tension of its stopped force.

"Dat knife, she iss mine. You touch? You come an' take heem, meebby? *Si?*"

For a moment I couldn't breathe. In spite of the fact that I knew and appreciated his good judgment, I wasn't sure that Old Greg would not reach for that knife. But sound sense was a fundamental of his existence, and it triumphed now over his present peeved irritation. Old Greg did the one possible saving thing. He laughed. And he was such a darn good poker player that the laugh sounded authentic.

"Have any trouble getting your victims buried, as a general thing?" he chuckled. "Or do you always just cut off a piece, and let the rest walk around waiting for a good chance to get even!"



Black Tony shrugged, an expressive gesture that dismissed with contempt the possible menace of stalking avengers. Old Greg laughed louder than ever.

"So-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" he jeered. "You don't take any precautions, eh?" Suddenly

he went grave and cold. He leaned forward and wagged an admonitory finger in Black Tony's dark face. "Well, let me tell you something, *hombre*. The time will come when you'll wish you didn't have so many of your trade marks walking around. The day will come when you'll be glad to give me that knife. That's all. Get out!"

I shivered! Somehow I sensed things in that promise, that prophesy, that constituted a threat and a portent. The old story of shadows cast ahead.

FOR five minutes after Black Tony had shambled from the office Old Greg made a pretense of taking up the business matters that we had been discussing when the boomer entered. Then he leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and a benign smile softened his face.

"So he doesn't take any precautions against reprisals!" he mused. "Milt, a man like Black Tony might be a success in life if he'd only learn to look ahead. H-m-m-m-m-m! You know, I sort of like Black Tony. I wonder . . ."

"Shall I fire him?" I suggested.

"Fire him? Hell, no! Good worker, I suppose?"

"None better."

"Then keep him on. I'll think over the matter of Black Tony, and I'll take some advice on the subject. Maybe we can arrange for some of the mutilated ears and other accoutrements that Black Tony has pruned to haunt him a bit. Think—?" He grinned widely at the expression on my face. "Well, never mind trying to dope that one out. You go ahead and build this job. We'll forget Black Tony for the present."

BUT Black Tony just wouldn't allow himself to be forgotten. Three days after he had lopped the lower half of the boomer's ear off, he took a sudden aversion to the style of hat worn by Pete Yonkers, the semi-official watchman we had on the

job, and sliced off the crown of Pete's hat. The hat was an old one and, except as a relic, had little value. But the chunk of Pete's scalp that went with the crown was different. That necessitated action. And the action was up to me. So I strapped on the old A. E. F. democracy insura—anyhow, I put on my gat, and I contacted Mister Black Tony. I found him shoveling concrete back into the dark recesses of a pier wing wall, a place to which the concrete wouldn't flow freely (Damn all concrete inspectors!) and doing it, mind you, with a Number Four scoop. Now a Number Four scoop bears to the ordinary concrete shovel about the same relationship as Gibraltar bears to a golf hazard. And Black Tony was using the scoop with the ease of the ordinary obese golfer muffing a hazard.

I waited until he paddled a ton or so of the plastic stuff about, and came out of the wing form. Then I hailed him.

"Look here, Tony," I told him. "You've sliced your last man on this job without a come-back. Pete's all there is. There ain't no more! See this pimple buster." I flipped out my gun in the most approved Plattsburg manner. At least, I intended to. But I guess I was a little rusty—or something—and it didn't work. Before I could yank the old blazer, Tony's left hand licked out like a released spring, and fastened on my wrist with the grip of a wire line clamp.

"You no pool gun, Señor Milt," the big oiler growled softly, "or mebbly I take heem away an' make eat."

If there's one thing that gets my goat worse than to see a girl pull chewing gum, that thing is to have a bird like Black Tony—or any other bird—take that "Naughty, naughty! Mustn't" attitude. So I put every ounce of my two hundred twenty pounds behind a hay-maker swing with my left fist. And it landed. Boy, how it landed! Smack on Black Tony's jaw with a jolt that was guaranteed to keep. And it fetched home the smoked pork, too. Black Tony's hand dropped away from my

wrist. His heavy frame wove and wavered back and forth like an oscillating pin on a seismograph. But I took no chances. I slammed him on the side of the head with the ejector jacket of the old clatter pole, and he went down like a defeated candidate's temperature. And that left me in a devil of a fix. I had to do something else—either hog-tie him, run before he got back up, or get ready to shoot him when he did. It was Hobson's choice with me. So I backed off ten feet, and waited for his move.

BUT I was saved the unwelcome task of doing the world a favor. Behind me I heard a low, amused laugh—like nothing I had ever heard before, except when my public school principal laughed at my attempt to lie out of a mouse-in-the-teacher's-valentine episode. I jerked my head around at that laugh, and saw one of the oddest looking critters my eyes have ever lit on. He was an inch or so over six feet tall, and his lanky, loose-jointed body had the cadaverous look of a hungry sword swallower. He had one of these long, old-time-Covenanter faces that a fellow just naturally associates with slow drum beats and Taps. And his eyes! They were pools of cold, grayish ice that reflected little glints from a dead sun. Those eyes flicked from the motionless figure of Black Tony to me, and I felt an actual impact when they looked into mine. The stranger's mouth twitched for a fleeting instant in a queer smile; just one side smiled, the other remained grimly noncommittal.

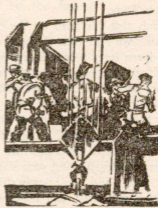
"What y' puttin on' mister?" this apparition asked in a deep, husky voice. "Sort of a giant-killin' act, 'r what? How chances f'r the job of day watchman y' got open? Guy named Bryson told me t' see y' 'bout it. I stopped at the county seat an' qualified." Throwing open his coat he displayed the shiny shield of a deputy sheriff. "I'll take that bird over f'r y', an' either bury him if he don't come to, 'r make him behave, if he does. What say?

T' way y' flivvered that gun pull shows y' need me in these parts. Look!" From somewhere in the folds of his loose-hanging clothes he conjured out a blued pistol. It cracked twice, and splinters flew in small showers from within two inches of where Black Tony's right hand lay across an oak timber. "I can dull the edge of his knife at fifty feet," the stranger bragged. "Gimme the job, pay f'r the ammunition I use, an' I'll make a good Greaser outa him."

"The job's yours," I told the stranger hurriedly—Black Tony's left foot was twitching with signs of reviving animation—and I turned toward the office. "Don't kill him if you can help it," I called back. "But don't strain yourself to help it."

I WASN'T out on the job again that day, but the next morning I ran into a situation. Black Tony and the newcomer, who had given the time clerk his name as 'Slim' Russell, were standing together at the edge of one of the big pier forms, talking earnestly. Slim seemed to be laying down the law in no uncertain terms. His bony forefinger shook aggressively in Black Tony's dark, lowering face, and his lips were apparently handing out a dressing down that bit to the very core of the big Mexican's being. Suddenly Black Tony snarled resentfully. Like a flash his powerful body swung into a tiger crouch, and his right hand darted with the speed of light to the knife in his sash. But he was much too slow. Scarcely an inch of the steel blade showed above the sash when he was looking into the muzzle of Slim's gun. For a second the two stood like statues, neither moving—neither, I suppose, breathing—then Black Tony's hand dropped away from his knife, and he turned with a shrug. Slim's gun disappeared into its secret hiding place as mysteriously as it had appeared, and he leaned back against one of the heavy pier timbers as nonchalantly as an ordinary day watchman.

THE next ten days were busy ones for me. Due to the checker, who must have been studying free verse while straining to become an engineer, the steel that was sent to the job for the reinforcement was in an awful muddle. Beam steel was marked with undecipherable characters that had no relation to those on the blueprints; tie rods and lighter stuff were all too long and bent the wrong way, and part of the junk was missing entirely.



Oddly enough, the most helpful and efficient of the men I had working on the job of sorting the misplaced and improper reinforcement was Black Tony. The powerful Mexican worked like a truck horse, and accomplished as much as two normal men. His speedy efficiency surprised me. But his attitude toward me was peculiar. Several times I caught him looking my way, with an expression lurking deep in his eyes that I didn't like. It wasn't exactly a look of anger, or of brooding resentment. But there was certainly nothing friendly or of good intention in it. It seemed to be a kind of calculating stare. It was deep stuff—too deep for me to fathom.

As the steel pile was beginning to take on some semblance of form, and it seemed possible that I might eventually bring order out of chaos, I turned my attention to the further progress of the job. I decided to rig up a stiff-leg derrick for the purpose of handling all steel in the future. With

this end in view, a space fifty feet square was cleared in the center of the steel pile, and here the massive timber sills were placed for the derrick to stand on. An eighty-foot mast was erected on the timbers, and from the base of the mast a hundred-foot boom stuck out over the piles of assorted steel. Naturally, the rigging of the derrick caused some complications in the sorting of the steel. The riggers got in our way, and we got in theirs. But everybody took it all in good humor—except Black Tony.

I'll admit that it's hard on the temper to be lifting with all your strength on the end of a dozen forty-foot rods, and to have them just at the point where they're pulling free of fifty other rods that hold them down, if a rigger uses the steel you're straining at as a fancy perch on which to stand and light a cigarette. And I'll admit that to be forced to drop the rods under such circumstances, barking your shins and bruising your feet, is devastating to philosophical calmness. But I'll be darned if it excuses Black Tony's demonstration of angry abandon.

WHEN the bundle of steel rods he was heaving on was jarred loose from his grip by the act of the thoughtless rigger, Black Tony didn't even stop to rub his shins. With a beast-like snarl he kicked his bruised feet free from the rods and dove headlong at the grinning rigger, his thick fingers clutching from the ends of his outthrust arms like the curved claws of a grizzly bear. The rigger took one look at the oncoming mass of savagery, then swung a vicious blow with the long connector's wrench that hung from his belt. The heavy eye end of the wrench hit Black Tony's left hand and slithered down over his wrist and forearm, leaving a gush of blood in its wake. After delivering the blow, the rigger ducked and swung to run. But Black Tony, springing like a gigantic cat, was on the man. His bleeding left hand fastened on the rigger's coat, and his right whipped the knife from his sash.

Slowly—with an unbelievably terrific natural force—Tony forced the rigger backward and down until he was on his knees. Then with that same deliberate slowness of motion, undoubtedly designed to inspire terror in the helpless victim, Black Tony brought the point of his knife to rest on the stretched throat of the white-faced rigger.

I tried desperately to throw off the grip of the horror that held me, and leap forward to the rigger's assistance. But the least move, with that shimmering blade resting against the man's bare throat, might serve to precipitate the thrust that I wanted to avert. The other men were as helpless as I. Then, with everything tensed to the aching point, Black Tony's knife shot out an angry gleam of fire, and slashed the man's clothing open from his neck to his waist. The blade licked back to the rigger's exposed white chest, and two more flashes were marked by two high-pitched yells of terror from the man on his knees. Tony straightened up and polished his knife by whetting it across his horny left palm. The rigger sat on the ground in a craze of fear, his fingers dabbling at the blood that welled from the four-inch T cut in his chest.

"Dat letter, he stan' for my nam'," Black Tony announced coolly. "Nex' time I mak, rest of nam' on chest. Savez? Bueno! Get up, peeg, or mebbly I get mad an'——" He ducked, threw himself to one side, and with a speed amazing in one of his build, darted into the shelter of a stack of steel. From a lumber pile, eighty feet away, the dry crack of a pistol had sounded, and the knife in Tony's hand had jerked angrily. As Tony disappeared into his lair of steel, Slim Russell came forward from the lumber pile.

"I left the damn greaser outa my sight just long enough t' go after a drink," Slim explained. "Who'd he kill? D'y want I should smoke him outa there?"

"Yes!" I directed. "Drive him out. Hurt him, but don't kill him. You might

drill him in a couple places that won't be fatal. I promised he'd suffer, and he will."

SLIM went about his work in a coolly methodical manner that reminded me of a surgeon I once saw perform an autopsy. Three times we got glimpses of Black Tony squirming through interstices in the tiers of steel. Three times Slim's pistol barked. I saw the last bullet tear through the dark calf of Black Tony's right leg. I figured that was plenty, so I drove Slim and the rest back a distance of a hundred feet, and I squatted on the ground in front of the pile of steel.

"Come out of there, Tony!" I called. "I told you I'd make you pay if you sliced anyone else on this job, and I've kept my promise. Come on out here now, and we'll fix that hole in your leg. Nobody'll bother you."

For two minutes I was more uncomfortable than I'd ever been before, except when I accidentally dropped a rivet gun off the twenty-eighth floor of a sky-scraper into a crowded street and awaited the effect. My imagination always was a hair-trigger affair. I was on the verge of repeating my assurance of immunity when I caught sight of Black Tony. He was coming out. And I got a thrill of satisfaction from the fact that he was squirming toward me, feet first. He had taken my word on the matter of protection. It was perfect poise or absolute damn foolishness—which ever way you look at it. Once in the open, Tony rose to his full height and turned to face me with an impassive countenance. Only his eyes showed the tenseness of the moment, and in them was that inexplicable something that worried me.

AS A matter of fact, according to the standards of the world's Black Tonys, he wasn't seriously hurt. He had a clean hole bored through the muscle of his right calf, another through the loose muscle beneath his upper left arm, and a

red welt on the right side of his neck. They stung, and undoubtedly they bothered him; but he merely shrugged when I offered to bandage him up. Then he turned and walked away without a word, and without a look in the direction of Slim Russell. A darn bad sign!

And now I was in a regular Moon Mullins of a quandary. Should I fire Black Tony, or should I go on the assumption that his last two experiences had cured him of his ugliness? I certainly hoped for the cure, because, in spite of everything, I liked Black Tony, and I actually wanted to see him turn white. So I decided to let things ride for the time.

THEN, five days after that affair in the steel yard, Slim Russell came staggering into the office, just at sun-down, with knife wounds in his left arm, the calf of his right leg, and on the right side of his neck, the identical places in which he had wounded Black Tony. He had been passing one of the tool sheds when suddenly two powerful arms had darted out and pinioned his hands. Then, with slow deliberation, Black Tony had stabbed him. That seemed to bring things to a conclusion, and I decided that we had reached the parting of the ways. The affair happened on Wednesday. I made up my mind that on Saturday both Black Tony and Slim Russell would get their time.

On Thursday night I happened to be passing the bunkhouse, and through an open window I heard Bull Ledburn making book on the feud between Black Tony and Slim. The betting was running even money that Tony would somehow overcome the handicap of pistol range and get Slim. And the general consensus of opinion was that both men would no longer be alive Monday morning.

That settled it. On Saturday evening I'd see that Black Tony went out on a southbound train, if it took the whole camp personnel to do it. And I'd insist that Slim ride north.

And that decision was a right decision.

But on Friday afternoon, when I went to the steel yard, I found the two of them facing each other. Black Tony was carelessly cool and indifferent, but Slim Russell was forcing the going. Tony stood with folded arms and inscrutable face, his glinting eyes half curtained by lowered lids, his head thrown back staring upward at Slim, who stood on the sloping top of a timber, three feet above him. Undoubtedly the meeting had been of Slim's choosing; the positions of the two showed that. And Slim was literally seething with



anger. His face was drawn in a taut mask of fury, and as he talked he ran his tongue out over his thin lips. His left hand moved in short, passionate jerks to

emphasize the things he said, and at each jerk his long fingers quivered as if motivated by an almost irresistible impulse to tear the dark face below him. But his right hand, fingers curved backward, hung close to his side—the position he always assumed when about to pull one of his gun-conjuring tricks. I didn't hesitate, didn't even stop to think, but walked forward and stepped between the two.

"We've had plenty of this stuff," I told them. "And we won't have any more. Slim, you started this—came here to pick a fight, I suppose. Beat it! I'll talk to you later. Tony, my promise to make you pay for any knife work you do on this job still holds good. Don't forget it!"

I HEAVED a sigh of relief when Slim turned and stalked away, and Tony returned to his work. I was satisfied, now, that I could keep them apart until I should spring the surprise news of their discharge. If I could, then all the bunkhouse bets would be off. But I made the mistake of telling a time-keeper of my intention, and

the time-keeper, unfortunately, was one of the bookmakers on the feud. Consequently, my intention enjoyed the same kind of privacy as the interior of a clock in a jeweler's hands. In fact, if things had proceeded on their course, by Saturday morning the only person on the job who would have been surprised would have been myself.

But on Friday night, Old Greg made one of his unannounced landings at the job. And the very first thing he did was to add complications to my Black Tony Mendoza problem.

"Nossir!" He emphatically and immediately vetoed my decision to let Black Tony go. I told him about the presence of Slim Russell, and about the feud between the pair; but he ignored my arguments, and blustered, "That Black Tony guy has been hunting trouble ever since he's been on the job. You told me so yourself. Now it's up to him to take his medicine. I hope he gets what's comin' to him, and gets that ugly spirit of his broken. I know all about Slim Russell. Sent him here. And, Milt, he's bad, bad medicine for birds like that surly Mexican. Watch! You'll see the impudent greaser crawl, yet."

I've often wondered if, somewhere in the vast expanses of infinity, there isn't a Master Joker who occasionally inspires stubborn decisions and allows mortal dabblers in destiny to mess up the plans, just for the fun of seeing things shoot back. However that may be, Old Greg's decision stood, and I, for one, went into Saturday morning with a bad anticipatory taste.

If it hadn't been for the uncertainty of what was to happen, I'd have enjoyed Saturday morning, for we had a nice piece of work on the ways. The center span of the Missouli Bar bridge was a two-hundred-foot concrete and steel arch over the right of way of the Missouli Valley Railroad, and we were building the great timber form for the arch in real "silk-and-purple" style. It being part of the contract

that we should do the job without interrupting schedules of the Missouri Valley's crack mail trains, I had used more than ordinary care in my methods. And those methods would be proven either sound or unsound on Saturday morning. I'd be proud as a peacock, or peeved as a petrel, by noon.

I HAD started construction of the arch forms simultaneously from both anchor piers. Every piece of timber that went into it, every bolt hole, and every joint, had been laid out, bored and cut, at the assembly yard, exactly on the specifications I had laid down. And now, if I had done my job well, when the last two sections were swung into place, one from either arm of the closing arch, the bolt holes of their lap joints would fit exactly—which would give me something to brag about to any man's grandchildren. If that joint didn't fit . . .

Naturally, I expected to be too deeply interested in the work of the morning to spend much time watching Black Tony and Slim. So I made a trip to the bunkhouses before the men turned in on Friday night. I found Slim Russell just finishing the job of oiling and loading his blued pistol. As I sat down on the bunk beside him, he hung the wicked looking thing from a nail that was driven into the wall, and grinned that mirthless, ugly grin of his.

"I ain't gonna start nothin'," he assured me when I spoke to him about his attitude for the next day. "But I got my gun workin' smooth in case I need it. Me'n the greaser both know we're gonna be let out t'morrow, an' it'll be a show-down. Nope! I won't promise nothin'. Like I told y', I won't start nothin', but I won't side-step. I come here t' break that Tony hombre, an' that's what I'll do. If he makes any move t' pull that knife of his'n—an' he will—he gets it."

Not a very satisfactory understanding. But I reached a better one with Black Tony, whom I found sprawled on his

bunk in the Mexicans' quarters, thrumming a guitar and humming a low tune. He laid the instrument aside when I sat down on his bunk.

"How come that Sleem hombre work on thees job?" he countered, when I asked him to maintain the peace next day. "He ees here for shoot me, no? Man Tony no lak' better stay away—any man, every man," with a wide, comprehensive sweep of his arm. "Sleem, he shoot me in leg an' neck an' arm—he get cut in same place. Twice he hav' call' me dirty greaser, an' live. Nex' time—" His hand patted the hilt of his knife.

"All right," I told him. "If Slim starts something, it's up to you. What I want is your word that you won't start any trouble, that you'll wait for him to make the first move."

For a moment Black Tony sat with his eyes closed. Then he turned to me with the closest thing to a friendly smile that I had ever seen on his face.

"*Bueno!*" he agreed. "I geeve my word." He raised his hand to his jaw, and his eyes twinkled. "You good man, all right. Fight weeth fist. You say 'Yes,' you mean yes. You say 'I do', you do. *Bueno*. I do lak' you ask."

Later, when I had time to think of it, the incongruity of asking a man armed with only a knife to wait for a gunman to open the play struck me forcibly. But at the time I was so elated over my success with Black Tony that I overlooked the significance of the agreement he had made. I was satisfied.

SATURDAY morning was one of the kind that make the business man wonder whether to wear galoshes and an umbrella, of golf shoes and a smile. Sort of a tired, dispirited morning, as if the light trickle of rain came from clouds that were just too blame weary to hang onto it. Hard to tell whether it would quit or get worse. But I was far too busy to bother with little things like weather.

Characteristically, Old Greg beat me out on the bridge that morning—he made it a point, always, to do that—and work was beginning to get under way when I arrived. Black Tony was working with a gang of laborers on the west arch arm—the one Old Greg and I were on. Slim Russell was standing well back from the work activities, on the east arm, some hundred feet away, with the open gap between the thrusting ends of the arch intervening. By nine o'clock everything but the last two sections was bolted tight, and on either arm the long boom of an erection crane swung out over the thirty-two-foot gap that still remained. From the load line of each boom hung a fabricated segment of arch. Slowly and carefully the segments were lowered, swung into proper position, and seated in place. And slowly the free ends began to close, like the sections of a double trap dropping downward, or the leaves of a bascule.

And just as the ends were about to meet and lock in place, something went wrong. A yell of pain sounded from the cab of the east arm crane, there was a clattering clash of racing gears, and the hundred-foot boom of the crane crashed down onto the form fabric, bridging the gap between the arch ends, and smashing into a twisted tangle the segments that were just being seated in place.

WHEN the boom fell, Old Greg and I were standing just behind the workmen who were guiding the west arm segment. I saw the thing coming in time to snatch Old Greg out of its way, and as I jerked backward I bumped into Black Tony, who was springing forward. At the same time I noted subconsciously that all the workmen on the east arm were crowding forward to the derrick that had broken.

Now, Old Greg was not the sort of man to run for safety when danger threatens. Jerking impatiently away from my grasp, he jumped after Black Tony, to assist the workmen who were straining on ropes to

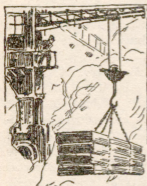
keep the shattered end segments from falling to the railroad tracks that ran beneath the arch, a hundred feet below the level on which we stood. Right now, debris falling to that track would mean a violation of contract, for one of the crack mail trains was almost due. With his usual impetuosity, Old Greg dove into the very heart of the action. After one quick look, to note the firmness of the grip the inner end of the segment had on the existing form, he jumped over the fallen boom and leaned far out over the wrecked fabric, to clear the ropes fouled in the wreckage. In a second, he pulled free one of the hand lines by means of which the workmen had guided the segment to its place. Wrapping the line around his wrists, and taking a firm grip on it with his hands, he braced himself to take the whole load of the apparently quiescent fabric—a not overly onerous task for any man of Old Greg's weight and strength.

"Back! Everybody back and get some ropes to pull in this junk," he called over his shoulder. "Hurry it up! I can hold it easy."

Motivated to intelligent action by his order, the men made a concerted rush back over the main fabric of the form. They had all got clear when there came a rending crash. The apparently uninjured end section of form on which we had all been standing, its joints sprung by the fall of the boom and overstrained by the rush of men across it, let go with a squeal of splintering timber. The wrecked segment, and the entire end section, dropped downward in a spiralling fall, carrying Old Greg with it, caught by the wrists in the looped line he was holding.

AS THE falling fabric swooped downward, with the boss lashed helplessly to its ragged face, no man moved. In that fall death seemed inevitable. Then a shout went up. Instead of crashing to the tracks in a splintered mass, the falling wrecked section came to a sudden jolting

stop, held by the load line of the derrick that had lifted it into place. But the wreckage was not hanging straight downward from the end of the west wing of the arch. One of the fouled ropes that were lashed to it had unaccountably whipped out as it fell and had snagged in the east wing fabric. So now the fallen segment hung away from the end of the west arm at an angle of fifteen degrees, held askew by that taut fouled line. And from the bottom of the twisted segment, his arms stretched above his head by the



loop of line that held his wrists, Old Greg hung, his feet kicking in thin air, six feet above the main line track.

For a second every man on the job breathed in relief. Old Greg's position

was not enviable, but he was at least alive. In a matter of three minutes we would be able to free the snarled cable at the derrick, and either lift him or lower him free. So I had already started for the derrick when my feet stumbled and my blood froze, and I realized that tragedy was still stalking the job.

From up the tracks, beyond the point where they swung in a slight curve, came the snarling blast of a running locomotive, and that blast heralded the approach of the crack train whose schedule we had guaranteed not to interrupt or interfere with. Old Greg, hanging helplessly, was doomed.

If we could only free that snarled line that held the broken segment out over the main track, its release would allow the segment itself and its human freight to swing back toward the west arm, free of the tracks. But twenty-five feet of timber-crowded structure stretched between the crown of the form and the point where

the line was caught—an almost impenetrable maze.

My heart was racing. This was my job. I liked Old Greg. Time! Time! I could feel the vibration in the steel rails that presaged the coming express as its pounding roar filled the cut. And now it swung into sight, with smoke lying straight back from its squat stack, steam jetting from its laboring cylinders, and death riding its iron forehead. If only we could loose the rope that held that fallen segment, and swing the dangling victim clear! Time!

Panic comes of emotion, and though my mind commonly works well enough at the problems of plan and structure, I was *feeling* too much in the present instant to be quite sane. And so I accomplished nothing, but waited helplessly for the inevitable. But there were better men than I on the job—better because cooler; and they acted.

ON THE east arm, Slim Russell darted from the gang of men crowded around the wrecked crane, and sprang to the edge of the forms, directly above the point where the important fouled rope was fast. Unhesitatingly, he swung his body over the side, and began monkeying his way down over the outer face of the false-work toward that rope. Another ten seconds—five—and his quick daring action might have accomplished its intended purpose. But the time was too short. In his desperate race against the hurtling express, Slim's hand fumbled a hold, he slipped, dropped downward, struck on the taut line he had tried to loosen, and caromed, spread-eagled, to the mass of wreckage from which Old Greg dangled. It was a fall of seventy feet, and after one single spasmodic writhe, Slim's body went limp, and—ironically, agonizingly awful to us who watched—his nerveless hands hung down over the wreckage and touched those of Old Greg. And there they both hung—helpless, hopeless—directly in the path of death that was rushing relentlessly toward them.

BUT even before Slim started on his ill-fated attempt at rescue, Black Tony Mendoza had moved to action. Springing out onto the boom tip that reached from the east arm, he stood crouched on the trouble-making timber, his naked knife held by its bone grip at shoulder height, his glittering eyes intent on the figure of Slim Russell. My knees buckled under me . . . Before my eyes flashed a picture of Old Greg and Black Tony facing each other, in anger . . . The death feud between Slim and Black Tony. . . . It looked as though crime were about to be heaped upon disaster. Tony had no love for either of the men in peril. The whole force of my life was centered on the gleaming knife that the Mexican held aloft—the knife that both Old Greg and Slim had defied.

I tried to shout, to call out a protest, an order, but my locked throat refused to respond. Held as in a grip of hypnotism, I saw Slim fall, saw Black Tony's powerful body jerk forward as he cast his knife, heard the shriek of brakes ineffectually applied by the engineer of the express, far below, and the scream of the emergency siren.

Then, under the break that follows a tension too great for human nerves to bear, my whole body turned into quaking jelly. Like a shaft of sparkling sunlight diving into an abyss, Tony's knife shot down. Through a haze of swift terrors I saw all the elements of the moment clearly, as in a crystal, and in the chaos of horror-laden sound I felt the keen blade strike. Dimly I knew that a great shout welled up from the white-faced workmen. The knife had done its work well. The rope that held the helpless bodies of Slim and Old Greg in peril was severed, and in the infinitesimal fraction of time that divides life and death, the battered segment

swooped free, carrying the men clear of the path of the hurtling express—to safety. The train went roaring by, the face of its engineer gleaming palely in the cab.

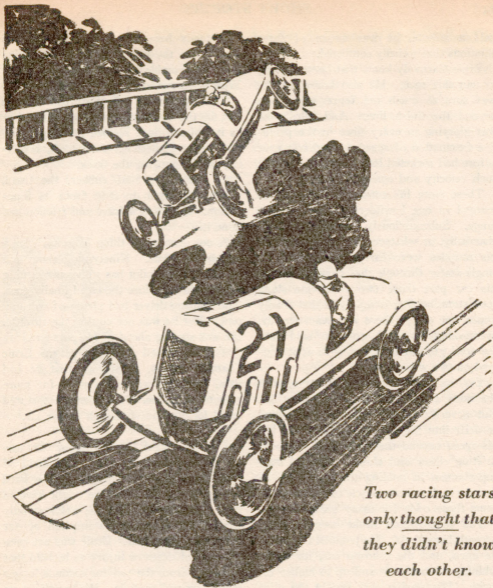
FIFTEEN minutes later, Old Greg rose from the timber on which he had been sitting while I chafed his rope-burned wrists and numbed hands. Stretching out his arm, he took from the open palm of the revived Slim Russell the knife of Black Tony that a workman had just retrieved. Then he turned to face the big Mexican, who stood before him, with arms folded and his face twisted in its usual diabolic grin. Old Greg thrust the knife forward, hilt first.

"Yours," he said simply. "And my thanks to you for using it.

Black Tony's arms unfolded. His right hand reached out. His thumb and forefinger closed on the end of the bone grip. There was a flip, a flash of light. The knife was reversed. Its tip now rested between Black Tony's fingers, its grip was held unwaveringly toward Old Greg. Black Tony bowed with the age-old courtesy of his race.

"Mebby you lak' for keep heem, Señor," he suggested softly. "You ask for heem, one tam'. Eet ees good knife. You get me 'nodder one mebby. An' w'ile I wait on new knife, p'r'aps Señor Sleem weel show me treek for pull an' shoot peestol." His great, dark eyes flicked to Slim, who was grinning his crooked grin.

A feeling of general good will and camaraderie flooded the job site. But I—Well, I had already seen Black Tony win several shooting matches, out behind the Mexicans' quarters, and I wondered what the devil would happen when he found out the secret of Slim's uncanny draw.



*Two racing stars
only thought that
they didn't know
each other.*

A TIGHT TRACK

By CLIFF FARRELL

Author of "Under the Lights," "Calamity Race," etc.

THAT part of the human brain that consciously thinks and knowingly directs muscular activity, becomes an unwieldy, stolid thing when pitted against some of its mechanical creations. At such

a time a man falls back upon instinct.

The racing driver listed on the program merely as "John Smith," and whose real name was Ernest Xavier Carmody, knew such a moment now. Consciously, as he rode into that last curve at a mile and a

half a minute, he was aware of three emotions that weirdly conflicted.

Ernie Carmody knew that he was going to win this race. He also knew that he was sure to crash the fence somewhere beyond the finish line. And thirdly he was glorying in every fiber in the primitive fascination of speed. No driver ever before had rocketed into this tight curve at such velocity and emerged from it.

These were his conscious thoughts, all merged in one bewildering, clashing mélange. Subconsciously, instinctively, mechanically, or whatever one might term it, his muscles were carrying him and his single-seater through that curve, carrying his car past those two other low-slung speedsters, holding it rigidly in that deadly upper lane where there was scant leeway, overcoming its wild urge to skid into the steel guardrail, balancing it as it teetered on two wheels.

Yes, he was mastering the curve, with the odds a hundred to one against him. But nevertheless he knew he was bound to drift into the rail before he could kill his speed beyond the finish line. He was drifting closer and closer. He had been superhuman in holding the car down on that curve, but mere muscle could not overcome those odds for many seconds more.

The homestretch broke away sharply beneath his wheels. He jammed the throttle open, and the crimson car, its motor whining vibrantly, wound up to higher velocity. His staring eyes caught the glint of a checkered flag against the background of indirect arc lights, for this was the Los Angeles speedway where night automobile racing was staged. He knew that the two cars he had passed on the curve were still at his heels, their motors straining to cheat him of victory at this last moment.

His crimson mount had been third as it shot into that curve. It was in first place now as it cannon-balled down upon the finish flag.

But it was staggering—drifting—veering slowly.

And the cause. The crowd on tiptoe in

the stands became aware of a slapping sound, like the vague rattle of a machine gun. A rumble of consternation arose. Women screamed.

The right front wheel of the crimson car, in the brief view the eye had of it as it whizzed past, seemed misshapen and distorted. Something clung to it, revolving madly, gouging the track.

It was a band of rubber, the tread, which had begun to strip from its foundation. Centrifugal force and friction had done it.

A not uncommon thing in motor racing—that was true. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred a pilot has sufficient warning to slow down before the tread finally goes. The crimson driver had plenty of warning now. But he was not cutting the throttle. He was staying ahead of his pursuers.

The checkered flag fell before Ernie Carmody's eyes. He knew that he had won. He had wanted to win—for more reasons than one. And then the tortured tread let go, and shot high in the air.

YOUNG CARMODY knew he was drifting into the rail. The thrill of speed was gone—submerged in the hard reality of the price that he might have to pay. He fought to stay the wreck as only a man can fight who is inspired by far more than mere fear. Ernie was not even thinking of death or injury as he held that car away from the rail for seconds longer than it seemed possible. His temples were bulging, his jaws knotted, his forehead damp from the effort.

He was fighting to escape exposure. The program listed him as merely "John Smith." Nobody—not even his mechanic, who is a driver's closest confidante—knew that in reality he was Ernest Xavier Carmody, young, unmarried and unassuming.

If he were killed, or seriously injured, then the world would know. Not that he cared a particular hoot about it, but there were three persons in the world from whom he wanted his secret withheld. Ernie was youthful, you see, barely past

his majority. He had been driving racing cars only a few months.

He had given his best, but it was not enough. His speed, however, had dropped under a mile a minute before that loggy right front staggered into the rail.

Sparks flew as steel grated on steel. Ernie heard his two late opponents moan safely past. A six by six post caught a hub. The crimson machine twirled sideways and struck the rail a glancing blow, its side caving in like paper. It bounded away into the center of the track and tilted gracefully up on two wheels.

Then it turned turtle. Ernie ducked beneath the cowl as his mount capsized. His safety belt held him in. He was safe! Safe! He did not even feel the numbness in his left arm. He had cut the ignition so there was no danger of fire unless the tank burst and spilled over the hot exhaust pipe. He felt the car settle to a stop over him. Dust almost suffocated him.

YOU'RE all right, Smith." It was a smiling surgeon talking. "That arm will be in shape in two weeks. Pretty lucky."

Ernie stared ruefully at a tightly bandaged upper arm. A torn muscle, a sprained ligament. That was all. Well, it could have been worse. The tank had not burst. No other speeding car had crashed into the wreck. He was alive and fairly fit as he sat in the field hospital under the grandstand, listening to the rumbling feet of the homeward bound crowd.

He flexed an arm. He could still bend his elbow. Well, he would wear a coat and they wouldn't know it—if he was careful.

"Thanks," he told the surgeon.

Two young men with lean jaws and frank, straight eyes, their faces bearing the white circles where their goggles had protected them, came in and clapped him on the shoulder.

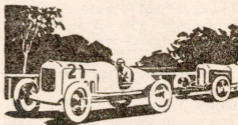
"Great driving," one said. "You beat us on that curve—plenty."

Ernie grinned in embarrassment. "I'm

glad I didn't trap you fellows when I broke up," he said.

They waited, but Ernie added nothing more. There always had been a barrier, an air of reticence about this "John Smith" as they knew him, and nobody ever had broken through it.

A cameraman sidled in and looked pleadingly at Ernie but the bandaged



driver shook his head. "No pictures," he ruled.

"Gawsh, Smith," the photographer objected. "You've never——"

"Sorry," Ernie said with finality, and the other fled.

"See you again, fellows," Ernie remarked casually, heading for the door. "They tell me I can race again in two weeks."

"Queer duck," one remarked after he had gone. "Nobody ever gets under his shell. John Smith. He *must* be a ringer."

"He's a puzzle all right," his companion agreed. "I was pumping Jess Barnes, his mechanic, the other day. Jess doesn't even know where Smith lives. Smith does a Houdini between races."

"And the way he drives——" the first driver raised supplicating eyes. "Acts like every jeloipie race means a million to him."

ERNIE arrived home after midnight. He wheeled his little stock roadster into the garage at the rear of the modest California bungalow around which the roses grew head high, slid the door, and strolled to the front, surveying with pride the lawn that he had planted and nurtured to graceful beauty. A light burned in the living room and he knew that his

dad, and probably Louise, his oldest sister, who was two years younger than himself, were up, waiting for him.

He glanced down critically at his left arm. His coat would effectively conceal everything, even from Louise.

There was a full moon, and he paused, staring westward. A mile away red lights rode on the crown blocks of a sprawling forest of oil derricks. The distant hiss of steam and thud of machinery affronted the calm night. That was the Hawthorne oil field over there—now two years old, but still flush.

Then he glanced at the gilt-lettered sign, mounted on standards on the lawn. "Charles A. Carmody, Realtor," it said. There were ten thousand such signs in and around Los Angeles.

That sign and those vacant acres stretching away westward from the Carmody driveway, were the joint reasons why Ernie was a racing driver. He fingered the check in his pocket. It wasn't much. That had been only a forty-lap race—twenty-five miles on that small track—that he had won tonight. It had been a sprint program. The public liked the sprints. There was more danger.

Yes, the check was meager. After he had paid off Jess Barnes and his pit crew, donated to disabled drivers, met the machine shop bill for those new camshafts, squared the garage for towage and rental, paid his entrance fee for another race, as well as putting out for new tires, he would have only a hundred or two left.

Well, that added to what he already had saved would put his balance in the bank more than halfway toward the goal he had set.

As for repairing the car? That would take a thousand at least—perhaps fifteen hundred. He would slap a plaster on it. It was a fast job. He had built it himself and any of the machine shops would be glad to get a financial toehold on it, for it was the fastest collection of iron competing in the weekly events.

ERNIE'S key admitted him to the house. "Howdy, Dad," he greeted the angular man with the keen eyes and lined face, who sat under the reading lamp. Louise was not present, and Ernie felt relief, because he was conscious of his arm.

"Lo, son," the father smiled from his newspaper. "Worked late again, I see. You usually do on Wednesday night."

Ernie had told them that he was a chauffeur—which was true in a sense. Before that he had been a garage mechanic—and before that a high school student.

As for auto racing—that was a subject never mentioned in the Carmody household. Ernie never had brought it up. He had gone into the sport as a boyish adventure. Now he was a slave to it—held both by the obligation he had assumed and by the growing fever of speed. He loved the sport. It was life and meat to him. Speed! Why, even the gods must envy him and his fellows of the unbridled steel steeds. True, these same gods sometimes took grim tribute. But even so a man lived life at the full while he lived.

"Had an offer for an acre today," the father said enthusiastically. "Only twelve hundred—but these are hard times you know."

"Don't take it," Ernie said sharply. "It's worth five thousand. And you still have three months before—"

"What do you know about—?" Charlie Carmody exclaimed, fixing accusing blue eyes on his lanky son.

"I knew you—you were in the red," Ernie hurriedly confessed. "I looked up your eighty at the collector's office some time ago."

"I suppose you've been worrying about it," his father said gloomily. "Don't tell the girls. They think we're comfortably fixed. But that twelve hundred might stave off the sheriff. I owe four thousand in tax liens. Five years overdue."

"Hold your eighty intact," Ernie urged in a burst of confidence. "It's worth a fortune. Just because the Hawthorne field pinched out on the east end doesn't mean

that there isn't oil under the Carmody land. You know, they say this is a broken formation, with the pools scattered."

"And how about that tax lien?" the father asked caustically.

"I've got a deal on that may bring in some money," Ernie admitted.

"It must be quite a deal for a chauffeur, to produce four thousand dollars," the father smiled. "All right, son."

AS ERNIE retired he was wondering. His dad had given in too easily. The elder Carmody was not in the habit of leaning on will-o'-the-wisps. He was hard-headed, keen-minded and intensely practical. In fact, come to think of it, Charles A. Carmody, realtor, was rather marvelous both as a man and a father.

"What sort of a crab would I have been?" Ernie wondered as he lay sleepless, his arm throbbing. "Three years in a cast with a broken back, another three in a wheel-chair—and then two more on crutches. Dad did it, and now he's back on his feet and growing younger every day."

Ernie could vaguely recall the day when someone had brought a message that had caused his mother to fall as though dead. Ernie had been only twelve then. An automobile accident it was, so they had told him later. Charlie Carmody had lived, but the frail mother, young and worn by some gnawing fear, had never recovered from the shock. She faded and died before the first year of it rounded out.

Ernie remembered when they had brought his dad home in an ambulance—a hopeless cripple, they hinted. And now that he was older Ernie could realize the fight the big man with the keen eyes had put up. Years of it. Years in plaster-casts, invalid chairs and on crutches. Years when the small fortune he had accumulated had dwindled until now those eighty acres, and this little bungalow were all that remained.

The crutches had disappeared six months ago, and Ernie realized now that

his dad was resuming his old vigor again, with only a slight limp, with bitter lines about his mouth, and with the slow fires of regret in his eyes, to tell the story.

Ernie had never learned the details of the accident. The elder Carmody was silent on that subject.

BUT Ernie learned the truth within a week. On the pretense that he was taking a short vacation from his work, he moped about the house in the day-time while his arm healed. He was safe, for Louise was employed in a downtown office, while Betty Marie, the younger sister, was attending high school. His dad was busy—walking, walking, walking in the outdoors as though surfing himself on the action that had been denied him during those long years.

One afternoon, a week after his smash-up, Ernie was prying through the store-room over the garage in search of forgotten relics. He opened a dusty camel-back trunk that he never had investigated before.

And there he learned who "Charles J. Carmody, Realtor" had been in the days before that "automobile accident."

Yellowed newspaper clippings, mildewed programs containing names that took Ernie's breath, faded photographs that enthralled him—they bit by bit told the story.

It had been an auto accident right enough—a smashup at two miles a minute. Ernie, his hands shaking, read and re-read the clipping that told it. There were pictures, too. A smashed car lying outside the curve of a big saucer track. Why, to be sure, that was the inaugural race on the old Kansas City bowl. Those were the days when they made real speed. Too bad the saucers had gone the way of—

"Comet Carmody!" Ernie shouted the name as it leaped up at him from a clipping.

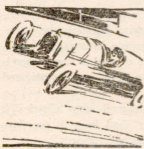
Why—why—it was incredible. But yes! There was a photo—a portrait of "Comet" Carmody, the famous speed king of an-

other decade. And it was his father, the sedate real estate dealer.

Ernie delved on in a frenzy through the clippings. Great names, the stories of mighty deeds, of road races, track races and bowl classics flickered from the scraps as he turned them.

DePalma, Oldfield, Wilcox, Tetzlaff, Resta, Cooper, Bruce-Brown, Burman, Murphy, Milton, Chevrolet. Those were names to conjure with. Giants—that's what they had been. And linked with them, striding shoulder to shoulder with them through those homeric days was the name of Comet Carmody, one of the greatest of them all.

Indianapolis, the road course at Santa Monica, the Vanderbilt Cup event, airplane hill at Elgin, the old saucer at Cincinnati,



the forgotten circular board track at Playa Del Rey, the three-hundred-mile grind on the dirt at Sioux City, the dusty highway at Corona, the old

Phoenix desert run. Yes, and here was the Brighton twenty-four hour event, too. Comet Carmody had been nothing but a stripling daredevil at Brighton.

Ernie read on and on in sheer ecstasy. Finally he laid the clippings aside. His first impulse was to go to his dad and tell him that he knew. But finally he returned the relics to the trunk and closed it.

"I couldn't tell him that racing isn't dangerous," Ernie muttered. "He knows—he knows—too well."

ERNIE stood with a group of men in the machine room of a Los Angeles racing engineering plant. They were looking at a trim, squatty car, as stream-lined as a bullet—and as compact. The car was new—its aluminum body not even

painted. It reposed there like a great, unpolished jewel waiting the touch of a master hand to give it lustrous life—fiery, powerful life.

"Yeah," its designer, a paunchy, middle-aged man, who was a genius in his line, was saying. "There's the job that has better than an even chance of winning the big race. She's built for it. Four hundred laps on that tight track is a long way, but she'll do the distance, and will be firing every barrel all the way. And she's for sale."

Nobody spoke. Ernie shifted his feet uneasily. The car intoxicated him. It had the allure a trim yacht holds for a sailor or the clean lines of a thoroughbred for a horseman. Ernie knew the car's history. It had been built for Al Sharp, a crack pilot, but Sharp would never drive it or any other car again. He had washed out at Oakland only a week previous—another tribute to the grim gods of velocity.

"I'll let it go cheap—bedrock cost, because they want to close out Al's estate," the engineer said casually. "Five thousand will take it out of the shop. It's either a complete sale or nothing."

ERNIE licked dry lips. It was a devilish temptation. He had the five thousand in the bank. Three months had whirled by since that night when he had drifted into the fence beyond the finish line. That mishap was already nearly forgotten. Ernie had missed death by fractions a score of times since then. He had won races—lost them—failed to finish—had known terrible moments when his car had spun dizzily end for end. He had driven by wrecked cars, burning cars, disabled cars, limping cars. He had seen ambulances tearing along the apron as he whizzed by. He had known the bitterness of empty victory, the full joy of hard-won, smartly driven races, and the dismay of last-minute defeat.

He was older in appearance. His eyes had narrowed. His cheeks were pinched in, and around his mouth were fine lines.

His palms were calloused, and his wrists were steel and wire. He was the champion at the Los Angeles speedway now, for he had won more frequently than he had lost.

"I'll stick with my old iron," he forced himself to smile.

"You're foolish, Smith," the paunchy engineer argued. "That crimson job of yours is through. It was fast in its day, but it's only a jelo pie now in a race against these new models. If you start in the crimson car you'll be in the pits before you roll half the distance, or you'll be hanging on the fence on one of those curves."

"I'll take a chance," Ernie declared with an effort.

THAT evening Ernie gave his father a check for four thousand.

"I earned it honestly," he remarked. "Don't ask me where."

Comet Carmody's hands shook as he stared at the check. In his pocket was another draft for twelve hundred dollars, for only that day he had closed the sale of one of his acres.

"You still have three weeks to meet that lien," his son said. "Then your eighty will be safe for another year. They're punching a new test on the east limits of the Hawthorne field. If they bring oil, you can lease your land for a fortune."

"Thanks, son," was all the elder Carmody could say. They were not an emotional family—these Carmodys.

Later that evening Comet Carmody sat alone beneath his reading lamp. The light caught the glint of silver in his hair. But his lined features were bronzed now—and rugged. A newspaper, opened to the pink section, lay at his feet. Pictures and a story on the page told the details of the two-hundred-and-fifty-mile championship race, which was only ten days away.

Comet Carmody lifted two big, capable hands, hardened by daily workouts with pick and hoe in his garden. He flexed his fingers and tested his wrists.

"Forty-two isn't so old," he muttered. "DePalma was riding the boards with the best of 'em when he was past forty-two. I can do it. Ten thousand for first money. That will repay Ernie."

He stared down at the newspaper with frightened eyes, and shook his head. But the urge remained. The speed fever was in his blood. It would never leave him. He still was Comet Carmody, the daredevil. He was still a slave to the stern gods.

"The boy gave it to me to pay that lien," he accused himself weakly. "But—but— Eight years—no, nine, out of the game—most of it an invalid. They never come back. Still—? Where could I get a good car? Four hundred laps on a tight track—under the lights, riding against youngsters.

He produced two checks from his pocket and stared at them.

AT THREE in the afternoon, the qualifying trials began. The race was scheduled to start at eight that evening. Picnic parties dotted the infield, and the stands were sparsely peppered with early enthusiasts.

Twenty-four cars, the fastest in the nation, and piloted by the pick of the world's driving talent, had been entered for the race. Only the fastest sixteen would start.

The crimson car, whose number was Six, and whose driver was on the entry blank as "John Smith," rolled out of the pits as the first to attempt the one-lap trial against time.

Ernie Carmody was pale. He faced competition of terrific caliber. Big league pilots from the East from the South, even from Europe, had gathered for this championship race.

Beautiful cars, sleek cars, graceful cars were what they had. Ernie's crimson mount, with its blunt tail, stubby hood and high cockpit, was in truth merely a "jelo pie" among these thoroughbreds of the motor world.

Ernie wound up slowly. The familiar curves began rising more boisterously to toss him about. The voice of the exhaust lifted in challenge to its old enemy—time and distance—as the crimson car swept around its third and final preliminary lap.

Ernie came down the stretch, the car swaying, its motor howling a triumphant chant of speed, the throttle to the floor. He flitted a brief arm to the timers, and was over the line like the wind.

"That jeloie is rolling," someone yelled in the pits.

THE crimson car *was* rolling. The track had been worked to perfect condition for the big race, and Ernie knew as he cut the breeze through the first curve that he was moving faster than he ever had moved before on four wheels.

The backstretch was a mere gulp at full throttle. The final curve was a dizzy blur, with centrifugal force pinning him down. The rush to the line was a mere flash.

As Ernie lifted his foot and drifted, he knew that he had broken the track record. But his elation died instantly. A jangle came from under the hood, and Ernie immediately cut the ignition. He rolled into the pit with a glum face.

"Twenty-five seconds flat," Jess Barnes was yelling at him in delight. "You clipped nearly a second off the record. You'll have the pole as sure as——"

"Pack the tools, Jess," Ernie said disgustedly. "Something went haywire. I'm hoping it was only a dropped valve. If it was a conrod we're washed up. We'll rush the car to the machine shop in town and tear her down."

Within five minutes they left the track, the crimson car squatting in the bed of a truck. They passed a racing outfit just

entering the speedway grounds as they roared along.

"Did you pipe that outfit?" Jess Barnes cried. "That was the car built up for poor Al Sharp. A guy entered as Dan Jones is driving it tonight—and he's just showing up to qualify. I heard rumors that this Jones was an old guy, who had been doing plenty of secret practicing in the daytime. They say he is an Easterner, but none of the boys from the West ever heard of him."

Ernie was not interested. He looked at his watch moodily. Less than four hours before starting time. If it was a conrod——? But luck was with him. The trouble was minor, though it required three hours of labor before they were speeding back to the track.

THE lights were on and traffic repelled them for agonizing minutes before they reached the pit gate and rolled onto the track.

The field was lined up. Officials buzzed about as they identified the arrival. A disappointed driver whose car sat in the last row in the line-up, gave a gesture of despair, and his crew rolled his machine off the course.

"You're on the pole in the third row, Smith," an official shouted. "Hustle. We start rolling in three minutes."

"The *third* row!" Jess Barnes howled in disbelief.

The cars were to line up in accordance with their qualifying speed. Ernie, too, was dazed. He had thought his time trial was unbeatable. But four machines had bettered his new record. He stared at them in wonder. Then his eyes widened. On the pole in the first row squatted a white car. Its number was 101—a number such as is given to men who have not completed in recent racing events. Its driver was named on the scoreboard as "Dan Jones."

"Jones? What was his—his time?" he asked Shorty Williams, who was his starting mate in the third row.



"Only twenty-three an' four-fifths," Shorty said grimly. "Freddy DeLong did it in twenty-four flat, and them other two jockeys in the second row, Al London an' Tommy Mandot, managed to get around in under twenty-five seconds."

Ernie stared at the figure sitting quietly in the cockpit of the pole car. Goggles already masked his eyes, but there was something vaguely familiar about him. Ernie had no time to investigate now. Jess Barnes was sloshing gas and oil into the tanks of his car, motors were beginning to crackle into life up and down the double file, and the starter was fluttering about.

Soon they were all rolling slowly in the wake of the leading cars, with Jones, the mysterious, pacing the field. It was to be the usual flying start on the second swing around, provided all were in position.

THE four cars ahead fascinated Ernie. This was the big league of speed that he rode with tonight. London, Mandot, DeLong. They were ranking stars. London had won the Indianapolis only a few seasons past. Mandot had been national champion twice. DeLong was younger, but more spectacular. They said he bore a charmed life. And Dan Jones, the puzzle. He must be a marvel.

As for their cars. Ernie felt a pang as he compared them to his battle-scarred crimson job.

"Beauty won't win a race," he muttered.

They were humming out of the north curve, with the starting line gleaming under the arcs ahead. Ernie felt the blast of heat from the four exhausts as their pilots leaned on the throttles, and he opened up, too. Behind him ten more cars soared up toward peak speed.

The starter leaped back, the green flag snapping down, as the multi-colored bullets came darting down upon him.

The race was on! The roar of motors rose in one wild bellow to a deafening thunder-clap.

Those opening laps were forever but

a hazy memory to Ernie. He had a vague recollection of jamming his way dizzily up among those four graceful cars on the initial curve. Hub to hub they had skidded around that turn, their motors still winding up.

He remembered that he had fallen a dozen feet behind in the backstretch. They had the edge on his race-weary crimson power plant in acceleration. Ernie held his foot down on the north turn. He mistily knew that he had snaked by three of them somehow, and that he had careened into the homestretch at the heels of the white car in which crouched the hawk-like figure of Dan Jones.

HE CAUGHT a brief, shocking glimpse of Freddy DeLong's car bursting through the steel guardrail on the first curve in the second lap. DeLong had tried to pass him, and had made some slight driving error. Ernie glanced back and saw Mandot and London skid past the wreckage.

Another wild lap or two, with that white streak staying stubbornly a yard ahead of him, and with the hot exhausts of Mandot's and London's cars baying at his heels, and the race began to clarify—to settle down to a bitter grind, a strength-sapping, agonizing test where only the curves counted, for Ernie could offset his opponent's greater acceleration on the stretches, only by relentless driving on the turns.

The crimson car never had undergone such a strain, even when all its parts were new. Ernie could sense that it was groaning and creaking now as the banked curves pressed against its tires with fearful weight. But Ernie did not ease off. On the twentieth lap he squeezed up on even terms with Jones who was sweeping around the bowl in an even course that was mechanical and resistless.

Jones shook him off then, but thirty laps later Ernie came bulleting into the south turn, found a new rut that a skidding car had cut in the track, hooked his tires

firmly in it, and steamed past the white car.

He held the lead for twenty searing circuits. Then Jones, who seemed possessed of a devil's skill, came floating up inch by inch until they were hub to hub and careening into the north turn. Ernie's car began to drift up the track, forcing the white machine closer and closer to the guardrail. Ernie held his foot down. He expected the white car to give away. But it boomed along grimly. With their hubs only inches apart, Ernie, with a bitter cry, lifted his foot and dropped into second place.

"He'd take the fence rather than slow down," Ernie gritted.

ERNIE chased the flying white car around and around the oval, dizzily and endlessly. They were like squirrels in a cage.

They lapped and re-lapped slower competitors. London went out with motor trouble, but Mandot's car still screamed along only a few lengths behind Ernie. A Mercury Special, driven by Percy Ellis, a famous driver, was coming up, too.

Eventually a slick of oil seeping down the banked track from the crushed motor of a green car that had folded up against the guardrail on a curve, caught Ernie's wheels out of line, and his car went sailing crazily up the track toward the fence. He mastered it before he crashed, and brought it under control in the stretch, but his loss of momentum had let Mandot slide past.

A tire sent Ernie to the pits before the race was half over. He glanced at the scoreboard and then ordered his crew to change rubber all around, as well as to refuel. They did so in slightly more than two minutes. Then he was rolling again.

The stop put him far back in the field, but eventually, as the two-hundred-lap point flashed by, all others began stopping, too, for fresh rubber and fuel. At three hundred laps the scoreboard had settled

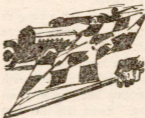
down again and Ernie was back in third place.

The sprint for the finish was on. Number Three—Tommy Mandot—now led the race. The white car—101, bearing the mysterious Jones—rode a close second. Ernie was one hundred yards behind them, with the oncoming Ellis an equal distance to his rear.

A blackboard flash from his pit apprised Ernie that a new challenger was coming up—Harry Jackson, a veteran of the racing wars, was making his bid. And it was a real bid, too, for Jackson soon side-slipped past Ellis and began bearing down on Ernie.

Ernie hunched over the wheel, his eyes heavy, his face numb from wind pressure. Half the length of the stretches ahead were Mandot and Jones. They were cutting through the rutted turns at vicious speed, their hot tires eating up the stretches at a pace that was disheartening to the young driver in the weary crimson car. Ernie was forced to ride with his foot down all the way around each lap. He was nearly broadsiding on every turn, but correcting his skids with mechanical, instinctive precision.

When they were fifty laps from the finish he saw Mandot oversteer on the



north turn. Jones' relentless pursuit had panicked him. Mandot's machine seemed to reel sideways slowly. It cut fur-

rows from the surface for fifty yards. Then its wheels caught. It bounded into the air, turning over—slowly, terribly. It landed upside down, gave another bound, and disappeared into the darkness beyond the top of the upper rail.

As Ernie whizzed down the stretch on his next lap he could hear the faint scream of an ambulance siren above the din of the race.

Jones, in the white car, was in the lead again, with only some twenty minutes of driving ahead.

"I'll get him," Ernie breathed. The crimson jeloie was still holding together.

THE man listed on the program as Dan Jones, was mumbling unintelligibly as he braced himself for those fiendish curves that hurled themselves at him in endless succession.

"Too old—too old," he was repeating. Before him was the vision of Mandot's red car hurdling the fence, its pilot pinned in the seat. He was seeing Freddy De-Long's wreck earlier in the race, too. And then there was that smashed green car whose body had been pulled over the rail off the course on the north turn. The ambulances had been busy tonight.

The piercing blue eyes behind the dust-shrouded goggles were Comet Carmody's eyes. They were red-rimmed with strain now. His wrists were lifeless, his shoulders numbed, his back and hands blistered, his legs scorched by the heat of the motor.

Now and then he shot a brief glance over his shoulder. A grim, crimson phantom was flitting along like a ghost, drawing nearer and nearer as each blistering lap whizzed by.

"Smith!" Carmody muttered. "The jeloie. He's coming up—trying to beat me—me, Comet Carmody!"

By sheer will power he forced new strength into his weary frame. He was Comet Carmody, the hero of a hundred big races. Who was this John Smith? A novice—a monkey track driver—an up-start.

"I'll show him what real speed is," Comet Carmody breathed.

Stubbornness — conceit — pride — and fighting spirit.

The Comet forced a painful foot farther down. He could feel the hot throttle even through his shoe and woollen sock. The curves clawed at him with greater ferocity,

endeavoring fiendishly to twirl his white mount into the rail.

Twenty laps to go now. Unreasoning anger swept him as he glanced back again. The crimson car was riding within thirty feet of him. It was gaining, despite his increased velocity.

"He's not human," the Comet groaned. He could do no more. His car was sliding badly on the turns, the ruts shaking him cruelly in his bucket seat. He could hear the scream of tortured rubber and knew that his tires were perilously thin.

The crimson jeloie edged up to within a length of him—gaining a yard now—losing a foot—gaining another inch—but always coming up.

FIVE laps to go. The Crimson car was upon him, its blunt nose creeping up to his elbow on the curves, and falling stubbornly back in the stretches. They were reeling around the oval insanely. They were out to win—this John Smith and Dan Jones who never had met face to face at the track. They were racing for victory alone now. Money had been forgotten. It was the thrill of the thing—daring death, inviting it. Pride, fighting blood, sheer dare-deviltry. Carmody blood. It flowed in the veins of both.

Three laps. They were side by side, elbow to elbow, hub to hub. The challenge made earlier by Harry Jackson and Percy Ellis had been shattered. They were half a lap behind now.

Two laps. The leaders were still side by side, their eyes glued to the spinning, weaving surface, their bodies taut.

A slower car appeared ahead. They were lapping it. Its wheels gunned back loose grit into their faces. A splatter of oil smeared Comet Carmody's goggles on a curve, and his car swayed sickeningly at one hundred miles an hour toward the crimson machine.

Ernie gave way until his hubs were grazing the rail, but he held his foot grimly down. The Comet, with a frantic

sweep of an arm tore his goggles from his eyes, corrected his skid, and drove on, his eyes slitted down to repel the wind pressure.

Around into the stretch they roared again. The blue flag was snapping before them as they flashed over the white line.

Last lap! They were still elbow to elbow.

Ernie shot one brief glance at the lean figure aboard the hurtling car just five feet from him, as he braced for the south turn.

Then the crimson car seemed to falter momentarily. But it recovered instantly, and held its place alongside its opponent.

Ernie drove the fleeting backstretch in a daze, his muscles instinctively taking over the task of steering.

"Dad!" he was telling himself over and over again as that last curve lifted to embrace them.

He had recognized his opponent now that the goggles were gone.

Driving mechanically, he eased his crimson car a yard into the lead on that last curve. He did not even know that his machine was swerving, swaying and nearly broadsiding, so great was his speed.

But as they reeled out of the turn, he did know that that mere yard was enough. He could hold it down the stretch to the finish line. He was a sure winner if he held his foot down.

He glanced from the corner of an eye at the lean Comet. The tall figure was drooping. There was sudden, tragic disappointment and the bitterness of defeat in those bowed shoulders, for Comet Carmody knew that he was beaten, too.

The Comet had driven out his very heart—and it had not been enough against this jelojie. The greatest race of a great career, and the Comet was being defeated.

One hundred yards from the line the two cars still swayed wildly, from the effects of their erratic course on the curve.

Ernie with a cry that nobody could hear

above the boom of the two motors, suddenly lifted his foot from the throttle. The crimson mount seemed to halt and waver. The white car leaped past and into the lead.

Ernie was smiling. He had deliberately tossed victory away.

Then the crowd came to its toes, a gasp of sheer horror rolling from ten thousand throats. The crimson car had staggered fearfully. It was breaking up there on the homestretch, within the shadow of the finish line. The front wheels were sagging out. The axle had snapped. The sudden deceleration had been too much for the jelojie.

The white car crossed the line a length to the good, in one brief flash. The crimson car swerved farther, its pilot battling grimly with the useless steering rim—but he was still smiling. Then it darted headlong into the railing. Such was its speed that it was over in a twinkling—an appalling second. The crimson jelojie seemed to fold up as it met the heavy barrier. Its body shot into the air, tires flying from it, axles dangling out grotesquely as they were ripped from the frame. Then, turning over in midair, it plunged into the well between the grandstand and the track—and was lost to view of the frozen spectators.

THE white car, its pilot looking back with a face ashen, beneath the grime, drifted on down the stretch, losing momentum as the hot throttle was lifted.

A fearful revulsion overcame Comet Carmody, as he numbly steered his drifting car toward the pits. That driver—that jelojie—that John Smith—was a great pilot—a marvel. He was no jelojie. Why, he was a greater driver than Comet Carmody. But now he probably had paid the price, merely because a stubborn veteran who had earned more than his share of this doubtful glory long ago, had listened to the siren voice of speed.

The Comet braked his car into the pits, leaped out, and brushed aside the men who

ran to congratulate him. He raced between speeding cars across the track, blind to them.

Men were pulling a limp figure from the wreckage of the crimson car in the gloom beyond the track. Comet Carmody strode moodily alongside the stretcher as it was carried to the field hospital under the grandstand.

And there, when the goggles were removed from the head of the young man listed on the program as John Smith, Comet Carmody grew weak and dropped down to his knees—a sobbing prayer on his lips.

"He'll come around any minute now," a surgeon said after what seemed years. "Broken leg, slight concussion, a flock of bruises, a few scorched spots. That's all. He's lucky."

"Lucky?" Comet Carmody exploded, his eyes streaming. "I'm the one who is lucky."

But as he watched his boy stir, open his eyes and smile up at him, there was an ache in Comet Carmody's heart. The Comet knew that there was room for only one Carmody in this mad sport where, after all, death is the real opponent.

The name of Carmody would go on. But it would not be Comet Carmody who was carrying it. The speed fever was in his son's veins, and Comet Carmody knew how resistless that fever was. He, the father, would sit at home, waiting and worrying and gnawing out his heart now—just as had that frail woman who had waited and suffered in silence in the days when Comet Carmody was dueling with the invisible opponent.



*All the crooks of the
diamond fields have
to get up pretty early
to get ahead of the
"Major"*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

BITERS BITTEN

A novelette, by

L. Patrick Greene

SUPER SALESMEN OF THE JUNGLE

By CARL N. TAYLOR



THE activities of clever native chiefs who have adopted high pressure salesmanship as a means of acquiring prestige provide almost continuous work for the Philippine constabulary in the jungles of Mindanao.

Two notable super-salesmen have been run down and killed within the last five years and their followers disbanded. In each case the trouble resulted from the sale of "blessed weapons" on such a large scale that the purchasers got out of hand and brought about the downfall of their leaders.

Old Dato Gono was a shrewd headman of the Bogobo tribe, which inhabits the mountain fastnesses of central Mindanao. Knowing the credulity of his people, he began carving small model bolos from wood and offering them for sale with various powerful charms which only he knew how to make. He guaranteed his product and told his prospective customers that the bullets of the soldiers would turn to water when fired at the owner of one of his wooden swords.

The warriors flocked in to buy the blessed weapons, and Dato Gono rapidly grew rich. Then the inevitable happened; the mengrew unruly and arrogant. Dato Gono could no longer control them. Finally, a group of his warriors descended upon the coast villages and killed eight Christians.

The constabulary were ordered into the field. Coming upon the outlaws on a mountain trail, the soldiers were met by a rush of men armed with wooden swords. At the first volley, fired at ten yards, a number of the fanatics were killed and many more injured. The rest ran away. After the encounter, one hundred and ninety wooden bolos were picked up on the field, and Dato Gono was never heard of again.

Mampurratt, a chief of the Manobas, a swamp tribe, was the greatest of the dealers in blessed weapons. He headed the Alankat uprising of 1927, and at the height of his power had eight thousand followers, all mad with fanatic zeal.

Instead of selling wooden swords, he carved a huge wooden crocodile from a

mahogany log, calling it Alankat—wise god. His followers were required to pay a fee for the privilege of touching their bolos and spears against the image, after which they were to be invulnerable.

ENTIRE villages joined the Alankat movement, and even today travelers in the Mindanao jungles sometimes come upon the pitiful remnants of these decaying towns, now almost hidden by the encroaching jungle growth; for the people never returned. Many were killed in encounters with the troops, and the others regarded their former homes as places accursed by evil spirits.

When Mampurratt realized that he was about to lose control over his "army," he led his followers into the mountains and built an almost impregnable stronghold.

There he tried, with no success, to stop the movement which he had fathered, before it should overwhelm him. But the mischief had been done; the soldiers were already marching against him.

When spies finally located his fort and the attack began, the old man came out to face the soldiers. Defying a withering

fire, he stood in the gateway, beating upon his wooden crocodile with the flat of his great two-handed *kampilan* and imploring it to render the soldiers harmless.

Meantime, his followers were being slaughtered as they sought to enter a large house within the barricade, where their charmed weapons were stored. Struck by a dozen bullets, Mampurratt fell mortally wounded and dragged himself into the bushes to die.

Panic followed. Fighting among themselves, the people struggled to cross a flimsy bamboo bridge leading across a deep chasm in the rear of the encampment. The bridge broke, and the warriors dropped down upon the rocks below. More than five hundred weapons were picked up and burned at the scene of the battle.

Mampurratt's huge sword, together with a number of Dato Gono's wooden bolos, are on display in the constabulary headquarters at Zamboanga. Mampurratt and Dato Gono are dead, but the constabulary officers say that the jungle is full of lesser salesmen who are growing prosperous from the dangerous traffic in charms which may turn against them and destroy them.

No Super Salesmen needed in the Jungle or on
the news-stands to sell SHORT STORIES—



In the next issue

A secret of the Orinoco jungles

HEADLESS MEN

by Arthur O. Friel

Army routine is a great thing

TIN HORN KILLER

by L. Clifford



BIG-SHOT SHOES

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

Author of "The Money Croppers," "The Sin Company," etc.

CHAPTER I

DANGER!

ANIP in the air had made the observation platform unpopular since sunset, and that exactly suited Battram—the outdoor freshness and the isolation, both. Topcoat collar and feet up, hat-brim and chin down, he was dreaming out new and Napoleonic mass plays for next fall's squad when the door of the club car opened beside him to emit a lash of Havana-scented back draft and somebody in a woolly polo coat and a jaunty scarlet beret.

Automatically his trim tan oxfords descended from railing to platform as the intrusive fluff settled into the chair farthest removed from his. Considerate of her, he thought; and then a side glance between lowered brim and raised collar revealed that his neighbor was young and pretty as well.

Battram didn't let the glance prolong itself into a stare. He was absorbed in a career in which femininity had absolutely no place, except as it dressed up a stand when linesmen were running and whistlings shrilling on keen autumn air. This girl was just another stand-dresser, to be

observed and classified and forgotten.

Looking straight back into dusty darkness, he found it necessary after a moment to remind himself of that. The clicking rails had stopped singing signals to him; now they were saying over and over, "This is somebody you ought to know!"

The new song of the wheels bothered Battram. Disgusted with himself when he tried to close his ears to it, and could not, he fished out a cigarette. The first match was a dud; the second flared high, and before he tossed it away a gasp had come from the girl in the scarlet beret. She was looking at him wide-eyed, lips parted in half-incredulous amazement.

"Why—Dude!" she faltered. "How perfectly weird! Where did you get on?"

BATTRAM'S head had come out of the turned collar as he swung to face her, flabbergasted. He found that his tongue, nimble as the next at skull-practice, nimbler than most between halves in the dressing-room when a team needed starching up, had suddenly gone lame on him.

"I—ah—pardon me?" was the best it would do.

Enough, though. Light through the door lay full on him. The girl, still staring, evidently no less astonished, had begun an

apology. Battram liked the humorous slant she gave it; admired her cool and efficient meeting of a situation that would have rendered him abject, he was certain, if the error had been his.

"Please believe me," she said, "it's *not* the beginning of a confidence game. You really do look so much like a friend of mine that I'd have gone chasing after you if I'd sighted you in a street. I've never seen such a resemblance. Wouldn't have believed it possible."

"A good friend, then," Battram hazarded.

She frowned a little; but only, he was relieved to discover, because she seemed to see something in that requiring thought.

"A better friend," she said seriously, "than I ever dreamed he was going to be."

In general, Battram detested train conversations with strangers; this was the first one in his memory that he had wanted to keep going. He asked a question—not too pointed—concerning the man for whom he had been mistaken.

"He left Chicago this morning by plane," the girl said. "When you lit that match and your face came out of shadow,

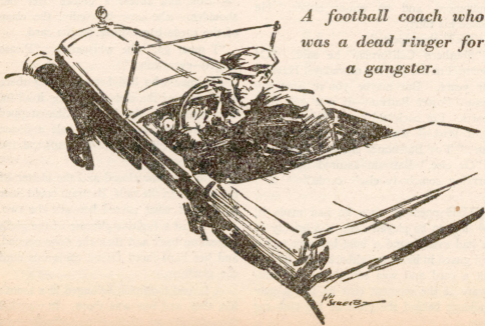
my first thought was that there'd been a crash. In that case, Dude might have got into Cleveland by automobile and boarded the train here. Just a wild guess."

And just "Dude" again. Evidently she didn't intend to go into detail in regard to his double—which, Battram told himself, was fair enough. It was the girl who really interested him, anyway. *She* did interest him a lot. Frankly and unprecedentedly, she did, and he jockeyed desultory talk in the direction of finding out who she was. The information carried a jolt when she finally supplied it. She was a singer in Chicago night clubs, and her name—Babette De Vere!

Battram gulped over it. A standresser she was—just that type. Until now he had seen in her all that was glamorous. But—Babette De Vere! Could she possibly have found a name that was shabbier, stagier, cheaper?

"Professional?" he asked weakly.

SHE smiled, and something in the smile as she murmured, "How in the world did you guess it?" heated his wind-slapped cheeks. She was laughing at him; had



*A football coach who
was a dead ringer for
a gangster.*

known in advance what his reaction to "Babette De Vere" would be, and was amused by it. That humbled him, but at the same time it took the lead out of his heart. Whatever she called herself, this girl was the real all-wool goods.

"It *had* to sound professional," she said. "Why be handicapped by plain Jane when there's no American copyright on Babette?"

"Personally," Battram said, "I like Jane better."

"Thanks. But the cabarets don't. Not in Chicago."

Jane—what? She shook her head when she saw the question coming and it went cold, unspoken. Shunted off, surer than ever that she was the one girl in a thousand he wanted to know better, he doggedly made a fresh start.

"Like football?" he asked her; and even though her brown eyes were puzzled by the sudden plopping of the question he took enough encouragement from her nod to carry him on. "I—I was thinking that maybe you'd like to come to the game when we play University of Chicago next November."

Her forehead crinkled. Battram was no sophomore, and no senior either. He looked his thirty.

"We?" she repeated.

"Southern California," he said. "Of course, I'm not playing nowadays. Haven't for years. But maybe you've seen my name—Foster Battram—if you ever read sports. I'm backfield coach."

At least it wasn't a strange name to her. "'Fos' Battram?" she said. "Really?"

"Or else," Battram assured her, "I'm carrying somebody else's cards."

THE opening, once he had made it, had to be played fast. As briskly as he had ever found a hole between tackle and guard in his own fullback days, he had out a card and was scribbling on it—unaware at the moment that he had a new audience behind the glass of the club car door.

"Listen, Jane Babette," he said, "this is pretty crude work—but if I don't see more of you it certainly is not going to be my fault. Here's the whole story; you can either flip it out on the cinders or tuck

it away. I've jotted down the hotel where I'll be staying for the next week or so. If you're going to be in New York that long



—if you'll be sport enough to have dinner and go to a show with me some evening—I'll be tickled China blue. *Maybe?*"

With suspense, he saw her debating, bending the card one way and the other between her slim, nice fingers. Thrilled as he had never thought he would be thrilled by any new girl, he saw her smile and open her small suede bag. And then, swiftly reddening, he saw for the first time the grimly intent face of that unsuspected onlooker behind the door.

THE girl caught his change of expression and threw a glance over her shoulder. She rose hurriedly, the clasp of the suede bag closing on the card.

"I must go," she whispered. "Please forget—everything."

The man who had been standing there at the rear of the club car, taking it all in, was some one she knew. She stopped for a moment to exchange half a dozen words with him, and fled on toward the line of sleepers.

With the door closed and the clatter of the wheels on the rails, Battram could hear nothing of what passed between the two. He got just a fugitive glimpse of the girl's retreating back and then the door opened, and her hard-faced friend came out onto the platform.

A frayed toothpick belonged in a mouth like that, and one was there. It waggled thoughtfully as studious and steady eyes

contemplated the occupant of the last filled chair, and at length shifted to a corner to make way for words. The words came softly.

"Well, I'll be damned! If I didn't see it, I'd never believe it!" Then a question, blurted, "Say, Chief, did anybody ever tell you that you're a ringer for Dude Bullion?"

Battram looked up and lazily exhaled.

"Bullion?" he asked. "Is that the rest of it? Guess it must be a striking resemblance. A young lady just mistook me for Dude Somebody-or-other. Mind telling me who the dickens Dude Bullion is?"

THE steady small eyes blinked and the leathery thin lips parted to let a pronouncement slip through.

"Then you sure don't know Chicago, Chief. Dude's a Noise in Chi. The new big Noise!"

"I don't understand, exactly," Battram said. "Should I be flattered?"

"A lot of people would be," Babette De Vere's friend observed briefly, and went on to another subject. "Now, that young lady——"

"You're acquainted with her, I think?"

"I'm travelin' with her. Lookin' out for her, and—here's something, Chief. Her time is all took up, see?"

"In what way?"

"I'm tellin' you. She belongs to somebody. Don't get huffy when I'm trying to give you a break, Chief. I mean, a guy wouldn't do himself any good playing around with her. Is that plain enough?"

Ten years earlier the conversation would never have gone that far without Battram on his feet, but he had balance wheels now. After holding down so many lively lids during so many training seasons, he knew how to sit on his own. He just said, quietly, "Thanks a lot."

"Check," said the bearer of the warning. "You're a wise guy—and a gent!"

The door opened, closed on its air-cushioned stop, and Battram sat alone

again with much more to think about than trick plays for the fall.

WHEN he walked into the diner next morning, still thinking, the girl in the scarlet beret was already at breakfast and her rough diamond sat across from her. She faced Battram's table, but looked at him without apparent recognition and passed him without a glance a few minutes later. Her traveling companion, trailing behind her, dropped him an approving nod and a grin.

The train was crossing the Jersey meadows before Battram saw either of them again. Then a familiar raspy voice spoke at his shoulder as he was angling out his bags.

"Say, Chief, thought I'd ask you—how long you going to be in New York?"

Battram took the question with a grin. Babette the mysterious would either give him a ring or she wouldn't; he had philosophically resigned himself to that. Whether or not, he'd certainly have a travel-adventure yarn to spin that would knock his brother coaches out of their chairs before they settled down to business at the meeting he had crossed the continent to attend.

"How long?" he said. "Probably a week. Look me up?"

The hard-faced man lacked humor. "Much obliged, Chief. Won't have a minute." He shook his head. "You're all right, though. Sorry you ain't shootin' straight through. It'd be better."

Battram saw a new twist coming on the believe-it-or-not he was primed to tell.

"Why?"

Another toothpick shifted—a dining-car quill, this one.

"Don't ask me nothing, Chief—just take a tip. Listenin'? Well, don't go strayin' on the lonesome. You stick around where there's plenty of lights and plenty of cops. Get me? G'bye!"

Battram thought he had the ultimate curl on his tall tale then. But he never made a bigger mistake in his life.

CHAPTER II

RUBBER FACE MAKES WAR

A SIGN in front of the dark road-house said, "Closed for Alterations," but evidently the man at the wheel of the big touring car didn't believe in signs. He turned in at the private drive, ran the machine around to the rear of the ramshackle building, left his engine idling there and thumped at a door.

"Comin' in, Turk," he said when the door opened a grudging inch. "Just what you asked for. Four and eight and twelve. The rest of the cars'll be drifting in a couple of minutes apart."

The door closed, and the pock-marked man who had taken the message moved back along the gloomy hall and into a room where a single electric lamp burned over a dusty jumble of bare tables and stacked chairs.

Glasses and a bottle stood on the one occupied table. Beside them lay a revolver whose curved grip, as seen from the hall, might have been the head of a question-mark wrought in gleaming metal.

A man sat alone at the table, taut and vigilant, a hand hovering over the gun. His face, turned to the door, was caught in profile by the light and a grotesquely exaggerated silhouette of it filled the far wall from paneling to ceiling.

A grotesque face with a misshapen blob of nose that had been weirdly flattened and widened at the bridge by some violent past impact, and now was afflicted by a twitching eerily magnified in that vast shadow.

"Rubber Face"—inevitably. The underworld's nickname for the man at the table had been automatic, pat, when he rose to rate one. Rubber Face Mannix.

He asked a one word question when his fever-pitted doorman had returned.

"Them?"

"First of 'em. They're all on the way."

"Four cars?"

"Right. Four chariots and eight type-

writers and the twelve best guys we got. Wasn't that the order? Plenty?"

Mannix twitched and nodded. "With me and you, fourteen. Yeah; plenty." He pocketed the revolver and got up. "We'll learn Dude Bullion's stockyards cowboys to muscle in!"

Another motor had thrummed past the shuttered windows, and then a third; a fourth long-snouted touring car, top down, was rolling into the yard as Mannix pulled open the door through which the first arrival had reported.

He stood on the top step, hands in coat pockets, eyes roving, the restless nostrils leaping more actively, as shadowy shapes from the parked machines grouped below him.

"Listen, you fellas," he said, "this is the



night when we're goin' out to give it. No use chewing about that. Everybody in the bunch knows why. We're *givin'* it—that's the program. I'm just askin' one question before we start. Is there any guy here who ain't ready to *take* it?"

Silence met that and Mannix ran down the steps, grinning jerkily.

"Okay," he said. "That's answer enough. You fellas know the difference between dimes and dollars in your kicks. Come ahead, let's go!"

A MOMENT later the four touring cars, close together now, swung past the torn "Closed for Alterations" sign with Rubber Face in the tonneau of the first of them. He leaned forward to the driver.

"Got the directions straight? South at the second blinker when we hit Baybrook, and down Steamboat Road to the old brick garage. They're campin' out there with the trucks."

Half an hour afterward, Baybrook and the second blinker. A right turn, four times made. Far down the narrower road, dark water ahead. A pier at the end of the new road, beside it the low, dark spread of a one-story garage building of brick, and outside the garage the pin-point glowing of half a dozen cigarettes. Dude Bullion's men.

"Who's that?" somebody shouted from the garage door as the touring cars braked to a sliding stop.

"Duck!" yelled another voice.

The cigarettes' sparks were scattering as Rubber Face Mannix nodded to his pock-marked neighbor on the rear seat of the touring car in the lead.

"Now!" he said softly. "Tear it off!"

Flame belched over the side of the open tonneau. A hundred feet away a running figure stumbled and went flat. A scream cut through the boiler-factory chorus of Rubber Face's visiting machine-guns. Four of them were going now. Four deadly typewriters.

The garage door had slammed. Revolvers were sniping back from windows flanking it. Mannix stood up on the seat.

"Come on!" he roared. "Rush 'em! Give 'em it all!"

THE rush started, Mannix at the head of it hugging a submachine-gun he had snatched from the floor of his car. A bullet from the garage missed him and clipped down the pock-marked man a scant stride behind him. Then suddenly the garage door was open again. Blinding headlights burst through it. The defenders within thirty seconds had organized a sortie. A rangy blue sedan came thundering out to meet the charge, spitting fire like a war tank.

The attacking line wavered. Mannix couldn't rally his faltering troops. He saw one man dropped by a machine-gun bullet from the sedan; saw the plowing blue Nemesis knock down another with its fender and pass over him.

At the same instant one of the touring

cars, left empty, burst into flame. The surprise of that, the mystery of it, completed the rout. What had been confident assault, turned into a crazy scramble for the parked machines. Starters whirred, motors churned, sound treads screamed on the cement in wild second-gear getaways.

A shore road ran past the head of the pier. Three touring cars spun into it while the fourth blazed behind them. The sedan had just flashed past it when the tank of the burning machine exploded and a shower of fiery oil spattered the concrete.

The sedan took another direction than the touring cars. It sped up the road over which Mannix had paraded in. A moment after it had rounded the blinker in Baybrook a carful of gray state troopers whizzed by. The sedan's driver looked fleetingly over his shoulder and saw the police car overshoot the blinker, and keep tearing on.

"Good!" he grunted. "They don't know where the fire is yet. That'll give the boys a chance to pull out the trucks and tuck 'em in the other garage."

AFTER a time he spoke again—asked a question, repeated it, and still got no answer. He slowed down then and looked around; reached for the tonneau switch and put on the dome-light.

What he saw wrenched a startled oath from him, and instantly the dome-light went out. Wide open, the sedan shot ahead. Miles west it whirled through a gate and along the grass-grown gravel drive of a long-neglected estate, to pull up finally before the veranda of a big house set far back from the highway.

A big-shouldered man stood on the veranda, slapping mosquitos and chewing a toothpick. The sedan's driver called to him.

"McNeil! For God's sake come here and give me a hand!"

The man with the toothpick made the drive in a jump. He looked into the car.

"Holy Mike!" he gasped. "If *this* ain't pretty!"

CHAPTER III

SNATCHED!

ON THE morning of his second day in New York, Foster Battram sat at breakfast with a newspaper propped back of his egg-cup and found himself suddenly and rather shockingly confronted by type spelling out the name of the Chicagoan who, as he had been twice assured on the way East, might have been his twin.

"Dude Bullion"—there it was in plain print, with a context that identified Bullion as the dominant new figure in Chicago's underworld; rum-runner, high stakes gambler and big-shot racketeer.

Bullion, the paper told him, had recently been trying to extend his racket empire eastward; had developed an ambition to muscle in on the rich and easy pickings of New York's gang lords. And to that ambition the police were quoted as crediting a bloody gun battle which had been fought between rival mobs on Long Island the night before. Three men had been left dead on the battle field, near a vacant garage below the village of Baybrook. Police had identified two of the three as New Yorkers and believed the other one to have been from Chicago.

"The fire-swept wreck of a big touring car bearing New York license plates," the report proceeded, "pointed to the probability that incendiary bullets had been fired from the tommy-guns, of the Chicago mobsmen. Authorities say that, if this theory be fact, the battle of Baybrook will go down in underworld history as marking an innovation in gang warfare. To date, there has been no other record of the use of incendiary bullets by racketeers in shooting out their differences."

So this was the near-double's game, wholesale rum and wholesale murder. Hardly a resemblance to advertise, was it?

Three dead in a fight over dirty money—and the man he looked so much like behind it all! Battram turned from the paper to consider his reflection in the mirror beside his table in the hotel grill. Had he

been all these years, without suspecting it, without ever getting the discreetest hint of it from his nearest and dearest friends, a criminal type? Would he, if an inherited competence had not made life comfortable for him—*could* he have ever developed into another Dude Bullion?

His face, as a matter of fact, did seem on close inspection to have things in it which he had never observed before—a sort of hard-jawed, public enemy quality, was it? His eyes, narrowed in self-examination, suggested an underlying cynicism of character that never before had revealed itself to him.

Studying his mirrored image, Battram at that moment was being as keenly and critically studied across the grill by a small and almost too perfectly-dressed patron



who had already begun his survey over the top of a menu card as he ordered fruit and coffee. He had entered the grill—pausing first at the door to cast a swift glance over the occupied

tables, a few minutes after Battram himself had; an ochre-skinned person with a cane hanging from his arm and a flaring brimmed derby in his hand and shining black hair plastered flat.

While they were together in the grill, the small man with the patent-leather hair did not register with the object of his attention. It was an hour later when Battram first became conscious of his existence—owing to the circumstances, most acutely conscious of it.

STROLLING aimlessly toward Times Square, Battram had stopped in front of a theatre where a hit show was running

to look over the photographs in the lobby display racks. He wasn't sure he wanted to see that particular play; in reviews he had read on the Coast, it had sounded just a little too high-brow for his taste.

Without his knowledge, a taxicab had been trailing him from the moment he left the hotel, making the worst of the heavy cross-street traffic, crawling always behind him, never permitting him to get quite out of sight. The patent-leather man in the London hat was a passenger in the cab, one of two passengers. With him rode a companion who would have made two of him in net tonnage.

The taxi stopped where Battram had stopped. Its passengers alighted; the small man approached Battram and touched his shoulder.

"Hello, Bullion," he said.

"Wrong man," Battram advised him. "I probably do look like somebody called Bullion—but that's not *my* name."

The husky man at his other shoulder grinned broadly. "Aw, what's the use, Dude?" he grunted. "There's only one pan like yours in America. Be nice and take a little cab ride with us. The big fella wants to see you downtown. That's all. Probably don't amount to nothin'. Far as we know, he's just wondering what you're doin' in New York."

THEY were only a few feet back in the theatre lobby, but far enough to be away and apart from the sidewalk stream. Dozens passed during those few seconds; none saw that the larger man, while speaking, was efficiently frisking Battram for concealed weapons, and the victim of the indignity himself was more amused than angry.

"A little high-handed, aren't you?" he mildly inquired.

"*Hard*-handed, if I got to be," the big man said. "You better be gentle with me. This ain't Chicago. There's the taxi. Get in."

Battram chuckled. His tale of adventure as a big shot's double had already

gone handsomely at the University Club, as it stood. Now it was getting richer and rarer and taller. His last shred of resentment passed away.

"Would it make any difference," he amiably inquired, "if I told you my name is Foster Battram and that I'm in New York for no felonious purpose whatever? Will you take my word that I'm just here to represent the University of Southern California at a football rules conference that opens tomorrow?"

"Nope; certainly won't," the big man assured him with affability equaling his own. He delved with thick fingers into a lower vest-pocket and let Battram glimpse the edge of a burnished shield. "That's warrant enough, ain't it?" he asked. "Coming peaceable?"

Deep down, Battram didn't mind the prospect of this taxi ride a bit. For subsequent narrative purposes an enforced trip to police headquarters would be far superior material to a mere near-arrest. He had plenty of time on his hands today—so why not?

"I hope," he said, "that you fellows won't have to pay the taxi fare yourselves when your boss discovers that you've brought in the wrong man."

He had crossed the sidewalk, closely escorted, and the door of the cab was open.

"We'll take our chances on that, Dude," grinned the flyweight of the arresting team.

WHEN the taxi turned into Times Square, Battram, enjoying himself hugely, had settled back between his captors and was offering them cigarettes. He tapped the monogram on the silver case.

"May I call your attention to the initials here, gentlemen? F. B.—Foster Battram."

He caught an exchange of grins.

"Sure!" the big man nodded. "F. B. is what it says. And 'B' don't stand for Bullion, does it? Say, what's your first name, anyway, Dude? Frank, maybe?"

A red light stopped the taxi at the north side of Forty-second Street. Directly ahead of it, the moving bright letters of the *Times* news-bulletin were spelling out a distinctly pertinent flash:

"DUDE - - BULLION - - CHICAGO
- - RACKET - - BOSS - - SOUGHT -
- HERE - - IN - - LONG - - ISLAND
- - GANG - - SLAUGHTER - - AR-
REST - - MOMENTARILY - - -"

Then the light changed and the taxi moved.

"It's going to be a terrible disappointment, boys," Battram murmured. "But you'll have no one to blame but yourselves."

Down Broadway, through the tangle of traffic and under the roaring elevated trains of old Herald Square; then around Madison Square Park and through Union Square on a long light. That was as far south in New York as Battram had ever been. What lay below was terra incognita to him.

BUT when the cab swung east and finally took the upgrade of a bridge approach, he knew that it must be leaving New York police headquarters behind. His puzzled, downward stare at the busy river held so obvious a question that the big man was answering before it was spoken.

"We're from Brooklyn Headquarters, see?" he explained.

Half an hour after that, though, they were in a suburban country and the cab was still rolling steadily on.

"We're not taking you to Headquarters," the patent-leather man said. "The skipper's out investigating that shindig last night, and you're going where *he* is."

The "skipper" was evidently far afield that day; the taxi meter had clocked up a staggering total—to Battram, an entirely humorous total—when the cab finally passed between stone gateposts and along a driveway where grass grew thick through the unraked gravel. A derelict mansion which showed no outward sign

of occupancy stood at the end of the drive, and the taxi rolled immediately away when its passengers had alighted there under a decaying porte-cochere.

Battram surmised that the New York Police Department did its cab riding on a charge account basis; the chauffeur, curiously, had not lingered to be paid off.

THE heavy front door of the old house, weatherbeaten and scaling, yielded to a key turned by the dapper small man. Beyond it lay a wide and desolate center hall. Battram, fished into a room opening off the front of this hall, began to develop nebulous misgivings when he had been left alone there. A key had turned behind him.

The room was shuttered to a cathedral gloom, filled with frayed and outmoded furniture, badly in need both of sweeping and dusting. He could scarcely imagine a high police official establishing even temporary field headquarters there without directing that the place be made at least broom-clean.

"The skipper will see you in a couple of minutes," the big man with the shield had promised, but when many minutes had passed, Battram was still in solitary confinement.

The queer feeling that there was something offside about this whole business grew with each minute stronger. Eventually, he tried the door through which he had come into the room. His ears had not deceived him. It had been locked on the outside.

There was one other door. It gave way when he turned the knob. Behind it was a mid-Victorian library, dustier if possible than the larger room, lined with elaborately ornamented and blank-shelved bookcases. Ashes of an apparently recent log fire were on the hearth and a leather couch had been drawn to it.

Something covered with a sheet lay stretched on the couch, and a ghastly implication of the outline drew a shudder from Battram. Staring, he was suddenly

in a tumult of conflict, a nameless repulsion at grips with an urge to look beneath the sheet and have it over with. The mystery of that shrouded figure had obscured instantly



all speculation regarding his captors and their real reason for bringing him here. The horror which his imagination pictured

blotted out everything else.

Imagination! He tried to laugh at himself—and wasn't quite up to it. Until now he had fancied himself the possessor of nerves as strong as topflight tennis gut. Jitters were a brand new sensation, but he certainly had them.

He hadn't moved an inch since first glimpsing the couch and its burden; couldn't budge until the clicking of the lock outside galvanized him to action. Then he stepped quickly forward and pulled back the sheet.

LIGHT through a broken shutter lay across an upturned white face that the sheet had hidden—a face all chalky except where, at the temple, blood had clotted about an ugly red hole. Battram felt his senses reeling. The unseeing blue eyes looking up at him might have been his own eyes. Feature for feature, the dead face might have been his own face. A cry of stark terror rose in his throat. Reason deserted him.

Someone had entered the big front room and was crossing it. It was only when he realized he was being watched from the connecting door that Battram managed to shake off his enchantment of horror and to turn.

The man at the door was neither of the pair who had brought him to this blood-chilling confrontation, but yet not a stranger. He was the one who had been

"lookin' out for" that tawny-haired mystery on the Limited, the extraordinary chaperon between Chicago and New York of the girl who called herself Babette De Vere.

And he, at least, was no spectre. The fresh tooth-pick in his hard mouth guaranteed him wholesomely carnal, and the sepulchral was not in his voice. It was matter of fact, pitched to inquiry.

"Now do you wonder at being took for him in the dark?" he asked Battram. "That was Dude Bullion, Chief—the squarest guy that ever checked in with his boots on!"

CHAPTER IV

HOBSON'S CHOICE

TWO men and a girl—all acquaintances of Battram's—sat talking at a window which looked out on a broad stretch of wild-grown lawn divided by a road whose surface gravel was half hidden by patches of weedy grass. The girl had noticeably less color now than when Battram had first seen her on the Pullman observation platform rushing eastward after the Cleveland stop; but pallor became her type.

She had said already what she had to say and turned listener. As the men talked on, she drummed the sill with slim and nervous fingers. They were the two upon whose urgent invitation Battram had entered the taxicab for his unexpectedly long ride into the country.

The dark little fashion-plate with the plastered hair meant to hold her in the conversation, evidenced when he lifted his eyes from contemplating a row of glistening fingernails and made an appeal in her direction.

"It's a good bet—I stick to that," he said. "If Dude could tell us anything, he'd tell us go ahead. There's an easy two hundred grand to shoot for. You gotta be practical, Babe. You feel pretty tough right now—sure. But if you figured this was what Dude would want you to do,

wouldn't you declare in? Leaving aside that you'd be cutting yourself a big slice of cake—now, wouldn't you?"

The girl shook her head wearily.

"You're a swell salesman, Joe Spinelli," she said, "but you'll never load me with this. I don't like it, and I don't want it. I'll sing a song and I'll sell a drink, maybe. But I'm out on any snatching. I gave you my advice just now, and it's still the same. Tell Battram that everything was in good, clean fun and turn him loose and let the down money go back where Dude meant for it to go."

Spinelli, the super-salesman, put a persuasive hand on her arm.

"Not that money is going to make everything up, girly," he soothed, "but try out some arithmetic. You pull down a flat fourth, and you don't have to do a thing but flash the It on this football buzzard and get him into line. A full quarter slice, Babs. Heffel says yes, and I say yes, and so does Mac. Twenty-fi' per cent for you!"

The large man with the useful metal shield in his pocket was Heffel. He nodded and chimed in, "You're the one can handle that big bozo, hon. You got the old original Kickapoo Indian sign on him. Mac says that anybody coulda seen it on the rattler. Don't ever tell me he gave you that card of his to slip in a solitaire deck."

She regarded him through narrowed eyes.

"I'd really like to know," she said, "which one of you took the card out of my bag—and when."

Heffel grinned. "Not me, Babs. Remember when you serve the next highballs that mine's the one without the arsenic."

THE girl gave him a hard look and said, "I wouldn't even waste arsenic on the man who pulled that two-cent larceny." Then she got up and walked away from them, and stood looking out another window.

Spinelli leaned to Heffel and lowered

his voice. "Dude never used the right bit on that filly. We'll have to hand it to her cold."

Heffel shook his rectangular head. "He was two different guys in one pair of shoes, Dude Bullion was," he said. "Most of the time you'd never know he was anybody and then—like last night. Say, he'd of sailed into that Mannix mob solo if he could have drove the car and snapped the firecrackers all by himself. A guy like that rates all the roses in Killarney at the shove-under. Yeah, and a solid gold box."

"Right," Spinelli agreed. "Chi would turn up an honest-to-God fifty grand funeral for Dude tomorrow if——"

Spinelli broke off. Their eyes had met and clung together, each pair half closed. Both men might have been struck simultaneously by the one thought. Heffel slowly nodded.

"Why not?" he whispered. "We wouldn't want this pigskin lad around chattering, anyway, would we?"

Spinelli gave the polished fingernails a prolonged and quite unnecessary rubbing against his trouser-leg.

"An idea!" he said. "Anybody that could pass for Dude walking around had ought to get by under glass. It might be worked out at that, Hef. A planting that'd shade any that Cook County ever seen. And Dude should worry who got the flowers as long as it was *him* that got the notices."

HEFFEL'S eyes fluttered a warning. "Soft pedal! You're stuffin' Babe's ear. Call her back—let's see what kind of a bit you work 'em with."

The hard bit. Steel was in Spinelli's voice when he raised it, and the girl a shade paler when she resumed her chair at his bidding.

"Listen, Babe," he said, "are you sure you ain't a little hypped on this big toe-and-elbow man?"

"Would I be?" she demanded in return.

The significance she put into that, the tightening of her hand on her crumpled

handkerchief, had no effect on Spinelli. He crossed his legs, leaned back and thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his lavender-piped waistcoat. In further sign that she need look for no further deference to her sex, the festive derby was on his head again, pushed back.

"Some dames make a fast recovery," he stated indifferently. "Tell you the truth, Babe, I ain't made a study of you. You might be ga-ga about a new dude with Dude Bullion laying cold under the same



roof with you; you're the only one knows that. It's your own private racket—it don't break out any ice-cubes in this other business.

But four men have been bumped off already, ain't it so? Well? Are we goin' to hand this guy his hat on your say-so when he could help us get the stuff? Does it stand to reason?"

The girl moistened her lips and sat straight.

"Wh— what do you mean, Joe?"

"Just this: we've been to a lot of trouble bringing him here, and he could make plenty more trouble come out of it. Believe you me, all that trouble ain't goin' for nothin', sister. If the big boy don't promise to do like we want him to—and make us believe he means it—he'll never go out of this house except the same way Dude Bullion is going out. There it is on the blackboard for you in big letters, Babe. You can either string with us in soaping him, or not. Suit yourself."

HEFFEL took his cue from a meaningful glance and quickly applied oil.

"Aw, don't look that way, Babs!" he said. "Joe don't mean that you'll be froze out. The proposition stands just the way it did before—one quarter for you if the

boy friend obliges. If he don't, then it's just too bad for him. Are you with us?"

For a moment she stared out along the grass-grown drive; then slowly she nodded. "I guess, Joe," she said, "that I feel pretty much the same way about men that you do about women. I mean, I only hope that I don't get short-counted if this comes through. Deal me in, though, anyway."

CHAPTER V

FOR HALF A CARD

NOBODY," said the man in the doorway, "ever thought that you'd stray in here, Chief. But—you did. And there he is. Dude Bullion!"

He accepted fact as fact, without emotion. Battram had seen what he had seen. That was that. To this weird train escort of Babette De Vere, uncannily popping up out of nowhere, violent death was apparently a commonplace. And obviously he would never be troubled by conjurings of imagination. He seemed not to grasp that a man might be shaken to the roots by such a discovery as Battram had made when he drew back the sheet to find the stark slain body, cast in his own mortal image, beneath it.

Battram looked again at the white face on the couch, his nerves steadying down. Coherent speech would not come yet, but his panic had departed. It wasn't, after all, a ghost that he had run upon in this room, but a man dead for the good and sufficient reason that a bullet had passed through his head.

Before the fetters were off his tongue, Battram's brain was out of the tailspin, striving to fit together this mad and tragical jigsaw. Vital pieces of it were lacking; but a few, at least, were in his possession. Automatically, he joined them up; and the sum of them suggested a conclusion that he shot point-blank at the human enigma whose bulk filled the door between the two rooms of shadows.

"Those men who brought me here—they weren't detectives!"

The current toothpick vanished and reappeared periscopelike.

"Well—no."

"Not detectives, but—friends of yours!"

"Kinda."

Battram shook his solid shoulders and took a stride toward the door. One stride. He stopped short. A pistol had materialized to dissuade departure, and the toothpick had gone up like a porcupine quill with the snapping of hard jaws.

"Be good! I don't want to have to plug you, Chief. On the square, I don't. I'm regular, Chief—and you're a gent."

Battram, whose coaching success had been built largely on his keenness in discovering stamina under quiet surfaces, knew the difference between bluster and this sort of thing. There was menace in the man's placidity, deadliness in his deprecation, confirmation of Battram's judgement in his very look of relief when he lowered the gun.

"That's right, Chief," he said. "Use your head, and you'll come out fine—maybe with more dough in your pocket than you got now. Nobody wants to put any scare on you. This is business."

"*Business!*" echoed Battram. Or a nightmare? Would he presently wake up, sweating, in his hotel—wake up to discover that this whole extravagant melodrama had been cooked into last night's rarebit at the club?

"Sure," the figment with the gun insisted. "Not any ordinary snatch, Chief. Straight business. And you're in a winner's seat."

THE stare of those fixed eyes looking up at him from the couch had become too much for Battram. He covered them and said, "You mean to be friendly, but that's all you make me understand. On the train you tried to tell me something—to warn me. I couldn't get any connection then. Can't now."

The toothpick shifted after a studious moment.

"You mighta made your own diagram,

Chief. I said for you to watch out for yourself. Some people in New York had a mark up on Dude Bullion. People that never seen any more of him than his picture. You looked enough like him to get it instead. But it was Dude himself got it. Last night. *They* don't know it yet, though. Nobody knows it excepting a few of us. Not a soul outside this house."

Somebody was at the hall door, behind the man behind the toothpick.

"Got him there, McNeil?" a voice called. "Bring him in!"

His guard nodded at Battram.

"Let's go, Chief. Now you'll hear the rest of it. For Pete's sake, listen nice and tell 'em you'll do what they want you to do. It's practically on the up and up, at that. I'm giving it to you straight."

They crossed the outer room and the wide hall, entered another and brighter room. The shutters were open here. Sunlight streamed in strongly. Battram stood blinking. Three figures facing him were only a blur at first. Then recognition. The two impostor detectives—and the girl of the Limited.

So she *was* a party to this! That, somehow, was the worst jolt yet. Battram nodded to her and looked away. A cabaret singer, mixed up with racketeers and kidnapers and professional killers. What a chump he really was, down at bottom. His dream girl!

THE small man with the English bowler pushed back on his head made a sweeping gesture, and a huge diamond solitaire flashed in the sun.

"Sit down, Dude."

Battram remained on his feet, holding the dark eyes.

"Don't bother to keep that up," he said. "I've been in that rear room across the hall. I know what's there."

The small man flicked an ash from a cigarette in a long holder and looked inquiringly at McNeil.

"Yes?" he murmured. "Well sit down, just the same. Sit down and listen to

something. Never mind what you saw or what you didn't see. *You're* going to be Dude Bullion for a while, and you ain't going to tell anybody different."

The big man who had let Battram see the edge of his vest-pocket badge in the theatre lobby spoke up, conciliatory, and Battram recognized team work. They had played this way together before. A little man and a big man, a ruffler and a smoother.

"Aw, Joe ain't as tough as he sounds," the big man said. "Go on and pull up a chair, brother. You might hear something to your advantage. Something that means money to you. Big money."

Battram's gaze, despite him, had wandered back to the girl. Her eyes were on him, curiously intent, her face white and drawn.

"I begin to see," he said. "You want somebody to masquerade as Bullion and you think I look enough like him to get by. Is that it?"

THE small man agreed with a cool nod. "You're not dumb," he said. "That's just it. Twenty-four hours will turn the trick and there's a big chunk to roll for. Did you ever make five grand in any other twenty-four hours of your life, mister? Five thousand dollars?"

"No," Battram said. He paused. "And I probably never will make five thousand dollars in much less time than twenty-four weeks."

"Don't be that way, brother," begged the man with the badge. "Listen to the story." He grinned and, at an apparent oblique, asked Battram, "Ever take a drink?"

"Once in a while."

"It's got to come from somewheres, ain't it? People got to bring it in and handle it along the line, don't they? Anything wrong about that, as long as it's the McCoy, they handle—good, honest stuff?"

Battram shook his head. "A misdemeanor, not a crime," he said. "But—I'm in the football business. Suits me better."

McNeil took the toothpick from his mouth and pointed it accusingly.

"There you go!" he exclaimed. "This ain't the football season, is it? Why don't you be clubby like I asked you, Chief? Didn't I say this deal was on the up and up? Am I a liar?"

"Strictly on the up and up," said the little dark man, digging a cigarette end out of the ivory holder. "And you don't ever need to be ashamed of being in Dude Bullion's shoes, either. Ask Babe. You remember *her*, don't you?"

The girl lowered her eyes before Battram's.

"Dude was—fine!" she said in a low voice.

"Tell him more, Babe," the dapper man urged. "Tell him about this particular load. Tell him why Dude got bumped."

SHE was rolling the little ball of handkerchief between her slim hands.

"Yes," she said, looking up at Battram. "You ought to know. It might make you feel different. This load of stuff is the first that Dude Bullion ever planned to bring in with his own people. He knew he was going to make enemies by doing it—knew that he'd probably go on the spot sooner or later for it. But that didn't stop him."

"It mighta looked like chiselin'," the dapper man prompted. "Was it?"

"No; it was courage," the girl said, and looked straight at Battram. "Dude was in the booze racket. *Big* in it. It wasn't a secret. But he'd have died before he'd have any part in bringing in junk—dope. He did die. And that's the reason. The honest truth."

"He stood all right with John Law," McNeil contributed. "What I mean—pretty much all right. The government knows that stuff'll be handled as long as there's buyers. Dude never had a lot of



bother from the Feds until they got a tip that somethin' else besides wet goods was comin' in with his loads. Then they asked him how about it."

"They had it straight," the girl said. "They knew more than Dude Bullion did."

"Right, they did," the small man confirmed. "Dude was fit to be tied. If he could have got hold of Rub——" He checked himself at a quick grunt from Heffel. "Never mind who," he said. "But there'd been a lot of flowers sold if Dude could've got his hands, right then, on the guy that crossed him."

"Dope-running was a side-line," interpreted McNeil, lucid for once, "with the Eastern crowd that had been bringing in the liquor."

"Get it?" the bearer of the fake police shield asked. "It was givin' Dude a bad name, without him knowing a thing about it."

BATTRAM, at last in a chair, sat fascinated. He had vaguely known, just as millions of other Americans knew, that a volcano underlay the whole structure of prohibition; for years past some echo of its rumblings had been in almost every newspaper he picked up. This was real smoke from it. Vesuvius was in eruption and he, Foster Battram, whose furthest violation of the dry laws had been a quiet and conservative drink or two in conservative and subdued speakeasies, now amazingly appeared to be in the direct path of the lava flow.

"I get it," he said. "I can see that Bullion had his points. But——"

"Just a minute!" The solitaire glistened as a staying hand went up. "Let me tell you the rest of it, and you'll see where you fit. What did Bullion do? Bop somebody? Not him. He was always against that, no matter what you hear. No; what Dude done, he organized to move his own stuff all the way—ship to Chicago, see? Him and I slid into New York, laid it on the line with a Glasgow guy, and slid out again."

"A whisky agent," McNeil supplied. "He's all straightened. Paid in advance, every last dime. The load's in hock, just the same. Layin' off Montauk right this minute and ready for delivery. But——"

"Settled for and waiting," nodded the small man. "All we got to do is get the card and go after it. Follow me?"

"I must have missed something," Battram said, still in a daze. "What card?"

"Who cares? Nine of spades, I think it was. But it'd be all the same if it was the jack of diamonds. Anyway, it's locked up."

MCNEIL spoke again from the inter-preter's chair. "I guess this sounds all screwy to you, Chief; you don't know the game. It ain't a whole card, but half of a card. They tore it in two. One piece went to Scotland by messenger with Dude's dough, and it's out there with the cargo now. The stuff won't be turned over only to somebody showing up with the other piece. It's got to fit into the tear. Swell insurance against larceny. Try tearin' a card some time—and then take another card and try to counterfeit the first rip."

"Can't be done; it's as sure as fingerprints," said the little over-dressed man. "That's what would have licked us—if you hadn't picked just the right train out of Chi."

"Bullion didn't get to town yesterday," elucidated the "detective" who weighed the rôle.

"We were going to the bank today, him and I," his partner in Battram's abduction said. "Yeah—and maybe we're *still* going. The people in the safe deposit vault only seen Dude once, when the both of us rented the box together and put the card in it. You'd pass for him. Easy. No questions asked."

"Cinch," said McNeil. "Not a chance of a jam, Chief. I wouldn't fool you."

Spinelli talked on, glib and confident. The safety deposit box had been taken on the basis that both of the renters must

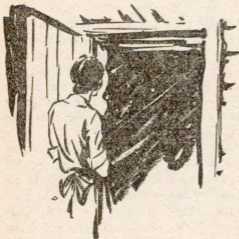
be present whenever it was opened. He and Bullion had signed assumed names for the vault record and there would be the routine comparison of signatures to consider, of course. But if one of the renters should now appear with a bandaged right hand, for instance, could he be expected to produce a perfect signature with his left?

"It's in the bag, brother," he said. "You'll be just as good down there as Dude Bullion, himself. No risk. Just make your bow at the bank, and you're out—five grand to the good!"

THE girl had turned from the window. Her face was whiter. She was nodding, shaping some message with her lips that she evidently dared not breathe. There was a strain in her eyes as they clung to Battram's, a desperation of anxiety warning him as clearly as so many words whispered that grave danger lay in a refusal.

"It's okay," insisted McNeil. "I never advised you wrong yet, did I, Chief?"

He was anxious, too, plain to see. The



toothpick took an upward angle and suspensefully ceased its gyrations.

The small man's dark eyes hardened on the face of a diamond-framed wrist watch, tiny as a woman's.

"Come on, make up your mind!" he

snapped. "We haven't got all day ahead of us. In—or out?"

The girl's hands were clenched tight on the wreck of the handkerchief,

"Anything—*anything!*" she whispered. "Please!"

Battram knew a jam when he saw it. This was one. It had dawned on him, seconds ago, that these people wouldn't have talked so freely if they had the slightest intention of permitting him a free decision. That breakfast table headline flashed back. "Three Die As Gang Guns Roar!" Dude Bullion, uncounted, made four dead. It was tacit that Foster Battram had a fine chance here to nominate himself as number five on the casualty list.

"Suppose," he temporized, "that I'd rather pass by the money?"

"You can wrap it up and throw it overboard; that's your business. In?"

Battram debated no longer. A reckless impulse had been prompting him, anyway, to see the thing through. Football had no kick like this; never would thrill him again. No—nor would any woman.

"In!" he said. And then he sharply cut off Spinelli, anticipating what he had started to say, beating him to it. "I said—'In!' Wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean to go the route. Understand that. No threats necessary. I'll play ball."

McNeil delivered a deep sigh. The toothpick went restless again.

"I can pick 'em, Chief," he said. "Yeah—you got savvy!"

CHAPTER VI

FORE-ARMED!

THEY were sweeping westward a few minutes later, all of them, girl included, in a garish lemon-colored touring car which had been standing alongside a big blue sedan behind locked garage doors. A badly abused sedan, incidentally. Its thick non-shatterable windshield was a welter of criss-cross cracks, and other long cracks starred out around a hole in

one of the rear windows—a hole, as Battram observed with quickening pulse, that would be exactly at head level for a seated passenger.

Miles away, he was still thinking about that hole and what it implied, and the picture in his mind double-riveted his decision to play his part through without a murmur. Death meant next to nothing to these men who lived by the gun, Bullion's or his or their own. Anything he started, they would most certainly finish. And a woman would be in the thick of it. No matter what kind, a woman.

Looking at it from the other angle, his companions probably did have as legitimate a claim as anybody in the land of the living to Bullion's embargoed estate. So, as McNeil had insisted, the project ahead really was to that extent on the up and up.

Battram, seeing it that way, sat silent as one suburban police booth after another was left behind; and in the city a north-and-south line of traffic policemen five miles long saw him, if they saw him at all, only as a young man lucky enough to have an Isotta to ride in and as beautiful a girl to ride with as that pale orchid beside him in the tonneau.

She sat at Battram's left and McNeil at his right, next the hand that Heffel had bandaged before the start with an expertness suggesting much earlier practice at first aid. Perhaps short of toothpicks, McNeil had been chewing an unlighted cigar on the way into town; when the touring car slid into a just-vacated parking space a short block from Times Square, he threw the cigar into the gutter and closed a tight grip on Battram's arm.

"Don't buck!" he whispered. "Bad medicine."

"I said I wouldn't," Battram reminded him. "That was a contract."

IN THE safety deposit department, tunneling like a ratskeller under the banking floor, Heffel's neatly professional bandage was accepted at par and Battram at face value. The clerk who had rented

the box to Bullion and Spinelli was called out to look at him.

"Sure," he said. "I remember 'em both. Okay, Tim."

They passed through steel gates into an artificially lighted strong room and were left alone. Spinelli produced two flat keys and fitted them into a double lock. The metal box he drew from its slide seemed empty. He shook it, and the torn half of a playing card fell into his hand. A spade. Not the nine, but the ten.

He looked at Battram queerly and grinned—held out the card to him.

"Here," he said. "You're the big shot in this deal. Pouch it!"

Automatically Battram's hand closed on the mutilated card. He had it.

"But—hold on!" he protested, staring. "I thought this was where we said good-bye."

"No; later." Spinelli smiled. "Didn't I tell you twenty-four hours? Don't worry. You're a pal from now on."

There was steel in the smile. Battram wondered, when they had been duly checked out of the vault, what would happen if he should put up his back now. Just wondered. He thought of Dude Bullion out there on Long Island under his sheet and didn't try it out.

McNeil looked surprised and not too well pleased when he started to climb back into the car. He said quickly to Spinelli, "No luck?"

"All there is. We got it, Mac."

"Then ain't we through with the chief, here?"

"Not until the load's in and rolling," Spinelli said. "He understands. He's perfectly willing to stick around." He prodded Battram, hopefully hesitant on the running-board. "Step up, brother. Don't pay any attention to Mac. You're going with us."

Battram reluctantly got in and sat down and as the machine purred and the clutch took hold, McNeil leaned to him and said, "I'm tellin' you again—you're a gent.

I'm for you. Everything's going to be all right."

On his other side, Battram felt the girl's body suddenly rigid against him. She breathed, "I don't like it!"

"What?"

SPINELLI, at Heffel's right on the front seat, turned swiftly then. He had sharp ears, and one hand had slipped under his coat.

"Yeah, Babe," he said softly, and looked at her long through slitted eyelids. "What?"

She had control. Her face was blank.

"Me? Did I say something?"

"Didn't you?"

"Must have been thinking out loud, then. Pretty near a habit lately."

Spinelli showed even small teeth, polished as brightly as his finger-nails, through a thin-lipped smile.

"Look out for it, Babe," he said. "There's nothing dangerous as letting a habit get you." Then he spoke out of the near corner of his mouth to Heffel. "Make the next turn east. Take Third Avenue down, so we got a clear track. I'm sick of looking at traffic cops."

Third Avenue had lights, but was uncongested. Traffic policemen were far apart, posted only at important crossings, and one after another the Isotta passed them swiftly on the green. Spinelli still faced the rear, left arm over the back of the driver's seat, his right hand never reappearing from beneath the single-but-toned coat.

THE Isotta recrossed the East River bridge which Battram had been over twice before that day, flitted through a region of factories where only ambling trucks were encountered and then through and endless series of drowsy residential streets, one just like the other.

"They call this town quiet—but don't you ever let them kid you, Chief," McNeil said at Battram's ear. "It's hot territory,

this and the whole of Long Island. A gink name of Rubber Face Mannix claims all concessions. And how he loves us!"

Spinelli had caught that.

"Wouldn't you go swell with a megaphone on a tourist bus?" he flung sourly over his shoulder, and McNeil subsided, growling an unpretty word.

Rows of joined houses had become rows of houses detached, and the spaces between increased little by little until the touring car had passed into suburbs again.

The small man, vice Dude Bullion, was boss. When he was ready for a halt, he called for it and the Isotta pulled up in front of a drug store displaying the blue Bell Telephone sign. Spinelli stayed put.

"You do it, Hef," he directed. "Phone and tell 'em to be ready. No use of us going all the way over to the south shore."

Heffel discharged the errand briskly. Settling back behind the wheel, he said, "They'll start for the Point right after dinner."

"And that saves us an extra thirty miles," Spinelli said. "We can shoot straight for the boat now."

McNeil had found another toothpick, and it came to uptilted attention.

"Hey!" he said. "You ain't going to drag the chief all the way? What the hell!"

"Don't do it, Joe!" the girl urged. "He's gone the limit for us, and we ought to be decent with him. If he promises——"

Spinelli fixed her with a hard stare.

"Leggo my ears, Babe!" he grunted. "I know what I'm doing. Shove off, Heffel."

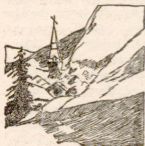
LIGHT, spattering rain had begun to fall. A few miles further on they made another halt to raise the folded top. It was raining hard then, prematurely twilight. Heffel didn't seem to be quite sure of his route. He and Spinelli consulted a road map before the Isotta got under way again.

"Safety first, brother—that's all," the little new big-shot assured Battram. "It won't be a bad trip, if you like the water."

They were in open and sparsely populated country now, away from towns and police and traffic, and Spinelli faced front and began talking in an undertone to Heffel.

"It ain't my doin'; don't know how he gets that way," McNeil muttered, and thereafter gnawed his toothpick in moody silence.

The girl said nothing more. She was a puzzle to Battram. Her whisper as they left the bank, her protest a while ago in his behalf, had seemed to indicate a genuine concern for his safety. Also, her har-



rowed appearance and her eulogy of Dude Bullion that morning had amply borne out McNeil's declaration on the trail that she had "be-

longed" to the racketeer. But neither grief nor concern, plain to see, could be strong enough within her to submerge her vanity. Presently she had opened her bag and she calmly and frankly busied herself with lipstick and rouge pad while Spinelli, swung around again, watched her in the dusk with cynically drooping eyes.

"Never mind if you can't see so good now, Babe," he remarked with heavy-handed irony. "It's a swell yacht we're usin' tonight. You'll have a special room with electric lights and a full-length look-in'-glass all to yourself."

She placidly continued to shape the outline of an exaggerated Cupid's bow with her little finger.

"A full-length looking-glass, Joe? Then you wouldn't need it to see yourself," she drawled, and McNeil guffawed.

BATTRAM groaned inwardly. Cheap! Could this be the same girl who had charmed him on the observation platform, his perfect "stand-dresser?" Or was it

possible that the club car girl had, like Dude Bullion, a double?

She had closed the bag when Spinelli, stopped cold by that scratch of her claws, glowered and turned his back on her. A moment after that she was gouging Battram with her elbow, forcing her arm back. He squeezed over toward McNeil.

"Enough room now?"

"Plenty," she said. "Thanks."

But she didn't seem to be comfortable in her new position. She withdrew the arm—and Battram, feeling a little jerk, could have sworn that her hand had been in his pocket. That was absurd, though. There was nothing in the pocket to interest her, or anyone else; nothing at all. It was absolutely empty, as the average left-side pocket in a man's coat almost always would be.

Absurd, but he was nevertheless certain. Curiosity sent his hand exploring, and he made an amazing discovery. The empty pocket was empty no longer. His fingers touched metal, closed around what must be the grip of a small, short-barrelled pistol!

And the girl knew when he had found it. Her wind-blown moist hair brushed against his cheek as she inclined her head to his.

"In case you need it," she whispered. She put a finger to her lips. "Quiet! Just be on guard!"

CHAPTER VII

AMBUSHED!

JUST that whisper, and nothing more. With a significant glance toward the small man alongside the driver, the girl had turned her head away. She seemed to feel that the pistol would speak sufficiently for itself.

It did; and it told Battram more than that she thought him in greater danger from this point on. It slapped him just as her mocking smile had slapped him after she had sprung that blatant "Babette" name on him. Again he had been too

hasty in judging her and had woefully misjudged.

Vanity nothing! He could see the whole thing clear as day. It had been no lipstick she was after when she opened the handbag, but that baby automatic. She had meant to provide him with means of self-defense in an emergency which she must, with good reason, see rising; and her calm by-play at touching up white cheeks and pale lips had been wholly an inspired strategic misdirection.

The Isotta was clipping off a smooth sixty over the dirt road, going places—far places. Night came black, drizzling, and still they swished along until at length a sea-tang was in the damp air and the dark water lay ahead.

This was a deep cove cutting in, Battram judged, from Long Island Sound. A side road dropped sharply to its shore. When they had descended a few hundred yards along this road, a pier and a float and the hull of some furtive or deserted vessel, all dark, showed murkily before them.

Close by the pier, a man stepped into the glare of the Isotta's headlights.

"Private dock," he said as Heffel trod down the brake pedal. "This ain't the ferry."

"We're not lookin' for the ferry; we're going out a ways," Spinelli said.

That was the right reply, evidently, to the challenge. The pier guard moved aside.

"Okay, gents," he said. "Everything's ready for you."

Spinelli kicked open the door beside him and climbed out.

"Hey, fella," he called. "Come back and lead the way. Want us to break our necks?" He swore fluidly. "Where the hell did that guy go? He must be deaf."

Beside him, McNeil stared into the black void that had swallowed the watchman.

"Presto!" he ejaculated. "Now, if he could only do that on the stage—!"

Battram stood with them, and Spinelli poked him with a small, hard thumb.

"Don't you go trying it, brother! Any-

body got a flashlight? Ain't there one in the car, Heffel?"

"Yeah, but the battery's shot." Cupped hands made a reflector behind a match that threw a feeble gleam toward the dock and quickly succumbed to the rain. "See? It's good solid walkin'."

HEFFEL struck another match and they started, Spinelli at Battram's elbow. Squashy mud for a few paces, then the wet planks of the pier. Battram could imagine what the mud had done to Spinelli's immaculate spats. So could Spinelli. He turned loose another machine-gun drum of profanity.

"What ails them apes on the boat? Can't they show a light?"

Somebody caught Battram's arm, caught it tight, while they stood huddled together, Heffel trying to find a dry place on the box to strike a third match. It was the girl.

"Look!" she commanded in a taut whisper. "*Look back there! All those men!*"

Battram glimpsed inky figures outlined on the white clapboards of a shack at the head of the dock—just barely made them out before hell was popping. Roaring, blazing hell.

"Tommies!" yelled Spinelli. "A turn-off!"

A gun was instantly in his hand, banging away under Battram's nose. Down on their knees, McNeil and Heffel went into action with solidly thumping pistols. Flame had begun spitting around the corners of the shack; now flame spat back.

The girl hadn't released her grip on Battram's arm. She was pulling desperately at him.

"Come! Run low! The boat!"

It wasn't his fight. He didn't know why he should be resisting, throwing his weight against hers, but for an instant he did resist. The old battling instinct that had been kicked and pounded and straight-armed into him on the gridiron had possession. The shack loomed as a fiery goal-post, and he was gripped by a berserk im-

pulse to unlimber that little lent pistol and go smashing for it.

HE SAW McNeil topple over, and sanity returned in a flash. McNeil was the only one of the three, anyhow, who had been even half way human. And the girl hadn't slipped the gun into his pocket in anticipation of this; certainly didn't expect or want him to use it. He wheeled and raced for the gangway leading down to the float where the dark, rake-masted yacht lay tied. As he ran he pushed her ahead of him and gave her own advice breathlessly back to her. "Run low!"

Lights flared along the deck above them as they reached the float. He boosted the girl to the rail, shoulder high, and sprang after her.

"It's Bullion!" somebody shouted. "Let go the lines!"

The battle on the pier was moving swiftly closer. As the hawsers were cast off, one man was in flight before many. He stopped once and fired back at the pursuing horde; made another stand when he had leaped down on the float, using the stringpiece as a breastwork.

Gun empty, he came sprinting for the yacht as it drifted clear, and with a cat-like leap achieved the deck.

It was McNeil, minus the toothpick, the exposed V of his shirt-front one vast crimson splotch. He stared, white-faced, at Battram.

"S-sorry, chief," he panted. "Wish I'd kept my trap shut!"

The yacht was throbbing to the turn of the engine, and a clump of men were moving toward them along the deck. What Battram first observed about their leader was that he held a heavy pistol in his hand. Then he saw that the man had a gargoye face, curiously mobile, a flattened nose with distended and constantly twitching nostrils.

"It's Mannix—Rubber Face! This is worse!" whispered McNeil.

Mannix?

Battram knew the name. He had heard it on McNeil's lips before. "Hot terri-

tory . . . Gink called Rubber Face Mannix claims all concessions."

The name had been in Battram's morning newspaper, too. Last night's big gun battle, the papers said, had risen out of a brand new feud between a Brooklyn gang led by one Rubber Face Mannix and Dude Bullion's invading artillery from Chicago.

Mannix, out of all the New York gang world, had been Dude's arch-enemy—and he still didn't know that Bullion was dead.

CHAPTER VIII

SPINELLI'S FINE HAND

WHAT the hell," Heffel demanded, "is the idea? Mac made it—and we could of been with him."

"Sure, we could of," Spinelli said. "That'd be grand, wouldn't it? Is Mannix such a fathead that he'd just lay here for us without grabbin' off the boat first?"

They were under the pier, talking low while heavy running feet pounded the planking above them. Half a minute earlier Spinelli, jamming a fresh cartridge clip into his automatic, had said, "Too many of 'em to handle!" and had ordered a retreat to the yacht. But when McNeil started, he had held Heffel back, whispering, "Don't follow him—follow me!" And so here they were, waist deep in water, out of the line of fire and for the moment safe.

Heffel was a slow thinker. They had waded half way to shore, their splashing covered by the hubbub of loud voices above and the rumble of the reversed engine as the yacht backed off, when he spoke again.

"Say, Joe! Just how long ago did you figure that out? If Mac—"

"Aw, what's the difference to him?" Spinelli said. "He was hit, anyway. Hit bad. There's times when it's every guy for himself. And this is one of 'em. Easy now!"

They had come to a sandy beach under the head of the dock. Crouching, they could see a string of lights out on the cove, well off from shore now, streaking for the

open Sound. Clustered figures on the float and at the foot of the pier showed against the lights. There was no more shooting, only a shouting back and forth between yacht and dock.

"What about Babe—and the chump?" Heffel whispered. A sudden after-thought.

"They're on the boat, too. Made it ahead of Mac. Come on!"

They emerged from under the dock and got the rain in their faces; cautiously climbed the bank and stole past the shack where the Eastern mobsmen had lain in ambush.

The Isotta loomed ahead. A guard left posted beside it called, "Who's that?" It was, not to be mistaken, the same voice that had challenged them on their approach to the pier.

Spinelli was only a step away, and his pistol was in his hand. The automatic swung hard against the watchman's head; he grunted and dropped. Spinelli drove a muddy foot into his ribs.

"Everything ready for us, was it?" he snarled. "Yeah—you bet it was! Hope I knocked you looney for life!"

He sprang into the car, took the wheel himself and kicked the starter. Off went the Isotta, rocking on the abrupt turn, and the range was a long one when guns began cracking on the dock.

"Save your smoke!" Spinelli called to Heffel at the first replying bang from the tonneau. "We're all washed up at this end."

Miles inland, miles peeled back at better than one to the minute, he pulled up under an arc at the outskirts of a village and spread the road map.

"What we gotta do now, we gotta find Montauk Highway and lay there for the trucks," he said. "We're dished on the load, Hef. Dealt right out on the last card. Like a sucker, I left All-America hang onto the spade that takes the trick."

"The hell!" Heffel exclaimed. "Yeah?"

"Yeah! And Mannix will get it off of him, first shot, and snatch the cargo. We just wasted time."

THE macadam road they were on was a cross-island road, and would do. Spinelli drove straight ahead when he had folded the map and tucked it back in the door pocket. Far south of the battleground, he avoided a village where Montauk Highway would be Main Street for a brief stretch, and came out on the through-route concrete half a mile below the town. There he stopped and lighted a cigarette.

Half an hour and scores of machines had passed when he dropped his palm quickly on the horn button and held it down, looking over his shoulder at a sedan that had gone sedately by, rolling eastward.

The long blast halted the sedan. It went into reverse and came back. A head topped by a plaid cap appeared through a window.

"You, Joe?"

Spinelli bruski cut off a question. "I'm here, and that's enough. Stop your trucks. Turn 'em around."

The trucks were coming, five of 'em, fleet and powerful new Macks travelling light on pneumatic tires. Two men rode on each and three in the sedan which had been piloting the fleet. The trucks came to a halt behind the sedan, and their riders came up afoot. They didn't know what the delay was; half a dozen had guns in their hands.

"Aw, nerst! Hide 'em!" Spinelli called through the Isotta's raised and dripping windshield. "Who the hell'd be hi-jackin' empties?"

"Nothin' doin'," the wearer of the plaid cap then told the truckman. "We're going back."

"Who says so?"

Spinelli scowled at the questioner. "I say so!" he snapped. "Something's happened—and you're taking orders from me now. If anybody don't want to, we'll settle it right on this spot."

His hand had flashed under his coat, and the threat in that was enough.

"Okay, Joe. Couldn't see who it was behind them lights. Back to the garage?"

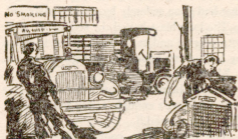
"No; back all the way. Back to Chicago. Start now and keep goin'. You can hit

Scranton by morning, and lay over there. No stop this side of Scranton—understand?"

The little man had good grounding in the psychology of command. He took obedience for granted, and at once started the Isotta westward. When Heffel looked around a moment afterward the last truck on the line was already backing into a side road and turning, and the others were maneuvering to follow suit.

"They're comin'," he said.

"Sure they are," grunted Spinelli. "And



the next trip east we'll leave the Macks home and bring bombs. Tonight ain't the end of this. I'll have a few smart guys in Chi to take care of now, but just as soon as I put the finger on 'em, I'm comin' down again and blow Mannix clean off this private island of his!"

He wasn't waiting for any mantle to descend upon him, nor for a caucus. Yesterday the power had been Dude Bullion's today, by promptness of seizure and sheer nerve, it was Joe Spinelli's.

FROM the tonneau Heffel looked speculatively for a moment at the slim man, lounging back, and then he shrugged. There was a subtle change in his voice when he spoke again, a shading of deference not too pronounced but plainly enough there to register on a sensitive ear and to bring a pleased thin grin to Spinelli's lips.

"Too bad about Mac and Babe," Heffel said, entirely forgetful of Battram. "It'll go tough with them if Mannix has got the boat."

"Not so tough with Babe, I guess," Spinelli said. "They tell me Rubber Face is nuts over skirts. De Vere ought to make out well enough if she plays him right." A humorous thought struck him and brought a hard, short laugh. "Say, it's goin' to be comical, Hef. I mean when our Colonel Rugby tries to make Mannix believe that he ain't Dude Bullion. You know, Mannix only seen Dude the once—and that was a couple years ago."

"I betcha." Heffel laughed, too, dutifully. "But I get sick every time I think about Rubber Face nailing our stuff."

"Don't worry. Wait till we're across the river, and we'll see how far he gets with it."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I don't want to take chances stopping anywheres over here. Too many of Rubber Face's guys running around the island tonight."

With that half answer Heffel found it expedient to content himself until the Isotta had passed through Brooklyn and over another bridge and had stopped outside a chain cigar store in lower Manhattan.

"Now we'll find out," Spinelli said, "whether Mannix gets away with it clean." He showed a coin between his fingers. "Lookut! I got a nickel that says he don't. Wait while I make a little phone call and throw a wrench in the machinery."

Heffel's jaw dropped. "Listen, Joe! You ain't goin' to holler cop?" he demanded, aghast.

"Of course I ain't—not on your life," Spinelli said, and grinned. "I don't play it that way. *Me* holler cop? Not in a million years, Hef. This is different. I'm just hollerin', "*Coast Guard!*" We'll see how Rubber Face Mannix likes that!"

THROUGH the show-window Heffel saw him walk into a booth and carefully close the door. Then his attention was distracted by two large men in dark fedoras who had stopped on the sidewalk to give the Isotta a long look. One of

them peered under the top and regarded the passenger with unflattering eyes.

"Oh, oh!" he said. "Give a look at this mug, Jerry, riding around in fifteen thousand dollars' worth of imported automobile!"

His companion looked and nodded while Heffel glared back.

"Well," he said, "it certainly ain't Clark Gable. And Illinois plates on the bus, too! Maybe we got something."

Spinelli had finished his business at the telephone. He appeared at the door smiling cheerfully, but the smile didn't last. He recognized one of the men beside the Isotta, and perceived that the recognition had been mutual.

"Hello, Spinelli," the big man said. "I don't s'pose you and your pal were anywhere out on Long Island last night—out around Baybrook, maybe?"

Desperate-eyed, Spinelli chewed his lip. "Baybrook? Never heard of it, Sarge. You got us wrong."

That won a laugh. "Maybe," the detective said. "How about giving us a ride in the gold-plated hack? The big fella wants to see you downtown."

Spinelli's hand had darted under his coat, but it came out empty. He had driven half a mile, with one plainclothes man beside him and the other sitting back with Heffel, before he recognized the right moment to get his concealed pistol out of its shoulder-holster.

He had no thought of using it. Close to the curb and a line of ash-cans while a light held him, he neatly got rid of it. When he walked into Police Headquarters a few minutes later he walked jauntily. New York wouldn't get him, anyhow, on its sharp-toothed Sullivan law, for the gun was back in one of those ash-cans.

CHAPTER IX

TEN IN THE HOLE

MANNIX, from the neck up, strongly suggested to Battram a scale enlargement of one of those little red rubber

heads once upon a time highly popular in juvenile circles. Ridiculous, plastic, gargoye heads, he remembered, which stuck out derisive red tongues when squeezed behind the ears. Mannix even had the same kind of eyes; hard little shoe-button eyes that just now showed a flare of malevolent triumph.

Pistol in hand, backed by his seven or eight cut-throats, he stood grinning into Battram's face. Evidently he hadn't known the Chicago big shot well; to him Battram was Dude Bullion, now a captive under his thumb.

"Well, Dude!" he jeered. "Surprised?" Then, ignoring McNeil, he looked at the girl and grinned wider. "*Hel-lo*, doll! Say, you're a swell little dish, ain't you?"

Battram had needed to ask himself only once how Mannix had got there. The answer was easy, automatic; capture of the yacht had been the natural first move in the setting of his trap. Cut off on the pier, assailed from shore by vastly superior numbers, the ambushed Chicagoans must either die where they stood, or drown, or be driven aboard.

Admiration of the girl preoccupied Mannix for a space. Then, grin faded, he spoke again to Battram.

"What's the matter, Bullion? Ain't you sayin' hello?"

Battram had been swiftly appraising possibilities, weighing one course against another, and he had come to a decision. He'd certainly do better, by the girl and big Mac as well as by himself, to play to Mannix's error and let things string along as they had begun.

"Why not?" he said. That in itself put him in for it—but what next? How did one big shot talk to another in a situation like this? He could only guess, and he compromised on a crisp and steady, "What's on your mind?"

That was in character, he saw; and his voice, too, passed for Dude Bullion's.

"On my mind? Lotta things," Mannix said. "You ought to guess some of 'em." He glanced at McNeil, who had first stared

open-mouthed when Battram spoke and then nodded thunderstruck approval. "Take that gorilla's rod off of him, somebody! He looks mean."

The girl threw Mannix a red-lipped smile.

"Surprised?" she murmured. "You don't know the half of it. Believe me, I'd rather be out on this sail than back there in Chateau-Thierry. Imagine my nerves!"

"You're all right, beautiful," the gargoyle told her, and turned back to Battram. "Suppose we go sit down somewheres, Dude? You might as well hear the bad news right now, hey?"

The procedure in racket war, Battram deduced from the calm invitation, must be patterned to some extent after that in wars between nations. When the common soldiers had fought and died and one side had finally gained a clear advantage, the generals got together and simply talked.

"Okay," he said—and that might have been Dude Bullion's own word, too.

THE yacht was a hundred-footer, some millionaire's toy in her better days. There was a big glass-sided deck cabin amidships, and there Rubber Face Mannix opened court with his three prisoners of war seated in front of him and his retainers lining the bulkheads forward and aft. A pock-marked man sat beside him, a thick shoulder-bandage visible under a coat that had one sleeve empty.

"Souvenir of last night," Mannix remarked, an eye on the bandaged shoulder. "Remember Turk O'Hare, Bullion? He was the guy with me when we made our original deal."

"Was he?" Battram asked, non-committal.

"Yeah," O'Hare said. "I remember you from that night, Dude. And I ain't forgettin' you at Baybrook, either. First you tommied me, and then you ran that damn sedan clean over me after I picked myself up. The damages'll be on the bill, don't worry!"

Mannix leaned forward.

"Damages! It'll make you dizzy, Bullion, to listen to 'em. Ready?"

"Go ahead."

"I'll break it easy, You laid four grand on the line for usin' this boat tonight, didn't you? Well, you paid and I'm usin' it."

"That's not news."

"No? All right, then. I got another errand for later; but first I'm runnin' out to the *Cornwall Countess* and takin' off that stuff you thought you were goin' to bring in yourself. It just used to be yours. Now it's mine. Hear?"

"I hear."

"That ain't all. I'm kinda dazzled on this dame of yours. Maybe you know what's what in men's clothes, Dude, but you don't know how to dress a woman. I'm goin' to keep her East and dress her right. How about it, baby?"

The girl spoke before Battram could, dimpling at Mannix.

"Don't I have any say about that, big boy? Listen; I've got a good cabaret-singing job in Chicago."

"Aw, be your age," Mannix grinned. "You won't need any job at all in New York. They'll be singin' to you!" He transferred the grin to Battram. "Much obliged for the new momma," he said. "Now come through with the ticket."

"What ticket?" Battram asked—but he knew.

He had anticipated that demand, and already had acted on the anticipation. The key to Bullion's liquid treasure, the torn ten of spades which by Joe Spinelli's whim he had been left holding, was no longer in his pocket. He had held it palmed when he followed Rubber Face into the deck-house; now it was hidden under the cushion of the huge wicker chair he sat in. A stronger card, he thought, to have in the hole than in his hand.

"Don't be simple," Mannix said. "You know what ticket. Would I be here if I wasn't wise to the whole play? Don't we both know that them Limeys out on the *Cornwall Countess* ain't turnin' over a

single case on any guy's face? You got a paper on you, Bullion—or maybe a card."

The girl and McNeil were both watching Battram, tense. He smiled and shrugged. "Maybe," he said, "and maybe not."

"Kick in with it!"

"Sorry."

"Don't try to be smart. Let's have it."

BATTRAM met the angrily sparkling little eyes with a direct and bantering gaze.

"Suppose," he said, "that it was half a card, and that somebody else has it—somebody we left behind?"

Mannix, nostrils jumping, spat out an oath.

"You're a liar, Bullion! You got it on you. Stand up and get your arms outta the way!"

Battram stood up. He could afford to submit to search. The suit he wore was a new one, delivered to him in Los Angeles just before he started east. There was nothing in the pockets to betray him; and as for the little automatic, it would be useless against such odds, anyway.

The gun barely spanned Mannix's palm when he brought it out and stood staring at it.

"Oh, my Gawd!" he ejaculated. "Will you give a look, Turk? It's like what a pansy would carry. And cologne on it!"

O'Hare looked from the tiny pistol to Battram with popping eyes.

"And that's the rod that buffaloes Windytown! Sweet shades of lavender! See if he ain't got a handkerchief up his sleeve, Mannix!"

Battram smiled at the girl and then at McNeil, who was staring as hard at the little gun as Mannix and O'Hare had stared. Comprehension dawned in McNeil's eyes. Suddenly he knew where

that pistol had come from. He spoke up grimly.

"A guy that can shoot like Dude don't need any cannon!"

Rubber Face Mannix, still perplexed by the lightness of Bullion's personal artillery, dropped the pistol into his pocket and resumed his hunt through Battram's clothing. A couple of minutes later he had given up the search in disgust.

"Well, I guess it *wasn't* kidding," he said. "You ain't got it."

"Maybe I could get it," Battram suggested.

Mannix glowered. "You better!"

That gave Battram the cue he had been hoping for.

"Now you're talking," he said promptly. "Just what do you mean by better? What's your proposition?"

Rubber Face scratched his fluttery nose. "Let's hear one from you."

"You want the card, Mannix? Well, set all three of us down in Times Square as fast as you can get us there, and it's yours. That's a promise." Battram glanced at McNeil and threw in that favorite phrase of his. "A promise—on the up and up!"

Mannix stood in thought. He was tempted; at least to the extent, Battram was sure, of trying to wangle himself into possession of that withheld trump without actually releasing his clutch on his prisoners.

"We'll talk some more about that," he said presently, "after I get this other business off my chest. Come out on deck, Turk. I want to see you about somethin'."

CHAPTER X

THE "MERRYMAKER"

MCNEIL edged his chair to Battram's when the deck door had closed. He made light of his wound. Maybe it looked bad, but it was "just a crease on the shoulder."

"You're good, chief, what I mean!" he



murmured sotto voce. "It was like—like Dude had never cashed in."

The girl drew over, too, applause in her eyes.

"Beautiful acting!"

Battram glanced at the pair of gunmen guards left behind by Mannix, and saw them busy in a conversation of their own, off watch.

"Don't know about the acting," he said. "But I'll take a bow on my sleight-of-hand. I've really got the card. Yes—here! How can we play it to get ourselves out of this?"

They couldn't believe he had it. He had to explain; and then McNeil dug out a toothpick and chewed it a while and said, "Maybe it'll be an ace. Lemme think."

The yacht had reached open water and was plowing eastward, lifting to long seas, apparently an innocent pleasure craft on an innocent trip, running lights all properly displayed and decks and cabins bright. Long Island lay to starboard marked only by an occasional struggling yellow gleam, headlands lost in the black night.

There was no chance for a further exchange among the captives; O'Hare came back to sit with them. He grinned maliciously at Battram.

"What a sap, Dude, thinking you could get away with it!" he said. "Why, the minute you hired this boat we knew it. Smart fella, you are! I know of a lotta guys that have been took on rides—but you're the first one I ever see pay for the gas!"

AN HOUR later he pointed to a winking light off to port.

"What's that look like to you, Bullion?" he asked. "The signal from the *Countess*, maybe? Well, she'll just have to lay there and keep blinking until we get around to her."

Some time after that, a new motion of the yacht told Battram that she had changed her course. Apparently she had rounded the tip of Long Island and was pushing on out to sea. He judged her speed

to be about fifteen knots, and so the second winking light which took O'Hare's attention must have been close to forty miles off Montauk.

"Guess that's it," he said and got up and went to the deck door. "Hey, Mannix! Do you see it?"

The yacht veered again, now making directly for the flashing light. Battram counted the flashes. One, two, three—out! One, two—out! One, two, three, four—out! And then the same thing all over again, three flashes and two flashes and four flashes. There wasn't any doubt it was a signal, and no doubt, either, that it was meant for Rubber Face Mannix et al.

The girl was at a port-hole, eager-eyed, when after half an hour's wallowing progress in the trough the shabby bulk of an anchored little freighter came dimly into view. Except for the blinker, the rusty-sided tramp had been all dark before; now at a megaphone hail from the yacht's bridge, she blazed with light.

Over a couple of hundred yards of tossing water, megaphone roared at megaphone.

"What yacht are you?"

"The *Merrymaker*."

"What's your bet tonight, *Merrymaker*?"

"A stack of yellows!"

"Good bet! Coming over! Stand by, *Merrymaker*!"

Davits creaked on the freighter and blocks rattled. One of her boats, loaded to the gunwales, splashed into the water and cut loose and came pulling toward the yacht. Another boat, gaspowered, had been lowered from the far side of the tramp and came chugging around her stern a moment afterward. She had a full load, too, and as the boats came nearer Battram could see it was a human cargo they were transshipping.

Somewhere aft, out of sight from the deck house, the two boats came under the yacht's lee. A din of excited voices arose as the passengers from the freighter

scrambled on deck—chattering voices, weirdly high-pitched.

They came streaming forward, and the sing-song quality of the voices was explained. Chinese! Half a hundred of them, none carrying any baggage except a small package wrapped in what appeared to Battram to be oiled silk. He observed that the packages were identical in size and shape and wrapping.

Mannix appeared directly outside the port-hole at which Battram and the girl were standing. As the Chinese filed past him, he relieved each one of a silk-covered box until finally there was a considerable pile of the boxes behind him.

"Clever!" the girl murmured.

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you guess what's in those packages? Opium! Mannix certainly invented a new one. Instead of taking cash for smuggling Chinese in, he lets them pay with this stuff. Easier for them and at least ten times as profitable for him. Can you see it now? *This* is why Dude drew the line!"

A door opened from the deck and a wizened Chinese in an ill-fitting occidental business suit stepped into the cabin. He stared at Battram and then walked up to him, smiling.

"Mist' Dude Bullion! You 'member Looey Gum?"

McNeil nudged Battram to silence.

"Sure, Dude remembers you, Looey. You bet! He took personal charge, Dude did, when we ran them Boston hatchmen outta Chicago for you last year."

The yellow man twinkled and bowed.

"Many thank," he smiled. "No come back."

THE power boat from the freighter was chugging away with the second boat in tow. Mannix, wet-shouldered, strode into the cabin.

"What's it all about, Looey? You know Bullion?"

"Oh, yuss. Know um plenty. Fine man!"

"Swell!" Rubber Face grinned. "Me and him are great pals."

Again the door opened. O'Hare, who had left the deck house at the approach of the boats, stuck his head through it.

"God sakes, Mannix!" he shouted. "There's somethin' comin' up on us—one of them damn cutters, maybe!"

As he spoke the bright white beam of a searchlight cut suddenly through the night and played dazzlingly on the cabin windows. Mannix rushed past O'Hare and plunged forward along the slippery deck. His shout as he climbed the bridge came back.

"Lights out! Full speed ahead!"

Looey Gum, bewildered, appealed to Battram.

"This my only tlip—just bling few gleenhorn cousin f'om old countly. What now? You please tell me, Mist' Dude?"

"The ocean's a little crowded tonight, Looey," McNeil said. "That's all." Then he whispered to Battram. "Gawd, if it only was a revenue boat—and collared us! Believe me, I'm pullin' for 'em!"

The vessel with the searchlight was many miles away, dishearteningly distant. But when half an hour had passed, Battram knew it had better speed than the yacht. It had come into gun range then, and the boom of a warning one-pounder announced it officially as a cutter.

Directly after the gun had been fired, a barked order sent a couple of deckhands on a dash aft. They returned with high-piled armloads of what proved to be gunny-sacks. Rubber Face thrust his gargoye head through an open port.

"Look, Looey," he said. "We're in a jam. So we're goin' to put your people in them sacks and stow 'em below, see? Then if anybody comes and searches us they'll just look like sacks of supplies. Get me?"

ON DECK, a saffron interpreter was explaining all that to his brother Chinese. Before he had finished, Mannix's men had begun to tie the yellow pas-

sengers into the sacks and to pile the loaded and strongly-roped sacks along the rail.

McNeil looked at Battram with horrified eyes.

"This is too strong for me, chief!" he said huskily. "Do you know what they'll do with them Chinks? Throw 'em overboard, every last one of 'em!"

The girl had heard that. Her face had no color at all except where she had dabbed the rouge in that quick-witted ruse of hers in the Isotta.

"Yes, yes; that's what they mean to do!" she said, answering the incredulity in Battram's dazed stare. "I've heard of it being done—many times. It's the regular trick of Chinese-smugglers when they're being caught up with."

Battram straightened, convinced. His jaw clicked.

"Are we going to stand by and let fifty men be drowned like rats in a bag?"

"Fat chance of stopping it!" grunted McNeil. "We might be goin' along ourself, anyway. But listen! When they come tryin' to put *me* in a sack——"

Battram swung to Looey Gum, covering with a grin his failure to follow all this rapid talk.

"Do you know what's happening? Your 'cousins' aren't going to be put in any hold. They're going to be thrown over the side. Chucked overboard without a chance even to swim for it. Understand?"

Looey Gum understood earnestness, at least.

"You tell me one time more, please!"

BATTRAM didn't have to finish the restatement. He was no more than half way through it when the man of the many cousins was at the port-hole, wildly jabbering. And jabbering with a tremendous effect. Filled sacks began desperately floundering on the deck. Chinese half way into sacks started to struggle, and the more than a score who had not been reached by Mannix's busy cargo-packers

were suddenly producing long knives out of loose sleeves and laying about them.

Pistols cracked on the deck. At each crack a yellow man went down—but there were too many of them to be swiftly disposed of at close quarters. Looey Gum had a revolver himself; through a port-hole he employed it with deadly effect, and when it began banging the white gunmen were thrown into panic and raced for the stern in a fire-spitting huddle.

The guards left in the cabin had gone to join in the *mêlée*. Battram grabbed up a heavy chair and rushed out. A man with a raised pistol got in his way as he raced for the bridge, but the chair came down on his head before the gun exploded and the bullet went into the deck.

Battram didn't even stop to snatch the pistol. The thing to do now, without an

instant's delay, was to heave the yacht to. If anything happened to that searchlight back on the cutter a vessel running dark would never be picked up on a night as black



as this.

He made the bridge in two leaps and stormed into the pilot-house. The yacht had been left to steer herself. The helmsman had his head out the starboard window—an unshaven head topped by a soiled white cap. Battram seized his shoulders and yanked him violently in.

"This boat has changed hands—and I'm the new command!" he said. "Stop right here! Stop her dead!"

THE man was unarmed. He took one scared look at Battram's efficient, menacing fists and then a bell was jangling somewhere below. The engine promptly cut off.

Battram strode out on the bridge just

as the battle took a new turn. From the fo'c's'le a man came charging aft along the starboard deck with two guns blazing. He had a marksman's eye, and at every thud a Chinese dropped. Before he had reached the bridge, the survivors in the group outside the long cabin were in flight.

"Give 'em hell back there!" the two-gun man screamed. "I'm herdin' them for you!"

It was Rubber Face Mannix and, alone, he had all but reclaimed the upper hand.

Battram did not hesitate. Up on the bridge-rail he went. Up and over. He came down, one hundred and eighty pounds of dead-weight, on Mannix's shoulders. They went rolling until Battram had a chance for a clear swing at the enemy's exposed jaw.

The jaw wasn't rubber. Battram felt his knuckles crushing back when they connected with it. But he had finished Mannix. When he rose, the New York big shot lay limp at his feet.

McNeil had seen it.

"Gee, chief!" he gulped. "The racket sure missed something when you went football!"

The battle was over. A moment ago McNeil had slammed a hatch on the New Yorkers' last resistance, and a dozen of the Chinese were standing over it with waiting knives.

Under forced draught, the cutter swept up, trim and white and destroyer-like. McNeil shrugged the unhurt shoulder.

"Guess it'll be the hoosegow for me," he said. "The chief's all right on this—but you'll have to alibi yourself out, Babe, best way you can."

THE cutter had lowered a launch. It came clipping briskly to the side of the stalled yacht. A man in damp ducks, a coast guard officer, climbed over her side. Then a muscular middle-aged man in civilian dress.

"Leave it to me," the girl said calmly. "These are—my people!"

The civilian was gaping at her.

"Jane! How the devil did you get here?"

"On assignment," she said. "And I've found out how the opium's been coming in—closed up our own Narcotic Division case and got one to hand over to the Immigration Bureau, too!"

McNeil's mouth was wide open.

"What, Babe? You—you're an undercover Fed agent?"

She smiled. "Not *all* under cover!" she protested. "Dude Bullion knew it—and helped."

Understanding of a great many things came to Battram then in one blinding flash. He felt small again; very small and foolish. Words completely failed him. He fumbled for the silver case that Mannix had permitted him to retain, and snapped it open.

"Smoke, Mac?"

"No thanks," McNeil said, polite always. He grinned dazedly and tapped his tooth-pick. "Chewin'!"

Battram walked away alone, but in a moment the girl was beside him.

"I told you," she said softly, "that Dude Bullion was fine and—and I liked him lots."

He kept staring off into the drizzle.

"Yes," he said. "You told me."

She put her hands on his shoulders and turned him to face her queer little smile.

"Then may I tell you something else?" she whispered. "You're as much finer than Dude as gold than silver. Listen, Foster Battram, you're—the finest man living."

She fled from him then, answering a call from the after-deck where her civilian co-worker was ripping into those oiled silk packages while white-uniformed sailors from the cutter were indiscriminately disarming Mannix's men and the Chinese.

The night was clammy cold, but Battram didn't notice either the chill or that his coat had been torn open in his brief rough-and-tumble with Mannix. Looking after her, adoring everything about her, he was all warm inside.

Adventurers All

CAVE EXPLORING IN KENTUCKY

I AM nearing forty years of age, my hair is turned almost white, and people ask me how comes it that a man so young in years should have such white hair. But that is part of my experience.

At the age of eighteen, I had the pleasure of visiting a friend in a small town in Kentucky. I spent the greater part of the summer in company with this friend exploring caves so numerous around that part of Kentucky. One morning while in the act of exploring one of the numerous caverns, after hours of creeping, crawling on hands and knees, and finding new thrills in the many different passages heretofore unknown to anyone, we came into a large open area. Lanterns in hand, we paused, looked around and my friend Brent Anderson said, "Jack, this one is sure a find, let's go on a little further."

Brent taking the lead, I followed close behind. All of a sudden he stopped, and upon moving up a few feet I saw why. An open space about eighteen inches wide in the solid rock stretched right across our pathway. One more step and we would have plunged into a chasm. Picking up a few pebbles we sounded out the depth, and with a resolve to return the following day with ropes, we retraced our way. To anyone not familiar with this form of sport, if I may call it so, I will say that the usual cavern seeker keeps information of his finds to himself, on account of the possibility of discovering something of value among these caverns. So on the following morning, bright and early, with lanterns, an extra supply of oil, chalk, to mark our course for the return, hammers and chisels, and a nice sized lunch, including water, we set out. We carried two one-hundred-foot pieces of five-eighths manila hemp rope, and no one knew of our destination, except that we were going exploring. On leaving, Brent whistled for his dog—common bred, large and shaggy, but

a more faithful companion could not be found anywhere. Always, on all explorations the dog accompanied my friend.

Across fields, into the hills, out of the sunlight into the small opening in the hillside, we went, pausing a few moments to allow our eyes to become accustomed to the change of light. Once more we started, Old Bob the dog following on behind, stopping here and there to sniff at the various bugs or worms along the passageway. Within half an hour we were at the start of an adventure we never would forget. In about another half hour, near the crevice we had discovered the previous day, we had made a hole in the rock with a jumper, deep enough to put one of the bars which we had brought along. To this bar we fastened the end of one rope, and fed the balance into the opening.

"Say, Jack, does this hole look any smaller to you than yesterday?"

"Can't say that it does, maybe you are right; I am not the old-timer like you, Brent."

So with a word to the dog to remain and not to wander off, Brent, hand over hand, lantern hooked to his belt, went down into the hole. In a few seconds I followed, and as I descended I noticed the space was hollowed out more, as if the opening we came through were an umbrella, cut in half and apart for some eighteen inches. Soon we were all taken up with the wonder of our new find; on and on, time passing, and ourselves not realizing in our elation that we were so far into the bowels of the earth. Underground streams, the mold and fungus formed into various shapes; sights that were beautiful. Finally, realizing that we must return, we retraced our steps, twelve hours having flown by from the time we entered.

By our marks on the side of the walls we soon found our way back to our rope. Brent took hold, started up, hand over hand, I waiting to hear him say all right.

I looked up; there was Brent suspended at what I judged was the top.

"What's the trouble Brent?" No answer. Down he came, and in the glow of the lantern light, I noticed he was almost as white as chalk. "Jack, we are closed in. The opening has all but closed tight, and if it was not for the rope hanging there I would say we were at the wrong place."

After we calmed down, which was not to any great extent, Brent explained to me how in different sections and caverns the rocks were constantly shifting. Well, there we were trapped like rats. Our food would not last at the most longer than two days, water we could get. How long it would be before our absence would be noticed, and a searching party would set out to look for us, and how long it would take them to find us, time alone would tell. No use to try and find another way out, because we then would be completely and hopelessly lost. We hoped that Old Bob would get tired waiting, would sense that something was wrong and would go home and raise the alarm. Then we thought we might be able to fasten a loop in the rope at the top, and try and cut our way out, but we knew we would starve to death before that could be accomplished. Our one immediate hope was that nature again would open the aperture as it had been when we came across it. Our only hope lay in waiting. Through the weary hours of the night we waited. No sleep, but luckily we had a watch, I having carried mine. Without it, I suppose we might have gone mad, for the waiting was like a lifetime. At intervals one of us climbed the rope to see if there were any signs of the rock opening. It seemed to be about the same. All night, all the next day, no sleep, only that fear of starvation. The

second night when my turn to climb the rope came and I neared the top, lantern in hand, I paused raising it over my head. The crack had started to widen! Was almost three inches wide! I slid down to my companion.

"Brent," I shouted, "it's opening; we are going to get out."

The joy, thrill, the thought of living once more, freedom, it was almost too much. Brent had in the meantime climbed the rope and convinced me that I was not dreaming nor gone crazy. A wait, a happy pair now. Eight hours more, and the hole was large enough for us to squeeze through, and when I say squeeze, I mean squeeze. That we were anxious to get out, cannot describe it at all. Space prohibits me from going into detail of the many thoughts that passed through my mind those hours spent in that hole.

Slowly wending our way through the tunnel—the dog was not in evidence—as we drew near the opening we heard voices. Yes, Old Bob had gone home, the morning after our first night in the cave. The people there had waited, become alarmed, and started to search, Old Bob leading the way. Once more in the bright and glorious sunlight, how good its warm rays felt after the coldness of the cavern. It was then I noticed that my pal's hair was not the same, and I remarked to him on the side about it.

"Well, Jack," he said, "you should see yours."

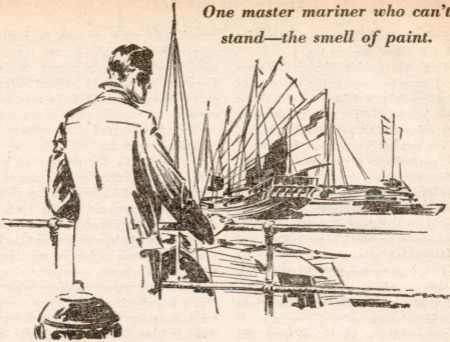
That is why I am so white today. Yes we went back, and timed the working of those shifting rocks. Sometimes three days, again a week, three weeks, sometimes closed, sometimes open. But we never went down in that opening again.

Jack S. Hockman

\$15 For True Adventures

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One master mariner who can't
stand—the smell of paint.



PASSAGE TO CALICUT

By FRANK J. LEAHY

Author of "Watch Your Steam," "Pressure," etc.

SINGAPORE is the meeting place of a hundred peoples. Deep-sea sailors from the South Pacific, the Arctics and the African gold coast; soldiers of fortune from Europe and the Americas; vagabonds from Nowhere; rogues who've somehow missed the wages of roguery; all, eventually drop their lives into the cluttered melting-pot to stir or fester with the black Tamil, the yellow Chinese, the brown Malay, the men of all colors.

Just try the place if you're looking for a rover, for some day he'll surely come to Singapore. I'd just about given up hope of ever again seeing Gerry Hammond, cosmopolite, ne'er-do-well and raconteur, when there I found him one day, as rugged as ever and as handsome, and, as usual, looking typically sea-going, hugging a patch of shade on a sun-baked quay.

"What'n hell have you been doing with

yourself, Gerry?" I asked, steering him into a little pub and to a cool, dark corner of it. "I haven't seen you since you threw the mate of the *Biloxi* off a balcony in the Rue el Tegara in Port Saïd—four years ago."

He kind of half laughed and I knew that, for a moment, he was sort of fingering back through the pages of memory. The pub was agreeably quiet for a yarn; out of range of the din of native chauffeurs' horns and rickshaw boys' bells and bale-laden coolies' shouts for way.

"Port Saïd!" he snorted at last. "That place is the fly in my coffee. But let me tell you about the last time I was there:

I WAS high and dry with having missed a perfectly good ship, of which I was third officer, and after about a week of beach combing I'll tell you that giant of a bronze De Lesseps on the Western Mole

was pointing a finger at me, demanding that I haul my freight, if it had to be in a coasting felucca or a strayed Hakodate junk.

So I said eenie-meenie-minie-mo at the funnels in the inner harbor and went aboard the *Keymark*, an eighty-five hundred ton freighter of British registry, and asked for an audience with the chief bottle-washer.

He was a kind of an overfed edition of a prize pig, that skipper, and he had little black eyes with a kind of a look in them.

"Got a mate's ticket?" he asks.

"Master's," says I.

"Ugh!" he grunts, true to pig-like form, and then he seems to fall to thinking. "How come," he demands to know, "you're on the beach?"

"Well," says I, "I'll tell you. I was watching one of those Arab snake-charmers on the Quai Francis Joseph one balmy evening when the snake jumped right out of the basket and bit me right on the left wrist. And when I recovered, my ship had sailed—and there I was and here I am."

"You'll do," says he, "for a magnificent liar. And since," he adds, "I can use a second mate, I'll sign you on. This ship is bound for Singapore, via Calicut and Rangoon, with wire, corrugated iron, paint and general cargo. She's here, among other reasons, to drop the man you're relieving in the hospital. He thought he knew too much and had an accident. Get the point?"

"I do," says I. "And you'll never have to drop me in a hospital for knowing anything. I'll be unusually dumb, if that's what you're fishing for."

SO I signed on, with no foreshadowing premonitions nor dunnage. And, around that midnight, when the Suez Canal Company ordered the *Keymark* through the highly profitable ditch, a mess of drunken, shore-going officers and crew fell aboard, and the skipper—Sloan's his name—introduced me around, somewhat.

"You'll find this just one little happy family," says he.

"Fine," says I. "And you'll find me, in turn, amiable in matters social and nautical. I can see right now I'm going to like this."

"You'll like it," says he, "as long as you don't get to think you know too much."

What it was all about was beyond my naive comprehension, you might say. Such solicitations didn't dovetail with what's generally demanded of a second officer, so I shrug or something and settle down to standing watch and watch once we've dropped the pilot who takes us through the canal.

We sizzled down through the Red Sea, with the deck seams bubbling pitch, and I got to laughing up my sleeve at that happy family remark. They were a motley, grumbling lot, hailing mostly from the King's blushing shame of a Limehouse and similar regions, with a Finn chief engineer and a squarehead mate and a Lascar bosun thrown in for seasoning. I've seen uglier crews, but only in the movies, and I finally got to thinking they'd been signed under the same condition I had—the demand to be dumb.

Anyway, we run into Aden and discharge a handful of general cargo, then nose out across the Arabian Sea. Then's when a monsoon catches the *Keymark* under her tail and flings her into scud-lashed contortions from Sokotra half way to the Laccadives. And when that wore down to a rain squall, then to a dead, flat calm, I thought I noticed that the *S. S. Keymark* wasn't doing her stuff in a perfectly seaworthy fashion. So I confront the skipper in his cabin.

"Cap'n Sloan," says I, "it seems to me the old gray mare ain't what she used to be since that blow. She's kind of slow on the gallop. She mounts a sea with a kind of a painful surge, if you get what I mean."

This Cap'n Sloan, as I say, was a kind of a pig of a man. He chewed black plug and let it dribble down his chin, and he

sat in an armchair and let himself overflow. It occurred to me I'd seen or heard tell of him before, but I couldn't say which or when. He didn't strike my romantic fancy, anyhow, as a dashing master mariner. He looks at me as I tell him about the sluggishness of his ship, and the way he does it makes me think and realize I've stepped out of my sworn rôle of dumbness.

"Mr. Hammond," says he, expectorating into a cuspidor, "don't destroy the faith I've put in you by getting to exercise the higher mental functions. Are you sure you know how a ship should maneuver and how she shouldn't?"

"I am," says I, "and I have a master's certificate to prove it. I think she's strained her plates and is making water below."

Well, sir, this Cap'n Sloan, believe it or not, nods with a sort of complacency.

"She has," says he, "and she is. Now you just go roll a hoop for yourself and leave the ruddy worrying to me."

SO, A-ROLLING I go. Being a conscientious sort of second officer, however, I couldn't see where Mr. Piggy should do the worrying for the both of us and all hands. Which a blind man could see he wasn't doing at all. And when, the next day, I watched the ship rising to the long swells with the grace of a coal barge, I got a bird's-eye view or something of a cullud gentleman in the woodpile.

And that goes to show what danger there is in warning mortal man not to do a thing. Let him follow his own compass course and he'll do what he should or what he shouldn't, according to the way the wind blows. But just tell him that black is white and he'll surely stretch his imagination to discover the truth, that white is black; or that a demand to be dumb spelled dirty work before the ship fetched Calicut.

"Cap'n Sloan," says I, stepping into the chart room where he was, "do you believe everything'll work out according to plans and specifications?"

"That has all the earmarks," says he, squinting one eye at me, hostile-like, "of a request for information."

"I was just thinking," says I, "of what's happened to certain ships that've been scratched from the register in the last couple of years. There was the *Gypsum Prince* that was abandoned in the Arafura Sea. Then there was the *Axoloti* that went down with all hands in the Mozambique Channel. And the *Ciudad* that was beached on Lord Howe. And the *Wairoa* that disappeared. All of the Chevron Line, or one of its controlled companies, same as this *Keymark*—and none of 'em, according to Dame Rumor, paying dividends."

Sloan closes the chart room door, then turns to burn me with a look.

"Well," says he, "and then what?"

"And then," says I, leaning on the chart-board, and fixing it with a seamanly eye, "it looks like the finger's pointed at the *Keymark* to sink in the Arabian Sea. I haven't exactly gone over the Chevron Line's books," says I, "but times being what they are, I'd say she wasn't making enough money to pay for the gold-leaf on your cap there. Who's there to shed tears, then, when she's lost, except the insurance company? And, by the way," says I, as if the thought just occurred to me, "have you got the pumps going lickety-bang so's all hands'll tell a likely story when the admiralty calls court to order? The Board o' Trade's a shrewd layout, I'm told."

"Meaning by that," says Sloan, "just what?"

"Oh, nothing," says I, "except that they'll have your certificate and kick you down among the long-shore damned if they find you didn't do your skipperly utmost to save her."

"You don't tell me!" says Sloan, coming to a gradual boil. "Well, did I happen to mention that the man you relieved in Port Said had a bad accident—for spouting off what he thought he knew about legalities."

"Seems to me you did," says I, with a kind of a frank expression, "and if you're

figuring I should have one too, just forget about it. I've



no stock in any marine insurance company, and the Chevron Line gave me a good samaritan lift off the beach. If the *Keymark* sinks," says I, "what skin is it off my back whether the cause is an act

of God or an act of common and ordinary barratry—a term meaning——"

"Shut up!" snaps Sloan, advancing on me a pace. "Where do you get that barratry stuff, you blasted, uninvited seelawyer!"

"Enough," says I, "of the personal bouquets!" I reiterate, "it's no cherries off my tree if the *Keymark* faints like a lady at prayer or folds up into native ore, so long as they don't have to write my epitaph. She rode through a monsoon and strained her plates, and that seems to me a good reason for any ship to sink, whether she's paying her owners dividends or not. If that calls for an accident, let 'er happen."

CAP'N SLOAN lets that circulate through his avoirdupois, then he relaxes a bit and bites off a fresh chew of plug.

"All right, mister," says he. "I guess you're feasible enough, with just a weakness in your system for being a wisenheimer. And now," says he, "how about getting to hell out there on the bridge where you belong? Unless you know other yarns, allegories or fables you'd like to spin."

"I've said my picce," says I, "and that plumb exhausts my repertoire."

After a while he comes out on the wing of the bridge where I'm standing, leaning over the dodger, watching the ship pushing

the ocean aside. I'm busy thinking she's not much worse off than she had been hours before, and that this pig-man knows a thing of two about keeping the situation well in hand. But I'm curious, and I ask him in a friendly, ordinary kind of way where he figures on letting her do the deep six.

"Keeping it up, are you?" says he, giving me a look as sour as fo'c'sle hash.

"Well, Cap'n," says I, "why not? Suppose you developed sleeping sickness or fallen arches, what would a dumb kluck like me, who's not in the know, know about the fine finishing touches of barratry?"

"I can see right now, mister," says Sloan, "that something's got to happen to you. And there won't be any hospital."

"What! No hospital?" says I. "Okay. I never could stomach the smell of paregoric and ether, anyhow. But, before I have my senses impaired," says I, "is it the Laccadive Islands you'll sight before you decide to abandon ship? It's a nice place, if I may offer a suggestion."

"Listen here," says Sloan, glancing to see that we've got no audience. "I'll confess you're a tough customer. Why don't you come out flat-footed and name your price to keep your hatch shut?"

"Oh, but no!" says I, looking Cap'n Pig square in the eye. "I hold a hard-earned master's ticket, and I'm not in the market to risk it by being an accessory before the fact. Or after it, either. Especially," says I, warming up, "not for this crooked Chevron Line and a buzzard like you. Now you can put that in your mouth and chew it," says I, "and t'hell with you!"

"That ends it!" storms Sloan. "I'll put you where you belong."

AND he does, according to his point of view. He has me locked up in the forepeak. It was hotter'n the anteroom of hell in there, and twice as unappreciated. All the rest of that day and all that night I laid on a soggy tarpaulin and imbibed the fumes of red-lead, turpentine and shellac. And, the next morning, the carpenter un-

locks the door and hands me a platter of sloppy hash and a bottle of lime juice.

"What you in for?" he asks.

He was a swivel-eyed kind of an individual, that carpenter, named Jewks, and I had a bright idea he was feeling my pulse for contrition, that he might go give Sloan a laugh.

"For the atmosphere," says I. "I'm figuring on turning landscape artist, and I want to get to know my pigments."

"The Old Man says you tried to interfere with the proper navigation of the ship," says Jewks.

"What ship?" says I. "Why, I never saw a ship in my life! This is the rest room of the Chamber of Commerce at Baragawoola, ain't it?"

He claims it's not, and I ask him when he estimates we'll make a landfall, and he tells me maybe never—that the ship seems to be getting pretty loggy by the head.

"There's a Chevron Line freighter, the *Acanthus*, due to cross our course, out of Bombay," adds Jewks. "The skipper's hopin' not to miss her, thinkin' some o' this cargo might be transferred."

"That's thoughtful o' him," says I. "Who but Cap'n Sloan'd be so considerate of the underwriters?"

"You and him don't exactly drink out of the same tin cup, do you?" asks Mr. Sawdust.

"Why, sure," says I. "He weighs a lot in my opinion."

"But you don't weigh much in his," says he.

"Oh," says I, "that's only hypothetical. It's a case of lupus and virtue and the fable of the upset applecart. And as for you," says I, "why don't you go peddle your papers?"

SO HE locks the door again and leaves me to stifle and sweat and listen to the far-away drumming of the screws.

Then, toward late afternoon, I think I hear the lookout report a landfall. Pretty soon after that, Cap'n Sloan, reinforced by the Finn engineer, opens the door.

"No fish today," says I from my luxurious pile of tarpaulin. At the same time, through the open door, I got a whiff of fresh air, and it had the smell of land in it.

"Still the wisecrack, eh?" sneers Sloan. "Well, get this. When the ship goes down, you're going to be the proverbial rat in a trap."

"What does that call for—supplication?" says I.

Then, all of a sudden, I jumped to my feet. I could swim it to shore, I knew, but Sloan knew it before me, evidently, for he pulls a gun and points it right between my eyes.

"Come on," he invites, "make a break."

"Oh, all right," says I, resuming my undowny couch with a kind of a shrug, "have it your own way then. But listen here, Sloan," I add, "how about the court of inquiry? You'll abandon ship under maritime law's perils-of-the-sea clause, but under what clause are you going to answer for leaving me behind? I'm signed on your papers," says I, "and you'd better not depend on the crew to back you up under a barrage of cross-questioning. Think it over."

"Oh, yes," says Sloan, "they'll back me up. This is a hand-picked crew, from a certain boarding-house around Commercial Docks, and the best thing they know is to keep their hatches shut. You'll have died of fever in my report, maybe. So," says he, "I'll see you in hell."

And bang goes the door, and click goes the lock.

A LITTLE later, I hear the ring of the engine room telegraph. Then the clatter of anchor chain. And I get the hunch we're in some sheltered waters of the Laccadives. I wait a long while—being inflicted with plenty of leisure—listening to the sounds of men working on deck, as if the hatches were being opened. After a time, there's a shout through a megaphone, and an answering shout, and that's followed by a large bump and running feet and orders, and I know there's

a ship alongside—that *Acanthus*, out of Bombay.

Well, sir, then begins the transferring of cargo. I slept through the racket all that night, and let my stomach roar through it all the next day. A forepeak isn't exactly atmosphere to work up a stevedore's appetite, but I got to realizing that I hadn't had so much as the smell of food for about forty-eight hours, and I began to resent such neglect. A man may lose his freedom, his balance, or the fillings from his teeth, but when he loses contact with his vitamins he's very apt to go into a huddle with himself and figure out and end run for the loaves and fishes.

Such disgusting ravenaciousness, so to speak, brought me to discover the crow-bar which that bottle-head of a Jewks had left in a half-filled barrel of red lead. That, I decided, should certainly be the jaw-bone of an ass to slay any Samson or pry open any forepeak door. But, on the other hand, says I to myself, what could be the use of breaking out now, with all hands and the ship's cat out there to seize, overtake and overhaul me before I could get the fresh air out of my eyes?

So I sat tight, fondling the crow-bar and listening to the sounds of working cargo. Said cargo being, ten to one, due to be sold by the *Acanthus* in some out-world port for a revenue over, above and on top of the insurance paid by the unwitting underwriters for its loss in the *Keymark*. All of which, with my dissatisfied stomach, I didn't give a fiddler's octave about.

After I'd suffered the impatience of Job for about another eight hours, I woke up to find I'd slept, and that it was night, and that the working of cargo had ceased, and that my alarm clock was the rattling of anchor chains.

The *Keymark* was off again, but she wouldn't go far, I knew that. I could hear the water sloshing around in her holds, and there was no lift and fall to her at all. Her next port of call was the lee shore, and, sick as I was, I felt kind of sick about it. Here was a ship, says I to my

better self, fallen into bad company, and I shed a tear or two for her out of the kindness of my starvation and painter's colic.

Then I climbed to my feet, thinking, like the walrus they talk about, that the time had come. But you could have knocked me over with an axe, I was that weak on my pins.

Just then, there's an alarm blast of the whistle and the jingle of the engine room telegraph. That's topped by a lot of confusion that means to me that they're swarming from all quarters and taking to the boats.

And then, when all's about quiet on the western front, there's the sound of foot-falls outside and the voice of Cap'n Sloan.

"Hey, you, in there!" he calls. "Are you dead yet?"

"Open this door," says I in snappy retort, "and you'll find me the livest dead man you ever saw, you fat chunk o' dried shark's liver!"

Sloan laughs at that one—a sound like an iron ball rolling down a cobbled street.

"Too bad!" says he, not to me, but to whoever he was talking to. "He's dead, poor fellow."

And away they go, and pretty soon there's silence all through the ship.

THEN I went to work on that door. I was weaker'n Aunt Bella's pet pom-pom, but my confinement had also inflicted me with a physical and mental turpitude sufficient to batter down the gates of the Great Wall. I spat a curse or two, and that helped me no end to get a bight under the outside latch with the sharp point of the bar. Then, with a couple of heaves and a couple of ho's, I crashed through and went sprawling.

When I'd regained my equipoise, I peered cautiously over the rail. I could see the boats splashing away through a lot of moonlight for the rocky beach about two miles away as the crow flies. And I could also see that the good ship *Keymark* was about to become a memory.

Hanging between unconsciousness and a faint I wavered between doing a swan dive to make a swim for it and doing one other thing.

I decided on the other thing.

I hurried aft and ducked into the engine-room. I wanted to duck into the galley, but there was no time for such inconsequential as food. It amounted to playing my hunch, or Sloan's "poor fellow" would be my epitaph.

All was bright and cheery in the engine-room. Everything but the main engines was banging away to its heart's content. Of course that's as it should be, this being barratry of the first water. That it was barratry, I learned for certain in the split second it took me to find that the main and bilge injection valves were as wide open as Joe E. Brown's mouth. Right away I closed the main and left the bilge open. The pumps went right on pumping without missing a stroke, just as had, unquestionably, been the case through the past several days under the management of the chief engineer. Now I had them discharging water from the filling holds, instead of pumping it in.

I gave the steam a boost by the difficult operation of opening the master fuel-oil-valve a fraction of an inch, then I dragged my victorious, if somewhat emaciated self back on deck.

The ship was rolling like a sailor on shore, and drifting. I calculated, at the rate of about a half knot an hour, a little away from the land.

There being nothing further I could do at the moment, the thought occurred to me that the partaking of a little nourishment might not be altogether beside the point.

And did I eat! And ingurgitate deep draughts of the skipper's private stock of laughing-water! And arm myself with a revolver of his I found he'd left for me in case I wanted to blow my brains out!

All of which rose-colored glasses raised my disconsolation beyond all laws of gravity. But I knew I wasn't through yet

with that hand-picked crew. I knew they were watching for the ship to sink, and when she didn't sink, after a reasonable passage of time, they'd be so mortified and discomposed that they'd be back out to see what was what about what.

WELL, came the dawn. And out across the water from the beach came the boats. When I saw the whites of eyes, as according to traditional naval custom, I fired from the rail, despatching a bullet as close to Cap'n Sloan's head as I could and still miss him.

That suspends rowing activities within speaking distance, but Sloan stands up in the stern sheets of his boat and shakes a fist at me.

"Now, don't be melodramatic, Cap'n," I called. "Sit down! You're rocking the boat."

"Drop that gun!" he yells. "We're coming aboard."

"Wait just a minute, Sloan," says I. "Aren't you the party of the first part who officiated at the abandonment of this ship? And didn't you forget to leave a notice on the door stating when you'd be back from lunch?"

"Never mind the smart cracks," says the cap'n. "Drop that gun or we'll swarm aboard, and then God have mercy on your soul."

"You'll do what?" says I squinting down the sights, pulling the trigger and boring a neat hole in the bottom of his boat. "Better not take a chance, Cap'n. I'm the worm that's turned, and the rat that's wriggled out of your trap, and I'm as bloodthirsty as hell."

"Look here, you!" says Sloan, in a kind of a tone of voice. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Wisenheimer. If you let us come on board, I'll pay you two hundred pounds of my own money. That's liberal enough as a bid for your silence and co-operation. I thought the ship was sinking from strained plates," says he, "but something must have happened to stop the leakage. I think I'll be able to take her safely

to Calicut, as I see it now. How about it?"

"Cash in advance?" I demand to know.

"Well," says he, with a kind of a gulp, "yes."

"All right," says I, "pull up to the sea-ladder. But only you come aboard. Nobody else, see? I've been a lonesome man," says I, "and too much company all of a sudden may give me a relapse."

The cap'n goes into conference with his oarsmen over that, and then the boat's pulled alongside. He climbs up and over, and I'm there to welcome him, gun still very much in hand. I order the boat to shove off and keep at no less of a distance than the other one.

"And as for you, Sloan," says I, "let's see the color of your money."

He fishes into a money belt that's buckled around his avoirdupois and fingers off the aforesaid amount and hands it to me.

"And now," says I, giving him a look fierce enough to almost scare myself, "you can do an about-face and haul your freight right down into the engine room with me."

"Why," says he, "what do you mean?"

"Business," says I. "And never mind the childish questions. Get going."

I yell at the men in the boats that if there's any attempt to swarm aboard I'll drill their beloved master of ceremonies to see what makes him bloat. Then I prod Sloan with the gun toward the engine room and down into it.

Still all's well down there. That's the beauty of these oil-burners. They're like women. Give the one a little jet of oil to burn, and the other a little dish of applesauce to flatter the vanity complex, and they'll both keep steam up till the fuel supply is exhausted. Anyway, the boilers are still boiling, and the pumps are still pumping, and the dynamo's still dynamiting. So I maneuver around to start the main engines.

"I've also got a first assistant engineer's ticket," says I, by way of explanation and apology. "That's how I'm so intelligent below decks as well as above. You might try for one yourself, Sloan, when you find

yourself high and dry on a deader'n dead master's ticket."

"I demand to know what this means," says he, all sweaty under the collar.

"Get on deck," says I, "and I'll tell you."

UP WE go, leaving the engines turning over at slow speed ahead and the main feed pump adjusted according to my sense of the wet and dry question. Right up to the bridge we go, in fact. And off across an intervening distance or so, the two boats, with their hand-picked and somewhat flabbergasted loads, are trying to keep pace with the ship—ineffectually, or adverbs to that effect.

"Now," says Sloan, when I've given the wheel a turn with my unarmed hand, "speak up or I'll——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," says I. "We're off for Calicut, or as close as we can come to it with no crew or other artificial aid."

"Double-crossing me, hah?" he snarls, fit to explode.

"Not any," says I. "I'm just a young man trying to get along in the world, and I don't like the smell o' paint. Here," says I, "take the wheel. What'n hell do you think this is—a free ride at Coney?"

He so did take the wheel. There was nothing else for him to do, I having his artillery, goat and heretofore authority.

And then, right about when I figured all the main bearings and the boiler tubes should be smoking nicely from lack of proper nursing, a Calicut-bound freighter of the Red Ball Line comes plowing up to providentially relieve the so-called sitch-iashun. I ran to raise a distress signal, and when it was answered I megaphoned something or other about the desertion of the crew, and requested the loan of a hand or two. And, at the next crack of dawn, one ship, *Keymark*, of the Chevron Line, steamed into Calicut, Madras, India. Whereupon, Cap'n Sloan goes ashore with a pale face and no ship's papers to do a lot of useless explaining, and yours truly goes ashore with two hundred quid in filthy

lucre and no dunnage to do a lot of plain and fancy celebrating.

GERRY HAMMOND paused, then gave a little laugh. Across the quay a big freighter was being loaded by sweating coolies whose singsong, as they trotted up to the slings with their sacks, filled the lazy air with sleepy sound. He watched the lading for a moment, in the raconteur's inevitable hesitation preceding denouement, then grinned at my frown.

"What's the matter, sailor?" he asked. "Don't you like my story?"

"I've heard better, and from more reputable sources," I replied. "Times just seem to be worse than I thought when a man of your endowments will let a rascal like that Sloan get away with attempted barratry."

Hammond snorted.

"All he got away with you could hide under a short fingernail," he said. "Good Lord! His ship was without a crew and empty of much cargo, and her plates weren't strained for a nickel. They socked him that hard, you can bet on it, that the command of a coasting dhow will be the best berth he can hope to get from now on and henceforth."

"And you," I probed, impatiently, "got nothing for your trouble but passage to Calicut—or what?"

"Well," he laughed, "I suppose I should give you the payoff before you start gnashing your teeth. When Sloan locked me in the forepeak, intending to let me drown there, he erased, obliterated, and otherwise destroyed all evidence of my having

signed on in the *Keymark*. That left me to be considered by the court of inquiry as neither officer, fo'c'sle hand, passenger, nor stowaway. It reduced, or elevated, me to the rank of a possible salvor of a

ship abandoned on the high seas. Then, from a possible salvor, I was proven the actual salvor—and, sir, was then awarded, according to the beneficial benefits of maritime law, twenty-five per cent of the \$75,000 value of the salvaged ship and remaining cargo. Not bad, eh?"

"No," I admitted. "Not bad at all."

"And not good," added Hammond. "And please don't interrupt when I'm multiplying my usual poverty by my unusual intelligence. That two hundred quid handed me by Sloan for letting him come back on board—remember? Well, when the *Keymark* investigation was over, I took said money to one Jacob Jerome, president, general manager and chief crook of the Chevron Line and laid it on his desk.

"Mister," says I to him, "this plurality of monetary units was paid me originally for my silence and coöperation. It's yours in exchange for the seventy-five per cent of the S. S. *Keymark* which I don't own."

"Are you crazy?" snarls Jerome.

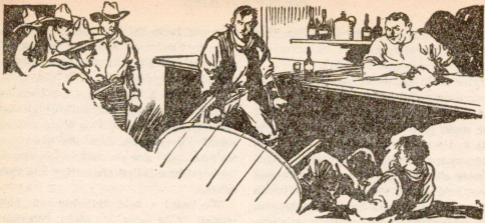
"I wouldn't doubt it," says I. "My trip in the *Keymark* may be responsible, but, more likely, it was the trip I made as bosun in your *Gypsum Prince*—that ship, you know, that you ordered abandoned in the Arafura Sea before she even cleared Sydney Head. Or maybe I'm crazy because you ran the *Ciudad* on Lord Howe Island in a doldrum, in spite of my argument, as third officer, with her rat of a skipper. Or maybe it's because I know all these things that you've got away with," says I, "when my sanctimonious duty is to confide in my pal, the Board o' Trade. Now, I have a fountain pen," says I in high-powered conclusion, "if you have a dotted line."

Again Gerry Hammond paused and looked out across the quay.

"Did it work?" I asked.

"Did it!" he laughed. "Well, I'll leave to your eyesight. There lays the *Keymark* herself, loading rice for the States. I'm her skipper and I'm her owner—and if I didn't hate the smell o' paint so, I'd freshen her up a bit."





FIGHTING MEN

By FOSTER-HARRIS

Author of "Red Breath," "Two Quarts of Hell," etc.

*The pipe-liner Cats loose their water-boy
but solve a curious puzzle.*

HUH? Oh, they're pipeliners—cats we call 'em here in the oilfields. The hardest workers and the roughest, toughest street scrappers in America.

Fighting men—boy, listen to 'em holler!

Yeah, they're a fighting breed. It's mighty seldom you find a coward among those boys. Sometimes, maybe, you think you do and then, like as not, something comes up and you discover you were dead wrong. Like I was about young Tom Daggett and old Pete Jones, when I was boss of a ditching gang for the old Gibraltar Pipeline outfit, in the palmy days up at Sanderson, Oklahoma.

Never told you that one? Buy the drinks, boy and here goes! Back in the days when some of the lines were still screwlines, this was, and not all welded jobs like they are now. Screwliners, they called us, mane-and-tail boys, meaning we had to work like a horse and in some ways that was a damn good description!

All day we'd battle rock and hardpan and clay, and then after supper maybe we'd take the trucks and go into town and carouse half the night, and the next day do another full day's work. And payday—boy, Sanderson was wide open then, right at the peak of its boom, a big, flush oilfield and as tough and hard a boom town as you ever saw. But when we come in on payday nights we sure made it plenty tougher and harder.

Old Pete Jones was the water-boy for my gang. Now that's a kind of funny job for a grown man to be holding, generally it's just a half-grown kid that carries the dipper and bucket, but old Pete had it. He'd been with the gang since before I came on the job.

He was a small, leathery, silent man, one of these guys you can't tell just how old they are, but he was old enough, all right. He had faded, bitter, blue eyes and nearly always you'd see he kept his mouth tight shut in a thin, puckery line and—

well, there was something about him that told you his story even if he never did spill it himself—and he didn't.

The world had kicked and shoved him around an awful lot, you knew that without telling. He'd got the dirty end and the mean jobs and the nasty breaks, and life had sort of run over him regardless, the way it does to folks sometimes. And, getting older and grayer and more stooped over, he'd sort of folded into himself with the years, silent and hopeless—taking it, you understand, because there wasn't anything else he could do, but just one of life's failures—and knowing it.

Sometimes he'd go into town with the boys and sit around a while with them, smiling sort of pathetically, but he'd never talk much and he wouldn't drink anything stronger than soda pop and he steered clear of fights like they was deadly poison.

Well, of course, that was generally all right with the boys. He was an old man, mighty old to them—they averaged about twenty-one, I'd say, just the age when a man's fullest of the Old Nick and spoiling for a nice, friendly fight wherever he can pick it—and they didn't expect him to pitch in and help them ordinarily.

BUT sometimes, you know, there're exceptions to all rules. Cats are an awful clannish lot, always sticking up for each other when necessary, and if one of them gets into more trouble than he can handle, why all he's got to do is holler and any other cat within hearing distance will come a running to jump in and help him.

No matter if they've just got through having a big fight among themselves, let some other gang jump on a cat and here all the doggone cats come piling in to help him. They're just that way, clannish. They fight with their fists, cats do, and usually you'll not find one gunman or knifer in a thousand of them. And, like all fist fighters, they hate gunmen.

One pay-day night big trouble arrived with a boom. Me and old Pete and a couple of the other boys was sitting at

a corner table in the Bean Soup Kid's place in Sanderson when a fight started up front and all of a sudden a six-gun started talking death.

Ever hear a forty-five start booming through the screams and yells of just an ordinary fight? Well, it's a blood chilling sound, I'll tell you, especially when you ain't packing a gun yourself and you know the boys those bullets are tearing into ain't either.

We heard a wild, belling yell, high pitched, "Yo, cats! Cats! Gibraltar, gang up!" and we come up to our feet with our back hair standing on end.

It was some of our guys in trouble. Some cat, armed with just his two fists, screaming for his buddies to come help him while that killer whoever he was blazed away with that gun. And we was cats, we had to go to him.

THE packed crowd in that place was stampeding like a herd of locoed steers, diving headfirst out the doors, through the windows, under tables, anywhere to get away from those bullets. You could hear 'em hit and ricochet and scream. And then the crowd sort of busted open like a bombshell right in front of us and I caught a glimpse of the gunman, a big hombre with a pistol in each hand, jumping sideways along the bar and slamming lead regardless at a guy behind him—a cat, that other guy, hit already, one of our gang and without even a pocket knife on him, I knew that.

Crazy wild to get away from those spitting guns, the crowd was diving every direction. There was a little guy right next the bar, a spunky little hellion and he made a jump and grabbed the big gunman's arms from behind, trying to force those two muzzles down towards the floor.

It was like a mouse attacking an elephant. For just a second though, he did lock that big killer's arms to his sides, jerking his guns down. There was a wide, clear space about the two of them, maybe ten or fifteen feet. The closest man to

them was old Pete Jones and then, I suppose, me and the two cats, on the other side of the table.

Just a split second, while those two fought. But the unarmed boy that dirty gunman had been shooting at was a cat, remember and the little guy fighting with him was a cat, one of our timekeepers. Old Pete Jones was closest. As a cat there was nothing else he could do but dive in and help.

He didn't. He whipped around, his face white as a sheet and jumped crazily for an overturned table. One of the boys beside me went over the top of the table we was standing beside in a great, head-first dive—he must have dove ten feet through the air—straight at those two, and me and the other cat went after him.

YEAH, I was scared pink, I'll admit it. Jumping at a blood crazy killer with a gun in his hand is a grand way to get yourself permanently killed. But we was all the same litter of cats, you understand. Under the code that was what we had to do.

The big gunman tore loose just before we hit him and whirled, but he didn't do it quite quick enough. Driving like a shell, the big boy in front of us hit him in the belly with his head. They smashed back against the bar and then me and the other boy was on him.

He was a regular giant of a guy, strong as two men and he fought like his veins were full of hellfire, but we got those guns away from him and we was just getting ready to pull him into little pieces and stomp on the pieces when interruption arrived.

A voice we knew lifted with a sort of cold, crackling snap. "Stop that! Get away from that man! Everybody—stand still!"

It was Dick Brazil, Sanderson's John Law, and we obeyed him, pronto! He was that kind of a Law. It got still in that big place and Brazil come over to where we'd untangled ourselves off the big gun-

man and he reached down and pulled the big boy up to his feet.

"You again, Morrell?" he said, in that cold, deadly calm voice of his. "Warned you, didn't I? Somebody tell me what happened?"



Somebody told him, in a shaking, excited voice. This guy, Morrell, had started it with one of our boys and

then when the cat was licking him proper, he'd pulled his hardware—on an unarmed man. Our boy was on the floor, hit bad and two other guys had got winged. Morrell had been shooting at unarmed men—knowing they were unarmed.

NOT more'n half the big gunman's size, Brazil was looking up at him with those cold, blue eyes of his, like bits of ice. You could see the blood draining out of Morrell's face. We'd hammered him up quite a plenty, but it wasn't what we'd done that was affecting him now. He was afraid, deathly afraid now and everybody there knew it.

Brazil turned his head and looked at where they were working over the wounded cat. Then he bent over and picked up one of Morrell's guns, flicking the gate open, starting to spin the cylinder and jack out the empty shells, and at the same time talking to Morrell in that grisly, quiet tone.

"If that boy dies, you'll follow him," he said. "Usin' a gun on a man who wasn't heeled. I warned you, Morrell. Now, one way or another, you're getting it."

He took some cartridges out of his belt and filled Morrell's gun. Then he stepped over and laid the gun on the bar beside

the big guy and stepped back. He didn't say another word, his hands were hanging loose and empty at his sides and his own gun, under his coat, wasn't even visible as a bulge. But just the same that silence seemed to thicken and grow until you could almost taste it.

It was the challenge direct to this two-gun guy, you understand, and Morrell was afraid to take it. He stood there, face white as a sheet, licking his lips, but not making a move. After a long moment Dick Brazil stepped over and pocketed the gun. "Come on, you yellow coward," he said quietly to Morrell. "If you won't take it that way, you'll get it another."

They went out. I reached up, kind of gingerly, to feel an eye that had got in the way of somebody's fist and was closing fast. I was thinking of what Brazil had called Morrell, "You yellow coward," and then, by golly, I was hearing it again, the identical words, right behind me.

I WHIRLED around. It was Buck Thomas, the guy who had dived at Morrell, saying it to Pete Jones, who had just come from behind his upturned table. And he was saying it in that low, hard, insulting tone a guy uses on somebody he just plain despises. "You yellow coward." Then he turned his back.

I saw something that looked like angry, bright tears start to leap up in old Pete's faded eyes. He opened his mouth and closed it without a sound. Then he just turned on his heel and was gone.

Well, that wasn't very fair of Buck Thomas because after all Pete was an old man and this hadn't been his fight. And it is asking a whole lot of a guy to say that, barehanded, he should ought to tackle a killer with a smoking pistol in each fist, just because that crazy killer has shot somebody who works in the same outfit the guy does.

But old Pete had been closest to Morrell and when that timekeeper grabbed him, Pete could have jumped in and helped hold him for just the split second

it would have took for us to get there too. As it was, we'd been darn lucky one of us hadn't got shot too. Old Pete was supposed to be a cat, but instead of acting like a cat should, he'd turned and run.

Even so, I don't think Buck would have called Pete so prompt and hard like, if Buck hadn't been mad—and twenty-one. You'll blurt out lots of things like that when you're a young squirt that you'll learn not to say when you get older and find out that lots of times you're wrong in your hasty ideas.

But our gang, like I said, was young guys, with one or two exceptions. Aside from old Pete I reckon Joe Mahon was the oldest man in the outfit, and he wasn't more than forty.

WE GOT our wounded man taken care of and then we started back to camp. Old Pete was missing. All the way out the boys kept talking it over, speculating on how hard a jolt Morrell would get. There wasn't any doubt that he'd get plenty, because he'd done the one thing that was sure punishment in Sanderson. He'd shot an unarmed man. You could do pretty near anything else you wanted to in Sanderson and get away with it, shoot it out with him, beat him to death with your fists, anything like that as long as he had anything like a fair chance. But shooting a guy who couldn't shoot back—well Dick Brazil was poison on that kind of stuff and over in the county seat was an old judge who was double distilled poison on the same—so Morrell was cooked.

The boys hardly mentioned old Pete at all. Somebody just said, yeah, I saw him run, and then there was a silence, and then somebody started talking about something else. I started wondering, sort of uneasily, just what they'd do to Pete when and if he came back.

Oh, they wouldn't hurt him physically, I knew that. But there's other things you can do to a man beside hurt his body, and sometimes those other things are a

lot worse. Yeah and young, husky fighters like those boys, seeing everything black or white, good or bad and no shades between, can be mighty cruel at times without realizing just how unfair they are.

Well, the next day old Pete was out there as usual, carrying his buckets and dipper. I peeled my eye, ready to snatch the head off the first guy who made a dirty crack, but nobody did. They let him alone, all but Joe Mahon, who treated him as usual. But as far as the rest was concerned, old Pete might have not even been there.

AND that was the cruelest thing they could have done. Because they'd kind of accepted Pete as a brother cat before that, kidded him like they did each other and made him feel he was one of them. Now—well he was outside. Yellow. As far as they was concerned, he just didn't exist any more.

It hurt him, you could see that and it made me right mad. Because it was mean. But you can't lick forty tough young giants just because they don't act pleasant and friendly to a water boy. Anyway I figured they'd get over it soon, so I just waited.

It was that afternoon we took on Tom Daggett to replace the guy who had been wounded.

He was a slim, young fellow and I wondered as I watched him start out if he'd be big and strong enough to stand the gaff. Oh, you understand, mane and tail work like that don't take a lot of skill, but it does take a mighty strong back and a weak mind as they say, and if a man's not mighty husky and used to hard labor, it'll just about kill him, for a while anyways. I was mighty afraid this new boy wasn't tough enough.

However, I was wrong. It about killed him the first few days, but he stuck like a fighter and pretty soon he was rounding into as good a 'liner as we had in the gang. He got into a couple of fights with the other boys, got licked proper once and,

I'd say, won the other scrap and the gang took him in as a brother. He was a cat.

A friendly, young hombre, he was nice to old Pete too and that was something else I liked about him. Because poor old Pete sure needed friends. Aside from Joe Mahon, young Tom Daggett was the only other cat in the outfit who treated him as if he even existed. He was a—what do they call 'em?—oh yeah, a pariah, a regular pariah. And having his mates treat him that way hurts a man deeper than any physical punishment ever could. That kind of stuff goes inside and hurts the soul.

I KEPT expecting old Pete to quit. In his shoes I would have. But jobs are mighty scarce in the oil country for old men and he knew it only too well, I reckon. He might not find another and even a pariah has to live. He stuck—maybe there was something dogged in him that just wouldn't let him quit, that made him clench his puckered old mouth tighter and narrow his faded eyes and go on no matter what they did to him.

Well, one night we was sitting outside the mess tent, old Pete and young Tom Daggett and Joe Mahon and me when an odd thing happened.

It was just about dusk. Some of the boys was pitching horse shoes over to one side and the teamsters were coming in, with the trace chains clanking as the big horses went by; and you could smell the dust and blackjack thickets and wood-smoke from the cook fire. Tom reached into his hip pocket for his bandanna and as it come out a billfold came with it and fell to the ground and opened and a picture dropped out.

It was one of these little, old tintype things, like they used to make for you at county fairs and carnival shows, long, long ago. Young Tom reached down, picking it up as careful as if it was priceless, wiping it off on his handkerchief and then he saw we was looking at him, so he passed the picture to me, with a little smile.

It was a picture of a square jawed man in a big, black hat, crushed down on top



like they used to wear them in the old days and there was an officer's star on his unbuttoned vest. He wasn't what you'd call a good looking man by any stretch of the imagi-

nation, but his face was lean, clean cut and powerful and even in that faded tintype his eyes looked out at you, absolutely straight and clear and strong. The kind of a Law you could bet on being square and efficient to your last nickle, that's what he looked like.

"My Dad," said Tom softly as I glanced up at him and somehow there was all the pride in the world in his quiet voice. "He—was killed before I was born. Buck Daggett. Squarest peace officer the West ever had. Even hear of him, Mac?"

I SHOOK my head, passing the picture on to Joe Mahon. "Mother used to tell me about him," Tom went on, still in that soft, proud voice. "He wasn't afraid of anything. A gun fighter, but straight, clean—what you'd call a man—"

Boy, I wish I could say it the way that kid did! If I had a son and he'd talk about me that way—well, I'd be ashamed it wasn't so, but proud! Man, how!

I heard somebody's slow, harsh breath to my left. I turned my head and saw it was old Pete Jones staring at that picture and just then some of the boys come around the tent and yelled for Tom to come join 'em in some horseplay or other they was cooking up. Tom jumped up with a grin, took the picture from Pete's fingers and put it away careful and away he went with the other guys.

I struck a match and put it to my pipe and looked at old Pete out of the corner of my eyes. He was staring down at his hand and on his wrinkled, leathery face

was one of the oddest mixtures of emotion I ever saw on a face. Amazement and incredulity and memory and hate—boy, you could fairly feel the hate on that silent, twisted mug of his.

All of a sudden he laughed and it wasn't pretty laughter. It was a hard, short, ugly sound that fairly lifted your back hair.

"Buck Daggett!" he says, almost as though he was speaking to himself. "The dirty, drunken coward! So that's his son! His mother—tellin' him that, about Buck Daggett!"

WELL, we didn't say anything for a long, long minute. Old Pete reached out a gnarled claw of a hand and closed it like it was closing on a throat and the hate on his face, the black hate—man!

"Uh—you knowed Buck Daggett?" says Joe Mahon in a too casual sort of tone. It's not etiquette to ask questions like that about a man's past in the oil country, but Joe did anyhow.

Old Pete Jones laughed again. "Yeah, I knew him," he answered, almost in a whisper. "But not—like that boy said. He was a drunken, yellow skunk! Fast with his guns and mighty loud and brave when he knew he was quicker than the other man, but when he didn't know—yellow to the guts! He let a cheap, tin horn gambler run him clear out of the country right when his wife was gonna have a baby. And she told that poor little kid—that!"

His mouth closed suddenly, like a trap and he got up, brushing his hand over his face. There was smoldering hell in his eyes. "I—sorry I told you that," he muttered. "Don't you spill it to young Daggett! He's a nice, young guy and I like him. But his Dad—" He turned and went quickly off into the gathering darkness.

Joe Mahon and me sat there for maybe five minutes, not saying a word. Then Joe eased a long leg out from under him and breathed hard.

"Well, I'll be damn," he whispered. "I'm damned. What on earth you reckon Buck Daggett done to him anyways?"

I shook my head. There'd been hate in Old Pete's voice when he mentioned Buck Daggett's name, searing, soul bitter hate, the kind that stays and gets stronger and stronger through the years. Hate—boy, I sure wouldn't admire to have anybody hating me like that!

"I don't know," I answered Joe. "Must have been a plenty."

WELL, the next two or three days I kept an eye on old Pete. He'd said he liked young Tom and to all appearances he did, but sometimes a guy who carries a hatred like that down through the years will try to take it out on the next generation if his real enemy has gone on beyond the reach of any earthly hates. Not likely, but it does happen.

But I was wrong again, looked like. Pete didn't do nothing. He and Tom got along just as well as ever, as far as I could see, good friends. If anything he seemed friendlier to Tom than he'd ever been to anybody else in the outfit. But sometimes I'd see him just sort of glancing at Tom when the boy wasn't looking and there'd be a gnawing, bitter something in his old, faded eyes, a something—oh, I can't make it plumb clear in words, that look, but it was disturbing, I'll tell you that. And it seemed like he was always somewhere around Tom too. It kept me on edge wondering if something wasn't going to happen.

Joe and me had kept our traps shut about what Pete had told us, because he'd asked us to, and after all it wasn't our business; but as I noticed the way Pete kept watching Tom I began to get more and more uncertain and wondering whether or not I better get Tom aside and just quietly wise him up a little. I thought it might be a good idea.

But, one thing and another, I didn't get a chance or couldn't make up my mind. And then, one night, a few of us was in

Sanderson. It was a couple of days before payday, so most of our outfit was broke and had stayed in camp. But I'd had to go in, with some reports, and Tom Daggett and Joe Mahon and old Pete Jones had come along with me. There it was again, you see, old Pete hanging around where Tom was again.

The boys dropped off at a pool hall to shoot a few games until I got through my business and I drove on to the company offices. I finished up there quite a bit sooner than I'd expected and come back, just in time to sit in on an odd, grim scene.

AS I went in the door of the pool hall, I noticed this guy in front of me, a great, big hombre, with a hard, still face and eyes like pieces of glass and his coat bulging just a little bit, under his left armpit. But you didn't need that bulge to tell you. One look at his face wized you up plenty that this bozo was a gunman, a killer.

There was three or four guys with him, hangers on, scum, with grins on their hard faces as though they expected to see some fun. Young Tom Daggett and Joe Mahon were at the front table, with old Pete setting on a bench against the wall, watching 'em play, smiling vaguely, but that strange something still in his eyes and his eyelids drawn down, covering it up.

The big hombre in front of me walked straight to Tom Daggett, grabbed him roughly by the shoulder and whirled him around and then he laughed. But there wasn't any mirth in that laugh. It was hard as iron, cold, sneering.

"You dirty, little rat," he snarled in a flat, ugly tone. "Knowed I'd meet you again somewheres. I'm just gonna kill you now—that's all. Got hardware on you?"

He stepped back and his right hand come up to his coat lapel. I could see Tom Daggett's face over his shoulder, white and still, but his jaw set and his blue eyes straight as a beam of light. He didn't have on any coat, just a light, khaki shirt and

anybody with half an eye could have told there wasn't a weapon on him anywheres.

"You know I haven't, Renner," he answered quietly. "I'm not wanting trouble with you. Go on, get out!"

THE gunman stepped back another step and I saw the muscles under his coat go tense. All of a sudden it was deadly still in that room. I set myself to make a wild jump for that big back.

"For God's sake, don't, Bud!" says one of his backers in a hoarse, frantic whisper. "He ain't heeled, that's the truth. They're death on that here—you gun a man that ain't heeled and they'll hang you, sure as hell!"

Straight goods, that, and the big gunman seemed to know it too. His hand come down from his coat lapel and he started to move forward. "All right then, I'll take him apart with my bare—" he began and Joe Mahon interrupted him.

"No you won't, tough guy!" Joe snapped, grabbing his cue with both hands and swinging the butt around. "You're twicest his size. You make one pass at him and we'll gang you and bust you up so bad you'll fill two cemeteries."

I come out of my dumb coma at that and

jumped past the gunman to stand beside Joe and Tom. "That goes, big boy," I said. "You're too big. Take out now or you'll regret it—if you live."



There was a filmy, glassy look in that big guy's eyes, like a maddened rattlesnake's, as he stared at me, then looked at Tom again. He was twice the kid's size. Against him, in a fist fight, Tom would have had about as much chance, I reckon, as a rabbit fighting a bulldog.

I thought for a second he was going to

come right on, but he looked at Tom, laughed again, that cold, ugly laugh and stepped back.

"All right, Willie boy—this time," he flung at Tom. "But Colt made everybody equal, savvy? Next time you come to this town, if you ever do again, you better come heeled. I'll be looking for you, Saturday night."

SATURDAY night was payday night, when we always came into town and obviously he knew it. "I'll remember you guys too—afterwards," he added, looking at Joe and me and then he turned on his heel and walked out.

I swung around, looking silently at Tom. Old Pete had got up and was standing right behind us, but I didn't pay him any attention. Tom Daggett was sort of smiling, a funny, thin little smile and his eyes were fixed on something an infinite distance away.

"Joe," he said, very quietly, to Mahon, "When we get back to camp, will you lend me that pistol you got in your bag?"

I dropped a hand on Joe Mahon's shoulder quick and stopped his protest. "All right, boys, let's go get the car," I said, for a gang of gawking loungers had collected and was listening to us. When we got outside I turned to Tom.

"Listen, guy, unless I'm mistaken plenty, that hombre's a gunman, ain't he?" I asked. "I mean, a bad one."

Tom Daggett nodded. "Yes," he said in that same, quiet voice.

"Well, you ain't, unless you got me fooled completely. It'd just be suicide for you to try to fight that big killer. You don't have to, boy. We're your partners and we know you got guts enough to do it. But we just can't let you get yourself killed. We'll take care of that two gun hombre for—"

I stopped. Tom Daggett was looking at me with the same, funny, little smile on his lips.

"Thanks, Mac," he said, very softly. "That's white. But—I don't reckon my,

Dad would have let his friends fight his battles for him. I reckon—I can try to do the same.”

I STARTED to protest violently and stopped. What could I say? Behind me I heard old Pete's harsh, shuddering breath.

Well, we went back out to camp. I gathered a little of what it was all about, this gunman, Bud Renner and Tom Daggett had had some trouble over in another town—you don't have any difficulty guessing who must of started it, do you? And young Tom had done his best to avoid him as long as he could honorably. But now—well, it was a showdown and young Tom had backed up as far as he was going to.

You couldn't argue with him. He was nice to us, but back in those blue eyes of his was a grim shadow that never changed and somehow you knew arguing was hopeless. He was going to pattern himself after that Dad of his, the Dad he'd never known, but who, so he thought, had been the kind of guy who'd face hell itself before he'd show yellow—or let his friends fight his battles for him.

And, you know, that was the thing that hit me right between the eyes. Because, right there on the back seat was old Pete Jones and if Pete had told us the truth, Tom Daggett's Dad really had been a dirty, yellow coward. Old Pete wasn't saying anything and his wrinkled face was a mask, but I couldn't help wondering just what he must be thinking.

WELL, I made up my mind, no matter what Tom thought he was going to do, we just wouldn't let him get himself killed. Either I'd manage to keep him out of town Saturday night or I'd take a bunch of the boys in and do something to this Bud Renner killer before he got a chance to kill the kid. I didn't have any doubt whatever that Renner would kill Tom if we let things alone, because after we got to camp I talked to some of the other cats and found they knew of Renner.

He was fast as lightning with his guns, a killer by nature and just plain poison, so they told me.

The next evening, Friday that was, I heard a gun barking over in the blackjack thickets and with a hunch what it was, I slipped over.

I was right. It was Tom Daggett, practicing with Joe Mahon's gun. He didn't see me and I stood there in the thicket, watching him until it was nearly dark. He'd draw and fire, draw and fire, reload and try it again, all with the deadly seriousness of a man trying to master the art of a lifetime in an hour. And watching him, something gripped tight at my throat.

For he was fast, you understand, naturally fast, but it was plain as day he knew next to nothing about gunplay. That's something that takes years of practice to get perfect. He was improving every draw, but I knew he wouldn't have any more chance than a rabbit against Bud Renner's machine like speed and accuracy.

I crept back out of that thicket thinking hard and fast, because I just had to do something and I didn't know what. For this kid wasn't just the ordinary young guy you could talk out of it, or hold him down and go have Dick Brazil run Bud Renner off. This kid was steel, really and was going to fight his own battle even though he knew it must mean his' death.

I HEARD a rustle over to one side as I started to come out of that thick brush and I stopped still. There was old Pete coming out too. He'd been watching young Tom, same as I had. He didn't see me, although he passed not ten feet away, so close that even in the dusk I could see the expression on his face, twisted, grim and I wondered again what he was thinking. All of a sudden, it struck me just what that shadowy, gnawing look in his eyes was!

It was the look of a man hunting something, something he'd sought for years and years. Hard and grim and almost hopeless; what was it he was looking for,

Buck Daggett? Or a chance to get back at Buck Daggett any way or every way, even through his son?

It made me uneasy, somehow and the next morning, when old Pete was missing, it made me plenty uneasy. I couldn't for the life of me figure just what he might be up to, but I knew, as plain as if he'd told me, that it was something about this Tom Daggett-Bud Renner trouble and it got my wind right up. Because, when a man hates like that all through the years, you just can't tell what he'll do. Hatred like that is crazy.

I called Joe Mahon aside and told him to keep an eye on Tom, every minute.

"I don't know whether we can keep him from going into town tonight or not," I said, "But, by Gad, he's not going to fight Renner! No matter what we have to do, he's not. You see he don't slip off. I wish I knew what the hell Pete Jones is up to—he's missing, you know that?"

Joe Mahon looked at me kind of funny. "Yeah, I know," he said. "I talked to him last night."

HE SAID it in such an odd tone that I turned sharply and started to ask him what he meant. But just then something else come up, the superintendent was yelling for me, and I didn't get a chance. The superintendent shunted me off on some side work and I didn't get to see my gang again until noon.

I was just pulling up in my car beside where they was working when one of the boys come over.

"Mac," he said, "Joe told me to tell you Tom's beat it. Gone to town, he thinks. Joe said to tell you he'd gone after him."

With a cussword I jammed my car into reverse and spun her around. I'd told Mahon not to let Tom slip off and here, very first thing, he'd done it. Tom going to town—by Gad, it might not be any of my damned business, but I was going to make it so! There wasn't going to be any gunfight between Daggett and Renner if I had to take a shotgun to Renner myself.

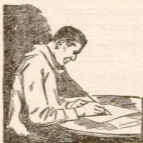
I burned the road proper, going into town. There was the usual milling mob on the street, but no signs at all of anything unusual happening or just happened. They hadn't met yet, apparently. I started a fast search for Tom and Mahon.

I couldn't find them anywheres, either one of them. But as I was coming down the sidewalk I did see Bud Renner coming out of a hotel across the street. He was rubbing his eyes, wasn't shaved and looked as though he'd just got up. Probably he just had. He didn't see me and I hurried on. I had to find the kid now and quick.

He wasn't anywhere to be found. But away down at the end of the street a driller friend of mine yelled at me and pulled me over to one side.

"Say, listen, big boy," he said earnestly,

"If you don't wanta see one of your cats get mighty well killed in a few minutes you better go get him quick. That Tom Daggett of yours that had



the mixup with Bud Renner is sitting at a front table in Tom Green's place and I just saw Renner heading that way."

OH, OH! Tom Green's place, clear up at the other end of the street! I whirled on my heel and started back, going as fast as I could through the milling mob on the board sidewalks. I was maybe halfway there when up the street about a block I saw old Pete Jones cross over to my side and lose himself in the crowd loafing in front of a two story frame building, with a barber shop and a clothing store on the ground floor and a rooming house upstairs.

I don't know what told me, but, right then, I had a lightning hunch something was going to happen in the next minute. I could feel cold sweat beading out on the

back of my neck, my heart was pounding. I didn't know why. I started to hurry forward and then I heard it.

Thup-thup-thup, three shots, just like that, so fast they all but blended into one roar.

The loafers around the front of that building boiled suddenly, like a swarm of bees somebody's stirred up with a stick. From across the street I could see Dick Brazil, the Law, coming on the dead run, smashing straight in toward the heart of that trouble. He disappeared and the next minute I was trying vainly to shove my way through a packed, wriggling, pushing mob, after him.

WILDLY excited voices was lifting from inside that ring of men, three or four guys trying to talk at once. I could hear Brazil's crackling voice, asking questions I reckon, but I couldn't make them out. Then, all of a sudden, high and shrill, I heard Bud Renner, the gunman.

"I tell you, he started to pull a gun on me," Renner was almost screaming. "He bumped into me apurpose and he snarled under his breath, 'Go for your gun, damn you! I'll kill you!' Then he made a pass for his gun and I hadda kill him! I had to, I tell you!"

"You're a dirty liar!" screamed another voice, so high it was almost hysterical. "You black murderer, you killed the poor, little devil in cold blood! He's dead, Brazil and look, he ain't even got a pocket knife on him! This skunk's killed an unarmed man! Let's lynch him, boys!"

A roar went up from that crowd like lions out loose in a jungle night. The packed shoulders around me jerked and swayed crazily and I got a sudden, brief look at Bud Renner's face, white as a sheet and Dick Brazil jumping in front of him. Boy, was that gunman scared!

Brazil whirled with his hands on his guns, his eyes blue white flames. He talked to that mob, his hard voice a bull whip lash, cracking 'em right in the face.

"Damn your gall! Back, every one of

you! First guy makes a move, I'll kill him! Back, yuh hear! There'll be no lynchin' in this town! The law'll take care of this guy. Everybody—back up and shut up!"

There was a quick hush because, tough as they were, those guys in Sanderson feared Dick Brazil a lot worse than they did the devil. Men in front tried to push back and guys behind who didn't have the least idea what it was all about were trying to shove in and look. I couldn't see either Renner or Brazil now, but in the hush I could hear Brazil talking, in that cold, flat tone.

"I'd warned you, Renner," he was saying. "You've done the one thing we're sure death on here—gunned an unarmed man. You can wait 'til a jury starts you toward the chair as it damn sure will or—well you got a gun in your hand, big boy. Wanta try to use it again?"

THERE was a frantic heave as the guys around me and behind Renner all tried at once to get to one side or the other, out of the line of fire. But no shots came. As I spun about in that mob, I saw Renner's face again, a sick, pasty yellow. He wasn't going to shoot, not at Dick Brazil he wasn't. He was done!

Brazil took the gun out of his hand and grabbed him roughly by the arm, shoving him through the crowd. A lane opened to let them through and that was the last I ever saw of Bud Renner. His face the color of a corpse, licking his lips, terror in his eyes and a blank, stupid bewilderment, on his way to the chair and knowing it!

All this time, mind you, I still didn't know who'd been killed. Then, suddenly, I was shoulder to shoulder with old Joe Mahon. They was lifting the poor devil up who'd been killed—there was a hallway between the barber shop and the store and the killing had taken place just inside of that hall door—I looked sideways at Joe Mahon and his tough, hard eyes were full of bright tears!

"I saw it," he whispered to me. "He—he done it, Mac, just like——"

Right then the crowd opened as six big roughnecks picked the dead man up and I saw him for the first time. It was old Pete Jones, three bullets in his heart and on his wrinkled face a little, secret smile.

I whirled on Joe Mahon, a big lump in my throat and on my lips a startled, incredulous question, but the old cat grabbed my arm before I could say it.

"C'mon, Mac, let's git away from here," he said. "I might of guessed this would happen. Come on, I'll tell you."

MAYBE it was twenty minutes later, we was standing in the little undertaking parlor, looking down at old Pete's still face. Meantime we'd seen young Tom Daggett, his face stern, set, listening to some guy telling him Bud Renner had just killed some old man who hadn't even had a pocket knife on him and now Bud's goose was sure cooked for good. You couldn't tell it, but I know there must have been relief in Tom's soul as he listened and why not?

He'd come in to town to meet Renner because he thought that was what his Dad would have done, but Tom certainly wasn't foolish enough to think he had much chance. Five or ten minutes later it would have been Tom meeting Renner and who the dead guy would have been don't take much guessing.

But now Bud Renner was put away forever.

The guy telling Tom the story had it all balled up, didn't even know Pete's name and for that matter, I'm certain Tom never did get the whole straight of it, like I'm telling you. He didn't see us and when I would have spoken to him, Joe Mahon pulled me away.

"Let him alone—now," said Joe gruffly. "Come on, let's get away. I'll tell you why later."

We was standing, looking down at Pete's quiet face. There was a faint,

little smile frozen on those dead features, a smile as though at the end he'd found something he'd sought for a long, long time. Joe Mahon had his head turned away so I couldn't see the glitter in his tough, red rimmed eyes.

"Yeah, he must have had it all figured out," Joe Mahon said again, his voice gruff. "He knowed that making a move like you was drawing a gun on a gunman is just like waving a red flag at a bull. He knowed this town is poison on a guy killing an unarmed man. He worked it perfect, in a door where nobody but Renner could see just what he done. Nobody on earth'll believe what Renner says about that threat Pete whispered and the way he moved his hand, even though it's true. Old Pete did it perfect, I tell you. He saved Tom Daggett's life——"

"I know," I interrupted. Joe'd told me all this before. "But still I don't get it all, guy. Why should Pete be willing to die for Tom Daggett—just an acquaintance, you might say. He prob'ly liked Tom, I'll admit now, but we know he hated Tom's Dad——"

"He thought less of Tom's Dad than any other living man," said Joe Mahon. "He—oh, he didn't exactly tell me, Mac, but he gave me enough to guess. He made me promise young Tom would never know." Joe looked at me, blinking his eyes and smiling, a crooked, twisting smile.

I shook my head. It was all so different, it'd been so bull headed wrong about Pete hating young Tom because he'd hated Tom's Dad. Yet here was Joe saying Pete had hated Buck Daggett and still he'd freely given his life for Buck Daggett's son, just a casual friend. That didn't jibe——

"Still don't get you, guy," I said stupidly. "Come again."

Joe Mahon made a little, impatient gesture. "Oh, you dumb, damn fool!" he exclaimed. "It was hisself old Pete hated. Don't you get it now? Pete Jones was young Tom Daggett's Dad!"

THE BALLAD OF BILL MORNINGSTAR



By
Henry
Herbert
Knibbs



I LEFT my liquor on the bar, I left my mates all standing there,
Wi' hand to glass and empty grin; behind me swung the kennel door.
"Bill Morningstar! Bill Morningstar!" came singing down the freshen-
ing air,
Ye tarry overlong wi' sin! Come down to shore! Come down to
shore!"

"Bill Morningstar!" I heard the call and knew the voice that called to me;
The harbor mist was burning gray wi' half a moon a-staggering through
And trembling on the long sea-wall—far out and faint across the sea,
Like bells that ring in Monterey, in evening when the hills are blue.

"Come down to shore!" I heard it sing; then, booming like a temple gong,
"In town and rum ye spend the night carousing wi' the harbor men,
And are ye not remembering the Tongas, Suva and Sarong,
The mistral and the Vendres Light, the morning sun of Darien?"

And then I saw a slant of spars, an outbound schooner slipping by,
Wi' music of her creaking blocks and sharp waves talking overside;
The mist was gone and all the stars were twinkling in the summer sky,
The tide was whimpering on the rocks, the wind was lifting wi' the tide.

Fair clear and bright against the moon I saw the pictures come and go,
The sloping deck, the tumbling green, the sealers rounding Nunivak;
The palms of Samarong lagoon, the China Sea, and Borneo,
Wi' proas darting in between from Zamboango, down and back.

Ay! like a magic-lantern show—an island schooner in the trade,
A Chino cook, Kanaka crew, wi' shell and copra in the hold;
A chancy run of touch and go, a checker game wi' Chance we played,
Til snug we anchored off Lavu and saw Vanua flaming gold.

And such would grip my soul wi' joy, and such would grip my soul wi'
fear,
The shore-wind calling high and far, the white moon staring in my eyes,
And someone singing out, "Ahoy!" as lifting to the breeze we clear
The offing—and Bill Morningstar outbound for Port O'Paradise.



FOUR DEAD CHINAMEN

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

Author of "Radio Warning for S. S. Zinnoa," "Yellow Guns," etc.

Vanishing Chinamen furnish a clue to riches.

SUDDENLY, and without warning, Lapar Island had again become a deadly place. Marston, who had spent several months putting a coconut plantation on the place, the only white man with him being Captain Benley, who had quit pearling, did not realize for some months the hidden danger which menaced him.

When the first Chinese house servant disappeared, it was possible that he had been taken with some accident while moving in the jungle, or had been drowned while swimming in the surf. It was possible that he had ended his life in some secret place, or been seized by a shark while swimming by moonlight.

Chen, the Chinese cook, was not greatly alarmed. He admitted at the end of a week that his helper would not come back. Such events should be taken with calm philosophy, so Chen got out his brush, his inkslab and his large writing paper, painted a letter which summoned a cousin from Sydney to take over the vacant job of waiter, house cleaner and dishwasher. And in due time the new man was swung down a ladder from a passing steamer and brought ashore in Captain Benley's sloop dinghy.

The pearling skipper about that time was suspicious of the cook. Chen was tall, with eyes always widely open, which was a trick of pretended frankness to

cover slyness. He was more Manchu than Chinese, being rangy, rawboned, physically strong, and, as Captain Benley expressed it, "too damned smart for a cook unless there was a jail waiting for him with a vacant room." Chen did cook well. More like a liner's chef than a plantation cook accustomed to jobs in the wilderness.

The new cousin had been on the job about two weeks when he went to his hammock on a bright moonlight night. He had been playing a jewsharp down on the beach until about ten o'clock, in plain sight of the house. He loved the fireflies swooping among the old wild palms. At daylight, when Chen turned out to prepare breakfast, and called for fresh water from the spring, there was nothing in the hammock but an empty opium pipe and some dice in a cotton sock.

It was then that Marston knew that he was facing something deadly—something swathed in a craftiness which was as smoothly gentle as the stab of a needle-like blade which kills before the victim feels pain. Silent, swift, certain, leaving behind not so much as a drop of blood, or a thin squeal of terror.

LAPAR in Malay means hungry. The island got that name from the fact it once was inhabited by cannibals. It was uninhabited when Marston got the concession to plant coconuts along the shore. He put up a large square building of bamboo and thatch, Benley having given the information that the island could be taken up for a song and sing it himself.

Captain Benley had to quit pearling. He had a fine sloop, and he knew his business, making a good profit with shell for the Sydney market. But rheumatism was beginning to twist his bones, so with the sloop for transportation, Marston and Benley put their cash into the pot, hired a gang of native labor boys from over Antihiven way, and put in thousands of seedlings for a new grove.

The government report on Lapor Island

stated, "the cannibal tribe formerly living there was wiped out by years of raiding by headhunters from the Antihiven group, who visited Lapor in swift craft, making the twenty miles across the strait when the monsoon served, and attacking with great ferocity, carrying back the heads after smoking them at Iskar Bay. But in recent years the headhunters have not visited Lapor, for headhunting has been put down by the government in the Antihiven group."

Captain Benley knew better. Headhunters did appear now and then at Lapor, going into Iskar Bay. He had seen them crossing and coming away when he was cruising in the vicinity. But a pair of white men with rifles did not need to worry about a few bushy haired savages going into Iskar Bay, a mile or more from the plantation house.

MARSTON was a big, quiet chap, only a little over thirty. He was cautious by nature, and though he had never made much money, he had never lost any. Captain Benley was a man of quick intuitions, willing to take a risk, but being past middle age and afflicted with occasional pain, he was beginning to think of his future. The two men worked together well, for Benley's inclination to rashness in business was tempered by Marston, but the younger man had great respect for the skipper, who always managed to make money just a little faster than he could lose it in hasty decisions. And he always enjoyed losing, for all his ventures had been in things calling for action and risk, and he swore that he got his money's worth even out of defeat.

When the second servant disappeared, Marston had a suspicion that he had taken Benley's advice about taking over the island a trifle too hastily. If Chinese disappeared, white men might also disappear. Not that Marston was afraid of anything, but he disliked the mystery of the thing. What if Benley disappeared? Marston would not want to be left the only white

man on the place, and with rumors of secret death falling upon Lapar Island, other white men would not want to go into partnership in such a place, nor take employment where death could be so sudden and strange.

Chen was now willing to be alarmed. But he was conservative even about his fear. He showed no desire to quit his job. That seemed queer to Benley, but he only shut one eye and squinted at his pipe with the other, always a sign that he was doing a bit of heavy thinking.

And when Benley found Chen getting out another letter to summon another cousin, the skipper suggested that there might be trouble in getting another helper if there was too much truth in what had caused the others to be off the job. But Chen only grinned and remarked, "Plenty more Chinamen, can do, come this side, maybe die, maybe no, all samee."

BENLEY went into the big house and snorted at Marston. "That cook has a sliver in his brain. Says to me plenty more Chinaman! As if we didn't know there was a whole damned country that don't do nothin' but produce Chinks for export."

"We ought to find something out with this next cousin of Chen's," said Marston. He had begun to wear his revolver belt and a holster, something Benley never left off.

"Why didn't we lose any of our natives when we were putting our seedlings into the ground?" demanded Benley. "I tell you, Chen's up to some game, losing his relations here, even if they're only forty-second cousins on his mother's side."

"Something's wrong, and Chen's in on it," agreed Marston. "But we've got to keep our suspicions quiet if we want to catch him. Of course, it may be that cannibals are up in the hills yet, and the government doesn't know it."

"Well, we can't go into the business of supplyin' quick lunches for cannibal boys,

or we won't be able to get a native crew for the plantation in a few months. You



ain't as suspicious of chinks as I am, and that's why I can't believe the chinks we lose are goin' as groceries for the cannibals."

Benley took his liniment bottle and began to rub his knees, because when he got angry his bones ached.

"We've got to watch Chen," said Marston.

"With both eyes. Fact is, I don't believe them two chinks are dead at all."

"Not dead! Why not?" Marston was incredulous.

CHEN'S startin' a colony on this island with cousins. And he'll keep 'em hid in the hills, feedin' 'em with our grub."

Marston smiled. "Nonsense! What would Chen want a colony here for?"

"He's the only one who can give you an answer—and he won't. Mebbe the game is to bring in a lot of chinks, one at a time, and when they're ready, we disappear. Then they've got a plantation on an island where nobody dares come on account of the bad name the place'll have from so many folks steppin' out into thin air."

Marston's brown face twisted as he considered the possibility of the plan Benley had suggested. "You really mean that?"

"Sure I mean it! But I ain't worried none—yet. They'll take their time if that's what they're up to, let us do the work and spend the money, and then scare us so we'll quit here, or we'll wake up some mornin' with our beds empty and nobody knows where we are. We'll have nothing more to worry about when that happens."

Marston got up from his packing case desk, walked across the room, and stepped up on a box under a high and narrow opening which served as a window. The whole back of the building had these high and narrow loopholes, which allowed the air to circulate, and were handy as rifle

ports. Making sure that Chen was still in the cookhouse, Marston returned to a chair near Benley and filled a fresh pipe.

"I believe that headhunters pick these boys up."

"I don't. If they did, they wouldn't take the whole chink—only the head."

"Chinese are queer about walking in the moonlight," persisted Marston. "They could be grabbed from the beach. That's why no body's left behind." Marston's gray eyes were fastened on the wrinkled face under the visor of the old cap which Benley always wore. He frequently went to bed with that cap on his head.

THE skipper winced from pain and straightened a leg slowly. "No headhunters!" he declared with fervor. "Them bushy haired boys might come over from Antihiven into Iskar Bay now and then, like the sailin' directions say. But they got sense enough not to mess around here close. They know my sloop, and they've seen me use a rifle. If they want new skulls, they'll keep clear of us. No, it's Chen behind all this. If not, he'd be so scared he'd be down on the beach with his bag, waitin' for somebody to come along and give him a boat-ride to Anti-hiven—or he'd swim. He wouldn't be writin' for new chinks."

"He seems to be pretty sure that he won't disappear," said Marston.

"You've hit it! Too sure to suit me."

They did not keep any watch on Chen nights during the three weeks they were waiting for the new servant. He jumped from a Dutch trading schooner, and was picked up by Benley. Lin Foo was his name. He was a tall, skinny Chinese, eager and alert, well past middle age with a few treasured gray hairs on his chin. His only baggage was a bundled handkerchief, the usual leather purse worn in front on a belt, and a flute.

"Two China boys come this side," said Captain Benley as Lin Foo dried himself out on the way to shore in the sloop. The skipper held up two fingers, and talked

in a loud voice, being under the impression that loudness made for clarity in his meaning. "Two we lose, go heaven side," yelled Benley, jerking the fingers toward the sky. "Not come back. Dead like hell. You savvy?"

LIN FOO'S black eyes regarded Captain Benley for a full minute, thoughtfully. He was amused. "Me savvy."

Benley, attempting to make certain that Chen had included fair warning in the letter summoning the new cousin, went on in a hurricane voice. "Mebbe you be dead. Go quick. Not come back. You likee job this side?"

Lin Foo grinned. "Me likee!" he declared with wet enthusiasm, as he wrung water from his long queue. "No 'fraid like hell." He bowed to Benley, as if by bowing, a stop might be made of the nonsense as making such a fuss over two dead Chinese.

"You bet your life he's no 'fraid," said Benley to Marston. "He's been told there's no danger, and probably knows where the pair of chinks are hiding out—and knows he'll be with 'em before long. And likes the idea. Damn chinks, anyhow!"

LIN FOO took over his duties as house servant and waiter, and slept in the hammock on the back porch of the main house. Chen lived in his cook-shack. Marston and Benley wanted no change in the details of the routine. They were satisfied if Lin Foo knew two of his countrymen had disappeared from the hammock—if he had a complete understanding of the business. It was likely that Chen had misled the newcomer as to the full facts—always considering the possibility that the facts were known to both Chinese as not dangerous. Chen gambled the normal amount with his helper, and Lin Foo found considerable solace in his flute at such times as Marston and Benley were distant from the house after working hours.

Lin Foo had been on the job a week

and nothing happened which broke into the routine of the days and nights. He apparently was not aware that he was watched during the night from one of the loopholes which gave on the veranda. He was a joyous old fellow, always happy and willing, adept at serving the two white men their meals. If anything, Benley believed Lin Foo was too happy. Something lurked behind the gaiety. Chen had probably infected the new man with some tale of easy wealth to be had on Lapar Island; some plan which would advance the family fortunes; or an idea of future loot.

"That chink is tickled clean through his yellow hide," Benley declared. "And come to think of it, don't you remember that the other two had an awful bright outlook on life? What the hell is it that makes our house servants feel so glad about knowin' they'll go missing one of these nights without so much as takin' a hop pipe along with 'em?"

MARSTON was tempted to ask Chen a few questions. But Benley advised against the idea. He swore that if Chen knew he was under the slightest suspicion, the cook might turn dangerous, and kill or poison the two white men. "Never let a chink know you want to find somethin' out," was Benley's advice. "If you do, he'll feed you what he wants you to think, and you're worse off than you was first."

Then the night came when something did happen. Marston was on watch after midnight, just having relieved Benley. The Chinese left his hammock and moved down among the wild palm trees toward the beach. There he stopped in a velvety patch of shadow out of the moonlight.

Benley, being warned that Lin Foo had left, got the extra rifle and climbed up on the box beside Marston.

"Didn't make much noise when he got off the porch, did he?"

"No, he slipped out of the hammock carefully, and moved away mighty slow.

And he turned in all dressed, with his shoes on. But what did he stop in that dark patch for?"

But they knew in a few minutes why Lin Foo was waiting in the dark. Some-



thing moved in the open door of the cookhouse. Chen had been there all the time, they believed, to watch the main house and see if there

was a light, or any investigation as the result of Lin Foo having been heard leaving the hammock.

Chen's figure, moving slowly, skirted the front of the cookhouse. He kept under the eaves where the ground was soft and his shoes made no sound. He moved to the far edge of the clearing, away from the main house and away from the position of Lin Foo so there would be no evidence that both Chinese were acting together.

The cook disappeared into the jungle. Lin Foo remained in his patch of cover. Then Chen, having circled along the jungle, appeared again down near the beach, where he had to move into the moonlight to gain the shore. Lin Foo ran into the open and joined the cook, and they hurried to the beach, masked somewhat from the house by the wild palms and the shade trees between beach and house.

THEY'RE headin' for Iskar Bay," declared Benley. "Just like I've always said—Chen's behind whatever the devilry is what loses our chinks."

"Looks like it," admitted Marston. "That's the danger spot if any headhunters come over from Antihiven."

"Know what I think?"

"Your guess is as good as mine—or better."

"He sells his cousins to the natives."

"Sells 'em? How the devil could he sell——?"

"Sure he can sell! Cannibal boys that come over from Antihiven would buy chinks on the hoof. Iskar is where Chen makes delivery."

Marston blew out his breath in a noiseless whistle. "They'll eat Lin Foo? It sounds preposterous!"

"I don't care a damn what it sounds like. When you've been in these latitudes as long as I have, you'll see a lot more queer things than what I'm talkin' about."

"But what excuse—what yarn—can Chen give the house help to go prowling around Iskar Bay at this time of night?"

"You'll have to ask 'em that yourself. I ain't a fortune teller. Whatever it is, it's good. And Lin Foo won't come back."

Marston felt that Captain Benley was right, at least so far as his certainty that they had seen the last of the new Chinese.

"I'd swear I saw an outrigger, or a canoe with a sail on it, off Iskar Bay just before the sun broke yesterday mornin'," Benley went on. I didn't pay much attention. Boats lay up that way for turtle. Been somethin' on the horizon to the no'th-'ard for a week. I should ha' gone up yesterday and looked things over."

"We've got to go now," said Marston.

"We can't foller 'em on the beach, or we'll be seen along that stretch of shore. And they might hide on us and let us pass, and we'd be no wiser."

CARRYING their rifles, they left the house on the side where there was the least moonlight. They got to a jungle trail which would bring them out on the top of a cliff overlooking the sandy beaches of gorge-like Iskar Bay.

It was nearly an hour before they pressed through the heavy foliage on the rim of the cliff. The nearest beach was about two hundred feet below them, the sand shining in the moonlight. Less than five hundred yards away was the opposite shore, but it was in shadow, for the moon struck in slantwise from the sea, and its

declination prevented illumination. The jungle grew down close on that side, with a few mangroves on a stretch of mud. A quarter of a mile away they could see the surf on the reef which crossed the opening to the bay, a narrow break making an opening only for boats of shallow draft.

The bay extended far back between the hills, becoming no wider than a small river as it reached into the jungles. Great vines overreached it in the narrow place, like gigantic spider nets. The peace and quiet of the place were deceptive. The white moonlight was alluring, and made one careless of the danger that lurked in the black shadows. The cannibals had used it for a hiding place, and it proved a trap. Attacked in there by headhunters, there was no escape up the high cliffs. Fat crocodiles wallowed in the mangrove swamps. And the sandy beaches were menaced on one side by the jungle, on the other by deep water full of hidden danger from sharks or crocodiles, as if the creator had laid a trap for the nourishment of monsters.

CAPTAIN BENLEY, in his pearling days, had operated in the waters about Lapar Island. But he never entered the bay. The barrier reef gave no entrance to his sloop. Most pearlery in those waters had scouted the vicinity of Lapar, seeking shoals where shell might be found. But there were no shell banks near the island at reasonable depths for the native divers.

But there was no trace of Chen and Lin Foo. It was possible they had not intended to come so far. But Benley was certain they would appear. As he lay on the edge of the cliff, his rifle extended before him through the low hanging leaves, and Marston close beside him, the skipper kept his eyes on the dark verge of the opposite shore. He said there was a canoe over there in the mangroves.

"No, I don't see it—I *feel* it. There ain't no natives on this shore. No cover for a boat. See that broken shell along

the beach under us? It shines like a lot of window glass, where the light strikes it at the right slant. I ought to look the place over come daylight."

"That whole beach glitters," whispered Marston.

"Sure! Natives lived in here for thousands of years, most likely. They been litterin' the place up with every kind of shell fish they et. And no surf to wash the trash away or break it up. Mebbe there's oysters in there—pearl oysters, and I'm goin' to come in with the dinghy one of these——"

"There's somebody," broke in Marston. "Just come around the point!"

BENLEY lifted himself on his elbows to look. "Chen!" he pronounced. "Didn't come very fast, probably on account of the moonlight. There's the other one, trailin' along behind. Chen's in the lead to prove there ain't no danger."

"Chen's a fool to come over here by night—or any other time," said Marston, convinced now that Benley's theories were proven sound to some degree.

"He's a fool for a blasted good reason," replied Benley. "Now we begin to get down to cases, and find out what hole our chinks drop into."

Chen waited for Lin Foo to come up. Then both disappeared under the fringe of jungle which overhung the sand. They did not talk nor make any sound that could be heard up on the cliff. But it was not long before they came into sight again. Now Lin Foo was farther up into the bay than Chen. And they were moving along the edge of the water, out in plain sight. At times, they stepped into the water, frequently bending low, examining the sand under foot.

Lin Foo moved a little faster than Chan. The cook seemed to linger behind. He was more on the alert. He frequently lifted his head and looked about him, while Lin Foo attended strictly to the business of picking up pieces of shell or coral, and throwing them down again.

Once they drew together and conferred in whispers. They held up something to see it better in the moonlight. Then Lin Foo hurried on ahead, head bent forward, scanning the sand, like a man who has lost something. And again, Chen lingered behind, watching all about him at short intervals. He was now almost directly below where Marston and Benley watched.

"Do you suppose there are gold nuggets on that beach?" asked Marston in a whisper.

MIGHT be. But I doubt it. Rock here is basalt, with a coral overgrowth, and that sand is mostly powdered coral."

"Then what could they be hunting?"

"Oh, maybe *tre pang*, or some other sea worm. Chinks have crazy ideas about medicines. They eat all kinds of trash that they think'll pep 'em up—snails for the bellyache, and so on."

"But they wouldn't have to hunt for whatever it is nights—on the sly—like this."

"If I knew why chinks done what they do I'd be king of China," replied Benley. "They ain't got good sense. But Chen's playin' horse with Lin Foo. What we're lookin' at now ain't the real secret, but just the come-on that Chen uses to bring the other here nights."

"Looks that way. I'd swear now that Chen lost the others up here—and brought 'em here to lose 'em. But what for?"

"Keep your eye on him, that's all you got to do, and watch it unravel," was Benley's advice. He bit off a piece of tobacco, as if showing a willingness to wait all night for the solution of the mystery.

"Chen knows there's danger, but Lin Foo's not aware of it. If headhunters are on the other side, they wouldn't be able to get across here before the chinks could escape to the main shore. But if Lin Foo gets far enough up, and it cut off, Chen is making sure of his getaway, so——"

"Now hark!" whispered Benley sharply.

Several minutes passed. "What'd you hear?"

"I don't know. Just keep listenin'."

THEN Marston saw something which startled him. And Benley observed the same queer happening. Chen, who had been moving with great wariness in the last few minutes, turned abruptly toward the jungle under the white men in an attitude of listening. He, too, had heard the sound Benley had caught.

Then Chen moved his feet slowly, swinging so he faced the way to the main shore of the island. He seemed crouched in readiness to run. He feared something, but he did not warn Lin Foo, who went on about his business of hunting the shore line, being then thirty or forty yards away from Chen.

Arms extended, one higher than the other, and one foot lifted ahead of the other, Chen was in the posture of a tight rope walker who has paused to insure his balance before going on. And the cook froze in that position, as if he had suddenly been stricken with great fear and could not move.

Then a sound so slight as to be barely caught by Marston and Benley came to their ears. Benley turned his head in a listening position, one ear nearer the shore than the other. He was waiting to



have the sound repeated, as if he were not sure of the direction from which it had come out of the brush below.

That sound was such as a cork makes when it is drawn swiftly from a bottle.

It was tinged with a low musical note. It might be the bursting of a bubble, or the collapse of a thin glass bulb, or a tiny gong struck gently with a drum stick swathed in soft cotton.

Ping!—but in a sibilant puff. Benley knew the sound. So did Marston. It was the ejection of an arrow from a *sumpitan*, or native blow gun.

All this time Chen remained frozen in the absurd attitude of a man checked instantly while in running.

Marston and Benley knew that the head-hunters were not on the far shore of the bay, but were hidden in the brush about opposite where Lin Foo was hunting his mysterious treasure at the edge of the water.

CHEN must have known the meaning of the blow-gun note. But he did not run. It was possible that Lin Foo did not hear the noise of the poisoned arrow leaving the tube of the gun, or if he did, had no understanding of the danger. Chen gave no warning to his companion—in-*stead*, the cook prepared for flight. Even if he had run swiftly, Lin Foo would have known he was in danger.

"Chen knowed they were on this side all the time," whispered Benley. "And he's waitin' now until Lin's hit. That first shot we heard missed him."

"We ought to warn Lin," said Marston. "Now's the time to stop this business, and—" He started to rise, but Benley pulled him down.

"If you crack this thing open on Chan, we're likely to be dead of poison," warned the skipper. "What's one chink, more or less?"

Ping! Again, but fainter, they heard the low note of the *sumpitan*. They could not see the flight of the tiny arrow. But they knew Lin Foo had been hit. His head and shoulders snapped stiffly upright from his bending position, and he slapped a hand to the back of his neck as if he had been stung by a hornet. He cried out in a high pitched squeal, more surprise than fright.

CHEN dropped flat to the sand. He gave no answer to Lin Foo's cry. Chen's action led the white men into the belief for the moment that the cook had been hit before Lin Foo and was just beginning to feel the paralyzing effect of the arrow—or had felt it when he took and held that queer attitude with outstretched arms. The poison worked swiftly at times, depending upon the part of the body hit, and penetration of a vein or other blood vessel near the heart. Frequently, the victim was taken violently ill in a few minutes after being hit.

Lin Foo began to run toward where Chen lay. But the running legs did not move fast. The feet seemed weighted down. Then Lin Foo began to stagger. Presently he began to turn round and round, not certain of the direction he wanted to go, or not able to keep his balance. When he had made but part of the distance between him and the prostrate cook, Lin Foo sank to his knees. He clawed at the ground. He blubbered in a peculiarly incoherent way.

A short, almost naked man, broke from the brush and dashed across the sand toward Lin Foo. The gigantic head of the native, which was really fuzzy hair brushed upward, revealed the fact that he was one of the Antihiven natives. A steel blade flashed in his hand. Three more natives followed from their cover, and as the first native reached Lin Foo, Marston and Benley heard a couple of blows struck. There were a couple more swift hacks at the prostrate form of Lin Foo.

The man who had reached the Chinese first started up the beach, away from where Chen was lying. The attacker was dragging something after him on a rope. But the white men knew it was not a rope. It was the long queue of Lin Foo, and his head was being dragged, followed by the three other natives.

There was no attempt to seek Chen. If the natives knew he was lying in the sand, they did not want his head. Apparently they understood that if Chen was killed

there would be no more men brought to the bay by night.

MARSTON threw up his rifle with a growl. He had snuggled his cheek against the stock and swung the sight toward the fleeing party of headhunters when Benley grasped the weapon and drew it aside. "No!" he whispered harshly. "Don't tip our hand to Chen! We want to hear what he says when we ask him where Lin Foo is."

A canoe shot out from the far shore—a big boat of the same type as the prohibited war canoes. In the moonlight it was most distinct, with its high stem, and eight paddlers clicking over the water like men in a race. In a few minutes they had picked up the party carrying the new head. Then the craft made for the open sea, wet paddles glistening, the only sound being the concerted dipping in unison, and the panting of the crew, along with the soft wash of water from the bows of the swiftly moving canoe.

"Perhaps Chen is dead," said Marston. "He hasn't moved."

Benley spat noisily. His own rifle was swung toward the departing canoe, showing that he was strongly tempted. "Damn him, I hope so," he whispered presently. "He walked Lin Foo into a trap. But what was the bait?"

"I don't see that Chen got anything for the head," said Marston. "Your selling idea falls down—unless they leave something behind that Chen knows where to look for as payment."

"He could ha' got away. He didn't hide so much as wait for 'em to go. He couldn't hide—they saw him just as well as they saw poor old Lin Foo. All they want is one head at a time, and come again, thank you, and I'll bet——"

But what it was Benley wanted to bet, Marston did not hear. For at that instant Chen rose to his feet. He wasted no time watching the canoe. Neither did he follow toward the main shore to get back home;

but, to the surprise of the white men, he ran to the headless body of Lin Foo.

THE cook bent over the victim of his treachery, avoiding the great patch of blackness on the sand which was formed by the blood of the dead Chinese. The sand, ivory white, made a perfect background for the watchers, and they saw in the moonlight every thing done with vivid distinctness.

Chen lifted one of Lin Foo's outstretched hands and seemed to pry something from the fingers. Then he hunted through the waistbelt, which carried the pouch-like purse always worn by Chinese.

Having finished his search through the dead body, Chen stepped into the brush and brought out a board. He hastily scooped a grave in the soft sand, and buried Lin Foo. By the time the task was completed, the canoe was outside the barrier reef, and with a sail up, was scudding for Antihiven. Then Chen turned and started for the main shore in a slow dog trot.

The first impulse of the white men was to scramble down the cliff and stop Chen. But they considered the matter. Chen was on his way home, and it would be better to pretend they did not know what had happened in the bay. Marston wanted to hear what Chen would have to say. They headed for home with all possible speed, hoping that by the short cut they could be there before Chen arrived. Benley did not want the cook to hide what had been taken from Lin Foo's body.

But Chen was there before them. He was standing in the cookhouse door watching. Apparently he had learned they were missing from the house. And when they broke from the trail, it was necessary to admit their absence, though not reveal their knowledge of what they had witnessed.

"Where Lin Foo, Chen?" demanded Marston, panting after his hurried trip through the jungle.

"Master, I run after Lin Foo with hurry

feet. I see him not in sleep place. He is lost gone."

"Hey! That's a boat out there!" cried Benley, with pretended surprise, as he looked toward the horizon in the direction of Antihiven. "What does that mean?"

CHEN hesitated for an instant. "I think bad feller man steal Lin Foo. I see this boat canoe come shore side. Lin Foo up there."

"Why you not talk it me when you find Lin Foo go out of sleep place?" demanded Marston.

"I see him go, I go look-see," replied Chen blandly. "What can do? Me not catch him, bad feller man catch him."

"But two other boy go same way, now three time happen like this. Must stop. No can do this," said Marston crossly.

"Now, first time I know in think head, Master, how them boys go so quick away from most good job this side and not come back."

"Tripe!" said Benley.

"You sure saw Lin Foo go in steal boat?" persisted Marston.

"My poor eyes look-see Lin Foo go in steal boat," lied Chen calmly. "Maybe come daytime captain person go in boat Antihiven side, catch back Lin Foo for good job this side."

"All right!" declared Benley. "That's a good idea. You come along me, Chen. We all go Antihiven in boat and catch back Lin Foo. Step on it! Git goin'! Right down to the landin', and I'll start the engine."

AGAIN Chen hesitated, but only for a second or two. It was plain that he had not bargained for pursuit of the headhunters, but so long as the white men were not in his secret, he was content to let them pursue. He followed Captain Benley down to the bamboo landing stage in the river where the vessel was kept.

His engine going, Benley proceeded seaward, Marston at the wheel, and Chen standing by with a spot light while the

skipper made examinations below. His old engine needed constant petting.

Well off the land, Benley shut down the engine, and began a siege of tinkering. By daylight they were abeam of the reef which closed Iskar Bay. Chen was making coffee in the little galley under the



foredeck, and was not aware that the sloop was heading inshore. There was not wind enough for sailing, and when he had got in behind the reef, Benley dropped his anchor.

Chen, coming on deck with a tray of coffee, was caught unaware for once in his life. He showed his astonishment at being so close in to Iskar Bay. And he was perturbed. He dropped the cup he was handing to Marston. But the cook said nothing.

With his glasses Benley studied the horizon toward the low land of Antihiven, but could see no sail that would mark a savage craft. He really did not expect to see anything, but was covertly watching Chen from behind the eye-pieces of the binoculars.

"He's cornered, and he knows it," whispered Benley, when Chen went below and was knocking pans about in the galley.

After breakfast, Benley drew the dinghy alongside. Chen popped up through the forward hatch eager to see what was happening. A rag tied about his head, sweat dripping from his forehead, he refrained asking with his lips the question which was in his black eyes.

"You stop ship side, we go shore to make see if bad feller man in that way," said Benley.

CHEN blinked twice. "Me go shore side, can do?" he asked.

"Can do," replied Benley carelessly.

"Short time stop, and go Antihiven proper time when have got wind mebbe."

Marston, carrying his rifle, got into the stern sheets. Benley got into the bow, and Chen was allowed to row in. He was a competent seaman. So they got round the end of the reef and in behind it. Chen was inclined to favor the shore on the far side, but Benley insisted that the boat be kept headed to the spot where Lin Foo was buried.

When they were about fifty yards from shore Chen dropped his oars and stood up straight. Marston's rifle was across his knees. Chen threw his weight to one side. The swift motion of the boat to that side caught Marston unaware. He nearly lost his rifle overboard.

Benley was standing in the stem with a grapnel hook in his hand, and a coil of rope, ready to throw the hook to the beach. His rifle was behind him leaning against the gunwale, for he did not keep watch on Chen, knowing Marston was facing the Chinese.

Chen snatched an automatic pistol from under the waist band of his trousers. The weapon belonged to Marston, usually kept in a locked drawer of his desk in the house. Marston, seeing the weapon pointed, rocked the boat swiftly to one side. Chen fired, but the bullet went wild.

Captain Benley swung and threw the grapnel hook at the Chinese. The iron struck him in the back, and he went overboard. And he began swimming for shore with lusty strokes. But after a few yards, he stopped and went down.

WHILE Marston rowed, Benley covered the hook and cleared the line. As they got to where Chen sank, they could see him struggling in the clear water. Throwing the grapnel beyond the Chinese, Benley brought him up, and Marston got hold of his queue at the transom, and hauled him aboard.

When they carried him ashore, still gasping, and laid him in the warm sand not far from where he had buried Lin Foo,

the cook seemed to be dying. But without warning he rose to his feet and drew a knife so small that it was concealed along the inner side of his belt. He made a lunge for Marston with the thin blade. Captain Benley fired twice with his revolver, and Chen fell forward, to lie still, his face in the sand.

"Looks like that'll be about all from you," remarked the skipper, as he looked at the dead Chinese. "But we'd better look you through and see how rich you are."

Marston unbuckled the purse belt, and they examined the contents of the flat leather sack worn in front.

Benley whistled as they found two pearls wrapped in tissue paper.

"Where would he get pearls?" demanded Marston.

"Them headhunters left 'em for him on the beach last night, payment in full for Lin Foo's head! Now we've got the answer."

"What are the pearls worth?"

Benley considered these color, size and shape of the pearls. "Good orient," he declared. "Not perfect—all of twenty grains apiece. If spheres, they'd be worth about five hundred dollars apiece. I'd say, offhand, two hundred apiece, dependin' on where they're sold, but where would the Antihiven headhunters get——" He stopped, twisted his face in thought. "Hell, no!" he cried. "Come along with me!" He began running up the beach to where there was a long raffle of broken shell and coral in parallel rows. He began to throw shells about, as if looking for something, just as they had observed Shen and Lin Foo working in the moonlight.

"What're you after?" asked Marston.

THESE are pearl shell," declared Benley in excited tones. "The shelf of water off this shore is full of pearl oysters—I can see 'em out there. A bank that's never been touched, and——" He clutched downward with his hand and brought out

of the broken stuff a small pearl. "You can pick 'em up, man! Look at that!"

"This beach of broken shell—speckled with pearls!" cried Marston. "That's what Chen and Lin Foo came for!"

"Them headhunters didn't bring no pearls," said Benley. "But the cannibals that lived here have shucked pearl oysters here for bait or to get the shell, the oysters rotted. Shell has been opened here for years—maybe generations. And Chen found there was pearls here for the pickin' of 'em up."

"He could have come days—with arms—and been safe," said Marston.

"Sure! But that'd give his information away. We'd catch him at it, or wonder why he was over here. He wanted to come nights, but he knew the headhunters would git him."

Marston nodded. "He let his Chinese helpers into the secret of the pearls—but not the secret of the headhunters."

"Something like that," agreed the elated Benley. "And he told Lin Foo—and the other—that the chinks who disappeared got out when they got rich. Showed 'em pearls, told 'em where they could be got, let them lose their heads, and he pinched whatever the boys found after they'd lost their skulls. His system was perfect. No wonder he didn't want us to come in here!"

"He saw that his game was up when we headed here instead of keeping on to Antihiven," said Marston.

"And no wonder! I'd say that there's shell enough here to buy four full grown plantations like the one we've just planted, not to mention the pearls. We've got to sift this beach, and then we'll comb the whole of Iskar Bay. A fortune in the shell, I'd say, by the looks of the bottom! Them are silver lip shell out there—and big ones, too. They run into big money. And we come here to plant coconuts! Marston, I wouldn't swap this bay for a gold mine!"

Captain Benley clapped his partner's shoulder under a heavy hand. "We're the heirs of four dead chinks!"



Two Great Impersonations

SOME of the greatest stories of all times have been written about impersonations; oddly enough two of the stories in this issue of *SHORT STORIES* center around that interesting pursuit—though two more different yarns could hardly be imagined. In Jackson Gregory's "*High Mesa*," a hot-headed youngster comes back to the cattle-country to find an impostor enjoying his heritage. We don't want to deprive you of any of the pleasure of reading Mr. Gregory's story by telling how this particular impersonation ended, but we could offer a word of advice to potential impersonators—it would be, *never* impersonate a red-headed man.

In "*Big Shot Shoes*" by Robert H. Rohde also in this issue, the fact that he was a dead-ringer for a gangster was unknown to a certain foot-ball coach until things began to happen to him. They happened so fast and furiously that he found the impersonation racket wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Well, you'll want to read that story, too. He wasn't a red-head, but was in for plenty trouble, all the same.

The Victim's Head Becomes a Trophy

IN CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE'S story in this issue, he has something to say about head-hunters in Malaysia—those pleasant fellows that it is just as well not to lose one's head over, if it can be avoided. Head-hunting, or head-snapping as the Dutch call it, among

the Malays is a practice believed to have had its origin in religious motives, the worship of skulls being universal. Severe repressive measures have led to its decrease among the Malay races, but it does actually survive even today among the Dyaks of Borneo.

There are also followers of the custom in South America, and as Mr. Edgar Lockrem recently wrote us:

The Indian head-hunter of interior Ecuador attaches as much significance to the head of his vanquished foe, as the American Indian did to the scalp of his enemy. After a tribal war or private quarrel the victor cuts the head off the defeated warrior, retires to the seclusion of his hut and there prepares a lasting war trophy.

His first step in preparing the head is to cut the skin open from the base of the neck to the crown, remove the entire skull leaving only the soft, pliant skin.

The skin is then dipped into a vegetable extract which dyes it a blue-black and probably has some action as a preservative. After the skin has been thoroughly dyed the skin is sewed up to restore the head to its original form.

The cavity is filled with hot sand or pebbles, after which the head is constantly turned and moved so that the drying goes on uniformly. When the sand has cooled, it is replaced by hot sand, this process often going on for several days before the head is completely cured.

The head is shrunk to an unbelievable degree, but it is so regulated that the fea-



tures retain their individuality to a great extent. The finished head is about the size of a man's fist.

The lips are sewed shut with long cotton cords, the exact pattern of the stitching varying with the locality and seeming to have some significance.

Within a short time after the preparation of a head, usually a month, the victor celebrates the event by a ceremonial dance, at which there is an orgy of wild drinking. After the dance the head can sometimes be bought. If the warrior's interest can be aroused in an object whose value he understands and appreciates, such as a musket, he will sell; otherwise he will keep it as a constant reminder of his valor.

Speedway Slang

WE HAVE written about circus slang in the Story Tellers' Circle; about cowboy slang; about a nautical language that sometimes the landlubber is at a loss to understand, and now along comes Cliff Farrell with a letter about the slang of the racing pits. He writes in connection with his story "A Tight Track" and his use in it of the term "jelopie":

You won't find the word "jelopie" in any dictionary. "Jelopie" is slang, pure and simple—speedway slang—and of fairly recent coinage at that, though it is one of the most familiar words in use in the pits now.

In its original sense "jelopie" means a misfit racing car—usually one of ancient vintage that is still competing against its betters. Speedway cars evolve greater

speed and more beauty of design and line year by year. The car that was the star of the track yesterday, is the clumsy, slow jelopie of today—by comparison.

In a broader sense jelopie is a term of contempt, amusement and occasionally of endearment, applied to both men and machines. Should a pilot, through a driving error, cause his car to spin end for end—a "gilhoolie" as they call it in speed circles—then that pilot is for the time being at least, a jelopie.

Should a new and expensive car prove to be one of those mysterious misfits that can never be made to handle on fast curves, or whose motors are eternally brittle, then that car is a jelopie also.

Should a pit crew fumble a wheel change and waste thirty seconds when a rival outfit is slapping on new rubber in half that time, then the unfortunate losers are jelopies, too.

It's just a new American custom, folks, and it's spreading beyond the speedways. Instead of being a dud or a flat-tire, you'll be a jelopie soon.

Incidentally, in auto-racing, a flat-tire is a "sneaker." A racing car is an "iron." Heavy dust is "soup." A "weasel" is a driver who insists on setting the pace. When a car has mechanical trouble it "breaks up."

China's Ancient Telegraph System

THE Chinese claim that half of the Western inventions are mere imitations or revivals of long forgotten things Chinese. Anything and everything—the

telegraph, steam ships, railroads, phonographs, and electric lights, almost the automobile and aeroplane—can be found described in some book of their immortal classics.

Ancient records indicate that ages ago a Taoist teacher spoke into a box, put his voice in the box and sent it to a friend. This, the Celestials claim was undoubtedly the forerunner of the foreigners' phonograph.

In Peking, centuries ago, market reports were issued daily to distant cities by means of carrier-pigeons. Every morning and afternoon the vault of the sky was swept by scores of carrier-birds winging their way across the city wall with bankers' messages and quotations of gold and silver sales—stock reporter and ticker service older than the telegraph and automatic tape, a system of market reports certainly as old as time.

Our Sponges

THE greater portion of the sponges used in the United States come from the waters surrounding the Isle of Pines off the coast of Cuba. The port of Batobanó, Cuba, is the headquarters of the sponging fleet. Here the sponging schooners unload their cargoes for grading and baling, and here they take on supplies. The little harbor is at times a veritable

forest of masts, for the schooners while equipped with gas engines depend largely on sails.

The sponge is a sea creature and lays eggs which find lodgement on coral branches. There they grow quickly as the movement of the waters sways them back and forth. In this swaying the sides rub against the sandy bottom which wears them quite smooth while the top grows unevenly.

When gathered these uneven tops are trimmed and the coral roots are broken up with hammers and removed. Sponge grades runs in Velvet, Wool, Yellow, and Grass. When sponges are found growing on a particular kind of coral as they are near the Isle of Pines they are termed White Wool.

Large sponges are usually divided into several parts and each is carefully trimmed for some particular use. After the trimmers and sorters finish their work, the sponges are baled under heavy pressure according to grade. Such bales are extremely heavy, and falling on a man from a height of a few feet would crush him.

Our Next Issue

OUR next issue hasn't anything about head-hunters, but it has a most exciting complete novel about "*Headless Men*" for that is the title of a story by

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 _____

Arthur O. Friel about the Orinoco country that will make your hair stand on end—for most of our readers not being headless can still enjoy that pleasant and eerie sensation.

Also there will be a "Major" story by L. Patrick Greene wherein the Major goes back to his old game in the Diamond fields and among the I. D. B. fraternity. But any crook of those parts had to get up pretty early to get ahead of the Major.

"*Tin Horn Killer*" a novelette by L. Clifford goes to show that routine is a good thing for even a dog in the army—

and very few writers know their soldier stuff the way Clifford dies. Another unusual novelette will be by Charles Green who wrote "White Men Should Stick Together" an issue or so back. This time the white men are in the North country, but they certainly didn't stick together. The title of their story is "*Hanging Evidence*."

In addition to these there will be a railroad story by Bennett Foster called "*Apron Strings*"; a Clem Yore Western; a prize fight story by a new author, the second great instalment of the Jackson Gregory serial, and other good yarns.



OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Noise In The Air

NOISE is an outstanding characteristic of all airplanes now in service. This has been the subject of much complaint on the part of the public and a great deal of research by aeronautical engineers. The principal source of it is the propeller, and no method of silencing it is as yet known, other than the reduction of propeller speed. Certain European transport airplanes have been held up to American manufacturers as relative paragons of silence as compared with the domestic article. Here again there is more to the story than meets the casual eye. The planes referred to are as a rule fitted with geared engines and have a customary cruising speed of about 95 miles an hour as compared with the American passenger transport speeds of 120 miles an hour. Added horsepower brings higher speed and

better cruising efficiency but it also brings more noise.

Flying Tourists

GRAPHICALLY indicating the extent to which the airplane is being used by all types of travelers between the 32 countries and colonies served by the Pan American Airways System, according to current records of traffic volume, passengers travel more than 1,200,000 miles every month on the Pan American planes. The average trip for each passenger is about 450 miles.

Bug Catchers

IN PANAMA the airplane is being used to spray crude oil over the mosquito-infected waters. Flying about 150 feet above the waters the oil is squirted from a 40-gallon tank on a Thomas-Morse

O-19C plane. In Honolulu they have a different bug problem and the airplane is being used to solve it. They want to be sure which way the bugs come to them. The theory is that the bugs cross over the mountains through the Mauanu Pass, especially during the time cane is being burnt on the windward side. So planes have been flying through the Pass with bug traps fastened to them. They catch the insect on the wing. In this way they are going to find out which pest comes to Honolulu by the Pass route and do something about it.

The Bat Hunters of Mexico

SINALOA, Tamaulipas, Sonora and other hill countries are the habitat of the Mexican bat, a species of *Thyroptera* which breeds in prolific abundance. This variety is rather small, with a flat head, broad ears and gives off a very pungent and musky odor. It makes its home in

obscure caves, far up in the rocky cliffs and ledges, the entrance being almost imperceptible from the ground.

Here, an odd class of prospectors find it very remunerative hunting for these bat caves, where the guano accumulates. It is not unusual for a "prospector" to make a small fortune on the sale of one cave's deposit, provided of course, the deposit is deep which is often the case, for bats invariably sleep hanging together in great bunches, and occupy a cave for many years.

These guano prospectors work in much the same manner as our western bee and honey hunters. After seeking out what appears to be a likely cliff, they sit by and wait until dusk. If bats emerge, the entrance is located and "staked" off. Excavating operations begin on the following morning. Frequently a deposit is sold outright by the finder who is too lazy to work his "claim."

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

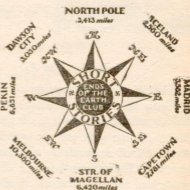
HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

This reader would like a correspondent from the West—especially around the border.

Dear Secretary:

I would like very much to become a member of your Ends of the Earth Club, and I promise that I will do my very best to answer all letters I receive.

I have been a constant reader of SHORT STORIES and I can truthfully say it is the best magazine I have ever read.



I would like to correspond with anyone from the West, especially from around the border.

I have traveled a little, having been in almost every state east of the Mississippi. I haven't been traveling so much recently as I sold my motorcycle, but I expect to be on my way again soon.

Yours sincerely,

Billy Miles

1300 Wright Street,
St. Louis, Missouri

Wants to travel by freighter. Well, that means on some of the most interesting trips in the world.

Dear Secretary:

Being a constant reader and more than fond of traveling I am taking the liberty of asking you to place my name and address on your mailing list as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. Due to the fact that I am employed by a banking institution in the City of New York, it is not possible for me to do much traveling outside of a two weeks' vacation.

On one of these vacations I managed to make a trip to Spanish Honduras. I am very much interested in ships and especially tramp steamers that travel to various ports of call. Would I be asking too much of you to inform me if you know of any steamship company that runs freight boats who would take a passenger. I mean by this that I would prefer a freight boat to a passenger due to the fact that I am not in a position financially, and also I like to travel with men only. Might I add that when I state that I am not in a position financially, I do not mean that I cannot pay for a trip of ten or twelve days, at a smaller rate than is charged by regular passenger lines.

Hoping to hear from you I remain

Yours very truly,

H. F. Kussmaul

6816 Owls Head Court,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Well, if this reader gets a Flemish answer will he please let us read it—translated!

Dear Secretary:

I am a comparatively new reader of your wonderful magazine, but the issues I have read are certainly above reproach.

I would like to be registered as a member of the club. I think I can qualify. I was born in Neuilly s/Seine, France. I came over to America in 1921 and was made a citizen of U. S. A. in May, 1926.

Having seen military service in France before the War 1914 as sergeant in the 61st Infanterie Coloniale D'Afrique, I served five years during the World War as First Lieutenant of the 66th Coloniale Infanterie, later attached as Captain in the Foreign Intelligence Department in France till the end of hostilities.

I have traveled a good bit over this little world, viz.: all over Europe, Northern and Central Africa, Egypt, India, until I came over to America.

Always glad to answer any letters from interested readers and will do my best to give them all information regardless whether they write in English, French, German or Holland Dutch or Flemish.

So come on club members, let's hear from you, *un ancien Capitaine des Poilus vous salue! Liberte-Egalite-Fraternite!*

Sincerely,

Louis Lafayette

Cottage Camp Grounds,
Watsonville, Calif.

I hope that this reader gets an answer from one of the men he met in 1921.

Dear Secretary:

I am desirous of being enrolled in the Ends of the Earth Club, of which I have heard such good accounts from friends who are members.

I am N. C. O. in charge of the Military Hospital at Cyprus, and I have been connected with the Boy Scout movement since 1912. Were any of your readers at the 1921 Jamboree in London (Olympia)? I was in next the line of tents to the U. S. A. boys, and I particularly remember the Denver, Colorado, troop.

I am a keen stamp collector and will exchange stamps by return of post with all writers.

Sincerely yours,

A. H. Lemon

Military Hospital,
Cyprus,
Mediterranean

SHORT STORIES was born in 1891. Now we wonder—?

Dear Secretary:

Have been a reader of SHORT STORIES from the time of its birth and have missed but few of its copies.

I would like to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club if I can qualify. I have had a varied if not adventurous life, having in the last twenty-two years been a paint chemist, sailor, explorer in a small way in Venezuela, then quartermaster on an ore vessel to Cuba, auto driver and truck mechanic. Enlisted in the Army in the late war. After being discharged helped build four "subs" at the Lake Plant here. Then was air brake tester on the West Shore Railroad in Weehawken, New Jersey, turnstile maintainer in the New York Subway and finally for the last few years have been engaged in selling and repairing radios.

The first seven or eight years of my life were spent in California and I would like to receive letters from someone there who could give me some information on living conditions and so forth in that state, but not in or near Los Angeles.

Yours sincerely,

Henry F. Morris

805 Park Avenue,
Bridgeport, Connecticut

This ought to be easy to answer.

Dear Secretary:

Would you please pass my name and address on to an American, who is desirous of corresponding with a British soldier, serving in India.

I would exchange snaps if desired, but am not a stamp collector, as one has not that opportunity out here.

Thanking you in anticipation, I am,

Yours sincerely,

W. R. Billinghamurst

No. 769341
13th Medium Battery R. A.
Agra, U. P. India

Well, it is good news that this reader doesn't think the SHORT STORIES can be improved.

Hello Gang:

How is everybody? I am still a member of the Ends of the Earth Club and I must say it is a fine thing for making new friends and above all we should be glad to be able to secure such a wonderful magazine as SHORT STORIES. I sure do enjoy it and would never be without it.

I live in the beautiful Fox River valley region in Elgin, Illinois, the home of the Elgin watch. I am alone, having lost both my parents, and I become a little lonesome at times, so I would be pleased to hear from anyone and will sure answer all letters and tell many interesting tales of the valley regions.

Here's wishing the gang the best of luck, and also the magazine, which I don't believe can be improved.

Yours sincerely,

Jack C. Lossan

731 Linden Avenue, Elgin, Illinois

A prospective prospector in Colombia.

Dear Secretary:

I would like very much to be a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. All my life I have been a traveler having served a greater part of the time as a seaman. I have been in England, Ireland, China, Japan and Canada and would like very much to correspond with members from these places. Just now I am planning a prospecting trip to Colombia. I am particularly interested in fencing and mining and would like to hear from members interested in these things also.

I have been a reader of SHORT STORIES for several years and find it not only interesting and entertaining but also very instructive.

Sincerely,

Giles Oliver Morrill

1326 Vermont Ave. N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Anyone in the Orient or the Tropics.

A call for the Border Patrol.

Dear Secretary:

Could you give me the name of some fellow comrade with whom I might correspond? I would like this person to be from the Orient or the Tropics. I have always wanted to travel in those countries and would be interested in hearing about them.

Very sincerely yours,
Bexley Todd

166 West Jackson Blvd.,
Room 1227, c/o W. H. May,
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Secretary:

I would like to enroll as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club because I have enjoyed reading your magazine very much.

I would appreciate hearing from some members of the United States Border Patrol.

Respectfully yours,
James Brennan

52 North Street,
Walpole,
Massachusetts

SAVE THESE LISTS!

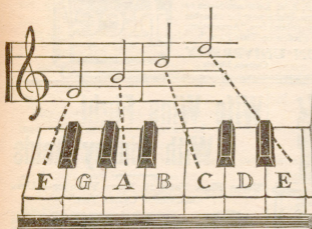
WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Save these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.

Jerry Falles, 310 Laurelton, Long Beach, Long Beach, California
Thomas C. Fehric, 1356 East Lycoming Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Michael H. Feider, 509 South 18th Street, Newark, New Jersey
Myrtle Fell, 550 North Pennsylvania Avenue, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania
Miss J. Ferguson, 49a Albion Avenue, San Francisco, California
James M. Fitzgerald, 5742-55th Avenue, S.E., Portland, Oregon
Jimmie Foster, SS Gulfight, c/o Gulf Refining Company, Port Arthur, Texas
Albert Franck, 90 Morningside Drive, New York City
Charles E. Frehofer, 325 Duke Street, Northumberland, Pennsylvania
Vivian Furman, Westfield, Illinois
M. C. Gardner, 1752-22nd Avenue North, St. Petersburg, Florida
Harry V. Gerhardt, 6529 Wheeler Street, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Stanley Paul Gibbs, 3106 South Henderson Avenue, Dallas, Texas
Gladys Gilbert, 739 South Mariposa, Los Angeles, California
George E. Gill, 46 Vine Street, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
Sarah Gilmer, 1112 Clarion Street, Reading, Pennsylvania
Howard Given, 856 Cherry Street, Norristown, Pennsylvania
R. P. Glasson, 366 Mathewson Place S. E., Atlanta, Georgia
Meyer Glickstein, 17 Pitt Street, New York City
Bernard F. Godfrey, R. F. 1, Box 49, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania
Raphael Gold, 3447 DeKalb Avenue, Bronx, New York
Manuel Goldmacher, 93 Hamilton Place, New York
Hal Gomes, 63rd Squadron, France Field, Canal Zone
Helen Goodale, 618 North Oakley, Laverne, Minnesota
Alfred Graham, P. O. Box 524, Lafayette, Louisiana
Jean Green, 23 Sussex Street off Paisley Road, Glasgow, Scotland
Lucy E. Greer, 2512 S Street, Sacramento, California
Barney K. Grinnvoll, Box 760, Hawilton, Montana
Sam Grodner, 1354 Longfellow Avenue, New York City

Stephen Haas, 798 East 165th Street, New York City
James A. Hale, Box 164, Edwight, West Virginia
Charles Hall, c/o Ferry Seattle, Coleman Dock, Seattle, Washington
Eric J. Hall, H. O. Battery, 8th Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Territory of Hawaii
Pvt. Morton Halsey, Battery F, 60th Coast Artillery, Ft. Mills, Corregidor, Philippine Islands
Charles E. Hammond, 51 Bedford Street, Waltham, Massachusetts
Walter Hammond, 41 Astor Street, Boston, Massachusetts
LeRoy Hancock, P. O. Box 906, Winslow, Arizona
Richard Haracy, 50 Hall Street, Fall River, Massachusetts
Pvt. E. J. Harding, Jr., Hdqrs. Co., 16th Infantry, Fort Jay, New York
Robert Hathaway, 2417 Fanow Avenue, Kansas City, Kansas
A. B. Hebert, 636 Rimmon Street, Manchester, New Hampshire
C. R. Heinz, 520 Commercial Street, Atchison, Kansas
Verle R. Hillman, Box 53, Bellaire, Kansas
Bjarne Hoegseth, c/o Messrs. Steamship Owners Operating Company, 17 Battery Place, New York
Wilbur Dock Hogue, Delta Chi House, Moscow, Idaho
Albert Hoile, 36th Pursuit Squadron, Langley Field, Virginia
Jack W. Holt, c/o Steamer John J. Ohagan, Marine Post Office, Detroit, Michigan
Fromhold Holtz, Hilbert, Wisconsin
James H. Hopkins, 524 Hospital Trust Building, Providence, Rhode Island
Mortimer Horowitz, 15 Magow Place, Washington Heights, New York
Beatrice Horton, Box 751, Van Dyke, Michigan
John Horton, 7704 Medbury Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
Erwin Houseman, Quartermaster Detachment, Fort Mills, Corregidor, Philippine Islands
Mercedes Howard-Norfolk, 4 Townsend Lane, Anfield, Liverpool, England
Herbert Hudson, Box 977, Lynch, Kentucky
May Hughes, 48 Ashbank Road, Dundee, Angus, Scotland
W. Lester Hughes, 1301 Baltimore Trust Building, Baltimore, Maryland
Vere R. Hunt, Box 1234, Southampton, Long Island

- Wilmot R. Hunt, Joseph, Oregon
 Rex Hybort-Taylor, Roan Antelope Copper Mines Ltd.,
 P. O. Luanshya, North Rhodesia, Africa
 Ernest D. Hlustre, 4824 Winthrop Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 Daniel Immerman, 543 Westfield Avenue, Elizabeth, New
 Jersey
 Louis N. Jacobson, 101 South Grange Avenue, Sioux Falls,
 South Dakota
 Mrs. C. L. Jarrell, Edwight, West Virginia
 Adelle Johnson, Lennig, Virginia
 Catherine Johnson, Lennig, Virginia
 I. Alden Johnson, 114 Greenbrier Street, Dorchester,
 Massachusetts
 Paul N. Johnson, Hdq. Detachment, Fort Lincoln, Bismarck,
 North Dakota
 Roland Johnson, 251 West 114th Street, Chicago, Illinois
 Ernest J. Jolviet, 595 Eastern Avenue, Fall River, Massachu-
 setts
 Sayles R. Jones, 501 California, Box 36, San Pedro, Califor-
 nia
 William F. Joyce, 121 Fillmore Street, New Haven, Con-
 necticut
 Jesse Renault Just, 187 Schaeffer Street, Brooklyn, New
 York
 Harold Kahl, 1302 Rosedale Avenue, Bronx, New York
 Leonard Kaplan, 174 East Mt. Eden Avenue, Bronx, New
 York
 William Karp, 111 Maple Avenue, Stamford, Connecticut
 H. B. Kavanaugh, 245 Hewes Street, Brooklyn, New York
 J. A. Keller, Box 396, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu,
 Territory of Hawaii
 James Kermath, 2384 Rushbrooke Street, Point St.
 Charles, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
 Robert Kermath, 2384 Rushbrooke Street, Montreal,
 Quebec, Canada
 Aubron Ketron, Decker, Montana
 Herbert A. Kirke, 828 East 8th Street, Traverse City,
 Michigan
 Walter Kmoteck, 1858 West 18th Street, 3 F. R., Chicago,
 Illinois
 Gb Knupp, 212 Fifth Avenue, Warren, Pennsylvania
 Rudolph Kokick, Route 2, Box 19, Beaverton, Oregon
 Bernard G. Krober, 355 East 88th Street, New York City
 George P. Lacey, 2739 Eagle Street, Los Angeles, Califor-
 nia
 Will C. Lackaye, 1921 Bissell Street, Chicago, Illinois
 Louis Lafayette, Cottage Camp Grounds, Watsonville,
 California
 Henry P. Landers, Providence Y. M. C. A., 160 Broad
 Street, Providence, Rhode Island
 Peter Langan, 1539 St. Lawrence Avenue, Bronx, New
 York
 Andrew P. La Panis, 10 McArdle Avenue, Albany, New
 York
 Don Larson, Route 3, Lynden, Washington
 Helen Lasky, 7704 Medbury Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
 Lauvux Aul Lauauvintine, c/o Post Office, Ketchikan,
 Alaska
 Margaret Law, 138 Miln Park Street, Kinniny Park, Glas-
 gow, Scotland
 Cleve Le Blanc, c/o Louisiana National Bank, Baton
 Rouge, Louisiana
 William C. Le Duc, 21 Coniston Road, Schenectady, New
 York
 Robert J. Lee, Rikers Island, New York
 Angeline Lehr, 7704 Medbury Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
 Fred Leifer, 15 Pitt Street, New York City
 Leo F. Leise, 5922-60th Lane, Maspeth, New York
 A. H. Lemon, Military Hospital, Isle of Cyprus, Medi-
 terranean
 Eugene Lennon, 121 West 24th Street, Wildwood, New
 Jersey
 Bradford Leonard, 550 Harlan Avenue, Johnstown, Penn-
 sylvania
 George E. Leppert, 3419 Highland, Kansas City, Missouri
 John Lindstrom, Jr., 1628 Harding Park, Clason Point,
 Bronx, New York
 Harriett Luttrell, 7067 Longyear Avenue, Detroit, Michi-
 gan
 W. L. Lynch, 33 Lindenlea Road, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
 George M. Lynch, 525 Cumberland Street, Cumberland,
 Maryland
 Frank C. Lyons, 209 North Lafayette Street, Mobile, Ala-
 bama
 Ralston McCue, Corte Madera, Marin County, California
 Charles McDermott, 1103-29th Street, Denver, Colorado
 W. J. McGuinness, 26 Glen Osmond Road, Parkside,
 Adelaide, South Australia
 William McKnight, 580 Parliament Street, Toronto, Can-
 ada
 Gloria Mach, 409 Vine Street, Kissimmee, Florida
 Olive Mach, 409 Vine Street, Kissimmee, Florida
 Jack Mackey, 1004 Knox Avenue, Monessen, Pennsylvania
 Donald C. Mac Claren, 4 Jackson Avenue, South Glen
 Falls, New York
 Lester M. Macomber, 22 Mowry Avenue, East Providence,
 Rhode Island
 Jack Madden, Branch Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio
 Ann J. Magdziak, 245-24th Street, Niagara Falls, New
 York
 Neville Mainguy, 309 Strathearn Avenue, Montreal, West,
 P. O. Canada
 Dick E. Marsh, P. O. Box 1423, El Paso, Texas
 Marvin P. Martin, American Legation, Peiping, China
 Mike Martin, 11 Esther Street, Newark, New Jersey
 Jerry Martinson, 2205-2nd Avenue, Apt. 211, Seattle,
 Washington
 Mary L. Materoh, 10754 Hosie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 William E. Mathews, 1535 Southern Blvd., New York City
 Andrew Mathson, 1049 Wellington Avenue, Chicago,
 Illinois
 Harry John Matlick, 1315 Girard Avenue, N. Minneapolis,
 Minnesota
 R. Matuszka, Ungarie, N. S. Wales, Australia
 Philip Maurer, Jr., 2552 University Avenue, Bronx, New
 York
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28x11.50	\$4.55	30x11.00	\$4.45
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28x12.50	\$4.85	30x12.00	\$4.75
28x13.00	\$5.00	30x12.50	\$4.90
28x13.50	\$5.15	30x13.00	\$5.05
28x14.00	\$5.30	30x13.50	\$5.20
28x14.50	\$5.45	30x14.00	\$5.35
28x15.00	\$5.60	30x14.50	\$5.50
28x15.50	\$5.75	30x15.00	\$5.65
28x16.00	\$5.90	30x15.50	\$5.80
28x16.50	\$6.05	30x16.00	\$5.95
28x17.00	\$6.20	30x16.50	\$6.10
28x17.50	\$6.35	30x17.00	\$6.25
28x18.00	\$6.50	30x17.50	\$6.40
28x18.50	\$6.65	30x18.00	\$6.55
28x19.00	\$6.80	30x18.50	\$6.70
28x19.50	\$6.95	30x19.00	\$6.85
28x20.00	\$7.10	30x19.50	\$7.00
28x20.50	\$7.25	30x20.00	\$7.15
28x21.00	\$7.40	30x20.50	\$7.30
28x21.50	\$7.55	30x21.00	\$7.45
28x22.00	\$7.70	30x21.50	\$7.60
28x22.50	\$7.85	30x22.00	\$7.75
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28x24.00	\$8.30	30x23.50	\$8.20
28x24.50	\$8.45	30x24.00	\$8.35
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28x25.50	\$8.75	30x25.00	\$8.65
28x26.00	\$8.90	30x25.50	\$8.80
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28x31.50	\$10.55	30x31.00	\$10.45
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28x35.50	\$11.75	30x35.00	\$11.65
28x36.00	\$11.90	30x35.50	\$11.80
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28x37.50	\$12.35	30x37.00	\$12.25
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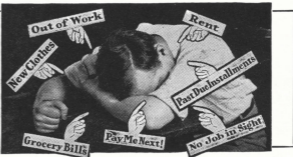
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Are You Out of a Job?

If You Need Money Send Me
Your Name and I'll Show You
How to Start Making Up to

\$15 a day

With My Thrilling New
Introductory Package Plan



A Breath-Taking Announcement That Will Put Both Men
and Women to Work at Once

Distributing Trial Packages

No More Worries---No More Bill Collectors---No More Skipping
---Now You Can Have Money In Your Pocket All the Time
---Here's the Quick New Way to Make It!



Your Own GROCERIES at Wholesale

When I send you instructions for making money on my new Trial Package Plan I also give you rock-bottom, wholesale prices on your own groceries—about half of regular retail prices. This is in addition to your regular pay. So you can MAKE big money in cash and SAVE big money on the things you use in your own home.

I'm not much of a hand for fancy writing—but I can think up ideas. When I thought of my new Introductory Package Plan I knew it was going to be a great thing; a great thing for me—and a positive blessing to hundreds who had been out of work. Best of all, with my new system, you can make as much in "hard times" as in "boom" times. So if you're wondering where the money is coming from to pay your bills, you're just the person I'm looking for. Your worries are over right now.

GO TO WORK AT ONCE

My new plan provides immediate cash earnings for both men and women. So long as you're honest and reliable you're eligible for one of these jobs. And I want someone in every territory because this new Trial Package idea is sweeping the country. So you can go to work at once right in your own locality.

NOT AN EXPERIMENT — EARNING PROVED

You may think this sounds too good to be true. But that's not so. Before I announced the idea for national use I tried it out thoroughly, and the men and women who tested it made big money right from the start. For example, Sel. Korembilt of New York took in enough money in one week to make \$119 for himself—when you count commissions. H. L. Lennon wrote me, "Started with you Friday morning and cleared \$36.63

in 7½ hours." Mrs. Eva McCutchen, in Oklahoma, quit an office job and made \$26.55 profit the first day with my system. Mrs. Jewel Hackett, here in Ohio, tried it and cleared \$33 in 7 hours. I have hundreds of reports like these to prove that this Trial Package Plan is a winner.

NO DEPRESSION WITH A PLAN LIKE THIS

You may wonder at making such big money even in hard times. But this plan of Trial Package distribution is doing exactly that for hundreds. The "Trial Package" Plan is simple. Your first work on this new job will be to distribute introductory packages of my line to people in your neighborhood. After they have had a chance to use these products and see how they save money, they give you their orders for full size packages. You handle the money and deliver the goods. And a big share of every dollar we take in goes into your pocket as your pay. Pay for this work is frequently as high as \$15 a day. Even at the start delivering only 35 Trial Packages a day will pay you \$8.75—regular and steady.

**30 CUSTOMERS —
\$15 FOR YOU**

In no time at all, you should have a list of regular customers that you call on every two

weeks. And with an established route which requires only 30 calls a day, your pay can easily be \$15 a day steady. If you want to have only a 15-call route and work only half-days, you can still make up to \$7.50 a day—and even that gives you \$15 a week—not bad for half-time.

DON'T SEND MONEY — JUST NAME

I don't want your money. All I want is your name and address so I can lay before you bona fide proof of the success of this plan—proof that you, too, can make good money. Remember, you invest no money in a stock of goods. I furnish the capital, set up your business, show you how to start earning money at once. It costs nothing to investigate. You read the proof, then decide for yourself. Since you can't lose and since you may find just the kind of steady, day-pay work you want, tear out this valuable blank right now, fill it in and mail it to me at once.

**A. L. MILLS, President
510 Monmouth Avenue
CINCINNATI, OHIO**

FREE AS AN EXTRA BONUS New Ford Tudor Sedan!

This is NOT a contest or a "prize" for solving puzzles. This Ford is not given to you in place of your money. No! But to everyone who proves to me that he is "on the job" and building up a real trade through proper and courteous handling of customers. I give this car as an extra bonus—in addition to what you make every day in cash. If you already have a car I'll give you an equal amount in cash instead. I'll explain this fully when I send you details of my Trial Package Plan.



GOOD for FREE OFFER

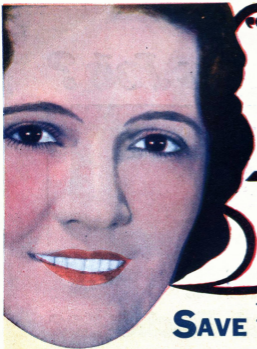
A. L. Mills, President,
510 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me full particulars of your Trial Package Plan showing how I can make up to \$15 a day—steady and sure. This is not an order for any goods and the plan you send is not to cost me one cent, now or at any other time.

Name

Address

(Please Print or Write Plainly)



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