

H. BEDFORD-JONES, BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR
L. PATRICK GREENE—all in this issue

Short Stories

Twice A Month

September 10th

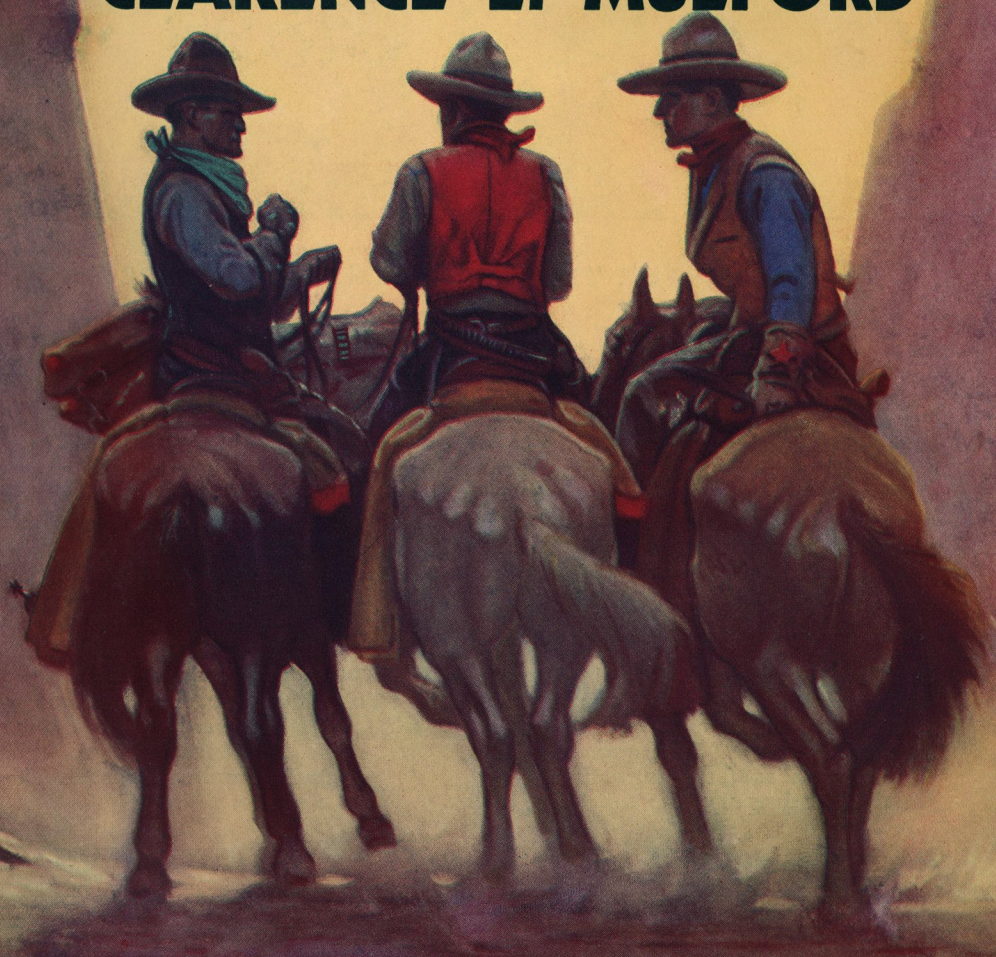
Part I

25c

"On the Trail of the Tumbling T"

by

CLARENCE E. MULFORD



REMINGTON
SCHUYLER



WOMEN MADE A FUSS OVER ME"

"FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE

"It was wonderful to realize that charming women found me interesting . . . wanted to be with me. Always before I had been left out of things . . . the No. 1 wallflower of the town. Could it be that this wonderful change had been brought about by reading a Listerine ad and following its sensible suggestion? There was no other way of accounting for it."

DON'T TAKE A CHANCE

People who are popular . . . men and women who go places and see things . . . make friends and keep them, are almost invariably users of Listerine. They are too sensible to run the risk of having halitosis (unpleasant breath), the unforgiv-

able social fault.

Don't take the chance of offending others needlessly. Every morning and every night and between times before business or social engagements, rinse the mouth with Listerine.

Listerine instantly halts the fermentation of tiny food particles, said by a noted dental authority to be the cause of ninety per cent of odors, then overcomes the odors themselves. The breath—in fact the entire mouth—becomes sweet, clean, and wholesome.

Don't rely on ordinary mouth washes which may be devoid of deodorant effect.

Use only Listerine which deodorizes longer. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.



PUT YOURSELF ON THE SAFE SIDE...USE LISTERINE BEFORE MEETING OTHERS

SHORT STORIES. Issued semi-monthly by DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC. 501 Franklin Ave., Garden City, N. Y., and entered as second-class matter at the Post Office, Garden City, N. Y. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE—In the United States, Mexico and American Possessions, \$5.00 per year; to Canada, \$5.50; and to all other foreign countries in the Postal Union, \$6.60; price payable in advance, and including postage.

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I'LL SEND MY FIRST LESSON FREE

It shows how EASY it is to learn at home to fill a **GIG IN RADIO**



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute.
The man who has directed the Home-Study Training of more men than the Radio industry than any other man in America.

Here's Proof

CLEARS \$4,500 IN 18 MONTHS



"Before taking your Radio Course I was making \$18 a week. I came here three years ago and in 18 months I made about \$4,500 in Radio. I cannot say too much for the wonderful help I have received from N. R. I."

NOEL W. RAY,
619 Broad St.,
Gadsden, Alabama.

SPARE TIME WORK PAYS \$18 A WEEK

"I only do spare time Radio work and average \$18 a week. People who in good times would buy a new Radio, now have the old one fixed."



STEPHEN J. DRAPCHAK,
407 Wunderlich Ave.,
Barberton, Ohio.

RADIO ENGINEER AT WSUI



"Upon graduating I accepted a job as service man and within three weeks was made Service Manager. This job paid \$40 to \$50 a week. Eight months later I obtained a position as operator with Station KWOB through your Employment Department. Now I am Radio Engineer of WSUI."

SYLVANUS J. EBERT,
University of Iowa,
Iowa City, Iowa.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm so sure that I can train you at home in your spare time for a good job in Radio that I'll send you my first lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Then you will know why many men with less than a grammar school education and no technical experience have become Radio Experts and are earning two to three times their former pay as a result of my training.

MANY RADIO EXPERTS MAKE \$40, \$60, \$75 A WEEK

In less than 15 years, the Radio Industry has grown from a few million to hundreds of millions of dollars. Over 300,000 jobs have been created by this growth, and thousands more will be created by its continued development. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you in the N. R. I. Course—have stepped into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

GET READY NOW FOR JOBS LIKE THESE

Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$7,500 a year. Radio operators on ships enjoy life, see the world, with board and lodging free, and get good pay besides. Dealers and jobbers employ servicemen, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay up to \$100 a week. My book tells you about these and many other interesting Radio jobs.

MANY MAKE \$5, \$10, \$15 A WEEK EXTRA IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING

The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which quickly show you how to do Radio repair jobs common in most every neighborhood. Throughout your training, I send you information for servicing popular makes of sets. I give you plans and ideas that have made good spare time money—\$200 to \$1,000 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My Course is famous as "the Course that pays for itself."

TELEVISION, SHORT WAVE, LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS INCLUDED

There's opportunity for you in Radio. Its future is certain. Television, short wave, loud speaker systems, police Radio, automobile Radio, aviation Radio—in every branch, developments and improvements are taking place. Here is a real future for thousands and thousands of men who really know Radio—men with N. R. I. training. Get the training that opens the road to good pay and success.

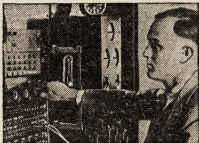
YOU GET A MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

I am so sure that N. R. I. can train you satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lesson and Instruction Service upon completion.

FREE 64-PAGE BOOK OF FACTS

Mail the coupon now. In addition to the sample lesson, I send my book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It tells you about the opportunities in Radio, tells you about my Course, what others who have taken it are doing and making. This offer is free to any ambitious fellow over 15 years old. Find out what Radio offers you without slightest obligation. ACT NOW! Mail coupon in an envelope, or paste on a 1c post card.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 5JM
Washington, D. C.



You Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE with Radio Equipment I GIVE YOU

I'll show you how to use my special Radio Equipment for conducting experiments and building circuits which illustrate important principles used in such well-known sets as Westinghouse, General Electric, Philco, R. C. A., Victor, Majestic and others. You work out with your own hands many of the things you read in my lesson books. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home easy, interesting, fascinating, intensely practical. You learn how sets work, why they work, how to make them work when they are out of order. Training like this shows up in your pay envelope—when you graduate you have had training and experience—you're not simply looking for a job where you can get experience.

I have doubled and tripled the salaries of many



MAIL THIS NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President,
National Radio Institute, Dept. 5JM,
Washington, D. C.

I want to take advantage of your offer. Without obligating me, send me your Free Sample Lesson and your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio."
(Please Print Plainly)

NAME..... AGE.....

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE..... "R"

The Tested Way to BETTER PAY

Train for ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS AT COYNE

The great Coyne Shops in Chicago have a world-wide reputation for training ambitious fellows for this big-pay field in only 12 weeks. Then help you by giving you lifetime employment service. By my new plan YOU can take advantage of their wonderful method of learning-by-doing NOW.

SEND TODAY FOR DETAILS OF MY "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan



"Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan

Get training in 90 days on real electrical machinery. Send the coupon today. If you are short of money I'll send you all details of my finance plan. If accepted, you won't have to start paying tuition until five months from the date you start school, and then you'll have 18 months to complete your payments. Send for Big Free Illustrated Book telling all about COYNE and how many earn while learning and training you can get there without book study or useless theory.

H. C. Lewis

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 65-66, Chicago, Illinois

MR. H. C. LEWIS, President
Dept. 65-66, 500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.
Send BIG FREE Illustrated Book on ELECTRICITY and details of your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY STATE

Wrestling Book Learn at Home **FREE**



Be an expert wrestler. Learn at home by mail. The greatest wrestlers of all, Frank Gotch and Farmer Burns, both world's champions have prepared the most wonderful course of lessons ever written on Physical Culture and Expert Wrestling. Be strong and healthy! Handle big men with ease. This great free book tells you how. Don't delay. Write now. State your age. Farmer Burns' School, 3036 Elwood Bldg., Omaha, Neb.

MIND POWER

A FREE BOOK

Develop your personal, creative power! Awaken the silent sleeping forces in your own consciousness. Become Master of your own life. Push aside all obstacles with a new energy you have overlooked. The ROSICRUCIANS know how, and will help you apply the greatest of all powers in man's control. Create health and abundance for yourself. Write for FREE book, "The Wisdom of the Sages" It tells how you may receive these teachings for study and use. It means the dawn of a new day for you. Address,

Scribe N. Z. C.
ROSICRUCIAN BROTHERHOOD
San Jose (AMORC) California

The Diesel Engineer



Is Your Job Safe

Just as the gasoline engine changed or wiped out the jobs of thousands who depended on horse-drawn vehicles for their living—just as electricity changed the entire set-up in the fields of light and power—so now the Diesel engine is fast invading both the power and transportation fields, and threatening the present jobs of thousands of workers.

If jobs in your line are steadily growing scarcer, you owe it to yourself to investigate this new, progressive, uncrowded line, that will offer good openings for the next 25 years.

Diesel—The Newest, Fastest-Growing Power

Diesel engines—because of their high efficiency, dependability, and economy of operation—are fast replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and buses, locomotives and ships, aircraft, tractors, dredges, drills, pumps, etc.—opening up an increasing number of well-paid jobs for Diesel-trained men. The field of Diesel Engineering is on the upgrade and continually expanding. It will provide steady employment and advancement for those properly trained in this new industry—as long as they need to work.

You get complete information on all the latest Diesel developments—two- and four-stroke cycles; low- and high-speed and heavy-duty types; Diesel-electric generating systems, etc.—in our course. Includes all text material—with special diagrams for quick understanding of this new power.

Now is your chance to get into a big new industry and grow up with it to an important position. Today there is practically no competition in the Diesel field, but the increasing use of Diesel engines will result in keen competition for jobs in three to five years. By starting your training now, you can keep ahead of such competition.

What This New Field Offers You

Get our Free Diesel Booklet and learn all about this newest, fastest-growing line—its opportunities and requirements. Find out what the Diesel field offers you—how rapidly the Diesel industry has developed during the last three years—the large number of Diesel engines and accessories being manufactured today—how easily you can obtain a complete understanding of Diesel engine principles and operation by home study during your spare time—without interfering with your regular work.

Asking for information involves no obligation—but it may mark the turning point in your life. Write TODAY for full information.

American School, Dept. D-639, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

Turn Your Spare Time into Dollars



I WANT MEN

for TEA and COFFEE ROUTES

PAYING UP TO \$60.00 IN A WEEK

PROVEN PROFITS

YOUR earnings begin the first day. You can increase them from week to week and month to month. You have your own established Route of steady customers. There is no time clock to punch—no back breaking labor to perform. This is a pleasant, dignified, healthful outdoor occupation—a bona fide opportunity to make up to \$60.00 in a week for your full time and up to \$3.00 to \$5.00 in a day just for your spare time.



Have a PERMANENT ROUTE with Big Weekly Cash Earnings

These Tea and Coffee Routes offer bigger opportunities to make money than laundry routes, milk routes or bakery routes. You are not limited to just one or two necessities. You supply your customers with Tea, Coffee, Extracts, Spices, Kitchen Necessities—things people need daily. You offer valuable premiums and other amazing bargain specials to customers with these fine products. You deliver the goods—handle all the money and keep a big share for yourself as your pay. I send everything you need. You don't risk a penny of your money.

NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Positively no experience is necessary to handle one of these Routes. No tedious training course to take. You must be trustworthy, conscientious, and willing to follow a few simple, common-sense instructions. I will show you all the inside workings of this Tea and Coffee Route business. I make the instructions so plain and simple that anyone who can read and write can quickly understand them and start earning money the very first day. Your Route can be right near your own home. Consumers—many of whom will be your friends and neighbors—will eagerly welcome the money-saving service you provide.

YEAR 'ROUND CASH EARNINGS

Think how wonderful it would be to have money rolling into your pockets



every week in the year. Imagine the feeling of independence and security you could have. Picture escaping the constant worry—that awful fear of losing your job and not knowing where your next dollar is coming from. With a steady Tea and Coffee Route, you can have the money you need to provide security, independence and freedom from financial worries. You don't have to wait—earnings begin the very first day.

GOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Both married and single women have been unusually successful in this light, pleasant business. Mrs. Ed. Koesler, Oreg., made \$81.00 in a week. Helen V. Woolmington, Pa., made \$45.00 in a week. Mrs. H. H. Hosick, Neb., made \$41.73 the very first week. You can see from these exceptional earning reports just how big the profit possibilities of my offer really are.

SEND NO MONEY—JUST NAME

As quickly as I can hear from you I will lay startling facts before you and then you can decide for yourself. You be the judge as to whether or not my offer is fair. Invest—positively no money risk. Costs nothing to know the truth. The facts I send you may be the turning point in your life. Put your name on coupon or penny postcard at once and mail.

FORD SEDANS GIVEN

I will give you a brand new 8-Cylinder Ford Tudor Sedan as a bonus if you show me you are a producer. This is not a prize contest, raffle, or a game of chance. These cars are given in addition to regular big cash earnings.

VACANCIES BEING FILLED RAPIDLY

These Tea and Coffee Routes are not an experiment. They are time tested and thoroughly proven money makers—the result of 28 years continuous success. Here are just a few exceptional earnings men have made on these Routes: L. P. Boyne, La., made \$67.20 in a week. Steve Witt, Mo., made \$21.59 in a day. George W. Creed, Ohio, \$95.00 in a week. Robert Bretscher, N. Y., \$78.00 in one week; \$25.00 in a day. Anaso Pardini, Calif., \$68.00 in a week; \$21.67 in a day. Albert Becker, Mich., made \$40.00 in a day and as high as \$100.00 in a week. Scores of others have sent me similar reports of their big earnings. Now I have an even better opportunity to offer you than these people had. You may do even better than they did. Better send me your name and find out what big earning possibilities my plan offers you.

TEA and COFFEE ROUTE COUPON

ALBERT MILLS, Route Mgr.,
7640 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me complete free details. Tell me about the Tea and Coffee Business and explain how I can get started making up to \$60.00 in a week without risking any of my money. Also send me your Ford automobile offer.

Name.....

Address.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

GUARANTEED TIRES

GOODYEAR FIRESTONE GOODRICH
And All Other STANDARD BRANDS

Save 60% TO 70%

25x4.40-21
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ON THE TRAIL OF THE TUMBLING T

Part I

I

NUECES pushed open the door marked CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION—ENTER and grinned down at the young man at the desk. He was feeling very good, liked his new job and was eager to get out of the state capital and back on the open range. A salary of a hundred dollars a month, and expenses, would not have caused him to throw up his old job

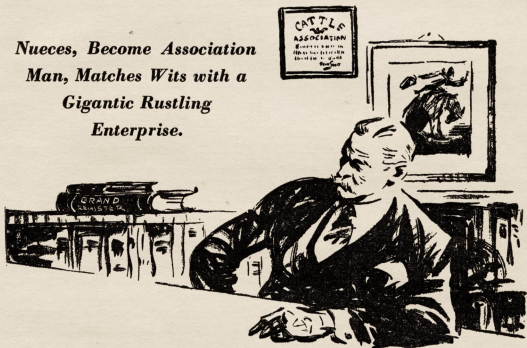
as foreman of the JC ranch, except that the JC was not like what it used to be; for now there was another woman on the old ranch. She was nothing like the woman Old John Corson had brought home in his dotage, nothing at all like her. She was a fine woman, a damned fine woman—but she was a woman, and the old careless freedom of action was gone.

He and Bob Corson were good friends and Bob understood the whole thing, and it was through Bob that Nueces had ob-

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

*Author of Such Well Known Cattle Country Yarns as "Trail Dust,"
"Cattle Get Notions," etc.*

Nueces, Become Association Man, Matches Wits with a Gigantic Rustling Enterprise.



tained his present job; and it had been Bob's last word that the old job was there whenever Nueces felt like coming back to it, and Bob had shown that he had hoped that Nueces would come back to it soon. Things had changed in other ways, too. Bob had served as sheriff for three terms and then refused to run again; and with that refusal Nueces' deputyship had died a peaceful death. He would not serve in that capacity under any other man. Being a deputy sheriff in a county where such an office had meant action, and plenty of it, had rather spoiled Nueces for the casual excitements incidental to running a ranch. He had the foot itch, the trigger-finger itch, and whatever other kinds of itches were necessary to make a man crave to move about and get into various sorts of trouble. He also had a peculiar mind, a beautifully trained gun hand and a boundless imagination. He could think directly,

obliquely and roundabout, often all three at the same time, and get what he wanted to get out of the scramble.

The young man at the desk let his feet drop to the floor and jerked a thumb over his shoulder at another door, this one marked PRIVATE.

"Old Man's waitin' for you; go on in," he said, and placed his feet back on the desk again.

THE Old Man was considering several telegrams when Nueces closed the door, and glanced from them up to the new-comer. The Old Man's eyebrows were thick and bushy, and the eyes which peered out from under them were keen as a hawk's. They also were of that peculiar, shallow blue which was worse than a red flag to a man who understood that color.

"Tired of the city?" he asked with a knowing smile. His own youth was far

behind him, but he had forgotten little of it.

Nueces dropped into a chair, placed his hat on the floor near his feet, and nodded.

"Hell, yes!" he said.

"Huh!" said the Old Man. "You know anything about Carter County?"

"Never even heard of it," answered Nueces.

"That's good," said the Old Man. "That means that Carter County knows nothing about you. It ain't really Carter County. It's a whole lot of territory hooked onto it for judicial purposes. They do their devilment in that territory, but they get tried in Carter County, if they get caught. If—they—get—caught," he repeated meaningfully, and then became thoughtful. He rested his hands on the telegrams for a moment, idly shifting them back and forth, and then he looked up at his caller.

"You ever catch anybody when you was a deputy?"

"Oh, three, four, here an' there," answered Nueces modestly.

"Huh! I know more about you than you do, yourself," said the Old Man suddenly. He sounded like he was barking. "No man gets the job you now hold without a lot of inquiries being made beforehand. I came out into this country in the wagon train that followed right behind Old John Corson's. I knew Old John well, and I know his son—have known him since he was born. I won't tell you what Bob Corson said about you because you might get too high ideas about your value; but what he said about you is responsible for me giving you the toughest job ever tackled by this office, and as your very first assignment. Understand?"

"Bob shore would say somethin' that'd get me into a mess," replied Nueces, but he could not check the grin.

"I'll be honest with you, Nueces, and tell you that two other men have had it—good men, too—have fallen down on it, and one of them simply disappeared. He walked out of this door and that's the last we ever saw of him. You understand?"

"Yeah," lazily answered Nueces. "I'd say that was right mysterious."

"Huh? Yes, yes; you're right. Now, the chief requisites of your job are courage, intelligence and persistence. Imagination is all right if you don't have too much of it. Bob Corson said that you have them all. I say that you'll need them all. You, too, may disappear. If you want to quit, quit now, and not later." He raised his hand in a swift gesture of protest. "Now, now! I'm not questioning you, or doubting you; I'm only warning you, as I should. What do you say about all this?"

"I figger to get my hoss, an' start, if you'll tell me about it," said Nueces, bending over to pick up his hat, but he let the hat alone and sat up again as the Old Man spoke.

"Better start in by reading these telegrams," said the Old Man, pushing the papers across the desk. "After you've read them, the matter will be out of my hands and in yours. The sheriff of any county will coöperate with you when you are ready; but this office is not in love with *all* the sheriffs. There are no politics in this association."

NUECES nodded knowingly, reached out a ham-like hand and picked up the telegrams. He read them slowly in the order in which they came. He was quiet for perhaps a minute and then reshuffled the messages according to dates and read them again. This time he was quiet for perhaps half a minute and then shifted two of the telegrams, so that the third became the second, read them again and placed them on the desk. In the keen eyes of the Old Man there came a sudden gleam, and he leaned back in his chair with a sigh of contentment.

"Two of them," said Nueces, waving at the messages, "came from New York. Th' other came from Kansas City. What's New York got to do with it?"

"Headquarters of the company."

"Uh-huh."

Nueces uncoiled his six feet six, stood

up and walked over to a map on the wall. He found Carter County and then pushed an exploring forefinger over the unorganized territory west of it. Then it came back and rested on Spofford, the county seat, and from there began a retrograde movement, following dotted lines to thin lines, and thin lines to heavy lines until it came to rest on the state capital, where he now was. He stepped back from the map, picked his hat from the floor and turned toward the door.

"I'm headin' for Spofford, to take a look at th' county brand book," he said, and a grin slid over his homely face. "No undertaker is goin' to make any money off'n me for a good, long while. So-long."

"Just a minute!" said the Old Man hurriedly, and laughed. "There are certain matters that we've got to settle before you



leave. We may want to get word to you from time to time. A letter or telegram sent to Jules A. Reynolds will find its way into this office, although he has no connection with it. What name will you go by? Not your own, of course."

Nueces chuckled and scratched his lean jaw.

"Mebby not, 'though there's only two folks in this whole country that knowed my name before you did," he replied.

"Others know it now," said the Old Man.

"Huh! So they do," admitted Nueces somewhat sorrowfully. "Well, after I look at th' brand book I'll know some names, too."

"You needn't go to Spofford for that purpose. We have accurate copies of every brand book in the state, and they're kept right up to the minute. Step in the third room down the hall on your way out and ask for any book you want. What name will you use if you want to get in touch with this office?"

Nueces scratched his head. His grin returned and the solution with it. Whenever his name was mentioned in the old days, Shorty's name had been coupled to it; and association coupled them together now. It would not hurt Shorty; that is, perhaps it wouldn't—and it would be proof that he had not forgotten Shorty. He gave Shorty's name.

"I'll be George Henry Blodgett," he said.

"George Henry Blodgett," repeated the Old Man, scribbling on a pad of paper. "All right. Now then, I'll tell you all that we know about this matter, which isn't much, and then you can study the brand books and be on your way. And I sincerely hope that I'll see you again."

"Figger mebby you will see me," said Nueces, and became all ears.

II

SPOFFORD was the county seat because in the very early days of town-site speculation it had stolen the little frame records office from the weaker town of Bartlett, ten miles to the west, transported it bodily by ox teams and the running gear of an eight-ton freight wagon to Spofford and then, out-shooting and later out-voting the justly incensed citizens of Bartlett, had retained both the office and the records, which increased the value of Spofford's building lots as it decreased those of Bartlett's. Two years later the latter town just evaporated, and the cattlemen made short work of the flimsy buildings. So do the just and humble prosper. The present records office was a most pretentious affair, erected through the medium of a bond issue sufficient to erect two such buildings,

and upon its completion two politically minded gentlemen retired from the strain and vicissitudes of active business, and contemplated life from the vantage point of secure financial havens. Later they both served terms in Congress, and had impressive funerals when they died.

George Henry Blodgett, oblivious of the potential dangers embodied in the two strands of telegraph wire paralleling the road, loped steadily toward the county seat, his memory uncertain in the more minute details of two recorded brands. It was his opinion that a copy is a copy except when it is not.

He rode into Spofford guilelessly and modestly, found a good stable for his horse, a fair hotel for himself and then, without loss of further time, began the perusal of the county brand book for the correction of certain annoying uncertainties. He found that the book back in the Old Man's office was a true copy, and did not seem to enjoy the discovery. It simply knocked the props entirely out from under a very bright idea of his own.

His conscience thus clear, he spent the evening somewhat in the fashion which cowpunchers are popularly supposed to enjoy and then made his now cheerful way toward the hotel an hour or two before midnight, serene in the knowledge that not one soul in this thriving little city knew him or had ever heard of him; and then, as he stepped across the entrance to an alley, something bright and glittery flicked past his ear and thudded soundly into the woodwork of a building on the far side of the street.

NUECES'S left hand grabbed the bleeding ear as his right hand grabbed his gun, and he whirled into the alley to make the best use he could of his long legs and earnest purpose. He heard a door slam, but where it was he could not guess, since no doors opened upon the alley. He glared around him in the darkness and stated that he could lick any so-and-so forth knife throwing this-that-and-whatever that

lived in the A, B, C town, or any other X, Y, Z who thought that Spofford was a fit place for even a this-and-that dog to live in. His loudly uttered challenge was ignored for a few minutes, and then a total stranger spoke from some darkened window, his remarks soaked in Tabasco sauce, and advised the rampant challenger to go home and sleep it off. This, under the circumstances, sounded like good advice and Nueces, backing slowly down the alley, forthwith acted upon it.

Reaching the hotel he hastened to his room and wrote a very short letter to one fictitious Jules A. Reynolds at the state capital, advising that fictitious person that George Henry Blodgett henceforth and hereafter would be William Henry Harrison, but utterly failed to appreciate that while he could change his name as often as he pleased, he could not change his physical appearance, which truly was a pity.

THE following morning he rode out of Spofford with his rifle loosened in its scabbard without the important little town realizing just how much it had been honored, although the local paper carried a brief item under the heading New Arrivals, which stated that George Henry Blodgett, of New York City, had registered at the Spofford House, which would have been news, indeed, to Shorty.

Nueces was now riding north and west, and at his side ran the telegraph wires, at times humming loudly in the wind. Two nights later in a much smaller and rougher town William Henry Harrison was shot at. The bullet passed through the window glass of his rented room, smashed the lamp, ruined the crayon portrait of somebody's grandfather and when last heard was whining high above Main Street. Again his search was hearty but fruitless, and this time he finished the night in the stall next to his horse; and early the next morning he informed Jules A. Reynolds, again by letter, that he now was Thomas Jefferson.

Knife throwing and pot shooting from doorways and alleys were one thing; pot

shooting out in the open was another, and at last he had reached the open range. The telegraph wires had quit at the last town, or turned off to follow the main trail. He used his brains in making his night's camps, and he hoped for action; but he was not disturbed. He did not know that a following horseman had pushed on all night to get ahead of him, now that the telegraph could not be used; that is, he did not know it until morning, when he saw a spang new set of tracks on the trail. Instinctively he pulled up and studied the tracks. Then he swung around and rode back past the point where he, himself, had turned from the trail the night before in the darkness.

The tracks of his own horse were plain to be seen, and equally plain were the tracks of the following horse, here and there most convincingly imprinted on top of his own. This fact was most significant. He sat quietly in the saddle while he turned this matter over in his mind, and as he stared steadily westward along the trail he became aware of the absence of the telegraph wires. It was just a casual notice, and then suddenly it became a pertinent fact; no longer able to send the news on ahead by wire, someone had to carry it.

There were draws and gullies, thick clumps of grass and other points near the trail suitable for pot shooting. He lifted the rifle a few inches in the scabbard and let it down again, and then he swung his horse southward and rode for more than a mile before he turned westward again.

He was at a distinct disadvantage, inasmuch as he did not know the pot-shooter while that person knew him. He simply assumed that there might be such a gentleman. If he rode into the last little town on the trail, the last vestige of the settlements on the edge of the great range, any man he saw might be his persistent enemy, and he would not know him, although they might stand face to face. Doubtless the pot-shooter had friends whose interests were identical with his own; if that person got to town and carried the description

of the Association agent, the enemies might easily multiply. Therefore, this man must not get to town first; as a matter of fact, he must not get there at all. Well, a pot-shooter was a pot-shooter, with a pot-shooter's well known traits. Somewhere on the trail he had left Nueces was certain that a man was lying in ambush, waiting for his victim to show up against his sights.

NUECES pushed his horse into a faster gait and rode all day. Again he camped without a fire, and when morning came he turned northward to get back on the trail. From his study of the map in the Old Man's office he felt that he must be getting near the town. Even in that tough town a dead man would arouse interest and might lead to questions. The pot-shooter would know that and reason that it would be much better to do the job away from town. If that was so, then somewhere east of Nueces the ambush had been laid. And if the pot-shooter had paused in ambush, then Nueces' description had not yet reached the town.

The trail came into sight, winding up the slope of a small depression, and Nueces studied it for an instant. A few score yards farther west was a rainwater gully, fringed with weeds and grass. A man could drop into that and not be seen by anyone riding along the trail from the east. He chuckled and struck straight for the trail, and then rode squarely down its middle, studying the earth before him. The horseshoe prints which he carried in his memory were not to be seen, and neither were there any prints fresh enough to have been made within the time interval. He was now ahead of the pot-shooter and making tracks for him to read, tracks which would trick him into self-betrayal. Grinning sardonically, Nueces rode along for several hundred yards and then, coming to an abrupt turn around an indurated hummock, he swung from the trail, hid his horse behind the hummock and went back on foot, paralleling the trail and far enough from

it. Reaching the little gully, he dropped into it and sat down, well hidden from any passing rider. The ambusher, waiting in vain for so long a time, would finally believe that he had been fooled, and hasten on toward town, anxious to again get sight of his quarry.

Noon came and passed without incident and thirst began to assail the waiting puncher, but he steadfastly ignored the canteen on the saddle and grimly kept his watch. Then a moving speck down the trail made him take off his hat, place it on the ground beside him and shift his position enough to take some of the cramp out of his legs.

The speck grew larger and attained a steadily increasing definition. It was a horse and rider, coming up the trail at speed. Then they were so close that he could see the ends of the knotted kerchief flick out behind the rider's neck. The horseman was watching the trail ahead of him, his eyes on the ground; and suddenly he saw that for which he had been looking. He checked the horse so quickly that it slid on its haunches in a rolling cloud of dust, and before it had stopped its slide the rider was on foot, bending over the new, fresh tracks. He jerked erect, hand dropping to gun, and looked swiftly around and then, realizing that the tracks went on for as far as he could see the trail, he whirled around toward his horse. And then he froze.

"Reckon yo're lookin' for me," said Nueces, standing up in the gully, both hands down at his sides. He grinned at the surprise on the swiftly turning face as he moved slowly out to the trail.

"I said, I reckon yo're lookin' for me," he repeated without checking his slow advance. "Nobody but a damn pot-shooter would act like *that* over a set of fresh hoss shoe tracks—over *my* hoss shoe tracks. Well, you found 'em ag'in. Stranger, *fill yore hand!*"

"Yore luck ain't holdin'," sneered the other, balanced on the balls of his feet.

"I figgered you had as many lives as a cat, but I figgered——"

THE conversation trick was an old one, too old. The movement of his hand was smooth and swift and the hot sun glinted on moving metal, and then the metal dropped from the spasmodic opening of the fingers.

Nueces sheathed his smoking gun and stepped slowly forward. Ten minutes later he was riding on his way again, the tell-tale saddle hidden and the tell-tale horse driven off and free to graze where it would.

He struck south again, away from the trail and rode on a wide circle, and when he came in sight of Rawhide he saw it to the east of him. And to call attention to this little matter of direction he slipped from the saddle at the edge of town and fussed about the tightening of a cinch which was already tight. Two men idling in front of the first saloon were watching him with casual interest, and nodded lazily in reply to his gestured greeting. He was



surprised by the number of horses at the tie rails, and by the volume of sound coming from the frame shacks on both sides of the short street, but he pushed slowly on and tied his own horse at the rail in front of the only hotel he could see. He loafed into the office and smiled at the clerk.

"All filled up," said the clerk, anticipating the request, "but you can throw yore blankets on th' floor for two bits."

"All right," replied Nueces, slowly turning on his heel. "I'll see you later, then. What'n hell's goin' on in this town, anyhow?"

"Th' boys are driftin' in to spend their month's wages. You passin' through?"

"Yeah," grunted Nueces, and sighed. "There just won't be no damn sleepin' in this town tonight. Shall I put my hoss back in th' stable?"

"If you can find room for it, but I reckon Jake can find a place. Dinin' room opens at six an' closes at seven. Eat then or go hungry."

"Yeah," said Nueces, and hesitated a moment. "Friend, I got to find me a job purty soon or I won't eat nowhere, no time. You know of anybody that's hirin'?"

"You ride in from th' east?"

"Naw. I come up from th' south an' hit th' trail just west of town, turned to th' right, an' here I am."

"You coulda kept on goin' north an' hit three, four ranches," said the clerk; "or you coulda turned west an' hit thirteen of 'em, all in one brand."

Nueces grinned wisely.

"Yeah?" he said derisively. "Thirteen ranches, all in one brand, huh? If you'd put th' three in front, you coulda made it thirty-one with th' same figgers."

"Handy with figgers, ain't you?" asked the clerk. "I said thirteen, an' I mean thirteen. Th' Tumblin' T, two days' ride to th' west. Thirteen outfits, countin' in th' headquarters ranch. You never heard of th' Tumblin' T?"

"Shore I have; who ain't?" replied Nueces. "Am I as close to it as you say?"

"You shore are, but I don't know if they're hirin'."

"Huh! I'll go out, find some of their boys, an' find out."

"You won't find none of their boys this time," said the clerk. "They got smart bosses, over there. Their boys come in after th' round-up, to go on their drunk."

"Well, I aim to find out, anyhow," said Nueces and he grinned cheerfully in the clerk's face. "Two days' ride, huh? I allus wanted to work with a big outfit."

"Well, it's shore big," said the clerk, and turned away to do some work.

Nueces walked to the door, through it,

lifted the reins from the tie-rail and led the horse across the street. When he came out of the general store he had provisions enough to last him for two days. Then he mounted and rode along the side of the hotel, but he did not stop at the stable or even look at Jake, he kept on riding.

III

FOR the next two days Nueces rode steadily across the range of the Texas Cattle Company, which was located a long way north of Texas. It was one of the largest cattle companies in the United States. It had bought, squatted, stolen and otherwise acquired grazing land enough to pleasantly and adequately sustain its enormous herds. The company had thirteen outfits, thirteen ranches, forty-odd line houses, miles of hay lands, owned four seats in the State Legislature, two in Congress, and was strongly in favor of statutes making felonies of sheep herding, mavericking and farming. Only one ranch in the entire country was admittedly larger than this Tumbling T, and that was the famous King ranch of Texas.

Nueces had entered this barony between ranches Numbers Four and Five without knowing of their existence and the trail led him almost out of the southern boundary before he saw an habitation, which proved to be Ranch Number Six. He dismounted in front of the kitchen door, stepped into the building, and pulled in his belt suggestively. He was an old hand on the ranges and he knew all the signs.

The perspiring cook, working in a temperature somewhere around a hundred degrees, bent ominous eyes upon him and his expression was frankly hostile. He, too, knew the signs.

"'Nother pilgrim ridin' th' grub line, huh?" he growled, totally ignoring the friendly smile on the stranger's face. All grub line riders smiled at cooks. "How th' hell do you hombres allus time it so you stop at some kitchen around grub time?" he demanded.

"Instinct, mebbly; or mebbly practice," answered Nueces, still grinning.

"Yo're an in—in—in—" said the cook, searching his mind for the rest of the word.

"—fantile?" suggested Nueces soberly.

"No, damn it! Not 'fantile—genius! That's it—in-genious cuss."

"Allus was, even as a child," admitted Nueces modestly. "It runs in th' fambly."

"Runs in th' fambly, huh?" growled the cook. "Too bad th' sheriff didn't."

"Didn't what?"

"Run in th' fambly!"

"Paw wouldn't stand for that," explained Nueces, and his grin was a sight to behold. "Paw was sheriff, hisself. But listen, I ain't had a bite to eat since night before last."

"You reckon that's good news for a cook? An' you shore look like it was longer'n that," said the cook, looking over the lanky specimen so earnestly regarding him. "Th' last feller had you beat by twelve hours. An' that's another mystery. None of you grub line riders ever had anythin' to eat under twenty-four hours. Huh! An' I reckon yo're lookin' for a job, too, like th' rest of 'em."

"I are," said Nueces, and laughed.

THE cook's frown faded and he laughed in turn.

"I are!" he snorted. "All right; this time I got a job all ready. You grab a skinnin' knife an' go after them p'taters."

"You must have twenty, sixty men in this here outfit," said Nueces, eyeing the pile of vegetables in question.

"You'd mebbly reckon so if you had to cook for 'em."

"Ain't they got no bottoms to their bellies?" asked Nueces, still staring at the pile of vegetables.

The cook followed the gaze and slowly shook his head.

"Mebby some of 'em have," he replied; "but I dunno. Well, there's th' p'taters. After you skin out that pile, dump half of 'em in that big pan an' fill it with water. Then they'll be ready for breakfast. I'd

rather give 'em p'taters than bake flap-jacks for 'em. Th' well is out back an' th' empty buckets is on th' bench. Then you can rustle in some firewood, throw out th' ashes, an' get ready to help me."

"You figger I'll be ready to help you by then?"

"Shore."

"Say, listen, cook," said Nueces. "I'll do all of them things, an' then help you, an' bust some hosses, ride a line or two, brand a couple calves an' be all ready to eat when you get it on th' table; but th' job I really rode in to get was a punchin' job."

"You havin' heard rumors, I reckon, that we was hirin'?"

"Don't know about no rumors. All I heard was that there was some cattle outfits over this way," rejoined Nueces. "For two days' steady ridin' I didn't believe it, but th' Lawd was with me."

"Well, we ain't hirin'," said the cook flatly; and then he softened a little. "But you might go on to Number Seven. Mebbly they need a hand."

"Number Seven?" repeated Nueces innocently. "What you doin' with me, playin' no roulette?"

"Naw. All th' ranches of this outfit are numbered. This is Number Six. Number Seven is thirty, forty miles farther on. Thirty miles northwest of that is Number Eight. You passed between Number Four and Number Five on yore way in, if you come from th' east."

"Grand layout for playin' hop-sotch on hossback," said Nueces.

"You can pick up twelve square meals, twenty, thirty, forty miles apart by playin' our numbers alone; but you don't want to make a mistake an' play th' same number twice. I'll draw you a map before you go. After you play Number Twelve you can run in toward th' middle, kinda, an' mebbly wrangle a feed at Main Headquarters. Did you hear what I said about th' skinnin' knife an' them p'taters? An' what name you goin' by?"

Nueces was about to mention his friend

Shorty's legal cognomen, but remembered the sound of that thrown knife.

"Thomas Jefferson Brady," he said, and beamed with pride.

The cook's mouth slowly closed.

"Great snakes! You don't think much of yoreself, do you?"

"Not a whole lot: but Pa an' Ma did," replied Nueces placidly.

"Tom, you grab that skinnin' knife an' wrangle them p'taters!" said the cook.

"All right," sighed Nueces. "An' where do I bunk?"

"Oh, most any place," answered the cook, "except on th' path to th' well or th' small corral. There's lots of room outside."

IN THE morning after breakfast the foreman of Number Six was not hiring and said so in few words. He knew, too, that Number Seven was not hiring, and grew expansive. Number Seven could fire half of its outfit, if the truth were told, providing the other half would really work, which he doubted. Number Eight had two full poker crowds now and shouldn't need another man. He said something equally complimentary about Numbers Nine, Ten, Eleven and Twelve, finished off with the headquarters' outfit, and stalked from the bunkhouse.

The cook stepped back from the gallery door and grinned at his erstwhile assistant.

"You'll get a job, all right, if yo're really lookin' for one," he said. "We're all head-in' right smack into th' Spring roundup an' there shore will be work som'ers out here. You can save yoreself a lot of ridin', though, if you go right into Main Headquarters. They'll know what outfit might need a hand."

Nueces was looking at him reproachfully.

"Great Gawd! Ain't you fellers through th' calf roundup yet? How many round-ups I got to work, this year? We finished up with the calves, down our way. You mean to say yo're just startin'?"

The cook laughed, thoroughly enjoying himself.

"We're shiftless, up in this part of th' country. But th' joke's on you, pilgrim. You'll get work an' lots of it—plenty of it; but you still got time to back out."

"A man that's hungry an' busted can't back out," growled Nueces.

"Reckon that's right," replied the cook, his grin growing. "An' after th' roundup there'll be a lot of shoes to pull off all them hosses, an' a lot of green hosses to bust. Then there's hay to cut an' haul an' stack. But I can tell you one thing. Brady: you'll draw down good pay an' you'll eat good grub. Th' Tumblin' T ain't a bad outfit to work for. An' all those other foremen are damn' good fellers."

"Th' ho-tel clerk, over in Rawhide, said it was a good outfit to work for," said Nueces grudgingly. "I wouldn't a-knowned th' damn town was there, only I happened to turn right when I hit that trail instead of left."

"Then you come down from th' north," said the cook.

NUECES flashed him an appraising glance but the cook was not looking.

"Naw," he said patiently, gently shaking his head. "I told you I come up from th' south. If I'd come down from th' north an' turned right, I'd a-headed west, wouldn't I?"

Wrinkles of cogitation furrowed the cook's brow and he twisted his body a little.

"That's right," he admitted slowly, and scratched his head. "Well, you keep to th' trail till you come to th' forks," he directed. "Take th' righthand trail there an' it'll lead you in to Headquarters, th' main headquarters. Th' other trail goes on to Number Seven."

"Much obliged," said Nueces, and turned toward the door to go out to his horse. Then he stopped, turned and grinned. In his suspicious mind was the cook's confusion of right and left, and the wrinkles

of cogitation, which might be too deep to be true. "Too bad yore boss ain't hirin'," he said regretfully. "I like yore grub."

"I could see that from th' way you et it, which makes me glad he ain't hirin'. You shore it was only twenty-four hours since you et that last meal?"

Nueces waved his hand and started toward the corral.

"Good luck," he called.

"Good luck," echoed the cook, and reached for his plug tobacco.

IV

NUECES, the lay of the huge ranch now sufficiently known to him, followed the trail leading into the northwest. It was direct and well marked. At the forks he chose the righthand branch which the cook had told him would lead to the headquarters ranch, the hub of the twelve-spoke wheel. By careful timing he reached it just before noon and swung down before the main building. A busy cook, glancing out of the cookhouse window to see who was riding in, frowned as his gaze settled



on the homely stranger. The homely stranger, catching sight of him, placed a big thumb to a big nose, wriggled his fingers and grinned even more widely. The cook's frown slowly died out and he thumbed his own nose and grinned in reply. Evidently this stranger was no hungry grub line rider.

Nueces anchored his four-legged ship of the high prairies by dropping the reins down before its eyes and took two long steps to the door. Over the door was a

faded sign: OFFICE. It was the first time he had ever seen such a sign on a ranch. He pushed open the door and slowly entered. A clerky looking person raised his eyes from a ledger, blinked, believed what he saw, and then did strange things to his facial muscles until they became a physiological question mark. Then the clerk spoke.

"Yes?"

"Yeah," answered Nueces politely.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'm lookin' for a job," answered Nueces. "I'm th' world's best cowpuncher lookin' for work. I don't have to prove that because I admit it. What you payin', an' how often?"

"Ah," said the clerk, almost fascinated by such an example of human homeliness. "I guess you'll have to talk with Mr. Treadway."

"Uh-huh," grunted Nueces. "An' where's he?"

"In his office," said the clerk, nodding at a closed door.

Nueces took the nod as a signal that the trail was open, looked at the door and started for it. Then he saw the clerk quickly raise a hand, and he waited until the clerk had passed through the doorway and emerged again. At the permissive nod Nueces got into motion again, crossed the room and entered the other office.

The man at the desk was slightly bald and a little stooped. He was watching the door and his surprised gaze passed slowly over the tall newcomer. A smile struggled against an habitual inhibition and lost out as Mr. Treadway pointed a thumb at a chair in front of his desk.

"Sit down," he invited, still studying the puncher. "You said that you wanted a job. Where did you work last?"

"On th' J 8," answered Nueces, knowing that Mr. Treadway was as unfamiliar with the J 8 as he, himself was.

"Why ain't you there now?"

"Because I quit."

"Why did you quit?"

"Because I rounded up all their cattle,

pulled all th' damn' shoes, busted all their green hosses, an' it looked like they was goin' to lay me off. So I quit."

"And where did you work before that?"

"On th' Flyin' W."

"I don't believe I've ever heard of either of those ranches."

"Mister," said Nueces earnestly, "there's a hull passel of ranches out in this country that neither you or me never heard of."

"Yes, I guess that's so," admitted Mr. Treadway. "Why did you quit the—ah—?"

"Flyin' W," prompted Nueces smiling kindly.

"Yes, the Flying W," said Mr. Treadway, nodding quickly. "Why did you quit them?"

SAM had one of them damn' accordions, an' too much time for playin' it. He only knowed one tune an' he played it all th' time. We had some words about it, me an' him, an' then one thing just kinda led to another. I kicked it out of his hands an' busted it. Then I had him on my hands an' I had to lick him to make him stop pickin' onto me. Th' boss was goin' to fire me, but I quit before he could. I had some wages comin' to me, an' I just kinda drifted north to see th' country. Th' wages petered out, an' now I'm lookin' to earn me some more. I'm a right handy man with cattle an' hosses."

"You drink?"

"Shore!" answered Nueces, his eyebrows rising a little.

"Gamble?"

"Shore! That's why th' wages petered out so soon," answered Nueces. His eyes narrowed a little. "You want me to ride herd on some Sunday school?"

"No," laughed Mr. Treadway. "I've no objections to either, as long as they don't interfere with a man's work. I just wanted to see whether you'd tell me the truth."

"Any time I lie it's free an' voluntary," replied Nueces. "I ain't never met th' man yet that I had to lie to."

"I suspected something like that when

you came through the door. We pay good punchers forty a month, with found, of course. If they're not good we don't want them at any price. Three of our outfits are short of riders. Numbers Eight, Nine and Eleven. You can gamble a little right now, and take your pick."

"Be just like namin' a card," said Nueces, "an' I found out that I ain't much good at that, no more. Anyhow, it don't make no difference. You pick me a number, tell me where to ride, an' I'll play it."

"Number Eight is farthest south on an old drive trail," said Mr. Treadway, and there was nothing showing on the poker face in front of him to tell him that his lanky caller regarded this as valuable information. "Number Nine is north and west of that, in rougher country. Number Eleven is almost north of here, in still rougher country."

"I lost most of my wages namin' cards," said Nueces with a grin, but he was wondering how he could swing the decision in favor of Number Eight. It would not do to press too hard; Treadway, himself, might be connected with the irregularities going on on this great ranch. "Ranges are ranges, hosses are hosses an' cows are cows, 'though of course a man can work easier and faster over flat country."

"Number Eight," said the man at the desk, glancing at a memorandum, "wants a good calf roper. Nine and Eleven don't specify."

NUECES'S eyes gleamed and he inched forward on the edge of the chair. There was no pretense in this, for he prided himself on his roping.

"Mister," he said earnestly, "ropin' is where I shine. I got me a calf rope on my saddle braided by th' best rope maker that ever came outa Texas. It's a four-strand forty-footer, but you never saw no rope that handles like——"

Mr. Treadway waved an impatient hand to cut short the eulogistic description which now threatened him. To him a rope was a rope, and none had appeal. He knew

an enthusiast, however, when he saw one, and he knew that he was looking at one now.

"No use of us going any further, then," he said quickly. "I guess you go to Number Eight. I'll give you a note to Jimson, the foreman. Eat dinner here and then follow the trail that turns off to the left at the second corral. Jimson and I both do the hiring for Number Eight, but Jimson does the firing and it sticks. If there are any accordion players on Number Eight, Jimson is quite competent to handle them. It's time to eat; you better go grab a plate and cup. Here," he said, and wrote rapidly. He folded the note and handed it across the desk to the standing puncher. "Give this to Jimson. I hope you are as good as your rope. Good day."

Nueces departed, the note in a pocket, and it was not much later when, a square meal tucked behind his belt, he rode at a lope along the trail, his mind busy with his problems. He ran back over his course so far to check up on any possible blunders, and sighed with satisfaction. He liked roundups, he liked roping, and he was beginning to like his present, real job more than any job he ever had held. This was like the old days, but he began to miss Shorty. That little runt certainly was an ace in the hole.

THERE were thirteen outfits, counting in the headquarters ranch, which should be counted in because it evidently took care of the middle of the range; and these outfits worked over an enormous territory, enormous for herds of just one brand. Cattle thieves had to drive off their booty before it became of any value to them. The markets all lay to the east, but to get to the markets the ranches had to drive to the railroads.

Cattle thieves stealing from the ranches lying to the northwest would not dare drive east, for that would take them across almost the whole expanse of Tumbling T range. They would have to head off at other angles, driving wide and circling

back for a distance so great as to make discovery almost certain. Of course, they might be stocking another range, but from what the Old Man had told Nueces, that possibility had been foreseen by his predecessors and the outlying country had been well scouted before they had turned their attention to the huge ranch, itself.

According to geographical position the outfits occupying the best locations for cattle stealing were those on the eastern edge of the great ranch; but that, too, had been considered by other association men, and the country surrounding that part of the ranch had been well watched, but to no avail. When Treadway had mentioned that Number Eight was on an old drive trail and that it was in the south—southwest, to be exact—Nueces had pricked up his ears, believing that at last he had been given a valuable lead. In the south two transcontinental railroads crossed the prairies, and there were trails leading in almost any direction, if trails were needed. There were dozens of little hamlets with shipping pens and loading chutes, there were hundreds of ranches, large and small and scores of places on those great expanses of prairie where herds could be hidden.

The shadow made by himself and his horse had grown very long when he at last topped another of the interminable rises and saw a cluster of buildings and corrals at the foot of the downward slope, nestling on the banks of a little stream of water; and higher up, and beyond the buildings, running slantwise across the farther slope, lay a naked welt against the gray-green of the scanty vegetation.

Here, then, was Number Eight; and here, too, was the old drive trail, not yet grassed over, which had been well used before the railroads, north and south, had scattered shipping points across the range and called into being scores of smaller trails.

Nueces knew that trail by hearsay, and had talked with men, older than himself, who had driven cattle over it; and this was

long before he had seen it. In the beginning it had stocked a tremendous territory with Texas cattle, the herds all bound up it, and at times the dust of one had not settled before it mixed with the dust of a following herd. Then the northbound drives eased up, and stopped; and then it had begun to pour the herds south instead of north, herd after herd of beef cattle bound for the stockyards of the lesser Kansas City and a few herds for points east of that. The days of the Texas drives were still not over, but they had dwindled almost to nothing when compared with the years of their glory. And the mute evidence of this old trail would outlast the movement that made it, outlast that movement for several score years.

THE horse stretched out its neck for looser reins and quickened its pace as it saw the clustered buildings. Off to the right was a fenced pasture, and Nueces estimated the enclosure as a mile square. Stacks of hay reared up in it here and there and the little stream flowed across one corner. A considerable number of cattle were in it, and Nueces knew them for what they were—blooded bulls. A smaller corral came next and another just beyond it. Breaking pens were passed, then a wagon shed, a blacksmith shop and a bunkhouse with galley attached. Everything was in a good state of repair. Facing the bunkhouse and not far from it was a small frame building and along one side of it some artistic soul had sprawled in red paint a huge capital T, considerably off balance, which was not due to carelessness. The T was falling—in other words, it was a tumbling T.

Nueces headed for this latter building and swung down before the door. As he turned to enter, a cold-faced man came around the corner of the house, carrying a saddle, and he looked quizzically at the newcomer and stopped. This person saw the folded paper in the rider's hand, and held his own hand out for it.

"I'm Jimson," he said. "Hope you rope

better'n th' last man Headquarters sent me," he continued, his glance coming to rest on the lariat neatly coiled on the stranger's saddle. His eyes lighted a little and he took two quick steps forward, his hand reaching out and feeling the rope. He squeezed it experimentally and nodded. Then he unfolded the paper, read laboriously, put the note in a pocket and nodded. "What name will I put on th' payroll?"

"Tom Brady."

"All right, Brady. Shuck yore saddle an' get ready to feed. Yo're just in time: we start roundin' up tomorrow mornin'."

NUECES forked the horse, rode toward the frame bunkhouse perhaps fifty yards distant, dismounted, stripped off saddle and bridle, rubbed the animal's wet back briskly, spread out the saddle blanket to air and dry, and carried the saddle and bridle to the wall of the house, where he dropped them. He turned to enter the building and saw a curious



puncher watching him from the open door.

"Howdy," said Nueces, smiling with friendliness. "Boss just told me to go eat."

A head poked out of the gallery window at the sound of this strange voice, and the cook gravely looked him over.

"'Nother empty-belly," growled the boss of the stove, and turned wearily to dig up another plate, cup and knife.

The man standing in the door grinned and jerked back his head as an invitation for the newcomer to enter, and stepped aside to give him room.

"Just in time," he said. "You ridin' on ag'in?" he asked with keen interest.

"Not till this damn' roundup is over,

I reckon," growled Nueces. "First job I threw a loop over in a couple of months runs me smack into th' beginnin' of a calf roundup. So I reckon you can say I got me a job."

"Yeah, plenty of job," agreed the man in the door, his eyes peering forth from between narrowed lids, although the light was not at all strong. "Plenty of job," he repeated, and let a slow and reluctant smile slip across his face. Then he squinted speculatively. "They call me Walt," he said.

"An' me, Brady," said Nueces, and out of the corner of his eye he caught a movement. It was only the cook sticking his head out of the window, preparatory to bellowing forth his customary call. Nueces could see no pan of potatoes being held over for breakfast and a feeling of satisfaction stole over him; perhaps this cook fed the boys flapjacks and sorghum for breakfast. He was very fond of that combination, even if the sorghum did make the coffee extra bitter.

The cook, hearing the exchange of names, pulled back from the window to gratuitously insult them both.

"An' I'm calling you hawgs," he stated. Turning back to the window, he stuck his head out of it, and his bellowing supper call rolled across the range. "COME AN' GET IT!"

V

FOR the next few weeks Nueces was so busy with the roundup work that when night came he was ready to smoke a cigarette right after supper and then roll up in his blankets and call it a day. He had no time to pursue the real duties of his calling of a more active or spectacular manner, but all the time he was in this camp he was pursuing the duties the Old Man had given him. The fact that he could establish himself on the ranch in a natural and unsuspecting manner and live and work among the men of this roundup crew was in itself a worthwhile achieve-

ment. The time was not being wasted, for he was becoming acquainted with the members of the outfit, could watch them while they worked and talked and was gaining a knowledge of the range which in other conditions would have been a task in itself.

The extent of this ranch was so great that the section allotted to Number Eight was as large as any ranch he had ever worked on, and he found that it was almost devoid of strays, which was a significant fact. It told him that the nearest ranch was so distant that its wilder, more restless cattle did not stray this far. Being on the southwestern fringe of the ranch proper, with no other ranch nearer than fifty miles in that direction, and with nothing but Tumbling T cattle for more than that distance north and east, a stray was a curiosity. This also meant that there was no stray herd to keep separate, and to herd day and night; and since this was a calf roundup, and all the animals were turned loose after being worked, there were no night shifts to be ridden. Later on, perhaps, when the cattle were scattered more, and fewer in number, night riding might come.

Instead of working the outlying sections of the range first, and throwing the cattle back on the ranch, which would mean that some of them would be gathered again and again, the opposite method was employed. The work started up in the north-east corner of Number Eight's territory, in toward the center of the great range, with two other outfits of the Tumbling T in plain sight. From there they progressed toward the outlying fringes, throwing the worked cattle behind them and toward the middle section of the ranch. The result of this would be that when the work was finished the cattle all would be moved a day's ride back on the range, and without being choused.

In the beginning of the roundup, working as they did where the cattle were thickest, they usually made their gathers in the forenoon and worked them in the afternoon. Then as they drew nearer to the

fringes of the range and the cattle were scarcer and more scattered, they needed more time to make the gathers, and because the gathers were necessarily smaller, less time for cutting out and branding. For more than a week they rounded up until mid-afternoon, and then worked the gathers before dark.

NUECES found that the forty-foot rope was too long for the work he was doing, and he also found that the horse he had been given for the roping was a very intelligent animal. Thanks to the horse, he found himself up close to the running calves and it was not long before he shortened his throws by half. This meant quick and unerring casts, and much less fatigue; and it also meant that the iron handlers at his fire had to buckle down to their job and scarcely had time to straighten their backs. Two men did the flopping at this fire, and Nueces and his wise horse kept them busy. At first they admired the teamwork of horse and rider, then the work of the horse, and at last they cursed both with whole-hearted sincerity. Dust enveloped them, the acrid and unpleasant odor of burning hair stung their nostrils, and their eyes smarted continually. Sweat poured down their faces and they hardly had time to wipe it off. A stiff-legged calf, too frightened even to bawl, skidded up to the fire and Nueces waited for his rope to be turned loose.

"Blast!" growled one of the flankers, reaching up to get hold of the taut rope. He grabbed it, ran down it, reached over the calf, got a double hold of the skin under the animal's belly, quickly bent his knees, forcing them in against the side of the calf, and stood erect with a jerk. The calf struck the ground on its back and was pinned down. The rope was cast off as an iron handler ran up from the fire with a cherry-red stamping iron in a hand. The calf stiffened, bawled and was turned loose with a mark on its hide which it would carry to its death.

The flanker slowly straightened his back

for fear of breaking it by a quicker movement, and scowled darkly at the roper, who was grinning as he drew in the rope.

"Hell!" said the flanker. "Don't you ever miss 'em?"

"Can't miss 'em with this hoss under me," answered Nueces.

"Can't you throw that measly little rope its full length?" demanded the second flanker craftily. A longer throw would take more time, more dragging and some of the longer casts would miss. This would mean chasing the calf back and trying again, and in the meantime the flankers would get a little breathing space and time to ease their backs.

"Hoss won't let me," chuckled Nueces. "Th' way he's workin' these calves, first thing I know I'll be able to reach out an' drop th' loop plumb over their necks. Won't have to throw a-tall."

HE HAD his eye on the herd and saw a cutter nearing the edge of it, a spot of frantic animation just ahead of him. Nueces gripped his knees and spoke to the horse, and a streak of dust followed him toward the point where the cow and calf would break into the open. They broke, tried in vain to get back, and were turned over to Nueces. His horse got between mother and offspring and headed the latter straight for the fire; and in this particular instance, coming right on top of its rider's jocose remark, the horse pushed up right alongside the running calf, and the rider lazily reached out and dropped the loop over the little animal's head.

"Well, I'll be tetotally damned!" swore the flanker, and he grabbed his big hat from his head and slammed it on the ground.

"That runs for me!" muttered his companion, and frowned at the snicker of mirth which came from the direction of the fire. Then his hand shot up to catch the rope and run down it.

The first flanker was angry. His tanned face was suffused with blood. He took a

slow step toward the grinning rider and looked that person fairly in the eyes.

"I figger yo're one of them suckin'-in hambres, that like to stand in with the boss! One of them fellers that ain't got —"

Nueces had turned the horse back toward the herd and the flanker's step forward was met by the movement of the animal. All Nueces had to do was to grip the saddle with his knees, lean over and swing. The blow was nicely timed, and struck neither too soon nor too late. Both Nueces and the flanker were moving toward each other when it landed, and the force of it lifted the flanker from his feet and sent them flashing upward as the man's head and shoulders went back and down. He did not stir after he struck the ground. Nueces cleared the saddle, landed on both feet and sprang toward the second flanker, hoping to get so close that a gun could not be drawn. Gunplay would cause too many complications and was not called for.

The second flanker had flopped the calf and was kneeling on it. He had been so busy with the little animal at the particular instant that he had not clearly seen what had happened, but only a hazy view which had flashed on the outer edge of his arc of vision. He now raised his head quickly to see the lanky, horse-faced puncher gazing down at him.

"You reckon I'm suckin' in with th' boss?" asked Nueces coldly.

"Hell no! Walt had no business sayin' that; but will you miss a throw once in awhile? We ain't gettin' no prizes for beatin' th' rest of th' fires! Damn it, man, my back's near busted!"

NUECES grinned. He was looking at a man who spoke his mind and was unafraid, and who seemed to be in the right.

"I never figgered that angle atall," admitted the roper, still smiling. "I was so plumb tickled with that rope, an' that hoss,

that I kinda got lost in 'em. They shore do make a pair to work with."

"Yeah, so I see; but now that you've found that out, would you mind settin' th' brakes a little? We ain't half through yet, but I figger this fire's done a full day's work a'ready." He glanced at the prostrate man. "An' he won't be of no account for awhile, neither. That runs a blazer on me. He ain't dead, is he?"

"No, reckon not," answered Nueces, slowly turning to go back to the horse. "But you can tell him if he makes a gunplay he mebbly will be."

"Tell him yoreself. He's got a nasty mouth, an' likes to use it. You mebbly won't have a chance to tell him." The flanker looked over at the fire and glared at the iron handler. "What th' hell you standin' there for? You figger I want to set on this damn' calf all day. Close yore mouth an' get movin'. Hot iron, *hot iron!*"

Nueces reached the horse, swung into the saddle and rode off toward the edge of the herd. The cow and calf popped out before the persistent pursuit of the cutting out rider, and found themselves cut off from their kind by the roper and his knowing horse. Nueces took plenty of time in his maneuvers, and finally dragged the calf up to the fire. The flanker grabbed the rope, leisurely went down it, got his holds and flopped the little animal. The iron man stepped forward, pressed down with the branding stamp, moved the handle toward him a little to make the iron bite evenly for its whole length, quickly raised his arm and went back to the fire.

The man on the ground had rolled over and was now making little, futile movements. He had been out all of five minutes and it was a wonder that his neck had not been broken. He stirred again, rolled over on his back and drew up one leg. Then he drew up the other, flung an arm sideways and rolled over on his side. Nueces, the flanker and the iron man were all watching him curiously. The bulk of the herd cut them off from view

of the other fires and so far they had attracted no attention of anyone except the cutter working this side of the gather. The cutter wore a grin which threatened his face, and now he raised his big hat in cheerful salutation.

THE iron handler pulled the two irons out of the fire to let them cool a little in this workless interim. They had become heated past the desired cherry color. He sauntered over to his two companions and stood looking down on the moving flanker.

"He'll be like a rattler when he comes to," he said, and felt for his plug tobacco. "He's a kinda peculiar feller, Walt is." Then he looked at Nueces and grinned. "You ever had to have th' boss help you punch?" he accused, and laughed aloud.

"That's right, I did; but I don't need help, generally," replied Nueces, closely watching the man on the ground. It was always a good thing to watch rattlers, and he had seen rattlers strike without warning. "Hope he don't make me shoot him," he growled, but even as he spoke he was



in motion, his hand streaking to the holster; for the man on the ground, taking full advantage of his position, had rolled over on his gun side, with his right hand under him, and when he moved again it was to slightly raise his body and jerk the gun loose.

The two crashes sounded almost as one. Nueces' hat jerked at his head, and his own shot grazed the arm of the prostrate flanker and jerked the weapon out of his hand.

Nueces took two quick forward steps and kicked the gun toward the fire, out of reach of its owner. Then he stepped

back again, sheathing his own weapon, and coldly watched the flanker slowly get to his feet. The two men looked at each other silently, measuring each other; but before anything came of it, pounding hoofs sounded suddenly as the foreman raced toward the scene of the trouble. He slid to a stop in a little cloud of dust and leaped from the saddle. He struck squarely on both feet and his knees remained a little bent.

"What th' hell's goin' on here?" he snapped. "What was that shootin'?" Then he saw the gun lying near the fire, the weapon in Nueces' sheath, the dust and litter on the flanker's clothes, and the swelling on the flanker's jaw. "Who started this?"

"Ask him," said Nueces, his steady gaze on the flanker. "I ain't talkin'."

"Oh, you ain't, huh?" snapped the foreman. He stared the roper in the eyes, and then looked at the sullen flanker. "What about it, Walt?"

"An' I ain't talkin'," answered Walt.

"That so?" asked the foreman with heavy sarcasm. "Well then, I will. If you fellers reckon I'm goin' to have th' work at this fire busted up by a couple of mossheads you shore can copper it. I'm payin' both of you to work, not fight." He turned to Nueces. "Take yore rope over to Ritchie's fire, an' send Tom over here."

"An' Gawd help Ritchie when this ropin' fool an' that damn' hoss git to work," said the second flanker with a broad grin. "Take it easy over there, Brady, an' you won't have to lick th' rest of th' outfit."

The foreman watched the lanky roper ride away and turned the second flanker's remark over in his mind. As the roper rounded the herd the foreman turned his attention to the dust covered, scowling man at his side. He studied the sullen face for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders.

"I reckon I can figger it," he said, and swung on his heel. He saw the two irons cooling and nodded to the handler. "You

can stick 'em into th' fire; Tom will be here purty soon, an' he'll mebbly miss some of his throws. Besides which, his hoss is tired an' never did have no brains no-how." A smile flickered over his tanned face. He stepped to his horse, swung into the saddle and departed as he had come, at speed and in a cloud of dust. He thought he would take a look at Brady working.

VI

THE outfit put in a week down on the southwest corner of the range and crossed the old drive trail many times in its riding. It showed no signs of being used any more by cattle and the few chips to be seen were so old that their age was indeterminable; but notwithstanding this, Nueces' concealed interest in it was deep.

Number Eight's roundup crew, having cleaned the last bit of range, was through with gathering, cutting out, branding and tallying, and was spending its last night with the wagon. Early the next morning it would ride back to the ranch proper and start pulling the shoes off most of the horses before turning the animals loose on the range. There would be horses to break and then, later on, hay to be cut and stacked against the threat of winter.

In honor of this last night on the open range the cook had done himself proud, and was generous with the canned peaches and pears. Since there now was no further need to conserve firewood beyond that needed for breakfast the fire blazed high and plenty of fuel was stocked handy to it.

The riders came in, covered with sweat and dust, turned their horses into the cavy for the wrangler to look after, washed briskly, slicked their hair and squatted or sat on the ground near the wagon. They stirred to quick motion at the cook's call, grabbed knives, tin plates and cups, and filed cheerfully past the tail-board of the wagon, where they helped themselves generously. The meal finished,

tobacco, papers and pipes appeared, and talk ran around the seated circle.

"Funny how things can change so much in a few years," said Nueces, blowing a lungful of smoke toward the fire. He watched it sucked in toward the flames and speed aloft. "Take that old cattle trail we been crossin' so much th' last week; time was when it was a right busy road. I've seen lots of 'em. They're scattered all over th' country."

"Old drive trail for herds up from th' south," said the foreman, stirring into a more comfortable position. "It stocked th' range, an' when th' range was stocked it didn't need no more cattle, 'specially Longhorns. For awhile we used it, us an' a few ranches up an' beyond, for drivin' down to th' railroad with beef herds for th' stockyards; an' then a railroad went acrost to th' north of us, a hundred miles nearer. It cuts th' northeast corner of our main range, an' we drive that way now. But that old drive trail won't grass over for years, an' mebbly never, th' way it's scoured by th' rains. Anyhow, it'll be plain to th' eye after we are all dead an' gone."

"I reckon it's still bein' used some," said Nueces carelessly. "There'll mebbly be some outfit along it, farther south, that'll be usin' it; some outfit nearer to that other railroad than we are."

The foreman shook his head uncertainly. "Don't know," he admitted. "I ain't been down it very far in years. Old Man Bronson used to have an outfit on it. Reckon he's still there. Is he, Walt? You come up that trail this spring."

WALT looked up hurriedly, but he answered slowly. He flashed a quick, malevolent glance at the man who had started the subject, and then let his gaze rest on the foreman.

"He's still there," Walt answered uncomfortably. "He's gettin' to be an old man. Ain't runnin' as many head as he used to."

This innocent statement caused several

heads to rise, and quick glances were exchanged. The owners of the heads thought they knew why the old man did not have to work.

"Old man?" inquired the foreman in surprise. "Hell, it ain't been more than five, six years since that train robbery. An' he warn't no old man then, or even near to bein' one. Not by a damn' sight! Wonder if he *was* mixed up in that?"

Ritchie re-crossed his legs and looked at the speaker.

"Everybody figgered that he was," he slowly said. "If he was, then he's got all that money. There wasn't a dollar of it found on th' others."

"They coulda cached it," suggested a man near the wagon.

"No signs of a cache, an' they didn't act that way," said the foreman. "They left a fair trail. Th' posse was watchin' them prints right close, lookin' for th' signs of a turn-off. There warn't no turn-off. Them fellers all kept in a bunch an' rode hard an' straight. Now, hard money don't melt an' it don't 'vaporate.'"

"How many was mixed up in th' robbery?" asked Nueces.

"Five," answered Ritchie. "An' not one of 'em was a weaner; they was five scraggy hombres, tougher than four hells. Their trail was easy. They had a pack hoss, or rather, two of 'em. Four of th' five holed up in a damn' good place when th' posse got to crowdin' 'em, an' th' other feller went on with th' pack hosses. He was outa sight before th' posse showed up. It had got cloudy a couple of hours before that, an' while th' shootin' was goin' on th' rain let loose. You know how it comes down sometimes. Well, this was one of them times. Th' posse wiped out th' four, seein' they was outnumbered more'n three to one, but it took considerable time; an' th' rain wiped out th' signs made by th' fifth feller. They never saw him in th' first place, an' they lost him for good, then an' there. Most every man that couldn't account for hisself was suspicioned for awhile, but that's all th' good it done."

10

"An' they kept right on suspicionin' Old Man Bronson, huh?" queried Nueces. "There must be some reason for that." Out of the corner of his eye he saw Walt was fidgeting.

"Yeah," said the foreman, "there's some. Two of our boys was ridin' up th' old trail, headin' for Number Eight. They stopped for th' night at Bronson's. He wasn't home. They made themselves comfortable, cooked supper an' turned in when it came time to.

"Just after daylight they heard him come in. He swore when he saw 'em, bein' kinda surprised at havin' company, an' he kept his hand near his gun for quite a spell. There wasn't a dry stitch on him, an' he was mud from his hat to his heels. Tired, too; dead tired. He built up a fire, changed his clothes an' got breakfast goin'. Ate like he was plumb starved. Didn't act right, nohow. He was nervous an' kept lookin' outa th' north windows. Said he'd been out on th' north edges of his range, lookin' for cattle thieves. Claimed that he'd got suspicious that he was losin' cattle, an' put in th' hull night ridin' around on th' off chance that he'd bump into a couple of wide-loopers. On his way home he said he'd found a cow bogged down in a hole, an' had a hell of a time draggin' it out."

"That all coulda been true," said Nueces.

"Shore; unless you knew Bronson," explained the foreman. "An' except for th' way he kept lookin' outa th' window, an' other things. He seemed to be on hair trigger, an' he was damn' glad when his company left."

"Th' boys," said Ritchie, "didn't know nothin' about th' robbery bein' committed, because it took place th' day before an' they hadn't met anybody that had heard about it. When they rode on they got to talkin' about Bronson, an' one of the boys said to th' other that if there'd been a murder committed in th' last few days, they would know about where they would start in to look for th' man that done it, if it was any business of theirs."

RITCHIE reached for his tobacco sack, and kept on talking.

"That remark of theirs, as much as anythin' else, made them think of Bronson when they finally heard th' news. A posse dropped in on him an' he had a lot of trouble before th' thing blew over; but he stuck to his story an' nobody could shake it. He even showed them th' hole where he said he dragged out th' cow!"

Nueces joined in the laughter and recrossed his long legs.

"Reckon that was right easy, findin' a bog hole," he said.

The foreman smiled and nodded.

"How big a robbery was it?" asked a man on the far side of the fire.

"Twenty thousan' in gold coin," answered Ritchie, and he laughed suddenly. "There was lots of stray cattle after that! Folks that never owned a cow was out lookin' for their strays. Most of th' missin' critters seemed to have strayed into th' country between Bronson's an' th' scene of that fight; anyhow, that's where quite some people went lookin' for 'em—an' that was th' only time I ever seen people huntin' stray cattle with picks an' shovels tied onto their saddles!"

Again Nueces joined in the laughter and turned toward the foreman.

"Old Bronson got prosperous after that? Buy hisself a brand new rifle, saddle or any gadgets that he'd been honin' for?"

"No. Lived th' same way an' ate th' same kinda grub."

"But he tried to sell out, lock, stock an' barrel," said Ritchie.

"Couldn't hardly blame him for that," grunted Nueces, "with everybody watchin' him an' suspicionin' him of bein' in that robbery."

"No, mebbly not," said the foreman slowly. "There are plenty of men who would have felt that way about it; but Bronson wasn't one of 'em. He never gave a triple-plated damn what folks thought about him. As a matter of fact he was so damn' cross-grained an' pe-cculiar that

I figger he kinda enjoyed it. Well, he's still there, an' th' money, too, mebbly. He's had time to get it nearer home than it was, to bury it some place near, where he can keep an eye on it. Mebbly it's buried in th' floor of his house by this time." The foreman looked up at Walt, whose face



shone redly in the firelight. "Was he glad to see you, Walt?"

"He wouldn't be glad to see nobody, no time," answered Walt in a growl. He was still fidgeting. "He watches every move you make, an' it makes a feller feel right uncomfortable. I was glad to pull out an' leave th' old mosshead to grouch by hisself. H-a-a-a-w!" he yawned. "Reckon I'll turn in; I'm plenty tired."

NUECES seemed always to be considering little things which most people overlooked. That yawn, for instance. It was overdone. Walt had fidgeted, and he was not a nervous man. They had been discussing a train robbery. That could not have been it, because Nueces had learned accidentally, some days before, that Walt was nearly a stranger to this part of the country. What else was there? Old Man Bronson and his buried money? Nueces chuckled softly; crazy ideas pop into crazy heads, and so he let this one pop out again. He wasn't concerned with train robberies or Old Man Bronson's money. Just the same, when he was a boy, a sly hen often meant a hidden nest. He would keep an eye on Walt. And with this Christian-like thought in his head, he reached for his blankets.

Somebody pushed the sticks into the cen-

ter of the fire, prodding them gently and expertly with the toe of a boot. Here and there blankets were being unrolled, boots removed; here and there, man after man lay down and rolled up, feet toward the fire. The fire, at first blazing brightly from the addition of new fuel, now began to burn lower. A soft snore gave proof that some lucky soul could drop off to sleep like a greenhorn off a saddle. Nueces stretched luxuriously in the blankets, made several tentative efforts to find a softer spot on the saddle for his head, had a quick mental picture of Old Man Bronson pulling a cow out of the mud with the rain pouring down; and the last clear picture in his mind was Walt's overdone yawn. Yeah; crazy ideas pop into crazy heads. Then he added his own snores to the others about him.

VII

THE cavy moved homeward at a good pace, kept moving by the spread out outfit behind it. Back of the outfit rolled and bumped the chuck wagon, raising very little dust from this hard soil. Nueces was riding on the left end of the line with nothing to do but to keep on riding. The saddle stock required practically no herding. In fact they seemed to know that they were going home to a merited rest.

Nueces was thinking. He had been with this outfit many days and nights and so far had not found a thing to connect a man of it with the loss of beef cattle complained of by the management of this great ranch; but, somehow, he felt that he had been given a definite lead—Old Man Bronson. Then an oblique thought struck him; if that were so, it would be strange that there would be an Old Man on each side of the trouble.

If Bronson would hold up a train he would not be above stealing cattle. And there was Walt's yawn. Walt would bear watching, but Nueces thought that the best place to do the watching would be in Bron-

son's neighborhood. You can watch one man on a trail, but if you can locate the rendezvous you can keep tabs on a dozen. And running off cattle in any number was hardly a one-man job.

Nueces pushed his horse forward on a right hand diagonal and the foreman looked up and regarded him curiously as he drew near.

"Gettin' lonesome?" asked Jimson with a smile.

"No; reckon not. I was just thinkin' I never did like pullin' shoes an' bustin' hosses," said Nueces with a grin. "They ain't no romance to them two jobs. You take a roundup, now; that's interestin'. Anyhow, you shore got men enough to pull shoes an' make shavetails outa broom-tails. Fact of th' matter, some of us are extra hands an', seein' I was th' last man hired, I'll be th' first to go. So I figger you won't go on th' prod if I ask for my time when we get in."

"You musta rode over considerable range," said the foreman, thoughtfully.

"Huh? What you mean?"

"I've noticed you talk two lingo—North an' South."

"Yeah," laughed Nueces. "I've wet my hoss's belly in th' Rio Grande, an' now I'm workin' purty fur up near th' Canadian line."

"Huh!" laughed the foreman. "You'll still have to ride a hell of a long way to reach th' line. You figgerin' to go up an' look at it?"

"No. I got me a good job whenever I want it. Feller down south has got a lot of improved hosses. His reg'lar range ain't none too good. He likes to have me take a couple hundred of them hosses an' drift 'em into th' mountain country, climbin' up or down accordin' to th' season. I graze 'em an' watch 'em an' bring 'em back well fed. It's a lonesome kinda game, but I never was afraid of herdin' by myself. Gives me a chance to get in some good huntin', too. I live high when I'm with them hosses."

"I know that yo're th' last man hired," said the foreman slowly; "but when it comes to firin' I have my own say. I never saw a better calf roper than you are. You add up to quite a lot of cow puncher, takin' you all in all. I could give you a reg'lar all year job, an' add a mite to yore pay. You don't hunt up trouble, but you shore can handle it as it comes. Nat'rally I keep my eyes on my boys. I've kept 'em on you. How'd you like to be second boss on Number Eight, at half again as much pay as yo're drawin' down now?"

"An' Adam said she tempted me," muttered Nueces, but he was shaking his head. "This here's a damn' good outfit. You ain't crowded, up here. You got all th' range you want an' ain't pestered with neighbors. You ain't got a lot of wide-loopers to make you ride range with a rifle on th' horn. Gosh, man; some of th' ranges I've ridden down south, where it is crowded! Brand-blotters, maverickers, runners. But th' summer is comin' on, Mister. It's summer down there a'ready. I can see them hosses an' me driftin' through th' mountain valleys an' over th' benches. You ever kill yore own wild meat an' broil it over a fire? You've made me a damn' fine offer, Jimson, but I itch to get with them hosses."

"That ain't th' only itch you got," chuckled Jimson, who himself was itching over the picture his companion had painted. "You got saddle itch, as well. Don't blame you, neither; if I was yore age I'd hunt me up a bunch of hosses, too." He smiled quizzically. "I figger I'll miss you more'n you'll miss me. I want to tell you, though, that a good job waits for you on th' Tumblin' T, if you come in to Number Eight to ask for it."

IF THIS foreman were crooked he would not offer the second-boss job to a stranger. He would be very particular about who held down that berth. Nueces scratched his head and grinned widely.

"I may call that play sometime," he ad-

mitted. Then he suddenly turned in the saddle and looked steadily into the frank eyes of his companion. "What do *you* know about Old Man Bronson?"

The foreman's eyes widened and a peculiar expression stole across his face. For a full half minute he studied the tall, homely rider.

"I don't know anythin' certain about him," answered Jimson. "I allus figgered that he helped hold up that train, an' got away with that money; but I don't know it."

"What you know about Walt, th' feller I had to hit?" persisted Nueces in a low voice.

The foreman's surprise increased.

"Headquarters made him my second boss an' I let it lay. I was figgerin' on givin' you his job."

"Why?"

"Because it strikes me yo're a better man for it."

"But how would that set with Headquarters?"

"I don't give a damn how it sets with 'em, Brady. I do th' firin' on Number Eight."

"You think about firin' him before I showed up?" persisted Nueces.

"I figger that's my business," replied Jimson with a smile.

"Shore," agreed Nueces. "How'd last year's beef tally compare with th' one before? You ran both of th' fall roundups in this section, didn't you?"

Jimson was still studying his inquisitor, and now he shook his head reprovingly.

"I know how it compared," he said; "but when you ask for figgers that mean so much to a ranch's rating, you better ask 'em at Headquarters."

"What you mean by ratin'?" asked Nueces curiously.

"Don't know just what I do mean, but this ranch is run by Eastern money an' quite some Eastern idears. It's got somethin' to do about stock, or somethin'."

"Hell, man; you can't have a ranch without stock!" persisted Nueces.

"Th' stock I'm talkin' about is paper."

"Paper stock! Hell!"

"Shore is hell," grunted Jimson. He smiled gently. "Then you don't want a good job with me?"

"I'll get me a better one; you ain't forgot all about them hosses, have you?"

"Well, not exactly," drawled the foreman. "Have you?"

"What you mean?"

"What you reckon?" countered the foreman with a broad smile. "How come you picked out Number Eight to work with? You must have rid right past two, three other outfits."

"Yeah, I did," admitted Nueces. "They told me they wasn't hirin', an' one of th' cooks said for me to go on in to Headquarters an' save myself some time."

"One of th' cooks, huh? Bet they thought you was ridin' th' grub line." Jimson smiled again. "An' you let 'em think so, didn't you?"

"I wasn't ridin' no grub line!" retorted Nueces with spirit, "an' I didn't let 'em think so. I wanted a job an' I told 'em so."

"How come you found th' Tumblin' T? It was a long ride outa yore way, wasn't it?"

"I'd allus heard of it, was allus curious about it. When I hit that town back yonder—Rawhide, ain't it?—they told me I was right close to it. Now, after I work for th' King outfit someday, I can say that I've rid range for th' two biggest ranches in th' world. An' man, Texas shore has got to be big to hold *that* ranch."

"How many calves they brand a year?" asked Jimson.

"Ten, twelve thousan'!"

"H'm. That's shore a lot."

"How many you brand, up here?" asked Nueces.

"Headquarters can tell you all about that, too."

"Huh!" said Nueces.

"Yeah," said Jimson, and both men laughed.

NUECES scratched his head and chuckled.

"Instead of you offerin' me a job, I wish I could offer you one."

"Thought you could broil yore own wild meat over th' fire when yo're driftin' them hosses," said Jimson with a laugh. "You won't need a cook."

"Why don't you tell me *all* you know about Old Man——" Nueces broke off suddenly as he saw Ritchie heading toward him, and switched quickly to Jimson's words. "I ain't just got th' knack of turnin' it. You see, I get to thinkin' about things an' let th' damn' meat burn."

"Reckon mebby you do quite a lot of thinkin'," muttered the foreman, and then nodded to Ritchie. "Hi!"

"Hi!" replied Ritchie, drawing rein. "Th' boys are figgerin' on a little party over to Rawhide when we get back. It'll be dusty, sweaty work pullin' shoes an' breakin' in th' green ones."

"Walt figgerin' to go with you?" asked Jimson.

"Yeah, if he don't get lost, like he did last time," said Ritchie with a grin. He saw the curious expression on Nueces' face, and laughed. "Yeah, he got lost. He stayed lost for three days. Stopped to pull up his cinch in th' dark while th' rest of us kept on goin'. Then he got confused an' never did get to town."

Nueces kept his face devoid of expression and he let his gaze settle on the countenance of the foreman. This was about the most absurd thing he had ever heard.

"I told Headquarters," said Jimson, chuckling at the recollection, "that our riders oughta be totin' a couple of compasses apiece, an' have guides with 'em any time they rid outa sight of th' bunkhouse."

Nueces joined in the laugh and nodded wisely.

"Well, that's *one* way of gettin' time off to go see yore girl," he said, and laughed again; but in his mind he made a second checkmark against the name of Walt.

Walt, as though conscious of being dis-

cussed, flashed them a glance from his far end of the line of riders, and that glance was not a pleasant one. The deep frown on his face showed that plainly. Of course it was only natural for a man to be sullen and angry after being knocked down and out.

Nueces studied him through eyelids half closed against the threat of the sun and partly shaded by the droop of his big hat. He had taken a strong dislike to Walt and this fact registered in his mind, and because of it he gave Walt the benefit of the doubt; human instinct, especially in the



male, was not always to be trusted. He had found that out more than once. When a man wanted facts he had to think things out and not guess at them. Appearances were often misleading, a horned toad was a repellent creature, but utterly harmless; in fact, it had certain virtues. So far as Nueces was concerned, Walt might be such a creature. Still, the feeling persisted; there was something wrong with Walt. He did not look right or act right. Second boss on a ranch, and an old hand at the game, he dismounted on a well marked trail at night, tightened a cinch, and got lost! A range-bred lad of ten would not do a thing like that. If Walt got lost under such circumstances it was because he wanted to get lost. Nueces was brought back to the present by the foreman's words.

"What we goin' to do with this cavvy while you boys are hellin' around over in Rawhide?" demanded the foreman. "Turn 'em loose with th' shoes on, an' then have to round 'em all up before we can get th' shoes off'n 'em?"

"Thought mebbly we could run 'em in to that Number Two pasture," suggested Ritchie. "There's enough feed in there to take care of this bunch for a month."

"Well, I know we've been lettin' that feed grow," admitted the foreman. "I'd rather get th' shoes off 'em as soon as we get in, an' turn 'em loose an' get shut of 'em; but they can wait. I reckon you all can go off to town, but th' man who brings back th' biggest head will find pull-in' shoes th' biggest job. Comin' right down to cases, you know, yo're really hired by th' month, an' yore time belongs to th' Tumblin' T. Well, go on to town an' get it all over with; an' if Walt gets lost this time, like a thumb-suckin' infant, I'll make him pay a reward to th' man that finds him."

RITCHIE laughed and nodded. Then he glanced at Nueces and nodded again.

"You shore got that rope of yourn edicated," he said with a smile. "After you get ten, twelve years older you'll make a top hand! Well, adios. Much obliged, Jimson. We'll pull them shoes plenty fast when we get back."

"You will when you get so you can see," laughed the foreman. He watched the rider swing away and return to his place, passing the good news from rider to rider, and then he looked calmly and searchingly at his companion.

"Wonder if yo're thinkin' about th' same thing I am?" he said.

"Weather," grunted Nueces.

"Weather?" muttered the foreman.

"Whether," said Nueces as if repeating.

"Well I'll be damned!" said the foreman. "Mebby you are."

"Whether a growed man could get lost like that," continued Nueces.

"Hit it plumb center," chuckled Jimson. "I was wonderin' th' same."

The foreman flung out an arm, indicating a straying horse, and Nueces gripped his knees against the saddle and went after the erring animal. When he returned the

foreman was biting into a huge plug of tobacco, his expression otherwise serene.

After a moment Nueces, glancing sideways, spoke again. He felt that he had the foreman rightly figured.

"We'll be back to th' bunkhouse tonight?" he asked.

"Yeah, figger so. I won't be sorry."

"Th' boys will leave for town bright an' early next mornin'?"

"You can gamble on that," smiled Jimson.

"Huh," muttered Nueces, turning something over in his mind. "My time ain't up till tomorrow mornin'."

"Yo're time's up when we get in," corrected Jimson.

Nueces slowly shook his head.

"No," he drawled. "It ain't up till tomorrow mornin'. That's too bad, because then I can't ride into town with th' boys. Anyhow, th' ranch has got to have at least one rider on it while th' others are away."

"Don't you figger I'm a rider?" asked the foreman, ironing out a grin. "I look crippled to you?"

"Well, I wouldn't say you was *too* crippled to set a hoss or throw a rope; but, just th' same, with copyin' yore tallies an' makin' out yore reports, you oughta have at least one man to wrangle in th' saddle hosses. Now, that's th' hell of workin' for hire; a man's got to do what he's told to do—an' I figger you'll tell me my time ain't up till th' next noon. If I was my own boss I could go to town with th' boys. Now I can't."

"You'll shore miss a bang-up headache," chuckled Jimson.

"An' when I do draw down my time I'll be headin' on a long ride south, to get that job driftin' them improved hosses into th' mountains. That'll mean I'll have to have quite some grub—all I can carry on my hoss. I'd much rather buy it off of you than to have to ride all th' way over to Rawhide for it. Lookit how many miles that would waste for me."

"We don't sell grub to good men that work for us," said Jimson.

"But after tomorrow noon I won't be workin' for you."

"You shore about that?" asked the foreman, watching his companion's face.

"Why, shore," answered Nueces, his eyes on the cavvy.

"We don't sell grub to our own hands," repeated Jimson. "We give it to 'em. If yo're quittin' at noon tomorrow, then I'll tell cook before noon comes, an' you can take it any time you want. We likewise do any little thing we can for our boys. I hope that hoss herd don't make you work too damn' hard among all them mountains." The foreman turned his face away for a moment and seemed to be having a little difficulty with his throat. His shoulders were gently shaking. "You still figger you don't need a cook on that hoss driftin' expedition of yourn? Sometimes a little help comes in handy."

THIS roundabout offer of aid cinched the status of the foreman so far as Nueces was concerned. He swung suddenly around in the saddle, his cold eyes boring into the curious and somewhat startled eyes of his companion.

"When you checked up yore tallies after th' beef roundup last fall, how many head of beef did you figger was missin'?"

"Plenty," slowly replied Jimson. He glanced at the distant riders, his gaze lingering on Walt who rode at the far end of the line. "We have combed th' range for a hundred miles in every direction. We didn't find a thing that meant anythin'. Our brand is a hard one to change over. It can't be changed into any other brand that we come acrost. You can take that for gospel, Brady. I've worked with cattle all my life, an' I know what I'm talkin' about when it comes to brands. There ain't no maverickin' or sleeperin' goin' on. We roundup clean, an' our range is open. Yo're thinkin' Bronson; he was th' first man we thought of. His brand is a B in a circle; an' th' B stands up straight. We didn't find a thing that looked a bit

wrong; but near as we could figger it, we were shy about six hundred head. We haven't any scrub cattle; our steers are heavy beef. Six hundred head of 'em would come to about eighteen thousand dollars."

"Worth takin' a few risks for," growled Nueces. "You say you kept watch of Bronson?"

"We watched him for near a month, an' he didn't make a play that we could find fault with. I figger he don't have to steal cattle. Anyhow, we watched him close."

"You figger th' missin' head went off from Number Eight's range?"

"That's somethin' I can't say," answered the foreman. "All our cattle carry th' same marks. Number Nine swore that most of th' missin' animals was from their section. That's just a guess, whether they belonged to us or them; but they did go from these west ranges. Over on th' east side th' tallies were about right." He shook his head. "Of course, cattle drift an' shuffle, but not that far an' all one way; an' if they had drifted east, th' tallies over there woulda showed some signs of it. Nobody saw 'em go. Nobody missed any particular animal; but th' tallies were short of what they shoulda been."

"Who are yore neighbors on th' west?" asked Nueces.

"They don't figger at all. There's two

ranges of mountains in between us an' them, with only three passes—two in th' first range an' one in the second. We never found no signs of cattle in any of 'em."

"What did th' stockyard inspectors say?" asked Nueces, although he knew the answer to that. He had read a copy of their report, back in the Old Man's office.

"Not nothin' that even looked like a changed Tumblin' T. Them boys at Kansas City know their business."

"How many cars you ship last year?"

"You mean from Number Eight?" asked Jimson.

"Yeah."

Jimson told him, and then amplified the statement:

"That don't mean a thing, Brady. I don't know how many Number Nine shipped. You'd have to get th' car totals for th' whole thirteen outfits. They can tell you that at Headquarters."

"I know it without goin' in to Headquarters," replied Nueces.

"Hell you do!"

"Yeah."

"You're goin' to have a fine time with all them hosses this summer," jibed Jimson, and he threw back his head and laughed.

"Yeah, ain't I? Now, if you was—to hell with it; here comes Ritchie ag'in."

(Part II in the Next SHORT STORIES.)

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*Bill West Tackles Detecting in His Own Way—Invariably
with His Fists*



PLUNDERING BLUNDERS

By **BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR**

Author of "Lost Dice," "In the Bag," etc.

SITTING on a down tree for a brief rest, with sweat in his eyes and a hindquarter and saddle of caribou beside him, Bill West turned his head at a crackle in the brush. He saw the tops of a saskatoon bush quiver. Bill gazed with alert eyes. Bill had reasons besides his natural hunting instinct for sitting tight, bright-eyed, ears cocked, a rifle across his knees.

Presently he marked dimly something reddish-brown, moving slowly. Bill stood up suddenly on the log. The added height allowed him to look down on the head and shoulders of a man moving as quietly as an Indian on stalk. But he wasn't stalking Bill. He didn't even know Bill was

there. Bill got a fair look at him at about forty feet, and the look made a puzzled frown cross Bill West's squarish dark face. Then he said aloud:

"Hello, stranger."

The fellow threw up his head like a startled deer. Then he ducked as a boxer avoids a blow, and stepped behind a low, thick spruce tree.

"Hey!" Bill called loudly, but got no answer. The man had vanished. Without a rustle, the snap of a trodden twig, with no sound that Bill's keen hearing could pick up he was gone into the dark depths of that illimitable forest of branchy spruce.

Bill hopped off the log and walked over to the tree. He found footprints, followed

them a little way. Then he shrugged his bulky shoulders, walked back and shouldered his load of fresh meat.

Bowed under this hundred-pound pack Bill turned the corner of his own cabin a couple of hours later, a cabin that fronted on a placer claim which had been torn up by the roots to uncover pay-dirt. Bill stood a moment speechless with surprise. Then he eased his burden down on a chopping block and said:

"What the blinkin' blazes has come off now?"

Henry Dufour, who was about of Bill's build and bulk, sat with his back against the cabin wall. Over him bent George Wylie, whose harsh, angular countenance was sober with concern and whose gray eyes were cloudy with anger. George was applying a cold cloth from a basin of bloody water to Dufour's face.

And Henry's face needed soothing applications. One eye was swollen shut, colored like a ripe dark plum. His classical French-Canadian nose was twice its normal size and slightly askew. His lips were cut, swollen and bleeding. The knuckles of both his hands were skinned raw.

George Wylie straightened up to look at Bill. Dufour said thickly:

"Me, Ah'm meet up wit ze wreckin' crew, Beel."

"I'll say," Bill grunted. "How come?"

"That blond gorilla your girl friend imported cleaned up on Hank a little while ago," George Wylie said caustically.

"Listen, George," Bill answered slowly, "I don't much like the way you say 'girl friend' about Sally. You hadn't ought to, George."

"I don't like the way he messed Henry, either," Wylie retorted. "I am not criticizing you, Bill, nor your friends. But—but—well, damn it, that guy has been a disturbin' element just about long enough—an' she brought him here."

"I know," Bill nodded. "Social error number three sixty-four for Sally. But

let's leave her outa this. That guy *must* be good. Hank's no set-up."

"He better be good," Wylie growled, "because he's goin' to have to beat me up, next."

"An' if he does then I have to go to the mat with him, I suppose," Bill grumbled. "Maybe he'll be all wore out by then. Was there any particular *casus belli*?"

"I was down at the lake," Wylie told him. "Carter come cussin' to Hank about somebody pinchin' their clean-up. They had words an' then blows."

"Aw, it's nozzin'," Dufour said. "I'm get mad for hees talk, an' go for heem. Son-of-gun for fight, zat bozo, all right."

"Did he intimate we swiped their gold-dust?" Bill asked.

DUFOUR nodded.

"An' did you inform him that somebody slipped into our shack yesterday about supper-time and pinched a tomato can full of nuggets, an' we wouldn't put it past him to pull somethin' like that?" Bill went on.

"Well, Ah'm tell him what we're theenk," Dufour admitted.

"I thought so," Bill said dryly. "You do talk too much sometimes, Hank. But I don't blame you. I took a long time to learn that I better keep part of what I know an' think, to myself. I probably woulda told that guy something the same myself if he got in my way an' started crabbin'—which seems to be one of the best things he does. Well, here's fresh meat. Let's eat."

Bill sliced off caribou steaks. Wylie started a fire. They cooked this midday meal in the open before the log cabin. A couple of hundred yards up the creek another cabin stood on the bank. Sitting with a plate on his knees Bill could see washed clothes fluttering on a line, smoke streaming from a tin stove-pipe. Sally Lunn had a stove and her crew ate inside. Bill watched them come out, four men and two women. Saw the men sit down on the

ground for a smoke. Sally had three hired miners working her claim—and another man who was, Bill reflected sourly, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, neither hired man nor partner. Just a guy that Sally Lunn had allowed to horn in on a good thing, because he and his sister had befriended her once.

Sally Lunn, adventuring alone in that wilderness where no lone woman should have been, had found that paystreak. And Bill had found Sally there; helped her stake and work that ground, staked a discovery claim for himself, and helped Sally Lunn hold hers against the rush that came with the spring.

Bill smoked and thought of the day he found Sally's camp by Chain o' Lakes the summer before. Sally had been sitting on a log, a Winchester across her lap, alone and fly-bitten, work and travel-stained, suspicious of him and all men. They had become partners in the same sense that men become partners in a chancy enterprise. Bill had liked Sally's red-gold hair, her round face with its determined jaw, her trim small body that housed the spirit of a lion. Bill had liked Sally Lunn as a woman as soon as he saw her, but he had kept that shoved clear into the back of his mind. He had proceeded on the assumption that they would continue as partners.

But Sally had thrown a monkey wrench into the works, without meaning to do so. Henry Dufour's battered face was only one—and not the first—of the broken gears. Bill's face kept getting a little more grim as he stared. He tossed the stub of a second cigarette away and stood up.

"You bozos 'tend to your knittin'," said he. "I'm amblin' over to our neighbor's."

"You goin' to discuss this," Wylie motioned toward Dufour's face, "with Carter? In your usual polite an' courteous manner? Because if you are——"

"No," Bill said curtly. "I am goin' to talk to Sally. Carter don't interest me, so long as he keeps outa my way."

"If you happen to see him," Wylie ob-

served, "you might tell him that if he'll step down the creek a ways I'd be interested to talk to him. I'd like to meet him on neutral ground."

"Don't be a damn fool, George," Hank Dufour put in. "Me, I skeen my own cats."

Bill laughed outright.

"An' you're givin' me advice about keepin' my fists parked in my pockets," he jeered.

BILL strolled up toward the other cabin. Those two claims, containing in streaks the richest pay dirt Bill West had ever seen in the North, had been a focal center of trouble. When the last gold-hungry prospector had ceased swarming over that area in the spring, Sally herself had introduced a new factor which had been troublesome from the start. One of Bill's uneasy hunches warned him now that something was coming to a head.

The troublesome factor was standing beside Sally before the cabin when Bill came up. Its name was Randall Carter. It stood six foot two in its socks. It had



very blond hair, blue eyes. It was an excellent sample of what nature can do in the way of a select physical specimen.

Ran Carter was quite as big and powerfully built as Bill West himself. Where Bill had a quick and explosive temper which the lore of the frontier plus scores of fights had taught him to control, Carter had a coldly calculated, deliberately offensive manner when he wanted to be offensive, which seemed to be most of the time. And apparently he could back up his statements with his fists. Hank Dufour was the oldest and considerably the least scrap-

per of Bill West's trio. But Hank was, even at that, a hard man to take. And Carter had taken him plenty. The only marks Bill could see on him were a couple of bruises on his forehead—which was probably how Dufour skinned his knuckles. Carter looked distinctly hostile.

"Probably," Bill reflected, "the lad thinks that since I have a rep for scrappin' I'm here to carry on Hank's war. Darn him, if he starts yappin' at me, I'll declare one of my own."

Bill looked at Sally with a touch of regret. Sally's crinkled red-gold hair shone in the autumn sun, the same sun that had burned a red V where a flannel shirt opened over her chest. Bill had no doubts about Sally Lunn's courage and resourcefulness, nor her loyalty. Sally's loyalty was really one of her weaknesses, for Bill doubted her judgment.

"I'd like to talk to you for a minute," he said.

"You got anything to say, say it," Carter put in promptly.

"Ran!" Sally flared at him.

"You'll keep for awhile, Mister Carter," Bill said silently to himself. He didn't even appear to notice Carter's statement.

A smallish, worn-looking blonde woman about thirty came out of the cabin. The three hired miners were sauntering over toward the sluice where they worked.

"You better join the boys at work," Sally said to Carter in a gentler tone. "Come over here, Bill."

SHE led the way to a felled spruce. Bill sat on the winter-bleached log and rolled a cigarette.

"I'm awfully sorry about Ran and Henry getting into a fight," Sally said.

"A scrap is nothin' to worry about," Bill assured her. "Hank can dish it out as well as take it. What's this about somebody pinchin' gold off you?"

"Somebody did," Sally said soberly.

"Much?" Bill asked.

"All of it," Sally said grimly.

"How much was all of it?" Bill persisted.

"All we've sluiced out of this claim since June," Sally muttered.

"God's teeth!" Bill exploded. "Do you mean to say you've never shipped out to the bank, all the different times that plane has come with supplies an' mail?"

"Not once," Sally said. "It was all stored in the cabin. And somebody got it last night."

"Somebody that knew where it was lifted it when nobody was lookin'," Bill supplied. "Well, I warned you this country ain't what it used to be. It may interest you to know that somebody likewise picked off a tomato can full of nuggets that sat on a shelf in our dump. Sally, if you've lost the whole summer's take, you've taken a beatin'. You got any suspicion who lifted this stuff? About how big a haul was there?"

"Not the faintest suspicion. Everybody in this camp is like Caesar's wife. There was a little over a hundred pounds by actual weight."

"Over fifty grand," Bill growled. "Just about what a man could pack."

"Yes," Sally said. "It was in a galvanized iron bucket under my bed. And not one of the five of us was outside the camp. In fact it vanished yesterday evening when we were all sitting in front of the cabin."

"Maybe me or Hank or George snuck up an' got in through the back window, an' grabbed it off," Bill suggested.

"Don't be absurd," Sally whispered.

"Your pal Carter expressed that notion to Hank," Bill said. "That's what started the scrap. What the devil did you bring that ape in here for, anyway?" Bill ended with a snarl. "Couldn't you see his high-handed way with everybody was bound to raise hell? Didn't it occur to you that he'd gum up any coöperation you might want to effect with anybody? What——"

"Let's not go into that again, Bill," Sally said wearily. "I told you I was under a real obligation to Ran and Mary. They stood by me when I was in the pit. I

wanted to give them a chance to make a little on my good luck. And I thought Mary would be company."

"Yeah, little Mary's a real companion," Bill snorted. "Crabbin' about isolation, belly-achin' about mosquitoes, an' the hardships of this God-forsaken country. Well, this season's about over, thank God! What you goin' to do about this robbery?"

"What *can* I do?" Sally flung back.

"Can't the great blond he-man from the corn-belt do somethin' about it besides pick a fight with my partners?" Bill demanded. "He's a man of education and brains—presumably—as well as brawn. Isn't he able to do anything about a theft that practically leaves you where you started? Doesn't it?"

WE-ELL," Sally said, "it leaves me rather dazed. I've got three men to pay wages to, and bills for supplies. Maybe we can work out enough to cover expenses before the freeze-up. But this ground is pretty well cleaned up. And that leaves me not much better off than I was when you and I located this creek last summer."

"An' friend Carter can't do anything about that either, I suppose," Bill grumbled.

"Well, what *could* he do?" Sally snapped.

"A guy that can't do anything but make trouble shouldn't be here," Bill stood up. "I'm goin' to do somethin' about it, Sally. I'm goin' to do some axe-work, an' the chips can fall where they may. I don't like to be robbed. I don't suppose we lost more than a couple of thousand dollars worth. But I have a hunch that the hand that plucked your treasure was the same hand that nicked us. It was a man. I found tracks. Now, I'm goin' back to camp an' get organized. Then I'm comin' back here to examine the ground around your place, if it hasn't been all tracked up already. No guy can pack off a hundred pounds of anything without leavin' tracks. If there's tracks they lead somewhere.

"Now, you better make a point of keep-

in' your big, yellow mastiff on his chain, when I pass back this way in a few minutes, Sally. He's been snarling at me, off and on for three months. I don't have to like guys that don't like me, simply because they're your friends. Next time he shows his teeth at me I'm goin' to knock 'em down his throat, Sally, and I don't mean maybe."

SALLY LUNN looked at Bill and looked away again, with a troubled air. Bill didn't have to add that qualifying phrase. Bill seldom announced belligerent intentions. Sally had seen Bill fight first and talk afterward more than once. When Bill did announce his intentions he carried them out.

Bill knew what Sally was thinking—or thought he did. Bill didn't like the rôle of disturber, aggressor or what have you, but he had reached his limit as far as Ran Carter was concerned. And Bill didn't want to complicate an already tense situation by fighting Ran Carter if he could prevail on Sally Lunn to keep Carter out of his way.

"I'll see that he avoids you," Sally said gently.

"Thanks a lot," Bill nodded. "That takes a load off my mind."

Bill watched her walk into the cabin. Something about that small sturdy soul moved Bill in a way that disturbed him. Bill West definitely had other fish to fry besides deflecting his career along the channels of the cosmic urge. He had lived and worked with Sally Lunn for three months without ever thinking of making a pass at her. Bill wasn't any lone sailor, but the North was getting smaller and chances fewer and farther between, and Bill wanted a stake, a real stake. The only place he knew where to get one was in the North. And that wasn't a woman's game. At least he had always thought so until Sally came along. And anyway, what had been friendship and a real partnership on the job had been busted higher than Gilderoy's kite shortly after Ran Carter

appeared on the scene of operations. Bill had gone back into his shell. And he would have stayed there but for this matter of stolen gold.

"Darn it all, even the best women are always gumming things up when they get into a man's game," Bill said disconsolately. "Well, here goes. I'm glad I didn't mention that bozo I saw in the woods. That would just mix 'em up some more. Gosh darn it, that guy worries me. I know him, an' I can't place him."

It took Bill West only a brief time to get organized. He wrung a promise from George Wylie that Wylie would lay off Ran Carter while Bill was away. Bill would have bet a modest sum that Wylie could take Carter. But he wasn't sure. Bill was quite certain he could himself, and there was guile in exacting that promise. Bill felt in his bones that Ran Carter was going to ask for it, in fact beg for it, and Bill wanted to bestow the gift of laying on of hands himself. For weeks Bill had been restraining himself by marvelous self-control from parking a straight right, or even a snappy left hook—it didn't matter to Bill—he could hit like lightning from either port or starboard—on the Carter jaw. Sally Lunn, he reflected sardonically, was certainly an influence for good. For Ran Carter's good.

There had been trouble over building a joint sluice. Trouble over the water that came down that sluice to wash their pay dirt. Trouble over little things. Now at the tail end of the season Sally's importation was starting more trouble by suggesting that they were thieves and beating the face off Hank Dufour for resenting that suggestion. Bill wasn't going to restrain himself any longer on Sally Lunn's account, if Mr. Carter insisted on getting in his hair.

BILL had a small rucksack containing a sleeping-bag and some food slung over his shoulder. He carried his rifle in one hand. He walked back to Sally's cabin. Sally left the sluice where she was

working with Carter and the miners when she saw Bill approach. Nearing the cabin Bill noticed Carter stand his shovel against the sluice-box and follow Sally. Outwardly Bill looked rather sober. He was really grinning on the wrong side of his face. If a fool *would* rush in where a better man might fear to tread, well——

Bill reached the rear of Sally's cabin. Staring at the ground he saw what he saw—which was just about what he expected to see. He was leaning on his rifle looking at the soft brown earth when Sally Lunn turned the corner.

"Did any of the detective force observe *that* when they investigated the scene of the crime?" Bill asked.

"Observe what?" Sally inquired.

"You see nothin'?" Bill grumbled.

"The ground," Sally replied.

"Look close," said Bill. "Right under the window. Right there," he pointed a finger. "There's a shallow round dent. You said you kept that gold in a galvanized bucket. A hundred pounds of metal is hefty. That mark is where somebody set that pail out the window. The chances are he, she, or it, went in the window after it. Or somethin'."

"Well?" Sally commented.

"Oh, nothin'," Bill said. "It's a startin' point, that's all. Your gold didn't walk off under its own power. Where yours went, ours probably did too. Both places were raided at the same time."

"Well, Mister Sleuth, have you deduced the operation theoretically?"

Ran Carter had come up behind them. Bill looked at Sally, and Sally said:

"I asked you to stay on the job, Ran."

"I'm on the job," Carter replied. "I asked you if you had any theory about this gold-stealing, West."

"If I had," Bill said slowly, "I wouldn't care to discuss it with you."

"Oh. And why?" Carter's tone became suddenly charged with animus.

"Chiefly because I don't like your way of discussing things," Bill said frankly, but

in a wholly casual tone. "Also because there is nothing to discuss."

"Listen, big boy," Carter took a step toward Bill, "any time I want to discuss anything with you there'll be a discussion."

"You're tellin' me," Bill smiled. "If I refused I suppose you'd beat the can off me like you did Hank?"

"I'm quite competent to do so," Carter announced brusquely.

Bill West laughed outright. If Ran Carter had known Bill better the metallic quality of that laugh would have warned him. Sally Lunn stepped back. Her gray eyes widened. Bill set his rifle against the wall. He slid the rucksack off his shoulder, staring fixedly at the other men.

"You know, Carter," he said quietly, "you're asking for it. An' I'm a generous man today. I'll give it to you."

With which Bill made what looked like an awkward stab at Ran Carter's face. Whereupon a glad smile flashed across the rugged blond features of his antagonist, and Mister Carter drove swiftly at Bill with a straight arm right that would have loosened all Bill's teeth—if it had landed.

But Bill's black, curly head bobbed under that piston-like punch. His own trusty right, with all Bill's weight and bottled-up anger behind it, smashed Carter in that sensitive spot known as the "wind." That is where the ribs part in a V at the bottom of a man's chest. And Bill whipped his left fist in a short hook to the jaw. The old one-two. Bill could sock. Bill West had fought good men and bad ones all over North America. And an ex-heavy-weight champion had spent a whole winter teaching Bill about placing a naturally hard punch where it would be most effective.

If Bill didn't literally knock Carter's teeth down his throat as he had told Sally Lunn he would, he certainly loosened a few of them with that left hook. Carter dropped in his tracks, quivering, squirming, paralyzed.

"Conclusion of the first canto," Bill said cheerfully, reaching for his pack.

"Oh, I wish this hadn't happened," Sally Lunn breathed.

"It was bound to," Bill declared. "The boy friend persisted in applyin' matches to the keg of powder. He wanted an explosion an' he finally got one. I hope he's satisfied. Meantime, I'll be on my way."

BILL caught up his rifle and walked away following the faint boot-marks his eye marked. A man, and a tolerably heavy man, carrying a weight of a hundred pounds couldn't help making tracks in that leaf-mold earth. Behind Bill Sally Lunn called something after him in a rather plaintive tone. But Bill didn't turn back. Just more argument. Bill was tired of argument.

Bill was just about off Sally Lunn for life when he followed that trail into the thicket and forest that stood like a green wall a few yards back from the creek. Women were either tricky, or else they didn't have sense enough to come in when it rained. Sally should have had better



sense than to introduce a disturber like Carter into their joint affairs. Bill couldn't quite overlook the fact that Sally Lunn had made that strike by herself, and had a perfect right to share it with anyone she saw fit. But if the Carters had stood by Sally, as she said, when *she* was in trouble, they were gumming things up for her now, plenty. Bill could see that, if Sally couldn't. He lost that track within half a mile, on hard ground. Then he began to cast back and forth in a zig-zag advance, like a yacht beating first on one tack and then the other against a head wind. Twice he found

footmarks, only to lose them quickly. But in general that foreign track pointed in a general direction, to the southwest—the region Bill had hunted caribou in on the previous morning, and where he had sighted the vanishing stranger.

Not being gifted with a bloodhound nose, Bill used his head. He reflected a good deal upon this unknown who had disappeared when Bill spoke. The gold thief was a man, and here was a man dodging other people. There was something else about this fellow that nagged at Bill West.

So Bill drove a little more directly into the region where he had been hunting. Bill was quite as competent on his feet as he was with his fists. By sundown he had covered a good many square miles of territory. Of course that might have meant a wandering prospector who didn't have good hearing, but Mr. William West felt sure the fellow had dodged.

Consequently, when toward evening, Bill came on the plain track of a hob-nailed boot on a patch of damp ground, he followed that track as warily as if he were hunting big game. He was. Man is the biggest game of all. Especially an armed man in a wilderness of forest and swamps.

Bill was at least seven miles from home when he found that hob-nailed print. He nosed it out until the creeping dusk blinded him. Then he made a night camp without bothering to light a fire.

And when he sat up in his sleeping bag at dawn his nostrils at once picked up the faint smell of wood-smoke.

All he had to do was follow his nose against the wind. That led him presently to the edge of a narrow glade lining a sluggish creek. Beside this stream a man stood stripped to the waist, sloshing cold water over his face and shoulders.

Bill had keen eyes, and he had worked up close in the bordering thicket. What he saw made him wrinkle his brows, shake his head irritably. He could have walked out and accosted the man, but he decided instead to do a little watchful waiting. The man covered his heavily muscled white

torso with an undershirt and a brown sweater and took a few steps back from the creek. He paused under a thick-trunked, ancient spruce, the dense boughs of which drooped in a twenty-foot radius. There he set about replenishing his fire.

BILL moved softly along the edge of the glade until he came to a point where the scrub ended a few feet from this tree. That spruce was like a giant umbrella. From time to time the man stepped in under it and reached for things among the branches. He fried stuff in a pan, made tea, ate very deliberately, and squatted on his haunches to smoke. And Bill, also squatting on his haunches, suddenly put his hand over his mouth. He had very nearly uttered an exclamation in sheer surprise. Bill's memory had peeled off a layer and exposed some highly important recollections.

Finally the man washed his tin plate, knife and fork, put everything out of sight among the boughs of that spruce, picked up a carbine and sauntered down the creek.

Bill followed discreetly. The spruce forest pressed close on both banks. The easiest going was right along the bed of the stream. This open the man traversed. Bill kept sight of him from the cover of the woods.

After a mile of this going Bill spurted ahead. He wanted a closer look. To get it he planted himself in a tongue of brush where the creek took a loop. And the man he followed passed that thicket within ten feet. Bill got a look that satisfied him. The fellow was fully as big a man as Bill. He was very fair. His left ear was thickened and distorted into what the prize-ring terms a cauliflower.

He was evidently going places in a leisurely fashion, and since Bill was no longer so much interested in his movements, he waited doggo until the man had gone a few hundred feet down the creek. Then Bill turned and legged it back to that camp as fast as he could cover the ground.

It could easily have been passed with

a casual glance. Fresh ashes and charred sticks. No other sign of occupancy. A dead camp-fire by an ancient spruce. But Bill walked in under that green canopy and looked up. Then hoisted himself into a tangle of boughs just above his head.

Stowed neatly among those boughs, screened from eye and sun and rain by branches thick as a thatched roof Bill found a very complete camp equipment and supplies of food.

But what caught Bill West's eye almost at once was an empty galvanized iron water bucket draped over a limb.

Unfortunately for Bill's eager soul, it was empty. But he knew that bucket. Bill had bought and shipped in supplies that spring for both Sally and himself. He had shipped two pails of like size and shape. One had a defective bail fastening, and Bill had remedied that with a copper rivet, himself in person, and allotted it to Sally Lunn. And there was the copper rivet.

Bill made a thorough search—without leaving any trace of said prying. He went over that camp with a fine-toothed comb. He kept his rifle handy and his eyes roving against surprise.

And when he did finally desist he ambled away from there with the galvanized bucket in his hand, bearing his rucksack slung across his shoulders. And he didn't look any more for trails. Bill had often found that to fight fire with fire was sound strategy. He headed straight for home. Only three or four miles from that hide-out in the beehive spruce tree he stopped and built a fire, cooked himself a belated breakfast.

He sauntered into the Chain o' Lakes camp about eleven o'clock, lugging Sally's galvanized pail. Mary Carter was picking up kindling by Sally's cabin when Bill strode by. He paid no attention to her start of surprise, but kept straight on to where Sally Lunn, Carter and the three miners labored by the sluice-boxes. He could see Hank and George down on their ground,

BILL noted with inner satisfaction that Carter had a lump on his jaw the size of half a walnut. And he didn't fail to note how Carter bristled at his approach. But Bill had his rifle in his hand and with the other held out the galvanized bucket to Sally Lunn. She gasped, recognizing an article as familiar as her own face. And Ran Carter uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Unfortunately," Bill said, "it was empty when I found it. Unless, of course, you choose to believe I emptied it."

"Bill," Sally said reproachfully. "But where did you find it?"

Carter's gaze shifted from the bucket to Bill, and back again, with a scowl. Bill didn't answer Sally's question.

"Carter," Bill addressed, "I got sight of a man in the woods that startled me. Have you by any chance got a twin brother, or a double?"

"What?" Carter said in a tone of complete incredulity. "A twin or a double!"

He stared at Bill with his mouth open.

"That's what I said," Bill replied.

"I heard what you said," Carter snapped. "But what the devil do you mean?"

"Maybe I better explain the allusion," Bill said briskly. "This empty bucket which had Sally's gold in it once, I found in a camp where somebody had left it. An' a mile or so from that camp I got a look at a guy who dodged away from me. But I saw his mush, an' he's a dead ringer for you, Carter, height, build, color an' everything. When he lamed me he did a duck. I never came up with him. But there he is, an' here's the empty bucket that had Sally's gold. An' I took it outa his camp. Does that spell anything in your bright lexicon, Mister Carter?"

Ran Carter didn't answer Bill. He was looking at Sally Lunn, and Sally's face was so utterly, deliberately wooden that Bill knew Sally was covering up something.

"Well, there you are," Bill said. "I've scoured the country for miles around. I've uncovered one galvanized bucket an' one furtive stranger. If you can make anything of that you're welcome. But I'm

goin' on that guy's trail again. Next time I see him, I'll see that he stops long enough to talk. That is, unless you want to resume hostilities on account of me settin' you down on your fanny this mornin'?"

Bill's tone was challenging. But Carter merely shook his head.

"I'll settle with you later," he said slowly. "Right now is not the time."

"Just as you like," Bill said indifferently.

He strode off toward his own property. The light of mischief glowed in Bill's dark eyes. He glanced back over his shoulder. Ran Carter and Sally Lunn were walking toward the cabin. Carter was talking, gesticulating with both hands.

"Now, which way will the cat hop?" Bill soliloquized. "Will he or won't he? Have I guessed right, or am I all wet? We'll see."

He shed his pack and rifle at the cabin, walked over to where his partners worked. Henry Dufour's face was beginning to assume its natural contours. He stared at Bill inquiringly out of one good eye and the plum-colored one.

"So you sock the beeg boy, huh?" Henry commented.

"Yeah," Bill admitted. "How'd you know?"

"Aw, Sally come down an' asks us please will we stage no more scraps," Wylie grumbled. "She says she'll see that Carter lays off from now on."

"So there's an armistice," Bill commented. "Well, he asked for it this mornin' in pleadin' accents. Listen, you bozos."

BILL, Henry and George Wylie leaned on the sluice. Bill made a sort of tracing in the gravel with his toe. He talked long and earnestly. His partners listened, nodding comprehension.

"Why, that's the creek where we killed the bull moose with the freak head this spring," George Wylie said.

"Yeah. Sure. I'd forgot that," Bill agreed. "Only it's a long way up the

creek to his camp from where we downed the moose. Anyway, you fellows sabe, now. If I don't turn up by tomorrow noon, you come take a look-see. Otherwise you tend strictly to your knittin'. Too many cooks spill the beans."

"I see the point," Wylie nodded. "If you weren't the kinda guy you are, Bill, I'd say you were a fool to take that long a chance. But——"

"I'm playin' a hunch," Bill declared. "If it doesn't work out, I can still cope with the situation. With you fellows wise, I'm not goin' to be left holdin' the bag."

"It would be a pleasure to be in on it," Wylie said, "but if you insist on a solo, it's O. K. by me. Only you better show up on time, or me'n Henry'll be up an' comin'."

"O. K.," Bill said briefly.

He went back to the cabin, lit a fire, had a wash and a shave. Hank and Wylie came in. They cooked some food. All the while Bill kept casual watch on Sally Lunn's camp. They were eating the noon meal there, too.

But presently Bill saw Ran Carter come out, look all around, and set off up the creek. He carried a rifle. A look of gratification crossed Bill's face. He watched until Carter vanished. Then he caught up his own rifle.

"Tomorrow by noon or bust," he said to his partners.

Bill dove into the woods directly behind his camp. Once under cover of the drooping spruce he chuckled. As he disappeared he had marked Sally Lunn hurrying toward their cabin.

"The gal suspects there's a screw loose an' she's about to demand or impart some information," Bill reflected. "Well, I got no time right now for a gabfest, Sally."

Bill could get through woods and over rough country as fast as any man that ever made a hike. He stepped on the gas now. He had to leave certain things to chance, but there was premeditated design in the way he legged it through the forest,

straight for that hideout in the old spruce tree.

Striding as if he wore the fabled seven-league boots, and trotting where the ground permitted, Bill came in record time from the rear, so to speak, of that camp where he had purloined the galvanized bucket that morning.

The blond stranger had got back to his camp. Something evidently annoyed and puzzled him. He stood alongside the drooping branches of his arboreal home cocking his cauliflower ear this way and that. Bill watched him for a minute from the nearest point he could approach under cover.

Bill had no time to waste. At any moment a complicating factor might enter into the situation.

So Bill laid down his gun gently, parted the bushes, braced himself—and launched his body across twelve or fourteen feet of space like a human battering ram. Swiftly as he moved some sound warned his quarry. He turned—just sufficiently around so that Bill's head caught him squarely amidships.

Subsequent proceedings interested that gentleman no more.

THE subsequent proceedings consisted of Bill hastily producing a length of stout cord from his hip pocket, lashing the fellow's wrists and ankles together, and stuffing a not-too-clean handkerchief into his mouth as a gag.

The man wasn't unconscious. He was simply paralyzed by that tremendous butt in the midriff. With his man tied and gagged Bill hastily retrieved his rifle, took it and the blond man's gun, and hoisted himself nimbly into the laced boughs of the spruce tree directly above the prostrate result of his felonious assault. Bill's tactics had been deliberately planned. Now he drew breath while he awaited eventualities.

They weren't long coming. Bill had scarcely got well settled before Ran Carter came legging it up the creek straight to

the massive spruce, straight up to the bound man on the ground.

"Hell, Nicky!" he exclaimed.

His fingers plucked at the gag. He was bent over, almost directly under Bill West.

At which moment Bill leaped feet first from his perch in the boughs above. He dropped from seven feet elevation square in the middle of Ran Carter's back. Bill weighed a trifle over two hundred and he wore heavy hob-nailed boots. He flattened Carter on top of the other flattened man and Bill flattened himself also, grab-



bing for and getting a strangle-hold around Ran Carter's neck. And he didn't release that hold until Carter's tongue was sticking out and his face had grown purple.

Then Bill tied him also hand and foot with light, stout line which he had put in his pocket for that very purpose. After which Bill sat down to admire his own technique, wipe the sweat from his curly forehead, and roll himself a smoke.

In the twilight of that evening Bill marched a specimen of Siamese twins of his own making up to Sally Lunn's door. There was still a touch of sun on the highest tips of the spruce forest, but it was growing dusky in the woods. Bill had two prisoners whom he had temporarily made one by the simple expedient of putting them beside each other and securely tying the inside ankle of one of his fellow's ankle, and lashing the inside wrists together. Thus he created a three-legged pair of twins and drove it through the woods to Sally's door.

Sally Lunn, Mary Carter and the three

miners stared speechless at this strange spectacle.

"I took it on myself to effect a family reunion," Bill said to Sally. "Introducin' the brothers Carter, doin' their well-known three-legged act. Another of their specialties is the disappearin' gold trick. Maybe they can explain that. I leave 'em to you, Sally. Do what you like with 'em. They know what to expect from me."

Bill turned away, turned back for a final word.

"This bozo with the cauliflower ear is known to the prize-ring as Catamount Carver," Bill said. "His name is Carter an' he's Ran Carter's brother. He had a hideout in the woods. As soon as I let it be known that I'd seen him, an' found that gold bucket in his camp, your friend Ran hotfoots to him. I expected him to do that, an' I beat him to the brother's camp, an' gathered 'em both in. Maybe you can figure it out, Sally."

Bill didn't wait for Sally Lunn to reply. He strode off to his own quarters down the creek. Over their supper fire he told Hank and George a tale that made them chuckle.

"Bill," Wylie said, "we'd oughto hand them guys over to the Mounted Police."

"No," Bill shook his head. "Leave 'em to Sally. It's her party."

BILL looked curiously at the Lunn camp when they went out to work in the morning. Hoar frost whitened the bushes. The weather had changed overnight. Winter was pushing down from the Polar ice-cap and he had sent his chill breath ahead. The sky was full of gray clouds, boiling along before a northwest wind.

The Lunn sluice lay idle. Bill wondered what was going on up there. Once or twice figures moved about Sally's cabin. About ten o'clock the three hired miners went stringing down the creek, blanket rolls across their shoulders. They waved to Bill and George and Henry.

"The boys are through," Bill remarked.

"Looks like an exodus. They'll be goin' out with Mike."

Mike Sneed, flying a plane in once a month with mail and supplies, was due on Chain o' Lakes at noon.

"I'd as soon exit, too," George Wylie said, leaning on his shovel handle. "I'd kinda like to get out before she freezes up. She looks like wind, snow, and zero weather right off the bat, to me."

"You mean you'd kinda like to see the wife," Bill grinned. "Well, that's O. K., George. You an' Henry go out with Mike. I'll stick around an' fix up for the winter, an' Mike can hop back in a week or ten days for me."

Promptly at noon a faint drone in the sky grew to a roar above. Mike Sneed banked an amphibian over the camp and slanted down to land on the lake a mile below the claims. Bill, walking light, George and Henry Dufour packing blankets and the last hundred ounces of gold taken from the sluice-box, made their way down the creek. Bill hadn't seen the others trek—but they were all there. Ran Carter, his sister Mary, the blond man with the cauliflower ear, and Sally. Sally Lunn was talking to Mike Sneed. The other three stood in a group by themselves. They looked the other way when Bill and his partners appeared. Mike Sneed came over to Bill, with a packet of letters.

"Looks like a shut-down on the good weather," the pilot said.

"Yeah," Bill agreed. "Hank an' George are goin' out. Want you to come back an' pick me up in about a week."

"I got a load spoke for," Mike frowned. "Miss Lunn's crowd. Six of 'em. I'll have to fly back tomorrow for George and Henry. Just can't take you boys this trip."

"Tomorrow's O. K.," George Wylie said. "We'll be seein' you then, Mike."

Bill turned away abruptly. George and Henry followed him.

"What's the mad haste?" Wylie wanted to know.

"Don't like the atmosphere," Bill said grimly. "Every time I think of those two blond bozos I want to start somethin'."

BACK at camp they heard Mike's plane take off, saw it rise above the forest and dwindle to nothing in the sky, bound for Whitefish on Great Bear Lake, six hundred miles away. A strange unaccustomed hush seemed to have settled over the camp. They puttered about the cabin, and presently went out to put in an hour or two on the sluice, on ground that they knew was all but washed up. Bill was rather thoughtful and silent.

Suddenly George Wylie said, "Hell, Sally didn't go!"

Bill looked. Sally Lunn was splitting a piece of wood on a block by her cabin door. She gathered up the sticks and went in. Smoke began to stream gray from the pipe. Bill went on shoveling.

When they knocked off about five o'clock Bill washed up, sat smoking a cigarette while Wylie cooked supper. Bill threw away the stub of his cigarette, walked up the bank to Sally's door.

Sally was sitting on a stool beside a homemade table when Bill's bulky frame darkened the doorway. She had her round determined chin cupped in the palm of one work-calloused, small hand.

"Hello, Bill," she said gently.

"Goin' to stay on the job single-handed?" Bill inquired.

"I don't know," Sally said dispiritedly. "I'm just thinking. I had a stake dug out of this ground—all the money I would ever have needed in this world—and it's gone. I'm worse off than I was this spring. I've got just about what we dug out of this ground last fall—and a played-out claim."

"Not so good," Bill admitted. "Still —"

"I suppose it could be worse," Sally said slowly. "Anything can always be worse. Bill, how did you figure out this Carter brothers combination? If you

knew all the time why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know. I only put two an' two together at the last minute," Bill told her. "I had a partner up here once—Bish Wright. I've told you about Bish. After Bish got married an' went back to Chicago to live I made him a visit. Naturally, Bish bein' a ex-heavyweight champ, an' me bein' interested in scrappin' we took in some boxin' exhibitions. I saw this Catamount Carver in a prelim. Bish knew him well. In fact Bish fought him once—when this Catamount guy was good. Bish gave me his history. They were all Chicago kids, Bish, an' Catamount, an' the brother. Bish told me Catamount's real name, which was Carter, not Carver. He was a college scrapper. Both him an' his brother. Only Catamount was no good for nothin' outside the ring, Bish said, an' he'd been in plenty trouble.

"I'd clean forgotten all that, Sally. I didn't like this Ran Carter. I never did like high-handed, tough guys. But until I got a good look at this bozo with a cauliflower ear pussy-footin' through the woods after your gold was stolen, I never even thought of any connection. After one or two good looks at him, I remembered. Carter here an' Carter there. One a broken-down pug that'd do anything for money, an' his brother, a busted civil engineer, who didn't ever look good to me—well, your friend Ran was a pretty nifty bird with his hands. So I just bore down hard on that lead. There's lots of people who just can't help grabbin' at easy money, friends or no friends."

"So it seems," Sally murmured. "I ought to have learned that long ago. I've known Ran Carter and Mary for six years. I didn't even know they had a black sheep brother."

"Did these pirates admit robbin' you?" Bill asked.

SALLY shook her head.

"They swore high up and low down they didn't," she said. "But they seemed

to be greatly relieved when I gave them their fare out to Edmonton and told them to buzz off and never come back."

Bill grinned.

"Sally," he said, "take a little walk with me. I want to show you somethin' before it gets dark."

Bill led the way across the upper part of Sally's claim. Twenty feet back from the creek bank, against a low hill, he stopped by a flat rock. Bill stooped, hooked his fingers under the edge of the rock, heaved, straining. The flat rock lifted, fell over on one side. In a hollow beneath it lay a canvas pack-sack. Bill threw back the flap, lifted the folds of a compact canvas bundle inside.

Sally Lunn gasped.

"There's your stolen gold," Bill said. "They *did* take it. Ran Carter simply stepped into the cabin, an' set the bucket out the back window. Catamount was there to grab it and pack it away. Perfect alibi for Ran. That blond baby did have it in his camp, an' I packed it back here. I had it when I sprung that thing on him about havin' a twin or a double. I figured he'd hotfoot to warn the other fellow. He did, an' I beat him to it, an' laid out first one then the other, an' shackled 'em together an' marched 'em in here, partly for my own satisfaction an' partly to show you what you were up against—to give you a chance to rid yourself of all that dead-wood. For God's sake be careful who you take up with after this, Sally."

Tears squeezed into Sally Lunn's gray eyes. Bill had never seen Sally cry. He had never seen her betray any particular emotion before, except a blazing anger, an-

noyance, a fiery independence that jibed at being either advised or managed against her own will. Half the time, during all their months of association Bill had struggled between impulses to kiss her, and an equally strong impulse to shake her at times until her teeth chattered. Sally Lunn was the only woman Bill had ever known who consistently and violently resented any suggestion that she couldn't stand on her own feet and run her own show.

To have Sally break down like that disturbed Bill. In his embarrassment Bill reached out and patted Sally's coppery-red head. He also made in the same instant the discovery that he wanted to bend down and kiss the back of her firm white neck. Which, of course, was not on the program as Bill read it.

"'S all right, old beano," he said. "Everything's jake."

"Bill," Sally said, "you big, black, curly-haired fightin' fool, you're the *only* man I've *ever* known who was worth the powder to blow him to hell. You've strained every nerve in you to get me out of three separate jams in the fourteen months we've known each other. Why do you do it?"

Which statement, coupled with the glow in Sally Lunn's wet eyes and the queer smile that suddenly curved her mouth, filled Bill with an internal commotion that fighting, danger, fire, devils, dark or anything, had never inflicted upon him.

"Aw, say—Sally," he stuttered. "I—say—listen—look here. I—aw, hell!"

Whenever words failed Bill he resorted to action. And his action was usually appropriate to the occasion.





**Horse Sense Counts for
a Lot—Even in the
Farthest Island of
the Solomons**



I OFTEN wonder what would've happened if I really had killed old Mr. Johnson. I'd lured him back into the bush and was all set to bump him off, but somehow at the last moment I found I couldn't do it. I hadn't wanted to all along, but Doc said the old feller had outlived his usefulness and was only cumberin' the earth, and what the hell was the good of being squeamish anyway?

It was at a time when the Queensland

THE SACRED MR. JOHNSON

By DOUGLAS LEACH

Author of

"Snide Pearl," "Rough Passage," etc.

police was hankerin' to interview us over a pearl-pirating job that had been pulled off very recent at Thursday Island. Naturally me and Doc was sorta shunnin' publicity at the moment, us bein' implicated in this here affair more than somewhat, so we headed our launch the *Zava*, into Malamaua because it was way off the map.

Malamaua is in the Solomons, and it was practically run by Mackay, an Australian trader who owned all the copra and sisal plantations on it. There was a dinky little lagoon, blue enough to make your eyes ache, and palms and copra sheds, and on a hill Mackay's bungalow.

We brung a letter of introduction signed "J. K. Cross, Resident Magistrate, Suai." It was one of the swellest testimonials we ever had, and so it should've been, seein' that Doc had wrote it himself. Anyway, it certainly went down big with Mackay, and when we kidded him we was goin' into the copra business ourselves and was lookin' for land, he swallowed it hook, line and sinker. For all that he was the only white man on the island, and boss over three hundred of the toughest lookin' Solomon Island kanakas you'd ever hope to see, he was kinda simple about some things.

"You can stay here in the bungalow with me as long as you please," he tells us, rubbin' his chin thoughtful. "I've got some land on the south side that I might sell to you—dead cheap."

He made a bad mistake then. He mentioned a price that showed his idea of dirt cheap was just about four times what the best land in the Pacific was worth!

We knew he thought we was easy pickin's, suckers. Whatever else me and Doc was, we wasn't suckers, and it kinda hurt our feelings to have him think we was. From then on we looked upon him as fair game, and we would've took him for everythin' he'd got without battin' an eyelid. So we accepted his kind invite without straining our conscience any, though the state of our finances was so low that you could've put all the land we could've bought into a paper bag.

While the Chink cook was bringin' our lunch onto the veranda I looked Mackay over and sized him up. He was a real Aussie—a long, slab-sided guy, with peerin' eyes, tight mouth and a hard jaw. He must've had plenty of nerve to handle all them Malamaua boys on his own, because they was a murderin', head-huntin' bunch, and mighty mean lookin', even for Solomon Islanders. But at the moment there seemed to be something worryin' him, and after lunch we found out what it was.

HE WAS takin' us to show us over the island when we passed a paddock right close to the bungalow. About a dozen of the boys was gathered nearby, jabberin' and arguin' and lookin' like they might fly at each other any moment. In the middle of the paddock an old horse was munchin' at somethin' white he'd got in his mouth.

"What's that he's eating?" grunts Doc. "Looks like a newspaper."

"It probably is," says Mackay. "Mr. Johnson'll eat anything. In some ways he's more like a goat than a horse. Old boots, old clothes, paper—it's all the same to him."

"Mr. Johnson, huh?" I mutters. "Funny name for a horse, ain't it?"

"I named him after the man I got him from," says Mackay. "And it was a bad day for me when I did get him, blast his old hide. He's never brought me anything but trouble, my oath!"

"How old is he?" Doc wants to know.

"Well, I've had him ten years, and he was old enough to vote when I bought him," says Mackay.

Doc strolled across to take a closer look at this remarkable animal. Mr. Johnson stood there switchin' flies, chewin' that paper with a far-away look in his eyes like he was dreaming, and as Doc walked up to him them native boys got considerable excited, and one big, ugly bozo half climbed the rails to stop him.

"Look out!" calls Mackay.

But he was too late. Doc puts his hand out to pat the old horse's shoulder, and in a flash Mr. Johnson nailed him.

Most horses let you know when they're goin' to kick. They lay back their ears and sorta hump themselves together. But not Mr. Johnson. He didn't telegraph his punches, if you know what I mean. From a standin' start he whipped round, and his heels shot out and he let Doc have it—wham!

If Doc hadn't been big and fat it would've killed him sure, but his fat sorta cushioned the shock, and it didn't do nothin' more than knock him flat on his back.

"I should have warned you about that," Mackay says, sorta apologetic, as Doc climbed to his feet cussin' a blue streak. "He's not always like that; sometimes he's so gentle you could climb all over him and he wouldn't turn a hair."

"This must be one of his off days!" snarls Doc, rubbin' himself, and he handed Mr. Johnson a very hard look. "If ever a horse had the devil in him, that brute has!"

"You're dead right," sighs Mackay, "but unfortunately my boys don't think so. They think he's sacred—and that's what's causing all the trouble. Look at 'em now!"

SURE enough these kanakas were lookin' very worked up. They'd stopped arguin' amongst 'emselfs, and was all bunched together, staring at Doc and mutterin'.

"They think Mr. Johnson is some sort of god," goes on Mackay.

"Well, they don't need to get sore at me!" rasps Doc. "The horse kicked me, I didn't kick the horse!"

Mackay went over to the boys and seemed to be giving 'em a good bawling out, and after a bit they went away, lookin' kinda sulky. Meanwhile Mr. Johnson finishes the paper and starts croppin' grass, looking plumb harmless and amiable.

When Mackay came back, and we walked on with him, he explained what the trouble was. Seems that for a long time there'd been two rival factions on the island—one under a chief called Nanoi, and the other under a bird called Kaliara. Like most of these here bad attacks of politics, neither side knew just what they wanted, or how it had all started, but they was dead against each other and hated each other's guts. And when Solomon Islanders get to quarrelin' there's usually hell to pay, because they're rough, them babies!

Then, to make matters worse, a kid belongin' to the Kaliara side had been playin' around with Mr. Johnson, and the old horse had bit him on the shoulder. This kid had been sufferin' with bush ulcers for some time, and it so happened that a day or two after he'd been bit, the ulcers disappeared. Naturally them ignorant heathen figured it was the horse's bite that had done it, and from then on when anybody got sick, they'd go down to the paddock and try to get Mr. Johnson to bite 'em. Of course, Mr. Johnson didn't always oblige 'em with a bite; sometimes he'd kick 'em for a change, and sometimes, out of contrariness, he wouldn't touch 'em at all. But whatever he did, it seemed to cure 'em, or at any rate, they thought it did, which came to the same thing.

It sounded like a queer yarn, but me and Doc knew kanakas. Anything's possible with them bozos. They're superstitious as hell.

"And I suppose the Nanoi party is jealous," says Doc, interruptin'.

"Too right they are!" says Mackay. "They claim that he's just as much their god as the Kaliara crowd's, and they swear that he's cured a lot of their people of everything from scrub itch to rheumatism. They're squabblin' every day about it, and they're so taken up with it that they aren't worth a damn for work any more. There haven't been any killings so far, but I'm expecting the lid to blow off any moment." He mopped his forehead and shook his head very solemn. "It's like living on top of a volcano."

"If I were you I'd shoot the darned horse," grunts Doc. "That would stop all the argument."

"It 'ud be just a fancy way of committing suicide, in the mood they're in!" comes back Mackay.

"Too bad he doesn't just pass away peaceable in his sleep," I says.

"Hell, I don't want him to die!" says Mackay, with a little shudder. "If he did, the fat would be in the fire *right!* Each side 'ud think the other had poisoned him, and then there *would* be guts to clean, my oath!"

"The worst troubles are them that never happens," I point out. "All you can do is sit back and let nature take its course."

WELL, we went and took a look at the south part of the island that Mackay wanted to sell us, and it was the poorest soil you could ever hope to see, and not worth a tenth of what he was askin'. As I told Doc afterwards, it wasn't only attempted robbery, it was a insult to our intelligence. We hummed and hawed, and finally he cut the price pretty near a third, and we pretended we'd give it our earnest consideration.

We walked for hours and hours, and on the way back we passed the boys at work in the hemp fields, and the village where they lived with their wives and families. Mister, the more I seen of Malamaua the less I liked it. It was somethin' in the way them frizzy-haired devils looked

at us and answered Mackay when he spoke to 'em. The atmosphere seemed kinda electric, if you know what I mean, and I was darned sure there was more in it than just bad-feelin' amongst 'emselfes. I knew that every so often the Solomons flared up and staged a general massacre of the white, even though they got shelled to hell by British gunboats afterwards, and it looked to me that Malamaua was all set



to be the startin' point of the next bit of trouble.

That evening, after supper, Doc's eye happened to fall upon a square of canvas parchment hangin' on the wall of the living room.

Mackay seen him lookin' at it, and said, "That's an old ship's map my grandfather had given him in Sydney."

"Very interesting," drawls Doc, examinin' it close. "Is it very valuable?"

"No, I don't think so," says Mackay. "Worth a few pounds, maybe. There are lots of 'em about. I wouldn't like to lose it, though, as it's been in the family quite a while."

Doc didn't say nothin' more, and Mackay changed the subject and started talkin' about the likelihood of the destroyer *Bacchante* calling on patrol.

"She's a week overdue now," he says.

Afterwards, when me and Doc was alone together on the veranda, I says, "I'm kinda glad to hear about that destroyer bein' on its way. I've gotta feeling hell's gonna pop in these islands before long."

"Quit croakin', and listen to me!" rasps Doc, grippin' my arm so hard I

pretty near yelped. "Casaldy, there's a pile of dough within a few feet of us, just waiting for someone to come along and pick it up!"

I only shook my head. I was used to Doc's particular brand of bull, and I knew he was about to give birth to a idea. And his ideas was usually dangerous. "All right, spill it," I says, weary. "I'm all ears."

"You're all bone—from the neck up!" he comes back. "It's that map—it's one of Cook's! Absolutely priceless, Casaldy!"

"Priceless nothin'!" I snorts. "Cook's maps are as common as dirt. Why, in their bureau in Sydney they give 'em away by the ton."

"I don't mean Cook's, the travel agency, you fool!" says Doc. "I mean Captain Cook, the famous old-time explorer and navigator. The man who discovered Australia!"

"Oh, him," I says. "How d'you know it's one of his?"

"Because I've made a study of old maps, and have collected them," answers Doc. "There are three of Cook's maps in the Sydney Museum, and there's no mistakin' his writing, and the way they're prepared. This is of the Cape Yorke Peninsula, and one of a set of six. Man, it's the chance of a lifetime! We could get over a thousand pounds for it in Sydney."

WELL, with all his faults Doc usually knew what he was talkin' about, and if he said it was a valuable map, that was good enough for me.

"How are we gonna get it?" I wants to know. "He didn't seem keen on partin' with it, and it's a cinch we ain't got enough money to buy it, even if he doesn't know its real value."

"I'll think of somethin'," says Doc.

Sure enough, next morning he had a plan, and at breakfast time he produces it.

"How much would it be worth to you to have all this trouble amongst the natives about the old horse all smoothed out?" he asks Mackay.

Mackay stared at him. "Plenty!" he grunts. "Why?"

"I have an idea that we could work it for you," says Doc. "Listen, I'll make you a sporting offer. I don't want money, but if we fixed this little affair, how about giving us that old map? I've taken a sort of fancy to it, and old curios always did interest me."

The Aussie rubbed his chin. "That sounds fair enough," he agrees. "What's your idea?"

"Just a matter of psychology," says Doc. "If Casaldy and I shoot the horse in such circumstances that boys from both the rival factions see us do it, they'll forget their quarrel with each other in their fury against us. And so that you can keep in solid with them, you can side with them and pretend we did it against your will. We'll be the scapegoats. It's really quite simple."

"Yeah, it's so simple it's practically half-witted!" I puts in. "Where d'you get this 'we' stuff, anyway? If you think I'm going in with you on a suicide stunt like that, you're nuts!"

"It looks pretty risky, my oath!" grunts Mackay.

"Well, I wasn't figuring on staying around once we'd done it," says Doc. "We'd have everything ready to make a quick getaway. After all, you can't get anything without taking risks."

We argued it back and forth, and in the end I give way. Y'see, although Doc was always gettin' us into trouble, I kinda liked the old hellion. If I didn't help, he'd do it on his own, anyway, and I couldn't leave him in the lurch. And although Mackay thought we was both bughouse, he said it was jake with him, and we could have the map if we pulled it off.

"It ain't nothin' new for us to be scapegoats," I tells Doc, bitter. "We always get blamed for everythin' that happens within fifty miles of us. But this time we're playin' with dynamite!"

The next thing was to fix up the details. There wasn't no difficulty in gettin' the

natives to watch us do the bumping-off, as there was always a bunch of 'em hangin' round the paddock, but we didn't want to do it in sight of the bungalow because Mackay wasn't supposed to know nothin' about it. We chose late afternoon as the time, and we had the launch tied handy to the jetty, the engine oiled and primed, all ready for our getaway. We figured they'd be so worked up they might take after us in their canoes, and we didn't want no accidents.

BEFORE we went, Mackay handed us the map and shook hands with us. "Good luck!" he says. "And I only hope it works out the way you want it to. Personally I think you're both crazy, but that's your funeral, and it'll be great weight off my mind to know that that old devil of a horse is out of the way." He shook his head and took a deep breath. "My oath it will!"

Doc folded up the map very careful and put it in his coat pocket. As we went down the veranda steps he patted it, and his hard old face split in a sorta blissful grin. "A thousand pounds at the very least, Casaldy," he whispers.

"Say," I says, "what are we waitin' for? Possession is nine points of the law; what's to stop us from high-tailing it outa here without goin' near that darned horse?"

"I thought of that myself," admits Doc, "but after all, we've sat at his table and eaten his salt, and it would be playing it pretty low down. Besides," he adds, "that cutter of his is twice as fast as our launch, and you can't play horse with Australians. He'd never rest till he'd run us down, and we've gotten enough enemies in this part of the world already. No, we'll keep the bargain."

Down by the paddock there was eight big, black, half-naked bozos, armed with clubs and shears; five of 'em on one side of the paddock lookin' very hostile at three on the other, and all of 'em, from time to time, gazin' at poor old Mr. Johnson

like a bunch of hick farmers at a prize sow. The old horse was in the middle, one hind leg bent very weary, his fiddle-head hangin' and his eyes half closed.

Me and Doc climbed over the rails, lookin' over our shoulders every now and then, as though we was scared of Mackay seein' us. Doc took outa his pocket a carrot that he'd got from Hop Chee, the cook, Mackay havin' told us Mr. Johnson was very fond of carrots. Soon as he seen it, the old plug pricked up his ears and whinnied, and when Doc walked away, still holding out the carrot, Mr. Johnson followed. At the same time a angry mutter went up from the native boys, and they tagged along behind us.

I let down the slip-rails on the far side, and we moseyed out into the bush. There was quite a little procession of us, and it must've been a mighty funny sight, but I didn't feel like laughing. Them woolly-headed savages was growling like angry dogs, and my hand closed on the butt of the .38 automatic in my coat pocket.

"All right, this'll do," says Doc, after we'd gone a little way into the bush. "Let him have it, Casaldy!"

I drew my gun. "I don't like this," I says. "I was always fond of horses."

"He's so old it'll be a merciful release," says Doc. "You'll be doing him a favor by putting him out of his misery."

I clicked the safety-catch and took a bead on Mr. Johnson, aimin' dead between the eyes. A sorta gaspin' moan went up from the natives, and I hesitated. The old horse was standin' as gentle as a lamb, and something in his eyes stopped me. Mister, it was like murder!

"It's no good," I mutters, "I can't do it!"

"Aw, hell, then I'll do it myself!" rasps Doc. "Stand out of the way."

He pulled his own automatic—and then it happened! A yell went up from them black devils, and without any warning they rushed. A club come whirling through the air, and as Doc ducked it caught his shoulder and spun him around. I seen the

whites of their eyes and the glint of the knives they pulled from their belts, and I let fly with a short burst, aimin' at their feet. One of 'em yelped and dropped, and the rest swerved aside and melted into the bush. As for Mr. Johnson, he kicked his heels in the air and went smashin' off into the jungle.

A knife whirred past my ear and stuck quiverin' in a tree. Doc fired into the dark of the bush to keep the kanakas off, and we ran for it.

"It's psychology!" I pants, sarcastic. "Just a matter of psychology!"

WE POUNDED along, makin' straight for the lagoon and the jetty, but though we sent a spatter of bullets back every now and then, some of them black bozos kept close behind us. Just before we reached the open another club whistled after us. Mister, them babies could certainly throw a wicked club! This one caught Doc on the back of his head, knocking his sun-helmet off and bowling him over like a shot rabbit.

I rammed another clip into my gat and turned. I seen something moving in the bush as the woolly-heads took cover, and I cut loose. There was a loud howl of pain and the thrashing of a body amongst the vines and scrub—then silence.

I bent over Doc, and he was out stone cold. I knew he wasn't dead, because he was so tough you couldn't kill him with a club. You might've been able to do it with the back of an ax, but not with anything made outa wood.

I started to drag him along to the jetty, but he weighed pretty near two-hundred-and-forty, and it was a slow job. Every second I was expectin' a spear in the back, and the thought of it give me a queer feelin' between the shoulder-blades. Still, it looked like the nigs had beat it for the time bein', for nothing happened, and at last I managed to get Doc aboard.

Then, just when it looked like everythin' would be okay, the *Zara's* engine, which was always kinda temperamental, went

balky on me and wouldn't start. For a long time I wrestled with it and squirted oil at it, and coaxed it and cursed it, but machinery never was my strong suit, and though I done everythin' to it but vaccinate it, I couldn't get as much as a cough out of it.

Doc begun to come to, but he was so dazed he wasn't much help. For a good five minutes all he could do was to rub the lump on the back of his old bald head, and groan, and mutter: "Hell! Hell!"

The sun went down, and it got dark almost at once, and suddenly I heard the *thump, thump* of drums beating up back in the native village, and a lotta howling that sounded like a pack of wild dogs gone crazy. At the same time one of the copra sheds in the distance went up in flame and smoke, and my heart did a back-flip and fell plunk into the soles of my shoes. Mister, it didn't need no master mind to dope out what had happened; the islanders was up and had started one of their famous risings!

"Snap out of it!" I yelps, catching Doc by the shoulder. "Malamaua has bust wide open, and we gotta get outa here! Help me with this cockeyed engine!"

After I'd repeated it about ten times the meanin' begun to soak in, and Doc shook his head to clear it, muttered, "Hell!" once more, got to his feet and went over to the engine.

HE HADN'T been tinkerin' about with it long before he got a coupla loud bangs outa it. It didn't start running properly, but it showed he had brung it to life, anyway.

"It won't be very long now!" he says, triumphant.

"You're damn whistlin' it won't!" I grunts, for it was just at that moment that I seen a bunch of dark shadders sweepin' down the beach towards us. "Here they come!"

Even if the engine had started it wouldn't have did no good then, because we couldn't have got up speed in time. As

it was, there was only just time for Doc to dive into the cabin and grab a rifle before the woolly-heads came swarmin' along the jetty and over the launch like ants over a can of molasses.

I let 'em have a clip from my gat, and in the spurt of the flame I seen three savages flop on their faces. Beside me Doc cut loose so close to my ear it pretty near blew my head off. Then I was down under about a dozen of the heaviest, smelliest, toughest black-skinned babies you'd find between Rabaul and San Christobal.



I couldn't see what happened to Doc, but by the growling and cussing and yelping that was going on, he was giving 'em plenty of trouble; but in the end they got him down too. Of course, he wasn't too strong on his pins 'count of the wallop on the bean he'd had quite recent. If he'd been in his normal, rough-house form, most anything might've happened.

Before we hardly realized it we was bein' hustled along towards the bungalow, surrounded by a milling mob of blacks, with a coupla mean bozos proddin' us in the back with their spears just to discourage us from tryin' any funny stuff.

"Well, I suppose we're lucky to be alive, anyway," I mutters.

"I don't know so much about that," comes back Doc, doubtful. "If they start playing some of their fancy tricks on us, we'd be better off dead. Much better off! Why, the wildest head-hunters in New Guinea are children beside these devils."

They took us to the paddock back of the bungalow, and it seemed like the whole population of Malamaua was gathered

there, all kickin' up the damndest row you ever heard in your life.

"Wonder where Mackay is?" I says. "I hope they haven't bumped the poor feller off. After all, we started all this, and I'd hate to have him on my conscience."

"If there's anybody that can look after himself in a situation like this, it's that tough Australian," says Doc.

I didn't say no more at the moment because them dirty heathen flung me on my face so hard it pretty near knocked my front teeth out. While I was still spitting grass and earth outa my mouth somebody jerked my arms behind me and tied 'em so tight it was as much as I could do to bite back a yelp. They done the same to Doc, and propped us up in the middle of the paddock, back to back, as helpless as a coupla tied pigs.

ABOUT ten minutes later, while they still seemed to be arguin' amongst 'emselfs as to what to do with us, we heard the explosions of a engine, and a loud chug, chug from the lagoon. Half a moon was comin' up over the trees, and by its light we seen the dark shape of Mackay's speed-launch cuttin' acrosst the water.

"What did I tell you!" grunts Doc. "He knows a thing or two, that gent! He probably ducked for cover as soon as the fuss started, and now he's got clean away." His voice sounded kinda bitter. "Some fellows get all the luck!"

"What d'you suppose they'll do with us?" I wants to know.

"Hard to say," says Doc. "Anything that comes into their minds. A favorite trick of theirs is to bend down two young trees, tie a fellow's leg to each tree, and let go. When the saplings spring back it tears you in half. Quite inventive in their way, these untutored savages."

"Yeah, I can see that," I gulps.

Mister, after that I didn't ask no more questions! Never seemed to have no tact, nor none of the finer feelin's, Doc didn't.

Pretty soon four or five of the younger

boys come outa the surroundin' bush, and who should they be leadin' but Mr. Johnson! The old horse was quite gentle, and seemed kinda bored with the whole proceedings, and you couldn't hardly realize it was the same animal that had lambasted Doc the day previous. Right away some of the women got busy, picking long strings of the flowering *lantana* vine and weavin' 'em into a kind of garland, which they hung round the old plug's neck like he'd just won the Kentucky Derby or somethin'.

"So that's it," grunts Doc. "The same idea as in Malaita and the other islands, where they make human sacrifices to their sacred dogs. Casaldy, they're going to sacrifice us to their sacred horse—Mr. Johnson!"

"Us?" was all I could say. "What for?"

"Nobody knows why any natives sacrifice anybody to anything," says Doc, rather weary. "I suppose it's an old island custom."

IN A little while they started dancing and chanting, and after what seemed like a coupla weeks, but was only about thirty minutes, a short guy with bowlegs and a monkey face shouted somethin', and everybody shut up. For a few seconds everythin' was so quiet I could hear my heart thumpin', and the only sound was the rustlin' of the trees in the hot, gusty wind that had sprung up. Some way off the copra sheds was still burning, lightin' up the sky with their glare.

Then the monkey guy, who seemed to be chief sorcerer and master of ceremonies, shouted again, and two of the biggest nigs pranced outa the crowd and jerked Doc to his feet. They didn't pay no attention to me for the time bein', but I knew my turn 'ud come later. Without untyin' his hands they ripped off Doc's coat and shirt, just tearing 'em down till they hung in rags from his waist.

Times like them it's the little details that stick in a man's mind, and I remem-

ber seein' something white go skitterin' over the paddock as the wind caught it. It was the five-thousand dollar map that had come outa Doc's pocket, and as it rolled across the grass and finally wrapped itself round one of the fence posts it looked like any old bit of newspaper blown against a park railing. Yeah, and for all that it was worth to us then it might just as well've been!

I remember seein' the muscles bulgin' on Doc's arm, and his great hairy chest, and the whiteness of his skin against them black devils. As they drug him back till he was only a few paces from where Mr. Johnson was standin', the sorcerer drew a knife, and I knew he was goin' to cut Doc up and sprinkle the old horse with his blood. Them blood-thirsty savages knew it too. They'd been waitin' a long time for this, and such a yelling and hollerin' broke out that you could've heard it back in Australia; and though the wind was so hot and sticky I felt shivery cold inside.

Then way beyond Doc and the savages I seen somethin' moving on the lagoon; somethin' long and black against the silver of the water, edging in through the reef passage.

"The *Bacchante*!" I yelps. "Lookit over there, you woolly-headed apes, and scram while your luck's in!"

But them murderin' devils was so worked up in watchin' the sorcerer performing over Doc, that they took about as much notice of me as a crowd at a World Series game 'ud take of a squallin' kid when the Babe was stepping up to bat. It ain't easy to get to your feet quick when your hands are tied behind you, but I scrambled up somehow, still yellin', and the big bozo guardin' me just knocked me down again with a sorta absent-minded, flat-handed clout, like I was a buzzin' insect spoiling his view of the game.

Mister, it was heart-breakin'! There was that destroyer gettin' closer every second, and I couldn't do a thing to help Doc.

The sorcerer's knife glinted in the moon-

light as he made a lotta fancy passes, and he stepped back ready for the first cut. This brung him right close to Mr. Johnson. Too close!

It had been a long and tiring day for Mr. Johnson, and it seemed like what with bein' hung with flowers, and chased around from hell to breakfast, things was gettin' on his nerves. Now havin' this stinking savage start waving things around under his nose was goin' a bit too far. So the old feller done his stuff. There was a sorta blur of speed, a swish, and—*whopp!*

Boy howdy, what a Lulu of a kick that was! It was a homer all the way, and it caught that misfortunate sorcerer right where he lived. Yeah, it lifted him off his feet and sent him into a nose-dive that pretty near buried his head in the ground. And then, not content with that, old Mr. Johnson ran amok. He charged that mob of blacks, kickin' and bitin' promiscuous and impartial, and if there was anything in that fool superstition of theirs about his bite havin' magic and healing properties, he must've done 'em a power of good!

DOC wasn't the sort to miss a chance like this. Though his hands was tied there wasn't no strings to his feet, and in the general mix-up he bust loose and started to help Mr. Johnson by kickin' as many bare shins as he could get next to.

All of a sudden a searchlight blazed out from the lagoon, lightnin' everythin' up clear as day. Then there was a "boom!" and a shell whined overhead and burst with a deafenin' crash only a coupla hundred yards away. That was more than enough for them poor misguided heathen; they just rolled their tails and got outa there on high, hollerin' blue murder! In half a minute there wasn't nobody left but me and Doc and Mr. Johnson.

It wasn't long before a boat-load of sailors from the destroyer come ashore in charge of a lieutenant, and they untied us. The loot asked us a lotta questions, which we got out of answerin' as much as we could. He had a cold, hard eye, and looked

us over very suspicious. It seems they was on the way to Malamaua when they seen the copra sheds burnin', and they guessed there was trouble and come on at full speed. Just outside the reef they had met Mackay in his speedboat, and he'd told 'em what had happened. They'd sent him off with a message to the cable station on Navolo, so's to warn the other islands in case the trouble spread, and had come on themselves to quell the risin'.

After a bit the loot took his bunch on down to the native village to put the fear of God into the nigs and take charge generally, and as soon as he'd gone, Doc says:

"Casaldy, we want to get away from here before Mackay gets back! If he gets talking to that lieutenant he may mention about that testimonial we gave him that was supposed to be from Cross at Sunai. And as the *Bacchante* often calls at Cuai, the loot'll know there isn't any such per-

son! I didn't like the way he looked at us just now, and if he gets more suspicious still he may detain us for further investigation. And with that pearl job at T. I. hanging over our heads—well, do I have to say more?"

"You don't!" I says. "For once I agrees with you implicit. You go on down and get the engine started, and I'll go back to the paddock for the map. I happened to notice where it blew to."

When I got to the jetty some ten minutes later, Doc had the engine purring.

"Well, did you get it all right?" he asks, as the launch heads acrosst the lagoon.

"Sure!" I says, with a holler laugh, and I handed him a chewed-up bit of parchment about three inches square.

"What?" yelps Doc. "What's happened to it? Where's the rest of it?"

"I was a mite late," I says. "Mr. Johnson had just finished eatin' it!"



**MEN STEALING AWAY
BY NIGHT TO SWELL
THE HORDES OF THE
GREATEST BANDIT
CHIEF IN ALL CHINA
—AND ONE WHITE MAN
WHO KNEW THE PERIL**

THE ROAR OF THE DRAGON

*A Complete Novel in
our next issue*

by

Walter C. Brown



BEYOND LASTWATER

By **ROBERT H. ROHDE**

Author of "Hell's Annex," etc.

SURE sorry I had to do this, Reilly," Sheriff Jim Longrin said, fumbling at one of his corn-husk cigarettes.

He really was sorry, too. Reilly's show—"Great Overland Circus & Animal Congress," the way it was billed—was certainly the cleanest show that ever played Sunburst. No phony fortune wheels, no gyp concessions, no grifters of any kind tolerated on the lot. Reilly wouldn't stand for 'em.

Longrin opined that might be why Reilly hadn't done better in the burned-up country east of Sunburst; why he couldn't find the couple of thousand that would have staved off the attachment and let the Great Overland Circus & Animal Congress truck on to solvency farther west.

"Rotten shame," Jim Longrin said at the door. "Next week—week after—hell, you'd made a cleanin'. Things ain't been so bad where you was headin'. They've got money west, Reilly, and they spend it."

He wished, after Reilly had gone up street, that he hadn't blurted that. Reilly, knowing it was so, had felt just so much

worse about the plaster. He had shrugged, turned away without a word; and it seemed to have taken everything he had to lift that thin shoulder. Reilly wasn't young. At his age it would be tough starting fresh from scratch.

Longrin worried about him most of the afternoon—might have kept on worrying if there hadn't, all of a sudden, been hell popping over in Lastwater. Somebody across from the bank there telephoned to the sheriff's office while lead still flew, and twenty minutes later old Jim Longrin drove lickety-split into Lastwater—practically as far as a car could go in that direction.

There was still plenty of excitement around the bank, but it was all over then. Eight thousand four hundred dollars gone and Renland, the cashier, plugged through the heart and done for.

No mystery, though, about where the eight thousand four hundred had gone. Or who had it. The job was another of Bald Pete Skale's. Skale had come swooping out of the desert again at the peak of the day's heat. Within five minutes he had

***Six Days in the Desert; Sunburst Couldn't
Believe that the Sheriff Could
Possibly Get His Man***



tapped the Lastwater National for its exposed stack, had killed Renland when he reached under the counter for his Colt, and galloped off loot-laden in a haze of desert dust.

Plenty of people had seen the robber; all of them, except poor Renland, could swear he was Bald Pete. Jim Longrin listened to everybody and climbed back into his flivver. He was getting a mite fleshy elsewhere, driving so much these days and in the saddle so seldom, but none of the fat was around his jaw. That Longrin jaw was just as definite as when he first went into the sheriff job, twenty years and more ago.

Squinting against the sun glare, he gazed off into the shimmery wasteland that rolled lifelessly, endlessly, southward below Lastwater's shot-up single street. Big Thirsty. Not the Sahara, maybe—but no toy desert, either. Except for Big Thirsty, the neighbors here would have stretched Pete Skale's neck for him long, long ago.

Somebody on the plank sidewalk drawled, "Thinkin' to hunt Skale by auto, Sheriff?" and drew a laugh. Even pinch-mouthed, sober-minded J. D. Crull, Lastwater's first citizen, joined in.

Jim Longrin smiled himself. A slow smile.

"Son," he answered gently, "I reckon I new Big Thirsty when your pa was still courtin' your ma. Shucks, a car 'ud have to be part aireoplane to follow Pete's trail even five miles out o' town—and Mr. Ford ain't puttin' wings on 'em yet awhile. So I'm aimin' to ride. Might be that I been quite a spell out o' the saddle. But if there's a critter on four legs that I can't fork and stay with, I never seen him."

The laugh frayed out. J. D. Crull, blinking, rubbed his thin nose. He was chief stockholder in the plundered bank, chairman of its loan committee, an ingrained skeptic. Born and reared on the desert's edge, he knew Big Thirsty for the hell-trap that it was.

"Don't," he snorted, "go talkin' like a

damn fool, Jim. Ride in after Skale in August? Think straight. The reward, that's just a matter o' form. You ought to know it. Hell, I wouldn't loan a nickel on your chance of fetchin' Bald Pete out. No, by Godfrey! Nor on your comin' out your *own* self!"

The sheriff still was smiling—his lips were. But his eyes, dark gray like gun metal, were hard as gun metal too.

"Jeff," he said in that same quiet voice, "I'd of rounded up Pete Skale a good while before this, only somehow the time never seemed quite ripe. But sure as sure, it won't ever be no riper than what it is right now. Which bein' plain enough fact——"

The starter whirred and Longrin slipped into gear.

"Never no riper," he repeated doggedly, and off he rattled for Sunburst.

IT WAS J. D. Crull's set and freely expressed opinion that in the cool of the evening second and better thought would come to Jim Longrin. But he was in optimistic error. Next morning there was a laconic scrawl on the sheriff's door in the courthouse: "Gone for Skale."

At a furtive hour after Sunburst's last light was out, old Jim had ridden desertward. Evidently he had cut around Lastwater some considerable time before dawn, for Big Thirsty had already swallowed him when his note was found. Young Al Hester, his deputy, came back white-faced and alone from a sweaty dash in pursuit. Even the sheriff's track was gone, he reported. Blown out.

Down in Lastwater, Jefferson Davis Crull shook his head.

"Gone for Skale?" he questioned. "Or—gone for good?"

He concurred with Doc Blevin, in general.

"A duty complex, amounting to mental unbalance," Blevin diagnosed at the county seat after Al Hester's return. "In short, poor Jim just suddenly went loco. He'd

been brooding pretty much over not being able to get at Skale, and what happened at Lastwater was the last straw. As a symptom of Jim's madness, look at the cunning of his getaway. He was bound not to be seen riding out, knowing he'd be restrained. Psychopathically, that's the clincher on his condition."

It was possible, Blevin said, that the condition would not be lasting; that Longrin might snap out of it at any time, sanely appraise his situation and turn back.

For a day and another day, there was hope that some such miracle would come to pass. Then the best hope was that it



had come to pass; for if it had not, Jim Longrin would recover reason only to perish the more miserably. He would be too deep in the desert now ever to fight his way out. What small stock of water he could have packed would be gone. He would be afoot, doomed.

There was water somewhere in Big Thirsty, some feeble, hidden trickle—must be. But only Bald Pete Skale had found it. Other and better men, scores of them, had died seeking it: today they and their animals were strewn of white-baked bones on the desert floor.

Three days, four days, five days, the sun each day like flying hellfire, Big Thirsty a blistering inferno. And no sign of Longrin on the dancing desert horizon. The fourth day had settled it, the fifth rubbed it in. That lunatic ride of old Jim's could be written down as his last ride ever.

It was impossible—flat impossible—that

Jim could still be living. J. D. Crull said so, and so said all Lastwater. Likewise Doc Blevin and all Sunburst. Only Reilly, the owner of that busted little circus anchored at the Sunburst fair grounds, clung to hope. He kept walking aimlessly around chewing toothpicks, insisting that the sheriff was "all right" and would presently turn up safe and sound.

"Another mental case," Blevin disposed of him. "Dazed by losing his show." He looked at big Al Hester. "By the way, going ahead with the auction? I'd kinda like that trapeze gal myself."

Then another day, the sixth since Jim Longrin rode to martyrdom, and suddenly heat-shriveled Lastwater was all dust and uproar. J. D. Crull, in the bank, dived for the Colt that Renland had been a split second late in reaching.

A head popped in at the street door.

"Sheriff's here! Pete Skale too! And oh—my—Gawd!"

Someone trumpeted "Gangway!" and old Jim Longrin clumped in, fatter than any apparition had decent right to be. J. D. Crull stood stockstill, staring, frozen stiff at 112 in the shade.

"Jim!" he gulped. "How come? You—found water?"

Longrin shook his head.

"Never looked. Hell, I only been out six days, all told. And I could count safe enough on seven."

J. D. Crull felt for his nose.

"Wait!" he croaked. "You're tellin' me any hawss could pack a whole week's water for both him an' you? No, no, Jim! That don't wash."

The sheriff's fagged pleased eyes shifted to the vault that held a golden nest egg for himself and, as per gentlemen's agreement, salvation for old Tom Reilly.

"Who," he mildly inquired, "said hawss? And me with a full zoo held hobbled at Sunburst? Damn fool yourself, Jeff, why I went after Skale on a camel!"

The Men Who Fought for Texas

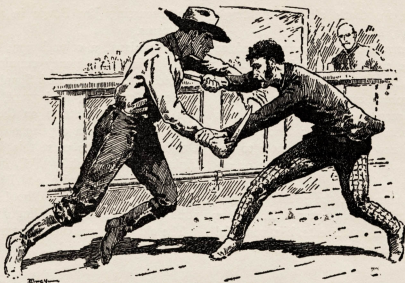
A Hundred Years Ago

DEAD MEN SINGING

by
H. BEDFORD-JONES



II THE SEVENTH CHILD



I WAS standing beside the wall of the ancient Concepcion Mission, outside San Antonio. Here had been the refectory of the monks, now destroyed on three sides, the walls pock-marked with bullet holes. It was here that James Bowie, most tragic of all the Texan heroes, had fought for freedom in 1835. And as I stood, an echo of voices came to me, then the words of a man singing. I was alone here, yet laughing tones sounded distinctly, until the lilting words reached to me more clearly. "Yankees and courtly Spaniards, Tennessee mountaineers,

Creoles and Dutch and slavers (gentlemen in arrears)

Shoulder to shoulder gathered, answering blow with blow—

For by God, sir! We fought in Texas a hundred years ago!"

I listened, astonished. A raucous burst of cheering sounded from the air around. Then, amid thin drumming hoofbeats of spurring men, a ragged hearty chorus came to me, a chorus as of distant, shouting men:

"Here's to you, Colonel Bowie, damn your eyes!"

What did it mean? Not even a tourist was in sight; was this some delusion of the senses? And yet, men had died here for liberty a hundred years ago. . . .

THE saloon in San Felipe was well filled, and blue with tobacco smoke. Voices rose in a steady blare of sound. Here in San Felipe men were gathered from all over the Texas settlements in this year of 1835. A new government had been formed, but the convention was riddled with politics, jealousy and diversity of aims.

Alone at the end of the bar stood a man whose hat was pulled far over his eyes. He was drinking, and drinking hard. He had traveled hard to get here, he had spurred hard, day and night; and the man he had come to find was not here.

"Old Houston's plumb locoed!" rose a rough voice down the bar. "We got no call to fight Mexico. All we want is our own state gov'ment back again, ain't it?"

"And be a part of Mexico again? Not much!" shouted another man. "Houston's right. We got to cut loose and have our own republic. We can lick them greasers easy."

"And lose everything doing it, too. Fannin and Bowie and them crazy galoots are fighting along the Border now, raiding Mexican settlements and killing soldiers. Is it true that there's been a fight at Gonzales?"

"Dunno," came the reply. "Some ru-

"She wants to tell your fortune, Joe."

"Fortune, hell! She's a spy, that's what."

The first speaker flushed darkly, then reached out and gripped the crone by the shoulder. "Sneaking in here to listen. By God, if I had my way I'd hang every greaser in Texas. Come on, you, spit it out; who's paying you to spy on us, huh?"

The crone shrank back, the man gripping her the more fiercely.

The man at the end of the bar moved suddenly. He had hot bright eyes, very blue in color, with reddish brown side-whiskers. He came up to the three, and took hold of the man's wrist. His movements were surprisingly swift and agile.

"I reckon, suh, you aren't used to womanfolks," he said calmly. His words reached out upon the startled hush. "Apologize to the lady."

"Huh? Me apologize? Leggo my wrist, damn you!" cried out the big man. "Joe Harkness don't apologize to no Mexican slut——"

HIS voice died. The grip of the smaller man tightened on his wrist. His fingers loosened, and the old crone slipped away. A grimace of pain crossed his face, then he swung with his free hand. Instead of hitting the smaller man, he himself was hit across the mouth. He staggered back against the bar, and a knife flashed out in his hand.

"By God, you'll pay for that with your ears!" he roared out, passion flooding in his face. He was oblivious to the swift mutter going around the circle of watchers; he did not catch the name of "Jim Bowie!" that flashed from mouth to mouth. "I'll slit them ears off'n you for that, hear me!"

He hurled himself at the slim figure, but Bowie did not move or evade the rush. Instead, Bowie met him breast to breast, with a ferocity that drew a gasp from those about. The two figures locked. Bowie caught the other's wrist in a steel grip—

then suddenly lashed out with terrific speed and savagery.

The fight was over almost as it had started. Harkness staggered away and sank down, groaning. Bowie put away his pearl-handled knife.

"He won't die," he said calmly. "Better get a doctor, to make sure——"

"Jim Bowie!"

The words fairly exploded on the room from all sides, and men crowded in with delighted yells. Drinks were passed. Five minutes later, the magnetic personality of the one man was dominating the whole place, for Jim Bowie had a peculiar charm that held men and gripped them.

They crowded about him in wonder and awe and friendship. Tales of him had gone afar. His prowess as a fighter was already a frontier fable, but he was also a great man, or had been. He had married into one of the proudest families of Mexico, he was wealthy, a golden future had opened out to him; then came the cholera and swept away his wife and children.

And now Jim Bowie was a heartbroken, terrible man who sought only liquor and freedom, for all life was wreckage behind him.

A gust of yells swept down the street. Men came running, bursting into the place.

"Hey! It's true, it's true!" arose the shout. "Fighting at Gonzales, and the boys there whipped the greasers! Licked the best cavalry a-going! Licked 'em!"

"Hear that, Bowie?" screamed somebody.

"I heard it a while back," he rejoined. "I just come from there."

The voices became frenzied, exultant; amid all the uproar, Jim Bowie slipped out unobserved. He passed around to the side of the saloon and stood there in the darkness, trying to decide what to do. He had wanted to find Sam Houston, but Houston was away. As he stood, he could hear the wave upon wave of exultant shouting that spread through town. The finest cavalry of Mexico had been licked by a handful of Texians!

BOWIE grimaced sourly. He had been raiding the Mexicans down on the Border; he and Fannin had formed bands of hot-heads whose sole purpose was to clear Texas of the Mexican yoke. The deputies here in San Felipe did not know whether to fear or admire these raiders.

San Antonio, which the Texians called Bexar, was held by the Mexican General Cos with fifteen hundred men, and President Santa Anna was said to be moving north with a huge army. The half-organized settlers were in chaos. Houston was nominally in command of the army, but had no army. Politics seethed. Rivalries and jealousies were rife. There was no imminent crisis to spur either side to action, unless the battle at Gonzales should set a spark to the powder. Texas was in open revolt, but Cos hesitated to attack, and the settlers sparred for time. Patriotism was, as ever, the cloak of selfish interest.

Bowie heard a step beside him. A hand touched his arm; he recognized the old Mexican woman who had disappeared from the saloon.

"Señor, I owe you thanks, many thanks."

"It is nothing, señora. You had best stay away from such places." Bowie, who spoke her tongue fluently, pressed money into her palm. "Here, this may help you."

"May God requite you! Do you wish me to tell your destiny?"

"I have none." He perceived that he was quite unknown to her. "My destiny lies all in the past."

"There is always death," she said, with a cackle of stark mirth. "Are you curious?"

"No," grunted Bowie. "But if it will humor you, tell me when I shall die."

She took his hand, drew him over to the lighted window in front, and there peered attentively at his palm. Then she looked up into his bright blue eyes.

"Caballero, you are a seventh child."

Bowie started, then laughed. "True true!"

"The past—ah, what a life, what sorrows! *Qué lástima*—what a pity! But I

shall tell you the truth, caballero. Death is not far away from you."

"So much the better." Bowie's voice was skeptical and harsh. "By a bullet?"

"No, caballero. I can see you very clearly, dying in bed——"

"In bed?" he broke in scornfully. "*Poder de dios!* Little you know me."

"You are a seventh child; I cannot mistake your future, caballero. You shall die in bed, with the arm of a woman about you——"

As though stung, Bowie jerked away his hand.

"You accursed liar! No woman has any place in my life——"

"By the mother of God, I speak the truth! You may believe me or not, but you shall die in bed——"

Bowie drew back, with a storm of oburgations in angry Spanish. "Devil, fly away with you and your croaking. It's impossible, absurd. Get out!"

HE THRUST her aside and went his way, anger spurring at his brain. The old fool was out of her head. A woman, indeed—die in bed! It was sheer lunacy. He, the most famed duelist and fighter on the frontier, die in bed! He, whose whole heart and soul had died with the woman and two children dead of cholera, have a woman's arms around him! It all angered him past bearing. Yet, how the devil had she known that he was a seventh child?

"Bowie! Hey, Jim, is that you?"

An indistinct figure was approaching him. Under the starlight, he could smell it before he could see it—an indescribable odor of sweat, liquor, horse. A man dusty like himself, whose seamed features suddenly came clear.

"Houston! Why, Sam, of all people! They told me you were out of town. I came here for a confab with you."

"Just got in." The two men struck hands heartily. "Heard you were here and come to run you down. I been ridin' for a week without takin' off my clothes. Come

on to the shack; I got a room in back of a store, yonder. Need a drink powerful bad."

Houston's voice was weary, and his shoulders drooped. Like Bowie, he had the wreckage of life and greatness behind him; but, unlike Bowie, he aimed ever at a fresh career, a newer vision. A hard, rough, patient man, Houston's right arm was a bit stiff from an old shoulder wound that would never heal; his calm poise was fathomless.

The two walked along in silence. Presently they were ensconced in a littered room whose desk was heaped with documents and letters. Houston lit candles, then got out a whiskey jug and drank deeply. Bowie followed suit. With a sigh, Houston sank down on the tumbled blankets of the bed.

"Good to see you, Jim. I been orating all over, trying to raise men, and damned poor luck. Something's got to happen."

"I know it," said Bowie. "When are you folks going to settle on readjustment or liberty?"

"God knows. These damned politicians talk and talk. If I had some men, we'd take action durned quick. Jim, it's a mess," said Houston dejectedly. "They're all holding out to support the Mexican constitution of 1824. Damn it, they can't see the idea of liberty. They don't realize that we must have complete freedom or nothing!"

"Heard about the scrap at Gonzales?"

Houston nodded. "Austin's just gone there to take charge——"

"Then you'd better send somebody after him," Bowie said grimly. "I have three men camped outside town. One of 'em met me here tonight; just come from Bexar. He says General Cos is leaving in a few days with five hundred men for Gonzales to wipe it out."

Houston whistled softly. But Jim Bowie went on without pause.

"You know what that means. We got to carry the fight to him—drive him out of Bexar, drive every Mexican back across

the Rio Grande! And I'm starting it. Fannin has thrown his men in with mine. We're riding for Goliad and we'll smash the garrison there, then turn and make for Bexar. Now, old hoss, say your piece!"

HOUSTON came to his feet and began to pace up and down. Fire gleamed in his eyes, his unshaven, grim features took on new life.

"Jim, that's great news! If Cos is attacking, then we can force things. I'll stay here, get the organization moving. Austin will whip up an army and move on Bexar—if you can answer for Goliad! That means everything."

"Upon my honor, Sam," said Bowie gravely. "The Mexicans will be chased out of Goliad if I have to do it by myself. But I shan't. Fannin's waiting for me. In three days, we'll have the town."

"I count on that, then," Houston said curtly. "But remember, Cos has artillery——"

"We have men, by God!" With a laugh, Bowie drank deeply. He knew that Bexar was the key to all Texas. "I'm sending word to Fannin that the army is on the move at last. I'll stop and scout Bexar a bit, and spread news there that the Texians are coming. That'll keep Cos from moving out——"

"Do it if you like, but it'll be known. We've a plague of spies here." Houston swung around, aflame with energy. "You've heard of Colonel Crockett? He's headed this way to throw in with us; I got a letter from him last week. I wish we could get hold of a few regular army officers, Jim! If we had Ben Milam and a few more like him——"

Bowie shook his head. Ben Milam had been a distinguished officer in both the American and Mexican armies. A representative in the Texas legislature at Coahuila, he had been flung into prison when Santa Anna dispersed the state government.

"Well, Sam, we haven't got him, that's all. By the way, how about making Fan-

nin a colonel of volunteers? He's only a cap'n now, and if you folks would give him a rank he'd have more authority."

"Right. You also; I'll have it done tomorrow. What's that paper you've got?"

Bowie grinned and opened the printed broadside he had dug out of his pocket.

"Compliment. A proclamation ordering a bunch of Texians arrested on the charge of treason. Me and Travis and some more —"

"Why, damn you—hurray!" Houston seized the paper avidly, his eyes blazing. "Just the thing we need, Jim; glory be, now we'll stampede these fellows! I'll send the news on to Austin tonight. How long are you staying in town?"

"About two minutes more. Got to be moving. How soon do you reckon Austin can march?"

"At once, with this news you've brought to stir things up. Jim, you've turned darkness into glory! You can't imagine the jealousy, the squabbles, the petty politics, here! But now it's all different. We'll stampede 'em, and no mistake. I'll guarantee that Austin will march for Bexar inside of five days—if I can send him word that you're attacking Goliad."

"Send him word that Goliad has been captured," said Bowie soberly. "I mean it. You can gamble that much on me."

"Agreed." Houston seized his hand, looked into his eyes. "God bless you, Jim! Take care of yourself; you don't realize how much I'm counting on you in the days to come. We haven't many men like you."

"Damned good thing you haven't," said Bowie with a laugh, and crammed his hat over his eyes. Next moment, he was gone.

AS HE strode along the muddy road, heading for the edge of town where his companions were camped to await him, he became lost in bitter thought. He could not get that old crone out of mind.

Die in bed? Absurd. A woman's arms around him? The idea maddened him. That was the most unlikely of all fates for Jim Bowie—partner of Lafitte the

pirate, slave-runner, grandee and land-owner, mill-owner, son-in-law of the great Veramendi, and now a broken man and hopeless. It was true, however, that he had been the seventh child. How the devil did that old hag guess it? Or did she have second sight?

His morose meditations were abruptly shattered. Too late, he awakened to dim shadows closing in upon him. A terrific blow on the back of the head crushed his hat and sent him staggering, to fall upon his face in a daze. Only the stout beaver hat saved him from complete oblivion.

He lay motionless, half-stunned, and to all appearance dead.

"Excellent work, my Diego!" sounded a Mexican voice. "It was the blow of a true caballero. We are sure of our money now; dead or alive, said the general. Ha, Mendez! Go you and fetch the other men and the horses, while we tie him hard and fast. Dead or not, he is a devil incarnate and safer if well tied. Hurry!"

There was a soft pad-pad of moccasined feet receding into the obscurity.

"Where is the riata, Diego?" came the voice again. Bowie's head was clearing. His thoughts went swiftly back to that night in Natches-under-the-Hill when, prone upon a saloon floor, he had knifed two men to death. Hard-fighting men. He smiled grimly as he lay.

"Alive or dead, once he reaches San Antonio, the money is ours. You have a good eye, my Diego; you did well to recognize him in that saloon. And it was a lovely blow. Well, take him by the feet; I'll tie up his arms. Wind the riata into the flesh, mind; we must take no chances, for this Bui is a devil. Here, turn him over."

Bowie's figure was rolled over in the mud. Hands seized upon his left arm, but the fingers of his right hand had already closed on the pearl haft of his knife.

The knife drove suddenly upward. There was a choked cry, then a furious and deadly struggle took place in the darkness. One man fell forward, his weight lying across

the legs of Bowie and pinning him down as the second Mexican drove in with knife stabbing viciously.

Somehow, Bowie avoided that frantic, panicky stroke. His left hand caught the assailant and dragged him down, with remorseless grip. What passed in the obscurity was impossible to say. Presently there was a bleating cry, then a slapping of spasmodic feet against the ground, and silence.

THE harsh, mirthless laugh of Jim Bowie sounded. He rose, picked up his crushed hat, and went staggering away. His head was still ringing from that blow; but, if a blow is to change the current of history, there must be no error in its delivery.

Now across the autumn plains of Texas, men spurred fast. Vigilance committees were formed, from near and far the summons brought men with their rifles and powder-horns to gather at Gonzales and elsewhere. Rumors were startling—some said that Goliad had been taken, others said that General Cos was marching on San Felipe. Couriers killed their horses, dust-white men rode shouting past groups of cabins, and from Louisiana parties of frontiersmen were heading fast and hard for Texas. What was actually happening, what would soon happen, no one dared to say.

Upon a chill evening, with a serape flung about his shoulders, Jim Bowie swaggered past the sentinels at the ford, and made his way into Bexar. His glib Spanish tongue, his forged papers, gained him free passage from the ex-convicts in Mexican uniform.

Old Bexar was purely a Mexican city, save for a few American traders. As he strolled about, Bowie was chuckling to himself at the changes in the town he knew so well. Far from marching against the settlers at Gonzales, shrewd General Cos had flung all his energy into preparing against the Texian attack. The stone houses were converted into forts, the

streets were barricaded and commanded by batteries of artillery.

Across the river lay the old San Antonio mission, now called the Alamo because a company of soldiers from Alamo de Pararas, in old Mexico, had once garrisoned it. It was vastly altered; the outer arches were gone, pulled down to help make a rubble heap, over which artillery could be pulled to the roofs. The barracks windows had been walled up, entrenchments and batteries and outer works had been constructed, and there was not such another fortress in all Texas. No Texian army, without artillery, could take this place.

Bowie was inclined to agree with his Mexican assurance. He turned back into the town and presently came to a halt on the bridge across the upper stream. He stood in moody abstraction, his figure dimly revealed by the starlight, listening to the idle talk of soldiers and women strolling by the stream. Death to the Texian traitors; no quarter; the plunder and loot of land and settlements—he vaguely heard the words, but paid scant attention.

For, there close by, were the lights of the one place he might still call home: the Veramendi mansion with its pleasant gardens. There, as elsewhere, he was welcome. All about in this city were warm sympathizers with the cause of Texas; here were friends, relatives, helpers. Yet he stood alone, staring grimly at the place.

ALONE; he would always be alone now. In that house he had lived and loved and won. Ursula Veramendi, fairest of all Texian women, was his bride. From here he had taken her to Saltillo and built his cotton mills; glittering vistas of wealth, position, influence were open to him. The two children whom he idolized had been born here in this house, had been baptized in the church across the plaza. And then the swift coming of cholera, and everything swept away in a day. Everything except the wealth which he cursed and flung aside.

He pulled his serape closer, staring moodily at the house where he would be so

warmly welcomed, did he but make himself known. So he would die in a bed, eh? His harsh laugh sounded softly. He, who had not so much as a bed to his name! Yet the old hag had sworn by the Virgin that she told the truth. Bah! He shrugged and turned away. He was alone, yes, but there remained Texas. Here was something to work for, to fight for, to give himself for; a cause, the only thing left in life. A thing intangible, without self-interest. . . .

"Señor Bui!"

At the soft voice, Bowie turned quickly; his name was pronounced alike in Spanish or English. Close to him in the darkness stood a Mexican soldier, uniform untidy in the starlight, *cigarillo* gleaming with a red point, hat pulled low.

"You speak to me, caballero?" Bowie said quietly, hand on knife.

"But yes," was the response. "I recognize you, señor. You are, no doubt, spy-



ing upon our glorious city, upon our *soldados*, our dispositions—"

Bowie's left arm shot out. He caught the speaker by the tunic and was in the very act of stabbing when he was paralyzed in every nerve.

"Hey! For gosh sake, Jim, hold on! It's me, 'Rastus Smith!'"

"Deaf Smith!" Bowie drew a deep breath. Another instant, and he would have killed the most famous scout and spy on the frontier. The two of them stood quite alone.

"Why, you damned fool, trying out your jokes on me! You ought to have a knife

in your gizzard; and you came close to it. Where'd you get that uniform?"

"Took it off a greaser; he didn't need it no more. By gosh, you've got a grip! I been follerin' you quite a spell. Thinks I, that ain't Jim Bowie, but it sure is Jim's walk. I'm on my way to locate you at Goliad."

"You look it," snapped Bowie, throwing an affectionate arm about the shoulders of the taller man. "How'd you know I was here?"

"Didn't. Just took a notion to scout Bexar a bit, and seen you. I hear they got Maverick and the other Americans here safe in jail."

"And cannon to hold the place. Anybody send you to find me?"

"Yeah," said Deaf Smith. "Gin'ral Austin allowed I might locate you. Seems like the boys are all het up over Goliad being captured."

Bowie laughed softly. "It will be, day after tomorrow. What's your message?"

"Well, Austin's getting the army on the move. Marching tomorrow."

"Marching?"

"Sure. Heading for Bexar lickety-split; coming like hell, Jim. Austin says for you and Fannin to fetch along your outfits and scout the place, and get a good spot for a camp. He's durned uneasy and wants to be sure you're ready to join up."

"Take back word that we're ready and waiting," said Bowie, a warm vibrancy in his words. "I got to meet Fannin and jump those Mexicans in Goliad."

Deaf Smith chuckled. "You don't need to hurry, Jim."

"Eh?" Bowie stared at him in the starlight. "What do you mean?"

"You'll be too late, I reckon. I met up with a feller on my way here, one of them settlers under Cap'n Collingsworth."

"Yes; he was going to raise men and meet us at Goliad."

"I reckon he's done took Goliad already, Jim. This feller allows that Collingsworth got tired of waiting for you and Fannin to come along and was a-heading for Goliad

hissed. Aimed to git there yesterday and jump the place. He had forty-odd men."

Bowie whistled. "And Colonel Sandoval there has a hundred Mexicans with cannon—good lord! I've got to be off —"

They moved off, and the obscurity swallowed them up.

IN DEFIANCE of the rainy season, Austin's alleged army was moving forward on Bexar. Sam Houston had sent out a call for five thousand men; five hundred responded. An army without artillery, with little powder, with no discipline. From New Orleans came the Grays, a troop of adventurers burning to liberate Texas, only to find that Texas had no anxiety to be liberated, but wanted to stay in the Mexican federation.

Desperately, vainly, Steve Austin endeavored to beat some cohesion into his rabble. These settlers, hunters, adventurers would acknowledge no authority, and jeered at orders which did not suit them. At the moment, they were aflame with zealous ardor, but not to the point of facing the artillery of General Cos.

Great news reached them. Collingsworth had taken Goliad by assault. Colonel Ben Milam had unexpectedly appeared, having escaped from his Mexican prison. Bowie and Fannin were scouring the plains. With wild cheers, the army pressed on to Salado, five miles from Bexar, and settled in camp. Here Bowie joined them, with Fannin, Milam and ninety men, to be received with great acclaim.

Privately, however, Austin was hopeless and despondent.

"What can we do against Mexican discipline and cannon?" he said to Bowie that night. "And we're far outnumbered."

"What of it? What are you here for?" Bowie snapped.

"To hold Cos in check and gain time. More men are on the march. We have a cannon and ammunition coming sometime. We can't assault Bexar, of course; we'll form a secure camp outside town

and wait for reinforcements. Have you selected any camp site?"

"Hell, no. One of the missions might do."

"Then suppose you go ahead tomorrow with your company, choose a secure spot, and we'll move up. Cheer up, Jim; in a week's time we'll have a thousand men gathered!"

Bowie, disgusted, yet realizing the hard sense of Austin's viewpoint, acceded. There was but one gleam of light. Mexican prisoners reported that General Cos, astounded by the assault and capture of Goliad, intended to stay safe behind his defenses.

With morning, Bowie and Fannin moved their ninety men ahead. Bowie had already decided that the Concepción Mission presented the desired site, as it was on the river and close to Bexar.

EVENING found him camped in and around the outlying mission buildings. He was in morose, surly humor. The prospect of capturing Bexar seemed fantastic, for the boasted army of Texas was no more than a straggling mob of riflemen.

With daybreak, he rose feeling feverish and uncertain. Outside, the camp was rolled in a blanket of dense fog, so thick that nothing could be seen fifty feet away. Bowie went to one of the outposts, and stood talking with the men there. After a little, he knelt and put an ear to the ground.

"Strange!" he said. "I could have sworn that I heard voices and hoof beats. You've seen nothing all night?"

"Nary a thing, Cunnel," was the response. "All quiet."

Rejoining Fannin for breakfast, Bowie had barely risen from table when a man came running and shouting that he had seen Mexican lancers in the trees, at the south end of camp. While a laugh went up at his expense, there came a yell from the northern outpost, then a discharge of

pistols. Instantly, the camp leaped into activity.

"Looks like they're all around us, Jim," said Fannin coolly. "Who'd have thought old Cos would have the nerve to attack!"

Bowie grunted. Before he could reply, the fog was split by a blazing volley of musketry, and as bullets rained upon the camp, the shrill voices of Mexican bugles began to blare unseen.

Volley after volley was poured into the camp from all directions. That they were completely surrounded was now obvious to all; but the men were kept out of sight, and ordered to shelter among the trees and vines below the mission buildings. Until the fog lifted, nothing could be done.

The sun rose, and gradually the fog began to clear. The Mexican fire had ceased; Bowie waited, impatient and anxious. That his force was surrounded and cut off, he quite realized. His head ached, and he knew now that fever had seized upon him.

A shout pealed up, and another. "There they are!"

To the right of the camp, the thinning fog disclosed lines of infantry deploying. Cavalry were wheeling and taking position. A cannon was being brought up and placed in readiness. Fannin uttered a cool laugh.

"Looks like they're out to get us, Jim! How many do you make it?"

"Four hundred, about," Bowie rejoined.

"Thought so. Orders?"

"Take the south side. I'll take the north——"

A rifle cracked. The battle had begun.

Bowie kept his men under cover, restrained their fire, and waited. From the Mexican lines, volley after volley rang out in an almost continuous fire that did little damage, except to the mission buildings. Estimating that the cannon was not more than eighty yards distant, Bowie, picking out his best riflemen, sent them forward to open fire upon it.

"Spread out, boys, and let 'em have it!"

As he spoke, the cannon erupted in

smoke. A storm of grape and cannister whined through the brush. Immediately after, the bugles shrilled, and the lines of cavalry wheeled into a charge.

A RIPPLE of rifle-fire broke out from the Texian lines. The men serving the cannon were dropped as though by magic. The cavalry fell into confusion; men and horses rolled in the brush, the charge was broken. A ragged cheer rang out, to be instantly checked as the lines reformed. The artillerymen, although dropping fast under the galling fire, served their piece bravely. Again it spouted death, and again.

The cavalry, spreading out now, came galloping and thundering forward, carbines banging, pennons and lances glittering. Again their ranks fell into disorder, as death smote among them. The gold-laced officers suffered heavily. Bowie, yelling with sheer frenzied delight, saw the charge broken and falling back.

"We've got 'em, boys, we've got 'em!" he shouted. "Get on up closer around that cannon! If they try it again, go for 'em!"

The cannon crashed out. The man next to Bowie coughed and fell against him with a spurt of lifeblood; grape shrieked through the air.

The infantry lines were wavering; most of their officers were down by this time. Their blaze of fire continued, but the bullets went high. Now the bugles were again shrilling, the squadrons of horsemen reformed. From the ground between, where horses kicked and men lay heaped, arose a terrible sound of shrieks and groans, drowned out by the crack of rifles.

The men around the cannon fell fast, yet it was fired again, and yet again, holding the Texian riflemen in check. The cavalry spread out farther, ringing in the whole position, the bugles sounded the charge. This time they meant business.

They swept forward with shrill yells. The rifles began their deadly cracking, front rank firing then falling back to reload

while the second rank fired. Officers went down. The ranks were broken, went sweeping aside in wild disorder.

"Go get 'em!" yelled Bowie, and his men obeyed.

Fourth from their covert for the first time broke the Texians. They charged upon the cannon, they went running at the infantry lines, hurled themselves at the broken cavalry. A panicky bugler sounded the retreat.

The lines broke and fled. The cannon was abandoned. The lancers and dragoons headed about in precipitate flight for Bexar's protection. The ninety had smashed the four hundred, captured their positions and their cannon.

Fannin and Bowie slapped each other on the back, dancing about in boyish exultation. Men shouted until they were hoarse, ran down horses and captured them, brought in the wounded, looted the dead.

"Jim, after this we can do anything!" exclaimed Fannin eagerly. "If we had the army here, we could keep 'em on the run and take Bexar!"

"Sure, but there's no army," said Bowie drily. His face was hot and flushed, his eyes very bright. Fannin surveyed him with a frown.

"Looks to me like you got fever, Jim."

"I know it. No matter. Come on, we got plenty to do!"

Plenty to do, yes—couriers to send out, wounded to take care of, dead to bury. Bowie settled down to write his report. The words came hard.

"I reckon I need a drink," he murmured, and got it. Then he looked down at a ragged wound in his coat—a bullet had torn through, not touching him. He broke into his harsh, mirthless laugh.

"I always heard a seventh child was born lucky," he observed. "Reckon it's so, too. And maybe that old hag knew her business. By godfrey, I may have to die in bed yet, just to prove that she did! I'm sure going to be ill. And if I am——"

His eyes warmed suddenly. Old Ben Milam, of course! There was the man to take over the company from him, if he was ill. Ben Milam!

(In Next Issue Ben Milam Leads One of the Most Desperate and Daring Attacks in History.)

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THE SEA ROLLS DOWN BY SINGAPORE

By JEFFERSON CRALLÉ

I

SMOKY gray streamers of cloud, ragged and torn, gale-whipped to westward across the orange and scarlet of the sunset sky, betokened the passing of the storm.

Ian Mackaye, steadying his feet to the roll of the *Carabin*, thrust his face, like the head of a blond hawk, over the weather cloth of the little bridge, and grinned. Eyes, bold and blue as any Viking's, peered out under the visor of the uniform cap

upon which the shiny new insignia of a captain of the Red Arrow Line was emblazoned.

"Yonder she goes, Mister," he shouted over the singing wind.

"Aye, an' well rid—forbye we can e'en raise Singapore the fortnight." Mr. Graeme, the chief mate, wiped the sweat from his gray lined face as he spoke. Sometimes, in the seas near Malaysia, it is hotter after a storm than before—or so it seems. "Yer luck holds——"

Mackaye laughed, the ringing laughter

of a young man, strong for life. "The combination of an old ship and a China Sea typhoon is a bad one. As for luck—disaster is a thing of no man's seeking. I'm glad we missed the blow."

"We have but escaped the disaster o' the deep but to endure yon disaster o' a supercargo," the mate grunted. "Why couldnâ one o' yon great waves have washed him to his rightful doom?"

Mackaye shook his head. With the command of the *Carabin* he had inherited the most disliked individual, the most cantankerous skipper-baiter of all the supercargoes that sailed with Red Arrow ships. A man named Cluff; who reputedly enjoyed the ear of Mr. John B. Hatton, the owner of the Red Arrow Line. It was rumored that in their youth Cluff had done John B. Hatton a service. And it might well have been, for Hatton was known to have a long memory—both for paying debts and collecting them. The kindest words spoken about Cluff by the seagoing men of the Line were that he was a goddamned spy for the owner. Be that as it might, the fact was well known that the ship upon which Cluff sailed was notably unlucky for the captain and mates. No matter how hard a man tried, invariably unfavorable word of his labors reached headquarters. In one case a captain of long standing had refused to sail with Cluff. And out of this dispute it was noted that the captain, not Cluff, left the employ of the Line.

"Keep what you think to yourself, Mister," Mackaye advised Graeme. "I'd hate to lose a good mate——"

"Damned if I'll sail again with the man. Forty years I've played my pipes without let or hindrance. My resignation is in yer hands, Captain Mackaye, when our haw-sers cap the bollards in Vancouver."

Mister Graeme spat vigorously to windward, and his eyes glittered.

Mackaye frowned. The bitter feud that had sprung up between Graeme and Cluff centered around the mate's fondness for the music of the Highland bagpipe. In the warm seas, where the *Carabin* ran lum-

beringly along with every available port open to what air was blowing, the sound of Graeme's pipes had proved unendurable to the sensitive ears of Cluff.

He had sent a wireless to the Line offices in Vancouver, complaining. The result had been a crisp rebuke to Mackaye, concerning order and discipline of his ship and the preventions of unnecessary disturbances inimical to comfort and safety of personnel.

"With a bit influence the now," went on Graeme, "I'd have Cluff keel-hauled. Don't ye have a friend at headquarters, Mackaye?"

MACKAYE shook his head. "No one I could really count on. In the ten years I've been with the Line I've only seen old John Hatton once. And a sour old bachelor that hates the sea, he was."

"He's no a bachelor—he's a widower," said Graeme. "His daughter's a sweet lass, they say. Ye should pay her yer compliments, Captain Mackaye——"

"The devil with you and your ideas——" Mackaye grinned at the sly light in the older man's eyes. "Hello, what's this?"

There came a clatter of feet on the stairway, and the thin, dark face of the wireless operator appeared. He sprang across the bridge, a sheet of paper clutched in his hand.

"S O S, sir——"

Mackaye seized the paper, holding it in both hands against the clutch of the wind.

Yacht Estrellita in danger foundering heavy seas—he read, and his eyes narrowed as he noted the position given.

"Contact him—find what ships are in his locality, their speeds and hour of arrival at scene. Keep in touch with *Estrellita*. Tell him we are coming——" Mackaye snapped. The operator dived back down the stairs.

Mackaye sprang to the engine room tubes. "Mr. Callister? That you—good. Cal, give me a full head—we've a rescue

job. We'll need all pressure for at least eight hours—you will? Good man!"

"Quartermaster—eight points to port. Hold her so. Mister, take the bridge while I plot our course!"

In the chart house, Mackaye went to his work with cool precision. Aided by the more complete reports of the wireless man, which came to him in the course of fifteen minutes, he had a clear picture of the situation. Blown out of her course by the typhoon which the *Carabin* had avoided, the *Estrellita* lay battered by the heavy seas in the midst of a rock-infested area contiguous to the Malay Archipelago. She was one hundred and ten miles away. The greatest speed which the *Carabin* could make was ten knots. There were no other ships in the vicinity. The yacht was alone in one of the worst spots in the South China Sea.

Mackaye stared at the operator's last message.

Twenty passengers aboard nine women. Boats all stove. Pumps out of order. Making water at rate permitting us to last until dawn tomorrow. For God's sake hurry. Fitzwilliam commanding Estrellita.

Mackaye stared at the chart, and then lifted his eyes to the white painted panels of the cabin wall. As on a screen he seemed to see projected the hard years that had brought him to command. The self denial, the labored study in watches when other men slept, the iron disciplining of self, more fierce than the disciplining of any crew—all that the spirit had wrought of the flesh in those years was paraded before his unseeing eyes. The drive and ambition that had placed him at thirty with one foot firmly planted on the lowest rung of the ladder of success. The youngest captain in the Red Arrow service—and for that reason peculiarly dependent upon the favor and good regard of his owners.

Why did that yacht—careless, pleasure-seeking flotsam, burdened with all that Mackaye had never had—why did it have to be there to eastward, in that coral-toothed sea, shunned of sailormen?

Crying faintly through the ether, to draw him from the steady, plodding path that spelled profit for the owner, and slow sure advancement for the captain? If only another ship were nearer—if only the urgency were not so great!

Voices of caution, of self-interest, whispered in his ear.

"Wait for daylight—slow speed—constant soundings—safety—safety of your ship—your crew—duty to owners—play safe—safe——"

Words, written words smote his eyes.

—Nine women—no boats—sink at dawn.

Women, helpless, crying in agony as the waters closed over them.

Slowly Mackaye's fist closed until the nails bit into the palm.

"We at least have boats," he thought, "and we are men. The choice is mine, the responsibility mine. Mine alone. By the outcome I must abide——"

Mackaye glanced up as someone entered the wheelhouse. It was Cluff, his thin,



ugly face scowling in a manner that betrayed his habitual ill nature.

"What's up?" he demanded. "You've altered the course."

Mackaye held his temper in check. "We're answering an S O S call," he said mildly. "There's a yacht in trouble over to eastward. She'll last until we get there, I hope. By driving full speed, we should be there by dawn."

"By dawn! Why you can't run full speed through those waters—it's out of the channel, and full of rocks. Besides it's out of our way. Last week you hove to for a lifeboat drill, and now you veer off to help yachts. At this rate we won't reach Singapore in time to make good de-

livery of cargo. Let some other ship go——"

"There aren't any other ships that can go," said Mackaye slowly. "So what?"

"It's only a yacht," said Cluff. "Let them get in their boats—can't be very many people. Then they can be picked up by——"

Mackaye smiled bleakly. "They have no boats——"

"Look here—you can't actually mean to run at full speed all night through those reefs just to get to a yacht. This is a valuable ship and she has a valuable cargo. You might hit a rock—and—and cause the loss of a great many lives, besides utter destruction of property." Cluff was beginning to get excited.

Mackaye eyed him thoughtfully. "You think the Line would object to my answering the call? You know the law of the sea——"

"Well, of course—I mean, if you have to go, you should do it properly. Take your time, and go slow. If you can't get there, you can't. That's all. But at least you won't sink your ship. Mr. Hatton never approves of unnecessary risks——"

MACKAYE pulled his lean six feet to its full height. "Mister, I command this ship. I am responsible to the owners for the hull and cargo; to God for the lives in my keeping. I am not responsible to you for anything. Get to hell out of here!"

"You—you——" Cluff's face twisted in anger. "I'll see to it that you answer to authority for this. Mind you, you—up-start!" Turning, he dashed from the cabin, lurching ludicrously as the *Carabin* on her new course, lunged heavily into the long afterswell of the storm.

Mackaye returned to the bridge. Half an hour later Sparks came up and touched his uniform cap. "Mr. Cluff wants this Marconi sent, sir. I thought you might wish to see it——"

Mackaye read the communication. It was from Cluff to the owner of the Line.

John Hatton, Vancouver, B. C.

CARABIN AND LIVES AND CARGO BEING JEOPARDIZED BY CAPTAIN. URGENTLY SUGGEST YOUR WIRELESSING HIM IMMEDIATELY INSTRUCTIONS TO TURN OVER COMMAND TO FIRST OFFICER (Signed) *Cluff*.

Mackaye laughed. "Send it."

Sparks stared at him. "Aye, sir——"

"And Sparks," Mackaye added, "when you have sent it, keep contact with *Estrelita*, and no one else. Understand."

"Not even answer our call letters?" Sparks grinned.

"Not even answer our call letters," said Mackaye. "Most particularly if Vancouver is calling by relay——"

There was a pleased smile on the operator's face as he grasped the meaning.

"My set is in very bad condition sir," he said. "The storm has played hob with it. I doubt if our reception is much over a hundred miles. Perhaps I should have an entry made in the log to that effect."

"Very good, Sparks—I'll see to it." Mackaye chuckled.

There was a warm feeling about his heart. It is not always that a crew will stand by a skipper, and back him up.

Before darkness fell, Mackaye turned out all hands, and had the boats cleared for lowering, provisioned and water and instruments for navigation placed aboard.

He was not afraid—and he thanked his stars for the rigidity over and above requirements which had made him heave the ship to at least twice each voyage while he drilled his men with the boats.

II

THE sky had cleared, and the stars came softly through the purpling vault of night as the *Carabin*, trembling under the racing thrust of her engines, surged steadily forward into the long ground swell that had followed in the wake of the storm.

All officers were on duty. Mackaye and Graeme took turns checking their course, and the second, Smith, a young man two

years out of nautical school, was on the bridge with binoculars.

At midnight the wireless operator came to the bridge.

"Beg pardon, sir," he spoke in a low voice for Mackaye's ear alone. "The *Araya*, of the Clason Line, is trying like fury to raise us. She's been hammering our call for the last hour——"

"Where is she?" asked Mackaye.

"She reported four hundred miles north of here at the time the S O S went out——"

"Probably has a message for us," said Mackaye grimly.

"I think so, sir. What should I do?"

"Don't answer them. What about the yacht?"

"*Estrellita* is still in contact. They are pinning their faith on us."

Mackaye nodded. "Sparks——"

"Yes, sir?"

"I think you're going to lose your job——"

"I've already lost it, sir. Cluff told me so," the operator laughed easily. "He's in a frightful state——"

Mackaye wrote something on a piece of paper. "Here's our position. I'll give you corrected readings hourly. If we—strike—flash it to *Araya*. She'll know where to look for the boats. Tell them we'll tow back over our course, due westward. We'll be clear of the reefs and they can pick us up."

The wireless man nodded, and disappeared down the stairway to his shack on the hurricane deck.

Mackaye joined Graeme by the weather cloth. The mate was peering out across the waters.

"By dawn yon sea will be a millpond," said Graeme. "'Twill be then an easy job. Provided of course we don't str-rike a rock afore then. 'Tis no light thing to run so fast in these waters——"

"There's nothing else we can do, Mister," said Mackaye. "The ship is insured to the hilt. If we took thought for our

own skins, we could never look men in the eye again."

"Aye—to walk the rest of one's days with nine drowned women beside you is not a pleasant thought."

THERE came an interruption. Cluff had appeared on the bridge.

"See here, Captain Mackaye——" his querulous tones rose over the beat of the engines—a high pitched snarl. "I sent a wireless message that required an answer. And the answer was one which would have relieved you of command of this ship, unless I am very much mistaken. Now that whippersnapper tells me that the receiving set is out of commission for any distance. He's lying. You are responsible for the refusal of that man to receive a message—and you'll be set ashore for this, immediately we get to Singapore!"

"The Bund at Singapore is uncommon bad for sailormen," said Mackaye. "Surely ye wouldn't wish that on me?"

"I tell you you have no right to risk my life—our lives—this way—do you hear me——?"

"Ah!" Mackaye suddenly pounded one fist into the palm of his hand. "Hear that, Graeme? Now we get at the truth. Your life—your skin, Mr. Cluff? And do ye no carry insurance on your skin, Mr. Cluff? The owners shall hear of this, Mr. Cluff! Grave oversight, Mr. Cluff. Why," Mackaye raised his voice until it thundered like the *Carabin's* great siren, "you damned white-livered sneak—get off my bridge wi' your filthy precious skin. Try to have me relieved of command to save yourself the possibility of havin' to swim——"

Cluff had turned and fled down the companionway, bleating threats.

"I feel better," said Mackaye, breathing deeply.

"So do I," agreed Graeme.

III

AT EIGHT bells in the dog watch the whistler from the engine room squealed. It was Callister.

"My engines, Mister Mackaye. How much longer must I rack an' rend them? They won't stand over much longer without some reduction o' speed——"

"Can you give me four hours more?"

"Don't ask me—'tis in the hands o' the Almighty," was the Glasgowman's answer from the depths of the engine room.

The truth of this statement was borne out at exactly half past four, land time, when the *Carabin* passed over an uncharted reef—eight thousand five hundred tons displacement of ship and cargo, traveling at slightly over ten knots an hour.

Strangely, there was not much of a shock felt upon the bridge. A peculiar grating tremor from the keel, a slight hesitation of the whole fabric—that was all that was noticeable.

Mackaye felt as though someone had laid a clammy hand around his heart and was squeezing the life out of him. The saliva glutted his mouth and he swallowed hard.

"She's gone, Mister Graeme," was all he said. "I've lost my ship. Prepare to abandon——"

There was no need to say more. She was already filling by the bows, and developing a noticeable list to starboard.

"Aye, sir." Graeme laid his hand on the engine room telegraph and rang the engines astern to check the ship's headway.

The *Carabin*'s siren moaned its farewell alarm, the shuddering of steam in the brazen throat tearing at Mackaye's heart-strings. Down along the decks he could hear the shrill of boatswain's whistles, and the faint, re-echoing commands "*Prepare to abandon—prepare to abandon—prepare to abandon——*"

The bells throughout the ship were ringing, and Mackaye's lips were white as he stood at the speaking tube from the engine room, listening to the reports from his chief engineer. Water was already awash in the boiler room.

"Send up your men, Mister—we haven't a moment to spare."

Twenty minutes from the time the *Carabin* had struck Mackaye, his log book under

his arm, went down the Jacob's ladder into the power launch, gave the command to shove off, and the *Carabin*, souging in the soft roll of the sea, was left deserted.

It had calmed steadily through the night, and the long gentle swell gave no trouble. The boats, bobbing slowly like so many tiny corks in the vast expanse of ocean, collected gradually around the lodestone that was the *Carabin*'s single power launch.

Dawn was breaking with the suddenness of the tropics when with her running lights still gleaming, the *Carabin* rose up her stern so that the bronze fins of the propellers shone redly in the first rays of the sun, and plunged downward through the long swells.

Half an hour had elapsed since she struck.

"Mr. Graeme!" Mackaye's voice rang out between the power launch and the first boat. "Give me one boat clear of men—take all the men into the boats left with you. Make fast all boats with line, and row slowly the course I gave you. I'll take the launch, and tow the empty boat. Four men out of my watch for launch's crew. If I can reach the *Estrellita* in time, we may get some of the survivors. If not, we'll come back and pick you up and start towing toward Singapore. If we don't come back, keep right on. The course will carry you into the steamer lanes, and you'll be picked up."

THE arrangements were made quickly, and the little motor of the launch awoke to its smooth purring that carried the little white boat, with its tow, swishing along through the waves that were growing momentarily calmer.

Those in the boats were getting the sweeps moving as Mackaye stared back, until the boats became little silver dots, and then blended with the faint haze that the sea keeps always about its surface, as a woman covers her purposeful eyes with filmy veils.

Minutes passed, and the steady drone of the motor in the launch told its assuring

story of knot after knot reeling out under the trim little craft's keel. Two of Mackaye's four men were in the whaleboat astern to give her balance, and steer to avoid unnecessary yawing which would cut down her speed.

Three hours elapsed, when Mackaye saw through his binoculars the low white blotch of a ship's hull two points off his starboard bow. Altering the course, he piloted his little caravan straight for it. As they drew closer, he could see that the yacht, a long, sumptuous craft, was so far down as to be nearly awash. There was certainly no time to be lost, and he could see the knot of people already waiting by the boom and rope ladder which had been rigged in preparation for his arrival.

Coming in at full speed, Mackaye cast off his boat so that its headway would carry it in under the boom, where it was checked. Then, describing a circle under power, he came up alongside his own boat as she lay there.

The yacht had suffered hideously in the typhoon. Her masts were gone, only the jagged stumps from which emergency wireless antennae trailed, remaining, and her funnel was collapsed in a strange caricature of itself. The bridge was wrecked askew and the wheel house smashed open on the port side.

Not a stick remained of her boats—only the bent davits rattled in the slow heave of the laboring ship.

A man in a weather-stained uniform but with the gold braid of a commander shouted from the rail, "We had despaired of you, Captain. She'll go down under us any moment!"

"How many are you?" asked Mackaye.

"Only what are here—we lost six men in the storm."

"Come ahead, then—there won't even be crowding. Plenty of room."

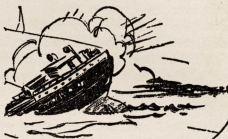
The survivors of the *Estrellita*, nine women and thirty men, scrambled down into the boats, and Mackaye ordered the boats cast off. They picked up way and drew

some distance astern of the *Estrellita*, from where it was plain that the yacht would sink in very short time.

Mackaye cast his glance around the sea, which was calming until it was like molten glass. Far to the eastward, a thin white line was indistinct on the water.

Mackaye shook his head. Among his other troubles he could have dispensed with the mist.

"Can't wait to see her go down, Captain," he said to the skipper of the *Estrel-*



lita, "We left our other boats back about twenty miles or so. I'll have to race that fog to pick 'em up."

"Your other boats——?" there was puzzlement in the man's face.

Mackaye looked at him. Each captain read in the other's eyes that look of odd bereavement which the landsman never knows.

IV

SLOWLY over the mist-wrapped sea Mackaye conned the launch and its tow. Eyes, strained from the vigil he had kept, searched endlessly in the grayness for his flotilla of boats.

Doubts began to assail him—questionings of his own course in having pushed on. Should he have told Graeme to row after him instead of away from him. In that way the boats would have been that much nearer the tow when he turned back.

Someone touched his elbow. Turning, annoyed, he found himself looking into the eyes of a girl—blue eyes, that were quite honest and serious. He sensed

vaguely that she had light hair, and was perhaps twenty years old. It was the first time he had seen her, as distinguished from the other survivors of the ill-fated yacht.

"If you have trouble finding your boats, Captain," she said quietly, "stop your motor when we reach the spot where you think they might be, and let me listen. I've spent a great deal of time at sea, and I'm very good at hearing in a fog."

There was a competence in her manner that suddenly heartened Mackaye, more than anything else that could have occurred.

"You think you could outhear the rest of us?" Mackaye smiled.

"I'm very sensitive that way—sometimes women are, you know."

"Good enough," Mackaye nodded. "You shall have a try at it——"

Half an hour later Mackaye stopped his engine. "Now all together—shout!" he ordered.

The combined voices of the boats' companies joined in a long halloo, that echoed back from the walls of fog and then were lost in the muffling stillness.

Still as mice, they listened. Mackaye could hear nothing.

"Guess we haven't caught up to them," he muttered, and prepared to start the engine.

"Wait——" the girl laid a hand on his arm. "Captain—I don't want to confuse you, but I'm sure they are back that way." She pointed back over the port quarter. "I sensed an ever so slight vibration of sound from that direction——"

Mackaye debated. To return in that direction would take him off the course—might make the difference between finding the boats and losing them. "We'll try it," he said, after a moment.

Slowly they turned back, running with the motor at slowest speed, shouting at intervals.

All at once, out of the mist before them, came the raucous bellow of many men

yelling together—the sweetest of sounds to Mackaye's ear.

Mackaye and the girl smiled at each other. "Miss, you've saved my life," he grinned.

"I'm not unmindful of what you've done for me," she answered.

WHEN the boats were making fast, Mackaye was suddenly annoyed by the man Cluff. "I want to talk to you—I want to get into the motor launch."

Mackaye let him clamber aboard.

"A fine mess you've made," said Cluff loudly. "Lost your ship, and put all these people as well as ourselves afloat in a lot of open boats. Then you nearly lose your whole crew through abandonment. You'll be set ashore for the rest of your days—I can promise you that."

"What did you want?"

"I simply want to be aboard this power boat so I can keep my eye on what you're doing—that's all. Carry on, Captain Mackaye!" There was a nasty sneer on Cluff's face as he settled down in the stern sheets.

"Who is that man?" said the girl, who had kept her place in the bows beside Mackaye.

"Sh—he's a friend of the owner," said Mackaye in a low tone. "My ship was the *Carabin*, of the Red Arrow Line. He was the supercargo. When we turned off to answer your S O S he wirelessly the owner to have me relieved of command. Now I've lost my ship—and I guess he has me where he wants me."

"Are you sorry you—took the chance?"

Mackaye, looking straight into her eyes, felt the peculiar daring that comes once in a man's life.

"I'm glad—for more reasons than one," he said.

She smiled faintly and dropped her eyes from his, a tiny bit of color touching her cheeks.

Mackaye suddenly wished that the eight boatloads of people strung out behind the *Carabin's* launch were on the other side of the Pacific.

V

AN HOUR after dawn the next morning they towed clear of the fog, and before midday raised the smoke of a steamer on the northern horizon. She was a big ship, and coming fast. A liner, from her looks. It proved to be the *Araya*, far out of her course.

As the sun touched the meridian she hove to, and Mackaye drew the boats alongside her landing stage.

An oddly forlorn appearing little group, they assembled on the deck.

A spotlessly uniformed officer stepped forward.

"Which of you is Miss Hatton?"

The blond girl, whom Mackaye had helped up the ladder and who was standing at his side, spoke up. "I am Cynthia Hatton——"

"Will you please go at once to the wireless and communicate with your father? Steward, show Miss Hatton to the radio room." The officer glanced at an envelope in his hand. "Captain Mackaye?"

Mackaye, a dazed look in his eyes, stepped forward.

"Here is a communication from your owners, Captain—we tried to relay it to you night before last, but couldn't somehow raise you. Your set was out of order, it seems." There was a smile on the officer's face.

Mackaye tore open the envelope. It didn't make any difference, now. He had already been relieved of his command by the sea's grimmest law.

"Mackaye Carabin Yacht Estrellita reported in distress your vicinity my daughter aboard reach her at all hazard. Signed John B. Hatton."

"That's nice." The girl was peering over Mackaye's shoulder. "That order relieves you of all responsibility, doesn't it?"

Mackaye looked at her. They both laughed.

"Perhaps you'd better come with me and send in your report, Captain." There was a quizzical expression about her eyes.

Mackaye grinned. "Very good, Miss Hatton——"

Behind his back he heard a dour snort from Chief Officer Graeme.

"Stand aside, Cluff," came his loud triumphant voice. "Ye're in my way!"

In the next SHORT STORIES

***Seven-up Was a Veteran Line-rider.
Seven-up Was His Only Game.
Blizzard-bound in His Dugout,
the Past Takes a Hand in the Present.***



Seven-up

by

**CHARLES ALDEN
SELTZER**

Adventurers All

A MAD ESCAPE



IT WAS during the month of August 1911 that I was preparing to make a desperate escape from the city of Cartagena, Colombia; where men, women and children were falling like poisoned flies on the burning streets, from the dreaded plague, yellow fever.

For three maddening, torturing days, I lived with the thoughts: Would I be next? Could I escape this thing, far more deadly than a bullet?

Quarantine was a strict law in Cartagena. Whoever attempted to leave the city had to dodge bullets. Whoever chose to stay—well, yellow fever had already claimed three thousand of the forty thousand inhabitants.

As business manager for a Syrian banana dealer, I had come to Colombia for the sole purpose of closing a business deal with some Colombian fruit growers. After accomplishing this transaction, I prepared for my journey back to the States. Then the staggering news came. Quarantine. Posters. To disobey the law of quarantine means death!

And now, the third day of the plague—the hottest day that I had ever seen or felt in my life. The temperature 118 in the shade. Masses of human flesh and bones lying where they fell—on the dusty, hot streets, in the fly-swarmed homes, where malaria mosquitoes stung far sharper than hornets.

With the touch of the fever already slightly yellowing my skin, I could stand it no longer. At three o'clock one day

I took a fast pinto from the corral and rode swiftly and desperately toward the Colombian border, my goal being Panama. Finally, after three hours of continuous riding, I approached the border. The sight I met sent a chill quivering along my flesh and a defeated fear racking through my feverish brain. Hundreds of Colombian soldiers stood in military formation along the border.

Now, too late, I realized my folly.

DOZENS of soldiers came running towards me. They were upon me quickly, guns raised for action. One of the soldiers grabbed my horse's bridle. I slid off sheepishly; both hands raised in air. They led me to their commanding officer, a captain. He stared at me angrily, and spoke sharply in a mixture of Spanish and Indian; his long, twirled mustache shivered rapidly as he spoke.

"*Si, Señor,*" I agreed, my knowledge of Spanish being exceedingly limited.

"Dog of a peeg!" boomed his voice. Then he whirled about and sent a gloved hand flush on my cheek. The unexpected jolt caused me to spin and slump sideways on the cobble-stoned road.

For a short time I lay there, staring puzzledly at the dozen or more scowling, poorly clad Colombian soldiers. My assailant stood defiantly smacking his thin lips, and rubbing his right hand on the butt of an automatic, suspended loosely from his side. I arose somewhat hesitantly. As I did, the captain drew the

automatic, pressed it firmly against my ribs, and then boomed:

"Keeler! This weel be your feenish!"

"Killer?" I managed to mutter feebly. "You must be mistaken. I have not murdered anyone."

He opened up his mouth in a loud mocking roar, and then looked at his men in a self-satisfied manner.

"We shall have zee honor, to catch gringo, Frisco Charlie. You are heem, who killed a Colombian soldier, eh?" said the captain, as he brought his grinning face into grimmer lines than before.

Immediately, I took out my papers and credentials, and attempted, futilely, to persuade the captain into believing that I was no such person called Frisco Charlie.

The most bitter jolt of all was in learning that neither the captain nor his soldiers could read a word of English.

My feverish head became dizzy, and a tremor that was sickening, ran along my sweaty back as the soldiers got the signal from the captain to tie me up. I was to be shot—as far as I could make out, by

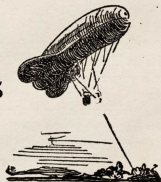
the captain himself, who would be honored to do this little deed in memory of his dead comrade. Then I was led towards a large tree a few yards away. But I never reached it. I could see the tree only faintly and soon it became very blurry. My brain throbbed and felt as though a white-hot iron had pierced it. My hands trembled and every muscle in my body seemed to quiver as I fell forward in the soldiers' firm grip.

IT WAS in a hospital in Cartagena that I learned that some others of the soldiers had captured this Frisco Charlie, even while their comrades were administering aid to me. His identification had been proved quite clearly when he had attempted to shoot it out with the soldiers. He was killed.

I was unsuccessful in trying to escape the yellow fever plague, but yellow fever had helped me in escaping a sure death before a captain's automatic.

—Joseph C. Newton

THE END OF BLIMP A-245



WE WENT out on the Blimp field at Pensacola, Florida, to go up for a night hop. It was October, 1918, and night flights were part of the routine training for dirigible pilots.

This evening Student Officer Wright was acting as pilot, Wise as mechanic and I as check pilot. We carried one passenger.

The pressure in the bag was low and

the Curtiss power motor overheated—we were flying the ship twenty-four hours a day. We attempted to build up pressure with the blower motor.

The only way the motor would work was to flood the carburetor, which was done by holding up the needle valve. Considerable gasoline ran over the sides, forming gasoline vapor which, when the motor back-fired, ignited with one powerful "puff."

I was blinded for an instant and began

feeling around for the pyrene fire extinguisher. I realized that the other three men had jumped from the gondola and I could hear the crowd calling for me to jump.

Looking over the side I could faintly discern that the dirigible was leaving the ground. I made a dive over the side of the fuselage, grabbing a suspension wire with one hand, while one foot caught in other wires.

For a few seconds I was hopelessly entangled, then managed to kick free. By that time the blimp was between thirty and forty feet in the air. I remember the weird sensation of plummeting through the air and the one thought that I'd surely break a leg or something.

Then I found myself struggling to my feet and assuring the fellows that I had not been hurt.

We watched the flaming blimp soar into the air, lighting the whole sky.

One of the gas tanks must have exploded about that time, as the bag took fire and finally with one powerful detonation, the bag was gone. The fuselage and engine dropped into the bay on the other side of the hangars. Our good little training ship, the Goodrich A-245, had gone up in a blaze of—well anyway in a blaze.

Everyone rushed down to the beach.

Women fainted on the streets and on doorsteps, as they watched the burning spectacle, thinking the dropping sand bags were burned bodies falling into the sea.

Blimpers over at the barracks wept, believing some of their friends had been burned to death.

The fire might have been extinguished if the men on the handling lines had remained at their posts. But they were new men and had been carefully instructed as to the explosiveness of hydrogen in an effort to stop them from smoking around the hangars. The instant the first explosion occurred, someone yelled, "Explosion!" and every man of them ran for shelter.

They carried me over to the dispensary where I was treated for bruises, a slightly sprained ankle, and superficial burns about the head and face. There I found the mechanic had also been slightly burned before he jumped.

An order was immediately put through to equip all dirigibles with parachutes.

It required some little time to grow another set of eyebrows and I had to buy a new sweater. The good old Navy blue had been reduced to so much ashes. Undoubtedly it prevented my clothing from catching fire, thereby saving my life.

Thomas J. Connelly

\$15 For True Adventures

UNDER the heading *Adventurers All*, the editors of *SHORT STORIES* will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors for the first time. Any reader of the magazine, any where, may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid \$15. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the page only; and address it to: "Adventurers All," Care of Editors of *SHORT STORIES* Magazine, Garden City, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.



THE SILVER CHAIN

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

Author of "The Copper Chest," "Captain Lucifer Returns," etc.

IT WAS a silver chain on the wrist of one of Tonga Sam's dancing girls and, when O'Bannion saw it, he knew that Peter Clane was dead.

The *Stormy Petrel* came into the anchorage at Fagan's Key at sundown and dropped her hook in seven fathoms of clear, green water. Gibraltar O'Bannion sat in a canvas chair beside the cabin skylight and listened disinterestedly while McGordon, his mate, shouted at the Kanaka crew.

Gibraltar O'Bannion was a large young man with frosty eyes, sunburned hair and an uncertain disposition. In Charley Fong's Bar in Liantang there were men who boasted that, if he should cross their paths, they would plant Gibraltar O'Bannion beneath six feet of good volcanic

earth. There were men who said the same thing, after their second drink, in Whiskey Nelson's Club at Port McCoy. At End o' Land, Bounty Bay, Kapahulu other fierce men said the same thing—and took good care that they did not become personally acquainted with the owner of the *Stormy Petrel*.

They had not forgotten the story of Sid Ringer, swinging from his own main gaff, or the tale of how the black ace of spades would have covered the three bullet holes in the middle of Lafe Edward's chest.

OLD MCGORDON'S voice piped with shrill anger in the dying afternoon. He was a gaunt and unshaven man who lived on quinine and cheap whiskey but he had a nose for hidden reefs and a neat



finger on a trigger still. It was ten years now since he had first sailed with Gibraltar O'Bannion.

He said, "Belay that line with an over-an'-under turn, ye yellow numb-brain. Twice it is now that I have told ye! Perhaps it's a rope's end that'll put remem-berin' into your thick hide!"

He kicked expertly and a stupid-faced Kanaka trotted gracefully across the deck to land on his hands and knees in the star-board scuppers. Other Kanakas laughed with child-like pleasure and McGordon spat sourly over the rail. He turned to stamp aft to where O'Bannion sat.

"Twice I have showed 'im," McGordon complained bitterly. "Am I a Job that there's no limit to my patience?"

"Have a drink, Mac. It's good whiskey."

O'Bannion pushed the black labeled bottle across the deck with a bare foot while he lifted his own glass. The cabin sky-

light threw a dark blot of shadow across the planking; the sunset was a scarlet flicker along O'Bannion's brown and naked shoulders.

McGordon lifted the bottle and splashed amber liquid into a thick glass. He smacked his lips and drew the back of a hairy fist across his face.

"Does a man good—warms his belly," he said sourly. "Well, we're here. Maybe you'll tell me why—with a good load of shell waitin' for us at Bottom's Bane."

O'Bannion slumped in his canvas chair with both hands about his glass. He was barefooted, naked except for worn canvas trousers and the brass-studded cartridge belt about his waist. He looked at his mate with sardonic good humor in his eyes.

"Two weeks ago," he said, "Ole Skane journeyed to Liantang in his stout schooner, the *Nellie*. He carried a letter—a very interesting letter, Mac. Maybe you'd like to see it?"



*Gibraltar O'Bannion Knew that There
Were Plenty Who Would Cut a
Throat for the Diego Pearls—
Aye, for One of Them*

"Maybe I would."

McGordon spat again and looked at the black labeled bottle. He took a worn plug of tobacco from his disreputable overalls and worried away a piece between broken teeth. O'Bannion turned his head toward where the Kanakas squatted in the bow.

"Joe Fish!"

"Yess, marster."

"You go along cabin strong fella too quick, eh? You catchum that fella box belong along me. You bringum that fella box topside quick fella, eh?"

THE Kanaka grinned with a flash of white teeth in the dying afternoon.

"Sure. Me catchum that fella box. My word!"

He padded along the deck on bare feet and disappeared into the cabin companion-way. O'Bannion stuffed rank tobacco into a blackened pipe and flicked a match into flame. The red light shimmered for a moment on his dark, uneven face; on the patches of gray at his temples. The Kanaka came back with a black metal box in his hands; he placed it carefully on the deck and went forward with a soft *shuf-shuf* of feet.

"He'll make a good hand—Joe Fish will," O'Bannion said reflectively. "He can shoot, Mac."

McGordon grunted skeptically.

"He'll be the first one I ever seen that could then. I hope yuh didn't come up here to this forgotten hole to do no shoot-in'. I'm gettin' too old for shootin'."

Gibraltar O'Bannion lifted the box to his knees and sat staring at the white half moon of beach a half a mile away. His eyes were sober all at once. Behind him the sky was scarlet and purple; great pillars of clouds were steaming slowly out of the brassy sea.

"I've got a letter here, Mac. It means shooting."

The box opened under the quick thrusts of O'Bannion's brown fingers. He laid packets of rubber bound papers in a neat pile on the deck beside him. At the bot-

tom of the box lay a single sheet of cheap paper. O'Bannion lifted it; looked at it for a long minute in silence. One side was covered with heavy writing; the other with sprawling traces made by a blunt lead pencil. After a while he handed it to McGordon.

"Maybe you remember Peter Clane, Mac?"

"I remember him."

The old man took the paper in gnarled fingers; he hunched his shoulders as his lips twisted about the words. O'Bannion sat back and picked up his half empty glass.

A half mile away the mean and iron-sheathed houses of Fagan's Key huddled under the dusty palms in the sunset. There was no sign of life. Later the Key would wake for another night of revelry. A score of beached luggers lay on their sides like black flies against the sand; beyond, green jungle stretched to the mountains which leaned wearily against the darkening sky.

OLD McGORDON lifted his head; spat again across the rail. Then he bent forward over the frayed paper once more.

..... it's big, O'Bannion—the Diego pearls. A month ago I ran into a man in Suva. He was dying with fever and he gave me the story. Diego hid the pearls here at Fagan's Key the night before he was killed and I know where he hid them. There's a tough crowd here at the Key and they've got wind of what I'm after so I'd be glad if you could come. Magoon is sailing tonight and I'm sending this by him—he's the only one I can trust. He'll catch you at Kapahulu and you can make the Key in three days if the wind holds. If anything should happen to me there's a rough sketch on the back of this letter. You'll know how to read it.

Old McGordon spat his tobacco over the rail and poured whiskey into the glass with a hand which was not quite steady. He

drank with a long swallow; placed the glass back on the deck.

"I remember when Diego was killed," he said somberly. "It's been six year ago now. There was stories about what happened."

"There's plenty of stories about pearls, Mac."

"Not pearls like Diego had." McGordon took off his hat and ran a hand through his grizzled hair. "I knowed a feller on the *Hetty* once. He seen 'em. As big as plums, he said—a hat full of 'em."

THE shadows deepened across O'Bannion's face; he thrust at the red hot dottle of his pipe with a calloused thumb. The twilight was going fast; already a yellow window or two winked beneath the palms on the beach.

O'Bannion said slowly, "Peter Clane is a friend of mine. Maybe you noticed something queer about that letter?"

"I ain't much of a hand at readin', O'Bannion."

Gibraltar O'Bannion leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. The smoke

bottle with the black label; he poured the glass nearly full. Old McGordon always thought better with the bite of the whiskey warming his stomach. More lights were winking on across the half mile of water.

"There's plenty would cut a throat for old Diego's pearls," he said under his breath. "For one of 'em, even!"

O'Bannion nodded.

"There's another little thing, Mac. I persuaded Ole Skane to talk a little—brass knuckles are a great help that way. Two days before we pulled into Liantang Cale Enoch and his crowd sailed for Fagan's Key."

"You think they got wind of it, O'Bannion?"

O'Bannion got up slowly and stretched until the muscles rippled along his shoulders. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and stuffed it into his pocket. Forward, a Kanaka banged on a tin pan to announce the arrival of supper. The sound drifted musically in the coming night; the smell of coffee lifted in the still air.

"Two and two make four, Mac," O'Bannion said. "We'll eat—then I'll go ashore."

"I'll go with you."

"You'll stay on board. It's in the cards, Mac, that I'm going to need you before morning. A hell of a lot of good you'd be to me with your head under a table someplace."

Old McGordon spat disgustedly as he followed O'Bannion toward the companion steps. There were many lights along the beach now. They winked yellowly; the tinny sound of a gramophone floated faintly across the still water.



from his pipe climbed stiffly upward in the quiet air and the big man's eyes were suddenly frosty and hard.

"Peter Clane sent that letter to me at Kapahulu, Mac. He sent it down by Magoon. I took it away from Ole Skane in a waterfront dive at Liantang—after I had broken his jaw for him! I should have got it almost a month ago. Maybe you understand now?"

Old McGordon reached again for the

THE moon was coming up as O'Bannion went along the shell road which led up from the foreshore. A hundred yards ahead of him a big bungalow sprawled under a clump of tired palms. Yellow light flooded across the sand from many windows; men's voices rose in a jumbled murmur. Fagan's Key was just beginning to waken—later that murmur

would become a drunken howl which would lift and fall until daybreak. Gibraltar O'Bannion had stopped at Fagan's Key on other occasions.

He walked slowly, stopping for a moment in front of the lighted bungalow. That was Offer Joe's Saloon, he remembered—a place where anything, from laughing brown girls to cheap gin, could be bought or sold. A piano jangled with mechanical harshness; the rectangle of light from the big door fell across O'Bannion.

A man, black-bearded and with a dirty shirt open down the front, swaggered up the shell road singing. He saw O'Bannion and waved his hand.

"Hi, mate! New chum, eh? I seen your schooner in the lagoon. Come intuh Joe's an' have a drink."

"Later," O'Bannion told him.

The big man lounged forward into the light. He teetered slightly on spread feet while he looked O'Bannion over with narrowed eyes. The corners of his mouth lifted unpleasantly.

"Have a drink, I said!"

O'Bannion stepped closer so that the yellow light glinted on his naked shoulders, the heavy butt of the gun at his hip. He took off the floppy hat with which he had dressed up to go ashore; he smiled gently with the sardonic amusement deepening in his eyes.

"My bewhiskered friend," he said in a soothing tone, "I drink when and where I please. Perhaps you would like for me to draw you a picture?"

The other's face darkened; obscenity crackled across his lips as he started to step forward. He stopped suddenly as though a hand had reached out and pulled him back. For a moment he stood, peering at O'Bannion with a perplexed scowl twisting his ugly face. He mumbled under his breath. O'Bannion smiled without mirth.

"You were saying?" he asked.

"Nothing, damn yuh!"

The big man swung on his heel and

went slowly up the steps which led to the lighted door of Offer Joe's Bar. He shook his head as he went. After a moment O'Bannion turned back up the shell road which led to the half dozen bungalows which clustered on the little rise at the edge of the jungle.

THE house, which Miles Garde had built for himself twenty years before, had been big as befitted the richest man in Fagan's Key. Miles Garde was not as rich now, but he was magistrate and that was worth something—in a place where anything can be bought—or sold.

O'Bannion kicked open the sagging gate and went up the walk which had rotted away with the years. Miles Garde would know where Peter Clane could be found and Miles Garde would talk. He, O'Bannion reflected, had dealt with men like Garde before. He climbed the steps to the veranda.

The front door was open and, through the screen, O'Bannion could see a lighted doorway at the end of a dim hall. He hammered on the door jamb with a rude fist. There was no answer and he pounded again. Footsteps tapped softly and a shadowy figure came down the hall.

It was a woman, O'Bannion saw, and his lips curled. Miles Garde had had plenty of women; later, he would send them down to Offer Joe. Garde was that sort.

"What do you want?" she asked softly.

She was white, O'Bannion saw then, and he was suddenly angry. There was a tiny thread of fear in her voice. A woman, O'Bannion thought, who took up with Miles Garde had nothing left to fear. He could not see her face but her hair glimmered palely in the light from the door behind her.

O'Bannion said, "I want to see Miles Garde, sister. As a matter of fact, I intend to see Miles Garde!"

"He's—not here."

Her voice shook a little and O'Bannion knew that she was indeed afraid. He

laughed suddenly. She could see him plainly in the moonlight, he remembered, and men clad in nothing but canvas trousers and cartridge belts did not inspire confidence. He reached a quick hand and pulled open the screen.

The girl stepped back and her voice lifted uncertainly.

"Stay where you are. I have a gun!"

"So have I," O'Bannion told her cheerfully. "Put it up, sister. I'm a harmless and extremely law abiding citizen—one that you could trust with the family silver. I want to talk with Miles Garde."

"I tell you that he isn't here!"

"One is told so many things, sister. I'll take a look."

AS HE stepped forward he caught the glint of the yellow light on the short barreled revolver in her hand. He laughed again. The sort of girls who stayed with Miles Garde didn't shoot. And then, a split second before it happened, O'Bannion knew that he had been wrong.

Orange flame spat wickedly as he threw himself to one side; the narrow hallway roared with muffled sound. O'Bannion felt a red hot iron stab at his left shoulder. He jerked forward, knocking the gun from the girl's hand with a hard slap. He heard it clatter against the floor.

For a moment O'Bannion stood looking. The girl was crying softly.

"Well, you *did* shoot, sister, didn't you?" he said in a gentle voice.

She sagged forward and he caught her about the shoulders, shook her roughly. His shoulder burned and he felt warm moisture creeping down his arm. He pulled the girl toward the lighted doorway.

It was Miles Garde's office; he remembered it as he kicked a chair about with his foot and let the girl drop into it. There was a bottle and a glass on the square desk and he splashed whiskey and held it to the girl's lips. She swallowed, choked a little and then straightened.

"I made a fool of myself," she said bleakly. "It seems to be an accomplish-

ment with me—making a fool of myself."

Gibraltar O'Bannion poured more whiskey into the glass, drained it, placed the glass on the desk. He turned up the smoking lamp and examined his wounded shoulder with probing fingers. The bullet had plowed a raw furrow—nothing worse. He wiped his fingers on the faded canvas trousers.

"You might," he said casually, "find me some sort of a bandage. That's what happens when one goes around shooting people."

He was looking at her with disinterested eyes. Not what he had expected. She was pretty in a way, he thought; young, too. Not enough color in her face though and there was a strained, hunted look in her eyes. She sat quite still for a long moment watching him.

"Who are you?" she asked at last. "You're not from the beach. You don't belong here?"

"I do not," O'Bannion told her a little grimly. "Now, if you'll get that bandage—one hates to bleed on a stranger's straw matting."

SHE got up slowly and went out into the darkened hallway. He could hear her footsteps scraping softly against the floor as she moved about in another room. O'Bannion poured more whiskey into the glass.

A big window, closed only by screening, gave the man a view of the moonlit beach. The night was close and hot. Faint sounds of the revelry, which was getting under way at Offer Joe's, drifted on the lifeless air.

Two men were coming up the shell road in the moonlight and O'Bannion leaned forward to watch. He recognized the thin and stooped figure of Miles Garde; his companion was the black-bearded man who had stopped O'Bannion earlier in the evening. The two stopped fifty yards from the bungalow and talked in low voices. Then the black-bearded man turned back toward the beach and Garde came on alone.

O'Bannion's shoulder had stopped bleeding. Deliberately he took a cigar from the box on Miles Garde's desk, lighted it and made himself comfortable in the chair where the girl had been sitting. He scowled thoughtfully for a moment; then stretched a long arm to move the bottle and the glass to a place where he could reach them easily. Footsteps echoed on the rotting veranda.

Miles Garde was going to be surprised to find that he had a visitor, O'Bannion guessed. Miles Garde was not going to be too pleased.

OFFER JOE'S Pacific Bar was old—a place of iniquity.

It squatted heavily on the sand a little back from the white shell of the road while its pale windows peered into the night. A dozen mangy palms threw a black and spidery shadow across the sagging steps which led to the veranda. Down in the shade of the beached luggers a man was singing in a high-pitched and mournful voice. It was hot; the moonlight was heavy with the smell of bougainvillea.

Inside, men crowded against the carved and shining bar which Offer Joe had sent to San Francisco for; men danced with Tonga Sam's dancing girls; men sat at the round tables, with the yellow light of the lamps dripping on their shoulders, while they watched the cards slide beneath the slim fingers of Offer Joe's gamblers. A thin man hunched freckled shoulders beneath a dirty undershirt while he pounded at the keyboard of the piano; brown girls laughed.

Three men sat at a table which had been shoved deep into a corner. They stopped talking as the waiter brought a new bottle and placed it on the slopped table.

"That be all, gents?" the waiter asked in an incurious voice. He mopped at the table with the end of his soiled apron. "Hotter 'an hell tonight, ain't it?"

"Get out!" Cale Enoch said in his heavy voice.

The waiter blinked and then shuffled

away, pushing into the milling dancers. He had been at Fagan's Key a long time; he knew that it was not wise to argue with Cale Enoch—or the men who sailed with Cale Enoch.

Bard Dunne reached a thick hand for the new bottle. He splashed amber liquor into the three glasses; scowled as he leaned forward with his forearms on the table. The lamplight trickled along the scar above his eyebrows. O'Bannion had put that scar there with the swift slap of a gun barrel—four years ago, that was, down in the Andalones.

Dunne said angrily, "He's here—in the Key—an' I happen to know that he's supposed to be at Bottom's Bane loadin' shell. What does that spell out to be?"

Ladar Green spat sourly. He slid forward in his chair and turned his head to watch a girl who danced by with her arms about the neck of a Kanaka pearl diver. Ladar Green was a small man with a face dried like the husk of an aged coconut and shoulders which were too wide for his skinny neck. Cale Enoch said nothing as he turned his glass between thick fingers. Dunne went on.

"It spells trouble, if yuh ask me!"

"Nobody asked yuh," Ladar Green answered spitefully. He sucked at his colorless lips and spat again. "What makes yuh think O'Bannion ought to be at Bottom's Bane?"

"I ain't thinkin'!" Dunne's voice lifted angrily. "I kicked it out of his agent at Liantang—after Ole Skane showed us the letter."

Ladar Green said, "Kind of keep an eye on O'Bannion, don't yuh, Dunne? Afraid he'll put his mark on yuh again?"

DUNNE didn't answer but his eyes were ugly as he lifted his glass and gulped the raw whiskey. Cale Enoch stirred. He was a big man—bigger even than Gibraltar O'Bannion. He gestured harshly and the yellow light glinted on his corded forearms, wrists, eloquently broken knuckles. When he spoke his voice was

low and deep—almost mild. Few men were deceived by that mildness, however.

"Easy," he said to Dunne. "I'll do the talking. Spin your yarn, if you got one to spin."

"O'Bannion's here in th' Key," Bard Dunne went on sullenly. "I run into him outside about thirty minutes ago. All right. If he's here he didn't go to Bottom's Bane. He had a reason for not goin'! That's all I got tuh say."

"What reason?" Cale Enoch asked softly.

Dunne ran a big hand across his face; his fingers touched the smooth line of the



scar. He leaned forward and his voice was hoarse as he spoke.

"Where's Ole Skane, Enoch? He should have been here with the *Nellie* three days ago and you damn well know it!"

Cale Enoch reached slowly for the bottle and watched as the brown liquor lifted in his glass. He drank leisurely. The lamp-light threw uneasy shadows over his deeply lined face and sober eyes.

He said finally, "Yes, Ole Skane should have been here. I had counted on him."

Dunne spat.

"I'll tell you what the trouble is! Skane's bungled things—Skane's a fool anyway. He's got drunk and blabbed the story! That's the reason O'Bannion's here, I tell yuh!"

Ladar Green turned his head and squinted at Dunne with pale eyes. He laughed unpleasantly. Ladar Green was a killer; a vicious and bitter man and quick

with a gun. The red began to crawl into Dunne's neck at the sound of that laughter.

Dunne said slowly, "Maybe you were thinking of something funny, damn you!"

Ladar Green leaned forward with his hands flat on the top of the table. His eyes were like pale and polished marbles against the twisted brown of his face.

"Maybe I was," he told Dunne softly. "What are yuh goin' tuh do about it?"

The music stopped with a tinny crash as the piano player swung about on his stool and called for a drink. Men crowded toward the bar where Offer Joe and his three assistants set out bottles and glasses. The air was gray and heavy with tobacco smoke.

"Maybe I was," Ladar Green said again.

Cale Enoch moved his great shoulders. He lifted a hand and touched his forehead with a tired gesture as he turned to look at Ladar Green.

"There will be no fighting," he said slowly. His voice did not lift, but there was an undercurrent—as cold and passionless as a death wind—rippling through it. "You understand, perhaps? You are valuable to me for a little while yet. Afterward—you can cut each other's throats. I do not care."

DUNNE stared for a moment; then dropped his eyes as he reached for his glass. He drank deeply with a moist, sucking noise of his lips. Ladar Green shrugged his thin shoulders and turned away with lips lifting back from yellow teeth.

The music started again and Cale Enoch went on in his faintly tired voice.

"Ole Skane has not come and that is bad—now that we know where the pearls are. I had hoped to get away tonight."

Ladar Green sat with his back half turned to the other two. He was following the girl, who had danced with the Kanaka pearl diver, with his eyes. She smiled invitingly at him—beckoned. He half rose.

"Sit down," Enoch said.

"We wouldn't live ten minutes in Fa-

gan's Key if the word got out that we've got old Diego's pearls," Dunne said under his breath. "We can't get out of here too soon."

Cale Enoch nodded his great head.

"I have a plan—a good plan. Skane has not come and you have aptly called Skane a fool. Then, too, there is a link in our chain that is weak. It would not do if he would talk."

"You mean Garde."

"Yes."

Shimmering droplets of sweat beaded Dunne's forehead. He wiped them away with the back of his hand. The brown girl danced by again and smiled at Ladar Green. A waiter slouched towards the table.

"Got everything yuh want, gents? How about another bottle?"

The waiter's voice trailed away, died, as Cale Enoch looked at him. He turned hurriedly, shoved his way into the crowd; he glanced back once with a white and scared face.

"Garde is weak."

"I talked with him tonight," Dunne said in a worried voice. "He's scared. That business over Clane scared him."

Ladar Green turned back to the table and reached for the bottle. He drank deeply and then rolled a cigarette between his thin and nervous fingers. It dropped from his lips with the smoke curling upward past his pale eyes.

"That rat!" he said in his flat voice. "That rat! Give me the word an' I'll put a knife in him tonight. He's got a girl up there, Cale——"

"You'll let him—and the girl—alone, Green. I have other plans."

Ladar Green laughed with an unpleasant twisting of his lips as he turned back to watch the dancers. Unseen by Enoch he made a swift motion with his hand; the brown girl saw and nodded.

"It is good that we leave tonight," Cale Enoch said slowly. "For reasons of my own Miles Garde goes with us."

Dunne spat.

"We can't fly," he answered sourly.

Cale Enoch did not move. He sat, slumped a little forward, with the smoky light falling over his shoulders. Two men were boosting a woman to the top of the piano. She sang with a voice which was husky from much gin.

"We will take O'Bannion's schooner," Enoch said. "I have been told that it is a good ship."

"None better," Dunne answered under his breath. He scowled darkly. "I ought to know."

Enoch nodded.

"It will not be hard—too hard. Listen. Garde is magistrate here. Tonight he will send for O'Bannion, tell him that he has found the Diego pearls and arrange for O'Bannion to go with him to get them. He will also arrange for passage for himself and the woman to Liantang."

"You mean you'll let O'Bannion in on this? No, by God!"

THE scar across Dunne's forehead was suddenly livid. He half lifted himself to his feet. Ladar Green watched scornfully.

"Sit down, you fool!" Enoch's voice was undisturbed. "O'Bannion gets no pearls. While *he* is going with Garde you and Green will take possession of the schooner. There'll be no trouble. Knock the mate in the head and drop him over—one white man's the same as another to a nigger."

"What'll you be doin' all this time?" Dunne asked suspiciously. Cale Enoch reached out a great fist and laid it on the table with the broken knuckles upward. He looked at Dunne.

"You had a question?"

"No," Dunne said sullenly under his breath. "Go on."

Cale Enoch jerked his shoulders and his voice lifted a little.

"More is not necessary now. Dunne, you and I will make a little call on Miles Garde. Green stays here. Watch for

O'Bannion. If he comes in follow him. You understand?"

Ladar Green nodded. The other two got up, pushed their way toward the door. Green watched as the night blotted them out. He poured another drink and swallowed it with a quick jerk of his head. The brown girl danced by and he lifted his hand.

She pulled herself away from a Portuguese half caste and came swiftly toward the white man. She was pretty with a soft face and a white flower stark against the blackness of her hair. The Portuguese stared with drunk and lack luster eyes; then turned toward the bar.

Green said swiftly, "Get word to Chuck Lee to meet me in the little room in ten minutes, eh?"

"Yess."

She smiled and dropped a brown arm about his shoulders as she bent toward him. She pulled at one of his ears.

"You 'ave promise Kona thee present, no? You geeve Kona those present first, beeg white man. Afterward Chuck Lee."

Green swore under his breath and his eyes swung back to the doorway. It was empty.

She smiled again and shook her head.

"First thee present."

Ladar Green jerked his shoulders impatiently as he slid to his feet. He thrust his hand into a pocket and pulled out a slender chain of silver. The girl's eyes sparkled as she reached for it.

"Now get a move on, you little cat!"

"Yess."

The girl laughed back at him over her shoulder as she slipped into the stumbling dancers. Green watched for a moment and then lounged to his feet. He settled the gun at his hip as he walked slowly toward the door through which Dunne and Cale Enoch had gone. The white shell road was empty in the moonlight. Green looked for a long moment; then crossed the big room swiftly to where a smaller door was half ajar. He slid through.

MILES GARDE was a stooped, angular man with a face yellowed by fever and hard living. His soiled white coat hung limply from his thin shoulders; a tobacco stained mustache drooped over mean lips. He stopped in the doorway to stare at the man who sat in the big chair beside the lamp.

O'Bannion said casually, "Evening, Garde. You look like you're about ready for an undertaker."

Garde's eyes flickered uncertainly. They dropped to the smear of blood on O'Bannion's shoulder—crept up again. The thin man's right hand reached for his pocket.

"No," O'Bannion said gently. "Oh no, Miles Garde. Mustn't put your hands in your pockets. It's unhealthy."

"I wanted a handkerchief," Garde said morosely.

"Use your coat sleeve," O'Bannion told him. "A nigger once told me that bad men—like you, friend—carry guns in their hip pockets. I wouldn't want you to get hurt."

O'Bannion reached out a lean hand and turned the yellow flame of the lamp higher. He poured whiskey into the glass and sipped at it while he looked at the other from beneath lifted eyebrows. Garde still stood in the doorway. O'Bannion kicked a chair with his foot.

"Sit down, friend. You and I are going to make big medicine in the next few minutes. *Sit down*, I said!"

Miles Garde shuffled forward uneasily and sat on the edge of the chair which O'Bannion had indicated. He pulled a soiled sleeve across his damp forehead. Miles Garde had not forgotten the last visit which Gibraltar O'Bannion had made to Fagan's Key—nor the promise which O'Bannion had made before he left.

O'Bannion jerked his chair into the shadow so that he could see the empty whiteness of the shell road past Garde's shoulders. There was sardonic amusement in his eyes.

Garde said, in an attempt at casualness, "I didn't know you had come in. I'm

glad to see you—always glad to see you, O'Bannion. Glad you came up to the house and made yourself at home."

He mopped again with the damp coat sleeve and tried to smile. The girl moved about in the other room and, at the sound, Garde's eyes flickered toward the doorway.

"Glad to see you," he repeated.

O'Bannion grinned with a sudden flash of white teeth against the mahogany of his face. He reached a hand and pushed the glass and the half empty bottle toward the other.

"Yeah? You lie by the clock, Garde. It just happens that I'm glad to see you though, Garde. You see, I'm interested in knowing just what skullduggery you're up to this time. Maybe you've forgotten but I promised you that I'd break your skinny neck the next time you strayed from the straight and narrow."

MILES GARDE laughed nervously. He reached an unsteady hand for the whiskey bottle and splashed the tumbler half full of pungent whiskey.

O'Bannion half turned his head and his eyes narrowed. Far down the shell road two figures had come out into the moonlight and had turned toward the magistrate's house. Garde drank, straightened in his chair, tried to assume an injured expression.

"You're too free with your talk, O'Bannion," he said angrily. "I happen to be magistrate here and I also happen to resent your implication that I would be mixed up in—"

"I didn't imply it," O'Bannion said cheerfully. "I stated it as a fact."

A trace of color flooded into Garde's sallow face. He started to get up. O'Bannion leaned forward.

"Sit down, you!" O'Bannion's voice was good humored no longer. "Some twenty minutes ago I saw you huddled up in conversation with an old friend of mine. He used to call himself Bard Dunne but he changes names fast. The last time I met him I marked him so that I would

know him again. You understand? Anyone who huddles up in conversation with Bard Dunne is up to no good. What's your little game now, Garde?"

Garde's shallow eyes flitted uncertainly about the room. They rested on the half opened drawer of the desk for a long moment, then traveled back to O'Bannion.

"I don't know what you're talking about, O'Bannion."

"You wouldn't have been talking to Dunne about the Diego pearls now, would you, Garde?"

Miles Garde had been lifting the whiskey glass to his lips again as O'Bannion spoke.



He put it down quickly. His fingers shook so that the liquor slopped onto the table.

"The Diego pearls? I don't know anything about them. You've got a touch of sun!"

O'Bannion jerked forward. The lines were deep in his face; he swung a hand and smashed away the glass which Garde's fingers had reached for. The glass broke with a metallic tinkle.

"Where is Peter Clane, Garde?"

Garde's face was a yellow mask but there was stark fear in his eyes. He lifted his skinny fingers as though to fend off a blow; sweat trickled down his cheeks in tiny rivulets and dripped onto the front of his rumpled shirt.

SOFT footsteps tapped in the hallway outside the door and O'Bannion swore under his breath. He had forgotten about the girl. He knew, without looking, that she was standing there with startled eyes.

She said, "Oh!" then, after a minute, "What is it? What's the matter, Uncle Miles?"

Uncle, O'Bannion thought sourly. Well, Miles Garde was a hell of an uncle, at that. She came forward into the room as O'Bannion straightened. Garde's eyes strayed again to that half open drawer and O'Bannion did not miss the cunning which lifted a corner of the older man's lips.

"Oh yes," O'Bannion said. "It's Annie Oakley back with the bandages."

Miles Garde mumbled under his breath and slouched to his feet. O'Bannion watched. Presently Miles Garde would edge toward that drawer and then O'Bannion would take him by the skinny throat and choke a little sense into him.

Those two dark figures on the shell road were still a quarter of a mile away. They came on slowly in the moonlight. There was still plenty of time.

Garde smirked beneath his stained mustache as he looked at the girl but his eyes were crafty and hard. He gestured with a thin, talon-like hand.

"My niece. She's staying with me. This is Gibraltar O'Bannion, Sarah. O'Bannion is a——"

"Trouble shooter," O'Bannion supplied. "He's thinking of shooting some at Fagan's Key." He grinned at the girl; turned back to Garde. "You see, we've met already, friend. She shot me. Now, if I'm not mistaken, those soft cloths are to bind me up. Right, sister?"

The girl nodded soberly.

"Yes."

She was pretty, O'Bannion saw. Her hair was like the burnished copper of a helmet and she carried herself proudly. Afraid, though. There was a haunting shadow of dread in her eyes and a strained tightness to her face.

Miles Garde moved forward. He patted the girl on the shoulder and licked nervously at his lips.

"Of course you must fix O'Bannion's arm, my dear. A nasty looking wound. An accident, eh?"

O'Bannion laughed shortly as he turned his head. Those two figures were nearer now. Garde was shuffling his feet aim-

lessly but his wanderings took him nearer to that drawer.

O'Bannion said, "Sure, an accident. Tie it up, sister. It'll be all right——"

Miles Garde leaped with clawing fingers. O'Bannion laughed softly as he spun himself out of the chair and lunged at the gun in Garde's claw-like fingers. For a flashing instant he saw fear rippling across Garde's face; then the fear was gone and O'Bannion knew that he had bungled.

A great weight crashed across the back of his neck. The room was whirling with a million lights as he dropped forward to his knees. He couldn't get up. From a tremendous distance he could hear Miles Garde's triumphant, cackling laughter.

The girl, with her copper-colored hair and her scared eyes, had done it.

CHUCK LEE slipped through the small door at the back of Offer Joe's Pacific Bar on noiseless, felt-soled slippers. He blinked in the light of the smoky lamp and looked inquiringly at Ladar Green. In Fagan's Key Chuck was known to be a good man with a knife.

"Come in," Green said. "Shut that damn door. I ain't got all night."

The Chino nodded impassively. He was a young man and carefully dressed; his hands were tucked out of sight in the long sleeves of his blouse as he came forward. There was a knife there, Ladar Green knew—a long and very unpleasant looking knife.

"You took your own time about coming," Green went on sourly. "There's no tellin' when Enoch an' Dunne'll get back. We got to work fast."

"That is true."

The Chino sat gingerly on the edge of a chair and stared at the closed door with expressionless eyes. White men were always in a hurry. He, Chuck Lee, was a philosopher; he could see no reason for rushing headlong through life in order to meet death. His honorable father, who had taught him many things including that quick twist of the wrist just before a knife

was driven home, had cautioned against haste. Still, it was well to seem to agree with the white men.

"All right. Now listen. Manuel's lugger is in Mandarin Cove—less than a mile from where the *Islander* is beached. Your job is to get the girl on the lugger before midnight. Got it?"

"It is very clear."

"Enoch an' Dunne are up at old Garde's house now. They'll leave before long and Garde will send a message to O'Bannion telling him to come to the house. You've got to get the girl before O'Bannion gets there—slip a knife into Garde if you have to."

The Chino still stared at the door with his mild, expressionless eyes. Behind him his shadow was squat and thick against the wall. Green spat.

"I'd like it better if you did slip a knife into him. You understand?"

"It is an easy thing." Chuck Lee's shoulders moved imperceptibly. "A quick thrust downward and a certain twisting of the blade before it bites. I have done it many times."

"It's little enough I care how many times you've done it," Green said sourly. "You get that girl on board the lugger by midnight."

"That, too, is easy—for Chuck Lee."

"You know old Garde's house?"

"As a fisherman knows his net, my friend. You need have no fear. And the pay?"

"Two pearls as big as the ends of your thumbs, damn you!"

THE Chino's expressionless eyes lighted a little for an instant while Ladar Green watched. The revelry, in the big room beyond the door, swirled upward in the night; a man was yelling in a hoarse and angry voice.

"Two pearls. Yes. That is good." The Chino turned his soft eyes away from the door and looked at Ladar Green. "It would not be well to forget—that pay, my friend."

He slid to his feet and the door swung behind him.

Green peered into the gray haze of the big room with narrowed eyes. The brown girl saw him and left her partner; she wore the silver chain about a slim wrist and she was no longer smiling. She stood in front of Green with her hands on her hips.

"You are go away, no?"

Green swore softly as he swung around to face her. When he saw the look in her eyes he swore again. She knew! The man's lips curled back from his broken teeth.

"Suppose I am?"

"You weel take Kona weeth you, no?"

He dropped an arm over her shoulders and tried to pull her to him but she jerked away. Her lips twisted savagely and her voice lifted above the brassy hammer of the piano.

"Peeg! I 'ave know w'at you are do! You 'ave like those girl of Meester Garde, eh? You take those girl weeth you, eh? Kona 'ave hear you say that!"

Her voice lifted suddenly above the babble in Offer Joe's Bar.

"You shall not! Peeg! Peeg! Kona weel stop you!"

Ladar Green struck with his closed fist, struck viciously with all the weight of his shoulder behind the blow. The girl spun about, slid along the floor, lay still. The music quieted with the suddenness of a shot; the dancers stared stupidly. Green leaped for the open door.

A big Kanaka barred the way with a knife in his hand and Green shot once. The Kanaka slumped to his knees and the knife slithered away with the yellow light flickering along its blade. A second shot banged out and then Green was into the moonlight and running swiftly. Those in Offer Joe's did not follow.

Ladar Green stopped at the edge of a palm clump three hundred yards from Offer Joe's lighted doorways. The sand was empty in the moonlight. Green smiled wolfishly. He squatted on his heels to rest

for a moment while he punched out the empty cartridge and slipped a fresh one into the chamber of his revolver. His plan was working well. After a moment he got to his feet again and turned to the southward along the beach.

The sand was hard packed and easy to walk on. He made good time. In three quarters of an hour he had reached the long and rocky point which jutted out into the water and sheltered Mandarin Cove. There was a faint trail; he had no trouble following it in the moonlight.

HE CLIMBED for ten minutes, winding his way up between the Kiawa bushes. The thorns snatched at his bare shoulders but he paid no attention. It was hard work. Sweat streamed across his cheeks and dripped from his chin. He wiped it away with impatient fingers. Then he rounded the last shoulder and Mandarin Cove lay below him in the white moonlight.

The Cove was small—perhaps a hundred yards across—and hemmed in by the towering shoulders of the cliff. A quarter of a mile off-shore a small lugger was a black shadow against the silver of the water; the lantern at her mast head bobbed slowly in the night. Green looked and grunted with satisfaction. Manuel was on time—and the pearls were hidden down there in that hundred yards of moon-washed sand!

Ladar Green started down the steep trail.

The sand was crisp and fresh beneath his feet at last. He turned to where the ancient bones of the wrecked *Islander* lay bleaching on the sand.

A dozen years before the four masted schooner, *Islander*, had been caught by the whirling fingers of a typhoon and flung bodily into her graveyard here in Mandarin Cove. She lay in the moonlight, with her bows deep in the sand and the rotting stumps of her masts like stark fingers against the sky.

Ladar Green went swiftly across the shingle.

He stopped a minute in the deep shadow against the schooner's side and watched the trail over which he had come. Nothing moved. He grunted with satisfaction and slid along the bleached whiteness of the schooner's flank. A dangling rope struck his fingers.

He swung himself up.

The deck was bare of wreckage, still sound. The open cabin companionway was a black rectangle of velvet shadow. Green went swiftly toward it. The steps were still there, he knew; he stepped down cautiously.

"Blacker than a whale's belly," he said aloud.

HE FUMBLLED for a moment in the pocket of his canvas trousers, pulled out the stub of a candle, lighted it. The wick flared yellowly so that the shadows danced on the ruined bulkheads. In front lay the *Islander's* main cabin. Ladar Green stepped forward.

The *Islander* had been a big ship; its main cabin was big—had been magnificent once. There was little left now. Glass, from the smashed mirrors, littered the floor; the paneling was split, ripped away.



The air was heavy with the smell of rot, dissolution, death. Ladar Green didn't notice.

He allowed tallow from the candle to drip onto the table which was still screwed to the deck in the cabin's center; he thrust the butt of the candle into the tallow and held it until it would stand alone. As he turned away his shadow danced mockingly before him on the bulkheads.

He said, half aloud, "Six inches from the

after bulkhead on the starboard side. I wouldn't forget it."

He knelt, brushing away the litter of debris with his fingers. The deck was still solid—as sound as the day the schooner had come off the ways. He tapped with his knuckles; after a moment grunted with satisfaction. A plank lifted under his probing fingers; a two-foot section came away. He thrust his arms, to the elbows, into the black hole.

The candle flickered and guttered as a lazy breath of wind filtered down the ruined companionway. Green straightened with a small, metal-bound chest in his hands.

"Mine!" he said between his teeth. "I'd like to see 'em get these away from Ladar Green! I'd like to see 'em!"

He placed the chest tenderly on the table beside the smoking candle; fumbled with the corroded hasps which held the lid. They loosened finally. Great drops of sweat stood out on Ladar Green's forehead. He shook his head angrily and they splattered into the dust on top of the table.

Inside was another chest—a smaller one, carved from shining mahogany. Green's fingers shook as he lifted it and placed it where the candlelight would fall across it in a yellow flood. The lid stuck a little and the man swore viciously as he shook at it. It came away at last.

"Ahhhhhh!"

The man's breath bubbled out in a great sigh—as though he had suddenly been struck in the pit of the stomach. He wiped at his forehead again.

"All mine!"

They lay there, bedded in cotton, in little trays. There were rows—dozens of them. Pearls! Pearls the like of which few men had ever seen! Great round ones as big as cherries with the cool luster of green lagoons in their depths; pearls with the smoky tints of a sunset sky; pear-shaped pearls tinted with the darkening thunderheads which crawl out of the Java Sea at sundown. Dozens of pearls; hundreds of them.

Ladar Green touched their sleek beauty with trembling fingers. He lifted them, caressed them, lowered them gently back into their cotton beds. The candle light sent dancing flames over their loveliness. Against the bulkhead the man's shadow swayed slowly back and forth.

"Pearls!" he said. "Pearls! And all mine!"

Another puff of hot wind crawled through the ruined cabin and the man stiffened suddenly. He had heard the scrape of footsteps on the deck over his head. He listened with his thin lips lifting above his teeth and his right hand dropping to the gun at his hip.

The sound came again. Tap-tap. Tap-tap. Green closed the mahogany chest with quick fingers, thrust it into the front of his shirt as he backed away. The deep shadow in the doorway of one of the ruined staterooms hid him as he waited coldly, gun in hand.

THE footsteps tapped uncertainly on the companionway stairs; a thin pencil of light stabbed ahead and made a white circle of light outside the cabin. It crossed the threshold—stopped. Behind it Ladar Green could see a dim figure. Green's eyes narrowed as he lifted his gun.

He said thinly, "Drop that light an' drop it quick!"

Someone gasped with a long, shivering intake of breath. The flashlight clattered onto the floor with a musical clang. Green suddenly could smell faint perfume and he knew that it was a woman there in the murky oblong of the doorway just beyond the candlelight.

Green laughed.

"Come on in, you. Get up to that table where I can take a look at you—and keep your hands up!"

The figure moved forward slowly. Green caught a quick glimpse of copper-colored hair which was like a helmet about a face which was too pale—eyes which were unnaturally large. It was Sarah Garde. She wore a man's shirt and riding breeches and

she was staring at the cubbyhole, where Green waited, with fascinated eyes.

The man moved slowly out into the ring of candlelight. With slow fingers he placed the chest of pearls back onto the table while his eyes clung to the girl's face. He licked at his lips and then laughed again.

"This is—nice," he said slowly. "This saves me a lot of trouble."

His left hand shot out, fastened in the cloth above the girl's shoulder.

TEN THOUSAND tiny devils pried at O'Bannion's brain with sharp pot-hooks as he opened his eyes. There was a dull pain in the back of his neck and his ears felt as though they had been stuffed with cotton. Then consciousness came back with a jerk.

He was in Miles Garde's office; the yellow lamp still smoked and sputtered on the desk. O'Bannion tried to move and then swore under his breath. He was tied up like a pig ready for the market. He swore again and tried to pull his arms forward. No good. Hard, new rope bit at his wrists and ankles.

"First she shoots me," O'Bannion said, half aloud. "Then she clubs me over the head. She might, at least, have done me the favor of tying these knots."

No woman had tied those ropes, however. O'Bannion admitted that whoever had trussed him up had done a good job of it. He sat on a heavy, wooden chair with his arms pulled behind and bound and his ankles tied to the chair legs. He pulled again but the ropes didn't give. From the next room he could hear a low murmur of voices.

O'Bannion could see better now. His head was beginning to clear and his brain was working in lightning darts. He pushed his bare toes against the floor and shoved his chair about so that he could see beyond the desk. A heavy and carved war-club lay in the lamplight on the floor. O'Bannion smiled grimly. The girl had used that, he guessed, to rap him across the back of the neck. Too bad it hadn't

been an axe—axes could be used to cut ropes with.

"Ummm," O'Bannion said reflectively.

He scowled at the club a half a dozen feet away—then hitched his chair carefully across the floor until he was above the club. It was black—carved into intricate designs. O'Bannion looked down thoughtfully.

In the next room voices lifted with an angry insistence. O'Bannion could hear Miles Garde protesting faintly in high and whining tones. Dunne's heavy voice silenced him.

For a long moment O'Bannion thought.

"It's worth a try," he said between his teeth at last. "Nobody but a fool would try it—but, then, nobody but a fool would be basted up here like a fat chicken. I seem to qualify on both counts."

The voices had quieted in the next room; footsteps echoed along the narrow hallway. Pushing hard with his toes, O'Bannion screwed his chair back to the other side of the desk. He was staring stupidly at the door as Cale Enoch came through. Behind was Miles Garde's yellow face, Bard Dunne with an unpleasant smile behind his beard.

Cale Enoch said slowly, "Hello, O'Bannion. I haven't seen you since that business in Suva."

O'Bannion yawned widely, then spat.

"It's Cale Enoch, isn't it?" he asked in an indifferent voice. "I heard that they had hanged you—but a man can hear anything. Too bad I didn't stretch your neck down in Suva."

ENOCH made no reply and O'Bannion spat again. Miles Garde stood against the door with his yellow face more cadaverous than ever in the smoky light. Dunne came forward, his red eyes vicious. He bent behind O'Bannion's chair, tested the knots with thick fingers. One of them touched O'Bannion's palm and O'Bannion's fingers closed over it with a steely grip, twisted, bent back. Dunne cried out as the bone broke.

O'Bannion laughed.

"It's a trick, Dunne—like marking a man across the eyebrows. You ought to learn it."

Cale Enoch and Garde watched without moving. Dunne was on his knees behind the chair, holding his broken left hand in the palm of his right. He lunged to his feet; his eyes were murderous as he swung around in front of the bound man.

"You black devil! You'll sweat for that—I'll take your hide off in strips!"

He swung his right fist viciously for O'Bannion's head but the bound man twisted and the blow slid off his shoulder. Dunne whirled about again. He set himself, poised his fist. Cale Enoch's voice stopped him.

"Let him be!"

Dunne whirled around, his lips lifting from his stained and yellowed teeth. He jerked out his left hand with his twisted and dangling finger.

"Let him be, hell! Look at that. I'll beat his brains out and spit on 'em! I been waitin' four years for a chance like this."

Cale Enoch's voice cut through the close room like the swift slash of a knife. O'Bannion watched, his fingers working at the knots. They didn't give. Enoch jerked his hand in a harsh gesture.

"I told you once that the pearls come first, Dunne. I'll not tell you again—I'll put a bullet into you. Maybe you understand?"

Dunne stared for a long moment. Then his eyes dropped. Cale Enoch was a man of his word—and O'Bannion could be taken care of later. He walked around the desk and poured a tumbler half full of whiskey; drained it at a gulp.

Enoch went on in his flat and passionless voice, "Get Green and get out to the schooner. Knock old McGordon over the head and drop him over. Then stand by until I get back from Mandarin Cove. Garde will stay here and keep an eye on O'Bannion."

Gibraltar O'Bannion laughed unpleasantly from the shadow by the wall.

"Going to steal my schooner, eh? Well, Ali Baba, I'd as soon hang you and your forty thieves on the *Stormy Petrel* as anywhere else."

Bard Dunne drank again and then turned toward the door. As he passed O'Bannion he swung his open hand viciously and white welts streaked the bound man's face. O'Bannion's set grin did not change but little lights began to glow and flicker at the back of his eyes.

Dunne snarled, "That's just the first taste of what you're going to get!"

"The next time," O'Bannion said gently, "I'll mark you so that the whole world will know you, my whiskered friend."

DUNNE went on out into the night. Cale Enoch turned to Garde who still stood against the door.

"You'll stay here. Where's the girl?"

Miles Garde lifted an unsteady hand and wiped at his damp forehead. There was fear in his eyes.

"I don't know."

"Find her."

Garde went, shuffling out of the lamplight with dragging steps. Cale Enoch sat on the desk and watched O'Bannion incuriously. A lizard chirruped under the roof. Then Garde's shuffling footsteps came back. He shook his head vaguely as he blinked at the light.

"I can't find her. She's gone."

"Gone where?"

"How would I know? She's just gone—she does as she pleases."

Enoch scowled and then jerked heavy shoulders as he stood up. He looked once more at O'Bannion with his flat, emotionless eyes.

"When she comes back lock her up—she's going with us. You understand?"

Garde nodded dumbly.

From where he sat O'Bannion could see Enoch going down the shell road in the moonlight. A hundred yards away the big man turned sharply to the left and was

swallowed by a clump of velvety shadow. The music, from Offer Joe's Bar, drifted faintly up the beach on the hot air. Half a mile away the ground swell was a silver cream against the sand of the foreshore. O'Bannion turned his attention back to Miles Garde.

He said, "Ever see a man hanged, Garde? It's quite a sight. They twitch and jerk—sometimes they gurgle. You'll probably gurgle."

The older man twisted as though he had been struck; his face was pasty and sick in the lamplight. He shuffled to the desk and picked up the whiskey bottle. A scant half dozen drops trickled out as he tilted it above his glass.

"Empty," he mumbled.

O'Bannion laughed.

"It's a waste of good whiskey, Garde. Whiskey won't do you any good in hell."

Garde's lips twitched loosely. He looked at O'Bannion for a long moment; then turned and slouched out through the door-



way. O'Bannion could hear his steps patting down the hall. The big man's eyes narrowed. He twisted his chair across the floor until it was over the war club which still lay there.

The glass, from which O'Bannion had been drinking when Miles Garde had come in a half an hour before, still stood in the shadow of the big chair. O'Bannion hitched his chair forward, rolling the club with his toes. It touched the glass and he drew it back a little. In the other room he could hear Garde opening a closet door in a search for more whiskey.

"If it works I'm a hero," O'Bannion said

grimly. "If it doesn't I'm more than likely a corpse."

HE SHOVED forward with a vicious twist of his body. The club tinkled against the glass, turned endways, slid harmlessly away. O'Bannion swore. He worked the club back; tried again. No luck. O'Bannion held his breath as the glass tipped, settled back. If it rolled over he'd never make it. He worked with vicious jerks while the sweat trickled down his face; it stung against the raw furrow which the girl's bullet had plowed.

A cabinet door slammed in the next room. Garde would be back soon now. The club was in place. O'Bannion gathered himself, kicked forward with a mighty heave. The glass broke with a musical tinkle; three jagged pieces gleamed there in the lamplight. O'Bannion jerked the chair around until he could get a knee against the desk. Garde's footsteps were scraping in the hallway.

"Here we go," O'Bannion said. "Happy landings!"

He shoved hard with his knee. The chair tipped onto two legs. He went to the floor with a crash and his reaching fingers touched the knife-like edges of the broken glass. Sharp pain stung him as his hands closed about the largest piece. Miles Garde peered from the doorway with a gun in one hand and a whiskey bottle in the other.

"What—what——?"

O'Bannion stared up from where he lay on his side. He must keep Miles Garde occupied for a little while. The older man slouched forward, his eyes suspicious. O'Bannion grinned sardonically.

"I was climbing out of the window, Pop. When I got to thinking of you trotting at the end of a rope I laughed so hard that I couldn't sit up—so I rolled over on the floor, Fatty."

O'Bannion's fingers were working desperately. He could feel the ragged edge of the glass bite as he dug at the ropes; his fingers were moist and sticky. The

glass slipped and red hot pain rippled along his forearm. Garde hesitated uncertainly as he stood there with the whiskey bottle hugged to his chest.

O'Bannion said, "I remember Sid Ringer, Garde. He squalled like a cat when we put the rope over his head. Nice shiny new hemp, it was."

If the old man would only open that bottle, O'Bannion thought. That would give him all the time he needed. Garde's fingers were shaking; he licked uncertainly at his lips. Then O'Bannion's eyes darkened triumphantly. Garde was placing the gun on the desk, pulling at the bottle cork.

"You'll make a good looking corpse, Garde. Your eyes'll bug out like grapes."

Garde dropped the cork with shaking fingers; the bottle neck chattered against the rim of the glass. O'Bannion worked. He could feel the tight ropes giving a little. He tightened his burning fingers and jabbed again. The ropes loosened, he jerked his aching wrists apart.

Miles Garde lifted a tumbler of whiskey to his lips, threw back his head and drank with long gulps. He choked a little and reached for the bottle again. O'Bannion moved an arm forward cautiously; his fingers closed about the smooth handle of the war club. He pulled it toward him. The older man was lifting his glass again.

"Ahhhhh—!"

The glass dropped from Garde's fingers; it crashed on the floor and the pungent odor of the whiskey swirled around O'Bannion's head. Garde swayed a little, turned, slumped—face downward—across the desk. As he slipped to the floor O'Bannion saw the thing that had done it—the haft of a knife which had been driven deeply between the other's shoulder blades.

O'Bannion reached for the desk, pulled himself erect; the ropes about his ankles still hobbled him to the chair. His fingers closed on the war club.

Chuck Lee, the Chino, stood a dozen feet away with his slanted eyes watching. The lamplight flickered along the blade of

a knife—the mate to the one which was sheathed in Garde's skinny back. His hand lifted to throw.

O'Bannion jerked his arm back and heaved the war club with a vicious twist of his shoulders. The ropes at his ankles tripped him and he fell forward against the desk but, as he fell, he saw the spinning handle of the club smash against the Chino's face; drive him backward.

Glass spattered in O'Bannion's face as Chuck Lee's knife missed—struck the lamp instead. The light went out; an unpleasant odor of spilled kerosene was heavy on the close air. Then scarlet flames licked across Garde's desk, leaped higher as they reached a pile of papers. In the dancing light O'Bannion saw that the Chino had twisted to his feet, was bounding toward the open window. Miles Garde's gun was cool under O'Bannion's fingers.

He shot once and knew that he had missed. The roar of the gun was muffled and dull in the ancient corridors of the old house. Red flame had touched a reed screen, was running toward the tinder dry ceiling.

O'BANNION dropped to his knees and pulled himself along the floor until he could reach the window which opened to the sea. The chair bumped awkwardly against the backs of his legs; the ropes cut at his naked ankles. He reached bleeding hands for the sill; pulled himself up.

Fifty yards away the Chino was running in the moonlight. O'Bannion shot and saw the bullet kick up a little spurt of white shell in front of the runner.

"Never could hit anything in the moonlight," O'Bannion said sourly under his breath.

The heavy gun spat a long tongue of red flame; jumped against O'Bannion's hand. The Chino sagged to his knees, rolled over in the shell. O'Bannion watched grimly. Chuck Lee did not move again.

The fire whooped upward with a crack-

ling and growing roar behind O'Bannion. The heat bit cruelly at his naked shoulders as he yanked at the knots, which bound his ankles, with lacerated fingers. One came away. O'Bannion swore again and worked grimly against the moment when that scarlet hell, a dozen feet away, would sweep over him. The flames swept across the ceiling and bits of red hot embers dropped on the man's shoulders.

The knot loosened at last. O'Bannion leaped for the window, swung himself over the sill and dropped to the cool sand below.

He stopped in the shade of a palm clump a hundred yards from the burning house; shrugged his shoulders as he dropped Miles Garde's gun into his own empty holster and looked back.

"It's better than hanging," he said aloud. "You'd have hanged, Miles Garde."

Ribbons of crimson flame were shooting out of the windows of the old house; a thin streamer of fire crept out and ran, cat-like, to the dry eaves. They exploded into a roaring caldron of flame; smoke steamed slowly upward in the moonlight.

O'BANNION went slowly down the shell road which led to Offer Joe's. He was tired, he reflected bitterly, and there was much to be done yet tonight. People were running from the doors of the Pacific Bar; their shouts drifted faintly to O'Bannion's ears. They were streaming up the shell road to where Miles Garde's big house was a roaring funeral pyre.

O'Bannion slid into the shelter of a palm clump and let them go by. They yelled with drunken excitement.

"Look at 'er burn! Wheeee! Le's go, boys!"

He waved a bottle above his head and ran with a drunken weave to his shoulders. Behind him came others. O'Bannion watched sardonically.

"Cattle!" he said half aloud. "Poor cattle, at that!"

He spat and turned his steps toward

where the light streamed from the open doors of Offer Joe's Bar. The yells grew fainter. O'Bannion looked back once. Black figures bobbed against the red glow of the fire.

One of Offer Joe's bartenders stood on the veranda with his soiled apron hiked up about his waist. He pulled his eyes away from the red glow up the beach and looked as O'Bannion came up the steps.

"What's up?" he demanded in a heavy voice. "It's Miles Garde's house, ain't it? How'd it get fire?"

"I might have put a match to it—but I didn't," O'Bannion told him shortly. "I want whiskey."

The man stared with curious eyes. He noted the dried blood on O'Bannion's shoulder, his gashed fingers and started to speak again but thought better of it. He rubbed a hand through the gray bristle on his cheeks and led the way inside.

The big room was empty except for two men who sat with their heads on the tops of sloped tables while they snored noisily. The bartender slid a black bottle across the bar, placed a cloudy glass beside it. O'Bannion drank. The whiskey warmed him, drove away that buzzing in his head.

"Stranger here, ain't yuh?"

The bartender mopped with a soiled rag. He was a fat man with watery eyes and no neck. O'Bannion poured another drink and regarded him across the rim of his glass.

"Not exactly, friend," he answered. "I've been getting acquainted right sudden. Where's Mandarin Cove?"

"Up the beach about two mile," the bartender answered. "It's around that point of rocks yuh see stickin' out there. That's where th' old *Islander* was aground in the typhoon."

O'BANNION drank and then swung about slowly. His ears had caught the faint creak of door hinges. The small door, at the end of the bar, had opened a crack. O'Bannion's hand dropped to his gun. The door opened wider. O'Bannion

shrugged his shoulders and let the gun alone. He had caught a glimpse of a girl's face.

She came out into the smoky lamplight and walked slowly to where O'Bannion leaned against the bar. She was pretty, after the fashion of Island women—a delicate face the color of aged amber, dark hair with a torn white blossom drooping over one ear. There was a great bruise across one cheek. Her eyes smouldered sullenly as O'Bannion looked without interest. Then his eyes quickened.

He swung toward her suddenly and his elbow struck the whiskey bottle and knocked it onto its side. He thrust out a hand, fingers closed about her wrist. He lifted it so that the yellow light of the lamps flooded over the narrow chain of silver which she wore.

"Where did you get that, sister?" O'Bannion's voice was harsh, compelling. "Where'd you get it?"

That was the silver chain which Peter Clane had worn about his wrist for seven years.

The girl was not afraid. She stood with her head thrown back and her eyes on O'Bannion's face. The bruise glowed darkly across her cheek.

"You are thee one who ees call O'Bannion, no?"

The smouldering light flared up again in her eyes; her voice shook with suppressed passion. O'Bannion nodded. Behind the bar the man in the dirty apron watched with disinterested eyes while he mopped up the whiskey which O'Bannion had spilled.

"I'm O'Bannion. Where'd you get that chain?"

"I 'ave heard thee story, eh? Maybe you weel keel those fellow who 'ave geeve Kona thees chain, no?"

"Maybe I will," O'Bannion told her grimly. "Where'd you get it?"

"Ladar Green 'ave geeve theese chain to Kona. He 'ave make love to Kona. He 'ave say he is take Kona away weeth heem on thee lugger of thees Manuel Ar-

ruda but he 'av lie. He 'ave send thees Chuck Lee to breeng thees white woman of Meester Garde's to go weeth heem on thee lugger!"

O'Bannion nodded.

"So he sent the Chino, did he?"

"Kona 'ave leesten w'ile he talks weeth thees Chuck Lee. Ladar Green ees take thee pearls, girl—all. He ees leave een thee lugger."

"Where's the lugger?"

"At thees Mandareen Cove."

"That makes several little things clear," O'Bannion said in a tight voice. "Green killed Peter Clane, too, eh? Killed him and robbed him of the pearls!"

O'Bannion's face was suddenly old in the yellow light; the lines about his mouth were valleys of shadow. He swung about, strode toward the door. The fat bartender looked up hurriedly.

"Hey, feller. How about payin' for this bottle uv whiskey yuh knocked over?"

"You can charge it to Ladar Green—or Cale Enoch," O'Bannion said harshly. "I'm charging a few things to them!"

HE WENT across the veranda and out into the moonlight. As he went along the hard sand of the beach he could hear the shouts of Offer Joe's customers coming back to finish the night. A dull glow, with an occasional burst of flame, was all that marked the spot where Miles Garde's big house had once stood.

O'Bannion walked swiftly. He skirted a palm clump which was deep in shade and then stopped suddenly as a darker shadow grew out of the sand in front of him. He dropped his hand to the gun at his hip; jerked it free.

"Easy," a sour voice warned him. "It's O'Bannion, ain't it? I seen yuh comin'."

"McGordon!"

There was swift relief in O'Bannion's tone. He stepped forward so that he could see better. McGordon was a good man to have along in a fuss—and there was going to be plenty of fuss!

"Yeah, it's me. I seen all the fireworks

up there on the hill an' I heard the shoot-in' so I figured I'd come ashore an' take a little walk. Figured yuh might of got yourself into some trouble. I'm a fool that way!"

O'Bannion laughed shortly as McGordon slid out of the shadow and into the soft moonlight. A heavy gun sagged at the old man's hip; he dropped the butt of a rifle on the sand.

"I never thought the time would come when I'd be glad to see that ugly mug



of yours, Mac, but a man lives and learns. There's hell to pay here on Fagan's Key tonight. Clane's dead."

O'Bannion's lips tightened bitterly as he went on.

"Enoch and his crew murdered him—got the pearls. Old Garde was in on it—he's dead now. Dead and his house is burned over the top of him. The rest of Cale Enoch's crew is at Mandarin Cove. We're heading for there, Mac."

McGordon spat.

"So we are," he said in his flat voice.

O'Bannion led the way; they went with swift strides and did not talk. The moon was high overhead now; in its light the long point, which shielded Mandarin Cove, lay black and forbidding. As they reached the shadow of the rocks O'Bannion halted, waited for McGordon to come up beside him. They rested a minute. McGordon looked curiously.

"They seem to of cut yuh up some, O'Bannion," he said in a dry voice. "Creased your shoulder, eh?"

O'Bannion laughed mirthlessly.

"A woman did that, Mac—old Garde's

niece. She's mixed up in this business some place but I don't know just where."

"Tried to kill you, huh?"

O'Bannion's lips twitched into a sour grin as he jerked at his cartridge belt. He spat.

"She wasn't just practicing."

"I never knew a woman who could shoot worth a damn anyway," McGordon said. He slapped viciously at the cloud of insects which buzzed about his white head. "Where does Cale Enoch figure in this?"

"I don't know for sure but this is the way I get it. Enoch saw the letter that I took from Ole Skane and learned that Clane had located the pearls. He, with Dunne and Green, came on to Fagan's Key probably expecting Skane to follow with the *Nellie*. They killed Clane. Then the *Nellie* didn't show up and they began to get jumpy."

O'BANNION stopped for a moment. Old McGordon took a worn pouch from his pocket and stuffed rank tobacco into a cavernous cheek. Behind them the bay rested like a sheet of silver in the moonlight. The *Stormy Petrel* pulled gently at her anchor chain; the lantern at her masthead bobbed in slow circles. A mile away another schooner had anchored since sundown.

O'Bannion went on in a level voice. "One of Tonga Sam's dance hall girls put me on the track, Mac. I saw her half an hour ago. She was wearing a silver chain about her wrist—that chain belonged to Peter!"

The big man's voice was hard. He thrust out his fist suddenly, opened his fingers so that McGordon could see the shiny trinket which lay there. The latter spat; swore under his breath.

"Yeah. I remember it. Peter Clane's dead all right."

"Ladar Green gave the chain to Tonga's girl—she told me that. She was jealous—crazy jealous. Green and old Garde's niece are putting the doublecross onto Enoch and the rest of the crowd—getting

the pearls and pulling out tonight in a lugger."

"Tonga Sam's girl spilled the yarn, eh?"

"Part of it. The rest is a guess but it's close enough. The girl told me one thing, though. Ladar Green is in Mandarin Cove—now. I want one look at him over gun sights!"

Old McGordon laughed harshly—a dry sound like the rustle of wind over flinty sand. He turned toward the dim trail which led up through the kiawe trees.

"Let's be goin'," he said.

LADAR GREEN said, "Take it easy, Lissy. You an' me are goin' to get to be friends—good friends."

The girl stood still, as though she had been turned to stone by the sight of the twisted man beside the table. The candle guttered and smoked in the eddy of hot air; behind Green his shadow was a distorted giant dancing liquidly against the ruined bulkhead. Insects circled in a slow cloud.

After a long moment Sarah Garde asked slowly, "What do you want? Who are you?"

The man rested his broken hands on the table and stared at her across the flickering candle flame. There was a touch of madness in his deep-set eyes. Riotous living, nights of dissipation and days of danger, had carved deep lines down his leathery face; had twisted and turtured his body.

He said at last, "I want you, girl. You're beautiful. I've wanted you since I first set eyes on you."

"No!"

The girl's voice was flat, dispassionate. She stood with her arms at her side and the yellow light flooding over her bright hair; the changing shadows laid soft fingers across her face.

"I want you, girl. Listen! I'm rich. *Rich!* I'll buy you anything. I'll make a great lady out of you."

Ladar Green's voice lifted excitedly but he still stood with his hands on the table.

In front of him the top of the mahogany chest shimmered with reflected light. Green reached thin fingers and stroked the sleek wood.

"Why are you here? What do you want?"

"You've got to listen to me, girl!" The madness deepened in the man's eyes. "I tell you you've got to listen to me! I'll take you away. London, Paris. Rome. Oh, I've known them all before—and I wasn't Ladar Green, a pearl pirate—then! Name the place, girl, and I'll take you there. I've got to have you!"

"No!"

THE girl's face was like carved marble with the yellow light in bars across her face. Her eyes swept slowly across the inside of the cabin, paused at one of the ruined staterooms, moved on again. She half turned but Green's voice stopped her.

"Look at me, girl!" In the shifting light he seemed to straighten; the coarse, harsh lines of his face were softer as though another man—long dead now—tried to break through the casnet which held him. "I have known other places, girl—soft lights and music and good women. I threw them away. I tell you I threw them away!"

His voice rose to a hoarse shout which echoed hollowly in the musty closeness of the cabin. His knuckles were white and strained across the backs of his clenched fists as they rested on the table.

"I'll get it back. All of it! You understand? I'm rich and I'll get it all back. You'll come with me, girl, and we'll get it back together. New York. Vienna. Paris. I'll take you wherever you want to go. What's your name, girl?"

"Sarah."

She answered without any volition of her own. It was as though she stood there listening to another speak—a stranger who stood beside a candle in the ancient cabin of a ruined ship.

"Sarah! It's a nice name, girl. I like

it. I'll make you happy! I'll give you more things than any woman has ever had before."

"No." The girl's voice was scarcely a whisper. The lines were deepening in Ladar Green's face again. His eyes were crazy and smouldering pools.

"Wait, you don't understand. Look!"

HE JERKED forward suddenly, pulled at the lid of the mahogany chest with shaking fingers. It loosened. He shoved the chest across the table; pulled away the cotton. Light flickered across the pearls in little ripples. They lay there, breath-taking in their beauty, while the girl looked. She stared with wide eyes.

"Pearls, girl! Pearls, and they're all mine. I'll share them with you. I'll give you half of them. All of them, if you want! Ahhhhh, the beauties!"

He reached a thin hand to touch them caressingly; then lifted his head to look at the girl. His twisted face was almost soft again.

"They're like you, girl—beautiful. I could appreciate beautiful things—once. You'll come with me—Sarah?"

The hysteria, which had been plucking at the girl's brain, swept over her in black waves. She lifted her hands to her face; began to laugh with harsh, mirthless gasps. The man watched with black anger welling upward into his eyes.

"Go with you? Oh, my God!" Her laughter climbed upward in the hot air; swirled through the yellow candlelight. "Go with you! I'd kill myself before I'd let you lay one of your filthy paws on me! Get away! Get away!"

Ladar Green slid around the table with cat-like liteness. His mouth twisted upward as he struck—a vicious, open-handed slap which drove the girl backward against the bulkhead. She sagged down onto the ruins of a settee and stared vacantly. A thin trickle of blood marked the corner of her mouth.

Ladar Green still stood by the table and his eyes were puzzled as he looked down.

He lifted a hand and drew it slowly across his face. He looked older all at once; more twisted and stooped.

At last he said hoarsely, "I'm sorry for that—sister. I've never struck a—good woman—before."

He walked forward slowly until he was so close that he could have touched her but his hands hung limp at his sides. The candle was burning lower; a little river of wax had trickled along the table and dripped to the deck. The light danced up and down on the butt of the gun at the man's hip.

"I'll not hurt you, girl," he went on with a puzzled note in his voice—as though he was a little surprised at what he was saying. "I wanted you——"

His voice trailed away suddenly as Ladar Green stiffened, whirled about. His ears had caught the creak of a door being slid back; his right hand dropped to the gun butt.

"My God!" he said between thin lips. And again, "My God!"

A tall man stood, holding himself erect with both hands braced against the crumbling wood of the stateroom doorway. The light flickered yellowly over him—a young man with a gaunt and unshaven face and a stained bandage which crossed his naked chest. His eyes were like holes, burned with a red hot iron, in a faded blanket.

"Peter!"

The girl swayed to her feet, crossed the cabin swiftly to slide an arm about the other's waist. Ladar Green did not move. He stood, his feet a little apart, while he stared with puzzled eyes.

"So you didn't die, eh?" he asked harshly at last. "I was a fool not to cut your throat!"

Peter Clane tried to step forward; he swayed and a fit of coughing shook his wasted frame. The girl steadied him while Ladar Green watched.

"Peter," she was saying in a soft voice, "you shouldn't have got up—the bleeding will start again. Here. Let me——"

"I'm all right," Peter Clane said

hoarsely. "I heard your voice. I knew you were in trouble——"

He sagged forward to his knees, tried to hold himself, slid to the floor. The girl dropped beside him; she lifted his head with frantic hands.

"Peter! Peter!"

"I see it now," Ladar Green was saying in a flat and toneless voice. "You kept him here—been taking care of him. You were coming to him tonight."

The girl lifted her head and stared at him with blazing eyes. She was beautiful, magnificent as she slowly got to her feet in the flickering light. Her hair had loosened until it was a copper sheath about her face.

"You did it!" she said in a slow, terrible voice. "I loved him and you have killed him. May God send your soul to rot in hell for ten times ten million years and may every second of it be black torment!"

The cabin was silent with the musty silence of death for the space of a dozen



heart beats. Then Ladar Green lifted his hand again and wiped at his forehead.

A cold voice said, from the companion-way, "A very pretty speech, my dear. Perhaps I can help God out—at least I can start Green's smelly soul whistling on its way to hell."

Ladar Green whirled, his right hand dropping wickedly. Scarlet flame spat from the doorway; the roar of the gun rolled back and forth between the rotting timbers. Powder smoke boiled up, acrid and unpleasant, in the hot air.

Ladar Green had whirled halfway around; the half drawn gun clattered to the deck beyond the table. Green's right

hand was a spattered and broken thing which he lifted and looked at curiously in the wavering light of the candle.

"Just lift your other hand and hold it still, friend Green. You may live five minutes longer that way!"

Cale Enoch stood in the doorway which led to the companion, a smoking gun in his hand. He watched for a moment and then stepped through. His eyes shifted to the girl, the man at her feet; then they swung back to Ladar Green.

"Double-crossed me, eh? There have been others that have tried that, you rotten ape! They got the same thing that I'm going to dish out to you."

Ladar Green was tough, hard; there was no fear in the shallow opaqueness of his eyes. He blinked at Cale Enoch as his mouth twisted into a harsh line. Blood trickled down over his smashed fingers; dripped to the littered deck.

He said, "Go on and shoot, you black hound! What the hell are you waiting for?"

Enoch laughed coldly.

"There's plenty of time. I never spoil a pleasure by hurrying it—a thing which you would not understand, my thick-skulled friend."

Green spat and said nothing. His face had frozen into a dried and lined mask but his eyes watched with hooded and cobra-like malice. Cale Enoch leaned against the rotting wood of the doorway and went on in his jeering voice.

"Presently I shall put a slug through your belly—maybe two slugs, Green. Then I shall take the pearls, which you have so kindly got for me, and I shall take your red-headed friend over there in the corner and I shall go out to Manuel's lugger. You have been very considerate. You have made all the arrangements."

"You'll let the girl alone," Green said thinly.

Cale Enoch laughed. He shifted the heavy gun to his left hand.

"Come here, girl!" The woman did not move. There was a ruthless undercurrent

in the big man's voice as he repeated his command. "I said, *come here, girl!*"

For the space of a heartbeat his eyes swung away from Ladar Green. Green whirled like a striking rattlesnake; his wounded hand smashed out the flickering candle, flung it against the bulkhead as he dropped, his good hand reaching for the gun beneath the table. Enoch's gun *spanged* and the dull glow lit the cabin redly for an instant.

Green's voice was calling to the girl. "Run, damn you! There's an alleyway forward——"

His voice was smothered by the roar of guns. In a double flash the girl caught a glimpse of Cale Enoch crouched against the bulkhead. Green on his knees beside the table. A bullet smashed into the timbers behind her; clouds of ghostly smoke drifted across the dim rectangle of the doorway to the after companion. She stumbled forward, found the alleyway, ran frantically through the blackness.

She fell once, bruising her shoulder cruelly. Behind her she could hear Ladar Green's jeering laughter punctuated by the spang of gunfire. Her groping fingers found broken steps with the dust and decay of the years thick upon them. Above her was a patch of barred moonlight. She climbed.

The fresh air was cool and sweet against her hot face. As she went across the sloping deck she heard Ladar Green call out once in a muffled voice. She dropped to the sand in the dark blot of the schooner's shadow.

GIBRALTAR O'BANNION slid the last few feet and dropped onto the sand of Mandarin Cove in the shade of a twisted kiawe tree. McGordon, scrambling down like a cat behind him, stopped.

"Wait," he said.

O'Bannion nodded. He, too, had heard the muffled report of a gun. McGordon came across the sand. A hundred yards away the *Islander* lay bleached and white

in the moonlight. The night was quiet again.

"It came from the schooner," McGordon said sourly. "The girl didn't lie to you—there's the lugger waitin'."

O'Bannion jerked his shoulders impatiently. Then he pointed. There was a satisfied note in his voice.

"We're just in time for the party, Mac. There's a boat putting off from the lugger. There she is—coming out into the moonlight now."

McGordon grunted. "I see 'er. What's your plan?"

"Watchful waiting, Mac. We'll get down the beach into that palm clump and see what happens. When that boat from the lugger gets into good shooting distance break an oar for them. Then we'll wait for that bunch in the schooner to come out."

They lay in the black shadow beneath the palms and waited. Old McGordon worked the lever of his rifle and brass cartridges flipped out onto the sand. He picked them up, wiped them carefully against his undershirt, fed them back into the magazine. The boat was halfway to the beach now. Two hunched figures swung steadily back and forth; the moonlight flashed on the white blades of the oars. O'Bannion lifted his head.

"At it again," he said sardonically under his breath. "It'll save us trouble."

A single shot, muffled and indistinct, had echoed from the rotting ship. It was followed by a half a dozen more. Old McGordon slid more deeply into the sand. He turned his head, spat—then cuddled the rifle stock against his shoulder.

"I'll give 'em another hundred yards," he said. "This moonlight's bad for shoot-in'."

O'Bannion nodded—then swore.

A white figure straightened on the deck of the schooner, ran swiftly, dropped over the rail. In a minute it was swallowed by the shadow; then reappeared, stumbling awkwardly across the sand in the moonlight.

"Trouble," O'Bannion said sourly. "That's old Garde's girl—the one who clubbed me across the neck."

McGORDON didn't answer. He was watching the boat which bobbed forward a hundred and fifty yards off-shore. He reached a gnarled thumb and pulled back the hammer of the rifle; it clicked softly.

The sand dragged at the girl's feet. She stumbled once, dropped to her knees. Then she was up again and running frantically for the shelter of the palms where O'Bannion lay. A gun banged from the deck of the rotting schooner and sand jumped wickedly ahead of her.

A man's voice, hoarse with anger, belated across the moonlight. Cale Enoch's voice.

"Come back here, you little rat! I'll put the next bullet between your shoulders."

"Hold it, Mac!" O'Bannion snapped.

He was too late. McGordon's rifle spat a slender rapier of flame, jerked upward. Two hundred yards away the boat from the lugger slewed around while one of the rowers looked stupidly at the smashed oar in his hand. McGordon was yanking at the lever of the rifle.

O'Bannion saw Cale Enoch's big shoulders crouched by the stump of the *Islander's* foremast; the moonlight flickered along the barrel of the gun in his hand as he lifted it. O'Bannion shot and swore as he saw that he had missed. That came of using another man's gun, he thought bitterly. Cale Enoch had slid back to the shelter of the companionway. The girl stumbled into the shelter of the palm clump.

"Get down," O'Bannion told her harshly.

She stumbled to her knees beside him, gasping painfully. He pushed her down with a rough hand so that one of the palm trunks sheltered her. In the dim light he saw that the shoulder of her shirt was torn; there was a trickle of drying blood across one cheek. McGordon shot

again; dropped the butt of the rifle from his shoulder while he pried fresh cartridges from his belt and fed them into the magazine.

"Got 'em," he grunted under his breath. "The tide's runnin' out an' they'll play hell gettin' ashore now!"

The boat had swung about and the two rowers worked frantically with their wrecked oars. They were heading back toward where the lugger waited. A shot banged from the *Islander's* deck and a bullet spat into the sand a dozen feet to the right of where old McGordon lay. The old man kicked himself around so that he was facing the schooner.

"Enoch's there by the companion," O'Bannion said softly. "Drive a couple of slugs in there and see if you can nick him, Mac." He looked back over his shoulder at the girl. "How many more of them are there in the schooner, you?"

She stared at him with steady eyes. When she answered her voice was flat, uncaring.

"A small man—twisted and dried up."

"That would be Green," O'Bannion said in a grim voice. "You pick nice company, sister. Anybody else?"

"Peter Clane."

"Peter Clane!"

She nodded dully. O'Bannion jerked back on his knees beside her. McGordon's rifle spanged twice in quick succession and splinters jumped from the *Islander's* deck.

THE girl went on in an emotionless voice, "He's dead. He might have lived—if he hadn't tried to help me. The bleeding had stopped."

O'Bannion stared with puzzled eyes. Absently he rested his gun on his knee and wiped damp fingers against the canvas of his trousers.

"Peter Clane's there—on the *Islander*, girl?"

"They shot him—that was last Thursday. Shot him through the chest and took the pearls. They thought he was dead

but the bleeding stopped. He was getting better—then tonight——”

“You took care of him,” O'Bannion interrupted harshly. “Why?”

The girl's face was white and dim in front of him. She brushed her hand across her forehead with a tired gesture.

“He was my husband,” she said. “That's reason enough, isn't it?”

O'Bannion swore bitterly under his breath. Old McGordon, a dozen yards away, shot again—then once more. There was no sound from the deck of the wrecked schooner.

“Peter Clane was a friend of mine,” O'Bannion said in a slow voice. “I was looking for his murderers. Why did you club me over the head back there in Miles Garde's house?”

“I didn't know,” the girl told him dully. “You asked where he was. I thought that you were like the rest—and had found out that Peter was still alive.”

“Well, you did a good job with that club,” O'Bannion grunted. “Keep down behind the tree, sister. I'll be back.”

He turned away and crawled swiftly across the sand to where old McGordon lay, peering across the sights of the rifle. McGordon turned his head.

“I see we got company.”

“Peter Clane's over there in the cabin of the *Islander*, Mac.”

“Dead?”

“Maybe. She thinks he is.” O'Bannion jerked his head toward the spot where the girl lay. “Enoch and his crowd jumped Clane last Thursday—put a bullet through his chest and left him. There's a chance he's still alive.”

“Where does she come in on this?”

“She's his wife—she says.”

“The hell!”

McGordon spat. He pulled back the hammer of the rifle and wormed himself deeper into the sand. The roar of the gun rolled back and forth between the black cliffs which walled the cove. The hot shell struck O'Bannion's shoulder as McGordon jerked the lever down.

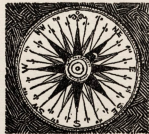
“Hold it up, Mac,” O'Bannion said curtly. “Enoch and Green have been having a friendly little argument in there—it's a safe guess that Green's either dead or hurt badly. Enoch's alone. I'll have a talk with him.”

“He'll put a bullet into yuh,” McGordon said morosely. “Why not smoke him out?”

“There's a chance that Pete Clane's still alive, for one thing,” O'Bannion answered. “Another thing is that we haven't got all night. Bard Dunne is loose still. Pretty soon now he's going to figure that someone is putting the double-cross on him. He'll pick up a half a dozen toughs at Offer Joe's and come smoking down here in the Cove.”

“My God!” McGordon said softly under his breath. And again, “My God! It's Clane all right! Cale Enoch's carryin' him!”

O'Bannion whirled toward the schooner. The moon was in mid-sky now and the bleached deck, a hundred yards away, was



as plain as though an arc light beat down upon it. O'Bannion heard the girl suck in her breath in a long, tortured gasp.

Cale Enoch was walking slowly up the *Islander's* deck carrying a limp figure in his arms; he took care that Peter Clane's body made a shield between himself and the palm clump. O'Bannion swore bitterly as he saw what Enoch was doing.

“This moonlight's bad for shootin',” old McGordon was mumbling. “Still, I might ——”

“No!” O'Bannion told him. “That means that Clane's alive still. He'd be no good to him dead. Wait!”

He watched while Cale Enoch propped

the limp figure where a section of the schooner's rail had been torn away. Once he thought that he saw Clane try to lift himself; he couldn't be sure. Enoch squatted behind the wounded man and the moonlight glinted on the gun in his hand.

He called out, "O'Bannion!"

HIS harsh voice carried cleanly across the sand to where the three waited. McGordon started to get up but O'Bannion's hand pushed him back. O'Bannion motioned for silence; listened intently. He heard it again—a faint scrape, the tinkle of a falling pebble. Someone was coming along the trail from Fagan's Key.

"O'Bannion! I want to talk to you."

O'Bannion said softly, "We're about to have visitors, Mac. Get back to the foot of the trail. If it's Dunne—any of his crowd—start shooting."

The old man nodded. He slid back into the shadows and, a moment later, O'Bannion heard the dry rustle of the brush as he entered the kiawe thicket. Cale Enoch's voice lifted again.

"O'Bannion! Damn your black soul—speak up!"

"What do you want?"

"I want to talk with you, O'Bannion!"

"Talk away. You'll do little enough talking presently—with a rope about your neck!"

Cale Enoch's harsh laughter drifted through the moonlight and O'Bannion knew that the big man was unafraid. That laughter would warn those who came over the trail but it couldn't be helped. If Dunne and his men were coming into the Cove they would have to shoot it out anyway. O'Bannion waited for the first sharp spang of McGordon's rifle. It didn't come.

Enoch was shouting across the night.

"Big words, O'Bannion. It'll take a good piece of hemp to hold Cale Enoch. Man, I hold all the cards and you'll play my game for me!"

"You hold deuces, Enoch!"

McGordon should have reached the foot of the trail by now, O'Bannion thought.

His forehead was damp and he wiped away the sweat with stiff fingers. His hands prickled and smarted as though they had been closed on a fistful of red-hot needles.

"I hold aces, O'Bannion!" Cale Enoch's voice was mocking. "I've got one of them here in front of me. Maybe you understand?"

BEHIND him O'Bannion could hear the girl's deep breathing. There was no sound from the foot of the trail where McGordon waited. O'Bannion turned his head to look toward the sea. The boat had got back to the lugger; while he watched a dim figure climbed to the rail and swung a lantern slowly back and forth. O'Bannion counted under his breath. Five times. The lantern was still for a moment; then it moved back and forth again. Three swings, this time.

"Speak up, O'Bannion!"

"What's your bargain, Enoch?"

"Oh ho! You don't like my ace in the hole, O'Bannion? All right—listen! First you will send the girl to me, you understand?"

"And if I don't?"

"Then I will shoot this good friend of yours through the belly—twice! Maybe you understand that!"

"Let me go," the girl whispered hoarsely at O'Bannion's shoulder. "Peter's alive. Let me go."

"No!" O'Bannion's voice was harsh.

"You don't understand." The girl's voice was flat and dead. "He means it—he'll do what he said."

"Be quiet," O'Bannion told her. He shouted at Cale Enoch. "Go on. I'm listening."

Enoch's laughter bellowed up in the moonlight but O'Bannion wasn't listening. His ears had caught the gentle rustle of the kiawe bushes again. McGordon was coming back.

Enoch said, "After you have sent the girl to me your mate will make a torch and go down to the edge of the beach. He

will light it and wave it up and down three times. Then he will stop. Presently a boat will come in from the lugger—my good friend Green, who is now dead, made careful preparations, eh? All right."

"O'Bannion!"

It was McGordon's cautious whisper. O'Bannion turned his head as the old man crept up beside him. A second figure, dim and shadowy, waited behind.

"Wait a minute," O'Bannion said curtly. "Listen."

Cale Enoch laughed again. Then his heavy voice boomed across the sand.

"Then I will take the pearls and the girl and we shall get into the boat. You will not shoot, O'Bannion, because the girl will stay in front of me all the time. That will be very amusing, eh? What do you say?"

"And if I tell you to go to hell, Enoch?"

"I shall sit here, my good friend O'Bannion. I am quite comfortable. Yes. And presently, while I am sitting here, one Bard Dunne will come down the trail with a half a dozen men who will be glad to cut your throat for just one of the smallest pearls in the little chest. Oh yes, Bard Dunne will be here. Those pearls are worrying Bard Dunne right now!"

Old McGordon whispered harshly, "It was a girl, O'Bannion. The same one who tipped you off to the Cove. She's here."

"Why?"

"She's lookin' for Green—figure it out if you can. I can't."

"O'Bannion!" Enoch's voice bellowed through the moonlight. "What's your answer, man? You'll get Clane and I'll get the pearls! What's your answer?"

"Let me go," the girl said evenly. "It's the best way. He'll kill Peter."

"Be quiet," O'Bannion told her roughly. "Where's Kona, Mac? Bring her up here. Quick!"

THE girl came. She still wore the flower in her hair; it glowed whitely through the shadows. On the bare deck

of the *Islander* Cale Enoch squatted behind his living fort and waited.

"You were looking for Green," O'Bannion asked. "Why?"

The girl gestured vaguely. A wind, almost cool now, rustled across the flinty sand and felt good on O'Bannion's naked shoulders. The dry palm fronds grated harshly together; great piles of clouds were beginning to lift out of the sea and crawl across the sky to where the moon dipped lower.

"Why?" O'Bannion repeated impatiently.

"Kona 'ave hear w'at those man say—thee one w'at you call Meester Dunne, no? Kona 'ave come to tell her man. That ees all."

McGordon started to crawl back toward his hole in the sand. O'Bannion stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Mac. What did Dunne say, girl?"

"He 'ave say Ladar Green 'ave stole thee pearls—'ave w'at you call put on thee double-cross. He 'ave told those fellow at Offer Joe's about thee pearls. He 'ave say that they weel come to thee Cove an' keel Enoch and Ladar Green—spleet thee pearls among them."

O'Bannion jerked his shoulders wearily.

"So you came to tell Green?"

"Yess."

"Three hours ago you hated him."

"Eet ees fonnee." The girl put out her hand slowly. "Kona does not understand either—yet, he 'ave love Kona so she 'ave come."

Old McGordon grunted and spat harshly as he fingered his rifle. Cale Enoch shouted again from the schooner, his voice lifting angrily.

"What do you say, O'Bannion? You'll get nothing when Dunne and his rabble gets here!"

McGordon said between his teeth, "Let me have a try at him, O'Bannion. I'll shoot careful—them clouds is gonna be over the moon before long now."

"No," O'Bannion told him curtly. "Wait." He turned back to the native

girl. "How soon will Dunne be here, girl?"

"First they dreenk much wheesky at Of-fer Joe's. Maybe ten-fifteen minutes they come. You weel take Kona to Ladar Green, no?"

McGordon suddenly stiffened, pushed himself up to his knees. He swore viciously as he pointed with the rifle barrel.

"O'Bannion!" His voice crackled shrilly. "It's that girl—Clane's wife. Come back here, you empty-headed little fool!"

O'Bannion clapped a hand over the old man's mouth, choked his words back. McGordon sat heavily on the sand as O'Bannion shoved him back.

"What th' hell——?"

"Let her go," O'Bannion told him. He cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted. "Enoch, we've accepted your terms, damn you! The girl's coming."

CALE ENOCH'S mocking laughter floated back in the moonlight. The girl was halfway to the wreck, now. She walked slowly, head down and her feet dragging across the sand.

"I see that she's coming, O'Bannion," Enoch shouted. "You'll never regret your bargain."

Old McGordon swore. The hammer of the rifle clicked viciously as he yanked it back. O'Bannion whirled toward him.

"Put that gun down, you old fool! I know what I'm doing."

"You're gonna let him have her? By God, you're not!"

Old McGordon cursed in a harsh, metallic voice. The girl was almost to the wreck; the dark shade stretched in front of her. Fleecy strings of cloud were beginning to crawl across the moon. Cale Enoch shouted again.

"Send that doddering mate of yours down to give the signal to the lugger, O'Bannion. I'm in a hurry."

"Make a torch," O'Bannion told his mate swiftly. "Get down at the edge of the water and swing it up and down three times. Then wait there—there'll be a boat

put off from the lugger. When it beaches take care of whatever men there are in it. You understand?"

"I'm beginnin' to," McGordon said sourly. "What's your plan?"

"I'm going onto the *Islander*." O'Bannion's voice was careless, a little pleased. "I don't like to shout at Cale Enoch across a hundred yards of sand."

Old McGordon stared for a moment and then turned away with his rifle under his arm. O'Bannion could hear him gathering dry kiawe twigs into a bundle. He could no longer see the girl; she had been swallowed by the sable shadow which clung to the schooner's flank.

O'Bannion pulled his belt tighter; jammed his gun firmly into its holster. A soft hand touched his arm. The native girl was looking up at him.

"You weel take Kona to Ladar Green?" she asked.

"Presently," O'Bannion said.

He turned away, went swiftly toward the water keeping close to the sheltering shadows. The rocks of the point were ragged against the sky in front of him. The water was warm and pleasant on his bare feet; he went slowly, easing himself across the slippery rocks. The sea reached to his waist, crept up against his chest as he waded out.

He was far enough out now. He stopped for a moment to get his bearings. The *Islander*, at her berth in the sand, was a good three hundred yards away; he could see the black shadow where Cale Enoch squatted on the deck, waiting. A match flared, burst into red flame. That was McGordon and his torch, O'Bannion thought. A patch of cloud sailed across the moon for an instant and McGordon's thin shoulders stood out against the leaping flame.

O'Bannion shoved away from the rocks, began to swim.

He reached the edge of the shadow of the rocky point, paused for a moment. The cloud had passed and the water was like a silver sheet in front of him. He lived

and swam parallel to the beach with a powerful stroke. When he came up cautiously for another breath he saw that he was almost opposite the *Islander*.

He dived again.

THERE was sand under his feet again and he straightened a little to look—then grunted with satisfaction. He was well beyond the schooner; hidden from Enoch by her lifted stern as long as the latter kept his position in the bow. O'Bannion glanced toward where the lugger waited. A boat was putting off.

A heavy bank of clouds was creeping toward the moon but O'Bannion knew that he couldn't wait. At any minute now he might hear drunken shouts which would tell him that Bard Dunne and his men were coming over the trail. He looked at the *Islander* again. There was no sign that he was observed.

"Your lucky day, O'Bannion," he said sourly. "Let's go."

He splashed through the gentle surf and ran swiftly, stooping low. His wet trousers flapped at his legs; the sand was soft



and unfirm beneath his bare feet. He heard Enoch shout once and wondered if a gun would spang in an instant now; if he would feel the tearing rend of a bullet.

It didn't come and he guessed that Enoch had shouted from his position in the bow, believing that O'Bannion was still in the palm grove. The shadow, beneath the stern of the wrecked schooner, was fifty yards away now. He flung himself forward while the air ripped into his lungs in great gasps.

The shadow reached out welcoming arms. He had made it. For a moment he leaned against the rotting timbers; sweat was pouring across his face. His lacerated hands still smarted from the salt water. Then he straightened, dropping a hand to the gun at his hip.

It was gone!

For a moment he was stunned—then he swore terse, blistering oaths which crackled under his breath. It was what came of using another man's gun; it hadn't fitted his holster and had dropped on his swim up the beach. He damned Miles Garde for having such a gun.

Suddenly he was angry, bitterly angry. The whole business was so useless, stupid. He had swum a half a mile, made a target out of himself across four hundred yards of sand and now he had no gun. Well, no matter!

He swung angrily along the schooner's flank, his feet quiet against the sand. A rope's end brushed against his face. He seized it; threw his weight against it—cautiously at first, then harder. It held. Above him Cale Enoch's voice boomed out into the night.

"O'Bannion! O'Bannion, you black baboon! Sing out, damn you, or I'll put a bullet into this bird up here anyway. Sing out, I tell you."

The pile of black clouds was going to miss the moon—pass under it. A single black streamer floated across its face and the light faded for a moment. O'Bannion went up like a cat.

He dropped noiselessly onto the deck. A dozen feet away Cale Enoch crouched by the broken rail, his gun in his hand. O'Bannion could see Peter Clane's inert figure lying at full length on the deck; the girl was a white huddle beside him.

"O'Bannion!" Enoch shouted again. The boat was midway between the lugger and the beach now. O'Bannion slid forward noiselessly. A broken length of capstand bar lay in front of him. He stooped, picked it up as he went by.

"O'Bannion!"

"Here I am," O'Bannion said softly.

CALE ENOCH whirled as though he had been shot. His gun swung up. The flame spat in O'Bannion's face as he leaped, swinging the club. Indifferently he heard the vicious spat of the bullet as it struck the shattered stump of foremast behind him. Enoch jumped back but he was too late; the club smashed against his forearm and the gun dropped from his limp fingers. It slithered across the deck toward O'Bannion. He kicked it across the broken rail.

Down below he heard McGordon's triumphant shout. Cale Enoch rushed and O'Bannion gave way before him until they reached the cleared deck amidships. Enoch's eyes were pools of fury. O'Bannion hurled his club out onto the sand and waited.

Suddenly Cale Enoch was laughing—sinister and mirthless laughter which bubbled up from deep within him. His right hand closed into a fist and O'Bannion thought, "I didn't break his wrist, then." He didn't care.

Enoch said, "You would stand up to me, O'Bannion? By God, I shall be sorry to kill you!"

For a second he stood there. The moon had come out again, white and pitiless. The light streamed over Enoch's naked and knotted shoulders; it dripped along his arms. He was a head taller than O'Bannion; fifty pounds heavier.

O'Bannion thought, "If he ever gets those arms around me he'll crack my back like a match stick."

Cale Enoch rushed, his head down and his long arms flailing. O'Bannion side-stepped and drove an iron fist at the big man's heart. The blow jolted O'Bannion to his heels; it would have killed a lesser man than Cale Enoch. For the first time a thin spear of doubt wedged into O'Bannion's brain. Cale Enoch had brushed that blow aside as though it had been a tap. O'Bannion dodged, slid along the rail just

out of reach of the big man's reaching hands.

"Come on, damn you! Come on and fight!"

O'Bannion didn't answer. He was going to need all of his breath. He ducked beneath one of Enoch's sledge-hammer swings and stabbed at the other's face with vicious knuckles. He saw dark blood spout from beneath Enoch's left eye. O'Bannion struck again—and then twice more and the dark streak widened down the side of the other's face.

"Fight, don't dance, damn you! Come on, O'Bannion. Let me get my hands on you."

Enoch came in with his big hands up to protect his face. O'Bannion drove another blow at the big man's body; it was like pounding against aged oak. His knuckles ached. He slid backward. A broken spar tripped him as Cale Enoch started another rush. O'Bannion saw the blow coming, tried to throw himself aside.

He was too late.

Enoch's sledge hammer fist caught him high on the head, bowled him across the deck like a fairly struck ten pin. He struck on his shoulders; without any will of his own he twisted and was on his feet again. Cale Enoch seemed to be a vast distance away; he was coming closer. O'Bannion could see his eyes and the blood which trickled down the side of his face.

He must get away; he must not let Cale Enoch get his great arms about him. That thought began to beat through the haze which had wrapped itself around his brain. He must get away until his head cleared and he could fight off those swinging, battering fists.

HE STABBED at the cut below the big man's eye again and the pain, which rippled through his hand and up his forearm, helped to drive those curling fog tendrils out of his brain. Cale Enoch's left eye was closing fast; it left him blind on that side.

O'Bannion could see better now;

strength was flowing back into his sagging knees but his head still buzzed as though countless bees swarmed there trying to get out. He could hear the girl calling to him but he could not understand what she was saying. Cale Enoch stopped for a minute, turning his head sideways so that he might see better. O'Bannion's stabbing knuckles had cut to the bone and the blood dripped in black spots to the moonlit deck.

"You think that you can beat me, damn you!" Enoch's voice was a hoarse rumble in his chest. "Fight me! *Fight me!* Let me get my hands on you!"

O'Bannion felt better now. He circled cautiously to get on the big man's blind side. Enoch turned, shaking his big head slowly. He stretched out his right hand, lifting the other to protect his face. For a split second the opening was there. O'Bannion stepped forward, drove his right hand viciously for Cale Enoch's throat.

"Ahhhh!"

Cale Enoch sagged back onto his heels. He coughed drunkenly. O'Bannion smashed at him again—once again. The big man's hands had dropped to his sides now; he stood, swaying ponderously, on spread feet. O'Bannion's right fist stabbed wickedly and Enoch sagged forward.

"Fight, damn you!" he rumbled.

O'Bannion knew it a second too late. He had been careless; too eager. As he slid in for the blow that would drive Cale Enoch to the deck he saw one of the big man's hands lift, dart forward. It clamped about O'Bannion's forearm with a paralyzing grip. Enoch sagged to his knees, pulling O'Bannion with him.

"Fight me! Fight me!"

The words were bubbling moistly from between Enoch's battered lips. O'Bannion hammered viciously at that face in front of him but the big man's grip tightened inexorably. He pulled O'Bannion in closer—closer; an arm like a young tree trunk, slid across O'Bannion's back.

O'Bannion twisted frantically but that arm was like a band of iron. Cale Enoch

was bending him backwards with the slow deliberation of a great machine. Pain stabbed through O'Bannion's muscles like a douche of ice water.

All at once his mind was curiously clear. He could see the patterns of the moonlight on the bleached deck; he could see dark spots where they had fought. Old McGordon was calling from an immense distance. There were other shouts—drunken yells which climbed upward in the night.

"I'll kill you—O'Bannion—I said—I'd—kill—you——"

CALE ENOCH'S voice sounded furry and thick. Somehow O'Bannion knew that Cale Enoch was dying—it had been that blow in the throat. He knew, too, that Cale Enoch would break his back before he died.

Then O'Bannion found that he was seeing something else; he knew that it must be his mind going. The pain was like a caldron of fire which was eating his whole body. He looked again and the thing was still there—curiously clear.

A head had lifted above the level of the deck; behind it was the dark curtain of the cabin companionway. It was a small head and it had a face—withered like the husk of an old coconut. Only the eyes were alive—they burned spitefully against the lined brown of the face.

"Your—back—will pop—like a—stick——" Cale Enoch was saying. His breath was coming in great gasps; he coughed and the cough strangled in his throat.

O'Bannion's mind was detached. He watched the queer head. It had a neck, now; shoulders were sliding forward—an arm. The face was strained and drawn as though the body, behind it, pulled a great load. A hand was stretching across the deck and there was a black gun in the hand.

O'Bannion was mildly surprised.

The gun wavered up and down and O'Bannion watched as its muzzle described small circles. The lips, in the withered

face, had crawled up above the teeth; O'Bannion could see the moonlight glisten on the little beads of sweat which stood out on the brown forehead. It spoke and the words seemed to boom against O'Bannion's aching eardrums.

"We'll—go—to—hell—together—Cale Enoch," it said clearly.

The black muzzle of the gun was pushing forward—forward—an inch at a time. It rested against Cale Enoch's spine a foot from O'Bannion's face. A brown and crooked finger felt waveringly for the trigger. O'Bannion watched.

Bang!

The flash blinded him; he felt the hot flame lick at his face. Cale Enoch's arms loosened suddenly as though the strength had run out of them as water runs out of a hose. Clear, cool air flooded into O'Bannion's lungs and then the moonlight was suddenly blotted out by a curtain of blackness which smothered him.

OLD MCGORDON said, "I wish to hell I had some whiskey."

O'Bannion could hear old McGordon's voice from a great distance. He tried to sit up as consciousness flowed back into his brain. His body was one great pain; with a vast effort he rolled over on the deck.

McGordon thrust an arm about his shoulders and lifted. The blackness was going now. All at once things began to take on form. He was on the *Islander's* deck, O'Bannion saw. McGordon was there and Peter Clane and Peter Clane's wife. Then, suddenly, he remembered. He shook his head violently, staggered to his feet.

"Yuh all right?" old McGordon was asking.

O'Bannion spat. His mouth tasted of blood; a dull pain throbbed across his back. He was feeling better now, though.

"I'm all right. How long was I out?"

"Maybe ten minutes," McGordon told him. "I got here just after Green blew

a hole through the middle of Cale Enoch's back. He did you a good turn."

O'Bannion nodded. He looked for a moment at the spot where the big man lay in the moonlight. Beside him Ladar Green was sprawled forward on his face with the black gun still gripped in his fingers. Kona, one of Tonga Sam's dancing girls, crouched beside the outlaw with her hair over her face. She was crying, O'Bannion saw; the moonlight streamed across her shaking shoulders.

"Dunne, Mac?" O'Bannion asked suddenly.

McGordon spat and jerked his head toward the dark ridge across which came the trail from Fagan's Key. O'Bannion listened. Men were coming along that trail—many men. They shouted drunkenly in the night; snatches of maudlin song crawled upward.

"They'll be here in five minutes," McGordon said softly. "We better be goin', O'Bannion."

"Yes," O'Bannion answered. "We better be going."

He walked slowly to where the native girl wept with her fingers tangled in Ladar



Green's stiff hair; stooped to touch her on the shoulder. She did not move.

"You'd better come," he told her kindly. "You can do him no good—now."

She got up slowly, turned away. O'Bannion took the black gun from Ladar Green's stiffening fingers; thrust it into his own holster. It was the second gun he had taken from a dead man that night, he reflected bitterly. He went forward along the deck with dragging steps.

Old McGordon dropped over the rail to the sand below as O'Bannion stooped above the thin figure of Peter Clane. The other's eyes were open. His lips moved with an effort as he looked up at O'Bannion.

"I'm—much—obliged," he whispered.

Together O'Bannion and the girl lifted him; lowered him into McGordon's upstretched arms. The girl slipped over the rail. The shouts of Dunne and his men had grown louder. O'Bannion knew that they had crossed the crest of the point—were onto the trail which led through the kiawe thicket and into the Cove.

"How about the boat from the lugger, Mac?"

McGordon jerked his head toward where the whaleboat was nosed into the sand. Two men sat quietly amidships, waiting.

"They didn't cause no trouble. Green hired 'em; they don't give a damn who their passengers are as long as they get their pay."

"Good! Get Clane into the boat and wait for me. Give me your cartridge belt and the rifle."

Old McGordon stooped, slipped his arms under Peter Clane's shoulders. The girl lifted and they dragged the wounded man to his feet. O'Bannion turned back to the splotched deck. Something bulky, in the shadow of the rail, caught his eye and he bent forward to look. It was a square chest, bound with metal. O'Bannion knew what it was; he pushed it out into the moonlight with a bare foot.

Diego's pearls.

The moonlight had brightened again. Fifty yards away McGordon and the girl went slowly across the sand with Peter Clane's arms about their shoulders. A drunken chorus was coming from the kiawe thicket at the upper end of the Cove. O'Bannion limped across the deck to where the native girl still sat by Ladar Green. He stooped, lifted her, shook her a little. She looked up at him with dull eyes.

"You can't do him any good now," O'Bannion told her gently. "He's gone,

sister. Come on—it's time you were pulling out."

SHE made no resistance as he led her to the rail, lifted her over. She waited at O'Bannion's command while he went back to the shadow of the rail and picked up the square chest. He reached it down to her.

"Go down to the whaleboat. Give the chest to McGordon. You understand?"

"Yess."

She went slowly, stopping once to turn and look back.

O'Bannion went slowly along the deck to where Cale Enoch lay on his side with the moonlight flooding over him. O'Bannion knew that he was dead but he knelt on one knee and felt for a pulse in the big man's wrist. There was none; dark blood stained the bleached deck. As he turned away O'Bannion felt very tired, all at once.

Ladar Green lay on his face with his legs stretched into the ruined companionway. O'Bannion dragged him clear. The smaller man had been shot to pieces down there in the dark cabin but he had pulled himself up the steps to settle his debt with Cale Enoch. Pearls, which a woman would one day wear about her throat, had done that!

He smiled grimly.

It was time to go. The shouts, from Bard Dunne's men, were close. There was time yet to do one thing more though, he thought.

HE TOOK a waterproof match case from the pocket of his trousers and groped his way into the crumbling companionway. The match flared above his head and he saw what he had hoped to find. Dry rubbish littered the rotting deck; he scraped it into a little heap against the tinder-like bulkhead.

Another match flared between the big man's palms and, in its red glow, his face was lined and old; the crimson light danced across the tight lines of his mouth, the patches of gray at his temples.

The dry splinters caught; a tongue of

flame leaped fiercely upward. It grew larger; began to crawl across the deck on swift legs. For a moment O'Bannion watched. Then he went back into the moonlight with the scarlet flames lifting behind him.

He stopped for a second beside Cale Enoch. The big man's face was set in a sightless grin. O'Bannion rolled him onto his back; folded his hands across his breast. He pulled Ladar Green beside his mate; the two of them would have a fitting funeral pyre.

O'Bannion said soberly, "You were right, Cale Enoch. You didn't hang. I'll meet you in hell, maybe."

It seemed to O'Bannion that Cale Enoch's sardonic smile seemed to deepen. He lifted his hand in a vague salute as he turned away. The flames had become a crackling roar now; a thin pillar of smoke climbed up into the moonlight.

Down on the beach McGordon was shouting in a strained and worried voice. O'Bannion picked up the rifle, which leaned against the rail, jumped down to the sand. Three hundred yards away a dark figure burst out of the kiawe thicket and staggered across the sand. Two other figures followed—half a dozen more.

Peter Clane, the two women were in the whaleboat. Two Kanakas leaned against their oars; old McGordon stood waiting at the bow, ready to shove off as O'Bannion came up.

"Let's go," he said.

They shoved hard and the boat slid smoothly across its anchoring of sand; the water lifted it and the two men ran it out until they were waist deep in the warm surf. The boat swung around slowly until its nose pointed toward the lugger. O'Bannion's waiting ears caught the sound which he had been expecting.

"In with you, Mac!"

The drunken songs, which Bard Dunne and his men had been singing, had given way to hoarse and angry shouts. Old McGordon clawed his way into the boat. O'Bannion shoved viciously against the

stern, pulled himself up. The Kanakas swung back hard against the oars.

Old McGordon said under his breath, "By God, they ain't seen us yet! They're runnin' for the *Islander*—she's afire, O'Bannion."

"Yes," O'Bannion said.

HE STRETCHED himself in the stern sheets with the rifle cradled across his arms. His mouth was dry and unpleasant; his left side ached with a dull, stabbing throb. Cale Enoch had broken a rib or two, he guessed.

Flames were shooting above the ruined deck of the *Islander* now; a thick column of smoke was steaming into the sky. A soft breeze had come up and it carried the dry crackle of burning wood. O'Bannion looked back over his shoulder. Sarah Clane crouched there with her husband's head in her lap; the native girl was beside her.

"Get down—as low as you can," O'Bannion said evenly. "They'll see us in a minute. Get some speed out of those rowers, Mac!"

Bard Dunne and his men had been hidden from O'Bannion by the burning schooner. Now he saw them again. There were eight of them; he recognized Dunne's black beard. He was pointing and his voice drifted faintly across the hundred and fifty yards of water which separated them from the beach.

"In the boat! Give me—rifle—damn you! Come on!"

They were running toward the foreshore with Dunne in the lead. O'Bannion settled himself, slid the rifle forward. Behind him old McGordon swore harshly at the heaving Kanakas.

O'Bannion saw one of the running men throw up a hand, caught the thin spit of flame. The sound of the gun rolled across the water a second later. The bullet spat into the water a dozen yards ahead of the whaleboat. Other men were stopping, dropping to their knees. Flashes, like orange fireflies, twinkled across the

sand. A bullet splashed water in O'Bannion's face.

"Let 'em have it, O'Bannion! Pump hell intuh 'em, man! What's the matter with yuh?"

O'BANNION was very tired—it was an effort to hook a thumb about the hammer of the rifle, to pull back. The hammer snicked softly; black figures danced in front of the sights. The muzzle of the rifle steadied and spat a slim rapier of flame. The kick of the butt sent a thin pain jarring through O'Bannion's shoulder. He jerked slowly at the lever.

"Yuh got 'im," old McGordon was yelling crazily. "Row, you black monkeys! Row, I tell yuh!"

The stretch of water, which led to the beach, was growing wider, O'Bannion saw. Old McGordon's revolver banged above his head with a vicious roar. Another black figure slid before O'Bannion's sight and he pulled the trigger, dreading the swift stab of pain which would follow. The figure on the beach crumpled into a dark heap.

Mandarin Cove danced with scarlet shadows; flames from the *Islander* were shooting fifty feet into the pale moonlight. The yells from the beach were fainter now; the little geysers, which the bullets kicked up, were falling astern. The range was too great for hand guns.

A bullet struck the gunwale beside O'Bannion, ripped off a long splinter screamed off into the night. He had forgotten; they had a rifle back there on the beach. Bard Dunne had a rifle. He could see the light flicker on the barrel where Bard Dunne lay in the sand.

He shot slowly—with a vast deliberation—and each time he dreaded the red hot pain which would flicker through his shoulder, race down along his side, as the gun butt stabbed back. The hammer fell with a sharp and metallic click; mechanically O'Bannion fumbled at his belt for more cartridges. Old McGordon was yelling in a high and exultant voice.

"We'll make it, O'Bannion. We'll make it, damn your soul! Row, you!"

O'Bannion's fingers were numb and awkward. He dropped the cartridge, which he had pulled from his belt, and it fell into the moonlit sea with a little splash. He fumbled for another. The brass case was cool against his fingers as he shoved it into the chamber.

The rifle butt jumped beneath his chin once more.

Then he saw that the orange fireflies no longer flickered along the sand. The scarlet tinged smoke, boiling out of the burning schooner, was a canopy above sprawled and still figures. O'Bannion rested his head on his folded arms. He was tired—tired as hell.

A voice called out, "Ahoy, there in the boat! Who are you?"

Old McGordon was answering. His thin voice drove through the fog which was grasping at O'Bannion's brain with thick fingers. With terrific effort O'Bannion sat up; the lugger was a dozen yards away.

"We want to come on board," McGordon was saying.

A thin man stood by the lugger's rail. He spat and lifted a hand to rub at his bald head. The Kanakas rested on their oars, their chests lifting and falling from the hard row.

"Who are you?" the man on the lugger repeated in an uncertain voice.

McGordon swore viciously.

"What th' hell difference does it make?" he demanded. "We're coming aboard! We want passage to the *Stormy Petrel*, you understand? She's anchored around the point."

The man at the lugger's rail laughed shortly, shook his head.

"The *Stormy Petrel*? Not me! That's O'Bannion's schooner—and Manuel does not tangle with Gibraltar O'Bannion! You can row back there where you came from. Send the Kanakas back with the whale-boat."

O'Bannion slowly stood up, leaning against the rifle for a cane. The moonlight was bright across his battered face as he looked.

"Row," he said to the Kanakas. His voice lifted a little to the man who stood beside the rail of the lugger. "We're coming on board. It's O'Bannion who's telling you, friend."

The bald man stared for a long minute as the whaleboat crept forward, came alongside the lugger. He wiped again at his forehead.

"Come aboard," he said in a husky voice. "Come aboard."

THE *Stormy Petrel* ran easily with a following sea and the wind on her quarter. The late afternoon was cool and pleasant. A Kanaka, with the sun flashing across his naked shoulders, padded aft with glasses and a bottle with a black label across it.

Gibraltar O'Bannion took one of the glasses, spilled amber liquor into it, held it toward Sarah Clane. She smiled and shook her head while she ran slim fingers through the hair of the man who sat beside her in a canvas chair. Peter Clane stretched a hand for the glass. O'Bannion filled a second one.

"How," he said gravely.

Peter Clane's smile was sober as he looked at the other man. He lifted his glass with slow deliberation.

"May Fate send you as good a friend as you have been to me—to us—Gibraltar O'Bannion. How!"

They drank. O'Bannion jerked his shoulders and grinned as he placed his glass on the deck beside his chair. The old half cynical, half amused look had come back into his eyes; he had not changed except for the bandage about his left hand and the discoloring bruises across his forehead.

He said, with his voice lifting, "Joe Fish! You come quick fella, eh?"

Forward, by the schooner's rail, Joe Fish turned reluctantly from the conversation which he had been having with Kona, late one of Tonga Sam's dancing girls. He padded along the deck.

"Me come."

"Joe Fish, you stopum along main cabin, eh? You catchum chest belong along me. You brungum that fella chest topside quick fella, eh?"

"Me catchum."

After a moment the Kanaka came back. He placed the chest beside O'Bannion's chair, padded forward with a flash of white teeth against the brown of his face. O'Bannion stooped, lifted the lid, took out the smaller mahogany box. For a long minute he sat there holding it on his knees while he watched the lift and fall of the schooner's white deck.

He said at last, "You lost a silver chain back there at Fagan's Key, Peter?"

The afternoon sunlight fell across Clane's pale face, touched the surprise in his eyes. He reached thin fingers for his left wrist; looked down.

"Why—yes. It doesn't matter."

O'Bannion opened the lid of the mahogany box; pulled away the cotton. The pearls lay there, shimmering in the soft shadows of the dying afternoon. A king's ransom in pearls. O'Bannion got up slowly, placed the box in the girl's lap.

"You lost a chain and you found a fortune, Peter," he said quietly. "Take good care of both."

He turned and went slowly down the deck to where old McGordon shouted shrilly at one of the Kanakas. The wind was cool and fresh; salt spray tasted good against O'Bannion's lips.

Old McGordon said sourly, "Ten thousand times have I told 'em to belay a line with an over-an'-under turn! Am I a Job that there's no end to my patience?"

O'Bannion grinned.

"You and I," he said, "will now have a drink, Mac."

*When Killing Ceases to Be a Necessity and Becomes a Sport—
for Some Men It Loses Its Appeal*



THE NO-GAME HUNTER

By S. OMAR BARKER

TRIL MALLORY stood on the porch and watched three men and three horses come slowly down the trail that zig-zagged steeply across the snow-mottled slant of Scrub Oak Mountain. Even in the growing November dusk she could guess who they were. Only one man was

riding. The other two were walking and leading their loaded horses. The dark burdens rocked heavily with the motion of the horses. Against a snow patch the girl's eyes caught the sharp, sprangly outline of antlers. She knew already that the two burdens must be deer, but that glimpse of huge, branchy antlers lashed to the sad-

dehorn on the lead horse gave her a little thrill of eager excitement. What a monster buck it must be!

Tril hurried to the end of the porch, the better to watch them. She was a tall girl, and slender. She moved, even in her manish cowboy boots, with a grace as easy and smooth as that of a lean-flanked cougar. A sharp, anxious little frown notched itself between her dark, long lashed eyes as they strove against the dusk to make out for certain which horses were carrying the two deer, and which men were leading them.

She could not deny her heart a quick, eager little pick-up in its beat when she saw, for sure, that it was Joel Budlong's blaze-faced bay that was carrying the larger deer, with Joel's own lank figure out ahead, leading him. Squatty Tom Otis led the second horse, and it was Curly (short for "Curly Wolf") Dunavant who was riding.

Every year all the Chug Valley cowboys took a day or two off during the deer season in November, went up into the mountains and brought back nice fat bucks. All of them, that is, except Joel Budlong. Without saying why, big, quiet Joel stubbornly refused to become a hunter. Sometimes when they rubbed the salt on him too strongly about it, he borrowed a rifle and went. But he never brought in any game.

"Reckon I'm too lazy for a deer hunter," he would shrug. Or: "Yeah, I see a nice buck all right, up on the Burn. Reckon I must of missed him—anyway he run off. Guess I ain't much of a nimrod—but what's the difference?"

In a country where hunting was the all-popular pastime, where folks rated a man pretty much by his ability to step out and bring in game, where a queer, camp-smelly, grime-grizzled old mule-rider like Catty-mount Collins stood ace-high, even among cowfolks, because he had killed more bear, deer, bobcats, wolves, and mountain lions than anybody else—in such a country it did make a difference. Joel Budlong's fellow cowboys razed him and hurrawed him un-

mercifully because he never killed any game. Didn't even own a rifle—though at a target he could beat most of them shooting one. Behind his back a good many surmised that Joel was kind of a sissy.

In her heart Tril Mallory knew he wasn't, but she was a sensitive girl, high spirited and maybe a little proud, and it stirred her to exasperation to have folks give him that name. Why couldn't he get out and hunt and bring in game like other Chug Valley men? Like Curly Dunavant, for instance, who always wore jack-ets and gloves made of buckskin from the deer he had himself killed? Curly told her he was going to have the next fine deer he brought in mounted—for her.

"That is," he had laughed, a little patronizingly, "if ol' Jellyfish Joel doesn't beat me to it!"

She had told Joel about it, casually of course, but hinting a little, too.

"Be mighty nice, won't it?" he said.

But on the first day of this deer season he had, at least, gone hunting, and now it was *his* horse bringing in the most magnificent buck, Tril Mallory thought, that she had ever seen.

When the three hunters stopped by the gate, Tril ran out to them eagerly. Joel was loosening the pack rope.

"Hail Natty Bumpo!" she cried. "Gee, Joel, that's the finest set of horns I ever saw! Where did you shoot him?"

Tom grinned. Curly Dunavant winked and laughed aloud.

"You tell her, Joel," he snickered mockingly. "I'm bashful."

"Why," said Joel calmly, "we just packed him in on my horse, account of Curly's being kinder spooky about it. It's Curly's buck."

"Then you didn't—you didn't even get one?"

"Him?" scoffed Curly. "Why, Miss Trilby, this ol' buck stood up there on the Burn an' made faces at Mister Budlong, not fifty yards off for dang near five minutes, an' ol' Joel couldn't recollect which

was the shootin' end of his Winchester—could yuh, Mister Budlong?"

"Maybe that's about the size of it," said Joel, a little edginess in his quiet voice. "Anyhow I didn't shoot."

"Why, Joel Budlong!" the girl said, "I'm actually ashamed of you!"

IN SILENCE, his lips a little tight, Joel helped Curly and Tom lift the dead buck down from the saddle. He looked down at the fine antlered head regretfully. The girl glimpsed the look and thought he was being sorry that he had not killed this great buck himself. She could not know that Joel Budlong was seeing again a loggy, fir-patched bench in the Big Burn, salmon-bright with the rising sunlight, and there, some forty yards away, this great proud buck, not stiffly sprawled on the ground as now, but high headed as the king that he was, big gray ears stiffly alert, his round eyes glistening in the sun, his graceful legs tensed for the leap—a thing of wild and vital beauty. A snow patch on the slope behind him had framed the rich gray-browns and creams of him, the black of his brisket, like a picture no human brush could paint.

Joel had raised his gun, but he had lowered it again, without shooting. He had come out deer hunting in the first place because he had wanted Tril Mallory to know that he *could* bring in a buck as easily as the next one. He had meant to do it, too, and if the head were fine enough, to ask her to accept it instead of the one Curly Dunavant had breezily promised. But there he had stood and watched this antlered monarch at deadshot range until finally the buck had twitched his little black tail, swung his sprangly head around and fled in great high leaps across a loggy ridge out of sight.

"Yeah," Curly Dunavant was saying, "after he'd stood an' offered hisself to Mister Budlong fer an hour or two an' found the mighty nimrod too paralyzed with buck fever to take him, this ol' buck took out. But when he come lopin' down through

the timber a-past ol' Curly, I shore cracked him down."

"Doggone good shot, too," agreed Tom Otis. "In the timber, an' runnin'. I got mine, standin' way off yonder on a——"

"I'm goin' to skin you out some of the saddle an' a ham, Tril," Curly broke in, "an' I reckon you know where I'm aimin' to have this head hung—sometime."

Tril could guess what he meant. Sure that Joel would see it, she allowed Curly Dunavant an admiring smile.

"Why don't you all stay for supper?" she said quickly. "Dad says I'm the best venison cook in the valley!"

"Why not?" agreed Curly, promptly. "Me an' Tom, anyhow. Maybe Mister Budlong don't like venison that he don't kill himself."

Joel's longish, mild face, his clear, kindly gray eyes gave no hint that he had noticed the other cowboy's broad, mocking wink.

"I eat it—sometimes," he said. Then to Trilby with a forced smile: "If you'll



excuse me this evenin', I reckon I'll jest drag on in."

He stepped up and reined his horse out toward the gate. On a sudden, unaccountable impulse, the tall girl followed him.

"Joel!" she called, and he stopped. They were out of hearing of the others. The girl's slender fingers touched the knee of his chaps, gently.

"Joel," she said, "I didn't mean to be hateful. Listen—I know where there is another buck—maybe as big as this one—old Cattymount told me where he ranges up on the Alamitos. I bet if you and I would ride up there before day in the morning, we could—you could get him!"

For all his outward quiet, this big cowboy felt no calmness inside. This damned deer hunting business—those fingers he could feel through the chap leather at his knee—his own foolish pride in not speaking out plainly why it was that he was not a hunter—Curly's hurrahing—the curb he had to hold on his self control to keep from making a row over it—all these things had his feelings stirred into turmoil. What difference did it make whether a man killed a deer or not? He didn't really mean to say it, but it was out before he could stop it.

"To hell with deer hunting!" he said, and started to ride on. Then some stubbornness in him made him choose this, of all moments, to turn back and say something else that deserved a fitter setting.

"Tril," he said, "I can't stand it no longer, you carrying on with this Curly Dunavant. I—I want you to marry me!"

Her queer, crooked little smile as she answered was something for Joel Budlong to puzzle over.

"Why, Mister Budlong," she said, "I'd rather counted on my first husband, at least, being a hunter!"

It was not until she was back in the house and Curly Dunavant and Tom Otis were coming in from putting their horses up at the sheds that she happened to remember: Curly had not even thanked Joel for the use of his horse. Nevertheless she greeted the two cowboys gaily when they came in.

IT WAS some weeks later that Tril Mallory rode alone up to Piney Cove. From before the half dugout log hut that he called home, old Cattymount Collins spied her coming over Turkey Ridge, got out his field glasses and made sure who it was. By the time she arrived he had on a clean shirt and overalls and his whiskers were freshly washed and combed. Tril Mallory was about the only one of the Chug Valley womenfolks who ever deigned to call on an uncouth old cattymount hunter, and he appreciated it. She

wasn't scared of his noisy but harmless dogs, either, like most of 'em, and she called him "Cattymount," straight out. He hated folks calling him Mister Collins.

Tril sat on a log the old lion man had hewn out into a seat. For a while she chatted aimlessly. Old Cattymount never talked much himself. Finally the girl grew quiet, gazing off across the sunlit foothills, patched green with pine, brown with scrub oak and white with snow where the sun did not hit. Cattymount looked at her, batting his weather-paled eyes, the hint of a slow, grave smile breaking through his whiskers.

"I see Joel last week, Miss Tril," he said. "Set an' augered quite a spell. Figgerin' to take out fer new parts, come New Years, he is. Not news to you, though, I reckon."

"Yes, it is, Cattymount," the girl said in a low voice. "Bad news."

"Uh-huh," grunted Cattymount, and fell silent again.

Presently the girl stirred again and faced him.

"Cattymount, both my grand-daddies killed deer, and antelope and buffalo to feed their families. Sometimes they traded wild meat for flour. But they hunted for the sport, too. So did—and do—my own dad and my uncles. I've been raised up among men who were hunters. I haven't got a better friend than you are, and you've lived off of the game you kill just about forever, I guess. I can't understand a man who just *can't*—or else just *won't*—even shoot a deer—can you?"

"Can," grunted the old trapper, "an' do."

"Then why won't he do it?"

"Meanin' Joel?"

The girl nodded, flushing a little, her eyes earnest.

"He ain't never told you?"

"No. He always just——"

"I reckon, Miss Tril, was he aimin' to have you told, he'd tell you hisself."

"But Cattymount, he——"

"Uh-huh. I savvy. Lets 'em think he's

too dumb—or maybe kinder of a sissy. Wal, he ain't. You've see him toppin' out a bronc, an' workin' cattle, ain't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"But you want to brag on him fer a hunter, too, eh? Kinder 'shamed of him 'cause he ain't the mighty nimrod? Wimmen, Miss Tril, they're like house cats: like to climb the tallest tree on the place, then yowl 'cause they can't git down."

"But the way he lets Curly Dunavant hurraw him about it! Why don't he take Curly apart sometime, like a man?"

"Maybe," drawled Cattymount, "maybe he's got reason to figger you don't want this Dunavant took apart. Listen here—how'd it be if ol' Joel went out an' slayed him a mountin lion, 'stid of a deer?"

"I—I wish he would, but——"

"Ain't many these cowhand deer hunters ever done that, ma'am. Not even ol' Curly Wolf Dunavant. It'd be somethin' for you to brag on Joel about. Wal, they's a big ol' he tom cattymount rangin' the Barrancas right now. I got one dog—ol' Mike, that there Airedale there, that'll trail fer another man if I tell him to. You jest lope on back an' send Joel up here to me, Miss Tril. I b'lieve he'd shoot a lion."

"But——"

"All right, then, don't. To hell with it! I was aimin' to dog out after that lion tomorrow anyhow, myownself. So——"

"Cattymount," broke in the girl, almost fiercely, "you let that lion alone or I won't ever speak to you again! I'm going to have his hide for a rug—and it's going to be a present from Mister Joel Budlong—trophy of his own prowess as a hunter, or my name isn't Tril Mallory!"

"Wal," grinned the old trapper, "maybe it won't be—long. Now you better git. Jest tell Joel I want to see him—about a dog."

TRIL did not need to ride on to the Box R where Joel worked. She came riding home late from Piney Cove and he was there, waiting for her, on the porch.

It was the first time he had come since that evening he had so abruptly asked her to marry him. She had seen him Thanksgiving night at the barn dance at the Mayboro's, but she had gone with Curly Dunavant, and Joel had not asked her to dance with him.

"Gee, I'm glad to see you, Joel," she said, and meant it.

Something—maybe a little constraint over the memory of the last time he had been here, maybe a natural shyness, seemed to give bashfulness a choking grip on the big lean cowboy. It made him abrupt.

"Hello Tril," he said. "Tril, I come to see if maybe you wouldn't go to the Christmas Eve dance with me. It'll be at the school house. Reckon I'll be pullin' out, come New Year's."

"Pulling out?"

"Well," stammered Joel, "a man in this country kinder needs a change, I reckon—especially if he ain't much on huntin'."

The girl wanted suddenly to say "to the devil with hunting, Joel! Just so you don't leave!" But there was a faint hint of sarcasm in his words that made her wary. After all you couldn't throw yourself at a man's head. Besides she wanted all these hunting fools around Chug Valley to quit hurrawing him. They would—if he should come in one day with a big, long-tailed mountain lion roped to his saddle.

"Joel," she said gently, "Curly has already asked me to go to the Christmas dance with him. But I haven't said whether I would. I—I'd rather go with you, Joel—and I will—if you'll just do one thing I want you to—first. Boxer would let you have a day or two off, wouldn't he?"

"Why, I reckon he would. The work ain't pushin'."

"Then—then go right up to Piney Cove—tell old Cattymount that I sent you—and do what he tells you to, will you?"

Such a request, to Joel Budlong's matter-of-fact ears, sounded just a little silly—maybe fishy. But the voice in which she asked it sounded earnest and eager and

pleading, and maybe a little bit tender and promising.

Joel grinned.

"Sounds mighty mysterious," he said, almost gaily, "but whatever it is, by golly, I'll do it!"

WAL, young feller," said old Cattymount Collins, "reckon you could crack down a cattymount if n ol' Mike treed him fer you?"

Joel grinned.

"I'd be mighty proud to try it, Cattymount. The way them ol' long-tails slaughters the deer, I'd mightily enjoy to crack one of 'em down. But——"

"But my hind foot," broke in Cattymount. "Stay the night with me, or come back 'fore day in the mornin'. They's an ol' tom usin' in the Barrancas. I'm aimin' to loan you ol' Mike so you kin go git him!"

"Doggone if I wouldn't enjoy to go with you, Cattymount, if——"

"With me my hindfoot! What you think I send fer you fer if I was able to take out the pack? I got a twinge of the mis'ry, son. You an' ol' Mike are goin' by yerselves."

"But I ain't no kind of a hunter, Cattymount. Maybe the dog won't——"

"Ol' Mike'll do what I tell him—an' you'd better! All you got to do, git him on that ol' tom's track—foller him till he trees, an' you've got you a lion! I'm jest makin' one condition: when you do git him, you got to give the hide to Miss Trilby—fer a weddin' present. She's kinder got her heart set on it."

"So," grunted Joel soberly, "that's the way the wind blows? But supposin' I don't git him?"

"You better," said Cattymount Collins, squinting through pipe smoke, "or I don't know wimmin—which I do—used to anyways."

"Who's the—the weddin' with, if you don't mind my askin'?"

"Maybe it kinder depends, son, on whether you git that lion or not."

"In which case," said Joel Budlong a little stiffly, "I reckon I ain't lost no lion, Cattymount. Much obliged fer the offer, but——"

"Tarnation!" cried the old hunter. "You aimin' to go 'round but-but-buttin' like a damn fool all yer life?"

EARLY the next morning Cattymount Collins reined up his saddle mule and let out a yelp in front of the Mallory ranch-house. Tril recognized the call and came out.

"Wal, him an' ol' Mike's took to it," he grinned, and rode on. Tril noticed that his battered field glass case hung under one arm from its buckskin thong. He didn't say where he was going.

JOEL BUDLONG struck the big tom lion's track on a high rough ridge some three miles west of the Barrancas. It was barely sunup and the track was about a dozen hours old, showing but faintly on the hard-crusted snow; but old Mike put his black nose to it and took out. With a thrill of excited anticipation the cowboy yelled encouragement to him, put the hooks to his horse and followed. It was break-neck going on the frozen, rocky slope, but Joel had picked a sure-footed, strong-legged horse for this day's work and had sharp-shod him fresh by lantern light the night before. He took the rough thicketed slant at a trot.

Presently, half a mile out ahead, old Mike yelped once. This was going to be easy. Already Joel saw himself coming in, maybe by noon, to pull a big lion out of the saddle and lay it at Tril Mallory's feet. She wanted him to be a hunter—well, today he would show her.

A mile east toward that great patch of scrubby-treed cliffs and chasms known as the Barrancas, the lion had slanted back up to the ridge top, struck the ridge-top trail and followed it, still coursing eastward. The track looked fresher here, with now and then a brownish smear, like blood. Evidently the old tom had feasted on venison

some time during the night. Occasionally, out ahead old Mike yelped briefly, letting Joel know that he still had the trail.

Suddenly the cowboy drew rein. Hurrying hoofs sounded behind him, and a rider came in view.

"Well, if it ain't ol' Joel, the Nimrod!" said a breezy voice. "I figgered you was up to somethin' when you shod that horse last night. Lion huntin', eh? Knowed you'd need some help, so here I am!"

For once Joel Budlong spoke sharply.

"Dunavant," he said, "your trail points west! Swing around an' git on it—*pronto!*"

Curly Wolf Dunavant hesitated. His bluster died down. A grinning sneer took its place. He had never seen quite that look on Joel's mild face before.

"O. K., feller," he grunted, reining around. "But I'll lay you a bet: my bid

across that vast maze of benchy, cave-pocked cliffs, up-tilted to the sun and barren of snow, that no dog could trail a lion, much less tree one, in such broken country.

Only now did he realize how much he had let himself count on the success of this hunt. He would be ashamed to come in again empty handed.

SLOWLY he worked out a way for his horse up around the top rim of the cliffs, eastward. Now and then he crawled to the edge to look down and listen. Dead silence. Presently he saw old Mike toppling out through a break in the rim a quarter of a mile ahead. Plainly, he too, had given it up.

Joel hurried to him. To his surprise, when old Mike saw that this "borrowed master" of his was still with him, he turned in his tracks and made his way perilously back down into the cliffs, whining anxiously. Joel sicked him on. For half an hour he watched him, trying to work out the lion's trail across slide rock slants and wind-swept rocky ridges. It looked hopeless. There were ten thousand places down there where a lion could hide from a dog—or a man.

But Joel Budlong was stubborn. He took off his chaps and spurs, left his horse and climbed down into the cliffs himself.

For hours he labored up and down, across and back, over and under the great Barrancas. Now and then old Mike caught a scent of the track, only to lose it again at some cliff he could not pass.

The sun crept around westward. Toiling, sweating, his mouth sticky-dry with thirst, Joel Budlong started to climb back out. He had lost track, even, of old Mike.

It was as he clawed his way up the last cliff, that the music broke loose. Half a mile down below him old Mike barked "treed." Traveling like a mountain goat, Joel started back down there. At three hundred yards he spied movement and a red brown color in the short, branchy tree under which old Mike was raising the dead. He levered a cartridge into the barrel of



for that Christmas dance against yours that you don't git this lion—by yerself!"

"Reckon I'll take you," Joel drawled. Then, sharply: "Now travel!"

He watched Curly Dunavant out of sight, then took the trail again, swiftly.

Down at the west rim of the Barranca cliffs the chase that had been so certain suddenly seemed hopeless. For here tracks showed that the old tom lion had reached the cliff country well ahead of old Mike. The dog had followed him in, but it seemed to Joel Budlong, as he gazed out

Tom Otis's .30-.30. It was too far to shoot, yet. He crept closer, certain now, of ultimate success.

At a hundred and fifty yards he stopped. Slowly he raised his gun. Then, suddenly, he lowered it. He saw now, all at once, that he dared not shoot. The lion was up in a scrub pine that stood not a yard from the brink of a great, hundred-foot cliff. If he shot him out old Mike would grab him the instant he fell. Even an instant-death shot could not keep the big cat from struggling a little after he fell. Wild things do not die easily nor quickly. And even one second of struggle at the slanting edge of that cliff would be enough to send the shot lion hurtling over the brink. Joel Budlong had heard enough from old Catymount Collins about his dogs to know what would happen. Old Mike would have hold of the lion—and he would not be likely to let go. Together they would roll over the brink. The fall would batter the brave old dog to death on the sharp slide rock below.

Joel Budlong had his lion treed, but could not kill him!

The cowboy felt no moment of indecision. He had never found enough hardness in his heart to shoot down a frightened, innocent deer, even though he did not blame other men who felt no such squeamishness. Certainly he would not risk a loyal old dog's life—not for all the lions in New Mexico!

Quickly Joel made up his mind. He would sneak down to the tree, catch old Mike, if he could, tie him up, and then shoot out the lion—if he were still there. If the old tom, already nervous, and only a dozen feet up, should get panicked and jump—to vanish safely into the cliffs—before he could get hold of Mike—well, let him, then, and to hell with lion hunting!

Fifty yards from the tree he began calling softly to the dog. But the big cat was shifting in the tree, and old Mike would not come. Hoarsely, raucously he was begging this darned fool to shoot that lion!

SUDDENLY the glint of sun on polished metal caught Joel's eye. In an instant he saw what it was. Across on the next sharp ridge, a hundred yards away, stood Curly Dunavant. His rifle was up. He was taking aim at the treed lion.

"Gosh-a-mighty, Curly!" Joel shouted. "Don't shoot! They'll roll over the cliff an'—"

He saw that Curly Dunavant was not going to heed the warning. All in one swift moment Joel swung up his rifle and fired. The bullet spanged, as he had intended it to, against the rock a dozen feet behind Curly. Its warning breath had passed within a foot of Curly Dunavant's head. Curly jumped suddenly sidewise and back. His rifle roared, its echoes mingling with Curly's yell of surprised fear and terror. At the same instant another snarling, spitting roar mingled with the rumbling echoes bouncing back and forth among the cliffs. In a swift, slanting flash the lion leaped from the tree. In one more bound he gained footing down on a narrow ledge of rock twenty feet below, leaped from it to another and was gone, clean out of sight, where neither dog nor man could follow. Even old Mike, barking wildly with excited disappointment, wholly unaware of the death he had so narrowly escaped, knew better than to try it.

Curly Dunavant's shot, thrown off aim by the scare of Joel's warning bullet, had flown harmlessly a dozen yards too high. Now Curly found his voice.

"You gone crazy over there?" he yelled. "I'm a-notation to crack you down, you —"

"Crack away!" Joel shouted back. "My powder's dry!"

Evidently, then, Curly thought better of it. Joel watched him start climbing back up toward the rim and disappear behind a jut of cliff.

Somewhere, far up on the main rim, Joel thought he caught a glimpse of sun reflected from something bright, but he

could make out nothing more and the flash did not repeat.

Joel tried to find a way down to where the lion had disappeared, but there was none. He scanned the cliffs all around for sight of a red-brown, long-tailed body slinking away, but the lion did not appear.

Old Mike looked up at him in disgust.

"Hell of a hunter, you are!" he seemed to say.

It took Joel two hours of hard, grueling climbing to get back up to his horse.

It was two hours after dark when he came in sight of old Cattymount Collins' outdoor cooking fire. In the firelight's edge Curly Dunavant was just swinging up to the saddle, leaving, on the other trail, out toward the Box R. Then he saw the slender figure of Tril Mallory standing in the firelight. Old Cattymount squatted over his cooking nearby. They had not yet heard him coming.

For an instant Joel stopped, remembering his foolish bet with Curly Dunavant, reflecting that, come morning, he and Curly would have to have it out; remembering, more than anything else, how much he had looked forward to this slim girl's approval, her praise—perhaps even the love that pride had made her hold back—when he should come in with a big tom lion swung across the saddle.

No telling, now, what Curly may have told them. Well, Joel Budlong wasn't the kind for lengthy explanations. Let them think what they chose. He would keep his mouth shut.

IN A few minutes he rode into the firelight. Old Mike and his master were having fits over each other. Tril looked up at him strangely. He decided not to get down.

"Well," he made out to say, a little stiffly, "I guess you don't get your lion, Trilby. An' that bid for the dance—jest cancel it."

The girl came a step nearer.

"No," she said, and her voice trembled a little, "I won't."

"But——"

"There you go, 'but-tin' ag'in!" broke in old Cattymount. "The coffee's hot. Light down, son, an' tell us about it."

"There ain't much to tell. I jest——"

"No," snapped the old lion hunter. "I reckon there ain't. This mornin' when you set out I kinder mistrusted how you'd make out if the ol' tom got into them cliffs. So I jest kinder follered around, myownself. Fact is, I set up yonder on the rim with my field glasses an' watched the hull performance, son. Now what you got to say?"

The weary, gaunt-faced cowboy sat in the saddle thinking how beautiful, how desirable Tril Mallory looked, standing there in the firelight. He wanted, now, to explain what had happened. But he hated bragging, explanations, excuses, alibis.

"Why," he said, "nothing, I reckon. Think I'll drag on in!"

"Joe Budlong!" said the girl with sudden spirit. "Sometimes you make me so darned mad I could cry! Nothing? Don't you realize that killing all the old tomat lions in the world couldn't make me half as proud of you as what Cattymount saw you do today? How many men would have given a darn about the dog—just so they got their lion? And why did you leave it to Cattymount to make me see that it's just your honest old tender heart that keeps you from killing deer? Oh, Joel, get down off that horse and come here—before I have to chuck *all* my pride and come after you!"

"Son," said old Cattymount with a grave chuckle, as he hugged his beloved old Mike to his side. "Ain't you got nothin' to say—now?"

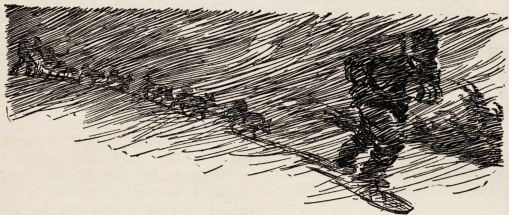
With a light step, a new-old gladness in his heart, Joel Budlong swung down from the saddle.

"Yes," he said, "I kinder reckon I have!"

And with his arms and lips—but no more words—he proceeded to say it.

*A Grim Trail of the Frozen North Brings a Sergeant
of the Mounted to—*

THE END OF THE STORY



By **FRANK J. LEAHY**

Author of "The Rescuers," etc.

THE very bottom was dropping from the trail, and at times the hunter, whose sled was piled high with rare furs, had to break a new trail around gaping holes. Spring was in the air. The sharpness had gone out of the snap of the frost, and though the snow was still over all the land, the murmur and splash of water gave promise that the steely grip of winter was letting go.

Mushing into the Koloa Trading Post, the hunter called "Whoa!" to his team in front of the cabin of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. His dogs were lean and worn and it could readily be seen that he had traveled far. Immediately the curious gathered around him, questioned him as to the condition of trails, probed him for news, asked him about the weather to the north, commented upon the richness of his catch, discussed with him such other things as make up the routine of the Northland wild.

"And ten days ago—maybe only nine—" the hunter got around to say, "I passed a grizzled old man on the trail. He wasn't

really old, either; he just seemed so. He was all hunched and twisted up, his hair and beard were scraggly and almost white, and one of his legs was so out of shape that he limped like a hobbled horse. He wasn't headed this way; I don't know which way he was headed, and I doubt if he knew, either. The foot of his twisted leg was encased in an enormous moccasin, and I could tell it was givin' him great pain. His whole frame was shrunken and wasted and stooped; his flesh—or, rather, the skin that covered his bones—was bloody-black and hideous from many frostings; his eyes had a wild look in them and stared out from deep cavities; his face was tense and bitter from suffering. He was crazy as a loon, I could see that, and his dogs were so thin and weak that I don't believe he could have been makin' more'n a couple of miles a day.

"When I stopped and asked him if there was anything I could do to help, in the way of grub or dogs or a lift or something, he only showed his teeth and snarled like a husky-dog. That was the only answer he'd give me. For a minute I thought he

was comin' after me with his dog-whip, and I backed away from him. After trying again to talk to him, which was a useless waste of time, I mushed on. I looked back after a time, to see if he was still starin' at me. But he was limpin' on his way, at right angles to my trail."

THE hunter paused briefly, then added: "I never knew a man could change so in the space of a single winter."

"Then you knew him?" someone asked. "Who was he?"

The hunter glanced at the questioner, then looked directly at Sergeant Clift of the Mounted.

"He was Henry Faber."

Clift started violently.

"What!"

"Henry Faber."

"Why, Faber's dead," the sergeant objected.

"You don't know that. You never learned for sure he was dead."

"No. But Sergeant Barree went after him. And the way he went after him is reason enough to believe that he killed Faber."

"And what about Barree? What became of him?"

"That's the question—what did become of him?"

"If you want my opinion," said the hunter, "Barree is in those mountains where I saw Henry Faber. Dead or alive—well, that's for you to find out."

IT WAS an exceptionally rugged, exceptionally wild country into which Sergeant Clift rode, some few weeks later. An aching silence hung over it: the spirit of unqualified desolation. It was a trackless solitude; never a sign, on one timbered slope or another, of a human footmark or habitation. For days he threaded his way along the clean aisles of the forest, crossed debouching streams, peered into unpeopled valleys. It seemed to him, then, almost a trick of the imagination when, on a day, he heard a gunshot far to the west of

where he was himself stalking a mountain sheep. Forgetting his quarry, forgetting his need of fresh meat, he followed the direction of the sound; espied finally a cabin amid the pines lipping the mirroring rim of a mountain lake.

On rounding the body of water and approaching the lonely habitation, he should have been grateful, he felt, for the consolation of a dog's howling challenge or the friendly whinney of a horse. But no. There was not even a wisp of smoke curling from the stovepipe, much less a sign of movement anywhere about or sound of voice calling a cheery or even a dreary "Hello!"

Dismounting, he kicked on the door, but there came no answer.

"Hello-o!" he called. "Anybody here?"

There was not, apparently. Or else, that gunshot he had heard—Grimly he shoved open the door and peered inside.

He at once made out a figure seated at a table in the center of the room. In the semi-darkness, the man, like all pieces of the cabin's hand-hewn furniture, took several moments for Sergeant Clift to positively identify. Then he knew that the silent figure, with forearms on the table and eyes fixed upon him, was none other than Sergeant Russ Barree, of the Royal Mounted.

"Russ!"

"What do *you* want?" asked the man, in a voice unquestionably long out of use.

"Well," said Sergeant Clift, attempting an offhandedness he by no means felt, "need you ask that? I want you, of course."

RUSS BARREE affected a short laugh, a harsh laugh; and, uninvited, Clift entered and sat down on a split-log stool. As his eyes gradually became accustomed to the modified light in the disorderly room, he found it hard to convince himself that this black-whiskered figure was actually the Russ Barree, the stalwart sergeant of police known far and wide over the Northland. The man was not in uni-

form. He wore the rough mackinaw clothing of a trapper, his buttonless shirt exposed a deep and sun-reddened chest, and the hair of his head was sadly in need of grooming. Sergeant Russ Barree had become strangely animalized.

"Why do *you* want me?" he asked, with that same accentuation of pronoun, as if



Clift, of all people, had no understandable right to intrude.

"We've been friends a long time, Russ," said Clift.

"So," was flung back, "you've come after me?"

Sergeant Clift gave a little shrug.

"We might talk it over."

Barree made a facial gesture of scorn—derision for Sergeant Clift and all he stood for. Relaxing, he leaned back in his chair, and Clift was startled to see for the first time that Barree had had his service revolver concealed by his forearms on the table.

"What's that for?"

"Get down to business," was the reply, the sharp demand. "You've come to arrest me, is that it?"

"Well——"

"Oh, don't beat about the bush, Clift. Out with it!"

The sergeant's jaw set hard. He spoke between his teeth:

"I didn't come to arrest you. You're thought to be dead."

"Well?"

"But I'm going to take you out of this."

"No, you're not, Sergeant Clift," grimly replied Barree. "You're not taking me anywhere." His glance shifted to the doorway, reached out to the quiet lake of Brewster-green, held there a moment. "I'm staying right here."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"But I think I do understand," said the sergeant. "Henry Faber is somewhere hereabouts, isn't he?"

Barree looked him straight in the eyes, defiantly.

"Yes. He is. Henry Faber—your friend."

"Not necessarily my friend," said Clift. "Yours."

"Don't say that!" was Barree's harsh warning. "I resent it. If he'd been my friend I'd not have had to wreck his body, break his spirit, drive him mad."

"But, good God, did you have to?"

Barree's glance darkened perceptibly. Some welling force within him seemed about to burst raging forth, but, with an effort, observable only by a tightening of his lips, he replied, almost with deadly quietness:

"Whether I had to or not, I did it."

SERGEANT CLIFT felt himself melting under the other's fierce stare.

"Because of Bess?"

"Why not?" sharply.

Clift gave a little shrug, said nothing. Barree took instant offense, sprang up, banged the table with his fist.

"You don't believe she was worth it, do you?" he snarled.

"Was she?"

"Why, damn you, Clift——"

"I'm only speaking from hearsay," the sergeant cut in. "As you know, I was at the Dawson post when it all happened. I was told that your wife ran away with the young mining engineer, Henry Faber,

and that you went after them. Little else is known by anyone."

"There is nothing else to know," replied Barree grimly. "That's all there is; there is no more."

"Except that—as it appears now—you finally caught them."

"Yes."

"I'd like to hear the whole story, Russ. Is it true——?"

"It's all true."

"Will you tell me about it?" demanded Clift, in a tone a shade harder than normal. "Or won't you? I'm your friend. Get a hold on yourself."

Slowly, Barree sat down again. A moment he looked sullenly at Clift. Then his eyes veered once more to the doorway, remained there, unfocused.

"You knew Bess?" he asked.

"Not well. I only met her that once, in Koloa, on my way to Dawson. She was—or should I say is?—a beautiful woman."

"She was more pretty than beautiful," was Barree's evasive reply. "For that reason, I suppose, she didn't belong in this country. At least, so she thought. I'd brought her from Winnipeg, where we were married. At first she entered willingly enough into the adventure of living in the wilderness, but after two years of the enforced isolation she began to change. In the third year she became morose. I'd been continually requesting a transfer to a post down in civilization, but couldn't get it. 'They'll have to give in some day,' I promised her. 'Some day!' she replied, bitterly. Then, one day, in one of her particularly gloomy moods, she let me have both barrels. It was toward the end of the summer—last summer. 'Another winter coming on,' she objected. 'Another nine months in this penitentiary post, where, if it isn't ice-jammed, it's snow-bound; if it isn't frozen, it's frost-bitten; if it isn't dogs and sleds and Indians, it's gold and furs and trails. The romantic Northland!' she sneered. 'In the summer it's all bad enough, with its flies and mosquitoes, but

the winters—God! Snow, snow, month after month, with nothing to look out on from frosted panes but ragged, imprisoning peaks. For music, the howling of starving wolveres. For companionship, you and glum Corporal Raney and the post factors and Indians and a few one-track-minded prospectors—and Henry Faber. For food, the same routine, day in and day out. For amusements, nothing. And I'm a white woman.'

"And my wife, Bess," I reminded her, gently but firmly. 'You married me for better or for worse.'

"And got the worst," said she.

"Perhaps," I said. 'So far, at any rate.'

"Then I reminded her of the gold mine in which I had—still have—a half interest. But that gave her no consolation, only irritated her further.

"'You're so wrapped up in that mine,' she accused, 'I don't believe you really want to be transferred south. You'd rather stay up here, close to it. Henry Faber,' she added, 'told me so.'

"What does he know about it?" I asked.

"But she didn't answer that, just sulked; and because I hadn't been altogether blind to their little flirtation, I suddenly put it to her straight from the shoulder: 'Do you, by any chance, care as much for Henry Faber as he seems to care for you?'

"She looked at me sharply and composed herself with an apparent effort.

"How, indeed, am I to know how much he cares for me?" was her evasive reply."

BARREE paused, drummed a few beats on the table with his fist, went on:

"A few days after that an Indian runner brought me a message signed by Inspector Staten, of the Mounted post at White Horse. It read: '*Proceed at once to the Masterville mining district and investigate recently reported murder there.*'

"I lost no time. The Masterville Mine was the one in which I have an interest, and the report of a murder having been committed there had me worried. Furthermore, there was a sharp whip to the wind;

the first snowfall wasn't far off, and I wanted to get back—to Bess.

"In three days I was at the mine, and I went at once to Old Dan McDougal—my partner—for what information he might have on the killing. He's a grizzled old chap, a holdover from the Klondike days.

"Hello, there, Barree!" he greeted me. "How did you get here so quick? I only sent for you just yesterday."

"You've got your dates mixed, old timer," I told him. "Besides, if you wanted me on the case, why did you report first to White Horse?" Then, without giving him time to answer, I asked, "But who was murdered, and who do you think did it?"

"Old Dan looked at me with a puzzled frown.

"Eh, what's that?" he growled. "What're you talkin' about, Barree? Murder!" He laughed then, and said, "Just one of your jokes, eh? All right. I bit on it. But I sent for you for a more important reason than a measly murder."

"Then there's been no murder?" I demanded. And I showed him the message from Inspector Staten.

"Somethin' mighty funny about this," said Dan. "Nobody's been killed around here in the thirteen years I've been in these parts. Somebody's just pullin' a little horseplay at your expense. Any idea who it might be?"

"No," said I. "And I hadn't."

"Well, now that we've disposed of the murder," said Dan, "let's get down to pleasant talk. Since you left Koloa before you could get my message, of course you're still in the dark."

"About what?" I asked.

"Why, Barree," said Dan, "we're in the money now. Just two days ago," he went on to explain, "we struck a vein of the old yellow stuff, over on the east ledge, and it's a honey. It's as big around as your arm, and, of course, we have no way of tellin' how deep into the mountain it goes. It's a simon-pure vein, if there ever was one north of sixty. You're rich now, Barree," he ran on. "Now you can quit the

Mounted; you've done your part, anyhow. You can take your Bess outside now, no maybe about it."

RUSS BARREE was really telling a story now. He made another momentary pause, his eyes unfocused on the lengthening shadows without.

"That night it began to snow," he went on, "but I started back for the post, anyway. I couldn't wait to tell Bess the news, you understand. I was carried away with joy, you might say. The storm was a bad one, but I didn't even mind it. It snowed all that night and all the next day, and the next night; and it was still snowing when I finally reached Koloa.

"Bess! I called as I dismounted, and wondered why she didn't, somehow, sense my elation and come running to share it with me.

"Corporal Raney appeared, instead. Always glum, I placed no particular significance on the set look he gave me just then. Why should I? But I knew why in a moment.

"Bess is gone," Raney told me.

"Gone?" I said. "What do you mean, gone?"

"And then he told me. On the night of my departure for the Masterville—what time during the night he didn't exactly know—Bess had left the cabin, gone away. And Henry Faber had gone, too. They'd gone together, headed in the general direction of White Horse."

Barree stopped, glanced unseeingly at Sergeant Cliff, said:

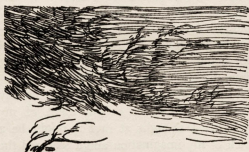
"With all I'd thought of, hoped, expected, dreaded, I'd never thought of that—of that precious pair running off together. There I was, a man become suddenly rich—and just as suddenly poor again."

He got up, limped heavily around to the door, stood staring out through the trees. Without turning, he said, almost to himself:

"Was I a fool to care? Am I a fool to still care?"

SERGEANT CLIFT did not attempt to reply. Barree turned and sat down at the table again; sat there in the gathering dusk, an unbelievably aged figure of a comparatively young man; with his dark eyes staring into the past, his bewhiskered face set hard, his hands again clenched into fists.

"That night," he spoke again, "with a team of dogs, I started out after them. It was cold, and turning steadily colder, but the weather was of small consequence to me just then. Through my mind ran the



one thought, 'Get your man, Barree; get the man who got your woman.' From far away my not unpolicemanlike intelligence told me that if it was not precisely a police duty to get Henry Faber simply because he had run off with my wife, it was my duty as a policeman to get him because he had—unquestionably had—turned in to the police a bit of false information signed with the forged signature of Inspector Staten. And with that official reason for pursuing the runaways, I salved my watching brain, which, otherwise, might have deafened me with the rebuke, 'Let them go, let them go!'

"At the first Indian camp I came to I made sure of the direction they'd taken, and went on. The southern end of Turtles Lake was already frozen over, so I crossed it, thus taking a short cut direct to White Horse and Dyea. To them, I knew, White Horse meant the procuring of a dog team, to get over the pass; and Dyea meant a steamer for the outside—possibly the last steamer till spring.

"There was no trail. I was the first one

through the country since the storm, so to me fell the task of packing the snow and gauging away through ice jams and the rough places. I drove the dogs without mercy. Once, when one of them dropped from sheer exhaustion, I lifted him out of the traces, tied him on the sled and let him rest there till he'd recovered; then put him to work again. The next mishap was when I blundered through a weak place in the ice of a frozen creek-bed and froze my foot, tender from a freezing of the winter before. But I had no time to lose. I sacrificed half of my fur sleeping robe by cutting strips from it and binding my foot in a huge moccasin; and mushed on.

AT NIGHTFALL of the third day I arrived at Sitka John's place. He advised me that Faber and Bess had stopped there on the day following the storm, left him their horses, bought dogs, a sled, snowshoes and other trail necessities from him, and gone on, not in the direction of White Horse, but on a more direct line to Dyea, over the Cassiar Mountains.

"I didn't stay at Sitka John's that night. I put twenty more miles behind me before I went into camp; there slept five hours; and was on my way again long before day-break. I marched all that day and half that night, too. It was then that I became seriously aware of the fact that my frozen foot was getting worse. The pain of it kept stabbing up through my stomach, pricking my brain, all that night. In the morning it was agony to put my weight on it. Nevertheless, I lost no fraction of that day by giving in to my misery; nor of the next day, nor the next, even though the sore on my foot had begun to run and to encroach on my leg.

"Those days, and the days to come, were so many horrible nightmares that festered in my brain. I began to know then what hatred was. All my sufferings I blamed on that man and that woman; why not? I became a man of one idea; I meant to master that one—to retaliate. In the fore-

ground of my mind was Dyea; in the background that precious pair. Outside of that I was but a mere automaton. I struggled and toiled and covered many miles each day, seeing all other things but those which made me suffer as through a pale mist, distantly, and without giving them any thought. The work of my brain was guided by the work of my body; and my body was in torture. My frozen foot was swelling daily, and every now and then I had to release the pressure of the fur-pelt bandage. Pain racked my whole side, and I limped terribly as I struggled over the heart-breaking trail.

"Then my food supply gave out. But I kept on; there was nothing else for me to do than keep on—starving myself, starving the dogs. Their spirit had already been broken; it was now only a case of stripping them of what little metal they had left. 'Mush, you poor, sore-footed brutes,' I'd say to them. 'Pull your hearts out, or I'll beat you till you wish you had.'

THEN I crossed trails with Jaques Ladue, a trapper. He didn't recognize me, I'd become so terrible to look at. From him I got grub and the startling information that he had seen Faber and Bess, two days before, forty miles to the south of the trail I was traveling. 'They were headed towards the coast, all right,' he told me, 'but at the rate they're traveling, they'll be all winter getting there.' Two of their dogs had died in the traces, and, in order to force the march and to save the three remaining dogs as much as possible, Faber himself was hauling on the traces.

"'And what of the woman?' I asked.

"'She was on the sled,' said Ladue. 'And she's in bad shape. I didn't know who she was. I can't believe, even now, she was the once-beautiful Bess Barree.' And he went on to say, 'Her cheeks are sunken in hollow caves, her cheekbones protrude, her nose is frost-bitten and twisted, her flesh is turning black. She was apparently in great agony. She looked at me

only once, with feverish eyes, and closed her lids again. She has a dry, hacking cough, which meant to me that her lungs are frosted.'

"I waited to hear no more. I rushed away in the direction from which Ladue had come. I rushed right into the night and stopped only when the dogs stopped and refused to go a step farther till they had been fed and rested. The next day dawned with the frost all of sixty degrees below. By late that afternoon I had entered the higher mountains—these mountains—and, that night, a blizzard caught me and forced me into an early camp. It snowed for two days and two nights—maybe more, for I'd reached the stage of not being too sure of anything, including time, direction and my own sanity.

"But in the late afternoon of some day or other, I at last caught sight of my quarry. I thought at first it might be a trick of my imagination and I smeared the icicles from my eyelids to clear my vision. And then I laughed. I distinctly remember that I laughed; why, I don't know yet, except that it was an uncontrollable outburst of exultation at having suffered not altogether in vain. Or, perhaps, it tickled my funny-bone to see my man—my wife-stealer—stumbling along, at the head of three weary dogs, with a haul-rope over his shoulder, dragging his lady-love-laden sled after him, across the frozen surface of the lake—that lake right out there.

"When I had soaked up that sight into my brain I yanked my poor brutes to their feet again and rushed on down the slope and out across the ice. I had new strength, new courage and a new ferocity.

"Faber heard me coming; then saw me; and stopped. As I came abreast of him, I hauled in on the traces and threw the dogs in a tangled mass of harness and raging flesh. Then I sprang at the man. 'Wait!' I heard him plead. But I wouldn't. I grabbed him by the throat and dug my fingers in, and down we went. I cursed him, called him every rotten name I could think of. Then I looked around at the

figure on his sled. 'And, you, Bess——' I began on her, and stopped; released Faber's throat and climbed to my feet, sick with dread.

"I stumbled to the sled, flung off the fur robe and looked down at the still figure of the woman who had been my wife.

"Had been, I say—for she was dead."

OUTSIDE the cabin, the day had darkened into a premature twilight. The stillness of that high mountain valley seemed oddly intensified as Barree broke off his narrative with that word, 'dead.' Sergeant Clift waited, sat looking across the solemn shadows in the room, spoke finally out of the long silence:

"I'm sorry, Russ."

"So Henry Faber said," he averred. "He got to his feet after that choking I'd given him, looked down at her with me and said, 'I'm sorry, Russ.' And added, 'I loved her, too.'"

Again he ceased speaking. Clift waited, but Barree did not go on. A moment longer he sat there at the table, then, suddenly, he banged his fists upon it, once easily, then hard, and stood up; again limped to the door and went out. Clift watched him melt into the dusk, noticed that the man's almost painful favoring of that frost-bitten leg of his was quite pronounced; saw him disappear into the trees.

Lighting a lantern, Clift spent some time attending to his saddle and pack horses, then went about preparing a meal on the cabin's dilapidated sheet-iron stove. Barree came back presently, sat down and munched his food in glum silence. The sergeant made several attempts to remark on such gloom-diverting topics as weather conditions and trail hazards, but he was encouraged only with far-away looks and occasional grunts.

The meal over, Clift lighted his pipe, pushed his stool back against the wall and, as though there had been no lapse in their earlier conversation, asked:

"And then what happened, Russ?"

Barree looked at him with barricaded

eye for a moment, then stared through him.

"Nothing happened," he replied, and stopped.

Sergeant Clift waited.

"Nothing?" he finally queried.

"Oh, I wanted to kill him, all right," Barree ground out. "Only my chicken-heartedness prevented. He suddenly began to cough—a dry, harsh cough that almost doubled him up. Frosted lungs, you understand, such as had no doubt carried off Bess. He looked so thin and weak, with his flesh all bloody-black, and one of his feet bound up, like mine, in an enormous moccasin, that pity worked up through my hatred. 'You're not far from dead yourself, you rat!' I said to him. And then my eye, in ranging for a place to camp, happened to find and focus upon this cabin. Then upon another, directly across the ice from it. Both abandoned by trappers, we later found. I chose this one as a place to put up for the night and ordered Faber to put up in the other. 'And what about—her?' he asked.

"I'll take care of her," I assured him; and added, 'Have you any objections?'

"And he had, believe it or not. He wanted to stay with her.

"I'm going to take her to Dyea," he told me; 'take her out of this country she hated so, back to civilization, and see that she gets a decent burial.'

"You are, are you?" I snarled at him. "Well, let me tell you something: You're under arrest." And I reminded him of why. And then—not just at that moment, but later—a little light seemed to flash somewhere in the back of my brain, Clift, and the next day, when I'd buried Bess in a temporary grave, till I could prepare a better one, I came back to this cabin to settle down, to stay. And I have stayed."

He added with grim deliberation:

"And I'm going to continue to stay, Clift. I'm dead to the world and I'll thank you to let me stay dead."

"But why?" asked the sergeant. "Good God, man, why?"

"Because Bess is here."

"Bess——"

"And Henry Faber."

"I don't understand."

"I'm here," Barree reiterated, "because Henry Faber is here. Officially, I'm holding him a prisoner; I'm still in the Mounted, you know. But it's not a case of holding him with shackles or under threat of a gun. He's staying because I'm staying. If I'm insane, he's two insane men. I've buried Bess here in these mountains—not because she hated the land, but because I love it and she was my wife;



love my earlier memories of her and want her spirit here with me now.

"But Faber—Faber, the wife-stealer—continues to insist that she should be taken outside. He's obsessed with that single idea, and he'd brooded on it so long, and so long had his plan denied, meanwhile undergone such terrible hardships and insufferable loneliness, that he's lost his mind—almost. He still knows what it's all about, but he's ceased to care about anything but that one thing. He prowls through the forest at night, and sometimes I begin to think he's giving up hope at last and going away, but he always comes back. Once he came back at a time when he thought I was out running my traps, and started to dig Bess out of her grave, but I caught him at it, and I laughed at him and drove him away. 'I loved her, too,' he keeps pleading. And 'But you had no right to love her,' is my insistent reply. He'd kill me, but I won't give him the chance. I keep one eye open for him night and day. I'd kill him, but it suits me better to watch him brood and suffer as I've suffered, and daily grow more insane.

"There's an old Indian, on the other side of the range, who packs me in a few supplies now and then, and keeps his mouth shut about my whereabouts. I repay him with an occasional fur-pelt or with the little dust I wash out of a nearby stream. The supplies I split with Faber—and, just so, we live, my prisoner and I.

"And that's my story, Sergeant Clift. A story of two supposedly dead men haunting the grave of a beautiful and selfish woman. A story of retaliation.

"But the story hasn't ended yet."

THE sergeant swallowed hard, as tonic for the cold chill that ran down his spine.

"What will the end be?" he asked.

"That remains to be seen," was the grim reply.

"Do you know what it'll be?"

"I have an idea."

"Plan on changing it," said Clift quietly.

"I'm going to take you out of this."

Barree's grim features twitched.

"You insist on that, do you?" he flung back with a harsh snarl. "Can't I drive home to you the fact that I'm dead? Can't you see for yourself that I'm no longer fit, physically, for police work, that I'm no longer fit, mentally, to care a damn about anything the world has to offer? Aren't you smart enough to understand that the man's castle I built has toppled? Can't you bring yourself to believe that all you could possibly gain by taking me out of this is a commendation from headquarters for having thrown the skids under my determination to fix Henry Faber? Can't you?"

Sergeant Clift shrugged a little, feeling compassion for the man, yet swallowing the expression of sympathy that welled up in his throat.

"No," he replied with challenging deliberation. "You've got to pull yourself together. You're a policeman, nothing more nor less, yet you're assuming the rights of a judge and an executioner.

You've sunk into the mood of these brooding mountains, that's what's the matter with you. Just as happened to your Bess. When she became just so desperate, she lost sight of consequences and made a break. And when you become just so desperate, you'll lose sight of Mounted traditions and kill—somebody."

BARREE nodded curtly across the lantern-light.

"You have it figured out pretty well, Clift," he said. "But you're sidestepping one important point—the fact that Faber stole her away."

"Because he loved her."

Barree again banged his fists on the table and came to his feet.

"But he had no right to love her," he roared.

"No," Clift admitted with helpless succinctness.

"And I'm punishing him for it now," said Barree grimly, and laughed a short, harsh laugh. "Punishing him by standing in the way of his insane desire to steal her out of her grave." His eyes suddenly snapped angrily. "But you sit there and tell me I haven't the right to do that. You'd have me believe that because he loved her I should let him have her body. Why, you damned intermeddler, you may sympathize with Henry Faber all you please, but you'll not push me off this spot."

Tall, lean, unkempt, with the butt of his revolver protruding from his wide belt, he rounded the table menacingly, halted, stood glaring down at the other, arms akimbo.

"I want to be left alone, understand?"

Clift did not flinch.

"You always were a stubborn man, Russ," he said quietly, and let it go at that.

Barree went again to the door, stood for a long moment sniffing of the jet blackness.

"There's a storm coming," he announced, without looking around, "so you can stay here tonight. You can clear out tomorrow."

10

CLIFT caught himself nodding his head, but only in reply to the weather prediction of the hulk in the doorway. Not Barree's positiveness, but some telltale something in the atmosphere of that lonely mountain stronghold portended a change. There was no wind; rather a vast absence of it, leaving the air sticky and difficult to breathe. All the world, shrouded in darkness outside their yellow lantern-glow, seemed depressed, as if by the telling of Russ Barree's story—the story not yet ended. Even the swaying of the pines, their swishings and creakings, had ceased; and their silence had an eerie and dreary quality of sound. Far off, a loon screamed. Listening to the mournful stillness, Clift had a mind-picture of Henry Faber, "shrunk and wasted and stooped—face tense and bitter—crazy as a loon," brooding in his cabin across the lake, listening, too, to the silence, with his mind upon a grave.

He shuddered, spoke at Barree's shoulder:

"It would also upset your plans, I suppose, if I'd take Faber out of this?"

Barree turned slowly, glared at him for a moment, then shook his head.

"You can't do that," he said. "He's my prisoner."

A wave of anger swept into Clift's brain.

"Can't?" he said brittlely.

"Won't, then," amended Barree. "You're my friend—so you announced yourself."

"I'm the friend of Sergeant Russ Barree," said Clift grimly. "And he's dead. You admit that. You're only a ghost of Russ Barree. You're mad. You—" He broke off. "Understand this, Russ: I respect your memory of the woman you loved, but I condemn your conduct as a member of the Mounted. You've certainly forfeited your authoritative rights. But you've committed no crime, so I can't take you with me if you insist on staying. Faber, however, has committed a crime—minor as giving false information might be—and I can take him along, and I shall. When

he's gone, perhaps you'll come to your senses."

Without standing for a reply, he brushed roughly past Barree and went out, stalked across the tiny, dark meadow where he had left his horses grazing. He had nothing in mind in that departure from the cabin, only escape from further hopeless argument. Once he glanced around, with the uncomfortable feeling that the other's revolver was trained on him or that he was being followed, but he decided quickly that it was only Barree's eyes burning into him from the doorway. He moved the horses to a stretch of richer pasture, tarried several minutes there with them, then strolled back to the cabin. Barree was still watching him, but with unseeing eyes; looking through him, into the past.

THE storm held off, though one and all of the pale stars had blanked completely out. Heavy clouds drifted athwart the pine-tops, a vast, damp drabness in-wrapped that hidden valley. All was dismal, full of disquietude. Alone that long evening with the brooding Barree, who sat interminably in silence, staring at nothing within those four bare walls, Clift finally put his pipe away and went about preparing a floor mattress of feathered pine-boughs.

"Well," he said, when he had spread his blankets, "how about it, Russ?"

Barree, came slowly back from the far-away, asked dully:

"What?"

"Shall we call it a day?"

"Mm."

"And get an early start in the morning?"

Hostility instantly boiled up again in Barree.

"You've spoken your little piece," he shot back, "and I've spoken mine. I'm staying here, and that ends it."

Clift gave a slow shrug of his shoulders.

"All right."

"And Faber's staying, too. You just keep your nose out of my affairs and your hands off my man. If you don't——"

"Well, if I don't—what?" sharply.

"I'm liable to take the notion to blow your head off."

In spite of Barree's deadly seriousness, the menace in his brittle threat, Sergeant Clift twisted one corner of his mouth into a contemptuous grin of unbelief; turned to his bed, sat down upon it and started to take off his boots.

"You wouldn't do that, Russ," he remarked casually.

"Don't be too sure of what I wouldn't do," was the bewhiskered man's grim reply.

Clift disdained to argue further, turned in and was soon fast asleep.

Some time later he was awakened by a sudden clap of thunder. The room was in darkness. He peered around him, felt the strange emotion of being alone.

"Russ," he said quietly.

No answer. No sound of breathing. He threw off his blanket, struck a match. But Barree was not there. He got up, lit the lantern, then opened the door and called again:

"Russ! Barree!"

The pines creaked in reply. He heard a movement, walked to the rear of the cabin, but it was only the restless prowling around in their enclosure of Barree's five husky-dogs. He crossed out to the meadow, found his horses peacefully cropping grass, returned to the cabin.

"Damn me," he muttered. "I wonder——"

He peered through the trees, ranged his eye across the black waters of the narrow lake, but could see no light nor any suggestion of the cabin reported occupied by Henry Faber.

"—wonder what he's up to now," he finished.

Suddenly he felt a breath of air sweep along the valley. A few drops of rain fell. Then there was a second thunder-clap, a blinding rent in the heavens and the storm broke—the clouds cannonading, the wind sounding a great note of distress through the swaying pines.

He closed the door, waited; and kept on waiting. But the accumulating loneliness under which his spirit began to sag was not relieved, even by the time the hail-stone volley had finally ceased and there sounded only occasional rumbles of direful thunder and the steady, dreary beat of rain.

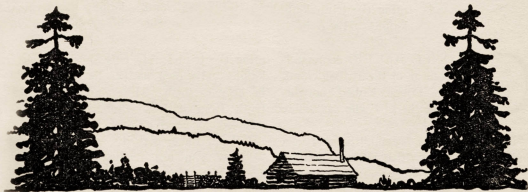
HIS growing impatience at last prompted him to action. He took up the lantern and went out, started off through the dark woodland, around the short end of the lake, determined to somehow find the Henry Faber cabin. Nor could he help suspecting, as he pressed blindly on over the pine-needled forest-floor, through the solemn aisles of dripping pines, that he was destined to be too late.

And, on presently finding the cabin with somewhat less difficulty than he had anticipated, he saw that he was not wrong in his suspicions. For, as he pushed open the door, he was not so much startled as appalled at the sight of the two men seated across from each other at a table set with a smoking oil-lamp and a leather-framed photograph. About each was an attitude

of utter weariness. Barree was bent forward, with his shaggy head resting on his left arm and his right hand gripping a gun. Faber was slumped down in his chair; his chin rested on his sunken chest, his arms hung at his sides; on the floor, under his right hand, was a gun which had fallen from his fingers. They were both quite dead. Each had unquestionably pulled his weapon's trigger at one and the same instant—Barree's bullet having crashed into Faber's brain; Faber's bullet having thundered into Barree's heart.

It was the end of the story.

And yet there was just this appendix; and Sergeant Clift realized it as he found himself staring at that photograph which leaned against the lamp at one end of the table. The photograph of a woman not quite young; a blonde woman, beautiful in a way, though not in the wilderness way; a sleek woman, lacquered, with selfish mouth, but with strange, passionate eyes which seemed to say "I love you" as they looked out from behind that leather frame—not at him, nor at the drained, terrible face of Henry Faber, but at the seemingly sleeping form of Russ Barree.



*As Famous a Character as the Major Appears in This Story
by the Same Author. Dynamite Drury of the
South African Police Solves—*

RITUAL MURDER

By L. PATRICK GREENE



COLONEL BAKER, commanding officer of the British South Africa Police, looked thoughtfully at the girl who sat beside his desk.

"I'm afraid, Miss Martin," he said in a kind, friendly voice, "that there is nothing else we can do. Trooper Greaves, who has been working on the case, reports that it was undoubtedly a ritual murder and that the natives implicated came from over the border—"

"Trooper Greaves!" the girl broke in scornfully. "What hope had he of discov-

ering the truth? He only speaks 'kitchen kaffir.' His own natives lie to him and he believes them. How could he get the truth from natives who have been instructed to deceive him?"

Colonel Baker sighed.

"Now you are dealing in suspicions again, Miss Martin. And you admit that you have no just grounds for suspecting this man Lake."

"I detest the man," the girl flared angrily.

"I said *just* grounds, Miss Martin," the C. O. said quietly.

"He's a white kaffir," the girl continued, controlling her anger with difficulty. "He's—oh, he's everything that's beastly."

"Granted. But that doesn't make him a murderer. No, Miss Martin. The murder of your brother has made you lose your sense of proportion. I can understand that and sympathize with you. But I cannot go any further. Your brother's death is just one of those tragic happenings which remind us that the black man is still ruled by his dark gods and that witchdoctors are still a strong force for evil—or what we call evil—despite the efforts of missionaries and the advance of civilization. Of course I will send Trooper Greaves' report to the Portuguese authorities and that, I think, is all that I can do."

The girl's eyes blazed as she rose to her feet.

"Very well, Colonel Baker," she said coldly. "If that is your last word, I shall deal with 'Kaffir' Lake myself. And killing him," she added viciously, "will also be a ritual murder. A ritual of just revenge. I—"

"Sit down," the C. O. commanded sharply, breaking into the girl's hysterical outburst. "You are acting like a child." He continued more gently as she was startled into obeying him. "You put me in a quandary. For your own sake, I cannot let you go—"

YOU cannot hold me here against my will," she retorted calmly. "And I will kill Kaffir Lake."

"Yes. That's what I am afraid of. And two wrongs never did make a right, Miss Martin. Nor, for the matter of that, does anything you have told me justify a suspicion that Lake murdered your brother." He looked at his watch and continued. "Now I will make a bargain with you. I'll send another man to investigate your brother's death but only on this condition: if his report corroborates that of Trooper Greaves you must accept it as final and admit that your own suspicions are utterly baseless. Well?"

"That depends," the girl answered coolly. "If the man you plan to send on the case is as big a fool as Trooper Greaves, my answer is No."

"I propose to detail the best man in the force to the case, Miss Martin. He was absent from headquarters on an important investigation when we received the report of your brother's murder or I would have sent him then instead of Greaves."

"What's his name?" the girl asked.

"Drury. Thomas 'Dynamite' Drury."

"How dare you, Colonel Baker!" the girl gasped. "Drury! I've heard of him. I've been told that he's a disgrace to the force and that, not so long ago, you were considering giving him his 'dishonorable discharge.' Why—"

"I give you my word," Colonel Baker interrupted calmly, "that he's the best man in the force for such an investigation. He has qualifications which put him in a class by himself. He speaks the Taal and many native dialects. He knows the country and the natives as do few white men. He's a splendid horseman although, admittedly, his seat is not a military one; he was a cowboy somewhere in the American West, I believe, before he came to Africa. He's—but suppose you suspend judgment on him until you have seen him. I warn you, though, that you must not judge by externals and remember please that, because of his many qualifications I have overlooked his many acts of insubordination, his lack of discipline and his unmilitary appearance, and have retained him on the force as a Special Duty trooper." The C. O. looked at his watch again. "He'll be here in a moment. Now I am going to let you tell him the facts of the case—but only the facts. I don't want him bothered with your suspicions. I'm not, even, going to let him read Trooper Greaves' report. He works better—" A knock sounded on the door. "There he is now. You understand—facts only."

The girl nodded and the C. O. shouted, "Come in!"

THE door opened and Trooper Thomas Drury entered.

He saluted clumsily and stood in a posture which vaguely resembled that of "attention," flushing red under the girl's searching scrutiny.

He was all of six feet though his slouching posture made him look less, he was lean and wiry and his legs were slightly bowed. A flaming lock of red hair escaped from under his helmet and hung down over his broad forehead. His nose was large, his mouth wide and generous. His eyes were of that deep blue which is almost violet. His uniform fitted him very badly; the collar of his tunic was unhooked, his buttons tarnished, his cloth puttees clung shapelessly to his legs.

"This is Miss Martin, Drury," the C. O. said tersely. "Sit down and listen to the story she wants to tell you."

"Pleased to know you, ma'am," Drury said as he seated himself. "An' if you're any relation to the Bob Martin that lived down Chimio way——"

"He was my brother," she said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, ma'am. Well—I reckon I know your story, ma'am. Cripes, everybody's talkin' about it!"

"And I suppose," the girl said coldly, "that you have concluded, like everybody else, that it was a ritual murder."

Trooper Drury scratched his head and looked to the C. O. for guidance, but that man was studiously examining his nails.

"No, ma'am," Drury replied. "I can't say that I've rightly formed any opinion at all. Can't, with only hearsay to go on."

"Just how much do you know about it, Drury?" the C. O. asked.

Drury looked questioningly at the girl.

"Don't worry about me," she said bitterly. "My emotions are under good control. And I'm the daughter of a pioneer. I've lived through two uprisings and fought beside my father and brother at the last one."

"Yes, ma'am," Drury said admiringly. "Well, all I know about your brother's death is that his headless body was found

under some mapani bush about ten miles from his homestead, and his body was covered with assegai wounds. At least," he amended cautiously, "they are reported to be assegai wounds. An' it's said that a party of natives—warriors—from over the border was seen with Martin's head stuck on an assegai. All of which 'ud seem to indicate that it was a ritual murder."

"Miss Martin says it wasn't," the C. O. said. "She has other suspicions."

DRURY looked at her keenly.

"Got anything to justify them suspicions, ma'am?"

"Yes—that is, no."

"The answer is no, Drury," the C. O. said quickly in answer to the trooper's quizzical look of inquiry. "But Miss Martin refuses to accept the report of Trooper Greaves and threatens to take the law into her own hands, acting entirely on her sus-



picious. Consequently, I am sending you to investigate on condition that she stays here until you have concluded your work on the case and that she accepts your report as final."

"It won't be noways easy," Drury said slowly. "Martin's been dead a month now, an' niggers have short memories when it suits them. However, I reckon I'd better be getting some kit together. I'll be leavin' on the noon train for Umtali—no sense wasting any more time. You'll have my traveling vouchers made out for me, sir?"

The C. O. nodded.

"Aren't there any questions you want to ask me, Trooper?" the girl asked.

"Reckon not, ma'am. Under the circumstances it ain't likely you're seeing or hearing things exactly right just now. Nope. I'll go along with an empty

head—"Drury grinned—"it'll be able to hold more when I get there."

He saluted, executed an awkward right about turn, muttered "Aw hell!" under his breath and left the office, slamming the door behind him.

"Well, Miss Martin?" the C. O. questioned.

"I agree to your conditions, Colonel Baker," she replied quietly. "Somehow, your clodhopper of a Special Duty trooper inspires confidence. He'll discover the truth."

FOUR days later Trooper Drury was riding through a desolate waste of mapani scrub, heading toward a kopje, shaped like a truncated cone, which was one of the few landmarks in that level bush veld. Two days previously, when only a few hours out of Umtali Drury had marked that kopje on the distant horizon. It had seemed little more than a forenoon's trek distant and now that he was within five or six miles of its base it seemed, distorted by the heat waves and the lengthening shadows of the westering sun, to be remote and unreal.

At the base of that kopje was built the kraal of Chimio, on the top of it was the store of a man named Lake. Several miles to the north was the homestead—now deserted—of Bob Martin and about the same distance to the east, on if not over the Portuguese border, was the homestead of a man named Parratt.

For this information, Drury was indebted to the Troop Sergeant Major at Umtali who had tried to pump the red-headed trooper as to the nature of his errand.

"Tisn't the Martin business, surely?" he had said. "Trooper Greaves did a good piece of work on that case."

But though he had questioned shrewdly and Drury had talked a lot, the T. S. M. failed to get a satisfactory answer to his questions. On the other hand, he had given Drury—quite unconsciously—a great deal of information about the district, especially about Chimio—the kraal and its

headman—and the white men who had settled in the neighborhood.

"Better make Parratt's place your headquarters," he had told Drury. "Parratt's one of the best and is always glad to have a trooper stay with him. The only other white man in the immediate neighborhood of Chimio's—now that poor old Martin's dead—is Lake, the storekeeper. And he's a swine if there ever was one. If we could prove only half the things we suspect, Lake 'ud be sent to *trunk* (prison) for the rest of his natural. But he's *slim*. (cunning) and, so far, we haven't been able to trap him. You see, it's next to impossible to catch him unawares. It's my opinion he has a lookout posted all the time on the top of that big kopje of his, sweeping all the veld around with a telescope. As for Chimio and his people; they're a typical crowd of gutless, lazy, lice-ridden Mashonas."

THERE had been some hot words passed between Drury and the T. S. M., before the latter had permitted Drury to take the sturdy, red roan he was now riding. The T. S. M., judging by externals, had tried to detail to Drury a raw-boned, half-broken Australian whaler. But Drury knew what he wanted and—supported by his authority as "Special Duty Trooper"—got it.

But he had not been able to avoid an inspection before setting off on his patrol and the T. S. M. had waxed indignantly sarcastic about his appearance, and with just cause: there was nothing about Drury to suggest that he was a member of a force which prides itself on being one of the smartest in the world. His uniform was creased and travel-soiled, his head rope needed pipe-claying, his saddle wallets were stuffed with food and his blanket roll was an untidy looking bundle fastened to the cantle. Drury blandly explained he didn't like the English style of saddle and that, as he was a poor rider, he liked to have something supporting him back and front. He also said that the coil of rope

which hung from his saddle came in useful when he wanted to gallop.

"You see, Sergeant Major, sir," he explained gravely, "I tie myself on—else I might fall off!"

Superficially, the sergeant major was justified in calling Drury a dirty soldier. But after he had examined Drury's rifle and revolver and had noted that the trooper's saddlery was in perfect condition, his wrath abated somewhat. But it broke out again when Drury rode off at a canter, sitting his horse like the born horseman he was.

"By gad," the T. S. M. cried, "I believe the insubordinate devil was pulling my leg!"

AND now it wanted about an hour to sun-under and Drury was riding at a leisurely tripple, content in the knowledge that he would arrive at the kraal and have time to make arrangements for the night before darkness covered the veld. He seemed to be sleeping in the saddle, trusting to his horse to keep to the course and avoid the ant bear burrows which honeycombed the ground. But when the native path they were following made a senseless detour, as native paths so often do, a pressure with his knee or that kept the horse to a direct line. Drury heard, too, though he did not look up or change his horse's pace or direction, the drumming of a horse's hooves on the hard sun-baked veld. He knew that someone was riding toward him from the east, rounding the line of low-lying kopjes about a mile distant and seeming to be the lower foothills of the kopje which was his goal.

But when three shots, fired in rapid succession, broke the silence, he drew rein and looked toward the hills. He saw then a man ride into view, cresting one of the wave-like billows which ridged the surface of the apparently level veld. After a moment's hesitation, Drury turned his horse and rode at a canter to meet the man.

"What's wrong?" he asked when they met a few minutes later.

"Wrong? Nothing's wrong, Trooper," the other replied. He was dressed in the nondescript garments of a back country settler. He was tall, slim and, Drury judged, very powerful. He sat his horse well, but—

"None of my business," Drury observed slowly. "But there ain't no need, surely, mister, to ride that horse of yours on the curb. However," he continued hurriedly, "if there's nothing wrong, what was all the shooting about?"

"I was trying to attract your attention—and I ride my horse any way I like."

"Sure you do. But why? What did you want to attract my attention for, I mean."

"Well I'm damned! Don't you know who I am?"

"Nope. Should I?"

The other laughed.

"It's easy to see you're a new comer to this district. But didn't they tell you about me at Umтали?"

"You ain't Lake, by any chance, the storekeeper?"

"I'm not!" the answer was given indignantly.

"Ah, then," Drury said heavily. "Then you must be Mr. Parratt."

"Right," Parratt said with a laugh. "Now you know why I wanted to attract your attention. You're heading the wrong way, Trooper. My place is over there, back of those hills. But look here, I can't keep calling you 'Trooper.' What's your name?"

"Drury—sometimes called 'Dynamite.' Don't know why, 'less it's this red thatch of mine."

Parratt laughed.

"If your temper's as hot as your hair suggests, you're a bad man to cross, Dynamite. Well, come along. No sense talking here. If we hurry, you'll have time for a bath and a sundowner before skoff."

Drury shook his head.

"I was fixing to get to Chimio's tonight," he said.

"But listen, old man," Parratt expostu-

lated. "You can't do that. Troopers always stay with me when they're patrolling this district. They make my place their headquarters, you know. And you must do the same. Really. I insist. There's nowhere else for you to go. There's only Lake—and he's a filthy swine. As for the kraal; well, perhaps you don't know what a Mashona kraal is like!"

"I'll know before morning," Drury replied dryly. "I'm staying there tonight."

Parratt eyed him shrewdly.

"Of course," he said with a shrug of his shoulders, "if that's the way you feel about it—you're not stationed at Umtali, are you? But of course not. You must have been sent down from headquarters about the Martin case. Grace—Miss Martin, that is—told me that she was going to make a personal appeal to Colonel Baker. I suppose you're the result of that appeal?"

"Right first time. A mad business if you ask me. What chance have I got to find out anything—even if there's anything to be found out—after all this time?"

PARRATT sighed.

"I know. It's a pity Grace won't accept the truth. She's so convinced that Lake is responsible for her brother's death that she won't listen to reason and makes it hard for her friends to help her. We were going to get married—but now she says she won't hear of it until her brother's murderer is brought to justice." He sighed again. "If there had been anything to connect Lake with the crime, Greaves would have discovered it. Good man Greaves. No. Lake's a rotter—no doubt about that—and he swore he'd blow out Martin's brains more than once——"

"Why?" Drury questioned sharply.

Parratt hesitated.

"Well. I don't like kicking a man when he's down. But Bob Martin could not stand Lake at any price. Lake's a white kaffir, you know, and a particularly dirty specimen, at that. Martin suspected him of selling liquor to the natives——"

"Had he any cause for that suspicion?" Drury asked.

"Lord, yes," Parratt replied with a curt laugh. "We've all suspected it, but have been unable to prove anything. That's why Bob Martin took the law into his own hands and gave Lake a sjamboking he won't forget in a hurry. Lake was mad, and he swore to get even with Martin——"

"Ah!" Drury said softly. "Then it looks as if there might be something back of Miss Martin's suspicions."

"I wish there was," Parratt said wearily. "For both our sakes. But there's no sense in thinking that way. Lake had nothing to do with Martin's murder. No. Martin was killed by natives who, following an old custom, killed a brave man and dipped their spears in his blood in order to prove they were warriors. Where Greaves fell down was in not going over the border after the niggers. To hell with international courtesy in a case like this. And now—it's too late. Well, we can discuss this better over a sundowner. Come on."

"I'm going on to Chimio's," Drury said obstinately. "Maybe I'll call in at your place in the mornin'."

"You're going to be my guest tonight," Parratt said firmly. "Come on. I won't take 'No' for an answer."

"I reckon you'll have to," Drury said with a laugh. And then his jaw dropped and he stared at the revolver Parratt had drawn. "What's the idea?"

PARRATT laughed.

"Nothing alarming. I've just made you my prisoner, that's all. You're coming with me whether you like it or not. Listen, man," he continued coaxingly, "I get as lonely as hell at my place. Except Lake, my nearest white neighbor is thirty miles away and he's a back-vel'd Boer without a thought in his head. Damn it. You can't refuse my hospitality now, can you?"

"As to that," Drury drawled, staring at the revolver in the other's hand as if it

hypnotized him. "I don't know as I can. Beats me where you got that revolver from. It ain't loaded, is it?"

"Well—what do you think?"

Drury shook his head and his helmet slid over one eye. He put his hand up as if to straighten it. When his hand came down again with great force and speed, his helmet was in it. The stiff rim struck Parratt across the wrist and caused him to drop his revolver. Drury caught it as it fell, broke it with a jerk which sent the bullets flying to the ground. Then he handed the revolver back to Parratt and before the man had recovered from his astonishment Drury wheeled his horse and cantered away, heading once again for Chimio's kraal.

"I'll be seeing you tomorrow, maybe," he shouted back over his shoulder. "Sorry if I hurt your wrist, but I don't like a man getting the drop on me—even by way of a joke!"

Parratt shook his fist, but whether in anger or fun Drury could not say, then wheeled his horse and rode off at a fast gallop in the direction from which he had come.

Drury grinned but immediately sobered and wondered if he had been wise to treat so off-handedly a man whose only offense had been an understandable desire for a white man's society.

"Aw hell!" Drury muttered with a shrug of his shoulders. "What else could I do? I'm gun-shy and wasn't responsible for my actions! I'll tell him that next time I see him. So that's that."

But Drury could not put the matter out of his mind; for some reason his meeting with Parratt had assumed an importance out of all proportion with its surface inconsequence. He slowed his horse to a walk and debated with himself the wisdom of riding to the Parratt homestead and of attempting to make some amends for his churlish rejection of that man's offer of hospitality. That he did not is due entirely to the fact that he was following a hunch. And, Drury had discovered, his

hunches were generally right; they were actually the result of subconscious consideration of whatever problem he was trying to solve. Just as a man may today suddenly remember something which yesterday escaped his memory—so Drury's hunches came to him. He did not attempt to analyze them, he acted on them and thus, by using this faculty, increased its effective-



ness. Occasionally his hunches let him down; more frequently they led him to the solution of his problem. And his present hunch was to get to the kraal of Chimio. Parratt's attempt to force hospitality upon him, thus delaying his arrival at the kraal, only served to strengthen that hunch though he could not have explained why that should be so.

THE sun had set—in half an hour darkness would drop on the veld—when he came to a deep and wide *donga* which ran north and south across the veld. It was in the bottom of a deep depression and out of sight of the kraal of Chimio two miles beyond. In the wet season Drury knew that *donga* would be a raging torrent and now, though it was bone dry, it was a difficult obstacle to cross for the sides of it were sheer rock. He rode along it a little way looking for a safe place to cross and coming at last to where the bank sloped less steeply rode down it, crossed over the rocky bed and up the opposite side.

As his horse with a snorting plunging effort scrambled on to the level veld again a heavy report shattered the silence. Drury was conscious of a stunning blow on the

head. He swayed helplessly in the saddle and as the horse broke into a frenzied gallop fell heavily to the ground, his fall broken somewhat by a clump of young mapani bush.

Feeling horribly nauseated, his head aching, Drury fought grimly against the mist of unconsciousness which threatened to engulf him. At last he knew he had succeeded—but he did not move. He was stretched out prone on the ground, his head resting on his left arm. His helmet was on the ground beside him. Two jagged holes gaped in the crown of it and the leather chin strap was broken.

Could anyone have seen him—which is doubtful as he was hidden in the mapani bush, but Drury took no chances!—they would have judged him to be dead or, at least, unconscious. But though his head ached abominably and his body was bruised, Drury was mentally on the alert; his right hand, it was beneath him, closed firmly about the butt of his revolver.

His bare head made a fiery patch there amongst the green of the foliage and, for once, it was indicative of his temper; his face was white with anger, his eyes blazed.

He had been shot at from ambush, and by a native. At least, the weapon used had been a muzzle-loader judging from its bellowing report and the heavy slug which had torn its way through his helmet. It was the impact of that slug—it had broken his chin strap and torn the helmet from his head—which had felt like a blow; the slug had just grazed the top of Drury's head but had not even broken the skin. A little lower—

"An' what brains I've got," Drury told himself, "'ud have been splattered all over the darned veld. If the feller had been wise he'd have aimed for my body instead of my head. Mebbe he did. Them muzzle loaders ain't what I'd call good target weapons; they're apt to throw high."

He listened intently, expecting to hear the footsteps of the ambusher approaching to make sure his shot had been successful. But no sound came to him and he

was forced to the conclusion that his assailant had been so sure of his aim that he was not bothering to confirm it.

That puzzled Drury. If he were right in supposing the weapon which had fired the shot to be a muzzle loader, then the marksman must have been a native. But it did not seem as if a native would have been so sure of his aim or possessed of sufficient self-restraint to keep from a close up, gloating view of his victim. And if it were a native—did that mean that he, Drury, was intended as the victim of another ritual murder?

On the other hand, if the unseen marksman were a white man why had he chosen such an uncertain weapon as a muzzle-loader? For the matter of that, why should a white man wish to kill him?

DRURY'S angry annoyance increased as the minutes passed and he silently cursed the ambusher for not acting according to precedent and coming to view the body of the man he had, presumably, killed. But Drury's anger did not destroy his patience. He could act with a devastating suddenness, but he could also wait.

The flaming afterglow of sunset faded quickly from the sky and the purple shadows were changing to black when Drury heard the high pitched voices of shouting, excited natives.

He cautiously raised his head a little and parting the bushes before him saw natives, carrying lighted torches, hurrying over the veld. They were, he realized, looking for him. Secure in the knowledge that the darkness hid his movements he rose and went forward to meet them.

Five minutes later he was the center of a ring of men who loudly protested their belief at finding him so quickly and unharmed.

"*Wo-we, inkosi,*" one said. "When your horse came galloping to the kraal we feared that death had come to you—"

"And how should death come to me?" Drury interrupted quickly.

"There are many deaths walking

abroad," the native replied sententiously. "There are lions and leopards; there are poisonous snakes——"

"Truly," Drury interrupted again. "There also are evil men. See!" He showed to them the gaping holes in the crown of his helmet. "See how closely death passed me by. A man with a fire stick loosed that death at me as I was riding up out of the *donga*. Who was it?"

"*Au-a, inkosi*," they muttered in awed tones, "it was not one of us. Fire-sticks are forbidden to us—you know it. And Chimio is a Government man; he sees to it that we obey the laws. Would the *inkosi* have us search for the evil man?"

Drury hesitated a moment. Then:

"No. You could not find him in the darkness." He laughed. "It is no matter. Maybe he was not evil. Maybe he was only a fool and the sun being in his eyes, he fired at me thinking I was a buck. See—" he snapped his fingers—"I put the matter out of my mind. It is forgotten. Now let us go to the kraal. I am hungry."

And with natives before and behind, on his right and on his left, Drury went on to the settlement.

He was greeted at the opening in the thorn stockade which encircled the kraal by the headman, a short, fat-bellied man with a goat-like beard.

"*Au-a, inkosi*," he said with true native courtesy, "I rejoice that you have come to no harm. Your horse has been attended to by my son who has seen service with white men and therefore knows many things. Another son—he too was in a white man's service is even now preparing food. After you have eaten then, if you will, we will talk."

"That is good," Drury approved. "Now first show me to the place where I may sleep."

Chimio was distressed by the trooper's request.

"*Au-a, inkosi*," he muttered. "I have no hut fitting. Other troopers of the police have always scorned my kraal and

have slept at the place of the *Inkosi* Par-rat-ee. Nevertheless——" He clapped his hands and to one of his wives who responded to the call he gave orders for a hut to be made ready. "Unless," he added, "the *inkosi* would rather stay at the place of the trader. Or yet again, if he wishes it my sons shall guide him through the darkness to the place of *Inkosi* Par-rat-ee."

"No," Drury decided, "I stay here. I want to talk to you and to your people—after I have eaten."

"The *inkosi* has spoken," Chimio said. "But I must tell the *inkosi*—for he is a stranger and perhaps does not know—there is a white man living very near. If he wishes, he could go to the place of the trader. It is on top of the kopje. True, the road to it is not easy in the darkness and there are dog-apes and leopards——"

"I stay here," Drury said wearily. "*Au-a!* Soon I shall think that you do not wish me to stay."

"I am your dog, *inkosi*. Come!"

Chimio took a smoking torch from one of the men and led the way past a collection of low, ill-built huts from which emanated the stinks of Africa and so to his own hut and the huts of his wives. These were larger and better built than the others and stood on one side of a small clearing in the center of the kraal. Before them a wood fire blazed.

HALF an hour later, after he had seen to his horse, Drury sat down in a rickety canvas chair proudly produced by Chimio and ate the food which had been prepared for him. And he ate with gusto, for Chimio's son proved to be an accomplished cook boy. As he ate occasional whispers and furtive rustlings came to him beyond the circle of light cast by the fire; he knew that Chimio's people were watching every move he made.

At last, his appetite satisfied, Drury lighted a cigarette and smoked contentedly.

Chimio then came forward, accompanied by several gray-beards. They squatted on their haunches to Drury's right and left.

Then the rest of the kraal people came nearer. The fire flames lighted the faces of those in the front row. They were grave faces, but friendly.

Drury said suddenly:

"I do not know you people of Chimio's kraal. Tell me; are you true men? Do you offer friendship with the right hand and stab with the left?"

"Test us, *inkosi*!" they shouted.

"As be sure I will," Drury commented dryly. "In my own time. In my own way. And are you liars, or——?"

"There are times when it is wise to lie," Chimio said.

"True. But that time is not now. *Wowe!* I have come to question you concerning a killing. But first I make a magic. Watch—for now I spin a web of truth about you."

He rose as he spoke and taking his rope from his saddle he caused it to come to life in his hand. At least, that is what it seemed to the natives as they watched him spin it about him in an ever widening circle, now up in the air above his head, now almost brushing the ground at his feet.

"This is the web of truth," he said. "With it about you you cannot lie; for, if you lie, it will tighten about you, choking out your life."

The natives gasped. All of them, even those who had seen service with white men, accepted without question the power Drury imputed to his spinning rope.

Suddenly he let the rope fall to the ground.

"Chimio," he said, "how many of your men have fire sticks?"

"Not one, *inkosi*." The answer came promptly and with the confidence of truth.

"You!" Drury said, pointing to a big native in the center of the row facing him.

"What is your name?"

"Kawiti, *inkosi*."

"Who tried to kill me with the fire stick at the donga?"

"Au-a!" Apparently proud of being singled out, Kawiti forgot for the moment

the charm Drury had spun and, in a manner that is characteristic of the Mashona, commenced to concoct an elaborate reply. "At the time of sun set evil spirits enter the bodies of men and doubtless——"

Drury's hand moved and the rope snaked out, its noose settling about Kawiti's neck. Drury pulled the man toward him.

"Who tried to kill me, Kawiti?" Drury asked grimly.

"*Au-a, inkosi*. I die. It is choking me. I—I do not know, *inkosi*, I do not know.

He gasped with relief when Drury took the rope from him and shuffled back shamefacedly to his place amidst the mocking laughter of the others.

DRURY was silent for a little while, listening to the noises which came from the summit of the kopje back of the kraal—the lowing of cattle and the excitement-filled shouts of men. He was conscious presently of a change in the tempers of the kraal people. They too were listening to the sounds and were debating their cause in excited whispers; Drury and his web of truth was forgotten.

Drury cursed, silently. He had meant his pause to be a dramatic one—as it would



have been but for the shouting. Now he would have to start all over again, and first he would have to discover what all the shouting was about and put a stop to it.

He was about to question Chimio when lights appeared on the kopje top. They looked like stars, but they moved downward swiftly; they were torches carried by shouting natives and now Drury could distinguish what they were saying:

"The storekeeper is dead. The Black One has killed him."

Guided by one of Chimio's sons carrying a torch—he ordered the rest of the natives to remain at the kraal—Drury left the place at a run. They followed a well-defined road which led through a chaos of boulders which strewed the kopje's lower slopes.

"Shall we follow the road all the way, *inkosi*?" the native asked, "or take the steep path?"

"The path," Drury said, "if that is quicker."

So they left the winding road and clambered up a steep path which was little better than a goat track and after a little while met the descending natives. Drury questioned them, but the tragedy which had been enacted upon the kopje top seemed to have robbed them of coherent speech. They could only say, over and over again, in hoarse, monotonous voices:

"He is dead. The Black One killed him. *Wo-we!* And the Majohnnie will hold us guilty."

Realizing that there was little to be gained in questioning them at the moment Drury continued the climb, accompanied by the natives and finally reached the level, plateau-like top of the kopje.

His way lighted by the torches, he encircled a large cattle kraal and so came to a group of huts built close up against a wall of solid rock. From the open door of one of them streamed a path of light.

AS DRURY entered this hut an incredibly fat native woman rose to her feet and cringed abjectly against the wall.

"He is dead, *inkosi*," she gasped, pointing to the trundle bed against the back wall of the hut. On the bed was stretched the body of a man. He was naked to the waist and some attempt had been made to close the gaping hole in his chest from which his life had departed. Taking down the hurricane lantern which hung from a nail driven into the center pole of the hut,

Drury examined the wound carefully. Then he turned swiftly to the woman.

"Who are you?"

"I am Mabele," she replied sullenly. "I was this one's wife. Now I am his widow."

"Who killed him?" Drury asked, turning on the natives who had crowded into the hut.

"*Wu!*" they said. "We have told you, *inkosi*. It was the Black One."

For the moment Drury came dangerously close to losing his temper, but, "And who is the Black One?"

"Come, *inkosi*. We will show you."

Carrying the hurricane lantern and escorted by the natives carrying torches, Drury went out of the hut and to a stout pole stockade standing by itself at the far end of the plateau. The stockade was really a small pen, housing a magnificent black bull which bellowed angrily as they neared.

"This is the Black One," the natives said—and there was fear in their voices. "He killed the storekeeper."

Drury went close to the stockade and held his light so that its rays fell upon the bull's head. The beast lowered its head and made a savage, grunting rush at him, crashing up against the pole with a terrific impact. Fortunately the poles were stout and well imbedded in the iron hard ground.

"Come away, *inkosi*," one of the natives shouted—he with the others had retreated to a safe distance. "Come away before he goes mad and breaks out."

Drury spoke softly to the bull and as the beast seemed to have exhausted its anger in that one mad rush, went close to the poles and resumed his scrutiny of the bull's head—specially of its wickedly curving horns.

Satisfied at last, he rejoined the natives and went with them to the large tin-roofed store hut.

"Now," he said after several lamps had been lighted, "who is the boss boy amongst you?"

A tall, gangling native, dressed in his late master's cast off garments, answered.

"I am, *inkosi*. My name is Tomasi."
"Then tell me the story of your boss's death."

"It was the bull, *inkosi*," Tomasi answered. "*Au-a!* It is the father of evil. It is strong as an elephant and as cunning as a leopard. And it was mad. Many of us have felt its horns. Look!" He bared his chest and showed an ugly, scarcely healed wound. "We begged the man who is dead to kill the bull—but he would not. He laughed at our fears. And tonight the beast killed him."

"How?" Drury's curt question cut into the native's speech.

"How?" he repeated stupidly. "With his horn. How else? We were in the store with the white man, making straight the day's tally of goods. We heard a voice shout, 'The Black One is loose. The Black One is loose.' And the storekeeper went out into the darkness to drive him back into the stockade."

"Alone?"

"Truly. As he had done before. He spoke a language that the Black One understood. And we—we were afraid of it. We heard the storekeeper talking to the Black One as was his wont. We heard the Black One bellow and the thud of his hoofs. Then, *inkosi*, the storekeeper screamed, calling for us to go to his aid. So we went—but not swiftly. We were afraid. We found the storekeeper on the ground close to the stockade and the Black One was standing over him, sniffing at his body. We drove the Black One—not easily—into the stockade and closed the opening. Then we looked to the storekeeper. And we picked him up and carried him to his hut. What we could do, that we did, but he was already dead. Then we, fearing that his death might be charged to us, and knowing you were at the kraal of Chimio, came down to tell you what had happened."

"How knew you I was at Chimio's?"

"*Wu!* We saw you riding over the veld before the setting of the sun."

"Did you see me ride up from the donga?"

"I did not, *inkosi*. But the storekeeper did. He was watching you through his glass that brings far things near. And he saw something which made him very angry. I do not know what it was."

Drury nodded thoughtfully. Then he asked, "Were all of you here in the store when the voice shouted that the Black One was loose?"

"Yes, *inkosi*."

"Then whose was the voice that shouted the warning?"

Tomasi gaped open-mouthed and turned to the others questioningly.

"*Au-a*," he said wonderingly. "We do not know. Until now, we had not thought of that."

"Then now think of it," Drury commanded. "How many men worked here with the white man? Name them."

They did so with grave deliberation.

"And you were all in the store with the white man?"

"Yes," they chorused.

"Was it the voice of a man or a woman?"

"A man's, *inkosi*." There was doubt in their minds of that.

"And of that voice you could not say, 'That is so-and-so'?"

"No, *inkosi*."

"It was perhaps the voice of one of the natives who came to trade and remained to—"

Drury did not complete the sentence and Tomasi said:

"No, *inkosi*. No strangers were allowed to stay here after the sun had set."

Drury shook his head. Then he said suddenly:

"I stay here tonight—alone. It may be that the voice which spoke will speak again. It may be that the spirit of the man who is dead will speak to me. Now go, all of you. Take the woman with you. And tomorrow after the sun has risen you will

all come again to this place, bringing the headman, Chimio, and all his men folk, with you."

FOR a long time after the natives had departed, Drury sat thoughtfully on the counter of the store. At last he rose and went outside, taking the hurricane lantern with him. He made a complete tour of the place, entering all the huts, examining the cattle kraal and specially the ground around the bull pen. But the ground was solid rock and if he hoped to discover any footprints, he was fated to disappointment.

He went to the hut of the trader and once again examined the wound. Then covering the body with a blanket he took a chair and sat just outside the door.

The night was filled with sounds: the lowing of sleepy cattle, the chatter of dog apes and from the veld far below the cackling laughter of hyenas mingled with the voices of the kraal people.

When a late rising moon appeared above the horizon, flooding the veld and the kopje's peak with its white light, Drury forgot the problem before him and was entranced by the splendor of the scene. Here and there patches of gossamer white mist rested on the veld, looking like breaking waves on a green sea. Rivers, looking like bars of molten silver, laced the veld.

After a time Drury roused himself with an effort and returned to the store hut and examined the account books. They told him nothing, save that the trader had an unusually large sale of scent.

"Gosh!" Drury muttered. "These Mashonas ought to smell a darned sight sweeter than they do, judging by the amount of the stuff Lake's been selling."

He looked at the bottles on the shelf back of the long deal counter. Some held yellow liquid, some green, some lavender and some pink. They all had garishly colored labels.

Selecting one at random, Drury undid the tin foil which sealed the cap and poured some of the liquid into his hand. He sniffed it gingerly and his face grew grim.

He examined several other bottles in the same way, selecting them as haphazardly as he had done the first. He discovered that the liquid in all had the same acrid odor. He knew now just how low Lake had sunk, just how shrewd he had been and how callous to the well-being of others as long as his own profits were big ones. The contents of those bottles of perfume would have made a white man—supposing he could have forced himself to swallow some—very ill and might kill him. But it was nectar to the natives who demand swift action from the drinks. The "scent" was rot-gut liquor of the vilest sort. The kick was imparted to it by a corrosive acid. Drury had seen natives take a small glassful of similar stuff and pass through the various stages of drunkenness to a final coma within five minutes. It made them lustful, murdering brutes. It ruined their health and made degenerates of them.

Drury supposed that Lake, for his own safety, had refused to sell the poisonous compound to the natives at Chimio's kraal. His customers came from distant kraals and were not allowed to drink it anywhere near the store. Knowing that dope selling often accompanied the selling of this rot-gut booze, Drury made a careful search of the store and found sufficient evidence to prove that Lake had been guilty of that too, though he did not discover any dope.

"Too bad he's dead," Drury muttered. "I'd have made him drink a bottle of this stuff before I took him in. Hell, though! He was taking a chance not putting that stuff under cover, knowing I was at Chimio's." Then Drury recalled something Tomasi had said. Lake had watched Drury riding over the veld and had seen something which made him angry. Had Lake been angry because the attempt on Drury's life had failed—or because it had been made?

COMING at last to the conclusion that further consideration of the matter was useless with nothing more to go on, Drury decided to put the matter out of his

mind until the morning. "But I know a lot, at that," he told himself with grim emphasis, "and if I knew who let the bull out of its pen and shouted a warning, I reckon I'd know the answer to everything. Reckon I'll take some of them blankets an' make myself up a bed up here. It's airy and cleaner than any of the huts—though that ain't sayin' much."

He went to a pile of gaudy trade blankets and took two or three. As he did so something which had been partially hidden under the blankets fell to the ground behind the counter with a noisy clatter. Drury hesitated, then went behind the counter to see what it was that he had dislodged and saw that it was an old Boer roer—a muzzle-loading elephant gun. Whistling softly, the trooper picked it up and examined it closely. It had been recently fired and Drury knew that he was looking at the gun from which had come the slug which had so nearly put an end to his interest in life.

And that, he deduced, would seem to indicate that Lake, or one of Lake's boys, was the would-be murderer. But that did not make sense. If the boys had told the truth—and Drury, banking on his knowledge of natives, was sure that they had—Lake had been on the kopje at the time of the attempted murder. Nor could Drury believe that a native could have fired the shot.

"I'm goin' to have a talk with Mr. Bloomin' Parratt," Drury said aloud in a defiant tone, as if some unseen person were making fun of the hunch which suddenly came to him. "Damn it; and it ain't exactly a hunch. This business has got me goin'. I'm getting out of my depth an' I want to talk it over with somebody—an' Parratt seems the most likely man to talk to, if it's only because he's the nearest. Wonder if he'll be so hospitable if I turn up there near midnight—an' it'll be close on that by the time I get there. I'm goin' now. I've wasted too much time on this business; I ain't going to waste any more."

He wrapped up the Roer gun in some

paper which he tied on with string. Then having put out the light and locked the door of the store and Lake's hut he made his way down the steep winding road. He debated with himself the wisdom of the course he was pursuing and, because he detested walking and the Roer was a cumbersome burden—considered whether he should get his horse from the kraal and ride to Parratt's. Before he had reached the foot of the kopje he decided to walk. What is more, he meant to take great pains that no one should see him. He wanted his visit to be a surprise.

DRURY'S trek over the veld to Parratt's homestead was quite uneventful; true, a shadowy form kept pace with him for a little while and he found himself wishing that he had his rifle with him or, at least, that the Roer was loaded. A revolver is a poor weapon to use against a charging leopard and he sighed with relief when the beast left him to go to its mate which, judging by the exultant scream which shattered the silence, had killed a dog ape in the low lying foothills.

Shortly after that Drury came to the wire fence which encircled Parratt's farm



and presently, after passing through an acre or so of tobacco plants, past the curing sheds and the native laborer's huts, he came to a well-built wooden bungalow surrounded by a stoep.

A light gleamed through one of the windows and the shadow which appeared intermittently on the shade told Drury that Parratt was getting ready for bed.

Drury climbed the stoep steps and

knocked on the door and in answer to angry shouts of inquiry said:

"It's me, Parratt. Trooper Drury."

Drury heard doors opening and closing, then suddenly the door before which he stood was thrown open and Parratt, holding a lamp in his left hand and a revolver in his right glowered suspiciously at Drury. Then he laughed.

"It really is you," he said. "Sorry to appear so discourteous but a man has to be careful in this country. I don't want to go out the same way Martin did and some of these niggers—however, come in."

He stood aside and Drury entered what was evidently the living room of the bungalow and dropped with a sigh of satisfaction into a large, comfortable chair.

"You're a bit late accepting my hospitality, Drury," Parratt said slowly. "But better late than never. Have a drink?"

"Thanks. Walking's dry work."

Parratt who had been getting whisky, siphon and glasses from a cupboard, exclaimed:

"Walk? Why didn't you ride?"

"Oh, my horse is a bit lame an' then—well, I didn't want to rouse the niggers at the kraal. They think I'm up at Lake's; let 'em think that. I'll be back by sun-up, maybe and they'll never know I've been away. You see, I wanted to have a talk with you before I see them in the morning."

"Anything I can do to help," Parratt said, "I'll do. Well, help yourself. I suppose," he continued after they had silently toasted each other, "you didn't care for Lake as a host."

"Not much," Drury said, pouring himself out another drink.

PARRATT laughed.

"He was a rotter when he lived—and I don't imagine death has improved him. I suppose that's what you want to see me about."

"Partly," Drury admitted. "But who told you Lake was dead?"

"One of my niggers—news travels fast, Drury."

"Ain't it the truth? Say, this is good whisky. Here's how. It's a damned nuisance about Lake, though. Have to hold some sort of inquest, I suppose."

"What for?" Parratt snapped. "He's dead—and you know what killed him, don't you?"

"I only know what his niggers told me," Drury hedged.

"You can take it for granted that he was killed as they said, Drury. That bull is a vicious beast. I've warned Lake about it more than once—but he wouldn't be advised. Well, it got him at last, just as I always said it would."

"Then you don't think he was stabbed by niggers—like Martin was?"

"Of course, Drury," Parratt said sarcastically, "if you can't tell the difference between an assegai wound and that made by a bull's horn——"

"That's true," Drury said, scratching his head thoughtfully. "I hadn't thought of that."

Parratt pointed to the Roer which Drury had put on the floor close to his chair.

"What's that?" he asked curiously.

"Evidence," Drury replied laconically.

"Evidence of what?"

"Damned if I know—yet," Drury admitted. "Say, did you hear I nearly had my brains shot out shortly after I left you this afternoon?"

"Yes—of course I did," Parratt replied quickly. "But this business about Lake put it out of my mind. You had a lucky escape by all accounts. I suppose it was some nigger having a shot at a buck and nearly got you by mistake——"

"You don't think it was Lake or some other white man then?"

"Of course not. What white man's going to murder a policeman in the first place—or use a Roer for the job in the second? I bet the nigger who fired the shot's scared nearly white and he'll probably have chucked the gun in the river."

"No. I've got the gun," Drury said.

"That's it. That's the evidence. I found it at Lake's place."

Parratt whistled.

"Then it looks as if Lake or one of Lake's niggers shot at you."

"Looks as if," Drury agreed.

"Lake would be capable of a sly trick like that," Parratt said easily. "He was afraid you'd stumble on to some of his illegal dealings, so tried to put you out of the way in a manner which 'ud make it seem that a nigger was responsible. I think it's a good job for you, Drury, that the bull killed him. The chances are he'd have another shot at you."

"That's so," Drury assented. "An' you know, I'm not sure in my mind that Martin's murder was a ritual affair. Who found out about it?"

"I did. At least, my niggers did," Parratt replied. "They found Martin's headless body under a bush and they said they saw some natives from over the border carrying Martin's head stuck on an assegai."

"I'd like to have a talk to them niggers," Drury said.

"Not a chance, old man. They were a lazy, insubordinate crowd and I let them go—their time had expired, you know—as soon as Trooper Greaves had finished his investigations."

"Where are they now?"

PARRATT shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? They weren't local niggers. They came from over the border."

"Well," Drury exclaimed in tones of disgust, "who's goin' to prove Martin's death was a ritual murder? The only niggers who can tell the truth about it have scattered to hell-an'-gone in territory that's outside our jurisdiction. Who's goin' to get hold of them again?"

"What need," Parratt asked coldly. "Greaves questioned them and was satisfied they told the truth——"

"I understand he don't speak the vernacular," Drury interrupted.

"He speaks it well enough. And I helped him out. Have another drink."

"It's good whisky," Drury mumbled and his hand seemed to shake as he raised the glass. "I'll tell you what I think; I've got a hunch that Martin's murder, the attack on me and Lake's murder are all linked up like."

Parratt laughed.

"And that's about the maddest thing I've ever heard."

"Hey, but listen; now I know Lake was a white kaffir, and a low-down one at that. I know he sold rot-gut booze to niggers; clever, too, the way he had it disguised as scent openly displayed on his shelves. I suspect he sold dope—and if a man does that, there ain't anything lower for him to do. Well now, suppose he had a partner—an under cover partner. Martin finds out who it is that is Lake's partner and kills him, putting the blame on a ritual murder *indaba*, in order to stop Martin from exposing him. Right. Then later on maybe, Lake's partner wants a bigger share of the takings an' him an' Lake have a row. Hell! I don't know what they rowed about—that don't matter. But my hunch is that Lake got ugly and threatened to turn king's evidence. Maybe Lake was sick of being a white kaffir. Maybe he wanted to run straight. Or maybe he wanted to collar all of the money he and his partner had been making. You see, the only charge that could be proved against him was selling booze—whereas, his partner was guilty of the murder of a white man.

"Well now, I come along—a good bit before the regular patrol is due. So Lake's partner gets in a bit of a panic—maybe he thinks Lake has sent for me—an' first of all he has a shot at me. He made a mistake there—two mistakes. He should have left me alone—but, as he didn't, he should have aimed straighter! Well, then he goes to Lake's store, lets the bull out of the pen and raises the alarm. Lake comes out and his partner stabs him. Then, when the niggers come out of the

store he leaves the gun there for me to find. Yep. That's how I figure it," Drury concluded and poured himself another drink.

Parratt laughed.

"You've got a good imagination, Drury. Martin's death was a ritual murder. The man who fired at you was either Lake—or one of Lake's niggers out after a buck and got you by mistake. And Lake was killed by his bull."

Drury laid his forefinger alongside his big nose and chuckled knowingly.

"No, he wasn't," he said. "I wasn't goin' to tell you this but—what the hell! Us white men have got to stick together. Ain't it the truth? Lake was murdered. The bull was only a blind——"

"You're talking like a fool, Drury," Parratt said harshly. "The wound was caused by a horn, wasn't it?"

"Some such," Drury agreed.

"Well then?"

"But it wasn't that bull's horn. First of all I don't believe the bull 'ud have attacked Lake. There wasn't a suspicion of blood on its horns. What's more, its horns curve upward an' it's a sure thing that any wound made by them 'ud rake upward. But Lake's don't. He was killed by a downward stab. I can prove that to the satisfaction of any jury. As a matter of fact, I'm planning on holding a sort of trial tomorrow. The bull will be in the dock, Chimio the judge, his people the jury an' me the counsel for the defense. We ain't got a prosecutin' counsel—'less you'd like the job?"

"Your mock trial ought to be amusing, Drury. I'd like to see it—but I've got other things more important to attend to. But if you can't tell the difference between the wound made by an assegai stab and that made by a horn—I don't think much of your chance of getting your client acquitted."

"I didn't say Lake was killed by an assegai stab," Drury objected mildly. "Nope. He was killed with something blunt—might have been a broken off horn of some

beast. Such a thing 'ud make a good weapon in the hands of a man strong enough to use it."

Drury poured himself out another drink and so perhaps he was not conscious of the scowl on Parratt's face. Or perhaps he was! Certainly men who knew him would have been surprised that the whisky he had drunk should have blurred his speech and affected his muscular reactions.

"Yep," he concluded, "that's the way I figure it. Maybe I'm a fool to gamble on a hunch—but my hunches don't often let me down. As I see it—all I got to do is find out who that gun belongs to——"

"It was Lake's," Parratt interrupted. "You found it at his store, didn't you?"

"Yep, but that don't prove nothing. I might go off and leave it here for somebody else to find. But that wouldn't prove it was yours—would it?"

"What are you getting at, Drury?" Parratt snapped.

"Me? Oh nothing!" Drury answered innocently.

"What are you going to do with that gun, Drury?"

"Take it to headquarters an' have the fingerprint expert go over it. Sure, an' I'm goin' to take a whole lot of fingerprints in with me too. Yours, an' Lake's, an' all the niggers that work for you an' Lake."

"And what's the object of that, Drury?"

"Well," Drury drawled, "suppose, just for the sake of argument, that we found your fingerprints on that gun. Why then I'd be inclined to say that it was you who was the man I'm looking for. See?"

PARRATT laughed harshly.

"Yes—I see. It's about the maddest thing I've ever heard."

Drury took up the Roer and unwrapped it with exaggerated care and eyed it owlishly.

"Darn murderous weapon this is," he said. "Nearly killed me an' before it's done it's going to hang the feller that killed Lake."

"I've never seen a Roer before," Parratt said as he stood up and moving across to where Drury sat, he looked down at the gun balanced across the trooper's knees. "Is it as heavy as it looks?"

"Heavier," Drury replied.

Parratt yawned.

"I think I'll have one more drink and then turn in."

He leaned over in front of Drury and poured himself a stiff drink. As he straightened himself, glass in hand, he seemed to lose his balance. In his frantic attempts to save himself from a fall he jerked the whisky from his glass full into Drury's face.

"What the hell?" Drury yelled as he jumped to his feet, his hands to his eyes. "You've nearly blinded me."

"I'm sorry, Drury," Parratt exclaimed. "Here," he soaked a small towel in water



and put it into Drury's groping hands, "hold this to your eyes. Damn me for a clumsy fool!"

As Drury, still cursing and grumbling, dabbed at his eyes with the damp towel, Parratt picked up the gun which had fallen with a clatter to the ground and polished it vigorously with another towel he had taken from a table drawer.

He looked up with a startled gasp at Drury's drawling, mocking voice:

"If you reckon you're destroying evidence, mister, you're wasting time. I ain't interested in fingerprints—under the circumstances, they wouldn't prove nothing anyway."

"You're talking out of the back of your head," Drury, Parratt faltered. "Some

whisky got on the gun and I was just drying it off—that's all. I——"

He came to an uneasy silence, intimidated by the look in Drury's keen eyes and the revolver in the trooper's hand.

"That was a clever trick of yours with the whisky," Drury conceded. "But I was expecting something like that. Consequently—I wasn't as blind as you thought, mister. Anyway, you're under arrest an' I warn you that—hell! I've forgotten the rest. But that don't matter. I ain't looking for a statement from you because——"

PARRATT threw the Roer at Drury with all his force, and followed it up with a furious rush. The butt of the gun caught Drury on the chest and his shot, intended only to cripple, went wild. Before he could fire again, Parratt had closed with him. The chair Drury was sitting in collapsed and the two men went to the ground in a tight clinch. They rolled over and over, fighting desperately. At last Parratt succeeded in pinning Drury to the ground and wrested his revolver away from him.

"Not quite smart enough, Trooper Dynamite Drury," he panted exultantly as Drury limply relaxed.

"And now what?" Drury questioned. "You can't use the bull again—an' I don't reckon you'll want to stage another ritual murder."

"No," Parratt snapped. "I don't repeat myself. But—well, you came here secretly. No one saw you come—no one need see you leave. Believe me, Drury, I'm not at all at a loss for means of disposing of your body. I should like to have avoided another killing—but you have forced my hand. And so——"

But Drury was not listening to him, that was obvious. Drury was looking over Parratt's shoulder toward the window; his lips were silently framing a message in the vernacular and his eyes gleamed with suppressed excitement.

For a fraction of a second Parratt was taken off guard and half turned his head

toward the window to see if someone had come to Drury's rescue. For a fraction of a second he relaxed his hold on Drury—and that proved his undoing. With a tremendous heave Drury threw him off his chest and grappled with him. In the ensuing struggle the revolver fell from Parratt's hand. Drury retrieved it and crashed the long barrel on Parratt's head with stunning force.

The trooper scrambled to his feet and looked for something with which to bind the unconscious man. There was a rawhide rope hanging from a hook on the wall and with that he trussed Parratt securely into a chair. Then he poured himself out a drink, silently congratulated himself on escaping from a difficult situation into which his own lack of alertness had got him, and threw the water still remaining in the water jug into Parratt's face.

Parratt splutteringly regained consciousness and after struggling for a few moments to free himself glared sullenly at Drury.

"Didn't think you'd be taken in by a kid's trick like that, mister," Drury remarked conversationally, "but I had to try it. An' now I reckon I'll gag you just in case you feel like yelling to your niggers to come an' give you a hand. An' then I'm goin' to search this place of yours to see if I can find any evidence that'll prove what I suspect."

"You'll find nothing," Parratt said, but there was no confidence in his voice.

"Maybe not. But perhaps you don't know what I'm goin' to look for."

THAT'S a splendid piece of work, Drury," the C. O. said warmly, looking from the report he had just read to the red-headed trooper who lounged easily in a chair drawn up beside his desk.

"Oh, I don't know," Drury replied in tones of self depreciation. "I had a lot of bull luck an' I was slow getting on to Parratt's trail."

The C. O. smiled.

"You're a bit hard on yourself, Drury.

If I had any criticism at all to make of the way you have handled this case, I should say it was about the way you—er—cut corners. You know, you had no right, no right whatsoever—from a strictly legal point of view—to act as you did. Had you failed to find the evidence, Parratt would have brought action against us—and would have won his case with heavy damages. But you found the evidence—and you are to be congratulated on a splendid piece of police work."

"Luck was with me," Drury said again. "Still, it *had* to be the way my hunch worked it out. But it is a fact that I was slow on the job. I ought to have suspected Parratt when he tried to stop me from going to Chimio's. Must have given him a nasty jar, though, when I wouldn't go to his place. You see, he'd made a good job of being a regular fellow so all the troopers who patrolled that district took him at his own estimation an' they believed everything he told 'em.

"Yep. I ought to have suspected him; he was a darned sight too hospitable. But I didn't—an' I didn't neither when he took a pot shot at me. He must have rode like hell to get round them hills an' to the place in the *donga* where he ambushed me. But he'd got it all planned out. I ain't sure in my mind whether he wanted to kill me or not. It's a fact, though, that I ought to have gone after him then. If I had, maybe Lake 'ud be alive now. Which 'ud be a pity for he was a low-down skunk.

"'Course I ought to have gone up to Lake's right away. But that wallop I'd had sort of upset my thinking gear. Anyway, I was set on finding out what Chimio's people knew about Martin's murder. I'm thinkin' I'd have got enough from them to have put me on the right track. But maybe not.

"Well, then Lake's killed—an' as soon as I saw him I suspected things weren't according to the way Lake's niggers had stated. But I didn't get what it was at first. Nope. It was later I tumbled to it

that the wound hadn't been made by a bull's horn. Leastways not by that bull's horn. It's all in my report how me an' Chimio's people tried the bull for murder—an' found it 'Not Guilty!'

"Then I found the Roer—hidden, I figured, where I'd be sure to find it an' that started me thinking of Mr. Parratt so I lost no time goin' to see him.

"Maybe I drank a bit an' didn't seem to hold my liquor very well. Fact is, Parratt wasn't what I'd call on guard. He talked a bit too easy—an' he made a mistake or two. He clinched the case against himself as far as I was concerned when he said it must have been a nigger that fired at me, because no white man 'ud use a Roer. That was before I'd told him anything about the gun. An' then when he fell for my talk about fingerprints an' played that whisky trick on me—as I hoped he would—so's he could give the gun a polish—why I knew my hunch was right.

"So I arrested him—an' then started looking for the evidence to prove my case. I found plenty. It's all entered in my report: exhibit A—an' so on.

"Evidence to prove he *was* Lake's partner; he made the rot-gut booze Lake sold. He supplied Lake with drugs an' guns which they sold to niggers over the border; they were cunning that way—they wouldn't sell to Chimio's people. Yep, an' I found evidence proving that Martin had found out Parratt's secret—you see Parratt was so sure he was safe that he'd kept the letter Martin wrote him, even, warning him to clear out of the country if he wanted to avoid arrest. An' I found letters an' such proving him an' Lake had fallen out about

a division of spoils, an' the kudu horn which Parratt used to stab Lake with. Yep. The case against Parratt for the murder of Lake—an' the attempted murder of myself is fool proof. He'll hang—no doubt about that. He killed Martin, too. He boasted about that to me when I was bringing him in. But I can't prove that—yet. No particular need to, I reckon. He can only hang once."

"And so Miss Martin was right, Drury," the C. O. commented. "It wasn't a ritual murder, but she never suspected Parratt. There's just one thing I'd like to know, Drury," he continued as the trooper rose to his feet. "Suppose Parratt hadn't been quite so confident that he was safe from suspicion. Suppose he'd destroyed his letters and account books and the horn he used to stab Lake. Suppose you had been unable to find any of the evidence which so conclusively proved your suspicious. What then?"

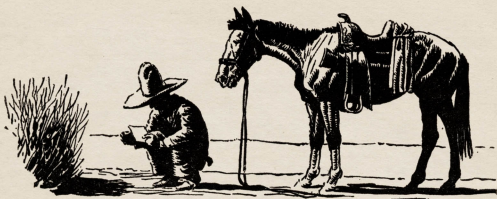
Drury pulled thoughtfully at the lobe of his right ear.

"Why," he drawled with a grin, "I reckon the end 'ud have been the same. I'd have bluffed to know more than I did and given him a chance to go for his gun. Yep, the end would have been the same. The law says: 'a life for a life.' Parratt'll hang, won't he? The other way 'ud have been a bit quicker—an' cheaper—that's all!"

He saluted, turned about awkwardly and slouched from the office.

"Dynamite, they call him," the C. O. mused as the door closed behind Drury. "He's well named. He's just as sudden—and as devastating."





The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Mulford's Millions

Doc and Casaldy

IT IS always an event when SHORT STORIES can announce a novel by Clarence E. Mulford, and apart from that, *On the Trail of the Tumbling T*, which begins in this issue, marks an interesting milestone along the trail of Mr. Mulford's brain children. With this novel—which is about our old friend Nueces of the JC—the author passes the quarter of a century mark in books—for, of course, this story will later appear in book form on the Doubleday list. Moreover, of all his twenty-five volumes, every one is still active in print—a great record. For drama, humor, action and atmosphere, Mulford is hard to beat—and you'll find them all in his latest yarn—*On the Trail of the Tumbling T*.

Seventh Child

IN HIS second story of *Dead Men Singing*, which has James Bowie as its central character, H. Bedford-Jones says there will be incidents which may seem strange, like Bowie meeting death in a woman's arms. That is probably true. This woman died at an advanced age; her story was accepted by those who knew her. No one knows exactly what happened in the Alamo, and in the main the author says he has followed the standard authority, Captain R. M. Potter.

THESE two original adventurers have become solid favorites in SHORT STORIES and we have just received this interesting letter from their creator, Douglas Leach:

"In a lifetime of knocking around the world I have met only one person whom I have taken, just as I remember him, as a model for a fiction character. True, I've met dozens who have given me the germ of an idea, and I have sometimes taken the face of one man and stuck it on to the body of another, and so built up a synthetic character. But Doc really existed, so help me! And even if he never really did all the things I've made him do, at least he was quite capable of doing most of them!

"I never knew his real name, and our acquaintance was limited to a couple of hours—very illuminating hours—spent in the American Bar in Brisbane, Queensland. His speech, so different from the half-Cockney intonation of Australians, bore witness that he had come originally from the States. He was big, bald-headed, profane, obviously well educated—and very, very tough.

"We got into conversation, and under the mellowing influence of various picturesquely named drinks of an expensive

In the next issue—

SHORT STORIES *for Sept. 25th*



*An American Engineer in China realizes that a bandit
horde is descending from the hills.*

The Roar of the Dragon

A Complete Novel by

WALTER C. BROWN

*A line dugout in
a blizzard*

"Seven-up"

by

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

*Texas a hundred
years ago*

"Dead Men Singing"

by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

*Nueces as a
Cattle Association
Man*

**"On the Trail of the
Tumbling T"**

by

CLARENCE E. MULFORD

etc.,

etc.,

etc.

and highly potent nature, he became confidential, and gave me the low-down on several incidents of his shady past. He had apparently, to put it politely, lived mostly on his wits. The shadier the incident, the prouder of it he seemed. He was a card-sharper of no mean order, and according to him there was no sucker quite so pitiful and easy to fleece as the amateur player who thought he was good. Sometimes he worked with a side-kick, but usually preferred to play a lone hand. Right there and then he produced a pack of cards, and dealt me exhibition hands to order. His memory was phenomenal, and when I shuffled and dealt out the pack faces up, he recalled the sequence of every card without one mistake.

"He had been everything from a student in a veterinary college to barber, deck-hand, estate-agent, con-man, fence and bouncer. At least, he said he had, and he certainly looked the part. But according to him he had only been pinched once, and that was in the great flu' epidemic just after the war. Regulations in Australia were very strict, and he had got three weeks for crossing into Queensland from New South Wales without reporting to the police!

"And Casaldy? Well, somebody had to tell the tale, so I made Casaldy up out of my head."

The latest exploits of these two are in *The Sacred Mr. Johnson* in this issue. Mr. Johnson himself is a new character.

In All Directions

THERE used to be a very funny story about the man who slammed the door, tore down the stairs, leaped upon his horse, and galloped madly off in *all directions*. Well, "all directions" part of it might well have fitted William Chamberlain, author of *The Silver Chain* in this issue, because he's traveled just about in all directions possible, and done about as many different things as the next man. Just now he writes from the Philippines and says about himself:

"I was born in the Salmon River country in the shadow of the Sawtooth Range in central Idaho, and in those days my home town was sixty miles and sixteen hours by Concord stage from the railroad. When I was thirteen I went to work in the woods and when I was fourteen I prided myself on the way I could handle a peavey and on the fact that I was getting forty-five dollars a month. The fact that at the end of each month the other loggers took my forty-five dollars away, teaching me to play blackjack, bothered me not at all.

"I left the woods to ride the rear wagon

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 _____

of a jerkline freighter's outfit hauling supplies into the mines in the Loon Creek country. Someday I am going to write some stories about that country. I tell you there are tales there which would make your hair stand on end—stories of the times when the big hydraulics roared from daylight to dark as they washed the mountain sides into the sluice boxes—stories of when Slim Smith and his gang used to serve up one white man and two Chinamen a day from the Loon Creek Bar to Bonanza.

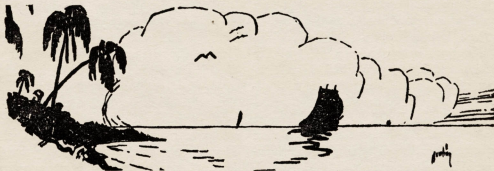
"Well, a loose foot took me from there to the Forest Service while it was still young, and I dug larkspur and chased smoke from the Morgan Creek Range to the Pend Oreille and from there I went to shoveling ore down an ore chute in the Coeur d'Alenes. My career as a miner was not long. One morning in my eagerness to get to the dry room and the showers I accidentally ran over the Super as I was coming off the night shift. He attended to the rest.

"Then followed a period when I wandered as my inclinations led me, gaining much experience and little else except suspicious glances from the uniformed representatives of law and order in the places I touched at up and down the Pacific Coast. Finally I returned to the University of Idaho and from there the loose foot carried me to the Military Academy at West Point from which I graduated in due time with no honors whatever and my desire to see

the world no whit lessened. Since then I have seen many places and intend to see many more—most particularly the islands of the South Pacific of which I am seeing just enough to whet my appetite."

A Snake That Spits

A HORRID snake which Kleinburg had tried to kill with his loading rod flew up at my eye and spat poison in it. I endured great pain all night; the next day the eye came all right again." So an African traveler, Gordon Cumming, reported about seventy years ago. Naturalists laughed at him as spitting snakes were regarded as just another tall story like many other tales told about snakes and their ways. Later explorers confirmed Cumming's story. The African cobra or Haje does defend itself by spitting a fine spray of venom at its enemy. This snake is usually about five to six feet long and can both climb and swim quite well. While it generally moves slowly, it has the speed of lightning when angered and will hardly ever run from an adversary of any kind. Though its bite is as poisonous as that of any other cobra, it seems to prefer defending itself with its venom spray which may reach a distance of six feet. Observation has shown that the snake aims at its victim's eyes where the poison causes considerable pain and even blindness that may in some cases be permanent.





OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



LEE GEHLBACH," *U. S. Air Services* magazine points out, "is a pilot who embodies just about all the characteristics that go to make what women writers of verse call a birdman, characteristics that make the real flyers of today a separate and distinct species of the human race. About two months ago, a man of Gehlbach's own stamina, courage and experience—Jimmy Collins—was killed when attempting to meet the Navy requirements for terminal velocity dive and pull-out while testing a Grumman airplane over Long Island. The plane was a total wreck, and it is understood that the manufacturers had no insurance on it. Gehlbach was hired to put a sister Grumman ship through its paces. While flying the plane in a spin test, starting at 12,500 feet altitude, Gehlbach found he could not get the plane to come out of it, and, after making more than fifty spins, he was successful in saving his valuable neck and other parts by taking to his parachute at 2,000 feet, over the Navy proving ground, at Dahlgren, Va., on Friday afternoon, May 17th. A Grumman airplane for the second time in a few weeks, became a total wreck.

"Just before going to Virginia, Gehlbach stopped over at Cleveland, Ohio, to put a Great Lakes plane, built by a company of that name, through the tests required by the Navy before it could be delivered. The details of the two tests were wholly dissimilar, but the final results of the operations, from the personal viewpoint of the pilot, were not unlike. In each case he survived by a hair's breadth. In each case he took to his parachute at the

last possible foot of altitude, and the plane was wrecked. In each case, Gehlbach stayed with the plane—first with the Great Lakes product, then with the Grumman—until there was nothing to do except jump for his life.

"Asked after landing in Virginia what he was going to do next, Gehlbach said he was going to look up his family in Indianapolis, or somewhere in that vicinity, as he hadn't seen them for a year or so. He was not in need of rest, he said; it was only that there was nothing else requiring his attention in the air at the moment. He seemed a bit disappointed about this, but as he is at the top in a restricted class of operators, he will be doing something extraordinary any day now."

The World's Longest Cattle-Whip

WITHOUT exception, the longest black-snake whip in the world is on exhibition at Foster's Saddlery, Bourke Street, Sydney, Australia. It was the final challenge of whipmaker Abraham Brooks of Sydney after forty years of keen rivalry between him and whipmaker Peter Henderson who was said to have been stinging the flanks of his herd with the longest stock-whip on the continent, and which was the pride of the overlander. Brooks became envious of the other's glory and plaited a twenty-five-foot thong, to which Henderson replied with one thirty-five feet long. This he sent to Melbourne as a challenge. Not to be outdone, the Victorian responded with the longest "black-

snake" ever made. It was 108 feet long from keeper to cracker, perfectly proportioned and balanced. From that time on, nothing further was heard from Henderson. While the great black-snake is the

admiration and envy of all the Australian cattlemen who visit Foster's establishment, it is not on record that any of them have ever attempted to swing the length of the greenhide.

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.

Imagine anyone having been to all these places and held all these jobs and still finding time to learn foreign languages.

Dear Secretary:

As a regular reader of *SHORT STORIES*, I wish to apply for membership in the Ends of the Earth Club. I am nineteen years old and will be glad to correspond with anyone whose interests are somewhat similar to mine.

I have lived in Minnesota, South Dakota and Washington, besides having traveled in Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois (I attended the World's Fair in 1933), Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California, and Oregon. Made one trip as ordinary seaman on the Oceanic and Oriental Line to Japan and North China. In all I've covered 25,000 miles. Have worked as assistant motion picture operator, rough carpenter, foreman, truck driver, tractor driver, fruit worker, logger, longshoreman, sailor and chauffeur. My hobbies are stamp collecting, correspondence, photography and reading.

So far my letter has been quite ego-

tistical, but one of my reasons for joining this club is to gain information about old Mexico, Central America and South America. If possible, I hope to journey down that way in about two years or so and I would like to contact people living there or who have been in those places.

I am very much interested in foreign languages—Danish, French, Japanese and all others, though specializing in Japanese. If anyone is interested, I will answer all letters.

Sincerely,

Harry J. Pedersen

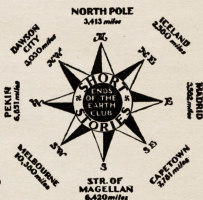
c/o Donald McIver
Box 364,
Kent,
Washington

Apparently Comrade Meyers doesn't know how many members collect stamps and postcards as a hobby.

Dear Secretary:

I hope you will admit me to the Ends of the Earth Club. I have read *SHORT STORIES* for a year and find them very interesting.

At present I live in Ontario, Canada,



but I have traveled a lot, having been from Coast to Coast three times. I have traveled about twenty thousand miles and I should like to travel three times that many. I am a stamp collector and also collect postcards from all over the world. Maybe some of your members could help me get some stamps and postcards or maybe some of them have the same hobby. I have quite a few postcards from Japan and would like to trade some. I should like to have some of the U. S. A. in return as I haven't many of them.

Here's hoping I hear from a lot of members as I am very lonely and have lots of time to write.

Cordially yours,

Ralph Jacob Meyers

Lake Road East,
R. R. No. 3,
Forest,
Ontario, Canada

We hope Comrade Anderson will not have to look far for some pen pals.

Dear Secretary:

I am looking for pen pals in our club, so will you kindly put my letter in your magazine?

I am thirty, Canadian, and have traveled considerably in Canada and part of the United States.

Let's hear from you, pals.

Sincerely,

R. Anderson

Project No. 9,
Whitemouth,
Manitoba,
Canada

Philatelists—attention! A large stamp collection to be exchanged.

Dear Secretary:

Received my membership card some time ago and wish to thank you for it.

I have traveled all over Canada and a good part of the United States and in my travels have picked up a very large stamp

collection which I would like to exchange with all members from all over the world, the farther away the better.

I would also be pleased to exchange information and snaps with all members and will answer all letters received.

Yours very sincerely,

Harry E. Jamieson

94 Raglan Avenue,
Toronto, Ontario,
Canada

We hope by this time the "wanderlust" has been appeased quite satisfactorily.

Dear Secretary:

I wish to acknowledge with thanks receipt of your letter enclosing my membership card. Please excuse the delay in my reply.

In the meantime I have already written to a number of members at various "Ends of the Earth" to appease that feeling of "wanderlust" which circumstances only permit me to satisfy through correspondence and reading, in the latter of which your magazine is of considerable help, and also through my hobby of stamp collecting.

I shall at all times be glad to correspond with members of the club, and particularly those located in the more distant parts of the earth.

Sincerely,

Herbert E. Dittrich

340 West 14th Street,
Norfolk, Virginia

To hear Comrade Reihl play the Hawaiian guitar might be worth a trip to Pennsylvania.

Dear Secretary:

I would be pleased to hear from any pen pal who may be interested in this part of the world. I have lived in Pennsylvania all my life and I would be pleased to furnish any information to those who may be thinking of coming down—up—over—or across this way.

I have traveled in Maryland and Ohio and can tell quite a lot about these states.

I am an amateur musician playing several instruments, among them being piano and Hawaiian guitar.

I have been reading SHORT STORIES Magazine for quite a time. I try very hard not to miss an issue and seldom do. It is

the most interesting magazine I have ever had the pleasure of reading.

Yours sincerely,

William P. Reihl

5020 Ampere Street,
Hazel Wood P. O. No. 7,
Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania

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.

Lawrence Moscovitz, 669 Stone Avenue, Brooklyn, New York
Joseph Moyer, 905 Park Avenue, Williamsport, Pennsylvania
Emil Mueck, Jr., Box 196, Iselin, New Jersey
Elbert Murray, Box 118, Pictou County, Stellarton, Nova Scotia, Canada
George Nantus, 14093 Kenilworth Avenue, Berwyn, Illinois
John O'Callahn, Jr., 176 West Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Richard Ogden, 352 East 139th Street, Bronx, New York City, New York
Jesse R. O'Harry, c/o Mrs. B. R. Wilson, 308 East 4th Street, Del Rio, Texas
Stanley Olezak, Ft. Hoyle, Maryland
Walter Papuga, Box 59, Thorndike, Massachusetts
A. Parkinson, 819117, 7th Anti Aircraft, Battery R. A., Blakan Mati, Singapore, Malaya
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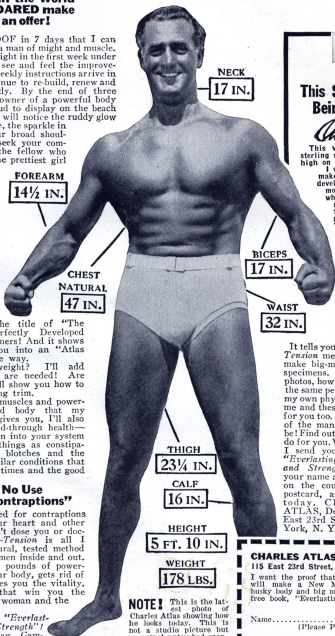
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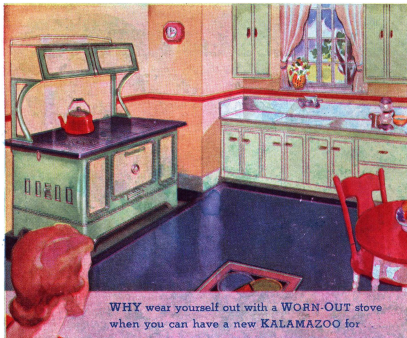
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