

A Halfaday Creek Story by JAMES B. HENDRYX
A Tonto Kid Story by HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Short Stories

Twice A Month

November 10th

25c

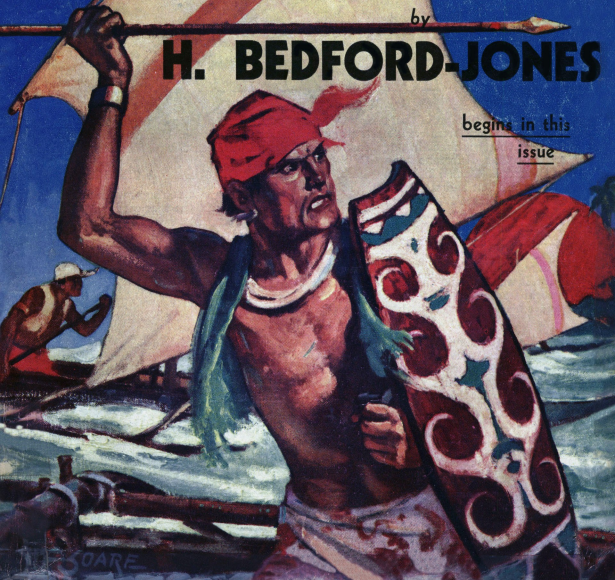
Master Pirate of
the Eastern Seas

The Devil's Bosun

by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

begins in this
issue



1725-1798
CASANOVA

Chevalier de Seingalt

THE WORLD'S GREATEST
LOVER



Take a tip from **CASANOVA**

HE left a trail of broken hearts from Warsaw to Paris, this swashbuckling, diplomatic, engaging soldier of fortune known to history as Casanova. Women high and women low, women brilliant and women dull, all found him fascinating . . . And not the least of his charms was his astonishing fastidiousness. Centuries before halitosis was a household word, he realized that unpleasant breath was a fault that could not be forgiven even in him. Consequently, before he awooing went, it was his habit to chew the leaves of certain fragrant herbs that would quickly render his breath sweet and agreeable.

. . .

If halitosis (bad breath) were an uncommon condition, few would be concerned about it. Unfortunately, however, it is an ever-present threat. Everyone is likely to have it at some time or other for this reason: even in normal

mouths fermentation of tiny food particles constantly goes on. Unpleasant odors are released *without the victim knowing it.*

Don't take a chance

Since it is impossible to know when this condition is present, the wise course is to take sensible precautions against it. The quick, wholly delightful method is to use Listerine as a mouth rinse before any engagement at which you wish to appear your best. Because it is antiseptic, Listerine instantly halts fermentation. Then it overcomes the odors fermentation causes. The breath—indeed the entire mouth—becomes cleaner, purer and sweeter.

Keep a bottle of this delightful mouth wash handy at all times. It is your assurance that you will not offend others needlessly; that you will be welcome. Lambert Pharmacal Company, *St. Louis, Mo.*

Listerine puts your breath beyond offense

QUICKLY CHECKS HALITOSIS

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, \$6.00; price payable in advance, and including postage.

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HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED-THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY-I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP, IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?

TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.

BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT

TOM'S RIGHT-AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE, I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES

TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST--

SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN

YOU SURE KNOW RADIO-MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THAT'S HIS I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME

THANKS!

N.R.I. TRAINING CERTAINLY PAYS. OUR MONEY WORRIES ARE OVER AND WE'VE A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO.

ON BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

MAIL THE COUPON NOW. Get the facts about Radio—the field with a future. N. R. I. training fits you for jobs in connection with the manufacture, sale and operation of Radio equipment. It fits you to go in business for yourself, service sets, operate on board ships, in broadcasting, television, aviation, police Radio and many other opportunities. My **FREE** book tells how I train you quickly at home in spare time to be a Radio Expert.

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Why struggle along in a dull job with low pay and no future? Start training now for the live-wire Radio field. I have helped many men make more money. Hundreds of successful men now in Radio got their start through N. R. I. training.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Hold your job. I'll not only train you in a few hours of your spare time a week, but 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. I give you Radio Equipment for conducting experiments and making tests that teach you to build and service practically every type of receiving set made. Otis Denton, 14166 Lorain Ave., Cleveland, Ohio, writes: "I picked up \$1800 while studying. The time I gave my Radio work did not interfere with my other business."

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My book has shown hundreds of fellows how to make more money and win success. It's **FREE** to any ambitious fellow over 15 years of age. Investigate. Find out what Radio offers you. Read what my graduates are doing and making, about my Money Back Agreement, and the many other N. R. I. features. Mail the coupon in an envelope, or paste it on a 1c post card **TODAY**.

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

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

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send your book which points out the sparetime and full time job opportunities in Radio and your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts.

(Please print plainly)

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ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

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Otis K. Wells, Harlan, Ky.



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"At the end of my first year I more than tripled the cost of my Course. Other fellows need not be afraid to start the Course for fear they cannot pay for it, because it more than pays for itself."—
F. E. Sandersen, Jr., Maysack, N. C.

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NOW**



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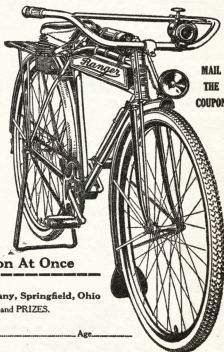
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Here's a wonderful chance to make
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Amount Earned In One Week

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H. D. White, Kan.....	67.50
Geo. E. Bohm, Idaho.....	53.86
Tom Noble, Mich.....	68.40
R. E. Tesque, Calif.....	52.00
L. P. Boyne, La.....	67.20
Clare C. Wellman, N. J.....	96.00
Paul T. Krider, Pa.....	81.00
Geo. W. Wright, Maine.....	63.75
Sam. A. Barker, Mich.....	51.00
A. Pardini, Calif.....	69.09
Norman Geisler, Mich.....	129.00
Lester Georgina, R. I.....	63.70
Albert Becker, Mich.....	100.00
R. J. Metcalfe, Idaho.....	51.87
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Lamar C. Cooper, Mich.....	96.00
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Lambert Wilson, Mich.....	79.00
Hans Cordes, Neb.....	96.40
S. C. Thomas, W. Va.....	50.00
W. J. Way, Kan.....	78.15

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If you are out of work or on part time and need cash at once to pay your bills and live on, you are just the person I am looking for. I have a good opportunity for you right now—a wonderful chance to start right in making up to \$6.50 in a day and quickly increase your earnings as you become established.

Make Money Fast

You don't have to go around penniless in a land of plenty. My system shows you how to make money FAST!

Look at those earnings in the column at the left. These are exceptional earnings for any kind of times, but they are especially good right now.

If only three or four people had made money as fast as this, you might call it an accident. But scores have done it! These are only a few—if space permitted I could print MANY MORE reports of exceptional earnings, every one sworn to as being the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. When these people first heard of my proposition they may have been skeptical. But they were wise enough to investigate. When they received the complete facts that I will now send you absolutely Free they opened their eyes in amazement and got busy.

Now I offer you the same opportunity I gave them. The very minute I hear from you I'll send you a few simple, easily read details, explaining just how you can start earning the very first day. You will be amazed how simple this Fast Money-Making plan really is.

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In addition to the cash earnings that you will make, I will give you a brand new Ford Sedan as an extra reward if you show me you are a producer. Send for free facts at once.

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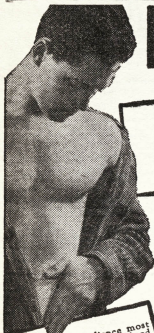
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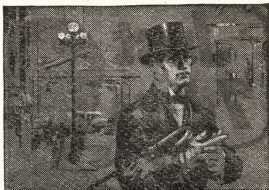
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THE ONE-MAN KINGDOM OF TRINIDAD

Kenneth P. Wood

IN THE mid nineties, an adventurous French-American named James A. Harden-Hickey announced himself King of Trinidad and sent his ambassador to Washington to ask for formal recognition of the title.

This was not the Trinidad of asphalt fame, but a small rocky island seven hundred miles off the coast of Brazil. It boasted of no inhabitants when Harden-Hickey came upon it in 1888. Finding guano upon the island in marketable quantities he projected a great plant for its exportation, including costly wharves, and spacious warehouses. Then, in 1894, after planting a colony of forty Americans upon its shores, he set himself up as its sovereign prince, assuming the title of "James I of Trinidad."

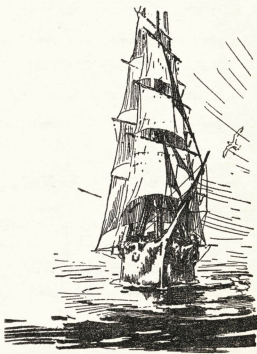
He adopted a flag for his principality, had paper-money and postage stamps printed, and even established an order of knighthood. But uneasy this crowned head began to rest when none of the powers would recognize his pretensions. Then his throne began to totter, in the spring of 1895, when a British cruiser called at his stronghold and formally took possession.

But when Brazil heard that the British flag was floating over the dominions of King James, all sorts of indignation meetings were held at Rio de Janeiro, for the Brazilians had claimed the island empire as their own. An emphatic protest was presented to England, which could only

reply that her occupation of the isle was merely temporary, for the purpose of installing a cable-station. Then the English finally receded and recognized Brazil by withdrawing her man-of-war.

Meanwhile, however, James I was miserably ignored by the contracting parties. So he appointed an ambassador, conferred upon him some high-sounding decorations, and packed him off to the United States under the label of the "Comte de la Boissière, Grand Chancellor and Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Principality of Trinidad." That was enough for the ubiquitous New York reporters. They published the fact that the rotund "count" was a French wine-agent.

Nevertheless he set up his embassy, not in Washington, but on the ground-floor rooms of a humble brick tenement in the metropolis, from which he made visits to the national capital in vain hope of pouring into the ear of the Secretary of State the troubles of his sovereign prince. But the latter was satisfied to have Brazil keep the guano kingdom as her own, and so poor King James passed out of his island kingdom, and out of history, as well.



BIGGEST AND BEST—ACTION



Short

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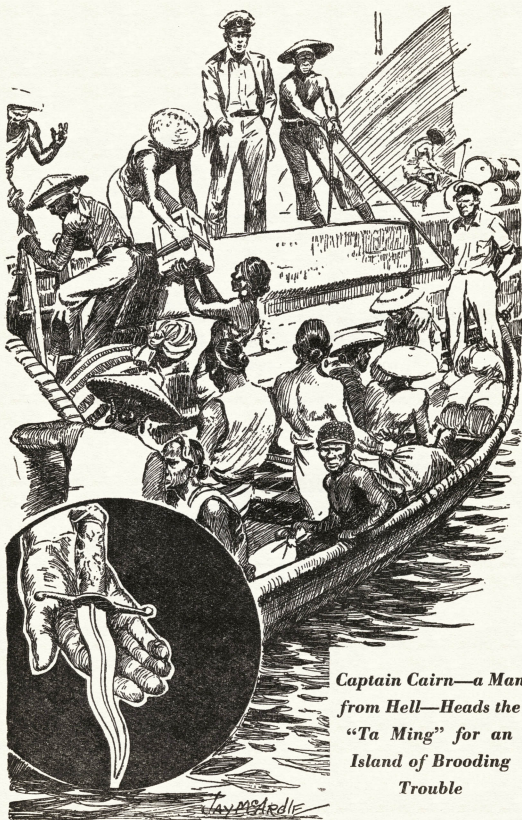
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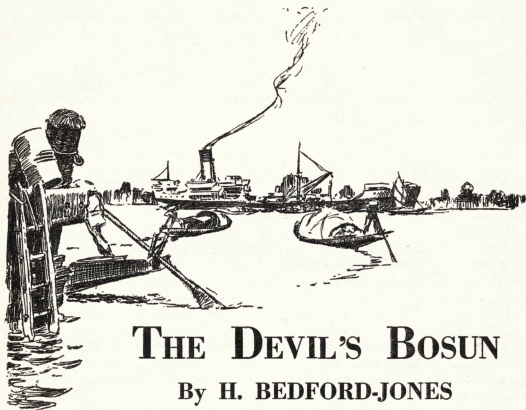
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*Captain Cairn—a Man
from Hell—Heads the
“Ta Ming” for an
Island of Brooding
Trouble*

MASTER PIRATE OF THE EASTERN SEAS



THE DEVIL'S BOSUN

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of Many Outstanding Adventure Stories

Part I

I

THE truth is revealed only in the sequence of events. You might think the meetings that morning on the bridge across the River of Gold were pure coincidence. They were not. Here was a gathering of forces, a culmination of schemes and cunning intents, apparently centered about Cairn but really concerned with someone much more important in the Eastern seas.

Cairn was idly smoking a cheroot on the bridge; he frequently stood loafing here, watching the crowds. Cairn was a man from hell, but did not look it. He

was lean and brown and hard, erect and trim in his whites, the four gold stripes of a captain on the arm of his jacket. His hatchet-face was young, almost unlined, and his gray eyes held humorous glints. A man of twenty-five seldom shows the searing scars of hell, except in his actions and reactions.

On either bank were the buildings of Surabaya, half drowned in the luxuriant foliage of Java. The muddy yellow torrent of the Kali Das, the River of Gold, was spotted with native boats. Across the bridge poured an endless tide of humanity; Dutch sepoy, laden coolies, natives in brilliant sarongs, Hindus and Chinese, the throngs starred by unhurried Europeans.

A perspiring Chinese clerk came up to Cairn, spoke him, and handed over a chit. Cairn opened the note and read the brief words:

"Please come to the office. The Ta Ming is chartered."

Li Tock Lo."

So the old bumboat was chartered, and he must get on the job! Cairn smiled. Working for a Chinese shipping firm was not bad by half, for a man from hell. He liked them, they liked and trusted him, despite his past.

"Tuan kapitan!" Cairn heard a low, guttural voice, and found a man at his elbow. An old Malay, who spoke very fluent English. "Is there not need for a servant? I am sick at heart for the sea. Once I was a *nakoda*, a ship captain. I am a good steward, cook, quartermaster, servant."

Cairn inspected the man. Why not? In a land of servants, he could well afford a man of his own, and here was one who spoke English. A rather small man, features flat like a dish, a fresh and unhealed knife-scar running across one cheek. Touches of gray at the temples, miserable dirty rags for clothes; neither affluent nor young, this man.

"Your name?"

"Ali, tuan. I can take good care of clothes."

"Your own don't prove it."

"Poverty and illness, tuan, are in the dispensation of Allah."

"You have references?"

"Yes, tuan. I am from Kelantan. I know few people here. But——"

He thrust out a dirty, folded paper. Cairn took it, opened it, and read:

"Ali deserves all trust. I recommend him."

No name was signed; merely a vermilion seal in Chinese. Cairn knew it to be the personal seal of Li Tock Lo, and whistled in surprise. A coincidence, of course. But if shrewd Li Tock Lo recommended any-

one, especially a Malay, it meant everything. Chinese and Malays despise each other.

"Very well, you're hired," said Cairn promptly. "We'll talk wages later."

"Agreed, tuan. May Allah requite you!"

CAIRN produced a key and a banknote. "Here's money; get yourself decent clothes. This is the key of my room at the Hotel Beaulieu, the French one. Go there, pack my things, and await me."

He spoke in Malay, and Ali, showing his black teeth in a grin, departed.

Cairn lit a fresh cheroot and sauntered toward the shipping office. He'd be glad of a servant who spoke English; it would add to his dignity, too. He turned in at Reilly's Bar and had a drink, passed the time of day with the half Irish proprietor, and went his way.

The shipping office was a low, pleasant place where punkas and electric fans stirred the air. Cairn was passed directly into the office of Li Tock Lo, a Straits Chinese of great girth and fat moon-face. Li shook hands cordially, and Cairn dropped into the indicated chair.

"So we're chartered, eh? When do we leave?"

"Stores are going aboard now, Captain. You'll leave in the morning."

Cairn's brows lifted. "But cargo——"

"There is none, on the out trip. A Mynheer Vandunk has chartered the *Ta Ming* for Coomassin in ballast, to return with cargo. He will be here in a few minutes; I wish you to meet him."

Something in the fat Chinaman's manner puzzled Cairn and caught his attention.

"Hm! All right. How about a crew?"

"Vandunk is engaging his own crew and officers, also paying them. You——"

"What the devil!" exclaimed Cairn in astonishment. "But that's not regular!"

"You will sign them on tonight, here at the office," proceeded Li Tock Lo impassively. "Vandunk expects to bring back a valuable cargo and wishes to have men he can trust. It is not regular, but quite

natural. I should say that Mynheer Vandunk has influence in the Dutch Colonial Office. He has wealth, and desires more, which Coomassin will give him."

Something in the flat, emotionless voice dinged again at Cairn's attention. There was more than appeared on the surface. He knew this fat yellow man pretty well. It would come out in good time.

"Where's Coomassin?"

"Look in your pilot guide, Captain. The island lies off the Celebes coast; it has no good harbor. I have prepared detailed instructions for your guidance in this respect. It has been semi-independent until last year when the sultan rebelled. The Dutch killed him and took over the island, leaving his daughter on the throne. Most unluckily, bubonic plague broke out. This is now over and ended. A resident and a garrison of sepoys are there. No more trouble. Mynheer Vandunk has a concession covering the island. He is taking with him an English gentleman and his sister who are interested in leasing the rubber plantations from Vandunk. I think that covers the situation, in brief."

"Hm!" Cairn scowled slightly. The scowl made his face harsh, intolerant, cruel. "Concession, eh? What sort?"

"Comprehensive," replied Li Tock Lo. "The island belongs to Mynheer Vandunk."

"By grant of the Dutch government, eh? That means slavery——"

"It is really none of our business," placidly said Li Tock Lo.

"Right; I'm rebuked," and Cairn broke into a laugh. "Look here, Li, I've hired a man. Going to put on a little dog by having my own servant. The fellow said you knew him. He's a Malay named Ali."

"Half the barbarian Malays are named Ali," said Li. "I remember one such man; he is not young, but speaks English. He may be trusted. As a youth, he spent several years in England. His morals are deplorable, but he does not steal."

"Fair enough," and Cairn nodded. "From you, that's a high recommendation."

LI TOCK LO permitted himself a smile. "May I be pardoned for suggesting, Captain, that you do not drink any more today?"

"That's really my own business, Li," said Cairn drily. "I intend to drink, and to drink plenty. I don't get drunk, as you know. I merely blunt memory."

"Absurd. The past is a sharp sword that cannot be blunted." The flat voice was suddenly edged and keen. "I am sending my young relative Erh Tan as supercargo aboard the ship, to which Mynheer Vandunk has agreed. I wish him to be protected. I desire that you do not drink."

"Oh! Fair enough. In that case, it's agreed," said Cairn. "Not until we reach Coomassin, anyhow. I'll take good care of your relative. A young chap, eh?"

Li Tock Lo nodded, produced a fan from his sleeve, and fanned himself gently.

"An estimable youth but inexperienced," he said blandly. "I am trying to teach him that the strongest forces in the world are often those which appear the weakest. A valuable lesson for anyone to know."

Again the indefinite something caught at Cairn. He looked the speaker in the eye.

"Meaning that for me, eh? All right; I get it. What sort of man is Vandunk?"

"I do not know; I have not seen him. His agent arranged everything," Li Tock Lo responded. "His agent is one John Drift, who goes as first officer——"

A buzzer sounded. Li Tock Lo leaned forward and pressed a bell-button on his desk.

"There is Mynheer Vandunk now," he said. "Whether you like him or not, please be very polite; his influence in colonial affairs is large."

The door opened. The fat moon-face of Li Tock Lo expressed surprise, as into the office came a small, brisk man with drooping mustaches and a very red nose.

"Hullo, Li, hullo," he said in English, then blinked at Cairn. "Eh?"

"Why, Mr. Drift!" exclaimed Li Tock

Lo. "I expected to see Mynheer Vandunk——"

"Blast it, he went and missed the train at Batavia!" said Drift with evident agitation and a slight cockney accent. "I just 'ad a wire from 'im to see you. He won't get 'ere until morning. That is, the train as gets in about three. He'll go right aboard ship, says 'e."

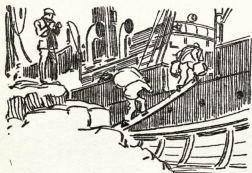
"So. Mr. Drift, this is Captain Cairn, who commands the ship."

Drift wrung the hand of Cairn and exclaimed cheerfully.

"Glad, sir, perishing glad! Board o' Trade ticket, I take it?"

"Yes," said Cairn. The brisk little man beamed.

"Right, right. First officer in steam—never 'ad my master's examination, blast it!



I'll be here at seven tonight to sign on the crew and go aboard, if that suits you, sir".

"Quite," said Cairn. Mr. Drift glanced at his watch.

"I'll 'ave to see Mr. Tracey and 'is sister," he rattled on. "They'll want to get aboard tonight too. At the Netherlands Hotel, they are. The blasted ship 'as no passenger license. I've arranged to sign 'em on as chief stewards and take 'em aboard wi' their luggage late tonight after dinner. I 'opes, sir, it meets with your consent?"

HE PEERED anxiously at Cairn, who nodded. Then he departed. When the door had closed, Li Tock Lo regarded Cairn with a twinkle.

"That man spoke much, and you uttered two words. Hm! I'm sorry not to meet Vandunk. By the way, Captain, I've secured government permission to put a dozen rifles and as many pistols aboard; you know, there's been so much piracy of late along the Celebes coast that the precaution should be observed."

Cairn laughed. "We've nothing worth robbing aboard the *Ta Ming*."

"You may have, returning. And this pirate holds people to ransom. The Dutch and English are both trying to run him down. Singular, they can't even discover much about him!"

"You mean the chap called the Devil's Bosun?" queried Cairn.

"Yes. Said to be a white man, leading natives. Well, let us hope you don't run into him. I should regret having to ransom my young relative, Erh Tan. He will be here this evening at seven, by the way, to be signed on."

"How about stewards?" asked Cairn. "And the black gang?"

"It seems that Vandunk—or his agent—bring a complete crew. Perhaps they, too, are taking no chances on accomplices of the pirates stowing away aboard. It is a wise precaution. Mr. Drift, by the way, is attending to all the ship's papers; through the official assistance extended to Mynheer Vandunk, it is made easy."

A queer business all around, thought Cairn, as he took his departure after all final arrangements. The *Ta Ming* was a small coastwise steamer of no great speed, comfort or ability. She had just got rid of a copra cargo, which increased her usual evil odor, and she was ready to start as soon as stores were in and steam up.

Queer, all of it. Vaguely, indefinitely queer; Li Tock Lo had sensed it without knowing why. Natural enough that a Dutch official would want to put his own crew aboard rather than trust Chinese. The Devil's Bosun was playing the devil with shipping over Borneo way, and often worked by stowing some of his pirates aboard the ship he meant to loot.

Natural enough that an official would be given an island concession. It meant virtual plunder, slavery and death for the unfortunate natives, who did not matter in the least. Particularly if they were Malays and therefore Mohammedan in religion.

Natural enough that an Englishman and his master, probably from Singapore or North Borneo, would want the rubber output. Natural enough that Vandunk should miss his train down from Batavia to Surabaya. And yet all of it, every bit of it, conveyed a queer and indefinite sensation of being a trifle screwy.

SO THINKING, Cairn went back to Reilly's Bar and bought half a case of Irish whiskey to be sent aboard for later consumption. He refused a drink. He was paying Reilly, when he heard a voice behind him.

"Bill, if that isn't Mark Hudson, I'm a liar! It's Hudson, I tell you! Hey, Mark! Mark!"

Cairn paid no attention. A hand caught his arm. He turned, to see two men staring at him. He knew them both instantly; but his look of surprised interrogation was perfectly assumed.

"I beg your pardon," said one of the two, a bit confused by that straight, blank look. "But aren't you Mark Hudson? You must be—you remember me—we were both in your class at Annapolis——"

Cairn's brows lifted. "Sorry," he said, with a deliberate English accent on the word. "Mistake, no doubt. My name is Cairn."

"Here's your change, Cap'n Cairn," broke in Reilly, handing over money. Cairn took it, nodded, and walked out, leaving the two Americans looking after him. They turned to Reilly and overwhelmed the latter with questions.

"No manner of use, gents," said Reilly. "I've knowed him a couple o' year. Master in steam he is—Cap'n Cairn. Where from? Lor' bless you! Liverpool Irish as ever was. Told me so hisself. What'll it be, gents?"

The two shook their heads at each other. A mistake, of course; Mark Hudson had been drowned the night before the court-martial. Had tried to escape and had been drowned. An old Annapolis custom. Damned good thing, too; saved all hands from disgrace. Drunken robbery, a woman tangled up in it—yes, a damned good thing. Men who made mistakes of that sort had no business in the navy.

But Cairn, cursing under his breath, walked home to his French hotel with eyes so bitter and hard that men who met him turned sharply away. He needed a drink now, wanted a dozen drinks, a whole bottle. Why the devil had he promised not to take a drink until he reached Coomassin? Now was when he needed it most.

He found Ali in his room, quietly packing his things. The dish-faced little old Malay now wore a fresh sarong and jacket. His teeth were quite black from chewing betel-paste, Cairn observed.

"Well, Ali! We're going to Coomassin. Know where that is?"

"No, tuan kapitan. I never heard of it."

"So much the better. 'Neither did I. You're free until seven tonight."

"If the tuan permits, I will stay here."

"Suit yourself. Lay out a fresh suit for me." Cairn departed to his bath. Later, he found his clothes ready, and flung a laughing question at Ali. "Where'd you learn so much about getting clothes ready?"

"By having servants of my own, tuan," said Ali. Cairn did not press the topic, from a feeling of delicacy.

AS HE had not eaten since morning, he was ready for a very early dinner—he had to be at the office by seven. He left everything packed, gave Ali money and orders to be there with his bags at the appointed time, and swung out of the little hotel.

What was the name of those English people? Tracey, yes, and at the Netherlands. Cairn went straight there, being curious. Woman aboard, eh? Not so

good. Still, these stiff Englishwomen didn't matter; they were sexless creatures, as a rule. Not like blooming, rosy Eurasian girls.

Cairn caught sight of them talking with Mr. Drift. He dropped into a chair, held up a newspaper, and kept an eye on them. At first he was staggered. Tracey was a young fellow, blond and eager, but far gone in liquor; nearly drunk, in fact. The sister was slim and cool, lovely as a flower unfolding. Cairn regarded her sourly, appraising her with jaundiced eye. Too damned cool altogether, too capable, bound by restraint and icy convention. Bah!

Mr. Drift went off with the young fellow, toward the bar. Cairn caught a flash of emotion in the girl's face as she looked after them—anxiety, even fear, widening the lovely blue eyes. He let the newspaper fall. She felt his gaze and her eyes touched on him for an instant, then drifted away. She rose and departed.

With a scornful grunt, Cairn strode off to get his dinner.

"I bet the Dutchman trims those two Britishers," he reflected. "Rubber, eh? And she tags along to keep the young fool sober—which she doesn't do. Bah! Bet she gets a few healthy shocks at Coomassin, or before. Do her good."

Dinner over, with time to spare, Captain Cairn drifted back to Reilly's Bar in order to meet a Scotch tramp skipper whom he wanted to see. He did not find his man, but two officers of a Burns-Philp boat were standing at the bar after many drinks, and one of them uttered the name of Coomassin.

"Sultan of Coomassin's daughter—aye, that's who she is," said one, handing over a photograph. "I hear she's running the bloody outfit now. Did you ever see the likes? My good gosh, what a woman! What a woman!"

"Aye, she's likely enough," said the other, with a catch in his voice.

Cairn came up beside them and looked. A pulse leaped in him at sight of the pictured face. Sultan's daughter? Nonsense!

Pure Caucasian, and ineffably lovely; a face to take away the breath of a man, eyes to hold his heart—one of those chance pictures where the eyes look out and pierce.

"Hi, there! Who are you, horning in?" With an oath, the two Aussies swung angrily around. Cairn laughed, reached forward, and took the picture. A fist swung into his midriff.

His fists struck out, lightly it seemed. A blow smashed him squarely in the eye; those two could fight. Glasses shivered, Reilly shrieked for help. One of the two went staggering down the length of the bar. The other spun around and was knocked over a table, and went crashing down with it.

Cairn, still laughing, strode out. In the street, he paused to look again at the picture. Head and shoulders, no more. An almost Grecian face, smiling a little, so unutterably perfect and adorable that his pounding heart stood still.

"Sultan's daughter, hell!" said Cairn, as he thrust it safely away. "There, by God, is a woman—a real woman, not an iceberg! Now I know why I'm going to Coomassin."

HE WALKED into the shipping office at seven o'clock with one eye puffed and blackening. The brisk Mr. Drift was there, and so were the other officers. Lochaber, a portly Scotch engineer, and his assistant who had Chinese blood. Andrews, second officer; a dark, taciturn man with cruel devils in his black eyes and an ugly twist to his lips. A powerful fellow, Andrews. Chinese steward, halfbreed quartermasters; black gang, deck hands, cook and helper—all halfbreeds or Malays or Chinese. Not a Dutchman in the lot.

And this was the queerest thing of all, thought Cairn.

Evidently Erh Tan thought the same thing, and the other clerks; Li Tock Lo was not here. Erh Tan was a plump young man, small, clad in black jacket and skirt of beautiful silk brocade; his features were exquisitely carven, like old ivory. His eyes

flitted in surprise and wonder over the assembled men. He turned, caught the gaze of Cairn, and smiled slightly.

Cairn liked him. He did not like this crew. None was drunk; and this was a strange thing, also. He had a word with Lochaber, the chief engineer. An unpleasant fat rascal of perhaps fifty, loose-lipped and heavy-jowled, with an odor about him. Over the room hung the same odor. Cairn had sharp nostrils, and sniffed at it with a frown. He touched Erh Tan on the elbow and met the slitted eyes.

"What is it I smell?" he said under his breath. "What's this odor?"

"Chandu," muttered the yellow man.

Opium, eh? The whole lot of them. That looked queer, too.

Cairn wondered what was the matter with him, that he should have this strange feeling about the whole business. Perhaps, meeting those two Americans and being recognized? No, not that.

The only natural touch to the affair was that of the Tracey girl; and Cairn grunted again at thought of her. The picture in his pocket—well, it might be a mistake. Those two Australians might have lied about it. No telling.

The comprador wakened him from his musing. All ready to go aboard; the boats were waiting.

A silent lot. No jokes, no stories, no talking. Less and less did Cairn like his outfit, but they were signed on now; no backing down. He found himself curious to see Vandunk. Mr. Drift stuck close to his side, chattering and rattling away with eternal nervous energy. Nervous? By God, that might be it! The brisk little devil was nervous. What about? Then Mr. Drift departed to seek the passengers.

Questions died. The river, the harbor, the glinting lights, the boats awaiting them, the men piling in with their duffel-bags. Cairn wanted another look at the photograph in his pocket, and wanted it badly.

There was the old scow now, with sampans and boats around her, stores going in, stevedores at work. Li Tock Lo attended

to everything. Now Cairn was to take over—a queer sea-going, this! But, with the decking under his feet, he became a different man, alert and alive, all dreams departed, pictures forgotten.

Mr. Drift was to come aboard an hour later with the Traceys.

Cairn pitched into details, getting the new crowd shaken down and everything shipshape. He stole time off for a visit to his cabin, under the bridge. There he emptied his pockets, glanced at the photograph, and put it down with a smile. Ali was stowing away his things, quietly efficient. Cairn saw the Irish whiskey and locked it into his private cupboard, and went back on deck.

There he reached for his pipe, found it forgotten, and returned to his cabin. As he stepped in, he caught sight of Ali, holding the picture of the girl, staring at it. The Malay whipped around, startled agitation in his scarred face.

"Hello!" exclaimed Cairn. "Do you know the lady, Ali?"

"No, tuan," humbly replied the little brown ban. "But her face is one in which there is no luck." And so saying, Ali left the cabin.

No luck? Cairn looked at the picture, met the wide, lovely eyes, and thrilled to them anew. He understood what Ali had meant. This girl was too exquisite, too perfect a thing, to have any great luck. She would be looted, plundered, used, a tool in the rapacious hands of conquerors.

"Probably she's Eurasian," thought Cairn. "A sultana in Coomassin, but in any white man's town a despised outcast. Well, by heaven——"

He checked his thoughts, shoved the picture into a drawer, and went back on deck. He came slap on Mr. Andrews, the dark second officer, standing on the bridge in talk with two of the men from forward—in talk and laughter, as though some smutty jest had just been passed. Cairn halted.

"I thought you had charge of stowing those stores, Mr. Andrews?" he said. "You

men, go below. Don't come on the bridge again except on duty."

"What the hell!" Andrews swung around. "Don't be so high-faluting on this old bumboat. You ain't going to run this hooker navy style——"

Cairn hit him twice, and hard, and carefully. Not at all like a gentleman, but like a man who meant to win his fight then and there. The two brown men disappeared like shadows. Mr. Andrews clamped both hands over his belly and leaned back against the bridge-house in agony, his dark eyes rolling.

"Don't make mistakes again," said Cairn, his voice cold and cruel. "I'm running this hooker any style I damned please. You're taking orders, not giving them. Wipe that look off your face and get to work, or I'll murder you."

Murder lay in the eyes of Andrews, but it was downed by suffering; he was all but paralyzed. He gasped out something and staggered away. Cairn went into the wheel house, examined his fine black eye, and fell to work with charts and pilot guide.

MR. DRIFT brought the Traceys aboard. Cairn met them at the rail and was formally introduced. Tracey was pleasantly drunk and affable. He shook hands and hurried off with Mr. Drift to look after the mountains of luggage streaming aboard. Miss Tracey moved aside with Cairn and spoke in a low, controlled voice.

"You were sitting in the hotel this evening, watching us. But you did not have that mouser at the time."

Cairn chuckled. "Right. It's a beautiful shiner, eh? Yes, I wanted to see what our passengers looked like. What do you think of the ship?"

"She's pretty dreadful," said Miss Tracey, with the usual English habit of speaking one's mind. "I don't understand why you should have such a ship."

"Eh? Oh, is that base flattery? You don't know the truth. I'm lucky to have any ship at all, much less the *Ta Ming*. The

'Great Enlightened' is one translation of the words. I think we'll need a lot of enlightenment this voyage."

"I think so, too," she answered calmly. "What is Mr. Vandunk like?"

"Eh? But you know him——"

"We know only his agent, Mr. Drift."

"That's queer. Well, I don't know Vandunk either. He'll be aboard sometime in the morning, before we sail. May I show you your cabins?"

He did so, called the Chinese steward, and put him at the lady's disposition. Then he bade his guests good night and got Mr. Drift to work. And Mr. Drift could work; he immediately relieved Cairn of all details in an admirably brisk manner.

It was after three in the morning when a launch brought Mynheer Vandunk aboard. Cairn, who had expected a brawny Hollander, was disappointed. The man who came over the rail was rather small, and enveloped in coat and shawl against the river mist, until only a pair of bright little eyes were visible. His handshake was limp.

"Glad to meet you, Captain," he said in English. "I must get to my cabin and go over matters with Mr. Drift, if you'll allow. The moment we start I'll be awfully sick. I get seasick with the first wave. I just can't help it. I'll be sick for days and days. That's why I can't abide the sea, just can't abide it. Good morning."

So this was Mynheer Vandunk! Cairn looked reflectively after him, then turned as a limp, senseless figure was lifted on deck under Mr. Drift's direction.

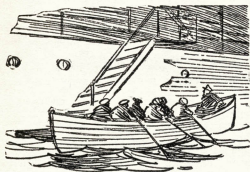
"Who the devil's this?" Cairn demanded. The first officer winked.

"Mynheer Vandunk's servant, sir—unfortunately, he's a bit addicted to the poppy. A fine fellow in his right senses. I'll have him placed in Mynheer Vandunk's cabin; the master likes to have him close at hand."

Cairn shrugged and sought the bridge. "Can't abide the sea!" Now that was a strange expression for any Dutchman to use, even if the speaker had been educated in England or were half English. And it

seemed odd that the Traceys should be taking a long trip with investment possibilities ahead, yet did not know Vandunk. Of course it was customary to deal through agents—and yet it seemed odd.

"Something queer back of it all," Cairn told himself. "The Traceys aren't crooked. The young fellow's a fool for liquor, the girl's got the brains of the two. Still,



there's something that doesn't show on the surface. I can feel it. So could Li Tock Lo. Something screwy."

Cairn turned to the instructions given him by Li Tock Lo. These merely concerned the Coomassin anchorage, which was exposed and unsafe. In case weather came up while Cairn was awaiting the return cargo, he was to run the ship into the river-mouth on the Celebes mainland, opposite the island.

So, with the turn of the tide, the *Ta Ming* put out to sea, with ballast of sharp death and subtle destiny.

II

STRANGE! He doesn't look a bit like his picture," said Stella Tracey. Her brother turned to her in surprise.

"Where'd you see his picture?"

"In Surabaya. I showed it to you, but you'd been drinking and paid no heed. It was in that government handbook we looked over; it told how he meant to turn Coomassin into a model district. He has full powers there, you know."

The speakers sat overlooking the after well-deck. Cairn had come aft for a look

around, before going to the bridge. Stella Tracey had a book in her lap. Her brother was mouthing a pipe, with moody, frowning air.

"Why did Vandunk send for you and not me?" he demanded irritably.

"Because I'm handling the business end, naturally."

Cairn hesitated. So Vandunk didn't look like his pictures, eh? Interesting if true; but few people do look like their pictures.

It was early afternoon. Rijstaafel, the enormous noonday meal of Java, was over. Cairn had everything running smoothly; the ship was pounding through a level, calm sea that was hardly ruffled by a breeze.

"Good afternoon!" Cairn approached the two. "Everything all right?"

"Oh, quite, thanks," said Tracey. "Sit down, do—take my chair."

"Can't possibly, to my regret," said Cairn. "I'm due on the bridge. By the way, if either of you care to come up there at any time, barge ahead."

Stella Tracey looked up at him, a peculiarly frank and level look.

"Thanks. If you'll not sit down, I may be up presently. I'd like a word with you when you've time."

"At your service," replied Cairn. "But I must run now. Come when you like."

He touched his cap and went up the after bridge ladder. Andrews, who was on duty, met him with a nod that betrayed no rancor.

"The steward was just here, sir, looking for you. Mynheer Vandunk would like a word with you when you've time to step down."

"Right," said Cairn, and lit his pipe. The quartermaster at the wheel saluted him. A bony-faced brown man, a halfbreed of sorts on a Malay base. A good seaman.

"I'm sorry about last night, sir," Andrews said unexpectedly.

Cairn laughed. "Forget it, if you can also forget what caused it. How on earth did you and Mr. Drift happen to be hired by a Dutchman?"

"Can't say for Mr. Drift, sir. For myself, I was out of a berth and got this one through knowing the Celebes coast a bit. And a clean ticket."

"Lucky man," Cairn commented drily.

FIVE minutes later, he saw Stella Tracey coming to the bridge. He was surprised by her speedy appearance, and surprised again when she halted at the lee-ward rail, as though to speak beyond hearing of anyone else. This, it proved, was her intent.

"Did anything queer or extraordinary take place last night, Captain Cairn?"

"Not to my knowledge." Cairn met her flashing blue eyes. "Why?"

"No one fell overboard?"

Cairn laughed. "I hope not! No, certainly not. Please tell me why."

"Then I must have been wrong." She hesitated, and continued. "You see, before daylight I was awakened. At first I thought by the movement of the ship at sea; but I heard voices next door. My cabin is next that of Mynheer Vandunk; next me, and farther aft, is that of my brother. The noise came from Vandunk's cabin. My port was open, and so, I imagine, was his."

Cairn nodded. "What sort of noise?"

"Excited voices. I could hear nothing of what was said; the tone was excited. I went to close my port. As I did so, I saw something fall. It was as though a man had jumped from the port next door. A voice said, 'He's gone.' That was all. I could not swear to it, mind. I was sleepy at the time. The whole thing must have been a mental error on my part."

"Perhaps; perhaps not," said Cairn. "It's good of you to have told me this, Miss Tracey. I'll look into it, without mentioning you. There are all sorts of queer goings-on when a ship leaves port, so don't be uneasy."

She laughed lightly. "Oh, I'm not! And I don't think your ship is half so bad as I did last night, really. By the way, have you ever been at Coomassin?"

"Never. Nor you?"

"No. My brother was there three or four years ago, when he first came out. He liked the place, and quite lost his heart to the sultan's daughter. I understand she's grown up now, and has become the sultana. Odd for a white girl, eh?"

Cairn's heart skipped a beat.

"White girl? But you said, the sultan's daughter——"

"Yes indeed. I believe she was the child of some trader who had no other family, and the sultan adopted her. Romantic, what?"

Cairn nodded. "I suppose so. If true. In these waters, romance usually turns out to be pretty sordid stuff that won't bear looking into. A white girl—and a sultana? I'll believe that when I see it."

She departed in frigid disapproval. Cairn cursed himself; what had impelled him to such savage words? In no pleasant mood, he sought the cabin of Vandunk, and at his knock was told to enter.

HE FOUND Vandunk seated before a table littered with papers from an open portfolio. Cairn's impression was one of astonishment. The man was small, rotund, beaming with merriment; little shoe-button eyes danced, his thick lips curved. He had a heavy cleft chin and high forehead, and was healthily bronzed. But there was no humor in his mirth. It was like a mask.

"Well, well, Captain! Seasick, says I; and here you find me hard at work. Even keel and no swell, eh? Well, I'll no doubt be sick enough tonight. Sit down, sir. A cheroot? Prime stuff, you'll find 'em."

Cairn accepted a whitish cheroot of fine tobacco, and seated himself. The little shoe-button eyes darted over him in appraisal.

"You speak English well," said Cairn.

"And why not? First twenty years of my life were spent in Norfolk, Cap'n. All well aboard?"

"Well enough," said Cairn, and lit his cheroot. "Who fell out of your port last night?"

He meant to catch Vandunk off guard; and did it. For a moment the man seemed to freeze in every line of his rotund face. But the black little eyes dilated until the whites showed clear around the pupils, and the thick lips hardened, and the limp hand on the desk made a jerky movement—as though to dive for a weapon. Then it stopped.

"That's what I called you down about, Cap'n," Vandunk said slowly. "My servant, poor devil! Out of his head with opium and bhang. He kicked up a bit of a row early this morning. You know how these Malays are, and the queer insanity that comes upon 'em at times, like running amok? This is the other kind, congenital. The poor devil was out of the port before I knew it, and gone."

Cairn nodded silently. He remembered the limp figure that had come aboard.

"I don't suppose you'll have to enter it in the log?" asked Vandunk.

"Not unless you want it entered. It's none of my affair."

Vandunk drew a deep breath, as of relief. "Right you are, Cap'n. You'll not lose by it, I promise you. I take it you know what's ahead of us?"

"Vaguely. No details."

Vandunk took a cheroot and bit at it, and relaxed in his seat.

"I'm to take over Coomassin for the government. I want to ship out a good deal of stuff at once; I'll have a cargo, or part of one, for you within a week, I hope. It may go to Sarawak or Macassar. We'll see about that. But there may be a bit of trouble. Two of our men, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Lochaber, were at the island at the time of the revolt and in fact were in the service of the sultan. They were, if I may so phrase it, agents of ours and in consequence the natives may remember the fact. They'll have to be careful about going ashore and so on. Don't give them any shore leave."

"I see," said Cairn. "To put it bluntly, I presume they're considered as traitors."

"That's it," and Vandunk gave him a

narrow glance. "You don't know the island?"

"Never heard of it before yesterday."

"Very well." Vandunk gestured to the litter of papers. "I've everything here to put me in full authority. Your ship's under charter to me. You take orders only from me. Is that understood?"

"Naturally," said Cairn.

"Then we understand each other," Vandunk said, and shook hands in dismissal. "I'll be a sick man tonight, I fear; looks like wind in the north. Well, good luck to you!"

CAIRN sought his own cabin, with mixed feelings. Looks like wind in the north, eh? This man spoke like a seaman. He was a Dutch colonial official, and unlike any of the ilk Cairn had ever met or seen. Yet a keen eye cast at those papers on the table had shown him that they were official papers. Yes, Vandunk was simply a queer sort of man, a square peg in a round hole as it were.

Ali was straightening up the cabin. He had a bandage about his face, and complained that the knife-wound over his cheek was swollen and painful. Cairn made him take off the bandage. The wound looked perfectly all right, but Cairn dosed it with iodine none the less and Ali replaced the bandage. This was just being finished when a knock sounded at the door, then Mr. Drift stuck his head in. His eyes rolled.

"Cap'n! Cap'n!" he said sharply. "Oh, this is terrible, awful! Come along, sir. Mr. Lochaber's cabin—the chief's dead, sir."

Cairn followed him on the jump. Lochaber's cabin was just across the passage. Cairn entered behind the first officer, and Mr. Drift pointed. On the floor lay the fat old chief, dead, and dreadfully dead. He had been stabbed twice.

With shaking fingers, Mr. Drift laid bare the wounds. They were neat and clean. No blood at all. Cairn knelt, then glanced up. Erh Tan stood in the open

doorway, and now came forward. The plump young Chinese showed no agitation, but looked down at the dead man and the exposed wounds. His voice came calmly, clearly.

"Strange! A kris *melala* did this work."

"What's that?" snapped Cairn. "What do you mean?"

"Look at the wounds, Captain," the young Chinese said. "Each shows very clearly that it was done by a knife with a raised ridge down the center. This could only be a certain form of kris used by Malays of the highest rank."

Mr. Drift felt the hands of the dead man.

"Stiff," he muttered in agitation. "He didn't show up at noon mess—that's why I looked in on him, and found him. Must have been done when he went off watch at eight bells, noon. As soon as he came into his cabin. Captain Cairn, what can we do about this murder?"

"Go take the deck and send Mr. Andrews here," said Cairn, rising. "Erh Tan, will you find the steward?"

Cairn was alone with the dead man. He looked about; the cabin showed nothing of the least interest. A duffel-bag, half-emptied, a half filled locker, afforded no help. Then Mr. Andrews came in, and his dark features were gray.

"Poor old devil!" he exclaimed. "Poor Tom Lochaber—"

"Get to work," said Cairn. "You and me both. Don't waste words; there's somebody aboard who murdered him. Why? We'll go through every cabin and every man until we find the weapon that did it. A kris with a ridge down the blade."

Andrews stared at him, and fright shook the dark man.

"A kris—ridged! A sultan's kris—no, no!" cried Andrews. "I tell you, it can't be, it can't! Not that, Cap'n. You don't know about it, but—"

"What's got into you?" snapped Cairn angrily. "You and the chief are old friends. Buck up! We'll find the murdering devil who did this. Go through every native

aboard. Oh, there's the steward—come along! Start with him. Take him for'ard and I'll be along as soon as I've spoken with the assistant engineer."

Andrews gripped the yellow steward and they disappeared, leaving a wake of oaths and protesting squeaks.

Cairn looked around the cabin once more, went to the half-open bag, and dumped it. Shoes fell out, a Bible, a tattered copy of Burns' poems, half a dozen knick-knacks, and two new Webley automobiles with a box of cartridges. Incredible, Cairn picked them up, examined them. Never fired, apparently, but cleaned of all grease. Service pistols, new, fresh, unscratched, empty. And cartridges for them. Where would a fat old engineer get such things—in Java? What would he want with them?

Cairn took them to his own cabin, locked them away, and sought the engine-room. The assistant, an empty-eyed fellow half Dutch and half native, gawked and blinked and knew nothing. Mynheer Lochaber had gone off watch. Trouble with anyone? Enemies? Not at all. The black gang all liked the old chief.

Cairn learned nothing. He joined Andrews forward, where the crew were mustered. The outcome was very curious. The whereabouts of every man was definitely shown, at the change of watches. Even Ali, the Malay, had been lending the steward a hand at the mess table. A search of the men's quarters showed no weapon of any kind.

Andrews resumed his watch. Cairn went to the bridge and found three men in the pilot-house; Andrews, the quartermaster and Mynheer Vandunk. The latter was in a white fury. Cairn heard him cursing, but he checked himself as Cairn appeared. His little eyes were like blazing coals.

"Who did this murder, Cap'n?" he shouted.

"Don't ask me," said Cairn wearily. "Every man for'ard has an alibi. Someone

aft did it—or these men are good liars.”

“None of my men did it!” exclaimed Vandunk vehemently. His voice was deep, authoritative, charged with power. “Lochaber was a favorite with the men. I’ve looked into the record of every man aboard. Perhaps you did it yourself?”

“Are you drunk?” Cairn surveyed him with quick appraisal.

“I beg your pardon,” said Vandunk. “I’m a bit worked up—Lochaber was an old friend. I’m terribly agitated. Oh, my stomach! I must get back to my cabin. I can’t stand the motion up here on the bridge—”

He departed hastily. Andrews watched Cairn with smoldering gaze, and spoke.

“I think he’s had a bit to drink, sir. Most upset, he was. I don’t mind saying it got me a bit, too. The chief and I have been found the motion up here on the bridge—”

“So Vandunk told me,” Cairn said drily. “Enter it up in the log. We’ll have the burial at sunset.”

To the surprise of Cairn, young Tracey eagerly volunteered to act as assistant engineer, the half-blood assistant becoming chief. Tracey knew engines, looked on it as a distinct lark, and threw himself into the job with a will.

Mr. Drift and Cairn searched everything aft, from captain’s cabin to cook’s galley, but no kris or knife with a ridged blade was turned up. The rifles and pistols that had been put aboard, Cairn kept under lock and key; he said nothing of the two new Webleys reposing in his private-locker.

NEXT morning, feeling the swell of the Straits of Macassar, the *Ta Ming* was wallowing through a heavy quartering sea. Both the Traceys were seasick and, the steward being busy, Ali took his place at breakfast. Mr. Drift and Cairn were at the table together, then the chief officer departed and Andrews took his place, with a glance at the little brown man, whose face was still bandaged.

“Can’t get it out of my head that I’ve seen you before, Ali,” said Andrews.

“Macassar, perhaps? Or aboard some craft?”

“No, tuan,” Ali responded in his humble way. “If I had ever seen the tuan before, I would not forget him. Ya Allah! The slave does not forget the great ones whom he has served.”

“Huh! I’ll remember sooner or later,” said Andrews. “Well, Cap’n, Mr. Tracey is a bit of all right. Sick as a dog, but sticking to his job. We’ll manage.”

Cairn happened to look up, caught a glance that Ali threw at the second mate, and was momentarily startled. The gleam and glitter in Ali’s eyes, the flashing scorn and even hatred—no, he must have misread the look. It was gone instantly. Perhaps Ali resented having to act as steward, for some of these Malays were devilish touchy.

Later, Cairn looked up Erh Tan and found the plump young fellow terribly gripped by seasickness. The ship was roll-



ing like a pig. Toward noon, Cairn went to the bridge, and while awaiting Mr. Drift to take the noon sights, fell into talk with Andrews. He had put the second officer down as a thorough bad one, but he got a bit of a surprise.

“Vandunk tells me you’ve been at Coomassin. I’ve heard stories about the sultan there having an adopted daughter, a white girl. Any truth in the yarn?”

“Yes,” said Andrews, and his hard face softened. “Amina, her name was. The most beautiful creature ever lived, Cap’n; a living angel, that girl was. I reckon she never had a bad thought, even—think me a damn fool, I s’pose?”

"No," said Cairn softly. "Tell me more about her."

"Ain't much to tell. She was a trader's daughter. The old sultan adopted her. She's got his throne now. I s'pose the Dutch will marry her off to some official and make sure of Coomassin. Everybody loved her—in a right way, mind you. Why, you take even me! I'd ha' gone into hell for her. And old Lochaber, who had four native women then, he'd get mighty ashamed if Amina even looked his way. Well, some women are like that. Have a queer effect on you."

Mr. Drift appeared with his instruments, and the conversation ended.

The noon meal was a sea snack and no mistake, with everything rolling great guns and the Chinese steward hard put to it at times to keep right side up. Stella Tracey showed up, white but brave, to cope with tea and toast.

The steward set a huge plate of curry before Cairn, especially decorated for him by the cook—shrimp, fish, meat, rice, arranged in fantastic manner. There was some laughter, Mr. Drift complaining loudly that nobody bothered to fix *his* plate navy style. Cairn attacked the dish with a will, and was part way through it when Ali appeared suddenly.

"Tuan kapitan! Mr. Ehr Tan wants you at once. He says he is dying and must see you——"

"Dying?" Cairn started up. "What's happened?"

"Nothing, tuan. He is seasick."

Cairn broke into a laugh. "All right, I'll come along and reassure him. Cover my plate and keep it warm, steward."

HE STARTED for Erh Tan's cabin, only to find Ali suddenly gripping his arm, looking into his face with blazing eyes.

"It was a lie, tuan. Go quickly, quickly! Your own cabin. Be sick. I came into the galley and saw the cook put a white powder into your curry. Poison. Ya Allah! There is no time to lose."

Poison—it was incredible! But the air, the suddenly vigorous tone of Ali, smashed the fact home. White powder? It might be some mistake or it might not.

Cairn went for his cabin with a rush. He got rid of his meal; then, white and shaken, he questioned Ali. The Malay really knew nothing, had merely seen the cook dosing the plate of curry with a white powder, and had jumped to conclusions. Cairn was tempted to anger, but repressed the feeling; such loyalty was too rare to be jeopardized.

He went back to the mess cabin and found only Miss Tracey there, lingering over her tea. Cairn told the steward to bring the cook at once.

The cook arrived. He was a lean, pock-marked fellow, with Malay features and oblique Chinese eyes. Cairn addressed him in English.

"The curry you made for me is excellent. I desire to compliment you. Unfortunately, my hunger does not permit me to eat so large an amount, therefore, as a mark of my favor, I desire you to finish the plate. Give it to him, steward."

The cook took the plate, and his face assumed a grayish look.

"Captain, no can do," he said in a thin voice. "Seasick. Velly sick. No can eat; all come topside quick. Velly solly."

Cairn smiled grimly. "Eat it, or I'll call two men to hold you and have it crammed down your throat. Eat it!"

"Why, Captain Cairn!" exclaimed the girl quickly. "You can see he's desperately ill—he can't possibly eat that curry! The very sight of it——"

The cook's eyes darted about. Then, like a flash, he was at the nearest port. With one hand he unscrewed it, and before Cairn could grab him, he had the thick glass open—and the plate went flying out. Then he crumpled in Cairn's hands, and made no resistance.

"Get the off watch quartermaster and two men," snapped Cairn at the steward.

Five minutes later, the cook was taken away to be laid in irons, and Cairn went

to the galley. Miss Tracey, wondering and a little angry because he ignored her, followed him. In the galley, Cairn turned on her.

"This is a case of poisoning, since you've got to know. Now keep quiet."

Presently he had what he sought; a folded paper such as chemists use, crumpled in one corner. Cairn opened it up. A few white grains of powder showed. He tasted them and made a wry grimace. Already he knew that the warning had come barely in time; a feeling of constriction was creeping through arms and legs, and his heart was pounding.

"Strychnine," he said curtly. "Miss Tracey, will you be good enough to find Mr. Drift—get him to my cabin at once. I didn't get enough of it to kill, but I may be knocked out for a bit. Hurry."

Once in his own cabin, he got into pajamas, took out one of the Webleys, loaded it, and took it to bed with him. Ali did not appear. When Mr. Drift showed up, Cairn regarded him grimly.

"Take charge. Sweat that cook; try and make him talk. I got rid of the poison in time, but the paralysis has got me. I'll be an hour or two before I can do anything. Heart's going hard."

Mr. Drift disappeared briskly. Then Cairn found Stella Tracey sitting beside him. Cool, capable, she silenced his protests.

"I've talked with Ali. Now keep quiet, Cap'n. Let me make things easy for you; best to let it wear off. I'm not a bad nurse, really."

CAIRN drifted. He would be all right later, and knew it; but the constriction was hard to bear. Her deft ministrations, her tenderness, astonished and softened him. She was a very beautiful woman, was Stella Tracey.

His brain was clear enough on certain subjects, but he could talk only with difficulty. She was making him drink quantities of hot black coffee all the time. She did the talking herself; told him a lot about

herself, even about the man over in Kedah, in the civil service, to whom she was engaged. She talked rapidly, trying to keep his mind occupied. Why anyone would try to poison the captain of the *Ta Ming* was a mystery, and she said so.

"More'n one mystery here," mumbled Cairn. "All this crowd aboard speaks English. Why? Most of the men, too. All picked men. Vandunk picked the cook."

"Well, don't think about it," she said. "Any signs of convulsions?"

"Nope. Just the first stage; nothing worse ahead," and Cairn laughed. "Saw a chap die of strychnine once, and it's damned unpleasant. Sorry—my rudeness. You're an angel."

"Oh, you're not a bad sort!" she replied brightly. "Tell me something—I saw this on the shelf yonder," and she held up the photograph of Amina. "A friend of yours? I'm interested, because I never saw a more lovely face in all my life. Who is she, if I may ask?"

"Not sure myself," Cairn said. "Took it away from a couple of chaps—in Reilly's Bar, in Surabaya. They said it was Amina, the Coomassin girl we were talking about—the other day. Not sure—"

Presently Erh Tan appeared in the doorway. He stayed only a moment, inquired very politely after Cairn, and went his way.

Ali showed up. His bandage was gone now, and Cairn noted that the wound on his cheek was healing well. He squatted in one corner, in the respectful style of Malays, and said little.

Cairn was beginning to feel more like himself; the cold sweat was passing, and the constriction, and the slight paralysis was also departing. Then, suddenly, Mr. Drift walked in and shut the door. He removed his cap, and wiped his forehead.

"Blast it! I've had one hell of a time—excuse me, miss. Terrible, Cap'n, but there warn't no 'elp for it. I fair 'ad to shoot the blighter. Come at me with a knife, he did. Pulled it out of behind his neck."

Cairn came to one elbow. "Who the devil are you talking about?"

"That ruddy cook, sir." The brisk Mr. Drift was agitated and earnest. "I was a-hauling of 'im over the coals when he done it. Lucky I 'ad my gun at hand, and let 'im have it. But it fair broke me up; put me all in a shake."

"Did you get any information out of him?" demanded Cairn. "Any reason for having poisoned me?"

"Not a smell, sir. It was me what signed 'im on, too; best of credentials and references. He'd been assistant cook in one o' them Bombay boats." Mr. Drift wiped his brow again. "I've put the steward on to the galley job, sir, and it struck me that if this here Malay of yours would act as steward——"

"That's for him to say. What about it, Ali?"

ALI, squatting in the corner, regarded them with a grim smile, an ironic smile, a smile proud and scornful at once. Then it was gone.

"What else can I do?" he said with a shrug. "Allah gives one man the power to order, another the faculty of obedience. I serve you, tuan."

"Good. Then that's arranged," said Mr. Drift with relief. "Now I'll 'ave to look up Mr. Andrews, blast him! He should be on the bridge, but he ain't. I'll just take a look in his cabin. Feeling better, sir?"

"Quite," Cairn rejoined. "I'm pretty much myself."

Mr. Drift departed briskly. Cairn looked at the little brown man.

"Ali, I'm in your debt; I don't forget debts. Thanks to you, I'm alive. And thanks to Miss Tracey, here, I'm quite all right again. By the way, Ali, have you any idea why that rascal wanted to kill me?"

"None, tuan," returned the Malay, rearranging his sarong as he squatted. "But he would certainly have talked, had he lived to talk."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Stella Tracey suddenly, in Malay. "What is in your mind? You are no man of

low caste; you are a raja at least, a man of some rank. What do your words mean?"

Ali looked blank. "Once I was a raja, yes; now I am a servant, by the will of Allah. Nothing was in my mind. The words were idle."

The door burst open.

"My God!" Mr. Drift came stumbling into the room, catching at the door as the ship rolled. He was livid, his eyes bulging. "My God! Poor Andrews has got it—just like the chief—laying in 'is cabin all blood, and dead, stone dead. Just like the chief, sir—stabbed twice——"

Cairn was out of bed, and caught up the pistol as his feet touched the floor.

III

DEATH hovered above the *Ta Ming* as she ploughed the eastern seas, and not death alone, but murder. It filled her like a living presence. Murder, stark and terrible in the sunlight, dread and whispering under the stars.

The utterly baffling mystery of it was horrible. Officers and men—all hands were jerky, eyes darting over shoulders, dark places shunned, cabin doors locked and ports screwed shut. A stiff sea was running, so that the clumsy little hooker kept rolling savagely, as though dodging the finger of death that reached into her vitals.

A couple of days put Cairn on his feet, as well as ever in body, but mentally aghast before the undeniable facts that faced him. Time had elapsed, giving him full opportunity to run down every clue and pin the murder upon the right man—and it was impossible. The murderer was by far too clever.

Andrews had not been long dead when Mr. Drift found him; but the time of his death could not be approximated. He, like Lochaber, had been stabbed twice by a kris with ridged blade. The same weapon, its mark clearly defined.

"I've run down nothing," said Cairn to Stella Tracey. She had come up to the bridge during his afternoon watch. They

stood at the lee rail together, beyond hearing of the quartermaster in the house.

"About three persons I'm absolutely sure. One's the cook, because he had just been shot. You and I were together in my cabin. Everybody else aboard is covered from suspicion—but someone's a liar. Vandunk was seasick, is still confined to his cabin. Erh Tan is about today, for the first time. He was certainly sick. Your brother was in the engine-room at the time; the engineer was asleep in his own cabin and was awakened by the noise and confusion. The steward had just taken over the duties of cook and was aft in the galley. None of the men from for'ard were in or about the 'midships cabins. That's the layout; and somebody's a liar. No telling who it is, though. Not a shadow of suspicion."

"Where was Ali? Oh, yes; he was with us."

"Not all the time. But he has no weapon of any kind. Then, we don't know exactly when Andrews was murdered, so we can't definitely pin anyone down to the moment. The one sure thing is that everybody aboard is in a flutter."

"Vandunk had me come to his cabin," she said, hesitant. "This morning. He questioned me, very insistently, as though he suspected you might have done it."

Cairn laughed. "I more than half suspect he might have done it. Anyone might have! Did he look pretty green in the face?"

"He didn't look ill at all," she said. "He was well wrapped up, of course."

"Have you, personally, any suspicion of the faintest sort?"

"No," she answered in her cool way. "Not the least."

"Where'd you learn to speak Malay so well?"

"We've been out here a year, you know. And immediately we resolved to come out, we pitched in to learn it. Everyone does. It's an easy language."

CAIRN nodded. One of the seamen, a Portuguese halfcaste named Souza, came up the ladder and saluted. Mynheer

Vandunk would like to see the captain.

"I'm on duty until eight bells," said Cairn. "What were you doing around the cabins?"

"Me and Hilo Tom were put on brass polishing, sir. You done it."

"Right. Tell Mr. Vandunk I'll see him at eight bells." The man went back, and Cairn turned to Stella Tracey. "Wouldn't you feel better if you had a pistol about your cabin? You look to me like the sort of girl who could use a gun."

"Thanks, I am, and I have," she said, laughing. "Mr. Drift insisted that I should bring one along; he gave me one in Surabaya. A Webley. He said that it was by Mr. Vandunk's orders."

"Eh?" Cairn's gray eyes glittered suddenly. "Would you mind getting it and letting me have a look at it?"

"Gladly."

She went below, to return with a handgun in which the pistol lay. Cairn gave it a short examination, beyond sight of the helmsman. Brand new, never used, same calibre, fully loaded. He replaced it in the handgun, with a nod.

"Thank you. A good gun. Hello! So he's come to me, eh?"

Mynheer Vandunk, shawl about his neck, came nimbly up the ladder. He bowed and removed his hat momentarily to the girl, then gave Cairn a look.

"Can we step into the house for a moment and talk?" he said.

"If you like. No, don't go, Miss Tracey," Cairn replied. "We may need your cool head to solve some of our problems. I'm sure Mynheer Vandunk agrees."

Vandunk assented. As the girl had said, he did not look at all ill. Once shut away from the wind, with a mere shrug at the presence of the Malay quartermaster, Vandunk faced Cairn brusquely.

"I'm not satisfied about these murders, Cap'n. As you know, this crew was hand-picked. None of our men could possibly have killed Lochaber and Andrews. That puts it squarely up to anyone outside our

men. You yourself, your Malay servant, that plump Chinese supercargo——"

"And Miss Tracey and her brother," put in Cairn. "Dead right, Vandunk, from one viewpoint. We'll come back to that in a minute. First, since the cook was your man and tried to murder me, what have you to say about it?"

Vandunk's little shoe-button eyes glittered. "Do you dare accuse me?"

"Certainly. I accuse anyone. Mr. Drift shot the cook. Two of the men were on the spot. Both swore that the cook attacked Mr. Drift. Let that pass. It was Mr. Drift who found Andrews murdered.



Maybe he murdered him and then came to give the alarm. I don't think so, mind; I say, it's possible. You might have done it. You've been laid up, but you look devilish healthy. You may as well face the possibilities all around."

Vandunk bit at a cheroot, then smiled slowly.

"I see. You're nobody's fool, Cap'n. I stick to it that no one in our crowd committed those murders. I've done a bit of investigation. There's no such knife aboard—no kris *melala*. Either it was flung overboard, or it's hidden away. And I've checked something else. Lochaber and Andrews, as I told you, were at Coomasin. Possibly they were killed because of that fact—because of their treachery, as the natives there called it."

"More than likely; that would explain why Andrews was so startled, even afraid," said Cairn. "And that puts it up to one of your own men. Ali tells me he was never

there in his life, told me so when I first engaged him. Some one of your own crowd up for'ard has put it over on you, Vandunk."

Vandunk was staggered. He scowled thoughtfully and then nodded.

"Possibly you've hit it. Frankly, I did think at first you were the killer."

"And I thought you might be; I still think so," said Cairn bluntly. "Not that I believe you were. I say, it's possible."

MISS TRACEY broke in upon the threatening silence with a bright laugh.

"I'll tell you what it all sounds like," she said cheerfully. "I've heard a good deal of talk at Singapore about the piracy up the coast. This sounds like one of the mysterious jobs pulled off by that man they call the Devil's Bosun! They say he has confederates aboard ships, you know, who murder the officers at the proper time."

Vandunk bit at his cheroot. His thick lips curved, merriment came back into his rather broad features—merriment, amusement that was a mask, but not humor.

"The Devil's Bosun!" he repeated, with a chuckle. "My dear Miss Tracey, that is all rot, really. Legend gets built up around some rascally pirate; he is given all sorts of attributes; every crime committed in the seven seas is laid at his door. As a matter of fact, no intelligent or even shrewd man would be a pirate, in this day of radio and sea-police. He couldn't get away with it."

"The Devil's Bosun does," said the girl. Vandunk shrugged.

"Nonsense; forgive me, but it is nonsense. Look at those pirates up around Bias Bay, within sight of Hongkong! Some genius was supposed to be at their head. When they were broken up, nothing of the sort was found. The same in this case. We have a number of piracies up the Celebes coast, and people jump to the conclusion that some person has contrived them all. No, no; it's quite unlikely. By the way, Cap'n, what do you know about this serv-

ant of yours? This Ali? Been with you long?"

"No," said Cairn. "He had a recommendation from Li Tock Lo in person; he used to be a Malay trader who had a ship of his own. He's a *raja*. That is, of good blood, a noble as opposed to a peasant. I think he's faithful. I know he has no weapon of any kind. That's really about all I know of him."

Vandunk nodded. "That's enough. Where is he from?"

"Kelantan, in the Malay States."

"I'm satisfied, then." Vandunk lit his cheroot. "We've checked up on every one of our men aboard; as you say, somebody's lying. Mr. Drift tells me that Erh Tan is a relative of Li Tock Lo. That rules him out. Looks like a plump young capon; not the sort to use a knife so well. We're blocked, that's all."

"There still remains the question of why your cook tried to poison me."

"I know. I can't explain that." Vandunk turned to Cairn, spreading out his hands. Earnestness suddenly sat in his face, his voice. "Cap'n, we're blocked; I can say no more. I'd give five thousand guilders, gold, if I could find the murderer of our two officers. I've spread that offer among the crew. Every man aboard is on the alert this moment."

Cairn stiffened. "Not your place to make the offer. You should have suggested it to me. I'm the captain aboard here, not you. You're here by sufferance."

"Eh?" exclaimed Vandunk. "I've chart-ered this ship, sir!"

"That has nothing to do with it. In future, remember the fact." Cairn smiled, and removed the offense of the words. The quartermaster turned to him and he nodded. Eight bells; four o'clock. "Now, mynheer, suppose we all have a regular English afternoon tea, eh? Mr. Drift will be up in a minute. Here he comes now. You'll join us, Miss Tracey? I'll have your brother as well——"

Vandunk assented. With the cheroot

between his teeth, he could not very well claim illness.

Ali was sent for tea. Tracey joined them in the mess cabin, as soon as he had removed the marks of his labor; he grinned boyishly, was eager about his job. Vandunk threw off his wraps, and Stella Tracey soon had him talking. He revealed himself as a man of wide travel and information; but Cairn, who was watching him with attention, divined that he kept a continual restraint upon himself. Vandunk said frankly that he detested the sea, and once he reached Coomassin intended to stay there several years. He was, Cairn judged, a man of forty-five.

"Have you any plans in regard to the sultana there?" asked Stella Tracey. "I understand you have entire authority over the island."

VANDUNK assented. "Plans? No," he said slowly. "No. I shall act for the best interests of the island, of course. An unfortunate situation, with that woman of white blood. It may be that a native sultan would be better regarded by the people."

"But," put in Tracey, "I thought she was the heiress of the former sultan?"

Vandunk waved his cheroot and smiled. "Oh, yes; however, I shall be guided by the resident there. It is impossible to predict conditions."

Cairn decided definitely that he did not like Mynheer Vandunk. The man was very shrewd, far more so than he appeared on the surface.

Later, when Ali was in his room, Cairn told the Malay about Lochaber and Andrews having been at Coomassin previously, and suggested that this might in some way lie behind their killing.

"That is true, tuan," said Ali reflectively. "I heard two of the men forward talking about it. It seems that those white men betrayed the sultan to the Dutch, although they had taken his salt and were in his service. It would not be strange if someone aboard here had killed them

for that reason. Shall I try to find if any of the Malays forward come from those parts?"

"If you can find out, do so," Cairn said. "And I'd give a good deal to learn why the cook tried to poison me."

Ali took from his pouch a bit of leaf-wrapped betel paste, and mouthed it.

"Allah alone knows the truth, tuan! I have heard men talk about the time when Tuan Drift will be captain."

Cairn whistled. So the crew expected that Drift would be captain!

"And," went on Ali slowly, "at that time there will be many women aboard."

"Interesting," said Cairn drily. "Keep your ears open."

He went to the cabin of Erh Tan, knocked, and entered. The plump young yellow man was sitting up, still very pallid, but still very calm. Politeness over, Cairn spoke abruptly.

"Some of the crew seem to think that Mr. Drift will be captain before long. One attempt has been made to poison me. Two of the officers have been murdered. Now, if you have any suspicions, speculations, or guesses, I'd like to hear 'em."

Erh Tan smiled faintly.

"Captain Cairn, you think because I am Chinese, maybe I guess something. You white men all think the Oriental people are very deep and shrewd. That is not so. We think differently, but we are far less shrewd than you. We are not deep and complex. Maybe we start a ball rolling, and that is all; we cannot tell where it will roll. Mynheer Vandunk hired this ship through his agent. Cash was paid, much cash. It is agreed that when cargo is handled, it is handled through the agents and associates of Li Tock Lo, in any port. I look after such interests. You look after the ship. It is very simple."

"It's too damned simple," Cairn said. "Suppose you and I were killed?"

"That would not matter. The ship is insured. She is old and has little value. No one would kill us in order to steal her. But how can I tell? A man walking in a

fog has no advantage over a blind man."

No help here. The young fellow was a mass of sluggish inertia, at this moment anyhow. And yet he had suggested that Lochaber's wounds had been made by a certain kind of kris—an odd thing for a Straits Chinese living in Java to know.

"Who ever told you," asked Cairn, "what a kris *melala* was like?"

Erh Tan stared at him for a moment, then smiled again.

"You think it strange that I should know, eh? Well, that is natural. About a week ago I was dining with my relative Li Tock Lo. He had upon his desk a Malay kris. The handle was made from old yellow ivory, and the blade was inlaid with gold. Like that of any kris, the blade was wavy like a flame, but unlike most, it had a heavy ridge in the center, on either side of the blade. My honorable relative told me that this kind of kris was called *melala* and was only carried by chiefs, among the barbarians. I remembered it. When I saw the body of the engineer, the shape of the wounds showed they had been made by a similar weapon."

That was all; simple, naive, candid. No deep and crafty brain here. This brain, like its body, was plump and soft. Still, it had its points; it had remembered and spoken at the right moment. Erh Tan was no fool, but he was no very crafty Oriental, either.

CAIRN went away thoughtfully. "Maybe we start a ball rolling, and that is all." The plump supercargo had expressed a profound truth there. But where, in this business, had anyone except Vandunk started a ball rolling? Nowhere, apparently.

There remained the little matter of the Webleys, and Cairn doggedly determined to go after this. When Mr. Drift relieved him at four the next morning, Cairn for a moment discussed the course, then beckoned Mr. Drift out to the lee of the bridge house. There was only a faint breeze, with the glass dropping fast and some

heavy weather ahead before they sighted Celebes.

"I suppose you haven't a gun, Mr. Drift?" asked Cairn.

"Aye, sir, that I have," was the prompt response. Mr. Drift, with surprising rapidity, slipped an automatic from an arm-pit holster. Cairn took it, moved forward into the light for a moment, then returned to the other man, but kept the gun.

"The same, I see. How did you happen to give Lochaber two instead of one?"

"Two?" In the darkness, the brisk mate caught his breath. "Why, sir——"

"You wouldn't intimate that Lochaber lied to me about it?" Cairn said grimly.

"Oh, no, sir, not for a moment! You see, now, this was the way of it." Drift was evidently sparring for thought. "I got 'im one, but he didn't like the hang of it. Very particular, the old chief was, about such things. So I got him another that he liked better. That's how it was, Cap'n. You see, I'd 'ad a chance to pick up a couple fairish cheap in Surabaya."

"I see," Cairn said, and clicked off the safety catch of the gun in his hand. He showed it suddenly against the other man. "Hands up, Drift! You'll lie your way to the gallows yet, if you don't watch out. You found Lochaber dead; you found Andrews dead. You've lied like hell about these Webleys——"

Mr. Drift was pressing back against the iron rail, his hands lifted.

"Good God, sir, you can't be saying I done it!" broke out his voice in a wail of acute horror. "Why, they was my friends, shipmates! I couldn't ha' done it, sir. Mr. Vandunk knows bloody well I couldn't."

"How does he know it?" snapped Cairn.

"Why, sir, it—it was me as got 'em to sign on!"

"Then Andrews lied when he said that Vandunk signed him and Lochaber on."

"I dunno, I dunno," cried Mr. Drift in desperate panic. "The three of us 'ad to get berths. I sent 'em to Vandunk, then

'e made me 'is agent, and that's the God's truth of it."

"You lie like hell," Cairn said grimly, and paused. "But I don't believe you're a murderer. I don't care a hang who signed you on. Let's have the truth about all these brand new Webley pistols you put aboard. Out with it, or I'll clap you into irons on a murder charge and you can talk to an Admiralty court."

In the darkness his voice was like the ring of steel. Then another voice broke in. Cairn started, and turned to see the figure of Vandunk approaching past the door of the pilot-house.

"What's all this, Cap'n? This talk about pistols—good heavens! Is that a pistol in your hand?"

"Mr. Drift has brought a number of Webley pistols aboard, and I want an explanation," said Cairn. "He's lied about it. Either he talks turkey, or I'll put him in irons for the murder of Andrews and Lochaber."

Vandunk halted. His voice rolled out silkily, calmly, with authority.

"That's absurd, Cap'n; they were friends for two or three years, all three of them. I looked them up. As for the pistols, I can explain that. I strictly ordered Mr. Drift to say nothing about it to a soul. I picked up a dozen new Webleys in Batavia and sent them to Mr. Drift, asking him to distribute them among our officers and to the Traceys as well. I thought we should have the officers armed. Later on, Mr. Drift wrote me that Li Tock Lo was sending arms aboard, so I knew my precautions were useless."

Cairn replaced the safety catch and handed the gun to the mate.

"You have the bridge, mister; go ahead," he observed. "And next time you lie to me, heaven help you! There'll be no excuse."

Mr. Drift ducked into the wheelhouse. Vandunk spoke with asperity.

"You appear jealous of your authority, Cap'n Cairn. I don't like it by half."

"I don't give a damn what you like,"

Cairn said quietly. "Aboard this ship, just one man gives orders, one man's responsible, one man is supreme. You should realize the fact, and not act as though you were also in command aboard here. Mr. Drift may have been your agent ashore. Here, he obeys me and no one else."

Vandunk sighed, laughed, and passed his arm in that of Cairn.

"You're right, Cap'n. I do forget that my authority doesn't extend here; the fault is mine. Come below and have a glass of Hollands with me."

"Thank you," Cairn replied, "but I don't drink until we're lying at Coomassin."

Mynheer Vandunk sighed again. "Cap'n, you're a man after my own heart, but a trifle apt to flare up. I'd like to speak honestly with you, as man to man. I'd like you to hear me out, keep yourself under control, remember that I'm speaking to you as a friend, and allow me to speak with the frankness of a friend. Yes or no?"

Cairn sensed a vibrance from the man, a subtle blend of power and character, a sober warning of something tremendously important in the wind. His dislike died out. He answered quietly.

"Very well. I'm not always so hasty as you seem to think."

"I know that, Cap'n. I like you because you don't apologize or excuse your words or actions. You're more or less unnerved by these murders. So am I. The death of Lochaber and Andrews gave me a frightful shock, more so than you can realize."

Vandunk was speaking the truth; his voice rang with it.

"Miss Tracey," he went on, "mentioned to me the photograph in your cabin of the Sultana Amina, as she is called. I may assume that you think the young woman very lovely, in which you are correct."

"The picture is, at all events," said Cairn cautiously.

"Yes. Men don't keep a picture around

unless they're moved by it. Now, when I was so careful about a crew for this ship, don't you suppose I was equally careful about the master? I was, Mr. Cairn. I looked him up and down, I promise you."

Cairn felt a tingle of warning. He could guess what was coming.

"I know," resumed Vandunk, "that you've been with this line for three years; that you obtained your tickets very rapidly; that your Board of Trade license is correct—all under the name of Cairn. I may have heard other things, but I speak only of what I know."

"Meaning what?" asked Cairn.

"That I like you. What lies in your past, I don't care. Allow me, and I'll make your future my concern. I may tell you that this sultana must be removed and safely put out of the way of making trouble for the government. If you like her—take her. I can give her to you, and no one else can do so. Marry her, do what you like. Wealth goes with her. In return, you take my orders, cut loose from your present employers. You'll never regret it."

"What sort of orders?" Amazed, bewildered as he was, Cairn spoke quietly. Did this man know or guess his past—that he had been kicked out of the navy, was now under an assumed name? Very probably. "Dishonest orders, mynheer?"

VANDUNK laughed softly. "Would you care what sort of orders? Can you afford to care? I offer you the most beautiful woman in this part of the world, for a wife or what you like; and wealth. I offer you a future to replace that which you lost. No man can afford to question what sort of orders he gets. In the American navy, you question no orders. In the army, you accept orders. But I accept your challenge! Yes. You might consider yourself bound to do anything I might command. In government service, remember, there are unpleasant duties—such as getting rid of young and lovely women,

If you refuse her, a far worse man must get her."

Cairn lit a cigarette. His brain was in a whirl. Shame and disgrace lay like a blanket upon his soul. So his past was known or guessed! And this Dutchman thought him reckless of honor—

Honor? To hell with honor. That lay far behind him. Cap'n Cairn was a good seaman, with a clean ticket, but with a damned poor future. Here was one ready-



made for him. Were Vandunk the devil in person, it certainly would not matter; and he had spoken frankly. Then there was the girl to consider. All question of money aside, the right person could save her from a lot of things.

"Think it over, Cap'n," said Vandunk quietly. "There's no hurry."

"You've sprung it on me a bit unexpectedly," Cairn rejoined. "That's true. I'll not deny—well, let me be frank. I don't like your jumping at the conclusion that I'd have no scruples over doing the wrong sort of things. I would. Nothing lies in the past that I'm ashamed of; much that I regret bitterly."

"Think it over," Vandunk repeated. "I need you for, say, three months. Then you can cut loose and the future is yours, and a free one. Give me your answer

when we sight Coomassin—but keep confidential what I said about the sultana. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Cairn. "Good night."

IV

ALI came early to make up the bunk, while Cairn was shaving.

"Well, what's the news?"

"The news is good, tuan."

It was the mechanical Malay greeting, as empty of meaning as "Good morning." Ali expectorated his crimson betel-paste saliva carefully into the slop-basin and then grinned.

"Tuan, somebody would like to do you in."

The expression, in Malay, was identical with the English phrase.

"Who?" Cairn demanded.

"I could not find out. Last night when they thought me asleep, they talked of your death as of a thing expected. More, I could not find out. But one of those men, who was a true believer, spoke of having killed an infidel, a Christian."

Cairn swung around. One of the Malays, no doubt, for all these Malays were followers of Allah. Here was something definite at last.

"Who was the man? Did he say when? Which of the two officers did he kill?"

"Neither one, tuan." Ali went on speaking in Malay, evidently to make sure of what he was saying and to avoid mistakes. "He only spoke of it as a thing done, a thing which would insure his entry into paradise. It was good luck, he said, that on the very night we sailed, before the ship was yet far at sea, he had sent a Christian infidel to hell. That is something I do not understand, tuan, for neither of these two officers was killed that night."

Cairn stood as though paralyzed. His mind slipped back, and farther back, to the night they had sailed from Surabaya. No, nothing had happened; no one had been missing then—no one.

"Ah!" The quick exclamation broke

from him. Stella Tracey's story—the body that had fallen from the port—Mynheer Vandunk's explanation about his unfortunate servant who had taken too much bhang and opium! "But that man was —"

He checked himself, unwilling to say too much. Not a white man? How did he know? Probably Vandunk's servant had been a white man, a Dutchman. Probably the fellow had really been killed, and Vandunk had covered up the matter to save himself trouble. Which he had certainly done. The man had not been entered on the articles, and no trace of the killing, if it were such, now remained.

"A man fell overboard that night, Ali," said Cairn slowly. "But he was not one of the crew. I did not know he was a white man. Possibly he was."

No. Vandunk had very definitely said the man was a Malay. He had said the man was a victim of the disease called *lateh*, a nervous disorder which causes a man to commit violence and draw blood, spasmodically, almost without knowing it. Vandunk had made no mistake. Either Vandunk or this man up forward had lied. And it was not the man who had hoped to enter paradise by his deed; it was Vandunk.

"Well, no matter," said Cairn at length. "It is not my affair. It's got nothing to do with the murder of the two officers. And as for killing me, they have a long way to go before that happens."

"May Allah will it!" echoed Ali, and fell to work at the bunk.

CAIRN looked at the picture on the shelf under the mirror, and went about his business in a dream that held his clear gray eyes unseeing. Even though the glass was down and weather whistling to clutch them in storm, he could think of nothing else. The face of that girl had bewitched him. The thought of her obsessed him.

The thought of her, torn from place and friends by an arrogant Dutch master, given

over as a chattel to anyone who would take her, fired his blood with anger. Not *that* way would he have her from Vandunk's hand! He might not have her at all, in fact; he might not want her; she might not want him. It was all the most utter madness to think about. But there was the picture, there was her lovely face, to assure him it was no dream; and the offer from Vandunk.

His future free and clear, whether with a wife or not. His future; money in the bank, a chance to build and carve afresh with no more slaving for mere wages. At the cost of three months' forgetting. A cheap price! He'd be a fool to throw it over. Lord knows he'd been no stickler for honor! And the thought that he would be in government service was like opium, deadening the conscience.

The world owed him a bitter debt. For a thing he had never done, he had been chucked out of the navy, been given a chance to disappear and be marked down as dead. Another man, some other man, had done it, fastening the guilt on him; that other man—and Cairn had never known who he was—now walked a warship's deck in high career. Well, no use thinking about it. He'd never regain what he had lost, and did not want to regain it. That was all done with. Ahead lay a suddenly golden future. Vandunk would give the orders, he would carry them out.

"I'll do it; and to hell with regrets!" he told himself. "After all, only the fellow who comes out on top matters. You've got to step on somebody to get anywhere!"

Gray scud filled the sky, an ugly sea was coming up; the *Ta Ming*, high in ballast, rolled like sin and pitched like a devil. Cairn was getting a storm apron rigged at the break of the bridge when Stella Tracey joined him. She enjoyed the whip of spray and the lash of the wind, and the foaming seas beneath, now beginning to burst over the forward well-deck.

"I want to ask you something," she said, as they stood in the lee of the pilot house.

"Something personal. You remember the picture I saw in your cabin?"

"And that you mentioned to Vandunk?" said Cairn maliciously. "Yes."

Her cool blue eyes dwelt upon him for an instant.

"Was there any harm in my mentioning that lovely face?"

Cairn broke into a laugh. "Lord, no! It brought me good luck. Go on."

"I wondered if I might show it to my brother. You know, you weren't sure whether it was the sultana's picture. He knew her and would be able to identify her. I'm curious to know whether it's really her picture."

"So am I," said Cairn eagerly. "Yes; by all means! I can't leave the bridge until noon, however. If you like, here's the key of my cabin. The picture's on the shelf under the mirror."

She hesitated, then took the key with a nod.

"Thanks very much. By the way, when do we reach Coomassin?"

Cairn squinted at the sky. "Depends on this blow. With luck, tomorrow night or next morning. The old girl's pretty good on her pins, old as she is."

After all, he thought, he had only the word of two drunks as to that photograph. A lot might depend on it; if it were not a picture of Amina, he would need to know it. Good thing Miss Tracey had thought about it.

NOON was approaching, and the ship was wallowing stoutly along, when Stella Tracey came clawing up the ladder to the bridge again. She stood in the open lee doorway and made a peremptory gesture.

Even before she gestured, at first glimpse of her, Cairn's pulses leaped; he knew something was fearfully and dreadfully wrong. Every bit of color was gone from her face, and her blue eyes were ablaze. As they touched on him, they seemed to recoil, to shrink back from him in horror.

He hastened to obey her motion, to join her outside, alone.

"What's wrong?" he shouted at her ear. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Worse," she replied, and thrust the key into his hand. "Take that."

"What's up?" he demanded, puzzled by her manner. "Get the picture?"

She shook her head, her eyes staring at him.

"No. I fell over—a lurch of the ship. I fell on your bunk. You——"

The rest was swept away by a howl of wind. Cairn caught her arm, and she pulled free as though his touch burned her.

"Go look for yourself!" she cried at him, stridently. "Look under the edge of your bunk. Can't talk here."

Then she turned and slowly made her way down the ladder out of sight.

Cairn cursed in bewildered surmise. What the devil could she be talking about? Well, no matter now. Too much going on to pay any attention to the whimsies of a woman. Until eight bells, he must stick right here.

Before noon sounded, Mr. Drift was on the bridge, cool and brisk as ever, his bright eyes darting about. No noon sights today, of course. All going well below, and the glass steady; even rising a fraction. The blow would be over by next morning. They talked, compared notes on drift and windage, pricked over the chart. Eight bells sounded. The watches were changed.

"Blasted good meal waiting down there," said Mr. Drift cordially. "Eat hearty, sir! Good luck."

Cairn, on tenterhooks, hastened below at last. Before going to mess, he must see what it was all about. Miss Tracey's eyes still burned into him.

He unlocked his cabin, stepped inside, closed the door again. He could see nothing amiss. What had she said—to look under the edge of the bunk? Why, the woman must have been out of her head!

Nothing wrong with the bunk. Nothing wrong with—with——

Good God!

A lurch of the deck threw Cairn sideways. He caught the edge of the bunk, sat down on the deck, and reached out to the thing that lay there just beneath the bunk. It was a knife, a short-handled, long-bladed knife, the blade wavy like a flame. A Malay kris, all stained and caked with dried blood.

The blade was not flat. It had a high, tapering ridge on either side. It was a kris *melala*; it was the knife that had killed Lochaber and Andrews. This was the dried blood of Andrews still upon it.

Cairn stared at the thing. What was it doing here in his cabin? It had not been here the previous night or he would have seen it. Or—or——

A sudden thought struck him. He lay flat on the deck, twisted his head beneath the bunk, looked up at it. Across the springs and the bottom of the mattress were dark smears. The knife had been hidden there, under the mattress, only to work out gradually. When Stella Tracey was flung off balance on the bunk, her weight must have knocked out the knife.

Cairn's brain struggled back to coherence. Hidden in his cabin—why? So that blame could be cast upon him?

For a moment the thought burned hotly within him, then died away. No, that was most unlikely. He had been here with Miss Tracey when Andrews was killed, and the knife had been stowed away here, red with blood. Perhaps before he came to his cabin and went to bed. Perhaps after. More likely before, though. It was improbable that the murderer could have hidden the knife under the mattress while he lay in bed with Stella Tracey sitting beside him.

While he lay here, Mr. Drift had come in, Erh Tan, Ali. No one else. No, the murderer must have been in the second mate's cabin when Andrews came off watch and walked in. Someone below here, not on deck. Finding this knife, knowing it

must have been put here before the cabin was occupied, narrowed things down.

CAIRN looked at the knife again. A short ivory handle, made to fit the small hand of a Malay. Beautiful old ivory, yellowed with age. A murderous ridged blade, such as only chiefs or great men would use, made of native Trengganu steel. Finely worked, this steel. Cairn rubbed it with his finger and saw yellow inlay. Gold. Arabic letters and arabesques inlaid in gold.

A sudden flame leaped through all his veins. He had the murderer at last!

Rising quickly, he went to the washstand and there cleansed the handle and part of the blade, washing off the dried blood, leaving the lower half of the kris as it had been. He thrust it under the blanket of his bunk, then made haste to the mess-cabin.

There he found Miss Tracey, her brother and Mynheer Vandunk, who was no longer affected by mal-de-mer. Cairn seated himself and met with a smile the coldly questioning blue eyes of the girl.

"Well, my friends," he said cheerfully, "thanks to Miss Tracey, here, I think I'm on the trail of the murderer of Lochaber and Andrews. I'll know in an hour or so. Miss Tracey, I'm going to ask you to accompany me, after lunch, to settle the matter."

She assented silently. An exclamation burst from Vandunk, just as Ali came into the cabin with his tray.

"What, Cap'n? You know who murdered 'em?"

Cairn nodded. "And I've got the weapon. Can't go into it now, until I make certain. So let it pass for the present." He glanced up and met the gaze of Ali fastened upon him, a wide and startled gaze. He smiled. "Ali! Remember the man whom you mentioned to me? The one who's headed for paradise? I want you to send him to my cabin at four bells—two o'clock. Nothing wrong; I merely

want to ask him a few questions. How's Mr. Erh Tan today?"

"The Chinaman is improving, tuan," Ali said, with his usual touch of contempt when mentioning the yellow race. "He has requested some food."

Cairn nodded and pitched into his meal.

"I say!" exclaimed young Tracey. "Couldn't you tip us off, Cap'n? We're all friends here, you know."

Cairn chuckled, met the shoe-button eyes of Vandunk, and winked.

"Are we? When Mynheer Vandunk had his doubts about me—and I had mine about him? Huh! Wait till it's definitely settled."

Under the impact of his decisive tone, the others laughed and yielded. Vandunk began to talk with Stella Tracey about rubber exports. Her brother, with his boyish manner, produced a clipping from his pocket, laughed, and thrust it at her.

"There you are, sis. You said you'd ask Mynheer Vandunk about it——"

He broke off, at his sister's angry flush. She caught at the clipping. Vandunk laughed and flung a question at her. Reluctantly, she gave him a glimpse of the clipping before tucking it out of sight.

"Nothing at all; silly curiosity," she said. "I saw this picture of you in an official gazette in Surabaya and kept the cutting. We decided it didn't look like you."

Vandunk's broad features contracted slightly. For an instant his eyes widened, and white showed around the pupils; then he broke into a hearty laugh.

"Oh! You're right about it," he said, chuckling. "It's an old picture, taken years ago when I was young and good-looking."

Cairn rose abruptly. "Ready, Miss Tracey? Let's go. Mynheer, I'll look you up in your cabin as soon as we know the rights of this."

Vandunk nodded silently. Cairn departed with Stella Tracey. She said nothing as she followed to Cairn's cabin. Her air was aloof but alert. Cairn unlocked his door and ushered her in, then took the

kris from under the blanket. He wrapped it in a couple of towels and turned to her.

"By the way, would you mind letting me see that picture of Vandunk? I'm a bit curious about it."

She produced the clipping. "Keep it, if it interests you. I'm sorry my brother mentioned it before him. Just what do you propose doing about that kris?"

"You'll see." Cairn glanced at the clipping, which showed a face of pronounced aquiline features, then tucked it from sight. "Come along, please. My program will explain itself and avoid a lot of talk."

His Webley was already in his jacket pocket, hanging heavily.

HE LED the way to the cabin of Erh Tan and knocked. At the response, he opened the door. The plump young Chinese, now not so plump, was sitting up in his berth.

"Miss Tracey is here," said Cairn. "We may come in? Thanks. I'd like a word with you, and it's rather important."

Erh Tan protested the disarray of his room, but Cairn ignored him. When the door was closed, he spoke calmly, affably.

"Do you remember telling me of having seen a certain kris lying on the desk of



your relative, Li Tock Lo, in Surabaya?"

Erh Tan remembered. He told of it again, exactly as he had told Cairn on the previous occasion, and described the kris. There was wonder in his face as he spoke, and a certain perplexity.

"That," said Cairn, "was about a week before we sailed, you said. Did you ever see the kris again?"

"Yes," said Erh Tan. "A day or two later, I noticed it, in the same place. I may have seen it on other occasions, but do not recall it."

A heightened color had risen in the cheeks of Stella Tracey.

"You haven't left your cabin for several days, I think?" asked Cairn.

"I have been ill." Erh Tan gestured helplessly. "That day when Ali told me you were poisoned, I went over to your cabin. It was the only time I have been out of the room."

Cairn laid bare the kris. "Is this the same weapon?"

Erh Tan looked at it and caught his breath. The pallor of his rotund face deepened. His eyes sharpened and drove suddenly at Cairn.

"That's it, Captain!" he exclaimed. "The same, the same! But how——"

"Exactly. How?" repeated Cairn grimly. "This was found hidden in my cabin, with the blood of Andrews still on it. And I don't think it walked aboard of itself. You've been below here. You're the only person, apparently, who might have murdered Mr. Andrews, hidden the knife in my room, and then returned here before I took to my bed that day. As to the murder of Lochaber——"

For a long moment Erh Tan stared up at him, with agitation working in the plump features. Then those features settled into lines of calm. The oblique eyes quieted. Cairn was perfectly acquainted with this phenomenon, so familiar to any who have had intimate dealings with the Chinese. Erh Tan had simply "retired within himself," as his people express it. He had cast a politely blank veil over his intercourse with the whites before him.

"I cannot explain," he said with a strange dignity. "I understand what you think. I cannot argue against it. I have been very ill here, and certainly would not have desired to kill anyone. I know nothing more about the kris than what I have already told you."

"Don't be a fool," said Cairn roughly. "The facts are against you——"

"I think Erh Tan has told us the truth, Captain," intervened Stella Tracey of a sudden. Cairn flung her an irritated glance.

"What? It's impossible that anyone else should have brought this kris aboard."

"You don't know that it is," she returned, and smiled. "You think it impossible; that does not make it so. Erh Tan would never have mentioned the kris to you, had he been guilty."

Cairn nodded. "Perhaps; perhaps not. You prefer to think me the guilty one?"

"Don't be silly." Her blue eyes warmed upon him. "I think nothing of the sort. Li Tock Lo is the person to ask about this weapon."

"Right. None the less," said Cairn, "I must put you under arrest and confine you to this cabin, Erh Tan. Agree, and I'll not charge you openly with the murders, until we can communicate with Li. Is there a cable station at Coomassin?"

"There is nothing," said the young Chinese calmly. "Macassar would be the nearest point from which you could reach Surabaya. Your proposal is equitable. I accept."

CAIRN nodded, ushered Miss Tracey out, locked the door and pocketed the key. The ship was lurching badly. He caught the hand-rail in the passage and looked at the English girl.

"Blessed if I know what to think!" he said slowly. "I'm tempted to believe him, and yet the facts——"

"You mean, the facts that we can see," she cut in. "You've brought me into this; let's be quite frank. You're not the type of man to commit murders, or in such a manner. That's why I was so horrified at finding the knife. Now, Erh Tan isn't the right type, either. He's really been very ill. Let the matter rest for the present as it is. Let me go and see Vandunk and tell him just what's happened; I think I can make him see the thing aright."

Cairn was silent for a moment. Oddly enough, into his mind flitted the words of Erh Tan: "Maybe we start a ball rolling, and that is all; we cannot tell where it will roll." Had somebody started some ball rolling here? What did Li Tock Lo know about this peculiar kris?

"Very well," Cairn said slowly. "Remember, the day Lochaber was killed, Erh Tan was up and about for the first time. Then he became seasick again, as he is now. It doesn't look so good for him. However, have it your own way."

"Thank you." She put out her hand, frankly. Cairn gave her a firm grip, met her cool blue eyes, and then she was gone.

Cairn went to his own cabin, put the kris out of sight, and started for a turn on the bridge. As he emerged from the passage and went to the foot of the ladder, he caught a sudden terrific commotion on the forward well-deck below. He swung around, startled.

A knot of the men there, careless of the flying spray and water, were tangling in mad and insensate battle. Yells rang on the wind, knives were flashing; half a dozen men were hotly swarming in the knot. Then a flying figure came down past Cairn, caught the lower ladder, hit the deck, and went into the mass of them. It was Mr. Drift.

Cairn was stupefied at the swiftness, the savagery, of the mate's action. Mr. Drift went into them barehanded. The knot disintegrated into groaning men. One of them rushed in with ready knife. A shot spanged out and the man fell. Pistol in hand, Mr. Drift kicked the others about their business and then returned, leaving the dead man to be tended by the others. At the top of the ladder, Cairn met him.

"Mister, that was a revelation! Did you kill that chap?"

"Aye, sir." Mr. Drift laughed shortly. "A bad actor, that Merah; he'd run amok and knifed two of the other men. When those brown monkeys run amok, they're done. They're bound for paradise, and the

quicker the better. He was a proper bad 'un. Shall I log it?"

"Of course. All right above?"

"Quite, sir. Weather breaking a bit and the glass rising."

Cairn went back to his cabin. He had forgotten his instructions to Ali, and meant to snatch an hour's sleep. First, he took out the clipping, the picture of Vandunk, and put it on his table. He stared down at it, frowning.

Younger? No. Not like Vandunk at all. A high-nosed, aquiline face with large eyes; a different man altogether. He thought of Vandunk's expression at catching sight of the picture. Queer! Yet the man had laughed it off quite naturally.

Four bells sounded; two o'clock. A knock, and Ali came into the cabin. Cairn looked up.

"Hello! I forgot about that order—where's the man?"

"Dead, tuan." Ali came forward and squatted down, crushed a wad of betel-paste and slipped it into his mouth. "It was the man Merah, a Malay from Kedah, who ran amok a little while ago and was shot by Tuan Drift."

"Eh? You mean that he was the same who boasted of having killed a Christian?"

"The same, tuan." Ali chewed in silence for a space, his bright old eyes fastened on Cairn. Then: "Tuan kapitan! When I was a young man, I was a ship captain and owner of ships. Then I went to England for a time. I know much about ships. Tuan Vandunk has charts in his room and has been working over them. On one is Coomassin."

"That's natural," Cairn said absently. "He's taking command there for the Dutch government. I thought you knew this. It's no secret."

"When you were on the bridge this morning, tuan, two men were in the cabin of Tuan Vandunk for a long time, talking with him. One was Tuan Drift. The other was Sabok, the quartermaster."

Cairn jerked awake. "Eh? In Vandunk's cabin—you're sure?"

ALI grinned unpleasantly. "If I do the work of a mongrel dog, at least I have a dog's scent—and teeth."

Well, why not? Drift had been the man's agent. No harm in one of the quartermasters coming along for a talk—no harm, but damned queer just the same. It was off balance entirely. Cairn began to stride up and down the cabin, knees giving to the thrust of the deck, a frown ridging his forehead, thinning his gray eyes.

"Any more word for'ard about my approaching death?" he shot out.

"None, tuan."

Cairn felt irritated with the man. He had the sense of being up against a blank wall here, as though this Malay knew a lot that remained unuttered.

"When you take any food to Mr. Erh Tan, get the key from me," he said. "He's locked into his cabin for the present. That's all. You may go."

Ali stood up. His gaze struck upon the table, upon the clipping lying there, upon the pictured face. A sharp glitter came into his eyes, as though of recognition. As he started to speak, came a rap at the door and the voice of Tracey.

"You here, Captain Cairn? May I come in?"

"Come in," sang out Cairn, and Tracey entered, laughing, blond, boyish. Ali took his departure.

"Cigarette?" Tracey proffered his case, struck a match, and sat on the edge of the bunk. "Well, how d'you like your amateur engineer?"

Cairn smiled. "He's open to congratulations. All well down below?"

"Smooth as smooth. Good old engines she's got." Tracey leaned forward earnestly. "Look here, sir; one of the stories about the Devil's Bosun goes that he's a chap named Patterson who was kicked out of the Shanghai Merchants' line a couple of years back. Never been proven, y'know. But a bally odd thing happened when I came off duty at eight bells. I turned

back, having forgotten my cigarette case, and that halfbreed engineer was speaking to the bridge. He didn't know I was coming down the gratings, never saw me in fact. I heard him say, 'Tell Cap'n Patterson about it.' That was all. It's utter rot, of course, but—well, I thought I'd mention it."

Cairn's brows lifted. Mr. Drift had taken over the bridge at that time.

"Patterson? An unlikely name to mistake, I admit," he said slowly. "You think we have the Devil's Bosun aboard? Why'd he be aboard us?"

Tracey leaned back and shook his head.

"I can't see, of course. Still, I was rather certain I'd caught the name aright. With these murders and all, you know—Well, I'll be off. Hope you don't think me too much of an ass to fetch such a story—"

"On the contrary," said Cairn, "I'm glad you did. I don't know what to make of it, for a fact. We've no pirates aboard. Not a chance; Mynheer Vandunk picked each man carefully. Even looked me up," and he grimaced wryly. "No, I don't think we need worry about the Devil's Bosun this trip, Tracey. But keep your ears open, by all means. So far we've drawn pretty blank, but no telling what may turn up."

Tracey departed. Almost instantly, Ali knocked and re-entered, as though he had been waiting outside the door. He slid forward and touched the clipping that still lay on the table.

"Tuan!" he exclaimed in his harsh Malay. "This man came aboard the night we sailed. I have not seen him since then. I saw him carried aboard. I was watching Tuan Vandunk come. This man was carried into his cabin after him; his hat fell off and I saw his face. Where is he now?"

Cairn swung around. For a moment he was incapable of speech, as the import of the words drifted across his mind. Vandunk's servant was a white man after all, then—no, impossible!

"Ali! You don't know what you're saying," he exclaimed quickly. "Not this man. Not this man of the picture!"

"It is the face of the white man who was carried into Tuan Vandunk's cabin," the Malay exclaimed vehemently. "I call Allah to witness that I speak truth, tuan kapitan! I saw his face before the door slammed. He has not been about the ship since then. He is the man whom Merah killed, the Christian——"

CAIRN felt stifled. "All right. Clear out of here and let me think," he ordered. Ali drew back, blinking at him; a rush of blood had suffused Cairn's face, his eyes were wild, his manner was strange. He struggled to keep himself under control, to meet this thing sanely. He heard the door close, knew he was alone. He came forward and looked down at the picture on the table.

Incredible? It was insane. And yet there was no mistaking it.

Here was a picture of the man who had been carried limply aboard, and who had later been killed and dropped out of Vandunk's port. This frightful and unbelievable fact was the key to everything. Cairn's brain raced back, picked up details as he stood there.

The real Mynheer Vandunk had been bound for Coomassin, no mistake about that. Mr. Drift might have been his agent; probably was not. With an appalling ef-fronterty, all the details had been arranged and dovetailed. Just how, did not matter now; it had been managed superbly. That little matter of the train from Batavia having been missed, gave the clue. Mynheer Vandunk had left Batavia—but he had not reached Surabaya consciously. Another man had taken his place.

Another man had come aboard ship in the early morning hours, taking his name; another man, muffled to the eyes. The real Vandunk had been lugged aboard, and later knifed and thrown into the ocean. Cold-blooded, efficient cruelty! Dead men tell no tales.

Handpicked crew? A bitter, wild laugh burst from Cairn.

"Who's this fellow, then?" he muttered. "Who's this man posing as Vandunk—this infernally clever rat who's been running the whole show, who has Vandunk's papers, who's taken his place? By the lord Harry, who else could it be? Tracey put a name to him—Patterson."

The whole thing lay clear to him now. This man who called himself Mynheer Vandunk was in reality this Devil's Bosun.

(Part II in the Next SHORT STORIES.)

You Gamble
WHEN YOU BUY THE unknown

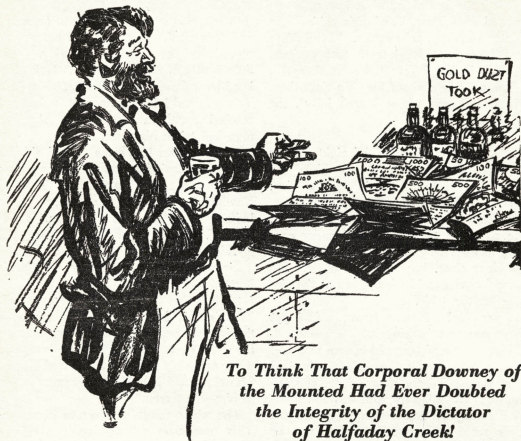


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PROBAK JUNIOR



BLACK JOHN BUYS SOME



To Think That Corporal Downey of the Mounted Had Ever Doubted the Integrity of the Dictator of Halfaday Creek!

OLD CUSH, proprietor of Cushing's Fort, the combined trading post and saloon that served the little community of outlawed men that had sprung up on Halfaday Creek, close against the Yukon-Alaska borderline, set out a bottle, a leather dice box, and two glasses as Black John Smith entered the door and advanced to the bar.

"There was a piece in the paper you fetched up from Dawson," he began, as the other picked up the dice box, "that says where some army officer, over there in the Phillippyne Islands, took a common soldier er two along with him, an' set out fer to capture this here Aguinaldo."

"I don't know nothin' about no Agui-

naldo," replied Black John, casting the dice, "but there's three fives to beat in one."

"Yeah," assented Cush, returning the dice to the box and spreading them on the bar with a flourish, "an' there's three sixes that does it. Aguinaldo, he's the nigger General that's fightin' the U. S. over there in them islands. An' there's four deuces right back at you. See what yer law of averages says about that!"

Black John cast the dice, scowled at the pair of fours that showed, and filled his glass, as Cush made the proper notation in his book. "What," he asked, "would the U. S. Army be wantin' with a General of niggers?"

"Well—hell! If they ketched their General, they could take him down an' choke

BONDS

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of the Halfaday Creek Stories



him, er somethin', till he ordered the niggers to quit fightin'. Then that would end the war."

"Why would the Army want to end a war? Cripes! If it wasn't fer wars, they wouldn't have no job."

"That's so," admitted Cush, "why would they? Maybe they figger they've got him about licked, er somethin', an' want to tip him off to start another one. But anyhow, it took a lot of guts fer this fella to go off in them jungles which is full of them head-huntin' niggers—an' white man's heads figgered as blue chips among 'em—an' try to pinch off their General. I feel kind of sorry fer him."

"Sorry hell!" exclaimed Black John. "What do you want to feel sorry fer him fer? He's doin' what he wants to, ain't

he? There didn't no one tell him to go, did they? It was his own idee. You kin bet that his superior officers never sent him on no sech a fool trip. An' if a man's workin' on an idee, no matter what the odds is agin him, he's happy. If you want to feel sorry, why the hell don't you feel sorry for them common soldiers he took along with him? I'll bet they ain't happy—by a damn sight!"

"The papers says where they've been gone quite a while now—an' they ain't come back. I still claim it took a lot of guts."

"I ain't deridin' his guts, none," agreed Black John. "But if a man lets his guts run away with his brains—that ain't so good neither. Their heads is prob'ly stickin' up on poles somewheres, right now."

ONE-ARMED JOHN was in a day or so back," said Cush, changing the subject, "an' he says how them three fellas that moved into Olson's old shack, down the crick, had went."

"Yeah," said Black John. "I looked in there when I come up from Dawson, an' I seen there wasn't no one there. It's prob'ly jest as well. I never figgered they was no ornament to the crick."

"By the way, John, did you do any good on yer prospectin' trip?"

"Oh—about so-so. I done a little better'n wages. Nothin' to brag of."

"Look who's comin' up from the land-in'," exclaimed Cush. "Damn if it ain't Corporal Downey! Wonder what he's doin' on Halfaday? Mebbe he's up after them three we was jest talkin' about."

"Might be, at that," agreed Black John, as he turned to greet the young officer of the Northwest Mounted Police, who was entering the door.

"Hello, Downey! Me an' Cush was jest talkin' about you! Is it, mebbe, some criminal matter that brings you amongst us? Er is this jest a neighborly call? Belly up. Cush is buyin' a drink."

"It's a kinda of a hurry-up case," replied Downey, filling the glass that Old Cush placed before him. "There was a big express train robbery down in Alberta, an' they seem to think that the robbers might of hit north. The Inspector sent me up the White, with orders to go on up the Dalton Trail as far as the detachment, an' then swing in here an' report back to Dawson."

"You got a description of the robbers?" asked Black John.

"No, all we know is that there's two of 'em, an' they might be headed north." He paused and grinned. "Any two fellows I meet on the trail headed inside are apt to get their packs searched for concealed weapons; if I should accidentally stumble onto any bonds, of course, I'd gather 'em in."

"Bonds, eh? Was there an important amount of 'em?"

"Yeah—damned important. Half a million dollars worth. They think the robbers got the wrong pouch. There was a heavy shipment of currency on the train, too. But somehow, they overlooked it an' took the bonds. It was a special shipment, to cover a deal involvin' the merger of the West Coast an' the Alaska-Pacific Steamship lines. It come through from England."

"Well, it was insured, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was insured, all right. But that ain't the half of it—if these bonds ain't located within ninety days, the merger deal is off, an' the London Syndicate that's interested will stand to lose a couple of millions in profits. Sir Henry Billson, their representative, is sure hell-bent to get them bonds back. It's important enough so we sent out special patrols."

"But no one could cash them bonds, even if they had 'em, could they? Hell—they're all numbered, er somethin', ain't they?"

"Sure they are, but the robbers might get away with it, at that. If they hit south an' crossed into the States, there's plenty of fences that handle hot bonds. They'd have to let go of 'em at a loss on their face value—but they could get rid of 'em, all right. It's the time element in this deal that makes Sir Henry so anxious to get 'em back. Of course, whoever showed up with one of 'em would be picked up for a suspected robber."

"Yeah," agreed Black John. "When was this here event pulled off?"

"Three weeks ago—jest long enough so they could be nosin' into the Yukon country, if they hurried."

"H-u-u-m, that would be about the time I was down to Dawson, wouldn't it?"

"Yup, jest about," agreed Downey. "Has anyone showed up on Halfaday? I sure wish you'd help me out on this case, John. Practically the whole force is huntin' 'm, an' believe me, I'd like to be the one that picked 'em up. Besides, they'd ort to be caught, anyhow. They killed the express

messenger, an'—it's the rope fer 'em if they're caught."

BLACK JOHN nodded. "You might's well go on back to Dawson," he said. "There ain't no new faces on Halfaday. I give you my word, Downey, that if them bonds shows up on the crick, you'll git 'em. You'll have to take your own chances on pickin' up the robbers, though. It would probably serve 'em right to git caught, at that. I don't believe in murderin' a man for the purpose of robbery. It don't somehow seem right."

Corporal Downey smiled a tight-lipped smile. "I'm takin' you at your word, John," he said. "Without havin' any description of the robbers, I know damn well that if they're already on Halfaday, they've had time to cache the stuff, an' I'd never find it. I know that if the bonds showed up on the crick, you'll locate 'em, an' I believe you'll deliver 'em to me. I ain't forgot that there's been times when



you've turned over big sums of cash to me, that you could jest as well kept for yourself—like the money from that Boston bank robbery, an' that dust Monty had hid in the shaft, behind them dead men, that time. But there's been other times when I've sort of had my suspicions that——" Downey paused, and the grin widened.

"Well, cripes," interrupted Black John, his keen blue eyes twinkling above the heavy black beard, "you can't expect to git all the breaks, Downey! A horse apiece is fair play, as the Good Book says. The

Mounted, bein' what it is, I hold that it's bad ethics to commit practically any crime at all on this side of the line. An' you've got to remember, Downey—you can't hang a man on suspicion."

"You an' yer ethics!" grinned the corporal. "We've hung men with better ethics than yours! Drink up, I'm buyin' one, an' then I'll be movin' along."

"Yeah, mebbe you have," laughed Black John. "But you've always ketched 'em at somethin' before you done it. Here's mud in yer eye. Up here on Halfaday you'll always find us willin' to work hand in glove with the police. Ain't that so, Cush?"

"Oh, shore," agreed the somber-faced proprietor. "We aim to keep the crick moral in spite of hell."

BLACK JOHN followed Downey down to the landing. "By the way," he asked, "did you fellas grab off either one of them kidnapers before they got outside? I've kind of wondered if that last one ever ketched up with his pardner—the one that had the dough?"

"No," replied Downey, "we didn't. They'll be picked up, though, as soon as they begin to spend that money. We took the numbers of all those bills, an' they've gone out over the new telegraph wire to every police force in Canada, an' the States, too. An' not only that, the banks have got the numbers, too."

"Well, well, so they've got the wire through, at last, eh? Handy thing fer you fellas, ain't it—that telegraph?"

"You bet it is! That's how we got word of this bond robbery. Hadn't been fer the wire, we prob'ly wouldn't have heard about it yet."

"Well, so long, Downey. Don't you worry about them bonds. If them fellas hit north, the chances is they'll show up on Halfaday. Most of them damn miscreants does, fer some reason er other. We don't mind that, as long as they stay moral. But the trouble with the bulk of 'em—there ain't no steadfastness about their morality. It's apt to be spread on kind

of thin—an' when it begins to wear through, they're out of luck."

II

IS THIS Cushing's Fort, on Halfaday Creek?" asked a voice from the doorway, one morning ten days after the departure of Corporal Downey.

"Both guesses is right," replied Black John, as he and Old Cush eyed the pack-laden men who advanced to the bar.

"We're glad to git here," said one of them wearily, as he wriggled from his straps and let his pack fall to the floor. "We've had a hell of a trip."

"Sech gladness might er might not be mutual," Black John retorted. "Jest reach in the name-can yonder, an' help yerselves to a couple of names."

"Name-can?" queried the other, as he too divested himself of his pack. "What the hell's a name-can?"

"It's a simple device me an' Cush here thought up for to furnish good workable names to folks that comes in here lyin' about their own. Most folks that comes bustin' in on us claims their name is John Smith, which would be all right with us, if it didn't lead to confusion."

The larger of the two men grinned. "I git you," he said, and reaching into the can withdrew a slip of paper and read off the name: "Eli Fulton."

The other man drew a slip and read, "Robert Whitney."

Black John nodded approval. "The party back of the bar is Old Cush hisself an' my name's John Smith," he announced. "I'm mostly called Black John, owin' to the fact that my whiskers turned out to be that color." He glanced toward the proprietor, who stood behind the bar, twisting an end of his long yellow mustache. "Cush, I want you should meet my old friends, Eli and Bob."

"The house is buyin' one," announced Cush, by way of acknowledging the introduction.

"I'll have some coneyack," said Whitney, eyeing the bottles on the back bar.

"You might think you will, but you won't," replied Cush evenly. "Them names is on them bottles jest to make 'em look fancy. The lickin' in all of 'em is drawn out of the same bar'l. It's whiskey. An' if it ain't good enough fer you, you kin go dry. Sometime some damn shorthorn is goin' to come prancin' up here demandin' beer—an' when he does, he's goin' to git a bung-starter right plumb between the eyes."

"Oh, hell—whiskey's all right with me," the man hastened to explain. "I seen that bottle with 'coneyack' on it, an' I thought I'd try a little jest fer a change."

"Changin' licker's hard on a man's guts," opined Cush, "besides bein' a damn nuisance for a bartender. What I claim, if a man can't git along with whiskey, he'd ort to stay to home an' rig him up a sugar tit."

THE liquor was downed, and, ordering another round, Fulton turned to Black John. "So you're Black John Smith, eh? We heard about you an' Cushing's Fort down on the Yukon. Some fellers was tellin' us how you boys was all outlaws up here—an' how the police don't never dare to stick their nose on Halfaday Crick. We was headin' fer the Klondike, till we run onto these fellers at Selkirk. An' when they told us about this crick, we decided to come on up here. We thought it might suit us better than down around Dawson."

"Well, it might, at that," agreed Black John, ordering a round of drinks. "It's true that most of us here on Halfaday is outlawed, fer one reason er another, but it ain't true that the police don't dare show up here. The fella you was talkin' with must of been a chechako, er he'd knowed damn well that the Mounted would dare to go anywhere they wanted to, an' it would be jest too damn bad fer anyone that tried to stop 'em. The facts is, the police don't bother us none up here—not because they don't dare to, but because there ain't any

reason they should. Me an' Cush, here, we try to keep the crick moral—an' all the rest of the boys backs us up in it, by votin' a hangin' onto anyone that would commit any crime on the crick that would fetch in the police. Keep a crick free of crime, an' the police will let it alone."

"That's good common sense," approved the man. "But what do you fellers do up here?"

"We work," replied Black John. "There ain't nothin' like good honest toil to keep a man out of mischief. Cush, here, he runs the saloon an' tradin' post—an' all the rest of us works on our claims."

"You mean, dig fer gold?"

"Yeah—that's about the only enterprise that's flourished, so far, on the crick."

"We don't know nothin' about gold diggin'," protested Whitney, calling for a round of drinks.

"It ain't no complicated business to learn," said Black John. "You stake out a claim, an' then you dig. You sink a shaft, an' throw the gravel onto a dump, and then sluice out the dump. We kin show you about riggin' up a windlass, an' a sluice."

BLACK JOHN noted that the man was beginning to show the effects of his liquor, and he ordered another round. As Whitney refilled his glass, he scowled. "I didn't come up here to dig in the ground like a damn badger," he said. "From what we heard about the gold camps, a man could have a hell of a good time, an' clean up good money at poker, an' roulette, an' faro—provided he had a stake to start with."

Black John nodded. "Yeah, I guess some of 'em's doin' it down around Dawson. But Halfaday ain't that kind of a camp."

"I don't notice you breakin' yer back none with no shovel," retorted the man.

Black John took no offence. "I took a day off," he explained. "I got up this mornin' with a bellyache, an' I figgered a little lickin' would do it good."

"Accordin' to what we heard from them fellers down on the Yukon, there's plenty of money on Halfaday—gold an' paper money, too. They claim that every onct in so often you go down to Dawson with a hull damn boatload of gold an' trade it in fer bills. They said you had plenty—an' Cush, too. They claimed that jest about everyone on the crick was well fixed."

Black John, himself, was obviously beginning to feel his liquor, so that Old Cush eyed him quizzically as he thumped the bar with his fist, and bellowed for another round. "Oh, shore!" he boasted. "Take us per capita, an' we're a damn rich crick! I've got plenty of dust an' bills, too! Plenty—an' more than a plenty fer all my needs an' requirements. But I'm a fly in my ointment, as the Good Book says—meanin' that I'm all bogged down in my own wealth. What good does it do a man to have a lot of gold, an' a lot of bills? No good whatever! Not a damn bit of good—if they ain't earnin' him nothin'. Gold an' bills cached away in holes in the rocks, an' in iron safes ain't producin' a man nothin'! They don't draw no interest. That's the trouble with Halfaday, gents—a man's got to keep toilin' away, no matter how much money he's got, er he ain't earnin' nothin'. Take it now in cities an' places like that, if a man's got money, he don't never have to work. No sir—he kin set back an' take life easy, an' let his money work fer him. He kin buy store buildin's an' houses, an' rent 'em out to folks. He kin put his money in a bank an' let it draw interest, er he kin buy stock in some company, an' drag down dividends, er he could buy bonds, an' live like a king on the interest of 'em. But here on Halfaday, we're cut off from all them advantages. I feel sorry fer us, gents. Yes, sir, much as we'd like to have you settle amongst us, I can't see no future in it fer you. You'd jest have to go on diggin' out dust, that you ain't got no use fer when you git it dug." He appealed to Cush, who stood eyeing him with a disapproving frown. "Am I right, my dear friend—er am I wrong?"

"Yer soused," growled Cush, "an' talkin' like a damn fool."

"Oh, I don't know," interrupted Fulton, ordering a round of drinks. "There's a hell of a lot of good common sense in what he says. If a man's got money he's out of luck if he can't set it to workin' fer him. Money ain't no good layin' around idle. Like he says, if he could invest it in good stock, er bonds—specially bonds. They're safer, an' they don't fluctuate, like stocks does. Good sound bonds is damn good property."

"You said it, ol' pal!" agreed Black John, throwing an arm about the man's shoulder. "Don't pay no 'tenshun to Cush. I know a smart man when I see one. Yer smart, 'cause yer smart enough to know I'm smart, an' that makes two of us. It's one-earned increments that's the bane of—of—the financial strucher of—of civilization—you know that, 'cause yer smart—an' I know it—but, Cush—he don't even know what we're talkin' about. He's good fella—Cush is—but he ain't smart—an' he never will be. Fill 'em up again, Cush! An' listen around a while, an' mebbe you'll git smart, too. Thish man's right—if I could buy some bonds, I'd be happy."

THE meaning look that passed between the two strangers at Black John's statement was not lost on Old Cush, whose frown deepened at Fulton's next words:

"Fact is," he said, casually, "we've got a few gilt-edged bonds with us that we might put with fer ready cash."

Black John regarded the man owlishly: "Wha's a difference if a bond's got gilt edges? It's wha's on the flat side of a bond that counts—not wha's on the edges of it. You think I'm a sucker, eh? Think you kin sell me some bonds because it's got fancy edges, eh?"

Fulton laughed good naturedly, and ordered a round of drinks. "You don't quite git me," he explained. "What I meant—gilt-edged—was jest a way us bond salesmen has of sayin' a bond is A Number One. Anything that's an awful good buy, we say it's gilt-edged. Like a deck of cards—the

gilt-edged ones is the best cards; they cost the most, an' they're worth more."

"Yeah," agreed Black John cagily. "But there's jest as many aces in a cheap deck. Like I was tellin' you—it's what's on the flat of 'em that counts, not the edges."

"You're right," agreed the man, "an' our bonds have got the goods on the flat of 'em—you kin bet on that. Hell—you don't suppose we'd try to unload no phony bonds on anyone, do you? Not with the laws what they be, we wouldn't. The Government checks up on all bonds before they'll let 'em be offered fer sale. Hell's fire, a man could go to jail fer tryin' to unload phony bonds!"

"They ort to, too," acquiesced Black John solemnly. "It would be one of the



worst forms of skullduggery—an' on Halfaday it would be hangable. So you two is bond salesmen, eh? Funny place fer bond salesmen to come. I'd think they'd stick around cities, where there's more folks to sell bonds to."

THAT'S where yer wrong," replied the man. "The cities is all full of bond salesmen. The competition's fierce. Me an' my pardner, here, we figgered this way—here's them gold camps, we says, up north, where they've got plenty of gold and no-where's to invest it—jest like you was sayin' yerself. We figgers that if we was to

take a bunch of bonds up there, we could sell 'em easy, 'cause there wouldn't be no competition, an' plenty of gold an' money jest itchin' to be invested in good solid securities, where it would be workin' fer a man, an' not layin' around idle—jest like you was tellin' us."

"That's right," agreed Black John. "Men like us is smart 'nough to see them things, an' grab the bull by the horns before the horse is stole, as the Good Book says. But how come you showed up on Halfaday? Dawson's a bigger camp. There's lots of dust in Dawson."

"We're goin' on to Dawson," replied the man. "We jest stopped in here 'cause we heard, from them fellas at Selkirk, that you boys had a lot of dust an' bills on hand, an' we figgered to give you a chanct to invest it, if you wanted to. We figgered we'd be doin' you boys a favor, besides doin' some business fer ourselves, to boot."

"That's right," agreed Black John. "What's bonds worth, a dozen? I might buy some."

"They ain't sold by the dozen," grinned the man. "Each bond is sold separate—accordin' to what it's worth. Like—a thousan', er five thousan', er ten thousan'. Each one has got the amount printed onto it, an' what company issued it, an' what's backin' it, in the way of property—an' all that stuff. It's all printed right on the bond where you kin read it yourself before you buy it. There ain't no chanct fer a fake."

Black John seemed to lose interest. "I guess you boys better go on down to Dawson," he said. "I wouldn't care to piffle around buyin' bonds one to a time. An' read each one out before I bought it. Hell, if I want to read, we've got books on Halfaday—Cush, here, has got a Bible, an' I've got a law book damn near a foot thick. You prob'l ain't got enough bonds to int'rest me, nohow. If you had a job lot I could pick up reasonable, I might talk to you."

Fulton smiled. "We've got half a mil-

lion dollars' worth," he said. "Would that interest you any?"

"Half a million dollars!" exclaimed Black John. "Cripes—them bonds runs up into figgers! Trot 'em out—let's look 'em over."

AS THE two men stooped to open their packs, Old Cush, by means of frantic head-shaking, and frowning grimaces, sought to dissuade the huge man from dealing with the strangers. But his efforts were futile, and presently the bar was decorated with an assortment of official looking documents in green, and yellow, and brown.

"Look a there, Cush!" exclaimed Black John, indicating the array with a wave of his hand. "Ain't them the purtyest layout of bonds you ever seen? Cripes—anyone could tell, jest by lookin' at 'em that there ain't nothin' phony about them bonds. They're the real article. You better git in on this, Cush. I'm goin' to take a bunch of them yellor ones. They look important as hell!"

"I wouldn't have nothin' to do with 'em," growled Cush. "An' if you've got any sense, you won't either."

"There you go," exclaimed the big man impatiently. "Always tryin' to obstruct civilization! If I was as gloomy minded as what you be, I'd of strangled myself at birth, an' saved a whole lifetime of misery! Why, jest lookin' at all that there wealth spread out on the bar makes me feel happy. Fill 'em up again—an' then open up the shafe, Cush! I'm a-goin' to make an investment."

Old Cush's lips straightened into a firm white line beneath his yellow mustache, as he reached beneath the bar and picked up the bung-starter, which he balanced in his hand with a certain devoted regard, as he eyed Black John through narrowed lids.

"I ain't openin' no safe—an' you ain't buyin' no bonds," he announced in a flat, cold tone. "Not with no dust er money you've got in that safe, you ain't. Yer licker's went back on you today, John. Yer

drunker'n a fool, right now. It ain't none of my business how drunk you git, but when it comes to blowin' all yer money into a lot of junk like that, I'm agin it. An' if you go makin' a move to open the safe, yerself, I'll knock you cold as a wedge with this bung-starter—an' when you come to, you'll thank me."

BLACK JOHN'S brows drew into a frown as he eyed the determined figure that stood behind the bar. Surprise was mingled with wholesome respect, as his eyes dropped from the other's face to the weapon that he fondled most caressingly. Long years of professional practise had made Old Cush a past master in the technique of the bung-starter, and Black John had seen too many demonstrations of his skill on the skulls of obstreperous customers, to ask for any of it on his own account. He sought, by means of soft words, to win the other over.

"Aw, lishen, Cus', I ain' drunk. I know damn well I ain'! Cripes—I couldn't talk buishness—businish, if I was drunk, could I? Course I couldn't. C'm on—open up the shafe, like a good fella, and lemme have some money. You wouldn't she all them good bonds go to waste, would you? They'd look as important as hell in the shafe, along with the dust an' bills."

"They ain't goin' to look important in this safe," replied Cush obstinately, "an' you ain't goin' to git no money out of it, neither."

The big man switched to bluff and bluster. "Why, you damn ol' badger! It's my money I want out of that safe—not yourn. An' I'm entitled to it, too. Open up, now—er damn if I don't climb the bar an' git it!"

"You'll sleep a while before you do," replied Cush dryly, wagging the bung-starter a bit as he rolled back his sleeve suggestively.

Black John assumed an air of outraged dignity. Ignoring Cush, he turned to the others. "It's pitiful, gents," he said, "how, in the hour of need, a man's friends goes

back on 'em. Look at him—my pal—standin' there with a bung-starter ready to brain me, jest 'cause I want to draw a little of my own money out of his shafe! But, gents, to hell wish him! Yesh—er—to hell wish him an' his shafe, too! I got some spare change to buy bonds wish. Got it right over to my cabin. You wait right here, gents, an' I'll go git it. Firs' though, we'll have a li'l drink all 'roun'. Cush shays I'm drunk—hell, I'll shtart in an' show'm how to git drunk! An' I'll buy all yer damn bonds, to boot. I know a businish man when I she one—an' I'm him. I c'n tell it jest by lookin' in the glash. Ain' I a bushiness man?"

"Sure you are!" exclaimed Fulton, turning to Cush. "Fill 'em up, barkeep. I'm buyin' this one. He's all right—let him alone."

"I don't give a damn how drunk he gits," said Cush, "an' I guess he won't buy no hell of a lot of bonds with what cash he's got in his cabin. Let him blow it, if he wants to—but he don't get a damn cent out of the safe."

"Don' need no money out of yer damn shafe!" retorted Black John, swallowing his liquor. "Got plenty over to my cabin. You wait an' she!"

CRossing the floor unsteadily, Black John disappeared to return a few minutes later with a bulky package done up in brown paper. Setting the package on the bar, he undid the wrapping, and three pairs of eyes widened in surprise as Old Cush and the two strangers gazed at the neat packets of bills, held together with rubber bands.

"There she ish, gents—jes' a li'l loosh change I keep on me in case I might wan' it. Fifty thousand, in good paper money! Fifty thousan' dollars, gents—bring on yer damn bonds!"

Eagerly the two strangers began sorting over their bonds, and presently Fulton handed Black John several of them. "There you be," he said. "Fifty thousand dollars worth, an' no charge fer accrued interest."

"Fer what?" asked Black John, fumbling the bonds over as he examined them.

"Accrued interest, they call it. You see, them bonds has already earnt some interest sence they was issued, an' it belongs to the one that owns 'em. But we ain't chargin' you fer that. We're sellin' 'em at face value—you keep the interest."

"Shore, thash all right," said Black John, "but all of 'em only adds up to fifty thousand'."

"Well—that's what you claimed you've got there in bills. Fifty thousand' in bonds, fer fifty thousand' in bills—that's fair enough, ain't it—with us throwin' in the interest?"

Black John shook his head. "Nope—that ain't the way I do business. Them bills ish real money. Bonds ain' money—they're jes' bonds. I gotta make a profit. Man would be a damn fool to give fifty thousand' in money fer fifty thousand' in bonds."

"Tell you what we'll do—we'll throw in an extry ten thousand'. There's a bargain fer you! Sixty thousand' in A Number One, gilt-edged bonds fer only a lousy fifty thousand' in cash."

"You talk kind of big, don't you? Lousy fifty thousand'! By God, fifty thousand' dollars in cash money ain' lousy—no matter how you look at it. It's important money, an' you'd think so, too, if you'd toiled fer it, like I did!"

"I didn't mean it that way—it was jest a way of speakin', to show you what kind of a bargain you was gittin'."

"Yeah, tha's what I think, too—lousy bargain! Tha's right. Come on agin with them bonds, if you want to do business with me!"

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? I mean keep shovin' them bonds over, till I git my money's worth. What you think I mean?"

FULTON frowned. "What kind of a bargain do you expect? We offered to throw in an extry ten thousand'."

"Yeah—an' you ain' started to throw in. Come on—keep 'em comin'."

"Tell you what we'll do—seem' you've got the ready cash handy. We'll sell 'em to you at seventy-five cents on the dollar. There's a bargain for you—seventy-five thousand' in bonds fer fifty thousand' in cash!"

"That's a li'l better—but not nowheres near good enough," replied Black John, shaking his head. "Yer willin'ness to part with 'em cheap, kind of warns me that there's somethin' shady about 'em. The bonds theirselves looks genuine—but yer title to 'em is ondoubtless open to suspicion. They might even be the product of some crime."

"Listen," said Fulton, scowling, "I'll give it to you straight. We ain't reg'lar bond salesmen, like I told you. We got holt of this stuff on a deal that was a little shady. The bonds is good as gold. We figgered we could git rid of 'em fer ready cash up here in the gold country, an' like I told you, we was headin' fer Dawson. But when we heard about here, we come on up, figgerin' that some of you would know how to git rid of 'em, an' we could, mebbe, git a better price than we could in Dawson. Tell you what I'll do—an' it's the best I kin do on 'em. Give me fifty cents on the dollar an' take 'em. At that price mebbe yer friend, here, would go in with you—two hundred an' fifty thousand' fer a half a million in bonds. You double yer money—not to say nothin' about the interest."

"I wouldn't have 'em at no price," said Cush. "Buyin' hot bonds ain't in my line—never was an' never will be."

Black John listened to Cush's dictum with drunken gravity. "Cush is right," he announced. "We might find ourself in a hell of a lot of trouble. Guesh I don' wan' none of 'em neither." Deliberately he began to arrange the packets of bills on the brown paper, preparatory to doing them up. "Damn shite better to have fifty thousand' in good honest bills than half a million in bonds that might git you in jail."

Better take 'em on down to Dawson, boys, an' peddle 'em down there."

BOTH strangers were eyeing the money avidly as Black John drew the paper around it.

"Hold on!" Fulton cried. "It's a damn hold-up—but I'll tell you what we'll do! We need the cash, bad. Fifty thousan' is nothin' but chicken feed, side of half a million in bonds—but it's a stake. If the play is runnin' like we hear tell of in Dawson, we kin hit there with fifty thousan' an' clean up a million with the cards. Shove us the money an' take the bonds—all of 'em! Half a million fer fifty thousan'! Ten cents on the dollar is all they're costin' you. You'll make four hundred and fifty thousan' profit—besides the interest. It's jest like you stole 'em!"

"We-e-e-l," hesitated Black John, "at that prishe mebbe a man might take a chanct."

"Course you kin take a chanct—only it's a sure thing fer you. We're the ones that's takin' the chanct—we've got to git our money out of the cards. If it worn't that we figger we kin git it back, we wouldn't let them bonds go at no discount whatsoever. Here's the bonds—all of 'em."

"All right," agreed Black John. "It's a deal. There's yer money—count it, while I figger up these bonds. Then we'll all know we ain't be'n short-changed."

A quarter of an hour later, bonds and bills having been checked to the satisfaction of all concerned, the two men took their departure.

"Sho long!" called Black John from the doorway, as the two shoved off in the canoe. "You boys be careful you don' take no wooden nickels!"

Returning to the bar he stood contemplating the pile of bonds while Old Cush scowled in silent disapproval. "By God," he exclaimed suddenly, "I know'd there was somethin' wrong! Them birds fergot to put them slips back in the name-can! What was them names they draw'd out, Cush? I'll write out some new slips."

OLD CUSH snorted his disgust. "Somethin' wrong—a couple of strips of paper out of a can! Sometimes, John, you kin be the damndest fool I ever seen. Most gen'ly when you git soused you've got some sense left in yer head—damn little, sometimes, but some—but this time—fifty thousan' dollars in cold cash fer a lot of bonds that's so sizzlin' hot that they're sendin' out special patrols of the Mounted fer 'em! Ain't you got no sense, at all? Take it from me—yer goin' to come out of this drunk with a hell of a headache!"

White teeth showed through the black beard, and suddenly Old Cush was aware that the drunken stare had disappeared



from the blue eyes that twinkled into his own. "What do you mean—cold cash?" he asked. "By God, when them boys begin shovin' out that cash in Dawson, they're goin' to find out it's a damn sight hotter'n them bonds ever thought of bein'!"

"You mean to tell me you ain't drunk—an' ain't be'n all along?" demanded Cush.

"I don't rec'lect of tellin' you I ain't drunk," grinned the other. "Where'n hell did you git the idee that I was? Cripes—I ain't had more'n a dozen er fifteen drinks. What would I be drunk fer?"

"Well, you talked an' acted drunk as hell."

"Oh, shore—I done that fer to give them birds a chanct to unload them bonds onto me. It was jest a little play actin', Cush. You know I always wanted to be an actor. Sometimes we'll go to work and stage a real dryama."

"Like hell we will! We've had enough of yer damn dryamas, as it is! If anything

had went wrong with them other ones you pulled off, I'd of been in a hell of a fix! What you goin' to do with them damn bonds, now you've got 'em?"

"Don't you rec'lect that I promised Corporal Downey, I'd git 'em fer him, if they show'd up on Halfaday?"

"Yeah—but it looks like you went in kind of deep, jest to do Downey a favor. When all's said an' done, John—fifty thousan' dollars is fifty thousan' dollars."

"Oh, hell," replied Black John, "what's little amounts like them, amongst friends?"

OLD CUSH eyed the other narrowly. "Where'd you git all that money, John? An' what d'you mean about it bein' hot?"

"It's what you might call the emolument of virtue—havin' to do with them three fellas that One Armed John told us was in Olson's shack, down the crick. I mistrusted they was malefactors of some kind, so I took that there prospectin' trip. In the course of my peregrinations——"

"What in hell's them? Can't you talk no English, at all?"

"As I was sayin'," continued Black John, ignoring the interruption, "whilst I was on that trip, I was instrumental in the prevention of a crime, as a reward fer which meritorious act I took over that money. An' it wasn't till Downey came up here the other day huntin' fer these bonds that I realized, from somethin' he told me, that them partic'lar bills was undesirable property to have. An' them fellas will be findin' it out, too, jest about the time they begin shuckin' it out around Dawson. Guess I'll jest drop down an' watch the fun. Besides, I've got to fetch Corporal Downey them bonds. You know, Cush, up here we've got to work hand in glove with the police."

III

HELLO, John—back agin already?"

Curley, the genial bartender of the Tivoli Saloon in Dawson, greeted the huge

man who faced him across the bar, as he set out a bottle and two glasses. "You folks can't be very busy up on Halfaday, the way yer runnin' back an' forth."

"Oh, we're busy, all right," replied Black John as he filled his glass. "But, cripes, you can't expect a man to spend his whole life in toil. Time a man cranks a windlass, an' shovels gravel eighteen, twenty hours a day, over a period of years, he's entitled to a little vacation, now an' then."

"Yeah," grinned Curley, "but they tell me there's a hell of a lot of windlasses you never cranked—an' a hell of a lot of gravel you never shovelled."

"Shut up, an' have another," laughed Black John, laying a bill on the bar. Picking up the bill, Curley glanced at its number, and dropping it into the till, laid the change on the bar.

"What the hell's the matter?" queried Black John. "Think it's counterfeit, or somethin'?"

"No, it ain't that it might be queer. But ever sence Chase was kidnapped, an' the Consolidated paid out that fifty thousan' to git him back, we're s'posed to look at the numbers on all bills. We've got a list of 'em a yard long there in the till. When we take in a bill that might be one of 'em, we check it with the list. This here bill you give me was only five numbers long, so it couldn't of been on the list. It's a cinch that some time or other, somewheres, them bills is bound to show up—an' the police is hopin' it'll be here. The kidnappin' bein' in their territory, they'd like to grab off the ones that done it. You was the one that found Chase an' fetched him back—where do you think they're at?"

"Well," replied Black John, "that would be hard to say. Of course, they might have hit fer the outside. But then ag'in, they might jest be layin' low till the stink blow'd away. I don't claim to be no authority on them criminal matters, but off hand I'd say that them bills would begin showin' up most any time, now."

"How long you goin' to be here?"

"Oh, not more'n a night er so. I jest

run down fer a couple of sessions of stud."

Curley grinned. "Old Bettles says you're the world's worst stud player. He claims you stayed through four or five stiff raises with a pair of deuces, back to back, an' him with one deuce showin' all along—and then you ketched the case deuce fer yer last card, an' beat him out of a hell of a big pot."

"Yeah, that's the way of it," chuckled the big man. "Trouble with most folks, they ain't got no faith in deuces jest 'cause they're little. Guess I'll set down by the table, yonder, an' read the paper till the boys drifts in."

BLACK JOHN, taking the Ladue Creek shortcut, had timed his arrival in Dawson to correspond as closely as possible to that of Fulton and Whitney, who would reach the big camp by way of the White River and the Yukon.

Thus, it was that, some two hours after he seated himself, he watched with interest through a small hole punched in the newspaper that concealed his face, as the two men entered, strode to the bar, lowered their packs to the floor, and demanded refreshment. He saw Curley set out the bottle and glasses, and saw Fulton lay a bill on the bar, in payment. He saw Curley pick up the bill, glance at it, and turn toward the till. Then, as the men filled their glasses, he noted that the bartender laid the bill on the back bar, counted out some change, which he placed on the bar before Fulton, then, with a casual air, turned his back upon the two, removed a long slip of paper from the till, and once more consulted the number on the bill.

A grin twitched the corners of Black John's lips as he watched Curley beckon to Joe, the porter, whisper a few words into his ear, and then turn toward the two customers with a genial invitation to have one on the house—as Joe slipped unobtrusively out the back door.

It was evident, during the next half-hour, that the two strangers found themselves

amid congenial surroundings. The house matched their purchases, drink for drink, and roars of laughter greeted the pithy but unprintable stories that bandied back and forth across the bar.

Then Black John drew the newspaper a bit closer for better concealment, as Corporal Downey stepped into the room and, crossing to the bar, paused behind the two. Receiving an almost imperceptible nod from Curley, the young officer laid a hand lightly upon the shoulder of each.

"I want to have a little talk with you men down to headquarters," he said.

The two turned swiftly. "What the hell!" exclaimed Whitney.

"There's some mistake here," blustered Fulton, truculently.

"Maybe," replied Downey. "I don't claim to be the man that never makes 'em. If there is, you fellows have got nothin' to fear. Until we find out, though, you're both under arrest for the kidnappin' of Frederick Chase, an' possession of the ransom money."

"Kidnappin'!" scoffed Fulton, with a laugh that Black John interpreted as one of vast relief. "Yer crazy as hell! Where was this kidnappin' pulled off—an' when?"

"Oh, a couple of months ago—right here in Dawson."

"That lets us out. We never seen Dawson till today!"

"Maybe," admitted Downey. "Come along with me, an' we'll find out."

"Sure we'll go," agreed Fulton with alacrity. "Why the hell wouldn't we? We ain't got nothin' to fear. Come on, cop—let's get it over with."

IV

AN HOUR later, Black John rose from the table, yawned, stretched prodigiously, and stepped to the bar. "I'm buyin' one," he announced, as Curley turned from the back bar to face him.

"Hell's fire, John—you been here all the time? I'd plumb fergot you. Where the hell was you at?"

"Oh, I set down over there to the table to read the paper, but I might have got kind of sleepy, an' took a little snooze."

"An' you didn't see what come off?"

"What come off? There couldn't be no hell of a lot come off, er I'd of woke up. I ain't no sound sleeper. It don't pay to be."

"There wasn't no excitement. It all comes off nice and quiet. Downey slipped in here an' pinched them kidnappers!"

"Well," grinned Black John, "you wouldn't expect him to let 'em run around loose, would you? That's what police is paid fer—to pinch miscreants like them."

"Yes, sir—two guys come in an' ordered the drinks, an' one of 'em lays a bill on the bar, an' I checks the number of it with that list, an' damn if it wasn't one of 'em! So I slips Joe the word to go fetch Downey, an' he come, an' pinched 'em both."

"Good work," approved Black John. "It looks like you both done yer duty."

"You bet! Damn cusses like them had ort to git pinched. Chances is, if the Consolidated hadn't paid that money, like they told 'em to, they'd of knocked Chase off. What'll they git fer it, John? What's the law on kidnappin'?"

"A term of years," answered the other. "I can't say off hand, jest how long. But it'll give 'em plenty of time to think things over."

"Damn if you wasn't right—about them bills bein' about due to show up. How the hell could you tell?"

"Oh, jest common sense—an' mebber some slight insight into the workin's of the criminal mind. Cripes, anyone could of doped that out."

"Yeah?" retorted Curley, a vast respect showing in his eyes. "Well, no wonder there ain't no crime on Halfaday! Gosh, John—you'd ort to be in the police!"

"No, no! I wouldn't make a good policeman. Hell, a policeman's got to be smart." Passing around the end of the bar, Black John retrieved his light pack and slung a strap to his shoulder. "Guess I'll jest percolate around a while. If the boys

drops in tell 'em I'll be back. Tell Bettles he better be practisin' up on his stud."

BLACK JOHN, as was his privilege, opened the door of Corporal Downey's office at detachment headquarters of the Mounted and stepped into the room, to find the young officer, his desk top covered with bills, and a long strip of typewritten numbers in his hand.

"Hello, Downey!" he greeted. "Cripes it must be pay day!"

"Yeah," grinned the officer, "an' I draw'd my salary fer the next twenty-five years in advance, eh? Do you know what this stuff is?"

"I might hazard a guess that it's money."

"It's money, all right! It's the money the Consolidated paid over to the kidnappers to get Chase back."

"Well, well! So you got it back, eh? Good work, Downey! Did you git the kidnappers along with it? I run acrost 'em, you remember, when they had Chase up on Halfaday. I wouldn't have no compunc-tions about helpin' identify sech damn scoundrels as them, because, by fetchin' Chase up there, they might have jeopardized the morals of our crick."

"I don't think you could identify these two that had the money," replied Downey. "I had Chase in here a few minutes ago, and he said he'd never seen these men. He definitely stated that they were not the ones who held him prisoner. Kidnap gangs work like that. The ones that do the snatchin' an' holdin' ain't the ones that handles the money. They work it that way so that in case they're picked up passin' the stuff, the victim can't identify 'em."

"Ain't they smart?" grinned Black John. "Why, if they'd put all them brains into honest pursuits, they'd prob'ly do well."

"They're smart, all right," replied Downey, "but they ain't quite smart enough. They overlooked the fact that possession of this money is a criminal offense of itself, and to any reasonable jury the fact that they had it would link them up with the kidnappin'. Here's how I've doped it out.

You remember, you told me that you followed the man who had this money up the Yukon, but failed to overtake him?"

"Shore, I remember that."

"Well, he went on up past the mouth of the White, where these two were prob'ly waitin' for him. Then they took over the money. An' the chances are they knocked off this bird an' the other one—the two that done the snatchin'—because these two I've got had every damn cent of the fifty thousan'."

"Tch, tch, tch! Don't it beat hell how some folks carries on? It's a wonder to me that them damn crooks trusts one another out of their sight!"

"I'm mighty glad I picked these birds up, John—as much for your sake, as for the Consolidated's."

"My sake? Cripes, Downey—I'd of got along, if you'd never ketched 'em."

YEAH," grinned Downey, "but if I hadn't picked up these fellows with that money, I'd have always held a sneakin' suspicion that you had it. You see, I was never quite satisfied that you didn't lie to me when you said you never overtook that bird goin' upriver. I figured you had overtook him, an' made him fork over the bills. Of course, I never could have proved it—but jest the same I'd have always thought it. I'm damn glad that this clears you of even that suspicion."

"Well, so'm I, Downey—if that's the way you felt about it. Cripes, I never had no idee you'd think I'd lie to you! How about givin' me the chanct to look these birds over, anyway? You see, they might of been hidin' out on Halfaday, too—an' I never connected 'em with the crime. Strangers comes and goes, an' a man wouldn't know who was mixed up in it, if they kep' away from them others."

"That's so," agreed Downey. "Wait till I call Constable Peters to watch this stuff, an' we'll step into the cell room."

"I s'pose they denied they know'd anythin' about the kidnappin', eh?"

"Sure they did. However, when I questioned them about the possession of the money, they were mighty vague, an' wound up by claimin' they found it in a cache."

WHEN Peters appeared, Black John followed Corporal Downey into the cell room, where the two prisoners sat in adjoining iron barred cages. Both stood up and paled perceptibly at the sight of Black John.

"There they are," said Downey. "Have you ever seen 'em before?"

According to the men scarcely a glance, Black John swung his light pack to the floor in the little passageway before the cells, and turned suddenly upon the officer. "By gosh, Downey!" he cried suddenly, "here I be, foolin' around like this, an' plumb fergot what I come clean down from Halfaday to fetch you." Fumbling in his pack, he drew forth a sizable packet, which he extended toward the officer. "Here's them bonds you was inquiren' about up to Cush's that day. Half a million dollars' worth of 'em; they're all there—count 'em."

"You mean," cried Downey, eagerly seizing the packet, and cutting the cord that bound it, "you located those bonds? The ones that were stolen in that express robbery?"

"I wouldn't be surprised an' them's the ones," replied Black John. "They're bonds—an' the amount of 'em checks with what you claimed was stole. An' by the way, Downey, didn't you claim there was a murder connected with that robbery?"

"Sure there was. A damn dirty murder, too. They never gave the poor devil of a messenger a chance. They'll sure swing for that job, when we lay hands on 'em!"

There was a movement in one of the cells, and Downey looked up from his scrutiny of the bonds to encounter the pale face of Fulton.

"Hey, Corp'r'l," said the man huskily, "we want to come clean on that kidnappin' job. We was in on it, all right. We lied

to you, but we been talkin' it over—an' we decided to plead guilty."

"All right," said the officer, "I'll take yer statements, later."

HE TURNED to give Black John a rousing thump on the back with the flat of his hand. "By gosh, John—you don't know how glad I am to get hold of these securities! But how about the men that had 'em. Did you bring them down?"

"Nope," replied Black John, "I didn't. You know damn well, Downey, that I never had nothin' to do with arrestin' anyone—er even squealin' on 'em. It ain't ethical, an' I wouldn't have nothin' to do with it. If you think them men's on Halfaday, an' you kin locate 'em—go to it. You won't be neither helped nor hindered when you git there. I promised you I'd try an' locate them bonds if they showed up on the crick—an' I done so."

"You sure did, John—an' I thank you for it. But my thanks don't stack up very big beside what you've got comin'. It jest goes to show that it pays to be honest. Sir Henry Billson has posted a reward of a

hundred thousan' dollars in cash fer the return of those bonds before October first—the date when the merger deal expires. An' it all goes to you."

"Well, well," grinned Black John. "That change'll shore come handy."

"Oh—yes—how about these two fellows—did you ever see 'em before?"

Black John eyed the two white-faced men deliberately, and subjected them to long and careful scrutiny. "No," he said, shaking his head in a slow negative. "No—I can't say that I ever laid eyes on either one of 'em—an' I've got a good mem'ry fer faces, too."

"Come on, then," said Downey, turning to lead the way back to the office. "I want to wire Vancouver about these bonds."

As he was about to follow the officer, Black John turned a solemn face toward the two men in the cells. "There's an old sayin', my men," he boomed sententiously, "that honesty is the best policy. If you two had learnt to live moral, you wouldn't be where yer at now. Jest remember that—when they turn you loose twenty, thirty years hence. It'll do you good."



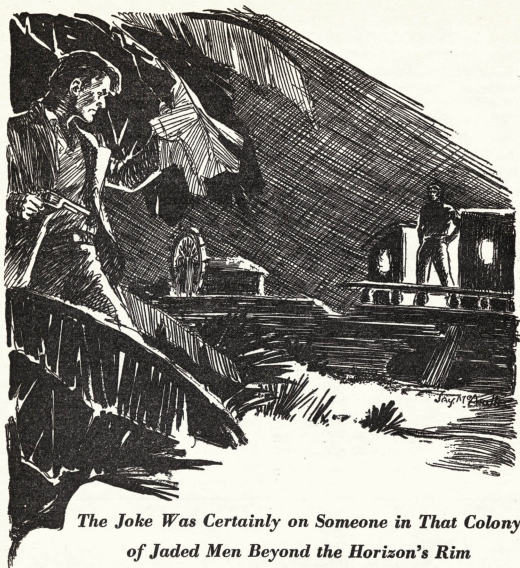
In the next issue—

WAR OF THE BRANDING IRON

*A Complete Novel
of Range Feuds
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November 25th
SHORT STORIES



*The Joke Was Certainly on Someone in That Colony
of Jaded Men Beyond the Horizon's Rim*

MURDER ON MALITONGA

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

Author of "Beyond Last Water," "Hell's Annex," etc.

I

SOMEONE—*of course!*—was down there by the dark lagoon, waiting for her. Before he saw the man himself, Safforth could see the beacon glow of his cigarette. The night's only star, that tell-tale cigarette had been; when it sparked to earth at her

approach the sky seaward was altogether black.

Barefoot, invisible within the deep-blue fold of the robe he had flung over his pajamas when he heard her stealing out of their bungalow above, Safforth was as sober now as if yesterday had not been mail day on Malitonga, remittance day for him.

An icy rage filled him. As he trailed

her, his hand dropped into that weighted pocket of the robe, closed on the gun he had snatched up.

Not surprisingly, the man she was trysting with at two in the morning, was Craig. Who else?

Old Ben Lark, pressing sixty, had thought left at his weathered age for only three things terrestrial—pearls, money, rum. Schruyn, the Dutchman who kept the hotel, might have a roving eye; but as certainly that alert brown Nuolana of his had too sharp a one for any dalliance to have escaped. Jollett, the ex-detective-inspector pensioned down to the islands from Auckland, was not only professedly but credibly a confirmed woman-hater—a rhino of a man, as fond as Ban Lark of his noggin. And except for Craig, these were the only whites now on the island.

Craig, who had been something or other with the American mining company that had flourished for a brief day on Malitonga, then gone suddenly sosh, was young and unattached. The sort that a woman, even in a spot less isolated, might find attractive. He drank a bit, but only a bit; and with Kay, Safforth grimly recognized, that might very well stand nowadays near the apex of masculine attractions. So then!

CLOSE up to them, blended into the sable sky, any light sound he may have made lost in the grumble of surf on the ringing reef, Safforth came to an abrupt halt, froze. Craig, just beyond the shoreline fringe of palms, had struck a match.

A lucky match. Safforth's finger had been a-jitter on the trigger; in another instant, except for that diverting flame, he would have squeezed it.

Kay had taken a cigarette from Craig. He was lighting it for her, lighting a fresh one for himself. He remarked, matter of fact:

"Thought you'd make it. Sort of looked that way at midnight."

The soft breeze carried Kay's voice to Safforth, clear as Craig's.

"Yes; he's beastly drunk again. Was

dead to the world the moment he fell into his bed."

Safforth, hidden by a palm-trunk hard by, could have laughed then. Tension snapped with the impulse. His grip on the pistol relaxed.

Not that he shouldn't, not that at an imminent moment he wouldn't, take Craig to account for the poaching—damned summarily to account. But why not hold off a bit? As it stood, the situation promised points. Tremendously, ironically amusing points. Such very proper people, these two, when they knew themselves observed—but what, for example, at two o'clock of a black morning?

Thinly, cynically, Safforth smiled. Queer turnabout! Weeks ago he'd made up his mind about Kay, decided to chuck her. It had been just a question of how soon he'd tire of this lazy living on Malitonga. When he did tire, he had meant to strike for the mainland next schooner day and leave her stewing there to work out her own destiny.

But now——!

Safforth's smile drew in.

FAR side of the palm, they had seated themselves. The blinking red ends of the two cigarettes were near together as Craig spoke. His voice was slower.

"Had to see you. I mean, I've had a letter. At last, a job turns up. Rather better one than I could reasonably hope for, these times. It's in South America. Peru."

One of the cigarettes—Kay's—brightened. It had been a long draw, Safforth could see. Then he had to strain to catch her words. They came wavery, low.

"I—I'm glad for you, Neil. Naturally, you'll go."

"It's that, or risk dry-rotting here another year. Maybe forever. Takes wire-pulling to land a decent engineering job in this depression. And the friends who pulled the Peruvian wires might not be so keen to pull others if I high-ball opportunity now."

"Right." She was trying for a hearti-

ness that didn't quite come off. "No use pretending that Malitonga will be the same without you. But sooner or later it had to be—good-by. We've always known it, haven't we?"

Craig took her up instantly, abruptly.

"Have we?"

The other cigarette glittered again, now with quick, jerky glowings that gave an effect of breathlessness.

"Neil! Certainly we have! Why, we —"

"We faced facts—yes, when 'good-by' was a sail behind the horizon. But when it's with us, hull up, it's different, Kay. I simply can't leave you sunk on Malitonga. That's the short of it. Oh, I'm not forgetting that you're still another man's wife. But—will you listen?"

Her cigarette made a swift arc of negation. Her voice faltered, "Absolutely, I will not!" And she listened.

"This," Craig was hurrying on, "has been in the back of my mind a long, long while. Was there before I suspected I'd ever be feeling this way about any woman. I meant, 'way back yonder, to offer you the chance to pull out when I pulled out. Just on the basis, then, that you were another American—and stuck with something you'd probably had more than enough of. It would have been a loan, you understand. Straight loan. No strings."

KAY'S cigarette was finished. She rubbed out its smoulder against coral; and her changed tone, when the last spark was gone, told Safforth of the rubbing out of a few of those sovereign inhibitions of hers as well. Her voice warmed, steadied, speeded.

"Dear, decent Neil—God, if it had only been *you* I found in Canberra last year this time!"

Then in the same rush she was spilling it all. With little sobs choking in, the whole of it cascaded. That American show touring Australia; its eventual pancaking; the flight, in good melodramatic tradition, of the company manager with the tag-end

of the company funds; Kay and her younger sister down to bedrock in Canberra.

She repeated bitterly, "But it couldn't have been Neil Craig *then*! No, this world isn't built that way. There was just Gerald Safforth, running through a few thousand inherited pounds and imagining he wanted to marry me. And little Connie, poor kid—it might've been the streets of Canberra for her if I hadn't flown at that chance to get her passage money for home."

Craig murmured pityingly, "Poor kid—*you*!" He was closer to her, pleading. "Forget all that. Forget Safforth. For-



get everything but—but better days ahead. You'll come, Kay? When the mail schooner calls on the up-trip, you'll come?"

She took a moment's thought. Safforth could imagine her forehead puckering there in the darkness as it had puckered when he proposed coming out to the islands. It had been a Hobson's choice for her then, for she had no money of her own, not one friend in the whole Antipodes. *Now?*

A chilly thin smile quirked Safforth's lips. He was amused again; amused by two things. He and Craig, husband and other man, both hanging on her answer—very good indeed! And Craig's fancying that he could take Mrs. Gerald Safforth off Malitonga without inviting, and evoking, catastrophic eventualities—*that*, all considered, was truly priceless.

KAY came to decision. "No, my dear." And that was a solid No. She followed it in the same flat voice.

"It would be madness, Neil. Not that I'd put it past Gerald to walk out on me—but my walking out would be something else. He'd make trouble. He has a pistol, wouldn't hesitate to use it. No, no! My going on the *Flamingo* with you isn't to be thought of. Please, please, won't you see it?"

With an edge of contempt, Craig said, "Safforth wouldn't have nerve to shoot. In a pinch he'd cave. He's yellow underneath."

At that moment death stood again at Craig's elbow. Safforth, at point-blank range, had dropped his hand to the pistol. *Yellow?* Hadn't he heard enough? Wasn't it just about time—spot time—for his lightning to strike?

Behind him, inland, the screen door at the hotel closed with a whang. Nuolana's voice shrilled.

"You hear, you two ol' whiska-barrel? You drink by yourself otha time. You leave my Schruyn be soba."

On the lagoon shore, Craig gave a little laugh.

"Lark and Jollett. Two-thirds of the active bar trade on Malitonga—the very cream of it. And listen to the woman!"

From Kay, Safforth caught, "Well, aren't Nuolana and I sisters under the skin?" Then, "Know this, Neil. All of me—all of me that's *mine*—is yours. I'd follow you to America, to Peru—follow you to hell if you ever took a notion to head that way. But as for making a start on the *Flamingo* with you, I definitely won't chance it. Such as it is, there's law on the islands. On a showdown, it would hold you wrong and Gerald right. He'd have that to bank on."

A second screen door whacked—the door of the mining-company bungalow across from the Safforths that Jollett had fallen heir to on his retirement from the Auckland police department not so many months before their own arrival. Ben Lark, a

moment after that, came picking his unsteady way down to the lagoon, his bright gasoline lantern whitening the night in a wide circle about him.

THE two on the shore sat silent. Lark, as they must have well known, wouldn't be coming in their direction. His venerable pearling schooner, long years beached on a lagoon flat that had risen clear of tides to engulf her to the scuppers, was still his home. She lay beyond the bungalows, eastward.

Lark went rocking along the spit. Presently Safforth heard his feet thump on the deck that would never again lift to the South Sea swell, thump on the companionway descending to that musty hole of a cabin.

A squalid way of life, Ben Lark's; and yet, if he chose, he could be living like a lord. For the old fellow was not only solvent, but very much more than solvent. Already well-fixed when he drove his rotting hooker aground to take root inside Malitonga reef, he had made an amazingly good thing of it since in snapping up off-price pearls from the native divers. Now he boasted that at any given instant of call he could put his hand on ten thousand pounds sterling, or its equivalent—and that, weirdly, was literal fact. Old Ben's wealth, trusted neither to distant bank nor local hiding, was an easily portable wealth, always upon his person. One could have said that he wore his fortune, for by settled habit he carried it snug in a money-belt.

Safforth, staring toward the now lighted ports of the ex-windjammer, felt once more the electric tingle, the flash of protest, that thought of Ben Lark's belt never failed to set off.

Once, unforgettably, he had had a glimpse into it—a time when Lark, very drunk, needed more funds than his pockets held to take up his monthly chit from Schruyn. Shades of Croesus, there had been the wherewithal of a lifetime champagne binge in that sweaty loop of leather! Given only that one kept off hazards of

green cloth and race meet, the means to buy years of London, years of Paris. The price of tailors, hotels, motors, dinners, theatres, night clubs, women ad lib.

Careless wads of banknotes, clinking gold coins, the sheen of pearls that would bring more cash showering—keys to the great world, held unused and unusable by a dotard who lived and would die like a beachcomber on this Godforsaken atoll!

EVIDENTLY Lark was turning in full-pack this morning. He must have screwed down the lantern's gas valve as he lurched off the companionway. The port-lights were white for only a moment. Then they were gray. Then black. The tropic night's dark curtain closed on spit and schooner.

Craig spoke quietly.

"I'd back myself to handle Mr. Gerald Safforth, whatever—but you win, Kay, so far as the *Flamingo's* concerned. Here's another idea. A sudden one—yes, and better one. If you're game to trust yourself to amateur navigation, hanged if I wouldn't make a stab at fetching Luahala on my own. Once we hit there, no trick at all getting on to Brisbane. And home!"

"But Luahala, Neil—that's a good two hundred miles."

"Two days and two nights, the way we'd go. Not more. This time of year we could count on fair wind, steady and strong, to get us there. Do you see, Kay, one of the crowd that quit Malitonga first schooner after the shut-down left a whale-boat behind. She's moored on the other side of the island and her gear—mast, mains'l, jib, compass, charts—is stowed away in the old tool-shed by Number One shaft. Mightn't be too comfortable, but certainly she'd take us to Luahala. Ought to, by Godfrey, for that's exactly where young Keene brought her from to Malitonga!"

Once more a match flamed. It jeweled the ripples lapping at Craig's feet, fleetingly yellowed Kay's thoughtful profile. Safforth

saw her chin come square as she took her light.

"When?" she asked.

"I could have the boat ready tomorrow night. Rigged. Water and food aboard. We'd shove off whenever you figured the coast clear. I'll get you to Luahala, never fear; get you on to America. Then—well, there'd be Reno. Or quicker than Reno, you could run down to Mexico for one of those famous cash-and-carry divorces. Meanwhile—oh, I want it that way just as much as you do, Kay!—we play it as straight as we have from the start. A go? Tomorrow night?"

Her die was cast. Safforth heard her breathe, "Yes, Neil! Tomorrow night—forever—yes!"

With that she was in Craig's arms.

Safforth's hand touched the pistol—no more than touched it, and came away. Strangely, his mind had flown off. Of a sudden he was thinking not of Kay, not of Craig, but of old Ben Lark. Lightning had struck, but another kind of lightning—a blaze in his brain. Clear as daylight, he might have ten thousand pounds out of this. If Craig and Kay were going, let them go!

Tomorrow night, Lark would have drunk himself sodden again before he came down from Schruyn's. He'd be sleeping like a log, cabin hatch wide open. If he woke to find his pearls and his money gone, and Kay Safforth and Neil Craig gone, too—wouldn't the addition be as plain as two and two?

What was the law term? *Prima facie*? Quite!

Oh, *certainly*, let them go!

Safforth waited. When after a space they rose and walked slowly off along the shore, he slipped soundlessly inland and to bed.

II

THEY really meant to skip out. No question. Bright and early, Craig had been down tinkering at that dory. He had

stepped her mast, stayed it; was reeving the mains'l halyards when, toward noon, Safforth strolled along the lagoon.

And Kay was another person than she had been at any time during the Malitonga months. Even another person, she seemed, than she had been during those first days in Canberra, before the windfall legacy melted away and it became a case of doing on two hundred a year. She had done things with her wavy brown hair that she hadn't bothered to do for weeks. The shadow was out of her eyes, the cloud gone from her brow. She hummed as she went about the bungalow, setting the bedrooms and the little breakfast veranda to rights.

When Safforth started for the hotel and his morning spot of Scotch, she had no caustic comment. No word at all. Well, good enough. He, on his own part, would have no comment when *she* shoved off. Leave comment—after the fact—to Lark et al!

For a while he watched Craig, but from a distance. Then he wandered across the island, a scant half mile from reef to reef at this bottle-neck end, to give Ben Lark's sand-swallowed schooner a look.

Lark was on deck, naked to the waist, sloshing in a bucket, puffing and blowing. Huge, he looked bigger with his ragged shirt off than with it on. Bigger and infinitely more formidable. For all his years of inactivity, all his rum-swigging, he wasn't fat like Jollett or bloated like Schruyn. His arms and shoulders were still mighty; his hairy chest was deep; gleaming, wet, his torso was like a punch-eon of stout oak.

He bellowed at Safforth, waved, and Safforth, returning the wave, walked on. Things he had heard about Ben Lark began to sift into his mind. Things as unsettling to think of as that amazingly surviving muscular machinery had been to behold.

Along with his pile, Lark had made a reputation through the islands. He was known far and wide as a mauler. In his day a bucko mate, he had found that the

atolls bred men as tough as the square-riggers he had begun life in. Knifings and gunnings had been incidents of his rise. Once, on Luahala—Schruyn swore he had seen it—he had killed a man with his fists.

"And ten minoots before dat," Schruyn had marveled, "you look at Ben and t'ink he is so far unter wetter he couldn't lift out from his chair!"

No, it wouldn't do to have Lark waking up at a wrong moment. Hardly!

Safforth, a little shaken by the picture that poignantly unpleasant thought conjured, returned to fortify himself with further Scotch—and then, suddenly, it was all very simple. Jolly handily he could fix it so Ben Lark wouldn't wake up while that mossy hoard of his was moving the first ticklish few inches of its flight to the bazaars. Gray matter having functioned, it would be no trick at all.

CRAIG came in after a space and got one of his American gin drinks. Lemon, sugar, sparing turn of the gin-crock, much warmish soda. He gave Safforth a nod and a brief, "Hullo" and stood off, as usual, to himself.

"You rig Keene's cutter, huh?" Schruyn said. With a wary eye on Nuolana, passing into the hotel hinterlands after meticulously brooming the veranda, he splashed a drink from the crock and swooped it down. "V'y not? He wouldn't use her for a long time yet. My Gott, it's our bum luck dey don't ever reopen der mines!"

"No telling if—or when." Craig blew off a thin, long trailer of cigarette smoke. "Yes, I rigged the whaleboat. Might as well be sailing around as sitting around. Just happened to think of her last night. A break in the monotony."

Safforth, much pleased, poured a self-congratulatory peg at that. Quite obviously, Craig hadn't said anything about quitting Malitonga—and if he hadn't, he wouldn't. Excellent!

From somewhere rearward piped that bos'n-whistle voice of Nuolana's. It was

coffee time for Schruyn. He waddled from behind his little bar and vanished.

Safforth caught Craig's eye. Smiling, he drawled, "Must be no end monotonous. Chap alone, and all that. I've rather wondered that you haven't taken in a house-keeper—like Schruyn. But I fancy it's a case of never knowing when you'll push on."

Craig looked at him straight.

"That's part of it, anyhow," he calmly agreed. Then he finished his drink, tossed another cool nod toward Safforth and walked out.

IT WAS as predictable as the tide-turn that the entire white male population of Malitonga would be found assembled in the hotel bar within, or shortly after, the first hour of darkness.

Island nights had been identical to date so far as Safforth's usual late-hour mist had permitted him to observe them, and this night was one more out of the same mold. There was just a single difference. Safforth's daylight drinking had been done, if not lightly, with judgment. There was no mist. He did not intend that there should be.

Ben Lark came up from the lagoon about eight and caught Jollett napping in the doubly-roped hammock on his veranda. That suggested golden opportunity to Lark's very primitive sense of humor, and he proceeded to a pleasantry involving a wooden match. Business end out, Lark deftly implanted it between the sole and upper part of a vast, dangling shoe; managing that without waking the sleeper. Then the match, ignited, burned down, and Jollett came out of slumberland and the hammock roaring. Ben Lark roared too. Safforth, looking across from the hotel, chuckled inwardly. This from Ben Lark now was roaring laughter. But tomorrow——!

Strangers a scant year ago, today as much cronies as if a lifetime's intimacy lay behind them, Jollett and Lark descended on the bar. They scooped Safforth into

their company; and when Craig came along a while later, Safforth presented all outward signs of having fallen into his accustomed nine o'clock haze.

One drink again for Craig. He stood with it for half an hour. When Jollett and Lark and Schruyn settled down to their nightly muggins marathon, he shot another appraising glance at Safforth and eased out.

Planted at a window table, Safforth saw him enter his bungalow and come out with a bulky package. There was, embarrass-



ingly for Craig, a moon tonight. Heading toward the whaleboat with his burden, he went roundabout. Safforth smiled and gave a space to cheerful thought of the Continent. Those knobby fists shuffling the dominoes gave him no concern, not an instant's. Samson, before the plucking, would have been well shorn.

Keeping foxily to shadow, Craig made several trips between lagoon and bungalow. Over the long course, they consumed hours. It was after midnight when he finally had all his cargo stowed.

SOMETIMES he would come back to the bar, late, for a nightcap. He came tonight. Looked at the lay of the dominoes; looked at the unplayed hands; looked, with a deeper interest, at Safforth.

In the rear, Nuolana had Schruyn's scratchy gramophone going. It was an American record squawking now, a favorite of the brown woman's. Something sticky about a Johnny's wife running off with somebody else and his being terrifically cracked up over it. Countless repe-

titions had made that record the most loathsome to Safforth of all Nuolana's ghastly collection—but distinctly it fitted. He couldn't keep a glint out of his eyes as they met Craig's. The American, he saw, also had caught the words. He flushed. A little frown came and went. Then his jaw tightened and he returned his attention to the domino game.

It was a moist game that grew noisier hand by hand. Safforth knew that Craig couldn't be enjoying it, but for once he appeared to be bent on seeing it through. Probably meant to hang on until he saw all white Malitonga tucked safely in for the night.

When one o'clock had passed, Safforth, fingering that chemist's vial in his pocket, really began to watch his chance to expedite matters. The little bottle contained a powerful opiate, liquid and almost odorless—quite odorless, on Safforth's test that afternoon, when in combination with alcohol. He had first made the acquaintance of the drug more than a few years ago; since then he had never permitted himself to be without a supply of it. When a man took a few drops after an especially heavy joust of drinking there was never any nonsense with nerves. In short order he corked off, retreated comfortably into a sleep sure to last until frays had patched themselves—a sleep that a blast of dynamite directly alongside his bed wouldn't break.

AT HALF past one, Safforth's opportunity had arisen and had been grasped. Sparing Schruyn a trip to the bar, he had obliged with service. And very definitely he had got the contents of the vial into the proper glass. In another ten minutes old Ben Lark was yawning cavernously. The beginning of the end. A ten-thousand-pound yawn!

There was no further necessity to stand by. Safforth, convincingly glassy, gurgled down a parting spot and bowed out. When he was half way home a bellow that was rich music came over his shoulder. That was Jollett.

"Come to life, Lark! Wake up! Your play!"

Kay was in her own room, in bed. Sleeping or pretending, one or the other. She didn't respond to Safforth's call, and Safforth didn't repeat it. Stumbling on, he artistically bumped a table and knocked over a chair. His voice when he swore was much thicker than there was need for it to be. His head was clear as a bell. Through his mind as he got into pajamas ran over and over an impudent little melody that had bridged an ocean of time. They had been singing it at the *Folies* his last shot in Paris. He thought of a girl called Babette, nice looking, altogether charmingly sinful. He wondered— But no, there'd be a new crop so pass Babette.

From the hotel came a gust of laughing. Ben Lark wasn't doing any of it. The laughers were Jollett and Schruyn, and promptly their guffaw had brought Nuolana, penetratingly indignant.

"Schruyn, you drunk like peeg! Ben Lark, he keel you sure if you mak' him hot foot!"

Then Jollett's voice, "Got to rouse him some way. He went out like a bloomin' light. Leave 'im to me."

Jollett's method, whatever it was, must have been rough and ready. It brought a protest even from Schruyn. Safforth heard, "My Gott, don't do it!" But Jollett, evidently persisting, was laughing again. And after a moment, Schruyn and Nuolana were laughing with him.

At last, Jollett got Lark on his feet, got him out on the veranda. Safforth, looking on from his dark bedroom over the way, saw the start for the schooner. The opiate, in truth, hadn't taken hold with full effect yet—would not for perhaps another half hour. Lark, of course, couldn't realize much what was happening; couldn't possibly have got down to the schooner under his own fading power. But with Jollett propping him on one side and Craig on the other, he did navigate after a fashion.

It was well after two when Jollett and Craig came back. At half past, Jollett's

light was out and Safforth's door was softly opening. Kay stood there listening; then, assured that he was soundly sleeping, she tiptoed out into the bright night. She wore a tweed skirt and a woolly sweater, carried just one small handbag.

This morning Craig awaited her by his own white bungalow. They embraced swiftly, swiftly and silently went toward the lagoon. Fifteen minutes after that the whaleboat flitted like a silver ghost over the reef as Safforth looked after her from the doorsill of his broken home.

"Bon voyage!" he murmured chipperly.

With care he ripped up the farewell note that Kay had left for him—not the best of reading, after all—and changed again from pajamas to dungarees. For moral support, nothing more, he shoved the pistol into his pocket at the moment of setting forth.

AT THIS tide there was a swirl of water lapping the counter of Lark's embedded schooner. Wading, boarding her aft, Safforth could be sure he was leaving no marplot footprints.

The cabin hatch stood open. Moonlight pouring through it fell on Malitonga's Midas, flat on his back, fathoms under, his mouth wide as the hatch.

He stirred as Safforth reached the foot of the companionway, and that was very hard on Safforth. Took it out of him the way his tries at the quarter-mile had done at school, before he was sent down. His heart slammed fearfully against his ribs. For an all-gone instant the pistol was a greater weight than his shaking hand could lift.

Lark hadn't opened his eyes—nor closed his mouth. But Safforth, staring at him, catching breath, found his faith in the infallible wavering. What if he hadn't dosed out quite enough of that stuff? What if there should be something in Lark's inner chemistry to make him exceptionally resistant to it?

Safforth shifted his grip to the barrel

of the gun and settled it with the heavy end. The crimson trickle starting out of the bristling gray thatch jolted him—and then he was jolted again. Either it wasn't true that Lark always wore that fabulous belt, or else he had somehow contrived to get it off and put away before the drug sank him. At any rate there was only one belt on Ben Lark now, the scarred strap looped through those baggy, beachcomber breeches.

Safforth embarked on a hasty search. No money-belt in the standing locker forward, none on the transom shelves, none in the drawers under the berths. In a sweat of anxiety he lifted his watch wrist into the shifted pond of moonlight under the hatch. Four o'clock was near. The sun would be up in devilish short order, and it mustn't see Gerald Safforth aboard the schooner or in its neighborhood.

The thing was, surely, that Lark was in the habit of laying his treasure away in some special place of concealment before he turned in, and that it was a habit which had prevailed.

A whiskey bottle, half full, stood on the cabin table. Not a favorite brand of Safforth's, but a stiff peg out of the bottle pulled him up. Getting into a lather, he told himself, he'd get nowhere. Somewhere in this small space that belt was hidden. If he sought it with intelligence, with method, he would have found it well ahead of daylight.

Method and that racing longer watch-hand didn't team so well. He took a second drink and a third. They failed to help. It was suddenly half after four.

A loose floorboard gave under his tread. He pulled it up and the foulness of the bilge surged at him. No belt there. It was maddening. Ten thousand pounds so close, yet not to be found. Could it be—only place he hadn't looked a dozen times—under Lark? Under that dirty pad of a mattress? He crossed over and heaved at the sleeper's supine bulk.

Somehow, there wasn't a right feel to

Lark. Safforth let him drop back, leaned over him—Lark didn't look right, either.

Safforth drew in a long, wheezy breath and went to ice. The shuddering truth was that Ben Lark's skull hadn't been built as staunchly as the rest of him. That precautionary tap had mortally crashed it, and now his belt was his estate.

It was murder—profitless murder. The eastern horizon was menacingly aglow.

III

FOR himself, Safforth felt no alarm. Let them protest as they would, there'd be a hanging case on Craig at the snap of the handcuffs—whenever and wherever they snapped. Why, his own lawyer would never believe that Craig had not killed Lark! Just as his flight would have branded him a thief on happier upshot, he was now a branded murderer.

The sun was coming over Schruyn's roof when Safforth settled himself for a sleep. It would be a long sleep, for he had taken all but the last few drops of the opiate. The vial he had placed in Kay's room. If there should be premature discovery of the murder, and others should come here and find him in a drugged torpor, there it would be—reasonable enough evidence that it was she who had slipped the drug to him.

Dropping off, Safforth could think equably of what was to happen to the man who had stolen Kay. His one overwhelming regret was that he had missed the belt, his one fondest hope that he might yet be the first to discover its hiding place. If he were alone then, it would be his. For surely the fact it was not actually on Craig at the moment of his apprehension could, in the circumstances, mean nothing. Wouldn't he have got his loot into hiding at the first chance?

Coming out of such a sleep, a man's head would not be at its clearest. Safforth, waking, knew that at least twelve hours must have passed since he closed his eyes. The sun had traveled a long way from

its fingerhold on the hotel roof. It was setting.

Someone was moving in the house. Safforth, not quite out from under, called "Kay!"

It was Jollett who came into the bedroom. His red-moon face that smiled so easily was funereally solemn.

"Been trying for hours to rout you out," he said. "You gave us a turn, you did. Feeling fit?"

Safforth gathered himself. He passed an uncertain hand over his forehead. "Dizzy. Am I—have I been ill, you mean? Where's Kay?"

Jollett dropped into the bedside chair; Safforth could have sworn that its legs bowed under him.

"There's bad news," he said. "Even if you're not tophole, you might as well have it off the shoulder. To begin it, your wife's gone. Or—did you know?"

Safforth lifted, stared.

"Gone!"

"You must know—can't be dodged. She's left you. Left Malitonga. She went



with Craig. They were both missing this morning. So was Keene's whaleboat."

Safforth gasped, "Impossible! It—it's one of your blighted tricks, Jollett. I tell you straight, you're overstepping."

"It's true." Jollett had whiskey on his breath, but his eyes were clearer than Safforth ever had seen them; clear and terrifically sympathetic. It was manifest in them that it went against Jollett to be burdened with ill tidings. He looked down his nose toward that great purplish wart, and sighed and looked at Safforth again. "As true," he said, "as that Ben Lark's dead."

"Dead!" repeated Safforth, up straight.

"Murdered," said Jollett. "Murdered in his sleep for his money-belt."

SCHRUYN filled the doorway—as solemn as Jollett, not as sober. Cutting in, he swayed.

"Und Craig—und Missus Safforth—running off so sudden und secret! What it look like, huh?"

"Desperate, it looked," Jollett nodded. "Deadly bad indeed. Murderous bad. But——"

Suddenly as he met that steady look the horror in Safforth's eyes was authentic. Jollett—God, what could that "But—" mean?—was fatefully sure of himself as he spoke it.

Sure too as he spoke again after that thundering little pause.

"But most luckily, Lark's murderer had left his signature in that cabin below. God help him, he'll swing. Yes—God help *you*, Safforth! It's your own mark there, not to be missed. Every time you pulled out another drawer, opened another locker, you deepened it. D'you begin to understand?"

Schruyn broke out with a boozy laugh. "You fool, Safforth! You don't know yet! Listen, dummer——"

He stopped. Safforth had heard enough for one purpose—enough to convince him he had made some mortal slip. He was diving for that pistol, cleaned now, innocent

of Ben Lark's blood. And as he dived, Jollett had his wrist.

"Thank you—for Craig, I thank you," Jollett murmured, master again of the easy smile. "Nothing else is needed now to send you on to hell. Of course, it was one of us four other whites who killed Ben—and which, indeed, but you? Might've been harder to make the proof, though, if you'd kept your bloody head!"

Schruyn was laughing again.

"Himmel!" he grunted. "Who iss the joke on, I like to know. Lark or Safforth?"

Jollett shrugged a suety shoulder.

"Not on Neil Craig, anyhow," said he. "After all, not on 'im."

AT THE whaleboat's tiller, midway between Malitonga and Luahala, Craig suddenly chuckled.

"Almost wish," he said, "we'd stayed put for one more day. It would have been something to see Ben Lark today—and listen to him when he found that ten-thousand-pound belt gone. First time, it was, I'd ever known him to do a blackout. And Jollett and Schruyn got his money-belt away while he napped and hid it overnight in that little safe of Schruyn's. Let's see, was your former boy friend Mr. Gerald J. V. Safforth in on it? No—I remember he'd just gone home!"



Bob Forrest and His Human Bloodhound from the Sticks
Watch a Real City Detective on a Murder Case



DAWG TRACKS

By

G. W. BARRINGTON



Author of "Trouble Rides the Range," "Battle in the Badlands," etc.

DAMN!" Bracing his chuffy shoulders against the rear cushion, Detective Moffat held his breath and hoped for the best, while expecting the worst, as all men must who ride with Speed Smiley. A skiff of rain on an oily pavement, with Speed doing seventy around a sharp turn swung the powerful police car into a careening wrench to the left that was followed by a drunken lurch to the right. Moffat found himself flying through space to an accompanying diapason of tinkling glass and grinding, buckling metal.

"*Whew!*" Contact with the good old earth, at last. Dripping shrubbery, soggy turf, darkness, silence. Lurching to his feet he swung his short arms and felt of his ribs. Sound all around. He dug out his flashlight and snapped it on. There was the car, on its side, its crumpled belly jammed against a tree, one front wheel still spinning lazily.

"Speed!"

"Here!" A shrimpy, bedraggled figure reeled into the circle of light and leaned against the mangled car.

"Hurt bad?" Moffat tried to be decent about it and inject a little anxious sympathy into his tone. If he was not entirely successful, allowance must be made for the fact that the lieutenant had told him to

get out to the big Cullom estate on the whizz, that eccentric old Cullom had been murdered in a most brutal manner, and that Moffat must produce results or else. That "or else" was injected because old Cullom had been the captain's financial chum, and the time had not yet arrived in Dallas when a captain's financial chum could be beaten to death with nothing done about it.

Then the lieutenant had malleted his favorite bald spot on the desk with a knucky fist and sworn by the wraiths of Nick Carter and Old Sleuth that if this crime was added to the six others unsolved during the past thirty days somebody was going to ketch hell. He had looked hard at Moffat when he said "somebody."

All the way from the station, worried Moffat had been arraying in his mind the disjointed clutter of facts his superior had sputtered at him. Cullom was rich, miserly in a way, and known to distrust banks. No relatives. Few business associates, fewer social intimates. No enemies. Maid out—neighborhood movie. Butler tied. Wall safe tapped. Old man killed. Ten thousand known to have been in the safe. Probably much more.

HURT bad?" Moffat repeated the query, when Speed failed to answer, seeming to be engaged in taking an inventory.

"Nawthin' serious. Bunged shoulder, ankle on the bum, noodle a little woozy. Guess I'll live."

"Huh! Nobody cares a damn whether you live or not. If you do you'll kill somebody else. What I wanta know is can you walk till I git you over to that house?"

Speed could and did, though he was a little wobbly. The folks at the house were sympathetic, but their car was out. After phoning the emergency hospital, Moffat rushed outside, bent on commandeering the first wheeled thing that came in sight. And there it came, a rattling fuming touring Lizzie that squealed wildly and stopped to throb and shimmy, when Moffat waved his flash. "Somethin' th' matter, Mister?" a slow drawl came from the back seat. Intrigued, despite his hot haste, Moffat played the torch over the speaker and saw a squabby-bodied, iron-gray man in faded but clean and serviceable brown corduroys, battered wool hat and laced boots. The eyes, steel-blue and twinkling, were surrounded by hundreds of criss-crossing smile wrinkles. The mouth and mustache were modifications of T. R.'s. The sun-cooked neck was Jack Dempsey's. The square chin was this man's and no one's else.

Moffat turned the torch on the driver—another fellow who appeared distinctly out of place in a fashionable Dallas suburb. Probably in his early thirties, he was tall, slender, with a face like a knife. The deep, steady brown eyes and rather long black hair betrayed his strain of Indian blood. Handsome, in a half-tamed way, Moffat decided. "Where you birds from?" he asked, a little gruffly, instead of answering the elder man's question.

"Seminole, Texas," came the drawling answer. "We come up to see the fair. We got a room out this-away, and drive in ev'ry day to—"

"I see." Moffat opened his coat and flashed the torch on his badge. "I'm the law, uncle. Gotta grab your hack fur a little ramble."

"Shore thing," came the genial answer. "You'll hafta come 'round on this side, though. Them doors on that side is busted, and we had to wire 'em shut."

WAL, wal, wal. So you're a officer, eh?" the slow full voice came from the back seat after Moffat had slipped in beside the driver and a succession of snorts and rumbles and puffs of acrid smoke told that they were on their way. "That's what a feller might call a funny coincidence. I'm a officer, too."

"Yeah?" Moffat froze instantly. He had encountered these hick laws before, had even piloted a few of them around town, watching them gape and answering their ceaseless questions. Not tonight, though. "Straight ahead. Step on it," he almost snapped.

"Uh-huh," the man on the rear seat went on, placidly, raising his even voice as the shivering machine gathered speed and fumed and rumbled and clanked proportionately. "Name's Forrest. I been sheriff down there at Seminole thutty-fo' year, come January." He leaned forward and tapped the driver's withy shoulder with a stubby forefinger. "This here's Danny Simmons, my head deputy. Folks down our way calls him th' human blood-houn'. Mebbe you've heered of 'im."

"Sure thing," Moffat lied, amiably, mollified by the fact that Danny was getting surprising results with that four-wheeled agitator. "Glad to meetchu. See'n th' fair, eh?"

"Uh-huh. Some show, hain't it?"

"So they say," Moffat answered, a little glumly. "Fact is I ain't been out there myself. Too much on th' books at headquarters. Take tonight, now. Just goin' off duty when in comes a hurry-up call, and the Loot shoos me out—right hand turn here—to work up a damn murder case."

LISSEN, Danny, he's a real city detective out on a murder case! Gee-whillikins, but I'm glad we happened to

come shackin' along just when we did! Now we kin he'p him."

"Thanks," Moffat answered, without enthusiasm. "But I'm afraid you fellows wouldn't be able to help a lot. You may be all right down at Seminole, Texas, but this town's too big for you. A dick hasta be really smart to work here."

"That's what me'n Danny been wantin' to find out," the old officer went on, cheerfully. "You know that word 'smart' means a hull lot, or nawthin' Mister. Depends on who's usin' it, an' who he's pastin' it



onto. A reg'lar jughead may be smart in some ways—specially when he's on his own dunghill. On t'other hand, the plumb ignorantest human I ever met up with was a college president. Honest to Gawd, Mister, that pore dumb galoot didn't know what a mayhaw glade was."

"You don't say," Moffat said a little lamely. The fact was that he hadn't the most remote idea of what a mayhaw glade was, either. He thought he had heard the driver chuckle softly. Could it be that the bird on the back seat was giving him the razz? He looked back suspiciously as they passed under a corner light, but the old officer had opened a grip on his lap and was prowling around inside of it, seemingly willing to allow conversation to cease, for the time being.

HERE'S the place," Moffat announced when they came opposite a big, square house set well back from the road and surrounded by a tangle of vines and shrubbery. Sticking its steaming prow into the

winding drive, the flivver displayed a new variety of vibrations and abdominal rumblings when its worn tires encountered a brick-flagged roadway. When it stopped, panting and shuddering, beside the deep front veranda, Moffat was already on the runningboard. "Much 'bliged," he admitted, none too graciously, then dropped off and took the steps three at a time.

In the vestibule loomed a huge blue-coated figure—Tiney Stevens, largest man on the force, exiled to patrol duty on the outlying beat because he had arrested one of the captain's friends for a traffic violation. Moffat shuddered when he thought of that captain's power. In the reception hall, Braley and Smith, radio patrol junters, were squirting tobacco juice into a glowing grate with the bored air of men who are not particularly interested in their surroundings, but must stay around. With Braley flat-footing ahead of him to show the way, Moffat went up the broad, winding stair and into the stuffy tapestried bedroom where the body lay. Not much to guess about there. Clad in a faded purple bathrobe, the time-worn, emaciated figure lay sprawled on a rug by the gloomy old canopied bed. There had been no struggle. The left temple had been caved in. Only a thin trickle of blood had dried on the craggy cheek-bone. One stiffened hand still clutched a long-stemmed pipe, embers from which had slightly scorched the rug beside the old man's shoulder. Satnding on the threshold, Moffat easily reconstructed the crime to his own satisfaction. Old Cullom had taken his bath, of course. Then, after filling and lighting his pipe, he had started toward a rocker in a bay-window near the bed for his bed-time smoke. Someone lurking there, probably having entered the room while he was bathing—had struck him down.

DONE?" Braley asked, as a matter of routine, when Moffat turned toward the hall after a cursory glance into the bathroom had shown him that the rubber,

rug before the tub was wet and that two soggy towels lay on the tiled floor.

"Sure. Tell Smith to stick here till the coroner takes his look-see," Moffat answered, as he reached the upper landing. He picked up speed on the stairway when sounds of a mild altercation were wafted up from the reception hall.

"'Gainst orders," Tiney's heavy basso announced, inflexibly.

"Mebbe so, mebbe so, Mister," that outlander sheriff's smooth drawl answered, placatingly. "Circumstances alters cases, though. Y'see we driv Detective Moffat out here an', bein' officers, it's our bound-in' duty to aid a feller-officer in distress. Anyway, that's what th' Texas statutes makes an' provides, so I reckon it's the law here in Dallas."

"Where do you git that distress stuff, uncle?" Moffat boomed, going on down. "I ain't sent out no S O S that I remember of."

"Cain't say as you did, precise," came the unruffled rejoinder. "Same time, I thought you looked kinda worritted, so ____"

"Huh! The clan to the rescue, eh?" Moffat stopped at the foot of the stair to say, dryly. "Well, I must say that you two believe in preparedness." The last remark had its justification. Moffat knew now what the old sheriff had been delving for in that grip. A large star labeled Sheriff glittered on the lapel of his coat, a wide leather belt with a double row of cartridges circled his waist, supporting two holstered revolvers of the old frontier type. The deputy also wore his badge, and in the crook of his arm nestled a light, high-powered rifle that seemed to belong just there. Somehow Moffat suddenly acquired an unaccountable respect for the alien pair. Plant that keen-eyed old coot's foot firmly on his native heath, and he'd be formidable. Peel those incongruous store clothes and yellow button shoes off the younger one and dress him in fringed buckskin, he'd give Deerslayer cards and spades and—

THIS officer tells me that the pore ol' feller's body is upstairs," the sheriff said. "Mind if me'n' Danny—"

"Oh go ahead," Moffat acquiesced, a little to his own surprise and to Tiney's evident astonishment. "Don't touch anything, though."

"Much obleeged, shore am," the veteran enthused, his smile wrinkles interlocking and dancing merrily behind his steel-bowed spectacles. "You know, this is gonna be right intrustin' to us. We-all bin readin' 'bout finger-printin' an' blood analyzin' an' sichlike tricks you city officers use. Y'see we may l'arn some didoes that'll he'p us in our own work, eh, Danny?"

Danny nodded silently, and they Indian-filed up to the death chamber, just as Smith ambled in from the front to sizzle



the grate with amber saliva and announce that the Big Boy was outside.

Damn! The fact that the captain deemed the case of sufficient importance to demand his personal attendance at the investigation reminded Moffat sharply of the dread ultimatum the desk-whacking lieutenant had bluntly laid down. It was pinch somebody—or else. Moffat would pinch somebody. "Fetch them servants in one at a time," he ordered with his most business-like air, just as the captain entered.

IT WAS quite an imposing tribunal that assembled in the big bleak living room. There was the captain, whose facial expression backed up everything the lieutenant's malleting fist had conveyed. There was Moffat, desperately bent upon digging up a clue somewhere—anywhere. There

was Tiney, a disciplined automaton, eager to serve. There was the resourceful Braley, acting as bailiff. Moffat's official frown deepened when the sheriff and his deputy stalked in, causing the captain's bushy brows to arch, and necessitating introductions and an explanation that was somewhat of an apology.

Perkins, the butler answered questions readily, his well-disciplined butlerish countenance devoid of expression. He had served in the house six years, having come directly there from Liverpool. Having no valet, and being somewhat feeble, his master sometimes demanded his aid in dressing. On this particular night, he had drawn the water for his master's bath, then come downstairs to lock up the silverware. As he entered the dining room, a tall man, roughly clothed and masked, had forced him to enter the living room and seat himself in a chair. To be more specific, it was the identical arm chair the sheriff gentleman was occupying.

Then the intruder had bound Perkins with the sash cord that was still lying there by the hearth, and gagged him with a strip torn from the bay-window curtain. There was the strip, half underneath the chair. Then the prowler had padded upstairs. Shortly afterward, Perkins had heard a blow and a heavy fall. That was all until Melissa, the maid had returned and found him. Horribly frightened, Melissa had fainted after cutting his bonds. He had just secured a pistol from the drawer of the desk in the library, when he heard the back door slam shut, and stealthy footsteps cross the service porch. Rushing in pursuit, he had glimpsed a furtive figure slinking through the kitchen garden and had given chase, firing his pistol twice. The robber had scrambled over the high fence and reached the next street. Not being an athletic man, Perkins was obliged to go around to the gate. Before he reached it, he heard a car start and hum away toward town. Returning to the house, Perkins had found his master dead, as the gentlemen could see. The combination of the

old-type wall safe in the library had been worked. No, Perkins had no idea how much money had been in the strong box, as he never interested himself in his master's affairs.

ABOUT what time was it when this yegg shoved the gat at you?" Moffat asked.

"'Alf after nine," Perkins answered, unhesitatingly. "Mr. Cullom was a gentleman of 'abits, sir. 'E made a point of it always to retire promptly at that hour. A most personable person 'e was."

"Can you give any description of this robber or his clothes?"

"Sorry, sir, but I cawn't. I 'ad a mere glimpse before he faced me about and chevied me in 'ere and trussed me, and another mere glimpse as 'e barged through the kitchen garden." The butler mopped his moist forehead with an immaculate handkerchief and volunteered, "Permit me to say, 'e must be an extraordinarily soft-moving person, quite. Not a sound did I 'ear from 'im while 'e was prowling about and looting the bally safe. It was fair spooky, sir, I assure you."

THERE was a brief interlude while Braley brought in the maid. The old sheriff picked up the strands of sash cord, examined them in a detached manner, then tossed them aside and sat gnawing at a tuft of his long, spiraling mustache and gazing into the fire. Seated on the other side of the hearth, his beloved rifle across his lap, Danny bent to scratch a match on the pitted tip of one of the antique bronze andirons. For some reason that set Moffat to wondering idly, the deputy changed his mind and hoisted a leg to scratch the lucifer on his shoe sole. Queer birds, those two, Moffat decided—a verdict that was strengthened a moment later when the deputy rose quietly and sniffed unobtrusively at a pair of empty glasses and a decanter that stood on the tall mantel shelf. "Hit it if your mouth's cottony," Moffat grinned.

"You too, uncle. It'll be the real stuff or Cullom wouldn't have it."

"Much obleeged, shore an," the sheriff smiled. "It's gin, though, and gin's a nigger drink down where we come from. Furdermore, whilst I don't mind admittin' that me'n Danny takes a little snifter now an' then, this ain't now an' it hain't then." The old officer finished repacking his black-rimmed corn-cob, and engaged himself in coaxing it into a satisfactory state of eruption.

Feeling rebuffed somehow, Moffat could not refrain from taking a sly dig. "You may not guzzle everything in sight, but I must say you gotta nose for your lick. You didn't guess twice about what was in that decanter."

"Sorter knowed it awready," the sheriff answered, unconcernedly, then leaned back in his arm chair with the air of one who had dismissed an inconsequential subject.

Eddie Stalworth, fingerprint expert, arrived from headquarters and was ordered to give the library the once over and take plaster casts of any footprints found in the back yard. Under the captain's all-seeing eye, Moffat was overlooking nothing. The ominous part of it was that the captain was taking no part whatever, but was seemingly content to give Moffat full play and see what he could do.

Well, he'd show 'em.

MELISSA, the maid, a buxom, round-faced brunette, had worked in the house before poor dear Mrs. Cullom had died, six years previously. She had taken the evening off to see the pictures, returning shortly after eleven to find Perkins tied. She had gotten a knife from the kitchen and cut him loose somehow. Then she had passed out, knowing no more about anything until she had roused to find herself alone and had dragged herself upstairs to find Perkins sobbing over the body. And, what with the murdering and robbing and chasing and shooting that had been going on, it was enough to frighten a body out of their wits, so she couldn't even

remember that she had phoned for the police, though Perkins said she had, so she supposed she must have. And now, if the gentlemen would kindly excuse her, she had told all she was capable of telling, and it was near two o'clock, so she would go and lie down, though heavens knows she didn't expect to sleep. After Moffat had nodded his assent, she started upstairs. Moffat was mildly surprised when the sheriff rose with alacrity, offered his sturdy arm and gallantly escorted the weeping, trembling maid to the upper floor. "Old gal's pretty shaky," the detective commented, after the sheriff had waddled back and re-



sumed his seat. "No wonder though. As she says, things have been happening around here."

"Shore have," the sheriff acquiesced. Wonderingly, Moffat noted that the deputy eyed his superior questioningly, receiving an almost imperceptible nod in response. What the devil was all that pantomime about anyhow? Moffat didn't know, and when there was something afoot that Moffat didn't know all about, Moffat was uneasy.

WELL?" Speaking almost for the first time, the captain put a respectable vocabulary into the monosyllable. It was a query, a covert threat and a prediction of failure.

"Just a minute while I go see what Eddie's dug up," Moffat parried.

As Moffat passed through the hall on his way out, Tiney leaned down to whisper, "Go to it, old top and scratch out something. Me an' Braley an' Smith will

yes the hell outa anything you say. Make 'er a good one though. The Big Boy's got you on the spot."

When Moffat re-entered, he had Eddie's report that there were prints on the safe door that might be anybody's. Plaster casts of two sets of footprints were hardening. One was about size number ten; the other was the biggest Eddie had ever taken. The two trails were all mixed up and ran straight from the service porch to the rear fence. There the number ten gent had circled and gone to the gate, then returned to the house. A damn dog had prowled around out there, messing things up some, but a few prints hadn't been smeared any. They'd be right in.

And now, the detective was walking on velvet—actually itching for the captain to ask him a few things. The captain did. It was another "Well?" a shade more menacing and surcharged with evil prophesy than the former one.

"Nothin' to it," Moffat answered, with airy confidence. "It's a plain open-and-shut case. Thumper Hayes got outa stir last week, and is back on th' job. Remember th' description Perkins give—big, soft-steppin' bird, never sayin' nothin' to nobody. Velvet-fingered that safe, too."

"Just what I was thinkin'," Tiney seconded promptly from the doorway. "This is one of Thumper's jobs. Might as well have left us a receipt fur that cash. He always bats 'em on th' head and lets 'em lay, and he always prowls aroun' quiet as a mouse just as that butler bloke says."

"Comin' to think of it," Braley contributed, "we thought we seen Thumper over on the water front, las' night, didn't we, Smith? Anyway, he's somewhere in town. We know that. Like Moffat says, this thing's a cold cinch."

THE stern look on the captain's face relaxed somewhat. After all, there was light ahead. He had had a real liking for eccentric old Cullom. If he only could turn a key on Cullom's murderer a lot of things could be overlooked. "You may be

right, Moffat," he said, just a little doubtfully. "Anyway, I hope you are. I'll call headquarters and ask the chief to throw the net out. I suppose, of course, the Bertillon room has Thumper's prints, eh?"

"Sure," Eddie answered, having just entered with a couple of plaster casts on sheets of pasteboard which he laid gingerly on a center table after brushing aside a few knick-knacks. "Well, there you are. This here's the butler's, of course. The other's big enough to be Thumper's, though he'll be slick enough to change shoes on us."

"He'll change clothes, too, if they still put stripes on 'em while they're waitin' to go through the little green door," the captain growled. "Where's the phone?" he asked of Perkins, who was hovering in the hall.

"Straight ahead, sir, at the far hend of the 'allway," Perkins answered, stepping aside and bowing. "Blimme, but I'm 'op'ing you'll make that bloody-anded knave come a cropper!"

"Don't worry," Moffat assured him, cheerfully. "Thumper's a slick one all right, but we got him dead to rights, this time. Gonna throw the book at him—burglary, assault, murder. The judge'll give him all of it, and that'll be that." With things going his way nicely, the detective turned to his guests of the evening. "Well, boys, what do you think of our city methods now? Scientific, eh? Johnny-at-the-rat-hole, eh? Quick service, eh?"

IN THE act of refilling the corn-cob, the old officer retrieved a few vagrant flakes of Green Toad from a crease in his vest and tamped them into the black-rimmed bowl with meticulous frugality. "We're lookin' an' we're listenin'," he finally drawled, non-committally, then scratched a match noisily on his bootsole and resumed his smoking.

"Lookin' an' listenin', eh?" Moffat chuckled. "Shoved onto the sidelines, eh? Game's too fast for you, eh? Well, get your money's worth while you're at it."

The detective's chortling voice trailed off to nothingness and he cocked his bullet head to one side and did a little looking and listening himself. The captain was returning from the phone, his quick, stamping tread having an eloquence that could not be mistaken. All eyed him in pregnant silence as he stalked in and faced the already-cringing sleuth. "You square-heads git to hell out of here. We'll take a fresh start on this thing in the morning," he snapped, reaching for his hat.

Apprehensive, but still game, Moffat faltered. "Then you don't think Thumper —"

The captain's close-cropped mustache contracted to a mere tuft on each side of his nose, and his nostrils twitched like a mouse's. "Thumper, hell," he grated, his close-set ferret eyes glittering balefully. "Don't ever say Thumper to me again. He's got what I call a air-tight alibi.

"Huh! Fine stuff, I don't think! 'Better have Thumper Hayes picked up,' I sez to the chief. 'We about got this Cullom thing pinned on him.'

"'Fine work!' the chief applauds in that sugar-coated voice he uses when he's about ready to bust somebody's jaw.

"'I don't see how Moffat ever hung this onto him so quick,' sez I, tryin' to give you a boost.

"'I don't either,' the chief honeys back. 'Especially in view of the fact that we've had Thumper in jail on general principles since day-before yesterday. If you and Moffat can't attend the morning show up, why in hell donchu read the papers?'

"Now I'm askin' you ivory-domes something. Don't all answer at once. Just how long do you think it'll be before the boys down at headquarters quit telling this story to each other?

"Think hard."

THE captain grabbed the decanter off the mantel, tilted it up, drank gurglingly, then banged it down. "Thumper Hayes," he mimicked Moffat's slightly

nasal tones, then clapped on his hat and started out.

"It was only a theory," Moffat defended, weakly, then bristled a little. "You said yourself——"

The detective stopped when his superior wheeled back to face him. The captain's mustache had disappeared altogether, and his nose had changed from a mouse's to an anteater's. "I'll put a harness on you for this, Moffat," he promised darkly. "A beat in the sticks, at that. That'll give you plenty of time to theorize all by your lonesome. Only one thing'll save you. Bring me in the man who killed John Cullom. I don't mean railroad some poor devil. I mean get the man!"

"Beggin' your pardon fur hornin' in," the old sheriff offered diffidently, "if we kin he'p, me'n' Danny's plumb willin'. You've done showed us your finger-prontin' an' plaster-castin', so, if they's any way we kin do hit we'd admire to pay you back."

"Huh," Moffat snorted. "I s'pose you and Hawkeye over there can solve this crime, right now, eh?"

"I ain't sayin'," the sheriff answered, placidly. "We mought, an' then ag'in, we moughtn't. Anyway, you 'pear to a got your tail in a crack, an' I don't want it said that Bob Forrest ever deserted a brother officer in——"

"Hey! Wait a minute," the captain interjected, the mustache commencing to spread toward normalcy. "Bob Forrest. Bob Forrest. Seems like I——"

"B'gawd, I gotchu! By special request of the president, you two put on an exhibition of man-trailing at the last meeting of the Sheriffs' and Police Chiefs' Association, didn't chu? Trailed a man all over a park where hundreds of men had been tramping around, didn't chu?"

"Danny did," the old officer said, modestly. "I ain't no great shakes at it, but I'm better'n' some, at that. Take Danny there, though. I'd shore admire to hev him——"

"Hop to it, the play's yours," the captain agreed heartily, while the others gaped and

shuffled their feet uneasily. Moffat brazenly took an unconscionable pull at the decanter, then sat down and crossed his legs with an alright-I-wash-my-hands-of-it air. Solemnly Braley, Eddie and Tiney followed his example. They needed it.

SHERIFF BOB knocked the dottle from his corncob, blew noisily into the stem to be certain it was clear, and tucked it into his pocket, seeming to shed off with it his air of somnolent lethargy. Rising briskly, he clipped orders right and left. "You big feller, take that butler man off upstairs somewheres and make him lay down fur a spell. He looks plumb beat out. You finger-printer, go see that that girl stays in her room till we call her. Mosey along with us, Moffat. You too, captain, if you wanta. We're gonna take a squint at them tracks."

"Nothin' to squint at," Eddie offered, helpfully. "Plain as print that a middle-sized man chased a big one through that garden and——"

"Mebbe so, mebbe so. But me'n' Danny come to Dallas to see th' sights. This is one of 'em. C'mon, Son."

Flashlight in hand, his rifle tucked under



the other arm, the deputy passed to the rear at that smooth running walk that was as effortless as it was deceptively fast. Waddling along in the rear, Sheriff Bob cautioned the others to keep back, and "leave Danny take a squint."

Under the rays of the flashlight, the trails lay beautifully clear, running straight down a cabbage row where the sandy soil had been freshly hoed. Gliding along the

next row, the deputy had not taken a half-dozen strides before he stopped and bent over to center the light on a jumble of tracks. "Oh Bob," he called over a withy shoulder—the first time he had spoken in the presence of the others.

"What chu got?" Sheriff Bob inquired, drawing alongside. By way of answer, the deputy held the light steady, and silently pointed at the trail.

"Watch your step, fellers," Sheriff Bob cautioned, then dropped to all fours and looked at the maze of imprints, through the steel-rims, then over them, then under them. "I got it," he said finally, a slight tremor of excitement in his even voice.

"Got what?" the captain wanted to know. "Looks to me like that's a poor place to find out anything. Dog tracks and man tracks all mixed up."

"Mix-ups like them there shore are enlightenin' sometimes," Sheriff Bob remarked, enigmatically, then placed both hands on his knees and rose with a grunt. "Go 'haid, son."

MORE big man tracks, more of the smaller ones. Always the dog tracks, mingled with the others. Always, too, the story appeared plain, so Moffat and the captain thought. A big, long-striding man had run down that cabbage row. A smaller man had followed, running also, but taking shorter strides.

Presently the deputy jerked to a stop, as a bird dog does when the scent strikes suddenly. Dropping to hands and knees, while the others crowded close to watch, he remained there, statuesque for a full half-minute. Rising, he played the light cross-wise of the rows. Finally he walked directly to a dense clump of Juneberry bushes a few yards to his left. After threshing among the dripping branches for a little time he came gliding back, buttoning the bosom of his blue flannel shirt over some bulky object he had tucked against his breast. This time it was Sheriff Bob who made the mute interrogation with his eyes when the light played over his ruddy face,

and it was Danny who nodded eloquently in reply.

The deputy followed the trail on for a little way, then appeared to lose interest. "Be in in a minute," he promised, by way of dismissing the others, then turned toward the garage. His flash was playing over the interior of it while they trooped back toward the house. "Had to give up, eh?" the captain remarked, dolefully, as they tramped across the service porch.

"Not precise," the sheriff answered. "Reckon Danny seen all he needed to. He shore is the sign-noticiness feller you'll ever meet up with.

"Dad-blinded mean mizzley mornin', hain't it?"

CAPTAIN, how was Mister Cullom, morally?" Sheriff Bob asked, after they had reseated themselves in the living-room, and the corn-cob had been placed back in commission. "What I mean is was he kinda dawgy-like?"

"Doggy-like? I'm afraid I don't quite—"

"Uh-huh, dawgylike. Philanderin' you know—a runnin' arter evil wimmen."

"Oh. We-l-l. In his younger days, John had more money than was good for him, so it was wine, woman and song—sky limit. Then he married a good woman, and cut out everything."

"An' she died?" Sheriff Bob finished, patiently.

"Yes. And since then John had stepped out occasionally with the frails and he drank—well, moderately."

"Moderately's a sorter rubbery word where drinkin's consarned."

"Well, then, I'll say that he hit it a little heavier than a man of his age should. No protracted sprees, understand, and he never got off his feet—just hilarious."

"I see. Wal, here comes Danny, so I reckon mebbe we better call that butler feller down an' chin 'im a little."

Re-entering, Danny laid a bundle on the sheriff's lap and resumed his former seat, leaning the rifle against the mantel within

easy reach. "The coat and pants were hanging in the garage," he said as his superior unrolled the bundle, which consisted of a pair of denim overalls and jumper, and an enormous pair of coarse work shoes.

After examining the cob-webbed garments carefully, Sheriff Bob laid them on the floor beside his chair and turned to Perkins, who just had entered, convoyed by Braley. "What's your fa-vor-ite drink, Perkins," he asked, without preliminary.

PERKINS flushed, and his head went up. "Tea, sir. Barring a glawss of ale when a good quality of it can be procured, I habolutely habstain from halcohol, sir—habolutely habstain."

"You do the work here in the house—I mean sweepin' an' dustin' an' polishin', an' sichlike?"

"To be sure not, sir," indignantly. "That's the maid's task."

"'Lowd so, but I thought I'd ast. Now who does this here coat an' pants b'long to?"

"The garments were left 'ere by a negro menial who was employed 'ere as gardener several years ago. 'E turned out a bad egg and the Master discharged 'im. We've 'ad no regular gardener, long since."

"An' them shoes? They b'long to th' nigger, too?"

The sheriff's voice still droned, his lolling attitude remained unchanged as he took the shoes from behind his chair and presented them. But something prompted Moffat to turn quickly and note the effect of the question on the butler. For the barest fraction of a second, the broad English face twitched—whether with surprise, fear or vexation, Moffat could not be sure. "I cawn't say, sir," Perkins answered, after taking the articles gingerly, and examining them judgmatically. "'Tis so long since 'e was 'ere, I cawn't—"

"I see. Sot down in that cheer, will you, whilst I try this plaster dingus on your foot. Huh! Fits exact, showin' that you

chased that there robber, just as you say you did."

"I am a man of truth, sir. That hall, sir?"

RECKON they is one leetle favor you mought do," Sheriff Bob answered, handing one of the work shoes to Perkins. "Take that there and see how it fits inta that cast th' fingerprinter made."

"Me, sir? Very well, to be sure, sir. Lor'lumme, but it matches, exactly! Quite extraordinary, I should say!"

"So should I," Sheriff Bob agreed, raking his armchair around to face the questioned one a little more squarely. "Plumb astonishin', when you stop to think of it. You chased th' galoot that was wearin' them shoes clean acrost th' yard an' heered 'im leave in a car. Now Danny finds them shoes out in them Juneberry bushes."

"The bugger must 'ave come back and delivered them there."

"Airplane ur dirigible, do you reckon? He didn't make nary track, a-comin' or a-gwine."

"Passin' that fur th' time bein', was it



a-rainin' any when you chased that Jasper?"

"Really, I cawn't say, sir. I was fair angry and in great 'aste at the time, so I cawn't—"

"Remember steppin' on any stray dawg out there?"

"To be sure not. As I 'ave told you gentlemen before—"

"Perkins', you're a damn liar—not a fust-class, convincin' liar, but just a plain, every-day damn liar. Hush now. It hurts my innards to hear a man tell 'em like you do."

"Perkins, that little mizzle of rain we had 'arly last evenin' washed them big tracks a mite, but never teched one of yourn. Mean

t' say that that rain kep' right in betwixt you two while you was hazin' that geezer down that cabbage row; 'fannin' his tail with a smokestick?

"'Nother thing, Perkins. That dawg stept on a good many of th' big tracks, but not ary one of th' little uns. Th' dawg was a-walkin'. You two was a-runnin'. Still an' yit, he kep' right in betwixt you."

"Yo're a damn liar, Perkins. Take him upstairs an'— Wait a secont. I got one more lie I wantchu to tell. How long since you c'menced sottin' by Melissa?"

Chalky-faced now, Perkins trembled and licked his dry lips.

"Keep a-tryin'," Sheriff Bob encouraged him. "Th' truth must be in you somewheres, if we kin only dig it out."

Desperate now, the butler folded his arms across his chest and thrust out his chin. "I'll talk no more."

"Ho-hum! Reckon we'll hafta ast her, then. Take 'im upstairs somewheres and have that big feller squat on 'is neck till we need 'im. Fetch that gal down!"

I GIVE it to you," the captain crowed, after Perkins had tramped out in the grasp of Tiney, with Braley acting as rear guard.

"So do I," Moffat chimed in, generous in defeat. "May as well come clean while I'm about it," he grinned, sheepishly. "Of course we can understand about them tracks, now that you explain it. Perkins put on the big shoes and made the trip, coming back on the walk. Then he made the chase in his own shoes. That right?"

"Why in course. Never was no doubt about that, nohow. Both sets of tracks toes out scandalous—one just as slantylike as t'other. Ol' mole like me could see that much, though, of course, it took Danny to show me th' fine p'int."

"That's what's worrying me yet," the captain confessed. "He turned right off that trail and went straight to those bushes as if he knew those shoes were there."

"He knowed somethin' was there, 'cause

why Perkins made a little half circle in th' soil with his right foot, and Danny knowed he'd throwed somethin' high an' fur to th' left. That was them bushes ready to ketch. Easy 'nuff, fur Danny, eh?"

"Yes—for Danny," the captain grinned, then rubbed his palms together gleefully. "Circumstantial, of course, but it's air-tight, at that. The jury'll give him the frosty eye."

WHAT'S your fa-vor-ite drink, Miss," the sheriff asked, when the girl appeared, red eyed from weeping, her hands clasping and unclasping on the arm of the rocker into which she had slumped. "Gin?" he suggested, when she hesitated.

She nodded. "I don't drink often, though."

"I see. Mebbe hit it a mite too hard when you do tear loose, though. If you don't mind me sayin' so, a person of that temperment never orter tech it a-tall."

"I never did, and never would have if he hadn't——" She stopped, confused, and a hunted look appeared on her flushed face.

"I onderstand," Sheriff Bob assured her, sympathetically. "Mister Cullom was your boss, so you couldn't hardly refuse to take a sociable leetle snifter with 'im when he ast you to—say like las' night, f'instance."

She nodded again. "That all?" she asked, hopefully after he had remained silent for a little time.

Sheriff Bob drawled another inquiry. "You do de dustin' an' sweepin' an' sich?"

"Yes sir."

"Ab-sol-dern-loot-ly all of it?" he pressed her.

"Yes sir. Perkins is helpless at work of that sort."

Sheriff Bob grabbed one of the andirons and jabbed it at her so suddenly that he appeared to be about to spear her with it. "Then it musta been you that polished the tip of that, eh?"

Instead of answering, the girl gazed at the thing as one fascinated. Her hands clenched on the chair arms, and her fore-

arms stiffened levering her slowly to her feet. "Didju?" he prodded her, inexorably. When she continued silent, he replaced the andiron on the hearth, and turned to the captain. "Better have that finger-printer take a whack at it, captain—not that it makes any great difference. We awready got 'nuff evidence 'gainst Perkins to hang ten men."

AS DESIGNED, that brought the girl out of her semi-coma. "Hang Perkins?" she shrilled. "Hang Perkins? Oh you can't do that! Perkins didn't do it! He didn't, I tell you! I did it! I killed him! I had to! I tell you I had to!"...

"Thar, thar, Miss. Don't take on so. Hand 'er a snifter, somebody. This is one time that she shore needs a bracer. Set now Miss, whilst I tell it fur you. Don't talk, 'less I go wrong, an' you hafta k'rect me."

After the captain had sluiced an ounce of gin down the girl in two attempts, spilling half of it each time in his excitement, the sheriff proceeded.

"You didn't go to no theater las' night. But Perkins went somewheres—leastwise he was outa reach."

"Cigarettes," she managed to sob, then rocked back and forth, while he droned on.

"Awright then, Perkins went after cigarettes, 'bout the time the boss was gittin' ready to go to bed, bein' tanked up so copious that his body still smelt like a gin factory when me'n' Danny went up there.

AWRIGHT. Now here comes a mebbe—so—th' fust one I've spoke. Hearin' Perkins leave, th' ol' cuss slips on a dressin' gown, he bein' 'bout ready to take 'is bath——"

"Hold it," the captain interjected. "My understanding is that John had taken his bath." He glared reprovably at Moffat.

"Tain't no sich," Sheriff Bob denied. "The tub was clean as a houn's tooth. Who clean't it at an excitin' time like that? The soap an' the sponge was dry as preachin'.

Wuss still, them towels on th' floor was wet. They was too wet. Nobody ever coulda dried themselves on either of 'em.

"Awright, thar's where the mebbeso comes in. Here's a naked geezer who hain't taked his bath, an' he's got a dressin' gown on. Answer is, slipt it on to go somewhere in a hurry. Where?"

"Excusin' th' remark, Miss, he smelt scandalous of gin' an' so did you, as I discovered when I escorted you upstairs—which same I done to find out about that very thing. They was two gin glasses on the mantel, so he was here an' you was here.

"Awright, we got another mebbeso. Somebody had polished only the tip of one andiron, though both of 'em was needin' it, all over. The guess was whether you an' him was cuddlin' all amicable and Perkins come back an' ketched you, or——"

"I did it! I did it! I had to!" she commenced again.

"Yes'm," he soothed. "Then Perkins come in, an' you tied 'im with that sash cord, arter you an' him had toted th' body upstairs. Perkins done th' runnin' an' shootin' an' sich, bein' bound to he'p you out 'cause he's been sottin' by you assiduous. Incidental, whar's that money?"

"Under my mattress," she answered, wearily. "Honestly, we didn't intend to keep it, though. We only took it to make the robbery story stand."

"Wal, don't worry none, Miss. They ain't no jury on earth that'll convict you, bein's you had a right to defend yourse'f,

plumb emphatic. 'All th' mistake you two made was that you didn't tell the truth on th' take-off, 'stead of fixin' up a lotta flummy-doodle bizness with tracks an' towels an' sich.

"At that, though, you moughta got away with it, if it hadn't been fur a skift of rain, an' a houn' dawg—an' Danny Simmons."

THE tribunal dissolved, Tiney and Smith leaving for headquarters with the prisoners. When the house had been locked and the two country officers with the captain and Moffat emerged into the pale morning light, the sheriff yawned prodigiously, then climbed stiffly into the decrepit flivver, which the deputy was cranking with mighty force.

"Wal, so long, fellers," the old officer droned, as the machine spat and blew its nose, then commenced snorting its desire to be off. "Me 'n' Danny shore is much obleeged to yuh fur lettin' us watch yuh work up that case.

"If yuh ever happen along down our way, drap in' an' mebbeso we kin do as much fur you boys."

The snorting changed to a series of rasping groans. The machine started with a jerk, then buck-jumped into full speed ahead.

It was a ludicrous sight, but neither Moffat nor the captain laughed. As they listened, though, the flivver's voice lost its harsh impatient note.

It seemed to them that it was chuckling softly.



THE BLACK GOD

By
DAVID
OWEN DAHER

CHAPTER I

ARNOLD paused momentarily in his pacing of the room. Brown from the sun, he was. Lean and hard from a deep-lying interest in everything outdoors in all of Africa. His eyes were narrow and

puckered from long gazing over heat shimmering veld. One sinewy hand hung by its thumb from the belt of his riding breeches; the other swung a hippo-hide whip from a thong. His soft-soled bush boots had made no sound as he stalked the polished floor of the Governor's office in Nairobi.

The young hunter, guide, trader—Jimmy

A Vast Store of Ivory Worth the Ransom of Many Kings, Weird Signals Resounding Through the Jungles—and an American Adventurer Who Hated Red Tape

Arnold was anything that had to do with the great outdoors—turned and bit his lip lightly and looked squarely into the eyes of Sir David Earl Stewart, Governor of Kenya Colony.

"Governor," Arnold said, "I can't do it."

"Now look here, Arnold," the older man pleaded, "think this thing over. There's some devilry hatching up there and I've got to find out what it's all about and stop it before it comes to a killing. You know what that would mean."

you. But he's had only six years of Africa."

"Six years! Why, all I've had is eight years in this blasted country!"

Sir David smiled again—a knowing smile, this time. "Yes," he said, "but you've had a different training. Oxford and Africa don't mix too well, unless old Father Time comes in."

Arnold grinned in agreement. "Sure is some handicap. Gosh, when that boy must have been writing Greek verse I was shin-



Arnold nodded. "Trouble. Bad trouble. But I can't do it. Not but what it's a whole man's job that I'd like to look back on and feel that I've pulled off. But gosh almighty, I'd have to write a hundred page report about it and I'd have to make out an expense account down to the last cent and a daily mileage list and—but who's your man up there? Why can't he handle it?"

Sir David smiled wryly. "A man called Sheldon. Assistant commissioner. Good youngster—maybe a couple years behind

ning mule back in Dakota and getting regularly swindled by an old Sioux medicine man on pony deals."

The governor nodded his head. "That's exactly what we need. A man who has been swindled by crafty Indians in pony deals and has learned his experience out of it to adapt it to crafty African spellbinders. A man who knows natives like you know them; almost like I know them."

"Governor, I—"

Arnold looked appealingly at Sir David. His eyes dropped to the floor and he started

stalking up the length of the room again. He wasn't hesitating. Arnold merely didn't know how to temper his refusal.

Sir David tried again. "If you would only take government employ as a special temporary agent I could wire to Entebbe and my colleague there would make some allowances for you. But——"

"Yes, *but*—that's just it," Arnold shot back at him, pointing with a long forefinger. "I'd still have to wrap myself in a gaudy silken cocoon with sacred red tape. Gosh, I'd suffocate."

The governor sighed resignedly. He could understand this restless man. Sir David was not one who had been born to the splendor of colonial administration; he had won his way along the line from the long ago days of the Boer War.

"That's the damned American of you," he growled. "If you wouldn't be so bally scornful of necessary authority you'd find some of our youngsters to be jolly decent chaps and this driveling red tape wouldn't bother you. But you're too dashed much like a leopard to change your spots. Well, if you won't, I suppose you won't. I'll have to see if I can find one of our more experienced officers to fill the job. But remember, not a word outside. This thing is an official secret as yet."

Arnold grinned. "Governor, how many years have you been in Africa, that you talk of secrets?"

Sir David smiled whimsically. "You're right. Oh, well, of course there's nothing hidden in Africa for those that have ears to hear. I suppose you'll pick up a lot of underground talk. If you hear anything real I would be glad to know about it."

Arnold chuckled good humoredly. "Anything that your blawsted British officials are too high to hear, yeah? Sure thing. I'm going upcountry after some ivory that I've heard about, and if I happen on any bush telegraph I'll pass the word pronto."

A worried frown puckered Sir David's forehead as Arnold left. Then the wise smile spread slowly across his face. Ivory, Arnold had said. Just where did the young

American expect to find— By heaven, maybe there wouldn't be any necessity of detailing anybody up there after all!

FROM Nairobi a bumpety railroad track straggles toward the northwest and vast Lake Victoria. Two weeks after his talk with the governor in Nairobi, Arnold sat in this train and damned its dreary rattle, bang, crash.

It is about two hundred and fifty miles from Nairobi to Kisumu, the port on the great Kavirondo Gulf of the inland sea. A day and night run if one is lucky, but to a weary traveler it seems a week. Mile after crawling mile of burned brown veld and sparse, flat topped acacia and countless dry dongas—the bridges over which make African railroading so expensive; and every now and then antelope or zebra in the distance; and dust. Over everything dust. Fine white dust; over the lumpy coach cushions, in the food, sticky around the collar, smarting in the eyes.

It is one of the most unpleasant railroad journeys in the world. But since it can cover in two days a distance that a safari could hardly accomplish in twenty, Arnold traveled by train and cursed it as he doctored his eyes against infection from the pestilence of flies.

He alighted from the train at Kisumu and cursed it with mechanical finality. As he turned away from the carriage he found a big, strongly built native grinning at him. The man was dressed in an old khaki shooting coat and the scantiest possible loin cloth. Below each sinewy knee and above the right elbow was a garter plaited of monkey hair leaving a flash of white tuft. He carried a long, beautifully polished stick, which was really a spear with the head removed, since the regulations of well policed Kisumu did not permit natives to go armed.

But Arnold knew very well that the two foot long, razor sharp blade of that spear was somewhere not far from the shaft. A Masai and his weapon do not part company.

"*K'kos bwana*," the man greeted. "Ma-leff? Train this time good?"

"Ha, Barounggo. Never good. Dak bungalow. And after bath time come and tell me what the talk is in Kisumu."

ARNOLD had barely entered the screened bungalow when he found Barounggo at his heels. He wheeled on the man.

"Talk after bath time, I said, Barounggo!"

The Masai raised his stick in the sign that was salute as well as deprecation. "Yes, *bwana*, talk is for after bath. But there is a gift and—maybe talk goes with gift."

He opened a grass basket and showed two beautiful melons, luscious luxuries in that parched season just before the rains.

"Ho, good!" Arnold exclaimed. "What friend sends this gift, Barounggo? And what talk should there be about a gift of two melons?"

"*Bwana*—" the man hesitated and looked up and down the long veranda and uneasily about the compound planted with laboriously cultivated shrubbery.

Arnold's eyebrows flickered and he, too, shot a glance along the veranda. It was deserted. Arnold stepped down to the stoop and seated himself on the edge. He knew his man. The Masai, besides being the most warlike, are some of the most intelligent of the Africans. Barounggo had been with Arnold for many years and Arnold knew he was no wild goose chaser.

"Tell me this talk that belongs to the two melons. All the talk."

"*Bwana*, there is talk, first, that trouble is growing up among the jungle men of the North."

So the great official secret was all over the district! Naturally, it would be. But what had trouble in the Rudolf province to do with melons, Arnold wanted to know.

"*Bwana*, the trouble is a young tree as yet; but it has a strong rain in the words of a new witch doctor. This man has a

strong witchcraft. A new juju has come to the land."

BAROUNGGO was off on a tangent. The Masai, like the Zulus, like to orate. Give them a chance and they will declaim all round a story in order, as they say, to wrap it with meat before they come to the bone. Arnold stopped him.

"Melons," he said simply.

Barounggo resigned himself and came to the point as directly as his innate sense of drama would permit him. "The talk is, *bwana*, that we have taken service with the government to go up and stop that trouble."

"The hell!" This time Arnold was startled. Though not accurate, this was



the fastest bush telegraph that he had known. But the melons. Barounggo had digressed again.

"Melons," Arnold repeated.

"Yes, as to the melons," Barounggo agreed. "A Kavirondo savage came to me immediately you left and said he was the servant of the Banyan trader Khoda Bux who has the garden and who remembered you with a full heart and sent these melons as a salaam."

That seemed plausible enough. Arnold had done some service for the East Indian, and a delicate compliment of a small gift

was an Oriental custom. Arnold knew that more lay behind that innocence.

Barounggo glanced about the compound again and then hurriedly put in his climax. "But the Banyan has been dead a month and the savage who brought the melons lost himself in the crowds at the bazaar immediately."

"Oho! And so?" Arnold's interest was more than merely surface now.

"And so, when talk is of trouble," Barounggo returned sententiously, "the wise map looks for trouble. Therefore observe that melon, *bwana*. This one, here. And consider that this is the limbwa melon which the white men say is spoiled by the taste of a knife, so they but score the skin and break it open in their hands."

ARNOLD looked closely and saw that a clean round hole had been punched in the fruit just over the stalk indentation and the plug neatly replaced. He whistled a thin, tuneless rhythm through his teeth.

"O-ho!" he exclaimed through clenched teeth. "It is possible, Barounggo, that you have been very wise. Now what trouble, do you think, can come into a melon through a round hole?"

"Many troubles, *bwana*," Barounggo whispered. "A good witch doctor, such as that one where the trouble is, who might wish that we should not go into his country, could put a strong devil into it. A fool could put poison into it."

True enough, Arnold thought. Poison. Or, if the not so generous donor had been a white man he might expect to find some sort of contact bomb. A bomb was really out of the question, but precaution would suggest cutting the interesting melon with a longish knife.

He looked at the imperturbable Masai and as if divining his master's mind, Barounggo reached his hand behind his neck and, apparently from out his spinal column, produced two feet of shining steel. The great blade fitted sweetly onto the end of his stick and he handed the weapon to Arnold.

Carefully, gingerly, at full spear's length Arnold sawed at the fruit with the keen blade. The denouement came with sudden swiftness. The fruit split softly open and fell apart disclosing its pale yellow interior which should have been speckled with large, dark purple seeds. Not a seed was there. Instead an incredibly swift watch spring thing, colored bright red with a thick black stripe down either side, wriggled free and coiled in compact but deadly menace.

"God!"

Almost as swift as the brilliant coiled death, Arnold lunged the great blade at it. The steel buried itself in the ground a bare inch from the vibrant thing, and it, like a watch spring again, flashed once in the sun and was gone.

"Whau!" Barounggo exclaimed. "A limpo'-olu! The snake whose evil is as great as his belly is small. But a pity! *Bwana* lacks practice with the spear."

Arnold was breathing hard through his nose, still looking at the spot where the beautiful death had coiled. Mechanically he tugged at the spear shaft, thinking the while. There was no doubt in his mind now but that there was much more to the fuss brewing to the northward than even the governor thought. Still, it was none of his funeral—or wouldn't be as soon as they stopped connecting him up with it. He turned to Barounggo.

"Barounggo, you have shown wisdom. I am pleased. There will be a blanket with stripes as brilliant as that snake. Make no talk with any man. This trouble is not our affair. We make safari to the Elgon Mountain. We go fast before all the water holes dry up and we come out fast before the big rain. Six carriers are enough for the going. For the return the number depends upon luck."

CHAPTER II

WITH the morning of the third day Arnold was striding out of Kisumu at the head of six porters who carried

bundles on their heads, Barounggo who carried only his ever present stick, and a wizened, monkey-like Hottentot who carried an extra gun and the splendid name of Kaffec'enq'uamdhlovu, which, in his queer, staccato language had something to do with the slaying of elephants.

Old timers who knew Arnold cocked their eyes and wondered what big venture he was set upon with all that equipment. Others, accustomed to seeing the mountainous impedimenta of rich sportsmen, wondered how far this rangy looking fellow thought he could go into the interior with that insufficiency of food, and how long he hoped to keep up that speed.

As a matter of fact Arnold proposed to keep up that speed until eleven thirty. Then he would camp under an umbrella acacia to let the heat of the sun pass over. There was nothing surprising in the proposal; but there was surprise in its accomplishment—to those six porters. Four miles per hour had been the pace set; and the men had swung along easily enough. Experienced sportsmen's porters they were, all of them.

Presently this white man would wander off into the veld and would tramp a few miles to shoot some buck or other. Meanwhile, they would lie on their backs and smoke and wiggle their toes in the good dust; and when the white man returned he would be tired. He would not go much farther and they would make early camp. There would be meat for them. It was a good, easy business, this portering for white hunters, and the government saw to it that their pay was twenty-five cents a day with *potio*.

BUT this white man did not wander off to shoot anything. At a steady four miles an hour he stalked over toward the horizon of brown, burned plain. The porters gabbled among themselves. It was just as well to establish their rights at the very beginning. Not that they were tired or that they couldn't keep up that pace. On their own business they could carry heavier

loads and would keep it up from dawn till dark.

White men were beyond reason. If a foolish porter should once show that he could do a certain stint of labor the white *brwana* would imagine that he could do it again. So they began to blow long moaning whistles between tongue and teeth and to sigh high pitched sighs. They began to straggle out till half a mile separated the last of them from the tireless white man.

Arnold wasted no breath in futile admonition, or even the energy to turn around. When he came to a shady mimosa he sat quietly under it, lighted his pipe and fanned himself with his sun helmet. The porters judged this to be the time to come up with lagging footsteps and with great heaving groans of relief. When the last of them had arrived, Arnold rose. He spoke only to Barounggo—reflectively, almost impersonally.

"Does it not seem to you, Barounggo, that some of these carriers think we have arrived in this land but yesterday? Not till the half hour before noon does the safari stop."

And so it was. At eleven-thirty Arnold found a suitable umbrella tree, and the caravan, right at his heels, was within its shade almost as soon as he was.

"Three hours rest," Arnold pointed out. "Let any man sleep who will. But first, in that load are mealies, already parched. Each man gets half a portion of *potio*."

The surly looks of the porters altered with African light heartedness to grins. This wasn't so bad after all. Their white man was not one to be made a fool of, but on the other hand he knew what other safaris never seemed to understand—that food was good at any time.

Promptly at two-thirty, Arnold rose. "Three hours trek," he announced briefly.

THE porters took up their loads. There was no murmuring. Three hours of steady going saw the party on rising land twenty-eight miles from Kisumu. It was good going. Nearly twice as far as the

cumbersome sporting safaris made in a day's trek.

To the northward, miles away, a pale cone of ghost gray without any tangible base stood up out of the dust haze. Almost transparent it looked at that distance. It might almost have been a freak of cloud; but the cool wind that blew from it even at this distance established it as the snow mass of Mount Elgon. The water beside which Arnold proposed to camp was snow water on its way to feed Lake Victoria.

There was a little more than an hour of sunlight left. Just time enough to make camp in comfort. Arnold directed four of the porters under the direction of Barounggo to cut thorn bush and build the customary boma against lions. An hour allowed just time enough to build an impregnable circle of some fifteen feet across and eight high and stock it with sufficient firewood to last the night through.

Arnold turned to two other porters. "Go and fetch in that buskbok," he commanded them. "The young one under that small tree."

The men stared at him, astounded, with the ape expression of their kind. The little herd of red-brown antelope were feeding between four and five hundred yards away. How were they, not hunters but porters, to carry out this peremptory order? They stood and stared dumbly.

For just a moment they stared at Arnold. There was something about the white man that puzzled them. He spoke with such sureness. Perhaps the young buck would wait for them. The white man had implied it would wait. It might be best for them to go.

So the two porters went. What foolish things white men said; particularly this white man. They set off, looking back at every few paces expecting they did not know what.

SUDDENLY Arnold called out after them. "Bring it back whole," he shouted. "Without disemboweling it."

There was another foolishness beyond

understanding. One always cleaned game where it fell. Why carry useless weight? The men with quick African superstition began to be uneasy about all this mystery—which was just what Arnold wanted.

He smiled thinly to himself as he watched them go. Then leisurely he walked to a little knoll, sat and kicked himself comfortable heel holes for a steady position. Carefully he wiped the day's dust from his rifle and blew sharply through the peep sight. He used the precise Lyman .48 and the little sums that went with its use came to him automatically. One point subtended one inch at one hundred yards, was the basic rule. Two inches at two hundred, and so on. For open veld shooting he kept his gun sighted in for point blank at three hundred. He knew his ammunition trajectory to drop three and a half inches between three and four hundred and four inches between four and five hundred.

Very well. It was four-fifty. Six points would just about do it. The little breeze that persisted was not of sufficient strength to figure. No old-fashioned guesswork about this. All that was required was the ability to hold steady. Good eyesight, unshakable nerves, and taut muscles. Arnold had all the requirements.

Taking it easy and without hurry, he fired. The young buck leaped high in the air and fell, and the rest stood staring stupidly at the distant report. Not till the porters began to approach did they up-tail and race off.

The little Hottentot, who noted everything with a monkey-like curiosity, pretended to be engrossed with his fire. Squatting as no white man can, with his knees up behind his ears, he ventured a question between violent blowings of flame.

"Master, for what purpose must those porters bring the entrails? There will be meat enough without."

Arnold smiled grimly. "For magic," he uttered momentarily. "There will be a witch smelling this night."

The Hottentot tended his fire in silence

and proceeded to prepare the meal. His master had many strange powers, he knew. Mysterious powers.

SINCE Arnold had not expressly ordered to the contrary this news of magic that night communicated itself to the camp before ever the meal was finished. The men, as they worked, looked at Arnold with uneasiness. The gloom deepened.

Meat was broiled on sticks and eaten in gloomy discomfort, Arnold sitting wrapped in black silence. The porters squatted apart and whispered to one another. The last of the day disappeared and tropic night swept over the country. The atmosphere was full of apprehension. Arnold sat without motion and let it all soak well in.

Suddenly he lifted his head and glared across the fire at the huddled bearers. Upon his forehead they could discern, marked in white, an oval with a spot in its center.

Someone shouted. "Look—it is the eye! The eye that sees within!"

The men muttered to one another and huddled closer. This was witchcraft such as their own witch doctors practiced.

"Bring those intestines!" Arnold's voice exploded into the uneasy gloom.

Kaffa, the Hottentot, scuttled forward with the mass. Not without a certain disgust Arnold pored over the offal.

"A young buck," he mumbled. "Without horns, without guile, one that had not yet learned the way of lies. Truth unwraps itself."

With his forefinger Arnold made a vast pretense of tracing out the windings of the intestines. With meticulous care he followed the thin tracery of the fatty tissues that surrounded the paunch, bending forward with eagerness, starting with ahs of surprise and ohs of conviction, breaking off to glare across the fire at the wretched porters who watched with the fearful fascination of the African for gruesome mystery. This was divination of the surest sort. Only the best of their witch doctors could work this magic. And that this white

man should know it too! It was fearfully horrible to the porters.

The slow moving forefinger traced the fatty nodules and thin windings of veins. "This is the house of the evil one," Arnold intoned. "This the road that he follows. Here is the fate which awaits him. I smell him out. I see the evil in his heart."



Nothing is hidden. Ha, it is finished. I make the test—the test of truth. His death sits in his shadow and is ready."

With that he sprang up and stalked before the wretched natives who rocked themselves on their hams and gave vent to moaning misery. In Arnold's hand appeared six white pellets—aspirin tablets.

"Stand up!" he shouted. "Stand up and take the test of the magic that does not lie. The guiltless one will grow strong from it; the one with evil in his heart—his belly will swell with his own poison that he carries and he will surely die. Up and open your mouths and let the guiltless have no fear!"

With something like relief the men stood up. They knew all about this kind of ordeal. Their own magicians always spelled out wrongdoers that way. And it was true, if the ordeal was done the innocent never suffered; and if one did, why there was proof of his guilt. The thing was infallible.

THE first porter opened his mouth obediently. Arnold muttered mumbo-jumbo and popped an aspirin into it. The man gulped and waited, half uneasy in his conscience for past wrong doings, though innocent enough in the present instance, feeling no sudden cramp in his vitals, he began slowly to grin his relief.

The second porter took the test with flying colors. So the third. But the fourth

man in the row was gray with terror. His eyes rolled white and the sinews of his neck distending dragged down the corners of his mouth in a horrible grimace. Suddenly, while the third man was still awaiting the verdict of his stomach, the man gave an inarticulate howl and bolted out into the night through the opening in the stockade. Arnold had left it open for that very purpose.

"*Whau!*" was the endorsement of the men. Even Barounggo and Kaffa were impressed. It was real magic. This had been a true witch smelling and the evil one had fled rather than take the test which would have swelled his belly and killed him in agony.

Arnold couldn't suppress a light smile. It was a good hunch and the bluff had worked. He had figured that the Rudolf crowd, if they thought he was important enough to stop with that melon trick, would have sense enough to work in a man with his porters. A clever man must be directing the work in the north. Well, it was really none of his business, so he should worry. Still Arnold would like to have known what the man's plan was. Arsenic in all probability. If he had searched the native he might have found something interesting. However it was just as well that the man ran away. Otherwise he'd have had to do something pretty horrid to make good his bluff about swelling him up.

Arnold's ruminations were broken in upon by the remaining two porters who came diffidently with every right they were sure, and wanted their share of the magic pills which would make them strong because they were innocent. Laughing, Arnold gave each of them a five-grain tablet of aspirin.

THREE days found the little safari on the northern slope of Mount Elgon. At that point Arnold had to pick up old trails. The information he had gathered about this cache of ivory was sure and accurate. There remained only the exact locale to trace. The story that had come

to him about the ivory was an alluring leftover from the days of the great scramble for Africa. Great Britain, Belgium, France were all playing the vast game of intrigue for control of Central Africa. Nominally they were great trading companies who were just trying to open up business. But the trading companies who were supported by troops of employees who knew how to salute smartly to young clerks who openly carried the titles of lieutenant and captain. Besides the business of stealing marches upon each other, these "business men" were faced with the always treacherous opposition of the Zanzibari Arabs who had got into the country before them.

The whole situation was a scrambled mess of intrigue and counter-intrigue with vast interests jockeying for control. It can be imagined what a glorious time was had by such traders as Tippoo Tib, perhaps the most infamous of all such opportunists. A clever organizer unhampered by any inhibitions at all, he sent his raiding parties north and south, east and west. The trail of slaughter and pillage that he left in his wake is but part of African history.

The methods of those traders, and Tippoo Tib was but one, were simple and effective. They would rush upon sleeping villages, shoot down all opposition, torture the survivors into confessing the local store of hidden gold and ivory, and then carry them all off, men, women and children, as porters for the loot, and eventually to serve as slaves.

Sometimes one of these raiding parties never came back. Fate or weather or desperate natives overcame them. The Buganda, a tribe of surprisingly advanced state of civilization, who lived along the shores of Lake Victoria, had put up an organized resistance to these raiders. The story that had come to Arnold was of a large party who had ravaged the country for a year and had amassed an incredible amount of loot. And then the Buganda avengers came upon them. The raiders swiftly buried their loot, murdered the

workmen in approved fashion, and moved out into the best fighting position they could find—and were there very properly wiped out by the Buganda.

That had happened only about fifty years ago. Old men lived who had seen that fight. The locale was known. Arnold had checked up descriptions of it from more than one source. What he hoped to find now was some old man who had survived the slave chain and who could perhaps give him some clue as to where all that ivory had been buried before the battle.

When Arnold required information he always went to one of two basic sources: missionaries or witch doctors. Both, he maintained, were excellent people and had many points in common, the most useful of which was that both had more downright accurate knowledge of their people than the most scientific observer could ever acquire.

He now made inquiries, therefore, for the oldest witch doctor in the north Elgon district and put himself out to make friends with him. Nothing patronizing or clumsy about his method. He knew the jealousies and vanities of all people who controlled their less intelligent fellows through superstition.

ARNOLD had met his hundreds of white men whose religion and conviction it was that the African must be dealt with only from the position of lofty dominance. It was a good rule, and knew all of the arguments and citations with which it was so uncompromisingly supported. Arnold knew, too, where to make the isolated exception. So, from his present camp, he sent Kaffa to the old rain maker's hut with a present of tobacco.

Kaffa knew his ambassadorial duties as well as any diplomat. First he told the old witch doctor how good he was. Then how good his own master was—a brother of the craft, no less—and that he sent a gift to express his admiration of the other's powers. Thus properly appreciated, the old magician, instead of secretly opposing

the superior white man's every move, sent him back a goat, and the way was open for social amenities.

Arnold paid a call and sat on the three-legged stool of honor before the doorway of the hut festooned with bones and dried snake skins and claptrap, and took snuff with the old faker while the uninitiated common herd of the village squatted in a wide circle out of earshot to let the two wise ones discuss the inner mysteries.

The two men talked in circles for an hour before Arnold dared broach the question that was uppermost in his mind. And there he had drawn a lucky number at his first venture. This old man knew all about that battle of Elgon and all about the ivory, too.

The fakir had not seen the fight himself because he had been serving his novitiate in the village of another witch doctor far away. But the ivory had been buried all right, and the Buganda, having foolishly speared every last Arab, had not been able to find it and had gone away. But some information had somehow remained alive; for after some seasons had passed a strong war party of the Tappuza, who were a branch of the great Elgume tribe, had come down from the north and had dug it all up and taken it away. The old doctor had seen it himself; a vast treasure; many hundreds of tusks—thousands, in fact. The warriors of the Tappuza covered the plain and each man carried a tusk; and there were many loads of gold besides.

The Tappuza were now the strongest of the Elgume peoples because—this was a secret, he said—they had for some time past been carefully trading ivory for rifles which the Armenian and Greek traders smuggled down from the Sudan. Still, there must be an immense treasure left, because it was difficult to get guns; the Inglesi were so stringent about such matters. But all the same, the Tappuza were a strong people. And thus and so on the witch doctor rambled for a full hour more.

Arnold came away from that interview in a thoughtful frame of mind. Not be-

cause that buried ivory had been removed. As far as that was concerned, one hole in the ground was as good as another. Not because the Tappuza tribe who now had it were a "strong people"—he had dwelt with many a strong tribe before. Not because they had it and recognized its value. That merely made a trade proposition of the deal rather than a treasure hunt. Rather, Arnold was thoughtful because he believed in luck, or fate or whatever it was. In Africa, every now and then, things happened. Without one's own volition; outside of one's knowledge; against one's direct precaution. They just went ahead and happened and one was drawn willy-nilly into the vortex of that happening.

THIS was one of those happenings. These Tappuza lived up north of the Elgon Mountains. They lived, as a matter of fact, along the western shore of another of the huge lakes of the Great African Rift—Lake Rudolf. That was where Arnold did not want to go; had refused to go. It was of just these Tappuza people that Sir David Earl Stewart, the governor of Nairobi had spoken.

Fate; that's what it was. It was too circumstantial to be coincidence. It was just one of those happenings of Africa beyond the molding of mere man. Man proposes and Africa disposes. Arnold felt that he was being pushed up to the scene of smouldering trouble. That was what gave him thought. That caution never hurt anybody was one of his rules. Another one was: figure it all out in advance and then jump with both feet. That was why he was so seldom hurt.

To be or not to be? There might be profit; there might be danger. Those people who were smart enough to make two attempts to waylay him might—

Well, that settled that little question right there. They weren't going to get away with that funny stuff!

Well, then, should he go back south to Kisumu, steamer across to Entebbe, see the chief executive there, and go officially with

the lavish pay and expenses that the Nairobi governor had offered? Arnold thought of the old Aesop fable about the dog who invited a wolf to dinner; and the wolf marveled at the other's ease of life—comfortable kennel, good food, protection from the constant fear of being hunted, plenty of leisure—until a whistle sounded and the dog jumped up and said he had to go instantly because his master was calling. So the wolf preferred to remain a free lone wolf. Arnold called Barounggo.

"Barounggo," he told the Masai, "from tomorrow we must catch guides to show us the water holes, for that country to the north is bad country and the road is not known to me."

Barounggo remained impassive. "Good, *bwana*," he said quietly. "It is moreover a happening of fate that in this village is a Turcana bush dweller who would return to his country. For his food and a present at the end of the journey he will show the good places; so I have engaged him." Arnold flicked an eyebrow at such prescience. The great seer continued, "It is already known to me that we go north. For three days I have smelled blood on my spear blade."

Arnold grunted with a light laugh: "Helluva cheerful prophet you are!"

CHAPTER III

IT WAS a long trek through bad country to the region occupied by the strong tribe of the Tappuza. In point of distance no more than a good day's run in an automobile; but to a safari traveling on foot, a journey of many parched and thirsty days; so desperately thirsty that one drank gratefully the water of the water holes. But the burned out plain began to give place to rolling higher ground, the beginning of the escarpment of Lake Rudolf. Trees other than thorn bush began to appear. Seepage of water showed among sheltered rocks. Green herbage grew.

At the edge of the forest, on the highest available ground overlooking the great

ake fifty miles away, to take advantage of whatever breezes might blow; yet no closer, for that again meant descending ground and more heat, was the little outpost station of Lo Bur.

It was at Lo Bur where Sidney Sheldon, the assistant commissioner was stationed; the same assistant whom Sir David decried as too young and inexperienced to handle the impending troubles with the Tappuza people.

Also at Lo Bur lived Father Ignatius van Dahl, a member of the Jesuit Belgian Mission. Here he had built a mission house from which his hope was to make as many as perhaps fifteen converts in the course of a year, and to win them to his mission settlement by teaching them to grow better yams and mealies and bananas than they knew how to grow before. As assistants Father van Dahl had Lay



Brother Leffaerts and—a new acquisition—D'mitrius Stephanopoulos, zealous convert from the Greek church in Alexandria, who had shortened his name to Stephen.

It is etiquette in African colonialdom for a traveler to call upon the local government authority. It is a pleasing convention which disguises the harsh necessity of reporting arrival. Where natives are many and turbulent, white men are desperately few, with, among the few, the inevitable percentage of those who would sell their own treacherous souls for gain. It is a wise administrative precaution to know the who and the why and the where of each newcomer.

In some of the fussier European colonies

in Africa the process is brutally direct. In British Africa, there is no severe inquisition, no finger-printing. One pays a polite call and discloses one's business in the process of conversation.

ARNOLD, therefore, presented a rather crumpled card to the barefoot sentry at the barbed wire gate and followed him in to the shade of the veranda. Dilapidated brothers of that card were known in many parts of Africa. Some men—like the governor in Nairobi, who knew men—were glad to see them. Others who had heard stories about this strenuous man from the wild and woolly West of that uncouth and inexplicable country, America, viewed them with misgiving.

Assistant Commissioner Sidney Sheldon received the card with a feeling of dismay that was akin to panic, which turned to smouldering irritation. He sank back in his chair and frowned while he fidgeted with a carefully clipped blond mustache. That man in his district! As if he didn't have enough trouble already. There was always trouble where Jimmy Arnold was.

That was true enough on the face of it, though some fault could be found with the wording. It was not exactly that trouble was where Arnold was, so much as that the restless Arnold was so often to be found where trouble was. Sheldon pushed back his chair and called sulkily to a boy to bring two whiskey pegs out to the veranda and went to meet his caller.

Arnold had been received by district officials before. He had a quite accurate comprehension of what many of them thought of him. He knew that they thought it because he came and went his own way, that he did whatever he did without explaining means and motives, and that he went away again without making clear exactly what he had done. Or, to paraphrase his words to the governor, because he would not write a hundred page report about his doings. Such procedure was disturbing to the peace of mind of district officials whose business it was to read hundred page re-

ports upon what was going on in their districts.

Sheldon received his caller with formal courtesy and made the formal Anglo-Saxon gesture of good will by offering alcoholic stimulant.

Arnold turned the drink down graciously. "No peg, thanks very much," he said. "Not so early in the day. I'm a confirmed sundowner."

RIGHT there, in the perfectly courteous offer and refusal of a drink, was a source of irritation to a mind already predisposed to antagonism. A little thing in itself; yet a universal cause of hostility throughout the tropics. To any man whose system feels that a stimulant during the sluggish heat of the day is advisable and perhaps necessary, it is a subtle reproof, a never admitted sense of inferiority, to meet a man whose more robust system does not need that stimulant.

Sydney Sheldon was unconscious of resentment, yet this impalpable barrier had been raised. Courtesy could continue to govern all his dealings with this man, but there could be no cordiality. Neither could Arnold confine himself to the banal preliminaries of polite conversation. He proceeded directly to give the information required by law.

"I report two rifles, Mr. Sheldon; a .457 and .300, and a sixteen shotgun. About three hundred cartridges all told, and two dozen sticks of dynamite."

Sheldon's jaw dropped to disclose large, even teeth and he fussed with his mustache. It was his duty to know, but he shrank from the barbarous necessity of the direct question. Things just weren't done that way. Such matters should always come out in the process of conversation; or at least after a decent period of persiflage.

"You—you are thinking of prospecting for gold here, Mr. Arnold?"

Arnold felt easier. The stiff preliminaries done with, he felt he could talk.

"Shucks, no. There's no gold around here—not in the ground, that is. I don't

know how much the high muck-a-mucks have got hidden away somewhere—not yet. I carry the dynamite 'cause I never know where I may be going; just part of any regular kit. I came up here on a yarn about some ivory."

Sheldon's jaw dropped still farther. He had heard some disquieting rumors about that ivory. If this troublesome trader should come stirring up ancient legends and if he should discover anything, there would immediately be confusion and argument and dissension about property rights and heaven only knew what else. He set out to explain to Arnold with great patience all about the difficulties and the secrecy of the people, and the almost prohibitive transport problem—and even a hint about the "little temporary unrest."

ARNOLD nodded appreciatively. "That's right, you seem to have quite a bit of underground something on your hands. I picked up a talk about getting guns in. Sounded pretty authentic, too."

The assistant commissioner shot a quick look at Arnold. Where did this unpromising person get so much information that was private news known only to the official elect? However, he commented only polite surprise.

"Yeah," Arnold supplemented. "Some sixty or seventy guns I'm told; Martin-Henry carbines mostly, with plenty ammunition. If as many as fifty percent of them don't blow up there's still enough to make heap big trouble."

Sheldon was suspicious. This was damnably explicit. More even than he knew. Was this man trying to pump him? Sheldon was the unfortunate victim of a tradition which Sir David could understand. He had been reared in the knowledge that in every outlying colony might be found a certain class of white man who would smuggle guns and liquor to the natives. No white man of his own class would ever descend to such a despicable business. Here was a white man distinctly not of his own class; therefore potentially he might belong

to the other class. And this white man seemed to possess much suspicious knowledge.

"Why, you make a very definite statement there about the number of guns which you say have been smuggled in, Mr. Arnold," Sheldon questioned his caller. "What basis, permit me to ask——?"

Arnold sensed the thing immediately and responded accordingly. There it was again, the same old clash between entrenched authority acting according to prescribed rule and its honest convictions, and the individual with an indomitable sense of personal liberty. Arnold's reaction was always that of the boy who dares to tease the policeman. His expression was one of innocent mysteriousness.

"Gossip, Mr. Sheldon," he remarked casually. "Just gossip. Native village chatter. You know natives, of course; and you must know how many guns have come into your district. I'm just retailing scandal."

Sheldon was not at all sure how genuine was this perfectly true statement. Arnold fired a metaphorical sling shot at a wicked chance.

"And I'll tell you another bit of gossip that'll give you a laugh. Your reinforcements from Karamojo are having trouble with the monthly mail truck and it's pretty sure betting that they'll have to make it on foot. Twenty days of foot slog over Africa if they're fast."

That broadside shook the assistant commissioner from his precise reserve. He gagged. Words stuttered in his throat. This man was a devil. How could he know about an urgent appeal for twenty more men—and what did he mean by his certitude of car trouble? If it were all true it would be a condition of desperate seriousness. But, it couldn't be. This unofficial person couldn't know!

AS A matter of fact, Arnold didn't. He had picked up a story about a runner having been dispatched two weeks previous with a letter going toward the headquar-

ters of the next district. He knew that regular mail communication was by monthly auto trucks, with an escort of two rifles. From this his simple deduction was that news that could not wait for the monthly mail must be very urgent. What urgent need might there be in the existing situation other than a call for help? And the bet about car trouble, then, was no more than a logical sequence. Having his own little experiences about the cleverness of the man, whoever might be organizing this unrest, in trying to keep him out of the game, Arnold felt confident that, if reinforcements had been sent for, the same alert mind would surely plan to delay them. Succeeding would not be a difficult task.

Arnold left the assistant commissioner wondering darkly just what was his purpose in coming there, and what might be his connection with the smuggled guns about which he seemed to know so much. Arnold chuckled as he went. It was so seldom that the bad boy could put anything over on the policeman. Authority always held all the cards; all the might of government; all the sources of information; all the mutual assistance and limitless funds. The lone hunter had nothing but his wits and such knowledge as he could dig out by diplomacy. That made the game an interesting contest of skill.

CHAPTER IV

ARNOLD'S next call was on another white man at the mission. Here there was no card of announcement. He found Father van Dahl standing under the long fringe of thatch eave over the door. A slight, pale figure with deep brown eyes, visible above a flowing brown beard and mustache, robed in the prescribed habit of the order, which had once been black but which many suns and many washings had faded to a rusty brown, the priest blended into the surroundings. There was no alien note of newness or harsh superiority; the quiet low house and the quiet little man belonged in that far African setting.

"Mr. Arnold?" The priest held out his hand. "They told me you had not long arrived. I have heard much of—Arnold *bwana*. You will come in, yes; and the boy will prepare the bath. Very shortly we eat our little tiffin. You will partake with us?"

Arnold took the proffered hand that he could have broken easily in his own brown fist and marveled, as he always did, at the spirit that could keep so frail a man in so thankless a place. The cool dimness of the house called to him.

"Yes, to all of them, Padre, and heaps thanks. Exactly what my system needs. I hope that all you've heard about me hasn't been as bad as some other people have heard."

Father van Dahl smiled wisely. "We who live in Africa, after we have lived a long time, we understand what to hear and how to hear, is it not?"

He pulled, almost as a bird, at Arnold's sleeve; and the dimness of the house swallowed them. Through the simple little lunch served by Lay Brother Laffaerts and the convert Stephen, they discussed Arnold's search for the hidden ivory. For the moment, however, Arnold was interested in something else.

"The ivory can wait for now," he said pleasantly. "The question of transport will keep it right where it is. But what about this new juju that the natives are hanging their courage on—what about it, what is it? That's more important."

The priest was immediately grave, his eyes those of a pleading spaniel.

"Yes, yes that is most important," he sighed. "They are children, these people; they run to follow a show. This idol, it makes some tricks. The man is clever, and my people leave me. More than a hundred there were—what is left? Perhaps twenty—perhaps ten. They leave and go to howl in the night before that devil made of wood. It is the story of Africa. Let Brother Stephen tell it. I will leave you. I still have some small duties."

Brother Stephen happened to be well in-

formed about the idol. An alert mind with no hallucinations, he dissected the situation with clarity and in fluent English.

The juju was an unusually large one carved out of some black wood, probably ebony. It was hardly new, probably an antique and had been produced from some witch house by its present high priest who was a cunning old highbinder. It stood upon a roofed platform some thirty feet up in a solitary "ghost tree"; it was hung about with the usual collection of bones and offerings; and it did tricks.

What kind of tricks? Well, its most spectacular trick was that its arm and jaws moved and it ate offerings—some simple system of strings or levers, no doubt, manipulated probably from the tree against the trunk of which it stood. At certain times, proclaimed in advance with all its attendant hokum, it talked and gave messages to the people. Stage effects, no more, put across by a smart knave; but quite spectacular enough to capture the infant imaginations of the Tappuza savages and to bend them to whatever purpose the highbinder had in view.

ARNOLD sat with narrowed eyes, a deep straight line running from his nose up into his forehead. "There's just two questions come out of that," was all his comment. "The man or men, whoever they are, are playing up to start a fuss. Why? The organized intelligence back of it all is more than the common witch doctor has. Who? If Sheldon knows enough to find those two answers he'll know how to put the skids under the trouble."

Brother Stephen thrust out his hands, palms uppermost, and his round, dark face twisted into a grimace that was not complimentary. "Mr. Sheldon thinks that the way to stop this trouble is to confiscate the ivory so that it cannot be traded for guns; and he is hoping to find it."

"That would cause a riot," returned Arnold with a nod of certitude.

"Yes, immediate riot, at once. But he will never find it. I could——" Stephen

checked himself. "If he were not so high and mighty toward a Greek trader I could perhaps help him. He had even planned to confiscate the juju."

"And that would have meant that you would all have been wiped out. These people have too many guns against Sheldon's little force."

"Yes, but I—but Father van Dahl agreed with my opinion and persuaded him to do nothing so hastily before he had



many more soldiers. So, you see, we stand upon a gunpowder mine. My advice to anybody would be to go away before the mine blows up."

Arnold nodded impersonally. "Yeah, that would be the wise thing for a man to do. But I came up to look into this ivory yarn."

Brother Stephen's hands were eloquent. "My friend, let me give you my opinion on that matter as a trader of experience. Consider. This ivory is no longer a buried treasure. It must be bought from these people—under government supervision and the government tax must be paid. If there is not so much of it as you hope the small profit is not worth the distance involved. If there is enough of it to make it really pay, you would need a whole tribe to transport it. Slow travel with the weight; one month's journey to the railway at Kisumu.

"This is not the good old days when you could dash a chief a few gaudy gimcracks and have him order his men out. You would have to pay the rate prescribed by the government; seven hundred men at one shilling a day apiece with food allowance and half pay coming back. And you

can figure that out—if the government would ever permit so many men to leave their fields at once. No, my friend, I assure you, as a business man, this is not a trade proposition."

ARNOLD remained in silent cogitation, absorbed in intent examination of the end of his second cigar and in the great rings he blew to enormous distances in that still, warm air.

"I think you're dead right in everything you say," he said at last. "And I think I'll go and see if this Sheldon gent is possibly as good an egg beneath his shell of caste as the old governor at Nairobi."

Brother Stephen's shoulders showed his disapproval. "I would not advise you to do that, my friend. I assure you he will listen to nothing; he will take no advice—" rising passion darkened the shallow face—"he will insult you to your face with his politeness; he will— What do you want to go to him for? You are not interested in this thing, you say; not officially. As a trade it is not possible, I tell you. Then leave the official to take care of his own troubles. Go away before trouble comes to you. It is not your affair."

He ceased abruptly and blinked his round eyes, swallowing to control his emotions. Arnold blew some more smoke rings in silence.

"You're right again in everything you say," he repeated. "Dead right. All the same I think I ought to have a pleasant chat with Sheldon. And there's Father van Dahl's hundred men to be remembered. It would be a pity to have them led astray by a trick juju after they have learned to wear white clothes and to grow bigger and better yams."

That apparently forgotten consideration was beginning to dawn in Brother Stephen's face as Arnold left him.

Well, there was the whole truth about affairs. Witch doctors and missionaries. Those were the people who always understood the rest of the people and who had the information. Arnold came from the

missionary interview even more thoughtful than he had come away from the ancient witch doctor at the Elgon Mountain. He smiled thinly to himself as he walked.

There was the answer to the first of the two questions. Clever lad, Stephen. Seemed to know quite accurately about everything. The thin smile stretched to a grin. Sheldon must have upstaged the good Brother pretty stiffly at that. Arnold decided to see Sheldon himself that night after he'd had his dinner. He'd be all dolled up and at his best then. But—why didn't Stephen want him to see the assistant commissioner? His insistence had a peculiar ring to it.

At the mission outskirts one of Arnold's porters met him. He had been sent by Barounggo to lead the way through a jungly path to the camp. They had moved from the hasty halt of arrival and had taken possession of a deserted stockade with a couple of huts in it which they had repaired. It was a strong place.

"Good," was all that Arnold said. He wondered what his two boys had heard that had induced them to move into a strong place. So close to human habitation there were no animal menaces to worry about other than the ubiquitous hyenas.

DESPITE his curiosity Arnold asked no questions when they arrived at camp. The information would come in its own good time. It would be better for the present to betray no anxiety. He washed up, rested, shaved, ate leisurely. That brought him to the time for his after dinner visit to the assistant commissioner. He signalled to Barounggo to accompany him. The Masai was ready; all that he needed was to pluck his great spear from the ground where it stood upright at the entrance to the hut and to stalk behind his master. A thin moon cut black and white silhouettes out of the jungle path. They walked a while in silence.

Arnold spoke first after a long trek through the bush. "What talk has been

this day that you moved the camp into a strong place?"

"A small talk, *bwana*," Barounggo replied, "yet such as I have heard before a letting of blood. Talk was that the Black One of the ghost tree will talk this night."

"Hmh. That is talk that must be heard by you or Kaffa, and I must know what is said by this witch doctor," Arnold ordered the Masai.

"Nay, *bwana*," Barounggo's contradiction was positive. "The witch doctor only calls the names and the titles in advance. It is the Black One himself who speaks."

"Huh!" Arnold grunted and walked on in silence. Then softly, "How many men, think you, are following behind us?"

Barounggo showed no surprise. "It has been in my mind that three men come running softly."

"Good," Arnold returned. "Now therefore at that bend in the trail where the moon strikes do you step swiftly to the left and I to the right, and we shall see what manner of men come behind us in the night."

Some thirty paces farther the trail took a sharp curve. No sooner round it than both men ducked into the bush and crouched. In a few seconds padding footsteps sounded and the followers trotted into view.

Arnold's eyes narrowed in the dark and he took a quick breath. He had seen this kind of night runner before. Three strongly built savages, naked except for their gee-strings, and each carried a short, heavy stabbing spear. Their heads were thrust forward, the moonlight glinted white upon their eyeballs, distended with excitement, and upon strong, white teeth showing between curled lips that panted wide, though not with the exertion of their stealthy running. Killers they were, and the lust of hot blood gleamed from each dark face.

Arnold muttered a curse and hurled himself out of his hiding place in a flying tackle at the foremost runner. The man crashed down with a startled yelp and Arnold in-

stantly rolled with him into the black shadow of the underbrush.

At the same moment a coughing "*Whaugh!*" the war shout of the Masai, told him that Barounggo had not hesitated. His own man was a burly fellow, who, after his first surprise, fought in ferocious silence. In the darkness, Arnold, clinging to his spear hand, found some difficulty in locating the man's head, holding it down with his free hand and smashing his knee hard under the ear. The squirming figure went limp.

Arnold leaped from that place, ten feet in one great bound, to another patch of shadow beside the path and crouched for whatever might come. Running feet receded farther up the trail. A tall, dark figure stood with his back to a tree, head forward, great spear raised. Arnold was at a disadvantage. He tore his automatic from his belt holster, though under the very shadow of the established law, as it were, he hesitated to get himself involved in any premature blood spilling.

But the dark figure in the half-shadow of the tree did not move. The head hung in the same forward strained position. The threatening spear pointed not at Arnold but curiously horizontal. In the same second Arnold knew. He whistled thinly and pushed his pistol slowly back into its holster. He stepped closer softly. The spear was not one of the short stabbing spears of the killers, but the great weapon of the Masai. Four inches of the blade's butt, a hand'sbreadth wide, showed darkly red before the man's chest. The remaining twenty inches of steel were through him and fast in the tree trunk behind.

Arnold was levering the blade loose when running steps sounded again. Single footsteps. It was the Masai, eager, face gleaming with excitement. He stood and regarded his handiwork critically.

"*Hau*, that was a good stroke. So, now three dead."

Arnold shook his head. "It was not good, Barounggo. And three are not dead. This one in the shadow we must take and

bind. It is a bad business. We sit under the very mantle of the English ruler, and much trouble will be made over spilled blood. Sure justice will come in the length of days; but we do not want talk and bother and interference in my doings now."

Arnold stood frowning at the body of the killer who was still pinned to a tree. A trickle of blood crawled the length of the spear shaft and fell with a plop onto a dry leaf. Here was a nasty dilemma. The three men had quite obviously followed them with murderous intent in the third attempt to keep him out of the fermenting trouble. Everything could no doubt be proven and cleared up; but the one certainty of the whole affair was restrictive delay.

THE Masai spoke from the shadow where he was tying the unconscious man's hands with a quickly twisted rope of grass. Arnold's antagonist must be made safe.

"*Bwana*," Barounggo spoke softly, "there is a word in my mind. I have many times listened to the talk of the white priests who say that their great white spirit who rules all things has put all things into the world for a good purpose. This is a hard talk to understand, but a little is clear to me. For this good purpose he has put these many hyenas into the land. Let me throw these two dead dogs into the first donga and in one hour it shall not be known how they died. And if *bwana* will permit likewise this third dog who would have murdered us from behind——"

Arnold grunted a short laugh and came to a decision. "You'd make a swell convert for the good padre; you have the faculty of acceptance of fundamentals. Listen now, Barounggo. Thus it shall be. Give these two to the hyenas; this third one take back into the stockade; bind and watch him well. He must be questioned and we may learn something. I go to talk with the *bwana* Inglesi."

Arnold found the assistant commissioner

sitting in his veranda in solitary after-dinner state. He could see the pale glow of Sheldon's shirt front, a white splash in the deep shadow, long before he reached the steps.

Like any other man, Arnold had grown up with certain traditions himself. One of these was that to wear anything white was a foolish invitation when trouble was abroad. The formal greeting concluded, the formal drink accepted, Arnold ventured a well meant warning.

"Mr. Sheldon, you ought to be able to step out there and look at yourself once. You've no idea what a target a boiled shirt makes for any sportively inclined native who's got one of those Martini-Henry's."

Sheldon shook his head confidently. "Oh, I suppose it is visible at quite a distance. But then, Mr. Arnold, one can't drop all the conventions of decent civilization just because one happens to be posted in a savage country."

Arnold, dressed in breeches and shooting coat, and with frayed cuffs at that, grinned to himself in the darkness. He had met the same thing all over Africa. It was the proper thing to do and it was therefore done. Tradition again. And unswerving faith to that tradition.

But he had come to talk, not to quarrel. He approached the subject placatingly. "Will you let me ask you a few questions, Mr. Sheldon—and let us look at question and answer quite impersonally?"

Sheldon inclined his head.

"Well, then," Arnold began, "have you formed any idea of what is the real bed-rock reason for this unrest here?"

Sheldon weighed his words before answering. "I don't mind answering that question, Mr. Arnold. I say, no, I don't know. I believe it to be the work of a crazy witch doctor with a sense of his sudden power over his superstitious people inflating his ego. In turn I would ask you why you are interested in this unrest?"

Arnold weighed his answer in turn. "I'm interested only, as I told you, Mr. Sheldon—that is to say, I *was* interested—only in

so far as it affected this ivory story. But—" the eyes narrowed to the same hard thinness as the mouth—"some nerry gent connected with this fuss is so interested in me that he's begun to warp my judgment. But let's continue to be impersonal for awhile yet. Let's suppose, for a moment, that everything was quiet here and a man should locate this hoard and deal for it legitimately. Would you sanction his hiring porters here?"

"That would depend," Sheldon returned judiciously, "upon how much ivory he wanted to take away."

"Well, suppose that man should tell you that there were seven hundred tusks; what would you say?"

"I would say first, Mr. Arnold, that I don't believe there is any such fortune of ivory in this district; next that that man knew very much more about this secret than I do; and finally, that I would refuse to sanction any such number of porters. Why, my good sir, that would be a migration. You have no idea what such a tribal upset would mean."

ARNOLD nodded. "Well, leaving out the ivory, suppose a man should tell you that somewhere in the tribe is a store of gold in quills. What would you say then to that?"

Sheldon was positive in his tone. "I would tell that man, first, as an officer of



the government, that he might as well forget it, because the government would not permit the tribe to be exploited. That gold would have to be paid for at its face value. And secondly—" Sheldon's eyes narrowed directly into Arnold's—"I would demand from that man how he knew so much about the ivory as to be able to state its quality

and so much about the gold rumor as to know that it was put up in quills? I would regard that man, Mr. Arnold, with suspicion, and I would watch his every move. In fact, I would cease to regard the question as impersonal; and I ask you flatly, Mr. Arnold, as the administrative officer of this district, how do you come to have all this information which has not even been reported to me?"

Arnold laughed shortly. "I have *not* all that information, Mr. Sheldon. I don't expect you to believe me, but I repeat, I'm following a thin trail of a story and I'm guessing. But I have one piece of information now which I will tell you. I'll tell you the rock bottom reason that's back of this unrest."

Arnold pointed his statement with a long forefinger. "This whoever it is who is stirring up trouble is aiming to bring about an uprising—it don't matter how quickly suppressed or who pays the piper afterwards."

Sheldon permitted himself a smile. "Uprisings are always possible in Africa when the natives are excited about something; but you ascribe an unusual intelligence to the agitator. Why, Mr. Arnold, permit me to ask, does this witch doctor wish to have an uprising? What would be his possible gain as against his very sure future punishment?"

Arnold pointed his forefinger like a gun. "Suppose, Mr. Sheldon," he said slowly, "that it isn't the witch doctor who is the bedrock. Now, this man who's supplying the brains wants to get the administration out of the way for just a little while—no, let me finish please. He wants to get it out of the way so that he can make his own dicker with whatever chief will be in power. He'll arrange with the chief for porters at about four cents a day. He'll fix up to snaffle all that ivory and that gold, to pay for it in trade trash, and to make his getaway before the government can restore order and come back to control things."

Sheldon gasped. The statement was too

audacious. That the unrest might develop into an uprising he knew only too well. But that the whole thing should be a deliberate plot, so diabolically clever—and going on right under his nose—that was more than he could assimilate all at once.

REVOLTING from its acceptance, his mind searched for difficulties in its conception. He found one almost immediately and it was so conclusive that he was afforded a laugh.

"That is a very ingenious theory, Mr. Arnold. But you forget an important point; I might say a prohibitive point. The jolly old transport problem, don't you know. While your magician might succeed in temporarily dislodging the government in this district he couldn't upset all of British Africa, could he? And one can't safari several hundred men with elephants' tusks hidden about their person; or even a few men with gold in quills, for that matter.

"To the northeast across the lake is Abyssinia, where they would take everything away from him in the first day's trek. To the north and northwest is the British Sudan and desert. Not a single water hole in many hundred miles. All the rest around us is British Uganda or Kenya Colony—not upset by your intriguing genius. And, dash it all, we do know what is going on in the country. So, where, Mr. Arnold, would your man go?"

"That is the big hole in the argument," Arnold admitted, "and maybe I can find that out. But let's suppose for a little bit longer. Suppose that is the plan, how could you stop the trouble before it came to an uprising and a white killing?"

Sheldon's triumph in the argument had put him in a more tractable humor. He was willing to discuss and disclose a corner of administrative policy.

"That is a problem, I don't mind admitting," he confessed. "You know, of course, that all these African disturbances are the work of some single dominant personality who understands how to excite the monkey

mind of the herd. These poor fools have nothing against us; they are infinitely better off than they ever were before, and if they would stop and think they would know it. But the excited African can not think. Some dominant mind is exciting these people by an appeal to their superstitions. Eighty percent of the African wars have been started that way."

SHELDON stopped to shake his head in a gesture of resignation. "We don't know who the person is in this case, but it's obvious that his instrument of excitation is this blasted juju. You know all about the smuggled guns somehow so I may as well admit I'm not strong enough just now to risk any possible riot."

There spoke Africa again. Arnold understood and nodded. He knew the old story by heart. Here was this stiff-necked official sitting, as Brother Stephen had said, upon a powder mine. Yet the thought never even came to him that he might desert his post. Nor did that thought occur to the missionary. Nor, for that matter, to Arnold. That was why the white man dominated Africa.

"So the question boils down," Arnold said quietly, "to who gets there first. The dominant mind with this uprising, or your reinforcements."

"Well—er—— I suppose that is so, Mr. Arnold, since you put it that way."

"And believe me your reinforcements are going to take a long time getting here."

Sheldon was immediately belligerently suspicious again. "What do you know about my reinforcements, Mr. Arnold? There again you display an unwarranted knowledge. I have a right to know your source of information and I demand to know."

Arnold held up disclaiming hands. "I don't know a darn thing, Mr. Sheldon. I'm guessing. You don't believe my guesses. When I know anything definite I'll tell you. Good night and thanks for your information."

Sheldon listened to the crunch of Arnold's retreating footsteps on the gravel—the khaki coat and breeches had melted into the darkness. The assistant commissioner just couldn't make up his mind. Was Arnold all right after all?

Arnold walked back through the moon-streaked jungle path alone, alert with ready gun, but not unduly anxious. The dominant mind, the dispatcher of three killers, would hardly have had time yet to ascertain the result of the mission and to have made new preparations.

His lips were set in a grim smile, but Arnold did not devote much time to indignation. The attempts on his life irked him to no little degree, it was true, but his mind was engrossed with other things. Thoughts flew from point to point in his brain; guesses formed, worked themselves out or remained as reckonable possibilities. Certain things adhered together in an as yet intangible train which he voiced to himself.

So Sheldon would regard with suspicion a man who knew that there were seven hundred tusks and that the gold was put up in quills. Arnold wondered about that. And the Greek, Brother Stephen as he styled himself, doesn't think of himself in his own mind as a missionary, but as a man of business, a trader. Again Arnold wondered. Still the hole remained. Where would the man go with the stuff if he got it?

At his camp he inquired about the prisoner. The man had been put into one of the huts and was safe. He would keep till morning. Arnold turned in to get some much needed sleep. He intended to devote the next night—when the juju would talk—to constructive wakefulness.

CHAPTER V

MORNING brought an interview with the prisoner, but it was entirely unsatisfactory from every angle. Arnold had to look at the man's face but once to know

that there was little hope. It was a brutish gorilloid face with wide cheek bones and prognathous jaw. The typical gunman type in the white race. Dull witted enough to be callous nad physically courageous.

He knew nothing. He had been told to go out and do a job, and he had gone accordingly. He was to receive a piece, two and a half yards, of print cloth in payment. He did not hesitate to name the higher up who had given him his orders— a certain Umbale, a native of the village. It meant nothing. Arnold had never hoped that the guiding genius would have been foolish enough to deal with this stupid tool directly.

Arnold was convinced that that was all the man did know. He knew better than to try to extort further information under threat of death. Only the civilized man, educated to dread after life torment, fears death. Primitive man lives in too close contact with sudden death to be terrified by its imminent threat.

"A spear and the bonga," Barounggo suggested.

"Shut up," Arnold quieted his man. "Put the fool back in the hut. Feed him and hold him safe. If he cries out drop sand in his mouth for a lesson. Perhaps later we give him to the *bwana* Inglesi for justice."

Arnold went to the official residence and asked to look at maps. Permission was granted readily enough though with unmistakable suspicion as to motive. Arnold spread an enormous roll out on a table, weighted the corners and pored over it.

What Sheldon had said was true. Except for a little corner of Abyssinia abutting on the lake, the rest was British territory. Miles upon thousands of square miles colored pink. It was true, too, their territories were well administered. Any large safari movement would be reported and quietly checked over at some point by some outlying resident white official. Particularly if the word had gone out that something bulky was being smuggled out.

NO, IT was impossible. Except—Arnold strained his eyes over the map and visualized roads and ways and means. Safaris could not just disappear into the uncharted wilderness; they were confined by certain definite trails by the inexorable circumstances of water holes. Kenya Colony? The sinewy brown finger trailed off hundreds of miles in a wide north-east-south arc. Uganda? Westward clear to the Belgian Congo. All of it quietly, efficiently policed. Up to the northwest there were no water holes at all. The Tappuza wooded country gave way to desert. Four hundred miles of blazing sand and rock and rubble to the mud village of Rejaf on the white Nile. Not a water hole, not a tree, not a blade of grass. An empty, deadly barrier.

Yet—an idea began to grow. Desert. That meant no water. No water meant no rain. No rain meant no steep sided wash-out ravines criss-crossing the country. That meant level, or at most rolling ground; sand dunes. No nourishment for man or beast. But—the idea flashed to a climax. What was four hundred miles to an automobile truck? Had not a French Count Somebody-or-other crossed the Sahara with a train of trucks?

Arnold whistled his tuneless melodies through his teeth and his eyes contracted to almost sightless slits. Was there any hole in that idea? Rejaf? The Nile? Too far up for regular river steamer traffic; but native boats plied up and down all the time with a worthless assortment of up-river trade. Dried mud fish; papyrus reed; pottery. All kinds of junk. Miles of barren, uninhabited stretches above and below the mud town. Many ivory tusks could be loaded into the bilge of a native boat, covered over with any kind of junk and could keep going without question till doomsday. Arnold removed his weights and the map rolled up with a conclusive snap. Well, that filled in that hole. He was ready to bet on question *why*. There still remained *who*?

Arnold went to have tea at the mission.

He talked with the good missionaries about nothing in particular; the gossip of interior Africa. People and tribes and local customs and railroad developments and isolation of distances and safari travel and autos and airplanes. Airplanes would be the salvation of the interior. All agreed to that. As to automobiles which had opened up the rest of the world—the trouble with automobiles, said Brother Stephen, was the prohibitive expense of bridging the wash-out ravines. If it were not for that, there were many makes of cars that would stand the rough going over the veld.

Brother Stephen was able, out of his experiences during his trading days not so long ago, before—with a flashing smile—before his reformation, he was able to name some of these cars and discuss their merits.

Arnold came away mumbling to himself. Brother Stephen had the knowledge. Did he have the nerve?

Away to his left he could hear a steady drumming. He knew the rhythm. It was the notice of a ceremony. It would continue all day, and that night the juju was going to talk. Decidedly, both Barounggo and Kaffa would have to go and hear that talk. He told them so again. They were only too eager. So were the six porters. He gave them all leave to go.

With the beginning of dusk they went. Arnold lounged in indolence until full dark—till no possible watcher could note his movements. Then he too got up with the eagerness of one who contemplated a show. First he went to the prison hut and assured himself that the captive was safe. He then opened one of his safari bundles; one of his secrets that not even his own servants must know. From a cloth roll he took a fat black stick and proceeded to make a black face of himself.

More than once before in his experience he had found that the glow of a white face in the dark was almost as noticeable as the glow of a white shirt front. Arnold was going where a white face would be a swift passport to a particularly horrible death.

THE ghost tree stood alone, a giant wild fig with enormous horizontal limbs and wide, buttressed roots, between some of which one might have pitched a tent. Half of the spreading base had been built up with crooked sticks and thatch to form a witch house. Bones, human skulls, dried monkey mummies, snake skins—all the horrors dear to the African mind hung about in gruesome suggestiveness.

For fifty yards around the tree was a clearing, stamped hard by the pounding of many hundreds of naked feet. The dark clearing was packed just now with naked



shuffling, heaving bodies, all stamping a dull rhythm on the hard ground. A sweaty odor of goat pens eddied in the hot night air over the human mass.

Back of the clearing was a treeless scrub of tangled bush and stunted thorny mimosa. In the scrub Arnold lay on his belly. It was pitch black in the shadow, for which he was properly thankful. This was as near as he dared to come. Arnold had no hallucinations about any sleuth ability to disguise himself so that he could mix in with the crowd. A white man detected in that hysterical mob would be torn apart by clutching blunt fingernails and big white teeth.

From where he crouched Arnold had a clear view of the juju. Halfway up the giant tree was its platform—high enough for the hocus-pokus of manipulation to pass muster. At either corner of the platform a smoky wick in a saucer of oil lighted the awesome idol; a squatting figure carved with all the savage talent for the bizarre; a huge grotesque of jutting angles and vast

opaque shadows. High lights glittered blackly from the knobby, drawn-up knees, from the curve of a great, pot belly, and reflected out of the higher gloom from the outlines of a bushel-basket mouth and glaring eyes. A clever stage effect of a voodoo horror.

The thick arms which hung between the splay feet moved jerkily. The heavy jaw chattered on a hinge like a ventriloquist's dummy. For a space the thing confined itself to these antics while the crowd below shuffled and milled in suspense.

An overwrought savage, nerves taxed beyond endurance by the awe-inspiring suspense, screamed a high pitched hyena laugh, slaving through blubber lips, and fell to the ground. He writhed unnoticed. His howlings were smothered out in horrid gurglings under hard feet. The mob moaned in minor keys and closed over him. He screamed once more and was silent. Shoulders heaved; heads tossed like cattle before the break of thunder; eyeballs glared white like those of the juju.

Arnold crouched in his shadow, tense. He knew the danger of Africa in that temper. This was more than he had come prepared to see.

The looming idol tired of its chatterings and its jerkings. It yawned cavernously to show inset bones for teeth, each as large as dollar pieces. The packed crowd shivered. The thing was going to speak.

THE jaws clicked woodenly. A hollow megaphonic voice issued. Arnold could make out most of its mumblings. The Tappuza dialect was an offshoot of the Masai with a sprinkling of Kiswahili. The message was meat for the attendant congregation. It flattered their strength. It praised their courage. It promised them wealth, and above all indolence. There would be nothing to do except sit in the shade of their huts and eat. And soon, soon, *soon*, would all these good things be forthcoming. Tomorrow it would eat offerings—Arnold grinned grimly at the in-

evitable priesthood—and soon would come the sign.

Africans do not cheer. The crowd seethed and its grunts of ejaculation rolled back and forth like summer thunder. Arnold was grave. This matter was closer to bloody riot than even he had guessed. The juju's trick was most dramatically impressive. Its great jaws opened once more and commenced on another harangue on the wrongs of the black man. Arnold listened, and wonder dawned upon him. He thanked his various heathen gods that he had come. Never would Barounggo and Kaffa have been able to report the important essence of this speech. His suspicions crystallized. This talk made everything clear; everything possible—and infinitely more dangerous.

The voice that mumbled from above was an unmistakable African voice; but the claptrap that it dispensed was pure Bolshevism. The African in himself has no inherent sense of his wrongs; he has not evolved to that state. If he is starved, and if he is beaten and robbed, he resents it with dull apathy. If the starving and beating and robbing reach a point beyond human endurance he will rise in a howling mob and will rend and slaughter everything within his reach.

He will rise and slaughter for other causes, too. But of his own volition, never because some intangible authority claims to own the land upon which he lives, which his fathers reclaimed from the jungle; nor because he has to pay a tax to that intangible authority for the privilege of growing yams upon his own land.

The primitive African is not convinced that he is an oppressed proletariat. But if he is told that he is; if he is told it carefully, in words of one syllable; and told often; and told the same thing again; and with all the force of awesome skullduggery to back up that telling—then the possibilities of the primitive African are devastating. No witch doctor could think those thoughts. They would be beyond his ken. But any African spellbinder could put those

thoughts across to the herd if some more sophisticated intelligence, which knew how potent such rhetoric was to inflame the primitive mind, would coach him along.

Arnold's lips framed to a soundless whistle. The intelligence behind this cunning propaganda—the same intelligence that had guided three attacks upon his own life—was indubitably a white man, or men. It was white intelligence that could see a huge profit in all that ivory and gold if it could dash the jubilant local chief a present and make a getaway—maybe by automobile—across the otherwise impassable desert.

ARNOLD'S blood chilled. So that was the seed of that plot. A perfect plan, carried out with devilish cleverness. Inexorable in its progress, and certain, from present indications, of success. The little white community that would be obliterated by the first wave of that mad orgy sat helpless. What if he should tell the government authority all that he knew and all that he suspected? What if the authority believed every word of it? Authority sat with empty hands, with a black sergeant and six soldiers against who could tell how many fairly modern guns? What could it do? Apprehend the guiding spirit? Who was the guiding spirit? If, acting in desperation upon suspicion it should succeed in arresting the evil genius, had not the deluge already gained sufficient momentum to carry it blindly forward? Authority could watch it come; but lacked sufficient force to stem it.

Authority could also run away. But Arnold laughed silently. The same tradition that made authority wear a boiled shirt for dinner in the wilderness would make it stick through hopeless odds and against all reason to the end. His night prowling had given him much to make him very serious indeed. So he laughed again out of a crooked mouth.

Suddenly he stiffened. His never dormant hunter's instinct made him aware of a presence near him. Something breathed

in the black shadows, softly, cautiously. It was not an animal; he knew that at once. This was no sniff-sniff-snuffle of any beast. It was the slow, careful exhalation of a human under the exertion of moving in dead silence.

Arnold cursed himself for a fool. Not because he was there, but because he must have in his absorption, in craning for a better view, made some noise to have betrayed his presence. Some sharp eared savage must have detected something in the bush and was crawling to investigate. Some unusually nervy fellow to go prowling about in the outer dark when magic was afoot.

He had been through too many violent experiences to have any hallucinations about any sort of certitude in the matter of a fight. It was only in the motion pictures that the intrepid hero could be sure of seizing an adversary and choking him into instant silence. That silence was desperately necessary to Arnold. A single cry, a scuffle, and that hysterical mob only a few feet in front of him would hurl itself, screaming and fighting one another, to lay clawing hands upon the intruder who had dared to spy upon their black mysteries.

ARNOLD had seen a dog once torn into little pieces of rag by the infuriated males of a troupe of rock baboons. He had no foolish shame of flight. He rolled softly over from his stomach, and over again. His legs felt the prick of a thorny stem. Carefully he drew them up and clear and rolled again. He listened. In the clearing the crowd still shuffled and murmured. From where he had just been his straining ears fancied they detected the click of a breaking twig.

He was on his knees now. How he thanked his stars for those days in his youth when he had played Indian with real Indian boys from the reservation and had labored so earnestly to vie with them in stalking the hostile brave. He had to feel his way, reaching with cautious hands to locate bush and overhanging branch and to sweep

dry twigs from his path. For a moment he thought he had lost his skulking follower. Then a soft scrape of thorn upon cloth came to him.

He wriggled under a bush, breathing hard. Curse his foolishness in getting in such a trap! The man was good. Arnold himself was far from a clumsy stalker, but this fellow managed to keep right on the trail. Could he smell him? Arnold wondered uneasily. He had heard many natives claim that a white man's smell was strong and unmistakable. Was this fellow following him by scent? Arnold rolled with drawn knees through another opening—and stopped in the middle of the turn.

To his left, farther away, sounded another swishing of disturbed foliage. Was the bush full of silent stalkers in the dark? And why so blood chillingly silent? Why didn't they yell an alarm and call the howling pack? But this was no time for questions. Arnold scrambled hurriedly in a right angle direction. His hand came down hard on a two-inch mimosa thorn which immediately pierced clear through the heel of his thumb. His tortured nerve responses forced a hissing intake of breath. He lurched on through the passage into an apparently more open place—and the presence was there.

It breathed heavily. Soft pats indicated a groping hand. Something touched his boot. He snatched his foot away. Leaves rustled above; a straining grunt; a swish; and a soft chuck in the ground where his foot had been.

ARNOLD scuttled desperately from there; he didn't know where. The noise he made seemed to him appalling. There was no mistaking those sounds. He might almost have seen the action in broad daylight. That had been the vicious stroke of a knife. Limping on two knees and a hand, Arnold contrived with his teeth to get a hold on the broken end of the thorn. Its drawing out seared like a hot needle. A tangle of thorn barred his progress. He wormed to the left of it. A

bristly stem radiated low hanging arms. Farther to the left. More thorns. Arnold was in a cul-de-sac. Beyond him sounded the rustle and crackle of the other stalker. This fellow was not so skillful. Behind him came the stealthy crawl of the expert with the knife. It was a trap.

Arnold was unarmed, to all intents and purposes. He had his automatic, of course, in his belt holster. But as well as use that he might stand up and shout his presence. The only weapon to this situation was a piece of lead pipe.

He reached out a cautious hand and groped the ground for a stone. Something to give weight to an empty hand. In this hope his luck was with him. His groping fingers closed on a large oval that fitted nicely to the hand. Arnold crouched on knee and one hand and waited.

Before him, skyward, the far glow of the juju's footlights showed blurry patches of foliage in silhouette. Around him the shadows were black. The very blackness took form and swelled and shrank and shifted. It was hopeless to try to discern anything there. Arnold's heart thumped and he took long inhalations to still its pounding. Stillness was the most difficult thing in his life.

Suddenly out of the black a hand pawed his face. Arnold, shaken from his nervous tension, nearly yelled. In the next second the other would yell his discovery. A faint odor clung to the hand; not of goat, not of sweat, not of plain African dirt—but of sandalwood perfume!

All that came to Arnold out of that startling discovery was the flash that it explained why a knife and not a spear. He visualized the knife again, heaved up for the instant stroke, and not, this time, at where a boot had been. The issue depended upon swiftness of decision. Upon which of the two would recover first from the momentary shock of actual contact. Arnold judged his distance and direction, heaved his shoulder and swung his long arm over with all his might. There was a hard thud as the stone struck; a stab of excruciating

pain where an overreaching fingernail had impacted. A soft, knuckly sound of subsidence.

Out in front the juju mumbled gutturally. The crowd shifted and stamped. This thing had been as silent as the best talking picture could have wished. To the left sounded the scuffling of the other, less skillful, stalker, clearly in a tangle himself. Arnold began his precarious retreat from the trap into which he had crawled. A certain elation filled him. He had discovered much. The exhilaration of having got out of a desperate trap was with him. The other clumsy stalker worried him not at all. He left him fumbling in the dark and felt his own way out from the so nearly fatal scrub.

CHAPTER VI

ARNOLD sat in his tent, without light, thinking. So it was established that the directing intelligence behind all this trouble was white. A knife and sandalwood perfume were not native attributes. That explained, too, why the stalker had not settled the issue by simply giving the alarm. However friendly with a more intelligent chief or witch doctor whom he directed



from behind the scenes, he would be, as a white man, just as forbidden as Arnold himself to a voodoo ceremony of the herd. Too, the herd, should it be known that a white man was directing operations, would with natural suspicion be less amenable to the spellbindings of their leaders.

The man was a cunning devil, whoever he, or they, were. He overlooked nothing.

Arnold supposed that he had hidden himself in the scrub to overhear whether his lessons were being put across properly and to supplement omissions in future lectures. Clever. Not a mistake anywhere, except—Arnold scowled into the dark—except the mistake of starting hostilities against him. Three times. Three attempts on his life. Somebody was going to pay damages for that.

If—there was always that terrible if—the trouble did not break before Arnold could, or the assistant commissioner could, or somehow somebody could do something! The situation was very near its climax. The directing genius would never have been so foolish as to announce a practical declaration of war unless he knew for certain that no reinforcements would suddenly arrive out of the south to spoil his plans. All that was needed now was the last straw; the final match. One good manifestation of the juju—some spectacular miracle—and the blue flame that glowed just beneath the dark crust of banked fuel would blaze out in an orgy of destruction. Let almost any little excitement start, and that insensate herd would stampede to the kill. To stab and thrust and mutilate long after the last white man had been killed. That was the history of Africa.

The situation was bad. There was no bright ray of hope in the immediate future either. Well, anyway—Arnold was able to bark a short laugh—there was one crafty plotter, who, just about then, would be carrying a horribly sore head in a sling. He would remember that for awhile.

Arnold's men came home jabbering in awestruck tones about the wonder they had witnessed. He sat still and said nothing. His mind was occupied. Once, long after the men's chatter had died down, he got up, fumbled among his duffel, carefully made up a package in wrappings of trade cloth, and returned to this thinking. It was a slim chance, he knew, but the only one. If only Father van Dahl would coöperate.

With earliest morning he went to visit the mission. He knew that missionaries

got up at an appallingly early hour. Father van Dahl met him, frail, quiet, smiling a welcome through tired eyes.

"So early, my friend? It is nothing of seriousness I hope."

Arnold was forced to smile in return to the greeting, but the smile quickly left his face. "Pretty bad, Padre. I've come to make medicine. I took in the juju show last night."

"So? That was no doubt difficult—even for Arnold *bwana*, no? Myself, I have never seen this; nor any other white man."

ARNOLD smiled wryly. "Hm! Don't be too sure, Padre. Your—er—are your people up yet?"

"Oh, yes; certainly, yes. Even Brother Stephen." The priest smiled indulgently. "Though he finds it not so easy as yet. He has been not long with us, and our devotions, yes, they come earlier than those of one who has been in the trade world."

Arnold's eyebrows flickered wide. He had somehow expected after the previous night's encounter in the bush that Stephen would be—but he wasn't exactly sure what he expected. Why should he have connected Stephen with anything at all?

Just at that moment Brother Stephen appeared. He was passing the door, full of health, without a care in the world. He flashed his ready smile, bustled in, shook hands and remarked cheerily on the early hour. Immediately, then, he bustled out murmuring something about morning duties.

Arnold was nonplussed. He had been building a theory upon a suspicion which he thought had been clinched the night before. Had it been correct, Stephen would have been a sick man this morning, a very sick man.

Father van Dahl was talking with fond benevolence. "He is a great comfort, Brother Stephen. He has a way most wonderful with the natives. His great experience as a trader—yes, it was a firm making much money; Stephanopoulos and

Righas. Perhaps you have known the name, yes? Already we consider him one of us, though he is not really a lay brother as yet; but the name pleases him, and he is a great help."

Arnold's brows contracted. "Righas," he muttered. "Righas. No, I don't know the name. They didn't operate in Kenya anywhere."

The priest shook his head. "No, not in Kenya. In Egypt and the Sudan. They were well known and were making much money—and he has given it all up for our work."

Arnold looked ahead blankly. The Sudan. That resumed a persistent train of thought. But he had come on a more important errand than blank speculations. He told the priest all that he had witnessed; the impressive performance of the juju; the temper of the crowd.

Father van Dahl was very grave. He nodded with understanding. "Yes, yes, that is bad. That is very bad. I did not know. I hoped— Yes, at any time now it may come. My poor people."

Arnold spoke swiftly, trying to put conviction into an argument that he knew was hopeless. "But there is still time, Padre. You're not tied down. You're not a government official glued to his job. You can get out. Grab your valuables and go. You haven't much to carry and enough of your converts remain to act as porters."

The priest smiled slowly, nodding. "Yes, yes, you are a man of the world; you do not understand. You can go while you have the opportunity. But I—have I not also my duties? More even than Mr. Sheldon. My people, who for the moment have been misled——"

ARNOLD was impatient. "But, Padre, have some sense. In a couple of months it'll be all over. You can come back and——"

The priest interrupted in turn. "In a couple of months? In one day, my son, my people will have lost their confidence in their pastor. My hundred whom I have

so slowly won. Shall the shepherd desert his flock?"

Arnold swore and made no attempt to apologize. He had known it would be so. Let battle and murder and sudden death come or let it pass, the priest was just as much an inexorable fixture as was the government official. That, too, had been written into the history of Africa.

Father van Dahl laid a thin brown hand on Arnold's knee. "And you, my friend. I do not perceive you making preparations to go, is it not?"

Arnold swore again. "Padre, there's just one chance—a slim chance, if I get all the breaks. And since your damned hundred nigger men whom you've taught to grow bigger and better bananas than the rest of the savages are more important than your life I'm going to take my hat off to you and I'm going to take the chance." He came closer.

"Now, listen. Wasn't there some prophet in the Old Testament once whose people were sliding out on him in favor of an idol that pulled magic stuff? Baal, wasn't it? And the prophet called miraculous fire from heaven and burned the juju up along with a batch of priests and so cut the sticks from under the opposition's prestige and won his crowd back?"

Father van Dahl perked his head in bird-like query. He could as yet see no analogy. Arnold continued with totally unconscious lack of reverence.

"Well, now; you give out that you're going to do a miracle and set a magic fire to this idol; and if my luck works, your people'll come crowding back on you so fast——"

The priest held up his hand. "My son, my son, do not blaspheme."

Arnold jumped up. He had never any patience with matters of sentiments unpractical. "Gosh almighty!" he stormed. "How can I get you to have some sense and understand? It'd take all day—and then you'd have some inhibition about it. Listen, Padre, I've got no time to argue. Things are buzzing right along in these

backwoods. I'm going out to take a long chance; and I'm going to prophesy the miracle for you. If it works you win—we'll all win and save our scalps. If it flops you'll be past worrying."

He stamped out without waiting for further reply.

IN ARNOLD'S camp the boys waited expectantly; children anxious to relate all the wonders of the show they had seen. Arnold sat on a camp stool and listened with exaggerated boredom. Not the most spectacular of the marvels moved him, even embroidered by African imagination. He flouted the super-juju powers of the idol.

"That is not such a great witchcraft. I have seen many better," he told them. "This is but a little jungle juju. Thus does it move its arms, its foolish mouth, and the words that it talks are winds." Arnold imitated the spasmodic antics of the thing and its megaphonic voice.

"Aho! *Wo-we!*" The boys were impressed. How did the white *bwana* who could not have seen know these things?

"I had heard much talk of this toy and it wearied me. I slept and sent my spirit to look while I rested."

"Arra-wa!" Yes, that might well be true. The greater of the witch doctors could do this thing, and the white *bwana* surely had this magic too.

Barounggo stood up. He had a speech to make and he required space for action. "If this is but a little witchcraft, *bwana*, then it is well. For that Black One of the Ghost tree—" Arnold noted that even the Masai hesitated to name the thing—"the Black One makes an ill talk; a talk of the slaying of all the white men in the land. Now it is my mind that we in this party could make a proper fight. We three alone, for these porters all will run as do the dogs when the lion speaks——"

Arnold could not but admire the loyal fellow's cheerful insult of the porters and their meek acceptance of it. The Masai gave himself over to declamation.

"A very proper fight. Or perchance in the wire stockade of the village, a better fight. These soldiers of the Raifuls are true men as I have spoken with them. Yet these Tappuza dogs are many and in the end their spears will be red. Therefore, *bwana*, if the Black One is not so strong as he says——"

Arnold yawned carelessly. "It is nothing. It is a small matter. For us it has no interest. But I have told the white priest of these babblings and he has said it is enough! I have given him a small witchcraft and he will burn up this little juju with magic fire. Tomorrow, perhaps; maybe today. It is nothing."

"*Aho?* A magic fire?"

The men were awesomely impressed. It was sufficient. Arnold knew that this planted seed of a counter magic to the Black One would sprout and spread throughout the community faster than the civilized magic of the telephone.

Kaffa, the little Hottentot, had a word to say. He squirmed uneasily making his request. "That is good. The white priest will make a magic and the Black One will burn up and die. *Bwana* has said so and it is without doubt true. Yet——" he writhed in his abashment—"suppose that the white man does not work his magic right; suppose that the Black One does not die. An offering, a small gift—today he eats offerings—a gift today might well be counted in our favor when trouble comes."

ARNOLD chuckled. It flashed upon him that maybe his luck was beginning to work. At the same time the everlasting adherence to type of the African held his attention. On the one side the Masai, the fighting man, loyal to the death, facing the imminent danger with a fierce nonchalance. On the other the Hottentot, the bush dweller, loyal, too; but as cunningly full of caution as a monkey. Maybe this caution was playing right into Arnold's hands.

"What is the manner of this eating of offerings?" he asked.

"It is a strong witchcraft, *bwana*. Those who give place their gifts upon a flat basket. In full daylight then a servant of the Black One ascends a ladder of bamboo with the basket, at no time touching the gifts, and places the basket before the Black One's feet. The servant retires and the Black One takes up the gifts in his own hands and eats them up. It is a great magic."

Arnold laughed outright. He quoted in English a familiar patter: "Nothing in my hands, gentlemen; nothing up my sleeve; at no time, you will perceive, do I touch the card—Gosh, what children! But it works, it works every time!"

Kaffa was emboldened by the laugh. "Therefore, *bwana*," he pleaded, "I would ask an advance against my payment. A piece of cloth; a small gift, *bwana*. On behalf of these porters, too."

Arnold held himself to pose in judicial contemplation, controlling his impulse to whoop. Then he announced in a matter of fact tone, "Good. I will give you a piece of cloth. But it is a waste, for the white priest's magic will surely burn up this little jungle juju this very day."

He went into his tent and there he pounded his fist into the other palm. His luck was running strong! He had been racking his brain to think of a means to introduce his miracle plan to the juju, and here it came to his hand. He took the little packet he had made overnight and unwrapped it.

TWO sticks would be enough, he felt sure, though the detonators would stand some doctoring. He proceeded to doctor accordingly and his tuneless whistle broke out. His plan was simple, as simple as are most great strategies. He knew from his youthful experience of July fourth that torpedoes were a lot cheaper to make than to buy. A pinch of fulminate and little fine gravel wrapped in a paper ball provided the most delightful material to explode at other boys' heels

CHAPTER VII

and to send girls screaming down the street.

With a certain cynicism he translated all his percussion cartridges into giant torpedoes. He began to feel that he had an almost foolproof miracle. The juju, he reasoned, from his observation of its movements, whether actuated by strings or by internal levers or whatever it might be, would pick up these offerings and would drop them through its cavernous mouth into its hollow interior. The figure squatted at least five feet high. Arnold knew from experience that a drop of less than that was ample to detonate a fulminate bomb. With a dozen oversize bombs and two sticks of dynamite surely something ought to happen. At about four o'clock that very afternoon, then, the predicted miracle might be counted upon to disintegrate the juju's death laden prestige into a great many very little pieces of hardwood.

Arnold chuckled. He would have to witness that miracle. He wrapped his sur-



prise packet carefully in a gaudy strip of trade calico, tied it with string carefully against monkey meddling, and came out from his tent.

"Here is your gift," he told the Hottentot. "A good gift. This order only do I place upon you. Carry it with care. Do not drop it, on your life. Place it softly in the gift basket. And return and report to me that it is done. Later you may all go and watch the eating."

The Hottentot took the package gingerly. Already it was becoming imbued with the sacredness of sacrosanct property. Arnold turned in to snatch some sleep.

WITH early afternoon he gave his men leave to go and watch the eating of the offerings. As soon as they were well out of the way he took his field glasses and set out himself. He was going to watch this show too, if from a distance. His way took him past the government compound. He had not intended to stop in, but a soldier ran after him. The assistant commissioner wanted to see him. Arnold found Sheldon in a condition of bewilderment, and in that predicament was much more cordial than before. Something had happened that had given him a considerable measure of respect for Arnold's judgment. Sheldon came to the point without preamble.

"Mr. Arnold, a very extraordinary thing has happened. I am taking you into my confidence because—er—you seem to know a great deal of what is going on. A man was picked up this noon in the bush in front of this juju thing. The natives would not touch him—some nonsense about witchcraft. My men brought him in—a white man."

Arnold's eyes flickered. He held his surprise with an effort. He had not expected this. "So? A white man, eh? He was —"

Sheldon nodded. "Yes, dead. Killed by a blow with a club. There's the usual secrecy of course. Nobody knows anything about him; never heard of him; and everybody is ox dumb. And as for me, I didn't even know that any strange white man was in the district. Where could he appear from? What could he be doing?"

Arnold frowned into space without answering. So the man who had stalked him in the bush was dead. At mention of the man having been killed with a club he impulsively squeezed his blackened middle fingernail into the palm of his hand and winced with the pain. He had hardly expected that. At most he thought the man would have a very sore head.

But even that was not exactly what was

occupying Arnold's mind. What he was cogitating was whether the death of one guiding genius would undermine the trouble at its source. Was there only one? Who had been the man in the bush with him at night? Native? White man? Partner, possibly in the great plot. It was a big thing for a single man to tackle. If only he had captured the man alive! He was a white man, not an African. He could have been made to talk.

At any event there was definite proof now of some of his theories. With a certain triumph he turned to Sheldon. "Well, doesn't that begin to fit into what you called my fantastic theory about a guiding genius behind this trouble?"

Sheldon nodded dumbly. "It does. I admit it. Otherwise why did the fellow not come up straightforwardly and report his presence? In fact, I don't know from where any white man could have come through without some report coming to me."

ARNOLD smiled thinly. He thought, if the rest of his theories were correct, that he could guess from where a white man—who had perhaps a sturdy automobile—could come without passing through a populous and well patrolled country. Sheldon was asking another embarrassing question. The law training essential to his studies for his appointment had rendered him adept in picking the holes in any situation.

"All the same, Mr. Arnold, if this man were, as you suggest, the guiding genius of this unrest, he would be obviously *persona grata* with the natives. Who, then, would kill him?"

Arnold did not feel that he could enter into explanations and delays. Time was passing. During the last minute conviction had come upon him about more than one of his cogitations. The death of one man, one wheel in the carefully built machine, would not stop the progress of its function. Not at this stage. It had gained too much momentum. There remained at least one

other wheel which, to insure its own safety, must now carry on. And there remained the juju, potent power of hysteria and latent slaughter. He turned the subject.

"Any source of identification, Mr. Sheldon? Name, business, where from?"

Sheldon made a wry face. "Not yet. I dislike that sort of thing myself. My men are looking him over in routine form."

"Well, I'll look in later," Arnold said. "I've got to hop along and see the Reverend van Dahl's miracle do its stuff."

Sheldon raised his eyebrows in interrogation, but Arnold was gone. He was aiming for a scrubby little knoll which he had noted before as being suitable for his purpose. From it a clear view of the ghost tree could be obtained and it was there that he proposed to plant himself with his glasses. The small delay at the government office had not made him too late. At all events he had heard no explosion, so he would be, he hoped, in time for the performance.

HE WAS. Arnold selected with instinctive habit a bush which screened him from casual observation. Under it he stretched himself luxuriously on his stomach and took his glasses from their leather case. Far away from the direction of the ghost tree the confused, sublimated thunder of drums sounded. This was no call to a function, to hear a speech. This was just noise; fiesta, sideshow about to commence. Arnold grinned in anticipation.

They were going to be seeing a bigger show than their tickets entitled them to, he reflected, his grin broadening. It wasn't every day that these frisky natives could see a white man's miracle.

He wiped the lenses of his field glasses and leisurely adjusted focus. It was one of the newest Zeiss eight-power hunting glasses; the kind that showed the approximate range of the focused object. Instinctive habit once again made him note it. Between seven and eight hundred yards. Well, that was plenty near enough to see everything that went on.

Arnold could see the ebony figure clearly; its inset shell eyes; its thick jointed arms; even the white tips of the big teeth between loose sagging lips. The drumming boomed distant thunder and faded out to nothing as the hot breeze eddied about. It rose to a crescendo and mingled with a sudden volume of far shouting. Something was going to happen. Either the servant of the Black One was about to climb up the ladder with the basket, or, if that had been done, the magic performance of eating was about to commence. Then Arnold noted that no ladder stood against the platform. He grinned again—cunning precaution that no overwrought worshipper should climb up to present himself as a juggernaut offering and so discover the hoax.

The thing would soon move then. And it did. A furious howling came on the wind and the juju's jaws chattered in anticipation. Arnold was keenly interested in the mechanism. Elbows firm on the ground, he held the glasses motionless.

The thick right arm moved. With a slow clumsy motion the thing groped at the basket between its feet. It seemed that the thumb worked on a hinge against the rest of the hand; a sort of lobster claw movement. Presently the claw found a hold on a small bundle. Stiffly the arm heaved up; the jaws fell open; the bundle hung between the big teeth, then was sucked down. The jaws champed wooden appreciation.

Arnold was troubled. From the nature of the movement he guessed that the mechanism was man. A man within the hollow figure worked a hollow arm and then, when the offering was between the jaws, just took it in. The poor devil! He couldn't know what he was in for.

But Arnold was consistently practical. Better, a hundred times better, the immolation of one malignantly scheming savage—or for that matter, of a dozen men—than the rebellion of a whole tribe that would mean a slaughter and its aftermath of blood in the reestablishment of control.

He watched each offering in turn lifted clumsily to the gaping mouth and disappear. With each gaudy packet he tensed. Would it come? Would a sudden explosion tear the sky? Or, since quite obviously the man inside took each bundle in his hand and presumably laid it down, would he jar it sufficiently to set spark to any one of the fulminate torpedoes?

For a long dragging hour the thing ate with gusto. Nothing happened; it remained full of health and horrid appetite. The last of the offerings disappeared. The crowd howled; the drums roared. The miracle of eating had been accomplished. No counter miracle as threatened by the white priest had occurred.

Arnold hovered for a moment on the verge of panic. His fool proof plan had failed. Nothing stood in the way of revolution. One white man was dead; but he was surely not working single handed on so ambitious a scheme. His associates, so near to success, would carry the blooded business through. Everything was ready. The very threat of the priest's counter miracle, by its failure, would enhance the prestige of the juju and raise the courage of the natives to a howling frenzy.

ARNOLD bit his teeth together until they hurt and forced himself to calm thought. What would happen now? What would be the next step? The juju man would obviously have to remain in hiding till dark. Then he could slip out. Arnold thought that the ebony figure stood close enough to the tree to enable an undetected retreat. It must be; the trick could never be worked otherwise. But the packages? The offerings? Would they be smuggled out at the earliest opportunity so that the greedy witch doctor could look over what he had drawn; or would they remain till a more favorable time?

There was one chance—only one chance left.

Arnold crawled from his shelter and sprinted through the bush for the home camp. Then as he ran and his thoughts

raced ahead he slowed down. After all, the thin chance that remained depended upon the lighting of the footlight lamps on the juju platform. There was to be another speech that night. Possibly the last one; who could tell? The carefully planted rumor about the white man's counter miracle might be the last straw, the match that the blaze of riot awaited.

Still, there was a dim gleam of hope in the forthcoming speech. The crowd would begin to gather early, before darkness set in, and the opportunity for the magician to remove the day's loot from the belly of the idol would be unfavorable. The explosive packet might well remain there for a while. In that hope lay his one chance. Arnold decided that he would have time to stop in at the government compound to urge Sheldon to be prepared for anything and to make arrangements, if necessary, to bring the missionaries in by force.

Sheldon thanked him coldly for advice that was neither asked nor needed. Everything for defense had been done as far as might be. But Sheldon had one item of information. The search of the dead man's clothing had revealed the fact that his name was Theophilus Righas.

Arnold stiffened. His eyes narrowed to the characteristic slits and in spite of his anxiety, the thin grin seamed his cheeks.

"So? Righas, eh?" That fitted exactly into his guessed theories. That was the last crooked key piece to the puzzle. With assumed carelessness he asked, "Ever hear of the firm of Stephanopoulos and Righas?"

THE names conveyed nothing to Sheldon, though Arnold's tone told him that something ought to connect somewhere.

"M-m, no," Sheldon said. "They didn't operate anywhere in Kenya or Uganda—wait a minute, though. There's something about—" he turned a key in a confidential steel file case and flipped over the cards. "Yes, here's a report that a firm of that name bought a hundred rifles from Daniel Leroux and Company in Port Said a year

ago, but we can't control those sales, you know."

"In Port Said?" Arnold echoed. "And from Port Said up the Nile to the extreme limit of the Sudan and to your borders; how about that?"

Sheldon considered for a moment. "It could be done," he said. "That is to say, except for that strip of desert."

Arnold went on. "Then if this Righas who bought a hundred guns in Port Said got bumped off in Tappuza district where somebody has sold guns to the natives, somebody did a pretty good job, no?"

Sheldon was aghast at the untold treacheries that this train of reasoning opened up. Indignation and disgust shook him



like a fever. "The scoundrel received no more than his just desserts," he exploded. "Why, what a foul thing!"

Arnold was not listening to any confirmation of what he knew. Another confirmation outweighed everything else. There *was* another partner then. Equally cunning; equally callous; who must now push the thing to its desperate climax. Perhaps the more cunning of the two. He had certainly played a bold and brilliant part. Possibly the brains of the outfit.

THIS was no time to dally. Unceremoniously Arnold left the still raging assistant commissioner and ran. Straight to his camp he went. Only Barounggo squatted in the compound. The rest of the boys had gone; scuttled off without leave to see the juju show again. To Barounggo Arnold gave permission to run off and

join the others. He was eager enough, but waited to say a word.

"This is an ill talk that will be this night, *bwana*. It has been said—all men have heard it—that the Black One will give word for a war."

Arnold forced himself with an effort to nonchalance. It was the white man's creed in Africa never to show anything but confidence before a native.

"There will be no war, Barounggo. The magic of the white priest will burn up this jungle juju with a great noise and fire this very night while it makes its monkey chattering. Go and watch it. And tell all men that it will happen."

Barounggo was impressed with his master's power. He lifted his great spear in salute and departed.

Arnold looked after his broad shoulders melting into the dusk and his face twisted in a wry grin. He wished he could be one tenth part as confident as he had bluffed. A chance there was that he might avert disaster; but the chance was a thin one.

It was his rifle that he had come home to fetch. Very soberly he took it, flipped its sling over his shoulder with familiar certainty, and started out. His objective was his observation post of the afternoon; the mound from which he had obtained a clear view of the juju; the knoll between seven and eight hundred yards distant. Nearly half a mile.

It was dark by the time he arrived. He sat down and set slowly to kicking heel holes at the exact places for a comfortable rest. He had never been able to accustom himself to the Army sharpshooter's prone position. The sitting rest for him every time.

The distant drone of voices came to him from the ghost tree, but the lamps had not been lighted yet. With methodical habit he wiped off the sights. By meticulous feel and by ear he turned the little micrometer screw and clicked off the required elevation.

Between seven and eight hundred yards.

Well, that was easy enough, and no guesswork. All he had to do was to count the clicks correctly; the elevation rule was absolute. A certain glow of contentment began to come over him as he worked. This was something he knew. He commenced to thrill to the test of his skill, of the surety of his hand and eye and nerve. His thin whistle broke from between his teeth.

Eight hundred yards call it. There was nothing to be alarmed in that. If an Army marksman could be expected to hit a bull's-eye at that distance and even greater, surely the squat juju was a mark large enough; and it would be nicely centered between two lights.

THAT was one little worry, too. Suppose the lights were not set in the regular positions? To an African a foot or so one way or the other would make no difference. But the main cause for anxiety was the conjecture whether the offerings had been removed from the belly of the juju or not. If, by God's grace and good luck, not, well, a bullet carefully planted anywhere near the middle of that bulk would jar that fulminate off like a bolt from heaven.

And since the dynamite would explode upward none of his men would be hurt. Arnold didn't want to hurt any of those poor fools unless it were necessary. Nobody would be hurt, unless perhaps a chunk of falling juju should hit somebody on the head. Arnold whistled some more. From his pocket he took a little bottle of radium paint and spotted a careful bead on his front sight. He squinted through the peep at it. Good, it was not too big.

Wind? Wind was in his face and therefore negligible. Perhaps one point of elevation. Click. He was ready. The issue depended upon his luck. Arnold began to feel confident. His luck had been running with him. Surely it would continue.

A point of light began to crawl fitfully up the wall of distant blackness. A swelling hum came downwind. Arnold shuffled his heels into secure position. The point

of light mounted interminably; it moved horizontally; became two lights; moved again; became three lights. The swelling hum became breakers on a rocky shore. The first light descended and left the two horizontal ones.

ARNOLD tried his glasses. Just dimly, he thought, he could see the ebony bulk between its illumination. It looked to be middle. Good. Luck had held that far. Arnold felt that he was not asking too much of the wayward goddess in hoping that the offerings had not been removed from the juju's belly. On the contrary, it would have been difficult for anybody to remove them between the eating and the after-dinner speech. That was all that Arnold asked. If his bomb were there he would hit it, or near enough to it.

Distance worried him not at all. Darkness troubled him hardly any more. Only one question caused him anxiety. Exactly where was the inner floor of that juju? Where did the offerings lie? The thing was a squatting figure some three feet wide. Its inner hollow would be, say twenty-four inches. Since it was about five feet high and since a man had crouched within it, it was reasonable to assume, Arnold hoped desperately, that it was bottomless. The carving, the hollowing out, would naturally have been done from that end. The open shell, therefore, probably stood upon the platform itself.

If that were so he would have to shoot middle and about six inches up. If he missed—well, he wouldn't miss the target—but if his bullet did not smash through near enough to his bomb to set it off he could shoot again. A one hundred and eighty grain bullet arriving into that assorted mess of hardware—even with a few packages of cloth—would disrupt things quite considerably. It was just a matter of his luck how many times he would have to shoot.

At that distance with wind against him, and the crowd howling, nobody would be likely to hear anything. And if one did,

what matter? It would be no more than a foolish stranger shooting at a hyena or something in the dark. If his first shot struck right nobody would hear anything because a high velocity bullet arrived at eight hundred yards quicker than sound, and the explosion would occupy everybody's attention for quite the next few days.

ARNOLD snuggled his cheek down to the stock and held his breath. This was to be the supreme test of his skill, of his judgment, of his luck. He was cool and unhurried. Evenly he pressed on the trigger. He felt the final small resistance, steadied to the last little fraction of immobility, and pressed it home. Instantly with the shot, stock on shoulder, his right hand shot up to the bolt, slammed it out, in again, ready for the next shot.

But before that lightning maneuver was one half accomplished a yellow glare split the sky before him. It winked once like an enormous eye and closed down on empty blackness. A roar hurtled downwind in a furious hurry and was gone. And after the roar came a prolonged yow-wow of shrill yelpings—the cry of Africa in its terror.

Arnold whooped once and let the remainder of his pent breath escape in a long hiss. He wiped his forehead. His immobility had vanished. He found a tremor shaking his whole body, and at the realization a dry laugh croaked from his throat. Then he scrambled to his feet in a panic and raced to the home camp. It behooved him to be innocently within his tent when his men arrived with the portentous news.

He found the camp silent. He went into his tent to await the boys. Suddenly he remembered. In one of the huts the native killer was still a captive. Arnold flashed a match in the man's startled face and looked him over. He was securely tied to the hut's centerpost. With his hunting knife, Arnold cut the cords.

The man couldn't do any damage now. Arnold held him by the back of the neck and pointed him toward the door. He

kicked the man hard, and like a thankful rabbit, the fellow bolted. Arnold chased him across the compound and then the night swallowed the man.

Arnold lay on his cot and laughed. Reaction from the nervous tension and the exhilaration of success were upon him. His luck had held good—he attributed it all to his luck. The consummation of the white priest's miracle would thoroughly cow the natives—must already have. The effect would be instantaneous. Not the most unscrupulous scoundrels would stir this tribe up again as long as the memory of that wonder lived.

ARNOLD was forced almost to admiration. Clever devils, those two. That had been a slick scheme to take cover under the mission and work right under the eye of the administration. An almost perfect plot the pair had hatched. If they hadn't overreached themselves in their anxiety and tried so hard to get him disposed of he might never have come to the Tapuza district. But yes, he would, though. It was fate. It was one of those "happenings of Africa."

And good Father van Dahl. Now he would be a veritable prophet in the land. How that backsliding flock would come crawling back to its bigger and better yam patches, and would bring a lot more with them to boot. That was the way to civilize the savage—appeal to his belly. All the same, the padre would reprove him sadly and would pray for his soul for having called the thing a miracle. Well—

Arnold's ruminations were broken in upon by his returning boys. They trooped into camp jabbering in awestruck whispers. Arnold left them to chatter for a while; they discussed whether they should wake the master to tell him the wonder. Finally they decided it was a matter of sufficient importance. Barounggo stood at the tent flap and rang his spear blade like a bell.

"Well?" Arnold called sleepily from within. "Has it happened? Some sort

of noise I heard. Was it the white priest's magic?"

"*Awo, bwana*, we do not know what happened. From the sky came a fire as of a lightning, only more fierce, and the Black One was eaten up."

Arnold chuckled silently. Well, that was just about the same way that the Baal miracle did happen. He turned to the men. "I told you this would happen. It was a good magic. Let one man light the lantern and go before me. I go to the mission house to give the white priest joy and to bring back my magic that I gave him."

WITH the morning Arnold was at the assistant commissioner's office, grinning all over his rough carved face—well, like a juju, Sheldon thought. For the first time in their acquaintance the government official met him with a smile—a rather twisted smile of inquiry, hands in pockets, head on one side. These miraculous happenings had passed beyond the pale of official reserve.

"What in hell have you been doing, Mr. Arnold?"

Arnold smiled. "Nothing, Mr. Sheldon, nothing. Er—I did a little shooting last night; damn good shooting, and I'm proud as all heck over it. But I've come to talk business. I've located this ivory at last. In a couple weeks, I take it, this flurry will have settled down to normal, and so I want to ask if you'll let me have six hundred men for porters."

Sheldon was pained. He felt in some vague way that Arnold had done something commendable. He didn't understand the whole of it yet, but he disliked having to refuse. But administrative regulations were adamant; decision was not in his hands.

"I told you before, Mr. Arnold, that I could not sanction such a migration. And why six hundred men? I thought that your very accurate information had made it seven hundred loads?"

Arnold grinned. He had played for just that question. "Oh, I can get a hundred

men from the mission; I require your sanction for the six hundred only."

Sheldon shook his head. "Government regulations, Mr. Arnold. I would have to apply to the governor in council for so great a local upset, and it would take weeks to get action. Under no circumstances may I permit so large a body of men to move more than one day's journey out of their district."

Arnold was satisfied. "That's quite all right, Mr. Sheldon. All I need is a half day out into the desert side."

Sheldon looked his amazement. "I have many proofs that you are anything but insane, Arnold. I'm prepared to find further proofs at any moment. So why not sit down and explain the joke or the catch or whatever it is in this thing?"

"No catch at all, Mr. Sheldon," Arnold assured him. "I've got an auto truck out there. A rugby six-wheeler, all comfortably stowed away under a canvas cover and weighted down with stones. Brother Stephen tells me it's an excellent car; and believe me, that boy knows trucks."

"Brother Stephen?"

"Yeah. He sold it to me. I've got a map how to find it, and I was careful to get a bill of sale—Stephen knows all about the business intricacies of these things—and my man Barounggo ought to be well on his way to sit on the property till I can get over."

Arnold produced a paper upon which, sure enough, was scrawled a correctly

worded bill-of-sale. It was signed D'mitrius Stephanopoulos.

"Of the late firm of Stephanopoulos and Righas," Arnold explained.

Sheldon began to see the light. With stolid British control he withheld himself from evincing any undignified curiosity or ignorance of happenings. Time would come for explanations later—over the dinner table would be appropriate. Yes, over the cigars and whiskey peg Arnold would talk. Just now he asked only:

"What sort of services?"

"Negative, Mr. Sheldon," Arnold returned. "Mostly negative. His chief appreciation seemed to be that I didn't twist his filthy neck for making three attempts to bump me off. I had a mind to, too; but I allowed that a good truck would balance the annoyance."

"Humph!" Sheldon grunted. "Perhaps I shall do so officially."

"Maybe, Mr. Sheldon, maybe," Arnold agreed. "But I'd almost bet against it. Our friend Stephanopoulos went out into the dark some time last night, and I'll bet that boy is melting into the African landscape right smartly. But to come back to the point. Now that I've got a fine new truck and a map to the Nile, how about those porters for seven hundred tusks of ivory?"

Sheldon grinned. "Well," he said judicially, "I suppose you've earned them, Mr. Arnold."

His grin widened into a broad laugh.

***African mystery and jungle
adventure again in our
next issue—***

"The Lame Boy"

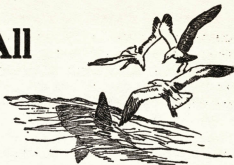
A "Major" novelette by

L. PATRICK GREENE



Adventurers All

SHARKING WATERS



I CAN'T clear the net, Captain. It is caught under a coral rock. Maybe an octopus or some sharks pulled it in there." Ansong, a Moro and my head boy announced, as he came up from a dive in the waters of my sharking station off Zambales, in the Philippines.

Ordinarily these thousand-foot gill nets are set in about thirty or forty fathoms of water. But here was a small passage between the mainland and a long coral bar; and the sharks were in the habit of sneaking in there and annoying us at the working dock. So I had this net hanging there at an average of fifteen fathoms; and had had very good results from it, too.

But now a section of the net had been dragged into a hole of an isolated coral table, about twelve fathoms down. Since my boys could only dive to and work at ten fathoms, and only for a few seconds at a time, I ordered the diving equipment. But none of the boys was willing to go down in that helmet; mainly not because the upper fifty feet of the air hose was white; and sharks had a peculiar habit of liking to bite white air hoses.

Well, a net like that is worth a considerable piece of money; and I wasn't willing to lose it, just because some sharks were playing hide and seek with a small section of it. So I went down myself.

Rope-soled shoes on my feet, blue bathing suit on, knife tied to my wrist, and the helmet on my head. Down the weighted rope-ladder to cut adrift whatever could be salvaged. To crawl into the hole and save the entire net was out of the question. These were sharking waters; too many

of these "ivory-plated" visitors coming along at the wrong moments.

I was about halfway through with the cutting, when a large shadow slowly passed over the ground in front of me, and was quickly followed by another equally slow moving shadow.

I stopped cutting, and felt myself getting cold all over. With just a helmet on my head, it was not an easy matter to look up. The water might rush in underneath the throat opening. Anyway, I didn't have to look up. Only two things will throw such shadows; either a dugout or a shark passing overhead.

These were sharks; large ones, judging by the shadow, and most likely hungry ones, too. They had either smelled the octopus or sharks which had dragged the net underneath the rock, or—worse yet—they had smelled me.

If I remained where I was, they might either bite through the hose, or come down to find out where the small bubbles came from; and then they would see me. Just a case of "veni, vidi, vici" for them.

If I tried to get up the ladder, they certainly would spot me. And to crawl into the hole, where the net was, was out of the question. If that was an octopus in there, I'd be finished.

I didn't know what to do. My temperature was rapidly changing from cold to hot, and back to cold. Then hot again. There was the shadow again—it was becoming smaller! That meant Mr. Shark was coming down—towards me.

Only one way out, now. One chance in a hundred. Take a deep breath, throw off

the helmet, and make a jump for the top, seventy-five feet away. And a wish and the hope that the buoyancy of my body would shoot me past the shark too quick for him to notice and bite me.

My left hand was still holding on the rope-ladder, and I was just about to release my hold on it, in order to put both of my hands under the helmet for a quick push-off, when the ladder was jerked out of my hands.

I lost my breath, and my balance. And down I sat on a hard and rough piece of coral. Collecting my senses again, I got ready for a second deep breath, but before I got halfway through with it, I saw a large twelve-foot Tiger Shark coming right my way.

The intended breath got stuck in my throat; my heart seemed to stop beating; and my blood was running cold. No way out, now! He was only fifteen feet away from me.

Easy! Easy! I said to myself. Sit still and keep your arms near your body; he can't bite through the helmet. He might yet smell the bait in the hole behind you, and get caught in the net, while trying to get in.

But he didn't. Instead of coming closer to me, he very gently and quietly descended to the bottom and lay down on his side.

I was still half paralyzed, and stared at him. And then I saw it. He had been shot. My headboy must have seen the

sharks from our boat, and he had promptly dived over and shot the shark with his seven-foot-long steel arrows. I could now see the arrow sticking out through both of his eyes. It had gone through the center of his brain, and killed him outright.

But the other shark! Where was he? I had seen two shadows, before.

There it was again! Right in front of my feet, between me and the dead shark! But now the shadow changed its shape, and I recognized it as that of one of my men.

It was Ansong, who signalled me to come up. The ladder was nowhere in sight, so I pulled myself up hand over hand, on the air-hose. And halfway up I saw the other shark!

But no more danger from him, now. He was very efficiently enmeshed in between the rungs of the ladder. When Ansong had shot the big male, the arrow had flitted very close by the female; and she had made a quick turn about and accidentally gotten her head right into the ladder, which had thus acted just like one of my gill nets.

If she hadn't been caught that way, she certainly would have noticed me, when she had come down to see what was detaining her dead companion. And in that case this story might never have been told; because even with sharks—the female is the more deadly of the species.

Captain J. M. Ellrich

\$15 For True Adventures

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*It Takes Real Deep Water Men to Work the Great Log Booms
of the Pacific Coast Through Rough Weather*



EXTRA HAND

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

Author of "Wilderness Heritage," "Plugging the Gap," etc.

CAPTAIN JUD RYAN, of the tugboat *Galardi*, had only stopped swearing long enough in the past day and a half to eat. In the dim light of gathering dusk he kicked on the locked door of the Marcus Engineering Works as if it gave him some satisfaction to boot the woodwork; not that it did him much good.

A low chuckle arrested his attention. He

turned, with a snarl. By the great horn spoon! Here was something animate, something human on which to vent his spleen. He found himself looking into the grinning frank face of Tom Saxon, a youngster whose frame stood out well under his tight-fitting blue jersey.

"Was you laughin' at me, kid?" snorted the skipper. "By thunder, if you was, I'm glad! I'm glad of the chance to tear somebody apart. I'll——" He made a lunge

at Tom, but the young drifter rolled easily off to one side.

"Wasn't laughin' at you in particular, Skipper," Tom jerked. "It was just kind of funny you kickin' on that door, when you know durned well there's been nobody there for the past thirty-six hours."

"Hunh! Then where the blazes are they at? They knowed I was warpin' the *Galardi* in for engine overhaul. Why, I—uh— What's the use me talkin' to you—a wharf caddy. I'm sunk, blast me. Got a season's tows o' log booms waitin' up off Rugged Island—tows that'll go to some other outfit, an' cost me plenty, if that damn Diesel outfit aboard the *Galardi* ain't fixed. *Tcha!* Where at's this engineerin' gang?"

"On a deep water job—rush call, Skipper," said the drifter. "Salvage boat in trouble off the main island. Outbound liner in trouble, an' merry hades blowin' all round. I—I've been stickin' around myself, hopin' to catch Dawson, the chief here. Thought I might pick up a job."

"Hunh! What was that, kid? You say you was lookin' for a job with the Marcus company. Why, you got to be a engineer, or a mechanic that is somethin', to tie in with this company. *Tcha!* I seen you humpin' a salmon catch onto the wharf this mornin'. A man who flops around in the well of a salmon dory ain't got no business lookin' for a job with a marine engineerin' outfit like the Marcus—blast 'em."

"Oh! Well, how'd you like to go take a runnin' backward jump into the harbor, Skipper!" Tom Saxon's well-muscled frame now hung in a crouch. He was pounds lighter than the ponderous skipper, but the *Galardi's* chief had stung him with his insults.

"Scuttle me—I'd boot you clean across that bay, for two barnacles, you damn drifter's whelp! I—ugh!" A clean right hook socked hard into the skipper's chin. He bellowed with rage, but another stinging blow caught him on the point of the chin—this time, a left. He toppled back. The

heel of a big sea boot struck the raised guard timber on the wharf edge, and Captain Jud Ryan pitched backward into the Pacific.

THE shock of impact, and the cold sting of the water saved Ryan from taking the count. He struck up with powerful arms, and swept to the barnacled pier piling. A rope dropped overside, an end of which Tom Saxon had hitched around a bitt.

Slowly, grumblingly, the sodden skipper hauled himself ashore. For a moment he stood in a crouch, and shook himself like some huge animal. Next, his eyes ranged and found Tom Saxon, who had taken a seat on a hawser coil.

"Why, you young salmon-heaver, I'll slit your danged gizzard out," thundered the skipper. "By the seven-toed prophet! No man ever got away with that on me. I'll break every damn bone in your—"

He was interrupted by a chuckle from Saxon.

"Aw, sit down, Skipper," jerked the youth. "I got a line on you now. You're a Yank, same as me. You're Jud Ryan, skipper of the old Mississippi *Calahoo*. I've heard my dad speak of you. He claimed you were the youngest, toughest, most efficient skipper ever to run a boat on ol' man river. Saxon's my name—Tom Saxon."

"Sax-on—Mina Saxon's kid! You—well, I'll be keel-hauled for a beachcomber if—h'mm. I'd oughta to take you acrost my knee an' spank you with a wheel spoke. Tom Saxon. But I heard you was with some deep water outfit. Cripes—I'm cold! Come on to the *Galardi*. Mebbe the Chink can scare us up some hot coffee. The rest of the crew's ashore."

Over hot coffee, Tom Saxon and his dad's old pal swapped experiences. Tom had got down beneath the surface bluster of this old Mississippi River skipper. He was going to like him.

"An' if you ain't nearly all like your mā, Tom," Ryan breathed, "I'll eat all them,

wet clothes afore I go to bed. Man, O, man, but your ma was purty. Tom, if your ma had been some younger, or—if I'd been some older, I might've been your dad. But we was great buddies, all of us. I've fished you out o' the river with a boat hook when you was crawlin' round my Texas deck in rompers; an' here you are—Gawsh!"

"Yeh, here I am, Skipper, and I'd like a look at the Diesel that's givin' you trouble. What's wrong with her?"

"You mean you're a marine engineer—mechanic!" jerked the skipper, slopping coffee onto his dry clothing in his excitement.

"Enough to apply for a job with the Marcus outfit. What seems to be wrong with the engine, Skip?"

"Come on down into the engine room. Take her apart. Come on—Cripes!"

TOM SAXON was down on his knees. Already his face was streaked with grease. Wrench in hand, he hung poised, his head bent, catching the stroke of the Diesel now in motion. He was catching the timing, tuning in on the beat, and power of the stroke.

"Take the wheel, an' run her out into the narrows a mile or two, Skip," he said.

Ryan swept his huge frame to the wheelhouse, bellowing orders to the Chinese cook who was posted at the hawser bitts ashore.

"Full astern, Tom," he called. "Stop'er! Let go on the stern line, Wong. Let go, ye galley cod. Now on the for'ard line, stand by. Half ahead, Tom—half. Stop'er! Let go, Wong."

The *Galardi* stood off. Ryan began to give his orders to Saxon below. They eased off at half astern speed. Ryan brought her round into the freeway, clear of the wharf and Tom Saxon opened the Diesel to full ahead.

Tom went thoroughly over the engine during the few miles of run. He examined the cylinder stroke. His valves were all right. Actually, there didn't seem a

thing wrong, and yet—the *Galardi* was not picking up speed. There wasn't enough power in her to tow a pleasure launch, let alone pull a million feet of heavy fir logs in rough, deep water.

Ryan brought the ship about. She was a trim craft, the *Galardi*, a good boat in any kind of a sea, but her vitals were weak. Even the Marcus people, as good an engineering outfit as ever operated on the Pacific Coast, had failed to put a finger on the *Galardi's* trouble.

Lying to, at wharf B, another tugboat skipper and his mate chuckled coarsely over a bottle of Scotch.

"There's old Ryan exêrcisin' the *Galardi*, Mason. She's still got a pain in her belly, huh? Why, you can hear her even now—



agrunтин' like a overfat hawg. Reckon we can get his tow business this time. We've made no mistake. That Diesel's got 'em all fogged."

"Yeh," grunted the mate of the *Maisie Dean*, Ryan's greatest rival. "Just so long as the Marcus outfit is busy, it's all hunky dory. But we got to cast off an' hit up to Rugged Island. We got to get a boom down to Everett an' back before Ryan hauls in to Rugged Island. We got to prove to that lumberin' outfit that we've got the goods. What time do we sheer off?"

"With the six tide, Mason. Not afore. He—he—I ain't enjoyed anythin' so much for a long time. But say—you're sure that second engineer is okay? You got him drilled aplenty?"

"Yeh—he's safe, an' he's the only one of that crew who's a mechanic. Why, the first's a pleasure boat man; got hisself in

wrong on a dude tour o' the islands an' that's why he's aboard the—say—is that the *Galardi* pickin' up power?"

BOTH senior officers of the *Maisie Dean* rushed topside to the for'ard head. The *Galardi* was picking up power. She was running at over twelve knots.

"Better not wait for that six o'clock tide, Skipper," growled the mate. "Somethin's happened. By gravy, if it has, somebody's goin' to get his!"

The skipper turned and bellowed to his second engineer.

"Tune her up," he snarled. "We're shovin' off, at once."

"Aye, aye, sir." The engineer dropped below and soon the powerful Diesel of the *Maisie Dean* was quaking her decks.

"An' you found it—you founed the trouble, Tom!" Jud Ryan was kneeling down, peering into the small engine room, his face agleam in the light of an electric bulb.

"Yes, I got it, Skipper—got something. It was in the air receiver. The engine wasn't pulling in enough air."

"Oh, I see. But why the blazes couldn't my engine crew discover that. Hell! I been rompin' all over for weeks, tryin' to get a line on that trouble. I've been payin' a first an' second engineer to—to——"

"Well, listen, Skipper—don't blow up till you hear the rest of it," cut in Tom. "This trouble isn't something that just happened. It—it was a plant."

"What!"

"This air receiver was plugged, purposely plugged by somebody. If you have any enemy in this business I reckon he's pretty clever, an' pretty near had you stopped. How's your own crew—all trustworthy?"

"A plant! Enemy! Sufferin' catfish! Sure I got a rival—enemy. Black, o' the *Maisie Dean*, would give one of his ears to keep me away from Rugged Island an' them log booms. I'm beginnin' to see a bit o' light, son. But, it don't work. By gawsh! I'll lick 'em yet, if you say this Diesel's O. K. I got a faster, stronger

boat. I——" Jud Ryan broke off. He stroked his stubbled face and for a long moment was wrapped in deep thought. Suddenly he jerked his head forward again.

"No—I can't say that any member o' my crew is crooked," he breathed. "This'll be an outside job, Tom. There's my second engineer—a bruiser I took a chance on, but he seems trustworthy enough. Say—how'd you like to sign on for a trip or two—a extra hand?"

TOM'S lips tightened. It wasn't quite in his line, but he remembered he hadn't eaten since he helped unload a salmon catch in the early hours of dawn. He had hoped to catch the chief of the Marcus outfit and get back on a lathe. But—somehow he had taken a liking to Jud Ryan, whom he scarcely remembered as an old family friend.

"Right, Skipper. I'm with you," he jerked. "I—uh——"

Tom reeled. The skipper crashed down and caught him as he was pitching toward the heated engine parts.

"Why, blast me for a danged ol' fool, I might've knowed you ain't been eatin' enough. Hey, Wong——" Jud bellowed up. The cook pattered aft and dropped to his knees.

"Haul away on this feller, an' help get him stowed plumb full o' grub. No canned muck, either. Fry him a big juicy steak, savvy?"

"Yeh—savvy, al'lite. Plenty empty belly, huh. I fix, al' time damn quick."

It was when he came topside, smeared with grease, that Jud Ryan caught the mocking blast of the *Maisie Dean's* whistle.

"Hounds of hell!" he bellowed. "Slip-pin' off. Think I'm busted."

He shook his big fist into the night, then hurled himself to the wharf. He knew where to find his crew. In less than half an hour the *Galardi* would be out to sea, and then—if Cap'n Black and the crew of the *Maisie Dean* were looking for trouble—by gor-r!

Jud Ryan balled his fists as he lumbered

up to a dark alley off the wharfside. He had been "Hell-Fire" Ryan on the Mississippi. That same old fighting fire was being rekindled. Somebody had blocked up the air intake on the *Galardi's* Diesel engine. There was crooked work afoot—and it didn't pay to flourish on the skipper of the *Galardi*.

"Skipp' plenty peeve al' time, unh? Plitty soon some'd'y catch plenty hell!" intoned Chon Wong, as he slid a prime steak to a plate before Tom Saxon's eager eyes.

"Yeh, you're right, Wong. The skip's a real man, too. I'm glad I'm in with him, instead of against him."

"Plenty in with skipp. Smack him down al' time. He—he—how come you plenty in after you knock 'im offside?"

"My dad and ma and Skipper Ryan were old friends," Tom said, and his voice was full of meaning. "You savvy just why the skip and me hitched up after I—after he fell off the wharf. I'm for him, Wong. I know him, an' his record. He's a ring-tailed snorter—a big chested old Mississippi man. There'll be doin's before we get our tow to Everett. Keep your eyes peeled, Wong—an' your ears open."

Wong regarded this new, extra hand through expressionless, oblique eyes. But, he was well satisfied, in his sage, silent way, that Jud Ryan had an ally in whom he could put lots of trust.

A FEW moments later the sound of coarse voices in argument and the clump of sea boots on the wharf decking brought Tom Saxon to his feet. Skipper Ryan was returning with his crew.

Jud wasted no time in introductions. Men were posted to the watch, and the Diesel started. The skipper then whistled to the wharf master for release. He stood by the port rail, and his orders to engine room and wheel man were clipped very short.

"Full astern. Hard-a-sta'bud. Stop 'er!" Then: "Half ahead—hard-a-port. Cast off on the head. Stop 'er."

The *Galardi* was answering the wheel like a charm. Ryan brought her stern about and slacked off. The man at the bitt ashore got his signal and cast off the stern line. Then Ryan chirped three short blasts on his whistle, and the stout little sea-going tug leaped forward, her nose smacking the phosphorescent waves full on.

"Full ahead, an' take her away," belowered the skipper. He then took position alongside the man at the wheel. There were tricky narrows and channels to navigate. But he spotted Tom Saxon, and called him up under a deck light.

"I want you to keep an eye an' an ear on that engine, Tom," he breathed. "Report anything you think might be wrong. By gor-r! I'm goin' to overhaul Black an' his *Maisie Dean*. No man'll steal my thunder an' get away with it. I heard somethin' ashore, son. I got on the inside o' Black's designs on me. I'll make this tow on scheduled time, or—well, by Jupiter, nobody else will!"

Tom Saxon nodded and sheered off. He strolled nonchalantly down to the engine hatch, and nodded to the chief and second, who were both on shift, perhaps amazed that the Diesel was pulling at full power.

"Who found the Diesel trouble?" jerked the chief as he spotted Tom.

"Oh—how do? It was the skipper an' me, Chief. Receiver was plugged with some old gasket metal. Nothin' much. She pullin' okay now?"

"Yeh—nearly perfect, stranger. Thanks for the good work." But Tom noticed that the second was eyeing him strangely. He had made no offer of greeting. His thin lips were drawn to a hard fine line.

"That cheap grease monkey an' me are not goin' to hit it," the young Yank told himself. "When a man packs a fish stare like that, he's got somethin' fishy on his mind."

Tom took a seat on a coil of towing hawser and as the *Galardi* throbbed on, he seemed to be counting her pulse beats—tuning his mind in with the rhythmic beat of the Diesel.

SEYMOUR INLET was alive with bobbing lights, as the *Galardi* threaded her way in and out of anchored log booms. Jud Ryan's teeth ground steadily on a quid of tobacco as he stood on the for'ard head, piloting his fast tugboat to her appointed place of anchorage.

The mudhook had scarcely taken hold before a gas boat putt-putted up to the side of the *Galardi*, and Ryan stepped aft to greet the big boss of the lumbering, transportation interests.

"Thought you weren't going to make it, Ryan," snapped the newcomer. "I allowed a tide to go by; wanted to give you all the chance possible. But it costs money to hold these booms here. Sure your boat's in shape for the tow? Black told me you were having Diesel trouble."

"Black's face is always open, Jenson," Ryan snarled. "One o' these times, I'll have to find something to stuff in it. Sure my boat's okay. I'll take two million feet o' logs, an' I'll be in Everett a half day before Black or any other skipper in the Inlet."

"Well, that's just fine, Jud. Everett Mills are raising Cain at the delay. If you can take two million feet and make that record run, I'll arrange for a bonus—from this end. Black has signed for a million and a half."

"Humph!" Ryan spat testily into the night. His was no idle boast, so long as his engine played up. He was the best navigator on the log run, and knew how to humor those tides which often got nasty off Grief Point, and in other waters.

"Well, better let's get signed up," suggested Jenson. "Then bring the boys up for a drink, and some poker. I'd like fine to have 'em. There's a U. S. government fishing boat anchored off the booms. Swell bunch of boys."

"Right, Jenson. We'll be over. I'll post an anchor watch an' bring the lads over in the dinghy."

Tom Saxon had heard most of the conversation. It had thrilled him to hear all this big talk about big logging operations.

Though a deep water man himself, he sensed a certain tingle of anticipation at the thought of getting a two million feet boom down through those narrow, treacherous channels.

"I'll take your anchor watch, Skipper," he suggested to Ryan, but the skipper waved him to one side.

"No. I want you to set in an' meet the boys at Jenson's place," he grunted. "Davey'll take the watch. He usually does. Great boy. Doesn't play cards. But there's another reason why he likes to stick aboard. He's a foolish drinker. It gets him. Now he's tryin' to lay off, so I do all I can to help him. Get a wash, Tom, an' we'll shove off. This'll be your last free night for a few. There's sign of a sou'easter comin' up; an' if she does, we'll have our hands full. She's a snorter. *Tcha*—so Black figures to skin out with a million and a half, and beat me into Everett, huh!"

Ryan moved over to the deckhand, Davey, and held a few seconds' whispered conversation with him. Then he turned, and piped the rest of the crew to the dinghy. It paid to play in with Jenson, and Jenson was touchy. To refuse one of his invitations was a fatal move against one's business.

THE night dragged on. Ashore, at Jenson's warehouse, stacked with supplies for the logging camps inland, a large room served as the recreation room. It was here that Tom Saxon watched his skipper play draw poker. There were two schools in the play. Ryan played with his mate, the first engineer, and a couple of petty officers from aboard the fisheries boat. At another table sat Captain Black, his mate, the second engineer of the *Galardi*, the senior officer of the U. S. cutter, and Jenson.

Saxon was deeply interested in the game before him. He smoked on in silence, watching the poker faces in that grim circle around the table. The pot was increasing, gradually, slowly, to one of worthwhile proportions. All players were still in. Jud

Ryan had drawn two cards to three deuces, but Tom had failed to see what the skipper drew. Ryan played a serious, close-fisted game; and his weather-beaten face never changed expression. He sat stolidly chewing his black plug, waiting for the rest to make their plays.

One of the U. S. P. O.'s tossed in his cards face down, and with a grin lit a cigarette. The *Galardi's* mate raised a bet to his skipper. Through the merest slits in his cards, Ryan squinted in. There was a long moment of tense silence; then—

"Raise you five!" Jud tossed in his chips and settled back in his hunch. The remaining P. O. screwed up his brows, shot a glance at the grizzled face of the tugboat skipper; then slowly doubled his bet.

Jud Ryan's big chest heaved. He shot a glance down at his watch.

"H'mm—reckon this'll have to be my last hand, gents, win or lose. I've got to inspect my booms yet, an' we shove off to catch the dawn tide. I'll—raise that little double fifteen bucks."

The *Galardi* mate tossed in his hand. The first engineer stayed, as did the P. O. But the latter quickly changed his mind and made another raise. Ryan's engineer dropped out.

Now for the first time since the game began, Tom Saxon saw a change of expression in the skipper's face—a not unkindly smile played with the corners of his mouth. His hand closed over a stack of chips, then came away. Jud Ryan knew that the young fellow opposite was playing him for a bluff. He knew he had the P. O. beaten. Ryan knew something else. He knew that the young naval man was betting perhaps the last cent he had in the world. There was likely a young wife back home.

Saxon was quick to spot Ryan's play. He had the P. O. beaten a mile. With a grunt, he tossed in his cards, face down.

"H'mmm, an' so it goes," he breathed as he glimpsed the three kings which the P. O. carelessly discarded. "Some must win, an' some must lose." He turned to

Saxon, and winked. Tom realized now, more than ever, that he was tied up with a real big square-shooter. There was no need for him to ask Ryan why he had tossed good fours into the discard.

"I'd like you to come along while I inspect the booms, Tom," Ryan grunted. He



had refused to drink with the P. O.; although he shook hands and wished the youngster plenty luck.

TOM SAXON'S eyes had wandered off toward the other tables. They fastened their gaze on the table at which Black and the second engineer of the *Galardi* had played. The table was deserted. Jensen, the big boss, was coming across the room.

"Black's determined to beat you into Everett, Ryan," he grinned. "Not waiting for the tide. Going to take a chance on round-in' Grief Point. That must have been some game you were in!"

Jud Ryan bit back a desire to thunder out his feelings. Black had slipped away on him. By the pink-heeled prophet, this didn't look so good! Tom Saxon hurried to his skipper, and drew him to one side.

"If it's all the same to you, Skipper," he breathed, "I'll beat it back to the boat. Mebbe the mate'll go over the booms with you. Black's outfit have all shoved off. I'm a little bit afraid that we're goin' to find ourselves a—man—short." Tom was running to the door. And then Jud Ryan

exploded. Calling to his mate, he lurched outdoors, and whistled up a dinghy.

TOM was three hundred yards from the *Galardi* when he saw a stealthy, dark form drop from the stern rail into a waiting boat. At once he was inclined to order the Siwash paddling him across to give chase, but he quickly changed his mind. A seething anger surged through his frame. He called to the Indian to increase his stroke.

"Plenty fast, tillicum," he bellowed. The canoe cut water like an arrow.

Aboard, the young extra hand rushed to the galley, but Wong, the cook, was absent—likely playing fan tan ashore with a bunch of the Orientals from the salmon cannery.

Tom dashed aft, then checked up short. Lying propped against a hawser coil was the anchor watch—dead to the world.

"Doped, I'll bet a million," Tom gasped. "Rotten dirty work." Now he dropped to the engine room, and prepared to start the Diesel. He got no response at all—not even a cough. He tried again and again, but with no better result. Then to his trained mind came the solution.

"Of course, blast them," he snarled, "the valves have gone. They've stolen the guts right out of her." He leaped to make his inspection and found that he was right. The valves had been stolen—likely dropped overboard.

"That lousy little fish-eyed second engineer," he thundered, coming slowly topside. "What a mess! Enough to turn Jud's brain. And he swore to reach Everett ahead of Black, with a half a million feet of logs extra. Gosh, what a lousy deal!"

Just then, from down the Inlet, came the mocking toot of the *Maisie Dean's* whistle, in a devil's tattoo. Tom Saxon whirled and shook his fist at those gliding lights. Black's tow of logs was stealing well out of the inlet.

Tom dropped to the canoe, and snapped a crisp order at the Siwash. Five minutes

later he was aboard a section of Jud Ryan's long log boom.

"Trouble, Skipper," he jerked.

"You mean more trouble, Tom. What now?"

"The Diesel. She's jinxed again. Somebody lifted the valves out of the auxiliary air compressor. She's——"

"My Gawd!" The exclamation came in a groan from Ryan. "An' Black's away. There's his lights. Swine! We're cooked, Tom. Reckon I'll have to sign off with Jenson, an' take my loss an' like it. You say *somebody* stole those valves. Any idea who?"

"Yeh, but that won't replace the valves, Skip. Don't bother signing off. There's a chance yet. How's the boom? Can she stand lots of sea and weather?"

"W-why, uh—I reckon so," stammered the skipper. "But what's on your mind? We're sunk, Tom. Jenson won't stand for any delay, an' you can't blame him. I'll send down to Vancouver for a set of new valves—then by the seven eyed Buddha, I'll overhaul Black some place an' put him to bed for the rest o' the season!"

But Tom Saxon had a better idea. There was a glitter in the extra hand's eye.

"Tighten up all boom section connections, and hire a couple of peavey men to ride the logs, Skipper," he jerked. "Give me an hour an' I'll have the Diesel running. Say nothing to Jenson. Will you play in with me?"

There was no immediate reply, but at a nudge from the *Galardi's* mate, Fred Peterson, the skipper grunted.

"Right! Go to it. If you can come through I'll give you a half share in the *Galardi*, by gor-r!" The skipper gave an order to the mate. Saxon leaped aboard the waiting canoe.

Aboard the *Galardi* he squatted on the floor plates, and with hammer and cold chisel began to shape new valves.

BY THE flood tide of dawn, the *Galardi* was standing off her boom, Jud Ryan throwing his voice like a fog horn at the

men responsible for the towlines. Tom Saxon, now acting second engineer was on duty below.

"Think she'll stand the drag of that two million tow, Tom?" asked the first engineer.

"Depends on weather an' tides. A lot depends on a lot of things when you hit the open sea."

"What! You mean the skipper's going to hit into deep water, with an extra million of logs in tow?"

"Yes—we're going to short cut it, Chief. We tie up for nothing. Ryan's been double-crossed too badly. He'd rip through the tide gates of hell, an' I'm with him. What about you?"

"I? Well, as a matter of fact I didn't bargain for any fool moves like this. Anyhow, I don't claim to let no driftin' extra hand tell me anythin'. I'm shovin' off to the Inlet. I'll catch a Rupert boat goin' north—a passenger. Tell Ryan I wish him luck."

As he neared the foot of the ladder, Tom Saxon loomed large and formidable before him, square jaw sticking well forward menacingly.

"I'd change my mind if I were you, Mister Chief Engineer," Tom drawled. "Haven't you got any more red liver than your second, who bunged up the Diesel, then made his getaway?"

"Pipe down, and shove out of the way, Saxon. I'm not shippin' with a damn fool March hare outfit like this. Gangway!" He made the mistake of grabbing Tom's shoulder.

Two lightninglike bolts shot out; two iron-balled fists took him on both sides of the lower jaw. He staggered back, rocking against the Diesel exhaust manifold. His vision cleared, and Tom saw his hand steal for'ard to a heavy Stillson wrench. With a cry of disgust, the extra hand leaped in and crashed over a savage hook.

The chief engineer sagged to the floor plating, and Tom resumed his task of blocking new valves out.

"What a lousy crew Ryan got stung with," he ruminated. "By George! Perhaps it would have been better to let him go, at that. Mebbe I should heave him overside before he loses his nerve when we get into a blow. Huh, I'll hogtie him to the mudhook, first. I'll see he gets a full taste of salt water spume—deep water spume, by gad!"

Jud Ryan and his mate stepped aboard, soaked to the skin, tired, but full of fight. It was just as Ryan got both feet aboard that the *Galardi's* Diesel broke into song. Tom Saxon had got his improvised valves cut to a nicety.

"Listen, Fred," the skipper chuckled. "By gor'r! Listen to that extry hand makin' her like it. Ye-ah! Man dear, we're shovin' off." He turned, and thundered a command at the deck hand, now revived.

"Stan' by to stow that mudhook, you. Take the wheel, Fred. We make fast the tow an' get goin'."

Jud strode to the engine room hatch. His eyes popped as he glimpsed the chief engineer sitting groggily trying to get to his feet.

"What's gone on here, Tom?" he jerked.

"One of your little pack rats was tryin' to abandon ship on you, Skip. I put him to sleep till you came. If you don't want him, I'll heave him overboard. How about it?"

"First the second—then you," snarled the skipper. "Get for'ard an' slop your head in a bucket o' bilge. Consider yourself under open arrest. When this trip's done I'll hand ye over, by gor-r! Now, Tom, take over the anchor winch. We're goin' down the roads, son—hell bent for Everett. Got lots of power?"

"Aye aye, Skipper, lots. I'll put her at it to the limit. Shoot me some hot coffee down here in about an hour, then hang on to your braces, we're goin' places."

FOR the next two days, the *Galardi's* held up her end like the true brig she was, taking a sou'easter and eating it, and

still retaining her hang on the long, sluggish boom.

On the eve of the third night, Tom Saxon was standing at the for'ard head together with the skipper and mate. They had bucked a fast tide in the flood through the strait. Of Black's *Maisie Dean* there was no sign.

"He's shown more guts than I gave him credit for," growled Jud Ryan. "In spite o' our efforts, he'll take his boom through ahead, unless a miracle happens. He——"

"Look, Skip," cut in Saxon. "Light ahead. That's his after boom lantern there off the starb'd head. He's less than three miles before us." The three men craned forward. There was no mistaking the riding light of the after boom section ahead. It hung low above the water. The *Maisie Dean* was making slow progress now.

"By gor-r!" grunted through Ryan's lips. "We're overhaulin' the crittur. If we had just twenty-four hours of fair weather, we'd roll him on his beam end with our wash."

But it was the mate who first called attention to a sudden change in the slap of the night wind.

"What d'you make of the blow, Skipper?" he jerked. "Am I just imaginin' things, or is that a westerly smackin' the back o' my neck?"

If there was one wind that tug men dreaded more than another coming through the strait it was a westerly. It either meant a tie up in some sheltered cove back of Texada Island, or a foolhardy attempt at a run before the wind, taking a chance on the breaking of the boom. Men who had attempted to run before had paid heavily for it, spending hours with peavey and pole, rescuing loose logs in the dark—making up broken booms with a heavy sea threatening death at every moment.

"You're right, Fred," Ryan jerked. "She's veerin' sharp to the west. Sufferin' seacats! First we take it in the head, an' now we got the devil off our stern. *Tcha!* An' I promised Jenson delivery of this

tow by Friday, the seventh. Reckon we're jinxed. There's nothin' for it but to put in at the back o' Texada till she blows herself out."

"H'mmm, too bad, Skipper, but you're right," acquiesced the mate. "Reckon this cooks our goose with Jenson, huh? We might as well call it a season. Well, there's the fishin' off the west coast o' the main island. I'm with ye, if ye want to take a fling at that."

Fishing—off the west coast. Fishing. Wallowing in the slime of a salmon catch. Jud Ryan jerked on his tobacco plug and spat contemptuously. He turned and snarled an order to the man at the wheel. Tom Saxon had been waiting for this. His blood was up close to boiling point. He knew Ryan was putting in to shelter purely in the interests of his crew; as well, he had two million feet of valuable timber at his back. His responsibilities were heavy. But Saxon knew that the real old fighting Ryan rebelled.

"You're not goin' to hide out, Skipper?" he snapped. "Hell, after all the trouble we've had, you're not goin' to hide out like a durned fair weather sailor! There's deep water in the open strait. Deep water'll take you any place, if you've got the guts to stay with her. You've got a good boat, an' log timber'll ride any place there's water. Of course, if you fair weather sailors are afraid of a stern wind an' deep water, then it's no use my talkin'. If you pull in off Texada Island, you can put me ashore. I'm a deep water man. I'm——"

"You danged young swab," bellowed Ryan. "Am I to take orders an' advice from a blasted extra hand! Deep water man—why you ain't dry behind the—the——" Ryan broke off sharp. Tom had stung him to the quick, but he bit back his retort now, knowing that the youngster was a deep water man, and a big chested young hellion who was afraid of nothing. Something in Ryan seemed to snap. Here was a boy, son of an old Mississippi River man, hurling a challenge into the teeth of Hell-Fire Ryan.

"Sta-b'd y'r hel-m," he roared at the wheel house.

"What the devil, Skip?" jerked the mate. "You ain't goin' to run her out. Man—you plumb crazy? You ain't listenin' to this—this damn extry hand?"

But Captain Ryan merely grunted.

THE *Galardi* swung into the flow again, and a screaming wind smacked her, stern on. In back of Texada Island, Captain Black tied up to sit out the blow.

Tom Saxon drew the skipper to one side.

"I'm goin' aboard the boom, Skipper," he said. "Have the mate take me along-side. I want plenty cable, an' chain. By the great eyelids of Buddah, I'm goin' to give those two beachcombers aboard those logs somethin' to do. Skip, we've got to



take this tow in on time. I—didn't mean any insult when I rode you about the deep water. I just wanted to get you steamed up. Hang on here, and hold her full ahead before it. I'll see those boom sections hold or——"

Anything else Tom Saxon might have said was lost in the whine of the wind.

Tom Saxon rode the after boom section like some marooned sailor aboard a raft. His clothing was almost ripped from his spume-blistered body. One of his helpers was down, groveling full length on the logs. For seven hours at a stretch the three of the boom crew had fought an almost losing battle with terrible sea and wind. Twice the after section had threatened to hurl its tonnage high up on the section ahead. Times without number Tom had gathered

his almost spent men and rushed for'ard to whip a length of cable about a heavy locking timber, and so retain another section.

The wind seemed to increase in force, and the sea thundered in, tossing the booms like matchwood with angry sideswipes.

But through his misery, Saxon forced a grin. The *Galardi* was holding her head up—holding it up like a deep water boat. Furthermore, she was making speed, and conserving her actual engine power. It took two men to hold her wheel over, but they were big-chested men—whose lips were blistered with the salt spume riding over them off the starbo'd head.

A sudden grinding crash brought Saxon about with a start. He gasped, struggling against the fury of the wind for breath, as he saw the after boom section stand almost on her head. In a flash he struck down at the man outstretched on the logs at his feet.

"Quick, you," he bellowed. "Run for it." He stooped, and half dragged, half booted the man for'ard.

They had scarcely cleared before the tremendous tonnage of battered logs thundered in with a quaking crash, piling up like a river jam, threatening the entire boom.

Tom ran forward, and with the help of the other member of the boom crew rushed aft with locking chains and cable.

"We've got to tie her, get me?" he thundered. "This boom tow's goin' through. Stan' by to pass me that chain."

HE HURLED himself at the piled up mass of logs, fighting as he had never fought before. He was dragging heavy cable with him, cable which almost tore his arms from their shoulder sockets.

Cut, bleeding, blistered, and aching in every limb, he fought those logs for upwards of two hours. His chest seemed utterly stove in, and save for a fragment of his trousers which clung suddenly to his waist, he was naked.

With peavey, he rolled troublesome logs

into place, helped by the one man able to stand on his legs. Tom made his chain and cable locks; not the best of ties, but good enough to tide them by.

But it seemed that fate was not done with its alliance with the devil. A sudden upheaval of the entire two after sections hurled Tom through space. He crashed to the timber and lay still, spread-eagled on his face. His right arm was strangely twisted, two sharp points of bone threatening to puncture the flesh above the elbow.

But the dawn was riding through. The wind was now moaning a half sob, in place of her scream. The waves still rode high, slopping over Saxon's recumbent frame. The heavy buffeting had ceased, however. Aboard the *Galardi*, Jud Ryan was humming a tune, as he stamped back and forth—for'ard and aft.

"Extry hand," he breathed. "I wonder why the devil I ever called him that! He'll be half owner in this outfit. He is, in fact, right now. *H'mmm*—extry hand."

BY MIDNIGHT of the seventh, the *Galardi* was tied in off Everett. Jud Ryan smoked a huge cigar in the office of the big boss of the Everett Mills, Limited.

"Make the check out to Ryan an' Saxon, Limited," he grunted. "An' that bonus check you spoke of can be in-incorporated."

"O. K., Cap'n," returned the accountant. "You've taken on a partner, eh? Who—

where'd you bump into him? Must be good, eh?"

"Good! I'll say. He's the first man to bring a two million tow into this water in many a year; an' he brought her through the straits, runnin' before a westerly—with his arm broke. An' old Mississippi lad, but a blown-in-the-glass deep water man. Do I—we get another two million feet right sharp?"

"You can get all the tows you want, Skipper," was the quick reply. "Any outfit that can pull a two million boom outfit through ahead of a westerly, as you did—with the boom standing on her ear, well—shake. And when that young partner of yours is out of hospital, fetch him along. The boys at the mill want to look him over."

Jud Ryan's eyes were misted. He pocketed his check, and moved to the door.

"By gor-r!" he grunted. "An' to think I once let him sock me off'n the Vancouver wharf. *Tcha!*" Jud spat testily into the night, then strode off to find a taxi which would whisk him to the hospital. He wanted Tom to see their first check—the first of many to come.

"An' when you finally slop along wit' that mere million an' a half feet o' hemlock, mister Cap'n Black," Ryan breathed. "I'm goin' to take just two pokes at that ugly mug o' yours—one each for Ryan an' Saxon. You won't need any more, by Gor-r!"

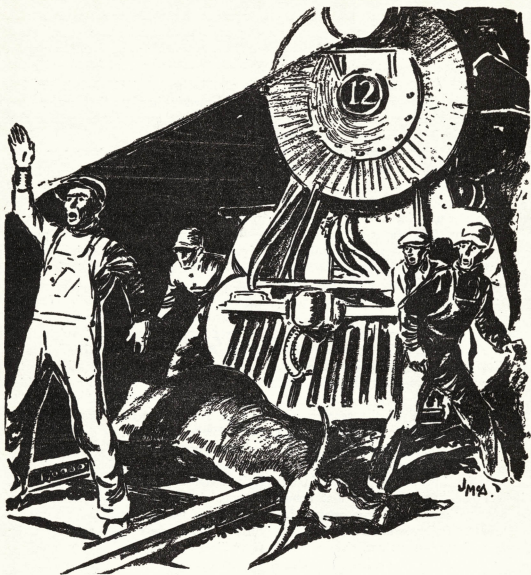
WAR OF THE BRANDING IRON

*Quick trigger fingers in a
complete novel in our
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Charles W. Tyler



*The First Glow of Number Twelve's Headlight Could Be Seen,
and Still the Dispatchers Hadn't Changed the Meet*



BADLAND MEET

By DUANE HOPKINS

Author of "Target Yard," "Flying Coupling," etc.

WE'LL just call him John Doe. He happens to be the president of one of the great Western railroad systems, so it is perhaps best that his real name not be mentioned here. In fact, he himself needn't have been mentioned here, except that this is his favorite story. He loves to tell it. He will tell it to anyone who drops into his office and asks to hear it. And he will tell it in words about like these:

But, my dear sir, I am a very busy man! I just can't spare the time, you know. Still—er, um—well, maybe I have a free minute or two, if you really want to hear the story.

But here, let me draw up a chair for you. Sit down, my friend. There, that's better. Have a cigar? They're rather strong. And a light? Not at all, don't mention it.

Now you take railroading. A dull and uninteresting business, you may think, all bound up with strict rules and rigid regulations. Ah, yes. But I want to tell you, some very odd and unusual things have been known to happen in the railroad game. The operation of trains isn't always such a dull routine as it appears to the outsider. Any veteran of the steel trails can spin you yarns that sound almost unbelievable, and yet are strictly the truth—actual, personal experiences.

This is just such a tale that I'm going to tell you. This is the true story of the strangest happening I have ever witnessed in a long lifetime of railroad service. It is something I'll never forget to my dying day, and if you find any part of it hard to believe, remember that I saw the whole thing with my own eyes and that I am telling you nothing but the gospel truth. These are real facts, without any coloring or exaggeration. Now if you're settled and comfortable, we'll get started.

TO BEGIN with, we must go back a good many years to a place known as Wildhorse. At that time Wildhorse was just a prairie flagstop out on our Plains Division, a jerkwater cow country town. And to tell the truth, Wildhorse remains to this day the same thing, a jerkwater cow country town. You haven't, by any chance, ever been there? No, I thought not. Few visitors ever have business in Wildhorse, and most of our trains never stop there.

However, if you should ever have occasion to journey to that part of the country, I'd be very pleased to have you use our railroad to take you. The fare is \$32.14, one way, Chicago to Wildhorse, Pullman

berth extra. Never overlook a chance to advertise, is my motto. That's probably the only reason I'm president of this company. I know a hundred men down in the ranks who have more brains and more education than I have, but they don't push. They don't push either the road or themselves.

But I'm wandering. Let's get back to Wildhorse in the old days. I was just a youngster then, starting right at the bottom on my first railroad job. Officially, I was the assistant station agent at Wildhorse; but actually, I was only a sort of errand boy, janitor, and general baggage smasher down at the depot. Anything in the line of odd jobs fell to me, because there were only two other railroad employees on duty at Wildhorse. One was the station agent, who was my daytime working companion and superior. The other was Dave DuShane, the night telegrapher.

I want to say a word here about Dave DuShane, because this is really his story. He is the chief character in it, and I might say an extraordinary character. Physically, he was a strapping big fellow, tall and dark and powerful, with flashing black eyes and a great shock of coal-black hair. He was rather handsome, too, in a bold hard way. And when it came to telegraphing, he was as handy an operator as ever worked in Morse code.

NEVERTHELESS, Dave DuShane was no good. Yes, I mean no good. He was a wild one, a bad one, even in an era when all railroaders were pretty much a gang of toughs. It may seem strange to you today that railroad men were once considered the scum of the earth, but in the early days they were just about that. In general, they were a roughneck, profligate bunch.

Dave DuShane was one of the worst of the old hellion crowd. He caroused around and got in every low brawl that started in Wildhorse. He guzzled booze continuously, off duty and on. More than once he stole the ticket money from the depot office to gamble with. And when it

came to plain and fancy swearing, he could curse more devilishly than any section boss who ever hurled an oath at a Mex track laborer. Dave DuShane was utterly godless—I can't word that too strongly—an utterly godless man.

Now I am sorry to have to say these things about Dave, because he was my friend. Bad as he was, I am not ashamed to call him my friend. He always liked me, for some unaccountable reason. He was a bully, too, a fist-fighting, hard-mouthed bully. Yet he never bullied me, and the day that the Scorpion Butte outfit captured me, it was Dave DuShane who really saved my life.

Understand, the boys from up on the Scorpion Butte range weren't deliberate killers, any of them. They weren't rustlers or outlaws. But they were as reckless a



mob of cow waddies as ever handled a cattle drive. They were in Wildhorse shipping spring beef that day, and their ranch foreman made the mistake of paying them a month's wages before they started back home from town. Consequently, by sunset they were drunk to a man, raising merry hell down at the stock loading pens, and looking for some real fun. They got it when I walked down the track to the pens, after work, to see if their cattle cars were properly loaded for the night freight east.

THE first thing I knew, somebody had a lariat on me. The loop whistled through the air, dropped over my shoul-

ders, tightened around my chest and arms, and jerked me sprawling on the ground. The next thing I knew, I was being dragged helplessly in circles behind a galloping horse, with the audience of punchers all whooping in delight. Gentle hazing, they'd have called it. But it was far from being gentle. The boys were too drunk to realize they were killing me, but that was just what they were doing. There were jagged boulders lying all about, and being dragged on my neck lickety-split through those rocks was deadly play. I'd certainly have had my skull split open if Dave DuShane hadn't suddenly appeared on the scene.

The last I'd seen of Dave, he was swigging whisky in one of the saloons up town. I never expected him to bob up at the shipping pens. But bob up he did, out of nowhere, and just in the nick of time. I was battered almost unconscious when I heard Dave's yelling curse rise above the laughter and shouts of the others. A moment later he came bursting through the knot of onlookers like a madman.

Nor did he pause an instant in the rescue. As the circling horse loped past, Dave dashed out after it and grabbed the rope that was dragging me. The lariat pulled him down sliding, but he hung on grimly and with his pocket knife slashed the rope in two. That freed us both, and we rolled to a stop together in a cloud of dust. Then Dave jumped up, jerked me to my feet also, shoved me behind him, and turned to face the cowhands.

For a minute there was only silence. My tormentors were too surprised at the sudden rescue to move or speak, and Dave just stood there calmly rolling up his shirt sleeves for combat, with his thick black hair hanging in his eyes and an ugly scowl on his face. Then the astonishment passed, and the entire group started for him in a rush. There must have been fifteen of them, but they could have been fifty for all Dave cared. A good gang fight was right up his alley, and he met the onslaught with flying fists and bellowed oaths. The first

three men to reach him went down in their tracks almost simultaneously.

"Pick on a skinny little lad, will you?" bawled Dave, his hefty arms pumping like pistons. "Now tackle somebody your own size, you blankety-blank thus-and-such's." Crack, slap, thud! "I do hate to hit a man when he's drunk, but I'm just as drunk as any of you, so—" Bam! Another cowboy bit the dust.

AT THAT, they might have overwhelmed him by weight of numbers, but Wildhorse suddenly woke up to what was going on. Entertainment! In a jiffy every saloon on the main street emptied and the occupants raced for the stock track. Nor did they come just as spectators. Their arrival started a grand free-for-all, with a hundred men slugging whoever happened to be within reach. The battle royal kept up joyously until all the combatants were either knocked out or winded and worn out. Then the whole thing was over as quickly as it had started. Everybody, including Dave, went back up town, had a few rounds of drinks together, and promptly forgot the pleasant little incident.

But I didn't forget it. I never forgot it. I always remembered that I owed my life to Dave DuShane, and that oddly enough he seemed to like me. After that experience, Dave stood as pretty much the hero in my eyes.

Still, he was no sort of man for a boy to look up to. He was no shining example to follow. Dave was about as devoid of morals as a man can get. Drunkard, bruiser, gambler, thief; he was all of those. He burned the candle at both ends, fast and hard—until the candle burned out.

It was bound to happen sooner or later, of course, and happen it did, one frosty autumn night Dave DuShane's candle finally burned out. And that brings us to the strange part of this story, the railroad-ing part, and the part that is seared even deeper into my memory than my narrow escape from death on the end of a lariat.

TO DESCRIBE just what happened on that memorable night, and how such a thing could have happened, I must first tell you a few facts about our railroad as it was in those days. The old line was single track, without block signals, and far from being a perfect speedway. East of Wildhorse it ran through a country of broken badlands, and the track had more curves than a boa constrictor with acute convulsions. It was a nasty piece of road, down there in the badlands east of us. Two of the worst train wrecks in the history of our system occurred on that dreaded stretch of rail. There was nothing west on our mountain divisions to equal it for continuous curves, variable grades, restricted visibility, and railroad tangle in general.

The first station east of Wildhorse was Alcorn, beyond the badlands and some twenty miles distant. But there was an intermediate passing track between Wildhorse and Alcorn, laid out right in the heart of the badland wilderness, and its name was Badland. It was a lonely and desolate place, a blind siding without a telegraph office or any means of communication with the outside world. About the only signs of life ever seen at Badland were a few scrawny range cattle of the old Tumbling T ranch, which occasionally wandered up on the track in front of a train and got knocked straight into cow heaven.

Now those are the brief facts. I mention them because they have a direct bearing on what happened that night. Having a picture of the layout, you can better understand the train movements and the events that took place in such a remarkable manner.

ON THE night I speak of, I sat in the Wildhorse depot from about eleven o'clock on. This was most unusual, for I was on day duty at the station and as a rule home in bed by ten. But merely by chance I had a bit of reporting to do. The road had just bought some new passenger locomotives, and one of them was coming through from the east that night on Num-

ber One. It was my idea to watch the first of the new engines rocket through Wildhorse, and then write up a piece about it for our company magazine. Not that I had any journalistic aspirations, but I did want to get my name known on the system. Even at that age I had started to advertise and push, you see, to get somewhere in the business.

So there I sat in the Wildhorse station that night, waiting for the arrival of Number One. She was due past without stop at midnight, but was running rather badly off schedule to the east, so I faced a longer wait than I had expected. However, for companionship I had Dave DuShane, working his regular night shift at the telegraph key. Dave welcomed my company, too, for his job was a dreary drag through the dark hours until dawn.

When midnight passed with no word at all of Number One, Dave called the dispatchers at division headquarters for some information about the delayed flyer. In answer, his telegraph sounder sputtered a long series of metallic dots and dashes, which Dave translated into English for me.

"You might as well go home, lad," he announced. "The DS office says One won't be here before three or four o'clock. That new engine is running some hot pins and boxes. They've had to tie up and rig a keeley line from the tender to water-cool the main driver bearing."

That was disagreeable news. It meant a prolonged wait for me, or else give up and go home to bed. But I was a determined youngster.

"I'll stick around," I decided. "I'm going to get that item for the company magazine if I have to sit here until breakfast time."

Dave only shrugged. "You'll fall asleep," he predicted. "Trying to stay awake all night on this job is a tough proposition. I know!"

HE WAS right about it, too. By one o'clock I could hardly keep my eyes open. Just sitting, that was the worst

part of it. There was no sound but the whine of a frosty wind around the little depot, an occasional click of the telegraph sounder, and the deadly ticking of the office clock. Dave sat at his table in the bay window that fronted the track, with a kerosene lamp burning smokily in front of him and a quart bottle of whisky alongside. I was seated back in the gloom by the heating stove, which I industriously stoked



whenever the monotony of sitting idle became unbearable.

Toward two o'clock Dave got up, stretched, walked around the room a few times. Finally he stopped at the stove and glanced in at my fire. In the bright glare from the coals I got a good look at his features. And the sight really startled me.

Dave DuShane looked like—well, like a man whose candle has about burned out. Deep lines of dissipation showed on his face, marring its natural handsomeness. His usually flashing black eyes were dull now, and bloodshot. His thick black hair was tousled, his clothing disheveled, and his muscular shoulders drooped wearily.

"Gosh, Dave," I spoke up. "You look like the last rose of summer. What's the matter with you?"

"Matter? Nothing. Just a little tired is all." He went back to his table, lifted the quart bottle to his lips, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Been on a drunk for a week, lad. Haven't been

in bed for five days. Yeh, I'm a little fagged out tonight."

I was glad then that I was there with Dave. It was my guess that he was on the verge of keeling over and falling asleep at the switch. I didn't want that to happen. I didn't want him to get into trouble for sleeping on duty—not after the way he had rescued me from the cowboys. I made up my mind to struggle and stay awake from that minute on, if for no other reason than to be sure that Dave stayed awake on his job.

AND stay awake I did, somehow, while the minutes ticked away in tiresome monotony. It was almost three o'clock before we had another report on Number One. By that time my head was nodding and I was groggy with sleepiness. The clicking of the sounder seemed far away, and then Dave's weary voice speaking to me.

"Still awake, lad? Well, you won't have much longer to wait for Number One. She's quit losing time and is making schedule speed now, steadily. The dispatchers have just put out a train order for One to meet Twelve at Alcorn."

Meet Twelve at Alcorn? I roused myself sufficiently to recollect the timetable. Number Twelve was the night limited from the west. She was due through Wildhorse at 3:20 a.m. without stop. Tonight, then, Twelve would get past us and as far east as Alcorn, the next station beyond the badlands, to sidetrack for the delayed crack flyer, Number One. And then One, racing westward through the badlands, would hit us at Wildhorse about four o'clock. Such was the line-up according to the orders that both trains had now received.

Fine and dandy. If it had worked out as planned, all would have been well. But it was destined not to be. Even then, trouble was brewing to the east. For Number One, running four hours late, was beginning to make up some of that lost time. And she was making it up fast.

At exactly 3:05, Dave's sounder began

to chatter again. Listening to the message, he perked up with sudden interest. Then he glanced up at the clock on the wall. When he saw the time he frowned, whistled softly, as if puzzled by it.

"There's speed for you!" he barked over his shoulder to me. "Buckhorn Creek just reported Number One by. The BC operator says One's new engine is running like a house afire. They've made up twenty minutes' lost time already."

"Ugh," I grunted drowsily. "That kind of balls up One's meet with Twelve at Alcorn, doesn't it?"

"Sure does," agreed Dave. "It throws that Alcorn meet all out of kilter. At this rate, One will reach Alcorn by three-twenty, the same time Twelve is due here at Wildhorse. The dispatchers will have to change the meeting point, move it this way from Alcorn."

"Uh-huh. But where to?"

"To Badland, lad. You know, that God-forsaken siding in the rough country between here and Alcorn. It's a perfect meet for Badland now, since One will reach Alcorn so much earlier than expected. The dispatchers will shift that meet, you watch and see."

AS A matter of fact, I was too sleepy to give a hang where the two trains met. But I kept up the discussion, just to help me stay awake.

"Then there'll be an annulment of orders?" I asked.

"Bound to be," said Dave. "Both trains have orders to meet at Alcorn. Those will be cancelled and new ones issued, changing the meet to Badland. Number One will pick up the new order at Alcorn at three-twenty. Number Twelve will get the new order here at Wildhorse, from me, at three-twenty. And then Twelve will take the siding at Badland to clear for One instead of running on to Alcorn for the meet."

Dave was gabbing away for about the same reason I was—trying to clear his weary and muddled senses. He got up and began to pace the floor of the tiny lamp-lit

office again, striking his hands together impatiently. This new development in train movements had caused him to become strained and nervous. He would be called on to handle the new order for Number Twelve, and there was little leeway in the matter of time. The dirty-faced clock on the wall registered 3:10 now.

"If the dispatchers aim to change that meet," I muttered, "they'd better hurry up and put out the new order for it. Number Twelve is due here in ten minutes."

"And she's reported right on the dot," added Dave. He stepped to the bay window and peered out into the night. "Yeh, the first glow of her headlight is showing in the west already. What in the devil can be slowing things up at headquarters?"

With an impatient oath, he broke open his telegraph instrument and called the division dispatchers. Their answer was for Dave to keep his shirt on, and it sent him into a tantrum. He grabbed up the whisky bottle from his table, took another stiff shot out of it, and began to stride around the office like a caged animal.

And then a thought struck me—the order board, the semaphore signal above the roof of the station. Its red light would have to be turned on, if Number Twelve was to be stopped and a new order delivered. At the moment, the order signal was dark, for the rules required that no train be stopped at Wildhorse unless the operator actually held a train order to deliver to it.

"Say, Dave," I broke in. "Hadn't you better play safe and turn on your red light? You don't want Twelve to get away from you."

"Play safe, hell!" swore Dave. "I'm not allowed to display my red light without an order to deliver. That's regulation. And I haven't got an order to deliver to Twelve because those fumble-fingered dispatchers haven't issued it yet. 'Keep your shirt on,' he says—the dirty son of a—"

AND Dave cursed the dispatchers for their delay; cursed them with such bitter hard blasphemy that it ran shivers

up my spine and reminded me again of what I sometimes forgot—that Dave DuShane was an utterly godless brute, an unprincipled ruffian of the first water.

It was 3:15 now, and still nothing from the dispatchers. The west pane of the bay window was becoming frosted with the increasing glow of Twelve's headlight. I could hear the low rumble of the train in the distance. Still cursing, Dave flung open the door of the heating stove and began to poke up the fire with furious impatience.

Then suddenly his telegraph sounder broke with a wild burst of stuttering. He jumped for the instrument, jumped quickly and anxiously, leaving the stove poker sticking in the hot coals in his haste. I was sitting right there beside the stove, but I was too drugged with drowsiness to notice the forgotten poker, or care.

After a moment at the key, Dave spoke aloud, but as much to himself as to me.



And his voice sounded strained and hoarse, thick in tone.

"Here it is at last!" he said. "The superseding order for Twelve. Number Twelve will hold for Number One at Badland instead of Alcorn. And it took those brainless dispatchers ten minutes to figure out a simple meet that an idiot could have arranged in ten seconds!"

The rumble of Twelve was growing louder now, and the light on the west window brighter. It was just 3:18. Two minutes were left in which to stop Twelve for its new order.

Dave promptly got up from his chair to turn on the red light of the order board

overhead. His hand reached forward toward the signal lever, set close beside the window. And in that very instant, Dave DuShane's waning candle gave its last flicker and burned out.

Rising hurriedly and clumsily, he had knocked his chair over backwards on the floor. With his hand halfway to the signal lever, he paused and turned around to see what had caused the racket. When he saw the overturned chair, he blinked at it, muttered an oath, and stooped over to pick it up. The interruption was fatal.

I WATCHED him, watched him every second; yet I saw him only dimly as in a dream, for my eyelids were leaden and half closed. For a moment he stood there leaning heavily on the back of his righted chair. He seemed to sway unsteadily on his feet, and to be clutching at support. Then abruptly he straightened erect, lifted his hands to his haggard face, and pressed his palms against his bloodshot eyes.

"Now let me see," he croaked dazedly. "What was I doing? What was I do—Oh, yes, I remember. The stove poker. Left it in the fire. Damn it to hell, I thought I was sober, but I must be drunk!"

He came over and pulled the poker out of the coals. It was red hot to the handle. He dropped it quickly on the zinc ash pan. Even that noise failed to disturb my sleepy stupor. Neither did the long station whistle of an approaching locomotive bring me to my senses. I was in a worse daze than Dave, or just as bad.

From the stove he staggered back to his chair and half fell into it. Why, I wondered vaguely, did he sit down? Shouldn't he have reached forward to turn on—to turn on what? My brain was so fogged that it refused to function at all.

"Twelve's almost here," came Dave's babbled words. "Can't make a mistake about this new order for her. Let's see if I've got it written right. Number Twelve will hold for Number One at Badland instead of Alcorn. Twelve will hold for One at Badland instead of Alcorn."

And so help me, I fell dead asleep.

I was awakened almost instantly. I was being shaken; shaken gently, but from head to foot. The chair I sat in shook, the whole depot shook. I jerked erect, looked around, wide-eyed and startled.

Through the bay window I caught a glimpse of movement, of speed. Dull varnish and glass was streaking by, followed by the flash of a red-and-green tail light. Then the shrill shriek of a locomotive whistle faded quickly to a long wail in the distance.

What train was that, so swiftly past? My brain was numb. I looked at the clock. 3:20. Why, that was Number Twelve, of course, right on the dot. But—

Shouldn't Twelve have stopped? To pick up a train order?

I looked quickly at Dave. And my heart turned a flip-flop. He was standing in the center of the room, standing frozen and speechless. His mouth hung open, his eyes bulged. In his hand was clutched a green order tissue.

"Dave! What is it? What happened?"

BUT I knew what had happened. I knew it even before I looked at the signal lever and saw it set the wrong way. Dave DuShane had forgotten to turn on his red order light!

It stunned me. Twelve gone, without that change of orders! I tried to think what would result. Certainly, Twelve would fail to take the siding at Badland now. She would run on to Alcorn for the old meet. And Number One, receiving the new order at Alcorn, would start at once for Badland, expecting a clear track all the way through. The two flyers had, in effect, lap orders. There would be a head-on collision between them.

"Dave!" I cried, leaping to my feet. "Stop Number One! Get Alcorn on the wire and stop One there—quick!"

The telegraph sounder had started to click again. Dave nodded toward it, dumbly, hopelessly. I knew no Morse, but I knew what Dave meant by that mute

nod. Alcorn was reporting Number One out, gone. Gone at 3:20 as expected, after receiving the new order saying that Twelve would be clear on the Badland siding.

My scalp prickled at the thought. It was too late now to stop that collision. There was no way left to warn either train. Only the badlands lay between them, and there was no living thing in the badlands except a few stray Tumbling T cows. Two trainloads of people, of peacefully sleeping passengers, were doomed to crash together between Badland siding and Alcorn. They would head-end at full speed on the blind curves of that dreaded country, already the scene of two major railroad disasters, and now about to witness a third and even worse catastrophe.

DESPERATELY I began to grope in my mind for some ray of hope, however slight. But it was useless, for there was no hope. It was just impossible for the coming collision to be avoided. Nothing could stop it, not even the warning of headlight beams. No engineer could see an approaching headlight in those broken badlands in time to do more than slap at his brake valve and jump for the rocks. Hopeless!

I know my own feelings then. But what were the feelings of Dave DuShane, whose mistake had caused this tragedy? The crumpled and useless train order dropped from his fingers and fluttered to the floor. He staggered back to his table, reached for the half-empty whisky bottle, started to lift it to his lips. Then suddenly his arm whipped back, and he hurled the bottle away from him, violently. It smashed through a pane of the bay window, and itself was shattered on the depot platform outside. Then Dave dropped heavily into his chair, slumped over in it, and buried his face in his hands, shuddering.

With a great effort I began to collect my wits. "Listen, Dave," I quavered, walking over to him. "Hadn't you better tell headquarters? Yes, that's the thing to do. Call the dispatchers. Tell them what's

happened, what is going to happen in a few minutes. Tell them to rush relief, an ambulance train, doctors, nurses, the wrecking crew. Hurry and get busy on your key!"

For a long moment he remained huddled and motionless. Then slowly his face came up out of his hands, white and old. Slowly he turned to his instrument and called the division dispatchers.

They answered promptly. And then, with his finger on the key, Dave's lips moved mechanically with the words he tapped over the wire to headquarters.

"Wildhorse. No. 12, out, 3:20 a.m."

Just that. No more. A regular report of train passage.

I was thunderstruck. I stood and gaped at him. It was several seconds before speech returned to me. Then it came in a rush.

"Man alive, Dave!" I burst out. "Why didn't you tell them the truth? Get help started down to those poor people! Heaven knows they'll need it soon enough! What's got into you, anyway?"

HE MADE no answer. I doubt if he even heard me. He got to his feet and stood silent and grim, staring vacantly into space. Slowly his fingers crept up the sides of his head and knotted in his heavy black hair. Then suddenly he turned and strode across the office to the door of the depot baggage room. Jerking it open, he stepped through into the pitch darkness beyond. The door banged closed behind him, and I heard the key click in the lock.

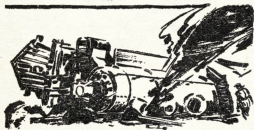
I could only gaze blankly after him. His actions had left me flabbergasted. Why had he locked himself in the dark baggage room? Why did he refuse to tell headquarters what had happened? Had the shock of the coming disaster unbalanced his mind?

My thoughts were in a turmoil. I went to the baggage door and pounded on it, calling for Dave to come out and notify the dispatchers. But there was no answer, no sound, within. I beat on the door until

my fists were bruised and bleeding, then went back to my chair beside the stove and dropped down in it exhausted.

It was 3:30 now. Number Twelve was due at Badland already, making the short run from Wildhorse at high speed. At that very moment Twelve probably was rocketing past the Badland siding on her way to doom. As nearly as I could figure it, her collision with Number One would come just four minutes later—at 3:34.

My eyes riveted on the office clock with horrible fascination. I counted in anguish every second of those next terrible min-



utes. 3:31, 3:32, 3:33. And then—3:34! I could hear the echo of that frightful crash in the badlands. But, no; it was only my frazzled nerves. The sound I heard was the door of the baggage room being unlocked and opened. Looking up, I saw Dave standing on the threshold.

"My God!" I said. "I thought I heard — Dave, are you going to tell the dispatchers?"

"There's no need of it." He stood there quietly, his tone strangely calm and assured. "You're overwrought about this, lad. Don't take it so hard. Everything will be all right."

"Be all right?" I echoed. "Two passenger trains collide in the badlands, and you say everything will be all right?"

HE CAME over and put his hand on my shoulder. And there was not a tremble to his fingers, I noticed. This was not the same man who had entered that baggage room, stunned and horror-stricken, ten minutes earlier.

"Stop your worrying, lad," he said.

"Those two trains didn't collide. There hasn't been any wreck at all."

At that, I went limp all over. No wreck? How had it been avoided? Had I overlooked some ray of hope? And what did Dave know about it?

"Why do you say that?" I asked weakly. "How do you know there hasn't been a wreck?"

Dave turned away, walked back to his table in the window, sat down. Reaching forward, he turned down the wick of the smoky lamp. The yellow flame shrank, leaving the room in semidarkness. Then he answered my question.

"Because I prayed! There hasn't been a wreck, because I prayed that there shouldn't be one!"

The words chilled my blood. So the shock of horror had affected Dave's mind, after all. The man was mad. It would have been funny if it hadn't been so tragic. Not really prayed! Not Dave DuShane, of all men!

"You know, lad," he went on, rationally enough, "I've always been a pretty godless sort. You know my reputation—booze-hound, barroom bully, company thief. I've never said a prayer in my life. But I prayed just now. I went in that baggage room and prayed my heart out. Whatever I've been or done, I don't go in for killing innocent people in droves. I don't want my hands stained with the blood of those helpless passengers. A thing like this will break any man, if he's human at all."

THERE was no doubting his sincerity. I could tell by the tone of his voice that he meant every word of it. But Dave's personal reaction was beside the point, which was a cold matter of a major railroad disaster miles away.

"I don't blame you for praying," I said. "I'd have done the same thing. But this is practical railroad operation. You should have called headquarters for help immediately. Surely you can't believe a prayer

has stopped that collision from taking place."

"Yes, I believe just that," declared Dave.

"But why? It's so ridiculous!"

"No, it isn't ridiculous, lad. You see, I had an answer to my prayer. While I was kneeling in the baggage room, just a few moments before the collision was due, I had an answer. Not an answer in words, or a vision of angels, or any of that silly stuff; but an answer, just the same. I felt it, somehow. The collision did not take place."

"Then what happened to stop it?"

"I don't know, lad. I haven't the faintest idea of what happened. But I'm certain there has been no wreck. Everything will be all right. I prayed, and received an answer."

Well, that was the last straw. "Prayed and received an answer!" It was just too much to believe. I was convinced then that Dave DuShane had lost his mind. His brain had cracked under the blow of tragedy. I could think of no other explanation for it. As for imploring him any longer to notify the dispatchers, that was clearly useless.

BY NOW it was nearing four o'clock. If the two trains had passed safely at Badland, as Dave seemed to think, it was now time for Number One to have arrived here at Wildhorse. But One was not here. Neither was there any glow of headlight in the eastern sky.

Soon the telegraph sounder began to click and sputter again. Headquarters was calling. Dave responded, sent reply. This conversing was repeated several times. At length Dave pulled out the plugs and cut his instruments off the wire circuit, leaving us in silence.

"The dispatchers are up in the air," he remarked. "They keep asking why Number One hasn't arrived here yet from Badland, and why Number Twelve hasn't reached Alcorn. I've told them there's some kind of delay at Badland, but nothing serious. There's no use for me to keep

repeating it, so I'll go dead-wire until I learn what's happened."

Then we sat there, just sat there, listening to the clock tick away the dreadful minutes. If I had hoped against hope earlier, I gave it up now, for it was after four o'clock and still no sign of Number One. Of course, it had been hopeless from the first. Two trainloads of people had been slaughtered, Dave DuShane was crazy, and that's all there was to it.

The minutes passed, somehow. Ten of them, twenty, thirty, forty. A full hour dragged by. Still we sat there in the gloom. I felt too weak to move off my chair. I could only hold my head in my hands and try to blot out the nightmarish visions—visions of scores of humans mangled and dying in the badlands, with no aid coming to them, their plight unknown to anyone except a helpless kid and an insane operator.

THEN suddenly I heard a word, one word, spoken by Dave.

"Smoke!"

I looked up, and through the bay window saw a strange dull light outside. Then I realized that daylight was breaking. The clock said 5:10 now. A sad gray twilight hung over the prairies, and frost was white on the sagebrush.

Smoke? I jumped up and over to Dave's window. I peered eastward down the track, eastward toward the badlands. Dawn was a blood-red streak on the ragged horizon. And against the crimson, darkly, there showed a little black smudge, like the smoke of a locomotive in the distance.

A locomotive? Coming out of the badlands? What could it be? Not Number One, surely! That was impossible, now. I left Dave sitting at his table and dashed outside to the track.

Standing there on the depot platform, I squinted my eyes against the growing dawn. Yes, it was an engine coming. And coming like a bat out of hell. She was raising a white cloud of alkali dust to mingle with her black smoke.

Then I saw it, nearer. A passenger locomotive. But a strange one, an engine I'd never seen on our road before. What the devil! Were my eyes deceiving me? Or had I gone crazy like Dave?

No, it was real. A strange engine running toward me like mad. And behind it, now, a long gray line of dust-coated sleeping cars. Good God!—could that be Number One and her brand-new locomotive approaching? I'd never write this report for our company magazine; the story was too big for me to handle.

Now a whistle shrieked. An engineer's goggled head poked out of the cab window. A gauntleted arm waved me back away from the track. Then a blast of wind almost bowled me over. There was a rush and a roar, pounding of wheels, screech of flanges, flash of smoking trucks. Dust choked me, gravel peppered me. And Number One was past like a shot, more than five hours late now and really burning the steel.

I BURST back into the station, laughing aloud. I must have been a little hysterical.

"Dave!" I yelled. "Did you see that? Did you see it?"

"Yes," said Dave simply. "It was Number One."

"But how did it happen? How could it ever have happened?"

"I still don't know, lad." He shook his head gravely. "I still haven't the slightest idea of what happened. It was the answer to my prayer. That's all I can say."

But we soon found out what had happened. Dave plugged in his instrument again, and almost at once got the information off the wire. Number Twelve had just been flagged down at Alcorn for her crew to explain to the dispatchers what had caused the long delay at Badland. And this is what had occurred, as Twelve's conductor told it:

Number Twelve, having only the old train order calling for a meet with Number

One at Alcorn, had of course run past Badland instead of sidetracking there. But on the first curve beyond Badland, Twelve's engine had hit a steer—one of those confounded Tumbling T cattle that were always wandering up on the track in the badlands and getting knocked into cow heaven. Instead of getting boosted over the telegraph wires as usual, however, this animal went down under the engine wheels. And one of its large leg bones derailed the pony wheels of Twelve's locomotive.

Naturally, the engineman made an emergency stop. Then, according to safety regulations, the train crew piled out to flag the track in both directions from the disabled flyer. The head brakeman strolled a few hundred feet up the rails eastward, and to his utter astonishment, suddenly saw Number One's headlight come zooming around a curve ahead of him. At once the brakeman broke out a red flare, and Number One, spotting the desperate signal, just managed to stop pilot to pilot with the derailed engine of Number Twelve.

Afterward, it had taken an hour or so to rerail those pony wheels. And then Twelve had reversed and backed into the Badland siding, trembling and thankful, after comparing orders with One.

I LEANED feebly against the table and looked at Dave taking the story off the sander.

"Well, can you beat that?" I exclaimed weakly. "A cow derailling a train! Why, such a thing wouldn't happen once in a thousand times. And yet it happened this time, at the exact moment when it was needed. What a lucky accident that was!"

"Only," said Dave quietly, "it wasn't an accident. It was—it was sent."

Well, was it? Had it been just a queer twist of chance that saved those trains? Or was it what Dave DuShane so deeply believed—a practical demonstration of the power of prayer? Freak accident or divine miracle, I do not know. Your guess is as good as mine.

! Whichever it was, Dave was through now. His job was gone. For failing to deliver a train order he would be discharged, blacklisted, run out of the game for life. You could get away with a lot of things on the railroads in those days—boozing, fighting, even stealing the company cash; but you couldn't get away with one bad operating mistake. Oh, no; Dave DuShane was done. As a railroad telegrapher he was washed up, forever and a day.

"But there's a way to beat the blacklist," I reminded him, trying not to be too downhearted about it. "You can go somewhere else and work under a false name. Plenty of other railroaders have done it. Wherever you go, Dave, I'll go with you."

"No, lad." He got up and put his arm around my shoulders. "You stay here and—and push. Don't be a fool like I've been. There's a new generation of railroad men coming, and they won't be drunken toughs like me and a lot of the others. Make yourself one of those new men, lad. Who knows, you might even push yourself up to be president of this system some day."

"But you, Dave. What's to become of you, now?"

"Just this." He bent to his instrument, called headquarters, and told the dispatchers to send a new telegrapher to Wildhorse to replace Operator DuShane, resigned. "I've got another job in mind," he added. "A better job than this. It just occurred to me. I'm going to— Hold on, lad! What's wrong?"

HE SAW me fall back against the wall, suddenly stunned. I thought I'd had my share of shocks that night, but here was another, perhaps the greatest shock of all.

"Your hair, Dave!" I gasped. "It's—why, it's—"

! Words failed me. I hadn't noticed it before, because the light in the office had been dim and I'd been too upset to notice much of anything. But now, with the first rays of the rising sun striking through the window full on Dave, I saw that astound-

ing sight. Dave's hair, his thick mop of coal-black hair, had turned white!

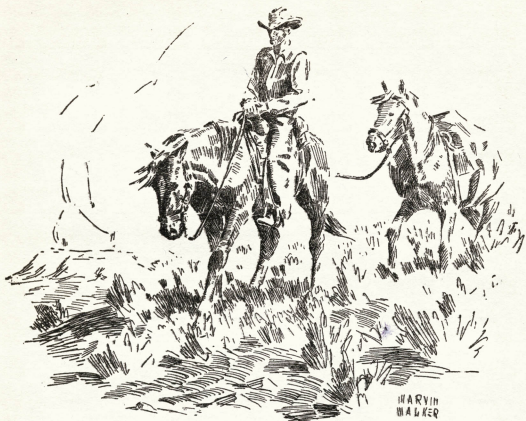
Of course, I'd read of people's hair suddenly turning gray or white under the stress of some great emotional upheaval. But I'd always taken such yarns with a grain of salt. At least I never expected to witness such a phenomenon. Yet here it was before my eyes. Sometime between the passage of Number Twelve and the arrival of Number One—perhaps while he was in the baggage room learning to pray—Dave DuShane's hair had turned as white as a ball of cotton. That capped the climax of a series of events which, as I said at the beginning, formed the strangest experience I have ever encountered in a lifetime of railroad service.

All this, to repeat, took place a long while ago. Railroading has changed a lot since then, and the men have changed even more than the business. Only Wildhorse remains the same, a jerkwater cow country town. Still, it has a church now, and the church stands on a corner that used to be the site of the largest saloon in the county. So even Wildhorse has changed some, too, since those days.

And now, my friend, I am afraid I'm overdue for an appointment with my board of directors. But before I excuse myself there is one more thing I'd like to say. If you should ever visit Wildhorse and attend Sunday service at the church I mentioned, I want you to take a good look at the preacher. You'll find him to be an old man, but for all his advanced age, still tall and powerful and handsome, with flashing black eyes and a great mop of snowy white hair. And if you should ask the old-timers in the congregation whether their pastor is a good man, a godly man, worthy to hold a pulpit, the old-timers will tell you this:

That the Rev. Mr. David DuShane hasn't touched liquor or uttered a single cuss word since a certain night, many long years ago, when his hair turned white between the passage of two trains and he quit a railroad job to join the clergy.

The Tonto Kid Turns Peace Officer—But Not for Long



HEADING SOUTH

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Author of

"A Slim Chance," "Wildcat Reward," "Slim Plays a Fast Game," etc.

THE bank window was riddled with bullets. Bits of bark were chipped from the plaza trees. A bay saddle horse staggered across the plaza, sank down and lay with head outstretched. Citizens of the state capital crept warily from behind counter and door, emerged from recessed hallways. The smell of burnt powder hung in the air. Someone telephoned the governor's mansion that the Randall gang had again raided the town. So far as the governor himself was concerned, the news was a bit late. The Randalls had fired into the governor's mansion as they raced

past, after their unsuccessful attempt to loot the First National Bank. Emerson, the druggist, a puncher from the Pecos, and the cashier of the First National Bank lay dead in the plaza. One of the Randall gang was badly wounded but still in the saddle.

The volley fired into the governor's mansion was an echo of the gang's frequently repeated challenge to the chief executive; if he wanted them, he could come and get them. Several times in the past five years the invitation had been accepted. But as yet no posse or peace officer had been able to dislodge the outlaws from their stronghold in Horse Thief

Canyon. The canyon itself was all but inaccessible, and the mountain trails west led into the Bad Lands, affording an easy retreat in case of a prolonged attack. The Hamills of Thunder Mountain controlled the timberland and high meadows south of the canyon. The Hamills themselves were notoriously unfriendly toward peace officers.

The day following the raid, a slim, rather carefully dressed man of about thirty called on the governor. The caller's name, the governor learned, was Alexander Akers. Always out for votes, the governor smiled. "Sandy Acres, eh?"

"So I have been told. But not gritty enough to go after the Randall outfit."

The governor's heavy gray eyebrows went up. Mr. Akers hadn't been in the reception room five minutes, and he had put his finger on a sore spot. This was just a little bit too swift. As governor of the state, The Honorable Frank B. Rowland felt entitled to a little more respect. "To just what am I indebted—" he began stiffly.

"For the pleasure of this visit?" Mr. Akers proffered a cigar which, not being accepted, he lighted himself. "Or for my remark about the Randalls?"

"Let us say both."

Mr. Akers nodded. "That saves time. However, allow me to point out that I didn't make the mistake of calling you Frank."

It pleased the governor to be facetious.

"Frank with a capital, or lower case?"

"Let us say both."

THE governor was no fool—he couldn't afford to be. So he let down the bars. "Haven't I met you before?"

"Several times, when you were a private citizen. But I don't care to trespass on that circumstance. About a year before you received the nomination, if you haven't forgotten, the pleasure of your company netted my establishment something like five hundred dollars."

A good politician, the governor could

remember that poker game and laugh. "Correct! You are Slim Akers."

"Gambler. Now we're on common ground."

"How are things going, Akers?"

"Quietly, in my line."

"Could I persuade you to take a little drink?"

"Why, yes—if you won't smoke."

"Not—well—let's try one of those cigars."

Again Mr. Akers gracefully proffered a cigar which the governor accepted as an accompaniment to the little drink.

"Wonderful," said Mr. Akers, setting down his glass, "how a little conversation loosens up the rivets."

"Especially the unofficial rivets. What can I do for you?"

"Issue a pardon for Young Pete, better known as The Tonto Kid."

Governor Rowland was surprised, more than surprised, and he showed it. Mr. Akers' nerve hadn't failed any since their last meeting. "But Akers!"

"Your constituents, and so forth. Of course! I expected that. Barring a select few, your constituents know as little about the real history of The Tonto Kid as you do. He's a bad man, a gunman, a killer. That's wholesale opinion, never sifted. What started him riding the high trails? When did he ever bump off a man without giving that man every chance in the world to either back down or pull his gun? How many times has he let a peace officer go when he could have blown his head off? When did The Kid ever go back on a friend," Mr. Akers looked the governor hard in the eye, "or play a favorite? I've traveled with The Tonto Kid for a good many years. I know him both ways from the jack. There isn't a straighter man in the state, nor a man with more sand. But your newspapers and your loose mouthed gentlemen who read them, all have it that The Kid is a rattler that will strike anything that comes within reach. To the contrary, if the peace officers of this unenlightened community had spent as much

time leaving him alone as he has trying to keep out of trouble, he'd hung up his gun and give the law a chance to get a little much needed sleep. Pardon him, and see if I am not correct."

THE governor felt there was considerable justice in the suggestion. The Tonto Kid, in spite of his record, was more a victim of circumstance than a deliberate lawbreaker. But to pardon him offhand would raise a storm of protest. Political rivals would charge him with currying favor with the wild bunch. It wouldn't do. For a full minute Governor Rowland studied the blotter on his desk. "I'm sorry, Akers," he said finally. "But it is impossible."

"Pardon a contradiction. You're not sorry—yet. But you feel you might be, next election time. I had anticipated your reply. This is my proposition. Give The Kid a pardon, deputize him and turn him loose, and he'll clean up the Randall outfit or get shot to pieces trying. Either way, you win."

"Have you talked with him?"

"Plenty. Now, I'm talking for him."

"Why didn't he come and see me himself?"

Mr. Akers allowed himself a smile. "Getting right down to cases, he doesn't trust you."

"And you do?"

"I'm not The Tonto Kid."

Governor Rowland frowned. "Folks seem to hold me personally responsible for the existence of the Randall gang."

"Aren't you?"

The back of Governor Rowland's neck tingled. This man Akers was too damned insistent. Like a bulldog on the end of a sack, he wouldn't let go. Swing the sack and he would hang on all the harder. Personally responsible for the existence of the Randall gang! The governor snorted, inwardly. Outwardly he remained the smiling politician. "Responsible? Hardly, Akers. Trouble is, when we do go after

the Randalls we don't get any coöperation from the community."

IT WAS Mr. Akers' turn to show surprise. "Then Emerson the druggist, cashier Harrison, and that young puncher from the Pecos stood off eight of the Randall gang yesterday just for the pleasure of getting shot at, and killed?"

"A splendid example of individual courage."

"Yes, I know. But they wouldn't have put it that way. They figured, as citizens,



it was their job. That's what I call coöperation."

"Accidental coöperation, if you wish."

"Got results, didn't it?"

"That isn't the point."

Mr. Akers was sorely tempted to say several things. Had he been suing for a pardon for himself he would have said them. But he represented his friend The Tonto Kid, so he restrained himself. "You speak of coöperation. That's exactly what I'm offering. Sheriff Yardlaw has failed to land the gang, and Buck is the best man in the state, barring one. Deputize The Tonto Kid and he'll make good."

"I can hardly deputize an outlaw."

"That's a joke. I could name seven or eight outlaws drawing salaries from the state. I would even be willing to name 'em in print." Mr. Akers rose.

Governor Rowland gestured to him to sit down. "No hurry, Akers. Let's look at

this from another angle. Suppose I issue the pardon. What guarantee have I that The Kid will clean up the gang?"

"None, whatever. He'll try."

"All right. Tell him to go ahead."

Governor Rowland waved a magnanimous hand. "If he turns the trick I'll issue the pardon."

Mr. Akers deliberated. "No. The Kid won't go after them without written authority from you. The pardon can come later."

Governor Rowland reached for a pad, wrote a brief line and handed it to his visitor. "Tell him to take this to room 28, Capitol Building. Glad you came in, Akers. Give my regards to The Kid."

ARRIVING in the state capital following the attempted bank robbery, Sheriff Yardlaw was summoned to a private conference with the governor. Yardlaw was instructed to ignore the Randall gang and the recent raid, also to keep his hands off The Tonto Kid should the latter show up. The tall, grizzled sheriff was not overpleased with these instructions. The governor had tied his hands. Sheriff Yardlaw decided to do a little intelligent listening.

A day later, while loafing in the Capitol Hotel bar the sheriff heard a voice he knew. Turning he saw The Tonto Kid's friend, Mr. Slim Akers, conversing with the proprietor of the local gambling hall. Mr. Akers had no establishment in town. His presence in the Capitol was interesting. Yardlaw concealed his curiosity with a brief nod to the gambler, who finally left his companion and joined the sheriff.

"This," said Akers, "is no place to talk politics."

"Who wants to talk politics?" growled Yardlaw.

"I do."

If anyone knew why the governor was protecting The Tonto Kid it would be Mr. Akers. Recalling the governor's injunction to keep his hands off The Tonto Kid, the sheriff accepted Mr. Akers' invitation to

more private quarters—an upstairs hotel room overlooking the plaza. Not that the gambler ever did any loose talking. But he had expressed a desire to talk.

"Have a cigar," said Mr. Akers.

"Just had one."

"Have a drink?"

"Just had one."

"Well, have a chair."

It was warm, and they sat by the open window. "Suppose," said the gambler, "we get down to cases."

"Suits me."

"You're taking a little vacation. Don't be surprised that I know it. I'm largely responsible."

Yardlaw said nothing.

"Just between ourselves, Buck, the governor has deputized The Tonto Kid to go out and clean up the Randall outfit."

Yardlaw nodded.

"If The Kid busts the gang, he gets his pardon."

"I'll be damned glad if he does."

"Save us all a lot of wear and tear, won't it? You know as well as I do, that Young Pete is entitled to a break. I had an idea the governor would talk to you about it. But you can't always tell about governors."

"Or about The Kid." Yardlaw nodded toward the plaza.

"Yes. I've been watching him." Mr. Akers leaned out. "Hey, Pete, come on up and meet a friend."

THE gaunt, grizzled sheriff rose, took off his belt and gun and laid them on the dresser. This was a great concession for the fighting sheriff to make to his old enemy The Tonto Kid. And yet it was natural enough. Between them existed no personal enmity. For several years Yardlaw had trailed The Kid. Several times they had met in battle. Outlaw and peace officer they had come to respect each other's nerve and ability. Now a pencilled line from the governor and a little piece of plated metal had put them on an equal footing socially. In disarming himself the sheriff had been wise. The Tonto Kid

would never take advantage of an unarmed man.

Someone knocked on the hotel room door, and although it was unlocked, waited for it to be opened. Mr. Akers did the honors. "This young fellow," he said as Young Pete stepped in, "is The Tonto Kid."

Young Pete grinned. "Hello, Buck. How's it goin'?"

Noting the belt and gun on the dresser, The Kid followed Yardlaw's example. Mr. Akers insisted that they shake hands. Yardlaw smiled. "Understand you're going after the Randall gang."

"So Slim tell me."

"Going in alone?"

"Sure! I don't want any posse messin' up my party."

Dark eyed, slender, boyish except when his eyes hardened, Young Pete stood looking at the sheriff. Gaunt, battle scarred, Yardlaw gazed at the youth who so often had given him the slip. Mr. Akers relieved what seemed a slight tension. "First time you fellows have ever shaken hands, I take it?"

Young Pete laughed. "Hell, I been willin' to shake hands with Buck any time he let go his gun."

Yardlaw indicated the badge on Young Pete's vest. "How does it feel to be wearin' one of those things?"

"Kinda like hidin' behind a tree when you're shootin'. I don't figure to be wearin' it long."

"Don't know that you will, if you stack up against the Randall outfit single handed."

"The fella that gets it can keep it."

Sheriff Yardlaw nodded grimly. "Bart Randall might like to try for it. He's in town."

RANDALL was in town! This was news. Yet Young Pete said nothing. Slim Akers merely elevated his eyebrows. Randall's brother was in town, probably scouting for the gang. Both Slim and Young Pete knew that Yardlaw would have

gone after him except for the governor's orders. "I'd kind of like to meet him," said Pete finally. "What does he look like?"

Yardlaw told him. For a moment Young Pete stood gazing down onto the plaza. Presently he rose and moved toward the door. "Guess you fellas'll have to excuse me for a couple of minutes."

"Don't make it any longer," said Slim Akers.

The door closed. Mr. Akers glanced at Yardlaw. The sheriff rose.

"I feel like taking a little walk," declared the gambler.

Buck Yardlaw picked up his belt and gun and followed Mr. Akers down to the street. "It's his party," said Mr. Akers as they moved toward the Capitol Saloon. "Unless another one of the gang should happen to be in town. I don't want to see anyone get shot in the back."

Opposite the front of the saloon stood a telephone pole. Against the pole leaned Young Pete, his thumbs in the arm holes of his vest. His hat was pushed back. A thin smile played about his mouth. Directly across the street in the doorway of the saddle shop stood Mr. Akers and Sheriff Yardlaw. Mr. Akers was smoking a cigar. Yardlaw was gazing at a cowpony tied to a hitch rail half a block away, a bay and white paint horse. Altogether too showy, reflected Yardlaw. Too easily spotted. The horse belonged to Bart Randall, brother of the outlaw. Mr. Akers' gaze was fixed on the doorway of the Capitol.

WITH no definite plan in mind, Young Pete had begun his campaign by simply awaiting developments. Sooner or later Randall's brother would show up. If the outlaw wanted a fight he could have it. If he chose to ignore the deputy loafing outside the saloon, Pete would not challenge him. But he would mark him down, note how he dressed and acted. A mining man and a local attorney came out of the saloon, glanced at the young fellow leaning against the telephone pole and

moved on. In the doorway of the saddle shop Yardlaw and Slim Akers stood talking quietly. The paint horse stamped and switched flies. A number of townsfolk were passing back and forth. Pete noted that there was not a town constable in sight.

Black hair, blue eyes, medium build, about twenty-five years old, acts tough. Yardlaw's description of Bart Randall. Aware that the gang had friends in town, Young Pete kept the telephone pole at his back.

Glancing across the street he noted that Slim Akers and the sheriff were leaving the doorway of the saddle shop—as plain a hint as he could wish. The saddle shop was directly in line of fire should the man who had just come out of the Capitol Saloon happen to be Randall. Pete seemed to be talking to himself. "Black hair, blue eyes . . ." The roughly clad man coming toward him stopped and stared at the badge on Pete's vest. "Acts tough," murmured Pete, flicking his half smoked cigarette into the gutter. Casually The Tonto Kid glanced at the other man, whose face was lined with a sneer of disdain for the young, slender, smooth faced youth sporting a deputy's badge. Still leaning easily against the telephone pole, Pete seemed to be staring at the other's boots, powdered with the red clay dust of the hill country. Yardlaw had disappeared. Slim Akers was standing a few doors up the street from the saddle shop.

"Anything about those boots you don't like?"

Young Pete looked up questioningly. "Talkin' to me?"

"Talking to you."

"All right. Go ahead." Pete saw Randall glance toward the paint horse.

"You're feeling real healthy, ain't you?"

Pete nodded. "Real healthy."

Randall strode up and flicked his finger at the deputy's badge as though snapping a fly from Young Pete's vest.

"Anything about that badge you don't

like?" Pete moved an inch or two, freeing his shoulder from the telephone pole.

RANDALL seemed to hesitate. Finally he swung round, and turning his back on The Tonto Kid, started to walk toward the paint horse at the hitch rail. Slim Akers, across the street, thought that the outlaw had backed down. But Young Pete had a different idea. Hardly had the outlaw taken two steps when he whirled. The guns of the outlaw and The Tonto Kid crashed like a single shot. Slim Akers groaned. His sympathy was wasted. Randall swayed and fell, face down on the sidewalk. Gun poised, Young Pete walked slowly toward him.

In the few seconds between the time Randall had accosted The Tonto Kid, and



the shooting, but one or two had seen the fight, or knew exactly what had happened. In the crowd gathering round the dead outlaw, loomed the grizzled face of Sheriff Yardlaw. "Yes, it's Bart Randall," he said. But when questioned as to who shot the outlaw, Yardlaw had no answer. Rumor spread that Buck Yardlaw had killed Bart Randall. When the news reached the governor, he sent for Yardlaw and got the facts. Apparently uninterested in the shooting, Mr. Slim Akers stood a few feet up the street using his pen knife to dig a bullet from a telephone pole.

In Mr. Akers' room in the Capitol Hotel sat Young Pete gazing down onto the plaza. No matter what happened now, he would have to go through with the job. The elder Randall wouldn't leave a leg under

a horse till he rode down the man who had killed his brother.

Cool and smiling, Mr. Slim Akers entered the room. Walking over to The Tonto Kid he laid a lead slug on the window sill. "Compliments of Bart Randall. I figured he had got you."

"No. Because he didn't know what I would do. The minute he started to walk away, I knew what he would do. Some fellas make mistakes like that."

"Going to stay around town and take them on as they come?"

Pete shook his head. "I'm going over into their country. I know the trails pretty well. I'll need a pack horse and some grub. Mebby you or Buck can stake me."

"Buck will let you have 'most anything he's got. Know where he was when the ruckus started?"

"No."

"He was sitting in the upstairs window of Rodney's, next to the saddle shop. No one would have got you from behind."

"And I suppose you were wearin' a telegraph pole for a chest protector."

"That's exactly what I was doing. How would you like a little drink?"

"When I can't handle myself without liquor, I'll hang up my gun."

Slim Akers glanced at his friend. Young Pete was staring out of the window, apparently lost in thought.

THE next day a rumor spread that The Tonto Kid was in town. An eye witness of the shooting was responsible for the news. Governor Rowland, who didn't want The Tonto Kid's presence advertised, was anything but pleased. But Yardlaw pointed out that it was the best thing that could have happened. The news would reach Randall, who, while he would hardly risk another raid immediately, probably would quietly send in someone to get The Tonto Kid, and thus split up the gang. "Let folks talk all they want to," advised Yardlaw. "Let them say The Tonto Kid is hiding somewhere in town until he can make a safe get away. Just as long as no

one actually knows where he is, just so much easier it will be for him to follow out his plans."

"What are his plans?" asked the governor bluntly.

"I don't know what his plans are. I don't even know whether he's in town or not."

The governor who wished to give some carefully edited news to the papers, surmised that Yardlaw knew considerably more than he cared to tell. "Governor is out to clean up the Randall gang." That would make a valuable headline. But the headline didn't appear. Even Young Pete's closest friend, Mr. Akers, seemed to know nothing about his whereabouts.

Meanwhile Young Pete, riding his own horse and leading a pack animal loaned him by Yardlaw, was riding south. Not until he was some miles out from the capital, did he swing west and make for the hills. Neither Yardlaw nor Akers knew just when he left or which way he would ride.

At dawn he made camp in the timbered range of Thunder Mountain. His next ride would bring him well over the range and into San Dimas valley. Heading up San Dimas, another eight hours' ride would locate him in the rough, rock-strewn foothills back of Horsethief Canyon. Surmising that the Randall gang had scattered following the recent raid, Young Pete planned to hunt them out one at a time—a fool's job, with the chances a hundred to one that he would not come out of the venture alive. But that bothered him considerably less than the fact that he, who had been hunted from Mexico to the Canadian border, was now the hunter. Reason told him that he was right—that he had the law behind him, that every member of the gang was a killer who would shoot him or any other peace officer on sight. Yet he hated the job, and had he not given his word that he would see it through, he would have quit long before he reached the backyard of the Randall stronghold.

BOTH his horses staked well down the mountainside, Young Pete climbed to the crest overlooking Horsethief Canyon. The air was clear and warm, the grass on the range stirrup-high. Below, the great rock walled cleft of Horsethief Canyon spread from a knife-edge to a wide boulder-strewn wash where it met the distant desert. The ledge trail leading up to the stone house where, several years ago he had fetched the mortally wounded Pecos, showed sharp edged in the morning sun. In the corral back of the house stood two horses.* Young Pete reasoned that at least two of the outlaws were at the gang's headquarters, possibly the man wounded in the recent raid and a companion. Pete did some reckoning. Bart Randall was out of it. That left seven to be accounted for. If two were holding out in the canyon, there must be five of the outlaws scattered back in the hill country. Two of the gang he knew by sight, Ed Randall and his right hand man, Harper. The other five he knew by name only; Lindquist, a Pecos cowboy and cattle rustler, Stevens, said to hail from the Tonto Valley, Bill Page, a former deputy sheriff, White Eye Johnson, a Texan, and Sarg, once a railroad man, who had joined the wild bunch. From Yardlaw's description Young Pete thought he could recognize them. As there was always the possibility that one or two of the gang might visit the canyon for word with their chief, or for supplies, Pete sat watching the stone house. After a half hour or so, he closed his eyes to clear his vision. When he opened them, a man was coming out of the stone house carrying another man. The figures were too far for Pete to catch any detail, but by the way the man being carried hung in the other's arms Pete judged him to be either unconscious or dead. In either case, why carry him out of the house? The man carrying the other walked to the rim of the ledge, paused for a second and then heaved his inanimate burden into the canyon below.

"That's one way of buryin' 'em," mut-

tered Young Pete. Evidently the man wounded in the raid had died.

HARDENED by a life of outlawry, Young Pete tried to ignore the brutality of dumping a body into a canyon like a log. While aware that on the ledges or anywhere along those rocky walls there was no place to make a grave, and to pack the body up to the timber and bury it would have been a risky job because the Randalls were on the watch, still no logic could convince him that the act was either necessary, or decent.

Seldom curious as to motives except as they might affect his own welfare, Young Pete was irritated by a growing urge to meet the man who had so callously disposed of his companion. Pete wanted to size him up, note what kind of an eye he had and how he carried himself under ordinary circumstances. He was almost tempted to make his way into the canyon and wait on one of the ledges above the stone house until the outlaw appeared. While he might get away with it, it would be a foolish and unnecessary risk. At any moment one or more of the gang hiding back in the hills might take a notion to visit the stone house. Moreover, it was not a good idea to leave his horses too long. Someone might happen to discover them and surmising that their owner was not in that part of the country strictly for the fun of it, ambush and kill him. He could, he told himself, lie out on one of the canyon ledges and pick off anyone that came along. Although he knew that any of the Randall gang would skyline him and drop him merely on suspicion, it was not in his book to shoot a man down without giving him a chance.

The man in the stone house below came out with a saddle on his shoulder. Pete watched the other saddle up and lead his horse out of the corral. Would he ride up or down the canyon? The noon sun was hammering hard on ledge and tree and boulder. A haze of heat hung in the air. Far

below the man mounted and began to ride up the canyon trail. Pete drew back from the point of rocks where he had been sitting. A few yards north of him the trail crossed the timbered crest.

SOMEWHERE in the brush a rattler buzzed. Through the still air came the distant click of hoofs. A little later Pete could hear the creak of a saddle. Soon he would be able to see the man who had more than roused his curiosity. Screened by a clump of brush, Pete stared at the trail. The head of a steel gray horse showed, then its shoulders and front. The polished butt of a carbine glittered in the hot light. Sharp, hard blue eyes looked out from beneath the curled brim of a tattered sombrero. Sallow faced, his mouth and chin half concealed by a stubbly black beard, the rider of the steel gray rested his mount for a few seconds. Already Young Pete had identified him as Harper, Ed Randall's right hand man. Black Joe Harper he was called. Appreciating the value of surprising a man from the rear, rather than from in front, Young Pete made no move until the outlaw had ridden past. "Harper!" he called sharply, expecting the outlaw to whirl and fire. To his surprise Harper coolly pulled up his horse and turning faced the man who had called to him. His hard blue eyes swept Young Pete from head to foot. "Hello, Tonto! What in hell are you doing up here?"

"Lookin' for a couple of stray horses. Seen any?"

"No."

Pete stood with his hands touching the edges of his open vest. Slouched in the saddle, Harper looked as if he had no suspicion whatever of The Tonto Kid's mission. Yet he knew there was something wrong. After killing Bart Randall, Young Pete would hardly hide out in the Horsethief Canyon country. "Looking for Ed Randall?" asked the outlaw.

"Yes."

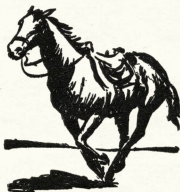
Harper bared his teeth in a grin. "He's

looking for you. Seems you and Bart had a little argument."

"Seems we did."

LITTLE by little Pete drew back the edge of his vest. Catching the glint of the deputy's star, the outlaw's expression changed. "So that's it?" With the first word Harper went for his gun. At the second word he fired. The third was not much more than a mumble. Whirling his horse he spurred over the crest. Save that he knew he was hit, and hit hard, Harper was hardly aware that The Tonto Kid had fired at all.

Crashing down the hillside, wide of the trail, the outlaw's horse lunged and leaped, his rider rocking in the saddle. Young Pete didn't want to drop the horse. But it wouldn't do for Harper to get to his fellows and warn them. Half way down



the mountainside as the horse swerved to avoid a boulder, the outlaw fell, and lay crumpled up in the low brush.

For several minutes Young Pete stood watching the country below before he finally climbed down to where the dead outlaw lay. The shot had taken Harper in the pit of the stomach, paralyzed him. Had he been hit anywhere else except in the head or the heart, he would have kept on firing until either he or The Tonto Kid was down.

Gouging a hollow in the hillside Young Pete covered the outlaw's body with rocks. Far down the foothills Harper's horse was making for the spot where Pete's horses

were staked. Fearing the gray would stampede them Pete lost no time in getting down to the valley. The steel gray broke for the brush-lined slope on the western hillside. Before Pete could saddle up and take after him, the horse had disappeared. Sooner or later some of the gang would run onto the gray, and look for Harper. "Had a hunch I ought to have dropped that horse," muttered Pete as he prepared to move camp.

THE Hamills of Thunder Mountain claimed the land bordering the south side of Horsethief Canyon. A stranger trespassing on the property had to explain himself. While the Hamills would not bother a man hiding from the law, a peace officer was about as welcome in their territory as a cloudburst. Once before Young Pete had had occasion to ride the Hamill range and had barely escaped with his life. Yet the south rim afforded the only lookout now that Harper had been killed.

That evening Young Pete camped in the timber back from the south rim, his horses grazing in a grassy meadow a few yards beyond. In spite of the chance that the Hamills might discover him, the location had its advantages. From the canyon trail, far to the north, it would be difficult for anyone to identify him without a field glass, should any of the Randall gang happen to see him on the rim rock. In any event he was reasonably safe from an attack from the rear. Only because the gang respected the Hamill range were they tolerated in the neighborhood.

That evening Young Pete sat near the edge of the rim watching the stone house. The horse left in the corral below moved about nervously, apparently suffering for water. As darkness settled, Young Pete turned in. He had been asleep several hours when he was awakened by moonlight on his face. Through the still, starlit air came the occasional click of a shod hoof. Walking to the canyon rim, Young Pete peered down into the wide, dusky hollow. Directly across the canyon, and some two

hundred feet below a patch of moonlight lay like a silver pool on the trail. Above and below the moonlit spot the canyon was deep in shadow. Faint and muffled, came the sound of horses moving along the trail. His gaze fixed on the pool of moonlight, Young Pete waited and listened. A horse stumbled. The sound of a curse came clearly through the still air. Finally the head of a horse poked into the pool of moonlight, its rider's figure tiny but distinct. Pete counted three horsemen. Some distance behind the others came a fourth, leading a horse with an empty saddle. A few minutes later a light showed dimly in the doorway of the stone house. The door closed. Four of the gang had assembled at headquarters. Pete wondered if Ed Randall was one of them, or if he had ridden to town in search of the man who shot his brother. The outlaws had found and captured Harper's mount. Pete went back to his blankets. For a long time he lay awake trying to shape some kind of plan. He decided, finally, that all planning was out of his hands. He would simply have to stay in the Horsethief Canyon country and take it as it came.

NEXT day, squatted near a tiny break-fast fire, Pete's gaze roved up and down the rimrock which ran like a clean-swept road in front of him. Just within the edge of the timber lay his blankets and saddle. A few yards farther back his horses grazed the circle of their stake ropes. The morning sun struck like slanting flame on the red bark of the big trees. In overalls, shirt and vest, his hat off, Young Pete might have been some stray cowboy who had bushed out for the night. Apparently unconcerned as to his surroundings, nevertheless his eye was constantly alert. Although his movements as he made breakfast seemed natural to the task, they were as deliberate as if planned. Now he was facing the rim rock and the wide void of the canyon. Again as he shoved a bit of dry branch into the fire, he was facing the timberlands. His hat was off not by

choice, but because its brim cut down his vision as he stooped above the fire. He hummed a tune, "Cowboy, What You Doin' Here?" That he had met and exterminated two of the Randall gang in the past few days did not bother him in the least. Had the shooting resulted from a private quarrel he would not have felt other than he did. The fact that he was a peace officer was secondary. In each instance his opponent had opened the fight. It was just as much his job to take care of himself as it was to take care of his enemies.

Glancing over the rim of his tin cup of coffee he saw a horseman coming through the timber. Pete ceased humming "Cowboy, What You Doin' Here?" Now he might have to answer the question. Black-bearded Judson Hamill, a Winchester across the saddle, was riding down the meadow where Pete's horses grazed. Young Pete's hand moved up under his vest. Unpinning the deputy's star he shoved it into his pocket.

Judson Hamill had once witnessed a strange quarrel in which his brother had been shot and killed by The Tonto Kid. At the time, Judson Hamill's brother was a peace officer, and consequently, according to the Hamill creed, beyond their protection. While no hand had been lifted against him as he rode from the scene of the shooting, Young Pete knew that hereafter the less he saw of the Hamills the better. Now he was camped on their range, grazing his horses in their meadows.

SQUATTING by the fire, his coffee cup in his hand, Pete nodded as Hamill rode up. The tall, gaunt mountain man showed no surprise in finding The Tonto Kid camped on his land. Yet his deep set black eyes asked a question. Again Young Pete nodded. "Campin' for a couple of days to catch my breath."

"Lost much breath lately?"

"Some." He gestured toward the canyon. "Them fellas over there got it."

"I heard about that." Judson Hamill waved his hand toward Young Pete's

horses. "Seems you had time to catch up a pack horse before you left."

"Sure! I don't mind runnin' from a bunch, when it's necessary. But damned if I feel like starvin' to death."

"I heard it was a deputy sheriff got Bart Randall."

"So did I. But I don't believe everything telephoned on the wind."

Hamill gestured toward his own domain. "The Randalls don't ride this country much."

"That's why I'm here."

"But if the Randall outfit should happen to be tracking down a peace officer, none of the Hamills will stop them."

"Fair enough," said Pete. "If any peace officers show up, you can bet I won't be anywhere in sight."

Judson Hamill stared hard at the youth squatting beside the fire. "Same if the Randalls were to show up?"

"That would be different. I reckon they're out to get me. That will be my own private party."

Saying nothing as to whether Young Pete could continue camping on his land or would have to move on, Judson Hamill reined round and rode back into the timber. Pete poured himself a second cup of coffee. Hamill, he was sure, would not inform the Randalls of his whereabouts. Whether or not the mountain man suspected him of being a peace officer, Young Pete was not so sure. Hamill was shrewd, and probably knew more about present circumstances than he seemed to know. Young Pete decided to stay where he was until some move of the outlaws forced him to another location.

HE SPENT most of the day watching the stone house in the canyon. Meanwhile, one of the outlaws sat with a rifle on his knees guarding the canyon trail below. Men came out of the stone house, filled the trough at the corral, packed feed to the horses, and spent their time loafing. Toward evening the guard rose and stood looking down the canyon. A

half hour later, after answering a signal, a rider appeared. There were now five men at the outlaw headquarters, and eight horses in the corral. Without being able to identify the recent arrival, Pete surmised that it was Ed Randall. With their leader present the outlaws would doubtless make some new move, governed largely, Pete reasoned, by what their leader had been able to find out in town. Pete asked himself what effect Harper's disappearance would have. Would the gang take to tracking and finally locate his present camp, or would they ignore the mound of stones in the foothills and simply look out for themselves?

Just before sundown two men came out of the stone house. One of them gestured across the canyon toward Young Pete's camp. The other raised his hands to his eyes. Pete caught the glint of field glass lenses. He could easily have lain back on



the rim rock, out of sight. But as he had already planned a second big move in his campaign, he sat still.

Before dark he made a fairly big fire on the rim, cooked supper, and packing hastily, struck west through the timberland, his fire on the rim rock still bright in the night shadows. Reaching the crest of the range he dropped down the western slope, staked his pack horse, and rode round the head of the canyon to the north side. Some twenty or thirty yards back in the brush he dismounted and sat down, the reins in his hand. In the thin chill air he had no difficulty in keeping awake. Reasoning that the outlaws would investigate his camp on the opposite side of the canyon, Young Pete wore down the tedious

hours waiting. About midnight he heard the unmistakable sound of hoofs. Dim in the moonlight, two riders passed on the trail below him, rounded the upper end of the canyon and disappeared in the timber. When they reappeared on the rim rock near his camp he tied his horse in the brush. Taking off his boots Pete made his way down the trail. He had just reached the corral above the stone house when the door swung open and someone stepped out. Pete dropped in the shadow of the water trough. The horses snorted and circled. Pete held his breath. Cursing the horses, the man turned and walked back to the house. Rising, Pete let down the corral bars and waved his hat. With a rush and roar the horses stampeded down the canyon.

YOUNG PETE turned and ran. Behind him rose the sound of men rushing about, of voices sharp with surprise. The pool of moonlight through which the outlaws had passed on the preceding night at an earlier hour, had widened. As Young Pete sped through it a rifle barked. A slug whistled past his head and spattered on an angle of the canyon wall. Again the rifle barked, but Young Pete had rounded the bend in the trail. He slowed down to a steady trot. Leaving the trail he climbed through the brush to his horse, mounted and crossing the crest rode down into San Dimas Valley. Two of the outlaws were afoot. Six of the eight horses were loose, probably making for the desert below. It would take some time to catch them up. Pete's pack horse was staked on the San Dimas side of the range. Arriving at his camp, Young Pete moved both horses to another location and managed to get an hour's sleep before daybreak.

That morning while he was watering his horses at the valley stream, a curl of smoke broke above the timber of the range. Finally the smoke grew dense and black, bulging over the distant tree tops, and moving slowly west in the light breeze. While safe enough in the valley, Young Pete was

curious as to what might have caused the fire. Like most mountain men, the Hamills were careful about fire. The smoke came from somewhere in the neighborhood of their homestead.

As Pete watched, a band of horses broke across the distant crest of the range and rocketed down into the valley. Too far away to read the brand, he surmised they were Hamill stock. The smoke seemed to grow less dense, finally subsiding to a thin yellow haze. Aware that in the valley he might be spotted from some crag or ridge, he had already decided to take to the high trails, circle the Hamill homestead and make his way back to the south rim of the canyon opposite the stone house. Only by constantly moving camp could he hope to keep from being ambushed. By this time the Randall gang would be only too well aware that someone was after them. It was a case of keeping out of their way, and in their way until he either wore them down, or they got him.

REASONING that it was his last chance to make good, to come clear of the law and settle down to some quiet occupation, Young Pete went at his job with the calculating mind of an accomplished chess player. He knew the game from both sides, and knew the odds against him. One mistake would probably end the game. And he didn't intend to make it.

His next move was apparently irrelevant, yet he had his reason for it. Riding down the valley to where the stampeded horses had crossed, he back-tracked them up the eastern slope. The smell of smoke came to him as he topped the crest. Films of ash drifted down through the trees. Alert for a surprise, he rode slowly through the timberland. When he came within sight of the Hamill homestead, set in a wide, grassy clearing, he pulled up and sat his horse, wondering how it had happened. The big log cabin, the sheds and outbuildings were burned to the ground. Tiny flames still played about the fallen timbers. Flecks of ash floated in the air. A breeze

ruffled the tree tops. The yellow haze cleared. The bars of the big corral, which had escaped the flames, were down. A man lay near the charred logs that had been the cabin. Still fearing some kind of a trap, Young Pete sat his horse watching. The man's hand moved as if signaling for help. Slowly Pete pulled his carbine from the scabbard. Slowly he rode forward, watching the timber edging the clearing. Within a few feet of the prostrate figure he reined up. The man on the ground was Judson Hamill. He raised on his elbow, tried to speak. His black beard twitched and his head fell back.

The mountain man's Winchester lay near him. Round about were scattered eight or ten empty shells. Tracks of plunging hoofs showed in the earth in front of the charred cabin. More empty shells glittered in the sunlight. Near the log stable Pete found the bullet riddled body of Judson Hamill's brother. Both the Hamills had died fighting.

PETE tried to picture the fight—Judson Hamill and his brother surprised by two mounted men, who according to the tracks near the cabin had not dismounted; an argument of some kind, and a battle. That the corralled horses had been turned loose after the Hamills had been shot down, was plainly evident. But why had they been turned loose? The earth round the corral gate was so heavily tracked that it told no special story. But out in the clearing Pete discovered that the mounted men had departed with two led horses. Keeping within the timber, Young Pete followed their trail out to the rim of the canyon. Too far back from the rim to see the stone house, he could see the upper end of the canyon trail as it neared the crest. Nothing showed on the trail. About to turn back, he glanced up and down the stretch of rim rock in front of him. The glint of a saddle gun caught his eye. Pete was puzzled. No one riding that country would leave a rifle

behind unless there was a mighty good reason to do so.

Still keeping within the timber he rode west until almost opposite the carbine on the rim rock. Huddled at the base of a big pine, lay Sarg, the railroad man who had joined the wild bunch. Wounded in the fight with the Hamills he had fallen from the saddle, dropped his carbine, and had then crawled to the timber. And there his companion, whoever he might have been, had left him.

Bending over the wounded man, Young Pete saw that he had been shot through the chest twice. He was unconscious and could not last long.

BART RANDALL, Harper, Sarg and the man wounded in the raid were out of it. Still remained four of the gang to be accounted for. Riding back to the Hamill homestead Young Pete dug a trench near the charred logs. He buried Judson Hamill and his brother. He worked fast, never taking it for granted that the Randall gang would not return to the clearing. An hour later he was back on the south rim of the canyon, near the spot where Sarg's carbine lay. Absorbed in watching the stone house, Young Pete was startled by a shuffling sound. Whirling, he saw a figure staggering toward him. It was Sarg, hands outstretched as though feeling his way in the dark. Shot through the body, and dying on his feet, he was evidently unaware of anyone near him. "Water," he gasped tonelessly. "Water."

Young Pete stepped to his horse and unslung his canteen. "Here you are, Sarg," he said, unscrewing the canteen cap. But the wounded outlaw did not seem to either see or hear. Slowly he lurched past Young Pete, groping blindly in the sunlight.

"Hold on!" cried Pete as Sarg kept on. "Sarg!" he called sharply. Standing within a few feet of the canyon rim, the outlaw hesitated, as if about to turn. Pete jumped forward, grasped his arm. Sarg

jerked free. "Water," he mumbled, as he lurched forward and toppled into the chasm below.

For a moment Young Pete stood as though paralyzed. The flicker of a lizard across the rim rock brought him back to himself. Picking up Sarg's carbine he examined the magazine. It was empty. Recalling how it had been emptied, he hurled the carbine out into space.

A few minutes later he saw four men leave the stone house across the canyon and ride toward the crest. Evidently the gang was heading for San Dimas Valley, possibly leaving the country. Once below the border it would take months of trailing to locate them. Mounting, Young Pete cut through the timberland, passed the Hamill clearing and nearing the ridge trail of the range, waited to see if the outlaws would come along the ridge or ride the valley trail below. For an hour he watched and waited, unaware that the gang had crossed the San Dimas Valley and had ridden up the opposite slope, instead of heading either north or south. Finally Young Pete rode down to where he had left his pack horse. Stake rope, pack horse and provisions were gone.

Where they had gone was not difficult to determine. The tracks near the river bed showed where five animals had crossed the stream, three shod horses and two unshod. "Got my eyes left, anyhow," muttered Pete as he began to trail the horses up the western slope of the San Dimas.

TO BE out of provisions and blankets, and riding an uninhabited country was no new experience to The Tonto Kid. He had a good horse under him, and arms and ammunition. He also had papers and tobacco. Heretofore he had not dared smoke. Now he curled a cigarette, and with his gaze on the brush-covered hillside before him, followed the plain trail of the five horses, three shod, two unshod. The unshod horses, he reasoned, had belonged to the Hamills. No doubt the Randall gang would tack shoes on them the first

chance they got. They would have to if they expected the Hamill mounts to last long in the desert country.

About an hour later Young Pete reached the crest of the range. He was not surprised to see, far out in the desert below, a cavalcade making for the town of Carmelita, an outpost on the edge of the Bad Lands. Carmelita was populated largely by Mexicans. Brinkley, an ex-cattleman, ran the general store. He had a hard name. The kind of man, reasoned Pete, who for policy alone would be friendly toward the Randall outfit. With a decidedly unfavorable prospect before him, Pete rode down the western slope. But not as a peace officer. Half way down the slope he unfastened his deputy star and shied it into the brush. "This here," he told his horse, "is what Slim would call a strictly personal matter. Somehow, I kinda like it better that way."

Fading sunlight lay on the low adobes, the littered streets, and the weathered general store of Carmelita. Round about

casional freighter hauled supplies through Carmelita to the distant cowtown of Rodney. An occasional buckboard passed through the town, and once in a while a cowhand. Otherwise Carmelita was as isolated as a pinnacle in the Bad Lands.

FAR out on the desert Young Pete waited until dark before approaching the town. He smoked to dull his hunger, and to amuse himself, talked to his pony. "Long haul and no grass, eh Buck? Mebby so you'll have to eat frijoles when we hit Carmelita. But you'll eat. I said it.

"Mebby so the Randall bunch kept right on goin'. That would be bad."

Buck mouthed his bit. He wanted water.

"If they're bushin' in town tonight, one of 'em will be watchin' the back trail. What do you say if we was to ride round and come into town from the west. Think that would be healthier?"

To the stout little buckskin it didn't matter. All he knew was that he was hungry and needed water. He could see no reason for standing there in the sunset shadows, his rider sitting at his feet smoking a cigarette.

"They got our pack horse, and some grub," Young Pete nodded toward the distant town. "That pack horse belongs to Buck Yardlaw. We got to do somethin' about it. Chucked my badge in the brush myself. All they got to do now is to get you," he looked up at the pony, "and my gun, and I'll be all washed up and ready for buryin'."

Pete caught himself thinking of Judson Hamill and his brother, of Harper and Sarg, and Horsethief Canyon. A man didn't last too long riding the high trails. He himself had been lucky. He had taken about every chance a man could take, and aside from having been wounded in two gun fights, had come through without a scratch. Sometimes it happened that way. But not often.

There were four of the Randall gang still going: Ed Randall, Lindquist the



spread the desert, stripped of greasewood near the town, criss-crossed by goat trails and meandering wagon roads. Shiftlessness and poverty were as apparent as though printed on a signboard. Mongrels of all sizes lay in the dust of the main street, or against the crumbling adobe walls. From a desert well, not much more than a square hole in the ground, planked on the sides, the natives drew their supply of water and carried it to their homes. Adjoining the store stood a squat adobe with a blue door—the saloon. Storekeeper Brinkley's partner ran the saloon. An oc-

Pecos cowboy, Stevens and White Eye Johnson. The outlaw wounded in the recent raid was, according to eye witnesses of the fight, Bill Page. His body lay at the bottom of Horsethief Canyon. Young Pete glanced toward the distant desert town, a vague outline in the gathering darkness. "White Eye Johnson and Ed Randall—I'd like to take 'em in and turn 'em over to Yardlaw. But shucks! Buck himself would have to knock 'em out and rope 'em to a buckboard and freight 'em in. And I ain't got a buckboard."

If he were lucky enough to clean up the gang, what proof, thought Pete, would the governor have that the Randall bunch was wiped out? None, except his word. Of course time would tell the story. But a whole lot could happen before folks finally realized that the Randall gang was actually out of existence.

PETE rose and gathering the reins, mounted. "We got to do this job quick. That's all. Tryin' to put 'em under arrest would be a joke. And the joke would be on me."

The Tonto Kid saw no romance in his work, no glory if he cleaned up the gang. It was simply a job, like roping out salty brones and riding them. It was his own fault if he got piled.

The desert stars shone high and clear when Young Pete stepped from his horse and led him up to the first adobe on the west side of Carmelita. A few houses down the street several horses stood tied to a hitch rail. With one exception the horses were saddled. The exception was Pete's pack horse. They belonged to strangers in town, he learned. The young Mexican girl he talked with laughed in the starlight. "You also are a stranger, no?"

Swarthy, black-haired, and speaking Mexican like a native, he could easily have passed as one of her country. "Yes, I'm a stranger. Got lost, out yonder. Saw this town and rode in. If I could get something to eat, and some water and feed for my horse—" Pete took some silver

from his pocket—"perhaps you could help me?"

"But there is the store. And there is water at the well."

"I know. But I can't go in the store. Those fellows," Pete lowered his voice, "are after me."

For a moment the girl studied Pete's face. "I will get food for you. But from my father's house, not from the store. The men in the store are bad men. They would talk to me. I am pretty, am I not?"

"Pretty as a speckled pup under a yellow wagon," blurted Pete. "But you don't savvy American talk. Like a rose," he added in Spanish.

"I will bring the food and the water, and no one shall see me."

Pete gestured. "I'll be waiting—out yonder."

IT WAS a long chance, and Pete had to take it. Carmelita was so small a town that should he appear on the street, his presence would soon be remarked. If the Mexican girl didn't talk, he would be safe for the present. If the girl talked—well, the buckskin pony would have another long trip without food or water.

The girl came stealthily through the shadows. She gave Young Pete some food. She had filled his canteen at the well. "The men in the store want shoes for their horses," she told him in Spanish. "There are no shoes. They have sent for my father who does the work of a blacksmith. They have told him he must make shoes. But he has not the iron. These men from the San Dimas country do not speak with reason. They are drunk."

"That's good," said Young Pete laconically.

"But it is not good! My father is afraid of these men."

"Kind of scared of 'em myself," said Pete smiling. "Suppose you go back to your house and forget all about me. Here's something to buy you a new dress with."

The girl took the money, two dollars,

which to her was a fortune. Young Pete seemed like a being sent by the saints—one who gave much money, yet asked nothing. For a moment she hesitated, gazing at the dark young stranger. "Is that all I may do for you?" she said finally.

Pete grinned. "You might give me a kiss. But I'm not beggin' you for it."

The girl was gone. Pete brushed his lips with the back of his hand. Taking the reins he led his thirsty pony round to the well back of the store. From down the desert came the rumbling and clack of a freighter's wagon. In Brinkley's store there was loud talking and an occasional burst of harsh laughter. Pete's pony raised a dripping muzzle and gazed toward the approaching wagon. The freighter would have supplies for the cowtown of Rodney. As there was no water between Carmelita and Rodney, he would make camp in Carmelita. Chances were he would have a supply of blacksmith's iron and horseshoes. The gang could now get their horses shod without any difficulty. The wagon was still several hundred yards east of town. Someone in the gang would soon step out to see who was coming. Young Pete mounted and rode toward the oncoming wagon.

JUST outside Carmelita he hailed the teamster. "Got any corn or anything a fella could use for horse feed?"

The man on the high seat nodded. "Don't figure to unload till I get in," he mumbled.

Young Pete's pulse quickened. There was something slightly familiar about the teamster's manner and his voice. Pete hated to be taken by surprise. "Suppose you quit chewin' tobacco and talk human," he blurted.

The teamster laughed. "So they didn't get you after all?"

"Not me. What in hell you doin' up in this country, Buck?"

"Freighting."

"Been doin' some trackin' too, I reckon."

"Some."

"Where's the regular freighter?"

"At Big South Bend. He'll wait till he hears from me."

Young Pete was regaining his poise. His old enemy, Sheriff Buck Yardlaw, evidently had trailed him to the Horsethief Canyon country, read sign to advantage and was now for some very good reason playing the part of a freighter. Surmising that Yardlaw was also out to clean up the Randall gang, on old scores, he said so.

Yardlaw shook his head. "That's your job. I'm after the men who murdered Jud Hamill and his brother."

Pete gestured toward Carmelita. "You'll find one of 'em yonder. The other, he's at the bottom of Horsethief Canyon."

"How many in this bunch?"

"Four. As I figure it, they are Ed Randall, Lindquist, White Eye, and Rud Stevens."

"Looks like you been busy."

"I had luck."

The tired horses fretted to get to water. "I'm camping at the well," said Yardlaw.

"Mebby I could help you unhitch."

"Mebby you could."

"I'll ride round and meet you," said Pete. "The gang are short on horseshoes. They'll be askin' you for some."

THE arrival of the freight wagon aroused no suspicion among the gang. White Eye Johnson came out of the store and asked the teamster if he had any horseshoes, and when he would be pulling out in the morning. The teamster replied that he had shoes, that he would not pull out until late in the morning, as he had to repair the wagon reach before starting. White Eye went back into the store.

Unhitched, the eight horses stood tied to the feed trailer. Young Pete, on foot, stood near Yardlaw. Solid as a rock, the big sheriff gazed at The Tonto Kid for a moment. "Got plenty?"

"Shells? Yes."

"Want to go after 'em now—or wait till morning?"

"I been thinkin' about that. You flip a coin."

Pete called heads, struck a match and gazed at the coin in Yardlaw's hand. "All right, Buck. I had a hunch somethin' was on for tonight. Ed Randall is the fastest gun. White Eye ain't slow, so I've heard. Let's get busy."

BEFORE entering Brinkley's store, Yardlaw and Young Pete carefully and noiselessly braced a stout post against the rear door, so that no one could leave the building at that end. Just before they came round to the front Young Pete took off his sombrero and hung it on a fence post. He might need it again, and he might not. Gray with alkali, gaunt and tall, Yardlaw strode round to the front of the building, Young Pete beside him. It was a warm night. The store door was open. Together they stepped in. "I hear somebody wants to see me," said Yardlaw.

Young Pete's eye traveled round the room. Ed Randall, leader of the outlaws, was sitting sideways on the counter talking with the storekeeper, Brinkley. White Eye Johnson sat astraddle of a chair facing the doorway. Stevens and Lindquist, a bottle between them, stood near the lower end of the counter.

"Where's Jamison?" said the storekeeper quickly, naming the regular freighter.

"Resting up at Big South Bend." Yardlaw answered Brinkley, but he kept his eyes on Ed Randall.

Lindquist and Stevens set their glasses down. Young Pete saw that Randall had recognized him, yet Pete was watching White Eye Johnson's hands.

"How many shoes do you want?" Yardlaw's question seemed filled with a double meaning. "Cold shoes, you said."

"I can use about eight," said Randall easily. At any minute the tension would break, and the outlaws would go into action. Young Pete, whose unspoken motto was The Sooner The Better, laughed.

"Eight shoes would be four too many if you're lookin' for luck."

For once in his life, Ed Randall seemed to be stricken with sort of paralysis. Had either Yardlaw or The Tonto Kid shown up alone, it is possible the outlaw would have gone for his gun the minute he saw them. Yardlaw took a step toward him. Still no one in the room made a move. Another step, and Yardlaw swung his sombrero and slapped Randall in the face. Young Pete heard the crash of their guns.



His own hand was up and busy. Twice he fired. White Eye Johnson sagged along the counter, grasped it and sank to his knees. Lindquist turned and dashed for the rear door. But his companion Stevens had his gun out and going. One of his shots struck Yardlaw, who flinched, and then walked slowly toward him, firing as he came. Brinkley, dropping behind the counter, fired through it. As the splinters sprang up round the hole, Young Pete threw a shot which bored another hole within an inch of it. Pete's gun was empty, and Stevens, though hit hard, was still firing. Suddenly Yardlaw dropped his own gun and collapsed. Young Pete dove for it and came up. Twice it flashed. Stevens staggered toward the front door and fell across the threshold.

Lindquist, the Pecos cowboy, stood with his hands in the air. Young Pete walked up to him, took his gun, and jerking it up knocked him down and out. Smoke hung in a blue haze round the two ceiling lamps. Out in the street a dog howled. Pete walked round the counter. "Come on out and show yourself," he called. But

Brinkley, drilled through the stomach, was unable to move.

BOLTING the front door, Young Pete raised Yardlaw's head. The sheriff had been hit twice, but it was the slug that plowed through his scalp that had downed him. The wound in his shoulder was high, and not serious.

The storekeeper died before sunrise. Randall, White Eye Johnson and Stevens had been killed in the fight. Lindquist, the Pecos cowboy, was the only one to escape being hit. He lay hogtied in the room back of the main store.

Two days Young Pete stayed in Carmelita. The third day following the fight, Yardlaw was able to travel. Mounted on the pick of the outlaws' horses the sheriff and Young Pete headed for San Dimas Valley, Lindquist handcuffed, riding a few yards ahead. Asked why he had not put the outlaw out of business during the fight, Young Pete replied that Lindquist was the only member of the gang alive, and the only witness, aside from himself, that could prove the rest of the gang had been exterminated. "It ain't as if I was a peace officer," said Pete. "I chucked my star before I hit Carmelita. Them fellas stole one of my horses. That was plenty excuse for me."

"So you figured Lindquist will turn state's evidence?"

"Figured he was the yellowest dog in the bunch. He'll talk. Then the governor will know I played my hand like I said I would."

WHILE crossing San Dimas Valley, Young Pete rode aside long enough to look at the mound of stone underneath which lay the body of Black Joe Harper. To Pete's surprise he found a roughly hewn headboard and on it penciled "The Tonto Kid." He surmised that Yardlaw had found the grave and had so marked it. Pete recalled Yardlaw's "So they didn't get you after all?" He rode back to where the sheriff waited.

"Buck," Pete hesitated and glanced away,

"we been gunnin' for each other for quite a spell."

This was no news to Yardlaw, but that Young Pete should mention it, seemed strange. The sheriff nodded.

"I just took a look at that headboard where Joe Harper is planted. It wasn't there when I planted him. I notice it's got my name on it."

"Somebody made a mistake."

"Mebby." Young Pete looked the sheriff in the eye. "I never reckoned you would take that kind of trouble for me."

"Hell, Pete! I said somebody made a mistake."

"Somebody. Buck Yardlaw, mebbby. Thought the gang had got me, so he does some fancy carvin', for a friend."

"For a friend who did some fancy shooting when I was down and the guns still going."

"But that headboard was there before the shootin' started. What I mean, I ain't no more peace officer than a coyote. It ain't my game. Now I figure you're feelin' healthy enough to take Lindquist on in, and pry some talk out of him. If the governor wants to make out that pardon, tell him to hand it to Slim Akers—and Slim will send it to me."

"Scared to ride back to the capital?"

Young Pete's face went red. "Yes. I'm scared. Scared of myself. Not that I'd be lookin' for trouble. But some other folks might. And there's only one way of settlin' them kind."

Sheriff Yardlaw thought he understood. Perhaps it would be just as well if The Tonto Kid kept out of sight for a year or two. The sheriff thrust out his hand. Young Pete seized it, and turned away. "So long, Buck." Pete grinned. "Tell Slim for me, to go to hell, and I'll meet him there, one of these days." Pete reined his horse round. The Pecos cowboy, Lindquist, stared at him.

"Heading south?" said Yardlaw as Pete rode down the valley.

Young Pete turned and nodded. "Head-in' South."



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

The Tonto Kid

THE TONTO KID, *Henry Herbert Knibbs'* young outlaw—who has been appearing in **SHORT STORIES** for some years—is a great favorite with our readers and we have received quite a few letters asking about the beginnings of this youngster who plays on both sides of the law. *Mr. Knibbs* writes us that:

"No one ever knew The Tonto Kid's real name.

"Following a flood in the Texas panhandle, some searchers found a washtub in the fork of a cottonwood, left there by the flood. In the tub was an old army overcoat wrapped round something. The something was discovered to be a baby of a few months, the sole survivor of the family of ranchers whose bodies were found miles from the homestead. The men who discovered the orphan all had large families of children. No one wanted the baby in the washtub, so the discoverers drew lots to see who should have to adopt it.

"The foundling was a male and was named Pete by the rancher who took it home. When Pete grew big enough to unlatch a gate he was put to work. Like all youngsters in that section he learned to ride at an early age. He knew no kindness from either of his foster parents. His only friend was his foster sister, a child of about his own age. About all he knew was hard

work and frequent beatings. One day, when Pete was about thirteen years of age, his foster father came home drunk. Pete's foster sister happened to get in her father's way. He knocked her down. Enraged by this brutality, and doubtless influenced unconsciously by an accumulated hatred for his foster father, Pete grabbed the latter's gun from the holster and shot him. Mounted on the horse his foster father had ridden from town Pete headed north in a hurry. Independent and resourceful he managed to survive the hardships of his flight, and arriving in Arizona met with a band of cattle and horse thieves who gave him a place by their fire and virtually adopted him. He became horse boy and errand boy for the gang. At first he was not aware of their thieving, but thought them cattlemen. By the time he had found out their real methods he had become so accustomed to their way of living that he decided to stay with them. Among the gang, long since wiped out by peace officers and personal quarrels, was a man Young Pete admired. His name was Tonto Charley. Tonto was the wildest of the gang, fast with a gun, reckless when drunk, but always kind to Young Pete. When about fifteen years of age, considering himself a man grown, Pete became involved in a quarrel among the gang, who, finding themselves hard pressed for recent cattle stealing, decided to rob a train, divide the loot and each go his own way. Camped in the

neighborhood of old Fort Apache the gang discussed plans for the train robbery. Tonto Charley refused to have anything to do with the scheme. The gang quarreled. The quarrel ended in a gun fight. Young Pete had never been taken seriously by the gang. Aware that Tonto had been drawn into the quarrel as an excuse to kill him, Young Pete watched the man who had threatened to get Tonto. When the shooting began Young Pete took a hand. His unexpected assistance in Tonto Charley's fight, saved Tonto's life. Together they made a getaway, finally arriving in Socorro, on the river. Here Tonto got drunk with an old companion, a Mexican he had known in years past.

"Talking over old times and old feuds, the two finally decided on a little private war with some Magdalena cattlemen whom they had reason to hate. Young Pete was against the idea and tried to reason with Tonto. But Tonto, always a fool when drunk wouldn't listen to reason. In the saloon fight which followed Tonto was badly wounded, but made his getaway, Young Pete riding with him. A posse was organized. Across the river and north of Socorro Tonto Charley and Pete rode the empty country between Socorro and Albuquerque. Finally Tonto, who was hit hard, gave out. Pete's horse, stepping in a gopher hole had broken its leg. Knowing they would be followed they took refuge in a shallow draw. Tonto Charley was all but helpless. Both he and Pete knew he couldn't live long. Tonto told Pete to go to the edge of the draw and look at their back trail. He returned saying there was no one in sight yet. Tonto Charley told Pete not to get smart with him, that he had stayed too long looking at the back trail. Pete tried to make Charley believe there was no posse in sight, but he couldn't fool his friend. Tonto told him to take his horse and get out of there. Pete refused to go. Finally the wounded man asked Young Pete to look again and see how near their pursuers were. While Pete was looking he heard Tonto say, 'So

long, kid.' Pete turned in time to see Tonto, who might have lived an hour or two longer, draw his gun and kill himself.

"Young Pete, on Charley's big iron gray horse, managed to evade the posse, who, finding Tonto with a hole through his chest and another in his forehead, reasoned that Young Pete had killed the wounded man to get his horse. That was the beginning of Young Pete's hard reputation.

"Drifting over into New Mexico he became involved in a war between the authorities and a gang holding out in Horseshief Canyon. At fifteen years of age he had become outlaw. Often during the years following he tried to ride a straight trail. But luck was against him. He had earned a hard reputation. His escapades were elaborated until he became known as The Tonto Kid, a killer feared and hated by those who didn't know him, but liked by his friends, and respected for his ability by more than one peace officer. He ranged from Mexico to the Canadian border, working at times, gambling, seldom in one place long. Eventually he met with a card man known as Slim Akers. The two made themselves known in Arizona, New Mexico and Sonora, were captured, managed to escape, and finally decided to leave the country and make a fresh start. Often they were obliged to follow separate trails, but always they came together again. Their plan to reach the Argentine was frustrated. Becoming tired of being constantly on the move, they decided to appeal to the governor for a pardon. What success they had is told in the story entitled '*Heading South.*'

"This is a brief and rather hasty sketch of The Tonto Kid. His adventures have been told in a series of stories during the past five or six years. All but one of these stories appeared in *SHORT STORIES*, which has done so much toward making Young Pete known to present day folk. Naturally many of the names used are not those of the folk they represent. And many of the place names have been changed.

"*Henry H. Knibbs*"

In the next issue **SHORT STORIES** for Nov. 25th



WAR OF THE BRANDING IRON

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DONALD BARR CHIDSEY, B. E. COOK,
etc., etc., etc.**

A Student of Voodoo

THE BLACK GOD in this issue is *David Owen Daher's* first story in **SHORT STORIES**, and it is a novel, at that. Pretty good for a start! Mr. Daher says in a recent letter:

"As for the background of *'The Black God'*—I'm quite a student of native voodooos and superstitions and feel I know quite a bit about witchcraft, especially as applied to the African negro. I've trekked through Kenya—though it was a few years ago; three I think—and am quite familiar with Nairobi and Kisumu. Believe me the Dark Continent intrigues me and I think I have material enough for at least one more witchcraft novelette in which I hope to keep Jimmy Arnold as my central figure. Actually, my life should fit me more for writing Westerns as I spent a few years riding the range up in Alberta, but my real love is the general adventure story.

"*'The Black God'* as a story is, in the main, the natural result of a knowledge of Kenya Colony and the superstitions that make government such a difficult thing—not so much so now as when I was there, I understand—and a fertile imagination. Some of the characters were suggested by men I knew in Kenya, such as the good Father and the English commissioner, but

Arnold is a fictitious character in the entirety.

"David Owen Daher"

A Pirate Queen

THE DEVIL'S BOSUN of *H. Bedford-Jones* serial which begins in this issue was a super-pirate if ever there was one, even in those seas swarming with outlaws of many nations, and it is an interesting fact that the world's only woman buccaneer is a Chinese. Her name is Madame Lai Choi San. Described as a fair-looking lady about forty years old, Madame San, with a fleet of armor-plated, swift-sailing junks, manned by no fewer than 500 cut-throats, William P. Schramm writes us is holding her own against the competition of hundreds of other Chinese pirates who infest China's coastal waters from Shanghai to French Indo-China. For years this pirate queen has been a Mystery Woman to the Far East. To date she has been seen by only one white man, a nervy newspaper correspondent, who placed his life at stake to get an interview with her. After spending weeks in Chinese coast villages to learn her whereabouts and days in negotiating, the correspondent obtained permission to come on board the lady's flagship. He was allowed to remain on board several days as a paying guest, this at \$45 a day!

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 _____

It was learned that Madame San was the daughter of a powerful buccaneer captain, who one day passed into Davy Jones' locker "with his slippers on" in a skirmish with a gunboat, whereupon the daughter had fallen heir to her parent's fleet of junks and set to following in his footsteps.

Through her piracies Madame San had become a millionaire, and as such she was found living a life of luxurious ease on her flagship, the decks of which bristled with ancient muzzle-loading cannons of all sizes. When not actively engaged in piracy, she spent her time in a lounge chair on the aft deck, attended by two valets who continually combed her long black hair. She disdained speaking to any one of the crew except the captain. In addition to raids on vessels and occasionally kidnapping a wealthy Chinaman and holding him for ransom, the lady carries on a lucrative side-business in levying moneyed tribute on the hundreds of fishing junks of her fellow countrymen who ply their trade in the waters where she reigns. When she began buccaneering with her inherited fleet, other pirates attempted to drive her from her territory, but the Madame readily managed to hold her own against all comers. Today, being well aware of her powers as a pirate queen, other ruffians give her territory a wide berth.

Animals Eat Railroad Track

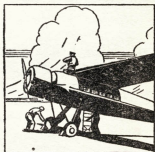
THE railroaders of *Duane Hopkins' Badland Meet* in this issue faced some tough problems, but back in 1873, animals actually ate part of the track of a railroad in the state of Washington!

One of the pioneer railroads of that state was built from Walla Walla to Wallula. It was a narrow-gauge line, and the whole thing was made of wood. Even the rails were hewn out of fir trees, and were about four by six inches in size. However, it was much better than the old horse-drawn stage coaches, and for a time everything was splendid. Then the rails began to splinter and go to pieces. The cost of steel rails prohibited the buying of them, so the owners replaced the worn-out track with rails covered with the hides of animals. Surprisingly, these were quite successful—for a time. Later, though, all the carnivorous animals in that section began lunching off the hides on the rails. With spring, only the well-chewed wooden strips remained. This time the company cheated the animals by using strap iron as a covering. Within a few years the road had made enough money to put down steel rails, and finally was taken over by the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company in the early part of the eighties.



OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Martin Bomber Makes Three Worlds Records

U. S. AIR SERVICES MAGAZINE reports that Brig. Gen. Frank M. Andrews recently hurled his Martin B-12

bombardment plane over the second lap of his 2,000-kilometer flight at an average speed of 165.4 m. p. h., which Col. Follette Bradley, intelligence officer at Langley Field, said broke three world's records for the 1,000-kilometer course. General An-

draws' elapsed time for the 1,000-kilometer course, flying with a 2,204.6 pound (2,000 kilogram) load, was 3 hours, 45 minutes, 13 seconds. The General, commander of G. H. Q. Air Force, headquarters at Langley Field, flew for the record over a triangular course in which the points were Willoughby Spit in Hampton Roads, Floyd Bennett Field, New York, and Bolling Field, Washington.

The previous marks, set by Colonel Lindbergh, Edwin Musick, and Boris Sergievsky in a Sikorsky S. 42 seaplane, were 157.3 m. p. h. over the prescribed distance, first, without payload, second, with payload of 500 kilograms, and third, with payload of 1,000 kilograms.

Davey Crockett's Strange Dog

THE lumberjacks have built up many legends about mythical creatures to be found in the woods and when they started telling strange tales of an evening, Davey Crockett's dog was often mentioned. This peculiar creature was actually supposed to have two of its legs, a front one and a hind one, sticking straight up in the air. This, the lumberjacks said, was due to an accident it once suffered. When running through the woods at its usual lightning

speed, it struck a tree with such force that the animal was broken into two equal sections with two legs on each. Fortunately the dog's owner, Davey Crockett himself, was close at hand and on seeing the beast's predicament, he instantly clapped the two halves together again. In his hurry he didn't notice until it was too late that he had one section upside down and ever since then two of the dog's legs have stuck up in the air. This odd state of affairs made the dog look rather queer but nevertheless it had its advantages. According to the lumbermen's legend, when the creature got tired of running on one pair of legs, it could actually flop over and start off afresh on the other two while the first pair were resting!

From Buenos Aires To Europe

THE German Transatlantic air mail and passenger line, The Sindicato Condor Ltd., is advertising in South America a four-day service for mail and passengers from Buenos Aires to Europe. Passengers are carried from Buenos Aires to Rio by planes, and from Rio to Friedrichshafen by the *Graf Zeppelin*. Intermediate stops are made at Sevilla and Recife.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

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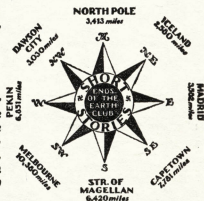
Here's an opportunity you stamp collectors had better not pass up.

Dear Secretary:

Is there any place for a Danish sailor to become a member of the Ends of the

Earth Club? I would like to join. I have been reading *SHORT STORIES* Magazine for some time.

I am very much interested in stamp collecting and I could supply large quantities of the current issues to members who



would care to write to me. I would like stamps from all over the world—South Sea Islands, India, Tasmania, Australia, South America, Africa, etc.

Yours respectfully,

H. Jensen

M/S "Nordhavet,"

D/S "Norden" Amaliegade 49,
Copenhagen K,
Denmark

Here's a chance for you fishermen who spend your winters in Florida to tell how you landed that big one.

Dear Secretary:

I have today received my membership card as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. I work in an office and consequently do not see much of the country. I would like to communicate with other members in the different countries and see just how those in the other parts of the world live.

I would appreciate it also very much if any members who have fished off the coast of Florida for sea bass and tarpon would communicate with me and let me know how the thing is done and how they fight.

Here's hoping the Club keeps up the good work and with orchids to SHORT STORIES, I remain

Yours sincerely,

Jack Langabeer

54 Henry Street,
Belleville, Ontario,
Canada

Here's an opportunity to gather some snaps of the Far East and also some interesting information as well.

Dear Secretary:

Here is a plea from a new member for some mail.

I am a soldier serving in the Far East in the British Royal Artillery. I can write interesting letters about India, Egypt, Malaya and the Mediterranean ports. Will swap personal and interesting snaps.

Hoping for a full mail bag, I am

Sincerely,

Richard Tester

Gunner,
4th Anti-Aircraft Battery, R. A.,
Changi, Singapore,
Malaya, South Seas

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.

W. Nelson Williamson, 4364 West Thompson Street, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I. M. Willis, Way Way, Macksville, New South Wales, Australia

Joseph St. R. Willis, Way Way, Macksville, New South Wales, Australia

Albert Aldo, 145 North Main, Concord, New Hampshire
Joseph Charles Alfano, 520 Wetmore Street, Utica, New York

H. Andberg, Highland Road, West Concord, New Hampshire

Murray Arnowitz, 1968 Cedar Avenue, Bronx, New York

Marcel Le Maistre Auger, 1394 Sherbrooke Street, East, Montreal, Province of Quebec, Canada

Ben Bailey, 116 Company, C. C. C., Millers Falls, Massachusetts

Dave Barney, 341 North Normandie Place, Los Angeles, California

John Bechtel, Riverside Park, Riverside, New Jersey

Joe Belmal, 118½ Grove Street, Bakersfield California

Alex Belyea, Browns Flats, Kings County, New Brunswick, Canada

Howard Best, C. C. C. Company 1835, Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Wilbur Black, Reidsville, Georgia

Willard Boe, 3728 South Lincoln Street, Rear, Chicago, Illinois

Paul Boff, 1908 Carson Street, Pittsburgh, S. S. Pennsylvania

Edward Bolson, 300 East 65th Street, New York City, New York

Bill V. Bonnell, 1700 Jopping Avenue, Bronx, New York

Joseph Bonpietro, 113 East Clifton Avenue, Clifton, New Jersey

Larry Bowen, General Delivery, Buffalo, New York

E. S. Boyer, Chaminade College, Clayton, Missouri

Edwin T. Brennan, 5 King Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts

Cecil L. Britton, Weymouth North, Digby County, Nova Scotia

Lewis Brown, 15 Spring Forest Avenue, Binghamton, New York

Van Burnham, Jr., Ruleville, Mississippi

Willie Burns, Weymouth North, Digby County, Nova Scotia

Ellis Olmstead Butler, 144-41 Thirty-fifth Street, Flushing, Long Island

D. F. Callaghan, 7 Maranea Cres, Coburg, N. 13, Melbourne, Australia

Emil Cederfelot, R. F. D. 1, Box 73, Brunswick, Maine
 Harold C. Carpenter, 2742 North Adams, Indianapolis, Indiana
 Harley E. Carroll, Route 1, Eckville, Alberta, Canada
 Edward Cevene, 216 South Main Street, c/o Western Union, Rockford, Illinois
 Gerald Clark, 40 Union Street, Lewiston, Maine
 Bernard A. Cobb, 5 Arboth Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts
 Pat Cochrane, 40 Beaufort Street, Grahamstown, Cape Province, South Africa
 Vincent Cochrane, 136 Lake Street, Kent, Ohio
 J. D. Coleman, Jr., Box 2, Burrwood, Louisiana
 Leonard Copobiano, 2046 South 22nd Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Armand J. Courtemouche, 94 River Street, Riverside, Rhode Island
 Joseph W. Covert, 1023 East 13th Street, Brooklyn, New York
 Chester Crockett, 1319 East Leafland Street, Decatur, Illinois
 John P. Dalton, 515 West 170th Street, New York City, New York
 Stuart Datesman, 1094 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California
 Woody De Leon, 170 Park Terrace, Hartford, Connecticut
 E. R. Delgado, Box 1002, Harlowtown, Montana
 Russell Dembreske, 11512—80th Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
 Louis Ralph de Pelletier, Box 575, Leesburg, Florida
 Donovan Dickson, 52 Gramercy Park North, New York City, New York
 William J. Didelot, Company 1506, C. C. C. Camp P-213, Columbia, California
 Bill Dorcy, 536 North Elm Street, Butler, Pennsylvania
 George C. Dougherty, 4207 Frost Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 W. E. Downham, 3011 West Street, Wilmington, Delaware
 Robert Drennan, 2453 North Kostner, Chicago, Illinois
 H. H. Dunbar, 1106 Company V, C. C. C., Jefferson Camp, North Whitefield, Maine
 C. H. Dunn, 716 Eighth Street North, St. Petersburg, Florida
 Bill Edmunds, 262 North Park Street, East Orange, New Jersey
 Henry J. Egges, Jr., 1256 South Greylock Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 George L. Elliott, Jr., 1301 West 42nd Street, Richmond, Virginia
 Walter M. Evans, Jr., USS Oglala, Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii
 Wesley Fladborg, 27 Caselli Avenue, San Francisco, California
 Ralph R. Forst, 513 West Madison Street, Durand, Wisconsin
 Ray French, East Windham, Greene County, New York
 Kenneth Fryer, Aircraft One F. M. F. VJ Squadron 6 M, Quantico, Virginia
 Larry L. Geyer, 4017 Evans Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri
 Willard Gilmour, Blakeburn, British Columbia, Canada
 James F. Graham, Box 241, Parsons, West Virginia
 Boris M. Grebnev, c/o P. S. K. Groznefi, 7/84 Prospect Revoluzii, Grozny City, Northern Caucasus, U. S. S. R.
 Charles Greenhood, 95-13 Northern Boulevard, Jackson Heights, L. I.
 Ralph Guariga, 304 Bank Way, Wilmerding, Pennsylvania
 Richard Guetzow, 5840 Roscoe Street, Chicago, Illinois
 Charles H. Guinon, 563 Lafayette Avenue, S. E., Grand Rapids, Michigan
 Howard Guthro, 2720 Brantford Avenue, New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada
 Joe W. Halase, Fly Field, Yuma, Arizona
 Joseph Hardy, 2517 Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois
 James Henry Harrison, 9 Chesley Street, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada
 Richard Haskell, 490 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, New York
 Frank Haughey, Box 244, Graterford, Pennsylvania
 Warren Hiltonsmith, 21 Catherine Street, Lynbrook, Long Island
 Tammy Hoffman, 2820 Overland Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland
 Joe Holter, 1419 Bragg Street, Little Rock, Arkansas
 Norman N. Hoover, Box 101, Wolfdale, Washington County, Pennsylvania
 Joseph Howorth, 16766 Murray Hill Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
 Leslie Howorth, 16766 Murray Hill Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
 Rex Howorth, 16766 Murray Hill Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
 Robert C. Iveson, Buckingham Street, Oakville, Connecticut
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