

"BLAME THE DEAD MEN"
a G-MAN novelette by Donald Barr Chidsey

Short Stories

Captain North of
the U. S. Secret Service

proves—

SHANGHAI

SANCTUARY

F. V. W. Mason

Twice A Month

December 10th

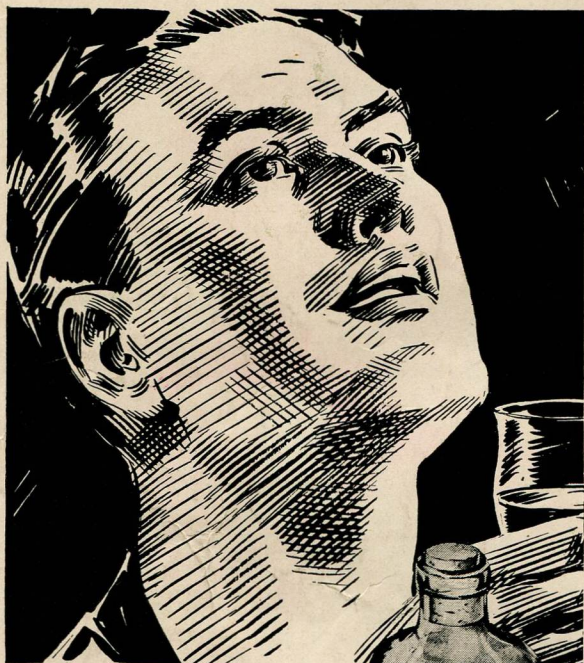
25c



A Desperate Passage
"Sailorman"

J. ALLAN DUNN

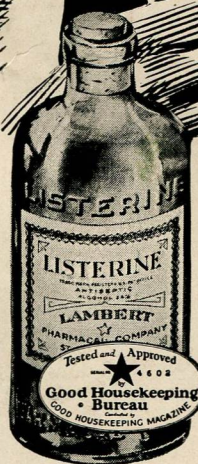
Fight colds where they start • *in the throat* -with **LISTERINE**



LISTERINE COUGH DROPS

A new, finer cough drop,
medicated for quick relief
of throat tickle, coughs,
irritations.

10¢



**Safe antiseptic kills mil-
lions of germs associated
with sore throat and colds**

DON'T go on suffering with heavy colds
that undermine your strength. Don't
put up with painful sore throats. Go
after these conditions in the sensible, scien-
tific way.

Kills germs in the throat

Listerine attacks the germs associated with
colds and sore throat. Almost immediately
after gargling it kills literally millions of
them in throat and mouth, before they have
a chance to enter the body.

Scientific tests in 1930-31, 1931-32 and
1934 have shown this astounding result:
that those who gargled with Listerine twice
a day or oftener caught about half as many
colds as non-garglers.

Moreover, when Listerine users did catch
cold, their colds were milder and of shorter
duration than those of non-users.

At the first sign of a cold

Start using Listerine today. As you can see,
it is an intelligent precaution against cold
infections. If you feel your throat getting
sore, or a cold coming on, use Listerine more
frequently—every 3 hours is recommended.
Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis,
Missouri.

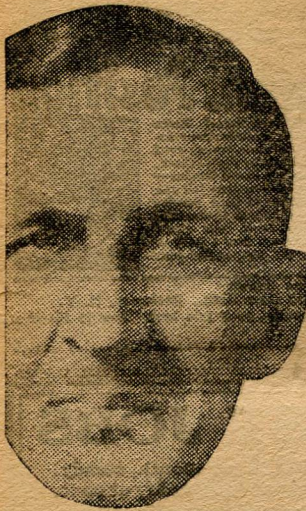
-and see how it relieves Sore Throat

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
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I will train you at home for many Good Spare Time and Full Time Radio Jobs

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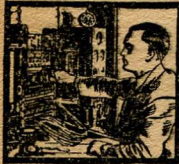
SET SERVICING

Spare time set servicing pays many N. R. I. men \$5, \$10, \$15 a week extra. Full time men make as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week.



BROADCASTING STATIONS

Employ managers, engineers, operators, installation and maintenance men for jobs paying up to \$5,000 a year.



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Installation and service work is another growing, money-making field for trained Radio men.



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It's hard to find a field with more opportunities awaiting the trained man. Why in 1934 the Radio industry sold \$235,000,000 worth of sets and parts! Over 300,000 people worked in the industry! It's a gigantic business, even in the poor business years. And look what's ahead. Millions of sets are going out of date annually. 20,000,000 sets are now in operation on which about \$60,000,000 are spent EACH YEAR for repairs, servicing, new tubes, etc. Broadcasting stations pay their employees (exclusive of artists) approximately \$23,000,000 a year. Advertisers pay 600 great Broadcasting Stations over \$75,000,000 a year for Radio time and talent. A few hundred jobs that paid \$30, \$50, \$75 a week less than 20 years ago have grown to thousands. These figures are so big that they're hard to grasp. Yet they're all TRUE! Here's a new industry that has grown to be a commercial giant! No wonder business leaders predict a brilliant future for the great and growing Radio industry.

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There's opportunity for you in Radio. Its future is certain. Television, short waves, police Radio, automobile Radio, midjet sets, loud speaker systems, aviation Radio—in every branch, developments and improvements are taking place. Here is a real future for hundreds of men who really know Radio. Get the training that opens the road to good pay and success! Send the coupon now and get full par-

ticulars on how easy and interesting I make learning at home. Read the letters from graduates who are today earning good money in this fascinating industry.

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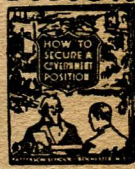
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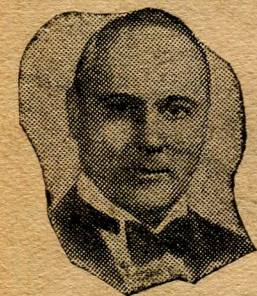
NEW GLAND HEALTH

FOR MEN PAST 40!

Scientist's Discovery Re-stimulates Important Prostate Gland

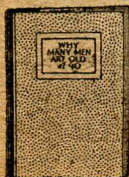
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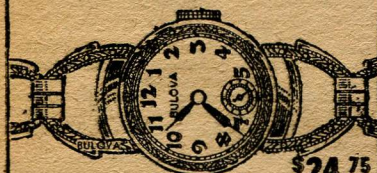
1842—Tiny baguette watch with 2 diamonds; chromium plated; 7 jewels.
\$19.75
\$1.90 a month



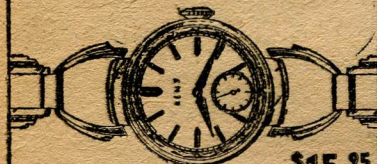
R4—Bulova's new round watch. 10k white rolled gold plate case; 7 jewels.
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\$2.50 a month



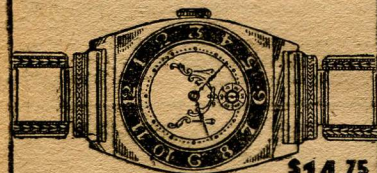
R1—Bulova's Miss America—a dainty baguette with 7 jewel movement.
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\$2.50 a month



M1—Bulova Commodore—a round watch for men with a 15 jewel movement.
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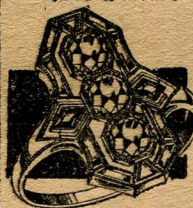
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30x4.50-21	2.10	.85	32x4	2.65	.85	30x5	3.30 1.35
28x4.75-19	2.15	.95	32x4	2.65	.85	33x5	3.40 1.45
28x4.75-20	2.20	.95	34x4	2.90	.85	33x5	3.55 1.55
28x5.00-19	2.55	1.05	32x4 1/2	3.00	1.15	35x5 1/2	3.55 1.55
30x5.00-20	2.60	1.05	HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES				
28x5.25-17	2.60	1.15	(High Pressure)				
28x5.25-18	2.60	1.15	Size Tires Tubes		Size Tires Tubes		
28x5.25-19	2.60	1.15	30x5	\$3.70 \$1.45	34x7	\$9.95 \$3.25	
31x5.25-21	2.90	1.15	32x5	3.75 1.45	35x7	9.95 3.95	
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15	34x5	3.95 2.00	38x7	10.65 3.95	
31x5.25-21	2.95	1.15	32x6	* 7.25 2.75	38x9	10.65 3.95	
28x5.50-18	2.95	1.15	36x6	9.00 3.95	40x8	12.65 4.15	
30x5.50-19	3.10	1.15	TRUCK BALLOON TIRES				
31x5.50-20	3.10	1.15	6.00-20	\$3.25 \$1.65	7.50-20	\$5.40 3.75	
32x5.50-20	3.10	1.25	6.50-20	3.60 1.95	8.25-20	7.50 \$4.95	
33x5.50-21	3.10	1.25	7.00-20	4.85 2.95	9.00-20	9.40 6.65	
32x5.50-20	3.35	1.25	ALL OTHER SIZES			DEALERS WANTED	
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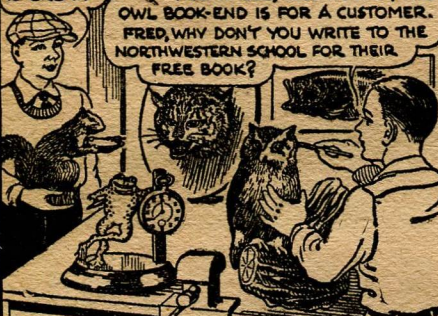
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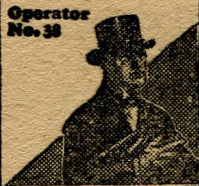
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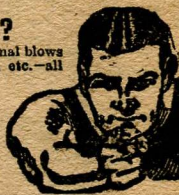
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THE LAST OF THE TROUBADOURS

Henry Herbert Knibbs



THE armorer chanted a ballad bold as he fashioned the warlock's blade;
The tailor sang with cloth on knee to the whip of his stitching fine;
The cobbler sang, in those days of old, as he cheerily plied his trade,
And the dark-eyed maidens of Tuscany as they trod the grapes to wine.

As the hoop was driven to bind the stave, as the farrier set the shoe,
As the wheelwright wedded the hub and spoke, as the potter thumped his clay;
'Prentice and craftsman, yokel, knave, they sang all the songs they knew,
And these were a lusty and cheerful folk, but where is the song today?

Never in factory, shop or mart—Time and the times deny:

Only a single voice remains, nor the printed page restores,
The fading glow of his tuneful art, so swiftly he galloped by,
The cowboy riding his spacious plains, the last of the troubadours.

When dawn leaped out like a crimson flail and the cook-fire snapped and gleamed,
He crawled from his tarp, a frosty shroud, by profanity thence beguiled,
And after a bout at the wagon-tail where the fragrant coffee steamed,
He topped a bronc, and his chant was proud—that is, if he wasn't piled.

When a storm bore down on the open land and the trail to the shack was long,
When his slicker leaked like a gavel-drum, and the keen rain stung his face,
He lowered his head and his bridle-hand but lifted his heart in song,
Or the wind forbade, he would softly hum to the lilt of his pony's pace.

When the night breeze rustled across the sage and he rode his round alone,
As the moon swam over the mountain-crest, a ship in a starry sea,
He borrowed a tune from a vanished age, though often the theme his own,
And hushed the shuffling herd to rest with his mournful melody.

Songs of his hardships, songs of strife, ballads of hope and cheer,
Dirges mourning a comrade's fate, or unprintable ribald verse,
Epic tales of an outlaw's life, lyrics of range and steer,
Pegasus was his running-mate, hitched up to a buckboard hearse.

Faint and fainter the echoes fall—gone, like a rush of wings,
Vanished this lyrical shooting-star; softly the moonlight pours,
On phantom ridges and canyon-walls, as into the vast he swings,
Spurring a pony of Palomar, the last of the troubadours.



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Short

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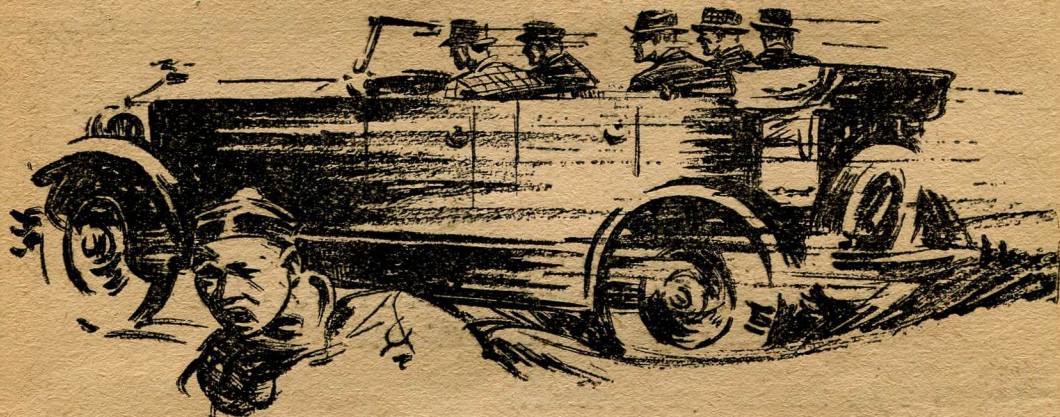
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SHANGHAI SANCTUARY

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of

Many Stories of Captain North of the United States Secret Service



The Celebrated Captain North Seeks a Secret in Shanghai— Well Hidden in Hands Dangerous to the Whole World

CHAPTER I

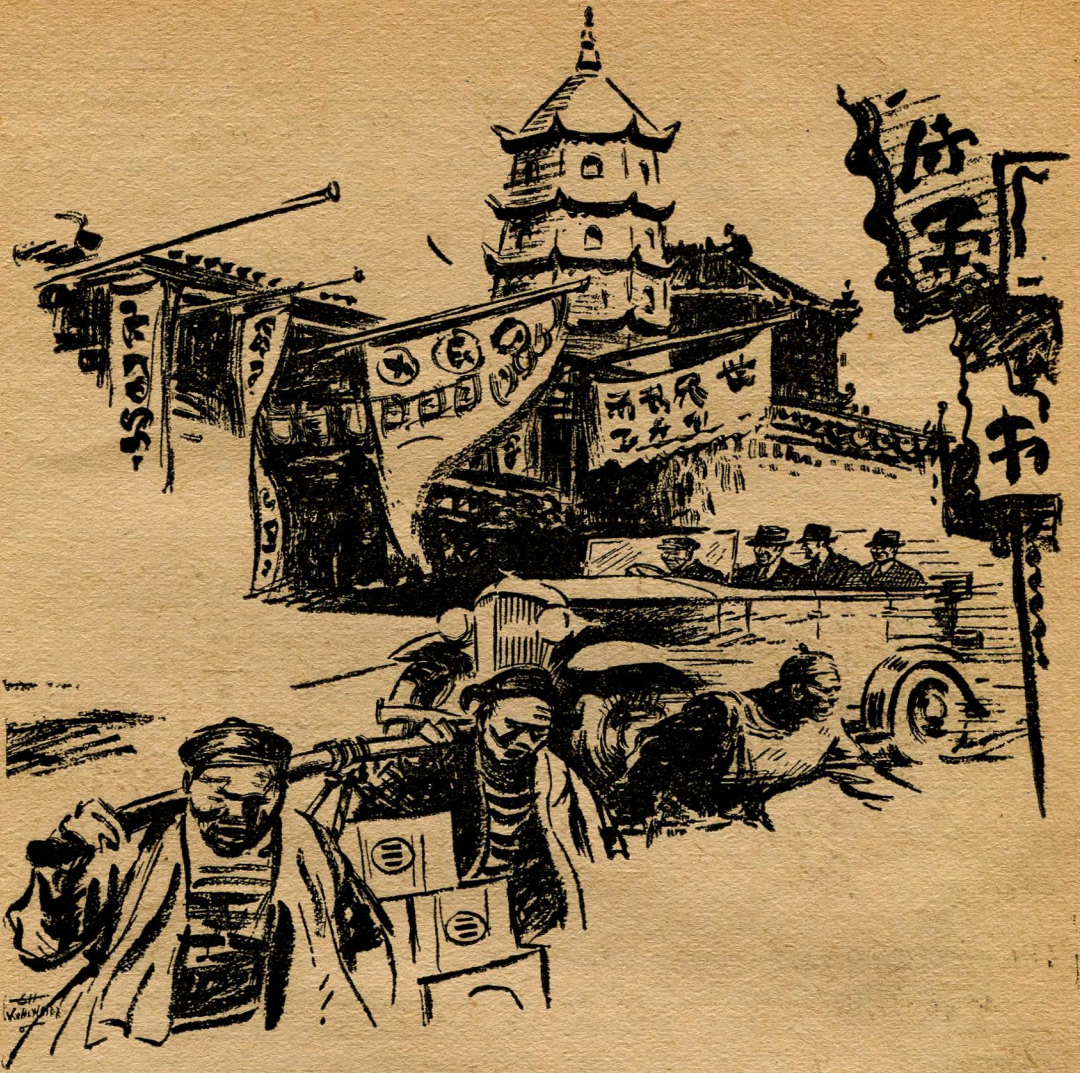
IT LOOKED to Captain Hugh North, D. C. I., as if this was going to be a dull evening—something exceptional at the *Cercle Sportif Français*. At the prospect he experienced an indefinable resentment and morosely surveyed desolate expanses of a lounge which would normally be seething with that unconquerable if febrile vivacity of the French. At the *Cercle* men as a rule were only as proper as they had to be and women were as dashing as they dared.

Yes, tonight was an off night. Customarily one could recognize a plethora of second flight diplomats, self important consular attachés, debt-harassed army officers, hard bitten adventurers and down-right blackguards aplenty. One could pro-

voke a conversation on any topic under the sun—be it the latest and bloodiest Tuchun war to the proper planting of tea roses.

As varied and disputable would have been the ladies in attendance; they ranged from the French Consul General's sedate *grande dame*, co-regent of Mme. la République's little satrapy in Shanghai, to a certain questionable Russian Princess whose morals, indeed, were not questionable at all.

Especially Hugh North would have enjoyed watching the *Cercle's* Russian, Italian and Spanish members, as well as those few inexplicable Americans who, like himself, preferred a vital if non-exclusive tableau to the stodgy conservatism of the Shanghai Club. Tonight, however, light rain and a damp wind sifting down from the upper Yangtze with the piercing effec-



tiveness of a bayonet had reduced the gathering to a minimum.

"Just my usual muddy luck, Wong," North remarked to the lounge steward. "And I was wanting a breather."

"Breatha, sah? My not know that cock-tail, sah." Wong looked desperately uneasy. "My ask bar man."

"Never mind, Wong—just tell him to turn off that wretched rain instead."

Buck teeth glimmered with comprehension. "Yessah, Cappen, my tellem. Cigar, sah?"

"No. I'll smoke my pipe—no ladies to object tonight."

North settled back, his brain yet vibrant with tension. It had been a bad half hour he'd spent standing in the Consul General's private office listening and looking

out on the yellow, rain-blasted Whangpoo.

Of course Mr. Reardon had exaggerated. Everything that was worth being discovered about steel had been known for over twenty years. And yet—what if steel could be manufactured strong as ever and sixty per cent lighter? He shut his eyes to avoid the necessity of talking to a sallow rice broker from Cochin China who, puffy cheeked and green bronze with malaria, came by, parading his newest *petite amie*, a frightened looking Russian child. At the outside she would be seventeen, North estimated.

IN A mild effort to escape complete boredom, North tried to divert himself in studying fat old Colonel Duplex and his faded blonde wife. Why did so many retired

army officers linger in Shanghai? Perhaps like Captain Nicholas, late of the Indian Army, he really didn't want to live there. There were a lot of people who, for obscure reasons, lingered on and on in the International Settlement, comfortable in the knowledge that the long arm of extradition could never drag them away.

Light-weight steel? So deep into his armchair sank the man from G-2 that a copy of *L'Illustration* fell from his knees, but he made only a faint attempt to recover it. Light-weight steel? It seemed incredible that by adding a new mineral the twentieth century's fundamental metal could be rendered little less ponderous than bronze.

North blinked. Why, great God, trains, autos, buildings, battleships—planes—all would be revolutionized! If the Consul General hadn't exaggerated there could be no doubt that the nation owning and guarding well such a secret could *ipso facto* become the paramount Power.

"*Eh bien, mon ami Hugh, ca va?*"

"*Passiblement, bien merci.*"

"We make up a table of baccarat, you will join us, no?" Commandant Du Bois, the French military attache, was standing above him, smiling and trim in his blue, red and silver uniform. Again it struck North as odd that the French and other Continentals should cling so passionately to uniform off duty, while Anglo-Saxons shed them at the first opportunity.

"Thanks, Etierme," the American's rather Indian-like head tilted comfortably against his chair back, "another time I should be delighted. I'm tired and this rain depresses me."

"Ah, what a cow of a day." The Frenchman's shrug was inimitably Gallic. "I understand. It is like trying to be gay at a funeral. But if you feel inclined, meet me in the bar later. I have with me a friend who just landed."

"From the *Empress of Finland*?"

"Yes. A most charming lady. She said the voyage was of the most miserable."

"See you later," smiled North and promptly relapsed into his state of troubled

inactivity. One of the discoverers of the new process had decided to overlook ethics and to cash in on it. Well, it wasn't to be wondered at—Army officers were by no means overpaid.

MOODILY twirling a liqueur glass between bluntly sensitive fingers, North debated whether the *Empress of Finland* might not have numbered among her passengers the subject of his conversation with Consul General Reardon—one Luther Adams, late major of the Chemical Warfare Corps? Possibly G-2 in Washington had been pointedly confident that the deserter would eventually turn up in Shanghai, prime haven for the world's rogues.

Dispassionately Hugh North tried to picture this Luther Adams. Thanks to a very meager description his imagination would have a free rein for another five hours. By that time his cable to the D. C. I. division should remedy the deficiency.

Light-weight steel! Um. Its possibilities were limitless—staggering. No wonder the temptation to realize a fortune on it had been too much for Major Adams.

North picked up and loaded a short stemmed Dunhill and had poised a flame over its bowl when a diminutive Chinese bell boy presented a chit carefully folded and sealed with blue wax. Unaccountably, North's heart sank as he fished out sixpence.

"You are an unmitigated affliction, Henry. Don't you dare bring in another chit tonight."

"Yessuh, Marster," grinned the urchin bobbing up and down rather like a Peking duck unexpectedly garbed in a neat white uniform. "My no bring this, only chit coolie fellah say plenty 'portant.'"

North had no need to open the blue sealed chit to recognize its origin. It would certainly be from Sir Guy Huntingden, chief of the Shanghai Municipal Police.

"Now what?" North muttered and, thrusting a finger beneath the seal, shattered its symmetry to read:

"Dear Hugh:

Hate to disturb you, but an American has committed suicide in the Mandarin House. Looks routine but perhaps you'd better drop in. There was a note in his pocket addressed to Luther Adams of Washington.

G. H."

A sense of breathlessness seized the long limbed figure in dinner clothes. So Major Adams had apparently committed suicide! If suicide weren't so often inexplicable it would be interesting to wonder why a man should flee half way across the world and then kill himself upon reaching security? He briefly debated sending a chit coolie, but finally decided to use the phone and so rang up the Central station. There he left word that he was starting at once for the Mandarin House—newest and most glittering of the great caravanserais along the Bund.

On leaving the booth he heard a light footstep behind him and, because he had



led a fairly turbulent existence for over twenty years, he swung quickly about.

"Captain North?" Simultaneously a hand fell lightly on his arm and he found himself gazing into the anxious face of one of the loveliest young women he had beheld for some time. Subdued excitement glittered like little knives in the depths of gray-green eyes.

"Beg pardon?"

"Oh, I'm so glad I've found you. That stupid lounge steward told me you'd gone."

"It's my good fortune that he was mistaken." A puzzled smile appeared beneath North's close-clipped black mustache and a series of genial crow's-feet appeared at the corners of his eyes.

"Have I had the pleasure? One meets so many people nowadays."

The girl's answering smile was as artificial as that of a taxi dancer. "Of course you don't know me; but please—you're Captain North the detective, aren't you?"

"I'm Captain North, but there are plenty of people who'd dispute the rest of your identification."

SHE cast a hurried glance about the foyer. "Please give me a minute. Here, let's go into the writing room." She tugged at his arm. "I *must* talk to you, really, I must. I'm in such trouble."

So poignant was the young woman's distress that North abruptly decided to postpone his departure for the Mandarin House and gravely offered his arm.

"Why am I so honored?" he inquired as, surveyed by more than one curious glance, he and this lovely creature in the jade green gown traversed the lounge. "Haven't you any friends in Shanghai?"

"Yes—no—that is, I've just landed, and something terrible has happened."

"What made you think I could help you?"

She shot her companion an impatient glance as they entered an otherwise deserted writing room. "Even the stupidest rickshaw coolie in Shanghai knows Hugh North's reputation—or so they tell me." Her fingers kept nervously kneading an expensive evening purse of green velvet. "You will help me?"

"I—well, Mademoiselle," North raised politely quizzical eyebrows, "before I commit myself hadn't you better tell me what's happened?"

"Oh of course. How stupid I am," apologized his companion and dabbed mechanically at skilfully coiffed hair that was so ash blonde as to give off occasional

bluish tints. "You'll have to forgive me, Captain, but—well, I'm all upset. It's my fiancé—I don't think you know him."

"Hardly, since I don't even know you."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Her bright lips quivered. "I—my name's Gallian—Marya Gallian."

She was, he could sense, covertly studying his face as if anticipating a possible reaction; but the name meant nothing to him.

"And your fiancé?"

"Philip King," she replied swiftly, but nonetheless a faint flush crept out along her cheekbones.

"Ah—an American?"

"Yes. We crossed on the *Empress of Finland* and landed this afternoon. In a few days we are to be married."

"Then one of you is from Shanghai?"

"Oh no. My fiancé's business is to be here. I've never been to China before and this is Phil's first trip, too.

"Oh, it's awful to have this happen—now of all times." In making a visible effort to control herself, Marya Gallian several times smoothed the skirt of an expensive evening gown of jade green velvet.

"Perhaps you'd better tell me what has happened."

"Philip was to call for me at the Astor at seven, and when he didn't come I phoned his hotel. When the operator said his room didn't answer I thought I'd misunderstood our arrangement, and because we were going to dine here at the Cercle I thought he might have come direct."

"I see. Were you right?"

"No. The doorman declared he hasn't been here." Marya Gallian wrung pale, distracted hands. "I called his room again, but he wasn't there and I've a feeling something terrible has happened to him."

"That hardly seems cause for alarm. Probably he's been delayed somewhere."

IMPATIENTLY the girl shook her head. "No. Only something very serious could have kept him. Well, the circumstances aren't usual."

"Why come to me rather than to the police?"

North was interested to read the alarm which sprang into her eyes. "Oh no, I couldn't go to them."

With absurd deliberation North produced a cigarette case which he tendered to his visitor.

"Does it occur to you, Miss Gallian, that your last remark has rather curious implications?"

"I suppose it does; but the police are so stupid and I must have discreet help."

"For all you know I might be of the police."

She shot him a curious veiled look. "I happen to know that you are not. In the States I—well, I've heard a great deal about you, how clever you are, how tactful, and I—"

"You seemed to have learned a lot about me since landing, Miss Gallian." Purposely he left his reactions in doubt. Silence, he had learned long ago, was a great questioner.

Marya Gallian pulled her chair so close that her sleek ash-blond head was only a few inches from North's dark one. He found her choice of perfumes as intriguing as it was instructive.

"Here's the whole situation in a nut shell. My fiancé and I are in Shanghai on a very delicate and important business matter. Surely you can understand that such things are possible."

"Oh quite, especially in Shanghai."

His companion either missed or ignored his inference, for she hurried on in nervous undertones.

"Please understand that I'm not asking charity, I'm willing to pay liberally for your help in finding Philip."

A match stick held between North's fingers was steady, though unsuspected vistas materialized before his mental eyes.

"I seldom undertake private commissions."

"You will this one," almost savagely predicted the blonde young woman. "You've got to! Can't you see I'm terribly fright-

ened? I *must* find my fiancé. Why I—I'd——" She hesitated, then fumbled at her bag. "How much do you want—for a retainer?"

TO HIS amazement she drew out a huge roll of English banknotes and thumbed it nervously.

Captain North hesitated, confronted as he was by a situation unique in his experience. Marya Gallian, though still in her early twenties, was no maiden hysterical at the thought of harm to her beloved. Her general appearance, gown, slippers, jewelry and perfume, indicated a young woman who had taken the world's measure and who, more often than not, was accustomed to getting what she wanted from it.

She broke in on his silent estimate with an impatient, "Please don't keep me waiting. Every moment is precious."

"Sorry, but I haven't yet made up my mind."

"Would ten thousand pounds make it up for you?" The Gallian girl's fingers closed on his forearm.

"Ten thousand pounds is a lot of money, Miss Gallian, and—well, it happens that I'm not on duty these days."

"Then you will?" Her whole being seemed to spring into her lambent eyes in eager anticipation. "You *will* help me find Philip!"

"I'll think about it. But I warn you to be absolutely frank, if you want my help—such as it is."

Brows faintly knitted, she said slowly, "I'll tell you everything you want to know with one exception. That I cannot," she had started to say she "dared not," but thought better of it.

"And that is?"

"I can't tell you why my fiancé and I came to Shanghai."

CHAPTER II

THE rain had stopped and Captain North, seated on the damp cushions of a rickshaw owned by the Able-to-Fly

company, could glimpse a few stars peering through clouds which scudded by so low as to risk scraping themselves on the shadowy spire of the Customs House. But his attention chiefly was on the tail light of Marya Gallian's gay yellow and black rickshaw which, some fifty feet ahead, ducked and swung through sodden traffic. Lights, multiplied by wet asphalt, glowed like a thousand gems and came charging at the rickshaw from a hundred directions, but somehow it always escaped annihilation.

"What a singular young lady—wonder who she really is?" North mused when the traffic halted to the command of a turbaned Sikh policeman. "Interesting as a lighted fuse." The affair of the suicided American, he was deciding could, and would have to wait a little. Not every night did distracted young women of uncertain nationality seek him out to offer what was tantamount to a bribe of ten thousand pounds.

The more he considered Marya Gallian the more she puzzled him. For all her genuine anxiety, she had nevertheless known just what she was doing—and had said no more than she had to while enlisting his services. She had been rather clever at the door of the Cercle Sportif when he had inquired their destination. All she had volunteered was, "Please follow me, Captain. I'll take you to Mr. King's room."

A whistle screeched, a silver kara bangle on the Sikh's wrist gleamed and then the traffic again gathered momentum to further unroll the glittering panorama of the Bund. Many noises, stilled by the downpour, began again.

"Ricksha wanchee?" Heavy laden carry coolies were bawling. "*Hai yo! Hai yo!*" "*Fa tsai lao-yeh!*" whined droves of incredibly ragged beggars cringing before belated strollers in evening clothes. On the wet sidewalk outside of Bianchi's half a dozen officers and some slim American girls in evening wraps were, without much success, trying to hail a cab.

When the Taiwan Bank lay behind, shrieks from the ungreased axles of prod-

uce laden wheelbarrows tortured the eardrums more frequently and soon the rickshaw coolie's wail of "Way for the distinguished foreigner," became mingled with drowsy river noises drifting in from the Whangpoo.

MARYA GALLIAN'S rickshaw sped smoothly past the North China Building and then the Palace Hotel, and North began to wonder whether her destination was the Yangtzepoo quarter. He hoped not; half an hour was the most he could at present devote to her problems.

The Cathay's glowing tower loomed briefly overhead and the clarinets of a jazz band blaring away within it for a while penetrated the traffic's roar. Just as lights of the Mandarin House shone ahead the leading rickshaw swerved and, to North's sharp surprise, swung into the curb before it. Promptly his interest in Marya Gallian achieved a new high for he distinctly heard her call out, "*Chan-cho! Makee stop!*"

"And she's never been to China!" A thin smile flitted over the Intelligence Captain's lean visage. "Well, well."

Deeply intrigued, he watched her grip her rickshaw's handles against the coolie's sudden dropping of the shafts—which nasty little habit will pitch an unwary traveler neatly onto the pavement.

"Your fiancé is staying here?" North inquired while interposing an arm between her and an M. P., busy hauling an hilarious gob away to some hoosegow.

Under the hotel's great steel and glass awning, Marya Gallian cast one darting look about her before she nodded and gathered her evening cape so high as to effectively mask her features.

"Yes. Room 1311—I think Phil said. Oh dear, I'm so worried." And this was one statement of hers which the man from G-2 saw no reason to doubt.

It was, North perceived, a neat dilemma in which he now found himself. Waiting for him inside would be Sir Guy Hunting-

den, Major Kilgour of the British Intelligence and probably that fat little lump of Oriental wisdom, Inspector Chao Ku. Especially he hoped Chao Ku would be on hand. Very little went on in Shanghai which escaped the S. M. P. detective's ears.

When they gained the lobby, North paused.

"Please wait for me in the women's lounge, Miss Gallian; better take a maga-



zine or a paper. I may be gone some minutes."

"I'd much rather go with you. Don't you see? I must find out what's happened as quickly as I can." Her skilfully tinted lips became crushed between small white teeth. "*Please let me go with you.*"

"You will do as I say," North insisted politely but definitely—he really needed to get oriented. "I'll be back shortly."

BOWING to occasional acquaintances, North was nearing the elevators when an assistant manager came up and in a stagey undertone said,

"You're Captain North, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"The police are waiting for you in room 1311. Please come with me."

1311! A small buzzing sensation made itself manifest in Hugh North's finger tips.

"1311? A bad luck number and a good one. Quite the happy medium in room numbers."

"It wasn't very happy for Mr. King, sir."

A sudden realization struck North like the warning buzz of a rattlesnake and his

long stride slowed a little. "What name did you say?"

"The man who—er, who hanged himself registered as Mr. King—Philip King. Gave his address as Baltimore, Maryland."

"Mr. King took the room alone?"

"Yes, sir. Why do you ask?"

"I had an impression that someone of a different name had taken 1311."

"I could check up, sir. It'd take only a minute."

"No. Never mind—it's my mistake."

Odd, he mused as the elevator shot upwards, if he had been disposed to accept Miss Gallian's ten thousand pounds—and he never had been—it seemed as if he had already earned it. So Luther Adams and Miss Gallian's Philip King were not strangers? How interesting. How very interesting.

The assistant-manager, impeccable in his neat dinner coat, rapped gently on the panels of a door marked 1311 and called, "Captain North is here, gentlemen."

A broad beam of light sprang out into the hall when the door opened. Simultaneously the assistant manager emitted a sharp:

"Oh, my God! Look at that!"

Cast impossibly high upon a wall within, the silhouette of a human head and shoulders was etched in sharp relief. From the base of the bent head a thin dark line arose to eventually lose itself in a long tangent across the ceiling.

"How horrible! How perfectly ghastly!" North's companion fumbled at his own throat as if it, too, were constricted.

The door was swung wider open and the bony red face of Major Kilgour appeared.

"Well, Hugh, you've been taking your own blessed time, I must say."

"Couldn't help it. What's wrong here?" Premonitions commenced to envelop North like lengthening shadows.

"Looks like a simple case of suicide. Still, there's something odd about it."

"Odd?"

"Yes. The dead man took this room

under a false name and—but you'd better draw your own conclusions."

With the invariable politeness of British officialdom, Kilgour thanked the assistant manager and sent that pallid individual back to his duties.

IN THE suite's little sitting room two men were standing in attitudes of expectancy. One was a big beefy individual with a phlegmatic face of the sort one felt would always remain impervious to emotion. To a dot he fitted the time-honored conception of house detective. The other was a round little Chinese much resembling a Buddha garbed in ill-fitting European clothes. Smiling all the while, he was examining the lining of a new gray felt hat. When North murmured, "Hello, Chao," he wheeled and clasped both hands over his round little belly. Thrice he bowed very low.

"Truly bright sun of wisdom enters room, eclipsing this dim planet."

"Inspector Chao, you ought to have that head of yours examined," North grinned and then suddenly serious once more addressed the British Intelligence officer. "Where's Sir Guy?"

"Left a few minutes ago. Said he was sorry but he'd received an urgent summons from our Consulate."

While offering his hand to the hotel detective, North wondered whether intelligence of certain arrivals on the *Empress of Finland* had not something to do with Sir Guy's abrupt departure.

"My name's North, and you're——?"

"Pebble, Capt'n. Special Officer Pebble. Sorry we haven't got nowheres yet, but this Chink," he nodded contemptuously towards Inspector Chao, "thought we shouldn't do nothing till you showed up."

"Sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Oh, it's okay with me. But it's all nonsense, this waiting." He indicated the door of a bathroom neatly tiled in black and white. "If ever I've seen a case of suicide plain and simple, it's in there."

North's black clad figure seemed to more nearly approximate its actual six feet and his prominent cheekbones became quite sharply delineated during his survey of a contorted figure dangling uglily from the end of a bright nicked chain.

"You've come to any conclusions, Bruce?"

"Only got here five minutes ago, so there hasn't been much time," Major Kilgour stated shortly. "Still, I've noted a thing or two out of the way. Maybe they'll strike you, too."

Drawing a deep breath, North approached the corpse and for some moments regarded its bulging eyes and protruding tongue with the detached criticalness of a connoisseur examining a doubtful old master.

"Um. Fellow seems to have died of strangulation all right." It was, he found, interesting to speculate on whether this gruesome figure's brain had helped develop a secret worth the security of a dozen great nations. He turned to Officer Pebble.

"What about his papers? I see you've been through them."

"They're made out to Philip King all right, passport and everything, but look at this." Officer Pebble raised up the lower tabs on the dead man's waistcoat to expose the initials L. A. embossed on his belt buckle.

"Well?" North was conscious of Major Kilgour's effort to appear unimpressed. He must be extra careful, he and Bruce generally worked hand in glove, but in this case—well, they'd probably still help each other up to a point, then the case would resolve itself into a struggle for a swift solution. The chances were Kilgour's people knew more about Luther Adams and his sudden departure from Washington than he did. It was also likely that the French Deuxieme Bureau was no less well posted.

"L. A.?"

"In lamented suicide's pocket was a letter addressed to one Major Luther Adams,

but that's all. All baggage new, all clothes new. Very queer."

MAKING no comment, North stripped off his dinner coat and, with the help of the others, released the corpse which they laid on the room's cheerful brown carpet. This done, the man from G-2 narrowly examined a strip of adhesive crudely securing the dead wrists.

"Looks as if the blighter might have done it himself, at that," Kilgour suggested from across the body.

"Yes, it's a poor job of binding."

"Of course he done it himself," broke in the house detective. "The whole thing's plain as the nose on your face. Motive means everything."

"Motive?"

"Yeh. The guy was broke flat—there ain't five dollars Mex on him—no letter of credit nor anything. Guess this was just the end of the trail for him."

"Shouldn't wonder," Kilgour murmured while running through a small heap of documents on the sitting room desk.

As for Chao Ku, he made no comment at all but continued a patient examination of the dead man's coat.

The fatal chain—it was designed to loop back the shower bath curtains—glittered briefly in North's carefully handkerchiefed hand while he made a mental photograph of the distorted purplish features glaring up from the level of his gleaming dancing shoes. Long, pointed and sensitive, the dead man's countenance was far from commonplace, and his brow was of a height as to suggest better than average intelligence.

North bent over one of the dead man's wrists and then looked up sharply when he found it quite cool—almost cold, in fact.

"At what time did—er, Mr. King check in?"

"I've already found out, Captain," Officer Pebble replied in conscious virtue. "He checked in about six."

"Is the clerk who checked him in still on duty?"

"No, Captain. The night clerks come on at seven. Why?"

"I was wondering if anyone had asked for Mr. King."

A brief telephone conversation established the fact that Mr. King had spoken twice over the wire. The last call had come around six-thirty—a man had called, the operator thought.

"He must have died shortly after that," Kilgour observed.

North nodded, then stooped again. This time narrowly to examine the link marks on the body's neck. These were dull red and deeply imprinted. At last he straightened, absently dusting his hands.

"Well, Bruce? What's your guess?"

Major Kilgour fingered a bony jaw. "I'd say this man is not Philip King, and I don't think he hanged himself for lack of funds."

"But he's broke," insisted the house detective.

"Nonsense. There's a gold watch and a cigarette case on the bedroom bureau, besides a check book which shows a good balance to Luther Adams' account in Baltimore."

"And what do you say, Chao Ku?"

"If insect may venture speech in presence of lion, I would offer those not even dead man's own clothes."

North chuckled. "I suppose that's what the hat told you?"

THE little Chinese bowed solemnly. "Quite right. In lining of hat marked P. K., I find black hair and no odor of moss rose. Most surprising; late lamented here has sandy red hair smelling like garden after spring rain."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Among cushions of couch I find this——" He held up nothing more nor less than a folding two foot rule of the sort generally used by plumbers and carpenters. It was brand new.

In silence the man from G-2 studied this new bit of evidence. "Go on, please."

"Fingers of late lamented are yellow from

use of tobacco, but no trace of weed is in coat pockets." Inspector Chao blinked rapidly. "After these insignificant deductions will *Tajen* finish incomplete picture?"

Officer Pebble manufactured a hoarse laugh.

"Go ahead, Capt'n. You can't disappoint the Chink. Tell him this guy didn't even commit suicide."

Grim amusement played about North's mouth. "Clever of you to notice it, too."

"Notice what?"

"That the fellow couldn't have committed suicide."

"Oh, I say," Kilgour broke in. "You're not going to ask us to believe that someone broke in here and hanged him?"

"Hardly. But please look at the towel basket from which the dead man is sup-



posed to have stepped when he hanged himself."

"What's wrong with it?" Officer Pebble rumbled.

"As towel basket, very fine." Puffing gently, Chao Ku offered a basket of metal lattice work. "Said receptacle, however, much too frail to support weight of late lamented. Please observe, esteemed collaborator Pebble." The S. M. P. detective upended the basket then placed a foot upon its bottom. At the first pressure the white enameled receptacle buckled.

Officer Pebble turned a delicate shade of magenta but clung to his opinion.

"Well, maybe you're right, but King could have stood on the edge of the bathtub and kicked the towel basket over in his struggles."

After briefly considering the point, North nodded. "That's entirely possible, Mr. Pebble, even if an overturned basket doesn't

generally land completely upside down. The use of this chain, however, to me is quite conclusive." He indicated the shower bath curtain chain.

"Ah, yes, the chain. What about it?" Major Kilgour demanded.

"Captain North's going to tell us it wasn't strong enough to support the body," Pebble's tone was bitter.

"Your error, Officer Pebble, it's a fine strong chain. But a person attempting suicide almost *never* uses wire or a chain, or anything that's likely to injure his skin. A curious quirk of human nature, isn't it, Inspector Chao?"

"Tajen's words are reflection and substance of truth. In this insignificant person's experience, he has observed many cases of self-destruction, but never once did suicide cut thread of life with object harsh to skin."

KILGOUR laughed a little shamefacedly. "I should have remembered that. Of course you're right. Gives one to wonder who staged this pretty little scene, eh what? By the bye, here's the letter we found on him—envelope, I should say, since there's nothing in it."

The envelope proved to be addressed to Major Luther Adams and had been post-marked in New York months earlier. Beyond that it told North nothing at all.

"Well, Hugh—who do you think he is? Adams or King?"

"Why guess when there's someone downstairs who knows Luther Adams?"

Chao Ku blinked, and Pebble opened his mouth and forgot to close it.

"Someone who knows Luther Adams?" Kilgour's sharp query removed any doubts North entertained about the Englishman's true concern in this affair. "Why, how —?"

"Tell you later. Officer Pebble, would you go down to the ladies' drawing room and fetch a young woman you'll find waiting there?"

"How'll I know her?"

"She's blonde and is wearing a jade green evening gown. Her name is Marya Gallian. Don't tell her anything about all this."

"Gallian?" Kilgour blinked, but he said nothing.

"All right, Captain, I'll get her."

The British agent cast his companion a sharp look.

"Where'd you meet this Gallian woman?"

"At the Cercle Sportif. She came up to me and asked me to help her find Philip King. That's all I know."

The British Intelligence man looked a trifle incredulous. "Come now, Hugh —"

"Honestly, I never saw her before; to me she's a complete enigma. And while we're on the subject, didn't you recognize her name?"

"I did," Kilgour admitted slowly. "Our people and the *Deuxieme Bureau* have had an eye on her for a long while."

"Um. What is she—a *baladeuse*?"

"Not at present. Last I heard she'd given up free-lance espionage." A ghost of a grin crept over the Englishman's wide mouth. "I say, Hugh, even if they didn't tell you, G-2 must have known she's been recently working as a clerk in your War Department."

North vented a brief Anglo-Saxon expletive, and a surge of color emphasized the whiteness of his dinner coat collar. It was, he had found, infinitely annoying to discover such quaint bits of information in the possession of alien Intelligence agents. Lightweight steel—it seemed vain to hope that the secret could be kept.

"Then la Gallian has become a *mouton*?"*

"Precisely, a *mouton*." Kilgour's shiny red forehead became furrowed. "You've no idea of what brought her to Shanghai?"

"I venture Sir Guy has been finding that

*A secret agent who collects data on military and industrial preparedness.

out," North predicted with a hollow laugh. "Well, Chao Ku?"

"Events begin to move with speed of dog troubled with firecrackers," he remarked. "Examination of neck reveals late lamented was garrotted from behind in most accomplished manner. His clothes were changed, then his body was hanged. I think very soon comes one big surprise for all of us."

"Shouldn't wonder," sighed the British agent. "Lend a hand, Inspector Chao, and we'll cover the blighter; he's scarcely ornamental. Well, Hugh, it looks as if you're the one to break the bad news."

"I'm afraid so. But stand by, as I'll bring her in here directly. Be a good lad, Bruce, and watch the proceedings through the bathroom door. I don't want her more self-conscious than I can help. Chao Ku, you'd better stand yonder among the shadows."

ONCE Captain North had replaced his coat he stepped out into the corridor just in time to see Marya Gallian leave the elevator. Apparently Officer Pebble had obeyed orders, for on the young woman's heart-shaped face was written no awareness of the shock in store. In fact she flashed North a smile of relief.

"You've made definite headway——?"

"A bit."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Many worried little lines fled from her features. "They told me you were wonderfully clever, but this——"

North raised a deprecating hand. "Be good enough to go downstairs, Mr. Pebble, and telephone Sir Guy that I'll be over to see him shortly."

"Sure. Don't you want me to——?"

"No, just do as I ask." When the heavy figure had disappeared, North drew the girl into a little alcove and said quietly, "You must prepare yourself for something unpleasant, Miss Gallian."

"Unpleasant?" Marya Gallian's hands fluttered up to press her cheeks. "Lu—Philip is hurt?"

"I'm afraid so, Miss Gallian. In fact, he's badly hurt."

It seemed impossible that anyone could become so pallid and yet retain consciousness, but this amazing young woman managed it. "He—he's not dead?"

"Hang onto your courage, Miss Gallian. I——"

So swiftly that Captain North had no chance of intercepting her, Marya Gallian ran over to wrench open the door of room 1311. In four swift strides he had caught up with her and was able to see her face when she paused swaying in the doorway. To his accumulating astonishment no expression of mortal anguish was stamped upon her pretty features, only a grimace of disappointed fury.

"Phil—where are you?" Apparently she failed to notice dumpy little Chao Ku standing in a far corner and looking on, expressionless and immobile as a piece of furniture. She started towards the bedroom, but on rounding the couch beheld the body sprawled beneath its bed sheet. Muttering something in German Marya Gallian stooped and jerked back the covering.

"*Mein Gott!*" As from a viper she recoiled.

"Why have you done this?" She whirled on North, scarlet with furious uncertainty. "What cheap trick is this?"

The man from G-2 remained as he was, brown features composed and hands dipped negligently into dinner coat pockets. He was looking not at the furious girl but at Chao Ku when he remarked,

"You were right."

"Right!" railed Marya Gallian, "Why, you great idiot, that *isn't* Philip King!"

"Nor Luther Adams?" Though he already knew the answer, North's query was interjected with electric rapidity.

"No. I've never seen this man before! What's he doing in this room?"

"I suspect, Miss Gallian," North observed, "that a good deal of water will have flowed down Soochow Creek before we find an answer to that question."

CHAPTER III

DURING a long instant the room was a well of stillness, then Marya Gallian drew a long shuddering breath and cast a frightened, inquisitive look across the body at Captain North.

"What—what's happened? I don't understand. Why is this man dressed in Philip King's clothes?"

"Perhaps intent of clever killer was to dig pitfall for police," Chao Ku suggested. "Tai-tai is sure she has never before seen lamented victim?"

"No, I tell you. Stop bothering me!" Her voice was eloquent of crackling nerves. "Do something—find Mr. King. He can't be——"

She in the green evening gown fell silent when a sudden loud and arrogant knocking began on the door. At a signal from North, Chao Ku started forward, but the door flew open to effectively frame in the entrance a big, raw-boned individual, picturesque in a dark green uniform boasting many golden buttons and a crimson collar. When the intruder halted, apparently looking for someone, North noted a light blue powder burn beneath one eye which in no way enhanced his hard-bitten countenance.

Deliberately the martial figure stepped inside and shut the door behind him.

"Where's King?" he demanded in a hoarse loud voice.

"You had an appointment with him?" North demanded unhurriedly.

"Sure I did. Say, what the hell is this? A lodge meeting, or what?" The newcomer's pale brown eyes, like thrusting bayonets, fixed one person after another; deeply interested, North watched his glance linger on Marya Gallian a long instant.

"What are you doin' here?" the soldier flung at her and North wondered if a flash of recognition did not pass between them as he snapped:

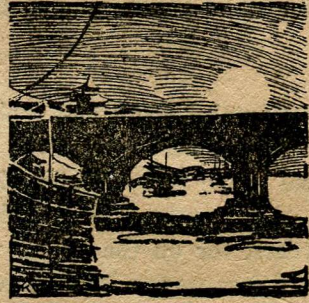
"Before this goes any further, you'd better explain why you came bursting in like this."

"Oh I had, had I?" The soldier, a holstered revolver swaying over his hip, swung over to confront the wiry figure in dinner clothes. "Get this, Mister, I go where I damn' well please and explain to nobody."

"You'll answer my question or get out!"

THE soldier merely grunted and aimed a quick, hard blow at North's head, but the latter with the ease of a bird dodging a puppy, ducked and a split second later he had pinioned the intruder's right arm in such a fashion that a struggle would cause it to snap. He held his grip just long enough to let the fellow's helplessness sink in, then released the arm and stepped back.

"Good job, Hugh," Kilgour remarked from the bathroom door. The girl on see-



ing him gave a startled little cry and shrank even deeper into the corner in which she had taken refuge.

"Stop that cursing!" North warned his victim. "I asked what you're doing here?"

"Had a date with King," the other growled nursing his maltreated arm. "Dropped in early——"

"You talked on the phone with him around six-thirty?"

"Yes."

"Name?"

"I'm Colonel Dave Spurr, chief of Marshal Wang's artillery. Who're you?"

Chao Ku came shuffling out of the shadows. "Permit honor of introducing celebrated Captain Hugh North."

"North? The devil you say! You must be the guy Sam Steel's always talking about."

"Sam Steel and I—er, bumped into each other last year."

Spurr offered a battered, liberally tattooed fist and his manner became almost affable. "Say, Cap, he thinks a lot of you."

"Kind of him. This is Major Kilgour."

When the introduction was made the adventurer cast a sharp glance at Marya Gallian.

"Who's the dame?"

"I'm Marya Gallian, Mr. King's fiancée," cried the girl so quickly as to forestall any other information.

"Fiancey? Damn' funny, he didn't tell me about a gal bein' along."

"I doubt if he saw the necessity," snapped the Gallian girl. Her attitude puzzled North no little. The advent of Dave Spurr, it seemed, was an unpleasant and a bewildering surprise.

"What the devil's that?" For the first time Colonel Spurr had caught sight of the shrouded body and started as if jabbed by a bayonet.

"Don't tell me that's King! *It can't be!*" A triple row of decorations ribbons glowed when Spurr bent to jerk back the sheet. If Marya Gallian's reaction had been violent, Colonel Spurr's was amazing. He remained rigid, eyes wide and hands outstretched. North could see his thick neck swelling above the gaudy uniform collar.

"Why—why, it's Louie! By God, somebody's knocked him off! Who did this?" He spun about, giving the impression of a steel spring coiled to strike.

"We're trying to find out. You know him?"

"Of course, Louie Larousse was my—well, a damned good friend. Say, I bet you know plenty about this." Colonel Spurr swung across the room to snatch at Marya Gallian's shoulder. "Speak up, Sister!"

"Let me go!"

"Who are you?"

"His fiancée."

"In a pig's eye! Adams would ha' told me if there was a skirt with him." Which

statement North labeled with a bright red tag and stored away in his memory.

"Don't be a fool," Marya Gallian was murmuring, an ugly twist to her lips. "You must be cracked to talk like this. Let go of me!" Before the soldier of fortune could divine her intention she slapped him resoundingly across his powder marked cheek.

EMITTING a roar, Spurr snatched at the girl who ran for the door; her flight, however, was interrupted by North's alertness, and Kilgour's hand, shooting out from behind, brought her pursuer up short.

"That'll do, my lad. Remember this is the International Settlement, not Kansu; nor are you dealing with coolies."

"Go to hell, you Limey flatfoot—you ain't got a thing on me!"

"Oh, haven't I? Well, my lad, just you get troublesome and see what happens. Now then, North, what next?"

"For the time being I think we'd better let the question of Larousse's murder go. He's dead and Luther Adams still may be alive." He addressed the oddly assorted couple. "Since you two are anxious to find Adams, I suggest you forget personal differences and coöperate."

"That makes sense," Spurr admitted sourly. "I'd sure like to find that hombre, *muy pronto.*"

North stepped to the phone and spoke briefly to the manager.

"Room 1305 is vacant," he informed Chao Ku. "Please escort Miss Gallian there and keep her company till I come."

When Adams' *soi disant* fiancée, haughty but very pale, had swept out of the room, North attacked the problem from a new angle.

"Now, Colonel, tell us what you can—and don't keep anything back. Remember your friend has been murdered and murder is a serious affair, even in Shanghai."

"Okay, but before I start spieling, suppose we take a look-see about Louie's room."

"It's right down the hall, isn't it?" North queried.

"Yeh, 1315. How did you know?"

"Because I've a theory your friend was murdered in his own room. In that case it would have to be close by, because one can't very well carry dead bodies around in elevators and hotel lobbies."

"Hadn't we better take a look at 1315, Hugh, and settle the point?"

"Why not?"

A MINOR surprise was in store for Captain North. Standing undecidedly in the corridor was a grizzled gentleman who, though he wore no uniform, had the flat back and drilled shoulders of a military man. Gloomy anxiety dominated his manner. When he nodded cautiously, North sent his two companions on to Larousse's room and lingered in the corridor.

"Hello, Denton; the Navy Intelligence managing to stagger along all right?"

Lieutenant Commander Denton frowned and nodded impatiently. He would never understand his Army colleague's unshakable insouciance—for Commander Denton no one was sick until he was dead, and no one was dead till he was five feet under ground.

"Stop fooling." The newcomer lowered a voice that shook audibly. "Something serious has happened."

"I know about it—heard the glad news only this evening."

"How can you be so infernally casual? Dammit, can't you realize what we're facing? Great God, if that rascal talks, our battle fleet will become just so much obsolete junk!"

"I've never noticed that pulling a long face helps solve my problems, Commander. But don't worry, I fully appreciate the necessity of finding Adams in a hurry. What did you want to tell me?"

"Admiral Wingate's just received some fresh cables from the Department. It seems the other governments are getting wise. Every Intelligence service in China is hunting for Luther Adams—French, British,

Japanese, Italian, everybody. Better keep an eye on your friend Kilgour."

"I will. Right now he's being very helpful."

"May I add that you can count on my unqualified coöperation."

"That's handsome of you, Commander."

"Anything I can do?"

"Yes. Before anyone else thinks of it you'd better rout out the purser of the *Empress of Finland* and anyone else who knew Philip King or Marya Gallian aboard ship. Find out all you can about them—who their friends were, what they did, everything. Then leave a report at the Consulate. I'll communicate later."

PAINSTAKINGLY Lieutenant Commander Denton wrote down the names, thereby causing North acute unhappiness. Dear God! If the man couldn't remember two simple names—but he shook hands warmly and sent the gloomy plodder on his way. It was something to be so easily rid of a well-intentioned blunderer.

To a superficial observer room 1315 did not seem to have been disturbed. But none the less little furrows in the carpet's nap, two or three tiny splinters of broken glass, such as might come from a shattered watch crystal, and fresh scars on a chair leg, bespoke of a struggle.

Someone, however, had exercised great care in disguising what had taken place. In room 1315 no luggage, no coat or hat, not even a used towel in the bathroom was to be found. Save for one item, room 1315 might have been awaiting the arrival of a new guest. That item was a two weeks old copy of the *North China Daily News*, which had been tossed into the wastebasket.

"You're sure this was Larousse's room?" Kilgour demanded shortly.

"Sure it's Louie's room; I helped him to move in here. Damned if I tumble, though." Spurr resembled a puzzled bear as with one hand he rubbed his other wrist. "Even his bag has vamoosed."

As if by tacit consent, the three men be-

gan a search—a very thorough one for reasons best known to themselves.

"Hanged if this isn't the dirtiest city along the whole China Coast." Kilgour's voice from the bathroom drew North's attention from an interested inspection of the discarded newspaper. "In a pukka place like this you'd imagine one could get away from dirt."

"Dirt?"

"Yes. This bathroom is a sight."

Dotting the bathroom's tiled floor was a sprinkling of ash and burnt paper cinders; on the windowsill one sizeable piece trembled visibly in a sour wind blowing off the Whangpoo. Spurr started to brush it away but North's raised hand checked him.

"Hold on, Colonel. Let's take a look at that."

"By God, you gumshoes *are* a suspicious lot!"

"It pays in the long run."

"What the devil can you hope to learn from a piece of ash blown in the window?"

"Probably nothing at all, but one never knows." Gingerly, North picked up the wrinkled black cinder on a sheet of note paper and carried it into the sitting room. There he locked it in a bureau drawer before once more addressing Marshal Wang's Chief of Artillery.

"Since you want to find Adams in a hurry, let's hear what you have to say." He did not feel obligated to mention that he, himself, was more anxious than anyone else to locate the elusive traitor.

AFTER a period of silent deliberation, Spurr inclined his big close-cropped red head.

"Can't see where I stand to lose anything by speaking up, so here goes—I first met this Adams guy when he was a military attaché at Peking—Peiping they call it now. We got to be pretty good friends up there and had some swell times together. Well, one day I let drop I was picking up spare change by representing a French munitions outfit here in China."

Features utterly impassive, Kilgour

hitched himself forward in his chair. "I presume you mentioned having access to large sums of money?"

"You presume correct, Major. I told Adams so on purpose, because I knew he was in the Chemical Warfare Division. That's a coming branch of the Service."

"You should know." Major Kilgour's blue eyes were studiously surveying the glittering upper reaches of Nanking Road.

"I do. Well, I told Adams if he ever came across an idea worth selling, he might make plenty of *dinero* by givin' yours truly a go at it!"

The asthmatic hoot of a Pootung ferry crept in through the open window emphasizing a brief silence which ensued.

"What with the old marshal's campaigns against Chang Maliang and the Communists, I forgot all about this guy Adams until about a month ago when I gets a cable. He says he's in on a great secret he's helped to discover. It's probably a lot of horsefeathers, but Adams swore it was worth billions."

"He said all that in a cable?" Kilgour was patently incredulous.

"In code, pal, in code. Well, I figgers it's worth a look-see so I get in touch with Louie Larousse, who's the French armament crowd's manager in these parts. He's all for it and is ready to talk turkey. Pretty soon I get another cable sayin' Adams is headin' for Shanghai and he hopes I've been busy, because he aims to sell this secret for the best price he can scare up.

"Two days ago Louie Larousse and me came down river to meet him, and to make things easier Louie took a room near Adams's as he could."

"And you arranged an interview for tonight?"

"Sure—I don't believe in lettin' moss grow on deals like this. Date was for eleven-thirty—Adams said he'd another date he must keep first."

"He seems to have kept it," was North's grim comment. "And then what?"

"Like you know, I phoned him. I noticed he sounded kind of upset and scared,

but he wouldn't admit it. That's why I showed up ahead of time." Big, knobby hands were flung wide apart. "There you have it, Cap, lock, stock and barrel."

"In your conversation with Adams did he make any mention of the secret's nature?"

"Not in so many words. He did let on, though, that it was more important commercially than from a military angle."

"Did you tell him you thought he sounded scared?"

"Yeh. Said he'd better be careful." Spurr grinned wolfishly. "But Adams said he wasn't worrying, because he just couldn't be robbed."

"What do you mean?"

"Because the whole business was in his head."

"In his head, eh?" Someone far duller than Captain North would have perceived



a subtle change in Major Kilgour's manner.

"Yep—in his head." Spurr pulled out a very long cigarette of Russian pattern and tapped it against a case of heavy gold.

"That's a fine case," pleasantly observed Kilgour.

"Yeh, the old marshal slipped it to me after my guns knocked the daylights out of Sunhwa. Say, Cap, you ought to have been along. Had the time of my young life. Boy! We simply massacred them Communists."

NO DOUBT." North brought the speaker back to his original subject. "You seemed quite surprised to see Miss Gallian."

"I was. Couldn't quite place her."

"You recognized her?"

"I still ain't too sure, but damn me if she don't look a lot like Daisy Richter."

"You knew this Daisy person?" Kilgour suggested mildly.

"Me? No. Bein' a number one 'coaster' she came too high for poor little Dave. Only saw Daisy once in Hong Kong 'bout three years ago."

"Why did Daisy leave the China coast?"

"Reckon she played both ends against the middle once too often. Anyhow, she skipped for India with a squarehead gun runner."

"Think she knows anything about Adams's disappearance?"

"Maybe—maybe not." Tarnished gold on Spurr's shoulder straps glinted in a brief shrug. "But my bet is she does; even if she did act up a tree about Adams takin' a powder."

"In that case a talk with Marya Gallian may be enlightening. Coming, Bruce?"

"No. I'll take my turn later. Think I'll chat with our friend the Colonel."

Inwardly thankful, North made no further attempt at persuasion. If the British Intelligence man elected to approach the problem through Spurr—well, it was just as well.

"Hey, Cap, better watch your step with that joy baby if she turns on the old S. A." Colonel Spurr's loose smile was not pretty.

"Thanks for the tip. By the bye, Bruce, you might see if you can learn anything from the newspaper." North indicated the discarded *North China Daily News*.

"But it's two weeks old?"

"Doesn't that make it all the more interesting?"

NORTH'S hand was actually closing over the cold brass doorknob of the room in which Chao Ku and Marya Gallian were waiting when a voice, menacing as a leveled pistol, warned:

"Stand still!"

North knew better than to disobey. Hostile eyes were drilling holes into his shoul-

der blades. Promptly he oriented the deadly undertone as coming from a door directly at his back.

"In sight iss anyone?"

"No."

"Then turn around, raise your hands und come in here."

Silently the door of a perfectly dark room swung open to shut again once North had crossed the threshold. Simultaneously a flashlight blazed into his eyes, making any reconnaissance simply out of the question.

"What the devil is this?" the man from G-2 demanded in a hoarse whisper. "Whoever you are, you've got the wrong man."

"Be quiet or I shoot, *verstehe*?" Then in guttural German, "All right, Johann, see if he has a pistol."

Grinding mental teeth, Hugh North perforce endured a search which ended when the second man pulled a compact little .32 from the wash leather holster adjusted beneath his left arm.

"I have it, Kurt."

"Gut. Now, *mein Herr*, these questions you must answer. Where iss Luther Adams gone?" A strong reek of onions offended North's nostrils as he merely blinked into the flashlight.

"Answer me!"

"I don't know," he muttered and tried to grasp the significance of this deadly ambush. He must be careful and make no mistakes. No matter what happened Luther Adams could not be left at large. Suppose the new process fell into the hands of certain nations who had an axe to grind with the world?

"We will see about that later. Who are you?" The fellow sounded angry and not altogether certain of his position.

"A member of the police," North lied.

"Ach, so? Who with the *Fraulein* iss in there?"

"Inspector Chao Ku, of the Shanghai Municipal Police."

"Why haff you her arrested?"

"She isn't under arrest; at least, not at present."

"Gut." The unknown drew a long breath then continued in a hoarse stage whisper. "Now you will go across the hall and send that Chinaman away."

"Indeed? I see no reason why I should."

"You are stupid, Herr Policeman," observed the voice. "Maybe you make it necessary for us to kill you, and then him."

"Violence is the tool of fools," North was surprised to hear his own voice saying. "Suppose I told you I'm very anxious to find Luther Adams myself?"

"I would believe you, *mein Herr*," came the surprising retort. "But I do not think you are of the *politzei*. You are Leonid Dankoff!"

"Dankoff?" The name impinged on North's consciousness like a clenched fist. "You're absolutely wrong. I'm not——"

"Silence! Don't try to lie to me! My people haff not forgotten what you did in Harbin. Where haff you the American Major taken? Answer me!"

NORTH could feel the prickle of perspiration breaking out on his palms and his throat was going dry as an arroyo in Death Valley. What a monumental irony it would be to perish, now of all times, for some unknown person's misdeeds. Instinct told him death had never before been quite so close.

"Don't be a bloody fool! I'm not Dan——"

An unexpected thing happened; in a room across the airshaft and directly behind North's captor someone switched on a light. Instantly he struck at the figure thus suddenly silhouetted. The blow landed hard, sending the Teuton reeling backwards, but before North could follow up his advantage he tripped on a piece of furniture and luckily went sprawling just as the second man fired at him.

Ears filled with the jangle of shattering glass North from his crouching position flung a wastebasket at the head of his principal enemy—and missed. The missile

however disturbed the other's aim enough to render harmless a second shot.

"*Heraus, schnell!*"

North cursed the loss of his .32 on glimpsing figures briefly outlined against the yellow rectangle of the doorway. People yelled, doors slammed and the corridor awoke to noisy confusion.

Scrambling to his feet, Hugh North reached the hall just in time to have the report of a heavy revolver buffet him in the face. He paused, semi-dazed—in that narrow hallway the shot had been deafening as the discharge of a fieldpiece.

"Get 'em!" he panted. Chao Ku was poised in the doorway of 1305 with a ponderous old-fashioned revolver raised, from under the big front sight of which a wisp of gray smoke curled upwards. Even at this moment the little Chinese's round face was devoid of expression.

"*Tajen! Tajen! You hurt?*"

"Never mind me! Get those men!"

"One have got. Major Kilgour, soldier man pursue other."

HIS nostrils stung by the bitter reek of burned powder, North plunged down the hall towards a figure lying slumped in an odd half sitting position against the corridor's neat gray wall. The fellow was moaning while feebly clawing at the bosom of a shirt already soggy with arterial blood and his close clipped head swayed in small, desperate circles. He raised dazed eyes when North bent over him.

"Why did you——?"

But Marya Gallian's hysteric screams began to make the corridor resound.

"Shut her up!" North rasped. "Who are you?"

"Johann Metzger. *Ich—ich sterbe.*"

"Why did you come here?" North was speaking fluent German, but the dying man only stared stupidly at his own encrimsoned fingers.

"Your friend knew Marya Gallian?"

Faint as the whisper of a duck's wing in an autumn sky came the words, "*Ja.* Daisy has betrayed——" Then a strong

hemorrhage extinguished the last spark of vitality.

Footsteps pattered and North glimpsed Marya Gallian speeding towards the stairs. Chao Ku, however, was after her with a speed amazing in so round and short-legged a man and caught her just as half dressed guests commenced to peer timidly out of their doorways.

"What's happened?" "Oh God, look! Fred, that man's hurt!" "No, he's dead! How awful!" "Help! Police!"

North leaped to the telephone in room 1305.

"Desk, quick!"

A voice, absurdly normal in this crowded moment, said, "Yes, sir?"

"There's been a murder on the thirteenth floor. Block all entrances! Allow no one to leave."

North hoped he had moved in time and bitterly he lamented the precious seconds necessarily lost over Johann Metzger.

Twenty minutes later the unpleasant fact was revealed that the man called Kurt had successfully eluded Kilgour and Spurr. Though The Mandarin House was thoroughly searched, not a trace of him could be found.

Another disappointing feature was that the body of Johann Metzger yielded no evidence of the least significance. Apparently effective precautions had been taken against carrying identification.

Just who and what had Marya Gallian betrayed? The question began to gnaw at North's subconscious mind like an imprisoned rat. To make things even more difficult her manner, nay her very personality, had undergone a complete transformation. Vanished was the sprightly, well bred young woman of the Cercle Sportif, leaving in her stead a sullen, hard eyed creature who only shivered and shook her head when addressed. Obviously she had been terrified by the turn of events.

In a private office at the Central Police Station North poured the distraught young woman a stiff tot of cognac and waited patiently until at least a measure of her

ghastly pallor had disappeared; only then did he approach his objective by advancing on a tangent.

"Why did you tell me you'd never been to China before?"

"I haven't."

"Miss Gallian, that's absurd and you know it."

"Well then, what if I have?"

"You were then known under another name?"

IN A pathetic attempt at casualness the wan creature dabbed aside a stray curl. "I hope you didn't pay any attention to what that dreadful man in the green uniform said——"

"You haven't answered my question."

"I've never had reason to change my name."

"Why did you return to China with Luther Adams?"

"As I told you, my fiancé has business here."

"Then Adams and King *are* the same person?"

Marya Gallian shrugged. "Why deny it?"

"It's a peculiar sort of business which requires a man to change his name."

"I don't know anything about his business."

"Did you recognize either of the men who waylaid me?"

"No. How could I?" Her reply was too emphatic to be credited.

"What about Dave Spurr?"

Into her eyes crept a look so puzzled that North made a mental note of it. "I met him in Hong Kong once. He's a low sort—they say he'll fight for anybody, do anything if you pay him enough. I can't understand his being at the Mandarin. I'm certain Luther didn't invite him there."

"Sure you didn't communicate with him?"

"No! No!"

North debated mentioning the cables between Adams and Wang's artillery officer, but thought better of it. So Adams had

been undertaking negotiations behind his fiancée's back? Well, well!

"How about another cognac? No? A cigarette, then?"

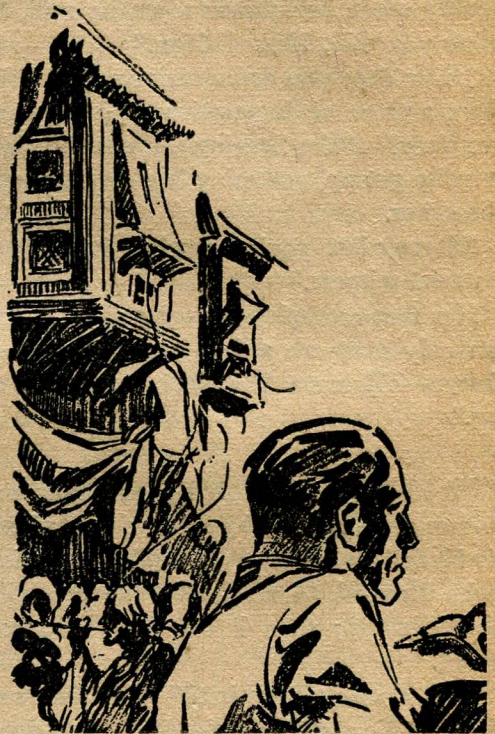
"Thank you. *Mein Gott*, what a night!"

In flawless German North suddenly returned to the attack.

"You recognized Johann Metzger?"

"*Ja, ich*—no, no. I don't know him. I've already said I didn't."

"Now that's odd, Miss Gallian, because Metzger knew you very well. He also said something not exactly complimentary."



Suddenly inspired, North launched a chance shaft. "He told me that you had betrayed him and Kurt."

Her newly returned color receding, Marya Gallian clutched the chair arms with such force as to whiten her knuckle bones.

"That's a lie!" she gasped. "I—I never did anything of the sort."

"But you were badly frightened when you saw Metzger."

"You imagine it."

"Oh nonsense! Come now. Who is this Kurt and what is he to you?"

Stubborn lines dominated the haggard but still handsome features of the young woman in green. "I tell you, I don't know!"

Smothering his exasperation, North tried another tack. "In that case, you won't object to helping me find him?"

"What do you mean?"

"In tomorrow's *Daily News* I'll run a personal in your name, asking Kurt for a rendezvous. All you have to do is to appear and I'll——"

"No! I will not do it."

North did not raise his voice but its quality made her shiver when he said, "I think you will, Miss Gallian."

"How dare you order me about?" Was there a trace of desperation now added to her fear? "I'm leaving at once." She actually got up, gathering her evening cape about her.

"Sorry, but you're staying here as a material witness."

Her face crumpled momentarily. "You can only keep me a few hours on such a charge—I'll leave Shanghai in the morning."

CAPTAIN NORTH'S good nature remained unruffled and he even twisted his black bow tie into a straighter position as he drawled, "I sincerely hope you will, Miss Gallian; then I can have you arrested."

"Arrest me? For what?" Her tone was shrill. "You can't arrest me. I've done nothing."

"You labor under a delusion, my dear young lady. Long before you are ready to leave the International Settlement I will present the police with a Federal warrant for your arrest. In case you've forgotten the fact, may I remind you that such a warrant can be served any place *outside* of the International Settlement?"

"A warrant? Why—why, you're crazy!"

"Possibly. But nevertheless there are penalties for criminal espionage even in an easy-going country like the United States.

Don't you think you'd do better to stay in Shanghai and lend me your valuable assistance? I do want to find that sportsman with the flashlight."

"Very well, then, I will stay. But," she added vindictively, "I refuse to help you."

"Indeed? Then remember that if you will not go to Kurt, it is always possible to bring Kurt to you. And since I don't think you'd enjoy meeting him, I'll give you some time to reconsider my request."

An expression of terror was still on her features when he bowed and with a pleasant, "*Auf Wiedersehen, Gnadige Fraulein*," left her alone again.

CHAPTER IV

CAPTAIN NORTH'S ascent to laboratories on the Central Police Station's third floor was interrupted by a grave, big bearded Sikh who hurried up and clicked heavy hobnailed heels.

"Gentleman below stairs asks for Captain Sahib."

"Sorry, I can't see him."

"Gentleman below stairs sent Captain Sahib this," and the Indian policeman presented a calling card engraved "Joseph T. Reardon, Consul General of the United States."

Lips pursed into a soundless whistle, North set off after the turbaned messenger. So there was more news; undoubtedly it would be bad.

The Consul General, white haired and patently nervous, was seated in the depths of a limousine beside a colonel of United States Marines. One glance at their faces warned North of the correctness of his intuition.

"Heard you'd gone here," Mr. Reardon remarked when North sank into one of the Pullman seats, "so the mountain has come to Mahomet. I thought you'd better know the latest news from Washington."

"It's not cheering, I take it?"

"Hardly. Before Adams skipped he altered the War Department's light steel formula into uselessness."

"Can't his collaborators recognize the changes?"

"No. It seems Adams was the one who developed the essential formula. It's doubtful if the process can be rediscovered without his help."

"Um. So instead of wanting 'Adams dead or alive,' it's now a question of 'get Adams alive'?"

"Precisely. Better read these."

By the limousine's dome light Captain North scanned the first of several transcribed code cables.

"To all United States Consular and Diplomatic Officers.

Immediate arrest and detention of Major Luther Adams is of critical importance. Military and naval authorities have been directed to offer all possible aid. Warrants will be immediately radioed from Nanking upon demand."

It was signed by the Secretary of State.

There were other cables. One from the War Department; another from the Chemical Warfare Division, and still a third from G-2 addressed to North himself.

In conclusion G-2 said:

"—Failure cannot be tolerated. Use any means to assure immediate capture of Adams. Unlimited financial backing is herewith placed at your disposal.

*Fox-Conroy
Brig.-Gen. U.S.A."*

"I don't envy you, Captain," sympathized the Consul General and, for all the raw wind, he mopped his forehead.

"I have five hundred men ready to carry out any reasonable request, sir," was Colonel Lord's sole contribution to the conversation.

"Thank you, Colonel." Lights whirling by briefly revealed North's lean face set in strained lines as he went on. "I've some work waiting inside, gentlemen. I'll phone the minute anything breaks."

NORTH was reopening the door when across the sidewalk Sir Guy Huntingden's broad shouldered figure hurried into the police station. The Consul General stiffened slightly and remarked, "You know, Captain, it won't do to have his people—or any other people—find Adams first."

When the limousine rolled away from the curb North paused to draw several deep breaths of the damp night wind. In view of these last developments he needed to clear his head. To swiftly silence Major Adams would have been difficult enough, but to bring him in alive—ah, that was a different matter. His own next steps, he foresaw, would not be easy and free of diplomatic complications for, although the Shanghai Municipal Police was nominally an international force responsible only to the Municipal Council, it was nonetheless manned by British subjects with only a leavening of other nationalities.

Um. In an ordinary city policed by an homogeneous force, it would have been hard enough to lay hands upon a man who had disappeared so completely as Luther Adams, but in Shanghai with its three sets of governments and its polyglot population, the prospect was appalling.

There was so much he needed to know. For instance, had Adams deserted the Mandarin House of his own free will—or with someone's gun jammed in his ribs? Was the deserter in any way responsible for the murder of the French munitions agent? And why had he told Marya nothing of his intended dicker with Spurr? These and a dozen other cogent questions nagged at his brain with persistent fingers.

In the laboratory he found Inspector Chao Ku and Major Kilgour, flanked by a pair of expert cryptographers. Judging from a litter of notes and calculations they had been hard at work for some time. One glance at the Englishman's ruddy countenance—though Kilgour was at pains to appear at ease—bore out his suspicions. He must have received orders not dissimilar to his own. An Italian cryptographer

was not so successful in controlling his emotions, a nerve in his cheek kept up a betraying flutter. Watching these three was another S.M.P. cipher expert, a diminutive Japanese whose eyes behind half lowered lids were restless as caged beasts behind bars.

"Getting anywhere?" North greeted on noting that all the evidence—newspaper, folding rule, envelope and burnt paper—was exposed for a general inspection.

"No." Kilgour smiled. "I fancy you're mistaken about this newspaper, Hugh. Fiaschetti, Kamanaki and I have tested for invisible ink, studied letter frequencies and have even tried to read double meanings into every line of this wretched rag, but no go."

"Very clever or very stupid system must be employed, *Tajen*."

"They weren't crude enough to use the puncture system, were they?" Captain North caught up the *North China Daily News*' front page and passed it slowly back and forth before a glaring light. He heaved a little sigh when no pin points of light beat through. "That would have been too good to be true."

"Well, Mr. Kamanaki, you're positive there's no indication of a hidden message?"

"Only fools are positive, Captain, but we have found nothing suspicious in the text."

"In that case let's try deciphering the piece of burnt paper."

KILGOUR shrugged as he flung down his pencil. "A waste of time, don't you think, old lad? I fancy we'd get further by checking up on Colonel Spurr."

"May be so—why don't you try that tack?" But oddly enough, Major Kilgour lingered in the laboratory and with frank interest watched his colleague's preparations. Having again removed his dinner coat, North rolled up his sleeves and picked up a small pane of plate glass which lay ready on a bench littered with various chemical impedimenta.

"By the bye, where is Spurr?" North

could not resist inquiring while lightly coating the glass with gum arabic.

"I don't precisely know. The blighter managed to lose us when we started over here, but a man of ours was trailing him, so we'll have news of some kind soon. Careful, that cinder looks confounded brittle."

"It is. I'll have to steam it." For some minutes North patiently held the crinkled black mass on a piece of fine wire netting above a basin of steaming water. When the vapor had somewhat reduced the cinder's stiffness, he deftly placed it upon the gummed glass and gently commenced to smooth it with a heavy camel's hair brush. Despite all precautions bits broke off here and there, but fell into their relative positions. When an irregular black hexagon of ash lay comparatively flat, lights were manipulated over it until they revealed to best advantage what looked like a long series of numerals or calculations of some sort.

"Take this down, please," North directed after careful adjustment of his microscope. "A figure nine then two long vertical bars; five and one long bar; fourteen, dash, three, dash, eighty-one, dash——" His voice droned on and Chao Ku's pencil point scraped audibly over a yellow scratch pad. North noted that the S. M. P. detective was using a hard, sharp pencil and felt immeasurably cheered. One had to play ball with Kilgour, but still——

In the end four incomplete lines of numerals appeared, separated here and there by double bars and, more frequently, by a single bar.

"Mr. Kamanaki, you're an expert in these matters, do these figures suggest any special form of cypher?" Kilgour demanded.

The Japanese hesitated then noisily sucked his breath in between prominent front teeth.

"Captain North was correct in presuming this ash to have a bearing on our problem. These figures are undoubtedly part

of a cypher message. But it is an unusual type. Eh, Signor Fiaschetti?"

THE Italian only nodded but his eyes were bright with excitement.

"Here. You can work better with the transcription in front of you." North detached it from its pad and gave it into Mr. Kamanaki's eager yellow fingers. Then, while the Japanese knit his brows and commenced an intricate calculation, Captain North deftly detached and pocketed the next sheet on the pad, complete with impressions of Chao Ku's pencil point. After all, a matter of such importance called not only for intelligence but finesse as well.

Speaking in his painfully correct English the Japanese announced. "This is almost certainly some form of the lexicon, or book cypher; the presence of these vertical bars are conclusive. The numbers set off by them indicate pages and lines."

Fiaschetti suddenly became voluble. "Look, my friends, in all the message the



highest twice barred number is sixteen—therefore the key is not a book, but more likely a pamphlet or a——"

"A newspaper, *North China News* perhaps?" Chao Ku came waddling across the laboratory with it in his pudgy hand.

An almost tangible tenseness invaded the brilliantly lit laboratory. Then everyone began talking at once.

"Letter frequencies will tell the story, no?" predicted the Italian. "It should not be difficult to break."

But it was. No amount of calculation, transposition nor mathematics availed the perspiring cryptographers, and by two

o'clock no real progress had been made. Precious time was slipping like quicksilver through the fingers, so North followed an old rule of his and temporarily abandoned the problem.

LEAVING Kilgour and his assistants hard at work, he drove to his quarters at the American Club and from its library files extracted a copy of *The North China Daily News* similar to the one causing so many headaches in the Central Police Station. From a sleepy night clerk he secured a foot rule and then retired to his room where, heaving a grateful sigh, he undid his high collar and then pulled off his dress shirt. Supremely comfortable in trousers and singlet, he crossed to his desk and laid upon it the ruler, the newspaper and, lastly, the sheet imprinted by Chao Ku's hard pencil. Yawning, he lightly darkened the back of the sheet until the marks upon it appeared. By propping his work before his bureau mirror the inverted numbers appeared normal and he copied them off.

This done Hugh North lit his pipe and commenced a slow prow around the room. Deliberately seeking to forget the problem, he crossed to his window and stared down upon the Bund. At this late hour the great avenue was deserted by all but barrow coolies trundling produce to market and a few miserable wretches scavenging along the gutters.

Out on the Whangpoo the riding lights of half a dozen warships blinked like the eyes of sleepy cats when the steel monsters swung to a changing tide, and off to his right hundreds of primitive lights in the sleepless Native City shone red-yellow instead of white-yellow, as in the French Concession. Was Luther Adams, hiding or a prisoner, somewhere in that direction?

"Get there first," G-2 had said. Um. What disasters did not impend if he failed? He dared not dwell, even for a moment, upon the magnitude of his responsibility. Odd how things happened sometimes. Everything indicated that someone, proba-

bly the killer of Louis Larousse, had carefully burnt a sheet of paper in the living room of suite 1315, and then had thrown it out of the window, quite unaware that an air current had promptly blown the ashes into the adjacent bathroom.

Despite all discouragements, he sensed the newspaper to be as much a part of the problem as the folding rule. And what about that rule? It presented a promising but singularly difficult clue. Why should a potential murderer carry a folding rule about with him? Had it been the property of Larousse? Or of Adams himself? In the morning he would give the point thorough consideration in the Central Police Station laboratory; somewhere so intricate an affair as the folding rule might conceal a hint of vital importance.

Were they making any progress at the Central Station? He was troubled—his imagination itched and he didn't know where to scratch. Up on Nanking Road a clock sleepily banged out the hour of three.

SLOWLY rumpling his strong black hair, Hugh North went over the possible uses of such a rule—granted it was not intended for its essential purpose. But suppose in this case it had been used to measure something? Too often investigators were prone to discount an obvious explanation simply because it was obvious.

Adopting the thesis the murderer had required a ruler to measure with, he racked his brains while thinking of the rule in connection with the rest of the evidence. Burnt paper? Envelope? Newspaper?

His restless parade came to a sudden halt beside the desk and even while he snatched up the sheet of numerals, his gaze sought the newspaper. Just out of reach fluttered an idea, but it remained infuriatingly elusive.

On inspiration, North picked up the telephone and called a police number reserved for Inspector Chao Ku.

"I'm getting nowhere fast, Chao, so I'd like company. Can you drop in?"

"This person is overwhelmed with unmerited honor. As with the wings of morning I hasten to American Club."

Inexplicably, the hitherto elusive idea crept into North's mental fingers just as he replaced the receiver and almost breathlessly he caught up the ruler. As usual it was subdivided into eighths, quarters and sixteenths. A consultation of the code message showed a figure nine set off by double bars, so he opened the *Daily News* to its ninth page and smoothed the rustling newsprint before him with fingers which trembled just a little. Then for quite a while his gray-blue eyes flashed over it.

He was aroused from his calculations by a gentle knock. "*Tsai chin?*"

"*Yao shen-ma?*"

"Inspector Chao Ku, *Tajen*."

"Come in." Smiling, Captain North shot back the door bolt; of all the men at the Central Station, Chao Ku was the only one to whom he dared unburden himself.

"The Hour of the Rat has brought success," the little Chinese predicted when, clasping a shapeless black felt hat over his stomach, he paused on the threshold.

"Possibly. How are they making out over at the Central?"

"Feet of their progress are shod with slippers of lead. Will *Tajen* have incredible patience to explain how he broke cypher letter?"

"Just as our friend Fiaschetti said, it's a lexicon cypher, Chao, and those numerals before the bars really indicate page and line numbers. But what he didn't perceive was that whoever made up the code was clever enough to go one step further."

Chao Ku blinked apologetically while placing his hat on the bureau. "Another step, *Tajen?*"

"Yes. This system isn't really difficult but it's odd because it's a combination of two simple forms of cypher writing. It's the old foot rule cypher added to the lexicon idea."

"But why use old newspapers?"

"I suppose the writer thought copies two weeks old would be harder to get—which

is true—but forgot that possession of such an old paper would arouse any observant person's suspicions."

"‘Any observant person’? Though Li Tai-po has sung of such modesty, I have never before been witness. Tell me, *Tajen*, numbers set off by dashes possibly indicate divisions on enigmatic ruler?"

"That's the idea. After a bit of figuring I found the key division. It's an eighth of an inch. Here on line twenty-one my next number is eighteen." Using a sharp pencil point North counted off eighteen eighths, coming to a stop beneath a letter T which he promptly added to the end of the word "tonight."

A FEW minutes later the two surveyed a thoroughly decoded but sadly incomplete message and frowned over its curious implications.

It said in part:

"*Dankoff:*

-- will find your man -- room 1311,
Mandarin House. Take him -----
cost ----- agreed place tonight ---
arrival --- call --- Chen, --- Coloniale.
Take all -----"

And though this was all there was, North could once more hear that sibilant voice behind the flashlight saying, "You are Leonid Dankoff."

"Dankoff?" Blankly, he regarded the little Chinese.

"He is a White Russian baron," Chao Ku replied looking very annoyed about something, "with solitary merit of courage. This uninspired person is very unhappy he has not learned of baron's arrival."

That statement North noted with interest. Among the men of the boatmen's guild, the barrow coolies, the railroad porters and rickshaw men, eyes saw and observed for the benefit of this fat little man at his elbow. The S. M. P. detective probably knew more about the three cities of Shanghai than any thousand other men.

"So Dankoff is in Shanghai? So amaz-

ing I have not heard. I must address chiding words to my men. Unpleasant baron well up on list of persons always-to-be-observed." Chao Ku sighed. "And this incredibly stupid person supposed no one could gain city without suffering observation. So much for vanity."

"Never mind, Chao. It may have been an extra good disguise."

Um. So a Russian *emigre* known to Marya's friend Kurt had come to Shanghai and had in room 1315 garroted Louis Larousse; and the recently deciphered message indicated that he had conducted Major Adams to some "agreed place."

"Now what I'd like especially to know," North remarked to a particularly hideous devil screen doing duty at the foot of his bed, "is how Baron Dankoff learned about Adams' projected trip to Shanghai?"

"Hot-blooded Colonel probably not tell him."

"Nor Marya's friend Kurt, and I doubt if Major Adams dickered with him. So, by process of elimination, we reach Marya. Looks as if she thought of doing a little trading on her own account."

"It is not impossible. Lady is shrewd as fox woman of ancient legend. Hence her terror of miscreants Kurt and Johann."

"What about the word 'Coloniale'?" North queried while stepping out of his dinner coat trousers.

"An hotel of not spotless reputation located in French Concession. You plan interview with mysterious Mr. Chen?"

"Your words are of golden merit, my dear Chao Ku. Yes, I'm very anxious for a chat with Dankoff's friend Mr. Chen."

Because North and his companion paused at the Central Station to spread a net for Baron Dankoff, a pale sun was already gilding the Whangpoo and *fu* carts bearing away the Settlement's offal were clattering through the streets ere they entered the French Concession.

Outside the Coloniale Captain North paused, ostensibly to light a cigarette.

"Since Chinese don't stay at the Coloniale, our friend Mr. Chen must be a half-

caste and therefore very wary—especially this morning.”

“You contemplate unannounced call on Mr. Chen?”

“Exactly.”

“Pardon incredible stupidity, but Mr. Chen’s room number is not known and to inquire, even with supreme subtlety, might cause alarm to be given.”

“One doesn’t have to ask,” was North’s brief comment as he drew forth a sheet of bright yellow note paper already folded in the unique fashion of a Shanghai chit. On it he had already written Chen’s name.

“Please tell the desk clerk this is for Mr. Chen, but that it’s not worth waking him for. Then come right out again.”

INSPECTOR CHAO KU hurried off, leaving North seemingly fascinated by a pair of stone Fo dogs grinning ferociously outside the gate of a rich merchant’s court-yard. The inspection lasted but a brief while for feet, tramping up from behind, prompted the man from G-2 to look about. He experienced a small twinge of excitement.

“Hi, Cap, see you’re an early bird, too —” Colonel Dave Spurr’s scarred face was quite expressionless—“and after such a restless night.”

“Kind of you to take such an interest in me, Colonel.”

“You’re an interesting feller, Cap, and you see with both eyes.”

“Thanks. But I’m not fond of audiences.”

“Too bad, Cap,” the other’s hard eyes narrowed. “I happen to like your style o’ doing things. Now listen.” Red stripes down the fellow’s breeches shone bright in the new sunlight as Spurr stepped closer. “Find Adams for me and it’s worth half a million Mex to you.”

“Sorry, Colonel, I’m not interested.”

“Don’t be a damn’ fool,” snapped the soldier of fortune. “You’re sticking your neck out further than you think and you might as well get paid for it.”

“Sorry, I don’t see it that way. Got a match?”

He in the gaudy green uniform nodded, fumbled in his tunic pockets and presently produced a box of wax ones.

“Hate to bother you——”

“Hang onto ’em. I’ve got another box.” Then he went on. “Did you sic that shadow onto me?”

“Shadow? Why no. Where is he?”

“You’ll see.” Spurr’s grin was not amiable. “Keep your eyes peeled for that guy Kurt—I think he means business. Also remember I aim to get hold of Adams and you and nobody else is goin’ to stop me!”

“You amaze me, Colonel.”

“Do I? Well, so long, Cap, and thanks for the shadow—looks like it might get hot later on.” So saying, Marshal Wang’s



Chief of Artillery tramped off along the sidewalk, spur chains clinking and gold ornamented shoulder straps faintly agleam. Fifty yards down the street a very ragged hot water vendor spat on his hands, lifted his load and, raising a thin cry of *Hai yo! Hai yo!*, staggered along after the martial figure in green and red.

“Whose baby are you?” North hummed when the vendor passed. “Looks like Kilgour’s sticking to his theory—or is it Kamanaki?”

NEITHER he nor Chao Ku spoke when the latter reappeared to shuffle off up to the Avenue Eugene Bard as if bent on nothing more important than an early morning stroll.

During a leisurely saunter across the Coloniale’s large and none too clean lobby, North had ample opportunity to discover

his yellow chit in the letter box of room 722 so, without interrupting his easy gait, he sought the stairs in preference to scrutiny by the lift boy; one couldn't be too careful about details.

On the seventh floor landing he paused and, screened by some jaundiced potted bamboos, placidly consumed a cigarette while awaiting the arrival of Inspector Chao Ku. He presently arrived puffing and perspiring.

When there came no response to Captain North's tentative knock at the door of room 722, he stooped and glanced through the keyhole, but on seeing nothing he gingerly tried the door and was puzzled to have it yield at his first pressure.

"Stand by." North's only precaution was to cast loose the buttons of his sack coat before stepping quickly inside. A moment later Chao Ku followed him and closed the door.

Neither man spoke, although the air in 722 was heavy with the distinctive musty-sweet odor of blood and everywhere were signs of a violent struggle. They discovered the Eurasian's body lying behind a thoroughly rummaged desk, its long face of ghastly yellow-bronze and its dressing gown of scarlet no more brilliant than the pool which had formed beneath the head and shoulders. Someone, it appeared, had plunged a large sailor's clasp knife far in beneath Mr. Chen's left arm pit; the weapon's curved handle of black horn was swarming with flies.

"Neat stabbing job," North commented, "and in the best Spanish manner. Um. Looks like he's been dead quite a while."

"Six or eight hours at least, *Tajen*."

Closely watched by his Chinese colleague, the man from G-2 dropped onto one knee, peered intently at the knife's handle an instant, then pulled out a wooden match and several times slid it along that slot in which the blade normally would rest. Without comment he dropped the match into a clean envelope from the desk and got to his feet.

"Finger prints, *Tajen*?"

"Hardly expected any. We're up against the cream of the crop, remember."

He turned to the Eurasian's coat. "Maybe we'd better take a look-see. It's hard finding Chen like this, but maybe we can learn something worthwhile."

"Shall I examine the contents of late lamented's suitcase?"

"Yes."

AN INTERVAL of search produced from beneath the murdered Eurasian's desk blotter a radio form which was dated three days earlier and addressed to Chen himself. The buzz of flies already exploring the dead mouth was quite audible while North and his companion read:

LAND THURSDAY STOP WILL PHONE ON
ARRIVAL STOP BRING YOUR FRIEND ASTOR
STOP MUST WORK FAST ANTICIPATE KURT
STOP

DAISY

"'Daisy'?" Chao Ku scratched a nearly hairless head when North broke into a broad grin.

North briefly outlined Daisy Richter's career.

"Very interesting. I think beautiful lady essayed private bargain with late Mr. Chen, Dankoff & Co., thereby administering doublecross to vindictive Mr. Kurt, her employer."

"Looks like it, Chao, though I'm still puzzled by the Russian's presence in this business. Um. Marya, of course, didn't suspect that her fiancé was doing business with Spurr on his own hook.

"In other words, there seems to be three sets of people violently interested in Luther Adams."

"Facts point to Russian baron as kidnapper of American major, do they not?"

"They tend in that direction, though we mustn't overlook the possibility that Adams might have gone willingly. His record shows he's capable of anything."

Having abandoned his inspection of the

Eurasian's luggage, Chao Ku glanced up sidewise.

"Esteemed friend, is it not possible that Kurt suspecting doublecross sought information aboard *Empress of Finland* still at anchor in Yangtze? To bribe radio man for inspection of duplicates is not difficult."

North emitted a low, wicked chuckle. "Done it often enough, eh?"

Chao Ku merely blinked as he went on. "Thus killer got Chen's address with sad results for latter. Too many millions at stake for half way methods."

"Sounds likely. But we'd better make sure who did the job—and I've an idea we can. We might even drop in on our friends at the Central; shouldn't wonder but they're making plenty of progress by now."

North's premonition was swiftly justified for, on quitting the hotel, he noted Sir Guy Huntingden and a pair of English detectives quite casually surveying the Colonnade. A further incentive to prompt action was the glimpse he caught of no less a person than the M. le Directeur des Services de Police entering the hotel by its service entrance.

CHAPTER V

AT THE Central Station an harassed vice-consul and a minor diplomat were waiting in obvious impatience; they pounced upon Hugh North with all the avidity of a brace of hungry ducks upon a succulent June bug.

"You can tell Mr. Reardon I've made a little progress," North informed them after their first broadside of questions. "You can also say that new evidence has come to light; but that's all."

"All? Oh, I say, Captain, I must give the State Department more of a report! You've no idea what we're up against. In Washington they're simply seething over this Adams affair."

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I can't say more without raising false hopes."

The vice-consul's haggard face was almost tragic as he held out pleading hands.

"Isn't there anything more? We're catching hell at the Consulate. What with the Army and Naval people storming around, Mr. Reardon's a nervous wreck; we'll all be headed for the funny farm if this keeps up much longer."

"It's hard on you, I know."

"You bet it is! Why, we're snowed under with cypher cables and radios—we're 'way behind in decoding them. You see, Captain, we know the—the other Intelligence Bureaus are breaking their necks and——"

"I've some realization of the fact," came the dry comment. "Nevertheless, gentlemen, that's all I have to say just now; you really must excuse me."

Once inside the station North immediately phoned for Dr. Helmholtz, Shanghai's leading analytical chemist, and had barely replaced the receiver before Inspector Chao Ku came in wearing as long a face as could be managed on a countenance essentially rotund.

"No news yet, *Tajen*. Disguise of Russian baron must be example of supreme artistry. Nowhere has his arrival been noted. We, however, continue diligent search."

"Then you'll locate him sooner or later. Incidentally, I wish you'd find out where Spurr's staying."

"At once. Do you wish silent observer detailed to hot-blooded Colonel?"

"No need," North remarked with a wry smile. "Major Kilgour has already attended to that."

IN THE laboratory Captain North was shortly joined by Dr. Helmholtz, gaunt, wrinkled and Austrian. In silence he examined first the folding rule, and then the match stick with which North had scraped the clasp knife's ferrule.

"There's enough dust to make an analysis?"

The Austrian's pale brows lifted dubiously.

"There is not much, but we shall see. This is pocket dust, no?"

"Yes. And please hurry things."

"*Ach*, you Americans always hurry, hurry! It is no wonder you die so young."

Having learned the necessity of complete, even if brief, relaxation during hours of tension, North left the chemist busy among a litter of apparatus, went below and indulged in a shave followed by a quick shower. Immeasurably refreshed by his half hour's vacation, he then repaired to the laboratory and found Dr. Helmholtz writing busily on a pad.

It was with something like the sensations of one who, riding a swing, hovers at the zenith before starting a downward plunge that Hugh North approached the expert.

"*Ach*, shaved and bathed! You have more self-control than I suspected, *Herr Hauptmann*. Your reports?" The chemist thrust two sheets of notes at North who, with lips pursed, swiftly scanned them.

"You're sure about this?"

"Absolutely positive, *Herr Hauptmann*. It proved a most simple analysis to conduct. Present in both specimens are the so little broken ends of wool colored with the same analyne dye; also tobacco grains of an identical mixture. Another interesting coincidence is the presence of Kansu limestone mud particles, a soil not to be found along the lower Yangtze. Most conclusive of all, perhaps, are traces of pepsin—in China few people have adopted the so horrible custom of chewing gum."

"Thank you, Doctor. And now I wish you'd examine this." North placed a small object in the chemist's acid-stained hand. "I'm hoping there'll be some dust in that, too."

"In such a filthy country as China, how can you doubt it? *Ach! Loess* dust gets even into my watch."

WHEN Dr. Helmholtz sought his microscope once more, North remained where he was, apparently absorbed in the antics of many gaudy dragon kites boasting absurdly long tails. Only me-

chanically, however, did his eyes move when a flight of pigeons circled near, filling the air with music from tiny silver flutes lashed to their primate wing feathers.

If only this third clue sustained his fast crystallizing suspicions! Though the chemist worked fast, the suspense gradually became so intolerable that North crossed to the work bench.

"Well, Doctor?"

Near-sighted blue eyes squinted up at him.

"*Herr Hauptmann*, I hope my answer will please you—but whether or not, before any court in Shanghai I would swear all three objects were carried by the same man."

"Thank you, Doctor. Your answer is all I hoped it would be."

In a private office, Captain Hugh North marshalled his facts and sought to decide on a plan of action. Um. The time element eliminated the use of thorough but leisurely methods. Quite conceivably Kilgour, Kamanaki and the rest had been quicker to comprehend clues available to everyone; in that case they might be even now closing in on the missing major.

His self communing was terminated by the hurried appearance of Inspector Chao Ku.

"Sacrificing stately step of philosopher, this person hastens to report discovery of interest."

"You're not going to tell me Baron Dankoff has not been in Shanghai within two months?"

Chao Ku goggled like a stranded catfish.

"Also that he's dead?"

"And where did *Tajen* learn so much?"

North smiled. "Upstairs in the laboratory. Am I right about Dankoff's being dead?"

"May all your guesses be of same excellent quality. Ten days ago Russian baron was shot in Kansu Province by soldiers of Marshal Wang."

"How interesting," North murmured, "not to mention illuminating. Of course that settles how Spurr got hold of the old

newspaper and learned all about Mr. Chen."

"So hot tempered Colonel conducted violent removal of competitors?"

"It was. Having attended to his only known rivals he then either forced or argued Adams into going away with him."

"In that case this person possesses no yen to occupy slippers of American major."

"Nor I. Spurr's no Boy Scout and he'll probably have Adams bumped off at the first hint of trouble—which wouldn't suit us at all. It's a cinch we'll have to walk 'as on golden lilies.'"

"What is Colonel Spurr doing now?"

"Because he killed Larousse, his original paymaster, I imagine he's trying to contact somebody else with money. Incidentally, I'd give a lot to know why he



quarreled with him. By the way, did you learn anything about Spurr's lodgings?"

"Yes and no. He occupies room at Palace Hotel—pretty obvious blind, *Tajen*. No doubt only kinsmen of Marshal Wang in Native City know Colonel's real abode."

"Nevertheless we've got to get Adams away whole."

"How does *Tajen* propose to accomplish laudable ambition? Deep guile seems required."

"It does, more than I've got I'm afraid; but I think I'll drop in on Marya Gallian. Chiefly because our friend Spurr knows that she'd cheerfully see my ashes on a shovel, she suggests possibilities. Please keep an eye on me when I leave the Sta-

tion." So saying, the man from G-2 caught up his hat and presently appeared in a private office where Marya Gallian sat sullenly perusing the morning papers.

To North's surprise Major Adams' fiancée presented a sharp contrast to the orchidaceous young creature of the night before. Apparently a messenger dispatched to the Astor had brought a suitcase, for Marya Gallian no longer wore her rather revealing jade evening gown. Now she was quite the tailored young woman, cool, self-contained and severely chic in a suit of dark tweed.

"Good morning." He offered his hand with a disarming smile which was reflected in distinctly friendly gray-blue eyes. "Sorry I've been delayed. Meant to drop in long ago. However I hope you'll forgive and take a bite of late breakfast at the Cathay with me?"

"Why, why—I hardly think I——" she stammered, still angry, and more than a little disconcerted.

"No excuses accepted. It's years since I've had the pleasure of so lovely a companion at breakfast."

"Somehow, I doubt that, Captain," said she forcing a smile.

"You'll come, then?"

She shrugged. "Since a captive has no choice but to obey——"

"A captive? What an idea! It's I who am captivated."

DISCREETLY followed by Chao Ku, North hailed a cab and soon he and his frankly bewildered guest were consuming iced mangoes in the Cathay's intimately enormous grille.

As the meal progressed more of Marya Gallian's self-confidence returned and, though apprehension remained in her manner, she nevertheless responded even wittily to North's good natured small talk.

When a cat-gestured Cantonese waiter had cleared away all but the coffee cups, Marya Gallian accepted one of her host's cigarettes, settled back in her chair and raised attractively plucked eyebrows.

"Well, Captain, am I to gather from this burst of graciousness that you've decided I had nothing to do with the wretched business of last night?"

Reassuring crowsfeet appeared at North's eye corners. "Let's say I'm sure you'd no part in Larousse's murder. However, there's still the espionage charge."

"You can't touch me while I'm in Shanghai," she pointed out almost demurely.

"Perish the thought! However, for a couple of reasons your friend Kurt might not be so forbearing."

"A couple of reasons? You intrigue me, Captain."

"You still have Kurt's ten thousand, I believe. Under the circumstances, I'm sure he'd hate to part with it."

"And the other reason?"

"He knows all about your rather indiscreet radiogram to the late Mr. Chen."

The girl paled sharply. "Chen—is—dead?"

"Someone stabbed him about half an hour before Louis Larousse was garroted."

"Oh." Marya Gallian's ability to withstand shock had improved, for she only shrugged. "It's the risk of the game, Captain."

"It is. But let's face facts. I presume you realize you're in a tight corner?"

Her attractive cloche of brown felt inclined to admit the truth of his observation.

"If you stay in Shanghai, Kurt will get you sooner or later; if you leave the Settlement, you face extradition and a long term in Atlanta."

"Why dwell on such unpleasant possibilities?"

"Because, if you'll listen to me, Miss Gallian, you can escape your dilemma and emerge richer by two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—American, not Mex."

"What are you driving at?" Sharp suspicion wrinkled the satin expanse of her brow.

"Suppose you think about it a minute. Meanwhile your buttonhole looks distressingly vacant."

"*Ta Shih-fu*." North beckoned a flower

girl who, quaint and petite as a porcelain figure in her trousered native costume, was passing with a tray of crimson lilies, tiny lotus blossoms, gardenias and an assortment of jewel-like roses. "A gardenia as nearly worthy of this lady's beauty as you have."

GIGGLING, the child selected an icily perfect blossom and placed it on Marya Gallian's plate, then with a murmured "Live a thousand years, O *Taipan*," she pocketed a yuan dollar and glided on among the tables.

North's guest was regarding his lean, high cheek-boned countenance with something like awe.

"Among other things, Captain, you're quite a connoisseur of human nature. If there was anything in the world I needed this morning, it was a little kindness. That lovely flower—why, I—I could almost cry." And indeed her large eyes glistened like sun upon gray-green water. "That was terribly sweet of you."

"We both follow difficult professions, Miss Gallian. There's no sense making them more difficult than one has to."

He watched her scent the bloom and then caress her cheek with it before placing it in her buttonhole.

"Suppose you pin it a little higher on the lapel. There, now it's perfect." In no hurry at all he settled the bill then cast a quick look about, but no new guests had entered the fast emptying dining room.

"You wanted something of me?" the girl reminded.

"I only want your coöperation. Tell me, is Major Adams really your fiancé?"

"Oh yes," she said dropping her eyes, "we're engaged all right, but only as a matter of convenience. He has no more appeal than a carp. Kurt wanted him brought in Shanghai—so did I, for reasons of my own which, as you know, haven't worked out very well."

"Do you want to help me?"

"I haven't much choice, have I?"

"It's intelligent of you to admit anything

so unpleasantly true. Could you get in touch with Kurt?"

"I'm not certain, but I probably could. Why?"

"Suppose you tell him he's seriously mistaken about your intentions. Give him any excuse you please, but you must make him think your telegram to Chen had absolutely nothing to do with the Adams affair."

Her vivid lips became pursed in doubt. "That will be difficult—and dangerous, too."

"Not if you prove your good faith by introducing Kurt to the man who knows where Adams is."

"Then *you* know?" she demanded, her eyes steady and pushing.

"I think I do, which is very different from being sure." Under pretext of lighting a fresh cigarette North hesitated, concerned by the magnitude of the gamble he was about to take. For all Marya Gallian's charm and pleasing appearance, she was a professional spy of long experience; shrewd, conscienceless and incapable of loyalty. In another minute he was going to give this young woman an excellent chance to not only effect her own escape, but also to put Adams forever beyond his reach. Against this he had but a doubtful counterpoise—her innate selfishness.

TACTFULLY, Captain North impressed upon her the wisdom of keeping faith; he could and would guarantee a quashing of the espionage charges, he would protect her life and he would pay her a quarter of a million dollars once Luther Adams was on his way to the United States.

"I—I'd like to help you, Captain, but I'm terribly frightened. You don't know Kurt as I do. He's a typical Prussian, cold, suspicious and absolutely without mercy. Please tell me a little more about this."

"Very well. As I said, you'll get in touch with Kurt as soon as you can and square yourself—tell him you've arranged a meeting with the man who has Adams.

The rendezvous will be for cocktails this afternoon, and as soon as you can you'll let me know where it's to be. You'll have to convince him that this is only a harmless little get-together or Spurr will shy off."

On Marya Gallian's features appeared the exasperated expression of a traveler who remembers leaving her steamer tickets on a bureau at home. "So it was that devil Spurr!"

"Yes. He not only murdered your friend Chen, but the French munitions agent and had Dankoff executed. He's thorough, is Dave Spurr."

"Then why is he such a fool as to stay in Shanghai?"

"Because he killed Larousse, who was going to put up the money."

"Your next step will be to send Spurr a line at the Palace."

She nodded sagely. "I'm to tell him Kurt wants to talk—business? I'll be very guarded."

"You'd better be, Spurr's not a gentle playmate. Your friend Kurt has funds?"

FROM Marya Gallian's bright lips the word "plenty" burst amid a little puff of cigarette smoke. Then, with ill-disguised curiosity, "What makes you think he'll listen to me?"

"He knows you hated me last night."

"It doesn't seem possible now, Captain."

Smiling, he ignored her interruption and went on. "Besides, he's sure you're out to make money on Adams. I think he'll listen."

"And after the cocktail party?"

"That's my look out."

"How can you arrest Kurt? He's done nothing."

"Nothing? Seems to me he held a man up at the point of his gun. Don't worry on that score; I'll dig up enough charges to keep Kurt in jail enough weeks to give you a good start."

"What a Machiavelli is lost in you!" Her whole being seemed to leap into her eyes and in that instant North understood her amazing success in Hong Kong—the

look was intimate, fathomless and essentially appealing. "I could wish we had met under different, less hampering circumstances, Captain."

When her hand, slim and blue veined, crept across the table towards him, he took it almost eagerly.

"Who knows but we may? I admire people who are sensible enough to admit it when the guns are too heavy on the other side."

"*Merci*. But remember, I may not be able to do things as quickly as you wish."

"I'm sorry but you'll have to arrange that meeting for this afternoon. Time is everything."

"I will do what I can." Her gaze engaged his and clung with an indefinable intensity. "And now am—am I free to go?"

"Quite. I'll see you to your taxi."

A MOMENT later he paused, half in and half out of the cab. "If you get in a jam, call the Central Station. I'll have men so spaced over the International Settlement that you can be reached within five minutes."

"Good-by, and thank you, Captain, for being so sweet." Before he suspected her intent, her arms slid about his neck and fragrant lips pressed his mouth. He straightened, blushing furiously, a reaction which by no means rendered him less attractive, and watched the cab go speeding off towards the Yangtzepoo quarter.

"My word, Hugh," drawled Kilgour's voice, "if this were war time, I'd damn' well denounce you for fraternizin' with the enemy. Still, she *is* a dashed fetching creature."

"Yes; and so was Circe."

For some little distance the two walked up the Bund in guarded amity, paralleling the progress of a company of United States Marines. How solid and friendly they looked with their equipment agleam, their distinctive campaign hats and their long brown faces in sharp contrast to the dingy

bronze ones of paper-plastered urchins running all about them.

"Come along to the Club," North suggested. "They've installed a man conditioning plant——"

"Does it come in white or brown bottles?"

"You pays yer money and you takes yer choice."

Once they were seated in the American Club's bar, Kilgour stretched prodigiously and speculatively eyed his drink. "Ye gods, what decadence—whiskey peg before lunch! But I'm dog tired and I fancy you are, too."

"*Y como!* I'd like a one way ticket to the Upper Uganda!"

"Run across Dankoff yet?" Bruce Kilgour's query was a masterpiece of the casual.

"Yes, thanks. We've located him all right. What luck have you had?"

The British agent burst out laughing. "Why fence, Hugh? We both know Spurr



did in Larousse and that half-caste at the Coloniale."

"I suppose so. Do you mind telling me how you came to suspect him?"

"By the usual C. I. D. methods. We checked up and quizzed every employee at both hotels, and then cross-checked on Spurr's movements. The result indicates he's guilty as hell."

"Was it you or Kamanaki who finally broke the lexicon foot rule code?"

"Neither of us." Kilgour shook his sandy red head. "There was no need. By the time we'd combed the hotels and did a

little calculation, we knew Spurr and no one else could have killed the man."

IT WAS odd, Captain North reflected, how often varying methods produced identical results. But then his problem was essentially different from Kilgour's in that the situation forced him to play an almost lone hand, while the British agent could count upon the coöperation of the British run Shanghai Municipal Police.

"Have you nailed him yet?" North's breath hovered in his throat.

"No, but I fancy we will pretty soon. *Entre nous*, we've surrounded his room at the Palace."

Imperceptibly, Captain North relaxed upon the cool leather lounge; so wary a bird as Spurr would hardly blunder into such an obvious trap.

"Tell me, old man, you don't really think Spurr would go there in person?"

"Why not?" Kilgour's face was absolutely devoid of expression. "Several messages have arrived there for him."

"Most probably he'll phone in and have them read." The man from G-2 sat straighter and looked his friend in the face. "If you ever want to see Spurr again, you'd better call off your dogs at the Palace—just in case he sends a messenger to find out if he's being hunted."

"That's a remarkable request, my lad."

"I don't think so—it's good sense. Aside from this I wish you'd hold back all messages for him save one which will come from Marya Gallian. Please allow Spurr to receive it without follow-up of any sort. It's most important."

"What the deuce are you up to?" To say that Bruce Kilgour was puzzled, would be to understate his reaction.

"If you do as I ask I'm all but certain we can grab Dave Spurr together no later than this afternoon." North paused, giving his companion time to reflect that Spurr would be promptly lodged in an English run jail. "I imagine your people would be glad to see this business cleared up."

"I've your word of honor we'll go after Spurr together?"

"You have."

Kilgour went immediately to the phone and spoke for quite a while.

CHAPTER VI

CHIMES of varying resonance were banging out six o'clock and a second rush of business people returning to their homes across Soochow Creek was filling the streets with cars, bicycles and rickshaws. Moodily, a dozen odd English and Chinese detectives slouched in two large touring cars and watched the human tide swirl past the Central Station and speculated on the circumstances which had kept them waiting there since four of the afternoon.

Even more angry and dismayed was Consul General Reardon who even at that moment was beating a solid police desk with the flat of his hand.

"It was positively insane for you to take such chances! I am amazed, sir, utterly astounded at such an appalling lack of judgment! Any country constable would have known better than to trust a woman like Marya Gallian." Mr. Reardon paused, his mottled old face twitching. "When you had her, you at least had a valuable witness, and your fingers on the case—I reported so to Washington. What am I to say now?"

"Nothing—except I let her go for what seemed to be good and sufficient reasons."

"Good and sufficient reasons! Great God, Captain, you're no further along than you were yesterday at this time!"

"I'll admit it looks that way, sir—I can't understand why she hasn't phoned long ago. However——"

"However nothing!" growled Mr. Reardon. "You know Shanghai's cocktail hours? They're from four to six. Bah! It's plain this pretty young woman has made a ring tailed monkey of you! Probably she and the rest of the lot are in safe hiding, if they haven't already slipped out

of the city." The angry old man glared at his somberly silent compatriot. "Famous Captain North or not, you're going to hear more about this, I promise you that! A great detective? Bah! Any of my vice-consuls could have handled the affair and done no worse!"

To all of which Captain North made no reply, only drummed on the desk and stared at the sunset which, because of dust rising from the Mongolian desert, made the sky an inverted bowl of incandescent brass. Presently the Consul General stamped out, his face rigid and gray and his eyes tragic.

In another room of the same building Sir Guy Huntingden was more calmly but more acidly giving vent to similar sentiments.

"Have you gone clean out of your head? 'Pon my word, Major, only a fatuous greenhorn would have even considered North's absurd proposition. I know he has a remarkable record and all that, but it was up to you to recognize his mistake and turn it to our advantage."

"Sorry, sir, North's generally steady as a rock. I was sure he'd lead me to Spurr. Once we have Spurr we'll soon locate Adams."

"Dammit, man, you'd no right to listen to him. Do you recall that the Foreign Office expects us to produce Adams today?"

"We may yet, sir," was Kilgour's lame reply. "Don't forget that Spurr did call the Palace and got the message from Marya Gallian."

"What if the scoundrel did? No doubt she was giving him warning—they're birds of a feather, after all. I'm afraid, Major, you've committed a frightful, irretrievable blunder; which is a shame after your excellent record."

BY HALF-PAST SIX even Hugh North was prepared to admit his defeat, and he looked so quietly wretched that Kilgour went over to lay a hand on his shoulder.

"They'll have our official heads, of course. Rotten shame——"

The telephone suddenly shrilled and once they had caught up duplicate receivers they heard a low, quivering voice say:

"We're at the Soochow Inn. Couldn't get away till now. You'll have to hurry—we're leaving almost any minute."

Neither man lingered, but dropped the receivers and took the stairs three at a time. On the sidewalk North paused an instant to call, "Be careful—the Soochow's a bad spot in a worse neighborhood."

"We will be." Then in his turn the British agent hesitated. "I say, Hugh, did you notice how her voice quivered? She may have been forced to phone. You don't suppose this is a trap?"

"It's possible," North called over his shoulder. "We'll see when we get there."

Like fleet juggernauts the police cars tore through streets on which strollers in evening clothes were already appearing. Rickshaw coolies screamed in terror, outraged Sikh police roared futile commands, porters ducked and squealed and more than one barrow coolie narrowly missed annihilation.

"May Kwan-yin preserve this wretched ant," gasped Chao Ku who, riding beside North, had shut his eyes and was clinging to the laprobe rail with both pudgy hands.

Ten minutes could not have passed before the police halted at the mouth of Wehei Lane, unaware that half a block behind them an inconspicuous taxi, operated by the Arrow-like-Speed company, also had stopped. Cautiously, its Chinese driver was craning his neck at the huge touring cars and their hurrying passengers.

"Suppose you take the front, Kilgour," North suggested. "We'll cover the rear."

Though the rest of North's men quickly took up strategic positions commanding nearby courtyards and alleys, Inspector Chao Ku lingered near the police car and when everyone was out of sight he waddled from the dingy environs of Soochow Inn towards the Arrow-like-Speed vehicle.

Meanwhile Captain North was giving his

subordinates a final admonition. "Under no conditions shoot unless in self-defense—we've got to take Colonel Spurr and the others alive. Thorvaldsen!" North beckoned one of the few Americans on the S. M. P. force. "You'll go in with me."

Sundry pigs and chickens expressed surprise and resentment when they beheld strangers tramping through their squalid domain in the rear of the Inn, and a quartet of chow dogs—in the process of being fattened for table—flew snarling at the invaders, but Thorvaldsen's sturdy boots sent them howling to cover behind a row of dilapidated sedan chairs.

"Watch the outer courts," North warned the detectives on either flank. "We're going in now."

OVER cobblestones slippery with the offal of years, North and his companion bore down on the steam clouded back door.

"There goes Kilgour's crowd," Thorvaldsen muttered when a shrill jazz band suddenly stopped playing. Somewhere a table crashed and startled voices could be heard. Then from the Inn's back door erupted a small torrent of Chinamen; scullions, waiters, cooks and guests alike sped into the back court. Standing to each side of the exit North and his assistant surveyed the fugitives, but made no effort to check their flight. More of the Inn's staff, chattering with fear, came bounding out of the back door like rabbits from a warren invaded by ferrets, but there was no sign of Marya Gallian and her companions.

"Let's go!" North waved on his companion. "Keep your eyes skinned for Kurt and the girl. I'll watch for Spurr."

The smell of steam and the pungent reek of curry, ginger and a dozen other spices beat in North's nostrils when he and Thorvaldsen passed through the grimy kitchen in order to block a pair of doors leading to the front of the Inn. Four or five white ducks added a ludicrous note by fluttering wildly about the kitchen and an enormous

battle-scarred cat bristled when the door in front of Thorvaldsen flew open and a sing-song girl pattered out, the bright kingfisher plumes in her hair quivering with terror. Everywhere sounded the thud of hurrying feet and the noise of doors being hastily slammed, but Kilgour's voice successfully penetrated the uproar.

"Stay where you are, everybody!"

"The hell you say!" There followed the unmistakable crash of a table being violently overturned. Then a shot preluded the sound of feet racing towards the kitchen. Thorvaldsen snatched out a .38 and tensed himself.

"If that's Spurr," North called, "remember, don't shoot! I want——" He got no further for, like a bolt of destruction, Wang's Chief of Artillery plunged through the door, an automatic blue-black in his hand.

"Gangway, flatfoot!" No sooner had he glimpsed Thorvaldsen than he fired from



the hip and charged on through the kitchen, the white ducks scattering in terror before him.

Instinctively North threw his sights on that broad green back just at that point where the Sam Browne belt bisected it, but somehow his bullet instead went thudding into the kitchen's flyblown ceiling. It severed an enormous string of dried onions and amid a veritable rain of vegetables North ran over to Thorvaldsen.

"How bad?"

"Through the shoulder. I'm okay."

North sprang up, conscious that Kilgour and his men were advancing down the cor-

ridor from the dining room. Sing-song girls fleeing from the Inn's upper floors were blocking the rear exit, but North plowed his way through them, all the while shouting commands for Spurr to halt. Then his heart stopped; in one of the outer courts two reports had sounded in rapid succession.

"Damn! Wonder if some idiot's shot him?" Biting the inside of his mouth with anxiety, North ran on until, gaining the kitchen courtyard, he glimpsed Spurr's green clad figure dashing out of a gate at its far end.

"Where did he go?" "Which way?" "Seen him, Thorne?" "Yes, went that way." "No! I tell you he's hiding in the right hand court." "He shot down Thorvaldsen!" "He's winged. See the blood?" "This way, men!"

Promptly the pursuers scattered, urged on by Kilgour and North. The latter, however, pursued his search so diligently that before long the Soochow Inn lay several blocks behind.

IT WAS a slightly flushed but entirely calm American gentleman who presently entered a dusty little drugstore operated by one Miguel Calvaho, a ginger colored Portuguese. Nodding, the newcomer sought an archaic telephone, put in a call for the American Club and spoke a few sentences in a voice so low that not even Senhor Calvaho's sharp ears could distinguish what he said. This done, the American purchased some cigarettes and seated himself.

Despite the robust odors of an imminent Portuguese supper, the American gentleman lingered to smoke and watch rusty hands crawl painfully on and on past minutes dividing the face of a dingy tin clock extolling groceries sold by a Mr. Mei Lan-pao.

Somebody's Number One boy came in to purchase a package of corn plasters, then a withered old Chinese scuffed up to the counter in search of a paper of ground

tiger's bones. His headache was very bad, he complained.

The American had finished his seventh cigarette before the ancient nicked apparatus at his elbow emitted a neurotic ring. Despite his long wait, he raised the receiver quite deliberately and murmured a number into the mouthpiece.

"Hot-blooded Colonel refuging in number 12 Kowloon Street. This insignificant person surveys front while chauffeur nephew observes rear."

Kowloon Street, North recalled on hailing a passing rickshaw, lay just inside the Native City; a fact which evoked mixed reactions. Much could be accomplished beyond the domain of the S. M. P., still, within the International zone Captain North also was a minor czar. On the far side of Soochow Creek he would be just another foreign devil. Moreover the invasion of an important Chinese home was attended by risks of an exceedingly unpleasant nature. Resolutely, North switched his mind from such a macabre train of thought.

Number 12 proved to be a typical Chinese home of the better sort, boasting an outer and several inner courts, such as would normally be occupied by servants and the less important members of the family. Barring entrance to the outer court was a formidable gate, topped with spikes and guarded by the usual Fo dogs.

"*Tajen* will force admission?"

Captain North shook his head. "No. If we try that they'd very likely kill Adams—always provided he's in there."

"What then, O Born Before I Was?"

"Have you any idea of how badly Spurr is hurt?"

"Only that hot-blooded Colonel almost fell in descending from taxi. Also there were large spots on sidewalk; since removed by Mongol *mafoo*."

"Has anybody come out of the house except the groom?"

"No, *Tajen*."

"Um. Then it should pay us to wait. Go and tell your nephew to let us know if anyone tries to leave by the back."

PERHAPS twenty minutes later a small door, let into the spike crowned gates, opened and an elderly house boy, wearing a European overcoat and hat over his native robe, slipped out.

"Wait here, Chao Ku; this may be a stall," North murmured before starting after the hurrying servant.

Ten minutes later the boy reappeared before Number 12 in company with a tall white man who walked close beside him and, in excited French, inquired into the prospective patient's condition. A peculiar triple knock and an explanation of "Foreign devil physician" caused bolts to click sleepily and the wicket door to swing open.

Once inside the courtyard Captain North pressed his .32 even more firmly against the house boy's ribs. Judging by the old fellow's manifest terror, he was likely to give no trouble, but nevertheless when they had penetrated the inner courtyard and were skirting a moon pool in its center, North whispered:

"Try the slightest sort of a trick, Chugen, and you'll be bowing before your ancestors."

"Foreign devil physician is here," the messenger repeated when a small grilled window set in a handsomely lacquered inner door shot back.

"Good. Like grayhound conduct him to *Taipan*."

The problem thus far was resolving itself with so little difficulty that North promptly became apprehensive; it was always unnerving to find a dangerous path unexpectedly smooth.

TWO armed guards wearing green uniforms roughly similar to Spurr's presented arms smartly enough when North halted before a particularly terrifying devil screen, but nevertheless sharp suspicion lurked in their eyes. Drawing a deep breath, Hugh North entered a room in which only two or three native lanterns glowed.

"Here, *Taipan*, is doctor man," the boy

quavered and, after closing the door, he pattered across the room to crouch against the opposite wall, his eyes riveted upon the menace concealed in North's coat pocket.

"Well, sir. Let's take a look at you. Where are you hit?"

"Through—chest. I c'n tell I'm pretty bad, Doc." At the feebleness of the voice coming from a couch set deep among the shadows, North was not surprised. Half a glance revealed the adventurer's serious condition. Uniform tunic hurriedly ripped open, booted feet spread wide apart, he lay limp on the great couch clutching a blood-stained bath towel to his chest and breathing hoarsely, though his chin was tilted upwards as if to ease a pressure on his throat.

"Sorry to find you like this, Colonel. Even if I were a doctor, there's nothing I could do—you're pegging out pronto."

By a prodigious effort, the prostrate figure raised its head an inch or so.

"Oh, so it's you, Cap? Well—ain't surprised—been—wondering—why you passed up—chance in kitchen—I—" The voice became lost in a strangled, sobbing sort of a cough.

"Hard lines, Spurr, but you had more of a chance than either Larousse or Chen."

"Damn your eyes—you goin' to preach?" The old fire flared in Spurr's faint tones.

"No. Why did you kill Larousse?"

"Frog swine—tried to chisel my—percentage on—deal—Louie was fool enough to turn ugly. Threatened to tip off—police about—my having fixed Dankoff."

A fresh burst of coughing sent a dark spray far over a coverlet of pale green silk.

"You came back to Adams' room to look for the rule, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I couldn't get it back—watched the Coloniale all night—see if you'd figure—message—took from Dankoff."

"You killed him before Larousse?"

A little silence ensued, during which the house boy began to whimper drearily.

"You're one smart guy, North. Sure, I killed him. Didn't want no competition

—too much dough—this deal——” Visibly the harsh powder burned face commenced to crumple and to fall into softer lines. “How much longer, Cap?”

“Very soon; hadn’t you better tell me where to find Adams?”

“Damned if—I do.”

“Why not?” North’s voice was low and very earnest. “I’ll get him anyhow.”

“The hell you will! Two of my men have orders—kill him—if anybody comes —”

“But he’s no use to you now, Spurr, and I want him very badly.”

THE stricken soldier tried to speak but coughed instead. After he had spat redly North bent and staunched the stained lips with a handkerchief.

“Where’s—house boy? So damn’ dark—can’t see him——”

“Here, *Taipan*, here!” The old Chinese scuttled over to kneel beside the couch and listen to Spurr gasp a few sentences in some Manchu dialect unfamiliar to North. Casting the man from G-2 a frightened glance, the boy immediately slipped out; the guards growled something, then followed a hurried tramping of feet.

Why was the dying man treating him to such a horrible grin? A sudden alarm seized the man from G-2.

“What did you say?” He bent low over the sofa. “Dammit, tell me what you told that boy!”

“If you want Adams—Cap—you can go left—down corridor——”

Hugh North started to turn, but Spurr’s breathing thickened suddenly.

“In a minute. I’d better stay with you until——”

Spurr’s voice was very faint now. “Been alone against the world a long time—guess I can leave it—without no cheering section. I ain’t afraid of——” With very little fuss for so turbulent a person, Colonel David Spurr ceased to breathe.

What orders had the dead man issued? Halted at the bedroom door, North hesitated. Save for a sound of stealthy footsteps in the distance, Number 12 Kowloon Street seemed utterly silent. No rifles cracked when he gingerly thrust open the door, so he stepped out. A beam of light slanting across the corridor floor some little distance to his left attracted his attention.

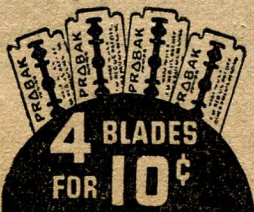
On tiptoes Hugh North stole down the passage. Disdaining the melodrama of a leveled pistol, he kept the weapon in his pocket even when he suddenly stepped forward to fill the doorway.

In the armchair of a comfortably furnished room, a sallow individual clad in ill fitting tweeds sat reading. Abruptly aware of an apparition at the doorway, he dropped his magazine and sprang up—pale eyes wide with alarm.

“What the devil do you want?”

“You, Major.”

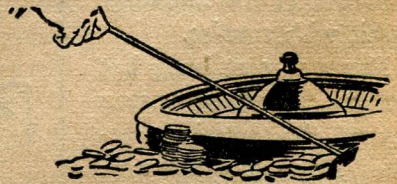
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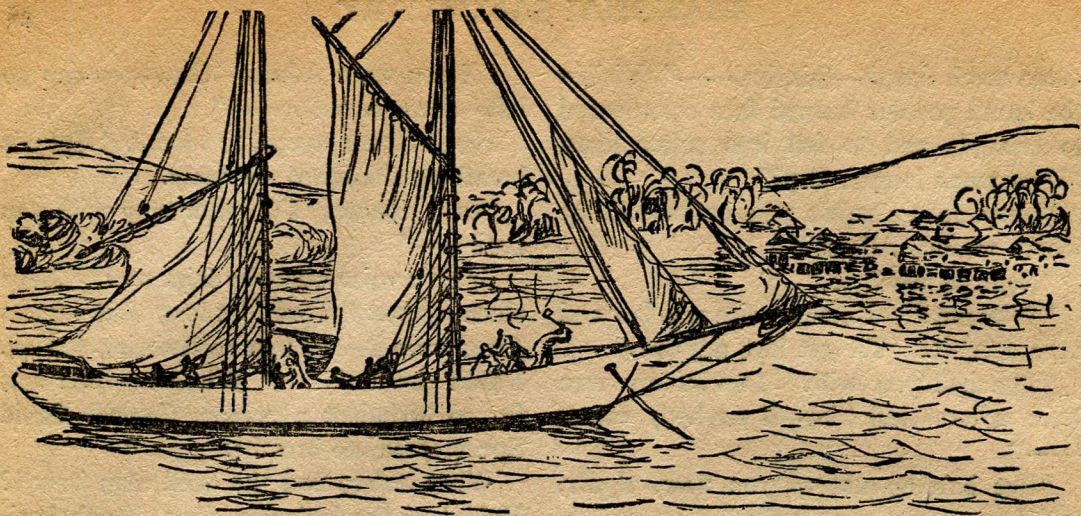


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SAILORMAN

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of

"Jungle Gold," "Hands of Fate," and Many Other Stories in *SHORT STORIES*

THE scape of sea and land and sky held the immense serenity of a world restored, filtered clean and clear through the soft veil of night, unvexed by man's contrivings and connivings.

The ship lay in the haven off the *campong* of Badang, reflected in the glassy surface, its folded canvas flaccid, like the wings of sleeping birds; the cable up and down; waiting for the wind to blow out of the Macassar Strait with sunrise.

Dawn was at hand but the sun was still unseen beyond the towering, serrate ridge of Koruwe. All was silence, stillness, somnolence. The sky behind the mountains was jade-green, flecked with clouds pink as the plumes of flamingoes. The water was like the heart of an

amethyst, save where the slick trails of the tide flowed in slow filmy coils of bronze. Sampans and proas were beached high, where red nets dried on bamboo racks. The high-peaked houses faced the strait from a dense grove of cocopalms whose slender, graceful trunks of silver-gray were banded with sepia, whose emerald fronds were stiff and bright as if they were made of metal, painted and varnished.

The Malay crew looked to the East, like true Mohammedans, but prayer and prostration were not of their habit. Their grafted religion lay lightly on their souls, though the lifting orb was a symbol of life and vigor. They threw no shadows, they were motionless, as if enchanted.

The mate leaned on the rail and absorbed the

It Was Celebes— Danger in the Golden Air, and Tragedy and Glory



beauty of the scene as he watched the high ridges and deep gorges, the latter brimmed with violet umbra, the precipices tapestried in verdure; looking for the first ripple of the breeze.

In such twilights he had always a sense of unreality. His was the spirit of the sailorman, a dreamer born of the sea, the stars, the winds and currents, the subtle forces of Nature that now threatened, and now favored him; that spoke steadily of rhythmic power, of the infinite. Such a moment was upon him, a spell of fantasy. All this was immortal magic, revealed to mortal men.

THE bark was a beautiful, buoyant thing in the crepuscular light; built for swift, urgent flight, clouded with canvas and surging through windy seas. Her lines were still sweet, though her tall spars had been lopped above the royals, and she was only a drab trader, stinking of ancient cargoes of shell and copra. Now she was half-laden with rattan and kapok, *damar*, nutmegs and trepang. The spices sought in vain to banish the fishlike reek, blending in the trade-smell of the East; that was in the sweat of a man, in his hair, in his clothing and food—in his blood.

If the wind failed them they would lose the tide. It would be a day wasted. The skipper would go ashore and renew the drunkenness he was now sleeping off in his cabin. It was the mate's job to get under way. They had to cross the bar while the tide was high, for there was no tug at Badang. The only power boat was the petrol cruising-launch of the rajah, now at its moorings beneath the one, long wharf, not to be desecrated by commercial use.

Dawn was coming fast, its hues changing like chemical reactions in a vast retort. The green of the sky turned amber, the pink wisps of vapor to amethyst, and then to gray. The zenith was a spreading pool of sapphire, transparent but impervious in its profundity.

Parrots bombed out of the jungle, whirling and screaming, their plumage gleaming

like rainbow fragments. Pigeons cooed in swelling chorus, soaring, wheeling, shuttling above the dome of the mosque. Crested baboons began to chatter.

The watchful mate caught the first windy ruffle in the treetops of a high crest. It was day—and the tide still served.

He clipped out an order. The silver whistle of the *serang* shrilled, the crew came alive and leaped to braces, stays and hal-yards; the cloths fell from clewlines and jiggers, the capstan creaked as the hook was yanked from the harbor mud.

From somewhere there seemed to come a mighty sigh, an exhalation sensed inwardly; perhaps the issue of the fleeing night.

The *Martha Howell* began to slip through the water, through the slack of the current that eddied about her prow, like seasnakes seeking to restrain her. The anchor was catted, being swabbed, the chain coiled. Crowley gave one last look at the land.

A SAMPAN shot out of a mangrove-screened creek, propelled at prodigious speed by the man who swung the bulbous-hafted sweep that was both scull and rudder. In the clear light the mate saw the heaving chest, the writhing muscles on arms and legs, the swelling calves, as the Buginese balanced himself rhythmically on the tiny poop, feet wide apart. His skin, naked except for a clout, gleamed like shining brass.

There were two more men in the sampan, in kilted sarongs; a woman in native dress crouched on a thwart. The narrow craft made for the *Martha Howell*, now gathering way, wind in her royals and topgallants. It shot alongside and one of the boatmen grappled a stay with the hook on the end of a bamboo pole.

His two fellows and the girl acted fast, almost like acrobats going through a well rehearsed routine. The men made a stair of knees, locked arms and shoulders, and the woman mounted, grasped the bamboo pole. So they set hands beneath her small, bare feet, and thrust her up.

She came over the rail, and stood gazing at Crowley, panting. The mate stared at her. A veil of gauze had fallen from her head, and her hair was the color of raw silk reeled from the cocoon. With the sun behind them, the loose, outer strands were prismatic, haloing her shapely head.

The mate looked at her eyes and saw there the exact color, half-translucent, subtly changing, of the crest of a roller; rising to the reef. They were the eyes of a nereid, of an enchantress. In that moment a mutation took place in Jim Crowley; the carefree sailorman; cagey with women, jealous of his liberty. He was conscious of it, of its significance, as it permeated him. He knew—in that moment—even before she spoke, that he was not likely to deny her anything, and he had refused many women the things they asked



of him. Over her shoulder he saw the sampan swirling towards shore in desperate endeavor, its wake fanning wide.

"I want a passage," she said breathlessly. "To anywhere, away from here! I can pay for it."

She flung a glance shoreward and her eyes darkened with fear. He knew what might happen to unprotected white women in places like Badang, where Rajah Kraeng Pegeri reigned practically supreme, indulging his sensuous appetites; nominally under Dutch rule, actually independent.

"My name is Janet Brooke," she said swiftly. "I am an American. I can't go ashore again. I *can't*. I——" her bosom rose and fell hurriedly; the mate saw her catch up the corner of a full underlip with her teeth, fight for control. She wore a

batik sarong fastened above her breasts, leaving her shoulders bare. She thrust a hand among the folds and brought out a string of pearls, lustrous and shimmering.

Crowley saw the implications of the sudden flight, the possession of the gleaming gems. She misread doubt in his eyes.

"They were given to me," she said. "I did not steal them."

THE mate was aware of the sidelong glances of the serang, of the quartermaster at the wheel. The crew were staring, watchful as cats. He knew they had seen the pearls, that they knew this white girl had come from the seraglio of the rajah. All the humanity had gone out of them. Trouble had come aboard, with this girl of the red-gold hair and seagreen eyes. They were waiting for it to develop, waiting to see what they might get out of it.

The glance of the serang passed on, and the mate sighted along it. There was bustle on the wharf. Hurrying, turbaned men, the glint of weapons, as they leaped down a gangway to the rajah's launch, the power-cruiser which could be his state barge, or his navy. It had a quickfirer mounted in the bow. The warriors of Kraeng Pegeri were armed with spears and krises, but they were fighting men, born and bred.

This was Celebes. Standard Oil tankers might sell the rajah his petrol, there was a radio in his palace—a half dozen of them—but civilization was as yet to Celebes what a remorafish is to a shark. Dutch authority was very thin and frail veneer. These Buginese were barbarians, even if not entirely pagans.

There was nothing *opera-bouffe* about what was happening or about to happen. It was drama, it might be tragedy.

The serang drifted towards the rail. Crowley and the skipper were his bosses, but they were aliens. Racial hates, old as Babel, were smouldering. The petty port of Badang was suddenly very remote.

"Put those pearls out of sight," said the mate. "Get away from the rail." He

turned to the *serang*. "Carry on, Ali, this *my* pidgin."

He could have spoken Malay, but he found it an advantage to deal with the *serang* in a tongue with which the latter was less fluent, and Crowley the superior. So he used Beach-English, the jargon used by seafaring men and traders from Singapore to Sitka.

"Go below," he told the girl. "My cabin is off the saloon, on the starboard side. The skipper's is aft—you'll hear him snoring. There's a bolt on the door. I'll come down presently."

She thanked him with a look, and disappeared in the companionway.

The mate stepped to the side, marked the run of water past the strakes, looked up at the kites, at the tide-rip on the shoals.

The launch was coming on fast. It would overhaul them before they crossed the bar. There they would get the full swing of the wind, but there was a second shoal, parallel to the first, and they would have to take a shoot to clear it, and then fetch the breeze just abaft the beam.

With its mizzenrig and headsails, the bark reached well. Once round the cape they would square off, go kiting. He had watched the launch before; once he had ridden in it. He set its speed at twelve knots, cut down from an original fifteen by Buginese engineers. Once outside, they could leave it behind.

That would not end the affair. Badang would be a closed port to the *Martha Howell*. So might others. The consequences of this act would spread and increase. He was fully aware of his responsibility, fully prepared to go ahead with it. He was exceeding his authority, doing what the skipper would not have done, tradebound, and callous to all but his own advantage.

THE skipper did not count for much with Crowley at any time. He was not afraid of losing his ticket. No Boards of Navigation controlled the bark, Chinese-owned, an independent trader flying the Dutch flag, but of uncertain registry. The

girl would stay aboard. He made up his mind to that.

The launch was blaring a siren. It held a dozen men. A man in a high lilac turban was in command. His headgear identified him as the *sabandhar*, headman of the *campong*, henchman of the *rajah*. Most of the men would be from the palace. Kraeng Pegeri was too haughty to personally appear in this.

The mate did not worry about the quick-firer. He knew that it had jammed and never been repaired. It was an emblem of power, not a weapon.

It was doubtful, in any event, if the *sabandhar* would dare to open fire on the bark, if the *rajah* would go that far and compromise his own claims. But, once aboard, it might be another story. The sly *serang*, treacherous as a leopard, the watchful Malays, might stand aloof; they might join with the Buginese and run amok in the glory of a fight, the hope of loot. Or the *rajah's* men might attack indiscriminately.

A boathook was jabbed into the side, the launch hung on, and the *sabandhar* spoke with insolent authority. He knew Crowley well enough. Now he acted as if the mate were a coolie, using Malay dialect.

"We have come for the woman. She has stolen jewels from the *Rajah*."

The mate leaned over the rail, grinning down at him. He was judging every foot of progress. Three minutes more and they would cross the bar. He saw the glittering eyes of the warriors, their bared teeth, betel-stained, between backcurled lips. They were tense as coiled springs, ready to swarm aboard, serpentine crises in their teeth; keen steel, capable of terrible slaughter at close quarters.

Now that it had come to the issue, he knew just what he was going to do. A parley, first.

"Take the wheel, Ali," he ordered. "Take her over the bar."

For just a second the *serang* hesitated. If he obeyed, took over, the Malays would follow his lead. The mate wanted him to

assume responsibility for the ship, to have his mind and hands occupied. Ali relieved the quartermaster.

"There is nothing on board belonging to you, or to the Rajah, *Sabandhar*," Crowley said.

The deck trembled slightly beneath his feet, there was a faint jar along the keel. They had barely touched the bar, between swells. They were over it. Away!

"Over with her, *hard over*," he barked at Ali, and the serang spun the wheel, the bark heeled, shooting-up, under her own way.

CROWLEY jerked a belaying pin from the fiferail, leaned over, and neatly knocked the boathook loose. The launch veered off, nudged by the port quarter of the bark as the course changed. It swung wild, and a kris came flying, a writhing serpent of steel. The keen edge bit into the fat of the mate's forearm before it fell into the water, and left his blood spurting.

The launch started to come back on its course but the *Martha Howell* cleared the second shoal before the wind was shaken out of her canvas. Crowley took over the wheel, regardless of his wounded arm, spattering the deck with scarlet; ripping out orders.

The silver whistle trilled and the crew sprang for sheets and braces. There was free water ahead, plenty of it, and now they were leaving the launch behind.

The *sabandhar* cursed and spittled in his hennaed beard. The overdriven, overheated engine faltered and the cruiser fell far behind, with the headman jerking puppet limbs in futile rage.

JIM CROWLEY left the deck to Ali, and went below. He put tight bandages above and below the cut, got the kit, cleansed the red slit, poured iodine into it, and closed it with adhesive strips over absorbent cotton before he took off the tourniquets. The kris had sliced a muscle, the arm would be stiff and sore, but it would heal in a week, if the blade had been clean.

He put on a white coat over his singlet, to hide the wound, listened to the skipper, snorting like the stuttering exhaust of a gas motor, before he rapped on the door of his own cabin.

"It's the mate," he said. "Never mind opening up right away. We're off; in the clear. How about some chow? Are you hungry?"

"I'm almost starving." There was a little catch in her voice, half chuckle and half sob of relief.

"I'll rustle you something. See you later. Nothing to worry about."

But there was plenty to worry about. The skipper, the rajah, and getting the girl away.

Crowley talked with the Sino-Japanese steward and ordered breakfast for her. He knew that already her presence on board, the brief display of the pearls, had become the prime topic. Only the snoring skipper was ignorant, and Ali would soon let him know what had happened.

The advent of this woman, white, young, blonde and comely, excited all the crew. The mate could sense the ship filled with whisperings and surmises, with mental and physical murmurings, conveyed by glance and gesture.

He rummaged in the trade-room. He dug out two pairs of Chinese slippers, guessing at the size of her feet, and he found a shawl of silk to cover her shoulders.

The steward was returning to the galley, and Crowley left her to eat her breakfast alone. He tried the door of the skipper's cabin and took a look at him.

Fenn sprawled across his bunk in crumpled, none too clean pajamas, the jacket unbuttoned, showing his chest furred with the red shag that matched his beard, and what hair he had left. His face was blotched, etched with broken veins. His diaphragm jittered with twitching ganglia above his gross abdomen, and he puffed through parted lips between snorts, each breath charged with the sour stink of rice-brandy.

He was not going to be nice about this happening—unless he could see profit in it, a lot of profit. He had been a good enough skipper once, before he drank himself down to the command of the *Martha Howell*, owning a few shares in the syndicate made up of Chinese merchants in Sourabaya.

The mate sailed the bark. Fenn needed him, seldom sober and always shaky of nerves himself. The serang was no good as a navigator beyond landfall. Crowley was the active captain, and Fenn did not like him more because of it.

Fenn was a fat slug, but he could make trouble. He would never have allowed the girl to stay on board. Now she was here——

THE mate shrugged his shoulders outside the door he closed gently. He could not yet see a clear way out of it—for the girl.

She sat on his bunk, eating daintily but thoroughly. She wiped her lips on the napkin the steward had provided, and smiled at the mate. Her seagreen eyes were gay.

"That," she said, "is the first Christian food I have had for a week."

Crowley nodded, guessing at the messes she had been served in the seraglio, spiced and savory enough to Oriental palates, but not to hers. He guessed, too, something of the reactions she must feel. She might have met a browbeating skipper or a bucko mate. She had yet to encounter the first, but she knew she had found a friend.

He did not have to tell her that. He knew it was understood between them. She trusted him, and he intended living up to it.

"Tell me about it," he asked her.

To Crowley the story was probable enough, knowing his East Indies. Others might have found it fantastic, but he believed it, and he saw that she sensed his credence and that it heartened her; watching him as she talked, gathering confidence herself in what she must have considered not too plausible a tale. She had been

living in a nightmare, it was still hard to justify it with reality.

Janet Brooke had started on a tour as companion to a wealthy widow, who had undoubtedly taken the trip as a means of replacing herself in circulation. She was not much over forty, attractive enough, inclined to selfishness and self-importance with the companion she regarded as a superior sort of maid.

In Batavia, at the *Hôtel des Indes*, she had met a Sumatran tobacco planter, a Dutchman named De Kuyper. He flattered the widow, proposed matrimony. He tried to make love to the companion, considering her fair game. The widow was jealous, blaming the girl, listening to her suitor, who resented being snubbed by Janet.

The swift upshot was that Janet Brooke found herself left in Weltevreden with a month's salary. The widow, a bride again, had gone to the East Coast of Sumatra



with her planter. She had not given Janet her passage home, though that was already paid for. She had deliberately canceled it.

There is no secrecy in an Oriental hostelry. The story of the crafty planter, the wealthy widow, and the virtuous companion, was known and discussed in all its details. On the second day after De Kuyper departed with his lady, a Chinese steward suggested to Janet, with all the frank subtlety of his kind, that she could easily obtain a good position—should she care to stay in the East Indies. There was, he said, a respectable hotel in the Lower Town, run by a worthy Chinaman, named Chang

Sui. The bed would be clean, the board good but cheap, and Chang Sui had connections with various native princes who were always eager to obtain governesses for their children, so that they could learn English and the ways of the western world.

It sounded likely, especially to a girl who was bewildered, and a little desperate. She saw she had no redress. The widow was now Dutch, no longer in Java. Janet would get no hearing, no sympathy. And Chang Sui was comforting. His hotel clients were almost entirely Eurasian, but she did not have to mingle with them. Her meals were served to her on a private veranda outside her room.

THE second night somebody stole in and robbed her. They took her money, her papers, including her passport; most of her clothes. Chang Sui was shocked, commiserate; and Chinese. He could not return her possessions, being but a poor man, and not responsible under the Dutch law; but he obtained her a Number-One job with Rajah Kraeng Pegeri, at a salary higher than the widow had paid.

He shipped her to Badang. It did not take long for her to find out for what purpose. The Rajah had a favorite from Bali, who had no will to play second fiddle to anyone, though she knew well enough that this blonde foreigner was at best a plaything, to be soon discarded and degraded.

Had Janet Brooke been one type of girl, she would have been poisoned or strangled. But she had the quality within her that ranked her in the freemasonry of women. The Bali favorite protected her with deft excuses for several days, knowing the bark was expected. She bribed a sampan owner, smuggled the girl out of the women's quarters, giving her a necklace from the many jewels that the Rajah had bestowed upon her—and she had cajoled out of him to prove she was the "Only Flower of His Desire."

Crowley looked at the pearls. He had been a pearl-trader himself, before he found out there were too few prizes in that sort

of sea-lottery, and grew tired of rotting-out shell on a steadily falling market.

His eyes narrowed as he held the gleaming gems in his palm, and tested their slick symmetry with his fingertips. A Greek merchant had told him that pearls were "Tears of Venus."

"I do not like to deal in them, my friend," Vlastos had said. "Some say eets the opal that breengs the bad luck. Me, I always say eets the pearl."

This string was towing trouble, the mate told himself.

"They are beautiful," she said with a little sigh. "I hope your captain will accept them for my passage."

"I wouldn't wonder. You'll have to see him, of course. He'll know about them. See what sort of a deal you can make with him. And then tell me about it," he added grimly. He knew just what sort of a deal Fenn would figure out.

One pair of the slippers fitted. She thanked him for them, and the shawl, and she gave him her hand. Crowley had a swift and imperative desire to take her in his arms and kiss her, to tell her not to worry—ever.

"I have to go on deck," he told her. "Keep a stiff upper lip."

As he came out into the main cabin he saw Ali slipping up the companionway. The skipper was no longer snoring. The serang had been in to him.

Fenn stuck his bleary head outside his door.

"I want to talk with you, Mister," he said huskily, his eyes bloodshot and angry.

FENN conspired with Greed in his cabin. He was contemplating a base thing, against which the remnants of his lost decencies occasionally rose in futile mutiny, only to be drowned in another tot of raw Hollands, or veiled by the shimmer of the pearls which the girl had traded him for a promise of freedom.

A freedom he meant to deny her. In that intent he slew the last of his manhood with a final qualm that only served to irri-

tate his dulled conscience and rouse a fierce and evil protest.

Here was his chance, his last chance, he persuaded himself to stir the lees of life into the semblance of a sparking and intoxicating draught, a nepenthe in which he would forever submerge his failures.

Greed was a vulture, ruthless and rapacious, battenning on indecency. The girl was worth money, or her pearls would fetch it. The rajah had paid for her once. He might not again, but others would.

Fenn told himself he did not believe her story. White women, more or less abandoned, made bargains with Chinamen and rajahs, only to repent and try to repudiate them.

He took another swig of straight, potent gin; and told the pearls through his sweaty fingers, like beads in an unhallowed rosary.

They had to call at Paré-Paré, and then at Macassar. By the time they reached the latter port, as he had told the girl, the rajah might have made complaint to the Governor. The bark might be held, the skipper and his mate put into a Dutch jail. The authorities would be all on the side of the rajah, who paid tribute. They would consider her merely as his concubine.

He would put her ashore at Paré-Paré, with a friend who could be trusted to get her away north to Manila. And then he would sail on, ignoring other ports of call, past Batavia, through to Singapore. His shares in the bark could go hang. He did not care what happened to the *Martha Howell*. He saw himself selling the pearls, living like a nabob.

There was the mate. Crowley was difficult. He would have to be handled. He would probably insist upon going ashore with her at Paré-Paré.

There was still some liquor left in the square-faced bottle. And there were other bottles.

THE mate and the girl leaned over the rail as the ship slid by the dreaming isles of the Spermude archipelago. Once

pirate-haunted, they looked like gigantic fern-baskets anchored to the reefs, the abode of fays.

The moon rode high, an incredible disk of nacre, martialed by the myriad spear-points of the stars. The wash seethed and murmured along the run. The spice of nutmegs and cloves was on the ambient air. They floated as in a dream.

The mate knew an awakening was coming but he persisted in his mood, like a drowsy sleeper seeking to hold a vision of the night.

He spoke to the girl of his happenings before he signed on the *Martha Howell*; of lonely atolls, sea-lost Edens, where sun-spangled surf broke in rainbows on the reef, the tall bush bowing in the trades, fire-writhen peaks that looked like wizards' castles, at dawn and sunset.

He knew well enough he was wooing her, letting go the bitt-ends of his liberty. And he knew that she came close to him.

The girl had loved life with her outer senses and now there was something that this sailorman stirred within her. It was like a bird-call in her heart, coming unasked but welcome. She was grasping the true substance of life, not its shadows, its simulacra. She yearned to hold it tight and fast. She knit her faith upon this mariner. If he did not take care of her, if he should not prove true, what mattered?

She began to quote:

*"Moon-magic, and the song of stars,
Piercing the dark.
Then comes the dawn
In trembling hues of lavender and fawn;
And so, the lark,
Rapt minstrel of the sky,
In music rising up to Heaven's bars."*

"That's poetry, I suppose," said Crowley. "Nature set down in words. I've felt it times like this, with the stars moving in their order, and the moon and sun swinging the tides. It makes you feel there is *Something*, that we are not just like skip-pers on the surface of a pool."

She looked at him then and understanding flowed between them. Then she pointed. "Look," she said, her voice eager.

FLYING-FISH broke skittering from the water, went planing in long, arching flight, spray dripping like scattered jewels from their widespread pectorals; as if they were heralds for Poseidon, liveried in blue and silver; or as if they were sporting joyously, gamboling in the wanton delight of flirting with another element.

The mate knew they had been flushed by dolphin, high-powered, streamlined carnivores, ravening and relentless. The girl saw the fliers drop into the water as gills and fins grew dry; she glimpsed the dark, active shapes that seized them, destroying all their beauty in cruel jaws; shattering the glory of the night; and she shivered.

"Nature is cruel," she said.

"Not always." Crowley set a brake to his tongue, and to his heart. This was no time to comfort her, to reassure her. Let him do something first, he told himself, knowing the skipper had laid his plans, guessing part of them, resolved to circumvent them.

He was well aware that Fenn would make a scapegoat of him, if necessary. The skipper, if sufficiently stimulated otherwise, could foreswear excess of liquor, and make shift to sail the bark alone.

"What did the captain say to you?" he asked.

"He was very kind. He explained to me that the pearls are false, that rajahs do not load down their favorites nowadays with real gems."

"Told you that, did he? Go ahead."

"They are good imitations—fishscale beads, he called them. He may be able to get something for them. So I am going ashore at Paré-Paré to a friend of his, who is a merchant. Leong Gan Dai will take care of me, and see that I get to Manila, without payment for my passage. Captain Fenn gives me a free passage to Paré-Paré as well."

"Leong Gan Dai! I should think you were fed up on Chinks," said Crowley grimly, thinking of Leong, opium smuggler, panderer, with all the instincts of a pirate. There was no sense in scaring her.

"What am I to do?" she asked, a hint of panic in her tone.

"Nothing. Leave it to me. I'll go ashore with you."

"You'll take care of me?"

The appeal that, through all the ages, has never lost its power to thrill a man, to arm a coward and make a hero of him. Crowley was no coward. He wanted to hold her in his arms, to tell her he loved her, that while he lived no harm would come to her. But that smacked of bragging, and he might fail her, through no fault of his own. He did not want that aftermath.

There were the Malays, always slinking, like black cats, about the deck. There was Ali, standing by the binnacle, sly and watchful.

"You turn in," he said. "We should fetch Paré-Paré tomorrow night, if the wind serves, as it should. Get some sleep—and don't worry. I'll look out for you, as well as I am able."

She gave a little sigh of satisfaction. "That's all any girl could ask," she murmured, and slipped away. Crowley had shifted into another cabin, taking with him a few belongings, including his gun.

THEY slid into Paré-Paré on the flood with the tailend of the breeze, three hours after sunset. There was no sandbar, a native pilot picked up their flare and took them through the coral. He had a drink with Fenn in the skipper's cabin, collected his fee, and paddled off as the anchor fluked into the mud. Crowley had no doubt that he carried a letter to Leong Gan Dai, consigning the girl, like a bale of illicit merchandise.

Crowley set the anchor watch. It was time to act, to have an accounting with

Fenn. As he started below he saw Ali at the port-quarter davits with four of the crew.

"What pidgin this?" he asked.

"Lillee ladee go ashore. I take, *kapitani* he speak."

Through the open skylight Crowley saw Fenn with the girl. He was practically sober, patting her hand, that lay in his clammy palm like a frightened bird.

"You can trust my friend Leong in everything," the skipper said unctuously. "You must not think all Chinamen are bad. He will keep you hidden until we clear, so that none of us will get into trouble."

The mate scowled. Fenn was stuffing her with ideas of the risks all were running. She had no more chance of reaching Manila than a fly of being freed from the



web by a spider. There were plenty of rajahs of wealthy Chinese, who would pay a good price for a white concubine.

The girl's gaze was hard upon him as he reached the bottom of the companionway. She was undeceived by Fenn's heavy-father manner, worried.

"I have arranged to send Miss Brooke ashore to a friend of mine, Mister."

"Very good, sir. Whenever she's ready."

"Ali will take her. There is no need for you to go."

The mate's face set hard. He felt the girl's silent plea, he saw the crafty look in the skipper's eyes, and was not deceived. Fenn knew he intended going in the boat. There was something more.

Fenn wondered how much the girl had told the mate. No doubt everything. And Crowley knew well enough what manner

of man Leong Gan Dai was. He was a romantic young fool. Let him go along—and be damned to him! If he tried to interfere, Ali knew what to do. Fenn had the pearls.

"I am ready," the girl said. "I have nothing to take along."

"Get your shawl," Crowley told her. "Then wait."

"The shawl, by all means," said Fenn magnanimously. The mate watched her go into the cabin he had relinquished, a graceful but rather drooping figure in the vivid batik sarong, clinging to her figure. He turned to Fenn.

"I want a few words with you, sir, in your cabin."

FENN glanced doubtfully at the open transom. There was a look in Crowley's eyes he did not relish. He supposed the fool was going to make some sort of plea. He would put him in his place, and the best spot to do that was in his own quarters, where he was Master, means of authority handy.

The cabin was a spacious one, across the full beam of the bark. There was a built-in bed, rather than a bunk, a doorless compartment opened from it, used as a chart-room. All was well lighted.

Crowley closed the door behind him, stood with his back to it. His eyes were looking at the sennit cord around the skipper's neck, almost, but not quite hidden by his beard.

"She's taking the pearls with her," he said, dropping the "sir." Respect was overboard. "You told her they were shams. You lied. I know pearls, you know that well enough, and I've handled these. Hand them over. You've got them in a bag now, at the end of that lanyard, keeping them warm."

Involuntarily one of Fenn's hands moved towards his neck, the other went back of him, as he stood by the head of his bed. The craft in his piggy eyes shifted to malice.

"I suppose you want them for yourself," he sneered, "along with the girl."

The pent-up contempt of months flushed into the mate's tanned face. "You fat slug," he said softly. "For that, I'll——"

Fenn snatched his gun from the holster that swung near his bolster. His lips parted for a shout to the serang.

They closed as the mate drove a straight right and pulped them. His left came in a short, slogging uppercut, hard through the cushioning beard. The pistol dropped, and Fenn fell with it, like a length of chain.

Crowley took a good look at him before he left. He had put all he had into that blow. Captain Fenn was out of commission—for quite a spell. The mate emptied the cylinder of the gun. He took the key, and locked the door on the outside, dropping the key into his pocket. The girl was still in the cabin, with the door ajar, waiting, as he had told her.

She had heard nothing. They had heard nothing on deck.

"Let's go," he said, casually enough.

Ali and the boat crew were busy with the falls. The serang gave his crooked, too-ready smile as Crowley told him to take place in the bow. The girl sat beside the mate, facing the five Lascars. Whorls of seafire marked the strokes, the play of Crowley's steering-sweep.

With highwater, the ladder at the wharf's end was short to climb. Ali did not use it, but sprang ashore first, as if to belay the painter as Crowley gripped a rung.

"Up with you," he said to the girl. "I'll be right behind you."

He had barely time to thrust her aside as Ali leaped from a squat, his hidden kris free. They would all have them, Crowley thought. They were out to do him in, for the price of a few guilders. Fenn had known he would insist upon going ashore.

The serang came in, thrusting, fast and vicious as a leopard.

Crowley found the stringpiece with his heel and used it, as a sprinter uses a mark, to aid his own leap as Ali's thrust turned to a sidewise sweep of the shining, curving

steel, twin-edged, and keen enough to go through meat and bone like so much cheese.

THE mate parried with the barrel of his gun and the blade snaked, skreeling, to the trigger-guard, slithered over its curve, and whistled through the air as Crowley jumped over it, landing lightly; the serang, for all his cattish agility, off-balance from the fury of his futile blow.

The mate's arm closed about Ali's neck from behind in a strangling headlock. He grabbed the folds of the sarong, tight in the Malay's crotch, and swung him off his feet, slashing feebly and wildly as the choke tightened on windpipe and jugular. Crowley took three strides to the stringpiece, and hurled him into the water.

The girl cried out, and Crowley whirled. Two of the rowers had come up the ladders, their krises in their teeth—in their hands—rushing him. He sidestepped and let the first go by, kicking him at the back of his knee. As the man stumbled, Crowley brought down the muzzle of his gun on the shaven skull. The sight bit into the bone and fractured it. He swung it on the second Lascar, fingering the trigger, and the other backed to the ladder, starting to scramble down.

The mate heaved his fellow into the boat, spilling him from the rungs, throwing them all into confusion.

"Get going, you greasy swine," he threatened them in their own tongue, "before I shoot the lot of you. Let Ali look out for himself."

Crowley had no desire to start shooting on Paré-Paré beach at that hour. Or any other. Leong's godown was not far away. He would be waiting for the girl, doubtless not alone.

But Ali was floundering in the water, his kris lost in the shock of the plunge, half-strangled, bewildered at his sudden defeat. "Let *Shaitan* fly away with the mate, and the woman!"

The boatman shoved off in haste, paddling raggedly back to the bark, like a wounded water-beetle.

THE mate and the girl went swiftly, avoiding lights and dogs, through the campong, along a road that led into the foothills.

"Where are we going?" she asked, and now there was no alarm in her voice.

"I've got a friend here myself. A good one. He grows spices for an American chain-concession. They pay the Dutch well for it. Palmer's a big shot. They won't monkey with him, or any one he vouches for. He's in with the American consul at Weltvereden. Scott's married, to a fine woman. She'll look after you, and see you safely off for the States."

Tall tamarinds lined the road, stars peeping through the lace of their foliage. The air was redolent of spice of nutmeg, clove and cinnamon.

"The States?" She did not seem to understand him. "How can I get back to the States?"

It was one of Crowley's bigger moments. He took a small sack of soft leather from his pocket and let a chain of beads, milkish-white, and very softly opalescent, slide into his palm.

"I've got your pearls," he said. "I persuaded the skipper to give them to me. They are yours. Kraeng's favorite gave them to you. That's all bunk about the rajah handing out fakes to his harem. Not to a lass from Bali. They are worth a tidy sum. Plenty to get you home in style, leave some over."

He offered them but she did not take them. "What about you? If you go back to the ship——?"

Crowley laughed. "Not me. I'm through with that hooker. She was a ship, once; now she's only a sour-bilged sailing-scow."

"Won't you get into trouble? I mean— isn't it mutiny? Won't you lose your ticket?"

"Not in these waters. I'll write my own ticket. I've got some money saved up, not quite enough, but I'll find a partner. And I'll buy a ship, a proper ship, a white ship with tall masts, and go pearling and trading among the islands."

"The Islands! I've always longed to see them. Always! And now—I don't think I want to go back to the States, Sailor-man. Not right away." She faltered, went on. "How much would a partnership cost in your tall-masted ship? Would my pearls bring enough?"

"Your pearls?" Did she know what she was saying, offering him? By God, she was asking him to——"

"Perhaps I could go along, as a mate."

Jim Crowley was a sailorman, who had been wooed and was not lightly won. But—Janet! His soul yearned towards her as he took her in his arms. Her upturned face was wet. She clung to him, and their lips met, their mouths became as one.

"You can be my mate for ever," he said huskily. "Don't cry, honey. Don't ever cry, any more. I don't want a weepy wife, sweetheart."

"I've got to cry, Sailorman," she whispered. "Women have to cry—sometimes—for happiness."

As they went down the slope together they could see the lights of Palmer's bungalow, set in its trim garden. They breathed the fragrance of *ylang-ylang* and *frangipani*.

The notes of a piano came muted through the tropic night, the sound of a woman, singing.



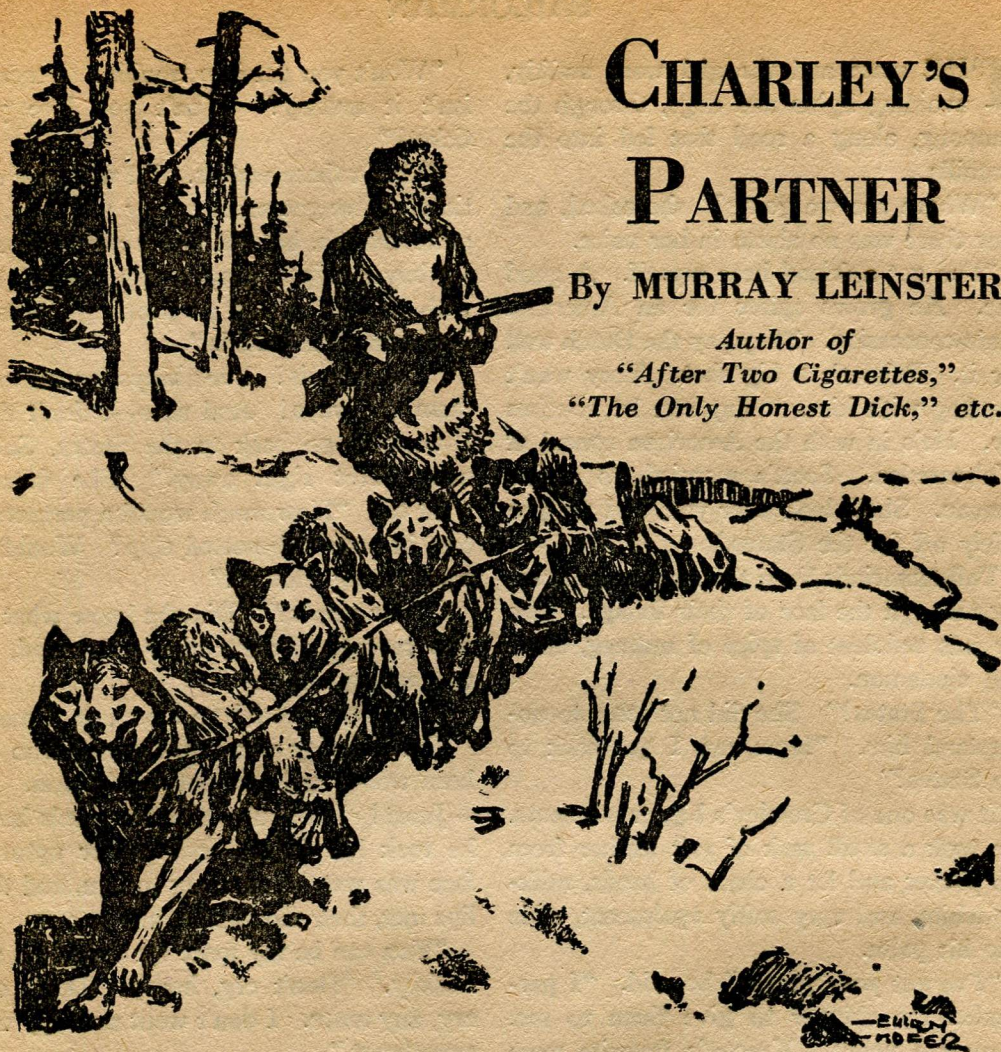
CHARLEY'S PARTNER

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of

"After Two Cigarettes,"

"The Only Honest Dick," etc.



*It Was the Tail-end of a Fairly Cold Spell—Some Fifty Below
—When Charley Started out on the Trail of His Partner*

I

CHARLEY'S partner came into Doc Walker's store with the winds of all the Arctic howling behind him. He fought the door shut and looked furtively at the group by the stove. Doc Walker was listening to a man from Nome, stopped over in Carson's Landing until this blizzard should blow out. The man from Nome was telling about the Elk Lake rush, when eight hundred men went insane in mid-winter and all tried to find a reported strike of wire-gold—and there wasn't any strike.

Doc moved reluctantly away from the stove to wait on Charley's partner. He stopped at the postoffice cubby-hole to get out a letter addressed to him in a child's round, unformed handwriting. He dropped it before Charley's partner on the bar.

"Letter for you," said Doc. "From th' kid."

Charley's partner picked it up absently, then dropped it. He licked his lips and whispered. Doc looked at him curiously. It wasn't often that Charley's partner came in Doc's store by himself. Charley usually bought and paid for everything. But now his partner reached inside his parka and

thumped down a heavy poke upon the bar. Doc recognized it. It was Charley's poke, and Charley's partner offered it. Doc frowned a bit uneasily and reached down a bottle. At a further whisper, he opened it. Charley's partner shuffled to a seat, leaving the poke behind on the bar. Doc looked at him and partly opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again and put the poke on the shelf beside the cash-register. He hesitated and returned the letter to the postoffice. He went back to the stove.

The group about the pot-bellied stove was highly various. There was the man from Nome. There were three or four semi-permanent residents of Carson's Landing—old-timers spending the winter in comparative civilization to keep from getting too queer and cranky through loneliness. Two men from Skagway, with plenty of time and too much sense to travel in this weather unless they had to. A government man, looking worried as government men always do. Doc Walker toasted himself comfortably by the fire.

THE man from Nome had watched. Now he said:

"Seems to me like I've seen that fella somewhere. Ain't he got a partner named Charley?"

Doc Walker nodded.

"I owe that Charley somethin'," said the man from Nome. "He done me a right big favor, once. Is he like to come in here tonight? If he ain't, by gosh I'm goin' to hunt him up an' shake han's with him! I tell you, that Charley is a good kinda scout! Once——"

"I'll see if he's like to come over," said Doc Walker. "He comes over now an' then."

He went over to Charley's partner, who had a glass before him and clutched the bottle tightly. He sipped and sipped and sipped, with an absorbed, ecstatic expression on his face.

"Is Charley goin' to be along presently?" asked Doc.

Charley's partner moved only his eyes. He poured another drink.

"Nope," he mumbled. "Charley's sick."

Doc Walker jumped. With a blizzard blowing over Carson's Landing, a man who was sick might be sick indeed. It was no time for his partner to be off somewhere getting drunk.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Doc sharply.

"Jus' sick," mumbled Charley's partner. He cringed at a movement from Doc. "He don't need me," he mumbled defensively. "I can't do no good! He's kickin' in."

Doc stared, then swore loud and deeply. He dived for his outdoor clothes. He dived into them, continuing to swear. Other men asked questions and promptly made ready to accompany him. In the North, men know an emergency when they see one. In all, there were five men who went out and fought through the blizzard to Charley's cabin.

Doc Walker battered a way inside when Charley didn't answer knocks or yellings. The cabin was dark. Charley was too weak to keep the fire blazing, and too sick to care. His partner had done exactly nothing for him, and now was getting blissfully drunk while Charley died. But the two Skagway men fished in powdery snow for firewood while the others wrought mightily, blaspheming. They built up the fire. They warmed the more than half-frozen Charley. One of them went back to Doc's store for whiskey with which they dosed the sick man. He returned to report that Charley's partner was already near the bottom of his bottle and sitting in a glassy-eyed, ecstatic daze.

"The low-down skunk!" said Doc venomously. "When I get back I'm goin' to kick him outa my place an' I hope he's too drunk to find shelter! Only instead o' freezin' he ought to fry!"

Charley had not spoken. Now his eyes flicked open.

"Like hell!" he snarled in a feeble whisper. "That's my partner you're talkin' about. Anybody picks on him's got me to fight."

BUT he was too sick to say more. Doc Walker was stricken dumb. He remained silent while the others rubbed Charley, and dosed him, and warmed him anew. The nursing of men is not always wise, and their treatment is frequently crude, but they are often surprisingly gentle. Doc Walker did not open his mouth again until Charley was in his bunk again and had fallen into an exhausted slumber. He'd get well, of course—men don't die so easily—but he'd tried to do the work for two when he was just sick enough so somebody should have worked for him instead. When he snored, Doc sputtered:

"Did y'hear him? Bawlin' me out for cussin' that hell of a partner of his!"

"He's hipped about his partner," said the man from Nome philosophically. "Always has been. Mistreat that fella an' you



got to fight Charley. I'll bet y' two to one if y' ever mention this here event he'll call y' a liar an' lick hell outa you."

One of the men from Skagway said meditatively:

"I'm beginnin' to remember somethin'."

He went poking around the cabin. He stopped before a picture on the wall. He looked at it, scratching his nose. It was not a picture of a woman. It was a little girl, round-faced and beaming, perhaps ten years old. Across the photograph there was a round, childish scrawl: "*To my Daddy, with love, from Lucy.*"

Doc Walker looked. He grunted.

"Huh! Bein' postmaster, I can tell y' who that is! It ain't Charley's kid, it's

his partner's. She writes him letters near every week. They come addressed to Charley's partner, but he don't even read 'em. I've seen him hand 'em right over to Charley. An' I've seen Charley read 'em an' grin real proud. I know it's him that answers 'em. I know his writin'."

The man from Skagway said painfully:

"I remember now. This Charley fella—somebody tol' me about him once. He was a dam' fool. He was goin' to marry a girl Outside. Crazy about her. Him an' his partner went out for the weddin'. Partner to be bes' man. An'—uh—somehow the partner cut him out. Persuaded the girl to marry him instead."

The man from Nome added without expression:

"Yeah. I know. She died after. An' Charley took his partner back. He stan's up for that partner, too. If you want to get in a fight with Charley, all y'got to do is pick on his partner."

Doc Walker sputtered.

"But—hell! Why does he stick to him?"

Nobody could tell him. Nobody could even guess. When morning came, Doc Walker went back to his store and kicked Charley's partner out of it. And Charley's partner shuffled away. He looked as if he would have snarled, had he dared. He went back to Charley's cabin. He went in.

II

DAYS passed. One day. Two days. Three. The man from Nome went on. The thermometer thawed out and the mercury rose to a mere thirty below zero. The two men from Skagway took advantage of the warm weather to be on their way. A freight-driver from Dawson came in and stopped overnight in Carson's Landing, being the only stranger present in the settlement at the moment.

That night Charley came in the store for the first time since his sickness. He looked weak and tired. His partner shuffled in with him, silent and shifty-eyed under Doc's corrosively scornful gaze.

"Mail for you, Charley," said Doc.

It was addressed to Charley's partner, but he hadn't wanted it. It was a letter from a child, addressed in a round, unformed scrawl. Doc handed it over to Charley, and he beamed and bought a drink for himself and his partner on the strength of it. He read the child's letter delightedly; proudly. He grinned, forgetting his drink. His partner sipped dissatisfiedly. His mouth worked as he saw other men having a second drink and a third. Charley chuckled over the child's letter and put it in his pocket with the air of someone who looked forward to a second reading.

He took his drink, then he saw the freight-driver from Dawson. The freight-driver nodded in a friendly enough fashion, and Charley said, "Howdy," but he scowled. He touched his partner's arm and led the way abruptly to the door. They vanished into the bitter chill of the Alaskan night.

Doc Walker swore a little. He'd wanted to give Charley back the poke his partner had left, but Charley'd gone away before he had a chance. To Doc, it seemed that the Dawson man was the cause of his going. And Doc was irritated by his inability to understand Charley.

Presently he entered into conversation with the man from Dawson.

"Uh—y'know Charley an' his partner," he observed, when the man drifted up to the bar. "I saw y' speak to him. Quite a fella, Charley."

The freight-driver grunted.

"A dam' fool, if y'want to know. I ain't seen him for a long time. He kinda—uh—disapproves of me because I beat hell outa his partner once."

"Just guessin'," said Doc malevolently, "it served him right!"

The freight-driver nodded.

"But why does Charley stick to him?" insisted Doc. "He done Charley dirt right in town, here, not more'n a coupla days ago!"

The freight-driver twirled his glass slowly.

"He told me he'd promised his partner's wife t' look after him. An' he was goin' to do it even if she was dead."

Doc said perplexedly:

"But hell, his partner took that girl away from him! She was goin' to marry Charley, an' married him instead!"

The freight-driver said shortly:

"Yeah. I know about that. It's true."

Doc Walker retired into silence to think it over. He could not understand. Charley taking his partner back after he'd stolen his girl. Promising that girl he'd take care of him. Doing it even after the girl was dead. Standing up for him. Defending him. Lying for him. Fighting for him, if necessary. And his partner took the first opportunity when Charley was sick to take the poke that contained their joint resources and get himself drunk while leaving Charley untended and alone to die!

Doc Walker meditated upon it for a long time, but he could not understand Charley and his partner. He understood still less next morning.

Charley came in alone. There was no one else in Doc's store at the moment, and Charley said gruffly:

"Doc, my partner tells me you' got my poke here, that you took off a Siwash buck that'd sneak-thieved it outa our cabin."

Doc Walker handed it over, his mouth having dropped open.

"But Charley, it was y'own partner! Don't y'remember me an' the other fellas nursin' you? Don't——"

Charley's face was pale. Charley wasn't young any more, and some people wouldn't have been frightened by the way he looked. But Doc Walker knew when a man was in a killing rage.

"I jus' told you what happened," said Charley thickly. "You took my poke from a Siwash Injun! An' I'm killin' any man that says anything different! Nobody had t' come to my cabin to nurse me, ain't I got a partner to look after me? Anybody that accuses my partner o' anything has got to fight me! Are you lookin' for

trouble? If y'are, say so, an' by Gawd _____"

Doc Walker blinked.

"Hell!" he said protestingly. "I ain't lookin' for trouble, but Charley, y'partner—"

Charley's hand trembled. His eyes blazed at once with rage, and with bitterness, and with defiance.

"When I want t' know somethin' about my partner, I'll ask!" he said harshly. "But meanwhile I'm right much obliged t' you for takin' my poke away from that Siwash. Did y'take out the dust for what he drunk, maybe? It's only right I should pay that, since y'saved the rest for me."

Doc Walker swallowed.

"Y'don't owe me anything, Charley," he said with some difficulty, "an' y'right welcome for anything I done."

Charley nodded and went out of the place again. Doc Walker noted that he was still a little bit shaky on his legs. And then Doc put his head in his hands and tried again to understand it. Charley was a new kind of fool in Doc Walker's experience.

III

MORE days passed, and more. The Dawson freight-driver vanished from Carson's Landing, and other men came and went. Not swiftly, of course. The traffic through Carson's Landing was a thin trickle; two men today, perhaps, and one tomorrow, and maybe two or three the day after, and perhaps none at all the next day still. The regular inhabitants of Carson's Landing continued to visit Doc's store. They sat by the pot-bellied stove a comfortable distance from the door. They conversed gravely and sedately with the occasional wayfarers. For two weeks—with the warm spell of barely twenty below zero—there was almost brisk traffic. Then the thermometer fell, and fell. The mail-sled came through with dogs straining in their harness. The mail-carrier reported another blizzard behind him, sweep-

ing inward from the sea. There was to be a drop of twenty, thirty, forty degrees. Which would mean cold! Men who might have planned travel in the relative balminess of twenty below, changed their minds. There were two men from Fairbanks who stayed over instead of going on. Because anybody can travel at twenty below zero, and most can travel at forty below. But when it comes to fifty, or worse—nobody travels but fools. The men from Fairbanks stayed.

These two men did not make a favorable impression on Doc Walker. They looked to him like crooks, though they settled down to the routine of living at Carson's Landing. Then Charley appeared in Doc's store, and one of them saw him before he saw that man. The man scuttled out of sight in a hurry. Next morning he traveled, fifty below or no fifty below. Doc Walker noted the fact and considered the other stranger with disapproving attention. He made a point of talking to him. He mentioned Charley. And whether the stranger lied or not, Doc learned nothing. He'd heard of Charley, said the stranger, but only casually. Sent all his money Outside to some kid or other that wasn't even his.

Charley's partner shambled in while Doc debated this solitary item. He didn't look Charley in the face—or anybody else, either. Doc ignored him. He disliked Charley's partner extremely, as a man who'd go out to get drunk while his partner was ill. It suddenly occurred to him that it must be this partner's daughter to whom Charley sent his money. That would be the round-faced little girl whose picture hung in Charley's cabin. The same one who wrote letters faithfully to her father—which he did not bother to read, but which Charley gloated over and proudly replied to. Doc felt that he disliked Charley's partner even more than before.

Then something else happened. Doc's store sold, quite literally, everything. And Doc went out the back to get something a customer asked for, and came back just

in time to see Charley's partner stuffing bottles underneath his parka.

Doc roared with wrath and charged. Charley's partner whimpered and fled. One bottle fell and broke. But pursuit was not practical beyond the door. Not in the paralyzing frigidity outside. Doc cursed savagely within his store. The remaining stranger from Fairbanks had seen the thing and grinned at Doc. And Doc was in that state of mind when it is not possible to allow one's righteous wrath to be misunderstood.

"Th' low skunk!" he panted. "Y'think it's funny? There ain't another man in town I wouldn't give a drink to but that —"

The stranger, still grinning, asked questions. Doc Walker told him all. In the end he had painted a lively picture of Charley's partner as that most despicable type of scoundrel—the man who has no backbone and clings as a protector to another man—whom he betrays. It is a familiar type, and always consistent.

"Huh!" grunted the stranger. "A dam' fool like that Charley fella deserves what he gets!"

Which served immediately to revive all of Doc's suspicions of him. He remembered it all day, though several things happened to upset him within the next few hours. The down mail came through and the mail-carrier tipped him privately that the winter shipment from the Shaughnessy stamps would be coming out shortly by registered mail. That meant eighty pounds of gold bullion in Doc's care for several hours, and he did not like it. A letter came for the stranger from Bennington, which was where the Shaughnessy stamps were. Disliking the stranger, Doc did not like that either. And there was a letter for Charley's partner from Outside. It was addressed in a round, unformed child's handwriting and it had slipped by Doc on the trip up and had been returned. Doc liked that least of all. It meant he'd overlooked something he should have noticed.

CHARLEY came in after dark with his partner shambling after him. Doc scowled at the partner and handed the little girl's letter to Charley, who beamed. He sat down and read it through three times without stopping and chuckled proudly at one identical spot in each perusal. Charley's partner sat apathetically beside him. The stranger from Fairbanks entered into conversation with him, and so with the pair. Doc watched and understood. As he waited upon somebody else he meditated profanely.

"Hell, Charley's a dam' fool for sure! He's gone an' adopted his partner's kid as if her louse of a pa wasn't enough!" He glanced at Charley. "Showin' her letter to that Fairbanks fella, an' explainin' that it's his partner's kid—an' the pore kid's pa don't give a damn!"

Charley read the letter again. The stranger bought drinks. That reminded Charley. He got up suddenly and came to Doc Walker. The proud look died out of his eyes and was replaced by a defiant sort of glitter. He pulled out his poke, belligerently.

"I sent m'partner over for a bottle, today. A coupla bottles. How much d' I owe you, Doc?"

Doc blinked. Charley was, in effect, proposing to pay for the liquor his partner had stolen on the sole condition that it should be pretended the liquor was got openly and honorably. But Doc was groping dimly toward understanding, now. He seemed to search his memory and told Charley the sum. But he despised a man who'd steal and then hasten to confess so somebody would make good what he'd stolen. He solemnly weighed out the dust and returned the poke. Then he said:

"Letter from the little girl, Charley?"

Charley relaxed. He pulled out the letter again and grinned up to the sun-wrinkles about his eyes.

"Just look at that!" he said proudly. "For a kid her age, Doc!"

Reading, and praising, Doc began to see more light still. This kid should have been

Charley's kid. And she wasn't. But Charley somehow felt about her as her own father should feel—and didn't. Maybe because her mother was the girl Charley once went Outside to marry. Maybe this was why he stuck to his partner.

Then Doc noticed that Charley's partner was getting on extraordinarily well with the man from Fairbanks whom Doc distrusted. The stranger talked furtively in Charley's partner's ear. And Charley's partner looked rather horribly eager. He licked his lips. It disturbed Doc, because he knew that the kind of man Charley's partner was, is always consistent. He runs true to form. And that form is not praiseworthy.

IV

THE next mail came, and went. The next down mail came four days later. Doc Walker went into one of his periodical fits of worrying. His report was to go out with this down mail, along with eighty pounds of gold bullion from the Shaughnessy stamps. And Doc had never quite solved the intricacies of the Postoffice Department system of bookkeeping. It is especially designed to keep merchants from enjoying fourth-class postmasterships. When a man has computed cancellations plus sixty per cent less fifteen per cent of the total, plus money-order fees and then minus the day of the month; and has divided that result by the number of letters in the middle name of the Postmaster-general's maiden aunt—well, he is apt to be worried. Doc was.

He knew that the stranger from Fairbanks made much of Charley's partner and had become a bosom friend of both of them, in the sudden fashion in which such friendships spring up in cold-bound Alaskan villages. And Doc still distrusted the stranger whenever he thought of it. But he was worried about his postoffice bookkeeping.

The stranger had been in the store when the down mail came in, and he watched while it was locked in the safe for the

night. He and Charley and Charley's partner were in the store all evening, and when Charley and his partner went home, the man from Fairbanks went with them. Which, also, Doc might not have approved of. But he was worried about his book-keeping.

Doc even saw Charley's partner as he turned to close the store door behind him. Ordinarily his expression was abject, was spiritless. Ordinarily it matched his shuffling walk and drooping shoulders. Tonight it was alight with malevolence and spite. Charley's partner had a look in his eyes which later on—much later—Doc realized was the light of hatred; the sort of hatred a cur dog might feel when at last it saw a safe chance to snap at someone or something it feared. But Doc did not notice then. He was thinking about the accounting system of the Postoffice Department.

He worried about that during the rest of the long evening. He was up early, and worried again while the eighty pounds of bullion was reloaded with the other mail and went away behind a straining dog-team into the paralyzing chill of the tail-end of a fairly cold spell.

Doc went back into his store and worried some more. For three hours or so he did nothing of any importance to anybody. He swept, ate breakfast, and worried. He served customers. If he thought of Charley, or Charley's partner, it was to picture them slumbering peacefully in the yet unbroken darkness of a short mid-winter morning. If he thought of the mail-driver, it was to picture him boring into the half-luminous dark, yelling to his dogs to keep them at top trail-speed and beating his arms against his body to keep the blood circulating. And if Doc thought of the stranger from Fairbanks—

But he did not think of him. His pictures of the others would have been all wrong, anyhow.

CHARLEY'S cabin was not a place of peace. He was not slumbering peacefully. Instead, there was a gory mass

of clotted blood across his temple and he was, panting, trying to struggle to his knees from a horrible-looking place on the floor. He swayed on his knees, and he rocked on his feet when he reached them. He stared about the cabin and saw what was only too plainly visible. His partner was gone. More, he had taken all that was desirable of the partnership equipment, including the poke that was to have seen them through the winter. And Charley's face twisted queerly, but there was no grief in his expression. There was only bitterness.

Similarly, the mail-driver was not as Doc might have pictured him. He was not yelling his dog-team on, nor beating his arms against his breast to keep the blood circulating. The mail-driver lay rather untidily in a snow-drift, a part of which was stained a rather improbable crimson. The trail of his dog-sled went on with two sets of man-tracks behind it—for a way. Later, there was only one set of man-tracks, and Charley's partner was the man who stayed behind. His face wore an expression of terrified astonishment which drifting brittle snowflakes were painstakingly trying to hide.

But of these things, of course, Doc Walker was ignorant. He worried only about his postoffice bookkeeping. He went about his daily duties in deep worriment lest he have to spend all his time for the ensuing six months explaining the entry of seventeen cents in column one-A on the green form instead of column B-6 on the blue. He hardly looked up when the door opened upon the graying darkness without.

Then Charley limped in, and Doc stared at him agape.

Charley had on his parka and the hood covered his head, but Doc could see some signs of the wound on his temple. He could see other signs of maltreatment. Charley looked as if he had been knocked unconscious, and then someone had amused himself by trying to stamp him to death. Which was a case where appearances were not deceitful. Somebody had tried just that. Charley's partner.

"I want some shells," said Charley thickly, "an' a gun."

"What's happened, Charley?" demanded Doc. "My Gawd, Charley——"

"It's none o' your dam' business what's happened!" snarled Charley. "Gimme a gun an' some shells!"

Doc gave him the shells and a gun. He poured out a generous drink, but Charley ignored it. He loaded the gun, lurched out the door, and seconds later Doc saw him stumbling out of Carson's Landing on snowshoes. He vanished in the duskiness of nine o'clock of an Alaskan winter morning. The sun was not nearly up yet.

Doc Walker watched. He meditated, uneasily. Presently, swearing, he swathed himself and made his way to Charley's cabin. Later on, he explained privately that he'd had a faint hope that Charley had killed his partner or done something else appropriate. Instead, however, there was just enough evidence to show what had happened. Charley's partner or the man from Fairbanks had struck Charley down. Probably from behind. Then Charley's partner had stamped upon him. The marks of that stamping were plain upon the floor. No man hates as horribly as a weakling hates the man who protects him. Charley's partner had found a new protector, and as some folk seem to bend every energy and every instinct to their own destruction, Charley's partner had acted to insure his own.

DOC WALKER sensed it vaguely. Less vaguely, he understood that Charley was pursuing his partner. At last awakened—so it seemed to Doc—he would follow and kill the man who had robbed and tried to murder him. Which would be murder if Charley accomplished it. But worse, Charley was a sick man, suffering from the wounds his partner had inflicted. And the thermometer——

Swearing luridly, Doc Walker summoned other inhabitants of Carson's Landing. He explained. His own profanity paled beside the more adequate phrasing of his fellows.

In half an hour a party of four men set out grimly after Charley. They bore certain necessities for travel in the temperature then obtaining. Dogs hauled those necessities upon a sledge.

They traveled swiftly, trailing Charley. At first it seemed to them a coincidence that his tracks followed the main trail, newly marked by the mail-sledge. Then they found the mail-driver. They found where two men had lain in wait for him. They saw that the two men had gone on with the mail-sled. They hoisted the mail-driver into a tree, out of the reach of hungry things. They went on more swiftly still. But already Doc Walker began to foresee what they would find next. He had told the man from Fairbanks what kind of creature Charley's partner was, and the stranger had showed that he understood that kind. He would know what was wisest for him to do with Charley's partner after using him.

Doc was right. They found Charley's partner a bare four miles up the trail. He had been shot in the back, probably as he was breaking trail for the mail-sled dog-team. The dogs had swerved around his body, and the sled had gone on.

Charley's tracks followed the sled. He had stopped at his partner's body, but barely stopped. He'd gone on ahead.

The four men from Carson's Landing followed. In three hours they believed they were gaining. In four, they were sure. But there are certain human necessities, when traveling in a temperature at which tobacco-juice freezes with a distinct snapping noise before it reaches the snow at one's feet. They stopped, of pure necessity, and made a fire, and tea of corrosive strength and blackness. It was while they thawed before going on that they heard the sound of a dog-team ahead. They made ready to start again and dash. But the sound grew louder.

It was Charley, returning, and driving the mail-sled team on the ready-broken trail on the way back to Carson's Landing. Blood-stained and weary, he was all grim-

ness. But his look was near to ferocity when he came upon the others, staring at him. The body of the man from Fairbanks was roped on top of the mail-sacks. He stopped his team and tipped the sled to keep the dogs from running with it. He regarded the four men savagely.

"What the hell you fellas doin' here?" he demanded furiously.

Doc Walker stared at him, and suddenly had a hunch. It startled him, and it convinced him, and it moved him to mutter, "My Gawd!" in a strictly private murmur. One of his fellows growled:

"Huh! We come out after you, Charley. I see y'got the guy after he'd killed th' other one for yuh. Come an' get warm."

CHARLEY advanced in something close to a ferocious calm.

"What's that?" he demanded harshly. "'Th' other one'? What d'you mean, 'th' other one'?"

"Hell!" growled the man from Carson's Landing. "Y'partner, the low skunk that he was! Served 'im right!"

Charley snarled.

"The hell you say!" he raged. "My partner? What you sayin' about him? This fella on the sled, he was in our cabin las' night, an' while my partner was outside he lammed me 'side the head when I wasn't lookin', an' when my partner come back in he done the same to him. An' then he lit out with our poke!"

He stood there in the gray twilight, mouthing a monstrous lie with blazing eyes. It was the queerest of sights. The dogs with lolling tongues. The tipped-over sled. The world all white snow and stark, white-covered trees. White vapor puffing from the lips and nostrils of the men and turning to faintly glittering snow-crystals in the air before them.

"My partner," raged Charley, "he figgered I was hurt too bad to chase that fella. He lit out by himself. An' that scum killed 'm! I come on after an' found him dead. An' I killed that fella from

Fairbanks after he'd done it all! You ain't goin' to slander my partner! He got killed tryin' to get back our poke an' stop a hold-up of the mail. An' if you ain't set to b'lieve it, get set to do some fightin' right here an' now!"

There was silence. Three men gaped foolishly at Charley. The tracks proved he lied. Everything proved that his partner had been one of the two men to murder the mail-driver. The dog-trail proved he'd been ahead of the mail-sled when he was shot. Three men were dazed by Charley's raging effrontery in demanding that they deny what they had seen and knew. But the fourth man was Doc Walker. He muttered "My Gawd!" to himself again. He remembered certain letters which had come to Charley's partner, which Charley's partner never read, but which Charley gloated over and answered faithfully. Childish letters, in a little girl's round handwriting. A little girl's round, beaming face in a picture marked, "*To my Daddy, with love, from Lucy.*" A little girl who should have been Charley's, but wasn't.

CHARLEY stood snarling at the four of them, belligerent and somehow queerly desperate. Doc Walker saw the desperation, and he understood. He stumbled forward.

"Hol' on, Charley," said Doc. "I rec'n we were mistaken. None of us liked y'partner. We were right ready to think th' worst of 'im. But—uh—I rec'n Carson's Landin' is goin' to think right different of y'partner when we get back an' tell our story of what he done."

He was close to Charley now, and he bent forward and whispered angrily:

"Charley, y'dam' fool! Ac' sensible! I'm with yuh! Between us we can make these fellas scared t' say a dam' word, an' they'll wind up believin' our story themselves. Hell, yes! 'Specially when the kid gets up here they'll be 'shamed to say a word against her pa. She'll believe he's

a hero same as you've been tellin' her. I'm backin' you! But for Gawd's sake ac' sensible! Y'goin' to bring her up here nex' summer?"

Charley looked at him swiftly. Suspicion, something like shame, and then—well—an immense relief shone in his eyes. He put out a mittened paw to Doc. Then he drew back.

"Y'crazy!" he said fiercely. "Crazy!"

But the desperation was gone from his manner when he turned upon the others. There was new confidence in his tone, and even more belligerence than before. Gaunt, and hectoring, and truculent, he browbeat them with his story of his partner's heroism. Only, well—he called on Doc Walker to back him up. Which Doc Walker did nobly. And in the end they sent the other three on ahead and the two of them messed up the all-revealing tracks alone.

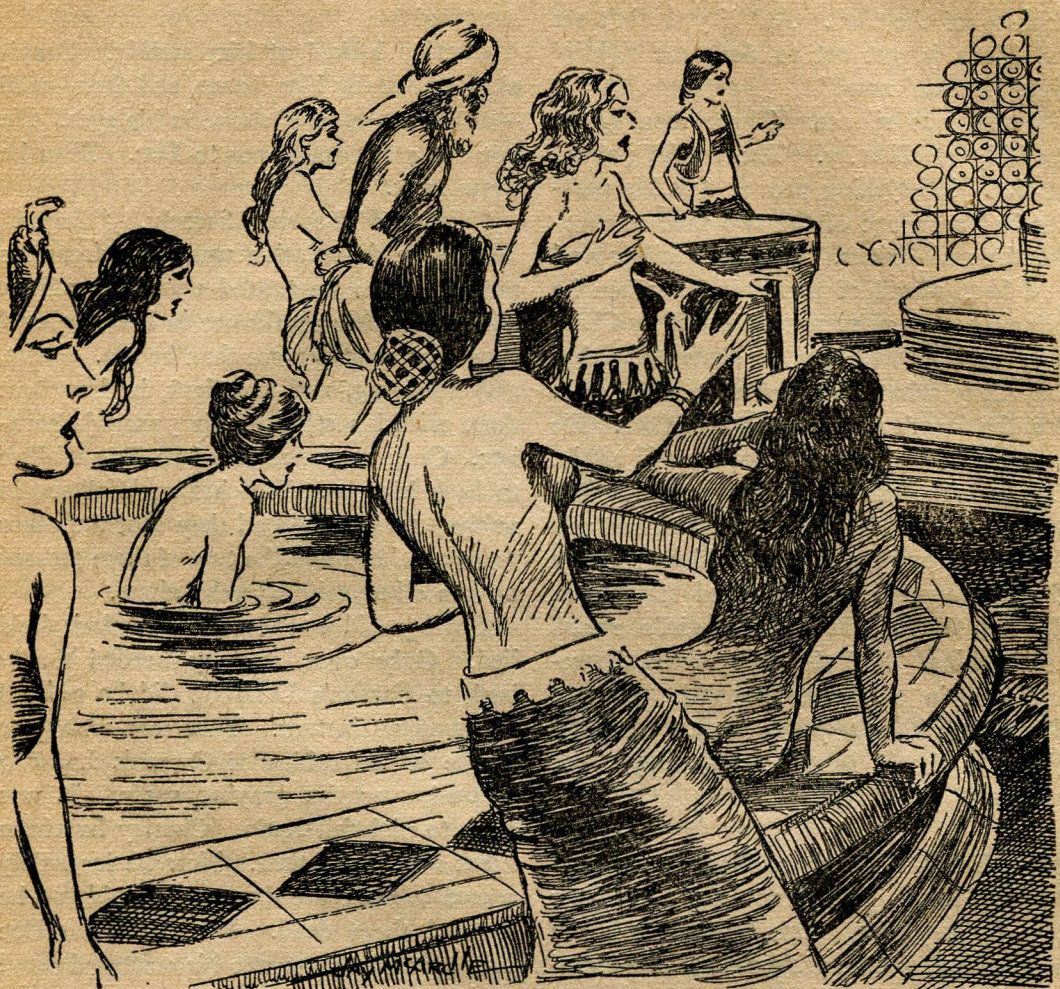
Charley did not even then admit he'd lied. Only once, as they headed finally back to Carson's Landing, did he unbend for even an instant. That was when the smoke of the cabins of Carson's Landing showed over the graying snow. It was close to nightfall again. Charley had been silent for a long time. Now he insensibly ceased to urge the dogs on. Suddenly he stopped them dead. He turned to Doc Walker and thrust out his mittened hand again.

"Doc," he said gruffly, "ya' dam' good egg. Shake!"

And that was all. That is all anybody knows. But Doc has his own opinion. Because next summer a round-faced, beaming little girl came up from Outside to visit her "Uncle Charley." She is very proud of her daddy, of course, because he was killed while he was doing a very heroic thing. But during the summer she became very fond of Charley. She decided that next to her daddy, he was the most wonderful man in the world. And before the summer was over they made a compact. By solemn compact, signed and sealed, she now is Charley's partner.

THE DEVIL'S BOSUN

Part III



By H. BEDFORD-JONES

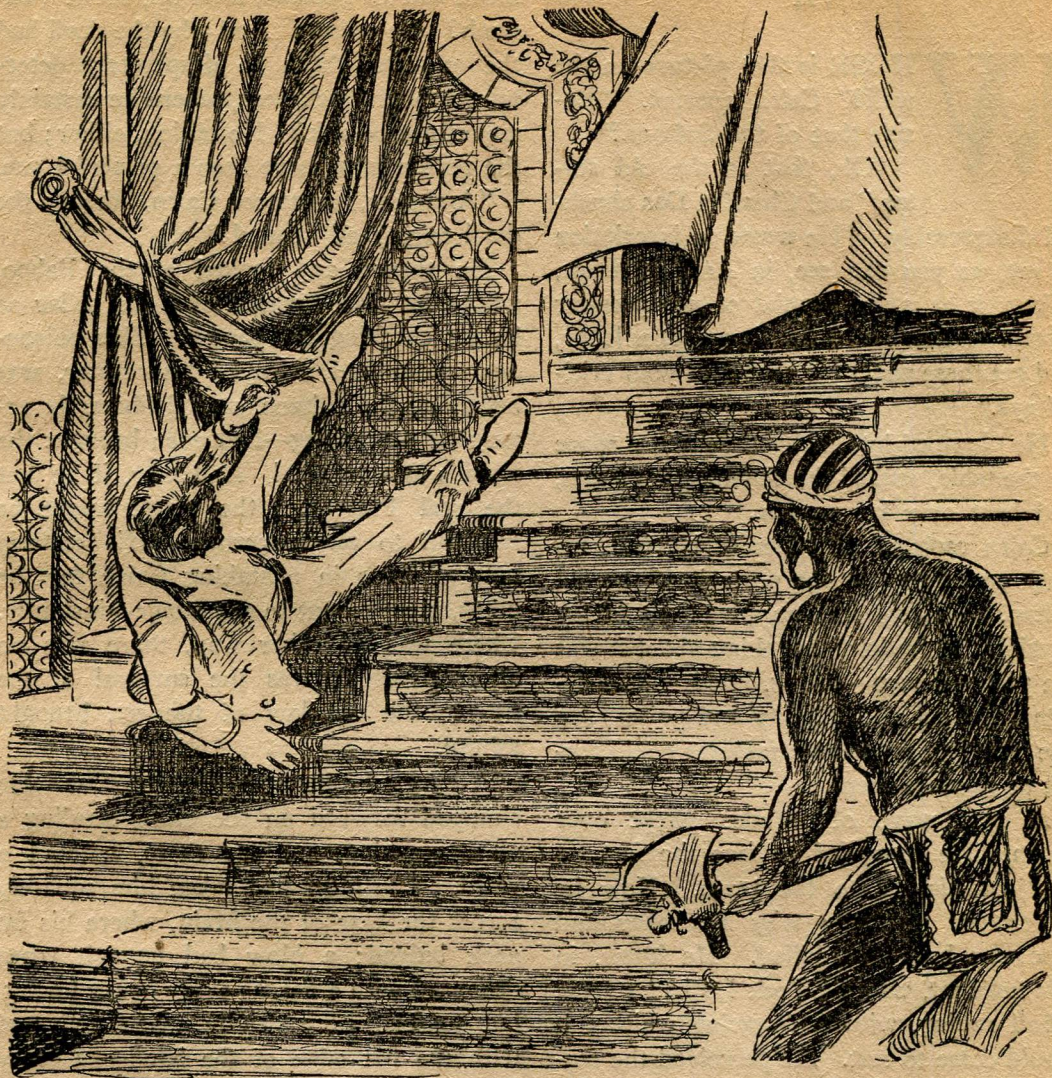
Author of Many Outstanding Adventure Stories

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT
HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

YOUNG Captain Cairn, American master of a Chinese freighter, was a man from hell, but he did his job and tried to forget the past. All the polyglot people of Java knew of the Devil's Bosun, master pirate of those treacherous waters, but when Cairn set sail on the *Ta Ming*, for the island of Coomassin, no thought of this evil celebrity was in his mind.

He had on board a Dutch trader, Vandunk, who owned the island, and all the crew were Vandunk's men. A young Englishman named Tracey and his sister—possible leasers of the island—were also aboard, and a young Chinese supercargo Erh Tan, relative of wily old Li Tock Lo, owner of the freighter. Very soon on the voyage, however, several untoward events happened—the engineer and the second officer were murdered, and the captain held the Chinese supercargo under suspi-

MASTER PIRATE OF THE EASTERN SEAS



A White Girl, Yet a Sultana—and Against Her All the Evil Forces of That Evil Outland

cion. Then Ali, Captain Cairn's Malay servant, called his attention to other mysteries, and suddenly Cairn realized the truth—the real trader Vandunk had been done away with and this mild appearing man posing as him was indeed that notorious pirate, the Devil's Bosun.

He and his servant Ali concoct a plan whereby Ali will swim ashore at Coomassin, warn the Dutch agent and the girl ruler of the island before the pseudo Van-

dunk and his men can land. But the plan miscarries, Ali disappears and the ship's company all go ashore, the captain having pretended to join forces with the pirates for the looting of the island. He sees the Sultana, meets Chandra Das, supposedly loyal to her but actually planning to throw in his lot with the Devil's Bosun, and in Chandra Das's quarters in the palace sees a photograph which leaves him speechless with shock and surprise.

VII

WHOSE is that picture on the wall?" Cairn queried. "Beside that of the Sultana?"

"Oh, that is the old sultan," and Chandra Das chuckled disagreeably. "He wrote an inscription to me, as you can see, in Arabic; hence, I kept it as a testimonial of my peculiar worth. Allow me to sit down, excellency, and get these papers in shape for your critical eye."

He plumped into a chair, cleared a space on the table, refilled the champagne glasses, and bent over his papers.

Cairn replaced the cheroot between his teeth and stared at the portrait of the old sultan. Despite the trappings of Malay royalty, the predominant thing about it was the pictured face—strong, filled with character, instinct with dignity and poise. No one who had seen those features could forget or mistake them.

A new wave of wonder swept over Cairn. He struggled to face the fact, to readjust himself to the truth. Now he understood perfectly why Lochaber and Andrews had been killed. He knew, in this moment, why Li Tock Lo had started a ball rolling, without knowing whither it would come to rest. He perceived the reason for the odd silence of Ali, and his more singular lies regarding the past. He knew, in short, why Ali had taken service with him and had come to Coomassin.

For this picture revealed everything. The old sultan of Coomassin, deported and supposedly killed by the Dutch, had come home again.

The old sultan was Ali, his servant.

The strongest forces in the world are often those which appear the weakest—very true! Li Tock Lo must have had his tongue in his cheek when he uttered those words, thought Cairn. That fat moon-faced Chinaman must have been behind Ali's escape from the Dutch all the time, must have arranged to send him back to Coomassin—why? No telling. How

much had Li guessed, after all, about Vandunk? No telling. And why the devil had the ex-sultan been so desperately determined to get back here, where he certainly would not be safe? No telling, either; but the reason must have been a powerful one.

"And now," muttered Cairn, "there's the devil to pay all around!"

He turned and looked at the Baboo, whose fat neck creased over his collar as he sat checking the papers. This poisonous spider had betrayed his master, was betraying the sultana, was deliberately arranging everything—had even brought the Devil's Bosun here! And now, if he met the real Patterson, the result might be frightful to all concerned. His entirely natural error in mistaking Cairn for the other, must be put to advantage—instantly. There was no other way, there was no alternative. It was the survival of the fittest; the old law of the sea brought ashore.

A gurgle broke from Chandra Das. He slumped forward on the table, sending a glass crashing, and lay there, without a word. The blow had taken him squarely across the base of the brain, where his fat neck bulged; a blow bad enough when delivered with a fist, as every boxer knows, but tenfold more deadly when delivered with the flat edge of the hand—as every Japanese knows. Then, and then only, an acute paralysis is induced, which may last an hour or more.

Cairn rubbed his hand; the blow had hurt. He could take no chances, for this rascally Baboo was powerful. Well indeed that he had taken no chances, as he perceived a moment later when he frisked the paralyzed and unconscious figure. An armpit holster and pistol, which he transferred to himself, and a deadly long knife, which he pitched on the table.

Stuffed pockets. Money, packets of it; all kinds of paper money, bills of accounts, rouleaux of gold, packets of gems. Graft or outright theft, beyond any doubt. Cairn pocketed the lot, then looked around thoughtfully.

A large closet in one corner caught his eye. He went to it, found it locked. From the pockets of Chandra Das he had taken a large bunch of keys. Patiently he tried these, until one fitted and the door swung open. Here, where it would be least suspected, was a species of gun room; rifles and shotguns neatly racked, pistols, long krisses and spears, boxes of ammunition. Weapons, no doubt, hidden away from the Dutch and left in the care of the Baboo.

CAIRN cleared them back into a pile, making room. He went to the table and fell to work with napkins and strips of the linen cloth. Presently he had Chandra Das uncomfortably but safely trussed, with a linen gag in his mouth that would stop any coherent utterance. Then, with much effort, he dragged his victim over to the closet, intending to deposit him there for later reference.

He was at the doorway, in the very act of bundling Chandra Das inside, when a sharp gasp, an intake of breath, caught his attention. Cairn straightened up, just in time to see a moving shape—a Malay leaping for him, uttering a shrill cry, kris all aflame and striking in for him. A servant of the Baboo, no doubt.

Evasion was impossible. No time for a gun. The darting figure was upon him all in an instant. Cairn struck the knife-arm aside; with the impact, both men went down in a heap above the figure of Chandra Das, the wild cry of outraged ferocity ringing high. In that confined space their two figures thrashed about frantically.

Cairn had a grip on the slender man, but the muscles under his hand were as corded steel. The Malay whipped back and forth; it was like holding a striking snake by the tail. The kris drove in and out, Cairn somehow knocking it aside—then the weapon thudded home. But Cairn's iron fingers had found their mark; they closed about the brown throat, closed with a ferocity, a savage outburst of energy that sank them into the flesh.

Half-crouched, Cairn kept his grip

grimly, while the lithe figure slowly grew limp and relaxed. It was hanging in his hands, like a doll. He came erect, but the brown body jerked at him, as though anchored to the floor. Cairn blinked the sweat from his eyes and peered down, surprised. A low exclamation burst from him.

The kris, still gripped by the dead brown hand, was buried to the very hilt in the body of Chandra Das. Driven in, through throat and breast—a chance stroke that had found deadly entry.

Cairn dropped the lolling-tongued thing from which he had squeezed the life. A shudder passed through him; he stepped from the closet and, after an effort, slammed the door and locked it. He went to the table, seized the champagne bottle, and gulped down some of the liquid. His head cleared.

The brown devil had not missed him by much. His coat pocket was ripped. The kris had struck against the flat automatic pistol there and glanced—perhaps for its fatal thrust. Almost mechanically, he reached out and took the papers Chandra Das had fetched from his safe. Glancing over them, Cairn thrust them into a pocket.

"And now what?" he thought. "Better get in touch with the sultana right off. If Vandunk is in the notion of quick action, as this Baboo indicated, we've no time to lose. What the devil! To think of old Ali being the ex-sultan, and lying like a good one about his past!"

He glanced out at the garden. No, not there; his way lay into the palace. He turned, stepped out of the dining-room, and closed the door behind him.

PRESENTLY he was out of the Baboo's apartment entirely. Then he halted. Which way? A corridor was before him; had he come from right or left? He could not recall, but it would make little difference. With a shrug, he turned to the right. His coat bulged. His pockets were filled, and besides his Webley he now had an automatic under his armpit.

Best find the sultana at once, turn over his loot to her, and consult as to some course of action. Stella Tracey must have warned her by this time, of course.

There was the Devil's Bosun to think about, also. Vandunk was not going to let his chief helper disappear for long, and not do something about it.

Cairn strode on down the passage; it seemed interminable. Then, ahead of him came an archway and sunlight, filtering down through greenery. This was not the way he had come, he now knew definitely, but he went on. Somewhere he would come out on the central patio, or reach one of the guards to direct him.

In the archway, he paused in dismay. A wall rose to right and left, tree branches leaning over them. Directly ahead, six feet away, were a door and another of the buildings that comprised the palace cluster. With a shrug, he passed on, tried the door, and after a hard pull it opened. Long disused, apparently.

Another corridor, with a sharp turn ahead. The sound of splashing fountains reached him; good! He must be near the central court. At the turn, a heavy curtain barred his way. He heaved it aside, unsuspecting—and went headlong.

Steps, unexpected; polished marble steps. He had a swift vision of them as he lurched downward and lost balance. He had a swift vision of a tiled bath where women were disporting themselves, brown women and girls; a swift, horrified vision. Their startled outcry rang in his ears. A glimpse of luxury; rich textiles, birds in cages, divans and cushions. All this in one flashing split second. Then he was falling, trying frantically to right himself—crash!

A thunder of stars as he went head-on against a pillar, and darkness.

Wakening came with a sense of oppression, of constriction, for which he could not account. He tried to move, and could not. His head felt as though gripped in a vise.

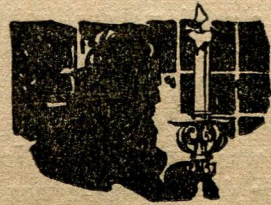
Then memory flashed into him. He had somehow blundered into the women's

quarter of the palace; worse yet, into the women's very bath! Sacrilege of sacrilege, at least from a Mohammedan viewpoint. Amina would not be living in a harem, of course, but this was undoubtedly the harem of the ex-sultan.

Cairn's head throbbed. Filaments of daylight reached his eyes, but he could see nothing; a cloth was wrapped about his head and eyes, probably a blindfold rather than a bandage for his cracked pate. And his mouth was held in a relentless clasp. A gag, most efficient, that irked cruelly. He was sitting in a chair of some kind, to which his wrists and ankles were bound fast.

There was a fluttering of voices and soft laughter about him. Women! He must still be in the same place, then; he could hear water splashing close by. He tried to speak, and could utter only a growling groan.

More laughter. A pad-pad of bare feet on the marble, and strong perfumes assailed his nostrils. Women were all



around; their fingers touched him mockingly. Panic laid hold on him. Struggling, Cairn tore at his bonds, all in vain, and relaxed again, breathing hard, muttering curses that came forth only as dull harsh sounds.

He winced, as a hand touched his sore head. It slid down and caressed his cheek. A voice spoke, with muffled laughter, in Malay.

"So the handsome Christian captain desired to look upon the women of the palace! And in his eagerness, he flung himself among them. Are there no infidel women, then, to slake his fury with kisses? Why should he seek out the women of true believers?"

"All Christians are curious, my daughter," croaked an older voice, with a hideous cackle of mirth. "Whether they be of Dutch or of other nations, they cannot stay away from women, but seek them out at all cost. Take my advice and call the guards, that they may slay this man quickly."

"No, no!" There was a little chorus of protest. Cairn realized there must be a number of women around him. Sweat started on his forehead. He comprehended now that these women must have tied him up while he was knocked out.

"Touch not his money or weapons," spoke out a stronger, more authoritative voice. "Yet he must not go unpunished. Since his eyes have offended, let them pay for the insult. Prick them out with needles, then turn him loose into the garden."

Another chorus, this time of eager affirmation. Beneath the mirth in these soft voices lay an undertone of cruelty, like that of most savage nations. Primitive mirth was based on cruelty. But now arose discussion, as Cairn sat there helpless and sweated in stark fear.

"Not yet, not yet!" sounded a voice almost at his ear. "Time enough for that when the moment comes. Look at me, infidel; am I not beautiful? Think how many men would give all that they have to sit where you sit, and behold me!"

"Bah! She lies, the cat!" chipped in another voice, amid a burst of laughter. "Not a drop of henna anywhere, and if she hasn't thirty years and ten squealing brats, may I be married to a Chinaman! Look at this paragon of beauty who addresses you, who lays at your feet all the loveliness that has made her famous through the world. I sigh for you, handsome infidel, and I embrace you!"

SOFT fingers flicked along his cheek. Whatever that embrace was, the gay chime of laughter that arose showed it did not lack in humor. Cairn's panic deepened into actual horror. These women, he knew well, were capable of anything.

He had laid himself open to any punishment they might inflict, and if it stopped at merely blinding him, he might well prove lucky.

"Perhaps he came here not to see us, but to bathe!" suggested someone. "Throw him into the pool and see if he can swim, chair and all——"

Various suggestions followed, none of them being put into effect. Savagely Cairn bit at his gag, tried to eject it from his mouth. A word of explanation, and at least he could force them to bring the sultana. But his efforts were useless. Irony of fate! He had condemned Chandra Das to the very situation in which he now found himself, except for the cruel mockery around him.

"Bring needles, bring needles!" came that same voice of authority which had first mentioned the blinding. "What sport is there in jeering at an elephant in a pit? Let him go forth blinded by the sight of our beauty!"

Cairn began to sweat afresh, for in this voice was a horrible earnestness and cold cruelty that banished all thought of jesting. The woman meant her words.

"First let him speak," said someone. "I have heard that the talk of Christians is like the rustling of leaves——"

"No, keep him as he is," came the quick retort. "I remember that in the time of the Sultan Ali a *hakim*, a doctor, came among us and brought with him an official. And what happened to this man, who dared to look upon the women of the harem? He was cut down by the guards and sliced with knives. But now we are ruled by a woman, and she dare not act so shrewdly. So let this infidel not cry out, lest the guards spoil our fun."

Cairn tried to wrench his clammy hands through the lashings, in vain. His agitation caused fresh laughter; the women pressed about him closely, mocking him, jeering at him, heaping him with insults. Their mood was changing from amusement to cruelty. One of them sank her

fingers in his throat, until others tore her away.

"Here are needles!" went up a panting cry, and the pad-pad of running feet. "Give me one eye, for my trouble in getting them! Uncover his eye, quickly!"

Excitement shrilled the voices. Cairn could hear a wild squabble over the needles, and cold terror seized upon him. These she-devils were in earnest, all right. Harem beauties! He groaned, and at his gulping sound they broke into delighted cries. They comprehended his torment and enjoyed it.

An overwhelming reek of perfume. He was aware of a woman beside him, touching him, baring his throat.

"Feel, infidel, feel!" A needle jabbed into his chest, and he winced. "Next in your pretty eyes, that dared so greatly and yet failed so far! Too eager, Christian, for your own good——"

A hand caught at the bandage about his eyes. Then, as he resigned himself to the horror of it, fell a sudden startled silence. He heard a quick gasping of breath, felt the woman beside him withdraw.

"What is this?" rose a voice—a new voice, startled, angry, dominant. "A man, here in the bath? And you, sisters of devils—oh!" The cry was swift and shrill. "Out of here! Instantly! Begone!"

There was a movement, an outburst of voices in shrill explanation and excuse. A sudden rush, and he heard the voice of Stella Tracey.

"Cairn—Captain Cairn! Here he is now——" Then she was at his side. She caught the blindfold and tore it away. He saw her bending over him; and behind her, standing on steps above the bath, the sultana. The others were gone, with a chattering burst of indignant lessening voices.

The gag yielded. Cairn gulped for air, tried to work his jaws, and failed. For the moment he was helpless to speak. Stella Tracey worked at his bonds.

"How did it happen? How did you get here?" she exclaimed quickly. "We missed

you. They are searching everywhere for you now—no one had seen you in the palace. There; that's better."

She knelt and fell to work at his ankles. Above her stooped shoulders, Cairn met the gaze of Amina the sultana; an inquiring, half angry, half amused look. A little color rose in her lovely features.

"Just got here—in time," he mumbled, as speech returned. "Can't blame 'em. I fell in here—tumbled down the stairs and hit my head. They didn't understand."

Amina broke into a smile. "Naturally they wouldn't," she said in flawless English. "In fact, Captain Cairn, you'd have a good deal of trouble making anyone understand, I imagine."

"Not you," said Cairn. His feet were free now. He stood up. "Thanks, Miss Tracey." He caught her hand, helped her to her feet. Then his gaze went again to Amina, standing there and regarding him. "No, not you, Sultana," he said awkwardly. "I can make you savvy quick enough—what do I call you? Royal Highness or something?"

She broke into a laugh. "Since my birth-name happens to be Talbot, I suppose I'm Miss Talbot. Or Amina, as you please. There certainly need be no formality among friends. Especially under the circumstances. Miss Tracey has told me the whole thing."

"You mean——"

"The truth about Mynheer Vandunk." A swift flash of anger lightened her dark eyes. "I don't know what to do, whom to reach. The resident distrusts me. My guards are faithful, but they can do little against soldiers. And this—this pig has taken over part of the palace with his men! They have rifles."

"Well, we can't stand here talking all day," said Cairn. He was rapidly becoming himself once more. "I've got my pockets filled with stuff belonging to you, and want to get rid of it; money and papers and so on. I was trying to find you when I stumbled in here. Your friend Chandra

Das was in cahoots with the Devil's Bosun——"

HE TOOK a step, and staggered. His head whirled. Putting up a hand, he discovered an egg-shaped bump over one ear. Stella Tracey caught his arm quickly.

"Where can we go, Amina?" she exclaimed. "Something must have happened that we don't know—we can't stay here——"

"Come into my apartment," said the sultana quietly. "I'll keep everyone out, even my own maids. How lucky that I wanted to show you the baths! Bring him. I'll go ahead and make sure everything is clear."

She turned and went up the steps. Cairn patted Stella Tracey's arm.

"I'm quite all right, thanks—just dizzy for a minute," he said abruptly. "This bump unsettled me. Come along."

What with one thing and another, time had elapsed since their arrival at the palace. From the passage into which they turned, he had a glimpse of the gardens through latticed windows, and perceived that the sun was westering fast.

"You mean to say nobody knows where I am?" he asked. Miss Tracey nodded.

"Precisely. Everything seems to have gone to pieces here; Vandunk has taken one of the palace buildings and is receiving some of the nobles. The poor girl there," and she motioned to Amina, ahead of them, "doesn't know what to make of it. Or rather, she didn't, until I told her everything."

"You don't know everything," Cairn said grimly.

The sultana held a door open, then shut and bolted it behind them.

Cairn was astonished. Even after his sight of Amina on the wharf, he none the less associated her with oriental luxury and the pomp of position; the very name of "sultana" suggested this.

Here in her apartment, however, everything fell away. Gone were the last vestiges of Coomassin; here was a small suite

of rooms as refreshingly European as a Park Avenue lodging. Curtains at the windows, rugs and furniture of French extraction, shaded lamps, a writing desk, pictures on the walls—he swallowed hard, accepted the chair offered him, and found himself face to face with Amina Talbot. The sultana was gone.

"If you don't mind," said Stella Tracey, at the door of the adjoining room, "I'll bathe and change my gown."

"The room's yours, my dear," said Amina, and reached for a cigarette.

CAIRN collected himself with an effort, held match for her, accepted a smoke himself. He needed it. He could not believe that he was on the island of Coomassin. Every moment seemed to present everything in a new and unexpected light; the shifting of scenes was rapid and totally different, like the changing scenes in a kaleidoscope. From that murderous affair with the Baboo, into the ghastly humor of the women's bath, and now—this!

Strangest of all, the woman before him, smiling slightly as she regarded him, a warm friendliness in her eyes, entirely at her ease. All crisis was very distant and far away. It was like being in a dream. He had thought her aping European ways, perhaps, but she was not; she was of his own people, his own class, his own blood. She must have read the expression in his eyes, for she broke into a silvery laugh.

"You are so astonished at finding things—like this? Come, Captain Cairn; we're realities, you know. It's only in a cinema that you'd find a gorgeous sultana draped in ropes of pearls and ordering ranks of slaves about."

"Cinema! That word spoils the charm," and Cairn relaxed, his gray eyes twinkling. "If you'd said moving picture, I'd have taken you for an American on the spot. No; you're far more lovely than any painted screen sultana. I didn't think it could be true."

"What?" she questioned, with an inquir-

ing lift of her brows. Cairn fell into swift confusion and wakened to where he was, why he had come. He began to pile money and gems and papers out on the table, emptied his pockets, while she stared wide-eyed.

"Whatever is all this? Where did you get it?"

"Yours," said Cairn. "All yours, Miss Talbot. Here are the papers regarding the bills payable elsewhere—I got all this from Chandra Das, you know."

"And this, too?" She leaned forward, pressed out her cigarette in an ash tray, and picked up a square of paper that had fallen out with the other stuff. A photograph. She looked at it in astonishment, then at Cairn. "My picture! Did Chandra Das have it?"

"No." Cairn flushed. "No. I got it—in Surabaya. That's what I didn't believe was true—that anyone could look like it. But never mind all that, Miss Talbot. You've got to buck up and act," he said earnestly. "You see, Chandra Das let out a good deal of information before he died. He thought that I was the Devil's Bosun——"

"What's that? Did you say Chandra is dead?" She started up, a sudden spark in her eyes. "It's impossible! Tell me quickly."

"Well, give me a chance." Cairn leaned back. "That's why I got lost. He met me and took me for Cap'n Patterson—" and in few words, he related the tragic mistake made by the Baboo, and its consequences. She listened with kindling eyes and animated features; swift energy leaped into her expression, and her voice rang out upon the room when he had finished.

"Dead! That unspeakable rascal, dead! And I have longed for the conscience to order his death—I could not do it. I am not one of these people whom I rule. And now he is dead! Well, he deserved it."

The spark died. Her clenched hands fell in her lap.

"But what can I do?" she exclaimed, helplessly. "Miss Tracey told me about

this man who pretends to be Vandunk. What can I do? My people are scattered over the island; they have no arms, they are cowed. Half of the rajas, even of the council, plot against me and hate me because I'm not of their race. I know not whom to trust among my own guards. The Dutch resident—ah, the fat pig! He has no intelligence."

"Well," said Cairn, "you can't sit and wring your hands, that's sure. One good thing has been done; the Devil's Bosun has lost his friend and ally the Baboo. I'd say, put a bullet into Vandunk first thing. Show me where he is, and I'll take care of him."

Pallor grew in her oval face as she met his incisive eyes.

"No," she said in a low voice. "He has taken the corner building, at the end of the palace. You do not understand. My father—rather, the old sultan—built it and it is like a fort in itself. He has his own men from the ship there, and a number of my guards—don't you see? Many of the council support him already. Even before we sat down to the table, he had won them over. They know that I am to be deposed. That is all they want. You cannot reach him, cannot——"

Her voice died out in despair. It was as though she suddenly beheld the gulf yawning beneath her; the situation in which she was utterly helpless and unable to act. Despair indeed, and panic. To struggle was hopeless.

IN THE silence, the adjoining door opened and Stella Tracey appeared, fresh and glowing. She stopped short at sight of their expressions.

"What? Lost in gloom?" she exclaimed. "Tell me about it. Captain Cairn, can't you do any better than cast a shadow over our hostess?"

"He's tried hard enough to do better," and Amina Talbot smiled faintly. "I'm afraid it just won't work. Sit down and listen to it. Tell me what to do."

Stella Tracey, cool and incisive, joined

them; she seemed more frigid, more coldly aloof than ever, as Cairn outlined the situation. Her blue eyes dwelt upon him with a chill reserve. He could not understand her attitude. Yet there was a strength in her very coolness, a quiet poise, a comprehension, that was heartening.

Then, abruptly, Cairn checked himself. For the first time, he recollected Ali, and the amazing recognition of the old sultan in his servant. And like a thunderbolt, the thought struck him aghast: this man, deposed and exiled and prisoned by the Dutch, certainly would not have gone to the resident with any warning against Vandunk. Ali would not have dared risk recognition. Whatever his purpose in wanting to regain the island of Coomassin—perhaps sheer homesickness—Ali would never have carried this warning. Even had he been able to reach the resident, he would not have done so.

"The old rascal put it over on me!" thought Cairn.

He was about to tell the sultana about her adopted father, when she broke out into weary utterance.

"Oh, what does it all matter! Let them depose me. Let them have their way. I don't want to stay here. I've longed to leave this place for ever. There was only one person I ever knew who loved me and whom I loved; whom I could respect, upon whom I could depend utterly. And him they took away in chains. Let them loot and fight over the loot. What does it matter? For me, there can only be escape—if that."

"Perhaps," said Cairn slowly, "they would not be satisfied to have you escape. Perhaps they mean to make sure of you—by marriage. Perhaps Vandunk hopes to get money by placing a certain Lop Mansur on the throne in your place; perhaps he has even offered your hand in marriage to someone else."

"Lop Mansur—that beast!" cried out the sultana. Her head lifted, her nostrils dilated; a flash shone again in her eyes. "Give me—in marriage? Sell me like a

chattel, like a Chinese woman? Oh, if my father Ali were here——"

"He is here," said Cairn shortly. Her eyes widened upon him. She caught her breath sharply.

"Here? You must be out of your senses! He is a prisoner in Java——"

"He's here," Cairn repeated, and smiled. He glanced at the wondering Stella Tracey. "My servant, Ali. There was a picture of the former sultan in Chandra's room; I recognized him instantly."

Suddenly Amina Talbot was beside him, clutching his hands, looking into his face; her nearness, the pressure of her fingers, the eager radiance illumining her features, was overpowering. Cairn felt himself shaken, trembling.

"Here, and alive? And you brought him? Oh, my friend!" Her voice lingered on the word like a softly echoing bell. "You do not know what this means. Now



I am alive again, now I am myself, life is worth living, worth fighting for——"

A sudden sharp hammering at the door broke in upon her, silenced her. She turned and called inquiringly. A voice made response in Malay, respectful, subservient. Cairn caught the words.

In two hours there would be a meeting of the council. Her presence was requested. The Dutch controller, Mynheer Vandunk, and the resident were to be present. In the hall of audience, in two hours. That was all.

Silence fell upon the room. Cairn became aware that the sun had disappeared, that dusk was gathering outside. The sultana was staring at him, her face aglow

with pride and anger; no more helplessness, no more wringing of hands. The crisis was upon her, and she was rising to it.

"So you were right! They will strike—good! I am still the sultana," she exclaimed with energy. Then she broke into a laugh. "Two hours! Until then, my friends, let us make the most of our time."

"I think I'll go out for a walk about the place," said Stella Tracey in her aloof way, and Cairn felt the touch of her eyes, blue and icy, as they passed over him and over the sultana with unspoken message. She walked to the door, unbarred it, and was gone. Cairn frowned a little, wondering at her manner. Then he forgot her again.

Vandunk was not delaying his stroke!

VIII

AMINA TALBOT went into another room and closed the door. Cairn heard the sound of a gong, heard her voice giving directions; presently she came back, pulled the curtains, and lit softly glowing lamps.

It was like a dream to Cairn, all of it. She was like a dream-fairy come to life. Caught unguarded in this unsuspected environment, Cairn had been awkward and embarrassed, self-conscious. This, perhaps, was why Stella Tracey had left them alone.

Now, in the lamplight, everything was different; once more the scene had shifted again, and Cairn came to his feet, lit a cigarette, suddenly found himself free of all restraint. They two were together, and the world of Coomassin was shut out.

"Tell me about him—my adopted father," said Amina softly. "How did he come here? Where is he now?"

Cairn told her. He spoke crisply, curtly, laid bare everything in few words. Ali had swum ashore, was perhaps hiding somewhere. Smiling, she shook her head.

"You don't know him. To many of the

natives he is their great hero; he will have found friends and shelter ere this. It was to find me, to protect me, that he came back here. He had no children—those he had, are dead. That was why he adopted me when I was a child. Well, we shall see! I don't know what to expect, what to think."

"Still hesitant?" snapped Cairn. "Still wringing your hands?"

"No," she said gravely, looking at him. Just the one word; it spoke volumes. Her face lit up, strangely radiant. They were standing close together, beside the desk and the lamp there. "Be careful! You're impatient, energetic, reckless. You must be careful."

"Why?" demanded Cairn, thrilled by the low timbre of her voice, by the singular beauty of her look. Something seemed drawing them together; he was conscious of her compellent personality, of her warm liking, of her friendship.

"Why? Because you have come into this place like a breath of vigorous and clean life," she exclaimed. "You, and this English woman. She looks strong; she is really weak. But you have strength for all."

"Stella Tracey weak?" Cairn laughed harshly. "Not she! But you—you——"

He checked his words, only to find her eyes bidding him on. He yielded.

"Call it madness, insolence, anything you like," he broke out, facing her frankly, looking into her eyes, a rugged earnestness in his attitude and words. "You showed me a new horizon before I ever saw you, Amina. Your picture, the look in your eyes—bah! Words are too small for it all. It's a big thing, a tremendous thing."

Courage grew in her steady gaze. Color climbed her cheek.

"That's why, perhaps, I told you just now to be careful," she said softly. "Because I don't want you to go under—poison, a stab in the back, a bullet. I know these people of mine. I know this place. I abhor it and them; all except one man. And you. When I looked down

from the wharf into the boat, and met your eyes, it was as though the world turned over. Should I say such things to you, a stranger? But you're not a stranger, my friend."

"No, thank heaven!" said Cairn, a little hoarsely.

SILENCE fell upon them. He reached out and she gave him her hand. Cairn knew his pulses were throbbing, a hammer was pounding at his temples, a joyous eagerness flooding through his veins. She was big enough to be herself. Nothing petty in all this, nothing sordid or small; no talk of love, though it underlay everything. Or was it love that had drawn them so, that compelled them now to open speaking, frank words?

Understanding, rather.

She was smiling, trembling a little; he released her fingers, reverently.

"My dear, my dear, there is so much we do not need to say!" he exclaimed under his breath. A short, sharp knock at the door, and the voice of Stella Tracey reached them. Cairn went to the door and opened it, shooting the bolt again when Miss Tracey had entered. From another room came the chiming of a gong.

"Just in time!" cried Amina brightly, catching Stella's hands in her own, putting an arm about her. "Supper is ready; I told them to serve it and summon me, and stay out. They do not know Captain Cairn is here."

"They must not know," said Stella Tracey quietly. "I met the resident, coming to dine with Vandunk and some of your council. He was much worried. He said the town is being searched—you're supposed to have disappeared while drunk, Captain Cairn. What about those women of yours, Amina? Will they talk?"

"Of course, in time," said Amina coolly. "Let them! Tomorrow is another day. Come along; eat, drink and be merry! You said nothing to the resident about Vandunk?"

Stella Tracey colored. "Yes, I did. He

wouldn't listen to me. No sooner had I blurted out that Vandunk was an impostor, than he waved his hands, rolled his eyes, and turned his back on me. He muttered something about sun-struck Englishers. He was worried, wildly nervous, and I think had been drinking. He had some soldiers with him."

"Yes, he always drinks toward evening," said Amina quietly. "Schnapps. He drinks heavily and in the morning has terrible headaches. He is a perfect pig, that man."

"And now I suppose the fat's in the fire," Miss Tracey observed, her voice all drooping. "He'll tell Vandunk what I said."

"What of it?" Amina Talbot laughed gaily and pressed the shoulders of the other woman. "Let it pass; they'll do no more than keep us under guard. Come along! We'll talk about it at the table. I have a plan. You see, I'm not wringing my hands any longer!"

And she darted a gay glance at Cairn, as she flung open the door.

A dining-room was disclosed, the table laid for two in tasteful elegance; none of the Baboo's vulgar display was here visible. There was no wine. Sandwiches, salad, coffee; nothing else.

"First, about you." Amina turned to Cairn, decision in her manner. "Can you rejoin Vandunk?"

"Certainly. If I don't delay too long about it."

"You'd be more help there than here. I can plan nothing definitely until I get in touch with my adopted father; Ali will have something in mind."

"Force?" queried Cairn. She shook her head.

"Not against the Dutch. We have not many people; the plague swept away numbers, others were killed in the revolt. They are cowed, afraid. The guns of the fort can sweep the town. Would there be any way of leaving here altogether? On your ship?"

"Not without a crew."

Her eyes flashed. "Suppose I could provide a crew? Our people are seamen. Many of them have served in ships like yours."

"Then it would be possible—in an emergency. But the fort could sink us in five minutes. We couldn't leave the harbor without permission of the resident."

"Understood, then," she said coolly. "Go back to Vandunk. I'll attend the council and see what he intends. I can communicate with you later—perhaps in the morning. There are two of the servants on whom I can depend absolutely. It may be that we'll simply take one of the native boats and head for the mainland."

"Depends on Ali, eh? All right; count on me. What about Miss Tracey?"

"She'll remain here, with me. Do nothing rash; await word from me. Agreed?"

Cairn shrugged. "I suppose so. I still think the best plan is to slap a bullet into Vandunk——"

"No, no!" she broke in quickly. "Don't you see? It would mean a massacre. The resident—oh, it would be terrible! And these Malays are my people. I must protect them, look out for them."

"Have it your own way, then. But there's bound to be a showdown. This Devil's Bosun knows the value of a bold, quick stroke. Look out, or he'll have everything right where he wants it! Now tell me how to reach the building he's in. No time to lose if I'm to rejoin him."

She swiftly sketched the position indicated. Cairn nodded, rose, and put out his hand to Stella Tracey. As he met her blue eyes, he was astonished; for in their depths he read a lurking fear, an apprehension. Was it possible that Amina had judged her aright? Her brother's death, perhaps, had broken down her frigid reserve.

"Buck up," he said cheerfully. "You still have your Webley?"

She nodded, smiled a little, and he turned to the door. Amina came to let

him out. She met his eyes for a moment, searchingly; her fingers closed on his.

"Good-by; good luck," she breathed. "If you should come to the council—remember! Do nothing rash. Whatever happens, be careful; you're the one hope."

Then he was outside, and the door was barred again.

The one hope! Cairn swore softly to himself. She was past all comprehension. Give him his own way, and this affair would be ended at a blow—if nothing happened to him. He suddenly perceived that this was exactly what was in her mind. She dared not jeopardize him. She must wait, get in touch with Ali, leave Cairn as a sort of last anchor for emergencies. She could not risk anything going wrong. At the worst, he could get her and Ali away from here in a native boat. Perhaps this was what lay in her mind.

Down a passage, to the left, burned a lamp; two guards were standing there in talk. Cairn turned right, as she had told him, and followed the corridor. Another lamp, two more guards ahead; but first the door she had indicated. It opened to his hand. He stepped into darkness, closed the door, and struck a match.

Yes, this was the place. The administrative office of the sultanate, with its desks and chairs and files. And beyond, the windows opening on the central patio.

BEHIND, in the corridor Cairn had just left, the two guards came quickly, stealthily. They paused at the door which he had just closed; they listened, heard his swift, firm steps. Booted leather rings on coral blocks. They heard the creak of a window swung open. They looked at one another, then they turned and hurriedly departed.

The great courtyard, or rather the paths that crisscrossed among the flowers and orange-trees, were lighted by tall post-lanterns. Cairn encountered many figures; natives of rank, servants, guards. Some stopped to stare after him amazedly, others

paid him no attention. His white uniform, of course, marked him out with startling clarity, his height made him doubly conspicuous.

Off in the jungle, gongs were beating monotonously, thuddingly, sending thin brazen shudders of vibrance across the night. There was no moon, but the stars blazed brightly. From somewhere about the palace came the strident voice of a radio, and the soft excited flutterings of women's voices. The casuarina trees roundabout were stirred by a low breeze, so that multitudes of people seemed talking distantly. Somehow, a vague but decided oppression seized upon Cairn; a sense of expectancy, of waiting, of near crisis at hand. He swore under his breath at it, and went on.

The building was not hard to find. It was ablaze with light, and high lanterns stood at the entrance, and two elephants of stone, nearly life size. A separate building at one corner of the palace, with a wide stone terrace and balustrade about it, Chinese style. The windows seemed narrow slits. The entrance could only be gained by crossing a bridge, which ran over a stream of water. For defense, the place was admirable.

Two men stood at the doorway with rifles; seamen from the *Ta Ming*. At Cairn's approach they greeted him with grins. One turned and hurried inside.

"Is Mynheer Vandunk here?" Cairn asked the other, who saluted.

"Yes, tuan kapitan. He has been expecting you."

Inside the heavy double doors, Cairn met the other guard, who turned and led him through two lighted rooms, into a third. Here at one table sat Vandunk and the resident. At another were three natives, obviously men of rank; for them to eat with Christians would have been unpardonable. Native servants were handing about dishes.

"Hello, Cap'n, hello!" exclaimed Vandunk cordially. "Where in the devil's

name have you been? Come and pitch in. Been searching the damned town for you."

Cairn laughed, drew up a chair, and nodded to the resident. The latter looked rather fuddled; the bottle of Schnapps beside his plate was half empty.

"You should have looked closer to home, mynheer," he returned. "To tell the truth, I've had a drop too much aboard. When we got here I tried to follow you and got lost. Went into some kind of parlor, curled up, and went to sleep. I woke up and tried to find my way out, walked slap into a lot of native women—and damned if they didn't knock me out!"

He fingered the bump on his head ruefully. The little shoe-button eyes of Vandunk bored into him, then glimmered with mirth.

"So help me! The women's quarters! And what happened?"

"They tied me up and had no end of fun." Cairn cursed heatedly. "At last, about dark, I managed to work my hands loose. After a while I got free and slipped out, and here I am——"

Vandunk poked the resident in the ribs, and in Dutch repeated the story. The resident wagged his head sadly.

"Lucky man," he said. "Lucky to be alive. Strictly forbidden to molest the native women——"

And, lifting his glass, he gulped down some more schnapps.

Vandunk called a servant, ordered a plate for Cairn, then rose. Cairn went with him to the other table, where he was introduced to the three natives. The only name Cairn caught was that of Lop Mansur, Lop the Victorious. This man was bony, unusually large of frame for a Malay, and unsmiling; he greeted Cairn with a grim, intent appraisal not without menace.

"That's the new sultan, Cap'n," said Vandunk. "Come on, pitch in. Council meets in half an hour. I want you there. You've a gun?"

Cairn slapped his pocket, and the other nodded.

"Right. Hang on to it. I've sent for Mr. Drift; going to start putting cargo aboard first thing in the morning. He can attend to it. How d'you like the sultana?"

"The bargain holds," Cairn replied, and Vandunk chuckled.

"Aye, if I don't change my mind. We've got ten sepoys on hand, and six of our own men, and Lop Mansur over there has twenty guards who've taken his money; enough to clean up on the whole damned place. Pitch in and get your meal."

He went over to the other table, squatted on a cushion, and fell into talk with Lop Mansur and the other two Malays. Presently one of the palace guards came in, salaamed to Lop Mansur, and began to speak, low-voiced. Glances were flung at Cairn, but the latter paid no attention. Another guard came in, making some report about Chandra Das. It seemed that the latter had completely disappeared.

"I tell you, we can expect only destruction here!" The resident lifted his head and addressed Cairn, a mournful fixity in his eyes. Dejection filled his spirit; whether it was the liquor speaking, or some inner conviction, he expressed a deep and hopeless despair.

"I have felt it from the first; now I know it is close at hand," he went on. "You were wrong to come here, mynheer. These people are treacherous, and though I have shot many of them, one never knows what to expect. Worst of all is that accursed girl. She is white, and not to be treated as a native. Even if you depose her, how will you handle the new sultan? This chief Lop is dangerous. He is cruel, implacable, capable of any treachery. And we are all doomed. I know it."

He took another drink. Tears came to his eyes and slowly trickled out and down his cheeks, unheeded. Cairn regarded him with momentary astonishment and contempt. Such a man to be a resident, an administrator! Yes; any warning to him would have been utterly useless. The Devil's Bosun would laugh at such a weakling.

VANDUNK rose and returned to them, swiftly, and stooped.

"Let me have that Webley," he said, excited animation in his broad features. "I'll get you another later. That damned chief will sell his soul for a pistol; you'll not be needing it, likely. You don't mind?"

Cairn shrugged. "Not a bit," he said, and slipping the flat automatic from his pocket, put it into the other's hand. Vandunk crossed back to the table of the Malays and after a moment Lop Mansur thrust the weapon beneath his sarong, a glitter in his snaky eyes. Natural enough, thought Cairn, that such a gift would conclude the bargain made with this Malay chief. A palace guard came in with word of the sultana's approach.

The three Malays rose. Vandunk came back to his own table and looked at the resident. A subtle change had crept over him. He was filled with eagerness, with a breath-taking excitement; his wide nostrils flared at each breath, his mask of mirthless humor had settled into grim lines. Cairn sensed instantly that the crisis had come.

"All ready, Cairn. Council meets in the big rear room; she's on her way and we must be there. Our crowd's all primed, so step out. Wake up, you blasted dog —"

And roughly, he seized the resident, dragging him to his feet with crude effort, supporting him, wasting no ceremony or politeness on him. The unhappy resident wiped his cheeks and stumbled along. Cairn followed. The three Malay chiefs came after him, but first came the two guards from outside. They joined Cairn, one on either side of him, as though escorting him alone.

For the first time, he felt an uneasy sensation, at this escort. Then it passed. Everything passed, except the astonishing scene before him, as a hanging fell away and the council room was revealed.

It is Malay custom to hold audience in the open air. So this room, for floor, had beaten earth, with young clumps of bam-

boo cunningly concealed along the walls, and vines growing, and even two chickens pecking at grain scattered among rocks at one side. The ceiling was of cloth pricked out with star-shaped holes, behind or above which many lamps were burning. Thus was made the counterfeit of an open-air meeting, light coming down from the stars.

At the door stood guards, and others were posted among the clumps of bamboos whose graceful slender shoots lined



the walls. Both palace guards, and the seamen from the ship. A group of sepoys remained in one corner, clumped there.

A dozen Malays sat in a semi-circle behind an empty mat, obviously awaiting the sultana. Two others awaited the resident and Vandunk, who took their seats. Lop Mansur and his two friends joined the council. Obeying a gesture from Vandunk, Cairn stood at one side; and he noted that the two seamen remained close at his elbows.

"Tuan-ku!" arose the chorus of voices. "Majesty!"

She had come. Cairn was startled by the sight of her. Gone was the white dress, gone every mark of the European. She was clad now in the most gorgeous of sarongs, of embroidered jackets, draped with jewels and pearls, her hair caught straight back, the little round cap of a *datto* on her head. The glinting white ivory handle of a kris showed at her waist.

"Tuan-ku!" Palm joined to palm, the seated men respectfully raised their hands in salute. The resident rose and bowed clumsily. Vandunk sat motionless.

She came into the room. Behind her were two of the palace guards; they were checked by crossed rifles, forced back, led away. She paid no attention, seemed unaware and careless. Cairn saw her face clearly in the light from above, and caught his breath at its proud beauty, at its loveliness which struck to the soul. She came forward and sank down on her mat, the council behind her, facing Vandunk and the resident.

THERE was a moment of silence; by all formality, there should be long silence, but she did not observe it. She spoke abruptly.

"You, Tuan Vandunk, seem to have called this council," she said in Malay. "Speak what is in your mind."

That was challenge from the outset. The language is given to much beating about the bush, to soft indirect meanings, to implications. She avoided all this brutally, indulged in no politeness, looked Vandunk in the eye and spoke her mind. The resident mumbled something of his astonishment and then fell silent.

"Very well, Majesty; you have commanded, I obey," said Vandunk calmly. "I am sent here to guide the best interests of your people, to watch over them and to protect them. Things have not gone well. They complain that one of their own race should sit on the throne."

"One of their own race did sit on the throne," she shot back. "He was not taken away by his people, but by yours. Where is he now? Where is Sultan Ali?"

"He is dead," said Vandunk.

"You lie," she interrupted swiftly, without emotion, in cold flatness. "You lie. He is alive. Someone told me today that he had been seen here in the island, here in Coomassin."

Now there was a silence that hurt—a silence of tiny sounds. Breaths were stopped, glances were exchanged. The old sultan alive, here? Ya Allah! But no; that was impossible. Vandunk smiled.

He was fully aware of the sensation caused by her words.

"Desperate words, vain hope," he said cuttingly, slowly. "If he were here, he would not long be alive, tuan-ku. But we are not talking of him. We have met here to talk of you, and of another who shall sit in your place."

She whitened at this, and there was a startled stir, as of distaste. Here the white man was coming to the point at once, when by all decency it should have taken an hour or two of talk at least. The Devil's Bosun was enjoying the part that he played, as Cairn could see, but the broad face showed anger, the whites of the eyes betrayed excitement, vindictive eagerness. A keen hostility crept into words and expression as he met the eyes, steady and unflinching, of the girl on the mat.

"You have no right to talk of such things," she riposted with cold contempt. "I was not placed in power by you, but by the council of the people."

"And they have decided to depose you," said Vandunk, and smiled again, terribly. "In this I have agreed, for I represent the power of the Netherlands that protects Coomassin, and the great Queen, the Bountiful, the Most High, who rules that land! Yes, majesty, I have agreed. It is not fitting that you, of Christian blood, should rule an island of true believers."

"That is not for you to say," she answered, "but for the council." She turned on her mat and faced those little brown men who stared at her. Her gaze lashed them, and her voice bit at them suddenly.

"Well, have the forest devils taken away your tongues?" she demanded. "Speak! Is it true that you will not have the daughter of Sultan Ali to rule you?"

Some hesitated, some exchanged glances. But Lop Mansur spoke out harshly.

"You are no daughter of Ali, but a daughter of the infidels whom he adopted. Yes, it is true. We are in the hands of this tuan who is sent to help us. We have agreed with him. The matter is ended."

"And you, Lop, feel strong enough to be insolent?" she asked softly. "Listen to me. Do you think I jested when I said that Sultan Ali is here in this island? Not so. Perhaps he will talk with you, Lop Mansur, one of these days."

UNEASY stirrings, glances, rolling eyes; there was something damnably convincing in her talk about the old sultan. Perhaps there was some truth in it. But Lop Mansur grinned at her and fingered his box of betel paste.

"You are a woman, Amina," he said. "Only a woman, after all. You are no longer ruler in this place, but a woman who has need of a husband and proper correction. And, as Allah liveth, you shall have it."

The words burned. They crumbled her pride; she winced before them, incredulous, disbelieving. After all, to natives a woman is but a chattel, a light thing for man's pleasure, and Malay minds regard her not highly.

Startled, she swept the brown faces, then she turned about and met the smiling evil gaze of Vandunk.

"What does this mean?" she cried out in a choked voice, as though she perceived the meaning yet shrank from it in fear and terror. "What does this mean?"

"You have heard," replied the Devil's Bosun softly. "You are no longer sultana of Coomassin. You are Amina, ward of the government, a woman—who is, indeed, in much need of a husband. You shall have that husband. You shall go with him here and now, go to his house, which is henceforth yours, and be his wife. It is a small matter."

"Are you—are you out of your senses?" she cried, and started suddenly to her feet. "You do not dare! You do not dare bring such indignity to me——"

"Men talk of daring, not women," said Vandunk, and his smile widened. Her torment, the agony of her eyes, seemed to delight him. "You are a woman, and I

give you to the person best fitted to cherish and correct you. Lop Mansur, have her taken to your own house, for she is yours."

Amina stiffened, stood staring, frozen, incapable of motion.

But Cairn, who had followed the swift words fairly well, started at hearing this decision. He moved, was about to speak, when something cold touched his neck. The seaman on his right held a pistol against him, the man on the left gripped his arm.

"Quiet, tuan, or I must shoot!" said the man with the pistol.

"Shoot and be damned," snapped Cairn. "Vandunk, listen to me! You promised—"

Vandunk looked up and smiled at him.

"I have changed my mind, Cap'n," he said blandly. That was all. The words, the look, held so indescribable a menace, so deadly a hatred, that for an instant Cairn was thunderstruck. He felt it, others felt it. Eyes went curiously to him. Amina turned and looked at him.

"Oh, be careful!"

Her voice went through him like a knife. The words brought back everything to his mind—her pleading, her reasons, her dependence upon him. "You're the one hope." My one hope, she should have said. He saw now that she was crumpled; her world had gone reeling around her; she had but one hope, indeed.

So he was gripped by indecision, and in his hesitation the moment when he might have acted, went by. Two of the native guards came forward. Lop Mansur snarled orders at them. They went to Amina and stood, one on either hand; the man to her left reached out and caught her kris, and drew it from her girdle. She made a quick little gesture, then her hands dropped.

"Take her to my house," said Lop Mansur, "and as Allah liveth, your lives answer for her keeping!"

One of the two touched her. She shrank from the touch, then walked out of the

council chamber proudly, her head held high, and was gone.

Vandunk looked at Cairn, still smiling, but there was no smile in his little black eyes. They were venomous. He made a gesture. The pistol-mouth jammed harder against Cairn's neck; his wrists were caught, twisted behind his back, and a cord lashed about them with expert ease.

"What does all this mean, Vandunk?" demanded Cairn in a low voice.

"You shall see, my friend. In due time."

There was a scrape of boots, a sharp query outside. Into the room came Mr. Drift, glancing briskly around. Vandunk beckoned him.

"Just in time, mister, just in time. I'll send a native with you for guide. Go to the apartment of the sultana, where you'll find Miss Tracey. Escort her aboard ship and lock her in her cabin until I come. I think I'll take charge of her future myself," and as he spoke, he chuckled softly.

"Very good, sir," Mr. Drift said briskly, and without apparent surprise. "But s'posin' she don't want to go?"

"Then persuade her—same as you did that Spanish girl south o' Luzon. But don't spoil her good looks, mind!"

"Aye, sir." Mr. Drift wiped his melancholy mustache. "Trust me, Cap'n."

"And, mister, you take on cargo in the morning. You can't warp in close to the godowns, so I'll send one of these native chiefs to arrange matters. The stuff will have to come out by boat, with natives to do the stowing. Watch 'em close and have your men armed. Pour in the stuff as fast as it comes aboard. Don't be too damned particular how it's stowed, either—what we want is speed. Is that fat capon of a Chinaman still aboard?"

"Aye, sir."

"We'll set him ashore last thing. Until then, put him on the supercargo's job he's signed for; we may as well use him in getting everything listed shipshape. And if anything suspicious turns up, shoot first and talk afterward. Understood?"

"Aye, sir." Mr. Drift shifted position uneasily. "But about this here Tracey woman—where'll I find her, sir?"

"I'll arrange that. And mind," said Vandunk sharply, "don't touch a thing! No looting yet. You just take her and go."

HE SPOKE rapidly. One of the Malay chiefs rose, called two guards, and they went out with Mr. Drift, who had not so much as nodded to Cairn. Some others of the Malays rose and took their departure. Vandunk looked at Lop Mansur and spoke.

"If you wish to be sultan, act like one. Make sure of the palace."

A flash leaped across the bony features of the Malay, and he rose, hand on kris. His voice struck out vibrantly; decision, leadership, authority, rang in his tone. A man to command, this; a man cruel, cold, instinct with power. Vandunk had chosen well.

He went out, and the others of the council with him, and the palace guards. The sepoys remained in one corner. The six armed seamen stood about the walls. The resident sat staring vacuously at nothing, until Vandunk extended a cheroot. He took it, seemed to waken from his abstraction, and blinked around. Then he bit at it and lit it, and settled back into dreamy absorption.

"What was it you were saying?" Vandunk jogged his arm. "About me? Miss Tracey?"

"Oh, that! Something—something about the Devil's Bosun," mumbled the resident, and fell again into frowning silence. Vandunk looked up at Cairn, and smiled blandly.

"You hear, Cap'n? Most interesting. A fine story you told me about your afternoon's escapade, too. Unfortunately, you didn't say anything about spending some time in the sultana's apartment, and coming from there here."

Cairn said nothing, but his features settled into harsh, drawn lines. He saw that

this man must know everything. No, not everything. That would be impossible—

At a word from Vandunk, one of the seamen stepped forward and handed him something. A cap. Golden oak-leaves about the band. Cairn's eyes widened on it. He started, then his heart sank. His cap, yes. He had not had it all afternoon; not since he had left the Baboo's rooms. He had forgotten his cap there. And now—

"Oh, you recognize it!" said Vandunk. "Perhaps you can tell us where to find Chandra Das, eh? And how Miss Tracey came to know so much about the Devil's Bosun? And how you came to know so much! And, indeed, what passed in the sultana's rooms—something, I think, about the ex-sultan? Yes, my dear Cap'n, you are going—"

He broke off, listening. A shrill, fierce yell drifted faintly in from outside; then other yells. A shot. A whole burst of shots. Silence again, then another shot all by itself, another yell. Vandunk nodded, and cast a grin at his six seamen, who had come closer to his mat.

"All's well, men," he observed. "Nothing to worry about. That is the new sultan putting my teachings of efficiency into practice, before he goes home to entertain his bride."

"You devil!" cried out Cairn, sudden madness flaming in his brain. "Oh, you unspeakable devil—"

Vandunk chuckled.

"No, my dear Cap'n; merely the Devil's Bosun," he rejoined. He gestured to the sepoys, and in Dutch ordered them to take post about the building and stand on guard until his own men relieved him. They saluted and obeyed, grotesque little brown men from Sumatra, with bare feet and rifles. He beckoned one of his own men and pointed to the resident.

"Take him back to the other room, get him another bottle of schnapps, and leave him."

The resident sighed, rose and departed without question, without interest, with a sodden lack of care about anything. When the curtain had fallen behind him, Vandunk looked up cheerfully at Cairn.

"Well, Cap'n! I'm interested in your conversation. What's all this about Ali? And the sultana?"

"Go to hell," said Cairn calmly, but his lips were white.

"Indeed?" The other regarded him with assumed surprise. "Do you think these men of mine can't make you talk? Strip him, two of you—leave jacket and shirt about his arms. Don't loose his wrists."

They began the work. Exclamations of surprise arose, as the holstered pistol under Cairn's arm was revealed for the first time. It was removed and handed to Vandunk.

"So! I see the name of Chandra Das burned into the leather. Then you know about him too, eh? One more thing for you to tell. Yes?"

"Go to hell," said Cairn steadily.

Vandunk looked at him and smiled—that smile which itself had come from hell.

"Well said, well said," he reflected aloud. "It would really be a pity to make you rebellious and put you into a nervous tension, my dear Cap'n. You might much better realize that you can do no damage to anyone by talking, and may save yourself considerable bother.

"Now, there's undoubtedly something to this talk about Sultan Ali, and you most certainly know what it is. You've deceived me; you've known for some time, I imagine, that I was not Mynheer Vandunk—just as Miss Tracey told the resident this evening. I fancy you know a good deal

more than you've admitted, about the murder of poor Lochaber and Andrews."

As he spoke, he lit a match, and now held it to his cheroot. He extended cheroots and matches to his five men, who accepted them grinningly. The sixth man now re-entered with word that the resident was occupied with his bottle. Vandunk nodded, and then fastened his attention anew on Cairn.

"You tricked me rather neatly, I'll admit; in fact, I was quite anxious to make use of you. We'd get on well together. You have qualities I greatly admire and need. But, that's all in the past," and he sighed regretfully.

"You must realize, Cap'n, that I've done rather a good bit of work here. Without boasting, an excellent bit of work. There's nothing like a quick, sharp blow before anyone suspects what's coming. The whole place is in my hands now, fort included. The chief natives are on my side. A new sultan will be in power tomorrow. And all within a few hours of landing."

He beamed complacently, and puffed at his cheroot, then studied the glowing end.

"You see, Cap'n, I can't allow this excellent job, the best job I ever pulled, to be imperiled by a stubborn tongue," he resumed softly. "It's really too much to be expected. I've found there are various sorts of persuasions, for various people, but fire is really the best of all. It need not even be disabling. Now, what do you think? Couldn't we get together on this information I need?"

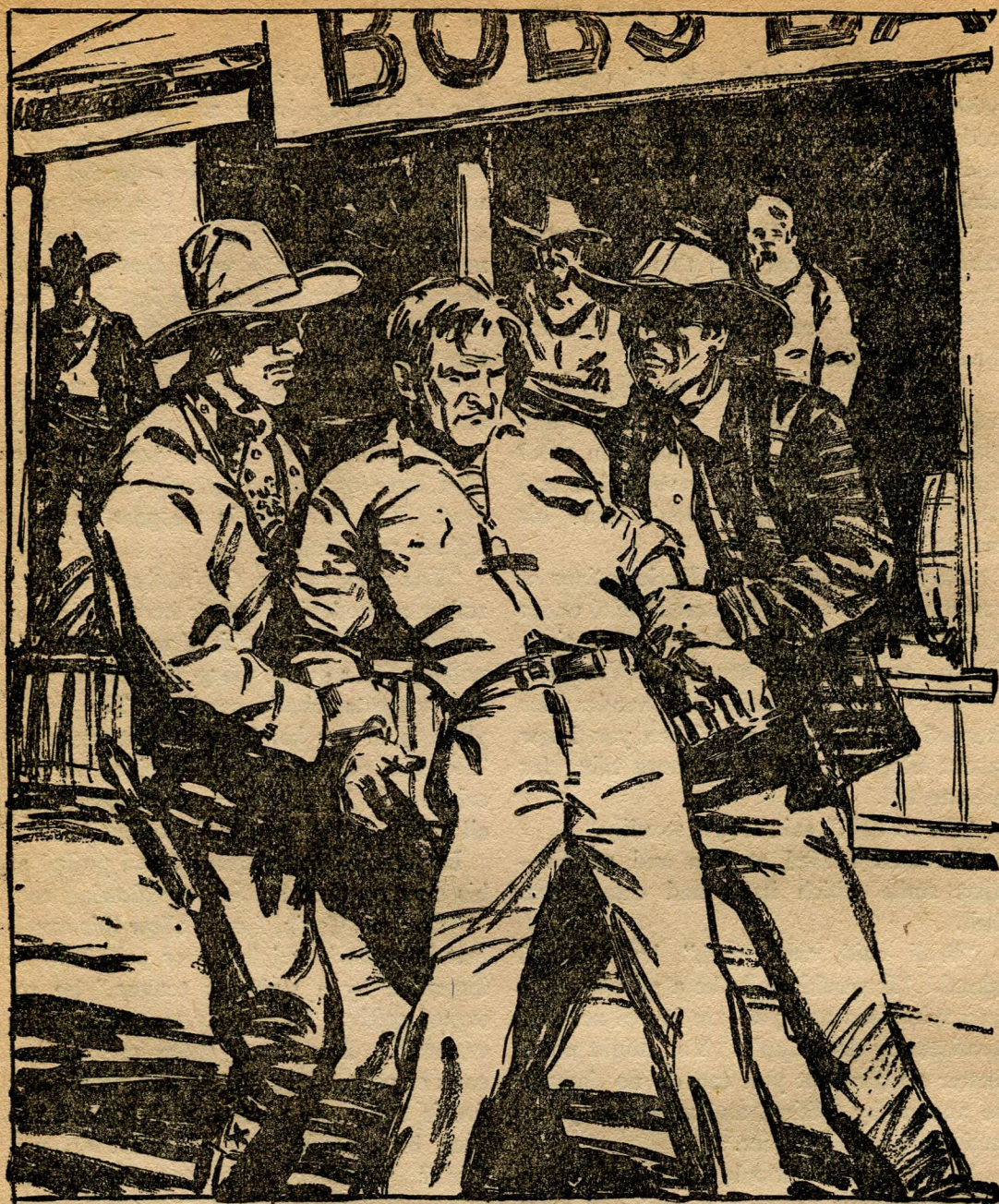
Cairn regarded him steadily, calmly.

"Go to hell."

Vandunk sighed again. "All right, then, that's exactly what I shall do, Cap'n. With you as my guest. Ready, men!"

(To be Concluded in the Next SHORT STORIES.)





CATALOGUE COWBOY AND Co.

By S. OMAR BARKER

Author of "Forty Ways," "The No-Game Hunter," etc.

EITHER the stranger did not realize that his leather-creaking, slack-reined progress down the dusty main drag of Dos Pasos was attracting a lot of attention, or else he did a good job of pretending

not to notice it. He rode stiff-backed, stiff-necked, the bridle reins gripped in a gauntleted right hand resting firmly upon the saddlehorn.

In the doorway under a sign that read "Post Office—Schurtz for Shirts and Genl.



*The Foreman
Had Asked for
Help on This
Rustling Propo-
sition, but He
Hadn't Expected
It to Come in
the Shape of
a Mail Order
Cowboy Detec-
tive, Belling
and Waving His
Tail All over
the Place*

Merchandise," the proprietor rolled a dead cigar stub from one corner of his wide, fat-lipped mouth to the other and back again as he watched. A few feet from him a thick-middled, heel-squatting hombre teetered a little on battered boot heels, eased the heavy hogleg at his hip, sluiced the plank walk brownly with cud juice, and cocked a squint-eyed face up at the leading merchant and postmaster of Dos Pasos.

"Won't be sellin' *him* none of your rai-

ment an' riggin', Sowbelly," he grinned. "Look like he's done bought out the catalogue!"

"Um! You know him, this feller?"

"Might be Adam—under them duds." The thick-middled hombre's shrugged shoulders touched the floppy brim of his black flat-crowned hat. "He's whoain' up at the Broadhorn."

Sowbelly Sam Schurtz rolled the dead cigar again. His pink right palm reached out two silver dollars.

"Maybe you wouldn't like to run down buy him a drink, Villie?"

With a face-twist that might have been meant for a wink, Bully Bill Hyatt rose, took the silver and slogged down the street with the slow arrogance of a bull. From the livery stable across the street another armed man in a flat crowned black sombrero strolled over through the reddish dust haze of twilight and squatted on his heels where Bill Hyatt had been.

LAMPS were already lit in the Broadhorn Saloon. Their yellow light gleamed upon the bright, unweathered nickel conchos of the stranger's chaps as he swaggered in through the swings. The half dozen dusty cowhands in the saloon looked up casually at first, then stared in amazement. In the hard-bitten cow village of Dos Pasos men didn't come busting into the Broadhorn togged out from heel to hat crown like a picture from the catalogue, all new at once—from gun to gut-strap.

"Damn if it ain't Mister Monkey Ward hisself!"

"Y'ought to come out an' spit on his saddle, too, Chink!"

Four or five grinning, rough dressed punchers in black, flat crowned hats shoved in behind the stranger. If he had come in more unobtrusively, even in such radiant raiment, the poorest of cow country manners would have kept their mouths shut for a while at least. But this glorified stranger strode in as if he were the man that drowned the duck. He made straight for the bar, swinging his long arms, and stuck his gloved hand across it.

Chin on his brisket with startled surprise, old Stutterin' Ike got his wet, limp hand well pumped in effusive greeting, before he realized what was happening. Cow country manners don't call for shaking hands with bartenders on sight.

"Uncork a few bottles of your best, pardner!" The stranger swung around, waved a long arm and addressed the room as if from a platform. "Gents, I go by the name of Karr—Range Detective Kenneth Karr,

rustler-wrangler by habit and profession. I'm the curly wolf of cowboy detectives. I've come here to stop this stealing on the RMD and stop it quick!"

His gloved right hand groped for his gun, missed it, groped again, found it and gripped the holt an instant, released it and cut the air again with a gesture of invitation. A lordly smile broke open the broad expanse of face that showed the red of sunburn, but little of its tan. His slightly bulging blue eyes looked them over boldly. Amusement, slightly puzzled, some of it a little wary, showed on a dozen leathery faces. Even the squinty mug of Bully Bill Hyatt wore the sour half of a grin as he bulged in through the door-wings.

"Gents, Cattle Detective Karr invites all *honest* cowmen present to step up and swaller!"

Nobody moved. There was a general swapping of grins among all the men in puncher rig—except one. After one contemptuous glance, this man kept his eyes upon the solitaire game spread on the table where he sat. Visible on his brown neck, under the brim of his weathered gray Stetson, were fuzzy little curlicues of yellow hair that needed cutting pretty badly. The brown brand of range and round-up, wind and sun, could not hide the youth of his lean face any more than the worn shabbiness of his clothing could conceal its one-time class and quality. A sort of half sullen, half hard-boiled sulkiness sagged his jaw as he slowly played his cards.

AT THE bar Detective Karr was repeating his breezy invitation. Stuttering Ike skidded empty whiskey glasses dexterously up and down the bar.

"K-k-kinder early in the e-evenin' f-fuhfer, y-y-know, honest, cu-cu-cowboys, stranger!" He ranged the bar with amber bottles.

Bill Hyatt and the rest looked questioningly toward a pair of coal black hoss-tail mustaches adorning the eagle-beaked face of a tall hombre slouching against the bar. Almost imperceptibly this man winked, and

the waiting punchers crowded to the bar, more of contempt than good fellowship in their grins.

"Mr. Detective," boomed the black-mustached hombre, "it's a pleasure! You got no idea how pleased us honest cowmen is to see a man like you sent down here to clean up this nefarious rustling business, sir! Here's to——"

Detective Karr, the greeting only half acknowledged, was already shoving his way along the bar. At the end he stopped. The man at the card table had not budged.

"You, there!" bellowed the hospitable stranger. "Maybe you didn't hear me?"

The blond hombre played up a jack.

"I heard you," he said curtly, without looking up.

How the tradition first started nobody knows. But tradition it was. However mail-orderish Kenneth Karr may have appeared as a stock detective, evidently he knew the etiquette of cow country drink-



ing. Here, it seemed, was an insult, and well nigh a dozen hard bitten range men watching to see how he would take it. He scowled ominously. He strode over within two steps of the hombre at the table. His gloved hand gripped the butt of his .45. His voice sneered with sarcasm.

"I said all *honest* cowmen, step up an' drink, cowboy! I represent the law!" He flipped over his jacket flap, displaying a cheap new star. "Now what about it?"

Chilly gray eyes gazed up at him.

"To hell with you an' the law!"

New leather squeaked as Karr's gun came out of the holster. With quiet speed the smaller man came to his feet.

"You asked for it!" Cold contempt chilled his voice, but he did not shoot. The well worn barrel of his six-gun thumped hard upon Karr's gloved knuckles. The new gun blazed, spudding a bullet into the table top, well out of line with the smaller man's body. It slipped from Karr's grip and thumped to the floor. The boyish faced hombre prodded new belt leather hard with the snout of his own gun. His slender left hand smacked open-palmed, once, twice, upon Karr's ruddy face. He stooped, picked up the other gun and laid it on the table.

Then he stepped back a couple of yards, holstered his own gun, pulled out the makin's and began to roll a smoke. He chin-pointed at the gun on the table between them.

"Don't wait on me, Mr. Detective," he said, batting his eyes. "Pick it up any time you're ready!"

With an oath Karr backed quickly up to the bar.

"To hell with it!" he growled. "I've got too much business ahead of me, gents, trailin' down rustlers, for this kind of monkey business now. Drink up, gents, I'll 'tend to that coyote later!"

IT MIGHT have been significant that, with an amused tolerance and a minimum of contemptuous rawhiding, they drank, then, with Detective Kenneth Karr. Karr watched suspiciously, but without making a move, when after a few minutes, the other hombre walked calmly out.

Presently Bully Bill Hyatt spent the two bucks Sowbelly Sam Schurtz had given him and returned to drop anchor again beside the store door.

Sowbelly Sam rolled his dead cigar.

"Vell?"

"He's wearin' a star—as new as them duds," chuckled Bully Bill. "But don't let it fret you, Sowbelly, for if he's got any brains I don't know where he totes 'em. They ain't in his head, an' they cain't be in his guts, 'cause he ain't got none."

Then he outlined what had happened.

"An' dis odder feller?" grunted Sam Schurtz.

"Todd's gone to chaw it over with him. Better light up that cigar, Sowbelly, yonder comes Michaels, an' he's got Karr sidin' him. You look a heap sweeter in a cloud of smoke!"

Michaels was the RMD ranch manager or general foreman. It was no enjoyable job, with the owners stuck to desk swivels a thousand miles away eastward, riding him, on paper, every time he sent in an accounting, for the continual heavy losses from rustling that his own honesty compelled him to report. The customary worried look on his waspish face seemed not to be lessened any by the company and unrestrained oratory of Cowboy Detective Kenneth Karr as they came up the street.

Karr jumped to hold the door open for Michaels and followed him into the store. Bully Bill Hyatt got up, lounged in after them and sat on a staple keg.

"Vell, vell! How-dee-do, Mizder Michaels!" Sowbelly Sam's cordiality gurgled through great puffs of cigar smoke from behind the counter. "Ve don't see you much in town, Mizder Michaels! Have a cigar?"

The little cowman shook his head morosely.

"No thanks, Schurtz. Bull—a dozen sacks, please. You couldn't guess, I reckon, why I'm not in oftener?"

"Guess? Py cholly, Mizder Michaels, vat an ol' storekeeper know 'bout such dings? You don't like the town, maybe?"

"I don't like," said Foreman Michaels with some bitterness, "that the minute I'm off the ranch ever damn loose rope in the country knows it an' goes to swingin'!"

"You mean," demanded Detective Karr loudly, "that them rustlers become unusually active when you're in town? Why, that's fine, Mr. Michaels! Now that I'm here, you just stay in town, see? That'll give me my chance to rush out there and grab 'em red-handed! And by the way, Mr. Schurtz—I noticed the name over the

door—let me introduce myself. As one of the leading citizens of Dos Pasos, I know you're goin' to be mighty pleased to know that the RMD owners have sent me down here from K. C. to stop this rustling business an' stop it quick! Karr's the name—Range Detective Karr!"

HE STUCK out a gauntleted hand. "Py cholly, bleased to meet you, Mizder Garr! Make my store your headquarters, Mizder Garr—unless, maybe you like the company better by the saloon, eh?"

Karr scowled.

"You heard about that, too, eh? Well, don't let it fool you. I ain't through with that hombre, yet." He lowered his voice. "Jest between us right here, I'm onto him. Gents, he's one of your main rustlers, or my name ain't Ken Karr!"

"Come on," said Michaels dryly, "more room for wind outside."

A few yards down the street Michaels pulled Karr to a halt.

"You double damned fool," he said disgustedly. "The feller that slapped your face ain't even been around here more'n a week—an' hardly outa the saloon! This rustlin's been goin' on for months. Now you listen to me. Them owners may of sent you down here, like you say, but I'm still bossin' this end of the job, an' I don't want no part of you. Bust on back to K. C. an' blow up in their faces if you like, but git loose from me before I bust you one in that damn big mug, you savvy!"

"But Mr. Michaels, if you don't kinder coöperate, how can I——?"

"Coöperate my hind leg!" Michaels spoke plenty angrily now. "I got troubles enough without nursin' idiots. Yonder's your hoss. If you cain't git on him by yerself, I'll boost yuh—but git on him, an' travel! I hear of you big-windyin' around here agin in the name of the RMD brand, damn if I don't shoot yuh on sight!"

With a sharp, swift movement the little foreman whirled the bigger man around. The kick landed true, smack on the pants

seat. A moment later Range Detective Karr was riding out of Dos Pasos the way he had come—but faster. It was too dark now for Michaels to see that he was grinning. Pleased, maybe, to be dusting out of this inhospitable village so soon.

THE hombre with the black mustaches found the blond young puncher currying his sorrel horse by lantern light in the lively stable.

"By God, cowboy," he said, "you kinder smack 'em, don't you? My name's Todd. Newcomer here, ain't you?"

"Yeah—an' a soon-goer. Got to find me a job some place. They seem mighty scarce around here."

"Maybe," said Todd judicially, "you ain't asked the right places."

"Where else? I've bumped the RMD an' the Ladder X. There ain't no more big spreads, an' I notice all these little two-bit outfits got more hands than cattle already. Like yours for instance."

"Still an' all," grinned Todd. "I might use another hand awhile. Some o' my boys got little brands of their own to look after. Don't mind me askin' where you come frum, Mister—Mister——"

"Smith—only the first name ain't Mister. Man hollers 'Whitey,' my ears gen'rally goes up. An' I don't mind your askin' where I hail from, Todd—if you don't mind me not tellin' you. Maybe I left there too fast to remember."

The gray eyes twinkled a little without losing their glint of hardness.

Todd lit his smoke, cleared his throat.

"Let's talk turkey, Whitey. I been seein' you around. I don't like to see a man around without no work, an' I could use another man. You ride an' rope as cool as you played it this evenin', why you're him. Your work won't interfere none with your pleasure—where lockin' horns with Mr. Range Detective Karr is concerned. I run the BXB out south."

"You've hired you a cowhand, Todd," said Whitey Smith laconically. "Which-away's the wagon?"

FOREMAN MICHAELS had no settin' hen's job. The RMD was a big spread, sprawling its loosely bounded range from hell to Halifax; and thanks to the ignorance or stinginess, or both, of its owners, he had to run it year in, year out shorthanded. It would have been a hard riding job for a crew of twenty. Under owners' orders Michaels ran it with ten, counting the cook. Nine underpaid, hard riding fools, loyal to the foreman who stuck to this sinking ship of his for no apparent reason but that he was of a sticking breed.

For as sure as daily sunset, rustling was sinking the RMD—steady, systematic rustling of every variety. Not the least of it was an underground traffic in hides—hides ripped from the carcasses of RMD cows, whose unbranded or sleepered calves were never found, or at least could never be surely identified again.

"You say you know pretty well who some of these rustlers are," wrote the absentee owners, "why don't you have them arrested and prosecuted?"

It was no use to try to tell them that knowing is one thing, proving another; that law out here was still a helpless, suckling infant in such matters, the nearest sheriff taking his ease at the county seat a hundred miles away. Give a man a dozen well paid gunmen to back up his cowboys and something might be done. But the owners apparently had fish in too many other kettles. It was up to him, with the crew he had, and if these losses from stealing continued they'd be obliged to sell out the ranch, even at a loss.

For Michaels, such sale might well be a bitter dose to swallow. No cow foreman enjoys having a ranch sold out from under him, especially on account of conditions he has failed to cure. Besides, in this case, Michaels had a hunch who the buyer might turn out to be.

It was a mess and the waspy little foreman didn't like it. He had appealed repeatedly for help on this rustling proposition, but he hadn't expected it to come in the shape of a mail order cowboy detective,

beller and waving his tail all over the place.

No wonder, then, that he felt pretty ringy when he got back to the ranch the next day to find that the man he had kicked out of Dos Pasos had been there ahead of him, with his brags and ballyhoo.

"Meet Kenneth Karr, gents! Range detective an' rustler-wrangler de luxe. I'm here to clean out this stealin' on the RMD for you boys, an' clean it out quick!"

It hadn't been belief in such talk, but rather a disgusted desire to get shed of him as quickly as possible that had made old Bat-Eye Williams, the ranch coosie, give the stranger a grudging supply of rations.

"Where'd this damn fool head for when he left here?"

Bat-Eye waved a rheumatic arm in a wide gesture that took in half the world.

"Nev' mind askin' *me*," he grumbled. "When he don't know hisownse'f, how the hard side o' hell you figger me to?"

All that Michaels said about it to the hands was:

"Any of you boys stumble onto a picture-book puncher squeakin' his leather around anywheres on our range, I don't give a damn if you leave him for the buzzards!"

But it is doubtful if the buzzards would have been interested. They were already fat, and within that week a new feast awaited them in one of the scores of brush hidden draws far down toward the southwest line of the RMD range; nine skinned carcasses of wet cows, and not a one of the nine calves in sight. The slaughter was about a day old when Michaels and two of his cowboys found it.

Cursing they read the sign: half a dozen riders, two or more pack horses. The cows had not been shot. They had been roped and axed. There were three trails of wind-dimmed tracks leaving the *matanza*; three riders driving the calves one way, two leading the horses packed with the cowhides another, and one rider alone, zigzagging, skulking, crisscrossing the other trails—obviously a rear guard scout.

The two young punchers with Michaels

were good cowhands, but they were not hardbitten gunmen. Nevertheless they looked carefully to the loading of their six-guns, and with the foreman, set out grimly on the trail of the driven calves. After a mile it got hard to follow and they traveled slow.

SUDDENLY the smacking sound of shots jerked them up, listening. The shots, briefly spaced, continued. They seemed to come from another brushy draw not more than half a mile away. Probably still on RMD range.

Foreman Michaels' eyes wore a grim light.

"Be worth the money to ketch some of 'em redhanded, boys," he said shortly. "Or it might be that Jimpson or one of the others has run into trouble. We better take us a look."

They swerved swiftly westward, using the spurs. From the flat ridgetop they could see nothing down in the brushy cove



beyond, but the shooting continued. And now they heard, too, the thump of galloping hoofs.

Michaels had meant to sneak down into the cove afoot, but at that sound he changed his mind.

"We better rush 'em, boys. They're on the move!"

Their faces brush-whipped at every jump, the three men wolfed it down into the cove, keeping their gun hands free.

At the edge of a small juniper dotted clearing the wizened foreman suddenly jerked rein. Their mouths agape, the two cowhands yanked up beside him, staring in

amazement. Yonder across the clearing something heavy swayed gently, hanging from a juniper limb. But it was not a man. It was a gunny sack, ballasted with rocks. And before it, galloping back and forth, emptying his six-gun at the swaying target each time he passed, was a rider—a rider whose leather gear squeaked and creaked with newness.

"Hail, hello an' howdy, gents!" shouted Cowboy Detective Karr cordially. "Join me in a little target practice?"

Fluently, bitterly, Foreman Michaels cursed him.

"Why—why Mister Michaels!" Karr looked painfully puzzled. "Yesterday I seen some fellers at a distance, drivin' off some calves. I jest knowed they must be some of them rustlers, so I jest snuck back here to kinder practice up on my shootin', so when I take in to follow 'em I won't be missin' my shots an' wastin' ammunition! Y'see I ain't been——"

"Shut up!" Foreman Michaels was loosening his lass rope. "By God, you addle-headed kindergarden cowboy, I aim to git rid of your prankin' if I got to hang you to do it!" He started to swing the loop.

With a yowl like a spooked cattymount Cowboy Detective Karr swung suddenly down to the far side of his horse like an Indian, the tall bay whirled and lunged for the brush. Before Foreman Michaels could grab out his gun, the rider and horse were gone; and in the surprise of their sudden going, the shots of the two RMD punchers missed.

As one man they clapped spurs to their mounts and started in pursuit. But their foreman, still cursing, shouted them back.

"To hell with him!" he snorted. "We got bigger fish to fry! We better git back to our trailin'!"

But out on the sand flats calf tracks and horse tracks alike petered out, whipped to invisibility by the wind. At dark they gave it up. It was well into the night that the three got back to the ranch, empty handed.

THE tow headed cowboy who called himself Whitey Smith didn't need magic spectacles to perceive that Blackie Todd's BXB was a growing brand. Sleeper a calf with a light-run RMD connected, and any fool with a hot iron could quickly make a BXB out of it. And several of Todd's men had brands equally appropriate. If the method looked to him dangerously bald-faced and obvious, he made no comment. The true test of any method of thievery is how well you get away with it, and apparently Todd's gang had little to worry about on that score. As long as they saw to it that they were never caught redhanded it would take hell's hottest lawyer and a damn sight stricter court than could be mustered at Dos Pasos to hang anything on them. It looked like a safe, cinch system to Whitey Smith.

Todd put him at roustabout work at first and said nothing about the business that sent the others riding, singly and in groups, out and in at all hours of the night. Often enough they rode northward, but returned from the rough, broken country lying off southwest.

Whitey Smith took his orders and kept his mouth shut.

But one evening when Todd and a batch of his crew rode in home an hour after dark, following one of their frequent loafing days in town, Whitey Smith was gone. When he rode in toward midnight Todd was waiting for him alone out by the saddle sheds. He greeted him harshly.

"Where the hell you think you been, cowboy?"

Whitey Smith did not answer in words. His thin grin showed faintly in the moonlight. He chunked a heavy sack down from behind his saddle, shook two fresh, neatly skinned cowhides out of it.

"Weaned you a coupla calves this evenin', Todd. Kinder wanted to see if I'd been manure-forkin' around so long I'd fer-got how."

The big, black-mustached hombre cursed softly but not disapprovingly. His hand went groping into the damp bundle, feeling

for the brand. Instead it found that some of the right hip-hide was missing, neatly half-mooned out. The RMD brand rode the right hip. So, for that matter, did the BXB.

"I always figger to earn my wages," said Whitey Smith a little belligerently. "You don't like it you can go to hell, an' I'll draw my time!"

"Percentage," said Todd. "Ain't much due you—yet. If this job don't backfire on you, I reckon you'll do to stay till you earn some more. Only don't bring these damn hides here. I'll show you where to take 'em, kid. An' don't fergit; you git yourself caught an' there ain't ary one of us ever seen you before—outside of the saloon. You savvy?"

"I savvy," answered Whitey Smith sharply. "An' don't you foster the idee that I'm runnin' with you wolves because I like you, either. It's a job, an' I aim to work at it, that's all."

Todd scowled.

"You talk purty brash fer a young'un, but it's all right by me as long as the—er—the work goes on. Only don't ever git you the notion that you can tough it with Blackie Todd or any of my men like you done with that greenhorn detective, Smith. We ain't that breed of dog."

THAT same night Jimpson, of the RMD, reported "strange doin's" to his boss. That afternoon, riding the outlying ridges for the purpose of drifting in what stuff he might find there to the more open mesas near the ranch, he had spied a lone rider, a long way off, working cattle.

"Looked like he was ropin' calves," said Jimpson, "an' workin' fast. But I couldn't make out no sign of smoke, so he wasn't brandin'. I lit out to come on him as quick as I could, but he must have had the ravens sharp-eyein' for him, an' got notice I was comin', because time I got there, he'd done took out. The sign showed he'd been ropin' all right. An' by the tracks, he knowed how. Nope, nary a sleepered calf, nary a cut ear, nary a skun cow like they

been doin'. But I did notice somethin' kinder funny. Dozen or more of them calves had dirty noses!"

"Damn it, Jimpson," snapped Foreman Michaels, "you pick a hell of a subject to git funny on. They're rustlin' us to death an' you find calves with dirty noses!"

"Hold on a minute!" Jimpson's face flushed angrily. The long strain of overwork, of bafflement, of bitterness that the best they could do availed nothing to stop the plague that was on them, had the nerves of the RMD hands rubbed raw. Sharp speech was like so much salt in open wounds. "Damn it, I'm talkin', Mike. You don't care to listen, say so!"

Michaels batted his eyes wearily.

"Right," he said quietly. "Go ahead."

"Their noses," Jimpson went on, "them calves' noses looked kinder smudged, somehow, specially in the middle where their tongues don't reach. Blackish. Sooty, only maybe they was likewise kinder greasy."

"All right, Jimpson, spring it an' git it over with." Foreman Michaels growled it out.

But Jimpson had no joke to spring. He was dead serious. He had trailed this hombre till it came dark on him, then shagged it on home.

"Sucker bait, I reckon," surmised the foreman. "Somebody stagin' a ropin' where he was sure you'd see him, while the rest done the dirty work some place else. Smeared them noses to work on your curiosity an' delay you follerin' him, maybe. Or maybe we've all rode ourselves kinder crazy, I dunno. But let's git to bed. We're ridin' out agin at three."

He'd had a letter from the owners that day. Old Sowbelly Schurtz, as he often did, had sent a man out with it. It was a favor Michaels never thanked him for. For a postmaster, Schurtz took too much interest in the mail of some of his patrons. The letter had mentioned that they were sending one Kenneth Karr, expert detective, to take hold of the rustling situation.

"We expect you to give him every co-operation. If, between you, you can show no definite results toward curbing the losses from stealing and landing the thieves in jail, and that very shortly, it is our intention to sell. We understand from the agent of our prospective buyer that he does not plan to retain any of the present working force of the ranch on the payroll. As you know, it is only the provision in our deceased uncle's will that has compelled us to keep you on as foreman, Mr. Michaels, to date. Now, with the assistance we are sending you, we expect results."

*"Very truly yours,
"McDollin Brothers."*

Before he went to bed, Foreman Michaels crushed the letter and jammed it in the stove.

"You citified nuts wasn't ol' Rick McDollin's nephews, I'd of quit you plumb back before the devil set fire to hell!"

THEREAFTER, when the rustlers rode, Whitey Smith rode with them, or he rode alone, on the same sort of business.

At the pink of sunrise, a few days later, Todd, Whitey and three others, hustling a little cut of calves before them, paused on a ridge hump for a brief backward look. Into the grass cove where they had just left, half a mile away, came a lone rider, at a dead gallop. He yanked his horse to a sudden stop, his arms flapping.

Todd focussed upon him quickly with field glasses.

"Wavin' us to stop," he grunted. "Gettin' out a carbine."

Bright metal glinted in the pink sunlight back in the cove. A faraway whapping sound whipped the air. A rifle bullet whined off a rock thirty steps short of them. Another, closer but still a wide miss. Another, a dozen steps to the right.

"Well, by God!" exclaimed Blackie Todd. "Look who's shootin' at us!"

He offered Whitey the glasses, but Whitey did not need them. Even at half

a mile Cowboy Detective Karr's mail order finery with its flaming orange bandanna and bright blue shirt, stood out as recognizable as a bonfire.

"Chink," Todd addressed the nearest rustler, "it could be that tin-horn has recognized us. You an' me better slip back there an'——"

"Like hell," Chink broke in with a snarl. "Supposin' he's jest baitin' the trap, with ol' Michaels an' his whole damn outfit hid out there to jump us? We better drift, boss!"

"Michaels with him?" Todd laughed. "Hell, don't you know ol' pewee Mike's done run him off the place two, three times?"

"Hell, then," grunted Chink, "that jump-in' jack ain't gonna follow us. He ain't gonna——"

"He's got eyes, ain't he? An' a tongue to talk with? Come on with me, Chink, an' purty soon he won't have!"

Sullenly Chink whirled his horse around to follow. Quickly Whitey Smith jumped his horse ahead of Todd's. There was a hard glint in his gray eyes, a cold, half grin on his thinnish lips.

"Hold it, Todd!" He spoke quietly but sharply. "Karr's my meat!"

"But you're a new hand here, Whitey. You——"

"Hell, if he takes a notion to run for it an' gits away would you rather he'd recollect seein' you an' Chink, or me? Besides——" he grinned dryly—"Karr's owin' me, ain't he? You goin' to beat him out of his chance to pay up?"

TODD scowled at him. He scratched the black haired head under his flat-crowned black sombrero thoughtfully.

Occasional bullets still whined from the rocks down in front of them, but the range was long, even for a good hand with a carbine, and this hombre's shots were growing wilder and wilder.

"You want him, eh?" Todd's eyes wore a crafty look. "All right, feller, go git him. But this ain't no face-slappin' party,

you savvy? Dead men don't twist no tails. If he runs, you ketch him—or else!"

The cold gleam in Whitey Smith's gray eyes was answer enough for Blackie Todd. He would have said it was the look of a killer, cold blooded, deliberate.

As the rump of Whitey Smith's horse joggled out of sight down the steep hill into the junipers, Todd turned to the puncher called Chink with a wide grin.

"Nothin' like keepin' a damn fool or two around to do the dirty work, eh, Chink?"

But it was part of Blackie Todd's system to keep close track of things. After he and Chink had spurred their horses out



of sight across the ridge toward where the others had gone on with the rustled calves, Todd lit down and sneaked back afoot to a good, well hidden vantage point behind a boulder and focussed his field glasses again.

Scattered about the cove were the peeled carcasses of four or five freshly slaughtered cows. Afoot, leading his horse, the carbine back in its boot, Cowboy Detective Karr was going from one to another of the carcasses, looking at them, turning them over, standing beside them, scratching his head in puzzlement. He seemed wholly unaware that one of the men he had been shooting at had dropped back and was heading his way.

Blackie Todd admired the way Whitey went at the job. He wasted no time in sneaking. Speed was the important thing—before this catalogue cowboy might take

a notion to light a shuck for safer parts. Todd could glimpse Whitey's approach through shuttling breaks in the juniper timber. It was direct. Todd himself would have figured to pot the man from ambush and come on back, but he found nothing to criticize in the fact that Whitey, apparently, meant to give the greenhorn his chance to a fair and open fight. He broke into the opening at a long lope. His gun spat sharply, once.

Todd grinned to see Detective Karr jump a yard straight up in the air, whirl around and scramble to the saddle like a scared wildcat taking to a tree. But to the rustler's surprise, Karr didn't even have sense enough to run for it. With a wild hand he one-reined his horse around and charged at a joggling gallop straight to meet Whitey Smith. He yelled like a Comanche, and the hand tugging at his six-gun finally brought it out.

Neatly, skillfully Whitey Smith reined up a little, circled and got beyond the other, cutting him off from flight. But even then Todd saw that Smith was waiting to shoot, giving the man his chance to make a fight of it.

Suddenly Karr's six-gun began to boom as he charged. But even through the field glasses Todd could see that it was the wild, futile shooting of a man who either didn't know how to aim, or else was too scared to do it.

THEN he saw Whitey Smith's gun barrel swing up, then level down, gripped in a cool, steady hand. Even before the sound of the report reached his ears, Todd saw Karr sway in the saddle, drop both gun and reins, grab at the saddle horn, miss and lunge heavily to the ground. One boot kicked a little, then, in a huddled lump, he lay still.

Calmly Whitey Smith holstered his gun. His eyes swung around in a circle, scanning the brush. Satisfied, apparently, that no danger lurked therein, he swung down and walked over to the man on the ground. He stooped and rolled him over. He

poked a hand methodically into the blue shirt front, held it there a second, pulled it out, wiped it on the down man's pants.

Still calmly, but without any waste of time, he looped his lass rope over the new boots, swung up and dragged Cowboy Detective Karr to the edge of a shallow arroyo and rolled him in.

He started to remount, then, as if it were an afterthought, he jumped down into the arroyo. For a moment he was down there, out of sight. When he climbed back out, Todd's glasses caught a glint of bright metal, like nickel, in his hand.

When Whitey Smith arrived back at the BXB hangout, coming in late by a round-about way, lest his tracks lead some possible follower upon the trail of Todd and his men, he showed Todd a four-bit, nickel plated star. On it were engraved the words: "Private Detective."

Whitey's face wore a chilly, sardonic smile.

"It costs a feller to wear such things—sometimes," he remarked, and stuck it back in his pocket.

"By God," said Blackie Todd, "you better drift south, come winter. Cold as your blood is, a mighty light frost would freeze it!"

LATE that afternoon Todd came to Whitey Smith's bunk and shook him awake.

"No ridin' tonight, cowboy, after what happened this morning," he said. "Me an' the rest of the boys are lopin' in for a little social evenin' at the Broadhorn."

"Sure, I figgered we would," yawned Whitey.

"Not you. You got to kinder lay low for a spell till we see what's what. A little friendly rustlin' is one thing, murder's another black horse of a different color. Somebody finds the carcass in that arroyo, they might even persuade the sheriff over here from Paso Borrado. He ain't much of a hand to spit ag'inst the wind on a rustlin' deal, but he might try it on a murder, an' we don't want him nosin'

around. We ain't ready for no showdown with them RMD fellers yet, nohow, case they take a notion to ride in all swelled up. So we won't be needin' you. You stay here, savvy!"

Whitey rolled out and began pulling on his boots.

"Think I'll ride in, too, Todd. I kinder like them fancy drinks Stutterin' Ike mixes to go with my solitaire."

"Damn it, *no!*" Todd's voice came back roughly, plumb out loud. At the tone several punchers left off slickin' up and loafed over closer, watching. "I don't want you with us, an' I'm givin' the orders."

"I heard you," said Whitey Smith curtly. Busy with his boots he did not even look up. "Heard you mention 'murder,' too, didn't I? I never hardly liked that word, Mister Todd. I jumped Stutterin' Ike for misusin' it, first day I was in Dos Pasos." He reached for a black string necktie.

The other hombre's big hand reached it first, snatched it away. He laughed, showing white teeth.

"Maybe you didn't hear me, kid. You won't need no necktie tonight. You're stayin' here."

Whitey Smith stood up.

"Get this, Todd," he said softly. "Out on the work I take orders. My goin's an' comin's otherwise, I decide for myself."

"Tough, eh?"

"Maybe you'd call it that. I'll thank you for that neck-string."

The cowboy called Chink let out a snicker. Todd turned his head to scowl at him. As he turned back one hand dropped to his gun. The slight tensing of muscles in Whitey Smith's arm extended visibly to his fingers. His six-gun hung in its holster on a bunk nail, not six inches away.

"A killin'," remarked the younger man as impersonally as if he were discussing some fine point of solitaire play, "ain't always murder."

Todd's right hand quit his gun holt as casually as he could make it. His left

handed Whitey the black string tie. He laughed boisterously, as one who makes a lame joke and has to furnish his own applause.

"Just a damn spoilt kid, ain't you?"

"Sure," said Whitey Smith, putting on the tie. "An' on my way to town."

FROM the doorway under the "Schurtz for Shirts" sign Sam Schurtz watched Blackie Todd and his riders string into town, throng the hitch-rail and stroll into the Broadhorn.

"All right, Villie," he grunted. "I lock up now. Maybe you like run down wisit a vile mit Dodd—an' make acquaintance mit dot cotton-top feller, eh? Don't be long."

Bully Bill Hyatt rose from squatted heels on the sidewalk beside the door, gave Schurtz a squint-eyed grin, and slogged off down the street. He took out his .45 and squinted at it as he went, then shoved it back in the holster carefully.

Whitey Smith was already seated alone at a small table, playing solitaire. It was a warm evening. The unscreened window giving on an alley at his back was open a few inches from the bottom. Todd and the rest lolled at the bar. Twilight lamp-light glinted on busy glassware. Bully Bill gave them a surly howdy and crowded up beside Todd. He drank, slid the empty glass out in front of Todd, his thick fingers clamped around it.

"Todd, take a look at this!" The glass crushed to pieces in his grip. "Sometimes jest takes one big squeeze—all your fingers, Todd—to bust 'em. You oughta try it—now!"

"Bueno," said Todd in a low voice. "Tomorrow night."

"Tonight," growled Hyatt. "No time like the present."

"Tomorrow night," said Todd stubbornly. "Got a sore hand tonight."

His fingers twirled a black mustache tip to point toward Whitey Smith. Then he pulled Hyatt aside and talked to him a moment in a low tone.

In his slow, bullish gait Bill Hyatt rolled over to Whitey's table and bent over it, a thick palm disarranging the cards.

"Schurtz wants to see you, Smith, up at the store."

"I like it here," said the cowboy, raising cold gray eyes. "An' I'll thank you to pull your paw off of these cards!"

FOR once Bully Bill Hyatt's heavy, squint-eyed face registered surprise. He grinned then, but it was not a pleasant looking display.

"Figger you're tough, eh? Well, you ain't dea'in' with no catalogue cowboy now, kid, like the freak you rolled into the arroyo this mornin'—after he'd missed his first shots."

It was Whitey's turn now to show surprise.

"News does get around, don't it?" he smiled.

"Murder," Hyatt spoke slowly, calculatingly, "gits itself heard of—an' might even make trouble, unless a feller's got the right friends backin' him. You better come on up to the store. The postmaster might have some mail for you."

"You call it murder?" Whitey's voice remained cool and casual. "You might kinder have your loop jangled, Mister Hyatt. That's a word I don't like. Suppose you ask Todd what he saw through the glasses. An' once more, I'll thank you to get off of my cards."

It had been some years since Bully Bill Hyatt's messages from Dos Pasos' leading citizen, Sowbelly Sam Schurtz, had been met with argument, much less cool unconcern. Reluctantly Hyatt moved his hand back from the cards. It was his right hand—and Hyatt was right-handed with his gun. The hand swung at his side. His voice rumbled threateningly, like a bull's.

"Maybe you didn't hear me, kid. The Boss says come up to the store."

Whitey shoved back a little in his chair. His face was expressionless, except for a strange, cold humor in the eyes.

"I've never met Mr. Schurtz personally,

I believe. Doubtless a very pleasant gentleman—but since when is he my boss, Hyatt?”

Todd and the others were silent now, watching, listening.

“Excuse me,” said Bully Bill mockingly. “I supposed you knowed. Well, you know now. Come on!”

If the young cowboy was either surprised or impressed his expression failed to show it. He shuffled the deck leisurely. Bully Bill backed up a step to stand clear of the table. The men at the bar drifted with seeming casualness toward the far end of the bar, out of line with the two by the window. They seemed to know instinctively what Bully Bill Hyatt’s stance indicated.

As if at the sound of their movement Whitey Smith looked up. Mock surprise lighted his face.

“What? You still here, Hyatt? When you go, you can tell Mr. Schurtz I’ll be pleased to make his acquaintance any time he wishes—*here!*”

A stuttery snicker came from behind the bar, quickly smothered into a cough. An oath ripped from the heavy lips of Bully Bill Hyatt. His hand hovered, ready, not six inches out and down from his gun holt.

“Get up, you damned insolent little snipe, before I——”

But the “little snipe” was up, already.

“My powder’s dry, Hyatt!” The voice was dry, too, and though neither man had touched his gun yet, the smoky air was suddenly flavored with the sharp presence of imminent death. Two men, eye to eye with death—and each other, ready to draw.

IN THAT split second while they stood thus, the keen black eyes of Todd saw and judged the two quickly. And his judgment was that Bill Hyatt’s time had come.

“Look out, Bill, he’ll be too fast for——”

A shot roared out. Only one. And it did not come from the gun of either of the two men standing there. Bill Hyatt’s .45 thumped to the floor. His left hand

crossed to grip and hold the shattered wrist of his right.

Behind Whitey Smith a fringed gauntlet gripping a smoking gun jerked back through the open window into the dark. Almost instantly there came a jingle of spurs, then the thuddy sound of a horse, put suddenly to the lope.

Bully Bill Hyatt backed up to lean against a table, his bullish shoulders heaving with the vigor of his cursing, blood dripping from his wrist. Whitey Smith’s fingers let his .45 slip back down into the



holster. Blackie Todd took one step toward the door.

“Out, boys! We got to git that——”

“Hold it, Todd!” Smith’s voice was sharp now, and quick, but it was deadly cold, too. Todd stopped.

“You can believe it or go to hell,” Whitey Smith was saying. “That shot from outside was as big a surprise to me as it was to you. But I’m tellin’ you—it saved this hombre’s life, not mine. Anybody present don’t like it, however, you can settle it here, with me. Todd? Chink? Billings? Pedro? I’m a-waitin’, boys!”

Two or three hands seemed to tense a little, then relax, Todd’s among them. Then the big man laughed harshly.

“By God,” he said, “we ain’t nursemaids to Bill Hyatt, boys. But I’m givin’ you some friendly advice, Smith; you keep your tail up thisaway around here, one of these days you’ll jump the wrong dog! You savvy?”

“My tail’s still up, Todd. Bring on your dog!”

“Forget it, kid!” Blackie Todd’s voice tried to sound genial. “Jest a little friendly

warnin', that's all. Come on an' have a drink!"

"No, thanks," said Whitey Smith crisply. "Somebody better be fixin' up this hombre's arm. I've got a solitaire game I want to play out, if——"

AT THE swings a floor board creaked heavily. With ponderous haste the fat figure of Sam Schurtz bulged in. A man with a gun lolled in behind him.

"Chentlemen! Chentlemen!" He rolled the dead cigar in his lips sternly. "Villie! You t'ink I vait on you all night? Shootings, eh? Vat goes on here?"

"J-j—just a l-l-little f-fuh-fuh-riently disagreement, M-m-muh-mister Schurtz," began Stuttering Ike. "S-s—some-b-b-body m-m-mentioned m-m-muh-murder, an'——"

"Look here, Sowbelly," Bill Hyatt spoke up over the wound Chink was bandaging with a bandanna, chin-pointing at Whitey Smith who sat at his table again, starting a new game of solitaire, "this damn little snipe says to hell with comin' up to the store. He goes for his gun an' I give him a fair break to draw it, an' somebody else plugs me. By God, I aim to know who an'——"

"Villie!" Somehow, out of that soft mass of flesh Sam Schurtz's voice came no longer like the voice of a fat, good-humored storekeeper. In it was a hard, sinister authority. "Villie! Todd! Ve have no more dis qvarreling, dis gun fight, you understand? You dink I pay you to stir up monkey-business! You, at de table dere! Your name iss Schmidt? I want to talk to you, young man!"

Schurtz's piggy eyes narrowed in a look of sharp appraisal. Tough young men, reasonably inclined, he might find useful in his business—future if not present. Whitey Smith looked up with a thin grin.

"Talk away," he said. "Only I've got a word to say to Todd first. Todd, it's ten seconds till nine o'clock. By nine I'll have my belly full of this outfit. In other words, at nine, figger I've quit."

"Qvittin'?" Sowbelly rubbed his fat hands. His voice was purring again now. "But Mister Schmidt, after the goot job you done today, is no time to qvit! You an' Dodd git togedder on the pay, eh? He could raise the wages. Or maybe——" his gurgly tone thinned down a little—"maybe you like better to talk mit dot sheriff at Paso Borrado about it, eh? No, my poy, I t'ink—*himmel!*"

Through the swings, grimy faced, disheveled, a great dirty bandage swathed around his head, left arm in a sling, walking groggily, stepped a tall man in cowboy rig that, for all its dirt, had not been many weeks out of the package. But even so, Cowboy Detective Kenneth Karr, whom Todd had seen Whitey drag into an arroyo and leave for the buzzards, had not lost all his swagger. They stared at him, all of them, their jaws sagging with surprise. Stuttering Ike stood as if paralyzed, the whiskey glass he was wiping held up on two fingers. With a swift, startled looking movement Whitey Smith snapped to his feet, upsetting the table in his haste. He backed against the wall.

Todd's hand dropped to his gun. Then when he saw that Karr's right hand held a .45 cocked, and that the man was paying no attention to any of them but Whitey Smith, he withdrew it, waiting. For all his grotesque garb, his shaky walk, there was a deadly look in Karr's eyes, a snarl on his lips.

And he was heading straight toward Whitey Smith.

"Hold it, boys," said Todd in a low tone. "Let 'em kill each other—then if they don't——"

AS HE advanced Karr's snarl grew to words. Hoarse, croaking words.

"Shoot down a detective in pursuit of his official duty, will you? Leave me to die like a dog, eh? Now I've got you where I want you, you——"

"Don't! Don't shoot! Wait!" For the first time since his first public appearance in Dos Pasos, Whitey Smith's voice was

shrill, unsteady with a tremor that sounded convincingly like fear. He backed up another step as Karr advanced toward him, kicking aside the tables. On the faces of Todd, of Sowbelly Schurtz, of Bully Bill Hyatt, even, appeared slow, satisfied grins, as the hands of the young puncher who had toughed it so brash with them began slowly to go up shoulder high before the menace of Karr's gun.

A yard in front of him Karr paused to gloat, loudly, in gusty, swaggering melodrama.

"Slap my face, eh? Refuse to drink with me! Shoot me down like a dog! Now—*go for your gun!*"

Like a streak of lightning Whitey Smith's hands came down. Like a second streak of the same, Cowboy Detective Karr whirled and stood beside him. Together, steady as sure death, they looked levelly across the tumbled tables. Karr's gun was out, ready. Whitey Smith's still undrawn.

"It's all up, boys!" The voice of Cowboy Detective Karr was no longer blustery, nor even harsh with the gloating croak of vengeance. It was calm, hard, quiet, deadly—the voice of a man who had stood both before and behind the old equalizer often enough to know the footing.

On the boyish face of Whitey Smith a grin grew slowly, but there was no humor in either what he said, nor how he said it.

"It's an arrest, Todd—all of you—for cattle stealing! Put 'em up! The show's over! Quick! My gun hand's gittin' anxious."

But the show wasn't over. In the flash that they saw how they had been duped, the courage of trapped wolves flared in Todd and his men. Cursing they went for their guns. And in swift deadly silence, Whitey Smith went for his.

With a squall of fear that sounded even above the roar of the shooting the leading citizen of Dos Pasos, caught in the sucker net with his own school of hired renegades, made a ponderous lunge for the swing doors. But the frantic surge of his big

fat body netted him no gain. For the doors swung open to meet him. For the first time in years his fat lips lost hold on their dead cigar as the barrel of Foreman Michaels' six-gun cracked smartly upon his head.

From behind the waspish little foreman there swarmed a trio of his cowhands, shooting as they came. Through the window leaped another—RMD riders, all, eager to be in at the finish. Only four of the nine—all that Michaels had been able to get together on the short notice of Cowboy Detective Karr's hurried call that the stage was set and waiting. And even then, until this moment, doubtful of his urgent request to be here by nine with their powder dry.

IT WAS seven against fifteen, and the blackening cloud of gun-smoke against them all, there in the Broadhorn. But of the seven, two were cool and calm and deadly. Two fought as pardners, side by side, as they had fought north in Montana, west in Oregon, east in Oklahoma many a time before. That one of them had recently lost his cowboy tan in a K. C. hospital while recovering from a rustler's bullet, that he now wore cheap unaccustomed, mail order rigging, that his head was bandaged heavily for wounds that did not exist, made no matter. His gun hand was working. And so was that of the blond youngster who had lately slapped his face.

What their real names were was now of no consequence. Together Cowboy Detective Kenneth Karr and the tow-head who called himself Whitey Smith threw hot lead that soon brought the rustlers of the RMD range to taw. Cowboy Detective Karr bled from a wound that was real, now, and the cottony fuzz on Whitey Smith's cheek was singed from the near-passing of hot lead. But of the BXB renegades, four would swing long loops no more, and Todd was on the floor with a broken leg, howling surrender. Two were gone, galloping into the night, with the

fear of God at their tails. And the rest, their main Big Auger quivering his huge bulk among them, stood lined against the wall, their hands in the air.

There were wounds among the RMD men, too, but none was down.

Waspish little Foreman Michaels stood before Sam Schurtz, nursing a shot finger.

"Goin' to force us to sell to you, was you, Sowbelly—shippin' stolen cowhides with one hand an' postmasterin' my mail with the other! By God, I oughta——"

"Proof! Proof! Noddings you can prove!" Miraculously unshot, Sowbelly Sam Schurtz was asserting himself again. But it was no use.

"Todd himself showed me the cache for them stolen hides, Michaels," said the youngster who called himself Whitey Smith. "An' I watched Schurtz an' his plug-ugly bodyguard—Hyatt, there, with the shot hand—overseein' the works. Bribin' the hide inspector an' shippin' 'em out by the carload, an' if that ain't proof enough—you tell 'em, Mister Cowboy Detective Karr!"

Karr grinned, rolling a smoke. He fished a loose-leaf notebook from his pocket. On each page was a black smear, a fine-lined print of something. Whitey Smith fished out a similar book.

"Calf nose-prints, boys," Karr grinned. "Recollect that day you spooked a feller off from ropin' calves, Jimpson? Maybe you took note them calves had dirty noses? I'd jest been printin' 'em. So I done some ridge-top signalin', an' my pardner here, runnin' with the wild bunch, he seen to it that some of these same calves got rustled. Then he snook out an' taken their prints—after Todd had 'em all branded an' hid out safe, in them southwest draws. Well, it's plumb simple. Ever' calf's got his own nose print pattern, same as a man's fingers. Proof? We'll jest show the jury my set of prints—an' his. Plenty of 'em's off the

same calf. What the hell, didn't I tell you I was the curly wolf of Cowboy Detectives?"

BLACKIE TODD groaned. "I'll be double damned to hell! We oughta hang by the toes for the buzzards to peck at, lettin' you frame us like that! Why double damn it, I——"

"By the neck, Todd," put in Foreman Michaels grimly, "if the court of law don't stand up to the taw line."

Bully Bill Hyatt still looked dazed.

"Who the hell shot me?" he growled. "Damn his cowardly soul, I'd have killed this snipe, only——"

"Yeah?" Cowboy Detective Karr's drawl sounded now quite different from the braggart bellowing with which he had first announced himself in the Broadhorn. "The White Haired Boy don't miss, feller, except when he's 'murderin' me! Chance of you killin' him ain't why I plugged your hand through the window. You see, Todd, while you watched Whitey 'murderin' me this mornin' him an' me was actually layin' out this work for tonight—to git ever'body here at nine, an' settle up with you rustlin' black hats, all around. I'd have let him kill you, Hyatt, it would have started the ruckus a few minutes too soon. He was augurin' you so as Schurtz would maybe come hisself. But what ails Whitey, he shore loves a fight. So I jest riz up outside an' plugged your hand myownself. I knowed Whitey wouldn't never finish his draw against a man with his gun hand ruint. That'd be murder, sure 'nough!"

"M-m-muh-murder!" Stuttering Ike's bald pate rose cautiously from behind the bar. "M-m-m-muh-murder is a-a w-w-w-wuh-word ol'-ol' Wh-wh-whu, y'know this feller Smith, he d-d-duh-don't much like! W-w-wuh-will all y-you hon-hon-honest c-c-cuh-cuh, damn it, cowboys step up for a d-d-drink?"

Adventurers

All

CURARE



EARLY in 1922 I was a member of a small geological party that was working in the vicinity of the Rio Napo, in the Oriente country of Ecuador.

In spite of various stories about the ferocity of the Jivaros, we had encountered no trouble with them at all, in fact they had in many cases been extremely helpful to us.

Late one afternoon we made camp in the vicinity of a Jivaro's house, set at the edge of the jungle. After we had eaten our evening meal the Indian came over to where we sat by the campfires. He was a fine specimen of his race. A sort of skirt tied around his waist, was his only article of attire. Around his neck was a necklace made from wood, while from each pierced ear hung a small piece of cane. His face was spotted with paint and there were three different colored feathers in his hair.

Speaking Spanish, he said that his name was I'Stata. We learned that he was the proud possessor of eight wives, and he announced casually that he had taken the heads of six of their husbands while acquiring the ladies. He seemed friendly and chatted for an hour.

When he had gone our head porter, a half-breed Spanish-Quichua named Sebastian, told us that the Jivaros were continually fighting among themselves over women. Raids were common even among members of the same tribe, and when a Jivaro's neighbors figured he had too many wives, they would organize a raid and relieve him of both his head and the women at the same time.

Kyle, who was the party's topographer, and I had some work to do on some notes, and retired to our small tent early, where

by the light of a carbide light, we worked until nearly midnight. When we finally turned in everyone else seemed fast asleep.

It seemed to me that I had barely closed my eyes, when a sudden yell from outside the tent brought me off my cot. I heard Kyle fumbling and cursing in the darkness and then he lit the lamp. Again came a chorus of yells, and then a thin high scream.

I had gone to bed half dressed, and now slipping on my boots, I grabbed my rifle and, without waiting to don shirt or coat, ran outside.

The moon was low and in the shadows thrown by the trees, objects were not easily distinguished. I thought I saw flames over in the direction of I'Stata's house. Men were running back and forth near the tents and I heard Howard and Jones profanely demanding from theirs, the cause of all the excitement.

In the semidarkness someone collided violently with me, I cursed him and Sebastian shouted almost in my ear:

"Raiding party of head hunters. They're trying to get I'Stata's head. Be careful of their blowguns, señor."

Kyle shouted at me at that instant and as the flames mounted higher from the burning house I saw him motion to me and start towards the fire at a trot.

I ran after him, and in a moment we were within a hundred yards of the house. The yells from the jungle had increased in volume, but as yet we had seen nothing. Then out of the darkness, to one side, an Indian, naked save for a loincloth and carrying a long lance, charged at us. Kyle grunted something, and whirling half around, dropped the head hunter with a single shot.

I was several feet in advance of him

then, and within a hundred feet of the door of the burning house. At that moment it opened and I'Stata with a leveled musket at his shoulder appeared in the opening.

THEN with a wild yell a small crowd of head hunters charged around one corner of the house.

I spread my legs apart to steady myself and emptied my magazine into them, two fell but the other five came on. From just behind me Kyle shot four times and another two went down.

The other three were nearly at the door, when I'Stata's musket boomed and one of them fell against the burning wall with a scream.

The other two thrust at I'Stata with their lances. Kyle ran past me and hit one behind the ear with his rifle butt. The last one turned to run, he nearly reached the corner of the house, but before he could make it there was a rattle of shots and he went down. Jones and Howard had at last arrived.

It seemed very quiet the next moment. Kyle led I'Stata, who was wounded in the shoulder away from the burning house, then all eight wives and several small children came charging through the doorway just as the roof went in with a roar.

Jones said something to me and just as I was about to reply, something hit me in the throat. I had a vision of Jones' gaping

face, and reaching up I plucked a cane tufted dart from my flesh. For an inch back from the point it was stained a rusty red color. I knew that it had been dipped in the deadly curare!

My heart began to hammer. I heard men shouting as though at a great distance. The sky, the fire and all the faces around me seemed to revolve. Pain gripped my body.

Then someone was stuffing something into my mouth; I tried to spit it out, but they kept cramming it back in, until at last things went dark.

It was four days later that I recognized Kyle's face at the end of my cot. I tried to sit up but was too weak.

"Take it easy, Stewart," Kyle said. "You damned near died from that poisoned dart. If it hadn't been for I'Stata feeding you that salt you'd have been a goner."

It was the first time that I had ever heard of common salt as an antidote for curare poison, but later I learned that the Jivaros would catch monkeys by first shooting them with poisoned darts and then, before the curare could take full effect, placing salt in the mouths of the animals.

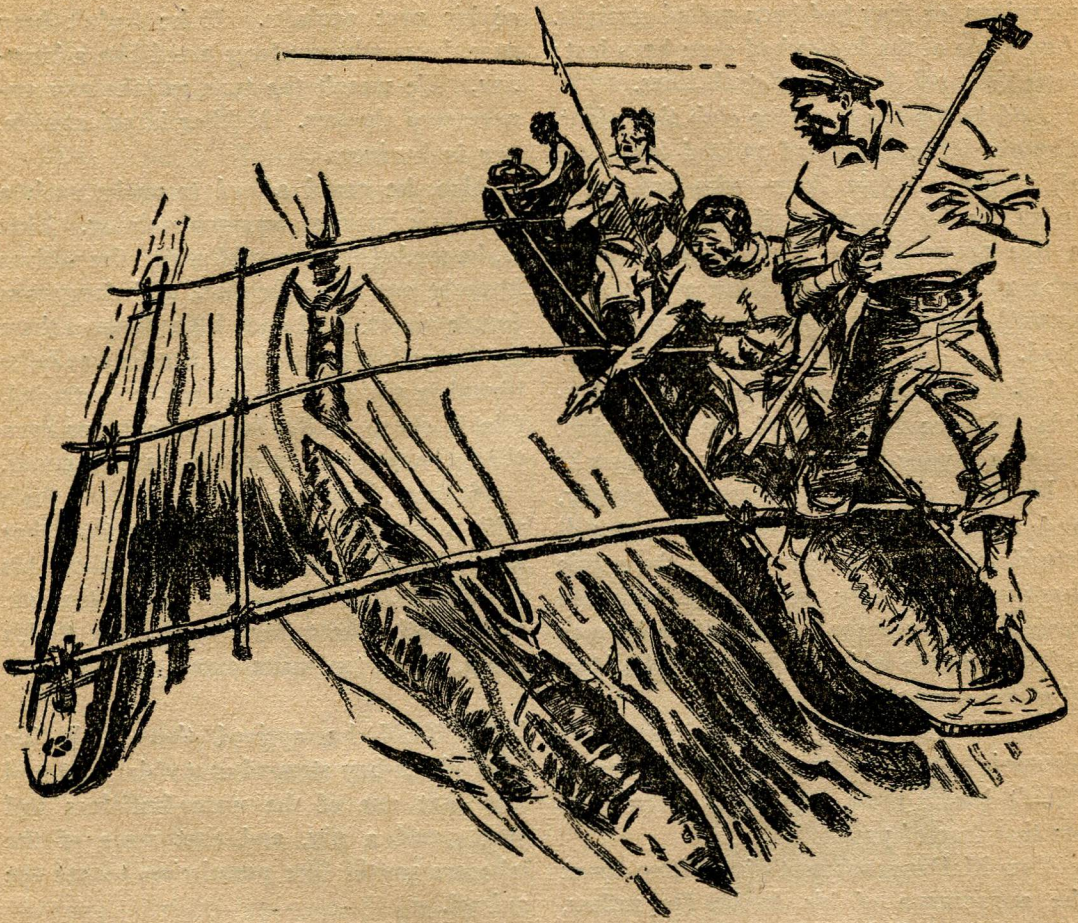
When I'Stata came to thank me for helping save his head and wives I gave him my .30-.30. I felt that I was the one that should be grateful.

B. M. Stewart.

\$15 For True Adventures

UNDER the heading *Adventurers All*, the editors of **SHORT STORIES** will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors for the first time. Any reader of the magazine, any where, may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid \$15. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the page only; and address it to: "*Adventurers All*," Care of Editors of **SHORT STORIES** Magazine, Garden City, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.

THE KING OF SHARKS



By CAPTAIN J. M. ELLRICH

CAPTAIN JIM McBANE was mad. Not crazy, mind you. He was just mad, indignant, angry.

He had caught more than six thousand sharks in four different oceans without any mishaps; and had come here to Borneo to catch a few thousand more.

But for the past two weeks—which were his first days of operating in these waters—he had not caught a single one.

His nets had been torn to shreds; by the sharks, as well as by the currents and the coral rocks. His anchors and buoys had been dragged; and some of them had become lost. And the hooks—well, either

Old Skipper McBane Didn't Mind Having the Sharks Laugh at Him, But When the German Trader Laughed About His Face—the King of Sharks Did Something Which Was NOT a Laughing Matter

they just had no bait left on them when he came around to inspect them in the mornings, or they had been pulled straight. And some of the hooks had even been lost; torn right off the ground troll lines.

And to top it off, at the club this night, Captain Fritz Zorn had twitted him. Of all people, Captain Zorn—who had never in all his life caught anything bigger than a five pound bass. That big squarehead who was hopping around the world with an antiquated army captaincy, and a swelled head.

"Hello, Shark!" he had said, when Captain McBane had entered the little club. "How are your friends treating you now?"

McBane had taken it good-naturedly, and replied, "Well, so far they are still laughing at me. I saw two of them this morning, and they had large wrinkles around their mouths." With that he was referring to the labial folds around the jaws of many sharks.

But Captain Zorn, with his misplaced Teutonic sense of humor, had answered, "Can't blame them, can you; when they see that face of yours?"

Now McBane was sort of sensitive about the appearance of his face. Or rather, about having it brought to his attention. It was at the battle of Hill Number 201, while he was serving with the 16th U. S. Infantry, that a German had massaged his nose with the butt of a Mauser, and left it somewhat flattened. And when he had stumbled, a sharp piece of shrapnel had left an ugly gash clear across the right side of his face. And he just did not like to be reminded of these disfigurements—especially not by a former enemy.

"Listen here, Zorn! At least I have caught sharks, in the past. All you have ever caught was the flu, and some bed-bugs behind the lines!"

"Vell, maybe," Zorn replied and his face reddened. "But I bet you, you could not catch a shark now. Ve haff real sharks here, not liddle babies. I bet you five hundred guilders you can't catch one dis week."

Zorn was fairly sure that McBane would not be able to land any sharks, irrespective of his past exploits. If he hadn't been sure, he would not have acted like a blow-fish. He wasn't the type to take any unnecessary chances. Neither in private life, nor in business.

Also, he could afford to make such a bet. His business was gold-mining. That is, he traded for the gold which the natives brought out from the dark and dangerous jungle rivers. And darn little he gave them for the yellow metal, too. But he was quite liberal in giving them gin before he traded. Gin is cheap in the Orient; cheaper even than German or Japanese trading goods.

McBane, however, wasn't any too flush with money just then. But on the other hand, he didn't like to be vexed about his abilities. And so he had taken the bet, and shortly thereafter driven back to his camp, about ten miles away.

WHEN he arrived there, Ali, his head-boy stepped up to him, and told him that one of the water-buffaloes had just gored a pig, and that some of the laborers would like permission to eat the animal.

"No! The boys can get all the pig to eat they want, after we bring in some sharks. Get some steel and build a fire; we are going to make some strong hooks and go out!"

"Now, sir?"

"Yes, now. And get three of the men over here to help us."

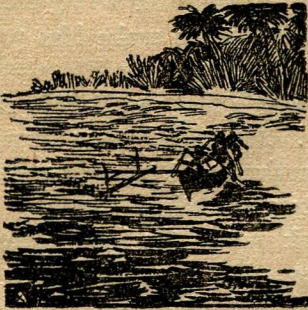
And so he and Ali, and three of the laborers were working all through the night sawing round steel bars, heating and bending them, and filing them until the points and barbs were as fine as needles, and the edges as sharp as razors.

By five o'clock in the morning a dozen new hooks were finished, welded into chains and swivels, attached to a new ground troll line, and placed into one of the dugouts, together with the pig-bait and a can of blood.

"Ali! You and Siang come with me. The rest of the boys get busy mending the nets we brought in yesterday."

McBane went into the dugout, and the men pushed it into the water. Ali and Siang followed in, and McBane started the outboard motor. Twenty minutes later they were outside of the reefs, and inspecting the gill-nets anchored there.

Half a mile of net there. Twenty-three sharks were in it; and every one bitten up.



Useless. The hides couldn't be sold. No use to pull up the nets and clear out the carcasses. Leave 'em hang, until later.

McBane fumed. There is only one shark that will do such a damage. The great striped tiger shark.

Well, he'd even up the score with that family right now. He started the motor again, and went half a mile farther out, away from the nets, and stopped the engine.

"All right, Ali! drop the hooks over!" Over they went. First a buoy, then fifty fathoms of line with an anchor on the end. Then the ground troll with the dozen chains and hooks. Another anchor and another buoy.

"Ali, secure the banca to the buoy, and spill the can of blood overboard. We are going to wait right here. You boys may smoke if you want to."

While Ali did as told, McBane lit his pipe, pushed his hat over the front of his head, and slumped down inside of the dugout. "Wake me up in an hour, if I fall asleep."

THE boys woke him in time, and another hour later he had one nine foot female tiger shark lying inside of the banca, another pair of tigers killed and lashed to the outrigger crosspieces, and was busy fighting with the fourth one, an eleven footer, whom he had just hauled up from his thirty-five fathom hide-out.

McBane was standing barefooted on the one-inch gunwale of the dugout, hammer in his right hand, waiting for Mr. Shark to expose the top of his head. So far McBane had succeeded in hitting him once only; and that blow had not been strong enough to stun the shark. But still and all, the memory of that blow caused Mr. Shark to be floating on the surface of the water, with his belly up. That is, at such moments when he was not busy with his vain attempts to bite through the chain, or rolling around his own axis, or madly lashing around with his powerful tail.

McBane tired of waiting, and reached down with his hammer, to tickle the shark's belly. That is one thing Mr. Shark does not like. The hammer grated along the rough abdominal scales, and he was doing all the acrobatics known to him. He splashed enough water in the dugout with his tail, to almost float the not yet quite dead female lying inside.

But just as quickly as he had started, he stopped. "Ali! Put another hook into his mouth. This one is pulling out." Ali turned to get one of the spare hooks, hanging on the other gunwale, and shouted: "Look! A big shark!"

McBane turned, and looked, almost dropping his hammer from surprise. There was a giant of a shark right between the dugout and the outriggers.

The boat was only twenty feet long, and when McBane saw the animal, it extended two feet on each end. He slowly lowered his hammer, and stood there watching the shark, while it slowly circled around the dugout.

He couldn't help but admire the brute. A slender, well proportioned and symmetrical body, slate gray in color, and marked

with even stripes of a deep black. But it was his size which caused him to open his eyes—twenty-four feet of man-eating tiger-shark. Twenty-four feet if an inch. And every inch showed his strength, his prowess, his imperial nonchalance.

There was nothing insecure in his movements. No furtive sneaking around. No quick and nervous movements. No mad dashes to bite in and retreat. He was the ruler of the sea, and he knew it. Every stroke with his pectoral fins showed that. Every sway of his high dorsal fin betrayed it. Every movement and scull of his tail pronounced it. He was the King of the Tigers, *Carcharias Rex* himself.

THE shark turned slightly, and for a second he seemed to look at the occupants of the boat. McBane looked into the shark's eyes; and they were not cold eyes like those of the cod, herring, or dogfish. There was a fire in them. A peculiar steel-gray flame of hatred. A hatred for mankind.

McBane had seen this fire often enough. In the eye of each tiger he had caught, he had seen it. And he had caught many of them. But never had he seen it as strong as this time.

The tiger turned a little more, and swam up to and smelled the smaller shark with which McBane had just been fighting. In his mind McBane was already seeing him bite the hooked animal, and thus not only ruin a beautiful and valuable skin, but also cause unwanted bloodshed, which would call dozens of other sharks to the scene. A free for all fight might end disastrously for the men in the frail dugout.

But the large tiger backed away without biting, and swam over to the shark suspended from the outrigger, and smelled that one. It was then that McBane saw that he had had dealings with the big tiger before.

He had bitten on one of McBane's hooks during the past weeks; and must have got away by twisting his body and rubbing through the rope with his rough skin.

There was the hook still in the corner of his mouth; with the chain and a few feet of rope still dangling from it.

Again the shark retreated. He dived, passed underneath the dugout, and went up to the other shark suspended from the port outrigger. There was something he was looking for. Something he missed and hadn't found as yet. McBane guessed it to be the female, which they had inside of the boat. Well, he'd give him something to smell; something he wouldn't want to smell again for a long time. Moreover, he decided to make him pay up for previous damages.

What a hide that would be! A twenty-foot skin! Mentally he was already seeing the hide arrive at the tannery in New York, and create a sensation.

He took one of the baited spare hooks, bent it to some twenty fathoms of half-inch line, and threw it overboard and afront of the tiger's nose.

AT FIRST Mr. Shark seemed to ignore it. But after a few seconds he slowly dived down after it. Down went the hook, until McBane had paid out about ten fathoms and could no longer see either the white bait on the hook, nor the shark.

Slowly he played the hook up and down. He felt the shark take the bait into his mouth for a taste. McBane pulled up sharply, but the hook came up free without catching.

He repeated the maneuver, and the next time he jerked on the line, his expert hands felt the hook ripping through the shark's lips.

The King was caught!

Off he went at full speed, pulling the line through McBane's hands and burning them.

Ali jumped over, and seeing the line go out too fast for him to grab it, he took the bitter end. Trying to snub the line, he threw a hitch around the fore and aft bamboo rowing pole, running a few inches outboard of the gunwale.

But the shark was running at such a

speed, that Ali could not retain enough line for a pull back, and with a quickly thrown half hitch he secured the end to the standing part.

"Too late, Ali! Stand back!" McBane shouted, expecting the shark to either part the line, or snap the bamboo pole.

The line went out. "Crrk! Squeak!" went the pole, and bent and sagged. The men ducked, lest they get hit by the rebounding and sharp bamboo splinters.

But the pole held, and the King of Sharks was towing the loaded banca astern of him, making fully six knots an hour.

Ali pulled his bolo. "Shall I cut the line, sir? He is heading for the reef, and we'll break up."

"No!" McBane shouted and jumped for the outboard motor, and gave it a few spins.

"No use! Darn it, it's wet! Ali, let's try to pull in on the line!"

So the three of them reached over the side and tried to haul in on the towing line. But their work was to no avail. The pull of the giant shark was too strong.

The sun was nearing the zenith, and it was becoming unbearably hot. The men were bathed in sweat. For five minutes now they had tried to stay the progress of their submerged tug. All they had received so far were red and sore fingers. But now the line slackened.

The shark had become tired, and had stopped. The men worked feverishly to get as much line as possible aboard. Perilously standing on the narrow bow and gunwales they hauled in, a few inches at a time. It was hard work, in that tropical sun, pulling in this mass of tiger, weighing every bit of half a ton, and then some. The muscles on their backs and arms ached. Their knees hurt, their feet pained, and the palms and fingers of their hands were red and sore. Perspiration was running off them, like rain from a roof.

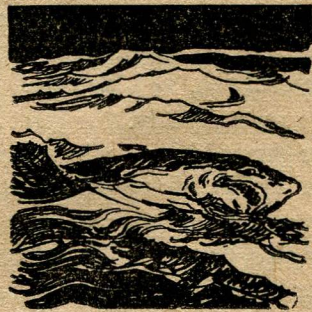
They rested for a minute, and then continued. Six inches at a time—that was the best they could heave in at one stroke.

There! The shark had rested enough, and was running away again. They lost a few inches of the ten fathoms they had aboard, but Siang snubbed the line before the tiger got away with too much of it.

"Hold it! Take a rest!" McBane shouted. "We'll rest while he's pulling; and pull while he's resting. We'll show him who's boss around here now!"

THE tiger was towing the dugout again; but the speed slackened quickly. He was trying to dive, but could not pull down against the weight of the boat, and lost much of his strength and energy with this attempt.

Back he went on a horizontal course, and was now rapidly nearing the reef. If he got in between the rocks, he might rub the line against the sharp coral and part it.



But apparently he saw the reef, and decided to fight it out in the open. So he made an about face and swam off in almost the same direction he had come from.

The towing line slackened and McBane and Ali heaved in on it, without however having Siang take in the slack around the mast.

As the banca began to turn around, they paid out again, little by little, until the line was taut. Another minute of towing by the shark, and he had to stop for another rest.

"Heave in, boys!"

McBane and Ali pulled together, and this time Siang took in the slack. Another five fathoms of line came aboard, six inches at a time. And only five more fathoms were out.

On the end of these was Mr. Shark, floating easily with his white belly to the top. Slowly he was beginning to show life again. He turned over, and raised his head while lowering his tail. He spotted the banca, and came up towards it.

"Quick! In on the line!" McBane shouted and rapidly pulled in two of the remaining five fathoms.

He raised the long handled hammer, and rested it against his shoulders, ready for a strike. "Pull him in, easy!"

Ali pulled in, and Siang took in the slack.

Now! The shark's head was close enough for McBane to act, and down came the hammer, the point hitting the shark just behind the front of his nose.

"Blub!" A sound like a gelatin-pudding being dumped out of its form onto a plate.

McBane withdrew the hammer, and a little blood trickled from the wound. The shark was stunned, and lay still. For exactly three seconds only.

Then he opened his mouth, pulled up the hard inner eyelid, closed his mouth again, and bit on the hook. Up came his tail at a forty-five degree angle, and smacked against the men in the boat.

McBane had ducked; but Ali lost a few inches of skin off his right leg, and fell down. He was going to rise again, but McBane shouted, "Stay down!"

The shark made a few more lashes with his tail, and then began to make spiral turns with his body. About ten seconds of that, and he was tired out. Again he floated there, belly up; but on the surface this time.

"Ali, take in all of the slack!" McBane ordered, laid down the hammer, and picked up a rope sling. "I am going to take him back alive. Pass this sling around him, while I hold the tail. But be careful you don't tickle him."

Ali secured the hookline around the mast, took the sling from McBane and made a bowline into the end of it. And while McBane was holding the shark's

tail, Ali passed the sling underneath the body, tightened it around the base of the tail, and lashed the shark's rear end to the fore and aft bamboo rowing piece.

That done, McBane picked up another hook, and tried to pass it between the shark's teeth without getting bitten. The tiger, however, kept his mouth and teeth closed as tight as a banker his safe in 1934; and it was only after ten minutes of hard work, that McBane finally succeeded in getting the hook in between the sharp triangular teeth.

Once the hook was in, McBane gave it a sharp twist, and pushed it through the shark's tongue, and out again through his lower jaw.

"All right, your majesty! That'll hold you for a while!" he said, and calmly bent down and secured the chain to the cross-piece.

FOR another hour they worked, and finally were all set. One shark aboard, and four lashed outboard. Three small ten-footers on the starboard; and the giant on the portside. McBane wiped the perspiration off his brow, and looked at the sun. "Hm! Must be around two o'clock already. Hoist the sail, Ali. We'll go in with the wind until I get the motor dry and working."

Ali hoisted the sail, and both boys started to row, while McBane busied himself with the outboard motor. In all that fighting and splashing it had received quite a bath, and spark-plugs and coils were soaking wet. McBane dried them, and spun the wheel a few times. But the motor was wet on the inside and wouldn't start. So McBane kicked it up, and took to steering.

It was ten o'clock that night, when they finally made the landing near the club. Tired, hungry, and thirsty.

"Ali, run up the road, and get Captain Zorn and the Police Commander to come down. And bring me a bottle of beer."

Fifteen minutes later Ali returned in

Zorn's car, and handed McBane a bottle of beer, which the latter drank down hastily.

Zorn and his companion stepped from the car. "Ali says you haff some sharks here, and vanted to see me. How did you ever do it?"

"Well," McBane said and hesitated a minute, while drinking the rest of the warm beer, "well, I went out there this morning and laid out a few hooks. And while I was waiting for the wind to shift, so we could come home, I talked with Ali about you. The sharks must have overheard us and become curious to see you. So here they are. And they are alive too!"

"Nonsense!" Zorn spouted. "How can any man bring in life sharks! I can see from here dat dey are dead. Anyway, dey are not so big. Dey only look like some big mackerels! Pool!"

The dugout was just barely floating in the shallow waters of the sandy beach. McBane was standing barefooted in the water, afront of the three ten and eleven footers. The big shark was on the other side of the craft, and not visible to Zorn, still standing on the beach.

McBane was angered at Zorn's ridicule, and his dislike for this big-mouthed German grew each minute. How he would have liked to have had that man out with him this day!

"Mackerels, eh? Listen, Zorn, they are sharks, and they are alive. But now they are harmless because they are tied up. Now I am going to show you a real big shark. The likes of which you'll never see again. Take your shoes off, and wade around the other side of the banca with me."

"No, I don't want to get wet," Zorn replied. He was the angry one now, having lost a bet on which he had counted too much.

"Afraid to catch cold? Or just yellow?" McBane jeered. "Afraid to walk

into shallow water, where a couple of half-dead sharks are lashed down?"

At that Zorn removed his shoes and came into the water. McBane took him by the hand, led him around to the other side, and played his flashlight. Slowly the beam of the light passed from a large mouth, to an immense belly, and then on to the tail.

"And I am going to show you that this shark is alive. Stand right there!" McBane said and walked from the tail-end to the middle of the shark's belly.

"You see, Zorn, I wouldn't show this secret to any other man, but I kind of like you. Anyhow, I think you really ought to see something for the five hundred guilders you are going to pay me tomorrow."

MCBANE'S flashlight illuminated the large center of the shark's abdomen, and he slowly bent down and rubbed his finger-nails along the center.

Zorn stepped up a little closer for a better view.

Swish! Slap! Up came the shark's tail and slapped across Zorn's face, knocking him into the water.

McBane helped him to get up. "Zorn, I don't think that the sharks like you."

They walked out of the water and towards the car, while Zorn was holding his hand against his cheek.

When they stepped into the light of the head-lamps, Zorn noticed that his clothes were not only wet, but also bloody.

He removed his hand from his face, looked at it, and uttered a faint: "Oh! Vat's dat?" When he was going to touch his face again, McBane held his hands, and said:

"Don't! He massaged your skin off. We got real sharks here, you know. You told me so yourself, last night. And if I were you, I'd keep away from them, hereafter. They certainly would laugh at that face of yours, now."

BLAME THE DEAD

By
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

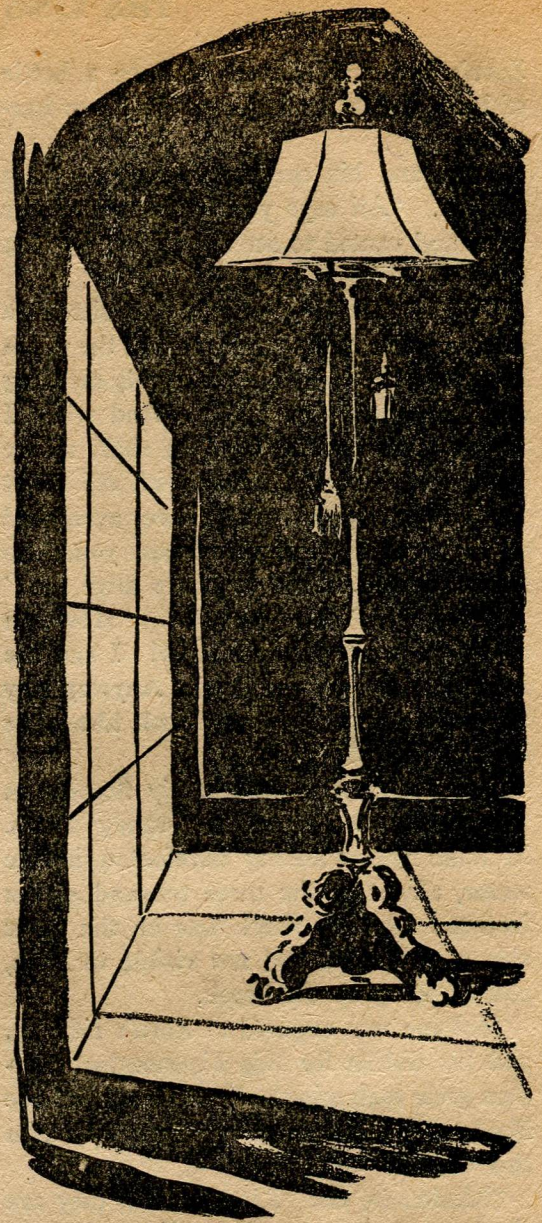
*Author of
"Carnation Babies,"
"Gorilla's Rest," etc.*

THE jury was out less than twenty minutes, and announcement of its verdict prompted some buzz but no outburst. "The Chief," sighed Timpkin, as he scribbled a telegram, "is going to be wild when he reads this."

If the Chief was, he didn't show it. He was a solidly built man, though no giant, and he sat in an office calculated to impress—a dramatic sort of office, with a dramatic desk holding many telephones. He could throw eagerness into his voice and face when he addressed some convention on the need for centralizing police information, or when he welcomed some delegation to the vast quarters of America's Scotland Yard in the big white building at Fourteenth and Pennsylvania Avenue; but that was showmanship; alone, or with subordinates, he was a sphinx.

He put the message aside, said to a secretary, "Get Barclay here from New York," and turned to other work.

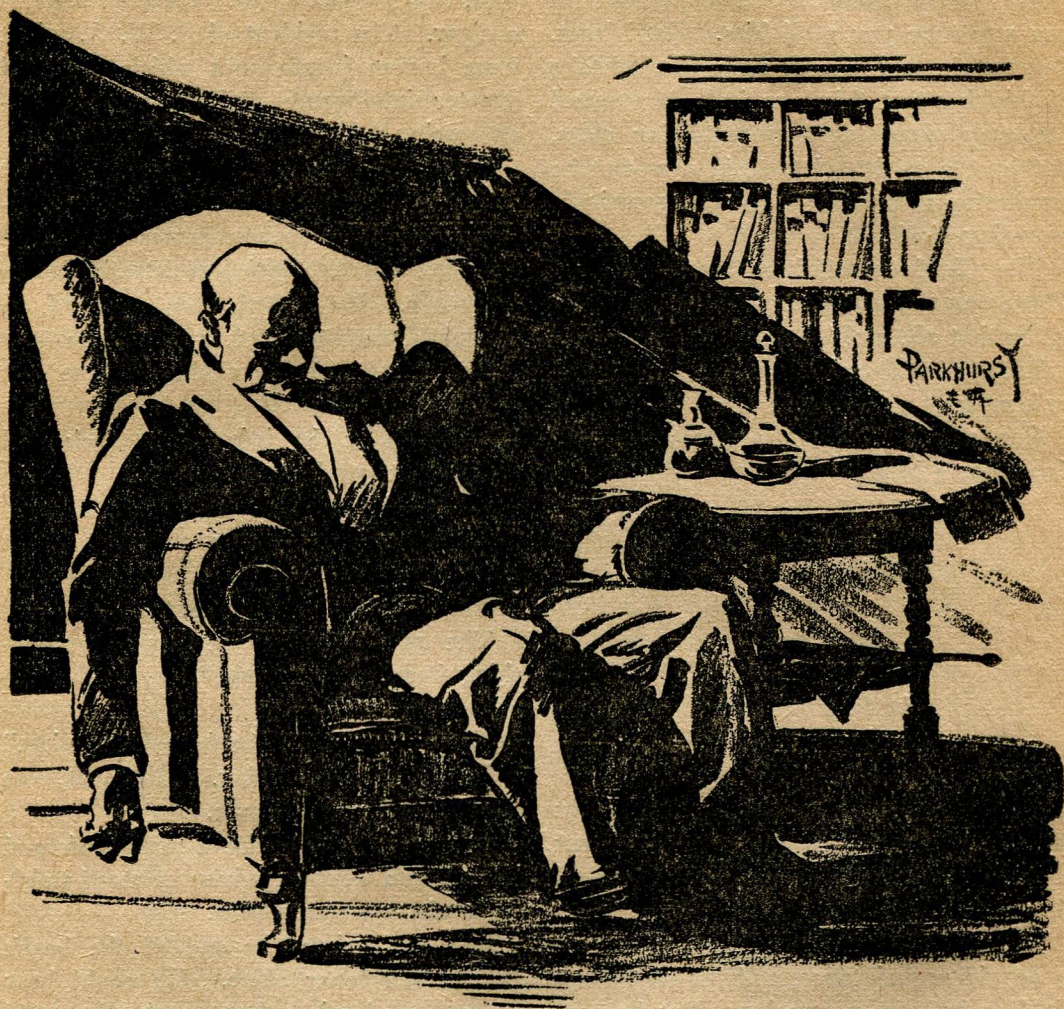
So the next morning Kenneth Barclay stood smiling in that dramatic office. Ken Barclay was usually smiling, a little. It wasn't a fatuous smile, it wasn't obsequious, and surely it wasn't supercilious, or cynical. It was a smile prompted by pleasure, but by a misty, rather secretive pleasure. He seemed a man amused by some memory which he didn't relate because it could not possibly mean anything to anybody else. It made him a shade



mysterious, that smile, though in every other respect he was straightforward enough.

Yet you wouldn't have supposed, seeing him, that Ken Barclay could be harboring many memories, amusing or otherwise. He was thirty, but he looked an undergraduate. Aside from that smile, and his natural good looks—he had dark brown hair, and forthright, dark brown eyes—there was nothing unusual about his appearance. His clothes were neat, not garish; they were not quite the best clothes he could afford. He was thin, had an

Jules Marot Was a Hard-bitten Criminal Who Was Accustomed to Bossing Racketeers and Murderers and He Didn't Like Interference—Especially from a G-Man



amiable manner, and never did much talking.

The Chief said:

"They acquitted Jules Marot yesterday."

"Yes, sir."

"It begins to look as though I was wrong in trying to get him on an income tax charge. Hereafter we go after him straight. And you're elected."

This time Ken didn't even say "Yes, sir." He merely smiled. The Chief, who fancied a semi-military atmosphere, hadn't asked him to sit down.

"Naturally you know Marot's game?"

"Oh, yes."

"It's got to stop, Barclay! We can't afford to let the cleverest crook in the country thumb his nose at us! We've pretty well cleaned up the outlaws who got so much publicity, and I don't say those fellows weren't tough—they were—but they were small potatoes compared with Jules Marot.

"He's outsmarted the police of New York time and again—and the police of a dozen other cities, if it comes to that. They can't even manage to revoke his license. Now what we've got to do is anticipate his next big job—he must be about ready for another one—and beat him to it, and get an airtight case against him before we

even think of making an arrest. That's your assignment. You're answerable only to me, though Timpkin will coöperate with you any time you need him. Get Marot. But watch out! Don't make the mistake of thinking that this man isn't dangerous! He may wear two-hundred-dollar suits, and have a cultivated taste in oils—but he won't stop at murder if he feels somebody crowding him!"

The Chief turned back to his papers. There was some silence. Then Ken asked: "Is that all, sir?"

"That's all," said the Chief, without looking up.

Ken went outside. In the ante-room there was a bronze tablet:

*"In Memory of
Special Agents
of the
Division of
Investigation
who have lost their
lives in line of duty"*

Eight names followed this, on eight bronze strips. They filled the lower part of the tablet; but they could be moved closer together, if necessary.

Ken Barclay nodded to this tablet, as to an old acquaintance, and for an instant his face had no expression. But he was smiling again when he quit the ante-room.

Next morning, in New York, he called upon Jules Marot.

THESE trim offices, you might suppose, were those of a prosperous real estate firm, or an importing house. No hole-in-the-wall! Ken found two busy stenographers, a pretty girl at a desk marked "Information," a not-too-fresh office boy, and a gorilla. Only the gorilla looked out of place. He stood about six feet three and was proportionately broad. A resident of British West Africa, who knew the States only through movies, might have pointed to this creature and said unhesitatingly. "Detective." He was

almost a burlesque. He wore a derby, rubber heels, shiny black coat, greasy black vest, soggy black shoes. He even smoked a cigar. The resident of B. W. A. might have known jungle apes which displayed greater intelligence and were more prepossessing.

Window dressing? The fellow had that bulldog glare which must be very reassuring to twittery society dames who have achieved their conception of detectives from the stage. He looked, Ken reflected, as though dynamite couldn't move him—yet a pickpocket probably could steal the coat off his back!

The girl at the information desk said Mr. Marot was busy.

Ken said he would wait.

The girl said she was afraid it might be a long while.

Ken said he had plenty of time.

The gorilla spoke. It was like something heavy being dragged over a rough cellar floor:

"He ain't going to be free all morning."

Ken still was smiling. "I'll wait," he said again, and sat down.

The gorilla gave him a dirty look and walked to a window, where he stood twirling a cheap watch charm.

Ken had taken the end of the bench nearest the inner office. He could hear a murmur of voices there—rather he could hear the murmur of a single voice, but there were gaps of silence which indicated that someone was answering in much lower tones. The one audible voice got louder, angrier. The girl at the information desk glanced nervously at the gorilla, who hadn't stirred. Then she glanced at Ken.

"I really don't think Mr. Marot will be able to see you this morning," she said. "Can't I make an appointment for you?"

Ken smiled, shook his head.

The inner office must have been nearly soundproof, but now the loud-voiced man was shouting. For the first time his words were clear.

"—and if you think I'm going to drop

out you're crazy! Keep your hands on the desk, you lousy——"

It wasn't so much the words themselves as the pitch of the voice. Ken Barclay sprang from the bench and threw himself against the office door. It was unlocked, and he burst into the office. In back of him a woman gave a squeaky, chopped-off scream; and there was a buffalo-like bellow which could only have come from the gorilla.

BEHIND an enormous Empire desk a smallish, beautifully dressed, pale, foreign-looking man stood erect, his dark eyes dilated. At the side of this desk, only a few feet away, a tall man in a double-breasted gray suit was jerking something out of a hip holster.

The gun didn't explode. Ken had cleared the room in one bound, caught the tall man's wrist, swung it down, around, then up. The man squealed, and dropped the gun. Ken lifted him in one swift, sweet motion, and threw him across the desk so that he clattered in a heap on the floor beyond. This happened very fast.

"Friend of yours?" asked Ken, and picked up the gun.

The man behind the desk had moved only his right hand, and that but a few inches. Now he was holding a small, ugly automatic. There was no expression on his face.

"I know him slightly. Not really a friend."

The gorilla came charging into the room, a pistol in his fist. Jules Marot, without even looking at him, without taking his gaze from Ken, said:

"All right, Hanker. Outside."

The gorilla looked at Marot, looked at Ken, looked too at the man on the floor, who was stunned and moaning. The gorilla shook his head. This was too much for him. But he went out, as ordered.

"Thanks," said Jules Marot, "for saving my life."

"He really meant to kill you, then?"

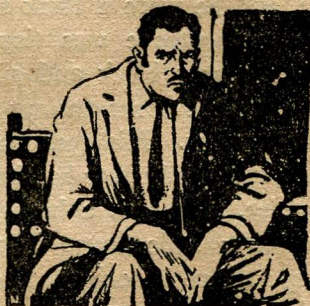
"Probably. He loses his head easily,

Lefferts does." He put the automatic away. He was still staring at Ken. "You're a swell wrestler."

The only thing on the desk had been a large shallow glass bowl filled with pansies. This had been swept to the floor when Lefferts was hurled across the desk. Now Marot picked it up, filled it at the wash basin, and replaced the pansies tenderly but swiftly, as though they were goldfish which might die if left out of water.

"From my own garden," he said. His delicate fingers pushed a flower here, pulled one there. "Picked them myself. First ones this season."

Ken went around the desk, yanked Lefferts to a sitting position, shook him. He



held the gun in front of Lefferts' face.

"Have you got a permit to carry this thing?"

The tall man blinked.

"Sure I got one." He reached a shaky hand. "Gimme it back."

"I'll give it to you over the ear," Ken Barclay said pleasantly.

Lefferts glared up from under black eyebrows.

"Sure I got a permit. Here." He found it, handed it to Ken, who examined it and then tossed it back.

"Now gimme that gun."

Ken said:

"Maybe the cops would like it for evidence." He turned to Marot. "Well, I've got no charge. He hasn't violated any federal law that I know of. What about you? Felonious assault with intent to kill?"

Marot murmured:

"So you're a federal? I was wonder-

ing." He glanced at Lefferts, who was getting to his feet. "No, I haven't any charge to make. He got a little excited, that's all. Get out, Sam."

"First I want my gun."

"Get out! Before this gentleman gets tired of being good-natured!"

JULES MAROT wore a blue suit with a white pencil stripe, a stiff blue-and-white striped collar and a stiff blue-and-white striped shirt. The stripes on the collar were vertical, the stripes on the shirt horizontal, which somehow wasn't as theatrical as it sounds. It gave Marot a foreign look, a Latin look; but he had that anyway. There was a gardenia in his buttonhole, and he wore a black silk knitted tie. His mustache was tiny, black, trig. His hair was black and silky, and looked as though it never got out of comb even when he slept. His eyes were large and very sad. Nobody ever had heard him raise his voice. He was a bachelor, and lived alone in a little house in northern New Jersey, where he collected oil paintings and bred Siamese cats.

Now he pushed a chair under Ken Barclay.

"So you're a federal? I thought you boys were all finished with me."

"No," said Ken, smiling.

"Well, you're wasting your time. I don't like to be rude to you—especially after what you've just done—but you're wasting your time."

"I just take orders," Ken explained, "and my orders are to get you. So I came here first."

"I see," Marot said slowly. His eyes went cold. His mouth tightened. Here was no longer a mild-mannered, dapper gentleman who boasted of his garden. Here was a hard-bitten criminal—a man who was accustomed to bossing racketeers and murderers—and who didn't like interference. He leaned forward, placing his hands flat on the desk. "Yes, I see," he whispered.

"No," said Ken, "you don't see at all."

He laughed. "I wasn't even dreaming of a shake-down, Mr. Marot. I just wanted to meet you."

"Oh."

Marot was looking at Ken with a different expression now. In his years of dealings with the police he had never met a detective like this.

"Do I understand that the Department of Justice has done me the honor of assigning a special man to me in the future?"

"That's the idea. So I'm starting by coming directly to you. Why not? You'd soon find out anyway. And I thought I'd like to know what you're like personally. Of course I've heard a lot about you, but mostly from men who had reason to dislike you. I hope you don't think I'm cocky?"

He said this in all earnestness, and Marot accepted it earnestly.

"No," Marot said, "I don't think you're cocky. But you do seem to have a lot of self-confidence. I don't blame you, in a way, after seeing you toss Sam Lefferts across my desk. But this is something else again. You're starting to investigate a man who is running a sound, respectable business. Lots of other detectives, older men than you, and more years in the game, have poked around here—and they never found anything wrong. I know that you people think I'm crooked, and you're welcome to think that. But the insurance people trust me."

"They have to."

"Eh? Well, whether they have to or not, they do. I get results."

"Yes," said Ken Barclay, still smiling.

THEN Marot too smiled, which was unusual. He leaned back, slapping the arms of his chair.

"I guess you're not so dumb at that," Marot admitted.

"Could I look around? Of course I haven't got a warrant."

"Why certainly! My records are open to anybody!" He touched a buzzer. "But you won't find anything wrong."

"I just want to look," Ken said.

Hanker, the gorilla, entered. He still was frowning, for this business was much too deep for his tiny mind.

"None of the other boys out there, Hanker?"

"No, sir. Only me."

"All right." Marot rose. "Then I'll show you around personally, Mr.— What is your name, by the way?"

"Barclay. Kenneth Barclay."

"Oh," said Marot. It was obvious that he'd heard this name. "I didn't expect you to be so young."

They started for the outer office. But in the doorway Marot paused.

"Will you excuse me for a moment? I just remembered a call I should make."

Ken waited outside the office door, which was open. Marot, in the office, called a number, and a moment later started; "Listen, your pal was just here and——" Then he noticed the door. He stopped, put down the instrument, went to the door and closed it.

He emerged a moment later, and they went through the files. Ken had neither the time nor the desire to make a thorough examination. He merely glanced over the records for the past few weeks.

"You do much guarding at weddings and so-forth?"

"Oh, yes. Our operatives are well acquainted with the leading jewel snatchers, so naturally we're in demand for that sort of thing."

"I noticed Mrs. Wendell Harris's name. That's what made me ask."

"Yes." Marot smiled a little. "She lost an earring from her celebrated sapphire set a couple of weeks ago, and she was all worked up about it. Came straight to me. Well, I went out there with one of my best men, and we poked around a few minutes and found the thing behind a radiator, where it had fallen. Of course, there are tricks to every trade, and I don't have to tell you, Barclay, that we fussed around a lot, and looked very important, before we handed the thing over. Mrs. Harris

thought we were wizards. It's silly—but it brought in a small fee, and it helps to build up the reputation, so why not?"

"Sure," said Ken. "Why not?"

"Mrs. Harris fired her maid, which seemed to me a dirty trick because I'm sure the maid had nothing to do with it. I got the girl another job, on my own account, but naturally I didn't tell Mrs. Harris that. Mrs. Harris thinks I'm the greatest sleuth in the world. I'm sending a man out there to guard her valuables, and her guests' valuables, this week-end. She's having a big house party.

"As a matter of fact," Marot went on, "though you boys get all steamed up about the occasional return of stolen goods we manage, those cases are few and far between, and the bulk of our business consists of just such trivial things as this."

Twenty minutes later they parted, again shaking hands.

"Glad to have met you, Barclay. Drop in any time."

"Thank you. You've been very kind."

Ken did not ask why Sam Lefferts had been about to murder the private detective. Ken never was one for wasting his breath.

He stopped in a telephone booth, called the bureau's New York office, and gave a fellow agent a carefully remembered telephone number.

"Find out where that is, won't you? He got the party right away—didn't have to go through a switchboard—so I suppose it's a private phone."

Then he went to the big white building in Center Street.

AGENTS of the Bureau of Investigation are not always welcomed at police stations. For publication, everything is hunky-dory between federal and municipal police, but in fact there's often jealousy. The cops, who after all get very little besides glory for risking their lives, and not too much of that, complain that the federals have a habit of horning into their cases and grabbing all the publicity. The fed-

erals, to be sure, privately say the same thing about the cops. So there you are.

But Kenneth Barclay could enter New York headquarters with a clear conscience and no diminution of smile. He had friends there, and particularly he had a friend on the Broadway Squad, one Buckley, first class detective. Buckley was large and slow. Three times he had been cited for conspicuous bravery. With a record like that, and with his brains, and a little ambition, he should have been a captain; but he was lazy.

"Hi, Boy Scout."

"Hello, tough."

Ken placed a .45 automatic on the desk.

Buckley asked:

"Find it in the street?"

"No. I took it from a man named Sam Lefferts. Know him?"

Buckley frowned, for this sounded like work.

"Tall and skinny, dark hair, biggish nose, quick temper?"

"That's the one."

"What was he doing with a gat? He's got a record, that guy. Why didn't you fasten a Sullivan on him?"

"He had a permit. From some little dump up around Saratoga."

Buckley, with considerable effort, rose. He scowled at the gun.

"Those upstate permits aren't any good here now, since the Governor signed that bill the other day. Sam ought to know that. It's a disgrace that a guy like that ever was allowed to get one in the first place."

"Who is he?"

"He used to be Georgie Gulick's bodyguard. Georgie's one of our highest-hat crooks. Hard-boiled shirts and all that. He had a reputation for knowing where a lot of hot stones were cached, and I suppose that's why he figured he needed a bodyguard. Or maybe he just wanted to show off. But anyway, I understand he fired Sam a little while ago." Buckley sighed. He took Ken's elbow. "Well,

anyway, let's go and ask Sam a few questions, huh?"

IT WAS on Eighth Avenue, in the Thirties, a dreary little walkup smelling of cabbage and bad plumbing.

"Might be a good idea to iron out, just in case," panted Buckley as they ascended. "Sam's only one of the guys around here that don't like cops." He shuddered to a stop on the third floor wall. "So here we are. Now we knock." He knocked. He was standing on one side of the door, and Ken stood on the other; both held pistols.

"So we get no answer. So we knock again."

But after a while Buckley said:

"This is no fun, standing here." He tried the door. It was unlocked, and he pushed it open. "So we walk in."

It was a two-room apartment. You had a feeling that millions of bugs were watching you from behind the wallpaper, from the cracks in the floor, from almost every place. It smelled damp and sickly. In a corner, unscreened, unabashed, was an old



zinc sink with one faucet, which dripped indefatigably. A doorway showed the end of an iron bed. The detectives walked there together. And together they stopped in the doorway, Ken with a little gasp, Buckley with a whistle.

"So we find a stiff," Buckley muttered.

Sam Lefferts wore a dirty undershirt, gray trousers, red socks, and a look of amazement. The undershirt was covered with blood. Ken knelt beside him. After a minute:

"Jabbed at least five times. The first might have done it."

Buckley, in the doorway, asked:

was busy at a desk and didn't see Ken, who stepped quietly into a telephone booth.

A man entered, was taken upstairs by the attendant. Then two women. Then the door opened again.

"Hello, Harold. Any messages?"

"Nothing, Mr. Carstairs."

"The admiral out there said somebody was asking for me?"

"I haven't seen anybody, sir. Will you go up?"

Ken looked out of the booth in time to see the newcomer. Neat, firm topcoat. Black pointed shoes, gray spats. A gray silk scarf. And above the scarf a lean, hard, dark face. The features were little, almost aristocratic. The eyebrows were thin and high.

"Yes, I'll go up. Thanks. Tomorrow I'm going out to Bernardsville for a few days, Harold, and if anybody should call —"

The elevator door slid shut. Ken walked out of the building.

The door man asked:

"Did you see Mr. Carstairs, sir?"

"Yes, I saw him. Thank you."

Then another telephone call. The Barclay butler, whose name, to the especial delight of Mrs. Barclay, was Scroggins, reported that a Mr. Buckley had left word that the police were about to interrogate a Miss Nordkin in Center Street.

"He did not say what number Center Street, sir, and when I endeavored to ask him he hung up."

"Thank you, Scroggins. I think I know where it is."

THE Nordkin girl was no gun moll. She was tiny, quietly dressed, and scared half out of her wits. Neither Buckley nor Ken participated in the questioning; they stood in a corner.

Buckley whispered:

"We're not getting anywhere."

"You question Marot?"

"Yes. And he was nice as could be about it, the way he always is. Came right over, and shook hands all around, and

handed out cigarettes with his monogram on 'em, and lied like the genius he is."

"What did he say?"

"Said Lefferts had asked him for a job, and he told Lefferts to come back in a couple of days, and Lefferts came back today. Marot says he'd looked him up in the meanwhile and decided he didn't want a guy like that working for him, and told him so, and Sam got sore."

"Sounds fishy."

"Sure it does, but what are you going to do? We let him go, of course. Had to. Now we got a pick-up call out for George Gulick, that Sam used to be body-guard for. We figure that if George fired Sam there might have been some hard feelings. George is a pretty bad baby himself. And a hard guy to find."

The girl was protesting:

"I haven't seen him since night before last."

"Did he seem to be worried about anything then?"

"No, he was happy. I guess he was a little drunk. He wanted me to marry him. Said he was going to buy a lot of swell clothes, and said he'd cover me with jewels that would match my eyes."

"That would match your eyes, eh?"

The Nordkin girl was a perfect blonde, with bright blue eyes.

"Something like that. I didn't pay much attention to him."

Ken whispered to Buckley:

"You suppose I could slip back to Identification and get a squint at this George Gulick's mug?"

Buckley looked at him strangely, sideways.

"Sure. Go ahead. Charley's in there now. You know him."

In the middle of the second flat steel tray, Ken flipped up the card he sought. The pictures, front and side, were no surprise. He had been tolerably sure that he would recognize that thin, hard face, and those small, dark, hard eyes. Gulick's hair was mussed, in the pictures, and his

necktie was disarranged, but still he seemed sleek and polished.

In the corridor outside Buckley was waiting.

"It's a funny thing about you wanting to look at that mug."

Ken said:

"You can't tell. I might run into him some time."

"I certainly would hate to think that if you did run into him, Ken, you wouldn't let us know right away. I'd certainly hate to think that you were trying to grab something out from underneath us."

Ken said earnestly:

"Buck, I'm only interested in one thing, and that is to get an airtight, lawyer-proof case against Jules Marot, let the newspaper stories fall where they may."

"It would be elegant, that's a fact." Buckley looked at the floor. "Where you going now?"

"I'm going to call on an old friend of mine."

"Wouldn't be somebody we might like to talk to, here?"

Ken laughed.

"No. This fellow lives in Park Avenue and drives a Rolls-Royce."

"You got some funny friends," said Buckley, "for a cop."

HARRY STORK had roomed with Ken Barclay in college. He was a slim, firm young man with military mustaches, a nervous temperament, a country club manner. He was outrageously rich. Once he had been an all-American end. Now he was an amateur stunt flyer and crack polo player.

"Lord! it's good to see you again! You're always so busy with this job of yours that a man forgets what you look like! Here, let me make you a drink."

Ken said:

"This is really business. I understand Mrs. Wendell Harris is tossing a house party, starting tomorrow. Are you going?"

"Why, I was. But if you get the day

off I'd be tickled to death to duck out of it, and maybe we could——"

"No, I want you to go."

Harry looked puzzled. This was not like Kenneth Barclay.

"And I'll go with you," Ken added.

"Oh, swell! The old dear will be delighted! She's heard about you being a secret service man, which is what she calls it, and she's been after me to get you to come to some of her parties. I'll give her a ring."

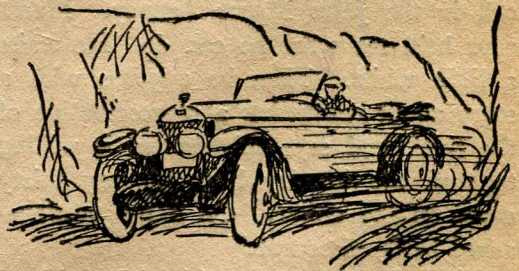
"Now wait a minute, Harry. I'm not going the way you think." He sat on the edge of his chair, elbows on knees. "You're always craving a thrill, Harry. Maybe I can fix one for you, this week-end."

"At a house party?"

"At a house party. Now listen——"

IT WAS spring, emphatically. Forsythia was everywhere in bloom, flaringly yellow, and iris and tulips were pushing tentative spouts above the earth. Suburbanites were scraping rust off their lawnmowers and hedge clippers, and anxiously examining flannels for evidences of moth activity.

"Sweet piece of road," Harry Stork



said. "Isn't it along here somewhere that your master-mind lives?"

"Yes. Take it easy, and we might get a glimpse of him."

Harry throttled down to a mere fifty-five miles an hour.

"I had always understood," he said, "that this fellow was trusted by the underworld, which was why he was able to make these secret deals. And that the reason the cops were always trying to get some-

thing on him was just because they were jealous—because he made them look foolish."

"They don't like him," Ken said. "But that trusted-by-the-underworld stuff is just part of the legend the man has built up around himself. The underworld doesn't trust anybody."

"But what is this man, anyway? What's his game, that you're so mysterious about? If he's such a crook, and the cops all know it, why is it that he's allowed to be in business as a private detective?"

"Because he's smart. He's got a perfectly legitimate business, and he undoubtedly makes the \$20,000 a year he declares when he fills out his income tax statement—and does it honestly. But he specializes in the return of stolen jewelry, and that's where the dirty work comes in."

"Here's what he does. He hangs around rich people, spots some giddy woman who likes to clank her gemmery in public, gets a line on her, finds out everything he can about her habits and household, and then calls in a professional thief. In other words, he fingers the job."

"The thief steals the stuff. The police and the insurance dicks run around getting nowhere, and finally the insurance people call in the Jules Marot Agency. Marot says he'll see what he can do. He waits a little while. Then he appears with a story about contacting a representative of the thief, and says this person is willing to turn the jewelry back for say thirty cents on the dollar. On a no-questions-asked basis, of course."

"Then how does the thief benefit?"

"Well, suppose the stolen stuff is insured for \$100,000, and worth it. The thief ordinarily couldn't get more than \$7,000 or \$8,000 on that, because he'd have to turn it over to a hot ice pusher, who'd have to turn it over to a layer, who'd turn it over to a fence, who'd either have to hold it a long while before he dared peddle it, or else he'd have to take the stones out, maybe break them up, and melt the mountings. Also, bringing that many men into

the thing increases the danger of a squeal, or a hijacking party. But dealing through Marot, the thief could get \$30,000. Or that's what would be reported. Actually he'd get perhaps half of that—which is still twice what he could expect by ordinary methods. Marot, of course, keeps the rest. The victim gets her stones back, intact. The insurance company is out \$30,000, which is better than being out \$100,000. And Marot not only has his cut with the thief but also a legitimate consultant's fee from the insurance company."

HARRY STORK stuck out his lower jaw, and raised and lowered his chin.

"I begin to understand. And now you've got me really curious to see this man. If we pass him, shall I stop?"

"No. He might recognize me."

"If he does," Harry Stork chuckled, "he is smart!" He looked admiringly at his companion. "Honestly, Ken, I'd always thought disguises consisted of false beards and grease paint. But you haven't done anything except change your clothes and comb your hair differently and put on those glasses—and you're another man!"

Ken didn't smile. A smile seemed incalculably remote from this grave, highly proper young man who sat beside Harry Stork. Ken wore a black cutaway, gray-striped trousers, black shoes, a derby. As his friend said, he seemed a different man. His expression was different. He held his head and shoulders differently. The very way he folded his hands in his lap was unlike the ordinary Ken Barclay. Even his voice seemed the voice of another man: it was higher, and slightly nasal, and he had an English accent now.

"Jeeves himself! Ken, I don't see how you do it!"

"Thank you, sir."

"Practicing?"

"Beg podden, sir?"

"You know, I envy you, Ken. I'd like to get a job like that myself, only the folks would howl. It must be a kick."

"It is, sometimes. But a lot of it's ordinary hard work."

"Well, I hope we catch some of the excitement this week-end. I brought along a pistol."

"Take it easy here. I think we're near where—— Yes! there it is! And there's Jules Marot himself!"

The famous private detective wore wine-colored corduroys, a blue-gray flannel shirt, blue gardening gloves. He knelt by the side of a flower-bed, a small weed-cutter in his hand, and he was gazing at the soft, nicely-sifted earth with all the rapture of an enthusiast who would, if he could, sit right there all day. Behind him a Negro was rolling the neat little lawn. Beyond was Marot's house, a quaint, very pretty brick bungalow covered with ivy; there were windowboxes in all the windows, and the front porch was thick with potted plants.

"He looks like a sissy to me."

"He's the most dangerous criminal in America today," Ken said.

THEY went through Morristown, around the square, and turned west.

"And you really think somebody's going to try to steal Mrs. Harris's sapphires?"

"I'm convinced of it. Marot did some work for her a few weeks ago—planted a maid there to mislay an earring, and then got himself called in to find it—and that would have given him an excellent chance to box the place. Mrs. Harris is notoriously careless, and absent-minded, and those sapphires are insured for \$150,000. When they're missed, Marot will be there even before the cops—if the cops are summoned at all. He'll have a chance to cover up any mistakes his man might have made."

"Well, aren't you going to prevent the theft?"

"No, indeed! I want them to be stolen! I want to see who does it, and find out where he goes afterward. I don't care whether Mrs. Harris loses her stones. All I want is to corner Marot."

"And you won't interfere with the thief himself?"

"I'll watch him. I'll shadow him, or have him shadowed. And eventually he'll be arrested. But I'm certainly not going to grab him red-handed and give Marot a chance to slide out from under."

"Maybe the man would talk?"

"Marot doesn't pick men like that. Though if worst comes to worst, we might get something out of this one on a threat to send him to the electric chair. Because there's a murder mixed up in this case, Harry."

"Oh-oh! I think I'm going to enjoy this week-end!"

Ken, for the first time that morning, flashed his familiar smile. But fifteen minutes later, when they rolled up the drive toward the Harris mansion, Ken's face was stony and he was again silent, self-effacing. When the car came to a stop under a glittering porte-cochere he hurried out, trotted around to the driver's side, and held open the door for his friend. Then he turned to the bags.

Harry said:

"Be careful with those tennis racquets, Chisholm."

"Very good, sir."

Half a dozen guests were on the veranda. They waved to Harry Stork, and shouted greetings. Mrs. Wendell Harris, a large and good-humored widow, came fluttering toward him, both arms outstretched. She had a screechy, nervous voice, very loud.

"So good of you to come! And I'm so sorry you couldn't persuade that nice Barclay boy to be here. I was hoping we could get him to tell us his experiences as a secret service detective. Isn't that a new man?"

"Victor's got an attack of pleurisy, and I got this chap from the agency to fill in. Name's Chisholm."

"Well, Arthur will help him with those bags and things. I'm giving you the room you asked for—right next to my own."

"Thanks. That's very good of you."

"You'll have a nice view of our little patch of lawn," she screamed, referring to the twenty-odd acres of formal landscaping which swept down toward an unseen highway. "And I'll put your valet with one of my chauffeurs, over the garage."

Ken Barclay's most difficult moment came when he saw the gorilla. Hanker looked so uncomfortable! He stood near the main doorway and scowled at Ken, who trembled with repressed laughter; and for all the white flannels and gabardine sport coat, and the brown-and-white shoes, he was every inch a cop.

"Good old Harris," chuckled Harry Stork on the way upstairs. "She would have to have a detective, to show everybody she's accustomed to people who have scads of jewelry! Did you spot the lum-mox, Ken?"

"Beg podden, sir?"

"Oh, go to hell!"

"Very good, sir."

IN AN apartment over the garage, Arthur, the footman, introduced Ken to a sour-faced blond in chauffeur's livery.

"You'll be rooming with Nelson. This guy's a valley, Nelson."

Nelson muttered, "Pleased to meet yuh," and scowled.

Ken bowed and said: "Chawmed. I'm sure we'll hit it off top-hole."

Nelson sat watching while Ken unpacked. He seemed to disapprove. He seemed to disapprove of everything in the world, but especially of Ken.

"So you're an Englishman, huh?"

"Ah, yes. Quite."

"Got any dough on you?"

"Beg podden?"

"Dough. Money. Mazuma."

"Ah! Ah, yes! Yes, I have a trifle. Why do you awsk?"

"Some of the boys plan to bend over ivory tonight. Downstairs, behind where the cars are. In case you're interested."

"Ah—I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"Craps! Don't you ever shoot craps in England?"

"Why, I—I'm not much of a one for gunning, no. I don't believe I've ever shot a crap. So sorry."

Nelson bellowed with laughter, throwing his head back. He went out, to tell the boys about this crazy Englishman.

The crazy Englishman was thinking that there was something teasingly familiar about this man Nelson. Ken seldom forgot a face. He didn't think he had ever seen Nelson before, but it was possible that he'd seen Nelson's picture. It was part of his job to remember pictures.

On impulse he locked the door and searched the room. Nelson's possessions were few, and except for a belt buckle with the initials "L.F.S." and a full clip for a Colt .45 automatic, they were harmless.

Well, the belt might have been given to Nelson by some former employee. As



for the permit, it was possible that Nelson had a local permit to carry a gun in the car he drove.

Just the same, the man's face was familiar. Ken looked around. There would be plenty of fingerprints . . . but the trick was to find a full set.

He went to the metal cover over the radiator, just under the window. The sort of thing any man would lean on when he looked out of the window. Ken took his little black box, selected a brush, a phial of gray powder. In a few minutes he had

raised a perfect set of prints. They couldn't have been better if they'd been taken in a police station with roller and ink. He examined them with a glass, jotting a series of numbers and letters on a piece of paper. Then with his dampened handkerchief he wiped out the prints. He went for a walk.

Some of the guests were playing tennis, some were playing croquet. Mrs. Wendell Harris fluttered from group to group, shrieking. She was stupid and noisy, and vulgarly ostentatious, but a good-hearted woman, and popular.

Harry Stork saw his friend, and smiled.

"Fixed up all right, Chisholm?"

"Quite comfortable, sir. Thank you, sir."

In a lower voice Harry said:

"There's a man named Carstairs here."

"Thank you, sir. I'm taking a bit of a stroll, sir, but I'll return in ample time to lay out your dinner clothes."

And Ken walked on, erect, unsmiling.

HE QUIT the estate by one of the main gates, and walked down the highway a short distance. Around the first curve, pulled far off on the side, was a low fast roadster. A man at the wheel, smoking a cigarette, scarcely glanced at Ken. But Ken stopped, leaned in.

"There's a chauffeur whose pan looks like one I ought to know. Here's his Henry. I don't want to use one of the house phones, so will you drive back and get this off for me?"

The man straightened.

"Gee, Ken! I never would have known you!"

"Better send the wire in your name. And if the answer says this is somebody I ought to know about, phone it to Mr. Harry Stork."

"Will it be all right to leave here for a while?"

"Yes. Nothing's going to happen until tonight anyway."

"And what's going to happen then?"

A couple of horsemen came out of a lane. Their mounts gladly stopped, doing

high, nervous little dance steps, while the horsemen frowned at the pavement as though they thought it had no right to be there.

Ken bowed.

"Thank you so much, sir. Very kind of you, I'm sure. I think I shall be able to find my way back now, sir."

He returned to the main gate. But he didn't go up the drive. Instead he sauntered along one of the narrow paths. It was pleasant, shady, spring-like. Ken, who knew that he would be up all night, welcomed its restfulness. But presently he began to frown. He walked fast, then slowly. When he came to a summer house he went through it, wheeled, scampered around behind some rhododendron bushes. A moment later Hanker went through the summer house.

Ken sighed, shook his head. He went into the summer house, supposing himself safe for a time. He could hear gleeful shouts from the direction of the croquet ground, but there was nobody in sight. He folded his arms, leaned back on the rustic bench, and deliberately went to sleep.

He was always able to sleep like this—whenever he wished and for as long as he wished. And he was a very light sleeper. Which was why he heard Hanker coming back. But it was too late. Hanker had seen him.

"Chawming day, sir."

Hanker said slowly:

"I've lamped you before somewhere."

"It scarcely seems possible, sir, if I may say so. I've only been in your country a short while."

"I've seen you somewhere," Hanker repeated, glowering.

"In London perhaps? You've been to London, sir?"

"No, and it wasn't in London either, because I never been there. Your name's supposed to be Chisholm, ain't it?"

Ken summoned dignity. "My name is Chisholm, sir!"

"Yeah. And mine's John D. Rockefeller. Where's your passport?"

"I'm not aware that you have any right to ask. I haven't it with me. I am only temporarily in Mr. Stork's service, you understand?"

"Yeah. Damn temporarily, I bet. Well, you must have something in your pockets, and I guess I'll take a look."

Ken stood up.

"This is an outrage, sir! If you dare lay your hands——"

"Just a minute, guy! I said I was going to look!"

Now among the things Ken did have in his pockets were his pistol and his credentials, and he didn't choose to have Hanker see these. So he deliberately slapped Hanker's face.

"Hey!"

Hanker lunged with a thick right arm. It was what Ken had anticipated. Ken stepped aside, caught the arm, jerked it forward, and thrust out his left leg. The big detective struck the rustic rail, crashed through, and went tumbling headlong into rhododendrons.

When he emerged, a moment later, swearing horribly, Ken was not in sight.

HARRY STORK, when Ken was dressing him for dinner, complained:

"Well, so far it's been just like any other country party."

"Things will happen," Ken promised serenely. "The batwing, sir?"

"You know, Ken, if I didn't happen to know you as well as I do, I'd say you were cuckoo when you think there's anything wrong about that chap Carstairs. I met him this afternoon. Nice fellow."

"Do you think so, sir? Your coat, sir."

Harry scowled, put on the coat, snapped a handkerchief into the breast pocket, and went downstairs.

Ken's strategy was simple. He wished to have a good look at Mrs. Harris's bedroom, to mark the windows and their locks, the bureau, the jewel case or cases, the closets. Later, when everybody had retired, and Mrs. Harris had presumably put away her trinkets, he would slip into her

room and hide there. Perhaps Carstairs would not come? Ken must take that chance. If Carstairs did come, Ken would permit him to go about his larceny uninterrupted. After that there were several possible courses of action. Carstairs might bolt, which wasn't likely. He might pass the jewels to a confederate. Or he might sit tight, confident that he would not be suspected, and that, even if his baggage and person were searched his partner Jules Marot would do the searching.

The third course seemed the most probable. In the case of the first or second, Ken himself would not pursue—unless Carstairs or his confederate tried to escape by foot. Loaded and ready, near a window of Harry Stork's room, was a Very pistol. Fired out of that window, it would send a flare which, because the house was on higher ground than the road, would be seen by other Bureau of Investigation agents waiting in two automobiles not far from each of the entrances of the estate. The jewels would be followed to their hiding place, and that place would be watched night and day. The next move would be up to Jules Marot.

If anything went wrong, if the jewels were lost, it would still be possible to arrest George Gulick, alias Carstairs. Gulick was even now being sought by the New York police in connection with the murder of his former bodyguard; but only Ken Barclay knew that Gulick was using the name of Carstairs and living in East Sixty-second Street, and only Ken knew that Jules Marot, immediately after a fight with Sam Lefferts, had made a telephone call to Gulick. That information surely would justify a short affidavit against Gulick, and he could be questioned for at least twenty-four hours. He had a bad record, and could not afford to face a murder charge. It was possible that he might squeal on Marot.

Ken ate a quick dinner in the servants' quarters, and then hurried back upstairs. The guests were having cocktails in the drawing room. A gay babble rose to the

second floor hall; but that hall itself was otherwise quiet.

Ken knocked at Mrs. Harris's door. He knocked again, listening. There was no answer, and no light shone under the door.

Ken went to Harry Stork's room.

This room too was dark, but when Ken swung open the door he caught a glimpse of a swift-moving shadow. Only a glimpse. There was no sound.

Somebody, some large man, had dodged to one side so as not to be silhouetted against the vague light from the windows. Ken already had closed the door. He crouched, his right hand reaching for his pistol, his left for the electric light switch.

Then something moved. Something whammed hard against the door just above Ken's head. And the big shadow, blurred and misshapen, loomed in front of him again, charging.

There was no time for the gun, even if Ken had been eager to use it. He straightened, lashing out with a long right. His fist hit a face. He stepped aside, hooked a left into a large, soft body. There was a grunt. A fist caught his right temple, knocked him off balance for an instant. He stumbled upon the edge of the rug, waved his arms wildly, crashed. His left cheekbone struck a leg of the bed.

It stunned him. He heard the man leaving the room, but it was a full minute before he was able to get to his feet.

THE hall was deserted. The sound of laughter and gay talk, the clink of glasses, the clatter of a cocktail shaker, floated up the staircase; but there was nobody in sight.

Ken went back into the bedroom. A window, he found, was open, but the Very pistol was untouched, and nothing seemed disturbed.

Then there was a step in the hall, a hand on the doorknob. Ken snaked out his gun and knelt behind the end of the bureau. The door opened. The light was switched on. Harry Stork stood there, blinking.

Ken rose, quietly putting away his pistol.

"Hello. They still lapping up drinks down there?"

"What in the world is the idea, Ken? Why the artillery?"

"I wasn't sure who you were going to be."

He went into the bathroom, and with a wet towel started to staunch the flow of blood from his cheek. Harry Stork followed him, and stared at Ken's reflection with brown, wondering eyes.

"Lord! here I was hoping to get a thrill helping you chase thieves, and everything goes along just as usual—as far as I'm concerned! But you seem to be getting all sorts of action!"

"You had a visitor."

"Who was it?"

"I didn't see him."

"It certainly wasn't this Carstairs chap you talk about, because I just left him downstairs."

"No, it wouldn't be Carstairs. It was a bigger man."

Harry shook his head. He wandered back into the bedroom. From the floor



near the hall door he picked up a black-jack and stared thoughtfully at it, wagging it. Then he carried it into the bathroom.

"This yours?"

"Well, it was given to me. But it missed. Might have cracked my skull if it'd been an inch or two lower."

Harry groaned.

"I certainly wish I could be in on some of these doings!"

Ken smiled his old, unvaletlike smile.

"What brings you up here, by the way?"

"Oh, I almost forgot that. I have a

telephone message for you. Somebody who wouldn't give his name said to tell you that your friend is Art Guntz, automobile bandit and mayhem artist, and he's wanted as a fugitive from the McAlester Penitentiary in Oklahoma."

Ken said, "Well, well, well." He came out of the bathroom. "You'd better get below, Harry. They'll be missing you."

"Well, for Pete's sake, let me know next time the fight starts!"

When his friend had gone Ken borrowed his tennis shoes, put a flashlight into a woollen sock, and went into the next room. He locked the door behind him, against the possibility of being surprised by the maid. Then he went to the windows, meaning to leave one of them open so that in an emergency he could scamper back to Harry's room by way of the veranda roof.

He found one of the two windows already open, and he examined it. It had been pried open from the outside, apparently by means of an ordinary jimmy, so that its lock was snapped. First it had been necessary to get the screen open, but this was simple. Two small slits had been cut in the screen just above the two little inside latches. The rest could have been done by a slipped-in finger.

But there was something odd about those slits . . . Ken examined them closely, with a glass. He even risked taking the flash out of the sock for a moment. And he learned that the tiny strands of cut screen were bent out, not in. He clucked his tongue, muttered "Careless," put the flash back.

IT TOOK him less than five minutes to make a thorough examination of the hostess's bedroom. The thing in which he was most interested was the jewel case which stood open on the dressing table. It was steel, but skilfully painted so that it resembled leather and polished wood. It was flat, oval, and very large, almost as large as the top of the dressing table. It had been specially built to contain the

sapphire set, and its velvet cushions had spaces for the various pieces—large earrings, small earrings, four bangles, six rings, and an enormous quadruple necklace. Just now the only things in it were the small earrings, four of the rings, and two bangles.

There was only one drawer in the bureau large enough to hold this jewel case. It was unlocked and open, and empty.

Leaving everything as he had found it, Ken returned to Harry Stork's room, got into his valet's shoes again, and went for a walk.

The night held a firm chill, and the garden smelled earthy, sappy. The sky was dark, the clouds very low. It might start to rain at any moment. Ken found a bench hidden by shrubbery and made himself comfortable. He allowed himself another hour of sleep. Then he got up, instantly wide-awake, and began to prowls.

There was somebody else prowling in this garden. Somebody not as quiet about it. Ken, after a time, saw the lumbrous Hanker cruising up one path and down another, looking very angry, and sillier than ever with a bruised right eye. Hanker met one of the assistant gardeners.

"Seen that guy Chisholm? The valet for this guy Stork? Well, if you should, let me know. That guy's a crook, and I happen to know it."

"He's a crook, eh?"

"Yeah, and I think he's something worse. I've had my eyes on him ever since he came here, but I just remembered a little while ago where it was I'd seen him before. He'd just been fighting with a man who got mysteriously murdered a little while after that."

"Holy gee!"

"But keep that part of it under your hat, see?"

"Oh, sure . . . sure!"

And the gardener hurried away, toward the garage.

Ken thought: Now the whole service

staff will be looking for me. He stared grimly at the skinned knuckles of his right fist. He went back to the garage. There was a crap game in the rear, as Nelson had promised, but though the play was lively and the crowd a good one, Ken, peering through a window, saw nothing of Nelson himself. He went upstairs—the door was on the side of the garage building and it was not necessary for him to go near the crap game—and found the door of the room he shared with Nelson open. He switched on the lights.

A chair was overturned. Ken's collars had been swept off the dresser. And in the very middle of the floor, fresh and new and glittery, was a splash of blood.

Ken opened one of Nelson's drawers. The extra clip for the automatic was no longer there.

The sound of the crap game below had ceased, and somebody was coming up the stairs. Five or six men, judging from the sound. Ken heard the assistant gardener's thrilled whispered:

"There's a light up there, and it wasn't there a little while ago. Now let's take it easy. This detective said this guy was a dangerous gunman. We don't want to —"

KEN ran to the window, kicked out the screen, climbed over, held the sill for an instant with both hands—and dropped.

He was too good a gymnast to lose his balance. He landed easily on gravel, and swung around. Next to him was a touring car, a black Lincoln with the top down. He started to run around this. But somebody grabbed his right arm; and somebody else grabbed his left.

"Wait a minute, fella! What's the rush?"

Ken jerked backward, falling, carrying both men with him. He wrenched himself free, rolled a short distance, sprang to his feet.

One of the men was up. The other was on his knees.

"So that's the kind of a guy——"

Ken chopped the sentence short with a whole-hearted uppercut which snapped the man's head back. The man teetered on his heels. Ken pushed him, and he tumbled backward over his companion.

Ken vaulted into the tonneau of the Lincoln.

For half an hour there was hubbub around that car. But it was a subdued hubbub. The servants were not sure of themselves. They were afraid to break up the party at the house and rile their mistress with wild stories. Some of them insisted that she should be told, and that the police should be summoned. They had seen the blood on the floor of Nelson's bedroom, and they believed that Nelson had been killed. Nelson himself they couldn't seem to find. Nor could they find Ken Barclay, who lay flat, listening, a few feet away. They beat the bushes; they spread out and searched the grounds; but nobody thought to look into the car. The two men Ken had knocked down had not seen him vault into the tonneau.

"I tell you Nelson's been murdered! We ought to report it!"

"Then Old Lady Harris'd be sure to find out about the game, and she'd be sorer'n a pup. Anyway, all we got to go on is the say-so of a guy we can't even find."

"That's what we ought to do! Get hold of that detective!"

"He's probably out chasing the Englishman somewhere."

"Maybe that's where Nelson is too?"

"I think we ought to find Nelson. Or if we don't, we ought to report it right away!"

"And maybe get fired?"

It was finally agreed that unless Nelson or the private detective appeared within half an hour, with a satisfactory explanation, they would report the whole business to Mrs. Harris. Many of them weren't satisfied with this decision, but they agreed to stick together. They drifted back into the garage, chattering in low voices.

KEN slipped out of the back seat. He too was wondering where Hanker and Art Guntz, alias Nelson, were. But for the moment, the house seemed the safest place for him.

He prayed, as he slipped in by a back door, that one of the missing men would soon reappear. If the scuffle were reported Ken would be obliged to reveal his identity—and make a fool of himself. His whole plan of campaign would be ruined. To be sure, he could cause the arrest of a fugitive from justice. But again, could he? Maybe Nelson would take alarm and wouldn't return at all? In any event, his arrest would do little to offset the scandal. Mrs. Wendell Harris would be furious. The Chief would be furious, for special agents of the Bureau of Investigation are not supposed to do some of the things



Ken had been doing—and be caught at them. And worse of all, Jules Marot would be warned.

He ascended to the second floor by a back stairway, meeting no one. He entered Harry Stork's room.

Hanker stood spread-legged in front of the bed, an automatic in his hand.

"It's about time you came," Hanker said.

Ken laughed quietly, without any notable mirth.

"You fool," he said.

"So I'm a fool, am I?"

Blood pounded in Hanker's face, which was dark red, almost black, and sweat rolled down his fat cheeks. His eye was badly puffed and discolored, his lips were puffed too. He took a step toward Ken,

"Of course you're a fool! You get it

into your head that I'm a crook, and you go pussyfooting around shooting off your mouth to everybody you meet, and then when you can't find me you go to my room. And you start to search it. And somebody comes in and finds you there."

"Yeah, I went to your room out over the garage! And you came in!"

"I did! Do you see any marks on my face? This man gave you a shiner, didn't he? And before he ran out on you, or you ran out on him, whichever it was, do you mean to say you didn't get in a return crack?"

Hanker was leaning closer, peering, puzzled.

"You got a cut on your cheek there."

"You didn't hit this man in the cheek, did you?"

"No. I smacked him one good square one on the nose. I'd swear to that much, even if I couldn't see him. I felt it."

"Sure. And he felt it too. And he bled all over the place, the way those big blond fellows with high complexions always do."

"Well then, if it wasn't you——"

"Mr. Marot," Ken said severely, "will be sore as all-get-out when I tell him about this."

It frightened the big man. His gun was lowered a little. Ken's cool assurance, his contempt for the weapon, were disconcerting.

"Wait a minute. I don't get this. Who are you, anyway?"

Ken shrugged. He spread his hands as though about to explain something to a backward child. Carelessly he stepped closer.

"Now look. You come here under orders to——"

THEN KEN sidestepped and swung. It took Hanker completely by surprise, and in a way it was a dirty trick. But Ken had been able to think of nothing else. Hanker wouldn't stay bluffed very long.

Ken swung with his left, a perfect solar plexus punch, lifting it. Hanker went

"oomp!" and went over on the bed, momentarily paralyzed. Ken sprang on top of him pushing down the gun.

The gun exploded once. Ken had shoved the muzzle against the bed clothes, and the kick was terrific. It shocked Hanker's arm, shocked both of Ken's arms. It seemed to make the whole bed jump. The wonder was that the big pistol held together. Hot gases and unburned powder, denied their customary exit, flared back through the ejector slot. Hanker squealed. Perhaps he would have shrieked—but Ken jammed an elbow into his mouth.

Big man though he was, Hanker half fainted from the pain. The whole outside of his right hand was scorched.

It gave Ken a chance to kick the gun to the floor. And presently, before Hanker realized what had happened, Ken was binding his wrists and ankles with pillow slips.

"I'll apologize later," Ken gasped.

Small flames were making an ever-widening circle in the bedspread, and the room was filling with black, stinking smoke. Ken beat out the flames. He opened windows. He went back to Hanker and treated the seared hand with sunburn ointment pilfered from Harry's toilet case.

When Harry Stork returned to his room, a few hours later, his friend of college days was seated by one of the windows smoking a cigarette. Harry gawped at the ravished bed.

"I was forced to use it as a sort of Maxim silencer," Ken explained. "Shall I undress you, sir?"

"I thought you were going to ring me in on some of this trouble?"

"This was an emergency case. Didn't have time to call you. Will you put on your dressing robe, sir?"

"Never mind the valeting! For God's sake, tell me what happened! Nobody heard a sound, downstairs." He dropped into a chair. "The only thing I did hear," he amended, "was one servant whispering to another, a little while ago, that out—side——"

He stopped staring at the large automatic on the bureau.

"Part of the trouble," Ken explained. "What did the servant say?"

"Ken, for a lad who's always as quiet as you are, you're the maddest person who ever walked the face of this earth!"

"Sure. What did the servant say?"

"Why, he said there'd been a fight back of the garage, and that everybody was looking for a man who was supposed to be a desperate criminal. I kept quiet about it because I didn't know whether or not it was some of your work. Was it?"

"In a way. Anybody else hear this? Carstairs?"

"No, I'm sure he didn't. I don't think anybody else did. The servant said everything was quiet now anyway. Said somebody by the name of Nelson had come back and reported that it was just a friendly fight."

"So Nelson came back, eh?"

"And now will you tell me what——"

Again Harry Stork broke off, this time because of a thumping and muffled pounding from the clothes closet.

"A prisoner," Ken explained. "Take a look. He won't bite. He can't."

The sight of the recumbent and linen-swathed Hanker at first struck Harry to silence. Then it made him roar with laughter. He fell back into a chair, laughing so hard that he couldn't say a word.

Ken, smiling, closed and locked the closet door.

"He won't keep that up," Ken predicted. "He's had a hard day, and he's tired. Besides, nobody can hear him but us."

STILL, Ken was troubled about Hanker. It wouldn't be possible to keep him in there indefinitely, and as soon as he was freed he would call his employer. Perhaps, Ken reflected, the best thing to do would be to catch George Gulick red-handed after all.

"I know it's useless begging you to tell a chap anything," Harry gasped at last,

"but what's next on the night's program?"

"Well, when I hear Mrs. Harris go to bed—it sounds as if she's in her bathroom now—I'm going to pay her a little visit."

"You're certainly not going to break into her room!"

"I don't have to. It's been broken into already—from the inside." He handed his friend the Very pistol. "If you really want to help, sit by this window and hold this thing, and if you see a car start down for the highway shoot it off. Be sure you keep the window and the screen open all the time too! I might have to come back in a hurry."

He drew a black linen cap from under his vest and put it on his head, pulling it low. He turned up his coat, pinning it in place so that no part of his collar or shirt was visible. He put on tennis shoes.

"Best of luck to you," Harry whispered.

The roof was of tin, with only a slight slope. Ken moved cautiously, trying each step. Next to the window with the smashed lock he squatted, and for a long time he didn't stir.

Glowering clouds seemed intent upon getting right down among the trees, and the threatened rain, long delayed, was beginning—one drop, big and round and warm—and then another—and then, after a long pause, another. There was a far-away mutter of thunder.

A car went by, very fast, on the highway. The hum of its engine, and the soprano whirr of its tires, blended into a receding whine.

Mrs. Wendell Harris, who was not as young as she used to be, could be expected to sleep well. A conscientious hostess, she had been up since dawn, and busy preparing for her guests; and it was now almost two.

Ken, once he had made up his mind that everything was clear, went into the room swiftly. He left the window open, as he had found it. He glided without any hesitation to the clothes closet opposite the big four-poster bed. He had previously selected this as the best place from which

to watch window, door, bed and bureau. Also it would permit him to move a bit, and thus keep his muscles from getting stiff and cramped.

He couldn't know the time, for he had brought no watch. Even so slight a thing as the ticking of a watch might betray him. He would remain in this closet, one eye fixed at the inch-open door, until dawn came—or until something more disturbing occurred.

The odor of Mrs. Wendell Harris was all about him. It was an odor of parties, of good cigarettes, fine brandy, expensive French perfume. He stirred, when he ventured to stir at all, amid velvet and gauzy silks and the satin-padded ends of dress hangers.

So he waited.

WHEN the intruder came Ken did not hear him, did not even see him at first. He only knew that somebody else was in the room because of the faint movement of a wisp of silk against his cheek. The hall door had been open for an instant. That was all.

Then something imponderable and without shape, a blurred thing of darkness



against darkness, flittered past the foot of the bed. It went to the bureau, it seemed to slide into itself, so that it became half its former indefinite height.

Mrs. Wendell Harris turned over.

She didn't turn slowly, nor yet twitchingly, as a sleeping person might be expected to do. To Ken, with ears made keenly sensitive by listening to silence, it seemed that she turned like a person with a purpose. She got up on one elbow.

She couldn't have heard anything, because neither visitor had made the slightest sound. Instinct? But if she sensed

the presence of somebody else in the bedroom now, why hadn't she sensed Ken Barclay's presence?

The shadow crouching by the bureau dissolved. Behind the end of the bureau, Ken figured. It was the only place the man could have gone.

Mrs. Harris looked at her bedside clock, which had a luminous dial. Then a chair clattered. She lighted a lamp.

Ken pressed back among the silks and velvets. He heard Mrs. Harris get out of bed. She started to scream. She ran for the hall, her bare feet pattering wildly.

"I've been robbed! The window! Help! Burglars! I've been robbed!"

Ken put his face to the inch-open door. The largest bureau drawer was open—and empty. The shadow, material now, was dashing for the window.

"Hold it!"

He had his pistol out, but not aimed. He had not expected any resistance. But when Gulick heard the command it was almost as though he had been waiting for it. He twisted, and a revolver glittered against his dark bathrobe. The revolver cracked twice. It split the air of the room like a streak of lightning. Ken's right shoulder stung, on top, as though touched by a red-hot poker; and the gun fell from his hand. It was only a shock of pain. A nerve shock. He stooped, picked up the gun, and ran to the window.

Gulick was across the roof by that time. He slipped over the edge, wet from rain, and dropped. Ken heard him hit the shrubbery which banked the veranda.

"Stop!"

Ken ran to the edge of the roof, saw Gulick running for deeper shrubbery on the other side of the drive.

"Stop, or I'll kill you!"

KEN could have done that. But he preferred to have Gulick alive. His shoulder didn't hurt now. He knew it couldn't be anything but a flesh wound. It would not spoil his marksmanship. The light was poor. He fired once at Gulick's

flying feet. Gulick swirled around in a rattle of stones, and fell flat. But he managed to drag himself into sheltering shadows, his right leg useless behind him.

Ken ducked. The revolver cracked.

Harry Stork came scrambling out on the roof.

"What is it, Ken?"

Ken yelled:

"Down!"

Harry dropped. Again a crack from the evergreens on the far side of the drive, and this time a window behind Harry Stork flew to pieces.

"That caveman's loose, Ken! He's just getting out, and his gun's back there! Shall I——"

"Never mind him! Crawl to the far end of the roof and watch a clump of spruce just beyond the drive. Don't expose yourself! If the man in there tries to make a break, let him have it in the legs. In the legs, understand?"

Windows were opening everywhere, and doors were opening too, and people were asking wild questions. Mrs. Wendell Harris, who had fallen in a swoon in the hallway just outside her bedroom, now got to her knees and started to scream again.

In all this noise, Ken, bending low and running for the end of the roof farthest from George Gulick, did not hear the gorilla Hanker at the window. But he caught a flash of Hanker as he sped past. And an instant later he heard the terrific boom of Hanker's big automatic. Ken was scrabbling over the edge by that time, and he felt the roofing shiver under his hands as the bullet ricocheted. He felt little chunks of paint flick against his cheek: the bullet had scraped them loose and sent them flying.

Ken muttered, "Oh, that fool!" and dropped.

He fell through bushes into soft earth. Arms in front of him, and staying close to the veranda, he pushed through more bushes to the place where Gulick had fallen. The earth was trampled there, and

the shrubbery torn, but there was no sign of the jewel case.

Now he was in Gulick's line of fire. The evergreens shuddered. The revolver spoke. Ken went to one knee. He heard Harry Stork, above, fire twice.

Then, incredibly, Hanker came bounding out of the front door. He was waving his gun and roaring like a wounded bull.

Ken yelled, "Keep down, you idiot!"

Hanker heard him, swerved. But the man was stark mad! All he knew was Ken. He raised his gun.

Again from the shadows the revolver cracked. George Gulick didn't know who this big fellow was either, and he didn't care. All men were his enemies now.

Hanker's gun exploded, tearing jagged splinters from the veranda just above Ken's head. Hanker spun around, staggered backward, sat on the steps. The revolver cracked again.

THIS much even Hanker was able to comprehend: That somebody was firing at him from those spruce trees. He charged.

He might have the brain of a mosquito, but he was packed to the brim with brute courage. He would have charged a nest of machine guns. He had forgotten about Ken now. He was running for the evergreens, and emptying his gun as he ran.

He didn't quite reach them. He fell in the drive, right arm outstretched, like a man burlesquing a homeplate slide.

Nor was there any further sound from the evergreens. Nobody could have survived for long the volley of slugs Hanker had poured into that place.

Ken called, "Enough, Georgie?"

The revolver, shiny, glittering, was pushed out into the drive. Ken straightened, went to it, walking past Hanker without a glance.

George Gulick, alias Carstairs, was on his back, coughing a little, and dying. Pain had drawn his thin features tight, but the dark eyes, under the thin high brows, glared with a very live hatred.

"I'm curtains . . . plenty."

Ken patted the man's pajamas and bathrobe, sometimes getting his hands wet with blood; for Gulick was a soggy mass of wounds.

He said, "No worse than you did to Sam Lefferts."

"He had it coming." Gulick began to cough again. After a moment he snarled, "You're not looking for sapphires, I hope?"

"Where did you put them? You didn't have time——"

"I never got them! They weren't there!"

"Why not tell the truth before you die?"

"I tell you they weren't there! That's the dumb part of it! That and the way the dame acted was what made me leery that I'd been trapped, which is why I blasted."

He squeezed his lips shut. Blood was forcing its way out of his mouth, at the corners; and presently it began to gush from his nose too.

HARRY STORK was calling questions from the roof. Hanker, flat in the drive, was moaning. Everybody else in the world appeared to be shouting or slamming a door, or doing both. But even above this racket Ken Barclay heard the whip of an automobile started.

That Lincoln! Why had it been left outside, away from all other cars? Why had Mrs. Harris roused herself and almost immediately started to scream that she'd been robbed? Who was it who had forced open Mrs. Harris's window screen from the inside, and then beat a retreat through Harry Stork's room when Ken knocked at Mrs. Harris's door? Where, if it wasn't in the bureau, and if it wasn't anywhere on or about George Gulick, was the jewel case?

That self-starter was all the answers at once. Ken knew, abruptly, why his carefully laid plan had blown up.

Something had happened for which he had not made provision. A thing he had

not expected. George Gulick, who had been telling the truth with his dying breath, hadn't expected it either. Of course Hanker hadn't. Even that master strategist Jules Marot had never anticipated anything like this.

Mrs. Wendell Harris herself, in an attempt to cheat the insurance company, had staged a fake robbery!

But Mrs. Harris was a bungler, and now she was being double-crossed. The sound of the automobile starter told Ken that.

He started to run back toward the garage.

The Lincoln was in second gear when it swung around a curve and Ken saw it. The headlights were not on.

Ken put his gun in his mouth—the hot barrel stung his lips—and jumped for the running board. His feet missed this, but his hands caught the folded-down top. It almost jerked his arms out at the shoulders.

He got his chin against the top, swung his legs until they found the spare tires. He tried to crawl into the tonneau.

Perhaps Nelson sensed him there, or perhaps Nelson saw him in the mirror. Anyway, Nelson half-turned, placing the barrel of an automatic on the back of the seat. The car was in high and going very fast, spewing through gravel, rocking from side to side.

The automatic exploded. Nelson's gun hand jumped. He had only guessed, not dared to turn his head. But now, with the car on a short straightaway, he turned fully. He took aim.

Then he blinked, blinded, as everything was lit with a bright white flare. Harry Stork had discharged the Very pistol.

It might be that Nelson realized even in that wild moment that he was trapped—that the rocket was a signal to men who waited on the highway. He might have been taking a mad chance of driving across lawns to crash through a hedge beyond one of the gates.

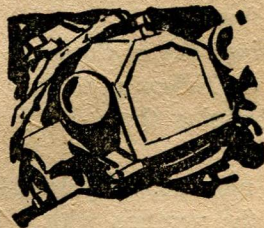
Or it might be that in shifting himself

for another shot at the man in back, he lost control.

Nobody was ever to know.

THE Lincoln went over a low embankment. It thudded, held firm, rushed on, swaying. It was going at a terrific rate of speed. The grass was wet with rain, and the car slid badly. Ken didn't know whether the brakes were on or whether Nelson was trying to fight the machine back to the drive. It splintered a small tree. The left wheels sideswiped a low stone wall, making a hideous screech. The car bumped, seemed to be trying to get back to that wall. The left front wheel struck a flower bed, very soft. The rear slammed against the wall again, much harder this time.

Ken pushed himself away, shoving with his feet at the same time. He felt the car



sink like a swift-dropping elevator cage. He landed on his back among some rose bushes. There is a lot in knowing how to fall. All Ken suffered was a stunning thump and a hundred thousand scratches.

He got to his feet, wondering what had happened to all that thunder which filled the earth for such a long, long while. For now there was a vast silence. And Ken almost regretted the thunder.

When he started to walk he found something in his mouth. He took it out. His gun! It made him feel foolish, but it reminded him of many things.

He cocked the gun.

Mrs. Wendell Harris's touring car had toppled over the wall, struck a bank, somersaulted at least twice across a terrace until it hit another and slighter wall; it had gone through this second wall, rolled over

at least once more, and lurched to rest against a self-consciously woodlandish pool in the middle of a rock garden. It was on its side. No sound came from it save the startled drip-drip-drip of a violated carburetor and the soft, uncertain hiss of raindrops.

Ken, when he saw Nelson, put the pistol away. Nelson had not been able to get free of the car, like Ken, and the wheel had crushed his chest. They found later that five ribs were broken and two of these had been driven back through his heart. His right leg was broken too. And his left wrist.

He dangled half out of the car, head down. The large, flat, oval jewel case which had been tucked under his tunic was crushed open by the crash, and its contents strewn down over the head of the driver. Even in that wan light they glowed magnificently; for they were wonderful stones, among the finest in the world.

One earring, one of the large ones, had got caught on Nelson's left ear. It looked very silly hanging there.

IT WAS near noon. Jules Marot came out on the veranda with a brisk, soft step. He wore fawn doeskins, a dark brown flannel tennis coat, jai-lai shoes, a terrycloth scarf. There was a small red carnation in his buttonhole, a red silk handkerchief in his breast pocket.

Ken was alone, smoking a cigarette and staring over the garden. The sun was out now. Mechanics were working on what remained of the touring car: they couldn't risk taking a wrecker down there, and the distance was too great for any block-and-tackle operation, so they were arguing whether it wouldn't be best to take the thing apart right where it was.

"I think we can keep any unfortunate suggestions from cropping into the report, as far as Mrs. Harris is concerned, don't you, Barclay?"

Ken smiled.

"That your job now? Keeping Mrs. Harris out of trouble?"

"It's always my job to guard the welfare of my clients. And of course," Marot said, looking sideways at Ken, "there really isn't any proof of any possible charge against the lady?"

"There isn't any proof of anything, if it comes to that. You wouldn't know there'd been trouble here, if it wasn't for a couple of corpses, a hospital case, a confession of murder, and a few dozen bullet holes—and that." He jerked his head toward the wreck.

Marot said sadly, "It's a shame about that."

"I don't honestly think the world will be so much worse without him."

"Oh, I didn't mean the chauffeur!"

"The car? Well, yes. A sweet job, that Lincoln. But for all the fact that Mrs. Harris has been losing so much money in the market lately that she feels the need to gyp an insurance company——"

"Sh-sh-sh!"

"—she still can afford to lose a Lincoln here and there."

"I wish," Marot said, "that you wouldn't put baseless and unfounded rumors into words. And anyway, I wasn't thinking of the car any more than I was thinking of the chauffeur. What I consider a pity is that it had to ruin that lovely row of Lady Elizabeths."

Ken felt of his cheeks and his neck, which hurt.

"Is that what they were?"

"Yes. Personally I think Mrs. Harris would have been wiser to set out a hardier rose along an exposed wall like that. A good pink Honorie, for example. Or better yet, pink and white alternately. Now you take those Lady Elizabeths, and in the first place they're late bloomers, and against a wall like that——"

KEN let him talk for some time. Later Ken said:

"That half-witted operative of yours is going to be a newspaper hero, by the way. Swell publicity for your agency."

Marot said gravely, "Yes, of course it

was Hanker who was on the lookout for trouble and chased George Gulick, alias Carstairs, who was a notorious thief—as Hanker knew all the time.”

“Oh, yes! Sure. And it was Hanker who tried to commit suicide by plunging straight at him. And it was Hanker who actually killed him, and damned near killed me too. Yes, Hanker is a valuable man! You ought to raise his salary.”

“Maybe I will,” Marot said solemnly.

“And so our plans went blooey because of a harum-scarum woman who really has plenty of money but who got it into her head that she was in desperate straits, decided to try a skin game with the coöperation of her chauffeur, and made a mess of it. Nelson, of course, was the man who forced open that bedroom window, to make it look like an outside job. He was supposed to hide the stuff somewhere, and then Mrs. Harris would give the alarm. But he got nervous, after finding your detective searching his room. He got the jewel case from Mrs. Harris all right, and I suppose he was getting ready to hide it when the shooting started. That threw him into a panic.”

“The papers, of course, will say that Gulick was the master mind and that Nelson was his confederate.”

“Sure! Always blame the dead men! But Gulick was a smooth worker, and it’s too bad he went in for murder. I suppose you only told him, when you called him from your office, that Sam Lefferts was getting too uppity about his desire to muscle in on the job you were going to pull? You just asked George to warn Sam, to call him off? But Sam wouldn’t listen to reason, and George had a quick temper too.”

MAROT said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“And naturally you’d refuse to box a job for a man with a wild-tempered, loose-mouthed bodyguard like that! But Gulick himself wasn’t any too reliable. You must

have a hard time getting reliable men?”

“Oh, all my operatives are dependable! Like Hanker.”

“Yes—like Hanker.” Ken sighed. “And now I’ve got to start all over again.”

“I wonder what hospital they’re taking Hanker to.” Marot didn’t seem to have heard. “I must remember to send him flowers.”

Ken grinned.

“Send him pansies,” he suggested, “for me.”

Harry Stork, released from the questioning police inside, came out.

“Say, Ken, I just heard Tony Serris is getting that ambassadorship, and that he’s asked you to be his secretary.”

“Yes, but I’m turning it down.”

Jules Marot laid a hand on Ken’s arm.

“Why don’t you accept?” The hand seemed to be resting lightly on Ken’s arm; but in fact, as only Ken and Marot knew, the fingers were pressing hard. They were strong, those immaculate, exquisitely manicured fingers—and they conveyed a warning which was supplemented, and strengthened, by the glint in Jules Marot’s large dark eyes. “The diplomatic service,” Marot said softly, “might lead to almost anything. But this life, as a federal detective, what will it lead to?”

Ken thought of the bronze tablet, and of the eight names which could, if necessary, be crowded closer so as to make room for a ninth.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “That’s just why I like it.”

“Mr. Serris is a fine man,” Marot said. “I think you ought to accept that offer.”

The pressure on Ken’s arm was released. Jules Marot was again the prim, precise gentleman. He shook hands with Ken and with Harry. He fluttered down to his car, stopping on the way to examine some promising tulip buds.

“You know, Ken, I still think that man is a sissy!”

Ken didn’t say anything. He only smiled.



THE HILL OF DEATH



By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of "Ritual Murder," "Exceptional," and Other Stories of Dynamite Drury of the South African Police

NUMBER 1278, Trooper Thomas Drury, sprawled indolently on his bed in the barrack hut at the Salisbury headquarters of the British South Africa Police. He was the one idle figure in the hive of industry, for the other occupants of the hut were cleaning their equipment in preparation for the morrow's kit inspection by Captain Carsten. And Carsten was a stern disciple of the spit and polish school. He had been known to ask a man to remove the badge from his slouch hat and put him on the peg if the back of the badge were not as brightly burnished as the front! Consequently, men preparing for an inspection by Captain Carsten knew that it was not wise to trust to native servants the cleaning of the least part of their equipment.

Sleepy-eyed, Drury watched the manifold activities with an air of contemptuous tolerance.

"Say, Stevens," he drawled, addressing the slim, dark-haired trooper who sat on the edge of the bed next to his, burnishing the steel heel-plate of his heavy, regulation

ammunition boots, "would you like me to give you a hand?"

Stevens ceased the *hissing* noise which he always made when grooming his horse or equipment, but his burnisher did not cease its glittering shuttle-like motion.

"What's the matter, Dynamite?" he asked in tones of mock solicitude. "Aren't you feeling very well? A dose of over-work, perhaps?"

"Hell!" Drury protested. "That ain't no way to treat an offer like mine, Stevens."

"I don't know a better way," Stevens retorted briskly. "But if you're feeling so damned energetic you'd better rise and shine, my lad; shine up your own stuff. You're crumby, sir! Look at your buttons! Look at your tunic! Look at your hair—if that flaming red stuff that thatches your head is hair." Both men laughed at Stevens' recognizable imitation of the Regimental Sergeant Major's biting whine. Stevens continued. "And just how do you propose, you lazy blighter, to lend me a hand?"

"I thought," Drury drawled, "that I



Once More on Special Duty, Dynamite Drury, Texas Drawl and All, Does Some Investigating of a Jungle Mystery



could sort of divide the work with you; you do the polishing, an' I'll do the hissin'. Must take a lot out of you, that must. You——"

He dodged, but not quick enough to avoid the burnisher Stevens threw at him.

"Hell! That's no way to act," he exclaimed in injured tones, "but I'm a good feller. I return evil for good. Or, if that ain't quotin' right—here's your burnisher back."

Stevens gasped as the chain-pad struck him with force in the belly.

"But seriously, Dynamite," he continued, "you ought to boss up your kit a bit. Carsten'll give you hell. Oh, I know you're a very special Special Duty man, excused parades, fatigues and inspections."

"That's what lets me out," Drury interrupted. "Don't you worry, Stevens. I'll clear out on a week-end pass before inspection time. I need a rest. Being a Special Duty trooper in this outfit is blamed strenuous, take it from me. Yep, I reckon a couple of days' loafin' is just what I want."

"Damn it! You do nothing but loaf," Stevens cried. "You and that chap up there make a good pair."

HE POINTED to the green-leaved branch which hung just above Drury's head and for a little while the two men watched the chameleon which had camouflaged itself amongst the leaves. The creature seemed to be asleep; actually it was moving slowly, incredibly slowly, toward its desired goal.

"Yes," Stevens mocked. "I'm going to call you 'Chameleon' Drury after this. Dynamite's no name for you. There's something swift about dynamite—but there's nothing swift about you. Now a chameleon——"

At that moment the creature, having got within striking distance of its objective, shot out its long tongue with a lightning rapidity. The tip curled round an unwary fly, the chameleon withdrew its tongue, its

jaw moved sluggishly, it swallowed and then was motionless again.

"What was that you was saying about me an' a chameleon?" Drury prompted.

"That you make a good pair."

"Maybe you're right. But I've noticed that he——" Drury jerked his thumb up toward the chameleon—"always gets his man!"

"That's what I meant, Dynamite," Stevens said.

Satisfied at length with the silvery brightness of the heel plates, Stevens put his heavy boots in their appointed place on the shelf at the head of his bed and started to work on the buttons of his tunic.

"I'll never see the sense in all that," Drury remarked contemptuously. "I reckon if a man's clean an' keeps his guns and saddlery in good condition, the rest don't matter. All this eye-wash gives me a pain. It's a waste of time. It don't make a man a better horseman an' shot. It don't teach him nothin' about the country or the niggers. It don't make him a better policeman. It just turns out a routine man who can't do no more than handle routine things in a routine way."

"Well," Stevens defended, "most of our work is routine stuff—so what's wrong with that."

"Nothin'," Drury admitted lazily, "except when stuff that ain't routine crops up." He added softly, "I hear you put in for a transfer to Mphoengs. Did you get it?"

"No," Stevens said tersely. "The Old Man said he was closing down the post."

"That ought to be lucky for you. By all accounts, Mphoengs ain't been exactly a health resort."

"There's nothing wrong with the place."

"No? Only a couple of troopers deserted from there. Another was murdered and another committed suicide. It's a health resort, if you ask me."

"Johnson and Larren may have deserted, Hewson *was* murdered," Stevens countered slowly, "but I'm morally sure that Jennings did not commit suicide."

"You knew him then?"

"We've been friends for years, Dynamite. Went to school together, joined up together. He wasn't the type to commit suicide. Damn it, man. There was no reason for him to do away with himself. And we were going home on leave together next month." Stevens' voice broke slightly. "Blast it," he added. "There's something in my eye!"

DRURY waited a few minutes, then he said:

"About Jennings now—that is, if you care to talk about him? Well, something may have happened to him up at Mphoengs that you know nothing about, something bad enough to make him think suicide was the easiest way out."

"Not Jennings," Stevens said confidently.

"It's a lonely post," Drury persisted. "He might have had a bad dose of fever—that leaves some men morbid-minded. Or maybe he boozed or——"

"No, I tell you," Stevens said heatedly. "I knew Jennings as well as I know myself. He didn't booze and he was one of those lucky chaps who scarcely ever have fever and, when they do get it so light that it's no more than a bad headache. And he had plenty to keep him busy. He planned to take the Native Language exam before he went home on leave. And, damn it, Dynamite; you pull my leg about the time I spend cleaning my kit—Jennings was twice as particular. He had one of those clean, orderly minds. Nothing slipshod or loose about Jennings. I'll never believe he killed himself. That's why I wanted to be transferred to Mphoengs. I wanted to investigate. I wanted to clear his name. Hell—I'll be seeing his people in two months time!"

"How is he reported to have killed himself?" Drury asked softly.

"With his revolver. Shot himself through the brain!"

"And Hewson? How was he murdered?"

"A native stabbed him with an assegai.

Hewson was reported to have been fooling around with the native's woman."

"I never met Hewson. Was he that sort of feller?"

Stevens frowned thoughtfully.

"I didn't know him very well myself. He had the reputation of being a bit of a hard case but, now you mention it, I never heard that he indulged that way."

"How about the two men who deserted—know anything about them?"

"Nothing specially good—or bad. Just ordinary troopers."

"Sent on a routine job, eh?" Drury laughed. "Maybe they ran up against



something that wasn't in their routine and they didn't know how to handle it. Anything been heard of 'em since?"

Stevens shook his head.

"I don't think so. They've probably cleared right out of the country."

"Who reported all these happenings up at Mphoengs? It's a one man post, ain't it? Well then?"

"There's a trader at the kraal, a chap named Stein. He sent in reports each time."

"Know anything about him?"

"He's got a good reputation with the Old Man. That's all I know. But look here, what are you getting at, Dynamite?"

"Don't know. Got a photo of Jennings?"

"Yes." Stevens took a snapshot from his note book and handed it to Drury. "That was taken just before he went to Mphoengs."

Drury looked thoughtfully at the snapshot. It was that of a slender, good look-

ing youngster with light, crisp hair of the texture that curls despite its owner's attempts to brush it flat. The chin was firm, the eyes well set.

"He don't look like a suicide, an' that's a fact," Drury said as he handed the snapshot back. "Looks the sort of chap who's got the world by the tail."

"And so he had. Here—where are you going?"

DRURY had risen and was reaching down his helmet from a peg.

"I'm goin' to see if I can have any better luck than you," he said. "I'm goin' to see the Old Man an' ask him to send me to Mphoengs. As a matter of fact, I don't mind tellin' you you've got me thinkin' your way about Jennings. Reckon I'm gettin' over-sentimental in my old age. If Jennings can be cleared, I'll clear him or else——"

"Or else?"

"Just 'or else.' S'long."

Drury stuck his helmet on his head at an angle and slouched lazily out of the hut countering the leg-pulling sallies which were shouted at him with retorts that were none the less barbed with wit because they were delivered in his slow Texan drawl.

Five minutes later, ignoring the protests of an irate troop sergeant major whose sense of discipline was outraged every time he came in contact with the red-headed trooper, Drury knocked on the C. O.'s office door and without waiting for permission turned the knob and entered, closing the door behind him.

The C. O. looked up with a frown then smiled as he saw who the intruder was.

"Well, Drury? I was just about to send for you. Really, when you're at headquarters you're a menace to my peace of mind. Can't you possibly remember to salute an officer. And what is this I hear about you calling Sergeant Herbert a——" the C. O. consulted a paper on the desk before him—"a bag of wind and a wall-eyed fool?"

"Hell! I mean, sir—Oh, hell! But that's what he is."

"Possibly. But it was hardly tactful of you to tell him that in front of a squad of recruits. Bad for discipline. And then I see, Drury, that you told the recruits to forget what he had just told them and proceeded to give them some instructions yourself."

"An' if they remember half of what I told them," Drury snorted, "an' practice every day, they may learn how to use a revolver. That is, if they don't run up against someone who does know in the meantime. Say——" Drury became quite excited as he thought of the sergeant's faulty instruction—"I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the things that galoot was teachin' them poor innocents. It was bad enough to see 'em doing things by numbers. 'On the command one—' an' all the rest of it. I might have stood that, knowing a man must walk afore he can run. But when Herbert had 'em stand with their revolvers on a level with their shoulders an', an' barrels 'pointing upward in a perpendicular direction'—that's what he said! An' then he had 'em lower the barrels till they was in line with the target afore firin'—why, hell! That was too much for me an' I decided to take a hand."

"But that's good revolver practice, surely, Drury? The regulations——"

"Never read 'em," Drury interrupted promptly. "I should have thought even a fool like Herbert would have known better. It stands to reason that the pull off 'll raise the muzzle an' the bullet 'll throw high. You don't bring your revolver down to your target an' fire; you bring it up and fire just afore your sights are lined. It makes for quicker shootin' too; only a matter of split seconds—but if you're them split seconds later than the other man, you're a long time dead. Ain't it the truth?"

"I've no doubt it is, Drury," the C. O. said with a smile. "And I think I'd better make you an instructor, Drury."

"Not on your life," Drury said hur-

riedly. Then he stiffened to something approaching attention, his freckled face flushed red and he stammered, "Beg your pardon, sir. You were sayin'?"

THE C. O. leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigar.

"I was saying, Drury, that you are a menace to my peace of mind when you are idle here at headquarters, and as there seems to be no case requiring your very special abilities, I find myself in somewhat of a quandary. I think I had better give you leave or invent a case for you to work on. There are times, 'pon my soul there are, when I find myself wishing that you would conform to routine discipline. But if you did, you would not be 'Dynamite,' would you?"

"Trooper Stevens is thinking of renaming me 'Chameleon,' sir," Drury said with a grin.

"And very apt too," the C. O. said. "Slow, no waste motions or wasted effort. And when it has decided that the time has come to strike, the chameleon always brings home the—er—fly." He eyed Drury sharply. "And now we'll come to the point. What was it you wanted to see me about? If I were to hazard a guess, I should say it is something to do with Mphoengs. You've been listening to Trooper Stevens' idiotic suspicions. Well, what is it?"

"I want to be transferred to Mphoengs, sir," Drury said.

"I thought so. Well, application refused. There isn't a police post at Mphoengs any longer. I'm closing it down."

"Why, sir?"

"Because there is no longer any reason for its existence. It's a thinly populated district. Its white population consists of one—a fine type of trader, well able to take care of himself—and the natives are a peaceful, law-abiding crowd. An occasional patrol from Plumtree is all that is required."

"Let me go to Mphoengs and close up the post, sir."

The C. O. shook his head.

"Not necessary," he said curtly. "Mr. Stein, the trader, has kindly offered to do all that is necessary in the way of packing up the effects and sending them in to Plumtree on his own wagon, in charge of the post's one native policeman."

Drury tugged thoughtfully at the lobe of his right ear. Then he said:

"I'm applying for a month's leave, sir."

"Application refused—what would you do with it?"

"Go to Mphoengs and poke my nose into things which, maybe, are none of my business."

"Why? You surely don't think——?"

"Don't know nothin', sir," Drury said stolidly. "Leastways, I don't know any facts. But Stevens, well, he ain't over-gifted with imagination an' he was Jennings' friend. He says Jennings wasn't the suicide type an' maybe he's right. An' if he's right, then maybe Johnson an' Larren didn't desert an' Hewson wasn't murdered—at least not as was reported."

The C. O. looked startled.

"God, Drury!" he exclaimed. "Do you understand what that means?" He laughed uneasily. "But it's absurd. Mr. Stein sent us a very clear and concise report of the desertions, the murder and the suicide."

"Did you send anyone to Mphoengs to check up?"

The C. O. shook his head.

"Nothing more than a routine inquiry by the replacing trooper in each case. What need? After all, Mr. Stein is a man with a splendid reputation with white men and black."

Drury ignored that.

"Then as nobody's been sent to replace Trooper Jennings, sir, I take it that there ain't even been a routine inquiry into his death? Well, sir, I'm applyin' once again to be sent to Mphoengs—on a routine case."

The C. O. hesitated a moment, then he said:

"Very good. I'll send you there to close up the post and to make any investigations you may think fit. I'm convinced that you're chasing a mare's nest for once, Drury, but at least the trip'll keep you out of the way of my officers and non-coms. Perhaps by the time you return something will have cropped up, some crime outside the normal run of things, that will justify my appointment of you as Special Duty Trooper. That's all."

But Drury did not budge.

"Well?" the C. O. barked. He was fighting off a threatened attack of malaria and was unusually splenetic.

"There are a few things I'd like to know about Mphoengs, sir, and the men who —"

"See the Regimental Sergeant Major then. He can tell you all you want to know. Now get out, I'm busy."

And Drury, grinning broadly, got out.

FIVE days later—two days by train to Plumtree, three days of hard trekking on horseback—Trooper Dynamite Drury came within sight of his destination. He didn't look much like a member of a police force which prides itself on the smart appearance of its men. True he wore the uniform of the corps and his saddlery was of regulation issue. But that's about as far as he and it went. His cloth, khaki puttees were loosely rolled—he detested them anyway, saying that they stopped the circulation of blood—his riding breeches fitted badly, his travel-stained tunic was unbuttoned and his disreputable helmet was tipped rakishly to one side. From under its brim an unkempt lock of flaming red hair hung down over his forehead. The shadow cast by the helmet's brim hid the keen light in his sleepy gray eyes and threw into undue prominence his over-large nose. He carried his revolver in a holster that was of a pattern unknown to the force and the revolver it contained was his own private property. It looked like a toy in comparison to the authorized weapon—but in Drury's hands it was as swift

and as deadly as a striking momba. His rifle was the regulation Lee-Enfield .303—but Drury had done things to the sights and the trigger spring; things which increased its efficiency. His performance with that rifle was on a par with that of a trick shot at a miniature range with a light Winchester repeater and if the occasion called for rapid fire his shots followed one another so closely that it sounded like machine-gun fire. Drury could hit a running buck—but then he never fired at a running buck; he was not that type of sportsman. He did not believe in giving the game he was after—animal or human—what is mistakenly called a sporting chance. If he could catch his quarry entirely unsuspecting the nearness of danger—so much the better for it and him. Infinitely better, he reasoned, than taking a long distance shot at a moving target with



the chance of missing a vital spot which meant that his quarry would get away to die later in agony.

Attached to his bulging saddle wallets, Drury carried his rope. He called it his third arm. Actually, it would have been described better had he called it an extension of his right arm; with it he had done strange things. It had been the law's long arm; it was as unexpected as the long arm of coincidence.

For the past two or three hours the trail had been leading steadily up hill and now, from the top of a pass between a range of kopjes he could see a kraal which was built in the center of a wide clearing cut from the thick bush growth of the valley below.

"I reckon that's Mphoengs," he said aloud, apparently addressing his horse. "An' them huts to the right must be the police camp."

His eyes roved over the valley, noting the long wooden building built on a slight rise of land not far from the kraal. That he supposed was Stein's store.

"Sure looks peaceful enough," he mused. "Shouldn't have thought though that there'd be enough trade up here to warrant a feller opening a store. Still, you never know. What's that?"

A glistening facet of light suddenly drew his attention to the hills on the opposite side of the valley. He thought it was a piece of quartz reflecting the rays of the setting sun. But as he watched the light disappeared only to reappear again a moment later. He trained his field glasses on the spot and saw several natives, armed with assegais, ascending the hill and as each man came to a certain spot the blade of his spear reflected the sun's rays across the valley. Drury chuckled at the simple explanation of what had promised to be a mystery. Still chuckling he put away his glasses and rode down the steep trail leading to the valley.

AT THE foot of the kopje he was surprised to find a crude grass hut before which sat a toothless, gray-bearded native who greeted him with extravagant compliments. Drury questioned him as to the distance to the police post but the native only stared foolishly at him, not understanding Dynamite's queer mixture of English and kitchen kaffir. Drury looked at him thoughtfully and thinking he detected an air of unease about the native decided to drop his pose of ignorance.

"What do you do here?" he asked in perfectly pronounced vernacular.

"I keep watch, *inkosi*," the man replied, too surprised to speak anything but the truth.

"For whom do you watch?"

"For any stranger that comes to the valley."

"I am a stranger. Now what do you do? Kill me?"

"*Wo-we!* You jest, white man. I am old. I have no arms. I do nothing save, when you have passed on, beat on my drum."

"For whose ears is your drum talk?"

The native's eye flickered. He was getting control of himself.

"For those who hear it," he said evasively.

Drury hesitated a moment considering whether to prevent the old man from giving the signal and thus making sure that his arrival at Mphoengs would be unannounced. Then, deciding against it, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Go and play with your drum, old one. Tell them that I am hungry and expect to find skoff waiting for me when I arrive." He added dryly, "And I will not tell them that I found you in your hut at the foot of the hill instead of keeping watch from the top."

Grinning at the look of consternation which came into the old native's face, Drury rode on.

"Well," he muttered a moment later as a signal drum sounded in the grass hut, "they'll know I'm comin'."

It was a good bit after sun-under and the crimson afterglow was swiftly deepening to the dark purple which foreshadows night, when Drury rode up to the police camp. A smartly uniformed, intelligent looking native police-boy ran up as he dismounted, jabbering an excited welcome.

"It is good that you have come, *inkosi*," he said as Drury unsaddled. "*Inkosi* Stein said that no more white police men would come here. But you have come and—*wo-we!* I think you are neither blind nor deaf. So together we will— Shall I take these things into your hut, *inkosi*? That is your hut, over there. Behind you—" he made a slight pause—"is the skoff hut."

"Yes," Drury replied. "And I am hungry. See that skoff is ready by the time I have washed."

HE MADE no comment on the native's sudden change of subject nor made no sign to indicate that he had noted the strain of fear which had suddenly come into the man's voice. And when he turned to enter the hut behind him his start of astonishment was as natural as if he had actually been caught off guard by the giant of a man who stood in the doorway of the hut.

"Say, who in hell are you?" he questioned truculently.

"Welcome to Mphoengs, Trooper," the other replied in a soft, almost womanish voice. "I am Stein, Peter Stein, the trader here. Perhaps you've heard of me, yes?"

"Yes." Quite unconsciously Drury mocked the lisp in the other's voice. He added in his normal voice, "Sure I've heard of you, Mr. Stein. Guess you'll have to forgive me if I turned on you kind of rough just now. But you took me by surprise—an' my name's Drury, generally called 'Dynamite.' Reckon that's because of my red thatch, though."

"Of course, I understand, Trooper. Don't think of apologizing. And apart from your hair," he laughed titteringly, "there's nothing particularly explosive about you, is there? A slow match—yes." He laughed again but his eyes were cold and fixed unblinkingly on Drury's face. He continued. "I suppose you are wondering what I am doing here. I am a welcoming committee of one, as it were. You are surprised that I should know you were coming? Yes?"

"No," Drury said flatly. "The nigger at the foot of the pass back there drummed in the news I reckon."

Stein frowned thoughtfully.

"You seem to know more about the natives—we don't call them niggers, Drury—than the average trooper."

"An' that ain't sayin' much, mister," Drury said with a laugh. "But I ain't meanin' any disrespect when I say 'nigger.' That's just a convenient label. But if that's the way you feel about it, why I

won't use it in your hearin'. No offense meant, you understand."

"And none taken," Stein said sharply. Drury laughed.

"Hell," he exclaimed admiringly, "but you're a giant of a man, ain't you? I'm no chicken, but you out-top me by three-four inches. An' I bet you're strong with it too."

"Strong enough, Drury," Stein agreed carelessly. "Well, I mustn't keep you here. You're hungry, the drum said. Very well. I took the liberty of bringing my own native servants down here to see that everything was in order for you and to prepare skoff. You would like to wash first? Yes?" He clapped his large white hands sharply together and to the cringing, undersized native who instantly came running from the lean-to cook house shack, said, "Prepare a bath for the *inkosi*, Kawiti. And be ready to serve skoff in half an hour."

As he followed the native to the other hut Drury was conscious of a feeling of deep resentment toward the trader and yet was forced to admit that, on the face of things, that resentment was unjustified. "I got to watch myself," he thought. "I'm lookin' so blamed hard for trouble that I'm likely to find it where it ain't."

AFTER he had washed and changed into a clean shirt and a pair of wrinkled slacks Drury took careful stock of the hut and its furnishings. The things it contained, he rightly supposed, had been the property of the last man at the post, Jennings, the man who had committed suicide. The dead man's kit was arranged on a shelf above the bed exactly as prescribed in the regulations; his rifle was in the rack—Drury examined it and found it greased and—save for the surface dust—clean; books and paper were neatly arranged on a little table. He picked up a note book. The few entries it contained, in the handwriting of a neat, methodical man, were observations on native customs and local proverbs. Drury recalled that

Jennings had been studying for his native language examination.

The furious beating of an iron triangle—the primitive dinner gong used at most of the police out-stations—announced that skoff was ready and putting out the oil lamp he made his way to the other hut.

He found Stein waiting for him in a chair set at a small deal table.

The man's face was the color of veld dirt and deeply lined. His nose was high bridged and aquiline, his mouth full and cruel. He had a broad high forehead, bulging out over deep set, narrow eyes. The eyes held Drury. They made him forget all the rest—the massive body, the muscular arms, the soft effeminate lisping voice. The eyes had in them something of the quality of a basilisk; they were cold, hard, repellent.

"Well, here I am," Drury said lamely. "And I'm blamed hungry."

"But of course," Stein replied. "I've already skoffed but, if you have no objections, I'll sit here and keep you company."

He clapped his hands and Kawiti entered bearing a steaming hot dish which he placed on the table.

Drury sat down and ate with an unfeigned appetite, conscious all the time that Stein was watching him closely. But not until he had finished his meal, had rolled and lighted a cigarette, did Drury meet the challenge of those piercing eyes.

"I'd sure like to steal your cook-boy," he then said with a sigh of satisfaction.

"You were hungry. And hunger is the best of sauces. Yes?"

"That's a fact," Drury agreed with a yawn.

"Ah! You are tired." Stein's voice almost purred. "That is not strange. You had a long trek. Perhaps I had better leave you."

"Hell, no," Drury protested. "Stay a bit. Maybe you can tell me something about this place I ought to know."

"I'm at your service," Stein said pompously. "I am ready to help you in every

way—just as I placed my services at the disposal of your predecessors."

"By all accounts," Drury said bluntly, "your services weren't much good to them."

Stein started angrily, his eyes blazed and he thumped the table with his fist.

"Must I be loaded with the blame of their folly?" he exclaimed. "Take Jennings—was Jennings a friend of yours, Trooper?"

DRURY shook his head. "Nope! Never met him. They tell me he was a good sort."

"So he was—until he came to Mphoengs. It's funny, Trooper, but this valley finds out a man's weakness. Drink was Jennings'."

"Wonder what mine is?" Drury drawled. "Wonder what's yours?" He added quickly, "So Jennings boozed, did he?"

"Yes. Probably, if he'd stayed in his own country he would have lived to a respected old age and would never have known that he had the makings of a heavy drinker. Well, there you are. The valley fed his weakness. I warned him many times but he only laughed at me. He shot himself with his revolver during an attack of delirium tremens. I tell you that in confidence. He spoke to me sometimes of his mother. It would hurt her to know her son died a drunkard's death. You see?"

"That's white man's talk, Mr. Stein," Drury said soberly.

"Yes," the trader continued. "Drink finished Jennings. Hewson ran after native women and a jealous husband stabbed him. I have no regrets for Hewson. He deserved to die."

"An' the other two," Drury prompted, "Johnson and Larren?"

Stein shrugged his shoulders.

"I reported that they deserted."

"An' did they?"

"I know of no other explanation for their disappearance," Stein said coldly.

"How about the native who killed Hew-

son?" Drury asked after a short pause. "Hell! Hewson may have deserved what he got, but we can't have men—no matter what's the color of their skins—taking the law into their own hands. I reckon I'll have to take him back to Plumtree with me for trial."

"That's quite impossible, Drury. You see, after killing Hewson the poor man—he was quite demented at the time—jumped into the river with the intention, perhaps, of swimming across to take refuge in the Tati Concessions. He was pulled under by crocodiles before he had gone more than ten yards from the bank."

"An' the woman?"

"She was tried by her people," Stein said very softly, "and found guilty of causing the death of the two men. I flogged



her and—she was not a valley woman—she was banished. She returned, I am informed, to her own people in Bechuana-land."

"She got off light at that," Drury commented.

"You think so?" Stein laughed. "But I assure you that my hand was not light."

"Well," Drury drawled, "I ain't interested in booze or women an' I'm more than satisfied with life in the police—so I ain't likely to go out the way them four did."

"I'm glad to hear that," Stein said cautiously. "But about you, Trooper? What is your mission here? I was informed that the post was to be closed and had been commissioned to do all that was necessary here. Am I to understand by your pres-

ence here that the decision to close down the post had been reconsidered?"

"Nope. I'm just here to close up the post officially." He added swiftly, "As a matter of fact, they sent me up here to get me out of the way for a bit. You see, there's some big pot coming to inspect the force at Salisbury an' they reckon I ain't exactly a credit to them. I don't cotton to all this 'Yes, sir,' an' 'No sir-ing.' An' I ain't clean—as they count cleanness. Between you an' me, they'd like to give me a ticket but I've got a pull—" he winked—"so I do pretty much as I like."

"I see," Stein said coldly. "And how long do you propose to stay here?"

"Oh, I'm in no hurry," Drury replied airily. "If they get snooty when I get back I can always say I was investigating some complaint."

"I'm rather jealous of the reputation of the people in this valley, Drury," Stein said, "and if you made that excuse for delaying your return I am afraid I should have to write to your commanding officer and tell him the truth."

"Why you——" Drury began angrily. He stopped, as if intimidated by Stein's cold stare, and concluded lamely, "If that's the way you feel I'll just tell 'em the truth, that I helped myself to a few days leave an' browsed around a bit."

"This is not a healthy place for white men to browse about. The natives are apt to object. They're a superstitious crowd."

"Hell!" Drury exclaimed uneasily. "I should have thought you'd have been glad of a white man's company. But you sound as if you didn't want me to stay."

"Oh, it's not that," Stein protested quickly. "Only, well, I don't want anything to happen to you."

"What could happen?" Drury asked truculently.

"Many things. Death walks in many guises in this country, Drury. No. I think you would be wise to hasten your departure. I will be down tomorrow with my

servants to help you pack. You should be ready to leave by noon."

"I'm in no hurry," Drury said stubbornly, "an' I won't be needing any help; leastways, not tomorrow."

"Tomorrow—or not at all."

"Reckon it'll have to be not at all, then," Drury replied.

STEIN shrugged his shoulders then rose and strode to the door of the hut. There he paused and looked back at Drury: "You are very foolish, Trooper," he said. "But I will give you one more warning; if you are determined to delay your departure, be sure that your browsing doesn't take you to the hills at the eastern end of the valley."

"And why?"

"Because it is sacred to the spirits of the people of the valley who are buried there. Good night."

He turned abruptly on his heels and vanished into the night's darkness. Drury heard him call to his native servants—Kawiti and the cook-boy—heard the pattering of their naked feet as they followed their gigantic employer. And then—silence.

"And that's a lot of tripe!" Drury exclaimed forcefully. He was referring to Stein's statement about the eastern hills being sacred to the spirits. "Hell! What's his game? It's got me beat, whatever it is. Wonder if he's running a double bluff on me by warning me to keep away from the hills. Does he want me to go there? Or is he so sure of himself that he don't care a darn whether I go there or not? Or is he just plain dumb? Wonder if I took the right line with him or whether it wouldn't have been wiser for me to have put on the soft pedal an'—well, wondering won't get me anywhere."

He went to the door of the hut and called the police-boy. He called again, louder. When there was still no response he took the lamp down from a hook and went to look for him.

He found him, after a prolonged search, on a pile of dried grass behind the stable shed, snoring heavily. Thinking the man was in a drunken sleep, Drury shook him angrily and held the light of the lamp close to his face.

He whistled softly then and picking the native up in his arms carried him to his own hut. Placing him on the bed he worked over him industriously, slapping his naked body with a water saturated towel. When the native finally stirred fitfully and sleepily opened his eyes, Drury hauled him to his feet, half dragged, half carried him outside and forced him to walk up and down at a brisk pace. With a clearing consciousness, the native begged to be allowed to rest, but Drury refused and ordering him to keep walking up and down hurried to the kitchen lean-to and heated up the remains of his dinner coffee. He made the native drink this and resumed the tireless pacing to and fro with him. Finally the native was horribly nauseated.

"It has left me, *inkosi*," he gasped weakly. "I am awake."

"You nearly knew the sleep from which there is no awakening," Drury said grimly. "Now come to my hut and we will talk."

INKOSI, the native police boy said a few minutes later, "I think I owe you my life."

Drury looked down at the man who was squatting on his haunches close to the trundle bed on which Drury sprawled lazily.

"Then for your life," he said, "you will tell the truth."

"That I would have told in any case, *inkosi*—unless you had proved to be a fool blinded by the threats which shine in the eyes of the man Stein."

"So? The wind blows from that quarter?"

"But of course, *inkosi*. And it blows a cloud of poison dust before it."

"First then—your name?"

"Guffa, *inkosi*."

"Now tell me, if you can, who gave you

the sleep medicine, why they gave it and how it came about that you, who are no fool, drank it."

Guffa chuckled softly.

"The *inkosi* takes all the meat from the nut. I answer. It was given to me by the cook-boy of the man Stein. It was given to me because that evil man knew I had warned you that he was standing at the door of the skoff hut. It was given to me because he knew that I would try to open the *inkosi's* eyes to the evil which has been done here. And I drank it—*au-a, inkosi*, my belly has a weakness for coffee greatly sweetened. So when the cook-boy brought some to me I took it suspecting no evil. But as the first mouthful flowed down my throat I knew it contained death. I would have spat it out, but the cook-boy was watching me closely. So, knowing that death would come to me in other ways, and perhaps to you, also, if I betrayed my knowledge I said nothing but pretended to drink more and more—" He smiled wryly. "And some did find its way to my belly. But most I spilled on the ground, unseen by Baas Stein's cook-boy. *Wo-we!* It was strong medicine. Even the little I drank sent me into a deep sleep."

Drury's eyes were stern as he said grimly:

"You might have died, Guffa. They shall be brought to account. Now what more? You are a Matabele?"

"Truly, *inkosi*." There was pride in Guffa's voice.

"You have been here—how long?"

"I came here with the *Inkosi* Jennings—three moons ago."

"Ah!" Drury was disappointed. "Then you know nothing of the policemen who were here before the *Inkosi* Jennings?"

"Nothing, *inkosi*. Only—" he hesitated.

"Only," Drury prompted.

"Does the *inkosi* wish me to speak of the things I suspect concerning those others or only what I know?"

"Only what you *know* to be true."

"Then I know nothing."

"You have made friends with the people of Mphoengs?"

"No, *inkosi*. They call themselves Matabele but—if the old order returned, Mphoengs would be my slave."

"What of the people of Mphoengs, the people of the valley? What do they think of the man Stein?"

"They hate him, *inkosi*."

"Then, if he is evil, we have many friends."

GUFFA shook his head. "It is not that way, *inkosi*. They are his servants. They fear him. They speak only to utter words he puts into their mouths. The *Inkosi* Jennings found that out."

"Now tell me of that man. Was he a weak fool who sought bottle strength?"

"No, *inkosi*. He was a man."

"Yet he is dead—and you live," Drury commented softly.

Guffa's eyes flashed.

"My death would not restore him to life, *inkosi*," he said, "nor destroy the evil which slew him."

"What is that evil?"

"If I knew, *inkosi*, there would be no need to ask. In some way it is bound to the white man, Stein. *Wo-we!* And the evil that is, is only the cook pot which brews a greater evil. The *Inkosi* Jennings went about asking questions, seeking to discover what the evil was. I think the answer was within reach of his hand—so he died. *Wo-we!* On the morning of the day he died he told me that before sundown he would have removed the cloud which darkened the valley."

"But he did not tell you what that cloud was?"

"No, *inkosi*," Guffa replied despondently. "In some things the *Inkosi* Jennings was secretive. It may be that in this matter he distrusted me."

"Or may be," Drury amended swiftly, "he knew that death was hanging over him and planned, by keeping you in ignorance, to prevent it falling on you also."

"Yes. That is it, *inkosi*," Guffa said al-

most happily. "But, *wo-we*, had he told me, he might till be alive!"

"And you?" Drury questioned. "Before his death and after—have you been blind and deaf? Have you discovered nothing?"

"Nothing, *inkosi*. Nothing, save that my outgoings and incomings have been watched. Nothing, save that the hill to the east is forbidden me. Elsewhere in this valley I may go without hindrance, but the path to that place is always barred to me. And it was to that place the *Inkosi* Jennings trekked on the day he died."

"Ah!" Drury exclaimed softly. "Now tell me? How did the *Inkosi* Jennings die?"

"He sent me that morning, before he departed, on a patrol to the west. I returned at sun-down. I went to this hut and found him on the ground. There was a bullet wound in his right temple. His revolver was on the ground, near to his outstretched hand. He was dead. There was an empty whiskey bottle on the ground beside him and his tunic was wet with it. And at that I wondered, for the *Inkosi* Jennings did not drink strong *puzo* at any time."

"And you thought that he had shot himself?"

"That is what I thought. Yes, *inkosi*. What else could I think? Yet I *know*, here—" Guffa pressed his hand to his belly—"that he did not shoot himself but that some one had killed him and had made it appear that way."

DRURY tugged thoughtfully at the lobe of his right ear. He questioned Guffa further, hoping to get a positive clue to the murderer. But there the native failed him, though had the murder—if murder it was—been committed with an assegai, or some other native weapon, he knew that Guffa would have been able to reconstruct the crime for him.

He asked next:

"Was the *Inkosi* Jennings friendly with the trader?"

"That is something that always puzzled

me, *inkosi*," Guffa replied. "Seeing them together one would have said they were close friends. Yet how could my *inkosi* have been friends with so evil a man?"

"Perhaps he did not know he was evil?"

"He knew," Guffa said confidently. "His evil shrouds him like the mist above a fever swamp."

The two men were silent for a little while. Then Guffa said:

"Is it true that you have come to this



place in order to say there shall be no longer a police post here?"

"It may be. Why do you ask?"

"Because, if that is so I shall put aside my uniform—as I may, for my time of service is ended—and stay here."

"Why?"

"That I may avenge the murder of my *inkosi*."

"And how will you do that?"

"The white trader is strong—but an assegai will find his heart."

"Then you think he killed *Inkosi* Jennings?"

"Or gave the order for his killing, it is all one. I know that is so. I feel it here." Again Guffa pressed his hand to his belly. "But if I tell other white men that, they would laugh at me and tell me that what I *feel* is no proof."

"I do not laugh," Drury assured him gravely. "So stay your hand a little while, warrior. It may be that I will find the proof. Tomorrow I go to the hills that are forbidden."

"Then tomorrow," Guffa said pessimistically, "I shall be mourning the death of another *inkosi*. You take me with you?"

Drury shook his head.

"No, you are too ill to trek. *Wo-we!* Tonight you drink much sleep medicine. You nearly died. Tomorrow you must be very sick—else they will suspect. Stay in your hut. That is an order."

NEXT morning Drury was having skoff long before sun-up. Guffa waited on him and listened attentively to the red-haired trooper's instructions.

"A new plan came to me while I slept, Guffa," Drury explained. "Instead of staying in your hut you will be seen about the place, but moving as if you were very tired. And you will put things in boxes as I have instructed, making all things ready for us to leave this place."

"And do we really leave it, *inkosi?*"

"When our work is done, yes. But not before."

Drury rose from the table and leaving the hut made his way along the path leading to the kraal of Mphoengs. He carried his rifle at the trail, his rope hung over his shoulder. Despite his almost rabid detestation of walking and the knowledge that his day's program meant a long and tiring trek, Drury had decided to go afoot. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, to hide his trail from native trackers had he ridden and he wished to move secretly, his whereabouts unknown.

The sun had not yet risen above the horizon and the eastern sky was blazing with color when Drury reached the kraal. Women, their eyes still filled with sleep, were busy preparing the morning meal, men sat huddled over the cook fires and naked, fat-bellied boys were letting the cattle and goats out to graze. Men, women and children greeted Drury with every indication of respect; but there was a strained atmosphere about the place. It was as if all the people in the kraal were patiently waiting for some long threatened fate to fall upon them.

Drury asked to see the chief and was escorted to that man's hut by a young

warrior. Mphoengs, the chief, was a tremendously fat man, jovially good natured and much given to laughter. Drury knew his type. But now, Drury thought, Mphoengs' fatness clothed a skeleton of fear; his laughter was the discordant note of a cracked bell.

"You will find all things well with us, white man," Mphoengs said. "My people obey the law."

"That may be," Drury replied dryly. "Yet two white men have gone from here—no one knows where—and two have died within the space of a year. What have you to say to that?"

"My people are innocent," Mphoengs said uneasily. "Those white men were evil—and their evil killed them. That is all." He brushed the palms of his hands lightly together, thus intimating that he dismissed the killings as a subject for discussion.

DRURY did not press the matter further. Actually, he was not at the moment interested in Mphoengs nor greatly concerned with what that man could tell him. The answer to the riddle, he was sure, was not to be found at the kraal—although the kraal people might be involved in it. He knew too that further questioning would only be met by lies and evasions. He knew the native mind too well to expect the truth from them under such circumstances. So he said:

"I am going hunting among the hills to the east. Have you hunters to go with me?"

"No, *inkosi*," Mphoengs said quickly. "You must not go there. The hills are forbidden. They are peopled by the spirits of the dead. To go there is to know death. Besides," he added in a milder tone, "there are no game in that place. It is forbidden to them as it is to us."

"It is of no matter," Drury said lightly. "I will hunt elsewhere. And I go alone. If your hunters are afraid of spirits in the sun's light, of what good would they be to me if a leopard charged?"

Mphoengs shook with anger at Drury's

contemptuous tone and commenced a heated defense of his men, but Drury turned his back on him and made his way out of the kraal. He looked lazily indifferent as he threaded his way between the huts, stepping over sprawling children, answering the salutes of the men and making bantering rejoinders to the simpering compliments of the women. But his keen eyes noted several interesting facts. Everything about the kraal was as primitive as it would have been before the country had been occupied by white men. The cooking utensils and what few digging tools were visible were of native manufacture and none of the women wore the cheap, gaudily patterned cotton stuff which is one of the staple articles of trade at most of the trading stores throughout the country. But most important of all to Drury's mind was the presence of a number of men of a different tribe; they were from the country over the border, beyond the western hills, and were the traditional enemies of Mphoengs' people. But they comported themselves as if they were sure of their position and authority.

Just beyond the stockade which encircled the kraal, Drury met Stein.

"Been to pay your respects to Mphoengs, Trooper?" Stein asked. "A case of hail and farewell, I hope."

"More or less," Drury replied easily. "Don't expect to be here long. I started Guffa packing up this morning. Don't suppose he'll get much done, though. Hell! He was a sick nig—native last night. Reckon he'd been pilfering the stores and ate something that didn't agree with him! You know how they are; no sense of proportion."

"So!" Stein rubbed his hands together. "You have decided to heed my warning."

"Did you warn me?" Drury asked innocently. "Against what?"

STEIN frowned. "I told you last night that Mphoengs' people observe the laws—but they are jealous of their rights and the honor of their women. That is

why I say it would be wise for you to leave before another sun rises."

"I don't take kindly to warnings of that sort, mister," Drury drawled. "I'll go when I'm good and ready. Hell! If it wasn't that the C. O. told me all about you before I left, praising you to the skies, I'd begin to think that you was up to something no good. As it is, I reckon you're a bit too touchy about the welfare of these niggers. Now I'll be getting along. Goin' to see if I can get a buck."

"You won't find any worth shooting in the valley," Stein said harshly. "But you might find some dassies, or even a klip-springer, in the hills over there." He pointed to the north.

"Thanks for the tip," Drury said. "I'll let you know how I get on next time I see you. S'long!"

He waved his hand in a gesture of farewell and slouched off.

Drury headed north at a leisurely pace after leaving the kraal but as soon as he reached the thick brush and was sure that he was safe from observation, he swung round to the east. He trekked swiftly, walking with a bent kneed gait which made little demand on his physical resources. As the sun rose higher the heat increased, but Drury was of that lean wiry type that is unaffected by extreme heat; it is true that he sweated a little, but that seemed to oil his joints and made his gait seem even more smooth and machinelike.

After about three hours trekking he came to a well made path which ran in a straight line from Mphoengs' kraal to that hill at the east end of the valley where, on the previous day, he had seen the armed natives.

He sat down under a bush beside the path and considered it thoughtfully. It was evidently a path made under the direction of a white man—a native path twisted and bent back on itself like a snake with a twisted back. Why, he wondered, did Stein want a path to the hills. Not for purpose of trade with the natives over the border. The traders on the other side

would not permit him to poach in their territory. Besides, it was not conceivable that he had anything to offer by way of trade to compensate the natives over the border for carrying their corn over the intervening barrier of steep, rock-strewn kopjes.

"He must be dealing in dope or booze," Drury concluded as he rose to his feet and continued his eastern trek. But he did not trek along the path; he kept well under cover of the thick bush which fringed it.

An hour later he came to the foot of the kopje which was his goal and keeping hidden he scanned the steep side of the hill, looking for that place where the natives had seemed to disappear when he had watched them through his field glasses from the opposite end of the valley. Presently he found it. It was marked by a clump of scrub bush which clung precariously to the rocky slope. He saw then that a trail led up the slope to that clump of bush, starting from the place where the bush path ended.

Drury grinned. The trail was getting hot.

"That bush must hide the entrance to a cave," he mused. "An' suppose it's somethin' more than a cave? Suppose it connects up with a sort of tunnel leading right through the hill to the opposite side." His eyes glowed with excitement, then he thought grumblingly, "But suppose it does? What of it? Where does that get me? Or anybody else? Well, I'm goin' to have a look see. That's better than askin' myself a lot of damn fool questions."

HE MADE his way along the base of the kopje until he came to where the trail began and commenced the climb without any further hesitation. He had not mounted very high when a low rumbling sound above him caused him to look up quickly. It was fortunate that he did so for an enormous boulder was crashing down the hills and he was directly in its path. He flattened himself against the side of the kopje; that was all he had time to

do. Luckily for him, the boulder struck a projecting spur just above his head and bounced off in a sweeping parabola to crash into the bush at the foot of the hill. An avalanche of lesser boulders and rubble followed in its wake, carrying Drury with it to the base of the hill. The fall winded him, he was bruised and badly shaken, but his quick brain was working efficiently. He knew that it was no mere chance that had set that boulder on its downward rush. Human hands had set it in motion and human eyes were now watching to see its effect.

The air was still thick with a cloud of red dust, it covered his movements as he crawled backward into the cover of the bush. There he rose and moved quickly through the undergrowth some hundred yards to the right. Then he halted and looked back and up toward the clump of bush, just as four natives emerged from its cover.

Drury did not wait to see any more. He reasoned that they would not be long



in discovering that the avalanche they had created had failed in its purpose and they would probably try to hunt him down. So he vanished swiftly and noiselessly.

He trekked in a line which finally brought him to a tree he had noted on his journey to the hill. The ground about its trunk was almost mud soft and void of bush growth. It was impossible for any man, even one as fully veld-wise as was Drury, to cross that ground without leav-

ing spoor that the greenest of greenhorns could read. The lowest branches of the tree which hung over the surrounding bush were far too high for him to reach nor were there any trees nearby from which he could gain access to them. But it was in that tree Drury meant to take refuge from possible pursuit and yet leave no trace. His rope was the means by which he gained his objective. He threw it over a branch and a few moments later was swarming up it with a monkey-like agility. Then, safely hidden in a natural bower of thickly leaved branches he recoiled his rope and examined his rifle which he had slung over his shoulders before commencing to climb the kopje. He sighed with relief on discovering that it was unharmed. He wiped off the dust which powdered it, opened the magazine cut-off, loaded the chamber and composed himself to wait for darkness.

At intervals during the day he heard the excited shouts of natives who were trying to pick up his trail. Two men came to the tree and examined the ground all about it with minute care, discussing the disappearance of the white man's spoor with awe filled voices. They looked everywhere, save up, and Drury nearly laughed aloud at the consternation which was in their voices as they finally departed.

At last the sun set and under cover of the darkness which shortly followed Drury climbed down from the tree and headed back for the police camp, travelling in a straight line through the bush.

Guffa greeted him with unfeigned relief.

"*Wo-we!*" he gasped. "I feared that death had come to you also, *inkosi.*"

"I live," Drury replied briefly. "And you? You have worked well?"

"Yes, *inkosi.* Everything is ready for us to leave."

"Alone you did this?" Drury asked wonderingly.

"No, *inkosi.* *Inkosi* Stein has been here many times. He brought his servants with him and directed them in the packing."

"Good."

"The *Inkosi* Stein says we must leave tomorrow. The last time he was here he was very angry. A messenger came to him from the kopjes which are forbidden. I think that is what made him angry."

"Without doubt," Drury laughed. "So we must leave tomorrow? Perhaps we will."

"And our work not finished, *inkosi?*" Guffa exclaimed reproachfully.

"And our work finished," Drury said. "Now bring me skoff for I am very hungry and soon I must trek again. *Wo-we!* I think we will both trek. You one way and I another."

BY THE time Drury had eaten the meal of buck stew which Guffa prepared for him, the white light of a full moon flooded the valley; it poured through the open doorway of the hut, paling the yellow glare of the oil lamp. A native suddenly appeared in the doorway. He carried a note in the cleft of a forked stick.

Drury took the note and read:

"*Dear Trooper:*

I have just heard of your lucky escape from a falling boulder. I congratulate you, but you will remember that I warned you to keep away from that end of the valley. I am curious to know how you avoided discovery by the natives who looked for you to make sure you were not hurt. They insist that you must have vanished into thin air. But that, of course, is ridiculous. I fancy that rope—I meant to ask you its purpose this morning—and a tree is the explanation. But natives are so ready to credit the supernatural with things they cannot understand.

I think you are even cleverer than I had at first supposed.

Come up and have a drink with me. I am feeling lonely and—what's the tag?—white men should stick together."

Stein."

Drury looked up at the waiting native. "Tell your *inkosi*," he said, "that I am very tired and that I now go to bed."

After the native had departed, Guffa said:

"And now what, *inkosi*?"

"I have words to write on a paper which you will take to the chief *inkosi* of police at Plumtree. Then I sleep for a little while. Then I trek again for the forbidden hills. But the manner of your departure has not yet come to me save that it must be a secret one, none knowing."

"That will not be easy, *inkosi*," Guffa said. "I feel that men are in the bush all about this place—watching. There is evil——"

Drury laughed and patted his revolver.

"This will account for all evil, Guffa," he said and yawning loudly he took the lamp which lighted the skoff hut and carried it over to the sleeping hut. As he entered he sniffed suspiciously. There was an odor, very faint, reminiscent of crushed cucumbers. He shut the door behind him with his foot, placed the lamp on the table, drew his revolver and stood listening intently. His keen eyes peered sharply about the hut.

His gaze was drawn at last toward the neatly made bed shrouded by a white mosquito net. In the center of the bed, underneath the thin cover, was a small mound—a mound which moved ever so slightly in the regular movements of breathing.

DRURY'S face was very grim as he watched for a few moments, considering what course to take. Then he hurriedly donned a suit of pajamas over his uniform, opened the hut door and stood yawning for a few moments in full view of any who might be watching. Then he shut the door and standing some distance from the bed gave a loud yell of terror. At the same time he emptied his revolver into the mound in the center of the bed.

Immediately the "mound" seemed to be galvanized into a series of convulsive contractions which scattered the bed clothes and tore down the mosquito net from its hook. Drury quickly reloaded and fired

again, smashing the ugly venomous head of a momba—Africa's most deadly snake—which had been hidden under the bed cover.

Guffa burst into the hut.

"What is it, *inkosi*?" he gasped. Then, seeing the snake, "Ou! It is death. Did it bite you, *inkosi*?"

"Yes," Drury gasped. "Run to the house of the trader. Ask him to come to me bringing whiskey and medicine."

"Let me see the wound, *inkosi*," Guffa begged. "I have a medicine——"

"Do as I order," Drury raved. "Hasten—or I will sjambok you."

Still protesting, Guffa departed on his errand.

Drury closed the door again and sitting down at the table wrote to the officer in charge at Plumtree, stating his suspicions and giving explicit instructions which he knew would be acted upon for he signed the letter: "Thomas Drury, Special Duty Trooper." As he wrote he groaned loudly and continuously like a man in great fear and pain.

He had just finished sealing his letter in an envelope when Guffa returned.

"Au-a, *inkosi*," the native panted fearfully. "The trader laughed when I told him of the evil which had befallen you. He said that there was no cure for a momba's bite. But he is wrong. I know a cure—if it is not too late. Let me see the wound."

"There is no wound, Guffa," Drury said quietly. "I have but played a trick on a man who has played many evil tricks. Now take this letter which I have written. You will give it to the police *inkosi* at Plumtree. You will go tonight, travelling very swiftly. I will presently show you how you may leave the camp, none suspecting. Now listen; presently I shall behave like a man who is aware that the poison of death is running through his veins. I shall leave this hut and run into the bush as if madness had seized me. You will run after me, trying to stop me. But once the bush covers our movements you will head with all speed for Plumtree. Once you are out

of the valley—and that will be long before sun-up—your path will be smooth.”

“And yours, *inkosi*?”

“Mine will be easy, too,” Drury replied confidently. “Now I make ready to go. You will try to stop me and if I cause you hurt—remember that there is no anger behind the blows I give you.”

Drury replaced his revolver in its holster, under the jacket of his pajamas and scraping off a flake of soap put it in his mouth. He ruffled his shock of flaming red hair and, foaming at the mouth, screaming inarticulately, flung the hut door open and reeled out into the moonlight.

After him darted Guffa, begging him to remain in the hut; he tried to grapple with the white man but Drury lashed out at him viciously and Guffa dropped to the ground. By the time the native had risen to his feet, his hand to his jaw, Drury was headed at a lumbering run for the bush. And Guffa, the letter Drury had given him carefully hidden in his loin cloth, gave desperate chase.

Hardly had they left the camp when two natives, laughing callously, came to the hut and took note of the dead snake on the disordered bed. Presently, still laughing, they made their way along the path leading to the store.

AS SOON as he had reached the cover of the bush Drury increased his pace and, strive as he would, Guffa could not catch up with him; indeed, he would have lost the trail completely save for Drury's hoarse shouts and the noise he made bursting through the bush.

Guffa smiled. The *inkosi* was playing the game very cleverly and he, Guffa, must do his part. At that moment Guffa ceased to be a man hurrying to give aid to a fear-demented man; he became one with the shadows which make the African bush a place of mystery, a shadow which moved silently, swiftly on a pre-determined course.

Shortly after that Drury's cries ceased and the night's silence filled the valley. But Drury had not slackened his pace. He was

taking no chances. Men might be sent after him to mark the place of his death.

After trekking for nearly two hours he halted and listened intently. No sound came to him and he grinned his satisfaction.

“Stein's swallowed the hook,” he told himself. “He's sure that the momba bit an' that I'm dead—or as good as dead. He'll probably send out a search party for me in the morning an' right now, I'm guessin', he's making up a report to send in to Plumtree. But mine'll be there first! Hell, I must look a sweet picture!”

His face was bleeding from many scratches, his pajamas were torn to shreds; he looked like the ghost of a scarecrow. He tore the few remaining rags of pajamas from him, stuffed them into an ant-bear's hole and resumed his trek, heading eastward toward the forbidden hills. Coming to a rock-girt water hole he rested, rinsing his mouth to remove from it the flavor of soap.

The false dawn lighted the sky when he resumed his trek; it was sunrise when he came to the foot of the hill and climbed up the steep path. Coming to the clump of bush he saw that it hid the entrance to a dark, narrow tunnel which led straight back into the heart of the hill. He made his way along this coming presently to an immense cavern. Here it was quite light for the rays of the sun filtered through cracks in the roof. The cavern was an ancient working. There are many such in Rhodesia; places where the ancients mined the gold which, perhaps, the Queen of Sheba presented to Solomon the Wise. But Drury had other things to think of now. He had half expected that Stein's closely guarded secret had something to do with gun-running, but he was stunned by the evidence of his eyes. The cavern was an arsenal. Racks lined the walls of the cavern and each rack held twenty rifles: Lee Enfields, Martinis, Mausers, Winchester and a weird collection of sport guns and old fashioned muzzle-loaders. In a far corner of the cavern was a store of

ammunition and kegs of powder and dynamite.

Close to the ammunition pile Drury discovered another passageway which led back through the hill. He would have liked to explore it, but decided against it. He was in possession of too great a secret to warrant taking unnecessary chances. What he had to do now was to find a secure hiding place until the arrival of help from Plumtree.

"But hell!" he wondered. "What's his little game? Something more than gun-running or I'll eat my hat." Then, as a



sudden thought came to him he scratched his head and whistled softly. "If that's it—an' it is!—he's as mad as a hatter. Reckon I'd better get out of here."

He made his way back along the tunnel very cautiously, stopping every few paces and listening intently, his revolver in his hand. A moment later he stepped out from the tunnel and stood for a moment, dazzled by the day's bright light. Then suddenly darkness descended heavily upon him and he pitched to the ground in an unconscious heap.

WHEN Drury recovered his senses he found himself back in the cavern, supported on either side by a stalwart native armed with a knobkerry. He struggled to free himself, but they held him firm. His head ached and he was unarmed. And then he saw the big, menacing form of Stein standing before him.

"So," Stein said softly, "you are now fully awake. That is good. For a little while I thought that fool Matiswa had

struck too hard with his knobkerry—and I do not want you to die, yet."

"Neither do I," Drury drawled.

Stein smiled.

"Your wishes in the matter will not be consulted, my dear trooper. And you are a fool. I warned you but you ignored my warnings. You tried to trick me——"

"An' didn't I?" Drury asked innocently.

"For a little while," the trader admitted. "Last night when word was brought to me that the snake had bitten you, I believed. But later the truth came to me. I told myself that men bitten by a momba do not act as you acted. No. Some sleep or, if not that, assuredly they have no strength to run far. So I knew that you had tried to trick me but I did not concern myself. I knew that I would find you here in the morning. And here I found you. Presently I shall kill you and I shall report to your captain that you died from the bite of a snake. But first I shall tell you what this means."

"I reckon I know," Drury said lightly, "but it'll be interesting hearin' you tell it. Still you're a fool, Stein."

"You think so," the trader restrained his temper with a palpable effort. "But no, I am very clever. There is not a man in all this country as clever as I. And someday, soon, I shall gain the reward of my cleverness. I shall be powerful. I shall rule all this land from here to the sea. Armed with guns, my black soldiers will conquer any force that is sent against them."

"Your secret will be discovered before that time comes," Drury said contemptuously.

"You think so?" Stein's eyes blazed fanatically. "Who can discover it? Not the police. Already four fools from the police have tried to discover what this hill hides—and I killed them just when they thought they had won success. I played with them—just as I have played with you."

"You're mad, Stein. Only a madman would train niggers to fight against his

fellow white men. You ain't clever—you're only cunning. Why, you try to keep your plottin' a secret but the minute a man enters the valley he's suspicious something's wrong. You're a cunnin' madman, that's all. You——"

Stein stepped forward and struck Drury full in the face with his clenched fist. Blood streamed from Drury's nose and but for the supporting hold of the two natives he would have slumped to the ground.

The sight of blood seemed to release Stein's mad passion.

"You call me mad," he shouted. "But I am sane, I tell you. You call me a renegade because I arm black men to fight the whites. But the black men are my people. Their blood flows in my veins. I am black, not white. *Au-a!*" He spoke now in the vernacular. "When I am ready I will have a hundred thousand men ready to march at my back. We will sweep all the whites into the sea and I shall be king. I shall be greater than Mzilikatse. Greater than Chaka."

"You poor devil," Drury said in a soft, weak voice, swaying uncertainly on his feet, feigning a greater weakness than really possessed him. "Your plan can never succeed. Already my messenger is well on his way to Plumtree with my report. In four or five days many mounted men will be up here——"

"You lie!" Stein interrupted fiercely. "Until today you knew nothing."

"But I suspected many things."

STEIN smiled blandly. "What of it. When the troopers come you will be dead and I shall help the police all I can. But they will not find this place. I shall seal the openings. And so they will depart thinking that madness came to you before you died—as perhaps it will.

"Matiswa!" He addressed one of the natives. "Get a rope and tie up the white man." He leveled his revolver at Drury's head as he spoke.

When the native loosed his hold to carry out Stein's order, Drury leaned heav-

ily against the other one and chuckled inwardly at the discovery that the man had somewhat relaxed his grip on him.

"You're mad and a fool, Stein," he mocked. "And you're afraid of me. Even though you're armed, you give orders for me to be bound. You keep your revolver leveled at my head, though I am weak from the blows I have received. Hell, you're nothing but a——"

Stein's eyes blazed insanely at the insult.

"For that," he shouted hoarsely, "I shall kill you now. I——"

"It is too late," Drury retorted calmly, looking steadily beyond the trader. And he shouted, "You fool, Guffa! I told you to hasten to Plumtree. But it is well you disobeyed. Hit——"

Despite the warning shout of the native who was holding Drury Stein turned quickly, expecting an attack from the rear. He was only off guard for a moment, but that moment was sufficient for Drury who broke the native's restraining hold and diving forward collared Stein below the knees. It brought the big man crashing heavily to the ground, the revolver falling from his hand. Before he could recover or either of the natives move to his assistance, Drury retrieved the weapon and brought its muzzle down on the madman's head with stunning force.

Then he rose quickly, just in time to thwart a concerted rush by the two natives. The revolver in his hand halted them.

"This *indaba* is finished," he said sharply. "Bind this madman up and gag him. Quick now, remembering that I am watching."

They obeyed quickly; willingly, Drury thought. And as they worked Drury questioned them shrewdly, learning how the madman's cruel cunning had kept the people of the valley in frightened subjection to him.

By the use of childish conjuring tricks he had played upon their superstitions, creating in them the belief that he was a reincarnation of a chief long dead.

THE C. O. sighed deeply as Trooper Dynamite Drury concluded his report of the affair at Mphoengs.

"You frighten me, Drury," he confessed. "I shall begin to distrust myself next. I trusted Stein as I would trust myself. I knew his parents. I've known him for years. And he was mad all that time. Mad, dangerously mad. Of course there's not a drop of black blood in him. He's as pure white as you or I. Wonder what planted that germ of madness in his veins? Suppose we'll never know. He's broken up entirely now, you say? Poor devil.

"But you have done well, Drury. I—the whole country is indebted to you. Stein's madness might have led to the bloodiest rebellion this country has ever known. Think of it. Hundreds of natives, well armed and led by a man they believed to be a reincarnation of Lobenguella. Well,

that's scotched and we've got his chief assistants under arrest. They'll go up for trial and some of them'll be hanged. But Stein will never be brought to trial. He'll end his days in an institution for the insane. It would have been kinder to have killed him, Drury."

"Too kind, I reckon," Drury said coldly. "He'll have his moments of remembering, I'm thinking. An' he killed four good men in cold blood. Now I got to see Stevens. He was Jennings' pal an' I'm thinking he'll be glad to know how Jennings died an' easier in his mind about seeing Jennings' people when he goes on leave. Somehow, 'Killed in the execution of his duty,' sounds a darn sight better than 'Died by his own hand.' Ain't it the truth?"

And Special Duty Trooper Dynamite Drury saluted awkwardly and made his way slowly across the dusty parade ground.

*Bill West Wasn't Going to
Stand for any Partner of
His Letting the North
Get Him*



ADAM'S APPLE

*A Northern novelette in our
next issue—by*

**Bertrand W.
Sinclair**





Western Pearls Do Travel

IN "SAILORMAN" the J. Allan Dunn story in this issue of SHORT STORIES, the American captain is very scornful of the canard that the rajah might be palming off some fake pearls on one of his harem favorites. And in this connection it is an interesting fact that not all pearls come from oysters in the tropical seas. Considerable numbers of them have also been obtained from the fresh water mussels found in the brooks and streams of North America. In fact, it is said that any stream running through a limestone region may yield pearls if it has the mussels in it. Over \$200,000 worth of fresh water pearls are reported sold annually in the United States. Most of these are found by those engaged at gathering mussel shells for the manufacture of buttons. Such prizes make a worth while addition to their income.

America's pearl beds are quite widely distributed from upstate New York to Mississippi. Arkansas has produced pearls from the White and Black rivers with a few from the Little River. Numerous pearls have also been found in the streams of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Over a century ago the Moravian settlers gathered pearls from the Lehigh River near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. A Philadelphia museum has on exhibition a collection of a hundred pearls gathered by Mr. Frank M. Ebert from the small streams forming the headwaters of the Schuylkill River near Tamaqua, Pennsylvania. New Jersey was

the scene of the most famous pearl discovery and so great was the excitement caused by the search for these gems back in 1857 that that year was known as the "pearl fever" year. About that time a carpenter from Paterson, New Jersey, found a pearl weighing 93 grains in a small tributary of the Passaic River. This was the famous "Queen Pearl," so called because it was purchased by the Empress Eugenie. At the present time this gem is actually in the possession of one of the wealthy princes of India, the ruler of Baroda.

Sharks Have Trouble Saving Their Skins

CAPTAIN ELLRICH, who wrote the shark story in this issue, returned not long ago from the Philippines, and writes us that in a recent issue of SHORT STORIES he noticed a letter in the Mail-Bag entitled "*Man Eaters*," signed by Mr. A. Potter, in which was made the following statement: "... as for Professor Beebe prodding a shark *on the ribs* to make him move. . . ."

"Although I have not seen the article by Beebe referred to," goes on Captain Ellrich, "I rather doubt that he employed those words. Professor Beebe is a naturalist, and is well aware of the fact that sharks do not possess any ribs. I imagine it to be rather difficult for anybody to prod something which does not exist.

"On the other hand, though, let it be



known that there do exist certain sharks which are very lazy, or phlegmatic. So phlegmatic at certain times, as a matter of fact, that I have found it necessary to smack a paddle against their sides in order to have them get out of my way.

"How they behaved after that smack, is a different matter, and a complete explanation of 'Shark Behaviorism' does not belong in a letter.

"I do not know much about sharks. I have only caught eleven or twelve thousand, but mayhaps the following paragraph will clarify matters in this shark-argument a bit.

"Science recognizes almost 250 different kinds of sharks, ranging in size from a few inches to almost seventy feet. They are voracious, greedy, cannibalistic, pelagic, and are generally found in the warm waters of the tropics; although certain families are found and caught as far north as $76^{\circ} 30'$. Sharks are distinctly male and female, each one provided with two organs; and intercourse is held periodically. The females do either lay eggs, or produce live young ones; sometimes as many as 100 to one throw. Sharks are not mammals, like the whales, porpoises, etc., but fishes; they are living prehistoric monsters. Sharks will eat any of the following foods, choice depending upon their class and availability: other fishes, shrimps, lobsters, plankton, cadavers—men—and other sharks. And like the cat—you can never tell what a shark will do, by looking at him."

"Cordially yours,

"Jean M. Ellrich"

AND in connection with Captain Ellrich's letter, there are certainly going to be fewer sharks in the seas in the future as people are finding out that they are worth catching and that means trouble for these hunters of the sea. In fact shark fishing has already developed into an important industry in Australian waters. The fins are dried and shipped to China where shark fin soup is considered a very great delicacy. The meat is salted and dried for export to the Malay States and Africa where there is considerable demand for it. The shark liver oil finds a use in tempering steel and in dressing leather.

People in other parts of the world are also finding that sharks are good to eat. They are now being fished commercially in the waters around the Shetland Islands where they are caught on large hooks using whole herrings for bait. The meat finds a ready market in Germany at a fair price. It is said to be quite good eating, tasting a little like halibut. The Nova Scotia fishermen say that the blue sharks are also good to eat with a flavor something like lamb. At present they are only a nuisance to the fishermen but they believe if the meat were properly introduced, there would soon be an increasing demand for it just as there is for the swordfish which no one ever thought of eating thirty years ago. Something like this has actually been done with the dogfish of the Pacific Coast which are a variety of shark. Sold under the name of grayfish, a good market has been developed for them as they are really good eating.

All in the next issue



\$TEERS

*And a good fight before the money
came in. A complete novel by*

Bennett Foster

ADAM'S APPLE

*It was an apple of gold—
and Bill West found it
in the North*

Bertrand W. Sinclair



WHITE MAGIC

An African novelette by

Walter C. Brown



And

SARGE

A dog of the Foreign Legion

by **Bob Du Soe**



All in **SHORT STORIES** *for December 25th*

French chemists have been studying the idea of making a motor fuel from shark oil. This would be useful in wartime as sharks are very plentiful along the shores of France's African colonies. The experiments have produced a type of fuel reported to be only ten per cent inferior to gasoline and it is said that it would give even better results if the types of the motors were changed somewhat.

Scientists have also been studying the oil made from shark livers and find that it is very rich in vitamins A and D. In this respect it is the equal of cod liver oil. As the scientists put it, the sharks eat the big fish that eat the smaller fish that eat the little fish that feed on the tiny surface plants floating in the sunlit surface waters.

A new industry has developed in Europe making fine ladies' shoes from shark leathers. The skins of three varieties are used, the Arctic, the tropical and the silk sharks. The silk shark is hunted in Portuguese waters. Its leather not only makes fine shoes but also is made up into beautiful handbags. In fact it now looks as if the shark, so long accustomed to hunting his neighbors in the sea, is going to have trouble saving his own skin in the future.

The Gold Trail

CHARLEY and his partner of *Murray Leinster's* dramatic story in this issue were on a very interesting gold trail for,

since Alaska was purchased from Russia, in 1867, for seven million, two hundred thousand dollars, it has brought to the people of the United States, from its fisheries, furs and mines, over twelve billion dollars within the first ten years after the discovery of gold in the Klondike.

In the spring of 1899, the spot marked as Nome on the map was as dismal a beach as might be found the world over. By June of the same year a tent-city, sheltering five thousand persons, occupied the site. By the following September the tent-city had vanished and in its place was a town of substantial frame buildings. In the meantime a city government had been formed, a mayor elected, a police force organized, a fire department equipped and a court established.

The most remarkable thing about Nome in those days was the rapidity with which it acquired the luxuries of civilization. Within two years it was a full-fledged city teeming with people and having its own clubs, theaters, hotels, cafes and every other adjunct to progressiveness. But the first winter of Nome was characterized by what might be called high finance—everybody tried to corner something. To corner things was in every particular legitimate, and to neglect an opportunity was to court ruin.

The price of coal under the gold stimulus went to one hundred and fifty dollars

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 _____

a ton, lumber commanded five hundred dollars a thousand feet before the winter broke. Castor oil could be had in large quantities for fifty cents an ounce; eggs brought fifty cents apiece. The most successful corner was that of fresh milk. There was only one cow in the city; the owner of which cleared one thousand dollars on milk, and selling the cow in the spring for beef, he realized five hundred dollars more. Beer brought unheard-of prices. Food was out of sight as far as its actual value was concerned. And the thing that brought this all about was gold.

Everybody in Nome had a claim; everybody expected to strike it rich sooner or later. The first mining was done by placer methods, right on the sea beach. At first one man could make as much as fifty dollars a day by the simplest methods. Every inch of beach was being worked. Back

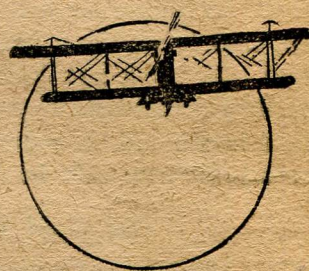
in the tundras fortune seemed to smile especially on the Swedes, for a favorite expression in Nome was "lucky Swedes," most of the big strikes having been made by Swedish gold-seekers. They would stake out a claim and dig a prospect hole down to bedrock, sometimes forty or fifty feet; if they found nothing, they would dig a second on another part of their claim. If this proved unsatisfactory, another was dug. Frequently they would dig as many as a dozen holes before giving up their claim, hence, such determination often resulted in a big strike.

Today Nome is a well-regulated and important city. It continues to ship fur, fish, metal and gold in a big way and while the glamor of the old gold rush has long since burned out the city itself bids fair to rank as one of America's most important commercial centers.



OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Post Office Sells Quinine

IN SPEAKING of India, quinine is sold at every rural post office in that country at the rate of five grains for a farthing. That is ten grains for a cent, or forty-eight cents an ounce, retail. In Bengal alone, 1,440,000 five-grain packages are sold annually. The government formerly imported \$250,000 worth of quinine every year, but the late Lieutenant Colonel King, superintendent of the royal botanic gardens in Calcutta, introduced its cultivation in India, and there are now about 5,000,000 trees in the Bengal province.

Flying India

AND if complete aeronautical education had been available in India, it would have been unnecessary for dozens of Indian students to proceed to England or America to obtain instruction in the higher arts of the profession, according to Captain A. T. Eden, principal of the proposed Aeronautical Training Centre opened in Delhi recently.

The Government of India has blessed the scheme by extending its patronage, even financially, to begin with, and advanced courses include construction, me-

Startling Facts for Men!

Inquire About Our New Improved Invention The "PROSAGER" and How Well It Serves Those Who Are Bothered by Getting Up Nights—And Also How Well It Serves Those with Other Weaknesses and Ailments Caused by a Faulty Prostate Gland.

PROSTATIC AILMENTS

Nervous Debility, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Lane Back, Lumbago, Lost Vigor, Kidney and Bladder Trouble, Chronic Constipation, Despondency, Restlessness at night are only some of the ailments differing in individuals, that can often be ascribed to lesion of the Prostate Gland.

MANY DOCTORS ENDORSE MASSAGE

Massaging for the alleviation of Prostate Trouble is as old as time, and some of the most outstanding authorities in the medical profession recommend massage as a safe effective treatment (See Reference Book of the Medical Science, [Vol. VII], 3rd Edition).

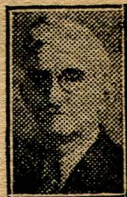
USE "PROSAGER"

A new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home. It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

THOUSANDS AFFLICTED

Thousands of men in every community suffer needlessly it is said from ailments, weaknesses and other physical shortcomings without knowing that very frequently they are caused by prostatic failure. The Prostate Gland though small is most important, when inflamed, enlarged or otherwise deranged, the result is most generally apparent in other vital organs which are also situated in the pelvis of man. Because the effects of a disordered Prostate Gland are responsible for so many varied ailments, the percentage of men past middle life that are troubled with these ailments is so high that it is impossible to estimate.

Many younger men suffer from conditions similar to that of sciatica, backache and perineal aches due to prostate ailing.



DR. W. D. SMITH
INVENTOR

UNSOLICITED LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

The following are extracts from letters received, which are on file in our office; the complete letters and addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them.

Mr. B. A. Williams, Columbus, Ohio, writes in regard to the Prosager: "I am thoroughly satisfied with it and wish to say that if I could not get another, I would not take a thousand dollars for the one I have—if you desire at any time you can use my name in any way in any exploiting you might want to do with your product."

Mr. Wm. F. Lemon, San Francisco, California, states in his letter: "After using the Prosager I am well again and feel none of the symptoms of Prostate trouble." Mr. Wm. F. Lee, Washington, D. C., writes: "The Prosager is mild; I would not be without it."

Mr. Henry Zitman, Auburn, Indiana, says: "I will say this much for the Prosager, it has saved me from an operation. The Doctor that treated me before I got it says it is a fine thing to use. If there is anyone in this territory that wants to know about it, direct them to me." Mr. Judson Trefethan, New Castle, N. H., writes about the Prosager: "I think it is a great invention, my Doctor came to see it and he said it was a good invention."

Each month we receive scores of unsolicited letters of gratitude and appreciation from users of the Prosager—having thousands of users we no doubt can refer Prostate Sufferers to someone in their own home town who are enthusiastic in their praise of the remarkable benefits received.

"You're as young as you feel—And the PROSAGER helps you to feel Young"

WHY NOT KEEP VIGOROUS? The Prostate Gland must be in a normal condition to perform the necessary function for which it was intended. You will enjoy life in fuller measure if your Prostate Gland is healthy. The "PROSAGER" massages the Prostate Gland, assisting nature to restore normal action.

FREE BOOKLET Explains Vital Details and Our TRIAL OFFER

Send at once for this free booklet containing startling and vital information of the cause of Prostate Trouble, that no doubt you have long wished to know.

A one cent post card with name and address plainly written is all that is necessary. Address card to

MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO., B-700, Kalamazoo, Mich.

tallurgy, physical testing of materials used for the construction of aircraft, heat treatment of metals and the testing of various parts. A practical aviation course consists of flying instruction under advanced conditions, such as blind flying, night flying over considerable ranges with intermediate

landings. Although conditions in India for safe flying are the same as elsewhere, there is a peculiar danger in that a large number of vultures come in the way of the planes. The most difficult period for flying is the monsoon for about four months from June to the end of September.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Apparently all his clouds are lined with SHORT STORIES instead of silver.

Dear Secretary:

Reading SHORT STORIES is one sure way to make a rainy day brighter, but any time is SHORT STORIES time.

I was born in London, England, and have traveled for six years on my own. I have seen a lot of Canada and have worked at Churchill in Northern Manitoba and have panned gold on the Fraser River in the Carriboo of British Columbia, making Prince George my head station.

I have worked at nearly every kind of job but can't stick long on account of itchy feet.

Wishing SHORT STORIES a long life and hoping I hear from people all over the world, I am

Yours truly,

R. H. Sewell

c/o Postal Station C,
Fort Rouge,
Manitoba,
Canada

All you pen pals better make the future hold lots of letters for this ambitious new member.

Dear Secretary:

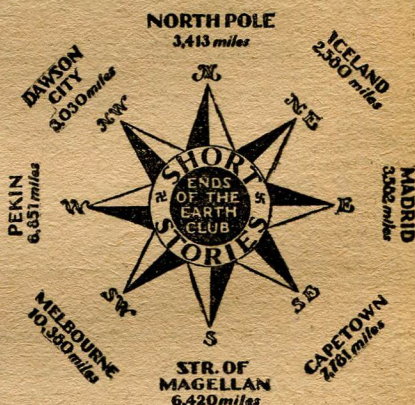
I just discovered your fine club and I should like to become a member. It is just exactly the sort of club that I have been looking for and I wish that I had known about it sooner. I have many ambitions and am always looking ahead and planning things for the future. I am interested in stamps and have quite a large collection.

I am joining your club for two reasons: first, because I am looking for pen pals, and second, because I should like to know more things of the country in which we live. I shall gladly correspond with all those who will write me, and I'm going to get every issue of SHORT STORIES for I think the stories are swell.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Barr

P. O. Box 37,
Boulder, Colorado



SAVE TH

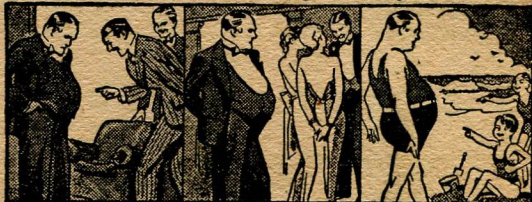
WITH hundreds of members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy **SHORT STORIES** because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of **Ends of the 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 address will appear only once.

Morris Berger, 2007 Union Street, Brooklyn, New York
 Pvt. Dourovel M. Birchell, U. S. Marine Detachment,
 American Legation, Peiping, China
 Francis C. Birkenshaw, U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Lyons,
 New Jersey
 P. W. Blakey, 2769 Oxford Street, Vancouver, B. C.,
 Canada
 Lt./Bar. Art H. C. Bloomfield, 1069546, 7th Anti Aircraft
 Battery R. A., Changi, Singapore, Malaya, Straits Set-
 tlement
 Paul Daskam Boff, 1908 Carson Street, Pittsburgh, Penn-
 sylvania
 George Hedley Borrow, 31 Bewdley Street, Barnsbury,
 London, N. England
 Robert W. Bowen, 4th Composite Group Hq., AC, Nichols
 Field, Rizal, Philippine Islands
 Ben Branaman, 2308 Green Street, Philadelphia, Pennsyl-
 vania
 Joseph Brennan, 3384060, A Coy, 2nd East Lancashire
 Regiment, Naking Barracks, Hong-Kong, China
 Jean Christine Brinson, Box 45, Baldwin, Florida
 Jesse Broxson, R. F. D. 1, Box 60, Merryville, Louisiana
 Theodore Bullockus, 2405 Fenton Avenue, New York City,
 New York
 Wayne Buswell, 67 Rutland Street, Boston, Massachusetts
 George Butler, 21 Quinn Building, Popham Street, London,
 N. England
 John Cade, 3520 Armitage Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 Louis Camponosi, 95 Pleasant Valley Avenue, Staten Island,
 New York
 Francis J. Carey, 70 Wellington Avenue, Pittsfield, Massa-
 chusetts
 Don Carpenter, Company 550, Y.N.P. 2, Camp Canyon,
 Yellowstone Park, Wyoming
 Eugene Carter, R. R. 1, Innerkip, Ontario, Canada
 Raymond Chandler, Box 54, Lewisburg, Alabama
 Norman Choka, 2909 Charles Street, St. Joseph, Missouri
 Joseph Chonofsky, Box 64, Norman, New Jersey
 James Churan, 47-27 39th Place, Long Island City, New
 York
 Lyle Cieloha, 1440 Hudson Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 Edward J. Clark, 89-41—201st Street, Hollis, New York
 F. J. Clark, Jr., 378 Wabash Avenue, Akron, Ohio
 Carroll W. Clarke, 81 Loudon Avenue, Amityville, New
 York
 Charles E. Clendenin, 4822 Washington Street, Downers
 Grove, Illinois
 Frank Coleman, 2105 City Councillors Street, Montreal,
 Canada
 George Collins, 1549 Second Avenue, New York City,
 New York
 Frank Conant, 907 Fillmore Street, Lynchburg, Virginia
 Alex. Roy Cooper, 31 Pepperell Street, Halifax, Nova
 Scotia, Canada
 Eugene Cosley, 1812 Park Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana
 Kenneth W. Cook, 1131 Twelfth Street, N.W., Washington,
 District of Columbia
 Harry Crawford, 210 N. Prairie Street, Jacksonville,
 Illinois
 W. Crowder, 4189062, A(S) Company, 2/R.W. Fusiliers,
 Victoria Barracks, Hong-Kong, South China
 J. M. Daniel, Route 4, Elberton, Georgia
 J. T. Dapay-Mannch, 6 Nanah Kroo Street, Freetown,
 South Africa
 Sylvio Ribeiro da Silva, 593 Sao Jao Avenue, 2nd And.
 Apt. 8, Sao Paulo City, Brazil, South America
 Robert Davis, c/o S. S. Granada, Standard Fruit &
 Steamship Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 A. V. Davidson, 1 Post Street, Yonkers, New York

(Continued on page 176)

REDUCE YOUR WAIST 3 INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT

... writes George Bailey



"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man". The boys kidded me about my big "paunch".

At parties I learned that I had become a "wall flower". Nobody wanted to dance with me.

In a bathing suit... I was immense. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.



What a change! I looked 3 inches slimmer at once and soon I had actually taken **EIGHT INCHES** off my waist... and 20 pounds off my weight!

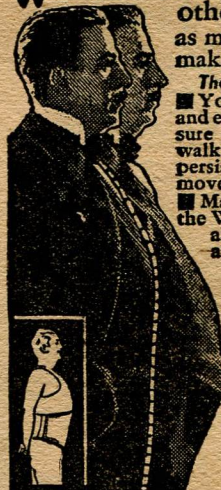
It seemed to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place... and best of all, I became acceptable for insurance!

I have a new feeling of energy and pep... work better, eat better, play better... I didn't realize how much I was missing!

REDUCE YOUR WAIST THREE INCHES IN TEN DAYS

... or it won't cost you a penny!

WE have done this for thousands of others... we know we can do as much for you... that's why we make this unconditional offer!



The Massage-Like Action Does It

■ You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit... its massage-like action persistently eliminating fat with every move you make!

■ Many enthusiastic wearers write that the Weil Belt not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place... that they are no longer fatigued... and that it greatly increases their endurance and vigor!

Improves Your Appearance

■ The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller... 3 inches of fat gone... or it won't cost you one cent!

Don't Wait. Fat Is Dangerous

■ Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity. Don't wait any longer act today!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, Inc. 8112 Hill St., New Haven, Conn.
 Gentlemen: Send me **FREE**, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 Day **FREE** Trial Offer.

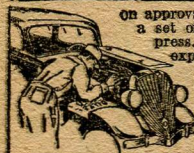
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Use Coupon or Send Name and Address on Penny Post Card

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CAN YOU FIX IT?

These wonder books tell step by step HOW to take out "play" in differential—to tell the shimmy in steering—to set TIMING—how to put your finger instantly on engine trouble and then the quick expert way to FIX it. Newest improvements fully covered. Equal to a complete trade course at less than a fourth the cost.

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 The new books delivery charges only, but if I choose to, I may return them express collect. If after 10 days you prefer to keep them, I will send you \$2 and pay the balance at the rate of only \$2 a month, until \$24.50 is paid. Please include free consulting membership as per your offer above. Send brand new 1935 edition.

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 City State
 Attach letter stating age, occupation and name and address of employer and at least one business man as reference.

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 Frank P. Dulberger, 1103 Sheridan Avenue, Bronx, New York
 Harry DuPont, 610 Second Street, Rayne, Louisiana
 V. F. Eastburg, 2143 Oak Hill Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio
 Arthur T. Edington, Veterinary Station Detachment, Fort Bliss, Texas
 Roland G. Ehmkke, 249 Southampton Street, Buffalo, New York
 Charles B. Ehrl, 751 Granville Street, Vancouver, B. C., Canada
 Edward E. Elson, 417 Claremont Parkway, Bronx, New York
 Kenneth B. Emery, 26 Attack Squadron, Wheeler Field, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii
 William Erbeck, Linden, New Jersey
 Ed. Errett, 1803 N. Berendo, Los Angeles, California
 A. N. Evans, 4189272, Att. H.Q. Hing, 2/R.W. Fusiliers, Murray Barracks, Hong-Kong, China
 Thomas Flanagan, 480 Peacock Street, Pottsville, Pennsylvania
 Walter Flesher, 356 Second Avenue, Garwood, New Jersey
 George Foran, 52 West 111th Street, New York City, New York
 Cyrenus Forrester, Cristobal, Canal Zone
 K. Fox, 623 Hunderton Street, Newark, New Jersey
 William E. Frankenburg, 6649 Hartwell Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 S. O. Franklin, Jr., Box 4, Lucasville, Ohio
 Howard C. Froehlich, 615 East 37th Street, Baltimore, Maryland
 George Fruh, Jr., 304 Nassau Avenue, Brooklyn, New York
 Ervin Gabrielson, Cincinnati, New York
 Robert B. Gaston, 242 South 39th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Gerald Gestwick, 210 South Gazelle Street, Dunkirk, New York
 Bill Gilmore, Oakhurst, Oklahoma
 A. D. Goffin, 1 Fayette Street, New Haven, Connecticut
 Bruno Golden, 10805 Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
 T. E. Gootee, 72 Barrow Street, New York City, New York
 Stephen F. Gould, Riggs Avenue, Locust Valley, New York
 Ted J. Graf, 3349 West Monroe Street, Chicago, Illinois
 J. P. Graham, Jr., 4th Observation Squadron, Luke Field, Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii
 Paul P. Graves, Northeast Harbor, Maine
 Harold E. Gray, 3425 West 64th Street, Chicago, Illinois
 W. W. Griffith, 1258 Elm Street, Abilene, Texas
 Robert Hales, 407 Congo Street, San Francisco, California
 William Charles Harper, 99 Arlington Street, Islington, London, N. England
 William Harrison, 2413 West Dartmouth Street, Flint, Michigan
 Clement Hector, c/o I. O. Yellowe, C.A.C. School, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, South Africa
 Lloyd E. Heinselman, Plymouth, Iowa
 Bill Helstein, 1253 Wheeler Avenue, Bronx, New York
 Arthur Herbert, Box 73, Homelake, Colorado
 Hugh M. Hibbits, Albuquerque, New Mexico
 Gordon Hill, Hq. Co., 31st Infantry, "Cuartel De Espana," Post of Manila, Philippine Islands
 Nelson H. Hohenstein, 60-47 Palmetto Street, Brooklyn, New York
 Rolfe Holbrook, 3929 South Carrollton, New Orleans, Louisiana
 Roy Holmertz, View Cove, Dail Island, Alaska, via Ketchikan
 Harold Honsbehn, 6906 Quimby Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio
 Francis Hortick, Company 1998, CCC, Thompson Falls, Montana
 Richard Houghton, 36 Woodlawn Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts
 John Bevis Hubbard, "Joas," Boomfield Avenue, Telcombe Cliffs, England
 A. Hughes, 796580 D Coy, 2/R.W. Fusiliers, Transport Section, Murray Barracks, Hong-Kong, China
 James H. Humphreys, 15 John Street, Newark, New Jersey
 Gnr. G. E. Hulatt, 824546, 7th Anti Aircraft Battery R. A., Changi, Singapore, Malaya, Straits Settlement
 Russell Jacobsen, 748-51st Street, Brooklyn, New York
 Laddie Jefferis, 509 Boulevard Way, Oakland, California
 Milton Leland Jeffers, U.S.H.B. Gen. John McE. Hyde, Pier One, Manila, Philippine Islands

"Lately?"

"He's still warm. And no rigor mortis yet. Besides, remember I saw this man alive not much more than an hour ago."

"I meant to ask you about that. Tell me about it when I come back. I'm going to call Spring 7-3100. Stick around."

When Buckley returned, Ken was reading some letters.

"A girl named Mae Nordkin," he said. Buckley panted:

"They'll be up right away. Nordkin, huh? Well, in the meanwhile, how come you had Sam's gun, fella?"

Ken told him. Buckley nodded sadly.

"A flock of big-time crime in this town runs right into that guy Marot," Buckley gloomed, "and that's just where it stops!"

"I'm going home. Give me a ring, won't you, when you pick up that woman? I'd like to listen to her answers."

KEN'S home was not the sort you'd expect a detective to have. It was a red brick building in Washington Square North, straight, narrow, very prim, with green shutters and bright green window boxes. For although the Barclays weren't rich any longer, they remained powerful in Knickerbocker society; and Ken's mother, a very positive woman, was determined that they should be housed as befitted their family name, whether or not they could afford it.

Ken went to his room and changed. Then he went downstairs and called the field office. He was informed that the number Jules Marot had called was listed opposite the name of George P. Carstairs, who lived in East Sixty-second Street.

"Thanks."

"Need any help, Ken?"

"Not yet, thanks. I may tomorrow."

He was hanging up when his father entered the room. Barclay, Sr. was red-faced, bluff in appearance. He had a country squire-ish air.

"How's the work going?"

"Swell, Dad. Thanks."

"Did your mother tell you Anthony Ser-

ris is going to get that ambassadorship and that she's persuaded him to appoint you his secretary?"

"Yes, we had that out just before I went down to Washington. It's nice of Mr. Serris, but I'm turning down the offer."

"Your mother," Barclay Sr. said cautiously, "thinks it isn't really decent for you to be doing this 'horrid police work,' as she calls it. She certainly would like to see you in the diplomatic corps, Kenneth."

"I know. But I'd stifle, Dad! I just couldn't stand it! I like dancing, and talking to women, and all that, and I've got nothing against counts and princes, but it just isn't my kind of stuff."

"Well, of course, if you feel that way —"

"Dad, I've got a round knee. I couldn't balance a teacup on it if I tried. And I've got so used to grabbing my meals whenever I get a chance, that if I found I was expected to conduct a lady in to dinner I'd forget myself and make a dash for the table without her."

The parent chuckled.

"Good boy. I hope you stick to that. Only don't tell your mother I said so!" He cleared his throat. "Working on something new?"

"Yes."

"Well, be careful. I'm sure you're quick with your pistol, after winning all those marksmanship medals and so-forth, but some of these desperados have a habit of shooting men in the back, and I wouldn't want to pick up my paper some morning and see— Well."

"Yes, I know."

For the moment he wasn't smiling. He was thinking of that bronze tablet in Washington, and the eight names.

The East Sixty-second Street address was a good one, a small and swanky apartment house. Ken asked the doorman:

"Mr. Carstairs come in?"

"No, sir. But we expect him any minute."

"Thanks. I'll wait in the foyer."

There was an attendant inside, but he

AND JUST WHEN I'VE MET THE SWELLEST GIRL



**A new crop
of pimples was
always taking
the joy out
of things!**



**Don't let adolescent
pimples spoil any of
YOUR dates!**

From about 13 to 25 years of age, important glands develop, causing disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons enter the blood. These irritate the skin, cause pimples. Doctors prescribe Fleischmann's Yeast for adolescent pimples. It clears skin irritants out of the blood, pimples disappear. Eat 3 cakes a day until the skin clears.

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—clears the skin.

**by clearing skin irritants
out of the blood**

FAMOUS AVIATORS TELL WHY CAMELS ARE Milder



Lieutenant Commander Frank Hawks, U. S. N. R. (left), holder of 214 speed records and the Harmon Trophy, comments: "As the athletes say, Camels are so mild they don't get the wind. And I've found they never upset my nerves. Camel must use choicer tobaccos."

"Camels don't get your Wind" Athletes say



"I smoke Camels all I want," says Colonel Roscoe Turner (right). "I enjoy Camels more. Because of their mildness they never tire my taste. And after smoking a Camel, I get a 'refill' in energy—a new feeling of vim and well-being."

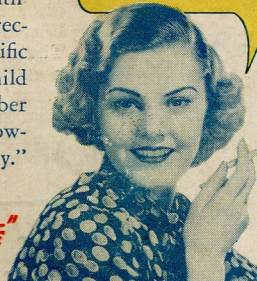
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"Camels refresh me so when I'm fatigued," says Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith (above), who made the record breaking transpacific flight. "And they are so mild that I can smoke any number of Camels without throwing my nerves off key."

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